Complete Works of

Bram Stoker

DELPHI CLASSICS

Series Two

The Complete Works of
BRAM STOKER

(1847-1912)

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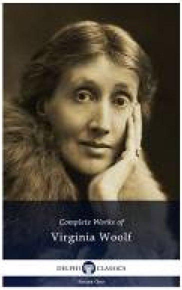
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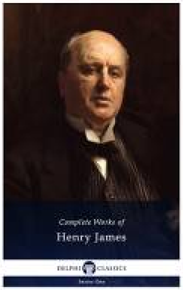
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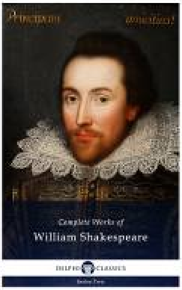
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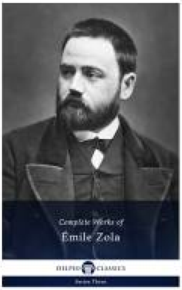
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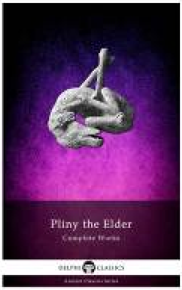
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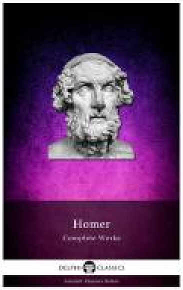
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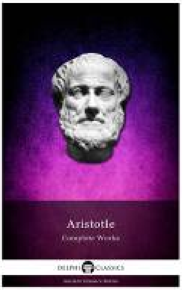
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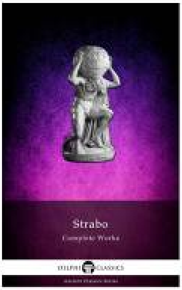
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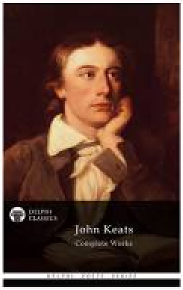
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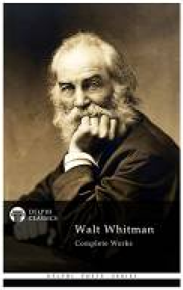
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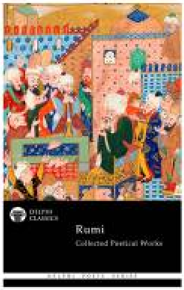
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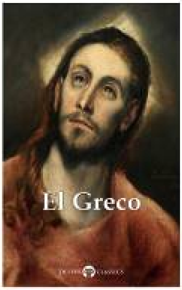
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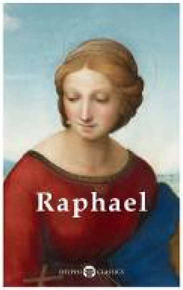
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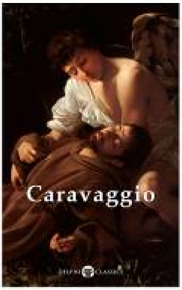
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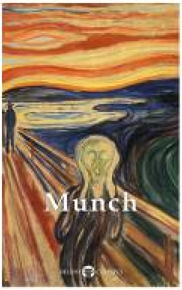
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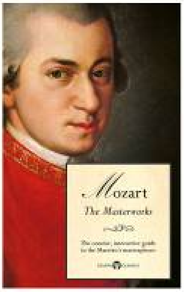
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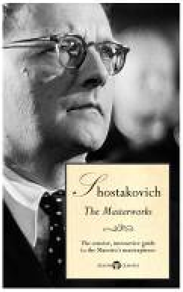
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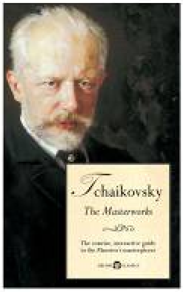
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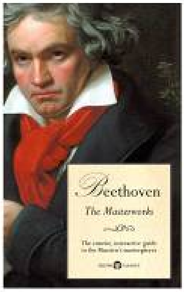
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The Complete Works of

BRAM STOKER

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ISBN: 978 1 90890 935 0

Delphi Classics
is an imprint of
Delphi Publishing Ltd
Hastings, East Sussex
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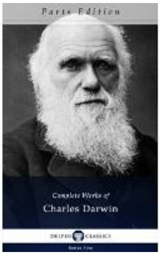
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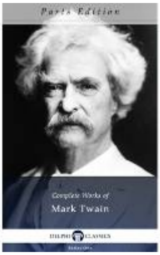
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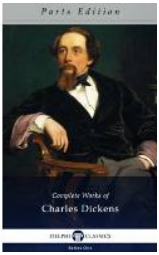
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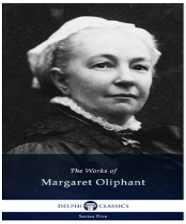
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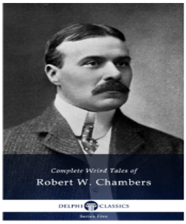
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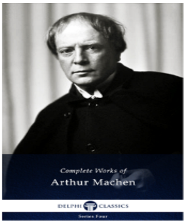
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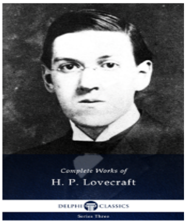
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The Novels

Marino Crescent, Dublin — Stoker's birthplace

The Primrose Path

Stoker's first novel was published in 1875 in *The Shamrock,* an Irish weekly magazine specialising in serial fiction. The novel appeared in five issues with the first part appearing on February 6, 1875 and the last on March 6, 1875. It tells the story of Jerry O'Sullivan, an honest Dublin theatrical carpenter, who moves to London, seeking a better job.

Stoker, close to the time of publication

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CHAPTER 1

A HAPPY HOME

‘I wonder will any of them come, Jerry?’

The pretty little woman’s face got puckered all over with baby wrinkles, more suitable to the wee pink face that lay on her bosom than to her own somewhat pale one, as she made the remark.

Jerry looked up from his newspaper and gazed at her lovingly for a moment before he answered, his answer being a confident smile with a knowing shake of the head from side to side as who should say - ‘Oh, you little humbug, pretending to distress yourself with doubts. Of course, they’ll come - all of them.’

Katey seemed to lose her trouble in his smile - it is wonderful what comforters love and sympathy are. She drew close to her husband and held down the tiny bald pink head for him to kiss, and then, leaning her cheek against his, said in a soft cooing voice, half wifely, half motherly, ‘Oh, Jerry, isn’t he a little beauty.’

Children are quite as jealous as dogs and cats in their own way, and instinctively the urchin sprawling on the hearth-rug came over and pulled at his mother’s dress, saying plaintively ‘Me too, mammy - me too.’

Jerry took the child on his knee. ‘Eh, little Jerry, your nose is out of joint again; isn’t it?’

A mother is jealous as well as her child, and this mother answered - ‘Oh, no, Jerry, sure I don’t love him less because I have to take care of the little mite.’

Further conversation was stopped by a knock at the door.

‘That’s some of them stayin’ away,’ said Jerry, as he went out to open the door.

As may be seen, Jerry and his wife expected company, the doubts as to whose arrival was caused by the extreme inclemency of the weather, and as the occasion of the festivities was an important one, the doubts were strong.

Jerry O'Sullivan was a prosperous man in his line of life. His trade was that of a carpenter, and as he had, in addition to large practical skill and experience gained from unremitting toil, a considerable share of natural ability, was justly considered by his compeers to be the makings of a successful man.

Three years before he had been married to his pretty little wife, whose sweet nature, and care for his comfort, and whose desire to perfect the cheerfulness of home, had not a little aided his success, and kept him on the straight path.

If every wife understood the merits which a cheerful home has above all other places in the eyes of an ordinary man, there would be less brutality than there is amongst husbands, and less hardships and suffering amongst wives.

The third child has just been christened, and some friends and relatives were expected to do honour to the occasion, and now the knock announced the first arrival.

Whilst Jerry went to the door, Katey arranged the child's garments so as to make him look as nice as possible, and also fixed her own dress, somewhat disturbed by maternal cares. In the meantime little Jerry flattened his nose against the window pane in a vain desire to see the appearance of the first arrival. Little Katey stood by him looking expectant as though her eyes were with her brother's.

Mrs Jerry's best smile showed that the newcomer, Mr Parnell, was a special friend. After shaking hands with him she stood close to him, and showed him the baby, looking up into his dark strong face with a smile of perfect trust. He was so tall that he had to stoop to kiss the baby, although the little mother raised it in her arms for him. He said very tenderly -

‘Let me hold him a minute in my arms.’

He lifted him gently as he spoke, and bending his head, said reverently: -

‘God bless him. Suffer little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of Heaven.’

Katey’s eyes were full of tears as she took him back, and she thanked the big man with a look too full of sacred feeling for even a smile.

Jerry stood by in silence. He felt much, although he did not know what to say.

Another knock was heard, and again Jerry’s services were required. This time there was a large influx, for three different bodies had joined just at the door. Much laughter was heard in the hall, and then they all entered. The body consisted of seven souls all told.

Place aux dames. We Irishmen must give first place always to the ladies. Of these there were four. Jerry’s mother and her assistant, Miss M’Anaspie, and Katey’s two sisters, one older and one younger than herself. The men were, Mr Muldoon, Tom Price, and Patrick Casey.

Jerry’s mother was a quiet dignified old lady, very gentle in manner, but with a sternness of thought and purpose which shone through her gentleness and forbid any attempt at imposition, as surely as the green light marks danger at a railway crossing. She had a small haberdashery shop, by which she was reputed amongst her friends to have realised a considerable amount of money. Miss M'Anaspie was her assistant, and was asked by Katey to be present out of pure kindness. She had originally set her cap at Jerry, and had very nearly succeeded in her aim. It was no small evidence of Katey's genuine goodness of nature and her perfect trust of her husband that she was present; for most women have a feeling of possible hostility, or, at least, maintain an armed neutrality towards the former flames of the man that they love. Miss M'Anaspie was tall and buxom, and of lively manners, quite devoid of bashfulness. It puzzled many of her friends how, with her desire to be married, she had not long ago succeeded in accomplishing her wish. Katey's sisters were pleasant, quiet girls, both engaged to be married - Jane to Price, and Mary to Casey, the former man being a blacksmith, and the latter an umbrella-maker, both being sturdy young fellows, and looking forward to being shortly able to marry.

Mr Muldoon was the great man of the occasion. He was a cousin of Mrs O'Sullivan's, and was rich. He had a large Italian warehouse, which he managed well, and consequently was exceedingly prosperous. Personally he was not so agreeable as he might have been. He was small, and stout, and ugly, with keen eyes, a sharply-pointed nose; was habitually clean-shaven, and kept his breast stuck out like that of a pouter pigeon. He always dressed gorgeously, and on the present occasion, as he considered that he was honouring his poor relations, had got himself up to a pitch of such radiance that his old servant had commented on his appearance as he had left home. His trousers were of the lightest yellow whipcord; his coat was blue; his waistcoat was red velvet, with blue glass buttons; and in the matter of green tie, high collar, and large cuffs he excelled. His watch chain, of massive gold, with the 'pint of seals' attached to the fob-chain after the manner of the bucks of the last generation was alone worthy of respect. His temper was not pleasant, for he was dictatorial to the last degree, and had a very unpleasant habit, something like Frederick the Great, of considering any difference of opinion as an insult intentionally offered to himself.

A man like this may be a pleasant enough companion so long as he goes with the tide, he thinking that it is the tide which goes with him; but when occasion of difference arises, the social horizon at once becomes overcast with angry clouds which gather quickly till the storm has burst. Oftentimes, as in nature - the great world of elements - the storm clears the air.

Mr Muldoon had been asked as an act possibly likely to benefit the new olive branch, for the Italian grocer was unmarried, and might at some future time, so thought Jerry and Katey in their secret hearts, take in charge the destinies of the new infant to-day made John Muldoon O'Sullivan.

When the party entered the room Mr Muldoon had advanced to Mrs Jerry, and, as she was a pretty little woman, had kissed her in a semi-paternal way which made Miss M'Anaspie giggle. Mr Muldoon looked round half indignantly, for he felt that his dignity was wounded. He considered that Miss M'Anaspie, of whose very name he was ignorant, was a forward young person, and in his mind determined to let her understand so before the evening was over.

After a few minutes the introductions had all been accomplished, and everybody knew everybody else. There was great kissing of the baby, great petting of the two elder children, for whose delectation sundry sweets were produced from mysterious pockets, and much laughter and good-humoured jesting.

Mr Muldoon prided himself upon being a good hand at saying smart things, and felt that the present occasion was not one to be thrown away. Being a bachelor, he considered that his most proper attitude was that of ignorance - utter ignorance regarding babies in general, and this one in particular. When he was shown the baby he put up his eyeglass, and said:

‘What is this?’

‘Oh, Mr Muldoon,’ said the mother, almost reproachfully. ‘Sure, don’t you know this is the new baby?’

‘Oh! oh! indeed. It is very bald.’

‘It won’t be long so, then,’ interrupted Miss M’Anaspie pertly. You can make it your heir, if you will.’ Her English method of aspiration pointed the joke.

Mr Muldoon looked at her almost savagely, but said nothing. He did not want to commit himself to any intention of aiding the child’s career; and he was obliged to remain silent. He mentally scored another black mark against the speaker.

Presently he spoke again.

‘Is it a boy or a girl?’

‘A boy.’

‘And are these boys or girls?’ He pointed as he spoke to little Jerry and little Katey.

Miss M’Anaspie answered again— ‘Neither. They are half of each.’

‘Dear me,’ said Mr Muldoon. ‘Can that be?’

‘Don’t you see,’ said Miss M’Anaspie in a tone which implied the addition of the words ‘you silly old fool,’ ‘one is a boy and the other a girl.’

Mr Muldoon made another black mark in his mental note-book, and ignoring his opponent, as he already considered Miss

M'Anaspie, spoke again to Katey.

'And are these all yours? Three children; and you have been married - let me see, how long?'

'Three years and two months.'

'Why, at this rate, what will you do in twenty years. Just fancy twenty children. Really, Mrs Katey, you should take the pledge.'

Katey did not know what to answer, and so stayed silent. Miss M'Anaspie turned away to hide an imagined blush, and Mr Muldoon feeling that he had said something striking, began to unbend and mix with the rest of the company in a better humour than he had been in for some time.

The table was ready set with all the materials for comfort, and as the teapot was basking inside the fender beside a dish of highly buttered cake, the work of Mrs Jerry herself, and the kettle singing songs of a bacchanalian character on the fire, promise of comfort to the foes and friends of Father Mathew was not wanting.

There was great arranging of places at the table. Jane and Mary with their sweethearts managed to monopolise one entire side, sitting alternately like the bread and ham in the pile of sandwiches before them.

Mr Muldoon was put next to Katey, and Jerry had his mother on his right hand, she being supported on the other side by Mr Parnell. This left Miss M'Anaspie to take her seat without choice, between the two eldest men of the party.

She did not shrink from the undertaking, however, but sat down, saying pertly to the company, but to no one in particular -

'My usual luck. Never mind. I like to have an old man on each side of me.'

Mr Muldoon liked to be thought young - most middle-aged bachelors do - and he looked his disapprobation of the remark so strongly that a silence fell on all.

The dowager Mrs O'Sullivan said quietly -

'You let your tongue run too fast, Margaret. You forget Mr Muldoon is a new friend of yours, and not an old one.'

Miss M'Anaspie had already seen that she had made a mistake, and was only waiting for an opportunity of correcting it, so she seized it greedily.

'I am so awfully sorry. I hope, sir, I did not offend. Indeed I wished to please. I thought that young people wished to be thought old. I know that I did when I was young.'

'That was some time ago,' whispered Pat Casey to Mary, who laughed too suddenly, and was nearly caught at it.

Mr Muldoon was mollified. He thought to himself that perhaps the poor girl did not mean to give offence; that she was a clever girl; much nicer after all than most girls; however that he would have an eye on her, and see what she was like.

For some time the consumption of the good things occupied the attention of everybody. Mrs Jerry handed a cup of tea to Mr Parnell before any of the rest of the men, saying -

'I know you like that better than anything else.'

'That I do,' he answered heartily. 'There is as much virtue in this as there is evil in beer, and whisky, and gin, and all other abominations.'

No one felt inclined to take up, at present at all events, the total-abstinence glove thus thrown down, and so the subject dropped.

It would have done one good to have seen the care which Katey's sisters took of their sweethearts, piling up their plates with everything that was nice, and keeping them as steadily at work as if they had been engaged in a contest as to who should consume the largest quantity in the smallest time. This was a species of friendly rivalry in which the men found equal pleasure with the girls.

It is quite wonderful the difference between the appetites of successful and unsuccessful lovers.

Mr Muldoon and Miss M'Anaspie during the progress of the meal became fast friends, at least so it would seem, for they bandied, unchecked, pleasantries of a nature usually only allowed amongst intimate friends. Both Jerry and his wife were much amazed, for both stood somewhat in awe of the great man with whom they would never have attempted to make any familiarity.

By the time the heavy part of the eating was done, the whole assemblage was in hearty good humour.

Katey began to clear away the things, having given the baby in charge to her mother-in-law. The moment she began, however, Mary and Jane started up and insisted that they should do the work, and on her showing signs of determination forced her into the arm-chair, and placed the two sweethearts on guard over her, threatening them with various pains and penalties in event of their failing in their trust.

Seeing the other girls at work, Miss MAnaspie insisted on helping also, and they were too kind-hearted not to make her welcome in the little kindly office.

The next addition to the working staff was Mr Muldoon, who, to the astonishment of every one who knew him, clamoured loudly for work, evidently bent on going wherever Miss M'Anaspie went, and on helping her in her every task.

It was a sight to see the great man work. He evidently felt that he was extending and being more friendly with his inferiors than, perhaps, in justice to his own position he was warranted in doing;

and he took some pains to let every one see that he was playing at work. His ignorance of the simplest domestic offices was preternatural. He did not know how to carry even a plate without putting it somewhere he ought not, or spilling its contents over some one; and he managed to break a tumbler and two plates just to show, like Beaumarchais and the watch, that that sort of thing was not in his line.

Mrs Jerry did not know Pope’s lines about the perfection of a woman’s manner and temper, wherein he puts as the culmination of her virtues, ‘And mistress of herself though china fall;’ but she had the good temper and the good manner of nature, which is above all art, and although, woman-like, the wreck of her household goods went to her heart, she said nothing, but looked as sweet as if the breakage pleased her.

Truly, Jerry O’Sullivan had a sweet wife and a happy home. Prosperity seemed to be his lot in life.

CHAPTER 2

TO AND FRO

When all was made comfortable for the after sitting, the conversation grew lively. The position of persons at table tends to further cliquism, and to narrow conversation to a number of dialogues, and so the change was appreciated.

The most didactic person of the company was Mr Parnell, who was also the greatest philosopher; and the idea of general conversation seemed to have struck him. He began to comment on the change in the style of conversation.

‘Look what a community of feeling does for us. Half an hour ago, when we were doing justice to Mrs O’Sullivan’s good things, all our ideas were scattered. There was, perhaps, enough of pleasant news amongst us to make some of us happy, and others of us rich, if we knew how to apply our information; but still no one got full benefit, or the opportunity of full benefit, from it.’

Here Price whispered something in Jane’s ear, which made her blush and laugh, and tell him to ‘go along.’

Parnell smiled and said gently -

‘Well, perhaps, Tom, some of the thoughts wouldn’t interest the whole of us.’

Tom grinned bashfully, and Parnell reverted to his theme. He was a great man at meetings, and liked to talk, for he knew that he talked well.

‘Have any of you ever looked how some rivers end?’

‘What end?’ asked Mr Muldoon, and winked at Miss M’Anaspie.

‘The sea end. Look at the history of a river. It begins by a lot of little streams meeting together, and is but small at first. Then it grows wider and deeper, till big ships mayhap can sail in it, and then it goes down to the sea.'

'Poor thing,' said Mr Muldoon, again winking at Margaret.

'Ay, but how does it reach the sea? It should go, we would fancy, by a broad open mouth that would send the ships out boldly on every side and gather them in from every point. But some do not do so - the water is drawn off through a hundred little channels, where the mud lies in shoals and the sedges grow, and where no craft can pass. The river of thought should be an open river — be its craft few or many — if it is to benefit mankind.'

Miss M'Anaspie who had, whilst he was speaking, been whispering to Mr Muldoon, said, with a pertness bordering on snappishness:

'Then, I suppose, you would never let a person talk except in company. For my part, I think two is better company than a lot.'

'Not at all, my dear. The river of thought can flow between two as well as amongst fifty; all I say is that all should benefit.'

Here Mr Muldoon struck in. He had all along felt it as a slight to himself that Parnell should have taken the conversational ball into his own hands. He was himself extremely dogmatic, and no more understood the difference between didacticism and dogmatism than he comprehended the meaning of that baphometic fire-baptism which set the critics of Mr Carlyle's younger days a-thinking.

'For my part,' said he, 'I consider it an impertinence for any man to think that what he says must be interesting to every one in a room.'

This was felt by all to be a home thrust at Parnell, and no one spoke. Parnell would have answered, not in anger, but in good-humoured argument, only for an imploring look on Katey's face, which seemed to say as plainly as words -

'Do not answer. He will be angry, and there will only be a quarrel.'

And so the subject dropped.

The men mixed punch, all except Mr Muldoon, who took his whisky cold, and Parnell, who took none. The former looked at the latter with a sort of semi-sneer, and said -

'Do you mean to say you don't take either punch or grog?'

'Well,' said Parnell, 'I didn't mean to say it, but now that you ask me I do say it. I never touch any kind of spirit, and, please God, I never will.'

'Don't you think,' said Muldoon, 'that that is setting yourself above the rest of us a good deal. We're not too good for our liquor, but you are. That's about the long and the short of it.'

'No, no, my friend, I say nothing of the kind. Any man is too good for liquor.'

Jerry thought the conversation was getting entirely too argumentative, so he cut in -

'But a little liquor needn't be bad for a chap if he doesn't take too much?'

'Ay, there it is,' said Parnell, 'if he doesn't take too much. But he does take too much, and the end is that it works his ruin, body and soul.'

'Whose?'

It was Miss M'Anaspie who asked the question, and it fell like a bombshell.

Parnell, however, was equal to the emergency.

'Whose?' he repeated. 'Whose? Everyone's who begins and doesn’t know where he may leave off.’

Miss M’Anaspie felt that she was answered, and looked appealingly at Mr Muldoon, who at once came to the rescue.

‘Everyone is a big word. Do you mean to tell me that every man that drinks a pint of beer or a glass of whisky, goes straight to the devil?’

‘No, no; indeed I do not. God forbid that I should say any such thing. But look how many men that mean only to take one glass, are persuaded to take two, and then the wits begin to go, and they take three or four, and five, ay, and more, sometimes. Why, men and women’ - he rose from his chair as he spoke, with his face all aglow, with earnestness and belief in his words, ‘look around you and see the misery that everywhere throngs the streets. See the pale, drunken, wasted-looking men, with sunken eyes, and slouching gait. Men that were once as strong and hard-working, and upright as any here, ay, and could look you in the face as boldly as any here. Look at them now! Afraid to meet your eyes, trembling at every sound; mad with passion one moment and with despair the next.’

The tide of his thought was pouring forth with such energy that no one spoke; even Mr Muldoon was afraid at the time to interrupt him. He went on:

‘And the women, too, God help us all. Look at them and see what part drink plays in their wretched lives. Listen to the laughter and the cries that wake the echoes in the streets at night. You that have wives, and mothers and,’ (this with a glance at Tom and Pat) ‘sweethearts, can you hear such laughter and cries and not shudder? If you can, then when next you hear it think of what it would be for you to hear some voice that you love raised like that.’

Mr Muldoon could not stand it any longer and spoke out:

'But come now, I can't see how all the misery and wretchedness of the world is to be laid on a simple glass of beer.'

'Hear, hear,' said Miss M'Anaspie.

Parnell's reply was allegorical. 'Do you see how the oak springs from the acorn - the bird from the egg? I tell you that if there were no spirits there would be less sin, and shame, and sorrow than there is.'

'Oh, yes,' said Muldoon. 'It would be a beautiful world entirely, and everybody would have everything, and nobody would want nothing, and we'd all be grand fellows. Eh, Miss Margaret, what do you think?'

'Hear, hear,' said Miss M'Anaspie, more timidly than before, however, at the same time looking over at Mrs O'Sullivan, who was looking not too well pleased at her.

'Ah, sir,' said Parnell, sadly, 'God knows that we, men and women, are not what we ought to be, and sin will be in the world, I suppose, till the time that is told. But this I say, that drink is the greatest enemy that man has on earth.'

'Why, you're quite an enthusiast,' said Mr Muldoon; 'one would think you were inspired.'

'I would I were inspired. I wish my voice was of gold, and that I could make men hear me all over the world, and that I could make the stars ring again with cries against the madness that men bring upon themselves.'

'Upon my life,' said Mr Muldoon, 'you should be on the stage. You have missed your vocation. By the way, what is your vocation?'

'I am a hatter.'

Miss M'Anaspie blurted out suddenly, 'Mad as a hatter,' and then suddenly got red in the face, and shut up completely as she saw her employer's eye fixed on her with a glare almost baleful in its intensity.

Mr Muldoon laughed loudly, and slapped his fat knees as he ejaculated - ‘Brayvo, brayvo. One for his nob - mad as a hatter. That accounts for the enthusiasm.’ Then, seeing a look of such genuine pain on Katey’s face that even his obtuseness could not hide from him how deeply he was hurting her, added - ‘Of course, Mr Parnell, I am only joking; but still it is not bad - mad as a hatter. Ha, ha!’

No one said anything more, and no one laughed; and so the matter was dropped.

Jerry felt that a gloom had fallen on the assemblage, and tried to lift it by starting a new topic.

‘Do you know,’ said he, ‘I had a letter from John Sebright the other day, and he tells me if you want to make money England’s the place.’

‘Indeed,’ said his mother, satirically.

Going to England was an old ‘fad’ of Jerry’s, and one which had caused his mother many an anxious hour of thought, and many a sleepless night.

‘Yes,’ answered Jerry, ‘he says there is more work there than here, and better paid; and that a man has ten chances for gettin’ on for one he has here.’

‘The one chance often wins when the ten fail,’ said Parnell.

‘And it’s worse losing ten pounds than one,’ added Margaret.

‘And some girls’ tongues are as long as ten,’ said Mrs O’Sullivan, who could not bear anything which tended to make light of her wishes with regard to Jerry, and so determined to put a stop to Miss M’Anaspie’s volubility.

Mr Muldoon, however, came to the rescue.

‘And some girls who have been for ten years in misery and discomfort find sometimes that one year brings them all they want.'

Miss M'Anaspie put her handkerchief before her face, and again dead silence fell on the assembly. Parnell broke it.

'Jerry, put the idea out of your head. You know that you couldn't go now even if you wanted, and there is no use sighing for what can't be.'

'I don't know that,' said Jerry argumentatively. 'I could go now with Katey and the young ones, just as well as if I was a boy still; ay, and better, for she would keep me out of harm.'

Parnell said with great feeling, 'That's right, Jerry; stick up for the wife and stick to her too, for she's worth it. Do you but keep to your wife, and the home that she will always make for you, as long as you let her, and you may go when and where you will, and your hands will find work.'

Katey began to cry. She was still a little delicate, and anything which touched her feelings upset her very much. There was an immediate rush of all the women in the room to comfort her.

Jerry offered her some of his punch, but she put the glass aside, saying -

'No, no, dear, I never take it.'

'Come, come,' said Mr Muldoon, 'Mrs Katey, this will never do, you must take it. It is good for you.'

'No, it is good for no one.'

'Come now, Mr Parnell,' said Mr Muldoon, 'don't you know a sup of liquor would do her good? Tell her so.'

'No, no,' said Katey, 'I know myself.'

Parnell spoke -

'I cannot say, but it is good as a medicine, and as a medicine one may take it without harm.'

‘Capital thing to be sick sometimes,’ said Muldoon, winking at Tom and Pat, and laughing at his own joke.

Parnell did not like to let a point go unquestioned on a subject on which he felt deeply, so he answered -

‘When you are sick, your wish is to be well again, and the medicine that seems nice to you when well, is only in sickness but medicine after all.’

Once more Mr Muldoon began to get angry, and said, with a determination to fight the argument - a I’outrance-

‘Why, man, you would make the world a hell with all your self-denials. Do you think life would be worth having if every enjoyment of it, great and little, was to be suppressed. The world is bad enough, goodness knows, already, without making a regular hell of it.’

‘Hell is a big word.’

‘It is a big word, and I mean it to be a big word.’

‘Ah, it is like enough to hell already,’ said Parnell sadly.

‘On account of all the bad spirits,’ added Miss M’Anaspie.

‘Laugh, my child. Laugh whilst you may. Heaven grant that the day may never come when you cannot laugh at such thoughts. Ay, truly, the world is hard enough as it is. Bad enough, and the devil is abroad enough, and too much.’

‘Oh, he’s on earth is he?’

‘Yes, Mr Muldoon, he is, to and fro, he walks always.’

Whilst he was speaking he was drawing in his note-book.

Miss M’Anaspie got curious to know what he was doing, and asked him.

In reply he handed her the book.

She took it eagerly, and then passed it on to all the others in turn.

He had drawn an allegorical picture under which he had written -

‘To and Fro.’

The picture represented a road through a moor to a village, seen lying some distance away, the spire of its church shadowed by a passing cloud. The moor was bleak, with, in the foreground, a clump of blasted trees, and in the distance a ruined house. On the road two travellers were journeying, both seated on the same horse - a sorry nag. One of them was booted and spurred, and wore a short cloak, a slouched hat, under which the lineaments showed ghastly, for the face was but that of a skull. The other, who rode pick-a-back, was clad as the German romances love to clothe their demon when he walks the earth, with trunk hose and pointed shoes, a long floating cloak, and peaked cap with cock’s feathers. On his arm he bore a basket full of bottles, and as he clutched his grisly companion he laughed with glee, bending his head as men do when their enjoyment is in perspective rather than an actuality.

From beneath a stone a viper had raised itself, and seemed to salute the travellers with its forked tongue.

When the picture came into Mrs O’Sullivan’s hands, she fixed her spectacles and held it up a little to let the most light possible fall on it. Then she spoke —

‘God bless us and save us, but that’s an awful thing. Where did you see that, Mr Parnell?’

‘I never saw it, ma’am, except in my mind, and I see it there often enough. You, young men, mind the lesson of that picture, for it is truth. Death and the devil go together, and so sure as the devil grips hold of you, death is not far off, you may be sure, in some form or other, waiting, waiting, waiting.’

Mr Muldoon saw that the subject of drinking was coming in again, and said maliciously -

‘And this is all from a glass of beer.’

‘Ay, if you will,’ said Parnell. ‘That’s how it begins - that which is the curse of Ireland in our own time; and which, so surely as Irishmen will not use the wit and strength that God has given them, will drag her from her throne.’

Jerry got into the conversation:

‘One thing John Sebright tells me, that there is less drunkenness in England than here.’

‘Don’t you believe him,’ said Parnell. ‘That man means mischief to you. He wants to entice you to England, and then live on you when he gets you there. For Heaven’s sake put that idea of going away out of your head. You’re very well here as you are; and let well alone.’

Jerry’s mother spoke also. ‘John Sebright is a nice chap to quote sobriety as a virtue. Do you remember how often I gave you money to pay his fines to keep him out of prison after his drunken freaks, for the sake of his poor dead and gone mother. Why, that chap could no more tell truth than he could work, and that’s saying a good deal.’

‘Well, drink or no drink, mother, England’s a grand place, anyhow, and there’s lots of money going there.’

Parnell rose up from his chair and said severely - ‘Jerry O’Sullivan, do you know what you are talking about? True, that England is rich, but is money all that a man is to seek after? If the good men leave poor Ireland to make a little more money for themselves, what is to become of her? Is it not as if she was sold for money; and if you look at the real difference of wages — the wages that good sober men that can work, get here and there, a poor price she would be sold for after all.’

‘I don’t like that way of putting it,’ said Jerry, rather testily. ‘In fact I have almost made up my mind to go, and I don’t think I’m selling my country at all at all, and I wish you wouldn’t say such things.’

Parnell said nothing for a few moments. Then he tore the picture out of his note-book and handed it to him saying -

‘Jerry, old boy, if you ever do go, keep that in your purse, and if ever you go to pay for liquor for yourself or others, just think what it means.’

When the party rose up to go they found that Katey had been crying quietly, and her eyes were red and swollen.

Jerry O’Sullivan’s home was happy, and his poor, good little wife feared a change.

CHAPTER 3

AN OPENING

Jerry O'Sullivan's desire to go to England was no mere transient wish. As has been told, he had had for years a strong desire to try his fortune in a country other than his own; and although the desire had since his marriage fallen into so sound a sleep that it resembled death, still it was not dead but sleeping.

Deep in the minds of most energetic persons lies some strong desire, some strong ambition, or some resolute hope, which unconsciously moulds, or, at least, influences their every act. No matter what their circumstances in life may be, or how much they may yield to those circumstances for a time, the one idea remains ever the same. This is, in fact, one of the secrets of how individual force of character comes out at times. The great idea, whatever it may be, sits enthroned in the mind, and round it gather subordinate wishes and resolves, as the feudal nobles round the King, and so goes on the chain down the whole gamut of man's nature from the taming or suppression of his wildest passions down to the commonplace routine of his daily life.

And yet we wonder at times to see, when occasion offers, with what astonishing rapidity certain individuals assert themselves, and how, when a strange circumstance arises, some new individual arises along with it, as though the man and the hour were predestined for each other.

We need not wonder if we will but think that all along the man was ready, girt in his armour, resolved in his cause, and merely awaiting, although, perhaps, he knew it not, the opportunity to manifest himself.

Whilst Jerry had been working - and working so honestly and well that he was on the high road to success - he never once abandoned in his secret heart the idea of seeking a wider field for his exertion. Truly, Alexander has his prototypes in every age and country; and men even try to look ever beyond the horizon of their hopes, sighing for new worlds when the victories of the old have been achieved.

From the receipt of Sebright's letter, Jerry had found the old wish reviving stronger than ever. He was so prosperous that the idea of failure in work seemed too far away to be easily realised; and his home was so happy that domestic trouble was absolutely beyond his comprehension.

The holy admonition - 'Ye that stand take heed lest ye fall,' should be ever before the minds of men.

Katey saw her husband's secret wish gradually growing into a resolve, with unutterable pain; and tried to combat Jerry's views but hopelessly. At first he listened, and argued the matter over fairly in all its aspects, being ever kind-hearted and tender, and seeming to thoroughly sympathise with her views; but as the weeks wore on, he began to take a different tone, and without losing any of his kindness or tenderness to express more decided opinions and intentions. The change was so gradual that even Katey's wifely love, and the acuteness which is the handmaiden of love, could see no cause for change, nor could mark any time as being the period of a definite change.

In fact, the masculine resolution was asserting itself over the feminine, and acting and reacting in itself, but constantly in the direction of settled purpose.

With the feeling of power which a man of average mental calibre feels over a woman of similar status amongst her own sex, comes a fuller purpose - a more decided, definite resolve to the man himself. Thus, Jerry, whilst arguing with his wife, had been all the time strengthening his own resolve, and working himself up to the belief that immediate action was necessary to his success in life.

Wives, be careful how you argue with your husbands, for you walk on a ridge between two precipices. If you allow a half-formed wish to be the parent of immediate action on your husband's part, without raising a warning voice should you see danger that he does not, then you do him a wrong which will surely recoil on your own head and the heads of your children. But if, on the other hand, you persistently combat with argument wishes which should be furthered or opposed with the patent truths of the heart's experience, then you will surely fail, for you will be fighting reality with vacuity - opposing steel with air-drawn daggers of the fancy.

Katey's position was very painful. She felt that her speaking to her husband was a duty which her wifely vow, as much as her wifely love, called on her to fulfil; but at the same time she felt with that subtle instinct of true love which never errs and never lies, that she was sapping the foundations of her husband's love and weakening the influence which she had over him. Poor Katey! her lot was a hard one, but she felt - and she was right - that where duty points the way, then the way must be walked whatever be the misery of the journey, and wherever the road may lead.

Jerry's mother, too, was fretted by her son's determination. He never spoke of it to her, but she heard it from their mutual friends, and the very fact of his being reticent on the point caused her more pain by raising doubts as to his motive, not only for going, but concealing his wish from her. Jerry had a two-fold reason for his silence. Firstly, he did not wish to give her pain, and thought that by keeping silent on the point she would be spared at least the agony of looking forward to his departure. In this, Jerry, like many of his fellows, fell into the same error, which leads the hunted ostrich to hide its head in the sand - the error which we make when we think that shutting our eyes means shutting out the danger which we wish to avoid. Again, Jerry wished to avoid pain to himself.

The analysis of a sensual nature shows two evil qualities, which, although not always expressed, are, nevertheless, ruling powers - obstinacy and cruelty. No matter how these qualities may be counterbalanced by other qualities as good as these are bad, or no matter how well they are disguised, these two evil powers have here their home. Obstinacy in its hardest light is the adherence to a line of action begun for its end to be gained rather than for its duty; and cruelty is almost its logical consequence, for it is by its direct or indirect means that obstacles are cleared away or points of vantage unworthily gained. Jerry's nature was a sensual one, although it had ever been held in check.

The power of evil has a home in every human heart. In one it is a palace vast and splendid, so splendid and vast that to the onlooker there are no dark nooks, no gloomy corners, but where all is so rich and noble that there is dignity in everything. In another it is a shooting-box only visited for motives of pleasure. In another it is an office where gold and secrecy are synonymous terms. In another it is a villa. In another a lowly hut. In Jerry it was the last; but no one is to suppose that because it was a hut, that, therefore, it was unimportant. The residents in palaces are usually to a certain extent migratory, but the inhabitants of huts are seldom absentees, and every Irishman knows that a perpetually resident peasant is better for a country than a lordly absentee.

Thus Jerry's devil, although living in a small house, was still always there, and was ever on the spot when opportunities occurred.

One change - one decided change - came which Katey regretted exceedingly, and that was in his friendship for Parnell. Hitherto the two men had been excellent friends, and Jerry's success in some little business ventures was largely due to Parnell's wise counsel. But now the two men were seldom together, and the elder one seemed to have lost all his old influence over his companion.

Parnell saw the change as well as Katey, and was deeply grieved. He, however, saw, whilst he saw the change, what danger there was in alluding to it, and so as he was one of those men who feel it almost as much a breach of duty to be silent on certain occasions as to bespeak falsely, wisely kept aloof and waited for a fitting opportunity for speaking earnestly to Jerry without the risk of offending him.

Jerry, too, knew of the change in himself, and felt a sort of hostile indignation with all who opposed openly or tacitly his determination.

This was the first manifestation of the cruelty of his nature.

His mother was broken-hearted, and in her grief, when arguing with him, unwisely gave play to her bitterness, and so hardened up one of the softest spots in his heart. She abused Sebright also, and, as some of the charges which she brought against him were manifestly absurd, Jerry took occasion to think, and to express his thoughts, that they were all absurd.

The devil works through love as well as hatred, and his blows are more deadly when we who strike and we who bear alike heed them not.

One day there came a letter from John Sebright, which influenced

Jerry vitally. It was as follows:-

'Kingficher Arms, Sundy.

'Dear Jerry - You had better come over here at wanse, there is a place to sute you in a theatre called the Stanly, where the wants a carpentre to manage for them; he must be a good man or he won't doo, and the wagis is fine, not to say exsiv, and the place esy and the people nice, you had best tri for it at wanse, and don't let the chance slip, or you will be a damd fool, and not worth gettin' another, don't let your mother or your wife keep you back, as the will tri to, for weemen isn't able to do bisnis, but men is; an' the maneger has a nefew, who is a friend o' mine an' a capatle felo, an' a hed like iren, an'mony is goin' heer lik water, an' a man with your hed wood make a fortin in no tim, which let me no at wanse til I tel the nephew, which if you give me a £1 tu give him to speek for you, it will be all rite, and send the money by return to me, care of Mrs Smith, Kingficher Arms, Welbred-street, London, and i remane yours trooly.

'John Sebright.

'P.S. - don't sho this to your wif or mother, or the'l think i wance to mak you cum, an' av corse mi motivs is disintrested, as i'm wel off miself an' quit hapy.

'P.S. 2. - if you tel the weemen tel them i'm goin' to be marrid to a good woman ho is very pias an' charetable an' wel off don't forget the £1.'

Jerry was no fool, and very clearly he saw through the motive of the writer of this precious epistle, but there were passages in it which interested him deeply. Notwithstanding the mean selfishness of the man's thoughts, and the vile English in which they were expressed, he could not shut his eyes to certain things which they suggested, chiefly the opening as theatrical carpenter.

Jerry had never heard of the Stanley Theatre, and even now had not the ghost of an idea what it was like or of what class; nevertheless, he could not help thinking that it might be something good. London has a big name, and people who live out of it have traditionally an idea that everything there is great, and rich, and flourishing, and happy.

The people who live in it can tell a different story, and point to hundreds and thousands of the poorest and most wretched creatures that exist on the face of God's beautiful world - the world that He has made beautiful, but that man has defaced with sin.

Jerry was in that state in which a man finds everything which happens exactly suiting his own views. His eyes - the eyes of his inner self - were so full of his project that they were incapable of seeing anything but what bore on its advancement. He shut his eyes to dangers and defects and difficulties, and like many another man leaped blindly into the dark.

Sometimes to leap in the dark is the perfection of wisdom and courage combined; but this is when the gloom which is round us is a danger, from which we must escape at any hazard, and not when we make an artificial night by wilfully shutting our eyes upon the glory of the sun.

Jerry wrote to Sebright, enclosing a Post-office order for one pound and telling him to lose no time about seeing after the situation for him.

He said not a word about what he had done, even to poor little Katey, who saw with the eyes of her love that he was keeping something back from her.

It was the first secret of their married life, and the bright eyes were dim from silent weeping as the little wife rose the morning after the letter to London was despatched.

Several days elapsed before Jerry got any reply from London; and the interval was an unhappy time for both him and his wife. Katey's grief grew heavier and heavier to her since she had no one to tell it to; and Jerry felt that there was a shadow between them. He recked not that it was the shadow of his own selfish desire - the spectre of the future - that stood between them.

Katey's lot was hard. The sweetest blessing of marriage is that it halves our sorrows and doubles our joys; and so far as her present life went Katey was a widow in this respect - but without the sweet consolation that married trust had never died.

Jerry's anxiety made the home trouble light. He had, like most men to whom the world behind the curtain is as unknown as were the mysteries of Isis to a Neophyte, a strange longing to share in the unknown life of the dramatic world. Moth-like he had buzzed around the footlights when a boy, and had never lost the slight romantic feeling which such buzzing ever inspires. Once or twice his professional work had brought him within the magic precincts where the stage-manager is king, and there the weirdness of the place, with its myriad cords and chains, and traps, and scenes, and flies, had more than ever enchanted him.

The chance now offered of employment was indeed a temptation. If he should be able to adopt the new life he would have an opportunity of combining his romantic taste and his trade experience, and would be moreover in that wider field for exertion to which he had long looked forward.

And so he waited with what patience he could, and shut his eyes as close as possible to the growing miseries of his home.

At last a letter came from Sebright, telling him that he had got the place, and one also from the manager, stating that he would have to be at work in a fortnight's time, and stating the salary, which was very liberal.

Face to face with the situation, Jerry found that the sooner he told his wife the better. He took the day to think over his plans, and when he went home in the evening he went prepared to tell her.

There was about him a tenderness unusual of late - a tenderness which reminded Katey of the first days of their married life and of the time when her first child was born; and so the little woman's heart was touched, and woman-like she could not fear, nor even see troubles in the light of her husband's smile. Jerry himself felt the change in her manner, and his tenderness grew. He took her on his knees, as in their old courting days, and a few sweet whispered words brought the colour to her cheek, and the old light into her eyes. Then it was that Jerry felt how hard was the news which he had to tell, and he half repented of his resolution. He thought of the happy home which he was breaking up, and of the anguish of the little wife and mother who was to be taken away from all her friends and relatives to begin the world anew amongst strangers. But the time was come when he must speak, for to delay would be cruel, and so he began with a huskiness in his throat which was not usual to him. 'Katey, dear, I've some news for you.' Katey's arms tightened round his neck. 'Oh, and good news too, Jerry, I know by your tenderness to me to-night. Jerry dear, have you given up the wild idea?'

Jerry did not expect this, and his voice became a little harder as he replied -

‘No, I have not given up the wild idea, as you call it. It is about it that I want to speak.’

Katey felt the shadow pass between them again, and in spite of all she could do her eyes filled with tears. She did not wish to hurt Jerry, however, and turned away her head. But, man-like, he would know all that was going on in the mind of his companion, and, taking her face between his strong hands, he turned it up to the light. As he did so, he saw the tears and could not help feeling annoyed, for he knew that as yet in the conversation he had said nothing to warrant the change from sunshine to rain. So he spoke not unkindly - ‘Cryin’ already. Ah, Katey, what do you mean?’ ‘Nothin’, Jerry, nothin’, my dear, only I couldn’t help it. I’m not very strong yet.’ She said this with a tender, half shy glance down at the cradle, which she was rocking with her foot, that would have turned the heart of a savage.

Jerry could not help feeling moved, and clasped her still more tenderly in his strong arms, and his voice softened -

‘Sure, Katey, it’s breakin’ my heart I am all day knowin’ how you would take the news. Cry away, darlin’, it’ll do you good, and mayhap the news will make you cry.’

‘No, no, Jerry, only talk to me like that, and I’ll never cry - never - never - never.’ The little woman’s voice went up in a sweet, half playful crescendo as she reiterated the last words, and shook aside her tears.

‘Then, Katey, I’ll tell you. I have got an offer to go to England’ - Katey’s face fell - ‘to London - to become head carpenter in a theatre, an’ I’ve written to say I’ll take it.’

Woman’s nature, when compared with man’s, resembles more the hare than his does, and her moral eye, like the hare’s eye, is set far back for seeing the past clearly, whilst it accepts the future blindly. She accepts facts more easily than resolves; and when once a thing has been accomplished, and any final or decisive step taken, the major part of her anxiety is over. Accordingly Katey heard her husband's resolve with an equanimity which took him by surprise. She did not cry, although her heart felt to herself to sink into her very boots, but simply drew his head on her bosom and stroked his hair, saying fervently -

'God grant, Jerry, acushla, that it may be for the best. May all the saints pray for us both.'

'Amen,' said Jerry, and then both remained silent for a time.

Soon the woman's curiosity spoke, and her imagination began to work; and in the pleasure of expectation of change - always specially dear to women - she lost sight for a time of her present trouble. She began to question Jerry about the new engagement, and, having once began, poured forth such a tide of questions that he had no time to answer them, even had he known himself all she wanted. He did as well as he could, however; and now that the worst of the news was over, her hopeful nature took the brightest view possible of the case, and she seemed, by comparison with her mood of the last few days, quite happy.

Jerry did not tell her that night of the time of leaving, but let her sleep with what happiness she could, for he knew that the morrow, when she had learned the necessary suddenness of their departure, would be a sad one for her.

In the morning he told her just before going to his work, for he put off the evil moment, half that she might be able to have her cry in quietness - he knew that she would cry - and half with a man's selfish wish to avoid an unpleasant scene.

Katey bore up till he was gone, and then the tide of her grief and sorrow burst forth unchecked, and she cried so pitifully that her little ones began to cry from childish sympathy. She took them in her arms and knelt down with them and rocked herself and them to and fro, and moaned - ‘Oh, woe the day, oh, woe the day.’

CHAPTER 4

THE NEW LIFE

Jerry O'Sullivan well knew the difference between the dispositions of his wife and his mother; and it was not without a shrinking of spirit that he approached the dwelling of the latter that evening to impart the unwelcome news.

His fears were not without foundation, for when he began to tell his news the old lady who had hitherto been full of love and affection broke out into a desperate fit of crying, a very unusual thing with her, mingling her tears with reproaches such as Jerry had never before heard from her lips.

'And you, my son,' she said, 'are about to leave your home, and your country, and your mother, and to go amongst strangers. Oh, woe the day, oh, woe the day, that my child ever wants to leave the ground where his poor dead father lies sleeping. Oh, Jerry, Jerry, was it for this that I watched over your youth, and toiled and slaved for you, early and late, that when I saw you grow into a strong, steady, honest man, with a sweet wife and a happy home, I should see you leave me for ever.'

Jerry interrupted. 'Not for ever, mother.'

'Ay, ay, for ever. Wirrasthrue, wirrasthrue. Sure, don't I know I'll never see your face again. You're goin', Jerry, among strangers an' their ways are not our ways, and amongst them you'll forget the lessons of your home. You're goin' to a city where the devil lives, if he lives any one place in the world; and I must sit at home here and doubt, and sigh, and weep, and weep, till I die.'

'Mother, dear, don't take on like this. Why should you doubt, and sigh, and weep at all, at all? I amn't goin' to do anything wrong. I'm goin' to work harder than ever, an' I think, mother - I do think that it's not fair to me to think that I'm goin' to go to the devil, just because I leave one town to live in another.'

But reason and consolation were alike thrown away on Mrs O'Sullivan. The spice of obstinacy in her nature, and which Jerry had inherited from her, made her stick to her point; and so after many efforts Jerry came away leaving her bowed down with sorrow. He was himself somewhat indignant - and with fair enough reason - that all his relatives should take it for granted that he was going to change an honest hardworking life for an idle dissolute one.

He did not like to go home at once, for he somehow felt afraid of meeting a reproachful look on Katey's face. This fear was a proof that he knew in his secret heart that he was doing wrong, for in all their married life Katey had never once given him cause for such a thought; it was in his own conscience that the reproach arose; and the look was on the face of his angel.

Accordingly, he made a detour and called at the house of Mr Muldoon. The great man was within and received him heartily.

'Why, O'Sullivan,' said he, 'this is quite unexpected. Sit down, man, and make yourself comfortable.'

Jerry sat down, but was anything but comfortable. Whilst he was on the way to his home, he had felt a desire to stay away, but now that he was settled down he longed to be at home. Katey's face, pale with her recent sickness, and paler still from her recent grief, seemed to look at him, and he thought and felt how her poor heart must be beating as she waited and waited for his return, counting the minutes, and finding in each moment's extra delay new causes for dread. At last he could stand it no longer and jumped up, saying to his host:

‘I can’t stay. I have not been at home yet, and Katey will be expecting me.’

Muldoon laughed.

‘There’s a man with three children! Sure, a wife in her honeymoon wouldn’t look for you like that.’

‘Katey would, and does. No, indeed, I can’t stay. I just came to tell you that I have got an engagement in the Stanley Theatre, in London, as carpenter, and I am going in less than a fortnight.’

Mr Muldoon whistled.

‘This is sudden,’ he said.

‘Ay,’ said Jerry, but said no more.

‘You must come and spend an evening with me before you go, and your mother will come and Marg-, Miss M’Anaspie; and we’ll get the boys and girls and have great fun.’

‘Agree,’ said Jerry, and took his leave.

When he got home Katey flew to the door to meet him, and clung to him and kissed him, and he wondered how he could be such a fool as to stop away for fear of any reproach from her. He told her of his visit to his mother and Mr Muldoon, and of the invitation of the latter, which she agreed should be accepted.

The next week was such a busy one that neither Jerry nor Katey had much time for repining, and even Mrs O’Sullivan found some consolation in her exertions and the liberal preparations which she was making for her son’s departure. At first there was some question as to the advisability of Katey and the children going at once, as some of the family thought that it would be better if Jerry went alone and Katey waited to follow when all was comfortably settled for her. Katey herself had, however, put a stop at once to the discussion.

‘I don’t want comfort,’ she said, ‘and I amn’t afraid to rough it since we are to go; but I want to be with Jerry.'

Her mother-in-law backed her up in this view, and so the matter was arranged.

Mr Muldoon's entertainment was a great affair. No expense had been spared on the host's part, and no trouble on the part of his servant; and the consequence was an amount of splendour which dazzled all beholders.

The entertainment was given in the drawingroom over the shop, a room seldom entered save by the servant, who periodically dusted it. The covers had been taken off the chairs which now showed their red cushions in all their splendour. The yellow gauze had been removed from the mirror, the picture frames, and the gaselier, which no longer presented its habitual appearance — that of an immense jelly bag, through which yokes of egg have passed. The eating and drinking was on a scale of magnificence. Not only had the warehouse been ransacked for its delicacies, but good things of, so to speak, an alien description had been provided, and so far as the inner-man was concerned nothing was wanting. The company was the same as that at the christening party, with the addition of a couple of hard dry old men, of whom Mr Muldoon thought much, and to whom he paid decided deference.

When all the company had assembled, which was about seven o'clock, Mr Muldoon ordered supper, and all went vigorously to work. Hitherto there had been a little stiffness. Price and Carey had been somewhat awed by Mr Muldoon's magnificence, and their sweethearts, seeing this, had followed their lead, and remained in seemingly bashful silence. Jerry and Katey, and Mrs O'Sullivan, and Parnell, were too heavy-hearted for mirth, and so the only members of the party who were lively, were the host and Miss M'Anaspie.

The latter was anything but sorrowful, and truly with good cause. She saw with the instinct of her sex that she had made a conquest in the rich old bachelor, and already tasted possession of all the splendour which surrounded her. She was even now, whilst she pretended to admire, planning changes in the room and its furniture. The chairs would not be arranged as at present, the pictures were too gloomy, and would have to be replaced by others of brighter hue - in fact, altogether much additional splendour would have to be imported, so that all her friends and visitors would be driven to the wildest envy without giving them a chance of escape.

When the supper was done, Mr Muldoon stood up and made a speech reverting to Jerry's departure, and wishing him success, and also managing to bring in a neat compliment to Miss M'Anaspie's good looks, which caused that bashful young female to hide her face in her pockethandkerchief and to giggle for some minutes. Before he sat down he said, and said it pointedly -

'The last meeting of a festive description at which we all assisted was, I think, somewhat spoiled by various discussions. Now, I hope that to-night we will have no such discussions. I wish that our friends, Jerry and Katey, may have an evening all jolly and merry.'

'Hear, hear,' said the old men, simultaneously.

Parnell felt that all this was levelled at him, and found his hands tied. There was no discussion of any kind, and as nothing more than casual remarks were made, the party soon took a tone so gloomy that even the lively Margaret found her spirits below zero. All this tended to irritate Mr Muldoon. A man of his temperament gets dogmatic in proportion to his irritation, and consequently he soon was laying down the law on every imaginable point.

This still more increased the gloom till all was so deadly that

Katey could bear it no longer, and left earlier than she had intended. The rest were not slow to follow her example, and Mr Muldoon was so enraged at the miserable failure of his merry party that he would hardly say good night.

The days drew on towards their departure, and all were so busy that there was no time for thought - perhaps just as well for those of them that had hearts to feel.

At last the day arrived, and their friends assembled at the North-wall to see them off, for they were going by sea on account of their luggage, which was quite disproportionate to their rank in life. The anguish of parting was very great, and the tears shed many. But partings must ever be, and this one was like all that have gone before and all that are to follow after. So great was the grief of all that Jerry for a time repented of his determination.

And so Jerry O'Sullivan and his wife and children left home and fortune to seek greater fortune in a strange place.

The voyage lasted three days. For the first twenty-four hours Katey was too sick to think, and the poor children suffered dreadfully; and it was not till the black bare rocks of the Land's End came into view that the poor little woman was able to look about her. Even the first glimpse of her future country was not reassuring, for it looked very black and cheerless and inhospitable indeed.

However, by the time Falmouth, with its houses clustered up the hill, and its quaint, quiet, old-world look still upon it, came in sight, her spirits rose. From thence the journey was enjoyed by all, for the weather was fine and the sea like glass. The south coast of England is full of charming scenery, which one sees much of in passing from port to port, and it was no wonder that Jerry and his wife felt somewhat elated at being amongst such wealth and security as the disposition of things there presupposed. Plymouth, the queen of ports, with its wealth of naval strength and its picturesque batteries on Mound Edgecombe, Drake Island, and the Hoe; and Portsmouth, guarded by iron-clad towers out in the very sea, miles of continuous batteries and innumerable war-ships, made a deep impression, and somehow Katey felt that Jerry was a cleverer man than she had given him credit for being.

It is the nature of the greater to absorb the lesser. We see the beauty of the rose in full luxuriance in the summer sunlight; it is only when we reach the core that we find the canker worm.

At last the Thames was reached, and the O'Sullivans were fairly awed by the strength of the defences. All up the river, which took them the best part of a day to ascend, the banks were studded with forts on either side. Little low-lying forts, all fronted with iron, dangerous places, very hard to hit from any distance away, but able to contain the best and biggest guns made in the world; the black iron-cased ports, in rows seemingly level with the water's edge, looked like the iron doors of the vaults in a cemetery, a fact which, in the eyes of the onlookers, added not a little to the grim terror of their appearance. The wonder culminated at Tilbury, for here two immense forts defended the narrowest part of the river, and made the idea of any hostile force passing up it a complete impossibility.

London was reached at last. Busy, bustling, rushing, hurrying London, compared with which all other cities seem as the castle of the sleeping princess in the fairy tale; and Jerry and his wife, on landing from the steamer, albeit they came from a city where Progress speaks with no puny voice and works with no lazy hand, felt bewildered.

At the best of times and places a landing-stage is no flower garden, especially to the incomer; but the London landing-stages, with their great steam-cranes and palatial warehouses, and ships lying seven or eight deep out into the river, are wonders in themselves. It was only by patience, and care, and asking many questions that Jerry was able to bring his family into the wholly terrestrial world.

Through much bustling, scrambling, and exertion, they found their way into the street where the theatre was situated, for as they knew nothing about the place Jerry thought it best to get as near to his work as he could. He had high resolves, and intended to work harder even in the new life than in the old.

The neighbourhood was exceedingly poor, and an amount of misery and squalor prevailed which showed Katey in as many moments as the other had taken hours that all was not gold which glittered within the strip of silver sea which her sons call Britain's bulwarks, but that the greatness, and wealth, and strength, have their counterfoils in crime, and poverty, and disease.

More than an hour was spent in looking for lodgings, and Katey's heart was sick and sore. There was some vital objection to every place. One was too dear, another was too dirty, a third was too small, and so on.

All things have an end, even looking for lodgings, and towards nightfall they lighted on a place, which, although not exactly what they required, was still the nearest approach to it that they had yet come across. It was over a green-grocer's shop, and promised to be fairly comfortable. Katey, somehow, felt that the mere show of green stuff gave it a little of the idea of home - just enough, she found out afterwards, to make her home sickness, which had worn somewhat away during the last day or two, come back again.

However, she had no time for brooding over sorrows, real or sentimental. The children were dead tired and crying with sleep, and so when a fire was lit, and the basket of provisions opened, they were tucked into their bed and fell asleep in a moment.

Whilst Katey was thus attending to her household duties, Jerry was exercising his professional skill in making the room comfortable, knocking up nails here and there, and generally improving the disposition of affairs. Both had finished about the same time, and then Katey made the tea, and the husband and wife sat down to chat, she sitting on his knee as all loving little wives love to sit.

Jerry now felt face to face with the realities of his new life, and the prospect was not all cheering. He missed the comforts of home, and felt, in spite of his strong wilful self-belief which deadens a mind like his to many outward miseries, that he was but an atom in the midst of the world around him - a grain of sand in that great desert which men call London. Katey was more cheerful, for a wife carries with her husband and children her true home which rests as securely in her heart as a snail's-house on his back. Katey slept that night, for she was tired out, but Jerry could not sleep.

In the morning he was stirring by daylight, and after lighting the fire, for Katey was so worn out that she still slept, went out to look about the neighbourhood. It was still so early that but few people were up. He found his way to the theatre, whose external appearance filled him with consternation. The outside of a small theatre is at the best of times unpromising, and this one looked, in the cool morning air, squalid in the extreme.

Jerry wandered round it curiously trying to get every possible view. As it went back into a large block of buildings, this was no sort of easy task; and so by the time the survey was completed he was quite ready for his breakfast.

Katey was up and as bright as a bee. The children had recovered their good temper in their sleep, and everything was infinitely more cheerful than had seemed possible for it ever to be the night before.

Katey came up to her husband as he entered the room and put her arms round his neck and kissed him several times very, very fondly.

'God bless our future life, Jerry, dear,' she said, 'I hope it will always be as happy as this. If I can do it be sure your home will always be a cheerful and happy one.'

He kissed her in return, feeling more deeply than he cared to say, for there was a rising lump in his throat.

The morning passed in settling things straight, and in the afternoon Jerry went down to the theatre again. The place looked more lively than before, although in reality still very dismal. There were a few of those nondescript, ill-clad loungers that are only seen in the precincts of theatres, hanging round the door - those seedy specimens of humanity who are the camp-followers of the histrionic army.

When Jerry asked one of them where he would find the manager, he winked at his companions, rubbed his lips, and said, with obsequious alacrity -

'This way, sir. Come with me and I'll show you the way.'

Jerry followed him through several dark passages filled with innumerable boxes of all sizes - old woodwork and portions of scenic ornamentation half covered with tarnished gilding, till they reached a door, to which the guide pointed, saying -

'It's a very dry day, your honour.'

'Very dry,' said Jerry.

‘A drop would not be bad, sir.’

Jerry’s appearance was so good that the man called him sir, not all for the purpose of flattering his small vanity.

Jerry gave him twopence, and knocked at the door.

He was told to come in, and on doing so found the manager who was just going out, and who, being in a hurry, told him to come to him next morning to talk over his duties, and in the meantime to see the stage-manager, Mr Griffin, who would show him over the place, so that he might get accustomed to it.

Jerry managed to find his way to the stage, which was lit by a great line of gas-jets on the top of a vertical pipe, like a hayrake, stuck at the back of the orchestra. A dress rehearsal was going on, and Jerry stood in the wing to watch. The play was a version of Faust, and the dresses were the same as those used in Gounod’s opera. Presently, Mr Griffin noticed the strange face, and came over to the wing. Jerry told him his name, and was at once welcomed as a member of the staff. He was introduced to several people on the stage with whom he was likely to come in contact. Amongst the actors was a tall individual who was performing the part of ‘Mephistopheles,’ who came over to Jerry and introduced himself, saying that he knew John Sebright. Jerry was glad to see anyone who had the tie of a mutual friend amongst so many strange faces, and, although he did not like the appearance of his new friend, spoke to him heartily.

Whenever he had an opportunity during the course of the rehearsal he came over to Jerry and resumed their chat. Presently he came over and said -

‘I am not on in this scene. Come and have a glass of beer with me.’

‘With pleasure,’ said Jerry, for he was hot and thirsty, and the twain adjourned to a little tavern across the street, Mons, the new friend, calling into his dressing room to put on his Ulster coat, so that his stage dress would not be observed.

When they entered the tavern the bar-keeper was busy settling his glasses, and had his back turned to them. Mons took off his Ulster and sat down, there being no one but themselves present except a drunken shoemaker, whom Mons knew, and a beggarman who followed them in.

When the bar-keeper turned round Jerry met the most repulsive face he had ever seen - a face so drawn and twisted, with nose and lips so eaten away with some strange canker, that it resembled more the ghastly front of a skull than the face of a living man. Jerry was shocked, but in the meantime Mons called for the beer, which was brought and soon drunk.

Mons then said —

‘Grinnell, this is our new carpenter.’

‘Glad to see you, sir. Welcome to London. I understand you’re Irish. You beat us there in one thing, at all events.’

‘What is that?’ said Jerry.

“Your whisky. We can get none like it; but I tell you what, I’ll give you some liquor you never tasted, I’ll be bound. And as you’re a stranger I’ll make it a present to you.’

‘No, no,’ said Jerry.

‘Take it,’ whispered Mons. ‘He’ll be offended if you don’t.’

Grinnell produced a bottle of labelled ‘Gift’ from the shelf, and poured out two half tumblers full and handed one to each.

‘That’s what I give for my hansel,’ said Grinnell. ‘What do you think of it?’

‘Capital,’ said Jerry, after tasting it. ‘What is it called. I see ‘Gift’ on the bottle?'

'No, that's not its name. I put that on it to show my customers that when I give it I mean civility and not commerce. It's a decoction I make myself.'

Just then a boy ran across from the theatre and said - 'Mr Mons, you're wanted. Your scene is on.' Mons tried to put his hand into his pocket, but could not as his tights had no pockets. He said to Jerry as he went out - 'I've got no money with me. Will you pay for the beer and I'll give it you when you come back to the theatre.' 'All right,' said Jerry, and he took out his purse. As he opened it he saw Parnell's picture, and then it struck him that his new life was beginning but badly, drinking in the middle of the day.

He paid the money and went quickly out of the public house without looking behind him.

CHAPTER 5

HOW THE NEW LIFE BEGAN

When Jerry got back to the theatre the place did not somehow look the same; there was too much tarnished gilding, he thought, and too little reality. Although the place seemed very old and dirty - so old and so dirty that after looking about him for a little time he felt that there was room and opportunity for all his skill and energy - there was something so cheering in this prospect of hard work that he forgave the dirt and the age, and longed to get into active service.

The rehearsal did not take much longer, and then the various actors and employes dispersed. Mons came over to Jerry and asked him to come to his dressing-room for a moment. Jerry was anxious to get home, and said so.

‘You need not fear,’ said Mons. ‘I shan’t detain you a minute. I only want to give you what you paid for me.’

‘Nonsense, man,’ said Jerry, who felt almost insulted, for, like all Irishmen, he had one virtue which too often leans to vice’s side - generosity, and considered that hospitality was involved in the question of ‘who pays?’

Of all the silly ideas that ever grew in the minds of a people, feeding on their native generosity of disposition, this idea is the most silly. Let any man but think honestly how honour or hospitality can be involved in the mere payment of a few pence, and then ask himself the question in his heart of what difference there is to him between the nobler virtues of his soul and the pride of superabundant coinage. Jerry O’Sullivan was no fool, and often reasoned with himself on the subject; but still the prejudice of habit was too strong within him to be easily overcome, and so he felt hurt in spite of his reasons. Mons answered him suavely —

‘No nonsense at all. I borrowed a small sum of money off you, which you kindly lent me. I now wish to repay you.’

‘Sure there isn’t need of repayment because I paid for a glass of beer.’

‘But a debt is a debt, large or small, and I don’t want to remain due to any man.’

Jerry thought for a moment or two. The justness of the statement struck him so forcibly that he felt that any further talk would be unfair to his friend; so answered simply - ‘Fair enough,’ and took the money proffered, thinking to himself what a good-hearted, honest fellow his new friend was.

It was well nigh dark when Jerry got home. He found Katey up to her eyes in work; for between settling the rooms and unpacking, and looking after the children and the supper, she had quite enough to do. She had given the rooms a thorough cleaning - a thing very much required — and as they had not quite recovered from the effects; were not so comfortable as they might have been. The floors still presented that patchy appearance which newly-washed woodwork always assumes; and even the bright fire was not able to quite overcome the idea of damp thus suggested.

Nevertheless, the change even to unfinished cleanliness was pleasant after the unutterable grime of the theatre; and Jerry felt how pleasant was the idea of home, albeit he regretted in the core of his heart that his real home - the place where he was born and bred — was far away.

Katey bustled about; and soon the supper was ready, and in its consumption things began to assume a pleasanter aspect. All were tired and went to bed early.

In the morning Jerry was up early and round the neighbourhood looking about him. Theatrical life, save on occasions, begins late, even for the subordinates, and Jerry's services were not required till an hour which, when compared with his habitual hour for going to work, seemed to him to be closer to evening than morning. At the time appointed he was waiting to see the manager, who did not appear, however, till more than an hour after his engagement. Jerry waited with impatience for his coming. To a man habitually as well as naturally active in occupation, nothing is so tiresome as that of waiting: it is only the drones in the hive of life that enjoy idleness in the midst of others' work.

It is the misery of all those whose work is connected with the arts that there is a spice of uncertainty in everything. It would seem as if Providence had decreed that those who soar above the level of commonplace humanity should bear with them some counterbalancing weakness to show them that they are but of the level after all. The ancients showed this idea by an allegory in the story of him who, with wings of wax, thinking himself no longer a mortal, but a god, flew close to the sun till the waxen pinions melted, and he fell prone.

Jerry was in no good humour at the end of his long wait, and more than once the idea occurred to him that a theatre was a very dry place. Fortunately, however, he was afraid to leave his post, or else Mr Grinnell might have benefitted by his thirst.

When the manager, Mr Meredith, came in he spoke to Jerry in an off-hand way, telling him what his duties would be, and what his salary; that he should be always up to time; that he should keep his subordinates in good order, and so forth; and ended by sending him off to Mr Griffin to find out the details of his work.

Mr Griffin was available, for the rehearsal of the day was only that of a stock piece, whose management he could trust to the hands of the prompter. He went right over the stage with Jerry, showing him the various appliances and their manner of use. Jerry's practised mind at once took in what was required in each case, and he saw his way to many improvements, to execute which his hands itched. The new style of work was not a little confusing, however, and the names of the different things got so mixed up that when he was asleep that night Jerry kept dreaming of slots, and flies, and wings, and flats, and vampire traps, and grooves, and PS (prompt side), and OP (opposite prompt side), all which got jumbled together and puzzled him not a little. He was not required at the theatre in the night time for a couple of days, and so spent the evenings at home.

At last he got regularly to work, and began his task of reorganisation, commencing by trying a general cleaning up. After half-an-hour's work he was astonished. He could not have believed that any place could be so dirty, or that such a pile of dust and rubbish of every kind could have been accumulated into the space from which the pile before him had been removed. In the cleaning process he had got so dry that he found it necessary to have a drink, and accordingly he went to a corner of the cellar, where there was a tap, to get some water. As he was about to drink, Mons, who had followed him, spoke -

'You don't mean to say you're drinking water at this time of day?'

'Bedad I am. I've the thirst of the lost upon me,' and Jerry raised his hands, of which he had made a bowl, to his lips. Mons gave him a shove, which spilled the water.

‘Don’t be an ass, man,’ he said. ‘Have a glass of beer, or try Barclay and Perkins.’

‘What is Barclay and Perkins?’

‘Entire.’

‘Entire! what do you mean?’

‘I mean, my dear O’Sullivan, that you are green as your Emerald Island. Barclay and Perkins are two great philanthropists who aid suffering humanity by brewing a delicious liquid called “Entire”.’

‘Oh, I see, they’re the London Guinness.’

Mons laughed satirically. ‘Exactly,’ he said. He could not fancy any one judging of anything except by a London standard of comparison. In the meantime Jerry was getting more thirsty than ever, and, on Mons renewing his invitation, he went with him to Grinnell’s, to see, as the latter suggested, ‘whether Ireland was equal to England in brewing or not.’

As they were leaving the theatre Mons stopped and said -

‘Hold on a moment, wait here - or stay, wait for me over there. I want to go up to my dressing-room to get some money.’

Jerry accordingly went across alone to the public-house.

As he opened the door his ears were greeted by sounds of strife - curses both loud and deep, falling furniture and breaking glass, and the scuffling and trampling of angry feet; added to these was the ceaseless yelping of a dog.

Jerry pushed open the door hastily and entered the house. The sight which met his eyes was not a pleasant one to a peaceably-disposed man. Two men were struggling in the centre of the room with all the intensity and ferocity of wild beasts. They were not fighting ‘fair,’ in the ordinary acceptance of the term, but were clutching wildly at each other’s throats and hair, and were trying to scratch as much as to hit. The strife evidently sprung from no desire of mastery, but was the outcome of hatred, deadly, so far as it went. Close by them a small table overturned, and a scattered pack of cards spoke volumes as to the origin of the hatred. A wretched-looking dog, whose foot had been trodden on in the scuffle, limped under the bar, yelping. The only element of calmness in the room was supplied in the person of Grinnell, who, conspicuous in his white shirt sleeves, with large cuffs and gorgeous links, leaned over his bar, complacently, resting his head on his hands and biting the tops of his fingers in quiet enjoyment of the scene. He knew from experience that a little emeute of this kind was in no wise to be discouraged, for it always ended in 'drinks all round,' an ending of which he, as a professional man, highly approved.

Jerry could not bear fighting. He had in himself, somewhere hidden below the outer crust of his nature, a spark of warlike fire which his consciousness told him should not be fanned into flame, and so, whilst his head remained clear and his reason worked, he dreaded that which he felt in his heart was dangerous. He was, however, an energetic man; and it is not natural to the energetic to stand by inactive whilst strife is being carried on. Accordingly, he rushed over to separate the combatants.

The part of peacemaker is a noble one, and one which no man worthy of the name should shrink from on account of its unpleasantnesses, difficulties, or dangers; but it has its own trials. The natural impulse of two animals, human or otherwise, when interrupted in combat is to both turn on the aggressor; and the experience of any man will tell him how marked is this characteristic in the human animal. Jerry knew this as well as most men, for, being a quiet and temperate man the burden of peacemaking fell on his shoulders more often than on those of most of his fellows.

He was not prepared, however, for the storm which fell upon him in this case. One of the combatants caught him by the hair, at which he dragged so savagely that, half to be free from the exquisite pain which it caused him, and half to end the struggle quickly, Jerry was obliged to clutch him by the throat. Having so caught him, Jerry was comparatively safe so far as this foe was concerned, for with his powerful thumb upon his throat and able to hold him at arm's length, the struggle was a matter of moments. He was not sorry for this, for he saw that his opponent was none other than John Sebright, who, however, did not seem to recognise him.

But in the meantime the second gambler was quite free and able to work out his purpose unchecked. What that purpose was Jerry had reason to remember for many a long day, for the man, who was a stoutly-built fellow enough, snatched up a chair, and, holding it by the leg in both hands, struck him over the head with it.

Jerry fell quite senseless just in time to be seen by Mons as he entered the door.

The sight of a man lying on the floor seemingly dead, save that he was bleeding copiously, called both the combatants to themselves, and instinctively they stopped and looked at him and at each other. Mons ran over and joined the group; and Grinnell, seeing that matters had gone a little too far, and fearing that his house would get a bad name, hurried out from behind his bar cursing and swearing and making a great fuss.

His first care was business. He was afraid of losing the custom of Jerry's victor by giving him offence, and equally afraid of getting into trouble if he did not take some active step against him; accordingly, he took a medium course, and coming close to him whispered:

“You had better cut, in case of a row.’

The man nodded, and taking up his coat and hat hurried out of the place.

Grinnell proceeded to act the part of the good Samaritan to Jerry, with, however, the difference that he forced the wine into his mouth instead of his cut. It takes a great deal to knock the senses out of a man for long, and Jerry’s temperate life and healthy physique stood him in good stead. In a couple of minutes he opened his eyes, and seeing a lot of strange faces round him started into a sitting posture. The effort made his head throb, and he put his hand to it. Then he felt something strange and clammy, and looking at his hand to see what it was saw it covered with blood. This gave him a shock, which, although it made him feel sick, still further aroused him, and he stood up. He was a little weak and his head was swimming, so that he clutched at the stretched hands round him to steady himself.

By-and-bye he got better, and measures were taken to stop the bleeding of the cut in his head. He did not like the dressing of the rough unskilled hands, and went off to a neighbouring apothecary to have the wound properly attended to. Sebright had vanished from the house at an early stage of the proceedings.

All this took some time, so that when Jerry got home it was past his appointed hour, and the dinner was nearly spoiled in spite of poor Katey’s efforts. In order to prevent Katey from seeing the wound, he pretended to be in a hurry to get back to his work and kept on his cap. Katey noticed that he was looking pale, and cautioned him against working too hard and going into places that were not healthy. Jerry smiled, kissed her, and went back to his work.

He was not able to do much, however, for after the rest he began to feel the real effects of the blow. He tried to work as before, but could not, and at one time got so faint that one of his men went out for some brandy, which freshened him up a bit, so that he tried to work again. Again he failed, and this time almost fainted, and again the brandy-and-water cure was resorted to. Jerry was a temperate man, and the liquor thus taken at an unusual time began to have effect on him. This made him angry, for he felt it, and having, as is known, a strong spice of obstinacy in his nature, determined not to give in to it. Therefore, instead of lying down, as Mr Griffin, who was present, wanted him to do, he insisted in going about and talking to every one, and generally laying for himself the foundation of a bad name and much distrust, for men never can have the same confidence in a man when they have once seen him off his head as they had when his wits were intact. Mons took advantage of his condition to induce him to pay Grinnell another visit, for the purpose, he said, of showing the poor man that he bore him no malice for the row that had occurred in his house. Jerry was in that state when a man thinks that to say 'yes' to everything is meritorious, and, having shaken Mons' hand several times in succession, they both adjourned over the way, followed by a little train of the hangers-on, who scented a 'free liquor' for themselves out of all this ultra-friendliness.

In the public-house they found Sebright and his sometime enemy engaged in a game of cards. They had both returned on learning that Jerry was all right, and had made up their quarrel.

When Sebright saw Jerry he rose up quickly and ran over, addressing him with much effusion.

'Why, Jerry, old man, I don't know how to look you in the face. To think that I didn't know you, and that the first time we met after so long I would be draggin' at your hair, and you clutchin' my throat.

How are you? I was waitin' here hopin' to see you, and that's how the row began. Me and Popham was playin' a game while we was waitin', an' somehow we fell out, an' - but I hope you don't mind?'

Jerry was in a large-hearted mood, and answered with some thickness of speech - 'All - righ - ole - fella' - that horrid assurance of acquiescence which is the shibboleth of the drunkard. He then forgave Popham also, who made a shambling kind of excuse for his striking him.

At this stage Grinnell proposed 'glasses round,' in which proposition he was warmly supported by all those present, Jerry offering to pay the expense.

It was late that night when Jerry got home. He was left at the door of his lodgings by Mons and Sebright, and managed to stagger upstairs.

Katey, who had been sitting alone all evening in growing anxiety for his unexplained absence, heard the unusual sound he made in ascending. She knew the step that was her husband's, and yet not his, and her heart stood still in deadly fear. She was afraid to go to the door lest she should see something to horrify her, and so sat still.

The door opened and Jerry staggered in, with hair tossed, clothes all awry, and, worst pain of all to Katey's loving heart, with the bright eyes opaque, the erect form collapsing, and the firm mouth relaxed with the drunkard's feeble maundering gape.

Katey said no word but fell on her knees, lifting her hands as she lifted her soul towards heaven for forgiveness for her poor husband.

It was the first time Jerry had ever been drunk, and it struck his poor wife a blow as cruel as the stroke of death.

'Oh, Jerry, Jerry,' she moaned in her heart, 'my love, my husband, better we had stayed at home than this - oh, God, than this.'

CHAPTER 6

A SUMMONS

The next morning was a bitter one. Katey had been crying all night, whilst Jerry lay in his drunken sleep, tears which even her prayers could not stop. To her this fall of Jerry's was but the beginning of the end, and she had wept as one who looks into the future, and sees there the moving shadow of hopeless misery, blighting and darkening everything. Towards morning her tears had stopped, partly from exhaustion, and partly because she had made a noble effort to overcome her feelings, in order that Jerry might see hope, and not despair, in her face, when he awoke.

Now, as the pale cold light was stealing in through the little window, all seemed cheerless indeed.

There is something dreadfully severe in the test of early morning light. Under it everything assumes its most real aspect; there is no use trying to hide or conceal anything from it, for out the truth will surely come. Those who fear it have no option but to shut it out altogether, and wait in darkness or artificial light, till a sun that has shone on more iniquity and untruth can look on them and their deeds, without crying shame to all the world.

Poor Katey had cause for her grief. As she sat up in their poor bed, nursing her baby, and shivering with cold and misery, the light fell on Jerry's face - a changed face to her - for on it was still the remains of a stupid frown, and the old firmness of the mouth had not yet returned. For the first time she noticed the cut on her husband's head, and with a cry, suppressed lest it should wake him, bent over to look at it. She was terribly frightened, for she had not had even a suspicion that he had been hurt. Now, having placed her baby beside her, she made a careful examination, and was horrified at the appearance which the wound presented. It was carefully dressed, but the very carefulness of the dressing increased her fear, for she should not see the actual extent of the wound, but could only fear, and of course she feared the worst. So she watched and waited till the morning light grew clearer and clearer, and then at his usual hour Jerry awoke.

There are different ways of waking, and those who take the trouble to study the matter can see for themselves how much good or evil conscience has to do with it. Jerry awoke with an evil conscience, that which makes ‘cowards of us all,’ and as the whole of yesterday, with its temptation, yielded to and its last prolonged debauch, rushed back upon his mind, he covered his eyes with his hands to shut out the reproach which he felt should be in the eyes of his wife. Katey saw the motion and understood it, and it wrung her heart with a bitter pain. She put her arms round his neck and said, with the tenderness that can only be in the voice of a loving wife exercising the sweet woman’s virtue of forgiveness:

‘Oh, Jerry, Jerry, don’t turn from me. Look to me, Jerry, dear. Can you find love and comfort anywhere but in the heart of your wife.’

Jerry could not look her in the face, but blindly groping, as if in the dark, he put his arms round her and hid his face in her bosom.

Neither spoke for a while, but Katey rocked his head on her breast, as a while ago she had rocked her baby’s. Presently she said:

‘Don’t speak, Jerry, not one word to me. Let me dress your poor hurt head, and then you can go to your work amongst your mates, knowing that there is no cloud between us.’

Jerry raised his head and looked at her, with his eyes full of honest tears and his mouth with something of the old firmness. He held her from him, at arm's length, in a loving way, and said, slowly:

'Katey, I have done wrong. Don't speak. I must say it, for it is true; but I hope it will be the last time. Trust me this once, and you won't have more cause for fear.'

He did not wish her to answer, and so she stayed silent.

All that day Jerry worked very hard, and resisted all temptations, both those from within - for his excess of the night before had parched him — and those from his friends; and he went home that night to Katey with a good conscience.

The next day was the same, and the next, and the next. Thus his old confidence in himself came back to him: "Ye that stand take heed lest ye fall.' With his confidence came a temptation to do things to test it, and conscious of his own strength of purpose, Jerry went across to Grinnell's 'just to prove,' he thought to himself, 'that I am not afraid.'

Great efforts were made by those present, who included Mons, Sebright, and Popham, to induce him to take something, but he consistently refused, but with good humour. Still he felt it pleasant to be in a cheerful room amongst a lot of companions, much better than grubbing away at piles of wood grimy with the dust of months, and he thought that now that he felt how strong he was he would often take a run across the road and hear some of the gossip of the day between his spells of work.

These days were pleasant for Katey, for she saw that Jerry was quite his old self, and she was beginning to get reconciled to the new life. Jerry never told her of his visits to Grinnell's, for he thought to himself, 'What is the use of telling her. There is no harm in it, but she will only be imagining harm, and worrying herself about nothing.'

Sebright came to see him one evening. Katey made her husband's friend welcome, as every good wife does. The two men chatted pleasantly, Katey occasionally joining in. She saw that Jerry enjoyed the evening, and she herself, devoid as she was of friends, enjoyed it too, and asked their guest to come again. He was not a man to stand on ceremony in such matters, and he did come again, and his visits grew more frequent till at last his coming was a matter to be expected every second night or so.

Mons also paid a visit, and was made welcome, and repeated his visits also. Katey did not like either man, but she disliked the latter. She had known Sebright long ago, and he had at least the title of old acquaintanceship to be liked; but Mons was a newcomer, and one that she felt was, for her husband's sake, not to be encouraged.

Thus things went on for some time. Occasionally letters came from Dublin telling of the progress of affairs. At last Katey received one, which she opened with some curiosity, as the writing was not familiar to her. It ran as follows:-

'Dear Mrs Katey - I have some news to tell you wh you will be glad to hear. I am going to be married. You will never guess who to, wh is Miss M'Anaspie, who I met at your home. Margaret - that is, Miss M'Anaspie, desires me to say she hopes you're well, and that my young god-son or god-daughter, or whatever the brat is, is quite well. I hope some day to be something else but a god-father. [Here was inserted in a feminine hand - 'Don't mind him; he is a wretch.'] We, wh we is I and Margaret - Miss M'Anaspie - are going over to London on our honeymoon, and hope to see you. Margaret - Miss M'Anaspie — says you are sure to live in some wretched hole, but you will not mind us going if we don't; provided, Margaret - Miss

M’Anaspie - says that her new clothes won’t get spoiled by going upstairs like a corkscrew to a garret, or down a slippery ladder into a cellar, where your head knocks above you in the grating, and your feet slip and you fall amongst the oysters, and shrimps, and prawns. But we will go all the same. Wishing you all the good wishes wh you wish - in which I join [written in a female hand again] - we remain, dear madam, yours respectfully.

‘John Muldoon.

‘PS - I hope Jerry hasn’t taken to drinking yet.’

This letter made poor Katey very unhappy. There was in it a tone of selfish heartlessness which would have made its contents a matter of indifference only for two or three of the remarks it contained.

‘What right have they,’ Katey thought indignantly, ‘to think that Jerry would take to drinking? “Has he taken to it yet,” indeed, as if Jerry would be a drunkard? My Jerry, that never was drunk but once, and that never goes near a public-house now. And why did they think we lived in a garret, or a cellar either. I’ll be bound there isn’t as clean or as comfortable a room in John Muldoon’s house as this very room. It’s like their impudence.’ And so ran on the little woman’s thoughts till something within her whispered, ‘Pride, Katey, pride. Take care of pride. Keep your room clean and nice, and it won’t matter whether they think you live in a garret or anywhere else.’

In time Mr and Mrs Muldoon came over to London, and, after sending a message to Katey that she might be prepared, they paid her a visit. Mrs Muldoon was radiant with every colour in the rainbow, and from the number of garments floating and flying about her looked of such portentous dimensions that her little stout husband seemed like a dwarf.

John Muldoon, however, did not consider himself a dwarf by any means, and was as proud of his wife ‘as a dog with a tin tail.’ Mrs Muldoon was most patronisingly affectionate as became her exalted rank and her blushing condition. She kissed Katey several times, and disported herself with the children, whom she took turn about on her knees until she got tired of them.

Her conduct towards the baby was worthy of note. Towards it she displayed an amount of affectionate curiosity worthy of all praise. She dandled it in her hands, she kissed it, she cuddled it, she almost strangled it, and by her unskilful nursing managed to inflict on it much pain in the way of pins.

Katey stood by, now smiling, now anxious, as the child seemed pleased or unhappy.

Suddenly, without any apparent cause, Mrs Muldoon stood up and said -

‘John, dear, I think we have stayed a long time. Mrs Katey will want to get back to her work.’ And so, taking her husband’s arm, went away, after a hurried farewell.

Katey was distressed, for she feared there was some offence, and the tone adopted by her new relative was gall and wormwood to her womanly feelings. For they had not wished to see Jerry, but merely asked for him. It was only, however, that the bride was tired of the visit, and wished to see some more of the sights of London.

A letter came from Parnell one day which gave Katey great pleasure. One sentence in it ran as follows:- ‘Never forget that you must be your husband’s Guardian Angel in case he falls into any temptation. Above all things remember that your hold on him is stronger while there is perfect confidence. When there is between man and wife a shadow of suspicion or doubt - when either hesitates to tell a secret or confess a fault, not knowing how it may be received - then there is over their lives the shadow of a dark future. Never keep a secret, then, except when it is not your own, from your husband, and strive so to act that he conceal nothing from you.'

As she read this the little woman said to herself with a mixture of pride and thoughtfulness -

'There are no secrets between Jerry and me, thank God. Sure there isn't a thought of my heart I wouldn't tell him, and I know that he tells me everything.'

This thought tended to perfect the happiness which, now that Jerry was going along so steadily and prosperously, was her natural condition.

A few evenings after, whilst Jerry was at the theatre, Sebright came in. In the course of conversation he happened to mention Grinnell's name.

'Who is Grinnell?' asked Katey.

'Don't you know Grinnell? Why he is a friend of Jerry's.'

'A friend of Jerry's! how odd that he never mentioned him to me. What is he?'

'He keeps the public-house opposite the stage door of the Stanley.'

Katey's heart seemed to turn to stone, but she did not choose to let Sebright see her feeling lest it should do harm, and so, for the present, let the matter drop.

When her visitor had gone she was in a dreadful state of mind. She longed to cry with a bitter longing, but feared to, lest Jerry should find her eyes red on his return from work, and so she bravely bore her sorrow - the sorrow that followed the thought of her husband's concealment.

When Jerry returned he found her bright and cheerful as usual, and in a talking humour. He had had a hard and long day's work, and was now quite in a humour for a quiet chat. Katey had been thinking over Sebright's remark, and had come to the conclusion that as Jerry had not told her about Grinnell he had some object in his concealment, and that to force a confession would be to put him in the wrong at the very outset. Accordingly she began her conversation, with the object of trying to invite his confidence.

After talking over the state of things at the theatre, to which she had been several times, Jerry's companions, and daily life, she asked him -

'What do you do all the evening, Jerry? It must be very slow work for you.'

'Well, it's slow at times; but, as a rule, there's plenty to do. So that with looking after the cellars, and the flies, and the wings, and trying to keep the men square and sober, my time isn't idle I can tell you.'

'Is it hard to keep the men sober?'

'Isn't it. They'd be always over in Grinnell's if I let them.'

'What is Grinnell's?'

'A public-house over the way.'

'And is Grinnell the proprietor?'

'He is, and a good fellow too - very pleasant and sociable.'

Jerry was thinking that the present was a good time to tell his wife that he sometimes went in, but did not drink anything; but such a look of fear came over her face, despite all her efforts, that he did not care to go on, and hastily turned aside the current of conversation.

Katey felt that the shadow was growing, but yet feared to say anything more at present lest Jerry should be hurt.

Poor little woman; she was in great doubt, pitiable doubt, and as she had no one near to advise her, was driven almost into despair. In her perplexity she wrote to Parnell a tender little letter, full of love for her husband, and asking earnestly for advice. The answer came in a way that she did not expect, for one day, shortly after, whilst she was busily engaged over her washing-tub a tall man, none other than Parnell himself, walked in.

Katey looked at him in amazement, and gave a low, glad cry, and, as she was, without even thinking of her wet hands and arms, ran over and put her arms round his neck and kissed him.

Whilst she was in this attitude Jerry came in, and, seeing his wife with her arms round a man's neck, for he did not at first recognise Parnell - not expecting to see him - gave vent to an indignant 'Hullo!'

Parnell turned his head round, and Katey peeped over his shoulder at her husband. When Jerry saw who it was he nearly shook his hand off and pressed him into a chair, asking him all sorts of questions, without giving him time to reply.

Parnell told him all the Dublin news; amongst other things giving him a description of Muldoon's wedding, at which they all laughed heartily.

When dinner was over, Jerry had to hurry back to his work, and Parnell remained to talk with Katey.

Katey did not delay, but proceeded to tell her trouble in full, Parnell listening quietly, and looking very grave. When she had finished, he took her hand in his and said -

'I do not like Jerry's keeping back anything from you, but this matter will be all right, I hope and believe.'

He was interrupted by the voice of the landlady calling out, 'Mrs

O'Sullivan, here's a boy wants you to go down to the theatre as quick as ever you can, something has happened.'

Katey, with a deadly fear in her heart, hurried with Parnell down to the theatre.

CHAPTER 7

KATEY'S TRIALS

When Jerry had arrived at the theatre he had found visitors waiting to see him. They were none other than Mr and Mrs Muldoon, who had appeared just before. The bride had taken a fancy to see the inside of the theatre in which Jerry worked; and being certain of finding him at his business, the pair had come straight to the theatre instead of calling at his lodgings.

A man is seldom so busy that he cannot spare a while to act as cicerone to his friends; and Jerry accordingly laid aside his hurry, and conducted the happy couple over the theatre. Both husband and wife took a great pleasure in everything, and insisted in going everywhere. Margaret would work the machines by which in the stage art the sounds of rain and wind and thunder are produced; and altogether the pair raised as pretty a storm as had been heard in the theatre for many a long day.

In spite of her prejudice against going up corkscrew stairs and down into cellars, Mrs Muldoon managed to poke her nose into every odd corner of the stage. She insisted on going up into the flies, where the dust lay in places almost inches thick, quite heedless of the state of dirt to which her clothing was reduced. This part of the sight-seeing did not please her husband much on account of several accidents which happened to him. In the first place, he slipped on a flight of stairs as steep as a ladder and 'barked' his shin. Then he ran his head against a beam and utterly destroyed his new silk hat. Finally, he put his foot in a division between two boards and hurt his ankle, narrowly escaping a sprain. At all these calamities his wife laughed loudly except at the spoiling of the hat, for which she reprimanded him severely as being guilty of a needless piece of extravagance. Mr Muldoon began to think that married life was not such a delightful thing after all.

Then they all went down to the cellars, as Mrs Muldoon wanted to see how the demons came up through the ground. Jerry explained to her the mechanism of the traps, how a sliding board was pulled away so as to leave an open space, into which fitted exactly a piece of flooring, on which stood the person or thing to be raised; that to this flooring were attached ropes which worked over pulleys and were attached to immense counter-weights, which, when suddenly released, shot up the trap swiftly between its grooves. Mrs Muldoon wished to see it working, so Jerry drew away the slot, and released the counter-weights. She gave a little ecstatic laugh as the trap flew up, and then said to Jerry -

'But surely it doesn't work that way when there's anything on it?'

'Just the same.'

'And how do you go up? Do you just stand on that and then up you go?'

'Exactly.'

'How do they stand? I suppose as stiff as pokers?'

'This way,' said Jerry, getting up and standing on the trap.

This was just what Mrs Muldoon wanted. She had all along been watching for an opportunity of releasing the trap, and had purposely led Jerry to stand on it that she might see him shoot up through the opening in the stage. Without giving him warning she suddenly released the trap, which flew up. Jerry, to whom the experience was novel, for his business was to work the trap and not ascend on it, felt the ground flying up with him, and was horribly startled, for the idea of the trap working of its own accord never entered his head. With an instinctive movement he started back, and in doing so lost his balance. He was hurled against the groove in which the trap worked, and from the velocity with which he was moving received a desperate blow.

When the trap was closed, Jerry lay on it perfectly insensible, and bleeding profusely.

In the meantime Mr Muldoon had been prowling about the cellar in a very bad humour, looking at the various appliances. When the trap flew up Margaret saw that Jerry was hurt, but did not know how much. She got afraid of something serious, and wished to avoid the consequences. Accordingly she ran over to her husband and said hurriedly -

'John, dear, I think Jerry has hurt himself. He was standing on the trap and it flew up, and he struck something. They will lay the blame on us. Don't you think we had better go?'

'All right, but make haste,' said the husband. And so they found their way with some difficulty into the street.

There was no one on the stage at the time, so Jerry's accident was unnoticed. He lay there for some time, still senseless, and still bleeding, till Mr Griffin saw him as he crossed the stage on his way to his own room. He thought it was a case of drunkenness and turned the man over with his foot, with that contemptuous 'get up' which is used on such occasions. As he did so he saw the blood, and with an exclamation, bent over to look more closely. He saw that some accident had occurred and called for help. In a few moments the various employes began turning up, one by one, till quite a little crowd had assembled; the alarm penetrated to Grinnell's and a large contingent arrived from that quarter.

Jerry’s head was raised and the restoratives usual to such occasions applied, but all in vain. Accordingly, a doctor was sent for, and a boy despatched to tell Mrs O’Sullivan.

Katey and Parnell arrived before the doctor. When the former saw her husband, limp and senseless, with his pale face looking vacantly upward from the knees of the man who was supporting his head, and the stage floor round him stained with blood, she gave a low, startled scream, which subsided into a prolonged moan. For an instant or two she stood, as if petrified, holding her arms out - surprise in her attitude and terror in her looks. Then, with a little hoarse, sibilant moan, she drew her left hand across her eyes and forehead, as if to clear her brain and sight, and then she knelt beside her husband for an instant, with her hands tightly clenched. The crowd made way for her and stood a little aloof.

When she recovered her shock sufficiently to understand what was before her, poor Katey’s grief was terrible. She threw herself on the body of her husband and passed her hands over his hands, his face, his hair, his bosom, whispering in a low, heartbreaking voice:

‘Jerry, Jerry, wake up; speak to me, Jerry, dear. Oh, Jerry, won’t you speak to me - to Katey, your wife, - your little wife that loves you? Oh, weirasthru, weirasthru, he’s dead, he’s dead! He won’t speak to me. He’ll never speak to me, again. Oh, Jerry, Jerry, asthore!” - Jerry, Jerry.’

The poor little woman’s voice died away into a long moan, as she buried her face in the bosom of her husband and wept.

Many of those standing round were touched, and turned away their heads not to show their emotion. All were silent, and waited.

The arrival of the doctor created a diversion. He was a fussy, good-humoured little man, who always looked at the bright side of things. His natural impulse on seeing a woman give way to violent grief was to think that it was without cause; and, as his impulse was supported by his experience, he generally continued so to think. When he bustled in and saw Katey stretched on the body of her husband, he spoke -

‘Come, come! what is all this? Who is crying? The man’s wife? Then the man’s wife has no right to cry. It is an insult to me — to science. The man’s wife thinks, I suppose, that Providence is very hard on her. What right, I say, has the man’s wife to judge Providence before science has spoken. The man is sure not to be dead. Why, the man’s wife ought to be ashamed of herself for not being thankful that he is not killed. Stand away and let me see the man, and we’ll very soon hear the man’s wife laughing instead of crying.’

While he was speaking he was preparing to make an examination of Jerry.

Katey was cheered by his tone, and stood up, anxious to the last degree, but feeling somewhat ashamed of her hasty grief.

The doctor made the examination usual in such cases, and then stood up before he spoke. Katey watched his lips to tell by their motion the coming words before they could be spoken.

‘Just as I thought.’ Katey’s heart gave a great bound of joy, and her head began to reel, so that she seemed to hear the remainder of his speech as through a curtain. ‘Now look at the man’s wife - she is going to faint, I warrant, just when she ought to be calm. That’s right. Courage, my poor girl, your husband is only stunned, and will be able to put his arms round your neck in ten minutes.’

Katey’s faintness began to pass away, and she knelt down by Jerry ready to do the doctor’s bidding. The latter gave some directions, which were carried out, and after a while Jerry opened his eyes. For a time he did not remember anything, and seemed quite dazed, staring blankly at the crowd of faces which he saw around him. Presently he recovered sufficiently to answer the doctor's questions, which elicited the fact that he was hurt in the head and the side. His wounds were dressed, and Katey, after receiving instructions as to his treatment, took him home, with Parnell's assistance, in a cab.

Parnell was obliged to return to Dublin that night; and as Jerry was very feverish and restless, Katey was obliged to sit up with him all night. In the morning Jerry was worse, and seemed to be a little off his head. He did not seem to realise where he was, and answered Katey's anxious inquiries so strangely that she got frightened and sent for Dr Sharp, in whom she had acquired great confidence from his manner at the time of the accident.

When he saw Jerry Dr Sharp looked very grave. Katey saw his face fall and began to cry. He turned on her severely and said, although with a spice of tenderness through his sternness —

'Silence, woman. This is no time to cry. This is a time to act - time enough to cry when there is a reason for it.'

'Oh, doctor, is he very bad?' asked poor Katey, so anxiously that the doctor patted her on the head as he answered:-

'It is best for you to face the worse, my dear. The wound on his head is worse than I thought. I think he will have an attack of brain fever. There now, I oughtn't to tell you anything. Come, come, stir yourself, and then you won't want to faint. We must get him to hospital whilst he is fit to be moved.'

At the word hospital Katey's fear became deadly, for she looked upon an institution as in some wise synonymous with ruin; but the doctor was peremptory, and before she had time to mourn Jerry was safely lodged in the nearest hospital.

Katey would have stayed with him all day only that she had her children to look after. Her sorrow at leaving him was much mitigated by the fact that one of the nurses, a Sister of Mercy, with whose sweet gentle face she fell in love, had promised to give him unfailing attention.

When she got home and thought of its desolation, now temporary, but perhaps to be permanent - Katey would have willingly cried herself stupid. But she felt that she must not give way to her feelings; the children were sobbing bitterly, having missed her for so long; and she felt, moreover, that now during Jerry’s illness, which might be a protracted one, there devolved on her the entire support of the family.

When she was going to bed that night she knelt down to say her prayers with a sadder heart than she had ever had before; she prayed for help and strength, and made a silent vow that she would work unceasingly and uncomplainingly, so that all might be as of old for Jerry when he should be well.

Nobly she kept her vow. Early and late she toiled, her only times of relaxation being those which she spent in the hospital watching by her husband’s bedside with her heart wrung by his piteous moans. He did not know her, and thus wrung her heart still more. To a loving wife there is scarcely anything so painful as the knowing that the man she loves - who is a part of herself - does not know her - that the twain which were one, are now but twain again.

She found it easy enough to get work at first, for some of the people living near knowing of her misfortune held out a helping hand. There was not much to gain, for the neighbourhood was a wretched one, but what little was came freely.

It is amongst the very poor that true generosity is found. The rich man pours his gifts, large to magnificence it may be, into the treasury, but he gives them from his superfluity: it is not often that he has to deny himself in order to be even lavish. But the mite of the widow comes out of her distress, and is valued accordingly. It would give many a wholesome lesson to even the truly charitable rich to see and know the good deeds which are done by their poorer brethren. It is only amongst the poor that charity will tolerate equality - nay, where is accorded the dignity which is the birthright of misfortune.

Katey got some little help from Dublin from Mrs O'Sullivan, who, however, was unable to do much for her on account of the absconding of a solicitor to whom she had intrusted all her little savings.

After a little while the work began to fall away; and do what she would poor Katey found it hard to keep the wolf from the door. She was up before daylight and into the market to buy vegetables which she then sold from house to house; she went charring; she tried needlework. Everything by which an honest penny could be turned she tried, and found no degradation in any employment no matter how lowly.

At last the constant working and watching tended, together with her anxiety, to make her so weak that she could hardly work. Jerry was still dangerously ill. He had by this time regained his consciousness, and she had the pleasure each day of hearing his voice speaking sweet words to her. But he was still wretchedly helpless, and she knew that it would be many a long day before he had regained his old vigour. She did not let him know of her work, but managed to let him believe that the help which she was getting from his mother was sufficient to keep her and the children from want.

When her strength began to go, many articles which could be dispensed with had to go too. Katey's first visit to a pawn-office was a bitter experience. She was afraid and ashamed to go alone, and got her landlady, from whom she borrowed a thick veil, to go with her. She bore the ordeal well enough, but when she came home she burst out crying, and took her children on her lap and wept over them and clasped them convulsively to her arms.

Her first visit was not her last; and by the time that Jerry was discharged from hospital their lodging, now reduced to a single room, was denuded of all the articles of luxury which had once been Katey's pride, and even of those articles of utility which were not necessary.

It was with a sinking heart that Katey took home her husband, and it was a moment of agony to her when Jerry looked around him in bewilderment, searching with wondering eyes for all the objects which were familiar to him. Jerry was thunderstruck. For a time he stood silent, and then asked as does one in a dream —

'Why, Katey, what's all this? Where is everything gone to? I don't seem to understand.'

Katey was silent, thinking what to say. Jerry asked again with that irritability which often accompanies extreme physical prostration -

'Why don't you answer me? It isn't kind to keep me waiting.'

Katey burst into tears. Her feelings and her strength had been too long tried, and now on this day, which she had hoped and prayed for, when her husband had been restored to her, that he should accuse her of unkindness was too much. Jerry got still more impatient, and spoke crossly.

'Katey, what do you mean by crying when I ask you a question?

Have I done any wrong to you? Perhaps it would be better if I had died.’

Katey cried still more bitterly, and could only murmur as she laid her head on her husband’s shoulder -

‘Oh, Jerry, Jerry. Oh, Jerry, Jerry.’

He put her aside with a motion rather of impatience than of unkindness. Katey did not distinguish the difference; with her head bent down she did not see his face, but merely felt the motion, and her sorrow turned into a wail.

‘Oh, Jerry, Jerry, Jerry, Jerry, that ever the day should come when you should put me from you, and after all I’ve suffered. Oh-h-h, oh-h-h, oh-h-h,’ and she moaned as one in dire pain.

Jerry threw himself back in his chair, and said, with a kind of desperation -

‘Oh, go on, go on. Cry away, and make me and yourself miserable. Would to God I had died, and then you might have been more cheerful.’

Katey heard no more, she fainted.

CHAPTER 8

DOWN THE HILL

From that hour a cloud seemed to have settled between Jerry O'Sullivan and his wife. Katey did all in her power to atone for what seemed in Jerry's eyes to be a piece of petulance, but which she knew to be the result of nervous weakness springing from protracted suffering and overwork. Jerry, as he got a little stronger too, got less petulant, and did not resist Katey's advances, although there seemed to be still in his breast a sense of injury which took the outward expression of a kind of latent antagonism, specially galling to his wife. It was a good while before he was able to work; and neither his strength nor temper was improved by finding that during his illness his place at the theatre had been given away to another man. When he was able he called to the theatre, and after waiting for a long time, saw the manager, who coolly told him that of course he could not afford to pay two men for doing the same work, and so had been obliged to get another tradesman.

Jerry remonstrated, saying that he did not wish to take away any man's bread, but that after all, fair play was fair play, and that as he had been injured in the theatre he thought he should be treated with some consideration, and be restored to his place which he had done nothing to forfeit. He was met with the answer, that a man must bear the risk and trouble of his own accidents on his own shoulders; that the manager had not been to blame in the matter; that Jerry had had the working of the machinery entirely under his own control, and that it was his own fault if anything went wrong.

Jerry felt that there was a soupqon of justice in this, and said no more. Indeed he did not get the chance of speaking, as the manager walked away. He did not know how the accident had occurred, for the idea of Mrs Muldoon's part in it never entered his head. He took it for granted that it was one of those accidents 'which will occur,' and hard as was his lot, that he must put up with it.

He tried to get work in the neighbourhood, but there was then in London a strike in the building trade, and there was no work to be had. Day after day, Jerry walked for miles and miles, trying every place to get work, but all in vain. He had not yet recovered his strength, and so felt his efforts cramped, and consequently worried himself so much, and fretted so constantly, that both his health and his temper suffered.

Katey had much to bear. Since Jerry was earning nothing, she had to earn for all. She worked early and late, and grudged herself even a sufficiency of food that Jerry might have enough and so get stronger. She was always in good humour, and no matter what pain or sorrow was in her heart there was ever a loving smile to meet Jerry when either he or she returned home. Still she could not earn enough to buy sufficient food, and so the pawn-office was visited again and again, till the home was left well nigh empty.

At last Jerry, finding that no work at his trade could be obtained, made up his mind to do what he could. He tried to get work in different places and of different kinds, but, like many another poor fellow, he found that London is too full of hungry mouths for work to go long a-begging, and it seemed to him that his lot in life was to be for the future just too late to get anything he sought for. One day he thought he would try the theatre, for he knew work, though of poor kind, was sometimes to be got there. It was not without a mighty effort that he made up his mind to seek employment from the man who had superseded him, and whom in his heart he regarded bitterly as an usurper. The new man seemed to recognise and to reciprocate the hostility, and his manner to poor Jerry was extremely galling. He was happy to be able to show his own power by giving work to the other man, and by patronising him, or else he would have peremptorily refused. As it was he gave him some work, and even made a point of seeming to treat him differently from the other men who were doing the same work - a fact which made every one of them hate Jerry with the hatred of jealousy.

The little he now earned helped to banish the extreme want from the household, yet somehow all seemed now even more miserable than when dire cold and hunger stared them in the face. The cause was this. While cold and hunger, and dire misery were inmates of the house there was something to be borne - there was a sense of complete difference between the old circumstances and the present, altogether a sense that this through which they were passing was unreal - merely a crisis - and that the present evils must pass away in time. But now no such sense of contrast existed. Jerry was working as of old, and enough money was coming in to buy off the officers of the grim sheriff, Death. Jerry was working, indeed, but not in the old way. There was now neither hope nor ambition. To work was merely to toil ceaselessly to support existence that was a burden.

Jerry grew more and more despondent as the days wore on. Katey's bright looks and hopeful words were now of no avail, and slowly and surely the conviction grew on her that sorrow, hopeless and overwhelming, was coming into their lives. Jerry began to feel, in all its force, how great had been his folly in leaving Dublin. Whilst he worked he kept thinking to himself, how different all would have been had he remained at home. Here sickness and trouble would have been his surest titles to the help and sympathy of his many friends; but in London, amid strangers where the maxim of life seemed to be sauve qui peut — a maxim which might be translated ‘Every man for himself - all was different, and to be down in the world was to be trampled upon.

Whenever he thought thus, there came to Jerry a fierce temptation to lose sight of his misery as other men lost sight of theirs - in that hell-cauldron, which is picturesquely termed ‘the bowl.’ He resisted this temptation for a time, but he felt that his resolution was giving way. He would have returned to Dublin but for lack of means, and he had not yet fallen so low as to beg for assistance.

One day he was reprimanded in good round terms by his superior for some seeming fault. He answered temperately, and was told to ‘shut up.’ He did shut up, for he felt that he dared not risk his present employment.

That day at dinner hour he went to Grinnell’s and drank recklessly. When a man who resists temptation for a time suddenly gives way to it, his fall is mighty. Jerry was unable to return to his work, and after a drunken sleep in the taproom was left at home in the evening still half stupefied.

Katey saw what had happened; and none can imagine her anguish save those who have known and felt some terrible sorrow - some sorrow where there was no thought of self. She did not wish for death, because she thought of her children; but too surely she saw that Jerry had been drinking to drown his care, and she knew that till the care disappeared - which could now only be at death - the remedy would be attempted again and again.

And she was right. Shakspere was right, too, when he wrote:

‘Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.’

When a naturally good disposition is warped or bent in a wrong direction all the strength that had been for good works now for evil; and in proportion to the natural strength of character is the speediness of the complete ruin. Day after day Jerry visited Grinnell’s, and day by day he grew more of a sot. He very seldom got drunk, because he felt that such would involve his dismissal; but he was nearly always in a state of’fuddle.’

Katey’s life grew harder and harder to bear, but she strove ever with herself, and determined that no effort, active or passive, either of action or endurance, should be wanting on her part to reclaim her husband. She used to wait up for Jerry no matter what hour he stayed out till, and never made his coming home unpleasant by showing that she had been sitting up or suffering anxiety from his absence.

A couple of times when she thought it likely that she would see him she peeped through the door of Grinnell’s, and each time saw Jerry either drinking or playing cards, or following both pursuits at once. The gambling was a new phase of vice to her, for she did not know that the one sin follows hard on the track of the other.

Jerry had, indeed, gone down the hill. With no friends round him to arrest his downward course, but surrounded by a troop of evil companions who wished to see him as low or lower than themselves, he was falling, falling still. At such times Katey had stood shivering in the doorway, shrinking out into the night each time anyone entered the house or left it, but coming back again and again as if fascinated. She noticed that Jerry in his play seemed to have always bad luck, and to always play recklessly. It was heartbreaking work to her standing thus an unseen witness of the fall of the man she loved better than herself, and oftentimes the temptation to go in and try to induce him to leave the place became almost too strong for her. She retained herself, however, overcome for the time by the deadly fear that any overt act of hers might shear away the last thread of her influence over him.

At last one evening the temptation to enter became too strong. Jerry had seemingly worse luck than usual, and drank more accordingly. He got exceedingly quarrelsome, and before anyone could interfere a fight had arisen. It was not a long fight, for the bystanders were numerous, and soon choked off the combatants the way men choke off fighting dogs.

Jerry's opponent - none other than Sebright - regained command of his temper in a few seconds; but as for Jerry himself, his rage was frightful. He would not be pacified or appeased in any way, but continued to rage and storm with purple swollen face and voice hoarse from passion and drink. Katey saw that they were making him worse by holding him the way they did, and irritating him. She could stand it no longer. She pushed open the door and entered.

At the sound of the opening door all turned round in fear that the newcomer was a policeman, and in the universal movement Jerry was released. Seeing a pretty young woman enter - for Katey, despite her long spell of hardship and suffering, was a pretty young woman still - the men who did not know her began what they called 'being civil.' Jerry knew instinctively that Katey would not have entered the public-house without some cause, and his conscience told him that that cause was his own misconduct; and so in his semi-drunken rage he determined to vent his anger, which was half for himself, on her. In addition, he heard the sotto voce remarks of the other men, and this inflamed him still more. He came angrily forward, and said to his wife in hard, stern angry tones -

‘What brings you here?’

The suddenness of the question, and the tone of it, took Katey by surprise, and she had to pause before replying. Her embarrassment was increased by the glare of light, and the rude admiring eyes turned upon her.

Jerry repeated his question with his face inflamed and his right hand raised. It was the first time Jerry’s hand had ever been raised to her in anger, and it was no wonder that poor Katey covered her face and wept. This seemed to make Jerry more angry still. He took her by the arm roughly, and shook her, saying -

‘At it again. Cryin’ - always cryin’.’ Then, again, with a sudden change, ‘What brings you here, I say - what brings you here?’

Katey lifted her head, and looked at him pleadingly through her tears. ‘Come home, Jerry; come home.’

‘I’ll not go home. Go you home and don’t dare to watch or follow me again. Out of this, I say - out of this.’

‘Oh, Jerry, Jerry, don’t send me away to-night. Oh, Jerry, you’re hurting me; indeed you are. I’ll go quietly. Do let me go, Jerry. Look at all the men. It is ashamed of my life I am.’

‘Out of this, I say.’

‘Oh, Jerry, come home.’

For answer Jerry lifted his hand and struck her in the face. The blow was a severe one, but Katey did not seem to feel it. The pain in her heart at the spirit which prompted the blow was so great that no outward pain would have touched her for the moment. With the courage and resolution of utter despair - for what could now be worse since Jerry had struck her - she clung to him, crying almost wildly -

‘Come home, come home.’

Jerry dashed her aside, and ran over to the counter.

‘Give me brandy,’ he said to Grinnell, ‘quick, man, give me brandy.’

Grinnell was in nowise backward, and gave him as he desired. He drank off two or three glasses one after the other despite all Katey could do to prevent him.

After this his coming home was a matter of mere labour, for he got too drunk to stand or to think, and lay on the floor like a log.

Katey looked round appealingly for help. Sebright and Mons, the only two men whom she knew, had both disappeared, for both of them retained sufficient pride to make them anxious to avoid the gaze of the injured woman. The help came from an unexpected quarter. Grinnell, who had hitherto been leaning complacently across the bar, came from behind it, and said very gently -

‘Let me help you.’

Katey was so anxious about Jerry that she did not notice the strangeness of the offer coming from such a man, but answered gratefully —

‘Oh, thank you, sir. God will bless you.’

Grinnell smiled softly to himself, but Katey did not see the smile.

The pot-boy was sent for a cab, and, when it came, was put in charge of the bar, whilst Grinnell helped Katey to take home her husband. There was lots of assistance to put him into the cab, but, as she could not get him out herself, Grinnell went with her himself. When the vehicle began to move, Grinnell said softly -

‘This is a very sad affair.’

‘Oh, sad indeed,’ sighed Katey.

‘I wish to God,’ said Grinnell, with intensity of voice, ‘that I had known of you before. Your husband would not have got drink in my house.'

'God bless you, sir, for these words. Oh, you will help me to keep him straight now, will you not?'

'I will.'

'You see,' said Katey, feeling that a palliation of her husband's conduct was necessary, 'the poor fellow has had much trouble and sorrow, and he was badly treated at the theatre.'

'I know it - I know it,' said Grinnell, with indignation. 'Didn't the whole neighbourhood ring with it, and the people cry shame on old Meredith. Why, I couldn't stand it, and it was no business of mine. I only wished to see justice. I amn't so bad as I look. I went to him, and says I - "Look you here, sir," says I, "you're doin' wrong. Here's the best workman in London, and the best fellow, too," says I, "and you're losin' him and doin' a wrong thing. And don't you expect to gain by it," says I, "for wickedness never prospers," says I, "and I tell you what," says I, "some of the other theatres will get hold of him, and then won't you be sorry. I have a good deal of influence," says I, "and I'll use it all for him" ' -

He was going on thus when the cab stopped. He helped Katey to lift out Jerry, and between them they carried him up to the room.

Grinnell waited a few minutes only, and said good night to Katey in a most friendly manner.

'I will call round in the morning and see how he goes on,' he said, 'and if you want anything that I have, you know it is quite at your disposal.'

'Oh, sir, I wouldn't for the world. I have no money, and I wouldn't for the world have Jerry feel that I owed money for anything.'

Grinnell gave a sudden unintentional laugh. ‘Don’t yon fret about that,’ he said. ‘O’Sullivan owes me myself too much money already to let that trouble him.’

Katey put her hand on her heart at this fresh blow, but said nothing.

Grinnell went on:

‘But that doesn’t matter. Lord bless you. He’s as welcome as the flowers of May. I’m too fond of him to let a trifle of money vex him.’ Then he went out.

Katey, despite her prejudice, could not but feel better disposed towards him. The narrative of what he had done for Jerry in going to the manager, touched her deeply, and she said to herself:-

‘Well, we should never judge by appearances. It is a lesson to us.’

Had she known that in all Grinnell had said there was not one single word of truth, she might have thought differently.

CHAPTER 9

THE TRAIL OF THE SERPENT

Katey watched by her husband for a long time till at last she cried herself to sleep. Her sleep was troubled by horrid dreams of care and sorrow, and nameless and formless horrors. She did not wake however. When we dream thus of awful things, and do not wake, the effect is much more wearing on the nervous system than if we did; and so in the morning when Katey woke she felt chilled and miserable. She started up, and in the half-light of the early morning found that she was alone. Jerry had waked early, and had hurriedly got up, struck with remorse when he remembered the previous evening, and not daring to meet the face of his wife. Katey was at once in deadly fear, for her woman's weakness prompted thoughts of terrible possibilities. She got up quickly and went down into the street.

She looked right and left for any sign of him, and after wavering between them finally with an instinct, pitiful since it had such a genesis, took her way towards Grinnell's, feeling that she would find her husband there.

Her instinct was not deceived. When she peeped in through the door of the public-house she saw Jerry standing by the bar with a glass in his hand, which Grinnell was filling. A man does not hold his glass in such a way unless it is being refilled, and this poor Katey knew by instinct. She shuddered as she looked - for she saw that Jerry was drinking to get drunk quickly.

Indeed it was a sorry and a pitiful picture - one which man or woman with a human heart in their bosom would shudder to see. In the grey light of the wintry morning the working man with clothing tossed, and hair unkempt - with feverous look and bloodshot eyes, drinking his rum at a draught, and taking it from the hand of one who, with soiled finery and unwashed face, might have stood for the picture of 'Debauch.'

Grinnell's sharp eyes saw Katey as she peeped, but he did not seem to notice. Presently he spoke loudly, so loudly that Katey could hear.

'Now, O'Sullivan, that will freshen you, I hope, and make you think clearly, but I won't give you any more, so don't ask me.'

'What do you mean?' asked Jerry, in amazement, for up to that moment Grinnell had been pressing him to drink.

'Never mind what I mean; only I won't give you any more.'

'Are you jokin'?'

'I am not.'

Jerry looked at him angrily a moment, and then flattening his hat down on his head, said:

'Oh, very well - oh, very well. Then I'll go somewhere else.'

Katey was afraid he would see her, so left the doorway and hurried down the street.

Jerry came home about breakfast-time in a frightfully bad humour. He had had just enough of liquor to make him wish for more, and having tried to get credit several places and been refused, felt a savage disappointment. The sight of Katey's disfigured face in no wise tended to mollify him, and he spoke to her with a harshness that was almost savage:

'Why don't you put somethin' on your face?'

Katey did not know what to say, so remained silent.

'Put somethin' on it, I tell you. Am I to be always made wretched by you?'

Katey could only murmur:

'Always, Jerry? Always?' and began to cry.

'Stop your cryin', I tell you. Here - I'll not stay here any longer. No wonder I have to keep away when I find nothin' here but tears.'

'Jerry, dear, I won't cry,' said Katey, in affright, lest he should go out. 'I won't cry, dear, and I'll cover up my face - only don't go out yet. Look, I am not cryin' now. See, I'm laughin'.'

'Stop your laughin', I say. There isn't much to laugh at here.'

This was too much for Katey, and again she broke down. Jerry got up to go out; she went to the door, and standing before it, said:

'For God's sake, Jerry, don't go out yet.'

'Let me go, I say. Will you dare to stop me.'

'Oh, Jerry, for the sake of the children, don't go out. For the sake of the love you used to have' -

'Out of the way, I say.'

'Oh, Jerry.'

'Let me go, I tell you. You won't. Then take that,' and again he struck her. She cowered away with a low wail. As he left the room, Jerry said, with an effort at self-justification:

'I see the way to manage you, now. Take care that you don't rouse the devil in me.'

Katey was sobbing still when Grinnell came to ask 'how Jerry was this morning.' She felt glad to see him on account of his refusing to give Jerry drink, and shook him warmly by the hand.

Grinnell looked at her without speaking, but manifestly taking notice of her bruised face; then he turned away and seemed as if drying an unostentatious tear. Katey felt drawn towards him by the manifestation of sympathy; and so it was with an open heart that she commenced to thank him for his promise to assist in reclaiming Jerry.

‘Don’t distress yourself,’ he said after some talk, ‘you see the influence I have over him, not only personally, but from my position, is ever great. He owes me money’ - Katey winced, he noticed it, and kept harping on that string— ‘he owes me, I may say, a good deal of money, not that I want him to pay me yet, or that I ever mean to press him for it, but owing me a good deal of money, you know, I can put the screw on him any time I like. For instance, if he did anything to offend me, or if anyone belonging to him got in my way, and I wished it, I could put my thumb on him and crush him like a fly.’

Katey laid her hand on his arm and asked him pleadingly -

‘Oh, don’t talk like that, it seems so dreadful to me that it frightens me.’

‘There, there, my dear,’ he answered, patting her shoulder, ‘don’t fret, I do not mean to crush him like a fly. I only mention it to show you what I could do if I had occasion to. You see when a man is down the hill the best thing for him is to have some determined friend who can crack the whip over his head.’

Katey began to get frightened, she did not know why. She was without knowing from what cause getting a repulsion and fear for the man before her. It might be, she thought, when she asked herself the question, from his hideous aspect, which was enough to alarm anyone. The thought of Jerry being in the power of anyone was a bitter one to her, but that of Jerry being in the power of this man was too dreadful to be realised.

Grinnell, who was watching her closely, saw that some idea of the kind was in her mind, and tried with all his might to banish it. He made kind promises, he offered to do generous acts, he spoke kindly and tenderly to Katey, using every means to rule her reason. But still that instinct which is above all reason spoke in her, and whispered her even not to trust to him. Grinnell saw that he was not making way in her good graces, and took his leave shortly, showing by his manner that he was hurt, though not offended.

Katey was so glad to get rid of him that she was not as kind in her manner as usual. When the door closed behind him she sank with a sigh of relief on one of the two chairs which still remained to them. The children, who had hidden in affright behind the bed as Grinnell had entered, scared by his frightful face, now came forward and hid their little heads in her lap, and began to cuddle her in their pretty way.

After Grinnell had departed, Katey began to take herself to task for not feeling more kindly towards him. The natural justice of her disposition told her that so far as she knew he had acted kindly, and intended to act more kindly still. But then in her heart arose the counterpleading - ‘so far as she knew’ - and she still continued to mistrust.

Jerry remained out all that day; Katey was almost afraid to go look for him - partly lest she should arouse his anger towards her for following him, and so widen the breach between them, and partly because with womanly delicacy she feared that the sight of her swollen face might tend to lower him amongst his companions.

It was not till the time for closing the public houses came that she ventured in desperation to go in search of him; she tried Grinnell’s expecting to find him there. There was no one in the place except the proprietor; and Katey, after some hesitation, pushed open the door and entered. Grinnell, with an exclamation, came from behind the bar, and shook her hand.

‘I was just going to call up to see you,’ he said.

‘What for?’

‘To tell you about Jerry.’

‘About Jerry? What about him, sir?’ asked Katey, in alarm.

‘Do not fret yourself, my dear. It will be all right.’

‘What will? For God’s sake tell me if anything is wrong? Remember he is my husband?’

‘Very well, then. He got into trouble to-day. He took too much to drink, and began fighting, and the police got hold of him.’

This was too much for Katey. She fainted.

When she recovered, Grinnell informed her ‘that Jerry was in the lock-up, where he would be detained all night, and that he would be brought before the magistrate in the morning.’

Katey never closed an eye that night. The greater part of the time she passed on her knees in prayer, in the rest she watched her children as they slept. In the morning early she was off to the pawnbrokers with some of the last of their goods to raise money to pay Jerry’s fine in case one should be imposed. She was at the police-court long before the time of commencing business, and having got into the court waited as patiently as she could till Jerry should be tried.

When business did commence she had still to wait for a good while, for there were a large number of cases to be tried, and as the time when he must appear grew closer and closer her heart beat faster and faster till she had to press her hand on her side from pain. At last Jerry’s case came on. It was a cruel blow to Katey to see her husband standing in the dock with his head hanging down, and a policeman standing beside him.

The charge, although exactly similar to many that had preceded it, seemed a terrible one to poor Katey, so terrible that she could not see anything but the dire punishment of imprisonment before Jerry, for her wifely fears multiplied everything many fold.

Some witnesses were called, and deposed to such things as fully supported the charge of assault. One of the attorneys who defend criminals in the police-courts spoke in favour of Jerry, and in the course of his remarks mentioned that it was a first offence, and that his client had up to the night before never struck a blow in his life. At this statement the complainant, who was standing by, laughed a loud ironical laugh, suddenly checked as he caught the magistrate's eye fixed on him. The magistrate was a clever man and a very experienced one, and although he said nothing he kept his wits about him. Presently his eye wandered over the court, and he soon fixed on Katey's anxious face. As he noticed the signs of ill-usage a look grew imperceptibly over his face, and the officers of the court who knew his looks felt that it boded ill for Jerry. He allowed the case to spin out a few minutes till he saw Jerry recognise his wife - he knew that she was his wife, and that to him was due her ill-treatment from the flush in his face. Then, when the case was concluded, instead of imposing a fine, as Jerry had anticipated, he ordered him a week's imprisonment with hard labour. It was one of his resolves to put down wife-beating if he could.

Jerry covered his face with his hands: and Katey was just about to rush forward with a wild prayer of mercy on her lips when a policeman standing by pulled her back, saying in a kindly voice:

'No use, my girl. It would only get you into trouble, and could do no good. Best go home and take care of the children till he comes out.'

Katey felt the wisdom of the remark, and stayed still.

Before Jerry left the dock he dropped his hands from his face and looked round the court with a hard cold look of recklessness that made Katey shudder. He did not seem to notice her at first, but seemed to include her in the category of his enemies. As he passed her on his way out, however, he gave her a look which said to her as plainly as if he had used the words -

‘This is your work. You couldn’t keep your cut face away for once. Very well, you’ll see that I’ll be even with you yet.’

Katey went home without crying. Despair is dry-eyed when it is most blank. It had seemed to her at each successive disaster that now at last had come the culmination of all that was most dreadful to be borne; but it was not till now that she knew the bitterness of despair. It was not even that Jerry no longer loved her, but that he hated her, and to her attributed a shame that she would have given her life to avert.

Grinnell called to her to try his powers of consolation. He told her most soothingly that a week was not long, and that the shock of the sentence would tend to sober Jerry; and, with many arguments of a like kind, tried to raise her spirits. He stayed a long time, and left her in a tranquil frame of mind.

He came again for a few minutes in the evening, and made some kindly offers of help, which, however, she did not accept.

Next day he came again; and every day that week - sometimes twice in the day. Katey did not like his coming so often, but he seemed so disinterested and kindly-disposed that she did not like to hurt his feelings by telling him so.

At last her eyes were opened to the fact that instinct may be stronger than reason.

She was working in the theatre, where she had got a job of cleaning to do, when she overheard some of the men talking. Katey was too honourable to voluntarily listen, and would never have done so in cold blood, but she heard her husband's name mentioned, and the curiosity arising from her great love, which made her anxious to find how he stood in the opinions of his companions, made her pause and listen with bated breath.

She found what pained her much, and yet had in it a gleam of hope. The men seemed to think that Jerry was drifting into being a hopeless drunkard, and that if he continued to go on, as he had been going on, he would get an attack of delirium tremens. One of them remarked presently:

'That was a damnable trick of Grin's.'

'What was that?' asked another.

'Don't you know? or you? or you? Why, men, you're as blind as bats. I saw it all long ago.'

'Saw what? Out with it, man.'

'Well, you see, Grinnell is sweet on the pretty little Irishwoman, and wanted to get the husband out of the way - What's that?'

It was the stir Katey made as she rose from her knees, where she had been scrubbing and leaned against the wall, with her heart beating wildly and her face on fire.

'Well, but what was the trick?'

'Why, man, can't you see? He put Dirty Dick up to make him pick a quarrel when he was full of drink, and then quietly sent the pot-boy to send round a policeman.'

'Oh, the blackguard. Tell you what, boys, we oughtn't to stand that,' the voice was that of a man who had not yet spoken.

'Don't make a blamed ass of yourself. What call is it of ours?

Don't you see that it would do no good. The woman is glad enough of it for all she takes on.'

'How do you know that?'

'How do I know it? Why, because I have eyes, and ears, and amn't a fool. Sure he spends half the day with her, till all the neighbours are beginnin' to talk.'

Katey felt as though she were going mad. The scales seemed to have fallen from her eyes, and, with the clear light of her present knowledge, she understood the villainy of Grinnell. She was afraid to hear more, and moved away and worked with such desperation, that presently her strength began to leave her.

When her work was over she tottered home, being scarcely able to walk steadily, and having arrived, shut the door behind her and locked it; and then she lay down on her bed in a state of mental and physical prostration, which was akin to death.

When Grinnell called he found the door locked, and, having knocked several times without getting any answer, went away without saying a word.

CHAPTER 10

THE END OF THE JOURNEY

Katey waited in, in the morning, at the time at which Grinnell had been in the habit of calling for the last few days; her object was to avoid him, and she feared meeting him if she should go out. Later on, however, when she had to go to her work, she met him outside the door of the house, where he had evidently been waiting for some time. She pretended not to see him, and walked quickly down the street. He walked alongside of her in silence for a while before he spoke.

'What's the meaning of all this?'

Katey hurried still faster, dragging her poor shawl closer as she went.

After another pause, Grinnell said again:

'You seem to have changed?'

'I have.' She turned, as she spoke, and looked him full in the face.

Something told him that her mind was made up, and that she knew or suspected his villainy; and there was passion in his voice now.

'It was mighty quick.'

'It was.'

After a pause he said, so slowly and impressively, and with such hidden purpose, that she grew cold as she listened:

'People are often too quick; it would sometimes be better for them - and those belonging to them - if they were a little slower.'

Seeing that she did not answer he changed his tone.

'A man can put his thumb on a fly - I wonder have flies wives - or children?’ He said the last words with a tone of deadly malice.

Katey winced, but said nothing. Grinnell saw that he was foiled, and all the hate of his nature spoke. He came closer to Katey and hissed at her:

‘Take care! I am not to be got rid of so easily as you think. I will be revenged on you for your scorn, bitterly revenged; and even when I see you crawling in the dust at my feet, I shall spurn you. Wait till you see your husband a hopeless drunkard, and your children in the workhouse burial-cart, and then perhaps you will be sorry that you despised me.’

Still seeing no signs of any answer, he added:

‘Very well. It’s war - is it then? Good-bye to you,’ and, so saying, he turned on his heel and left her.

Katey worked all that day as if in a dream, and when her work was over, shut herself up again with her children. The next day was the same. She did not see Grinnell, but somehow she mistrusted his silence even more than she feared his malice.

When the time came for Jerry’s liberation, Katey was in waiting outside the prison door. Katey had made herself look as smart as possible, and the bruises on her face were nearly well. When Jerry caught sight of her, he started as if with a glad surprise, but the instant after, as if from remembrance, a dark frown gathered on his face, and he walked past her without seeming to notice her present. Katey was cut to the heart, but, nevertheless, she did not let her pain appear on her face. She came and touched him on the shoulder and said:

‘Jerry, dear, here I am.’

‘I see you’ - this in a harsh, cold voice.

‘Are you coming home, dear.’

‘Ay, a nice home.’

‘Come home, Jerry.’

‘I will not. I must get something to make my hair grow,’ and without another word he strode away from her side. She went home and wept bitterly.

Jerry came home drunk late that night, and neither then nor the next morning would speak kindly to his wife. In the afternoon he went to the theatre, but found that his place had been given away.

He could get no work that suited him, and after a few days’ seeking, gave it up as a hopeless task, and took to drinking all day long in Grinnell’s, where he was allowed credit.

As he earned no money, the entire support of the family once more devolved on Katey, and once again the brave little woman tried to meet the storm. Morning, noon, and night she worked, when work could be got; but the long suffering and anxiety had told on her strength, and, in addition, there had lately come a new trial. Mrs O’Sullivan had got a stroke of paralysis, and her failing business had entirely deserted her. She now required help, and as Jerry could give none, had been removed to the workhouse.

Day after day things got worse and worse. The room, up to the present occupied, had to be given up as Katey could not pay for it, and the change was to a squalid garret, bare, and bleak, and cold. One by one the last necessary articles of furniture vanished, till nothing was left but an old table and chair, and some wretched bed gear, which had not been worth pawning, and which now covered two wretched beds, knocked up by Jerry with old boards. Jerry, too, had gone down and down. He was not the scoff of his comrades, for he was too quarrelsome, but he was their unconscious tool, and occupied a position somewhat akin to that of a vicious bulldog ready to be set at any comer. Grinnell gave him as much drink as he required, and in every way tried to get him into his power.

Jerry often struck his wife now, and it was not due to his efforts that he did not do it oftener. When he was drunk she always kept as much as possible out of the way, often waiting outside the door till he had fallen asleep, well knowing that if he met her she would suffer violence. More than once he was arrested either for drunkenness or assault, or both, and so often that his hair never had time to grow to a decent length.

After this life had gone on for some time, and Katey was showing signs of failing health, Grinnell tried to renew his acquaintance. Katey told him plainly that she would have nothing to do with him in any way, not even so far as speaking to him was concerned. He answered with such a cruel threat that Katey fainted. This was in the street, and whilst she was still senseless a policeman appeared, sent by Grinnell, who had told him that there was a drunken woman lying on the pathway.

The man, with the instinct of his profession, which sees a crime in every doubtful case, procured assistance, and brought her to the station-house, which was close at hand. There she was restored with a little care, but the charge of drunkenness had been preferred against her, and she would not be allowed to go home. The sergeant in charge said that he would allow her to go home if she got bail. She did not know where to turn to; she could only sit down in the cell and cry. Presently Grinnell, who knew what would happen, arrived, and having ascertained the state of the case went through the formality of going bail, and Katey was released. Grinnell was waiting outside, and walked up the street with her. Katey walked so fast that he had trouble to keep up with her.

‘I think you might speak to me after I have kept you out of jail?’ Katey did not answer. He waited, and then said, ‘Very well, go your own road. If anything happens to you just think of me.’ Then he walked away.

Katey did not sleep that night. She knew that on the morrow she would have to stand in the dock charged with an offence whose very name she hated; and she did not know where in the wide world to look for help in case a fine should be imposed. She could not look into the possibility of her being sent to prison. It was too terrible both for herself and her children.

Early in the morning she rose. Jerry had not been home all night, and so she had been unable to tell him of the charge.

There was still one article in the room on which money could be raised. This was Jerry’s tool-basket, which, with something of traditional reverence and something of hope, he had still spared. He could not bear to pledge the tools he had worked with, and both he and Katey felt that whilst these tools remained to his hand there was a prospect that things would mend. Katey now regarded the tool-basket with longing eyes. She felt that should she be sent to prison there was hunger and suffering and, perhaps, ruin for her children, and a shame that would make Jerry worse. She thought of pledging it, but the thought arose to restrain her - ‘It would take away Jerry’s last hope — pull down the prop of his better life, and his wife’s should not be the hand to do this at any cost.’ And so she spared the basket.

She had to wait a long time in the court, and when she was put in the dock felt faintish. However, she nerved herself, and answered all the questions put to her. The magistrate was a kind and just one, and recognised truth in her story, and ordered her to be discharged. She left the court crying, after calling down a thousand blessings on his head.

When she came home she found the basket gone. Jerry had taken it that very morning and pledged it to get money for dissipation. This was a great blow to Katey, for she felt that despair was gathering when Jerry had made up his mind to part with his tools. Nevertheless, she felt in her heart a gleam of comfort in the thought that she had acted rightly, and that the prop had not been shorn away by her hand.

Jerry drank frightfully that day, and came home early in the evening in a state of semi-madness. He rushed into the room and caught Katey by the shoulder so roughly that she screamed out. He said hoarsely —

'Is this true what I heard about you?'

'What, Jerry? Oh, let go of me, you are hurting me.'

'What? I suppose you don't know. Well, I'll tell you — that you were run in for bein' drunk?'

'Let me explain, Jerry dear.'

'Let me explain, Jerry dear. Explain away, but you won't explain that out of my head. So this is my model wife that abuses me for gettin' drunk. This is the woman that thinks it wrong and a sin. I know you now.'

Katey spoke in desperation —

'Jerry, listen to me. I was not drunk. I fainted in the street, and they brought me to the station, but indeed, indeed I was not drunk. I haven't tasted even a drop of liquor for years - sure don't you believe me, Jerry. I was discharged this morning. The magistrate said there was no case against me.'

'Ay, fine talk that. But I've heard about it already. Grinnell told me all about it.'

'Grinnell told you! Oh, Jerry, take care what that man tells you of me.'

'What do you mean?'

The question was asked in a tone of bitter suspicion.

'I mean that that wicked, wicked man hates me, and would do me harm if he could.'

'What do you mean I say? Why does he hate you? Why should he hate you?'

Jerry was now so violent that Katey was afraid to tell him lest he should do something desperate. Jerry grew more and more violent, and finally struck her severely in the bosom with his clenched fist, and ran out swearing horribly.

When he came home that night Katey searched in his pocket and found the pawn ticket for his tools. The sum was only for a few shillings, and she resolved that if she possibly could she would redeem them, and then go herself and look for some work for him.

Accordingly, next day she went out and pledged the only thing left to her worth pledging - her wedding ring. It cost her many an effort, and many a bitter tear, but for too long bitterness had been her fortune to be deterred from action by it now. She got back the tool basket, and left it on the table where Jerry would see it when he returned.

So she waited and waited all though the long day.

Jerry was drinking at Grinnell's, and was in such a state of despondency that his liquor seemed to have hardly any effect on him. Grinnell supplied him freely, for he had a design of vengeance against Katey on hands, and desired to work Jerry, whom he had fixed on as his tool, to the required pitch. Mons was present, too, and

Sebright, and Popham, and Dirty Dick, who had been primed up to do Grinnell's bidding.

By and by Jerry began to be excited, and grew quarrelsome. Dirty Dick, at a sign from Grinnell, put himself in his way, and an altercation arose. Jerry had a spite against the latter as being the means of his being put in gaol for the first time, and commenced hostilities at once.

'Get out, you dog. You want to fight, I suppose. Best mind out or I'll give you what I gave you before.'

'You had better. Who laughed at the wrong side of his mouth after that? Who got his hair cut - eh? Look, boys, it hasn't grown since.'

Jerry began to get savage.

'Here, get out, I've murder in me.'

Grinnell, as he heard the latter remark, smiled softly to himself — a smile that boded no good to poor Katey. Dirty Dick ran behind Popham and peered over his shoulder in mock fear.

'Don't stir, man, don't you see I'm goin' to be murdered by the long-haired man?'

Jerry was getting furious, but they still continued to irritate him. Dirty Dick said again -

'How is your wife, Irishman? Have you been beating her lately, or has she been run in for being drunk?'

This was too much for Jerry. By a sudden rush he caught the man by the throat, and before he could be torn away from him had inflicted some desperate blows, one of which laid his cheek open.

Then Dick lost his temper in turn and spoke out again, this time without heeding what he said, for he merely meant to wound.

'Better go home and look after your wife.'

'What does he mean?' asked Jerry.

‘I mean what I mean. Ask Grinnell?’

The individual named seemed to grow paler. He saw that his tool was reckless and feared for himself — both personally from Jerry’s violence, should he find out his treachery, and in his character if such things should be known by the frequenters of his house. He came from behind the bar and laid his hand on Dick’s shoulder.

Dirty Dick shook him off. ‘Let me alone,’ he said.

Grinnell whispered to him -

‘Hush, man, do you know what you are saying? Best keep your temper or I’ll put my thumb on you.’

‘Damn your thumb. Don’t threaten me. I’m reckless now.’

Grinnell saw that another row was the only way to check his tongue, and struck him. The two men were at once seized and held, and then Dick gave his tongue full play. He spoke of Katey so foully that the men cried shame on him. He told Jerry how all the neighbours were talking of her and Grinnell. How Grinnell had paid him to get up a fight, so that he might be put in gaol and leave the field clear. He spoke with such an air of truth, and all he said being true, except his foul speeches about Katey, fitted so well into Jerry’s knowledge of things, that he took it all as true. There is no lie so damaging as that which is partly true. The shock of hearing all these things and believing them sobered Jerry, and he grew calm. Seeing him so the men let him go, and having done so did not attempt to lay hands on him, for there was a look in his face so deadly, that they were afraid. He said no word; he looked at no one but Grinnell, and at him only one glance, which said, ‘Wait’ so plainly, that Grinnell shuddered. Then he walked out of the room, and there was silence.

Jerry walked home on set purpose, and entered the garret where Katey, wearied out of her long waiting, lay asleep in bed. The first things he saw was the tool basket on the table, beside a bottle and glass. He pulled off his coat and flung it on the table, and hurled the basket on to the floor. Katey woke with the noise, and the children woke also, and sat up with their little eyes fixed with terror. Jerry went to the bedside and caught Katey's hand. 'Get up,' he said. Katey was rising, when he pulled her impatiently out on the floor, bringing down the bed also.

Katey rose and stood before him. She saw that something dreadful was the matter, and thought that he had got into more fresh trouble. She said to him lovingly, 'Oh, Jerry, if there is trouble, sure I am here to share it with you. Jerry - we will begin fresh to-morrow. Look, dear, I have got back your tools.'

'How did you get them? Where did the money come from?'

'Don't ask me, Jerry.'

'Where did the money come from - answer me at once, or' — He spoke so savagely that she grew cold.

'Jerry, I sold my wedding ring.'

Jerry laughed - the hard, cold laugh of a demon. 'Time for you to sell it.'

She saw that there was some hidden meaning in his words, and asked him what he meant. 'I mean that when you have a husband in every man, you need no ring.'

'For shame, Jerry, for shame. What have I done to deserve all this?'

Jerry grew furious. The big veins stood out on his forehead and his eyes rolled.

'Done!' he said. 'Done! What about Grinnell?'

Then without another word, or if the very idea was too much for him, he stooped and picked up a hammer which had rolled out of the tool-basket.

Katey saw the act and screamed, for she read murder in his eyes. He clutched her by the arm and raised the hammer; she struggled wildly, but he shook her off, and then, with a glare like that of a wild beast, struck her on the temple.

She fell as if struck by lightning.

When he saw her lying on the floor, with the blood streaming round her and forming a pool, the hammer dropped from his hand, and he stood as one struck blind.

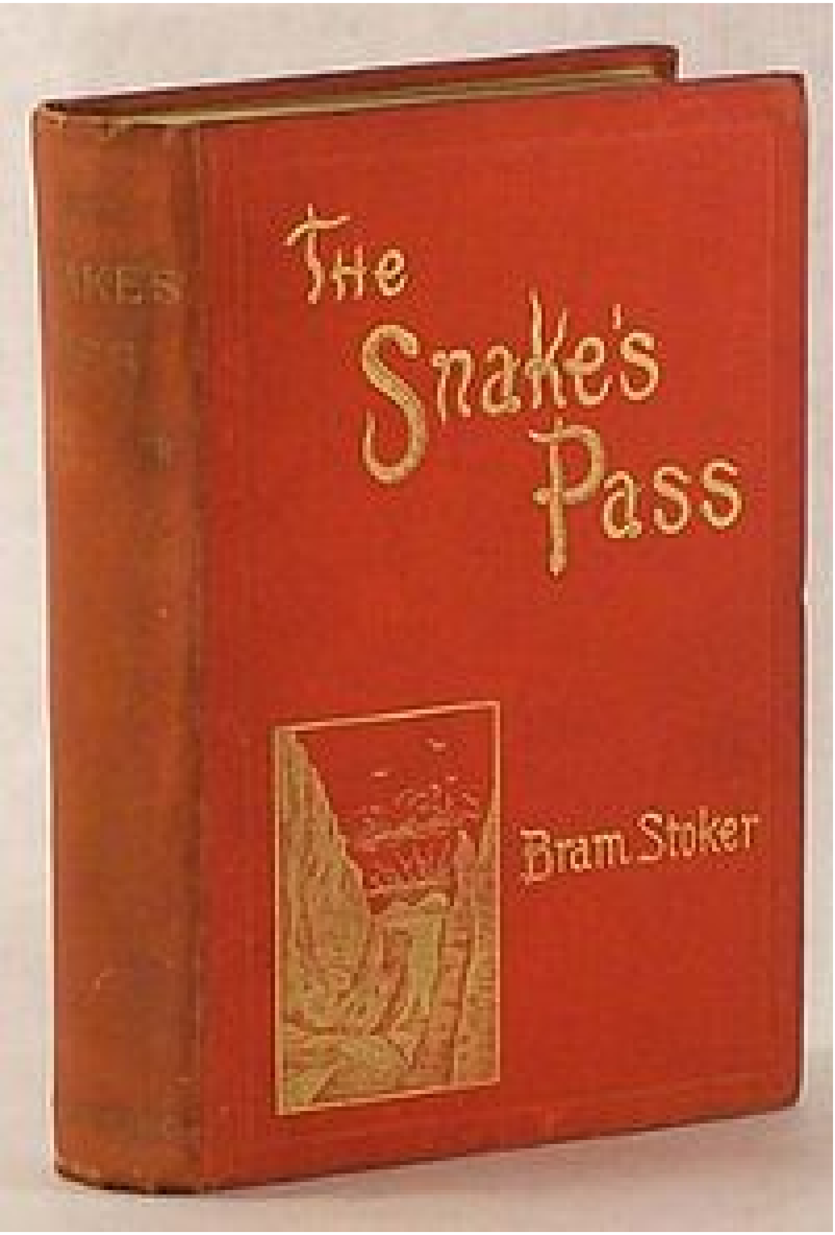
So he stood a moment, then knelt beside her and tried to coax her back to life.

‘Katey, Katey, what have I done? Oh, God, what have I done? I have murdered her. Oh? the drink! the drink! Why didn’t I stay at home and this wouldn’t have happened?’

He stopped suddenly, and, rushing over to the tool-basket, took up a chisel, and with one fierce motion drew it across his throat, and fell down beside the body of his wife.

The Snake’s Pass

Stoker’s second novel was originally published in 1890 by Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, Limited of London. A year before the release of *The Snake’s Pass*, Stoker published chapter three “The Gombeen Man” as a short story in *The People*.


The Snake's Pass
Bram Stoker

The first edition

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CHAPTER I

Between two great mountains of gray and green, as the rock cropped out between the tufts of emerald verdure, the valley, almost as narrow as a gorge, ran due west towards the sea. There was just room for the road-way, half cut in the rock, beside the narrow strip of dark lake of seemingly unfathomable depth that lay far below, between perpendicular walls of frowning rock. As the valley opened, the land dipped steeply, and the lake became a foam- fringed torrent, widening out into pools and miniature lakes as it reached the lower ground. In the wide terrace-like steps of the shelving mountain there were occasional glimpses of civilization emerging from the almost primal desolation which immediately surrounded us — clumps of trees, cottages, and the irregular outlines of stone-walled fields, with black stacks of turf for winter firing piled here and there. Far beyond was the sea — the great Atlantic — with a wildly irregular coast-line studded with a myriad of clustering rocky islands. A sea of deep dark blue, with the distant horizon tinged with a line of faint white light, and here and there, where its margin was visible through the breaks in the rocky coast, fringed with a line of foam as the waves broke on the rocks or swept in great rollers over the level expanse of sands.

The sky was a revelation to me, and seemed almost to obliterate memories of beautiful skies, although I had just come from the south, and had felt the intoxication of the Italian night, where, in the deep blue sky, the nightingale’s note seems to hang as though its sound and the colour were but different expressions of one common feeling. The whole west was a gorgeous mass of violet and sulphur and gold — great masses of storm-cloud piling up and up till the very heavens seemed weighted with a burden too great to bear. Clouds of violet, whose centres were almost black, and whose outer edges were tinged with living gold; great streaks and piled up clouds of palest yellow deepening into saffron and flame-color which seemed to catch the coming sunset and to throw its radiance back to the eastern sky. The view was the most beautiful that I had ever seen; and accustomed as I had been only to the quiet pastoral beauty of a grass country, with occasional visits to my great aunt's well-wooded estate in the south of England, it was no wonder that it arrested my attention and absorbed my imagination. Even my brief half-a-year's travel in Europe, now just concluded, had shown me nothing of the same kind.

Earth, sea, and air all evidenced the triumph of Nature, and told of her wild majesty and beauty. The air was still — ominously still. So still was all, that through the silence, that seemed to hedge us in with a sense of oppression, came the booming of the distant sea, as the great Atlantic swell broke in surf on the rocks or stormed the hollow caverns of the shore.

Even Andy, the driver, was for the nonce awed into comparative silence. Hitherto, for nearly forty miles of a drive, he had been giving me his experiences — propounding his views — airing his opinions; in fact, he had been making me acquainted with his store of knowledge touching the whole district and its people — including their names, histories, romances, hopes and fears — all that goes to make up the life and interest of a country-side.

No barber — taking this tradesman to illustrate the popular idea of loquacity in excelsis — is more consistently talkative than an Irish car-driver to whom has been granted the gift of speech. There is absolutely no limit to his capability, for every change of surrounding affords a new theme and brings on the tapis a host of matters requiring to be set forth.

I was rather glad of Andy’s “brilliant flash of silence” just at present, for not only did I wish to drink in and absorb the grand and novel beauty of the scene that opened out before me, but I wanted to understand as fully as I could some deep thought which it awoke within me. It may have been merely the grandeur and beauty of the scene — or perhaps it was the thunder which filled the air that July evening — but I felt exalted in a strange way, and impressed at the same time with a new sense of the reality of things. It almost seemed as if through that opening valley, with the mighty Atlantic beyond and the piling up of the storm-clouds overhead, I passed into a new and more real life. Somehow I had of late seemed to myself to be waking up. My foreign tour had been gradually dissipating my old sleepy ideas, or perhaps overcoming the negative forces that had hitherto dominated my life; and now this glorious burst of wild natural beauty — the majesty of nature at its fullest — seemed to have completed my awakening, and I felt as though I looked for the first time with open eyes on the beauty and reality of the world.

Hitherto my life had been but an inert one, and I was younger in many ways and more deficient in knowledge of the world in all ways than other young men of my own age. I had stepped but lately from boyhood, with all boyhood’s surroundings, into manhood, and as yet I was hardly at ease in my new position.

For the first time in my life I had had a holiday — a real holiday, as one can take it who can choose his own way of amusing himself.

I had been brought up in an exceedingly quiet way with an old clergyman and his wife in the west of England, and except my fellow pupils, of whom there was never at any time more than one other, I had had little companionship. Altogether I knew very few people. I was the ward of a great aunt, who was wealthy and eccentric and of a sternly uncompromising disposition. When my father and mother were lost at sea, leaving me, an only child, quite unprovided for, she undertook to pay for my schooling and to start me in a profession if I should show sufficient aptitude for any. My father had been pretty well cut off by his family on account of his marriage with what they considered his inferior, and times had been, I was always told, pretty hard for them both. I was only a very small boy when they were lost in a fog when crossing the Channel; and the blank that their loss caused me made me, I dare say, seem even a duller boy than I was. As I did not get into much trouble, and did not exhibit any special restlessness of disposition, my great aunt took it, I suppose, for granted that I was very well off where I was; and when, through growing years, the fiction of my being a school-boy could be no longer supported, the old clergyman was called "guardian" instead of "tutor," and I passed with him the years that young men of the better class usually spend in college life. The nominal change of position made little difference to me, except that I was taught to ride and shoot, and was generally given the rudiments of an education which was to fit me for being a country gentleman. I dare say that my tutor had some secret understanding with my great aunt, but he never gave me any hint whatever of her feelings towards me. A part of my holidays each year was spent in her place, a beautiful country-seat. Here I was always treated by the old lady with rigid severity but with the best of good manners, and by the servants with affection as well as respect. There were a host of cousins, both male and female, who came to the house; but I can honestly say that by not one of them was I ever treated with cordiality. It may have been my fault, or the misfortune of my shyness; but I never met one of them without being made to feel that I was an "outsider."

I can understand now the cause of this treatment as arising from their suspicions when I remember that the old lady, who had been so severe with me all my life, sent for me when she lay on her death-bed, and, taking my hand in hers and holding it tight, said, between her gasps:

"Arthur, I hope I have not done wrong, but I have reared you so that the world may for you have good as well as bad — happiness as well as unhappiness; that you may find many pleasures where you thought there were but few. Your youth, I know, my dear boy, has not been a happy one; but it was because I, who loved your dear father as if he had been my own son — and from whom I unhappily allowed myself to be estranged until it was too late — wanted you to have a good and happy manhood."

She did not say any more, but closed her eyes and still held my hand. I feared to take it away lest I should disturb her; but presently the clasp seemed to relax, and I found that she was dead.

I had never seen a dead person, much less any one die, and the event made a great impression on me. But youth is elastic, and the old lady had never been much in my heart.

When the will was read, it was found that I had been left heir to all her property, and that I would be called upon to take a place among the magnates of the county. I could not fall at once into the position, and, as I was of a shy nature, resolved to spend at least a few months in travel. This I did, and when I had returned, after a six months' tour, I accepted the cordial invitation of some friends, made on my travels, to pay them a visit at their place in the county of Clare.

As my time was my own, and as I had a week or two to spare, I had determined to improve my knowledge of Irish affairs by making a detour through some of the counties in the west on my way to Clare. By this time I was just beginning to realise that life has many pleasures. Each day a new world of interest seemed to open before me. The experiment of my great aunt might yet be crowned with success. And now the consciousness of the change in myself had come home to me — come with the unexpected suddenness of the first streak of the dawn through the morning mists. The moment was to be to me a notable one; and as I wished to remember it to the full, I tried to take in all the scene where such a revelation first dawned upon me. I had fixed in my mind, as the central point for my memory to rest on, a promontory right under the direct line of the sun, when I was interrupted by a remark made, not to me but seemingly to the universe in general: "Musha! but it's comin' quick."

"What is coming?" I asked.

"The shtorm! Don't ye see the way thim clouds is dhriftin'? Faix, but it's fine times the ducks'll be afther havin' before many minutes is past!"

I did not heed his words much, for my thoughts were intent on the scene. We were rapidly descending the valley, and, as we got lower, the promontory seemed to take bolder shape, and was beginning to stand out as a round- topped hill of somewhat noble proportions. "Tell me, Andy," I said, "what do they call the hill beyond?"

"The hill beyant there, is it? Well, now, they call the place Shleenanaher."

"Then that is Shleenanaher Mountain?"

"Begor, it's not. The mountain is called Knockcalltecrore. It's Irish."

"And what does it mean?"

“Faix, I believe it’s a short name for the Hill iv the Lost Goolden Crown.”

“And what is Shleenanaher, Andy?”

“Throth, it’s a bit iv a gap in the rocks beyant that they call Shleenanaher.”

“And what does that mean? It is Irish, I suppose?”

“Thrue for ye! Irish it is, an’ it manes ‘The Shnake’s Pass.’”

“Indeed! And can you tell me why it is so called?” “Begor, there’s a power iv raysons guv for callin’ it that. Wait till we get Jerry Scanlan or Bat Moynahan, beyant in Carnaclif! Sure they knows every laygend and shtory in the bar’ny, an’ll tell them all, av ye like. Whew! Musha, here it comes!”

Surely enough, it did come. The storm seemed to sweep through the valley in a single instant; the stillness changed to a roar, the air became dark with the clouds of drifting rain. It was like the bursting of a water-spout in volume, and came so quickly that I was drenched to the skin before I could throw my mackintosh round me. The mare seemed frightened at first; but Andy held her in with a steady hand and with comforting words, and after the first rush of the tempest she went on as calmly and steadily as hitherto, only shrinking a little at the lightning and the thunder.

The grandeur of that storm was something to remember. The lightning came in brilliant sheets that seemed to cleave the sky, and threw weird lights among the hills, now strange with black, sweeping shadows. The thunder broke with startling violence right over our heads, and flapped and buffeted from hill-side to hill-side, rolling and reverberating away into the distance, its farther voices being lost in the crash of each succeeding peal. On we went, through the driving storm, faster and faster; but the storm abated not a jot. Andy was too much occupied with his work to speak; and as for me, it took all my time to keep on the rocking and swaying car, and to hold my hat and mackintosh so as to shield myself as well as I could from the pelting storm. Andy seemed to be above all considerations of personal comfort. He turned up his coat collar, that was all, and soon he was as shiny as my own water-proof rug. Indeed, altogether, he seemed quite as well off as I was, or even better, for we were both as wet as we could be, and while I was painfully endeavouring to keep off the rain, he was free from all responsibility and anxiety of endeavour whatever. At length, as we entered on a long, straight stretch of level road, he turned to me and said: "Yer 'an'r, it's no kind iv use dhrivin' like this all the way to Carnaclif. This shtorm'll go on for hours. I know thim well up on these mountains, wid' a nor'-aist wind blowin'. Wouldn't it be betther for us to get shelther for a bit?" "Of course it would," said I. "Try it at once. Where can you go?"

"There's a place nigh at hand, yer 'an'r, the Widdy Kelligan's shebeen, at the cross-roads of Glennashaughlin: it's quite contagious. Gee-up, ye ould corn-crake! hurry up to Widdy Kelligan's." It seemed almost as if the mare understood him and shared his wishes, for she started with increased speed down a lane-way that opened out a little on our left. In a few minutes we reached the cross-roads, and also the shebeen of Widow Kelligan, a low whitewashed thatched house, in a deep hollow between high banks in the south-western corner of the cross. Andy jumped down and hurried to the door.

"Here's a sthrange gintleman, Widdy. Take care iv him," he called out, as I entered. Before I had succeeded in closing the door behind me, he was unharnessing the mare, preparatory to placing her in the lean-to stable, built behind the house against the high bank.

Already the storm seemed to have sent quite an assemblage to

Mrs. Kelligan's hospitable shelter. A great fire of turf roared up the chimney, and round it stood, and sat, and lay a steaming mass of nearly a dozen people, men and women. The room was a large one, and the inglenook so roomy that nearly all those present found a place in it. The roof was black, rafters and thatch alike; quite a number of cocks and hens found shelter in the rafters at the end of the room. Over the fire was a large pot suspended on a wire, and there was a savoury and inexpressibly appetising smell of marked volume throughout the room of roasted herrings and whiskey punch.

As I came in all rose up, and I found myself placed in a warm seat close to the fire, while various salutations of welcome buzzed all around me. The warmth was most grateful, and I was trying to convey my thanks for the shelter and the welcome, and feeling very awkward over it, when, with a "God save all here!" Andy entered the room through the back door.

He was evidently a popular favourite, for there was a perfect rain of hearty expressions to him. He, too, was placed close to the fire, and a steaming jorum of punch placed in his hands — a similar one to that which had been already placed in my own. Andy lost no time in sampling that punch. Neither did I; and I can honestly say that if he enjoyed his more than I did mine, he must have had a very happy few minutes. He lost no time in making himself and all the rest comfortable.

"Hurroo!" said he. "Musha! but we're just in time. Mother, is the herrin's done? Up with the creel, and turn out the pitaties; they're done, or me senses desaves me. Yer 'an'r, we're in the hoight iv good luck! Herrin's it is, and it might have been only pitaties an' point."

"What is that?" I asked.

"Oh, that is whin there is only wan herrin' among a crowd — too little to give aich a taste, and so they put it in the middle and point the pitaties at it to give them a flaviour."

All lent a hand with the preparation of supper. A great potato basket, which would hold some two hundred-weight, was turned bottom up, the pot was taken off the fire, and the contents turned out on it in a great steaming mass of potatoes. A handful of coarse salt was taken from a box and put on one side of the basket, and another on the other side. The herrings were cut in pieces, and a piece given to each — the dinner was served. There were no plates, no knives, forks, or spoons — no ceremony — no precedence — nor was there any heartburning, jealousy, or greed. A happier meal I never took a part in, nor did I ever enjoy food more. Such as it was, it was perfect. The potatoes were fine and cooked to perfection; we took them in our fingers, peeled them how we could, dipped them in the salt, and ate till we were satisfied.

During the meal several more strangers dropped in, and all reported the storm as showing no signs of abating. Indeed, little such assurance was wanting, for the fierce lash of the rain, and the howling of the storm as it beat on the face of the house, told the tale well enough for the meanest comprehension.

When dinner was over and the basket removed, we drew around the fire again, pipes were lit, a great steaming jug of punch made its appearance, and conversation became general. Of course, as a stranger, I came in for a good share of attention. Andy helped to make things interesting for me, and his statement, made by my request, that I hoped to be allowed to provide the punch for the evening, even increased his popularity, while it established mine. After calling attention to several matters which evoked local stories and jokes and anecdotes, he remarked: “His ‘an’r was axin’ me just afore the shtorm kem on as to why the Shleenanaher was called so. I tould him that none could tell him like Jerry Scanlan or Bat Moynahan, an’ here is the both of them, sure enough. Now, boys, won’t ye oblige the sthrange gintleman, an’ tell him what yez know iv the shtories anent the hill?” “Wid all the plisure in life,” said Jerry Scanlan, a tall man of middle age, with a long thin clean-shaven face, a humorous eye, and a shirt collar whose points in front came up almost to his eyes, while the back part disappeared into the depths of his frieze coat collar behind. “Begor, yer ‘an’r, I’ll tell ye all I iver heerd. Sure there’s a laygend, and there’s a shtory — musha! but there’s a wheen o’ both laygends and shtories — but there’s wan laygend beyant all — here, Mother Kelligan, fill up me glass, fur sorra one o’ me is a good dhry shpaker. Tell me, now, sor, do they allow punch to the Mimbers iv Parlymint whin they’re shpakin’?” I shook my head. “Musha! thin, but it’s meself they’ll niver git as a number till they alther that law! Thank ye, Mrs. Kelligan, this is just my shtyle. But now for the laygend that they tell of Shleenanaher.”

CHAPTER II

“Well, in the ould ancient times, before St. Pathrick banished the shnakes from out iv Ireland, the hill beyant was a mighty important place intirely. For more betoken, none other lived in it than the King iv the Shnakes himself. In thim times there was up at the top iv the hill a wee bit iv a lake wid threes and sedges and the like growin’ round it; and ’twas there that the King iv the Shnakes made his nist — or whativer it is that shnakes calls their home. Glory be to God! but none us of knows anythin’ of them at all, at all, since Saint Pathrick tuk them in hand.”

Here an old man in the chimney corner struck in: “Thrue for ye, acushla; sure the bit lake is there still, though, more belike it’s dhry now, it is, and the threes is all gone.”

“Well,” went on Jerry, not ill-pleased with this corroboration of his story, “the King iv the Shnakes was mighty important, intirely. He was more nor tin times as big as any shnake as any man’s eyes had iver saw; an’ he had a goolden crown on to the top of his head, wid a big jool in it that tuk the colour iv the light, whether that same was from the sun or the moon; an’ all the shnakes had to take it in turns to bring food, and lave it for him in the cool iv the evenin’, whin he would come out and ate it up and go back to his own place. An’ they do say that whiniver two shnakes had a quarr’ll they had to come to the King, an’ he decided betune them; an’ he tould aich iv them where he was to live, and what he was to do. An’ wanst in ivery year there had to be brought to him a live baby; and they do say that he would wait until the moon was at the full, an’ thin would be heerd one wild wail that made every sowl widin miles shuddher, an’ thin there would be black silence, and clouds would come over the moon, and for three days it would never be seen agin.”

“Oh, glory be to God!” murmured one of the women, “but it was a terrible thing!” and she rocked herself to and fro, moaning, all the motherhood in her awake.

“But did none of the min do nothin’?” said a powerful- looking young fellow in the orange and green jersey of the Gaelic Athletic Club, with his eyes flashing; and he clinched his teeth.

“Musha! how could they? Sure, no man ever seen the King iv the Shnakes!”

“Thin how did they know about him?” he queried, doubtfully.

“Sure, wasn’t one of their childher tuk away iv’ ry year? But, anyhow, it’s all over now! an’ so it was that none iv the min iver wint. They do say that one woman what lost her child, run up to the top of the hill; but what she seen, none could tell, for whin they found her she was a ravin’ lunatic, wid white hair an’ eyes like a corpse — an’ the mornin’ afther they found her dead in her bed wid a black mark round her neck as if she had been choked, an’ the mark was in the shape iv a shnake. Well, there was much sorra and much fear, and whin St. Pathrick tuk the shnakes in hand the bonfires was lit all over the counthry. Never was such a flittin’ seen as whin the shnakes came from all parts wrigglin’ and crawlin’ an’ shkwirmin’.”

Here the narrator dramatically threw himself into an attitude, and with the skill of a true improvisatore, suggested in every pose and with every limb and in every motion the serpentine movements. “They all came away to the west, and seemed to come to this wan mountain. From the north and the south and the east they came be millions an’ thousands an’ hundhreds — for whin St. Pathrick ordhered them out he only tould them to go, but he didn’t name the place — an’ there was he up on top of Brandon Mountain, wid his vistments on to him an’ his crozier in his hand, and the shnakes movin’ below him, all goin’ up north, an’ sez he to himself: “‘I must see about this.’ An’ he got down from aff iv the mountain, and he folly’d the shnakes, and he see them move along to the hill beyant that they call Knockcalltecrore. An’ be this time they wor all come from all over Ireland, and they wor all round the mountain — exceptin’ on the say-side — an’ they all had their heads pointed up the hill, and their tails pointed to the Saint, so that they didn’t see him, an’ they all gave wan great hiss, an’ then another, an’ another, like wan, two, three! An’ at the third hiss the King iv the Shnakes rose up out of the wee fen at the top of the hill, wid his goold crown gleamin’; an’ more betoken it was harvest time, an’ the moon was up, an’ the sun was settin’, so the big jool in the crown had the light of both the sun an’ the moon, an’ it shone so bright that right away in Lensther the people thought the whole counthry was afire. But whin the Saint seen him, his whole forrum seemed to swell out an’ get bigger an’ bigger, an’ he lifted his crozier, an’ he pointed west, an’ sez he, in a voice like a shtorm, ‘To the say, all ye shnakes! At wanst! to the say!’

“An’ in the instant, wid wan movement, an’ wid a hiss that made the air seem full iv watherfalls, the whole iv the shnakes that was round the hill wriggled away into the say as if the fire was at their tails. There was so many iv them that they filled up the say out beyant to Cusheen Island, and them that was behind, had to shlide over their bodies. An’ the say piled up till it sent a wave mountains high rollin’ away across the Atlantic till it sthruck upon the shore iv America — though more betoken it wasn’t America thin, for it wasn’t discovered till long afther. An’ there was so many shnakes that they do say that all the white sand that dhrifts up on the coast from the Blaskets to Achill Head is made from their bones." Here Andy cut in: "But, Jerry, you haven't tould us if the King iv the Shnakes wint too."

"Musha! but it's in a hurry ye are. How can I tell ye the whole laygend at wanst; an', moreover, when me mouth is that dhry I can hardly spake at all — an' me punch is all dhrunk—"

He turned his glass face down on the table, with an air of comic resignation. Mrs. Kelligan took the hint and refilled his glass while he went on:

"Well! whin the shnakes tuk to say-bathin' an' forgot to come in to dhry themselves, the ould King iv thim sunk down agin into the lake, an' Saint Pathrick rowls his eyes, an' sez he to himself: "'Musha! is it dhramin' I am, or what? or is it laughin' at me he is? Does he mane to defy me?' An' seein' that no notice was tuk iv him at all, he lifts his crozier, and calls out: "'Hi! here! you! Come here! I want ye!' As he spoke, Jerry went through all the pantomime of the occasion, exemplifying by every movement the speech of both the Saint and the Snake. "Well, thin the King iv the Shnakes puts up his head out iv the lake, an' sez he: "'Who calls?' "'I do,' says St. Pathrick, an' he was so much mulvathered at the Shnake presumin' to sthay, afther he tould thim all to go that for a while he didn't think it quare that he could sphake at all. "'Well, what do ye want wid me?' sez the Shnake. "'I want to know why you didn't lave Irish soil wid all th' other Shnakes,' sez the Saint. "'Ye tould the Shnakes to go,' sez the King, 'an' I am their King, so I am; and your wurrds didn't apply to me!' an' with that he dhrops like a flash of lightnin' into the lake again.

"Well! St. Pathrick was so tuk back wid his impidence that he had to think for a minit, an' then he calls again: "'Hi! here! you!' "'What do you want now?' sez the King iv the Shnakes, again poppin' up his head. "'I want to know why you didn't obey me ordhers?' sez the Saint. An' the King luked at him an' laughed; and he looked mighty evil, I can tell ye, for be this time the sun was down and the moon up, an' the jool in his crown threw out a pale cold light that would make you shuddher to see. 'An',' says he, as slow an' as hard as an attorney (saving your prisence) when he has a bad case: "'I didn't obey,' sez he, 'because I thraverse the jurisdiction.' "'How do ye mane?' asks St. Pathrick. "'Because,' sez he, 'this is my own houldin',' sez he, 'be perscriptive right,' sez he. I'm the whole govermint here, and I put a nexeat on meself not to lave widout me own permission,' and he ducks down agin into the pond. "Well, the Saint began to get mighty angry, an' he raises his crozier, and he calls him agin: "'Hi! here! you!' and the Shnake pops up. "'Well! Saint, what do you want now? Amn't I to be quit iv ye at all?' "'Are ye goin', or are ye not?' sez the Saint. "'I'm King here, an' I'm not goin'.' "'Thin,' says the Saint, 'I depose ye!' "'You can't,' sez the Shnake, 'while I have me crown.'

"'Then I'll take it from ye,' sez St. Pathrick. "'Catch me first!' sez the Shnake; an' wid that he pops undher the wather, what began to bubble up and boil. Well, thin, the good Saint stood bewildhered, for as he was lukin' the wather began to disappear out of the wee lake; and then the ground iv the hill began to be shaken as if the big Shnake was rushin' round and round it down deep down undher the ground.

"So the Saint stood on the edge of the empty lake an' held up his crozier, and called on the Shnake to come forth. And when he luked down, lo! an' behold ye! there lay the King iv the Shnakes coiled round the bottom iv the lake, though how he had got there the Saint could niver tell, for he hadn’t been there when he began to summons him. Then the Shnake raised his head, and, lo! and behold ye! there was no crown onto it.

“‘Where is your crown?’ sez the Saint.

“‘It’s hid,’ sez the Shnake, leerin’ at him.

“‘Where is it hid?’ “‘It’s hid in the mountain! Buried where you nor the likes iv you can’t touch it in a thousand years!’ an’ he leered agin. “‘Tell me where it may be found?’ sez the Saint starnly. An’ thin the Shnake leers at him agin wid an eviller smile than before; an’ sez he: “‘Did ye see the wather what was in the lake?’ “‘I did,’ sez St. Pathrick.

“‘Thin, when ye find that wather ye may find me jool’d crown, too,’ sez he; an’ before the Saint could say a word, he wint on:

“‘An’ till ye git me crown I’m king here still, though ye banish me. An’ mayhap I’ll come in some forrum what ye don’t suspect, for I must watch me crown. An’ now I go away — iv me own accord.’ An’ widout one word more, good or bad, he shlid right away into the say, dhrivin’ through the rock an’ makin’ the clift that they call the Shleenanaher — an’ that’s Irish for the Shnake’s Pass — until this day.”

“An’ now, sir, if Mrs. Kelligan hasn’t dhrunk up the whole bar’l, I’d like a dhrop iv punch, for talkin’ is dhry wurrk,” and he buried his head in the steaming jorum, which the hostess had already prepared. The company then began to discuss the legend. Said one of the women: “I wondher what forrum he tuk when he kem back!” Jerry answered:

“Sure, they do say that the shiftin’ bog wor the forrum he tuk. The mountain wid the lake on top used to be the ferti lest shpot in the whole counthry; but iver since the bog began to shift this was niver the same.” Here a hard-faced man named McGlown, who had been silent, struck in with a question: “But who knows when the bog did begin to shift?” “Musha! sorra one of me knows; but it was whin th’ ould Shnake druv the wather iv the lake into the hill!” There was a twinkle in the eyes of the story-teller, which made one doubt his own belief in his story. “Well, for ma own part,” said McGlown, “A don’t believe a sengle word of it.” “An’ for why not?” said one of the women. “Isn’t the mountain called ‘Knockcalltecrore,’ or ‘The Hill of the Lost Crown iv Gold,’ till this day?” Said another: “Musha! how could Misther McGlown believe anythin’, an’ him a Protestan’.”

“A’ll tell ye that A much prefer the facs,” said McGlown. “Ef hestory es till be believed, A much prefer the story told till me by yon old man. Damn me! but A believe he’s old enough till remember the theng itself.”

He pointed as he spoke to old Moynahan, who, shrivelled up and white-haired, crouched in a corner of the inglenook, holding close to the fire his wrinkled, shaky hands.

“What is the story that Mr. Moynahan has, may I ask?” said I. “Pray oblige, me, won’t you? I am anxious to hear all I can of the mountain, for it has taken my fancy strangely.’’ The old man took the glass of punch, which Mrs.

Kelligan handed him as the necessary condition antecedent to a story, and began:

“Oh, sorra one of me knows anythin’ except what I’ve heerd from me father. But I oft heerd him say that he was tould that it was said that in the Frinch invasion that didn’t come off undher Gineral Humbert, whin the attimpt was over an’ all hope was gone, the English sodgers made sure of great prize-money whin they should git hould of the threasure-chist. For it was known that there was much money goin' an' that they had brought a lot more than iver they wanted for pay and expinses in ordher to help bribe some of the people that was houldin' off to be bought by wan side or the other — if they couldn't manage to git bought be both. But, sure enough, they wor all sould, bad cess to thim! and the divil a bit of money could they lay their hands on at all."

Here the old man took a pull at his jug of punch, with so transparent a wish to be further interrogated that a smile flashed round the company. One of the old crones remarked, in an audible sotto voce: "Musha! but Bat is the cute story-teller intirely. Ye have to dhrag it out iv him! Go on, Bat, go on! Tell us what become iv the money." "Oh, what become iv the money? So ye would like to hear? Well, I'll tell ye — just one more fill of the jug, Mrs. Kelligan, as the gintleman wishes to know all about it — well, they did say that the officer what had charge of the money got well away with some five or six others. The chist was a heavy wan — an iron chist bang full up iv goold! Oh, my! but it was fine! A big chist — that high, an' as long as the table, an' full up to the led wid goolden money an' paper money, an' divil a piece of white money in it at all! All goold, every pound note iv it." He paused, and glanced anxiously at Mrs. Kelligan, who was engaged in the new brew. "Not too much wather, if ye love me, Katty; you know me wakeness! Well, they do say that it tuk hard work to lift the chist into the boat; an' thin they put in a gun-carriage to carry it on, an' tuk out two horses, an' whin the shmoke was all round an' the darkness of night was on, they got on shore, an' made away down south from where the landin' was made at Killala. But, anyhow, they say that none of them was ever heerd of agin. But they was thraced through Ardnaree an' Lough Conn, an' through Castlebar Lake an’ Lough Carra, an’ through Lough Mask an’ Lough Corrib. But they niver kem out through Galway, for the river was watched for thim day an’ night be the sodgers; and how they got along God knows, for ’twas said they suffered quare hardships. They tuk the chist an’ the gun-carriage an’ the horses in the boat, an’ whin they couldn’t go no farther they dhragged the boat over the land to the next lake, an’ so on. Sure, one dhry sayson, when the wathers iv Corrib was down feet lower nor they was iver known afore, a boat was found up at the Bealanabrack end that had lay there for years; but the min nor the horses nor the treasure was never heerd of from that day to this — so they say,” he added, in a mysterious way, and he renewed his attention to the punch, as if his tale was ended.

“But, man alive!” said McGlown, “that’s only a part. Go on, man dear! an’ fenesh the punch after.” “Oh, oh! Yes, of course, you want to know the end. Well, no wan knows the end. But they used to say that whin the min lift the boat they wint due west, till one night they sthruck the mountain beyant; an’ that there they buried the chist an’ killed the horses, or rode away on them. But anyhow, they wor niver seen again; an’, as sure as you’re alive, the money is there in the hill! For luk at the name iv it! Why did any wan iver call it ‘Knockcalltore’ — an’ that’s Irish for ‘The Hill of the Lost Gold’ — if the money isn’t there?” “Thrue for ye!” murmured an old woman with a cutty pipe. “For why, indeed? There’s some people what won’t believe nothin’ altho’ it’s undher their eyes!” and she puffed away in silent rebuke to the spirit of scepticism — which, by the way, had not been manifested by any person present.

There was a long pause, broken only by one of the old women, who occasionally gave a sort of half-grunt, half- sigh, as if unconsciously to fill up the hiatus in the talk. She was a “keener” by profession, and was evidently well fitted to and well drilled in her work. Presently old Moynahan broke the silence: “Well, it’s a mighty quare thing, anyhow, that the hill beyant has been singled out for laygends and sthories and gossip iv all kinds consarnin’ shnakes an’ the like. An’ I’m not so sure, naythur, that some iv thim isn’t there shtill; for, mind ye! it’s a mighty curious thin’ that the bog beyant keeps shiftin’ till this day. And I’m not so sure, naythur, that the shnakes has all left the hill yit!” There was a chorus of “Thrue for ye!” “Aye, an’ it’s a black shnake too!” said one. “An’ wid side-whishkers!” said another. “Begorra! we want St. Pathrick to luk in here agin!” said a third.

I whispered to Andy the driver: “Who is it they mean?” “Whisht!” he answered, but without moving his lips; “but don’t let on I tould ye! Sure an’ it’s Black Murdock they mane.”

“Who or what is Murdock?” I queried. “Sure an’ he is the Gombeen Man.” “What is that? What is a gombeen man?” “Whisper me now,” said Andy; “ax some iv the others.

They’ll larn it ye more betther nor I can.” “What is a gombeen man?” I asked to the company generally.

“A gombeen man, is it? Well, I’ll tell ye,” said an old, shrewd-looking man at the other side of the hearth. “He’s a man that linds you a few shillin’s or a few pounds whin ye want it bad, and then niver laves ye till he has tuk all ye’ve got — yer land an’ yer shanty an’ yer holdin’ an’ yer money an’ yer craps; an’ he would take the blood out of yer body if he could sell it or use it anyhow!”

“Oh, I see — a sort of usurer.” “Ushurer? aye, that’s it; but a ushurer lives in the city, an’ has laws to hould him in. But the Gombeen has nayther law nor the fear iv law. He’s like wan that the

Scriptures says 'grinds the faces iv the poor.' Begor, it's him that'd do little for God's sake if the divil was dead!" "Then I suppose this man Murdock is a man of means — a rich man in his way?" "Rich is it? Sure an' it's him as has plinty. He could lave this place if he chose an' settle in Galway — aye, or in Dublin itself if he liked betther, and lind money to big min — landlords an' the like — instead iv playin' wid poor min here an' swallyin' them up, wan be wan. But he can't go! He can't go!" This he said with a vengeful light in his eyes; I turned to Andy for explanation. "Can't go! How does he mean? What does he mean?"

"Whisht! Don't ax me. Ax Dan, there. He doesn't owe him any money!"

"Which is Dan?" "The ould man there be the settle what has just spoke — Dan Moriarty. He's a warrum man, wid money in bank an' what owns his houldin'; an' he's not afeerd to have his say about Murdock.' "Can any of you tell me why Murdock can't leave the Hill?" I spoke out.

"Begor, I can," said Dan quickly. "He can't lave it because the Hill houlds him!" "What on earth do you mean? How can the Hill hold him?"

"It can hould tight enough! There may be raysons that a man gives — sometimes wan thing, an' sometimes another; but the Hill houlds — an' houlds tight all the same!" Here the door was opened suddenly, and the fire blazed up with the rush of wind that entered. All stood up suddenly, for the new-comer was a priest. He was a sturdy man of middle age, with a cheerful countenance. Sturdy as he was, however, it took all his strength to shut the door, but he succeeded before any of the men could get near enough to help him. Then he turned and saluted all the company: "God save all here." All present tried to do him some service. One took his wet great-coat, another his dripping hat, and a third pressed him into the warmest seat in the chimney-corner, where, in a very few seconds, Mrs. Kelligan handed him a steaming glass of punch, saying, “Dhrink that up, yer rivYence. ‘Twill help to kape ye from catchin’ cowld.” “Thank ye, kindly,” he answered, as he took it. When he had half emptied the glass, he said: “What was it I heard as I came in about the Hill holding some one?” Dan answered: “’Twas me, yer riv’rence. I said that the Hill had hould of Black Murdock, and could hould him tight.”

“Pooh! pooh! man; don’t talk such nonsense. The fact is, sir,” said he, turning to me, after throwing a searching glance round the company, “the people here have all sorts of stories about that unlucky Hill — why, God knows; and this man Murdock, that they call Black Murdock, is a moneylender as well as a farmer, and none of them like him, for he is a hard man and has done some cruel things among them. When they say the Hill holds him, they mean that he doesn’t like to leave it because he hopes to find a treasure that is said to be buried in it. I’m not sure but that the blame is to be thrown on the different names given to the Hill. That most commonly given is Knockcalltecrore, which is a corruption of the Irish phrase Knock-na-callte-croin-oir, meaning, ‘The Hill of the Lost Golden Crown;’ but it has been sometimes called Knockcalltore — short for the Irish words Knock-na-callte-oir, or ‘The Hill of the Lost Gold’. It is said that in some old past time it was called Knocknanaher, or ‘The Hill of the Snake;’ and, indeed, there’s one place on it they call Shleenahaher, meaning the ‘Snake’s Pass’. I dare say, now, that they have been giving you the legends and stories and all the rubbish of that kind. I suppose you know, sir, that in most places the local fancy has run riot at some period and has left a good crop of absurdities and impossibilities behind it?”

I acquiesced warmly, for I felt touched by the good priest’s desire to explain matters, and to hold his own people blameless for crude ideas which he did not share.

He went on:

“It is a queer thing that men must be always putting abstract ideas into concrete shape. No doubt there have been some strange matters regarding this mountain that they’ve been talking about — the Shifting Bog, for instance; and as the people could not account for it in any way that they can understand, they knocked up a legend about it. Indeed, to be just to them, the legend is a very old one, and is mentioned in a manuscript of the twelfth century. But somehow it was lost sight of till about a hundred ago, when the loss of the treasure-chest from the French invasion at Killala set all the imaginations of the people at work, from Donegal to Cork, and they fixed the Hill of the Lost Gold as the spot where the money was to be found. There is not a word of fact in the story from beginning to end, and” — here he gave a somewhat stern glance round the room—“I’m a little ashamed to hear so much chat and nonsense given to a strange gentleman like as if it was so much gospel. However, you mustn’t be too hard in your thoughts on the poor people here, sir, for they’re good people — none better in all Ireland — in all the world for that — but they talk too free to do themselves justice.”

All those present were silent for awhile. Old Moynahan was the first to speak.

“Well, Father Pether, I don’t say nothin’ about St. Pathrick an’ the shnakes meself, because I don’t know nothin’ about them; but I know that me own father tould me that he seen the Frinchmin wid his own eyes crossin' the sthrame below, an' facin' up the mountain. The moon was risin' in the west, an' the hill threw a big shadda. There was two min an' two horses, an' they had a big box on a gun-carriage. Me father seen them cross the sthrame. The load was so heavy that the wheels sunk in the clay, an' the min had to pull at them to git them up again. An' didn't he see the marks iv the wheels in the ground the very nixt day?"

"Bartholomew Moynahan, are you telling the truth?" interrupted the priest, speaking sternly. "Throth an' I am, Father Pether; divil a word iv a lie in all I've said."

"Then how is it you've never told a word of this before?" "But I have tould it, Father Pether. There's more nor wan here now what has heerd me tell it; but they wor tould as a saycret!"

"Thrue for ye!" came the chorus of almost every person in the room. The unanimity was somewhat comic and caused among them a shamefaced silence, which lasted quite several seconds. The pause was not wasted, for by this time Mrs. Kelligan had brewed another jug of punch, and glasses were replenished. This interested the little crowd, and they entered afresh into the subject. As for myself, however, I felt strangely uncomfortable. I could not quite account for it in any reasonable way. I suppose there must be an instinct in men as well as in the lower orders of animal creation — I felt as though there were a strange presence near me.

I quietly looked round. Close to where I sat, on the sheltered side of the house, was a little window built in the deep recess of the wall, and, farther, almost obliterated by the shadow of the priest as he sat close to the fire, pressed against the empty lattice, where the glass had once been, I saw the face of a man — a dark, forbidding face it seemed in the slight glimpse I caught of it. The profile was towards me, for he was evidently listening intently, and he did not see me. Old Moynahan went on with his story: “Me father hid behind a whin bush, an’ lay as close as a hare in his forrum. The min seemed suspicious of bein’ seen, and they looked carefully all round for the sign of any wan. Thin they started up the side of the Hill; an’ a cloud came over the moon, so that for a bit me father could see nothin’. But prisintly he seen the two min up on the side of the Hill at the south, near Joyce’s mearin’. Thin they disappeared agin, an’ prisintly he seen the horses an’ the gun-carriage, an’ all, up in the same place, an’ the moonlight sthruck thim as they wint out iv the shadda; and min, an’ horses, an’ gun-carriage, an’ chist, an’ all wint round to the back iv the hill at the west an’ disappeared. Me father waited a minute or two to make sure, an’ thin he run round as hard as he could an’ hid behind the projectin’ rock at the enthrance iv the Shleenanaher, an’ there foreninst him, right up the hill-side, he seen two min carryin’ the chist, an’ it nigh weighed thim down. But the horses an’ the gun-carriage was nowhere to be seen. Well, me father was stealin’ out to folly thim when he loosened a sthone, an’ it clattered down through the rocks at the Shnake’s Pass wid a noise like a dhrum, an’ the two min sot down the chist an’ they turned; an’ whin they seen me father, one of them runs at him, and he turned an’ run. An’ thin another black cloud crossed the moon; but me father knew ivery foot of the mountain-side, and he run on through the dark. He heerd the footsteps behind him for a bit, but they seemed to get fainter an’ fainter; but he niver stopped runnin’ till he got to his own cabin. And that was the last he iver see iv the men, or the horses, or the chist. Maybe they wint into the air or the say, or the mountin; but, anyhow, they vanished, and from that day to this no sight, or sound, or word iv them was ever known!”

There was a universal, “Oh!” of relief as he concluded, while he drained his glass.

I looked round again at the little window; but the dark face was gone.

Then there arose a perfect babel of sounds. All commented on the story, some in Irish, some in English, and some in a speech, English indeed, but so purely and locally idiomatic that I could only guess at what was intended to be conveyed. The comment generally took the form that two men were to be envied — one of them, the Gombeen Man, Murdock, who owned a portion of the western side of the hill; the other one, Joyce, who owned another portion of the same aspect. In the midst of the buzz of conversation the clattering of hoofs was heard. There was a shout, and the door opened again and admitted a stalwart stranger of some fifty years of age, with a strong, determined face, with kindly eyes, well-dressed, but wringing wet and haggard, and seemingly disturbed in mind. One arm hung useless by his side. “Here’s one of them!” said Father Peter.

CHAPTER III

"God save all here," said the man as he entered. Room was made for him at the fire. He no sooner came near it and tasted the heat than a cloud of steam arose from him.

"Man! but ye're wet," said Mrs. Kelligan. "One'd think ye'd been in the lake beyant!" "So I have," he answered, "worse luck! I rid all the way from Galway this blessed day to be here in time, but the mare slipped coming down Curragh Hill and threw me over the bank into the lake. I wor in the wather nigh three hours before I could get out, for I was foreninst the Curragh Rock an' only got a foothold in a chink, an' had to hold on wid me one arm, for I fear the other is broke." "Dear! dear! dear!" interrupted the woman. "Sthrip yer coat off, acushla, an' let us see if we can do anythin'."

He shook his head, as he answered: "Not now; there's not a minute to spare. I must get up the Hill at once. I should have been there be six o'clock. But I mayn't be too late yit. The mare has broke down entirely. Can any one here lend me a horse?"

There was no answer till Andy spoke: "Me mare is in the shtable, but this gintleman has me an' her for the day, an' I have to lave him at Carnaclif tonight."

Here I struck in: "Never mind me, Andy. If you can help this gentleman, do so. I'm better off here than driving through the storm. He wouldn't want to go on with a broken arm if he hadn't good reason!"

The man looked at me with grateful eagerness: "Thank yer honor kindly. It's a rale gintleman ye are! An' I hope ye'll never be sorry for helpin' a poor fellow in sore trouble."

"What's wrong, Phelim?" asked the priest. "Is there anything troubling you that any one here can get rid of?”

“Nothin’, Father Pether, thank ye kindly. The trouble is me own intirely, an’ no wan here could help me. But I must see Murdock to-night.”

There was a general sigh of commiseration; all understood the situation. “Musha!” said old Dan Moriarty, sotto voce. “An’ is that the way of it? An’ is he, too, in the clutches iv that wolf — him that we all thought was so warrum? Glory be to God! but it’s a quare wurrld it is; an’ it’s few there is in it that is what they seems. Me poor frind, is there any way I can help ye? I have a bit iv money by me that yer welkim to the lend iv av ye want it.”

The other shook his head gratefully: “Thank ye kindly, Dan, but I have the money all right; it’s only the time I’m in trouble about!” “Only the time, me poor chap! It’s be time that the divil helps Black Murdock an’ the likes iv him, the most iv all!

God be good to ye if he has got his clutch on yer back, an’ has time on his side, for ye’ll want it!” ‘‘Well! anyhow, I must be goin’ now. Thank ye kindly, neighbors all. When a man’s in throuble, sure the good-will of his frinds is the greatest comfort he can have.” “All but one, remember that — all but one!” said the priest.

“Thank ye kindly, Father, I sha’n’t forget. Thank ye Andy: an’ you, too, young sir; I’m much beholden to ye. I hope some day I may have it to do a good turn for ye in return. Thank ye kindly again, and good-night.” He shook my hand warmly, and was going to the door, when old Dan said: “An’ as for that black-jawed ruffian, Murdock —” He paused, for the door suddenly opened, and a harsh voice said:

“Murtagh Murdock is here to answer for himself!” It was my man at the window. There was a sort of paralyzed silence in the room, through which came the whisper of one of the old women: “Musha!

talk iv the divil!" Joyce's face grew very white; one hand instinctively grasped his riding-switch, the other hung uselessly by his side. Murdock spoke: "I kem here expectin' to meet Phelim Joyce. I thought I'd save him the throuble of comin' wid the money." Joyce said in a husky voice: "What do ye mane? I have the money right enough here. I'm sorry I'm a bit late, but I had a bad accident — bruk me arrum, an' was nigh dhrownded in the Curragh Lake. But I was goin' up to ye at once, bad as I am, to pay ye yer money, Murdock." The Gombeen Man interrupted him: "But it isn't to me ye'd have to come, me good man. Sure, it's the sheriff himself that was waitin' for ye, an' whin ye didn't come" — here Joyce winced; the speaker smiled— "he done his work." "What wurrk, acushla?" asked one of the women.

Murdock answered slowly: "He sould the lease iv the farrum known as the Shleenanaher in open sale, in accordance wid the terrums of his notice, duly posted, and wid warnin' given to the houldher iv the lease." There was a long pause. Joyce was the first to speak: "Ye're jokin', Murdock. For God's sake, say ye're jokin'! Ye tould me yerself that I might have time to git the money. An' ye tould me that the puttin' me farrum up for sale was only a matther iv forrum to let me pay ye back in me own way. Nay, more, ye asked me not to tell any iv the neighbors, for fear some iv them might want to buy some iv me land. An' it's niver so, that whin ye got me aff to Galway to rise the money, ye went on wid the sale, behind me back — wid not a soul by to spake for me or mine — an' sould up all I have! No! Murtagh Murdock, ye're a hard man, I know, but ye wouldn't do that! Ye wouldn't do that!" Murdock made no direct reply to him, but said, seemingly to the company generally: "I ixpected to see Phelim Joyce at the sale to-day, but as I had some business in which he was consarned, I kem here where I knew there'd be neighbors — an', sure, so there is."

He took out his pocket-book and wrote names: "Father Pether Ryan, Daniel Moriarty, Bartholomew Moynahan, Andhrew McGlown, Mrs. Katty Kelligan — that's enough! I want ye all to see what I done. There's nothin' undherhand about me! Phelim Joyce, I give ye formial notice that yer land was sould an' bought by me, for ye broke yer word to repay me the money lint ye before the time fixed. Here's the sheriffs assignmint, an' I tell ye before all these witnesses that I'll proceed with ejectment on title at wanst."

All in the room were as still as statues. Joyce was fearfully still and pale, but when Murdock spoke the word "ejectment" he seemed to wake in a moment to frenzied life. The blood flushed up in his face, and he seemed about to do something rash; but with a great effort he controlled himself and said: "Mr. Murdock, ye won't be too hard. I got the money today — it's here — but I had an accident that delayed me. I was thrown into the Curragh Lake and nigh dhrownded an' me arrum is bruk. Don't be so close as an hour or two; ye'll never be sorry for it. I'll pay ye all, and more, and thank ye into the bargain all me life. Ye'll take back the paper, won't ye, for me childhren's sake — for Norah's sake?"

He faltered; the other answered with an evil smile: "Phelim Joyce, I've waited years for this moment. Don't ye know me betther nor to think I would go back on meself whin I have shtarted on a road? I wouldn't take yer money, not if ivery pound note was spread into an acre and cut up in tin-pound notes. I want yer land — I have waited for it, an' I mane to have it! Now don't beg me any more, for I won't go back; an' tho' it's many a grudge I own ye, I square them all before the neighbors be refusin' yer prayer. The land is mine, bought be open sale; an' all the judges an' coorts in Ireland can't take it from me! An' what do ye say to that now, Phelim Joyce?"

The tortured man had been clutching the ash sapling which he had used as a riding-whip, and from the nervous twitching of his fingers I knew that something was coming.

And it came; for, without a word, he struck the evil face before him — struck as quick as a flash of lightning — such a blow that the blood seemed to leap out round the stick, and a vivid welt rose in an instant. With a wild, savage cry the Gombeen Man jumped at him; but there were others in the room as quick, and before another blow could be struck on either side both men were grasped by strong hands and held back.

Murdock's rage was tragic. He yelled, like a wild beast, to be let get at his opponent. He cursed and blasphemed so outrageously that all were silent, and only the stern voice of the priest was heard:

"Be silent, Murtagh Murdock! Aren't you afraid that the God overhead will strike you dead? With such a storm as is raging as a sign of his power, you are a foolish man to tempt him."

The man stopped suddenly, and a stern, dogged sullenness took the place of his passion. The priest went on:

"As for you, Phelim Joyce, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Ye're not one of my people, but I speak as your own clergyman would if he were here. Only this day has the Lord seen fit to spare you from a terrible death; and yet you dare to go back of his mercy with your angry passion. You had cause for anger — or temptation to it, I know — but you must learn to kiss the chastening rod, not spurn it. The Lord knows what he is doing for you as for others, and it may be that you will look back on this day in gratitude for his doing, and in shame for your own anger. Men, hold off your hands — let those two men go; they'll quarrel no more — before me at any rate, I hope." The men drew back. Joyce held his head down, and a more despairing figure or a sadder one I never saw. He turned slowly away, and, leaning against the wall, put his face between his hands and sobbed. Murdock scowled, and the scowl gave place to an evil smile, as looking all around he said: "Well, now that me work is done, I must be gettin' home." "An' get some wan to iron that mark out iv yer face," said Dan. Murdock turned again and glared around him savagely as he hissed out: "There'll be iron for some one before I'm done — Mark me well! I've never gone back or wakened yit whin I promised to have me own turn. There's thim here what'll rue this day yit! If I am the Shnake on the Hill — thin beware the Shnake. An' for him what shtruck me, he'll be in bitther sorra for it yit — him an' his!" He turned his back and went to the door.

"Stop!" said the priest. "Murtagh Murdock, I have a word to say to you — a solemn word of warning. Ye have to-day acted the part of Ahab towards Naboth the Jezreelite; beware of his fate! You have coveted your neighbor's goods; you have used your power without mercy; you have made the law an engine of oppression. Mark me! It was said of old that what measure men meted should be meted out to them again. God is very just. 'Be not deceived, God is not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap.' Ye have sowed the wind this day; beware lest you reap the whirlwind! Even as God visited his sin upon Ahab the Samarian, and as he has visited similar sins on others in his own way — so shall he visit yours on you. You are worse than the land-grabber — worse than the man who only covets. Saintough is a virtue compared with your act. Remember the story of Naboth's vineyard, and the dreadful end of it. Don't answer me! Go and repent if you can, and leave sorrow and misery to be comforted by others, unless you wish to undo your wrong yourself. If you don't, then remember the curse that may come upon you yet!"

Without a word Murdock opened the door and went out, and a little later we heard the clattering of his horse's feet on the rocky road to Shleenanaher.

When it was apparent to all that he was really gone, a torrent of commiseration, sympathy, and pity broke over Joyce. The Irish nature is essentially emotional, and a more genuine and stronger feeling I never saw. Not a few had tears in their eyes, and one and all were manifestly deeply touched. The least moved was, to all appearance, poor Joyce himself. He seemed to have pulled himself together, and his sterling manhood and courage and pride stood by him. He seemed, however, to yield to the kindly wishes of his friends, and when we suggested that his hurt should be looked to, he acquiesced: "Yes, if you will. Betther not go home to poor Norah and distress her with it. Poor child! she'll have enough to bear without that."

His coat was taken off, and between us we managed to bandage the wound. The priest, who had some surgical knowledge, came to the conclusion that there was only a simple fracture. He splinted and bandaged the arm, and we all agreed that it would be better for Joyce to wait until the storm was over before starting for home. Andy said he could take him on the car, as he knew the road well, and that as it was partly on the road to Carnaclif, we should only have to make a short detour and would pass the house of the doctor, by whom the arm could be properly attended to.

So we sat around the fire again, while without the storm howled and the fierce gusts which swept the valley seemed at times as if they would break in the door, lift off the roof, or in some way annihilate the time-worn cabin which gave us shelter.

There could, of course, be only one subject of conversation now, and old Dan simply interpreted the public wish when he said: “Tell us, Phelim — sure we’re all friends here — how Black Murdock got ye in his clutches? Sure any wan of us would get you out of thim if he could.”

There was a general acquiescence. Joyce yielded himself, and said: “Let me thank ye, neighbors all, for yer kindness to me and mine this sorraful night. Well, I’ll say no more about that; but I’ll tell ye how it was that Murdock got me into his power.

Ye know that boy of mine — Eugene?” “Oh, and he’s the fine lad, God bless him! an’ the good lad, too!” — this from the women. “Well, ye know, too, that he got on so well whin I sint him to school that Dr. Walsh recommended me to make an ingineer of him. He said he had such promise that it was a pity not to see him get the right start in life, and he gave me, himself, a letther to Sir George Henshaw, the great ingineer. I wint and seen him, and he said he would take the boy. He tould me that there was a big fee to be paid, but I was not to throuble about that; at any rate, that he himself didn’t want any fee, and he would ask his partner if he would give up his share too. But the latther was hard up for money. He said he couldn’t give up all fee, but that he would take half the fee, provided it was paid down in dhry money. Well, the regular fee to the firm was five hundhred pounds, and as Sir George had giv up half an’ only half, th’ other half was to be paid, if that was possible. I hadn’t got more’n a few pounds by me; for what wid dhrainin’ and plantin’ and fencin’, and the payin’ the boy’s schoolin’ and the girl’s at the Nuns’ in Galway, it had put me to the pin iv me collar to find the money up to now. But I didn't like to let the boy lose his chance in life for want of an effort, an' I put me pride in me pocket an' kem an' asked Murdock for the money. He was very smooth an' nice wid me — I know why now — an' promised he would give it at wanst if I would give him security on me land. Sure, he joked an' laughed wid me, an' was that cheerful that I didn't misthrust him. He tould me it was only forrums I was signin' that'd never be used." Here Dan Moriarty interrupted him: "What did ye sign, Phelim?" "There wor two papers. Wan was a writin' iv some kind, that in considheration iv the money lent an' his own land — which I was to take over if the money wasn't paid at the time appointed — he was to get me lease from me; an' the other was a power of attorney to Enther Judgment for the amount if the money wasn't paid at the right time. I thought I was all safe, as I could repay him in the time named, an' if the worst kem to the worst I might borry the money from some wan else — for the lease is worth the sum tin times over — an' repay him. Well, what's the use of lookin' back, anyhow? I signed the papers — that was a year ago, an' one week. An' a week ago the time was up!" He gulped down a sob, and went on: "Well, ye all know the year gone has been a terrible bad wan, an' as for me it was all I could do to hould on — to make up the money was impossible. Thrue, the lad cost me next to nothin', for he arned his keep be exthra work, an' the girl, Norah, kem home from school and labored wid me, an' we saved every penny we could. But it was all no use; we couldn't get the money together anyhow. Thin we had the misfortin wid the cattle that ye all know of; an' three horses that I sould in Dublin, up an' died before the time I guaranteed them free from sickness." Here Andy stuck in: "Thrue for ye! Sure there was some dhreadful disordher in Dublin among the horse cattle, intirely; an' even Misther

Docther Perfesshinal Ferguson himself couldn't git undher it!" Joyce went on: "An' as the time grew nigh I began to fear, but Murdock came down to see me whin I was alone, an' tould me not to throuble about the money, an' not to mind about the sheriff, for he had to give him notice. 'An',' says he, 'I wouldn't, if I was you, tell Norah anythin' about it, for it might frighten the girl; for weemin is apt to take to heart things like that that's only small things to min like us.' An' so, God forgive me, I believed him; an' I niver tould me child anything about it — even whin I got the notice from the sheriff. An' whin the notice tellin' iv the sale was posted up on me land, I tuk it down meself, so that the poor child wouldn't be frightened — God help me!" He broke down for a bit, but then went on:

"But somehow I wasn't asy in me mind, an' whin the time iv the sale dhrew nigh I couldn't keep it to meself any longer, an' I tould Norah. That was only yisterday, and look at me to-day! Norah agreed wid me that we shouldn't trust the Gombeen, an' she sent me off to the Galway Bank to borry the money. She said I was an honest man an' farmed me own land, and that the bank might lind the money on it.

An', sure enough, whin I wint there this mornin' be appointment, wid the Coadjuthor himself to inthroduce me, though he didn't know why I wanted the money — that was Norah's idea, and the Mother Superior settled it for her — the manager, who is a nice gintleman, tould me at wanst that I might have the money on me own note iv hand. I only gave him a formal writin', an' I took away the money. Here it is in me pocket in good notes; they're wet wid the lake, but, I'm thankful to say, all safe. But it's too late, God help me!" Here he broke down for a minute, but recovered himself with an effort:

"Anyhow, the bank that thrusted me musn't be wronged. Back the money goes to Galway as soon as iver I can get it there. If I am a ruined man, I needn’t be a dishonest wan! But poor Norah! God help her! it will break her poor heart.”

There was a spell of silence, only broken by sympathetic moans. The first to speak was the priest: “Phelim Joyce, I told you a while ago, in the midst of your passion, that God knows what he is doin’, and works in his own way. You’re an honest man, Phelim, and God knows it, and, mark me, he won’t let you nor yours suffer. ‘I have been young,’ said the Psalmist, ‘and now am old; and I have not seen the just forsaken, nor his seed seeking bread.’ Think of that, Phelim! — may it comfort you and poor Norah. God bless her, but she’s the good girl! You have much to be thankful for, with a daughter like her to comfort you at home and take the place of her poor mother, who was the best of women; and with such a boy as Eugene, winnin’ name and credit, and perhaps fame to come, even in England itself. Thank God for his many mercies, Phelim, and trust him.”

There was a dead silence in the room. The stern man rose, and coming over took the priest’s hand.

“God bless ye, Father!” he said, “it’s the true comforter ye are.”

The scene was a most touching one; I shall never forget it. The worst of the poor man’s trouble seemed now past. He had faced the darkest hour; he had told his trouble, and was now prepared to make the best of everything — for the time at least — for I could not reconcile to my mind the idea that that proud, stern man, would not take the blow to heart for many a long day, that it might even embitter his life. Old Dan tried comfort in a practical way by thinking of what was to be done. Said he: “Iv course, Phelim, it’s a mighty throuble to give up yer own foine land an’ take Murdock’s bleak shpot instead, but I dare say ye will be able to work it well enough. Tell me, have ye signed away all the land, or only the lower farm? I mane, is the Cliff Fields yours or his?” Here was a gleam of comfort evidently to the poor man.

His face lightened as he replied: “Only the lower farm, thank God! Indeed, I couldn’t part wid the Cliff Fields, for they don’t belong to me — they are Norah’s, that her poor mother left her — they wor settled on her, whin we married, be her father, and whin he died we got them. But, indeed, I fear they’re but small use by themselves; shure, there’s no wather in them at all, savin’ what runs off me ould land; an’ if we have to carry wather all the way down the hill from — from me new land” — this was said with a smile, which was a sturdy effort at cheerfulness— “it will be but poor work to raise anythin’ there — ayther shtock or craps. No doubt but Murdock will take away the sthrame iv wather that runs there now. He’ll want to get the cliff lands, too, I suppose.”

I ventured to ask a question:

“How do your lands lie compared with Mr. Murdock’s?”

There was a bitterness in his tone as he answered, in true Irish fashion: “Do you mane me ould land, or me new?” “The lands that were — that ought still to be yours,” I answered.

He was pleased at the reply, and his face softened as he replied:

“Well, the way of it is this. We two owns the west side of the Hill between us. Murdock’s land — I’m spakin’ iv them as they are, till he gets possession iv mine — lies at the top iv the Hill; mine lies below. My land is the best bit on the mountain, while the Gombeen’s is poor soil, with only a few good patches here and there. Moreover, there is another thing. There is a bog which is high up the Hill, mostly on his houldin’, but my land is free from bog, except one end of the big bog, an’ a stretch of dry turf, the best in the counthry, an’ wid enough turf to last for a hundhred years, it's that deep."

Old Dan joined in:

"Thrue enough! that bog of the Gombeen's isn't much use anyhow. It's rank and rotten wid wather. Whin it made up its mind to sthay, it might have done betther!"

"The bog? Made up its mind to stay! What on earth do you mean?" I asked. I was fairly puzzled.

"Didn't ye hear talk already," said Dan, "of the Shiftin' Bog on the mountain?"

"I did."

"Well, that's it. It moved an' moved an' moved longer than anywan can remimber. Me grandfather wanst tould me that whin he was a gossoon it wasn't nigh so big as it was when he tould me. It hasn't shifted in my time, and I make bould to say that it has made up its mind to settle down where it is. Ye must only make the best of it, Phelim. I dare say ye will turn it to some account."

"I'll try what I can do, anyhow. I don't mane to fould me arms an' sit down oppawsit me property an' ate it!" was the brave answer.

For myself, the whole idea was most interesting. I had never before even heard of a shifting bog, and I determined to visit it before I left this part of the country.

By this time the storm was beginning to abate. The rain had ceased, and Andy said we might proceed on our journey. So after a while we were on our way; the wounded man and I sitting on one side of the car, and Andy on the other. The whole company came out to wish us God-speed, and with such comfort as good counsel and good wishes could give we ventured into the inky darkness of the night.

Andy was certainly a born car-driver. Not even the darkness, the comparative strangeness of the road, or the amount of whiskey-punch which he had on board could disturb his driving in the least; he went steadily on. The car rocked and swayed and bumped, for the road was a by one, and in but poor condition; but Andy and the mare went on alike unmoved. Once or twice only, in a journey of some three miles of winding by-lanes, crossed and crossed again by lanes or watercourses, did he ask me the way. I could not tell which was road-way and which water-way, for they were all watercourses at present, and the darkness was profound. Still, both Andy and Joyce seemed to have a sense lacking in myself, for now and again they spoke of things which I could not see at all. As, for instance, when Andy asked: "Do we go up or down where the road branches beyant?" Or again: "I disremimber, but is that Micky Dolan's ould apple-three, or didn't he cut it down? an' is it Tim's fornent us on the lift?" Presently we turned to the right, and drove up a short avenue towards a house. I knew it to be a house by the light in the windows, for shape it had none. Andy jumped down and knocked, and after a short colloquy, Joyce got down and went into the doctor's house. I was asked to go too, but thought it better not to, as it would only have disturbed the doctor in his work; and so Andy and I possessed our souls in patience until Joyce came out again, with his arm in a proper splint. And then we resumed our journey through the inky darkness.

However, after a while, either there came more light into the sky, or my eyes became accustomed to the darkness, for I thought that now and again I beheld "men as trees walking."

Presently something dark and massive seemed outlined in the sky before us — a blackness projected on a darkness — and, said Andy, turning to me: "That's Knockcalltecrore; we're nigh the foot iv it now, and pretty shortly we’ll be at the enthrance iv the boreen, where Misther Joyce’ll git aff.”

We plodded on for a while, and the hill before us seemed to overshadow whatever glimmer of light there was, for the darkness grew more profound than ever; then Andy turned to my companion: “Sure, isn’t that Miss Norah I see sittin’ on the sthile beyant?” I looked eagerly in the direction in which he evidently pointed, but for the life of me I could see nothing. “No, I hope not,” said the father, hastily. “She’s never come out in the shtorm. Yes, It is her; she sees us.” Just then there came a sweet sound down the lane:

“Is that you, father?” “Yes, my child; but I hope you’ve not been out in the shtorm.”

“Only a bit, father; I was anxious about you. Is it all right, father? Did you get what you wanted?” She had jumped off the stile and had drawn nearer to us, and she evidently saw me, and went on in a changed and shyer voice: “Oh, I beg your pardon. I did not see you had a stranger with you.”

This was all bewildering to me. I could hear it all — and a sweeter voice I never heard — but yet I felt like a blind man, for not a thing could I see, while each of the three others was seemingly as much at ease as in the daylight. “This gentleman has been very kind to me, Norah. He has given me a seat on his car, and indeed he’s come out of his way to lave me here.” I am sure we’re all grateful to you, sir; but, father, where is your horse? Why are you on a car at all? Father, I hope you haven’t met with any accident — I have been so fearful for you all the day.” This was spoken in a fainter voice; had my eyes been of service, I was sure I would have seen her grow pale.

“Yes, my darlin’, I got a fall on the Curragh Hill, but I’m all right. Norah dear! Quick, quick! catch her, she’s faintin’! — my God! I can’t stir!”

I jumped off the car in the direction of the voice, but my arms sought the empty air. However, I heard Andy’s voice beside me:

“All right; I have her. Hould up, Miss Norah; yer dada’s all right. Don’t ye see him there, sittin’ on me car? All right, sir; she’s a brave girrul! She hasn’t fainted.”

“I am all right,” she murmured, faintly; “but, father, I hope you are not hurt?”

“Only a little, my darlin’ — just enough for ye to nurse me a while; I dare say a few days will make me all right again. Thank ye, Andy; steady now, till I get down; I’m feelin’ a wee bit stiff.” Andy evidently helped him to the ground. “Good-night, Andy, and good-night you too, sir, and thank you kindly for your goodness to me all this night. I hope I’ll see you again.” He took my hand in his uninjured one, and shook it warmly.

“Good-night,” I said, and “good-bye: I am sure I hope we shall meet again.”

Another hand took mine as he relinquished it — a warm, strong one — and a sweet voice said, shyly: “Good-night, sir, and thank you for your kindness to father.”

I faltered “Good-night”, as I raised my hat; the aggravation of the darkness at such a moment was more than I could equably bear. We heard them pass up the boreen, and I climbed on the car again.

The night seemed darker than ever as we turned our steps towards Carnaclif, and the journey was the dreariest one I have ever taken. I had only one thought which gave me any pleasure, but that was a pretty constant one through the long miles of damp, sodden road — the warm hand and the sweet voice coming out of the darkness, and all in the shadow of that mysterious mountain, which seemed to have become a part of my life. The words of the old story-teller came back to me again and again: “The Hill can hould tight enough! A man has raysons — sometimes wan thing and sometimes another — but the Hill houlds him all the same!”

And a vague wonder drew upon me as to whether it could ever hold me, and how!

CHAPTER IV

Some six weeks elapsed before my visits to Irish friends were completed, and I was about to return home. I had had everywhere a hearty welcome: the best of sport of all kinds, and an appetite beyond all praise, and one pretty well required to tackle with any show of success the excellent food and wine put before me. The West of Ireland not only produces good viands in plenty and of the highest excellence, but there is remaining a keen recollection, accompanied by tangible results, of the days when open house and its hospitable accompaniments made wine- merchants prosperous — at the expense of their customers.

In the midst of all my pleasure, however, I could not shake from my mind — nor, indeed, did I want to — the interest which Shleenanaher and its surroundings had created in me. Nor did the experience of that strange night, with the sweet voice coming through the darkness in the shadow of the Hill, become dim with the passing of the time. When I look back and try to analyse myself and my feelings, with the aid of the knowledge and experience of life received since then, I think that I must have been in love. I do not know if philosophers have ever undertaken to say whether it is possible for a human being to be in love in the abstract — whether the something which the heart has a tendency to send forth needs a concrete objective point! It may be so; the swarm of bees goes from the parent hive with only the impulse of going — its settling is a matter of chance. At any rate I may say that no philosopher, logician, metaphysician, psychologist, or other thinker, of whatsoever shade of opinion, ever held that a man could be in love with a voice. True that the unknown has a charm — omne ignotum pro magnifico. If my heart did not love, at least it had a tendency to worship. Here I am on solid ground; for which of us but can understand the feelings of those men of old in Athens, who devoted their altars “To the Unknown God?” I leave the philosophers to say how far apart, or how near, are love and worship: which is first in historical sequence, which is greatest or most sacred! Being human, I cannot see any grace or beauty in worship without love. However, be the cause what it might, I made up my mind to return home via Carnaclif. To go from Clare to Dublin by way of Galway and Mayo is to challenge opinion as to one’s motive. I did not challenge opinion; I distinctly avoided doing so, and I am inclined to think that there was more of Norah than of Shleenanaher in the cause of my reticence. I could bear to be “chaffed” about a superstitious feeling respecting a mountain, or I could endure the same process regarding a girl of whom I had no high ideal, no sweet illusive memory. I would never complete the argument, even to myself — then; later on, the cause or subject of it varied! It was not without a certain conflict of feelings that I approached Carnaclif, even though on this occasion I approached it from the south, whereas on my former visit I had come from the north. I felt that the time went miserably, slowly, and yet nothing would have induced me to admit so much. I almost regretted that I had come, even while I was harrowed with thoughts that I might not be able to arrive at all at Knockcalltecrore. At times I felt as though the whole thing had been a dream; and again as though the romantic nimbus with which imagination had surrounded and hallowed all things must pass away and show that my unknown beings and my facts of delicate fantasy were but stern and vulgar realities. The people at the little hotel made me welcome with the usual effusive hospitable intention of the West. Indeed, I was somewhat nettled at how well they remembered me, as, for instance, when the buxom landlady said: “I’m glad to be able to tell ye, sir, that yer car-man, Andy Sullivan, is here now. He kem with a commercial from Westport to Roundwood, an’ is on his way back, an’ hopin’ for a return job. I think ye’ll be able to make a bargain with him if ye wish.” I made to this kindly speech a hasty, and, I felt, an ill-conditioned reply, to the effect that I was going to stay in the neighborhood for only a few days and would not require the car. I then went to my room and locked my door, muttering a malediction on officious people. I stayed there for some time, until I thought that probably Andy had gone on his way, and then ventured out. I little knew Andy, however. When I came to the hall, the first person that I saw was the cheerful driver, who came forward to welcome me: “Musha! but it’s glad I am to see yer ‘an’r. An’ it’ll be the proud man I’ll be to bhring ye back to Westport wid me.”

“I’m sorry, Andy,” I began, “that I shall not want you, as I am going to stay in this neighborhood for a few days.” “Sthay is it? Begor! but it’s more gladerer shtill I am. Sure, the mare wants a rist, an’ it’ll shute her an’ me all to nothin’; an’ thin while ye’re here I can be dhrivin’ yer ‘an’r out to Shleenanaher. It isn’t far enough to intherfere wid her rist.”

I answered in, I thought, a dignified way — I certainly intended to be dignified: “I did not say, Sullivan, that I purposed going out to Shleenanaher or any other place in the neighborhood.” “Shure, no, yer ‘an’r, but I remimber ye said ye’d like to see the Shiftin’ Bog; an’ thin Misther Joyce and Miss Norah is in throuble, and ye might be a comfort to thim.” “Mr. Joyce! Miss Norah! who are they?” I felt that I was getting red and that the tone of my voice was most unnatural.

Andy’s sole answer was as comical a look as I ever saw, the central object in which was a wink which there was no mistaking. I could not face it, and had to say: “Oh yes, I remember now. Was not that the man we took on the car to a dark mountain?” “Yes, surr — him and his daughther!” “His daughter! I do not remember her. Surely we only took him on the car.” Again I felt angry, and with the anger an inward determination not to have Andy or any one else prying around me when I should choose to visit even such an uncompromising phenomenon as a shifting bog. Andy, like all humorists, understood human nature, and summed up the situation conclusively in his reply — inconsequential though it was: “Shure yer ‘an’r can thrust me; it’s blind or deaf an’ dumb I am, an’ them as knows me knows I’m not the man to go back on a young gintleman goin’ to luk at a bog. Sure, doesn’t all young min do that same? I’ve been there meself times out iv mind! There’s nothin’ in the wurrld foreninst it! Lukin’ at bogs is the most intherestin’ thin’ I knows.” There was no arguing with Andy; and as he knew the place and the people, I then and there concluded an engagement with him. He was to stay in Carnaclif while I wanted him, and then drive me over to Westport. As I was now fairly launched on the enterprise, I thought it better to lose no time, but arranged to visit the bog early the next morning. As I was lighting my cigar after dinner that evening, Mrs. Keating, my hostess, came in to ask me a favor. She said that there was staying in the house a gentleman who went over every day to Knockcalltecrore, and as she understood that I was going there in the morning, she made bold to ask if I would mind giving a seat on my car to him, as he had turned his ankle that day and feared he would not be able to walk. Under the circumstances I could only say “Yes,” as it would have been a churlish thing to refuse. Accordingly, I gave permission with seeming cheerfulness, but when I was alone my true feelings found vent in muttered grumbling: “I ought to travel in an ambulance instead of a car.” “I seem never to be able to get near this Shleenanaher without an invalid.” “Once ought to be enough; but it has become the regulation thing now.” “I wish to goodness Andy would hold his infernal tongue; I’d as lief have a detective after me all the time.” “It’s all very well to be a good Samaritan as a luxury, but as a profession it becomes monotonous.” “Confound Andy! I wish I’d never seen him at all.”

This last thought brought me up standing, and set me face to face with my baseless ill-humor. If I had never seen Andy, I should never have heard at all of Shleenanaher. I should not have known the legend — I should not have heard Norah’s voice.

“And so,” said I to myself, “this ideal fantasy — this embodiment of a woman’s voice — has a concrete name already. Aye, a concrete name, and a sweet one too.” And so I took another step on my way to the bog, and lost my ill-humor at the same time. When my cigar was half through and my feelings were proportionately soothed, I strolled into the bar and asked Mrs. Keating as to my companion of the morrow. She told me that he was a young engineer named Sutherland. “What Sutherland?” I asked, adding that I had been at school with a Dick Sutherland, who had, I believed, gone into the Irish College of Science.

“Perhaps it’s the same gentleman, sir. This is Mr. Richard Sutherland, and I’ve heerd him say that he was at Stephen’s Green.”

“The same man!” said I. “This is jolly! Tell me, Mrs.

Keating, what brings him here?”

“He’s doin’ some work on Knockcalltecrore for Mr. Murdock, some quare thing or another. They do tell me, sir, that it’s a most mystayrious thing, wid poles an’ lines an’ magnets an’ all kinds of divilments. They say that Mr. Murdock is goin' from off his head ever since he had the law of poor Phelim Joyce. My! but he's the decent man, that same Mr. Joyce, an' the Gombeen has been hard upon him."

"What was the lawsuit?" I asked. "All about a sellin' his land on an agreement. Mr. Joyce borryed some money, an' promised if it wasn't paid back at a certain time that he would swop lands. Poor Joyce met wid an accident comin' home wid the money from Galway an' was late, an' when he got home found that the Gombeen had got the sheriff to sell up his land on to him. Mr. Joyce thried it on the coorts, but now Murdock has got a decree on to him an' the poor man'll have to give up his fat lands an' take the Gombeen's poor ones instead."

"That's bad! When has he to give up?" "Well, I disremember meself exactly, but Mr. Sutherland will be able to tell ye all about it as ye drive over in the mornin'."

"Where is he now? I should like to see him; it may be my old school-fellow." "Troth, it's in his bed he is; for he rises mighty arly, I can tell ye."

After a stroll through the town (so-called) to finish my cigar I went to bed also, for we started early. In the morning, when I came down to my breakfast, I found Mr. Sutherland finishing his. It was my old school-fellow; but from being a slight, pale boy he had grown into a burly, hale, stalwart man, with keen eyes and a flowing brown beard. The only pallor noticeable was the whiteness of his brow, which was ample and lofty as of old.

We greeted each other cordially, and I felt as if old times had come again, for Dick and I had been great friends at school. When we were on our way I renewed my inquiries about Shleenanaher and its inhabitants. I began by asking Sutherland as to what brought him there. He answered:

"I was just about to ask you the same question. 'What brings you here?'"

I felt a difficulty in answering as freely as I could have wished, for I knew that Andy's alert ears were close to us, so I said:

"I have been paying some visits along the west coast, and I thought I would take the opportunity on my way home of investigating a very curious phenomenon of whose existence I became casually acquainted on my way here — a shifting bog."

Andy here must strike in:

"Shure, the masther is mighty fond iv bogs, intirely. I don't know there's anything in the wurruld what intherests him so much."

Here he winked at me in a manner that said as plainly as if spoken in so many words, "All right, yer'an'r, I'll back ye up!"

Sutherland laughed as he answered: "Well, you're in the right place here, Art; the difficulty they have in this part of the world is to find a place that is not bog. However, about the Shifting Bog on Knockcalltecrore, I can, perhaps, help you as much as any one. As you know, geology has been one of my favourite studies, and lately I have taken to investigate in my spare time the phenomena of this very subject. The bog at Shleenanaher is most interesting. As yet, however, my investigation can only be partial, but very soon I shall have the opportunity which I require."

"How is that?" I asked. "The difficulty arises," he answered, "from a local feud between two men, one of them my employer, Murdock, and his neighbor, Joyce." "Yes," I interrupted, "I know something of it. I was present when the sheriffs assignment was shown to Joyce, and saw the quarrel. But how does it affect you and your study?”

“This way: the bog is partly on Murdock’s land and partly on Joyce’s, and until I can investigate the whole extent I cannot come to a definite conclusion. The feud is so bitter at present that neither man will allow the other to set foot over his boundary, or the foot of any one to whom the other is friendly. However, to-morrow the exchange of lands is to be effected, and then I shall be able to continue my investiqation. I have already gone nearlvall over Murdock’s present ground, and after to-morrow I shall be able to go over his new ground — up to now forbidden to me.”

“How does Joyce take his defeat?”

“Badly, poor fellow, I am told; indeed, from what I see of him, I am sure of it. They tell me that up to lately he was a bright, happy fellow, but now he is a stern, hard-faced, scowling man — essentially a man with a grievance, which makes him take a jaundiced view of everything else. The only one who is not afraid to speak to him is his daughter, and they are inseparable. It certainly is cruelly hard on him. His farm is almost an ideal one for this part of the world; it has good soil, water, shelter, trees, everything that makes a farm pretty and comfortable, as well as being good for farming purposes; and he has to change it for a piece of land as irregular in shape as the other is compact; without shelter, and partly taken up with this very bog and the utter waste and chaos which, when it shifted in former times, it left behind.”

“And how does the other, Murdock, act?”

“Shamefully; I feel so angry with him at times that I could strike him. There is nota thing he can say or do, or leave unsaid or undone, that is not aggravating and insulting to his neighbor. Only that he had the precaution to bind me to an agreement for a given time, I’m blessed if I would work for him, or with him at all — interesting as the work is in itself, and valuable as is the opportunity it gives me of studying that strange phenomenon, the Shifting Bog."

"What is your work with him," I asked— "mining, or draining, orwhat?"

He seemed embarrassed at myquestion. He "'hum'd and 'ha'd" — then with a smile he said quite frankly: "The fact is that I am not at liberty to say. The worthy Gombeen Man put a special clause in our agreement that I was not, during the time of my engagement, to mention to any one the object of my work. He wanted the clause to run that I was never to mention it; but I kicked at that, and only signed in the modified form." I thought to myself, "More mysteries at Shleenanaher!"

Dick went on:

"However, I have no doubt that you will very soon gather the object for yourself. You are yourself something of a scientist, if I remember?" "Not me," I answered, "my great aunt took care of that when she sent me to our old tutor — or, indeed, to do the old boyjustice, he tried to teach me something of the kind; but I found out it wasn't my vogue — anyhow, I haven't done anything lately."

"How do you mean?" "I haven't got over being idle yet. It's not a year since I came into my fortune. Perhaps — indeed I hope — that I may settle down to work again."

"I'm sure I hope so, too, old fellow," he answered gravely. "When a man has once tasted the pleasure of real work, especially work that taxes the mind and the imagination, the world seems only a poor place without it." "Like the wurrld widout girruls for me, or widout bog for his 'an'r!" said Andy, grinning as he turned round on his seat.

Dick Sutherland, I was glad to see, did not suspect the joke. He took Andy's remark quite seriously, and said to me:

"My dear fellow, it is delightful to find you so interested in my own topic." I could not allow him to think me a savant. In the first place, he would very soon find me out, and would then suspect my motives ever after. And, again, I had to accept Andy's statement, or let it appear that I had some other reason or motive — or what would seem even more suspicious still, none at all; so I answered: "My dear Dick, my zeal regarding bog is new; it is at present in its incipient stage, in so far as erudition is concerned. The fact is, that although I would like to learn a lot about it, I am at the present moment profoundly ignorant on the subject." "Like the rest of mankind," said Dick. "You will hardly believe that, although the subject is one of vital interest to thousands of persons in our own country — one in which national prosperity is mixed up to a large extent — one which touches deeply the happiness and material prosperity of a large section of Irish people, and so helps to mould their political action, there are hardly any works on the subject in existence."

"Surely you are mistaken," I answered. "No, unfortunately, lam not. There is a Danish book, but it is geographically local; and some information can be derived from the blue-book containing the report of the International Commission on turf-cuttinq, but the special authorities are scant indeed. Some day, when you want occupation, just you try to find in any library, in any city of the world, any works of a scientific character devoted to the subject. Nay; more; try to find a fair share of chapters in scientific books devoted to it. You can imagine how devoid of knowledge we are, when I tell you that even the last edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica does not contain the heading 'bog.'" "You amaze me!" was all I could say. Then, as we bumped and jolted over the rough by-road, Dick Sutherland gave me a rapid but masterly survey of the condition of knowledge on the subject of bogs, with special application to Irish bogs, beginning with such records as those of Giraldus Cambrensis, of Dr. Boate, of Edmund Spenser, from the time of the first invasion, when the state of the land was such that, as is recorded, when a spade was driven into the ground a pool of water gathered forthwith. He told me of the extent and nature of the bog- lands, of the means taken to reclaim them, and of his hopes of some heroic measures being ultimately taken by Government to reclaim the vast Bog of Allen, which remains as a great evidence of official ineptitude. "It will be something," he said, "to redeem the character for indifference to such matters so long established, as when Mr. King wrote two hundred years ago, 'We live in an island almost infamous for bogs, and yet I do not remember that anyone has attempted much concerning them.'" We were close to Knockcalltecrore when he finished his impromptu lecture thus: "In fine, we cure bog by both a surgical and a medical process. We drain it so that its mechanical action as a sponge may be stopped, and we put in lime to kill the vital principle of its growth. Without the other, neither process is sufficient; but together, scientific and executive man asserts his dominance." "Hear! hear!" said Andy. "Musha, but Docther Wilde himself (rest his sowl!) couldn't have put itaisierto grip. It's a purfessionalerthe young gintleman is, intirely!"

We shortly arrived at the south side of the western slope of the Hill, and, as Andy took care to inform me, at the end of the boreen leading to the two farms, and close to the head of the Snake's Pass.

Accordingly, I let Sutherland start on his way to Murdock's, while I myself strolled away to the left, where Andy had pointed out to me, rising over the slope of the intervening spur of the Hill, the top of one of the rocks which formed the Snake’s Pass. After a few minutes of climbing up a steep slope, and down a steeper one, I arrived at the place itself.

From the first moment that my eyes lit on it, it seemed to me to be a very remarkable spot, and quite worthy of being taken as the scene of strange stories, for it certainly had something “uncanny” about it.

I stood in a deep valley, or rather bowl, with behind me a remarkably steep slope of greensward, while on either hand the sides of the hollow rose steeply — that on the left, down which I had climbed, being by far the steeper and rockier of the two. In front was the Pass itself.

It was a gorge or cleft through a great wall of rock, which rose on the sea-side of the promontory formed by the Hill. This natural wall, except at the actual Pass itself, rose some fifty or sixty feet over the summit of the slope on either side of the little valley; but right and left of the Pass rose two great masses of rock, like the pillars of a giant gate-way. Between these lay the narrow gorge, with its walls of rock rising sheer some two hundred feet. It was about three hundred feet long, and widened slightly outward, being shaped something funnel-wise, and on the inner side was about a hundred feet wide. The floor did not go so far as the flanking rocks, but, at about two-thirds of its length, there was a perpendicular descent, like a groove cut in the rock, running sheer down to the sea, some three hundred feet below, and as far under it as we could see. From the northern of the flanking rocks which formed the Pass the rocky wall ran northward, completely sheltering the lower lands from the west, and running into a towering rock that rose on the extreme north, and which stood up in jagged peaks something like The Needles off the coast of the Isle of Wight.

There was no doubt that poor Joyce's farm, thus sheltered, was an exceptionally favored spot, and I could well understand how loath he must be to leave it.

Murdock's land, even under the enchantment of its distance, seemed very different, and was just as bleak as Sutherland had told me. Its south-western end ran down towards the Snake's Pass. I mounted the wall of rock on the north of the Pass to look down, and was surprised to find that down below me was the end of a large plateau of some acres in extent which ran up northward, and was sheltered north and west by a somewhat similarformation of rock to that which protected Joyce's land. This, then, was evidently the place called the Cliff Fields, of which mention had been made at Widow Kelligan's.

The view from where I stood was one of ravishing beauty. Westward in the deep sea, under gray clouds of endless variety, rose a myriad of clustering islets, some of them covered with grass and heather, where cattle and sheep grazed; others were mere rocks rising boldly from the depths of the sea, and surrounded by a myriad of screaming wild-fowl. As the birds dipped and swept and wheeled in endless circles, their white breasts and gray wings varying in infinite phase of motion, and as the long Atlantic swell, tempered by its rude shocks on the outer fringe of islets, broke in fleecy foam and sent living streams through the crevices of the rocks and sheets of white water over the bowlders where the sea-rack rose and fell, I thought that the earth could give nothing more lovely or more grand.

Andy's voice beside me grated on me unpleasantly:

"Musha! but it's the fine sight it is intirely; it only wants wan thing."

“What does it want?” I asked, rather shortly. “Begor, a bit of bog to put your arrum around while ye’re lukin’ at it,” and he grinned at me knowingly.

He was incorrigible. I jumped down from the rock and scrambled into the boreen. My friend Sutherland had gone on his way to Murdock’s, so calling to Andy to wait till I returned, I followed him.

I hurried up the boreen and caught up with him, for his progress was slow along the rough lane-way. In reality I felt that it would be far less awkward having him with me; but I pretended that my only care was for his sprained ankle.

Some emotions make hypocrites of us all!

With Dick on my arm limping along we passed up the boreen, leaving Joyce’s house on our left. I looked out anxiously in case I should see Joyce — or his daughter; but there was no sign of any one about. In a few minutes Dick, pausing for a moment, pointed out to me the Shifting Bog.

“You see,” he said, “those two poles? The line between them marks the mearing of the two lands. We have worked along the bog down from there.” He pointed as he spoke to some considerable distance up the Hill to the north where the bog began to be dangerous, and where it curved around the base of a grassy mound, or shoulder of the mountain.

“Is it a dangerous bog?” I queried. “Rather! It is just as bad a bit of soft bog as ever I saw. I wouldn’t like to see anyone or anything that I cared for try to cross it!” “Why not?”

“Because at any moment they might sink through it; and then, good-bye — no human strength or skill could ever save them.”

“Is it a quagmire, then, or like a quicksand?”

“Like either, or both. Nay, it is more treacherous than either. You may call it, if you are poetically inclined, a 'carpet of death!' What you see is simply a film or skin of vegetation of a very low kind, mixed with the mould of decayed vegetable fibre and grit and rubbish of all kinds, which have somehow got mixed into it, floating on a sea of ooze and slime — of something half liquid, half solid, and of an unknown depth. It will bear up a certain weight, for there is a degree of cohesion in it; but it is not all of equal cohesive power, and if one were to step on the wrong spot—" He was silent.

"What then?" "Only a matter of specific gravity! A body suddenly immersed would, when the airof the lungs had escaped and the rigor mortis had set in, probably sink a considerable distance; then it would rise after nine days, when decomposition began to generate gases, and make an effort to reach the top. Not succeeding in this, it would ultimately waste away, and the bones would become incorporated with the existing vegetation somewhere about the roots, or would lie among the slime at the bottom."

"Well," said I, "for real cold-blooded horror, commend me to your men of science." This passage brought us to the door of Murdock's house — a plain, strongly-built cottage, standing on a knoll of rock that cropped up from the plateau round it. It was surrounded with a garden hedged in by a belt of pollard ash and stunted alders. Murdock had evidently been peering surreptitiously through the window of his sitting-room, for, as we passed in by the gate, he came out to the porch. His salutation was not an encouraging one: "You're somethin' late this mornin', Mr. Sutherland. I hope ye didn't throuble to delay in ordher to bring up this sthrange gintleman. Ye know how particular I am about any wan knowin' aught of me affairs." Dick flushed up to the roots of his hair, and, much to my surprise, burst out quite in a passionate way: "Look you here, Mr.

Murdock, I'm not going to take any cheek from you, so don't you give any. Of course I don't expect a fellow of your stamp to understand a gentleman's feelings — damn it! how can you have a gentleman's understanding when you haven't even a man's? You ought to know right well what I said I would do, I shall do I despise you and your miserable secrets and your miserable trickery too much to take to myself anything in which they have a part; but when I bring with me a friend, but for whom I shouldn't have been here at all — for I couldn't have walked — I expect that neither he nor I shall be insulted. For two pins I'd not set foot on your dirty ground again!" Here Murdock interrupted him: "Aisy now! Ye're undher agreement to me; an' I hould ye to it."

"So you can, you miserable scoundrel, because you know I shall keep my word; but remember that I expect proper treatment; and remember, too, that if I want an assistant I am to have one. Again Murdock interrupted, but this time much more soothingly:

"Aisy! aisy! Haven't I done every livin' thing ye wanted, and helped ye meself every time? Sure arn't Iyer assistant?"

"Yes, because you wanted to get something, and couldn't do without me. And mind this: you can't do without me yet. But be so good as to remember that I choose my own assistant; and I shall not choose you unless I like. You can keep me here and pay me for staying as we agreed; but don't you think that I could fool you if I would?"

"Ye wouldn't do that, I know — an' me thrusted ye!"

"You trusted me! you miserable wretch — Yes! you trusted me by a deed, signed, sealed, and delivered. I don't owe you anything for that."

"Mr. Sutherland, sir, ye're too sharp wid me. Yerfrind is very welkim. Do what you like — go where you choose — bring whom you will — only get on wid the worrk and kape it saycret."

"Aye!" sneered Dick, "you are ready to climb down because you want something done, and you know that this is the last day for work on this side of the hill. Well, let me tell you this — for you'll do anything for greed — that you and I together, doing all we can, shall not be able to cover all the ground. I haven't said a word to my friend — and I don't know how he will take any request from you after your impudence; but he is myfriend, and a clever man, and if you ask him nicely, perhaps he will be good enough to stay and lend us a hand."

The man made me a low bow and asked me in suitable terms if I would kindly stop part of the day and help in the work. Needless to say I acquiesced. Murdock eyed me keenly, as though to make up his mind whether or no I recollected him — he evidently remembered me — but I affected ignorance, and he seemed satisfied. I was glad to notice that the blow of Joyce's riding-switch still remained across his face as a livid scar. He went away to get the appliances ready for work, in obedience to a direction from Sutherland.

"One has to cut that hound's corns rather roughly," said the latter, with a nice confusion of metaphors, as soon as Murdock had disappeared.

Dick then told me that his work was to make magnetic experiments to ascertain, if possible, if there was any iron hidden in the ground.

"The idea," he said, "is Murdock's own, and I have neither lot nor part in it. My work is simply to carry out his ideas, with what mechanical skill I can command, and to invent or arrange such appliances as he may want. Where his theories are hopelessly wrong, I point this out to him, but he goes on or stops just as he chooses. You can imagine that a fellow of his low character is too suspicious to ever take a hint from anyone. We have been working forthree weeks past and have been all over the solid ground, and are just finishing the bog."

"How did you first come across him?" I asked.

"Very nearly a month ago he called on me in Dublin, having been sent by old Gascoigne, of the College of Science. He wanted me to search for iron on his property. I asked if it was regarding opening mines? He said, 'No, just to see if there should be any old iron lying about.' As he offered me excellent terms for my time, I thought he must have some good — or rather, I should say, some strong motive. I know now, though he has never told me, that he is trying for the money that is said to have been lost and buried here by the French after Humbert's expedition to Killala."

"How do you work?" I asked. "The simplest thing in the world; just carry about a strong magnet — only we have to do it systematically."

"And have you found anything as yet?"

"Only old scraps — horseshoes, nails, buckles, buttons; our most important find was the tire of a wheel. The old Gombeen thought he had it that time!" and Dick laughed.

"How did you manage the bog?" "That is the only difficult part; we have poles on opposite sides of the bog with lines between them. The magnet is fixed, suspended from a free wheel, and I let it down to the centre from each side in turn. If there were any attraction I should feel it by the thread attached to the magnet which I hold in my hand."

"It is something like fishing?"

“Exactly.”

Murdoch now returned and told us that he was ready, so we all went to work. I kept with Sutherland at the far side of the bog, Murdoch remaining on the nearside. We planted, or rather placed, a short stake in the solid ground, as close as we could get it to the bog, and steadied it with a guy from the top; the latter I held, while Murdoch, on the other side, fulfilled a similar function. A thin wire connected the two stakes; on this Sutherland now fixed the wheel, from which the magnet depended. On each side we deflected the stake until the magnet almost touched the surface of the bog. After a few minutes’ practice I got accustomed to the work, and acquired sufficient dexterity to be able to allow the magnet to run freely. Inch by inch we went over the surface of the bog, moving slightly to the south-west each time we shifted, following the edges of the bog. Every little while Dick had to change sides, so as to cover the whole extent of the bog, and when he came round again had to go back to where he had last stopped on the same side. All this made the process very tedious, and the day was drawing to a close when we neared the posts set up to mark the bounds of the two lands. Several times during the day Joyce had come up from his cottage and inspected our work, standing at his own side of the post. He looked at me closely, but did not seem to recognise me. I nodded to him once, but he did not seem to see my salutation, and I did not repeat it.

All day long I never heard the sweet voice; and as we returned to Carnaclif after a blank day — blank in every sense of the word — the air seemed chillier and the sunset less beautiful than before. The last words I heard on the mountain were from Murdock: “Nothin’ to-morrow, Mr. Sutherland! I’ve a flittin’ to make, but I pay the day all the same; I hould ye to your conthract. An’ remember, surr, we’re in no hurry wid the wurrk now, so ye'll not need help any more." Andy made no remark till we were well away from the Hill, and then said, dryly: "I'm afeerd yer 'an'r has had but a poor day; ye luk as if ye hadn't seen a bit iv bog at all, at all. Gee up, ye ould corn-crake! the gintlemin does be hurryin' home fur their tay, an' fur more wurrk wid bogs to-morra!"

CHAPTER V

When Sutherland and I had finished dinner that evening we took up the subject of bogs where we had left it in the morning. This was rather a movement of my own making, for I felt an awkwardness about touching on the special subject of the domestic relations of the inhabitants of Knockcalltecrore. After several interesting remarks, Dick said:

"There is one thing that I wish to investigate thoroughly: the correlation of bog and special geological formations." "For instance?" said I. "Well, specially with regard to limestone. Just at this part of the country I find it almost impossible to pursue the investigation any more than Van Trail could have pursued snake studies in Iceland." "Is there no limestone at all in this part of the country?" I queried.

"Oh yes, in lots of places; but as yet I have not been able to find any about here. I say 'as yet' on purpose, because it seems to me that there must be some on Knockcalltecrore." Needless to say the conversation here became to me much more interesting. Dick went on: "The main feature of the geological formation of all this part of the country is the vast amount of slate and granite, either in isolated patches or lying side by side. And as there are instances of limestone found in quaint ways, I am not without hopes that we mayyetfind the same phenomenon." "Where do you find the instances of these limestone formations?" I queried, for I felt that as he was bound to come back to, or towards Shleenanaher, I could ease my own mind by pretending to divert his from it. "Well, as one instance, I can give you the Corrib River — the stream that drains Lough Corrib into Galway Bay; in fact, the river on which the town of Galway is built.

At one place one side of the stream all is granite, and the other is all limestone; I believe the river runs overthe union of the two formations. Now, if there should happen to be a similar formation, even in the least degree, at Knockcalltecrore, it will be a great thing."

"Why will it be a great thing?" I asked. "Because there is no lime near the place at all; because, with limestone on the spot, a hundred things could be done that, as thing are at present, would not repay the effort. With limestone we could reclaim the bogs cheaply all over the neighborhood — in fact a lime-kiln there would be worth a small fortune. We could build walls in the right places; I can see how a lovely little harbor could be made there at a small expense. And then, beyond all else, would be the certainty — which is at present in my mind only a hope or a dream — that we could fathom the secret of the Shifting Bog, and perhaps abolish or reclaim it."

"This is exceedingly interesting," said I, as I drew my chair closer. And I only spoke the exact truth, for at that moment I had no other thought in my mind. "Do you mind telling me more, Dick? I suppose you are not like Lamb's Scotchman that will not broach a half-formed idea!" "Not the least in the world. It will be a real pleasure to have such a good listener. To begin at the beginning, I was much struck with that old cavity on the top of the Hill. It is one of the oddest things I have ever seen or heard of. If it were in any other place or among any other geological formation, I would think its origin must have been volcanic. But here such a thing is quite impossible. It was evidently once a lake." "So goes the legend. I suppose you have heard it?" "Yes; and it rather confirms my theory. Legends have always a base in fact; and whatever cause gave rise to the myth of St. Patrick and the King of the Snakes, the fact remains that the legend is correct in at least one particular — that at some distant time there was a lake or pond on the spot." "Are you certain?" "A very cursory glance satisfied me of that. I could not go into the matter thoroughly, for that old wolf of mine was so manifestly impatient that I should get to his wild-goose chase for the lost treasure-chest, that the time and opportunity were wanting. However, I saw quite enough to convince me." "Well, how do you account for the change? What is your theory regarding the existence of limestone?"

"Simply this, that a lake or reservoir on the top of a mountain means the existence of a spring or springs. Now, springs in granite or hard slate do not wear away the substance of the rock in the same way as they do when they come through limestone. And, moreover, the natures of the two rocks are quite different. There are fissures and cavities in the limestone which are wanting, or which are, at any rate, not so common or perpetually recurrent in the other rock. Now, if it should be, as I surmise, that the reservoir was ever fed by a spring passing through a streak or bed of limestone, we shall probably find that in the progress of time the rock became worn, and that the spring found a way in some other direction — either some natural passage through a gap or fissure already formed, or by a channel made for itself."

"And then?"

"And then the process is easily understandable. The spring naturally sent its waters where there was the least resistance, and they found their way out on some level lower than the top of the Hill. You perhaps noticed the peculiar formation of the Hill, specially on its west side — great sloping tables of rock suddenly ended by a wall of a different stratum — a sort of serrated edge all the way down the inclined plane; you could not miss seeing it, for it cuts the view like the teeth of a saw! Now, if the water, instead of rising to the top and then trickling down the old channel, which is still noticeable, had once found a vent on one of those shelving planes it would gradually fill up the whole cavity formed by the two planes, unless, in the mean time, it found some natural escape. As we know, the mountain is covered in a number of places with a growth or formation of bog, and this water, once accumulating under the bog, would not only saturate it, but would raise it — being of less specific gravity than itself — till it actually floated. Given such a state of things as this, it would only require sufficient time for the bog to become soft and less cohesive than when it was more dry and compact, and you have a dangerous bog, something like the carpet of death that we spoke of this morning."

"So far I can quite understand," said I. "But if this be so, how can the bog shift as this one undoubtedly has? It seems, so far, to be hedged with walls of rock. Surely these cannot move."

Sutherland smiled. "I see you do apprehend. Now we are at the second stage. Did you notice, as we went across the hill-side, that there were distinct beds or banks of clay?"

"Certainly; do they come in?"

"Of course. If my theory is correct, the shifting is due to them."

"Explain!"

"So far as I can. But here I am only on surmise, or theory pure and simple. I may be all wrong, or I may be right — I shall know more before I am done with Shleenanaher. My theory is that the shifting is due to the change in the beds of clay, as, for instance, by rains washing them by degrees to lower levels; this is notably the case in that high clay bank just opposite the Snake's Pass. The rocks are fixed, and so the clay becomes massed in banks between them, perhaps aided in the first instance by trees falling across the chasm or opening. But then the perpetually accumulating water from the spring has to find a way of escape; and as it cannot cut through the rock, it rises to the earth bed, till it either tops the bed of clay which confines it or finds a gap or fissure through which it can escape. In either case it make a perpetually deepening channel for itself, for the soft clay yields little by little to the stream passing over it, and so the surface of the outer level falls, and the water escapes, to perhaps find new reservoirs ready-made to receive it, and a similar process as before takes place."

"Then the bog extends, and the extended part takes the place of the old bog, which gradually drains." "Just so; but such would, of course, depend on the level; there might be two or more reservoirs, each with a deep bottom of its own and united only near the surface; or if the bank or bed of clay lay in the surface of one shelving rock, the water would naturally drain to the lowest point, and the upper land would be shallow in proportion." "But," I ventured to remark, "if this be so, one of two things must happen: either the water would wear away the clay so quickly that the accumulation would not be dangerous, or else the process would be a very gradual one, and would not be attended with such results as we are told of. There would be a change in the position of the bog, but there would not be the upheaval and complete displacement and chaos that I have heard of, for instance, with regard to this very bog of Knockcalltecrore."

"Your 'if is a great peacemaker. If what I have supposed were all, then the result would be as you have said; but there are lots of other supposes; as yet we have only considered one method of change. Suppose, for instance, that the waterfound a natural means of escape — as, for instance, where this very bog sends a stream over the rocks into the Cliff Fields — it would not attack the clay bed at all, unless under some unusual pressure. Then suppose that when such pressure had come the water did not rise and top the clay bed, but that it found a small fissure part of the way down. Suppose there were several such reservoirs as I have mentioned — and from the formation of the ground I think it very likely, for in several places jutting rocks from either side come close together, and suggest a sort of gap or canon in the rock formation, easily forming it into a reservoir. Then, if the barrier between the two upper ones were to be weakened and a sudden weight of water were to be thrown on the lower wall, suppose such wall were to partially collapse, and bring down, say, a clay bank, which would make a temporary barrier loftier than any yet existing, but only temporary; suppose that the quick accumulation of waters behind this barrier lifted the whole mass of water and slime and bog to its utmost height. Then, when such obstruction had been reached, the whole lower barrier, weakened by infiltration and attacked with sudden and new force, would give way at once, and the stream, kept down from above by the floating bog, would force its way along the bed-rock and lift the whole spongy mass resting on it. Then, with this new extent of bog suddenly saturated and weakened — demoralised as it were — and devoid of resisting power, the whole floating mass of the upper bog might descend on it, mingle with it, become incorporated with its semi-fluid substance, and form a new and dangerous quagmire incapable of sustaining solid weight, but leaving behind on the higher level only the refuse and sediment of its former existence — all the rubble and grit too heavy to float, and which would gradually settle down on the upper bed-rock.”

“Really, Dick, you put it most graphically. What a terrible thing it would be to live on the line of such a change.”

"Terrible, indeed! At such a moment a house in the track of the movement — unless it were built on the rock — would go down like a ship in a storm — go down solid and in a moment, without warning and without hope!" "Then, with such a neighbor as a shifting bog, the only safe place for a house would be on a rock?" — Before my eyes, as I spoke, rose the vision of Murdock's house, resting on its knoll of rock, and I was glad, for one reason, that there, at least, would be safety for Joyce — and his daughter.

"Exactly. Now Murdock's house is as safe as a church. I must look at his new house when I go up to-morrow." As I really did not care about Murdock's future, I asked no further questions; so we sat in silence and smoked in the gathering twilight. There was a knock at the door. I called, "Come in." The door opened slowly, and through a narrow opening Andy's shock head presented itself.

"Come in, Andy," said Dick. "Come here and try if you can manage a glass of punch." "Begor!" was Andy's sole expression of acquiescence.

The punch was brewed and handed to him. "Is that as good as Widow Kelligan's?" I asked him.

Andy grinned: "All punch is good, yer 'an'rs. Here's both yer good healths, an' here's The Girls' an'" — turning to me, ""the Bog.'" He winked, threw up his hand — and put down the empty glass. "Glory be to God!" was his grace after drink. "Well, Andy! what is it?" said Dick. "I've heerd," said he, "that yer 'an'rs isn't goin' in the mornin' to Shleenanaher, and I thought that yez couldn't do betther nordhrive over to Knocknacarto-morra an' spind the day there."

"And why Knocknacar?" said I. Andy twirled his cap between his hands in a sheepish way. I felt that he was acting a part, but could not see any want of reality. With a little hesitation he said: “I’ve gotherfrom what yer ‘an’rs wor sayin’ on the car this mornin’, that yez is both intherested in bogs, an’ there’s the beautifulest bit iv bog in all the counthry there beyant. An’, moreover, it’s a lovely shpot intirely. If you gintlemin have nothin’ betther to do, ye’d dhrive over there — if ye’d take me advice.” “What kind of bog is it, Andy?” said Dick. “Is there anythin’ peculiar about it. Does it shift?”

Andy grinned a most unaccountable grin. “Begor, it does, surr!” he answered, quickly. “Sure, all bogs does shift!” And he grinned again. “Andy,” said Dick, laughing, “you have some joke in your mind. What is it?” “Oh, sorra wan, surr — ask the masther there.” As it did not need a surgical operation to get the joke intended into the head of a man — of whatever nationality — who understood Andy’s allusion, and as I did not want to explain it, I replied: “Oh, don’t ask me, Andy; I’m no authority on the subject,” and I looked rather angrily at him, when Dick was not looking.

Andy hastened to put matters right; he evidently did not want to lose his day’s hire on the morrow: “Yer ‘an’rs, ye may take me wurrd for it. There’s a bog beyant at Knocknacar which’II intherestyez intirely; I remimber it meself a lot higher up the mountain whin Iwas a spalpeen, an’ it’s been crawlin’ down iver since. It’s a mightyquare shpot, intirely!” This settled the matter, and we arranged forthwith to start early on the following morning for Knocknacar, Andy, before he left, having a nightcap — out of a tumbler. We were astir fairly early in the morning, and having finished a breakfast sufficiently substantial to tide us over till dinner-time, we started on our journey. The mare was in good condition for work, the road was level and the prospect fine, and altogether we enjoyed our drive immensely. As we looked back we could see

Knockcalltecrore rising on the edge of the coast away to our right, and seemingly surrounded by a network of foam- girt islands, for a breeze was blowing freshly from the southwest.

At the foot of the mountain — or, rather, hill — there was a small, clean-looking sheebeen. Here Andy stopped and put up the mare; then he brought us up a narrow lane bounded by thick hedges of wild brier to where we could see the bog which was the object of our visit. Dick's foot was still painful, so I had to give him an arm, as on yesterday. We crossed over two fields, from which the stones had been collected and placed in heaps. The land was evidently very rocky, for here and there — more especially in the lower part — the gray rock cropped up in places. At the top of the farthest field, Andy pointed out an isolated rock rising sharply from the grass.

"Look there, yer'an'rs; whin I remimber first, that rock was as far aff from the bog as we are now from the boreen; an' luk at it now: why, the bog is close to it, so it is." He then turned and looked at a small heap of stones. "Murther! but there is a quare thing. Why that heap, nota yearago, was as high as the top iv that rock. Begor, it's bein' buried, it is!" Dick looked quite excited as he turned to me and said:

"Why, Art, old fellow, here is the very thing we were talking about. This bog is an instance of the gradual changing of the locality ofa bog by the filtration of its water through the clay beds resting on the bed-rock. I wonder if the people here will let me make some investigations!

Andy, who owns this land?" "Oh, I can tell yer'an'r that well enough; it's Mishter Moriartyfrom Knockcalltecrore. Him, surr," turning to me, "that ye seen at Widda Kelligan's that night in the shtorm."

"Does he farm it himself?"

"No, surr — me father rints it. The ould mare was riz on this very shpot."

"Do you think your father will let me make some investigations here, if I get Mr. Moriarty's permission also?"

"Throth, an' he will, surr — wid all the plisure in life — iv coorse," he added, with native shrewdness, "if there's no harrum done to his land — or, if there's harrum done, it's ped for."

"All right, Andy," said I; "I'll be answerable for that part of it."

We went straight away with Andy to see the elder Sullivan. We found him in his cabin at the foot of the hill — a hale old man of nearly eighty, with all his senses untouched, and he was all that could be agreeable. I told him who I was, and that I could afford to reimburse him if any damage should be done. Dick explained to him that, so farfrom doing harm, what he would do would probably prevent the spreading of the bog, and would in such case much enhance the value of his holding, and in addition give him the use of a spring on his land. Accordingly we went back to make further investigations. Dick had out his note-book in an instant, and took accurate note of everything; he measured and probed the earth, tapped the rocks with the little geological hammerwhich he always carried, and finally set himself down to make an accurate map of the locality, I acting as his assistant in the measurements. Andy left us for a while, but presently appeared, hot and flushed. As he approached, Dick observed: "Andy has been drinking the health of all his relatives. We must keep him employed here, or we maygeta spill going home." The object of his solicitude came and sat on a rock beside us, and looked on. Presently he came over, and said to Dick:

“Yer ‘an’r, can I help ye in yer wurrk? Sure, if ye only want wan hand to help ye, mayhap mine id do. An’ thin his ‘an’r here might hop up to the top ivthe mountain; there’s a mighty purty view there intirely, an’ he could enjoy it, though ye can’t get up wid yer lame fut.” “Good idea!” said Dick. “You go up on top, Art. This is very dull work, and Andy can hold the tape for me as well as you or any one else. You can tell me all about it when you come down.”

“Do, yer ‘an’r. Tell him all ye see!” said Andy, as I prepared to ascend. “If ye go up soft be the shady parts, mayhap ye’d shtrike another bit of bog be the way.” I had grown so suspicious of Andy’s double entente, that I looked at him keenly, to see if there was any fresh joke on; but his face was immovably grave, and he was seemingly intent on the steel tape which he was holding.

I proceeded up the mountain. It was a very pleasant one to climb, or rather, to ascend, for it was nearlyall covered with grass. Here and there, on the lower half, were clumps of stunted trees, all warped eastwards by the prevailing westerly wind — alders, mountain-ash, and thorn. Higher up these disappeared, but there was still a pleasant sprinkling of hedge-rows. As the verdure grew on the south side higher than on the north or west, I followed it and drew near the top. As I got closer, I heard some one singing. “By Jove,” said I to myself, “the women of this country have sweet voices!” — indeed, this was by no means the first time I had noticed the fact. I listened, and as I drew nearer to the top of the hill I took care not to make any noise which might disturb the singer. It was an odd sensation to stand in the shadow of the hill-top, on that September day, and listen to Ave Maria sung by the unknown voice of an unseen singer.

I made a feeble joke all to myself: “My experience of the girls of the west is that of voxet proeteria nihil” There was an infinity of pathos in the voice — some sweet, sad yearning, as though the earthly spirit was singing with an unearthly voice — and the idea came on me with a sense of conviction that some deep unhappiness underlay that appeal to the Mother of Sorrows. I listened, and somehow felt guilty. It almost seemed that I was profaning some shrine of womanhood, and I took myself to task severely in something of the following strain: “That poor girl has come to this hill-top for solitude. She thinks she is alone with Nature and Nature’s God, and pours forth her soul freely; and you, wretched, tainted man, break in on the sanctity of her solitude — of her prayer. For shame! for shame!” Then — men are all hypocrites — I stole guiltily forward to gain a peep at the singer who thus communed with Nature and Nature’s God, and the sanctity of whose solitude and prayer I was violating.

A tuft of heath grew just at the top; behind this I crouched, and parting its luxuriance looked through.

For my pains I only saw a back, and that back presented in the most ungainly way of which graceful woman is capable. She was seated on the ground, not even raised upon a stone. Her knees were raised to the level of her shoulders, and her outstretched arms confined her legs below the knees — she was, in fact, in much the same attitude as boys are at games of cock-fighting. And yet there was something very touching in the attitude — something of self-oblivion so complete that I felt a renewed feeling of guiltiness as an intruder. Whether her reasons be aesthetic, moral, educational, or disciplinary, no self- respecting woman ever sits in such a manner when a man is by.

The song died away, and then there was a gulp and a low suppressed moan. Her head drooped between her knees, her shoulders shook, and I could see that she was weeping. I wished to get away, but for a few moments I was afraid to stir lest she should hear me. The solitude, now that the vibration of her song had died out of the air, seemed oppressive. In those few seconds a new mood seemed to come over her. She suddenly abandoned her dejected position, and, with the grace and agility of a young fawn, leaped to her feet. I could see that she was tall and exquisitely built, on the slim side — what the French call svelte. With a grace and pathos which were beyond expression she stretched forth her arms towards the sea, as to something that she loved, and then, letting them fall by her side, remained in a kind of waking dream. I slipped away, and when I was well out of sight ran down the hill about a hundred yards, and then commenced the re-ascent, making a fair proportion of noise as I came, now striking at the weeds with my heavy stick, now whistling, and again humming a popular air. When I gained the top of the hill I started as though surprised at seeing anyone, much less a girl, in such a place. I think I acted the part well: again I say that at times the hypocrite in us can be depended upon. She was looking straight towards me, and certainly, so far as I could tell, took me in good faith. I doffed my hat and made some kind of stammering salutation, as one would to a stranger — the stammering not being, of course, in the routine of such occasions, but incidental to the special circumstances. She made me a graceful courtesy and a blush overspread her cheeks. I was afraid to look too hard at her, especially at first, lest I should frighten her away, but I stole a glance towards her at every moment when I could. How lovely she was! I had heard that along the west coast of Ireland there are traces of Spanish blood and Spanish beauty, and here was a living evidence of the truth of the hearsay. Not even at sunset in the parades of Madrid or Seville, could one see more perfect beauty of the Spanish type — beauty perhaps all the more perfect for being tempered with northern calm. As I said, she was tall and beautifully proportioned. Her neck was long and slender, gracefully set in her rounded shoulders, and supporting a beautiful head, borne with the free grace of the lily on its stem. There is nothing in woman more capable of complete beauty than the head, and crowned as this head was with a rich mass of hair as black and as glossy as the raven's wing, it was a thing to remember. She wore no bonnet, but a gray homespun shawl was thrown loosely over her shoulders; her hair was coiled in one rich mass at the top and back of her head, and fastened with an old- fashioned tortoise-shell comb. Her face was a delicate oval, showing what Rossetti calls "the pure wide curve from ear to chin." Luxuriant black eyebrows were arched over large black-blue eyes swept by curling lashes of extraordinary length, and showed off the beauty of a rounded, ample forehead — somewhat sunburnt, be it said. The nose was straight and wide between the eyes, with delicate sensitive nostrils; the chin wide and firm, and the mouth full and not small, with lips of scarlet, forming a perfect Cupid's bow, and just sufficiently open to show two rows of small teeth, regular and white as pearls. Her dress was that of a well-to-do peasant — a sort of body or jacket of printed chintz overa dress or petticoat of homespun of the shade of crimson given by a madder dye. The dress was short, and showed trim ankles in gray homespun with pretty feet in thick, country-made, wide-toed shoes. Her hands were shapely, with long fingers, and were very sunburnt and manifestly used to work. As she stood there, with the western breeze playing with her dress and tossing about the stray ends of her raven tresses, I thought that I had never in my life seen anything so lovely. And yet she was onlya peasant girl, manifestly and unmistakably, and had no pretence of being anything else.

She was evidently as shy as I was, and fora little while we were both silent. As is usual, the woman was the first to recover her self-possession, and while I was torturing my brain in vain for proper words to commence a conversation, she remarked: “What a lovely view there is from here! I suppose, sir, you have never been on the top of this hill before?” “Never,” said I, feeling that I was equivocating if not lying. “I had no idea that there was anything so lovely here.” I meant this to have a double meaning, although I was afraid to make it apparent to her. “Do you often come up here?” I continued.

“Not very often. It is quite a long time since I was here last; but the view seems fairer and dearer to me every time I come.” As she spoke the words, my memory leaped back to that eloquent gesture as she raised her arms. I thought I might as well improve the occasion and lay the foundation for another meeting without giving offence or fright, so I said: “This hill is quite a discovery; and as lam likely to be here in this neighborhood for some time, I dare say I shall often find myself enjoying this lovely view.”

She made no reply or comment whatever to this statement. I looked overthe scene, and it was certainlya fit setting for so lovely a figure; but it was the general beauty of the scene, and not, as had hitherto been the case, one part of it only, that struck myfancy. Away on the edge of the coast-line rose Knockcalltecrore; but it somehow looked lower than before, and less important. The comparative insignificance was, of course, due to the fact that I was regarding it from a superior altitude, but it seemed to me that it was because it did not now seem to interest me so much. That sweet voice through the darkness seemed very far away now; here was a voice as sweet, and in such habitation! The invisible charm with which Shleenanaher had latterly seemed to hold me, or the spell which it had laid upon me, seemed to pass away, and I found myself smiling that I should ever have entertained such an absurd idea.

Youth is not naturally stand off, and before many minutes the two visitors to the hill-top had laid aside reserve and were chatting freely. I had many questions to ask of local matters, for I wanted to find out what I could of my fair companion without seeming to be too inquisitive; but she seemed to fight shy of all such topics, and when we parted my ignorance of her name and surroundings remained as profound as it had been at first. She, however, wanted to know all about London. She knew it only by hearsay; for some of the questions which she asked me were amazingly simple; manifestly she had something of the true peasant belief that London is the only home of luxury, power, and learning. She was so frank, however, and made her queries with such a gentle modesty, that something within my heart seemed to grow and grow; and the conviction was borne upon me that I stood before my fate. Sir Geraint's ejaculation rose to my lips:

"Here, by God's rood, is the one maid for me!"

One thing gave me much delight. The sadness seemed to have passed quite away — for the time, at all events. Her eyes, which had at first been glassy with recent tears, were now lit with keenest interest, and she seemed to have enti rely forgotten the cause of her sorrow.

"Good!" thought I to myself, complacently. "At least I have helped to brighten her life, though it be but for one hour."

Even while I was thinking she rose up suddenly — we had been sitting on a bowlder— "Goodness! how the time passes!" she said; "I must run home at once.” “Let me see you home,” I said, eagerly. Her great eyes opened, and she said, with a grave simplicity that took me “way down” to use American slang: “Why?”

“Just to see that you get home safely,” I stammered.

She laughed merrily.

“No fearfor me. I’m safer on this mountain than anywhere in the world — almost,” she added, and the grave, sad look stole again over her face. “Well, but I would like to,” I urged. Again she answered, with grave, sweet seriousness:

“Oh no, sir; that would not do. What would folk say to see me walking with a gentleman like you?” The answer was conclusive. I shrugged my shoulders because I was a man, and had a man’s petulance under disappointment; and then I took off my hat and bowed — not ironically, but cheerfully, so as to set her at ease; for I had the good fortune to have been bred a gentleman. My reward came when she held out her hand frankly and said: “Good-bye, sir,” gave a little graceful curtsey, and tripped away over the edge of the hill.

I stood bareheaded looking at her until she disappeared. Then Iwentto the edge of the little plateau and looked over the distant prospect of land and sea, with a heart so full that the tears rushed to my eyes. There are those who hold that any good emotion is an act of prayer. If this be so, then on that wild mountain-top as fervent a prayer as the heart of man is capable of went up to the Giver of all good things! When Ireached the foot of the mountain Ifound Dick and Andy waiting for me at the sheebeen. As I came close Dick called out: “What a time you were, old chap. I thought you had taken root on the hill-top! What on earth kept you?” “The view from the top is lovely beyond compare,” I said, as an evasive reply. “Is what ye see there more lovelier nor what ye see at Shleenanaher?" said Andy, with seeming gravity. "Far more so!" I replied instantly and with decision. "I told yer 'an'r there was somethin' worth lukin' at," said he. "An' may I ask if yer 'an'r seen any bog on the mountain?"

I looked at him with a smile. I seemed to rather like his chaff now. "Begor I did, yer'an'r," I answered, mimicking his accent.

We had proceeded on our way for a long distance, Andy apparently quite occupied with his driving, Dick studying his note-book, and I quite content with my thoughts, when Andy said, apropos of nothing and looking at nobody:

"I seen a young girrul comin' down the hill beyant a wee while before yer'an'r. I hope she didn't disturb any iv yez?" The question passed unnoticed, for Dick apparently did not hear, and I did not feel called upon to answer it. I could not have truthfully replied with a simple negative or positive.

CHAPTER VI

The next day Sutherland would have to resume his work with Murdock, but on his newly-acquired land. I could think of his visit to Knockcalltecrore without a twinge of jealousy; and, for my own part, I contemplated a walk in a different direction. Dick was full of his experiment regarding the bog at Knocknacar, and could talk of nothing else — a disposition of things which suited me all to nothing, for I had only to acquiesce in all he said, and let my own thoughts have free and pleasant range.

"I have everything cut and dry in my head, and I'll have it all on paper before I sleep to-night," said the enthusiast. "Unfortunately, I am tied for a while longer to the amiable Mr. Murdock; but since you're good enough, old fellow, to offer to stay to look after the cutting, I can see my way to getting along. We can't begin until the day after to-morrow, for I can't byany possibility get old Moriarty's permission before that. But then we'll start in earnest. You must get some men up there and set them to work at once. By tomorrow evening I'll have an exact map ready for you to work by, and all you will have to do will be to see that the men are kept up to the mark, look at the work now and then and take a note of results. I expect it will take quite a week or two to make the preliminarydrainage, forwe must have a decided fall for the water. We can't depend on less than twenty or thirty feet, and I should not be surprised if we want twice as much. I suppose I sha'n't see you till to-morrow night; for I'm going up to my room now, and shall work late, and I must be off early in the morning. As you're going to have a walk I suppose I may take Andy, for my foot is not right yet?" "By all means," I replied, and we bade each other goodnight.

When I went to my own room I locked the door and looked out of the open window at the fair prospect bathed in soft moonlight. For a long time I stood there. What my thoughts were I need tell no young man or young woman, for without shame I admitted to myself that I was over head and ears in love. If any young person of either sex requires any further enlightenment, well, then, all I can say is that their education in life has been shamefully neglected, or their opportunities have been scant; or, worse still, some very grave omission has been made in their equipment for the understanding of life. If any one not young wants such enlightenment, I simply say, "Sir, or madam, either you are a fool, or your memory is gone!"

One thing I will say, that I never felt so much at one with my kind; and before going to bed I sat down and wrote a letter of instructions to my agent, directing him to make accurate personal inquiries all overthe estate, and at the forthcoming rent-day make such remissions of rent that would relieve any trouble, or aid in any plan of improvements such as his kinder nature could guess at or suggest.

I need not say that for a long time I did not sleep, and although my thoughts were full of such hope and happiness that the darkness seemed ever changing into sunshine, there were, at times, such harrowing thoughts of difficulties to come — in the shape of previous attachments; of my being late in my endeavours to win her as my wife; of my never being able to find her again — that, now and again, I had to jump from my bed and pace the floor. Towards daylight I slept, and went through a series of dreams of alternating joyand pain. At first, hope held full sway, and my sweet experience of the day became renewed and multiplied; again, I climbed the hill and saw her and heard her voice; again, the tearful look faded from her eyes; again, I held her hand in mine and bade good-bye, and a thousand happy fancies filled me with exquisite joy. Then doubts began to come. I saw her once more on the hill-top, but she was looking out for some other than myself, and a shadow of disappointment passed over her sweet face when she recognised me. Again, I saw myself kneeling at herfeetand imploring her love, while only cold, hard looks were my lot; or I found myself climbing the hill, but never able to reach the top, or on reaching it finding it empty. Then I would find myself hurrying through all sorts of difficult places — high, bleak mountains, and lonely wind-swept strands, dark paths through gloomy forests, and over sun- smitten plains, looking for her whom I had lost, and in vain trying to call her, for I could not remember her name. This last nightmare was quite a possibility, for I had never heard it.

I awoke many times from such dreams in an agony of fear; but after a time both pleasure and pain seemed to have had their share of my sleep, and I slept the dreamless sleep that Plato eulogises in the "Apologia Socratis." I was awakened to a sense that my hour of rising had not yet come by a knocking at my door. I opened it, and on the landing without saw Andy standing, cap in hand. "Holloa, Andy!" I said. "What on earth do you want?" "Yer'an'r'II parden me, but I'mjistoffwid Misther Sutherland; an' as I undherstand ye was goin' for a walk, I made bould t' ask yer 'an'r if ye'll give a missage to me father?"

"Certainly, Andy, with pleasure." "Maybe ye'd tell him that I'd like the white mare tuk off the grashan' gave some hard 'atin' for a few days, as I'll want her brung into Wistport before long." "All right, Andy. Is that all?" "That's all, yer 'an'r." Then he added, with a sly look at me:

"Maybe ye'll keep yer eye out for a nice bit o' bog as ye go along."

"Get on, Andy," said I. "Shut up, you ould corn-crake!" I felt I could afford to chaff with him, as we were alone. He grinned, and went away. But he had hardly gone a few steps when he returned and said, with an airof extreme seriousness:

"As I'm goin' to Knockcalltecrore, is there any missage I kin take for ye to Miss Norah?" "Oh, go on!" said I. "What message should I have to send, when I never saw the girl in my life?" For reply he winked at me with a wink big enough to cover a perch of land, and, looking back over his shoulder so that I could see his grin to the last, he went along the corridor, and I went back to bed. It did not strike me till a long time afterwards — when I was quite close to Knocknacar — how odd it was that Andy had asked me to give the message to his father. I had not told him I was even coming in the direction — I had not told anyone; indeed, I had rather tried to mislead when I spoke of taking a walk that day, by saying some commonplace about "the advisability of breaking new ground," and so forth. Andy had evidently taken itforgranted; and it annoyed me somewhat that he could find me so transparent. However, I gave the message to the old man, to which he promised to attend, and had a drink of milk, which is the hospitality of the West of Ireland farmhouse. Then, in the most nonchalant way I could, I began to saunter up the hill.

I loitered awhile here and there on the way up. I diverted my steps nowand then as if to make inquiry into some interesting object. I tapped rocks and turned stones over, to the discomfiture of various swollen pale-colored worms and nests of creeping things. With the end of my stick I dug up plants, and made here and there unmeaning holes in the ground, as though I were actuated by some direct purpose known to myself and not understood of others. In fact, I acted as a hypocrite in many harmless and unmeaning ways, and rendered myself generally obnoxious to the fauna and flora of Knocknacar.

As I approached the hill-top my heart beat loudly and fast, and a genuine supineness took possession of my limbs, and a dimness came over my sight and senses. I had experienced something of the same feeling at other times in my life — as, for instance, just before my first fight when a school-boy, and when I stood up to make my maiden speech at the village debating society. Such feelings — or lack of feelings — however, do not kill; and it is the privilege and strength of advancing years to know this fact.

I proceeded up the hill. I did not whistle this time, or hum, or make any noise; matters were far too serious with me for any such levity. I reached the top, and found myself alone! A sense of blank disappointment came over me, which was only relieved when, on looking at my watch, I found that it was as yet still early in the forenoon. It was three o'clock yesterday when I had met — when I had made the ascent.

As I had evidently to while awaya considerable time, I determined to make an accurate investigation of the hill of Knocknacar — much, very much, fuller than I had made as yet. As my unknown had descended the hill by the east, and would probably make the ascent — if she ascended at all — by the same side; and as it was my object not to alarm her, I determined to confine my investigations to the west side. Accordingly, I descended about half way down the slope, and then commenced my prying into the secrets of Nature under a sense of the just execration of me and my efforts on the part of the whole of the animate and inanimate occupants of the mountain-side.

Hours to me had never seemed of the same inexhaustible proportions as the hours thus spent. At first I was strong with a dogged patience; but this in time gave way to an impatient eagerness that merged into a despairing irritability. More than once I felt an almost irresistible inclination to rush to the top of the hill and shout, or conceived an equally foolish idea to make a call at every house, cottage, and cabin in the neighborhood. In this latter desire my impatience was somewhat held in check by a sense of the ludicrous; for, as I thought of the detail of the doing it, I seemed to see myself, when trying to reduce my abstract longing to a concrete effort, meeting only jeers and laughter from both men and women in my seemingly asinine effort to make inquiries regarding a person whose name even I did not know, and for what purpose I could assign no sensible reason. I verily believe I must have counted the leaves of grass on portions of that mountain. Unfortunately, hunger or thirst did not assail me, for they would have afforded some diversion to my thoughts. I sturdily stuck to my resolution not to ascend to the top until after three o'clock, and I gave myself much kudos for the stern manner in which I adhered to my resolve. My satisfaction at so bravely adhering to my resolution, in spite of so much mental torment and temptation, may be imagined when, at the expiration of the appointed time, on ascending to the hill-top, I saw my beautiful friend sitting on the edge of the plateau and heard her first remark after our mutual salutations: "I have been here nearly two hours, and amjust going home! I have been wondering and wondering what on earth you were working at all over the hill-side! May I ask, are you a botanist?"

"No." "Or a geologist?"

"No." "Or a naturalist?" "No."

There she stopped; this simple interrogation as to the pursuits of a stranger evidently struck her as unmaidenly, for she blushed and turned away. I did not know what to say; but youth has its own wisdom — which is sincerity — and I blurted out: "In reality I was doing nothing; I was only trying to pass the time."

There was a query in the glance of the glorious blue- black eyes and in the lifting of the ebon lashes; and I went on, conscious as I proceeded that the ground before me was marked "Dangerous": "The fact is, I did not want to come up here till after three, and the time seemed precious long, I can tell you." "Indeed. But you have missed the best part of the view. Between one and two o'clock, when the sun strikes in between the islands — Cusheen there to the right, and Mishear — the view is the finest of the whole day." "Oh, yes," I answered, "I know now what I have missed."

Perhaps my voice betrayed me. I certainly felt full of bitter regret; but there was no possibility of mistaking the smile which rose to her eyes and faded into the blush that followed the reception of the thought.

There are some things which a woman cannot misunderstand or fail to understand; and surely my regret and its cause were within the category. It thrilled through me with a sweet intoxication, to realise that she was not displeased. Man is predatory even in his affections, and there is some conscious power to him which follows the conviction that the danger of him — which is his intention — is recognised. However, I thought it best to be prudent, and to rest on success — for a while, at least. I therefore commenced to talk of London, whose wonders were but fresh to myself, and was rewarded by the bright smile that had now become incorporated with my dreams by day and by night.

And so we talked — talked in simple companionship; and the time fled by on golden wings. No word of love was spoken or even hinted at, but with joyand gratitude unspeakable I began to realise that we were en rapport. And, more than this, I realised that the beautiful peasant girl had great gifts — a heart of gold, a sweet, pure nature, and a rare intelligence. I gathered that she had had some education, though not an extensive one, and that she had followed up at home such subjects as she had learned in school. But this was all I gathered. I was still as ignorant as ever of her name, and all else beside, as when I had first heard her sweet voice on the hill-top.

Perhaps I might have learned more had there been time; but the limit of my knowledge had been fixed. The time had fled so quickly, because so happily, that neither of us had taken account of it; and suddenly, as a long red ray struck overthe hill-top from the sun, now preparing for his plunge into the western wave, she jumped to her feet with a startled cry:

"The sunset! What am I thinking of! Good-night! goodnight! No, you must not come — it would never do! Goodnight!" And before I could say a word, she was speeding down the eastern slope of the mountain. The revulsion from such a dream of happiness made me for the moment ungrateful; and I felt that it was with an angry sneer on my lip that I muttered, as I looked at her retreating form: "Why are the happy hours so short, while misery and anxiety spread out endlessly?"

But as the red light of the sunset smote my face, a better and a holierfeeling came to me; and there on the top of the hill I knelt and prayed, with a directness and fervor that are the spiritual gifts of youth, that every blessing might light on her — the arriere pensee being — her, my wife. Slowly I went down the mountain after the sun had set; and when I got to the foot I stood bareheaded for a long time, looking at the summit which had given me so much happiness.

Do not sneer or make light of such moments, ye whose lives are gray. Would to God that the gray-haired and gray- souled watchers of life, could feel such moments once again!

I walked home with rare briskness, but did not feel tired at all by it; I seemed to tread on air. As I drew near the hotel I had some vague idea of hurrying at once to my own room, and avoiding dinner altogether as something too gross and carnal for my present exalted condition; but a moment's reflection was sufficient to reject any such folly. I therefore achieved the other extreme, and made Mrs. Keating's kindly face beam by the vehemence with which I demanded food. I found that Dick had not yet returned — a fact which did not displease me, as it insured me a temporary exemption from Andy's ill-timed banter, which I did not feel in a humor to enjoy at present. I was just sitting down to mydinnerwhen Dickarrived. He, too, had a keen appetite; and it was not until we had finished our fish, and were well into our roast duck, that conversation began. Once he was started, Dick was full of matters to tell me. He had seen Moriarty — that was what had kept him so late — and had got his permission to investigate and experiment on the bog. He had thought out the whole method of work to be pursued, and had, during Murdock's dinner-time, made to scale a rough diagram for me to work by. We had our cigars lit before he had exhausted himself on this subject. He had asked me a few casual questions about my walk, and, so as not to arouse any suspicions, I had answered him vaguely that I had had a lovely day, had enjoyed myself immensely, and had seen some very pretty things — all of which was literally and exactly true. I had then asked him as to how he had got on with his operations in connection with the bog. It amused me to think how small and secondary a place Shleenanaher, and all belonging to it, now had in my thoughts. He told me that they had covered a large portion of the new section of the bog; that there was very little left to do now, in so far as the bog was concerned; and he descanted on the richness and the fine position of Murdock's new farm. "It makes me angry," said he, "to think that that human- shaped wolf should get hold of such a lovely spot, and oust such a good fellow as the man whom he has robbed — yes, it is robbery, and nothing short of it. I feel something like a criminal myself for working for such a wretch at all."

"Never mind, old chap," said I; "you can't help it. Whatever he may have done wrong, you have had neither act nor part in it. It will all come right in time." In my present state of mind I could not imagine that there was, or could be, anything in the world that would not come all right in time.

We strolled into the street, and met Andy, who immediately hurried up to me: "Good-evenin', yer 'anr'! An' did ye give me insthructions to me father?" "I did, Andy; and he asked me to tell you that all shall be done exactly as you wish."

"Thank yer 'an'r." He turned away, and my heart rejoiced, for I thought I would be free from his badinage; but he turned and came back, and asked, with a servility which I felt to be hypocritical and assumed:

"Any luck, yer 'an'r, wid bogs to-day?" I know I got red as I answered him: "Oh, I don't know — yes, a little — not much." "Shure, an' I'm glad to hear it, surr; but I might have known be the luk iv ye and be yer shtep. Faix, it's aisy known whin a man has been lucky wid bogs!" The latter sentence was spoken in a pronounced "aside."

Dick laughed, for although he was not in the secret he could see that there was some fun intended. I did not like his laugh, and said hotly: "I don't understand you, Andy!" "Is it undershtand me ye don't do? Well, surr, if I've said anythin' that I shouldn't, I ax yer pardon. Bogs isn't to be lightly shpoke iv at all, at all;" then, after a pause: "Poor Miss Norah!" "What do you mean?" said I. "Shure yer 'an'r, I was only pityin' the poor crathur. Poor thing! but this'll be a bitther blow to her intirely!" The villain was so manifestly acting a part, and he grinned at me in such a provoking way, that I got quite annoyed. "Andy, what do you mean? — out with it!" I said, hotly. "Mane, yer 'an'r? Shure nawthin'. All I mane is, poor Miss Norah! Musha! but it'll be the sore thrial to her. Bad cess to Knocknacar, anyhow!" "This is infernal impertinence! Here—" I was stopped by Dick's hand on my breast: "Easy, easy, old chap! What is this all about? Don't get angry, old man. Andy is only joking, whatever it is. I'm not in the secret myself, and so can give no opinion; but there is a joke somewhere. Don't let it go beyond a joke." "All right, Dick," said I, having had time to recover my temper. "The fact is that Andy has started some chaff on me about bogs — meaning girls thereby — every time he mentions the word to me; and now he seems to accuse me in some way about a girl that came to meet her father that night I left him home at Knockcalltecrore. You know Joyce, that Murdock has ousted from his farm. Now, look here, Andy! You're a very good fellow, and don't mean any harm; but I entirely object to the way you're going on. I don't mind a button about a joke. I hope I'm not such an ass as to be thin-skinned about a trifle, but it is another matter when you mention a young lady's name alongside mine. You don’t think of the harm you may do. People are very talkative, and generally get a story the wrong end up. If you mention this girl — whatever her name is—” “Poor Miss Norah!” struck in Andy, and then ostentatiously corrected himself— “I big yer’anVs pardon, Miss Norah, I mane.”— “this Miss Norah — along with me,” I went on, “and especially in that objectionable form, people may begin to think she is wronged in some way, and you may do heran evil that you couldn’t undo in all your lifetime. As for me, I never even saw the girl. I heard her speak in the dark for about half a minute, but I never set eyes on her in my life. Now, let this be the last of all this nonsense! Don’t worry me any more; but run in and tell Mrs. Keating to give you a skinful of punch, and to chalk it up to me.”

Andy grinned, ducked his head, and made his exit into the house as though propelled or drawn by some unseen agency. When I remarked this to Dick he replied, “Some spirit draws him, I dare say.” Dick had not said a word beyond advising me not to lose my temper. He did not appear to take any notice of my lecture to Andy, and puffed unconcernedly at his cigartill the driver had disappeared. He then took me by the arm, and said:

“Let us stroll a bit up the road.” Arm in arm we passed out of the town and into the silence of the common. The moon was rising, and there was a soft, tender light over everything. Presently, without looking at me, Dick said: “Art, I don’t want to be inquisitive or to press for any confidences, but you and I are too old friends not to be interested in what concerns each other. What did Andy mean? Is there any girl in question?” I was glad to have a friend to whom to open my mind, and without further thought I answered: “There is, Dick.” Dick grasped my arm and looked keenly into my face, and then said: “Art, answer me one question — answer me truly, old fellow, by all you hold dear — answer me on your honor."

"I shall, Dick. What is it?" "Is it Norah Joyce?" I had felt some vague alarm from the seriousness of his manner, but his question put me at ease again, and with a high heart, I answered: "No, Dick, it is not." We strolled on, and after a pause, that seemed a little oppressive to me, he spoke again:

"Andy mentioned a poor 'Miss Norah' — don't get riled, old man — and you both agreed that a certain young lady was the only one alluded to. Are you sure there is no mistake? Is not your young lady called Norah?" This was a difficult question to answer, and made me feel rather awkward. Being awkward, I got a little hot: "Andy's an infernal fool. What I said to him — you heard me—" "Yes; I heard you."— "was literally and exactly true. I never set eyes on Norah Joyce in my life. The girl I mean — the one you mean also — was one I saw by chance yesterday — and to-day — on the top of Knocknacar." "Who is she?" — there was a more joyous sound in Dick's voice.

"Eh — eh," I stammered; "the fact is, Dick, I don't know."

"What is her name?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know her name?"

"No."

"Where does she come from?" "I don't know. I don't know anything about her except this, Dick — that I love her with all my heart and soul!" I could not help it — I could not account for it — but the tears rushed to my eyes, and I had to keep my head turned away from Dick lest he should notice me. He said nothing, and when I had surreptitiously wiped away what I thought were unmanly tears of emotion, I looked round at him. He, too, had his head turned away and, if my eyes did not deceive me, he, too, had some unmanly signs of emotion.

"Dick," said I. He turned on the instant. We looked in one another's faces, and the story was all told. We grasped hands warmly.

"We're both in the same boat, old boy," said he. "Who is it, Dick?"

"Norah Joyce!" — I gave a low whistle.

"But," he went on, "you are well ahead of me. I have never even exchanged a word with her yet. I have only seen her a couple of times; but the whole world is nothing to me beside her. There, I've nothing to tell. Veni, Vidi, Victus sum! — I came, I saw, I was conquered. She has beauty enough, and if I'm not an idiot, worth enough to conquer a nation. — Now, tell me all about yours."

"There's nothing to tell, Dick; as yet I have only exchanged a few words. I shall hope to know more soon." We walked along in silence, turning our steps back to the hotel.

"I must hurry and finish up my plans to-night so as to be ready for you to-morrow. You won't look on it as a labor to go to Knocknacar, old chap," said he, slapping me on the back.

"Nor you to go to Shleenanaher," said I, as we shook hands and parted for the night. It was quite two hours after this when I began to undress for bed. I suppose the whole truth, however foolish, must be told, but those two hours were mainly spent in trying to compose some suitable verses to my unknown. I had consumed a vast amount of paper — consumed literally, for what lover was ever yet content to trust his unsuccessful poetic efforts to the waste basket? and my grate was thickly strewn with filmy ashes. Hitherto the Muse had persistently and successfully evaded me. She did not even grant me a featherfrom her wing, and my "woful ballad made to my mistress' eyebrow" was among the things that were not. There was a gentle tap at the door. I opened it, and saw Dick with his coat off. He came in. "I thought I would look in, Art, as I saw the light under your door, and knew that you had not gone to bed. I only wanted to tell you this: You don't know what a relief it is to me to be able to speak of it to any living soul — how maddening it is to me to work for that scoundrel Murdock. You can understand now why I flared up at him so suddenly ere yesterday. I have a strong conviction on me that his service is devil's service as far as my happiness is concerned, and that I shall pay some terrible penalty for it."

"Nonsense, old fellow," said I, "Norah only wants to see you to know what a fine fellow you are. You won't mind my saying it, but you are the class of man that any woman would be proud of!" "Ah! old chap," he answered sadly, "I'm afraid it will never get that far. There isn't, so to speak, a fair start for me. She has seen me already — worse luck! — has seen me doing work which must seem to her to aid in ruining her father. I could not mistake the scornful glance she has thrown on me each time we have met. However, che sara sara! It's not use fretting beforehand. Goodnight!"

CHAPTER VII

We were all astir shortly after daylight on Monday morning. Dick's foot was well enough for his walk to Knockcalltecrore, and Andy came with me to Knocknacar, as had been arranged, for I wanted his help in engaging laborers and beginning the work. We got to the sheebeen about nine o'clock, and Andy, having put up the mare, went out to get laborers. As I was morally certain that at that hour in the morning there would be no chance of seeing my unknown on the hill-top, I went at once to the bog, taking my map with me and studying the ground where we were to commence operations. Andyjoined me in about half an hour with five men — all he had been able to get in the time. They were fine strapping young fellows and seemed interested in the work, so I thought the contingent would be strong enough. By this time I had the ground marked out according to the plan, and so, without more ado, we commenced work. We had attacked the hill some two hundred feet lower down than the bog, where the land suddenly rose steeply from a wide sloping extent of wilderness of invincible barrenness. It was over this spot that Sutherland hoped ultimately to send the waters of the bog. We began at the foot and made a trench some four feet wide at the bottom, and with sloping walls, so that when we got in so far the drain would be twenty feet deep, the external aperture would measure about twice as much. The soil was heavy and full of moderate-sized bowlders, but was not unworkable, and among us we came to the conclusion that a week of solid work would, bar accidents and our coming across unforeseen difficulties, at any rate break the back of the job. The men worked in sections — one marking out the trench by cutting the surface to some foot and a half deep, and the others following in succession. Andy sat on a stone hard by, filled his pipe, and endeavoured in his own cheery way to relieve the monotony of the labor of the others. After about an hour he grew tired and went away — perhaps it was that he became interested in a country car, loaded with persons, that came down the road and stopped a few minutes at the sheebeen on its way to join the main road to Carnaclif. Things went steadily on for some time. The men worked well, and I possessed my soul in such patience as I could, and studied the map and the ground most carefully. When dinner-time came the men went off each to his own home, and as soon as the place was free from them I hurried to the top of the mountain. The prospect was the same as yesterday. There was the same stretch of wild moor and rugged coast, of clustering islands and foam-girt rocks, of blue sky laden with such masses of luminous clouds as are only found in Ireland. But all was to me dreary and desolate, for the place was empty and she was not there. I sat down to wait with what patience I could. It was dreary work at best; but at any rate there was hope — and its more immediate kinsman, expectation — and I waited. Somehow the view seemed to tranquillise me in some degree. It may have been that there was some unconscious working of the mind which told me, in some imperfect way, that in a region quite within my range of vision nothing could long remain hidden or unknown. Perhaps it was the stilly silence of the place. There was hardly a sound — the country people were all within doors at dinner, and even the sounds of their toil were lacking. From the west came a very faint breeze, just enough to bring the far-off, eternal roarof the surf. There was scarcely a sign of life. The cattle far below were sheltering under trees, or in the shadows of hedges, or standing still knee-deep in the pools of the shallow streams. The only moving thing which I could see was the car which had left so long before, and was now far off, and was each moment becoming smaller and smaller as it went into the distance.

So I sat for quite an hour with my heart half sick with longing, but she never came. Then I thought I heard a step coming up the path at the far side. My heart beat strangely. I sat silent, and did not pretend to hear. She was walking more slowly than usual, and with a firmer tread. She was coming. I heard the steps on the plateau, and a voice came:

"Och! an' isn't it a purty view, yer'an'r?" I leaped to my feet with a feeling that was positively murderous. The revulsion was too great, and I broke into a burst of semi- hysterical laughter. There stood Andy, with ragged red head and sun-scorched face, in his garb of eternal patches, bleached and discolored by sun and rain into a veritable coat of many colours, gazing at the view with a rapt expression, and yet with one eye half closed in a fixed but unmistakable wink, as though taking the whole majesty of nature into his confidence. When he heard my burst of laughter he turned to me quizzically:

"Musha! but it's the merry gentleman yer'an'r is this day. Shure, the view here is the laughablest thing I ever see!" and he affected to laugh, but in such a soulless, unspontaneous way that it became a real burlesque. I waited for him to go on. I was naturally very vexed, but I was afraid to say anything lest I might cause him to interfere in this affair — the last thing on earth that I wished for. He did go on — no one ever found Andyabashed or ill at ease:

"Begor! but yer 'an'r lepped like a deer when ye heerd me shpake. Did ye think I was goin' to shoot ye? Faix, an' I thought that ye wor about to jump from aff iv the mountain into the say, like a shtag."

“Why, what do you know about stags, Andy? There are none inthis part of the country, are there?” Ithought Iwould drag a new subject across his path. The ruse of the red herring drawn across the scent succeeded. “Phwhat do I know iv shtags? Faix, I know this, that there does be plinty in me lard’s demesne beyant at Wistport. Shure, wan iv thim got out last autumn an’ nigh ruined me garden. He kem in at night an’ ate up all me cabbages an’ all the vigitables I’d got. I frightened him away a lot iv times, but he kem back all the same. At last I could shtand him no longer, and I wint meself an’ complained to the lard. He tould me he was very sorryfur the damage he done, ‘an’,’ sez he, ‘Andy, I think he’s a bankrup’,’ sez he, ‘an’ we must take his body.’ ‘How is that, me lard?’ sez I. Sez he, ‘I give him to ye, Andy. Do what ye like wid him.’ An’ wid that I wint home an’ I med a thrap iv a clothes-line wid a loop in it, an’ I put it betune two threes; and, shure enough in the night I got him.”

“And what did you do with him, Andy?” said I.

“Faith, surr, I shkinned him and ate him.” He said this just in the same tone in which he would speak of the most ordinary occurrence, leaving the impression on one’s mind that the skinning and eating were matters done at the moment and quite off-hand.

I fondly hoped that Andy’s mind was now in quite another state from his usual mental condition; but I hardly knew the man yet. He had the true humorist’s persistence, and before I was ready with another intellectual herring he was off on the original track.

“I thrust I didn’t dishturb yer ‘an’r. I know some gintlemin likes to luk at views and say nothin’. I’m tould that a young gintleman like yer ‘an’r might be up on top iva mountain like this, an’ he’d luk at the view so hard day afther day that he wouldn’t even shpake to a purty girrul — if there was wan forninst him all the time!”

“Then they lied to you, Andy.” I said this quite decisively.

“Faix, yer’an’r, an’ it’s glad lam to hear that same, for I wouldn’t like to think that a young gintleman was afraid of a girrul, however purty she might be.” “But, tell me, Andy,” I said, “what idiot could have started such an idea? And even if it was told to you, how could you be such a fool as to believe it?” “Me belave it! Surr, I didn’t belave a wurrd iv it — not until I met yer ‘an’r.” His face was quite grave, and I was not sorry to find him in a sober mood, for I wanted to have a serious chat with him. It struck me that he, having relatives at Knocknacar, might be able to give me some information about my unknown. “Until you met me, Andy! Surely I never gave you any ground for holding such a ridiculous idea.” “Begor, yer ‘an’r, but ye did. But p’r’aps I had betther not say any more — yer’ an’r mightn’t like it.” This both surprised and nettled me, and I was determined now to have it out, so I said, “You quite surprise me, Andy. What have I ever done? Do not be afraid; out with it,” for he kept looking at me in a timorous kind of way. “Well, then, yer ‘an’r, about poor Miss Norah.”

This was a surprise, but I wanted to know more.

“Well, Andy, what about her?” “Shure, an’ didn’t you refuse to shpake iv her intirely an’ sot on me fur only mintionin’ her — an’ she wan iv the purtiest girruls in the place?” “My dear Andy,” said I, “I thought I had explained to you last night all about that. I don’t suppose you quite understand; but it might do a girl in her position harm to be spoken about with a — a man like me.”

“Wid a man like you — an’ for why? Isn’t she as good a girrul as iver broke bread?” “Oh, it’s not that, Andy; people might think harm.”

“Think harrum! Phwhat harrum, an’ who’d think it?” “Oh, you don't understand; a man in your position can hardly know."

"But, yer 'an'r, I don't git comprehindin'. What harrum could there be, an' who'd think it? The people here is all somethin' iv me own position — workin' people — an' whin they knows a girrul is a good, dacent girrul, why should they think harrum because a nice young gintleman goes out iv his way to shpake to her? Doesn't he shpake to the quality like himself, an' no wan thinks any harrum ivayther iv them?"

Andy's simple, honest argument made me feel ashamed of the finer sophistries belonging to the more artificial existence of those of my own station.

"Sure, yer 'an'r, there isn't a bhoy in Connaught that wouldn't like to be shpoke of wid Miss Norah. She's that good, that even the nuns in Galway, where she was at school, loves her and thrates her like wan iv themselves, for all she's a Protestan'."

"My dear Andy," said I, "don't you think you're a little hard on me? You're putting me in the dock, and trying me for a series of offences that I never even thought of committing with regard to heroranyone else. Miss Norah may be an angel in petticoats, and I'm quite prepared to take it for granted that she is so; your word on the subject is quite enough for me. But just please to remember that I never set eyes on her in my life. The only time I was ever in her presence was when you were by yourself, and it was so dark that I could not see her, to help her when she fainted. Why, in the name of common-sense, you should keep holding her up to me, I do not understand."

"But yer'an'r said that it might do her harrum even to mintion her wid you."

"Oh, well, Andy, I give it up — it's no use trying to explain.

Either you wont understand, or I am unable to express myself properly."

"Surr, there can be only one harrum to a girrul from a gintleman" — he laid his hand on my arm, and said this impressively; whatever else he may have ever said injest, he was in grim earnest now— "an' that's whin he's a villain. Ye wouldn't do the black thrick, and desave a girrul that thrusted ye?"

"No, Andy, no! God forbid! I would rather go to the highest rock on some island there beyond, where the surf is loudest, and throw myself into the sea, than do such a thing. No, Andy; there are lots of men that hold such matters lightly, but Idon'tthink I'm one of them. Whatever sins I have, or may ever have upon my soul, I hope such a one as thatmW never be there."

All the comment Andy made was, "I thought so." Then the habitual quizzical look stole over his face again, and he said:

"There does be some that does fear braches iv promise. Mind ye, a man has to be mighty careful on the subiect, for some weemin is that cute there's no bein' up to them."

Andy's sudden change to this new theme was a little embarrassing, since the idea leading to it — or rather preceding it — had been one purely personal to myself; but he was off, and I thought it better that he should go on.

"Indeed!" said I. "Yes, surr. Oh my, but they're cute. The first thing that a girrul does when a man looks twice at her, is t' ask him to write her a letther, an' thin she has him — tight."

"How so, Andy?" "Well, ye see, surr, when you're writin' a letther to a girrul, ye can't begin widouta 'My dear' ora 'Mydarlin'', an' thin she has the grip iv the law onto ye! An' ye do be badgered be the counsillors, an' ye do be frowned at be the judge, an' ye do be laughed at be the people, an' ye do have to pay yer money, an' there ye are!" "I say, Andy," said I, "I think you must have been in trouble yourself in that way; you seem to have it all off pat."

"Oh, throth, not me, yer 'an'r. Glory be to God! but I niver was a defindant in me life — an' more betoken, I don't want to be — but I was wance a witness in a case ivthe kind."

"And what did you witness?" "Faix, I was called to prove that I seen the gintleman's arrum around the girrul's waist. The counsillors made a deal out iv that — just as if it warn't only manners to hould up a girrul on a car!"

"What was the case, Andy? Tell me all about it." I did not mind his waiting, as it gave me an excuse for stavinq on the top of the hill. I knew I could easily qet rid of him when she came — if she came — by sending him on a message.

"Well, this was a young woman what had an action agin Shquire Murphy, iv Ballynashoughlin himself — a woman as was no more nor a mere simple governess!" It would be impossible to convey the depth of social unimportance conveyed by his tone and manner; and coming from a man of "shreds and patches," it was more than comic. Andy had his good suit of frieze and homespun; but while he was on mountain duty, he spared these and appeared almost in the guise of a scarecrow.

"Well, what happened?"

"Faix, whin she tould hershtory the shquire's councillor luked up at the jury, an' he whispered a wurrd to the shquire and his 'an'rwrote outa shlip iv paperan' handed it to him, an' the councillor ups an' says he: 'Me lard and gintlemin iv the jury, me client is prepared to have the honor iv the lady's hand if she will so, for let by-gones be by-gones.' An', sure enough, theywas married on the

Sunday next four weeks; an' there she is nowdhrivin' him about the counthry in her pony-shay, an' all the quality comin' to tay in the garden, an' she as affable as iver to all the farmers round. Aye, an' be the hokey, the shquire himself sez that it was a good day for him whin he sot eyes on her first, an' that he don't know why he was such a damn fool as iver to thry to say 'no' to her, or to wish it."

"Quite a tale with a moral, Andy. Bravo, Mrs. Murphy."

"A morial is it? Now, may I make bould to ask yer 'an'r what morial ye take out iv it?"

"The moral, Andy, that I see is, When you see the right woman go for herforall you're worth, and thank God for giving you the chance." Andyjumped up and gave me a great slap on the back. "Hurroo! more power to yer elbow! but it's a bhoy afther me own h'arrty' are. I big yer pardon, surr, for the liberty; but it's mighty glad lam."

"Granted, Andy; I like a man to be hearty, and you certainlyare. But whyare you so glad about me?" "Because I like yer'an'r. Shure in all me life I niver see so much iv a young gentleman as I've done iv yer 'an'r. Surr, I'm an ould man compared wid ye — I'm the beginnin' iv wan, at any rate — an' I'd like to give ye a wurrd iv advice; git marrid while ye can! I tell ye this, surr, it's not whin the hair is beginnin' to git thin on to the top ivyer head that a nice young girrul 'ill love ye for yerself. It's the people that goes all their lives makin' moneyand lukin' after all kinds iv things that's no kind iv use to thim, that makes the mishtake. Suppose ye do git marrid when ye're ould and bald, an' yer legs is shaky, an' ye want to be let sit close to the fire in the warrum corner, an' ye've lashins iv money that ye don't know what to do wid! Do you think that it's thin that yer wives does be dhramin' ivye all the time and worshippin' the ground ye thrid? Not a bit iv it! They do be wantin' — aye and thryin' too —

to help God away wid ye!” “Andy,” said I, “you preach, on a practical text, a sermon that any and every young man ought to hear.” I thought I saw an opening here for gaining some information, and at once jumped in.

“By Jove! you set me off wishing to marry! Tell me, is there any pretty girl in this neighborhood that would suit a young man like me?” “Oho! begor, there’s girruls enough to shute any man.”

“Aye, Andy — but pretty girls!” “Well surr, thatdepinds. Now what might be yer’anVs idea iva purtygirrul?” “My dear Andy, there are so many different kinds of prettiness that it is hard to say.” “Faix, an’ I’ll tell ye if there’s a girrul to shute in the counthry, for bedad I think I’ve seen thim all. But you must let me know what would shute ye best?” “How can I well tell that, Andy, when I don’t know myself? Show me the girl, and I’ll very soon tell you.” “Unless I was to ax yer’an’r questions;” this was said very slyly.

“Go on, Andy; there is nothing like the Socratic method.” “Very well, thin; I’ll ax two kinds iv things, an’ yer’an’r will tell me which ye’d like the best.” “All right, go on.” “Long or short?” “Tall; not short, certainly.” “Fat or lane?”

“Fie! fie! Andy, for shame; you talk as if they were cattle or pigs.”

“Begor, there’s only wan kind ivfatan’ lane that I knows of; but avye like I’ll call it thick or thin; which is it?” “Not too fat, but certainly not skinny.” Andy held up his hands in mock horror:

“Yer ‘an’r shpakes as if ye was talkin’ iv powlthry.” “I mean, Andy,” said I, with a certain sense of shame, “she is not to be either too fat or too lean, as you put it.” “Ye mane ‘shtreakyT “Streaky!” said I, “what do you mean?” He answered promptly:

“Shtreaky — thick an’ thin — like belly bacon.” I said nothing. I felt certain it would be useless and out of place. He went on: “Nixt, fair or dark?” “Dark, by all means.” “Dark be it, surr. What kind iveyes might she have?” “Ah! eyes like darkness on the bosom of the azure deep!”

“Musha! but that’s a quare kind iveye fur a girrul to have intirely! Is she to be all dark, surr, or only the hair of her?” “I don’t mean a nigger, Andy!” I thought I would be even with him for once in a way. He laughed heartily. “Oh, my, but that’s a good wan. Be the hokey, a girrul can be dark enough fur any man widout bein’ a naygur. Glory be to God, but I niver seen a faymale naygur meself, but I suppose there’s such things; God’s very good to all his craythurs! But, barrin’ naygurs, must she be all dark?” “Well, not of necessity, but I certainly preferwhat we call a brunette.”

“A bru-net. What’s that now? I’ve heerd a wheen o’ quare things in me time, but I niver heerd a woman called that before.”

I tried to explain the term; he seemed to understand, but his only comment was: “Well, God is very good,” and then went on with his queries.

“How might she be dressed?” he looked very sly as he asked the question. “Simply. The dress is not particular — that can easily be altered. For myself, just at present, I should like her in the dress they all wear here, some pretty kind of body and a red petticoat.” “Thrue for ye,” said Andy. Then he went over the list, ticking off the items on his fingers as he went along: “A long, dark girrul, like belly bakin, but not a naygur, some kind iva net, an’ wid a rid petticoat, an’ a quare kind iv an eye! Is that the kind iv a girrul that yer ‘an’r wants to set yer eyes on?”

“Well,” said I, “item by item, as you explain them, Andy, the description is correct; but I must say that never in my life did I know a man to so knock the bottom out of romance as you have done in summing up the lady’s charms.” “Her charrums, is it? Be the powers! I only tuk what yer ‘an’r tould me. An” so that’s the girrul that id shute yer?” “Yes, Andy, I think she would.” I waited in expectation, but he said nothing. So I jogged his memory. “Well?” He looked at me in a most peculiar manner, and said, slowly and impressively: “Thin I can sahtisfy yer ‘an’r. There’s no such girrul in all Knocknacar!” I smiled a smile of triumph: “You’re wrong for once, Andy. I saw such a girl only yesterday, here on the top of this mountain, just where we’re sitting now.” Andyjumped up as if he had been sitting on an ant-hill, and had suddenly been made aware of it. He looked all round in a frightened way, but I could see that he was only acting, and said: “Glory be to God! but maybe it’s the fairies, it was, or the pixies! Shure, they do say that there’s lots an’ lots an’ lashins ivthem on this hill. Don’t ye have nothin’ to say to thim, surr! There’s only sorra follys thim. Take an ould man’s advice, an’ don’t come up here any more. The shpot is dangerous to ye. If ye want to see a fine girrul go to Shleenanaher, an’ have a good luk at Miss Norah in the daylight.”

“Oh, bother Miss Norah!” said I. “Get along with you, do! I think you’ve got Miss Norah on the brain, or perhaps you’re in love with her yourself.” Andy murmured, sotto voce, but manifestly for me to hear: “Begor, I am, like the rist iv the bhoys, av course!” Here I looked at my watch, and found it was three o’clock, so thought it was time to get rid of him. “Here,” said I, “run down to the men at the cutting and tell them that I’m coming down presently to measure up their work, as Mr. Sutherland will want to know how they’ve got on.”

Andy moved off. Before going, however, he had something to say, as usual: “Tell me, Misther Art” — this new name startled me, Andy had evidently taken me into his public family— “do ye think Misther Dick” — this was another surprise— “has an eve on Miss Norah?” There was a real shock this time. “I see him lukin’ at herwance or twice as if he’d like to ate her; but, bedad, it’s no use if he has, for she wouldn’t luk at him. No wondher, an’ him helpin’ to be takin’ her father’s houldin’ away from him.” I could not answer Andy’s question as to poor old Dick’s feelings, for such was his secret and not mine; but I determined not to let there be any misapprehension regarding his having a hand in Murdock’s dirty work, so I spoke hotly:

“You tell any one that dares to say that Dick Sutherland has any act or part, good or bad, large or small, in that dirty ruffian’s dishonorable conduct, that he is either a knave or a fool, at any rate he is a liar. Dick is simply a man of science engaged by Murdock, as any other man of science might be, to look after some operations in regard to his bog.” Andy’s comment was made sotto voce, so I thought it better not to notice it.

“Musha! but the bogs ivall kinds is gettin’ mixed up quarely. Here’s another iv them. Misther Dick is engaged to luk afther the bogs. An’ so he does, but his eyes goes wandherin’ among thim. There does be bogs ivall kinds now all over these parts. It’s quare times we’re in, or I’m gettin’ ould!”

With this Parthian shaft Andy took himself down the hill, and presently I saw the good effects of his presence in stimulating the workmen to more ardent endeavours, for they all leaned on their spades while he told them a long story, which ended in a tumult of laughter. I might have enjoyed the man’s fun, but I was in no laughing humor. I had got anxious long ago because she had not visited the hill-top. I looked all round, but could see no sign of her anywhere. I waited and waited, and the time truly went on leaden wings. The afternoon sun smote the hill-top with its glare, more oppressive always than even the noontide heat. I lingered on and lingered still, and hope died within me. When six o'clock had come I felt that there was no more chance for me that day; so I went sadly down the hill, and, after a glance for Dick's sake at the cutting, sought the sheebeen where Andy had the horse ready harnessed in the car. I assumed as cheerful an aspect as I could, and flattered myself that I carried off the occasion very well. It was not at all flattering, however, to my histrionic powers to hear Andy, as we were driving off, whisper in answer to a remark deploring how sad I looked, made by the old lady who kept the sheebeen: "Whisht! Don't appear to notice him, orye'll dhrive him mad. Me opinion is that he's been wandherin' on the mountain too long, an' tamperin' wid the rings on the grass — you know — an' that he has seen the fairies!" Then he said aloud and ostentatiously: "Gee up, ye old corn-crake! Ye ought to be fresh enough; ye've niver left the fut iv the hill all the day." Then turning to me, "An' sure, surr, it's goin' to the top that takes it out ivwan — aythera horse or a man." I made no answer, and in silence we drove to Carnaclif, where Ifound Dick impatiently waiting dinnerforme. I was glad to find that he was full of queries concerning the cutting, for it saved me from the consideration of subjects more difficult to answer satisfactorily. Fortunately I was able to give a good account of the time spent, for the work done had far exceeded my expectations. I thought that Dick was in much better spirits than he had been; but it was not until the subject of the bog at Knocknacar was completely exhausted that I got any clew on the subject. I then asked Dick if he had had a good time at Shleenanaher?

"Yes!" he answered. "Thank God, the work is nearly done! We went over the whole place to-day, and there was only one indication of iron. This was in the bog just beside an elbow where Joyce's land — his present land — touches ours — no, I mean on Murdock's, the scoundrel!" He was quite angry with himself for using the word "ours" even accidentally.

"And has anything come of it?" I asked him. "Nothing. Now that he knows it is there, he would not let me go near it on any account. I'm in hopes he'll quarrel with me soon in order to get rid of me, so that he may try by himself to fish it — whatever it may be — out of the bog. If he does quarrel with me! Well, I only hope he will; I have been longing for weeks past to get a chance at him. Then she'll believe, perhaps—" He stopped.

"You saw her to-day, Dick!"

"How did you know that?"

"Because you look so happy, old man."

"Yes, I did see her; but only for a moment. She drove up in the middle of the day, and I saw her go up to the new house. But she didn't even see me," and his face fell. Presently he asked: "You didn't see your girl?" "No, Dick, I did not. But how did you know?" "I saw it in your face when you came in." We sat and smoked in silence. The interruption came in the shape of Andy. "I suppose, Masther Art, the same agin to-morra — unless ye'd like me to bring ye wid Masther Dick to see Shleenanaher; ye know the shpot, surr — where Miss Norah is!"

He grinned, and as we said nothing, made his exit.

CHAPTER VIII

With renewed hope I set out in the morning for Knocknacar.

It is one of the many privileges of youth that a few hours' sleep will change the darkest aspect of the entire universe to one of the rosiest tint. Since the previous evening, sleeping and waking, my mind had been framing reasons and excuses for the absence of It was a perpetual grief to me that I did not even know her name. The journey to the mountain seemed longer than usual; but, even at the time, this seemed to me only natural under the circumstances. Andy was to-day seemingly saturated or overwhelmed with a superstitious gravity. Without laying any personal basis for his remarks, but accepting as a stand-point his own remark of the previous evening concerning my having seen a fairy, he proceeded to develop his fears on the subject. I will do him the justice to saythat his knowledge of folk-lore was immense, and that nothing but a gigantic memory for detail, cultivated to the full, or else an equally stupendous imagination working on the facts that momentarily came before his view, could have enabled him to keep up such a flow of narrative and legend. The general result to me was, that if I had been inclined to believe such matters I would have remained under the impression that, although the whole seaboard, with adjacent mountains, from Westport to Galway, was in a state of plethora as regards uncanny existences, Knocknacar, as a habitat for such, easily bore off the palm. Indeed, that remarkable mountain must have been a solid mass of gnomes, fairies, pixies, leprachauns, and all genii, species and varieties of the same. No Chicago grain elevator in the early days of a wheat corner could have been more solidly packed. It would seem that so many inhabitants had been allured by fairies, and consequently had mysteriously disappeared, that this method of minimisation of the census must have formed a distinct drain on the local population, which, by the way, did not seem to be excessive.

I reserved to myself the right of interrogating Andy on this subject later in the day, if, unhappily, there should be any opportunity. Now that we had drawn near the hill, my fears began to return.

While Andy stabled the mare I went to the cutting and found the men already at work. During the night there had evidently been a considerable drainage from the cutting, not from the bog, but entirely local. This was now Friday morning, and I thought that if equal progress were made in the two days, it would be quite necessary that Dick should see the working on Sunday, and advise before proceeding further.

As I knew that gossip and the requirements of his horse would keep Andy away fora while, Idetermined to take advantage of his absence to run up to the top of the hill, just to make sure that no one was there. It did not take long to get up, but when I arrived there was no reward, except in the shape of a very magnificent view. The weather was evidently changing, for great clouds seemed to gather from the west and south, and faraway overthe distant rim of the horizon the sky was as dark as night. Still, the clouds were not hurrying as before a storm, and the gloom did not seem to have come shoreward as yet; it was rather a presage of prolonged bad weather than bad itself. I did not remain long, as I wished to escape Andy's scrutiny. Indeed, as I descended the hill I began to think that Andy had become like the "Old Man of the Sea," and that my own experience seemed likely to rival that of Sindbad. When I arrived at the cutting I found Andy already seated, enjoying his pipe. When he saw me he looked up with a grin, and said audibly: "The Good

People don't seem to be workin' so 'arly in the mornin'. Here he is safe an' sound among us." That was a very long day. Whenever I thought I could do so, without attracting too much attention, I strolled to the top of the hill, but only to suffera new disappointment. At dinner-time I went up and sat all the time. I was bitterly disappointed, and also began to be seriously alarmed. I seemed to have lost my Unknown. When the men got back to their work, and I saw Andy beginning to climb the hill in an artless, purposeless manner, I thought I would kill two birds with one stone, and, while avoiding my incubus, make some inquiries. As I could easily see from the top of the hill, there were only a few houses all told in the little hamlet; and including those most isolated, there were not twenty in all. Of these I had been in the sheebeen and in old Sullivan's, so that a stroll of an hour or two, properly organised, would cover the whole ground; and so I set out on my task to try and get some sight or report of my unknown. I knew I could always get an opportunity of opening conversation by asking for a light for my cigar.

It was a profitless task. Two hours after I had started I returned to the top of the hill as ignorant as I had gone, and the richer only by some dozen or more drinks of milk, for I found that the acceptance of some form of hospitality was an easy opening to general conversation. The top was still empty, but I had not been there a quarter of an hour when I was joined by Andy. His first remark was evidently calculated to set me at ease: "Begor, yer'an'r comes to the top ivthis hill nigh as often as I do meself." I felt that my answer was inconsequential as well as ill- tempered:

"Well, why on earth, Andy, do you come so often? Surely there is no need to come, unless you like it." "Faix, I came this time lest yer'an'r might feel lonely. I niver seea manyitbe himself on top iva hill that he didn't want a companion iv some kind or another." "Andy," I remarked, as I thought, rather cuttingly, "you judge life and men too much by your own experience. There are people and emotions which are quite out of your scope — far too high, or perhaps too low, for your psychic or intellectual grasp." Andy was quite unabashed. He looked at me admiringly.

"It's a pity yer'an'r isn't a mimber iv Parlyment. Shure, wid a flow iv language like that ye could do anythin'!" As satire was no use, I thought I would draw him out on the subject of the fairies and pixies. "I suppose you were looking for more fairies; the supply you had this morning was hardly enough to suit you, was it?"

"Begor, it's meself is not the only wan that does be lukin' for the fairies!" and he grinned. "Well, I must say, Andy, you seem to have a good supply on hand. Indeed, it seems to me that if there were any more fairies to be located on this hill it would have to be enlarged, for it's pretty solid with them already, as far as I can gather."

"Augh! there's room for wan more! I'm tould there's wan missin' since ere yistherday." It was no good trying to beat Andy at this game, so I gave it up and sat silent. After a while he asked me: "Will I be dhrivin' yer 'an'r over to Knockcalltecrore?" "Why do you ask me?" "I'm thinking it's glad yer'an'r will be to see Miss Norah."

"Upon my soul, Andy, you are too bad. A joke is a joke, but there are limits to it; and I don't let any man joke with me when I prefer not. If you want to talk of your Miss Norah, go and talk to Mr. Sutherland about her. He's there everyday and can make use of your aid. Why on earth do you single me out as your father-confessor? You're unfair to the girl, after all, for if I ever do see her I'm prepared to hate her." "Ah! yer 'an'r wouldn't be that hard! What harrum has the poor crathur done thatye'd hate her — a thing no mortial man iver done yit?" "Oh, go on! don't bother me any more; I think it's about time we were getting home. You go down to the sheebeen and rattle up that old corn-crake of yours; I'll come down presently and see how the work goes on." He went off, but came back as usual; I could have thrown something at him. "Take me advice, surr: pay a visit to Shleenanaher, an' see Miss Norah," and he hurried down the hill. His going did me no good; no one came, and after a lingering glance around, and noting the gathering of the rain clouds, I descended the hill. When I got up on the car I was not at all in a talkative humor, and said but little to the group surrounding me. I heard Andy account for it to them: "Whisht! don't notice his 'anVs silence! It's stupid wid shmokin' he is. He lit no less norsiventeen cigars this blessed day. Ax the neighbors av ye doubt me. Gee up!"

The evening was spent with Dick as the last had been. I knew that he had seen his girl; he knew that I had not seen mine, but neither had anything to tell. Before parting he told me that he expected to shortly finish his work at Knockcalltecrore, and asked me if I would come over. "Do come," he said, when I expressed a doubt; "do come, I may want a witness;" so I promised to go. Andy had on his best suit, and a clean wash, when he met us smiling in the early morning. "Look at him," I said; "wouldn't you know he was going to meet his best girl?" "Begor," he answered, "mayhap we'll all do that same!" It was only ten o'clock when we arrived at Knockcalltecrore, and went up the boreen to Murdock's new farm. The Gombeen Man was standing at the gate with his watch in his hand. When we came up, he said: "I feared you would be late. It's just conthract time now. Hadn't ye betther say good-bye to your frind an' git to work? " He was so transparently inclined to be rude, and possibly to pick a quarrel, that I whispered a warning to Dick. To my great satisfaction he whispered back: “I see he wants to quarrel; nothing in the world will make me lose temper to-day.” Then he took out his pocket-book, searched for and found a folded paper. Opening this he read: “‘and the said Richard Sutherland shall be at liberty to make use of such assistant as he may choose or appoint whensoever he may wish during the said engagement at his own expense.’ You see, Mr. Murdock, I am quite within the four walls of the agreement, and exercise my right. I now tell you formally that Mr. Arthur Severn has kindly undertaken to assist me for to-day.” Murdock glared at him for a minute, and then opened the gate and said:

“Come in, gintlemin.” We entered. “Now, Mr. Murdock!” said Dick, briskly, “what do you wish done to-day? Shall we make further examination of the bog where the iron indication is, or shall we finish the survey of the rest of the land?”

“Finish the rough survey.” The operation was much less complicated than when we had examined the bog. We simply “quartered” the land, as the constabulary say when they make search for hidden arms; and taking it bit by bit, passed the magnet over its surface. We had the usual finds of nails, horseshoes, and scrap-iron, but no result of importance. The last place we examined was the house. It was a much better built and more roomy structure than the one he had left. It was not, however, like the other, built on a rock, but in a sheltered hollow. Dick pointed out this to me, and remarked: “I don’t know but that Joyce is better off, all told, in the exchange. I wouldn’t care myself to live in a house built in a place like this, and directly in the track of the bog.”

“Not even,” said I, “if Norah was living in it too?” “Ah, that’s another thing. With Norah I’d take my chance, and live in the bog itself, if I could get no other place." When this happened our day's work was nearly done, and very soon we took our leave for the evening, Murdock saying, as I thought, rather offensively: "Now, you, sir, be sure to be here in time on Monday morning."

"All right," said Dick, nonchalantly; and we passed out.

In the boreen he said to me: "Let us stroll up this way, Art," and we walked up the hill towards Joyce's house, Murdock coming down to his gate and looking at us. When we came to Joyce's gate we stopped. There was no sign of Norah; but Joyce himself stood at his door. I was opening the gate when he came forward.

"Good-evening, Mr. Joyce," said I. "How is your arm? I hope quite well by this time. Perhaps you don't remember me. I had the pleasure of giving you a seat up here in my car, from Mrs. Kelligan's, the night of the storm." "I remember well," he said; "and I was thankful to you, for I was in trouble that night; it's all done now." And he looked round the land with a sneer, and then he looked yearningly towards his old farm. "Let me introduce myfriend, Mr. Sutherland," said I. "I ax yer pardon, sir, an' I don't wish to be rude; but I don't want to know him. He's no frind to me and mine!"

Dick's honest, manly face grew red with shame. I thought he was going to say something angrily, so cut in as quickly as I could: "You are sadly mistaken, Mr. Joyce; Dick Sutherland is too good a gentleman to do wrong to you or any man. How can you think such a thing?" "A man what consorts wid me enemy can be no frind of mine!"

"But he doesn't consort with him; he hates him. He was simply engaged to make certain investigations for him as a scientific man. Why, I don't suppose you yourself hate Murdock more than Dick does." "Thin I ax yer pardon, sir," said Joyce. "I like to wrong no man, an’ I’m glad to be set right.”

Things were going admirably, and we were all beginning to feel at ease, when we saw Andy approach. I groaned in spirit; Andy was gradually taking shape to me as an evil genius. He approached, and making his best bow, said:

“Fine evenin’, Misther Joyce. I hope yerarrum is betther; an’ how is Miss Norah?” “Thank ye kindly, Andy; both me arm and the girl’s well.” “Is she widin?” “No; she wint this mornin’ to stay over Monday in the convent. Poor girl, she’s broken-hearted, lavin’ her home and gettin’ settled here. I med the changin’ as light for her as I could; but weemin takes things to heart more nor min does, an’ that’s bad enough, God knows!” “Thrue for ye,” said Andy. “This gintleman here, Mashter Art, says he hasn’t seen her since the night she met us below in the dark.” “I hope,” said Joyce, “you’ll look in and see us, if you’re in these parts, sir, whin she comes back. I know she thought a dale of your kindness to me that night.” “I’ll be here for some days, and I’ll certainly come, if I may.”

“And I hope I may come, too, Mr. Joyce,” said Dick, “now that you know me.”

“Ye’ll be welkim, sir.” We all shook hands, coming away; but as we turned to go home, at the gate we had a surprise. There, in the boreen, stood Murdock, livid with fury. He attacked Dick with a tirade of the utmost virulence. He called him every name he could lay his tongue to — traitor, liar, thief, and, indeed, exhausted the whole terminology of abuse, and accused him of stealing his secrets and of betraying his trust. Dick bore the ordeal splendidly; he never turned a hair, but calmly went on smoking his cigar. When Murdock had somewhat exhausted himself and stopped, he said, calmly:

“My good fellow, now that your ill-manners are exhausted, perhaps you will tell me what it is all about?”

Whereupon Murdock opened again the phials of his wrath. This time he dragged us all into it — I had been brought in as a spy, to help in betraying him, and Joyce had suborned him to the act of treachery. For myself I fired up at once, and would have struck him, only Dick had laid his hand on me, and in a whisper cautioned me to desist. “Easy, old man, easy! Don’t spoil a good position. What does it matter what a man like that can say? Give him rope enough; we’ll have our turn in time, don’t fear!” I held back, but unfortunately Joyce pressed forward. He had his say pretty plainly.

“What do ye mane, ye ill-tongued scoundhrel, comin’ here to make a quarrel? Why don’t ye shtay on the land you have robbed from me, and lave us alone? I am not like these gintlemen here, that can afford to hould their tongues and despise ye; I’m a man like yerself, though I hope I’m not the wolf that ye are — fattenin’ on the blood of the poor! How dare you say I suborned any one — me that never told a lie, or done a dirty thing in me life? I tell you, Murtagh Murdock, I put my mark upon ye once — I see it now comin’ up white through the red of yer passion! Don’t provoke me further, or I’ll put another mark on ye that ye’ll carry to yer grave!”

No one said a word more. Murdock moved off and entered his own house; Dick and I said “good-night” to Joyce again, and went down the boreen.

CHAPTER IX

The following week was a time to me of absolute bitterness. I went each day to Knocknacar, where the cutting was proceeding at a rapid rate. I haunted the hilltop, but without the slightest result. Dick had walked over with me on Sunday, and had been rejoiced at the progress made; he said that if all went well we could about Friday next actually cut into the bog. Already there was a distinct infiltration through the cutting, and we discussed the best means to achieve the last few feet of the work so as not in any way to endanger the safety of the men worki ng. All this time Dick was in good spirits. His meeting with Norah's father had taken a great and harrowing weight off his mind, and to him all things were now possible in the future. He tried his best to console me for my disappointment. He was full of hope — indeed he refused to see anything but a delay, and I could see that in his secret heart he was not altogether sorry that my love affair had received a temporary check. This belief was emphasised by the tendency of certain of his remarks to the effect that marriages between persons of unequal social status were inadvisable — he, dear old fellow, seemingly in his transparent honesty unaware that he was laying himself out with all his power to violate his own principles.

But all the time I was simply heart-broken. To say that I was consumed with a burning anxiety would be to understate the matter; I was simply in a fever. I could neither eat nor sleep satisfactorily, and, sleeping or waking, my brain was in a whirl of doubts, conjectures, fears, and hopes. The most difficult part to bear was my utter inability to do anything. I could not proclaim my love or my loss on the hill-top; I did not know where to make inquiries, and I had no idea who to inquire for. I did not even like to tell Dick the full extent of my woes. Love has a modesty of its own, whose lines are boldly drawn, and whose rules are stern. On more than one occasion I left the hotel secretly — after having ostensibly retired for the night — and wended my way to Knocknacar. As I passed through the sleeping country I heard the dogs bark in the cottages as I went by, but little other sound I ever heard except the booming of the distant sea. On more than one of these occasions I was drenched with rain, for the weather had now become thoroughly unsettled. But I heeded it not; indeed the physical discomfort — when I felt it — was in some measure an anodyne to the torture of my restless soul. I always managed to get back before daylight, so as to avoid any questioning. After three or four days, however, the "boots" of the hotel began evidently to notice the state of my clothes and boots, and ventured to speak to me. He cautioned me against going out too much alone at night, as there were two dangers: one from the moonlighters who now and again raided the district, and who, being composed of the scum of the country-side— "corner-boys" and loafers of all kinds — would be only too glad to find an unexpected victim to rob; and the other, lest in wandering about I should get into trouble with the police under suspicion of being one of these very ruffians.

The latter difficulty seemed to me to be even more obnoxious than the former; and to avoid any suspicion I thought it best to make my night wanderings known to all. Accordingly, I asked Mrs. Keating to have some milk and bread and butter left in my room each night, as I would probably require something after my late walk. When she expressed surprise as to my movements, I told her that I was making a study of the beauty of the country by night, and was much interested in moonlight effects. This last was an unhappy setting forth of my desires, for it went round in a whisper among the servants and others outside the hotel, until at last it reached the ears of an astute Ulster-born policeman, from whom I was much surprised to receive a visit one morning. I asked him to what the honor was due.

His answer spoke for itself: “From information received, A come to talk till ye regardin’ the interest ye profess to take in moonlichtin’.”

“What on earth do you mean?” I asked. “A hear ye’re a stranger in these parts; an’ as ye might take away a wrong impression weth ye, A thenk it ma duty to tell ye that the people round here are nothin’ more nor less than leears, an’ that ye mustn’t believe a single word they say.”

“Really,” said I, “I am quite in the dark. Do try and explain. Tell me what it is all about.” “Why, A larn that ye’re always out at nicht all over the country, and that ye’ve openly told people here that ye’re interested in moonlichtin’.”

“My dear sir, some one is quite mad. I never said such a thing — indeed, I don’t know anything about moonlighting.”

“Then why do ye go out at nicht?”

“Simply to see the country at night — to look at the views — to enjoy the effects of moonlight.” “There ye are, ye see — ye enjoy the moonlicht effect.”

“Good lord! I mean the view — the purely aesthetic effect — the chiaroscuro — the pretty pictures!”

“Oh, aye! A see now — A ken weel! Then A needn’t trouble ye further. But let ma tell ye that it’s a dangerous practice to walk out be nicht. There’s many a man in these parts watched and laid for. Why in Knockcalltecrore there’s one man that’s in danger all the time. An’ as for ye — why ye’d better be careful that yer nicht wanderins doesn't bring ye ento trouble," and he went away.

As last I got so miserable about my own love affair that I thought I might do a good turn to Dick; and so I determined to try to buy from Murdock his holding on Knockcalltecrore, and then to give it to myfriend, as I felt that the possession of the place, with power to re-exchange with Joyce, would in no way militate against his interests with Norah.

With this object in view I went out one afternoon to Knockcalltecrore, when I knew that Dick had arranged to visit the cutting at Knocknacar. I did not tell any one where I was going, and took good care that Andy went with Dick. I had acquired a dread of that astute gentleman's inferences.

It was well in the afternoon when I got to Knockcalltecrore. Murdock was out at the edge of the bog making some investigations on his own account with the aid of the magnets. He flew into a great rage when he saw me, and roundly accused me of coming to spy upon him. I disclaimed any such meanness, and told him that he should be ashamed of such a suspicion. It was not my cue to quarrel with him, so I restrained myself as well as I could, and quietly told him that I had come on a matter of business.

He was anxious to get me away from the bog, and took me into the house. Here I broached my subject to him, for I knew he was too astute a man for my going round the question to be of any use. At first my offer was a confirmation of his suspicion of me as a spy; and, indeed, he did not burke this aspect of the question in expressing his opinion. "Oh, aye!" he sneered. "Isn't it likely I'm goin' to give up me land to ye, so that ye may hand it over to Mr. Sutherland — an' him havin' saycrets from me all the time — maybe knowin' where what I want to find is hid. Didn't I know it's a thraitor he is, an' ye a shpy.” “Dick Sutherland is no traitor and I am no spy. I wouldn’t hear such words from anyone else; but, unfortunately, I know already that your ideas regarding us both are so hopelessly wrong that it’s no use trying to alterthem. I simply came here to make you an offer to buy this piece of land. The place is a pretty one, and I, or some friend of mine, may like some day to put up a house here. Of course if you don’t want to sell there’s an end to the matter; but do try to keep a decent tongue in your head — if you can.” My speech had evidently some effect on him, for he said:

“I didn’t mane any offinse — an’ as forsellin’, I’d sell anything in the wurrld av I got me price fur it!” “Well, why not enter on this matter? You’re a man of the world, and so am 1.1 want to buy; I have money and can afford to give a good price, as it is a fancy with me. What objection have you to sell?” “Ye know well enough I’ll not sell — notyit, at all evints. I wouldn’t part wid a perch ivthis land fur all ye cud offer — not till I’m done wid me sarch. I mane to get what I’m lukin’ fur — if it’s there!”

“I quite understand. Well, I am prepared to meet you in the matter. I am willing to purchase the land — it to be given over to me at whatever time you may choose to name. Would a year suit you to make your investigations?” He thought for a moment; then took out an old letter, and on the back of it made some calculations. Then he said: “I suppose ye’d pay the money down at wanst?” “Certainly,” said I, “the very day I get possession.” I had intended paying the money down, and waiting for possession as a sort of inducement to him to close with me; but there was so much greed in his manner that I saw I would do better by holding off payment until I got possession. Myjudgment was correct, for his answer surprised me:

“A month ‘II do what I wanted — or, to be certain, say five weeks from to-day. But the money would have to be payed to the mi nit."

"Certainly," said I. "Suit yourself as to time, and let me know the terms, so that I can see if we agree. I suppose you will want to see your attorney, so name anydayto suit you.'

"I'm me own attorney. Do ye think I'd thrust any iv them wid me affairs? Whin I have a lawsuit I'll have thim, but not before. If ye want to know me price I'll tell it to ye now."

"Go on," said I, concealing my delight as well as I could.

He accordingly named a sum which, to me, accustomed only as I had hitherto been to the price of land in a good English county, seemed very small indeed.

He evidently thought he was driving a hard bargain, for he said, with a cunning look:

"I suppose ye'II want to see lawyers and the like. So you may; but only to see that ye get ye bargin hard and fast. I'll not discuss the terrums wid anyone else; an' if y accept, ye must sign me a writin' now, that ye buy me land right here, an' that ye'll pay the money widin a month before ye take possession on the day we fix."

"All right," said I. "That will suit me quite well. Make out your paper in duplicate, and we will both sign. Of course, you must put in a clause guaranteeing title, and allowing the deed to be made with the approval of my solicitor, not as to value, but as to form and completeness."

"That's fair!" he said, and sat down to draw up his papers. He was evidently a bit of a lawyer — a gombeen man must be — and he knew the practical matters of law affecting things in which he was himself interested. His memorandum of agreement was, so far as I could judge, quite complete, and as concise as possible. He designated the land sold, and named the price which was to be paid into the account in his name in the Galway Bank before twelve o'clock noon on September 27th, or which might be paid in at an earlier date, with the deduction of two percent, per annum as discount — in which case the receipt was to be given in full, and an undertaking to give possession at the appointed time, namely Wednesday, October 27th, at twelve o'clock noon. We both signed the memorandum, he having sent the old woman who came up from the village to cook for him for the old school-master to witness the signatures. I arranged that when I should have seen my solicitor and have had the deed properly drafted, I would see him again. I then came away, and got back at the hotel a little while before Dick arrived.

Dick was in great spirits; his experiment with the bog had been quite successful. The cutting had advanced so far that the clay wall hemming in the bog was actually weakened, and with a mining cartridge, prepared for the purpose, he had blown up the last bit of bank remaining. The bog had straightway begun to pour into the opening, not merely from the top, but simultaneously to the whole depth of the cutting. "The experience of that first half-hour of the rush," went on Dick, "was simply invaluable. I do wish you had been there, old fellow. It was in itself a lesson on bogs and their reclamation."

It just suited my purpose that he should do all the talking at present, so I asked him to explain all that happened. He went on:

"The moment the cartridge exploded the whole of the small clay bank remaining was knocked to bits and was carried away by the first rush. There had evidently been a considerable accumulation of water just behind the bank; and at the first rush this swept through the cutting and washed it clean. Then the bog at the top, and the water in the middle, and the ooze below all struggled for the opening. I could see that the soft part of the bog actually floated. Naturally the water got away first. The bog proper, which was floating, jammed in the opening, and the ooze began to drain out below it. Of course, this was only the first rush; it will be running for days before things begin to settle; and then we shall be able to make some openings in the bog and see if my theories are tenable, in so far as the solidification is concerned, lam only disappointed in one thing."

"What is that?" "That it will not enlighten us much regarding the bog at Shleenanaher, for I cannot find any indication here of a shelf of rock such as I imagine to be at the basis of the Shifting Bog. If I had had time I would like to have made a cutting into some of the waste where the bog had originally been. I dare say that Joyce would let me try now if I asked him."

I had my own fun out of my answer:

"Oh, I'm sure he will; but even if he won't let you now, he may be inclined to in a month or two, when things have settled down a bit." His answer startled me. "Do you know, Art, I fear it's quite on the cards that in a month or two there may be some settling down there that may be serious for some one?"

"How do you mean?"

"Simply this: that I am not at all satisfied about Murdock's house. There is every indication of it being right in the track of the bog in case it should shift again; and I would not be surprised if that hollow where it stands was right over the deepest part of the natural reservoir, where the rock slopes into the ascending stratum. This wet weather looks bad, and already the bog has risen somewhat. If the rain lasts, I wouldn't like to live in that house after five or six weeks."

A thought struck me: “Did you tell this to Murdock?” “Certainly; the moment the conviction was in my mind.”

“When was that now — just for curiosity?” “Last night, before I came away.” A light began to dawn on me as to Murdock’s readiness to sell the land. I did not want to have to explain anything, so I did not mention the subject of my purchase, but simply asked Dick: “And what did our upright friend say?” “He said, in his own sweet manner, that it would last as long as he wanted it, and that after that it might go to hell — and me too, he added, with a thoughtfulness that was all his own.”

When I went to my room that night I thought over the matter. For good or ill I had bought the property, and there was no going back now; indeed, I did not wish to go back, for I thought that it would be a fine opportunity for Dick to investigate the subject. If we could succeed in draining the bog and reclaiming it, it would be a valuable addition to the property.

That night I arranged to go over on the following day to Galway, my private purpose being to consult a solicitor; and I wrote to my bankers in London, directing that an amount something over the sum required to effect my purchase should be lodged forthwith to an account to be opened for me at the Galway Bank.

Next day, I drove to Galway, and there, after a little inquiry, found a solicitor, Mr. Caicy, of whom everyone spoke well. I consulted him regarding the purchase. He arranged to do all that was requisite, and to have the deed of purchase drawn. I told him that I wished the matter kept a profound secret. He agreed to meet my wishes in this respect, even to the extent that when he should come to Carnaclif to make the final completion with Murdock, he would pretend not to know me. We parted on the best of terms, after I had dined with him, and had consumed my share of a couple of bottles of as fine old port as is to be had in all the world.

Next day I returned to Carnaclif in the evening and met Dick.

Everything had gone right during the two days. Dick was in great spirits; he had seen his Norah during the day, and had exchanged salutations with her. Then he had gone to Knocknacar, and had seen a great change in the bog, which was already settling down into a more solid form. I simply told him I had been to Galway to do some banking and other business. It was some consolation to me in the midst of my own unhappiness to know that I was furthering the happiness of my friend. On the third day from this Mr. Caicy was to be over with the deed, and the following day the sale was to be completed, I having arranged with the bank to transfer on that day the purchase-money for the sale to the account of Mr. Murdock. The two first days I spent mainly on Knocknacar, going over each day ostensibly to look at the progress made in draining the bog, but in reality in the vain hope of seeing my Unknown. Each time I went, my feet turned naturally to the hill-top; but on each visit I felt only a renewal of my sorrow and disappointment. I walked on each occasion to and from the hill, and on the second day, which was Sunday, went in the morning and sat on the top many hours, in the hope that some time during the day, it being a holiday, she might be able to find her way there once again.

When I got to the top the chapel bells were ringing in all the parishes below me to the west, and very sweetly and peacefully the sounds came through the bright crisp September air. And in some degree the sound brought peace to my soul, for there is so large a power in even the aspirations and the efforts of men towards good, that it radiates to immeasurable distance. The wave theory that rules our knowledge of the distribution of light and sound may well be taken to typify, if it does not control, the light of divine love and the beating in unison of human hearts. I think that during these days I must have looked, as well as felt, miserable; for even Andy did not make any effort to either irritate or draw me. On the Sunday evening, when I was on the strand behind the hotel, he lounged along, in his own mysterious fashion, and after looking at me keenly for a few moments, came up close, and said to me in a grave, pitying half-whisper: “Don’t be afther breakin’ yer harrt, yer’an’r. Divil mend the fairy girrul! Shure, isn’t she vanished intirely? Mark me now, there’s no sahtisfaction at all, at all, in them fairy girruls. Faix, but I wouldn’t like to see a fine young gintleman like yer’an’r, become like Yeoha, the Sigher, as they called him in the ould times.” “And who might that gentleman be, Andy?” I asked, with what appearance of cheerful interest I could muster up. “Begor, it’s a prince he was that married onto a fairy girrul, what wint an’ was tuk off be a fairy man what lived in the same mountain as she done herself. Shure, thim fairy girruls has mostly a fairy man iv their own somewheres, that they love betther nor they does mortials. Jist you take me advice, Master Art, fur ye might do worser: go an’ take a luk at Miss Norah, an’ ye’ll soon forgit the fairies. There’s a rale girrul avye like!”

I was too sad to make any angry reply, and before I could think of any other kind, Andy lounged away whistling softly — for he had, like many of his class, a very sweet whistle — the air of “Savourneen Deelish.”

The following day Mr. Caicy turned up at the hotel according to his promise. He openly told Mrs. Keating, of whom he had often before been a customer, that he had business with Mr. Murdock. He was, as usual with him, affable to all, “passing the time of day” with the various inhabitants of all degrees, and, as if a stranger, entering into conversation with me as we sat at lunch in the coffee- room. When we were alone he whispered to me that all was ready; that he had made an examination of the title, for which Murdock had sent him all the necessary papers, and that the deed was complete and ready to be signed. He told me he was going over that day to Knockcalltecrore, and would arrange that he would be there the next day, and that he would take care to have some one to witness the signatures.

On the following morning, when Dick went off with Andy to Knocknacar, and Mr. Caicy drove over to Knockcalltecrore, where I also shortly took my way on another car.

We met at Murdock's house. The deed was duly completed, and Mr. Caicy handed over to Murdock the letter from the bank where the lodgment had been made.

The land was now mine; and I was to have possession on the 27th of October. Mr. Caicy took the deed with him, and with it took also instructions to draw out a deed making the property over to Richard Sutherland. He went straight away to Galway; while I, in listless despair, wandered out on the hill-side to look at the view.

CHAPTER X

I went along the mountain-side until I came to the great ridge of rocks which, as Dick had explained to me, protected the lower end of Murdock's farm from the westerly wind. I climbed to the top to get a view, and then found that the ridge was continuous, running as far as the Snake's Pass where I had first mounted it. Here, however, I was not, as then, above the sea, for I was opposite what they had called the Cliff Fields, and a very strange and beautiful sight it was. Some hundred and fifty feet below me was a plateau of seven or eight acres in extent, and some two hundred and fifty feet above the sea. It was sheltered on the north by a high wall of rock like that I stood on, serrated in the same way, as the strata ran in similar layers. In the centre there rose a great rock, with a flat top some quarter of an acre in extent. The whole plateau, save this one bare rock, was a mass of verdure. It was watered by a small stream which fell through a deep, narrow cleft in the rocks, where the bog drains itself from Murdock's present land. The after-grass was deep, and there were many clumps of trees and shrubs — none of them of considerable height except a few great stone-pines which towered aloft and dared the fury of the western breeze. But not all the beauty of the scene could hold my eyes, for seated on the rocky table in the centre, just as I had seen her on the hill-top at Knocknacar, sat a girl to all intents the ditto of my unknown.

My heart gave a great bound, and in the tumult of hope that awoke within my breast the whole world seemed filled with sunshine. For an instant I almost lost my senses; my knees shook, and my eyes grew dim. Then came a horrible suspense and doubt. It was impossible to believe that I should see my Unknown here when I least expected to see her. And then came the man's desire of action.

I do not know how I began. To this day I cannot make out whether I took a bee-line for that isolated table of rock, and from where I was slid or crawled down the face of the rock, or whether I made a detour to the same end. All I can recollect is that Ifound myself scrambling over some large bowlders, and then passing through the deep, heavy grass at the foot of the rock. Here I halted to collect my thoughts: a moment sufficed. I was too much in earnest to need any deliberation, and there was no choice of ways. I only waited to be sure that I would not create any alarm by unnecessary violence.

Then I ascended the rock. I did not make more noise than I could help, but I did not try to come silently. She had evidently heard steps, for she spoke without turning round.

"Am I wanted?" Then, as I was passing across the plateau, my step seemed to arouse her attention; for at a bound she leaped to her feet, and turned with a glad look that went through the shadow of my soul, as the sunshine strikes through the mist.

"Arthur!" She almost rushed to meet me, but stopped suddenly, for an instant grew pale, and then a red flush crimsoned her face and neck. She put up her hands before herface, and I could see the tears drop through her fingers.

As for myself, I was half dazed. When I saw that it was indeed my Unknown a wild joy leaped to my heart; and then came the revulsion from my long pent-up sorrow and anxiety; and as I faltered out, "At last! at last!" the tears sprang unbidden to my eyes. There is, indeed, a dry-eyed grief, but its corresponding joy is as often smitten with sudden tears.

In an instant I was by her side, and had her hand in mine. It was only for a moment, for she withdrew it with a low cry of maidenly fear; but in that moment of gentle, mutual pressure a whole world had passed, and we knew that we loved.

We were silent for a time, and then we sat together on a bowlder, she edging away from me shyly. What matters it of what we talked? There was not much to say — nothing that was new — the old, old story that has been told since the days when Adam, waking, found that a new joy had entered into his life. For those whose feet have wandered in Eden there is no need to speak; for those who are yet to tread the hallowed ground there is no need either — for in the fulness of time their knowledge will come. It was not till we had sat some time that we exchanged any sweet words: they were sweet, although to anyone but ourselves they would have seemed the most absurd and soulless commonplaces.

We spoke, and that was all. It is of the nature of love that it can from airy nothings win its own celestial food. Presently I said — and I pledge my word that this was the first speech that either of us had made, beyond the weather and the view, and such lighter topics: "Won't you tell me your name? I have so longed to know it, all these weary days." "Norah — Norah Joyce. I thought you knew." This was said with a shy lifting of the eyelashes, which were as suddenly and as shyly dropped again. "Norah!" As I spoke the word — and my whole soul was in its speaking — the happy blush overspread her face again. "Norah! What a sweet name — Norah! No, I did not know it; if I had known it, when I missed you from the hill-top at Knocknacar, I should have sought you here."

Somehow her next remark seemed to chill me: "I thought you remembered me, from that night when father came home with you?" There seemed some disappointment that I had so forgotten.

"That night," I said, "I did not see you at all. It was so dark that I felt like a blind man; I only heard your voice." "I thought you remembered my voice." The disappointment was still manifest. Fool that I was! — that voice, once heard, should have sunk into my memory forever.

"I thought your voice was familiar when I heard you on the hill-top; but when I saw you, I loved you from that moment; and then every other woman's voice in the world went, for me, out of existence!" She half arose, but sat down again, and the happy blush once more mantled her cheek. I felt that my peace was made. "My name is Arthur." Here a thought struck me — struck me for the first time, and sent through me a thrill of unutterable delight: the moment she had seen me she had mentioned my name — all unconsciously, it is true, but she had mentioned it. I feared, however, to alarm her by attracting her attention to it as yet, and went on: "Arthur Severn — but I think you know it."

"Yes; I heard it mentioned up at Knocknacar."

"Who by?"

"Andy, the driver. He spoke to my aunt and me when we were driving down, the day after we — after we met on the hill-top the last time."

Andy! And so my jocose friend knew all along! Well, wait! I must be even with him!

"Your aunt?"

"Yes; my aunt Kate. Father sent me up to her, for he knew it would distress me to see all our things moved from our dear old home — all my mother's things. And father would have been distressed to see me grieved, and I to see him. It was kind of him; he is always so good to me." "He is a good man, Norah — I know that;

I only hope he won’t hate me.” “Why?” This was said very faintly. “For wanting to carry off his daughter. Don’t go, Norah. For God’s sake, don’t go! I shall not say anything you do not wish; but if you only knew the agony I have been in since I saw you last — when I thought I had lost you — you would pity me — indeed you would! Norah, I love you! No! you must listen to me — you must! I want you to be my wife — I shall love and honor you all my life! Don’t refuse me, dear; don’t draw back — for I love you! — I love you!” There, it was all out. The pent-up waters find their own course.

For a minute, at least, Norah sat still. Then she turned to me very gravely, and there were tears in her eyes: “Oh, why did you speak like that, sir? why did you speak like that? Let me go! — let me go! You must not try to detain me!” I stood back, for we had both risen. “I am conscious of your good intention — of the honor you do me — but I must have time to think. Good-bye!” She held out her hand. I pressed it gently — I dared not do more — true love is very timid at times! She bowed to me, and moved off. A sudden flood of despair rushed over me — the pain of the days when I thought I had lost her could not be soon forgotten, and I feared that I might lose her again. “Stay, Norah! stay one moment!” She stopped and turned round. “I may see you again, may I not? Do not be cruel! May I not see you again?” A sweet smile lit up the perplexed sadness of her face. “You may meet me here to-morrow evening, if you will,” and she was gone. To-morrow evening! Then there was hope; and with gladdened heart I watched her pass across the pasture and ascend a path over the rocks. Her movements were incarnate grace; her beauty and her sweet presence filled the earth and air. When she passed from my sight, the sunlight seemed to pale and the warm air to grow chill. For a long while I sat on that table rock, and my thoughts were of heavenly sweetness — all, save one which was of earth — one brooding fear that all might not be well — some danger I did not understand.

And then I too arose, and took my way across the plateau, and climbed the rock, and walked down the boreen on my wayfor Carnaclif. And then, and for the first time, did a thought strike me — one which for a moment made my blood run cold — Dick!

Aye, Dick! What about him? It came to me with a shudder, that my happiness — if it should be my happiness — must be based on the pain of myfriend. Here, then, there was perhaps a clew to Norah's strange gravity! Could Dick have made a proposal to her? He admitted having spoken to her. Why should he, too, not have been impulsive? Why should it not be that he, being the first to declare himself, had got a favorable answer, and that now Norah was not free to choose? How I cursed the delay in finding her; how I cursed and found fault with everyone and everything! Andy, especially, came infer my ill-will. He, at any rate, knew that my unknown of the hill-top at Knocknacar was none other than Norah.

And yet, stay! who but Andy persisted in turning my thoughts to Norah, and more than once suggested my paying a visit to Shleenanaher to see her? No; Andy must be acquitted at all points; common justice demanded that.

Who, then, was I to blame? Not Andy — not Dick, who was too noble and too loyal a friend to give any cause for such a thought. Had he not asked me at the first if the woman of my fancy was not this very woman; and had he not confessed his own love only when I answered him that it was not? No; Dick must be acquitted from blame.

Acquitted from blame! Was that justice? At present he was in the position of a wronged man, and it was I who had wronged him, in ignorance certainly, but still the wrong was mine. And now what could I do? Should I tell Dick? I shrank from such a thing; and as yet there was little to tell. Not till to-morrow evening should I know my fate; and might not that fate be such that it would be wiser not to tell Dick of it? Norah had asked for time to consider my offer. If it should be that she had already promised Dick, and yet should have taken time to consider another offer, would it be fair to tell Dick of such hesitation, even though the result was a loyal adherence to her promise to him? Would such be fair either to him or to her? No; he must not be told — as yet, at all events.

How, then, should I avoid telling him, in case the subject should crop up in the course of conversation? I had not told him of any of my late visits to Knockcalltecrore, although, God knows! they were taken not in my own interest, but entirely in his; and now an explanation seemed impossible.

Thus revolving the situation in my mind as I walked along, I came to the conclusion that the wisest thing I could do was to walk to some other place and stay there for the night. Thus I might avoid questioning altogether. On the morrow I could return to Carnaclif, and go over to Shleenanaher at such a time that I might cross Dick on the way, so that I might see Norah and get her answer without anyone knowing of my visit. Having so made up my mind, I turned my steps towards Roundwood, and when I arrived there in the evening sent a wire to Dick: “Walked here, very tired; sleep here to-night; probably return to-morrow.” The long walk did me good, for it made me thoroughly tired, and that night, despite my anxiety of mind, I slept well — I went to sleep with Norah’s name on my lips. The next day I arrived at Carnaclif about mid-day. I found that Dick had taken Andy to Knockcalltecrore. I waited until it was time to leave, and then started off. About half a mile from the foot of the boreen I went and sat in a clump of trees, where I could not be seen, but from which I could watch the road, and presently saw Dick passing along on Andy’s car. When they had quite gone out of sight, I went on my way to the Cliff Fields. I went with mingled feelings: there was hope, there was joy at the remembrance of yesterday, there was expectation that I would see her again — even though the result might be unhappiness — there was doubt, and there was a horrible haunting dread. My knees shook, and I felt weak as I climbed the rocks. I passed across the field and sat on the table-rock. Presently she came to join me. With a queenly bearing she passed over the ground, seeming to glide rather than to walk. She was very pale, but as she drew near I could see in her eyes a sweet calm. I went forward to meet her, and in silence we shook hands. She motioned to the bowlder, and we sat down. She was less shy than yesterday, and seemed in many subtle ways to be, though not less girlish, more of a woman.

When we sat down I laid my hand on hers and said — and I felt that my voice was hoarse: “Well?”

She looked at me tenderly, and said, in a sweet, grave voice:

“My father has a claim on me that I must not overlook. He is all alone; he has lost my mother, and my brother is away, and is going into a different sphere of life from us. He has lost his land that he prized and valued, and that has been ours for a long, long time; and now that he is sad and lonely, and feels that he is growing old, how could I leave him? He that has always been so good and kind to me all my life!” Here the sweet eyes filled with tears. I had not taken away my hand, and she had not removed hers; this negative of action gave me hope and courage.

“Norah! answer me one thing: is there any other man between your heart and me?”

“Oh, no! no!” Her speech was impulsive; she stopped as suddenly as she began. A great weight seemed lifted from my heart, and yet there came a qualm of pity for my friend. Poor Dick! poor Dick! Again we were silent for a minute. I was gathering courage for another question. “Norah!” — I stopped; she looked at me.

“Norah, if your father had other objects in life, which would leave you free, what would be your answer to me?”

“Oh, do not ask me! do not ask me!” Her tone was imploring; but there are times when manhood must assert itself, even though the heart be torn with pity for woman’s weakness. I went on: “I must, Norah, I must! I am in torture till you tell me! Be pitiful to me! Be merciful to me! Tell me, do you love me? You know I love you, Norah. O God! how I love you! The world has but one being in it for me; and you are that one! With every fibre of my being — with all my heart and soul — I love you! Won’t you tell me, then, if you love me?” A flush as rosy as dawn came over her face, and timidly she asked me, “Must I answer? Must I?” “You must, Norah!” “Then, I do love you! God help us both! but I love you! I love you!” and tearing away her hand from mine, she put both hands before her face and burst into a passionate flood of tears. There could be but one ending to such a scene. In an instant she was in my arms. Her will and mine went down before a sudden flood of passion that burst upon us both. She hid her face upon my breast, but I raised it tenderly, and our lips met in one long, loving, passionate kiss. We sat on the bowlder, hand in hand, and whispering confessed to each other, in the triumph of our love, all those little secrets of the growth of our affection that lovers hold dear. That final separation, which had been spoken of but a while ago, was kept out of sight by mutual consent; the dead would claim its dead soon enough. Love lives in the present, and in the sunshine finds its joy.

Well, the men of old knew the human heart when they fixed upon the butterfly as the symbol of the soul; for the rainbow is but sunshine through a cloud, and love, like the butterfly, takes the colours of the rainbowon its airy wings!

Long we sat in that beauteous spot. High above us towered the everlasting rocks; the green of Nature's planting lay beneath our feet; and far off the reflection of the sunset lightened the dimness of the soft twilight over the wrinkled sea.

We said little as we sat hand in hand; but the silence was a poem, and the sound of the sea and the beating of our hearts were hymns of praise to Nature and to Nature's God.

We spoke no more of the future; for now that we knew that we were each beloved, the future had but little terror for us. We were content.

When we had taken our last kiss, and parted beneath the shadow of the rock, I watched her depart through the gloaming to her own home; and then, I too, took my way. At the foot of the boreen I met Murdock, who looked at me in a strange manner, and merely growled some reply to my salutation.

I felt that I could never meet Dick to-night. Indeed, I wished to see no human being, and so I sat for long on the crags above the sounding sea; and then wandered down to the distant beach. To and fro I went all the night long, but ever in sight of the Hill, and ever and anon coming near to watch the cottage where Norah slept.

In the early morning, I took my way to Roundwood, and going to bed, slept until late in the day.

When I woke I began to think of how I could break my news to Dick. I felt that the sooner it was done the better. At first I had a vague idea of writing to him from where I was, and explaining all to him; but this, I concluded, would not do; it seemed too cowardly a way to deal with so true and loyal a friend. I would go now and await his arrival at Carnaclif, and tell him all, at the earliest moment when I could find an opportunity.

I drove to Carnaclif, and waited his coming impatiently, for I intended, if it were not too late, to afterwards drive over to Shleenanaher, and see Norah — or at least the house she was in.

Dick arrived a little earlier than usual, and I could see from the window that he was grave and troubled. When he got down from the car he asked if I were in, and being answered in the affirmative, ordered dinner to be put on the table as soon as possible, and went up to his room.

I did not come down until the waiter came to tell me that dinnerwas ready. Dick had evidently waited also, and followed me down-stairs. When he came into the room, he said heartily:

“Holloa, Art, old fellow, welcome back! I thought you were lost,” and shook hands with me warmly.

Neither of us seemed to have much appetite, but we pretended to eat, and sent away plates full of food, cut up into the smallest proportions. When the apology for dinner was over, Dick offered me a cigar, lit his own, and said: “Come out for a stroll on the sand, Art; I want to have a chat with you.” I could feel that he was making a great effort to appear hearty, but there was a hollowness about his voice, which was not usual. As we went through the hall, Mrs. Keating handed me my letters, which had just arrived.

We walked out on the wide stretch of fine hard sand, which lies westwards from Carnaclif when the tide is out, and were a considerable distance from the town before a word was spoken. Dick turned to me, and said:

“Art, what does it all mean?” I hesitated for a moment, for I hardly knew where to begin. The question, so comprehensive and so sudden, took me aback. Dick went on: “Art, two things I have always believed, and I won’t give them up without a struggle. One is that there are very few things that, no matter how strange or wrong they look, won’t bear explanation of some kind; and the other is that an honorable man does not grow crooked in a moment. Is there anything, Art, that you would like to tell me?” “There is, Dick. I have a lot to tell; but won’t you tell me what you wish me to speak about?” I was just going to tell him all, but it suddenly occurred to me that it would be wise to know something of what was amiss with him first. “Then I shall ask you a few questions. Did you not tell me that the girl you were in love with was not Norah Joyce?” “I did; but I was wrong. I did not know it at the time; I only found it out, Dick, since I saw you last.” “Since you saw me last! Did you not then know that I loved Norah Joyce, and that I was only waiting a chance to ask her to marry me?” “I did.” I had nothing to add here; it came back to me that I had spoken and acted all along without a thought of myfriend.

“Have you not of late paid many visits to Shleenanaher; and have you not kept such visits quite dark from me?” “I have, Dick.”

“Did you keep me ignorant on purpose?”

“I did. But those visits were made entirely on your account.” I stopped, for a look of wonder and disgust spread over my companion’s face.

“On my account! on my account! And was it, Arthur Severn, on my account that you asked, as I presume you did, NorahJoyceto marry you — I take it for granted that your conduct was honorable, to her at any rate — the woman whom I had told you I loved, and that I wished to marry, and that you assured me that you did not love, your heart being fixed on another woman? I hate to speak so, Art, but I have had black thoughts, and am not quite myself. Was this all on my account?” It was a terrible question to answer, and I paused. Dick went on: “Was it on my account that you, a rich man, purchased the home that she loved; while, I, a poor one, had to stand by and see her father despoiled day by day, and, because of my poverty, had to go on with a hateful engagement, which placed me in a false position in her eyes?”

Here I saw daylight. I could answer this scathing question.

“It was, Dick, entirely on your account.” He drew away from me, and stood still, facing me in the twilight as he spoke:

“I should like you to explain, Mr. Severn, for your own sake, a statement like that.” Then I told him, with simple earnestness, all the truth. How I had hoped to further his love, since my own seemed so hopeless; how I had bought the land, intending to make it over to him, so that his hands might be strong to woo the woman he loved; how this and nothing else had taken me to Shleenanaher; and that while there I had learned that my own unknown love and Norah were one and the same; of my proposal to her — and here I told him humbly how in the tumult of my own passion I had forgotten his — whereat he shrugged his shoulders — and of my long anxiety till her answer was given. I told him that I had stayed away the first night at Roundwood, lest I should be betrayed into any speech which would lack in loyalty to him as well as to her. And then I told him of her decision not to leave her father, touching but lightly on the confession of her love, lest I should give him needless pain; I did not dare to avoid it lest I should mislead him to his further harm. When I had finished he said, softly: “Art, I have been in much doubt.” I thought a moment, and then remembered that I had in my pocket the letters which had been handed to me at the hotel, and that among them there was one from Mr. Caicy at Galway. This letter I took out and handed to Dick. “There is a letter unopened. Open it and it may tell you something. I know my word will suffice you; but this is in justice to us both.” Dick took the letter and broke the seal. He read the letterfrom Caicy, and then holding up the deed so that the dying light of the west should fall on it, read it. The deed was not very long. When he finished it he stood for a moment with his hands down by his sides; then he came over to me, and laying his hands, one of which grasped the deed, on my shoulders, said: “Thank God, Art, there need be no bitterness between me and thee! All is as you say; but oh, old fellow” — and here he laid his head on my shoulder and sobbed— “my heart is broken! All the light has gone out of my life!” His despair was only for a moment. Recovering himself as quickly as he had been overcome, he said: “‘Nevermind, old fellow, only one of us must suffer; and, thank God! my secret is with you alone; no one else in the wide world even suspects. She must never know. Now tell me all about it; don’t fear that it will hurt me. It will be something to know that you are both happy. By the way, this had better be torn up; there is no need of it now!” Having torn the paper across, he put his arm over my shoulder as he used to do when we were boys; and so we passed into the gathering darkness. Thank God for loyal and royal manhood! Thank God for the heart ofa friend that can suffer and remaintrue! And thanks, above all, that the lessons of tolerance and forgiveness, taught of old by the Son of God, are nowand then remembered by the sons of men.

CHAPTER XI

When we were strolling back to the hotel Dick said to me:

"Cheer up, old fellow! You needn't be the least bit downhearted. Go soon and see Joyce. He will not stand in the girl's way, you may be sure. He is a good fellow, and loves Norah dearly — who could help it?" He stopped for a moment here, and choked a great sob, but went on bravely:

"It is only like her to be willing to sacrifice her own happiness; but she must not be let do that. Settle the matter soon. Go to-morrow to see Joyce. I shall go up to Knocknacar instead of working with Murdock; it will leave the coast clearforyou." Then we went into the hotel,and I felt as if a great weight had been removed. When I was undressing I heard a knock. "Come in," I called, and Dick entered. Dear old fellow! I could see that he had been wrestling with himself, and had won. His eyes were red, but there was a noble manliness about him which was beyond description.

"Art," said he, "I wanted to tell you something, and I thought it ought to be told now. I wouldn't like the night to close on any wrong impression between you and me. I hope you feel that my suspicion about fair play and the rest of it is all gone."

"I do, old fellow, quite."

"Well, you are not to get thinking of me as in anyway wronged in the matter, either by accident or design. I have been going overthe whole matter to try and get the heart of the mystery; and I think it only fair to say that no wrong could be done to me. I never spoke a single word to Norah in my life, nor did she to me. Indeed, I have seen her but seldom, though the first time was enough to finish me. Thank God, we have found out the true state of affairs before it was too late. It might have been worse, old lad, it might have been worse! I don't think there's any record — even in the novels — ofa man's life being wrecked over a girl he didn't know. We don't get hit to death at sight, old boy. It's only skin- deep this time, and though skin-deep hurts the most, it doesn't kill. I thought I would tell you what I had worked out, for I knew we were such old friends that it would worry you and mar your happiness to think I was wretched. I hope, and I honestly expect, that by to-morrow I shall be all right, and able to enjoy the sight of both your happiness — as, please God, I hope such is to be." We wrung each other's hands, and I believe that from that moment we were closer friends than ever. As he was going out, Dick turned to me, and said: "It is odd about the legend, isn't it? The Snake is in the Hill still, if I am not mistaken. He told me all about your visits and the sale of the land to you, in order to make mischief. But his time is coming; St. Patrick will lift that crozier of his before long."

"But the Hill holds us all," said I; and as I spoke there was an ominous feeling over me. "We're not through yet; but it will be all right now."

The last thing I saw was a smile on his face as he closed the door. The next morning Dick started for Knocknacar. It had been arranged the night before that he should go on Andy's car, as I preferred walking to Shleenanaher. I had more than one reason for so doing, but that which I kept in the foreground of my own mind — and which I almost persuaded myself was the chief, if not the only reason — was that I did not wish to be troubled with Andy's curiosity and impertinent badinage. My real and secret reason, however, was that I wished to be alone so that I might collect my thoughts, and acquire courage for what the French call un mauvais quart dfieure. In all classes of life, and under all conditions, this is an ordeal eminently to be dreaded by young men. No amount of reason is of the least avail to them; there is some horrible, lurking, unknown possibility which may defeat all their hopes, and may, in addition, add the flaming aggravation of making them appear ridiculous. I summed up my own merits, and, not being a fool, found considerable ground for hope. I was young, not bad-looking, Norah loved me; I had no great bogie of a past secret or misdeed to make me feel sufficiently guilty to feara just punishment falling upon me; and, considering all things, I was in a social position and of wealth beyond the dreams of a peasant — howsoever ambitious for his daughter he might be. And yet I walked along those miles of road that day with my heart perpetually sinking into my boots, and harassed with a vague dread which made me feel at times an almost irresistible inclination to run away. I can only compare my feelings, when I drew in sight of the hill-top, with those which animate the mind ofa young child when coming in sight of the sea in order to be dipped for the first time. There is, however, in man some wholesome fear of running away, which at times either takes the place of resolution, or else initiates the mechanical action of guiding his feet in the right direction — of prompting his speech and regulating his movements. Otherwise no young man, or very few at least, would ever face the ordeal of asking the consent of the parents of his inamorata. Such a fear stood to me now; and with a seeming boldness I approached Joyce’s house. When I came to the gate I saw him in the field not far off, and went up to speak to him. Even at that moment, when the dread of my soul was greatest, I could not but recall an interview which I had had with Andy that morning, and which was not of my seeking, but of his.

After breakfast I had been in my room, making myself as smart as

I could, for, of course, I hoped to see Norah, when I heard a knock at the door, timid but hurried. When I called to "come in," Andy's head appeared; and then his whole body was by some mysterious wriggle conveyed through the partial opening of the door. When within, he closed it, and, putting a finger to his lip, said, in a mysterious whisper: "Masther Art!"

"Well, Andy, what is it?"

"Whisper me now! Shure, I don't want to see yer'an'r so onasyinyer mind." I guessed what was coming, so interrupted him, for I was determined to get even with him.

"Now, Andy, if you have any nonsense about your 'Miss Norah,' I don't want to hear it." "Whisht, surr; let me shpake. I mustn't kape Misther Dick waitin'. Now take me advice, an' take a luk out to Shleenanaher. Ye may see some wan there what ye don't ixpect." This was said with a sly mysteriousness impossible to describe.

"No, no, Andy," said I, looking as sad as I could. "I can see no one there that I don't expect." "They do say, surr, that the fairies does take quare shapes; and your fairy girrul may have gone to Shleenanaher. Fairies may want to take the wather like mortials."

"Take the water, Andy! What do you mean?" "What do I mane! why what the quality does call say- bathin'. An', maybe, the fairy girrul has gone too!"

"Ah, no, Andy," said I, in as melancholy a way as I could, "my fairy girl is gone. I shall never see her again."

Andy looked at me very keenly; and then a twinkle came in his eye, and he said, slapping his thigh: "Begor, but I believe yer 'an'r is cured. Ye used to be that melancholy that, bedad, it's meself what was gettin' sarious about ye; an' now it's only narvous ye are. Well, if the fairy is gone, why not see Miss Norah? Sure wan sight iv her'd cure all the fairy spells what iverwas cast. Go now, yer 'an'r, an' see her this day!" I said with decision, "No, Andy, I will not go to-day to see Miss Norah. I have something else to do." "Oh, very well!" said he with simulated despondency. "If yer 'an'r won't, of course ye won't; but ye're wrong. At any rate, if ye're in the direction iv Shleenanaher, will ye go an' see th' ould man? Musha, but I'm thinkin' it's glad he'd be to see yer'an'r."

Despite all I could do, I felt blushing up to the roots of my hair. Andy looked at me quizzically, and said oracularly, and with sudden seriousness: "Begor! if yer fairy girrul is turned into a fairy complately, an' has flew away from ye, maybe ould Joyce too'd become a leprachaun! Hould him tight whin ye catch him! Remimber, wid leprachauns, if ye wance let thim go ye may nivergitthim agin. But if ye hould thim tight, they must do whatsumiverye wish. So they do say — but maybe I'm wrong — I'm intherfarin' wid a gintleman as was bit be a fairy, and knows more nor mortials does about thim. There's the masther callin'. Good-bye, surr, an' good luck!" and with a grin at me over his shoulder, Andy hurried away.

I muttered to myself: "If any one is a fairy, my bold Andy, I think I can name him. You seem to know everything!" This scene came back to me with renewed freshness. I could not but feel that Andy was giving me some advice. He evidently knew more than he pretended; indeed, he must have known all along of the identity of my Unknown of Knocknacar with Norah. He now also evidently knew of my knowledge on the subject; and he either knew or guessed that I was off to see Joyce on the subject of his daughter. In my present state of embarrassment, his advice was a distinct light. He knew the people, and Joyce especially; he also saw some danger to my hopes, and showed me a way to gain my object. I knew already that Joyce was a proud man, and I could quite conceive that he was an obstinate one; and I knew from general experience of life that there is no obstacle so difficult to surmount as the pride of an obstinate man. With all the fervor of my heart I prayed that, on this occasion, his pride might not in anyway be touched or arrayed against me. When I saw him I went straight towards him, and held out my hand. He seemed a little surprised, but took it. Like Bob Acres, I felt my courage oozing out of the tips of my fingers, but with the remnant of it threw myself into the battle:

"Mr. Joyce, I have come to speak to you on a very serious subject."

"A sarious subject! Is it concarnin' me?"

"It is."

"Go on. More throuble, I suppose?" "I hope not, most sincerely. Mr. Joyce, I want to have your permission to marry your daughter." If I had suddenly turned into a bird and flown away, I do not think I could have astonished him more. For a second or two he was speechless, and then said, in an unconscious sort of way: "Want to marry me daughter!"

"Yes, Mr. Joyce. I love her very dearly. She is a pearl among women; and if you will give your permission, I shall be the happiest man on earth. I can quite satisfy you as to my means. I am well to do; indeed, as men go, I am a rich man."

"Aye, sir, I don't doubt. I'm contint that you are what you say. But you never saw me daughter, except that dark night when you took me home."

"Oh yes, I have seen her several times, and spoken with her; but, indeed I only wanted to see her once to love her."

"Ye have seen her, and she never tould me! Come wid me!" He beckoned me to come with him, and strode at a rapid pace to his cottage, opened the door, and motioned me to go in. I entered the room — which was both kitchen and living-room — to which he pointed. He followed.

As I entered, Norah, who was sewing, saw me and stood up. A rosy blush ran over her face; then she grew as white as snow as she saw the stern face of her father close behind me. I stepped forward, and took her hand; when I let it go, her arm fell by her side. "Daughter" — Joyce spoke very sternly, but not unkindly— "do you know this gentleman?"

"Yes, father."

"He tells me that you and he have met several times. Is it thrue?"

"Yes, father, but—" "Ye never tould me! How was that?"

"It was by accident we met." "Always be accident?" Here I spoke:

"Always by accident — on her part." He interrupted me: "Yer pardon, young gentleman. I wish me daughter to answer me! Shpeak, Norah!" "Always, father, except once, and then I came to give a message — yes! it was a message, although from myself."

"What missage?" "Oh father, don't make me speak! We are not alone. Let me tell you alone, lam only a girl, and it is hard to speak."

His voice had a tear in it, for all its sternness, as he answered:

"It is on a subject that this gentleman has spoke to me about — as mayhap he has spoke to you."

"Oh, father!" — she took his hand, which he did not withdraw, and, bending over, kissed it and hugged it to her breast — oh, father, what have I done that you should seem to mistrust me? You have always trusted me; trust me now, and don't make me speak till we are alone!" I could not be silent any longer. My blood began to boil, that she I loved should be so distressed, whatsoever the cause, and at the hands of whomsoever, even herfather.

“Mr. Joyce, you must let me speak! You would speak yourself to save pain to a woman you loved.” He turned to tell me to be silent, but suddenly stopped. I went on: “Norah” — he winced as I spoke her name— “is entirely blameless. I met her quite by chance at the top of Knocknacar when I went to see the view. I did not know who she was — I had not the faintest suspicion; but from that moment I loved her. I went next day, and waited all day in the chance of seeing her; I did see her, but again came away in ignorance even of her name. I sought her again, day after day, day after day, but could get no word of her; for I did not know who she was, or where she came from. Then, by chance, and after many weary days, again I saw her in the Cliff Fields below, three days ago. I could no longer be silent, but told her that I loved her, and asked her to be my wife. She asked a while to think, and left me, promising to give me an answer on the next evening. I came again, and I got my answer.” Here Norah, who was sobbing, with her face turned away, looked round, and said: “Hush! hush! You must not let father know. All the harm will be done!” Herfather answered in a low voice: “All that could be done is done already, daughter. Ye never tould me!” “Sir, Norah is worthy of all esteem. Her answer to me was that she could not leave her father, who was all alone in the world.” Norah turned away again, but herfather’s arm went round her shoulder. “She told me I must think no more of her; but, sir, you and I, who are men, must not let a woman, who is dear to us both make such a sacrifice.” Joyce’s face was somewhat bitter as he answered me:

“Ye think pretty well of yerself, young sir, whin ye consider it a sacrifice for me daughter to shtay wid the father, who loves her, and who she loves. There was never a shadda on her life till ye came." This was hard to hear, but harder to answer, and I stammered as I replied: "I hope I am man enough to do what is best for her, even if it were to break my heart. But she must marry some time; it is the lot of the young and beautiful." Joyce paused a while, and his look grew very tender as he made answer, softly:

"Aye, thrue, thrue! The young birds lave the nist in due sayson — that's only natural." This seemed sufficient concession for the present; but Andy's warning rose before me, and I spoke:

"Mr. Joyce, God knows I don't want to add one drop of bitterness to either of your lives! Only tell me that I may have hope, and I am content to wait and to try to win your esteem and Norah's love."

The father drew his daughter closer to him, and with his other hand stroked her hair, and said, while his eyes filled with tears:

"Ye didn't wait for me esteem to win her love." Norah threw herself into his arms and hid herface on his breast.

He went on:

"We can't undo what is done. If Norah loves ye — and it seems to me that she does — do I shpeak thrue, daughter? " The girl raised herface bravely, and looked in her father's eyes:

"Yes! father." A thrill of wild delight rushed through me. As she dropped her head again, I could see that her neck had "The colour of the budding rose's crest."

"Well, well," Joyce went on, "ye are both young yit. God knows what may happen in a year! Lave the girl free a bit to choose. She has not met many gentlemen in her time, and she maydesave herself. Me darlin', whativer is foryour good shall be done, plase God!" "And am I to have her in time?" The instant I had spoken I felt that I had made a mistake; the man's face grew hard as he turned to me: "I think for me daughter, sir, not for you. As it is, her happiness seems to be mixed up with yours — lucky for ye. I suppose ye must meet now and thin; but ye must both promise me that ye'II not meet widout me lave, or, at laste, me knowin' it. We're not gentle-folk, sir, and we don't undherstand their ways. If ye were of Norah's and me own kind, I mightn't have to say the same; but ye're not." Things were now so definite that I determined to make one I more effort to fix a time when my happiness might be certain, so I asked: "Then if all be well, and you agree — as please God you shall when you know me better — when may I claim her?" When he was face to face with a definite answer Joyce again grew stern. He looked down at his daughter and then up at me, and said, stroking her hair: "Whin the threasure of Knockcalltecrore is found, thin ye may claim her if ye will, an' I'll freely let her go." As he spoke, there came before my mind the strong idea that we were all in the power of the Hill — that it held us; however, as lightly as I could I spoke: "Then I would claim her now!" "What do ye mane?" — this was said half anxiously, half fiercely.

"The treasure of Knockcalltecrore is here; you hold her in your arms!" He bent over her: "Aye, the threasure sure enough — the threasure ye would rob me of." Then he turned to me, and said sternly, but not unkindly: "Go, now; I can't bear more at prisent, and even me daughter may wish to be for a while alone wid me." I bowed my head and turned to leave the room; but as I was going out, he called me back: "Shtay! Afther all, the young is only young. Ye seem to have done but little harm — if any." He held out his hand; I grasped it closely, and from that instant it seemed that our hearts warmed to each other. Then I felt bolder, and stepping to Norah took her hand — she made no resistance — and pressed it to my lips, and went out silently. I had hardly left the door when Joyce came after me. “Come agin in an hour,” he said, and went in and shut the door.

Then I wandered to the rocks and climbed down the rugged path into the Cliff Fields. I strode through the tall grass and the weeds, rank with the continuous rain, and gained the table rock. I climbed it, and sat where I first had met my love, after I had lost her; and, bending, I kissed the ground where her feet had rested. And then I prayed as fervent a prayer as the heart of a lover can yield, for every blessing on the future of my beloved; and made high resolves that whatsoever might befall, I would so devote myself that, if a man’s efforts could accomplish it, her feet should never fall on thorny places. I sat there in a tumult of happiness. The air was full of hope, and love, and light; and I felt that in all the wild glory and fulness of nature the one unworthy object was myself. When the hour was nearly up I went back to the cottage; the door was open, but I knocked on it with my hand. A tender voice called to me to come in, and I entered.

Norah was standing up in the centre of the room. Her face was radiant, although her sweet eyes were bright with recent tears; and I could see that in the hour which I had passed on the rock, the hearts of the father and the child had freely spoken. The old love between them had taken a newer and fuller and more conscious life — based, as God has willed it with the hearts of men, on the parent’s sacrifice of self for the happiness of the child. Without a word I took her in my arms. She came without bashfulness and without fear; only love and trust spoke in every look and every moment. The cup of our happiness was full to the brim; and it seemed as though God saw, and, as of old with His completed plan of the world, was satisfied that all was good.

We sat, hand in hand, and told again and again the simple truths that lovers tell; and we built bright mansions of future hope. There was no shadow on us, except the shadow that slowly wrapped the earth in the wake of the sinking sun. The long, level rays of sunset spread through the diamond panes of the lattice, grew across the floor, and rose on the opposite wall; but we did not heed them until we heard Joyce's voice behind us:

"I have been thinkin' all the day, and I have come to believe that it is a happy day for us all, sir. I say, though she is my daughter, that the man that won her heart should be a proud man, for it is a heart of gold. I must give her to ye. I was sorry at the first, but I do it freely now. Ye must guard and kape, and hould her as the apple of your eye. If ye should everfail orfalter, remimber that ye took a great thrust in takin' herfrom me that loved her much, and in whose heart she had a place — not merely for her own sake, but for the sake of the dead that loved her." He faltered a moment, but then coming over, put his hand in mine, and while he held it there, Norah put her arm around his neck, and laying her sweet head on his broad, manly breast, said softly:

"Father, you are very good, and I am very, very happy!" Then she took my hand and her father's together, and said to me:

"Remember, he is to be as your father, too; and that you owe him all the love and honor that I do!"

"Amen!" I said, solemnly; and we three wrung each other's hands.

Before I went away, I said to Joyce: "You told me I might claim her when the treasure of the Hill was found. Well, give me a month, and perhaps, if I don't have the one you mean, I may have another." I wanted to keep, for the present, the secret of my purchase of the old farm, so as to make a happy surprise when I should have actual possession.

“What do ye mane?” he said.

“I shall tell you when the month is up,” I answered; “or if the treasure is found sooner — but you must trust me till then.”

Joyce’s face looked happy as he strolled out, evidently leaving me a chance of saying good-bye alone to Norah; she saw it too, and followed him.

“Don’t go, father,” she said. At the door she turned her sweet face to me, and with a shy look at her father, kissed me, and blushed rosy red.

“That’s right, me girl,” said Joyce, “honest love is without shame! Ye need never fear to kiss your lover before me.”

Again we stayed talking for a little while. I wanted to say good-bye again; but this last time I had to give the kiss myself. As I looked back from the gate, I saw father and daughter standing close together; he had his arm round her shoulder, and the dear head that I loved lay close on his breast, as they both waved me farewell.

I went back to Carnaclif, feeling as though I walked on air; and my thoughts were in the heaven that lay behind my footsteps as I went, though before me on the path of life.

CHAPTER XII

When I got near home I met Dick, who had strolled out to meet me. He was looking much happier than when I had left him in the morning. I really believe that now that the shock of his own disappointment had passed, he was all the happier that my affair had progressed satisfactorily. I told him all that had passed, and he agreed with the advice given by Joyce, that for a little while, nothing should be said about the matter. We walked together to the hotel, I hurrying the pace somewhat, for it had begun to dawn upon me that I had eaten but little in the last twenty-four hours. It was prosaic, but true: I was exceedingly hungry. Joy seldom interferes with the appetite; it is sorrow or anxiety which puts it in deadly peril. When we got to the hotel we found Andy waiting outside the door. He immediately addressed me: "'Och, musha, but it's the sad man I am this day! Here's Masther Art giv over intirely to the fairies. An' it's leprachaun catchin' he has been onto this blissed day. Luk at him! isn't it full iv sorra he is? Give up the fairies, Masther Art — do thry an' make him, Misther Dick — an' take to fallin' head over ears in love wid some nice young girrul. Sure, Miss Norah herself, bad as she is, 'd be betther nor none at all, though she doesn't come up to Masther Art's rulin'."

This latter remark was made to Dick, who immediately asked him: "What is that, Andy?" "Begor, yer 'an'r, Masther Art has a quare kind iva girrul in his eye intirely, wan he used to be lukin' for on the top iv Knocknacar — the fairy girrul, yer'an'r," he added to me in an explanatory manner. "I suppose, yer 'an'r," turning to me, "ye haven't saw her this day?"

"I saw nobody to answer your description, Andy; and I fear I wouldn’t know a fairy girl if I saw one,” said I, as I passed into the house followed by Dick, while Andy, laughing loudly, went round to the back of the house, where the bar was.

That was, for me at any rate, a very happy evening. Dick and I sat up late and smoked, and went over the ground that we had passed, and the ground that we were, please God, to pass in time. I felt grateful to the dear old fellow, and spoke much of his undertakings, both at Knocknacar and at Knockcalltecrore. He told me that he was watching carefully the experiment at the former place as a guide to the latter.

After some explanations, he said: “There is one thing there which rather disturbs me. Even with the unusual amount of rain which we have had lately, the flow or drain of water from the bog is not constant; it does not follow the rains as I expected. There seems to be some process of silting, or choking, or damming up the walls of what I imagine to be the different sections or reservoirs of the bog. I cannot make it out, and it disturbs me; for if the same process goes on at Knockcalltecrore, there might be any kind of unforeseen disaster in case of the shifting of the bog. lam not at all easy about the way Murdock is going on there. Ever since we found the indication of iron in the bog itself, he has taken every occasion when lam not there to dig away at one of the clay banks that jut into it. I have warned him that he is doing a very dangerous thing, but he will not listen. To-morrow, when I go up, I shall speak to him seriously. He went into Galway with a cart the night before last, and was to return by to-morrow morning. Perhaps he has some game on. I must ascertain what it is.” Before we parted for the night we had arranged to go together in the morning to Knockcalltecrore, for, of course, I had made up my mind that each day should see me there. In the morning, early, we drove over. We left Andy, as usual, in the boreen at the foot of the hill, and walked up together. I left Dick at Murdock's gate, and then hurried as fast as my legs could carry me to Joyce's. Norah must have had wonderful ears. She heard my footsteps in the lane, and when I arrived at the gate she was there to meet me. She said, "Good-morning," shyly, as we shook hands. Foran instant she evidently feared that I was going to kiss her there in the open, where some one might see; but almost as quickly she realised that she was safe so far, and we went up to the cottage together. Then came my reward; for, when the door was closed, she put her arms round my neck as I took her in my arms, and our lips met in a sweet, long kiss. Our happiness was complete. Any one who has met the girl he loved the day after his engagement to her can explain why or how — if any explanation be required. Joyce was away in the fields. We sat hand in hand, and talked fora good while; but Itook no note of time. Suddenly Norah looked up. "Hush!" she said. "There is a step in the boreen; it is your friend, Mr. Sutherland." We sat just a little further apart and let go hands. Then the gate clicked, and even I heard Dick's steps as he quickly approached. He knocked at the door; we both called out "Come in" simultaneously, and then looked at each other and blushed. The door opened and Dick entered. He was very pale, but in a couple of seconds his pallor passed away. He greeted Norah cordially, and she sweetly bade him welcome. Then he turned to me: "I am very sorry to disturb you, old fellow, but would you mind coming down to Murdock's for a bit? There is some work which I wish you to give me a hand with." I started up and took my hat, whispered good-bye to Norah, and went with him. She did not come to the door; but from the gate I looked back and saw her sweet face peeping through the diamond pane of the lattice. “What is it, Dick?” I asked, as we went down the lane. “A new start to-day. Murdock evidently thinks we have got on the track of something. He went into Galway for a big grapnel; and now we are making an effort to lift it — whatever ‘it’ is — out of the bog.”

“By Jove!” said I, “things are getting close.” “Yes,” said Dick. “And I am inclined to think he is right.

There is most probably a considerable mass of iron in the bog. We have located the spot, and are only waiting for you, so as to be strong enough to make a cast.”

When we got to the edge of the bog we found Murdock standing beside a temporary jetty, arranged out of a long plank, with one end pinned to the ground, and the centre supported on a large stone, placed on the very edge of the solid ground, where a rock cropped up. Beside him was a very large grappling-iron, some four feet wide, attached to a coil of strong rope. When we came up, he saluted me in a half surly manner, and we set to work, Dick saying, as we began:

“Mr. Severn, Mr. Murdock has asked us to help in raising something from the bog. He prefers to trust us, whom he knows to be gentlemen, than to let his secret be shared in with any one else.”

Dick got out on the end of the plank, holding the grapnel and a coil of the rope in his hand, while the end of the coil was held by Murdock.

I could see from the appearance of the bog that some one had been lately working at it, for it was all broken about as though to make a hole in it, and a long pole that lay beside where I stood was covered with wet and slime.

Dick poised the grapnel carefully and then threw it out. It sank into the bog, slowly at first, but then more quickly; an amount of rope ran out which astonished me, for I knew that the bog must be at least so deep.

Suddenly the run of the rope ceased, and we knew that the grapnel had gone as far as it could. Murdock and I then held the rope, and Dick took the pole and poked, and beat a passage for it through the bog up to the rock where we stood. Then he too joined us, and we all began to pull.

For a few feet we pulled in the slack of the rope. Then there was a little more resistance for some three or four feet, and we knew that the grapnel was dragging on the bottom. Suddenly there was a check, and Murdock gave a suppressed shout: "We have got it! I feel it! Pull away for your lives!"

We kept a steady pull on the rope. At first there was simply a dead weight, and in my own mind I was convinced that we had caught a piece of projecting rock. Murdock would have got unlimited assistance and torn out of the bog whatever it was that we had got hold of, even if he had to tear up the rocks by the roots; but Dick kept his head, and directed a long steady pull.

There was a sudden yielding, and then again resistance. We continued to pull, and then the rope began to come, but very slowly, and there was a heavyweight attached to it. Even Dick was excited now. Murdock shut his teeth, and scowled like a demon: it would have gone hard with anyone who came then between him and his prize. As for myself, I was in a tumult. In addition to the natural excitement of the time, there rose to my memory Joyce's words: "When the treasure is found you may claim her if you will," and, although the need for such an occasion passed away with his more free consent, the effect that they had at the time produced on me remained in my mind.

Here, then, was the treasure at last; its hiding fora century in the bog had come to an end. We pulled and pulled. Heavens! how we tugged at that rope. Foot after foot it came up through our hands, wet and slimy, and almost impossible to hold. Now and again it slipped from each of us in turns a few inches, and a muttered "Steady, steady," was all the sound heard. It took all three of us to hold the weight, and so no one could be spared to make an effort to further aid us by any mechanical appliance. The rope lay beside us in seemingly an endless coil. I began to wonder if it would ever end. Our breath began to come quickly, our hands were cramped. There came a new and more obstinate resistance. I could not account for it. Dick cried out: "It is under the roots of the bog; we must now take it up straight. Can you two hold on for a moment, and I shall get on the plank." We nodded, breath was too precious for unnecessary speech. Dick slacked out after we had got our feet planted for a steady resistance. He then took a handful of earth, and went out on the plank a little beyond the centre and caught the rope. When he held it firmly with his clay-covered hands, he said:

"Come now, Art. Murdock, you stay and pull." I ran to him, and, taking my hands full of earth, caught the rope also.

The next few minutes saw a terrible struggle. Our faces were almost black with the rush of blood in stooping and lifting so long and so hard, our hands and backs ached to torture, and we were almost in despair, when we saw the bog move just under us. This gave us new courage and new strength, and with redoubled effort we pulled at the rope.

Then up through the bog came a large mass. We could not see what it was, for the slime and the bog covered it solidly; but with a final effort we lifted it. Each instant it grew less weighty as the resistance of the bog was overcome, and the foul slimy surface fell back into its place and became tranquil. When we lifted and pulled the mass on the rock bank, Murdock rushed forward in a frenzied manner, and shouted to us: “Kape back! Hands off! It’s mine, I say, all mine! Don’t dar even to touch it, or I’ll do ye a harrum! Here, clear off! This is my land! Go!” and he turned on us with the energy of a madman and the look ofa murderer. I was so overcome with my physical exertions that I had not a word to say, but simply, in utter weariness, threw myself upon the ground; but Dick, with what voice he could command, said: “You’re a nice grateful fellow to men who have helped you. Keep your find to yourself, man alive; we don’t want to share. You must know that as well as I do, unless your luck has driven you mad. Handle the thing yourself, by all means. Faugh! how filthy it is!” and he too sat down beside me. It certainly was most filthy. It was a shapeless, irregular mass, but made solid with rust and ooze and the bog surface through which it had been dragged. The slime ran from it in a stream; but its filth had no deterring power for Murdock, who threw himself down beside it and actually kissed the nauseous mass, as he murmured: “At last, at last, me threasure! All me own!”

Dick stood up with a look of disgust on his handsome face.

“Come away, Art; it’s too terrible to see a man degraded to this pitch. Leave the wretch alone with his god.” Murdock turned to us, and said with savage glee:

“No, shtay — shtay an’ see me threasure! It’ll make ye happy to think of afther. An’ ye can tell Phelim Joyce what I found in me own land — the land what I tuk from him.” We stayed.

Murdock took his spade and began to remove the filth and rubbish from the mass; and in a very few moments his discovery proclaimed itself.

There lay before us a rusty iron gun-carriage. This was what we had dragged with so much effort from the bottom of the bog; and beside it Murdock sat down with a scowl of black disappointment.

"Come away," said Dick. "Poor devil, I pity him! It is hard to find even a god of that kind worthless." And so we turned and left Murdock sitting beside the gun-carriage and the slime, with a look of baffled greed which I hope never to see on any face again.

We went to a brook at the foot of the Hill, Andy being by this time in the sheebeen about half a mile off. There we cleansed ourselves as well as we could from the hideous slime and filth of the bog, and then walked to the top of the hill to let the breeze freshen us up a bit if possible. After we had been there for a while, Dick said:

"Now, Art, you had better run back to the cottage. Miss Joyce will be wondering what has become of you all this time, and may be frightened." It was so strange to hear her — Norah, my Norah — called "Miss Joyce," that I could not help smiling, and blushing while I smiled. Dick noticed and guessed the cause. He laid his hand on my shoulder, and said:

"You will hear it often, old lad. I am the only one of all your friends privileged to hear of her by the name you knew her by at first. She goes now into your class and among your own circle; and, by George! she will grace it too — it or any circle — and they will naturallygive to herfolk the same measure of courtesy that they mete to each other. She is Miss Joyce — until she shall be Mrs. Arthur Severn!" What a delicious thrill the very thought sent through me!

I went up to the cottage, and on entering found Norah still alone. She knew that I was under promise not to tell anything of Murdock's proceedings, but noticing that I was not so tidy as before — for my cleansing at the brook-side was a very imperfect one — went quietly and got a basin with hot water, soap, and a towel, and clothes-brush, and said I must come and be made very tidy.

That toilet was to me a sweet experience, and is a sweet remembrance now. It was so wifely in its purpose and its method that I went through it in a languorous manner, like one in a delicious dream. When, with a blush, she brought me her own brush and comb and began to smooth my hair, I was as happy as it is given to a man to be. There is a peculiar sensitiveness in their hair to some men, and to have it touched by hands that they love is a delicious sensation. When my toilet was complete Norah took me by the hand and made me sit down beside her. After a pause, she said to me with a gathering blush:

"I want to ask you something." "And I want to ask you something," said I. "Norah, dear, there is one thing I want much to ask you." She seemed to suspect or guess what I was driving at, for she said: "You must let me ask mine first." "No, no," I replied, "you must answer me; and then, you know, you will have the right to ask what you like."

"But I do not want any right." "Then it will be all the more pleasure to me to give a favor — if there can be any such from me to you." Masculine persistence triumphed — men are always more selfish than women — and I asked my question. "Norah, darling, tell me when will you be mine — my very own? When shall we be married?" The love-light was sweet in her eyes as she answered me with a blush that made perfect the smile on her lips: "Nay, you should have let me ask my question first."

Why so, dearest?" "Because, dear, I am thinking of the future. You know, Arthur, that I love you, and that whatever you wish I would and shall gladly do; but you must think for me too. lam only a peasant girl—” “Peasant!” I laughed. “Norah, you are the best lady I have ever seen! Why, you are like a queen — what a queen ought to be!”

“I am proud and happy, Arthur, that you think so; but still I am only a peasant. Look at me — at my dress. Yes, I know you like it, and I shall always prize it because it found favor in your eyes.” She smiled happily, but went on: “Dear, I am speaking very truly. My life and surroundings are not yours. You are lifting me to a higher grade in life, Arthur, and I want to be worthy of it and of you. I do not want any of your family or your friends to pity you and say, ‘Poor fellow, he has made a sad mistake. Look at her manners; she is not of us.’ I could not bear to hear or to know that such was said — that any one should have to pity the man I love, and to have that pity because of me. Arthur, it would break my heart.” As she spoke the tears welled up in the deep dark eyes and rolled unchecked down her cheeks. I caught her to my breast with the sudden instinct of protection, and cried out: “Norah, no one on earth could say such a thing of you — you who would lift a man, not lower him. You could not be ungraceful if you tried; and as for my family and friends, if there is one who will not hold out both hands to you and love you, he or she is no kin or friend of mine.”

“But, Arthur, they might be right. I have learned enough to know that there is so much more to learn — that the great world you live in is so different from our quiet, narrow life here. Indeed, I do not mean to be nervous as to the future, or to make any difficulties; but, dear, I should like to be able to do all that is right and necessary as your wife. Remember, that when I leave here I shall not have one of my own kin or friends to tell me anything — from whom I could ask advice. They do not themselves even know what I might want — not one of them all. Your world and mine, dear, are so different — as yet."

"But, Norah, shall I not be always by your side to ask?" I felt very superior and very strong, as well as very loving, as I spoke.

"Yes, yes; but oh, Arthur, can you not understand? I love you so that I would like to be, even in the eyes of others, all that you could wish. But, dear, you must understand and help me here. I cannot reason with you. Even now I feel my lack of knowledge, and it makes me fearful. Even now" — her voice died away in a sob, and she hid her beautiful eyes with her hand.

"My darling, my darling!" Isaid to her passionately, all the true lover in me awake, "tell me what it is that you wish, so that I may try to judge with all my heart."

"Arthur, I want you to let me go to school — to a good school for a while — a year or two before we are married.

Oh, I should work so hard! I should try so earnestly to improve, for I should feel that every hour of honest work brought me higher and nearer to your level!"

My heart was more touched than even my passion gave me words to tell; and I tried, and tried hard, to tell her what I felt, and in my secret heart a remorseful thought went up: "What have I done in my life to be worthy of so much love?"

Then, as we sat hand in hand, we discussed how it was to be done, for that it was to be done we were both agreed. I had told her that we should so arrange it that she should go for awhile to Paris, and then to Dresden, and finish up with an English school. That she could learn languages, and that among them would be Italian; but that she would not go to Italy until we went together — on our honey-moon. She bent her head and listened in silent happiness; and when I spoke of our journey together to Italy, and how we would revel in old-world beauty — in the softness and light and colour of that magic land — the delicate porcelain of her shelllike ear became tinged with pink, and I bent over and kissed it. And then she turned and threw herself on my breast, and hid her face. As I looked I saw the pink spread downward and grow deeper and deeper, till her neck and all became flushed with crimson. And then she put me aside, rose up, and with big brave eyes looked me full in the face through all her deep embarrassment, and said to me: "Arthur, of course I don't know much of the great world, but I suppose it is not usual for a man to pay for the schooling of a lady before she is his wife, whatever might be arranged between them afterwards. You know that my dear father has no money for such a purpose as we have spoken of, and so if you think it is wiser, and would be less hardly spoken of inyour family, Iwould marry you before I went — if — if you wished it. But we would wait till after I came from school to — to — to go to Italy," and while the flush deepened almost to a painful degree, she put her hands before her face and turned away. Such a noble sacrifice of her own feelings and her own wishes — and although I felt it in my heart of hearts I am sure none but a woman could fully understand it — put me upon my mettle, and it was with truth I spoke:

"Norah, if anything could have added to my love and esteem for you, your attitude to me in this matter has done it. My darling, I shall try hard all my life to be worthy of you, and that you may never, through any act of mine, decline for a moment from the standard you have fixed. God knows I could have no greater pride or joy than that this very moment I should call you my wife. My dear, my dear, I shall count the very hours until that happy time shall come! But all shall be as you wish. You will go to the schools we spoke of, and your father shall pay for them. He will not refuse, I know, and what is needed he shall have. If there be anyway that he would prefer — that suits your wishes — it shall be done. More than this, if he thinks it right, we can be married before you go, and you can keep your own name until my time comes to claim you." "No, no, Arthur! When once I shall bear your name I shall be too proud of it to be willing to have any other. But I want, when I do bear it, to bear it worthily — I want to come to you as I think your wife should come."

"My dear, dear Norah — my wife to be — all shall be as you wish."

Here we heard the footsteps of Joyce approaching.

"I had better tell him," she said. When he came in she had his dinner ready. He greeted me warmly.

"Won't ye stay?" he said. "Don't go unless ye wish to."

"I think, sir, Norah wants to have a chat with you when you have had your dinner."

Norah smiled a kiss at me as I went out. At the door I turned and said to her: "I shall be in the Cliff Fields in case I am wanted."

I went there straightway, and sat on the table rock in the centre of the fields, and thought and thought. In all my thoughts there was no cloud. Each day, each hour, seemed to reveal new beauties in the girl I loved, and I felt as if all the world were full of sunshine, and all the future of hope; and I built new resolves to be worthy of the good fortune which had come upon me.

It was not long before Norah came to me, and said that she had told her father, and that he wished to speak with me. She said that he quite agreed about the school, and that there would be no difficulty made by him on account of any false pride about my helping in the task. We had but one sweet minute together on the rock, and one kiss; and then, hand in hand, we hurried back to the cottage, and found Joyce waiting for us, smoking his pipe.

Norah took me inside, and, after kissing herfather, came shyly and kissed me also, and went out. Joyce began:

“Me daughter has been tellin’ me about the plan of her goin’ to school, an’ her an’ me’s agreed that it’s the right thing to do. Of coorse, we’re not of your class, an’ if ye wish for her it is only right an’ fair that she should be brought up to the level of the people that she’s goin’ into. It’s not in me own power to do all this for her, an’ although I didn’t give her the schoolin’ that the quality has, I’ve done already more nor min like me mostly does. Norah knows more noranygirl about here. An’ as ye’re to have the benefit of yer wife’s schoolin’, I don’t see no rayson why ye shouldn’t help in it. Mind ye this, if I could see me way to do it meself, I’d work me arms off before I’d let you or any one else come between her an’ me in such a thing. But it’d be only a poor kind of pride that’d hurt the poor child’s feelin’s, an’ mar her future; an’ so it’ll be as ye both wish. Ye must find out the schools an’ write me about them when ye go back to London.” I jumped up and shook his hand. “Mr. Joyce, I am more delighted than I can tell you; and I promise, on my honor, that you shall never in your life regret what you have done.”

“I’m sure of that — Mr. — Mr.—” “Call me Arthur.”

“Well — I must do it some day — Arthur. An’ as to the matther that Norah told me ye shpoke of — that, if I’d wish it, ye’d be married first. Well, me own mind an’ Norah’s is the same: I’d rather that she come to you as a ladyatwance, though, God knows, it’s a lady she is in all ways I iver see one in me life — barrin’ the clothes.” “That’s true, Mr. Joyce; there is no better lady in all the land.”

"Well, that's all settled. Ye'll let me know in good time about the schools, won't ye? An' now I must get back to me work," and he passed out of the house, and went up the hillside.

Then Norah came back, and with joy I told her that all had been settled; and somehow, we seemed to have taken another step up the ascent that leads from earth to heaven, and that all feet may tread which are winged with hope. Presently Norah sent me away for a while, saying that she had some work to do, as she expected both Dick and myself to come back to tea with them; and I went off to look for Dick.

I found him with Murdock. The latter had got over his disappointment, and had evidently made up his mind to trust to Dick's superior knowledge and intelligence. He was feverishly anxious to continue his search, and when I came up we held a long discussion as to the next measure to be taken. The afternoon faded away in this manner before Murdock summed up the matter thus: "The chist was carried on the gun-carriage, and where wan is th' other is not far off. The min couldn't have carried the chist far, from what ould Moynahan sez. His father saw the min carryin' the chist only a wee bit." Dick said: "There is one thing, Murdock, that I must warn you about. You have been digging in the clay bank by the edge of the bog. I told you before how dangerous this is; now, more than ever, I see the danger of it. It was only to-day that we got an idea of the depth of the bog, and it rather frightens me to think that with all this rain falling, you should be tampering with what is more important to you than even the foundations of your house. The bog has risen far too much already, and you have only to dig perhaps one spadeful too much in the right place and you'll have a torrent that will sweep away all you have. I have told you that I don't like the locality of your house down in the hollow. If the bog ever moves again, God help you! You seem also to have been tampering with the stream that runs into the Cliff Fields. It is all very well for you to try to injure poor Joyce more than you have done — and that's quite enough, God knows! — but here you are actually imperilling your own safety. That stream is the safety valve of the bog, and if you continue to dam up that cleft in the rock you will have a terrible disaster. Mind, now, I warn you seriously against what you are doing. And, besides, you do not even know for certain that the treasure is here. Why, it may be anywhere on the mountain, from the brook below the boreen to the Cliff Fields. Is the off chance worth the risk you run?" Murdock started when he mentioned the Cliff Fields, and then said suddenly: "If ye're afraid ye can go. I'm not."

"Man alive!" said Dick, "why not be afraid if you see cause for fear? I don't suppose I'm a coward any more than you are, but I can see a danger, and a very distinct one, from what you are doing. Your house is directly in the track in which the bog has shifted at any time this hundred years; and if there should be another movement, Iwould not like to be in the house when the time comes."

"All right," he returned, doggedly, "I'll take me chance; and I I'll find the threasure, too, before many days is over!"

"Well, but be reasonable also, or you may find your death." "Well, if I do that's me own luk out. Ye may find yer death first."

"Of course I may, but I see it my duty to warn you. The weather these last few weeks back has been unusually wet.

The bog is rising as it is. As a matter of fact, it is nearly a foot higher now than it was when I came here first; and yet you are doing what must help to rise it higher still, and are weakening its walls at the same time." He scowled at me as he sullenly answered: "Well, all

I say is I’ll do as I like wid me own. I wouldn’t give up me chance ivfindin’ the threasure now — no, not for God himself!”

“Hush, man; hush!” said Dick sternly, as we turned away. “Do not tempt him, but be warned in time!”

“Let him look out for himself, an’ I’ll look out for meself,” he answered with a sneer. “I’ll find the threasure, an’, if need be, in spite ivGod an’ ivthe Divil too!”

CHAPTER XIII

I think it was a real pleasure to Dick to get Norah's message that he was expected to tea that evening. Like the rest of his sex, he was not quite free from vanity; for when I told him, his first act was to look down at himself ruefully, and his first words were: "But I say, old lad, look at the mess I'm in! and these clothes are not much, anyhow."

"Never mind, Dick, you are as good as I am."

"Oh, well," he laughed, "if you'll do, I suppose I needn't mind. We're both pretty untidy. No, begad!" he added, looking me all over, "you're not out of the perpendicular with regard to cleanliness, anyhow. I say, Art, who's been tidying you up? Oh, I see! — forgive me, old lad — and quite natural, too! Miss Joyce should see you blush, Art! Why, you are as rosy as a girl!"

"Call her 'Norah,' Dick; it is more natural, and I am sure she will like it better. She is to look on you as a brother, you know."

"All right, Art," he answered, heartily, "but you must manage it for me, for I think I should be alarmed to do so unless I got a lead; but it will come easy enough after the first go off. Remember, we both always thought of her as 'Norah.'"

We went down towards the brook and met with Andy, who had the car all ready for us.

"Begoryer'an'rs," said he, "I thought yez was lost intirely, or that the fairies had carried yez off, both iv yez this time" — this with a sly look at me, followed by a portentous wink to Dick; "an' I'm thinkin' it's a bout time fur so me thin' to ate. Begor, but me stummick is cryin' out that me throat is cut!"

"You're quite right, Andy, as to the fact," said Dick, "but you are a little antecedent.” “An’ now what’s that, surr? Begor, I niverwas called that name afore. Shure, an’ I always thry to be dacent; diwle a man but can tell ye that. Antidacent, indeed! Well, now, what nixt?”

“It means, Andy, that we are going to be carried off by the fairies, and to have some supper with them too; and that you are to take this half-crown, and go over to Mother Kelligan’s, and get her to try to dissipate that unnatural suspicion of capital offence wreaked on your thoracic region. Here, catch! and see how soon you can be off.”

“Hurroo! Begor, yer ‘an’r, it’s the larned gintleman y’ are! Musha! but ye ought to be a counsillor intirely. Gee-up, ye ould corn-crake!” and Andy was off at full speed. When we had got rid of him, Dick and I went down to the brook and made ourselves look as tidy as we could. At least Dick did; for, as to myself, I purposely disarranged my hair — unknown to Dick — in the hope that Norah would take me in hand again, and that I might once more experience the delicious sensation of a toilet aided by her sweet fingers.

Young men’s ideas, however, are very crude; no one who knew either the sex or the world would have fallen into such an absurd hope. When I came in with Dick, Norah — in spite of some marked hints, privately and secretly given to her — did not make either the slightest remark on my appearance or the faintest suggestion as to improving it.

She had not been idle in the afternoon. The room, which was always tidy, was as prettilyarranged as the materials would allow. There were some flowers and flag-leaves and grasses tastefully placed about, and on the table in a tumbler was a bunch of scarlet poppies. The table-cloth, although of coarse material, was as white as snow, and the plates and cups, of common white and blue, were all that was required. When Joyce came in from his bedroom, where he had been tidying himself, he looked so manly and handsome in his dark frieze coat with horn buttons, his wide, unstarched shirt-collar, striped waistcoat, and cord breeches, with gray stockings, that I felt quite proud of him. There was a natural grace and dignity about him which suited him so well, that I had no wish to see him other than a peasant. He became the station, and there was no pretence. He made a rough kind of apology to us both: "I fear ye'll find things a bit rough, compared with what you're accustomed to, but I know ye'll not mind. We have hardly got settled down here yit; and me sisther, who always lives with us, is away with me other sisther that is sick, so Norah has to fare by herself; but, gentlemen both — you, Mr. Sutherland, and you, Arthur — you're welcome." We sat down to table, and Norah insisted on doing all the attendance herself. I wanted to help her, and, when she was taking up a plate of cakes from the hearth, stooped beside her and said: "May not I help, Norah? Do let me!" "No — no, dear," she whispered. "Don't ask me now — I'm a little strange yet — anothertime. You'll be very good, won't you, and help me not to feel awkward?" Needless to say, I sat at table for the rest of the meal and feasted my eyes on my darling, while, in common with the others, I enjoyed the good things placed before us. But when she saw that I looked too long and too lovingly, she gave me such an imploring glance from her eloquent eyes, that for the remainder of the time I restrained both the ardor of my glance and its quantity within modest bounds. Oh, but she was fair and sweet to look upon! Her dark hair was plainly combed back and coiled modestly round her lovely head. She had on her red petticoat and chintz body, that she knew I admired so much; and on her breast she wore a great scarlet poppy, whose splendid colour suited well with her dark and noble beauty. At the earliest opportunity, when tea was over, I whispered to her: “My darling, how well the poppy suits you. How beautiful you are. You are like the Goddess of Sleep!” She put her finger to her lips with a happy smile, as though to forbid me to pay compliments — before others. I suppose the woman has never yet been born — and never shall be — who would not like to hear her praises from the man she loves.

I had eaten potato-cakes before, but never such as Norah had made for us; possibly they seemed so good to me because I knew that her hands had made them. The honey, too, was the nicest I had tasted — for it was made by Norah’s bees. The butter was perfect — for it was the work of her hands!

I do not think that a happier party ever assembled round a tea-table. Joyce was now quite reconciled to the loss of his daughter, and was beaming all over; and Dick’s loyal nature had its own reward, for he too was happy in the happiness of those he loved — or else I was, and am, the most obtuse fool, and he the most consummate actor, that has been. As for Norah and myself, I know we were happy — as happy as it is given to mortals to be. When tea was over, and Norah fetched her father’s pipe and lighted it for him, she said to me with a sweet blush, as she called me by my name for the first time before a stranger:

“I suppose, Arthur, you and Mr. Sutherland would like your own cigars best; but if you care fora pipe there are some new ones here,” and she pointed them out. We lit our cigars, and sat round the fire; for in this damp weather the nights were getting a little chilly. Joyce sat on one side of the fire and Dick on the other. I sat next to Dick, and Norah took her place between her father and me, sitting on a little stool beside herfatherand leaning her head against his knees, while she took the hand that was fondly laid over her shoulder and held it in her own. Presently, as the gray autumn twilight died away, and as the light from the turf-fire rose and fell, throwing protecting shadows, her other hand stole towards my own, which was waiting to receive it; and we sat silent for a spell, Norah and I in an ecstasy of quiet happiness.

By-and-by we heard a click at the latch of the gate, and firm, heavy footsteps coming up the path. Norahjumped up and peeped out of the window. “Who is it, daughter?” said Joyce.

“Oh father, it is Murdock! What can he want?”

There was a knock at the door. Joyce rose up, motioning to us to sit still, laid aside his pipe, and went to the door and opened it. Every word that was spoken was perfectly plain to us all.

“Good-evenin’, Phelim Joyce.”

“Good-evenin’. You want me?” “I do.” Murdock’s voice was fixed and firm, as of one who has I made up his mind.

“What is it?”

“May I come in? I want to shpake to ye particular.”

“No, Murtagh Murdock. Whin a man comes undher me roof by me own consint, I’m not free wid him to spake me mind the same as whin he’s outside. Ye haven’t thrated me well, Murdock, Ye’ve been hard wid me; and there’s much that I can’t forgive!” “Well! if I did, ye gev me what no other man has ever gave me yit widout repintin’ it sore. Ye sthruck me a blow before all the people, an’ I didn’t strike ye back.”

“I did, Murtagh; an’ I’m sorry for it. That blow has been hangin’ on me conscience iver since. I would take it back if I could; God knows that is thrue. Much as ye wronged me, I don’t want such a thing as that to remimber when me eyes is closin’. Murtagh Murdock, I take it back, an’ gladly. Will ye let me?”

“I will — on wan condition.” “What is it?”

“That’s what I’ve kem here to shpake about; but I’d like to go in.”

“No, ye can’t do that — not yit, at any rate, till I know what ye want. Ye must remimber, Murtagh, that I’ve but small rayson to thrust ye.”

“Well, Phelim, I’ll tell ye, tho’ it’s mortial hard to name it shtandin’ widout the door like a thramp. I’m a warrum man; I’ve a power iv money put by, an’ it brings me in much.”

“I know! I know!” said the other bitterly. “God help me! but I know too well how it was gother up.”

“Well, niver mind that now; we all know that. Anyhow, it is gother up. An’ them as finds most fault wid the manes, mayhap’d be the first to get hould iv it av they could. Well, anyhow, I’m warrum enough to ask any girrul in these parts to share it wid me. There’s many min and weemin between this and Galway, that’d like to talk over the fortin iv their daughter wid Murtagh Murdock, for all he’s a gombeen man.”

As he spoke the clasp of Norah’s hand and mine grew closer. I could feel in her clasp both a clinging, as for protection, and a restraining power on myself. Murdock went on:

“But there’s none of thim girls what I’ve set me harrt on — except wan!” He paused. Joyce said, quietly:

“An’ who, now, might that be?” “Yer own daughther, Norah Joyce!” Norah’s hand restrained me as I was instinctively rising. “Go on!” said Joyce, and I could notice that there was a suppressed passion in his voice. “Well, I’ve set me harrt on her; and I’m willin’ to settle a fortin on her, on wan condition.” “And what, now, might that be?” — the tone was of veiled sarcasm.

“She’ll have all the money that I settle on her to dale wid as she likes — that is, the intherest iv it — as long as she lives; an’ I’m to have the Cliff Fields that is bier’s, as me own to do what I like wid, an’ that them an’ all in them belongs to me.” Joyce paused a moment before answering: “Is that all ye have to say?” Murdock seemed nonplussed, but after a slight pause he answered: “Yis.”

“An’ ye want me answer?” “Ivcoorse!”

“Thin, Murtagh Murdock, I’d like to ask ye for why me daughter would marry you orthe like of you? Is it because that yer beauty’d take a young girl’s fancy — you, that’s known as the likest thing to a divil in these parts? Or is it because of yer kind nature? You that tried to ruin her own father, and that drove both her and him out of the home she was born in, and where her poor mother died! Is it because yer characther is respicted in the counthry wheriver yer name is known?—” Here Murdock interrupted him:

“I tould ye it’s a warrum man I am” — he spoke decisively, as if his words were final— “an’ I can, an’ will, settle a fortin on her.” Joyce answered slowly, and with infinite scorn:

“Thank ye, Mr. Murtagh Murdock, but me daughter is not for sale!”

There was a long pause. Then Murdock spoke again, and both suppressed hate and anger were in his voice: “Ye had betther have a care wid me. I’ve crushed ye wance, an’ I’ll crush ye agin! Ye can shpake scornful yerself, but mayhap the girrul would give a different answer.” “Then, ye had betther hear her answer from herself.

Norah! Come here, daughter; come here!” Norah rose, making an imperative sign to me to keep my seat, and with the bearing of an empress passed across to the door and beside her father. She took no notice whatever of her wooer. “What is it, father?” “Now, Murdock, spake away! Say what ye have to say; an’ take yer answer from her own lips.” Murdock spoke with manifest embarrassment: “I’ve been tellin’ yer father that I’d like ye for me wife.” “I’ve heard all you said.” “An’ yer answer?” “My father has answered for me.” “But I want me answerfrom yer own lips. My, but it’s the handsome girrul ye are this night!” “My answer is ‘No!’” and she turned to come back. “Shtay!” Murdock’s voice was nasty, so nasty that instinctively I stood up. No person should speak like that to the woman I loved. Norah stopped. “I suppose ye won’t luk at me because ye have a young shpark on yer hands. I’m no fool, an’ I know why ye’ve been down in the fields! I seen yez both more nor wance; an’ I’m makin’ me offer knowin’ what I know. I don’t want to be too hard on ye, an’ I’ll say nothin’ if ye don’t dhrive me to. But remimber ye’re in me power; an’ ye’ve got to plase me in wan wayoranother. I knew what I was doin’ whin I watched ye wid yer young shpark! Ye didn’t want yer father to see him nigh the house! Ye’d betther be careful, the both of ye. If ye don’t intind to marry me, well, ye won’t; but mind how ye thrate me or shpake to me, here or where there’s others by; or be th’ Almighty, I’ll send the ugly whisper round the counthry about ye—” flesh and blood could not stand this. In an instant I was out in the porch and ready to fly at his throat; but Norah put her arm between us.

“Mr. Severn,” she said, in a voice which there was no gainsaying, “my father is here. It is for him to protect me here, if any protection is required from a thing like that!” The scorn of her voice made even Murdock wince, and seemed to cool both Joyce and myself, and also Dick, who now stood beside us.

Murdock looked from one to another of us for a moment in amazement, and then, with a savage scowl, as though he were looking who and where to strike with venom, he fixed on Norah —

God forgive him!

"An' so ye have him at home already, have ye! An' yer father present, too, an' a witness. It's the sharp girrul ye are, Norah Joyce, but I suppose this wan is not the first." I restrained myself simply because Norah's hand was laid on my mouth. Murdock went on: "An' so ye thought I wanted ye for yerself! Oh no! It's no bankrup's daughtherfor me; but I may as well tell ye why I wanted ye. It was because I've had in me hands, wan time or another, ivery inch ivthis mountain, bit be bit, all except the Cliff Fields; and thim I wanted for purposes iv me own — thim as knows why, has swore not to tell" — this with a scowl at Dick and me. "But I'll have thim yit; an' have thim, too, widout thinkin' that me wife likes sthrollin' there wid sthrange min!" Here I could restrain myself no longer; and to my joy on the instant — and since then whenever I have thought of it —

Norah withdrew her hand as if to set me free. I stepped forward, and with one blow fair in the lips knocked the foul- mouthed ruffian head over heels. He rose in an instant, his face covered with blood, and rushed at me. This time I stepped out, and with an old foot-ball trick, taking him on the breastbone with my open hand, again tumbled him over. He arose livid — but this time his passion was cold — and standing some yards off, said, while he wiped the blood from his face: "Wait; ye'll be sorry yit ye shtruck that blow! Aye, ye'll both be sorry — sad an' sorry — an' for shame that ye don't reckon on. Wait!" I spoke out: "Wait! yes, I shall wait, but only till the time comes to punish you. And let me warn you to be careful how you speak of this lady. I have shown you already how I can deal with you personally; next time — if there be a next time—" Here Murdock interrupted sotto voce: "There'll be a next time; don't fear! Be God, but there will!" I went on: "I shall not dirty my hands with you, but I shall have you in jail for slander." "Jail me, is it?" he sneered. "We'll see. An' so ye think ye're going to marry a lady, whin ye make an honest woman iv Norah Joyce, do ye? Luk at her! an' it's a lady ye're goin' to make iv her, is it? An' thim hands iv hers, wid the marks iv the milkin' an' the shpade onto them. My! but they'll luk well among the quality, won't they?" I was going to strike him again, but Norah laid her hand on my arm; so, smothering myangeras well as I could, I said: "Don't dare to speak ill of people whose shoes you are not worthy to black; and be quick about your finishing your work at Shleenanaher, for you've got to go when the time is up. I won't have the place polluted by your presence a day longer than I can help." Norah looked wonderingly at me and at him, for he had given a manifest start. I went on: "And as for these hands" — I took Norah's hands in mine— "perhaps the time may come when you will pray for the help of their honest strength — pray with all the energy of your dastard soul! But whether this may be or not, take you care how you cross her path or mine again, or you shall rue it to the last hour of your life. Come, Norah, it is not fit that you should contaminate your eyes or your ears with the presence of this wretch!" and I led her in. As we went I heard Joyce say: "An' listen to me: niver you dare to put one foot across me mearin' again, or I'll take the law into me own hands!"

Then Dick spoke: "And hark you, Mr. Murdock: remember that you have to deal with me also in any evil that you attempt!" Murdock turned on him savagely: '"As for you, I dismiss ye from me imploymint. Ye'll niver set foot on me land agin! Away wid ye!" "Hurrah!" shouted Dick. "Mr. Joyce, you're my witness that he has discharged me, and I am free." Then he stepped down from the porch, and said to Murdock, in as exasperating a way as he could:

“And, dear Mr. Murdock, wouldn’t it be a pleasure to you to have it out with me here, now? Just a simple round or two, to see which is the best man? I am sure it would do you good — and me too. I can see you are simply spoiling for a fight. I promise you that there will be no legal consequences if you beat me, and if I beat you I shall take my chance. Do let me persuade you! Just one round;” and he began to take off his coat. Joyce, however, stopped him, speaking gravely: “No, Mr. Sutherland, not here; and let me warn ye, for ye’re a younger man nor me, agin such anger. I sthruck that man wance, an’ it’s sorry I am for that same! No; not that I’m afeered of him” — answering the query in Dick’s face— “but because, for a full-grown man to sthrike in anger is a sarious thing. Arthur there sthruck not for himself, but for an affront to his wife that’s promised, an’ he’s not to be blamed.” Norah here took my arm and held it tight; “but I say, wid that one blow that I’ve sthruck since I was a lad on me mind, ‘Never sthrike a blow in anger all yer life long, unless it be to purtect one ye love.’” Dick turned to him, and said, heartily:

“You’re quite right, Mr. Joyce, and I’m afraid I acted like a cad. Here, you clear off! Your very presence seems to infect better men than yourself, and brings them something nearer to your level. Mr. Joyce, forgive me; I promise I’ll take your good lesson to heart.” They both came into the room; and Norah and I looking out of the window — my arm being around her — saw Murdock pass down the path and out at the gate.

We all took our places once again around the fire. When we sat down Norah instinctively put her hands behind her, as if to hide them — that ruffian’s words had stung her a little; and as I looked, without, however, pretending to take any notice, I ground my teeth. But with Norah such an ignoble thought could be but a passing one.

With a quick blush she laid her hand open on my knee, so that, as the fire-light fell on it, it was shown in all its sterling beauty. I thought the opportunity was a fairone, and I lifted it to my lips and said:

“Norah, Ithink I maysaya word before yourfatherand myfriend. This hand — this beautiful hand,” and I kissed it again, “is dearer to me a thousand times, because it can do, and has done, honest work; and I only hope that in all my life I may be worthy of it.” I was about to kiss it yet again, but Norah drew it gently away. Then she shifted her stool a little, and came closer to me. Her father saw the movement, and said simply: “Go to him, daughter. He is worth it — he sthruck a good blow for ye this night.” And so we changed places, and she leaned her head against my knee; her other hand — the one not held in mine — rested on her father’s knee.

There we sat and smoked, and talked for an hour or more. Then Dick looked at me and I at him, and we rose. Norah looked at me lovingly as we got our hats. Her father saw the look, and said: “Come, daughter; if you’re not tired, suppose we see them down the boreen.” A bright smile and a blush came in her face; she threw a shawl over her head, and we went all together. She held her father’s arm and mine; but by-and-by the lane narrowed, and her father went in front with Dick, and we two followed.

Was it to be wondered at, if we did lag a little behind them, and if we spoke in whispers? Or, if now and again, when the lane curved and kindly bushes projecting threw dark shadows, our lips met? When we came to the open space before the gate we found Andy. He pretended to see only Dick and Joyce, and saluted them.

“Begor, but it’s the fine night, it is, Misther Dick, though more betoken the rain is comin’ on agin soon. A fine night, Misther Joyce; and how’s Miss Norah? — God bless her! Musha! but it’s sorry I am that she didn't walk down wid ye this fine night! An' poor MastherArt — I suppose the fairies has got him agin?" Here he pretended to just catch sight of me. "Yer'an'r, but it's the sorraful man I was; shure, an' I thought ye was tuk aff be the fairies — or, mayhap, it was houldin' a leprachaun that ye wor. An' my! but there's Miss Norah, too, comin' to take care iv her father! God bless ye, Miss Norah, acushla, but it's glad I am to see ye!" "And I'm always glad to see you, Andy," she said, and shook hands with him. Andy took her aside, and said, in a staccato whisper intended for us all: "Musha! Miss Norah, dear, may I ax ye somethin'?"

"Indeed you may, Andy. What is it?"

"Well, now, it's throubled in me mind lam about Masther Art — that young gintleman beyantye, talkin't' yerfather;" the hypocritical villain pointed me out, as though she did not know me. I could see in the moonlight the happy smile on her face as she turned towards me.

"Yes; I see him," she answered. "Well, Miss Norah, the fairies got him on the top iv Knocknacar, and ivir since he's been wandherin' round lukin'fur wan iv thim. I thried to timpt him away be tellin' him iv nice girruls iv these parts — real girruls, not fairies. But he's that obstinate he wouldn't luk at wan iv thim — no, nor listen to me, ayther."

"Indeed!" she said, her eyes dancing with fun.

"An', Miss Norah, dear, what kind iva girrul d'ye think he wanted to find?"

"I don't know, Andy. What kind?"

"Oh, begor! but it's meself can tell ye! Shure, it's a long, yalla, dark girrul, shtreaky — like — like he knows what — not quite a faymale nagur, wid a rid petticoat, an' a quare kind ivaneye!"

"Oh, Andy!" was all she said, as she turned to me smiling.

“Get along, you villain!” said I, and I shook my fist at him in fun; and then I took Norah aside, and told her what the “quare kind iv an eye” was that I had sought — and found.

Then we two said “Good-night” in peace, while the others in front went through the gate. We took — afterwards — a formal and perfectly decorous farewell, only shaking hands all round, before Dick and I mounted the car. Andy started off at a gallop, and his “Git up, ye ould corn-crake!” was lost in our shouts of “Goodbye!” as we waved our hats. Looking back, we saw Norah’s hands waving as she stood with her father’s arm around her, and her head laid back against his shoulder, while the yellow moonlight bathed them from head to foot in a sea of celestial light. And then we sped on through the moonlight and the darkness alike, forthe clouds of the coming rain rolled thick and fast across the sky.

But for me the air was all aglow with rosy light, and the car was a chariot flying swiftly to the dawn!

CHAPTER XIV

The next day was Sunday; and after church I came over early to Knockcalltecrore, and had a long talk with Norah about her school project. We decided that the sooner she began the better — she because, as she at first alleged, every month of delay made school a less suitable place for her — I because, as I took care not only to allege but to reiterate, as the period had to be put in, the sooner it was begun the sooner it would end, and so the sooner would my happiness come. Norah was very sweet, and shyly told me that if such was my decided opinion, she must say that she too had something of the same view. “I do not want you to be pained, dear, by any delay,” she said, “made by your having been so good to me; and I love you too well to want myself to wait longer than is necessary;” an admission that was an intoxicating pleasure to me.

We agreed that our engagement was, if not to be kept a secret, at least not to be spoken of unnecessarily. Her father was to tell her immediate relatives, so that there would not be any gossip at herabsence, and I was to tell one or two of my own connections — for I had no immediate relatives — and perhaps one or two friends who were rather more closely connected with me than those of my own blood. I asked to be allowed to tell also my solicitor, who was an old friend of my father’s, and who had always had more than merely professional relations with me. I had reasons of my own for telling him of the purposed change in my life, for I had important matters to execute through him, so as to protect Norah’s future in case my own death should occur before the marriage was to take place. But of this, of course, I did not tell her.

We had a happy morning together, and when Joyce came in we told him of the conclusion we had arrived at. He fully acquiesced; and then, when he and I were alone, I asked him if he would prefer to make the arrangements about the schools himself or by some solicitor he would name, or that should all be done by my solicitor. He told me that my London solicitor would probably know what to do better than anyone in his own part of the world; and we agreed that I was to arrange it with him.

Accordingly I settled with Norah that the next day but one I should leave for London, and that when I had put everything on a satisfactory footing I should return to Carnaclif, and so be for a little longer able to see my darling. Then I went back to the hotel to write my letters in time for the post. That afternoon I wrote to my solicitor, Mr. Chapman, and asked him to have inquiries made, without the least delay, as to what was the best school in Paris to which to send a young lady, almost grown up, but whose education had been neglected. I added that I should be myself in London within two days of my letter, and would hope to have the information.

That evening I had a long talk on affairs with Dick, and opened to him a project I had formed regarding Knockcalltecrore. This was that I should try to buy the whole of the mountain, right away from where the sandy peninsula united it to the main-land, for evidently it had ages ago been an isolated sea-girt rock-bound island. Dick knew that already we held a large part of it — Norah the Cliff Fields, Joyce the upper land on the sea side, and myself the part that I had already bought from Murdock. He quite fell in with the idea, and as we talked it over he grew more and more enthusiastic.

“Why, my dear fellow,” he said, as he stood up and walked about the room, “it will make the most lovely residence in the world, and will be a fine investment for you. Holding long leases, you will easily be able to buy the freehold, and then every penny spent will return manifold. Let us once be able to find the springs that feed the bog, and get them in hand, and we can make the place a paradise. The springs are evidently high up on the Hill, so that we can not only get water for irrigating and ornamental purposes, but we can get power also! Why, you can have electric light, and everything else you like, at the smallest cost. And if it be, as I suspect, that there is a streak of limestone in the Hill, the place might be a positive mine of wealth as well! We have not lime within fifty miles, and if once we can quarry the stone here we can do anything. We can build a harbor on the south side, which would be the loveliest place to keep a yacht in that ever was known — quite big enough for anything in these parts — as safe as Portsmouth, and of fathomless depth." "Easy, old man!" I cried, for the idea made me excited too.

"But I assure you, Art, I am within the truth." "I know it, Dick; and now I want to come to business." "Eh! how do you mean?" he said, looking puzzled. Then I told him of the school project, and that I was going to London after another day to arrange it. He was delighted, and quite approved. "It is the wisest thing I ever heard of!" was his comment. "But how do you mean about business?" he asked. "Dick, this has all to be done; and it needs some one to do it. I am not a scientist nor an engineer, and this project wants the aid of both, or of one man who is the two. Will you do it for me — and for Norah?" He seemed staggered for a moment, but said heartily:

"That I will; but it will take some time." "We can do it within two years," I answered, "and that is the time that Norah will be away. It will help to pass it;" and I sighed.

"A long time, indeed, but oh, what a time, Art! Just fancy what you are waiting for; there need be no unhappy moment, please God, in all those months.” Then I made him a proposition, to which he, saying that myofferwas too good, at first demurred. I reasoned with him, and told him that the amount was little to me, as, thanks to my great aunt, I had more than I ever could use; and that I wanted to make Norah’s country-home a paradise on earth, so far as love and work and the means at command could do it; that it would take up all Dick’s time, and keep him for the whole period from pursuing his studies; and that he would have to be manager as well as engineer, and would have to buy the land for me. I told him also my secret hope that in time he would take all my affairs in hand and manage everything for me. “Buying the land will, I fancy, be easy enough,” he said. “Two of the farms are in the market now, and all round here land is literally going a-begging. However, I shall take the matter in hand at once, and write you to London, in case there should be anything before you get back.” And thus we settled that night that I was, if possible, to buy the whole mountain. Iwrote bythe next post to Mr. Caicy, telling him that I had a project of purchase in hand, and that Mr. Sutherland would do everything for me during myabsence, and that whatever he wished was to be done. I asked him to come over and see Dick before the week was out.

The next day I spoke to Joyce, and asked him if he would care to sell me the lease of the land he now held. He seemed rejoiced at the chance of being able to get away.

“I will go gladly, though, sure enough, I’ll be sad for awhile to lave the shpot where I was born, and where I’ve lived all me life. But whin Norah is gone — an’ sure she’ll never be back, for I’m thinkin’ that after her school ye’ll want to get married at once—” “That we shall!” I interrupted. “An’ right enough too. But widout her the place will be that lonesome that I don’t think I could a-bear it! Me sister”Il go over to Knocknacar to live wid me married sister there, that'll be only too happy to have herwith her; and I'll go over to Glasgow, where Eugene is at work. The boy wants me to come, and whin I wrote and tould him of Norah's engagement, he wrote at once askin' me to lave the Hill and come to him. He says that before the year is out he hopes to be able to keep himself — and me, too, if we should want it; an' he wrote such a nice letter to Norah — but the girl will like to tell ye about that herself. I can't sell ye the Cliff Fields meself, for they belong to Norah; but if ye like to ask her I'm sure she'll make no objection." "I should be glad to have them," I said, "but all shall be hers in two years." And then and there we arranged for the sale of the property. I made Joyce the offer; he accepted at once, but said it was more than it was worth. "No," said I, "I shall take the chance. I intend to make improvements." Norah did not make any objection to her father selling the Cliff Fields. She told me that as I wanted to have them, I might, of course; but she hoped I would never sell the spot, as it was very dear to her. I assured her that in this, as in all other matters, I would do as she wished, and we sealed the assurance with — never mind; we sealed it. I spent the afternoon there, for it was to be my last afternoon with Norah until I came back from Paris. We went down for a while to the Cliff Fields, and sat on the table rock and talked overall our plans. I told her I had a scheme regarding Knockcalltecrore, but that I did not wish to tell her about it, as it was to be a surprise. It needed a pretty hard struggle to be able to keep her in the dark even to this extent — there is nothing more sweet to young lovers than to share a secret. She knew that my wishes were all for her, and was content. When we got back to the cottage I said good-bye. This naturally took some time — a first good-bye always does — and went home to get my traps packed ready for an early start in the morning, more especially as I wished, when in Galway, to give Mr. Caicy instructions as to transferring the two properties — Norah's and her father's.

When Dick came home he and I had a long talk on affairs, and I saw that he thoroughly understood all about the purchase of the whole mountain. Then we said goodnight, and I retired. I did not sleep very well. I think I was too happy; and out of the completeness of my happiness there seemed to growa fear — some dim, haunting dread of a change — something which would reverse the existing order of things. And so in dreams the Drowsy God played at ball with me: now throwing me to a dizzy height of joy, and then, as I fell swiftly through darkness, arresting my flight into the nether gloom with some new sweet hope. It seemed to me that I was awake all the night; and yet I knew I must have slept, for I had distinct recollections of dreams in which all the persons and circumstances lately present to my mind were strangely jumbled together. The jumble was kaleidoscopic; there was an endless succession of its phases, but the pieces all remained the same. There were moments when all seemed aglow with rosy light, and hard on them others horrid with the gloom of despair or fear; but in all the dominating idea was the mountain standing against the sunset, always as the embodiment of the ruling emotion of the scene, and always Norah's beautiful eyes shone upon me. I seemed to live over again in isolated moments all the past weeks; but in such a way that the legends and myths and stories of Knockcalltecrore which I had heard were embodied in each moment. Thus, Murdock had always a part in the gloomy scenes, and got inextricably mixed up with the King of the Snakes. They freely exchanged personalities, and at one time I could see the Gombeen Man defying St. Patrick, while at another the

Serpent seemed to be struggling with Joyce, and, after twisting round the mountain, being only beaten off by a mighty blow from Norah's father, rushing to the sea through the Shleenanaher. Towards morning, as I suppose the needs of the waking day became more present to my mind in the gradual process of awakening, the bent of my thoughts began to be more practical; the Saint and His Majesty of the Serpents began to disappear, and the two dim cuirassiers, who, with the money-chest, had through the earlier hours of the night been passing farathwart mydreams, appearing and disappearing equally mysteriously, took a more prominent, or, perhaps, a more real part. Then I seemed to see Murdock working in a grave, whose sides were ever crumbling in as he frantically sought the treasure-chest, while the gun-carriage, rank with the slime of the bog, was high above him on the brink of the grave, projected blackly against the yellow moon. Every time this scene in its myriad variations came round, it changed to one where the sides of the grave began to tumble in, and Murdock in terror tried to scream out, but could make no sound, nor could he make any effort to approach Norah, whose strong hands were stretched out to aid him. Withsucha preparation for waking, is it any wonder that I suddenly started broad awake, with a strong sense of something forgotten, and found that it was four o'clock, and time to get ready for my journey? I did not lose anytime, and after a hot cup of tea, which the cheery Mrs. Keating had herself prepared for me, was on my way under Andy's care to Recess, where we were to meet the "long-car" to Galway.

Andy was, for a wonder, silent, and as I myself felt in a most active frame of mind, this rather gave me an opportunity for some amusement. I waited for a while to see if he would suggest any topic in his usual style; but as there was no sign of a change, I began: "You are very silent to-day, Andy. You are sad. What is it?"

"I'm thinkin'."

"So I thought, Andy. But who are you thinking of?" "Faix, I'm thinkin' iv poor Miss Norah there wid ne'er a bhoyon the flure at all, at all; an' iv the fairy girrul at Knocknacar — the poor craythurwaitin' for some kind iva leprachaun to come back to her. They do say, yer 'an'r, that the fairies is mighty fond ivthim leprachauns intirely. Musha! but it's a quare thing that weemen of all natures thinks a power more iv minkind what is hard to be caught nor ivthem thatfollys them an' is had aisy!"

"Indeed, Andy." I felt he was getting on dangerous ground, and thought it would be as well to keep him to generalities if I could.

"Shure, they do tell me so; that the girruls, whether fairies orweemin, is more fond iv lukin' out fur leprachauns, or min, if that's their kind, than the clargy is iv killin' the divil — an' they've bin at him fur thousands iv years, an' him not turned a hair."

"Well, Andy, isn't it only natural, too? If we look at the girls and make love to them, why shouldn't they have a turn too, poor things, and make love to us? Now you would like to have a wife, I know; only that you're too much afraid of any woman."

"Thrue for ye! But shure an' how could I go dhrivin' about the counthry av I had a wife iv me own in wan place? It's meself that's welkim everywhere, jist because any wan iv the weemen might fear I'd turn the laugh on her whin I got her home; but a car-dhriver can no more shpake soft to only wan girrul nor he can dhrive his car in his own shanty."

"Well, but, Andy, what would you do if you were to get married?"

"Faix, surr, an' the woman must settle that whin she comes. But, begor, it's not for a poor man like me — nor for the likes iv me —

that the fairies does be keepin' their eyes out. I tell yer 'an'r that poor min isn't iv much account anyhow! Shure, poverty is the worst iv crimes; an' there's no hidin' it like th' others. Patches is sawa mightyfarway off; and, shure enough, they're more frightfuller nor even the polis!"

"By George, Andy," said I, "I'm afraid you're a cynic."

"A cynic, surr; an', faix, what sin am I up to now?"

"You say poverty is a crime."

"Begor, but it's worse! Most crimes is forgave afther a bit; an' the law is done wid ye whin ye're atin' yer skilly. But there's some people — aye! an' lashins ivthim too — what'd rather see ye in a good shute iv coffin than in a bad shute iv clothes!"

"Why, Andy, you're quite a philosopher!"

"Bedad, that's quare; but whisper me now, surr, what kind iva thing's that?"

"Well, it's a very wise man — one who loves wisdom."

"Begor, yer 'an'r, lovin' girruls is more in my shtyle; but I thought maybe it was some new kind iva Protestan'."

"Why a Protestant?"

"Sorra wan iv me knows! I thought maybe they can believe even less nor the ould wans."

Andy's method of theological argument was quite too difficult for me, so I was silent; but my companion was not. He, however, evidently felt that theological disquisition was no more his forte than my own, for he instantly changed to another topic:

"I'll be goin' back to Knockcalltecrore to-morra, yer 'an'r. I've been tould to call fur Mr. Caicy, th' attorney — savin' yer prisence — to take him back to Carnaclif. Is there any missage ye'd like to send to any wan?" He looked at me so slyly that his meaning was quite obvious. “Thanks, Andy, but I think not, unless you tell Mr. Dick that we have had a pleasant journey this morning.”

“Nothin’ but that? — to nobody?” “Who to, for instance, Andy?” “There’s Miss Norah, now. Shure girruls is always fond iv gettin’ missages, an’ most iv all from people what they’re not fond iv!” “Meaning me?” “Oh yis, oh yis, if there’s wan more nor another what she hates the sight iv, it’s yer’an’r. Shure didn’t I notice it in her eye ere yistherday night, beyant at the boreen gate? Faix, but it’s a nice eye Miss Norah has. Now, yer ‘an’r, wouldn’t an eye like that be bettherfora young gintleman to luk into, than the quare eye iv yer fairy girrul — the wan that ye wor lukin’ for, an’ didn’t find?” The sly way in which Andy looked at me as he said this was quite indescribable. I have seen sly humor in the looks of children where the transparent simplicity of their purpose was a foil to their manifest intention to pretend to deceive. I have seen the arch glances of pretty young women when their eyes contradicted with resistless force the apparent meaning of their words; but I have never seen any slyness which could rival that of Andy. However, when he had spoken as above, he seemed to have spent the last bolt in his armory; and forthe remainder of the drive to Recess he did not touch again on the topic, or on a kindred one. When Iwas inthe hotel porch waiting the arrival of the long-car, Andy came up to me: “What day will I be in Galway for yer’an’r?” “How do you mean, Andy? I didn’t tell you I was coming back.”

Andy laughed a merry, ringing laugh. “Begor, yer ‘an’r, d’ye think there’s only wan way ivtellin’ things? Musha! butspache’d be a mighty precious kind iv a thing if that was the way.” “But, Andy, is not speech the way to make known what you wish other people to know?” “Ah, go to God! I’d like to know if ye take it for granted whin ask a girrul a question an' she says 'no', that she manes it, or that she intends ayther that ye should think she manes it. Faix, it'd be a harrd wurrld to live in, if that was so; an' there'd be mightyfewwiddys in it ayther!" "Why widows, Andy?" "Shure, isn't wives the shtuff that widdys is made iv?"

"Oh, I see. I'm learning, Andy — I'm getting on." "Yis, yer 'an'r. Ye haven't got on the long cap now, but I'm afeerd it's only a leather medal ye'd get as yit. Niver mind, surr! Here's the long-car comin'; an' whin ye tellygraph to Misther Dick to sind me over to Galway fur to bring ye back, I'll luk up Miss Norah an' ax her to condescind to give ye some lessons in the differ betwixt 'yes' an' 'no' as shpoke by girruls. I'm tould now, it's a mighty intherestin' kind iva shtudyfora young gintleman." There was no answering this Parthian shaft. "Good-bye, Andy," I said, as I left a sovereign in his hand.

"Good-luck, yer 'an'r; though what's the use ivwishin' luck to a man, whin the fairies is wid him?" The last thing I saw was Andy waving his ragged hat as we passed the curve of the road round the lake before Recess was hidden from our view. When I got to Galway I found Mr. Caicy waiting for me. He was most hearty in his welcome, and told me that as there was nearly an hour to wait before the starting of the Dublin express, he had luncheon on the table, and that we could discuss our business over it. We accordingly adjourned to his house, and after explaining to him what I wanted done with regard to the purchase of the property at Knockcalltecrore, I told him that Dick knew all the details, and would talk them over with him when he saw him on the next evening.

I began my eastward journey with my inner man in a most comfortable condition. Indeed, I concluded that there was no preparation for a journey like a bottle of "Sneyd's 47" between two. I got to Dublin in time for the night mail, and on the following morning walked into Mr. Chapman's office at half-past ten o'clock. He had all the necessary information for me; indeed, his zeal and his kindness were such that then and there I opened my heart to him, and was right glad that I had done so when I felt the hearty grasp of his hand as he wished me joy and all good fortune. He was, of course, on the side of prudence. He was my own lawyerand myfather's friend, and it was right and fitting that he should be. But it was quite evident that in the background of his musty life there was some old romance — musty old attorneys always have romances — so at least say the books. He entered heartily into my plan, and suggested that, if I chose, he would come with me to see the school and the school-mistress in Paris.

"It will be better, I am sure," he said, "to have an old man like myself with you, and who can in our negotiations speak for herfather. Indeed, my dear boy, from being so old a friend of your father's, and having no children of my own, I have almost come to look on you as my son, so it will not be much of an effort to regard Miss Norah as my daughter. The school-mistress will, in the long-run, be better satisfied with my standing in loco parentis than with yours." It was a great relief to me to find my way thus smoothed, for I had half expected some objection or remonstrance on his part. His kind offer was, of course, accepted, and the next morning found us in Paris.

We went to see the school and the school-mistress. All was arranged as we wished. Mr. Chapman did not forget that Norah wished to have all the extra branches of study, or that I wished to add all that could give a charm to her life.

The school-mistress opened her eyes at the total of Norah's requirements, which Mr. Chapman summed up as "all extras" — the same including the use of a saddle-horse, and visits to the opera and such performances as should be approved of, under the special care and with the special accompaniment of Madame herself.

I could see that for the coming year Norah's lines would lie in pleasant places in so far as Madame Lepecheaux could accomplish it. The date of her coming was to be fixed by letter, and as soon as possible.

Mr. Chapman had suggested that it might be well to arrange with Madame Lepecheaux that Norah should be able to get what clothes she might require, and such matters as are wanted by young ladies of the position which she was entering. The genial French woman quite entered into the idea, but insisted that the representative of Norah's father should come with her to the various magasins and himself make arrangements. He could not refuse; and as I was not forbidden bythe unsuspecting lady, I came too.

These matters took up some time, and it was not until the fifth day after I had left Connemara that we were able to start on our return journey. We left at night, and after our arrival in the early morning, went, as soon as we had breakfasted, to Mr. Chapman's office to get our letters.

I found two. The first I took to the window to read, where I was hidden behind a curtain, and where I might kiss it without being seen; for although the writing was strange to me — for I had never seen her handwriting — I knew that it was from Norah.

Do any of us who arrive at middle life ever attempt to remember our feelings on receiving the first letter from the woman or the man of our love? Can there come across the long expanse of commonplace life, strewn as it is with lost beliefs and shattered hopes, any echo, any after-glow, of that time, any dim recollection of the thrill of pride and joy that flashed through us at such a moment? Can we rouse ourselves from the creeping lethargy of the contented acceptance of things, and feel the generous life-blood flowing through us once again?

I held Norah’s letter in my hand, and it seemed as though with but one more step I should hold my darling herself in my arms. I opened her letter most carefully; anything that her hands had touched was sacred to me. And then her message — the message of her heart to mine — sent direct and without intermediary, reached me:

“My dear Arthur, — I hope you had a good journey, and that you enjoyed your trip to Paris. Father and I are both well, and we have had excellent news of Eugene, who has been promoted to more important work. We have seen Mr. Sutherland everyday. He says that everything is going just as you wish it. Mr. Murdock has taken old Bat Moynahan to live with him since you went; they are always together, and Moynahan seems to be always drunk. Father thinks that Mr. Murdock has some purpose on foot, and that it cannot be a good one. We shall all be glad to see you soon again. I am afraid this letter must seem very odd to you; but you know I am not accustomed to writing letters. You must believe one thing: that whatever Isayto you, Ifeeland believe with all my heart. I got your letters, and I cannot tell you what pleasure they gave me, or how I treasure them. Father sends his love and duty. What could I send that words could carry? I may not try yet. Perhaps I shall be more able to do what I wish when I know more.

Norah.”

The letter disappointed me. Was any young man ever yet satisfied with written words, when his medium had hitherto been rosy lips, with the added commentary of loving eyes? And yet, when I look back on that letter from a peasant girl, without high education or knowledge of the world, and who had possibly never written a letter before except to her father or brother, or a girl friend, and but few even of these — when I read in every word its simplicity and truth, and recognise the arriere pensee of that simple phrase, "Whatever Isayto you Ifeel and think withall my heart," Ifind it hard to think thatany other letter that she or anyone else could have written, could have been more suitable, or could have meant more.

When I had read Norah's letter over a few times, and feared that Mr. Chapman would take humorous notice of my absorption, I turned to the other letter, which I knew was from Dick. I brought this from the window to the table, beside which I sat to read it, Mr. Chapman being still deep in his own neglected correspondence.

I need not give his letter in detail. It was long and exhaustive, and told me accurately of every step taken and everything accomplished since I had seen him. Mr. Caicy had made his appearance, as arranged, and the two had talked over and settled affairs. Mr. Caicy had lost no time, and fortune had so favored him that he found that nearly all the tenants on the east side of the hill wished to emigrate, and so were anxious to realise on their holdings. The estate from which they held was in bankruptcy; and as a sale was then being effected, Mr. Caicy had purchased the estate, and then made arrangements for all who wished to purchase to do so on easy terms from me. The net result was, that when certain formalities should be complied with, and certain moneys paid, I should own the whole of Knockcalltecrore and the land immediately adjoining it, together with certain other parcels of land in the neighborhood. There were other matters of interest also in his letter. He told me that Murdock, in order to spite and injure Joyce, had completed the damming up of the stream which ran from his land into the Cliff Fields by blocking with great stones the narrow chine in the rocks through which it fell; that this, coupled with the continuous rains had made the bog rise enormously, and that he feared much there would be some disaster. His fear was increased by what had taken place at Knocknacar. Even here the cuttings had shown some direful effects of the rain; the openings, made with so much trouble, had become choked, and as a consequence the bog had risen again, and had even spread downwards on its original course. Alarmed by these things, Dick had again warned Murdock of the danger in which he stood from the position of his house; and further, from tampering with the solid bounds of the bog itself. Murdock had not taken his warnings in good part — not any better than usual — and the interview had, as usual, ended in a row. Murdock had made the quarrel the occasion of ventilating his grievance against me for buying the whole mountain, for by this time it had leaked out that I was the purchaser. His language, Dick said, was awful. He cursed me and all belonging to me. He cursed Joyce and Norah, and Dick himself, and swore to be revenged on us all, and told Dick that he would balk me of finding the treasure, even if I were to buy up all Ireland, and if he had to peril his soul to forestall me. Dick ended his description of his proceedings characteristically: "In fact, he grew so violent, and said such insulting things of you and others, that I had to give him a good sound thrashing." "Others" — that meant Norah, of course — good old Dick! It was just as well for Mr. Murdock's physical comfort, and forthe peace of the neighborhood, that I did not meet him then and there; for, under these favoring conditions, there would have been a continuance of his experiences under the hands of Dick Sutherland. Then Dick went on to tell me at greater length what

Norah had conveyed in her letter — that, since I had left, Murdock had taken Bat Moynahan to live with him, and kept him continually drunk; that the two of them were evidently trying to locate the whereabouts of the treasure; and that, whenever they thought they were not watched, they trespassed on Joyce's land, to get near a certain part of the bog.

"I mean to watch them the first dark night," wrote Dick, at the close of his letter; "for I cannot help thinking that there is some devilment on foot. I don't suppose you care much for the treasure — you've got a bigger treasure from Knockcalltecrore than ever was hidden in it by men — but, all the same, it is yours after Murdock's time is up; and, as the guardian of your interest, I feel that I have a right to do whatever may be necessary to protect you. I have seen, at times, Murdock give such a look at Moynahan out of the corners of his eyes — when he thought no one was looking — that, upon my soul, I am afraid he means — if he gets the chance — to murder the old man, after he has pumped him of all he knows. I don't want to accuse a man of such an intention, without being able to prove it, and of course have said nothing to a soul; but I shall be really more comfortable in my mind when the man has gone away." By the time I had finished the letter, Mr. Chapman had run through his correspondence — vacation business was not much in his way — and we discussed affairs. The settlement of matters connected with my estate, and the purchase of Knockcalltecrore, together with the making of certain purchases — including a ring for Norah — kept me a few days in London; but at length all was complete, and I started on my trip to the west of Ireland.

Before leaving, I wrote to Norah that I would be at Knockcalltecrore on the morning of the 20th of October; and also to

Dick, asking him to see that Andy was sent to meet me at Galway on the morning of the 19th, for I preferred rather to have the drive in solitude than to be subjected to the interruptions of chance fellow-passengers.

At Dublin Mr. Caicy met me, as agreed; and together we went to various courts, chambers, offices, and banks, completing the purchase with all the endless official formalities and eccentricities habitual to a country whose administration has traditionally adopted and adapted every possible development of all belonging to red-tape. At last, however, all was completed; and very early the next morning Mr. Caicy took his seat in the Galway express, in a carriage with the owner of Knockcalltecrore, to whom he had been formally appointed Irish law agent.

The journey was not a long one, and it was only twelve o'clock when we steamed into Galway. As we drew up at the platform, I saw Dick, who had come over to meet me. He was, I thought, looking a little pale and anxious; but as he did not say anything containing the slightest hint of any cause for such a thing, I concluded that he wished to wait until we were alone. This, however, was not to be for a little while; for Mr. Caicy had telegraphed to order lunch at his house, and thither we had to repair. We walked over, although Andy, who was in waiting outside the station, grinning from ear to ear, offered to "rowl our 'an'rs over in half a jiffey."

Lunch over, and our bodies the richer for some of Mr. Caicys excellent port, we prepared to start. Dick took occasion to whisper to me: "Some time on the road propose to walk for a bit, and send on the car. I want a talk with you alone without making a mystery."

"All right, Dick. Is it a serious matter?" "Very serious."

CHAPTER XV

When, some miles on our road, we came to a long stretch of moorland, I told Andy to stop till we got off. This being done, I told him to go on and wait for us at the next house, as we wished to have a walk.

“The nixt house?” queried Andy, “the very nixt house?

Must it be that same?”

“No, Andy,” I answered, “the next after that will do equally well, or the third, if it is not too far off. Why do you want to change?”

“Well, yer ‘an’r, to tell ye the thruth, there’s a girrul at the house beyant what thinks it’s a long time on the road I am widoutdoin’ anythin’ about settlin’ down, an’ that it’s time I asked herfortin, anyhow. Musha! but it’s afeerd lam to shtop there, fur maybe she’d take advantage iv me whin she got me all alone, an’ me havin’ to wait there till yez come. An’ me so soft-hearted, that maybe I’d say too much or too little.” “Why too much or too little?”

“Faix, if I said too much I might be settled down before the month was out; an’ if I said too little I might have a girrul lukin’ black at me iv’ry time Idhruv by. The house beyant it is a public, an’ shure I know I’m safe there anyhow — if me dhrouth ‘II only hould out!”

I took the hint, and Andy spun my shilling in the airas he drove off. Dick and I walked together, and when he was out of ear-shot I said: “Now, old fellow, we are alone. What is it?” “It’s about Murdock.” “Not more than you told me in your letter, I hope. I owe you a good turn for that thrashing you gave him!” “Oh, that was nothing; it was a labor of love. What I want to speak of is a much more serious affair.” “Nothing to touch Norah, I hope?” I said, anxiously. “This individual thing is not, thank God! But everything which that ruffian can do to worry her, or any of us, will be done. We'll have to watch him closely." "What is this new thing?" "It is about old Moynahan. I am in serious doubt and anxiety as to what I should do. At present I have only suspicion to go on, and not the faintest shadow of proof, and I really want help and advice." "Tell me all about it." "I shall, exactly as I remember it; and when I have told you, you may be able to draw some conclusion which can help us."

"Go on; but remember I am, as yet, in ignorance of what it is all about. You must not take any knowledge on my part for granted."

"I'll bear it in mind. Well, you remember what I said in my letter, that I had a suspicion of Murdock, and intended watching him?" I nodded. "Two nights after I had written that, the evening was dark and wet — just the weather I would have chosen myself had I had any mysterious purpose on hand. As soon as it got dark I put on my black water-proof and fishing-boots and a sou'wester, and then felt armed for any crouching or lying down that might be required. I waited outside Murdock's house in the lane-way, where I could see from the shadows on the window that both men were in the house. I told you that old Bat Moynahan had taken up his residence entirely with the Gombeen Man—" "And that he was always drunk." "Exactly. I see you understand the situation. Presently I heard a stumble on the stone outside the porch, and peeping in through the hedge I saw Murdock holding up old Moynahan. Then he shut the door and they came down the path. The wind was by this time blowing pretty strongly, and made a loud noise in the hedge-rows, and bore in the roar of the surf. Neither of the men could hear me, for I took care as I followed them to keep on the leeward side, and always with something between us. Murdock did not seem to have the slightest suspicion that anyone was even on the hillside, let alone listening, and he did not even lower his tone as he spoke. Moynahan was too drunk to either know or care how loud he spoke, and indeed both had to speak pretty loud inorderto be heard through the sound of the growing storm. The rain fell in torrents, and the men passed down the boreen stumbling and slipping. I followed on the other side of the hedge, and I can tell you I felt grateful to the original Mackintosh, or Golosh, or whatever was the name of the Johnny who invented the water-proof. When they had reached the foot of the hill, they went on the road which curves round bythe south-east, and I managed to scramble through the fir wood without losing sight of them. When they came to the bridge over the stream, where it runs out on the north side of the peninsula, they turned up on the far bank. I slipped over the bridge behind them, and got on the far side of the fringe of alders. Here they stopped and sheltered fora while, and as Iwas but a few feet from them I heard every word which passed. Murdock began by saying to Moynahan:

"'Now, keep yer wits about ye, if ye can. Ye'll get lashins ivdhrink whin we get back, but remimberye promised to go over the ground where yer father showed ye that the Frinchmin wint wid the gun-carriage an' the horses. Where was it now that he tuk ye?' Moynahan evidently made an effort to think and speak: "'It was just about this shpot wheer he seen thim first. They crast over the sthrame — there wor no bridge thin nigher nor Galway — an' wint up the side ivthe hill sthraight up.'

"'Now, couldn't ye folia the way yer father showed ye? Jist think. It's all dark, and there's nothin' that ye know to confuse ye — no threes what has growed up since thin. Thry an' remimber, an' ye'll have lashins ivdhrink this night, an' half the goold whin we find it.'

'"I can go. I can show the shpot. Come on.' He made a sudden bolt down into the river, which was running unusually high. The current almost swept him away; but Murdock was beside him in a moment, crying out:

'"Go an; the wather isn't deep! don't be afeerd! I'm wid ye.' When I heard this, I ran around and across the bridge, and was waiting behind the hedge on the road when they came up again. The two men went up the Hill straight for perhaps a hundred yards, I still close to them; then Moynahan stopped: '"Here's about the shpot me father tould me that he seen the min whin the moon shone out. Thin they went aff beyant,' and he pointed to the south. The struggle through the stream had evidently sobered him somewhat, for he spoke much more clearly. '"Come on thin,' cried Murdock, and they moved off. '"Here's wheer they wint to, thin,' said Moynahan, as he stopped on the south side of the Hill — as I knew it to be from the louder sound of the surf which was borne in by the western gale. 'Here they wor, jist about here, an' me father wint away to hide from thim beside the big shtone at the Shleenanaherso that they wouldn't see him.' Then he paused, and went on in quite a different voice: '"There, now I've tould ye enough for wan night. Come home, for it's chilled to the harrt I am, an' shtarved wid the cowld. Come home; I'll tell no more this night.' The next sound I heard was the popping of a cork, and then the voice of Murdock in a cheery tone: '"Here, take a sup of this, ould man. It's chilled we both are, an' cramped wid cowld. Take a good dhraw, ye must want it if ye're as bad as lam!' The gurgle that followed showed that he had obeyed orders; this was confirmed within an incredibly short time by his voice as he spoke again.

'"Me father hid there beyant. Come on.' We all, each in his own way, moved down to the Shleenanaher, and stood there. Moynahan spoke first. '"From here, he seen them jist over the ridge ivthe hill. I can go there now; come on.' He hurried up the slope, Murdock holding on to him. I followed, now crouching low, for there was but little shelter here. Moynahan stopped and said: '"It was just here.' '"How do ye know?' asked Murdock, doubtfully. '"How do I know! Hasn't me father been over the shpot wid me a score iv times; aye, an' a hundhred times afore that be himself. It was here, I tell ye, that he seen the min wid the gun-carriage for the last time. Do ye want to arguey it?'

'"Not me,' said Murdock; and as he spoke I saw him stoop, for as I was at the time lying on the ground, I could see his outline against the dark sky. He was looking away from me, and as I looked, too, I could see him start as he whispered to himself: '"Be God, but it's thrue! There's the gun-carriage.' There it was, Art, true enough before my eyes, not ten feet away on the edge of the bog. Moynahan went on: '"Me father tould me that the mountain was different at that time; the bog only kem down about as low as this. Musha! but it's the quare lot it has shifted since thin!' There was a pause, broken by Murdock, who spoke in a hoarse, hard voice:

'"An' where did he see them nixt?' Moynahan seemed to be getting drunker and drunker, as was manifest in his later speech; his dose of whiskey had no doubt been a good one.

'"He seen them next to the north beyant — higher up towards Murdock's house.'

'"Towards Murdock's house! Ye mane Joyce's.' '"No, I mane Black Murdock's; the wan he had before he robbed Joyce. But, begor, he done himself! It's on Joyce's ground the money is. He's a naygur, anyhow — Black Murdock, the Gombeen — bloody end to him!’ and he relapsed into silence. I could hear Murdock grind his teeth; then, after a pause, he spoke as the bottle popped again. ‘“Have a sup; it’ll kape out the cowld.’ Moynahan took the bottle.

‘“Here’s death and damnation to Black Gombeen!’ and the gurgling was heard again. ‘“Come, now, show me the shpot where yer father last saw the min!’ Murdock spoke authoritatively, and the other responded mechanically, and ran rather than walked, along the side of the Hill. Suddenly he stopped. ‘“Here’s the shpot!’ he said, and incontinently tumbled down.

‘“Git up! Wake up!’ shouted Murdock in his ear. But the whiskey had done its work; the man slept, breathing heavily and stentoriously, heedless of the storm and the drenching rain. Murdock gathered a few stones and placed them together; I could hear the sound as they touched each other. Then he, too, took a pull at the bottle, and sat down beside Moynahan. I moved off a little, and when I came to a whin bush got behind it for a little shelter, and raising myself, looked round. We were quite close to the edge of the bog, about half-way between Joyce’s house and Murdock’s, and well in on Joyce’s land. I was not satisfied as to what Murdock would do, so I waited.

“Fully an hour went by without any stir, and then I heard Murdock trying to awaken old Moynahan. I got down on the ground again and crawled over close to them. I heard Murdock shake the old man, and shout in his ear; presently the latter awoke, and the Gombeen Man gave him another dose of whiskey. This seemed to revive him a little as well as to complete his awakening.

‘“Musha, but it’s cowld lam!’ he shivered.

‘“Begor it is. Git up and come home,’ said Murdock, and he dragged the old man to his feet. ‘“Hould me up, Murtagh,’ said the latter; ‘I’m that cowld I can’t shtand, an’ me legs is like shtones: I can’t feel them at all, at all!’

“‘All right,’ said the other; ‘walk on a little bit — sthraight — as ye’re goin’ now; I’ll just shtop to cork the bottle.’ “From my position I could see their movements, and as I am a living man, Art, I saw Murdock turn him with his face to the bog, and send him to walk straight to his death!”

“Good God, Dick, are you quite certain?”

“I haven’t the smallest doubt on my mind. I wish I could have, for it’s a terrible thing to remember. That attempt to murder in the dark and the storm, comes between me and sleep. Moreover, Murdock’s action the instant after showed only too clearly what he intended. He turned quickly away, and I could hear him mutter as he moved past me on his way down the Hill:

“‘He’ll notthrouble me now, curse him! an’ his share won’t be required,’ and then he laughed a low, horrible laugh, slow and harsh, and as though to himself; and I heard him say:

“‘An’ whin I do get the chist, Miss Norah, ye’II be the nixt!’”

My blood began to boil as I heard of the villain’s threat.

“Where is he Dick? He must deal with me for that.”

“Steady, Art, steady!” and Dick laid his hand on me. “Go on,” I said.

“I couldn’t go after him, for I had to watch Moynahan, whom I followed close, and I caught hold of as soon as I thought Murdock was too far to see me. I was only just in time, for as I touched him he staggered, lurched forward, and was actually beginning to sink in the bog. It was atone of those spots where the rock runs sheer down into the morass. It took all my strength to pull him out, and when I did get him on the rock he sank down again into his drunken sleep. I thought the wisest thing I could do was to go to Joyce’s for help; and as, thanks to my experiments with the magnets all those weeks, I knew the ground fairly well, I was able to find my way — although the task was a slow and difficult one.

"When I got near I saw a light at the window. My rubber boots, I suppose, and the plash of the falling rain dulled my footsteps, for as I drew near I could see that a man was looking in at the window, but he did not hear me. I crept up behind the hedge and watched him. He went to the door and knocked — evidently not for the first time; then the door was opened, and I could see Joyce's figure against the light that came from the kitchen.

"'Who's there? What is it?' he asked. Then I heard Murdock's voice.

"I'm lukin' for poor ould Moynahan. He was out on the Hill in the evenin', but he hasn't kem home, an' I'm anxious about him, for he had a sup in him, an' I fear he may have fallen into the bog. I've been out lukin' for him, but I can't find him. I thought he might have kem in here.'

"'No, he has not been here. Are you sure he was on the Hill?'

"'Well, I thought so; but what ought I to do? I'd be thankful if ye'd advise me. Be-the-way, what o'clock might it be now?'

"Norah, who had joined herfather, ran in and looked at the clock.

"'It is just ten minutes past twelve,' she said.

"'I don't know what's to be done,' said Joyce. 'Could he have got to the sheebeen?'

"'That's a good idea. I suppose I'd betther go there an' luk afther him. Ye see, I'm anxious about him, for he's been livin' wid me, an' if anythin' happened to him, people might say I done it!'

"'That's a queer thing for him to say,' said Norah to her father.

"Murdock turned on her at once.

“‘Quare thing — no more quare than the things they’ll be sayin’ about you before long.’

“‘What do you mean?’ said Joyce, coming out. “‘Oh, nawthin’, nawthin’! I must look for Moynahan.’ And without a word he turned and ran. Joyce and Norah went into the house. When Murdock had quite gone I knocked at the door, and Joyce came out like a thunderbolt. “‘I’ve got ye now, ye ruffian!’ he shouted. ‘What did ye mean to say to me daughter?’ But by this time I stood in the light, and he recognised me. “‘Hush!’ I said; ‘let me in quietly;’ and when I passed in we shut the door. Then I told them that I had been out on the mountain, and had found Moynahan. I told them both that they must not ask me any questions, or let on to a soul that I had told them anything — that much might depend on it; for I thought, Art, old chap, that they had better not be mixed up in it, however the matter might end. So we all three went out with a lantern, and I brought them to where the old man was asleep. We lifted him, and between us carried him to the house; Joyce and I undressed him and put him in bed, between warm blankets. Then I came away and went over to Mrs. Kelligan’s, where I slept in a chair before the fire.

“The next morning when I went up to Joyce’s I found that Moynahan was all right — that he hadn’t even got a cold, but that he remembered nothing whatever about his walking into the bog. He had even expressed his wonder at seeing the state his clothes were in. When I went into the village I found that Murdock had been everywhere and had told everyone of his fears about Moynahan. I said nothing of his being safe, but tried quietly to arrange matters so that I might be present when Murdock should set his eyes for the first time on the man he had tried to murder. I left him with a number of others in the sheebeen, and went back to bring Moynahan, but found, when I got to Joyce's that he had already gone back to Murdock's house. Joyce had told him, as we had arranged, that when Murdock had come asking for him he had been alarmed, and had gone out to look for him; had found him asleep on the hill-side, and had brought him home with him. As I found that my scheme of facing Murdock with his victim was frustrated, I took advantage of Murdock's absence to remove the stones which he had placed to mark the spot where the treasure was last seen. I found them in the form of a cross, and moving them, replaced them at a spot some distance lower down the line of the bog. I marked the place, however, with a mark of my own — four stones put widely apart at the points of a letter Y — the centre marking the spot where the cross had been. Murdock returned to his house not long after, and within a short time ran down to tell that Moynahan had found his way home, and was all safe. They told me that he was then white and scared-looking." Here Dick paused: "Now, my difficulty is this: I know he tried to murder the man, but I am not in a position to prove it. No man could expect his word to be taken in such a matter and under such circumstances. And yet I am morally certain that he intends to murder him still. What should I do? To take any preventive steps would involve making the charge which I cannot prove. As yet neither of the men has the slightest suspicion that I am concerned in the matter in anyway, or that I even know of it. Now, may I not be most useful by keeping a watch and biding my time?"

I thought a moment, but there seemed to be only one answer. "You are quite right, Dick. We can do nothing just at present. We must keep a sharp lookout, and get some tangible evidence of his intention — something that we can support, and then we can take steps against him. As to the matter of his threat to harm Norah, I shall certainly try to bring that out in a way we can prove, and then he shall have the hottest corner he ever thought of in his life."

"Quite right that he should have it, Art; but we must think of her too. It would not do to have her name mixed up with any gossip. She will be going away very shortly, Isuppose, and then his power to hurt her will be nil. In the mean time everything must be done to guard her."

"I shall get a dog — a good savage one, this very day; that ruffian must not be able to even get near the house again—" Dick interrupted me.

"Oh, I quite forgot to tell you about that. The very day after that night I got a dog and sent it up. It is the great mastiff that Meldon, the dispensary doctor, had — the one that you admired so much. I specially asked Norah to keep it for you, and train it to be always with her. She promised that she would always feed him herself and take him about with her. I am quite sure she understood that he was to be her protector."

"Thank you, Dick," I said, and I am sure he knew I was grateful.

By this time we had come near the house outside which the car stood. Andy was inside, and evidently did not expect our coming so soon, for he sat with a measure of stout half emptied before him on the table, and on each of his knees sat a lady — one evidently the mother of the other.

As we appeared in the door-way he started up.

"Be the powdhers, there's the masther! Git up, acushla!" — this to the younger woman, for the elder had already jumped up. Then to me: "Won't ye sit down, yer 'an'r. There's only the wan chair, so ye see the shifts we're dhruv to, whin there's three iv us. I couldn't put Mrs. Dempsey from off iv her own shtool, an' she wouldn't sit on me knee alone — the dacent woman — so we had to take the girrul on too. They all sit that way in these parts!" The latter statement was made with brazen openness and shameless effrontery. I shook my finger at him:

"Take care, Andy. You'll get into trouble one of these days."

"Into throuble, fora girrul sittin' on me knee! Begor, the Govermint 'Il have to get up more coorts and more polis if they want to shtop that ould custom. An' more betoken, they Il have to purvide more shtools, too. Mrs. Dempsey, whin I come round agin, mind ye kape a govermint shtool for me. Here's the masther wouldn't let any girrul sit on any wan's knee. Begor, not even the quality nor the fairies! All right, yer'an'r, the mare's quite ready. Good-bye, Mrs. Dempsey. Don't forgit the shtool — an' wan, too, for Biddy! Gee up, ye ould corn-crake!" and so we resumed our journey.

As we went along Dick gave me all details regarding the property which he and Mr. Caicy had bought for me. Although I had signed deeds and papers without number, and was owner in the present or in future of the whole Hill, I had not the least idea of either the size or disposition of the estate. Dick had been all over it, and was able to supply me with every detail. As he went on he grew quite enthusiastic — everything seemed to be even more favorable than he had at first supposed. There was plenty of clay; and he suspected that in two or three places there was pottery clay, such as is found chiefly in Cornwall. There was any amount of water; and when we should be able to control the whole Hill and regulate matters as we wished, the supply would enable us to do anything in the way of either irrigation or ornamental development. The only thing we lacked, he said, was limestone, and he had a suspicion that limestone was to be found somewhere on the Hill.

"I cannot but think," said he, "that there must be a streak of limestone somewhere. I cannot otherwise account for the subsidence of the lake on the top of the Hill. I almost begin to think that that formation of rock to which the Snake's Pass is due runs right through the Hill, and that we shall find that the whole top of it has similar granite cliffs, with the hollow between them possibly filled in with some rock of one of the later formations. However, when we get possession I shall make accurate search. I tell you, Art, it will well repay the trouble if we can find it. A limestone quarry here would be pretty well as valuable as a gold mine.

Nearly all these promontories on the western coast of Ireland are of slate or granite, and here we have not got lime within thirty miles. With a quarry on the spot, we can not only build cheap and reclaim our own bog, but we can supply five hundred square miles of country with the rudiments of prosperity, and at a nominal price compared with what they pay now." Then he went on to tell me of the various arrangements effected — how those who wished to emigrate were about to do so, and how others who wished to stay were to have better farms given them on what we called "the main-land"; and how he had devised a plan for building houses for them — good solid stone houses, with proper offices and farmyards. He concluded what seemed to me like a somewhat modified day-dream: "And if we can find the limestone — well, the improvements can all be done without costing you a penny; and you can have around you the most prosperous set of people to be found in the country." In such talk as this the journey wore on till the evening came upon us. The day had been a fine one — one of those rare sunny days in a wet autumn. As we went I could see everywhere the signs of the continuous rains. The fields were sloppy and sodden, and the bottoms were flooded;

the bogs were teeming with water; the roads were washed clean — not only the mud but even the sand having been swept away, and the road-metal was everywhere exposed. Often, as we went along, Dick took occasion to illustrate his views as to the danger of the shifting of the bog at Knockcalltecrore by the evidence around us of the destructive power of the continuous rain. When we came to the mountain gap where we got our first and only view of Knockcalltecrore from the Galway road, Andy reined in the mare, and turned to me, pointing with his whip. "There beyant, yer'an'r, is Knockcalltecrore — the Hill where the threasure is. They do say that a young English gintleman has bought up the Hill, an' manes to git the threasure for himself. Begor, perhaps he has found it already. Here, gee up, ye ould corn-crake! What the divil are ye kapin' the quality waitin' for?" and we sped down the road.

The sight of the Hill filled me with glad emotion, and I do not think that it is to be wondered at. And yet my gladness was as followed by an unutterable gloom — a gloom that fell over me the instant after my eyes took in the well-known Hill struck by the falling sunset from the west. It seemed to me that all had been so happy and so bright and so easyfor me, that there must be in store some terrible shock or loss to make the balance even, and to reduce my satisfaction with life to the level above which man's happiness may not pass.

There was a curse on the Hill! I felt it and realised it at that moment for the first time. I suppose I must have shown something of my brooding fear in my face, for Dick, looking round at me after a period of silence, said suddenly: "Cheer up, Art, old chap! Surely you, at any rate, have no cause to be down on your luck. Of all men that live, I should think you ought to be about the very happiest."

“That’s it, old fellow,” I answered. “I fear that there must be something terrible coming. I shall never be quite happy till Norah and all of us are quite away from the Hill.” “What on earth do you mean? Why, you have just bought the whole place.” “It may seem foolish, Dick; but the words come back to me and keep ringing in my ears: The mountain holds, and it holds tight.’” Dick laughed. “Well, Art, it is not my fault, or Mr. Calces, if you don’t hold it tight. It is yours now, every acre of it; and, if I don’t mistake, you are going to make it in time — and not a long time either — into the fairest bower to which the best fellow ever brought the fairest lady! There now, Art, isn’t that a pretty speech?” Dick’s words made me feel ashamed of myself, and I made an effort to pull myself together, which lasted until Dick and I said good-night.

CHAPTER XVI

I cannot say the night was a happy one. There were moments when I seemed to lose myself and my own anxieties in thoughts of Norah and the future, and such moments were sweet to look back on — then as they are now; but I slept only fitfully and dreamt frightfully. It was natural enough that mydreams should centre around Knockcalltecrore; but there was no good reason why they should all be miserable or terrible. The Hill seemed to be ever under some uncomfortable or unnatural condition. When mydreams began, it was bathed in a flood of yellow moonlight, and at its summit was the giant Snake, the jewel of whose crown threw out an unholy glare of yellow light, and whose face and form kept perpetually changing to those of Murtagh Murdock. I can now, with comparatively an easy effort, look back on it all, and disentangle or give a reason for all the phases of my thought. The snake "wid side whishkers" was distinctly suggested the first night I heard the legend at Mrs. Kelligan's; the light from the jewel was a part of the legend itself; and so on with every fact and incident. Presently, as I dreamed, the whole Mountain seemed to writhe and shake as though the great Snake was circling round it, deep under the earth; and again this movement changed into the shifting of the bog. Then through dark shadows that lay athwart the Hill I could see the French soldiers, with their treasure-chest, pass along in dusky, mysterious silence, and vanish in the hill-side. I saw Murdock track them; and, when they were gone, he and old Moynahan — who suddenlyand mysteriously appeared beside him — struggled on the edge of the bog, and, with a shuddering wail, the latter threw up his arms and sank slowly into the depths of the morass. Again Norah and I were wandering together, when suddenly

Murdock's evil face, borne on a huge serpent body, writhed up beside us; and in an instant Norah was whirled from my side and swept into the bog, I being powerless to save her or even help her. The last of all my dreams was as follows: Norah and I were sitting on the table rock in the Cliff Fields; all was happy and smiling around us. The sun shone and the birds sang, and as we sat hand in hand the beating of our hearts seemed a song also. Suddenly there was a terrible sound — half a roar, as of an avalanche, and half a fluttering sound, as of many great wings. We clung together in terror, waiting for the portent which was at hand. And then over the cliff poured the whole mass of the bog, foul-smelling, foetid, terrible, and of endless might. Just as it was about to touch us, and as I clasped Norah to me, so that we might die together, and while her despairing cry was in my ear, the whole mighty mass turned into loathsome, writhing snakes, sweeping into the sea! I awoke with a scream which brought nearly everyone in the hotel into my bedroom. Dick was first, and found me standing on the floor, white and drunk with terror.

"What is it, old fellow? Oh, I see, only a nightmare! Come on; he's all right; it's only a dream!" and almost before I had realised that the waking world and not the world of shadows was around me, the room was cleared and I was alone. I lit a candle and put on some clothes; as it was of no use trying to sleep again after such an experience, I got a book and resolutely set to reading. The effort was successful, as such efforts always are, and I quite forgot the cause of my disturbance in what I read. Then the matter itself grew less interesting...

There was a tap at my door. I started awake. It was broad daylight, and the book lay with crumpled leaves beside me on the floor. It was a message to tell me that Mr. Sutherland was waiting breakfast for me. I called out that I would be down in a few minutes, which promise I carried out as nearly as was commensurate with the requirements of the tub and the toilet. Ifound Dick awaiting me; he looked at me keenly as I came in, and then said, heartily: “I see your nightmare has not left any ill effects. I say, old chap, it must have been a whopper — a regular Derby winner among nightmares — worse than Andy’s old corncrake. You yelled fit to wake the dead. I would have thought the contrast between an ordinary night and the day you are going to have would have been sufficient to satisfy any one without such an addition to its blackness.” Then he sung out in his rich voice:

“Och, Jewel, kape dhramin’ that same till ye die, For bright mornin’ will give dirty night the black lie.”

We sat down to breakfast, and I am bound to say, from the trencher experience of that meal, that there is nothing so fine as an appetiserfor breakfast as a good preliminary nightmare.

We drove off to Knockcalltecrore. When we got to the foot of the hill we stopped as usual. Andy gave me a look which spoke a lot, but he did not say a single word — for which forbearance I owed him a good turn. Dick said: “I want to go round to the other side of the hill, and shall cross over the top. I shall look you up, if I may, at Joyce’s about two o’clock.” “All right,” I said; “we shall expect you,” and I started up the Hill.

When I got to the gate and opened it there was a loud, deep barking, which, however, was instantly stilled. I knew that Norah had tied up the mastiff, and I went to the door. I had no need to knock; for as I came near it opened, and in another instant Norah was in my arms. She whispered in my ear when I had kissed her: “I would like to have come out to meet you, but I thought you would rather meet me here.” Then, as we went into the sitting-room, hand in hand, she whispered again: “Aunt has gone to buy groceries, so we are all alone.

You must tell me all about everything.” We sat down close together, still hand in hand, and I told her all that we had done since I had left. When I had finished the Paris part of the story, she put up her hands before her face, and I could see the tears drop through herfingers. “Norah, Norah, don’t cry, my darling! What is it?” “Oh, Arthur, I can’t help it! It is so wonderful — more than all I ever longed or wished for!” Then she took her hands away, and put them in mine, and looked me bravely in the face, with her eyes half laughing and half crying, and her cheeks wet, and said: “Arthur, you are the Fairy Prince! There is nothing that I can wish for that you have not done — even my dresses are ready by your sweet thoughtfulness. It needs an effort, dear, to let you do all this, but I see it is quite right: I must be dressed like one who is to be your wife. I shall think I am pleasing you afresh every time I put one of them on; but I must pay for them myself. You know I am quite rich now. I have all the money you paid for the Cliff Fields; father says it ought to go in such things as will fit me for my new position, and will not hearof taking any of it.” “He is quite right, Norah, my darling, and you are quite right, too; all shall be just as you wish. Now tell me all about everything since I went away.”

“May I bring in Turco? he is so quiet with me; and he must learn to know you and love you, or he won’t be any friend of mine.” She looked at me lovingly, and went and brought in the mastiff, by whom I was forthwith received into friendship.

That was indeed a happy day. We had a family consultation about the school; the time of beginning was arranged, and there was perfect accord among us. As Dick and I drove back through the darkness, I could not but feel that, even if evil were looming ahead of us, at least some of us had experienced what it is to be happy.

It had been decided that after a week’s time — on the 28th of October — Norah was to leave for school. Her father was to bring her as far as London, and Mr. Chapman was to take her over to Paris. This was Joyce’s own wish. He said:

“‘Twill be betther for ye, darlin’, to go widout me. Ye’ll have quite enough to do for a bit to keep even wid the girls that have been reared in betther ways nor you, widout me there to make little ivye.”

“But, father,” she remonstrated, “I don’t want to appear any different from what I am. And I am too fond of you, and too proud of you, not to want to appear as your daughter.”

Her father stroked her hair gently as he answered:

“Norah, my darlin’, it isn’t that. Ye’ve always been the good and dutiful daughter to me; an’ in all your pretty life there’s not wan thing I wish undone or unsaid. But I’m older than you, daughter, an’ I know more iv the world; an’ what I say is best for ye — now, and in yer future. I’m goin’ to live wid Eugene; an’ afther a while I suppose I, too, ‘ll be somethin’ different from what lam. An’ thin, whin I’ve lived a while in a city, and got somethin’ of city ways, I’ll come an’ see ye, maybe. Ye must remimberthat it’s not only of you we’ve to think, but of th’ other girls in the school. I don’t want to have any of them turnin’ up their noses at ye; that’s not the way to get the best out iv school, my dear; for I suppose school is like everywhere else in the world: the higher ye’re able to hould yer head, the more others’ll look up to ye.”

His words were so obviously true, that not one of us had a word to say, and the matter was acquiesced in nem. con. I myself got leave to accompany the party as far as London, but not beyond. It was further arranged that Joyce should take his daughter to Galway to get some clothes for her — just enough to take her to Paris — and that when in Paris she should have a full outfit under the direction of Madame Lepecheaux. They were to leave on Friday, so as to have the Saturday in Galway; and as Norah wanted to say goodbye on the Sunday to old school-fellows and friends in the convent, they would return on Monday, the 25th of October. Accordingly, on the morning after next, Joyce took a letter for me to Mr. Caicy, who was to pay to him whatever portion of the purchase-money of his land he should require, and whom I asked to give all possible assistance in whatever matters either he or Norah might desire. I would have dearly liked to have gone myself with them, but the purpose and the occasion were such that I could not think of offering to go. On the dayfixed they left on the long carfrom Carnaclif. They started in torrents of rain, but were as well wrapped up as the resources of Dick and myself would allow.

When they had gone Dick and I drove over to Knockcalltecrore. Dick wished to have an interview with Murdock, regarding his giving up possession of the land on the 27th, as arranged. We left Andy as usual at the foot of the Hill, and went up to Murdock's house. The door was locked; and although we knocked several times, we could get no answer. We came away, therefore, and went up the Hill, as Dick wished me to see where, according to old Moynahan, was the last place at which the Frenchmen had been seen. As we went on and turned the brow of the mound, which lay straight up — for the bog-land lay in a curve round its southern side — we saw before us two figures at the edge of the bog. They were those of Murdock and old Moynahan. When we saw who they were, Dick whispered to me: “They are at the place to which I changed the mark, but are still on Joyce’s land.” They were working just as Dick and I had worked with Murdock, when we had recovered the gun-carriage, and were so intent on the work at which they toiled with feverish eagerness that they did not see us coming; and it was only when we stood close beside them that they were conscious of our presence. Murdock turned at once with a scowl and a sort of snarl. When he saw who it was he became positively livid with passion, and at once began to bombard us with the foulest vituperation. Dick pressed my arm, as a hint to keep quiet and leave the talking to him, and I did nothing; but he opposed the Gombeen Man’s passion with an unruffled calm. Indeed, he seemed to me to want even to exasperate Murdock to the last degree. When the latter paused for a second for breath, he quietly said: “Keep yourhairon, Murdock, and just tell me quietly why you are trespassing; and why, and what, you are trying to steal from this property?”

Murdock made no answer, so Dick went on: “Let me tell you that I act for the owner of this land, who bought it as it is, and I shall hold you responsible for your conduct. I don’t want to have a row needlessly, so if you go away quietly, and promise to not either trespass here again, ortryto steal anything, I shall not take any steps. If not, I shall do as the occasion demands.”

Murdock answered him with the most manifestly intentional insolence: “You! ye tell me to go away! I don’t ricognise ye at all. This land belongs to me frind, Mr. Joyce, an’ I shall come on it whin I like; and do as I like. Whin me frind tells me not to come here, I shall shtayaway. Till then I shall do as I like.”

Said Dick:

“You think that will do to bluff me because you know Joyce is away for the day, and that, in the mean time, you can do what you want, and perhaps get out of the bog some property that does not belong to you. I shall not argue with you any more; but I warn you that you will have to answer for your conduct." Murdock and Moynahan continued their pulling at the rope. We waited till the haul was over, and saw that the spoil on this occasion was a part of the root ofa tree. Then, when both men were sitting exhausted beside it, Dick took out his note-book, and began to make notes of everything. Presently he turned to Murdock, and said: "Have you been fishing, Mr. Murdock? What a strange booty you have brought up! It is really most kind of you to be aiding to secure the winterfiring for Mr. Joyce and my friend. Is there anything but bog-wood to be found here?" Murdock's reply was a curse and a savage scowl; but old Moynahan joined in the conversation: "Now, I tould ye, Murtagh, that we wur too low down." "Shut up!" shouted the other, and the old man shrank back as if he had been struck. Dick looked down, and seemed to be struck by the cross of loose stones at his feet, and said: "Dear me! that is very strange — a cross of stones! It would almost seem as if it were made here to mark something; but yet" — here he lifted one of the stones— "it cannot have been long here; the grass is fresh under the stones." Murdock said nothing, but clinched his hands and ground his teeth. Presently, however, he sent Moynahan back to his house to get some whiskey. When the latter was out of ear-shot, Murdock turned to us, and said: "An' so ye think to baffle me, do ye? Well, I'll have that money out if I have to wade in yer blood. I will, by the livin' God!" and he burst into a string of profanities that made us shudder.

He was in such deadly earnest that I felt a pity for him, and said impulsively: "Look here, if you want to get it out, you can have a little more time if you like, if only you will conduct yourself properly. I don't want to be bothered looking for it. Now, if you'll only behave decently, and be something like a civilised being, I'll give you another month if you want it."

Again he burst out at me with still more awful profanities. He didn't want any of my time. He'dtakewhat time he liked. God himself — and he particularised the persons of the Trinity — couldn't balk him, and he'd do what he liked; and if I crossed his path it would be the worse for me! And, as for others, that he would send the hard word round the country about me and my leman. I couldn't be always knocking the ruffian down, so I turned away and called to Dick. "Coming," said Dick, and he walked up to Murdock and knocked him down. Then, as the latter lay dazed on the grass, he followed me. "Really," he said, apologetically, "the man wants it. It will do him good."

Then we went back to Carnaclif.

These three days were very dreary ones for me; we spent most of the time walking over Knockcalltecrore and making plans for the future. But, without Norah, the place seemed very dreary.

We did not go over on the Monday, as we knew that Joyce and Norah would not get home until late in the evening, and would be tired. Early, however, on the day after — Tuesday — we drove over. Joyce was out, and Dick left me at the foot of the boreen, so when I got to the house I found Norah alone.

The dear girl showed me her new dresses with much pride; and presently going to her room put on one of them, and came back to let me see how she looked. Herface was covered with blushes. Needless to say that I admired the new dress, as did her father, who just then came in.

When she went away to take off the dress Joyce beckoned me outside. When we got away from the house he turned to me; his face was very grave, and he seemed even more frightened than angry. “There’s somethin’ I was touid while I was away that I think ye ought to know.”

“Go on, Mr. Joyce.” “Somebody has been sayin’ hard things about Norah.” “About Norah! Surely there is nobody mad enough or bad enough to speak evil of her.” “There’s wan.” He turned as he spoke, and looked instinctively in the direction of Murdock’s house. “Oh, Murdock, as he threatened. What did he say?” “Well, I don’t know. I could only get it that somebody was sayin’ somethin’, an’ that it would be well to have things so that no wan could say anythin’ that we couldn’t prove. It was a frind tould me; and that’s all he would tell. Mayhap he didn’t know any more himself; but I knew him to be a frind.”

“And it was a friendly act, Mr. Joyce. I have no doubt that Murdock has been sending round wicked lies about us all. But, thank God, in a few days we will be all moving, and it doesn’t matter much what he can do.” “No, it won’t matter much in wan way, but he’s not goin’, all the same, to throw dirt on me child. If he goes on I’ll folly him up.”

“He won’t go on, Mr. Joyce. Before long, he’ll be out of the neighborhood altogether. To tell you the truth, I have bought the whole of his land, and I get possession of it tomorrow; and then I’ll never let him set foot here again. When once he is out of this he will have too much other wickedness on hand to have time to meddle with us.” “That’s thrue enough. Well, we’ll wait an’ see what happens; but we’ll be mighty careful all the same.”

“Quite right,” I said, “we cannot be too careful in such a matter.”

Then we went back to the house, and met Norah coming into the room in her red petticoat, which she knew I liked. She whispered to me, oh, so sweetly:

"I thought, dear, you would like me to be the old Norah, today. It is our last day together in the old way." Then hand in hand we went down to the Cliff Fields, and sat on the table rock for the last time, and feasted our eyes on the glorious prospect, while we told each other our bright dreams of the future.

In the autumn twilight we came back to the house. Dick had, in the mean time, come in, and we both stayed for tea. I saw that Dick had something to tell me, but he waited until we were going home before he spoke.

It was a sad parting with Norah that night; for it was the last day together before she went off to school. For myself, I felt that whatever might be in the future — and I hoped for much — it was the last time that I might sit by the fire-light with the old Norah. She, too, was sad, and when she told me the cause of her sadness I found that it was the same as my own.

"But oh, Arthur, my darling, I shall try — I shall try to be worthy of my great good-fortune — and of you," she said, as she put her arms round my neck, and leaning her head on my bosom, began to cry.

"Hush, Norah. Hush, my darling!" I said; "you must not say such things to me — you, who are worthy of all the good gifts of life. Oh, my dear, my dear! I am only fearful that you maybe snatched away from me by some terrible misfortune; I shall not be happy till you are safely away from the shadow of this fateful mountain, and are beginning your new life."

"Only one more day," she said. "To-morrow we must settle up everything — and I have much to do forfather — poorfather, how good he is to me! Please God, Arthur, we shall be able some day to repay him for all his goodness to me.” How inexpressibly sweet it was to me to hear her say “we” shall be able, as she nestled up close to me. Ah, that night! Ah, that night! — the end of the day when, for the last time, I sat on the table rock with the old Norah that I loved so well. It almost seemed as if Fate, who loves the keen contrasts of glare and gloom, had made on purpose that day so bright, and of such flawless happiness. As we went back to Carnaclif, Dick told me what had been exercising his mind all the afternoon. When he had got to the bog he found that it had risen so much that he thought it well to seek the cause. He had gone at once to the place where Murdock had dammed up the stream that ran over into the Cliff Fields, and had found that the natural position of the ground had so far aided his efforts that the great stones thrown into the chine had become solidified with the rubbish bythe new weight of the risen bog into a compact mass, and unless some heroic measure, such as blowing up the dam, should be taken, the bog would continue to rise until it should flowoverthe lowest part of the solid banks containing it. “As sure as we are here, Art,” he said, “that man will do himself to death. I am convinced that if the present state of things goes on, with the bog at its present height, and with this terrible rainfall, there will be another shifting of the bog, and then, God help him; and, perhaps, others too! I told him of the danger, and explained it to him; but he only laughed at me and called me a fool and a traitor; that I was doing it to prevent him getting his treasure — his treasure, forsooth! And then he went again into those terrible blasphemies, so I came away; but he is a lost man, and I don’t see how we can stop him.” I said, earnestly: “Dick, there’s no danger to them — the Joyces — is there?"

"No," he answered, "not the slightest; their house is on the rock high over the spot, and quite away from any possible danger." Then we relapsed into silence, as we each tried to think out a solution.

That night it rained more heavily than ever. The downfall was almost tropical — as it can be on the west coast — and the rain on the iron roof of the stable behind the hotel sounded like thunder; it was the last thing in my ears before I went to sleep. That night again I kept dreaming — dreaming in the same nightmare fashion as before. But although the working of my imagination centred round Knockcalltecrore and all it contained, and although I suffered dismal tortures from the hideous dreams of ruin and disaster which afflicted me, I did not on this occasion arouse the household. In the morning, when we met, Dick looked at my pale face and said: "Dreaming again, Art! Well, please God, it's all nearly over now. One more day, and Norah will be away from Knockcalltecrore." The thought gave me much relief. The next morning — on Thursday, the 28th of October — we should be on our way to Galway en route for London, while Dick would receive on my behalf possession of the property which I had purchased from Murdock. Indeed, his tenure ended at noon this very day; but we thought it wiser to postpone taking possession until after Norah had left. Although Norah's departure meant a long absence from the woman I loved, I could not regret it, for it was after all but a long road to the end I wished for. The two years would soon be over. And then — and then life would begin in real earnest, and along its paths of sorrow as of joy Norah and I should walk with equal steps.

Alas for dreaming! The dreams of the daylight are often more delusive than even those born of the glamour of moonlight or starlight, or of the pitchy darkness of the night.

It had been arranged that we were not on this day to go over to Knockcalltecrore, as Norah and her father wanted the day together. Miss Joyce, Norah's aunt, who usually had lived with them, was coming back to look after the house. So after breakfast Dick and I smoked and lounged about, and went over some business matters, and we arranged many things to be done during my absence. The rain still continued to pour down in a perfect deluge; the road-way outside the hotel was running like a river, and the wind swept the rain-clouds so that the drops struck like hail. Every now and again, as the gusts gathered in force, the rain seemed to drive past like a sheet of water; and looking out of the window we could see dripping men and women trying to make head-way against the storm. Dick said to me:

"If this rain holds on much longer it will be a bad job for Murdock. There is everyfearthat if the bog should break under the flooding he will suffer at once. What an obstinate fool he is! he won't take any warning. I almost feel like a criminal in letting him go to his death, ruffian though he is; and yet what can one do? We are all powerless if anything should happen." After this he was silent. I spoke the next: "Tell me, Dick, is there any earthly possibility of any harm coming to Joyce's house in case the bog should shift again? Is it quite certain that they are all safe?" "Quite certain, old fellow. You may set your mind at rest on that score. In so far as the bog is concerned, she and her father are in no danger. The only way they could run any risk of dangerwould be by theirgoing to Murdock's house, or by being by chance lower down on the Hill, and I do not think that such a thing is likely to happen." This set my mind more at ease, and while Dick sat down to write some letters I continued to look at the rain. By-and-by I went down to the tap-room, where there were always a lot of peasants, whose quaint speech amused and interested me. When I came in one of them, whom I recognised as one of our navvies at Knocknacar, was telling something, for the others all stood round him.

Andy was the first to see me, and said, as I entered: “Ye’ll have to go over it all agin, Mike. Here’s his ‘an’r, that is just death on to bogs — an’ the like,” he added, looking at me slyly.

“What is it?” I asked.

“Oh, not much, yer ‘an’r, except that the bog up at Knocknacar has run away intirely. Whin the wather rose in it, the big cuttin’ we med tuk it all out, like butthermilk out iv a jug. Begor, there never was seen such a flittin’ since the wurrld begun! An’, more betoken, the quare part iv it is that it hasn’t left the bit iv a hole behind it at all, but it’s all mud an’ wather at the prisint mi nit.” I knew this would interest Dick exceedingly, so I went for him. When he heard it he got quite excited, and insisted that we should go off to Knocknacar at once. Accordingly Andy was summoned, the mare was harnessed, and, with what protection we could get in the way of wraps, we went off to Knocknacar through the rain-storm. As we went along we got some idea of the damage done, and being done, by the wonderful rainfall. Not only the road was like a river, and the mountain streams were roaring torrents, but in places the road was flooded to such a dangerous depth that we dared not have attempted the passage only that, through our repeated journeys, we all knew the road so well. However, we got at last to Knocknacar, and there found that the statement we heard was quite true. The bog had been flooded to such a degree that it had burst out through the cutting which we had made, and had poured in a great stream over all the sloping moorland on which we had opened it. The brown bog and black mud lying all over the stony space looked like one of the lava streams which mark the northern side of Vesuvius. Dick went most carefully all over the ground wherever we could venture, and took quite a number of notes. Indeed, the day was beginning to draw in when, dripping and chilled, we prepared for our return journey through the rain. Andy had not been wasting his time in the sheebeen, and was in one of his most jocular humors; and when we, too, were fortified with steaming hot punch, we were able to listen to his fun without wanting to kill him.

On the journey back, Dick, when Andy allowed him speech, explained to me the various phenomena which we had noticed. When we got back to the hotel it was night. Had the weather been fine we might have expected a couple more hours of twilight; but with the mass of driving clouds overhead, and the steady downpour of rain, and the fierce rush of the wind, there was left to us not the slightest suggestion of day.

We went to bed early, for I had to rise by daylight for our journey on the morrow. After lying awake for some time listening to the roarof the storm and the dash of the rain, and wondering if it were to go on forever, I sank into a troubled sleep.

It seemed to me that all the nightmares which had individually afflicted me during the last week returned to assail me collectively on the present occasion. I was a sort of Mazeppa in the world of dreams. Again and again the fatal Hill and all its mystic and terrible associations haunted me; again the snakes writhed around and took terrible forms; again she I loved was in peril; again Murdock seemed to arise in new forms of terror and wickedness; again the lost treasure was sought under terrible conditions; and once again I seemed to sit on the table rock with Norah, and to see the whole mountain rush down on us in a dread avalanche, and turn to myriad snakes as it came; and again Norah seemed to call to me, “Help! help! Arthur, save me! save me!” And again, as was most natural, I found myself awake on the floor of my room — though this time I did not scream — wet and quivering with some nameless terror, and with Norah’s despairing cry in my ears.

But even in the first instant of my awakening I had taken a resolution which forthwith I proceeded to carry into effect. These terrible dreams, whencesoever they came, must not have come in vain; the grim warning must not be despised. Norah was in danger, and I must go to her at all hazards.

I threw on my clothes and went and woke Dick. When I told him my intention he jumped up at once and began to dress, while I ran down-stairs and found Andy, and set him to get out the car at once. “Is it goin’ out agin in the shtorm ye are? Begor, ye’d not go widout some rayson, an’ I’m not the bhoy to be behind whin ye want me. I’ll be ready, yer’an’r, in two skips iva dead salmon;” and Andy proceeded to make, or rather complete, his toilet, and hurried out to the stable to get the car ready. In the mean time Dick had got two lanterns and a flask, and showed them to me.

“We may as well have them with us. We do not know what we may want in this storm.”

It was now past one o’clock, and the night was pitchy dark. The rain still fell, and high overhead we could hear the ceaseless rushing of the wind. It was a lucky thing that both Andy and the mare knew the road thoroughly, for otherwise we never could have got on that night. As it was, we had to go much more slowly than we had ever gone before.

I was in a perfect fever. Every second’s delay seemed to me like an hour. I feared — nay more, I had a deep conviction — that some dreadful thing was happening, and I had over me a terrible dread that we should arrive too late.

CHAPTER XVII

As we drew closer to the mountain, and recognised our whereabouts bythe various landmarks, my dread seemed to grow. The night was now well on, and there were signs of the storm abating; occasionally the wind would fall off a little, and the rain beat with less dreadful violence. In such moments some kind of light would be seen in the sky — or, to speak more correctly, the darkness would be less complete — and then the new squall which followed would seem by contrast with the calm to smite us with renewed violence. In one of these lulls we sawforan instant the mountain rise before us, its bold outline being shown darkly against a sky less black. But the vision was swept away an instant after by a squall and a cloud of blinding rain, leaving onlya dreadful memory of some field forgrim disaster. Then we went on our way even more hopelessly; for earth and sky, which in that brief instant we had been able to distinguish, were now hidden under one unutterable pall of gloom.

On we went slowly. There was now in the air a thunderous feeling, and we expected each moment to be startled by the lightning's flash or the roar of heaven's artillery. Masses of mist or sea-fog now began to be borne landward bythe passing squalls. In the time that elapsed between that one momentary glimpse of Knockcalltecrore and our arrival at the foot of the boreen a whole lifetime seemed to me to have elapsed, and in my thoughts and harrowing anxieties I recalled — as drowning men are said to do before death — every moment, every experience since I had first come within sight of the western sea. The blackness of myfears seemed onlya carrying inward of the surrounding darkness, which was made more pronounced by the flickering of our lanterns, and more dread by the sounds of the tempest with which it was laden. When we stopped in the boreen Dick and I hurried up the Hill, while Andy, with whom we left one of the lanterns, drew the horse underthe comparative shelter of the windswept alders which lined the entrance to the lane. He wanted a short rest before proceeding to Mrs. Kelligan's, where he was to stop the remainder of the night, so as to be able to come for us in the morning. As we came near Murdock's cottage Dick pressed my arm.

"Look!" he called to me, putting his mouth to my ear so that I could hear him, for the storm swept the Hill fiercely here, and a special current of wind came whirling up through the Shleenanaher. "Look! he is up even at this hour.

There must be some villany afloat!" When we got up a little farther he called to me again in the same way. "The nearest point of the bog is here; let us look at it." We diverged to the left, and in a few minutes were down at the edge of the bog.

It seemed to us to be different from what it had been. It was raised considerably above its normal height, and seemed quivering all over in a very strange way. Dick said to me, very gravely: "We are just in time. There's something going to happen here."

"Let us hurry to Joyce's," I said, "and see if all is safe there."

"We should warn them first at Murdock's," he said. "There may not be a moment to lose." We hurried back to the boreen, and ran on to Murdock's, opened the gate, and ran up the path. We knocked at the door, but there was no answer. We knocked more loudly still, but there came no reply.

"We had better make certain," said Dick; and I could hear him more easily now, for we were in the shelter of the porch. We opened the door, which was only on the latch, and went in. In the kitchen a candle was burning, and the fire on the hearth was blazing, so that it could not have been long since the inmates had left. Dick wrote a line of warning in his pocket-book, tore out the leaf, and placed it on the table where it could not fail to be seen byanyone entering the room. We then hurried out, and up the lane to Joyce's.

As we drew near we were surprised to find a light in Joyce's window also. I got to the windward side of Dick, and shouted to him:

"A light here also; there must be something strange going on." We hurried as fast as we could up to the house. As we drew close the door was opened, and through a momentary lull we heard the voice of Miss Joyce, Norah's aunt:

"Is that you, Norah?"

"No," I answered. "Oh, is it you, Mr. Arthur? Thank God, ye've come! I'm in such terror about Phelim and Norah. They're both out in the shtorm, an' I'm nigh disthracted about them." By this time we were in the house, and could hear each other speak, although not too well even here, for again the whole force of the gale struck the front of the house, and the noise was great.

"Where is Norah? Is she not here?"

"Oh no, God help us! Wirrastru, wirrastru!" The poor woman was in such a state of agitation and abject terror that it was with some difficulty we could learn from her enough to understand what had occurred. The suspense of trying to get her to speak intelligibly was agonising, for now every moment was precious; but we could not do anything or make any effort whatever until we had learned all that had occurred. At last, however, it was conveyed to us that early in the evening Joyce had gone out to look after the cattle, and had not since returned. Late at night old Moynahan had come to the door half drunk, and had hiccoughed a message that Joyce had met with an accident, and was then in Murdock's house. He wanted Norah to go to him there, but Norah only was to go and no one else. She had at once suspected that it was some trap of Murdock's for some evil purpose, but still she thought it better to go, and accordingly called to Turco, the mastiff, to come with her, she remarking to her aunt, "I am safe with him, at any rate." But Turco did not come. He had been restless and groaning for an hour before, and now on looking for him they had found him dead. This helped to confirm Norah's suspicions, and the two poor women were in an agony of doubt as to what they should do. While they were discussing the matter Moynahan had returned, this time even drunker than before, and repeated his message, but with evident reluctance. Norah had accordingly set to work to cross-examine him, and after a while he admitted that Joyce was not in Murdock's house at all — that he had been sent with the message and told when he had delivered it to go away to Mother Kelligan's, and not to ever tell anything whatever of the night's proceedings, no matter what might happen or what might be said. When he had admitted this much he had been so overcome with fright at what he had done that he began to cry and moan, and say that Murdock would kill him for telling on him. Norah had told him he could remain in the cottage where he was if he would tell her where her father was, so that she could go to look for him; but that he had sworn most solemnly that he did not know, but that Murdock knew, for he told him that there would be no chance of seeing him at his own house for hours yet that night. This had determined Norah that she would go out herself, although the storm was raging wildly, to look for herfather. Moynahan, however, would not stay in the cottage, as he said he would be afraid to, unless Joyce himself were there to protect him; for if there were no one but women in the house

Murdock would come and murder him and throw his body in the bog, as he had often threatened. So Moynahan had gone out into the night by himself, and Norah had shortly after gone out also, and from that moment she — Miss Joyce — had not set eyes on her, and feared that some harm had happened. This the poor soul told us in such an agony of dread and grief that it was pitiful to hear her, and we could not but forgive the terrible delay. I was myself in deadly fear, for every kind of harrowing possibility rose before me as the tale was told. It was quite evident that Murdock was bent on some desperate scheme of evil; he either intended to murder Norah or to compromise her in some terrible way. I was almost afraid to think of the subject. It was plainto me that by this means he hoped not only to gratify his revenge, but to get some lever to use against us, one and all, so as to secure his efforts in searching for the treasure. In my rage against the cowardly hound I almost lost sight of the need of thankfulness for one great peril avoided.

However, there was no time at present for further thought — action, prompt and decisive, was vitally necessary. Joyce was absent — we had no clew to where he could be. Norah was alone on the mountain, and with the possibility of Murdock assailing her, for he, too, was abroad, as we knew from the fact of his being away from his house.

We lost not a moment, but went out again into the storm. We did not, however, take the lantern with us, as we found by experience that its occasional light was in the long-run an evil, as we could not by its light see any distance, and the gray of the coming dawn was beginning to show through the abating storm, with a faint indication that before long we should have some light. We went down the Hill westward until we came near the bog, for we had determined to make a circuit of it as our first piece of exploration, since we thought that here lay the most imminent danger. Then we separated, Dick following the line of the bog downward while I went north, intending to cross at the top and proceed down the farther side. We had agreed on a signal, if such could be heard through the storm, choosing the Australian "coo-ee," which is the best sound to travel known. I hurried along as fast as I dared, for I was occasionally in utter darkness. Although the morning was coming with promise of light, the sea wind swept inland masses of swiftly-driving mist, which, while they encompassed me, made movement not only difficult and dangerous, but at times almost impossible. The electric feeling in the air had become intensified, and each moment I expected the thunderstorm to burst.

Every little while I called, "Norah! Norah!" in the vain hope that, while returning from her search for herfather, she might come within the sound of my voice. But no answering sound came back to me, except the fierce roar of the storm, laden with the wild dash of the breakers hurled against the cliffs and the rocks below. Even then, so strangely does the mind work, the words of the old song, "The Pilgrim of Love," came mechanically to my memory, as though I had called "Orinthia" instead of "Norah":

"Till with 'Orinthia' all the rocks resound."

On, on I went, following the line of the bog, till I had reached the northern point, where the ground rose and began to become solid. I found the bog here so swollen with rain that I had to make a long detour so as to get round to the western side. High up on the Hill there was, I knew, a rough shelter for the cattle; and as it struck me that Joyce might have gone here to look after his stock, and that Norah had gone hither to search for him, I ran up to it. The cattle were there, huddled together in a solid mass behind the sheltering wall of sods and stones. I cried out as loudly as I could from the windward side, so that my voice would carry: “Norah! Norah! Joyce! Joyce! Are you there? Is anyone there?”

There was a stir among the cattle and one or two low “moos” as they heard the human voice, but no sound from either of those I sought; so I ran down again to the farther side of the bog. I knew now that neither Norah nor her father could be on this point of the Hill, or they would have heard my voice; and as the storm came from the west, I made a zigzag line going east to west as I followed down the bog so that I might have a chance of being heard should there be anyone to hear. When I got near to the entrance to the Cliff Fields I shouted as loudly as I could, “Norah! Norah!” but the wind took my voice away as it would sweep thistles down, and it was as though I made the effort but no voice came, and I felt awfully alone in the midst of a thick pall of mist.

On, on I went, following the line of the bog. Lower down there was some shelter from the storm, for the great ridge of rocks here rose between me and the sea, and I felt that my voice could be heard farther off. I was sick at heart and chilled with despair, till I felt as if the chill of my soul had extended even to my blood; but on I went with set purpose, the true doggedness of despair.

As I went I thought I heard a cry through the mist — Norah’s voice. It was but an instant, and I could not be sure whether my ears indeed heard, or if the anguish of my heart had created the phantom of a voice to deceive me. However, be it what it might, it awoke me like a clarion; my heart leaped and the blood surged in my brain till I almost became dizzy. I listened to try if I could distinguish from what direction the voice had come. I waited in agony. Each second seemed a century, and my heart beat like a trip-hammer. Then again I heard the sound — faint, but still clear enough to hear. I shouted with all my power, but once again the roar of the wind overpowered me; however, I ran on towards the voice. There was a sudden lull in the wind — a blaze of lightning lit up the whole scene, and, some fifty yards before me, I saw two figures struggling at the edge of the rocks. In that welcome glance, infinitesimal though it was, I recognised the red petticoat which, in that place and at that time, could be none other than Norah's. I shouted as I leaped forward; but just then the thunder broke overhead, and in the mighty and prolonged roll every other sound faded into nothingness, as though the thunder-clap had come on a primeval stillness. As I drew near to where I had seen the figures, the thunder rolled away, and through its vanishing sound I heard distinctly Norah's voice: "Help! help! Arthur! Father! help! help!" Even in that wild moment my heart leaped, that of all names, she called on mine the first. — Whatever men may say, Love and Jealousy are near kinsmen!

I shouted in return as I ran, but the wind took my voice away; and then I heard her voice again, but fainter than before:

"Help! Arthur — father! Is there no one to help me now?" And then the lightning flashed again, and in the long jagged flash we saw each other, and I heard her glad cry before the thunder-clap drowned all else. I had seen that her assailant was Murdock, and I rushed at him, but he had seen me too, and before I could lay hands on him he had let her go, and with a mighty oath which the roll of the thunder drowned, he struck her to the earth and ran.

I raised my poor darling, and, carrying her a little distance, placed her on the edge of the ridge of rocks beside us, for by the light in the sky, which grew paler each second, I saw that a stream of water rising from the bog was flowing towards us. She was unconscious; so I ran to the stream and dipped my hat full of water to bring to revive her. Then I remembered the signal of finding her, and putting my hands to my lips I sounded “coo-ee” once, twice. As I stood I could see Murdock running to his house, for every instant it seemed to grow lighter, and the mist to disperse. The thunder had swept away the rain-clouds, and let in the light of the coming dawn. But even as I stood there — and I had not delayed an unnecessary second — the ground under me seemed to be giving way. There was a strange shudder or shiver below me, and my feet began to sink. With a wild cry — for I felt that the fatal moment had come, that the bog was moving, and had caught me in its toils — I threw myself forward towards the rock. My cry seemed to arouse Norah like the call ofa trumpet. She leaped to herfeet, and in an instant seemed to realise my danger, and rushed towards me. When I saw her coming I shouted to her: “Keep back! keep back.” But she did not pause an instant, and the only words she said were: “lam coming, Arthur, I am coming!”

Half-way between us there was a flat-topped piece of rock, which raised its head out of the surrounding bog. As she struggled towards it, herfeet began to sink, and a new terror for her was added to my own. But she did not falter a moment, and, as her lighter weight was in herfavor, with a great effort she gained it. In the mean time I struggled forward. There was between me and the rock a clump of furze-bushes; on these I threw myself, and for a second or two they supported me. Then even these began to sink with me, for faster and faster, with each succeeding second, the earth seemed to liquify and melt away. Up to now I had never realised the fear, or even the possibility, of death to myself; hitherto all my fears had been for Norah. But now came to me the bitter pang which must be for each of the children of men on whom Death has laid his icy hand. That this dread moment had come there was no doubt; nothing short of a miracle could save me. No language could describe the awful sensation of that melting away of the solid earth; the most dreadful nightmare would be almost a pleasant memory compared with it.

I was now only a few feet from the rock whose very touch meant safety to me, but it was just beyond my reach. I was sinking to my doom! I could see the horror in Norah's eyes as she gained the rock and struggled to her feet. But even Norah's love could not help me; I was beyond the reach of her arms, and she no more than I could keep a foothold on the liquifying earth. Oh, that she had a rope and I might be saved! Alas! she had none; even the shawl that might have aided me had fallen off in her struggle with Murdock.

But Norah had, with her woman's quick instinct, seen a way to help me. In an instant she had torn off her red petticoat of heavy homespun cloth and thrown one end to me. I clutched and caught it with a despairing grasp, for by this time only my head and hands remained above the surface.

"Now, O God, for strength!" was the earnest prayer of her heart; and my thought was: "Now for the strong hands that that other had despised!"

Norah threw herself backward with herfeet against a projecting piece of the rock, and I felt that if we could both hold out long enough I was saved.

Little by little I gained! I drew closer and closer to the rock! Closer! closer still! till with one hand I grasped the rock itself, and hung on, breathless, in blind desperation. I was only just able to support myself, for there was a strange dragging power in the viscous mass that held me, and greatly taxed my strength, already exhausted in the terrible struggle for life. The bog was beginning to move! But Norah bent forward, kneeling on the rock, and grasped my coat-collar in her strong hands. Love and despair lent her additional strength, and with one last great effort she pulled me upward, and in an instant more I lay on the rock safe and in her arms.

During this time, short as it was, the morning had advanced, and the cold gray mysterious light disclosed the whole slope before us, dim in the shadow of the Hill. Opposite to us, across the bog, we saw Joyce and Dick watching us, and between the gusts of wind we faintly heard their shouts.

To our right, far down the Hill, the Shleenanaher stood out boldly, its warder rocks struck bythe gray light falling over the hill-top. Nearer to us, and something in the same direction, Murdock's house rose, a black mass in the centre of the hollow. But as we looked around us, thankful for our safety, we grasped each other more closely, and a low cry of fear emphasised Norah's shudder, for a terrible thing began to happen.

The whole surface of the bog, as faras we could see it in the dim light, became wrinkled, and then began to move in little eddies, such as one sees in a swollen river. It seemed to rise and rise till it grew almost level with where we were, and instinctively we rose to our feet and stood there awe-struck, Norah clinging to me, and with our arms round each other. The shuddering surface of the bog began to extend on every side to even the solid ground which curbed it, and with relief we saw that Dick and Joyce stood high up on a rock. All things on its surface seemed to melt away and disappear as though swallowed up. This silent change or demoralization spread down in the direction of Murdock's house, but when it got to the edge of the hollowinwhich the house stood, it seemed to move as swiftly forward as water leaps down a cataract. Instinctively we both shouted a warning to Murdock — he, too, villain though he was, had a life to lose. He had evidently felt some kind of shock or change, for he came rushing out of the house full of terror. For an instant he seemed paralyzed with fright as he saw what was happening. And it was little wonder; for in that instant the whole house began to sink into the earth — to sink as a ship founders in a stormy sea, but without the violence and turmoil that marks such a catastrophe. There was something more terrible, more deadly, in that silent, causeless destruction than in the devastation of the earthquake or the hurricane.

The wind had now dropped away; the morning light struck full over the Hill, and we could see clearly. The sound of the waves dashing on the rocks below, and the booming of the distant breakers filled the air, but through it came another sound, the like of which I had never heard, and the like of which I hope, in God's providence, I shall never hear again: a long, low gurgle, with something of a sucking sound — something terrible, resistless, and with a sort of hiss in it, as of seething waters striving to be free. Then the convulsion of the bog grew greater; it almost seemed as if some monstrous living thing was deep under the surface and writhing to escape. By this time Murdock's house had sunk almost level with the bog. He had climbed on the thatched roof, and stood there looking towards us, and stretching forth his hands as though in supplication for help. For a while the superior size and buoyancy of the roof sustained it, but then it too began slowly to sink. Murdock knelt, and clasped his hands in a frenzy of prayer. And then came a mighty roar and a gathering rush. The side of the Hill below us seemed to burst. Murdock threw up his arms; we heard his wild cry as the roof of the house, and he with it, was in an instant sucked below the surface of the heaving mass.

Then came the end of the terrible convulsion. With a rushing sound, and the noise of a thousand waters falling, the whole bog swept, in waves of gathering size and with a hideous writhing, down the mountain-side to the entrance of the Shleenanaher — struck the portals with a sound like thunder, and piled up to a vast height. And then the millions of tons of slime and ooze, and bog and earth, and broken rock swept through the Pass into the sea.

Norah and I knelt down, hand in hand, and with full hearts thanked God for having saved us from so terrible a doom.

The waves of the torrent rushing by us at first came almost level with us; but the stream diminished so quickly, that in an incredibly short time we found ourselves perched on the top of a high jutting rock, standing sharply up from the sloping sides of a deep ravine, where but a few minutes before the bog had been. Carefully we climbed down, and sought a more secure place on the base of the ridge of rocks behind us. The deep ravine lay below us, down whose sides began to rattle ominously, here and there, masses of earth and stones deprived of their support below where the torrent had scoured their base. Lighterand lighter grew the skyoverthe mountain, till at last one red ray shot up like a crack in the vault of heaven, and a great light seemed to smite the rocks that glistened in their coat of wet. Across the ravine we saw Joyce and Dick beginning to descend, so as to come over to us. This aroused us, and we shouted to them to keep back and waved our arms to them in signal; for we feared that some landslip or some new outpouring of the bog might sweep them away, or that the bottom of the ravine might be still only treacherous slime. They saw our gesticulations, if they did not hear our voices, and held back. Then we pointed up the ravine, and signalled them that we would move up the edge of the rocks. This we proceeded to do, and they followed on the other side, watching us intently. Our progress was slow, for the rocks were steep and difficult, and we had to keep eternally climbing up and descending the serrated edges, where the strata lapped over each other; and besides we were chilled and numbed with cold.

At last, however, we passed the corner where was the path down to the Cliff Fields, and turned eastward up the Hill. Then in a little while we got well above the ravine, which here grew shallower, and could walk on more level ground. Here we saw that the ravine ended in a deep cleft, whence issued a stream of water. And then we saw hurrying up over the top of the cleft Joyce and Dick.

Up to now Norah and I had hardly spoken a word. Our hearts were too full for speech; and, indeed, we understood each other, and could interpret our thoughts by a subtler language than that formulated by man.

In another minute Norah was clasped in herfather's arms. He held her close, and kissed her, and cried over her; while Dick wrung my hand hard. Then Joyce left his daughter, and came and flung his arms round me, and thanked God that I had escaped; while Norah went up to Dick, and put her arms round him, and kissed him as a sister might.

We all went back together as fast as we could; and the sun that rose that morning rose on no happier group, despite the terror and the trouble of the night. Norah walked between herfather and me, holding us both tightly, and Dick walked on my other side with his arm in mine. As we came within sight of the house, we met Miss Joyce, her face gray with anxiety. She rushed towards us, and flung her arms round Norah, and the two women rocked each other in their arms; and then we all kissed her — even Dick, to her surprise. His kiss was the last, and it seemed to pull her together; for she perked up, and put her cap straight — a thing which she had not done for the rest of us. Then she walked beside us, holding her brother's hand.

We all talked at once, and told the story over and over again of the deadly peril I had been in, and how Norah had saved my life; and here the brave girl's fortitude gave way. She seemed to realise all at once the terror and the danger of the long night, and suddenly her lips grew white, and she would have sunk down to the ground, only that I had seen her faint coming and had caught her and held her tight. Her dear head fell over on my shoulder, but her hands never lost their grasp of my arm.

We carried her down towards the house as quickly as we could; but before we had got to the door she had recovered from her swoon, and her first look when her eyes opened was for me, and the first word she said was: "Arthur! Is he safe?"

And then I laid her in the old arm-chair by the hearth- place, and took her cold hands in mine, and kissed them and cried overthem — which I hoped vainly that no one saw. Then Miss Joyce, like a true housekeeper, stirred herself, and the flames roared up the chimney, and the slumbering kettle on the chain over the fire woke and sang again; and it seemed like magic, for all at once we were all sipping hot whiskey punch, and beginning to feel the good effects of it.

Then Miss Joyce hurried away Norah to change her clothes, and Dick and I went with Joyce, and we all rigged ourselves out with whatever came to hand; and then we came back to the kitchen and laughed at each other's appearance. We found Miss Joyce already making preparations for breakfast, and succeeding pretty well, too.

And then Norah joined us, but she was not the least grotesque; she seemed as though she had just stepped out ofa bandbox — she seemed so trim and neat, with her gray jacket and her Sunday red petticoat. Her black hair was coiled in one glorious roll round her noble head, and there was but one thing which I did not like, and which sent a pang through my heart — a blue and swollen bruise on her ivory forehead where Murdock had struck her that dastard blow! She saw my look and her eyes fell, and when I went to her and kissed the wound and whispered to her how it pained me, she looked up at me and whispered so that none of the others could hear: "Hush! hush! Poor soul, he has paid a terrible penalty; let us forget as we forgive." And then I took her hands in mine and stooped to kiss them, while the others all smiled happily as they looked on; but she tried to draw them away, and a bright blush dyed her cheeks as she murmured to me:

"No, no, Arthur! Arthur dear, not now! I only did what any one would do for you!" and the tears rushed to her eyes.

"I must, Norah," said I, "I must, for I owe these brave hands my life!" and I kissed them and she made no more resistance. Her father's voice and words sounded very true as he said:

"Nay, daughter, it is right that he should kiss those hands this blessed mornin', forthey took a true manoutof the darkness of the grave!"

And then my noble old Dick came over too, and he raised those dear hands reverently to his lips, and said, very softly: "For he is dear to us all!"

By this time Miss Joyce had breakfast well underway, and one and all we thought that it was time we should let the brightness of the day and the lightness of our hearts have a turn; and Joyce said heartily:

“Come now! Come now! Let us sit down to breakfast; but first let us give thanks to Almighty God that has been so good to us, and let us forgive that poor wretch that met such a horrible death. Rest to his soul!” We were all silent for a little bit, for the great gladness of our hearts, that came through the terrible remembrance thus brought home to us, was too deep for words. Norah and I sat hand in hand, and between us was but one heart and one soul and one thought — and all were filled with gratitude.

When once we had begun breakfast in earnest a miniature babel broke out. We had each something to tell and much to hear; and for the latter reason we tacitly arranged, after the first outbreak, that each should speak in turn.

Miss Joyce told us of the terrible anxiety she had been in ever since she had seen us depart, and how every sound, great or small — even the gusts of wind that howled down the chimney and made the casements rattle — had made her heart jump into her mouth, and brought her out to the door to see if we or any of us were coming. Then Dick told us how, on proceeding down the eastern side of the bog, he had diverged so as to look in at Murdock’s house to see if he were there, but had found only old Moynahan lying on the floor in a state of speechless drunkenness, and so wet that the water running from his clothes had formed a pool of water on the floor. He had evidently only lately returned from wandering on the hill-side. Then as he was about to go on his way, he had heard, as he thought, a noise lower down the Hill, and on going towards it had met Joyce carrying a sheep which had its leg broken, and which he told him had been blown off a steep rock on the south side of the Hill. Then they two had kept together, after Dick had told him of our search for Norah, until we had seen them in the coming gray of the dawn.

Next Joyce took up the running, and told us how he had been working on the top of the mountain when he saw the signs of the storm coming so fast that he thought it would be well to look after the sheep and cattle, and see them in some kind of shelter before the morning. He had driven all the cattle which were up high on the hill into the shelter where I had found them, and then had gone down the southern shoulder of the hill, placing all the sheep and cattle in places of shelter as well as he could, until he had come across the wounded one, which he took on his shoulders to bring it home, but which had since been carried away in the bursting of the bog. He finished by reminding me jocularly that I owed him something for his night's work, for the stock was now all mine. "No," said I, "not for another day. My purchase of your ground and stock was only to take effect from after noon of the 28th, and we are nowonlyat the early morning of that day; but at any rate I must thank you for the others," for I had a number of sheep and cattle which Dick had taken over from the other farmers whose land I had bought.

Then I told over again all that had happened to me. I had to touch on the blow which Norah had received, but I did so as lightly as I could; and when I said "God forgive him!" they all added softly, "Amen!" Then Dick put in a word about poor old Moynahan: "Poor old fellow, he is gone also. He was a drunkard, but he wasn't all bad. Perhaps he saved Norah last night from a terrible danger. His life, mayhap, may leaven the whole lump of filth and wickedness that went through the Shleenanaher into the sea last night!" We all said "Amen" again, and I have no doubt that we all meant it with all our hearts.

Then I told again of Norah's brave struggle, and how, by her courage and her strength, she took me out of the very jaws of a terrible death. She put one hand before her eyes — for I held the other close in mine — and through her fingers dropped her welling tears.

We sat silent for a while, and we felt that it was only right and fitting when Joyce came round to her and laid his hand on her head and stroked her hair as he said: “Ye have done well, daughter — ye have done well!”

CHAPTER XVIII

When breakfast was finished, Dick proposed that we should go now and look in the full daylight at the effect of the shifting of the bog. I suggested to Norah that perhaps she had better not come as the sight might harrow her feelings, and, besides, that she would want some rest and sleep after her long night of terror and effort. She point-blank refused to stay behind, and accordingly we all set out, having now had our clothes dried and changed, leaving only Miss Joyce to take care of the house. The morning was beautiful and fresh after the storm. The deluge of rain had washed everything so clean that already the ground was beginning to dry, and as the morning sun shone hotly there was in the air that murmurous hum that follows rain when the air is still. And the airwas now still — the storm seemed to have spent itself, and away to the west there was no sign of its track, except that the great Atlantic rollers were heavier and the surf on the rocks rose higher than usual. We took our way first down the Hill, and then westward to the Shleenanaher, for we intended, under Dick's advice, to follow, if possible, up to its source the ravine made by the bog. When we got to the entrance of the Pass we were struck with the vast height to which the bog had risen when its mass first struck the portals. A hundred feet overhead there was the great brown mark, and on the sides of the Pass the same mark was visible, declining quickly as it got seaward and the Pass widened, showing the track of its passage to the sea.

We climbed the rocks and looked over. Norah clung close to me, and my arm went round her and held her tight as we peered over and saw where the great waves of the Atlantic struck the rocks three hundred feet below us, and were fora quarter of a mile away still tinged with the brown slime of the bog. We then crossed over the ravine, for the rocky bottom was here laid bare, and so we had no reason to fear water- holes or pitfalls. A small stream still ran down the ravine and, shallowing out over the shelf of rock, spread all across the bottom of the Pass, and fell into the sea — something like a miniature of the Staubach Fall, as the water whitened in the falling.

We then passed up on the west side of the ravine, and saw that the stream which ran down the centre was perpetual — a live stream, and not merely the drainage of the ground where the bog had saturated the earth. As we passed up the Hill we saw where the side of the slope had been torn bodily away, and the great chasm where once the house had been which Murdock took from Joyce, and so met his doom. Here there was a great pool of water — and, indeed, all throughout the ravine were places where the stream broadened into deep pools, and again into shallow pools where it ran over the solid bed of rock. As we passed up Dick hazarded an explanation or a theory: “Do you know it seems to me that this ravine or valley was once before just as it is now? The stream ran down it and out at the Shleenanaher just as it does now. Then by some landslips, ora series of them, or by a falling tree, the passage became blocked, and the hollow became a lake, and its edges grew rank with boggy growth; and then, from one cause and another — the falling in of the sides, orthe rush of rain-storms carrying down the detritus of the mountain and perpetually washing down particles of clay from the higher levels — the lake became choked up; and then the lighter matter floated to the top, and by time and vegetable growth became combined. And so the whole mass grew cohesive and floated on the water and slime below. This may have occurred more than once. Nay, moreover, sections of the bog may have become segregated or separated by some similarity of condition affecting its parts, or by some formation of the ground, as bythe valley narrowing in parts between walls of rock so that the passage could be easily choked. And so solid earth formed to be again softened and demoralised bythe latter mingling with the less solid mass above it. It is possible, if not probable, that more than once, in the countless ages that have passed, this ravine has been as we see it, and again as it was but a few hours ago." No one had anything to urge against this theory, and we all proceeded on our way. When we came to the place where Norah had rescued me, we examined the spot most carefully, and again went over the scene and the exploit. It was almost impossible to realise that this great rock, towering straight up from the bottom of the ravine, had, at the fatal hour, seemed only like a tussock rising from the bog. When I had climbed to the top I took my knife and cut a cross on the rock, where my brave girl's feet had rested, to mark the spot. Then we went on again. Higher up the Hill we came to a place where, on each side, a rocky promontory with straight, deep walls, jutted into the ravine, making a sort of narrow gateway or gorge in the valley. Dick pointed it out.

"See, here is one of the very things I spoke of that made the bog into sections, or chambers, or tanks, or whatever we should call them. More than that, here is an instance of the very thing I hinted at before — that the peculiar formation of the Snake's Pass runs right through the Hill. If this be so — but we shall see later on." On the other side was, we agreed, the place where old Moynahan had said the Frenchmen had last been seen. Dick and I were both curious about the matter, and we agreed to cross the ravine and make certain, for if it were the spot, Dick's mark of the stones in the Yshape would be a proof. Joyce and Norah both refused to let us go alone, so we all went up a little farther, where the sides of the rock sloped on each side, and where we could pass safely, as the bed was rock and quite smooth, with the stream flowing over it in a thin sheet.

When we got to the bottom, Joyce, who was looking round, said, suddenly: “What is that like a square block behind the high rock on the other side?” He went over to it, and an instant after gave a great cry, and turned and beckoned to us. We all ran over; and there before us, in a crescent-shaped nook at the base of the lofty rock, lay a wooden chest. The top was intact, but one of the lower corners was broken, as though with a fall; and from the broken aperture had fallen out a number of coins, which we soon found to be of gold. On the top of the chest we could make out the letters R. F. in some metal, discolored and corroded with a century of slime, and on its ends were great metal handles, to each of which something white was attached. We stooped to look at them, and then Norah, with a low cry, turned to me and laid her head on my breast, as though to shut out some horrid sight. Then we investigated the mass that lay there.

At each end of the chest lay a skeleton, the fleshless fingers grasping the metal handle. We recognised the whole story at a glance, and our hats came off. “Poor fellows,” said Dick; “they did their duty nobly; they guarded their treasure to the last.” Then he went on: “See, they evidently stepped into the bog, straight off the rock, and were borne down at once, holding tight to the handles of the chest they carried — or, stay” — and he stooped lower and caught hold of something— “see how the bog can preserve. This leather strap attached to the handles of the chest each had round his shoulder, and so, willy nilly, they were dragged to theirdoom. Never mind, they were brave fellows all the same, and faithful ones; they never let go the handles; look, their dead hands clasp them still.

France should be proud of such sons. It would make a noble coat of arms, this treasure-chest sent byfreemen to aid others, and with two such supporters!" We looked at the chest and the skeletons for a while, and then Dick said: "Joyce, this is on your land — for it is yours till to-morrow — and you may as well keep it; possession is nine points of the law, and if we take the gold out, the Government can only try to claim it. But if they take it, we may ask in vain."

Joyce answered: "Take it I will, an' gladly; but not for meself. The money was sent for Ireland's good, to help them that wanted help, an' plase God, I'll see it doesn't go asthray now." Dick's argument was a sensible one, and straightway we wrenched the top off the chest, and began to remove the gold; but we never stirred the chest or took away those skeleton hands from the handles which they grasped.

It took us all, carrying a good load each, to bring the money to Joyce's cottage. We locked it in a great oak chest, and warned Miss Joyce not to say a word about it. I told Miss Joyce that if Andy came for me he was to be sent on to us, explaining that we were going back to the top of the new ravine. We followed it up farther, till we reached a point much higher up on the Hill, and at last came to the cleft in the rock whence the stream issued. The floor here was rocky, and, it being so, we did not hesitate to descend, and even to enter the chine. As we did so, Dick turned to me. "Well, it seems to me that the mountain is giving up its secrets to-day. We have found the Frenchmen's treasure, and now we may expect, I suppose, to find the lost crown. By George, though, it is strange! They said the Snake became the Shifting Bog, and that it went out by the Shleenanaher, as we saw the bog did." When we got well into the chine we began to look about us curiously. There was something odd — something which we did not expect. Dick was the most prying, and certainly the most excited of us all. He touched some of the rock and then almost shouted: “Hurrah! this a day of discoveries! — Hurrah! hurrah!” “Now, Dick, what is it?” I asked — myself in a tumult, for his enthusiasm, although we did not know the cause, excited us all.

“Why, man, don’t you see? This is what we have wanted all along.”

“What is? Speak out, man dear! We are all in ignorance.” Dick laid his hand impressively on the rock.

“Limestone! There is a streak of it here, right through the mountain; and, moreover, look, look! This is not all Nature’s work; these rocks have been cut in places bythe hands of men.” We all got very excited, and hurried up the chine; but the rocks now joined over our heads, and all was dark beyond, and the chine became a cave. “Has anyone a match? We must have a light of some kind here,” said Joyce. “There is the lantern in the house. I shall run for it. Don’t stir until I get back,” I cried; and I ran out and climbed the side of the ravine, and got to Joyce’s house as soon as I could. My haste and impetuosity frightened Miss Joyce, who called in terror: “Is there anything wrong — not an accident I hope?” “No, no; we only want to examine a rock, and the place is dark. Give us the lantern — quick — and some matches.” “Aisy, aisy, alanna!” she said. “The rock won’t run away.”

I took the lantern and matches and ran back. When we had lit the lantern, Norah suggested that we should be very careful, as there might be foul air about. Dick laughed at the idea.

“No foul air here, Norah; it was full of water a few hours ago,” and, taking the lantern, he went into the narrow opening. We all followed, Norah clinging tightly to me. The cave widened as we entered, and we stood in a moderate- sized cavern, partly natural and partly hollowed out by rough tools. Here and there were inscriptions in strange character, formed by straight vertical lines something like the old telegraph signs, but placed differently. “Ogham! — one of the oldest and least known of writings,” said Dick, when the light fell on them as he raised the lantern.

At the far end of the cave was a sort of slab or bracket, formed of a part of the rock carven out. Norah went towards it, and called us to her with a loud cry. We all rushed over, and Dick threw the light of the lantern on her; and then exclamations of wonder burst from us also. In her hand she held an ancient crown of strange form. It was composed of three pieces of flat gold joined all along one edge, like angle-iron, and twisted delicately. The gold was wider and the curves bolder in the centre, from which they were fined away to the ends and then curved into a sort of hook. In the centre was set a great stone, that shone with the yellow light of a topaz, but with a fire all its own.

Dick was the first to regain his composure, and, as usual, to speak.

“The Lost Crown of Gold! — the crown that gave the Hill its name, and was the genesis of the story of St. Patrick and the King of the Snakes. Moreover, see, there is a scientific basis for the legend. Before this stream cut its way out through the limestone, and made this cavern, the waters were forced upward to the lake at the top of the Hill, and so kept it supplied; but when its channel was cut here — or a way opened for it by some convulsion of nature, or the rending asunder of these rocks — the lake fell away.” He stopped, and I went on:

“And so, ladies and gentlemen, the legend is true: that the Lost Crown would be discovered when the water of the lake was found again."

"Begor, that's thrue, anyhow!" said the voice of Andy in the entrance. "Well, yer 'an'r, ivall the sthrange things what iver happened, this is the most shtrangest! Fairies isn't in it this time, at all, at all!"

I told Andy something of what had happened, including the terrible deaths of Murdock and Moynahan, and sent him off to tell the head-constable of police, and anyone else he might see. I told him also of the two skeletons found beside the chest.

Andy was off like a rocket. Such news as he had to tell would not come twice in a man's lifetime, and would make him famous through all the country-side. When he was gone we decided that we had seen all that was worth while, and agreed to go back to the house, where we might be on hand to answer all queries regarding the terrible occurrences of the night. When we got outside the cave, and had ascended the ravine, I noticed that the crown in Norah's hands had now none of the yellow glare of the jewel, and feared the latter had been lost. I said to her: "Norah, dear, have you dropped the jewel from the crown?"

She held it up, startled, to see; and then we all wondered again, for the jewel was still there, but it had lost its yellow colour, and shone with a white light, something like the lustre ofa pearl seen in the midst of the flash of diamonds. It looked like some kind of uncut crystal, but none of us had ever seen anything like it. We had hardly got back to the house when the result of Andy's mission began to be manifested. Every soul in the country-side seemed to come pouring in to see the strange sights at Knockcalltecrore. There was a perfect babel of sounds; and every possible and impossible story, and theory, and conjecture was ventilated at the top of the voice of everyone, male and female. The head-constable was one of the first to arrive. He came into the cottage, and we gave him all the required details of Murdock's and Moynahan's death, which he duly wrote down, and then went off with Dick to go over the ground.

Presently there was a sudden silence among the crowd outside, the general body of which seemed to continue as great as ever from the number of new arrivals, despite the fact that a large number of those present had followed Dick and the head-constable in their investigation of the scene of the catastrophe. The silence was as odd as noise would have been under ordinary circumstances, so I went to the door to see what it meant. In the porch I met Father Ryan, who had just come from the scene of the disaster. He shook me warmly bythe hand, and said loudly, so that all those around might hear: "Mr. Severn, I'm real glad and thankful to see ye this day. Praise be to God, that watched over ye last night, and strengthened the arms of that brave girl to hold ye up." Here Norah came to join us; and he took her warmly by both hands, while the people cheered.

"My, but we're all proud of ye! Remember that God has given a great mercy through your hands, and ye both must thank him all the days of your life. And those poor men that met their death so horribly — poor Moynahan, in his drunken slumber. Men, it's a warning to ye all. Whenever ye may be tempted to take a glass too much, let the fate of that poor soul rise up before ye and forbid ye to go too far. As for that unhappy Murdock, may God forgive him and look lightly on his sins! I told him what he should expect — that the fate of Ahab and Jezebel would be his. For Ahab coveted the vineyard of his neighbor Naboth, and as Jezebel wrought evil to aid him to his desire, so this man hath coveted his neighbor's goods and wrought evil to ruin him. And now behold his fate, even as the fate of Ahab and Jezebel! He went without warning and without rites, and no man knows where his body lies. The fishes of the sea have preyed on him, even as the dogs on Jezebel." Here Joyce joined us, and he turned to him: "And do you, Phelim Joyce, take to heart the lesson of God's goodness! Ye thought when yer land and yer house was taken that a great wrong was done ye, and that God had deserted ye; and yet so inscrutable are his ways that these very things were the salvation of ye and all belonging to ye. For in his stead you and yours would have been swept in that awful avalanche into the sea." And now the head-constable returned with Dick, and the priest went out. I took the former aside and asked him if there would be any need for Norah to remain, as there were other witnesses to all that had occurred. He told me that there was not the slightest need. Then he went away, after telling the people that we all had had a long spell of trouble and labor, and would want to be quiet and have some rest. And so, with a good feeling and kindness of heart which I have never seen lacking in this people, they melted away; and we all came within the house, and shut the door, and sat round the fire to discuss what should be done. Then and there we decided that the very next day Norah should start with her father, for the change of scene would do her good, and take her mind off the terrible experiences of last night.

So that day we rested. The next morning Andy was to drive Joyce and Norah and myself off to Galway, en route for London and Paris.

In the afternoon Norah and I strolled out together for one last look at the beautiful scene from our table rock in the Cliff Fields. Close as we had been hitherto, there was now a new bond between us; and when we were out of sight of prying eyes — on the spot where we had first told our loves, I told her of my idea of the new bond. She hung down her head, but drew closer to me as I told her how much more I valued my life since she had saved it for me, and how I should in all the two years that were to come try hard that every hour should be such as she would like me to have passed.

"Norah, dear," I said, "the bar you place on our seeing each other in all that long time will be hard to bear, but I shall know that I am enduring for your sake." She turned to me, and with earnest eyes looked lovingly into mine as she said:

"Arthur, dear Arthur, God knows I love you! I love you so well that I want to come to you, if I can, in such a way that I may never do you discredit; and I am sure that when the two years are over — and, indeed, they will not go lightly for me — you will not be sorry that you have made the sacrifice for me. Dear, I shall ask you when we meet on our wedding morning if you are satisfied."

When it was time to go home we rose up, and — it might have been that the evening was chilly — a cold feeling came over me, as though I still stood in the shadow of the fateful Hill. And there in the Cliff Fields I kissed Norah Joyce for the last time.

The two years sped quickly enough, although my not being able to see Norah at all was a great trial to me. Often and often I felt tempted almost beyond endurance to go quietly and hang round where she was so that I might get even a passing glimpse of her; but I felt that such would not be loyal to my dear girl. It was hard not to be able to tell her, even now and again, how I loved her; but it had been expressly arranged — and wisely enough too — that I should only write in such a manner as would pass, if necessary, the censorship of the school-mistress. "I must be," said Norah to me, "exactly as the other girls are, and, of course, I must be subject to the same rules." And so it was that my letters had to be of tempered warmth, which caused me now and again considerable pain.

Mydeargirl wrote to me regularly, and although there was not any of what her school-mistress would call "love" in her letters, she always kept me posted in all her doings; and with every letter it was borne in on me that her heart and feelings were unchanged.

I had certain duties to attend to with regard to my English property, and this kept me fairly occupied. Each few months I ran over to the Knockcalltecrore, which Dick was transforming into a fairy-land. The discovery of the limestone had, as he had conjectured, created possibilities in the way of building and of waterworks of which at first we had not dreamed. The new house rose on the table rock in the Cliff Fields. A beautiful house it was, of red sandstone with red tiled roof and quaint gables, and jutting windows and balustrades of carven stone. The whole Cliff Fields were laid out as exquisite gardens, and the murmur of water was everywhere. None of this I ever told Norah in my letters, as it was to be a surprise to her.

On the spot where she had rescued me we had reared a great stone — a monolith — whereon a simple legend told the story of a woman's strength and bravery. Round its base were sculptured the history of the mountain, from its legend of the King of Snakes down to the lost treasure and the rescue of myself. This was all carried out under Dick's eye. The legend on the stone was:

NORAH JOYCE A BRAVE WOMAN ON THIS SPOT BY HER COURAGE AND DEVOTION SAVED A MAN'S LIFE

At the end of the first year Norah went to another school at Dresden for six months; and then, by her own request to Mr. Chapman, was transferred to an English school at Brighton, one justly celebrated among Englishwomen. These last six months were very, very long to me; for as the time drew near when I might claim my darling the suspense grew very great, and I began to have harrowing fears lest her love might not have survived the long separation and the altered circumstances. I heard regularly from Joyce. He had gone to live with his son Eugene, who was getting along well, and was already beginning to make a name for himself as an engineer. By his advice his father had taken a sub-section of the great ship canal, then in progress of construction, and with the son's knowledge and his own shrewdness and energy was beginning to realise what to him was a fortune. So that the purchase-money of Shleenanaher, which formed his capital, was used to a good purpose. At last the long period of waiting came to an end. A month before Norah's school was finished, Joyce went to Brighton to see her, having come to visit me beforehand.

His purpose and mine was to arrange all about the wedding, which we wanted to be exactly as she wished. She asked herfather to let it be as quiet as possible, with absolutely no fuss — no publicity, and in some quiet place where no one knew us.

"Tell Arthur," she said, "that I should like it to be somewhere near the sea, and where we can get easily on the Continent." I fixed on Hythe, which I had been in the habit of visiting occasionally, as the place where we were to be married. Here, high over the sea level, rises the grand old church where the bones of so many brave old Norsemen rest after a thousand years. The place was so near to Folkestone that, after the wedding and an informal breakfast, we could drive over to catch the mid-day boat. I lived the requisite time in Hythe, and complied with all the formalities. I did not see my darling until we met in the church-porch, and then I gazed on her with unstinted admiration. Oh, what a peerless beauty she was! Every natural grace and quality seemed developed to the full. Every single grace of womanhood was there; every subtle manifestation of high- breeding; every stamp of the highest culture. There was no one in the porch — for those with me delicately remained in the church when they saw me go out to meet my bride — and I met her with a joy unspeakable. Joyce went in and left her with me a moment — they had evidently arranged to do so — but when we were quite alone she said to me, with a very serious look: "Mr. Severn, before we go into the church answer me one question — answer me truthfully, I implore you!" A great fear came upon me that at the last I was to suffer the loss of her I loved — that at the moment when the cup of happiness was at my lips it was to be dashed aside; and it was with a hoarse voice and a beating heart I answered: "I shall speak truly, Norah. What is it?" She said, very demurely:

"Mr. Severn, are you satisfied with me?" I looked up and caught the happy smile in her eyes, and for answer took her in my arms to kiss her; but she said: "Not yet, Arthur, not yet. What would they say? And, besides, it would be unlucky." So I released her, and she took my arm, and as we came up the aisle together I whispered to her: "Yes, my darling! Yes, yes, a thousand times! The time has been long, long; but the days were well spent." She looked at me with a glad, happy look as she murmured in my ear:

"We shall see Italy soon, dear, together. I am so happy!" and she pinched my arm. That was a very happy wedding, and as informal as it was happy. As Norah had no bridesmaid, Dick, who was to have been my best man, was not going to act; but when Norah knew this she insisted on it, and said, sweetly: "I should not feel I was married properly unless Dick took his place. And as to my having no bridesmaid, all I can say is, if we had half so good a girl friend, she would be here, of course." This settled the matter, and Dick, with his usual grace and energy carried out the best man's chief duty of taking care of his principal's hat. There were only our immediate circle present: Joyce and Eugene, Miss Joyce (who had come all the wayfrom Knocknacar), Mr. Chapman, and Mr. Caicy (who had also come over from Galway specially). There was one other old friend also present, but I did not know it until I came out of the vestry, after signing the register, with my wife on my arm.

There, standing modestly in the background, and with a smile as manifest as a ten-acre field, was none other than Andy — Andy, so well-dressed and smart that there was really nothing to distinguish him from any other man in Hythe. Norah saw him first, and said, heartily: "Why, there is Andy! How are you, Andy?" and held out her hand. Andy took it in his great fist, and stooped and kissed it as if it had been a saint's hand and not a woman's:

"God bless and keep ye, Miss Norah darlin', an' the Virgin and the saints watch over ye both!" Then he shook hands with me.

"Thank you, Andy," we said, both together, and then I beckoned Dick and whispered to him. We went back to breakfast in my rooms, and sat down as happy a party as could be, the only one not quite comfortable at first being Andy. He and Dick both came in quite hot and flushed. Dick pointed to him: "He's an obstinate, truculent villain, is Andy! Why, I had to almost fight him to make him come in. Now, Andy, no running away; it is Miss Norah's will." And Andy subsided bashfully into a seat. It was fully several minutes before he either smiled or winked. We had a couple of hours to pass before it became time to leave for Folkestone; and when breakfast was over, one and then another said a few kindly words. Dick opened the ball by speaking most beautifully of our own worthiness, and of how honestly and honorably each had won the other, and of the long life and happiness that lay, he hoped and believed, before us. Then Joyce spoke a few manly words of love for his daughter and his pride in her. The tears were in his eyes when he said how his one regret in life was that her dear mother had to look down from Heaven her approval on this day, instead of sharing it among us as the best of mothers and the best of women. Then Norah turned to him and laid her head on his breast and cried a little — not unhappily, but happily, as a bride should cry at leaving those she loves for one she loves better still.

Of course both the lawyers spoke, and Eugene said a few words bashfully. I was about to reply to them all, when Andy got up and crystallised the situation in a few words.

“Miss Norah an’ yer ‘an’r, I’d like, if I might make so bould, to say a wurrd fur all the men and weemen in Ireland that ayther iv yez iver kem across. I often heerd ivfairies, an’ Masther Art knows well how he hunted wan from the top iv Knocknacar to the top iv Knockcalltecrore, and I won’t say a wurrd about the kind iv a fairy he wanted to find — not even in her quare kind iv an eye — bekase I might be overlooked, as the mastherwas; and, more betoken, since I kem here Masther Dick has tould me that I’m to be yer ‘anVs Irish coachman. Hurroo! an’ I might get evicted from that same houldin’ fur me impidence in tellin’ tales iv the Masther before he was married; but I’ll promise yez both that there’ll be no man from the Giant’s Causeway to Cape Clearwhat’ll thry, an’ thryhardher, to make yerfeet walk an’ yer wheels rowl in aisy ways than meself. I’m takin’ a liberty, I know, be sayin’ so much, but plase God, ye’ll walk yer ways wid honor an’ wid peace, believin’ inaichotheran’ in God; an’ may he bless ye both, an’ yer childher, and yer childher’s childher to folly ye. An’ if iver ayther iv yez wants to shtep into glory over a man's body, I hope ye'll not look past poor ould Andy Sullivan!" Andy's speech was quaint, but it was truly meant, for his heart was full of quick sympathy, and the honest fellow's eyes were full of tears as he concluded.

Then Miss Joyce's health was neatly proposed by Mr. Chapman and responded to in such a way by Mr. Caicy that Norah whispered to me that she would not be surprised if aunt took up her residence in Galway before long.

And now the hour was come to say good-bye to all friends. We entered our carriage and rolled away, leaving behind us waving hands, loving eyes, and hearts that beat most truly.

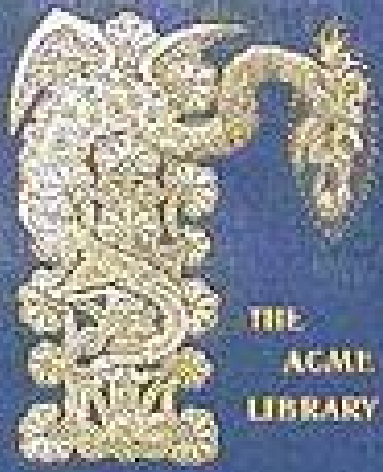
And the great world lay before us with all the possibilities of happiness that men and women may win for themselves. There was never a cloud to shadow our sunlit way; and we felt that we were one.

THE END

The Watter's Mou'

The title of Stoker's third novel relates to the "the water's mouth" in Scottish dialect, referring to a river emptying into the ocean. The novel was first published in 1895 by A. Constable and Company of Westminster as part of their *Acme Library* series. It is the story of a woman in love with a man whose job it is to stop poor fishermen smuggling – one of whom happens to be her father.

The WATTER'S MOU'



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CHAPTER I

It threatened to be a wild night. All day banks of sea-fog had come and gone, sweeping on shore with the south-east wind, which is so fatal at Cruden Bay, and indeed all along the coast of Aberdeenshire, and losing themselves in the breezy expanses of the high uplands beyond. As yet the wind only came in puffs, followed by intervals of ominous calm; but the barometer had been falling for days, and the sky had on the previous night been streaked with great ‘mare’s-tails’ running in the direction of the dangerous wind. Up to early morning the wind had been south-westerly, but had then ‘backed’ to south-east; and the sudden change, no less than the backing, was ominous indeed. From the waste of sea came a ceaseless muffled roar, which seemed loudest and most full of dangerous import when it came through the mystery of the driving fog. Whenever the fog-belts would lift or disperse, or disappear inland before the gusts of wind, the sea would look as though swept with growing anger; for though there were neither big waves as during a storm, nor a great swell as after one, all the surface of the water as far as the eye could reach was covered with little waves tipped with white. Closer together grew these waves as the day wore on, the angrier ever the curl of the white water where they broke. In the North Sea it does not take long for the waves to rise; and all along the eastern edge of Buchan it was taken for granted that there would be wild work on the coast before the night was over.

In the little look-out house on the top of the cliff over the tiny harbour of Port Erroll the coastguard on duty was pacing rapidly to and fro. Every now and again he would pause, and, lifting a field-glass from the desk, sweep the horizon from Girdleness at the south of Aberdeen, when the lifting of the mist would let him see beyond the Scaurs, away to the north, where the high cranes of the Blackman quarries at Murdoch Head seemed to cleave the sky like gigantic gallows-trees.

He was manifestly in high spirits, and from the manner in which, one after another, he looked again and again at the Martini-Henry rifle in the rack, the navy revolver stuck muzzle down on a spike, and the cutlass in its sheath hanging on the wall, it was easy to see that his interest arose from something connected with his work as a coastguard. On the desk lay an open telegram smoothed down by his hard hands, with the brown envelope lying beside it. It gave some sort of clue to his excitement, although it did not go into detail. ‘Keep careful watch tonight; run expected; spare no efforts; most important.’

William Barrow, popularly known as Sailor Willy, was a very young man to be a chief boatman in the preventive service, albeit that his station was one of the smallest on the coast. He had been allowed, as a reward for saving the life of his lieutenant, to join the coast service, and had been promoted to chief boatman as a further reward for a clever capture of smugglers, wherein he had shown not only great bravery, but much ability and power of rapid organisation.

The Aberdeen coast is an important one in the way of guarding on account of the vast number of fishing-smacks which, during the season, work from Peterhead up and down the coast, and away on the North Sea right to the shores of Germany and Holland. This vast coming and going affords endless opportunities for smuggling; and, despite of all vigilance, a considerable amount of ‘stuff’ finds its way to the consumers without the formality of the Custom House. The fish traffic is a quick traffic, and its returns come all at once, so that a truly enormous staff would be requisite to examine adequately the thousand fishing-smacks which use the harbour of Peterhead, and on Sundays pack its basins with a solid mass of boats. The coast-line for some forty miles south is favourable for this illicit traffic. The gneiss and granite formations broken up by every convulsion of nature, and worn by the strain and toil ages into every conceivable form of rocky beauty, offers an endless variety of narrow creeks and bays where the daring, to whom rocks and the currents and the tides are known, may find entrance and speedy exit for their craft. This season the smuggling had been chiefly of an overt kind — that is, the goods had been brought into the harbour amongst the fish and nets, and had been taken through the streets under the eyes of the unsuspecting Customs officers. Some of these takes were so large, that the authorities had made up their minds that there must be a great amount of smuggling going on. The secret agents in the German, Dutch, Flemish, and French ports were asked to make extra exertions in discovering the amount of the illicit trade, and their later reports were of an almost alarming nature. They said that really vast amounts of tobacco, brandy, ruin, silks, laces, and all sorts of excisable commodities were being secretly shipped in the British fishing-fleet; and as only a very small proportion of this was discovered, it was manifest that smuggling to a large extent was once more to the fore. Accordingly precautions were doubled all along the east coast frequented by the fishing-fleets. Not only were the coastguards warned of the danger and cautioned against devices which might keep them from their work at critical times, but they were apprised of every new shipment as reported from abroad. Furthermore, the detectives of the service were sent about to parts where the men were suspected of laxity — or worse.

Thus it was that Sailor Willy, with the experience of two promotions for cause, and with the sense of responsibility which belonged to his office, felt in every way elated at the possibility of some daring work before him. He knew, of course, that a similar telegram had been received at every station on the coast, and that the chance of an attempt being made in Cruden Bay or its surroundings was a small one; but he was young and brave and hopeful, and with an adamantine sense of integrity to support him in his work. It was unfortunate that his comrade was absent, ill in the hospital at Aberdeen, and that the strain at present on the service, together with the men away on annual training and in the naval manoeuvres, did not permit of a substitute being sent to him. However, he felt strong enough to undertake any amount of duty — he was strong enough and handsome enough to have a good opinion of himself, and too brave and too sensible to let his head be turned by vanity.

As he walked to and fro there was in the distance of his mind — in that dim background against which in a man's mind a woman's form finds suitable projection — some sort of vague hope that a wild dream of rising in the world might be some time realised. He knew that every precaution in his power had been already taken, and felt that he could indulge in fancies without detriment to his work. He had signalled the coastguard at Whinnyfold on the south side of the Bay, and they had exchanged ideas by means of the signal language. His appliances for further signalling by day or night were in perfect order, and he had been right over his whole boundary since he had received the telegram seeing that all things were in order. Willy Barrow was not one to leave things to chance where duty was concerned.

His day-dreams were not all selfish. They were at least so far unselfish that the results were to be shared with another; for Willy Barrow was engaged to be married. Maggie MacWhirter was the daughter of an old fisherman who had seen days more prosperous than the present. He had once on a time owned a fishing-smack, but by degrees he had been compelled to borrow on her, till now, when, although he was nominal owner, the boat was so heavily mortgaged that at any moment he might lose his entire possession. That such an event was not unlikely was manifest, for the mortgagee was no other than Solomon Mendoza of Hamburg and Aberdeen, who had changed in like manner the ownership of a hundred boats, and who had the reputation of being as remorseless as he was rich. MacWhirter had long been a widower, and Maggie since a little girl had kept house for her father and her two brothers, Andrew and Niel. Andrew was twenty-seven — six years older than Maggie — and Niel had just turned twenty. The elder brother was a quiet, self-contained, hard working man, who now and again manifested great determination, though generally at unexpected times; the younger was rash, impetuous, and passionate, and though in his moments of quiescence more tender to those he cared for than was usual with men of his class, he was a never-ending source of anxiety to his father and his sister. Andrew, or Sandy as he was always called, took him with consistent quietness.

The present year, although a good one in the main, had been but poor for MacWhirter's boat. Never once had he had a good take of fish — not one-half the number of crans of the best boat; and the season was so far advanced, and the supply had been so plentiful, that a few days before, the notice had been up at Peterhead that after the following week the buyers would not take any more herring.

This notice naturally caused much excitement, and the whole fishing industry determined to make every effort to improve the shining hours left to them. Exertions were on all sides redoubled, and on sea and shore there was little idleness. Naturally the smuggling interest bestirred itself too; its chance for the year was in the rush and bustle and hurry of the coming and going fleet, and anything held over for a chance had to be ventured now or left over for a year — which might mean indefinitely. Great ventures were therefore taken by some of the boats; and from their daring the authorities concluded that either heavy bribes were given, or else that the goods were provided by others than the fishermen who undertook to run them. A few important seizures, however, made the men wary; and it was understood from the less frequent but greater importance of the seizures, that the price for ‘running’ had greatly gone up. There was much passionate excitement amongst those who were found out and their friends, and a general wish to discover the informers. Some of the smuggling fishermen at first refused to pay the fines until they were told who had informed. This position being unsupportable, they had instead paid the fines and cherished hatred in their hearts. Some of the more reckless and turbulent spirits had declared their intention of avenging themselves on the informers when they should be known. It was only natural that this feeling of rage should extend to the Customs officers and men of the preventive service, who stood between the unscrupulous adventurers and their harvest; and altogether matters had become somewhat strained between the fishermen and the authorities.

The Port Erroll boats, like those from Collieston, were all up at Peterhead, and of course amongst them MacWhirter’s boat the *Sea Gull* with her skipper and his two sons. It was now Friday night, and the boats had been out for several days, so that it was pretty certain that there would be a full harbour at Peterhead on the Saturday. A marriage had been arranged to take place this evening between Thomas Keith of Boddam and Alice MacDonald, whose father kept the public-house The Jamie Fleeman on the northern edge of the Erroll estate. Though the occasion was to be a grand one, the notice of it had been short indeed. It was said by the bride's friends that it had been fixed so hurriedly because the notice of the closing of the fishing season had been so suddenly given out at Peterhead. Truth to tell, some sort of explanation was necessary, for it was only on Wednesday morning that word had been sent to the guests, and as these came from all sorts of places between Peterhead and Collieston, and taking a sweep of some ten miles inland, there was need of some preparation. The affair was to top all that had ever been seen at Port Erroll, and as The Jamie Fleeman was but a tiny place — nothing, in fact, but a wayside public-house — it was arranged that it was to take place in the new barn and storehouses Matthew Beagrie had just built on the inner side of the sandhills, where they came close to the Water of Cruden.

Throughout all the east side of Buchan there had for some time existed a wonder amongst the quiet-going people as to the strange prosperity of MacDonald. His public-house had, of course, a practical monopoly; for as there was not a licensed house on the Erroll estate, and as his was the nearest house of call to the port, he naturally got what custom there was going. The fishermen all along the coast for some seven or eight miles went to him either to drink or to get their liquor for drinking elsewhere; and not a few of the Collieston men on their Saturday journey home from Peterhead and their Sunday journey out there again made a detour to have a glass and a chat and a pipe, if time permitted, with 'Tammas Mac' — for such was his sobriquet. To the authorities he and his house were also sources of interest; for there was some kind of suspicion that some of the excellent brandy and cigars which he dispensed had arrived by a simpler road than that through the Custom House. It was at this house, in the good old days of smuggling, that the coastguards used to be entertained when a run was on foot, and where they slept off their drunkenness whilst the cargoes were being hidden or taken inland in the ready carts. Of course all this state of things had been altered, and there was as improved a decorum amongst the smugglers as there was a sterner rule and discipline amongst the coastguards. It was many a long year since Philip Kennedy met his death at Kirkton at the hands of the exciseman Anderson. Comparatively innocent deception was now the smugglers' only wile.

Tonight the whole country-side was to be at the wedding, and the dance which was to follow it; and for this occasion the lion was to lie down with the lamb, for the coastguards were bidden to the feast with the rest. Sailor Willy had looked forward to the dance with delight, for Maggie was to be there, and on the *Billy Ruffian,* which had been his last ship, he had been looked on as the best dancer before the mast. If there be any man who shuns a dance in which he knows he can shine, and at which his own particular girl is to be present, that man is not to be found in the Royal Naval Marine, even amongst those of them who have joined in the preventive service. Maggie was no less delighted, although she had a source of grief which for the present she had kept all to herself. Her father had of late been much disturbed about affairs. He had not spoken of them to her, and she did not dare to mention the matter to him; for old MacWhirter was a close-mouthed man, and did not exchange many confidences even with his own children. But Maggie guessed at the cause of the sadness — of the down-bent head when none were looking; the sleepless nights and the deep smothered groans which now and again marked his heavy sleep told the tale loudly enough to reach the daughter's ears. For the last few weeks, whenever her father was at home, Maggie had herself lain awake listening, listening, in increasing agony of spirit, for one of these half moans or for the sound of the tossing of the restless man. He was as gentle and kind to his daughter as ever; but on his leaving the last time there had been an omission on his part which troubled her to the quick. For the first time in his life he had not kissed her as he went away.

On the previous day Sailor Willy had said he would come to the wedding and the dance if his duties should permit him; and, when asked if he could spare a few rockets for the occasion, promised that he would let off three Board of Trade rockets, which he could now deal with as it was three months since he had used any. He was delighted at the opportunity of meeting the fisherfolk and his neighbours; for his officers had impressed on him the need of being on good terms with all around him, both for the possibility which it would always afford him of knowing how things were going on, and for the benefit of the rocket-service whenever there might be need of willing hands and hearts to work with him, for in the Board of Trade rocket-service much depends on voluntary aid. That very afternoon he had fixed the rockets on the wall of the barn with staples, so that he could fire them from below with a slow match, which he fixed ready. When he had got the telegram he had called in to Maggie and told her if he did not come to fetch her she was to go on to the wedding by herself, and that he would try to join her later. She had appeared a little startled when he told her he might not be present; but after a pause smiled, and said she would go, and that he was not to lose any time coming when he was free. Now that every arrangement was complete, and as he had between puffs of the sea-fog got a clean sweep of the horizon and saw that there was no sail of any kind within sight, he thought he might have a look through the village and keep in evidence so as not to create any suspicion in the minds of the people. As he went through the street he noticed that nearly every house door was closed — all the women were at the new barn. It was now eight o'clock, and the darkness, which is slow of coming in the North, was closing in. Down by the barn there were quite a number of carts, and the horses had not been taken out, though the wedding was not to be till nine o'clock, or perhaps even later; for Mrs. MacDonald had taken care to tell her friends that Keith might not get over from Boddam till late. Willy looked at the carts carefully — some idea seemed to have struck him. Their lettering shewed them to be from all parts round, and the names mostly of those who had not the best reputation. When his brief survey was finished he looked round and then went swiftly behind the barn so that no one might see him. As he went he muttered reflectively:

'Too many light carts and fast horses — too much silence in the barn — too little liquor going, to be all safe. There's something up here tonight.' He was under the lee of the barn and looked up where he had fixed the rockets ready to fire. This gave him a new idea.

'I fixed them low so as to go over the sandhills and not be noticeable at Collieston or beyond. They are now placed up straight and will be seen for fifty miles if the weather be clear.'

It was too dark to see very clearly, and he would not climb up to examine them lest he should be noticed and his purpose of acquiring information frustrated; but then and there he made up his mind that

Port Erroll or its neighbourhood had been the spot chosen for the running of the smuggled goods. He determined to find out more, and straightway went round to the front and entered the room.

CHAPTER II

As soon as Sailor Willy was seen to enter, a large part of the gathering looked relieved, and at once began to chat and gabble in marked contrast to their previous gloom and silence. Port Erroll was well represented by its womankind, and by such of its men as were not away at the fishing; for it was the intention to mask the smuggling scheme by an assemblage at which all the respectability would be present. There appeared to be little rivalry between the two shoemakers, MacPherson and Beagrie, who chatted together in a corner, the former telling his companion how he had just been down to the lifeboat-house to see, as one of the Committee, that it was all ready in case it should be wanted before the night was over. Lang John and Lang Jim, the policemen of the place, looked sprucer even than usual, and their buttons shone in the light of the many paraffin lamps as if they had been newly burnished. Mitchell and his companions of the salmon fishery were grouped in another corner, and Andrew Mason was telling Mackay, the new flesher, whose shed was erected on the edge of the burn opposite John Reid's shop, of a great crab which he had taken that morning in a pot opposite the Twa Een.

But these and nearly all the other Port Erroll folk present were quiet, and their talk was of local interest; the main clack of tongues came from the many strange men who stood in groups near the centre of the room and talked loudly. In the midst of them was the bridegroom, more joyous than any, though in the midst of his laughter he kept constantly turning to look at the door. The minister from Peterhead sat in a corner with the bride and her mother and father — the latter of whom, despite his constant laughter, had an anxious look on his face. Sailor Willy was greeted joyously, and the giver of the feast and the bridegroom each rose, and, taking a bottle and glass, offered him a drink.

'To the bride', said he; but seeing that no one else was drinking, he tapped the bridegroom on the shoulder, 'Come, drink this with me, my lad!' he added. The latter paused an instant and then helped himself from MacDonald's bottle. Willy did not fail to notice the act, and holding out his glass said:

'Come, my lad, you drink with me! Change glasses in old style!' An odd pallor passed quickly across the bridegroom's face, but MacDonald spoke quickly:

'Tak it, mon, tak it!' So he took the glass, crying 'No heeltaps', threw back his head, and raised the glass. Willy threw back his head too, and tossed off his liquor, but, as he did so, took care to keep a sharp eye on the other, and saw him, instead of swallowing his liquor, pour it into his thick beard. His mind was quite made up now. They meant to keep him out of the way by fair means or foul.

Just then two persons entered the room, one of them, James Cruickshank of the Kilmarnock Arms, who was showing the way to the other, an elderly man with a bald head, keen eyes, a ragged grey beard, a hooked nose, and an evil smile. As he entered MacDonald jumped up and came over to greet him.

'Oh! Mr. Mendoza, this is braw! We hopit tae see ye the nicht, but we were that feared that ye wadna come.'

'Mein Gott, but why shall I not come — on this occasion of all — the occasion of the marriage of the daughter of mein goot frient, Tam Smack? And moreovers when I bring these as I haf promise. For you, mein frient Keith, this cheque, which one week you cash, and for you, my tear Miss Alice, these so bright necklace, which you will wear, ant which will sell if so you choose.'

As he spoke he handed his gifts to the groom and bride. He then walked to the corner where Mrs. Mac sat, exchanging a keen look with his host as he did so. The latter seemed to have taken his cue and spoke out at once.

'And now, reverend sir, we may proceed — all is ready.' As he spoke the bridal pair stood up, and the friends crowded round. Sailor Willy moved towards the door, and just as the parson opened his book, began to pass out. Tammas Mac immediately spoke to him:

'Ye're no gangin', Sailor Willy? Sure ye'll wait and see Tam Keith marrit on my lass?'

He instantly replied: 'I must go for a while. I have some things to do, and then I want to try to bring Maggie down for the dance!' and before anything could be said, he was gone.

The instant he left the door he slipped round to the back of the barn, and running across the sandhills to the left, crossed the wooden bridge, and hurrying up the roadway by the cottage on the cliff gained the watch-house. He knew that none of the company in the barn could leave till the service was over, with the minister's eye on them, without giving cause for after suspicion; and he knew, too, that as there were no windows on the south side of the barn, nothing could be seen from that side. Without a moment's delay he arranged his signals for the call for aid; and as the rockets whizzed aloft, sending a white glare far into the sky, he felt that the struggle had entered on its second stage.

The night had now set in with a darkness unusual in August. The swaithes of sea-mist whirled in by the wind came fewer and fainter, and at times a sudden rift through the driving clouds showed that there was starlight somewhere between the driving masses of mist and gloom. Willy Barrow once more tried all his weapons and saw that all his signals were in order. Then he strapped the revolver and the cutlass in his belt, and lit a dark lantern so that it might be ready in case of need. This done, he left the watch-house, locking the door behind him, and, after looking steadily across the Bay to the Scaurs beyond, turned and walked northward towards the Watter's Mou'. Between the cliff on the edge of this and the watch-house there was a crane used for raising the granite boulders quarried below, and when he drew near this he stopped instinctively and called out, 'Who is there?' for he felt, rather than saw, some presence. 'It is only me, Willy,' came a soft voice, and a woman drew a step nearer through the darkness from behind the shaft of the crane.

'Maggie! Why, darling, what brings you here? I thought you were going to the wedding!'

'I knew ye wadna be there, and I wanted to speak wi' ye' — this was said in a very low voice.

'How did you know I wouldn't be there? — I was to join you if I could.'

'I saw Bella Cruickshank hand ye the telegram as ye went by the Post Office, and — and I knew there would be something to keep ye. O Willy, Willy! why do ye draw awa frae me?' for Sailor Willy had instinctively loosened his arms which were round her and had drawn back — in the instant his love and his business seemed as though antagonistic. He answered with blunt truthfulness:

'I was thinking, Maggie, that I had no cause to be making love here and now. I've got work, mayhap, tonight!'

'I feared so, Willy — I feared so!' Willy was touched, for it seemed to him that she was anxious for him, and answered tenderly:

'All right, dear! All right! There's no danger — why, if need be, I am armed,' and he slipped his hand on the butt of the revolver in his belt. To his surprise Maggie uttered a deep low groan, and turning away sat on the turf bank beside her, as though her strength was failing her. Willy did not know what to say, so there was a space of silence. Then Maggie went on hurriedly:

'O my God! it is a dreadfu' thing to lift yer han' in sic a deadly manner against yer neighbours, and ye not knowing what woe ye may cause.' Willy could answer this time:

'Ay, lass! it's hard indeed, and that's the truth. But that's the very reason that men like me are put here that can and will do their duty no matter how hard it may be.'

Another pause, and then Maggie spoke again. Willy could not see her face, but she seemed to speak between gasps for breath.

'Ye're lookin' for hard wark the nicht?'

'I am! — I fear so.'

'I can guess that that telegram tellt ye that some boats would try to rin in somewhere the nicht.'

'Mayhap, lass. But the telegrams are secret, and I must not speak of what's in them.'

After a long pause Maggie spoke again, but in a voice so low that he could hardly hear her amid the roar of the breaking waves which came in on the wind:

'Willy, ye're not a cruel man! — ye wadna, if ye could help it, dae harm to them that loved ye, or work woe to their belongin's?'

'My lass! that I wouldn't.' As he answered he felt a horrible sinking of the heart. What did all this mean? Was it possible that Maggie, too, had any interest in the smuggling? No, no! a thousand times no! Ashamed of his suspicion he drew closer and again put his arm around her in a protecting way. The unexpected tenderness overcame her, and, bursting into tears, she threw herself on Willy’s neck and whispered to him between her sobs:

‘O Willy, Willy! I’m in sic sair trouble, and there’s nane that I can speak to. Nae! not ane in the wide warld.’

‘Tell me, darling; you know you’ll soon be my wife, and then I’ll have a right to know all!’

‘Oh, I canna! I canna! I canna!’ she said, and taking her arms from round his neck she beat her hands wildly together. Willy was something frightened, for a woman’s distress touches a strong man in direct ration to his manliness. He tried to soothe her as though she were a frightened child, and held her tight to him.

‘There! there! my darling. Don’t cry. I’m here with you, and you can tell me all your trouble.’ She shook her head; he felt the movement on his breast, and he went on:

‘Don’t be frightened, Maggie; tell me all. Tell me quietly, and mayhap I can help ye out over the difficult places.’ Then he remained silent, and her sobs grew less violent; at last she raised her head and dashed away her tears fiercely with her hand. She dragged herself away from him: he tried to stop her, but she said:

‘Nae, nae, Willy dear; let me speak it in my am way. If I canna trust ye, wha can I trust? My trouble is not for mysel.’ She paused, and he asked:

‘Who, then, is it for?’

‘My father and my brothers.’ Then she went on hurriedly, fearing to stop lest her courage should fail her, and he listened in dead silence, with a growing pain in his heart.

‘Ye ken that for several seasons back our boat has had bad luck — we took less fish and lost mair nets than any of the boats; even on the land everything went wrong. Our coo died, and the shed was blawn doon, and then the blight touched the potatoes in our field. Father could dae naething, and had to borrow money on the boat to go on with his wark; and the debt grew and grew, till now he only owns her in name, and we never ken when we may be sold up. And the man that has the mortgage isn't like to let us off or gie timel'

'Who is he? His name?' said Willie hoarsely.

'Mendoza — the man frae Hamburg wha lends to the boats at Peterhead.'

Willy groaned. Before his eyes rose the vision of that hard, cruel, white face that he had seen only a few minutes ago, and again he saw him hand out the presents with which he had bought the man and woman to help in his wicked scheme. When Maggie heard the groan her courage and her hope arose. If her lover could take the matter so much to heart all might yet be well, and in the moment all the womanhood in her awoke to the call. Her fear had broken down the barriers that had kept back her passion, and now the passion came with all the force of a virgin nature. She drew Willy close to her — closer still — and whispered to him in a low sweet voice, that thrilled with emotion:

'Willy, Willy, darlin'; ye wouldna see harm come to my father — my father, my father!' and in a wave of tumultuous, voluptuous passion she kissed him full in the mouth. Willy felt for the moment half dazed. Love has its opiates that soothe and stun even in the midst of their activity. He clasped Maggie close in his arms, and for a moment their hearts beat together and their mouths breathed the same air. Then Willy drew back, but Maggie hung limp in his arms. The silence which hung in the midst of nature's tumult broke its own spell. Willy realised what and where he was: with the waves dashing below his feet and the night wind laden with drifting mist wreathing around him in the darkness, and whistling amongst the rocks and screaming sadly through the ropes and stays of the flagstaff on the cliff. There was a wild fear in his heart and a burning desire to know all that was in his sweetheart's mind.

'Go on, Maggie! go on!' he said. Maggie roused herself and again took up the thread of her story — this time in feverish haste. The moment of passion had disquieted and disturbed her. She seemed to herself to be two people, one of whom was new to her, and whom she feared, but woman-like, she felt that as she had begun so must she go on; and thus her woman's courage sustained her.

'Some weeks ago, father began to get letters frae Mr. Mendoza, and they aye upset him. He wrote answers and sent them away at once. Then Mr. Mendoza sent him a telegram frae Hamburg, and he sent a reply — and a month ago father got a telegram telling him to meet him at Peterhead. He was very angry at first and very low-spirited after; but he went to Peterhead, and when he cam back he was very still and quite pale. He would eat naething, and went to bed although it was only seven o'clock. Then there were more letters and telegrams, but father answered nane o' them — sae far as I ken — and then Mr. Mendoza cam to our hoose. Father got as pale as a sheet when he saw him, and then he got red and angry, and I thocht he was going to strike him; but Mr. Mendoza said not to frichten his daughter, and father got quiet and sent me oot on a message to the Nether Mill. And when I cam back Mr. Mendoza had gone, and father was sitting with his face in his hands, and he didna hear me come in. When I spoke, he started up and he was as white as a sheet, and then he mumbled something and went into his room. And ever since then he hardly spoke to any one, and seemed to avoid me a'thegither. When he went away the last time he never even kissed me. And so, Willy — so, I fear that that awfu' Mr Mendoza has made him dae something that he didna want to dae, and it's all breaking my heart!' and again she laid her head on her lover's breast and sobbed. Willy breathed more freely; but he could not be content to remain in doubt, and his courage was never harder tried than when he asked his next question.

'Then, Maggie, you don't know anything for certain?'

'Naething, Willy — but I fear.'

'But there may be nothing, after all!' Maggie's hopes rose again, for there was something in her lover's voice which told her that he was willing to cling to any straw, and once again her woman's nature took advantage of her sense of right and wrong. 'Please God, Willy, there may be naething! but I fear much that it may be so; but we must act as if we didna fear. It wadna dae to suspect poor father without some cause. You know, Willy, the Earl has promised to mak him the new harbourmaster. Old Forgie is bedridden now, and when winter comes he'll no even be able to pretend to work, so the Earl is to pension him, and father will get the post and hae the hoose by the harbour, and you know that every one's sae glad, for they a' respect father.'

'Ay, lass,' interrupted Willy, 'that's true; and why, then, should we — you and me, Maggie — think he would do ill to please that damned scoundrel, Mendoza?'

'Indeed, I'm thinkin' that it's just because that he is respeckit that Mendoza wants him to help him. He kens weel that nane would suspeck father, and—' here she clipped her lover close in her arms once again, and her breath came hot in his face till it made him half drunk with a voluptuous intoxication— 'he kens that father, my father, would never be harmt by my lover!'

Even then, at the moment when the tragedy of his life seemed to be accomplished, when the woman he loved and honoured seemed to be urging him to some breach of duty, Willy Barrow could not but feel that some responsibility for her action rested on him. That first passionate kiss, which had seemed to unlock the very gates of her soul — in which she had yielded herself to him — had some mysterious bond or virtue like that which abides in the wedding ring. The Maggie who thus acted was his Maggie, and in all that came of it he had a part. But his mind was made up; nothing — not Maggie's kisses or Maggie's fears — would turn him from his path of duty, and strong in this resolution he could afford to be silent to the woman in his arms. Maggie instinctively knew that silence could now be her best weapon, and said no word as they walked towards the guard-house, Willy casting keen looks sea-wards, and up and down the coast as they went. When they were so close that in its shelter the roar of the surge seemed muffled, Maggie again nestled close to her lover, and whispered in his ear as he looked out over Cruden Bay:

'The *Sea Gull* comes hame the nicht!' Willy quivered, but said nothing for a time that seemed to be endless. Then he answered— 'They'll find it hard to make the Port tonight. Look! the waves are rolling high, and the wind is getting up. It would be madness to try it.' Again she whispered to him:

'Couldna she rin in somewhere else — there are other openings besides Port Erroll in Buchan!' Willy laughed the laugh of a strong man who knew well what he said:

'Other openings! Ay, lass, there are other openings; but the coble isn't built that can run them this night. With a south-east gale, who would dare to try? The Bullers, or Robies Haven, or Dunbuy, or Twa Havens, or Lang Haven, or The Watter's Mou' — why, lass, they'd be in matches on the rocks before they could turn their tiller or slack a sail.'

She interrupted him, speaking with a despairing voice:

'Then ye'll no hae to watch nane o' them the nicht?'

'Nay, Maggie. Port Erroll is my watch tonight; and from it I won't budge.'

'And the Watter's Mou'?' she asked, 'is that no safe wi'oot watch? it's no far frae the Port.' Again Willy laughed his arrogant, masculine laugh, which made Maggie, despite her trouble, admire him more than ever, and he answered:

'The Watter's Mou'? To try to get in there in this wind would be to court sudden death. Why, lass, it would take a man all he knew to get out from there, let alone get in, in this weather! And then the chances would be ten to one that he'd be dashed to pieces on the rocks beyond,' and he pointed to where a line of sharp rocks rose between the billows on the south side of the inlet. Truly it was a fearful-looking place to be dashed on, for the great waves broke on the rocks with a loud roaring, and even in the semi-darkness they could see the white lines as the waters poured down to leeward in the wake of the heaving wave. The white cluster of rocks looked like a ghostly mouth opened to swallow whatever might come in touch. Maggie shuddered; but some sudden idea seemed to strike her, and she drew away from her lover for a moment, and looked towards the black cleft in the rocks of which they could just see the top from where they stood — the entrance to the Watter's Mou'.

And then with one long, wild, appealing glance skyward, as though looking a prayer which she dared not utter even in her heart, Maggie turned towards her lover once more. Again she drew close to him, and hung around his neck, and said with many gasps and pauses between her words:

‘If the *Sea Gull* should come in to the Port the nicht, and if ony attempt that ye feared should tak you away to Whinnyfold or to Dunbuy so that you might be a bit — only a wee bit — late to search when the boat cam in—’

She stopped affrighted, for Willy put her from him to arm’s length, not too gently either, and said to her so sternly that each word seemed to smite her like the lash of a whip, till she shrunk and quivered and cowered away from him:

‘Maggie, lass! What’s this you’re saying to me? It isn’t fit for you to speak or me to hear! It’s bad enough to be a smuggler, but what is it that you would make of me? Not only a smuggler, but a perjurer and a traitor too. God! am I mistaken? Is it you, Maggie, that would make this of me? Of me! Maggie MacWhirter, if this be your counsel, then God help us both! you are no fit wife for me!’ In an instant the whole truth dawned on Maggie of what a thing she would make of the man she loved, whom she had loved at the first because he was strong and brave and true. In the sudden revulsion of her feelings she flung herself on her knees beside him, and took his hand and held it hard, and despite his efforts to withdraw it, kissed it wildly in the humility of her self-abasement, and poured out to him a passionate outburst of pleading for his forgiveness, of justification of herself, and of appeals to his mercy for her father.

‘O Willy, Willy! dinna turn frae me this nicht! My heart is sae fu’ o’ trouble that I am nigh mad! I dinna ken what to dae nor where to look for help! I think, and think, and think, and everywhere there is nought but dark before me, just as there is blackness oot ower the sea, when I look for my father. And noo when I want ye to help me — ye that are all I hae, and the only ane on earth that I can look tae in my wae and trouble — I can dae nae mair than turn ye frae me! Ye that I love! oh, love more than my life or my soul! I must dishonour and mak ye hate me! Oh, what shall I dae? What shall I dae? What shall I dae?' and again she beat the palms of her hands together in a paroxysm of wild despair, whilst Willy looked on with his heart full of pain and pity, though his resolution never flinched. And then through the completeness of her self-abasement came the pleading of her soul from a depth of her nature even deeper than despair. Despair has its own bravery, but hope can sap the strongest resolution. And the pleadings of love came from the depths of that Pandora's box which we call human nature.

'O Willy, Willy! forgie me — forgie me! I was daft to say what I did! I was daft to think that ye would be so base! — daft to think that I would like you to so betray yoursel! Forgie me, Willy, forgie me, and tak my wild words as spoken not to ye but to the storm that maks me fear sae for my father! Let me tak it a' back, Willy darlin' — Willy, my Willy; and dinna leave me desolate here with this new shadow ower me!' Here, as she kissed his hand again, her lover stooped and raised her in his strong arms and held her to him. And then, when she felt herself in a position of security, the same hysterical emotion came sweeping up in her brain and her blood — the same self-abandonment to her lover overcame her — and the current of her thought once again turned to win from him something by the force of her woman's wile and her woman's contact with the man.

'Willy,' she whispered, as she kissed him on the mouth and then kissed his head on the side of his neck, 'Willy, ye have forgien me, I ken — and I ken that ye'll harm father nae mair than ye can help — but if—'

What more she was going to say she hardly knew herself. As for Willy, he felt that something better left unsaid was coming, and unconsciously his muscles stiffened till he held her from him rather than to him. She, too, felt the change, and held him closer — closer still, with the tenacity induced by a sense of coming danger. Their difficulty was solved for them, for just on the instant when the suggestion of treachery to his duty was hanging on her lips, there came from the village below, in a pause between the gusts of wind, the fierce roar of a flying rocket. Up and up and up, as though it would never stop — up it rose with its prolonged screech, increasing in sound at the first till it began to die away in the aërial heights above, so that when the explosion came it seemed to startle a quietude around it. Up in the air a thousand feet over their heads the fierce glitter of the falling fires of red and blue made a blaze of light which lit up the coast-line from the Scaurs to Dunbuy, and with an instinctive intelligence Willy Barrow took in all he saw, including the many men at the little port below, sheltering under the sea-wall from the sweeping of the waves as they looked out seawards. Instinctively also he counted the seconds till the next rocket should be fired — one, two, three; and then another roar and another blaze of coloured lights. And then another pause, of six seconds this time! and then the third rocket sped aloft with its fiery message. And then the darkness seemed blacker than ever, and the mysterious booming of the sea to grow louder and louder as though it came through silence. By this time the man and the woman were apart no less in spirit than physically. Willy, intent on his work, was standing outside the window of the guard-house, whence he could see all around the Bay and up and down the coast, and at the same time command the whole of the harbour. His feet were planted wide apart, for on the exposed rock the sweep of the wind was strong, and as he raised his arm with his field-glass to search the horizon the wind drove back his jacket and showed the butt of his revolver and the hilt of his cutlass. Maggie stood a little behind him, gazing seawards, with no less eager eyes, for she too expected what would follow. Her heart seemed to stand still though her breath came in quick gasps, and she did not dare to make a sound or to encroach on the business-like earnestness of the man. For full a minute they waited thus, and then far off at sea, away to the south, they saw a faint blue light, and then another and another, till at the last three lights were burning in a row. Instantly from the town a single rocket went up — not this time a great Board of Trade rocket, laden with coloured fire, but one which left a plain white track of light behind it. Willy gazed seawards, but there was no more sign from the far-off ship at sea; the signal, whatever it was, was complete. The coastguard was uncertain as to the meaning, but to Maggie no explanation was necessary. There, away at sea, tossed on the stormy waters, was her father. There was danger round him, but a greater danger on the shore — every way of entrance was barred by the storm — save the one where, through his fatal cargo, dishonour lay in wait for him. She seemed to see her duty clear before her, and come what might she meant to do it: her father must be warned. It was with a faint voice indeed that she now spoke to her lover:

'Willy!'

His heart was melted at the faltering voice, but he feared she was trying some new temptation, so, coldly and hardly enough, he answered:

'What is it, lass?'

'Willy, ye wadna see poor father injured?'

‘No, Maggie, not if I could help it. But I’d have to do my duty all the same.’

‘And we should a’ dae oor duty — whatever it might be — at a’ costs?’

‘Ay, lass — at all costs!’ His voice was firm enough now, and there was no mistaking the truth of its ring. Maggie’s hope died away. From the stern task which seemed to rise before her over the waste of the black sea she must not shrink. There was but one more yielding to the weakness of her fear, and she said, so timidly that Willy was startled, the voice and manner were so different from those he had ever known:

‘And if — mind I say “if”, Willy — I had a duty to dae and it was fu’ o’ fear and danger, and ye could save me frae it, wad ye?’ As she waited for his reply, her heart beat so fast and so heavily that Willy could hear it; her very life, she felt, lay in his answer. He did not quite understand the full import of her words and all that they implied, but he knew that she was in deadly earnest, and he felt that some vague terror lay in his answer; but the manhood in him rose to the occasion — Willy Barrow was of the stuff of which heroes are made — and he replied:

‘Maggie, as God is above us, I have no other answer to give! I don’t know what you mean, but I have a shadow of a fear! I must do my duty whatever comes of it!’ There was a long pause, and then Maggie spoke again, but this time in so different a voice that her lover’s heart went out to her in tenfold love and passion, with never a shadow of doubt or fear.

‘Willy, tak me in your arms — I am not unworthy, dear, though for a moment I did falter!’ He clasped her close to him, and whispered when their lips had met:

‘Maggie, my darling, I never loved you like now. I would die for you if I could do you good.’

‘Hush, dear, I ken it weel. But your duty is not only for yoursel, and it must be done! I too hae a duty to dae — a grave and stern ane!’

‘What is it? Tell me, Maggie dear!’

‘Ye maunna ask me! Ye maun never ken! Kiss me once again, Willy, before I go — for oh, my love, my love! it may be the last!’

Her words were lost in the passionate embrace which followed. Then, when he least expected it, she suddenly tore herself away and fled through the darkness across the field which lay between them and her home, whilst he stood doggedly at his watch looking out for another signal between sea and shore.

CHAPTER III

When she got to the far side of the field, Maggie, instead of turning to the left, which would have brought her home, went down the sloping track to the right, which led to the rustic bridge crossing the Back Burn near the Pigeon Tower. Thence turning to the right she scrambled down the bank beside the ruined barley-mill, so as to reach the little plots of sea-grass — islands, except at low tide — between which the tide rises to meet the waters of the stream.

The whole situation of Cruden is peculiar. The main stream, the Water of Cruden, runs in a south-easterly direction, skirts the sandhills, and, swirling under the stone bridge, partly built with the ruins of the old church which Malcolm erected to celebrate his victory over Sueno, turns suddenly to the right and runs to sea over a stony bottom. The estuary has in its wash some dangerous outcropping granite rocks, nearly covered at high tide, and the mouth opens between the most northerly end of the sandhills and the village street, whose houses mark the slope of the detritus from the rocks. Formerly the Water of Cruden, instead of taking this last turn, used to flow straight on till it joined the lesser stream known as the Back Burn, and together the streams ran seawards. Even in comparatively recent years, in times of flood or freshet, the spate broke down or swept over the intervening tongue of land, and the Water of Cruden took its old course seaward. This course is what is known as the Watter's Mou'. It is a natural cleft — formed by primaeval fire or earthquake or some sort of natural convulsion, — which runs through the vast mass of red granite which forms a promontory running due south. Water has done its work as well as fire in the formation of the gully as it now is, for the drip and flow and rush of water that mark the seasons for countless ages have completed the work of the pristine fire. As one sees this natural mouth of the stream in the rocky face of the cliff, it is hard to realise that Nature alone has done the work.

At first the cleft runs from west to east, and broadens out into a wide bay of which on one side a steep grassy slope leads towards the new castle of Slains, and on the other rises a sheer bank, with tufts of the thick grass growing on the ledges, where the earth has been blown. From this the cleft opens again between towering rocks like what in America is called a cañon and tends seaward to the south between precipices two hundred feet high, and over a bottom of great boulders exposed at low water towards the northern end. The precipice to the left or eastward side is twice rent with great openings, through which, in time of storm, the spray and spume of the easterly gale piling the great waves into the Castle Bay are swept. These openings are, however, so guarded with masses of rock that the force of the wildest wave is broken before it can leap up the piles of boulders which rise from their sandy floors. At the very mouth the cleft opens away to the west, where the cliff falls back, and seaward of which rise great masses of black frowning rock, most of which only show their presence at high water by the angry patches of foam which even in calm weather mark them — for the current here runs fast. The eastern portal is composed of a giant mass of red granite, which, from its overhanging shape, is known as 'the Ship's Starn.' It lies somewhat lower than the cliff of which it is a part, being attached to it by a great sloping shelf of granite, over which, when the storm is easterly, the torrent of spray sent up by the dashing waves rolls down to join the foamy waves in the Watter's Mou.'

Maggie knew that close to the Barley Mill, safe from the onset of the waves-for the wildest waves that ever rise lose their force fretting and churning on the stony sides and bottom of the Watter's Mou' — was kept a light boat belonging to her brother, which he sometimes used when the weather was fine and he wanted to utilise his spare time in line fishing. Her mind was made up that it was her duty to give her father warning of what awaited him on landing — if she could. She was afraid to think of the danger, of the myriad chances against her success; but, woman-like, when once the idea was fixed in her mind she went straight on to its realisation. Truly, thought of any kind would have been an absolute barrier to action in such a case, for any one of the difficulties ahead would have seemed sufficient. To leave the shore at all on such a night, and in such a frail craft, with none but a girl to manage it; then to find a way, despite storm and current, out to the boat so far off at sea; and finally, to find the boat she wanted at all in the fret of such a stormy sea — a wilderness of driving mist — in such a night, when never a star even was to be seen: the prospect might well appal the bravest.

But to think was to hesitate, and to hesitate was to fail. Keeping her thoughts on the danger to her father, and seeing through the blackness of the stormy night his white, woe-laden face before her, and hearing through the tumult of the tempest his sobs as on that night when her fear for him began to be acute, she set about her work with desperate energy. The boat was moored on the northern side of the largest of the little islands of sea-grass, and so far in shelter that she could get all in readiness. She set the oars in their places, stepped the mast, and rigged the sail ready to haul up. Then she took a small spar of broken wood and knotted to it a piece of rope, fastening the other end of the rope, some five yards long, just under the thwarts near the centre of the boat, and just a little forward on the port side.

The spar she put carefully ready to throw out of the boat when the sweep of the wind should take her sail — for without some such strain as it would afford, the boat would probably heel over. Then she guided the boat in the shallow water round the little island till it was stern on to the sea side. It was rough work, for the rush and recoil of the waves beat the boat back on the sandy bank or left her now and again dry till a new wave lifted her.

All this time she took something of inspiration from the darkness and the roar of the storm around her. She was not yet face to face with danger, and did not realise, or try to realise, its magnitude. In such a mystery of darkness as lay before, above, and around her, her own personality seemed as nought. Truly there is an instinct of one's own littleness which becomes consciously manifest in the times when Nature puts forth her might. The wind swept up the channel of the Watter's Mou' in great gusts, till the open bay where she stood became the centre of an intermittent whirlwind. The storm came not only from the Mouth itself, but through the great gaps in the eastern wall. It drove across the gully till high amongst the rocks overhead on both sides it seemed now and again to scream as a living thing in pain or anger. Great sheets of mist appeared out of the inky darkness beyond, coming suddenly as though like the great sails of ships driving up before the wind. With gladness Maggie saw that the sheets of fog were becoming fewer and thinner, and realised that so far her dreadful task was becoming possible. She was getting more inspired by the sound and elemental fury around her. There was in her blood, as in the blood of all the hardy children of the northern seas, some strain of those sturdy Berserkers who knew no fear, and rode the very tempest on its wings with supreme bravery. Such natures rise with the occasion, and now, when the call had come, Maggie’s brave nature answered it. It was with a strong, almost an eager, heart that she jumped into the boat, and seizing the oars, set out on her perilous course. The start was difficult, for the boat was bumping savagely on the sand; but, taking advantage of a big wave, two or three powerful strokes took her out into deeper water. Here, too, there was shelter, for the cliffs rose steeply; and when she had entered the elbow of the gully and saw before her the whole length of the Watter’s Mou’, the drift of the wind took it over her head, and she was able to row in comparative calmness under the shadow of the cliffs. A few minutes took her to the first of the openings in the eastern cliff, and here she began to feel the full fury of the storm. The opening itself was sheer on each side, but in the gap between was piled a mass of giant boulders, the work of the sea at its wildest during the centuries of stress. On the farther side of these the waves broke, and sent up a white cloud of spume that drove instantly into the darkness beyond. Maggie knew that here her first great effort had to be made, and lending her strength pulled the boat through the turmoil of wind and wave. As she passed the cleft, driven somewhat more out into the middle of the channel, she caught, in a pause between the rush of the waves, a glimpse of the lighted windows of the castle on the cliff. The sight for an instant unnerved her, for it brought into opposition her own dreadful situation, mental and physical, with the happy faces of those clustered round the comforting light. But the reaction was helpful, for the little jealousy which was at the base of the idea was blotted out by the thought of that stern and paramount duty which she had undertaken. Not seldom in days gone by had women like her, in times of test and torment, taken their way over the red-hot ploughsharcs under somewhat similar stress of mind.

She was now under the shelter of the cliff, and gaining the second and last opening in the rocky wall: as the boat advanced the force of the waves became greater, for every yard up the Watter's

Mou' the fretting of the rocky bottom and sides had broken their force. This was brought home to her roughly when the breaking of a coming wave threw a sheet of water over her as she bent to her oars. Chop! chop! went the boat into the trough of each succeeding wave, till it became necessary to bale out the boat or she might never even get started on her way. This done she rowed on, and now came to the second opening in the cliff. This was much wilder than the first, for outside of it, to the east, the waves of the North Sea broke in all their violence, and with the breaking of each a great sheet of water came drifting over the wall of piled-up boulders. Again Maggie kept out in the channel, and, pulling with all her might, passed again into the shelter of the cliff. Here the water was stiller, for the waves were breaking directly behind the sheltering cliff, and the sound of them was heard high overhead in the rushing wind.

Maggie drew close to the rock, and, hugging it, crept on her outward way. There was now only one danger to come, before her final effort. The great shelf of rock inside the Ship's Starn was only saved from exposure by its rise on the outer side; hut here, happily, the waves did not break, they swept under the overhanging slope on the outer side, and then passed on their way; the vast depth of the water outside was their protection within. Now and then a wave broke on the edge of the Ship's Starn, and then a great wall of green water rose and rushed down the steep slope, but in the pause between Maggie passed along; and now the boat nestled on the black water, under the shelter of the very outermost wall of rock. The Ship's Starn was now her last refuge. As she hurriedly began to get the sail ready she could hear the whistling of the wind round the outer side of the rock and overhead. The black water underneath her rose and fell, but in some mysterious eddy or backwater of Nature's forces she rested in comparative calm on the very edge of the maelström. By contrast with the darkness of the Watter's Mou' between the towering walls of rock, the sea had some mysterious light of its own, and just outside the opening on the western side she could see the white water pouring over the sunken rocks as the passing waves exposed them, till once more they looked like teeth in the jaws of the hungry sea.

And now came the final struggle in her effort to get out to open water. The moment she should pass beyond the shelter of the Ship's Starn the easterly gale would in all probability drive her straight upon the outer reef of rocks amongst those angry jaws, where the white teeth would in an instant grind her and her boat to nothingness. But if she should pass this last danger she should be out in the open sea and might make her way to save her father. She held in her mind the spot whence she had seen the answering signal to the rockets, and felt a blind trust that God would help her in her difficulty. Was not God pleased with self-sacrifice? What could be better for a maid than to save her father from accomplished sin and the discovery which made sin so bitter to bear? 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend.' Besides there was Sailor Willy! Had not he — even he — doubted her; and might she not by this wild night's work win back her old place in his heart and his faith? Strong in this new hope, she made careful preparation for her great effort. She threw overboard the spar and got ready the tiller. Then having put the sheet round the thwart on the starboard side, and laid the loose end where she could grasp it whilst holding the tiller, she hoisted the sail and belayed the rope that held it. In the eddy of the storm behind the sheltered rock the sail hung idly for a few seconds, and in this time she jumped to the stern and held the tiller with one hand and with the other drew the sheet of the sail taut and belayed it. An instant after, the sail caught a gust of wind and the boat sprang, as though a living thing, out toward the channel. The instant the shelter was past the sail caught the full sweep of the easterly gale, and the boat would have turned over only for the strain from the floating span line, which now did its part well. The bow was thrown round towards the wind, and the boat began rushing through the water at a terrific pace. Maggie felt the coldness of death in her heart; but in that wild moment the bravery of her nature came out. She shut her teeth and jammed the tiller down hard, keeping it in place against her thigh, with the other leg pressed like a pillar against the side of the boat. The little craft seemed sweeping right down on the outer rocks; already she could see the white wall of water, articulated into white lines like giant hairs, rushing after the retreating waves, and a great despair swept over her. But at that moment the rocks on the western side of the Watter's Mou' opened so far that she caught a glimpse of Sailor Willy's lamp reflected through the window of the coastguard hut. This gave her new hope, and with a mighty effort she pressed the tiller harder. The boat sank in the trough of the waves, rose again, the spar caught the rush of the receding wave and pulled the boat's head a point round, and then the outer rock was passed, and the boat, actually touching the rock so that the limpets scraped her side, ran free in the stormy waves beyond.

Maggie breathed a prayer as with trembling hand she unloosed the rope of the floating spar; then, having loosened the sheet, she turned the boat's head south, and, tacking, ran out in the direction where she had seen the signal light of her father's boat.

By contrast with the terrible turmoil amid the rocks, the great waves of the open sea were safety itself. No one to whom the sea is an occupation ever fears it in the open; and this fisher's daughter, with the Viking blood in her veins, actually rejoiced as the cockleshell of a boat, dipping and jerking like an angry horse, drove up and down the swell of the waves. She was a good way out now, and the whole coast-line east and west was opening up to her. The mist had gone by, or, if it lasted, hung amid the rocks inshore; and through the great blackness round she saw the lights in the windows of the castle, the glimmering lights of the village of Cruden, and far off the powerful light at Girdleness blazing out at intervals. But there was one light on which her eyes lingered fixedly — the dim window of the coastguard's shelter, where she knew that her lover kept his grim watch. Her heart was filled with gladness as she thought that by what she was doing she would keep pain and trouble from him. She knew now, what she had all along in her heart believed, that Sailor Willy would not flinch from any duty however stern and pain-laden to him it might be; and she knew, too, that neither her rugged father nor her passionate young brother would ever forgive him for that duty. But now she would not, could not, think of failing, but gripped the tiller hard, and with set teeth and fixed eyes held on her perilous way.

Time went by hour by hour, but so great was her anxiety that she never noted how it went, but held on her course, tacking again and again as she tried to beat her way to her father through the storm. The eyes of sea folk are not ordinary eyes — they can pierce the darkness wherein the vision of land folk becomes lost or arrested; and the sea and the sky over it, and the coast-line, however black and dim — however low-lying or distant — have lessons of their own. Maggie began by some mysterious instinct to find her way where she wanted to go, till little by little the coast-line, save for the distant lights of Girdleness and Boddam, faded out of sight. Lying as she was on the very surface of the water, she had the horizon rising as it were around her, and there is nearly always some slight sign of light somewhere on the horizon's rim. There came now and again rents in the thick clouding of the stormy sky, and at such moments here and there came patches of lesser darkness like oases of light in the desert of the ebon sea. At one such moment she saw far off to the port side the outline of a vessel well known on the coast, the revenue cutter which was the seaward arm of the preventive service. And then a great fear came over poor Maggie's heart; the sea was no longer the open sea, for her father was held in the toils of his enemies, and escape seaward became difficult or would be almost impossible, when the coming morn would reveal all the mysteries that the darkness hid. Despair, however, has its own courage, and Maggie was too far in her venture now to dread for more than a passing moment anything which might follow. She knew that the *Sea Gull* lay still to the front, and with a beating heart and a brain that throbbed with the eagerness of hope and fear she held on her course. The break in the sky which had shown her the revenue cutter was only momentary, and all was again swallowed up in the darkness; but she feared that some other such rent in the cloudy night might expose her father to his enemies. Every moment, therefore, became precious, and steeling her heart and drawing the sheet of her sail as tight as she dared, she sped on into the darkness — on for a time that seemed interminable agony. Suddenly something black loomed up ahead of her, thrown out against the light of the horizon's rim, and her heart gave a great jump, for something told her that the Powers which aid the good wishes of daughters had sent her father out of that wilderness of stormy sea. With her sea-trained eyes she knew in a few moments that the boat pitching so heavily was indeed the *Sea Gull.* At the same moment some one on the boat's deck saw her sail, and a hoarse muffled murmur of voices came to her over the waves in the gale. The coble's head was thrown round to the wind, and in that stress of storm and chopping sea she beat and buffeted, and like magic her way stopped, and she lay tossing. Maggie realised the intention of the manoeuvre, and deftly swung her boat round till she came under the starboard quarter of the fishing-boat, and in the shadow of her greater bulk and vaster sail, reefed though it was, found a comparative calm. Then she called out:

'Father! It's me — Maggie! Dinna show a licht, but try to throw me a rope.'

With a shout in which were mingled many strong feelings, her father leaned over the bulwark, and, with seaman's instinct of instant action, threw her a rope. She deftly caught it, and, making it fast to the bows of her boat, dropped her sail. Then someone threw her another rope, which she fastened round her waist. She threw herself into the sea, and, holding tight to the rope, was shortly pulled breathless on board the *Sea Gull.*

She was instantly the centre of a ring of men. Not only were her father and two brothers on board, but there were no less than six men, seemingly foreigners, in the group.

'Maggie!' said her father, 'in God's name, lass, hoo cam ye oot here? Were ye overta'en by the storm? God be thankit that ye met us, for this is a wild nicht to be oot on the North Sea by yer lanes.'

'Father!' said she, in a hurried whisper in his ear. 'I must speak wi' ye alane. There isna a moment to lose!'

‘Speak on, lass.’

‘No’ before these strangers, father. I must speak alane!’ Without a word, MacWhirter took his daughter aside, and, amid a muttered dissatisfaction of the strange men, signed to her to proceed. Then, as briefly as she could, Maggie told her father that it was known that a cargo was to be run that night, that the coastguard all along Buchan had been warned, and that she had come out to tell him of his danger.

As she spoke the old man groaned, and after a pause said: ‘I maun tell the rest. I’m no’ the maister here the noo. Mendoza has me in his grip, an’ his men rule here!’

‘But, father, the boat is yours, and the risk is yours. It is you’ll be punished if there is a discovery!’

‘That may be, lass, but I’m no’ free.’

‘I feared it was true, father, but I thocht it my duty to come!’ Doubtless the old man knew that Maggie would understand fully what he meant, but the only recognition he made of her act of heroism was to lay his hand heavily on her shoulder. Then stepping forward he called the men round him, and in his own rough way told them of the danger. The strangers muttered and scowled; but Andrew and Neil drew close to their sister, and the younger man put his arm around her and pressed her to him. Maggie felt the comfort of the kindness, and laying her head on her brother’s shoulder, cried quietly in the darkness. It was a relief to her pent-up feelings to be able to give way if only so far. When MacWhirter brought his tale to a close, and asked: ‘And now, lads, what’s to be done?’ one of the strangers, a brawny, heavily-built man, spoke out harshly:

‘But for why this? Was it not that this woman’s lover was of the guard? In this affair the women must do their best too. This lover of the guard—’ He was hotly interrupted by Neil:

’Tisna the part of Maggie to tak a hand in this at a’.’

‘But I say it is the part of all. When Mendoza bought this man he bought all — unless there be traitors in his house!’ This roused Maggie, who spoke out quickly, for she feared that her brother’s passion might brew trouble:

‘I hae nae part in this dreadfu’ affair. It’s no’ by ma wish or ma aid that father has embarked in this — this enterprise. I hae naught to dae wi ‘t o’ ony kind.’

‘Then for why are you here?’ asked the burly man, with a coarse laugh.

‘Because ma father and ma brithers are in danger, danger into which they hae been led, or been forced, by ye and the like o’ ye. Do ye think it was for pleasure, or, O my God! for profit either, that I cam oot this nicht — an’ in that?’ and as she spoke she pointed to where the little boat strained madly at the rope which held her. Then MacWhirter spoke out fiercely, so fiercely that the lesser spirits who opposed him were cowed:

‘Leave the lass alane, I say! Yon’s nane o’her doin’; and if ye be men ye’d honour her that cam oot in sic a tempest for the sake o’ the likes o’ me — o’ us’

But when the strangers were silent, Neil, whose passion had been aroused, could not be quieted, and spoke out with a growing fury which seemed to choke him:

‘So Sailor Willy told ye the danger and then let ye come oot in this nicht! He’ll hae to reckon wi’ me for that when we get in.’

‘He telt me naething. I saw Bella Cruickshank gie him the telegram, and I guessed. He doesna ken I’m here — and he maun never ken. Nane must ever ken that a warning cam the nicht to father!’

‘But they’ll watch for us comm in.’

‘We maun rin back to Cuxhaven,’ said the quiet voice of Andrew, who had not yet spoken.

‘But ye canna,’ said Maggie; ‘the revenue cutter is on the watch, and when the mornin’ comes will follow ye; and besides, hoo can ye get to Cuxhaven in this wind?’

‘Then what are we to dae, lass?’ said her father.

‘Dae, father? Dae what ye should dae — throw a’ this poisonous stuff that has brought this ruin owerboard. Lichten yer boat as ye will lichten yer conscience, and come hame as ye went oot!’

The burly man swore a great oath.

‘Nothing overboard shall be thrown. These belongs not to you but to Mendoza. If they be touched he closes on your boat and ruin it is for you!’ Maggie saw her father hesitate, and feared that other counsels might prevail, so she spoke out as by an inspiration. There, amid the surges of the perilous seas, the daughter’s heroic devotion and her passionate earnestness made a new calm in her father’s life:

‘Father, dinna be deceived. Wi’ this wind onshore, an’ the revenue cutter ootside an’ the dawn no’ far off ye canna escape. Noo in the darkness ye can get rid o’ the danger. Dinna lose a moment. The storm is somewhat lesser just enoo. Throw a’ owerboard and come back to yer old self! What if we be ruined? We can work; and shall a’ be happy yet!’

Something seemed to rise in the old man’s heart and give him strength. Without pause he said with a grand simplicity:

‘Ye’re reet, lass, ye’re reet! Haud up the casks, men, and stave them in!’

Andrew and Neil rushed to his bidding. Mendoza’s men protested, but were afraid to interfere, and one after another bales and casks were lifted on deck. The bales were tossed overboard and the heads of the casks stove in till the scuppers were alternately drenched with brandy and washed with the seas.

In the midst of this, Maggie, knowing that if all were to be of any use she must be found at home in the morning, quietly pulled her boat as close as she dared, and slipping down the rope managed to clamber into it. Then she loosed the painter; and the wind and waves took her each instant farther and farther away. The sky over the horizon was brightening every instant, and there was a wild fear in her heart which not even the dull thud of the hammers as the casks were staved in could allay. She felt that it was a race against time, and her over-excited imagination multiplied her natural fear; her boat's head was to home, steering for where she guessed was the dim light on the cliff, towards which her heart yearned. She hauled the sheets close — as close as she dared, for now speed was everything if she was to get back unseen. Well she knew that Sailor Willy on his lonely vigil would be true to his trust, and that his eagle eye could not fail to note her entry when once the day had broken. In a fever of anxiety she kept her eye on the Girdleness light by which she had to steer, and with the rise and fall of every wave as she swept by them, threw the boat's head a point to the wind and let it fall away again.

The storm had nearly spent itself, but there were still angry moments when the mist was swept in masses before fresh gusts. These, however, were fewer and fewer, and in a little while she ceased to heed them or even to look for them, and at last her eager eye began to discern through the storm the flickering lights of the little port. There came a moment when the tempest poured out the lees of its wrath in one final burst of energy, which wrapped the flying boat in a wraith of mist.

And then the tempest swept onward, shoreward, with the broken mist showing white in the springing dawn like the wings of some messenger of coming peace.

CHAPTER IV

Matters looked serious enough on the *Sea Gull* when the time came in which rather the darkness began to disappear than the light to appear. Night and day have their own mysteries, and their nascence is as distant and as mysterious as the origin of life. The sky and the waters still seemed black, and the circle in which the little craft lived was as narrow as ever; but here and there in sky and on sea were faint streaks perceptible rather than distinguishable, as though swept thither by the trumpet blast of the messenger of the dawn.

Mendoza's men did not stint their curses nor their threats, and Neil with passionate violence so assailed them in return that both MacWhirter and Andrew had to exercise their powers of restraint. But blood is hot, and the lives of lawless men are prone to make violence a habit; the two elder men were anxious that there should be no extension of the present bitter bickering. As for MacWhirter, his mind was in a whirl and tumult of mixed emotions. First came his anxiety for Maggie when she had set forth alone on the stormy sea with such inadequate equipment. Well the old fisherman knew the perils that lay before her in her effort to win the shore, and his heart was positively sick with anxiety when every effort of thought or imagination concerning her ended in something like despair. In one way he was happier than he had been for many months; the impending blow had fallen, and though he was ruined it had come in such a time that his criminal intent had not been accomplished. Here again his anxiety regarding Maggie became intensified, for was it not to save him that she had set forth on her desperate enterprise. He groaned aloud as he thought of the price that he might yet have to pay — that he might have paid already, though he knew it not as yet

— for the service which had saved him from the after-consequences of his sin. He dared not think more on the subject, for it would, he feared, madden him, and he must have other work to engross his thoughts. Thus it was that the danger of collision between Neil and Mendoza's men became an anodyne to his pain. He knew that a quarrel among seamen and under such conditions would be no idle thing, for they had all their knives, and with such hot blood on all sides none would hesitate to use them. The whole of the smuggled goods had by now been thrown overboard, the tobacco having gone the last, the bales having been broken up. So heavy had been the cargo that there was a new danger in that the boat was too much lightened. As Mendoza had intended that force as well as fraud was to aid this venture he had not stuck at trifles. There was no pretence of concealment and even the ballast had made way for cask and box and bale. The *Sea Gull* had been only partially loaded at Hamburg, but when out of sight of port her cargo had been completed from other boats which had followed, till, when she started for Buchan, she was almost a solid mass of contraband goods. Mendoza's men felt desperate at this hopeless failure of the venture; and as Neil, too, was desperate, in a different way, there was a grim possibility of trouble on board at any minute.

The coming of the dawn was therefore a welcome relief, for it united — if only for a time — all on board to try to avert a common danger.

Lighter and lighter grew the expanse of sea and sky, until over the universe seemed to spread a cool, pearly grey, against which every object seemed to stand starkly out. The smugglers were keenly on the watch, and they saw, growing more clearly each instant out of the darkness, the black, low-lying hull, short funnel, and tapering spars of the revenue cutter about three or four miles off the starboard quarter. The preventive men seemed to see them at the same time, for there was a manifest stir on board, and the cutter's head was changed. Then MacWhirter knew it was necessary to take some bold course of action, for the *Sea Gull* lay between two fires, and he made up his mind to run then and there for Port Erroll.

As the *Sea Gull* drew nearer in to shore the waves became more turbulent, for there is ever a more ordered succession in deep waters than where the onward rush is broken by the undulations of the shore. Minute by minute the dawn was growing brighter and the shore was opening up. The *Sea Gull,* lightened of her load, could not with safety be thrown across the wind, and so the difficulty of her tacks was increased. The dawn was just shooting its first rays over the eastern sea when the final effort to win the little port came to be made.

The harbour of Port Erroll is a tiny haven of refuge won from the jagged rocks that bound the eastern side of Cruden Bay. It is sheltered on the northern side by the cliff which runs as far as the Watter's Mou', and separated from the mouth of the Water of Cruden, with its waste of shifting sands, by a high wall of concrete. The harbour faces east, and its first basin is the smaller of the two, the larger opening sharply to the left a little way in. At the best of times it is not an easy matter to gain the harbour, for only when the tide has fairly risen is it available at all, and the rapid tide which runs up from the Scaurs makes in itself a difficulty at such times. The tide was now at three-quarters flood, so that in as far as water was concerned there was no difficulty; but the fierceness of the waves which sent up a wall of white water all along the cliffs looked ominous indeed.

As the *Sea Gull* drew nearer to the shore, considerable commotion was caused on both sea and land. The revenue cutter dared not approach so close to the shore, studded as it was with sunken rocks, as did the lighter draughted coble; but her commander evidently did not mean to let this be to the advantage of the smuggler. A gun was fired to attract the authorities on shore, and signals were got ready to hoist.

The crowd of strangers who thronged the little port had instinctively hidden themselves behind rock and wall and boat, as the revelation of the dawn came upon them, so that the whole place presented the appearance of a warren when the rabbits are beginning to emerge after a temporary scare. There were not wanting, however, many who stood out in the open, affecting, with what nonchalance they could, a simple business interest at the little port. Sailor Willy was on the cliff between the guard-house and the Watter's Mou', where he had kept his vigil all the night long. As soon as possible after he had sent out his appeal for help the lieutenant had come over from Collieston with a boatman and three men, and these were now down on the quay waiting for the coming of the *Sea Gull.* When he had arrived, and had learned the state of things, the lieutenant, who knew of Willy Barrow's relations with the daughter of the suspected man, had kindly ordered him to watch the cliff, whilst he himself with the men would look after the port. When he had first given the order in the presence of the other coastguards, Willy had instinctively drawn himself up as though he felt that he, too, had come under suspicion, so the lieutenant took the earliest opportunity when they were alone of saying to Willy:

'Barrow, I have arranged your duties as I have done, not by any means because I suspect that you would be drawn by your sympathies into any neglect of duty — I know you too well for that — but simply because I want to spare you pain in case things may be as we suspect!’

Willy saluted and thanked him with his eyes as he turned away, for he feared that the fullness of his heart might betray him. The poor fellow was much overwrought. All night long he had paced the cliffs in the dull routine of his duty, with his heart feeling like a lump of lead, and his brain on fire with fear. He knew from the wildness of Maggie’s rush away from him that she was bent on some desperate enterprise, and as he had no clue to her definite intentions he could only imagine. He thought and thought until his brain almost began to reel with the intensity of his mental effort; and as he was so placed, tied to the stake of his duty, that he could speak with no one on the subject, he had to endure alone, and in doubt, the darkness of his soul, tortured alike by hopes and fears, through all the long night. At last, however, the pain exhausted itself, and doubt became its own anodyne. Despair has its calms — the backwaters of fears — where the tired imagination may rest awhile before the strife begins anew.

With joy he saw that the storm was slackening with the coming of the dawn; and when the last fierce gust had swept by him, screaming through the rigging of the flagstaff overhead, and sweeping inland the broken fragments of the mist, he turned to the sea, now of a cool grey with the light of the coming dawn, and swept it far and wide with his glass. With gladness — and yet with an ache in his heart which he could not understand — he realised that there was in sight only one coble — the *Sea Gull — he* knew her well — running for the port, and farther out the hull and smoke, the light spars and swift lines of the revenue cutter, which was evidently following her. He strolled with the appearance of leisureliness, though his heart was throbbing, towards the cliff right over the little harbour, so that he could look down and see from close quarters all that went on. He could not but note the many strangers dispersed about, all within easy distance of a rush to the quay when the boat should land, or the way in which the lieutenant and his men seemed to keep guard over the whole place. At first the figures, the walls of the port, the cranes, the boats, and the distant headlands were silhouetted in black against the background of grey sea and grey sky; but as the dawn came closer each object began to stand out in its natural proportions. All kept growing clearer and yet clearer and more and more thoroughly outlined, till the moment came when the sun, shooting over the horizon, set every living thing whose eyes had been regulated to the strain of the darkness and the twilight blinking and winking in the glory of the full light of day.

Eagerly he searched the faces of the crowd with his glass for Maggie, but he could not see her anywhere, and his heart seemed to sink within him, for well he knew that it must be no ordinary cause which kept Maggie from being one of the earliest on the look-out for her father. Closer and closer came the *Sea Gull,* running for the port with a speed and recklessness that set both the smugglers and the preventive men all agog. Such haste and such indifference to danger sprang, they felt, from no common cause, and they all came to the conclusion that the boat, delayed by the storm, discovered by the daylight, and cut off by the revenue cutter, was making a desperate push for success in her hazard. And so all, watchers and watched, braced themselves for what might come about. Amongst the groups moved the tall figure of Mendoza, whispering and pointing, but keeping carefully hidden from the sight of the coastguards. He was evidently inciting them to some course from which they held back.

Closer and closer came the *Sea Gull,* lying down to the scuppers as she tacked; lightened as she was she made more leeway than was usual to so crank a boat. At last she got her head in the right direction for a run in, and, to the amazement of all who saw her, came full tilt into the outer basin, and, turning sharply round, ran into the inner basin under bare poles. There was not one present, smuggler or coastguard, who did not set down the daring attempt as simply suicidal. In a few seconds the boat stuck on the sandbank accumulated at the western end of the basin and stopped, her bows almost touching the side of the pier. The coastguards had not expected any such manœuvre, and had taken their place on either side of the entrance to the inner basin, so that it took them a few seconds to run the length of the pier and come opposite the boat. The crowd of the smugglers and the smugglers' friends was so great that just as Neil and his brother began to shove out a plank from the bows to step ashore there was so thick a cluster round the spot that the lieutenant as he came could not see what was going on. Some little opposition was made to his passing through the mass of people, which was getting closer every instant, but his men closed up behind, and together they forced a way to the front before any one from the *Sea Gull* could spring on shore. A sort of angry murmur — that deep undertone which marks the passion of a mass — arose, and the lieutenant, recognising its import, faced round like lightning, his revolver pointed straight in the faces of the crowd, whilst the men with him drew their cutlasses.

To Sailor Willy this appearance of action gave a relief from almost intolerable pain. He was in feverish anxiety about Maggie, but he could do nothing — nothing; and to an active and resolute man this feeling is in itself the worst of pain. His heart was simply breaking with suspense, and so it was that the sight of drawn weapons, in whatever cause, came like an anodyne to his tortured imagination. The flash of the cutlasses woke in him the instinct of action, and with a leaping heart he sprang down the narrow winding path that led to the quay.

Before the lieutenant's pistol the crowd fell back. It was not that they were afraid — for cowardice is pretty well unknown in Buchan — but authority, and especially in arms, has a special force with law-breakers. But the smugglers did not mean going back altogether now that their booty was so close to them, and the two bodies stood facing each other when Sailor Willy came upon the scene and stood beside the officers. Things were looking pretty serious when the resonant voice of MacWhirter was heard:

'What d'ye mean, men, crowdin' on the officers. Stand back, there, and let the coastguards come aboard an they will. There's naught here that they mayn't see.'

The lieutenant turned and stepped on the plank — which Neil had by this time shoved on shore — and went on board, followed by two of his men, the other remaining with the boatman and Willy Barrow on the quay. Neil went straight to the officer, and said:

'I want to go ashore at once! Search me an ye will!' He spoke so rudely that the officer was angered, and said to one of the men beside him:

'Put your hands over him and let him go,' adding, sotto voce, 'He wants a lesson in manners!' The man lightly passed his hands over him to see that he had nothing contraband about him, and, being satisfied on the point, stood back and nodded to his officer, and Neil sprang ashore, and hurried off towards the village.

Willy had, by this time, a certain feeling of relief, for he had been thinking, and he knew that MacWhirter would not have been so ready to bring the coastguards on board if he had any contraband with him. Hope did for him what despair could not, for as he instinctively turned his eyes over the waste of angry sea, for an instant he did not know if it were the blood in his eyes or, in reality, the red of the dawn which had shot up over the eastern horizon.

Mendoza's men, having been carefully searched by one of the coastguards, came sullenly on shore and went to the back of the crowd, where their master, scowling and white-faced, began eagerly to talk with them in whispers. MacWhirter and his elder son busied themselves with apparent nonchalance in the needful matters of the landing, and the crowd seemed holding back for a spring. The suspense of all was broken by the incoming of a boat sent off from the revenue cutter, which, driven by four sturdy oarsmen, and steered by the commander himself, swept into the outer basin of the harbour, tossing amongst the broken waves. In the comparative shelter of the wall it turned, and driving into the inner basin pulled up on the slip beyond where the *Sea Gull* lay. The instant the boat touched, six bluejackets sprang ashore, followed by the commander, and all seven men marched quietly but resolutely to the quay opposite the *Sea Gull's* bow. The oarsmen followed, when they had hauled their boat up on the slip. The crowd now abandoned whatever had been its intention, and fell back looking and muttering thunder.

By this time the lieutenant was satisfied that the coble contained nothing that was contraband, and, telling its master so, stepped on shore just as Neil, with his face white as a sheet, and his eyes blazing, rushed back at full speed. He immediately attacked Sailor Willy:

'What hae ye dune wi' ma sister Maggie?'

He answered as quietly as he could, although there shot through his heart a new pain, a new anxiety:

'I know naught of her. I haven't seen her since last night, when Alice MacDonald was being married. Is she not at home?'

'Dinna ye ken damned weel that she's no'. Why did ye send her oot?' And he looked at him with the menace of murder in his eyes. The lieutenant saw from the looks of the two men that something was wrong, and asked Neil shortly:

'Where did you see her last?' Neil was going to make some angry reply; but in an instant Mendoza stepped forward, and in a loud voice gave instruction to one of his men who had been on board the *Sea Gull* to take charge of her, as she was his under a bill of sale. This gave Neil time to think, and his answer came sullenly:

'Nane o' ye're business — mind yer ain affairs!' MacWhirter, when he had seen Neil come running back, had realised the worst, and leaned on the taffrail of the boat, groaning. Mendoza's man sprang on board, and, taking him roughly by the shoulder, said:

'Come, clear out here. This boat is to Mendoza; get away!' The old man was so overcome with his feelings regarding Maggie that he made no reply, but quietly, with bent form, stepped on the plank and gained the quay. Willy Barrow rushed forward and took him by the hand and whispered to him:

'What does he mean?'

'He means,' said the old man in a low, strained voice, 'that for me an' him, an' to warn us she cam oot last nicht in the storm in a wee bit boat, an' that she is no' to her hame!' and he groaned. Willy was smitten with horror. This, then, was Maggie's high and desperate purpose when she left him. He knew now the meaning of those despairing words, and the darkness of the grave seemed to close over his soul. He moaned out to the old man: 'She did not tell me she was going. I never knew it. O my God!’ The old man, with the protective instinct of the old to the young, laid his hand on his shoulder, as he said to him in a broken voice:

‘A ken it, lad! A ken it weel! She tell’t me sae hersel! The sin is a’ wi’ me, though you, puir lad, must e’en bear yer share o’ the pain!’ The commander said quietly to the lieutenant:

‘Looks queer, don’t it — the coastguard and the smuggler whispering?’

‘All right,’ came the answer, ‘I know Barrow; he is as true as steel, but he’s engaged to the old man’s daughter. But I gather there’s something queer going on this morning about her. I’ll find out. Barrow,’ he added, calling Willy to him, ‘what is it about MacWhirter’s daughter?’

‘I don’t know for certain, sir; but I fear she was out at sea last night.’

‘At sea,’ broke in the commander; ‘at sea last night — how?’

‘She was in a bit fishin’-boat,’ broke in MacWhirter. ‘Neighbours, hae ony o’ ye seen her this mornin’? ’Twas ma son Andra’s boat, that he keeps i’ the Downans!’ — another name for the Watter’s Mou’. A sad silence that left the angry roar of the waves as they broke on the rocks and on the long strand in full possession was the only reply.

‘Is the boat back in the Watter’s Mou’?’ asked the lieutenant sharply.

‘No,’ said a fisherman. ‘A cam up jist noo past the Barley Mill, an’ there’s nae boat there.’

‘Then God help her, an’ God forgie me,’ said MacWhirter, tearing off his cap and holding up his hands, ‘for A’ve killed her — her that sae loved her auld father, that she went oot alane in a bit boat i’ the storm i' the nicht to save him frae the consequence o' his sin.' Willy Barrow groaned, and the lieutenant turned to him: 'Heart, man, heart! God won't let a brave girl like that be lost. That's the lass for a sailor's wife. 'Twill be all right — you'll be proud of her yet!'

But Sailor Willy only groaned despite the approval of his conscience; his words of last night came back to him. 'Ye're no fit wife for me!' Now the commander spoke out to MacWhirter:

'When did you see her last?'

'Aboot twa o'clock i' the mornin'.'

'Where?'

'Aboot twenty miles off the Scaurs.'

'How did she come to leave you?'

'She pulled the boat that she cam in alongside the coble, an' got in by hersel — the last I saw o' her she had hoisted her sail an' was running nor'west. . . . But A'll see her nae mair — a's ower wi' the puir, brave lass — an' wi' me, tae, that killed her — a's ower the noo — a's ower!' and he covered his face with his hands and sobbed. The commander said kindly enough, but with a stern gravity that there was no mistaking:

'Do I take it rightly that the girl went out in the storm to warn you?'

'Ay! Puir lass— 'twas an ill day that made me put sic a task on her — God forgie me!' and there and then he told them all of her gallant deed.

The commander turned to the lieutenant, and spoke in the quick, resolute, masterful accents of habitual command:

'I shall leave you the bluejackets to help — send your men all out, and scour every nook and inlet from Kirkton to Boddam. Out with all the lifeboats on the coast! And you, men!' he turned to the crowd, ‘turn out, all of you, to help! Show that there’s some man’s blood in you, to atone if you can for the wrong that sent this young girl out in a storm to save her father from you and your like!’ Here he turned again to the lieutenant, ‘Keep a sharp eye on that man — Mendoza, and all his belongings. We’ll attend to him later on: I’ll be back before night.’

‘Where are you off to, Commander?’

‘I’m going to scour the sea in the track of the storm where that gallant lass went last night. A brave girl that dared what she did for her father’s sake is not to be lost without an effort; and, by God, she shan’t lack it whilst I hold Her Majesty’s command! Boatswain, signal the cutter full steam up — no, you! We mustn’t lose time, and the boatswain comes with me. To your oars, men!’

The seamen gave a quick, sharp ‘Hurrah!’ as they sprang to their places, whilst the man of the shore party to whom the order had been given climbed the sea-wall and telegraphed the needful orders; the crowd seemed to catch the enthusiasm of the moment, and scattered right and left to make search along the shore. In a few seconds the revenue boat was tossing on the waves outside the harbour, the men laying to their work as they drove her along, their bending oars keeping time to the swaying body of the commander, who had himself taken the tiller. The lieutenant said to Willy with thoughtful kindness:

‘Where would you like to work on the search? Choose which part you will!’ Willy instinctively touched his cap as he answered sadly:

‘I should like to watch here, sir, if I may. She would make straight for the Watter’s Mou’!’

CHAPTER V

The search for the missing girl was begun vigorously, and carried on thoroughly and with untiring energy. The Port Erroll lifeboat was got out and proceeded up coast, and a telegram was sent to Kirkton to get out the lifeboat there, and follow up the shore to Port Erroll. From either place a body of men with ropes followed on shore keeping pace with the boat's progress. In the meantime the men of each village and hamlet all along the shore of Buchan from Kirkton to Boddam began a systematic exploration of all the openings on the coast. Of course there were some places where no search could at present be made. The Bullers, for instance, was well justifying its name with the wild turmoil of waters that fretted and churned between its rocky walls, and the neighbourhood of the Twa Een was like a seething caidron. At Dunbuy, a great sheet of foam, perpetually renewed by the rush and recoil of the waves among the rocks, lay like a great white blanket over the inlet, and effectually hid any flotsam or jetsam that might have been driven thither. But on the high cliffs around these places, on every coign of vantage, sat women and children, who kept keen watch for aught that might develop. Every now and again a shrill cry would bring a rush to the place and eager eyes would follow the pointing hand of the watcher who had seen some floating matter; but in every case a few seconds and a little dispersing of the shrouding foam put an end to expectation. Throughout that day the ardour of the searchers never abated. Morning had come rosy and smiling over the waste of heaving waters, and the sun rose and rose till its noonday rays beat down oppressively. But Willy Barrow never ceased from his lonely vigil on the cliff. At dinner-time a good-hearted woman brought him some food, and in kindly sympathy sat by him in silence, whilst he ate it. At first it seemed to him that to eat at all was some sort of wrong to Maggie, and he felt that to attempt it would choke him. But after a few mouthfuls the human need in him responded to the occasion, and he realised how much he wanted food. The kindly neighbour then tried to cheer him with a few words of hope, and a many words of Maggie's worth, and left him, if not cheered, at least sustained for what he had to endure.

All day long his glass ranged the sea in endless, ever-baffled hope. He saw the revenue boat strike away at first towards Girdleness, and then turn and go out to where Maggie had left the *Sea Gull;* and then under full steam churn her way north-west through the fretted seas. Now and again he saw boats, far and near, pass on their way; and as they went through that wide belt of sea where Maggie's body might be drifting with the wreckage of her boat, his heart leaped and fell again under stress of hope and despair. The tide fell lower and ever lower, till the waves piling into the estuary roared among the rocks that paved the Watter's Mou'. Again and again he peered down from every rocky point in fear of seeing amid the turmoil — what, he feared to think. There was ever before his eyes the figure of the woman he loved, spread out rising and falling with the heaving waves, her long hair tossing wide and making an aureole round the upturned white face. Turn where he would, in sea or land, or in the white clouds of the summer sky, that image was ever before him, as though it had in some way burned into his iris.

Late in the afternoon, as he stood beside the crane, where he had met Maggie the night before, he saw Neil coming towards him, and instinctively moved from the place, for he felt that he would not like to meet on that spot, for ever to be hallowed in his mind, Maggie's brother with hatred in his heart. So he moved slowly to meet him, and when he had got close to the flagstaff waited till he should come up, and swept once again the wide horizon with his glass — in vain. Neil, too, had begun to slow his steps as he drew nearer. Slower and slower he came, and at last stood close to the man whom in the morning he had spoken to with hatred and murder in his heart.

All the morning Neil had worked with a restless, feverish activity, which was the wonder of all. He had not stayed with the searching party with whom he had set out; their exhaustive method was too slow for him, and he soon distanced them, and alone scoured the whole coast as far as Murdoch Head. Then in almost complete despair, for his mind was satisfied that Maggie's body had never reached that part of the shore, he had retraced his steps almost at a run, and, skirting the sands of Cruden Bay, on whose wide expanse the breakers still rolled heavily and roared loudly, he glanced among the jagged rocks that lay around Whinnyfold and stretched under the water away to the Scaurs. Then he came back again, and the sense of desolation complete upon him moved his passionate heart to sympathy and pity. It is when the soul within us feels the narrow environments of our selfishness that she really begins to spread her wings.

Neil walked over the sandhills along Cruden Bay like a man in a dream. With a sailor's habit he watched the sea, and now and again had his attention attracted by the drifting masses of seaweed torn from its rocky bed by the storm. In such tossing black masses he sometimes thought that Maggie's body might lie, but his instinct of the sea was too true to be long deceived. And then he began to take himself to task. Hitherto he had been too blindly passionate to be able to think of anything but his own trouble; but now, despite what he could do, the woe-stricken face of Sailor Willy would rise before his inner eye like the embodiment or the wraith of a troubled conscience. When once this train of argument had been started, the remorseless logic which is the mechanism of the spirit of conscience went on its way unerringly. Well he knew it was the ill-doing of which he had a share, and not the duty that Willy owed, that took his sister out alone on the stormy sea. He knew from her own lips that Willy had neither sent her nor even knew of her going, and the habit of fair play which belonged to his life began to exert an influence. The first sign of his change of mind was the tear which welled up in his eye and rolled down his cheek. 'Poor Maggie! Poor Willy!' he murmured to himself, half unconsciously, 'A'll gang to him an' tak it a' back!' With this impulse on him he quickened his steps, and never paused till he saw Willy Barrow before him, spy-glass to eye, searching the sea for any sign of his lost love. Then his fears, and the awkwardness which a man feels at such a moment, no matter how poignant may be the grief which underlies it, began to trip him up. When he stood beside Willy Barrow, he said, with what bravery he could:

'I tak it a' back, Sailor Willy! Ye werena to blame! It was oor daein'! Will ye forgie me?' Willy turned and impulsively grasped the hand extended to him. In the midst of his overwhelming pain this was some little gleam of sunshine. He had himself just sufficient remorse to make the assurance of his innocence by another grateful. He knew well that if he had chosen to sacrifice his duty Maggie would never have gone out to sea, and though it did not even occur to him to repent of doing his duty, the mere temptation — the mere struggle against it, made a sort of foothold where flying remorse might for a moment rest. When the eyes of the two men met, Willy felt a new duty rise within his. He had always loved Neil, who was younger than himself, and was Maggie’s brother, and he could not but see the look of anguish in the eyes that were so like Maggie’s. He saw there something which in one way transcended his own pain, and made him glad that he had not on his soul the guilt of treachery to his duty. Not for the wide world would he have gazed into Maggie’s eyes with such a look as that in his own. And yet — and yet — there came back to him with an overpowering flood of anguish the thought that, though the darkness had mercifully hidden it, Maggie’s face, after she had tempted him, had had in it something of the same expression. It is a part of the penalty of being human that we cannot forbid the coming of thoughts, but it is a glory of humanity that we can wrestle with them and overcome them. Quick on the harrowing memory of Maggie’s shame came the thought of Maggie’s heroic self-devotion: her true spirit had found a way out of shame and difficulty, and the tribute of the lieutenant, ‘That’s the lass for a sailor’s wife!’ seemed to ring in Willy’s ears. As far as death was concerned, Willy Barrow did not fear it for himself, and how could he feel the fear for another. Such semblance of fear as had been in his distress was based on the selfishness which is a part of man’s love, and in this wild hour of pain and distress became a thing of naught. All this reasoning, all this sequence of emotions, passed in a few seconds, and, as it seemed to him all at once, Willy Barrow broke out crying with the abandon which marks strong men when spiritual pain breaks down the barriers of their pride. Men of Willy’s class seldom give way to their emotions. The prose of life is too continuous to allow of any habit of prolonged emotional indulgence; the pendulum swings back from fact to fact and things go on as before. So it was with Sailor Willy. His spasmodic grief was quick as well as fierce, like an April shower; and in a few seconds he had regained his calm. But the break, though but momentary, had relieved his pent-up feelings, and his heart beat more calmly for it. Then some of the love which he had for Maggie went out to her brother, and as he saw that the pain in his face did not lessen, a great pity over-came him and he tried to comfort Neil.

‘Don’t grieve, man. Don’t grieve. I know well you’d give your heart’s blood for Maggie’ — he faltered as he spoke her name, but with a great gulp went on bravely: ‘There’s your father — her father, we must try and comfort him. Maggie,’ here he lifted his cap reverently, ‘is with God! We, you and I, and all, must so bear ourselves that she shall not have died in vain.’ To Sailor Willy’s tear-blurred eyes, as he looked upward, it seemed as if the great white gull which perched as he spoke on the yard of the flagstaff over his head was in some way an embodiment of the spirit of the lost girl, and, like the lightning phantasmagoria of a dream, there flitted across his mind many an old legend and eerie belief gained among the wolds and barrows of his Yorkshire home.

There was not much more to be said between the men, for they understood each other, and men of their class are not prone to speak more than is required. They walked northwards, and for a long time they stood together on the edge of the cliff, now and again gazing seawards, and ever and anon to where below their feet the falling tide was fretting and churning amongst the boulders at the entrance of the Watter’s Mou’.

Neil was unconsciously watching his companion’s face and following his thoughts, and presently said, as though in answer to something that had gone before: ‘Then ye think she’ll drift in here, if onywhere?’ Willy started as though he had been struck, for there seemed a positive brutality in the way of putting his own secret belief. He faced Neil quickly, but there was nothing in his face of any brutal thought. On the contrary, the lines of his face were so softened that all his likeness to his sister stood out so markedly as to make the heart of her lover ache with a fresh pang — a new sense, not of loss, but of what he had lost. Neil was surprised at the manner of his look, and his mind working back gave him the clue. All at once he broke out:

‘O Willy mon, we’ll never see her again! Never! never! till the sea gies up its dead; what can we dae, mon? what can we dae? what can we dae?’

Again there was a new wrench to Sailor Willy’s heart. Here were almost Maggie’s very words of the night before, spoken in the same despairing tone, in the same spot, and by one who was not only her well-beloved brother, but who was, as he stood in this abandonment of his grief, almost her living image. However, he did not know what to say, and he could do nothing but only bear in stolid patient misery the woes that came upon him. He did all that could be done — nothing — but stood in silent sympathy and waited for the storm in the remorseful young man’s soul to pass. After a few minutes Neil recovered somewhat, and, pulling himself together, said to Willy with what bravery he could:

‘A’ll gang look after father. A’ve left him ower lang as’t is!’ The purpose of Maggie’s death was beginning to bear fruit already.

He went across the field straight towards where his father’s cottage stood under the brow of the slope towards the Water of Cruden. Sailor Willy watched him go with sadness, for anything that had been close to Maggie was dear to him, and Neil’s presence had been in some degree an alleviation of his pain.

During the hours that followed he had one gleam of pleasure — something that moved him strangely in the midst of his pain. Early in the morning the news of Maggie's loss had been taken to the Castle, and all its household had turned out to aid vigorously in the search. In his talk with the lieutenant and his men, and from the frequent conversation of the villagers, the Earl had gathered pretty well the whole truth of what had occurred. Maggie had been a favourite with the ladies of the Castle, and it was as much on her account as his own that the Mastership of the Harbour had been settled prospectively on MacWhirter. That this arrangement was to be upset since the man had turned smuggler was taken for granted by all, and already rumour and surmise were busy in selecting a successor to the promise. The Earl listened but said nothing. Later on in the day, however, he strolled up the cliff where Willy paced on guard, and spoke with him. He had a sincere regard and liking for the fine young fellow, and when he saw his silent misery his heart went out to him. He tried to comfort him with hopes, but, finding that there was no response in Willy's mind, confined himself to praise of Maggie. Willy listened eagerly as he spoke of her devotion, her bravery, her noble spirit, that took her out on such a mission; and the words fell like drops of balm on the seared heart of her lover. But the bitterness of his loss was too much that he should be altogether patient, and he said presently:

'And all in vain! All in vain! she lost, and her father ruined, his character gone as well as all his means of livelihood — and all in vain! God might be juster than to let such a death as hers be in vain!'

'No, not in vain!' he answered solemnly, 'such a deed as hers is never wrought in vain. God sees and hears, and His hand is strong and sure. Many a man in Buchan for many a year to come will lead an honester life for what she has done; and many a woman will try to learn her lesson in patience and self-devotion. God does not in vain put such thoughts into the minds of His people, or into their hearts the noble bravery to carry them out.'

Sailor Willy groaned. 'Don't think me ungrateful, my lord,' he said, 'for your kind words — but I'm half wild with trouble, and my heart is sore. Maybe it is as you say — and yet — and yet the poor lass went out to save her father and here he is, ruined in means, in character, in prospects — for who will employ him now just when he most wants it. Everything is gone — and she gone too that could have helped and comforted him!'

As he spoke there shot through the mind of his comforter a thought followed by a purpose not unworthy of that ancestor, whose heroism and self-devotion won an earldom with an ox-yoke as its crest, and the circuit of a hawk's flight as its dower. There was a new tone in the Earl's voice as he spoke:

'You mean about the harbour-mastership! Don't let that distress you, my poor lad. MacWhirter has lapsed a bit, but he has always borne an excellent character, and from all I hear he was sorely tempted. And, after all, he hasn't done — at least completed — any offence. Ah!' and here he spoke solemnly, 'poor Maggie's warning did come in time. Her work was not in vain, though God help us all! she and those that loved her paid a heavy price for it. But even if MacWhirter had committed the offence, and it lay in my power, I should try to prove that her noble devotion was not without its purpose — or its reward. It is true that I might not altogether trust MacWhirter until, at least, such time as by good service he had re-established his character. But I would and shall trust the father of Maggie MacWhirter, that gave her life for him; and well I know that there isn't an honest man or woman in Buchan that won't say the same. He shall be the harbour-master if he will. We shall find in time that he has reared again the love and respect of all men. That will be Maggie's monument; and a noble one too in the eyes of God and of men!'

He grasped Willy's hand in his own strong one, and the hearts of both men, the gentle and the simple, went out each to the other, and became bound together as men's hearts do when touched with flame of any kind.

When he was alone Willy felt somehow more easy in his mind. The bitterest spirit of all his woe — the futility of Maggie's sacrifice — was gone, exorcised by the hopeful words and kind act of the Earl, and the resilience of his manhood began to act.

And now there came another distraction to his thoughts — an ominous weather change. It had grown colder as the day went on, but now the heat began to be oppressive, and there was a deadly stillness in the air; it was manifest that another storm was at hand. The sacrifice of the night had not fully appeased the storm-gods. Somewhere up in that Northern Unknown, where the Fates weave their web of destiny, a tempest was brewing which would soon boil over. Darker and darker grew the sky, and more still and silent and oppressive grew the air, till the cry of a sea-bird or the beating of the waves upon the rocks came as distinct and separate things, as though having no counterpart in the active world. Towards sunset the very electricity of the air made all animate nature so nervous that men and women could not sit quiet, but moved restlessly. Susceptible women longed to scream out and vent their feelings, as did the cattle in the meadows with their clamorous lowing, or the birds wheeling restlessly aloft with articulate cries. Willy Barrow stuck steadfastly to his post. He had some feeling — some presentiment, that there would soon be a happening — what, he knew not; but, as all his thoughts were of Maggie, it must surely be of her. It might have been that the thunderous disturbance wrought on a system overtaxed almost beyond human endurance, for it was two whole nights since he had slept. Or it may have been that the recoil from despair was acting on his strong nature in the way that drives men at times to desperate deeds, when they rush into the thick of battle, and, fighting, die. Or it may simply have been that the seaman in him spoke through all the ways and offices of instinct and habit, and that with the foreknowledge of coming stress woke the power that was to combat with it. For great natures of the fighting kind move with their surroundings, and the spirit of the sailor grew with the storm pressure whose might he should have to brave.

Down came the storm in one wild, frenzied burst. All at once the waters seemed to rise, throwing great sheets of foam from the summit of the lifting waves. The wind whistled high and low, and screamed as it swept through the rigging of the flagstaff. Flashes of lightning and rolling thunderclaps seemed to come together, so swift their succession. The rain fell in torrents, so that within a few moments the whole earth seemed one filmy sheet, shining in the lightning flashes that rent the black clouds, and burn and nil and runlet roared with rushing water. All through the hamlet men and women, even the hardiest, fled to shelter — all save the one who paced the rocks above the Watter's Mou', peering as he had done for many an hour down into the depths below him in the pauses of his seaward glance. Something seemed to tell him that Maggie was coming closer to him. He could feel her presence in the air and the sea; and the memory of that long, passionate kiss, which had made her his, came back, not as a vivid recollection, but as something of the living present. To and fro he paced between the flagstaff and the edge of the rocks; but each turn he kept further and further from the flagstaff, as though some fatal fascination was holding him to the Watter's Mou'. He saw the great waves come into the cove tumbling and roaring, dipping deep under the lee of the Ship's Starn in wide patches of black, which in the dark silence of their onward sweep stood out in strong contrast to the white turmoil of the churning waters under his feet. Every now and again a wave greater than all its fellows — what fishermen call the 'sailor's waves — would ride in with all the majesty of resistless power, shutting out for a moment the jagged whiteness of the submerged rocks, and sweeping up the cove as though the bringer of some royal message from the sea.

As one of these great waves rushed in, Willy's heart beat loudly, and for a second he looked around as though for some voice, from whence he knew not, which was calling to him. Then he looked down and saw, far below him, tossed high upon the summit of the wave, a mass that in the gloom of the evening and the storm looked like a tangle of wreckage — spar and sail and rope — twirling in the rushing water round a dead woman, whose white face was set in an aureole of floating hair. Without a word, but with the bound of a panther, Willy Barrow sprang out on the projecting point of rock, and plunged down into the rushing wave whence he could meet that precious wreckage and grasp it tight.

Down in the village the men were talking in groups as the chance of the storm had driven them to shelter. In the rocket-house opposite the Salmon Fisher's store had gathered a big cluster, and they were talking eagerly of all that had gone by. Presently one of them said:

‘Men, oughtn’t some o’ us to gang abeen the rocks and bide a wee wi’ Sailor Willy? The puir lad is nigh daft wi’ his loss, an ‘a wee bit companionship wouldna be bad for him.’ To which a sturdy youth answered as he stepped out:

‘A’ll go bide wi’ him. It must be main lonely for him in the guard-house the nicht. An’ when he’s relieved, as A hear he is to be, by Michael Watson ower frae Whinnyfold, A’ll gang wi’ him or tak him hame wi’ me. Mither’ll be recht glad to thole for him!’ and drawing his oilskin closer round his neck he went out in the storm. As he walked up the path to the cliff the storm seemed to fade away — the clouds broke, and through the wet mist came gleams of fading twilight; and when he looked eastwards from the cliff the angry sea was all that was of storm, for in the sky was every promise of fine weather to come. He went straight to the guard-house and tried to open the door, but it was locked; then he went to the side and looked in. There was just sufficient light to see that the place was empty. So he went along the cliff looking for Willy. It was now light enough to see all round, for the blackness of the sky overhead had passed, the heavy clouds being swept away by the driving wind; but nowhere could he see any trace of the man he sought. He went all along the cliff up the Watter’s Mou’, till, following the downward trend of the rock, and plashing a way through the marsh — now like a quagmire, so saturated was it with the heavy rainfall — he came to the shallows opposite the Barley Mill. Here he met a man from The Bullers, who had come along by the Castle, and him he asked if he had seen Willy Barrow on his way. The decidedly negative answer ‘A’ve seen nane. It’s nae a night for ony to be oot that can bide wi’in!’ made him think that all might not be well with Sailor Willy, and so he went back again on his search, peering into every hole and cranny as he went.

At the flagstaff he met some of his companions, who, since the storm had passed, had come to look for weather signs and to see what the sudden tempest might have brought about. When they heard that there was no sign of the coastguard they separated, searching for him, and shouting lest he might have fallen anywhere and could hear their voices.

All that night they searched, for each minute made it more apparent that all was not well with him; but they found no sign. The waves still beat into the Watter's Mou' with violence, for though the storm had passed the sea was a wide-stretching mass of angry waters, and curling white crowned every wave. But with the outgoing tide the rocky bed of the cove broke up the waves, and they roared sullenly as they washed up the estuary.

In the grey of the morning a fisher-boy rushed up to a knot of men who were clustered round the guard-house and called to them:

'There's somethin' wollopin' aboot i' the shallows be the Barley Mill! Come an' get it oot! It looks like some ane!' So there was a rush made to the place. When they got to the islands of sea-grass the ebbing tide had done its work, and stranded the 'something' which had rolled amid the shallows.

There, on the very spot whence the boat had set sail on its warning errand, lay its wreckage, and tangled in it the body of the noble girl who had steered it — her brown hair floating wide and twined round the neck of Sailor Willy, who held her tight in his dead arms.

The requiem of the twain was the roar of the breaking waves and the screams of the white birds that circled round the Watter's Mou'.

The Shoulder of Shasta

This romance novel was first published in 1895 by Archibald Constable and Company of Westminster. The name of the novel refers to Mount Shasta, located in northern California. The narrative features the rich English heiress Esse, who is told by her doctor that she should spend the coming summer on the high mountainside to recover her health. Esse, after some adventures including a fight with wild bears, falls in love with Grizzly Dick, the American guide and bear-hunter.

Stoker, 1890

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CHAPTER 1

When Mrs Elstree was told that a suitable summer home had been found for her, a certain weight was lifted from her mind. The Doctor whom she had consulted in San Francisco as to her daughter's health was emphatic in his direction that Esse should spend the coming summer high up on some mountain side, and that she should have iron and other natural tonics suitable to her anaemic condition. Dr De Young suggested that on some of the spurs of Shasta, a spot might be found where the air was sufficiently bracing, and where the waters which lower down made the valleys green and bright with their crystal purity had the requisite volcanic qualities. Mrs Elstree had passed by Shasta Mountain once, on her way from British Columbia, and had fallen somewhat under its spell.

It is certainly a wonderful mountain, and has a personality which is rare amongst mountains. The Matterhorn has such a quality, and so have Ranier and Mount Hood; but mountains generally have as little individuality as the items of a dish of peas.

An energetic friend volunteered to make search on Shasta, and after a fortnight's absence telegraphed:

'Have found very spot for you and agreed purchase subject your approval - made deposit; price all told two thousand dollars; strongly advise purchase.' She immediately wired:

'Purchase. Cheque sent payable to you.' The friend was a wise, astute and business-like agent, and when he returned to San Francisco just after an even month's absence he brought with him the deeds of the estate. As to its beauties he would say nothing except an energetic Wait. I may be wrong!' When further pressed he added:

'I went there to purchase for you, not myself; but if you don't care about the buy, wire me and I'll take the whole outfit at ten premium!'

The journey from San Francisco seemed to gain new beauty from experience. As the train, after leaving Sacramento, wound its way by the brawling river, its windows brushed by the branches of hazel and mountain-ash, the whole wilderness seemed like the natural pleasaunce of an old-world garden. The road took its serpentine course up and above its own track, over and over again, and the bracing air made the spirits of all the party more eager for a sight of the new summer home. The only exception was Miss Gimp, a good-hearted lady who had been governess of Esse up to the previous year, when she had arrived at her sixteenth birthday, and was now her mother's secretary and companion. Miss Gimp was not altogether satisfied with the whole affair. She had not been consulted about the purchase, she had not even been asked, as an accessory after the fact, if she approved; and worst of all, she had not been there to see that everything was in good order. Mr Le Maistre, who was Mrs Elstree's male factotum, steward, butler, agent, handy-man, engineer and courier, had gone on a week before with the furniture and household effects of all kinds and supplies wherewith to stock the pantry and wine-cellar. He was to meet them at Edgewood, with horses and ponies, and a suitable guide to bring them to the new house. As he had taken the Saratoga trunks, the present party went flying light as to baggage, and had only to look after their travelling bags and wraps. The live stock was in the special care of Miss Gimp and consisted of a terrier, three Persian cats, and a parrot.

It was but a little after mid-day when the train, winding up through the clearings, drew near the station at Edgewood. The scene was not altogether a promising one. There were too many old meat and vegetable tins scattered about; too many rugged tree-stumps sticking out of the weedy ground, already bare in patches under the heats of the coming summer; insufficient attention to pleasant detail everywhere, and an absolute lack of picturesqueness in the inclined plane formed of rough timber beside the track, and used for purposes of firing and watering the engines. In fact, the whole of the little clearing was in that stage of development when beauty stands equally apart from nature and utility. But there was one sufficient compensation for all the immediate squalor. Beyond, in the distance, rose the mighty splendour of Shasta Mountain, its snow-covered head standing clear and stark into the sapphire sky, with its foothills a mass of billowy green, and its giant shoulders seemingly close at hand when looked at alone, but of infinite distance when compared with the foreground, or the snowy summit.

There is something in great mountains which seems now and then to set at defiance all the laws of perspective. The magnitude of the quantities, the transparency of cloudless skies, the lack of regulating sense of the spectator's eye in dealing with vast dimensions, all tend to make optical science like a child's fancy. Up at the present height, nearly three thousand feet, the bracing air began to tell on their spirits. Even Esse's pale cheeks began, to her mother's great delight, to show some colour, and her dark eyes flashed with unwonted animation, as they ranged over the splendid prospect. She rushed up to Le Maistre, who was signalling some men on the far side of the clearing to bring the horses which were tethered in the shelter of the great pine-trees, and exclaimed:

Where is our place? Point it out to me; I am simply perishing to know all about it!' Le Maistre turned round, and then pointed to the northern shoulder of the mountain.

There, miss, on the left hand of the mountain, a little way below that sharp curve that looks like an old volcano!' Esse looked, and her heart leaped high. On the northern shoulder of the great mountain lay a little plateau where could be seen in the distance the green undulation of forest with here and there a great conifer towering out of the mass. As it lay to the western side of the mountain, it was manifest that it must command the whole range of the seaboard. There was this added charm, that just below it was a thin white line of rushing water, so that there must be some lake or tarn at hand. Mrs Elstree shared in the joy when Esse ran towards her impulsively, calling out:

'Hurry, mother! hurry, or we'll never get there!' It was many a long day since Esse had shown so much interest in anything, and the mother's heart was glad that already the mountain had begun its invigorating work.

It took a little time to get the little caravan in order, and Mrs Elstree utilised the time in making Esse take something to eat. A cup of tea was soon made ready by the obliging wife of the station-master, and some San Franciscan sandwiches formed the rest of the improvised meal. As soon as she could do so without altogether disappointing her mother, Esse hurried out and found Le Maistre, with his companions, ready to set out when the word should be given. Le Maistre was himself somewhat of a picturesque figure, for he was a tall, fine man, with good features, and a black beard tinged with grey; and he was dressed in a suitable compromise between his domestic occupation and the requirements of his new surroundings. He had riding trousers and high boots, a flannel shirt, and a short cutaway coat; altogether he looked like a Western version of an English squire. But his glories entirely paled before the picturesque appearance of his companions. Some of these were Indians, bronze-coloured, black-haired, high cheek-boned, lithe fellows who made announcement to all men of the fact of their being civilised by the nondescript character of their attire. Some had old red coats of the British infantry, and some the ragged remains of fashionable trousers; but they still wore some of their barbaric feathers, trinkets and necklaces of bone and teeth; and most of them had given themselves a mild coat of paint in honour of the occasion. They were all armed with rifles, and their lassos hung over their arms.

The most picturesque figure of the group by far was, however, a tall, handsome mountaineer who stood leisurely fastening a new whip lash beside a sturdy little Indian pony at the head of the cavalcade. He was dressed in a deerskin shirt marked with the natural variations of the tanning, and stained with weather, and with fringes cut in its own stuff at neck and sleeve. It was beautifully embroidered in front and round the neck with fine Indian work of bead and quill. He wore his fair hair long so that it fell over his shirt collar and right down his back. In his belt of dressed deerskin was a huge bowie knife and two revolvers; buckskin breeches and great riding boots, with big Mexican spurs, completed his dress. The saddle of his mustang was of the heavy cowboy pattern, with flaps to cover the rider's feet; a Winchester rifle and a curled-up raw-hide lasso lay across the saddle. There was about him a free and resolute bearing - the easy natural carriage of one conscious of his power, and that complete absence of fear, and even of misgiving, which mark the King of Beasts in his own sphere. Le Maistre called him up:

'Hi! Dick!' The man turned and came forward with the long, easy, swaying stride of a mountaineer, and as he came raised his beaver-skin cap. Le Maistre introduced him:

'This is Dick, Miss Esse. He is a neighbour up at Shasta, and has kindly undertaken to Mr Hotteridge to look after us all. It’s no mean thing either, Miss, in a place where there are still lots of grizzlies, and the Indians are - well, you see yourself what they are! This man they call Grizzly Dick because he’s killed so many!’ Dick took the compliment with true Indian stoicism, and simply turned to Esse and held out a huge brown hand. As she placed her little one in it he wrung it with such strength and exuberant vitality, that she felt almost inclined to cry out as he spoke:

‘How d’ye, Little Missy. Glad ter see ye. You’n me’ll be pards I guess. When ye want anything, count me in every time!’ While he was speaking, Mrs Elstree drew close and held out her hand, saying:

‘Glad to see you, Mr Grizzly Dick. I hope you’re going to take me on in the little game!’ She showed her dazzling white teeth, her blue eyes flooded with merriment, and her tangle of gold hair shook like the fleck of falling sunshine. Dick rubbed his brown palm on the thigh of his buckskin breeches, and then took her hand in his with a grip that made her wince. When she withdrew her cramped fingers, she said:

‘By the way, are you Mr Grizzly Dick or Mr Dick Grizzly? If that is your friendly shake, I must look out for a real grizzly when I want a mild one!’ Dick threw back his head and laughed with a glee and a resonance which plainly showed that not only his heart, but all his other vital organs were sound. Then Esse and her mother mounted, and Dick, sending two Indians ahead, rode beside them on their way to Shasta.

The sun was hot, and when they rode through clearings between the trees, the air seemed to hold the heat till it quivered from the moist ground to the tree tops high above them; but there was a delicious sweetness and fragrance from the pines, and the rarefied air of the high plateau braced them to the pitch of joyousness. Esse felt that she could never forget that journey; there was such an adventurous, picnicing air about everything, that she was afraid of losing a moment of the time.

For most part of the journey of that day, the snow cap of Shasta was hidden from them by the great trees that seemed to rise all round them; but every now and then, on surmounting a ridge that whilst its ascent was being made seemed itself like a mountain, they caught a glimpse of the noble dome before them rising in silent grandeur. In the early part of the afternoon their path was almost entirely through the forest, where the hoofs of the ponies fell silently on the mass of pine needles. There were myriads of ant-hills, sometimes rising in open spaces of the glade like little brown mounds of moving items - coherent masses of strenuous endeavour - or piled against and around the fir-trees, up and down whose rugged stems the armies of the ants seemed to be ever moving. More than once they had to make a long and deep descent into a valley, in order to cross a stream which looked from above like a silver thread, but which when they reached it had to be forded with the greatest care. But still the way they were winning was upward, and each time they emerged from a stretch of forest the air was appreciably colder, due both to the height they had climbed, and to the oncoming night.

Towards evening, they picked out a spot for a camp on a little spur of rocky ground overlooking a deep valley. There were here only a few tall pines whose bare and rugged appearance bore witness to their constant exposure. How they ever came to be there was a wonder to Mrs Elstree, till she saw the spring of sweet water which bubbled up close to their roots, and trickling away fell over the precipice into the valley below. The instant the word was given, the preparation for the bivouac began. Some of the Indians took from their ponies the material for a little bell-tent, such as soldiers use, and in what appeared to Esse to be an incredibly short time, had it fixed, pegged down and banked up with earth from a trench which they dug round it. At the same time some of the others had got wood, and lighted a fire over which they had hung the cooking-pot for their evening's meal. Le Maistre had in the meantime busied himself with his own preparations for dinner. He had lighted a small fire in a circle of loose stones, and placed over it what looked like a square box, which presently began to give out appetising odours. A rough table was formed from a log, and campstools were placed beside it; and before Esse could get over her wonderment at the whole scene, she found that dinner was ready to be served. The evening was now close at hand, and the beauty of the scene arrested the hungry mortals who had the privilege of seeing it. The sun was sinking like a great red globe into the Pacific, and from the great height at which they were, the rays reached them from over a far stretch of the earth below them, now shrouded in the black shadow of the evening. High above and beyond them, when they looked back, the rosy light fell on the snowy top of the mountain, and lit it with a radiance that seemed divine.

And then the sun seemed to pass from them, and they too were hidden in the shadow of the night; but still the light fell on the mountain till the darkness, creeping up, seemed to wipe it out. When the last point of light had faded from the white peak, which the instant after seemed like the ghost of itself, they looked down, and seemed to realise that the night was upon them.

Dinner was waiting them, so as soon as the entire landscape was blotted out, they bethought them of their hunger. By the time they had sat down at the rude table the Indians had lighted some pine branches and stood round holding them as torches.

It was a wonderful sight. The red flare of the burning pine threw up the red trunks of the great pine-trees so that they seemed to tower towards the very skies, until they were lost in distance, and behind them their black shadows seemed to fall into the depths of the valley. Esse felt like some barbaric empress, and could not take her mind off the picturesque and romantic aspect of the whole thing. It seemed a piece of nightmare projection of the present on the past whenever Le Maistre, in the course of the meal, changed his enamelled tin plates, or brought a fresh variety of food from his mysterious box. Mrs Elstree was full of the beauty of the scene; and as she looked at the happiness on her daughter's face, and noted the quick eagerness which had already taken the place of the habitual languor, she felt a great peace stealing over her, much as sleep creeps over a wearied child.

Esse did not stay longer at the table than was necessary. In the thoughtlessness of her youth she overlooked the fact that the others of the party were hungry, and, only for her mother's whispered warning, she would at once have joined the group awaiting round the camp fire the completion of the cookery. The Indians sat on one side of the fire and ate their meat half cooked - part of a little deer which Dick had shot, on purpose for the meal, just before sunset. Le Maistre and Dick sat together at the opposite side of the fire, and took their dinner with the larger deliberation of the Caucasian. Still, there were not many courses to be served, and it was not long till both men had got out their pipes and were beginning to enjoy a smoke. The Indians had already lit their corn-cobb pipes, and were in high enjoyment, squatted down close enough to the fire to have begun the cookery of a white man. When Esse saw the puffs of smoke she at once went over to the fire. Le Maistre jumped to his feet and took his pipe from his mouth; but Dick sat still and smoked on. Esse said, as she came close:

‘If you stop smoking I shall go away; and I want to come and ask you things.’ Le Maistre at once sat down and resumed his pipe, and Esse sat on a broken trunk and watched the fire. All the while Miss Gimp was sitting with Mrs Elstree, asking questions as to the best way of finishing a new pattern of crochet which had hitherto baffled her. Esse’s first question to Dick was:

“Why have we chosen this spot to camp in? Suppose a high wind were to come, wouldn’t it blow the tent over the precipice?’

That’s true enough, Little Missy, but there ain’t no high wind a-comin’ up the canon to-night - nothin’ more than the sea-wind which is keepin’ the smoke off this here camp. An’ even if it did come, well, we’ve got fixin’s on to these trees that I reckon’ll see the night through. As to choosin’ this spot, where is there a better? See, we’ve shelter from the big trees, an’ water here to hand, so with a fire across the neck of this rock, and one man to watch it, where’s the harm to come from, and how’s it goin’ to reach us?’

‘I see,’ said Esse, and was silent for a while, taking in and assimilating her first lesson in woodcraft. After a little bit she strolled away to the northern side of the precipice, and stood at the edge, wrapt in the glorious silence. A little way off the great fire, which the Indians had heaped with branches, leaped and threw lurid lights on its own smoke, which, taken by the west wind, seemed to bend over and disappear into the darkness of the valley like falling water. Overhead was the deep dark blue of the night, spangled with stars that seemed through the clear air as if one had only to stretch out a hand to touch them; and high away to the south rose the snow-cap of Shasta gleaming ghostly white.

After a while the silence itself became oppressive, as though the absence of sound were something positive which could touch the nervous system. Esse listened and listened, straining her ears for any sound, and at length the myriad and mystic sounds of the night began to be revealed; the creaking of branches and the whispering rustle of many leaves; the fall of distant water; and now and then the far away sound of some beast of the night began to come through the silence. And so, little by little, the life of the night, which is as ample and multitudinous as the life of the day, had one but knowledge to recognise its voices, became manifest; and as the experience went into Esse's mind, as it must ever go into the mind of man or woman when it is once realised, the girl to whom the new life was coming felt that she had learned her second lesson in woodcraft.

And so she sat thinking and thinking, weaving from the very fabric of the night such dreams as are ever the elixir of a young maiden's life, till she forgot where she was, and all about the wonders of the day that had passed, and wandered at will through such starlit ways as the future opened for her.

She was recalled to her surroundings by some subde sense of change around her. The noises of the night and the forest seemed to have ceased. At first she thought that this was because her ears had become accustomed to the sounds; but in a few seconds later she realised the true cause; the moon was rising, and in the growing light the sounds, which up to then had been the only evidence of Nature's might, became at once of merely ordinary importance. And then, all breathless with delight, Esse, from her high coign of vantage on the brow of the great precipice, saw what looked like a ghostly dawn.

Above the tree-tops, which became articulated from the black mass of a distant hill as the light shone through the rugged edge, sailed slowly the great silver moon. With its coming the whole of Nature seemed to become transformed. The dark limit of forest, where hill and valley were lost in mere expanse, became resolved in some uncertain way into its elements. The pale light fell down great slopes, so that the waves of verdure seemed to roll away from the light and left the depths of the valleys wrapped in velvety black. Hill-tops unthought of rose in points of light, and the great ghostly dome of Shasta seemed to gleam out with a new, silent power.

Esse had begun to lose herself again in this fresh manifestation of Nature's beauty when her mother's voice recalled her to herself. She went over to the tent and found her busily engaged with Miss Gimp in arranging matters for the night. The tent was so tiny that there was just room for the three women to lie comfortably on the piles of buffalo and bear rugs which were laid about; and Esse having seen her own corner fixed, went out and stood by the fire where Dick and Le Maistre still sat smoking and talking. She had taken a bearskin robe with her, and this she spread on the ground, near enough to hear the men talk, and sat on it, leaning back on one elbow, and gazed into the fire. She did not feel sleepy; but sleep had been for many a day an almost unknown luxury. For hours every night had she lain awake and heard the clocks chime, and sometimes had seen the dark meet with the dawn, but when sleep had come, it had come unwillingly, with lagging and uncertain step. But for very long she had not known that natural, healthy sleep which comes with silent footstep, and makes no declaration of his intent. The bright firelight flickered over her face, now and again making her instinctively draw back her head as a collapsing branch threw out a fresh access of radiance. And she thought and thought, and her wishes and imaginings became wrought into her strange surroundings. All at once she sat up with sudden impulse as she heard Dick's voice in tones of startling clearness:

'Guess Little Missy's fallen asleep. You'd better tell her mother to get her off to bed!' With the instinctive obedience of youth and womanhood to the voice of authority she rose, swaying with sleep, and saying good-night passed into the tent. Here she found her mother wrapping herself in her blanket for the night. Esse made her simple toilet, and in a few minutes she too was wrapped in her blanket and was settling down to sleep. Then Miss Gimp put out the dark lantern which was close to her hand, and in a very few minutes, what she would have denied as being a snore, proclaimed that she slept. Mrs Elstree was lying still, and breathed with long, gentle breaths. Esse could not go to sleep at once, but lay awake listening. She heard some sounds as of men moving, but nothing definite enough to help her imagination in trying to follow what was happening outside. She raised herself softly, and unlooping one of the flaps of the tent looked out.

The fire still blazed but with the strong settled redness, that shows that there is a solid base of glowing embers underneath the flame, and round it were stretched several dark figures wrapped in gaily coloured blankets. In the whole camp was only one figure upright) at the neck of the little rocky promontory stood a tall figure leaning on a Winchester rifle, seeming to keep guard over the camp. He was too far off to be touched by the firelight, but the moonlight fell on the outline of his body and showed the long fair hair falling on the shoulders of his embroidered buckskin shirt. When he turned she could see the keen eagle eyes looking out watchfully.

Esse crept back to her bed, and, with a contented sigh, fell asleep.

CHAPTER 2

Esse became awake all at once, and, throwing off the buffalo robe which covered her, opened the flap of the tent and looked out. Over everything was the cold light of the coming dawn. The Indians were moving about and piling up again the fire, which was beginning to answer their attention with spluttering crackles, and Grizzly Dick was blowing a tin mug of steaming coffee which Le Maistre had just handed to him. Esse hurried her toilet in a manner which would have filled Miss Gimp with indignant concern, had she been awake, and stole out of the tent. She went over to the eastern side of the plateau, and stood there, looking expectantly for the coming dawn. It was something of a shock when Dick handed to her a mug of hot coffee saying:

'Catch hold! Guess, Little Missy, ye'd better rastle this or the cold of the morning'll get ye, sure!' She took the coffee, and, although at first she felt it a sort of sacrilege to superadd the enjoyment of its consumption to the more ethereal pleasure of the sea of beauty around her, was glad a moment later for the physical comfort which it gave her. As she looked, the eastern sky commenced to lose its pallor; and then, softy and swiftly, the whole expanse of the horizon began to glow rosy red. As the light grew, the stretch of forest below began to manifest itself in a sea of billowy green. Wave after wave of forest seemed to fall back into the distance, till far away, beyond a great reach of dimness which seemed swathed in mist, the myriad peaks of the Rocky Mountains began to glow under the coming dawn. And then a great red ray shot upward, as though some veil in the sky had been rent, and the light of the eternal sun streamed through. Esse clasped her hands in ecstasy, and a great silence fell on her. This silence she realised as strange a moment after, for with the first ray of sunlight all the rest of Nature seemed to spring into waking life. Every bird - and the forest seemed to become at once alive with them - seemed to hail the dawn with the solemn earnestness of a Mahomedan at the voice of the muezzin, and the full chorus of Nature proclaimed that the day had come. Esse stood watching and watching, and drinking in consciously and unconsciously all the rare charm and inspiration of Nature, and a thousand things impressed themselves on her mind, which she afterwards realised to the full, though at the moment they were but unconsidered items of a vast mutually-dependent whole. Like many another young girl of restless imagination, at once stimulated and cramped by imperfect health, she had dipped into eccentric forms of religious thought. Swedenborgianism had at one time seemed to her to have an instinctive lesson which was conveyed in some more subde form than is allowed of by words. Again, that form of thought, or rather of feeling, which has been known as of the 'Lake School,' had made an impression on her, and she had so far accepted Pantheism as a creed that she could not dissociate from the impressions of Nature the idea of universal sentience. What the moral philosophers call 'natural religion,' and whose methods of education are of the emotions, had up to the present satisfied a soul which was as yet content to deal with abstractions. This content is the content of youth, for things concrete demand certain severities of thought and attitude which hardly harmonise with the easy-going receptivities of the young. At the present the whole universe was to Esse a wonderland, and its potentialities of expression and of deep meanings which she yearned for, and she could not realise - and did not in her ignorance think of the subject - proved to her that the

Children of Adam, being finite in all their relations, can only find happiness in concrete reality. The religion of the men of Athens who set up their altars To The Unknown God' was a type of the restless spirit of an unsatisfied longing, and not merely a satisfied worship of something beyond themselves. Not seldom in Greece of old did youth or maiden pass weary hours in abasement before a statue of Venus or Apollo, hoping for the incarnation of the god. So Esse in her unsatisfied young life watched and waited at the shrine of Nature, not knowing what she sought or hoped for, whilst all the time the deep, underlying, unconscious forces of her being were making for some tangible result which would complete her life.

Now, as she stood alone in the springing dawn, with the entire world seemingly at her feet, she began to feel that in the whole scheme of Nature was one deep underlying purpose in which each thing was merely a factor; that she herself was but a unit with her own place set, and the narrow circle of her life appointed for her, so that she might move to the destined end. It might be destiny, it might be fate, it might be simply the accomplishment of a natural purpose; but whatever it might be, she would yield herself to the Great Scheme, and let her feet lead her where instinct took them. And as she sighed in relief at not having to struggle any more - for so the emotion took her - she found herself repeating Coleridge's lines:

'And if that all of animated Nature Be but organic harps diversely framed, That tremble into thought as o'er them sweeps Plastic and vast one intellectual breeze -
At once the soul of each and God of all.'

It was not, she felt, all fancy that the gentle sweet wind of the dawn took the pine-needles overhead, and rustled them in some sort of divine harmony with the poet’s song.

Esse’s mood of semi-religious, semi-emotional exaltation was brought to an end by Dick, who came and stood beside her, and said, as he pointed with a wide, free sweep of his arm to the whole eastern panorama:

‘Considerable of a purty view, Little Missy!’

‘Oh, beautiful, beautiful! How you must love it who live here in the midst of it all. I suppose you were born on Shasta?’ Dick laughed:

‘Guess not much! I was raised somewhere out on the edge of the Great Desert. Mother couldn’t abide mountings, and kept dad down in the bottoms.’

Then how did you ever come to Shasta?’

Wall, dad he lived by huntin’ an’ trappin’ an’ when the Union Pacific came along, he found the place got too crowded; so he made tracks for Siskiyou! But, Lordy! it didn’t seem to be no time at all till the engineers began runnin’ new lines between Portland and Sacramento. So says dad: ‘If the Great American Desert ain’t good enough to let a man alone in, an’ if he gets crowded out of the chaparral at Siskiyou, then durn my skin but I’ll try the top of the mountings,’ so we up sticks and kem up here!’

‘And your mother?’ asked Esse, sympathetically; ‘how did she bear the change?’

‘Lor’ bless ye! she didn’t hev no change; why before we ever went to Siskiyou, she up an’ took a fever, an’ died. Me an’ dad scooped a hole for the old lady ‘way down by One Tree Creek. Dad said as how he didn’t see as she’d be able to lie quiet even there, with fellers bringin’ along school-houses, an’ dancin’ saloons, an’ waterworks, and sewin' machines, an' plantin' them down right atop of her. Ye see, Little Missy, the old man were that fond of nobody that he didn't take no stock whatever in fash'nable life - like you an' me!' A ghost of a smile flickered at the corners of Esse's mouth; she was not herself in any way addicted to 'society' life, but rather longed for the wilderness - in an abstract form, and of course free from discomforts; but between Dick and herself there was so little in common - that was Dick's very charm - that she wondered what might be the nature of that fashion which took them both within its limits to the exclusion of others. She was, however, interested in the man, and curious as to his surroundings, so she made an interrogative remark:

'Of course you love living on the mountain; and never go into a town at all?'

"Never go into a town! I should smile! Only whenever I can, and then, oh Lordy! but that town comes out all over red spots!' Again Esse made another searching remark:

'I suppose your wife goes with you!' Dick laughed a loud, aggressive, resonant laugh, which seemed to dominate the whole place. The Indians, hearing it, turned to gaze at him, and as Esse looked past his strong face, jolly with masculine humour and exuberant vitality, at their saturnine faces, in which there was no place for, or possibility of a smile, and contrasted his picturesqueness, which was yet without offence to convention, with their unutterably fantastic, barbarous, childish, raggedness, she could not help thinking that the Indian want of humour was alone sufficient to put the race in a low place in the scale of human types. Dick continued to roar. 'My wife,' he said, 'my wife. Ha! ha! ha! Wall, that's the best joke I heard since I see the Two Macs at Virginia City a twelvemonth ago.’ Then he became suddenly grave. ‘Askin’ yer pardon, Little Missy, fur laffin’ at yer words, but the joke is, I ain’t got no wife. No sir! not much!’ Here he turned away to avoid wounding her feelings, and his face was purple with suppressed laughter as he passed beyond the fire, where she heard his laughter burst out afresh amongst the Indians. Esse looked after him with a smile of amused tolerance. With a woman’s forbearance for the opposite sex - whether the object deserved it or not does not matter - she felt herself drawn to the man because of her forgiveness of him. The laughter, however, had completely dispersed the last fragments of her pantheistic imaginings, and she realised that the day was well begun; and so she went to the tent to her mother.

When she opened the flap and entered, she felt a sense of something out of harmony. The white walls of the tent were translucent enough to let in sufficient light to show up everything with sufficient harshness to be unpleasant. Mrs Elstree and Miss Gimp still slept; the former lying on her side, with her golden hair in a picturesque tangle, and her bosom softly rising and falling; the latter on her back, with her mouth open, and snoring loudly. Her hair was tightly screwed up over her rather bald forehead, and in her appearance seemed to be concentrated all that was hard in Nature, heightened by the resources of art. Esse bent down and kissed her mother, and shook her gently, telling her that it was time to get up. Then she woke Miss Gimp, with equal gentleness, but with a different result. Mrs Elstree had waked with a smile, and seeing before her her daughter’s bright face, had drawn it down and kissed her. Miss Gimp woke with a snort, which reminded Esse of one time when her umbrella stick had snapped in a high wind, and, after scowling at Esse, turned over on her other side with a vicious dig at her pillow and an aggressive grunt. A moment later, however, the instinctive idea of duty, and work to be done, came to her, and instantly she was on her feet commencing her toilet; then Esse went out and sat by the fire, till presently her mother joined her, and later Miss Gimp, and they all fell to on the savoury breakfast which Le Maistre had ready for them.

Whilst they were eating, the Indians had struck the tent; and very shortly the little cavalcade was on its way again under the spreading aisles of the great stone-pines, and tramping with a ghostly softness on the carpet of pine needles underfoot.

The first part of the journey took them down into the valley overhung by their camping place of the night, but after crossing the stream which ran through it, they began a steady ascent which continued for hours. It was very much steeper than the ascent of the previous day, and the men all dismounted so as to relieve the ponies. Esse, too, insisted on walking, and by a sort of natural gravitation found herself at the head of the procession, walking alongside Dick, who held the rein of his pony over his arm. Hour after hour they tramped on slowly, only resting for a little while every now and again. At last, when the noon was at hand, they emerged from the forest on a bare shoulder of rock. At first the glare of the high sun dazzled Esse's eyes, focussed to the semi-gloom of the woods; but Dick and the Indians felt no such difficulty, and the former, pointing up in the direction of the Cone, said:

'Look, Little Missy. See where the tall pine rises above! There's where you're bound for, and the shaft of thet thar pine will tell you what o'clock it is.' Esse clapped her hands with delight, for the home which she had so looked forward to was in their sight. It lay on a level plateau below where the belt of verdure stopped. It was still a considerable way off, and lay some seven or eight hundred feet above them, but a fair idea could be had of its location. It was just on the northern edge of the shoulder of the great mountain, and, so far as they could judge, must have a superb view. Esse was all impatience to get on, and her mother shared in her anxiety. She, too, wanted to see in what kind of place fortune had fixed her for the months to come. From this on, the trees did not grow so densely, and here and there were patches of cleared space, where the stumps of trees, some bearing the mark of axes, and some of fire, dotted the glade. The nature of the ground did not permit of their seeing the place of destination again till, after a long spell of upward ascent, followed by a stiff bit of climbing, they emerged on the northern edge of the plateau. Then Mrs Elstree and Esse agreed that they had never seen any place so ideally beautiful.

The plateau was like an English park, ringed round with the close belt of pine forest. Great trees, singly and in clusters, rose here and there from a sward of emerald green, and through it ran a bright stream, entering from the south, and after curving by the east, fell away to the western edge of the plateau over a shelf of rock. Where the stream entered it fell from another great rock, making a waterfall sufficiently high that its spray took rainbow colours where the sunlight struck it, and fell into a great deep pool, seemingly cut by Nature’s forces from the solid rock. In the centre of the plateau was a great circular hedge of prickly cactus and bear-thorn, inclosing the house in a garden of some two acres in extent. The house was small, and built solidly of logs, with a veranda all round it, and many creepers climbed over it. Right in front of its northern aspect grew a giant stone-pine, which towered up more than a hundred feet without a break, and whose wide-spreading branches threw a flickering shadow on the sward as its very height made it tremulous.

Esse was speechless, and clasped her mother’s arm tightly, and then began to thump her shoulders, as had been her habit when a little child, and she had been unable in any other way to express her feelings of delight. Dick spoke:

‘Well, Little Missy, ain’t it a purty location; though why you should thump the old lady I don’t quite see. Say, if ye want physical exercise of that kind why don’t ye lam inter me! Guess I’m built more suitable fur it than that purty creetur!’

Mrs Elstree had been slightly annoyed at being spoken of as an old lady, but Dick’s compliment set matters straight again, and she shook her golden head at him, and her blue eyes danced as she said:

‘It’s evident, Mr Grizzly, that you don’t understand the feelings of a mother when her child is happy. You are not a mother!’

‘Guess not!’ roared Dick; ‘not by a jug full!’ and he slapped his thigh, and laughed with that infectious laugh of his. Esse did not altogether like to hear him laugh, especially without good cause; so to divert the subject she asked him how the tree could tell what hour it was. ‘Come and see,’ answered Dick, as he threw the reins of his pony to an Indian, and strode towards the house, followed eagerly by the two women, holding arms.

When they got near the hedge they turned to the right, and followed it for a little time. On the west side they found a gateway, which Dick opened. The gate seemed ridiculously massive for such a place, and was studded all over with sharp steel spikes.

‘What on earth are they for?’ asked Esse, pointing. The answer was as complete as it was short.

‘B’ars! Things didn’t uster be as they are now!’ They all went inside the inclosure, and as they drew in front of the great pine Dick spread out his arms, and with a comprehensive sweep took in the whole circle of the compass. 'Look, Little Missy,' said he; tell me now what o'clock it is?' Esse looked around, and up and down, but could see no sign of any time-keeping appliance. She was disturbed by a quick little cry from her mother:

'Oh, look! Esse! look! look! the whole garden is a sun-dial!' Esse looked, and sure enough all around her, at intervals, rose groups of tall, slim pines, but at varied distances, so that there was no appearance of a ring. Some of them leaned from the perpendicular in a queer way, and yet all were so arranged that a perfect sun-dial with Roman numerals was formed, and the shadow of the great pine fell with the movement of the whirling earth, and told the tale of flying hours. There was a long pause, and Esse turned to Dick.

'Dick, did you do this?' Again the hunter slapped his thigh in mirth and his wild, resonant cachinnation seemed to sound louder than ever, as though there were some containing acoustic quality in the prickly fence. Esse got somewhat nettled, and there was a red spot on each cheek as she said:

'I don't see much to laugh at in that. I don't see why you can't answer a simple question without being rude!' Dick sobered at once, and, with a grave courtesy that seemed like a knightly act by a natural man, took off his cap and bowed his head.

'Askin' yer pardon, Little Missy. I'd no mind to be rude, nor no call to. Why, I'd not a thought of that in a thousand years. That was all done by the old doctor who found this place, and built the house, and fixed up the fence and the garden. Took a mighty deal o' pleasure in it too, seemin'ly. Every year he was here he left it less and less, till at the end he wouldn't ha' quitted, not for a farce-comedy speciality an' a comic-opera troupe rolled inter one! 'Pears to me, Little Missy, that you've come along jest in time, for there's many as would like to hev the place if onst they knowed of it.' Esse made no other reply than:

'Come along, Dick, and show me the view. I want to see the Pacific from up here.' Without a word Dick strode away to the rocky ledge over which the stream tumbled. As they got near it Miss Gimp, who had been grizzling with the indifference of all to her presence, overtook them, and said in a tone which all could hear:

'Wants to show her all the kingdoms of the earth from a high place! We know what to make of him!' and she snorted. Esse looked at her with an amused smile, but Mrs Elstree felt annoyed, and, in order to get rid of her, asked her to go into the house and see Mrs Le Maistre, who was the housekeeper, as to the arrival. She complied with outward calmness, but was shortly afterwards seen going to the house with several Indians. One of them carried the cats, and another the dog, while a third held out at arm's length the cage of the parrot, which, from its talking, he evidently regarded with some very remarkable awe. She was letting off steam by poking the Indians in the back with the point of her umbrella. They did not resent it, but took it with that outward stoicism which marked their bearing. This aggravated her even more, and she poked the harder; but still the Indians did not resent it. She would have been not a little mortified had she known the cause of their forbearance.

Mrs Elstree and Esse stood for a long time looking at the view, and then Dick took them northward along a ledge of rock behind the belt of trees. Here there was a high, bare rock with a flat top, and on it was a natural seat of rock, resting whereon they looked round the whole horizon, except where the giant bulk of Shasta shut out the southern aspect.

Esse was in a trance of delight. Below her the mountain fell away in billows of green, through which the rivers ran like threads of silver. Far away, where the whole landscape became merged in one dark, misty expanse, she could see the Pacific, a grey mass of nothingness, fringed on the near side with the jagged edge of the coast, and beyond, the arc of the horizon. Here and there in the plain hills rose and valleys dipped; but their heights and depths were lost in the distance, and had no more individual existence than the pattern of a carpet. Then she looked south, and her eye travelled up the steep side of the mountain, passing from the lessening fringe of forest to where the hardy trees stood out starkly one by one in the isolation of their strength to endure; up the rolling steep where rushes and scanty herbage grew in the shelter of the rocks; upward still, where the bare rock stood out from the grey mass of primeval rubble wherein is no vital strength, and where the snow and ice ran down in spurs into the sheltered gorges; upward still, to where the snow lay like a winding-sheet, and where the ruggedness of Nature was softened into flowing lines. And then her eye lit on the mighty curve of the mountain top, whose edges, as the high sun took them, were fringed with dazzling light. She turned to her mother, and with a sort of hysterical cry fell over against her, clasping her in her arms and hiding her tears on her bosom. Take me in, mother,' she said; 'I am tired, tired! and it is too sweet to see all at once!' Mrs Elstree felt her arms relax, and bent down anxiously; Esse had fainted. The mother knew of her long illness, and was not altogether surprised, but Dick was overcome with anxiety, as strong natural men are where womankind and her weakness are concerned, and he said, in an awe-struck whisper:

'The poor, purty little thing! Let me carry her for ye, marm. I'll bear her very gently!' Mrs Elstree nodded, and he took her up in his powerful arms as though she was a baby, and together they went softy to the house.

At the door they were met by the entire household with Mrs Le Maistre at the head; Miss Gimp rushed out on seeing the body of Esse carried limply, and began to scream and call out:

‘Is she dead? Is it an accident? Oh, my child, my child!’ and she beat her hands wildly together. Miss Gimp was a good creature in spite of her eccentricity, and Grizdy Dick summed her up fairly when he said: The old girl is a crank from Crankville; but her heart is in the right location all the same.’ Mrs Elstree tried to soothe her, and raised her hand as she said:

‘Hush, hush! she has only fainted. The journey and the hot sun have been too much for her. She will be all right presently!’ Then Mrs Le Maistre, who had been her nurse, took her in her strong arms, and carried her in, not without protest from Dick.

‘Let me carry her, marm. Purty Little Missy, I’ll be as gentle as her mother!’ As they entered the doorway Esse opened her eyes, and, after looking at them all for a few seconds, in a dazed sort of way, said suddenly, whilst a bright blush took the place of her pallor:

‘Oh, let me down, I’m all right now! Don’t let Dick see me like this; he’ll think me a baby!’ Miss Gimp sniffed as she looked over at Dick, but said nothing, for it was borne in upon her, swiftly but conclusively, that he was a mighty fine figure of a man.

Towards evening, when, after a lie down and a cup of tea, Esse was feeling quite restored, she asked her mother if she might go out and see the sunset. Without a word, Mrs Elstree tied a scarf over her head, for the evening was growing chilly at this altitude, and taking her daughter’s arm they strolled out towards the entrance gate and across the plateau. Once more they sat upon the rocky seat and looked out westward. Once again they saw the sun sink, a red globe, into the western sea, and the dark shadow of night climb up the hillside, and the summit of Shasta gleam ghostly white.

And then they went in.

CHAPTER 3

For several weeks the life on the Shasta was ideal, and Mrs Elstree's heart rejoiced to see the changes it was working in Esse. Her languidness seemed to have disappeared, and she was now bright, brisk, and alert, for ever devising new ways of passing the time, and helping with invention and design to improve the place. Le Maistre, who had a pretty mechanical aptitude of his own, had designed a new water supply for the house, and was already carrying it into execution. From the rocky basin which stood up the mountain nearly three hundred feet above the house, he was to lay a series of logs, pierced with great augers, now being brought up from San Francisco on purpose. These were to be joined together, and would convey so easily applicable as well as so abundant a supply that Esse had designed several fountains for round the house, each of which would throw up a fair sheet of water to a considerable height. Thus from whatever way the wind blew, something of the cooling spray could be borne to the house. In this work Dick was of great use, not only by his lending a hand himself, but by being able to induce the Indians to help. A few nondescript settlers of lower down the mountain were glad to earn a little money, and altogether muscular power was not wanting. Dick was only present now and again, for his hunting pursuits took him away sometimes for a few days at a time. But his time was not wasted in so far as the household was concerned, for it was he who kept the larder supplied with fresh meat. There was always abundance of all sorts of game, and a very liberal supply of necessaries had been laid in; the garden afforded a good supply of fruit and vegetables, and altogether no need for comfort was lacking.

Esse's great amusement was with the Indians. She very soon learned that their village was in a deep cleft which lay between the house and the western side of the mountain. As a little rocky peak lay between them, it was not possible to see even the smoke of their fires. On the near side to them, but on the far side of the rock, Dick’s cabin stood on a rocky shelf beside a spring. From it he could see the whole western slope of the mountain, and by it he could on his many journeys make for the most direct way home. His proximity kept the Indians in order; for with the dominance of a Caucasian he made himself to some degree regulator of his neighbour’s affairs. Indeed, he stood with regard to the Indians somewhat in the relation of a British justice of the peace to the village community. This dominance was a great comfort to Mrs Elstree, who had at the first some doubts as to the physical security of her party, removed so far as they were from any means of help. An incident which occurred shortly after her arrival had not tended to allay her fears.

She had been taking a siesta in a hammock slung between two of the sun-dial trees, and was in the semi-lethargic condition of one who is sleeping for mere luxury, not need - such a sweetly overpowering condition as is only to be felt in the open air - when she noticed one of the Indians approach stealthily. He was one of the most brainless looking of the tribe, and in general a sort of butt of the rest. His face was in fact only removed a degree above idiocy, and this by the cunning twinkle of his eyes. His character, as it often happens amongst Indians, was shown in his name, Hi’-oh’, which means Heap (or always) Hungry in the Shoshonie dialect.

Half amused, and half in that adventurous state of mind when fear becomes a sort of intellectual tickling - a sort of continuation of her dreams - Mrs Elstree lay still, pretending slumber. He approached with increasing stealthiness, keeping always behind some tree trunk, till he had reached the head of the hammock. Now, when he was out of her sight, Mrs Elstree became seriously alarmed, but by a great effort she lay still, though her heart beat like a trip-hammer. The seconds seemed to be years, and in the agonising suspense she could hear - or thought she could - the blood running through the veins of her neck. Then slowly and cautiously a pair of copper-coloured hands stole gently down the netting of the hammock, and with deft movement the fingers began inserting themselves under her head. With a tremendous effort she lay quite still, for she felt that it was too late now to do anything if harm to her were intended. Her only grain of consolation - and it necessitated a new effort to suppress the smile which it caused - was that her scalp would be different from the general run of such curios. She had once seen, in a chest full of scalps, in the collection of a friend who was an amateur of Indian trophies, a scalp of a woman's golden hair, and she herself, in common with all who had seen it, felt more pity for the late owner of those yellow tresses, than for all the original proprietors of the dark ones put together. She could in her mind's eye see her own tresses hanging up in a wigwam, or helping to trim a buck's festal costume, and already she had begun to hope that his earth-colours would match her hair. Here her thoughts were cut short by a strange sensation. The hands were lifting her head and holding it balanced; then it was laid down again softly, and the hands were withdrawn. Once more she conquered a strong impulse to start up, for she thought it better not to appear to have noticed. So she lay still awhile, breathing softly. Then she yawned, raised her arms, turned over, and as if waking, assumed a sitting posture. She looked around keenly; but there was no sign of an Indian about the place.

At first she was a little startled, and then a queer kind of doubt came upon her as to whether she had not been asleep and dreamed the whole thing. As there was no trace of an Indian, she remained in doubt, not liking to tell any one, lest it might cause ill feeling. Dick was away; but the day after he returned, and she took the opportunity of being alone with him to ask his opinion of the transaction. To her surprise, but also to her relief, Dick burst into his characteristic roar of laughter.

“Wall, durn my skin!’ said he, ‘but that is the all-firedest funniest rascal I ever kem across. I guess now what was in Heap Hungry’s thick head when he made a proposition to me that we should work a gold mine together: “Hi’-oh’ knows,” sez he, “of a gold mine, much gold on top. If much gold on top, mucher gold under that, waugh!” He is a cunnin’ beggar, too; wouldn’t take any chances over his gold mine, but wanted to make cert if it was gold.’

‘But I don’t understand!’ said Mrs Elstree. Dick slapped his thigh again in his emphatic way, and roared with laughter:

“Why, marm, don’t ye see. You was the gold mine! With the golden hair atop, he thought as how yer skull would be gold, an’ he wanted to make sure before ringin’ me in, so’s we’d kill you together and wash up fair!’ Mrs Elstree shuddered, but she laughed nevertheless; she felt when Dick took so grim a thing jocularly it would not do for her to make new troubles.

But she was seriously disturbed in her mind all the same. She was not accustomed to Indians, and their ways and their proximity, combined with the possibilities of such ideas as had been brought to her notice, made her anxious. It might be all very well to have a terrible penalty afterwards exacted by one’s friends; but scalping was not a pleasant matter to contemplate, and the battle between the edge of a tomahawk and the human skull was not altogether a fair one.

Esse got on very well with the Indians. They had the idea that she was somehow or other under the special protection of Dick, and she was herself so kind to them, that to show her their eagerness to serve came easy. At first they amused her, and then, when she knew them a little better, they disgusted her. In fact, she went with them through somewhat of those phases with which one comes to regard a monkey before its place in the scale of creation is put in true perspective. Now and again she grew furiously indignant when there came under her notice some instance of their habitual and brutal cruelty to their squaws and children, their dogs and their horses. At first she used to speak to Dick, and to please her he would rate and threaten them; but she soon began to see that this was not quite fair to the hunter, as it created a certain sullenness towards him, which augured badly for future peace. So she gradually began to realise that, in spite of their ragged relics of a higher civilization, they were but little better than savages, and with the savage instincts which could not be altered all at once. Dick, who was, like all hunters, a close observer of little things, noticed the change in her bearing, and spoke of it in his own frank way:

'Guess, Little Missy, you're gettin' the hang of the Indian. He ain't of much account nohow, and ye can't bet money on him more'n on a yaller dog. Though he ain't so bad as those think that don't know him. There's times when the cruelty of that lot of ours makes me so mad, I want to wipe them all out; but I know all the same that there isn't one of them, man, woman, or child, that wouldn't stand between me and death. Ay, or between any of you and death either. Guess, you're about beginnin' to size up the noble red man without his frills!'

The member of the party who got on best with the Indians was

Miss Gimp. Le Maistre they respected and looked up to on account of his big beard; and for Mrs Le Maistre they had the respect and affection which goes with the enjoyment of toothsome delicacies. But Miss Gimp ruled amongst them like a princess. No matter how she rated them for their imperfect costume, or their dirty ways, or their cruelty, they never made reply except their grave obeisance; and the point of her umbrella made, without evoking remonstrance, indentations in their bodies. Whenever they saw her stiff skirts moving along the sward - for Miss Gimp adhered loyally to the traditions of her youth and wore hoops - albeit of an undefined pattern - they would glide up as near as they could, keeping furtively in the shelter of the trees. So long as they were allowed, they would hang around her, looking like a lot of spectres who had seen better days. At first this used to annoy her, but it very soon became a source of pride, for human nature very soon becomes accustomed to the deference of inferiors. Miss Gimp, in her mind, regarded them as in some sort a kind of royal cohort, and began to treat them with added disdain, such as is supposed to be the attribute of royalty. They were perpetually sneaking round the house, and if they saw her at a window would wait patiently for hours in the hope of her coming out. Both Mrs Elstree and Esse saw with amusement this perpetual attention on their part, but never said anything to her about it. Esse noticed that it used to give the most intense amusement to Dick whenever he chanced to see it, and that he often hurried away with a purple face; and she, listening, would hear the forest echoing to his explosive laughter. One day she followed him and came upon him sitting upon the trunk of a fallen tree, slapping his thighs, and with his long hair tossing about as he shook his head in a paroxysm of laughter. He did not hear her approach, and for a few moments she stood looking at him, at first a little indignant that he should be making such a fool of himself; but then the contagion of his laughter took her, and she too burst out in a wild peal. He instantly started to his feet, all his instincts of protection and aggression awake, and for the moment sobered into a grim seriousness. When, however, he saw who it was, the lines of his face relaxed, and he said:

Wall, an' it's you, Little Missy. Durn! if I hadn't kem away by myself I'd have busted - jest busted with laughter. The old lady takes the Indians like she was a queen, an' all the while it ain't her they're after at all. There ain't one of them that wouldn't take and put a tomahawk through her skull or skelp her so far as the queenin' racket is concerned.'

Then what is it they are after, Dick?'

'It's the parrot! Nothin' else than that durned parrot!' and again Dick went off into fits of laughter. When he recovered his breath, he went on:

'Did ye notice Kim lately - the parrot, I mean - they've all been tryin' to get near him, and jest now one of them went up nigh him, an' as soon as he got near up, the durned bird says "How!" jest as well as if he was a Christian or an Indian. The man was so took back that he was like to drop. They all thought he was a god before, but nothin' in this world would make them disbelieve it now!'

'But how does this affect Miss Gimp?'

Why, don't ye see, Little Missy, that she has the charge of him; she's the sachem, the medicine-man, the witch, and they want to make themselves solid with her because they think she can square him. There isn't one of them that likes her; but, all the same, they'd go a good length to please old Yam-pi, as they call her.'

What is Yam-pi? What does it mean?' said Esse, inquisitively.

‘It means, in Shoshonie, “Leather Legs,” or “the old woman with boots,’” said Dick, and he laughed again.

Esse came away from the wood not altogether pleased with Dick. There seemed to be an overpowering levity in his character which did not altogether suit her idea of him, based originally on his fine physique. A woman who likes a man wants to respect him, and as Dick was the only male in the place, for of course Indians and servants did not count, she felt that she had to think of him now and then.

One morning Miss Gimp was in a state of suppressed excitement which at once arrested Esse’s attention. At breakfast she could not remain still, but buzzed and fluttered about everyone and everything in an unusual way. Mrs Elstree with her usual placidity did not notice anything out of the common, or, if she did, kept it to herself. Esse had therefore the sweet interest of a secret, and she carefully noticed every detail of the companion, and very shortly came to the conclusion that she had a secret which she was simply bursting to tell someone - anyone. With true feminine perversity she therefore, at once and sternly, made up her mind that she would not assist in the unfolding at all. If Gimp wanted to tell anything she would have to do so altogether on her own initiative. It would of course have been quite a different thing if Gimp had a secret which she didn’t want to tell; in such case Esse would have had to make the overtures and do the entire corkscrew business herself. Therefore it was that the games of hide-and-seek, run-away-and-follow, were so prolonged that morning until they would have afforded the most exquisite enjoyment to any third party who had been in the secret. Esse stayed all the early forepart of the morning with her mother, nothing could take her away, lured Miss Gimp never so wisely; and when she did go out it was at a time when Miss Gimp was absorbed in some household duty and could not follow her. She went into the wood, and when Miss Gimp followed and called after her softly, she did not answer; so hour after hour Miss Gimp had to bear in her breast the burden of her untold secret. After lunch Esse's heart relented, and she strolled out to the seat on the rocks so that Miss Gimp could follow her. She sat down, and within a few minutes the amanuensis sat alongside her and had entered on her theme. Esse noticed that she had put on a veil, an adornment - or concealment - so rare with her that it became at once noticeable. Esse sat down and waited. She had allowed the first step to be taken and had to be wooed into accepting the next. Miss Gimp looked up at her under her eyelids with a very tolerable imitation of bashfulness, simpered, sighed, looked up and down several times, turned warily round to see that there was no one else within earshot, gave a premonitory cough, and opened proceedings:

'It is a very strange thing!' said she.

'Indeed?'

"Yes, my dear; and the worst of it is that it is so embarrassing. One doesn't wish to make anyone unhappy, much less to ruin their lives!' After a pause, which Esse filled up with another 'Indeed,' Miss Gimp went on:

'I have been told that young men take such matters so to heart that they grow wild, and go out and drink, and do all manner of dreadful things!' Esse's curiosity was now becoming interested; she had a vague idea that Miss Gimp had some kind of hallucination as to a love affair, but she could not quite make out yet what was its special direction. She felt herself thinking a phrase which she had several times heard Dick use, 'How many kinds of a durn'd fool was it that she was makin' of herself?' Her monotonous 'Indeed' was hardly adequate to the situation, so she added with as little tendency towards laughter as she could manage.

'Poor young man! You must not let him suffer too much!' Miss Gimp sighed and wiped a phantom tear from her cheek as she said in a far-away manner.

'Oh, poor Dick! Poor dear Dick! I fear he has much suffering before him! - Did you speak?' she added in a different tone, for Esse had on the instant been taken with a sudden and very violent cough which made her in a short space of time grow almost purple in the face. The shock was too much when Miss Gimp apostrophised the man who was the victim of unhappy attachment, and in her mind's eye rose the burly figure of Grizzly Dick, driven crazed for love, painting red spots all over the town of Sacramento. The figure changed instantly to the same man sitting amongst the forest trees, slapping his thighs and roaring with laughter as he thought of Miss Gimp and the parrot, and the relative places which they held in Indian esteem. Miss Gimp bridled somewhat, and seemed more than ever to justify her Indian name; but Esse, who really liked her, found her risibility checked by her genuine concern for her, apologised for the interruption, and asked her to go on. So, with as many 'flirts and flutters' as Poe's famous bird of ill omen, Miss Gimp began her story.

'It has surprised - surprised me very much, to find little offerings placed outside my window. Most odd things, my dear - wild turkeys and young fawns, hare, bear-meat, and sometimes fruit of an edible kind, potatoes, honey, and such like. I wondered who could have put them there!' Here she simpered in a way that would have looked artificial in a girls' school on the day when male relatives are received. Then she went on with marked inconsequentiality:

'It would be a sin - a perfect sin to drive to desperation such a fine figure of a man!' Esse had expected to find her laughter uncontrollable as the story went on, but instead she felt something beginning to overpower her which was much nigher akin to tears. How could she but feel sorrow for the poor, dear old thing who with all her oddities was as loyal and as true as the sunlight. She knew that whatever was the cause of her error, there was no possibility of her manifest wishes being carried out. Then came a doubt. 'How did she herself know this?' with the consequent answer, 'Because Dick was already' - the thought was completed in her mind with an overpowering rush of blood to her face, which Miss Gimp must have noticed only that she was coyly turning away and simpering all to herself.

It is commonly thought that men and women become transformed and glorified in and by great moments. This may be so, but the common idea of great moments is not so true to Nature. There are great moments for all the Children of Adam; but they are not always great through the force of external facts. The dramatic moment in real life does not always come amongst picturesque and suitable surroundings. It is the conjuncture of spiritual and mundane suitabilities which makes the opportunity of the dramatist; but to others, who are the puppets of the great dramatic poet Nature, the moments of transfiguration come as they came to St Paul. The Great Light which turns the thoughts of men inwards, and reveals to themselves the secret springs of their own actions, has many moral and psychical and intellectual manifestations. The pagans whose imagination wrought into existence the whole theology of Olympus, had a subtle insight into the human heart when they showed the familiar figure of Cupid shooting his sweetly poisoned arrows at them that slept.

Such a crucial moment was now for Esse. She had come to that great temple of the hillside to laugh - to laugh at the brain-sick, love-sick fancies of an old woman whose whole being seemed a mockery of the possibilities of love; and she had remained to pray, with a bitter pang of hope and fear. In the whirling of her thought she got glimpses into her own soul which made her cheeks burn, even while half in a fainting mood she felt the solid earth slipping beneath her feet. Her mind must have been earnestly occupied, for she did not hear Miss Gimp go on with her story. It was strange to her that after a pause of mental blankness, during which she sat still, she felt the roaring in her ears pass away and realised that Miss Gimp was speaking - speaking with the volubility of one who has entered on a congenial theme and is under its sway:

Of course, my dear, Dick being a hunter thinks that he should make his - he! he! - offerings of a suitable kind. It is most embarrassing, for a girl can't put a leg of a deer, or a bear ham, or a wild turkey, into a jewel case, or lock it up in a drawer, so that she can take it out when no one is looking and kiss it. In fact there is no sense in kissing a ham or a leg of raw meat at all, and if you lock it up in a drawer it doesn't smell very nice, even if it does not go bad altogether. The matter is now getting serious. I assure you, my dear, that my room is beginning to get into a shocking state. I am positively afraid to open the lower section of my chest of drawers, for I put the first of the - the offerings in there; and there's a very suspicious odour from it already. I wish you'd advise me, my dear, what I ought to do!' There was such a delightful air of seriousness about Miss Gimp as she made her strange disclosure, and it seemed so absolutely out of harmony with the ridiculous matter, that Esse felt once more an almost overpowering desire to laugh. She felt that she could not overcome it if she remained where she was, so she started up briskly, and, taking Miss Gimp by the arm, called out:

‘Come along quick! - We must look over the jewel casket, and see what can be done.’ Miss Gimp would rather have sat still and nursed her sentiment, but she was overborne by Esse’s spirits and energy; and so hand in hand, like a pair of children, they raced to the house.

When they went into Miss Gimp’s room there was no possibility of mistaking the odour. Even a properly arranged larder is not always the most pleasant of places, but a lady’s bedroom is in no way adapted for the storage of dead flesh. Esse for a moment felt qualmish, and would have decamped at once only that Miss Gimp had silently and mysteriously locked the door, and so she remained, supported solely by the humour of the situation. Miss Gimp walked on tip-toe over to the chest of drawers and opened the top drawer. ‘Here is the last,’ she said as she lovingly surveyed a fine wild turkey which was huddled into the drawer, wings and neck and tail twisted about ruthlessly. She put in her hand and began to stroke its feathers, whilst she sighed pensively. The idea of a hunter’s bride was strongly fixed in her mind, and with it a tenderness towards all belonging to his craft. Esse now wanted to see the job over so she asked:

‘And where is the first?’ Miss Gimp pulled out the lowest drawer of all and disclosed to Esse’s gaze a horrible looking leg of deer meat all blue, damp and sodden; and which had been rudely hacked from the carcase. The look and the smell almost turned Esse faint, and with a sudden jerk she shut up the drawer. What an awful thing to send you!’ was all she could say. Miss Gimp was pathetically apologetic in her manner as she said:

Well, it is an odd way of showing affection. If it had been a nice gold specimen now, or one of those opals in the matrix, like the one that was presented to your mother in Mexico, or a slab of onyx, one would understand it better. But the dear man has his own ways I suppose! He is a fine figure of a man, isn't he?' This she said in a burst of something like rapture. Esse tried to cut this short - the new light still shone round her enough to make it seem unfair to let the other woman show her heart, more especially when her hopes were so baseless; so she turned the conversation to what was to be done with the offerings. Miss Gimp was beginning to be seriously alarmed about being found out, on one side as hoarding the provisions in such a ridiculous way, and on the other of being laughed at if she broached the subject at all; so she was glad to embrace Esse's suggestion that they should during the darkness of the evening take out the gifts and bury them.

This fell deed was achieved before they went to bed that night, and Miss Gimp slept peacefully, with the consciousness of a weight taken off her mind.

The next morning Esse came across Dick, who was for once in a way in a tearing rage. She asked him the cause, and he told her:

'It's that durned crowd - dirty, thievin' scoundrels; an' I believe that Heap Hungry is at the bottom of it. I'd make some of them own up, but that it don't suit me to quarrel with them just now. I'll lay for them some night an' I'll put a hole through some of them.'

What have they been stealing?'

"Not much - nothin' of any value, but it's the beginnin', and I mean to stop it right here. An Indian is real pizon when he gets off the square, and this may be only one in the lot; but it's a beginnin', and I won't stand it!' Esse began to have an understanding, so she asked again:

'What did they steal, Dick?'

'Oh, only some meat and such like. A week ago I had a buck hangin' up, an' in the night the durned thieves came and hacked a leg off it; last night it was a turkey. By gum, Little Missy, what air you laughin' at now?' for Esse had gone off in peals of laughter after his own manner. At first he was annoyed, but in a few seconds the anger of his face disappeared; then his features relaxed into a grin and the pent up whirlwind burst, and Esse's laughter was drowned in the volume of his stentorian tones. When Esse recovered her breath she told him what she had found out, and as Dick's laughter broke out afresh at every step of the doing, of Heap Hungry's stealing the meat and placing it in Miss Gimp's window as an offering to the parrot, of her taking it to herself and as a love gift from Dick, and of the mysterious burying. Then she suggested that to complete the circle Dick should come each night and dig up the offering and use it either for himself or for Mrs Elstree's household. The humour of the idea took hold of Dick, and his imagination was so manifesdy touched that Esse got a little frightened lest he should in some way betray the secret. She was only made easy when he solemnly swore not to betray the secret in any way.

And so this night Dick went to his cabin shaking with laughter; and Esse put her head on her pillow filled with a secret but fearful exultation that Dick and she shared a secret between them.

CHAPTER 4

Esse's first quarrel with Dick arose from wounded vanity. Remotely the feeling may have been on his side, but the immediate cause was on her own part. When the secret had been shared for some time, she began to take Dick to task in a purely feminine way. She wanted his hands to be always clean, and his nails to be properly regulated. Dick was something of a dandy in his way, but in the mountains vanity prefers more picturesque forms than the manifestations of soap and water. He was not by any means a dirty man; but more than the mere absence of dirt is demanded by the exigence of feminine propinquity, and Esse, greatly daring, took him to task. He received her monitions well enough at the time, but later on developed a certain huffiness which told her that his self-love had been wounded. Anxious to set matters right, she took an early opportunity of saying to him:

'Dick, you know you and I should help one another. You are big and strong, and mother says that the care you have taken of me, and the sense of security which your presence gives has made a new girl of me. I want to see you like other men - no, no! I don't mean like them, with all their meanness and selfishness, but in not being ridiculous or not seeming at your best. Down in the cities men have rules among themselves as to how they should dress and what they should do; and I wouldn't like any of them to misjudge you, if you should be there, or they here. You're not offended with me, are you, Dick?' He had been sitting with his knees apart and his face downcast, but there was something in her voice which made him look up. His great blue eyes looked into her great brown ones, and the whole quarrel was made up in one word as he held out his great brown hand and said:

‘Shake!’ Esse took the pleasant punishment of his pump-handle shake without a wince, and when Dick had dropped her hand as suddenly as he had grasped it she felt in a less dictatorial mood towards him than she had ever experienced. With a certain new shyness she said:

‘And I want you, Dick, to tell me of anything you notice that isn’t quite right in me - not quite as you’d have it in a girl that you respected. You know, Dick, we all want help to do the best that we are capable of!’ she went on in a voice that somehow seemed to herself not to ring true, though Dick did not seem to notice it. He fidgeted his hands about awkwardly and blushed, actually blushed like a school-girl - that is, as a school-girl is supposed to blush according to the books. Then he coughed prefatorily: this sent a pang through Esse’s heart, or whatever portion of her anatomy vanity resides in. Did a woman ever yet not feel a pang when a man whom she liked discovered the smallest fault? She could have beaten herself for the falsity of her tone as she said, with seeming impulsiveness:

‘Go on, Dick! Don’t be afraid! I’ll tell you if you’re right.’ So Dick began:

‘Wall, Little Missy, as you wish me to tell you, there is a matter - I don’t know as how I oughter mention it; or I don’t quite know how to say it right. But it hasn’t been my own noticin’ entirely. Them Shoshonies are mighty cute in noticin’, an’ they have a name for you which tells it; or rather they had, till I promised to knock the stuffin’ out of any of them that would use it again.’

What was it?’ asked Esse in curiosity, though her face was suffused with an indignant blush. But Dick kept an artful silence on the point.

Well, Little Missy, I think I'd better explain to you first. Why do you keep that nose-rag of yours always over your face the way you do? Guess, it looks mighty odd to folks!' Esse's blush turned a bright scarlet; she had a habit which had adhered to her from childhood up, just as some children maintain the habit of sucking the thumb, and concerning which she had often been spoken to and remonstrated with. She would twirl her handkerchief round her forefinger and thumb, and then place these fingers, parted widely, across her nose and mouth and sit reading hour after hour in this attitude. Even when she was not reading she would unconsciously assume the same position. She could not but be conscious that the habit was an odd one even if her mother and Miss Gimp had not kept her eternally informed of it, and it was simply gall and wormwood to her to have Dick notice the matter and join in the ranks of her tormentors. For a few moments she remained silent in sheer bewilderment as to what she should say, and then the only thing that was possible under the circumstances was spoken:

Thank you! Dick, it is a bad habit I know, and mother and Gimp are always hammering me about it. I suppose I got into a habit as a child, and it has stuck to me. But I'll try and get rid of it! indeed I will.' There were tears of mortified vanity in her eyes, which recognising, Dick held out a red hand and gave his comfort in a homeopathic dose:

'Shake!' Then Esse grew coy and said:

"Not till you tell me what the Indians call me.' Dick looked for a moment embarrassed, and then his laugh rang out.

'Ha! ha! ha! Well, Little Missy, I'll tell you - they call you Pahoo-mounon-he-ka.'

'And what does that mean?' As she spoke Esse tried to keep down her flaming indignation. The very fact of her not knowing what the word or phrase meant intensified her feeling. Omne ignotum pro magnifico. Dick answered:

‘It means, “Nose-ghost”; so you see that even the Shoshonies, that haven’t had a nose-rag among them since Adam, noticed that you don’t use yours correctly.’

‘I presume that you mean a pocket-handkerchief by - by that - that vulgar phrase,’ said Esse tartly.

That’s so. But look here, Little Missy, since we’re on the trail, and we mean to run down the game this time - and since you kick - oh, yes, you do! Don’t I see it in every corner of your face! A man don’t learn woodcraft without gettin’ to notice little things like that! Let us wash up clean right here. Why do you always carry the noserag - excuse me little Missy, the pocket-handkerchief - rolled up in a ball when you’re not making a tent of it over your nose?’

‘I don’t do anything of the kind!’ said Esse indignantly, and again the tears of mortified vanity rose in her eyes. Dick laughed in a way that seemed more insulting and aggressive than ever as he slapped his thigh in the way that aggravated Esse more than anything else.

Wall, bust me if that doesn’t take the cake! Here is you denyin’ that; an’ all the time you’re a-holdin’ your nose-rag screwed up just the same as ever!’ Esse looked at her hand, and, seeing the handkerchief just as he had said, flung it on the ground as though it had been something noxious. Then, turning her back, she ran out of the glade, and went home.

An hour later she went back to the glade to get the handkerchief, but she could not find it; it had gone. From this little fact she felt that Miss Gimp could have woven a romance; and somehow it did not seem to her that it would have been quite ridiculous on the part of

Miss Gimp.

Two days afterwards, Dick, in the midst of a conversation, suddenly stopped and handed her the handkerchief, neatly washed out and folded:

This belongs to you, Little Missy. You dropped it in the wood the other night when you ran away.’ Esse took it with a simple ‘thank you,’ but when she got home, she put it in the locked drawer where she kept her valuables of all sorts.

The constant habit of trying to conquer her old trick when Dick was present seemed in some way to make a subde kind of barrier between them. But it was in truth only a subtle barrier, and one that thought could overleap at will. The very existence of such a restraint raised the rough man in the girl’s eyes to a more important position, and blinded her to a thousand little roughnesses and coarsenesses which would have hourly offended her more cultured susceptibilities. This very lack of refinement on Dick’s part caused Esse many unhappy moments, for he seemed to fail to see that she was trying her best to rid herself of the ridiculous habit, and would often notice failures to which a more delicately minded person would have been wilfully blind. Thus, Esse soon grew to abandon the habit of covering her mouth and nose, but she still instinctively and unconsciously clung to the habit of rolling her handkerchief, and keeping it hidden in the hollow of her hand. But habits, be they never so trivial or ridiculous, have a hideous vitality of their own, and Esse soon found to her cost, that this unutterably trivial habit, which both the Indians and the trapper had noticed, had a tenacity denied to worthier things. She was often wounded to the quick when Dick, in his boisterous way would notice her resumption of her failing; but all the time this little trial was forming her character and developing that consciousness of effort which marks the border line between girl and woman. Once she was goaded into a retort - but such a retort as she had never dreamed of - when Dick had slapped his thigh, and with a Titanic peal of laughter remarked:

‘Wall, Little Missy, the Ghost is kep’ to home in the shanty today, but she’s sent the wean on the trail!’ She answered, with a certain soft appealing in her voice:

‘You needn’t be too hard on me, Dick. I am doing my best; but I can’t be quite perfect all at once.’ She had never in all her life been so sweetly womanly as at the moment, and even whilst she spoke she could not but feel that some change had taken place in her own nature. Dick seemed to realise this too, for off came his cap in a moment in apology, and he said with, for him, gravity:

‘Your pardon, Little Missy. Why, I wouldn’t pain you for all the world!’ Esse smiled, and held out her hand, which was by this time nearly as brown as his own, and said, in exact imitation of his style, ‘Shake!’ And so that breeze passed on its way and left the air clearer behind it.

In these days Miss Gimp was nursing a gentle melancholy, which was daily fostered on game, honey, and raw meat, which took their usual course on their allotted circle from Dick’s larder to Miss Gimp’s window-sill, thence, via her wardrobe, to the place of burial, and so back to the larder again. Heap Hungry was more than ever assiduous in his attentions to the parrot, and was maturing schemes of his own. Esse had now taken up her sketching, and having exhausted all the picturesque possibilities of the plateau, had begun to go further afoot in search of material to suit her fancy. Tired of the endless expanse, she now sought inclosed dells amidst the woods. She used to go about alone now, for her health had been completely restored by the bracing air, and the chemical qualities of the water, as the doctors had foretold. She sometimes took the dog with her, but not always; for the freedom of the mountain had somewhat demoralised it, and it took to hunting in miniature on its own account, instead of devoting itself solely to the wishes of its mistress. At first Miss Gimp used to accompany her, but Esse got so unutterably tired of her perpetual chattering, that by-and-by she began to make excuses to leave her at home. When she found that these, being naturally limited, began to be exhausted, she kept her away by making her own sketching tours to distant places. Miss Gimp knew when she was beaten in this respect, and after a time made no effort to accompany her. Esse had by this time, under Dick's guidance, learned to shoot with a heavy revolver, which he insisted that she should always carry with her when out of sight of the house.

"Tain't, Little Missy, that I'm afeard of any special harm; because if I'm put to it I can't point out any as is likely to come. But in the forest everythin' or anythin' may be harmful, and you can't be wrong anyhow in bein' heeled proper! Some day or other you'll find that very derringer of yourn the best friend you ever set eyes on. But even if ye don't, wall! then the exercise of carryin' it won't do your muscles no harm!' Mrs Elstree did not at first like the idea of Esse carrying firearms, but when she saw that she soon acquired a certain dexterity in their use she solaced herself with the thought that at any rate they meant protection.

One day Esse, straying further than usual down the steep side of the mountain, came to a spot which excited all her artistic admiration. The hot sun beat into a dell so well watered that even in the great heat the grass was as green as emerald, and there was about everything a semi-tropical luxuriance. There was a fallen tree, which served for a seat, and here, having unstrapped and mounted her portable easel, she began to make her sketch. There was a drowsy hum about the place, for these were regions of honey bees, and in the delightful solitude her thoughts took their most pleasant way, their central point being none other than the picturesque figure of Grizzly Dick. For two days she had not seen him, for he had gone out on a hunting expedition and had not yet returned. By-and-by the sweet drowsiness of the place overcame her; her hands and eyes relaxed from the intentness of their work, and with a gentle little sigh she slid from the log, and, half reclining against it, slept among the soft grass.

After a while she started, broad awake with that conviction upon her of some new presence, which shows that some of the senses at least guard us even during sleep. She realised that there was some physical stir going on around her, for the log against which she leaned was being shaken, and the sounds, as it was touched, were like sawing and hammering together. Her senses, only half aroused, had still something of the imaginative power of sleep; and even whilst she felt and listened there grew over her some strange feeling of uncanniness. Of one thing she was certain, that her surroundings were not those she was accustomed to, and all awake in a moment her heart began to beat strangely.

‘As one who on a lonesome road doth walk with fear and dread, And having once turned round he turns no more his head, Because he knows some frightful fiend doth close behind him tread.’

Esse felt herself gasping out the lines as, with instinctive caution, she turned her head round to see what was causing the disturbance.

The sight which met her eyes might well have appalled the bravest. A great grizzly she-bear was tearing a honeycomb from the end of the log, whilst two tiny cubs sat on their haunches by her side. Esse's brain began to throb. She could not think all at once, but her instinct was to remain still, and she obeyed it. Then she began to remember that to feign death is an artifice of the hunter, and she feared lest the bear should turn round, and, seeing her eyes open, would discover her secret, so she shut them close and waited.

But the suspense was awful. Her temples began to throb, and she felt an almost irresistible desire to scream out. Each instant the monster seemed to be coming closer, closer, till its great paw was stretched to tear her heart out, as she had seen it rend the fallen tree to take out the honeycomb. In her fancy she saw the great shaggy head thrust forward, till the big white teeth were close to her, and the enormous mouth was opened to seize her. She could feel the hot breath falling over her, and could even smell the sweet scent of the honeycomb which the bear had been eating... She could bear the suspense no longer, and opened her eyes. And then a desire to laugh almost as irresistible as that to scream came to her, and instinctively she crammed her pocket-handkerchief into her mouth. The bear was sitting down on her haunches, sucking the honey from her paws, and the two cubs were simply her miniatures in appearance and attitude.

But her mirth was short-lived, for as she looked she saw the bear turn her head suddenly to the opposite side of the thicket and give a low warning growl, which had the effect of drawing the cubs to her side as though they had been attached with springs which had suddenly been released. Between the bear and the edge of the thicket was a low clump of bushes, and to look beyond this she reversed herself on her hind paws, and with a sort of waddle moved to the far side of it. Esse looked on fascinated. As she looked she saw Dick's head rise above the edge of the thicket, and the muzzle of his rifle brought down to cover the bear. He had not seen her, for the clump of bushes and the log hid her easel and herself from him, and his eyes had been so intently fixed on the bear that he had seen nothing else. Esse was afraid to move even an eyelid, lest she should spoil his aim, and waited, waited, with her heart throbbing. Dick meant to take no chances, but just as he was about to fire a slight puff of wind turned the leaves of the sketch-book, which lay on top of the log beside where Esse had been sitting. This was just enough to spoil his aim; the rifle cracked, and seemingly at the very instant the bear, with a wild snarl, threw herself forward at Dick. Esse started to her feet; but the happenings were quicker than her movements. Seeing the bear rushing at him, Dick shifted his rifle to his left hand, and grasping his bowie knife with his right, threw it open with that dexterous jerk which those who use the weapon understand. The bear struck at him, but only hit the rifle, which, driven forward, took Dick on the leg, knocking him off his balance. Esse screamed, but Dick recovered in an instant, and, as the other great paw was raised to strike, drove the knife straight into the beast's heart. But the grizzly bear is a creature of extraordinary vitality, and death seems to reach it but slowly. The uplifted paw fell, and catching him on the thigh, broke it, with the sound of a snapping branch, and threw him down as though he had been struck with a hammer, whilst the forward rush of the great beast took its dead body onward.

It seemed to Esse that all at once Dick lay on the ground, maimed and bleeding, with the great bulk of the dead grizzly pinning him down.

She rushed over to him, and, although the sight of the blood unnerved her for a moment, bent over to help him. Dick lay on his side, with the back of the bear towards his head, and she could see by the way that one of his legs - which stuck out from under the carcase - was twisted, that it must be broken. She seized hold of the bear's leg to try to drag it off, but as she tugged at it unavailingly Dick groaned and spoke to her:

'Hold hard, Little Missy! The varmint has broke my leg, an' is lyin' on it; but don't bother about it yet a minute. We'll have some work to do first! The old gentleman was the one I was followin', an' he ain't fur off. When he sees that I've sliced up his missis he'll come in on the tear, and we've got to look out. Try if you can find my rifle. The b'ar knocked it out of my hand with her first come on, and I fear it's busted!' Esse looked and found the rifle; but it was all destroyed, the stock beaten off, and the barrel bent. Dick groaned.

'Look here, Little Missy, you can't do no good here. You trot off home, and tell Le Maistre to get some of the Indians to come along here with a blanket and a pole. Let them bring their weppins, for if the old gentleman don't get me before they come, we'll get him, sure.'

'Go, and leave you alone!' said Esse indignantly, 'and you wounded and tied down like that? Not me! What do you take me for?'

'By gum! I take you for a plucky little girl, anyhow; an' I shan't never forget it! But what can you do? What can I do, with my weppins gone - for this young lady has got my knife in her, an' is lyin' on it! I can't stir - hold on! What's that?' He raised his hand warningly, and then said in an agonised whisper:

'For God A'mighty's sake, Little Missy, clear out that way!' and he pointed to one side of the clearing; 'and if ever ye dumb a tree in your life, try to do so now! There's the male b'ar on the track. Quick! quick! here he comes!' At that instant there was a fierce growling, the underbush crackled as if violently forced aside, and an enormous grizzly bear plunged into the glade. A grizzly bear is at all times a sight to inspire terror, but when inflamed to do battle he is more than ever appalling. Esse stood a moment paralysed, till she heard Dick's quick shout to her:

'Get out your gun, Little Missy - quick! It's the only chance now!' Esse looked helplessly to where her revolver was hung on the cross arm of her easel; but it was as close to the bear as it was to her, and she knew that before she could reach it the fierce animal, which was even now rearing on its hind legs to plunge, would be down upon her. He had smelled the blood, and had seen the body of his mate, and was full of fury. In her helplessness she had been unconsciously twisting her pocket-handkerchief into a ball in her usual habit, and as the bear dashed forward, she instinctively threw it at him, throwing it in that high, helpless, over-arm fashion which is woman's method. The tiny ball struck him between the eyes, and opening out with the impact, just as a slight puff of wind swept through the glade, for an instant covered his face. He stopped and put up a great paw to tear it down, and as he did so, Esse heard a chuckle from Dick across the glade. This, together with the hiding of the baleful eyes, which seemed to have in some way fascinated her, recalled her to herself; to her dreadful position and Dick's; to the necessity for instant action. With a bound she jumped to the easel and seized her revolver, and as the bear, who had now cleared his eyes, hurled his vast body towards her, she fired once, twice, at random, with only a vague intent of aiming at him, but without marking any special spot. The good fortune which now and again waits on novices seemed to have guided her aim, for one of the baleful eyes seemed on the instant to become obliterated, and then to spout out blood. The grizzly quivered, and, whirling his great paws like the flying sails of a windmill, fell over towards her in a heap. The sharp claws of one of the fore-paws, just grazing her flesh, tore through her dress, and rent it in strips, almost tearing it from her body.

For an instant she gazed at the fallen monster in a sort of stupefaction. From this she was aroused by a wild laugh from Dick; and as she turned to him she saw him slapping the hind quarters of the great carcase of the she-bear as he used to slap his thigh, and heard him say:

‘Durn my cats, if Little Missy hain’t killed the biggest grizzly on the Pacific Slope with her nose-rag!’

As she looked however, his voice faltered; and as she ran towards him she saw his face grow deadly pale, as flesh does under ether spray, and he sank back seemingly as dead as the mighty brute that lay over him.

CHAPTER 5

Esse rushed wildly over to Dick, and, kneeling down by him, raised his head and laid it on her knee. As she did so she became aware for the first time of the ravages which the bear had made with her clothing, and a hot blush swept over her. In the intensity of her shame it did not trouble her to see that the bear's claws had in that last death-stroke actually cut her flesh, and that her stocking - the remnant of it - was running with blood. She looked despairingly round for a moment in the vague hope of help, but seeing that there was none she braced herself for the superlative efforts which had now to be made. Her reason and even her emotion responded to the call, and she set about her work with a business-like precision. First she felt Dick's heart, and distinguishing its beat, though very faint, knew that he still lived. This made her efforts of feverish intensity, and she worked with an unconscious power and purpose which those who knew her would never have suspected.

First she threw the remnants of her torn dress around her and pinned them together; this was just enough to protect her modesty and did not impede her efforts. Then she set herself to draw the body of the great she-bear from Dick's wounded leg. She knew that it must be taken away in the direction of head to feet so as not to lacerate the flesh with the broken bones or to rub the pieces together. If she could but succeed in removing either the body from him, or him from underneath the body, without further injury to the broken leg, all might be well - at least the smallest amount of harm would be done. So she set herself to examine the situation, and as her eye lit on the bent barrel of the rifle she straightway conceived a plan. She buried one end of it in the ground, close to

Dick's chest, leaving the other sloping up the brute's great side - this was made with a rough calculation of the weight, so that the carcase could not topple sideways. Then she got a strong branch and, using it as a lever, began to try to lift the bear little by little. At first she could not stir the carcase, but by getting each time the lever further under she felt at last that it moved. Then, bending her knees, she put the branch on her shoulder, and, using all her strength, pushed upwards. The weight rose, and the gun-barrel, slipping down the side, acted as a strut and prevented it falling back. With joy Esse looking down saw that Dick's legs were free; running to his head she took him from behind under the armpits and dragged him safely away. As it was, there had not been a moment to lose, for the weight of the bear was slowly sinking the gun-barrel into the soft ground and a few seconds later the carcase sank back to its old place. But Dick was free. Then she ran and filled her cup with water from the little rill that murmured over the rock in the glade, and raising Dick's head began to try to restore him to consciousness. It was but the consequence of her womanhood that in the midst of her ministrations she stooped and kissed the brow, pale under its nut-brown skin, and never thought of blushing as she did so. The change of posture, and the relief from the horrible pressure on his wounded leg, seemed to aid in restoring him to consciousness, and after a minute or two of her bathing his temples, and trying to force a few drops of water into his mouth, he opened his eyes in a dull, dazed way and looked inquiringly round him. The first manifestation of instinct was that of the hunter; that of the man came later. He said in a quick, eager voice:

'The b'ar! Is he dead?' but catching sight of Esse's face a gleam of fun lit up his own as he said: 'Oh, I remember; you killed him with' - here he seemed to realise that Esse had not come off scot free in the encounter, for in a horrified way he said, raising himself on one elbow, whilst he pointed with the other hand:

Why, Little Missy, you're wounded. 'Taint very bad, I hope!'

'No! no, Dick - it's nothing. He only tore my dress!'

'So I see. The brute! couldn't he let you alone, anyhow!' Esse burst out laughing. She had been under such a horrible strain of anxiety and effort that some reaction must come. Dick's remark, and, moreover, the rueful, angry tone of it, afforded the occasion. There was to her something exquisitely humorous in the idea that they too who had just escaped death - if indeed they had escaped, for their troubles were only beginning - should be only troubled about a torn dress. Dick joined in the laugh, but it was rather through his instinct than from any merriness of heart, for presently his laughter suddenly ceased, and with a groan he fell back. He had not fainted as Esse found when she had flown to his side; it was simply that the pain had overcome him, and after giving him some whiskey from his flask he was somewhat restored. But even in his half swooning state he had been thinking, for he now said:

Wall, Little Missy, guess ye'll have to tramp off by yourself, and send down that help to bring me home. You jest pull my knife outer that b'ar an' find my gun for me if it's lyin' anywheres round, an' put a cup of water by me. Then you jest run off home afore the dark comes on.'

'I'm not going to do anything of the kind! - I'm not going to leave you here alone!'

Then what in thunder air ye goin' to do? Air you an' me to stick here and have a picnic as long as the b'ar meat holds out? No! Little Missy; ye'll hev to go home, an' soon, or that prospectin' party will have to bring on a bran new coffin for this durned leg of mine!' He winced and almost writhed with pain. In the meantime Esse's mind was made up and she had commenced action. Pulling from the heart of the grizzly Dick's bowie knife, though it made her shudder to touch the bloody hilt, she quickly cut several straight sticks and trimmed them roughly. These she placed beside Dick and quietly began to tear the remnant of her dress, the part which she was not wearing, into long strips; she then filled her cup with water and dipped the bandages in it. Dick looked on with silent admiration, for even in the midst of his pain he could admire her swift dexterity; and with a practical man's instinct, seeing that she was busy with her work, did not distract her, but waited with what patience he could summon. When Esse commenced her efforts to splint the wounded leg Dick helped her, not only with directions, but by shutting his teeth hard and enduring without a groan even her most ignorant efforts. At last the job was done, and Dick spoke again:

'My dear Little Missy, I'm world-wide obliged to ye. Ye saved my life from that old grizzly, and ye've doctored me fine! Now, run off home, an' I'll be all safe here till ye return.'

'I'm not going to leave you, Dick!' she said decisively. 'I'm going to carry you home myself.' Dick laughed feebly, but this time it wounded the girl to the quick; she blushed up hotly, but cooled at once into a paleness, and her answer came with sudden tears into her eyes:

You wouldn't leave me, Dick, if it was I who was hurt - would you, now?'

"Wall, I should smile!' said Dick.

Then why should I leave you?' Dick scratched his head; logic and reason failed him as they have failed many a man when arraying them against the strength of a woman’s resolve. Besides, Esse had a very forcible argument on her side; in his helpless condition it was utterly impossible that he should oppose any of her wishes. Accordingly, when Esse bent over to lift him, he gave the best aid in his power by throwing his strong arms round her shoulders, and so placing his weight that she could most easily carry him.

And, strange to say, she did carry him all the way home. It is true that the struggle seemed an endless one, and that over and over again she felt that she could have lain down and died of sheer fatigue. But it was for life and death, and to men and women who have true grit great needs give great endeavour. They bring out all that is royal in their natures, from physical strength to highest nerve and psychic power, so that such strength as Nature has manifested to them can be used to the full. Dick suffered a simple martyrdom; for the constant struggle of the weary girl, and her want of usage in such effort, seemed to thrill through the very marrow of his bones, and made the broken leg a veritable torture. But he was a generous and chivalrous soul, and never once in all the long weary hours that followed their outset for home did he utter a groan. Even when, every now and again, the pain overmastered him to such a degree that he swooned, he did not make any sign, but took his swoon like a gentleman, and sank into it, and awoke from it, without a sign to add to the torture, both mental and physical, which the poor devoted girl, who was struggling on his behalf, endured. Over and over and over again had Esse to set down her burden and rest, her heart panting wildly, and her knees trembling so sorely that she felt that she would be unable even to raise her precious burden again. But each time her spirit rose to the new endeavour, and she attacked the task before her with a fresh energy which surprised herself as much as it did Dick, who helped her loyally to the very best of his power. His heart seemed never to flag or falter, and at times, whilst she sat beside him panting and in almost utter collapse, his ready laugh would ring out to cheer her. She was not even conscious of his swooning, for each time she spoke to him her voice seemed to recall him to waking sense, and he resumed the thread of his own endeavour to cheer her up.

The sun had long set, and the forest paths were dim - like cathedral aisles in the night, when the light through great windows just steals in to show the gloom as an existing thing - when they began to emerge from the depths of the wood and to enter on the steep rise that led to the plateau. Here the moon rose, sailing high in the heavens, and its cheering light gave Esse, now tired almost to unconsciousness, a new lease of strength. With feverish energy she toiled up the steep incline, spurred on by something of the same feeling which quickens the pace of a returning horse, or cheers a spent swimmer who hears the dash of waves on a welcome shore. At the top her arms relaxed, and Dick, now quite unconscious, sank to the ground; and for a little while she lay beside him almost as unconscious as he was.

Suddenly she seemed to wake to the fact that Dick was deathly still, and, forgetting for the moment her own awful tiredness, she sprang to her feet, and, putting her hands to her mouth, sent out a shout for help which rang across the plateau and reached the anxious household, which awaited her with vague apprehension, shared by all, but which none dared to utter.

With answering shouts they all ran out, some bearing lanterns, and came to where she stood beside Dick's body. Her mother screamed when she saw her, for she was indeed but a sorry sight.

The struggle, and the constant forcing a way through undergrowth, had tumbled her hair and thrown it, wild and dishevelled, over her shoulders, and the dust of the forest had grimed her damp face, which also was smeared with blood. The hours of strong effort had kept her own wounds and Dick's open, and from top to toe the white dress in which she had started out - all that was left of it - was smeared, if not drenched, with blood. The flashing lanterns threw into harsh relief the red stains which the falling moonlight had softened, and though the wild picturesqueness of her figure seemed to heighten the effect of her manifest vitality, it could not comfort the heart of her mother, who saw in every item of it danger and pain, and all sorts of unknown possibilities of horror. Recognising the look in her mother's face, Esse said quickly:

'I am all right, mother. It was the bears, but they are both dead. Look to Dick! he is badly wounded, and I had to carry him home!' and even as she spoke she reeled and would have fallen, only that the strong arms of her old nurse held her up. By this time Le Maistre was kneeling by Dick. Presently he turned round and said:

'He is not dead! I can feel his heart beat! Run for some Indians to carry him to the house!' And without a word, off started Miss Gimp - who up to now had stood wringing her hands - glad of an opportunity to be of some service. Mrs Le Maistre murmured to Mrs Elstree:

'Some Indians to carry him, and the dear child carried him all by her poor self up the mountain!'

The Indians were on the spot in a very few minutes, but by this time Dick had recovered his senses, under the stimulant of a little whiskey, and was telling in his own way of the accident and his rescue. At first Esse had tried to put in a word of protest when his praise seemed excessive, but she was by far too exhausted to argue, and Dick's words seemed to have a far-away, pleasing music of their own as he went on:

‘I followed the b’ar an’ missed him, but see his mate eatin’ honey. As I seen her, an’ fired, I see Little Missy sittin’ beside the log, an’ that put out my aim, an’ the old lady came jumpin’ for me before I could draw a bead on her. She hit out, and crumpled up my shootin’-iron quicker nor I could see; so I had just time to whip out my bowie, and drive at her before she came at me, an’ busted my leg into matches, an’ tumbled over me with my knife in her heart, pinning me down everlastingly. Then while Little Missy was tryin’ to raise me up the old-man b’ar came whirlin’ along; but Little Missy went boldly up to him, and threw her nose-rag in his eye, and while he was clawin’ it off, she up with her derringer, and gave it him in the face. He’d just got near enough to rip her tucks out, and scratch her a bit before he went under. Then Little Missy she tackled me like a little hero, as she is, an’ dragged the b’ar off my sore leg, an’ took an’ splinted me up and carried me here like I was a rabbit. Blest, but she’s the all-firedest, bravest, kindest, staunchest comrade from the Rockies to the sea! She wouldn’t leave me, no, sir! but took me up here all by her little self; an’ I’d have died any way, only for her, half-a-dozen different ways - God bless her!’ then he said in a whisper to Le Maistre:

‘Take me home, quick, old man! I’m racked with pain, and nigh dead, and its torture keepin’ it up afore the women folks. I’ll be better when I get to my cabin!’ Mrs Elstree, who was just bending over, heard the last word, and said:

‘You’ll go to no cabin, but to my house, and be nursed. I’d like to know what Esse would have done if you hadn’t killed the bear; and, whether or no, I wouldn’t let you go anywhere else. So that ends it!’

‘All right, all right; thank ye much!’ said Dick resignedly. Te’ll forgive me marm, for my manners, but I ain't pannin' out much in that way just now, owin' to contrairey circumstances!' And so the Indians took him up, and carried him to the house, previous to their going off to the glade, by his emphatic instructions, to get the skins and claws of the two grizdies, and to bring back the cubs.

For the next few days Esse was obliged to keep her bed, so that she did not know, and was barely in a condition to know, exactly how Dick progressed. The terrible strain, both mental and physical, which she had undergone, brought on a sort of fever; but good nursing, and a little antipyrine, finally ousted the fever, and she was allowed to get up. She had of course heard in the interim of Dick's condition, and was anxious to be allowed to assist in the nursing. When she was seated in the balcony, and felt the freshness of the breeze sweeping down from the white summit of Shasta, she had a long talk with her mother on all the events that had passed. First, she learned that Dick was going on as well as could be expected, for his wound was a terrible one, and the hardship of his home-bringing, which she had effected with such nobility of purpose, had much aggravated the original evil. When he had been taken into the house, Le Maistre, who had some little knowledge of surgical dressing, had unbound the bandaging in order to reset it in a more finished manner, but, finding it in good order, waited more skilled assistance. An Indian runner had been sent with a letter to the Doctor at Ashland, and twenty-four hours later he had appeared on the plateau, and had brought to Dick's aid the latest academic skill. When he saw Esse's improvised splint he shook his head, but on his unwinding the bandage, and seeing how well his patient was getting on, he grew enthusiastic on the subject of the mechanical ability displayed in the improvisation. With genuine amazement he learned that it had been effected, under unheard-of conditions, by a young lady who had never seen a broken limb in her life. His wonderment increased when he was told that the slight, pale girl whose pulse he had just felt in the veranda had herself carried the huge bulk of the wounded man up the side of the mountain.

Dick's splendid physique stood him in good stead, and the ruthless stretching of his leg when he was pulled from under the bear, combined with the almost miraculous accident of the rude splints being placed in exact position, had already begun the cure. The Doctor happily prognosticated that within a month, if all went well, Dick would be on the high road to recovery, if not able to move about a little.

'We can never tell,' he said 'what will happen in the way of recovery with a man like that. His simple life, with his great energy and his plain living, make recovery seem extraordinary to town-bred men. But we must not judge of his health and recovery by the standard of the towns, but rather by the animals, who simply lie quiet and lick their wounds, and are running about again when a man is beginning to realise that he is helpless!'

Miss Gimp had been up to this the head-nurse, with Mrs Elstree as a relief; but Esse now joined the nursing staff. Her mother was not altogether satisfied about it, but did not like to make any objection just at present. She was beginning to have an uneasy feeling that perhaps Esse had seen too much of Dick at her impressionable age, though, as yet, she did not imagine that there could be anything serious arising out of their unchecked companionship. But out of her uneasiness came one certain thing - the complete realization that Esse was no longer the child that she had hitherto considered her. She was a woman now, for good or ill; and whatever she thought or did was from the standpoint of a woman, and would have to be adhered to with a woman's constancy, or abandoned with a woman's resolve. Esse had by this time told her mother all the incidents at the killing of the bears, and she could not but see that the circumstance of her own life being saved by Dick - for, with woman's imagination, she realised more than any other episode the agonised waiting till the bear should discover her before Dick came - was an important step in the growth of a romantic affection. She realised as a still stronger one the fact, as Dick repeated to all over and over again, with increasing freedom of speech and added emphasis of delivery, about her saving his life. Mrs Elstree therefore thought that to forbid the girl the sick room would be to beget or increase a desire to see the man, which might develop later into something more serious.

So Esse sat with Dick daily, reading or talking to him whilst he was awake, which was always charming to her; and watching him whilst he slept, which was a much more dangerous pleasure, for then her memory and imagination worked together to weave romances which she durst not think when his eyes were on her, and which were not nearly so real when she was alone. The closed eyelids could not take note of blush or pallor, and had no terror for the maiden spirit in its hour of stress.

Dick was distinctly an interesting invalid. There are men who look their worst under such circumstances, and whose natural petulance under pain or restraint destroys any charm which their weakness may have for the feminine mind, but Dick was not such. There was about him a large-hearted patience and a masculine dominance, on which illness seemed to have no effect. Miss Gimp, who was a born nurse, kept him so clean, and his room so picturesque with summer flowers, that even the memory of his personal carelessness died away from Esse's mind. More than ever the man who had saved her, and whom she had saved, and with whom she had undergone the adventure so sweet to look back upon, became idealised in all those smaller details with which the romantic simulacrum in a woman's mind is in some degree built up. His great amusement at this time was to polish the bears' claws, and to drill them in a particular way, until finally he made a magnificent necklace of them, which he handed over to Esse, telling her that they were fairly hers as she had won them.

When the time of convalescence came, Esse became herself head-nurse. At least, all the labour of amusing the patient seemed to devolve on her. She sat by his side in the veranda reading to him and playing draughts or chess, all of which pastimes were dangerous enough; or often listening to his stories of adventure, which was a thousand times more dangerous. After a while Mrs Elstree came to understand something of the feelings of Brabantio, as he afterwards reflected on the method of Desdemona's wooing by Othello - with the exception that she assured herself that in no way had Dick the smallest intention of making love. Had she known the deeper strata of human passion she would not have so easily thrown aside her fears with a sigh of relief, for the very indifference of the man to the girl's preference, so palpable to the mother's eye, was perhaps the one element remaining to complete the daughter's fascination. Mrs Elstree was, however, a wise woman within her own limitations, and as the summer was drawing to a close she determined not to take any notice at present of what was going on, but to let affairs run their course till the return to San Francisco. She felt that it would be a less dangerous course than doing anything whilst there was present the opportunity, in the shape of Dick, of matters coming to a head prematurely.

At this time there were two surly people on Shasta: one, Miss Gimp, who seemed never to get farther in her love-making to Dick; and the other, Heap Hungry, whose offerings to the parrot had been cut short by Esse, lest their continuous presence should lead to some awkward revelation.

One morning when Esse looked out of her window she saw the whole plateau white with snow. It was but a tiny dusting of the ground, and had vanished before the sun was high. But it was a warning that the summer had gone, and that Shasta was henceforth to be, for a time, at any rate, but a sweet memory. When departure had been decided upon, all the mother and guardian became awake in Mrs Elstree; day and night she watched, and waited, and bestirred herself so, that there was never an opportunity for Esse to have a sentimental leave-taking. To this end, Dick's natural imperturbability aided, and it was with only a hearty handshake, and a last wave of his cap, that Dick took leave of Esse at the railway station at Edgewood.

Esse herself was too sorry to be very demonstrative. She knew her own secret now, and it took her all her time and effort to so bear herself as to deceive her mother.

CHAPTER 6

The change from Shasta to San Francisco for a time altered the course of Esse’s thoughts. It was not merely that the atmosphere was different or that the duties of life, in great and little degree, were not the same, but that there were compensations for the loss of the bracing air, the natural exhilaration which is given by a rarefied atmosphere, and the unconventional companionship of Grizzly Dick. There were shops! Shops whose contents were to be investigated thoroughly and their new treasures displayed. There were concerts with divine possibilities, and Esse was a musician cultivated far beyond the opportunities of even San Francisco. Hollander, and Paderewski, and Sarasate were all personal friends of her mother, and from each of them she had friendly counsel. Now that she was come again in touch with all these delightful results of civilization, she began to feel as though the Shoulder of Shasta were barren of the higher delights of life - of some of them at least. Then there were the theatres, for to Esse a theatre was a veritable wonderland. Like all persons of pure imagination, the theatre itself was but a means to an end. She did not think of a play as a play, but as a reality, and so her higher education - the education of the heart, the brain, and the soul - was pursued; and by the sequence of her own emotion and her memory of them, she became, each time she saw a play, to know herself a little better, and so to better know the world and its dwellers. Visits, too, and dances, and the thousand and one harmless frivolities which go to make up a woman’s life, claimed her time and her passing interest.

And so it was that within a few weeks of return to San Francisco, Grizzly Dick and all his romantic environment became for the time only a distant memory. But out of this very state of things, in which her mother had a new sense of security, there came a new danger. Since Dick was only a memory, he became one with that particular nimbus of softening effects which is apt to accompany and environ a memory which is a pleasant one - that which is to a memory what a halo is to a pictorial saint, at once a distinguishing trait and an aid to fancy. Esse began to feel that since Dick was a memory he was one that could be shared; and so each dearest friend of the hour became in turn the recipient of her confidence. It is an easy matter to sympathise with a misplaced affection; and the slaughtering of grizzlies and the saving and being saved by picturesque hunters, massive of limb and quaint of speech, has a charm for young ladies unaccustomed to the shedding of blood. Esse began to hear nothing but praise of Dick, and envious wishes, sighingly expressed by susceptible companions, that her chance of love had been theirs. Thus by a subtle process, which the Fates so thoroughly understood, Esse began to look into her own heart with the eyes of her friends. What she found there she did not quite know. All was nebulous, inchoate and dim of outline; but it - whatever it was - had a living, breathing charm which touched her imagination, fired afresh all the impulses of her virgin heart, and made her very nerves tingle at all sweet unknown possibilities. When a girl gets thus far into the dark forests of love she seems to realise - historically, but last of all by herself - the truth of that master of the craft who said that ‘a woman loves for the sake of loving.’ There is something in feminine nature which seems to have a distinct need of expressing itself in some form of self-abnegation. It may be that there is a bacillus of love, which, when once it finds an entry into the human heart, goes on multiplying itself, as other microbes do when finding their ‘final’ destination; or it may be that it is a virus which can affect all around it in ever-widening area. But be it what it may, and work how it will, one thing is certain, that when once this idea has become conscious to a woman and she can locate its cause, the process of its growth is a natural one, and nothing in the world can stop it. Thus Esse, having begun the new phase of her feeling towards Dick by finding in him a sort of hero of romance, began to exaggerate her own feelings towards him; and finally grew to believe that she had acted rather badly towards him.

And here her memory, spurred on thereto by her wishes, began to play her tricks. She construed in the secrecy of her own soul the indifference of their parting into a wrong to him; and remorse began to assail her. She seemed to remember a certain sadness in his beautiful eyes - for by this time his eyes had become to her memory beautiful - and to have all the wealth of varied and passionate expression which is the possession of a young woman's fancy. As one by one the thousand little incidents of Dick's illness and convalescence came back to her mind they came accompanied by all sorts of added charms on his part and small defects on her own, which fed the fires of her remorse; so that it was not long until as she sat thinking and recollecting her eyes would fill with unbidden tears.

This process of Esse's mental unhinging was aided by the care which her mother took to avoid the subject. She had seen that Esse had resumed her old life where she had left it, and was rejoiced that she did so with a physical improvement which she had hardly dared at the beginning to hope for. Mrs Elstree prided herself on her worldly wisdom, and took special satisfaction to herself that by her patient forbearance at Shasta, she was now enabled to let well alone, without any fear of her attitude, positive or negative, being misunderstood by her daughter. Had she been a more experienced woman, she would not have avoided the subject of Dick, but from her superior position of manifested tolerance could have minimised the effect of his picturesque romance by judicious belittlement. As it was, her silence seemed to Esse a want of appreciation on her part of Dick's heroic qualities; and so it left her daughter to the dangers of her own imagination, with its active and reactive power on memory, and to the less wise sympathies of her girl companions. In the world of Esse's imaginings as to how Dick bore her absence, she began to invest him with a despairing loneliness which became in time but the co-ordinate feeling of her own heart.

Naturally her brooding on this theme, and the secrecy which as naturally became imposed upon her when once she had come to understand its existence, told in time upon her health. She began to grow pale and listless; with poignant fear her mother realised that she was lapsing into her old condition of ill-health - with the added drawback that she had in the meantime passed from girlhood to womanhood, and that her secret tears whose traces she could not always conceal, showed that a new and dangerous emotional side of her nature had been developed. Mrs Elstree thought and thought the matter over patiently, prayerfully, doubtingly, and with a vague, deadly fear which at times became an anguish. She could not conceal from herself that there might be some deep-lying cause in the shape of an unrequited affection, and, naturally she thought that Grizzly Dick might be the object of it. Well, she had known from the observation of her own life and that of the companions of her youth, the truth that was told in Viola's true-false tale:

'She never told her love But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud, Feed on her damask cheek.'

She took counsel with Miss Gimp on the subject, and even asked her opinion as to the possibility of Dick being the object - if indeed, there was one. Under ordinary circumstances the perspicacity of the two elder women who loved her, might have found a way to the knowledge of Esse's secret, and have also found a way for her to its settlement; but Miss Gimp's own feeling for Dick became at once a bar to the knowledge. She had in the discussion her own secret to keep, and this involved a putting aside of the subject altogether. She had also her own end to serve, for she still regarded Dick as a victim to her charms, and a possible object of her settlement in life. In slang phrase she had 'her own axe to grind' in the matter, and looked upon the possibility of Esse's falling in love with Dick as a direct infringement of her own rights. She was only human - and woman - and the stalwartness of her opinion on the subject of Dick set Mrs Elstree's doubts on the subject almost at rest. She determined however to be assured, and took an early opportunity of touching on the subject with Esse herself. She was, however, delicately careful only to touch on the subject in such a manner as not to arouse Esse's suspicions, in case the idea should have no basis in fact, and not to put such an idea in her head, in case it was not fixed there already. And as Esse wished to keep her secret from her mother, who she felt by this time assured would not understand it, it was no wonder that the conversation had the result of clearing all doubts from Mrs Elstree's mind and leaving her under the impression that she had Esse's direct assurance that Dick had no place - and no possible place - in her affections.

The schoolmen doubtless believed when they came to formulate the rules of logic that the suppressio veriand the suggestio falsi were emanations from the mature intellect of man. Widely they erred! for Eve, the first of women understood them to the full, and it was in that stage of her existence which coincided with a later woman's girlhood that - before she had known Adam and begun to understand the more simple directness of his man's thought and ways - she most fully understood their advantages. Since her time no young woman has ever failed to conceal, by their use, her thoughts on the subject of her affections - when she wished to do so - more efficaciously than a man can conceal his by the direct method of a denial accompanied by blows.

Now and again Esse wore the necklace of bears' claws, for she felt that to omit doing so occasionally would arouse her mother's suspicion; and it was sweet to be able to have so close to her something which was in every way a manifest link between her and Dick. But she continued to grow thinner and paler; and the heart of her mother grew sadder as the time went on.

There came to visit their home in California Street an old friend who occupied a sort of brotherly position towards both mother and daughter. He had been an intimate friend of Esse's father, and on the marriage of the latter had become equally a friend of his young wife. This relationship was not changed even by his own marriage or by Mr Elstree's death, for his wife became, as it were, a partner in the friendly concern, and when Mr Elstree died he left a letter asking him to look after his wife and daughter, and aid them by his help and counsel. He did not burden him with the trusteeship or care of their affairs, for the fortune which he had left to them was sufficiently great to be a care in itself. Peter Blyth was now approaching middle age, and seemed to have gathered to himself in his progress through life all its pleasant possibilities and advantages. He followed, or had followed at some time or other, quite a number of avocations, so that his knowledge was as varied as his taste and sympathy; and as in every phase of his career he had some distinct points of contact with the needs and doings of men he had arrived at a large and tolerant knowledge of human nature. Esse, from her earliest childhood, had known him as a sort of big brother, and had never called him anything but Peter. From him had always come to her something that was pleasant or helpful, from the days that she used to wheedle him into producing the toy or sweet that she knew was waiting for her in the deep recess of some pocket. When she was in any trouble, either of her own or others' doing, she relied on him confidently to see her through it; and even when she had suffered any childish pain, to hold Peter's hand was a distinct ease and help to her. Naturally between the two had grown up a rare confidence, and up to now in her life Esse had never had a secret which Peter Blyth had not shared. The years that had passed had not aged him in any way, except in the limiting of his physical buoyancy, and in strewing a few white hairs through the thickness of his curly brown beard. This beard of Peter Blyth's was the feature on which a physiognomist would have lingered longest in the setting forth of his character, for it gave a distinctive quality to other features which, though altogether good, were in no wise remarkable. From his beard, and what was all around it, could be deduced the fact that he belonged to the antique rather than the modern world, and distinctly to the pagan school of life. It was not that he was sceptical, for he was not; nor that he was assailed with unconquered doubts, for he had his moods of acquiescence in the fitness of things, and the opposite, as have all men in whose veins the red blood of life flows freely. But there was about him a large-hearted, easy tolerance which made any limited phase of thought a thing rather despicable to him than abhorrent. For all ‘isms’ he had only contempt, from Calvin to Ibsen; all who held with the ungenerous side of beliefs could not move him from intellectual placidity. His throat had the broad smooth lines which we see in the old busts of Jupiter, and his mouth and chin, which, taken separately, showed the two poles of resolution and of power of enjoyment, pronounced, when taken together, for a conscious joie de vivre, which was most certainly not a characteristic of his time.

When he saw Esse his instinct and his knowledge jumped to one conclusion - that there was some secret cause for her low condition, but with characteristic caution he did not betray himself. He then and there determined to take an early opportunity of learning from the girl herself how matters stood. To this end he had a long talk with Mrs Elstree, and in the course of it gathered all the events, great and small, of the life at Shasta. Not content with Mrs Elstree’s confidence, he took an opportunity of learning the opinions of Miss Gimp, and thus armed, he felt himself fairly confident of finding out in his talk with Esse the true inwardness of things.

The next morning he came to breakfast with his mind made up as to how he should discuss affairs with Esse. He knew already from her mother all that that dear lady knew, including her put-aside suspicion of an attachment between Esse and Dick, and as he had discovered her mother was manifestly not in Esse’s secret, whatever it might be, he knew that there was need for extreme caution. To this end he determined that time should not be of vital importance, for the telling of a secret means on a woman’s part a gradual yielding to her own wishes, and a not impossible accompaniment of tears; so he opened the matter with a frank remark:

‘You’re not looking well, Esse! Too many dances and sittings-out in the conservatory. Suppose you put on your bonnet and come with me for a drive. A whiff of sea air will do us both good.' Esse looked at her mother appealingly, and on her nodding acquiescence, assented joyfully, so Peter Blyth went off to look for a buggy suitable to the occasion. He shortly drove up in a very snappy one, with a pair of horses that looked like 2:40 speed. Esse came to the stoop with a lighter footstep than she had used for many a day, and, her mother noticing it, said to herself, with a sigh of relief, 'The dear child is only tired. She feels already with Peter like her old self.'

As they swept up and down the steep hills that lay between them and the Pacific Peter Blyth tried his best to put and keep Esse in a gay humour. He told her all his best and newest stories, and so interested her with all the little things which had happened in her London home since she had last seen it, that when they came to Sutro Heights Esse was looking more like her old - or, rather, her new - self than she had done since she had parted with Dick at Shasta.

Peter put up his trap at the Cliff House, and having ordered luncheon for a couple of hours later, the two strolled out along the beach to the southward. When they had gone some distance they sat down on a patch of sea grass and looked around them. Below their feet, beyond a narrow strip of yellow sand, was the vast blue of the silent Pacific, its breast scarcely moved by the ripple of a passing breeze. Southwards the headlands, dimly blue and purple, ran out, tier upon tier, into the sea; northwards the mountains towered brown above the Golden Gate. Both were impressed with the full, silent beauty of the scene, and for a time neither spoke. Then Peter, turning to Esse, said:

'What is it, dear, that is troubling you?' Esse started, and a vivid blush swept swiftly over her face, and then left her pale.

What do you mean?' was her answer, given in a faint voice. For reply Peter took both her hands in his, and said:

'Look here, little girl, that's the first time in all your life that you ever asked me what I meant. Do you really mean, Esse, that you don't understand? Tell me, dear! I only want to help you! Don't you know what I mean?'

Esse's 'yes,' came in a faint voice. Peter went on:

'Now that clears the ground. We understand each other. Tell me all about it, Esse! Confession is good for the soul; and I don't think you'll ever find a softer-hearted father confessor than your old friend.'

'Must I tell, Peter?' She spoke in an appealing way, but it was manifest to him that she wished to be treated in such a way that her natural obedience would help her. So he smiled a broad, genial smile, and seeing that her face brightened, he attempted a chastened laugh, and flung some of his good-humoured man-of-the-world philosophy at her:

'Look here, little girl, when we human beings have any secret that's pretty difficult to tell, and that we had rather not tell our mothers, it's generally about the opposite sex. When it's a girl that has to do the telling, well! she's best off when she can get it off her chest to some sympathetic soul that won't give her away. Nature demands that she tells some one, and that some one must be either a friend or the Other Fellow. If it's the Other Fellow then there's no need to tell the friend! But in that case there are rosy cheeks instead of pale ones, and the harmonies of life are set in a full major key instead of the minor. See?' Esse nodded. Peter continued:

'I'll help you all I can, little girl, now and hereafter. Your father was my dearest friend, and one of his last acts was to write to me asking me to look after you and your mother, and to do what I could for you both. If he were here, my dear, you wouldn't need to talk to me! Shut your eyes, little girl, and pretend that he is with you, and open out your heart to him. Don't fear to! Every girl has to, and it is well for them that there are fathers and brothers and friends, to whom they can speak; for otherwise there would be a deal more sorrow in the world even than there is! Esse took his hand in hers and turned away her head, hiding her face with her other hand, and said in a low voice:

'I want to see Dick!' Peter's reply was given with heartiness, although her words sent a mild chill through him. He had almost come to this conclusion already, and he saw trouble - possibly great trouble - ahead for his little friend:

'Grizzly Dick! I've heard all about him, and a mighty fine fellow he must be. No wonder you want to see him, little girl, after all you and he went through together. When your mother was telling me last night about the bears, I was looking at the skins of the two monsters, and thinking that I'd like to shake hands with the fellow that shared that danger with you, and that you were so good to!'

Esse said nothing, but he could tell by the pressure of her fingers on his hand that his words touched her, so he waited a minute or two before going on. Then he asked suddenly:

'Esse, do you want to see him so badly? Is he all the world to you, so that his not being here makes life, with all the good things which it has for you, of no account? Tell me! Speak freely; don't be afraid!' Esse turned her face round, and her eyes were all swimming with unfallen tears. At this moment her heart was full of Dick, and she could look unabashed at Peter whilst she spoke:

'Oh, yes! I want to see him so. The whole world seems so small and cramped without him! If I could only see him for a moment it would be like feeling the wind blowing down from Shasta - like hearing the roar of the falling water - like the sound of the forest coming up at the dawn! It all seems so little here, and he is so brave and strong, and moves through life as though he were born to rule it!' Peter Blyth sat silent, amazed. The young girl's poetic phrases, her full, passionate way of speaking; the very openness of her avowal, were all strange and new to him, and he felt that he must learn more, and then consider well his store of knowledge; so again he asked her:

'Esse, do you think you love him?' She immediately began to cry quietly, and it was only when he had petted and comforted her a little that she was able to reply:

'I don't know! I don't know!' and Peter muttered to himself: 'Hanged if I do, either!' then he went on with his questioning: "Now, tell me just one thing - I only want your opinion - do you think he loves you?' 'He never told me so.'

'No, but what do you think?' Esse turned to him with all the coquetry of her nature ablaze, and asked:

What do you think?' Peter Blyth instantly laughed a merry, wholesome laugh which seemed somehow to find an echo in the very recesses of Esse's soul. Somewhere there was hope and comfort for her. This winning trust in a man's power to smooth matters, and the consequent shifting of the burden from her own shoulders was beginning already to work for her recovery. She laughed too, though the laugh smote Peter with pain, for it was like the ghost of her old cheery laugh; but he was glad to hear any approach to merriment, and took advantage of the occasion.

'Come on! Let us get to lunch, and then we shall be able to think better. We know now; our next step will be to see what is best to be done, and then to do it!' Esse took his outstretched hand, and so, hand-in-hand, they walked by the sea together. Suddenly he stopped and said:

'Look here, little girl, you mustn't go into the hotel with your eyes like that. They'd think that I was the lover, and that I had been quarrelling with you!' He put his hand into his pocket and took out a tiny parcel which he handed to her. Esse took it with curiosity and opened it. Out fluttered a gauzy veil.

Well, I do declare!' she said, 'I believe this is a put-up job, and that you expected me to cry, and were prepared for it.'

'Of course I did,' said Peter, boldly. 'What else did I come out here for except that you and I might be alone, and that you could tell me your troubles! I knew you would cry! all girls do - under the circumstances!' and he laughed a resonant and ease-giving laugh. So she took his arm and they walked back to the hotel.

CHAPTER 7

When her mother saw Esse, her heart was filled with gladness, for her pallor had given way to a cheerful tinge of rose, and her manner was buoyant and exhilarated. ‘Well, I declare,’ said she, turning to Peter Blyth, ‘an hour or two with you has done her more good than all the doctors in San Francisco in three months. You must take her in hand, and prescribe for her a bit, if you will.’ By this time Esse had tripped upstairs to get ready for tea, and Peter, seeing his opportunity, wished to get from Mrs Elstree a comprehensive consent to whatever he might see well to do. All the way home, after lunch, whilst Esse had been chattering to him with all the energy of an emancipated soul, he had been thinking. The problem which he had to solve was a difficult one, and he felt that all his diplomatic acumen would be required. He could not believe that his highly cultured, refined little friend Esse whose fastidiousness, even in her babyhood, had been a little joke in the family, could be really in love with a rough, unmannered trapper. And yet he could not deceive himself that at the present time Esse had an absorbing desire to meet the man; that the unsatisfied desire was sapping her health, and that it would be necessary to take the matter seriously as the only chance of an ultimate solution of the difficulty. It might be that Esse’s craving was for the mountain as well as the man; that the place and its possibilities, its adventures, its bracing qualities, the stimulation of the high mountain air and the whole wild, free exuberance which had come into her life at the moment when her womanhood was developing, and as cure for her failing health, had seized on her imagination. In such case, her sense of contrast and the strongly humorous side of her character would be her best protection. In any case, the man was at present so inextricably mixed up in her mind with his surroundings that without his presence no disentanglement could take place. Of course, it might be that when Esse should see him the vague desire for his presence might become an actuality, and that nothing short of marriage with him would content her. If so, then the chance must be taken, for it could not be allowed that her present declining health should not be considered; and if marriage became a necessity, at least Esse had at her disposal all the means of comfort for them both. In a word, the argument ran in his mind: if she should not see Dick she would in all probability fade away and die. If she should see him, one of two things must happen - she would become disenchanted, which was all desirable, or her infatuation would increase until it ended in an undesirable marriage. In any case she must see him.

She must see him - that was certain; and this conclusion having been arrived at, Peter's next point was as to the most advisable way of this accomplishment. There was already experience of the ill effects of her seeing him when his foot was on his native heath. There he was paramount, and his whole personality gathered round itself the romance of the surroundings. If Esse were to see him on Shasta under her present psychic and nervous condition, she would simply tumble head over ears in love with him. There was nothing at all to the contrary; whereas if she were to see him in the midst of her present refined surroundings, she could not help contrasting him with them, with a result that could not altogether tend to further infatuation. Dick therefore must come to San Francisco! Peter felt that his logic was complete, and that no further thought on that part of the subject was required. Thus he had driven up to California Street with his mind so far at rest, and his only present intent that

Mrs Elstree should, without even guessing at his knowledge, be content to leave the affair in his hands. So when Esse had gone to her room he turned to Mrs Elstree and said:

‘Do you really wish me to prescribe?’

‘Most certainly! Look at the effect of your first dose!’

‘And you will not blame me if anything should happen that you don’t contemplate; or as you should not wish?’ Mrs Elstree put both her hands in his and said:

‘Peter Blyth whatever you do will be for Esse’s good. That is your intention I am sure. I know it; and my dear husband knew it. None of us are infallible; but you are at least a true friend and a clever man. Do what you will for my dear child’s good. Nothing can be worse than to see her fading away from me, as it has been my misery to watch for months past.’ She turned away her head, but Peter could see that she was crying as she left the room. When she returned she was cheerful, though there were traces of tears in her eyes. Women have a sort of fixed idea that bathing the eyes with watered eau-de-cologne will remove traces of tears; it is a happy belief, saving much small humiliation, and there are men generous enough to pretend that they are deceived!

After dinner Peter Blyth sat with Esse in the back of the drawing-room, whilst her mother in the music-room opening from it played Liszt and Chopin. His manner was hearty, and his laugh so cheery, that it would have been impossible for Esse to have in his presence been under the domination of any brooding or love-sick fancies, so she fell into the buoyant mood. Now that the strain of keeping her secret was past she felt able to discuss it without doing violence to her feelings. Peter opened the battle with a point-blank shot:

‘I have thought all over what you told me, and I have come to a conclusion.’ Esse’s heart seemed to cease to beat, and she simply listened. ‘I think Dick had better come here!’ A blush rose under the girl’s eyes, and steadily grew, till cheeks and forehead, and ears and neck, were all flushed to a deep crimson. She put her hands before her fact but still sat silent. Peter went on:

‘I take it, Esse, that this has your approval?’ She nodded.

‘I take it also that it is your wish?’ Again she nodded.

‘I take it also that I may - that you wish me to convey to Dick the strong feeling that you have towards him, the keen desire to see him,’ - here Esse broke in:

‘Oh, Peter, must that be?’

‘I fear, my dear, that it will be necessary. He might not be willing to come without such assurance. You see he does not know me at all!’

‘But wouldn’t it be like my asking him?’ Peter laughed cheerfully:

‘It would be uncommonly like it. There is no possible mistake about that! But then the whole thing is uncommon! It is not common that you should care for a man away outside the class you have been reared in; the occasions that threw you together were uncommon. It is uncommon that I should be holding this conversation with you all the time that your mother is playing there in the next room so uncommonly well. I take it also that I had better let Dick know that there may be - later on - a more tender feeling between you? Esse paused. It seemed to her like the probing of a wound this questioning by Peter; and yet it was done with the same matter-of-factness which distinguishes the work of an able surgeon. The wounded have to suffer, and it does not matter if the wound be inflicted by a bullet, or an arrow, or a knife. But there was about the whole thing a sort of business atmosphere, something which tends to suppress romance and to bring into unpleasant prominence the sternest facts; and Esse could not but feel that she was rather following up the logic of the part than expressing her present feelings when she replied from behind her sheltering hands:

‘I suppose so!’

‘Good!’ said Peter. Now I know exactly where I am!’ and he rose up to join his hostess in the music-room, whilst Esse lay back amongst the deep cushions of her chair, thinking what a queer place the world is, when even the realization of one’s wishes is not a matter of unqualified happiness, and beginning to wonder if Dick would think it strange of her sending such a message. Then she began to wonder how her San Francisco friends with their fastidiousness, their fondness for the ridiculous side of things, and their haughty pride at times, would look on Dick. And then she began to think how Dick would look amongst his new and unaccustomed surroundings. A thousand little traits and habits of his, which she now wished that she had forgotten, recalled themselves to her memory, and she thought it would have been better that she had not told Peter so much, until, at all events, she had some opportunity of seeing that Dick was better schooled to conventional usages. But that could never be until Peter told him! The whole thing was getting so tangled that she could not follow it; and so she stole out of the room, leaving Peter talking to her mother as she played on, and went to bed.

Esse was beginning to feel that an unconventional attachment was not without its drawbacks. The cure was commencing to work!

Next morning, at breakfast, Peter mentioned that he had had a telegram which would compel him to go at once to New York. It might be, that from New York he might have to go on to London; but this was only a possibility, and in any case, his visit home need be only a short one. He would, he expected, be back in San Francisco in a couple of months at the latest. Mrs Elstree was truly sorry that he had to go so soon, but hoped that he would soon be back, and Esse looked at him with a flush and endorsed her mother's sentiments. He received many commissions, and went up to dress for his journey. Before he left he said to both ladies:

'I think I have my commissions all right. Do either of you want to alter anything?' There was no reply, and off he went.

Esse had a half-feeling that she would like to countermand all that she had asked Peter to do, or had acquiesced in his doing. Womanlike, she began to have misgivings when once the bolt had sped, and, womanlike, she felt personally freer now that she had committed herself to a definite act.

Peter Blyth left the eastward train at Sacramento, and took the Portland train on his way north. He had posted himself thoroughly as to the route, and had telegraphed to the station-master at Edge-wood to have procured for him horses and a guide to Shasta. On his arrival he found all ready for him, and setting out at once, made good way before stopped by the darkness. Early the next day he arrived at the Shoulder of Shasta, and leaving his guide and horses on the plateau, went at once to Dick's cottage.

All the way up the mountain he had been thinking of the strange job which he had undertaken; and the higher he got, the more the ridiculous side of it came to the front. Here was he, a man of middle age, climbing up an almost desolate snow-clad mountain, to find a hunter who probably couldn't read or write, and to ask him to marry a particularly refined and cultivated young heiress. He had no clue to the man's style, or thought, or ideas, and he could only surmise what his reception might be. Like a good many Londoners, his sole knowledge of the actuality of Western life was from 'Buffalo Bill' and the 'Wild West Show,' and, from the rough-and-ready energy displayed by some of the participants in these Olympic Games up-to-date, he had strange imaginings as to what his welcome might be like in case he should be regarded as a meddlesome fool - a capacity which, to do him justice, he felt that he filled with quite sufficient satisfactoriness. By the time he had arrived at Dick's cabin he felt not only ridiculous, but in a sort of 'funk,' an unusual thing with him. With somewhat of the feelings of a schoolboy, who learns on calling that the dentist is absent, he found that the cabin door was locked. He had, however, a duty to do, and he did not mean to shirk it, be it never so ridiculous or unpleasant; and so went back to his guide to breakfast.

When he returned to the cabin, an hour later, he found the door unlocked; the owner, however, was absent. He went in and seated himself, awaiting his coming. As he sat, all his unpleasant surmises came back to his mind, and he called himself - inwardly - an unmitigated ass, until the image of Esse's pale face came before him and nerved him. He looked round the cabin, and, as he saw its meagreness and absolute destitution of refinement, he could not bring himself to believe that Esse could really and truly love a man who lived in such a way. The exhilarating air of the mountain, somehow seemed to increase his natural buoyancy of spirits, and he felt that he wanted to laugh, but the gravity of his mission restrained him.

There came a shadow in the doorway and Dick entered, quite unconscious that there was a stranger in his house. When Peter Blyth saw him, the contrast between his appearance and the purpose of his mission was so great that it burst the barriers of his gravity, and the long pent-up laughter broke forth in a flood. He tried to rise, but he was helpless with his paroxysm of cachinnation, and sank back again, and shook whilst Dick looked on in a sequence of emotions. First he was amazed, then somewhat indignant; and, finally, his kindly nature yielded to the humour of the situation, and, throwing back his head, he joined in the laughter till the rafters rang.

There certainly was ground for Peter's laughter when one took in calmly Dick's appearance as the proposer of marriage on the part of a young lady. He had just come back from a hunt of several days' duration, and bore all the signs of hardship and turmoil. Manifestly, he had not washed, even his hands, for several days; his hair was matted and wild looking - unkempt would have been an inadequate word to describe its condition. His clothes were creased with sleeping in them, and were encrusted in places with mud, wherein had stuck bits of twig, dead leaves and pine needles; and from head to foot he was smothered with grease and blood. Killing and skinning big game is not an aesthetic occupation, and is apt to leave just the same traces on the operator as on the artist who wields the knife in a Chicago packing house. In sober truth, he looked like a large, rough, peculiarly dirty, and slovenly butcher on leaving his work. Across his shoulders he carried the skinned carcase of a deer, from which dripped on the floor drops of blood, till they formed a little glittering pool.

Dick, with a hitch of his mighty shoulder, dropped the carcase on the floor, and stood looking admiringly at Peter Blyth, whilst joining in his laugh; then he sat down opposite him on a rough stool, which he drew towards him by crooking a toe round its leg, and went on with his laugh in greater comfort. Presently Peter began to realise that he was in a more amazingly ridiculous position than that which he had feared, and, with a certain feeling of shamefacedness, felt his laughter die away as he began to gasp out apologies. Dick leaned over, and, lifting a mighty hand, smote the other's thigh as he roared out:

'Durn me, stranger, but ye're welcome. I hain't seen a man laugh so hearty in all my born days, an' I hain't had such a laugh myself since I seen the Two Macs split one another's heads open at the Empire Saloon in Sacramento.' My! but I'm glad to see ye, though who the hell ye are, or why ye're here, is more'n I know yet. But we'll know in time. Have ye breakfasted? I'm nearly famished myself; but I've brought in a roast,' he designated it by a kick, 'and we'll soon have a blaze and get fixed right up!' Before Peter could say anything he had strode to the fireplace, and stirring up the embers with his foot, had thrown on them an armful of dried twigs. In a few seconds a fierce blaze was roaring up the rude chimney, and very shortly a chunk of the buck, hung on an iron hook, was already beginning to splutter in the heat. Peter offered to help, but the other waved him back:

'No, sir! This is my shanty, an' ye're my guest! Ye're as welcome in it as the flowers of May. Jest ye sit down and try to get ready another laugh for after breakfast, while I get the fixin's ready. I hope ye can eat saleratus bread; it's all we get up here this time o' year.' As he spoke he was making tea, and setting out his rude table with workmanlike dexterity. Peter could not but admire him as he moved, for notwithstanding his big bulk he was always in perfect poise, and in everything he did he seemed perfect master of it; and he soon lost sight, or at least consciousness, of his dirt and blood, and saw only the splendid specimen of natural manhood, so magnificently equipped for his wild mountain life and so nobly unconscious of his surroundings.

Peter Blyth felt his feelings mingled; half being of shame that he had so underestimated his host, the other of anxiety as to the future. Matters did not seem of such simple solution as he had imagined. He could not but feel that there was a basis for Esse's unsettlement rather wider than he had thought possible.

When breakfast was ready he sat at table with enjoyment, and, despite want of tablecloth, napkin, or any of the luxuries to which he was accustomed, made a hearty meal. As for Dick he ate to such an extent that Peter had serious misgivings as to whether he might not do himself an injury. When hunger was satisfied Dick took two pipes and handed one of them to Peter with the tobacco canister, and drawing up a rude armchair to one side of the fireplace motioned Peter into it; he took his own seat in a similar one on the other side. Then he commenced the conversation:

'Now, stranger! Wire in, and tell me all about it!' Peter Blyth saw that the difficult part of his task was at hand, and went straight at it: 'I am a friend of Mrs Elstree and of Esse!' Dick rose up and held out a large hand.

'Wall, ye were welcome before, but ef that's yer racket, there ain't no welcome under this ar roof big enough or good enough for ye. Shake!' Then Peter experienced the force of Dick's pump-handle act of friendship; and, like Esse and her mother, felt that Nature might easily have been forgiven if she had gifted her child with a lesser measure of manual power. One good thing, however, was accomplished, the two men were en rapport, and Peter's task became more possible. He went on:

'My name is Blyth - Peter Blyth; but no one ever calls me anything but Peter! I hope you will be like the rest!' 'All right, Peter!' said Dick cheerfully. 'Drive along!' 'I saw both the ladies two days ago. Mrs Elstree did not know I was coming here or she would, I am sure, have sent you her very warm greeting. Esse, however, knew that I was coming, and sent her love.'

'Lor' bless her! Little Missy, I hope she's keepin' peart an' clipper? She kem up here as white as a lily; but me an' Shasta soon set her up, an' she went away like a rose!' Here Peter saw an opportunity of arousing Dick's pity, and at once took advantage of it.

'Poor little girl!' he said, 'I fear she is not at all so well as she should be. She looked pretty pale when I saw her.'

'Do tell! The poor purty Little Missy. I wouldn't see her sick for all the world.'

'I'm sure of that, old fellow! And it would gladden her heart to hear you say that!'

Well, I should smile! Why, I don't suppose that by this time she remembers there's such a man as me!'

'No, no, Dick - you mustn't think that! Esse thinks more of you than you imagine. Indeed, that's why I'm here now!'

'Why you're here? Say, stranger, you're talking conundrums!' Peter felt the drops gather on his forehead; he was in the thick of it now, and spoke out boldly.

'Look here, Dick, I've come up here on purpose to speak with you! May I speak frankly, as man to man?'

'You bet!'

'And you promise that you will never repeat what I say?' Again the horny hand was held out:

'Shake!' The promise was recorded.

'Dick, that poor little girl is fretting her heart out to see you again!’

‘No!’ the wonderment ended in a short laugh. ‘Go on! What’s yer game? Oh, ye’re a funny one, ye are!’ and he gave his guest a playful push that almost sent him headlong into the fire, whilst his laughter seemed to Peter to hum and buzz amongst the rafters. peter went on seriously:

‘Honest Indian, Dick! I give you my word of honour that the little girl has been thinking of you till she has nearly broken her heart for want of seeing you. She is as pale as a ghost, and her poor mother has been fretting her life out about her. Now, won’t you do something for her?’

‘Do somethin’! Why look here! ye may take the full of her purty little body of blood out of my veins for her, if that will do her any good!’ This time it was Peter Blyth who held out his hand, and said: ‘Shake!’ Then he went on:

‘You know, Dick - or perhaps you don’t know, living up here all alone - that young girls have strange fancies, and their affections don’t always go where their elders would like to see them. Esse has been a good deal with you, they tell me, all last summer; and after all, you’re a man! By George, you are all that! And she’s a woman! And it seems to me - you understand, old man! Why need I go on!’ A blush, a distinct and veritable blush, as pronounced as might be found in any ladies’ seminary in San Francisco suffused Dick’s face, and he turned away with a little simper that would not have disgraced a schoolgirl. Why, ye don’t mean to say,’ he went on sheepishly, ‘that that purty thing wants me for her bo?’ His bashfulness kept him silent, and Peter Blyth looked on in fresh wonderment to see such awkward modesty so manifesdy displayed in the person of such a blood-stained ruffian as he looked. Dick’s embarrassment, however, was only momentary, and ended, as did most of his emotions, in a peal of laughter. Peter looked on with qualified amusement; it would have been all pure fun to him only for the memory of Esse's pale face in the background. Dick suddenly stopped and said: What do ye want me to do?'

That's right, old chap! I want you to find your way down to San Francisco, and let Esse get a glimpse of you. It will bring back to her all this beautiful mountain, and she'll feel the wind from the snow peak blowing once more on her, if I know her!'

'Good, I'll come! It can't be for a few weeks yet, for I have undertaken a contract that I must get through with; but I'll come. That's cert! Where does she live in 'Frisco?'

'In California Street, No 437, the big house with the stone seals on the steps. Dick, you're a brick! Old man, you'll be very tender with her, will you not? Remember it was a great struggle to her to let me gather even so much of her wishes as I did. She's only a young girl; and you must make things easy for her! Won't you? Don't shame her by making any overture come from her?'

'Say, what's that? Over what?'

'Overture! It means, old man, that you mustn't leave it to her to do the love-making, if there's any to be done.'

'Hold hard there, pard! Easy up the hill! I ain't much of a feller I know, an' my breedin' has been pretty rough; but I ain't such a fool as to leave no girl to do the courtin' when I'm on the racket! Ye make yer mind easy! - Say, must ye go?' for Peter had risen.

'Yes, Dick, I'm bound to be in New York without a day's delay. I've important business awaiting me there; and say, Dick, if things don't turn out as I think, and as you may think too, when you see her, you'll make it easy for her, won't you?' Dick looked a perfect giant as he stood in the doorway following out his guest, for all the manhood of him seemed to swell within him, and to glorify him till the blood and dirt on him seemed as if Viking adjuncts to his mighty personality. His words came deep and resonant as from one who meant them:

‘Look you here, pard! That dear little lady is the truest and bravest comrade that ever a man had! She stayed by me in the forest, when it was good time for her to go, with the biggest grizzly on the California slope comin’ up express. She fou’t him, for me, an’ killed him. An’ then she wouldn’t leave me, even to get help; but she carried me alone, although she was wounded herself, more’n a mile up the mountain side! She took me outen the grave and hell and the devil, an’ I ain’t goin’ to go back on her, so help me God! I don’t want to be no trouble to her, nor no sorrow, an’ I think it’s a mistake of her choosin’ such a man as me - but I tell ye this: She’ll do with me what she likes, an’ how she likes, an’ when she likes, an’ whar she likes! The wind doesn’t blow that’s a-goin’ to blow between her and me, if she wants me by her side!’

CHAPTER 8

When Esse found that there was a possibility of her again seeing Dick she began to become reconciled to the existing condition of things. It was true that as yet she had only a glimmer of hope, for Peter Blyth had not been explicit as to his intentions. In the first place he might not be able to find Dick, for his journey to New York, and possibly to Europe, might eventuate in complications which would forbid his returning to California at all; in any event for a long time. Then again, Dick might not see his way to come to live in cities, and Esse had already begun to appreciate the refinements of life sufficiently well to make it impossible for her to even contemplate an isolated life in the woods or on the mountains. Picnicing, and especially in a honeymoon form, might be delightful, fascinating, of unspeakable joy; but such life, without relief, would never suit her as an unvarying constancy. From the glimpses which she had had into Dick's shanty she knew well enough that the measure of his refinement would not reach her own minimum standard, and she had doubts from her experience of his improvement in small matters if he would readily lend himself - if he could lend himself, even if he so desired - to a loftier social condition. These were certainly arguments which tended to damp the zeal begotten of absence, and the stimulating effect of pleasant memory working upon a morbid but fervid imagination. When in the anaemic condition Esse's imagination was apt to run away with her, though when her system was well furnished with red blood her fancies and desires were healthy and under control. Now that the strain of her self-imposed secrecy had been relieved, her health began to mend, and the improvement was manifest in the ready manner in which she yielded herself to her surroundings, and began to make the most of them; thus mental and physical health began to act and react on each other, and Mrs Elstree's heart rejoiced as she saw the improvement in her daughter. Soon Esse began to show something of the same robustness which she had achieved on Shasta. Her chalky pallor yielded to a delicate rose colour which, tingeing her brown skin, made a charming union of health and refinement. Her figure began to fill out, and within a few weeks from the time of Peter Blyth's departure she looked quite a different being from the pallid, meagre, green-sick girl whom he had left. Peter had telegraphed from New York that he had to go to London, but that he looked to return in about two months. He had said nothing of Dick, thinking it wiser to be silent until he knew for certain whether he would turn up in San Francisco. Mrs Elstree did her best to keep Esse up to the mark of health and energy at which she had arrived; and she so laid herself out to this end that her house became the very centre of the most pleasant circle in San Francisco. Every stranger who arrived was of course introduced to her, and not a few found an excuse for prolonging their stay in order to share again her charming hospitality and the companionship of Esse. There was a constant succession of luncheons, dinners, balls, picnics, and all those harmless gatherings which have no definite name, but which have a charm of their own in their freedom and the relaxing of the bonds of conventionality.

Amongst the strangers who came, and in natural course made Mrs Elstree's acquaintance, was a young English painter, who had already made a great name for himself. He was one of those who had not attached himself to any art school long enough to be cramped by its inevitable littleness. He had skipped lightly through the various schools of the world, learning and adapting all their methods to his own genius, and keeping his mind and imagination fresh by a perpetual study of Nature in all her moods. Pardy by nature, and pardy by merit of his varied training, he was of a most charming personality, with gentler manners and keener refinement than might have been expected from his strength and stature. As, in addition to his other qualifications, he was remarkably handsome, it was small wonder that he was looked upon with favour by the ladies in San Francisco, and with a certain reserved tolerance by the men. Even the instantaneous heartiness of his reception by the Bohemian Club did not allay the misgivings of certain young men of pleasure, unattached.

Between Mr Hampden and Esse a friendship soon sprang up, and this was fostered by the opportunities given by her sitting to him for her portrait, and his finally coming to stay as a guest in the house. To him the freshness and artless simplicity of Esse was akin to those grand simplicities of Nature which had been the study of his life; and it was little wonder that when for some time his art and human sympathies had been thus united and centred in so charming a young lady as Esse, his feelings of friendship should have taken a warmer turn. Before the month was over he was head over ears in love with her.

And Esse? By this time, sad to tell, Esse had quite overlooked, if indeed she had not forgotten, the fact of Dick's existence. Sometimes, when some accidental allusion or expression suggested the idea, she remembered him, but as a far-off and independent fact; she never connected him now with her own life. He was, and would be till the end of her life, a true and faithful friend, whose memory was set in a frame of romantic picturesqueness, as a miniature is set round with diamonds; but he did not belong to the living present at all. And, strangely enough, when he had come to occupy this place in Esse's mind, all the pleasant things began to cluster round him again. His individuality was a centre round which crystallized all the pleasant lesser memories of the summer on Shasta. Once or twice in the night time, when something kept her awake, Esse thought, with burning blushes, of her confiding to Peter Blyth the one secret of her life. She wondered how she could have done such a thing, and was angry with herself for what she now considered her mistaken idea as to her own feelings, as well as for her unmaidenly confidence. With a gush of thankfulness she remembered Peter's sudden call to the East, and determined that on his return, and before any harm could be done, she would set that matter right in a few words. Mrs Elstree saw what Esse herself did not see, that she was herself becoming, nay, had already become, in love with the young painter; and as she in every way approved of him as a possible son-in-law, she allowed matters to freely run their course. Esse's romantic feeling for Dick belonged to the school-girl phase of her existence; but the new affection was the expression of her woman's life, and it differed as much from the former in its strength as in its consciousness. The episode of Shasta was, in a sort of way, the 'preliminary canter' of her affections, and had all the consciousness of its limited purpose; whereas the later and truer love had all the unconscious, serious earnestness of the race itself, where means are forgotten and only the end is held in view. There was no thought of Dick in her mind, no regret, no remorse, even no pity of his wasted and ruined life, as a few months ago she would have considered it. There was, in fact, no thought or recollection of Dick at all, when, in answer to Reginald Hampden's passionate appeal, she put her two hands in his, and their lips met in love's first long kiss.

That evening, as they sat hand-in-hand in the little drawing-room, where there was no one else, in that early darkness which is the nearest thing to twilight which California can produce, Esse, with a manifest purpose, and with many flutterings of the heart, told Reginald that she had a confession to make. He, with the amused, superior tolerance of a successful lover, encouraged her by gentle words and manifold tender caresses to proceed. As a man of the world he knew that, as a rule, the sins which well-bred young ladies have to confess to their fiancés are merely self-distrustful exaggerations of minor indiscretions, or breaches of temper. With a sinking heart Esse began, for now that she had to speak of Dick again to a third person, his figure loomed up uncommonly large into the foreground of her thoughts.

'It is about Shasta!' she said, in an almost inaudible voice.

'About Shasta, dear, that is lovely! I like to hear you speak of that sweet spot! I think I am in love with it myself from what I have heard you and your mother say of it. I am thinking already, Esse' - here he drew her closer to him - 'how you and I shall go there some summer and have a fresh honeymoon!' Esse was silent; there were conflicting thoughts in her mind, and she listened as he went on:

'You shall show me all over the place; the seat on the rocks on the edge of the plateau, where we shall see together the sunset over the sea; the sun-dial of the trees by which we shall reckon the hours of our happiness - for, my dear, we shall not be able to keep any other reckoning, they shall go so quickly; the spot where you killed the bear; and then we shall come up the way you carried Dick. You see, dear, I know them all!'

'It is about Dick I want to speak!'

'Speak on, Esse dear; I like to hear about him! What a splendid fellow he must be! I want to shake him by the hand; he saved the life of my little girl, and she saved his! Why, we must be like brother and sister to Dick!'

'But, Reginald, I must tell you about him before you say -' Here Reginald interrupted her.

'Isn't Dick the splendid, brave fellow that I think him; the manly, upright gentleman of nature, with the freshness and splendour of the wood and mountain upon him!'

'Oh yes! he is all that; there is nobody in the world braver or nobler than Dick! You can't say anything too good of him. But that's just it! You may not like it that I - one time - before I met you - thought all the world of him!' Reginald laughed, and caught her again to him; he was glad of these excuses for demonstrative affection.

'Oh you dear little high-minded goose!' he said. "Why, of course you thought all the world of him! So would any girl! If I were a girl I would go my boots on a splendid fellow like that.' Esse began to breathe more freely, though the worst was yet to come; she had to finish her confession. She bravely went on:

That would be bad enough if only you knew it, but I told it to Peter Blyth!'

'And who may Peter Blyth be?' asked Reginald, with a tinge of jealousy in his voice.

'He is an old friend of my mother's. He was my dead father's greatest friend, and he is a sort of guardian to us both.'

'Oh!' said Reginald, pardy satisfied, so Esse went on.

'I don't know why I told him - that I - I - wanted to see Dick - but I did; and he said he would see Dick some time and that he would come and see me!' Here she covered her face with her hands, and in the dusk Reginald could see that she was crying. He took it that it was pardy from regret and partly from vexation, so he asked another question in order to distract her mind:

'And did he come?'

'Oh no!' Esse started up and looked at him with wet eyes. 'Oh no! and I hope he never will! Peter Blyth was called away to New York the very next day, and from there had to go on to London, so I am in hopes that he will never tell Dick. When he comes I shall ask him never to say another word about it again as long as he lives, or never even to think of it!' Reginald thought for a moment and then spoke. Would it not be well to send Mr Blyth a cable?'

Why so?'

'Because he might go up to Shasta on his way back. And, my dearest, that would never do. In addition to making you uncomfortable it would not be fair to Dick. He would take it to heart that he had been so invited; and without any blame on his part he would feel that he had been deprived of a great happiness!'

'Oh, Dick would not mind!'

'How do you know?'

If he had cared about me he would have said so long ago!' from which it could be seen that poor Dick's silence was already beginning to be construed into a fault, and his blindness into an offence. Reginald hardly took the same view as Esse on the subject, but he was none the less contented. However, they agreed that it would be no harm to send a cable to Peter Blyth to his London address, for Esse did not know where he stayed in New York, and the following was despatched:

'Do nothing about Dick till I see you. - ESSE.'

The next evening Mrs Elstree had a reception of all her friends, and she thought that it would be a good occasion to make known Esse's engagement. Her receptions were given in English style, and as she had brought over English servants, her Californian friends were always interested in the way things were done. They generally ended however in an impromptu dance, American fashion. When the night arrived Mrs Elstree received, just as she was going to dress, a telegram from Peter Blyth:

'Arrive in evening; dining on car.' So she gave instructions to have his room prepared. Presently the guests began to assemble, and both Esse and her mother were busy receiving them, Reginald naturally not being far off, and being now and then introduced in his new capacity. There were congratulations on all sides, and a well-bred hum arose throughout the rooms.

In the midst of the festivities a tall, powerful-looking man, walking with long strides, but putting his feet down as though they were cramped, came to the house and knocked. When the liveried footman opened the door he said:

'Say, boss, does Mrs Elstree live here?' The man had only been imported a few days, and, as he had come to the West with vague ideas as to snakes and scalping, and other American commonplaces, and would not have been surprised if he had seen a tribe of Indians on the war-path in Montgomery Street, answered with his usual imperturbability:

'Yes, sir, she receives to-night.'

'Kin I go in?'

'Certingly, sir, if my mistress was expecting of you.'

'I know Little Missy is.'

'Miss Elstree is within too, she receives with her mother.'

Then, General, I guess I'll just cavort in and pay my respects.'

The man motioned him in, and he was handed over to another footman, who took his hat and said:

'What neem, sir?'

'Guess, Colonel, you have me there!'

What neem shall I enounce?'

'My name? Oh, I tumble! Jest you say Grizzly Dick of Shasta!' The man called up the staircase to another footman half way up:

'Mis-tar Greezly Dick of Shost-ar!' The second man called on to another, at the door of the drawing-room:

'Mr Greazy Dick of Shostar!' And the latter shouted the name into the room, in a Hibernian accent:

'Misther Crazy Dick Shostoo!' Dick was for an instant amazed by the wilderness of strange faces, the myriad lights, the hum and movement of the scene; and as for Mrs Elstree and Esse, they were for a moment ignorant of the personality of their visitor. The Dick who now stood blinking in the doorway, and awkwardly shuffling his feet, had little resemblance, except in stature, to the Dick whom they had known on Shasta.

When the time for his visit to San Francisco was ripe, Dick had come as far as Sacramento, and had then prepared himself for what he considered a fashionable visit. This he did by getting himself up as like as he could to the more aristocratic-looking of the Two Macs, as that individual had dwelt in his memory, combined with the most stylish of gamblers and barmen, from living examples. His general effect was enhanced by the failure of the goods exhibited in the various tailors' shops, and 'misfit parlors' to adapt themselves to the great bulk and free, sinuous carriage of the hunter. Dick had thus arrayed himself in a blue claw-hammer coat with brass buttons, a low-cut waistcoat of mighty pattern, in plaid of many colours, in which primary shades of scarlet, yellow, and blue, predominated, a light pair of yellow cord trousers, of preternatural tightness, and enormous patent leather pumps, which were all too small to be easy on feet accustomed to mocassins. His shirt was what far-western salesmen call ‘dressy,’ and exhibited on its bosom many rows of fancy pleating with, between them, masses of herring-bone handwork, such as the rustic maiden is wont to exhibit on her Sunday petticoat. A red tie with big bows and fringed ends, and some massive gold studs of fancy pattern, to match the watch chain, which lay across his diaphragm like a hawser, completed his toilet. But Dick, not feeling complete, even in this subjugatory attire, had been to the barber’s and undergone a process of curling, oiling, and scenting, which alone would have isolated him in any high-bred society throughout the world. Add to these disadvantages a manner composed of equal parts of unchastened ease of gait and shy awkwardness, and it is little wonder that the ladies did not at once recognise their old friend the free-gaited, bold, natural child of the mountains. Esse was the first to recognise him, and stepping forward, held out both her hands with eager welcome, utterly forgetting, in the surprise of seeing him, her previous anxiety as to his possible coming. At the moment, however, Dick had recognised Mrs Elstree and had stepped forward and taken her by the hand, and was beginning to work the pump-handle shake, which she already knew, and dreaded. This peculiar shake of Dick’s was a work of time, and Mrs Elstree knew that the best way to get over it was to submit quietly; she was not sorry also, to have a moment in which to collect her thoughts, for it flashed on her that so strange an appearance, and so unexpected a coming, must have some special cause. She had a half fear that there was some trouble in store for Esse, or with her;

and as she knew that the eyes of all fashionable San Francisco were on her, she felt that it behoved her to be cautious. She instantly determined on a course of action - heartiness. Dick was an unconventional person, and when the guests knew and realised who and what he was, the manifest surprise and amazement with which they were already regarding him would cease. He had saved Esse's life, and she had saved his, and under very strange and unusual circumstances. This alone would justify his appearance, and any reception that might be accorded to him. So she said effusively:

'Why, Mr Grizzly Dick, this is a treat! I am delighted to see you in San Francisco! Do you make a long stay?'

In the meantime Esse stood with outstretched hands, for she did not like to draw them back, lest Dick should think she was offended, and so waited. Before Dick could reply to her mother he saw them, and answering: 'Thank ye, marm!' turned to Esse and said:

Wall, Little Missy, if this ain't jest the all-firedest, highest old time as ever was. My! but ye look purty; like a ripe apple ready to be bit. An' do ye remember the b'ar, and the way yer frock was tore all away? Durn me if the old-man grizzly was here himself now, he wouldn't have the heart to lay a claw on ye!' As he spoke he had taken her hand, and was subjecting her in turn to the pump-handle ordeal. Esse answered with what heartiness she could muster, for there was a look in Dick's eye, a sort of assuring her, which was quite new to her, and which made her anxious as to what might happen. She would have given worlds that her mother knew the exact state of affairs, for she could and would have helped her at any cost; but her mother did not know, and she must now trust to Providence and the chapter of accidents. In the meantime, other guests were arriving, and they both had to receive them. Mrs Elstree saw so much of the difficulty as that Dick would become a nuisance if he did not pass on with the rest, so she said sweetly:

Won't you take a seat for a few minutes, Mr Dick? Esse and I have to stand here a little while to receive our guests; but we shall come to you very soon.' Dick laughed his boisterous laugh - how Esse felt at the moment that she disliked it - which more than ever attracted all eyes to him, and with a rough bow and a 'Count on me, marm, every time!' withdrew to the other end of the room. Feeling thoroughly awkward in such a novel situation, he began to make up for his want of savoir faire by brazen impudence, this being his idea of easy deportment.

At this time, Peter Blyth arrived at the house, and went upstairs to his room to dress himself for the evening.

CHAPTER 9

It was some little time before either Mrs Elstree or Esse could get an opportunity of rejoining Dick. The news of Esse's engagement had got about, and all her friends made a point of coming round to offer good wishes. The stream seemed to Esse as if it would never end, for with each moment her anxiety grew. Those who have not experienced it cannot understand the rapidity with which a desire for a few moments' thought grows, until it becomes a sort of agony. Esse was in a way chained to the social stake. She had to stay by her mother, to smile, and give her whole thoughts to what was going on around her. She would have given anything to have had time to warn her mother, or Reginald, to take care of Dick, and find out his purpose; for all the time unconscious cerebration was working, and she was rapidly coming to the conclusion that Peter Blyth's message had gone, and that Dick's presence was an answer to it. Reginald saw with the eyes of love her anxiety, but could do nothing to allay it; he, too, was chained to the stake by the exceptional circumstances of his social duty. Presently they heard a loud laugh in the room behind them, followed by a titter of feminine voices, and a louder laugh from men. Esse felt her ears burning. Her mother shot a quick glance at her and said sotto voce:

'Never mind, dear, we shall be able to attend to him in a few moments; I see the stream is slackening.' A few minutes more and the last of the guests, except stragglers, had arrived, and they were free to move about. Esse went off to look for Dick, for she felt that he was safest with her, and that she was safest too, for she did not know what he might not do or say in his strange surroundings. She found him in the midst of a group of the smartest young people in San

Francisco society. Poor Dick in his ignorance thought he was getting on capitally, for in the society in which he had hitherto mixed the person who caused the loudest laughter was most esteemed of the company. He had with his native taste and daring selected out the prettiest girl in the room, one who though ostensibly one of Esse's 'dearest friends' yet bore her no good will since it had been apparent to her that Reginald Hampden, upon whom she had set her heart, was in love with her friend. The recent knowledge of their engagement was gall and wormwood to her, and she was delighted to have an opportunity of making Esse feel uncomfortable. Dick had opened his conversation with a piece of complimentary pleasantry such as he would have used to a barmaid in a dancing saloon, nothing coarse, nothing unpleasant, but altogether familiar and out of place in a conventional assembly. The young lady was not offended, a girl very seldom is at being singled out for compliment by a fine-looking man, be he never so rude in his style; but she saw her opportunity, and led him on. She had seen the familiarity of Esse's greeting, and, though she did not comprehend the whole situation, saw that there was fun for her and others, and some sort of humiliation for her friend. So she at once began to ask Dick questions, and to encourage him to laugh and make remarks. Some of her smart set came round, and a game of refined bantering began, the victim being unconscious of his ridiculous position, and of the ridicule showered upon him. That was the fun of the game - Dick was not the build of person that a man would ostensibly make game of, unless he wanted a fight. She asked him all about Esse, and supposed all manner of things as to their friendship; and in fine brought Dick to the point of bragging, not of his own prowess, but of hers. This involved an appearance of familiarity with Esse, and as he went on she gently insinuated that they must be great friends: at last she daringly said:

'If I was a man, and a girl saved my life, I would ask her to marry me. I think it would be the least I could do!'

'Now, do ye really think so, miss? Wall, I do admire! Do tell, now, how ye'd set about it?' Poor Dick had quite fallen into the trap through his very simplicity, and the honesty of his purpose in coming to the city. His tormentor, gathering courage from the winks and smiles of her male admirers round her, said:

'In the most open way I could! I'd ask her before all her friends, so that there might be no mistake. If I wanted to honour her by the offer of my hand and heart there should not be any slouch about it!'

'Shake!' said Dick, extending his mighty hand, and half a moment later his new friend, with a rueful smile, raised a crumpled hand, and looked at the blood, where her rings had cut into her crushed fingers, which was beginning to show through the rent in her glove.

'Oh, I say,' said one of her admirers, 'has the clumsy brute hurt you?'

'Miss,' said Dick, 'I humbly beg yer pardon! I never thought of how tender ye women critters is. I should have known better.' Then he turned to the last speaker and said:

'Look here, Jedge, I wouldn't be so free with them cuss words o' yourn. Ef ye fling them about so promiscuous, some one is apt to be hurt. They're worse'n chunks of rock, anyway!' The man addressed ran his eye up him from his boots to his oily hair but said nothing.

At this moment Esse came forward, and Dick, seeing her, and with her a way out of the embarrassment due to his clumsy strength, stepped towards her, and delivered himself of a little speech which he had rehearsed to himself an innumerable number of times on his journey from Shasta. He had submitted it to his casual friends the bar-keeper and the barber at Sacramento, and armed with their approval, and fortified by the expression of Esse's young lady friend, whom he took to typify fashionable society, and who had used almost his words, he had no hesitation now in speaking. Dick was in no wise a coward; he could face an awkward situation, and, like many another man, he had only to begin to find all his difficulty removed. Esse stood amazed when he began his speech, and for a moment looked helplessly round her; but then, catching Reginald's eye as he stood on the outskirts of the little throng, braced herself to the situation, and smoothed her face to a grave smile by mere force of education and habit.

'Little Missy! An honest man's love is all that he can give the proudest lady! I am only a simple man, but I have come from the snows of Shasta to do ye the only honour in my power. I am glad to do it before your honoured friends and your family circle. Will you honour me by becoming my wife and giving me your heart and hand?' Having spoken, he looked calmly around him, as one does who has done a meritorious action, and done it well. Esse felt the blood rushing up to her head, and burning her cheeks and ears, as she heard the titter of laughter around her. Dick heard it too, and faced round with a quick flush.

It was just at this moment that Peter Blyth came into the room, standing just inside the doorway. He saw instantly that something was afoot, and said to the servant at the door:

*Who is that, Stephens? that gentleman with the shiny hair, with his back towards us?'

That, sir? I think his name is Mr Measly Shostoo, or words to that effek!'

'Mr how much?'

'Measly Shostoo, sir. I didn't hear him pernounce it hisself, for I was a-taking of the 'ats in the 'all, but only on the transgression.' Just then, Dick turned, and Peter saw him, and instantly recognised the situation. He hurried in, but too late to be of any immediate service, and stood by, ready.

Esse did not know exactly what she should do, but instinctively she put her hand up, and said with a smile:

'Oh, Dick, Dick! not before all these people! They'll think you are making game of me.' One of the smart young men here said:

'Making game of her! He is a hunter! Good!' Dick turned on him like lightning:

'Dry up there, mister! I don't make game of no female of her sex; and I don't allow no man to say I do, see? Look ye here, Little Missy, this is honest Injin, a right square game; and, durn me, but I mean it down to my boots. This ain't no ten-cent ante, no bluff on a pair, but a dead sure thing - a straight flush, ace high!' Instantly there was a chorus of ironical remarks from the men all round:

'I straddle the blind!'

'Raise him out of his boots, pard!'

'I go you two chips better!'

'Make it a Jack-pot!'

Dick looked around again scornfully, but as he did so he caught Esse's eye, and seemed to recognise the story which it told; the ripple of laughter around, however, filled up the blanks, where there were any to fill. Dick felt that he was fooled. He was, as may have been seen already, a vain man, all the more vain because of the consciousness of its own strength. Hitherto in his life he had only been tested in ways that brought out his natural force and left it triumphant; and the habit of his life was behind him to resent an affront. He glared at the ring of faces around him, and this time his look meant mischief to all who knew danger signals in a man’s face. Controlling himself with an effort, he said to Esse:

‘Little Missy, ye ain’t a-foolin’ me, air ye?’

‘Oh, no, Dick; no, no!’

‘Then I wish I had that laughin’ jackass that kem all the way up on Shasta to fool me - to fool me in face of all these Here he looked around again, and, as he did so, whipped from the collar of his coat his great bowie knife and, pressing the spring, threw it open with a dexterous jerk. No woman screamed; it takes more than a generation of ignorance of such matters to make women fear cold steel. But there was more than one woman present who in earlier days had seen just such quiet anger flame out and end in murder, and with one accord they drew back and left the men in front. Dick, seeing only men’s faces, finished his scornful sentence: These - these swine! There he is, the laughin’ jackass hisself!’ he said, seeing Peter Blyth’s face in the ring, where the withdrawal of the womenkind had left him in the front.

With a sudden spring he caught him by the throat with his powerful left hand, and held him as in a vice. Esse was paralyzed, and could make neither sound nor stir, and Peter Blyth found himself, for the first time in his life, face to face with sudden death. The rest of the men round feared to stir, not for themselves, for there was not one of them, being Californians, who would not cheerfully have made the battle his own; but they were all unarmed, and they feared that in his present infuriated condition Dick might do a brutal violence before he could be restrained. As for Peter his manhood stood to him. He did not flinch, but with cool, calm courage faced the situation. On one side was Dick, more dangerous than any wild animal, and ready to do anything, as he thundered out:

‘Now, ye dog, tell me what ye meant by foolin’ me and shamin’ me this way; and beg my pardon, or by the Almighty I’ll corpse ye - whar ye stand!’ On the other side was Esse’s quivering face, all fright; but fright of many kinds, for Peter, and for the shame of the open exposure of her secret which she saw coming. Peter Blyth did not himself quite know how matters stood: he had not yet heard of Esse’s engagement to Reginald. All he knew was that Dick was there in such a rage that it might mean death and disaster and life-long sorrow to those he loved. The comedy had all at once and, with a vengeance, become a tragedy. So he was silent, and Dick, who was all man, even in his blood-madness, recognised the courage in him, and with an imperious gesture threw him off, saying:

‘I suppose ye ain’t no worse nor the rest. I’ve seen the day when I cleared out the Holy Moses saloon in Portland for less than this. Answer me some of ye! what does it all mean?’ It was a terrible situation, and in all that roomful of people, now as still as death, there was not one whose heart did not beat quickly, or seem to stand still at the thought of the potent, reckless, fatal force which seemed to have been let loose amongst them. In the midst of the silence Reginald Hampden stepped out, and Esse felt glad, and a new sense of relief, as she noticed his calm and gallant bearing. He moved towards Dick, and said with courtly sweetness:

‘I hope I may speak here, since it is my privilege to speak for Miss Elstree! Look, sir! Look; the young lady! You are distressing her! I know you to be a brave man, and, from all I have heard her say to your honour, I am quite sure you would not willingly cause her harm or humiliate her. See, sir! you are crushing her to the dust!’ as he spoke he went to Esse and stood beside her.

A quick flush seemed to leap up Dick's face from neck to forehead; his hand dropped, and with a sound in his throat between a sob and a gasp, he said:

'Little Missy, forgive me if ye can! I must have gone mad! This galoot here was pretty right when he called me a brute. Let me get back to the b'ars an' the Injuns. I'm more to home with them than I am here. Be easy, Little Missy, an' ye too, all ye ladies and gentlemen; it'll be no pleasant thinkin' for me up yonder, away among the mountings, that when I kem down to 'Frisco, meanin' to do honour to a young lady that I'd give the best drop of my blood for - and she knows it - I couldn't keep my blasted hands off my weppins in the midst of a crowd of women! Durn the thing! I ain't fit to go heeled inter decent kempany! As he spoke he lifted his arm, and with a mighty downward sweep hurled down his bowie knife, so that it stuck inches deep into the oaken floor, where it quivered. Once more he turned to Esse:

'Forgive me, Little Missy; an' if ye kin forgit me, an' the shame I've brought upon ye and yer house!' He bowed and was moving away, when again Reginald, to whom Esse had whispered, strode forward.

'No, sir! You must not go like that. There is a mistake here which must be set right! You will understand me when I tell you that Miss Elstree has done me the honour to consent to be my wife. You have been put in a false position. It is quite true that Esse wished to see you; that she asked her friend, Mr Blyth, to carry such a message to you. Believe me, that she does understand and appreciate the honour that you have done her, though, I must say, in some justification of these other ladies and gentlemen, in so unconventional a manner. But you must not leave the house in such a way! Believe me, you are, and ever shall be, an honoured guest in a house to which you have saved so dear a life!' And he put his arm round Esse who had got suddenly pale and seemed about to faint.

'One of you boys,' he said, 'pick up Dick's knife and give it to him. I can't move yet!' One of the young men took the handle and tugged at it, but in vain. There was a laugh; another tried it, but with the same effect. A smile stole over the pale anger of Dick's face; he was beginning to yield to the humour of the situation, and he stood silent where he was. Mrs Elstree came forward, she had only just come into the room, having been in the music-room, and did not understand what was going on, but seeing Esse's head drooping had flown to her side. Reginald, finding her mother's arms round her, left her side and striding forward, seized the handle of the bowie knife. With a sharp jerk, and with a force which made his arm tingle from wrist to shoulder, and sent the blood up into his head, he plucked it from the floor amid a buzz of approval, and a responsive 'Good!' from Dick as he slapped his thigh in his old fashion. He stepped over to Dick, shutting the knife with an experienced jerk, and held it out him: 'Your weapon, sir!' he said, 'but I should be very proud if you will let me keep it, in memory of a brave man to whom I and others owe so much!'

Take it,' said Dick, 'an' welkim! The poor thing'll never, I am sure, be disgraced by ye as it was to-night by me. Shake! Ye're a man, ye are; and I wish you and Little Missy all the happiness in the world!'

The two men shook hands and Reginald went on:

'You'll let me give you this in exchange, I hope.' He drew from his pocket, and detached from its gold chain, a beautiful hunting knife. 'It is not merely that it is mine, but it was given me by an emperor, who was good enough to say I had done him some service when a wild boar charged him in a Thuringian forest.’ Dick took the knife:

‘I’ll take it and keep it, pard, because on my soul I believe it will pleasure ye if I wear it! An’ now, good night, an’ I humbly ask all yer pardon for my conduct! Forget it and me if ye can!’ and he moved to the door.

Here Mrs Elstree spoke out; Esse had been whispering to her during the foregoing:

‘No, no, Mr Grizdy Dick, you must not go! There is no one who can come into my house that I could be more glad to see. You must stay and show us all that you forgive us that we have amongst us made you, for a time, uncomfortable!’ He paused, and Esse stepped up to him, her eyes this time full of tears, and said:

‘Yes, Dick, do stay; if only to show me that you forgive me! And that you are not unhappy for what has passed. Dick - D - D - Dick, sh - sh - shake!’ her tears fell as he clasped her two hands and whispered to her:

‘Lord love ye, Little Missy, I ain’t a-goin’ to be unhappy. Why, I only kem down from the mounting because I heerd tell that it was like ye wanted me. I didn’t believe it myself, an’ I feared it would be a mistake if ye did. But that wasn’t my affair, but yourn; an’ whatever ye’d do would be right enough for me. An’ as to forgivin’! - Wall of course I’ll stay if ye wish it. I think I’ve made this jamboree pretty dismal enough already, without refusin’ to do anything I kin do to help make it lively again.’ Another voice now joined in, that of the young lady who had commenced the trouble.

‘Yes, stay! Do stay, Mr Grizdy Dick, and presently you must dance with me, if only to show me that you forgive my bad manners and my unkindness of heart. And if you do tread on my toes, I guess we'll be about even!'

'Done with ye, miss; but I'm afeerd this here rig out of mine ain't jest exactly the thing for a fash'nable party. So ye'll hev to excuse me.'

'Never mind, Dick,' said Reginald heartily; 'we are all friends of yours here! If there are any who are not so, then they are no friend of our hostess or of me either; and I'll stand back to back, if you'll let me, when we slice up the last of them!' Dick smiled a good ten-inch smile, and just then catching sight of Peter Blyth's face he slapped his thigh and burst out into a peal of laughter. Going over to him he held out his hand saying:

'Ye'll forgive me, pard, won't ye; though I mighty near skelped ye? Ye took it well though! Durned, but ye took it standin' with yer boots on! I only hope I'll take it as well when my time comes; fur ye had a close call that time - closer'n ever ye'll hev it again. Shake!' the two men shook hands, and Peter Blyth, within his mind's eye the recollection of their first meeting, roared with laughing too. Then Reginald came and slapped him on the shoulder and said:

'Come with me, Dick. I've got something that will make you feel more comfortable than this Sacramento rig out!' Then he straightway took him off to his own room.

Some fifteen minutes afterwards there was a buzz of admiration through the room when Dick entered, clad in a hunter's outfit, something like his own, which Reginald had some time before bought from the Indians as a model for his work.

There was about him something so fresh, and wild, and free - so noble a simplicity and manhood, that more than one woman present did not wonder that Esse had asked him to come down to 'Frisco.

THE END

Dracula

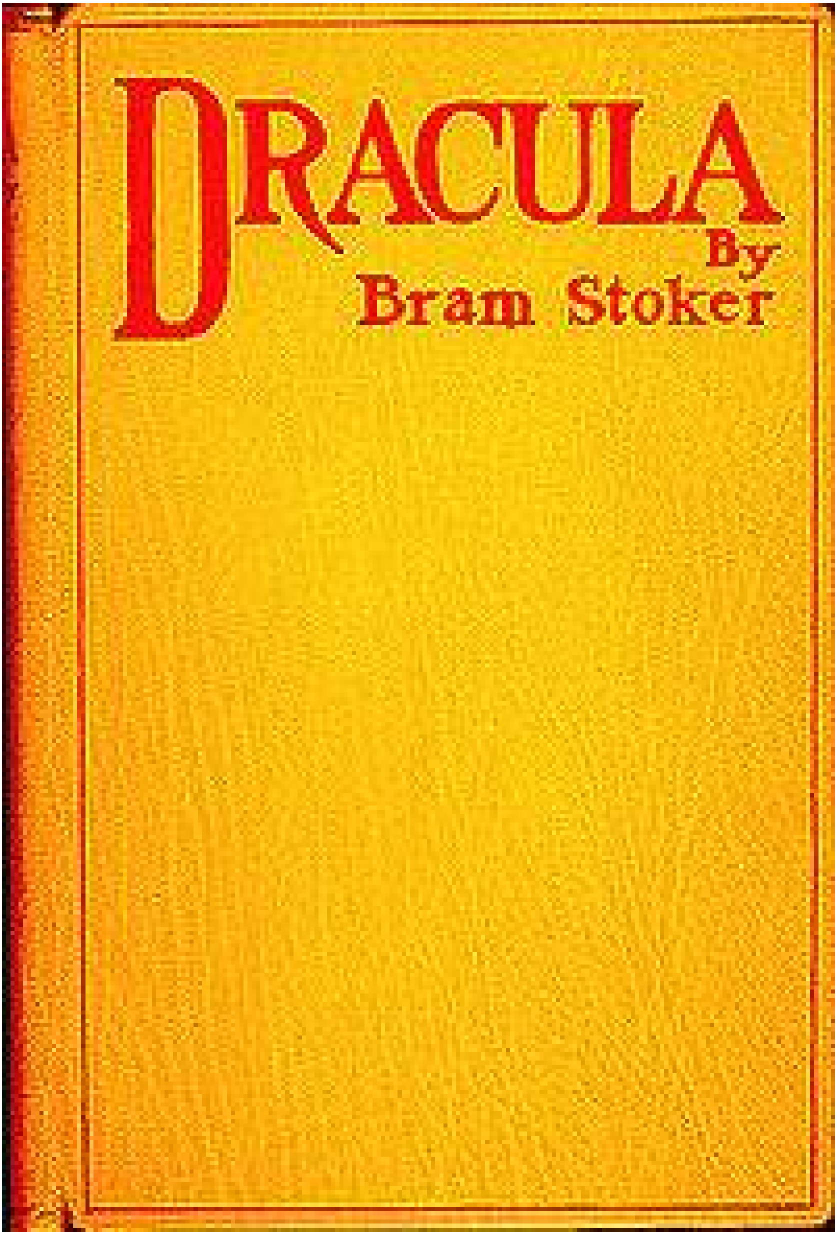
First published in 1897, *Dracula* is now one of the most famous novels of nineteenth century literature. Literary critics have identified many themes in the novel, such as the role of women in Victorian society, conventional and conservative sexuality, immigration, colonialism, post colonialism and folklore. Although Stoker did not invent the concept of the vampire, the novel has influenced the many theatrical, film and television portrayals ever since.

Dracula tells the story of Jonathan Harker, a London bank clerk, sent to Transylvania to oversee the business of the mysterious Count. The story is told in epistolary format, as a series of letters, diary entries, and ships' log entries, whose narrators are the novel's protagonists, and occasionally supplemented with newspaper clippings relating events not directly witnessed. The events portrayed in the novel take place largely in England and Transylvania during 1893.

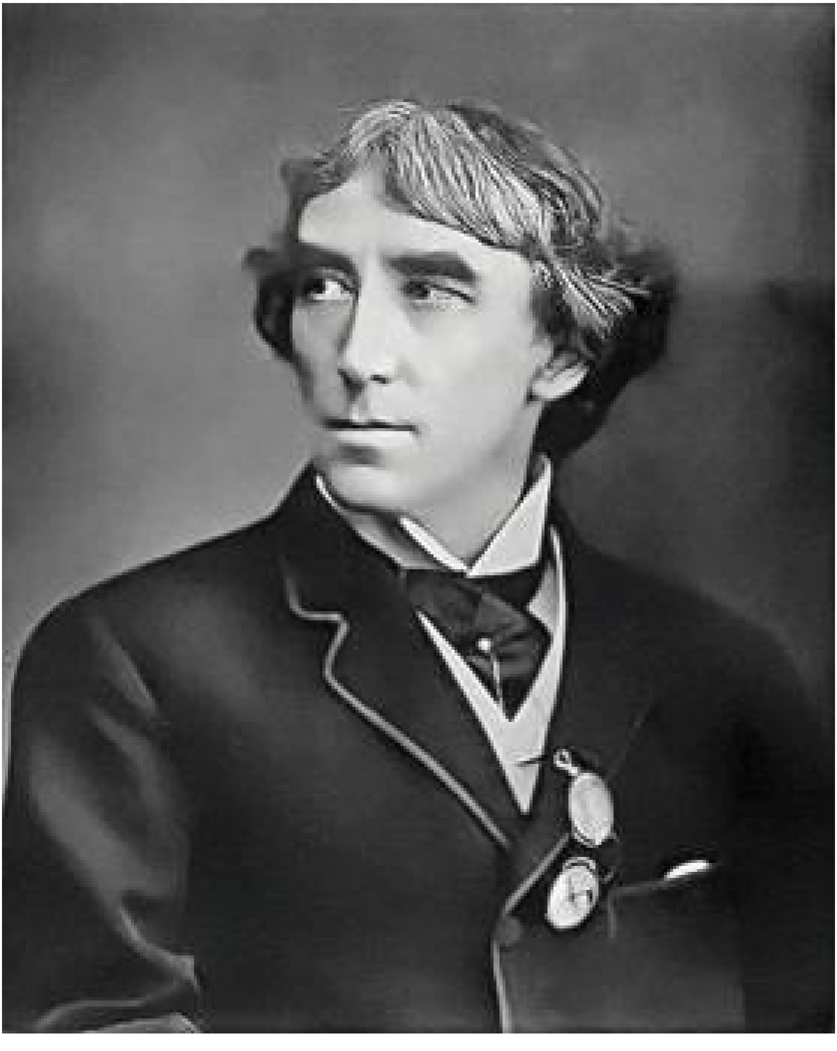
At first enticed by Dracula's gracious manners, Harker soon realises that he is in fact Dracula's prisoner. Wandering the Count's castle against Dracula's warning, Harker encounters three female vampires, from whom he is eventually rescued by the Count. After preparations are made, Dracula leaves Transylvania and abandons Harker to the sisters. The solicitor barely escapes from the castle with his life.

Shortly after this, a Russian ship, the Demeter, having weighed anchor at Varna, runs aground on the shores of Whitby. The captain's log narrates the gradual disappearance of the entire crew, until the captain alone remained, himself bound to the helm to maintain course. An animal resembling “a large dog” is seen leaping ashore. The ship’s cargo is described as silver sand and boxes of “mould”, or earth, from Transylvania.

When first published, *Dracula* was not an immediate bestseller, although reviewers were vigorous in their praise. *The Daily Mail* ranked Stoker’s powers above those of Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe, as well as Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*.

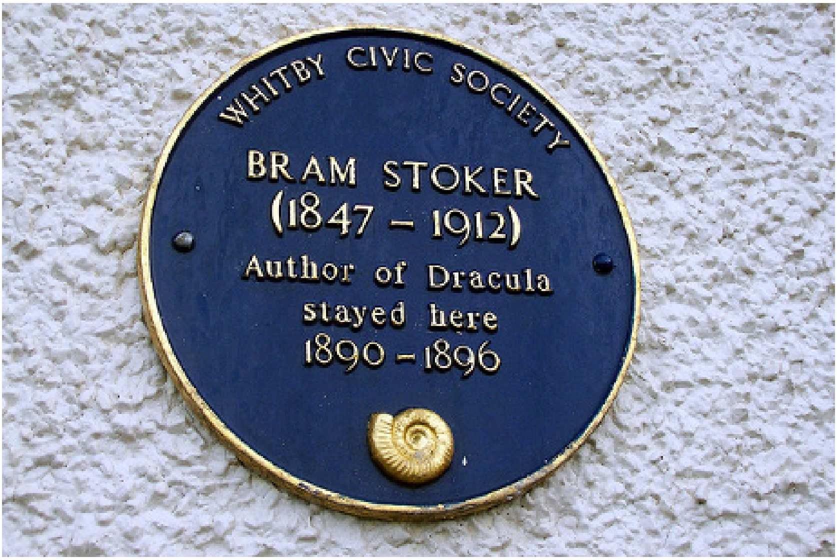

DRACULA
By
Bram Stoker

The first edition



Sir Henry Irving (1838–1905), a famous English stage actor in the Victorian era, who was the first actor to be awarded a knighthood. Stoker was Irving's personal assistant, as well as the manager of the Lyceum theatre. Irving is thought to have been the inspiration for the character Dracula.

No 6 Royal Crescent, where Stoker first stayed in Whitby in 1890. Stoker later used the coastal town as the setting for many of the chapters in ‘Dracula’


WHITBY CIVIC SOCIETY
BRAM STOKER
(1847 – 1912)
Author of Dracula
stayed here
1890 – 1896

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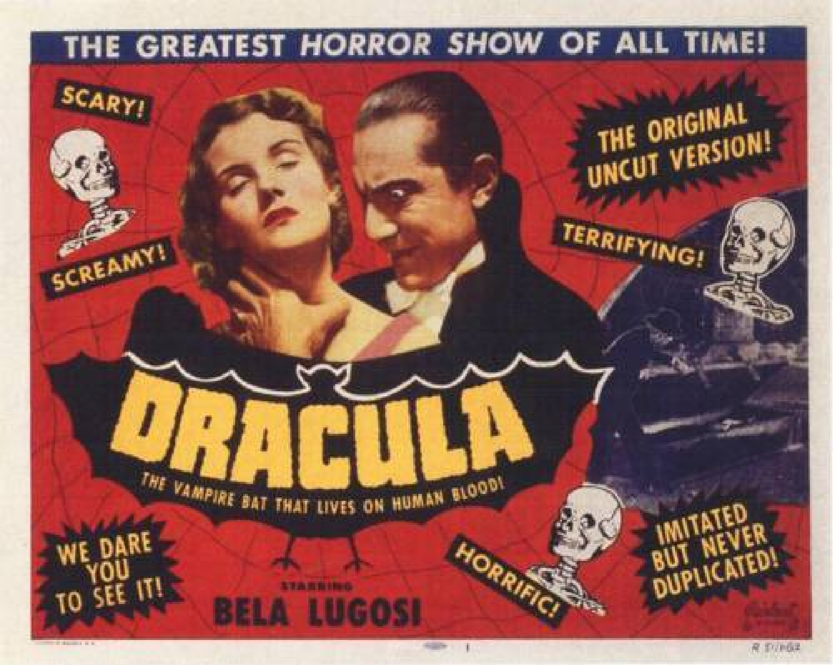
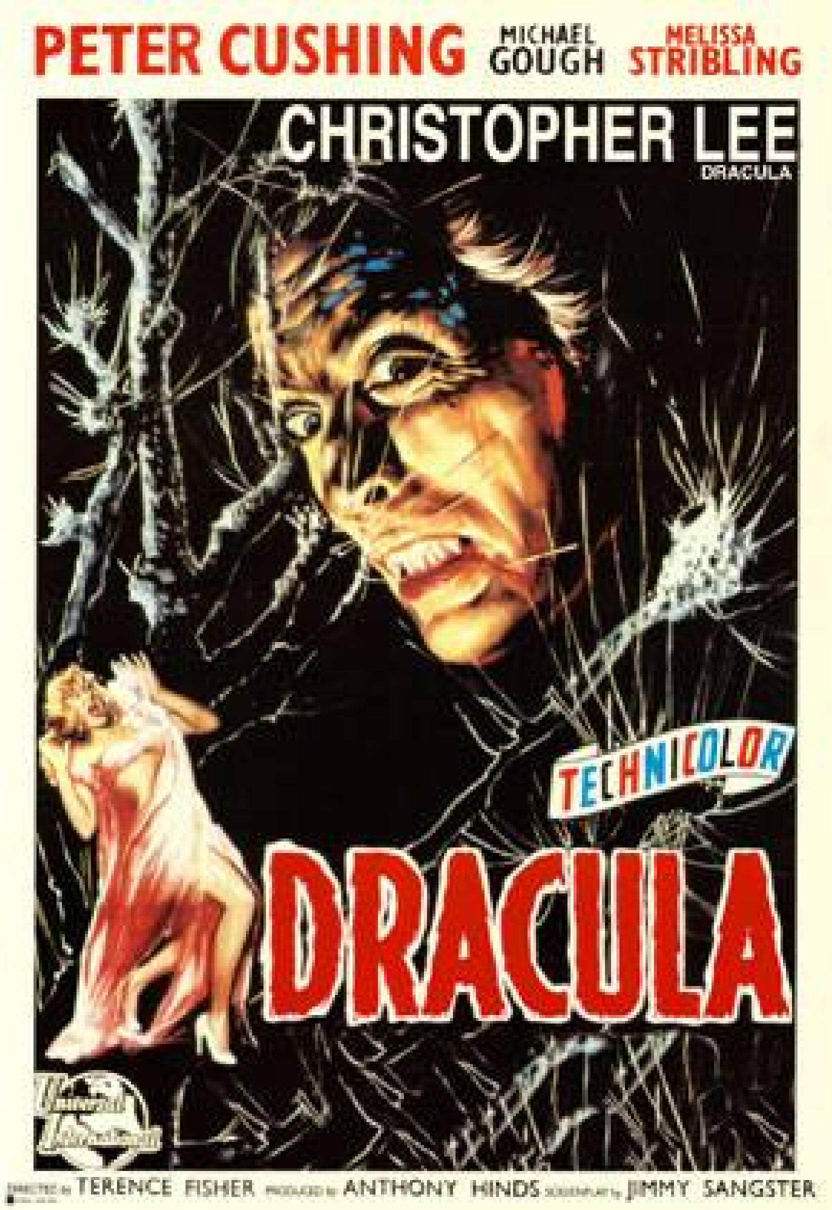
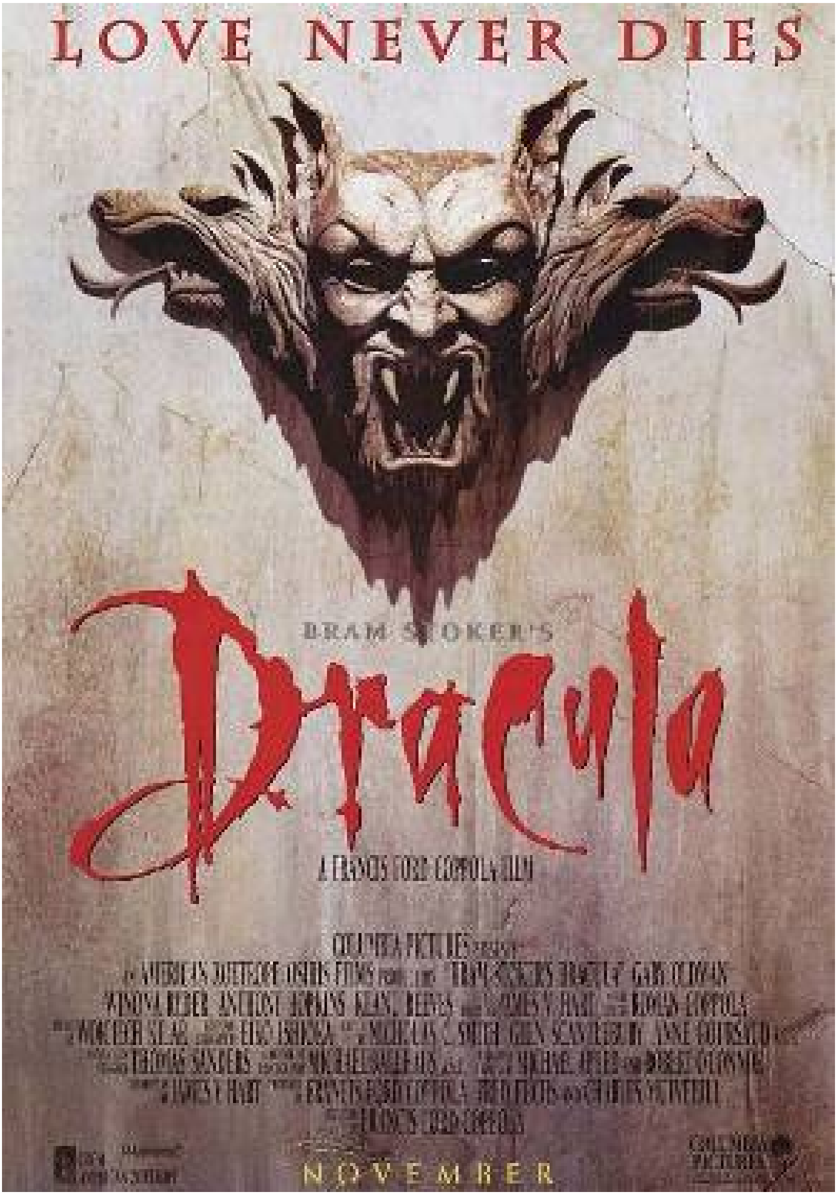

THE GREATEST HORROR SHOW OF ALL TIME!
SCARY!
SCREAMY!
THE ORIGINAL UNCUT VERSION!
TERRIFYING!
DRACULA
THE VAMPIRE BAT THAT LIVES ON HUMAN BLOOD!
WE DARE YOU TO SEE IT!
STARRING
BELA LUGOSI
HORRIFIC!
IMITATED BUT NEVER DUPLICATED!

The first film adaptation, 1931


PETER CUSHING
MICHAEL GOUGH
MELISSA STRIBLING
CHRISTOPHER LEE
DRACULA
TECHNICOLOR
DRACULA
TERENCE FISHER
ANTHONY HINDS
JIMMY SANGSTER

The 1958 film version


LOVE NEVER DIES
BRAM STOKER'S
Dracula
A FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA FILM
NOVEMBER

The 1992 film version, which particularly romanticises Dracula's character

CHAPTER 1

Jonathan Harker's Journal

(*Kept in shorthand*)

3 May. Bistritz. — Left Munich at 8:35 P.M., on 1st May, arriving at Vienna early next morning; should have arrived at 6:46, but train was an hour late. Buda-Pesth seems a wonderful place, from the glimpse which I got of it from the train and the little I could walk through the streets. I feared to go very far from the station, as we had arrived late and would start as near the correct time as possible.

The impression I had was that we were leaving the West and entering the East; the most western of splendid bridges over the Danube, which is here of noble width and depth, took us among the traditions of Turkish rule.

We left in pretty good time, and came after nightfall to Klausenburgh. Here I stopped for the night at the Hotel Royale. I had for dinner, or rather supper, a chicken done up some way with red pepper, which was very good but thirsty. (Mem. get recipe for Mina.) I asked the waiter, and he said it was called "paprika hendl," and that, as it was a national dish, I should be able to get it anywhere along the Carpathians.

I found my smattering of German very useful here, indeed, I don't know how I should be able to get on without it.

Having had some time at my disposal when in London, I had visited the British Museum, and made search among the books and maps in the library regarding Transylvania; it had struck me that some foreknowledge of the country could hardly fail to have some importance in dealing with a nobleman of that country.

I find that the district he named is in the extreme east of the country, just on the borders of three states, Transylvania, Moldavia, and Bukovina, in the midst of the Carpathian mountains; one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe.

I was not able to light on any map or work giving the exact locality of the Castle Dracula, as there are no maps of this country as yet to compare with our own Ordnance Survey Maps; but I found that Bistritz, the post town named by Count Dracula, is a fairly well-known place. I shall enter here some of my notes, as they may refresh my memory when I talk over my travels with Mina.

In the population of Transylvania there are four distinct nationalities: Saxons in the South, and mixed with them the Wallachs, who are the descendants of the Dacians; Magyars in the West, and Szekelys in the East and North. I am going among the latter, who claim to be descended from Attila and the Huns. This may be so, for when the Magyars conquered the country in the eleventh century they found the Huns settled in it.

I read that every known superstition in the world is gathered into the horseshoe of the Carpathians, as if it were the centre of some sort of imaginative whirlpool; if so my stay may be very interesting. (Mem., I must ask the Count all about them.)

I did not sleep well, though my bed was comfortable enough, for I had all sorts of queer dreams. There was a dog howling all night under my window, which may have had something to do with it; or it may have been the paprika, for I had to drink up all the water in my carafe, and was still thirsty. Towards morning I slept and was wakened by the continuous knocking at my door, so I guess I must have been sleeping soundly then.

I had for breakfast more paprika, and a sort of porridge of maize flour which they said was “mamaliga”, and egg-plant stuffed with forcemeat, a very excellent dish, which they call “impletata”. (Mem., get recipe for this also.)

I had to hurry breakfast, for the train started a little before eight, or rather it ought to have done so, for after rushing to the station at 7:30 I had to sit in the carriage for more than an hour before we began to move.

It seems to me that the further east you go the more unpunctual are the trains. What ought they to be in China?

All day long we seemed to dawdle through a country which was full of beauty of every kind. Sometimes we saw little towns or castles on the top of steep hills such as we see in old missals; sometimes we ran by rivers and streams which seemed from the wide stony margin on each side of them to be subject to great floods. It takes a lot of water, and running strong, to sweep the outside edge of a river clear.

At every station there were groups of people, sometimes crowds, and in all sorts of attire. Some of them were just like the peasants at home or those I saw coming through France and Germany, with short jackets, and round hats, and home-made trousers; but others were very picturesque.

The women looked pretty, except when you got near them, but they were very clumsy about the waist. They had all full white sleeves of some kind or other, and most of them had big belts with a lot of strips of something fluttering from them like the dresses in a ballet, but of course there were petticoats under them.

The strangest figures we saw were the Slovaks, who were more barbarian than the rest, with their big cow-boy hats, great baggy dirty-white trousers, white linen shirts, and enormous heavy leather belts, nearly a foot wide, all studded over with brass nails. They wore high boots, with their trousers tucked into them, and had long black hair and heavy black moustaches. They are very picturesque, but do not look prepossessing. On the stage they would be set down at once as some old Oriental band of brigands. They are, however, I am told, very harmless and rather wanting in natural self-assertion.

It was on the dark side of twilight when we got to Bistritz, which is a very interesting old place. Being practically on the frontier — for the Borgo Pass leads from it into Bukovina — it has had a very stormy existence, and it certainly shows marks of it. Fifty years ago a series of great fires took place, which made terrible havoc on five separate occasions. At the very beginning of the seventeenth century it underwent a siege of three weeks and lost 13,000 people, the casualties of war proper being assisted by famine and disease.

Count Dracula had directed me to go to the Golden Krone Hotel, which I found, to my great delight, to be thoroughly old-fashioned, for of course I wanted to see all I could of the ways of the country.

I was evidently expected, for when I got near the door I faced a cheery-looking elderly woman in the usual peasant dress — white undergarment with a long double apron, front, and back, of coloured stuff fitting almost too tight for modesty. When I came close she bowed and said, “The Herr Englishman?”

“Yes,” I said, “Jonathan Harker.”

She smiled, and gave some message to an elderly man in white shirtsleeves, who had followed her to the door.

He went, but immediately returned with a letter:

“My friend. — Welcome to the Carpathians. I am anxiously expecting you. Sleep well tonight. At three tomorrow the diligence will start for Bukovina; a place on it is kept for you. At the Borgo Pass my carriage will await you and will bring you to me. I trust that your journey from London has been a happy one, and that you will enjoy your stay in my beautiful land. — Your friend, Dracula."

4 May — I found that my landlord had got a letter from the Count, directing him to secure the best place on the coach for me; but on making inquiries as to details he seemed somewhat reticent, and pretended that he could not understand my German.

This could not be true, because up to then he had understood it perfectly; at least, he answered my questions exactly as if he did.

He and his wife, the old lady who had received me, looked at each other in a frightened sort of way. He mumbled out that the money had been sent in a letter, and that was all he knew. When I asked him if he knew Count Dracula, and could tell me anything of his castle, both he and his wife crossed themselves, and, saying that they knew nothing at all, simply refused to speak further. It was so near the time of starting that I had no time to ask anyone else, for it was all very mysterious and not by any means comforting.

Just before I was leaving, the old lady came up to my room and said in a hysterical way: "Must you go? Oh! Young Herr, must you go?" She was in such an excited state that she seemed to have lost her grip of what German she knew, and mixed it all up with some other language which I did not know at all. I was just able to follow her by asking many questions. When I told her that I must go at once, and that I was engaged on important business, she asked again:

"Do you know what day it is?" I answered that it was the fourth of May. She shook her head as she said again:

"Oh, yes! I know that! I know that, but do you know what day it is?”

On my saying that I did not understand, she went on:

“It is the eve of St. George’s Day. Do you not know that tonight, when the clock strikes midnight, all the evil things in the world will have full sway? Do you know where you are going, and what you are going to?” She was in such evident distress that I tried to comfort her, but without effect. Finally, she went down on her knees and implored me not to go; at least to wait a day or two before starting.

It was all very ridiculous but I did not feel comfortable. However, there was business to be done, and I could allow nothing to interfere with it.

I tried to raise her up, and said, as gravely as I could, that I thanked her, but my duty was imperative, and that I must go.

She then rose and dried her eyes, and taking a crucifix from her neck offered it to me.

I did not know what to do, for, as an English Churchman, I have been taught to regard such things as in some measure idolatrous, and yet it seemed so ungracious to refuse an old lady meaning so well and in such a state of mind.

She saw, I suppose, the doubt in my face, for she put the rosary round my neck and said, “For your mother’s sake,” and went out of the room.

I am writing up this part of the diary whilst I am waiting for the coach, which is, of course, late; and the crucifix is still round my neck.

Whether it is the old lady’s fear, or the many ghostly traditions of this place, or the crucifix itself, I do not know, but I am not feeling nearly as easy in my mind as usual.

If this book should ever reach Mina before I do, let it bring my goodbye. Here comes the coach!

5 May. The Castle. — The gray of the morning has passed, and the sun is high over the distant horizon, which seems jagged, whether with trees or hills I know not, for it is so far off that big things and little are mixed.

I am not sleepy, and, as I am not to be called till I awake, naturally I write till sleep comes.

There are many odd things to put down, and, lest who reads them may fancy that I dined too well before I left Bistritz, let me put down my dinner exactly.

I dined on what they called “robber steak” — bits of bacon, onion, and beef, seasoned with red pepper, and strung on sticks, and roasted over the fire, in simple style of the London cat’s meat!

The wine was Golden Mediasch, which produces a queer sting on the tongue, which is, however, not disagreeable.

I had only a couple of glasses of this, and nothing else.

When I got on the coach, the driver had not taken his seat, and I saw him talking to the landlady.

They were evidently talking of me, for every now and then they looked at me, and some of the people who were sitting on the bench outside the door — came and listened, and then looked at me, most of them pityingly. I could hear a lot of words often repeated, queer words, for there were many nationalities in the crowd, so I quietly got my polyglot dictionary from my bag and looked them out.

I must say they were not cheering to me, for amongst them were “Ordog” — Satan, “Pokol” — hell, “stregoica” — witch, “vrolok” and “vlkoslak” — both mean the same thing, one being Slovak and the other Servian for something that is either werewolf or vampire.

(Mem., I must ask the Count about these superstitions.)

When we started, the crowd round the inn door, which had by this time swelled to a considerable size, all made the sign of the cross and pointed two fingers towards me.

With some difficulty, I got a fellow passenger to tell me what they meant. He would not answer at first, but on learning that I was English, he explained that it was a charm or guard against the evil eye.

This was not very pleasant for me, just starting for an unknown place to meet an unknown man. But everyone seemed so kind-hearted, and so sorrowful, and so sympathetic that I could not but be touched.

I shall never forget the last glimpse which I had of the inn yard and its crowd of picturesque figures, all crossing themselves, as they stood round the wide archway, with its background of rich foliage of oleander and orange trees in green tubs clustered in the centre of the yard.

Then our driver, whose wide linen drawers covered the whole front of the boxseat,— "gotza" they call them — cracked his big whip over his four small horses, which ran abreast, and we set off on our journey.

I soon lost sight and recollection of ghostly fears in the beauty of the scene as we drove along, although had I known the language, or rather languages, which my fellow-passengers were speaking, I might not have been able to throw them off so easily. Before us lay a green sloping land full of forests and woods, with here and there steep hills, crowned with clumps of trees or with farmhouses, the blank gable end to the road. There was everywhere a bewildering mass of fruit blossom — apple, plum, pear, cherry. And as we drove by I could see the green grass under the trees spangled with the fallen petals. In and out amongst these green hills of what they call here the "Mittel Land" ran the road, losing itself as it swept round the grassy curve, or was shut out by the straggling ends of pine woods, which here and there ran down the hillsides like tongues of flame. The road was rugged, but still we seemed to fly over it with a feverish haste. I could not understand then what the haste meant, but the driver was evidently bent on losing no time in reaching Borgo Prund. I was told that this road is in summertime excellent, but that it had not yet been put in order after the winter snows. In this respect it is different from the general run of roads in the Carpathians, for it is an old tradition that they are not to be kept in too good order. Of old the Hospadars would not repair them, lest the Turk should think that they were preparing to bring in foreign troops, and so hasten the war which was always really at loading point.

Beyond the green swelling hills of the Mittel Land rose mighty slopes of forest up to the lofty steeps of the Carpathians themselves. Right and left of us they towered, with the afternoon sun falling full upon them and bringing out all the glorious colours of this beautiful range, deep blue and purple in the shadows of the peaks, green and brown where grass and rock mingled, and an endless perspective of jagged rock and pointed crags, till these were themselves lost in the distance, where the snowy peaks rose grandly. Here and there seemed mighty rifts in the mountains, through which, as the sun began to sink, we saw now and again the white gleam of falling water. One of my companions touched my arm as we swept round the base of a hill and opened up the lofty, snow-covered peak of a mountain, which seemed, as we wound on our serpentine way, to be right before us.

“Look! Isten szek!”— “God’s seat!” — and he crossed himself reverently.

As we wound on our endless way, and the sun sank lower and lower behind us, the shadows of the evening began to creep round us. This was emphasised by the fact that the snowy mountain-top still held the sunset, and seemed to glow out with a delicate cool pink. Here and there we passed Cszeks and slovaks, all in picturesque attire, but I noticed that goitre was painfully prevalent. By the roadside were many crosses, and as we swept by, my companions all crossed themselves. Here and there was a peasant man or woman kneeling before a shrine, who did not even turn round as we approached, but seemed in the self-surrender of devotion to have neither eyes nor ears for the outer world. There were many things new to me. For instance, hay-ricks in the trees, and here and there very beautiful masses of weeping birch, their white stems shining like silver through the delicate green of the leaves.

Now and again we passed a leiter-wagon — the ordinary peasants’s cart — with its long, snakelike vertebra, calculated to suit the inequalities of the road. On this were sure to be seated quite a group of homecoming peasants, the Cszeks with their white, and the Slovaks with their coloured sheepskins, the latter carrying lance-fashion their long staves, with axe at end. As the evening fell it began to get very cold, and the growing twilight seemed to merge into one dark mistiness the gloom of the trees, oak, beech, and pine, though in the valleys which ran deep between the spurs of the hills, as we ascended through the Pass, the dark firs stood out here and there against the background of late-lying snow. Sometimes, as the road was cut through the pine woods that seemed in the darkness to be closing down upon us, great masses of greyness which here and there bestrewed the trees, produced a peculiarly weird and solemn effect, which carried on the thoughts and grim fancies engendered earlier in the evening, when the falling sunset threw into strange relief the ghost-like clouds which amongst the Carpathians seem to wind ceaselessly through the valleys. Sometimes the hills were so steep that, despite our driver's haste, the horses could only go slowly. I wished to get down and walk up them, as we do at home, but the driver would not hear of it. "No, no," he said. "You must not walk here. The dogs are too fierce." And then he added, with what he evidently meant for grim pleasantry — for he looked round to catch the approving smile of the rest— "And you may have enough of such matters before you go to sleep." The only stop he would make was a moment's pause to light his lamps.

When it grew dark there seemed to be some excitement amongst the passengers, and they kept speaking to him, one after the other, as though urging him to further speed. He lashed the horses unmercifully with his long whip, and with wild cries of encouragement urged them on to further exertions. Then through the darkness I could see a sort of patch of grey light ahead of us, as though there were a cleft in the hills. The excitement of the passengers grew greater. The crazy coach rocked on its great leather springs, and swayed like a boat tossed on a stormy sea. I had to hold on. The road grew more level, and we appeared to fly along. Then the mountains seemed to come nearer to us on each side and to frown down upon us. We were entering on the Borgo Pass. One by one several of the passengers offered me gifts, which they pressed upon me with an earnestness which would take no denial. These were certainly of an odd and varied kind, but each was given in simple good faith, with a kindly word, and a blessing, and that same strange mixture of fear-meaning movements which I had seen outside the hotel at Bistritz — the sign of the cross and the guard against the evil eye. Then, as we flew along, the driver leaned forward, and on each side the passengers, craning over the edge of the coach, peered eagerly into the darkness. It was evident that something very exciting was either happening or expected, but though I asked each passenger, no one would give me the slightest explanation. This state of excitement kept on for some little time. And at last we saw before us the Pass opening out on the eastern side. There were dark, rolling clouds overhead, and in the air the heavy, oppressive sense of thunder. It seemed as though the mountain range had separated two atmospheres, and that now we had got into the thunderous one. I was now myself looking out for the conveyance which was to take me to the Count. Each moment I expected to see the glare of lamps through the blackness, but all was dark. The only light was the flickering rays of our own lamps, in which the steam from our hard-driven horses rose in a white cloud. We could see now the sandy road lying white before us, but there was on it no sign of a vehicle. The passengers drew back with a sigh of gladness, which seemed to mock my own disappointment. I was already thinking what I had best do, when the driver, looking at his watch, said to the others something which I could hardly hear, it was spoken so quietly and in so low a tone, I thought it was “An hour less than the time.” Then turning to me, he spoke in German worse than my own.

“There is no carriage here. The Herr is not expected after all. He will now come on to Bukovina, and return tomorrow or the next day, better the next day.” Whilst he was speaking the horses began to neigh and snort and plunge wildly, so that the driver had to hold them up. Then, amongst a chorus of screams from the peasants and a universal crossing of themselves, a caleche, with four horses, drove up behind us, overtook us, and drew up beside the coach. I could see from the flash of our lamps as the rays fell on them, that the horses were coal-black and splendid animals. They were driven by a tall man, with a long brown beard and a great black hat, which seemed to hide his face from us. I could only see the gleam of a pair of very bright eyes, which seemed red in the lamplight, as he turned to us.

He said to the driver, "You are early tonight, my friend."

The man stammered in reply, "The English Herr was in a hurry."

To which the stranger replied, "That is why, I suppose, you wished him to go on to Bukovina. You cannot deceive me, my friend. I know too much, and my horses are swift."

As he spoke he smiled, and the lamplight fell on a hard-looking mouth, with very red lips and sharp-looking teeth, as white as ivory. One of my companions whispered to another the line from Burger's "Lenore".

"Denn die Todten reiten Schnell." ("For the dead travel fast.")

The strange driver evidently heard the words, for he looked up with a gleaming smile. The passenger turned his face away, at the same time putting out his two fingers and crossing himself. "Give me the Herr's luggage," said the driver, and with exceeding alacrity my bags were handed out and put in the caleche. Then I descended from the side of the coach, as the caleche was close alongside, the driver helping me with a hand which caught my arm in a grip of steel. His strength must have been prodigious.

Without a word he shook his reins, the horses turned, and we swept into the darkness of the pass. As I looked back I saw the steam from the horses of the coach by the light of the lamps, and projected against it the figures of my late companions crossing themselves.

Then the driver cracked his whip and called to his horses, and off they swept on their way to Bukovina. As they sank into the darkness I felt a strange chill, and a lonely feeling come over me. But a cloak was thrown over my shoulders, and a rug across my knees, and the driver said in excellent German— “The night is chill, mein Herr, and my master the Count bade me take all care of you. There is a flask of slivovitz (the plum brandy of the country) underneath the seat, if you should require it.”

I did not take any, but it was a comfort to know it was there all the same. I felt a little strangely, and not a little frightened. I think had there been any alternative I should have taken it, instead of prosecuting that unknown night journey. The carriage went at a hard pace straight along, then we made a complete turn and went along another straight road. It seemed to me that we were simply going over and over the same ground again, and so I took note of some salient point, and found that this was so. I would have liked to have asked the driver what this all meant, but I really feared to do so, for I thought that, placed as I was, any protest would have had no effect in case there had been an intention to delay.

By-and-by, however, as I was curious to know how time was passing, I struck a match, and by its flame looked at my watch. It was within a few minutes of midnight. This gave me a sort of shock, for I suppose the general superstition about midnight was increased by my recent experiences. I waited with a sick feeling of suspense.

Then a dog began to howl somewhere in a farmhouse far down the road, a long, agonised wailing, as if from fear. The sound was taken up by another dog, and then another and another, till, borne on the wind which now sighed softly through the Pass, a wild howling began, which seemed to come from all over the country, as far as the imagination could grasp it through the gloom of the night.

At the first howl the horses began to strain and rear, but the driver spoke to them soothingly, and they quieted down, but shivered and sweated as though after a runaway from sudden fright. Then, far off in the distance, from the mountains on each side of us began a louder and a sharper howling, that of wolves, which affected both the horses and myself in the same way. For I was minded to jump from the caleche and run, whilst they reared again and plunged madly, so that the driver had to use all his great strength to keep them from bolting. In a few minutes, however, my own ears got accustomed to the sound, and the horses so far became quiet that the driver was able to descend and to stand before them.

He petted and soothed them, and whispered something in their ears, as I have heard of horse-tamers doing, and with extraordinary effect, for under his caresses they became quite manageable again, though they still trembled. The driver again took his seat, and shaking his reins, started off at a great pace. This time, after going to the far side of the Pass, he suddenly turned down a narrow roadway which ran sharply to the right.

Soon we were hemmed in with trees, which in places arched right over the roadway till we passed as through a tunnel. And again great frowning rocks guarded us boldly on either side. Though we were in shelter, we could hear the rising wind, for it moaned and whistled through the rocks, and the branches of the trees crashed together as we swept along. It grew colder and colder still, and fine, powdery snow began to fall, so that soon we and all around us were covered with a white blanket. The keen wind still carried the howling of the dogs, though this grew fainter as we went on our way. The baying of the wolves sounded nearer and nearer, as though they were closing round on us from every side. I grew dreadfully afraid, and the horses shared my fear. The driver, however, was not in the least disturbed. He kept turning his head to left and right, but I could not see anything through the darkness.

Suddenly, away on our left I saw a faint flickering blue flame. The driver saw it at the same moment. He at once checked the horses, and, jumping to the ground, disappeared into the darkness. I did not know what to do, the less as the howling of the wolves grew closer. But while I wondered, the driver suddenly appeared again, and without a word took his seat, and we resumed our journey. I think I must have fallen asleep and kept dreaming of the incident, for it seemed to be repeated endlessly, and now looking back, it is like a sort of awful nightmare. Once the flame appeared so near the road, that even in the darkness around us I could watch the driver's motions. He went rapidly to where the blue flame arose, it must have been very faint, for it did not seem to illumine the place around it at all, and gathering a few stones, formed them into some device.

Once there appeared a strange optical effect. When he stood between me and the flame he did not obstruct it, for I could see its ghostly flicker all the same. This startled me, but as the effect was only momentary, I took it that my eyes deceived me straining through the darkness. Then for a time there were no blue flames, and we sped onwards through the gloom, with the howling of the wolves around us, as though they were following in a moving circle.

At last there came a time when the driver went further afield than he had yet gone, and during his absence, the horses began to tremble worse than ever and to snort and scream with fright. I could not see any cause for it, for the howling of the wolves had ceased altogether. But just then the moon, sailing through the black clouds, appeared behind the jagged crest of a beetling, pine-clad rock, and by its light I saw around us a ring of wolves, with white teeth and lolling red tongues, with long, sinewy limbs and shaggy hair. They were a hundred times more terrible in the grim silence which held them than even when they howled. For myself, I felt a sort of paralysis of fear. It is only when a man feels himself face to face with such horrors that he can understand their true import.

All at once the wolves began to howl as though the moonlight had had some peculiar effect on them. The horses jumped about and reared, and looked helplessly round with eyes that rolled in a way painful to see. But the living ring of terror encompassed them on every side, and they had perforce to remain within it. I called to the coachman to come, for it seemed to me that our only chance was to try to break out through the ring and to aid his approach, I shouted and beat the side of the caleche, hoping by the noise to scare the wolves from the side, so as to give him a chance of reaching the trap. How he came there, I know not, but I heard his voice raised in a tone of imperious command, and looking towards the sound, saw him stand in the roadway. As he swept his long arms, as though brushing aside some impalpable obstacle, the wolves fell back and back further still. Just then a heavy cloud passed across the face of the moon, so that we were again in darkness.

When I could see again the driver was climbing into the caleche, and the wolves disappeared. This was all so strange and uncanny that a dreadful fear came upon me, and I was afraid to speak or move. The time seemed interminable as we swept on our way, now in almost complete darkness, for the rolling clouds obscured the moon.

We kept on ascending, with occasional periods of quick descent, but in the main always ascending. Suddenly, I became conscious of the fact that the driver was in the act of pulling up the horses in the courtyard of a vast ruined castle, from whose tall black windows came no ray of light, and whose broken battlements showed a jagged line against the sky.

CHAPTER 2

Jonathan Harker's Journal Continued

5 May. — I must have been asleep, for certainly if I had been fully awake I must have noticed the approach of such a remarkable place. In the gloom the courtyard looked of considerable size, and as several dark ways led from it under great round arches, it perhaps seemed bigger than it really is. I have not yet been able to see it by daylight.

When the caleche stopped, the driver jumped down and held out his hand to assist me to alight. Again I could not but notice his prodigious strength. His hand actually seemed like a steel vice that could have crushed mine if he had chosen. Then he took my traps, and placed them on the ground beside me as I stood close to a great door, old and studded with large iron nails, and set in a projecting doorway of massive stone. I could see even in the dim light that the stone was massively carved, but that the carving had been much worn by time and weather. As I stood, the driver jumped again into his seat and shook the reins. The horses started forward, and trap and all disappeared down one of the dark openings.

I stood in silence where I was, for I did not know what to do. Of bell or knocker there was no sign. Through these frowning walls and dark window openings it was not likely that my voice could penetrate. The time I waited seemed endless, and I felt doubts and fears crowding upon me. What sort of place had I come to, and among what kind of people? What sort of grim adventure was it on which I had embarked? Was this a customary incident in the life of a solicitor's clerk sent out to explain the purchase of a London estate to a foreigner? Solicitor's clerk! Mina would not like that. Solicitor, for just before leaving London I got word that my examination was successful, and I am now a full-blown solicitor! I began to rub my eyes and pinch myself to see if I were awake. It all seemed like a horrible nightmare to me, and I expected that I should suddenly awake, and find myself at home, with the dawn struggling in through the windows, as I had now and again felt in the morning after a day of overwork. But my flesh answered the pinching test, and my eyes were not to be deceived. I was indeed awake and among the Carpathians. All I could do now was to be patient, and to wait the coming of morning.

Just as I had come to this conclusion I heard a heavy step approaching behind the great door, and saw through the chinks the gleam of a coming light. Then there was the sound of rattling chains and the clanking of massive bolts drawn back. A key was turned with the loud grating noise of long disuse, and the great door swung back.

Within, stood a tall old man, clean shaven save for a long white moustache, and clad in black from head to foot, without a single speck of colour about him anywhere. He held in his hand an antique silver lamp, in which the flame burned without a chimney or globe of any kind, throwing long quivering shadows as it flickered in the draught of the open door. The old man motioned me in with his right hand with a courtly gesture, saying in excellent English, but with a strange intonation.

"Welcome to my house! Enter freely and of your own free will!" He made no motion of stepping to meet me, but stood like a statue, as though his gesture of welcome had fixed him into stone. The instant, however, that I had stepped over the threshold, he moved impulsively forward, and holding out his hand grasped mine with a strength which made me wince, an effect which was not lessened by the fact that it seemed cold as ice, more like the hand of a dead than a living man. Again he said,

“Welcome to my house! Enter freely. Go safely, and leave something of the happiness you bring!” The strength of the handshake was so much akin to that which I had noticed in the driver, whose face I had not seen, that for a moment I doubted if it were not the same person to whom I was speaking. So to make sure, I said interrogatively, “Count Dracula?”

He bowed in a courtly way as he replied, “I am Dracula, and I bid you welcome, Mr. Harker, to my house. Come in, the night air is chill, and you must need to eat and rest.” As he was speaking, he put the lamp on a bracket on the wall, and stepping out, took my luggage. He had carried it in before I could forestall him. I protested, but he insisted.

“Nay, sir, you are my guest. It is late, and my people are not available. Let me see to your comfort myself.” He insisted on carrying my traps along the passage, and then up a great winding stair, and along another great passage, on whose stone floor our steps rang heavily. At the end of this he threw open a heavy door, and I rejoiced to see within a well-lit room in which a table was spread for supper, and on whose mighty hearth a great fire of logs, freshly replenished, flamed and flared.

The Count halted, putting down my bags, closed the door, and crossing the room, opened another door, which led into a small octagonal room lit by a single lamp, and seemingly without a window of any sort. Passing through this, he opened another door, and motioned me to enter. It was a welcome sight. For here was a great bedroom well lighted and warmed with another log fire, also added to but lately, for the top logs were fresh, which sent a hollow roar up the wide chimney. The Count himself left my luggage inside and withdrew, saying, before he closed the door.

“You will need, after your journey, to refresh yourself by making your toilet. I trust you will find all you wish. When you are ready, come into the other room, where you will find your supper prepared.”

The light and warmth and the Count’s courteous welcome seemed to have dissipated all my doubts and fears. Having then reached my normal state, I discovered that I was half famished with hunger. So making a hasty toilet, I went into the other room.

I found supper already laid out. My host, who stood on one side of the great fireplace, leaning against the stonework, made a graceful wave of his hand to the table, and said,

“I pray you, be seated and sup how you please. You will I trust, excuse me that I do not join you, but I have dined already, and I do not sup.”

I handed to him the sealed letter which Mr. Hawkins had entrusted to me. He opened it and read it gravely. Then, with a charming smile, he handed it to me to read. One passage of it, at least, gave me a thrill of pleasure.

“I must regret that an attack of gout, from which malady I am a constant sufferer, forbids absolutely any travelling on my part for some time to come. But I am happy to say I can send a sufficient substitute, one in whom I have every possible confidence. He is a young man, full of energy and talent in his own way, and of a very faithful disposition. He is discreet and silent, and has grown into manhood in my service. He shall be ready to attend on you when you will during his stay, and shall take your instructions in all matters.”

The count himself came forward and took off the cover of a dish, and I fell to at once on an excellent roast chicken. This, with some cheese and a salad and a bottle of old tokay, of which I had two glasses, was my supper. During the time I was eating it the Count asked me many questions as to my journey, and I told him by degrees all I had experienced.

By this time I had finished my supper, and by my host's desire had drawn up a chair by the fire and begun to smoke a cigar which he offered me, at the same time excusing himself that he did not smoke. I had now an opportunity of observing him, and found him of a very marked physiognomy.

His face was a strong, a very strong, aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils, with lofty domed forehead, and hair growing scantily round the temples but profusely elsewhere. His eyebrows were very massive, almost meeting over the nose, and with bushy hair that seemed to curl in its own profusion. The mouth, so far as I could see it under the heavy moustache, was fixed and rather cruel-looking, with peculiarly sharp white teeth. These protruded over the lips, whose remarkable ruddiness showed astonishing vitality in a man of his years. For the rest, his ears were pale, and at the tops extremely pointed. The chin was broad and strong, and the cheeks firm though thin. The general effect was one of extraordinary pallor.

Hitherto I had noticed the backs of his hands as they lay on his knees in the firelight, and they had seemed rather white and fine. But seeing them now close to me, I could not but notice that they were rather coarse, broad, with squat fingers. Strange to say, there were hairs in the centre of the palm. The nails were long and fine, and cut to a sharp point. As the Count leaned over me and his hands touched me, I could not repress a shudder. It may have been that his breath was rank, but a horrible feeling of nausea came over me, which, do what I would, I could not conceal.

The Count, evidently noticing it, drew back. And with a grim sort of smile, which showed more than he had yet done his protruberant teeth, sat himself down again on his own side of the fireplace. We were both silent for a while, and as I looked towards the window I saw the first dim streak of the coming dawn. There seemed a strange stillness over everything. But as I listened, I heard as if from down below in the valley the howling of many wolves. The Count's eyes gleamed, and he said.

"Listen to them, the children of the night. What music they make!" Seeing, I suppose, some expression in my face strange to him, he added, "Ah, sir, you dwellers in the city cannot enter into the feelings of the hunter." Then he rose and said.

"But you must be tired. Your bedroom is all ready, and tomorrow you shall sleep as late as you will. I have to be away till the afternoon, so sleep well and dream well!" With a courteous bow, he opened for me himself the door to the octagonal room, and I entered my bedroom.

I am all in a sea of wonders. I doubt. I fear. I think strange things, which I dare not confess to my own soul. God keep me, if only for the sake of those dear to me!

7 May. — It is again early morning, but I have rested and enjoyed the last twenty-four hours. I slept till late in the day, and awoke of my own accord. When I had dressed myself I went into the room where we had supped, and found a cold breakfast laid out, with coffee kept hot by the pot being placed on the hearth. There was a card on the table, on which was written— "I have to be absent for a

while. Do not wait for me. D.” I set to and enjoyed a hearty meal. When I had done, I looked for a bell, so that I might let the servants know I had finished, but I could not find one. There are certainly odd deficiencies in the house, considering the extraordinary evidences of wealth which are round me. The table service is of gold, and so beautifully wrought that it must be of immense value. The curtains and upholstery of the chairs and sofas and the hangings of my bed are of the costliest and most beautiful fabrics, and must have been of fabulous value when they were made, for they are centuries old, though in excellent order. I saw something like them in Hampton Court, but they were worn and frayed and moth-eaten. But still in none of the rooms is there a mirror. There is not even a toilet glass on my table, and I had to get the little shaving glass from my bag before I could either shave or brush my hair. I have not yet seen a servant anywhere, or heard a sound near the castle except the howling of wolves. Some time after I had finished my meal, I do not know whether to call it breakfast or dinner, for it was between five and six o’clock when I had it, I looked about for something to read, for I did not like to go about the castle until I had asked the Count’s permission. There was absolutely nothing in the room, book, newspaper, or even writing materials, so I opened another door in the room and found a sort of library. The door opposite mine I tried, but found locked.

In the library I found, to my great delight, a vast number of English books, whole shelves full of them, and bound volumes of magazines and newspapers. A table in the centre was littered with English magazines and newspapers, though none of them were of very recent date. The books were of the most varied kind, history, geography, politics, political economy, botany, geology, law, all relating to England and English life and customs and manners. There were even such books of reference as the London Directory, the “Red” and “Blue” books, Whitaker’s Almanac, the Army and Navy Lists, and it somehow gladdened my heart to see it, the Law List.

Whilst I was looking at the books, the door opened, and the Count entered. He saluted me in a hearty way, and hoped that I had had a good night’s rest. Then he went on.

“I am glad you found your way in here, for I am sure there is much that will interest you. These companions,” and he laid his hand on some of the books, “have been good friends to me, and for some years past, ever since I had the idea of going to London, have given me many, many hours of pleasure. Through them I have come to know your great England, and to know her is to love her. I long to go through the crowded streets of your mighty London, to be in the midst of the whirl and rush of humanity, to share its life, its change, its death, and all that makes it what it is. But alas! As yet I only know your tongue through books. To you, my friend, I look that I know it to speak.”

“But, Count,” I said, “You know and speak English thoroughly!” He bowed gravely.

“I thank you, my friend, for your all too-flattering estimate, but yet I fear that I am but a little way on the road I would travel. True, I know the grammar and the words, but yet I know not how to speak them.”

“Indeed,” I said, “You speak excellently.”

“Not so,” he answered. “Well, I know that, did I move and speak in your London, none there are who would not know me for a stranger. That is not enough for me. Here I am noble. I am a Boyar. The common people know me, and I am master. But a stranger in a strange land, he is no one. Men know him not, and to know not is to care not for. I am content if I am like the rest, so that no man stops if he sees me, or pauses in his speaking if he hears my words, 'Ha, ha! A stranger!' I have been so long master that I would be master still, or at least that none other should be master of me. You come to me not alone as agent of my friend Peter Hawkins, of Exeter, to tell me all about my new estate in London. You shall, I trust, rest here with me a while, so that by our talking I may learn the English intonation. And I would that you tell me when I make error, even of the smallest, in my speaking. I am sorry that I had to be away so long today, but you will, I know forgive one who has so many important affairs in hand."

Of course I said all I could about being willing, and asked if I might come into that room when I chose. He answered, "Yes, certainly," and added.

"You may go anywhere you wish in the castle, except where the doors are locked, where of course you will not wish to go. There is reason that all things are as they are, and did you see with my eyes and know with my knowledge, you would perhaps better understand." I said I was sure of this, and then he went on.

"We are in Transylvania, and Transylvania is not England. Our ways are not your ways, and there shall be to you many strange things. Nay, from what you have told me of your experiences already, you know something of what strange things there may be."

This led to much conversation, and as it was evident that he wanted to talk, if only for talking's sake, I asked him many questions regarding things that had already happened to me or come within my notice. Sometimes he sheered off the subject, or turned the conversation by pretending not to understand, but generally he answered all I asked most frankly. Then as time went on, and I had got somewhat bolder, I asked him of some of the strange things of the preceding night, as for instance, why the coachman went to the places where he had seen the blue flames. He then explained to me that it was commonly believed that on a certain night of the year, last night, in fact, when all evil spirits are supposed to have unchecked sway, a blue flame is seen over any place where treasure has been concealed.

"That treasure has been hidden," he went on, "in the region through which you came last night, there can be but little doubt. For it was the ground fought over for centuries by the Wallachian, the Saxon, and the Turk. Why, there is hardly a foot of soil in all this region that has not been enriched by the blood of men, patriots or invaders. In the old days there were stirring times, when the Austrian and the Hungarian came up in hordes, and the patriots went out to meet them, men and women, the aged and the children too, and waited their coming on the rocks above the passes, that they might sweep destruction on them with their artificial avalanches. When the invader was triumphant he found but little, for whatever there was had been sheltered in the friendly soil."

"But how," said I, "can it have remained so long undiscovered, when there is a sure index to it if men will but take the trouble to look?" The Count smiled, and as his lips ran back over his gums, the long, sharp, canine teeth showed out strangely. He answered:

"Because your peasant is at heart a coward and a fool! Those flames only appear on one night, and on that night no man of this land will, if he can help it, stir without his doors. And, dear sir, even if he did he would not know what to do. Why, even the peasant that you tell me of who marked the place of the flame would not know where to look in daylight even for his own work. Even you would not, I dare be sworn, be able to find these places again?"

"There you are right," I said. "I know no more than the dead where even to look for them." Then we drifted into other matters.

"Come," he said at last, "tell me of London and of the house which you have procured for me." With an apology for my remissness, I went into my own room to get the papers from my bag. Whilst I was placing them in order I heard a rattling of china and silver in the next room, and as I passed through, noticed that the table had been cleared and the lamp lit, for it was by this time deep into the dark. The lamps were also lit in the study or library, and I found the Count lying on the sofa, reading, of all things in the world, an English Bradshaw's Guide. When I came in he cleared the books and papers from the table, and with him I went into plans and deeds and figures of all sorts. He was interested in everything, and asked me a myriad questions about the place and its surroundings. He clearly had studied beforehand all he could get on the subject of the neighbourhood, for he evidently at the end knew very much more than I did. When I remarked this, he answered.

"Well, but, my friend, is it not needful that I should? When I go there I shall be all alone, and my friend Harker Jonathan, nay, pardon me. I fall into my country's habit of putting your patronymic first, my friend Jonathan Harker will not be by my side to correct and aid me. He will be in Exeter, miles away, probably working at papers of the law with my other friend, Peter Hawkins. So!"

We went thoroughly into the business of the purchase of the estate at Purfleet. When I had told him the facts and got his signature to the necessary papers, and had written a letter with them ready to post to Mr. Hawkins, he began to ask me how I had come across so suitable a place. I read to him the notes which I had made at the time, and which I inscribe here.

"At Purfleet, on a byroad, I came across just such a place as seemed to be required, and where was displayed a dilapidated notice that the place was for sale. It was surrounded by a high wall, of ancient structure, built of heavy stones, and has not been repaired for a large number of years. The closed gates are of heavy old oak and iron, all eaten with rust.

"The estate is called Carfax, no doubt a corruption of the old Quatre Face, as the house is four sided, agreeing with the cardinal points of the compass. It contains in all some twenty acres, quite surrounded by the solid stone wall above mentioned. There are many trees on it, which make it in places gloomy, and there is a deep, dark-looking pond or small lake, evidently fed by some springs, as the water is clear and flows away in a fair-sized stream. The house is very large and of all periods back, I should say, to mediaeval times, for one part is of stone immensely thick, with only a few windows high up and heavily barred with iron. It looks like part of a keep, and is close to an old chapel or church. I could not enter it, as I had not the key of the door leading to it from the house, but I have taken with my Kodak views of it from various points. The house had been added to, but in a very straggling way, and I can only guess at the amount of ground it covers, which must be very great. There are but few houses close at hand, one being a very large house only recently added to and formed into a private lunatic asylum. It is not, however, visible from the grounds."

When I had finished, he said, "I am glad that it is old and big. I myself am of an old family, and to live in a new house would kill me. A house cannot be made habitable in a day, and after all, how few days go to make up a century. I rejoice also that there is a chapel of old times. We Transylvanian nobles love not to think that our bones may lie amongst the common dead. I seek not gaiety nor mirth, not the bright voluptuousness of much sunshine and sparkling waters which please the young and gay. I am no longer young, and my heart, through weary years of mourning over the dead, is not attuned to mirth. Moreover, the walls of my castle are broken. The shadows are many, and the wind breathes cold through the broken battlements and casements. I love the shade and the shadow, and would be alone with my thoughts when I may." Somehow his words and his look did not seem to accord, or else it was that his cast of face made his smile look malignant and saturnine.

Presently, with an excuse, he left me, asking me to pull my papers together. He was some little time away, and I began to look at some of the books around me. One was an atlas, which I found opened naturally to England, as if that map had been much used. On looking at it I found in certain places little rings marked, and on examining these I noticed that one was near London on the east side, manifestly where his new estate was situated. The other two were Exeter, and Whitby on the Yorkshire coast.

It was the better part of an hour when the Count returned. "Aha!" he said. "Still at your books? Good! But you must not work always. Come! I am informed that your supper is ready." He took my arm, and we went into the next room, where I found an excellent supper ready on the table. The Count again excused himself, as he had dined out on his being away from home. But he sat as on the previous night, and chatted whilst I ate. After supper I smoked, as on the last evening, and the Count stayed with me, chatting and asking questions on every conceivable subject, hour after hour. I felt that it was getting very late indeed, but I did not say anything, for I felt under obligation to meet my host's wishes in every way. I was not sleepy, as the long sleep yesterday had fortified me, but I could not help experiencing that chill which comes over one at the coming of the dawn, which is like, in its way, the turn of the tide. They say that people who are near death die generally at the change to dawn or at the turn of the tide. Anyone who has when tired, and tied as it were to his post, experienced this change in the atmosphere can well believe it. All at once we heard the crow of the cock coming up with preternatural shrillness through the clear morning air.

Count Dracula, jumping to his feet, said, "Why there is the morning again! How remiss I am to let you stay up so long. You must make your conversation regarding my dear new country of England less interesting, so that I may not forget how time flies by us," and with a courtly bow, he quickly left me.

I went into my room and drew the curtains, but there was little to notice. My window opened into the courtyard, all I could see was the warm grey of quickening sky. So I pulled the curtains again, and have written of this day.

8 May. — I began to fear as I wrote in this book that I was getting too diffuse. But now I am glad that I went into detail from the first, for there is something so strange about this place and all in it that I cannot but feel uneasy. I wish I were safe out of it, or that I had never come. It may be that this strange night existence is telling on me, but would that that were all! If there were any one to talk to I could bear it, but there is no one. I have only the Count to speak with, and he — I fear I am myself the only living soul within the place. Let me be prosaic so far as facts can be. It will help me to bear up, and

imagination must not run riot with me. If it does I am lost. Let me say at once how I stand, or seem to.

I only slept a few hours when I went to bed, and feeling that I could not sleep any more, got up. I had hung my shaving glass by the window, and was just beginning to shave. Suddenly I felt a hand on my shoulder, and heard the Count's voice saying to me, "Good morning." I started, for it amazed me that I had not seen him, since the reflection of the glass covered the whole room behind me. In starting I had cut myself slightly, but did not notice it at the moment. Having answered the Count's salutation, I turned to the glass again to see how I had been mistaken. This time there could be no error, for the man was close to me, and I could see him over my shoulder. But there was no reflection of him in the mirror! The whole room behind me was displayed, but there was no sign of a man in it, except myself.

This was startling, and coming on the top of so many strange things, was beginning to increase that vague feeling of uneasiness which I always have when the Count is near. But at the instant I saw that the cut had bled a little, and the blood was trickling over my chin. I laid down the razor, turning as I did so half round to look for some sticking plaster. When the Count saw my face, his eyes blazed with a sort of demoniac fury, and he suddenly made a grab at my throat. I drew away and his hand touched the string of beads which held the crucifix. It made an instant change in him, for the fury passed so quickly that I could hardly believe that it was ever there.

"Take care," he said, "take care how you cut yourself. It is more dangerous that you think in this country." Then seizing the shaving glass, he went on, "And this is the wretched thing that has done the mischief. It is a foul bauble of man's vanity. Away with it!" And opening the window with one wrench of his terrible hand, he flung out the glass, which was shattered into a thousand pieces on the stones of the courtyard far below. Then he withdrew without a word. It is very annoying, for I do not see how I am to shave, unless in my watch-case or the bottom of the shaving pot, which is fortunately of metal.

When I went into the dining room, breakfast was prepared, but I could not find the Count anywhere. So I breakfasted alone. It is strange that as yet I have not seen the Count eat or drink. He must be a very peculiar man! After breakfast I did a little exploring in the castle. I went out on the stairs, and found a room looking towards the South.

The view was magnificent, and from where I stood there was every opportunity of seeing it. The castle is on the very edge of a terrific precipice. A stone falling from the window would fall a thousand feet without touching anything! As far as the eye can reach is a sea of green tree tops, with occasionally a deep rift where there is a chasm. Here and there are silver threads where the rivers wind in deep gorges through the forests.

But I am not in heart to describe beauty, for when I had seen the view I explored further. Doors, doors, doors everywhere, and all locked and bolted. In no place save from the windows in the castle walls is there an available exit. The castle is a veritable prison, and I am a prisoner!

CHAPTER 3

Jonathan Harker's Journal Continued

When I found that I was a prisoner a sort of wild feeling came over me. I rushed up and down the stairs, trying every door and peering out of every window I could find, but after a little the conviction of my helplessness overpowered all other feelings. When I look back after a few hours I think I must have been mad for the time, for I behaved much as a rat does in a trap. When, however, the conviction had come to me that I was helpless I sat down quietly, as quietly as I have ever done anything in my life, and began to think over what was best to be done. I am thinking still, and as yet have come to no definite conclusion. Of one thing only am I certain. That it is no use making my ideas known to the Count. He knows well that I am imprisoned, and as he has done it himself, and has doubtless his own motives for it, he would only deceive me if I trusted him fully with the facts. So far as I can see, my only plan will be to keep my knowledge and my fears to myself, and my eyes open. I am, I know, either being deceived, like a baby, by my own fears, or else I am in desperate straits, and if the latter be so, I need, and shall need, all my brains to get through.

I had hardly come to this conclusion when I heard the great door below shut, and knew that the Count had returned. He did not come at once into the library, so I went cautiously to my own room and found him making the bed. This was odd, but only confirmed what I had all along thought, that there are no servants in the house. When later I saw him through the chink of the hinges of the door laying the table in the dining room, I was assured of it. For if he does himself all these menial offices, surely it is proof that there is no one else in the castle, it must have been the Count himself who was the driver of the coach that brought me here. This is a terrible thought, for if so, what does it mean that he could control the wolves, as he did, by only holding up his hand for silence? How was it that all the people at Bistritz and on the coach had some terrible fear for me? What meant the giving of the crucifix, of the garlic, of the wild rose, of the mountain ash?

Bless that good, good woman who hung the crucifix round my neck! For it is a comfort and a strength to me whenever I touch it. It is odd that a thing which I have been taught to regard with disfavour and as idolatrous should in a time of loneliness and trouble be of help. Is it that there is something in the essence of the thing itself, or that it is a medium, a tangible help, in conveying memories of sympathy and comfort? Some time, if it may be, I must examine this matter and try to make up my mind about it. In the meantime I must find out all I can about Count Dracula, as it may help me to understand. Tonight he may talk of himself, if I turn the conversation that way. I must be very careful, however, not to awake his suspicion.

Midnight. — I have had a long talk with the Count. I asked him a few questions on Transylvania history, and he warmed up to the subject wonderfully. In his speaking of things and people, and especially of battles, he spoke as if he had been present at them all. This he afterwards explained by saying that to a Boyar the pride of his house and name is his own pride, that their glory is his glory, that their fate is his fate. Whenever he spoke of his house he always said “we”, and spoke almost in the plural, like a king speaking. I wish I could put down all he said exactly as he said it, for to me it was most fascinating. It seemed to have in it a whole history of the country. He grew excited as he spoke, and walked about the room pulling his great white moustache and grasping anything on which he laid his hands as though he would crush it by main strength. One thing he said which I shall put down as nearly as I can, for it tells in its way the story of his race.

"We Szekelys have a right to be proud, for in our veins flows the blood of many brave races who fought as the lion fights, for lordship. Here, in the whirlpool of European races, the Ugric tribe bore down from Iceland the fighting spirit which Thor and Wodin gave them, which their Berserkers displayed to such fell intent on the seaboards of Europe, aye, and of Asia and Africa too, till the peoples thought that the werewolves themselves had come. Here, too, when they came, they found the Huns, whose warlike fury had swept the earth like a living flame, till the dying peoples held that in their veins ran the blood of those old witches, who, expelled from Scythia had mated with the devils in the desert. Fools, fools! What devil or what witch was ever so great as Attila, whose blood is in these veins?" He held up his arms. "Is it a wonder that we were a conquering race, that we were proud, that when the Magyar, the Lombard, the Avar, the Bulgar, or the Turk poured his thousands on our frontiers, we drove them back? Is it strange that when Arpad and his legions swept through the Hungarian fatherland he found us here when he reached the frontier, that the Honfoglalas was completed there? And when the Hungarian flood swept eastward, the Szekelys were claimed as kindred by the victorious Magyars, and to us for centuries was trusted the guarding of the frontier of Turkeyland. Aye, and more than that, endless duty of the frontier guard, for as the Turks say, ‘water sleeps, and the enemy is sleepless.’ Who more gladly than we throughout the Four Nations received the ‘bloody sword,’ or at its warlike call flocked quicker to the standard of the King? When was redeemed that great shame of my nation, the shame of Cassova, when the flags of the Wallach and the Magyar went down beneath the Crescent? Who was it but one of my own race who as Voivode crossed the Danube and beat the Turk on his own ground? This was a Dracula indeed! Woe was it that his own unworthy brother, when he had fallen, sold his people to the Turk and brought the shame of slavery on them! Was it not this Dracula, indeed, who inspired that other of his race who in a later age again and again brought his forces over the great river into Turkeyland, who, when he was beaten back, came again, and again, though he had to come alone from the bloody field where his troops were being slaughtered, since he knew that he alone could ultimately triumph! They said that he thought only of himself. Bah! What good are peasants without a leader? Where ends the war without a brain and heart to conduct it? Again, when, after the battle of Mohacs, we threw off the Hungarian yoke, we of the Dracula blood were amongst their leaders, for our spirit would not brook that we were not free. Ah, young sir, the Szekelys, and the Dracula as their heart’s blood, their brains, and their swords, can boast a record that mushroom growths like the Hapsburgs and the Romanoffs can never reach. The warlike days are over. Blood is too precious a thing in these days of dishonourable peace, and the glories of the great races are as a tale that is told.”

It was by this time close on morning, and we went to bed. (Mem., this diary seems horribly like the beginning of the “Arabian Nights,” for everything has to break off at cockcrow, or like the ghost of Hamlet’s father.)

12 May. — Let me begin with facts, bare, meager facts, verified by books and figures, and of which there can be no doubt. I must not confuse them with experiences which will have to rest on my own observation, or my memory of them. Last evening when the Count came from his room he began by asking me questions on legal matters and on the doing of certain kinds of business. I had spent the day wearily over books, and, simply to keep my mind occupied, went over some of the matters I had been examined in at Lincoln's Inn. There was a certain method in the Count's inquiries, so I shall try to put them down in sequence. The knowledge may somehow or some time be useful to me.

First, he asked if a man in England might have two solicitors or more. I told him he might have a dozen if he wished, but that it would not be wise to have more than one solicitor engaged in one transaction, as only one could act at a time, and that to change would be certain to militate against his interest. He seemed thoroughly to understand, and went on to ask if there would be any practical difficulty in having one man to attend, say, to banking, and another to look after shipping, in case local help were needed in a place far from the home of the banking solicitor. I asked to explain more fully, so that I might not by any chance mislead him, so he said,

"I shall illustrate. Your friend and mine, Mr. Peter Hawkins, from under the shadow of your beautiful cathedral at Exeter, which is far from London, buys for me through your good self my place at London. Good! Now here let me say frankly, lest you should think it strange that I have sought the services of one so far off from London instead of some one resident there, that my motive was that no local interest might be served save my wish only, and as one of London residence might, perhaps, have some purpose of himself or friend to serve, I went thus afield to seek my agent, whose labours should be only to my interest. Now, suppose I, who have much of affairs, wish to ship goods, say, to Newcastle, or Durham, or Harwich, or Dover, might it not be that it could with more ease be done by consigning to one in these ports?"

I answered that certainly it would be most easy, but that we solicitors had a system of agency one for the other, so that local work could be done locally on instruction from any solicitor, so that the client, simply placing himself in the hands of one man, could have his wishes carried out by him without further trouble.

"But," said he, "I could be at liberty to direct myself. Is it not so?"

"Of course," I replied, and "Such is often done by men of business, who do not like the whole of their affairs to be known by any one person."

"Good!" he said, and then went on to ask about the means of making consignments and the forms to be gone through, and of all sorts of difficulties which might arise, but by forethought could be guarded against. I explained all these things to him to the best of my ability, and he certainly left me under the impression that he would have made a wonderful solicitor, for there was nothing that he did not think of or foresee. For a man who was never in the country, and who did not evidently do much in the way of business, his knowledge and acumen were wonderful. When he had satisfied himself on these points of which he had spoken, and I had verified all as well as I could by the books available, he suddenly stood up and said, "Have you written since your first letter to our friend Mr. Peter Hawkins, or to any other?"

It was with some bitterness in my heart that I answered that I had not, that as yet I had not seen any opportunity of sending letters to anybody.

"Then write now, my young friend," he said, laying a heavy hand on my shoulder, "write to our friend and to any other, and say, if it will please you, that you shall stay with me until a month from now."

"Do you wish me to stay so long?" I asked, for my heart grew cold at the thought.

"I desire it much, nay I will take no refusal. When your master, employer, what you will, engaged that someone should come on his behalf, it was understood that my needs only were to be consulted. I have not stinted. Is it not so?"

What could I do but bow acceptance? It was Mr. Hawkins' interest, not mine, and I had to think of him, not myself, and besides, while Count Dracula was speaking, there was that in his eyes and in his bearing which made me remember that I was a prisoner, and that if I wished it I could have no choice. The Count saw his victory in my bow, and his mastery in the trouble of my face, for he began at once to use them, but in his own smooth, resistless way.

"I pray you, my good young friend, that you will not discourse of things other than business in your letters. It will doubtless please your friends to know that you are well, and that you look forward to getting home to them. Is it not so?" As he spoke he handed me three sheets of note paper and three envelopes. They were all of the thinnest foreign post, and looking at them, then at him, and noticing his quiet smile, with the sharp, canine teeth lying over the red underlip, I understood as well as if he had spoken that I should be more careful what I wrote, for he would be able to read it. So I determined to write only formal notes now, but to write fully to Mr. Hawkins in secret, and also to Mina, for to her I could write shorthand, which would puzzle the Count, if he did see it. When I had written my two letters I sat quiet, reading a book whilst the Count wrote several notes, referring as he wrote them to some books on his table. Then he took up my two and placed them with his own, and put by his writing materials, after which, the instant the door had closed behind him, I leaned over and looked at the letters, which were face down on the table. I felt no compunction in doing so for under the circumstances I felt that I should protect myself in every way I could.

One of the letters was directed to Samuel F. Billington, No. 7, The Crescent, Whitby, another to Herr Leutner, Varna. The third was to Coutts & Co., London, and the fourth to Herren Klopstock & Billreuth, bankers, Buda Pesth. The second and fourth were unsealed. I was just about to look at them when I saw the door handle move. I sank back in my seat, having just had time to resume my book before the Count, holding still another letter in his hand, entered the room. He took up the letters on the table and stamped them carefully, and then turning to me, said,

“I trust you will forgive me, but I have much work to do in private this evening. You will, I hope, find all things as you wish.” At the door he turned, and after a moment’s pause said, “Let me advise you, my dear young friend. Nay, let me warn you with all seriousness, that should you leave these rooms you will not by any chance go to sleep in any other part of the castle. It is old, and has many memories, and there are bad dreams for those who sleep unwisely. Be warned! Should sleep now or ever overcome you, or be like to do, then haste to your own chamber or to these rooms, for your rest will then be safe. But if you be not careful in this respect, then,” He finished his speech in a gruesome way, for he motioned with his hands as if he were washing them. I quite understood. My only doubt was as to whether any dream could be more terrible than the unnatural, horrible net of gloom and mystery which seemed closing around me.

Later. — I endorse the last words written, but this time there is no doubt in question. I shall not fear to sleep in any place where he is not. I have placed the crucifix over the head of my bed, I imagine that my rest is thus freer from dreams, and there it shall remain.

When he left me I went to my room. After a little while, not hearing any sound, I came out and went up the stone stair to where I could look out towards the South. There was some sense of freedom in the vast expanse, inaccessible though it was to me, as compared with the narrow darkness of the courtyard. Looking out on this, I felt that I was indeed in prison, and I seemed to want a breath of fresh air, though it were of the night. I am beginning to feel this nocturnal existence tell on me. It is destroying my nerve. I start at my own shadow, and am full of all sorts of horrible imaginings. God knows that there is ground for my terrible fear in this accursed place! I looked out over the beautiful expanse, bathed in soft yellow moonlight till it was almost as light as day. In the soft light the distant hills became melted, and the shadows in the valleys and gorges of velvety blackness. The mere beauty seemed to cheer me. There was peace and comfort in every breath I drew. As I leaned from the window my eye was caught by something moving a storey below me, and somewhat to my left, where I imagined, from the order of the rooms, that the windows of the Count's own room would look out. The window at which I stood was tall and deep, stone-mullioned, and though weatherworn, was still complete. But it was evidently many a day since the case had been there. I drew back behind the stonework, and looked carefully out.

What I saw was the Count's head coming out from the window. I did not see the face, but I knew the man by the neck and the movement of his back and arms. In any case I could not mistake the hands which I had had some many opportunities of studying. I was at first interested and somewhat amused, for it is wonderful how small a matter will interest and amuse a man when he is a prisoner. But my very feelings changed to repulsion and terror when I saw the whole man slowly emerge from the window and begin to crawl down the castle wall over the dreadful abyss, face down with his cloak spreading out around him like great wings. At first I could not believe my eyes. I thought it was some trick of the moonlight, some weird effect of shadow, but I kept looking, and it could be no delusion. I saw the fingers and toes grasp the corners of the stones, worn clear of the mortar by the stress of years, and by thus using every projection and inequality move downwards with considerable speed, just as a lizard moves along a wall.

What manner of man is this, or what manner of creature, is it in the semblance of man? I feel the dread of this horrible place overpowering me. I am in fear, in awful fear, and there is no escape for me. I am encompassed about with terrors that I dare not think of.

15 May. — Once more I have seen the count go out in his lizard fashion. He moved downwards in a sidelong way, some hundred feet down, and a good deal to the left. He vanished into some hole or window. When his head had disappeared, I leaned out to try and see more, but without avail. The distance was too great to allow a proper angle of sight. I knew he had left the castle now, and thought to use

the opportunity to explore more than I had dared to do as yet. I went back to the room, and taking a lamp, tried all the doors. They were all locked, as I had expected, and the locks were comparatively new. But I went down the stone stairs to the hall where I had entered originally. I found I could pull back the bolts easily enough and unhook the great chains. But the door was locked, and the key was gone! That key must be in the Count's room. I must watch should his door be unlocked, so that I may get it and escape. I went on to make a thorough examination of the various stairs and passages, and to try the doors that opened from them. One or two small rooms near the hall were open, but there was nothing to see in them except old furniture, dusty with age and moth-eaten. At last, however, I found one door at the top of the stairway which, though it seemed locked, gave a little under pressure. I tried it harder, and found that it was not really locked, but that the resistance came from the fact that the hinges had fallen somewhat, and the heavy door rested on the floor. Here was an opportunity which I might not have again, so I exerted myself, and with many efforts forced it back so that I could enter. I was now in a wing of the castle further to the right than the rooms I knew and a storey lower down. From the windows I could see that the suite of rooms lay along to the south of the castle, the windows of the end room looking out both west and south. On the latter side, as well as to the former, there was a great precipice. The castle was built on the corner of a great rock, so that on three sides it was quite impregnable, and great windows were placed here where sling, or bow, or culverin could not reach, and consequently light and comfort, impossible to a position which had to be guarded, were secured. To the west was a great valley, and then, rising far away, great jagged mountain fastnesses, rising peak on peak, the sheer rock studded with mountain ash and thorn, whose roots clung in cracks and crevices and crannies of the stone. This was evidently the portion of the castle occupied by the ladies in bygone days, for the furniture had more an air of comfort than any I had seen.

The windows were curtainless, and the yellow moonlight, flooding in through the diamond panes, enabled one to see even colours, whilst it softened the wealth of dust which lay over all and disguised in some measure the ravages of time and moth. My lamp seemed to be of little effect in the brilliant moonlight, but I was glad to have it with me, for there was a dread loneliness in the place which chilled my heart and made my nerves tremble. Still, it was better than living alone in the rooms which I had come to hate from the presence of the Count, and after trying a little to school my nerves, I found a soft quietude come over me. Here I am, sitting at a little oak table where in old times possibly some fair lady sat to pen, with much thought and many blushes, her ill-spelt love letter, and writing in my diary in shorthand all that has happened since I closed it last. It is the nineteenth century up-to-date with a vengeance. And yet, unless my senses deceive me, the old centuries had, and have, powers of their own which mere "modernity" cannot kill.

Later: The morning of 16 May. — God preserve my sanity, for to this I am reduced. Safety and the assurance of safety are things of the past. Whilst I live on here there is but one thing to hope for, that I may not go mad, if, indeed, I be not mad already. If I be sane, then surely it is maddening to think that of all the foul things that lurk in this hateful place the Count is the least dreadful to me, that to him alone I can look for safety, even though this be only whilst I can serve his purpose. Great God! Merciful God, let me be calm, for out of that way lies madness indeed. I begin to get new lights on certain things which have puzzled me. Up to now I never quite knew what Shakespeare meant when he made Hamlet say, “My tablets! Quick, my tablets! ’tis meet that I put it down,” etc., For now, feeling as though my own brain were unhinged or as if the shock had come which must end in its undoing, I turn to my diary for repose. The habit of entering accurately must help to soothe me.

The Count’s mysterious warning frightened me at the time. It frightens me more not when I think of it, for in the future he has a fearful hold upon me. I shall fear to doubt what he may say!

When I had written in my diary and had fortunately replaced the book and pen in my pocket I felt sleepy. The Count’s warning came into my mind, but I took pleasure in disobeying it. The sense of sleep was upon me, and with it the obstinacy which sleep brings as outrider. The soft moonlight soothed, and the wide expanse without gave a sense of freedom which refreshed me. I determined not to return tonight to the gloom-haunted rooms, but to sleep here, where, of old, ladies had sat and sung and lived sweet lives whilst their gentle breasts were sad for their menfolk away in the midst of remorseless wars. I drew a great couch out of its place near the corner, so that as I lay, I could look at the lovely view to east and south, and unthinking of and uncaring for the dust, composed myself for sleep. I suppose I must have fallen asleep. I hope so, but I fear, for all that followed was startlingly real, so real that now sitting here in the broad, full sunlight of the morning, I cannot in the least believe that it was all sleep.

I was not alone. The room was the same, unchanged in any way since I came into it. I could see along the floor, in the brilliant moonlight, my own footsteps marked where I had disturbed the long accumulation of dust. In the moonlight opposite me were three young women, ladies by their dress and manner. I thought at the time that I must be dreaming when I saw them, they threw no shadow on the floor. They came close to me, and looked at me for some time, and then whispered together. Two were dark, and had high aquiline noses, like the Count, and great dark, piercing eyes, that seemed to be almost red when contrasted with the pale yellow moon. The other was fair, as fair as can be, with great masses of golden hair and eyes like pale sapphires. I seemed somehow to know her face, and to know it in connection with some dreamy fear, but I could not recollect at the moment how or where. All three had brilliant white teeth that shone like pearls against the ruby of their voluptuous lips. There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips. It is not good to note this down, lest some day it should meet Mina's eyes and cause her pain, but it is the truth. They whispered together, and then they all three laughed, such a silvery, musical laugh, but as hard as though the sound never could have come through the softness of human lips. It was like the intolerable, tingling sweetness of waterglasses when played on by a cunning hand. The fair girl shook her head coquettishly, and the other two urged her on.

One said, "Go on! You are first, and we shall follow. Yours is the right to begin."

The other added, "He is young and strong. There are kisses for us all."

I lay quiet, looking out from under my eyelashes in an agony of delightful anticipation. The fair girl advanced and bent over me till I could feel the movement of her breath upon me. Sweet it was in one sense, honey-sweet, and sent the same tingling through the nerves as her voice, but with a bitter underlying the sweet, a bitter offensiveness, as one smells in blood.

I was afraid to raise my eyelids, but looked out and saw perfectly under the lashes. The girl went on her knees, and bent over me, simply gloating. There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal, till I could see in the moonlight the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the white sharp teeth. Lower and lower went her head as the lips went below the range of my mouth and chin and seemed to fasten on my throat. Then she paused, and I could hear the churning sound of her tongue as it licked her teeth and lips, and I could feel the hot breath on my neck. Then the skin of my throat began to tingle as one's flesh does when the hand that is to tickle it approaches nearer, nearer. I could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the super sensitive skin of my throat, and the hard dents of two sharp teeth, just touching and pausing there. I closed my eyes in languorous ecstasy and waited, waited with beating heart.

But at that instant, another sensation swept through me as quick as lightning. I was conscious of the presence of the Count, and of his being as if lapped in a storm of fury. As my eyes opened involuntarily I saw his strong hand grasp the slender neck of the fair woman and with giant's power draw it back, the blue eyes transformed with fury, the white teeth champing with rage, and the fair cheeks blazing red with passion. But the Count! Never did I imagine such wrath and fury, even to the demons of the pit. His eyes were positively blazing. The red light in them was lurid, as if the flames of hell fire blazed behind them. His face was deathly pale, and the lines of it were hard like drawn wires. The thick eyebrows that met over the nose now seemed like a heaving bar of white-hot metal. With a fierce sweep of his arm, he hurled the woman from him, and then motioned to the others, as though he were beating them back. It was the same imperious gesture that I had seen used to the wolves. In a voice which, though low and almost in a whisper seemed to cut through the air and then ring in the room he said,

"How dare you touch him, any of you? How dare you cast eyes on him when I had forbidden it? Back, I tell you all! This man belongs to me! Beware how you meddle with him, or you'll have to deal with me."

The fair girl, with a laugh of ribald coquetry, turned to answer him. "You yourself never loved. You never love!" On this the other women joined, and such a mirthless, hard, soulless laughter rang through the room that it almost made me faint to hear. It seemed like the pleasure of fiends.

Then the Count turned, after looking at my face attentively, and said in a soft whisper, "Yes, I too can love. You yourselves can tell it from the past. Is it not so? Well, now I promise you that when I am done with him you shall kiss him at your will. Now go! Go! I must awaken him, for there is work to be done."

"Are we to have nothing tonight?" said one of them, with a low laugh, as she pointed to the bag which he had thrown upon the floor, and which moved as though there were some living thing within it. For answer he nodded his head. One of the women jumped forward and opened it. If my ears did not deceive me there was a gasp and a low wail, as of a half smothered child. The women closed round, whilst I was aghast with horror. But as I looked, they disappeared, and with them the dreadful bag. There was no door near them, and they could not have passed me without my noticing. They simply seemed to fade into the rays of the moonlight and pass out through the window, for I could see outside the dim, shadowy forms for a moment before they entirely faded away.

Then the horror overcame me, and I sank down unconscious.

CHAPTER 4

Jonathan Harker's Journal Continued

I awoke in my own bed. If it be that I had not dreamt, the Count must have carried me here. I tried to satisfy myself on the subject, but could not arrive at any unquestionable result. To be sure, there were certain small evidences, such as that my clothes were folded and laid by in a manner which was not my habit. My watch was still unwound, and I am rigorously accustomed to wind it the last thing before going to bed, and many such details. But these things are no proof, for they may have been evidences that my mind was not as usual, and, for some cause or another, I had certainly been much upset. I must watch for proof. Of one thing I am glad. If it was that the Count carried me here and undressed me, he must have been hurried in his task, for my pockets are intact. I am sure this diary would have been a mystery to him which he would not have brooked. He would have taken or destroyed it. As I look round this room, although it has been to me so full of fear, it is now a sort of sanctuary, for nothing can be more dreadful than those awful women, who were, who are, waiting to suck my blood.

18 May. — I have been down to look at that room again in daylight, for I must know the truth. When I got to the doorway at the top of the stairs I found it closed. It had been so forcibly driven against the jamb that part of the woodwork was splintered. I could see that the bolt of the lock had not been shot, but the door is fastened from the inside. I fear it was no dream, and must act on this surmise.

19 May. — I am surely in the toils. Last night the Count asked me in the suavest tones to write three letters, one saying that my work here was nearly done, and that I should start for home within a few days, another that I was starting on the next morning from the time of the letter, and the third that I had left the castle and arrived at Bistritz. I would fain have rebelled, but felt that in the present state of things it would be madness to quarrel openly with the Count whilst I am so absolutely in his power. And to refuse would be to excite his suspicion and to arouse his anger. He knows that I know too much, and that I must not live, lest I be dangerous to him. My only chance is to prolong my opportunities. Something may occur which will give me a chance to escape. I saw in his eyes something of that gathering wrath which was manifest when he hurled that fair woman from him. He explained to me that posts were few and uncertain, and that my writing now would ensure ease of mind to my friends. And he assured me with so much impressiveness that he would countermand the later letters, which would be held over at Bistritz until due time in case chance would admit of my prolonging my stay, that to oppose him would have been to create new suspicion. I therefore pretended to fall in with his views, and asked him what dates I should put on the letters.

He calculated a minute, and then said, “The first should be June 12, the second June 19, and the third June 29.”

I know now the span of my life. God help me!

28 May. — There is a chance of escape, or at any rate of being able to send word home. A band of Szgany have come to the castle, and are encamped in the courtyard. These are gipsies. I have notes of

them in my book. They are peculiar to this part of the world, though allied to the ordinary gipsies all the world over. There are thousands of them in Hungary and Transylvania, who are almost outside all law. They attach themselves as a rule to some great noble or boyar, and call themselves by his name. They are fearless and without religion, save superstition, and they talk only their own varieties of the Romany tongue.

I shall write some letters home, and shall try to get them to have them posted. I have already spoken to them through my window to begin acquaintanceship. They took their hats off and made obeisance and many signs, which however, I could not understand any more than I could their spoken language…

I have written the letters. Mina’s is in shorthand, and I simply ask Mr. Hawkins to communicate with her. To her I have explained my situation, but without the horrors which I may only surmise. It would shock and frighten her to death were I to expose my heart to her. Should the letters not carry, then the Count shall not yet know my secret or the extent of my knowledge.…

I have given the letters. I threw them through the bars of my window with a gold piece, and made what signs I could to have them posted. The man who took them pressed them to his heart and bowed, and then put them in his cap. I could do no more. I stole back to the study, and began to read. As the Count did not come in, I have written here…

The Count has come. He sat down beside me, and said in his smoothest voice as he opened two letters, “The Szgany has given me these, of which, though I know not whence they come, I shall, of course, take care. See!" — He must have looked at it.— "One is from you, and to my friend Peter Hawkins. The other," — here he caught sight of the strange symbols as he opened the envelope, and the dark look came into his face, and his eyes blazed wickedly,— "The other is a vile thing, an outrage upon friendship and hospitality! It is not signed. Well! So it cannot matter to us." And he calmly held letter and envelope in the flame of the lamp till they were consumed.

Then he went on, "The letter to Hawkins, that I shall, of course send on, since it is yours. Your letters are sacred to me. Your pardon, my friend, that unknowingly I did break the seal. Will you not cover it again?" He held out the letter to me, and with a courteous bow handed me a clean envelope.

I could only redirect it and hand it to him in silence. When he went out of the room I could hear the key turn softly. A minute later I went over and tried it, and the door was locked.

When, an hour or two after, the Count came quietly into the room, his coming awakened me, for I had gone to sleep on the sofa. He was very courteous and very cheery in his manner, and seeing that I had been sleeping, he said, "So, my friend, you are tired? Get to bed. There is the surest rest. I may not have the pleasure of talk tonight, since there are many labours to me, but you will sleep, I pray."

I passed to my room and went to bed, and, strange to say, slept without dreaming. Despair has its own calms.

31 May. — This morning when I woke I thought I would provide myself with some papers and envelopes from my bag and keep them in my pocket, so that I might write in case I should get an opportunity, but again a surprise, again a shock!

Every scrap of paper was gone, and with it all my notes, my memoranda, relating to railways and travel, my letter of credit, in fact all that might be useful to me were I once outside the castle. I sat and pondered awhile, and then some thought occurred to me, and I made search of my portmanteau and in the wardrobe where I had placed my clothes.

The suit in which I had travelled was gone, and also my overcoat and rug. I could find no trace of them anywhere. This looked like some new scheme of villainy…

17 June. — This morning, as I was sitting on the edge of my bed cudgelling my brains, I heard without a crackling of whips and pounding and scraping of horses' feet up the rocky path beyond the courtyard. With joy I hurried to the window, and saw drive into the yard two great leiter-wagons, each drawn by eight sturdy horses, and at the head of each pair a Slovak, with his wide hat, great nail-studded belt, dirty sheepskin, and high boots. They had also their long staves in hand. I ran to the door, intending to descend and try and join them through the main hall, as I thought that way might be opened for them. Again a shock, my door was fastened on the outside.

Then I ran to the window and cried to them. They looked up at me stupidly and pointed, but just then the "hetman" of the Szgany came out, and seeing them pointing to my window, said something, at which they laughed.

Henceforth no effort of mine, no piteous cry or agonised entreaty, would make them even look at me. They resolutely turned away. The leiter-wagons contained great, square boxes, with handles of thick rope. These were evidently empty by the ease with which the Slovaks handled them, and by their resonance as they were roughly moved.

When they were all unloaded and packed in a great heap in one corner of the yard, the Slovaks were given some money by the Szgany, and spitting on it for luck, lazily went each to his horse's head. Shortly afterwards, I heard the crackling of their whips die away in the distance.

24 June. — Last night the Count left me early, and locked himself into his own room. As soon as I dared I ran up the winding stair, and looked out of the window, which opened South. I thought I would watch for the Count, for there is something going on. The Szgany are quartered somewhere in the castle and are doing work of some kind. I know it, for now and then, I hear a far-away muffled sound as of mattock and spade, and, whatever it is, it must be the end of some ruthless villainy.

I had been at the window somewhat less than half an hour, when I saw something coming out of the Count's window. I drew back and watched carefully, and saw the whole man emerge. It was a new shock to me to find that he had on the suit of clothes which I had worn whilst travelling here, and slung over his shoulder the terrible bag which I had seen the women take away. There could be no doubt as to his quest, and in my garb, too! This, then, is his new scheme of evil, that he will allow others to see me, as they think, so that he may both leave evidence that I have been seen in the towns or villages posting my own letters, and that any wickedness which he may do shall by the local people be attributed to me.

It makes me rage to think that this can go on, and whilst I am shut up here, a veritable prisoner, but without that protection of the law which is even a criminal's right and consolation.

I thought I would watch for the Count's return, and for a long time sat doggedly at the window. Then I began to notice that there were some quaint little specks floating in the rays of the moonlight. They were like the tiniest grains of dust, and they whirled round and gathered in clusters in a nebulous sort of way. I watched them with a sense of soothing, and a sort of calm stole over me. I leaned back in the embrasure in a more comfortable position, so that I could enjoy more fully the aerial gambolling.

Something made me start up, a low, piteous howling of dogs somewhere far below in the valley, which was hidden from my sight. Louder it seemed to ring in my ears, and the floating moats of dust to take new shapes to the sound as they danced in the moonlight. I felt myself struggling to awake to some call of my instincts. Nay, my very soul was struggling, and my half-remembered sensibilities were striving to answer the call. I was becoming hypnotised!

Quicker and quicker danced the dust. The moonbeams seemed to quiver as they went by me into the mass of gloom beyond. More and more they gathered till they seemed to take dim phantom shapes. And then I started, broad awake and in full possession of my senses, and ran screaming from the place.

The phantom shapes, which were becoming gradually materialised from the moonbeams, were those three ghostly women to whom I was doomed.

I fled, and felt somewhat safer in my own room, where there was no moonlight, and where the lamp was burning brightly.

When a couple of hours had passed I heard something stirring in the Count's room, something like a sharp wail quickly suppressed. And then there was silence, deep, awful silence, which chilled me. With a beating heart, I tried the door, but I was locked in my prison, and could do nothing. I sat down and simply cried.

As I sat I heard a sound in the courtyard without, the agonised cry of a woman. I rushed to the window, and throwing it up, peered between the bars.

There, indeed, was a woman with dishevelled hair, holding her hands over her heart as one distressed with running. She was leaning against the corner of the gateway. When she saw my face at the window she threw herself forward, and shouted in a voice laden with menace, “Monster, give me my child!”

She threw herself on her knees, and raising up her hands, cried the same words in tones which wrung my heart. Then she tore her hair and beat her breast, and abandoned herself to all the violences of extravagant emotion. Finally, she threw herself forward, and though I could not see her, I could hear the beating of her naked hands against the door.

Somewhere high overhead, probably on the tower, I heard the voice of the Count calling in his harsh, metallic whisper. His call seemed to be answered from far and wide by the howling of wolves. Before many minutes had passed a pack of them poured, like a pent-up dam when liberated, through the wide entrance into the courtyard.

There was no cry from the woman, and the howling of the wolves was but short. Before long they streamed away singly, licking their lips.

I could not pity her, for I knew now what had become of her child, and she was better dead.

What shall I do? What can I do? How can I escape from this dreadful thing of night, gloom, and fear?

25 June. — No man knows till he has suffered from the night how sweet and dear to his heart and eye the morning can be. When the

sun grew so high this morning that it struck the top of the great gateway opposite my window, the high spot which it touched seemed to me as if the dove from the ark had lighted there. My fear fell from me as if it had been a vaporous garment which dissolved in the warmth.

I must take action of some sort whilst the courage of the day is upon me. Last night one of my post-dated letters went to post, the first of that fatal series which is to blot out the very traces of my existence from the earth.

Let me not think of it. Action!

It has always been at night-time that I have been molested or threatened, or in some way in danger or in fear. I have not yet seen the Count in the daylight. Can it be that he sleeps when others wake, that he may be awake whilst they sleep? If I could only get into his room! But there is no possible way. The door is always locked, no way for me.

Yes, there is a way, if one dares to take it. Where his body has gone why may not another body go? I have seen him myself crawl from his window. Why should not I imitate him, and go in by his window? The chances are desperate, but my need is more desperate still. I shall risk it. At the worst it can only be death, and a man's death is not a calf's, and the dreaded Hereafter may still be open to me. God help me in my task! Goodbye, Mina, if I fail. Goodbye, my faithful friend and second father. Goodbye, all, and last of all Mina!

Same day, later. — I have made the effort, and God helping me, have come safely back to this room. I must put down every detail in order. I went whilst my courage was fresh straight to the window on the south side, and at once got outside on this side. The stones are big and roughly cut, and the mortar has by process of time been washed away between them. I took off my boots, and ventured out on the desperate way. I looked down once, so as to make sure that a sudden glimpse of the awful depth would not overcome me, but after that kept my eyes away from it. I know pretty well the direction and distance of the Count's window, and made for it as well as I could, having regard to the opportunities available. I did not feel dizzy, I suppose I was too excited, and the time seemed ridiculously short till I found myself standing on the window sill and trying to raise up the sash. I was filled with agitation, however, when I bent down and slid feet foremost in through the window. Then I looked around for the Count, but with surprise and gladness, made a discovery. The room was empty! It was barely furnished with odd things, which seemed to have never been used.

The furniture was something the same style as that in the south rooms, and was covered with dust. I looked for the key, but it was not in the lock, and I could not find it anywhere. The only thing I found was a great heap of gold in one corner, gold of all kinds, Roman, and British, and Austrian, and Hungarian, and Greek and Turkish money, covered with a film of dust, as though it had lain long in the ground. None of it that I noticed was less than three hundred years old. There were also chains and ornaments, some jewelled, but all of them old and stained.

At one corner of the room was a heavy door. I tried it, for, since I could not find the key of the room or the key of the outer door, which was the main object of my search, I must make further examination, or all my efforts would be in vain. It was open, and led through a stone passage to a circular stairway, which went steeply down.

I descended, minding carefully where I went for the stairs were dark, being only lit by loopholes in the heavy masonry. At the bottom there was a dark, tunnel-like passage, through which came a deathly, sickly odour, the odour of old earth newly turned. As I went through the passage the smell grew closer and heavier. At last I pulled open a heavy door which stood ajar, and found myself in an old ruined chapel, which had evidently been used as a graveyard. The roof was broken, and in two places were steps leading to vaults, but the ground had recently been dug over, and the earth placed in great wooden boxes, manifestly those which had been brought by the Slovaks.

There was nobody about, and I made a search over every inch of the ground, so as not to lose a chance. I went down even into the vaults, where the dim light struggled, although to do so was a dread to my very soul. Into two of these I went, but saw nothing except fragments of old coffins and piles of dust. In the third, however, I made a discovery.

There, in one of the great boxes, of which there were fifty in all, on a pile of newly dug earth, lay the Count! He was either dead or asleep. I could not say which, for eyes were open and stony, but without the glassiness of death, and the cheeks had the warmth of life through all their pallor. The lips were as red as ever. But there was no sign of movement, no pulse, no breath, no beating of the heart.

I bent over him, and tried to find any sign of life, but in vain. He could not have lain there long, for the earthy smell would have passed away in a few hours. By the side of the box was its cover, pierced with holes here and there. I thought he might have the keys on him, but when I went to search I saw the dead eyes, and in them dead though they were, such a look of hate, though unconscious of me or my presence, that I fled from the place, and leaving the

Count's room by the window, crawled again up the castle wall. Regaining my room, I threw myself panting upon the bed and tried to think.

29 June. — Today is the date of my last letter, and the Count has taken steps to prove that it was genuine, for again I saw him leave the castle by the same window, and in my clothes. As he went down the wall, lizard fashion, I wished I had a gun or some lethal weapon, that I might destroy him. But I fear that no weapon wrought along by man's hand would have any effect on him. I dared not wait to see him return, for I feared to see those weird sisters. I came back to the library, and read there till I fell asleep.

I was awakened by the Count, who looked at me as grimly as a man could look as he said, "Tomorrow, my friend, we must part. You return to your beautiful England, I to some work which may have such an end that we may never meet. Your letter home has been despatched. Tomorrow I shall not be here, but all shall be ready for your journey. In the morning come the Szgany, who have some labours of their own here, and also come some Slovaks. When they have gone, my carriage shall come for you, and shall bear you to the Borgo Pass to meet the diligence from Bukovina to Bistritz. But I am in hopes that I shall see more of you at Castle Dracula."

I suspected him, and determined to test his sincerity. Sincerity! It seems like a profanation of the word to write it in connection with such a monster, so I asked him point-blank, "Why may I not go tonight?"

"Because, dear sir, my coachman and horses are away on a mission."

"But I would walk with pleasure. I want to get away at once."

He smiled, such a soft, smooth, diabolical smile that I knew there was some trick behind his smoothness. He said, “And your baggage?”

“I do not care about it. I can send for it some other time.”

The Count stood up, and said, with a sweet courtesy which made me rub my eyes, it seemed so real, “You English have a saying which is close to my heart, for its spirit is that which rules our boyars, ‘Welcome the coming, speed the parting guest.’ Come with me, my dear young friend. Not an hour shall you wait in my house against your will, though sad am I at your going, and that you so suddenly desire it. Come!” With a stately gravity, he, with the lamp, preceded me down the stairs and along the hall. Suddenly he stopped. “Hark!”

Close at hand came the howling of many wolves. It was almost as if the sound sprang up at the rising of his hand, just as the music of a great orchestra seems to leap under the baton of the conductor. After a pause of a moment, he proceeded, in his stately way, to the door, drew back the ponderous bolts, unhooked the heavy chains, and began to draw it open.

To my intense astonishment I saw that it was unlocked. Suspiciously, I looked all round, but could see no key of any kind.

As the door began to open, the howling of the wolves without grew louder and angrier. Their red jaws, with champing teeth, and their blunt-clawed feet as they leaped, came in through the opening door. I knew than that to struggle at the moment against the Count was useless. With such allies as these at his command, I could do nothing.

But still the door continued slowly to open, and only the Count’s body stood in the gap. Suddenly it struck me that this might be the moment and means of my doom. I was to be given to the wolves, and at my own instigation. There was a diabolical wickedness in the idea great enough for the Count, and as the last chance I cried out, “Shut the door! I shall wait till morning.” And I covered my face with my hands to hide my tears of bitter disappointment.

With one sweep of his powerful arm, the Count threw the door shut, and the great bolts clanged and echoed through the hall as they shot back into their places.

In silence we returned to the library, and after a minute or two I went to my own room. The last I saw of Count Dracula was his kissing his hand to me, with a red light of triumph in his eyes, and with a smile that Judas in hell might be proud of.

When I was in my room and about to lie down, I thought I heard a whispering at my door. I went to it softly and listened. Unless my ears deceived me, I heard the voice of the Count.

“Back! Back to your own place! Your time is not yet come. Wait! Have patience! Tonight is mine. Tomorrow night is yours!”

There was a low, sweet ripple of laughter, and in a rage I threw open the door, and saw without the three terrible women licking their lips. As I appeared, they all joined in a horrible laugh, and ran away.

I came back to my room and threw myself on my knees. It is then so near the end? Tomorrow! Tomorrow! Lord, help me, and those to whom I am dear!

30 June. — These may be the last words I ever write in this diary. I slept till just before the dawn, and when I woke threw myself on my knees, for I determined that if Death came he should find me ready.

At last I felt that subtle change in the air, and knew that the morning had come. Then came the welcome cockcrow, and I felt that I was safe. With a glad heart, I opened the door and ran down the hall. I had seen that the door was unlocked, and now escape was before me. With hands that trembled with eagerness, I unhooked the chains and threw back the massive bolts.

But the door would not move. Despair seized me. I pulled and pulled at the door, and shook it till, massive as it was, it rattled in its casement. I could see the bolt shot. It had been locked after I left the Count.

Then a wild desire took me to obtain the key at any risk, and I determined then and there to scale the wall again, and gain the Count's room. He might kill me, but death now seemed the happier choice of evils. Without a pause I rushed up to the east window, and scrambled down the wall, as before, into the Count's room. It was empty, but that was as I expected. I could not see a key anywhere, but the heap of gold remained. I went through the door in the corner and down the winding stair and along the dark passage to the old chapel. I knew now well enough where to find the monster I sought.

The great box was in the same place, close against the wall, but the lid was laid on it, not fastened down, but with the nails ready in their places to be hammered home.

I knew I must reach the body for the key, so I raised the lid, and laid it back against the wall. And then I saw something which filled my very soul with horror. There lay the Count, but looking as if his youth had been half restored. For the white hair and moustache were changed to dark iron-grey. The cheeks were fuller, and the white skin seemed ruby-red underneath. The mouth was redder than ever, for on the lips were gouts of fresh blood, which trickled from the corners of the mouth and ran down over the chin and neck. Even the deep, burning eyes seemed set amongst swollen flesh, for the lids and pouches underneath were bloated. It seemed as if the whole awful creature were simply gorged with blood. He lay like a filthy leech, exhausted with his repletion.

I shuddered as I bent over to touch him, and every sense in me revolted at the contact, but I had to search, or I was lost. The coming night might see my own body a banquet in a similar war to those horrid three. I felt all over the body, but no sign could I find of the key. Then I stopped and looked at the Count. There was a mocking smile on the bloated face which seemed to drive me mad. This was the being I was helping to transfer to London, where, perhaps, for centuries to come he might, amongst its teeming millions, satiate his lust for blood, and create a new and ever-widening circle of semi-demons to batten on the helpless.

The very thought drove me mad. A terrible desire came upon me to rid the world of such a monster. There was no lethal weapon at hand, but I seized a shovel which the workmen had been using to fill the cases, and lifting it high, struck, with the edge downward, at the hateful face. But as I did so the head turned, and the eyes fell upon me, with all their blaze of basilisk horror. The sight seemed to paralyze me, and the shovel turned in my hand and glanced from the face, merely making a deep gash above the forehead. The shovel fell from my hand across the box, and as I pulled it away the flange of the blade caught the edge of the lid which fell over again, and hid the horrid thing from my sight. The last glimpse I had was of the bloated face, blood-stained and fixed with a grin of malice which would have held its own in the nethermost hell.

I thought and thought what should be my next move, but my brain seemed on fire, and I waited with a despairing feeling growing over me. As I waited I heard in the distance a gipsy song sung by merry voices coming closer, and through their song the rolling of heavy wheels and the cracking of whips. The Szgany and the Slovaks of whom the Count had spoken were coming. With a last look around and at the box which contained the vile body, I ran from the place and gained the Count's room, determined to rush out at the moment the door should be opened. With strained ears, I listened, and heard downstairs the grinding of the key in the great lock and the falling back of the heavy door. There must have been some other means of entry, or some one had a key for one of the locked doors.

Then there came the sound of many feet tramping and dying away in some passage which sent up a clanging echo. I turned to run down again towards the vault, where I might find the new entrance, but at the moment there seemed to come a violent puff of wind, and the door to the winding stair blew to with a shock that set the dust from the lintels flying. When I ran to push it open, I found that it was hopelessly fast. I was again a prisoner, and the net of doom was closing round me more closely.

As I write there is in the passage below a sound of many tramping feet and the crash of weights being set down heavily, doubtless the boxes, with their freight of earth. There was a sound of hammering. It is the box being nailed down. Now I can hear the heavy feet tramping again along the hall, with many other idle feet coming behind them.

The door is shut, the chains rattle. There is a grinding of the key in the lock. I can hear the key withdrawn, then another door opens and shuts. I hear the creaking of lock and bolt.

Hark! In the courtyard and down the rocky way the roll of heavy wheels, the crack of whips, and the chorus of the Szgany as they pass into the distance.

I am alone in the castle with those horrible women. Faugh! Mina is a woman, and there is nought in common. They are devils of the Pit!

I shall not remain alone with them. I shall try to scale the castle wall farther than I have yet attempted. I shall take some of the gold with me, lest I want it later. I may find a way from this dreadful place.

And then away for home! Away to the quickest and nearest train! Away from the cursed spot, from this cursed land, where the devil and his children still walk with earthly feet!

At least God’s mercy is better than that of those monsters, and the precipice is steep and high. At its foot a man may sleep, as a man. Goodbye, all. Mina!

CHAPTER 5

LETTER FROM MISS MINA MURRAY TO MISS LUCY WESTENRA

9 May.
My dearest Lucy,

Forgive my long delay in writing, but I have been simply overwhelmed with work. The life of an assistant schoolmistress is sometimes trying. I am longing to be with you, and by the sea, where we can talk together freely and build our castles in the air. I have been working very hard lately, because I want to keep up with Jonathan's studies, and I have been practicing shorthand very assiduously. When we are married I shall be able to be useful to Jonathan, and if I can stenograph well enough I can take down what he wants to say in this way and write it out for him on the typewriter, at which also I am practicing very hard.

He and I sometimes write letters in shorthand, and he is keeping a stenographic journal of his travels abroad. When I am with you I shall keep a diary in the same way. I don't mean one of those two-pages-to-the-week-with-Sunday-squeezed- in-a-corner diaries, but a sort of journal which I can write in whenever I feel inclined.

I do not suppose there will be much of interest to other people, but it is not intended for them. I may show it to Jonathan some day if there is in it anything worth sharing, but it is really an exercise book. I shall try to do what I see lady journalists do, interviewing and writing descriptions and trying to remember conversations. I am told that, with a little practice, one can remember all that goes on or that one hears said during a day.

However, we shall see. I will tell you of my little plans when we meet. I have just had a few hurried lines from Jonathan from Transylvania. He is well, and will be returning in about a week. I am longing to hear all his news. It must be nice to see strange countries. I wonder if we, I mean Jonathan and I, shall ever see them together. There is the ten o’clock bell ringing. Goodbye.

Your loving
Mina

Tell me all the news when you write. You have not told me anything for a long time. I hear rumours, and especially of a tall, handsome, curly-haired man???

LETTER, LUCY WESTENRA TO MINA MURRAY

17, Chatham Street
Wednesday
My dearest Mina,

I must say you tax me very unfairly with being a bad correspondent. I wrote you twice since we parted, and your last letter was only your second. Besides, I have nothing to tell you. There is really nothing to interest you.

Town is very pleasant just now, and we go a great deal to picture-galleries and for walks and rides in the park. As to the tall, curly-haired man, I suppose it was the one who was with me at the last Pop. Someone has evidently been telling tales.

That was Mr. Holmwood. He often comes to see us, and he and Mamma get on very well together, they have so many things to talk about in common.

We met some time ago a man that would just do for you, if you were not already engaged to Jonathan. He is an excellent parti, being handsome, well off, and of good birth. He is a doctor and really clever. Just fancy! He is only nine-and twenty, and he has an immense lunatic asylum all under his own care. Mr. Holmwood introduced him to me, and he called here to see us, and often comes now. I think he is one of the most resolute men I ever saw, and yet the most calm. He seems absolutely imperturbable. I can fancy what a wonderful power he must have over his patients. He has a curious habit of looking one straight in the face, as if trying to read one's thoughts. He tries this on very much with me, but I flatter myself he has got a tough nut to crack. I know that from my glass.

Do you ever try to read your own face? I do, and I can tell you it is not a bad study, and gives you more trouble than you can well fancy if you have never tried it.

He says that I afford him a curious psychological study, and I humbly think I do. I do not, as you know, take sufficient interest in dress to be able to describe the new fashions. Dress is a bore. That is slang again, but never mind. Arthur says that every day.

There, it is all out, Mina, we have told all our secrets to each other since we were children. We have slept together and eaten together, and laughed and cried together, and now, though I have spoken, I would like to speak more. Oh, Mina, couldn't you guess? I love him. I am blushing as I write, for although I think he loves me, he has not told me so in words. But, oh, Mina, I love him. I love him! There, that does me good.

I wish I were with you, dear, sitting by the fire undressing, as we used to sit, and I would try to tell you what I feel. I do not know how

I am writing this even to you. I am afraid to stop, or I should tear up the letter, and I don't want to stop, for I do so want to tell you all. Let me hear from you at once, and tell me all that you think about it. Mina, pray for my happiness.

Lucy

P.S. — I need not tell you this is a secret. Goodnight again. L.

LETTER, LUCY WESTENRA TO MINA MURRAY

24 May

My dearest Mina,

Thanks, and thanks, and thanks again for your sweet letter. It was so nice to be able to tell you and to have your sympathy.

My dear, it never rains but it pours. How true the old proverbs are. Here am I, who shall be twenty in September, and yet I never had a proposal till today, not a real proposal, and today I had three. Just fancy! Three proposals in one day! Isn't it awful! I feel sorry, really and truly sorry, for two of the poor fellows. Oh, Mina, I am so happy that I don't know what to do with myself. And three proposals! But, for goodness' sake, don't tell any of the girls, or they would be getting all sorts of extravagant ideas, and imagining themselves injured and slighted if in their very first day at home they did not get six at least. Some girls are so vain! You and I, Mina dear, who are engaged and are going to settle down soon soberly into old married women, can despise vanity. Well, I must tell you about the three, but you must keep it a secret, dear, from every one except, of course, Jonathan. You will tell him, because I would, if I were in your place, certainly tell Arthur. A woman ought to tell her husband everything.

Don’t you think so, dear? And I must be fair. Men like women, certainly their wives, to be quite as fair as they are. And women, I am afraid, are not always quite as fair as they should be.

Well, my dear, number One came just before lunch. I told you of him, Dr. John Seward, the lunatic asylum man, with the strong jaw and the good forehead. He was very cool outwardly, but was nervous all the same. He had evidently been schooling himself as to all sorts of little things, and remembered them, but he almost managed to sit down on his silk hat, which men don’t generally do when they are cool, and then when he wanted to appear at ease he kept playing with a lancet in a way that made me nearly scream. He spoke to me, Mina, very straightforwardly. He told me how dear I was to him, though he had known me so little, and what his life would be with me to help and cheer him. He was going to tell me how unhappy he would be if I did not care for him, but when he saw me cry he said he was a brute and would not add to my present trouble. Then he broke off and asked if I could love him in time, and when I shook my head his hands trembled, and then with some hesitation he asked me if I cared already for any one else. He put it very nicely, saying that he did not want to wring my confidence from me, but only to know, because if a woman’s heart was free a man might have hope. And then, Mina, I felt a sort of duty to tell him that there was some one. I only told him that much, and then he stood up, and he looked very strong and very grave as he took both my hands in his and said he hoped I would be happy, and that If I ever wanted a friend I must count him one of my best.

Oh, Mina dear, I can’t help crying, and you must excuse this letter being all blotted. Being proposed to is all very nice and all that sort of thing, but it isn’t at all a happy thing when you have to see a poor fellow, whom you know loves you honestly, going away and looking all broken hearted, and to know that, no matter what he may say at the moment, you are passing out of his life. My dear, I must stop here at present, I feel so miserable, though I am so happy.

Evening.

Arthur has just gone, and I feel in better spirits than when I left off, so I can go on telling you about the day.

Well, my dear, number Two came after lunch. He is such a nice fellow, an American from Texas, and he looks so young and so fresh that it seems almost impossible that he has been to so many places and has such adventures. I sympathise with poor Desdemona when she had such a stream poured in her ear, even by a black man. I suppose that we women are such cowards that we think a man will save us from fears, and we marry him. I know now what I would do if I were a man and wanted to make a girl love me. No, I don't, for there was Mr. Morris telling us his stories, and Arthur never told any, and yet…

My dear, I am somewhat previous. Mr. Quincy P. Morris found me alone. It seems that a man always does find a girl alone. No, he doesn't, for Arthur tried twice to make a chance, and I helping him all I could, I am not ashamed to say it now. I must tell you beforehand that Mr. Morris doesn't always speak slang, that is to say, he never does so to strangers or before them, for he is really well educated and has exquisite manners, but he found out that it amused me to hear him talk American slang, and whenever I was present, and there was no one to be shocked, he said such funny things. I am afraid, my dear, he has to invent it all, for it fits exactly into whatever else he has to say. But this is a way slang has. I do not know myself if I shall ever speak slang. I do not know if Arthur likes it, as I have never heard him use any as yet.

Well, Mr. Morris sat down beside me and looked as happy and jolly as he could, but I could see all the same that he was very nervous. He took my hand in his, and said ever so sweetly…

“Miss Lucy, I know I ain’t good enough to regulate the fixin’s of your little shoes, but I guess if you wait till you find a man that is you will go join them seven young women with the lamps when you quit. Won’t you just hitch up alongside of me and let us go down the long road together, driving in double harness?”

Well, he did look so good humoured and so jolly that it didn’t seem half so hard to refuse him as it did poor Dr. Seward. So I said, as lightly as I could, that I did not know anything of hitching, and that I wasn’t broken to harness at all yet. Then he said that he had spoken in a light manner, and he hoped that if he had made a mistake in doing so on so grave, so momentous, and occasion for him, I would forgive him. He really did look serious when he was saying it, and I couldn’t help feeling a sort of exultation that he was number Two in one day. And then, my dear, before I could say a word he began pouring out a perfect torrent of love-making, laying his very heart and soul at my feet. He looked so earnest over it that I shall never again think that a man must be playful always, and never earnest, because he is merry at times. I suppose he saw something in my face which checked him, for he suddenly stopped, and said with a sort of manly fervour that I could have loved him for if I had been free…

“Lucy, you are an honest hearted girl, I know. I should not be here speaking to you as I am now if I did not believe you clean grit, right through to the very depths of your soul. Tell me, like one good fellow to another, is there any one else that you care for? And if there is I'll never trouble you a hair's breadth again, but will be, if you will let me, a very faithful friend."

My dear Mina, why are men so noble when we women are so little worthy of them? Here was I almost making fun of this great hearted, true gentleman. I burst into tears, I am afraid, my dear, you will think this a very sloppy letter in more ways than one, and I really felt very badly.

Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble? But this is heresy, and I must not say it. I am glad to say that, though I was crying, I was able to look into Mr. Morris' brave eyes, and I told him out straight…

"Yes, there is some one I love, though he has not told me yet that he even loves me." I was right to speak to him so frankly, for quite a light came into his face, and he put out both his hands and took mine, I think I put them into his, and said in a hearty way…

"That's my brave girl. It's better worth being late for a chance of winning you than being in time for any other girl in the world. Don't cry, my dear. If it's for me, I'm a hard nut to crack, and I take it standing up. If that other fellow doesn't know his happiness, well, he'd better look for it soon, or he'll have to deal with me. Little girl, your honesty and pluck have made me a friend, and that's rarer than a lover, it's more selfish anyhow. My dear, I'm going to have a pretty lonely walk between this and Kingdom Come. Won't you give me one kiss? It'll be something to keep off the darkness now and then. You can, you know, if you like, for that other good fellow, or you could not love him, hasn't spoken yet."

That quite won me, Mina, for it was brave and sweet of him, and noble too, to a rival, wasn't it? And he so sad, so I leant over and kissed him.

He stood up with my two hands in his, and as he looked down into my face, I am afraid I was blushing very much, he said, "Little girl, I hold your hand, and you've kissed me, and if these things don't make us friends nothing ever will. Thank you for your sweet honesty to me, and goodbye."

He wrung my hand, and taking up his hat, went straight out of the room without looking back, without a tear or a quiver or a pause, and I am crying like a baby.

Oh, why must a man like that be made unhappy when there are lots of girls about who would worship the very ground he trod on? I know I would if I were free, only I don't want to be free. My dear, this quite upset me, and I feel I cannot write of happiness just at once, after telling you of it, and I don't wish to tell of the number Three until it can be all happy. Ever your loving…

Lucy

P.S. — Oh, about number Three, I needn't tell you of number Three, need I? Besides, it was all so confused. It seemed only a moment from his coming into the room till both his arms were round me, and he was kissing me. I am very, very happy, and I don't know what I have done to deserve it. I must only try in the future to show that I am not ungrateful to God for all His goodness to me in sending to me such a lover, such a husband, and such a friend.

Goodbye.

DR. SEWARD'S DIARY (Kept in phonograph)

25 May. — Ebb tide in appetite today. Cannot eat, cannot rest, so diary instead. Since my rebuff of yesterday I have a sort of empty feeling. Nothing in the world seems of sufficient importance to be

worth the doing. As I knew that the only cure for this sort of thing was work, I went amongst the patients. I picked out one who has afforded me a study of much interest. He is so quaint that I am determined to understand him as well as I can. Today I seemed to get nearer than ever before to the heart of his mystery.

I questioned him more fully than I had ever done, with a view to making myself master of the facts of his hallucination. In my manner of doing it there was, I now see, something of cruelty. I seemed to wish to keep him to the point of his madness, a thing which I avoid with the patients as I would the mouth of hell.

(Mem., Under what circumstances would I not avoid the pit of hell?) Omnia Romae venalia sunt. Hell has its price! If there be anything behind this instinct it will be valuable to trace it afterwards accurately, so I had better commence to do so, therefore…

R. M, Renfield, age 59. Sanguine temperament, great physical strength, morbidly excitable, periods of gloom, ending in some fixed idea which I cannot make out. I presume that the sanguine temperament itself and the disturbing influence end in a mentally-accomplished finish, a possibly dangerous man, probably dangerous if unselfish. In selfish men caution is as secure an armour for their foes as for themselves. What I think of on this point is, when self is the fixed point the centripetal force is balanced with the centrifugal. When duty, a cause, etc., is the fixed point, the latter force is paramount, and only accident or a series of accidents can balance it.

LETTER, QUINCEY P. MORRIS TO HON. ARTHUR HOLMOOD

25 May.

My dear Art,

We’ve told yarns by the campfire in the prairies, and dressed one another’s wounds after trying a landing at the Marquesas, and drunk healths on the shore of Titicaca. There are more yarns to be told, and other wounds to be healed, and another health to be drunk. Won’t you let this be at my campfire tomorrow night? I have no hesitation in asking you, as I know a certain lady is engaged to a certain dinner party, and that you are free. There will only be one other, our old pal at the Korea, Jack Seward. He’s coming, too, and we both want to mingle our weeps over the wine cup, and to drink a health with all our hearts to the happiest man in all the wide world, who has won the noblest heart that God has made and best worth winning. We promise you a hearty welcome, and a loving greeting, and a health as true as your own right hand. We shall both swear to leave you at home if you drink too deep to a certain pair of eyes. Come!

Yours, as ever and always,

Quincey P. Morris

TELEGRAM FROM ARTHUR HOLMWOOD TO QUINCEY P. MORRIS

26 May

Count me in every time. I bear messages which will make both your ears tingle.

Art

CHAPTER 6

MINA MURRAY'S JOURNAL

24 July. Whitby. — Lucy met me at the station, looking sweeter and lovelier than ever, and we drove up to the house at the Crescent in which they have rooms. This is a lovely place. The little river, the Esk, runs through a deep valley, which broadens out as it comes near the harbour. A great viaduct runs across, with high piers, through which the view seems somehow further away than it really is. The valley is beautifully green, and it is so steep that when you are on the high land on either side you look right across it, unless you are near enough to see down. The houses of the old town — the side away from us, are all red-roofed, and seem piled up one over the other anyhow, like the pictures we see of Nuremberg. Right over the town is the ruin of Whitby Abbey, which was sacked by the Danes, and which is the scene of part of "Marmion," where the girl was built up in the wall. It is a most noble ruin, of immense size, and full of beautiful and romantic bits. There is a legend that a white lady is seen in one of the windows. Between it and the town there is another church, the parish one, round which is a big graveyard, all full of tombstones. This is to my mind the nicest spot in Whitby, for it lies right over the town, and has a full view of the harbour and all up the bay to where the headland called Kettleness stretches out into the sea. It descends so steeply over the harbour that part of the bank has fallen away, and some of the graves have been destroyed.

In one place part of the stonework of the graves stretches out over the sandy pathway far below. There are walks, with seats beside them, through the churchyard, and people go and sit there all day long looking at the beautiful view and enjoying the breeze.

I shall come and sit here often myself and work. Indeed, I am writing now, with my book on my knee, and listening to the talk of three old men who are sitting beside me. They seem to do nothing all day but sit here and talk.

The harbour lies below me, with, on the far side, one long granite wall stretching out into the sea, with a curve outwards at the end of it, in the middle of which is a lighthouse. A heavy seawall runs along outside of it. On the near side, the seawall makes an elbow crooked inversely, and its end too has a lighthouse. Between the two piers there is a narrow opening into the harbour, which then suddenly widens.

It is nice at high water, but when the tide is out it shoals away to nothing, and there is merely the stream of the Esk, running between banks of sand, with rocks here and there. Outside the harbour on this side there rises for about half a mile a great reef, the sharp of which runs straight out from behind the south lighthouse. At the end of it is a buoy with a bell, which swings in bad weather, and sends in a mournful sound on the wind.

They have a legend here that when a ship is lost bells are heard out at sea. I must ask the old man about this. He is coming this way…

He is a funny old man. He must be awfully old, for his face is gnarled and twisted like the bark of a tree. He tells me that he is nearly a hundred, and that he was a sailor in the Greenland fishing fleet when Waterloo was fought. He is, I am afraid, a very sceptical person, for when I asked him about the bells at sea and the White Lady at the abbey he said very brusquely,

“I wouldn’t fash masel’ about them, miss. Them things be all wore out. Mind, I don’t say that they never was, but I do say that they wasn’t in my time. They be all very well for comers and trippers, an’ the like, but not for a nice young lady like you. Them feet-folks from York and Leeds that be always eatin’ cured herrin’s and drinkin’ tea an’ lookin’ out to buy cheap jet would creed aught. I wonder masel’ who’d be bothered tellin’ lies to them, even the newspapers, which is full of fool-talk.”

I thought he would be a good person to learn interesting things from, so I asked him if he would mind telling me something about the whale fishing in the old days. He was just settling himself to begin when the clock struck six, whereupon he laboured to get up, and said,

“I must gang ageeanwards home now, miss. My grand-daughter doesn’t like to be kept waitin’ when the tea is ready, for it takes me time to crammle aboon the grees, for there be a many of ‘em, and miss, I lack belly-timber sairly by the clock.”

He hobbled away, and I could see him hurrying, as well as he could, down the steps. The steps are a great feature on the place. They lead from the town to the church, there are hundreds of them, I do not know how many, and they wind up in a delicate curve. The slope is so gentle that a horse could easily walk up and down them.

I think they must originally have had something to do with the abbey. I shall go home too. Lucy went out, visiting with her mother, and as they were only duty calls, I did not go.

1 August. — I came up here an hour ago with Lucy, and we had a most interesting talk with my old friend and the two others who always come and join him. He is evidently the Sir Oracle of them, and I should think must have been in his time a most dictatorial

person.

He will not admit anything, and down faces everybody. If he can’t out-argue them he bullies them, and then takes their silence for agreement with his views.

Lucy was looking sweetly pretty in her white lawn frock. She has got a beautiful colour since she has been here.

I noticed that the old men did not lose any time in coming and sitting near her when we sat down. She is so sweet with old people, I think they all fell in love with her on the spot. Even my old man succumbed and did not contradict her, but gave me double share instead. I got him on the subject of the legends, and he went off at once into a sort of sermon. I must try to remember it and put it down.

“It be all fool-talk, lock, stock, and barrel, that’s what it be and nowt else. These bans an’ wafts an’ boh-ghosts an’ bar-guests an’ bogles an’ all anent them is only fit to set bairns an’ dizzy women a’belderin’. They be nowt but air-blebs. They, an’ all grims an’ signs an’ warnin’s, be all invented by parsons an’ illsome berk-bodies an’ railway touters to skeer an’ scunner hafflin’s, an’ to get folks to do somethin’ that they don’t other incline to. It makes me ireful to think o’ them. Why, it’s them that, not content with printin’ lies on paper an’ preachin’ them out of pulpits, does want to be cuttin’ them on the tombstones. Look here all around you in what airt ye will. All them steans, holdin’ up their heads as well as they can out of their pride, is acant, simply tumblin’ down with the weight o’ the lies wrote on them, ‘Here lies the body’ or ‘Sacred to the memory’ wrote on all of them, an’ yet in nigh half of them there bean’t no bodies at all, an’ the memories of them bean’t cared a pinch of snuff about, much less sacred. Lies all of them, nothin’ but lies of one kind or another! My gog, but it’ll be a quare scowderment at the Day of Judgment when they come tumblin' up in their death-sarks, all jouped together an' trying' to drag their tombsteans with them to prove how good they was, some of them trimmlin' an' dithering, with their hands that dozzened an' slippery from lyin' in the sea that they can't even keep their gurp o' them."

I could see from the old fellow's self-satisfied air and the way in which he looked round for the approval of his cronies that he was "showing off," so I put in a word to keep him going.

"Oh, Mr. Swales, you can't be serious. Surely these tombstones are not all wrong?"

"Yabblins! There may be a poorish few not wrong, savin' where they make out the people too good, for there be folk that do think a balm-bowl be like the sea, if only it be their own. The whole thing be only lies. Now look you here. You come here a stranger, an' you see this kirkgarth."

I nodded, for I thought it better to assent, though I did not quite understand his dialect. I knew it had something to do with the church.

He went on, "And you consate that all these steans be aboon folk that be haped here, snod an' snog?" I assented again. "Then that be just where the lie comes in. Why, there be scores of these laybeds that be toom as old Dun's 'baccabox on Friday night."

He nudged one of his companions, and they all laughed. "And, my gog! How could they be otherwise? Look at that one, the aftest abaft the bier-bank, read it!"

I went over and read, "Edward Spencelagh, master mariner, murdered by pirates off the coast of Andres, April, 1854, age 30." When I came back Mr. Swales went on,

"Who brought him home, I wonder, to hap him here? Murdered off the coast of Andres! An’ you consated his body lay under! Why, I could name ye a dozen whose bones lie in the Greenland seas above,” he pointed northwards, “or where the currants may have drifted them. There be the steans around ye. Ye can, with your young eyes, read the small print of the lies from here. This Braithwaite Lowery, I knew his father, lost in the Lively off Greenland in ‘20, or Andrew Woodhouse, drowned in the same seas in 1777, or John Paxton, drowned off Cape Farewell a year later, or old John Rawlings, whose grandfather sailed with me, drowned in the Gulf of Finland in ‘50. Do ye think that all these men will have to make a rush to Whitby when the trumpet sounds? I have me antherums aboot it! I tell ye that when they got here they’d be jommlin’ and jostlin’ one another that way that it ‘ud be like a fight up on the ice in the old days, when we’d be at one another from daylight to dark, an’ tryin’ to tie up our cuts by the aurora borealis.” This was evidently local pleasantry, for the old man cackled over it, and his cronies joined in with gusto.

“But,” I said, “surely you are not quite correct, for you start on the assumption that all the poor people, or their spirits, will have to take their tombstones with them on the Day of Judgment. Do you think that will be really necessary?”

“Well, what else be they tombstones for? Answer me that, miss!”

“To please their relatives, I suppose.”

“To please their relatives, you suppose!” This he said with intense scorn. “How will it pleasure their relatives to know that lies is wrote over them, and that everybody in the place knows that they be lies?”

He pointed to a stone at our feet which had been laid down as a slab, on which the seat was rested, close to the edge of the cliff. “Read the lies on that thruff-stone,” he said.

The letters were upside down to me from where I sat, but Lucy was more opposite to them, so she leant over and read, "Sacred to the memory of George Canon, who died, in the hope of a glorious resurrection, on July 29, 1873, falling from the rocks at Kettleness. This tomb was erected by his sorrowing mother to her dearly beloved son. 'He was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.' Really, Mr. Swales, I don't see anything very funny in that!" She spoke her comment very gravely and somewhat severely.

"Ye don't see aught funny! Ha-ha! But that's because ye don't gawm the sorrowin' mother was a hell-cat that hated him because he was acrewk'd, a regular lamiter he was, an' he hated her so that he committed suicide in order that she mightn't get an insurance she put on his life. He blew nigh the top of his head off with an old musket that they had for scarin' crows with. 'Twarn't for crows then, for it brought the clegs and the dowps to him. That's the way he fell off the rocks. And, as to hopes of a glorious resurrection, I've often heard him say masel' that he hoped he'd go to hell, for his mother was so pious that she'd be sure to go to heaven, an' he didn't want to addle where she was. Now isn't that stean at any rate," he hammered it with his stick as he spoke, "a pack of lies? And won't it make Gabriel keckle when Geordie comes pantin' ut the grees with the tompstean balanced on his hump, and asks to be took as evidence!"

I did not know what to say, but Lucy turned the conversation as she said, rising up, "Oh, why did you tell us of this? It is my favourite seat, and I cannot leave it, and now I find I must go on sitting over the grave of a suicide."

"That won't harm ye, my pretty, an' it may make poor Geordie gladsome to have so trim a lass sittin' on his lap. That won't hurt ye. Why, I've sat here off an' on for nigh twenty years past, an' it hasn't done me no harm. Don’t ye fash about them as lies under ye, or that doesn’ lie there either! It’ll be time for ye to be getting scart when ye see the tombsteans all run away with, and the place as bare as a stubble-field. There’s the clock, and I must gang. My service to ye, ladies!” And off he hobbled.

Lucy and I sat awhile, and it was all so beautiful before us that we took hands as we sat, and she told me all over again about Arthur and their coming marriage. That made me just a little heart-sick, for I haven’t heard from Jonathan for a whole month.

The same day. I came up here alone, for I am very sad. There was no letter for me. I hope there cannot be anything the matter with Jonathan. The clock has just struck nine. I see the lights scattered all over the town, sometimes in rows where the streets are, and sometimes singly. They run right up the Esk and die away in the curve of the valley. To my left the view is cut off by a black line of roof of the old house next to the abbey. The sheep and lambs are bleating in the fields away behind me, and there is a clatter of donkeys’ hoofs up the paved road below. The band on the pier is playing a harsh waltz in good time, and further along the quay there is a Salvation Army meeting in a back street. Neither of the bands hears the other, but up here I hear and see them both. I wonder where Jonathan is and if he is thinking of me! I wish he were here.

DR. SEWARD’S DIARY

5 June. — The case of Renfield grows more interesting the more I get to understand the man. He has certain qualities very largely developed, selfishness, secrecy, and purpose.

I wish I could get at what is the object of the latter. He seems to have some settled scheme of his own, but what it is I do not know. His redeeming quality is a love of animals, though, indeed, he has such curious turns in it that I sometimes imagine he is only abnormally cruel. His pets are of odd sorts.

Just now his hobby is catching flies. He has at present such a quantity that I have had myself to expostulate. To my astonishment, he did not break out into a fury, as I expected, but took the matter in simple seriousness. He thought for a moment, and then said, "May I have three days? I shall clear them away." Of course, I said that would do. I must watch him.

18 June. — He has turned his mind now to spiders, and has got several very big fellows in a box. He keeps feeding them his flies, and the number of the latter is becoming sensibly diminished, although he has used half his food in attracting more flies from outside to his room.

1 July. — His spiders are now becoming as great a nuisance as his flies, and today I told him that he must get rid of them.

He looked very sad at this, so I said that he must some of them, at all events. He cheerfully acquiesced in this, and I gave him the same time as before for reduction.

He disgusted me much while with him, for when a horrid blowfly, bloated with some carrion food, buzzed into the room, he caught it, held it exultantly for a few moments between his finger and thumb, and before I knew what he was going to do, put it in his mouth and ate it.

I scolded him for it, but he argued quietly that it was very good and very wholesome, that it was life, strong life, and gave life to him.

This gave me an idea, or the rudiment of one. I must watch how he gets rid of his spiders.

He has evidently some deep problem in his mind, for he keeps a little notebook in which he is always jotting down something. Whole pages of it are filled with masses of figures, generally single numbers added up in batches, and then the totals added in batches again, as though he were focussing some account, as the auditors put it.

8 July. — There is a method in his madness, and the rudimentary idea in my mind is growing. It will be a whole idea soon, and then, oh, unconscious cerebration, you will have to give the wall to your conscious brother.

I kept away from my friend for a few days, so that I might notice if there were any change. Things remain as they were except that he has parted with some of his pets and got a new one.

He has managed to get a sparrow, and has already partially tamed it. His means of taming is simple, for already the spiders have diminished. Those that do remain, however, are well fed, for he still brings in the flies by tempting them with his food.

19 July — We are progressing. My friend has now a whole colony of sparrows, and his flies and spiders are almost obliterated. When I came in he ran to me and said he wanted to ask me a great favour, a very, very great favour. And as he spoke, he fawned on me like a dog.

I asked him what it was, and he said, with a sort of rapture in his voice and bearing, “A kitten, a nice, little, sleek playful kitten, that I can play with, and teach, and feed, and feed, and feed!”

I was not unprepared for this request, for I had noticed how his pets went on increasing in size and vivacity, but I did not care that his pretty family of tame sparrows should be wiped out in the same manner as the flies and spiders. So I said I would see about it, and asked him if he would not rather have a cat than a kitten.

His eagerness betrayed him as he answered, “Oh, yes, I would like a cat! I only asked for a kitten lest you should refuse me a cat. No one would refuse me a kitten, would they?”

I shook my head, and said that at present I feared it would not be possible, but that I would see about it. His face fell, and I could see a warning of danger in it, for there was a sudden fierce, sidelong look which meant killing. The man is an undeveloped homicidal maniac. I shall test him with his present craving and see how it will work out, then I shall know more.

10 pm. — I have visited him again and found him sitting in a corner brooding. When I came in he threw himself on his knees before me and implored me to let him have a cat, that his salvation depended upon it.

I was firm, however, and told him that he could not have it, whereupon he went without a word, and sat down, gnawing his fingers, in the corner where I had found him. I shall see him in the morning early.

20 July. — Visited Renfield very early, before attendant went his rounds. Found him up and humming a tune. He was spreading out his sugar, which he had saved, in the window, and was manifestly beginning his fly catching again, and beginning it cheerfully and with a good grace.

I looked around for his birds, and not seeing them, asked him where they were. He replied, without turning round, that they had all flown away. There were a few feathers about the room and on his pillow a drop of blood. I said nothing, but went and told the keeper to report to me if there were anything odd about him during the day.

11 am. — The attendant has just been to see me to say that Renfield has been very sick and has disgorged a whole lot of feathers. “My belief is, doctor,” he said, “that he has eaten his birds, and that he just took and ate them raw!”

11 pm. — I gave Renfield a strong opiate tonight, enough to make even him sleep, and took away his pocketbook to look at it. The thought that has been buzzing about my brain lately is complete, and the theory proved.

My homicidal maniac is of a peculiar kind. I shall have to invent a new classification for him, and call him a zoophagous (life-eating) maniac. What he desires is to absorb as many lives as he can, and he has laid himself out to achieve it in a cumulative way. He gave many flies to one spider and many spiders to one bird, and then wanted a cat to eat the many birds. What would have been his later steps?

It would almost be worth while to complete the experiment. It might be done if there were only a sufficient cause. Men sneered at vivisection, and yet look at its results today! Why not advance science in its most difficult and vital aspect, the knowledge of the brain?

Had I even the secret of one such mind, did I hold the key to the fancy of even one lunatic, I might advance my own branch of science to a pitch compared with which Burdon-Sanderson’s physiology or Ferrier’s brain knowledge would be as nothing. If only there were a sufficient cause! I must not think too much of this, or I may be tempted. A good cause might turn the scale with me, for may not I too be of an exceptional brain, congenitally?

How well the man reasoned. Lunatics always do within their own scope. I wonder at how many lives he values a man, or if at only one. He has closed the account most accurately, and today begun a new record. How many of us begin a new record with each day of our lives?

To me it seems only yesterday that my whole life ended with my new hope, and that truly I began a new record. So it shall be until the Great Recorder sums me up and closes my ledger account with a balance to profit or loss.

Oh, Lucy, Lucy, I cannot be angry with you, nor can I be angry with my friend whose happiness is yours, but I must only wait on hopeless and work. Work! Work!

If I could have as strong a cause as my poor mad friend there, a good, unselfish cause to make me work, that would be indeed happiness.

MINA MURRAY'S JOURNAL

26 July. — I am anxious, and it soothes me to express myself here. It is like whispering to one's self and listening at the same time. And there is also something about the shorthand symbols that makes it different from writing. I am unhappy about Lucy and about Jonathan. I had not heard from Jonathan for some time, and was very concerned, but yesterday dear Mr. Hawkins, who is always so kind, sent me a letter from him. I had written asking him if he had heard, and he said the enclosed had just been received. It is only a line dated from Castle Dracula, and says that he is just starting for home. That is not like Jonathan. I do not understand it, and it makes me uneasy.

Then, too, Lucy, although she is so well, has lately taken to her old habit of walking in her sleep. Her mother has spoken to me about it, and we have decided that I am to lock the door of our room every night.

Mrs. Westenra has got an idea that sleep-walkers always go out on roofs of houses and along the edges of cliffs and then get suddenly wakened and fall over with a despairing cry that echoes all over the place.

Poor dear, she is naturally anxious about Lucy, and she tells me that her husband, Lucy's father, had the same habit, that he would get up in the night and dress himself and go out, if he were not stopped.

Lucy is to be married in the autumn, and she is already planning out her dresses and how her house is to be arranged. I sympathise with her, for I do the same, only Jonathan and I will start in life in a very simple way, and shall have to try to make both ends meet.

Mr. Holmwood, he is the Hon. Arthur Holmwood, only son of Lord Godalming, is coming up here very shortly, as soon as he can leave town, for his father is not very well, and I think dear Lucy is counting the moments till he comes.

She wants to take him up in the seat on the churchyard cliff and show him the beauty of Whitby. I daresay it is the waiting which disturbs her. She will be all right when he arrives.

27 July. — No news from Jonathan. I am getting quite uneasy about him, though why I should I do not know, but I do wish that he would write, if it were only a single line.

Lucy walks more than ever, and each night I am awakened by her moving about the room. Fortunately, the weather is so hot that she cannot get cold. But still, the anxiety and the perpetually being awakened is beginning to tell on me, and I am getting nervous and wakeful myself. Thank God, Lucy's health keeps up. Mr. Holmwood has been suddenly called to Ring to see his father, who has been taken seriously ill. Lucy frets at the postponement of seeing him, but it does not touch her looks. She is a trifle stouter, and her cheeks are a lovely rose-pink. She has lost the anemic look which she had. I pray it will all last.

3 August. — Another week gone by, and no news from Jonathan, not even to Mr. Hawkins, from whom I have heard. Oh, I do hope he is not ill. He surely would have written. I look at that last letter of his, but somehow it does not satisfy me. It does not read like him, and yet it is his writing. There is no mistake of that.

Lucy has not walked much in her sleep the last week, but there is an odd concentration about her which I do not understand, even in her sleep she seems to be watching me. She tries the door, and finding it locked, goes about the room searching for the key.

6 August. — Another three days, and no news. This suspense is getting dreadful. If I only knew where to write to or where to go to, I should feel easier. But no one has heard a word of Jonathan since that last letter. I must only pray to God for patience.

Lucy is more excitable than ever, but is otherwise well. Last night was very threatening, and the fishermen say that we are in for a storm. I must try to watch it and learn the weather signs.

Today is a gray day, and the sun as I write is hidden in thick clouds, high over Kettleness. Everything is gray except the green grass, which seems like emerald amongst it, gray earthy rock, gray clouds, tinged with the sunburst at the far edge, hang over the gray sea, into which the sandpoints stretch like gray figures. The sea is tumbling in over the shallows and the sandy flats with a roar, muffled in the sea-mists drifting inland. The horizon is lost in a gray mist. All vastness, the clouds are piled up like giant rocks, and there is a 'brool' over the sea that sounds like some passage of doom. Dark figures are on the beach here and there, sometimes half shrouded in the mist, and seem 'men like trees walking'. The fishing boats are racing for home, and rise and dip in the ground swell as they sweep into the harbour, bending to the scuppers. Here comes old Mr. Swales. He is making straight for me, and I can see, by the way he lifts his hat, that he wants to talk.

I have been quite touched by the change in the poor old man. When he sat down beside me, he said in a very gentle way, "I want to say something to you, miss."

I could see he was not at ease, so I took his poor old wrinkled hand in mine and asked him to speak fully.

So he said, leaving his hand in mine, "I'm afraid, my deary, that I must have shocked you by all the wicked things I've been sayin' about the dead, and such like, for weeks past, but I didn't mean them, and I want ye to remember that when I'm gone. We aud folks that be daffled, and with one foot abaft the krok-hooal, don't altogether like to think of it, and we don't want to feel scart of it, and that's why I've took to makin' light of it, so that I'd cheer up my own heart a bit. But, Lord love ye, miss, I ain't afraid of dyin', not a bit, only I don't want to die if I can help it. My time must be nigh at hand now, for I be aud, and a hundred years is too much for any man to expect. And I'm so nigh it that the Aud Man is already whettin' his scythe. Ye see, I can't get out o' the habit of caffin' about it all at once. The chafts will wag as they be used to. Some day soon the Angel of

Death will sound his trumpet for me. But don't ye dooal an' greet, my deary!" — for he saw that I was crying— "if he should come this very night I'd not refuse to answer his call. For life be, after all, only a waitin' for somethin' else than what we're doin', and death be all that we can rightly depend on. But I'm content, for it's comin' to me, my deary, and comin' quick. It may be comin' while we be lookin' and wonderin'. Maybe it's in that wind out over the sea that's bringin' with it loss and wreck, and sore distress, and sad hearts. Look! Look!" he cried suddenly. "There's something in that wind and in the hoast beyont that sounds, and looks, and tastes, and smells like death. It's in the air. I feel it comin'. Lord, make me answer cheerful, when my call comes!" He held up his arms devoutly, and raised his hat. His mouth moved as though he were praying. After a few minutes' silence, he got up, shook hands with me, and blessed me, and said goodbye, and hobbled off. It all touched me, and upset me very much.

I was glad when the coastguard came along, with his spyglass under his arm. He stopped to talk with me, as he always does, but all the time kept looking at a strange ship.

"I can't make her out," he said. "She's a Russian, by the look of her. But she's knocking about in the queerest way. She doesn't know her mind a bit. She seems to see the storm coming, but can't decide whether to run up north in the open, or to put in here. Look there again! She is steered mighty strangely, for she doesn't mind the hand on the wheel, changes about with every puff of wind. We'll hear more of her before this time tomorrow."

CHAPTER 7

CUTTING FROM “THE DAILYGRAPH”, 8 AUGUST

(PASTED IN MINA MURRAY’S JOURNAL)

From a correspondent.
Whitby.

One of the greatest and suddenest storms on record has just been experienced here, with results both strange and unique. The weather had been somewhat sultry, but not to any degree uncommon in the month of August. Saturday evening was as fine as was ever known, and the great body of holiday-makers laid out yesterday for visits to Mulgrave Woods, Robin Hood’s Bay, Rig Mill, Runswick, Staithes, and the various trips in the neighborhood of Whitby. The steamers Emma and Scarborough made trips up and down the coast, and there was an unusual amount of ‘tripping’ both to and from Whitby. The day was unusually fine till the afternoon, when some of the gossips who frequent the East Cliff churchyard, and from the commanding eminence watch the wide sweep of sea visible to the north and east, called attention to a sudden show of ‘mares tails’ high in the sky to the northwest. The wind was then blowing from the south-west in the mild degree which in barometrical language is ranked ‘No. 2, light breeze.’

The coastguard on duty at once made report, and one old fisherman, who for more than half a century has kept watch on weather signs from the East Cliff, foretold in an emphatic manner the coming of a sudden storm. The approach of sunset was so very beautiful, so grand in its masses of splendidly coloured clouds, that there was quite an assemblage on the walk along the cliff in the old churchyard to enjoy the beauty. Before the sun dipped below the black mass of Kettleness, standing boldly athwart the western sky, its downward way was marked by myriad clouds of every sunset colour, flame, purple, pink, green, violet, and all the tints of gold, with here and there masses not large, but of seemingly absolute blackness, in all sorts of shapes, as well outlined as colossal silhouettes. The experience was not lost on the painters, and doubtless some of the sketches of the 'Prelude to the Great Storm' will grace the R. A and R. I. walls in May next.

More than one captain made up his mind then and there that his 'cobble' or his 'mule', as they term the different classes of boats, would remain in the harbour till the storm had passed. The wind fell away entirely during the evening, and at midnight there was a dead calm, a sultry heat, and that prevailing intensity which, on the approach of thunder, affects persons of a sensitive nature.

There were but few lights in sight at sea, for even the coasting steamers, which usually hug the shore so closely, kept well to seaward, and but few fishing boats were in sight. The only sail noticeable was a foreign schooner with all sails set, which was seemingly going westwards. The foolhardiness or ignorance of her officers was a prolific theme for comment whilst she remained in sight, and efforts were made to signal her to reduce sail in the face of her danger. Before the night shut down she was seen with sails idly flapping as she gently rolled on the undulating swell of the sea.

"As idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean."

Shortly before ten o'clock the stillness of the air grew quite oppressive, and the silence was so marked that the bleating of a sheep inland or the barking of a dog in the town was distinctly heard, and the band on the pier, with its lively French air, was like a dischord in the great harmony of nature's silence. A little after midnight came a strange sound from over the sea, and high overhead the air began to carry a strange, faint, hollow booming.

Then without warning the tempest broke. With a rapidity which, at the time, seemed incredible, and even afterwards is impossible to realise, the whole aspect of nature at once became convulsed. The waves rose in growing fury, each over-topping its fellow, till in a very few minutes the lately glassy sea was like a roaring and devouring monster. White-crested waves beat madly on the level sands and rushed up the shelving cliffs. Others broke over the piers, and with their spume swept the lanthorns of the lighthouses which rise from the end of either pier of Whitby Harbour.

The wind roared like thunder, and blew with such force that it was with difficulty that even strong men kept their feet, or clung with grim clasp to the iron stanchions. It was found necessary to clear the entire pier from the mass of onlookers, or else the fatalities of the night would have increased manifold. To add to the difficulties and dangers of the time, masses of sea-fog came drifting inland. White, wet clouds, which swept by in ghostly fashion, so dank and damp and cold that it needed but little effort of imagination to think that the spirits of those lost at sea were touching their living brethren with the clammy hands of death, and many a one shuddered as the wreaths of sea-mist swept by.

At times the mist cleared, and the sea for some distance could be seen in the glare of the lightning, which came thick and fast, followed by such peals of thunder that the whole sky overhead seemed trembling under the shock of the footsteps of the storm.

Some of the scenes thus revealed were of immeasurable grandeur and of absorbing interest. The sea, running mountains high, threw skywards with each wave mighty masses of white foam, which the tempest seemed to snatch at and whirl away into space. Here and there a fishing boat, with a rag of sail, running madly for shelter before the blast, now and again the white wings of a storm-tossed seabird. On the summit of the East Cliff the new searchlight was ready for experiment, but had not yet been tried. The officers in charge of it got it into working order, and in the pauses of onrushing mist swept with it the surface of the sea. Once or twice its service was most effective, as when a fishing boat, with gunwale under water, rushed into the harbour, able, by the guidance of the sheltering light, to avoid the danger of dashing against the piers. As each boat achieved the safety of the port there was a shout of joy from the mass of people on the shore, a shout which for a moment seemed to cleave the gale and was then swept away in its rush.

Before long the searchlight discovered some distance away a schooner with all sails set, apparently the same vessel which had been noticed earlier in the evening. The wind had by this time backed to the east, and there was a shudder amongst the watchers on the cliff as they realised the terrible danger in which she now was.

Between her and the port lay the great flat reef on which so many good ships have from time to time suffered, and, with the wind blowing from its present quarter, it would be quite impossible that she should fetch the entrance of the harbour.

It was now nearly the hour of high tide, but the waves were so great that in their troughs the shallows of the shore were almost visible, and the schooner, with all sails set, was rushing with such speed that, in the words of one old salt, “she must fetch up somewhere, if it was only in hell”. Then came another rush of sea-fog, greater than any hitherto, a mass of dank mist, which seemed to close on all things like a gray pall, and left available to men only the organ of hearing, for the roar of the tempest, and the crash of the thunder, and the booming of the mighty billows came through the damp oblivion even louder than before. The rays of the searchlight were kept fixed on the harbour mouth across the East Pier, where the shock was expected, and men waited breathless.

The wind suddenly shifted to the northeast, and the remnant of the sea fog melted in the blast. And then, mirabile dictu, between the piers, leaping from wave to wave as it rushed at headlong speed, swept the strange schooner before the blast, with all sail set, and gained the safety of the harbour. The searchlight followed her, and a shudder ran through all who saw her, for lashed to the helm was a corpse, with drooping head, which swung horribly to and fro at each motion of the ship. No other form could be seen on the deck at all.

A great awe came on all as they realised that the ship, as if by a miracle, had found the harbour, unsteered save by the hand of a dead man! However, all took place more quickly than it takes to write these words. The schooner paused not, but rushing across the harbour, pitched herself on that accumulation of sand and gravel washed by many tides and many storms into the southeast corner of the pier jutting under the East Cliff, known locally as Tate Hill Pier.

There was of course a considerable concussion as the vessel drove up on the sand heap. Every spar, rope, and stay was strained, and some of the ‘top-hammer’ came crashing down. But, strangest of all, the very instant the shore was touched, an immense dog sprang up on deck from below, as if shot up by the concussion, and running forward, jumped from the bow on the sand.

Making straight for the steep cliff, where the churchyard hangs over the laneway to the East Pier so steeply that some of the flat tombstones, thruffsteans or through-stones, as they call them in Whitby vernacular, actually project over where the sustaining cliff has fallen away, it disappeared in the darkness, which seemed intensified just beyond the focus of the searchlight.

It so happened that there was no one at the moment on Tate Hill Pier, as all those whose houses are in close proximity were either in bed or were out on the heights above. Thus the coastguard on duty on the eastern side of the harbour, who at once ran down to the little pier, was the first to climb aboard. The men working the searchlight, after scouring the entrance of the harbour without seeing anything, then turned the light on the derelict and kept it there. The coastguard ran aft, and when he came beside the wheel, bent over to examine it, and recoiled at once as though under some sudden emotion. This seemed to pique general curiosity, and quite a number of people began to run.

It is a good way round from the West Cliff by the Draw-bridge to Tate Hill Pier, but your correspondent is a fairly good runner, and came well ahead of the crowd. When I arrived, however, I found already assembled on the pier a crowd, whom the coastguard and police refused to allow to come on board. By the courtesy of the chief boatman, I was, as your correspondent, permitted to climb on deck, and was one of a small group who saw the dead seaman whilst actually lashed to the wheel.

It was no wonder that the coastguard was surprised, or even awed, for not often can such a sight have been seen. The man was simply fastened by his hands, tied one over the other, to a spoke of the wheel. Between the inner hand and the wood was a crucifix, the set of beads on which it was fastened being around both wrists and wheel, and all kept fast by the binding cords. The poor fellow may have been seated at one time, but the flapping and buffeting of the sails had worked through the rudder of the wheel and had dragged him to and fro, so that the cords with which he was tied had cut the flesh to the bone.

Accurate note was made of the state of things, and a doctor, Surgeon J. M. Caffyn, of 33, East Elliot Place, who came immediately after me, declared, after making examination, that the man must have been dead for quite two days.

In his pocket was a bottle, carefully corked, empty save for a little roll of paper, which proved to be the addendum to the log.

The coastguard said the man must have tied up his own hands, fastening the knots with his teeth. The fact that a coastguard was the first on board may save some complications later on, in the Admiralty Court, for coastguards cannot claim the salvage which is the right of the first civilian entering on a derelict. Already, however, the legal tongues are wagging, and one young law student is loudly asserting that the rights of the owner are already completely sacrificed, his property being held in contravention of the statues of mortmain, since the tiller, as emblemship, if not proof, of delegated possession, is held in a dead hand.

It is needless to say that the dead steersman has been reverently removed from the place where he held his honourable watch and ward till death, a steadfastness as noble as that of the young Casabianca, and placed in the mortuary to await inquest.

Already the sudden storm is passing, and its fierceness is abating. Crowds are scattering backward, and the sky is beginning to redden over the Yorkshire wolds.

I shall send, in time for your next issue, further details of the derelict ship which found her way so miraculously into harbour in the storm.

9 August. — The sequel to the strange arrival of the derelict in the storm last night is almost more startling than the thing itself. It turns out that the schooner is Russian from Varna, and is called the Demeter. She is almost entirely in ballast of silver sand, with only a small amount of cargo, a number of great wooden boxes filled with mould.

This cargo was consigned to a Whitby solicitor, Mr. S.F. Billington, of 7, The Crescent, who this morning went aboard and took formal possession of the goods consigned to him.

The Russian consul, too, acting for the charter-party, took formal possession of the ship, and paid all harbour dues, etc.

Nothing is talked about here today except the strange coincidence. The officials of the Board of Trade have been most exacting in seeing that every compliance has been made with existing regulations. As the matter is to be a 'nine days wonder', they are evidently determined that there shall be no cause of other complaint.

A good deal of interest was abroad concerning the dog which landed when the ship struck, and more than a few of the members of the S.P.C.A., which is very strong in Whitby, have tried to befriend the animal. To the general disappointment, however, it was not to be found. It seems to have disappeared entirely from the town. It may be that it was frightened and made its way on to the moors, where it is still hiding in terror.

There are some who look with dread on such a possibility, lest later on it should in itself become a danger, for it is evidently a fierce brute. Early this morning a large dog, a half-bred mastiff belonging to a coal merchant close to Tate Hill Pier, was found dead in the roadway opposite its master's yard. It had been fighting, and manifestly had had a savage opponent, for its throat was torn away, and its belly was slit open as if with a savage claw.

Later. — By the kindness of the Board of Trade inspector, I have been permitted to look over the log book of the Demeter, which was in order up to within three days, but contained nothing of special interest except as to facts of missing men. The greatest interest, however, is with regard to the paper found in the bottle, which was today produced at the inquest. And a more strange narrative than the two between them unfold it has not been my lot to come across.

As there is no motive for concealment, I am permitted to use them, and accordingly send you a transcript, simply omitting technical details of seamanship and supercargo. It almost seems as though the captain had been seized with some kind of mania before he had got well into blue water, and that this had developed persistently throughout the voyage. Of course my statement must be taken cum grano, since I am writing from the dictation of a clerk of the Russian consul, who kindly translated for me, time being short.

LOG OF THE "DEMETER" Varna to Whitby

Written 18 July, things so strange happening, that I shall
keep accurate note henceforth till we land.

On 6 July we finished taking in cargo, silver sand and boxes
of earth. At noon set sail. East wind, fresh. Crew, five
hands… two mates, cook, and myself, (captain).

On 11 July at dawn entered Bosphorus. Boarded by Turkish Customs officers. Backsheesh. All correct. Under way at 4 p.m.

On 12 July through Dardanelles. More Customs officers and flagboat of guarding squadron. Backsheesh again. Work of officers thorough, but quick. Want us off soon. At dark passed into Archipelago.

On 13 July passed Cape Matapan. Crew dissatisfied about something. Seemed scared, but would not speak out.

On 14 July was somewhat anxious about crew. Men all steady fellows, who sailed with me before. Mate could not make out what was wrong. They only told him there was SOMETHING, and crossed themselves. Mate lost temper with one of them that day and struck him. Expected fierce quarrel, but all was quiet.

On 16 July mate reported in the morning that one of the crew, Petrofsky, was missing. Could not account for it. Took larboard watch eight bells last night, was relieved by Amramoff, but did not go to bunk. Men more downcast than ever. All said they expected something of the kind, but would not say more than there was SOMETHING aboard. Mate getting very impatient with them. Feared some trouble ahead.

On 17 July, yesterday, one of the men, Olgaren, came to my

cabin,
and in an awestruck way confided to me that he thought there was a strange man aboard the ship. He said that in his watch he had been sheltering behind the deckhouse, as there was a rain storm, when he saw a tall, thin man, who was not like any of the crew, come up the companionway, and go along the deck forward and disappear. He followed cautiously, but when he got to bows found no one, and the hatchways were all closed. He was in a panic of superstitious fear, and I am afraid the panic may spread. To allay it, I shall today search the entire ship carefully from stem to stern.

Later in the day I got together the whole crew, and told them, as they evidently thought there was some one in the ship, we would search from stem to stern. First mate angry, said it was folly, and to yield to such foolish ideas would demoralise the men, said he would engage to keep them out of trouble with the handspike. I let him take the helm, while the rest began a thorough search, all keeping abreast, with lanterns. We left no corner unsearched. As there were only the big wooden boxes, there were no odd corners where a man could hide. Men much relieved when search over, and went back to work cheerfully. First mate scowled, but said nothing.

22 July. — Rough weather last three days, and all hands busy with sails, no time to be frightened. Men seem to have forgotten their dread. Mate cheerful again, and all on good terms. Praised men for work in bad weather. Passed Gibraltar and out through Straits. All well.

24 July. — There seems some doom over this ship. Already a hand short, and entering the Bay of Biscay with wild weather ahead, and yet last night another man lost, disappeared. Like the first, he came off his watch and was not seen again. Men all in a panic of fear, sent a round robin, asking to have double watch, as they fear to be alone. Mate angry. Fear there will be some trouble, as either he or the men will do some violence.

28 July. — Four days in hell, knocking about in a sort of maelstrom, and the wind a tempest. No sleep for any one. Men all worn out. Hardly know how to set a watch, since no one fit to go on. Second mate volunteered to steer and watch, and let men snatch a few hours sleep. Wind abating, seas still terrific, but feel them less, as ship is steadier.

29 July. — Another tragedy. Had single watch tonight, as crew too tired to double. When morning watch came on deck could find no one except steersman. Raised outcry, and all came on deck. Thorough search, but no one found. Are now without second mate, and crew in a panic. Mate and I agreed to go armed henceforth and wait for any sign of cause.

30 July. — Last night. Rejoiced we are nearing England. Weather fine, all sails set. Retired worn out, slept soundly, awakened by mate telling me that both man of watch and steersman missing.

Only self and mate and two hands left to work ship.

1 August. — Two days of fog, and not a sail sighted. Had hoped when in the English Channel to be able to signal for help or get in somewhere. Not having power to work sails, have to run before wind. Dare not lower, as could not raise them again. We seem to be drifting to some terrible doom. Mate now more demoralised than either of men. His stronger nature seems to have worked inwardly against himself. Men are beyond fear, working stolidly and patiently, with minds made up to worst. They are Russian, he Roumanian.

2 August, midnight. — Woke up from few minutes sleep by hearing a cry, seemingly outside my port. Could see nothing in fog. Rushed on deck, and ran against mate. Tells me he heard cry and ran, but no sign of man on watch. One more gone. Lord, help us! Mate says we must be past Straits of Dover, as in a moment of fog lifting he saw North Foreland, just as he heard the man cry out. If so we are now off in the North Sea, and only God can guide us in the fog, which seems to move with us, and God seems to have deserted us.

3 August. — At midnight I went to relieve the man at the wheel and when I got to it found no one there. The wind was steady, and as we ran before it there was no yawing. I dared not leave it, so shouted for the mate. After a few seconds, he rushed up on deck in his flannels. He looked wild-eyed and haggard, and I greatly fear his reason has given way. He came close to me and whispered hoarsely, with his mouth to my ear, as though fearing the very air

might hear. “It is here. I know it now. On the watch last night I saw It, like a man, tall and thin, and ghastly pale. It was in the bows, and looking out. I crept behind It, and gave it my knife, but the knife went through It, empty as the air.” And as he spoke he took the knife and drove it savagely into space. Then he went on, “But It is here, and I’ll find It. It is in the hold, perhaps in one of those boxes. I’ll unscrew them one by one and see. You work the helm.” And with a warning look and his finger on his lip, he went below. There was springing up a choppy wind, and I could not leave the helm. I saw him come out on deck again with a tool chest and lantern, and go down the forward hatchway. He is mad, stark, raving mad, and it’s no use my trying to stop him. He can’t hurt those big boxes, they are invoiced as clay, and to pull them about is as harmless a thing as he can do. So here I stay and mind the helm, and write these notes. I can only trust in God and wait till the fog clears. Then, if I can’t steer to any harbour with the wind that is, I shall cut down sails, and lie by, and signal for help…

It is nearly all over now. Just as I was beginning to hope that the mate would come out calmer, for I heard him knocking away at something in the hold, and work is good for him, there came up the hatchway a sudden, startled scream, which made my blood run cold, and up on the deck he came as if shot from a gun, a raging madman, with his eyes rolling and his face convulsed with fear. “Save me! Save me!” he cried, and then looked round on the blanket of fog. His horror turned to despair, and in a steady voice he said, “You had better come too, captain, before it is too late. He is there! I know the secret now. The sea will save me from Him, and it is all that is left!” Before I could say a word, or move forward to seize him, he sprang on the bulwark and deliberately threw himself into the sea. I suppose I know the secret too, now. It was this madman who had got rid of the men one by one, and now he has followed them himself. God help me! How am I to account for all these horrors when I get to port? When I get to port! Will that ever be?

4 August. — Still fog, which the sunrise cannot pierce, I know there is sunrise because I am a sailor, why else I know not. I dared not go below, I dared not leave the helm, so here all night I stayed, and in the dimness of the night I saw it, Him! God, forgive me, but the mate was right to jump overboard. It was better to die like a man. To die like a sailor in blue water, no man can object. But I am captain, and I must not leave my ship. But I shall baffle this fiend or monster, for I shall tie my hands to the wheel when my strength begins to fail, and along with them I shall tie that which He, It, dare not touch. And then, come good wind or foul, I shall save my soul, and my honour as a captain. I am growing weaker, and the night is coming on. If He can look me in the face again, I may not have time to act. . . If we are wrecked, mayhap this bottle may be found, and those who find it may understand. If not… well, then all men shall know that I have been true to my trust. God and the Blessed Virgin and the

Saints help a poor ignorant soul trying to do his duty…

Of course the verdict was an open one. There is no evidence to adduce, and whether or not the man himself committed the murders there is now none to say. The folk here hold almost universally that the captain is simply a hero, and he is to be given a public funeral. Already it is arranged that his body is to be taken with a train of boats up the Esk for a piece and then brought back to Tate Hill Pier and up the abbey steps, for he is to be buried in the churchyard on the cliff. The owners of more than a hundred boats have already given in their names as wishing to follow him to the grave.

No trace has ever been found of the great dog, at which there is much mourning, for, with public opinion in its present state, he would, I believe, be adopted by the town. Tomorrow will see the funeral, and so will end this one more ‘mystery of the sea’.

MINA MURRAY’S JOURNAL

8 August. — Lucy was very restless all night, and I too, could not sleep. The storm was fearful, and as it boomed loudly among the chimney pots, it made me shudder. When a sharp puff came it seemed to be like a distant gun. Strangely enough, Lucy did not wake, but she got up twice and dressed herself. Fortunately, each time I awoke in time and managed to undress her without waking her, and got her back to bed. It is a very strange thing, this sleep-walking, for as soon as her will is thwarted in any physical way, her intention, if there be any, disappears, and she yields herself almost exactly to the routine of her life.

Early in the morning we both got up and went down to the harbour to see if anything had happened in the night. There were very few people about, and though the sun was bright, and the air clear and fresh, the big, grim-looking waves, that seemed dark themselves because the foam that topped them was like snow, forced themselves in through the mouth of the harbour, like a bullying man going through a crowd. Somehow I felt glad that Jonathan was not on the sea last night, but on land. But, oh, is he on land or sea? Where is he, and how? I am getting fearfully anxious about him. If I only knew what to do, and could do anything!

10 August. — The funeral of the poor sea captain today was most touching. Every boat in the harbour seemed to be there, and the coffin was carried by captains all the way from Tate Hill Pier up to the churchyard. Lucy came with me, and we went early to our old seat, whilst the cortege of boats went up the river to the Viaduct and came down again. We had a lovely view, and saw the procession nearly all the way. The poor fellow was laid to rest near our seat so that we stood on it, when the time came and saw everything.

Poor Lucy seemed much upset. She was restless and uneasy all the time, and I cannot but think that her dreaming at night is telling on her. She is quite odd in one thing. She will not admit to me that there is any cause for restlessness, or if there be, she does not understand it herself.

There is an additional cause in that poor Mr. Swales was found dead this morning on our seat, his neck being broken. He had evidently, as the doctor said, fallen back in the seat in some sort of fright, for there was a look of fear and horror on his face that the men said made them shudder. Poor dear old man!

Lucy is so sweet and sensitive that she feels influences more acutely than other people do. Just now she was quite upset by a little thing which I did not much heed, though I am myself very fond of animals.

One of the men who came up here often to look for the boats was followed by his dog. The dog is always with him. They are both quiet persons, and I never saw the man angry, nor heard the dog bark. During the service the dog would not come to its master, who was on the seat with us, but kept a few yards off, barking and howling. Its master spoke to it gently, and then harshly, and then angrily. But it would neither come nor cease to make a noise. It was in a fury, with its eyes savage, and all its hair bristling out like a cat's tail when puss is on the war path.

Finally the man too got angry, and jumped down and kicked the dog, and then took it by the scruff of the neck and half dragged and half threw it on the tombstone on which the seat is fixed. The moment it touched the stone the poor thing began to tremble. It did not try to get away, but crouched down, quivering and cowering, and was in such a pitiable state of terror that I tried, though without effect, to comfort it.

Lucy was full of pity, too, but she did not attempt to touch the dog, but looked at it in an agonised sort of way. I greatly fear that she is of too super sensitive a nature to go through the world without trouble. She will be dreaming of this tonight, I am sure. The whole agglomeration of things, the ship steered into port by a dead man, his attitude, tied to the wheel with a crucifix and beads, the touching funeral, the dog, now furious and now in terror, will all afford material for her dreams.

I think it will be best for her to go to bed tired out physically, so I shall take her for a long walk by the cliffs to Robin Hood's Bay and back. She ought not to have much inclination for sleep-walking then.

CHAPTER 8

MINA MURRAY'S JOURNAL

Same day, 11 o'clock P.M. — Oh, but I am tired! If it were not that I had made my diary a duty I should not open it tonight. We had a lovely walk. Lucy, after a while, was in gay spirits, owing, I think, to some dear cows who came nosing towards us in a field close to the lighthouse, and frightened the wits out of us. I believe we forgot everything, except of course, personal fear, and it seemed to wipe the slate clean and give us a fresh start. We had a capital 'severe tea' at Robin Hood's Bay in a sweet little old-fashioned inn, with a bow window right over the seaweed-covered rocks of the strand. I believe we should have shocked the 'New Woman' with our appetites. Men are more tolerant, bless them! Then we walked home with some, or rather many, stoppages to rest, and with our hearts full of a constant dread of wild bulls.

Lucy was really tired, and we intended to creep off to bed as soon as we could. The young curate came in, however, and Mrs. Westenra asked him to stay for supper. Lucy and I had both a fight for it with the dusty miller. I know it was a hard fight on my part, and I am quite heroic. I think that some day the bishops must get together and see about breeding up a new class of curates, who don't take supper, no matter how hard they may be pressed to, and who will know when girls are tired.

Lucy is asleep and breathing softly. She has more colour in her cheeks than usual, and looks, oh so sweet. If Mr. Holmwood fell in love with her seeing her only in the drawing room, I wonder what he would say if he saw her now. Some of the 'New Women' writers will some day start an idea that men and women should be allowed to see each other asleep before proposing or accepting. But I suppose the 'New Woman' won't condescend in future to accept. She will do the proposing herself. And a nice job she will make of it too! There's some consolation in that. I am so happy tonight, because dear Lucy seems better. I really believe she has turned the corner, and that we are over her troubles with dreaming. I should be quite happy if I only knew if Jonathan… God bless and keep him.

11 August. — Diary again. No sleep now, so I may as well write. I am too agitated to sleep. We have had such an adventure, such an agonising experience. I fell asleep as soon as I had closed my diary. . . . Suddenly I became broad awake, and sat up, with a horrible sense of fear upon me, and of some feeling of emptiness around me. The room was dark, so I could not see Lucy's bed. I stole across and felt for her. The bed was empty. I lit a match and found that she was not in the room. The door was shut, but not locked, as I had left it. I feared to wake her mother, who has been more than usually ill lately, so threw on some clothes and got ready to look for her. As I was leaving the room it struck me that the clothes she wore might give me some clue to her dreaming intention. Dressing-gown would mean house, dress outside. Dressing-gown and dress were both in their places. "Thank God," I said to myself, "she cannot be far, as she is only in her nightdress."

I ran downstairs and looked in the sitting room. Not there! Then I looked in all the other rooms of the house, with an ever-growing fear chilling my heart. Finally, I came to the hall door and found it open. It was not wide open, but the catch of the lock had not caught. The people of the house are careful to lock the door every night, so I feared that Lucy must have gone out as she was. There was no time to think of what might happen. A vague over-mastering fear obscured all details.

I took a big, heavy shawl and ran out. The clock was striking one as I was in the Crescent, and there was not a soul in sight. I ran along the North Terrace, but could see no sign of the white figure which I expected. At the edge of the West Cliff above the pier I looked across the harbour to the East Cliff, in the hope or fear, I don't know which, of seeing Lucy in our favourite seat.

There was a bright full moon, with heavy black, driving clouds, which threw the whole scene into a fleeting diorama of light and shade as they sailed across. For a moment or two I could see nothing, as the shadow of a cloud obscured St. Mary's Church and all around it. Then as the cloud passed I could see the ruins of the abbey coming into view, and as the edge of a narrow band of light as sharp as a sword-cut moved along, the church and churchyard became gradually visible. Whatever my expectation was, it was not disappointed, for there, on our favourite seat, the silver light of the moon struck a half-reclining figure, snowy white. The coming of the cloud was too quick for me to see much, for shadow shut down on light almost immediately, but it seemed to me as though something dark stood behind the seat where the white figure shone, and bent over it. What it was, whether man or beast, I could not tell.

I did not wait to catch another glance, but flew down the steep steps to the pier and along by the fish-market to the bridge, which was the only way to reach the East Cliff. The town seemed as dead, for not a soul did I see. I rejoiced that it was so, for I wanted no witness of poor Lucy's condition. The time and distance seemed endless, and my knees trembled and my breath came laboured as I toiled up the endless steps to the abbey. I must have gone fast, and yet it seemed to me as if my feet were weighted with lead, and as though every joint in my body were rusty.

When I got almost to the top I could see the seat and the white figure, for I was now close enough to distinguish it even through the spells of shadow. There was undoubtedly something, long and black, bending over the half-reclining white figure. I called in fright, "Lucy! Lucy!" and something raised a head, and from where I was I could see a white face and red, gleaming eyes.

Lucy did not answer, and I ran on to the entrance of the churchyard. As I entered, the church was between me and the seat, and for a minute or so I lost sight of her. When I came in view again the cloud had passed, and the moonlight struck so brilliantly that I could see Lucy half reclining with her head lying over the back of the seat. She was quite alone, and there was not a sign of any living thing about.

When I bent over her I could see that she was still asleep. Her lips were parted, and she was breathing, not softly as usual with her, but in long, heavy gasps, as though striving to get her lungs full at every breath. As I came close, she put up her hand in her sleep and pulled the collar of her nightdress close around her, as though she felt the cold. I flung the warm shawl over her, and drew the edges tight around her neck, for I dreaded lest she should get some deadly chill from the night air, unclad as she was. I feared to wake her all at once, so, in order to have my hands free to help her, I fastened the shawl at her throat with a big safety pin. But I must have been clumsy in my anxiety and pinched or pricked her with it, for by-and-by, when her breathing became quieter, she put her hand to her throat again and moaned. When I had her carefully wrapped up I put my shoes on her feet, and then began very gently to wake her.

At first she did not respond, but gradually she became more and more uneasy in her sleep, moaning and sighing occasionally. At last, as time was passing fast, and for many other reasons, I wished to get her home at once, I shook her forcibly, till finally she opened her eyes and awoke. She did not seem surprised to see me, as, of course, she did not realise all at once where she was.

Lucy always wakes prettily, and even at such a time, when her body must have been chilled with cold, and her mind somewhat appalled at waking unclad in a churchyard at night, she did not lose her grace. She trembled a little, and clung to me. When I told her to come at once with me home, she rose without a word, with the obedience of a child. As we passed along, the gravel hurt my feet, and Lucy noticed me wince. She stopped and wanted to insist upon my taking my shoes, but I would not. However, when we got to the pathway outside the churchyard, where there was a puddle of water, remaining from the storm, I daubed my feet with mud, using each foot in turn on the other, so that as we went home, no one, in case we should meet any one, should notice my bare feet.

Fortune favoured us, and we got home without meeting a soul. Once we saw a man, who seemed not quite sober, passing along a street in front of us. But we hid in a door till he had disappeared up an opening such as there are here, steep little closes, or ‘wynds’, as they call them in Scotland. My heart beat so loud all the time sometimes I thought I should faint. I was filled with anxiety about Lucy, not only for her health, lest she should suffer from the exposure, but for her reputation in case the story should get wind. When we got in, and had washed our feet, and had said a prayer of thankfulness together, I tucked her into bed. Before falling asleep she asked, even implored, me not to say a word to any one, even her mother, about her sleep-walking adventure.

I hesitated at first, to promise, but on thinking of the state of her mother's health, and how the knowledge of such a thing would fret her, and think too, of how such a story might become distorted, nay, infallibly would, in case it should leak out, I thought it wiser to do so. I hope I did right. I have locked the door, and the key is tied to my wrist, so perhaps I shall not be again disturbed. Lucy is sleeping soundly. The reflex of the dawn is high and far over the sea…

Same day, noon. — All goes well. Lucy slept till I woke her and seemed not to have even changed her side. The adventure of the night does not seem to have harmed her, on the contrary, it has benefited her, for she looks better this morning than she has done for weeks. I was sorry to notice that my clumsiness with the safety-pin hurt her. Indeed, it might have been serious, for the skin of her throat was pierced. I must have pinched up a piece of loose skin and have transfixed it, for there are two little red points like pin-pricks, and on the band of her nightdress was a drop of blood. When I apologised and was concerned about it, she laughed and petted me, and said she did not even feel it. Fortunately it cannot leave a scar, as it is so tiny.

Same day, night. — We passed a happy day. The air was clear, and the sun bright, and there was a cool breeze. We took our lunch to Mulgrave Woods, Mrs. Westenra driving by the road and Lucy and I walking by the cliff-path and joining her at the gate. I felt a little sad myself, for I could not but feel how absolutely happy it would have been had Jonathan been with me. But there! I must only be patient. In the evening we strolled in the Casino Terrace, and heard some good music by Spohr and Mackenzie, and went to bed early. Lucy seems more restful than she has been for some time, and fell asleep at once. I shall lock the door and secure the key the same as before, though I do not expect any trouble tonight.

12 August. — My expectations were wrong, for twice during the night I was wakened by Lucy trying to get out. She seemed, even in her sleep, to be a little impatient at finding the door shut, and went back to bed under a sort of protest. I woke with the dawn, and heard the birds chirping outside of the window. Lucy woke, too, and I was glad to see, was even better than on the previous morning. All her old gaiety of manner seemed to have come back, and she came and snuggled in beside me and told me all about Arthur. I told her how anxious I was about Jonathan, and then she tried to comfort me. Well, she succeeded somewhat, for, though sympathy can't alter facts, it can make them more bearable.

13 August. — Another quiet day, and to bed with the key on my wrist as before. Again I awoke in the night, and found Lucy sitting up in bed, still asleep, pointing to the window. I got up quietly, and pulling aside the blind, looked out. It was brilliant moonlight, and the soft effect of the light over the sea and sky, merged together in one great silent mystery, was beautiful beyond words. Between me and the moonlight flitted a great bat, coming and going in great whirling circles. Once or twice it came quite close, but was, I suppose, frightened at seeing me, and flitted away across the harbour towards the abbey. When I came back from the window Lucy had lain down again, and was sleeping peacefully. She did not stir again all night.

14 August. — On the East Cliff, reading and writing all day. Lucy seems to have become as much in love with the spot as I am, and it is hard to get her away from it when it is time to come home for lunch or tea or dinner. This afternoon she made a funny remark. We were coming home for dinner, and had come to the top of the steps up from the West Pier and stopped to look at the view, as we generally do. The setting sun, low down in the sky, was just dropping behind Kettleness. The red light was thrown over on the East Cliff and the old abbey, and seemed to bathe everything in a beautiful rosy glow. We were silent for a while, and suddenly Lucy murmured as if to herself…

“His red eyes again! They are just the same.” It was such an odd expression, coming apropos of nothing, that it quite startled me. I slewed round a little, so as to see Lucy well without seeming to stare at her, and saw that she was in a half dreamy state, with an odd look on her face that I could not quite make out, so I said nothing, but followed her eyes. She appeared to be looking over at our own seat, whereon was a dark figure seated alone. I was quite a little startled myself, for it seemed for an instant as if the stranger had great eyes like burning flames, but a second look dispelled the illusion. The red sunlight was shining on the windows of St. Mary’s Church behind our seat, and as the sun dipped there was just sufficient change in the refraction and reflection to make it appear as if the light moved. I called Lucy’s attention to the peculiar effect, and she became herself with a start, but she looked sad all the same. It may have been that she was thinking of that terrible night up there. We never refer to it, so I said nothing, and we went home to dinner. Lucy had a headache and went early to bed. I saw her asleep, and went out for a little stroll myself.

I walked along the cliffs to the westward, and was full of sweet sadness, for I was thinking of Jonathan. When coming home, it was then bright moonlight, so bright that, though the front of our part of the Crescent was in shadow, everything could be well seen, I threw a glance up at our window, and saw Lucy's head leaning out. I opened my handkerchief and waved it. She did not notice or make any movement whatever. Just then, the moonlight crept round an angle of the building, and the light fell on the window. There distinctly was Lucy with her head lying up against the side of the window sill and her eyes shut. She was fast asleep, and by her, seated on the window sill, was something that looked like a good-sized bird. I was afraid she might get a chill, so I ran upstairs, but as I came into the room she was moving back to her bed, fast asleep, and breathing heavily. She was holding her hand to her throat, as though to protect if from the cold.

I did not wake her, but tucked her up warmly. I have taken care that the door is locked and the window securely fastened.

She looks so sweet as she sleeps, but she is paler than is her wont, and there is a drawn, haggard look under her eyes which I do not like. I fear she is fretting about something. I wish I could find out what it is.

15 August. — Rose later than usual. Lucy was languid and tired, and slept on after we had been called. We had a happy surprise at breakfast. Arthur's father is better, and wants the marriage to come off soon. Lucy is full of quiet joy, and her mother is glad and sorry at once. Later on in the day she told me the cause. She is grieved to lose Lucy as her very own, but she is rejoiced that she is soon to have some one to protect her. Poor dear, sweet lady! She confided to me

that she has got her death warrant. She has not told Lucy, and made me promise secrecy. Her doctor told her that within a few months, at most, she must die, for her heart is weakening. At any time, even now, a sudden shock would be almost sure to kill her. Ah, we were wise to keep from her the affair of the dreadful night of Lucy's sleep-walking.

17 August. — No diary for two whole days. I have not had the heart to write. Some sort of shadowy pall seems to be coming over our happiness. No news from Jonathan, and Lucy seems to be growing weaker, whilst her mother's hours are numbering to a close. I do not understand Lucy's fading away as she is doing. She eats well and sleeps well, and enjoys the fresh air, but all the time the roses in her cheeks are fading, and she gets weaker and more languid day by day. At night I hear her gasping as if for air.

I keep the key of our door always fastened to my wrist at night, but she gets up and walks about the room, and sits at the open window. Last night I found her leaning out when I woke up, and when I tried to wake her I could not.

She was in a faint. When I managed to restore her, she was weak as water, and cried silently between long, painful struggles for breath. When I asked her how she came to be at the window she shook her head and turned away.

I trust her feeling ill may not be from that unlucky prick of the safety-pin. I looked at her throat just now as she lay asleep, and the tiny wounds seem not to have healed. They are still open, and, if anything, larger than before, and the edges of them are faintly white. They are like little white dots with red centres. Unless they heal within a day or two, I shall insist on the doctor seeing about them.

LETTER, SAMUEL F. BILLINGTON & SON, SOLICITORS WHITBY, TO MESSRS. CARTER, PATERSON & CO., LONDON.

17 August

“Dear Sirs, — Herewith please receive invoice of goods sent by Great Northern Railway. Same are to be delivered at Carfax, near Purfleet, immediately on receipt at goods station King’s Cross. The house is at present empty, but enclosed please find keys, all of which are labelled.

“You will please deposit the boxes, fifty in number, which form the consignment, in the partially ruined building forming part of the house and marked ‘A’ on rough diagrams enclosed. Your agent will easily recognise the locality, as it is the ancient chapel of the mansion. The goods leave by the train at 9:30 tonight, and will be due at King’s Cross at 4:30 tomorrow afternoon. As our client wishes the delivery made as soon as possible, we shall be obliged by your having teams ready at King’s Cross at the time named and forthwith conveying the goods to destination. In order to obviate any delays possible through any routine requirements as to payment in your departments, we enclose cheque herewith for ten pounds, receipt of which please acknowledge. Should the charge be less than this amount, you can return balance, if greater, we shall at once send cheque for difference on hearing from you. You are to leave the keys on coming away in the main hall of the house, where the proprietor may get them on his entering the house by means of his duplicate key.

“Pray do not take us as exceeding the bounds of business courtesy in pressing you in all ways to use the utmost expedition.

"We are, dear Sirs, Faithfully yours, SAMUEL F. BILLINGTON & SON"

LETTER, MESSRS. CARTER, PATERSON & CO., LONDON, TO MESSRS. BILLINGTON & SON, WHITBY.

21 August.

"Dear Sirs, — We beg to acknowledge 10 pounds received and to return cheque of 1 pound, 17s, 9d, amount of overplus, as shown in receipted account herewith. Goods are delivered in exact accordance with instructions, and keys left in parcel in main hall, as directed.

"We are, dear Sirs, Yours respectfully, Pro CARTER, PATERSON & CO."

MINA MURRAY'S JOURNAL.

18 August. — I am happy today, and write sitting on the seat in the churchyard. Lucy is ever so much better. Last night she slept well all night, and did not disturb me once.

The roses seem coming back already to her cheeks, though she is still sadly pale and wan-looking. If she were in any way anemic I could understand it, but she is not. She is in gay spirits and full of life and cheerfulness. All the morbid reticence seems to have passed from her, and she has just reminded me, as if I needed any reminding, of that night, and that it was here, on this very seat, I found her asleep.

As she told me she tapped playfully with the heel of her boot on the stone slab and said,

"My poor little feet didn't make much noise then! I daresay poor old Mr. Swales would have told me that it was because I didn't want to wake up Geordie."

As she was in such a communicative humour, I asked her if she had dreamed at all that night.

Before she answered, that sweet, puckered look came into her forehead, which Arthur, I call him Arthur from her habit, says he loves, and indeed, I don’t wonder that he does. Then she went on in a half-dreaming kind of way, as if trying to recall it to herself.

“I didn’t quite dream, but it all seemed to be real. I only wanted to be here in this spot. I don’t know why, for I was afraid of something, I don’t know what. I remember, though I suppose I was asleep, passing through the streets and over the bridge. A fish leaped as I went by, and I leaned over to look at it, and I heard a lot of dogs howling. The whole town seemed as if it must be full of dogs all howling at once, as I went up the steps. Then I had a vague memory of something long and dark with red eyes, just as we saw in the sunset, and something very sweet and very bitter all around me at once. And then I seemed sinking into deep green water, and there was a singing in my ears, as I have heard there is to drowning men, and then everything seemed passing away from me. My soul seemed to go out from my body and float about the air. I seem to remember that once the West Lighthouse was right under me, and then there was a sort of agonising feeling, as if I were in an earthquake, and I came back and found you shaking my body. I saw you do it before I felt you.”

Then she began to laugh. It seemed a little uncanny to me, and I listened to her breathlessly. I did not quite like it, and thought it better not to keep her mind on the subject, so we drifted on to another subject, and Lucy was like her old self again. When we got home the fresh breeze had braced her up, and her pale cheeks were really more rosy. Her mother rejoiced when she saw her, and we all spent a very happy evening together.

19 August. — Joy, joy, joy! Although not all joy. At last, news of Jonathan. The dear fellow has been ill, that is why he did not write. I am not afraid to think it or to say it, now that I know. Mr. Hawkins sent me on the letter, and wrote himself, oh so kindly. I am to leave in the morning and go over to Jonathan, and to help to nurse him if necessary, and to bring him home. Mr. Hawkins says it would not be a bad thing if we were to be married out there. I have cried over the good Sister's letter till I can feel it wet against my bosom, where it lies. It is of Jonathan, and must be near my heart, for he is in my heart. My journey is all mapped out, and my luggage ready. I am only taking one change of dress. Lucy will bring my trunk to London and keep it till I send for it, for it may be that… I must write no more. I must keep it to say to Jonathan, my husband. The letter that he has seen and touched must comfort me till we meet.

LETTER, SISTER AGATHA, HOSPITAL OF ST. JOSEPH AND STE. MARY BUDA-PESTH, TO MISS WILLHELMINA MURRAY

12 August,

"Dear Madam.

"I write by desire of Mr. Jonathan Harker, who is himself not strong enough to write, though progressing well, thanks to God and St. Joseph and Ste. Mary. He has been under our care for nearly six weeks, suffering from a violent brain fever. He wishes me to convey his love, and to say that by this post I write for him to Mr. Peter Hawkins, Exeter, to say, with his dutiful respects, that he is sorry for his delay, and that all of his work is completed. He will require some few weeks' rest in our sanatorium in the hills, but will then return. He wishes me to say that he has not sufficient money with him, and that he would like to pay for his staying here, so that others who need shall not be wanting for help.

"Believe me,

"Yours, with sympathy and all blessings. Sister Agatha

"P.S. — My patient being asleep, I open this to let you know something more. He has told me all about you, and that you are shortly to be his wife. All blessings to you both! He has had some fearful shock, so says our doctor, and in his delirium his ravings have been dreadful, of wolves and poison and blood, of ghosts and demons, and I fear to say of what. Be careful of him always that there may be nothing to excite him of this kind for a long time to come. The traces of such an illness as his do not lightly die away. We should have written long ago, but we knew nothing of his friends, and there was nothing on him, nothing that anyone could understand. He came in the train from Klausenburg, and the guard was told by the station master there that he rushed into the station shouting for a ticket for home. Seeing from his violent demeanour that he was English, they gave him a ticket for the furthest station on the way thither that the train reached.

"Be assured that he is well cared for. He has won all hearts by his sweetness and gentleness. He is truly getting on well, and I have no doubt will in a few weeks be all himself. But be careful of him for safety's sake. There are, I pray God and St. Joseph and Ste. Mary, many, many, happy years for you both."

DR. SEWARD'S DIARY

19 August. — Strange and sudden change in Renfield last night.

About eight o'clock he began to get excited and sniff about as a dog does when setting. The attendant was struck by his manner, and knowing my interest in him, encouraged him to talk. He is usually respectful to the attendant and at times servile, but tonight, the man tells me, he was quite haughty. Would not condescend to talk with him at all.

All he would say was, "I don't want to talk to you. You don't count now. The master is at hand."

The attendant thinks it is some sudden form of religious mania which has seized him. If so, we must look out for squalls, for a strong man with homicidal and religious mania at once might be dangerous. The combination is a dreadful one.

At nine o'clock I visited him myself. His attitude to me was the same as that to the attendant. In his sublime self-feeling the difference between myself and the attendant seemed to him as nothing. It looks like religious mania, and he will soon think that he himself is God.

These infinitesimal distinctions between man and man are too paltry for an Omnipotent Being. How these madmen give themselves away! The real God taketh heed lest a sparrow fall. But the God created from human vanity sees no difference between an eagle and a sparrow. Oh, if men only knew!

For half an hour or more Renfield kept getting excited in greater and greater degree. I did not pretend to be watching him, but I kept strict observation all the same. All at once that shifty look came into his eyes which we always see when a madman has seized an idea, and with it the shifty movement of the head and back which asylum attendants come to know so well. He became quite quiet, and went and sat on the edge of his bed resignedly, and looked into space with lack-luster eyes.

I thought I would find out if his apathy were real or only assumed, and tried to lead him to talk of his pets, a theme which had never failed to excite his attention.

At first he made no reply, but at length said testily, “Bother them all! I don’t care a pin about them.”

“What?” I said. “You don’t mean to tell me you don’t care about spiders?” (Spiders at present are his hobby and the notebook is filling up with columns of small figures.)

To this he answered enigmatically, “The Bride maidens rejoice the eyes that wait the coming of the bride. But when the bride draweth nigh, then the maidens shine not to the eyes that are filled.”

He would not explain himself, but remained obstinately seated on his bed all the time I remained with him.

I am weary tonight and low in spirits. I cannot but think of Lucy, and how different things might have been. If I don’t sleep at once, chloral, the modern Morpheus! I must be careful not to let it grow into a habit. No, I shall take none tonight! I have thought of Lucy, and I shall not dishonour her by mixing the two. If need be, tonight shall be sleepless.

Later. — Glad I made the resolution, gladder that I kept to it. I had lain tossing about, and had heard the clock strike only twice, when the night watchman came to me, sent up from the ward, to say that Renfield had escaped. I threw on my clothes and ran down at once. My patient is too dangerous a person to be roaming about. Those ideas of his might work out dangerously with strangers.

The attendant was waiting for me. He said he had seen him not ten minutes before, seemingly asleep in his bed, when he had looked through the observation trap in the door. His attention was called by the sound of the window being wrenched out. He ran back and saw his feet disappear through the window, and had at once sent up for me. He was only in his night gear, and cannot be far off.

The attendant thought it would be more useful to watch where he should go than to follow him, as he might lose sight of him whilst getting out of the building by the door. He is a bulky man, and couldn't get through the window.

I am thin, so, with his aid, I got out, but feet foremost, and as we were only a few feet above ground landed unhurt.

The attendant told me the patient had gone to the left, and had taken a straight line, so I ran as quickly as I could. As I got through the belt of trees I saw a white figure scale the high wall which separates our grounds from those of the deserted house.

I ran back at once, told the watchman to get three or four men immediately and follow me into the grounds of Carfax, in case our friend might be dangerous. I got a ladder myself, and crossing the wall, dropped down on the other side. I could see Renfield's figure just disappearing behind the angle of the house, so I ran after him. On the far side of the house I found him pressed close against the old iron-bound oak door of the chapel.

He was talking, apparently to some one, but I was afraid to go near enough to hear what he was saying, lest I might frighten him, and he should run off.

Chasing an errant swarm of bees is nothing to following a naked lunatic, when the fit of escaping is upon him! After a few minutes, however, I could see that he did not take note of anything around him, and so ventured to draw nearer to him, the more so as my men had now crossed the wall and were closing him in. I heard him say…

“I am here to do your bidding, Master. I am your slave, and you will reward me, for I shall be faithful. I have worshipped you long and afar off. Now that you are near, I await your commands, and you will not pass me by, will you, dear Master, in your distribution of good things?”

He is a selfish old beggar anyhow. He thinks of the loaves and fishes even when he believes he is in a real Presence. His manias make a startling combination. When we closed in on him he fought like a tiger. He is immensely strong, for he was more like a wild beast than a man.

I never saw a lunatic in such a paroxysm of rage before, and I hope I shall not again. It is a mercy that we have found out his strength and his danger in good time. With strength and determination like his, he might have done wild work before he was caged.

He is safe now, at any rate. Jack Sheppard himself couldn’t get free from the strait waistcoat that keeps him restrained, and he’s chained to the wall in the padded room.

His cries are at times awful, but the silences that follow are more deadly still, for he means murder in every turn and movement.

Just now he spoke coherent words for the first time. “I shall be patient, Master. It is coming, coming, coming!”

So I took the hint, and came too. I was too excited to sleep, but this diary has quieted me, and I feel I shall get some sleep tonight.

CHAPTER 9

LETTER, MINA HARKER TO LUCY WESTENRA

Buda-Pesth, 24 August.

“My dearest Lucy,

“I know you will be anxious to hear all that has happened since we parted at the railway station at Whitby.

“Well, my dear, I got to Hull all right, and caught the boat to Hamburg, and then the train on here. I feel that I can hardly recall anything of the journey, except that I knew I was coming to Jonathan, and that as I should have to do some nursing, I had better get all the sleep I could. I found my dear one, oh, so thin and pale and weak-looking. All the resolution has gone out of his dear eyes, and that quiet dignity which I told you was in his face has vanished. He is only a wreck of himself, and he does not remember anything that has happened to him for a long time past. At least, he wants me to believe so, and I shall never ask.

“He has had some terrible shock, and I fear it might tax his poor brain if he were to try to recall it. Sister Agatha, who is a good creature and a born nurse, tells me that he wanted her to tell me what they were, but she would only cross herself, and say she would never tell. That the ravings of the sick were the secrets of God, and that if a nurse through her vocation should hear them, she should respect her trust.

“She is a sweet, good soul, and the next day, when she saw I was troubled, she opened up the subject my poor dear raved about, added, ‘I can tell you this much, my dear. That it was not about anything which he has done wrong himself, and you, as his wife to be, have no cause to be concerned. He has not forgotten you or what he owes to you. His fear was of great and terrible things, which no mortal can treat of.'

"I do believe the dear soul thought I might be jealous lest my poor dear should have fallen in love with any other girl. The idea of my being jealous about Jonathan! And yet, my dear, let me whisper, I felt a thrill of joy through me when I knew that no other woman was a cause for trouble. I am now sitting by his bedside, where I can see his face while he sleeps. He is waking!

"When he woke he asked me for his coat, as he wanted to get something from the pocket. I asked Sister Agatha, and she brought all his things. I saw amongst them was his notebook, and was going to ask him to let me look at it, for I knew that I might find some clue to his trouble, but I suppose he must have seen my wish in my eyes, for he sent me over to the window, saying he wanted to be quite alone for a moment.

"Then he called me back, and he said to me very solemnly, 'Wilhelmina', I knew then that he was in deadly earnest, for he has never called me by that name since he asked me to marry him, 'You know, dear, my ideas of the trust between husband and wife. There should be no secret, no concealment. I have had a great shock, and when I try to think of what it is I feel my head spin round, and I do not know if it was real of the dreaming of a madman. You know I had brain fever, and that is to be mad. The secret is here, and I do not want to know it. I want to take up my life here, with our marriage.' For, my dear, we had decided to be married as soon as the formalities are complete. 'Are you willing, Wilhelmina, to share my ignorance? Here is the book. Take it and keep it, read it if you will, but never let me know unless, indeed, some solemn duty should come upon me to go back to the bitter hours, asleep or awake, sane or mad, recorded here.' He fell back exhausted, and I put the book under his pillow, and kissed him. I have asked Sister Agatha to beg the Superior to let our wedding be this afternoon, and am waiting her reply…"

"She has come and told me that the Chaplain of the English mission church has been sent for. We are to be married in an hour, or as soon after as Jonathan awakes."

"Lucy, the time has come and gone. I feel very solemn, but very, very happy. Jonathan woke a little after the hour, and all was ready, and he sat up in bed, propped up with pillows. He answered his 'I will' firmly and strong. I could hardly speak. My heart was so full that even those words seemed to choke me.

"The dear sisters were so kind. Please, God, I shall never, never forget them, nor the grave and sweet responsibilities I have taken upon me. I must tell you of my wedding present. When the chaplain and the sisters had left me alone with my husband — oh, Lucy, it is the first time I have written the words 'my husband' — left me alone with my husband, I took the book from under his pillow, and wrapped it up in white paper, and tied it with a little bit of pale blue ribbon which was round my neck, and sealed it over the knot with sealing wax, and for my seal I used my wedding ring. Then I kissed it and showed it to my husband, and told him that I would keep it so, and then it would be an outward and visible sign for us all our lives that we trusted each other, that I would never open it unless it were for his own dear sake or for the sake of some stern duty. Then he took my hand in his, and oh, Lucy, it was the first time he took his wife's hand, and said that it was the dearest thing in all the wide world, and that he would go through all the past again to win it, if need be. The poor dear meant to have said a part of the past, but he cannot think of time yet, and I shall not wonder if at first he mixes up not only the month, but the year.

"Well, my dear, what could I say? I could only tell him that I was the happiest woman in all the wide world, and that I had nothing to give him except myself, my life, and my trust, and that with these went my love and duty for all the days of my life. And, my dear, when he kissed me, and drew me to him with his poor weak hands, it was like a solemn pledge between us.

"Lucy dear, do you know why I tell you all this? It is not only because it is all sweet to me, but because you have been, and are, very dear to me. It was my privilege to be your friend and guide when you came from the schoolroom to prepare for the world of life. I want you to see now, and with the eyes of a very happy wife, whither duty has led me, so that in your own married life you too may be all happy, as I am. My dear, please Almighty God, your life may be all it promises, a long day of sunshine, with no harsh wind, no forgetting duty, no distrust. I must not wish you no pain, for that can never be, but I do hope you will be always as happy as I am now. Goodbye, my dear. I shall post this at once, and perhaps, write you very soon again. I must stop, for Jonathan is waking. I must attend my husband!

"Your ever-loving Mina Harker."

LETTER, LUCY WESTENRA TO MINA HARKER.

Whitby, 30 August.

"My dearest Mina,

"Oceans of love and millions of kisses, and may you soon be in your own home with your husband. I wish you were coming home soon enough to stay with us here. The strong air would soon restore Jonathan. It has quite restored me. I have an appetite like a cormorant, am full of life, and sleep well. You will be glad to know that I have quite given up walking in my sleep. I think I have not stirred out of my bed for a week, that is when I once got into it at night. Arthur says I am getting fat. By the way, I forgot to tell you that Arthur is here. We have such walks and drives, and rides, and rowing, and tennis, and fishing together, and I love him more than ever. He tells me that he loves me more, but I doubt that, for at first he told me that he couldn't love me more than he did then. But this is nonsense. There he is, calling to me. So no more just at present from your loving,

"Lucy.

"P.S. — Mother sends her love. She seems better, poor dear.

"P.P.S. — We are to be married on 28 September."

DR. SEWARDS DIARY

20 August. — The case of Renfield grows even more interesting. He has now so far quieted that there are spells of cessation from his passion. For the first week after his attack he was perpetually violent. Then one night, just as the moon rose, he grew quiet, and kept murmuring to himself. "Now I can wait. Now I can wait."

The attendant came to tell me, so I ran down at once to have a look at him. He was still in the strait waistcoat and in the padded room, but the suffused look had gone from his face, and his eyes had something of their old pleading. I might almost say, cringing, softness. I was satisfied with his present condition, and directed him to be relieved. The attendants hesitated, but finally carried out my wishes without protest.

It was a strange thing that the patient had humour enough to see their distrust, for, coming close to me, he said in a whisper, all the while looking furtively at them, “They think I could hurt you! Fancy me hurting you! The fools!”

It was soothing, somehow, to the feelings to find myself disassociated even in the mind of this poor madman from the others, but all the same I do not follow his thought. Am I to take it that I have anything in common with him, so that we are, as it were, to stand together. Or has he to gain from me some good so stupendous that my well being is needful to Him? I must find out later on. Tonight he will not speak. Even the offer of a kitten or even a full-grown cat will not tempt him.

He will only say, “I don’t take any stock in cats. I have more to think of now, and I can wait. I can wait.”

After a while I left him. The attendant tells me that he was quiet until just before dawn, and that then he began to get uneasy, and at length violent, until at last he fell into a paroxysm which exhausted him so that he swooned into a sort of coma.

. . . Three nights has the same thing happened, violent all day then quiet from moonrise to sunrise. I wish I could get some clue to the cause. It would almost seem as if there was some influence which came and went. Happy thought! We shall tonight play sane wits against mad ones. He escaped before without our help. Tonight he shall escape with it. We shall give him a chance, and have the men ready to follow in case they are required.

23 August.— “The expected always happens.” How well Disraeli knew life. Our bird when he found the cage open would not fly, so all

our subtle arrangements were for nought. At any rate, we have proved one thing, that the spells of quietness last a reasonable time. We shall in future be able to ease his bonds for a few hours each day. I have given orders to the night attendant merely to shut him in the padded room, when once he is quiet, until the hour before sunrise. The poor soul's body will enjoy the relief even if his mind cannot appreciate it. Hark! The unexpected again! I am called. The patient has once more escaped.

Later. — Another night adventure. Renfield artfully waited until the attendant was entering the room to inspect. Then he dashed out past him and flew down the passage. I sent word for the attendants to follow. Again he went into the grounds of the deserted house, and we found him in the same place, pressed against the old chapel door. When he saw me he became furious, and had not the attendants seized him in time, he would have tried to kill me. As we were holding him a strange thing happened. He suddenly redoubled his efforts, and then as suddenly grew calm. I looked round instinctively, but could see nothing. Then I caught the patient's eye and followed it, but could trace nothing as it looked into the moonlight sky, except a big bat, which was flapping its silent and ghostly way to the west. Bats usually wheel about, but this one seemed to go straight on, as if it knew where it was bound for or had some intention of its own.

The patient grew calmer every instant, and presently said, "You needn't tie me. I shall go quietly!" Without trouble, we came back to the house. I feel there is something ominous in his calm, and shall not forget this night.

LUCY WESTENRA'S DIARY

Hillingham, 24 August. — I must imitate Mina, and keep writing things down. Then we can have long talks when we do meet. I wonder when it will be. I wish she were with me again, for I feel so unhappy. Last night I seemed to be dreaming again just as I was at Whitby. Perhaps it is the change of air, or getting home again. It is all dark and horrid to me, for I can remember nothing. But I am full of vague fear, and I feel so weak and worn out. When Arthur came to lunch he looked quite grieved when he saw me, and I hadn’t the spirit to try to be cheerful. I wonder if I could sleep in mother’s room tonight. I shall make an excuse to try.

25 August. — Another bad night. Mother did not seem to take to my proposal. She seems not too well herself, and doubtless she fears to worry me. I tried to keep awake, and succeeded for a while, but when the clock struck twelve it waked me from a doze, so I must have been falling asleep. There was a sort of scratching or flapping at the window, but I did not mind it, and as I remember no more, I suppose I must have fallen asleep. More bad dreams. I wish I could remember them. This morning I am horribly weak. My face is ghastly pale, and my throat pains me. It must be something wrong with my lungs, for I don’t seem to be getting air enough. I shall try to cheer up when Arthur comes, or else I know he will be miserable to see me so.

LETTER, ARTHUR TO DR. SEWARD

“Albemarle Hotel, 31 August

“My dear Jack,

“I want you to do me a favour. Lucy is ill, that is she has no special disease, but she looks awful, and is getting worse every day. I have asked her if there is any cause, I not dare to ask her mother, for to disturb the poor lady's mind about her daughter in her present state of health would be fatal. Mrs. Westenra has confided to me that her doom is spoken, disease of the heart, though poor Lucy does not know it yet. I am sure that there is something preying on my dear girl's mind. I am almost distracted when I think of her. To look at her gives me a pang. I told her I should ask you to see her, and though she demurred at first, I know why, old fellow, she finally consented. It will be a painful task for you, I know, old friend, but it is for her sake, and I must not hesitate to ask, or you to act. You are to come to lunch at Hillingham tomorrow, two o'clock, so as not to arouse any suspicion in Mrs. Westenra, and after lunch Lucy will take an opportunity of being alone with you. I am filled with anxiety, and want to consult with you alone as soon as I can after you have seen her. Do not fail!

"Arthur."

TELEGRAM, ARTHUR HOLMWOOD TO SEWARD

1 September

"Am summoned to see my father, who is worse. Am writing. Write me fully by tonight's post to Ring. Wire me if necessary."

LETTER FROM DR. SEWARD TO ARTHUR HOLMWOOD

2 September

"My dear old fellow,

"With regard to Miss Westenra's health I hasten to let you know at once that in my opinion there is not any functional disturbance or any malady that I know of. At the same time, I am not by any means satisfied with her appearance. She is woefully different from what she was when I saw her last. Of course you must bear in mind that I did not have full opportunity of examination such as I should wish. Our very friendship makes a little difficulty which not even medical science or custom can bridge over. I had better tell you exactly what happened, leaving you to draw, in a measure, your own conclusions. I shall then say what I have done and propose doing.

“I found Miss Westenra in seemingly gay spirits. Her mother was present, and in a few seconds I made up my mind that she was trying all she knew to mislead her mother and prevent her from being anxious. I have no doubt she guesses, if she does not know, what need of caution there is.

“We lunched alone, and as we all exerted ourselves to be cheerful, we got, as some kind of reward for our labours, some real cheerfulness amongst us. Then Mrs. Westenra went to lie down, and Lucy was left with me. We went into her boudoir, and till we got there her gaiety remained, for the servants were coming and going.

“As soon as the door was closed, however, the mask fell from her face, and she sank down into a chair with a great sigh, and hid her eyes with her hand. When I saw that her high spirits had failed, I at once took advantage of her reaction to make a diagnosis.

“She said to me very sweetly, ‘I cannot tell you how I loathe talking about myself.’ I reminded her that a doctor’s confidence was sacred, but that you were grievously anxious about her. She caught on to my meaning at once, and settled that matter in a word. ‘Tell Arthur everything you choose. I do not care for myself, but for him!’ So I am quite free.

“I could easily see that she was somewhat bloodless, but I could not see the usual anemic signs, and by the chance, I was able to test the actual quality of her blood, for in opening a window which was stiff a cord gave way, and she cut her hand slightly with broken glass. It was a slight matter in itself, but it gave me an evident chance, and I secured a few drops of the blood and have analysed them.

"The qualitative analysis give a quite normal condition, and shows, I should infer, in itself a vigorous state of health. In other physical matters I was quite satisfied that there is no need for anxiety, but as there must be a cause somewhere, I have come to the conclusion that it must be something mental.

"She complains of difficulty breathing satisfactorily at times, and of heavy, lethargic sleep, with dreams that frighten her, but regarding which she can remember nothing. She says that as a child, she used to walk in her sleep, and that when in Whitby the habit came back, and that once she walked out in the night and went to East Cliff, where Miss Murray found her. But she assures me that of late the habit has not returned.

"I am in doubt, and so have done the best thing I know of. I have written to my old friend and master, Professor Van Helsing, of Amsterdam, who knows as much about obscure diseases as any one in the world. I have asked him to come over, and as you told me that all things were to be at your charge, I have mentioned to him who you are and your relations to Miss Westenra. This, my dear fellow, is in obedience to your wishes, for I am only too proud and happy to do anything I can for her.

"Van Helsing would, I know, do anything for me for a personal reason, so no matter on what ground he comes, we must accept his wishes. He is a seemingly arbitrary man, this is because he knows what he is talking about better than any one else. He is a philosopher and a metaphysician, and one of the most advanced scientists of his day, and he has, I believe, an absolutely open mind. This, with an iron nerve, a temper of the ice-brook, and indomitable resolution, self-command, and toleration exalted from virtues to blessings, and the kindliest and truest heart that beats, these form his equipment for the noble work that he is doing for mankind, work both in theory and practice, for his views are as wide as his all-embracing sympathy. I tell you these facts that you may know why I have such confidence in him. I have asked him to come at once. I shall see Miss Westenra tomorrow again. She is to meet me at the Stores, so that I may not alarm her mother by too early a repetition of my call.

"Yours always."

John Seward

LETTER, ABRAHAM VAN HELSING, MD, DPh, D. Lit, ETC, ETC, TO DR. SEWARD

2 September.

"My good Friend,

"When I received your letter I am already coming to you. By good fortune I can leave just at once, without wrong to any of those who have trusted me. Were fortune other, then it were bad for those who have trusted, for I come to my friend when he call me to aid those he holds dear. Tell your friend that when that time you suck from my wound so swiftly the poison of the gangrene from that knife that our other friend, too nervous, let slip, you did more for him when he wants my aids and you call for them than all his great fortune could do. But it is pleasure added to do for him, your friend, it is to you that I come. Have near at hand, and please it so arrange that we may see the young lady not too late on tomorrow, for it is likely that I may have to return here that night. But if need be I shall come again in three days, and stay longer if it must. Till then goodbye, my friend John.

“Van Helsing.”

LETTER, DR. SEWARD TO HON. ARTHUR HOLMWOOD

3 September

“My dear Art,

“Van Helsing has come and gone. He came on with me to Hillingham, and found that, by Lucy’s discretion, her mother was lunching out, so that we were alone with her.

“Van Helsing made a very careful examination of the patient. He is to report to me, and I shall advise you, for of course I was not present all the time. He is, I fear, much concerned, but says he must think. When I told him of our friendship and how you trust to me in the matter, he said, ‘You must tell him all you think. Tell him what I think, if you can guess it, if you will. Nay, I am not jesting. This is no jest, but life and death, perhaps more.’ I asked what he meant by that, for he was very serious. This was when we had come back to town, and he was having a cup of tea before starting on his return to Amsterdam. He would not give me any further clue. You must not be angry with me, Art, because his very reticence means that all his brains are working for her good. He will speak plainly enough when the time comes, be sure. So I told him I would simply write an account of our visit, just as if I were doing a descriptive special article for THE DAILY TELEGRAPH. He seemed not to notice, but remarked that the smuts of London were not quite so bad as they used to be when he was a student here. I am to get his report tomorrow if he can possibly make it. In any case I am to have a letter.

“Well, as to the visit, Lucy was more cheerful than on the day I first saw her, and certainly looked better. She had lost something of the ghastly look that so upset you, and her breathing was normal. She was very sweet to the Professor (as she always is), and tried to make him feel at ease, though I could see the poor girl was making a hard struggle for it.

“I believe Van Helsing saw it, too, for I saw the quick look under his bushy brows that I knew of old. Then he began to chat of all things except ourselves and diseases and with such an infinite geniality that I could see poor Lucy’s pretense of animation merge into reality. Then, without any seeming change, he brought the conversation gently round to his visit, and suavely said,

“‘My dear young miss, I have the so great pleasure because you are so much beloved. That is much, my dear, even were there that which I do not see. They told me you were down in the spirit, and that you were of a ghastly pale. To them I say “Pouf!”’ And he snapped his fingers at me and went on. ‘But you and I shall show them how wrong they are. How can he,’ and he pointed at me with the same look and gesture as that with which he pointed me out in his class, on, or rather after, a particular occasion which he never fails to remind me of, ‘know anything of a young ladies? He has his madmen to play with, and to bring them back to happiness, and to those that love them. It is much to do, and, oh, but there are rewards in that we can bestow such happiness. But the young ladies! He has no wife nor daughter, and the young do not tell themselves to the young, but to the old, like me, who have known so many sorrows and the causes of them. So, my dear, we will send him away to smoke the cigarette in the garden, whiles you and I have little talk all to ourselves.’ I took the hint, and strolled about, and presently the professor came to the window and called me in. He looked grave, but said, ‘I have made careful examination, but there is no functional cause. With you I agree that there has been much blood lost, it has been but is not. But the conditions of her are in no way anemic. I have asked her to send me her maid, that I may ask just one or two questions, that so I may not chance to miss nothing. I know well what she will say. And yet there is cause. There is always cause for everything. I must go back home and think. You must send me the telegram every day, and if there be cause I shall come again. The disease, for not to be well is a disease, interest me, and the sweet, young dear, she interest me too. She charm me, and for her, if not for you or disease, I come.’

“As I tell you, he would not say a word more, even when we were alone. And so now, Art, you know all I know. I shall keep stern watch. I trust your poor father is rallying. It must be a terrible thing to you, my dear old fellow, to be placed in such a position between two people who are both so dear to you. I know your idea of duty to your father, and you are right to stick to it. But if need be, I shall send you word to come at once to Lucy, so do not be over-anxious unless you hear from me.”

DR. SEWARD’S DIARY

4 September. — Zoophagous patient still keeps up our interest in him. He had only one outburst and that was yesterday at an unusual time. Just before the stroke of noon he began to grow restless. The attendant knew the symptoms, and at once summoned aid. Fortunately the men came at a run, and were just in time, for at the stroke of noon he became so violent that it took all their strength to hold him. In about five minutes, however, he began to get more

quiet, and finally sank into a sort of melancholy, in which state he has remained up to now. The attendant tells me that his screams whilst in the paroxysm were really appalling. I found my hands full when I got in, attending to some of the other patients who were frightened by him. Indeed, I can quite understand the effect, for the sounds disturbed even me, though I was some distance away. It is now after the dinner hour of the asylum, and as yet my patient sits in a corner brooding, with a dull, sullen, woe-begone look in his face, which seems rather to indicate than to show something directly. I cannot quite understand it.

Later. — Another change in my patient. At five o'clock I looked in on him, and found him seemingly as happy and contented as he used to be. He was catching flies and eating them, and was keeping note of his capture by making nailmarks on the edge of the door between the ridges of padding. When he saw me, he came over and apologised for his bad conduct, and asked me in a very humble, cringing way to be led back to his own room, and to have his notebook again. I thought it well to humour him, so he is back in his room with the window open. He has the sugar of his tea spread out on the window sill, and is reaping quite a harvest of flies. He is not now eating them, but putting them into a box, as of old, and is already examining the corners of his room to find a spider. I tried to get him to talk about the past few days, for any clue to his thoughts would be of immense help to me, but he would not rise. For a moment or two he looked very sad, and said in a sort of far away voice, as though saying it rather to himself than to me.

"All over! All over! He has deserted me. No hope for me now unless I do it myself!" Then suddenly turning to me in a resolute way, he said, “Doctor, won’t you be very good to me and let me have a little more sugar? I think it would be very good for me.”

“And the flies?” I said.

“Yes! The flies like it, too, and I like the flies, therefore I like it.” And there are people who know so little as to think that madmen do not argue. I procured him a double supply, and left him as happy a man as, I suppose, any in the world. I wish I could fathom his mind.

Midnight. — Another change in him. I had been to see Miss Westenra, whom I found much better, and had just returned, and was standing at our own gate looking at the sunset, when once more I heard him yelling. As his room is on this side of the house, I could hear it better than in the morning. It was a shock to me to turn from the wonderful smoky beauty of a sunset over London, with its lurid lights and inky shadows and all the marvellous tints that come on foul clouds even as on foul water, and to realise all the grim sternness of my own cold stone building, with its wealth of breathing misery, and my own desolate heart to endure it all. I reached him just as the sun was going down, and from his window saw the red disc sink. As it sank he became less and less frenzied, and just as it dipped he slid from the hands that held him, an inert mass, on the floor. It is wonderful, however, what intellectual recuperative power lunatics have, for within a few minutes he stood up quite calmly and looked around him. I signalled to the attendants not to hold him, for I was anxious to see what he would do. He went straight over to the window and brushed out the crumbs of sugar. Then he took his fly box, and emptied it outside, and threw away the box. Then he shut the window, and crossing over, sat down on his bed. All this surprised me, so I asked him, “Are you going to keep flies any more?”

“No,” said he. “I am sick of all that rubbish!” He certainly is a wonderfully interesting study. I wish I could get some glimpse of his mind or of the cause of his sudden passion. Stop. There may be a clue after all, if we can find why today his paroxysms came on at high noon and at sunset. Can it be that there is a malign influence of the sun at periods which affects certain natures, as at times the moon does others? We shall see.

TELEGRAM. SEWARD, LONDON, TO VAN HELSING, AMSTERDAM

“4 September. — Patient still better today.”

TELEGRAM, SEWARD, LONDON, TO VAN HELSING, AMSTERDAM

“5 September. — Patient greatly improved. Good appetite, sleeps naturally, good spirits, colour coming back.”

TELEGRAM, SEWARD, LONDON, TO VAN HELSING, AMSTERDAM

“6 September. — Terrible change for the worse. Come at once. Do not lose an hour. I hold over telegram to Holmwood till have seen you.”

CHAPTER 10

LETTER, DR. SEWARD TO HON. ARTHUR HOLMWOOD

6 September

“My dear Art,

“My news today is not so good. Lucy this morning had gone back a bit. There is, however, one good thing which has arisen from it. Mrs. Westenra was naturally anxious concerning Lucy, and has consulted me professionally about her. I took advantage of the opportunity, and told her that my old master, Van Helsing, the great specialist, was coming to stay with me, and that I would put her in his charge conjointly with myself. So now we can come and go without alarming her unduly, for a shock to her would mean sudden death, and this, in Lucy’s weak condition, might be disastrous to her. We are hedged in with difficulties, all of us, my poor fellow, but, please God, we shall come through them all right. If any need I shall write, so that, if you do not hear from me, take it for granted that I am simply waiting for news, In haste,

“Yours ever,”

John Seward

DR. SEWARD’S DIARY

7 September. — The first thing Van Helsing said to me when we met at Liverpool Street was, “Have you said anything to our young friend, to lover of her?”

“No,” I said. “I waited till I had seen you, as I said in my telegram. I wrote him a letter simply telling him that you were coming, as Miss Westenra was not so well, and that I should let him know if need be.”

“Right, my friend,” he said. “Quite right! Better he not know as yet. Perhaps he will never know. I pray so, but if it be needed, then he shall know all. And, my good friend John, let me caution you. You deal with the madmen. All men are mad in some way or the other, and inasmuch as you deal discreetly with your madmen, so deal with God’s madmen too, the rest of the world. You tell not your madmen what you do nor why you do it. You tell them not what you think. So you shall keep knowledge in its place, where it may rest, where it may gather its kind around it and breed. You and I shall keep as yet what we know here, and here.” He touched me on the heart and on the forehead, and then touched himself the same way. “I have for myself thoughts at the present. Later I shall unfold to you.”

“Why not now?” I asked. “It may do some good. We may arrive at some decision.” He looked at me and said, “My friend John, when the corn is grown, even before it has ripened, while the milk of its mother earth is in him, and the sunshine has not yet begun to paint him with his gold, the husbandman he pull the ear and rub him between his rough hands, and blow away the green chaff, and say to you, ‘Look! He’s good corn, he will make a good crop when the time comes.’”

I did not see the application and told him so. For reply he reached over and took my ear in his hand and pulled it playfully, as he used long ago to do at lectures, and said, “The good husbandman tell you so then because he knows, but not till then. But you do not find the good husbandman dig up his planted corn to see if he grow. That is for the children who play at husbandry, and not for those who take it as of the work of their life. See you now, friend John? I have sown my corn, and Nature has her work to do in making it sprout, if he sprout at all, there's some promise, and I wait till the ear begins to swell." He broke off, for he evidently saw that I understood. Then he went on gravely, "You were always a careful student, and your case book was ever more full than the rest. And I trust that good habit have not fail. Remember, my friend, that knowledge is stronger than memory, and we should not trust the weaker. Even if you have not kept the good practice, let me tell you that this case of our dear miss is one that may be, mind, I say may be, of such interest to us and others that all the rest may not make him kick the beam, as your people say. Take then good note of it. Nothing is too small. I counsel you, put down in record even your doubts and surmises. Hereafter it may be of interest to you to see how true you guess. We learn from failure, not from success!"

When I described Lucy's symptoms, the same as before, but infinitely more marked, he looked very grave, but said nothing. He took with him a bag in which were many instruments and drugs, "the ghastly paraphernalia of our beneficial trade," as he once called, in one of his lectures, the equipment of a professor of the healing craft.

When we were shown in, Mrs. Westenra met us. She was alarmed, but not nearly so much as I expected to find her. Nature in one of her beneficient moods has ordained that even death has some antidote to its own terrors. Here, in a case where any shock may prove fatal, matters are so ordered that, from some cause or other, the things not personal, even the terrible change in her daughter to whom she is so attached, do not seem to reach her. It is something like the way dame Nature gathers round a foreign body an envelope of some insensitive tissue which can protect from evil that which it would otherwise harm by contact. If this be an ordered selfishness, then we should pause before we condemn any one for the vice of egoism, for there may be deeper root for its causes than we have knowledge of.

I used my knowledge of this phase of spiritual pathology, and set down a rule that she should not be present with Lucy, or think of her illness more than was absolutely required. She assented readily, so readily that I saw again the hand of Nature fighting for life. Van Helsing and I were shown up to Lucy's room. If I was shocked when I saw her yesterday, I was horrified when I saw her today.

She was ghastly, chalkily pale. The red seemed to have gone even from her lips and gums, and the bones of her face stood out prominently. Her breathing was painful to see or hear. Van Helsing's face grew set as marble, and his eyebrows converged till they almost touched over his nose. Lucy lay motionless, and did not seem to have strength to speak, so for a while we were all silent. Then Van Helsing beckoned to me, and we went gently out of the room. The instant we had closed the door he stepped quickly along the passage to the next door, which was open. Then he pulled me quickly in with him and closed the door. "My god!" he said. "This is dreadful. There is not time to be lost. She will die for sheer want of blood to keep the heart's action as it should be. There must be a transfusion of blood at once. Is it you or me?"

"I am younger and stronger, Professor. It must be me."

"Then get ready at once. I will bring up my bag. I am prepared."

I went downstairs with him, and as we were going there was a knock at the hall door. When we reached the hall, the maid had just opened the door, and Arthur was stepping quickly in. He rushed up to me, saying in an eager whisper,

"Jack, I was so anxious. I read between the lines of your letter, and have been in an agony. The dad was better, so I ran down here to see for myself. Is not that gentleman Dr. Van Helsing? I am so thankful to you, sir, for coming."

When first the Professor's eye had lit upon him, he had been angry at his interruption at such a time, but now, as he took in his stalwart proportions and recognised the strong young manhood which seemed to emanate from him, his eyes gleamed. Without a pause he said to him as he held out his hand,

"Sir, you have come in time. You are the lover of our dear miss. She is bad, very, very bad. Nay, my child, do not go like that." For he suddenly grew pale and sat down in a chair almost fainting. "You are to help her. You can do more than any that live, and your courage is your best help."

"What can I do?" asked Arthur hoarsely. "Tell me, and I shall do it. My life is hers, and I would give the last drop of blood in my body for her."

The Professor has a strongly humorous side, and I could from old knowledge detect a trace of its origin in his answer.

"My young sir, I do not ask so much as that, not the last!"

"What shall I do?" There was fire in his eyes, and his open nostrils quivered with intent. Van Helsing slapped him on the shoulder.

"Come!" he said. "You are a man, and it is a man we want. You are better than me, better than my friend John." Arthur looked bewildered, and the Professor went on by explaining in a kindly way.

"Young miss is bad, very bad. She wants blood, and blood she must have or die. My friend John and I have consulted, and we are about to perform what we call transfusion of blood, to transfer from full veins of one to the empty veins which pine for him. John was to give his blood, as he is the more young and strong than me." — Here Arthur took my hand and wrung it hard in silence.— "But now you are here, you are more good than us, old or young, who toil much in the world of thought. Our nerves are not so calm and our blood so bright than yours!"

Arthur turned to him and said, "If you only knew how gladly I would die for her you would understand…" He stopped with a sort of choke in his voice.

"Good boy!" said Van Helsing. "In the not-so-far-off you will be happy that you have done all for her you love. Come now and be silent. You shall kiss her once before it is done, but then you must go, and you must leave at my sign. Say no word to Madame. You know how it is with her. There must be no shock, any knowledge of this would be one. Come!"

We all went up to Lucy's room. Arthur by direction remained outside. Lucy turned her head and looked at us, but said nothing. She was not asleep, but she was simply too weak to make the effort. Her eyes spoke to us, that was all.

Van Helsing took some things from his bag and laid them on a little table out of sight. Then he mixed a narcotic, and coming over to the bed, said cheerily, "Now, little miss, here is your medicine. Drink it off, like a good child. See, I lift you so that to swallow is easy. Yes." She had made the effort with success.

It astonished me how long the drug took to act. This, in fact, marked the extent of her weakness. The time seemed endless until sleep began to flicker in her eyelids. At last, however, the narcotic began to manifest its potency, and she fell into a deep sleep. When the Professor was satisfied, he called Arthur into the room, and bade him strip off his coat. Then he added, "You may take that one little kiss whiles I bring over the table. Friend John, help to me!" So neither of us looked whilst he bent over her.

Van Helsing, turning to me, said, “He is so young and strong, and of blood so pure that we need not defibrinate it.”

Then with swiftness, but with absolute method, Van Helsing performed the operation. As the transfusion went on, something like life seemed to come back to poor Lucy’s cheeks, and through Arthur’s growing pallor the joy of his face seemed absolutely to shine. After a bit I began to grow anxious, for the loss of blood was telling on Arthur, strong man as he was. It gave me an idea of what a terrible strain Lucy’s system must have undergone that what weakened Arthur only partially restored her.

But the Professor’s face was set, and he stood watch in hand, and with his eyes fixed now on the patient and now on Arthur. I could hear my own heart beat. Presently, he said in a soft voice, “Do not stir an instant. It is enough. You attend him. I will look to her.”

When all was over, I could see how much Arthur was weakened. I dressed the wound and took his arm to bring him away, when Van Helsing spoke without turning round, the man seems to have eyes in the back of his head, “The brave lover, I think, deserve another kiss, which he shall have presently.” And as he had now finished his operation, he adjusted the pillow to the patient’s head. As he did so the narrow black velvet band which she seems always to wear round her throat, buckled with an old diamond buckle which her lover had given her, was dragged a little up, and showed a red mark on her throat.

Arthur did not notice it, but I could hear the deep hiss of indrawn breath which is one of Van Helsing’s ways of betraying emotion. He said nothing at the moment, but turned to me, saying, “Now take down our brave young lover, give him of the port wine, and let him lie down a while. He must then go home and rest, sleep much and eat much, that he may be recruited of what he has so given to his love. He must not stay here. Hold a moment! I may take it, sir, that you are anxious of result. Then bring it with you, that in all ways the operation is successful. You have saved her life this time, and you can go home and rest easy in mind that all that can be is. I shall tell her all when she is well. She shall love you none the less for what you have done. Goodbye."

When Arthur had gone I went back to the room. Lucy was sleeping gently, but her breathing was stronger. I could see the counterpane move as her breast heaved. By the bedside sat Van Helsing, looking at her intently. The velvet band again covered the red mark. I asked the Professor in a whisper, "What do you make of that mark on her throat?"

"What do you make of it?"

"I have not examined it yet," I answered, and then and there proceeded to loose the band. Just over the external jugular vein there were two punctures, not large, but not wholesome looking. There was no sign of disease, but the edges were white and worn looking, as if by some trituration. It at once occurred to me that that this wound, or whatever it was, might be the means of that manifest loss of blood. But I abandoned the idea as soon as it formed, for such a thing could not be. The whole bed would have been drenched to a scarlet with the blood which the girl must have lost to leave such a pallor as she had before the transfusion.

"Well?" said Van Helsing.

"Well," said I. "I can make nothing of it."

The Professor stood up. "I must go back to Amsterdam tonight," he said "There are books and things there which I want. You must remain here all night, and you must not let your sight pass from her."

"Shall I have a nurse?" I asked.

"We are the best nurses, you and I. You keep watch all night. See that she is well fed, and that nothing disturbs her. You must not sleep all the night. Later on we can sleep, you and I. I shall be back as soon as possible. And then we may begin."

"May begin?" I said. "What on earth do you mean?"

"We shall see!" he answered, as he hurried out. He came back a moment later and put his head inside the door and said with a warning finger held up, "Remember, she is your charge. If you leave her, and harm befall, you shall not sleep easy hereafter!"

DR. SEWARD'S DIARY — CONTINUED

8 September. — I sat up all night with Lucy. The opiate worked itself off towards dusk, and she waked naturally. She looked a different being from what she had been before the operation. Her spirits even were good, and she was full of a happy vivacity, but I could see evidences of the absolute prostration which she had undergone. When I told Mrs. Westenra that Dr. Van Helsing had directed that I should sit up with her, she almost pooh-poohed the idea, pointing out her daughter's renewed strength and excellent spirits. I was firm, however, and made preparations for my long vigil. When her maid had prepared her for the night I came in, having in the meantime had supper, and took a seat by the bedside.

She did not in any way make objection, but looked at me gratefully whenever I caught her eye. After a long spell she seemed sinking off to sleep, but with an effort seemed to pull herself together and shook it off. It was apparent that she did not want to sleep, so I tackled the subject at once.

"You do not want to sleep?"

"No. I am afraid."

"Afraid to go to sleep! Why so? It is the boon we all crave for."

"Ah, not if you were like me, if sleep was to you a presage of horror!"

"A presage of horror! What on earth do you mean?"

"I don't know. Oh, I don't know. And that is what is so terrible. All this weakness comes to me in sleep, until I dread the very thought."

"But, my dear girl, you may sleep tonight. I am here watching you, and I can promise that nothing will happen."

"Ah, I can trust you!" she said.

I seized the opportunity, and said, "I promise that if I see any evidence of bad dreams I will wake you at once."

"You will? Oh, will you really? How good you are to me. Then I will sleep!" And almost at the word she gave a deep sigh of relief, and sank back, asleep.

All night long I watched by her. She never stirred, but slept on and on in a deep, tranquil, life-giving, health-giving sleep. Her lips were slightly parted, and her breast rose and fell with the regularity of a pendulum. There was a smile on her face, and it was evident that no bad dreams had come to disturb her peace of mind.

In the early morning her maid came, and I left her in her care and took myself back home, for I was anxious about many things. I sent a short wire to Van Helsing and to Arthur, telling them of the excellent result of the operation. My own work, with its manifold arrears, took me all day to clear off. It was dark when I was able to inquire about my zoophagous patient. The report was good. He had been quite quiet for the past day and night. A telegram came from Van Helsing at Amsterdam whilst I was at dinner, suggesting that I should be at

Hillingham tonight, as it might be well to be at hand, and stating that he was leaving by the night mail and would join me early in the morning.

9 September. — I was pretty tired and worn out when I got to Hillingham. For two nights I had hardly had a wink of sleep, and my brain was beginning to feel that numbness which marks cerebral exhaustion. Lucy was up and in cheerful spirits. When she shook hands with me she looked sharply in my face and said,

"No sitting up tonight for you. You are worn out. I am quite well again. Indeed, I am, and if there is to be any sitting up, it is I who will sit up with you."

I would not argue the point, but went and had my supper. Lucy came with me, and, enlivened by her charming presence, I made an excellent meal, and had a couple of glasses of the more than excellent port. Then Lucy took me upstairs, and showed me a room next her own, where a cozy fire was burning.

"Now," she said. "You must stay here. I shall leave this door open and my door too. You can lie on the sofa for I know that nothing would induce any of you doctors to go to bed whilst there is a patient above the horizon. If I want anything I shall call out, and you can come to me at once."

I could not but acquiesce, for I was dog tired, and could not have sat up had I tried. So, on her renewing her promise to call me if she should want anything, I lay on the sofa, and forgot all about everything.

LUCY WESTENRA'S DIARY

9 September. — I feel so happy tonight. I have been so miserably

weak, that to be able to think and move about is like feeling sunshine after a long spell of east wind out of a steel sky. Somehow Arthur feels very, very close to me. I seem to feel his presence warm about me. I suppose it is that sickness and weakness are selfish things and turn our inner eyes and sympathy on ourselves, whilst health and strength give love rein, and in thought and feeling he can wander where he wills. I know where my thoughts are. If only Arthur knew! My dear, my dear, your ears must tingle as you sleep, as mine do waking. Oh, the blissful rest of last night! How I slept, with that dear, good Dr. Seward watching me. And tonight I shall not fear to sleep, since he is close at hand and within call. Thank everybody for being so good to me. Thank God! Goodnight Arthur.

DR. SEWARD'S DIARY

10 September. — I was conscious of the Professor's hand on my head, and started awake all in a second. That is one of the things that we learn in an asylum, at any rate.

"And how is our patient?"

"Well, when I left her, or rather when she left me," I answered.

"Come, let us see," he said. And together we went into the room.

The blind was down, and I went over to raise it gently, whilst Van Helsing stepped, with his soft, cat-like tread, over to the bed.

As I raised the blind, and the morning sunlight flooded the room, I heard the Professor's low hiss of inspiration, and knowing its rarity, a deadly fear shot through my heart. As I passed over he moved back, and his exclamation of horror, "Gott in Himmel!" needed no enforcement from his agonised face. He raised his hand and pointed to the bed, and his iron face was drawn and ashen white. I felt my knees begin to tremble.

There on the bed, seemingly in a swoon, lay poor Lucy, more horribly white and wan-looking than ever. Even the lips were white, and the gums seemed to have shrunken back from the teeth, as we sometimes see in a corpse after a prolonged illness.

Van Helsing raised his foot to stamp in anger, but the instinct of his life and all the long years of habit stood to him, and he put it down again softly.

“Quick!” he said. “Bring the brandy.”

I flew to the dining room, and returned with the decanter. He wetted the poor white lips with it, and together we rubbed palm and wrist and heart. He felt her heart, and after a few moments of agonising suspense said,

“It is not too late. It beats, though but feebly. All our work is undone. We must begin again. There is no young Arthur here now. I have to call on you yourself this time, friend John.” As he spoke, he was dipping into his bag, and producing the instruments of transfusion. I had taken off my coat and rolled up my shirt sleeve. There was no possibility of an opiate just at present, and no need of one; and so, without a moment’s delay, we began the operation.

After a time, it did not seem a short time either, for the draining away of one’s blood, no matter how willingly it be given, is a terrible feeling, Van Helsing held up a warning finger. “Do not stir,” he said. “But I fear that with growing strength she may wake, and that would make danger, oh, so much danger. But I shall precaution take. I shall give hypodermic injection of morphia.” He proceeded then, swiftly and deftly, to carry out his intent.

The effect on Lucy was not bad, for the faint seemed to merge subtly into the narcotic sleep. It was with a feeling of personal pride that I could see a faint tinge of colour steal back into the pallid cheeks and lips. No man knows, till he experiences it, what it is to feel his own lifeblood drawn away into the veins of the woman he loves.

The Professor watched me critically. “That will do,” he said. “Already?” I remonstrated. “You took a great deal more from Art.” To which he smiled a sad sort of smile as he replied,

“He is her lover, her fiance. You have work, much work to do for her and for others, and the present will suffice.”

When we stopped the operation, he attended to Lucy, whilst I applied digital pressure to my own incision. I laid down, while I waited his leisure to attend to me, for I felt faint and a little sick. By and by he bound up my wound, and sent me downstairs to get a glass of wine for myself. As I was leaving the room, he came after me, and half whispered.

“Mind, nothing must be said of this. If our young lover should turn up unexpected, as before, no word to him. It would at once frighten him and enjealous him, too. There must be none. So!”

When I came back he looked at me carefully, and then said, “You are not much the worse. Go into the room, and lie on your sofa, and rest awhile, then have much breakfast and come here to me.”

I followed out his orders, for I knew how right and wise they were. I had done my part, and now my next duty was to keep up my strength. I felt very weak, and in the weakness lost something of the amazement at what had occurred. I fell asleep on the sofa, however, wondering over and over again how Lucy had made such a retrograde movement, and how she could have been drained of so much blood with no sign any where to show for it. I think I must have continued my wonder in my dreams, for, sleeping and waking my thoughts always came back to the little punctures in her throat and the ragged, exhausted appearance of their edges, tiny though they were.

Lucy slept well into the day, and when she woke she was fairly well and strong, though not nearly so much so as the day before. When Van Helsing had seen her, he went out for a walk, leaving me in charge, with strict injunctions that I was not to leave her for a moment. I could hear his voice in the hall, asking the way to the nearest telegraph office.

Lucy chatted with me freely, and seemed quite unconscious that anything had happened. I tried to keep her amused and interested. When her mother came up to see her, she did not seem to notice any change whatever, but said to me gratefully,

“We owe you so much, Dr. Seward, for all you have done, but you really must now take care not to overwork yourself. You are looking pale yourself. You want a wife to nurse and look after you a bit, that you do!” As she spoke, Lucy turned crimson, though it was only momentarily, for her poor wasted veins could not stand for long an unwonted drain to the head. The reaction came in excessive pallor as she turned imploring eyes on me. I smiled and nodded, and laid my finger on my lips. With a sigh, she sank back amid her pillows.

Van Helsing returned in a couple of hours, and presently said to me: “Now you go home, and eat much and drink enough. Make yourself strong. I stay here tonight, and I shall sit up with little miss myself. You and I must watch the case, and we must have none other to know. I have grave reasons. No, do not ask me. Think what you will. Do not fear to think even the most not-improbable. Goodnight.”

In the hall two of the maids came to me, and asked if they or either of them might not sit up with Miss Lucy. They implored me to let them, and when I said it was Dr. Van Helsing’s wish that either he or I should sit up, they asked me quite piteously to intercede with the ‘foreign gentleman’. I was much touched by their kindness. Perhaps it is because I am weak at present, and perhaps because it was on Lucy’s account, that their devotion was manifested. For over and over again have I seen similar instances of woman’s kindness. I got back here in time for a late dinner, went my rounds, all well, and set this down whilst waiting for sleep. It is coming.

11 September. — This afternoon I went over to Hillingham. Found Van Helsing in excellent spirits, and Lucy much better. Shortly after I had arrived, a big parcel from abroad came for the Professor. He opened it with much impressment, assumed, of course, and showed a great bundle of white flowers.

“These are for you, Miss Lucy,” he said.

“For me? Oh, Dr. Van Helsing!”

“Yes, my dear, but not for you to play with. These are medicines.” Here Lucy made a wry face. “Nay, but they are not to take in a decoction or in nauseous form, so you need not snub that so charming nose, or I shall point out to my friend Arthur what woes he may have to endure in seeing so much beauty that he so loves so much distort. Aha, my pretty miss, that bring the so nice nose all straight again. This is medicinal, but you do not know how. I put him in your window, I make pretty wreath, and hang him round your neck, so you sleep well. Oh, yes! They, like the lotus flower, make your trouble forgotten. It smell so like the waters of Lethe, and of that fountain of youth that the Conquistadores sought for in the Floridas, and find him all too late.”

Whilst he was speaking, Lucy had been examining the flowers and smelling them. Now she threw them down saying, with half laughter, and half disgust,

“Oh, Professor, I believe you are only putting up a joke on me. Why, these flowers are only common garlic.”

To my surprise, Van Helsing rose up and said with all his sternness, his iron jaw set and his bushy eyebrows meeting,

“No trifling with me! I never jest! There is grim purpose in what I do, and I warn you that you do not thwart me. Take care, for the sake of others if not for your own.” Then seeing poor Lucy scared, as she might well be, he went on more gently, “Oh, little miss, my dear, do not fear me. I only do for your good, but there is much virtue to you in those so common flowers. See, I place them myself in your room. I make myself the wreath that you are to wear. But hush! No telling to others that make so inquisitive questions. We must obey, and silence is a part of obedience, and obedience is to bring you strong and well into loving arms that wait for you. Now sit still a while. Come with me, friend John, and you shall help me deck the room with my garlic, which is all the way from Haarlem, where my friend Vanderpool raise herb in his glass houses all the year. I had to telegraph yesterday, or they would not have been here.”

We went into the room, taking the flowers with us. The Professor’s actions were certainly odd and not to be found in any pharmacopeia that I ever heard of. First he fastened up the windows and latched them securely. Next, taking a handful of the flowers, he rubbed them all over the sashes, as though to ensure that every whiff of air that might get in would be laden with the garlic smell. Then with the wisp he rubbed all over the jamb of the door, above, below, and at each side, and round the fireplace in the same way. It all seemed grotesque to me, and presently I said, “Well, Professor, I know you always have a reason for what you do, but this certainly puzzles me. It is well we have no sceptic here, or he would say that you were working some spell to keep out an evil spirit."

"Perhaps I am!" he answered quietly as he began to make the wreath which Lucy was to wear round her neck.

We then waited whilst Lucy made her toilet for the night, and when she was in bed he came and himself fixed the wreath of garlic round her neck. The last words he said to her were,

"Take care you do not disturb it, and even if the room feel close, do not tonight open the window or the door."

"I promise," said Lucy. "And thank you both a thousand times for all your kindness to me! Oh, what have I done to be blessed with such friends?"

As we left the house in my fly, which was waiting, Van Helsing said, "Tonight I can sleep in peace, and sleep I want, two nights of travel, much reading in the day between, and much anxiety on the day to follow, and a night to sit up, without to wink. Tomorrow in the morning early you call for me, and we come together to see our pretty miss, so much more strong for my 'spell' which I have work. Ho, ho!"

He seemed so confident that I, remembering my own confidence two nights before and with the baneful result, felt awe and vague terror. It must have been my weakness that made me hesitate to tell it to my friend, but I felt it all the more, like unshed tears.

CHAPTER 11

LUCY WESTENRA’S DIARY

12 September. — How good they all are to me. I quite love that dear Dr. Van Helsing. I wonder why he was so anxious about these flowers. He positively frightened me, he was so fierce. And yet he must have been right, for I feel comfort from them already. Somehow, I do not dread being alone tonight, and I can go to sleep without fear. I shall not mind any flapping outside the window. Oh, the terrible struggle that I have had against sleep so often of late, the pain of sleeplessness, or the pain of the fear of sleep, and with such unknown horrors as it has for me! How blessed are some people, whose lives have no fears, no dreads, to whom sleep is a blessing that comes nightly, and brings nothing but sweet dreams. Well, here I am tonight, hoping for sleep, and lying like Ophelia in the play, with ‘virgin crants and maiden strewments.’ I never liked garlic before, but tonight it is delightful! There is peace in its smell. I feel sleep coming already. Goodnight, everybody.

DR. SEWARD’S DIARY

13 September. — Called at the Berkeley and found Van Helsing, as usual, up to time. The carriage ordered from the hotel was waiting. The Professor took his bag, which he always brings with him now.

Let all be put down exactly. Van Helsing and I arrived at Hillingham at eight o’clock. It was a lovely morning. The bright sunshine and all the fresh feeling of early autumn seemed like the completion of nature’s annual work. The leaves were turning to all kinds of beautiful colours, but had not yet begun to drop from the trees. When we entered we met Mrs. Westenra coming out of the morning room. She is always an early riser. She greeted us warmly and said,

"You will be glad to know that Lucy is better. The dear child is still asleep. I looked into her room and saw her, but did not go in, lest I should disturb her." The Professor smiled, and looked quite jubilant. He rubbed his hands together, and said, "Aha! I thought I had diagnosed the case. My treatment is working."

To which she replied, "You must not take all the credit to yourself, doctor. Lucy's state this morning is due in part to me."

"How do you mean, ma'am?" asked the Professor.

"Well, I was anxious about the dear child in the night, and went into her room. She was sleeping soundly, so soundly that even my coming did not wake her. But the room was awfully stuffy. There were a lot of those horrible, strong-smelling flowers about everywhere, and she had actually a bunch of them round her neck. I feared that the heavy odour would be too much for the dear child in her weak state, so I took them all away and opened a bit of the window to let in a little fresh air. You will be pleased with her, I am sure."

She moved off into her boudoir, where she usually breakfasted early. As she had spoken, I watched the Professor's face, and saw it turn ashen gray. He had been able to retain his self-command whilst the poor lady was present, for he knew her state and how mischievous a shock would be. He actually smiled on her as he held open the door for her to pass into her room. But the instant she had disappeared he pulled me, suddenly and forcibly, into the dining room and closed the door.

Then, for the first time in my life, I saw Van Helsing break down.

He raised his hands over his head in a sort of mute despair, and then beat his palms together in a helpless way. Finally he sat down on a chair, and putting his hands before his face, began to sob, with loud, dry sobs that seemed to come from the very racking of his heart.

Then he raised his arms again, as though appealing to the whole universe. “God! God! God!” he said. “What have we done, what has this poor thing done, that we are so sore beset? Is there fate amongst us still, send down from the pagan world of old, that such things must be, and in such way? This poor mother, all unknowing, and all for the best as she think, does such thing as lose her daughter body and soul, and we must not tell her, we must not even warn her, or she die, then both die. Oh, how we are beset! How are all the powers of the devils against us!”

Suddenly he jumped to his feet. “Come,” he said, “come, we must see and act. Devils or no devils, or all the devils at once, it matters not. We must fight him all the same.” He went to the hall door for his bag, and together we went up to Lucy’s room.

Once again I drew up the blind, whilst Van Helsing went towards the bed. This time he did not start as he looked on the poor face with the same awful, waxen pallor as before. He wore a look of stern sadness and infinite pity.

“As I expected,” he murmured, with that hissing inspiration of his which meant so much. Without a word he went and locked the door, and then began to set out on the little table the instruments for yet another operation of transfusion of blood. I had long ago recognised the necessity, and begun to take off my coat, but he stopped me with a warning hand. “No!” he said. “Today you must operate. I shall provide. You are weakened already.” As he spoke he took off his coat and rolled up his shirtsleeve.

Again the operation. Again the narcotic. Again some return of colour to the ashy cheeks, and the regular breathing of healthy sleep. This time I watched whilst Van Helsing recruited himself and rested.

Presently he took an opportunity of telling Mrs. Westenra that she must not remove anything from Lucy's room without consulting him. That the flowers were of medicinal value, and that the breathing of their odour was a part of the system of cure. Then he took over the care of the case himself, saying that he would watch this night and the next, and would send me word when to come.

After another hour Lucy waked from her sleep, fresh and bright and seemingly not much the worse for her terrible ordeal.

What does it all mean? I am beginning to wonder if my long habit of life amongst the insane is beginning to tell upon my own brain.

LUCY WESTENRA'S DIARY

17 September. — Four days and nights of peace. I am getting so strong again that I hardly know myself. It is as if I had passed through some long nightmare, and had just awakened to see the beautiful sunshine and feel the fresh air of the morning around me. I have a dim half remembrance of long, anxious times of waiting and fearing, darkness in which there was not even the pain of hope to make present distress more poignant. And then long spells of oblivion, and the rising back to life as a diver coming up through a great press of water. Since, however, Dr. Van Helsing has been with me, all this bad dreaming seems to have passed away. The noises that used to frighten me out of my wits, the flapping against the windows, the distant voices which seemed so close to me, the harsh sounds that came from I know not where and commanded me to do I know not what, have all ceased. I go to bed now without any fear of sleep. I do

not even try to keep awake. I have grown quite fond of the garlic, and a boxful arrives for me every day from Haarlem. Tonight Dr. Van Helsing is going away, as he has to be for a day in Amsterdam. But I need not be watched. I am well enough to be left alone.

Thank God for Mother's sake, and dear Arthur's, and for all our friends who have been so kind! I shall not even feel the change, for last night Dr. Van Helsing slept in his chair a lot of the time. I found him asleep twice when I awoke. But I did not fear to go to sleep again, although the boughs or bats or something flapped almost angrily against the window panes.

THE PALL MALL GAZETTE 18 September.

THE ESCAPED WOLF PERILOUS ADVENTURE OF OUR INTERVIEWER

INTERVIEW WITH THE KEEPER IN THE ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS

After many inquiries and almost as many refusals, and perpetually using the words 'PALL MALL GAZETTE' as a sort of talisman, I managed to find the keeper of the section of the Zoological Gardens in which the wolf department is included. Thomas Bilder lives in one of the cottages in the enclosure behind the elephant house, and was just sitting down to his tea when I found him. Thomas and his wife are hospitable folk, elderly, and without children, and if the specimen I enjoyed of their hospitality be of the average kind, their lives must be pretty comfortable. The keeper would not enter on what he called business until the supper was over, and we were all satisfied. Then when the table was cleared, and he had lit his pipe, he said,

"Now, Sir, you can go on and arsk me what you want. You'll excoose me refoosin' to talk of perfeshunal subjucts afore meals. I gives the wolves and the jackals and the hyenas in all our section their tea afore I begins to arsk them questions."

"How do you mean, ask them questions?" I queried, wishful to get him into a talkative humor.

"'Ittin' of them over the 'ead with a pole is one way. Scratchin' of their ears in another, when gents as is flush wants a bit of a show-orf to their gals. I don't so much mind the fust, the 'ittin of the pole part afore I chucks in their dinner, but I waits till they've 'ad their sherry and kawffee, so to speak, afore I tries on with the ear scratchin'. Mind you," he added philosophically, "there's a deal of the same nature in us as in them theer animiles. Here's you a-comin' and arskin' of me questions about my business, and I that grump-like that only for your bloomin' 'arf-quid I'd 'a' seen you blowed fust 'fore I'd answer. Not even when you arsked me sarcastic like if I'd like you to arsk the Superintendent if you might arsk me questions. Without offence did I tell yer to go to 'ell?"

"You did."

"An' when you said you'd report me for usin' obscene language that was 'ittin' me over the 'ead. But the 'arf-quid made that all right. I weren't a-goin' to fight, so I waited for the food, and did with my 'owl as the wolves and lions and tigers does. But, lor' love yer 'art, now that the old 'ooman has stuck a chunk of her tea-cake in me, an' rinsed me out with her bloomin' old teapot, and I've lit hup, you may scratch my ears for all you're worth, and won't even get a growl out of me. Drive along with your questions. I know what yer a-comin' at, that 'ere escaped wolf."

"Exactly. I want you to give me your view of it. Just tell me how it happened, and when I know the facts I'll get you to say what you consider was the cause of it, and how you think the whole affair will end."

"All right, guv'nor. This 'ere is about the 'ole story. That 'ere wolf what we called Bersicker was one of three gray ones that came from Norway to Jamrach's, which we bought off him four years ago. He was a nice well-behaved wolf, that never gave no trouble to talk of. I'm more surprised at 'im for wantin' to get out nor any other animile in the place. But, there, you can't trust wolves no more nor women."

"Don't you mind him, Sir!" broke in Mrs. Tom, with a cheery laugh. "'E's got mindin' the animiles so long that blest if he ain't like a old wolf 'isself! But there ain't no 'arm in 'im."

"Well, Sir, it was about two hours after feedin' yesterday when I first hear my disturbance. I was makin' up a litter in the monkey house for a young puma which is ill. But when I heard the yelpin' and 'owlin' I kem away straight. There was Bersicker a-tearin' like a mad thing at the bars as if he wanted to get out. There wasn't much people about that day, and close at hand was only one man, a tall, thin chap, with a 'ook nose and a pointed beard, with a few white hairs runnin' through it. He had a 'ard, cold look and red eyes, and I took a sort of mislike to him, for it seemed as if it was 'im as they was hirritated at. He 'ad white kid gloves on 'is 'ands, and he pointed out the animiles to me and says, 'Keeper, these wolves seem upset at something.'

"'Maybe it's you,' says I, for I did not like the airs as he give 'isself. He didn't get angry, as I 'oped he would, but he smiled a kind of insolent smile, with a mouth full of white, sharp teeth. 'Oh no, they wouldn't like me,' 'e says.

"'Ow yes, they would,' says I, a-imitatin' of him. 'They always like a bone or two to clean their teeth on about tea time, which you ‘as a bagful.’

“Well, it was a odd thing, but when the animiles see us a-talkin’ they lay down, and when I went over to Bersicker he let me stroke his ears same as ever. That there man kem over, and blessed but if he didn’t put in his hand and stroke the old wolf’s ears too!

“‘Tyke care,’ says I. ‘Bersicker is quick.’

“‘Never mind,’ he says. I’m used to ‘em!’

“‘Are you in the business yourself?’ I says, tyking off my ‘at, for a man what trades in wolves, anceterer, is a good friend to keepers.

“‘Nom,’ says he, ‘not exactly in the business, but I ‘ave made pets of several.’ And with that he lifts his ‘at as perlite as a lord, and walks away. Old Bersicker kep’ a-lookin’ arter ‘im till ‘e was out of sight, and then went and lay down in a corner and wouldn’t come hout the ‘ole hevening. Well, larst night, so soon as the moon was hup, the wolves here all began a-’owling. There warn’t nothing for them to ‘owl at. There warn’t no one near, except some one that was evidently a-callin’ a dog somewheres out back of the gardings in the Park road. Once or twice I went out to see that all was right, and it was, and then the ‘owling stopped. Just before twelve o’clock I just took a look round afore turnin’ in, an’, bust me, but when I kem opposite to old Bersicker’s cage I see the rails broken and twisted about and the cage empty. And that’s all I know for certing.”

“Did any one else see anything?”

“One of our gard’ners was a-comin’ ‘ome about that time from a ‘armony, when he sees a big gray dog comin’ out through the garding ‘edges. At least, so he says, but I don’t give much for it myself, for if he did ‘e never said a word about it to his missis when ‘e got ‘ome, and it was only after the escape of the wolf was made known, and we had been up all night a-huntin' of the Park for Bersicker, that he remembered seein' anything. My own belief was that the 'armony 'ad got into his 'ead."

"Now, Mr. Bilder, can you account in any way for the escape of the wolf?"

"Well, Sir," he said, with a suspicious sort of modesty, "I think I can, but I don't know as 'ow you'd be satisfied with the theory."

"Certainly I shall. If a man like you, who knows the animals from experience, can't hazard a good guess at any rate, who is even to try?"

"Well then, Sir, I accounts for it this way. It seems to me that 'ere wolf escaped — simply because he wanted to get out."

From the hearty way that both Thomas and his wife laughed at the joke I could see that it had done service before, and that the whole explanation was simply an elaborate sell. I couldn't cope in badinage with the worthy Thomas, but I thought I knew a surer way to his heart, so I said, "Now, Mr. Bilder, we'll consider that first half-sovereign worked off, and this brother of his is waiting to be claimed when you've told me what you think will happen."

"Right y'are, Sir," he said briskly. "Ye'll excoose me, I know, for a-chaffin' of ye, but the old woman here winked at me, which was as much as telling me to go on."

"Well, I never!" said the old lady.

"My opinion is this: that 'ere wolf is a'idin' of, somewheres. The gard'ner wot didn't remember said he was a-gallopin' northward faster than a horse could go, but I don't believe him, for, yer see, Sir, wolves don't gallop no more nor dogs does, they not bein' built that way. Wolves is fine things in a storybook, and I dessay when they gets in packs and does be chivyin' somethin' that's more afeared than they is they can make a devil of a noise and chop it up, whatever it is. But, Lor' bless you, in real life a wolf is only a low creature, not half so clever or bold as a good dog, and not half a quarter so much fight in 'im. This one ain't been used to fightin' or even to providin' for hisself, and more like he's somewhere round the Park a'hidin' an' a'shiverin' of, and if he thinks at all, wonderin' where he is to get his breakfast from. Or maybe he's got down some area and is in a coal cellar. My eye, won't some cook get a rum start when she sees his green eyes a-shinin' at her out of the dark! If he can't get food he's bound to look for it, and mayhap he may chance to light on a butcher's shop in time. If he doesn't, and some nursemaid goes out walkin' or orf with a soldier, leavin' of the hinfant in the perambulator — well, then I shouldn't be surprised if the census is one babby the less. That's all."

I was handing him the half-sovereign, when something came bobbing up against the window, and Mr. Bilder's face doubled its natural length with surprise.

"God bless me!" he said. "If there ain't old Bersicker come back by 'isself!"

He went to the door and opened it, a most unnecessary proceeding it seemed to me. I have always thought that a wild animal never looks so well as when some obstacle of pronounced durability is between us. A personal experience has intensified rather than diminished that idea.

After all, however, there is nothing like custom, for neither Bilder nor his wife thought any more of the wolf than I should of a dog. The animal itself was a peaceful and well-behaved as that father of all picture-wolves, Red Riding Hood's quondam friend, whilst moving her confidence in masquerade.

The whole scene was a unutterable mixture of comedy and pathos. The wicked wolf that for a half a day had paralyzed London and set all the children in town shivering in their shoes, was there in a sort of penitent mood, and was received and petted like a sort of vulpine prodigal son. Old Bilder examined him all over with most tender solicitude, and when he had finished with his penitent said,

“There, I knew the poor old chap would get into some kind of trouble. Didn’t I say it all along? Here’s his head all cut and full of broken glass. ‘E’s been a-gettin’ over some bloomin’ wall or other. It’s a shyme that people are allowed to top their walls with broken bottles. This ‘ere’s what comes of it. Come along, Bersicker.”

He took the wolf and locked him up in a cage, with a piece of meat that satisfied, in quantity at any rate, the elementary conditions of the fatted calf, and went off to report.

I came off too, to report the only exclusive information that is given today regarding the strange escapade at the Zoo.

DR. SEWARD’S DIARY

17 September. — I was engaged after dinner in my study posting up my books, which, through press of other work and the many visits to Lucy, had fallen sadly into arrear. Suddenly the door was burst open, and in rushed my patient, with his face distorted with passion. I was thunderstruck, for such a thing as a patient getting of his own accord into the Superintendent’s study is almost unknown.

Without an instant’s notice he made straight at me. He had a dinner knife in his hand, and as I saw he was dangerous, I tried to keep the table between us. He was too quick and too strong for me, however, for before I could get my balance he had struck at me and cut my left wrist rather severely.

Before he could strike again, however, I got in my right hand and he was sprawling on his back on the floor. My wrist bled freely, and quite a little pool trickled on to the carpet. I saw that my friend was not intent on further effort, and occupied myself binding up my wrist, keeping a wary eye on the prostrate figure all the time. When the attendants rushed in, and we turned our attention to him, his employment positively sickened me. He was lying on his belly on the floor licking up, like a dog, the blood which had fallen from my wounded wrist. He was easily secured, and to my surprise, went with the attendants quite placidly, simply repeating over and over again, “The blood is the life! The blood is the life!”

I cannot afford to lose blood just at present. I have lost too much of late for my physical good, and then the prolonged strain of Lucy’s illness and its horrible phases is telling on me. I am over excited and weary, and I need rest, rest, rest. Happily Van Helsing has not summoned me, so I need not forego my sleep. Tonight I could not well do without it.

TELEGRAM, VAN HELSING, ANTWERP, TO SEWARD, CARFAX

(Sent to Carfax, Sussex, as no county given, delivered late by twenty-two hours.)

17 September. — Do not fail to be at Hilllingham tonight. If not watching all the time, frequently visit and see that flowers are as placed, very important, do not fail. Shall be with you as soon as possible after arrival.

DR. SEWARD’S DIARY

18 September. — Just off train to London. The arrival of Van

Helsing’s telegram filled me with dismay. A whole night lost, and I know by bitter experience what may happen in a night. Of course it is possible that all may be well, but what may have happened? Surely there is some horrible doom hanging over us that every possible accident should thwart us in all we try to do. I shall take this cylinder with me, and then I can complete my entry on Lucy’s phonograph.

MEMORANDUM LEFT BY LUCY WESTENRA

17 September, Night. — I write this and leave it to be seen, so that no one may by any chance get into trouble through me. This is an exact record of what took place tonight. I feel I am dying of weakness, and have barely strength to write, but it must be done if I die in the doing.

I went to bed as usual, taking care that the flowers were placed as Dr. Van Helsing directed, and soon fell asleep.

I was waked by the flapping at the window, which had begun after that sleep-walking on the cliff at Whitby when Mina saved me, and which now I know so well. I was not afraid, but I did wish that Dr. Seward was in the next room, as Dr. Van Helsing said he would be, so that I might have called him. I tried to sleep, but I could not. Then there came to me the old fear of sleep, and I determined to keep awake. Perversely sleep would try to come then when I did not want it. So, as I feared to be alone, I opened my door and called out, “Is there anybody there?” There was no answer. I was afraid to wake mother, and so closed my door again. Then outside in the shrubbery I heard a sort of howl like a dog’s, but more fierce and deeper. I went to the window and looked out, but could see nothing, except a big bat, which had evidently been buffeting its wings against the window. So I went back to bed again, but determined not to go to sleep. Presently the door opened, and mother looked in. Seeing by my moving that I was not asleep, she came in and sat by me. She said to me even more sweetly and softly than her wont,

"I was uneasy about you, darling, and came in to see that you were all right."

I feared she might catch cold sitting there, and asked her to come in and sleep with me, so she came into bed, and lay down beside me. She did not take off her dressing gown, for she said she would only stay a while and then go back to her own bed. As she lay there in my arms, and I in hers the flapping and buffeting came to the window again. She was startled and a little frightened, and cried out, "What is that?"

I tried to pacify her, and at last succeeded, and she lay quiet. But I could hear her poor dear heart still beating terribly. After a while there was the howl again out in the shrubbery, and shortly after there was a crash at the window, and a lot of broken glass was hurled on the floor. The window blind blew back with the wind that rushed in, and in the aperture of the broken panes there was the head of a great, gaunt gray wolf.

Mother cried out in a fright, and struggled up into a sitting posture, and clutched wildly at anything that would help her. Amongst other things, she clutched the wreath of flowers that Dr. Van Helsing insisted on my wearing round my neck, and tore it away from me. For a second or two she sat up, pointing at the wolf, and there was a strange and horrible gurgling in her throat. Then she fell over, as if struck with lightning, and her head hit my forehead and made me dizzy for a moment or two.

The room and all round seemed to spin round. I kept my eyes fixed on the window, but the wolf drew his head back, and a whole myriad of little specks seems to come blowing in through the broken window, and wheeling and circling round like the pillar of dust that travellers describe when there is a simoon in the desert. I tried to stir, but there was some spell upon me, and dear Mother's poor body, which seemed to grow cold already, for her dear heart had ceased to beat, weighed me down, and I remembered no more for a while.

The time did not seem long, but very, very awful, till I recovered consciousness again. Somewhere near, a passing bell was tolling. The dogs all round the neighbourhood were howling, and in our shrubbery, seemingly just outside, a nightingale was singing. I was dazed and stupid with pain and terror and weakness, but the sound of the nightingale seemed like the voice of my dead mother come back to comfort me. The sounds seemed to have awakened the maids, too, for I could hear their bare feet pattering outside my door. I called to them, and they came in, and when they saw what had happened, and what it was that lay over me on the bed, they screamed out. The wind rushed in through the broken window, and the door slammed to. They lifted off the body of my dear mother, and laid her, covered up with a sheet, on the bed after I had got up. They were all so frightened and nervous that I directed them to go to the dining room and each have a glass of wine. The door flew open for an instant and closed again. The maids shrieked, and then went in a body to the dining room, and I laid what flowers I had on my dear mother's breast. When they were there I remembered what Dr. Van Helsing had told me, but I didn't like to remove them, and besides, I would have some of the servants to sit up with me now. I was surprised that the maids did not come back. I called them, but got no answer, so I went to the dining room to look for them.

My heart sank when I saw what had happened. They all four lay helpless on the floor, breathing heavily. The decanter of sherry was on the table half full, but there was a queer, acrid smell about. I was suspicious, and examined the decanter. It smelt of laudanum, and looking on the sideboard, I found that the bottle which Mother's doctor uses for her — oh! did use — was empty. What am I to do? What am I to do? I am back in the room with Mother. I cannot leave her, and I am alone, save for the sleeping servants, whom some one has drugged. Alone with the dead! I dare not go out, for I can hear the low howl of the wolf through the broken window.

The air seems full of specks, floating and circling in the draught from the window, and the lights burn blue and dim. What am I to do? God shield me from harm this night! I shall hide this paper in my breast, where they shall find it when they come to lay me out. My dear mother gone! It is time that I go too. Goodbye, dear Arthur, if I should not survive this night. God keep you, dear, and God help me!

CHAPTER 12

DR. SEWARD’S DIARY

18 September. — I drove at once to Hillingham and arrived early. Keeping my cab at the gate, I went up the avenue alone. I knocked gently and rang as quietly as possible, for I feared to disturb Lucy or her mother, and hoped to only bring a servant to the door. After a while, finding no response, I knocked and rang again, still no answer. I cursed the laziness of the servants that they should lie abed at such an hour, for it was now ten o’clock, and so rang and knocked again, but more impatiently, but still without response. Hitherto I had blamed only the servants, but now a terrible fear began to assail me. Was this desolation but another link in the chain of doom which seemed drawing tight round us? Was it indeed a house of death to which I had come, too late? I know that minutes, even seconds of delay, might mean hours of danger to Lucy, if she had had again one of those frightful relapses, and I went round the house to try if I could find by chance an entry anywhere.

I could find no means of ingress. Every window and door was fastened and locked, and I returned baffled to the porch. As I did so, I heard the rapid pit-pat of a swiftly driven horse’s feet. They stopped at the gate, and a few seconds later I met Van Helsing running up the avenue. When he saw me, he gasped out, “Then it was you, and just arrived. How is she? Are we too late? Did you not get my telegram?”

I answered as quickly and coherently as I could that I had only got his telegram early in the morning, and had not a minute in coming here, and that I could not make any one in the house hear me. He paused and raised his hat as he said solemnly, “Then I fear we are too late. God’s will be done!”

With his usual recuperative energy, he went on, “Come. If there be no way open to get in, we must make one. Time is all in all to us now.”

We went round to the back of the house, where there was a kitchen window. The Professor took a small surgical saw from his case, and handing it to me, pointed to the iron bars which guarded the window. I attacked them at once and had very soon cut through three of them. Then with a long, thin knife we pushed back the fastening of the sashes and opened the window. I helped the Professor in, and followed him. There was no one in the kitchen or in the servants’ rooms, which were close at hand. We tried all the rooms as we went along, and in the dining room, dimly lit by rays of light through the shutters, found four servant women lying on the floor. There was no need to think them dead, for their stertorous breathing and the acrid smell of laudanum in the room left no doubt as to their condition.

Van Helsing and I looked at each other, and as we moved away he said, “We can attend to them later.” Then we ascended to Lucy’s room. For an instant or two we paused at the door to listen, but there was no sound that we could hear. With white faces and trembling hands, we opened the door gently, and entered the room.

How shall I describe what we saw? On the bed lay two women, Lucy and her mother. The latter lay farthest in, and she was covered with a white sheet, the edge of which had been blown back by the drought through the broken window, showing the drawn, white, face, with a look of terror fixed upon it. By her side lay Lucy, with face white and still more drawn. The flowers which had been round her neck we found upon her mother’s bosom, and her throat was bare, showing the two little wounds which we had noticed before, but looking horribly white and mangled. Without a word the Professor bent over the bed, his head almost touching poor Lucy's breast. Then he gave a quick turn of his head, as of one who listens, and leaping to his feet, he cried out to me, "It is not yet too late! Quick! Quick! Bring the brandy!"

I flew downstairs and returned with it, taking care to smell and taste it, lest it, too, were drugged like the decanter of sherry which I found on the table. The maids were still breathing, but more restlessly, and I fancied that the narcotic was wearing off. I did not stay to make sure, but returned to Van Helsing. He rubbed the brandy, as on another occasion, on her lips and gums and on her wrists and the palms of her hands. He said to me, "I can do this, all that can be at the present. You go wake those maids. Flick them in the face with a wet towel, and flick them hard. Make them get heat and fire and a warm bath. This poor soul is nearly as cold as that beside her. She will need be heated before we can do anything more."

I went at once, and found little difficulty in waking three of the women. The fourth was only a young girl, and the drug had evidently affected her more strongly so I lifted her on the sofa and let her sleep.

The others were dazed at first, but as remembrance came back to them they cried and sobbed in a hysterical manner. I was stern with them, however, and would not let them talk. I told them that one life was bad enough to lose, and if they delayed they would sacrifice Miss Lucy. So, sobbing and crying they went about their way, half clad as they were, and prepared fire and water. Fortunately, the kitchen and boiler fires were still alive, and there was no lack of hot water. We got a bath and carried Lucy out as she was and placed her in it. Whilst we were busy chafing her limbs there was a knock at the hall door. One of the maids ran off, hurried on some more clothes, and opened it. Then she returned and whispered to us that there was a gentleman who had come with a message from Mr. Holmwood. I bade her simply tell him that he must wait, for we could see no one now. She went away with the message, and, engrossed with our work, I clean forgot all about him.

I never saw in all my experience the Professor work in such deadly earnest. I knew, as he knew, that it was a stand-up fight with death, and in a pause told him so. He answered me in a way that I did not understand, but with the sternest look that his face could wear.

“If that were all, I would stop here where we are now, and let her fade away into peace, for I see no light in life over her horizon.” He went on with his work with, if possible, renewed and more frenzied vigour.

Presently we both began to be conscious that the heat was beginning to be of some effect. Lucy’s heart beat a trifle more audibly to the stethoscope, and her lungs had a perceptible movement. Van Helsing’s face almost beamed, and as we lifted her from the bath and rolled her in a hot sheet to dry her he said to me, “The first gain is ours! Check to the King!”

We took Lucy into another room, which had by now been prepared, and laid her in bed and forced a few drops of brandy down her throat. I noticed that Van Helsing tied a soft silk handkerchief round her throat. She was still unconscious, and was quite as bad as, if not worse than, we had ever seen her.

Van Helsing called in one of the women, and told her to stay with her and not to take her eyes off her till we returned, and then beckoned me out of the room.

“We must consult as to what is to be done,” he said as we descended the stairs. In the hall he opened the dining room door, and we passed in, he closing the door carefully behind him. The shutters had been opened, but the blinds were already down, with that obedience to the etiquette of death which the British woman of the lower classes always rigidly observes. The room was, therefore, dimly dark. It was, however, light enough for our purposes. Van Helsing’s sternness was somewhat relieved by a look of perplexity. He was evidently torturing his mind about something, so I waited for an instant, and he spoke.

“What are we to do now? Where are we to turn for help? We must have another transfusion of blood, and that soon, or that poor girl’s life won’t be worth an hour’s purchase. You are exhausted already. I am exhausted too. I fear to trust those women, even if they would have courage to submit. What are we to do for some one who will open his veins for her?”

“What’s the matter with me, anyhow?”

The voice came from the sofa across the room, and its tones brought relief and joy to my heart, for they were those of Quincey Morris.

Van Helsing started angrily at the first sound, but his face softened and a glad look came into his eyes as I cried out, “Quincey Morris!” and rushed towards him with outstretched hands.

“What brought you here?” I cried as our hands met.

“I guess Art is the cause.”

He handed me a telegram.— ‘Have not heard from Seward for three days, and am terribly anxious. Cannot leave. Father still in same condition. Send me word how Lucy is. Do not delay. —Holmwood.’

"I think I came just in the nick of time. You know you have only to tell me what to do."

Van Helsing strode forward, and took his hand, looking him straight in the eyes as he said, "A brave man's blood is the best thing on this earth when a woman is in trouble. You're a man and no mistake. Well, the devil may work against us for all he's worth, but God sends us men when we want them."

Once again we went through that ghastly operation. I have not the heart to go through with the details. Lucy had got a terrible shock and it told on her more than before, for though plenty of blood went into her veins, her body did not respond to the treatment as well as on the other occasions. Her struggle back into life was something frightful to see and hear. However, the action of both heart and lungs improved, and Van Helsing made a sub-cutaneous injection of morphia, as before, and with good effect. Her faint became a profound slumber. The Professor watched whilst I went downstairs with Quincey Morris, and sent one of the maids to pay off one of the cabmen who were waiting.

I left Quincey lying down after having a glass of wine, and told the cook to get ready a good breakfast. Then a thought struck me, and I went back to the room where Lucy now was. When I came softly in, I found Van Helsing with a sheet or two of note paper in his hand. He had evidently read it, and was thinking it over as he sat with his hand to his brow. There was a look of grim satisfaction in his face, as of one who has had a doubt solved. He handed me the paper saying only, "It dropped from Lucy's breast when we carried her to the bath."

When I had read it, I stood looking at the Professor, and after a pause asked him, "In God's name, what does it all mean? Was she, or is she, mad, or what sort of horrible danger is it?" I was so bewildered that I did not know what to say more. Van Helsing put out his hand and took the paper, saying,

"Do not trouble about it now. Forget it for the present. You shall know and understand it all in good time, but it will be later. And now what is it that you came to me to say?" This brought me back to fact, and I was all myself again.

"I came to speak about the certificate of death. If we do not act properly and wisely, there may be an inquest, and that paper would have to be produced. I am in hopes that we need have no inquest, for if we had it would surely kill poor Lucy, if nothing else did. I know, and you know, and the other doctor who attended her knows, that Mrs. Westenra had disease of the heart, and we can certify that she died of it. Let us fill up the certificate at once, and I shall take it myself to the registrar and go on to the undertaker."

"Good, oh my friend John! Well thought of! Truly Miss Lucy, if she be sad in the foes that beset her, is at least happy in the friends that love her. One, two, three, all open their veins for her, besides one old man. Ah, yes, I know, friend John. I am not blind! I love you all the more for it! Now go."

In the hall I met Quincey Morris, with a telegram for Arthur telling him that Mrs. Westenra was dead, that Lucy also had been ill, but was now going on better, and that Van Helsing and I were with her. I told him where I was going, and he hurried me out, but as I was going said,

"When you come back, Jack, may I have two words with you all to ourselves?" I nodded in reply and went out. I found no difficulty about the registration, and arranged with the local undertaker to come up in the evening to measure for the coffin and to make arrangements.

When I got back Quincey was waiting for me. I told him I would see him as soon as I knew about Lucy, and went up to her room. She was still sleeping, and the Professor seemingly had not moved from his seat at her side. From his putting his finger to his lips, I gathered that he expected her to wake before long and was afraid of forestalling nature. So I went down to Quincey and took him into the breakfast room, where the blinds were not drawn down, and which was a little more cheerful, or rather less cheerless, than the other rooms.

When we were alone, he said to me, "Jack Seward, I don't want to shove myself in anywhere where I've no right to be, but this is no ordinary case. You know I loved that girl and wanted to marry her, but although that's all past and gone, I can't help feeling anxious about her all the same. What is it that's wrong with her? The Dutchman, and a fine old fellow he is, I can see that, said that time you two came into the room, that you must have another transfusion of blood, and that both you and he were exhausted. Now I know well that you medical men speak in camera, and that a man must not expect to know what they consult about in private. But this is no common matter, and whatever it is, I have done my part. Is not that so?"

"That's so," I said, and he went on.

"I take it that both you and Van Helsing had done already what I did today. Is not that so?"

"That's so."

"And I guess Art was in it too. When I saw him four days ago down at his own place he looked queer. I have not seen anything pulled down so quick since I was on the Pampas and had a mare that

I was fond of go to grass all in a night. One of those big bats that they call vampires had got at her in the night, and what with his gorge and the vein left open, there wasn't enough blood in her to let her stand up, and I had to put a bullet through her as she lay. Jack, if you may tell me without betraying confidence, Arthur was the first, is not that so?"

As he spoke the poor fellow looked terribly anxious. He was in a torture of suspense regarding the woman he loved, and his utter ignorance of the terrible mystery which seemed to surround her intensified his pain. His very heart was bleeding, and it took all the manhood of him, and there was a royal lot of it, too, to keep him from breaking down. I paused before answering, for I felt that I must not betray anything which the Professor wished kept secret, but already he knew so much, and guessed so much, that there could be no reason for not answering, so I answered in the same phrase.

"That's so."

"And how long has this been going on?"

"About ten days."

"Ten days! Then I guess, Jack Seward, that that poor pretty creature that we all love has had put into her veins within that time the blood of four strong men. Man alive, her whole body wouldn't hold it." Then coming close to me, he spoke in a fierce half-whisper. "What took it out?"

I shook my head. "That," I said, "is the crux. Van Helsing is simply frantic about it, and I am at my wits' end. I can't even hazard a guess. There has been a series of little circumstances which have thrown out all our calculations as to Lucy being properly watched. But these shall not occur again. Here we stay until all be well, or ill."

Quincey held out his hand. "Count me in," he said. "You and the

Dutchman will tell me what to do, and I'll do it."

When she woke late in the afternoon, Lucy's first movement was to feel in her breast, and to my surprise, produced the paper which Van Helsing had given me to read. The careful Professor had replaced it where it had come from, lest on waking she should be alarmed. Her eyes then lit on Van Helsing and on me too, and gladdened. Then she looked round the room, and seeing where she was, shuddered. She gave a loud cry, and put her poor thin hands before her pale face.

We both understood what was meant, that she had realised to the full her mother's death. So we tried what we could to comfort her. Doubtless sympathy eased her somewhat, but she was very low in thought and spirit, and wept silently and weakly for a long time. We told her that either or both of us would now remain with her all the time, and that seemed to comfort her. Towards dusk she fell into a doze. Here a very odd thing occurred. Whilst still asleep she took the paper from her breast and tore it in two. Van Helsing stepped over and took the pieces from her. All the same, however, she went on with the action of tearing, as though the material were still in her hands. Finally she lifted her hands and opened them as though scattering the fragments. Van Helsing seemed surprised, and his brows gathered as if in thought, but he said nothing.

19 September. — All last night she slept fitfully, being always afraid to sleep, and something weaker when she woke from it. The Professor and I took in turns to watch, and we never left her for a moment unattended. Quincey Morris said nothing about his intention, but I knew that all night long he patrolled round and round the house.

When the day came, its searching light showed the ravages in poor Lucy's strength. She was hardly able to turn her head, and the little nourishment which she could take seemed to do her no good. At times she slept, and both Van Helsing and I noticed the difference in her, between sleeping and waking. Whilst asleep she looked stronger, although more haggard, and her breathing was softer. Her open mouth showed the pale gums drawn back from the teeth, which looked positively longer and sharper than usual. When she woke the softness of her eyes evidently changed the expression, for she looked her own self, although a dying one. In the afternoon she asked for Arthur, and we telegraphed for him. Quincey went off to meet him at the station.

When he arrived it was nearly six o'clock, and the sun was setting full and warm, and the red light streamed in through the window and gave more colour to the pale cheeks. When he saw her, Arthur was simply choking with emotion, and none of us could speak. In the hours that had passed, the fits of sleep, or the comatose condition that passed for it, had grown more frequent, so that the pauses when conversation was possible were shortened. Arthur's presence, however, seemed to act as a stimulant. She rallied a little, and spoke to him more brightly than she had done since we arrived. He too pulled himself together, and spoke as cheerily as he could, so that the best was made of everything.

It is now nearly one o'clock, and he and Van Helsing are sitting with her. I am to relieve them in a quarter of an hour, and I am entering this on Lucy's phonograph. Until six o'clock they are to try to rest. I fear that tomorrow will end our watching, for the shock has been too great. The poor child cannot rally. God help us all.

LETTER MINA HARKER TO LUCY WESTENRA

(Unopened by her)

17 September

My dearest Lucy,

“It seems an age since I heard from you, or indeed since I wrote. You will pardon me, I know, for all my faults when you have read all my budget of news. Well, I got my husband back all right. When we arrived at Exeter there was a carriage waiting for us, and in it, though he had an attack of gout, Mr. Hawkins. He took us to his house, where there were rooms for us all nice and comfortable, and we dined together. After dinner Mr. Hawkins said,

“‘My dears, I want to drink your health and prosperity, and may every blessing attend you both. I know you both from children, and have, with love and pride, seen you grow up. Now I want you to make your home here with me. I have left to me neither chick nor child. All are gone, and in my will I have left you everything.’ I cried, Lucy dear, as Jonathan and the old man clasped hands. Our evening was a very, very happy one.

“So here we are, installed in this beautiful old house, and from both my bedroom and the drawing room I can see the great elms of the cathedral close, with their great black stems standing out against the old yellow stone of the cathedral, and I can hear the rooks overhead cawing and cawing and chattering and chattering and gossiping all day, after the manner of rooks — and humans. I am busy, I need not tell you, arranging things and housekeeping. Jonathan and Mr. Hawkins are busy all day, for now that Jonathan is a partner, Mr. Hawkins wants to tell him all about the clients.

“How is your dear mother getting on? I wish I could run up to town for a day or two to see you, dear, but I dare not go yet, with so much on my shoulders, and Jonathan wants looking after still. He is beginning to put some flesh on his bones again, but he was terribly weakened by the long illness. Even now he sometimes starts out of his sleep in a sudden way and awakes all trembling until I can coax him back to his usual placidity. However, thank God, these occasions grow less frequent as the days go on, and they will in time pass away altogether, I trust. And now I have told you my news, let me ask yours. When are you to be married, and where, and who is to perform the ceremony, and what are you to wear, and is it to be a public or private wedding? Tell me all about it, dear, tell me all about everything, for there is nothing which interests you which will not be dear to me. Jonathan asks me to send his 'respectful duty', but I do not think that is good enough from the junior partner of the important firm Hawkins & Harker. And so, as you love me, and he loves me, and I love you with all the moods and tenses of the verb, I send you simply his 'love' instead. Goodbye, my dearest Lucy, and blessings on you.

"Yours,

"Mina Harker"

REPORT FROM PATRICK HENNESSEY, MD, MRCSLK, QCPI, ETC, ETC, TO JOHN SEWARD, MD

20 September

My dear Sir:

"In accordance with your wishes, I enclose report of the conditions of everything left in my charge. With regard to patient, Renfield, there is more to say. He has had another outbreak, which might have had a dreadful ending, but which, as it fortunately happened, was unattended with any unhappy results. This afternoon a carrier's cart with two men made a call at the empty house whose grounds abut on ours, the house to which, you will remember, the patient twice ran away. The men stopped at our gate to ask the porter their way, as they were strangers.

"I was myself looking out of the study window, having a smoke after dinner, and saw one of them come up to the house. As he passed the window of Renfield's room, the patient began to rate him from within, and called him all the foul names he could lay his tongue to. The man, who seemed a decent fellow enough, contented himself by telling him to 'shut up for a foul-mouthed beggar', whereon our man accused him of robbing him and wanting to murder him and said that he would hinder him if he were to swing for it. I opened the window and signed to the man not to notice, so he contented himself after looking the place over and making up his mind as to what kind of place he had got to by saying, 'Lor' bless yer, sir, I wouldn't mind what was said to me in a bloomin' madhouse. I pity ye and the guv'nor for havin' to live in the house with a wild beast like that.'

"Then he asked his way civilly enough, and I told him where the gate of the empty house was. He went away followed by threats and curses and revilings from our man. I went down to see if I could make out any cause for his anger, since he is usually such a well-behaved man, and except his violent fits nothing of the kind had ever occurred. I found him, to my astonishment, quite composed and most genial in his manner. I tried to get him to talk of the incident, but he blandly asked me questions as to what I meant, and led me to believe that he was completely oblivious of the affair. It was, I am sorry to say, however, only another instance of his cunning, for within half an hour I heard of him again. This time he had broken out through the window of his room, and was running down the avenue. I called to the attendants to follow me, and ran after him, for I feared he was intent on some mischief. My fear was justified when I saw the same cart which had passed before coming down the road, having on it some great wooden boxes. The men were wiping their foreheads, and were flushed in the face, as if with violent exercise. Before I could get up to him, the patient rushed at them, and pulling one of them off the cart, began to knock his head against the ground. If I had not seized him just at the moment, I believe he would have killed the man there and then. The other fellow jumped down and struck him over the head with the butt end of his heavy whip. It was a horrible blow, but he did not seem to mind it, but seized him also, and struggled with the three of us, pulling us to and fro as if we were kittens. You know I am no lightweight, and the others were both burly men. At first he was silent in his fighting, but as we began to master him, and the attendants were putting a strait waistcoat on him, he began to shout, 'I'll frustrate them! They shan't rob me! They shan't murder me by inches! I'll fight for my Lord and Master!' and all sorts of similar incoherent ravings. It was with very considerable difficulty that they got him back to the house and put him in the padded room. One of the attendants, Hardy, had a finger broken. However, I set it all right, and he is going on well.

"The two carriers were at first loud in their threats of actions for damages, and promised to rain all the penalties of the law on us. Their threats were, however, mingled with some sort of indirect apology for the defeat of the two of them by a feeble madman. They said that if it had not been for the way their strength had been spent in carrying and raising the heavy boxes to the cart they would have made short work of him. They gave as another reason for their defeat the extraordinary state of drouth to which they had been reduced by the dusty nature of their occupation and the reprehensible distance from the scene of their labors of any place of public entertainment. I quite understood their drift, and after a stiff glass of strong grog, or rather more of the same, and with each a sovereign in hand, they made light of the attack, and swore that they would encounter a worse madman any day for the pleasure of meeting so 'bloomin' good a bloke' as your correspondent. I took their names and addresses, in case they might be needed. They are as follows: Jack Smollet, of Dudding's Rents, King George's Road, Great Walworth, and Thomas Snelling, Peter Farley's Row, Guide Court, Bethnal Green. They are both in the employment of Harris & Sons, Moving and Shipment Company, Orange Master's Yard, Soho.

"I shall report to you any matter of interest occurring here, and shall wire you at once if there is anything of importance.

"Believe me, dear Sir,

"Yours faithfully,

"Patrick Hennessey."

LETTER, MINA HARKER TO LUCY WESTENRA (Unopened by her)

18 September

"My dearest Lucy,

"Such a sad blow has befallen us. Mr. Hawkins has died very suddenly. Some may not think it so sad for us, but we had both come to so love him that it really seems as though we had lost a father. I never knew either father or mother, so that the dear old man's death is a real blow to me. Jonathan is greatly distressed. It is not only that he feels sorrow, deep sorrow, for the dear, good man who has befriended him all his life, and now at the end has treated him like his own son and left him a fortune which to people of our modest bringing up is wealth beyond the dream of avarice, but Jonathan feels it on another account. He says the amount of responsibility which it puts upon him makes him nervous. He begins to doubt himself. I try to cheer him up, and my belief in him helps him to have a belief in himself. But it is here that the grave shock that he experienced tells upon him the most. Oh, it is too hard that a sweet, simple, noble, strong nature such as his, a nature which enabled him by our dear, good friend's aid to rise from clerk to master in a few years, should be so injured that the very essence of its strength is gone. Forgive me, dear, if I worry you with my troubles in the midst of your own happiness, but Lucy dear, I must tell someone, for the strain of keeping up a brave and cheerful appearance to Jonathan tries me, and I have no one here that I can confide in. I dread coming up to London, as we must do that day after tomorrow, for poor Mr. Hawkins left in his will that he was to be buried in the grave with his father. As there are no relations at all, Jonathan will have to be chief mourner. I shall try to run over to see you, dearest, if only for a few minutes. Forgive me for troubling you. With all blessings,

"Your loving
"Mina Harker"

DR. SEWARD'S DIARY

20 September. — Only resolution and habit can let me make an entry tonight. I am too miserable, too low spirited, too sick of the world and all in it, including life itself, that I would not care if I heard this moment the flapping of the wings of the angel of death.

And he has been flapping those grim wings to some purpose of late, Lucy's mother and Arthur's father, and now… Let me get on with my work.

I duly relieved Van Helsing in his watch over Lucy. We wanted Arthur to go to rest also, but he refused at first. It was only when I told him that we should want him to help us during the day, and that we must not all break down for want of rest, lest Lucy should suffer, that he agreed to go.

Van Helsing was very kind to him. "Come, my child," he said. "Come with me. You are sick and weak, and have had much sorrow and much mental pain, as well as that tax on your strength that we know of. You must not be alone, for to be alone is to be full of fears and alarms. Come to the drawing room, where there is a big fire, and there are two sofas. You shall lie on one, and I on the other, and our sympathy will be comfort to each other, even though we do not speak, and even if we sleep."

Arthur went off with him, casting back a longing look on Lucy's face, which lay in her pillow, almost whiter than the lawn. She lay quite still, and I looked around the room to see that all was as it should be. I could see that the Professor had carried out in this room, as in the other, his purpose of using the garlic. The whole of the window sashes reeked with it, and round Lucy's neck, over the silk handkerchief which Van Helsing made her keep on, was a rough chaplet of the same odorous flowers.

Lucy was breathing somewhat stertorously, and her face was at its worst, for the open mouth showed the pale gums. Her teeth, in the dim, uncertain light, seemed longer and sharper than they had been in the morning. In particular, by some trick of the light, the canine teeth looked longer and sharper than the rest.

I sat down beside her, and presently she moved uneasily. At the same moment there came a sort of dull flapping or buffeting at the window. I went over to it softly, and peeped out by the corner of the blind. There was a full moonlight, and I could see that the noise was made by a great bat, which wheeled around, doubtless attracted by the light, although so dim, and every now and again struck the window with its wings. When I came back to my seat, I found that Lucy had moved slightly, and had torn away the garlic flowers from her throat. I replaced them as well as I could, and sat watching her.

Presently she woke, and I gave her food, as Van Helsing had prescribed. She took but a little, and that languidly. There did not seem to be with her now the unconscious struggle for life and strength that had hitherto so marked her illness. It struck me as curious that the moment she became conscious she pressed the garlic flowers close to her. It was certainly odd that whenever she got into that lethargic state, with the stertorous breathing, she put the flowers from her, but that when she waked she clutched them close. There was no possibility of making any mistake about this, for in the long hours that followed, she had many spells of sleeping and waking and repeated both actions many times.

At six o'clock Van Helsing came to relieve me. Arthur had then fallen into a doze, and he mercifully let him sleep on. When he saw Lucy's face I could hear the hissing indraw of breath, and he said to me in a sharp whisper. "Draw up the blind. I want light!" Then he bent down, and, with his face almost touching Lucy's, examined her carefully. He removed the flowers and lifted the silk handkerchief from her throat. As he did so he started back and I could hear his ejaculation, "Mein Gott!" as it was smothered in his throat. I bent over and looked, too, and as I noticed some queer chill came over me. The wounds on the throat had absolutely disappeared.

For fully five minutes Van Helsing stood looking at her, with his face at its sternest. Then he turned to me and said calmly, “She is dying. It will not be long now. It will be much difference, mark me, whether she dies conscious or in her sleep. Wake that poor boy, and let him come and see the last. He trusts us, and we have promised him.”

I went to the dining room and waked him. He was dazed for a moment, but when he saw the sunlight streaming in through the edges of the shutters he thought he was late, and expressed his fear. I assured him that Lucy was still asleep, but told him as gently as I could that both Van Helsing and I feared that the end was near. He covered his face with his hands, and slid down on his knees by the sofa, where he remained, perhaps a minute, with his head buried, praying, whilst his shoulders shook with grief. I took him by the hand and raised him up. “Come,” I said, “my dear old fellow, summon all your fortitude. It will be best and easiest for her.”

When we came into Lucy’s room I could see that Van Helsing had, with his usual forethought, been putting matters straight and making everything look as pleasing as possible. He had even brushed Lucy’s hair, so that it lay on the pillow in its usual sunny ripples. When we came into the room she opened her eyes, and seeing him, whispered softly, “Arthur! Oh, my love, I am so glad you have come!”

He was stooping to kiss her, when Van Helsing motioned him back. “No,” he whispered, “not yet! Hold her hand, it will comfort her more.”

So Arthur took her hand and knelt beside her, and she looked her best, with all the soft lines matching the angelic beauty of her eyes.

Then gradually her eyes closed, and she sank to sleep. For a little bit her breast heaved softly, and her breath came and went like a tired child's.

And then insensibly there came the strange change which I had noticed in the night. Her breathing grew stertorous, the mouth opened, and the pale gums, drawn back, made the teeth look longer and sharper than ever. In a sort of sleep-waking, vague, unconscious way she opened her eyes, which were now dull and hard at once, and said in a soft, voluptuous voice, such as I had never heard from her lips, "Arthur! Oh, my love, I am so glad you have come! Kiss me!"

Arthur bent eagerly over to kiss her, but at that instant Van Helsing, who, like me, had been startled by her voice, swooped upon him, and catching him by the neck with both hands, dragged him back with a fury of strength which I never thought he could have possessed, and actually hurled him almost across the room.

"Not on your life!" he said, "not for your living soul and hers!" And he stood between them like a lion at bay.

Arthur was so taken aback that he did not for a moment know what to do or say, and before any impulse of violence could seize him he realised the place and the occasion, and stood silent, waiting.

I kept my eyes fixed on Lucy, as did Van Helsing, and we saw a spasm as of rage flit like a shadow over her face. The sharp teeth clamped together. Then her eyes closed, and she breathed heavily.

Very shortly after she opened her eyes in all their softness, and putting out her poor, pale, thin hand, took Van Helsing's great brown one, drawing it close to her, she kissed it. "My true friend," she said, in a faint voice, but with untellable pathos, "My true friend, and his! Oh, guard him, and give me peace!"

"I swear it!" he said solemnly, kneeling beside her and holding up his hand, as one who registers an oath. Then he turned to Arthur, and said to him, “Come, my child, take her hand in yours, and kiss her on the forehead, and only once.”

Their eyes met instead of their lips, and so they parted. Lucy’s eyes closed, and Van Helsing, who had been watching closely, took Arthur’s arm, and drew him away.

And then Lucy’s breathing became stertorous again, and all at once it ceased.

“It is all over,” said Van Helsing. “She is dead!”

I took Arthur by the arm, and led him away to the drawing room, where he sat down, and covered his face with his hands, sobbing in a way that nearly broke me down to see.

I went back to the room, and found Van Helsing looking at poor Lucy, and his face was sterner than ever. Some change had come over her body. Death had given back part of her beauty, for her brow and cheeks had recovered some of their flowing lines. Even the lips had lost their deadly pallor. It was as if the blood, no longer needed for the working of the heart, had gone to make the harshness of death as little rude as might be.

“We thought her dying whilst she slept, and sleeping when she died.”

I stood beside Van Helsing, and said, “Ah well, poor girl, there is peace for her at last. It is the end!”

He turned to me, and said with grave solemnity, “Not so, alas! Not so. It is only the beginning!”

When I asked him what he meant, he only shook his head and answered, “We can do nothing as yet. Wait and see.”

CHAPTER 13

DR. SEWARD’S DIARY — cont.

The funeral was arranged for the next succeeding day, so that Lucy and her mother might be buried together. I attended to all the ghastly formalities, and the urbane undertaker proved that his staff was afflicted, or blessed, with something of his own obsequious suavity. Even the woman who performed the last offices for the dead remarked to me, in a confidential, brother-professional way, when she had come out from the death chamber,

“She makes a very beautiful corpse, sir. It’s quite a privilege to attend on her. It’s not too much to say that she will do credit to our establishment!”

I noticed that Van Helsing never kept far away. This was possible from the disordered state of things in the household. There were no relatives at hand, and as Arthur had to be back the next day to attend at his father’s funeral, we were unable to notify any one who should have been bidden. Under the circumstances, Van Helsing and I took it upon ourselves to examine papers, etc. He insisted upon looking over Lucy’s papers himself. I asked him why, for I feared that he, being a foreigner, might not be quite aware of English legal requirements, and so might in ignorance make some unnecessary trouble.

He answered me, “I know, I know. You forget that I am a lawyer as well as a doctor. But this is not altogether for the law. You knew that, when you avoided the coroner. I have more than him to avoid. There may be papers more, such as this.”

As he spoke he took from his pocket book the memorandum which had been in Lucy's breast, and which she had torn in her sleep.

"When you find anything of the solicitor who is for the late Mrs. Westenra, seal all her papers, and write him tonight. For me, I watch here in the room and in Miss Lucy's old room all night, and I myself search for what may be. It is not well that her very thoughts go into the hands of strangers."

I went on with my part of the work, and in another half hour had found the name and address of Mrs. Westenra's solicitor and had written to him. All the poor lady's papers were in order. Explicit directions regarding the place of burial were given. I had hardly sealed the letter, when, to my surprise, Van Helsing walked into the room, saying,

"Can I help you friend John? I am free, and if I may, my service is to you."

"Have you got what you looked for?" I asked.

To which he replied, "I did not look for any specific thing. I only hoped to find, and find I have, all that there was, only some letters and a few memoranda, and a diary new begun. But I have them here, and we shall for the present say nothing of them. I shall see that poor lad tomorrow evening, and, with his sanction, I shall use some."

When we had finished the work in hand, he said to me, "And now, friend John, I think we may to bed. We want sleep, both you and I, and rest to recuperate. Tomorrow we shall have much to do, but for the tonight there is no need of us. Alas!"

Before turning in we went to look at poor Lucy. The undertaker had certainly done his work well, for the room was turned into a small chapelle ardente. There was a wilderness of beautiful white flowers, and death was made as little repulsive as might be. The end of the winding sheet was laid over the face. When the Professor bent over and turned it gently back, we both started at the beauty before us. The tall wax candles showing a sufficient light to note it well. All Lucy's loveliness had come back to her in death, and the hours that had passed, instead of leaving traces of 'decay's effacing fingers', had but restored the beauty of life, till positively I could not believe my eyes that I was looking at a corpse.

The Professor looked sternly grave. He had not loved her as I had, and there was no need for tears in his eyes. He said to me, "Remain till I return," and left the room. He came back with a handful of wild garlic from the box waiting in the hall, but which had not been opened, and placed the flowers amongst the others on and around the bed. Then he took from his neck, inside his collar, a little gold crucifix, and placed it over the mouth. He restored the sheet to its place, and we came away.

I was undressing in my own room, when, with a premonitory tap at the door, he entered, and at once began to speak.

"Tomorrow I want you to bring me, before night, a set of post-mortem knives."

"Must we make an autopsy?" I asked.

"Yes and no. I want to operate, but not what you think. Let me tell you now, but not a word to another. I want to cut off her head and take out her heart. Ah! You a surgeon, and so shocked! You, whom I have seen with no tremble of hand or heart, do operations of life and death that make the rest shudder. Oh, but I must not forget, my dear friend John, that you loved her, and I have not forgotten it for is I that shall operate, and you must not help. I would like to do it tonight, but for Arthur I must not. He will be free after his father's funeral tomorrow, and he will want to see her, to see it. Then, when she is coffined ready for the next day, you and I shall come when all sleep. We shall unscrew the coffin lid, and shall do our operation, and then replace all, so that none know, save we alone."

"But why do it at all? The girl is dead. Why mutilate her poor body without need? And if there is no necessity for a post-mortem and nothing to gain by it, no good to her, to us, to science, to human knowledge, why do it? Without such it is monstrous."

For answer he put his hand on my shoulder, and said, with infinite tenderness, "Friend John, I pity your poor bleeding heart, and I love you the more because it does so bleed. If I could, I would take on myself the burden that you do bear. But there are things that you know not, but that you shall know, and bless me for knowing, though they are not pleasant things. John, my child, you have been my friend now many years, and yet did you ever know me to do any without good cause? I may err, I am but man, but I believe in all I do. Was it not for these causes that you send for me when the great trouble came? Yes! Were you not amazed, nay horrified, when I would not let Arthur kiss his love, though she was dying, and snatched him away by all my strength? Yes! And yet you saw how she thanked me, with her so beautiful dying eyes, her voice, too, so weak, and she kiss my rough old hand and bless me? Yes! And did you not hear me swear promise to her, that so she closed her eyes grateful? Yes!

"Well, I have good reason now for all I want to do. You have for many years trust me. You have believe me weeks past, when there be things so strange that you might have well doubt. Believe me yet a little, friend John. If you trust me not, then I must tell what I think, and that is not perhaps well. And if I work, as work I shall, no matter trust or no trust, without my friend trust in me, I work with heavy heart and feel oh so lonely when I want all help and courage that may be!" He paused a moment and went on solemnly, "Friend John, there are strange and terrible days before us. Let us not be two, but one, that so we work to a good end. Will you not have faith in me?"

I took his hand, and promised him. I held my door open as he went away, and watched him go to his room and close the door. As I stood without moving, I saw one of the maids pass silently along the passage, she had her back to me, so did not see me, and go into the room where Lucy lay. The sight touched me. Devotion is so rare, and we are so grateful to those who show it unasked to those we love. Here was a poor girl putting aside the terrors which she naturally had of death to go watch alone by the bier of the mistress whom she loved, so that the poor clay might not be lonely till laid to eternal rest.

I must have slept long and soundly, for it was broad daylight when Van Helsing waked me by coming into my room. He came over to my bedside and said, "You need not trouble about the knives. We shall not do it."

"Why not?" I asked. For his solemnity of the night before had greatly impressed me.

"Because," he said sternly, "it is too late, or too early. See!" Here he held up the little golden crucifix.

"This was stolen in the night."

"How stolen," I asked in wonder, "since you have it now?"

"Because I get it back from the worthless wretch who stole it, from the woman who robbed the dead and the living. Her punishment will surely come, but not through me. She knew not altogether what she did, and thus unknowing, she only stole. Now we must wait." He went away on the word, leaving me with a new mystery to think of, a new puzzle to grapple with.

The forenoon was a dreary time, but at noon the solicitor came, Mr. Marquand, of Wholeman, Sons, Marquand & Lidderdale. He was very genial and very appreciative of what we had done, and took off our hands all cares as to details. During lunch he told us that Mrs. Westenra had for some time expected sudden death from her heart, and had put her affairs in absolute order. He informed us that, with the exception of a certain entailed property of Lucy's father which now, in default of direct issue, went back to a distant branch of the family, the whole estate, real and personal, was left absolutely to Arthur Holmwood. When he had told us so much he went on,

"Frankly we did our best to prevent such a testamentary disposition, and pointed out certain contingencies that might leave her daughter either penniless or not so free as she should be to act regarding a matrimonial alliance. Indeed, we pressed the matter so far that we almost came into collision, for she asked us if we were or were not prepared to carry out her wishes. Of course, we had then no alternative but to accept. We were right in principle, and ninety-nine times out of a hundred we should have proved, by the logic of events, the accuracy of our judgment.

"Frankly, however, I must admit that in this case any other form of disposition would have rendered impossible the carrying out of her wishes. For by her predeceasing her daughter the latter would have come into possession of the property, and, even had she only survived her mother by five minutes, her property would, in case there were no will, and a will was a practical impossibility in such a case, have been treated at her decease as under intestacy. In which case Lord Godalming, though so dear a friend, would have had no claim in the world. And the inheritors, being remote, would not be likely to abandon their just rights, for sentimental reasons regarding an entire stranger. I assure you, my dear sirs, I am rejoiced at the result, perfectly rejoiced.”

He was a good fellow, but his rejoicing at the one little part, in which he was officially interested, of so great a tragedy, was an object-lesson in the limitations of sympathetic understanding.

He did not remain long, but said he would look in later in the day and see Lord Godalming. His coming, however, had been a certain comfort to us, since it assured us that we should not have to dread hostile criticism as to any of our acts. Arthur was expected at five o’clock, so a little before that time we visited the death chamber. It was so in very truth, for now both mother and daughter lay in it. The undertaker, true to his craft, had made the best display he could of his goods, and there was a mortuary air about the place that lowered our spirits at once.

Van Helsing ordered the former arrangement to be adhered to, explaining that, as Lord Godalming was coming very soon, it would be less harrowing to his feelings to see all that was left of his fiancee quite alone.

The undertaker seemed shocked at his own stupidity and exerted himself to restore things to the condition in which we left them the night before, so that when Arthur came such shocks to his feelings as we could avoid were saved.

Poor fellow! He looked desperately sad and broken. Even his stalwart manhood seemed to have shrunk somewhat under the strain of his much-tried emotions. He had, I knew, been very genuinely and devotedly attached to his father, and to lose him, and at such a time, was a bitter blow to him. With me he was warm as ever, and to Van Helsing he was sweetly courteous. But I could not help seeing that there was some constraint with him. The professor noticed it too, and motioned me to bring him upstairs. I did so, and left him at the door of the room, as I felt he would like to be quite alone with her, but he took my arm and led me in, saying huskily,

“You loved her too, old fellow. She told me all about it, and there was no friend had a closer place in her heart than you. I don’t know how to thank you for all you have done for her. I can’t think yet…”

Here he suddenly broke down, and threw his arms round my shoulders and laid his head on my breast, crying, “Oh, Jack! Jack! What shall I do? The whole of life seems gone from me all at once, and there is nothing in the wide world for me to live for.”

I comforted him as well as I could. In such cases men do not need much expression. A grip of the hand, the tightening of an arm over the shoulder, a sob in unison, are expressions of sympathy dear to a man’s heart. I stood still and silent till his sobs died away, and then I said softly to him, “Come and look at her.”

Together we moved over to the bed, and I lifted the lawn from her face. God! How beautiful she was. Every hour seemed to be enhancing her loveliness. It frightened and amazed me somewhat. And as for Arthur, he fell to trembling, and finally was shaken with doubt as with an ague. At last, after a long pause, he said to me in a faint whisper, “Jack, is she really dead?”

I assured him sadly that it was so, and went on to suggest, for I felt that such a horrible doubt should not have life for a moment longer than I could help, that it often happened that after death faces become softened and even resolved into their youthful beauty, that this was especially so when death had been preceded by any acute or prolonged suffering. I seemed to quite do away with any doubt, and after kneeling beside the couch for a while and looking at her lovingly and long, he turned aside. I told him that that must be goodbye, as the coffin had to be prepared, so he went back and took her dead hand in his and kissed it, and bent over and kissed her forehead. He came away, fondly looking back over his shoulder at her as he came.

I left him in the drawing room, and told Van Helsing that he had said goodbye, so the latter went to the kitchen to tell the undertaker's men to proceed with the preparations and to screw up the coffin. When he came out of the room again I told him of Arthur's question, and he replied, "I am not surprised. Just now I doubted for a moment myself!"

We all dined together, and I could see that poor Art was trying to make the best of things. Van Helsing had been silent all dinner time, but when we had lit our cigars he said, "Lord…" but Arthur interrupted him.

"No, no, not that, for God's sake! Not yet at any rate. Forgive me, sir. I did not mean to speak offensively. It is only because my loss is so recent."

The Professor answered very sweetly, "I only used that name because I was in doubt. I must not call you 'Mr.' and I have grown to love you, yes, my dear boy, to love you, as Arthur."

Arthur held out his hand, and took the old man's warmly. "Call me what you will," he said. "I hope I may always have the title of a friend. And let me say that I am at a loss for words to thank you for your goodness to my poor dear." He paused a moment, and went on, "I know that she understood your goodness even better than I do. And if I was rude or in any way wanting at that time you acted so, you remember" — the Professor nodded— "you must forgive me."

He answered with a grave kindness, "I know it was hard for you to quite trust me then, for to trust such violence needs to understand, and I take it that you do not, that you cannot, trust me now, for you do not yet understand. And there may be more times when I shall want you to trust when you cannot, and may not, and must not yet understand. But the time will come when your trust shall be whole and complete in me, and when you shall understand as though the sunlight himself shone through. Then you shall bless me from first to last for your own sake, and for the sake of others, and for her dear sake to whom I swore to protect."

"And indeed, indeed, sir," said Arthur warmly. "I shall in all ways trust you. I know and believe you have a very noble heart, and you are Jack's friend, and you were hers. You shall do what you like."

The Professor cleared his throat a couple of times, as though about to speak, and finally said, "May I ask you something now?"

"Certainly."

"You know that Mrs. Westenra left you all her property?"

"No, poor dear. I never thought of it."

"And as it is all yours, you have a right to deal with it as you will. I want you to give me permission to read all Miss Lucy's papers and letters. Believe me, it is no idle curiosity. I have a motive of which, be sure, she would have approved. I have them all here. I took them before we knew that all was yours, so that no strange hand might touch them, no strange eye look through words into her soul. I shall keep them, if I may. Even you may not see them yet, but I shall keep them safe. No word shall be lost, and in the good time I shall give them back to you. It is a hard thing that I ask, but you will do it, will you not, for Lucy's sake?"

Arthur spoke out heartily, like his old self, "Dr. Van Helsing, you may do what you will. I feel that in saying this I am doing what my dear one would have approved. I shall not trouble you with questions till the time comes."

The old Professor stood up as he said solemnly, “And you are right. There will be pain for us all, but it will not be all pain, nor will this pain be the last. We and you too, you most of all, dear boy, will have to pass through the bitter water before we reach the sweet. But we must be brave of heart and unselfish, and do our duty, and all will be well!”

I slept on a sofa in Arthur’s room that night. Van Helsing did not go to bed at all. He went to and fro, as if patroling the house, and was never out of sight of the room where Lucy lay in her coffin, strewn with the wild garlic flowers, which sent through the odour of lily and rose, a heavy, overpowering smell into the night.

MINA HARKER’S JOURNAL

22 September. — In the train to Exeter. Jonathan sleeping. It seems only yesterday that the last entry was made, and yet how much between then, in Whitby and all the world before me, Jonathan away and no news of him, and now, married to Jonathan, Jonathan a solicitor, a partner, rich, master of his business, Mr. Hawkins dead and buried, and Jonathan with another attack that may harm him. Some day he may ask me about it. Down it all goes. I am rusty in my shorthand, see what unexpected prosperity does for us, so it may be as well to freshen it up again with an exercise anyhow.

The service was very simple and very solemn. There were only ourselves and the servants there, one or two old friends of his from Exeter, his London agent, and a gentleman representing Sir John Paxton, the President of the Incorporated Law Society. Jonathan and I stood hand in hand, and we felt that our best and dearest friend was gone from us.

We came back to town quietly, taking a bus to Hyde Park Corner. Jonathan thought it would interest me to go into the Row for a while, so we sat down. But there were very few people there, and it was sad-looking and desolate to see so many empty chairs. It made us think of the empty chair at home. So we got up and walked down Piccadilly. Jonathan was holding me by the arm, the way he used to in the old days before I went to school. I felt it very improper, for you can't go on for some years teaching etiquette and decorum to other girls without the pedantry of it biting into yourself a bit. But it was Jonathan, and he was my husband, and we didn't know anybody who saw us, and we didn't care if they did, so on we walked. I was looking at a very beautiful girl, in a big cart-wheel hat, sitting in a victoria outside Guiliano's, when I felt Jonathan clutch my arm so tight that he hurt me, and he said under his breath, "My God!"

I am always anxious about Jonathan, for I fear that some nervous fit may upset him again. So I turned to him quickly, and asked him what it was that disturbed him.

He was very pale, and his eyes seemed bulging out as, half in terror and half in amazement, he gazed at a tall, thin man, with a beaky nose and black moustache and pointed beard, who was also observing the pretty girl. He was looking at her so hard that he did not see either of us, and so I had a good view of him. His face was not a good face. It was hard, and cruel, and sensual, and big white teeth, that looked all the whiter because his lips were so red, were pointed like an animal's. Jonathan kept staring at him, till I was afraid he would notice. I feared he might take it ill, he looked so fierce and nasty. I asked Jonathan why he was disturbed, and he answered, evidently thinking that I knew as much about it as he did, "Do you see who it is?"

"No, dear," I said. "I don't know him, who is it?" His answer seemed to shock and thrill me, for it was said as if he did not know that it was me, Mina, to whom he was speaking. "It is the man himself!"

The poor dear was evidently terrified at something, very greatly terrified. I do believe that if he had not had me to lean on and to support him he would have sunk down. He kept staring. A man came out of the shop with a small parcel, and gave it to the lady, who then drove off. The dark man kept his eyes fixed on her, and when the carriage moved up Piccadilly he followed in the same direction, and hailed a hansom. Jonathan kept looking after him, and said, as if to himself,

"I believe it is the Count, but he has grown young. My God, if this be so! Oh, my God! My God! If only I knew! If only I knew!" He was distressing himself so much that I feared to keep his mind on the subject by asking him any questions, so I remained silent. I drew away quietly, and he, holding my arm, came easily. We walked a little further, and then went in and sat for a while in the Green Park. It was a hot day for autumn, and there was a comfortable seat in a shady place. After a few minutes' staring at nothing, Jonathan's eyes closed, and he went quickly into a sleep, with his head on my shoulder. I thought it was the best thing for him, so did not disturb him. In about twenty minutes he woke up, and said to me quite cheerfully,

"Why, Mina, have I been asleep! Oh, do forgive me for being so rude. Come, and we'll have a cup of tea somewhere."

He had evidently forgotten all about the dark stranger, as in his illness he had forgotten all that this episode had reminded him of. I don't like this lapsing into forgetfulness. It may make or continue some injury to the brain. I must not ask him, for fear I shall do more harm than good, but I must somehow learn the facts of his journey abroad. The time is come, I fear, when I must open the parcel, and know what is written. Oh, Jonathan, you will, I know, forgive me if I do wrong, but it is for your own dear sake.

Later. — A sad homecoming in every way, the house empty of the dear soul who was so good to us. Jonathan still pale and dizzy under a slight relapse of his malady, and now a telegram from Van Helsing, whoever he may be. “You will be grieved to hear that Mrs. Westenra died five days ago, and that Lucy died the day before yesterday. They were both buried today.”

Oh, what a wealth of sorrow in a few words! Poor Mrs. Westenra! Poor Lucy! Gone, gone, never to return to us! And poor, poor Arthur, to have lost such a sweetness out of his life! God help us all to bear our troubles.

DR. SEWARD’S DIARY-CONT.

22 September. — It is all over. Arthur has gone back to Ring, and has taken Quincey Morris with him. What a fine fellow is Quincey! I believe in my heart of hearts that he suffered as much about Lucy’s death as any of us, but he bore himself through it like a moral Viking. If America can go on breeding men like that, she will be a power in the world indeed. Van Helsing is lying down, having a rest preparatory to his journey. He goes to Amsterdam tonight, but says he returns tomorrow night, that he only wants to make some arrangements which can only be made personally. He is to stop with me then, if he can. He says he has work to do in London which may take him some time. Poor old fellow! I fear that the strain of the past

week has broken down even his iron strength. All the time of the burial he was, I could see, putting some terrible restraint on himself. When it was all over, we were standing beside Arthur, who, poor fellow, was speaking of his part in the operation where his blood had been transfused to his Lucy's veins. I could see Van Helsing's face grow white and purple by turns. Arthur was saying that he felt since then as if they two had been really married, and that she was his wife in the sight of God. None of us said a word of the other operations, and none of us ever shall. Arthur and Quincey went away together to the station, and Van Helsing and I came on here. The moment we were alone in the carriage he gave way to a regular fit of hysterics. He has denied to me since that it was hysterics, and insisted that it was only his sense of humor asserting itself under very terrible conditions. He laughed till he cried, and I had to draw down the blinds lest any one should see us and misjudge. And then he cried, till he laughed again, and laughed and cried together, just as a woman does. I tried to be stern with him, as one is to a woman under the circumstances, but it had no effect. Men and women are so different in manifestations of nervous strength or weakness! Then when his face grew grave and stern again I asked him why his mirth, and why at such a time. His reply was in a way characteristic of him, for it was logical and forceful and mysterious. He said,

"Ah, you don't comprehend, friend John. Do not think that I am not sad, though I laugh. See, I have cried even when the laugh did choke me. But no more think that I am all sorry when I cry, for the laugh he come just the same. Keep it always with you that laughter who knock at your door and say, 'May I come in?' is not true laughter. No! He is a king, and he come when and how he like. He ask no person, he choose no time of suitability. He say, 'I am here.'

Behold, in example I grieve my heart out for that so sweet young girl. I give my blood for her, though I am old and worn. I give my time, my skill, my sleep. I let my other sufferers want that she may have all. And yet I can laugh at her very grave, laugh when the clay from the spade of the sexton drop upon her coffin and say ‘Thud, thud!’ to my heart, till it send back the blood from my cheek. My heart bleed for that poor boy, that dear boy, so of the age of mine own boy had I been so blessed that he live, and with his hair and eyes the same.

“There, you know now why I love him so. And yet when he say things that touch my husband-heart to the quick, and make my father-heart yearn to him as to no other man, not even you, friend John, for we are more level in experiences than father and son, yet even at such a moment King Laugh he come to me and shout and bellow in my ear, ‘Here I am! Here I am!’ till the blood come dance back and bring some of the sunshine that he carry with him to my cheek. Oh, friend John, it is a strange world, a sad world, a world full of miseries, and woes, and troubles. And yet when King Laugh come, he make them all dance to the tune he play. Bleeding hearts, and dry bones of the churchyard, and tears that burn as they fall, all dance together to the music that he make with that smileless mouth of him. And believe me, friend John, that he is good to come, and kind. Ah, we men and women are like ropes drawn tight with strain that pull us different ways. Then tears come, and like the rain on the ropes, they brace us up, until perhaps the strain become too great, and we break. But King Laugh he come like the sunshine, and he ease off the strain again, and we bear to go on with our labor, what it may be.”

I did not like to wound him by pretending not to see his idea, but as I did not yet understand the cause of his laughter, I asked him. As he answered me his face grew stern, and he said in quite a different tone,

“Oh, it was the grim irony of it all, this so lovely lady garlanded with flowers, that looked so fair as life, till one by one we wondered if she were truly dead, she laid in that so fine marble house in that lonely churchyard, where rest so many of her kin, laid there with the mother who loved her, and whom she loved, and that sacred bell going ‘Toll! Toll! Toll!’ so sad and slow, and those holy men, with the white garments of the angel, pretending to read books, and yet all the time their eyes never on the page, and all of us with the bowed head. And all for what? She is dead, so! Is it not?”

“Well, for the life of me, Professor,” I said, “I can’t see anything to laugh at in all that. Why, your expression makes it a harder puzzle than before. But even if the burial service was comic, what about poor Art and his trouble? Why his heart was simply breaking.”

“Just so. Said he not that the transfusion of his blood to her veins had made her truly his bride?”

“Yes, and it was a sweet and comforting idea for him.”

“Quite so. But there was a difficulty, friend John. If so that, then what about the others? Ho, ho! Then this so sweet maid is a polyandrist, and me, with my poor wife dead to me, but alive by Church’s law, though no wits, all gone, even I, who am faithful husband to this now-no-wife, am bigamist.”

“I don’t see where the joke comes in there either!” I said, and I did not feel particularly pleased with him for saying such things. He laid his hand on my arm, and said,

“Friend John, forgive me if I pain. I showed not my feeling to others when it would wound, but only to you, my old friend, whom I can trust. If you could have looked into my heart then when I want to laugh, if you could have done so when the laugh arrived, if you could do so now, when King Laugh have pack up his crown, and all that is to him, for he go far, far away from me, and for a long, long time, maybe you would perhaps pity me the most of all."

I was touched by the tenderness of his tone, and asked why.

"Because I know!"

And now we are all scattered, and for many a long day loneliness will sit over our roofs with brooding wings. Lucy lies in the tomb of her kin, a lordly death house in a lonely churchyard, away from teeming London, where the air is fresh, and the sun rises over Hampstead Hill, and where wild flowers grow of their own accord.

So I can finish this diary, and God only knows if I shall ever begin another. If I do, or if I even open this again, it will be to deal with different people and different themes, for here at the end, where the romance of my life is told, ere I go back to take up the thread of my life-work, I say sadly and without hope, "FINIS".

THE WESTMINSTER GAZETTE, 25 SEPTEMBER A HAMPSTEAD MYSTERY

The neighborhood of Hampstead is just at present exercised with a series of events which seem to run on lines parallel to those of what was known to the writers of headlines as "The Kensington Horror," or "The Stabbing Woman," or "The Woman in Black." During the past two or three days several cases have occurred of young children straying from home or neglecting to return from their playing on the Heath. In all these cases the children were too young to give any properly intelligible account of themselves, but the consensus of their excuses is that they had been with a “bloofer lady.” It has always been late in the evening when they have been missed, and on two occasions the children have not been found until early in the following morning. It is generally supposed in the neighborhood that, as the first child missed gave as his reason for being away that a “bloofer lady” had asked him to come for a walk, the others had picked up the phrase and used it as occasion served. This is the more natural as the favourite game of the little ones at present is luring each other away by wiles. A correspondent writes us that to see some of the tiny tots pretending to be the “bloofer lady” is supremely funny. Some of our caricaturists might, he says, take a lesson in the irony of grotesque by comparing the reality and the picture. It is only in accordance with general principles of human nature that the “bloofer lady” should be the popular role at these al fresco performances. Our correspondent naively says that even Ellen Terry could not be so winningly attractive as some of these grubby-faced little children pretend, and even imagine themselves, to be.

There is, however, possibly a serious side to the question, for some of the children, indeed all who have been missed at night, have been slightly torn or wounded in the throat. The wounds seem such as might be made by a rat or a small dog, and although of not much importance individually, would tend to show that whatever animal inflicts them has a system or method of its own. The police of the division have been instructed to keep a sharp lookout for straying children, especially when very young, in and around Hampstead Heath, and for any stray dog which may be about.

THE WESTMINSTER GAZETTE, 25 SEPTEMBER EXTRA

SPECIAL

THE HAMPSTEAD HORROR

ANOTHER CHILD INJURED

THE “BLOOFER LADY”

We have just received intelligence that another child, missed last night, was only discovered late in the morning under a furze bush at the Shooter’s Hill side of Hampstead Heath, which is perhaps, less frequented than the other parts. It has the same tiny wound in the throat as has been noticed in other cases. It was terribly weak, and looked quite emaciated. It too, when partially restored, had the common story to tell of being lured away by the “bloofer lady”.

CHAPTER 14

MINA HARKER'S JOURNAL

23 September. — Jonathan is better after a bad night. I am so glad that he has plenty of work to do, for that keeps his mind off the terrible things, and oh, I am rejoiced that he is not now weighed down with the responsibility of his new position. I knew he would be true to himself, and now how proud I am to see my Jonathan rising to the height of his advancement and keeping pace in all ways with the duties that come upon him. He will be away all day till late, for he said he could not lunch at home. My household work is done, so I shall take his foreign journal, and lock myself up in my room and read it.

24 September. — I hadn't the heart to write last night, that terrible record of Jonathan's upset me so. Poor dear! How he must have suffered, whether it be true or only imagination. I wonder if there is any truth in it at all. Did he get his brain fever, and then write all those terrible things, or had he some cause for it all? I suppose I shall never know, for I dare not open the subject to him. And yet that man we saw yesterday! He seemed quite certain of him, poor fellow! I suppose it was the funeral upset him and sent his mind back on some train of thought.

He believes it all himself. I remember how on our wedding day he said "Unless some solemn duty come upon me to go back to the bitter hours, asleep or awake, mad or sane…" There seems to be through it all some thread of continuity. That fearful Count was coming to London. If it should be, and he came to London, with its teeming millions… There may be a solemn duty, and if it come we must not shrink from it. I shall be prepared. I shall get my typewriter this very hour and begin transcribing. Then we shall be ready for other eyes if required. And if it be wanted, then, perhaps, if I am ready, poor Jonathan may not be upset, for I can speak for him and never let him be troubled or worried with it at all. If ever Jonathan quite gets over the nervousness he may want to tell me of it all, and I can ask him questions and find out things, and see how I may comfort him.

LETTER, VAN HELSING TO MRS. HARKER

24 September

(Confidence)

“Dear Madam,

“I pray you to pardon my writing, in that I am so far friend as that I sent to you sad news of Miss Lucy Westenra’s death. By the kindness of Lord Godalming, I am empowered to read her letters and papers, for I am deeply concerned about certain matters vitally important. In them I find some letters from you, which show how great friends you were and how you love her. Oh, Madam Mina, by that love, I implore you, help me. It is for others’ good that I ask, to redress great wrong, and to lift much and terrible troubles, that may be more great than you can know. May it be that I see you? You can trust me. I am friend of Dr. John Seward and of Lord Godalming (that was Arthur of Miss Lucy). I must keep it private for the present from all. I should come to Exeter to see you at once if you tell me I am privilege to come, and where and when. I implore your pardon, Madam. I have read your letters to poor Lucy, and know how good you are and how your husband suffer. So I pray you, if it may be, enlighten him not, least it may harm. Again your pardon, and forgive me.

“VAN HELSING”

TELEGRAM, MRS. HARKER TO VAN HELSING

25 September. — Come today by quarter past ten train if you can catch it. Can see you any time you call.

“WILHELMINA HARKER”

MINA HARKER’S JOURNAL

25 September. — I cannot help feeling terribly excited as the time draws near for the visit of Dr. Van Helsing, for somehow I expect that it will throw some light upon Jonathan’s sad experience, and as he attended poor dear Lucy in her last illness, he can tell me all about her. That is the reason of his coming. It is concerning Lucy and her sleep-walking, and not about Jonathan. Then I shall never know the real truth now! How silly I am. That awful journal gets hold of my imagination and tinges everything with something of its own colour. Of course it is about Lucy. That habit came back to the poor dear, and that awful night on the cliff must have made her ill. I had almost forgotten in my own affairs how ill she was afterwards. She must have told him of her sleep-walking adventure on the cliff, and that I knew all about it, and now he wants me to tell him what I know, so that he may understand. I hope I did right in not saying anything of it to Mrs. Westenra. I should never forgive myself if any act of mine, were it even a negative one, brought harm on poor dear Lucy. I hope

too, Dr. Van Helsing will not blame me. I have had so much trouble and anxiety of late that I feel I cannot bear more just at present.

I suppose a cry does us all good at times, clears the air as other rain does. Perhaps it was reading the journal yesterday that upset me, and then Jonathan went away this morning to stay away from me a whole day and night, the first time we have been parted since our marriage. I do hope the dear fellow will take care of himself, and that nothing will occur to upset him. It is two o'clock, and the doctor will be here soon now. I shall say nothing of Jonathan's journal unless he asks me. I am so glad I have typewritten out my own journal, so that, in case he asks about Lucy, I can hand it to him. It will save much questioning.

Later. — He has come and gone. Oh, what a strange meeting, and how it all makes my head whirl round. I feel like one in a dream. Can it be all possible, or even a part of it? If I had not read Jonathan's journal first, I should never have accepted even a possibility. Poor, poor, dear Jonathan! How he must have suffered. Please the good God, all this may not upset him again. I shall try to save him from it. But it may be even a consolation and a help to him, terrible though it be and awful in its consequences, to know for certain that his eyes and ears and brain did not deceive him, and that it is all true. It may be that it is the doubt which haunts him, that when the doubt is removed, no matter which, waking or dreaming, may prove the truth, he will be more satisfied and better able to bear the shock. Dr. Van Helsing must be a good man as well as a clever one if he is Arthur's friend and Dr. Seward's, and if they brought him all the way from Holland to look after Lucy. I feel from having seen him that he is good and kind and of a noble nature. When he comes tomorrow I shall ask him about Jonathan. And then, please God, all this sorrow and anxiety may lead to a good end. I used to think I would like to practice interviewing. Jonathan's friend on "The Exeter News" told him that memory is everything in such work, that you must be able to put down exactly almost every word spoken, even if you had to refine some of it afterwards. Here was a rare interview. I shall try to record it verbatim.

It was half-past two o'clock when the knock came. I took my courage a deux mains and waited. In a few minutes Mary opened the door, and announced "Dr. Van Helsing".

I rose and bowed, and he came towards me, a man of medium weight, strongly built, with his shoulders set back over a broad, deep chest and a neck well balanced on the trunk as the head is on the neck. The poise of the head strikes me at once as indicative of thought and power. The head is noble, well-sized, broad, and large behind the ears. The face, clean-shaven, shows a hard, square chin, a large resolute, mobile mouth, a good-sized nose, rather straight, but with quick, sensitive nostrils, that seem to broaden as the big bushy brows come down and the mouth tightens. The forehead is broad and fine, rising at first almost straight and then sloping back above two bumps or ridges wide apart, such a forehead that the reddish hair cannot possibly tumble over it, but falls naturally back and to the sides. Big, dark blue eyes are set widely apart, and are quick and tender or stern with the man's moods. He said to me,

"Mrs. Harker, is it not?" I bowed assent.

"That was Miss Mina Murray?" Again I assented.

"It is Mina Murray that I came to see that was friend of that poor dear child Lucy Westenra. Madam Mina, it is on account of the dead that I come."

"Sir," I said, "you could have no better claim on me than that you were a friend and helper of Lucy Westenra." And I held out my hand. He took it and said tenderly,

"Oh, Madam Mina, I know that the friend of that poor little girl must be good, but I had yet to learn…" He finished his speech with a courtly bow. I asked him what it was that he wanted to see me about, so he at once began.

"I have read your letters to Miss Lucy. Forgive me, but I had to begin to inquire somewhere, and there was none to ask. I know that you were with her at Whitby. She sometimes kept a diary, you need not look surprised, Madam Mina. It was begun after you had left, and was an imitation of you, and in that diary she traces by inference certain things to a sleep-walking in which she puts down that you saved her. In great perplexity then I come to you, and ask you out of your so much kindness to tell me all of it that you can remember."

"I can tell you, I think, Dr. Van Helsing, all about it."

"Ah, then you have good memory for facts, for details? It is not always so with young ladies."

"No, doctor, but I wrote it all down at the time. I can show it to you if you like."

"Oh, Madam Mina, I well be grateful. You will do me much favour."

I could not resist the temptation of mystifying him a bit, I suppose it is some taste of the original apple that remains still in our mouths, so I handed him the shorthand diary. He took it with a grateful bow, and said, "May I read it?"

"If you wish," I answered as demurely as I could. He opened it, and for an instant his face fell. Then he stood up and bowed.

"Oh, you so clever woman!" he said. "I knew long that Mr. Jonathan was a man of much thankfulness, but see, his wife have all the good things. And will you not so much honour me and so help me as to read it for me? Alas! I know not the shorthand."

By this time my little joke was over, and I was almost ashamed. So I took the typewritten copy from my work basket and handed it to him.

"Forgive me," I said. "I could not help it, but I had been thinking that it was of dear Lucy that you wished to ask, and so that you might not have time to wait, not on my account, but because I know your time must be precious, I have written it out on the typewriter for you."

He took it and his eyes glistened. "You are so good," he said. "And may I read it now? I may want to ask you some things when I have read."

"By all means," I said, "read it over whilst I order lunch, and then you can ask me questions whilst we eat."

He bowed and settled himself in a chair with his back to the light, and became so absorbed in the papers, whilst I went to see after lunch chiefly in order that he might not be disturbed. When I came back, I found him walking hurriedly up and down the room, his face all ablaze with excitement. He rushed up to me and took me by both hands.

"Oh, Madam Mina," he said, "how can I say what I owe to you? This paper is as sunshine. It opens the gate to me. I am dazed, I am dazzled, with so much light, and yet clouds roll in behind the light every time. But that you do not, cannot comprehend. Oh, but I am grateful to you, you so clever woman. Madame," he said this very solemnly, "if ever Abraham Van Helsing can do anything for you or yours, I trust you will let me know. It will be pleasure and delight if I may serve you as a friend, as a friend, but all I have ever learned, all

I can ever do, shall be for you and those you love. There are darknesses in life, and there are lights. You are one of the lights. You will have a happy life and a good life, and your husband will be blessed in you.”

“But, doctor, you praise me too much, and you do not know me.”

“Not know you, I, who am old, and who have studied all my life men and women, I who have made my specialty the brain and all that belongs to him and all that follow from him! And I have read your diary that you have so goodly written for me, and which breathes out truth in every line. I, who have read your so sweet letter to poor Lucy of your marriage and your trust, not know you! Oh, Madam Mina, good women tell all their lives, and by day and by hour and by minute, such things that angels can read. And we men who wish to know have in us something of angels’ eyes. Your husband is noble nature, and you are noble too, for you trust, and trust cannot be where there is mean nature. And your husband, tell me of him. Is he quite well? Is all that fever gone, and is he strong and hearty?”

I saw here an opening to ask him about Jonathan, so I said, “He was almost recovered, but he has been greatly upset by Mr. Hawkins death.”

He interrupted, “Oh, yes. I know. I know. I have read your last two letters.”

I went on, “I suppose this upset him, for when we were in town on Thursday last he had a sort of shock.”

“A shock, and after brain fever so soon! That is not good. What kind of shock was it?”

“He thought he saw some one who recalled something terrible, something which led to his brain fever.” And here the whole thing seemed to overwhelm me in a rush. The pity for Jonathan, the horror which he experienced, the whole fearful mystery of his diary, and the fear that has been brooding over me ever since, all came in a tumult. I suppose I was hysterical, for I threw myself on my knees and held up my hands to him, and implored him to make my husband well again. He took my hands and raised me up, and made me sit on the sofa, and sat by me. He held my hand in his, and said to me with, oh, such infinite sweetness,

"My life is a barren and lonely one, and so full of work that I have not had much time for friendships, but since I have been summoned to here by my friend John Seward I have known so many good people and seen such nobility that I feel more than ever, and it has grown with my advancing years, the loneliness of my life. Believe me, then, that I come here full of respect for you, and you have given me hope, hope, not in what I am seeking of, but that there are good women still left to make life happy, good women, whose lives and whose truths may make good lesson for the children that are to be. I am glad, glad, that I may here be of some use to you. For if your husband suffer, he suffer within the range of my study and experience. I promise you that I will gladly do all for him that I can, all to make his life strong and manly, and your life a happy one. Now you must eat. You are overwrought and perhaps over-anxious. Husband Jonathan would not like to see you so pale, and what he like not where he love, is not to his good. Therefore for his sake you must eat and smile. You have told me about Lucy, and so now we shall not speak of it, lest it distress. I shall stay in Exeter tonight, for I want to think much over what you have told me, and when I have thought I will ask you questions, if I may. And then too, you will tell me of husband Jonathan's trouble so far as you can, but not yet. You must eat now, afterwards you shall tell me all."

After lunch, when we went back to the drawing room, he said to me, “And now tell me all about him.”

When it came to speaking to this great learned man, I began to fear that he would think me a weak fool, and Jonathan a madman, that journal is all so strange, and I hesitated to go on. But he was so sweet and kind, and he had promised to help, and I trusted him, so I said,

“Dr. Van Helsing, what I have to tell you is so queer that you must not laugh at me or at my husband. I have been since yesterday in a sort of fever of doubt. You must be kind to me, and not think me foolish that I have even half believed some very strange things.”

He reassured me by his manner as well as his words when he said, “Oh, my dear, if you only know how strange is the matter regarding which I am here, it is you who would laugh. I have learned not to think little of any one’s belief, no matter how strange it may be. I have tried to keep an open mind, and it is not the ordinary things of life that could close it, but the strange things, the extraordinary things, the things that make one doubt if they be mad or sane.”

“Thank you, thank you a thousand times! You have taken a weight off my mind. If you will let me, I shall give you a paper to read. It is long, but I have typewritten it out. It will tell you my trouble and Jonathan’s. It is the copy of his journal when abroad, and all that happened. I dare not say anything of it. You will read for yourself and judge. And then when I see you, perhaps, you will be very kind and tell me what you think.”

“I promise,” he said as I gave him the papers. “I shall in the morning, as soon as I can, come to see you and your husband, if I may.”

“Jonathan will be here at half-past eleven, and you must come to lunch with us and see him then. You could catch the quick 3:34 train, which will leave you at Paddington before eight." He was surprised at my knowledge of the trains offhand, but he does not know that I have made up all the trains to and from Exeter, so that I may help Jonathan in case he is in a hurry.

So he took the papers with him and went away, and I sit here thinking, thinking I don't know what.

LETTER (by hand), VAN HELSING TO MRS. HARKER

25 September, 6 o'clock

"Dear Madam Mina,

"I have read your husband's so wonderful diary. You may sleep without doubt. Strange and terrible as it is, it is true! I will pledge my life on it. It may be worse for others, but for him and you there is no dread. He is a noble fellow, and let me tell you from experience of men, that one who would do as he did in going down that wall and to that room, aye, and going a second time, is not one to be injured in permanence by a shock. His brain and his heart are all right, this I swear, before I have even seen him, so be at rest. I shall have much to ask him of other things. I am blessed that today I come to see you, for I have learn all at once so much that again I am dazzled, dazzled more than ever, and I must think.

"Yours the most faithful,

"Abraham Van Helsing."

LETTER, MRS. HARKER TO VAN HELSING

25 September, 6:30 P.M.

"My dear Dr. Van Helsing,

“A thousand thanks for your kind letter, which has taken a great weight off my mind. And yet, if it be true, what terrible things there are in the world, and what an awful thing if that man, that monster, be really in London! I fear to think. I have this moment, whilst writing, had a wire from Jonathan, saying that he leaves by the 6:25 tonight from Launceston and will be here at 10:18, so that I shall have no fear tonight. Will you, therefore, instead of lunching with us, please come to breakfast at eight o’clock, if this be not too early for you? You can get away, if you are in a hurry, by the 10:30 train, which will bring you to Paddington by 2:35. Do not answer this, as I shall take it that, if I do not hear, you will come to breakfast.

“Believe me,

“Your faithful and grateful friend,

“Mina Harker.”

JONATHAN HARKER’S JOURNAL

26 September. — I thought never to write in this diary again, but the time has come. When I got home last night Mina had supper ready, and when we had supped she told me of Van Helsing’s visit, and of her having given him the two diaries copied out, and of how anxious she has been about me. She showed me in the doctor’s letter that all I wrote down was true. It seems to have made a new man of me. It was the doubt as to the reality of the whole thing that knocked me over. I felt impotent, and in the dark, and distrustful. But, now that I know, I am not afraid, even of the Count. He has succeeded after all, then, in his design in getting to London, and it was he I saw. He has got younger, and how? Van Helsing is the man to unmask him and hunt him out, if he is anything like what Mina says. We sat late, and talked it over. Mina is dressing, and I shall call at the hotel

in a few minutes and bring him over.

He was, I think, surprised to see me. When I came into the room where he was, and introduced myself, he took me by the shoulder, and turned my face round to the light, and said, after a sharp scrutiny,

"But Madam Mina told me you were ill, that you had had a shock."

It was so funny to hear my wife called 'Madam Mina' by this kindly, strong-faced old man. I smiled, and said, "I was ill, I have had a shock, but you have cured me already."

"And how?"

"By your letter to Mina last night. I was in doubt, and then everything took a hue of unreality, and I did not know what to trust, even the evidence of my own senses. Not knowing what to trust, I did not know what to do, and so had only to keep on working in what had hitherto been the groove of my life. The groove ceased to avail me, and I mistrusted myself. Doctor, you don't know what it is to doubt everything, even yourself. No, you don't, you couldn't with eyebrows like yours."

He seemed pleased, and laughed as he said, "So! You are a physiognomist. I learn more here with each hour. I am with so much pleasure coming to you to breakfast, and, oh, sir, you will pardon praise from an old man, but you are blessed in your wife."

I would listen to him go on praising Mina for a day, so I simply nodded and stood silent.

"She is one of God's women, fashioned by His own hand to show us men and other women that there is a heaven where we can enter, and that its light can be here on earth. So true, so sweet, so noble, so little an egoist, and that, let me tell you, is much in this age, so sceptical and selfish. And you, sir… I have read all the letters to poor Miss Lucy, and some of them speak of you, so I know you since some days from the knowing of others, but I have seen your true self since last night. You will give me your hand, will you not? And let us be friends for all our lives."

We shook hands, and he was so earnest and so kind that it made me quite choky.

"And now," he said, "may I ask you for some more help? I have a great task to do, and at the beginning it is to know. You can help me here. Can you tell me what went before your going to Transylvania? Later on I may ask more help, and of a different kind, but at first this will do."

"Look here, Sir," I said, "does what you have to do concern the Count?"

"It does," he said solemnly.

"Then I am with you heart and soul. As you go by the 10:30 train, you will not have time to read them, but I shall get the bundle of papers. You can take them with you and read them in the train."

After breakfast I saw him to the station. When we were parting he said, "Perhaps you will come to town if I send for you, and take Madam Mina too."

"We shall both come when you will," I said.

I had got him the morning papers and the London papers of the previous night, and while we were talking at the carriage window, waiting for the train to start, he was turning them over. His eyes suddenly seemed to catch something in one of them, "The Westminster Gazette", I knew it by the colour, and he grew quite white. He read something intently, groaning to himself, "Mein Gott! Mein Gott! So soon! So soon!" I do not think he remembered me at the moment. Just then the whistle blew, and the train moved off. This recalled him to himself, and he leaned out of the window and waved his hand, calling out, “Love to Madam Mina. I shall write so soon as ever I can.”

DR. SEWARD’S DIARY

26 September. — Truly there is no such thing as finality. Not a week since I said “Finis,” and yet here I am starting fresh again, or rather going on with the record. Until this afternoon I had no cause to think of what is done. Renfield had become, to all intents, as sane as he ever was. He was already well ahead with his fly business, and he had just started in the spider line also, so he had not been of any trouble to me. I had a letter from Arthur, written on Sunday, and from it I gather that he is bearing up wonderfully well. Quincey Morris is with him, and that is much of a help, for he himself is a bubbling well of good spirits. Quincey wrote me a line too, and from him I hear that Arthur is beginning to recover something of his old buoyancy, so as to them all my mind is at rest. As for myself, I was settling down to my work with the enthusiasm which I used to have for it, so that I might fairly have said that the wound which poor Lucy left on me was becoming cicatrised.

Everything is, however, now reopened, and what is to be the end God only knows. I have an idea that Van Helsing thinks he knows, too, but he will only let out enough at a time to whet curiosity. He went to Exeter yesterday, and stayed there all night. Today he came back, and almost bounded into the room at about half-past five o’clock, and thrust last night’s “Westminster Gazette” into my hand.

“What do you think of that?” he asked as he stood back and folded his arms.

I looked over the paper, for I really did not know what he meant, but he took it from me and pointed out a paragraph about children being decoyed away at Hampstead. It did not convey much to me, until I reached a passage where it described small puncture wounds on their throats. An idea struck me, and I looked up.

"Well?" he said.

"It is like poor Lucy's."

"And what do you make of it?"

"Simply that there is some cause in common. Whatever it was that injured her has injured them." I did not quite understand his answer.

"That is true indirectly, but not directly."

"How do you mean, Professor?" I asked. I was a little inclined to take his seriousness lightly, for, after all, four days of rest and freedom from burning, harrowing, anxiety does help to restore one's spirits, but when I saw his face, it sobered me. Never, even in the midst of our despair about poor Lucy, had he looked more stern.

"Tell me!" I said. "I can hazard no opinion. I do not know what to think, and I have no data on which to found a conjecture."

"Do you mean to tell me, friend John, that you have no suspicion as to what poor Lucy died of, not after all the hints given, not only by events, but by me?"

"Of nervous prostration following a great loss or waste of blood."

"And how was the blood lost or wasted?" I shook my head.

He stepped over and sat down beside me, and went on, "You are a clever man, friend John. You reason well, and your wit is bold, but you are too prejudiced. You do not let your eyes see nor your ears hear, and that which is outside your daily life is not of account to you. Do you not think that there are things which you cannot understand, and yet which are, that some people see things that others cannot? But there are things old and new which must not be contemplated by men's eyes, because they know, or think they know, some things which other men have told them. Ah, it is the fault of our science that it wants to explain all, and if it explain not, then it says there is nothing to explain. But yet we see around us every day the growth of new beliefs, which think themselves new, and which are yet but the old, which pretend to be young, like the fine ladies at the opera. I suppose now you do not believe in corporeal transference. No? Nor in materialization. No? Nor in astral bodies. No? Nor in the reading of thought. No? Nor in hypnotism…"

"Yes," I said. "Charcot has proved that pretty well."

He smiled as he went on, "Then you are satisfied as to it. Yes? And of course then you understand how it act, and can follow the mind of the great Charcot, alas that he is no more, into the very soul of the patient that he influence. No? Then, friend John, am I to take it that you simply accept fact, and are satisfied to let from premise to conclusion be a blank? No? Then tell me, for I am a student of the brain, how you accept hypnotism and reject the thought reading. Let me tell you, my friend, that there are things done today in electrical science which would have been deemed unholy by the very man who discovered electricity, who would themselves not so long before been burned as wizards. There are always mysteries in life. Why was it that Methuselah lived nine hundred years, and 'Old Parr' one hundred and sixty-nine, and yet that poor Lucy, with four men's blood in her poor veins, could not live even one day? For, had she live one more day, we could save her. Do you know all the mystery of life and death? Do you know the altogether of comparative anatomy and can say wherefore the qualities of brutes are in some men, and not in others? Can you tell me why, when other spiders die small and soon, that one great spider lived for centuries in the tower of the old Spanish church and grew and grew, till, on descending, he could drink the oil of all the church lamps? Can you tell me why in the Pampas, ay and elsewhere, there are bats that come out at night and open the veins of cattle and horses and suck dry their veins, how in some islands of the Western seas there are bats which hang on the trees all day, and those who have seen describe as like giant nuts or pods, and that when the sailors sleep on the deck, because that it is hot, flit down on them and then, and then in the morning are found dead men, white as even Miss Lucy was?"

"Good God, Professor!" I said, starting up. "Do you mean to tell me that Lucy was bitten by such a bat, and that such a thing is here in London in the nineteenth century?"

He waved his hand for silence, and went on, "Can you tell me why the tortoise lives more long than generations of men, why the elephant goes on and on till he have sees dynasties, and why the parrot never die only of bite of cat of dog or other complaint? Can you tell me why men believe in all ages and places that there are men and women who cannot die? We all know, because science has vouched for the fact, that there have been toads shut up in rocks for thousands of years, shut in one so small hole that only hold him since the youth of the world. Can you tell me how the Indian fakir can make himself to die and have been buried, and his grave sealed and corn sowed on it, and the corn reaped and be cut and sown and reaped and cut again, and then men come and take away the unbroken seal and that there lie the Indian fakir, not dead, but that rise up and walk amongst them as before?"

Here I interrupted him. I was getting bewildered. He so crowded on my mind his list of nature's eccentricities and possible impossibilities that my imagination was getting fired. I had a dim idea that he was teaching me some lesson, as long ago he used to do in his study at Amsterdam. But he used them to tell me the thing, so that I could have the object of thought in mind all the time. But now I was without his help, yet I wanted to follow him, so I said,

"Professor, let me be your pet student again. Tell me the thesis, so that I may apply your knowledge as you go on. At present I am going in my mind from point to point as a madman, and not a sane one, follows an idea. I feel like a novice lumbering through a bog in a midst, jumping from one tussock to another in the mere blind effort to move on without knowing where I am going."

"That is a good image," he said. "Well, I shall tell you. My thesis is this, I want you to believe."

"To believe what?"

"To believe in things that you cannot. Let me illustrate. I heard once of an American who so defined faith, 'that faculty which enables us to believe things which we know to be untrue.' For one, I follow that man. He meant that we shall have an open mind, and not let a little bit of truth check the rush of the big truth, like a small rock does a railway truck. We get the small truth first. Good! We keep him, and we value him, but all the same we must not let him think himself all the truth in the universe."

"Then you want me not to let some previous conviction inure the receptivity of my mind with regard to some strange matter. Do I read your lesson aright?"

"Ah, you are my favourite pupil still. It is worth to teach you. Now that you are willing to understand, you have taken the first step to understand. You think then that those so small holes in the children’s throats were made by the same that made the holes in Miss Lucy?”

“I suppose so.”

He stood up and said solemnly, “Then you are wrong. Oh, would it were so! But alas! No. It is worse, far, far worse.”

“In God’s name, Professor Van Helsing, what do you mean?” I cried.

He threw himself with a despairing gesture into a chair, and placed his elbows on the table, covering his face with his hands as he spoke.

“They were made by Miss Lucy!”

CHAPTER 15

DR. SEWARD’S DIARY — cont.

For a while sheer anger mastered me. It was as if he had during her life struck Lucy on the face. I smote the table hard and rose up as I said to him, “Dr. Van Helsing, are you mad?”

He raised his head and looked at me, and somehow the tenderness of his face calmed me at once. “Would I were!” he said. “Madness were easy to bear compared with truth like this. Oh, my friend, why, think you, did I go so far round, why take so long to tell so simple a thing? Was it because I hate you and have hated you all my life? Was it because I wished to give you pain? Was it that I wanted, now so late, revenge for that time when you saved my life, and from a fearful death? Ah no!”

“Forgive me,” said I.

He went on, “My friend, it was because I wished to be gentle in the breaking to you, for I know you have loved that so sweet lady. But even yet I do not expect you to believe. It is so hard to accept at once any abstract truth, that we may doubt such to be possible when we have always believed the ‘no’ of it. It is more hard still to accept so sad a concrete truth, and of such a one as Miss Lucy. Tonight I go to prove it. Dare you come with me?”

This staggered me. A man does not like to prove such a truth, Byron excepted from the category, jealousy.

“And prove the very truth he most abhorred.”

He saw my hesitation, and spoke, “The logic is simple, no madman’s logic this time, jumping from tussock to tussock in a misty bog. If it not be true, then proof will be relief. At worst it will not harm. If it be true! Ah, there is the dread. Yet every dread should help my cause, for in it is some need of belief. Come, I tell you what I propose. First, that we go off now and see that child in the hospital. Dr. Vincent, of the North Hospital, where the papers say the child is, is a friend of mine, and I think of yours since you were in class at Amsterdam. He will let two scientists see his case, if he will not let two friends. We shall tell him nothing, but only that we wish to learn. And then…"

"And then?"

He took a key from his pocket and held it up. "And then we spend the night, you and I, in the churchyard where Lucy lies. This is the key that lock the tomb. I had it from the coffin man to give to Arthur."

My heart sank within me, for I felt that there was some fearful ordeal before us. I could do nothing, however, so I plucked up what heart I could and said that we had better hasten, as the afternoon was passing.

We found the child awake. It had had a sleep and taken some food, and altogether was going on well. Dr. Vincent took the bandage from its throat, and showed us the punctures. There was no mistaking the similarity to those which had been on Lucy's throat. They were smaller, and the edges looked fresher, that was all. We asked Vincent to what he attributed them, and he replied that it must have been a bite of some animal, perhaps a rat, but for his own part, he was inclined to think it was one of the bats which are so numerous on the northern heights of London. "Out of so many harmless ones," he said, "there may be some wild specimen from the South of a more malignant species. Some sailor may have brought one home, and it managed to escape, or even from the Zoological Gardens a young one may have got loose, or one be bred there from a vampire. These things do occur, you, know. Only ten days ago a wolf got out, and was, I believe, traced up in this direction. For a week after, the children were playing nothing but Red Riding Hood on the Heath and in every alley in the place until this 'bloofer lady' scare came along, since then it has been quite a gala time with them. Even this poor little mite, when he woke up today, asked the nurse if he might go away. When she asked him why he wanted to go, he said he wanted to play with the 'bloofer lady'."

"I hope," said Van Helsing, "that when you are sending the child home you will caution its parents to keep strict watch over it. These fancies to stray are most dangerous, and if the child were to remain out another night, it would probably be fatal. But in any case I suppose you will not let it away for some days?"

"Certainly not, not for a week at least, longer if the wound is not healed."

Our visit to the hospital took more time than we had reckoned on, and the sun had dipped before we came out. When Van Helsing saw how dark it was, he said,

"There is not hurry. It is more late than I thought. Come, let us seek somewhere that we may eat, and then we shall go on our way."

We dined at 'Jack Straw's Castle' along with a little crowd of bicyclists and others who were genially noisy. About ten o'clock we started from the inn. It was then very dark, and the scattered lamps made the darkness greater when we were once outside their individual radius. The Professor had evidently noted the road we were to go, for he went on unhesitatingly, but, as for me, I was in quite a mixup as to locality. As we went further, we met fewer and fewer people, till at last we were somewhat surprised when we met even the patrol of horse police going their usual suburban round. At last we reached the wall of the churchyard, which we climbed over. With some little difficulty, for it was very dark, and the whole place seemed so strange to us, we found the Westenra tomb. The Professor took the key, opened the creaky door, and standing back, politely, but quite unconsciously, motioned me to precede him. There was a delicious irony in the offer, in the courtliness of giving preference on such a ghastly occasion. My companion followed me quickly, and cautiously drew the door to, after carefully ascertaining that the lock was a falling, and not a spring one. In the latter case we should have been in a bad plight. Then he fumbled in his bag, and taking out a matchbox and a piece of candle, proceeded to make a light. The tomb in the daytime, and when wreathed with fresh flowers, had looked grim and gruesome enough, but now, some days afterwards, when the flowers hung lank and dead, their whites turning to rust and their greens to browns, when the spider and the beetle had resumed their accustomed dominance, when the time-discoloured stone, and dust-encrusted mortar, and rusty, dank iron, and tarnished brass, and clouded silver-plating gave back the feeble glimmer of a candle, the effect was more miserable and sordid than could have been imagined. It conveyed irresistibly the idea that life, animal life, was not the only thing which could pass away.

Van Helsing went about his work systematically. Holding his candle so that he could read the coffin plates, and so holding it that the sperm dropped in white patches which congealed as they touched the metal, he made assurance of Lucy's coffin. Another search in his bag, and he took out a turnscrew.

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"To open the coffin. You shall yet be convinced."

Straightway he began taking out the screws, and finally lifted off the lid, showing the casing of lead beneath. The sight was almost too much for me. It seemed to be as much an affront to the dead as it would have been to have stripped off her clothing in her sleep whilst living. I actually took hold of his hand to stop him.

He only said, “You shall see,” and again fumbling in his bag took out a tiny fret saw. Striking the turnscrew through the lead with a swift downward stab, which made me wince, he made a small hole, which was, however, big enough to admit the point of the saw. I had expected a rush of gas from the week-old corpse. We doctors, who have had to study our dangers, have to become accustomed to such things, and I drew back towards the door. But the Professor never stopped for a moment. He sawed down a couple of feet along one side of the lead coffin, and then across, and down the other side. Taking the edge of the loose flange, he bent it back towards the foot of the coffin, and holding up the candle into the aperture, motioned to me to look.

I drew near and looked. The coffin was empty. It was certainly a surprise to me, and gave me a considerable shock, but Van Helsing was unmoved. He was now more sure than ever of his ground, and so emboldened to proceed in his task. “Are you satisfied now, friend John?” he asked.

I felt all the dogged argumentativeness of my nature awake within me as I answered him, “I am satisfied that Lucy’s body is not in that coffin, but that only proves one thing.”

“And what is that, friend John?”

“That it is not there.”

“That is good logic,” he said, “so far as it goes. But how do you, how can you, account for it not being there?”

"Perhaps a body-snatcher," I suggested. "Some of the undertaker's people may have stolen it." I felt that I was speaking folly, and yet it was the only real cause which I could suggest.

The Professor sighed. "Ah well!" he said, "we must have more proof. Come with me."

He put on the coffin lid again, gathered up all his things and placed them in the bag, blew out the light, and placed the candle also in the bag. We opened the door, and went out. Behind us he closed the door and locked it. He handed me the key, saying, "Will you keep it? You had better be assured."

I laughed, it was not a very cheerful laugh, I am bound to say, as I motioned him to keep it. "A key is nothing," I said, "there are many duplicates, and anyhow it is not difficult to pick a lock of this kind."

He said nothing, but put the key in his pocket. Then he told me to watch at one side of the churchyard whilst he would watch at the other.

I took up my place behind a yew tree, and I saw his dark figure move until the intervening headstones and trees hid it from my sight.

It was a lonely vigil. Just after I had taken my place I heard a distant clock strike twelve, and in time came one and two. I was chilled and unnerved, and angry with the Professor for taking me on such an errand and with myself for coming. I was too cold and too sleepy to be keenly observant, and not sleepy enough to betray my trust, so altogether I had a dreary, miserable time.

Suddenly, as I turned round, I thought I saw something like a white streak, moving between two dark yew trees at the side of the churchyard farthest from the tomb. At the same time a dark mass moved from the Professor's side of the ground, and hurriedly went towards it. Then I too moved, but I had to go round headstones and railed-off tombs, and I stumbled over graves. The sky was overcast, and somewhere far off an early cock crew. A little ways off, beyond a line of scattered juniper trees, which marked the pathway to the church, a white dim figure flitted in the direction of the tomb. The tomb itself was hidden by trees, and I could not see where the figure had disappeared. I heard the rustle of actual movement where I had first seen the white figure, and coming over, found the Professor holding in his arms a tiny child. When he saw me he held it out to me, and said, "Are you satisfied now?"

"No," I said, in a way that I felt was aggressive.

"Do you not see the child?"

"Yes, it is a child, but who brought it here? And is it wounded?"

"We shall see," said the Professor, and with one impulse we took our way out of the churchyard, he carrying the sleeping child.

When we had got some little distance away, we went into a clump of trees, and struck a match, and looked at the child's throat. It was without a scratch or scar of any kind.

"Was I right?" I asked triumphantly.

"We were just in time," said the Professor thankfully.

We had now to decide what we were to do with the child, and so consulted about it. If we were to take it to a police station we should have to give some account of our movements during the night. At least, we should have had to make some statement as to how we had come to find the child. So finally we decided that we would take it to the Heath, and when we heard a policeman coming, would leave it where he could not fail to find it. We would then seek our way home as quickly as we could. All fell out well. At the edge of Hampstead Heath we heard a policeman's heavy tramp, and laying the child on the pathway, we waited and watched until he saw it as he flashed his lantern to and fro. We heard his exclamation of astonishment, and then we went away silently. By good chance we got a cab near the ‘Spainiards,’ and drove to town.

I cannot sleep, so I make this entry. But I must try to get a few hours’ sleep, as Van Helsing is to call for me at noon. He insists that I go with him on another expedition.

27 September. — It was two o’clock before we found a suitable opportunity for our attempt. The funeral held at noon was all completed, and the last stragglers of the mourners had taken themselves lazily away, when, looking carefully from behind a clump of alder trees, we saw the sexton lock the gate after him. We knew that we were safe till morning did we desire it, but the Professor told me that we should not want more than an hour at most. Again I felt that horrid sense of the reality of things, in which any effort of imagination seemed out of place, and I realised distinctly the perils of the law which we were incurring in our unhallowed work. Besides, I felt it was all so useless. Outrageous as it was to open a leaden coffin, to see if a woman dead nearly a week were really dead, it now seemed the height of folly to open the tomb again, when we knew, from the evidence of our own eyesight, that the coffin was empty. I shrugged my shoulders, however, and rested silent, for Van Helsing had a way of going on his own road, no matter who remonstrated. He took the key, opened the vault, and again courteously motioned me to precede. The place was not so gruesome as last night, but oh, how unutterably mean looking when the sunshine streamed in. Van Helsing walked over to Lucy’s coffin, and I followed. He bent over and again forced back the leaden flange, and a shock of surprise and dismay shot through me.

There lay Lucy, seemingly just as we had seen her the night before her funeral. She was, if possible, more radiantly beautiful than ever, and I could not believe that she was dead. The lips were red, nay redder than before, and on the cheeks was a delicate bloom.

“Is this a juggle?” I said to him.

“Are you convinced now?” said the Professor, in response, and as he spoke he put over his hand, and in a way that made me shudder, pulled back the dead lips and showed the white teeth. “See,” he went on, “they are even sharper than before. With this and this,” and he touched one of the canine teeth and that below it, “the little children can be bitten. Are you of belief now, friend John?”

Once more argumentative hostility woke within me. I could not accept such an overwhelming idea as he suggested. So, with an attempt to argue of which I was even at the moment ashamed, I said, “She may have been placed here since last night.”

“Indeed? That is so, and by whom?”

“I do not know. Someone has done it.”

“And yet she has been dead one week. Most peoples in that time would not look so.”

I had no answer for this, so was silent. Van Helsing did not seem to notice my silence. At any rate, he showed neither chagrin nor triumph. He was looking intently at the face of the dead woman, raising the eyelids and looking at the eyes, and once more opening the lips and examining the teeth. Then he turned to me and said,

“Here, there is one thing which is different from all recorded. Here is some dual life that is not as the common. She was bitten by the vampire when she was in a trance, sleep-walking, oh, you start. You do not know that, friend John, but you shall know it later, and in trance could he best come to take more blood. In trance she dies, and in trance she is UnDead, too. So it is that she differ from all other. Usually when the UnDead sleep at home," as he spoke he made a comprehensive sweep of his arm to designate what to a vampire was 'home', "their face show what they are, but this so sweet that was when she not UnDead she go back to the nothings of the common dead. There is no malign there, see, and so it make hard that I must kill her in her sleep."

This turned my blood cold, and it began to dawn upon me that I was accepting Van Helsing's theories. But if she were really dead, what was there of terror in the idea of killing her?

He looked up at me, and evidently saw the change in my face, for he said almost joyously, "Ah, you believe now?"

I answered, "Do not press me too hard all at once. I am willing to accept. How will you do this bloody work?"

"I shall cut off her head and fill her mouth with garlic, and I shall drive a stake through her body."

It made me shudder to think of so mutilating the body of the woman whom I had loved. And yet the feeling was not so strong as I had expected. I was, in fact, beginning to shudder at the presence of this being, this UnDead, as Van Helsing called it, and to loathe it. Is it possible that love is all subjective, or all objective?

I waited a considerable time for Van Helsing to begin, but he stood as if wrapped in thought. Presently he closed the catch of his bag with a snap, and said,

"I have been thinking, and have made up my mind as to what is best. If I did simply follow my inclining I would do now, at this moment, what is to be done. But there are other things to follow, and things that are thousand times more difficult in that them we do not know. This is simple. She have yet no life taken, though that is of time, and to act now would be to take danger from her forever. But then we may have to want Arthur, and how shall we tell him of this? If you, who saw the wounds on Lucy’s throat, and saw the wounds so similar on the child’s at the hospital, if you, who saw the coffin empty last night and full today with a woman who have not change only to be more rose and more beautiful in a whole week, after she die, if you know of this and know of the white figure last night that brought the child to the churchyard, and yet of your own senses you did not believe, how then, can I expect Arthur, who know none of those things, to believe?

“He doubted me when I took him from her kiss when she was dying. I know he has forgiven me because in some mistaken idea I have done things that prevent him say goodbye as he ought, and he may think that in some more mistaken idea this woman was buried alive, and that in most mistake of all we have killed her. He will then argue back that it is we, mistaken ones, that have killed her by our ideas, and so he will be much unhappy always. Yet he never can be sure, and that is the worst of all. And he will sometimes think that she he loved was buried alive, and that will paint his dreams with horrors of what she must have suffered, and again, he will think that we may be right, and that his so beloved was, after all, an UnDead. No! I told him once, and since then I learn much. Now, since I know it is all true, a hundred thousand times more do I know that he must pass through the bitter waters to reach the sweet. He, poor fellow, must have one hour that will make the very face of heaven grow black to him, then we can act for good all round and send him peace. My mind is made up. Let us go. You return home for tonight to your asylum, and see that all be well. As for me, I shall spend the night here in this churchyard in my own way. Tomorrow night you will come to me to the Berkeley Hotel at ten of the clock. I shall send for Arthur to come too, and also that so fine young man of America that gave his blood. Later we shall all have work to do. I come with you so far as Piccadilly and there dine, for I must be back here before the sun set."

So we locked the tomb and came away, and got over the wall of the churchyard, which was not much of a task, and drove back to Piccadilly.

NOTE LEFT BY VAN HELSING IN HIS PORTMANTEAU, BERKELEY HOTEL DIRECTED TO JOHN SEWARD, M. D. (Not Delivered)

27 September

"Friend John,

"I write this in case anything should happen. I go alone to watch in that churchyard. It pleases me that the UnDead, Miss Lucy, shall not leave tonight, that so on the morrow night she may be more eager. Therefore I shall fix some things she like not, garlic and a crucifix, and so seal up the door of the tomb. She is young as UnDead, and will heed. Moreover, these are only to prevent her coming out. They may not prevail on her wanting to get in, for then the UnDead is desperate, and must find the line of least resistance, whatsoever it may be. I shall be at hand all the night from sunset till after sunrise, and if there be aught that may be learned I shall learn it. For Miss Lucy or from her, I have no fear, but that other to whom is there that she is UnDead, he have not the power to seek her tomb and find shelter. He is cunning, as I know from Mr. Jonathan and from the way that all along he have fooled us when he played with us for

Miss Lucy’s life, and we lost, and in many ways the UnDead are strong. He have always the strength in his hand of twenty men, even we four who gave our strength to Miss Lucy it also is all to him. Besides, he can summon his wolf and I know not what. So if it be that he came thither on this night he shall find me. But none other shall, until it be too late. But it may be that he will not attempt the place. There is no reason why he should. His hunting ground is more full of game than the churchyard where the UnDead woman sleeps, and the one old man watch.

“Therefore I write this in case… Take the papers that are with this, the diaries of Harker and the rest, and read them, and then find this great UnDead, and cut off his head and burn his heart or drive a stake through it, so that the world may rest from him.

“If it be so, farewell.

“VAN HELSING.”

DR. SEWARD’S DIARY

28 September. — It is wonderful what a good night’s sleep will do for one. Yesterday I was almost willing to accept Van Helsing’s monstrous ideas, but now they seem to start out lurid before me as outrages on common sense. I have no doubt that he believes it all. I wonder if his mind can have become in any way unhinged. Surely there must be some rational explanation of all these mysterious things. Is it possible that the Professor can have done it himself? He is so abnormally clever that if he went off his head he would carry out his intent with regard to some fixed idea in a wonderful way. I am loathe to think it, and indeed it would be almost as great a marvel as the other to find that Van Helsing was mad, but anyhow I shall

watch him carefully. I may get some light on the mystery.

29 September. — Last night, at a little before ten o'clock, Arthur and Quincey came into Van Helsing's room. He told us all what he wanted us to do, but especially addressing himself to Arthur, as if all our wills were centred in his. He began by saying that he hoped we would all come with him too, "for," he said, "there is a grave duty to be done there. You were doubtless surprised at my letter?" This query was directly addressed to Lord Godalming.

"I was. It rather upset me for a bit. There has been so much trouble around my house of late that I could do without any more. I have been curious, too, as to what you mean.

"Quincey and I talked it over, but the more we talked, the more puzzled we got, till now I can say for myself that I'm about up a tree as to any meaning about anything."

"Me too," said Quincey Morris laconically.

"Oh," said the Professor, "then you are nearer the beginning, both of you, than friend John here, who has to go a long way back before he can even get so far as to begin."

It was evident that he recognised my return to my old doubting frame of mind without my saying a word. Then, turning to the other two, he said with intense gravity,

"I want your permission to do what I think good this night. It is, I know, much to ask, and when you know what it is I propose to do you will know, and only then how much. Therefore may I ask that you promise me in the dark, so that afterwards, though you may be angry with me for a time, I must not disguise from myself the possibility that such may be, you shall not blame yourselves for anything."

“That’s frank anyhow,” broke in Quincey. “I’ll answer for the Professor. I don’t quite see his drift, but I swear he’s honest, and that’s good enough for me.”

“I thank you, Sir,” said Van Helsing proudly. “I have done myself the honour of counting you one trusting friend, and such endorsement is dear to me.” He held out a hand, which Quincey took.

Then Arthur spoke out, “Dr. Van Helsing, I don’t quite like to ‘buy a pig in a poke’, as they say in Scotland, and if it be anything in which my honour as a gentleman or my faith as a Christian is concerned, I cannot make such a promise. If you can assure me that what you intend does not violate either of these two, then I give my consent at once, though for the life of me, I cannot understand what you are driving at.”

“I accept your limitation,” said Van Helsing, “and all I ask of you is that if you feel it necessary to condemn any act of mine, you will first consider it well and be satisfied that it does not violate your reservations.”

“Agreed!” said Arthur. “That is only fair. And now that the pourparlers are over, may I ask what it is we are to do?”

“I want you to come with me, and to come in secret, to the churchyard at Kingstead.”

Arthur’s face fell as he said in an amazed sort of way,

“Where poor Lucy is buried?”

The Professor bowed.

Arthur went on, “And when there?”

“To enter the tomb!”

Arthur stood up. “Professor, are you in earnest, or is it some monstrous joke? Pardon me, I see that you are in earnest.” He sat down again, but I could see that he sat firmly and proudly, as one who is on his dignity. There was silence until he asked again, “And when in the tomb?”

“To open the coffin.”

“This is too much!” he said, angrily rising again. “I am willing to be patient in all things that are reasonable, but in this, this desecration of the grave, of one who…” He fairly choked with indignation.

The Professor looked pityingly at him. “If I could spare you one pang, my poor friend,” he said, “God knows I would. But this night our feet must tread in thorny paths, or later, and for ever, the feet you love must walk in paths of flame!”

Arthur looked up with set white face and said, “Take care, sir, take care!”

“Would it not be well to hear what I have to say?” said Van Helsing. “And then you will at least know the limit of my purpose. Shall I go on?”

“That’s fair enough,” broke in Morris.

After a pause Van Helsing went on, evidently with an effort, “Miss Lucy is dead, is it not so? Yes! Then there can be no wrong to her. But if she be not dead…”

Arthur jumped to his feet, “Good God!” he cried. “What do you mean? Has there been any mistake, has she been buried alive?” He groaned in anguish that not even hope could soften.

“I did not say she was alive, my child. I did not think it. I go no further than to say that she might be UnDead.”

“UnDead! Not alive! What do you mean? Is this all a nightmare, or what is it?”

“There are mysteries which men can only guess at, which age by age they may solve only in part. Believe me, we are now on the verge of one. But I have not done. May I cut off the head of dead Miss Lucy?"

"Heavens and earth, no!" cried Arthur in a storm of passion. "Not for the wide world will I consent to any mutilation of her dead body. Dr. Van Helsing, you try me too far. What have I done to you that you should torture me so? What did that poor, sweet girl do that you should want to cast such dishonour on her grave? Are you mad, that you speak of such things, or am I mad to listen to them? Don't dare think more of such a desecration. I shall not give my consent to anything you do. I have a duty to do in protecting her grave from outrage, and by God, I shall do it!"

Van Helsing rose up from where he had all the time been seated, and said, gravely and sternly, "My Lord Godalming, I too, have a duty to do, a duty to others, a duty to you, a duty to the dead, and by God, I shall do it! All I ask you now is that you come with me, that you look and listen, and if when later I make the same request you do not be more eager for its fulfillment even than I am, then, I shall do my duty, whatever it may seem to me. And then, to follow your Lordship's wishes I shall hold myself at your disposal to render an account to you, when and where you will." His voice broke a little, and he went on with a voice full of pity.

"But I beseech you, do not go forth in anger with me. In a long life of acts which were often not pleasant to do, and which sometimes did wring my heart, I have never had so heavy a task as now. Believe me that if the time comes for you to change your mind towards me, one look from you will wipe away all this so sad hour, for I would do what a man can to save you from sorrow. Just think. For why should I give myself so much labor and so much of sorrow? I have come here from my own land to do what I can of good, at the first to please my friend John, and then to help a sweet young lady, whom too, I come to love. For her, I am ashamed to say so much, but I say it in kindness, I gave what you gave, the blood of my veins. I gave it, I who was not, like you, her lover, but only her physician and her friend. I gave her my nights and days, before death, after death, and if my death can do her good even now, when she is the dead UnDead, she shall have it freely." He said this with a very grave, sweet pride, and Arthur was much affected by it.

He took the old man's hand and said in a broken voice, "Oh, it is hard to think of it, and I cannot understand, but at least I shall go with you and wait."

CHAPTER 16

DR. SEWARD'S DIARY — cont.

It was just a quarter before twelve o'clock when we got into the churchyard over the low wall. The night was dark with occasional gleams of moonlight between the dents of the heavy clouds that scudded across the sky. We all kept somehow close together, with Van Helsing slightly in front as he led the way. When we had come close to the tomb I looked well at Arthur, for I feared the proximity to a place laden with so sorrowful a memory would upset him, but he bore himself well. I took it that the very mystery of the proceeding was in some way a counteractant to his grief. The Professor unlocked the door, and seeing a natural hesitation amongst us for various reasons, solved the difficulty by entering first himself. The rest of us followed, and he closed the door. He then lit a dark lantern and pointed to a coffin. Arthur stepped forward hesitatingly. Van Helsing said to me, "You were with me here yesterday. Was the body of Miss Lucy in that coffin?"

"It was."

The Professor turned to the rest saying, "You hear, and yet there is no one who does not believe with me."

He took his screwdriver and again took off the lid of the coffin. Arthur looked on, very pale but silent. When the lid was removed he stepped forward. He evidently did not know that there was a leaden coffin, or at any rate, had not thought of it. When he saw the rent in the lead, the blood rushed to his face for an instant, but as quickly fell away again, so that he remained of a ghastly whiteness. He was still silent. Van Helsing forced back the leaden flange, and we all looked in and recoiled.

The coffin was empty!

For several minutes no one spoke a word. The silence was broken by Quincey Morris, “Professor, I answered for you. Your word is all I want. I wouldn’t ask such a thing ordinarily, I wouldn’t so dishonour you as to imply a doubt, but this is a mystery that goes beyond any honour or dishonour. Is this your doing?”

“I swear to you by all that I hold sacred that I have not removed or touched her. What happened was this. Two nights ago my friend Seward and I came here, with good purpose, believe me. I opened that coffin, which was then sealed up, and we found it as now, empty. We then waited, and saw something white come through the trees. The next day we came here in daytime and she lay there. Did she not, friend John?

“Yes.”

“That night we were just in time. One more so small child was missing, and we find it, thank God, unharmed amongst the graves. Yesterday I came here before sundown, for at sundown the UnDead can move. I waited here all night till the sun rose, but I saw nothing. It was most probable that it was because I had laid over the clamps of those doors garlic, which the UnDead cannot bear, and other things which they shun. Last night there was no exodus, so tonight before the sundown I took away my garlic and other things. And so it is we find this coffin empty. But bear with me. So far there is much that is strange. Wait you with me outside, unseen and unheard, and things much stranger are yet to be. So,” here he shut the dark slide of his lantern, “now to the outside.” He opened the door, and we filed out, he coming last and locking the door behind him.

Oh! But it seemed fresh and pure in the night air after the terror of that vault. How sweet it was to see the clouds race by, and the passing gleams of the moonlight between the scudding clouds crossing and passing, like the gladness and sorrow of a man's life. How sweet it was to breathe the fresh air, that had no taint of death and decay. How humanising to see the red lighting of the sky beyond the hill, and to hear far away the muffled roar that marks the life of a great city. Each in his own way was solemn and overcome. Arthur was silent, and was, I could see, striving to grasp the purpose and the inner meaning of the mystery. I was myself tolerably patient, and half inclined again to throw aside doubt and to accept Van Helsing's conclusions. Quincey Morris was phlegmatic in the way of a man who accepts all things, and accepts them in the spirit of cool bravery, with hazard of all he has at stake. Not being able to smoke, he cut himself a good-sized plug of tobacco and began to chew. As to Van Helsing, he was employed in a definite way. First he took from his bag a mass of what looked like thin, wafer-like biscuit, which was carefully rolled up in a white napkin. Next he took out a double handful of some whitish stuff, like dough or putty. He crumbled the wafer up fine and worked it into the mass between his hands. This he then took, and rolling it into thin strips, began to lay them into the crevices between the door and its setting in the tomb. I was somewhat puzzled at this, and being close, asked him what it was that he was doing. Arthur and Quincey drew near also, as they too were curious.

He answered, "I am closing the tomb so that the UnDead may not enter."

"And is that stuff you have there going to do it?"

"It is."

"What is that which you are using?" This time the question was by Arthur. Van Helsing reverently lifted his hat as he answered.

“The Host. I brought it from Amsterdam. I have an Indulgence.”

It was an answer that appalled the most sceptical of us, and we felt individually that in the presence of such earnest purpose as the Professor’s, a purpose which could thus use the to him most sacred of things, it was impossible to distrust. In respectful silence we took the places assigned to us close round the tomb, but hidden from the sight of any one approaching. I pitied the others, especially Arthur. I had myself been apprenticed by my former visits to this watching horror, and yet I, who had up to an hour ago repudiated the proofs, felt my heart sink within me. Never did tombs look so ghastly white. Never did cypress, or yew, or juniper so seem the embodiment of funeral gloom. Never did tree or grass wave or rustle so ominously. Never did bough creak so mysteriously, and never did the far-away howling of dogs send such a woeful presage through the night.

There was a long spell of silence, big, aching, void, and then from the Professor a keen “S-s-s-s!” He pointed, and far down the avenue of yews we saw a white figure advance, a dim white figure, which held something dark at its breast. The figure stopped, and at the moment a ray of moonlight fell upon the masses of driving clouds, and showed in startling prominence a dark-haired woman, dressed in the cerements of the grave. We could not see the face, for it was bent down over what we saw to be a fair-haired child. There was a pause and a sharp little cry, such as a child gives in sleep, or a dog as it lies before the fire and dreams. We were starting forward, but the Professor’s warning hand, seen by us as he stood behind a yew tree, kept us back. And then as we looked the white figure moved forwards again. It was now near enough for us to see clearly, and the moonlight still held. My own heart grew cold as ice, and I could hear the gasp of Arthur, as we recognised the features of Lucy Westenra. Lucy Westenra, but yet how changed. The sweetness was turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness.

Van Helsing stepped out, and obedient to his gesture, we all advanced too. The four of us ranged in a line before the door of the tomb. Van Helsing raised his lantern and drew the slide. By the concentrated light that fell on Lucy's face we could see that the lips were crimson with fresh blood, and that the stream had trickled over her chin and stained the purity of her lawn death-robe.

We shuddered with horror. I could see by the tremulous light that even Van Helsing's iron nerve had failed. Arthur was next to me, and if I had not seized his arm and held him up, he would have fallen.

When Lucy, I call the thing that was before us Lucy because it bore her shape, saw us she drew back with an angry snarl, such as a cat gives when taken unawares, then her eyes ranged over us. Lucy's eyes in form and colour, but Lucy's eyes unclean and full of hell fire, instead of the pure, gentle orbs we knew. At that moment the remnant of my love passed into hate and loathing. Had she then to be killed, I could have done it with savage delight. As she looked, her eyes blazed with unholy light, and the face became wreathed with a voluptuous smile. Oh, God, how it made me shudder to see it! With a careless motion, she flung to the ground, callous as a devil, the child that up to now she had clutched strenuously to her breast, growling over it as a dog growls over a bone. The child gave a sharp cry, and lay there moaning. There was a cold-bloodedness in the act which wrung a groan from Arthur. When she advanced to him with outstretched arms and a wanton smile he fell back and hid his face in his hands.

She still advanced, however, and with a languorous, voluptuous grace, said, “Come to me, Arthur. Leave these others and come to me. My arms are hungry for you. Come, and we can rest together. Come, my husband, come!”

There was something diabolically sweet in her tones, something of the tinkling of glass when struck, which rang through the brains even of us who heard the words addressed to another.

As for Arthur, he seemed under a spell, moving his hands from his face, he opened wide his arms. She was leaping for them, when Van Helsing sprang forward and held between them his little golden crucifix. She recoiled from it, and, with a suddenly distorted face, full of rage, dashed past him as if to enter the tomb.

When within a foot or two of the door, however, she stopped, as if arrested by some irresistible force. Then she turned, and her face was shown in the clear burst of moonlight and by the lamp, which had now no quiver from Van Helsing’s nerves. Never did I see such baffled malice on a face, and never, I trust, shall such ever be seen again by mortal eyes. The beautiful colour became livid, the eyes seemed to throw out sparks of hell fire, the brows were wrinkled as though the folds of flesh were the coils of Medusa’s snakes, and the lovely, blood-stained mouth grew to an open square, as in the passion masks of the Greeks and Japanese. If ever a face meant death, if looks could kill, we saw it at that moment.

And so for full half a minute, which seemed an eternity, she remained between the lifted crucifix and the sacred closing of her means of entry.

Van Helsing broke the silence by asking Arthur, “Answer me, oh my friend! Am I to proceed in my work?”

“Do as you will, friend. Do as you will. There can be no horror like this ever any more." And he groaned in spirit.

Quincey and I simultaneously moved towards him, and took his arms. We could hear the click of the closing lantern as Van Helsing held it down. Coming close to the tomb, he began to remove from the chinks some of the sacred emblem which he had placed there. We all looked on with horrified amazement as we saw, when he stood back, the woman, with a corporeal body as real at that moment as our own, pass through the interstice where scarce a knife blade could have gone. We all felt a glad sense of relief when we saw the Professor calmly restoring the strings of putty to the edges of the door.

When this was done, he lifted the child and said, "Come now, my friends. We can do no more till tomorrow. There is a funeral at noon, so here we shall all come before long after that. The friends of the dead will all be gone by two, and when the sexton locks the gate we shall remain. Then there is more to do, but not like this of tonight. As for this little one, he is not much harmed, and by tomorrow night he shall be well. We shall leave him where the police will find him, as on the other night, and then to home."

Coming close to Arthur, he said, "My friend Arthur, you have had a sore trial, but after, when you look back, you will see how it was necessary. You are now in the bitter waters, my child. By this time tomorrow you will, please God, have passed them, and have drunk of the sweet waters. So do not mourn over-much. Till then I shall not ask you to forgive me."

Arthur and Quincey came home with me, and we tried to cheer each other on the way. We had left behind the child in safety, and were tired. So we all slept with more or less reality of sleep.

29 September, night. — A little before twelve o'clock we three, Arthur, Quincey Morris, and myself, called for the Professor. It was odd to notice that by common consent we had all put on black clothes. Of course, Arthur wore black, for he was in deep mourning, but the rest of us wore it by instinct. We got to the graveyard by half-past one, and strolled about, keeping out of official observation, so that when the gravediggers had completed their task and the sexton, under the belief that every one had gone, had locked the gate, we had the place all to ourselves. Van Helsing, instead of his little black bag, had with him a long leather one, something like a cricketing bag. It was manifestly of fair weight.

When we were alone and had heard the last of the footsteps die out up the road, we silently, and as if by ordered intention, followed the Professor to the tomb. He unlocked the door, and we entered, closing it behind us. Then he took from his bag the lantern, which he lit, and also two wax candles, which, when lighted, he stuck by melting their own ends, on other coffins, so that they might give light sufficient to work by. When he again lifted the lid off Lucy's coffin we all looked, Arthur trembling like an aspen, and saw that the corpse lay there in all its death beauty. But there was no love in my own heart, nothing but loathing for the foul Thing which had taken Lucy's shape without her soul. I could see even Arthur's face grow hard as he looked. Presently he said to Van Helsing, "Is this really Lucy's body, or only a demon in her shape?"

"It is her body, and yet not it. But wait a while, and you shall see her as she was, and is."

She seemed like a nightmare of Lucy as she lay there, the pointed teeth, the blood stained, voluptuous mouth, which made one shudder to see, the whole carnal and unspirited appearance, seeming like a devilish mockery of Lucy's sweet purity. Van Helsing, with his usual methodicalness, began taking the various contents from his bag and placing them ready for use. First he took out a soldering iron and some plumbing solder, and then small oil lamp, which gave out, when lit in a corner of the tomb, gas which burned at a fierce heat with a blue flame, then his operating knives, which he placed to hand, and last a round wooden stake, some two and a half or three inches thick and about three feet long. One end of it was hardened by charring in the fire, and was sharpened to a fine point. With this stake came a heavy hammer, such as in households is used in the coal cellar for breaking the lumps. To me, a doctor's preparations for work of any kind are stimulating and bracing, but the effect of these things on both Arthur and Quincey was to cause them a sort of consternation. They both, however, kept their courage, and remained silent and quiet.

When all was ready, Van Helsing said, "Before we do anything, let me tell you this. It is out of the lore and experience of the ancients and of all those who have studied the powers of the UnDead. When they become such, there comes with the change the curse of immortality. They cannot die, but must go on age after age adding new victims and multiplying the evils of the world. For all that die from the preying of the Undead become themselves Undead, and prey on their kind. And so the circle goes on ever widening, like as the ripples from a stone thrown in the water. Friend Arthur, if you had met that kiss which you know of before poor Lucy die, or again, last night when you open your arms to her, you would in time, when you had died, have become nosferatu, as they call it in Eastern Europe, and would for all time make more of those Un-Deads that so have filled us with horror. The career of this so unhappy dear lady is but just begun. Those children whose blood she sucked are not as yet so much the worse, but if she lives on, UnDead, more and more they lose their blood and by her power over them they come to her, and so she draw their blood with that so wicked mouth. But if she die in truth, then all cease. The tiny wounds of the throats disappear, and they go back to their play unknowing ever of what has been. But of the most blessed of all, when this now UnDead be made to rest as true dead, then the soul of the poor lady whom we love shall again be free. Instead of working wickedness by night and growing more debased in the assimilating of it by day, she shall take her place with the other Angels. So that, my friend, it will be a blessed hand for her that shall strike the blow that sets her free. To this I am willing, but is there none amongst us who has a better right? Will it be no joy to think of hereafter in the silence of the night when sleep is not, 'It was my hand that sent her to the stars. It was the hand of him that loved her best, the hand that of all she would herself have chosen, had it been to her to choose?' Tell me if there be such a one amongst us?"

We all looked at Arthur. He saw too, what we all did, the infinite kindness which suggested that his should be the hand which would restore Lucy to us as a holy, and not an unholy, memory. He stepped forward and said bravely, though his hand trembled, and his face was as pale as snow, "My true friend, from the bottom of my broken heart I thank you. Tell me what I am to do, and I shall not falter!"

Van Helsing laid a hand on his shoulder, and said, "Brave lad! A moment's courage, and it is done. This stake must be driven through her. It well be a fearful ordeal, be not deceived in that, but it will be only a short time, and you will then rejoice more than your pain was great. From this grim tomb you will emerge as though you tread on air. But you must not falter when once you have begun. Only think that we, your true friends, are round you, and that we pray for you all the time."

"Go on," said Arthur hoarsely. "Tell me what I am to do."

"Take this stake in your left hand, ready to place to the point over the heart, and the hammer in your right. Then when we begin our prayer for the dead, I shall read him, I have here the book, and the others shall follow, strike in God's name, that so all may be well with the dead that we love and that the UnDead pass away."

Arthur took the stake and the hammer, and when once his mind was set on action his hands never trembled nor even quivered. Van Helsing opened his missal and began to read, and Quincey and I followed as well as we could.

Arthur placed the point over the heart, and as I looked I could see its dint in the white flesh. Then he struck with all his might.

The thing in the coffin writhed, and a hideous, blood-curdling screech came from the opened red lips. The body shook and quivered and twisted in wild contortions. The sharp white teeth champed together till the lips were cut, and the mouth was smeared with a crimson foam. But Arthur never faltered. He looked like a figure of Thor as his untrembling arm rose and fell, driving deeper and deeper the mercy-bearing stake, whilst the blood from the pierced heart welled and spurted up around it. His face was set, and high duty seemed to shine through it. The sight of it gave us courage so that our voices seemed to ring through the little vault.

And then the writhing and quivering of the body became less, and the teeth seemed to champ, and the face to quiver. Finally it lay still. The terrible task was over.

The hammer fell from Arthur's hand. He reeled and would have fallen had we not caught him. The great drops of sweat sprang from his forehead, and his breath came in broken gasps. It had indeed been an awful strain on him, and had he not been forced to his task by more than human considerations he could never have gone through with it. For a few minutes we were so taken up with him that we did not look towards the coffin. When we did, however, a murmur of startled surprise ran from one to the other of us. We gazed so eagerly that Arthur rose, for he had been seated on the ground, and came and looked too, and then a glad strange light broke over his face and dispelled altogether the gloom of horror that lay upon it.

There, in the coffin lay no longer the foul Thing that we had so dreaded and grown to hate that the work of her destruction was yielded as a privilege to the one best entitled to it, but Lucy as we had seen her in life, with her face of unequalled sweetness and purity. True that there were there, as we had seen them in life, the traces of care and pain and waste. But these were all dear to us, for they marked her truth to what we knew. One and all we felt that the holy calm that lay like sunshine over the wasted face and form was only an earthly token and symbol of the calm that was to reign for ever.

Van Helsing came and laid his hand on Arthur's shoulder, and said to him, "And now, Arthur my friend, dear lad, am I not forgiven?"

The reaction of the terrible strain came as he took the old man's hand in his, and raising it to his lips, pressed it, and said, "Forgiven! God bless you that you have given my dear one her soul again, and me peace." He put his hands on the Professor's shoulder, and laying his head on his breast, cried for a while silently, whilst we stood unmoving.

When he raised his head Van Helsing said to him, "And now, my child, you may kiss her. Kiss her dead lips if you will, as she would have you to, if for her to choose. For she is not a grinning devil now, not any more a foul Thing for all eternity. No longer she is the devil's UnDead. She is God's true dead, whose soul is with Him!"

Arthur bent and kissed her, and then we sent him and Quincey out of the tomb. The Professor and I sawed the top off the stake, leaving the point of it in the body. Then we cut off the head and filled the mouth with garlic. We soldered up the leaden coffin, screwed on the coffin lid, and gathering up our belongings, came away. When the Professor locked the door he gave the key to Arthur.

Outside the air was sweet, the sun shone, and the birds sang, and it seemed as if all nature were tuned to a different pitch. There was gladness and mirth and peace everywhere, for we were at rest ourselves on one account, and we were glad, though it was with a tempered joy.

Before we moved away Van Helsing said, "Now, my friends, one step of our work is done, one the most harrowing to ourselves. But there remains a greater task: to find out the author of all this our sorrow and to stamp him out. I have clues which we can follow, but it is a long task, and a difficult one, and there is danger in it, and pain. Shall you not all help me? We have learned to believe, all of us, is it not so? And since so, do we not see our duty? Yes! And do we not promise to go on to the bitter end?"

Each in turn, we took his hand, and the promise was made. Then said the Professor as we moved off, "Two nights hence you shall meet with me and dine together at seven of the clock with friend John. I shall entreat two others, two that you know not as yet, and I shall be ready to all our work show and our plans unfold. Friend John, you come with me home, for I have much to consult you about, and you can help me. Tonight I leave for Amsterdam, but shall return tomorrow night. And then begins our great quest. But first I shall have much to say, so that you may know what to do and to dread. Then our promise shall be made to each other anew. For there is a terrible task before us, and once our feet are on the ploughshare we must not draw back."

CHAPTER 17

DR. SEWARD'S DIARY — cont.

When we arrived at the Berkely Hotel, Van Helsing found a telegram waiting for him.

"Am coming up by train. Jonathan at Whitby. Important news. Mina Harker."

The Professor was delighted. "Ah, that wonderful Madam Mina," he said, "pearl among women! She arrive, but I cannot stay. She must go to your house, friend John. You must meet her at the station. Telegraph her en route so that she may be prepared."

When the wire was dispatched he had a cup of tea. Over it he told me of a diary kept by Jonathan Harker when abroad, and gave me a typewritten copy of it, as also of Mrs. Harker's diary at Whitby. "Take these," he said, "and study them well. When I have returned you will be master of all the facts, and we can then better enter on our inquisition. Keep them safe, for there is in them much of treasure. You will need all your faith, even you who have had such an experience as that of today. What is here told," he laid his hand heavily and gravely on the packet of papers as he spoke, "may be the beginning of the end to you and me and many another, or it may sound the knell of the UnDead who walk the earth. Read all, I pray you, with the open mind, and if you can add in any way to the story here told do so, for it is all important. You have kept a diary of all these so strange things, is it not so? Yes! Then we shall go through all these together when we meet." He then made ready for his departure and shortly drove off to Liverpool Street. I took my way to

Paddington, where I arrived about fifteen minutes before the train came in.

The crowd melted away, after the bustling fashion common to arrival platforms, and I was beginning to feel uneasy, lest I might miss my guest, when a sweet-faced, dainty looking girl stepped up to me, and after a quick glance said, “Dr. Seward, is it not?”

“And you are Mrs. Harker!” I answered at once, whereupon she held out her hand.

“I knew you from the description of poor dear Lucy, but…” She stopped suddenly, and a quick blush overspread her face.

The blush that rose to my own cheeks somehow set us both at ease, for it was a tacit answer to her own. I got her luggage, which included a typewriter, and we took the Underground to Fenchurch Street, after I had sent a wire to my housekeeper to have a sitting room and a bedroom prepared at once for Mrs. Harker.

In due time we arrived. She knew, of course, that the place was a lunatic asylum, but I could see that she was unable to repress a shudder when we entered.

She told me that, if she might, she would come presently to my study, as she had much to say. So here I am finishing my entry in my phonograph diary whilst I await her. As yet I have not had the chance of looking at the papers which Van Helsing left with me, though they lie open before me. I must get her interested in something, so that I may have an opportunity of reading them. She does not know how precious time is, or what a task we have in hand. I must be careful not to frighten her. Here she is!

MINA HARKER’S JOURNAL

29 September. — After I had tidied myself, I went down to Dr. Seward's study. At the door I paused a moment, for I thought I heard him talking with some one. As, however, he had pressed me to be quick, I knocked at the door, and on his calling out, "Come in," I entered.

To my intense surprise, there was no one with him. He was quite alone, and on the table opposite him was what I knew at once from the description to be a phonograph. I had never seen one, and was much interested.

"I hope I did not keep you waiting," I said, "but I stayed at the door as I heard you talking, and thought there was someone with you."

"Oh," he replied with a smile, "I was only entering my diary."

"Your diary?" I asked him in surprise.

"Yes," he answered. "I keep it in this." As he spoke he laid his hand on the phonograph. I felt quite excited over it, and blurted out, "Why, this beats even shorthand! May I hear it say something?"

"Certainly," he replied with alacrity, and stood up to put it in train for speaking. Then he paused, and a troubled look overspread his face.

"The fact is," he began awkwardly, "I only keep my diary in it, and as it is entirely, almost entirely, about my cases it may be awkward, that is, I mean…" He stopped, and I tried to help him out of his embarrassment.

"You helped to attend dear Lucy at the end. Let me hear how she died, for all that I know of her, I shall be very grateful. She was very, very dear to me."

To my surprise, he answered, with a horrorstruck look in his face, "Tell you of her death? Not for the wide world!"

"Why not?" I asked, for some grave, terrible feeling was coming over me.

Again he paused, and I could see that he was trying to invent an excuse. At length, he stammered out, "You see, I do not know how to pick out any particular part of the diary."

Even while he was speaking an idea dawned upon him, and he said with unconscious simplicity, in a different voice, and with the naivete of a child, "that's quite true, upon my honour. Honest Indian!"

I could not but smile, at which he grimaced. "I gave myself away that time!" he said. "But do you know that, although I have kept the diary for months past, it never once struck me how I was going to find any particular part of it in case I wanted to look it up?"

By this time my mind was made up that the diary of a doctor who attended Lucy might have something to add to the sum of our knowledge of that terrible Being, and I said boldly, "Then, Dr. Seward, you had better let me copy it out for you on my typewriter."

He grew to a positively deathly pallor as he said, "No! No! No! For all the world. I wouldn't let you know that terrible story!"

Then it was terrible. My intuition was right! For a moment, I thought, and as my eyes ranged the room, unconsciously looking for something or some opportunity to aid me, they lit on a great batch of typewriting on the table. His eyes caught the look in mine, and without his thinking, followed their direction. As they saw the parcel he realised my meaning.

"You do not know me," I said. "When you have read those papers, my own diary and my husband's also, which I have typed, you will know me better. I have not faltered in giving every thought of my own heart in this cause. But, of course, you do not know me, yet, and I must not expect you to trust me so far."

He is certainly a man of noble nature. Poor dear Lucy was right about him. He stood up and opened a large drawer, in which were arranged in order a number of hollow cylinders of metal covered with dark wax, and said,

"You are quite right. I did not trust you because I did not know you. But I know you now, and let me say that I should have known you long ago. I know that Lucy told you of me. She told me of you too. May I make the only atonement in my power? Take the cylinders and hear them. The first half-dozen of them are personal to me, and they will not horrify you. Then you will know me better. Dinner will by then be ready. In the meantime I shall read over some of these documents, and shall be better able to understand certain things."

He carried the phonograph himself up to my sitting room and adjusted it for me. Now I shall learn something pleasant, I am sure. For it will tell me the other side of a true love episode of which I know one side already.

DR. SEWARD'S DIARY

29 September. — I was so absorbed in that wonderful diary of Jonathan Harker and that other of his wife that I let the time run on without thinking. Mrs. Harker was not down when the maid came to announce dinner, so I said, "She is possibly tired. Let dinner wait an hour," and I went on with my work. I had just finished Mrs. Harker's diary, when she came in. She looked sweetly pretty, but very sad, and her eyes were flushed with crying. This somehow moved me much. Of late I have had cause for tears, God knows! But the relief

of them was denied me, and now the sight of those sweet eyes, brightened by recent tears, went straight to my heart. So I said as gently as I could, “I greatly fear I have distressed you.”

“Oh, no, not distressed me,” she replied. “But I have been more touched than I can say by your grief. That is a wonderful machine, but it is cruelly true. It told me, in its very tones, the anguish of your heart. It was like a soul crying out to Almighty God. No one must hear them spoken ever again! See, I have tried to be useful. I have copied out the words on my typewriter, and none other need now hear your heart beat, as I did.”

“No one need ever know, shall ever know,” I said in a low voice. She laid her hand on mine and said very gravely, “Ah, but they must!”

“Must! But why?” I asked.

“Because it is a part of the terrible story, a part of poor Lucy’s death and all that led to it. Because in the struggle which we have before us to rid the earth of this terrible monster we must have all the knowledge and all the help which we can get. I think that the cylinders which you gave me contained more than you intended me to know. But I can see that there are in your record many lights to this dark mystery. You will let me help, will you not? I know all up to a certain point, and I see already, though your diary only took me to 7 September, how poor Lucy was beset, and how her terrible doom was being wrought out. Jonathan and I have been working day and night since Professor Van Helsing saw us. He is gone to Whitby to get more information, and he will be here tomorrow to help us. We need have no secrets amongst us. Working together and with absolute trust, we can surely be stronger than if some of us were in the dark.”

She looked at me so appealingly, and at the same time manifested such courage and resolution in her bearing, that I gave in at once to her wishes. “You shall,” I said, “do as you like in the matter. God forgive me if I do wrong! There are terrible things yet to learn of, but if you have so far traveled on the road to poor Lucy’s death, you will not be content, I know, to remain in the dark. Nay, the end, the very end, may give you a gleam of peace. Come, there is dinner. We must keep one another strong for what is before us. We have a cruel and dreadful task. When you have eaten you shall learn the rest, and I shall answer any questions you ask, if there be anything which you do not understand, though it was apparent to us who were present.”

MINA HARKER’S JOURNAL

29 September. — After dinner I came with Dr. Seward to his study. He brought back the phonograph from my room, and I took a chair, and arranged the phonograph so that I could touch it without getting up, and showed me how to stop it in case I should want to pause. Then he very thoughtfully took a chair, with his back to me, so that I might be as free as possible, and began to read. I put the forked metal to my ears and listened.

When the terrible story of Lucy’s death, and all that followed, was done, I lay back in my chair powerless. Fortunately I am not of a fainting disposition. When Dr. Seward saw me he jumped up with a horrified exclamation, and hurriedly taking a case bottle from the cupboard, gave me some brandy, which in a few minutes somewhat restored me. My brain was all in a whirl, and only that there came through all the multitude of horrors, the holy ray of light that my dear Lucy was at last at peace, I do not think I could have borne it without making a scene. It is all so wild and mysterious, and strange that if I had not known Jonathan's experience in Transylvania I could not have believed. As it was, I didn't know what to believe, and so got out of my difficulty by attending to something else. I took the cover off my typewriter, and said to Dr. Seward,

"Let me write this all out now. We must be ready for Dr. Van Helsing when he comes. I have sent a telegram to Jonathan to come on here when he arrives in London from Whitby. In this matter dates are everything, and I think that if we get all of our material ready, and have every item put in chronological order, we shall have done much.

"You tell me that Lord Godalming and Mr. Morris are coming too. Let us be able to tell them when they come."

He accordingly set the phonograph at a slow pace, and I began to typewrite from the beginning of the seventeenth cylinder. I used manifold, and so took three copies of the diary, just as I had done with the rest. It was late when I got through, but Dr. Seward went about his work of going his round of the patients. When he had finished he came back and sat near me, reading, so that I did not feel too lonely whilst I worked. How good and thoughtful he is. The world seems full of good men, even if there are monsters in it.

Before I left him I remembered what Jonathan put in his diary of the Professor's perturbation at reading something in an evening paper at the station at Exeter, so, seeing that Dr. Seward keeps his newspapers, I borrowed the files of 'The Westminster Gazette' and 'The Pall Mall Gazette' and took them to my room. I remember how much the 'Dailygraph' and 'The Whitby Gazette', of which I had made cuttings, had helped us to understand the terrible events at Whitby when Count Dracula landed, so I shall look through the evening papers since then, and perhaps I shall get some new light. I am not sleepy, and the work will help to keep me quiet.

DR. SEWARD'S DIARY

30 September. — Mr. Harker arrived at nine o'clock. He got his wife's wire just before starting. He is uncommonly clever, if one can judge from his face, and full of energy. If this journal be true, and judging by one's own wonderful experiences, it must be, he is also a man of great nerve. That going down to the vault a second time was a remarkable piece of daring. After reading his account of it I was prepared to meet a good specimen of manhood, but hardly the quiet, businesslike gentleman who came here today.

LATER. — After lunch Harker and his wife went back to their own room, and as I passed a while ago I heard the click of the typewriter. They are hard at it. Mrs. Harker says that they are knitting together in chronological order every scrap of evidence they have. Harker has got the letters between the consignee of the boxes at Whitby and the carriers in London who took charge of them. He is now reading his wife's transcript of my diary. I wonder what they make out of it. Here it is…

Strange that it never struck me that the very next house might be the Count's hiding place! Goodness knows that we had enough clues from the conduct of the patient Renfield! The bundle of letters relating to the purchase of the house were with the transcript. Oh, if we had only had them earlier we might have saved poor Lucy! Stop! That way madness lies! Harker has gone back, and is again collecting material. He says that by dinner time they will be able to show a whole connected narrative. He thinks that in the meantime I should see Renfield, as hitherto he has been a sort of index to the coming and going of the Count. I hardly see this yet, but when I get at the dates I suppose I shall. What a good thing that Mrs. Harker put my cylinders into type! We never could have found the dates otherwise.

I found Renfield sitting placidly in his room with his hands folded, smiling benignly. At the moment he seemed as sane as any one I ever saw. I sat down and talked with him on a lot of subjects, all of which he treated naturally. He then, of his own accord, spoke of going home, a subject he has never mentioned to my knowledge during his sojourn here. In fact, he spoke quite confidently of getting his discharge at once. I believe that, had I not had the chat with Harker and read the letters and the dates of his outbursts, I should have been prepared to sign for him after a brief time of observation. As it is, I am darkly suspicious. All those out-breaks were in some way linked with the proximity of the Count. What then does this absolute content mean? Can it be that his instinct is satisfied as to the vampire's ultimate triumph? Stay. He is himself zoophagous, and in his wild ravings outside the chapel door of the deserted house he always spoke of 'master'. This all seems confirmation of our idea. However, after a while I came away. My friend is just a little too sane at present to make it safe to probe him too deep with questions. He might begin to think, and then… So I came away. I mistrust these quiet moods of his, so I have given the attendant a hint to look closely after him, and to have a strait waistcoat ready in case of need.

JOHNATHAN HARKER'S JOURNAL

29 September, in train to London. — When I received Mr. Billington's courteous message that he would give me any information in his power I thought it best to go down to Whitby and

make, on the spot, such inquiries as I wanted. It was now my object to trace that horrid cargo of the Count's to its place in London. Later, we may be able to deal with it. Billington junior, a nice lad, met me at the station, and brought me to his father's house, where they had decided that I must spend the night. They are hospitable, with true Yorkshire hospitality, give a guest everything and leave him to do as he likes. They all knew that I was busy, and that my stay was short, and Mr. Billington had ready in his office all the papers concerning the consignment of boxes. It gave me almost a turn to see again one of the letters which I had seen on the Count's table before I knew of his diabolical plans. Everything had been carefully thought out, and done systematically and with precision. He seemed to have been prepared for every obstacle which might be placed by accident in the way of his intentions being carried out. To use an Americanism, he had 'taken no chances', and the absolute accuracy with which his instructions were fulfilled was simply the logical result of his care. I saw the invoice, and took note of it. 'Fifty cases of common earth, to be used for experimental purposes'. Also the copy of the letter to Carter Paterson, and their reply. Of both these I got copies. This was all the information Mr. Billington could give me, so I went down to the port and saw the coastguards, the Customs Officers and the harbour master, who kindly put me in communication with the men who had actually received the boxes. Their tally was exact with the list, and they had nothing to add to the simple description 'fifty cases of common earth', except that the boxes were 'main and mortal heavy', and that shifting them was dry work. One of them added that it was hard lines that there wasn't any gentleman 'such like as like yourself, squire', to show some sort of appreciation of their efforts in a liquid form. Another put in a rider that the thirst then generated was such that even the time which had elapsed had not completely allayed it. Needless to add, I took care before leaving to lift, forever and adequately, this source of reproach.

30 September. — The station master was good enough to give me a line to his old companion the station master at King’s Cross, so that when I arrived there in the morning I was able to ask him about the arrival of the boxes. He, too put me at once in communication with the proper officials, and I saw that their tally was correct with the original invoice. The opportunities of acquiring an abnormal thirst had been here limited. A noble use of them had, however, been made, and again I was compelled to deal with the result in ex post facto manner.

From thence I went to Carter Paterson’s central office, where I met with the utmost courtesy. They looked up the transaction in their day book and letter book, and at once telephoned to their King’s Cross office for more details. By good fortune, the men who did the teaming were waiting for work, and the official at once sent them over, sending also by one of them the way-bill and all the papers connected with the delivery of the boxes at Carfax. Here again I found the tally agreeing exactly. The carriers’ men were able to supplement the paucity of the written words with a few more details. These were, I shortly found, connected almost solely with the dusty nature of the job, and the consequent thirst engendered in the operators. On my affording an opportunity, through the medium of the currency of the realm, of the allaying, at a later period, this beneficial evil, one of the men remarked,

“That ‘ere ‘ouse, guv’nor, is the rummiest I ever was in. Blyme! But it ain’t been touched sence a hundred years. There was dust that thick in the place that you might have slep’ on it without ‘urtin’ of yer bones. An’ the place was that neglected that yer might ‘ave smelled ole Jerusalem in it. But the old chapel, that took the cike, that did! Me and my mate, we thort we wouldn’t never git out quick enough. Lor’, I wouldn’t take less nor a quid a moment to stay there arter dark.”

Having been in the house, I could well believe him, but if he knew what I know, he would, I think have raised his terms.

Of one thing I am now satisfied. That all those boxes which arrived at Whitby from Varna in the Demeter were safely deposited in the old chapel at Carfax. There should be fifty of them there, unless any have since been removed, as from Dr. Seward’s diary I fear.

Later. — Mina and I have worked all day, and we have put all the papers into order.

MINA HARKER’S JOURNAL

30 September. — I am so glad that I hardly know how to contain myself. It is, I suppose, the reaction from the haunting fear which I have had, that this terrible affair and the reopening of his old wound might act detrimentally on Jonathan. I saw him leave for Whitby with as brave a face as could, but I was sick with apprehension. The effort has, however, done him good. He was never so resolute, never so strong, never so full of volcanic energy, as at present. It is just as that dear, good Professor Van Helsing said, he is true grit, and he improves under strain that would kill a weaker nature. He came back full of life and hope and determination. We have got everything in order for tonight. I feel myself quite wild with excitement. I suppose

one ought to pity anything so hunted as the Count. That is just it. This thing is not human, not even a beast. To read Dr. Seward's account of poor Lucy's death, and what followed, is enough to dry up the springs of pity in one's heart.

Later. — Lord Godalming and Mr. Morris arrived earlier than we expected. Dr. Seward was out on business, and had taken Jonathan with him, so I had to see them. It was to me a painful meeting, for it brought back all poor dear Lucy's hopes of only a few months ago. Of course they had heard Lucy speak of me, and it seemed that Dr. Van Helsing, too, had been quite 'blowing my trumpet', as Mr. Morris expressed it. Poor fellows, neither of them is aware that I know all about the proposals they made to Lucy. They did not quite know what to say or do, as they were ignorant of the amount of my knowledge. So they had to keep on neutral subjects. However, I thought the matter over, and came to the conclusion that the best thing I could do would be to post them on affairs right up to date. I knew from Dr. Seward's diary that they had been at Lucy's death, her real death, and that I need not fear to betray any secret before the time. So I told them, as well as I could, that I had read all the papers and diaries, and that my husband and I, having typewritten them, had just finished putting them in order. I gave them each a copy to read in the library. When Lord Godalming got his and turned it over, it does make a pretty good pile, he said, "Did you write all this, Mrs. Harker?"

I nodded, and he went on.

"I don't quite see the drift of it, but you people are all so good and kind, and have been working so earnestly and so energetically, that all I can do is to accept your ideas blindfold and try to help you. I have had one lesson already in accepting facts that should make a man humble to the last hour of his life. Besides, I know you loved my Lucy…"

Here he turned away and covered his face with his hands. I could hear the tears in his voice. Mr. Morris, with instinctive delicacy, just laid a hand for a moment on his shoulder, and then walked quietly out of the room. I suppose there is something in a woman's nature that makes a man free to break down before her and express his feelings on the tender or emotional side without feeling it derogatory to his manhood. For when Lord Godalming found himself alone with me he sat down on the sofa and gave way utterly and openly. I sat down beside him and took his hand. I hope he didn't think it forward of me, and that if he ever thinks of it afterwards he never will have such a thought. There I wrong him. I know he never will. He is too true a gentleman. I said to him, for I could see that his heart was breaking, "I loved dear Lucy, and I know what she was to you, and what you were to her. She and I were like sisters, and now she is gone, will you not let me be like a sister to you in your trouble? I know what sorrows you have had, though I cannot measure the depth of them. If sympathy and pity can help in your affliction, won't you let me be of some little service, for Lucy's sake?"

In an instant the poor dear fellow was overwhelmed with grief. It seemed to me that all that he had of late been suffering in silence found a vent at once. He grew quite hysterical, and raising his open hands, beat his palms together in a perfect agony of grief. He stood up and then sat down again, and the tears rained down his cheeks. I felt an infinite pity for him, and opened my arms unthinkingly. With a sob he laid his head on my shoulder and cried like a wearied child, whilst he shook with emotion.

We women have something of the mother in us that makes us rise above smaller matters when the mother spirit is invoked. I felt this big sorrowing man's head resting on me, as though it were that of a baby that some day may lie on my bosom, and I stroked his hair as though he were my own child. I never thought at the time how strange it all was.

After a little bit his sobs ceased, and he raised himself with an apology, though he made no disguise of his emotion. He told me that for days and nights past, weary days and sleepless nights, he had been unable to speak with any one, as a man must speak in his time of sorrow. There was no woman whose sympathy could be given to him, or with whom, owing to the terrible circumstance with which his sorrow was surrounded, he could speak freely.

"I know now how I suffered," he said, as he dried his eyes, "but I do not know even yet, and none other can ever know, how much your sweet sympathy has been to me today. I shall know better in time, and believe me that, though I am not ungrateful now, my gratitude will grow with my understanding. You will let me be like a brother, will you not, for all our lives, for dear Lucy's sake?"

"For dear Lucy's sake," I said as we clasped hands. "Ay, and for your own sake," he added, "for if a man's esteem and gratitude are ever worth the winning, you have won mine today. If ever the future should bring to you a time when you need a man's help, believe me, you will not call in vain. God grant that no such time may ever come to you to break the sunshine of your life, but if it should ever come, promise me that you will let me know."

He was so earnest, and his sorrow was so fresh, that I felt it would comfort him, so I said, "I promise."

As I came along the corridor I saw Mr. Morris looking out of a window. He turned as he heard my footsteps. “How is Art?” he said. Then noticing my red eyes, he went on, “Ah, I see you have been comforting him. Poor old fellow! He needs it. No one but a woman can help a man when he is in trouble of the heart, and he had no one to comfort him.”

He bore his own trouble so bravely that my heart bled for him. I saw the manuscript in his hand, and I knew that when he read it he would realise how much I knew, so I said to him, “I wish I could comfort all who suffer from the heart. Will you let me be your friend, and will you come to me for comfort if you need it? You will know later why I speak.”

He saw that I was in earnest, and stooping, took my hand, and raising it to his lips, kissed it. It seemed but poor comfort to so brave and unselfish a soul, and impulsively I bent over and kissed him. The tears rose in his eyes, and there was a momentary choking in his throat. He said quite calmly, “Little girl, you will never forget that true hearted kindness, so long as ever you live!” Then he went into the study to his friend.

“Little girl!” The very words he had used to Lucy, and, oh, but he proved himself a friend.

CHAPTER 18

DR. SEWARD’S DIARY

30 September. — I got home at five o’clock, and found that Godalming and Morris had not only arrived, but had already studied the transcript of the various diaries and letters which Harker had not yet returned from his visit to the carriers’ men, of whom Dr. Hennessey had written to me. Mrs. Harker gave us a cup of tea, and I can honestly say that, for the first time since I have lived in it, this old house seemed like home. When we had finished, Mrs. Harker said,

“Dr. Seward, may I ask a favour? I want to see your patient, Mr. Renfield. Do let me see him. What you have said of him in your diary interests me so much!”

She looked so appealing and so pretty that I could not refuse her, and there was no possible reason why I should, so I took her with me. When I went into the room, I told the man that a lady would like to see him, to which he simply answered, “Why?”

“She is going through the house, and wants to see every one in it,” I answered.

“Oh, very well,” he said, “let her come in, by all means, but just wait a minute till I tidy up the place.”

His method of tidying was peculiar, he simply swallowed all the flies and spiders in the boxes before I could stop him. It was quite evident that he feared, or was jealous of, some interference. When he had got through his disgusting task, he said cheerfully, “Let the lady come in,” and sat down on the edge of his bed with his head down, but with his eyelids raised so that he could see her as she entered. For a moment I thought that he might have some homicidal intent. I remembered how quiet he had been just before he attacked me in my own study, and I took care to stand where I could seize him at once if he attempted to make a spring at her.

She came into the room with an easy gracefulness which would at once command the respect of any lunatic, for easiness is one of the qualities mad people most respect. She walked over to him, smiling pleasantly, and held out her hand.

“Good evening, Mr. Renfield,” said she. “You see, I know you, for Dr. Seward has told me of you.” He made no immediate reply, but eyed her all over intently with a set frown on his face. This look gave way to one of wonder, which merged in doubt, then to my intense astonishment he said, “You’re not the girl the doctor wanted to marry, are you? You can’t be, you know, for she’s dead.”

Mrs. Harker smiled sweetly as she replied, “Oh no! I have a husband of my own, to whom I was married before I ever saw Dr. Seward, or he me. I am Mrs. Harker.”

“Then what are you doing here?”

“My husband and I are staying on a visit with Dr. Seward.”

“Then don’t stay.”

“But why not?”

I thought that this style of conversation might not be pleasant to Mrs. Harker, any more than it was to me, so I joined in, “How did you know I wanted to marry anyone?”

His reply was simply contemptuous, given in a pause in which he turned his eyes from Mrs. Harker to me, instantly turning them back again, “What an asinine question!”

“I don’t see that at all, Mr. Renfield,” said Mrs. Harker, at once championing me.

He replied to her with as much courtesy and respect as he had shown contempt to me, “You will, of course, understand, Mrs. Harker, that when a man is so loved and honoured as our host is, everything regarding him is of interest in our little community. Dr. Seward is loved not only by his household and his friends, but even by his patients, who, being some of them hardly in mental equilibrium, are apt to distort causes and effects. Since I myself have been an inmate of a lunatic asylum, I cannot but notice that the sophistic tendencies of some of its inmates lean towards the errors of non causa and ignoratio elenche.”

I positively opened my eyes at this new development. Here was my own pet lunatic, the most pronounced of his type that I had ever met with, talking elemental philosophy, and with the manner of a polished gentleman. I wonder if it was Mrs. Harker’s presence which had touched some chord in his memory. If this new phase was spontaneous, or in any way due to her unconscious influence, she must have some rare gift or power.

We continued to talk for some time, and seeing that he was seemingly quite reasonable, she ventured, looking at me questioningly as she began, to lead him to his favourite topic. I was again astonished, for he addressed himself to the question with the impartiality of the completest sanity. He even took himself as an example when he mentioned certain things.

“Why, I myself am an instance of a man who had a strange belief. Indeed, it was no wonder that my friends were alarmed, and insisted on my being put under control. I used to fancy that life was a positive and perpetual entity, and that by consuming a multitude of live things, no matter how low in the scale of creation, one might indefinitely prolong life. At times I held the belief so strongly that I actually tried to take human life. The doctor here will bear me out that on one occasion I tried to kill him for the purpose of strengthening my vital powers by the assimilation with my own body of his life through the medium of his blood, relying of course, upon the Scriptural phrase, ‘For the blood is the life.’ Though, indeed, the vendor of a certain nostrum has vulgarised the truism to the very point of contempt. Isn’t that true, doctor?”

I nodded assent, for I was so amazed that I hardly knew what to either think or say, it was hard to imagine that I had seen him eat up his spiders and flies not five minutes before. Looking at my watch, I saw that I should go to the station to meet Van Helsing, so I told Mrs. Harker that it was time to leave.

She came at once, after saying pleasantly to Mr. Renfield, “Goodbye, and I hope I may see you often, under auspices pleasanter to yourself.”

To which, to my astonishment, he replied, “Goodbye, my dear. I pray God I may never see your sweet face again. May He bless and keep you!”

When I went to the station to meet Van Helsing I left the boys behind me. Poor Art seemed more cheerful than he has been since Lucy first took ill, and Quincey is more like his own bright self than he has been for many a long day.

Van Helsing stepped from the carriage with the eager nimbleness of a boy. He saw me at once, and rushed up to me, saying, “Ah, friend John, how goes all? Well? So! I have been busy, for I come here to stay if need be. All affairs are settled with me, and I have much to tell. Madam Mina is with you? Yes. And her so fine husband? And Arthur and my friend Quincey, they are with you, too? Good!”

As I drove to the house I told him of what had passed, and of how my own diary had come to be of some use through Mrs. Harker's suggestion, at which the Professor interrupted me.

"Ah, that wonderful Madam Mina! She has man's brain, a brain that a man should have were he much gifted, and a woman's heart. The good God fashioned her for a purpose, believe me, when He made that so good combination. Friend John, up to now fortune has made that woman of help to us, after tonight she must not have to do with this so terrible affair. It is not good that she run a risk so great. We men are determined, nay, are we not pledged, to destroy this monster? But it is no part for a woman. Even if she be not harmed, her heart may fail her in so much and so many horrors and hereafter she may suffer, both in waking, from her nerves, and in sleep, from her dreams. And, besides, she is young woman and not so long married, there may be other things to think of some time, if not now. You tell me she has wrote all, then she must consult with us, but tomorrow she say goodbye to this work, and we go alone."

I agreed heartily with him, and then I told him what we had found in his absence, that the house which Dracula had bought was the very next one to my own. He was amazed, and a great concern seemed to come on him.

"Oh that we had known it before!" he said, "for then we might have reached him in time to save poor Lucy. However, 'the milk that is spilt cries not out afterwards,' as you say. We shall not think of that, but go on our way to the end." Then he fell into a silence that lasted till we entered my own gateway. Before we went to prepare for dinner he said to Mrs. Harker, "I am told, Madam Mina, by my friend John that you and your husband have put up in exact order all things that have been, up to this moment."

“Not up to this moment, Professor,” she said impulsively, “but up to this morning.”

“But why not up to now? We have seen hitherto how good light all the little things have made. We have told our secrets, and yet no one who has told is the worse for it.”

Mrs. Harker began to blush, and taking a paper from her pockets, she said, “Dr. Van Helsing, will you read this, and tell me if it must go in. It is my record of today. I too have seen the need of putting down at present everything, however trivial, but there is little in this except what is personal. Must it go in?”

The Professor read it over gravely, and handed it back, saying, “It need not go in if you do not wish it, but I pray that it may. It can but make your husband love you the more, and all us, your friends, more honour you, as well as more esteem and love.” She took it back with another blush and a bright smile.

And so now, up to this very hour, all the records we have are complete and in order. The Professor took away one copy to study after dinner, and before our meeting, which is fixed for nine o’clock. The rest of us have already read everything, so when we meet in the study we shall all be informed as to facts, and can arrange our plan of battle with this terrible and mysterious enemy.

MINA HARKER’S JOURNAL

30 September. — When we met in Dr. Seward’s study two hours after dinner, which had been at six o’clock, we unconsciously formed a sort of board or committee. Professor Van Helsing took the head of the table, to which Dr. Seward motioned him as he came into the room. He made me sit next to him on his right, and asked me to act as secretary. Jonathan sat next to me. Opposite us were Lord

Godalming, Dr. Seward, and Mr. Morris, Lord Godalming being next the Professor, and Dr. Seward in the centre.

The Professor said, “I may, I suppose, take it that we are all acquainted with the facts that are in these papers.” We all expressed assent, and he went on, “Then it were, I think, good that I tell you something of the kind of enemy with which we have to deal. I shall then make known to you something of the history of this man, which has been ascertained for me. So we then can discuss how we shall act, and can take our measure according.

“There are such beings as vampires, some of us have evidence that they exist. Even had we not the proof of our own unhappy experience, the teachings and the records of the past give proof enough for sane peoples. I admit that at the first I was sceptic. Were it not that through long years I have trained myself to keep an open mind, I could not have believed until such time as that fact thunder on my ear. ‘See! See! I prove, I prove.’ Alas! Had I known at first what now I know, nay, had I even guess at him, one so precious life had been spared to many of us who did love her. But that is gone, and we must so work, that other poor souls perish not, whilst we can save. The nosferatu do not die like the bee when he sting once. He is only stronger, and being stronger, have yet more power to work evil. This vampire which is amongst us is of himself so strong in person as twenty men, he is of cunning more than mortal, for his cunning be the growth of ages, he have still the aids of necromancy, which is, as his etymology imply, the divination by the dead, and all the dead that he can come nigh to are for him at command; he is brute, and more than brute; he is devil in callous, and the heart of him is not; he can, within his range, direct the elements, the storm, the fog, the thunder; he can command all the meaner things, the rat, and the owl, and the bat, the moth, and the fox, and the wolf, he can grow and become small; and he can at times vanish and come unknown. How then are we to begin our strike to destroy him? How shall we find his where, and having found it, how can we destroy? My friends, this is much, it is a terrible task that we undertake, and there may be consequence to make the brave shudder. For if we fail in this our fight he must surely win, and then where end we? Life is nothings, I heed him not. But to fail here, is not mere life or death. It is that we become as him, that we henceforward become foul things of the night like him, without heart or conscience, preying on the bodies and the souls of those we love best. To us forever are the gates of heaven shut, for who shall open them to us again? We go on for all time abhorred by all, a blot on the face of God's sunshine, an arrow in the side of Him who died for man. But we are face to face with duty, and in such case must we shrink? For me, I say no, but then I am old, and life, with his sunshine, his fair places, his song of birds, his music and his love, lie far behind. You others are young. Some have seen sorrow, but there are fair days yet in store. What say you?"

Whilst he was speaking, Jonathan had taken my hand. I feared, oh so much, that the appalling nature of our danger was overcoming him when I saw his hand stretch out, but it was life to me to feel its touch, so strong, so self reliant, so resolute. A brave man's hand can speak for itself, it does not even need a woman's love to hear its music.

When the Professor had done speaking my husband looked in my eyes, and I in his, there was no need for speaking between us.

"I answer for Mina and myself," he said.

"Count me in, Professor," said Mr. Quincey Morris, laconically as usual.

"I am with you," said Lord Godalming, "for Lucy's sake, if for no other reason.”

Dr. Seward simply nodded.

The Professor stood up and, after laying his golden crucifix on the table, held out his hand on either side. I took his right hand, and Lord Godalming his left, Jonathan held my right with his left and stretched across to Mr. Morris. So as we all took hands our solemn compact was made. I felt my heart icy cold, but it did not even occur to me to draw back. We resumed our places, and Dr. Van Helsing went on with a sort of cheerfulness which showed that the serious work had begun. It was to be taken as gravely, and in as businesslike a way, as any other transaction of life.

“Well, you know what we have to contend against, but we too, are not without strength. We have on our side power of combination, a power denied to the vampire kind, we have sources of science, we are free to act and think, and the hours of the day and the night are ours equally. In fact, so far as our powers extend, they are unfettered, and we are free to use them. We have self devotion in a cause and an end to achieve which is not a selfish one. These things are much.

“Now let us see how far the general powers arrayed against us are restrict, and how the individual cannot. In fine, let us consider the limitations of the vampire in general, and of this one in particular.

“All we have to go upon are traditions and superstitions. These do not at the first appear much, when the matter is one of life and death, nay of more than either life or death. Yet must we be satisfied, in the first place because we have to be, no other means is at our control, and secondly, because, after all these things, tradition and superstition, are everything. Does not the belief in vampires rest for others, though not, alas! for us, on them? A year ago which of us would have received such a possibility, in the midst of our scientific, sceptical, matter-of-fact nineteenth century? We even scouted a belief that we saw justified under our very eyes. Take it, then, that the vampire, and the belief in his limitations and his cure, rest for the moment on the same base. For, let me tell you, he is known everywhere that men have been. In old Greece, in old Rome, he flourish in Germany all over, in France, in India, even in the Chermosese, and in China, so far from us in all ways, there even is he, and the peoples for him at this day. He have follow the wake of the berserker Icelander, the devil-begotten Hun, the Slav, the Saxon, the Magyar.

"So far, then, we have all we may act upon, and let me tell you that very much of the beliefs are justified by what we have seen in our own so unhappy experience. The vampire live on, and cannot die by mere passing of the time, he can flourish when that he can fatten on the blood of the living. Even more, we have seen amongst us that he can even grow younger, that his vital faculties grow strenuous, and seem as though they refresh themselves when his special pabulum is plenty.

"But he cannot flourish without this diet, he eat not as others. Even friend Jonathan, who lived with him for weeks, did never see him eat, never! He throws no shadow, he make in the mirror no reflect, as again Jonathan observe. He has the strength of many of his hand, witness again Jonathan when he shut the door against the wolves, and when he help him from the diligence too. He can transform himself to wolf, as we gather from the ship arrival in Whitby, when he tear open the dog, he can be as bat, as Madam Mina saw him on the window at Whitby, and as friend John saw him fly from this so near house, and as my friend Quincey saw him at the window of Miss Lucy.

“He can come in mist which he create, that noble ship’s captain proved him of this, but, from what we know, the distance he can make this mist is limited, and it can only be round himself.

“He come on moonlight rays as elemental dust, as again Jonathan saw those sisters in the castle of Dracula. He become so small, we ourselves saw Miss Lucy, ere she was at peace, slip through a hairbreadth space at the tomb door. He can, when once he find his way, come out from anything or into anything, no matter how close it be bound or even fused up with fire, solder you call it. He can see in the dark, no small power this, in a world which is one half shut from the light. Ah, but hear me through.

“He can do all these things, yet he is not free. Nay, he is even more prisoner than the slave of the galley, than the madman in his cell. He cannot go where he lists, he who is not of nature has yet to obey some of nature’s laws, why we know not. He may not enter anywhere at the first, unless there be some one of the household who bid him to come, though afterwards he can come as he please. His power ceases, as does that of all evil things, at the coming of the day.

“Only at certain times can he have limited freedom. If he be not at the place whither he is bound, he can only change himself at noon or at exact sunrise or sunset. These things we are told, and in this record of ours we have proof by inference. Thus, whereas he can do as he will within his limit, when he have his earth-home, his coffin-home, his hell-home, the place unhallowed, as we saw when he went to the grave of the suicide at Whitby, still at other time he can only change when the time come. It is said, too, that he can only pass running water at the slack or the flood of the tide. Then there are things which so afflict him that he has no power, as the garlic that we know of, and as for things sacred, as this symbol, my crucifix, that was amongst us even now when we resolve, to them he is nothing, but in their presence he take his place far off and silent with respect. There are others, too, which I shall tell you of, lest in our seeking we may need them.

"The branch of wild rose on his coffin keep him that he move not from it, a sacred bullet fired into the coffin kill him so that he be true dead, and as for the stake through him, we know already of its peace, or the cut off head that giveth rest. We have seen it with our eyes.

"Thus when we find the habitation of this man-that-was, we can confine him to his coffin and destroy him, if we obey what we know. But he is clever. I have asked my friend Arminius, of Buda-Pesth University, to make his record, and from all the means that are, he tell me of what he has been. He must, indeed, have been that Voivode Dracula who won his name against the Turk, over the great river on the very frontier of Turkeyland. If it be so, then was he no common man, for in that time, and for centuries after, he was spoken of as the cleverest and the most cunning, as well as the bravest of the sons of the 'land beyond the forest.' That mighty brain and that iron resolution went with him to his grave, and are even now arrayed against us. The Draculas were, says Arminius, a great and noble race, though now and again were scions who were held by their coevals to have had dealings with the Evil One. They learned his secrets in the Scholomance, amongst the mountains over Lake Hermanstadt, where the devil claims the tenth scholar as his due. In the records are such words as 'stregoica' witch, 'ordog' and 'pokol' Satan and hell, and in one manuscript this very Dracula is spoken of as 'wampyr,' which we all understand too well. There have been from the loins of this very one great men and good women, and their graves make sacred the earth where alone this foulness can dwell. For it is not the least of its terrors that this evil thing is rooted deep in all good, in soil barren of holy memories it cannot rest."

Whilst they were talking Mr. Morris was looking steadily at the window, and he now got up quietly, and went out of the room. There was a little pause, and then the Professor went on.

"And now we must settle what we do. We have here much data, and we must proceed to lay out our campaign. We know from the inquiry of Jonathan that from the castle to Whitby came fifty boxes of earth, all of which were delivered at Carfax, we also know that at least some of these boxes have been removed. It seems to me, that our first step should be to ascertain whether all the rest remain in the house beyond that wall where we look today, or whether any more have been removed. If the latter, we must trace…"

Here we were interrupted in a very startling way. Outside the house came the sound of a pistol shot, the glass of the window was shattered with a bullet, which ricochetting from the top of the embrasure, struck the far wall of the room. I am afraid I am at heart a coward, for I shrieked out. The men all jumped to their feet, Lord Godalming flew over to the window and threw up the sash. As he did so we heard Mr. Morris' voice without, "Sorry! I fear I have alarmed you. I shall come in and tell you about it."

A minute later he came in and said, "It was an idiotic thing of me to do, and I ask your pardon, Mrs. Harker, most sincerely, I fear I must have frightened you terribly. But the fact is that whilst the Professor was talking there came a big bat and sat on the window sill. I have got such a horror of the damned brutes from recent events that I cannot stand them, and I went out to have a shot, as I have been doing of late of evenings, whenever I have seen one. You used to laugh at me for it then, Art."

"Did you hit it?" asked Dr. Van Helsing.

"I don't know, I fancy not, for it flew away into the wood." Without saying any more he took his seat, and the Professor began to resume his statement.

"We must trace each of these boxes, and when we are ready, we must either capture or kill this monster in his lair, or we must, so to speak, sterilise the earth, so that no more he can seek safety in it. Thus in the end we may find him in his form of man between the hours of noon and sunset, and so engage with him when he is at his most weak.

"And now for you, Madam Mina, this night is the end until all be well. You are too precious to us to have such risk. When we part tonight, you no more must question. We shall tell you all in good time. We are men and are able to bear, but you must be our star and our hope, and we shall act all the more free that you are not in the danger, such as we are."

All the men, even Jonathan, seemed relieved, but it did not seem to me good that they should brave danger and, perhaps lessen their safety, strength being the best safety, through care of me, but their minds were made up, and though it was a bitter pill for me to swallow, I could say nothing, save to accept their chivalrous care of me.

Mr. Morris resumed the discussion, "As there is no time to lose, I vote we have a look at his house right now. Time is everything with him, and swift action on our part may save another victim."

I own that my heart began to fail me when the time for action came so close, but I did not say anything, for I had a greater fear that if I appeared as a drag or a hindrance to their work, they might even leave me out of their counsels altogether. They have now gone off to

Carfax, with means to get into the house.

Manlike, they had told me to go to bed and sleep, as if a woman can sleep when those she loves are in danger! I shall lie down, and pretend to sleep, lest Jonathan have added anxiety about me when he returns.

DR. SEWARD'S DIARY

1 October, 4 A.M. — Just as we were about to leave the house, an urgent message was brought to me from Renfield to know if I would see him at once, as he had something of the utmost importance to say to me. I told the messenger to say that I would attend to his wishes in the morning, I was busy just at the moment.

The attendant added, "He seems very importunate, sir. I have never seen him so eager. I don't know but what, if you don't see him soon, he will have one of his violent fits." I knew the man would not have said this without some cause, so I said, "All right, I'll go now," and I asked the others to wait a few minutes for me, as I had to go and see my patient.

"Take me with you, friend John," said the Professor. "His case in your diary interest me much, and it had bearing, too, now and again on our case. I should much like to see him, and especial when his mind is disturbed."

"May I come also?" asked Lord Godalming.

"Me too?" said Quincey Morris. "May I come?" said Harker. I nodded, and we all went down the passage together.

We found him in a state of considerable excitement, but far more rational in his speech and manner than I had ever seen him. There was an unusual understanding of himself, which was unlike anything

I had ever met with in a lunatic, and he took it for granted that his reasons would prevail with others entirely sane. We all five went into the room, but none of the others at first said anything. His request was that I would at once release him from the asylum and send him home. This he backed up with arguments regarding his complete recovery, and adduced his own existing sanity.

"I appeal to your friends," he said, "they will, perhaps, not mind sitting in judgement on my case. By the way, you have not introduced me."

I was so much astonished, that the oddness of introducing a madman in an asylum did not strike me at the moment, and besides, there was a certain dignity in the man's manner, so much of the habit of equality, that I at once made the introduction, "Lord Godalming, Professor Van Helsing, Mr. Quincey Morris, of Texas, Mr. Jonathan Harker, Mr. Renfield."

He shook hands with each of them, saying in turn, "Lord Godalming, I had the honour of seconding your father at the Windham; I grieve to know, by your holding the title, that he is no more. He was a man loved and honoured by all who knew him, and in his youth was, I have heard, the inventor of a burnt rum punch, much patronised on Derby night. Mr. Morris, you should be proud of your great state. Its reception into the Union was a precedent which may have far-reaching effects hereafter, when the Pole and the Tropics may hold alliance to the Stars and Stripes. The power of Treaty may yet prove a vast engine of enlargement, when the Monroe doctrine takes its true place as a political fable. What shall any man say of his pleasure at meeting Van Helsing? Sir, I make no apology for dropping all forms of conventional prefix. When an individual has revolutionised therapeutics by his discovery of the continuous evolution of brain matter, conventional forms are unfitting, since they would seem to limit him to one of a class. You, gentlemen, who by nationality, by heredity, or by the possession of natural gifts, are fitted to hold your respective places in the moving world, I take to witness that I am as sane as at least the majority of men who are in full possession of their liberties. And I am sure that you, Dr. Seward, humanitarian and medico-jurist as well as scientist, will deem it a moral duty to deal with me as one to be considered as under exceptional circumstances." He made this last appeal with a courtly air of conviction which was not without its own charm.

I think we were all staggered. For my own part, I was under the conviction, despite my knowledge of the man's character and history, that his reason had been restored, and I felt under a strong impulse to tell him that I was satisfied as to his sanity, and would see about the necessary formalities for his release in the morning. I thought it better to wait, however, before making so grave a statement, for of old I knew the sudden changes to which this particular patient was liable. So I contented myself with making a general statement that he appeared to be improving very rapidly, that I would have a longer chat with him in the morning, and would then see what I could do in the direction of meeting his wishes.

This did not at all satisfy him, for he said quickly, "But I fear, Dr. Seward, that you hardly apprehend my wish. I desire to go at once, here, now, this very hour, this very moment, if I may. Time presses, and in our implied agreement with the old scytheman it is of the essence of the contract. I am sure it is only necessary to put before so admirable a practitioner as Dr. Seward so simple, yet so momentous a wish, to ensure its fulfilment."

He looked at me keenly, and seeing the negative in my face, turned to the others, and scrutinised them closely. Not meeting any sufficient response, he went on, “Is it possible that I have erred in my supposition?”

“You have,” I said frankly, but at the same time, as I felt, brutally.

There was a considerable pause, and then he said slowly, “Then I suppose I must only shift my ground of request. Let me ask for this concession, boon, privilege, what you will. I am content to implore in such a case, not on personal grounds, but for the sake of others. I am not at liberty to give you the whole of my reasons, but you may, I assure you, take it from me that they are good ones, sound and unselfish, and spring from the highest sense of duty.

“Could you look, sir, into my heart, you would approve to the full the sentiments which animate me. Nay, more, you would count me amongst the best and truest of your friends.”

Again he looked at us all keenly. I had a growing conviction that this sudden change of his entire intellectual method was but yet another phase of his madness, and so determined to let him go on a little longer, knowing from experience that he would, like all lunatics, give himself away in the end. Van Helsing was gazing at him with a look of utmost intensity, his bushy eyebrows almost meeting with the fixed concentration of his look. He said to Renfield in a tone which did not surprise me at the time, but only when I thought of it afterwards, for it was as of one addressing an equal, “Can you not tell frankly your real reason for wishing to be free tonight? I will undertake that if you will satisfy even me, a stranger, without prejudice, and with the habit of keeping an open mind, Dr. Seward will give you, at his own risk and on his own responsibility, the privilege you seek.”

He shook his head sadly, and with a look of poignant regret on his face. The Professor went on, “Come, sir, bethink yourself. You claim the privilege of reason in the highest degree, since you seek to impress us with your complete reasonableness. You do this, whose sanity we have reason to doubt, since you are not yet released from medical treatment for this very defect. If you will not help us in our effort to choose the wisest course, how can we perform the duty which you yourself put upon us? Be wise, and help us, and if we can we shall aid you to achieve your wish.”

He still shook his head as he said, “Dr. Van Helsing, I have nothing to say. Your argument is complete, and if I were free to speak I should not hesitate a moment, but I am not my own master in the matter. I can only ask you to trust me. If I am refused, the responsibility does not rest with me.”

I thought it was now time to end the scene, which was becoming too comically grave, so I went towards the door, simply saying, “Come, my friends, we have work to do. Goodnight.”

As, however, I got near the door, a new change came over the patient. He moved towards me so quickly that for the moment I feared that he was about to make another homicidal attack. My fears, however, were groundless, for he held up his two hands imploringly, and made his petition in a moving manner. As he saw that the very excess of his emotion was militating against him, by restoring us more to our old relations, he became still more demonstrative. I glanced at Van Helsing, and saw my conviction reflected in his eyes, so I became a little more fixed in my manner, if not more stern, and motioned to him that his efforts were unavailing. I had previously seen something of the same constantly growing excitement in him when he had to make some request of which at the time he had thought much, such for instance, as when he wanted a cat, and I was prepared to see the collapse into the same sullen acquiescence on this occasion.

My expectation was not realised, for when he found that his appeal would not be successful, he got into quite a frantic condition. He threw himself on his knees, and held up his hands, wringing them in plaintive supplication, and poured forth a torrent of entreaty, with the tears rolling down his cheeks, and his whole face and form expressive of the deepest emotion.

"Let me entreat you, Dr. Seward, oh, let me implore you, to let me out of this house at once. Send me away how you will and where you will, send keepers with me with whips and chains, let them take me in a strait waistcoat, manacled and leg-ironed, even to gaol, but let me go out of this. You don't know what you do by keeping me here. I am speaking from the depths of my heart, of my very soul. You don't know whom you wrong, or how, and I may not tell. Woe is me! I may not tell. By all you hold sacred, by all you hold dear, by your love that is lost, by your hope that lives, for the sake of the Almighty, take me out of this and save my soul from guilt! Can't you hear me, man? Can't you understand? Will you never learn? Don't you know that I am sane and earnest now, that I am no lunatic in a mad fit, but a sane man fighting for his soul? Oh, hear me! Hear me! Let me go, let me go, let me go!"

I thought that the longer this went on the wilder he would get, and so would bring on a fit, so I took him by the hand and raised him up.

"Come," I said sternly, "no more of this, we have had quite enough already. Get to your bed and try to behave more discreetly."

He suddenly stopped and looked at me intently for several moments. Then, without a word, he rose and moving over, sat down on the side of the bed. The collapse had come, as on former occasions, just as I had expected.

When I was leaving the room, last of our party, he said to me in a quiet, well-bred voice, “You will, I trust, Dr. Seward, do me the justice to bear in mind, later on, that I did what I could to convince you tonight.”

CHAPTER 19

JONATHAN HARKER'S JOURNAL

1 October, 5 A.M. — I went with the party to the search with an easy mind, for I think I never saw Mina so absolutely strong and well. I am so glad that she consented to hold back and let us men do the work. Somehow, it was a dread to me that she was in this fearful business at all, but now that her work is done, and that it is due to her energy and brains and foresight that the whole story is put together in such a way that every point tells, she may well feel that her part is finished, and that she can henceforth leave the rest to us. We were, I think, all a little upset by the scene with Mr. Renfield. When we came away from his room we were silent till we got back to the study.

Then Mr. Morris said to Dr. Seward, "Say, Jack, if that man wasn't attempting a bluff, he is about the sanest lunatic I ever saw. I'm not sure, but I believe that he had some serious purpose, and if he had, it was pretty rough on him not to get a chance."

Lord Godalming and I were silent, but Dr. Van Helsing added, "Friend John, you know more lunatics than I do, and I'm glad of it, for I fear that if it had been to me to decide I would before that last hysterical outburst have given him free. But we live and learn, and in our present task we must take no chance, as my friend Quincey would say. All is best as they are."

Dr. Seward seemed to answer them both in a dreamy kind of way, "I don't know but that I agree with you. If that man had been an ordinary lunatic I would have taken my chance of trusting him, but he seems so mixed up with the Count in an indexy kind of way that I am afraid of doing anything wrong by helping his fads. I can’t forget how he prayed with almost equal fervor for a cat, and then tried to tear my throat out with his teeth. Besides, he called the Count ‘lord and master’, and he may want to get out to help him in some diabolical way. That horrid thing has the wolves and the rats and his own kind to help him, so I suppose he isn’t above trying to use a respectable lunatic. He certainly did seem earnest, though. I only hope we have done what is best. These things, in conjunction with the wild work we have in hand, help to unnerve a man.”

The Professor stepped over, and laying his hand on his shoulder, said in his grave, kindly way, “Friend John, have no fear. We are trying to do our duty in a very sad and terrible case, we can only do as we deem best. What else have we to hope for, except the pity of the good God?”

Lord Godalming had slipped away for a few minutes, but now he returned. He held up a little silver whistle as he remarked, “That old place may be full of rats, and if so, I’ve got an antidote on call.”

Having passed the wall, we took our way to the house, taking care to keep in the shadows of the trees on the lawn when the moonlight shone out. When we got to the porch the Professor opened his bag and took out a lot of things, which he laid on the step, sorting them into four little groups, evidently one for each. Then he spoke.

“My friends, we are going into a terrible danger, and we need arms of many kinds. Our enemy is not merely spiritual. Remember that he has the strength of twenty men, and that, though our necks or our windpipes are of the common kind, and therefore breakable or crushable, his are not amenable to mere strength. A stronger man, or a body of men more strong in all than him, can at certain times hold him, but they cannot hurt him as we can be hurt by him. We must, therefore, guard ourselves from his touch. Keep this near your heart." As he spoke he lifted a little silver crucifix and held it out to me, I being nearest to him, "put these flowers round your neck," here he handed to me a wreath of withered garlic blossoms, "for other enemies more mundane, this revolver and this knife, and for aid in all, these so small electric lamps, which you can fasten to your breast, and for all, and above all at the last, this, which we must not desecrate needless."

This was a portion of Sacred Wafer, which he put in an envelope and handed to me. Each of the others was similarly equipped.

"Now," he said, "friend John, where are the skeleton keys? If so that we can open the door, we need not break house by the window, as before at Miss Lucy's."

Dr. Seward tried one or two skeleton keys, his mechanical dexterity as a surgeon standing him in good stead. Presently he got one to suit, after a little play back and forward the bolt yielded, and with a rusty clang, shot back. We pressed on the door, the rusty hinges creaked, and it slowly opened. It was startlingly like the image conveyed to me in Dr. Seward's diary of the opening of Miss Westenra's tomb, I fancy that the same idea seemed to strike the others, for with one accord they shrank back. The Professor was the first to move forward, and stepped into the open door.

"In manus tuas, Domine!" he said, crossing himself as he passed over the threshold. We closed the door behind us, lest when we should have lit our lamps we should possibly attract attention from the road. The Professor carefully tried the lock, lest we might not be able to open it from within should we be in a hurry making our exit. Then we all lit our lamps and proceeded on our search.

The light from the tiny lamps fell in all sorts of odd forms, as the rays crossed each other, or the opacity of our bodies threw great shadows. I could not for my life get away from the feeling that there was someone else amongst us. I suppose it was the recollection, so powerfully brought home to me by the grim surroundings, of that terrible experience in Transylvania. I think the feeling was common to us all, for I noticed that the others kept looking over their shoulders at every sound and every new shadow, just as I felt myself doing.

The whole place was thick with dust. The floor was seemingly inches deep, except where there were recent footsteps, in which on holding down my lamp I could see marks of hobnails where the dust was cracked. The walls were fluffy and heavy with dust, and in the corners were masses of spider's webs, whereon the dust had gathered till they looked like old tattered rags as the weight had torn them partly down. On a table in the hall was a great bunch of keys, with a time-yellowed label on each. They had been used several times, for on the table were several similar rents in the blanket of dust, similar to that exposed when the Professor lifted them.

He turned to me and said, "You know this place, Jonathan. You have copied maps of it, and you know it at least more than we do. Which is the way to the chapel?"

I had an idea of its direction, though on my former visit I had not been able to get admission to it, so I led the way, and after a few wrong turnings found myself opposite a low, arched oaken door, ribbed with iron bands.

"This is the spot," said the Professor as he turned his lamp on a small map of the house, copied from the file of my original correspondence regarding the purchase. With a little trouble we found the key on the bunch and opened the door. We were prepared for some unpleasantness, for as we were opening the door a faint, malodorous air seemed to exhale through the gaps, but none of us ever expected such an odour as we encountered. None of the others had met the Count at all at close quarters, and when I had seen him he was either in the fasting stage of his existence in his rooms or, when he was bloated with fresh blood, in a ruined building open to the air, but here the place was small and close, and the long disuse had made the air stagnant and foul. There was an earthy smell, as of some dry miasma, which came through the fouler air. But as to the odour itself, how shall I describe it? It was not alone that it was composed of all the ills of mortality and with the pungent, acrid smell of blood, but it seemed as though corruption had become itself corrupt. Faugh! It sickens me to think of it. Every breath exhaled by that monster seemed to have clung to the place and intensified its loathsomeness.

Under ordinary circumstances such a stench would have brought our enterprise to an end, but this was no ordinary case, and the high and terrible purpose in which we were involved gave us a strength which rose above merely physical considerations. After the involuntary shrinking consequent on the first nauseous whiff, we one and all set about our work as though that loathsome place were a garden of roses.

We made an accurate examination of the place, the Professor saying as we began, “The first thing is to see how many of the boxes are left, we must then examine every hole and corner and cranny and see if we cannot get some clue as to what has become of the rest.”

A glance was sufficient to show how many remained, for the great earth chests were bulky, and there was no mistaking them.

There were only twenty-nine left out of the fifty! Once I got a fright, for, seeing Lord Godalming suddenly turn and look out of the vaulted door into the dark passage beyond, I looked too, and for an instant my heart stood still. Somewhere, looking out from the shadow, I seemed to see the high lights of the Count's evil face, the ridge of the nose, the red eyes, the red lips, the awful pallor. It was only for a moment, for, as Lord Godalming said, "I thought I saw a face, but it was only the shadows," and resumed his inquiry, I turned my lamp in the direction, and stepped into the passage. There was no sign of anyone, and as there were no corners, no doors, no aperture of any kind, but only the solid walls of the passage, there could be no hiding place even for him. I took it that fear had helped imagination, and said nothing.

A few minutes later I saw Morris step suddenly back from a corner, which he was examining. We all followed his movements with our eyes, for undoubtedly some nervousness was growing on us, and we saw a whole mass of phosphorescence, which twinkled like stars. We all instinctively drew back. The whole place was becoming alive with rats.

For a moment or two we stood appalled, all save Lord Godalming, who was seemingly prepared for such an emergency. Rushing over to the great iron-bound oaken door, which Dr. Seward had described from the outside, and which I had seen myself, he turned the key in the lock, drew the huge bolts, and swung the door open. Then, taking his little silver whistle from his pocket, he blew a low, shrill call. It was answered from behind Dr. Seward's house by the yelping of dogs, and after about a minute three terriers came dashing round the corner of the house. Unconsciously we had all moved towards the door, and as we moved I noticed that the dust had been much disturbed. The boxes which had been taken out had been brought this way. But even in the minute that had elapsed the number of the rats had vastly increased. They seemed to swarm over the place all at once, till the lamplight, shining on their moving dark bodies and glittering, baleful eyes, made the place look like a bank of earth set with fireflies. The dogs dashed on, but at the threshold suddenly stopped and snarled, and then, simultaneously lifting their noses, began to howl in most lugubrious fashion. The rats were multiplying in thousands, and we moved out.

Lord Godalming lifted one of the dogs, and carrying him in, placed him on the floor. The instant his feet touched the ground he seemed to recover his courage, and rushed at his natural enemies. They fled before him so fast that before he had shaken the life out of a score, the other dogs, who had by now been lifted in the same manner, had but small prey ere the whole mass had vanished.

With their going it seemed as if some evil presence had departed, for the dogs frisked about and barked merrily as they made sudden darts at their prostrate foes, and turned them over and over and tossed them in the air with vicious shakes. We all seemed to find our spirits rise. Whether it was the purifying of the deadly atmosphere by the opening of the chapel door, or the relief which we experienced by finding ourselves in the open I know not, but most certainly the shadow of dread seemed to slip from us like a robe, and the occasion of our coming lost something of its grim significance, though we did not slacken a whit in our resolution. We closed the outer door and barred and locked it, and bringing the dogs with us, began our search of the house. We found nothing throughout except dust in extraordinary proportions, and all untouched save for my own footsteps when I had made my first visit. Never once did the dogs exhibit any symptom of uneasiness, and even when we returned to the chapel they frisked about as though they had been rabbit hunting in a summer wood.

The morning was quickening in the east when we emerged from the front. Dr. Van Helsing had taken the key of the hall door from the bunch, and locked the door in orthodox fashion, putting the key into his pocket when he had done.

“So far,” he said, “our night has been eminently successful. No harm has come to us such as I feared might be and yet we have ascertained how many boxes are missing. More than all do I rejoice that this, our first, and perhaps our most difficult and dangerous, step has been accomplished without the bringing thereinto our most sweet Madam Mina or troubling her waking or sleeping thoughts with sights and sounds and smells of horror which she might never forget. One lesson, too, we have learned, if it be allowable to argue a particulari, that the brute beasts which are to the Count’s command are yet themselves not amenable to his spiritual power, for look, these rats that would come to his call, just as from his castle top he summon the wolves to your going and to that poor mother’s cry, though they come to him, they run pell-mell from the so little dogs of my friend Arthur. We have other matters before us, other dangers, other fears, and that monster… He has not used his power over the brute world for the only or the last time tonight. So be it that he has gone elsewhere. Good! It has given us opportunity to cry ‘check’ in some ways in this chess game, which we play for the stake of human souls. And now let us go home. The dawn is close at hand, and we have reason to be content with our first night’s work. It may be ordained that we have many nights and days to follow, if full of peril, but we must go on, and from no danger shall we shrink.”

The house was silent when we got back, save for some poor creature who was screaming away in one of the distant wards, and a low, moaning sound from Renfield's room. The poor wretch was doubtless torturing himself, after the manner of the insane, with needless thoughts of pain.

I came tiptoe into our own room, and found Mina asleep, breathing so softly that I had to put my ear down to hear it. She looks paler than usual. I hope the meeting tonight has not upset her. I am truly thankful that she is to be left out of our future work, and even of our deliberations. It is too great a strain for a woman to bear. I did not think so at first, but I know better now. Therefore I am glad that it is settled. There may be things which would frighten her to hear, and yet to conceal them from her might be worse than to tell her if once she suspected that there was any concealment. Henceforth our work is to be a sealed book to her, till at least such time as we can tell her that all is finished, and the earth free from a monster of the nether world. I daresay it will be difficult to begin to keep silence after such confidence as ours, but I must be resolute, and tomorrow I shall keep dark over tonight's doings, and shall refuse to speak of anything that has happened. I rest on the sofa, so as not to disturb her.

1 October, later. — I suppose it was natural that we should have all overslept ourselves, for the day was a busy one, and the night had no rest at all. Even Mina must have felt its exhaustion, for though I slept till the sun was high, I was awake before her, and had to call two or three times before she awoke. Indeed, she was so sound asleep that for a few seconds she did not recognise me, but looked at me with a sort of blank terror, as one looks who has been waked out of a bad dream. She complained a little of being tired, and I let her

rest till later in the day. We now know of twenty-one boxes having been removed, and if it be that several were taken in any of these removals we may be able to trace them all. Such will, of course, immensely simplify our labor, and the sooner the matter is attended to the better. I shall look up Thomas Snelling today.

DR. SEWARD'S DIARY

1 October. — It was towards noon when I was awakened by the Professor walking into my room. He was more jolly and cheerful than usual, and it is quite evident that last night's work has helped to take some of the brooding weight off his mind.

After going over the adventure of the night he suddenly said, "Your patient interests me much. May it be that with you I visit him this morning? Or if that you are too occupy, I can go alone if it may be. It is a new experience to me to find a lunatic who talk philosophy, and reason so sound."

I had some work to do which pressed, so I told him that if he would go alone I would be glad, as then I should not have to keep him waiting, so I called an attendant and gave him the necessary instructions. Before the Professor left the room I cautioned him against getting any false impression from my patient.

"But," he answered, "I want him to talk of himself and of his delusion as to consuming live things. He said to Madam Mina, as I see in your diary of yesterday, that he had once had such a belief. Why do you smile, friend John?"

"Excuse me," I said, "but the answer is here." I laid my hand on the typewritten matter. "When our sane and learned lunatic made that very statement of how he used to consume life, his mouth was actually nauseous with the flies and spiders which he had eaten just before Mrs. Harker entered the room.”

Van Helsing smiled in turn. “Good!” he said. “Your memory is true, friend John. I should have remembered. And yet it is this very obliquity of thought and memory which makes mental disease such a fascinating study. Perhaps I may gain more knowledge out of the folly of this madman than I shall from the teaching of the most wise. Who knows?”

I went on with my work, and before long was through that in hand. It seemed that the time had been very short indeed, but there was Van Helsing back in the study.

“Do I interrupt?” he asked politely as he stood at the door.

“Not at all,” I answered. “Come in. My work is finished, and I am free. I can go with you now, if you like.”

“It is needless, I have seen him!”

“Well?”

“I fear that he does not appraise me at much. Our interview was short. When I entered his room he was sitting on a stool in the centre, with his elbows on his knees, and his face was the picture of sullen discontent. I spoke to him as cheerfully as I could, and with such a measure of respect as I could assume. He made no reply whatever. ‘Don’t you know me?’ I asked. His answer was not reassuring: ‘I know you well enough; you are the old fool Van Helsing. I wish you would take yourself and your idiotic brain theories somewhere else. Damn all thick-headed Dutchmen!’ Not a word more would he say, but sat in his implacable sullenness as indifferent to me as though I had not been in the room at all. Thus departed for this time my chance of much learning from this so clever lunatic, so I shall go, if I may, and cheer myself with a few happy words with that sweet soul Madam Mina. Friend John, it does rejoice me unspeakable that she is no more to be pained, no more to be worried with our terrible things. Though we shall much miss her help, it is better so."

"I agree with you with all my heart," I answered earnestly, for I did not want him to weaken in this matter. "Mrs. Harker is better out of it. Things are quite bad enough for us, all men of the world, and who have been in many tight places in our time, but it is no place for a woman, and if she had remained in touch with the affair, it would in time infallibly have wrecked her."

So Van Helsing has gone to confer with Mrs. Harker and Harker, Quincey and Art are all out following up the clues as to the earth boxes. I shall finish my round of work and we shall meet tonight.

MINA HARKER'S JOURNAL

1 October. — It is strange to me to be kept in the dark as I am today, after Jonathan's full confidence for so many years, to see him manifestly avoid certain matters, and those the most vital of all. This morning I slept late after the fatigues of yesterday, and though Jonathan was late too, he was the earlier. He spoke to me before he went out, never more sweetly or tenderly, but he never mentioned a word of what had happened in the visit to the Count's house. And yet he must have known how terribly anxious I was. Poor dear fellow! I suppose it must have distressed him even more than it did me. They all agreed that it was best that I should not be drawn further into this awful work, and I acquiesced. But to think that he keeps anything from me! And now I am crying like a silly fool, when I know it comes from my husband's great love and from the good, good wishes of those other strong men.

That has done me good. Well, some day Jonathan will tell me all. And lest it should ever be that he should think for a moment that I kept anything from him, I still keep my journal as usual. Then if he has feared of my trust I shall show it to him, with every thought of my heart put down for his dear eyes to read. I feel strangely sad and low-spirited today. I suppose it is the reaction from the terrible excitement.

Last night I went to bed when the men had gone, simply because they told me to. I didn't feel sleepy, and I did feel full of devouring anxiety. I kept thinking over everything that has been ever since Jonathan came to see me in London, and it all seems like a horrible tragedy, with fate pressing on relentlessly to some destined end. Everything that one does seems, no matter how right it may be, to bring on the very thing which is most to be deplored. If I hadn't gone to Whitby, perhaps poor dear Lucy would be with us now. She hadn't taken to visiting the churchyard till I came, and if she hadn't come there in the day time with me she wouldn't have walked in her sleep. And if she hadn't gone there at night and asleep, that monster couldn't have destroyed her as he did. Oh, why did I ever go to Whitby? There now, crying again! I wonder what has come over me today. I must hide it from Jonathan, for if he knew that I had been crying twice in one morning… I, who never cried on my own account, and whom he has never caused to shed a tear, the dear fellow would fret his heart out. I shall put a bold face on, and if I do feel weepy, he shall never see it. I suppose it is just one of the lessons that we poor women have to learn…

I can't quite remember how I fell asleep last night. I remember hearing the sudden barking of the dogs and a lot of queer sounds, like praying on a very tumultuous scale, from Mr. Renfield's room, which is somewhere under this. And then there was silence over everything, silence so profound that it startled me, and I got up and looked out of the window. All was dark and silent, the black shadows thrown by the moonlight seeming full of a silent mystery of their own. Not a thing seemed to be stirring, but all to be grim and fixed as death or fate, so that a thin streak of white mist, that crept with almost imperceptible slowness across the grass towards the house, seemed to have a sentience and a vitality of its own. I think that the digression of my thoughts must have done me good, for when I got back to bed I found a lethargy creeping over me. I lay a while, but could not quite sleep, so I got out and looked out of the window again. The mist was spreading, and was now close up to the house, so that I could see it lying thick against the wall, as though it were stealing up to the windows. The poor man was more loud than ever, and though I could not distinguish a word he said, I could in some way recognise in his tones some passionate entreaty on his part. Then there was the sound of a struggle, and I knew that the attendants were dealing with him. I was so frightened that I crept into bed, and pulled the clothes over my head, putting my fingers in my ears. I was not then a bit sleepy, at least so I thought, but I must have fallen asleep, for except dreams, I do not remember anything until the morning, when Jonathan woke me. I think that it took me an effort and a little time to realise where I was, and that it was Jonathan who was bending over me. My dream was very peculiar, and was almost typical of the way that waking thoughts become merged in, or continued in, dreams.

I thought that I was asleep, and waiting for Jonathan to come back. I was very anxious about him, and I was powerless to act, my feet, and my hands, and my brain were weighted, so that nothing could proceed at the usual pace. And so I slept uneasily and thought. Then it began to dawn upon me that the air was heavy, and dank, and cold. I put back the clothes from my face, and found, to my surprise, that all was dim around. The gaslight which I had left lit for Jonathan, but turned down, came only like a tiny red spark through the fog, which had evidently grown thicker and poured into the room. Then it occurred to me that I had shut the window before I had come to bed. I would have got out to make certain on the point, but some leaden lethargy seemed to chain my limbs and even my will. I lay still and endured, that was all. I closed my eyes, but could still see through my eyelids. (It is wonderful what tricks our dreams play us, and how conveniently we can imagine.) The mist grew thicker and thicker and I could see now how it came in, for I could see it like smoke, or with the white energy of boiling water, pouring in, not through the window, but through the joinings of the door. It got thicker and thicker, till it seemed as if it became concentrated into a sort of pillar of cloud in the room, through the top of which I could see the light of the gas shining like a red eye. Things began to whirl through my brain just as the cloudy column was now whirling in the room, and through it all came the scriptural words "a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night." Was it indeed such spiritual guidance that was coming to me in my sleep? But the pillar was composed of both the day and the night guiding, for the fire was in the red eye, which at the thought got a new fascination for me, till, as I looked, the fire divided, and seemed to shine on me through the fog like two red eyes, such as Lucy told me of in her momentary mental wandering when, on the cliff, the dying sunlight struck the windows of St. Mary's Church. Suddenly the horror burst upon me that it was thus that Jonathan had seen those awful women growing into reality through the whirling mist in the moonlight, and in my dream I must have fainted, for all became black darkness. The last conscious effort which imagination made was to show me a livid white face bending over me out of the mist.

I must be careful of such dreams, for they would unseat one's reason if there were too much of them. I would get Dr. Van Helsing or Dr. Seward to prescribe something for me which would make me sleep, only that I fear to alarm them. Such a dream at the present time would become woven into their fears for me. Tonight I shall strive hard to sleep naturally. If I do not, I shall tomorrow night get them to give me a dose of chloral, that cannot hurt me for once, and it will give me a good night's sleep. Last night tired me more than if I had not slept at all.

2 October 10 P.M. — Last night I slept, but did not dream. I must have slept soundly, for I was not waked by Jonathan coming to bed, but the sleep has not refreshed me, for today I feel terribly weak and spiritless. I spent all yesterday trying to read, or lying down dozing. In the afternoon, Mr. Renfield asked if he might see me. Poor man, he was very gentle, and when I came away he kissed my hand and bade God bless me. Some way it affected me much. I am crying when I think of him. This is a new weakness, of which I must be careful. Jonathan would be miserable if he knew I had been crying. He and the others were out till dinner time, and they all came in tired. I did what I could to brighten them up, and I suppose that the effort did me good, for I forgot how tired I was. After dinner they sent me to bed, and all went off to smoke together, as they said, but I knew that they wanted to tell each other of what had occurred to each during the day. I could see from Jonathan's manner that he had something important to communicate. I was not so sleepy as I should have been, so before they went I asked Dr. Seward to give me a little

opiate of some kind, as I had not slept well the night before. He very kindly made me up a sleeping draught, which he gave to me, telling me that it would do me no harm, as it was very mild… I have taken it, and am waiting for sleep, which still keeps aloof. I hope I have not done wrong, for as sleep begins to flirt with me, a new fear comes: that I may have been foolish in thus depriving myself of the power of waking. I might want it. Here comes sleep. Goodnight.

CHAPTER 20

JONATHAN HARKER'S JOURNAL

1 October, evening. — I found Thomas Snelling in his house at Bethnal Green, but unhappily he was not in a condition to remember anything. The very prospect of beer which my expected coming had opened to him had proved too much, and he had begun too early on his expected debauch. I learned, however, from his wife, who seemed a decent, poor soul, that he was only the assistant of Smollet, who of the two mates was the responsible person. So off I drove to Walworth, and found Mr. Joseph Smollet at home and in his shirtsleeves, taking a late tea out of a saucer. He is a decent, intelligent fellow, distinctly a good, reliable type of workman, and with a headpiece of his own. He remembered all about the incident of the boxes, and from a wonderful dog-eared notebook, which he produced from some mysterious receptacle about the seat of his trousers, and which had hieroglyphical entries in thick, half-obliterated pencil, he gave me the destinations of the boxes. There were, he said, six in the cartload which he took from Carfax and left at 197 Chicksand Street, Mile End New Town, and another six which he deposited at Jamaica Lane, Bermondsey. If then the Count meant to scatter these ghastly refuges of his over London, these places were chosen as the first of delivery, so that later he might distribute more fully. The systematic manner in which this was done made me think that he could not mean to confine himself to two sides of London. He was now fixed on the far east on the northern shore, on the east of the southern shore, and on the south. The north and west were surely never meant to be left out of his diabolical scheme, let alone the City

itself and the very heart of fashionable London in the south-west and west. I went back to Smollet, and asked him if he could tell us if any other boxes had been taken from Carfax.

He replied, “Well guv’nor, you’ve treated me very ‘an’some”, I had given him half a sovereign, “an I’ll tell yer all I know. I heard a man by the name of Bloxam say four nights ago in the ‘Are an’ ‘Ounds, in Pincher’s Alley, as ‘ow he an’ his mate ‘ad ‘ad a rare dusty job in a old ‘ouse at Purfleet. There ain’t a many such jobs as this ‘ere, an’ I’m thinkin’ that maybe Sam Bloxam could tell ye summut.”

I asked if he could tell me where to find him. I told him that if he could get me the address it would be worth another half sovereign to him. So he gulped down the rest of his tea and stood up, saying that he was going to begin the search then and there.

At the door he stopped, and said, “Look ‘ere, guv’nor, there ain’t no sense in me a keepin’ you ‘ere. I may find Sam soon, or I mayn’t, but anyhow he ain’t like to be in a way to tell ye much tonight. Sam is a rare one when he starts on the booze. If you can give me a envelope with a stamp on it, and put yer address on it, I’ll find out where Sam is to be found and post it ye tonight. But ye’d better be up arter ‘im soon in the mornin’, never mind the booze the night afore.”

This was all practical, so one of the children went off with a penny to buy an envelope and a sheet of paper, and to keep the change. When she came back, I addressed the envelope and stamped it, and when Smollet had again faithfully promised to post the address when found, I took my way to home. We’re on the track anyhow. I am tired tonight, and I want to sleep. Mina is fast asleep, and looks a little too pale. Her eyes look as though she had been crying. Poor dear, I’ve no doubt it frets her to be kept in the dark, and it may make her doubly anxious about me and the others. But it is best as it is. It is better to be disappointed and worried in such a way now than to have her nerve broken. The doctors were quite right to insist on her being kept out of this dreadful business. I must be firm, for on me this particular burden of silence must rest. I shall not ever enter on the subject with her under any circumstances. Indeed, It may not be a hard task, after all, for she herself has become reticent on the subject, and has not spoken of the Count or his doings ever since we told her of our decision.

2 October, evening — A long and trying and exciting day. By the first post I got my directed envelope with a dirty scrap of paper enclosed, on which was written with a carpenter's pencil in a sprawling hand, "Sam Bloxam, Korkrans, 4 Poters Cort, Bartel Street, Walworth. Arsk for the depite."

I got the letter in bed, and rose without waking Mina. She looked heavy and sleepy and pale, and far from well. I determined not to wake her, but that when I should return from this new search, I would arrange for her going back to Exeter. I think she would be happier in our own home, with her daily tasks to interest her, than in being here amongst us and in ignorance. I only saw Dr. Seward for a moment, and told him where I was off to, promising to come back and tell the rest so soon as I should have found out anything. I drove to Walworth and found, with some difficulty, Potter's Court. Mr. Smollet's spelling misled me, as I asked for Poter's Court instead of Potter's Court. However, when I had found the court, I had no difficulty in discovering Corcoran's lodging house.

When I asked the man who came to the door for the "depite," he shook his head, and said, "I dunno 'im. There ain't no such a person ‘ere. I never ‘eard of ‘im in all my bloomin’ days. Don’t believe there ain’t nobody of that kind livin’ ‘ere or anywheres.”

I took out Smollet’s letter, and as I read it it seemed to me that the lesson of the spelling of the name of the court might guide me. “What are you?” I asked.

“I’m the depity,” he answered.

I saw at once that I was on the right track. Phonetic spelling had again misled me. A half crown tip put the deputy’s knowledge at my disposal, and I learned that Mr. Bloxam, who had slept off the remains of his beer on the previous night at Corcoran’s, had left for his work at Poplar at five o’clock that morning. He could not tell me where the place of work was situated, but he had a vague idea that it was some kind of a “new-fangled ware’us,” and with this slender clue I had to start for Poplar. It was twelve o’clock before I got any satisfactory hint of such a building, and this I got at a coffee shop, where some workmen were having their dinner. One of them suggested that there was being erected at Cross Angel Street a new “cold storage” building, and as this suited the condition of a “new-fangled ware’us,” I at once drove to it. An interview with a surly gatekeeper and a surlier foreman, both of whom were appeased with the coin of the realm, put me on the track of Bloxam. He was sent for on my suggestion that I was willing to pay his days wages to his foreman for the privilege of asking him a few questions on a private matter. He was a smart enough fellow, though rough of speech and bearing. When I had promised to pay for his information and given him an earnest, he told me that he had made two journeys between Carfax and a house in Piccadilly, and had taken from this house to the latter nine great boxes, “main heavy ones,” with a horse and cart hired by him for this purpose.

I asked him if he could tell me the number of the house in Piccadilly, to which he replied, “Well, guv’nor, I forgits the number, but it was only a few door from a big white church, or somethink of the kind, not long built. It was a dusty old ‘ouse, too, though nothin’ to the dustiness of the ‘ouse we tooked the bloomin’ boxes from.”

“How did you get in if both houses were empty?”

“There was the old party what engaged me a waitin’ in the ‘ouse at Purfleet. He ‘elped me to lift the boxes and put them in the dray. Curse me, but he was the strongest chap I ever struck, an’ him a old feller, with a white moustache, one that thin you would think he couldn’t throw a shadder.”

How this phrase thrilled through me!

“Why, ‘e took up ‘is end o’ the boxes like they was pounds of tea, and me a puffin’ an’ a blowin’ afore I could upend mine anyhow, an’ I’m no chicken, neither.”

“How did you get into the house in Piccadilly?” I asked.

“He was there too. He must ‘a started off and got there afore me, for when I rung of the bell he kem an’ opened the door ‘isself an’ ‘elped me carry the boxes into the ‘all.”

“The whole nine?” I asked.

“Yus, there was five in the first load an’ four in the second. It was main dry work, an’ I don’t so well remember ‘ow I got ‘ome.”

I interrupted him, “Were the boxes left in the hall?”

“Yus, it was a big ‘all, an’ there was nothin’ else in it.”

I made one more attempt to further matters. “You didn’t have any key?”

“Never used no key nor nothink. The old gent, he opened the door ‘isself an’ shut it again when I druv off. I don’t remember the last time, but that was the beer.”

“And you can’t remember the number of the house?”

“No, sir. But ye needn’t have no difficulty about that. It’s a ‘igh ‘un with a stone front with a bow on it, an’ ‘igh steps up to the door. I know them steps, ‘avin’ ‘ad to carry the boxes up with three loafers what come round to earn a copper. The old gent give them shillin’s, an’ they seein’ they got so much, they wanted more. But ‘e took one of them by the shoulder and was like to throw ‘im down the steps, till the lot of them went away cussin’.”

I thought that with this description I could find the house, so having paid my friend for his information, I started off for Piccadilly. I had gained a new painful experience. The Count could, it was evident, handle the earth boxes himself. If so, time was precious, for now that he had achieved a certain amount of distribution, he could, by choosing his own time, complete the task unobserved. At Piccadilly Circus I discharged my cab, and walked westward. Beyond the Junior Constitutional I came across the house described and was satisfied that this was the next of the lairs arranged by Dracula. The house looked as though it had been long untenanted. The windows were encrusted with dust, and the shutters were up. All the framework was black with time, and from the iron the paint had mostly scaled away. It was evident that up to lately there had been a large notice board in front of the balcony. It had, however, been roughly torn away, the uprights which had supported it still remaining. Behind the rails of the balcony I saw there were some loose boards, whose raw edges looked white. I would have given a good deal to have been able to see the notice board intact, as it would, perhaps, have given some clue to the ownership of the house. I remembered my experience of the investigation and purchase of Carfax, and I could not but feel that if I could find the former owner there might be some means discovered of gaining access to the house.

There was at present nothing to be learned from the Piccadilly side, and nothing could be done, so I went around to the back to see if anything could be gathered from this quarter. The mews were active, the Piccadilly houses being mostly in occupation. I asked one or two of the grooms and helpers whom I saw around if they could tell me anything about the empty house. One of them said that he heard it had lately been taken, but he couldn't say from whom. He told me, however, that up to very lately there had been a notice board of "For Sale" up, and that perhaps Mitchell, Sons, & Candy the house agents could tell me something, as he thought he remembered seeing the name of that firm on the board. I did not wish to seem too eager, or to let my informant know or guess too much, so thanking him in the usual manner, I strolled away. It was now growing dusk, and the autumn night was closing in, so I did not lose any time. Having learned the address of Mitchell, Sons, & Candy from a directory at the Berkeley, I was soon at their office in Sackville Street.

The gentleman who saw me was particularly suave in manner, but uncommunicative in equal proportion. Having once told me that the Piccadilly house, which throughout our interview he called a "mansion," was sold, he considered my business as concluded. When I asked who had purchased it, he opened his eyes a thought wider, and paused a few seconds before replying, "It is sold, sir."

"Pardon me," I said, with equal politeness, "but I have a special reason for wishing to know who purchased it."

Again he paused longer, and raised his eyebrows still more. "It is sold, sir," was again his laconic reply.

"Surely," I said, "you do not mind letting me know so much."

"But I do mind," he answered. "The affairs of their clients are absolutely safe in the hands of Mitchell, Sons, & Candy."

This was manifestly a prig of the first water, and there was no use arguing with him. I thought I had best meet him on his own ground, so I said, "Your clients, sir, are happy in having so resolute a guardian of their confidence. I am myself a professional man."

Here I handed him my card. "In this instance I am not prompted by curiosity, I act on the part of Lord Godalming, who wishes to know something of the property which was, he understood, lately for sale."

These words put a different complexion on affairs. He said, "I would like to oblige you if I could, Mr. Harker, and especially would I like to oblige his lordship. We once carried out a small matter of renting some chambers for him when he was the honourable Arthur Holmwood. If you will let me have his lordship's address I will consult the House on the subject, and will, in any case, communicate with his lordship by tonight's post. It will be a pleasure if we can so far deviate from our rules as to give the required information to his lordship."

I wanted to secure a friend, and not to make an enemy, so I thanked him, gave the address at Dr. Seward's and came away. It was now dark, and I was tired and hungry. I got a cup of tea at the Aerated Bread Company and came down to Purfleet by the next train.

I found all the others at home. Mina was looking tired and pale, but she made a gallant effort to be bright and cheerful. It wrung my heart to think that I had had to keep anything from her and so caused her inquietude. Thank God, this will be the last night of her looking on at our conferences, and feeling the sting of our not showing our confidence. It took all my courage to hold to the wise resolution of keeping her out of our grim task. She seems somehow more reconciled, or else the very subject seems to have become repugnant to her, for when any accidental allusion is made she actually shudders. I am glad we made our resolution in time, as with such a feeling as this, our growing knowledge would be torture to her.

I could not tell the others of the day's discovery till we were alone, so after dinner, followed by a little music to save appearances even amongst ourselves, I took Mina to her room and left her to go to bed. The dear girl was more affectionate with me than ever, and clung to me as though she would detain me, but there was much to be talked of and I came away. Thank God, the ceasing of telling things has made no difference between us.

When I came down again I found the others all gathered round the fire in the study. In the train I had written my diary so far, and simply read it off to them as the best means of letting them get abreast of my own information.

When I had finished Van Helsing said, "This has been a great day's work, friend Jonathan. Doubtless we are on the track of the missing boxes. If we find them all in that house, then our work is near the end. But if there be some missing, we must search until we find them. Then shall we make our final coup, and hunt the wretch to his real death."

We all sat silent awhile and all at once Mr. Morris spoke, "Say! How are we going to get into that house?"

"We got into the other," answered Lord Godalming quickly.

"But, Art, this is different. We broke house at Carfax, but we had night and a walled park to protect us. It will be a mighty different thing to commit burglary in Piccadilly, either by day or night. I confess I don't see how we are going to get in unless that agency duck can find us a key of some sort."

Lord Godalming's brows contracted, and he stood up and walked about the room. By-and-by he stopped and said, turning from one to another of us, "Quincey's head is level. This burglary business is getting serious. We got off once all right, but we have now a rare job on hand. Unless we can find the Count's key basket."

As nothing could well be done before morning, and as it would be at least advisable to wait till Lord Godalming should hear from Mitchell's, we decided not to take any active step before breakfast time. For a good while we sat and smoked, discussing the matter in its various lights and bearings. I took the opportunity of bringing this diary right up to the moment. I am very sleepy and shall go to bed…

Just a line. Mina sleeps soundly and her breathing is regular. Her forehead is puckered up into little wrinkles, as though she thinks even in her sleep. She is still too pale, but does not look so haggard as she did this morning. Tomorrow will, I hope, mend all this. She will be herself at home in Exeter. Oh, but I am sleepy!

DR. SEWARD'S DIARY

1 October. — I am puzzled afresh about Renfield. His moods change so rapidly that I find it difficult to keep touch of them, and as they always mean something more than his own well-being, they form a more than interesting study. This morning, when I went to see him after his repulse of Van Helsing, his manner was that of a man commanding destiny. He was, in fact, commanding destiny, subjectively. He did not really care for any of the things of mere

earth, he was in the clouds and looked down on all the weaknesses and wants of us poor mortals.

I thought I would improve the occasion and learn something, so I asked him, “What about the flies these times?”

He smiled on me in quite a superior sort of way, such a smile as would have become the face of Malvolio, as he answered me, “The fly, my dear sir, has one striking feature. Its wings are typical of the aerial powers of the psychic faculties. The ancients did well when they typified the soul as a butterfly!”

I thought I would push his analogy to its utmost logically, so I said quickly, “Oh, it is a soul you are after now, is it?”

His madness foiled his reason, and a puzzled look spread over his face as, shaking his head with a decision which I had but seldom seen in him.

He said, “Oh, no, oh no! I want no souls. Life is all I want.” Here he brightened up. “I am pretty indifferent about it at present. Life is all right. I have all I want. You must get a new patient, doctor, if you wish to study zoophagy!”

This puzzled me a little, so I drew him on. “Then you command life. You are a god, I suppose?”

He smiled with an ineffably benign superiority. “Oh no! Far be it from me to arrogate to myself the attributes of the Deity. I am not even concerned in His especially spiritual doings. If I may state my intellectual position I am, so far as concerns things purely terrestrial, somewhat in the position which Enoch occupied spiritually!”

This was a poser to me. I could not at the moment recall Enoch’s appositeness, so I had to ask a simple question, though I felt that by so doing I was lowering myself in the eyes of the lunatic. “And why with Enoch?”

"Because he walked with God."

I could not see the analogy, but did not like to admit it, so I harked back to what he had denied. "So you don't care about life and you don't want souls. Why not?" I put my question quickly and somewhat sternly, on purpose to disconcert him.

The effort succeeded, for an instant he unconsciously relapsed into his old servile manner, bent low before me, and actually fawned upon me as he replied. "I don't want any souls, indeed, indeed! I don't. I couldn't use them if I had them. They would be no manner of use to me. I couldn't eat them or…"

He suddenly stopped and the old cunning look spread over his face, like a wind sweep on the surface of the water.

"And doctor, as to life, what is it after all? When you've got all you require, and you know that you will never want, that is all. I have friends, good friends, like you, Dr. Seward." This was said with a leer of inexpressible cunning. "I know that I shall never lack the means of life!"

I think that through the cloudiness of his insanity he saw some antagonism in me, for he at once fell back on the last refuge of such as he, a dogged silence. After a short time I saw that for the present it was useless to speak to him. He was sulky, and so I came away.

Later in the day he sent for me. Ordinarily I would not have come without special reason, but just at present I am so interested in him that I would gladly make an effort. Besides, I am glad to have anything to help pass the time. Harker is out, following up clues, and so are Lord Godalming and Quincey. Van Helsing sits in my study poring over the record prepared by the Harkers. He seems to think that by accurate knowledge of all details he will light up on some clue. He does not wish to be disturbed in the work, without cause. I would have taken him with me to see the patient, only I thought that after his last repulse he might not care to go again. There was also another reason. Renfield might not speak so freely before a third person as when he and I were alone.

I found him sitting in the middle of the floor on his stool, a pose which is generally indicative of some mental energy on his part. When I came in, he said at once, as though the question had been waiting on his lips. “What about souls?”

It was evident then that my surmise had been correct. Unconscious cerebration was doing its work, even with the lunatic. I determined to have the matter out.

“What about them yourself?” I asked.

He did not reply for a moment but looked all around him, and up and down, as though he expected to find some inspiration for an answer.

“I don’t want any souls!” he said in a feeble, apologetic way. The matter seemed preying on his mind, and so I determined to use it, to “be cruel only to be kind.” So I said, “You like life, and you want life?”

“Oh yes! But that is all right. You needn’t worry about that!”

“But,” I asked, “how are we to get the life without getting the soul also?”

This seemed to puzzle him, so I followed it up, “A nice time you’ll have some time when you’re flying out here, with the souls of thousands of flies and spiders and birds and cats buzzing and twittering and moaning all around you. You’ve got their lives, you know, and you must put up with their souls!”

Something seemed to affect his imagination, for he put his fingers to his ears and shut his eyes, screwing them up tightly just as a small boy does when his face is being soaped. There was something pathetic in it that touched me. It also gave me a lesson, for it seemed that before me was a child, only a child, though the features were worn, and the stubble on the jaws was white. It was evident that he was undergoing some process of mental disturbance, and knowing how his past moods had interpreted things seemingly foreign to himself, I thought I would enter into his mind as well as I could and go with him.

The first step was to restore confidence, so I asked him, speaking pretty loud so that he would hear me through his closed ears, “Would you like some sugar to get your flies around again?”

He seemed to wake up all at once, and shook his head. With a laugh he replied, “Not much! Flies are poor things, after all!” After a pause he added, “But I don’t want their souls buzzing round me, all the same.”

“Or spiders?” I went on.

“Blow spiders! What’s the use of spiders? There isn’t anything in them to eat or…” He stopped suddenly as though reminded of a forbidden topic.

“So, so!” I thought to myself, “this is the second time he has suddenly stopped at the word ‘drink’. What does it mean?”

Renfield seemed himself aware of having made a lapse, for he hurried on, as though to distract my attention from it, “I don’t take any stock at all in such matters. ‘Rats and mice and such small deer,’ as Shakespeare has it, ‘chicken feed of the larder’ they might be called. I’m past all that sort of nonsense. You might as well ask a man to eat molecules with a pair of chopsticks, as to try to interest me about the less carnivora, when I know of what is before me.”

“I see,” I said. “You want big things that you can make your teeth meet in? How would you like to breakfast on an elephant?”

“What ridiculous nonsense you are talking?” He was getting too wide awake, so I thought I would press him hard.

“I wonder,” I said reflectively, “what an elephant’s soul is like!”

The effect I desired was obtained, for he at once fell from his high-horse and became a child again.

“I don’t want an elephant’s soul, or any soul at all!” he said. For a few moments he sat despondently. Suddenly he jumped to his feet, with his eyes blazing and all the signs of intense cerebral excitement. “To hell with you and your souls!” he shouted. “Why do you plague me about souls? Haven’t I got enough to worry, and pain, to distract me already, without thinking of souls?”

He looked so hostile that I thought he was in for another homicidal fit, so I blew my whistle.

The instant, however, that I did so he became calm, and said apologetically, “Forgive me, Doctor. I forgot myself. You do not need any help. I am so worried in my mind that I am apt to be irritable. If you only knew the problem I have to face, and that I am working out, you would pity, and tolerate, and pardon me. Pray do not put me in a strait waistcoat. I want to think and I cannot think freely when my body is confined. I am sure you will understand!”

He had evidently self-control, so when the attendants came I told them not to mind, and they withdrew. Renfield watched them go. When the door was closed he said with considerable dignity and sweetness, “Dr. Seward, you have been very considerate towards me. Believe me that I am very, very grateful to you!”

I thought it well to leave him in this mood, and so I came away. There is certainly something to ponder over in this man’s state. Several points seem to make what the American interviewer calls “a story," if one could only get them in proper order. Here they are:

Will not mention "drinking."

Fears the thought of being burdened with the "soul" of anything.

Has no dread of wanting "life" in the future.

Despises the meaner forms of life altogether, though he dreads being haunted by their souls.

Logically all these things point one way! He has assurance of some kind that he will acquire some higher life.

He dreads the consequence, the burden of a soul. Then it is a human life he looks to!

And the assurance…?

Merciful God! The Count has been to him, and there is some new scheme of terror afoot!

Later. — I went after my round to Van Helsing and told him my suspicion. He grew very grave, and after thinking the matter over for a while asked me to take him to Renfield. I did so. As we came to the door we heard the lunatic within singing gaily, as he used to do in the time which now seems so long ago.

When we entered we saw with amazement that he had spread out his sugar as of old. The flies, lethargic with the autumn, were beginning to buzz into the room. We tried to make him talk of the subject of our previous conversation, but he would not attend. He went on with his singing, just as though we had not been present. He had got a scrap of paper and was folding it into a notebook. We had to come away as ignorant as we went in.

His is a curious case indeed. We must watch him tonight.

LETTER, MITCHELL, SONS & CANDY TO LORD

GODALMING.

"1 October.

"My Lord,

"We are at all times only too happy to meet your wishes. We beg, with regard to the desire of your Lordship, expressed by Mr. Harker on your behalf, to supply the following information concerning the sale and purchase of No. 347, Piccadilly. The original vendors are the executors of the late Mr. Archibald Winter-Suffield. The purchaser is a foreign nobleman, Count de Ville, who effected the purchase himself paying the purchase money in notes 'over the counter,' if your Lordship will pardon us using so vulgar an expression. Beyond this we know nothing whatever of him.

"We are, my Lord,

"Your Lordship's humble servants,

"MITCHELL, SONS & CANDY."

DR. SEWARD'S DIARY

2 October. — I placed a man in the corridor last night, and told him to make an accurate note of any sound he might hear from Renfield's room, and gave him instructions that if there should be anything strange he was to call me. After dinner, when we had all gathered round the fire in the study, Mrs. Harker having gone to bed, we discussed the attempts and discoveries of the day. Harker was the only one who had any result, and we are in great hopes that his clue may be an important one.

Before going to bed I went round to the patient's room and looked in through the observation trap. He was sleeping soundly, his heart rose and fell with regular respiration.

This morning the man on duty reported to me that a little after midnight he was restless and kept saying his prayers somewhat loudly. I asked him if that was all. He replied that it was all he heard. There was something about his manner, so suspicious that I asked him point blank if he had been asleep. He denied sleep, but admitted to having "dozed" for a while. It is too bad that men cannot be trusted unless they are watched.

Today Harker is out following up his clue, and Art and Quincey are looking after horses. Godalming thinks that it will be well to have horses always in readiness, for when we get the information which we seek there will be no time to lose. We must sterilise all the imported earth between sunrise and sunset. We shall thus catch the Count at his weakest, and without a refuge to fly to. Van Helsing is off to the British Museum looking up some authorities on ancient medicine. The old physicians took account of things which their followers do not accept, and the Professor is searching for witch and demon cures which may be useful to us later.

I sometimes think we must be all mad and that we shall wake to sanity in strait waistcoats.

Later. — We have met again. We seem at last to be on the track, and our work of tomorrow may be the beginning of the end. I wonder if Renfield's quiet has anything to do with this. His moods have so followed the doings of the Count, that the coming destruction of the monster may be carried to him some subtle way. If we could only get some hint as to what passed in his mind, between the time of my argument with him today and his resumption of fly-catching, it might afford us a valuable clue. He is now seemingly quiet for a spell… Is he? That wild yell seemed to come from his room…

The attendant came bursting into my room and told me that

Renfield had somehow met with some accident. He had heard him yell, and when he went to him found him lying on his face on the floor, all covered with blood. I must go at once…

CHAPTER 21

DR. SEWARD'S DIARY

3 October. — Let me put down with exactness all that happened, as well as I can remember, since last I made an entry. Not a detail that I can recall must be forgotten. In all calmness I must proceed.

When I came to Renfield's room I found him lying on the floor on his left side in a glittering pool of blood. When I went to move him, it became at once apparent that he had received some terrible injuries. There seemed none of the unity of purpose between the parts of the body which marks even lethargic sanity. As the face was exposed I could see that it was horribly bruised, as though it had been beaten against the floor. Indeed it was from the face wounds that the pool of blood originated.

The attendant who was kneeling beside the body said to me as we turned him over, "I think, sir, his back is broken. See, both his right arm and leg and the whole side of his face are paralysed." How such a thing could have happened puzzled the attendant beyond measure. He seemed quite bewildered, and his brows were gathered in as he said, "I can't understand the two things. He could mark his face like that by beating his own head on the floor. I saw a young woman do it once at the Eversfield Asylum before anyone could lay hands on her. And I suppose he might have broken his neck by falling out of bed, if he got in an awkward kink. But for the life of me I can't imagine how the two things occurred. If his back was broke, he couldn't beat his head, and if his face was like that before the fall out of bed, there would be marks of it."

I said to him, "Go to Dr. Van Helsing, and ask him to kindly come here at once. I want him without an instant's delay."

The man ran off, and within a few minutes the Professor, in his dressing gown and slippers, appeared. When he saw Renfield on the ground, he looked keenly at him a moment, and then turned to me. I think he recognised my thought in my eyes, for he said very quietly, manifestly for the ears of the attendant, "Ah, a sad accident! He will need very careful watching, and much attention. I shall stay with you myself, but I shall first dress myself. If you will remain I shall in a few minutes join you."

The patient was now breathing stertorously and it was easy to see that he had suffered some terrible injury.

Van Helsing returned with extraordinary celerity, bearing with him a surgical case. He had evidently been thinking and had his mind made up, for almost before he looked at the patient, he whispered to me, "Send the attendant away. We must be alone with him when he becomes conscious, after the operation."

I said, "I think that will do now, Simmons. We have done all that we can at present. You had better go your round, and Dr. Van Helsing will operate. Let me know instantly if there be anything unusual anywhere."

The man withdrew, and we went into a strict examination of the patient. The wounds of the face were superficial. The real injury was a depressed fracture of the skull, extending right up through the motor area.

The Professor thought a moment and said, "We must reduce the pressure and get back to normal conditions, as far as can be. The rapidity of the suffusion shows the terrible nature of his injury. The whole motor area seems affected. The suffusion of the brain will increase quickly, so we must trephine at once or it may be too late."

As he was speaking there was a soft tapping at the door. I went over and opened it and found in the corridor without, Arthur and Quincey in pajamas and slippers; the former spoke, “I heard your man call up Dr. Van Helsing and tell him of an accident. So I woke Quincey or rather called for him as he was not asleep. Things are moving too quickly and too strangely for sound sleep for any of us these times. I’ve been thinking that tomorrow night will not see things as they have been. We’ll have to look back, and forward a little more than we have done. May we come in?”

I nodded, and held the door open till they had entered, then I closed it again. When Quincey saw the attitude and state of the patient, and noted the horrible pool on the floor, he said softly, “My God! What has happened to him? Poor, poor devil!”

I told him briefly, and added that we expected he would recover consciousness after the operation, for a short time, at all events. He went at once and sat down on the edge of the bed, with Godalming beside him. We all watched in patience.

“We shall wait,” said Van Helsing, “just long enough to fix the best spot for trephining, so that we may most quickly and perfectly remove the blood clot, for it is evident that the haemorrhage is increasing.”

The minutes during which we waited passed with fearful slowness. I had a horrible sinking in my heart, and from Van Helsing’s face I gathered that he felt some fear or apprehension as to what was to come. I dreaded the words Renfield might speak. I was positively afraid to think. But the conviction of what was coming was on me, as I have read of men who have heard the death watch. The poor man’s breathing came in uncertain gasps. Each instant he seemed as though he would open his eyes and speak, but then would follow a prolonged stertorous breath, and he would relapse into a more fixed insensibility. Inured as I was to sick beds and death, this suspense grew and grew upon me. I could almost hear the beating of my own heart, and the blood surging through my temples sounded like blows from a hammer. The silence finally became agonising. I looked at my companions, one after another, and saw from their flushed faces and damp brows that they were enduring equal torture. There was a nervous suspense over us all, as though overhead some dread bell would peal out powerfully when we should least expect it.

At last there came a time when it was evident that the patient was sinking fast. He might die at any moment. I looked up at the Professor and caught his eyes fixed on mine. His face was sternly set as he spoke, “There is no time to lose. His words may be worth many lives. I have been thinking so, as I stood here. It may be there is a soul at stake! We shall operate just above the ear.”

Without another word he made the operation. For a few moments the breathing continued to be stertorous. Then there came a breath so prolonged that it seemed as though it would tear open his chest. Suddenly his eyes opened, and became fixed in a wild, helpless stare. This was continued for a few moments, then it was softened into a glad surprise, and from his lips came a sigh of relief. He moved convulsively, and as he did so, said, “I’ll be quiet, Doctor. Tell them to take off the strait waistcoat. I have had a terrible dream, and it has left me so weak that I cannot move. What’s wrong with my face? It feels all swollen, and it smarts dreadfully.”

He tried to turn his head, but even with the effort his eyes seemed to grow glassy again so I gently put it back. Then Van Helsing said in a quiet grave tone, “Tell us your dream, Mr. Renfield.”

As he heard the voice his face brightened, through its mutilation, and he said, “That is Dr. Van Helsing. How good it is of you to be here. Give me some water, my lips are dry, and I shall try to tell you. I dreamed…”

He stopped and seemed fainting. I called quietly to Quincey, “The brandy, it is in my study, quick!” He flew and returned with a glass, the decanter of brandy and a carafe of water. We moistened the parched lips, and the patient quickly revived.

It seemed, however, that his poor injured brain had been working in the interval, for when he was quite conscious, he looked at me piercingly with an agonised confusion which I shall never forget, and said, “I must not deceive myself. It was no dream, but all a grim reality.” Then his eyes roved round the room. As they caught sight of the two figures sitting patiently on the edge of the bed he went on, “If I were not sure already, I would know from them.”

For an instant his eyes closed, not with pain or sleep but voluntarily, as though he were bringing all his faculties to bear. When he opened them he said, hurriedly, and with more energy than he had yet displayed, “Quick, Doctor, quick, I am dying! I feel that I have but a few minutes, and then I must go back to death, or worse! Wet my lips with brandy again. I have something that I must say before I die. Or before my poor crushed brain dies anyhow. Thank you! It was that night after you left me, when I implored you to let me go away. I couldn’t speak then, for I felt my tongue was tied. But I was as sane then, except in that way, as I am now. I was in an agony of despair for a long time after you left me, it seemed hours. Then there came a sudden peace to me. My brain seemed to become cool again, and I realised where I was. I heard the dogs bark behind our house, but not where He was!”

As he spoke, Van Helsing’s eyes never blinked, but his hand came out and met mine and gripped it hard. He did not, however, betray himself. He nodded slightly and said, “Go on,” in a low voice.

Renfield proceeded. “He came up to the window in the mist, as I had seen him often before, but he was solid then, not a ghost, and his eyes were fierce like a man’s when angry. He was laughing with his red mouth, the sharp white teeth glinted in the moonlight when he turned to look back over the belt of trees, to where the dogs were barking. I wouldn’t ask him to come in at first, though I knew he wanted to, just as he had wanted all along. Then he began promising me things, not in words but by doing them.”

He was interrupted by a word from the Professor, “How?”

“By making them happen. Just as he used to send in the flies when the sun was shining. Great big fat ones with steel and sapphire on their wings. And big moths, in the night, with skull and cross-bones on their backs.”

Van Helsing nodded to him as he whispered to me unconsciously, “The Acherontia Atropos of the Sphinges, what you call the ‘Death’s-head Moth’?”

The patient went on without stopping, “Then he began to whisper. ‘Rats, rats, rats! Hundreds, thousands, millions of them, and every one a life. And dogs to eat them, and cats too. All lives! All red blood, with years of life in it, and not merely buzzing flies!’ I laughed at him, for I wanted to see what he could do. Then the dogs howled, away beyond the dark trees in His house. He beckoned me to the window. I got up and looked out, and He raised his hands, and seemed to call out without using any words. A dark mass spread over the grass, coming on like the shape of a flame of fire. And then He moved the mist to the right and left, and I could see that there were thousands of rats with their eyes blazing red, like His only smaller.

He held up his hand, and they all stopped, and I thought he seemed to be saying, ‘All these lives will I give you, ay, and many more and greater, through countless ages, if you will fall down and worship me!’ And then a red cloud, like the colour of blood, seemed to close over my eyes, and before I knew what I was doing, I found myself opening the sash and saying to Him, ‘Come in, Lord and Master!’ The rats were all gone, but He slid into the room through the sash, though it was only open an inch wide, just as the Moon herself has often come in through the tiniest crack and has stood before me in all her size and splendour.”

His voice was weaker, so I moistened his lips with the brandy again, and he continued, but it seemed as though his memory had gone on working in the interval for his story was further advanced. I was about to call him back to the point, but Van Helsing whispered to me, “Let him go on. Do not interrupt him. He cannot go back, and maybe could not proceed at all if once he lost the thread of his thought.”

He proceeded, “All day I waited to hear from him, but he did not send me anything, not even a blowfly, and when the moon got up I was pretty angry with him. When he did slide in through the window, though it was shut, and did not even knock, I got mad with him. He sneered at me, and his white face looked out of the mist with his red eyes gleaming, and he went on as though he owned the whole place, and I was no one. He didn’t even smell the same as he went by me. I couldn’t hold him. I thought that, somehow, Mrs. Harker had come into the room.”

The two men sitting on the bed stood up and came over, standing behind him so that he could not see them, but where they could hear better. They were both silent, but the Professor started and quivered.

His face, however, grew grimmer and sterner still. Renfield went on without noticing, “When Mrs. Harker came in to see me this afternoon she wasn’t the same. It was like tea after the teapot has been watered.” Here we all moved, but no one said a word.

He went on, “I didn’t know that she was here till she spoke, and she didn’t look the same. I don’t care for the pale people. I like them with lots of blood in them, and hers all seemed to have run out. I didn’t think of it at the time, but when she went away I began to think, and it made me mad to know that He had been taking the life out of her.” I could feel that the rest quivered, as I did; but we remained otherwise still. “So when He came tonight I was ready for Him. I saw the mist stealing in, and I grabbed it tight. I had heard that madmen have unnatural strength. And as I knew I was a madman, at times anyhow, I resolved to use my power. Ay, and He felt it too, for He had to come out of the mist to struggle with me. I held tight, and I thought I was going to win, for I didn’t mean Him to take any more of her life, till I saw His eyes. They burned into me, and my strength became like water. He slipped through it, and when I tried to cling to Him, He raised me up and flung me down. There was a red cloud before me, and a noise like thunder, and the mist seemed to steal away under the door.”

His voice was becoming fainter and his breath more stertorous. Van Helsing stood up instinctively.

“We know the worst now,” he said. “He is here, and we know his purpose. It may not be too late. Let us be armed, the same as we were the other night, but lose no time, there is not an instant to spare.”

There was no need to put our fear, nay our conviction, into words, we shared them in common. We all hurried and took from our rooms the same things that we had when we entered the Count’s house. The

Professor had his ready, and as we met in the corridor he pointed to them significantly as he said, “They never leave me, and they shall not till this unhappy business is over. Be wise also, my friends. It is no common enemy that we deal with Alas! Alas! That dear Madam Mina should suffer!” He stopped, his voice was breaking, and I do not know if rage or terror predominated in my own heart.

Outside the Harkers’ door we paused. Art and Quincey held back, and the latter said, “Should we disturb her?”

“We must,” said Van Helsing grimly. “If the door be locked, I shall break it in.”

“May it not frighten her terribly? It is unusual to break into a lady’s room!”

Van Helsing said solemnly, “You are always right. But this is life and death. All chambers are alike to the doctor. And even were they not they are all as one to me tonight. Friend John, when I turn the handle, if the door does not open, do you put your shoulder down and shove; and you too, my friends. Now!”

He turned the handle as he spoke, but the door did not yield. We threw ourselves against it. With a crash it burst open, and we almost fell headlong into the room. The Professor did actually fall, and I saw across him as he gathered himself up from hands and knees. What I saw appalled me. I felt my hair rise like bristles on the back of my neck, and my heart seemed to stand still.

The moonlight was so bright that through the thick yellow blind the room was light enough to see. On the bed beside the window lay Jonathan Harker, his face flushed and breathing heavily as though in a stupor. Kneeling on the near edge of the bed facing outwards was the white-clad figure of his wife. By her side stood a tall, thin man, clad in black. His face was turned from us, but the instant we saw we all recognised the Count, in every way, even to the scar on his forehead. With his left hand he held both Mrs. Harker's hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension. His right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man's bare chest which was shown by his torn-open dress. The attitude of the two had a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten's nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink. As we burst into the room, the Count turned his face, and the hellish look that I had heard described seemed to leap into it. His eyes flamed red with devilish passion. The great nostrils of the white aquiline nose opened wide and quivered at the edge, and the white sharp teeth, behind the full lips of the blood dripping mouth, clamped together like those of a wild beast. With a wrench, which threw his victim back upon the bed as though hurled from a height, he turned and sprang at us. But by this time the Professor had gained his feet, and was holding towards him the envelope which contained the Sacred Wafer. The Count suddenly stopped, just as poor Lucy had done outside the tomb, and cowered back. Further and further back he cowered, as we, lifting our crucifixes, advanced. The moonlight suddenly failed, as a great black cloud sailed across the sky. And when the gaslight sprang up under Quincey's match, we saw nothing but a faint vapour. This, as we looked, trailed under the door, which with the recoil from its bursting open, had swung back to its old position. Van Helsing, Art, and I moved forward to Mrs. Harker, who by this time had drawn her breath and with it had given a scream so wild, so ear-piercing, so despairing that it seems to me now that it will ring in my ears till my dying day. For a few seconds she lay in her helpless attitude and disarray. Her face was ghastly, with a pallor which was accentuated by the blood which smeared her lips and cheeks and chin. From her throat trickled a thin stream of blood. Her eyes were mad with terror. Then she put before her face her poor crushed hands, which bore on their whiteness the red mark of the Count's terrible grip, and from behind them came a low desolate wail which made the terrible scream seem only the quick expression of an endless grief. Van Helsing stepped forward and drew the coverlet gently over her body, whilst Art, after looking at her face for an instant despairingly, ran out of the room.

Van Helsing whispered to me, "Jonathan is in a stupor such as we know the Vampire can produce. We can do nothing with poor Madam Mina for a few moments till she recovers herself. I must wake him!"

He dipped the end of a towel in cold water and with it began to flick him on the face, his wife all the while holding her face between her hands and sobbing in a way that was heart breaking to hear. I raised the blind, and looked out of the window. There was much moonshine, and as I looked I could see Quincey Morris run across the lawn and hide himself in the shadow of a great yew tree. It puzzled me to think why he was doing this. But at the instant I heard Harker's quick exclamation as he woke to partial consciousness, and turned to the bed. On his face, as there might well be, was a look of wild amazement. He seemed dazed for a few seconds, and then full consciousness seemed to burst upon him all at once, and he started up.

His wife was aroused by the quick movement, and turned to him with her arms stretched out, as though to embrace him. Instantly, however, she drew them in again, and putting her elbows together, held her hands before her face, and shuddered till the bed beneath her shook.

"In God's name what does this mean?" Harker cried out. "Dr. Seward, Dr. Van Helsing, what is it? What has happened? What is wrong? Mina, dear what is it? What does that blood mean? My God, my God! Has it come to this!" And, raising himself to his knees, he beat his hands wildly together. "Good God help us! Help her! Oh, help her!"

With a quick movement he jumped from bed, and began to pull on his clothes, all the man in him awake at the need for instant exertion. "What has happened? Tell me all about it!" he cried without pausing. "Dr. Van Helsing, you love Mina, I know. Oh, do something to save her. It cannot have gone too far yet. Guard her while I look for him!"

His wife, through her terror and horror and distress, saw some sure danger to him. Instantly forgetting her own grief, she seized hold of him and cried out.

"No! No! Jonathan, you must not leave me. I have suffered enough tonight, God knows, without the dread of his harming you. You must stay with me. Stay with these friends who will watch over you!" Her expression became frantic as she spoke. And, he yielding to her, she pulled him down sitting on the bedside, and clung to him fiercely.

Van Helsing and I tried to calm them both. The Professor held up his golden crucifix, and said with wonderful calmness, "Do not fear, my dear. We are here, and whilst this is close to you no foul thing can approach. You are safe for tonight, and we must be calm and take counsel together."

She shuddered and was silent, holding down her head on her husband's breast. When she raised it, his white nightrobe was stained with blood where her lips had touched, and where the thin open wound in the neck had sent forth drops. The instant she saw it she drew back, with a low wail, and whispered, amidst choking sobs.

“Unclean, unclean! I must touch him or kiss him no more. Oh, that it should be that it is I who am now his worst enemy, and whom he may have most cause to fear.”

To this he spoke out resolutely, “Nonsense, Mina. It is a shame to me to hear such a word. I would not hear it of you. And I shall not hear it from you. May God judge me by my deserts, and punish me with more bitter suffering than even this hour, if by any act or will of mine anything ever come between us!”

He put out his arms and folded her to his breast. And for a while she lay there sobbing. He looked at us over her bowed head, with eyes that blinked damply above his quivering nostrils. His mouth was set as steel.

After a while her sobs became less frequent and more faint, and then he said to me, speaking with a studied calmness which I felt tried his nervous power to the utmost.

“And now, Dr. Seward, tell me all about it. Too well I know the broad fact. Tell me all that has been.”

I told him exactly what had happened and he listened with seeming impassiveness, but his nostrils twitched and his eyes blazed as I told how the ruthless hands of the Count had held his wife in that terrible and horrid position, with her mouth to the open wound in his breast. It interested me, even at that moment, to see that whilst the face of white set passion worked convulsively over the bowed head, the hands tenderly and lovingly stroked the ruffled hair. Just as I had finished, Quincey and Godalming knocked at the door. They entered in obedience to our summons. Van Helsing looked at me questioningly. I understood him to mean if we were to take advantage of their coming to divert if possible the thoughts of the unhappy husband and wife from each other and from themselves. So on nodding acquiescence to him he asked them what they had seen or done. To which Lord Godalming answered.

“I could not see him anywhere in the passage, or in any of our rooms. I looked in the study but, though he had been there, he had gone. He had, however…” He stopped suddenly, looking at the poor drooping figure on the bed.

Van Helsing said gravely, “Go on, friend Arthur. We want here no more concealments. Our hope now is in knowing all. Tell freely!”

So Art went on, “He had been there, and though it could only have been for a few seconds, he made rare hay of the place. All the manuscript had been burned, and the blue flames were flickering amongst the white ashes. The cylinders of your phonograph too were thrown on the fire, and the wax had helped the flames.”

Here I interrupted. “Thank God there is the other copy in the safe!”

His face lit for a moment, but fell again as he went on. “I ran downstairs then, but could see no sign of him. I looked into Renfield’s room, but there was no trace there except…” Again he paused.

“Go on,” said Harker hoarsely. So he bowed his head and moistening his lips with his tongue, added, “except that the poor fellow is dead.”

Mrs. Harker raised her head, looking from one to the other of us she said solemnly, “God’s will be done!”

I could not but feel that Art was keeping back something. But, as I took it that it was with a purpose, I said nothing.

Van Helsing turned to Morris and asked, “And you, friend

Quincey, have you any to tell?”

“A little,” he answered. “It may be much eventually, but at present I can’t say. I thought it well to know if possible where the Count would go when he left the house. I did not see him, but I saw a bat rise from Renfield’s window, and flap westward. I expected to see him in some shape go back to Carfax, but he evidently sought some other lair. He will not be back tonight, for the sky is reddening in the east, and the dawn is close. We must work tomorrow!”

He said the latter words through his shut teeth. For a space of perhaps a couple of minutes there was silence, and I could fancy that I could hear the sound of our hearts beating.

Then Van Helsing said, placing his hand tenderly on Mrs. Harker’s head, “And now, Madam Mina, poor dear, dear, Madam Mina, tell us exactly what happened. God knows that I do not want that you be pained, but it is need that we know all. For now more than ever has all work to be done quick and sharp, and in deadly earnest. The day is close to us that must end all, if it may be so, and now is the chance that we may live and learn.”

The poor dear lady shivered, and I could see the tension of her nerves as she clasped her husband closer to her and bent her head lower and lower still on his breast. Then she raised her head proudly, and held out one hand to Van Helsing who took it in his, and after stooping and kissing it reverently, held it fast. The other hand was locked in that of her husband, who held his other arm thrown round her protectingly. After a pause in which she was evidently ordering her thoughts, she began.

“I took the sleeping draught which you had so kindly given me, but for a long time it did not act. I seemed to become more wakeful, and myriads of horrible fancies began to crowd in upon my mind. All of them connected with death, and vampires, with blood, and pain, and trouble.” Her husband involuntarily groaned as she turned to him and said lovingly, “Do not fret, dear. You must be brave and strong, and help me through the horrible task. If you only knew what an effort it is to me to tell of this fearful thing at all, you would understand how much I need your help. Well, I saw I must try to help the medicine to its work with my will, if it was to do me any good, so I resolutely set myself to sleep. Sure enough sleep must soon have come to me, for I remember no more. Jonathan coming in had not waked me, for he lay by my side when next I remember. There was in the room the same thin white mist that I had before noticed. But I forget now if you know of this. You will find it in my diary which I shall show you later. I felt the same vague terror which had come to me before and the same sense of some presence. I turned to wake Jonathan, but found that he slept so soundly that it seemed as if it was he who had taken the sleeping draught, and not I. I tried, but I could not wake him. This caused me a great fear, and I looked around terrified. Then indeed, my heart sank within me. Beside the bed, as if he had stepped out of the mist, or rather as if the mist had turned into his figure, for it had entirely disappeared, stood a tall, thin man, all in black. I knew him at once from the description of the others. The waxen face, the high aquiline nose, on which the light fell in a thin white line, the parted red lips, with the sharp white teeth showing between, and the red eyes that I had seemed to see in the sunset on the windows of St. Mary’s Church at Whitby. I knew, too, the red scar on his forehead where Jonathan had struck him. For an instant my heart stood still, and I would have screamed out, only that I was paralyzed. In the pause he spoke in a sort of keen, cutting whisper, pointing as he spoke to Jonathan.

"'Silence! If you make a sound I shall take him and dash his brains out before your very eyes.' I was appalled and was too bewildered to do or say anything. With a mocking smile, he placed one hand upon my shoulder and, holding me tight, bared my throat with the other, saying as he did so, 'First, a little refreshment to reward my exertions. You may as well be quiet. It is not the first time, or the second, that your veins have appeased my thirst!' I was bewildered, and strangely enough, I did not want to hinder him. I suppose it is a part of the horrible curse that such is, when his touch is on his victim. And oh, my God, my God, pity me! He placed his reeking lips upon my throat!" Her husband groaned again. She clasped his hand harder, and looked at him pityingly, as if he were the injured one, and went on.

"I felt my strength fading away, and I was in a half swoon. How long this horrible thing lasted I know not, but it seemed that a long time must have passed before he took his foul, awful, sneering mouth away. I saw it drip with the fresh blood!" The remembrance seemed for a while to overpower her, and she drooped and would have sunk down but for her husband's sustaining arm. With a great effort she recovered herself and went on.

"Then he spoke to me mockingly, 'And so you, like the others, would play your brains against mine. You would help these men to hunt me and frustrate me in my design! You know now, and they know in part already, and will know in full before long, what it is to cross my path. They should have kept their energies for use closer to home. Whilst they played wits against me, against me who commanded nations, and intrigued for them, and fought for them, hundreds of years before they were born, I was countermining them. And you, their best beloved one, are now to me, flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood, kin of my kin, my bountiful wine-press for a while, and shall be later on my companion and my helper. You shall be avenged in turn, for not one of them but shall minister to your needs. But as yet you are to be punished for what you have done. You have aided in thwarting me. Now you shall come to my call. When my brain says "Come!" to you, you shall cross land or sea to do my bidding. And to that end this!'

"With that he pulled open his shirt, and with his long sharp nails opened a vein in his breast. When the blood began to spurt out, he took my hands in one of his, holding them tight, and with the other seized my neck and pressed my mouth to the wound, so that I must either suffocate or swallow some to the… Oh, my God! My God! What have I done? What have I done to deserve such a fate, I who have tried to walk in meekness and righteousness all my days. God pity me! Look down on a poor soul in worse than mortal peril. And in mercy pity those to whom she is dear!" Then she began to rub her lips as though to cleanse them from pollution.

As she was telling her terrible story, the eastern sky began to quicken, and everything became more and more clear. Harker was still and quiet; but over his face, as the awful narrative went on, came a grey look which deepened and deepened in the morning light, till when the first red streak of the coming dawn shot up, the flesh stood darkly out against the whitening hair.

We have arranged that one of us is to stay within call of the unhappy pair till we can meet together and arrange about taking action.

Of this I am sure. The sun rises today on no more miserable house in all the great round of its daily course.

CHAPTER 22

JONATHAN HARKER'S JOURNAL

3 October. — As I must do something or go mad, I write this diary. It is now six o'clock, and we are to meet in the study in half an hour and take something to eat, for Dr. Van Helsing and Dr. Seward are agreed that if we do not eat we cannot work our best. Our best will be, God knows, required today. I must keep writing at every chance, for I dare not stop to think. All, big and little, must go down. Perhaps at the end the little things may teach us most. The teaching, big or little, could not have landed Mina or me anywhere worse than we are today. However, we must trust and hope. Poor Mina told me just now, with the tears running down her dear cheeks, that it is in trouble and trial that our faith is tested. That we must keep on trusting, and that God will aid us up to the end. The end! Oh my God! What end?… To work! To work!

When Dr. Van Helsing and Dr. Seward had come back from seeing poor Renfield, we went gravely into what was to be done. First, Dr. Seward told us that when he and Dr. Van Helsing had gone down to the room below they had found Renfield lying on the floor, all in a heap. His face was all bruised and crushed in, and the bones of the neck were broken.

Dr. Seward asked the attendant who was on duty in the passage if he had heard anything. He said that he had been sitting down, he confessed to half dozing, when he heard loud voices in the room, and then Renfield had called out loudly several times, "God! God! God!" After that there was a sound of falling, and when he entered the room he found him lying on the floor, face down, just as the doctors had seen him. Van Helsing asked if he had heard “voices” or “a voice,” and he said he could not say. That at first it had seemed to him as if there were two, but as there was no one in the room it could have been only one. He could swear to it, if required, that the word “God” was spoken by the patient.

Dr. Seward said to us, when we were alone, that he did not wish to go into the matter. The question of an inquest had to be considered, and it would never do to put forward the truth, as no one would believe it. As it was, he thought that on the attendant’s evidence he could give a certificate of death by misadventure in falling from bed. In case the coroner should demand it, there would be a formal inquest, necessarily to the same result.

When the question began to be discussed as to what should be our next step, the very first thing we decided was that Mina should be in full confidence. That nothing of any sort, no matter how painful, should be kept from her. She herself agreed as to its wisdom, and it was pitiful to see her so brave and yet so sorrowful, and in such a depth of despair.

“There must be no concealment,” she said. “Alas! We have had too much already. And besides there is nothing in all the world that can give me more pain than I have already endured, than I suffer now! Whatever may happen, it must be of new hope or of new courage to me!”

Van Helsing was looking at her fixedly as she spoke, and said, suddenly but quietly, “But dear Madam Mina, are you not afraid. Not for yourself, but for others from yourself, after what has happened?”

Her face grew set in its lines, but her eyes shone with the devotion of a martyr as she answered, “Ah no! For my mind is made up!”

“To what?” he asked gently, whilst we were all very still, for each in our own way we had a sort of vague idea of what she meant.

Her answer came with direct simplicity, as though she was simply stating a fact, “Because if I find in myself, and I shall watch keenly for it, a sign of harm to any that I love, I shall die!”

“You would not kill yourself?” he asked, hoarsely.

“I would. If there were no friend who loved me, who would save me such a pain, and so desperate an effort!” She looked at him meaningly as she spoke.

He was sitting down, but now he rose and came close to her and put his hand on her head as he said solemnly. “My child, there is such an one if it were for your good. For myself I could hold it in my account with God to find such an euthanasia for you, even at this moment if it were best. Nay, were it safe! But my child…”

For a moment he seemed choked, and a great sob rose in his throat. He gulped it down and went on, “There are here some who would stand between you and death. You must not die. You must not die by any hand, but least of all your own. Until the other, who has fouled your sweet life, is true dead you must not die. For if he is still with the quick Undead, your death would make you even as he is. No, you must live! You must struggle and strive to live, though death would seem a boon unspeakable. You must fight Death himself, though he come to you in pain or in joy. By the day, or the night, in safety or in peril! On your living soul I charge you that you do not die. Nay, nor think of death, till this great evil be past.”

The poor dear grew white as death, and shook and shivered, as I have seen a quicksand shake and shiver at the incoming of the tide. We were all silent. We could do nothing. At length she grew more calm and turning to him said sweetly, but oh so sorrowfully, as she held out her hand, “I promise you, my dear friend, that if God will let me live, I shall strive to do so. Till, if it may be in His good time, this horror may have passed away from me."

She was so good and brave that we all felt that our hearts were strengthened to work and endure for her, and we began to discuss what we were to do. I told her that she was to have all the papers in the safe, and all the papers or diaries and phonographs we might hereafter use, and was to keep the record as she had done before. She was pleased with the prospect of anything to do, if "pleased" could be used in connection with so grim an interest.

As usual Van Helsing had thought ahead of everyone else, and was prepared with an exact ordering of our work.

"It is perhaps well," he said, "that at our meeting after our visit to Carfax we decided not to do anything with the earth boxes that lay there. Had we done so, the Count must have guessed our purpose, and would doubtless have taken measures in advance to frustrate such an effort with regard to the others. But now he does not know our intentions. Nay, more, in all probability, he does not know that such a power exists to us as can sterilise his lairs, so that he cannot use them as of old.

"We are now so much further advanced in our knowledge as to their disposition that, when we have examined the house in Piccadilly, we may track the very last of them. Today then, is ours, and in it rests our hope. The sun that rose on our sorrow this morning guards us in its course. Until it sets tonight, that monster must retain whatever form he now has. He is confined within the limitations of his earthly envelope. He cannot melt into thin air nor disappear through cracks or chinks or crannies. If he go through a doorway, he must open the door like a mortal. And so we have this day to hunt out all his lairs and sterilise them. So we shall, if we have not yet catch him and destroy him, drive him to bay in some place where the catching and the destroying shall be, in time, sure."

Here I started up for I could not contain myself at the thought that the minutes and seconds so preciously laden with Mina's life and happiness were flying from us, since whilst we talked action was impossible. But Van Helsing held up his hand warningly.

"Nay, friend Jonathan," he said, "in this, the quickest way home is the longest way, so your proverb say. We shall all act and act with desperate quick, when the time has come. But think, in all probable the key of the situation is in that house in Piccadilly. The Count may have many houses which he has bought. Of them he will have deeds of purchase, keys and other things. He will have paper that he write on. He will have his book of cheques. There are many belongings that he must have somewhere. Why not in this place so central, so quiet, where he come and go by the front or the back at all hours, when in the very vast of the traffic there is none to notice. We shall go there and search that house. And when we learn what it holds, then we do what our friend Arthur call, in his phrases of hunt 'stop the earths' and so we run down our old fox, so? Is it not?"

"Then let us come at once," I cried, "we are wasting the precious, precious time!"

The Professor did not move, but simply said, "And how are we to get into that house in Piccadilly?"

"Any way!" I cried. "We shall break in if need be."

"And your police? Where will they be, and what will they say?"

I was staggered, but I knew that if he wished to delay he had a good reason for it. So I said, as quietly as I could, "Don't wait more than need be. You know, I am sure, what torture I am in."

"Ah, my child, that I do. And indeed there is no wish of me to add to your anguish. But just think, what can we do, until all the world be at movement. Then will come our time. I have thought and thought, and it seems to me that the simplest way is the best of all. Now we wish to get into the house, but we have no key. Is it not so?" I nodded.

"Now suppose that you were, in truth, the owner of that house, and could not still get in. And think there was to you no conscience of the housebreaker, what would you do?"

"I should get a respectable locksmith, and set him to work to pick the lock for me."

"And your police, they would interfere, would they not?"

"Oh no! Not if they knew the man was properly employed."

"Then," he looked at me as keenly as he spoke, "all that is in doubt is the conscience of the employer, and the belief of your policemen as to whether or not that employer has a good conscience or a bad one. Your police must indeed be zealous men and clever, oh so clever, in reading the heart, that they trouble themselves in such matter. No, no, my friend Jonathan, you go take the lock off a hundred empty houses in this your London, or of any city in the world, and if you do it as such things are rightly done, and at the time such things are rightly done, no one will interfere. I have read of a gentleman who owned a so fine house in London, and when he went for months of summer to Switzerland and lock up his house, some burglar come and broke window at back and got in. Then he went and made open the shutters in front and walk out and in through the door, before the very eyes of the police. Then he have an auction in that house, and advertise it, and put up big notice. And when the day come he sell off by a great auctioneer all the goods of that other man who own them. Then he go to a builder, and he sell him that house, making an agreement that he pull it down and take all away within a certain time. And your police and other authority help him all they can. And when that owner come back from his holiday in Switzerland he find only an empty hole where his house had been. This was all done en regle, and in our work we shall be en regle too. We shall not go so early that the policemen who have then little to think of, shall deem it strange. But we shall go after ten o'clock, when there are many about, and such things would be done were we indeed owners of the house."

I could not but see how right he was and the terrible despair of Mina's face became relaxed in thought. There was hope in such good counsel.

Van Helsing went on, "When once within that house we may find more clues. At any rate some of us can remain there whilst the rest find the other places where there be more earth boxes, at Bermondsey and Mile End."

Lord Godalming stood up. "I can be of some use here," he said. "I shall wire to my people to have horses and carriages where they will be most convenient."

"Look here, old fellow," said Morris, "it is a capital idea to have all ready in case we want to go horse backing, but don't you think that one of your snappy carriages with its heraldic adornments in a byway of Walworth or Mile End would attract too much attention for our purpose? It seems to me that we ought to take cabs when we go south or east. And even leave them somewhere near the neighbourhood we are going to."

"Friend Quincey is right!" said the Professor. "His head is what you call in plane with the horizon. It is a difficult thing that we go to do, and we do not want no peoples to watch us if so it may."

Mina took a growing interest in everything and I was rejoiced to see that the exigency of affairs was helping her to forget for a time the terrible experience of the night. She was very, very pale, almost ghastly, and so thin that her lips were drawn away, showing her teeth in somewhat of prominence. I did not mention this last, lest it should give her needless pain, but it made my blood run cold in my veins to think of what had occurred with poor Lucy when the Count had sucked her blood. As yet there was no sign of the teeth growing sharper, but the time as yet was short, and there was time for fear.

When we came to the discussion of the sequence of our efforts and of the disposition of our forces, there were new sources of doubt. It was finally agreed that before starting for Piccadilly we should destroy the Count's lair close at hand. In case he should find it out too soon, we should thus be still ahead of him in our work of destruction. And his presence in his purely material shape, and at his weakest, might give us some new clue.

As to the disposal of forces, it was suggested by the Professor that, after our visit to Carfax, we should all enter the house in Piccadilly. That the two doctors and I should remain there, whilst Lord Godalming and Quincey found the lairs at Walworth and Mile End and destroyed them. It was possible, if not likely, the Professor urged, that the Count might appear in Piccadilly during the day, and that if so we might be able to cope with him then and there. At any rate, we might be able to follow him in force. To this plan I strenuously objected, and so far as my going was concerned, for I said that I intended to stay and protect Mina. I thought that my mind was made up on the subject, but Mina would not listen to my objection. She said that there might be some law matter in which I could be useful. That amongst the Count's papers might be some clue which I could understand out of my experience in Transylvania. And that, as it was, all the strength we could muster was required to cope with the Count's extraordinary power. I had to give in, for Mina's resolution was fixed. She said that it was the last hope for her that we should all work together.

"As for me," she said, "I have no fear. Things have been as bad as they can be. And whatever may happen must have in it some element of hope or comfort. Go, my husband! God can, if He wishes it, guard me as well alone as with any one present."

So I started up crying out, "Then in God's name let us come at once, for we are losing time. The Count may come to Piccadilly earlier than we think."

"Not so!" said Van Helsing, holding up his hand.

"But why?" I asked.

"Do you forget," he said, with actually a smile, "that last night he banqueted heavily, and will sleep late?"

Did I forget! Shall I ever… can I ever! Can any of us ever forget that terrible scene! Mina struggled hard to keep her brave countenance, but the pain overmastered her and she put her hands before her face, and shuddered whilst she moaned. Van Helsing had not intended to recall her frightful experience. He had simply lost sight of her and her part in the affair in his intellectual effort.

When it struck him what he said, he was horrified at his thoughtlessness and tried to comfort her.

"Oh, Madam Mina," he said, "dear, dear, Madam Mina, alas! That I of all who so reverence you should have said anything so forgetful. These stupid old lips of mine and this stupid old head do not deserve so, but you will forget it, will you not?" He bent low beside her as he spoke.

She took his hand, and looking at him through her tears, said hoarsely, “No, I shall not forget, for it is well that I remember. And with it I have so much in memory of you that is sweet, that I take it all together. Now, you must all be going soon. Breakfast is ready, and we must all eat that we may be strong.”

Breakfast was a strange meal to us all. We tried to be cheerful and encourage each other, and Mina was the brightest and most cheerful of us. When it was over, Van Helsing stood up and said, “Now, my dear friends, we go forth to our terrible enterprise. Are we all armed, as we were on that night when first we visited our enemy’s lair. Armed against ghostly as well as carnal attack?”

We all assured him.

“Then it is well. Now, Madam Mina, you are in any case quite safe here until the sunset. And before then we shall return… if… We shall return! But before we go let me see you armed against personal attack. I have myself, since you came down, prepared your chamber by the placing of things of which we know, so that He may not enter. Now let me guard yourself. On your forehead I touch this piece of Sacred Wafer in the name of the Father, the Son, and…”

There was a fearful scream which almost froze our hearts to hear. As he had placed the Wafer on Mina’s forehead, it had seared it… had burned into the flesh as though it had been a piece of white-hot metal. My poor darling’s brain had told her the significance of the fact as quickly as her nerves received the pain of it, and the two so overwhelmed her that her overwrought nature had its voice in that dreadful scream.

But the words to her thought came quickly. The echo of the scream had not ceased to ring on the air when there came the reaction, and she sank on her knees on the floor in an agony of abasement. Pulling her beautiful hair over her face, as the leper of old his mantle, she wailed out.

“Unclean! Unclean! Even the Almighty shuns my polluted flesh! I must bear this mark of shame upon my forehead until the Judgement Day.”

They all paused. I had thrown myself beside her in an agony of helpless grief, and putting my arms around held her tight. For a few minutes our sorrowful hearts beat together, whilst the friends around us turned away their eyes that ran tears silently. Then Van Helsing turned and said gravely. So gravely that I could not help feeling that he was in some way inspired, and was stating things outside himself.

“It may be that you may have to bear that mark till God himself see fit, as He most surely shall, on the Judgement Day, to redress all wrongs of the earth and of His children that He has placed thereon. And oh, Madam Mina, my dear, my dear, may we who love you be there to see, when that red scar, the sign of God’s knowledge of what has been, shall pass away, and leave your forehead as pure as the heart we know. For so surely as we live, that scar shall pass away when God sees right to lift the burden that is hard upon us. Till then we bear our Cross, as His Son did in obedience to His Will. It may be that we are chosen instruments of His good pleasure, and that we ascend to His bidding as that other through stripes and shame. Through tears and blood. Through doubts and fear, and all that makes the difference between God and man.”

There was hope in his words, and comfort. And they made for resignation. Mina and I both felt so, and simultaneously we each took one of the old man’s hands and bent over and kissed it. Then without a word we all knelt down together, and all holding hands, swore to be true to each other. We men pledged ourselves to raise the veil of sorrow from the head of her whom, each in his own way, we loved. And we prayed for help and guidance in the terrible task which lay before us. It was then time to start. So I said farewell to Mina, a parting which neither of us shall forget to our dying day, and we set out.

To one thing I have made up my mind. If we find out that Mina must be a vampire in the end, then she shall not go into that unknown and terrible land alone. I suppose it is thus that in old times one vampire meant many. Just as their hideous bodies could only rest in sacred earth, so the holiest love was the recruiting sergeant for their ghastly ranks.

We entered Carfax without trouble and found all things the same as on the first occasion. It was hard to believe that amongst so prosaic surroundings of neglect and dust and decay there was any ground for such fear as already we knew. Had not our minds been made up, and had there not been terrible memories to spur us on, we could hardly have proceeded with our task. We found no papers, or any sign of use in the house. And in the old chapel the great boxes looked just as we had seen them last.

Dr. Van Helsing said to us solemnly as we stood before him, “And now, my friends, we have a duty here to do. We must sterilise this earth, so sacred of holy memories, that he has brought from a far distant land for such fell use. He has chosen this earth because it has been holy. Thus we defeat him with his own weapon, for we make it more holy still. It was sanctified to such use of man, now we sanctify it to God.”

As he spoke he took from his bag a screwdriver and a wrench, and very soon the top of one of the cases was thrown open. The earth smelled musty and close, but we did not somehow seem to mind, for our attention was concentrated on the Professor. Taking from his box a piece of the Sacred Wafer he laid it reverently on the earth, and then shutting down the lid began to screw it home, we aiding him as he worked.

One by one we treated in the same way each of the great boxes, and left them as we had found them to all appearance. But in each was a portion of the Host. When we closed the door behind us, the Professor said solemnly, "So much is already done. It may be that with all the others we can be so successful, then the sunset of this evening may shine of Madam Mina's forehead all white as ivory and with no stain!"

As we passed across the lawn on our way to the station to catch our train we could see the front of the asylum. I looked eagerly, and in the window of my own room saw Mina. I waved my hand to her, and nodded to tell that our work there was successfully accomplished. She nodded in reply to show that she understood. The last I saw, she was waving her hand in farewell. It was with a heavy heart that we sought the station and just caught the train, which was steaming in as we reached the platform. I have written this in the train.

Piccadilly, 12:30 o'clock. — Just before we reached Fenchurch Street Lord Godalming said to me, "Quincey and I will find a locksmith. You had better not come with us in case there should be any difficulty. For under the circumstances it wouldn't seem so bad for us to break into an empty house. But you are a solicitor and the Incorporated Law Society might tell you that you should have known better."

I demurred as to my not sharing any danger even of odium, but he went on, “Besides, it will attract less attention if there are not too many of us. My title will make it all right with the locksmith, and with any policeman that may come along. You had better go with Jack and the Professor and stay in the Green Park. Somewhere in sight of the house, and when you see the door opened and the smith has gone away, do you all come across. We shall be on the lookout for you, and shall let you in.”

“The advice is good!” said Van Helsing, so we said no more. Godalming and Morris hurried off in a cab, we following in another. At the corner of Arlington Street our contingent got out and strolled into the Green Park. My heart beat as I saw the house on which so much of our hope was centred, looming up grim and silent in its deserted condition amongst its more lively and spruce-looking neighbours. We sat down on a bench within good view, and began to smoke cigars so as to attract as little attention as possible. The minutes seemed to pass with leaden feet as we waited for the coming of the others.

At length we saw a four-wheeler drive up. Out of it, in leisurely fashion, got Lord Godalming and Morris. And down from the box descended a thick-set working man with his rush-woven basket of tools. Morris paid the cabman, who touched his hat and drove away. Together the two ascended the steps, and Lord Godalming pointed out what he wanted done. The workman took off his coat leisurely and hung it on one of the spikes of the rail, saying something to a policeman who just then sauntered along. The policeman nodded acquiescence, and the man kneeling down placed his bag beside him. After searching through it, he took out a selection of tools which he proceeded to lay beside him in orderly fashion. Then he stood up, looked in the keyhole, blew into it, and turning to his employers, made some remark. Lord Godalming smiled, and the man lifted a good sized bunch of keys. Selecting one of them, he began to probe the lock, as if feeling his way with it. After fumbling about for a bit he tried a second, and then a third. All at once the door opened under a slight push from him, and he and the two others entered the hall. We sat still. My own cigar burnt furiously, but Van Helsing's went cold altogether. We waited patiently as we saw the workman come out and bring his bag. Then he held the door partly open, steadying it with his knees, whilst he fitted a key to the lock. This he finally handed to Lord Godalming, who took out his purse and gave him something. The man touched his hat, took his bag, put on his coat and departed. Not a soul took the slightest notice of the whole transaction.

When the man had fairly gone, we three crossed the street and knocked at the door. It was immediately opened by Quincey Morris, beside whom stood Lord Godalming lighting a cigar.

"The place smells so vilely," said the latter as we came in. It did indeed smell vilely. Like the old chapel at Carfax. And with our previous experience it was plain to us that the Count had been using the place pretty freely. We moved to explore the house, all keeping together in case of attack, for we knew we had a strong and wily enemy to deal with, and as yet we did not know whether the Count might not be in the house.

In the dining room, which lay at the back of the hall, we found eight boxes of earth. Eight boxes only out of the nine which we sought! Our work was not over, and would never be until we should have found the missing box.

First we opened the shutters of the window which looked out across a narrow stone flagged yard at the blank face of a stable, pointed to look like the front of a miniature house. There were no windows in it, so we were not afraid of being overlooked. We did not lose any time in examining the chests. With the tools which we had brought with us we opened them, one by one, and treated them as we had treated those others in the old chapel. It was evident to us that the Count was not at present in the house, and we proceeded to search for any of his effects.

After a cursory glance at the rest of the rooms, from basement to attic, we came to the conclusion that the dining room contained any effects which might belong to the Count. And so we proceeded to minutely examine them. They lay in a sort of orderly disorder on the great dining room table.

There were title deeds of the Piccadilly house in a great bundle, deeds of the purchase of the houses at Mile End and Bermondsey, notepaper, envelopes, and pens and ink. All were covered up in thin wrapping paper to keep them from the dust. There were also a clothes brush, a brush and comb, and a jug and basin. The latter containing dirty water which was reddened as if with blood. Last of all was a little heap of keys of all sorts and sizes, probably those belonging to the other houses.

When we had examined this last find, Lord Godalming and Quincey Morris taking accurate notes of the various addresses of the houses in the East and the South, took with them the keys in a great bunch, and set out to destroy the boxes in these places. The rest of us are, with what patience we can, waiting their return, or the coming of the Count.

CHAPTER 23

DR. SEWARD’S DIARY

3 October. — The time seemed terribly long whilst we were waiting for the coming of Godalming and Quincey Morris. The Professor tried to keep our minds active by using them all the time. I could see his beneficent purpose, by the side glances which he threw from time to time at Harker. The poor fellow is overwhelmed in a misery that is appalling to see. Last night he was a frank, happy-looking man, with strong, youthful face, full of energy, and with dark brown hair. Today he is a drawn, haggard old man, whose white hair matches well with the hollow burning eyes and grief-written lines of his face. His energy is still intact. In fact, he is like a living flame. This may yet be his salvation, for if all go well, it will tide him over the despairing period. He will then, in a kind of way, wake again to the realities of life. Poor fellow, I thought my own trouble was bad enough, but his… !

The Professor knows this well enough, and is doing his best to keep his mind active. What he has been saying was, under the circumstances, of absorbing interest. So well as I can remember, here it is:

“I have studied, over and over again since they came into my hands, all the papers relating to this monster, and the more I have studied, the greater seems the necessity to utterly stamp him out. All through there are signs of his advance. Not only of his power, but of his knowledge of it. As I learned from the researches of my friend Arminius of Buda-Pesth, he was in life a most wonderful man. Soldier, statesman, and alchemist — which latter was the highest development of the science knowledge of his time. He had a mighty brain, a learning beyond compare, and a heart that knew no fear and no remorse. He dared even to attend the Scholomance, and there was no branch of knowledge of his time that he did not essay.

"Well, in him the brain powers survived the physical death. Though it would seem that memory was not all complete. In some faculties of mind he has been, and is, only a child. But he is growing, and some things that were childish at the first are now of man's stature. He is experimenting, and doing it well. And if it had not been that we have crossed his path he would be yet, he may be yet if we fail, the father or furtherer of a new order of beings, whose road must lead through Death, not Life."

Harker groaned and said, "And this is all arrayed against my darling! But how is he experimenting? The knowledge may help us to defeat him!"

"He has all along, since his coming, been trying his power, slowly but surely. That big child-brain of his is working. Well for us, it is as yet a child-brain. For had he dared, at the first, to attempt certain things he would long ago have been beyond our power. However, he means to succeed, and a man who has centuries before him can afford to wait and to go slow. Festina lente may well be his motto."

"I fail to understand," said Harker wearily. "Oh, do be more plain to me! Perhaps grief and trouble are dulling my brain."

The Professor laid his hand tenderly on his shoulder as he spoke, "Ah, my child, I will be plain. Do you not see how, of late, this monster has been creeping into knowledge experimentally. How he has been making use of the zoophagous patient to effect his entry into friend John's home. For your Vampire, though in all afterwards he can come when and how he will, must at the first make entry only when asked thereto by an inmate. But these are not his most important experiments. Do we not see how at the first all these so great boxes were moved by others. He knew not then but that must be so. But all the time that so great child-brain of his was growing, and he began to consider whether he might not himself move the box. So he began to help. And then, when he found that this be all right, he try to move them all alone. And so he progress, and he scatter these graves of him. And none but he know where they are hidden.

"He may have intend to bury them deep in the ground. So that only he use them in the night, or at such time as he can change his form, they do him equal well, and none may know these are his hiding place! But, my child, do not despair, this knowledge came to him just too late! Already all of his lairs but one be sterilise as for him. And before the sunset this shall be so. Then he have no place where he can move and hide. I delayed this morning that so we might be sure. Is there not more at stake for us than for him? Then why not be more careful than him? By my clock it is one hour and already, if all be well, friend Arthur and Quincey are on their way to us. Today is our day, and we must go sure, if slow, and lose no chance. See! There are five of us when those absent ones return."

Whilst we were speaking we were startled by a knock at the hall door, the double postman's knock of the telegraph boy. We all moved out to the hall with one impulse, and Van Helsing, holding up his hand to us to keep silence, stepped to the door and opened it. The boy handed in a dispatch. The Professor closed the door again, and after looking at the direction, opened it and read aloud.

"Look out for D. He has just now, 12:45, come from Carfax hurriedly and hastened towards the South. He seems to be going the round and may want to see you: Mina."

There was a pause, broken by Jonathan Harker's voice, "Now, God be thanked, we shall soon meet!"

Van Helsing turned to him quickly and said, "God will act in His own way and time. Do not fear, and do not rejoice as yet. For what we wish for at the moment may be our own undoings."

"I care for nothing now," he answered hotly, "except to wipe out this brute from the face of creation. I would sell my soul to do it!"

"Oh, hush, hush, my child!" said Van Helsing. "God does not purchase souls in this wise, and the Devil, though he may purchase, does not keep faith. But God is merciful and just, and knows your pain and your devotion to that dear Madam Mina. Think you, how her pain would be doubled, did she but hear your wild words. Do not fear any of us, we are all devoted to this cause, and today shall see the end. The time is coming for action. Today this Vampire is limit to the powers of man, and till sunset he may not change. It will take him time to arrive here, see it is twenty minutes past one, and there are yet some times before he can hither come, be he never so quick. What we must hope for is that my Lord Arthur and Quincey arrive first."

About half an hour after we had received Mrs. Harker's telegram, there came a quiet, resolute knock at the hall door. It was just an ordinary knock, such as is given hourly by thousands of gentlemen, but it made the Professor's heart and mine beat loudly. We looked at each other, and together moved out into the hall. We each held ready to use our various armaments, the spiritual in the left hand, the mortal in the right. Van Helsing pulled back the latch, and holding the door half open, stood back, having both hands ready for action. The gladness of our hearts must have shown upon our faces when on the step, close to the door, we saw Lord Godalming and Quincey Morris. They came quickly in and closed the door behind them, the former saying, as they moved along the hall:

“It is all right. We found both places. Six boxes in each and we destroyed them all.”

“Destroyed?” asked the Professor.

“For him!” We were silent for a minute, and then Quincey said, “There’s nothing to do but to wait here. If, however, he doesn’t turn up by five o’clock, we must start off. For it won’t do to leave Mrs. Harker alone after sunset.”

“He will be here before long now,” said Van Helsing, who had been consulting his pocketbook. “Nota bene, in Madam’s telegram he went south from Carfax. That means he went to cross the river, and he could only do so at slack of tide, which should be something before one o’clock. That he went south has a meaning for us. He is as yet only suspicious, and he went from Carfax first to the place where he would suspect interference least. You must have been at Bermondsey only a short time before him. That he is not here already shows that he went to Mile End next. This took him some time, for he would then have to be carried over the river in some way. Believe me, my friends, we shall not have long to wait now. We should have ready some plan of attack, so that we may throw away no chance. Hush, there is no time now. Have all your arms! Be ready!” He held up a warning hand as he spoke, for we all could hear a key softly inserted in the lock of the hall door.

I could not but admire, even at such a moment, the way in which a dominant spirit asserted itself. In all our hunting parties and adventures in different parts of the world, Quincey Morris had always been the one to arrange the plan of action, and Arthur and I had been accustomed to obey him implicitly. Now, the old habit seemed to be renewed instinctively. With a swift glance around the room, he at once laid out our plan of attack, and without speaking a word, with a gesture, placed us each in position. Van Helsing, Harker, and I were just behind the door, so that when it was opened the Professor could guard it whilst we two stepped between the incomer and the door. Godalming behind and Quincey in front stood just out of sight ready to move in front of the window. We waited in a suspense that made the seconds pass with nightmare slowness. The slow, careful steps came along the hall. The Count was evidently prepared for some surprise, at least he feared it.

Suddenly with a single bound he leaped into the room. Winning a way past us before any of us could raise a hand to stay him. There was something so pantherlike in the movement, something so unhuman, that it seemed to sober us all from the shock of his coming. The first to act was Harker, who with a quick movement, threw himself before the door leading into the room in the front of the house. As the Count saw us, a horrible sort of snarl passed over his face, showing the eyeteeth long and pointed. But the evil smile as quickly passed into a cold stare of lion-like disdain. His expression again changed as, with a single impulse, we all advanced upon him. It was a pity that we had not some better organised plan of attack, for even at the moment I wondered what we were to do. I did not myself know whether our lethal weapons would avail us anything.

Harker evidently meant to try the matter, for he had ready his great Kukri knife and made a fierce and sudden cut at him. The blow was a powerful one; only the diabolical quickness of the Count’s leap back saved him. A second less and the trenchant blade had shorn through his heart. As it was, the point just cut the cloth of his coat, making a wide gap whence a bundle of bank notes and a stream of gold fell out. The expression of the Count's face was so hellish, that for a moment I feared for Harker, though I saw him throw the terrible knife aloft again for another stroke. Instinctively I moved forward with a protective impulse, holding the Crucifix and Wafer in my left hand. I felt a mighty power fly along my arm, and it was without surprise that I saw the monster cower back before a similar movement made spontaneously by each one of us. It would be impossible to describe the expression of hate and baffled malignity, of anger and hellish rage, which came over the Count's face. His waxen hue became greenish-yellow by the contrast of his burning eyes, and the red scar on the forehead showed on the pallid skin like a palpitating wound. The next instant, with a sinuous dive he swept under Harker's arm, ere his blow could fall, and grasping a handful of the money from the floor, dashed across the room, threw himself at the window. Amid the crash and glitter of the falling glass, he tumbled into the flagged area below. Through the sound of the shivering glass I could hear the "ting" of the gold, as some of the sovereigns fell on the flagging.

We ran over and saw him spring unhurt from the ground. He, rushing up the steps, crossed the flagged yard, and pushed open the stable door. There he turned and spoke to us.

"You think to baffle me, you with your pale faces all in a row, like sheep in a butcher's. You shall be sorry yet, each one of you! You think you have left me without a place to rest, but I have more. My revenge is just begun! I spread it over centuries, and time is on my side. Your girls that you all love are mine already. And through them you and others shall yet be mine, my creatures, to do my bidding and to be my jackals when I want to feed. Bah!"

With a contemptuous sneer, he passed quickly through the door, and we heard the rusty bolt creak as he fastened it behind him. A door beyond opened and shut. The first of us to speak was the Professor. Realising the difficulty of following him through the stable, we moved toward the hall.

"We have learnt something… much! Notwithstanding his brave words, he fears us. He fears time, he fears want! For if not, why he hurry so? His very tone betray him, or my ears deceive. Why take that money? You follow quick. You are hunters of the wild beast, and understand it so. For me, I make sure that nothing here may be of use to him, if so that he returns."

As he spoke he put the money remaining in his pocket, took the title deeds in the bundle as Harker had left them, and swept the remaining things into the open fireplace, where he set fire to them with a match.

Godalming and Morris had rushed out into the yard, and Harker had lowered himself from the window to follow the Count. He had, however, bolted the stable door, and by the time they had forced it open there was no sign of him. Van Helsing and I tried to make inquiry at the back of the house. But the mews was deserted and no one had seen him depart.

It was now late in the afternoon, and sunset was not far off. We had to recognise that our game was up. With heavy hearts we agreed with the Professor when he said, "Let us go back to Madam Mina. Poor, poor dear Madam Mina. All we can do just now is done, and we can there, at least, protect her. But we need not despair. There is but one more earth box, and we must try to find it. When that is done all may yet be well."

I could see that he spoke as bravely as he could to comfort

Harker. The poor fellow was quite broken down, now and again he gave a low groan which he could not suppress. He was thinking of his wife.

With sad hearts we came back to my house, where we found Mrs. Harker waiting us, with an appearance of cheerfulness which did honour to her bravery and unselfishness. When she saw our faces, her own became as pale as death. For a second or two her eyes were closed as if she were in secret prayer.

And then she said cheerfully, “I can never thank you all enough. Oh, my poor darling!”

As she spoke, she took her husband’s grey head in her hands and kissed it.

“Lay your poor head here and rest it. All will yet be well, dear! God will protect us if He so will it in His good intent.” The poor fellow groaned. There was no place for words in his sublime misery.

We had a sort of perfunctory supper together, and I think it cheered us all up somewhat. It was, perhaps, the mere animal heat of food to hungry people, for none of us had eaten anything since breakfast, or the sense of companionship may have helped us, but anyhow we were all less miserable, and saw the morrow as not altogether without hope.

True to our promise, we told Mrs. Harker everything which had passed. And although she grew snowy white at times when danger had seemed to threaten her husband, and red at others when his devotion to her was manifested, she listened bravely and with calmness. When we came to the part where Harker had rushed at the Count so recklessly, she clung to her husband’s arm, and held it tight as though her clinging could protect him from any harm that might come. She said nothing, however, till the narration was all done, and matters had been brought up to the present time.

Then without letting go her husband's hand she stood up amongst us and spoke. Oh, that I could give any idea of the scene. Of that sweet, sweet, good, good woman in all the radiant beauty of her youth and animation, with the red scar on her forehead, of which she was conscious, and which we saw with grinding of our teeth, remembering whence and how it came. Her loving kindness against our grim hate. Her tender faith against all our fears and doubting. And we, knowing that so far as symbols went, she with all her goodness and purity and faith, was outcast from God.

"Jonathan," she said, and the word sounded like music on her lips it was so full of love and tenderness, "Jonathan dear, and you all my true, true friends, I want you to bear something in mind through all this dreadful time. I know that you must fight. That you must destroy even as you destroyed the false Lucy so that the true Lucy might live hereafter. But it is not a work of hate. That poor soul who has wrought all this misery is the saddest case of all. Just think what will be his joy when he, too, is destroyed in his worser part that his better part may have spiritual immortality. You must be pitiful to him, too, though it may not hold your hands from his destruction."

As she spoke I could see her husband's face darken and draw together, as though the passion in him were shriveling his being to its core. Instinctively the clasp on his wife's hand grew closer, till his knuckles looked white. She did not flinch from the pain which I knew she must have suffered, but looked at him with eyes that were more appealing than ever.

As she stopped speaking he leaped to his feet, almost tearing his hand from hers as he spoke.

"May God give him into my hand just for long enough to destroy that earthly life of him which we are aiming at. If beyond it I could send his soul forever and ever to burning hell I would do it!"

"Oh, hush! Oh, hush in the name of the good God. Don't say such things, Jonathan, my husband, or you will crush me with fear and horror. Just think, my dear… I have been thinking all this long, long day of it… that… perhaps… some day… I, too, may need such pity, and that some other like you, and with equal cause for anger, may deny it to me! Oh, my husband! My husband, indeed I would have spared you such a thought had there been another way. But I pray that God may not have treasured your wild words, except as the heart-broken wail of a very loving and sorely stricken man. Oh, God, let these poor white hairs go in evidence of what he has suffered, who all his life has done no wrong, and on whom so many sorrows have come."

We men were all in tears now. There was no resisting them, and we wept openly. She wept, too, to see that her sweeter counsels had prevailed. Her husband flung himself on his knees beside her, and putting his arms round her, hid his face in the folds of her dress. Van Helsing beckoned to us and we stole out of the room, leaving the two loving hearts alone with their God.

Before they retired the Professor fixed up the room against any coming of the Vampire, and assured Mrs. Harker that she might rest in peace. She tried to school herself to the belief, and manifestly for her husband's sake, tried to seem content. It was a brave struggle, and was, I think and believe, not without its reward. Van Helsing had placed at hand a bell which either of them was to sound in case of any emergency. When they had retired, Quincey, Godalming, and I arranged that we should sit up, dividing the night between us, and watch over the safety of the poor stricken lady. The first watch falls to Quincey, so the rest of us shall be off to bed as soon as we can.

Godalming has already turned in, for his is the second watch. Now that my work is done I, too, shall go to bed.

JONATHAN HARKER'S JOURNAL

3-4 October, close to midnight. — I thought yesterday would never end. There was over me a yearning for sleep, in some sort of blind belief that to wake would be to find things changed, and that any change must now be for the better. Before we parted, we discussed what our next step was to be, but we could arrive at no result. All we knew was that one earth box remained, and that the Count alone knew where it was. If he chooses to lie hidden, he may baffle us for years. And in the meantime, the thought is too horrible, I dare not think of it even now. This I know, that if ever there was a woman who was all perfection, that one is my poor wronged darling. I loved her a thousand times more for her sweet pity of last night, a pity that made my own hate of the monster seem despicable. Surely God will not permit the world to be the poorer by the loss of such a creature. This is hope to me. We are all drifting reefwards now, and faith is our only anchor. Thank God! Mina is sleeping, and sleeping without dreams. I fear what her dreams might be like, with such terrible memories to ground them in. She has not been so calm, within my seeing, since the sunset. Then, for a while, there came over her face a repose which was like spring after the blasts of March. I thought at the time that it was the softness of the red sunset on her face, but somehow now I think it has a deeper meaning. I am not sleepy myself, though I am weary… weary to death. However, I must try to sleep. For there is tomorrow to think of, and there is no rest for me until…

Later — I must have fallen asleep, for I was awakened by Mina, who was sitting up in bed, with a startled look on her face. I could see easily, for we did not leave the room in darkness. She had placed a warning hand over my mouth, and now she whispered in my ear, “Hush! There is someone in the corridor!” I got up softly, and crossing the room, gently opened the door.

Just outside, stretched on a mattress, lay Mr. Morris, wide awake. He raised a warning hand for silence as he whispered to me, “Hush! Go back to bed. It is all right. One of us will be here all night. We don’t mean to take any chances!”

His look and gesture forbade discussion, so I came back and told Mina. She sighed and positively a shadow of a smile stole over her poor, pale face as she put her arms round me and said softly, “Oh, thank God for good brave men!” With a sigh she sank back again to sleep. I write this now as I am not sleepy, though I must try again.

4 October, morning. — Once again during the night I was wakened by Mina. This time we had all had a good sleep, for the grey of the coming dawn was making the windows into sharp oblongs, and the gas flame was like a speck rather than a disc of light.

She said to me hurriedly, “Go, call the Professor. I want to see him at once.”

“Why?” I asked.

“I have an idea. I suppose it must have come in the night, and matured without my knowing it. He must hypnotise me before the dawn, and then I shall be able to speak. Go quick, dearest, the time is getting close.”

I went to the door. Dr. Seward was resting on the mattress, and seeing me, he sprang to his feet.

"Is anything wrong?" he asked, in alarm.

"No," I replied. "But Mina wants to see Dr. Van Helsing at once."

"I will go," he said, and hurried into the Professor's room.

Two or three minutes later Van Helsing was in the room in his dressing gown, and Mr. Morris and Lord Godalming were with Dr. Seward at the door asking questions. When the Professor saw Mina a smile, a positive smile ousted the anxiety of his face.

He rubbed his hands as he said, "Oh, my dear Madam Mina, this is indeed a change. See! Friend Jonathan, we have got our dear Madam Mina, as of old, back to us today!" Then turning to her, he said cheerfully, "And what am I to do for you? For at this hour you do not want me for nothing."

"I want you to hypnotise me!" she said. "Do it before the dawn, for I feel that then I can speak, and speak freely. Be quick, for the time is short!" Without a word he motioned her to sit up in bed.

Looking fixedly at her, he commenced to make passes in front of her, from over the top of her head downward, with each hand in turn. Mina gazed at him fixedly for a few minutes, during which my own heart beat like a trip hammer, for I felt that some crisis was at hand. Gradually her eyes closed, and she sat, stock still. Only by the gentle heaving of her bosom could one know that she was alive. The Professor made a few more passes and then stopped, and I could see that his forehead was covered with great beads of perspiration. Mina opened her eyes, but she did not seem the same woman. There was a far-away look in her eyes, and her voice had a sad dreaminess which was new to me. Raising his hand to impose silence, the Professor motioned to me to bring the others in. They came on tiptoe, closing the door behind them, and stood at the foot of the bed, looking on. Mina appeared not to see them. The stillness was broken by Van Helsing's voice speaking in a low level tone which would not break the current of her thoughts.

"Where are you?" The answer came in a neutral way.

"I do not know. Sleep has no place it can call its own." For several minutes there was silence. Mina sat rigid, and the Professor stood staring at her fixedly.

The rest of us hardly dared to breathe. The room was growing lighter. Without taking his eyes from Mina's face, Dr. Van Helsing motioned me to pull up the blind. I did so, and the day seemed just upon us. A red streak shot up, and a rosy light seemed to diffuse itself through the room. On the instant the Professor spoke again.

"Where are you now?"

The answer came dreamily, but with intention. It were as though she were interpreting something. I have heard her use the same tone when reading her shorthand notes.

"I do not know. It is all strange to me!"

"What do you see?"

"I can see nothing. It is all dark."

"What do you hear?" I could detect the strain in the Professor's patient voice.

"The lapping of water. It is gurgling by, and little waves leap. I can hear them on the outside."

"Then you are on a ship?'"

We all looked at each other, trying to glean something each from the other. We were afraid to think.

The answer came quick, "Oh, yes!"

"What else do you hear?"

“The sound of men stamping overhead as they run about. There is the creaking of a chain, and the loud tinkle as the check of the capstan falls into the ratchet.”

“What are you doing?”

“I am still, oh so still. It is like death!” The voice faded away into a deep breath as of one sleeping, and the open eyes closed again.

By this time the sun had risen, and we were all in the full light of day. Dr. Van Helsing placed his hands on Mina’s shoulders, and laid her head down softly on her pillow. She lay like a sleeping child for a few moments, and then, with a long sigh, awoke and stared in wonder to see us all around her.

“Have I been talking in my sleep?” was all she said. She seemed, however, to know the situation without telling, though she was eager to know what she had told. The Professor repeated the conversation, and she said, “Then there is not a moment to lose. It may not be yet too late!”

Mr. Morris and Lord Godalming started for the door but the Professor’s calm voice called them back.

“Stay, my friends. That ship, wherever it was, was weighing anchor at the moment in your so great Port of London. Which of them is it that you seek? God be thanked that we have once again a clue, though whither it may lead us we know not. We have been blind somewhat. Blind after the manner of men, since we can look back we see what we might have seen looking forward if we had been able to see what we might have seen! Alas, but that sentence is a puddle, is it not? We can know now what was in the Count’s mind, when he seize that money, though Jonathan’s so fierce knife put him in the danger that even he dread. He meant escape. Hear me, ESCAPE! He saw that with but one earth box left, and a pack of men following like dogs after a fox, this London was no place for him. He have take his last earth box on board a ship, and he leave the land. He think to escape, but no! We follow him. Tally Ho! As friend Arthur would say when he put on his red frock! Our old fox is wily. Oh! So wily, and we must follow with wile. I, too, am wily and I think his mind in a little while. In meantime we may rest and in peace, for there are between us which he do not want to pass, and which he could not if he would. Unless the ship were to touch the land, and then only at full or slack tide. See, and the sun is just rose, and all day to sunset is us. Let us take bath, and dress, and have breakfast which we all need, and which we can eat comfortably since he be not in the same land with us."

Mina looked at him appealingly as she asked, "But why need we seek him further, when he is gone away from us?"

He took her hand and patted it as he replied, "Ask me nothing as yet. When we have breakfast, then I answer all questions." He would say no more, and we separated to dress.

After breakfast Mina repeated her question. He looked at her gravely for a minute and then said sorrowfully, "Because my dear, dear Madam Mina, now more than ever must we find him even if we have to follow him to the jaws of Hell!"

She grew paler as she asked faintly, "Why?"

"Because," he answered solemnly, "he can live for centuries, and you are but mortal woman. Time is now to be dreaded, since once he put that mark upon your throat."

I was just in time to catch her as she fell forward in a faint.

CHAPTER 24

DR. SEWARD'S PHONOGRAPH DIARY

SPOKEN BY VAN HELSING

This to Jonathan Harker.

You are to stay with your dear Madam Mina. We shall go to make our search, if I can call it so, for it is not search but knowing, and we seek confirmation only. But do you stay and take care of her today. This is your best and most holiest office. This day nothing can find him here.

Let me tell you that so you will know what we four know already, for I have tell them. He, our enemy, have gone away. He have gone back to his Castle in Transylvania. I know it so well, as if a great hand of fire wrote it on the wall. He have prepare for this in some way, and that last earth box was ready to ship somewheres. For this he took the money. For this he hurry at the last, lest we catch him before the sun go down. It was his last hope, save that he might hide in the tomb that he think poor Miss Lucy, being as he thought like him, keep open to him. But there was not of time. When that fail he make straight for his last resource, his last earth-work I might say did I wish double entente. He is clever, oh so clever! He know that his game here was finish. And so he decide he go back home. He find ship going by the route he came, and he go in it.

We go off now to find what ship, and whither bound. When we have discover that, we come back and tell you all. Then we will comfort you and poor Madam Mina with new hope. For it will be hope when you think it over, that all is not lost. This very creature that we pursue, he take hundreds of years to get so far as London.

And yet in one day, when we know of the disposal of him we drive him out. He is finite, though he is powerful to do much harm and suffers not as we do. But we are strong, each in our purpose, and we are all more strong together. Take heart afresh, dear husband of Madam Mina. This battle is but begun and in the end we shall win. So sure as that God sits on high to watch over His children. Therefore be of much comfort till we return.

VAN HELSING.

JONATHAN HARKER'S JOURNAL

4 October. — When I read to Mina, Van Helsing's message in the phonograph, the poor girl brightened up considerably. Already the certainty that the Count is out of the country has given her comfort. And comfort is strength to her. For my own part, now that his horrible danger is not face to face with us, it seems almost impossible to believe in it. Even my own terrible experiences in Castle Dracula seem like a long forgotten dream. Here in the crisp autumn air in the bright sunlight.

Alas! How can I disbelieve! In the midst of my thought my eye fell on the red scar on my poor darling's white forehead. Whilst that lasts, there can be no disbelief. Mina and I fear to be idle, so we have been over all the diaries again and again. Somehow, although the reality seem greater each time, the pain and the fear seem less. There is something of a guiding purpose manifest throughout, which is comforting. Mina says that perhaps we are the instruments of ultimate good. It may be! I shall try to think as she does. We have never spoken to each other yet of the future. It is better to wait till we see the Professor and the others after their investigations.

The day is running by more quickly than I ever thought a day could run for me again. It is now three o'clock.

MINA HARKER'S JOURNAL

5 October, 5 P.M. — Our meeting for report. Present: Professor Van Helsing, Lord Godalming, Dr. Seward, Mr. Quincey Morris, Jonathan Harker, Mina Harker.

Dr. Van Helsing described what steps were taken during the day to discover on what boat and whither bound Count Dracula made his escape.

"As I knew that he wanted to get back to Transylvania, I felt sure that he must go by the Danube mouth, or by somewhere in the Black Sea, since by that way he come. It was a dreary blank that was before us. *Omne ignotum pro magnifico*; and so with heavy hearts we start to find what ships leave for the Black Sea last night. He was in sailing ship, since Madam Mina tell of sails being set. These not so important as to go in your list of the shipping in the Times, and so we go, by suggestion of Lord Godalming, to your Lloyd's, where are note of all ships that sail, however so small. There we find that only one Black Sea bound ship go out with the tide. She is the Czarina Catherine, and she sail from Doolittle's Wharf for Varna, and thence to other ports and up the Danube. 'So!' said I, 'this is the ship whereon is the Count.' So off we go to Doolittle's Wharf, and there we find a man in an office. From him we inquire of the goings of the Czarina Catherine. He swear much, and he red face and loud of voice, but he good fellow all the same. And when Quincey give him something from his pocket which crackle as he roll it up, and put it in a so small bag which he have hid deep in his clothing, he still better fellow and humble servant to us. He come with us, and ask many men who are rough and hot. These be better fellows too when they have been no more thirsty. They say much of blood and bloom, and of others which I comprehend not, though I guess what they mean. But nevertheless they tell us all things which we want to know.

"They make known to us among them, how last afternoon at about five o'clock comes a man so hurry. A tall man, thin and pale, with high nose and teeth so white, and eyes that seem to be burning. That he be all in black, except that he have a hat of straw which suit not him or the time. That he scatter his money in making quick inquiry as to what ship sails for the Black Sea and for where. Some took him to the office and then to the ship, where he will not go aboard but halt at shore end of gangplank, and ask that the captain come to him. The captain come, when told that he will be pay well, and though he swear much at the first he agree to term. Then the thin man go and some one tell him where horse and cart can be hired. He go there and soon he come again, himself driving cart on which a great box. This he himself lift down, though it take several to put it on truck for the ship. He give much talk to captain as to how and where his box is to be place. But the captain like it not and swear at him in many tongues, and tell him that if he like he can come and see where it shall be. But he say 'no,' that he come not yet, for that he have much to do. Whereupon the captain tell him that he had better be quick, with blood, for that his ship will leave the place, of blood, before the turn of the tide, with blood. Then the thin man smile and say that of course he must go when he think fit, but he will be surprise if he go quite so soon. The captain swear again, polyglot, and the thin man make him bow, and thank him, and say that he will so far intrude on his kindness as to come aboard before the sailing. Final the captain, more red than ever, and in more tongues, tell him that he doesn't want no Frenchmen, with bloom upon them and also with blood, in his ship, with blood on her also. And so, after asking where he might purchase ship forms, he departed.

"No one knew where he went 'or bloomin' well cared' as they said, for they had something else to think of, well with blood again. For it soon became apparent to all that the Czarina Catherine would not sail as was expected. A thin mist began to creep up from the river, and it grew, and grew. Till soon a dense fog enveloped the ship and all around her. The captain swore polyglot, very polyglot, polyglot with bloom and blood, but he could do nothing. The water rose and rose, and he began to fear that he would lose the tide altogether. He was in no friendly mood, when just at full tide, the thin man came up the gangplank again and asked to see where his box had been stowed. Then the captain replied that he wished that he and his box, old and with much bloom and blood, were in hell. But the thin man did not be offend, and went down with the mate and saw where it was place, and came up and stood awhile on deck in fog. He must have come off by himself, for none notice him. Indeed they thought not of him, for soon the fog begin to melt away, and all was clear again. My friends of the thirst and the language that was of bloom and blood laughed, as they told how the captain's swears exceeded even his usual polyglot, and was more than ever full of picturesque, when on questioning other mariners who were on movement up and down the river that hour, he found that few of them had seen any of fog at all, except where it lay round the wharf. However, the ship went out on the ebb tide, and was doubtless by morning far down the river mouth. She was then, when they told us, well out to sea.

"And so, my dear Madam Mina, it is that we have to rest for a time, for our enemy is on the sea, with the fog at his command, on his way to the Danube mouth. To sail a ship takes time, go she never so quick. And when we start to go on land more quick, and we meet him there. Our best hope is to come on him when in the box between sunrise and sunset. For then he can make no struggle, and we may deal with him as we should. There are days for us, in which we can make ready our plan. We know all about where he go. For we have seen the owner of the ship, who have shown us invoices and all papers that can be. The box we seek is to be landed in Varna, and to be given to an agent, one Ristics who will there present his credentials. And so our merchant friend will have done his part. When he ask if there be any wrong, for that so, he can telegraph and have inquiry made at Varna, we say 'no,' for what is to be done is not for police or of the customs. It must be done by us alone and in our own way."

When Dr. Van Helsing had done speaking, I asked him if he were certain that the Count had remained on board the ship. He replied, "We have the best proof of that, your own evidence, when in the hypnotic trance this morning."

I asked him again if it were really necessary that they should pursue the Count, for oh! I dread Jonathan leaving me, and I know that he would surely go if the others went. He answered in growing passion, at first quietly. As he went on, however, he grew more angry and more forceful, till in the end we could not but see wherein was at least some of that personal dominance which made him so long a master amongst men.

"Yes, it is necessary, necessary, necessary! For your sake in the first, and then for the sake of humanity. This monster has done much harm already, in the narrow scope where he find himself, and in the short time when as yet he was only as a body groping his so small measure in darkness and not knowing. All this have I told these others. You, my dear Madam Mina, will learn it in the phonograph of my friend John, or in that of your husband. I have told them how the measure of leaving his own barren land, barren of peoples, and coming to a new land where life of man teems till they are like the multitude of standing corn, was the work of centuries. Were another of the Undead, like him, to try to do what he has done, perhaps not all the centuries of the world that have been, or that will be, could aid him. With this one, all the forces of nature that are occult and deep and strong must have worked together in some wonderous way. The very place, where he have been alive, Undead for all these centuries, is full of strangeness of the geologic and chemical world. There are deep caverns and fissures that reach none know whither. There have been volcanoes, some of whose openings still send out waters of strange properties, and gases that kill or make to vivify. Doubtless, there is something magnetic or electric in some of these combinations of occult forces which work for physical life in strange way, and in himself were from the first some great qualities. In a hard and warlike time he was celebrate that he have more iron nerve, more subtle brain, more braver heart, than any man. In him some vital principle have in strange way found their utmost. And as his body keep strong and grow and thrive, so his brain grow too. All this without that diabolic aid which is surely to him. For it have to yield to the powers that come from, and are, symbolic of good. And now this is what he is to us. He have infect you, oh forgive me, my dear, that I must say such, but it is for good of you that I speak. He infect you in such wise, that even if he do no more, you have only to live, to live in your own old, sweet way, and so in time, death, which is of man's common lot and with God's sanction, shall make you like to him. This must not be! We have sworn together that it must not. Thus are we ministers of God's own wish. That the world, and men for whom His Son die, will not be given over to monsters, whose very existence would defame Him. He have allowed us to redeem one soul already, and we go out as the old knights of the Cross to redeem more. Like them we shall travel towards the sunrise. And like them, if we fall, we fall in good cause."

He paused and I said, "But will not the Count take his rebuff wisely? Since he has been driven from England, will he not avoid it, as a tiger does the village from which he has been hunted?"

"Aha!" he said, "your simile of the tiger good, for me, and I shall adopt him. Your maneater, as they of India call the tiger who has once tasted blood of the human, care no more for the other prey, but prowl unceasing till he get him. This that we hunt from our village is a tiger, too, a maneater, and he never cease to prowl. Nay, in himself he is not one to retire and stay afar. In his life, his living life, he go over the Turkey frontier and attack his enemy on his own ground. He be beaten back, but did he stay? No! He come again, and again, and again. Look at his persistence and endurance. With the child-brain that was to him he have long since conceive the idea of coming to a great city. What does he do? He find out the place of all the world most of promise for him. Then he deliberately set himself down to prepare for the task. He find in patience just how is his strength, and what are his powers. He study new tongues. He learn new social life, new environment of old ways, the politics, the law, the finance, the science, the habit of a new land and a new people who have come to be since he was. His glimpse that he have had, whet his appetite only and enkeen his desire. Nay, it help him to grow as to his brain. For it all prove to him how right he was at the first in his surmises. He have done this alone, all alone! From a ruin tomb in a forgotten land. What more may he not do when the greater world of thought is open to him. He that can smile at death, as we know him. Who can flourish in the midst of diseases that kill off whole peoples. Oh! If such an one was to come from God, and not the Devil, what a force for good might he not be in this old world of ours. But we are pledged to set the world free. Our toil must be in silence, and our efforts all in secret. For in this enlightened age, when men believe not even what they see, the doubting of wise men would be his greatest strength. It would be at once his sheath and his armor, and his weapons to destroy us, his enemies, who are willing to peril even our own souls for the safety of one we love. For the good of mankind, and for the honour and glory of God."

After a general discussion it was determined that for tonight nothing be definitely settled. That we should all sleep on the facts, and try to think out the proper conclusions. Tomorrow, at breakfast, we are to meet again, and after making our conclusions known to one another, we shall decide on some definite cause of action…

I feel a wonderful peace and rest tonight. It is as if some haunting presence were removed from me. Perhaps…

My surmise was not finished, could not be, for I caught sight in the mirror of the red mark upon my forehead, and I knew that I was still unclean.

DR. SEWARD'S DIARY

5 October. — We all arose early, and I think that sleep did much for each and all of us. When we met at early breakfast there was more general cheerfulness than any of us had ever expected to

experience again.

It is really wonderful how much resilience there is in human nature. Let any obstructing cause, no matter what, be removed in any way, even by death, and we fly back to first principles of hope and enjoyment. More than once as we sat around the table, my eyes opened in wonder whether the whole of the past days had not been a dream. It was only when I caught sight of the red blotch on Mrs. Harker's forehead that I was brought back to reality. Even now, when I am gravely revolving the matter, it is almost impossible to realise that the cause of all our trouble is still existent. Even Mrs. Harker seems to lose sight of her trouble for whole spells. It is only now and again, when something recalls it to her mind, that she thinks of her terrible scar. We are to meet here in my study in half an hour and decide on our course of action. I see only one immediate difficulty, I know it by instinct rather than reason. We shall all have to speak frankly. And yet I fear that in some mysterious way poor Mrs. Harker's tongue is tied. I know that she forms conclusions of her own, and from all that has been I can guess how brilliant and how true they must be. But she will not, or cannot, give them utterance. I have mentioned this to Van Helsing, and he and I are to talk it over when we are alone. I suppose it is some of that horrid poison which has got into her veins beginning to work. The Count had his own purposes when he gave her what Van Helsing called "the Vampire's baptism of blood." Well, there may be a poison that distills itself out of good things. In an age when the existence of ptomaines is a mystery we should not wonder at anything! One thing I know, that if my instinct be true regarding poor Mrs. Harker's silences, then there is a terrible difficulty, an unknown danger, in the work before us. The same power that compels her silence may compel her speech. I dare not think further, for so I should in my thoughts dishonour a noble woman!

Later. — When the Professor came in, we talked over the state of things. I could see that he had something on his mind, which he wanted to say, but felt some hesitancy about broaching the subject. After beating about the bush a little, he said, “Friend John, there is something that you and I must talk of alone, just at the first at any rate. Later, we may have to take the others into our confidence.”

Then he stopped, so I waited. He went on, “Madam Mina, our poor, dear Madam Mina is changing.”

A cold shiver ran through me to find my worst fears thus endorsed. Van Helsing continued.

“With the sad experience of Miss Lucy, we must this time be warned before things go too far. Our task is now in reality more difficult than ever, and this new trouble makes every hour of the direst importance. I can see the characteristics of the vampire coming in her face. It is now but very, very slight. But it is to be seen if we have eyes to notice without prejudge. Her teeth are sharper, and at times her eyes are more hard. But these are not all, there is to her the silence now often, as so it was with Miss Lucy. She did not speak, even when she wrote that which she wished to be known later. Now my fear is this. If it be that she can, by our hypnotic trance, tell what the Count see and hear, is it not more true that he who have hypnotise her first, and who have drink of her very blood and make her drink of his, should if he will, compel her mind to disclose to him that which she know?”

I nodded acquiescence. He went on, “Then, what we must do is to prevent this. We must keep her ignorant of our intent, and so she cannot tell what she know not. This is a painful task! Oh, so painful that it heartbreak me to think of it, but it must be. When today we meet, I must tell her that for reason which we will not to speak she must not more be of our council, but be simply guarded by us."

He wiped his forehead, which had broken out in profuse perspiration at the thought of the pain which he might have to inflict upon the poor soul already so tortured. I knew that it would be some sort of comfort to him if I told him that I also had come to the same conclusion. For at any rate it would take away the pain of doubt. I told him, and the effect was as I expected.

It is now close to the time of our general gathering. Van Helsing has gone away to prepare for the meeting, and his painful part of it. I really believe his purpose is to be able to pray alone.

Later. — At the very outset of our meeting a great personal relief was experienced by both Van Helsing and myself. Mrs. Harker had sent a message by her husband to say that she would not join us at present, as she thought it better that we should be free to discuss our movements without her presence to embarrass us. The Professor and I looked at each other for an instant, and somehow we both seemed relieved. For my own part, I thought that if Mrs. Harker realised the danger herself, it was much pain as well as much danger averted. Under the circumstances we agreed, by a questioning look and answer, with finger on lip, to preserve silence in our suspicions, until we should have been able to confer alone again. We went at once into our Plan of Campaign.

Van Helsing roughly put the facts before us first, "The Czarina Catherine left the Thames yesterday morning. It will take her at the quickest speed she has ever made at least three weeks to reach Varna.

But we can travel overland to the same place in three days. Now, if we allow for two days less for the ship's voyage, owing to such weather influences as we know that the Count can bring to bear, and if we allow a whole day and night for any delays which may occur to us, then we have a margin of nearly two weeks.

"Thus, in order to be quite safe, we must leave here on 17th at latest. Then we shall at any rate be in Varna a day before the ship arrives, and able to make such preparations as may be necessary. Of course we shall all go armed, armed against evil things, spiritual as well as physical."

Here Quincey Morris added, "I understand that the Count comes from a wolf country, and it may be that he shall get there before us. I propose that we add Winchesters to our armament. I have a kind of belief in a Winchester when there is any trouble of that sort around. Do you remember, Art, when we had the pack after us at Tobolsk? What wouldn't we have given then for a repeater apiece!"

"Good!" said Van Helsing, "Winchesters it shall be. Quincey's head is level at times, but most so when there is to hunt, metaphor be more dishonour to science than wolves be of danger to man. In the meantime we can do nothing here. And as I think that Varna is not familiar to any of us, why not go there more soon? It is as long to wait here as there. Tonight and tomorrow we can get ready, and then if all be well, we four can set out on our journey."

"We four?" said Harker interrogatively, looking from one to another of us.

"Of course!" answered the Professor quickly. "You must remain to take care of your so sweet wife!"

Harker was silent for awhile and then said in a hollow voice, "Let us talk of that part of it in the morning. I want to consult with Mina."

I thought that now was the time for Van Helsing to warn him not to disclose our plan to her, but he took no notice. I looked at him significantly and coughed. For answer he put his finger to his lips and turned away.

JONATHAN HARKER'S JOURNAL

5 October, afternoon. — For some time after our meeting this morning I could not think. The new phases of things leave my mind in a state of wonder which allows no room for active thought. Mina's determination not to take any part in the discussion set me thinking. And as I could not argue the matter with her, I could only guess. I am as far as ever from a solution now. The way the others received it, too puzzled me. The last time we talked of the subject we agreed that there was to be no more concealment of anything amongst us. Mina is sleeping now, calmly and sweetly like a little child. Her lips are curved and her face beams with happiness. Thank God, there are such moments still for her.

Later. — How strange it all is. I sat watching Mina's happy sleep, and I came as near to being happy myself as I suppose I shall ever be. As the evening drew on, and the earth took its shadows from the sun sinking lower, the silence of the room grew more and more solemn to me.

All at once Mina opened her eyes, and looking at me tenderly said, "Jonathan, I want you to promise me something on your word of honour. A promise made to me, but made holily in God's hearing, and not to be broken though I should go down on my knees and implore you with bitter tears. Quick, you must make it to me at once."

“Mina,” I said, “a promise like that, I cannot make at once. I may have no right to make it.”

“But, dear one,” she said, with such spiritual intensity that her eyes were like pole stars, “it is I who wish it. And it is not for myself. You can ask Dr. Van Helsing if I am not right. If he disagrees you may do as you will. Nay, more if you all agree, later you are absolved from the promise.”

“I promise!” I said, and for a moment she looked supremely happy. Though to me all happiness for her was denied by the red scar on her forehead.

She said, “Promise me that you will not tell me anything of the plans formed for the campaign against the Count. Not by word, or inference, or implication, not at any time whilst this remains to me!” And she solemnly pointed to the scar. I saw that she was in earnest, and said solemnly, “I promise!” and as I said it I felt that from that instant a door had been shut between us.

Later, midnight. — Mina has been bright and cheerful all the evening. So much so that all the rest seemed to take courage, as if infected somewhat with her gaiety. As a result even I myself felt as if the pall of gloom which weighs us down were somewhat lifted. We all retired early. Mina is now sleeping like a little child. It is wonderful thing that her faculty of sleep remains to her in the midst of her terrible trouble. Thank God for it, for then at least she can forget her care. Perhaps her example may affect me as her gaiety did tonight. I shall try it. Oh! For a dreamless sleep.

6 October, morning. — Another surprise. Mina woke me early, about the same time as yesterday, and asked me to bring Dr. Van Helsing. I thought that it was another occasion for hypnotism, and

without question went for the Professor. He had evidently expected some such call, for I found him dressed in his room. His door was ajar, so that he could hear the opening of the door of our room. He came at once. As he passed into the room, he asked Mina if the others might come, too.

"No," she said quite simply, "it will not be necessary. You can tell them just as well. I must go with you on your journey."

Dr. Van Helsing was as startled as I was. After a moment's pause he asked, "But why?"

"You must take me with you. I am safer with you, and you shall be safer, too."

"But why, dear Madam Mina? You know that your safety is our solemnest duty. We go into danger, to which you are, or may be, more liable than any of us from… from circumstances… things that have been." He paused embarrassed.

As she replied, she raised her finger and pointed to her forehead. "I know. That is why I must go. I can tell you now, whilst the sun is coming up. I may not be able again. I know that when the Count wills me I must go. I know that if he tells me to come in secret, I must by wile. By any device to hoodwink, even Jonathan." God saw the look that she turned on me as she spoke, and if there be indeed a Recording Angel that look is noted to her ever-lasting honour. I could only clasp her hand. I could not speak. My emotion was too great for even the relief of tears.

She went on. "You men are brave and strong. You are strong in your numbers, for you can defy that which would break down the human endurance of one who had to guard alone. Besides, I may be of service, since you can hypnotise me and so learn that which even I myself do not know."

Dr. Van Helsing said gravely, “Madam Mina, you are, as always, most wise. You shall with us come. And together we shall do that which we go forth to achieve.”

When he had spoken, Mina’s long spell of silence made me look at her. She had fallen back on her pillow asleep. She did not even wake when I had pulled up the blind and let in the sunlight which flooded the room. Van Helsing motioned to me to come with him quietly. We went to his room, and within a minute Lord Godalming, Dr. Seward, and Mr. Morris were with us also.

He told them what Mina had said, and went on. “In the morning we shall leave for Varna. We have now to deal with a new factor, Madam Mina. Oh, but her soul is true. It is to her an agony to tell us so much as she has done. But it is most right, and we are warned in time. There must be no chance lost, and in Varna we must be ready to act the instant when that ship arrives.”

“What shall we do exactly?” asked Mr. Morris laconically.

The Professor paused before replying, “We shall at the first board that ship. Then, when we have identified the box, we shall place a branch of the wild rose on it. This we shall fasten, for when it is there none can emerge, so that at least says the superstition. And to superstition must we trust at the first. It was man’s faith in the early, and it have its root in faith still. Then, when we get the opportunity that we seek, when none are near to see, we shall open the box, and… and all will be well.”

“I shall not wait for any opportunity,” said Morris. “When I see the box I shall open it and destroy the monster, though there were a thousand men looking on, and if I am to be wiped out for it the next moment!” I grasped his hand instinctively and found it as firm as a piece of steel. I think he understood my look. I hope he did.

"Good boy," said Dr. Van Helsing. "Brave boy. Quincey is all man. God bless him for it. My child, believe me none of us shall lag behind or pause from any fear. I do but say what we may do… what we must do. But, indeed, indeed we cannot say what we may do. There are so many things which may happen, and their ways and their ends are so various that until the moment we may not say. We shall all be armed, in all ways. And when the time for the end has come, our effort shall not be lack. Now let us today put all our affairs in order. Let all things which touch on others dear to us, and who on us depend, be complete. For none of us can tell what, or when, or how, the end may be. As for me, my own affairs are regulate, and as I have nothing else to do, I shall go make arrangements for the travel. I shall have all tickets and so forth for our journey."

There was nothing further to be said, and we parted. I shall now settle up all my affairs of earth, and be ready for whatever may come.

Later. — It is done. My will is made, and all complete. Mina if she survive is my sole heir. If it should not be so, then the others who have been so good to us shall have remainder.

It is now drawing towards the sunset. Mina's uneasiness calls my attention to it. I am sure that there is something on her mind which the time of exact sunset will reveal. These occasions are becoming harrowing times for us all. For each sunrise and sunset opens up some new danger, some new pain, which however, may in God's will be means to a good end. I write all these things in the diary since my darling must not hear them now. But if it may be that she can see them again, they shall be ready. She is calling to me.

CHAPTER 25

DR. SEWARD'S DIARY

11 October, Evening. — Jonathan Harker has asked me to note this, as he says he is hardly equal to the task, and he wants an exact record kept.

I think that none of us were surprised when we were asked to see Mrs. Harker a little before the time of sunset. We have of late come to understand that sunrise and sunset are to her times of peculiar freedom. When her old self can be manifest without any controlling force subduing or restraining her, or inciting her to action. This mood or condition begins some half hour or more before actual sunrise or sunset, and lasts till either the sun is high, or whilst the clouds are still aglow with the rays streaming above the horizon. At first there is a sort of negative condition, as if some tie were loosened, and then the absolute freedom quickly follows. When, however, the freedom ceases the change back or relapse comes quickly, preceded only by a spell of warning silence.

Tonight, when we met, she was somewhat constrained, and bore all the signs of an internal struggle. I put it down myself to her making a violent effort at the earliest instant she could do so.

A very few minutes, however, gave her complete control of herself. Then, motioning her husband to sit beside her on the sofa where she was half reclining, she made the rest of us bring chairs up close.

Taking her husband's hand in hers, she began, "We are all here together in freedom, for perhaps the last time! I know that you will always be with me to the end." This was to her husband whose hand had, as we could see, tightened upon her. “In the morning we go out upon our task, and God alone knows what may be in store for any of us. You are going to be so good to me to take me with you. I know that all that brave earnest men can do for a poor weak woman, whose soul perhaps is lost, no, no, not yet, but is at any rate at stake, you will do. But you must remember that I am not as you are. There is a poison in my blood, in my soul, which may destroy me, which must destroy me, unless some relief comes to us. Oh, my friends, you know as well as I do, that my soul is at stake. And though I know there is one way out for me, you must not and I must not take it!” She looked appealingly to us all in turn, beginning and ending with her husband.

“What is that way?” asked Van Helsing in a hoarse voice. “What is that way, which we must not, may not, take?”

“That I may die now, either by my own hand or that of another, before the greater evil is entirely wrought. I know, and you know, that were I once dead you could and would set free my immortal spirit, even as you did my poor Lucy’s. Were death, or the fear of death, the only thing that stood in the way I would not shrink to die here now, amidst the friends who love me. But death is not all. I cannot believe that to die in such a case, when there is hope before us and a bitter task to be done, is God’s will. Therefore, I on my part, give up here the certainty of eternal rest, and go out into the dark where may be the blackest things that the world or the nether world holds!”

We were all silent, for we knew instinctively that this was only a prelude. The faces of the others were set, and Harker’s grew ashen grey. Perhaps, he guessed better than any of us what was coming.

She continued, “This is what I can give into the hotch-pot.” I could not but note the quaint legal phrase which she used in such a place, and with all seriousness. “What will each of you give? Your lives I know,” she went on quickly, “that is easy for brave men. Your lives are God’s, and you can give them back to Him, but what will you give to me?” She looked again questioningly, but this time avoided her husband’s face. Quincey seemed to understand, he nodded, and her face lit up. “Then I shall tell you plainly what I want, for there must be no doubtful matter in this connection between us now. You must promise me, one and all, even you, my beloved husband, that should the time come, you will kill me.”

“What is that time?” The voice was Quincey’s, but it was low and strained.

“When you shall be convinced that I am so changed that it is better that I die that I may live. When I am thus dead in the flesh, then you will, without a moment’s delay, drive a stake through me and cut off my head, or do whatever else may be wanting to give me rest!”

Quincey was the first to rise after the pause. He knelt down before her and taking her hand in his said solemnly, “I’m only a rough fellow, who hasn’t, perhaps, lived as a man should to win such a distinction, but I swear to you by all that I hold sacred and dear that, should the time ever come, I shall not flinch from the duty that you have set us. And I promise you, too, that I shall make all certain, for if I am only doubtful I shall take it that the time has come!”

“My true friend!” was all she could say amid her fast-falling tears, as bending over, she kissed his hand.

“I swear the same, my dear Madam Mina!” said Van Helsing. “And I!” said Lord Godalming, each of them in turn kneeling to her to take the oath. I followed, myself.

Then her husband turned to her wan-eyed and with a greenish pallor which subdued the snowy whiteness of his hair, and asked, “And must I, too, make such a promise, oh, my wife?”

“You too, my dearest,” she said, with infinite yearning of pity in her voice and eyes. “You must not shrink. You are nearest and dearest and all the world to me. Our souls are knit into one, for all life and all time. Think, dear, that there have been times when brave men have killed their wives and their womenkind, to keep them from falling into the hands of the enemy. Their hands did not falter any the more because those that they loved implored them to slay them. It is men’s duty towards those whom they love, in such times of sore trial! And oh, my dear, if it is to be that I must meet death at any hand, let it be at the hand of him that loves me best. Dr. Van Helsing, I have not forgotten your mercy in poor Lucy’s case to him who loved.” She stopped with a flying blush, and changed her phrase, “to him who had best right to give her peace. If that time shall come again, I look to you to make it a happy memory of my husband’s life that it was his loving hand which set me free from the awful thrall upon me.”

“Again I swear!” came the Professor’s resonant voice.

Mrs. Harker smiled, positively smiled, as with a sigh of relief she leaned back and said, “And now one word of warning, a warning which you must never forget. This time, if it ever come, may come quickly and unexpectedly, and in such case you must lose no time in using your opportunity. At such a time I myself might be… nay! If the time ever come, shall be, leagued with your enemy against you.

“One more request,” she became very solemn as she said this, “it is not vital and necessary like the other, but I want you to do one thing for me, if you will.”

We all acquiesced, but no one spoke. There was no need to speak.

"I want you to read the Burial Service." She was interrupted by a deep groan from her husband. Taking his hand in hers, she held it over her heart, and continued. "You must read it over me some day. Whatever may be the issue of all this fearful state of things, it will be a sweet thought to all or some of us. You, my dearest, will I hope read it, for then it will be in your voice in my memory forever, come what may!"

"But oh, my dear one," he pleaded, "death is afar off from you."

"Nay," she said, holding up a warning hand. "I am deeper in death at this moment than if the weight of an earthly grave lay heavy upon me!"

"Oh, my wife, must I read it?" he said, before he began.

"It would comfort me, my husband!" was all she said, and he began to read when she had got the book ready.

How can I, how could anyone, tell of that strange scene, its solemnity, its gloom, its sadness, its horror, and withal, its sweetness. Even a sceptic, who can see nothing but a travesty of bitter truth in anything holy or emotional, would have been melted to the heart had he seen that little group of loving and devoted friends kneeling round that stricken and sorrowing lady; or heard the tender passion of her husband's voice, as in tones so broken and emotional that often he had to pause, he read the simple and beautiful service from the Burial of the Dead. I cannot go on… words… and v-voices… f-fail m-me!

She was right in her instinct. Strange as it was, bizarre as it may hereafter seem even to us who felt its potent influence at the time, it comforted us much. And the silence, which showed Mrs. Harker's coming relapse from her freedom of soul, did not seem so full of despair to any of us as we had dreaded.

JONATHAN HARKER'S JOURNAL

15 October, Varna. — We left Charing Cross on the morning of the 12th, got to Paris the same night, and took the places secured for us in the Orient Express. We traveled night and day, arriving here at about five o'clock. Lord Godalming went to the Consulate to see if any telegram had arrived for him, whilst the rest of us came on to this hotel, "the Odessus." The journey may have had incidents. I was, however, too eager to get on, to care for them. Until the Czarina Catherine comes into port there will be no interest for me in anything in the wide world. Thank God! Mina is well, and looks to be getting stronger. Her colour is coming back. She sleeps a great deal. Throughout the journey she slept nearly all the time. Before sunrise and sunset, however, she is very wakeful and alert. And it has become a habit for Van Helsing to hypnotise her at such times. At first, some effort was needed, and he had to make many passes. But now, she seems to yield at once, as if by habit, and scarcely any action is needed. He seems to have power at these particular moments to simply will, and her thoughts obey him. He always asks her what she can see and hear.

She answers to the first, "Nothing, all is dark."

And to the second, "I can hear the waves lapping against the ship, and the water rushing by. Canvas and cordage strain and masts and yards creak. The wind is high… I can hear it in the shrouds, and the bow throws back the foam."

It is evident that the Czarina Catherine is still at sea, hastening on her way to Varna. Lord Godalming has just returned. He had four telegrams, one each day since we started, and all to the same effect. That the Czarina Catherine had not been reported to Lloyd's from anywhere. He had arranged before leaving London that his agent should send him every day a telegram saying if the ship had been reported. He was to have a message even if she were not reported, so that he might be sure that there was a watch being kept at the other end of the wire.

We had dinner and went to bed early. Tomorrow we are to see the Vice Consul, and to arrange, if we can, about getting on board the ship as soon as she arrives. Van Helsing says that our chance will be to get on the boat between sunrise and sunset. The Count, even if he takes the form of a bat, cannot cross the running water of his own volition, and so cannot leave the ship. As he dare not change to man's form without suspicion, which he evidently wishes to avoid, he must remain in the box. If, then, we can come on board after sunrise, he is at our mercy, for we can open the box and make sure of him, as we did of poor Lucy, before he wakes. What mercy he shall get from us all will not count for much. We think that we shall not have much trouble with officials or the seamen. Thank God! This is the country where bribery can do anything, and we are well supplied with money. We have only to make sure that the ship cannot come into port between sunset and sunrise without our being warned, and we shall be safe. Judge Moneybag will settle this case, I think!

16 October. — Mina's report still the same. Lapping waves and rushing water, darkness and favouring winds. We are evidently in good time, and when we hear of the Czarina Catherine we shall be ready. As she must pass the Dardanelles we are sure to have some report.

17 October. — Everything is pretty well fixed now, I think, to

welcome the Count on his return from his tour. Godalming told the shippers that he fancied that the box sent aboard might contain something stolen from a friend of his, and got a half consent that he might open it at his own risk. The owner gave him a paper telling the Captain to give him every facility in doing whatever he chose on board the ship, and also a similar authorization to his agent at Varna. We have seen the agent, who was much impressed with Godalming's kindly manner to him, and we are all satisfied that whatever he can do to aid our wishes will be done.

We have already arranged what to do in case we get the box open. If the Count is there, Van Helsing and Seward will cut off his head at once and drive a stake through his heart. Morris and Godalming and I shall prevent interference, even if we have to use the arms which we shall have ready. The Professor says that if we can so treat the Count's body, it will soon after fall into dust. In such case there would be no evidence against us, in case any suspicion of murder were aroused. But even if it were not, we should stand or fall by our act, and perhaps some day this very script may be evidence to come between some of us and a rope. For myself, I should take the chance only too thankfully if it were to come. We mean to leave no stone unturned to carry out our intent. We have arranged with certain officials that the instant the Czarina Catherine is seen, we are to be informed by a special messenger.

24 October. — A whole week of waiting. Daily telegrams to Godalming, but only the same story. "Not yet reported." Mina's morning and evening hypnotic answer is unvaried. Lapping waves, rushing water, and creaking masts.

TELEGRAM, OCTOBER 24TH RUFUS SMITH, LLOYD'S, LONDON, TO LORD GODALMING, CARE OF H. B. M. VICE CONSUL, VARNA

"Czarina Catherine reported this morning from Dardanelles."

DR. SEWARD'S DIARY

25 October. — How I miss my phonograph! To write a diary with a pen is irksome to me! But Van Helsing says I must. We were all wild with excitement yesterday when Godalming got his telegram from Lloyd's. I know now what men feel in battle when the call to action is heard. Mrs. Harker, alone of our party, did not show any signs of emotion. After all, it is not strange that she did not, for we took special care not to let her know anything about it, and we all tried not to show any excitement when we were in her presence. In old days she would, I am sure, have noticed, no matter how we might have tried to conceal it. But in this way she is greatly changed during the past three weeks. The lethargy grows upon her, and though she seems strong and well, and is getting back some of her colour, Van Helsing and I are not satisfied. We talk of her often. We have not, however, said a word to the others. It would break poor Harker's heart, certainly his nerve, if he knew that we had even a suspicion on the subject. Van Helsing examines, he tells me, her teeth very carefully, whilst she is in the hypnotic condition, for he says that so long as they do not begin to sharpen there is no active danger of a change in her. If this change should come, it would be necessary to take steps! We both know what those steps would have to be, though we do not mention our thoughts to each other. We should neither of us shrink from the task, awful though it be to contemplate.

"Euthanasia" is an excellent and a comforting word! I am grateful to whoever invented it.

It is only about 24 hours' sail from the Dardanelles to here, at the rate the Czarina Catherine has come from London. She should therefore arrive some time in the morning, but as she cannot possibly get in before noon, we are all about to retire early. We shall get up at one o'clock, so as to be ready.

25 October, Noon. — No news yet of the ship's arrival. Mrs. Harker's hypnotic report this morning was the same as usual, so it is possible that we may get news at any moment. We men are all in a fever of excitement, except Harker, who is calm. His hands are cold as ice, and an hour ago I found him whetting the edge of the great Ghoorka knife which he now always carries with him. It will be a bad lookout for the Count if the edge of that "Kukri" ever touches his throat, driven by that stern, ice-cold hand!

Van Helsing and I were a little alarmed about Mrs. Harker today. About noon she got into a sort of lethargy which we did not like. Although we kept silence to the others, we were neither of us happy about it. She had been restless all the morning, so that we were at first glad to know that she was sleeping. When, however, her husband mentioned casually that she was sleeping so soundly that he could not wake her, we went to her room to see for ourselves. She was breathing naturally and looked so well and peaceful that we agreed that the sleep was better for her than anything else. Poor girl, she has so much to forget that it is no wonder that sleep, if it brings oblivion to her, does her good.

Later. — Our opinion was justified, for when after a refreshing sleep of some hours she woke up, she seemed brighter and better than she had been for days. At sunset she made the usual hypnotic report. Wherever he may be in the Black Sea, the Count is hurrying to his destination. To his doom, I trust!

26 October. — Another day and no tidings of the Czarina Catherine. She ought to be here by now. That she is still journeying somewhere is apparent, for Mrs. Harker's hypnotic report at sunrise was still the same. It is possible that the vessel may be lying by, at times, for fog. Some of the steamers which came in last evening reported patches of fog both to north and south of the port. We must continue our watching, as the ship may now be signalled any moment.

27 October, Noon. — Most strange. No news yet of the ship we wait for. Mrs. Harker reported last night and this morning as usual. "Lapping waves and rushing water," though she added that "the waves were very faint." The telegrams from London have been the same, "no further report." Van Helsing is terribly anxious, and told me just now that he fears the Count is escaping us.

He added significantly, "I did not like that lethargy of Madam Mina's. Souls and memories can do strange things during trance." I was about to ask him more, but Harker just then came in, and he held up a warning hand. We must try tonight at sunset to make her speak more fully when in her hypnotic state.

28 October. — Telegram. Rufus Smith, London, to Lord Godalming, care H. B. M. Vice Consul, Varna

"Czarina Catherine reported entering Galatz at one o'clock today."

DR. SEWARD'S DIARY

28 October. — When the telegram came announcing the arrival in Galatz I do not think it was such a shock to any of us as might have been expected. True, we did not know whence, or how, or when, the bolt would come. But I think we all expected that something strange would happen. The day of arrival at Varna made us individually satisfied that things would not be just as we had expected. We only waited to learn where the change would occur. None the less, however, it was a surprise. I suppose that nature works on such a hopeful basis that we believe against ourselves that things will be as they ought to be, not as we should know that they will be. Transcendentalism is a beacon to the angels, even if it be a will-o'-the-wisp to man. Van Helsing raised his hand over his head for a moment, as though in remonstrance with the Almighty. But he said not a word, and in a few seconds stood up with his face sternly set.

Lord Godalming grew very pale, and sat breathing heavily. I was myself half stunned and looked in wonder at one after another. Quincey Morris tightened his belt with that quick movement which I knew so well. In our old wandering days it meant "action." Mrs. Harker grew ghastly white, so that the scar on her forehead seemed to burn, but she folded her hands meekly and looked up in prayer. Harker smiled, actually smiled, the dark, bitter smile of one who is without hope, but at the same time his action belied his words, for his hands instinctively sought the hilt of the great Kukri knife and rested there.

"When does the next train start for Galatz?" said Van Helsing to us generally.

"At 6:30 tomorrow morning!" We all started, for the answer came from Mrs. Harker.

"How on earth do you know?" said Art.

"You forget, or perhaps you do not know, though Jonathan does and so does Dr. Van Helsing, that I am the train fiend. At home in Exeter I always used to make up the time tables, so as to be helpful to my husband. I found it so useful sometimes, that I always make a study of the time tables now. I knew that if anything were to take us to Castle Dracula we should go by Galatz, or at any rate through Bucharest, so I learned the times very carefully. Unhappily there are not many to learn, as the only train tomorrow leaves as I say."

"Wonderful woman!" murmured the Professor.

"Can't we get a special?" asked Lord Godalming.

Van Helsing shook his head, "I fear not. This land is very different from yours or mine. Even if we did have a special, it would probably not arrive as soon as our regular train. Moreover, we have something to prepare. We must think. Now let us organise. You, friend Arthur, go to the train and get the tickets and arrange that all be ready for us to go in the morning. Do you, friend Jonathan, go to the agent of the ship and get from him letters to the agent in Galatz, with authority to make a search of the ship just as it was here. Quincey Morris, you see the Vice Consul, and get his aid with his fellow in Galatz and all he can do to make our way smooth, so that no times be lost when over the Danube. John will stay with Madam Mina and me, and we shall consult. For so if time be long you may be delayed. And it will not matter when the sun set, since I am here with Madam to make report."

"And I," said Mrs. Harker brightly, and more like her old self than she had been for many a long day, “shall try to be of use in all ways, and shall think and write for you as I used to do. Something is shifting from me in some strange way, and I feel freer than I have been of late!”

The three younger men looked happier at the moment as they seemed to realise the significance of her words. But Van Helsing and I, turning to each other, met each a grave and troubled glance. We said nothing at the time, however.

When the three men had gone out to their tasks Van Helsing asked Mrs. Harker to look up the copy of the diaries and find him the part of Harker’s journal at the Castle. She went away to get it.

When the door was shut upon her he said to me, “We mean the same! Speak out!”

“Here is some change. It is a hope that makes me sick, for it may deceive us.”

“Quite so. Do you know why I asked her to get the manuscript?”

“No!” said I, “unless it was to get an opportunity of seeing me alone.”

“You are in part right, friend John, but only in part. I want to tell you something. And oh, my friend, I am taking a great, a terrible, risk. But I believe it is right. In the moment when Madam Mina said those words that arrest both our understanding, an inspiration came to me. In the trance of three days ago the Count sent her his spirit to read her mind. Or more like he took her to see him in his earth box in the ship with water rushing, just as it go free at rise and set of sun. He learn then that we are here, for she have more to tell in her open life with eyes to see ears to hear than he, shut as he is, in his coffin box. Now he make his most effort to escape us. At present he want her not.

"He is sure with his so great knowledge that she will come at his call. But he cut her off, take her, as he can do, out of his own power, that so she come not to him. Ah! There I have hope that our man brains that have been of man so long and that have not lost the grace of God, will come higher than his child-brain that lie in his tomb for centuries, that grow not yet to our stature, and that do only work selfish and therefore small. Here comes Madam Mina. Not a word to her of her trance! She knows it not, and it would overwhelm her and make despair just when we want all her hope, all her courage, when most we want all her great brain which is trained like man's brain, but is of sweet woman and have a special power which the Count give her, and which he may not take away altogether, though he think not so. Hush! Let me speak, and you shall learn. Oh, John, my friend, we are in awful straits. I fear, as I never feared before. We can only trust the good God. Silence! Here she comes!"

I thought that the Professor was going to break down and have hysterics, just as he had when Lucy died, but with a great effort he controlled himself and was at perfect nervous poise when Mrs. Harker tripped into the room, bright and happy looking and, in the doing of work, seemingly forgetful of her misery. As she came in, she handed a number of sheets of typewriting to Van Helsing. He looked over them gravely, his face brightening up as he read.

Then holding the pages between his finger and thumb he said, "Friend John, to you with so much experience already, and you too, dear Madam Mina, that are young, here is a lesson. Do not fear ever to think. A half thought has been buzzing often in my brain, but I fear to let him loose his wings. Here now, with more knowledge, I go back to where that half thought come from and I find that he be no half thought at all. That be a whole thought, though so young that he is not yet strong to use his little wings. Nay, like the 'Ugly Duck' of my friend Hans Andersen, he be no duck thought at all, but a big swan thought that sail nobly on big wings, when the time come for him to try them. See I read here what Jonathan have written.

"That other of his race who, in a later age, again and again, brought his forces over The Great River into Turkey Land, who when he was beaten back, came again, and again, and again, though he had to come alone from the bloody field where his troops were being slaughtered, since he knew that he alone could ultimately triumph.

"What does this tell us? Not much? No! The Count's child thought see nothing, therefore he speak so free. Your man thought see nothing. My man thought see nothing, till just now. No! But there comes another word from some one who speak without thought because she, too, know not what it mean, what it might mean. Just as there are elements which rest, yet when in nature's course they move on their way and they touch, the pouf! And there comes a flash of light, heaven wide, that blind and kill and destroy some. But that show up all earth below for leagues and leagues. Is it not so? Well, I shall explain. To begin, have you ever study the philosophy of crime? 'Yes' and 'No.' You, John, yes, for it is a study of insanity. You, no, Madam Mina, for crime touch you not, not but once. Still, your mind works true, and argues not a particulari ad universale. There is this peculiarity in criminals. It is so constant, in all countries and at all times, that even police, who know not much from philosophy, come to know it empirically, that it is. That is to be empiric. The criminal always work at one crime, that is the true criminal who seems predestinate to crime, and who will of none other. This criminal has not full man brain. He is clever and cunning and resourceful, but he be not of man stature as to brain. He be of child brain in much. Now this criminal of ours is predestinate to crime also. He, too, have child brain, and it is of the child to do what he have done. The little bird, the little fish, the little animal learn not by principle, but empirically. And when he learn to do, then there is to him the ground to start from to do more. 'Dos pou sto,' said Archimedes. 'Give me a fulcrum, and I shall move the world!' To do once, is the fulcrum whereby child brain become man brain. And until he have the purpose to do more, he continue to do the same again every time, just as he have done before! Oh, my dear, I see that your eyes are opened, and that to you the lightning flash show all the leagues," for Mrs. Harker began to clap her hands and her eyes sparkled.

He went on, "Now you shall speak. Tell us two dry men of science what you see with those so bright eyes." He took her hand and held it whilst he spoke. His finger and thumb closed on her pulse, as I thought instinctively and unconsciously, as she spoke.

"The Count is a criminal and of criminal type. Nordau and Lombroso would so classify him, and qua criminal he is of an imperfectly formed mind. Thus, in a difficulty he has to seek resource in habit. His past is a clue, and the one page of it that we know, and that from his own lips, tells that once before, when in what Mr. Morris would call a 'tight place,' he went back to his own country from the land he had tried to invade, and thence, without losing purpose, prepared himself for a new effort. He came again better equipped for his work, and won. So he came to London to invade a new land. He was beaten, and when all hope of success was lost, and his existence in danger, he fled back over the sea to his home. Just as formerly he had fled back over the Danube from

Turkey Land."

"Good, good! Oh, you so clever lady!" said Van Helsing, enthusiastically, as he stooped and kissed her hand. A moment later he said to me, as calmly as though we had been having a sick room consultation, "Seventy-two only, and in all this excitement. I have hope."

Turning to her again, he said with keen expectation, "But go on. Go on! There is more to tell if you will. Be not afraid. John and I know. I do in any case, and shall tell you if you are right. Speak, without fear!"

"I will try to. But you will forgive me if I seem too egotistical."

"Nay! Fear not, you must be egotist, for it is of you that we think."

"Then, as he is criminal he is selfish. And as his intellect is small and his action is based on selfishness, he confines himself to one purpose. That purpose is remorseless. As he fled back over the Danube, leaving his forces to be cut to pieces, so now he is intent on being safe, careless of all. So his own selfishness frees my soul somewhat from the terrible power which he acquired over me on that dreadful night. I felt it! Oh, I felt it! Thank God, for His great mercy! My soul is freer than it has been since that awful hour. And all that haunts me is a fear lest in some trance or dream he may have used my knowledge for his ends."

The Professor stood up, "He has so used your mind, and by it he has left us here in Varna, whilst the ship that carried him rushed through enveloping fog up to Galatz, where, doubtless, he had made preparation for escaping from us. But his child mind only saw so far. And it may be that as ever is in God's Providence, the very thing that the evil doer most reckoned on for his selfish good, turns out to be his chiefest harm. The hunter is taken in his own snare, as the great Psalmist says. For now that he think he is free from every trace of us all, and that he has escaped us with so many hours to him, then his selfish child brain will whisper him to sleep. He think, too, that as he cut himself off from knowing your mind, there can be no knowledge of him to you. There is where he fail! That terrible baptism of blood which he give you makes you free to go to him in spirit, as you have as yet done in your times of freedom, when the sun rise and set. At such times you go by my volition and not by his. And this power to good of you and others, you have won from your suffering at his hands. This is now all more precious that he know it not, and to guard himself have even cut himself off from his knowledge of our where. We, however, are not selfish, and we believe that God is with us through all this blackness, and these many dark hours. We shall follow him, and we shall not flinch, even if we peril ourselves that we become like him. Friend John, this has been a great hour, and it have done much to advance us on our way. You must be scribe and write him all down, so that when the others return from their work you can give it to them, then they shall know as we do."

And so I have written it whilst we wait their return, and Mrs. Harker has written with the typewriter all since she brought the MS to us.

CHAPTER 26

DR. SEWARD'S DIARY

29 October. — This is written in the train from Varna to Galatz. Last night we all assembled a little before the time of sunset. Each of us had done his work as well as he could, so far as thought, and endeavour, and opportunity go, we are prepared for the whole of our journey, and for our work when we get to Galatz. When the usual time came round Mrs. Harker prepared herself for her hypnotic effort, and after a longer and more serious effort on the part of Van Helsing than has been usually necessary, she sank into the trance. Usually she speaks on a hint, but this time the Professor had to ask her questions, and to ask them pretty resolutely, before we could learn anything. At last her answer came.

"I can see nothing. We are still. There are no waves lapping, but only a steady swirl of water softly running against the hawser. I can hear men's voices calling, near and far, and the roll and creak of oars in the rowlocks. A gun is fired somewhere, the echo of it seems far away. There is tramping of feet overhead, and ropes and chains are dragged along. What is this? There is a gleam of light. I can feel the air blowing upon me."

Here she stopped. She had risen, as if impulsively, from where she lay on the sofa, and raised both her hands, palms upwards, as if lifting a weight. Van Helsing and I looked at each other with understanding. Quincey raised his eyebrows slightly and looked at her intently, whilst Harker's hand instinctively closed round the hilt of his Kukri. There was a long pause. We all knew that the time when she could speak was passing, but we felt that it was useless to say anything.

Suddenly she sat up, and as she opened her eyes said sweetly, "Would none of you like a cup of tea? You must all be so tired!"

We could only make her happy, and so acqueisced. She bustled off to get tea. When she had gone Van Helsing said, "You see, my friends. He is close to land. He has left his earth chest. But he has yet to get on shore. In the night he may lie hidden somewhere, but if he be not carried on shore, or if the ship do not touch it, he cannot achieve the land. In such case he can, if it be in the night, change his form and jump or fly on shore, then, unless he be carried he cannot escape. And if he be carried, then the customs men may discover what the box contain. Thus, in fine, if he escape not on shore tonight, or before dawn, there will be the whole day lost to him. We may then arrive in time. For if he escape not at night we shall come on him in daytime, boxed up and at our mercy. For he dare not be his true self, awake and visible, lest he be discovered."

There was no more to be said, so we waited in patience until the dawn, at which time we might learn more from Mrs. Harker.

Early this morning we listened, with breathless anxiety, for her response in her trance. The hypnotic stage was even longer in coming than before, and when it came the time remaining until full sunrise was so short that we began to despair. Van Helsing seemed to throw his whole soul into the effort. At last, in obedience to his will she made reply.

"All is dark. I hear lapping water, level with me, and some creaking as of wood on wood." She paused, and the red sun shot up. We must wait till tonight.

And so it is that we are travelling towards Galatz in an agony of expectation. We are due to arrive between two and three in the morning. But already, at Bucharest, we are three hours late, so we cannot possibly get in till well after sunup. Thus we shall have two more hypnotic messages from Mrs. Harker! Either or both may possibly throw more light on what is happening.

Later. — Sunset has come and gone. Fortunately it came at a time when there was no distraction. For had it occurred whilst we were at a station, we might not have secured the necessary calm and isolation. Mrs. Harker yielded to the hypnotic influence even less readily than this morning. I am in fear that her power of reading the Count's sensations may die away, just when we want it most. It seems to me that her imagination is beginning to work. Whilst she has been in the trance hitherto she has confined herself to the simplest of facts. If this goes on it may ultimately mislead us. If I thought that the Count's power over her would die away equally with her power of knowledge it would be a happy thought. But I am afraid that it may not be so.

When she did speak, her words were enigmatical, "Something is going out. I can feel it pass me like a cold wind. I can hear, far off, confused sounds, as of men talking in strange tongues, fierce falling water, and the howling of wolves." She stopped and a shudder ran through her, increasing in intensity for a few seconds, till at the end, she shook as though in a palsy. She said no more, even in answer to the Professor's imperative questioning. When she woke from the trance, she was cold, and exhausted, and languid, but her mind was all alert. She could not remember anything, but asked what she had said. When she was told, she pondered over it deeply for a long time and in silence.

30 October, 7 A.M. — We are near Galatz now, and I may not have time to write later. Sunrise this morning was anxiously looked for by us all. Knowing of the increasing difficulty of procuring the hypnotic trance, Van Helsing began his passes earlier than usual. They produced no effect, however, until the regular time, when she yielded with a still greater difficulty, only a minute before the sun rose. The Professor lost no time in his questioning.

Her answer came with equal quickness, “All is dark. I hear water swirling by, level with my ears, and the creaking of wood on wood. Cattle low far off. There is another sound, a queer one like…” She stopped and grew white, and whiter still.

“Go on, go on! Speak, I command you!” said Van Helsing in an agonised voice. At the same time there was despair in his eyes, for the risen sun was reddening even Mrs. Harker’s pale face. She opened her eyes, and we all started as she said, sweetly and seemingly with the utmost unconcern.

“Oh, Professor, why ask me to do what you know I can’t? I don’t remember anything.” Then, seeing the look of amazement on our faces, she said, turning from one to the other with a troubled look, “What have I said? What have I done? I know nothing, only that I was lying here, half asleep, and heard you say ‘go on! speak, I command you!’ It seemed so funny to hear you order me about, as if I were a bad child!”

“Oh, Madam Mina,” he said, sadly, “it is proof, if proof be needed, of how I love and honour you, when a word for your good, spoken more earnest than ever, can seem so strange because it is to order her whom I am proud to obey!”

The whistles are sounding. We are nearing Galatz. We are on fire with anxiety and eagerness.

MINA HARKER'S JOURNAL

30 October. — Mr. Morris took me to the hotel where our rooms had been ordered by telegraph, he being the one who could best be spared, since he does not speak any foreign language. The forces were distributed much as they had been at Varna, except that Lord Godalming went to the Vice Consul, as his rank might serve as an immediate guarantee of some sort to the official, we being in extreme hurry. Jonathan and the two doctors went to the shipping agent to learn particulars of the arrival of the Czarina Catherine.

Later. — Lord Godalming has returned. The Consul is away, and the Vice Consul sick. So the routine work has been attended to by a clerk. He was very obliging, and offered to do anything in his power.

JONATHAN HARKER'S JOURNAL

30 October. — At nine o'clock Dr. Van Helsing, Dr. Seward, and I called on Messrs. Mackenzie & Steinkoff, the agents of the London firm of Hapgood. They had received a wire from London, in answer to Lord Godalming's telegraphed request, asking them to show us any civility in their power. They were more than kind and courteous, and took us at once on board the Czarina Catherine, which lay at anchor out in the river harbor. There we saw the Captain, Donelson by name, who told us of his voyage. He said that in all his life he had never had so favourable a run.

"Man!" he said, "but it made us afeard, for we expect it that we should have to pay for it wi' some rare piece o' ill luck, so as to keep up the average. It's no canny to run frae London to the Black Sea wi' a wind ahint ye, as though the Deil himself were blawin' on yer sail for his ain purpose. An’ a’ the time we could no speer a thing. Gin we were nigh a ship, or a port, or a headland, a fog fell on us and travelled wi’ us, till when after it had lifted and we looked out, the deil a thing could we see. We ran by Gibraltar wi’ oot bein’ able to signal. An’ til we came to the Dardanelles and had to wait to get our permit to pass, we never were within hail o’ aught. At first I inclined to slack off sail and beat about till the fog was lifted. But whiles, I thocht that if the Deil was minded to get us into the Black Sea quick, he was like to do it whether we would or no. If we had a quick voyage it would be no to our miscredit wi’ the owners, or no hurt to our traffic, an’ the Old Mon who had served his ain purpose wad be decently grateful to us for no hinderin’ him.”

This mixture of simplicity and cunning, of superstition and commercial reasoning, aroused Van Helsing, who said, “Mine friend, that Devil is more clever than he is thought by some, and he know when he meet his match!”

The skipper was not displeased with the compliment, and went on, “When we got past the Bosphorus the men began to grumble. Some o’ them, the Roumanians, came and asked me to heave overboard a big box which had been put on board by a queer lookin’ old man just before we had started frae London. I had seen them speer at the fellow, and put out their twa fingers when they saw him, to guard them against the evil eye. Man! but the supersteetion of foreigners is pairfectly rideeculous! I sent them aboot their business pretty quick, but as just after a fog closed in on us I felt a wee bit as they did anent something, though I wouldn’t say it was again the big box. Well, on we went, and as the fog didn’t let up for five days I joost let the wind carry us, for if the Deil wanted to get somewheres, well, he would fetch it up a’reet. An’ if he didn’t, well, we’d keep a sharp lookout anyhow. Sure eneuch, we had a fair way and deep water all the time. And two days ago, when the mornin' sun came through the fog, we found ourselves just in the river opposite Galatz. The Roumanians were wild, and wanted me right or wrong to take out the box and fling it in the river. I had to argy wi' them aboot it wi' a handspike. An' when the last o' them rose off the deck wi' his head in his hand, I had convinced them that, evil eye or no evil eye, the property and the trust of my owners were better in my hands than in the river Danube. They had, mind ye, taken the box on the deck ready to fling in, and as it was marked Galatz via Varna, I thocht I'd let it lie till we discharged in the port an' get rid o't althegither. We didn't do much clearin' that day, an' had to remain the nicht at anchor. But in the mornin', braw an' airly, an hour before sunup, a man came aboard wi' an order, written to him from England, to receive a box marked for one Count Dracula. Sure eneuch the matter was one ready to his hand. He had his papers a' reet, an' glad I was to be rid o' the dam' thing, for I was beginnin' masel' to feel uneasy at it. If the Deil did have any luggage aboord the ship, I'm thinkin' it was nane ither than that same!"

"What was the name of the man who took it?" asked Dr. Van Helsing with restrained eagerness.

"I'll be tellin' ye quick!" he answered, and stepping down to his cabin, produced a receipt signed "Immanuel Hildesheim." Burgen-strasse 16 was the address. We found out that this was all the Captain knew, so with thanks we came away.

We found Hildesheim in his office, a Hebrew of rather the Adelphi Theatre type, with a nose like a sheep, and a fez. His arguments were pointed with specie, we doing the punctuation, and with a little bargaining he told us what he knew. This turned out to be simple but important. He had received a letter from Mr. de Ville of London, telling him to receive, if possible before sunrise so as to avoid customs, a box which would arrive at Galatz in the Czarina Catherine. This he was to give in charge to a certain Petrof Skinsky, who dealt with the Slovaks who traded down the river to the port. He had been paid for his work by an English bank note, which had been duly cashed for gold at the Danube International Bank. When Skinsky had come to him, he had taken him to the ship and handed over the box, so as to save porterage. That was all he knew.

We then sought for Skinsky, but were unable to find him. One of his neighbors, who did not seem to bear him any affection, said that he had gone away two days before, no one knew whither. This was corroborated by his landlord, who had received by messenger the key of the house together with the rent due, in English money. This had been between ten and eleven o'clock last night. We were at a standstill again.

Whilst we were talking one came running and breathlessly gasped out that the body of Skinsky had been found inside the wall of the churchyard of St. Peter, and that the throat had been torn open as if by some wild animal. Those we had been speaking with ran off to see the horror, the women crying out. "This is the work of a Slovak!" We hurried away lest we should have been in some way drawn into the affair, and so detained.

As we came home we could arrive at no definite conclusion. We were all convinced that the box was on its way, by water, to somewhere, but where that might be we would have to discover. With heavy hearts we came home to the hotel to Mina.

When we met together, the first thing was to consult as to taking Mina again into our confidence. Things are getting desperate, and it is at least a chance, though a hazardous one. As a preliminary step, I was released from my promise to her.

MINA HARKER'S JOURNAL

30 October, evening. — They were so tired and worn out and dispirited that there was nothing to be done till they had some rest, so I asked them all to lie down for half an hour whilst I should enter everything up to the moment. I feel so grateful to the man who invented the "Traveller's" typewriter, and to Mr. Morris for getting this one for me. I should have felt quite astray doing the work if I had to write with a pen…

It is all done. Poor dear, dear Jonathan, what he must have suffered, what he must be suffering now. He lies on the sofa hardly seeming to breathe, and his whole body appears in collapse. His brows are knit. His face is drawn with pain. Poor fellow, maybe he is thinking, and I can see his face all wrinkled up with the concentration of his thoughts. Oh! if I could only help at all. I shall do what I can.

I have asked Dr. Van Helsing, and he has got me all the papers that I have not yet seen. Whilst they are resting, I shall go over all carefully, and perhaps I may arrive at some conclusion. I shall try to follow the Professor's example, and think without prejudice on the facts before me…

I do believe that under God's providence I have made a discovery. I shall get the maps and look over them.

I am more than ever sure that I am right. My new conclusion is ready, so I shall get our party together and read it. They can judge it. It is well to be accurate, and every minute is precious.

MINA HARKER'S MEMORANDUM

(ENTERED IN HER JOURNAL)

Ground of inquiry. — Count Dracula's problem is to get back to his own place.

(a) He must be brought back by some one. This is evident; for had he power to move himself as he wished he could go either as man, or wolf, or bat, or in some other way. He evidently fears discovery or interference, in the state of helplessness in which he must be, confined as he is between dawn and sunset in his wooden box.

(b) How is he to be taken? — Here a process of exclusions may help us. By road, by rail, by water?

1. By Road. — There are endless difficulties, especially in leaving the city.

(x) There are people. And people are curious, and investigate. A hint, a surmise, a doubt as to what might be in the box, would destroy him.

(y) There are, or there may be, customs and octroi officers to pass.

(z) His pursuers might follow. This is his highest fear. And in order to prevent his being betrayed he has repelled, so far as he can, even his victim, me!

2. By Rail. — There is no one in charge of the box. It would have to take its chance of being delayed, and delay would be fatal, with enemies on the track. True, he might escape at night. But what would he be, if left in a strange place with no refuge that he could fly to? This is not what he intends, and he does not mean to risk it.

3. By Water. — Here is the safest way, in one respect, but with most danger in another. On the water he is powerless except at night. Even then he can only summon fog and storm and snow and his wolves. But were he wrecked, the living water would engulf him,

helpless, and he would indeed be lost. He could have the vessel drive to land, but if it were unfriendly land, wherein he was not free to move, his position would still be desperate.

We know from the record that he was on the water, so what we have to do is to ascertain what water.

The first thing is to realise exactly what he has done as yet. We may, then, get a light on what his task is to be.

Firstly. — We must differentiate between what he did in London as part of his general plan of action, when he was pressed for moments and had to arrange as best he could.

Secondly. — We must see, as well as we can surmise it from the facts we know of, what he has done here.

As to the first, he evidently intended to arrive at Galatz, and sent invoice to Varna to deceive us lest we should ascertain his means of exit from England. His immediate and sole purpose then was to escape. The proof of this, is the letter of instructions sent to Immanuel Hildesheim to clear and take away the box before sunrise. There is also the instruction to Petrof Skinsky. These we must only guess at, but there must have been some letter or message, since Skinsky came to Hildesheim.

That, so far, his plans were successful we know. The Czarina Catherine made a phenomenally quick journey. So much so that Captain Donelson's suspicions were aroused. But his superstition united with his canniness played the Count's game for him, and he ran with his favouring wind through fogs and all till he brought up blindfold at Galatz. That the Count's arrangements were well made, has been proved. Hildesheim cleared the box, took it off, and gave it to Skinsky. Skinsky took it, and here we lose the trail. We only know that the box is somewhere on the water, moving along. The customs and the octroi, if there be any, have been avoided.

Now we come to what the Count must have done after his arrival, on land, at Galatz.

The box was given to Skinsky before sunrise. At sunrise the Count could appear in his own form. Here, we ask why Skinsky was chosen at all to aid in the work? In my husband's diary, Skinsky is mentioned as dealing with the Slovaks who trade down the river to the port. And the man's remark, that the murder was the work of a Slovak, showed the general feeling against his class. The Count wanted isolation.

My surmise is this, that in London the Count decided to get back to his castle by water, as the most safe and secret way. He was brought from the castle by Szgany, and probably they delivered their cargo to Slovaks who took the boxes to Varna, for there they were shipped to London. Thus the Count had knowledge of the persons who could arrange this service. When the box was on land, before sunrise or after sunset, he came out from his box, met Skinsky and instructed him what to do as to arranging the carriage of the box up some river. When this was done, and he knew that all was in train, he blotted out his traces, as he thought, by murdering his agent.

I have examined the map and find that the river most suitable for the Slovaks to have ascended is either the Pruth or the Sereth. I read in the typescript that in my trance I heard cows low and water swirling level with my ears and the creaking of wood. The Count in his box, then, was on a river in an open boat, propelled probably either by oars or poles, for the banks are near and it is working against stream. There would be no such if floating down stream.

Of course it may not be either the Sereth or the Pruth, but we may possibly investigate further. Now of these two, the Pruth is the more easily navigated, but the Sereth is, at Fundu, joined by the Bistritza which runs up round the Borgo Pass. The loop it makes is manifestly as close to Dracula's castle as can be got by water.

MINA HARKER'S JOURNAL — CONTINUED

When I had done reading, Jonathan took me in his arms and kissed me. The others kept shaking me by both hands, and Dr. Van Helsing said, "Our dear Madam Mina is once more our teacher. Her eyes have been where we were blinded. Now we are on the track once again, and this time we may succeed. Our enemy is at his most helpless. And if we can come on him by day, on the water, our task will be over. He has a start, but he is powerless to hasten, as he may not leave this box lest those who carry him may suspect. For them to suspect would be to prompt them to throw him in the stream where he perish. This he knows, and will not. Now men, to our Council of War, for here and now, we must plan what each and all shall do."

"I shall get a steam launch and follow him," said Lord Godalming.

"And I, horses to follow on the bank lest by chance he land," said Mr. Morris.

"Good!" said the Professor, "both good. But neither must go alone. There must be force to overcome force if need be. The Slovak is strong and rough, and he carries rude arms." All the men smiled, for amongst them they carried a small arsenal.

Said Mr. Morris, "I have brought some Winchesters. They are pretty handy in a crowd, and there may be wolves. The Count, if you remember, took some other precautions. He made some requisitions on others that Mrs. Harker could not quite hear or understand. We must be ready at all points."

Dr. Seward said, “I think I had better go with Quincey. We have been accustomed to hunt together, and we two, well armed, will be a match for whatever may come along. You must not be alone, Art. It may be necessary to fight the Slovaks, and a chance thrust, for I don’t suppose these fellows carry guns, would undo all our plans. There must be no chances, this time. We shall not rest until the Count’s head and body have been separated, and we are sure that he cannot reincarnate.”

He looked at Jonathan as he spoke, and Jonathan looked at me. I could see that the poor dear was torn about in his mind. Of course he wanted to be with me. But then the boat service would, most likely, be the one which would destroy the… the… Vampire. (Why did I hesitate to write the word?)

He was silent awhile, and during his silence Dr. Van Helsing spoke, “Friend Jonathan, this is to you for twice reasons. First, because you are young and brave and can fight, and all energies may be needed at the last. And again that it is your right to destroy him. That, which has wrought such woe to you and yours. Be not afraid for Madam Mina. She will be my care, if I may. I am old. My legs are not so quick to run as once. And I am not used to ride so long or to pursue as need be, or to fight with lethal weapons. But I can be of other service. I can fight in other way. And I can die, if need be, as well as younger men. Now let me say that what I would is this. While you, my Lord Godalming and friend Jonathan go in your so swift little steamboat up the river, and whilst John and Quincey guard the bank where perchance he might be landed, I will take Madam Mina right into the heart of the enemy’s country. Whilst the old fox is tied in his box, floating on the running stream whence he cannot escape to land, where he dares not raise the lid of his coffin box lest his Slovak carriers should in fear leave him to perish, we shall go in the track where Jonathan went, from Bistritz over the Borgo, and find our way to the Castle of Dracula. Here, Madam Mina's hypnotic power will surely help, and we shall find our way, all dark and unknown otherwise, after the first sunrise when we are near that fateful place. There is much to be done, and other places to be made sanctify, so that that nest of vipers be obliterated."

Here Jonathan interrupted him hotly, "Do you mean to say, Professor Van Helsing, that you would bring Mina, in her sad case and tainted as she is with that devil's illness, right into the jaws of his deathtrap? Not for the world! Not for Heaven or Hell!"

He became almost speechless for a minute, and then went on, "Do you know what the place is? Have you seen that awful den of hellish infamy, with the very moonlight alive with grisly shapes, and every speck of dust that whirls in the wind a devouring monster in embryo? Have you felt the Vampire's lips upon your throat?"

Here he turned to me, and as his eyes lit on my forehead he threw up his arms with a cry, "Oh, my God, what have we done to have this terror upon us?" and he sank down on the sofa in a collapse of misery.

The Professor's voice, as he spoke in clear, sweet tones, which seemed to vibrate in the air, calmed us all.

"Oh, my friend, it is because I would save Madam Mina from that awful place that I would go. God forbid that I should take her into that place. There is work, wild work, to be done before that place can be purify. Remember that we are in terrible straits. If the Count escape us this time, and he is strong and subtle and cunning, he may choose to sleep him for a century, and then in time our dear one," he took my hand, "would come to him to keep him company, and would be as those others that you, Jonathan, saw. You have told us of their gloating lips. You heard their ribald laugh as they clutched the moving bag that the Count threw to them. You shudder, and well may it be. Forgive me that I make you so much pain, but it is necessary. My friend, is it not a dire need for that which I am giving, possibly my life? If it were that any one went into that place to stay, it is I who would have to go to keep them company."

"Do as you will," said Jonathan, with a sob that shook him all over, "we are in the hands of God!"

Later. — Oh, it did me good to see the way that these brave men worked. How can women help loving men when they are so earnest, and so true, and so brave! And, too, it made me think of the wonderful power of money! What can it not do when basely used. I felt so thankful that Lord Godalming is rich, and both he and Mr. Morris, who also has plenty of money, are willing to spend it so freely. For if they did not, our little expedition could not start, either so promptly or so well equipped, as it will within another hour. It is not three hours since it was arranged what part each of us was to do. And now Lord Godalming and Jonathan have a lovely steam launch, with steam up ready to start at a moment's notice. Dr. Seward and Mr. Morris have half a dozen good horses, well appointed. We have all the maps and appliances of various kinds that can be had. Professor Van Helsing and I are to leave by the 11:40 train tonight for Veresti, where we are to get a carriage to drive to the Borgo Pass. We are bringing a good deal of ready money, as we are to buy a carriage and horses. We shall drive ourselves, for we have no one whom we can trust in the matter. The Professor knows something of a great many languages, so we shall get on all right. We have all got arms, even for me a large bore revolver. Jonathan would not be happy unless I was armed like the rest. Alas! I cannot carry one arm that the rest do, the scar on my forehead forbids that. Dear Dr. Van Helsing comforts me by telling me that I am fully armed as there may be wolves. The weather is getting colder every hour, and there are snow flurries which come and go as warnings.

Later. — It took all my courage to say goodbye to my darling. We may never meet again. Courage, Mina! The Professor is looking at you keenly. His look is a warning. There must be no tears now, unless it may be that God will let them fall in gladness.

JONATHAN HARKER’S JOURNAL

30 October, night. — I am writing this in the light from the furnace door of the steam launch. Lord Godalming is firing up. He is an experienced hand at the work, as he has had for years a launch of his own on the Thames, and another on the Norfolk Broads. Regarding our plans, we finally decided that Mina’s guess was correct, and that if any waterway was chosen for the Count’s escape back to his Castle, the Sereth and then the Bistritza at its junction, would be the one. We took it, that somewhere about the 47th degree, north latitude, would be the place chosen for crossing the country between the river and the Carpathians. We have no fear in running at good speed up the river at night. There is plenty of water, and the banks are wide enough apart to make steaming, even in the dark, easy enough. Lord Godalming tells me to sleep for a while, as it is enough for the present for one to be on watch. But I cannot sleep, how can I with the terrible danger hanging over my darling, and her going out into that awful place…

My only comfort is that we are in the hands of God. Only for that faith it would be easier to die than to live, and so be quit of all the trouble. Mr. Morris and Dr. Seward were off on their long ride before we started. They are to keep up the right bank, far enough off to get on higher lands where they can see a good stretch of river and avoid the following of its curves. They have, for the first stages, two men to ride and lead their spare horses, four in all, so as not to excite curiosity. When they dismiss the men, which shall be shortly, they shall themselves look after the horses. It may be necessary for us to join forces. If so they can mount our whole party. One of the saddles has a moveable horn, and can be easily adapted for Mina, if required.

It is a wild adventure we are on. Here, as we are rushing along through the darkness, with the cold from the river seeming to rise up and strike us, with all the mysterious voices of the night around us, it all comes home. We seem to be drifting into unknown places and unknown ways. Into a whole world of dark and dreadful things. Godalming is shutting the furnace door…

31 October. — Still hurrying along. The day has come, and Godalming is sleeping. I am on watch. The morning is bitterly cold, the furnace heat is grateful, though we have heavy fur coats. As yet we have passed only a few open boats, but none of them had on board any box or package of anything like the size of the one we seek. The men were scared every time we turned our electric lamp on them, and fell on their knees and prayed.

1 November, evening. — No news all day. We have found nothing of the kind we seek. We have now passed into the Bistritza, and if we are wrong in our surmise our chance is gone. We have

overhauled every boat, big and little. Early this morning, one crew took us for a Government boat, and treated us accordingly. We saw in this a way of smoothing matters, so at Fundu, where the Bistritza runs into the Sereth, we got a Roumanian flag which we now fly conspicuously. With every boat which we have overhauled since then this trick has succeeded. We have had every deference shown to us, and not once any objection to whatever we chose to ask or do. Some of the Slovaks tell us that a big boat passed them, going at more than usual speed as she had a double crew on board. This was before they came to Fundu, so they could not tell us whether the boat turned into the Bistritza or continued on up the Sereth. At Fundu we could not hear of any such boat, so she must have passed there in the night. I am feeling very sleepy. The cold is perhaps beginning to tell upon me, and nature must have rest some time. Godalming insists that he shall keep the first watch. God bless him for all his goodness to poor dear Mina and me.

2 November, morning. — It is broad daylight. That good fellow would not wake me. He says it would have been a sin to, for I slept peacefully and was forgetting my trouble. It seems brutally selfish to me to have slept so long, and let him watch all night, but he was quite right. I am a new man this morning. And, as I sit here and watch him sleeping, I can do all that is necessary both as to minding the engine, steering, and keeping watch. I can feel that my strength and energy are coming back to me. I wonder where Mina is now, and Van Helsing. They should have got to Veresti about noon on Wednesday. It would take them some time to get the carriage and horses. So if they had started and travelled hard, they would be about now at the Borgo Pass. God guide and help them! I am afraid to

think what may happen. If we could only go faster. But we cannot. The engines are throbbing and doing their utmost. I wonder how Dr. Seward and Mr. Morris are getting on. There seem to be endless streams running down the mountains into this river, but as none of them are very large, at present, at all events, though they are doubtless terrible in winter and when the snow melts, the horsemen may not have met much obstruction. I hope that before we get to Strasba we may see them. For if by that time we have not overtaken the Count, it may be necessary to take counsel together what to do next.

DR. SEWARD'S DIARY

2 November. — Three days on the road. No news, and no time to write it if there had been, for every moment is precious. We have had only the rest needful for the horses. But we are both bearing it wonderfully. Those adventurous days of ours are turning up useful. We must push on. We shall never feel happy till we get the launch in sight again.

3 November. — We heard at Fundu that the launch had gone up the Bistritza. I wish it wasn't so cold. There are signs of snow coming. And if it falls heavy it will stop us. In such case we must get a sledge and go on, Russian fashion.

4 November. — Today we heard of the launch having been detained by an accident when trying to force a way up the rapids. The Slovak boats get up all right, by aid of a rope and steering with knowledge. Some went up only a few hours before. Godalming is an amateur fitter himself, and evidently it was he who put the launch in trim again.

Finally, they got up the rapids all right, with local help, and are off on the chase afresh. I fear that the boat is not any better for the accident, the peasantry tell us that after she got upon smooth water again, she kept stopping every now and again so long as she was in sight. We must push on harder than ever. Our help may be wanted soon.

MINA HARKER’S JOURNAL

31 October. — Arrived at Veresti at noon. The Professor tells me that this morning at dawn he could hardly hypnotise me at all, and that all I could say was, “dark and quiet.” He is off now buying a carriage and horses. He says that he will later on try to buy additional horses, so that we may be able to change them on the way. We have something more than 70 miles before us. The country is lovely, and most interesting. If only we were under different conditions, how delightful it would be to see it all. If Jonathan and I were driving through it alone what a pleasure it would be. To stop and see people, and learn something of their life, and to fill our minds and memories with all the colour and picturesqueness of the whole wild, beautiful country and the quaint people! But, alas!

Later. — Dr. Van Helsing has returned. He has got the carriage and horses. We are to have some dinner, and to start in an hour. The landlady is putting us up a huge basket of provisions. It seems enough for a company of soldiers. The Professor encourages her, and whispers to me that it may be a week before we can get any food again. He has been shopping too, and has sent home such a wonderful lot of fur coats and wraps, and all sorts of warm things. There will not be any chance of our being cold.

We shall soon be off. I am afraid to think what may happen to us. We are truly in the hands of God. He alone knows what may be, and I pray Him, with all the strength of my sad and humble soul, that He will watch over my beloved husband. That whatever may happen, Jonathan may know that I loved him and honoured him more than I can say, and that my latest and truest thought will be always for him.

CHAPTER 27

MINA HARKER'S JOURNAL

1 November. — All day long we have travelled, and at a good speed. The horses seem to know that they are being kindly treated, for they go willingly their full stage at best speed. We have now had so many changes and find the same thing so constantly that we are encouraged to think that the journey will be an easy one. Dr. Van Helsing is laconic, he tells the farmers that he is hurrying to Bistritz, and pays them well to make the exchange of horses. We get hot soup, or coffee, or tea, and off we go. It is a lovely country. Full of beauties of all imaginable kinds, and the people are brave, and strong, and simple, and seem full of nice qualities. They are very, very superstitious. In the first house where we stopped, when the woman who served us saw the scar on my forehead, she crossed herself and put out two fingers towards me, to keep off the evil eye. I believe they went to the trouble of putting an extra amount of garlic into our food, and I can't abide garlic. Ever since then I have taken care not to take off my hat or veil, and so have escaped their suspicions. We are travelling fast, and as we have no driver with us to carry tales, we go ahead of scandal. But I daresay that fear of the evil eye will follow hard behind us all the way. The Professor seems tireless. All day he would not take any rest, though he made me sleep for a long spell. At sunset time he hypnotised me, and he says I answered as usual, "darkness, lapping water and creaking wood." So our enemy is still on the river. I am afraid to think of Jonathan, but somehow I have now no fear for him, or for myself. I write this whilst we wait in a farmhouse for the horses to be ready. Dr. Van Helsing is sleeping.

Poor dear, he looks very tired and old and grey, but his mouth is set as firmly as a conqueror's. Even in his sleep he is intense with resolution. When we have well started I must make him rest whilst I drive. I shall tell him that we have days before us, and he must not break down when most of all his strength will be needed… All is ready. We are off shortly.

2 November, morning. — I was successful, and we took turns driving all night. Now the day is on us, bright though cold. There is a strange heaviness in the air. I say heaviness for want of a better word. I mean that it oppresses us both. It is very cold, and only our warm furs keep us comfortable. At dawn Van Helsing hypnotised me. He says I answered "darkness, creaking wood and roaring water," so the river is changing as they ascend. I do hope that my darling will not run any chance of danger, more than need be, but we are in God's hands.

2 November, night. — All day long driving. The country gets wilder as we go, and the great spurs of the Carpathians, which at Veresti seemed so far from us and so low on the horizon, now seem to gather round us and tower in front. We both seem in good spirits. I think we make an effort each to cheer the other, in the doing so we cheer ourselves. Dr. Van Helsing says that by morning we shall reach the Borgo Pass. The houses are very few here now, and the Professor says that the last horse we got will have to go on with us, as we may not be able to change. He got two in addition to the two we changed, so that now we have a rude four-in-hand. The dear horses are patient and good, and they give us no trouble. We are not worried with other travellers, and so even I can drive. We shall get to the Pass in

daylight. We do not want to arrive before. So we take it easy, and have each a long rest in turn. Oh, what will tomorrow bring to us? We go to seek the place where my poor darling suffered so much. God grant that we may be guided aright, and that He will deign to watch over my husband and those dear to us both, and who are in such deadly peril. As for me, I am not worthy in His sight. Alas! I am unclean to His eyes, and shall be until He may deign to let me stand forth in His sight as one of those who have not incurred His wrath.

MEMORANDUM BY ABRAHAM VAN HELSING

4 November. — This to my old and true friend John Seward, M.D., of Purfleet, London, in case I may not see him. It may explain. It is morning, and I write by a fire which all the night I have kept alive, Madam Mina aiding me. It is cold, cold. So cold that the grey heavy sky is full of snow, which when it falls will settle for all winter as the ground is hardening to receive it. It seems to have affected Madam Mina. She has been so heavy of head all day that she was not like herself. She sleeps, and sleeps, and sleeps! She who is usual so alert, have done literally nothing all the day. She even have lost her appetite. She make no entry into her little diary, she who write so faithful at every pause. Something whisper to me that all is not well. However, tonight she is more *vif*. Her long sleep all day have refresh and restore her, for now she is all sweet and bright as ever. At sunset I try to hypnotise her, but alas! with no effect. The power has grown less and less with each day, and tonight it fail me altogether. Well, God's will be done, whatever it may be, and whithersoever it may lead!

Now to the historical, for as Madam Mina write not in her stenography, I must, in my cumbrous old fashion, that so each day of us may not go unrecorded.

We got to the Borgo Pass just after sunrise yesterday morning. When I saw the signs of the dawn I got ready for the hypnotism. We stopped our carriage, and got down so that there might be no disturbance. I made a couch with furs, and Madam Mina, lying down, yield herself as usual, but more slow and more short time than ever, to the hypnotic sleep. As before, came the answer, “darkness and the swirling of water.” Then she woke, bright and radiant and we go on our way and soon reach the Pass. At this time and place, she become all on fire with zeal. Some new guiding power be in her manifested, for she point to a road and say, “This is the way.”

“How know you it?” I ask.

“Of course I know it,” she answer, and with a pause, add, “Have not my Jonathan travelled it and wrote of his travel?”

At first I think somewhat strange, but soon I see that there be only one such byroad. It is used but little, and very different from the coach road from the Bukovina to Bistritz, which is more wide and hard, and more of use.

So we came down this road. When we meet other ways, not always were we sure that they were roads at all, for they be neglect and light snow have fallen, the horses know and they only. I give rein to them, and they go on so patient. By and by we find all the things which Jonathan have note in that wonderful diary of him. Then we go on for long, long hours and hours. At the first, I tell Madam Mina to sleep. She try, and she succeed. She sleep all the time, till at the last, I feel myself to suspicious grow, and attempt to wake her. But she sleep on, and I may not wake her though I try. I do not wish to try too hard lest I harm her. For I know that she have suffer much, and sleep at times be all-in-all to her. I think I drowse myself, for all of sudden I feel guilt, as though I have done something. I find myself bolt up, with the reins in my hand, and the good horses go along jog, jog, just as ever. I look down and find Madam Mina still asleep. It is now not far off sunset time, and over the snow the light of the sun flow in big yellow flood, so that we throw great long shadow on where the mountain rise so steep. For we are going up, and up, and all is oh so wild and rocky, as though it were the end of the world.

Then I arouse Madam Mina. This time she wake with not much trouble, and then I try to put her to hypnotic sleep. But she sleep not, being as though I were not. Still I try and try, till all at once I find her and myself in dark, so I look round, and find that the sun have gone down. Madam Mina laugh, and I turn and look at her. She is now quite awake, and look so well as I never saw her since that night at Carfax when we first enter the Count’s house. I am amaze, and not at ease then. But she is so bright and tender and thoughtful for me that I forget all fear. I light a fire, for we have brought supply of wood with us, and she prepare food while I undo the horses and set them, tethered in shelter, to feed. Then when I return to the fire she have my supper ready. I go to help her, but she smile, and tell me that she have eat already. That she was so hungry that she would not wait. I like it not, and I have grave doubts. But I fear to affright her, and so I am silent of it. She help me and I eat alone, and then we wrap in fur and lie beside the fire, and I tell her to sleep while I watch. But presently I forget all of watching. And when I sudden remember that I watch, I find her lying quiet, but awake, and looking at me with so bright eyes. Once, twice more the same occur, and I get much sleep till before morning. When I wake I try to hypnotise her, but alas! though she shut her eyes obedient, she may not sleep. The sun rise up, and up, and up, and then sleep come to her too late, but so heavy that she will not wake. I have to lift her up, and place her sleeping in the carriage when I have harnessed the horses and made all ready. Madam still sleep, and she look in her sleep more healthy and more redder than before. And I like it not. And I am afraid, afraid, afraid! I am afraid of all things, even to think but I must go on my way. The stake we play for is life and death, or more than these, and we must not flinch.

5 November, morning. — Let me be accurate in everything, for though you and I have seen some strange things together, you may at the first think that I, Van Helsing, am mad. That the many horrors and the so long strain on nerves has at the last turn my brain.

All yesterday we travel, always getting closer to the mountains, and moving into a more and more wild and desert land. There are great, frowning precipices and much falling water, and Nature seem to have held sometime her carnival. Madam Mina still sleep and sleep. And though I did have hunger and appeased it, I could not waken her, even for food. I began to fear that the fatal spell of the place was upon her, tainted as she is with that Vampire baptism. “Well,” said I to myself, “if it be that she sleep all the day, it shall also be that I do not sleep at night.” As we travel on the rough road, for a road of an ancient and imperfect kind there was, I held down my head and slept.

Again I waked with a sense of guilt and of time passed, and found Madam Mina still sleeping, and the sun low down. But all was indeed changed. The frowning mountains seemed further away, and we were near the top of a steep rising hill, on summit of which was such a castle as Jonathan tell of in his diary. At once I exulted and feared. For now, for good or ill, the end was near.

I woke Madam Mina, and again tried to hypnotise her, but alas! unavailing till too late. Then, ere the great dark came upon us, for even after down sun the heavens reflected the gone sun on the snow, and all was for a time in a great twilight. I took out the horses and fed them in what shelter I could. Then I make a fire, and near it I make Madam Mina, now awake and more charming than ever, sit comfortable amid her rugs. I got ready food, but she would not eat, simply saying that she had not hunger. I did not press her, knowing her unavailingness. But I myself eat, for I must needs now be strong for all. Then, with the fear on me of what might be, I drew a ring so big for her comfort, round where Madam Mina sat. And over the ring I passed some of the wafer, and I broke it fine so that all was well guarded. She sat still all the time, so still as one dead. And she grew whiter and even whiter till the snow was not more pale, and no word she said. But when I drew near, she clung to me, and I could know that the poor soul shook her from head to feet with a tremor that was pain to feel.

I said to her presently, when she had grown more quiet, "Will you not come over to the fire?" for I wished to make a test of what she could. She rose obedient, but when she have made a step she stopped, and stood as one stricken.

"Why not go on?" I asked. She shook her head, and coming back, sat down in her place. Then, looking at me with open eyes, as of one waked from sleep, she said simply, "I cannot!" and remained silent. I rejoiced, for I knew that what she could not, none of those that we dreaded could. Though there might be danger to her body, yet her soul was safe!

Presently the horses began to scream, and tore at their tethers till I came to them and quieted them. When they did feel my hands on them, they whinnied low as in joy, and licked at my hands and were quiet for a time. Many times through the night did I come to them, till it arrive to the cold hour when all nature is at lowest, and every time my coming was with quiet of them. In the cold hour the fire began to die, and I was about stepping forth to replenish it, for now the snow came in flying sweeps and with it a chill mist. Even in the dark there was a light of some kind, as there ever is over snow, and it seemed as though the snow flurries and the wreaths of mist took shape as of women with trailing garments. All was in dead, grim silence only that the horses whinnied and cowered, as if in terror of the worst. I began to fear, horrible fears. But then came to me the sense of safety in that ring wherein I stood. I began too, to think that my imaginings were of the night, and the gloom, and the unrest that I have gone through, and all the terrible anxiety. It was as though my memories of all Jonathan's horrid experience were befooling me. For the snow flakes and the mist began to wheel and circle round, till I could get as though a shadowy glimpse of those women that would have kissed him. And then the horses cowered lower and lower, and moaned in terror as men do in pain. Even the madness of fright was not to them, so that they could break away. I feared for my dear Madam Mina when these weird figures drew near and circled round. I looked at her, but she sat calm, and smiled at me. When I would have stepped to the fire to replenish it, she caught me and held me back, and whispered, like a voice that one hears in a dream, so low it was.

"No! No! Do not go without. Here you are safe!"

I turned to her, and looking in her eyes said, "But you? It is for you that I fear!"

Whereat she laughed, a laugh low and unreal, and said, “Fear for me! Why fear for me? None safer in all the world from them than I am,” and as I wondered at the meaning of her words, a puff of wind made the flame leap up, and I see the red scar on her forehead. Then, alas! I knew. Did I not, I would soon have learned, for the wheeling figures of mist and snow came closer, but keeping ever without the Holy circle. Then they began to materialise till, if God have not taken away my reason, for I saw it through my eyes. There were before me in actual flesh the same three women that Jonathan saw in the room, when they would have kissed his throat. I knew the swaying round forms, the bright hard eyes, the white teeth, the ruddy colour, the voluptuous lips. They smiled ever at poor dear Madam Mina. And as their laugh came through the silence of the night, they twined their arms and pointed to her, and said in those so sweet tingling tones that Jonathan said were of the intolerable sweetness of the water glasses, “Come, sister. Come to us. Come!”

In fear I turned to my poor Madam Mina, and my heart with gladness leapt like flame. For oh! the terror in her sweet eyes, the repulsion, the horror, told a story to my heart that was all of hope. God be thanked she was not, yet, of them. I seized some of the firewood which was by me, and holding out some of the Wafer, advanced on them towards the fire. They drew back before me, and laughed their low horrid laugh. I fed the fire, and feared them not. For I knew that we were safe within the ring, which she could not leave no more than they could enter. The horses had ceased to moan, and lay still on the ground. The snow fell on them softly, and they grew whiter. I knew that there was for the poor beasts no more of terror.

And so we remained till the red of the dawn began to fall through the snow gloom. I was desolate and afraid, and full of woe and terror. But when that beautiful sun began to climb the horizon life was to me again. At the first coming of the dawn the horrid figures melted in the whirling mist and snow. The wreaths of transparent gloom moved away towards the castle, and were lost.

Instinctively, with the dawn coming, I turned to Madam Mina, intending to hypnotise her. But she lay in a deep and sudden sleep, from which I could not wake her. I tried to hypnotise through her sleep, but she made no response, none at all, and the day broke. I fear yet to stir. I have made my fire and have seen the horses, they are all dead. Today I have much to do here, and I keep waiting till the sun is up high. For there may be places where I must go, where that sunlight, though snow and mist obscure it, will be to me a safety.

I will strengthen me with breakfast, and then I will do my terrible work. Madam Mina still sleeps, and God be thanked! She is calm in her sleep…

JONATHAN HARKER’S JOURNAL

4 November, evening. — The accident to the launch has been a terrible thing for us. Only for it we should have overtaken the boat long ago, and by now my dear Mina would have been free. I fear to think of her, off on the wolds near that horrid place. We have got horses, and we follow on the track. I note this whilst Godalming is getting ready. We have our arms. The Szgany must look out if they mean to fight. Oh, if only Morris and Seward were with us. We must only hope! If I write no more Goodby Mina! God bless and keep you.

DR. SEWARD’S DIARY

5 November. — With the dawn we saw the body of Szgany before us dashing away from the river with their leiter wagon. They surrounded it in a cluster, and hurried along as though beset. The snow is falling lightly and there is a strange excitement in the air. It may be our own feelings, but the depression is strange. Far off I hear the howling of wolves. The snow brings them down from the mountains, and there are dangers to all of us, and from all sides. The horses are nearly ready, and we are soon off. We ride to death of some one. God alone knows who, or where, or what, or when, or how it may be…

DR. VAN HELSING'S MEMORANDUM

5 November, afternoon. — I am at least sane. Thank God for that mercy at all events, though the proving it has been dreadful. When I left Madam Mina sleeping within the Holy circle, I took my way to the castle. The blacksmith hammer which I took in the carriage from Veresti was useful, though the doors were all open I broke them off the rusty hinges, lest some ill intent or ill chance should close them, so that being entered I might not get out. Jonathan's bitter experience served me here. By memory of his diary I found my way to the old chapel, for I knew that here my work lay. The air was oppressive. It seemed as if there was some sulphurous fume, which at times made me dizzy. Either there was a roaring in my ears or I heard afar off the howl of wolves. Then I bethought me of my dear Madam Mina, and I was in terrible plight. The dilemma had me between his horns.

Her, I had not dare to take into this place, but left safe from the Vampire in that Holy circle. And yet even there would be the wolf! I resolve me that my work lay here, and that as to the wolves we must submit, if it were God's will. At any rate it was only death and freedom beyond. So did I choose for her. Had it but been for myself the choice had been easy, the maw of the wolf were better to rest in than the grave of the Vampire! So I make my choice to go on with my work.

I knew that there were at least three graves to find, graves that are inhabit. So I search, and search, and I find one of them. She lay in her Vampire sleep, so full of life and voluptuous beauty that I shudder as though I have come to do murder. Ah, I doubt not that in the old time, when such things were, many a man who set forth to do such a task as mine, found at the last his heart fail him, and then his nerve. So he delay, and delay, and delay, till the mere beauty and the fascination of the wanton Undead have hypnotise him. And he remain on and on, till sunset come, and the Vampire sleep be over. Then the beautiful eyes of the fair woman open and look love, and the voluptuous mouth present to a kiss, and the man is weak. And there remain one more victim in the Vampire fold. One more to swell the grim and grisly ranks of the Undead!…

There is some fascination, surely, when I am moved by the mere presence of such an one, even lying as she lay in a tomb fretted with age and heavy with the dust of centuries, though there be that horrid odour such as the lairs of the Count have had. Yes, I was moved. I, Van Helsing, with all my purpose and with my motive for hate. I was moved to a yearning for delay which seemed to paralyze my faculties and to clog my very soul. It may have been that the need of natural sleep, and the strange oppression of the air were beginning to overcome me. Certain it was that I was lapsing into sleep, the open eyed sleep of one who yields to a sweet fascination, when there came through the snow-stilled air a long, low wail, so full of woe and pity that it woke me like the sound of a clarion. For it was the voice of my dear Madam Mina that I heard.

Then I braced myself again to my horrid task, and found by wrenching away tomb tops one other of the sisters, the other dark one. I dared not pause to look on her as I had on her sister, lest once more I should begin to be enthrall. But I go on searching until, presently, I find in a high great tomb as if made to one much beloved that other fair sister which, like Jonathan I had seen to gather herself out of the atoms of the mist. She was so fair to look on, so radiantly beautiful, so exquisitely voluptuous, that the very instinct of man in me, which calls some of my sex to love and to protect one of hers, made my head whirl with new emotion. But God be thanked, that soul wail of my dear Madam Mina had not died out of my ears. And, before the spell could be wrought further upon me, I had nerved myself to my wild work. By this time I had searched all the tombs in the chapel, so far as I could tell. And as there had been only three of these Undead phantoms around us in the night, I took it that there were no more of active Undead existent. There was one great tomb more lordly than all the rest. Huge it was, and nobly proportioned. On it was but one word.

DRACULA

This then was the Undead home of the King Vampire, to whom so many more were due. Its emptiness spoke eloquent to make certain what I knew. Before I began to restore these women to their dead selves through my awful work, I laid in Dracula's tomb some of the Wafer, and so banished him from it, Undead, for ever.

Then began my terrible task, and I dreaded it. Had it been but one, it had been easy, comparative. But three! To begin twice more after I had been through a deed of horror. For it was terrible with the sweet Miss Lucy, what would it not be with these strange ones who had survived through centuries, and who had been strengthened by the passing of the years. Who would, if they could, have fought for their foul lives…

Oh, my friend John, but it was butcher work. Had I not been nerved by thoughts of other dead, and of the living over whom hung such a pall of fear, I could not have gone on. I tremble and tremble even yet, though till all was over, God be thanked, my nerve did stand. Had I not seen the repose in the first place, and the gladness that stole over it just ere the final dissolution came, as realization that the soul had been won, I could not have gone further with my butchery. I could not have endured the horrid screeching as the stake drove home, the plunging of writhing form, and lips of bloody foam. I should have fled in terror and left my work undone. But it is over! And the poor souls, I can pity them now and weep, as I think of them placid each in her full sleep of death for a short moment ere fading. For, friend John, hardly had my knife severed the head of each, before the whole body began to melt away and crumble into its native dust, as though the death that should have come centuries ago had at last assert himself and say at once and loud, “I am here!”

Before I left the castle I so fixed its entrances that never more can the Count enter there Undead.

When I stepped into the circle where Madam Mina slept, she woke from her sleep and, seeing me, cried out in pain that I had endured too much.

“Come!” she said, “come away from this awful place! Let us go to meet my husband who is, I know, coming towards us.” She was looking thin and pale and weak. But her eyes were pure and glowed with fervour. I was glad to see her paleness and her illness, for my mind was full of the fresh horror of that ruddy vampire sleep.

And so with trust and hope, and yet full of fear, we go eastward to meet our friends, and him, whom Madam Mina tell me that she know are coming to meet us.

MINA HARKER'S JOURNAL

6 November. — It was late in the afternoon when the Professor and I took our way towards the east whence I knew Jonathan was coming. We did not go fast, though the way was steeply downhill, for we had to take heavy rugs and wraps with us. We dared not face the possibility of being left without warmth in the cold and the snow. We had to take some of our provisions too, for we were in a perfect desolation, and so far as we could see through the snowfall, there was not even the sign of habitation. When we had gone about a mile, I was tired with the heavy walking and sat down to rest. Then we looked back and saw where the clear line of Dracula's castle cut the sky. For we were so deep under the hill whereon it was set that the angle of perspective of the Carpathian mountains was far below it. We saw it in all its grandeur, perched a thousand feet on the summit of a sheer precipice, and with seemingly a great gap between it and the steep of the adjacent mountain on any side. There was something wild and uncanny about the place. We could hear the distant howling of wolves. They were far off, but the sound, even though coming muffled through the deadening snowfall, was full of terror. I knew from the way Dr. Van Helsing was searching about that he was trying to seek some strategic point, where we would be less exposed in case of attack. The rough roadway still led downwards. We could trace it through the drifted snow.

In a little while the Professor signalled to me, so I got up and joined him. He had found a wonderful spot, a sort of natural hollow in a rock, with an entrance like a doorway between two boulders. He took me by the hand and drew me in.

“See!” he said, “here you will be in shelter. And if the wolves do come I can meet them one by one.”

He brought in our furs, and made a snug nest for me, and got out some provisions and forced them upon me. But I could not eat, to even try to do so was repulsive to me, and much as I would have liked to please him, I could not bring myself to the attempt. He looked very sad, but did not reproach me. Taking his field glasses from the case, he stood on the top of the rock, and began to search the horizon.

Suddenly he called out, “Look! Madam Mina, look! Look!”

I sprang up and stood beside him on the rock. He handed me his glasses and pointed. The snow was now falling more heavily, and swirled about fiercely, for a high wind was beginning to blow. However, there were times when there were pauses between the snow flurries and I could see a long way round. From the height where we were it was possible to see a great distance. And far off, beyond the white waste of snow, I could see the river lying like a black ribbon in kinks and curls as it wound its way. Straight in front of us and not far off, in fact so near that I wondered we had not noticed before, came a group of mounted men hurrying along. In the midst of them was a cart, a long leiter wagon which swept from side to side, like a dog’s tail wagging, with each stern inequality of the road. Outlined against the snow as they were, I could see from the men’s clothes that they were peasants or gypsies of some kind.

On the cart was a great square chest. My heart leaped as I saw it, for I felt that the end was coming. The evening was now drawing close, and well I knew that at sunset the Thing, which was till then imprisoned there, would take new freedom and could in any of many forms elude pursuit. In fear I turned to the Professor. To my consternation, however, he was not there. An instant later, I saw him below me. Round the rock he had drawn a circle, such as we had found shelter in last night.

When he had completed it he stood beside me again saying, “At least you shall be safe here from him!” He took the glasses from me, and at the next lull of the snow swept the whole space below us. “See,” he said, “they come quickly. They are flogging the horses, and galloping as hard as they can.”

He paused and went on in a hollow voice, “They are racing for the sunset. We may be too late. God’s will be done!” Down came another blinding rush of driving snow, and the whole landscape was blotted out. It soon passed, however, and once more his glasses were fixed on the plain.

Then came a sudden cry, “Look! Look! Look! See, two horsemen follow fast, coming up from the south. It must be Quincey and John. Take the glass. Look before the snow blots it all out!” I took it and looked. The two men might be Dr. Seward and Mr. Morris. I knew at all events that neither of them was Jonathan. At the same time I knew that Jonathan was not far off. Looking around I saw on the north side of the coming party two other men, riding at breakneck speed. One of them I knew was Jonathan, and the other I took, of course, to be Lord Godalming. They too, were pursuing the party with the cart. When I told the Professor he shouted in glee like a schoolboy, and after looking intently till a snow fall made sight impossible, he laid his Winchester rifle ready for use against the boulder at the opening of our shelter.

“They are all converging,” he said. “When the time comes we shall have gypsies on all sides.” I got out my revolver ready to hand, for whilst we were speaking the howling of wolves came louder and closer. When the snow storm abated a moment we looked again. It was strange to see the snow falling in such heavy flakes close to us, and beyond, the sun shining more and more brightly as it sank down towards the far mountain tops. Sweeping the glass all around us I could see here and there dots moving singly and in twos and threes and larger numbers. The wolves were gathering for their prey.

Every instant seemed an age whilst we waited. The wind came now in fierce bursts, and the snow was driven with fury as it swept upon us in circling eddies. At times we could not see an arm’s length before us. But at others, as the hollow sounding wind swept by us, it seemed to clear the air space around us so that we could see afar off. We had of late been so accustomed to watch for sunrise and sunset, that we knew with fair accuracy when it would be. And we knew that before long the sun would set. It was hard to believe that by our watches it was less than an hour that we waited in that rocky shelter before the various bodies began to converge close upon us. The wind came now with fiercer and more bitter sweeps, and more steadily from the north. It seemingly had driven the snow clouds from us, for with only occasional bursts, the snow fell. We could distinguish clearly the individuals of each party, the pursued and the pursuers. Strangely enough those pursued did not seem to realise, or at least to care, that they were pursued. They seemed, however, to hasten with redoubled speed as the sun dropped lower and lower on the mountain tops.

Closer and closer they drew. The Professor and I crouched down behind our rock, and held our weapons ready. I could see that he was determined that they should not pass. One and all were quite unaware of our presence.

All at once two voices shouted out to “Halt!” One was my Jonathan’s, raised in a high key of passion. The other Mr. Morris’ strong resolute tone of quiet command. The gypsies may not have known the language, but there was no mistaking the tone, in whatever tongue the words were spoken. Instinctively they reined in, and at the instant Lord Godalming and Jonathan dashed up at one side and Dr. Seward and Mr. Morris on the other. The leader of the gypsies, a splendid looking fellow who sat his horse like a centaur, waved them back, and in a fierce voice gave to his companions some word to proceed. They lashed the horses which sprang forward. But the four men raised their Winchester rifles, and in an unmistakable way commanded them to stop. At the same moment Dr. Van Helsing and I rose behind the rock and pointed our weapons at them. Seeing that they were surrounded the men tightened their reins and drew up. The leader turned to them and gave a word at which every man of the gypsy party drew what weapon he carried, knife or pistol, and held himself in readiness to attack. Issue was joined in an instant.

The leader, with a quick movement of his rein, threw his horse out in front, and pointed first to the sun, now close down on the hill tops, and then to the castle, said something which I did not understand. For answer, all four men of our party threw themselves from their horses and dashed towards the cart. I should have felt terrible fear at seeing Jonathan in such danger, but that the ardor of battle must have been upon me as well as the rest of them. I felt no fear, but only a wild, surging desire to do something. Seeing the quick movement of our parties, the leader of the gypsies gave a command. His men instantly formed round the cart in a sort of undisciplined endeavour, each one shouldering and pushing the other in his eagerness to carry out the order.

In the midst of this I could see that Jonathan on one side of the ring of men, and Quincey on the other, were forcing a way to the cart. It was evident that they were bent on finishing their task before the sun should set. Nothing seemed to stop or even to hinder them. Neither the levelled weapons nor the flashing knives of the gypsies in front, nor the howling of the wolves behind, appeared to even attract their attention. Jonathan's impetuosity, and the manifest singleness of his purpose, seemed to overawe those in front of him. Instinctively they cowered aside and let him pass. In an instant he had jumped upon the cart, and with a strength which seemed incredible, raised the great box, and flung it over the wheel to the ground. In the meantime, Mr. Morris had had to use force to pass through his side of the ring of Szgany. All the time I had been breathlessly watching Jonathan I had, with the tail of my eye, seen him pressing desperately forward, and had seen the knives of the gypsies flash as he won a way through them, and they cut at him. He had parried with his great bowie knife, and at first I thought that he too had come through in safety. But as he sprang beside Jonathan, who had by now jumped from the cart, I could see that with his left hand he was clutching at his side, and that the blood was spurting through his fingers. He did not delay notwithstanding this, for as Jonathan, with desperate energy, attacked one end of the chest, attempting to prize off the lid with his great Kukri knife, he attacked the other frantically with his bowie. Under the efforts of both men the lid began to yield. The nails drew with a screeching sound, and the top of the box was thrown back.

By this time the gypsies, seeing themselves covered by the Winchesters, and at the mercy of Lord Godalming and Dr. Seward, had given in and made no further resistance. The sun was almost down on the mountain tops, and the shadows of the whole group fell upon the snow. I saw the Count lying within the box upon the earth, some of which the rude falling from the cart had scattered over him. He was deathly pale, just like a waxen image, and the red eyes glared with the horrible vindictive look which I knew so well.

As I looked, the eyes saw the sinking sun, and the look of hate in them turned to triumph.

But, on the instant, came the sweep and flash of Jonathan's great knife. I shrieked as I saw it shear through the throat. Whilst at the same moment Mr. Morris's bowie knife plunged into the heart.

It was like a miracle, but before our very eyes, and almost in the drawing of a breath, the whole body crumbled into dust and passed from our sight.

I shall be glad as long as I live that even in that moment of final dissolution, there was in the face a look of peace, such as I never could have imagined might have rested there.

The Castle of Dracula now stood out against the red sky, and every stone of its broken battlements was articulated against the light of the setting sun.

The gypsies, taking us as in some way the cause of the extraordinary disappearance of the dead man, turned, without a word, and rode away as if for their lives. Those who were unmounted jumped upon the leiter wagon and shouted to the horsemen not to desert them. The wolves, which had withdrawn to a safe distance, followed in their wake, leaving us alone.

Mr. Morris, who had sunk to the ground, leaned on his elbow, holding his hand pressed to his side. The blood still gushed through his fingers. I flew to him, for the Holy circle did not now keep me back; so did the two doctors. Jonathan knelt behind him and the wounded man laid back his head on his shoulder. With a sigh he took, with a feeble effort, my hand in that of his own which was unstained.

He must have seen the anguish of my heart in my face, for he smiled at me and said, “I am only too happy to have been of service! Oh, God!” he cried suddenly, struggling to a sitting posture and pointing to me. “It was worth for this to die! Look! Look!”

The sun was now right down upon the mountain top, and the red gleams fell upon my face, so that it was bathed in rosy light. With one impulse the men sank on their knees and a deep and earnest “Amen” broke from all as their eyes followed the pointing of his finger.

The dying man spoke, “Now God be thanked that all has not been in vain! See! The snow is not more stainless than her forehead! The curse has passed away!”

And, to our bitter grief, with a smile and in silence, he died, a gallant gentleman.

NOTE

Seven years ago we all went through the flames. And the happiness of some of us since then is, we think, well worth the pain we endured. It is an added joy to Mina and to me that our boy's birthday is the same day as that on which Quincey Morris died. His mother holds, I know, the secret belief that some of our brave friend's spirit has passed into him. His bundle of names links all our little band of men together. But we call him Quincey.

In the summer of this year we made a journey to Transylvania, and went over the old ground which was, and is, to us so full of vivid and terrible memories. It was almost impossible to believe that the things which we had seen with our own eyes and heard with our own ears were living truths. Every trace of all that had been was blotted out. The castle stood as before, reared high above a waste of desolation.

When we got home we were talking of the old time, which we could all look back on without despair, for Godalming and Seward are both happily married. I took the papers from the safe where they had been ever since our return so long ago. We were struck with the fact, that in all the mass of material of which the record is composed, there is hardly one authentic document. Nothing but a mass of typewriting, except the later notebooks of Mina and Seward and myself, and Van Helsing's memorandum. We could hardly ask any one, even did we wish to, to accept these as proofs of so wild a story. Van Helsing summed it all up as he said, with our boy on his knee.

"We want no proofs. We ask none to believe us! This boy will some day know what a brave and gallant woman his mother is. Already he knows her sweetness and loving care. Later on he will understand how some men so loved her, that they did dare much for her sake."

JONATHAN HARKER

Miss Betty

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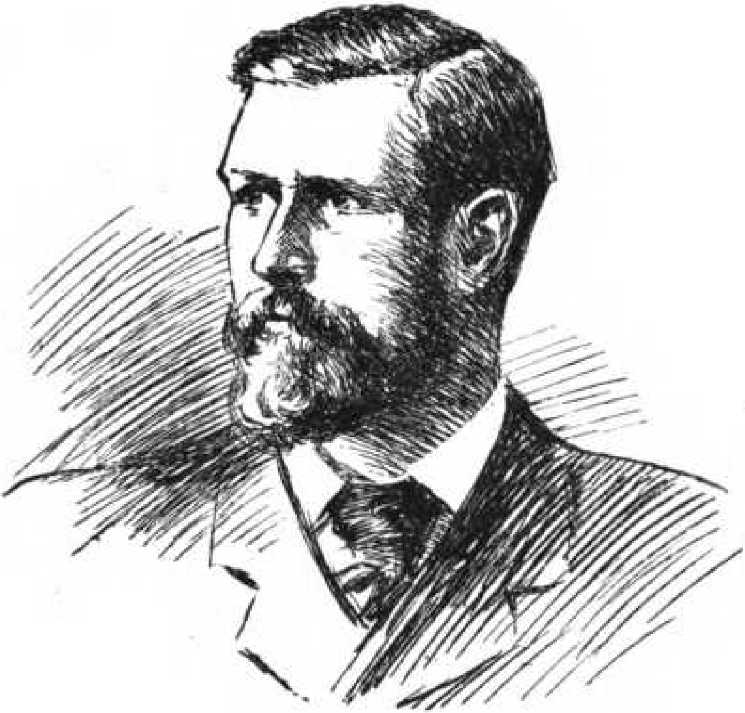


Bram Stoker

CHAPTER I

GRANDFATHER’S STORY

OF all the incidents of her early life none had so great or lasting an effect on Betty Pole as those of that evening in Cheyne Walk on which she had been accused of breaking the blue china jar. This was one of those beautiful pieces, brought from Holland, which had been given to her grandfather by the Dutch Minister when on some diplomatic mission to King William III. Great store had been set on it by the household generally, and Betty’s mother had often, during her lifetime, enjoined on the children special care of the beautiful piece of oriental china. She always said that it was to be looked upon as a sort of heirloom in the family.

The charge against Miss Betty was made by Abigail, she coming right into the back sitting-room after supper, when the dusk was beginning to fall through the trees in the garden of the King’s House in Chelsea. Abigail’s manner was at all times a pronounced one, for all her kindness of heart; but she was not feared so much by the children, who knew the softness as well as the weight of her hand, as by the two men whom she controlled in the despotic manner which purely domestic women assume to lonely men — men who have not wives to protect them. Abigail had in the motherless household the honour and privileges of one whom the mother had trusted, and who by faithful service had earned the trust. As a rule she was a just woman, but on this occasion the violence of her demeanour almost implied to those who knew her that she was herself not quite blameless in the matter. They all knew that she would not wilfully and deliberately lie, but they felt that the occasion was a grave one, and one in which no one would willingly be under the imputation of guilt if it could be avoided. Some of them, face to face with the charge, would have held it justifiable to have deflected the current of public thought if they could not on such an occasion have stemmed it. The young people, one and all, with wonderful unanimity, denied the charge which had at first been made in the general form of ‘ one of the children.’ The two men were concerned, as men ever are regarding the breakages of things they value. Betty’s father, Charles Pole, was as near anger as his gentle nature and the sorrow of his too recent loss would let him be. He spoke severely of the need of care, and reminded the children that their dear mother had ever told them to be careful of this thing that she loved; and then the sight of their little black clothes seemed to smite him and he stopped speaking, for he knew that to that mother’s heart one moment of any of his children’s happiness was dearer than all the vessels which had ever grown under the potter’s hand. She had accepted on her marriage the motherhood of the four children of her husband’s first wife, and treated them all just as she afterwards treated her own little Betty, her only child.

After a spell of silence Betty’s grandfather, Dudley Stanmore, spoke —

“I am sorry that the jar, which had for me very dear memories, has been broken; but we must not forget to be just. Tell me, children; which of you broke it?”

There was no answer. Then the old man spoke again, this time more sternly; his voice was grave and strong, despite his ninety and odd years —

“Let whoever did this, own to it!” All were still silent. For a few seconds the old man’s face looked very stem; but then came a smile and a sigh of relief, and he said quietly —

“Well, Mistress Abigail, that is all right! I am glad that none of the children did it.” This was more than Abigail could brook, so she answered hotly —

“Oh yes! saving your presence, but they did;” and turning to the children added: “Ye know, children, that God hates a liar, and that liars stand without the Gates and go into the burning Pit. Now, tell me, which done it?” Marjory, who though not the eldest had pertness beyond the level of her years, answered— “None of us did it, Abigail! Did you?”

“Me! Me? you wicked Miss. You! Miss Betty. You were last in the room — what do you say to it?”

Betty, who was sitting in her usual place on a little stool at her grandfather’s knee, said gently, in her sweet, old-fashioned way —

“I know nothing of it, Abigail! When I was in the room I was reading.”

“Take care, Miss Betty, take care! now take care!” said Abigail hotly, as she raised a warning finger. “Tell the truth.”

“But I am telling the truth,” said the child. Here her grandfather joined in:

“My word for Betty’s truth! She would not speak falsely! Would you, dear?” The child looked up, turning her head so that the wrinkled hand which he had laid on it slipped down on her shoulder.

“Oh no, grandfather!” she answered quietly; “how could I?”

“Old master always sticks up for Miss Betty,” said Abigail tartly, “just because she is his kin, I suppose — and so like him!” she added, with a touch of feminine causticity.

The likeness was remarkable, despite the gulf of more than fourscore years that lay between them. The old man’s face was wrinkled, his hair fell in thin, straggling flakes of snow, his eyes were dim, and his tall form was bowed with years, whilst the child's hair was golden-brown, her eyes were sapphire, and her skin had the freshness and the warm glow of youth. But there was in each the same inward calm, the same line of profile, the same delicacy of nostril, the same resolution of mouth; and, beyond all else, that something which can hardly be put in words — the capacity of exaltation.

Betty's father now spoke reprovingly— "Abigail Hood, you forget yourself when you so address Mr. Stanmore. Greater respect is due to him! And beside, he would say nothing but what is true. If Betty is like him, then I thank God that it is so; for her life should be pure and strong and true, like that of her dear mother."

Abigail was prepared to do battle only up to a certain point, and as there was nothing here to be argued she used with deadly effect her purely feminine arms. Taking up the corner of her apron and holding it to her eyes, she withdrew. Mr. Stanmore then rose, and taking Betty's hand in his, said —

"Come! We will go and see the broken jar and find out, if we can, what is the cause of it."

The other children followed, and they all passed up the wide staircase into the drawingroom overhead. At the back of the house the dusk was now more marked, and the trees and i their shadows were mixed; but in the front the sunset still struck the summer clouds high overhead and made a sort of after-glow which gave light enough to survey the damage.

Truly the jar was broken, but it had evidently been lifted from its place and had been overturned. When the old man saw it he said —

"Why, Betty could not have done it. She could not have lifted it if she had tried. We must find out something more about it.”

As he spoke there was a sound of sobbing outside. The door opened and Abigail entered, pushing before her a maidservant who held her apron to her eyes.

“Here she is! Here is the hussy what broke the jar. I taxed her with it, and she can’t deny!”

“If you please, master, I am main sorry, but the jar was on the floor where Mrs. Abigail put it for me to put out the old popery and put the new rose-leaves in; and then I was called away. When I came back I forgot all about it, and when I was dusting round knocked it over.” Here she made a vain effort to fall on her knees to her master, and her further utterances became undistinguishable.

“Get up, girl! Get up!” said the old man. “Don’t insult the Creator by kneeling to men. There, run away now, and be more careful in future. Your crying won’t mend broken china!” and, still sobbing, she was incontinently hustled out of the room by Abigail. The old man lifted the broken jar and put it again in its old place, and then taking Betty by the hand, led the way back to the room below.

When they had resumed their old places, the room being now in a deep twilight, one of the boys said: “Tell us a story, grandfather.” The old man paused, and then said —

“I will tell you something, my dears, which comes back vividly to my mind tonight. Mrs. Abigail said how like my dear little Betty is to her grandfather, and I said myself that I knew she was true. Perhaps it is these two things together that take my mind back seventy years and more — further than the span of a man’s life. It was when I was brought before the great, Cromwell, not long after the King had been martyred.”

As he spoke the last words the old man’s voice was instinct with reverence, and he stood (up. As he paused one of the boys said —

“‘ Great Cromwell! ‘ He wasn’t great. He was a traitor.” The old man answered —

“Traitor or no traitor, he was a great man. K Sometimes when I look back through the dimness of my age I wonder where, in time to come, the measure of his greatness shall |be set. But we will not talk of this now. Suffice it that in the days I speak of the world called him great. He was the victorious general of a conquering army. He was the head of the State — in the eyes of some; the head of the Parliament and the general of the Parliament’s forces, and his iron will was felt throughout the land. I had been an officer of the King’s household, and had some knowledge of usage in foreign matters; but when the Parliament slew the King I refused to serve longer under those who made him a martyr, and so I went away from London and stayed in Much Hadam, where my great-aunt had her home. Not very many days had passed when a letter came demanding my presence in London. To this I replied, respectfully but still firmly, that inasmuch as my services and my faith had been those of my King, I could not now give to others the fealty which had been his.”

“And was there any answer?” said Betty, nestling closer to his knee and looking up into his face with her earnest eyes.

“Any answer! My faith, child, but there was an answer! Before another day had passed it came in the shape of a troop of soldiers, who arrived covered with dust and with their horses foaming, for they had ridden from London during the night. They had a warrant for my arrest, signed by Cromwell himself; and they, only waiting to bait their horses before starting, took me back to London. They treated me civilly enough. They said their orders were to show me all due respect, and they were a fine set of fellows, I warrant — tall men and strong, and earnest and grave in their ways and bearing. Aye, children, they were earnest men, those old Ironsides, whatever any one may tell you now; and, my faith! but they spoke and fought as though they believed in the righteousness of their cause."

"Oh fie! grandfather," said Marjory, in her pert way, "to speak for traitors — and you a King's man!"

"Nay, child," said the old man gravely, "it is no shame to speak truly of any man. The truth is a purging fire that cleanses all it touches, and it would be shame to me, and you might well cry ' Fie! ' upon me if any malice on my part bore down truth. And moreover, my dear, I was a King's man then, and a King's man when his son came to his own again, and a King's man in the old succession till James, tampered with our faith, and made me a King's man to Dutch William and his English Queen. And a Queen's man am I now — and shall be whilst good Queen Anne is spared to rule. All these be different Kings, and there be many who iold that the Crown of England should rest on another head; yet you cry not ' Fie! ' upon those who bled with the King when he fought against the King. But there! these things are beyond you, I fear. You will know more and understand better hereafter." "Well, but go on, grandfather! Tell us of the soldiers," said one of the boys. "Go on! Don't mind Marjory; she's always interrupting. Keep quiet, you Marjory, and don't trouble us!" he added, in the dictatorial way of brothers.

"Well, we never drew rein till we rode into Whitehall, and then and there, all booted and spurred as I was and white with the summer dust, I was taken before Cromwell himself. He received me standing, and put his questions simply and directly. I listened in silence, and after a pause spoke —

"'Sir, I may not answer. When the evil time came and my King was butchered, I who held loyal service as his due, resigned my place and sought that solitude which should be the right of every Englishman-if England is, as you boast her to be, free. Whereat the hands of the grim Ironside around me instinctively sought their sword and I tell you that for all my brave words — and I meant to die for them if need were — my heart beat quick and heavy. But Cromwell looked me steadily in the face and spoke out —

"‘ Well said, young sir! That is the speech of a true Englishman, and God forbid that I or those who hold with me should deem it ill on thy part to do thy] duty boldly — even though our duty to follow! it were to send thee to the gallows for it. But think, young sir! mayest thou not have d higher duty than even the loyalty of doing nothing in memory of a dead man? Hath England no claim upon thee? Hast thou no duty to her? Is there no work in the present to which the hand of a loyal Englishman can be turned? It is a grave question that thou hast to answer; and yet thou thinkest it meet to be silent. Thou hast, much knowledge of certain matters; and even earnest men, for lack of such help as thine, may blunder into rougher ways of statecraft than were needed. Nevertheless thou shalt go free, for I cannot see in thy eye other than the look of a true man. Stand back there, and let him pass! I am Essex stock myself, and know his home and lineage. There is naught but truth in his blood; and England never needed true men more than now. Bethink thee, in the future, sir, when the time comes for other grave choice, that thou hast chosen blind obedience to a dead fancy rather than the call of living England — that England for whom men like these have shed their blood!’ and with a grave sweep of his arm he took in the whole ranks of soldiers and statesmen who stood around him. I turned to the door, feeling of such small worth that though I had risked my very life in the boldness of my words, I knew that my going was without dignity. No one else moved to the extent of a hair; I opened the door, passed out, and closed it again.

"And then, hardly had I crossed the threshold, than there came over me such an overwhelming sense of duty undone that I almost reeled. Who and what was I that I should hold my hand or my tongue, when England, in the very throes and stress of civil war, might need me? What was duty that I should deny its call? What was truth? And, my dears, in that instant the answer rose before me as if, like Belshazzar's doom, it had been written in fire upon the wall — that truth and duty were one, and that both must be obeyed at all sacrifice of self. My duty seemed then a simple thing enough. I had no more right to hold back my doing than to refuse to risk my life. The duty must be done, whatever the risk, whatever the pang.

"And then I turned and opened the door again, and walked in silence into that room with head erect — I had left it with downcast head. And then the great Captain stepped forward to meet me, and took me by the hand and said: 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant! ' and it seemed to me that truth and duty, though strong together, were imperfect, but that with faith the perfect trinity appeared. But this is all over your heads. Run away to bed now, children! Good-night!" And the old man sank back into his chair, as though the full weight of his ninety years had come upon him all at once.

As she gave her good-night kiss Betty murmured in her grandfather's ear —

"I think I know, grandfather! Faith and!

Duty and Truth are like three candles with but one light," and she walked gravely away, whilst the old man's eyes followed her lovingly. When the children were all in bed and Betty's father had gone to work in his study, her grandfather went up to the nursery and tapped softly at the door. Mrs. Abigail came quickly and opened it. She was about to make some remark, when the old man held up a warning finger and said softly —

"Is Betty asleep? Please look into her room and see. I do not want to disturb her if she is." Abigail, with an inaudible protest against disturbing people when they were going to bed after a hard day's work, softly opened the door of Betty's room. The child was not asleep, for she spoke at once. Abigail reckoned to the old man. He entered the room, and the nurse shut the door softly and vent back to her own room, but without protest of any kind this time, for there was something so grave in the old man's face — something so sweet and yet so earnest — that it awed her a little, and unconsciously her womanhood admitted the dominance of the man.

As he entered the room the child said, in a most natural way —

"I knew you would come, grandfather."

The old man was a little startled, for such visit was a rare thing indeed on his part, and the subject had not been mentioned between them. Indeed his own intention to come had been formed long after she had said goodnight. And yet there was something so genuine and unforced in the utterance, as though it was the natural conclusion of a train of thought, that the old man was strangely moved; and as he sat beside the little cot he said brightly —

"Why Betty, my dear, you seem to know things by instinct."

"Oh, I don't know, grandfather; but sometimes when I am told things, or see or hear them, other things come into my mind all at once."

Then, as the child took his great hand in her little ones and drew it to her breast and nursed it, visions of other faces rose before him and mingled with hers, so that the past and the present — the living and the dead — became embodied in the one sweet childish presence! The story of his thought was so well written in his face that the child, looking into his eyes whispered softly —

“Tell me, dear grandfather; what are you thinking of? — tell me all.” After a pause, the old man spoke to her in a low, solemn voice.

It was a strange, albeit so sweet and peaceful a scene. The lamp which the old man carried, was laid on the table at the foot of the cot so that its light might not dazzle the eyes of the child, and the two were in shadow, deep save for the reflected light from the walls of the room and the dim echo of the moonlight through the yellow curtains. The child’s face was framed in her little white muslin cap, with just here and there a stray tangle of her sunny brown hair peeping through. Her sapphire eyes were grave and earnest, and the likeness of the child to the old man was more strangely great even than before.

“My child, it seems strange of me to talk of such things, but there is a spell upon me to-night. Mayhap that the old memories are awake and are growing stronger still as the end draws nearer.” The child held his hand tighter and closer to her breast, but said not a word, though a tear gathered in each eye and rolled slowly down her cheeks as she lay. “For the end must come some time, my dear,” he added, as he saw the tears. Stooping, he kissed her forehead, and then, with his silk handkerchief, wiped the tears from her sweet little face. “All the faces I have loved seem gathered in yours to-night. The face of my mother, who, when a child like you, stood with her mother on the heights of Portland Bill and saw the great Armada sweep up the Channel and watched the beginning of the fight that ended in its annihilation. My mother it was who taught me to be true above all things and not to fear to do that which my conscience told me. And I see, too, the face of my wife, whom I had known when she was scarcely bigger than you are, and who grew up to love me as I had loved her all along; who counselled me ever in the way that was most honourable and most true; who mourned when my master suffered at the hands of his foes; who, when I saw the work of that Cromwell who had taught me my duty to England pass away, told me he had been right to choose even death for my conscience's sake, and to act on it when it showed me a new path; and who, alas! left me with my little daughter when God's time came for her to go home to Him. And I see, too, the face of that little one — so like you, my dear, that half a century seems gone and that I see her lying in her little cot, that very time the Great Plague was on us that the Great Fire later purged away." The child held his hand closer and tighter still. "And I see, too the face of her daughter."

"That's me, grandfather!" said the child brightly. The old man shook his head.

"Nay, nay, my dear. Time runs more quickly than you think. I speak of your mother, my child, who stood with me in the streets of London and saw Dutch William enter. Your mother, my child's child; for Betty, dear, you are my great-granddaughter, though we always call you granddaughter. But that is naught to me, my dear," he added, earnestly and quickly, seeing a look of disappointment crossing the child's face. "You are all the more dear for the years that have elapsed, and for all the love and the sweet memories that go to mould you in my heart. Nay, I can say with all truth that as my life ebbs away and I come nearer to the time when I shall meet my dear ones who have gone before, I love best of all the little one whom I must leave and whose love I shall bear to them when we shall meet. But these are sad thoughts for a child, and I must leave you to rest; nevertheless I want to tell you, Betty dear, something which I always intended you to know. When I have passed away all that I have is to be yours; it is in the hands of I trustees; what this means you will know later.

But there is one sum which is kept apart and which is to be yours and yours alone, and which you are to deal with when you pleas? and how you please. I want to ask you not to use that money lightly. Keep it till you feel that there is real want of it; that it can do some good thing such as your heart tells you is good — when it can avert some calamity. It is a trust given to me long, long ago by one who had sinned deeply and had greatly atoned, and who knew the value of help given freely and at the right time. I have never, had cause to use it, and I want to pass over the trust to the nearest of my own kin. You will keep it for me, Betty, will you not?"

"I shall do as you wish, grandfather," said Betty gravely, and added: "Please God!" Then the old man went on: "And now, my child, good-night. We are not likely to speak of this again; in the morning I shall not allude to it, but I wanted you to know it! Good-night my child, and God keep you in His sight and in His heart of hearts, so that you may walk in His ways all the days of your life!" and he bent over and kissed her forehead.

Then the deep love of the child's heart spoke out. She rose in her cot and flung her arms round the old man's neck and kissed him. The tears ran down her cheeks as she sobbed out-l-

"Good-night, great-grandfather — and grandfather too!" She lay back on her pillow and choked down her sobs while the old man once more dried her eyes and bid her cheerily goodnight When the footsteps sounded in the passage, Abigail came out and asked him if he wanted anything. He shook his head, nodded her a kindly good-night, and passed into his own room.

In the morning Abigail came into Betty's room and dressed her herself; when the child had knelt at her knees and said her prayers, the woman said to her quietly —

"Don't rise yet, Betty dear; I have something to tell you, but you must not be frightened." To her astonishment Betty answered gravely — "Don't fear, Abigail, I am not afraid; grandfather is dead!"

"Lord have mercy on us!" said the woman, startled, "but how did you know it, Miss? We only learned it half an hour gone, and I came right here lest you should be shocked to hear it sudden. Who learned you of it?"

"No one, Abigail; I seemed to know. Last night he spoke to me as if he was going away. Oh, grandfather! dear, dear, grandfather!" For a moment the child broke out into a paroxysm of weeping; but as suddenly she stopped, and, drying her eyes, said —

"May I see him, Abigail? I shall be very good."

"Yes, Miss," she answered, after a pause, "but not yet — not till after — not till this afternoon."

Then Betty went and sat in the window-seat and cried quietly all to herself till the time had come.

CHAPTER II

DOGGETT'S COAT AND BADGE

IN the ten years that had elapsed after her great-grandfather's death Betty Pole had many subjects for after-remembrance. Queen Anne had passed away; Marlborough had won glorious victories, had been a traitor twice told and had fallen; the royal vultures had gathered round the deathbed of the Queen, and the hopes of the Stuarts had been for ever shattered. King George had come, and ruled in London a German Court by German ways. In Betty's own family, too, there had been many changes. Her father had been dead more than six years, and his sister who had come to take his place still waged a pretty even battle with Abigail. The latter had grown fatter and greyer, but her heart was as stout as of old and her tongue as sharp. Many a hard knock Miss Priscilla had had to take in the way of words; but she was a just, shrewd woman and knew Abigail's worth and fidelity too well to quarrel with her for a show of temper. She never failed, however, to have her revenge, and in time Abigail came to know that she had met more than her match in the patient, well-tempered woman who bided her time and gave a home-thrust when that time came.

The elder children had all gone their own ways. One of the boys had become a midshipman and was away with the Southern fleet, and the other had just been gazetted a cornet in the Green Horse Dragoons. Marjory, the pert, had married a Scotch Writer to the Signet and was at present engaged in nursing her first baby in Edinburgh, whilst her elder sister, Lucy, lay beside her baby and her husband too in the deep sea beyond the Dogger Bank where the

Queen of Sheba went down with all hands.

Betty was now an heiress to a considerable fortune, for during her long minority the money and estate which her great-grandfather had left her had been used to great advantage by her trustees: 'Every year the account in Mr. Child's bank grew larger. Even the nation wanted money badly at times, and the most active trustee, the shrewd merchant, Mr. Fenton, of Finsbury Square — Betty's cousin on her father's side — who advised the dealings with her money, knew well how to open his hand and when to close it; and each year's end found that his judgment in such matters was always right. He was a somewhat hard, stem man, this Mr. Fenton, now a London alderman, and to some he seemed of: an icy temperament; but in his own way he loved his gentle, high-bred cousin, and was proud of her. He would often confide to his cronies that some day she should have such a fortune as would show the world what a London merchant could gather in the span of one life. His sister, who lived with him, shared his love for Betty, who well knew that there was always a loving welcome for her from the stern old pair in the City.

There was only one point on which the old merchant was unsatisfied, and that was the sum of one thousand guineas which, by Mr. Stanmore's will, lay in the hands of Mr. Child to be paid only to Miss Betty Pole on her own order, when and how she would — all wishes even of her trustees to the contrary notwithstanding. Once he spoke to her about it and she listened in silence whilst he spoke —

"It is a shame, lass, I tell ye; simply a shame to let a sum like that lie idle. I could turn it over and over again in a year and make each guinea into ten. Why, what with their fancy stocks, their South Sea schemes, and their East India Companies and the like, these fools run mad in the hunt for the shadow of wealth; and men who know what money and business mean look on and keep their heads cool till the time comes. I could use this sum alone in such a way that if ye had naught else in the world it would let ye hold up your head with Miss Mendez herself. What with this and your youth and beauty you might pick a husband from the heirs of the Russells and the Montagus! Be wise, child, and let me deal with that as I have dealt with the rest!” Then Betty answered very quietly, as she took his hand and held it, as she Used to hold her grandfather’s — it was a pretty trick she had and it seemed to become her well —

“Thank you, indeed, dear Cousin Fenton, for all you have done for me. Aunt Priscilla often tells me how good you have been to me, and how well you have dealt with my fortune, and I am not ungrateful. Indeed, indeed I am not! But my grandfather spoke to me of that money the very last time I saw him — the very night he died — when he told me of his mother who had seen the Armada, and of his wife who had cried at King Charles’s death, and of his daughter who had been through the Great Plague and the Great Fire, and of her daughter, my mother, who had seen King William enter London. And he gave me a trust that I must keep!”

Here Mr. Fenton struck in —

“Oh, if there is any secret “ Betty still held his hand in one of hers whilst she laid the other on his lips.

“No secret indeed, cousin — now do not be angry with me — I am sure that if you knew all you would be the first to tell me that I am right.”

The old gentleman yielded at once to her soft influence and stroked her hand, as he answered —

“There, there, my dear, I won’t say another word — not one! Do as you please, and if you see any duty, do it. But for the life of me I can't see what duty there is in not multiplying one by ten."

Just then his sister, Cousin Hester, came in, and other matters were spoken of. That night it was arranged that Cousin Hester was to come and stay for a few days in Chelsea at the old house in Cheyne Walk so as to see the great race amongst the watermen for the (orange-coloured coat and silver badge given by Mr. Doggett, the comedian. This race was expected to be a very fine affair; it was to be held on the ist of August, in memory of the crowning of King George the year before, and a great company were expected to be on the river that day. The race was to be amongst six young watermen, who were to start from the "Old Swan," near London Bridge, at the ebb of the tide and row up the river as far as the White Swan Inn at Chelsea. All the Livery of the watermen were to be there, all the great City companies were to send their State barges, and many noblemen and gentlemen of quality arranged that their barges and wherries would be out that day. As the barges were sumptuous affairs, gay with bright colours and gold, with canopies of rich stuffs; and as oarsmen and other servants were glorious with the richest liveries, the sight was expected to be a fine one indeed.

When the day came there was more splendour even than had been expected, for the ministers were wary, and they thought it possible that so: great a concourse might afford an opportunity to the enemies of the House of Hanover to make manifest their disfavour. As the German succession was too recent to allow of any such chance being ignored, it was thought advisable to have a great display of the forces of the Crown — albeit in a purely pacific manner and simply as an addition to the pageant And so each warship at the Nore and Tilbury and in the docks and at the wharves of London sent some of her boats to the show. Dapper and business-like they all seemed as, in perfect time - with flashing oar-blades and steersmen bending double at each stroke, they swept in and out amongst the floating mass. They were everywhere along the whole course, not seeming of set purpose; but from the Tower to Chelsea there was no stretch of water without its navy boat full of alert, swarthy, pig-tailed fellows, cutlass on side and pistol in belt ready for any emergency.

And then again there was another addition, more showy if less effective at a pinch. All the boats of the King’s household were out. Indeed, there seemed to have been here some attempt to make as brave a show as possible; for even all those boats whose -antique shapes and time-worn timbers seemed to have entitled them to rot away in peace, had been furbished up and sent out, gay with paint and gold, to add to the splendour of the scene. These royal boats, each carrying the Standard, made a numerous muster, and the scarlet of the royal livery with the great badges of the King’s watermen almost as large as breastplate and ‘ back-piece, caught the eyes of the multitude.

In each of the royal boats sat some gentleman to represent his King. In some of the great barges were high officers of State, each with a party of ladies and gentlemen, all radiant with rich clothing. Especially noticeable were all those in any way connected with ceremonial or pleasure, the Lord Chamberlain, the Master of the Horse, the Master of the Hounds, the Master of the Hawks. In others were less important personages, and even in | the wherries and smaller pleasure boats were some young gentlemen of family or degree, as an overt sign of the magnitude and importance of the Court party. In the great barge of the Company of Drysalters, Alderman Fenton, i as was right, had a place. Betty had the boat | of four oars which her brothers had used to delight in, made brave for the occasion, and she, with Aunt Priscilla and Cousin Hester, sat I on blue cushions in the stern, whilst Mrs. Abigail had a seat all to herself in the bow and j looked after the baskets with the dinner, which was to be taken on the water to-day. Everything was astir on the river hours before the race, and all sorts of trials of strength and speed were undertaken, and all sorts of mishaps occurred. The river ran strongly in the reaches between Vauxhall and Battersea, and in such a throng there were many novices. But help was always at hand, and the sun was bright and warm; men and women and girls and boys were on pleasure bent, and all were gay and happy.

Betty’s boat took several turns down the river as far as Vauxhall Gardens, and the eyes of its occupants enjoyed, to the full the life and rich beauty of the scene.

Several times they were passed, either going up or down the river, by one of the royal boats, which seemed gifted with a divine uneasiness. It was powerfully manned by four splendid oarsmen, whose bronzed faces, tattooed skin, and precision of stroke, showed them-to be men-of-war’smen who had donned the royal livery for the occasion — a state of things noticeable to the eye of a keen observer in many of the royal boats. They never seemed to tire, but swept up and down as though to show off their strength. There was only one other person in the boat, a young gentleman who steered. He was a handsome young fellow with black hair and dark eyes and a proud bearing, and he carried well the elegant dress which he wore. It did not seem to strike either of the elder ladies that there was a method in the constant passing and repassing of their boat; but Betty seemed to realise it in some way, for she never raised her eyes as the boat swept by — that is, she never raised her eyelids, but looked out between her long eyelashes, as even the fairest and sweetest young women do when a strange young man of elegant appearance is in the immediate foreground.

As for Mrs. Abigail, communing with herself in the solitude amongst the pasties and chickens and bottles, her mind was quite made up. Here at last was the true Prince Charming, whose heart the young mistress whom she idolised was to win. His bright, handsome face, his resolute bearing, his stature and form — for he looked lithe as a panther and strong as steel — his royal surroundings, and the manifest admiration of his glances at Miss Betty as he ran his barge instinctively as close as he safely could, all satisfied the faithful old woman's requirements, and the time seemed impossibly and exasperatingly long until he should formally declare himself. After all is told, what is so enduring, so strong, or so complete as an old servant's protectorship over the future of the child she has reared? Abigail got more and more-impatient as the time went on. The day was hot, for the August sun was blazing, and she took off her hat to fan herself. This hat was a treasure, something that Abigail valued as the apple of her eye. Betty called out to her —

"Take care of your hat, Abigail; if you let it drop you know the current will carry it under some of the boats."

They were at this time up close to the "Swan," where a great assemblage was gathering to watch the close of the race, which was now going on. Down the river was heard a roaring which was taken up as the boats passed along. A way was kept clear in the centre of the stream, and to insure this the boats drew right and left. This occasioned some confusion, especially on the left bank, where the current, glancing off the projecting promenade in front of the King's house, drove the boats together.

Betty's oarsmen, who knew the river, kept the boat in her place by judiciously modulated strokes; but some of the other boats were not so well handled, and one of them came swiftly down the current towards the mass of craft. Some of the men in the other boats called out — especially the gallant-looking young gentleman in the royal barge, who had taken up his position a little down the stream and out towards the centre, from whence he could see Betty.

Abigail, intent on watching the young gentleman, did not see the coming boat, and when the collision came, though it was not much in itself, it so upset her that she dropped her precious hat to catch the gunwale of the boat, and the current in an instant swept it away. Betty saw it coming by and tried to catch it. It was just beyond her reach, and so, with hand on the gunwale, she leaned over as far as she could and just succeeded in grasping it. But at that instant the colliding boat, fended off at first by the hands of its occupants, again struck Betty's boat. The shock, slight as it was in itself, was much to her in her position of poise, and threw her into the water. There was an instant shout, and then Priscilla and Hester clutched wildly at where Betty's head had been, and many a voice was raised and many a hand stretched out.

But quickest of all the throng was the young gentleman in the royal boat! Hardly had Betty sunk under the water when he had leaped to his feet and dived after her. He was a strong swimmer and caught her as she rose, and with a few powerful strokes of his right arm took her with the stream, whilst his own men bent to their oars and followed him.

But it is no light task to swim amongst a press of boats in a current, and especially when one has to support two and with only one hand available for the purpose. One or two boats in such a case can be helpful, but a mass of them makes new danger, Oars get entangled, those who should sit quiet stand up, and those who can help are hampered; boats which to be useful should be held still and on an even keel, are rocked to and fro till they themselves become a positive source of danger. So it was on this occasion. The mere multitude of rescuers and their variety of plans, made a small danger into a great one.

So skilful and strong a swimmer as this man evidently was, could have easily held her up till help came; but with the current, the swaying boats, and the closer ingathering mass there was an added danger of being crushed. He took in the situation at a glance, and with a boldness and readiness which commended itself to every man present who could swim, he dived beneath the boats, taking with him Betty, who had not uttered a sound and who now yielded herself quietly to his guidance. His oarsmen, who, seeing the danger and recognising his course of action, had skirted round the press of boats and were waiting at the other side when he came up, immediately seized him. He gasped out to them: “Take the lady!” and instantly four strong hands raised her and lifted her into the barge whilst he himself clung to the gunwale, I panting. !

Instantly all those around began to cheer in j true British fashion; even those in the mass! of boats up and down and across the stream who had not seen what had happened but knew from the struggling and the pressing together of the boats and by the cheers that something unusual had taken place, took up j the shout till down the stream the waiting, crowd seemed to be in doubt as to which way the race was coming. Priscilla and Hester, both pale as death, held one another’s hands tight, and Abigail, with no one to hold on to except the oarsman, clasped her own hands and said her prayers, as a good woman should do in time of danger — and at other times. Close to

Betty's boat there was at this time another royal barge with several old people splendidly dressed. One of them, a man with white hair and the ribbon of the garter, said in Abigail's hearing to the lady beside him —

"By the Lord! splendidly done. I never saw anything better or readier in my life. He is a fine fellow! Who is he?"

"I can tell you," came the answer, "for I asked just now. His name is Rafe Otwell."

"Who is he?"

"Oh, the usual thing! — a poor gentleman. Some sort of kinsman of Walpole."

There was a bitter undertone in the reply— "Poor! and a kinsman of Walpole! He is a distant kinsman then, of course."

"Fie, my lord, fie! You politicians are more severe on one another than we ladies — are supposed to be."

"Well, kinsman of Walpole, near or far though he be — and the farther the better, say I! — he is a gallant fellow, and a ready fellow; in my time such qualities counted for much!"

By this time the boat containing the two rescued people was in mid-stream and the onlookers had forgotten the incident, for the race was now close up and all eyes were directed towards the approaching wherries. Betty's oarsmen cleared the press of boats and drew to shore, the royal barge following. When they got close in the young gentleman leaped ashore and his men put down a stretcher for Betty to walk to the bank, and she took his hand to steady herself. Sweet and beautiful she looked as she stood there in the brilliant sunshine, though her white dress was sorely draggled and clung to her so that she could hardly walk. The pallor which was consequent on her danger had given way to a bright blush, and as the young man held her hand she tried to thank him. Betty was not good with words when she wanted them, and sometimes those to whom she spoke — and to whom she wrote — thought that the simplicity of her words showed coldness. It was not so, however; the sincerity of their purpose was all-in-all.

"I thank you, sir," she said simply "I thank you with all my heart!" And, after all, what could she have said nicer had she spoken a volume?

"Nay," he answered, "the thanks are mine that I have been permitted the honour of serving you!"

Further talk was cut short by the embraces of her aunt and cousin, who had gained the bank and now wept over her and rejoiced in physical contact, to the great detriment of their costumes. Abigail too came up and embraced her and finished an outpouring of rejoicing at her mistress's safety and of anger towards herself for causing the accident, with the following —

"And, God save us, if the darling child hasn't kept the hat all the time!"

Betty looked down; she had quite forgotten the hat, which she held in her hand dripping many-coloured tears. The young gentleman said gallantly —

"Such faithfulness is indeed strange!" Abigail instantly capped his speech— "You wouldn't think it strange if you knew Miss Betty, sir."

"Hush, Abigail!" said Betty.

Then Aunt Priscilla spoke —

"Sir, we do not know how to thank you. This dear child's life is more to us than we can say; but, indeed, we are very, very grateful." She held out her hand, and the young gentleman took it; but to his surprise and indeed to his consternation she stooped and kissed his hand.

"No, no!" he said, "not that, Madam — not that!"

"Sir, I must show my gratitude somehow!

Were I younger or you older I might take a different way! But come, sir," she added, "our home is yonder in Cheyne Walk. Come with us and dry your clothes."

"No, no!" he answered, "it is nothing; I shall be less wet presently and a ducking does no harm."

By this time Betty was moving off, but on hearing him refuse she stopped.

"At least, sir," she said, "you will not refuse to let us make you welcome!"

He said nothing but bowed, and they all moved off towards Cheyne Walk.

Betty was hurried to her room by Abigail, who rushed about getting cordials which she insisted on her taking, and wept and laughed over her; whilst the stranger, after being duly dosed with cordial — which he did not refuse — was shown into another room where was the whole wardrobe of Betty's father. He made his choice of clothes, and presently appeared in the drawing-room. Here he formally introduced himself to the two ladies, Betty not yet having appeared.

"Ladies, allow me to introduce myself, since good fortune for me, though bad for " he looked from one to the other of the elderly ladies, as if in doubt— "for your young sister," the ladies here smiled not displeased, "has taken the place of social usage. My name is Rafe Otwell. I am a gentleman of the Temple, though I regret to say as barren of law as I am of means. I „ am a kinsman of Sir Robert

Walpole, who promises me a place as soon as I have been called to the Bar. I am a sometime scholar of Cambridge, and my home, when I had one, was in Cheshire.”

To which Miss Pole replied —

“Sir! you may be poor — Providence rules in lesser matters of the world as in greater things — but you are a gallant gentleman and have played a ready as well as a brave part this day, and if my dear brother, Betty’s father, were here, he would thank you better — than I — than I can “ and here the poor lady’s emotion overcame her and she burst into tears.

“Don’t cry! there Mistress, don’t cry!” said the young man, all his ceremonial stiffness gone in a moment. “There is nothing to cry for. She is alive and well! All is well! There now, don’t cry!” In the midst of this, when the young gentleman was half embracing the elderly lady at his side, in well-meant efforts to comfort her, Betty entered the room. She instantly became the objective point of all the embracings and all the tears; and for awhile rejoicing, in the form most objectionable to a person not in the game, was rampant Suddenly Hester said — .

“Those men who picked you up were not even thanked. I will go and thank them,” and she went down to the edge of the river opposite where the royal barge still hung on her oars, though the mass of boats save those clustered around the landing at the “Swan” were on their way back to London.

“We have come to thank you,” said Miss Fenton; and with an inspiration added: “Won’t you have something to drink?” Their answer was unmistakably and decidedly in the affirmative.

“Come to the house yonder,” she said.

“Not for worlds, Miss. We daren’t go ashore without leave.”

Here, however, Betty appeared, followed by Abigail and a blushing maid who carried four tankards.

‘God bless you, Miss,” said the sailor who was spokesman for the rest. “You should be an Admiral’s lady.”

CHAPTER III

THE GOLD BUTTONS

RAFE'S introduction of himself was followed by a more formal one, for amongst his few friends was a lady of Ware, to whom Betty Pole was of course known from her estate at Much Hadam, and the young people met at a kettledrum at her house. By this time he was head over ears in love with Betty; he would have declared himself but for that restraining sense of his own unworthiness which Providence has been good enough to implant, for the protection of young maidens, in the hearts of young men. But this sense lies latent only until such time as a true attachment manifests itself, whereupon it asserts all its strength. This force, however, like all great forces, is active and reactive; and, like other forces, what it loses in strength, it gains in direction, and vice versa. For the timorous young maiden when she feels assured that her lover holds back through some strange weakness which is alien to feminine nature — and her heart never fails to tell her when this is so — takes heart of grace and gives freely, if not ostentatiously, that which timid self-consciousness fears even to ask. Si la jeunesse savait! Well, if it did, the young would cease to be young. The decadence of old age came into the world at the first bite of the apple, and wrinkles formed an appropriate punishment for the sin of Eve.

Betty's course of thought was masked by her habitual direct simplicity. She made up her mind on the necessary points, and took all the rest for granted. Indeed, had she done anything foolish — which she did not — it would have been excusable. Here was a young gentleman, only a few years older than she was, handsome, stalwart, brave, of gallant bearing, and of high connections — and to whom she owed her life. His only disqualification in the eyes of the world did not matter in her case; for if he was poor, she had enough for both, and it would be only an added sweetness to say to him when the time came — if it ever did come— "I give you all I have, Rafe! And yet how little! You gave me your name — a woman has none worth having in our English law; my life is yours already," and so forth. The day-dreams of a young maid are very tender; and somewhere at base of them is ever some such idea of self-sacrifice.

But though these young people met often — by premeditated chance — such meetings were not often enough for them, and Rafe took to calling at Cheyne Walk more frequently than the strict rules of ceremony demanded. Aunt Priscilla was not, however, a very fiery dragon, and the only effect of his frequent visits was to keep her in a state of constant expectation. As he might at any time come she thought it well to be always ready for such a contingency, and so the requirements of a small household of two Women became gradually enlarged to meet the needs of a third person, that person a man and a stranger. Abigail never grumbled, and we may be sure the maids did not, at all the extra trouble.

The meetings of the young people became more full of eloquent silence than they had been. Betty and Rafe did not speak even so much as had been usual at first, for as they grew to understand each other better, fewer words sufficed. Occasionally they walked together on the path by the riverside, up and down, up and down before the house, never further than the eyes of Aunt Priscilla could follow them as she sat in the window of the drawing-room embroidering. For worlds Betty would not have gone beyond this limit — not that she feared Aunt Priscilla or the proprieties, but she was a resolute young person when her mind was made up, and she had set this limit for herself. Often they watched the sun set up the river and saw the shadows grow darker and darker over the hill that rose away to Clapham and Wandsworth. At such moments no speech at all was necessary, for the hearts of the two beat as one heart, and though nothing had been spoken they knew that they loved. Their only doubt on earth was of their own worthiness of each other.

At last one evening when Rafe called there was a certain air of resolution manifest on him, awkwardly borne, but which made the heart of Abigail rejoice for she knew by instinct what was coming. He used generally to ask for Miss Priscilla, but to-day his request was to see Miss Pole, and he was shown into the drawingroom. Whenever he had called previously he had usually found Betty alone, or if she was not in the room, she came alone and was shortly followed by Miss Priscilla; but to-day, after a delay, Betty came in accompanied by her aunt. To accomplish this there had been a little skirmishing, for Betty declared that she would not go in alone.

How Betty did talk that afternoon — she that was usually so silent! She did not allow the chatter to flag for a moment. Every topic of conversation that could be imagined she exhausted; and her aunt sat in amazement, secretly bridling at this unwonted vivacity. As Betty chattered and as Aunt Priscilla's back got stiffer and stiffer, so also Rafe's temper seemed to give way a little. His answers grew more monosyllabic and a sort of cloud settled on his brows. But the more glum and dour he became, the brighter grew Betty. She teased and rallied him till Priscilla grew indignant and began to take his part; whereupon she grew more merry still, and, making an excuse, slipped out of the room and rushed up to her own chamber. There, after locking the door, she threw herself face down on the sofa and began to cry.

The instant that Betty was out of the room her aunt changed her tactics, and began to make excuses for her. The dear child had not been quite herself lately; the weather seemed to affect her, and so forth. Rafe was not slow to acquiesce in these excuses; his real love for her, and his somewhat ruffled vanity both came to his aid. and the atmosphere began to clear. In the midst of this process Betty returned, but without a sign of tears upon her face. She was one of those women whose beauty tears do not mar. It is well for some women that it is so, and that in this way the wind of adversity is tempered to them. Betty was in a mood not quite the same but very slightly different; she was not less cheerful, but she did not tease; Rafe felt the sunshine of her presence again begin to glow around his heart.

By some feminine diplomacy which has no match in the nature of man, Betty so arranged matters that she was not left alone with Rafe for a single moment. When Priscilla made an effort to leave in order to get a book for Mr. Otwell, Betty started up and insisted that she should get it. When Abigail came to the door and craved the elder lady's presence for a moment it was the younger one who went. And all the while she was so sweet and winning that Rafe loved her better than ever for his defeat.

Presently, as a last resource, he asked her if she would not walk on the river bank and watch the sunset Betty at once acquiesced and ran off to get. her hat and wraps. She came back with two hats and two wraps, Priscilla's and her own, and insisted, then and there, that her aunt should share the pleasure. Rafe, secretly chafing but all the while amused, could of course only acquiesce, and the three took a series of prim promenades along the river bank under the trees. Betty so manoeuvred that her aunt was always in the middle; if in the course of turning to retrace their steps this arrangement became upset, she with some deft movement restored it again.

Rafe did not enjoy that walk. Things somehow seemed to be running the wrong way. Had he been older! — Si la jeunesse savait! The burden of the old saw is ever the same, and its application is eternal!

When they came back to the house Betty was as sweet as usual, with the exception that she would not allow Rafe an instant's opportunity of love-making or even of being alone with her. When he asked her to sing something for him she sat down to her harp and sang in a manner of enchanting archness a little song which whilst it provoked her lover made him more in love than ever. As she bent over to the harp in one of the most graceful attitudes that woman can assume, and swept the strings till they trilled in sympathy with her arch merriment, she looked towards Rafe bewitchingly, but in such wise that she seemed to look through and beyond him — a fact which, through all his love, inflamed that jealousy which is possible to all men.

"What will you sing?" Rafe had asked.

"' Love at play'!" she answered, and straightway began —

"He is not dead — nor sleeping!
The playful Boy pretends to die —
See! see! he peeps with laughing eye, He tests the lover's truth with weeping.

"Love is naught but lying.
Its wiles are jests to earnest carried, When Cupid smiles on lovers

married, The thought that troubles least is dying.

“Lovers be happy toying!
Still be children whilst ye may!
Ye will be grave in coming day.
Youth, not age, is the season of enjoying.”

When the song was done Betty rose quickly and sat down primly close beside her aunt; she was silently demure during the whole time that Rafe remained. Seeing that he could get no further with his suit, Rafe, concealing his chagrin as well as he could, took an early leave.

When Betty was alone with her aunt the latter took her to task gravely.

“Betty dear, don’t you think you were a little hard on that young gentleman?”

Betty opened her eyes wide in seeming surprise as she answered artlessly —

“Hard, aunt! how do you mean?”

“How do I mean, my dear? Eyes don’t grow as old as mine without being able to understand what they do see. That young gentleman is just breaking his heart for you.” “For me, aunt?” This was spoken with an exquisite softness.

“Yes, my child. Can’t you see — or won’t you see — that he is head over ears in love with you?”

“Oh no, aunt; that cannot be.”

“Can’t be! What do you mean, child?” Betty answered, with a strange mixture of shyness and drollery: “He never told me so.”

“Upon my word, young lady, you are too bad! You are — you are — just like other girls!”

“And besides, aunt, I am not sure of the worthiness!”

“Indeed, my dear, I am sure he is worthy. True, he is poor; but, my dear, you are rich enough to please yourself; and, my dearest Betty” — this was said very gravely— “do not trifle with the best part of a man, the sincerity of his heart. A good man, dear, is a very great and noble thing, and worth a woman’s love.”

“But indeed, aunt, I did not mean that he was unworthy. Oh no! oh no! oh no!” and the deep, dark blue eyes filled with tears.

“Who, then?”

“It is I who am not worthy!” and she threw herself into the arms opened to receive her.

Aunt Priscilla understood all, and comforted her.

The very next day Master Rafe called again. This time he was not nervous, for he had made up his mind that though he would wait for a suitable opportunity he would seize the very. first which might come. He found Betty in the drawing-room alone, and she received him very sweetly, so sweetly that he felt that he was at one with her, and then and there blurted out what he fondly thought was his secret.

“Oh, Betty, I love you with all my heart! Won’t you take me? I shall be a true and loving husband to my life’s end!” Betty sat silent for a moment, for it was too sweet a pleasure to shorten, and so he went on: “I have been so miserable, Betty, since last night that I have never slept. I came here yesterday to propose to you, but somehow I never got a chance. Tell me, Betty — tell me, dear, that you love me, or I shall be miserable all my life.”

Betty raised her earnest eyes, and looked him full in the face, as she put her two hands in his, and said, with a shy sweetness that made his heart thrill —

“Do not be miserable, Rafe, ever any more!” He caught her in his arms, and their lips met in their first kiss. The first kiss is a holy thing. It should be the symbol of spiritual marriage — of the union of two souls; the youth and maiden who feel this can never really love, at least the same way, again.

Priscilla waited as long as she thought proper, and then, with a little flutter in her heart, opened the door and walked in with the commencement of an apology on her lips. That apology, however, was never completed, for the lovers, who had been holding each other's hands, drew apart instinctively, and Betty, blushing rosy red, jumped up and ran over to her aunt and kissed her, and then laid her head on her bosom. Rafe rose up and took one of her hands, and with an old-fashioned gallantry stooped and kissed it, and Priscilla, too, blushed. Blushing on such occasions is the first preliminary to feeling at ease, so presently all three sat on the sofa, Rafe leaning back very happy and with an all-conquering air about him which both women secretly admired. Priscilla held one of Betty's hands in hers, and stroked and smoothed it lovingly, whilst the other lay emptily in her lap, Rafe being too new a lover to dare to take it in his — openly.

Supper that night was a glorious meal. They were all merry and light-hearted, and Abigail herself waited on them, to the chagrin of the maids who wanted to see for themselves how things went whilst the news was very new indeed.

Betty had rushed upstairs for a moment to tell Abigail, but had had no need to speak; the news was written plain in the radiance of her face, and the old woman threw her arms around her and sat down and took her on her knees as she used to do when she was a child. Indeed, that evening Abigail seemed to have gained a new importance. She behaved exactly as usual, but in a more genial way;

she excused everything that went wrong, unless it bore on the proper entertainment of the guest. When parting time came Aunt Priscilla had a message to give to Abigail who was waiting to receive orders, and as this took some time to get through and required much talking in a loud tone, so that the impossibility of immediate disturbance was made manifest, the young people had a full and satisfactory opportunity of parting — as newly plighted lovers should have. It is but just to say that they availed themselves of it.

When he came next day — and his visit was much earlier than ever before — Rafe had presents for all the women. To Aunt Priscilla he ventured to give a souvenir of his deep appreciation of her many virtues, in the shape of an exquisite little gold patch-box shaped like two hands clasping, which, when open, showed each hand complete in itself. To Abigail he gave a large silver money-box, shaped like a German peasant's hat, for he said that it was her original loss in the shape of her hat which was the occasion of his great gain, and he had ventured to put within a something wherewith to purchase another hat. Abigail, having admired its external appearance, and having put off looking within as long as seemliness required, opened it and found within ten bright guineas, and went off at once to fill the maids with wonder and envy at the beauty and worth of her gift. Strangely enough, Aunt Priscilla had on his coming perforce to withdraw herself on household duties, which she did with a needless elaboration of apologies. Then, when he and Betty were alone, and when they had taken by a common instinct their old seats on the sofa, he gave Betty her present. It was an Indian ruby set in brilliants — evidently an heirloom — and when he had put it on the third finger of her left hand, he kissed the finger, and said that it was now his and that he was the very happiest person on all the earth. This assertion

Betty, as she nestled close to him, doubted; but she did not then proclaim herself, for the love of her heart was as yet like the green corn when it timidly puts its head above the earth — not like the same in the autumn, when its ripening time has come, and it rustles as it waves its head openly in the sunshine that it loves.

Betty's life had been so retired that she had not many friends whom it was necessary to tell of her betrothal, but such as there were had to be duly informed, although it was thought wise to say as little as possible about the engagement, since so long a time must elapse before its fulfilment. All this involved much letter-writing, and kept her very busy; not, however, too busy to have a delightful time with her lover when he came, which was pretty well every day. The guardians were of course informed very soon; and although they grumbled a littlfe, and said that a young lady of Miss Pole's fortune and prospects might have done much better, when they came to know that their ward really and truly loved, they consented to the engagement. They insisted, however, on the stipulation mentioned in her great-grandfather's will, that she should not be married till she was of full age. This was two years and three months off, and it seemed to both the young people to be a cruelly long time to have to wait. As, however, they were not forbidden to meet as often as they would, their engagement was a delightful time.

It was, perhaps, a foolish thing of Rafe not to have gone at once to his kinsman, from whom he expected so much, and have told him. This he often felt; but as at first he had not done so, he dreaded more and more the hard inquiry that would infallibly come: "And pray, sir, why did you not inform me of this at the first? Am I no one that I should be thus ignored?"

One day he was sent for by his kinsman, now the virtual ruler of

England, since he controlled both the Treasury and the Exchequer. When the interview commenced Walpole told him that he would shortly place him in a great position, as the time had come when he, Sir Robert, should consolidate his power by all means possible, and that he wished to have allied to himself a certain great house that might be dangerous in opposition.

"You," he said, "are to marry the Lady Mary. It is true that she is no longer young; but you have youth and good looks for both, and I warrant me she will not complain of those qualities in you! You do not seem elated with the opportunity," for Rafe's face had fallen and his feeling was only too plain, "but be good enough to remember, young sir, that though you have youth and a fair presence, these comprise all your present possessions. When you go into the market with a full purse you may pick and choose, but when your purse is a slim one — if purse you have at all, or wherewithal to put in one — you must take what you can get. Understand me plainly: I am willing to help my kinsmen, and you amongst the number, but in turn they must help me. If you will not do as I want, then you cannot expect that I will do as you want. When you can come to tell me that you are willing to carry out my project I shall appoint you forthwith to the post I spoke of; but time does not stand still, and lacking you, I must choose some other suitor for my Lady Mary, and his must be the reward I reserved for you."

Rafe was ushered from his presence with a very formal and distant bow.

As we know, Rafe did not lack physical courage; in face of all dangers to life and limb he was a brave man. But his moral courage had not been tested; had it been, he might have spoken out at once to the Minister, and told him of his betrothal to the young heiress. Had he done so he would doubtless have found new favour in the eyes of his kinsman, who had a shrewd head and knew the worth of such an alliance; and his interests in life would have been advanced in some other way. So Rafe went home and fretted and fumed and cursed his luck, for by this time he had nearly come to the end of his resources.

He had much wished to make Betty a present, but he had hoped that his nomination to a place would have come at once, and that he would then be better able to give something worthy of the acceptance of a young lady who had so much of her own already. Now he found his chance of place gone — for the time at all events — and but a small store of guineas remaining of his inheritance. So it was with a somewhat saddened joy that he took his way to Chelsea that afternoon.

There was a source of interest in the household which, however, he did not share. Betty's brother had come up on leave of a few days from his regiment, then quartered at York, and naturally the household was full of his presence. Rafe, who only knew of him as Betty's half-brother, was not any too delighted, and held himself somewhat stiffly, though for Betty's sake he tried to be as cordial as he could. Robert Pole, too, seemed to have some slight holding back from his sister's suitor. He had a vague idea that the latter was in some sense an interloper; and as he had a special design in his own visit, not unconnected with certain debts incurred since the receipt of his commission, and which could only be removed through the agency of a rich sister, he wished, perhaps not unnaturally, to have that sister to himself as much as possible. With every minute he began to jar more and more on Rafe. There was with his sister a sort of taken-for-granted superiority, and an almost rudeness of manner which their having been children together made possible, but which in the jealous eyes of the lover — for such thinks no refinement sufficiently worthy for his beloved — seemed coarse and intolerable. Lovers have many crosses to bear in the time of their probation, and not the least of them are placed on their shoulders by the brothers and sisters of their beloved, whose familiarity seems a trifling with a sacred thing.

Betty could not but be conscious of the state of feeling between the two young men, and tried to keep the peace between them. Rafe felt that she was an angel, and loved her more than ever. He loyally strove to further her wishes, and would not see or understand when some specially caustic remark was aimed at him. Now and again he and Betty exchanged glances which showed that they understood each other, and in this silent sympathy he found a great reward for his forbearance. Aunt Priscilla was sublimely unconscious of all that was going on and took an early opportunity to whisper to Betty —

"How delightful it is that they understand each other so well. They have become great friends already."

Once Betty feared there would be a scene.

Robert, with a brother's freedom, took Betty's | hand in his, and noticing the ring, said —

"Hallo! this is something new. I wonder at your wearing such a beggarly thing among those fine ones." |

Betty blushed up to the roots of her hair, for she felt, as did Rafe, that an insult to the latter's gift was intended, but as she did not wish to foment a quarrel she smiled with what heart she could and kissed the ring, saying —

"Never mind, brother, let who will have the rest — this is good enough for me!"

"Indeed but it's not," he answered, with a sneer; "I have given a better to an innkeeper's daughter!"

Betty's heart sank within her, but Rafe's look reassured her. Then, as she had a shrewd idea as to what Master Robert's visit was really due, she thought of a way — albeit one that seemed a little ungenerous — to make him at least behave with decorum. Master Robert wanted a lesson, and he should have it! So she answered —

"Oh! Robert, how can you be so extravagant! Surely it is not a necessity of being in the Green Horse that you should be so lavish! I did not know that a cornet's pay allowed such openhandedness!"

Robert felt that he had gone too far. He! knew that he had yet to explain the disposal of the fifty guineas sent to him not long before in answer to an urgent request, and beyond this 1 again that another hundred at the present time would hardly suffice to meet his more present needs. So he determined on a discreet measure of silence, and tried to change entirely the whole current of conversation. After a moment's thought he jumped up, calling out —

"Come, Betty! put on your hat, and we'll all go pay a visit to Don Saltaro and see his museum. I haven't seen a mummy or a mermaid, or a whale's tooth since I left for York!"

Betty was glad of the change, and as she looked pleased, Robert was pleased to be out of the difficulty of his own creation. So in a good humour the three young people adjourned to Don Saltaro's museum before the afternoon should have become too late for the presence of ladies in the coffee-house. They admired everything, and the Don, who thought much of his aristocratic neighbours, came himself and explained everything to them. With great ceremony he took down from its hook on the wall a splendid old Spanish sword, beautifully hiked and of immense length. This, he told them, had belonged to a captain of the Armada, and was evidently an heirloom.

“Look!” he said; “see here are the arms, and there a writing on it in the Spanish tongue. Young lady, your eyes are better than mine. Do you please to read it, that these young gallants may learn how the old Spaniard loved!”

Betty, blushing brightly, took the sword and read the legend on the blade —

“‘ El Amor del infiel es como la Espada destemplada.’”

“Can any of you construe it?” asked the Don. “No! Then is it to me, to whom are many tongues. ‘ The Love lacking faith is as a sword untempered.’ What think you of that, young lady?”

“It is true,” said Betty gravely. “There is a lesson in the sword of that old Spanish gentleman which every man and every woman should take to heart!” The Don cried: “Bravo! Bravo!” and Robert applauded, whilst Rafe looked his acquiescence.

Rafe did not return to supper, for he felt that it would be easier for Betty if he were not present to notice — and perhaps to cause — her brother’s rudeness. So at the gate he said farewell, not in his usual style but in a ceremonious way befitting a public occasion, and went back to the Temple in a waterman’s wherry.

The legend on the sword had given him an idea. He would have it worked out in some jewel for Betty! And as he was rowed down the river with the ebbing tide his idea took a definite form. He would have wrought, by some cunning goldsmith, a set of buttons in gold of some old Spanish device, such as that which embellished the sword, and on each should be graven a word of the legend. Then he bethought him whether it would be better in Spanish or English, for the wording of the sentence allowed either; and the happy idea came to him that he would have each button to contain a word of Spanish and a word of English, but in such a way that the sentence should run the reverse way, the last of one series being the first of the other.

The perfecting of his idea pleased him, and he forgot all the disagreeable part of his meeting with Betty's brother; and so he landed at the stairs at Westminster and sought the sign of the "Golden Ball" at Windmill Street in the Haymarket. There he confided to Paul de Lamerre, the Crown goldsmith, his wishes. He rejoiced that the latter liked, the idea, and would therefore produce something which should be a pleasure to Betty.

CHAPTER IV

RAFE'S OPPORTUNITY

RAFE paid one more visit during Robert's stay, for he did not wish it to appear as though he avoided the house on account of Betty's brother; but he was secretly rejoiced when, on his following visit, Abigail told him that Master Robert had gone back to York. The young gentleman had returned to his regimental duties somewhat richer in worldly goods than when he had come; but he was also richer in certain caution and advice of a sisterly kind which rankled in his breast during the whole of the journey between London and York. Betty had impressed upon him the necessity of at least some measure of prudence in his expenditure, lest he should have to end his military duties before they were well, begun; she had also, but in a more guarded way, made it perfectly plain to him that his attitude to his new brother-in-prospect was not such as to insure in the family that peace and affection whence bounty for the prodigal had its only possible source.

"In fact," summed up that fairly shrewd young gentleman, "I have made a cursed fool of myself, and Betty sends me packing with a flea in my ear!" — a conclusion which, though somewhat coarsely expressed, did infinite credit to his judgment. Henceforth he passes out of our story. He loved his life while it lasted; and his calls on Betty's liberality became so extravagant that had he not had the misfortune to challenge a more expert and soberer swordsman than himself, it might have become necessary for her guardians to interfere. His one touch with Rafe had been truly but a slight one, but it had the consequence that the mind of the latter was made up to bestow on his lady a gift worthy of her, though at an expense which, when the goldsmith had received his payment, left only a few lonely guineas in the treasury of the kinsman of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Rafe kept the buttons in a case in. his pocket, waiting for a suitable opportunity of giving them to Betty; and when he found that the house was rid of the embarrassing presence of Robert he knew that the time had come.

That evening, when the sun was going down in the west, he asked Betty to come with him to the river bank and watch the sunset. She put on her hat, and they went out together. They walked by the rows of trees opposite the King's House, and, passing up the marshlands, came to the jutting bank whence they could look over the watery waste and see the sunset mirrored in every bend of the river, every little tidal stream, and every stagnant pool.

Here there was a grove or clump of trees, and passing through these they stood on the edge of the bank with the full tide brimming right up to their very feet. All the pools and rivulets of the marshes of the opposite bank to right and left were full of water, and the marshland looked as if shot with gold or silver as the water caught the glow of the sunset or showed cold without it. The sun sank slowly down towards the far-off bend of the river, where the willows fringed the banks between Wandsworth and Putney and the river blazed in a glory.

The rise of the ground towards Clapham and Wandsworth seemed bolder than in a colder light, and on the further edge rose the gibbet, black and grim, which marked the winding of the Portsmouth road. As she pointed out the 'beauties and answered Rafe's queries Betty had a strange pleasure, for it was sweet beyond measure to be able to instruct her lover; but she shuddered when, in answer to his query, she told him of the black gibbet.

Then, as the sun sank, he took the case with the golden buttons from his pocket and handed them to her and told her, with sweet words and a look that was an anthem, that he had tried to get something which she would like and which might be worthy of her. When she opened the case and saw the buttons she gave a cry of delight and kissed his gift; then she took out a button and saw that there were words on it in Spanish and English, and at once she guessed at the legend and read it right through both ways. Then she turned to Rafe, and, secure that the grove of trees hid them from the gaze of any prying wanderer, put her-arms around his neck and kissed him on the mouth and told him that she would value his dear gift till her dying day.

And so the sun sank into the water in a last flood of crimson and gold; and then in an instant the whole colour of the scene changed, the gold of the sunshine turning to the silver of the moonlight. The air seemed colder as the lovers retraced their steps to home, where they found Priscilla looking anxiously for them, for they had never been out so long together before. That evening, before he began to say good-night, Betty said to him very gravely, after a painful and manifest hesitation —

"Rafe dear, there is something troubling me. May I speak of it to you? May I ask you a question?"

"My darling, there is nothing in all the wide world that you may not say to me." "Thank you, Rafe dear; you are kind to help me in what I want Rafe, I know you are not rich. Can you really afford to give me so valuable a present? My love, I fear lest my. brother's taunt may have worried you."

"How do you mean?" asked Rafe, for he hardly knew what to answer.

"Rafe, you will forgive me, but perhaps they" — and here she laid her hand on her bosom, wherein she had placed her lover's gift— "may come to more than you calculated, and indeed something cheaper will suit me as well."

Rafe drew a long breath. He saw a way of answering without lying and without committing himself to the truth.

"Betty dear," he said, "the buttons are already paid for, and with my own money — a part of my inheritance." Then, wishing to divert her thoughts, he started up and said— "Come, I shall sing you a song," and forthwith burst out the following in a rich baritone voice —

"Let Gallants pledge in wine their loves
And all such other trumpery!
But faith! not I — no toasts for me: —
My Heart and I are company.

"In gory fields good fellows rot —
And all for love of Country!
No fields for me, save furrowed ones —
And my old Heart for company.

"Your loves and wars alike bring tears,
And naught care I to pump any!
My quiet laugh sufficeth well —
And my old Heart for company.

"And yet, and yet when wars were on
And frightened maids would run to me,
I never shirked the blows a jot
Or shunned the maidens' company.

"Perhaps my Heart remembers well,

Adds up and reads the sum to me,
And pleasured stores are spread again
When bygone days are company.
“So pass I on my way — alone,
Till Death shall sound his tramp to me.
Nor doubt I then my weary
Heart Shall find him right good company!”

Despite Rafe’s resolute bearing and the strong, masculine roundness of his voice, which is so comforting to a woman, Betty felt full of sadness as the last note of her lover’s song died away. Looking at him through the dimness of her own eyes, she saw that some subtle emotion had so wrought upon him that his eyes too were full of tears. So she tried to comfort him — and succeeded. The rest of the evening was very sweetly and peacefully happy.

When he had said good-night, not in the ceremonious but in the usual fashion, Rafe Otwell took himself back to his chambers in the Temple, a man of about as desperate fortunes, in so far as the present and the immediate future were concerned, as any between London and Westminster.

It was still nearly two years to Betty’s majority, and how Rafe was to live in the interim he did not know. The Law was ever a waiting profession, and the Services were denied him as he had no money and he could therefore only join in the humblest ranks; moreover such would take him from Betty, the mere thought of which he could not endure. He had no knowledge of Commerce and no capital to embark in it. He had thoughts, desperate though they seemed, of asking the advice of the Alderman; but the remembrance of the stern bearing of the latter made them seem chimerical, for the old gentleman had thought it right, as Betty’s trustee, to always assume an additional gravity in his intercourse with the younger man. Moreover, the thought that if the trustees should know how really penniless he was they might forbid the marriage altogether, created a new fear. Rafe was not a fortune-hunter. He loved Betty dearly and truly, and he only regarded her fortune in so far that it might become a help or a bar to his happiness. Having turned in his mind over and over again every means of earning at least a living, and having brooded on the difficulty, day by day and through sleepless nights, he made up his mind that he would once more consult his kinsman.

When he made known to the great man his wish to see him, he received a courteous though curt summons, and on the afternoon of the same day was ushered into the spacious apartment where Sir Robert controlled the destinies of England. He had evidently given some special orders, for on Rafe's entrance the two secretaries, who sat before masses of State papers, withdrew silently.

Sir Robert looked after them till he saw that the door was shut; then he bowed to Rafe, smiled, and pointed to a chair and sat down himself. For a moment or two he eyed Rafe keenly, and then, leaning over, to his intense astonishment laid his hand on his shoulder — a piece of condescension and familiarity which he had never before even approached.

"Courage, kinsman," he said kindly; "it is not so bad as this. You look quite woebegone! 'Fore Gad, Lady Mary will want to see more sunshine, or the matter may not be so easy as I thought."

Rafe felt a sort of paralysis creeping over him. Sir Robert had evidently taken it for granted that he had made up his mind to fall in with his scheme of marriage. He did not know how to get out of the difficulty, and so remained silent; his want of moral courage had never stood him in worse stead. Walpole went on —

"You see, I have sent away my secretaries. This matter concerns you and me alone; and let me tell you this: With such an alliance your fortune may yet be a greater one than you think. You and I will be brought into very close relations, and many secrets of State, hidden — and of necessity most carefully — from men so young as you are, must become known to you. Knowledge is power, young man; and nowhere is it more patent than in the world of politics. I feared from the first that you had not sufficient ambition for public life; but I am glad to find that my fears were false. Moreover, I am personally well pleased that you have fallen in with my views, for there is none other of my kinsmen, distant or near, that I could count on for such an alliance. Without you one of the greatest strokes of my life cannot be accomplished. You see I speak frankly — more frankly perhaps than a statesman in my position should speak; but inasmuch as you are to fill, and very shortly, a high office and one in close confidence with myself, it is well that you should know it at once."

Here Rafe, who found that every word uttered was putting him in a more difficult position, tried to speak. He felt that a confidence so given and unjustified by facts would turn a useful friend into an implacable enemy.

"Oh! sir," he began, "your ideas of me are not correct; indeed they are not."

Sir Robert smiled. "The ingenuousness of your youth palliates the folly of your selfdepreciation. When you enter the political world, my dear young friend, you must put such modesty in the lumber-room with your childish toys. Take all you can get, and ask for more. Never thank any one as though you were satisfied. Be willing to assume the responsibility of the whole Government. That is the statesman's attitude in these troublesome times! Now to business. Here is your appointment to a secretaryship of State subject to his Majesty's approval, and only waiting to be dated. For this you must have a seat in the House. This shall be done within the week, and then, Mr. Secretary, I shall have the honour of introducing to the Lady Mary, under the best auspices, my young kinsman Rafe Otwell, Member of Parliament — the rising hope of the Whig party. Thenceforward your fortune rests in your own hands!" Having so spoken Sir Robert leaned back in his chair, holding his finger-tips together with an indescribable air of friendly patronage.

Rafe now began to grow desperate — in fact so desperate that he straightway abandoned the idea of asking for a more modest post He grew red and stammered, and altogether so bore himself that the shrewd statesman guessed his conclusion, though not the reason of it. Standing up he said, with withering sarcasm —

"Have I then been so mistaken in you that I have told you what I would have told no other living man? I thought there was better metal in you than I find there is!"

As a matter of fact he had not been mistaken as to the metal of the man. Rafe had, like other young men, his ambitions and adaptability; and but for the fact of his engagement to Betty, Sir Robert would have had little difficulty in engaging him to such an enterprise, as he contemplated. His very lack of moral courage would have been an aid to the ambitious statesman, who would have moulded him to his will. For answer Rafe blurted out the truth straightway —

"Sir, I have every desire to meet your wishes in all ways I can. Indeed I am in a desperate plight, and unless I can get some place soon I am ruined; but I cannot marry the lady you had destined for me, as already I am betrothed to another lady."

Without a word Sir Robert rang the bell that stood on his table and a servant appeared. But in the instant a new thought had come to the statesman, and instead of ordering him to show Rafe out he simply gave a trivial direction as to the time at which his chair was to be in waiting. Sir Robert's idea was a wise one enough, for it struck him that he had to a degree placed himself in the young man's power, and he knew well how, had the circumstances been his own, he would have availed himself of such a knowledge. This young gentleman should perhaps be dealt with gently! He should be encouraged to hope for awhile, so that his intentions should have time to manifest themselves harmlessly; and then, if need be, he could be shelved by presentation to some minor appointment It was not for nothing that the English Minister had fixed the Civil List on the occasion of the Hanoverian succession at £700,000 per annum.

Sir Robert walked up and down the room two or three times, and then stopping opposite Rafe again regarded 'him intently. This scrutiny seemed in some measure to satisfy him, for his face cleared. After some more turns he stopped and said, with a seeming geniality —

"I will not deny that this unexpected attitude of yours has thwarted my plans gravely. However, we must see what can be done. You said that without office you would be a ruined man; I presume therefore that you are without friends — of course I mean friends able to help you!"

"That is so."

"Then you must in the meantime let me arrest the impending ruin — from this cause at any rate." And then and there he wrote an order on his banker for the sum of one hundred guineas. As he handed this to Rafe, he said —

"Now, of course, it is understood between us that your acceptance of the money binds you, were you not already bound in honour, to keep absolutely secret the plan of your advancement which I broached to you in ignorance of your inability to concur with my views. I shall try if I can obtain for you some post to meet your permanent wants; but I need not tell you that such posts as suit quite neutral persons who can receive from a party but yield nothing to it are few in number and are much sought after. You must husband the sum I have had the pleasure of lending you, for months must elapse before you can be suited. Indeed, I fear that there is little hope within a year." Then he rang the bell again; the servant appeared and Rafe was dismissed with a wave of the hand.

As the door closed Sir Robert sank into his seat with a smile upon his face such as is not as a rule calculated, if seen by those causing it, to beget confidence, and murmured to himself— "We shall see! we shall see! A little pinching of the shoe, my dear young kinsman! A few jovial friends now and then, just to ensure a fair amount of debt, and these I shall make it my care to have provided for you; a proper spell of waiting and hoping — just long enough to make the existing young lady, whoever she may be — and for my part I don't want to know for I am freer to act without such knowledge — seem a rock ahead in life. And then another chance. Lady Mary need not despair of a young husband yet!"

That day Rafe went down to Chelsea and found Betty sweeter and more amiable than ever. She was very grave and evidently had something on her mind. When it was growing towards the twilight she asked him to come for a walk by the river bank, and then, when they were quite away from the possibility of interruption, she opened the subject at heart.

"Rafe dear, you know that you and I are to be husband and wife." With a man's, and especially a young man's, wish to seize the occasion for an amatory episode, he made as though to kiss her; but she motioned such an idea aside and took his hand in hers and looked him in the face.

"No, Rafe!" she said, "I don't mean that; that is all true already. I mean that whatever affects me affects you, and whatever troubles you troubles me."

"Yes, Betty, that is so."

"I have been thinking, Rafe, that you may have many expenses to meet. You will forgive me, I know dear, for speaking of such matters, but they must be spoken of sometimes! Must they not?"

"There is nothing, Betty, that you may not speak of to me."

"I feel that, dear. Now, of course, when we are married" — here he squeezed her hand; she blushed but did not withdraw it— "all I have will be yours; and then I shall be easy in my mind, for I shall know that you have all that you want. But I sometimes think that until then you may have occasion for more money than you have at your command. I know, dear, that you are expecting a place, but until that place comes you must live, and living is expensive for young men. Oh yes, I know. Robert proves that to me pretty well; and I want you to feel how glad I should be, and how proud, if you will let me do as I wish. You know my guardians allow me ever so much more money than I can use. Oh, Rafe, won't you help me out? Don't let me have to say such things all myself. You know what I mean."

"I do know what you mean, Betty, and I know that you are a little angel and that I shall never be able to be good enough for you. Now let me tell you something. To-day I saw Sir Robert, and he has promised me a post as soon as he can get one for me; and in earnest of it he has given me this" — and opening his pocket-book he showed her Sir Robert's order on his bankers.

Rafe's weakness was here again manifested. He hoped and intended to make the money last till his marriage; and strong in the security of his self-belief, wished to hide from Betty the disagreeable truth of Sir Robert's proposal. After a pause Betty said —

"But,, dear, this will not last for ever; and indeed, Rafe, I feel almost jealous of Sir Robert. He can give you what he likes ' '

"But, sweetheart, this is an advance."

"And that is all that I propose."

"But, dear, how can I explain? I cannot take a gift. I am a gentleman! This is a loan, and must be returned. It is to last me if needs be a whole year, until I get my place." Betty's logical power was not sufficient to see the fine distinction which her lover drew. One part of it only was to her as clear daylight— "I am a gentleman, and cannot take a gift!" This touched some subtle chord of honour in her own breast, and she was glad and proud that her lover had so spoken. So she simply said —

"I am so glad, Rafe, that my fears were groundless. But you will forgive, will you not? It was because I love you that I spoke."

For answer Rafe simply lifted her hand and kissed it. Then they went back to supper, and Rafe was in his heart glad that he did not have any occasion to say more of his interview with the great Minister, or he would have had to keep a secret from Betty.

Thus he persuaded himself; for he kept the secret from her all the same. It was the appearance of keeping a secret from her that he dreaded, and not the fact Time went on happily enough with both the young people for a few months. They both had hope and they loved each other; and under such conditions life goes smoothly enough and evils that are not vital are not hard to bear. It was at this time of quiet, easygoing prosperity that the difference of the two natures became most apparent. Betty developed new and finer phases of character. Always thoughtful, she now became blessed with a sweet gravity — that gravity which so becomes the wife potential, the one whose self is forgotten in the needs of others. She also became more tolerant. True the stern rule of right and wrong which she had set for herself was never relaxed, and the standard of Duty was ever before her, her pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night. She more than once sent money unasked to Robert, and when his brief career was cut short by the rapier of his antagonist she had all the debts which he owed, and they were many, paid without ever even appearing in the matter. At this sad time Rafe was of much comfort to her, and the truly generous and manly side of his character never came out better than in the way he spoke of the dead man and did all in his power to mitigate the grief of his half-sister.

But the period of rest or quiescence told not favourably on Rafe's character. The need of thought and the fear of consequences being out of the range of his immediate vision, he began to get more careless. His imagination began to run away with him; everything was of such rosy colour that it seemed hard or impossible to believe that it could change. He did not husband his small means as he should have done; and one day he woke to the fact that of Walpole's loan not a fifth part remained. Then he grew careful, but not quite in a satisfactory way. True that he husbanded his resources; but it was only ready money that he was careful about. He got into debt and found, as others do, that debt is an expensive process and that one does not get full money's worth for the promise of money — that it is not possible to go minutely into questions of cost when we are not prepared to pay. Thus it happened that when, some three months after his last interview, he got a summons from his powerful kinsman he was down almost to his last shilling.

The interview was not altogether a pleasant one. Sir Robert was much more courteous than on the former occasion. He asked him a number of questions as to his prospects, and seemed generally to look on him as a man on whom time was exerting a requisite pressure. Rafe felt this and it galled him; but he did not dare to find fault, for his affairs were now in such a plight that his only hope was in the patronage of his powerful kinsman. He felt that he had in his selfish carelessness thrown away the advantage which had been put into his hand. Sir Robert gently, and as if casually, alluded to the fact that the Lady Mary's hand was still unwon. He might have added "unsought," but this excess of candour was no part of his programme. He very soon made up his mind that Rafe was not yet at all events ripe for his scheme; and after mentioning the circumstance of his former debt in such a way as to impress his hearer of iron possibilities in his nature if he should be a hostile creditor, sat down and drew a draft on his banker for fifty guineas. This he handed to Rafe with all protestations of goodwill.

Rafe was at first a little more careful with this money; but very soon the logic of his careless nature began to assert itself. This second rescue was unexpected; therefore other unexpected things might happen. What can be more fallacious than to depend on, and expect, the unexpected! It never occurred to him that the unexpected things might happen in opposite direction to his wish. Once or twice he brought trifling presents to Betty, little inexpensive things which she received with delight, frankly telling him that she was glad to see he was prudent. It is always a delight to a woman to get presents from the man she loves; and these things, since unaccompanied by any fear, made Betty very happy.

So another couple of months elapsed; and then a great temptation began to assail Rafe. His means were down at the lowest ebb. His credit was running low and he feared daily, hourly, lest wind of such should get to Betty or her guardians. He had a sort of feeling that Sir Robert had him in his power and meant to mould him to his will. He was now so tangled in various ways that he could see no opening anywhere. Betty had offered him her purse, but he had told her that a gentleman could not accept a gift. Sir Robert held out hopes of all his ambition could dream of. Debt pressed him on every side, and a debtors' prison was not a place to be yearned for in the early days of King George. Such legal study as he had had taught him that much. What if, after all, he should be compelled to fall into Sir Robert's plans? It would be well enough except for one thing — Betty. No! he could not bear the thought of parting from her or of giving her up. Should he go and tell her his dilemma? He knew well that she would help him and forgive him. But then such would involve his telling her a whole host of other matters which he had kept concealed, and so he might lose her esteem and appear in her eyes as one who did not tell — or who hesitated to tell — the truth. His pride, or vanity, would not allow of this.

Whilst thus pondering he got a hurried line from Sir Robert asking him to call on him, this time at his private house. He went at once and was kept waiting for some time in the ante-room. During his wait many persons kept coming and going, and he could easily see that there was some excitement in the air. At last he was summoned, and found Sir Robert alone in the midst of a chaos of torn papers. The Minister motioned him to take a seat, and then plunged into his subject —

“I have sent for you, not this time on my own account but on yours. To-day I send in my seals ‘‘ — Rafe’s heart sank within him; his hopes were gone— “but I have still a thought for you. You can answer me ‘yes’ or ‘no’ just as you wish, the choice is now your own. If you will choose to wed the Lady Mary your future, whatever may happen, is secured; and if it should be that I return again to power the highest honours can be yours. Quick! make your choice, for time presses. If you say ‘ yes ‘ I shall aid you with my purse to make a fit and proper appearance for the sake of our kinship.

If not “ he paused, and Rafe, with all the firmness he could muster, answered —

“Not!”

“In that case, my young friend, you may go to the devil. I don’t suppose he is so busy today as I am, and may have time to make terms to suit you. Good-day!”

CHAPTER V

IN THE DEAD WATCH OF THE NIGHT

SEVERAL weeks elapsed before Rafe again called at Cheyne Walk. Betty got a letter from him saying that he had to go to the North on some family business, but that so soon as he returned he would come and gladden his eyes with the sight of her sweet face; with much other matter of the same kind, tedious to third parties. The early Georgian love-letter was of much the same tone and tendency as that of earlier — and of later — years; and its recipient gave it the same sweet and trustful welcome as was usual before — and after — that epoch.

Whilst Rafe was away Betty busied herself about household matters and in works of charity; began to think of her housekeeping when her majority should have come, and other things should have happened. So the time sped by quickly enough, and it did not seem so very long to look back upon when Rafe appeared at the door. Betty flew to meet him, and no lover, however exacting, need have been disappointed with the warmth of her greeting. When they reached the drawingroom, a measure of decorum having been restored and they holding each other's hands, Betty held him at arms' length and gazed at him lovingly. He seemed taller and more robust, but there was something about him, she could hardly say what it was, that disappointed her. All his timidity in her presence seemed gone, and there was something boisterous — reckless — she knew not what to call it — which certainly she had never before noticed. All this was, of course, vague and shadowy. To say she thought it, would be hardly correct, for the idea was spontaneous and evanescent. It was rather a food for afterthought than thought itself. But whether such thoughts were on solid base or baseless as the air, they did not disturb Betty's happiness. Rafe was home again, and she was content! She half hoped that after a while he would tell her something of his journey, or of why he went away, and where he went to and what he saw, and whom he met, and his adventures — for of course he had adventures. But Rafe did not touch on such topics, and Betty feared to ask him lest he should think it inquisitive to speak of things that he himself had not thought right to mention.

Had she had a mother it would have been different, for the mother would have known the wishes of her child and would have so wrought the conversation that the betrothed girl's most natural curiosity should have been satisfied. As the evening wore on there were several little shocks to Betty's delicate trust, her very ignorance making shadowy fears. Before he left Rafe put his hand in his pocket and took out a little box, which he handed to Betty and told her he hoped she would value it for his sake. Betty took it with joy in her face and kissed him, before Aunt Priscilla too, and told him how sweet it was of him to remember her when he was away. But when she opened the box and found a little pair of diamond buckles lying on the white silk that lined the box, her face grew very grave, and she said, in a voice not without reproval— "No, Rafe dear, I cannot accept so valuable a present. You have not got your place yet, and it would ill become me who love you to be the means or the motive of such extravagance.

Dear, you will let me keep this box, will you not? But take these," and she handed him back the buckles. He did not attempt to force them upon her, but put them in his pocket with a light laugh that somewhat jarred upon her.

When he had taken leave she ran up to her own room and, raising a tiny corner of the curtain, watched her lover as he walked away. To her surprise he did not go in the usual direction towards Swan Walk so as to gain the King's Road, where he was accustomed to leave his horse, but walked with head down towards the river bank.

He stood there a moment and then put his hand into his pocket, and taking out something therefrom hurled it with an angry gesture far into the river. Betty saw a white flash in the moonlight as the water was struck, and then as Rafe strode angrily away she dropped the curtain and slipped away quickly and went to bed in the dark. With her head under the bedclothes she sobbed herself to sleep.

Rafe came every day that week to see her, and as the time wore on he came back nearer and nearer to his old self. There was still a certain masculine dominance in his manner; but to this she did not object. What woman ever did object to such a quality in her lover? It was sweet to be asked to do things, but in such manner that the doing was expected as a matter of course; but sweeter still to be told rather than asked to do anything, but in a way which did not wound.

Things seemed to have prospered somehow of late with Rafe. His clothes were of the very finest, though this alone was not strange, for he was always somewhat of a dandy. But he now had a barge and a wherry all of his own — very spruce ones too, with his men in his own livery; and when he rode down, which was pretty often, he was always splendidly mounted. These things gave Betty many a pang, for she feared he might have been getting into debt or gambling, and either supposition was pain to her. She did not like to broach the subject, but fondly hoped that some day, not far off, Rafe would take her into his full confidence. But as days and weeks wore on it became evident to her that Rafe had no such intention. Sometimes he would be absent for two or three days, and when he came there would be something of that new self-assertive manner which she partly disliked and partly feared; but after a few days this would all wear away and he became more the old Rafe again.

One day Alderman Fenton came to drink a dish of tea with Betty and Aunt Priscilla, and afterwards took his cousin out for a walk along by the river bank. Here, after some preliminary hum-ing and ha-ing, for the subject was a difficult one, he began to speak of Rafe and his doings.

“My dear,” he said, “I thought I’d better come and speak to you first, for I feared I might make some trouble if I did the wrong thing. You won’t be angry with me, Betty, will you?”

Betty’s heart sank within her, for she dreaded some confirmation of her fears; nevertheless she answered lightly —

“I promise you, cousin, that whatever it is you tell me, I shall not be angry with you. I know that whatever you think for me is out of your kindness.”

“That’s true, Betty, my dear. Quite true! I have no chick or child of my own, and all the care I have in the world is for you. Now I want to talk about this young gentleman of yours.”

“About Rafe, cousin?” she interrupted.

The old gentleman pinched her cheek as he answered —

“Who else, puss? There’s only one that I know of!”

“Or I either!” she answered demurely, with a sweet, half shy, half arch, and wholly adorable upward look at him.

“Well! I have been minded many times of late to go and talk with him about matters. You see, from what I am told, he’s taken to more extravagant ways than he had; keeps more company, and ruffles about with all the young bloods in the town; boats, horses, and all the rest of it; and draws his sword as readily as may be. Wherever there is money being spent there he is, spending with the best of them. Nay, he seems to keep all companies; for he sits also in the taverns and coffee-houses with the merchants and adventurers and talks much with them. He is quite clever too; and that is part of the pity of it, for with his knowledge of what is going to happen, gathered from statesmen and secretaries and young gallants and old merchants, he might make a fortune in no time. But alack! he prefers to royster with the bloods of the town."

"I am very sorry, cousin, to hear this," faltered poor Betty with her face as white as a sheet "And not more sorry than I am to tell you, my dear," said the old gentleman, more moved than he thought possible by the sight of the maid's silent distress, "and if it lay with me such ill tidings would never come a-nigh you; but I have thought the matter over for some time, and I have concluded that the least harmful thing I could do would be to consult you. You see, my dear," he added confidentially, "young men of his kind are not like us plain city folk, and have their own proud ideas and their own quick-tempered ways; and as for us, we don't quite understand either of them. I'm often minded to think that the sweeping out of the shop which we have had to do in our 'prentice days is a mighty chastening exercise for the spirit. It somehow makes us think more of our work and less of ourselves, than the breeding of these young gallants teaches them."

After a little pause the old gentleman went on, but very gently and suppressing all his personal feelings, for he was touched deeply by the maid's white face —

"So the other day I made opportunity to speak with him; and as I thought so old a man as I might take such a liberty with a younger one, I began by offering, though I fear but clumsily, to be of such service as an old man and a London merchant might with his advice or his purse."

Here Betty interrupted a moment by an eloquent, grateful look and a squeeze of her hand; the old man smiled and spoke more cheerfully as he went on —

"At the first, my dear, I did think that he was grateful, for there was a look in his face that you would have loved to see there; but an instant after it was lost in a very sad look — a white, sad look, my dear, that made me think that he has some trouble that he is bearing all by himself. My heart opened to him as though he was a boy of my own. It was partly for your sake, Betty, and I was in hopes that hereafter he and I might be more to each other. But in an instant after he broke out into a hard laugh that dried me up like a touch of the east wind and he said, as coolly and as insolently as ever I heard words spoke, but, my dear, with all his own elegance of word and manner:

'Thank you much, good sir, but when I want advice or money I shall not fail to apprise you of the fact.' I suppose he saw my disappointment in my face, for after a pause he said: ' Do not think me rude or ungrateful, dear sir, but in such matters I am apt to be proud and hard. I have so long had to advise myself and to provide for my wants in my own way, that I am perhaps too wishful to stand alone and to continue in my own course.' And so, Betty, sure I am that the young man has some trouble that he wraps up in his pride away from the eyes of others; and so I am come to advise with you."

Both were silent for a little while. Betty had now taken the old gentleman's arm and was leaning on it heavily enough. Poor child! her knees seemed to have grown weak, and it was a comfort to her to have something to lean on in her distress. Presently she said —

“What can I do, cousin? What can I do?”

“I thought that so gay and gallant a young gentleman would listen with more patience to so sweet a young lady as you are, and whom he loves so fondly” — Betty was grateful for this, though she doubted the Alderman’s sincerity in making the statement, and smiled at him as he went on— “than he did to an old merchant like myself. These young bloods seem to forget that we are men like themselves, and that we feel passion even if we do not show it, or wear swords with the intention of using them on our kind.”

Betty could not but feel that the successful man of business had a little class jealousy rankling in his mind, and somehow it raised Rafe in her esteem. She did not, of course, show any of the feeling; indeed, she was too distressed to show any feeling but the one — her concern regarding Rafe. Alderman Fenton went on —

“You know, my dear, that when your engagement was told us, we trustees made inquiries, and found that Mr. Otwell had realised his patrimony and had come into the Temple; so now when he spends money in the way he does I cannot but think that there is something wrong. There is so much gambling nowadays, and so many young men like him fling away their fortunes over the dice that maybe he picks up some of what their folly loses. In any case it is but a poor thing; and if it be so, we had better look to it lest the happiness of your life be thrown away. A gambler, my dear, is but a sorry mate for such a girl as you.”

Again Betty’s heart seemed to stop. Here was almost a’ confirmation of her worst fears, but, hoping against hope, she pleaded once more for her lover —

“Oh! I trust this is not so. It cannot be! May not there be some other way, cousin, by which Rafe can get such money as he spends?”

“There may,” said the merchant. “He can borrow money. There are sharks who prey on the needs of youngsters like him, and lend a little that they may take back a deal. But the debtors’ prison lies that way. Nay! Betty, my dear, do not be frightened! Sit ye down awhile. There, dear heart, you are all right now. Why, rather than see him in a prison I would for your sake pay away half my fortune. I fear, my dear, that I have done wrong to tell you so much; but, truth to tell, I did not know which way to turn.” Before Betty’s eyes had all along been the face of her lover as he had refused her offer of help: “I cannot take a gift; I am a gentleman!” She thought that she understood Rafe’s pride, and how it dominated him in his interview with the Alderman, in whose eyes he wished, of course, for her sake, to appear at his best; and’ in her eyes his pride was his best. So she answered the old man very tenderly —

“Indeed, cousin, you have done quite right. I will find out thesis things direct on the next occasion that may be; and then I will consult with you. You will forgive me being so — so weak, will you not? I do not feel very strong lately. I think I want change of air, and shall presently go to Much Hadam and rest awhile. The air there always seems to do me good.”

“My dear girl, I am sure you want a change. But you must be careful how you go; these quiet times seem to have grown a new crop of highwaymen, and but few of our roads are safe. Indeed, the Cambridge road seems infested, for of late there have been many daring robberies; and when you go through Essex and Hertford you must be more than careful.”

“Oh, I don’t fear highwaymen, cousin. It is not people like me whom they stop; they prefer your rich city folk whose purses are like those of the Fortunate Prince!”

Thus they talked and rallied each other, and came back to the house in a somewhat less unhappy frame of mind; but Betty’s face was still white and drawn.

It was nearly a week after this evening that Rafe paid Betty a visit; and then he was in one of his most aggressive moods. His under eyelids looked somewhat swollen, and with a pang Betty came to the conclusion that he had taken a part in some drinking bout. Drunkenness did not in those days inspire such disgust in refined womankind as it did later on; but still the change in Rafe seemed all downward and not upward. Betty, however, was very resolute when her mind was made up, and notwithstanding that Rafe’s mood was not one she would have chosen in which to attack him upon the subject of his faults, she steadfastly adhered to her intention. At the earliest moment when they were alone she began her task —

“Rafe, I want you to tell me something. You must not make light of it, for I am very serious and have of late had much unquiet in my mind about you.”

Rafe’s face turned a sort of livid green; he answered, however, boldly enough, although the ring of his voice was loud rather than true: “All right, Betty dear! Go on; I am all attention.”

Face to face with the difficulty, Betty’s hardihood began to melt away. Her heart beat fast, and she had that trembling of the knees that had of late come to her on such occasions. Nevertheless she did not falter, but went on with outward calm —

“It is because I love you, Rafe! Remember, dear, that we are soon to be married, and I shall then have a right to ask you such questions. You will let me forestall that time, won’t you?”

“What questions?” Rafe’s voice was rather hollow.

“I want you to tell me, dear, two things. I know you have recently been spending much money, and I know you had lately but very little. Do you gamble, Rafe? or are you in debt?”

The words were spoken with a shy, sweet sincerity that should have melted the heart of any man. It was all out now, and the hardihood was quite gone. Betty felt it was well she was sitting down and could lean back, or else she might have fallen to the floor. To her surprise and joy Rafe laughed, though she did not quite like the tone of the laugh, and said heartily and with a sort of boisterous buoyancy —

“Neither the one nor the other, little one. See here! that for my owing money!” and he opened a pocket-book and showed her quite a handful of gold and bankers’ orders. “And as for gambling, I swear I have not touched the dice since I knew you.”

Betty drew a long breath, and was just beginning to follow up these answers with another question as to where he got the money he spent; but he saw it coming and stopped it with an irritated protest —

“More questions! Why, what can have come over you, Betty? You used not to be like this. Come! you think too much of my affairs, and the thinking has robbed the roses from your cheeks. As a punishment I here promise and vow that I shall not answer you any more questions concerning money till I can hold you in my arms and call you mine.”

“I am yours already, Rafe!”“ said Betty simply; but she turned the conversation and asked no more questions.

When Rafe was going away that night he told Betty that it would be some days before he could come again as he had to await certain dispatches coming through Portsmouth. “A private affair,” he added, seeing new questions in her eyes. So Betty said good-night and went to bed, hoping that some day Rafe would give her all his confidence.

A few days after this the Alderman paid a visit to Cheyne Walk. He was concerned about Betty's health, and wanted to cheer her up a bit. So he paid a long visit, staying for supper, and told her all the news of the town. How the new waterworks of the New River and the Lea were progressing, and how good this was for her, since her trustee held for her some adventurers' shares in the under- taking, and of the great moneys being spent on the works and the many men employed. He explained to her how every Saturday a great sum had to be sent down from London to pay the men; but as they feared the paymaster might be traced and robbed the Board had determined to send the next consignment of money on the Friday evening to Ware, and to send it by a roundabout way through Bishop's Stortford so as to avoid the danger, and by a messenger who could not be suspected. In fact he hinted that the messenger would be disguised as a woman. Then seeing that such talk upset her a little he turned the conversation, and, so well as he could, he told her of the new fashions; for he had made it his business to have a chat with the Lady Mayoress only the day before, so that he would be properly learned in such matters. And then he told her of all the Court gossip that had reached the city, and of the great marriages arranged, and all the presents given; of the quarrels amongst the bloods, and who had fought whom, and the thousand and one little pieces of everyday gossip which were so much to quiet folk in the days before newspapers. Finally he told her of the great robbery two days before, when the coach from Ports- mouth was stopped at Ockham with great treasure being brought up to London from my Lord Baltimore for the Southern Department. That it was a most daring robbery, for the highwayman was alone and rode so boldly and carried himself so fearlessly that all in the coach were awed and yielded to him without firing a shot. Then he went on to tell her how the robber had left the coachman and the guard and all the passengers bound, so that it was not until many hours afterwards that they were discovered and released by the down mail. That the authorities were on the alert, and that the hue and cry was out for the robber, and that if he were caught it would be a sorry case for him. And as he told her the story Betty's heart went out in thankfulness that no lives were lost; and above all one life most dear to her, for it might have been that Rafe was in that very coach. Had it so been, then for sure the robber had not got off full-handed or without a fight for it. And as she thought of her lover's peril she grew so pale, and as she thought of his courage — for could she ever forget that day on the river! — she grew so rosy again that her elderly cousin rubbed his hands with delight at his success as a story-teller, and said to her —

"Hey Betty, my lass, but you've got white and red like the apple and the candle twirling at Halloween. You take such things too much to heart, my dear. It can't be good for you to be so earnest over things that don't touch you or yours."

So Betty, she being a little shamefaced about her great love which made such fears, was silent about Rafe, and thanked her cousin for all his kind interest in her and for all his entertaining conversation, and bade him come again soon. The stern old Alderman, when his carriage came round for him, rode back to town again, pleased that he had come, but sad at heart that he had not just such another daughter to gladden his hearth and to keep his heart and memory green.

When next Rafe came he was in great spirits, and spoke of the time, drawing closer, when he was to call Betty his own. There was a jubilation about him which was infectious, and Betty's spirits rose with his; when they were alone she sat at the spinet and played and sang the sweet old airs that she loved; but he sat very silent the while. The dusk came on, and the shadows of the evening fell heavier and heavier. At the spinet Betty still sat, with her white dress showing through the gathering gloom; Rafe, on a low chair, bent his head down on his knees and lost himself in thought, so that when Betty's hands moved slower and slower over the keys and her voice died away in a deep, low chord in which spoke the happiness and the hope of her heart, he never stirred. Then Betty came closer to him and laid her hand on his head. He started up suddenly, like one who is hunted and stands at his defence, with an oath on his lips and his hand instinctively seeking his sword-hilt. Betty was somewhat afraid, but her fears were laid when she saw that his cheeks were wet with tears. She would like to have said something very tender and sweet to him, but he brushed the tears aside so angrily and seemed so savage with himself — though not with her — for his forgetfulness, that she thought it better not to take notice of his emotion. But he was not the same Rafe any more that evening. His buoyancy became boisterous, though of an indifferent kind, and Betty closed the spinet; she sang no more that night. Before he left Rafe told her that he would come again in four days — that he could not come before as he had an engagement that must take him towards Cambridge, but that when this engagement was over he hoped to come oftener; every day, till the time would come when they should part no more. Altogether the evening, despite its unpleasant episode, was a very, very happy one for Betty, and when going to bed she remained a long time on her knees in thankfulness and prayer, and fell asleep thinking of Rafe and the coming time.

What Betty dreamed that night she could never remember. It seemed to be that her sleeping thoughts had at first been happy enough, but that such dreams as she had were not all about Rafe. Suddenly, however, she found herself broad awake, sitting up in bed with her hair damp with terror and a scream frozen on her lips. It was as though all her vague thoughts of months past had suddenly become clear — that her fears had found their source, and that henceforth there was nothing more left in the world that could give her new pain. And that source — Rafe!

“Rafe!”

She understood now his determination; his growing restlessness; whence came the money he lavished so freely. She pieced together the fragments of her fears on each occasion when her lover had gone away, and when he had returned. She understood now the motive of that visit to the North, and of that “private affair” which had taken him along the Portsmouth road at such a fatal time; and with a terror and pain unspeakable she realised the import of that coming journey towards Cambridge when the treasure of the New River Company was to be taken to Ware by way of Bishop’s Stortford which was on the Cambridge road. All had come to,her as if revealed in a moment, as one sees through after years of blindness the figures standing stark in the last-seen terrible glare of the lightning-flash. She wondered how she could ever have been so blind as not to have seen all long ago; for there was no doubt now, and it seemed to her, in the anguish of her excited mind, that there never had been any.

She would have given worlds to have been able to confide her troubles to any one; but such a thing was impossible — no human being must ever know. The horror and the shame must be hers alone; and further evil must be averted at all cost. There was no doubt in her mind; no flickering ash of a hope. No voice of the unseen could persuade her that her conclusion was untrue. “Would to God it were!” she thought, in a blind anguish. Ah no! it was all so clear, as though written in fire on the wall by that same hand which of old had swept the gaiety from Belshazzar’s feast.

Betty rose and knelt beside her bed. She threw her white arms stretched out in front of her and hid her face in the snowy napery. She prayed till her eyes seemed full of fire and she thought that her heart would break with anguish. Clasping her hands above her head she looked up as though her vision could pierce through the roof and the sky beyond so that God Himself might see her anguish and have pity on her and send her help. But these wild bursts of passionate prayer gave no sensible relief; her arms fell by her side, and her sweet face lay on the white counterpane like snow on snow, till the light of the morning stealing in through the curtains of her chamber window caught the beautiful Greek lines of her profile and lit the deep, earnest eyes with the resolve of action that comes with the waking day.

Betty did not realise it then, but perhaps for all she knew her silent cry of anguish did pierce through the roof and sky and come as a sweeter gift than any burnt offering before the Throne of the Most High. The burnt offering of charred flesh is poor indeed before the renunciation of the soul that pain has burned and purified and made a worthy gift to the Creator of mankind!

“Thou delightest not in burnt offerings. The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, shalt Thou not despise.”

CHAPTER VI

PREPARATIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

IN the long vigil of that night Betty's course was resolved upon. She seemed to see her duty clear before her. She would go forth herself and reclaim the man she loved — the man whose heart seemed to beat in her own breast and who carried with him all her love. Unworthy though he had proved, she loved him still; and as even he had given her life to her, so if need be should that life be given for him in return. She thought over the whole matter; and as she thought, the, way seemed to open to her. Every detail of the coming trial rose before her mind, so that ultimately she was satisfied as to where she should go, what she should do, and how she should bear herself so as to keep her purpose hidden.

It was now the morning of Wednesday, and no time was to be lost. When she came down to breakfast her aunt noticed how pale she was and was much concerned for her. As a rule Betty did not yield to small ills but turned them aside and battled through them in her own quiet way; but to-day she acquiesced in the alarm of her aunt. The latter said presently —

"You must have change of air, Betty. I will write to my sister at Much Hadam and tell her to prepare for us; and next week we will go there to stay for a month or two."

To which Betty replied —

"Oh! Aunt Priscilla, I have been longing to see the dear old house and the trees and all.

I know it will do me so much good. I want to go at once; let us go to-day."

"Lord-a-mercy child!" said the elder lady, "how can we go at once, when I have arranged for Monday to have the painters here to choose the colours for the repainting?"

"Then let me go, aunt! I am sick to go." "How could you go alone, child?"

"Why, aunt," — and Betty smiled— "it is only a part of a day's ride. I shall take Robin with with me, and shall stay the night with Cousin Hester at Finsbury Square. I can then do some shopping, and go in the morning to Much Hadam."

"I fear to let you go all alone, 'my child. Remember all these terrible things of footpads and highwaymen, that have been going on of late."

"Not more than usual, aunt! Those wicked folk have never ceased their ways that I have heard tell of. But I have no fear of footpads or highwaymen, and we go an open way with many travellers to Bishop's Stortford. Thence it is only a step, and through byways where it is never worth a highwayman's while to stop. He would starve for all the travellers there!" Aunt Priscilla was not convinced; but she saw no way to an effective answer, so she said— "Well, as you will, child! But when would you go?"

"I thought in the morning."

"Dear me! dear me! but that leaves little time to prepare."

"But, aunt, I want to go! My mind is made up, and it will fret me if I am disappointed." This settled the matter. Aunt Priscilla looked at the sweet, pale face, and came over and kissed her, and said —

"Please God, dear, the change will do you good. You shall have your wish, and go in the morning," and she hurried off to consult with Abigail as to the preparation of Betty's valise.

Though she had conciliated her aunt, Betty was not yet free from domestic obstruction — Abigail had still to be reckoned with; but this she expected and was prepared for. With the freedom and directness of an old servant, Abigail entered on her task. She burst into the room, almost at the charge, and began —

"What's all this nonsense, Miss, that Miss Priscilla tells me about your going to Much Hadam all by yourself, and all at once, like this, without a stitch of clothes to your back ready, and not so much as a valise even aired! What are things coming to, I wonder? — though why should I wonder, when young ladies nowadays do just as they like and as their mothers wouldn't have ventured to have done in my time? and why should you keep such a thing in your mind away from the nurse that loved and reared you and took you from the arms of your dear dead mother and did for you ever since? And now you put this on her that she don't know no more of your movements and intentions than the maids themselves. I'm astonished at you, Miss Betty! That I am, sure and true; and sorry I am this day!" and the good soul burst out into tears, refusing for a while to be comforted. Betty had let her run on till she had said her say, for this she knew to be not merely the wisest but the only plan. Now she made her answer in her own way. The beginning was purely pacific. She went over to Abigail and put her arms round her and nestled close to her, and with her own pocket-handkerchief wiped away her tears. This Abigail resented at the first, and then wouldn't allow, saying sobbingly that she wasn't worthy to have her eyes dried by her young mistress — a young lady that was so great that she couldn't see any differ betwixt the maids and them that had to keep them in order. But Betty persevered, and the summer shower was soon past. Then Betty made her sit down, and sat on her knee and asked her if she remembered when she, Betty, was a little child and used to come and sit on her, Abigail's, knee and be comforted. So what could the old woman do but hug her close to her, and tell her again how well she recalled those days? And then, remembering to be depressed at something, she added that such times were all past now, and that young children had grown up to be fine ladies, and made as though to put her off her knees and to rise respectfully — but all the time holding her tighter than ever. So Betty put her face against hers and said —

"Abigail, I am a little child again, and I want to go away in the morning. Long ago, when I wanted anything and was denied it, I came to you; and you never denied me. And now when I want to go in the morning, and to go peacefully, for I am feeling ill and in low spirits, and will be miserable if I leave you all discontented behind me, I ask you, Abigail, to help me again! You must help me, dear, and cheer me up. Look at me, Abigail, and let my old nurse say if I am not ill and do not want a change." So Abigail looked, and suddenly caught her in her arms and told her how her poor, pale face made her miserable; and that she should go away that very hour if she wished it, if she, Abigail, had to work her fingers to the very bone to enable her to do so. And so the old accord was established, and one more willing heart and two more willing hands aided in all love in furthering Betty's wishes.

All that day Betty went as one in a dream — that is, so far as her own conscious thought was concerned, for to all the others she was as usual, only that there was an added sweetness in her every act and thought. To-day everything with her was an impulse, a spontaneous carrying out of a settled purpose — something already ordained and quite outside herself. Part of the day she spent in the drawing-room busy at her escretoire, reading old letters and tearing up many of them, the pieces of which she afterwards burned. Now and then she sat at the spinet and sang over some of the old songs that she loved, and that Rafe said he liked to hear; but they gave her no pain now, and though she sang all the most touching of them she did not shed a tear. Last of all her work in the drawing-room, she wrote out a paper, very short and evidently the result of much thought. This she sealed carefully and put away in an interior drawer which had a lock of its own. In her bedroom she went through her dresses with Abigail and chose out a few, a very few, to carry in her valise; the rest she said were to follow when Aunt Priscilla and Abigail came on to Much Hadam. In the afternoon she laid down for awhile and slept; in the cool of the evening she went out for a walk by herself on the river bank. One by one she visited all the spots associated in her mind with Rafe; the place above the Swan Inn where he had saved her life, and then where he had helped her on shore; the little peninsula where the great trees grew, where they had walked and sat and exchanged thoughts and silences; and the grove of trees near the marshes where he had given her the gold buttons with the legend that she so loved wrought on them. Here she remained for a long time, standing still as if carved out of stone. The red glare of the sunset fell full upon her smiting her pale face and snowy garments till from head to foot she looked as if dipped in blood. Her thoughts were very peaceful; her mind was made up, and all that remained to her was the doing of her task.

And so once again the sun dropped into the far reaches of the river beyond the marshes, and the silver and gold of the stream and pools grew grey in the shadows of the evening, and the chill of the coming night crept over the river and its banks; and Betty went home.

Abigail had tested for supper that evening all the powers of the kitchen. She had determined that Miss Betty should not lack choice of such things as she generally liked, so that there was a rare display of tasty dishes on the table. Betty tried to acknowledge her thoughtfulness, and took from many of the dishes; and so, although feeling no relish for her food, made in the end a hearty meal. Then she said goodnight to her aunt and thanked her for all her goodness, and also Abigail, till the two elderly women thought that she was getting afraid of the journey before her, and once more urged her to wait or to have a proper escort. But she laughed their doubts aside and told them she had no fear; that she only said goodbye at all because she was going on a journey and should have to leave them even for a short time. All at once Abigail asked —

"But when Master Rafe comes, Miss Betty, what am I to tell him?"

To which she answered —

"Of course you will tell him that I have gone to Much Hadam to rest awhile and have change of air, and that if he should see well to ride down, my Aunt Edith will be most delighted — and that I shall be glad too!" and Betty slipped away to her room and locked her door.

Then she opened the valise that Abigail had so carefully packed, and took out one of the dresses that was ready in it — a beautiful dress of figured Italian silk. This she put away in one of the wardrobes, under some other clothes, so that Abigail's sharp eyes should not notice it at once, and in its stead she packed the white lawn dress which she had worn that day on the river when Rafe had rescued her. It had been so carefully washed that it was just as it had been and as fair as then. She made two other additions to the mail, hiding them amongst the things already packed lest some chance should reveal them. One was the box containing the gold buttons, and the other a short, sharp dagger in a shagreen sheath which had always used to lie on the dressing-table of her great-grandfather to serve, if required, as an arm against thieves. Lastly, she made the packing complete so that only a few toilet articles used in the morning would have to be added before the time for strapping up came. Then having undressed, she knelt and prayed for a long, long time, and arose and went to bed, where she at once fell asleep and slept well all through the night.

All this time she appeared to have no concern, no mental disturbance or perturbation of any kind, and there never seemed to come into her mind even the shadow of a doubt as to Rafe. Truly the intuition of a woman is a divine thing, and complete with the calm perfection of things beyond earth. Each act of the day seemed to have its definite and fore-appointed plan — to be part of a scheme of things already arranged. When she slept she lay with her hands meekly folded over her breast, just as a saint or a martyr — who is the best of saints — is represented in stone. Very sweet and very pure she looked, and the pallor and repose of her face seemed like peaceful death; the white drapery of her bed lay in classic folds to suit the antique beauty of her profile. Only the golden brown hair, which Praxiteles himself could not have chiselled, the eyelids drooped in sleep, and the gently heaving bosom, showed her to belong to the real world and not already to the land of dreams.

She awoke with the first ray of sunrise which stole into the room, and after praying long and earnestly and having made her toilet, finished the packing of her valise. Then she strapped it ready for travel, so that when Abigail came up herself earlier than had been intended, that there should be nothing left undone which her young mistress should want, she was amazed to find her ready for the journey.

"Dear heart!" she ejaculated, "you never strapped and all, Miss Betty, instead of lettin' me see to it And I'll be bound to say that you've forgotten something."

"No, Abigail dear, I think not. I have with me all that I want." But the old woman was not yet quite satisfied, and would have unstrapped the valise and gone through it all afresh had not Betty diverted her attention by asking her to brew for her a dish of tea before she started on her journey. Abigail hurried off to attend herself to such an unwonted order as a dish of tea in the early morning. In 1717 tea. was not a common luxury, and its preparation was not to be lightly entrusted to any one of minor importance in the household. Then for awhile Betty was idle, but the idleness did not distress her at all. She seemed to take the necessary waiting as a part of the work which she had in hand and to be quite content to exercise her patience. By and by Aunt Priscilla joined her, and, as she had an infinity of questions to ask and directions to give, the time flew till breakfast.

It was still early when Robin, with his mistress's valise strapped behind his saddle, stood ready at the gate. He was not kept long waiting, for very shortly Betty with a last hug and kiss to her aunt and her old nurse, was swung into her saddle, ready to depart. Abigail hung round her to the last, adjusting the folds of her habit, seeing that her foot was well, in the stirrup, and in every little act of thoughtfulness manifesting her love.

At last she was off, and presently turning in her saddle, as the road debouched at Swan Walk, looked back with one last lingering look at the old house where so much of her life had been passed, and which had held for her so much hope and joy. The last wrench is not usually the least, and into those few moments was gathered half a lifetime of pain. But this too passed by; she was now in truth fully embarked on her enterprise, whether for good or ill.

In due time she reached Finsbury Square, and filled Hester with surprise and consternation at her unexpected movement Miss Fenton was old-fashioned to the last degree, and looked upon such a journey as Betty contemplated as little less than a tempting of Providence. She was, however, delighted to see her, and, as usual, made her welcome and tried forthwith to persuade her to prolong her stay for at least a few days. She was more surprised than ever, when, after a short rest, Betty announced her wish to go out into the town to make some purchases, and on volunteering to come with her was gently told that the business she was concerned in was of a very special nature, connected, with a wish expressed Jong before by her great-grandfather. Hester, as Betty had reason to believe, knew nothing of the existence of the trust-money, and the latter thought that such a real excuse for privacy was better than any fictitious reason which she could invent. So Betty went forth alone, and, having made previous inquiries, found her way at last to the banking house of Mr. Child. She had been there before on various occasions with the Alderman, but had always been driven in a coach or carried in a chair, so that she did not know the various streets and the turnings necessary to take. It was a long walk from Finsbury Square, and she was well tired with both the exercise and the unaccustomed bustle of the streets when she arrived at the house. Having asked to see Mr. Child himself, she was shown into a private room and sat down to wait. The day was intensely hot and the chair soft and enticing, and gradually, as she leaned back, the hum of the city life which floated in through the open windows died away, her eyes closed and she sank into gentle sleep. She suddenly wakened to find Mr. Child standing in front of her, and with him a grave clerk who was concealing behind his extended hand the remains of a surreptitious smile. She was filled with confusion, and her pale face became aglow as she stammered out an apology. The kindly banker, however, at once set her at ease and asked if she were really tired, and would she not rest awhile with his daughters who had just returned from a row upon the river. Betty thanked him gratefully but declined, and asked him to be so good as not to make mention of the fact of her visit, as she had come in all privacy to withdraw the trust-money in accordance with the wish expressed to her by her great-grandfather. The banker at once fell into her views, and having obtained her formal signature, handed over to her, in notes of the Bank of England, the sum of a thousand guineas. He offered to have the money sent for her where she would by a trusty messenger, but as this would have at once betrayed her plans she refused; whereupon Mr. Child said that he would have her conveyed in his own chair to what place she wished, so that she could regain the Alderman's house, where she told him she was stopping, without any unnecessary fatigue. And so, not late in the afternoon, Betty, having been set down in Finsbury Circus, re-entered the house of the Alderman. Going straight to her room she deposited in her valise the sum of money which she had received, and then went downstairs to sit with Hester. During her absence the Alderman had been at home, and hearing that she had gone out on a matter of private business at once guessed that it was connected with the trust-money. Without taking Hester into his confidence he hastened away to Temple Bar to try to find her. As he went up Fleet Street she came down it, but neither saw the other. In the evening when he came home he tried to find out indirectly from Betty if his suspicion was correct, but she was on her guard and took care not to betray herself; after a little friendly skirmishing he gave up the contest, for the time, and decided to await the development of circumstances.

Betty retired early, as she was to be ready to start in the morning betimes. She bade an affectionate good-night to both Hester and the Alderman, and again thanked them very tenderly for all their manifold kindnesses to her. When securely locked and bolted in her bedchamber, she opened her valise and took from it the white dress which she had exchanged for the one placed there by Abigail, and also the case with the golden buttons. Then taking her housewife, she proceeded to sew down the front of the dress the set of buttons. She then packed in the valise the dress which she had hitherto worn, and laid out ready to wear in the morning the white dress now so richly adorned, and also the grey dust-wrap which was to cover it Lastly, she placed the case of the buttons back in the valise, and taking from the same the old dagger hid it in the pocket of the white dress. This having been done she said her prayers — long and earnest they were — and betook herself to bed and to sleep.

At early morn she was awake, and rising, dressed herself even to the dust-wrap. Having completed her packing and strapped her valise, she sat and waited patiently hour by hour till some of the family should seek her. In the city household the hours were fairly early, and Hester was with her a little after seven. She was once more astonished to see her dressed and ready for the road, and at first rallied her on her hurry, speaking as though she was going to meet her betrothed, and as though the time could not run fast enough to satisfy her. Seeing, however, that she did not blush or become in any way embarrassed, she gave over this pleasantry and asked many questions to make sure of the perfection of all preparation. When she examined the dust-wrap to see that Betty was properly attired for travel, she expressed her amazement at the way in which her cousin had dressed herself for the journey.

"Law, child!" she said, "you never surely put on a white dress to ride through the dusty roads; for what with the drought, they say that out of London the roads be inches deep in dust. And as to wearing your beautiful buttons, it's simply a tempting of Providence, and of highwaymen; that it is! But there, child, I know it's no use my scolding you, for what your mind's set on that you will do, though I argued and barged myself hoarse. But do 'ee be careful and keep yourself well covered, or folk will think you are going to a bridal all unknown to your own kin."

"Oh, Cousin Hester, surely to wear white is not always to be going to be married!"

"No, child, surely not! It would be foolishness to say so. The dead wear white, so far as that goes; but then you don't put gold buttons on grave-clothes — and such gold buttons too, and coming from where yours did. Neither do you put on either white or buttons to travel on a lonely road where there have been enough robberies to make one fearsome. Why, my dear, I'd no more put on my gold ornaments for such a journey, and with no more escort than old Robin carrying my valise behind me, than I'd — than I'd dream of going to St. Paul's to say my prayers alone. Well, anyhow, if you will have things with you that you oughtn't to have, you ought at least to see that you have with you all that you should have. Are your keys all right? and your housewife? and your purse? and"

"Oh yes, Hester; I have everything quite right," interrupted Betty, for she was conscious of that sharp dagger in her pocket as well as the parcel of banknotes, and she feared lest Hester, in her kindly zeal to ascertain that nothing had been forgotten, should make the discovery of either. When they went to breakfast they found the Alderman waiting them. He was full of concern for the journey, and wanted — right or wrong — to send one or two of his apprentices, armed, with Betty, for he said he feared she might have some trouble by the way. The Newmarket road had several times of late been beset by footpads and highwaymen, and it was hardly safe or right for a young lady to go out alone, or with only such attendance as she had. Then Hester spoke of the white dress and the golden buttons; and the Alderman, then and there, announced his intention of going on with her himself rather than see her travel alone on such a journey.

So Betty, beginning to be afraid that some real obstacle to the accomplishment of her purpose might arise out of their solicitude for her, laid herself out to overcome their fears. She protested that there was no danger; that the journey was only a very short one, a few miles at most, and through roads that were much frequented; that she did not fear any highwaymen; and that, after all, she was going to her own place, where she had passed a large portion of her youth; and that it would seem strange and more than ungracious to the people who had always treated her so well to appear to be afraid to come amongst them alone or without escort; and she knew that neither Hester nor her dear, kind Alderman would like such a thing.

And so, though both the old folk knew that the argument was bad, and were not a bit satisfied as to either the safety or the propriety of the journey, they gave in to her winning gentleness and acquiesced in her going. They comforted themselves with the thought that after all, considering the number of people who travelled, there were very few robberies, that the very fact of Betty's journey being so unusual would disarm their suspicions, and that no man — even a highwayman — could find it in him to rob so sweet and gentle a child as Betty Pole.

As to Betty herself, it was a sore trouble to her to mislead, even to so small an extent, the friends who loved her and whom she loved and trusted. It is one of the penalties of ill-doing, and perhaps not the least, that the innocent that we fain would spare and hold aloof from all evil, suffer and run danger of deterioration, directly or indirectly, for our faults. When the ship goes down, many an atom that else had floated in good time safe to land and survived the wreckage, is sucked into the whirling maelstrom and disappears for ever.

But no matter how prolonged partings may be, the time comes at last; the forenoon had still some time to run when Betty left the house at Finsbury Square, and, turning back at the corner, saw her friends still waving their hands as they stood in the open doorway.

CHAPTER VII

NEAR MUCH HADAM

IN all her life before, Betty had never been so gentle as she was on that journey; and old Robin, jogging along on his stout roadster, watched her with affectionate eyes and marvelled. Her love and tenderness seemed to go out to every living thing. For her the summer pervaded all things, and there was in her heart — in one of her hearts — a joyousness that bubbled up perpetually. For she had two hearts now. One which was full of pain and weariness, for which life had all gone by and which was but like the ash of an extinct fire, with naught remaining but sentience and the power to suffer pain. The other heart was new and fresh — such a heart as might be in the breast of one who had been born again in a new and a higher life.

The roads were dusty, and the sun glared fiercely as the noon drew nigh. The trees and grass were losing the freshness of their green; but there were places of deep shadow where the trees arched over the roadway, and there were many purling rills which made music cool and sweet as the waters gurgled in the chasms of their stony bed or flashed as they fell. In most of these calm, restful places there was ever some life or other to interest the traveller, and she lingered by them so long and so often that Robin began seriously to think it his duty to remonstrate with her on the delay, and to call her attention to the length of the journey still before them. When, however, he saw her look at the cattle or the horses or the very birds so lovingly, and heard her speak to them so prettily — as though they had souls and understandings of their own — he simply admired her innocent sweetness and held his peace. But as the afternoon drew on, and they had still some way to go before reaching Bishop's Stortford, he made up his mind to speak, and stammeringly advised that they should get on a little faster lest the night should close in before they were at Much Hadam.

Betty thanked him sweetly, and said that she would hurry if he wished it, but that it seemed so nice to be in the real country, and the horses enjoyed it so much more than hurrying on, that she had not the heart to hasten. So Robin made speed to tell his lady that his only dread was that the journey might be so prolonged that some mischance might happen. Then Betty again thanked him for his thoughtfulness, and quickened her pace somewhat, so that before long they arrived at Bishop's Stortford, where she put up for awhile at "The Rayne-deere" and had dinner. As they had arrived some time after the regular dinner-hour, it was necessary to wait till a fresh meal had been cooked; and then the eating of dinner took some little time — for Betty, though not for Robin who got through a very large dinner in a small space of time.

Betty had much talk with the hostess, Mrs. Unsworth, and with many of the servants; and made much inquiry as to what had of late been going on in the place. She even went into the stables where the horses were being baited, taking herself some crusts for them. Whilst there she had talked with the grooms and postilions, making inquiries as to the various parts of the road between Bishop's Stortford and Ware, and incidentally touching on the recent robberies. The men were pleased with so much conversation from so great a lady and spoke freely, so that ere she went on her way, Betty had some clear idea of the general method in which the robberies had of late been carried out on the Cambridge road. All this made much, delay, so that when they had well started on their way the afternoon was drawing to a close.

It was not very far to Betty's house at Much Hadam, and so Robin was not anxious any more, but was content to go as slowly as she wished. One's faithfulness, however much it be, has but little control over one's digestion, and it is a wonderful thing what a different complexion affairs assume after a good meal. It would have been hard for a little while to have fixed on any pace which would have been too slow for old Robin.

But the slowest journey must progress somewhat, and at last they turned into the road leading towards Ware, whence the by-road to Betty's destination took its source. Here Betty suddenly reined up and called Robin who was jogging along a little way behind with his chin sunk on his breast, and evidently more than half asleep. He became fully awake to a great mental confusion, and it took him some few seconds to realise where he was and what was before his mind.

"Lard-a-marcy, Miss Betty," he finally said, "but ye fairly frightened me! I thought that summat had gone wrong wi' the saddle, or that some of them " he paused, for under the circumstance of absence from help, he did not wish to speak disrespectfully of robbers— "some of them " Again he stopped.

"Of what?" said Betty, with a smile.

"Well, Miss, of some of them highway gentlemen."

"Oh, Robin, what are you thinking of? I do believe you were asleep and dreaming."

"Belike I was, Miss," he added simply. "Well, Robin, I hope your dreams were pleasant; or perhaps I ought not to hope that or I should have to be sorry for interrupting them, for I find that I left behind me at the hotel my diamond ring with the cameo. It was on the dressing-table where I washed for dinner. You must ride back to Bishop's Stortford as fast as you can and get it for me. Mrs. Unsworth will give it to you, for I am sure it will have been found by this time."

"Lard-a-marcy!" said the old man, "what's to become of you whilst I should go back? You can't stay here on these roads alone, and niver a soul nigh ye in case ye wanted help."

"But I don't want help, Robin. You will not be long gone, and I shall ride' slowly on till you overtake me. Remember, I am close to my own house and near my own people."

"But, Miss Betty dear, I daren't leave ye all alone. Miss Priscilla told me on no account to let ye out of my sight; and as for Mrs. Abigail, why she'd have my life if I were to dare to do such a thing. That she would, and more!"

"Don't fear, Robin," said Betty smiling. "In the first place Abigail will never know, unless you tell her; and I am sure that even Abigail would not say very pretty things to you if I were to lose my beautiful ring because you refused to obey my orders." At this Robin, manlike, gave in, so she went on —

"Now ride back, my good Robin, and get my ring; and you may come after me as quickly as ever you please. Stay! take off my valise and leave it here, so that you can go quicker." "What, Miss! leave your trunk on the roadside? Oh no! that would never do. 'Tis no weight at all, and 'tis only a little way back. Go slow, Miss Betty, and take care of yourself till I come." The old man, quite awake now, rode back to Bishop's Stortford for the ring.

Betty rode slowly along at a foot's pace till he was out of sight. Then she drew up a ' moment in the shadow of a hazel grove and dismounted. She took from her pocket the sharp dagger and laid it bare in her breast where she could grasp it in an instant; then she unbuttoned her grey dust-wrap and threw it back over her shoulders so that her white ‘ dress with the golden buttons showed out. The road here was shady and the ground underfoot somewhat damp, so there was no rising dust to mar the spotless fairness of her dress. She drew close to a bank and climbed to her saddle again, and then went on her way. The hoofs of her horse made but little noise on the sand, and the only sound she could hear, save the myriad voices of nature, was the beating of her’ own heart. For now the two hearts had become one again. The new and joyous heart had somehow ceased to carol, and the fire in the heart of ashes had waked again. The two hearts of this sorely anxious maiden, that spoke jof her past and her future, were merged in the *one great, human, beating heart which the present needs.

As she went slowly along, every beauty of the scene seemed revealed to her in a manner which she had never felt before, and which it seemed to her would henceforth become a part of her memory and her life.

The road now ran through a valley, deep in woods, in whose heart was a full stream with waters which flowed in murmuring rills as the valley fell, or widened into dark brown pools which reached to the roadway and which took their colours from the complementary shadows of the green overhead. The undergrowth of beech and hazel was thick and full of dark shadows, dark in the shade which the great oaks and elms already threw along the valley. The sun was setting; and as it sunk lower and lower on the top of the slope that crowned the valley, the shadows grew larger and larger. And as the shadows grew, so the peace and beauty of the scene won on Betty till her heart ceased its tumult; and she could go on her way with resolution unchecked, and without any disturbance from within.

Before her there was a space where lay a broad stream of light, for there was a dip in the western slope of the valley, and the sunlight blazed, broad and red, across it. Here the trees grew more lofty than elsewhere, and on the eastern side of the road a dense mass of foliage covered a low bank of grass which rose some four feet above the road. As her eyes lit on this, Betty shivered as though some chill wind had blown upon her. She seemed instinctively to realise that here was the place she sought — the one spot which answered all the conditions she expected. For an instant she pressed her hand to her heart, and then with a silent prayer passed on her way.

When pacing slowly along, with the hood of her dust-wrap over her head and her face turned to the glory of the sunset,’ her horse suddenly stopped, so that she almost lost her balance. There was a sudden shout from the copse —

“Stop!” spoken by a ringing voice. On the instant a black horse leaped down the bank to the road, carrying a masked rider who held a pistol at arm’s length.

Then Betty knew that the moment of her life had come. With a sudden spring she threw herself from the saddle and caught the rein of the black horse close to the bridle. As she did this there was a cry from the rider, and his hand fell to his side. Betty felt the horse quiver, and knew that in a moment it would try to dart away, and so cried out quickly— “Unmask! unless you wish your horse to trample me down!”

The answer came: “Let go the rein! For God’s sake, let go! I shall not harm you.”

“Unmask!” Her tone was of command, and there was in her voice and bearing never a trace or shadow of fear. The highwayman seemed to recognise it, and, with a groan, drew the velvet mask from his face.

“Rafe!”

“Betty!”

Her tone was full of sad conviction, the simple conclusion of a train of thought: his was of horrified despair. There -was a long pause, which Betty was the first to break.

“Thank God, that it was I, and not another, that came this road to-day!”

Then, seeing that Rafe was still silent, she went on —

“Oh! Rafe, my heart told me all. I feared! I feared! and I have come here all alone that I might save you!”

Rafe leaped from his saddle.

“Save me!”

“Ah yes, Rafe! to save you from this horrible thing. Oh God! to think that you — you of all men — should drop so low as to rob on the highway!”

Rafe was still silent. Instinctively he had taken his horse’s rein through his arm, and the beautiful animal stood patiently in sad contrast — the one, the human animal, in spite of all the high courage of his kind, feeling depraved and degraded more than he had power to express; the other animal, full of its own pride, but harrowed by no moral feaf.

Betty’s brain now began almost to reel. She had so much to say — yet when the moment came she could say nothing. She despised herself for being so overcome — yet she would not have been cold even at the price of the power of coherency.

Little by little, however, the weight which oppressed her seemed to leave her, and the clouds about her brain to pass away. Then all was clear before her, and in a very sweet, grave way she began to tell her lover of her fears for him: how justice was on his track and how his career of crime was likely to be atoned for in a very dreadful way — and here she shuddered. But Rafe did not shudder; on the contrary, the idea of danger of any kind was, in his present condition of overwhelming shame, a restorative. There was something to be fought for, something which he could oppose, some action of the future or the present, rather than the dull, impotent misery of regret; and so the masculinity of him began to awake. As she looked, Betty felt, rather than saw, the change, and so her task became a harder one, though she never faltered in the doing of it It was a more difficult thing to bring home the sense of his guilt to the man of prouder bearing than to the man in the depths of despair, seemingly ready to take any step to escape, from his dreadful position.

There is, however, an adaptability in woman’s nature, intellectual as well as physical or moral, which always answers when called upon. Betty instinctively abandoned any idea which she might have had of alluding to danger; but she still pursued her object unfalteringly. As Rafe’s bearing was proud, she appealed to his honour.

“Oh! Rafe, you told me that a gentleman could not accept gifts; and I would have given you all I had! God knows what a delight and pride it would have been for me to have had the privilege of doing so. I dreaded, somehow, lest want of any kind, or desperation, should drive you to forget yourself. Would to God that you had listened to me, or that I had had the courage to speak!”

Here Rafe interrupted her impetuously —

“Betty, surely you are at least without blame. I have sinned, I know, but it has nothing to do with you.”

Betty raised her eyes wonderingly to his.

“Nothing to do with me, Rafe? and we pledged to be married!”

A sudden joy shot through Rafe when he heard the words “we pledged to be married,” but it was quickly followed by a chill when the sense of his present position flashed across him. It was with a genuine, manly shame that his eyes fell and his head sank upon his breast. His voice was hoarse with an agony of his own as he said —

“To be married, Betty? Alas! that must be all past now. No, no! I am not such a scoundrel as that!”

There was a pathos in his voice as he spoke that had never been there before. He realised his great loss. That was the penalty he had to pay for his wrong-doing.

Betty’s face was serene ^s she looked at him, so straightly and so earnestly that, as if by some mesmeric influence, he raised his eyes to meet hers.

“We are promised to each other, Rafe,” she said simply. “God heard our promise, and it is not for us to go back from it, if He so wills it in His good time.”

Rafe sprang forward to catch her in his arms, but the horse started a little, and the rein on his arm held him off. There was a sort of grim irony in the situation, which, however, both Rafe and Betty were too agitated to notice.

It was, perhaps, only a natural manifestation of masculine nature, but when the conviction began to dawn upon him that he had not lost Betty’s love, the supremacy of the man over the woman began unconsciously to assert itself.

“You had better get on your way, Betty,” he said, in an authoritative manner; “the roads are not safe, and it was unwise to come alone.”

The speech may seem inconsequent, but both speaker and hearer understood the connection. The silences of lovers, and the habits of such silent understandings, are known to themselves. Then a thought seemed to strike him, and he added, with a horrified expression on his face— "My God! if it had been some other than me!"

Betty said sadly: "Would to God, Rafe, that it had!"

"But you don't know the danger!"

Here a momentary pang of bitterness swept over Betty's heart, and she answered out of the quickness of her woman's speech —

"Aye, Rafe; you know better than I do the highwayman's mercy!"

Then followed quickly the reaction of her long restraint, and in a burst of passion she poured forth her whole heart, and all that had been torturing her during the past two days. She ended thus —

"But, Rafe, it was because I feared it, and dreaded it, that I came. If it were bad for me, an. innocent woman, to suffer, what must the guilt be that makes such a fear to you. Oh, Rafe! Rafe! what mattered the danger to me, a dead woman — aye, a dead woman!" for she saw the question in his face. "What life is in one when the hopes are shattered, and the fire in the heart is quenched? I would have given my life for you, Rafe, as you did for me. Why, then, should I hesitate to run a danger for your sake?"

Here Rafe interrupted —

"But, my God! Betty, you don't know the danger. These men are the roughest, the cruellest, the most remorseless wretches that exist!"

He ground his teeth with passion at the horrible possibilities that rose before his mind. Betty looked at him a moment, and her heart began to beat with a new hope. The lesson of his own shame and ill-doing, and what it meant to her eyes, was coming home to him; out of his very passion might come his reclamation. He would, she reasoned to herself, never have experienced such emotion if he were truly hardened; and so she felt she could enter on a new phase of her task. Still calmly looking him in the face, she put her hand in the bosom of her dress and pulled out her sharp dagger.

“See!” she said, as she held it out towards him, “I did not come unarmed!”

Rafe smiled a bitter smile, wrung from the depths of his masculine experience.

“A good weapon, child, but of small use against a desperate man. He would have beaten it from your hand with his whip or his pistol-butt before you could have struck a blow.”

Betty answered calmly, as she replaced the dagger in her breast —

“It was not for him!”

“Who for, then? Good God! Betty, not for yourself?” he added, as the thought struck him.

“For myself, Rafe! I did not come out on this desperate enterprise without weighing well the consequences. But I saw my duty clear before me, and I had no alternative. Oh, Rafe! Rafe! it was a desperate choice.” Here she broke down for a moment, but recovered herself and went on, without even a falter in her voice —

“In any case I must have suffered such a loss — my life or my love, my life or my love!”

They were both silent, and then a new thought struck Rafe, and he asked —

“But how did you know you would meet me? The chances were a thousand to one against such a thing!”

“Oh! Rafe, my heart told me.”

“Your heart told you!” said Rafe, with sudden bitterness. “Your heart told you that I was a robber, when you had no grounds even to imagine such a thing. And yet you come here with those gold buttons on your dress.

'Love without faith ' indeed! And so this was your faith in me! that unheard you condemned me and held me as guilty."

He became fairly speechless with indignation. Betty was so overwhelmed with this monstrous change of front — this outcome of jealousy and love and vanity, which was so thoroughly masculine in its nature as to be beyond feminine comprehension. She stood silent and hung her head, for the rebuke touched her deeply in her inner nature; she felt the remorse that she might, and would, have felt had her supposition as to Rafe's misdoing proved untrue. Betty was a girl who seldom cried, and more especially when the tears came from any emotion beginning with herself. Now and again she wept at hearing or reading a piteous tale or seeing such told in a play, but her tears came gently and passed soon; but when she wept with cause her tears were very tears of blood. At such times, even before the tears fell, dark circles grew round her beautiful eyes, and the misery of her soul became very pitiful to see. Rafe saw the tears fall from her downcast eyes, but his anger was hot — -jealousy is so hard to efface — and even Betty's tears did not move him at once. Then the anguish of the poor girl's heart found a voice; in a deep, low tone which smote on his ears with a pang which he never forgot she said —

"Oh, Rafe! Rafe! my lost love! Would to God that my fears had been untrue! My life would have been well spent to have learned so sweet a truth!"

Then, in an instant, down at her feet fell Rafe, all the man in him rising to the height of his humility. Down into the dust, on his knees, with his face in his hands. The rein slipping from his arm freed the horse which started away, but stopped at once and began quietly to browse the herbage on the bank.

Betty still wept, but her tears were such as angels shed; and all the sorrow of her heart was turned to instant joy. Rafe was won! His heart was true, and she felt that there had come the dawn of a new life. At that moment, as though it were some mysterious presage, the day fell. The sun sank over the hill, and the red light fading left the girl, who stood with her hand on her lover's head, pale and spirit-like. Her dress of white gleamed out beneath the thrown-back mantle of grey, and the golden buttons twinkled like stars in the night.

So they stood for a moment; but Betty suddenly raised her head and listened, and both the horses raised their ears and listened too. Far away came the quick stroke of a horse's feet on the high-road; Robin was evidently coming at a gallop — a way that was new to him. Betty said quietly —

"Robin is returning; he must not find you here. No living soul but you and I know this sad secret; and, Rafe dear, it must die with us. You must go away for a time; it will be best for you, as for us all. Go abroad to the wars, where you can begin life afresh. Think that you go to win back your honour, and so to claim the hand of the wife that waits for you. See here! I have brought with me money that will keep you from want, and help you in your career," and she produced the packet that Mr. Child had given her. "Take it, Rafe!"

But Rafe sunk his head lower and lower, and spoke without looking up —

"Oh! spare me — spare me this!"

"Nay," she said, "Rafe dear, there is nothing to spare. This is not mine to give. I knew you would not receive from me — would to God that your pride had not been so; but that is past. This is a trust which my dear grandfather left me. He gave it to me the very night he died; and it is as though he were come from the grave to give it you. Take it, Rafe! It is a holy trust; and hereafter, if you may be able to do so, you may yet pass it on to others, so that it can help some in dire straits. Surely, Rafe," she added, as he still hesitated— "surely I have won to-day the right to ask you that no such trouble should come upon you again, when with this trust-money we can avert it. Your own heart must tell you that I am right. Quick! quick!" for the gallop sounded nearer.

Rafe put up his hand and took the packet; then he seized her hand and held it a moment to his lips, and looked up in her eyes as he said solemnly —

"Betty, as God sees us, this hand shall never sin in such way again. It shall never be less worthy than now when it touches the hand of one of His saints."

"Oh! hush, hush, Rafe!" said Betty, overwhelmed with emotion.

Rafe sprang to his feet; the manhood of him seemed triumphant again, and all the nobler part of the soul within stood revealed without dross.

"Betty, if I am spared I shall come back to, claim you; and if I do so come, I shall feel: worthy to ask you to share my life. But living or dying I shall send you word, if I do not - bring it, that your faith has been justified. Goodbye! Goodbye!" Betty held out her arms, and he sprang to them, and for an instant enfolded her in a passionate embrace. Then I he tore himself away. He paused a second and returned.

"Give me a keepsake," he said. "Something that I can wear over my heart, and which will be with me always as the symbol of your faith and love."

"Take one of the buttons, Rafe; they are dear to us both," she said shyly. He stooped ‘ and caught one in his hand — the one nearest the ground.

“Why that one, Rafe?”

“Because it is fittest for me. ’Tis nearest to your garment’s hem.”

“No, no, Rafe! take this!” Pulling out the dagger, she severed the third of the buttons, held it an instant to her lips, and handed it to him.

“’Tis nearest to my heart.”

Rafe’s breast heaved; he looked at her one moment, flung himself to the dust, and kissed the hem of her dress; then, without a word, sprang to his saddle, and with a wave of his hand, leaped up the bank whence he had come.

Betty heard the crash of his passage through the short undergrowth as he started, as the crow flies, towards Harwich, to take that night a fishing-boat to Holland.

As she watched him go, even in the anguish of her parting, Betty gloried in the strength and daring of her lover, in his rapid action, and the vigour of his determination; and, womanlike, she felt happy because the man was strong.

Then she drew her horse to the bank, climbed into the saddle, and pushed hastily on -her way. She did not look back as the coming horseman drew closer, but only turned when she found that the speed did not diminish on his approach. For an instant she was startled as a woman, magnificently mounted, swept by at break-neck speed; but before horse and rider had dissolved into the shadows of the evening, she recognised beneath the woman’s habit the free carriage of a-man. A new gush of thankfulness went up from her heart, for she knew it was the rider with the money of the New River Company. Her heart beat fast at the thought of how close had been the rescue of Rafe, and a new thankfulness filled her soul. However, she proceeded on her way thankfully, so that when presently Robin, riding hot haste, overtook her, she was some distance from the scene of the meeting.

“Dear heart, Miss Betty!” said the honest fellow as he rode up, “but I feared ye would be lost when the night fell. I have the ring; but we must push on, or ‘twill be dark before we reach the house. And oh! Miss, when that daredevil woman rode past me like a flash I couldn’t but think that mayhap some of those highway gentlemen’s ladies had took to the road too! I feared till I saw you safe ahead o’ me.” That night when Robin, after his supper, was relating to the servants in the kitchen all the adventures of the day he added —

“And sure I am that the change has done Miss Betty — Lord love her! — good already. She hasn’t been so gay for days and days as when I came up to her in the road She was singing to herself like a bird, and her eyes were like stars.”

CHAPTER VIII

IN FINSBURY SQUARE

AS the next five years flew by they saw many changes in many things, but none in the heart of Betty Pole. The new dynasty grew more and more a part of the life and the future of England, and the thunder, which followed ever the hopes of the Stuarts, was but as the far roll of elemental disturbance which makes apparent to all men their own immediate safety. Everything was prosperous with Betty in the way of fortune, and her wealth grew with each year, despite the fact that the many calls on her charity were never unanswered, and that the other members of the family looked to her — and did not look in vain — for countenance in all their aspirations and endeavours. One great loss there was in the household, and only one: Priscilla slept at peace.

From the evening when they had parted on the road to Much Hadam, Betty had never heard from Rafe or of him. He had disappeared as effectually as if the earth had swallowed him. Betty's faith never faltered. She believed that one day he would appear, or that some message from him would reach her, and in that belief she rested serenely. Some time after his disappearance she had taken into her own hands certain large sums of money, much to the chagrin of the vigilant Alderman, who remonstrated with her for withdrawing from active use any money at a time when with decent care it would multiply itself through the rage for public speculation. Betty did not attempt to argue on the subject with him, but told him that it was in the fulfilment of a duty, and begged him not to make a somewhat difficult task into a labour of pain. She spoke to him so sweetly, and withal so warmly, of her gratitude to him for his constant care, that the old gentleman, although somewhat chagrined and jealous as to the cause of her mystery, abandoned the subject except at rare intervals.

Then after a time strange rumours began to be heard. The agents of Lord Baltimore received a mysterious letter saying that if they searched in a certain place in Wandsworth they would find the money stolen so long before. They sought the place with a select following of servants, and sure enough found an amount in new gold larger than the sum stolen. This strange occurrence was followed at irregular intervals by similar ones, till after a time it was found that quite a number of persons who had been robbed-near London in the early half of 1717 had had full restitution made to them. The matter was the subject of comment in the coffee-houses, and many were the surmises as to the cause or means of so unusual a set of circumstances.

All this time Betty lived partly at her house at Much Hadam and partly at Chelsea She had now many affairs to keep her busy, and she often made calls at the counting-house of Mr. Child and lodged and drew much money from time to time. She went much amongst poor and distressed persons. Sometimes her ministrations of this kind took her to places beyond the Liberties of the city; but she smiled at warnings against footpads and went on her way. Now and again she paid visits to the prisons; and although she always went with a sort of dread upon her, and suffered much whilst witnessing the pain and degradation of the poor souls held in durance, she came away as if cheered and benefited by the accomplishment of her good work.

Once, after the news had been told in the coffee-houses of another mysterious finding of stolen property, the old Alderman came out to pay her a visit. For a time he had been angry and indignant at the disappearance of her affianced husband, and, manlike, had managed, whilst trying to comfort the poor girl, to visit on her head some of his disapprobation. She had borne it all meekly, and had held herself with such a grave manner that her friends had hardly ventured to condole with her on her loss or misfortune — they did not know which to consider Rafe's disappearance.

On this occasion the Alderman did not come' in his great carriage with rich hammercloth and with coachman and big servants in gorgeous livery, which he had continued to use on great occasions since he had been Lord Mayor, but in a plain coach with no servant but the driver. Betty was all alone; she was delighted to see her old friend, and made him very welcome. He, however, was manifestly ill at ease and had something on his mind; so when they sat together in the cool drawingroom Betty laid her little hand on the back of his great one and said —

"What is it? I know something is troubling you. Won't you tell me?"

The Alderman seemed relieved to have the matter commenced, though for the moment his embarrassment increased and he grew red and stammered.

"My dear, I'll do anything in all the wide world that you wish," he said; and then added hastily and inconsequently —

"Betty, do you want any money? I mean any large sums."

Betty was really surprised, and with wide-open eyes she answered —

"No, Cousin Fenton. I have more than I shall ever want."

"But I mean, my dear, money to deal with — money " he stammered and stuttered for a second or two and then spoke with grave, frank directness —

“I mean, Betty, my dear, more money — such as you have drawn from us and spent — in your own way.” Betty shook her head; he went on, and there was a tremor in his voice —

“I mean money to deal with as you dealt with that thousand guineas of your grandfather’s. Oh, my dear! my dear! I have been thinking; and somehow I seem to know now.

I take back all I said of money to you, Betty dear! You were right and I was wrong; and now I want you to understand that if you want any more money to do what you will with — even to throw it away — I shall be only too proud if you will let me give it to you. For’ all I have is, in the end, for you, Betty! And oh! my dear; you were right. You are right in all you do; and how I honour you! All last night I lay awake, thinking of you; and I seemed to see you setting out that day from my door in your pretty white frock and your gold buttons. I didn’t know what it all meant, and in my blind obstinacy I must have caused you grievous pain — and more, piled up your troubles and difficulties on you. I’ll never get the sight of you on that morning out of my eyes again. And I never want to, my dear, for the good Lord was with you on your journey that day; and if I had only known”

Here the old man fairly burst out crying, and taking Betty’s two hands in his raised them to his lips and kissed them and went on, whilst Betty drawing from her bosom a gold button by its white silk string, kissed it —

“My dear child, when I see you bearing your trouble so bravely, and striving so to do all that is right, I think better of others — of all others — for your sweet sake; and I pray that you may yet have the desire of your heart of hearts. I hope and pray God with all my soul that in time to come your life will be blessed with love — that love you hope for: the love of a good and worthy husband, whom you can honour and who will love and honour you as you should be loved and honoured!”

Then Betty bent over his great, wrinkled hands and kissed them and raised her eyes to his. He saw the dark marks come round them; and then she too bursts out crying. And so without further words these two great hearts understood all, and they found much comfort in the silent sympathy.

They never spoke of the matter again, either of money or of Rafe, but from that day the old merchant had many inquiries made secretly, and kept watch for any sign of the missing man.

No one ever mentioned Rafe to Betty, or directly or indirectly alluded to marriage. Would-be suitors there were many, for the greatness of her fortune was known; but, living retired equally at Much Hadam or Chelsea, Miss Pole gave no opportunity of wooing. Now and again there came from the wars, which, here and there, ever convulsed some part of Europe, rumours of some gallant deed wrought by some unknown soldier; and Betty’s hopes grew high. The age was one when soldiers of fortune were not uncommon; and when the tales of the camp-fire had found their way to the hearth and men’s blood quickened and women’s tears fell fast at the recounting of some heroic deed, Betty’s heart would beat at the thought: “That might be my Rafe! ‘Twere surely like him;” and there would rise before her inner eye the image of that gallant horseman whom for her Time had purified from his base surroundings. But alas! these gallant heroes either fought their way to fame and the knowledge of the world, or else they perished and were heard of no more; and Betty’s hopes grew colder and colder still, though her faith was as warm as ever.

One day — it was the fifth anniversary of the dayshehadmade the journey to Much Hadam — Betty went into the city to pay a visit to her Cousin Fenton. It was not altogether that she wished to see her friends, but she had a hungry longing to go over once again at least a part of that journey which had such dire and sweet results. In the hot afternoon she left Mr. Child's bank, and sending her carriage to the stables of the "Saracen's Head," walked all the way to Finsbury Square. She intended to surprise her cousin, and so took her way into the garden by the wicket at the back.

The garden was fresh and delicious, for the Alderman loved flowers, and his were well kept and constantly watered. Even on this burning afternoon they all looked sweet and bright; the turf plot was green as emerald with long grass studded with sweet summer flowers, and from the tiny beds rose beautiful turncap lilies and great, heavy-hearted roses, bending from the stakes round which they were twined. Here she wandered for a while, and then climbing the steps, without seeing any of the maids, entered the Alderman's cosy room which looked out on the garden. The room was darkened by the summer blinds; and the heavy Turkey curtains which shut the room off from the great diningroom beyond were drawn. The windows were open, and into the room stole the sweetness of the flowers and the muffled roar of the city without. Betty sat down in a great leather-covered chair, half as big as a sofa, and made up her mind to wait and rest until her cousin should appear. The hum of the bees in the garden and the roar of the city merged in one — and Betty fell asleep.

She was partially awakened by the opening of a door in the room beyond and the Alderman's heavy footfall. She was just making up her mind to become fully awake and speak to him when there was a knocking at the outer door. Presently the door was opened again and the voice of a maid said —

“It is a gentleman to see you, sir.”

“What name did he give?”

“He asked to be excused giving his name, sir. He said he was wishful to see you alone if he might; that he had waited till he had seen you enter, and that you would know him if you saw him.”

What was it that brought up Betty sitting in the great armchair with extended hands tightly grasping the arms and her eyes glowing? She was all awake now, and though at the first her impulse had been to depart on hearing the stranger’s message, she did not now think of moving. She heard the old Alderman say —

“Wishful to see me alone — would know him if I see him; strange! Show him in, Hannah! and if your mistress comes whilst he is here simply tell her that I am engaged.”

The seconds that passed were agony to Betty. She thought — she did not know what; she hoped — she did not know what. She caught sight of herself in a great mirror and saw the white frock, which she always wore on this day of the year, and noted the gaps left where two of the gold buttons were gone.

The door opened, closed again, and there was a pause. Betty sat like one in a dream and waited, her heart standing still in expectancy. Then came a voice which went through Betty’s heart like sunshine, or a note of celestial music. She wondered how any one in the wide world who had ever heard it could fail to know it again. She would have liked to cry out — to sing — to spring to her feet and rush through the curtains and throw herself into the loving arms that she knew would be stretched out to her. But, as people usually are in moments of supreme emotion, she was self-contained and sat silent, though in an ecstasy. She did not go away now; she did not mean to go. She would wait, for wherever Rafe's voice was, she had a right to be there. She had won that right out of her love and patience and belief; and there was none in all the wide world, she was sure, who would wish her to go. Rafe had simply said —

"Mr. Fenton, I would like a word with you if I may be so privileged."

The Alderman's tone as he answered was noncommittal; Betty knew by it that he had not recognised his-visitor, and a wild thrill shot through her as to how Rafe could have become so changed that Cousin Fenton did not know him.

"I shall be pleased, sir. Pray be seated." When Rafe spoke there was a sweet humility in the tone of the answer which brought a quick thought to Betty that the years had not passed in vain —

"I thank you, sir, for your courtesy; but there are reasons why I may not be seated in this house, or in your presence, until you are aware of who I am."

"Of who you are! Sir, the room is dark and my eyes are not young!"

There was the sound of a drawn curtain, and then an exclamation —

"Rafe! Mr. Otwell! Sir, this is strange indeed. You have not hurried in your coming!" Betty could not but be glad that he had pronounced the Christian name first, as though the young man had been in his thoughts; but it made her wince to hear the later words. Rafe's answer went straight to her heart.

"Ah, sir, you are justified in any words you may use to me. But I fain would ask you not to judge me altogether too hardly for that fault. See here!"

The Alderman's answer explained his reason, as it came in horrified tones —

"The marks on your wrists! Are they of chains?"

"Yes."

There was a pause, then came the Alderman's remark in a constrained voice —

"When a man comes from prison, there is need to explain"

"You need not fear, sir. God knows that I have much to answer for; but though I well merited chains and prison, it was not my demerits that set these marks upon my wrists." Betty listened with a sickening heart, and her one idea was to kiss those maimed wrists; but her eyes flashed as he went on: "They were won for me in battle against the Turks, for Faith and Freedom. For a whole year I wrought in a Turkish. galley. But this is not to the point; I deserved to suffer, and I do not dare to repine. I only mention this old pain because I would fain beg a little forbearance, if not a little sympathy. Oh sir, yours is the first face that I have seen of all that I knew in the life here that seems so long ago. Yours is the first of the old voices that I have heard; and it may be the last, for I have come unknown to any, and I may depart the same. I know how little I deserve from any man, and least of all from you, to whom of old I showed so little courtesy, not knowing then your worth, or perhaps being jealous of it. But there is a hunger in my very soul. I would not forget my manhood — But! — It is in such moments that we remember it."

Betty longed to fly to him to comfort him, but she waited she knew not how. She had her reward, for they were tears of joy which burst from her eyes as heir old cousin said, with a sob in his voice —

"Nay, sir; God forbid that I should be harsh with one who has suffered. There is my hand if you will, and glad I shall be if I can do good to you — for another’s sake if not for your own.”

The clasp of the men’s hands appeared to draw them together, for the voices of both seemed more at ease as they went on. Rafe was the first to speak —

“I have much to say, but a certain duty comes the first. Sir, do you know my sad story — or must I tell all my shame afresh?”

“Go on, sir! Go on! I think I know enough to understand.”

“I have been so long away, and have had no means of knowing aught that has happened.

The long suspense has been a part of my punishment. I have made some gain in the wars, and I have to make some restitution. No man can undo altogether such wrongs as mine, but he can search out and restore.”

Here the Alderman interrupted —

“That has been done long ago — I daresay you can guess by whom.”

In the silence that followed Betty seemed in her inner eye to see the grave bowing of that erect head. Then Rafe went on, though from the broken voice Betty could tell how much his heart had been troubled —

“Beyond this I wish to place ten times the sum in good hands for the use and benefit of others. I thought that you would accept the trust — for charity’s sake, not for mine. I feel it ill to ask even such a thing from you whose hands have always wrought in honour; but with so upright a career as yours you can well afford to minister a charity, though the hands are not clean which entrust it to you.”

“I accept it, sir,” said the old man, “and with a joy unspeakable.”

“And now, sir,” said Rafe, with a choking in his voice, “you may perhaps answer me two questions. Is Betty — is Miss Pole alive?”

“She is! Thank Almighty God, she is!”

“God be thanked! And — and — is she married; or has she kept single?”

“She is single still.”

Again there was a long pause, and Betty, looking out straight in front of her, saw her image in the tall mirror. She dared not stir; she might not venture even to put a sheltering hand before her burning face lest the rustle of her dress should betray her presence. It seemed to her that, listening as she was in secret, it was almost immodest to behold even her own image in the glass, and so closed her eyes — and listened. She heard Rafe sob, and each word went beating through her heart like the throb of a giant pulse. With ears strained to every sound she heard the Alderman step close to him and the sound of his laying his hand on his shoulder. And then came his voice full of kindliness —

“Nay, lad, don’t cry. Heart, man! There is hope for us all.”

“Thank God for hope! Oh, sir, in the years that have gone by I have found hope such a bitter pleasure that not seldom have I realised what the men of old meant when they said it was the last evil in Pandora’s box. Many a starlit night, when I lay out on the plains or up the mountain slopes, have I thought and thought that a time might come when I should set foot on this dear English soil again, and that life might begin afresh for me here. But with the hope came dread thoughts that all might come too late. But still God be thanked for hope, for without it many a poor soul — and mine among them — would long ago have succumbed. And now, dear sir, I have one more thing to ask. I ask it as a favour from one man to another, in no wise to take after-responsibility, but only to advise me out of your greater knowledge.”

There was a conscious stiffening of the old man's manner, and a hardening of his voice as he replied —

"Go on, young sir. Let me hear what it is that you wish; then I shall be better able to judge'how far I may further your desires." Again a long pause; and then Rafe spoke, but this time his voice had a new charm for Betty. It was the old voice, strong and full and mellow; but oh, how refined! Even amid her joy at such a change, Betty's heart was wrung with the thought that so much pain to him must have gone to the refining —

"I come back as poor as I went, for all that I have won is but to restore that which belonged to others, and to make some reparation through the poor. There is one other sum, a thousand guineas, which has been a trust, and which has done no unworthy work whilst I have been its guardian. Of this I can speak freely and frankly, for it is not from myself but from that sweet saint who sent me out to try to purge my sin and to win honour again. It has freed captives and saved men's bodies, and I humbly trust their souls too. Beyond these monies I have nothing but my personal belongings, and I come to my own land as naked as a babe, to try to win something of the place I lost. Now I want you to tell me something according to your best judgment. I have come to you of all men because I know you to be unflinchingly upright in all ways, and because I know that you are, first of all, a firm and true friend of Betty Pole; that you will not let anything in the wide world come between her and what is most for her good. I know well, sir — as well as any man can know anything — that it would not be for the best, were all things starting from to-day, that such a pure, sweet, noble young thing as Betty should mate with such a stained and sinful man as I am. But I cannot shut out from my reasoning any more than I can from my memory, all the sweet moments when she was pledged to me. She herself might not wish all the past obliterated; and hers is the right to choose if she so wills it — most certainly in so far as I am concerned. How, then, should I act so as to deny her no happiness, or to cause her the least pain? To me she is a living truth, and I cannot take from her acts or her words one little thing and believe that in that she was untruthful when all else was so crystal bright. I believe, as I live, that I am man enough to go away and make no sign, so that she may deem, me dead, and so leave her life more free. Nay more, I can go away and have set on foot a rumour of my death, so that she may not be tortured with any hope. You are her friend, her wise and constant friend; and I shall be deeply grateful if you will aid me with your counsel on her behalf." He paused, and the rapture of Betty's face was a joy to the angels.

The Alderman blew his nose violently, and said in a choky voice —

"Young sir, your words are brave; and on my soul and honour I believe them. But they should be spoken in a young maid's ear — nay, in the very ear of our young maid herself — rather than to an old loveless and childless man, as I am."

Then Betty stood up. Her heart had beat heavily all through Rafe's saying, and, though in her secret heart her mind was made up as to what she should do, she wanted the endorsement of others as to its wisdom in order to complete her happiness. She was only a young maid, after all, and the care of choosing between good and bad is not rightly for young heads and hearts that are not steeled to the ways of the world. But she waited, covering her eyes with her hot hands, and listened a little longer. Rafe's voice came now more eagerly, the hope in his heart was growing; his long penance had done its work in purging his soul, and he spoke now more like a free man — more like the old Rafe —

"Nay, but, sir, will you not help me? — not for my sake, but for Betty's. It is of her that I think, and it is for her that I would act. Will you give me a hint as to what is for her good, or rather for her happiness?"

The old man was evidently troubled in his mind, for he paused. Betty waited in an agony of expectation. But when the Alderman spoke her heart leaped, for he answered in tones that she had seldom heard from him— "God forbid that I, or such a poor opinion as mine, should stand in the way when the Lord has been doing His own work and leading back a lost sheep to the fold. But oh! sir, search your own heart. Think of what a terrible responsibility you take upon yourself if you win the right to guard the happiness of that young life. Think what it would be — what it must be — if you were to take even the smallest step backward from the way that you have won. Think of the harrowing anxiety that for many a long year would be in her heart regarding your every step, no matter how well intentioned or well ordered it might be.

"Ah! sir, I see you are moved. That is good. Then let me tell you more — more than I ever dreamed of telling you till now. In my heart I feel — nay, I know — that our dear Betty loves you still. That for all these years.she has been watching the hands of the clock as they crawled round the dial. That her thoughts have been of you and for you. And then think how every act or word of yours, if not of the highest, would shatter that high ideal in her mind — nay, would even reveal to her that you are only a man like the rest of us, with a man's failings, and compact of clay. It would break that tender, loving, patient heart. This is a battle, sir, that a man must fight out alone.

Judge for yourself, sir, and may the good God aid you in the task of judging wisely! Ah! that is right. You can never be wrong, sir, whilst you take counsel like that. Would that Betty might be here to see you on your knees in such a cause!"

Betty, with her eyes still shut, put out her arms instinctively as though to embrace — she did not know which, her lover or the old friend who so comforted him in his trouble. Then Rafe spoke again —

"I shall take your kindly warning, sir, and spend the night in thought. I have looked at the matter hitherto perhaps selfishly and in too great self-belief. To-morrow, if I see that my duty is to go without seeing Betty, I shall send you word; and, if this be the sad result of my thought, then I charge you on your faith and honour that never-by word or deed shall you even hint of this day, for its end may be that I shall simply pass away. If I think I am justified in staying, that I have learned sufficiently to trust myself, then I shall go to Chelsea. Whatever be the result, let me say that to the last hour of my life I shall be grateful to you for your attitude to me to-day — you from whom I deserve so little, and on whose loved one I have brought such trouble and such pain."

"Stay, sir! you must not go without some assurance that I shall see you again. You may miscalculate your own strength in this matter, and be driven to some desperate act." "No, sir; be not alarmed on that score. I have, since we met last, been through too many bitter experiences to do aught rashly. And if it be that you fear that some time I may foredo my own life, again I say, be not alarmed. It is true that I do not fear death. In the years that have gone, I have seen too many souls take flight; I have looked too often into the eyes of Death to fear them. I have come to regard dying only as a means to an end;

and with that new insight that end is too holy to be tampered with by any fell act of mine. But if it will give you ease, I promise that I shall not leave England without coming to see you again, without taking hope from your kindness, without bearing comfort and fortitude from the grasp of your honest hand." "Then when may I expect you, if, indeed, we are to lose you? — and I pray that such may not be."

"At this hour the day after to-morrow. If I feel that I may see Betty and learn her wishes' from her own true lips, I shall go to Chelsea in the afternoon of to-morrow. If not, or, if, as it may be, Betty will not or cannot let all things be as they were before I shut the gates of that Paradise on myself, then I shall see you, as I said, at this hour of the day following; and shall then beg you of your goodness to be my almoner for that sum for charity of which I spoke."

Betty here could stand no more. She felt, now that the torturing fears of her heart were stilled, that she had no right to be an unknown confidant of such secrets. It came upon her with a rush that she had been an eavesdropper, though sure it was that the angels themselves could not have blamed one in her plight. She wished to be away — away anywhere — where she could hide her joy and, in its vastness, this little shame; where she could sink,, unchallenged, to her, knees and unburden her glad soul to God. In the midst of all the thought was one fixed and dominant idea — that she must not interfere with Rafe's project. This was the struggle, the final struggle and test of his own soul; and it must be wrought out alone. Well she knew that if he failed to know her glad and perfect happiness to take all risks with him, she would herself come to him and tell him to be of good cheer. She knew now where to find him, if there should be need. The doubt was a very small one, for she seemed to know that the morrow afternoon would see him at Cheyne Walk.

And so she stole away out of the room, trembling lest a rustle of her dress should betray her. Down the steps she went, and out into the garden. The shrubs hid her from the house, and, not stopping to notice the new beauty which had come upon the flowers, she stole, feeling like a guilty thing, through the garden and out noiselessly through the wicket into the quiet lane-way behind the house.

Before long she was at the “Saracen’s Head,” and having ordered her carriage with all speed, was on her way to Chelsea before the sun began to set.

CHAPTER IX

AT CHEYNE WALK

IN the twilight that night Betty stole out alone, and walked by herself up the path by the river where Rafe had given her the golden buttons. Here, all hidden by the trees, turning to the west where the afterglow was like the rosy blush on her own face, she let out her soul in thankfulness to God. Then she went home. That night she slept like a tired child, and never woke till the glad sun, peering in at her windows, recalled her to what the day might bring forth.

All that morning she moved with the ordered routine of her life, and no one in the household saw enough change to cause a thought.

When, however, the noon had turned, Betty went to her room and made her toilet most carefully, The time since Rafe had seen her seemed so long that she feared it might have left some stamp upon her, and anxiously she used her glass as every good woman does; for a good woman is a true woman, and her glass — next to her Bible — is ever her help in self-respect. She put on once again the white dress in which she had parted from Rafe, and the gaps where the two buttons were missing were unmistakable. Then she stole down to the drawing-room and sat in her old place on the sofa where she had used to sit with Rafe. It was many a day since she had sat in the spot, for she had felt that to sit there was to hope too much, and if she hoped too much some tinge of blame might rest on Rafe. But now she was assured, and she need no longer deny herself the sweet luxury.

After a while Abigail came into the room and looked around, but not seeing her mistress in her accustomed seat by the window, turned to go out. Betty called to her —

"I am here, Abigail!"

"Dear heart alive! Miss Betty, I never looked for you in that seat. I did but want to ask if you will walk or ride after dinner." "Neither, Abigail. I think I shall sit quiet this afternoon. I had a long day in London yesterday, and I daresay it tired me."

"'Deed, then, Miss Betty, I feared so at first; but when I saw you come home I thought you never looked less tired in your life. But it's the way with young maids — they're not tired when they are, and when they are they're not!" with which seemingly incomprehensible piece of wisdom she withdrew.

The time seemed to Betty to fly with leaden wings that afternoon. She would not let herself come to any definite conclusion as to what she even hoped, but held surmise, of joy and pain alike, at arm's length. Of one thing she was certain — that she knew what she intended as to the result. The manner of it and the means were all that were left open. After dinner she took her seat in the window, ostensibly reading the last part of Mr. Pope's "Homer"; but the pages were unturned. From her seat she could watch the roadway for some little distance; no one could come near the house without being seen by her, though the screen of flowers which grew in their pots on the window-ledge hid her from strange eyes.

The clock had just struck four when her heart leaped, for her eyes, raised from her book, had lighted on the form she looked for. There was no fear of her mistaking that upright carriage, that swinging gait. She peered between the leaves of the plants, and her hungry eyes lit on Rafe's face. And then, oh! the tumult of joy in her heart! He was unchanged save in all manly and noble ways. The pain, and suffering, and responsibility, and high endeavour of the years that had passed had only purified and ennobled his face. Her glance well justified the opinion she had formed the evening before from his voice and words. She did not dare to look long, but with a light bound and with noiseless foot flew back to her old seat on the sofa, and waited with the throbbing of her heart stilled by the magnitude of her expectancy. Then came the knock, and Abigail herself flew to open the door. The old woman may have taken some hint from seeing Betty in her old seat, and her intuition grasped the rest; or it may simply have been that she recognised the knock. None ever knew, not even she herself, for none ever asked; but she threw open the door, and recoiled with a halfsmothered cry —

"Master Rafe! oh my dear young master!" She threw her arms impulsively round him, and instantly drew back. "Forgive me," she said, "I forgot my duty." Then in a louder and more ceremonious voice, and with a certain ominous stiffening of her back which of old the children had come to recognise as a sort of storm signal, she went on: "The mistress has been looking out for you, sir. She was much distressed that you had not called sooner."

"Looking out for me!" said Rafe, in amazement, for in his new simplicity of thought, and with his mind concentrated on the last twenty-four hours, he overlooked the longer time. "Looking for me! Since when?"

"Only for the last five years, sir!" said the old nurse, with mingled dignity and sarcasm. A sweet smile broke over Rafe's face as he took her by the hand:'

"You are right, my dear, good soul. The time has been long; but be assured it has not gone quickly with me. I can only hope that you who so love Miss Betty will in time forgive me."

"Dear heart! but I must go break it to the child that you are come."

She retired demurely as far as the foot of the staircase, and then ran with what speed her old legs could make to the drawing-room. Her method of breaking it was her own. She darted into the door and called in a fierce, joyous whisper— “He is here, Miss Betty! He is here! and looking finer than ever. Let me see, darling, that you are looking your best!” and she eyed her mistress critically for an instant.

Then she retired, seemingly satisfied, as Betty said in grand simplicity —

“Tell him to come up, Abigail dear. You need not announce!”

Abigail flew to the stair-head; and thence coming down with sedateness and decorum, gave her message —

“My mistress will receive you, sir, in the drawing-room. You will excuse me accompanying you, but my orders are that I am not to announce you!”

Rafe smiled at her so sweetly that in her secret heart she forgave him on the spot. Then she stayed silent, keeping a jealous watch lest any of the maids should by any bungling accident make interruption of her mistress.

Betty sat silent — silent and still as death. She heard Rafe’s footsteps on the carpeted stair, and wondered why they were so slow. How she would have flown had she been going to him! But he was a man, and it was her place to await him; the sweetness of the coming moments was not to be forestalled.

The door opened and closed again, and she looked up. Before her stood Rafe, more erect than ever as to his body, for his years of soldiering had perfected his bearing. But his head was slightly drooped; the long years of hopes, of fears, of imaginings, told their tale when now he stood in the presence of the woman who had been his very sunlight. There was no need for him to speak. Had she not known already, Betty would have understood by instinct the meaning of that humble bearing. The lesson of her own patient years of hoping and waiting were not lost; and face to face these two loving hearts realised that for them time had stood still, and the golden days of their lives had even to begin. All Betty's joy and pride and hope and love shone in her sweet eyes as she rose to her feet, and with one glad word— "Rafe!" — whose tone was music to the man who heard, and to the angels who smiled approvingly — fairly leaped to the arms which opened to receive her.

When they sat again in their old place on the sofa, Betty said, as she held his hand and pressed it to her side in the sweet old fashion of her childhood —

"Rafe dear, I have a confession to make; you must forgive me, for I could not help what I did."

"Granted, my dear one, whatever it may be," said Rafe, and it need hardly be said he took advantage of the occasion for another kiss.

"I was in Cousin Fenton's study last afternoon!" She paused, for Rafe instinctively stood up. "Nay, you must sit again and be my prisoner!" She held out her hands, and as he extended his to take them his scarred wrists became exposed beneath the ruffles. With a low cry, almost a sob, Betty drew them to her and bent down and kissed them. "Oh! Rafe," she said, "the word is a pang to me, for it wrought these cruel wounds!" Then she smiled through her tears as she went on: "'Tis I who am the prisoner now, but oh how different! for my chains are of light, and music, and flowers and love, whilst these " and she bent over, despite Rafe's protest, and kissed the scars again.

For an instant Rafe said nothing; then he spoke with a grave solemnity that Betty never forgot all her life long —

"I grieve beyond measure that I must come to you with such a scar. Therefore, oh! my dear one, be most kind to me and turn not against me the arrows of my own conscience. Though it be true that these scars come about from no shameful cause at man's hands, yet I may not forget that they are justly given at the hands of God. I have come to realise, Betty, something of the wonder of His ways; the sowing and the reaping is all in just measure though men know not or care not at the seed-time what grain it is that they scatter. ' Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.' These scars shall be warnings to me for all my life; till at the last, if it may be in God's good time, the. hands that bear them shall lie folded over a peaceful heart."

Betty took the two maimed hands in hers and held them to her heart as she answered —

"You are right, Rafe: they must be guides to us both. I must share in all things; and then you will truly feel that you have won something for me too out of that bitter time!" Then she went on:

"I had come into the house in Finsbury Square through the garden, and no one saw me. I had fallen asleep in Cousin Fenton's own chair, and I was only awakened by his coming — and yours. I listened to all, Rafe. I could not help it; for at the first I was spellbound, and then afraid to stir. And then — then, oh! Rafe, when I heard your brave words and knew of the noble doubt that was in your hetrt, I did not want to go, for I feared that then any movement might have turned things awry, and I hoped — oh! Rafe, how I hoped! — that your trust in my love would win in that struggle, and that you would come to me as one knowing."

Here she faltered, and her voice broke. With a silent gush of tears she laid her head on her lover's breast, and her arms went instinctively round his neck. Rafe soothed her and stroked her sunny hair, and when he thought she was not aware of it, kissed the tresses. But this did not pass unknown, though Betty said nothing, in sweet hope that the transgression might be repeated. The years that had passed had changed Betty from a girl into a woman, and though her heart and mind retained all their bashfulness, there was a new yielding to the sweet impulses which came to her, as to all the daughters of Eve. The years had made a new hunger of the heart, and when she felt her lover in her arms, and heard his heart beat close to hers, she wanted something more than the simple assurance that he would not leave her again.

And so the two sat silent till even Abigail at the stair-foot was satisfied that the reconciliation, if there were need of one, was complete, and hurried to the kitchen and the still-room to see that a worthy supper was provided. By and by she went to the drawing-room to learn her mistress's commands; and though she was delayed by a distressing cough of sudden oncoming, which took her in the hall, and lasted with increasing violence till her hand was on the door, she made her entrance at last When she saw Rafe and Betty sitting as of old on the sofa — for the sound of her coughing had driven them apart — the tears of gladness rushed unbidden to her eyes; which seeing, Betty flew to her, and, putting her arms round her, kissed them away. Rafe came over to her, and, taking her hand, said in hi's old, boyish way —

"Abigail, I must have a kiss too. For all your loving care of Betty when I was away who should have been at her side; for all your hope and cheer and belief; for the tenderness and love and care, you must count me your friend and servant so long as we both shall live!" and stooping over her he kissed the old wrinkled cheek which blushed like a maiden's under his caress.

In order to put herself at ease again, Abigail said, in as natural a way as she could manage —

"What are your commands for supper, Miss Betty?"

"All! all! everything!" said Betty, dancing round the room like a happy child. "Kill the fatted calf, Abigail! Kill the whole herd of them. Rafe is come home! Rafe is come home!"

"Dear heart!" said Abigail, looking at her with glad eyes, and taking Rafe into her confidence with a look. Betty suddenly stopped and said —

"And oh! Abigail, lay another cover, for I should not be surprised if Cousin Fenton were to join us at supper."

"La, Miss Betty, surely his lordship wouldn't come out here at this hour all by himself; and him not knowing whether you are at home."

"Perhaps not, Abigail; but I should make ready for him anyway, lest by chance he should come."

So Abigail went off to add to her preparations; for a gentleman who had once been Lord Mayor of London was to her of no small importance. From the day of Mayoralty he had never been to her anything but "His Lordship" or "My Lord."

It was not long before there was another knock at the door, hesitating and unobtrusive, and Abigail herself flew to open it. Visitors at such an hour were rare enough, and to-night, when there was every reason for keeping strangers at their distance, the faithful guardian would not trust to any less responsible person the answering of queries. Her first thought was that Miss. Betty's prophecy was true, and that Alderman Fenton had arrived; but that could not be, for there was no sound of wheels, not even of hoof-strokes, as would have been had he ridden. So it was with a certain curiosity that she opened the door. Her wonder was in no wise lessened when she saw that the guest was none other than the Alderman himself — the late Lord Mayor — His Lordship — all alone and on foot, and looking no more than an ordinary and unofficial man! Abigail's wonder grew, as with admonitory finger on lip he stepped into the hall, and himself closed the door softly behind him. She waited in respectful silence for him to speak, yet not without a secret bridling, which would have manifested itself to any one unsheltered by the memory of Lord Mayoral state. The Alderman asked —

"Has your mistress had any visitors today?"

Abigail, under ordinary circumstances, would have blurted out the whole matter; but since there was a mystery, she felt that she should best help herself to some clue by being as uncommunicative as might be. Out of the very questions put to her she might be able to construe something, so she swiftly answered —

"Yes, my lord!"

Then the Alderman got even more vague.

"Ladies?"

"No, my lord."

"At what time was the visit paid?"

"After dinner, my lord."

"At what time did they go?"

"Not yet, my lord."

"Good! How many gentlemen were there in the party?" Abigail began to see daylight.

"Only one, my lord!"

"Good! Do you know him?"

The old man was manifestly perturbed in his mind as he asked this question. So Abigail's eagerness to tell and her respect for his dignity combined with her liking for him — for he was very dear to Miss Betty and had always been kind to herself — all worked in the direction he wished; putting her mouth close to his ear she whispered exultingly —

"'Tis Master Rafe come home; and oh! my dear lord, this is a joyful house this night!"

The old Alderman sank down on the high-backed settle in the hall and covered his face with his hands.

"Now God be thanked!" he said, and when he took his hands away Abigail saw that his eyes were wet. She too was moved, and as she raised the corner of her apron to her eyes, he bent over, took both her hands, and said— "Good Mistress Abigail, the faithful friend of that dear child, we old folks, methinks, are those that have the youngest hearts still. Only that we cry with joy when the time has gone by that we can cry at sorrow. I have been so anxious — in such suspense — that I was afraid almost to know the truth I sought. How did she receive him?"

The old woman shook her head:

"That I don't know, my lord, but I take it that there wasn't any great quarrel between them, for when I was up there awhile gone they was sitting together on the sofy as they used to sit."

The Alderman paused, and then with some diffidence he said —

"Do you think now, Mistress Abigail, that I might go up just for a little while?"

"Dear heart, now! but you came that quiet that I quite forgot. Miss Betty told me herself to lay a cover for you for supper, for that she wouldn't be surprised if you looked in this evening. To think of it!

She must be a witch!”

“Then go and ask her, if you please, Mistress Abigail, if she will care to receive me this evening?”

Abigail departed at once on her errand. A moment later Betty came flying down the stairs, calling out —

“Where is he? He must have come very quietly, for I never heard him!” and she threw her arms round him and kissed him. “Come upstairs,” she said. “I was hoping you would come, for I have something to tell you.” Arm in arm they came back to the drawingroom where Rafe was standing at the door. As they drew close, each man extended a hand. Betty, taking them, placed them together and put both her own hands over the clasped ones. The Alderman was about to speak when Betty began, so he waited.

“Cousin Fenton I have a confession to make, and you must let me make it now. I was sitting in your own chair in your study last evening when you talked with Rafe.”

His surprise overmastered him. “God bless my soul! I hope you didn’t hear—”

“Oh yes, I did! thank God! I did. For I wouldn’t for anything miss out of my life that conversation of two men whom I love and honour. Rafe knows what I think of him; or perhaps he knows a little — it will take a longer time to let him know it all!” and she looked at him lovingly. “But you know up to now only that I am an eavesdropper. How am I to thank you? You know what I mean! I know your kindness and your sympathy already — I — I shall try to show you some day,” and once again the sweet eyes were filled with tears, but this time they were of pure joy. “My dear old friend, your wish has come true; the good God is giving me my heart’s desire.”

They all three went and sat on the sofa, Betty being between the two men and holding a hand of each; and the time seemed to have flown by too quickly when Abigail came and announced that supper was served. Betty took her cousin's arm and smiled at Rafe as she did so, saying to the Alderman but so that Rafe could hear —

"A hostess must not be taken down by her husband; and Rafe is not far from that now!" The blush on her face as she spoke was a poem in itself.

That was a happy meal; and if there was any of the three who sat at meat, or any of those who waited on them, who was not content no sign of the feeling was evidenced. It was not late when Rafe and the Alderman went away together; for in Cheyne Walk they kept early hours, and the road to London was one which had its own anxieties. Rafe took a little longer to say goodbye than his elder, who did not, however, seem impatient as he stood chatting in the hall with Abigail; but when he came running down the stairs Betty's sweet "goodbye" followed his footsteps like a blessing.

The Alderman had left his carriage at the inn at Chelsea, and they drove to town together. On the way Mr. Fenton learned where Rafe was staying, and drove straight to the place and took away his belongings. Rafe remonstrated, he feared he might give trouble; but the Alderman would hear no denial. Willy-nilly he must stay in his house till the happy time came when he would be with Betty.

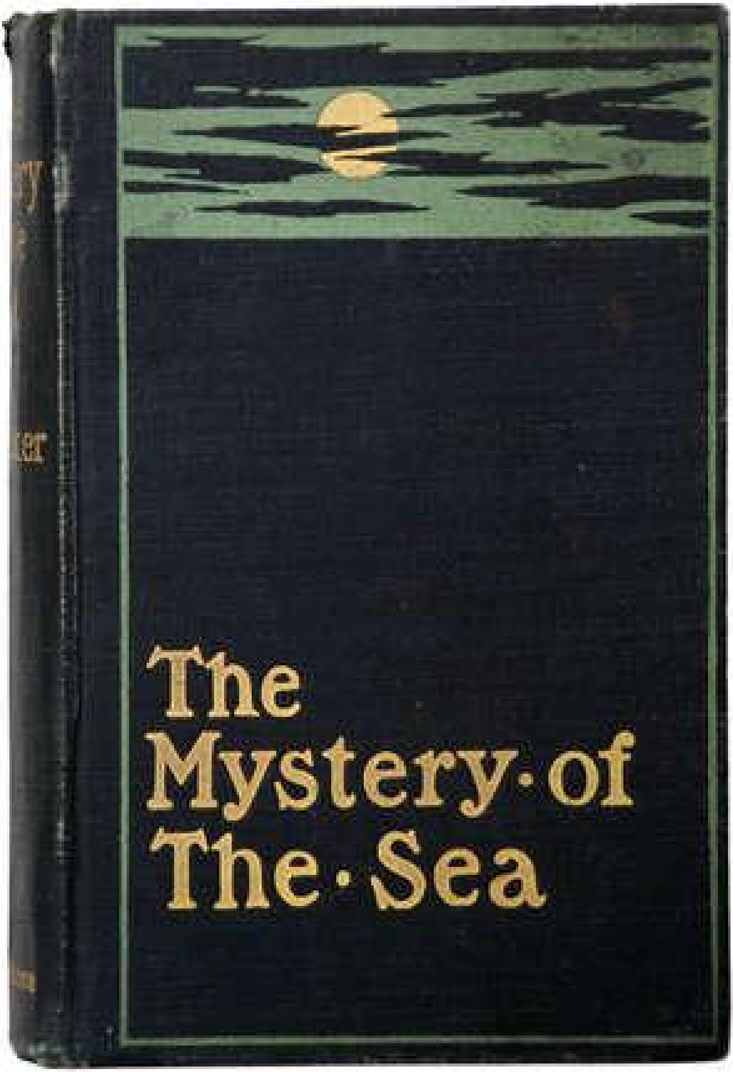
"Tut man!" he said; "d'ye think that I would let Betty's husband lie at an inn? The dear lass! When she told me to take her to supper and gave her reason I seemed to see the time come already that please God will come. She and you going through life hand in hand, trusting each other and taking light to guide yourselves and others out of the troubles that are behind. I hope to see you with your children at your knees, teaching them how to grow into good men and women, and making the world the more like what God would have it because you both have lived in it!” Rafe reverently lifted his hat, and as he raised his hands the back flash of the carriage lamps showed his scarred wrists, and he said— “God helping us, your vision will be true.”

It must be taken that God did help them; for the record of all their lives showed that the old man’s insight had not deceived him.

THE END

The Mystery of the Sea

This novel was first published in 1902 by Doubleday, Page and Company of New York. The first two chapters were later republished as the short story *The Seer*. The novel tells the story of Archie Hunter, who is on vacation on Cruden Bay, Aberdeenshire, when he begins to see strange visions of death. An old local woman, Gormala, possesses the same gift — the 'second sight' — and informs Archie of an ancient legend of "the mystery of the sea." According to this legend, when a "golden man" with "death as his bride" should die at Lammas-tide, the mystery will be revealed.


The Mystery of The Sea

The first edition

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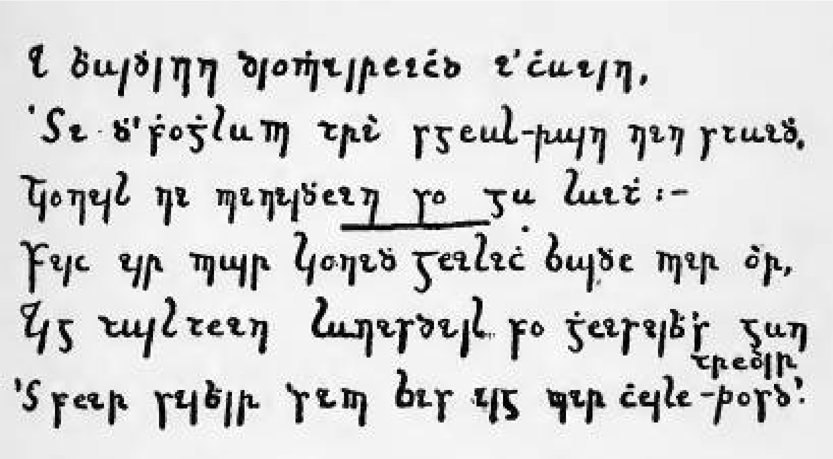
TO

DAISY GILBEY RIVIERE

OF THE THIRD GENERATION OF

LOVING AND LOYAL FRIENDS

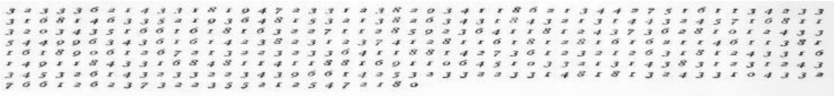


A ḃuiḋinn ḋioṁaireaċḋ a' ċuain,
'Se d'ḟoġlum trí sgeul-ruin nan stuaḋ.
Tionail na mianaiḋean so gu leir:-
Ruic air muir lionaḋ gealaċ buiḋe mar ór,
Ags tuilteann Lunasdail fo ġeasaiḃ gun
treoir
'S fear sgḃir sem bas ags mar ċeile-posḋ.

“To win the mystery o’ the sea,
“An’ learn the secrets that there be,
“Gather in ane these weirds three:

“A gowden moon on a flowin’ tide;
“An’ Lammas floods for the spell to bide;
“An’ a gowden mon wi death for his bride.”

Gaelic verse and English translation.



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allowance or benefite of Clergie or ſanctuarie.

And for the full expreſſing what perſon and perſons ſhall bee entended within this braunch to be roges, vagabonds, and ſturdie beggers, to haue and receiue the puniſhment aforeſayd, for the ſayd lewde maner of life: It is nowe publiſhed, declared and ſet forth by the authoritie of this preſent parliament, that all and euerie ſuch perſon and perſons, that be or vtter themſelues to bee proctours or procuratours, going in or about any countrey or countreis within this realme without ſufficient authoritie deriued from, or vnder our ſoueraigne ladie the queene: and all other idle perſons going about in any countrey of the ſayde realme, vſing ſubtill, craftie, and vnlawfull games or playes, and ſome of them faining themſelues to haue knowledge in Phiſnomie, Palmeſtrie or other abuſed ſciences, whereby they beare yͤ people in hand they can tell their deſtinies, deathes, & fortunes, and ſuch other like fantaſticall imaginations: and all and euerie perſon & perſons, being whole and mightie in bodie, and able to labour, hauing not land or maiſter, nor vſing any lawfull marchandiſe, craft, or miſterie, whereby he or ſhe might get his or her liuing, and can giue no reckoning how he or ſhe dooth lawfully get

Clergie.
Sanctuarie.

Roges

Proctors

Idle perſons

Games.
Cards.

Phiſnomie.

CHAPTER I. SECOND SIGHT

I had just arrived at Cruden Bay on my annual visit, and after a late breakfast was sitting on the low wall which was a continuation of the escarpment of the bridge over the Water of Cruden. Opposite to me, across the road and standing under the only little clump of trees in the place was a tall, gaunt old woman, who kept looking at me intently. As I sat, a little group, consisting of a man and two women, went by. I found my eyes follow them, for it seemed to me after they had passed me that the two women walked together and the man alone in front carrying on his shoulder a little black box — a coffin. I shuddered as I thought, but a moment later I saw all three abreast just as they had been. The old woman was now looking at me with eyes that blazed. She came across the road and said to me without preface:

"What saw ye then, that yer e'en looked so awed?" I did not like to tell her so I did not answer. Her great eyes were fixed keenly upon me, seeming to look me through and through. I felt that I grew quite red, whereupon she said, apparently to herself: "I thocht so! Even I did not see that which he saw."

"How do you mean?" I queried. She answered ambiguously: "Wait! Ye shall perhaps know before this hour to-morrow!"

Her answer interested me and I tried to get her to say more; but she would not. She moved away with a grand stately movement that seemed to become her great gaunt form.

After dinner whilst I was sitting in front of the hotel, there was a great commotion in the village; much running to and fro of men and women with sad mien. On questioning them I found that a child had been drowned in the little harbour below. Just then a woman and a man, the same that had passed the bridge earlier in the day, ran by with wild looks. One of the bystanders looked after them pityingly as he said:

“Puir souls. It’s a sad home-comin’ for them the nicht.”

“Who are they?” I asked. The man took off his cap reverently as he answered:

“The father and mother of the child that was drowned!” As he spoke I looked round as though some one had called me.

There stood the gaunt woman with a look of triumph on her face.

* * * * *

The curved shore of Cruden Bay, Aberdeenshire, is backed by a waste of sandhills in whose hollows seagrass and moss and wild violets, together with the pretty “grass of Parnassus” form a green carpet. The surface of the hills is held together by bent-grass and is eternally shifting as the wind takes the fine sand and drifts it to and fro. All behind is green, from the meadows that mark the southern edge of the bay to the swelling uplands that stretch away and away far in the distance, till the blue mist of the mountains at Braemar sets a kind of barrier. In the centre of the bay the highest point of the land that runs downward to the sea looks like a miniature hill known as the Hawklaw; from this point onward to the extreme south, the land runs high with a gentle trend downwards.

Cruden sands are wide and firm and the sea runs out a considerable distance. When there is a storm with the wind on shore the whole bay is a mass of leaping waves and broken water that threatens every instant to annihilate the stake-nets which stretch out here and there along the shore. More than a few vessels have been lost on these wide stretching sands, and it was perhaps the roaring of the shallow seas and the terror which they inspired which sent the crews to the spirit room and the bodies of those of them which came to shore later on, to the churchyard on the hill.

If Cruden Bay is to be taken figuratively as a mouth, with the sand hills for soft palate, and the green Hawklaw as the tongue, the rocks which work the extremities are its teeth. To the north the rocks of red granite rise jagged and broken. To the south, a mile and a half away as the crow flies, Nature seems to have manifested its wildest forces. It is here, where the little promontory called Whinnyfold juts out, that the two great geological features of the Aberdeen coast meet. The red sienite of the north joins the black gneiss of the south. That union must have been originally a wild one; there are evidences of an upheaval which must have shaken the earth to its centre. Here and there are great masses of either species of rock hurled upwards in every conceivable variety of form, sometimes fused or pressed together so that it is impossible to say exactly where gneiss ends or sienite begins; but broadly speaking here is an irregular line of separation. This line runs seawards to the east and its strength is shown in its outcrop. For half a mile or more the rocks rise through the sea singly or in broken masses ending in a dangerous cluster known as “The Skares” and which has had for centuries its full toll of wreck and disaster. Did the sea hold its dead where they fell, its floor around the Skares would be whitened with their bones, and new islands could build themselves with the piling wreckage. At times one may see here the ocean in her fiercest mood; for it is when the tempest drives from the south-east that the sea is fretted amongst the rugged rocks and sends its spume landwards. The rocks that at calmer times rise dark from the briny deep are lost to sight for moments in the grand onrush of the waves. The seagulls which usually whiten them, now flutter around screaming, and the sound of their shrieks comes in on the gale almost in a continuous note, for the single cries are merged in the multitudinous roar of sea and air.

The village, squatted beside the emboucher of the Water of Cruden at the northern side of the bay is simple enough; a few rows of fishermen's cottages, two or three great red-tiled drying-sheds nestled in the sand-heap behind the fishers' houses. For the rest of the place as it was when first I saw it, a little lookout beside a tall flagstaff on the northern cliff, a few scattered farms over the inland prospect, one little hotel down on the western bank of the Water of Cruden with a fringe of willows protecting its sunk garden which was always full of fruits and flowers.

From the most southern part of the beach of Cruden Bay to Whinnyfold village the distance is but a few hundred yards; first a steep pull up the face of the rock; and then an even way, beside part of which runs a tiny stream. To the left of this path, going towards Whinnyfold, the ground rises in a bold slope and then falls again all round, forming a sort of wide miniature hill of some eighteen or twenty acres. Of this the southern side is sheer, the black rock dipping into the waters of the little bay of Whinnyfold, in the centre of which is a picturesque island of rock shelving steeply from the water on the northern side, as is the tendency of all the gneiss and granite in this part. But to east and north there are irregular bays or openings, so that the furthest points of the promontory stretch out like fingers. At the tips of these are reefs of sunken rock falling down to deep water and whose existence can only be suspected in bad weather when the rush of the current beneath sends up swirling eddies or curling masses of foam. These little bays are mostly curved and are green where falling earth or drifting sand have hidden the outmost side of the rocks and given a foothold to the seagrass and clover. Here have been at some time or other great caves, now either fallen in or silted up with sand, or obliterated with the earth brought down in the rush of surface-water in times of long rain. In one of these bays, Broad Haven, facing right out to the Skares, stands an isolated pillar of rock called locally the “Puir mon” through whose base, time and weather have worn a hole through which one may walk dryshod.

Through the masses of rocks that run down to the sea from the sides and shores of all these bays are here and there natural channels with straight edges as though cut on purpose for the taking in of the cobbles belonging to the fisher folk of Whinnyfold.

When first I saw the place I fell in love with it. Had it been possible I should have spent my summer there, in a house of my own, but the want of any place in which to live forbade such an opportunity. So I stayed in the little hotel, the Kilmarnock Arms.

The next year I came again, and the next, and the next. And then I arranged to take a feu at Whinnyfold and to build a house overlooking the Skares for myself. The details of this kept me constantly going to Whinnyfold, and my house to be was always in my thoughts.

Hitherto my life had been an uneventful one. At school I was, though secretly ambitious, dull as to results. At College I was better off, for my big body and athletic powers gave me a certain position in which I had to overcome my natural shyness. When I was about eight and twenty I found myself nominally a barrister, with no knowledge whatever of the practice of law and but little less of the theory, and with a commission in the Devil’s Own — the irreverent name given to the Inns of Court Volunteers. I had few relatives, but a comfortable, though not great, fortune; and I had been round the world, dilettante fashion.

CHAPTER II. GORMALA

All that night I thought of the dead child and of the peculiar vision which had come to me. Sleeping or waking it was all the same; my mind could not leave the parents in procession as seen in imagination, or their distracted mien in reality. Mingled with them was the great-eyed, aquiline-featured, gaunt old woman who had taken such an interest in the affair, and in my part of it. I asked the landlord if he knew her, since, from his position as postmaster he knew almost everyone for miles around. He told me that she was a stranger to the place. Then he added:

"I can't imagine what brings her here. She has come over from Peterhead two or three times lately; but she doesn't seem to have anything at all to do. She has nothing to sell and she buys nothing. She's not a tripper, and she's not a beggar, and she's not a thief, and she's not a worker of any sort. She's a queer-looking lot anyhow. I fancy from her speech that she's from the west; probably from some of the far-out islands. I can tell that she has the Gaelic from the way she speaks."

Later on in the day, when I was walking on the shore near the Hawklaw, she came up to speak to me. The shore was quite lonely, for in those days it was rare to see anyone on the beach except when the salmon fishers drew their nets at the ebbing tide. I was walking towards Whinnyfold when she came upon me silently from behind. She must have been hidden among the bent-grass of the sandhills for had she been anywhere in view I must have seen her on that desolate shore. She was evidently a most imperious person; she at once addressed me in a tone and manner which made me feel as though I were in some way an inferior, and in somehow to blame:

"What for did ye no tell me what ye saw yesterday?" Instinctively I answered:

"I don't know why. Perhaps because it seemed so ridiculous." Her stern features hardened into scorn as she replied:

"Are Death and the Doom then so redeekulous that they pleasure ye intil silence?" I somehow felt that this was a little too much and was about to make a sharp answer, when suddenly it struck me as a remarkable thing that she knew already. Filled with surprise I straightway asked her:

"Why, how on earth do you know? I told no one." I stopped for I felt all at sea; there was some mystery here which I could not fathom. She seemed to read my mind like an open book, for she went on looking at me as she spoke, searchingly and with an odd smile.

"Eh! laddie, do ye no ken that ye hae een that can see? Do ye no understand that ye hae een that can speak? Is it that one with the Gift o' Second Sight has no an understandin' o' it. Why, yer face when ye saw the mark o' the Doom, was like a printed book to een like mine."

"Do you mean to tell me" I asked "that you could tell what I saw, simply by looking at my face?"

"Na! na! laddie. Not all that, though a Seer am I; but I knew that you had seen the Doom! It's no that varied that there need be any mistake. After all Death is only one, in whatever way we may speak!" After a pause of thought I asked her:

"If you have the power of Second Sight why did you not see the vision, or whatever it was, yourself?"

"Eh! laddie" she answered, shaking her head "'Tis little ye ken o' the wark o' the Fates! Learn ye then that the Voice speaks only as it listeth into chosen ears, and the Vision comes only to chosen een. None can will to hear or to see, to pleasure themselves."

“Then” I said, and I felt that there was a measure of triumph in my tone “if to none but the chosen is given to know, how comes it that you, who seem not to have been chosen on this occasion at all events, know all the same?” She answered with a touch of impatience:

“Do ye ken, young sir, that even mortal een have power to see much, if there be behind them the thocht, an’ the knowledge and the experience to guide them aright. How, think ye, is it that some can see much, and learn much as they gang; while others go blind as the mowdiwart, at the end o’ the journey as before it?”

“Then perhaps you will tell me how much you saw, and how you saw it?”

“Ah! to them that have seen the Doom there needs but sma’ guidance to their thochts. Too lang, an’ too often hae I mysen seen the death-sark an’ the watch-candle an’ the dead-hole, not to know when they are seen tae ither een. Na, na! laddie, what I kent o’ yer seein’ was no by the Gift but only by the use o’ my proper een. I kent not the muckle o’ what ye saw. Not whether it was ane or ither o’ the garnishins o’ the dead; but weel I kent that it was o’ death.”

“Then,” I said interrogatively “Second Sight is altogether a matter of chance?”

“Chance! chance!” she repeated with scorn. “Na! young sir; when the Voice has spoken there is no more chance than that the nicht will follow the day.”

“You mistake me,” I said, feeling somewhat superior now that I had caught her in an error, “I did not for a moment mean that the Doom — whatever it is — is not a true forerunner. What I meant was that it seems to be a matter of chance in whose ear the Voice — whatever it is — speaks; when once it has been ordained that it is to sound in the ear of some one.” Again she answered with scorn:

“Na, na! there is no chance o’ ocht aboot the Doom. Them that send forth the Voice and the Seein’ know well to whom it is sent and why. Can ye no comprehend that it is for no bairn-play that such goes forth. When the Voice speaks, it is mainly followed by tears an’ woe an’ lamentation! Nae! nor is it only one bit manifestation that stands by its lanes, remote and isolate from all ither. Truly ’tis but a pairt o’ the great scheme o’ things; an’ be sure that whoso is chosen to see or to hear is chosen weel, an’ must hae their pairt in what is to be, on to the verra end.”

“Am I to take it” I asked, “that Second Sight is but a little bit of some great purpose which has to be wrought out by means of many kinds; and that whoso sees the Vision or hears the Voice is but the blind unconscious instrument of Fate?”

“Aye! laddie. Weel eneuch the Fates know their wishes an’ their wark, no to need the help or the thocht of any human — blind or seein’, sane or silly, conscious or unconscious.”

All through her speaking I had been struck by the old woman’s use of the word ‘Fate,’ and more especially when she used it in the plural. It was evident that, Christian though she might be — and in the West they are generally devout observants of the duties of their creed — her belief in this respect came from some of the old pagan mythologies. I should have liked to question her on this point; but I feared to shut her lips against me. Instead I asked her:

“Tell me, will you, if you don’t mind, of some case you have known yourself of Second Sight?”

“’Tis no for them to brag or boast to whom has been given to see the wark o’ the hand o’ Fate. But sine ye are yerself a Seer an’ would learn, then I may speak. I hae seen the sea ruffle wi’oot cause in the verra spot where later a boat was to gang doon, I hae heard on a lone moor the hammerin' o' the coffin-wright when one passed me who was soon to dee. I hae seen the death-sark fold round the speerit o' a drowned one, in baith ma sleepin' an' ma wakin' dreams. I hae heard the settin' doom o' the Spaiks, an' I hae seen the Weepers on a' the crood that walked. Aye, an' in mony anither way hae I seen an' heard the Coming o' the Doom."

"But did all the seeings and hearings come true?" I asked. "Did it ever happen that you heard queer sounds or saw strange sights and that yet nothing came of them? I gather that you do not always know to whom something is going to happen; but only that death is coming to some one!" She was not displeased at my questioning but replied at once:

"Na doot! but there are times when what is seen or heard has no manifest following. But think ye, young sir, how mony a corp, still waited for, lies in the depths o' the sea; how mony lie oot on the hillsides, or are fallen in deep places where their bones whiten unkent. Nay! more, to how many has Death come in a way that men think the wark o' nature when his hastening has come frae the hand of man, untold." This was a difficult matter to answer so I changed or rather varied the subject.

"How long must elapse before the warning comes true?"

"Ye know yersel', for but yestreen ye hae seen, how the Death can follow hard upon the Doom; but there be times, nay mostly are they so, when days or weeks pass away ere the Doom is fulfilled."

"Is this so?" I asked "when you know the person regarding whom the Doom is spoken." She answered with an air of certainty which somehow carried conviction, secretly, with it.

"Even so! I know one who walks the airth now in all the pride o' his strength. But the Doom has been spoken of him. I saw him with these verra een lie prone on rocks, wi' the water rinnin' down from his hair. An' again I heard the minute bells as he went by me on a road where is no bell for a score o' miles. Aye, an' yet again I saw him in the kirk itsel' wi' corbies flyin' round him, an' mair gatherin' from afar!"

Here was indeed a case where Second Sight might be tested; so I asked her at once, though to do so I had to overcome a strange sort of repugnance:

"Could this be proved? Would it not be a splendid case to make known; so that if the death happened it would prove beyond all doubt the existence of such a thing as Second Sight." My suggestion was not well received. She answered with slow scorn:

"Beyon' all doot! Doot! Wha is there that doots the bein' o' the Doom? Learn ye too, young sir, that the Doom an' all thereby is no for traffickin' wi' them that only cares for curiosity and publeecity. The Voice and the Vision o' the Seer is no for fine madams and idle gentles to while away their time in play-toy make-believe!" I climbed down at once.

"Pardon me!" I said "I spoke without thinking. I should not have said so — to you at any rate." She accepted my apology with a sort of regal inclination; but the moment after she showed by her words she was after all but a woman!

"I will tell ye; that so in the full time ye may hae no doot yersel'. For ye are a Seer and as Them that has the power hae gien ye the Gift it is no for the like o' me to cumber the road o' their doin'. Know ye then, and remember weel, how it was told ye by Gormala MacNiel that Lauchlane Macleod o' the Outer Isles hae been Called; tho' as yet the Voice has no sounded in his ears but only in mine. But ye will see the time — —”

She stopped suddenly as though some thought had struck her, and then went on impressively:

“When I saw him lie prone on the rocks there was ane that bent ower him that I kent not in the nicht wha it was, though the licht o’ the moon was around him. We shall see! We shall see!”

Without a word more she turned and left me. She would not listen to my calling after her; but with long strides passed up the beach and was lost among the sandhills.

CHAPTER III. AN ANCIENT RUNE

On the next day I rode on my bicycle to Peterhead, and walked on the pier. It was a bright clear day, and a fresh northern breeze was blowing. The fishing boats were ready to start at the turn of the tide; and as I came up the first of them began to pass out through the harbour mouth. Their movement was beautiful to see; at first slowly, and then getting faster as the sails were hoisted, till at last they swept through the narrow entrance, scuppers under, righting themselves as they swung before the wind in the open sea. Now and again a belated smacksman came hurrying along to catch his boat before she should leave the pier.

The eastern pier of Peterhead is guarded by a massive wall of granite, built in several steps or tiers, which breaks the fury of the gale. When a northern storm is on, it is a wild spot; the waves dash over it in walls of solid green topped with mountainous masses of foam and spray. But at present, with the July sun beating down, it was a vantage post from which to see the whole harbour and the sea without. I climbed up and sat on the top, looking on admiringly, and lazily smoked in quiet enjoyment. Presently I noticed some one very like Gormala come hurrying along the pier, and now and again crouching behind one of the mooring posts. I said nothing but kept an eye on her, for I supposed that she was at her usual game of watching some one.

Soon a tall man strode leisurely along, and from every movement of the woman I could see that he was the subject of her watching. He came near where I sat, and stood there with that calm unconcerned patience which is a characteristic of the fisherman.

He was a fine-looking fellow, well over six feet high, with a tangled mass of thick red-yellow hair and curly, bushy beard. He had lustrous, far-seeing golden-brown eyes, and massive, finely-cut features. His pilot-cloth trousers spangled all over with silver herring scales, were tucked into great, bucket-boots. He wore a heavy blue jersey and a cap of weazel skin. I had been thinking of the decline of the herring from the action of the trawlers in certain waters, and fancied this would be a good opportunity to get a local opinion. Before long I strolled over and joined this son of the Vikings. He gave it, and it was a decided one, uncompromisingly against the trawlers and the laws which allowed them to do their nefarious work. He spoke in a sort of old-fashioned, biblical language which was moderate and devoid of epithets, but full of apposite illustration. When he had pointed out that certain fishing grounds, formerly most prolific of result to the fishers, were now absolutely worthless he ended his argument:

"And, sure, good master, it stands to rayson. Suppose you be a farmer, and when you have prepared your land and manured it, you sow your seed and plough the ridges and make it all safe from wind and devastatin' storm. If, when the green corn be shootin' frae the airth, you take your harrow and drag it ath'art the springin' seed, where be then the promise of your golden grain?"

For a moment or two the beauty of his voice, the deep, resonant, earnestness of his tone and the magnificent, simple purity of the man took me away from the scene. He seemed as though I had looked him through and through, and had found him to be throughout of golden worth. Possibly it was the imagery of his own speech and the colour which his eyes and hair and cap suggested, but he seemed to me for an instant as a small figure projected against a background of rolling upland clothed in ripe grain. Round his feet were massed the folds of a great white sheet whose edges faded into air. In a moment the image passed, and he stood before me in his full stature.

I almost gasped, for just behind him, where she had silently come, stood Gormala, gazing not at the fisherman but at me, with eyes that positively blazed with a sort of baleful eagerness. She was looking straight into my eyes; I knew it when I caught the look of hers.

The fisherman went on talking. I did not, however, hear what he was saying, for again some mysterious change had come over our surroundings. The blue sea had over it the mystery of the darkness of the night; the high noon sun had lost its fiery vigour and shone with the pale yellow splendour of a full moon. All around me, before and on either hand, was a waste of waters; the very air and earth seemed filmed with moving water, and the sound of falling waters was in my ears. Again, the golden fisherman was before me for an instant, not as a moving speck but in full size now he lay prone; limp and lifeless, with waxen cold cheeks, in the eloquent inaction of death. The white sheet — I could see now that it was a shroud — was around him up to his heart. I seemed to feel Gormala's eyes burning into my brain as I looked. All at once everything seemed to resume its proper proportion, and I was listening calmly to the holding forth of the Viking.

I turned instinctively and looked at Gormala. For an instant her eyes seemed to blaze triumphantly; then she pulled the little shawl which she wore closer round her shoulders and, with a gesture full of modesty and deference turned away. She climbed up the ridges of the harbour wall and sat looking across as at the sea beyond, now studded with a myriad of brown sails.

A little later the stolid indifference as to time slipped all at once from the fisherman. He was instinct with life and action, and with a touch of his cap and a "Farewell good Master!" stood poised on the very edge of the pier ready to spring on a trim, weather-beaten smack which came rushing along almost grazing the rough stone work. It made our hearts jump as he sprang on board and taking the tiller from the hand of the steersman turned the boat's head to the open sea. As she rushed out through the harbour mouth we heard behind us the voice of an old fisherman who had hobbled up to us:

"He'll do that once too often! Lauchlane Macleod is like all these men from Uist and the rest of the Out Islanders. They don't care 'naught about naught.'"

Lauchlane Macleod! The very man of whom Gormala had prophesied! The very mention of his name seemed to turn me cold.

After lunch at the hotel I played golf on the links till evening drew near. Then I got on my bicycle to return home. I had laboured slowly up the long hill to the Stirling quarry when I saw Gormala sitting on the roadside on a great boulder of red granite. She was evidently looking out for me, for when I came near she rose up and deliberately stood in the roadway in my path. I jumped off my wheel and asked her point blank what she wanted with me so much that she stopped me on the road.

Gormala was naturally an impressive figure, but at present she looked weird and almost unearthly. Her tall, gaunt form lit by the afterglow in a soft mysterious light was projected against the grey of the darkening sea, whose sombreness was emphasised by the brilliant emerald green of the sward which fell from where we stood to the jagged cliff-line.

The loneliness of the spot was profound. From where we stood not a house was to be seen, and the darkening sea was desert of sails.

It seemed as if we two were the only living things in nature's vast expanse. To me it was a little awesome. Gormala's first mysterious greeting when I had seen the mourning for the child, and her persistent following of me ever since, had begun to get on my nerves. She had become a sort of enforced condition to me, and whether she was present in the flesh or not, the expectation or the apprehension of her coming — I hardly knew which it was — kept my thoughts perpetually interested in her. Now, her weird, statuesque attitude and the scene around us finished my intellectual subjugation. The weather had changed to an almost inconceivable degree. The bright clear sky of the morning had become darkly mysterious, and the wind had died away to an ominous calm. Nature seemed altogether sentient, and willing to speak directly to a man in my own receptive mood. The Seer-woman evidently knew this, for she gave fully a minute of silence for the natural charm to work before she spoke. Then in a solemn warning voice she said:

"Time is flying by us; Lammas-tide is nigh." The words impressed me, why I know not; for though I had heard of Lammas-tide I had not the smallest idea of what was meant by it. Gormala was certainly quick with her eyes — she had that gypsy quality in remarkable degree — and she seemed to read my face like an open book. There was a suppressed impatience in her manner, as of one who must stop in the midst of some important matter to explain to a child whose aid is immediately necessary:

"Ye no ken why? Is it that ye dinna heed o' Lammas-tide, or that ye no ken o' the prophecy of the Mystery of the Sea and the treasures that lie hid therein." I felt more than ever abashed, and that I should have known long ago those things of which the gaunt woman spoke, towering above me as I leaned on my wheel. She went on:

“An’ ye no ken, then listen and learn!” and she spoke the following rune in a strange, staccato cadence which seemed to suit our surroundings and to sink into my heart and memory so deep that to forget would be impossible:

“To win the Mystery o’ the Sea, “An’ learn the secrets that there be, “Gather in one these weirds three:

“A gowden moon on a flowin’ tide, “And Lammas floods for the spell to bide; “And a gowden mon wi’ death for his bride.”

There was a long pause of silence between us, and I felt very strangely. The sea before me took odd, indefinite shape. It seemed as though it was of crystal clearness, and that from where I gazed I could see all its mysteries. That is, I could see so as to know there were mysteries, though what they were individually I could not even dream. The past and the present and the future seemed to be mingled in one wild, chaotic, whirling dream, from the mass of which thoughts and ideas seemed now and again to fly out unexpectedly on all sides as do sparks from hot iron under the hammer. Within my heart grew vague indefinite yearnings, aspirations, possibilities. There came a sense of power so paramount that instinctively I drew myself up to my full height and became conscious of the physical vigour within me. As I did so I looked around and seemed to wake from a dream.

Naught around me but the drifting clouds, the silent darkening land and the brooding sea. Gormala was nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER IV. LAMMAS FLOODS

When I got to Cruden it was quite dark. I had lingered by the way thinking of Gormala MacNiel and all the queer kind of mystery in which she seemed to be enmeshing me. The more I thought, the more I was puzzled; for the strangest thing of all to me was that I understood part of what seemed to be a mystery. For instance I was but imperfectly acquainted with the Seer-woman's view of what was to be the result of her watching of Lauchlane Macleod. I knew of course from her words at our first conversation that in him she recognised a man doomed to near death according to the manifestation of her own power of Second Sight; but I knew what she did not seem to, that this was indeed a golden man. From the momentary glimpse which I had had in that queer spell of trance, or whatever it was which had come to me on the pier head, I had seemed to *know* him as a man of gold, sterling throughout. It was not merely that his hair was red gold and that his eyes might fairly be called golden, but his whole being could only be expressed in that way; so that when Gormala spoke, the old rhyme seemed at once a prime factor in the group of three powers which had to be united before the fathoming of the Mystery of the Sea. I accordingly made up my mind to speak with the Seer-woman and to ask her to explain. My own intellectual attitude to the matter interested me. I was not sceptical, I did not believe; but I think my mind hung in poise. Certainly my sympathies tended towards the mysterious side, backed up by some kind of understanding of the inner nature of things which was emotional or unintentional rather than fixed.

All that night I seemed to dream, my mind working eternally round the data of the day; hundreds of different relationships between

Gormala, Lauchlane Macleod, Lammas-tide, the moon and the secrets of the sea revolved before me. It was grey morning before I fell asleep to the occasional chirping of the earliest birds.

As sometimes happens after a night of uneasy dreaming of some disturbing topic, the reaction of the morning carried oblivion with it. It was well into the afternoon when all at once I remembered the existence of the witch-woman — for as such I was beginning to think of Gormala. The thought came accompanied by a sense of oppression which was not of fear, but which was certainly of uneasiness. Was it possible that the woman had in some way, or to some degree, hypnotised me. I remembered with a slightly nervous feeling how the evening before I had stopped on the roadway obedient to her will, and how I had lost the identity of my surroundings in her presence. A sudden idea struck me; I went to the window and looked out. For an instant my heart seemed to be still.

Just opposite the house stood Gormala, motionless. I went out at once and joined her, and instinctively we turned our steps toward the sand-hills. As we walked along I said to her:

"Where did you disappear to last night?"

"About that which is to be done!" Her lips and her face were set; I knew it was no use following up that branch of the subject, so I asked again:

"What did you mean by those verses which you told me?" Her answer was given in a solemn tone:

"Them that made them alone can tell; until the time shall come!"

"Who made them?"

"Nane can now tell. They are as aud as the rocky foundations o' the isles themselves."

"Then how did you come to know them?" There was a distinct note of pride in her answer. Such a note as might be expected from a prince speaking of his ancestry:

"They hae come doon to me through centuries. Frae mither to dochter, and from mither to dochter again, wi' never a break in the lang line o' the tellin'. Know ye, young master, that I am o' a race o' Seers. I take my name from that Gormala o' Uist who through long years foresaw the passing o' mony a one. That Gormala who throughout the islands of the west was known and feared o' all men; that Gormala whose mither's mither, and mither's mither again, away back into the darkness o' time when coracles crept towards the sunset ower the sea and returned not, held the fates o' men and women in their han's and ruled the Mysteries o' the Sea." As it was evident that Gormala must have in her own mind some kind of meaning of the prophecy, or spell, or whatever it was, I asked her again:

"But you must understand something of the meaning, or you would not attach so much importance to it?"

"I ken naught but what is seen to ma een, and to that inner e'e which telleth tae the soul that which it seeth!"

"Then why did you warn me that Lammas-tide was near at hand?" The grim woman actually smiled as she replied:

"Did ye no hearken to the words spoken of the Lammas floods, which be of the Powers that rule the Spell?"

"Well, the fact is that I don't know anything of 'Lammas-tide!' We do not keep it in the Church of England," I added as an afterthought, explanatory of my ignorance. Gormala was clever enough to take advantage of having caught me in a weak place; so she took advantage of it to turn the conversation into the way she wished herself:

"What saw ye, when Lauchlane Macleod grew sma' in yer een, and girt again?"

"Simply, that he seemed to be all at once a tiny image of himself, seen against a waste of ripe corn." Then it struck me that I had not as yet told her or any one else of what I had seen. How then did she know it? I was annoyed and asked her. She answered scornfully:

"How kent I it, an' me a Seer o' a race o' Seers! Are ma wakin' een then so dim or so sma' that I canna read the thochts o' men in the glances o' their een. Did I no see yer een look near an' far as quick as thocht? But what saw ye after, when ye looked rapt and yer een peered side to side, as though at one lyin' prone?" I was more annoyed than ever and answered her in a sort of stupor:

"I saw him lying dead on a rock, with a swift tide running by; and over the waters the broken track of a golden moon." She made a sound which was almost a cry, and which recalled me to myself as I looked at her. She was ablaze. She towered to her full height with an imperious, exultant mien; the light in her eyes was more than human as she said:

"Dead, as I masel' saw him an' 'mid the foam o' the tide race! An' gowd, always gowd ahint him in the een of this greater Seer. Gowden corn, and gowden moon, and gowden sea! Aye! an' I see it now, backie-bird that I hae been; the gowden mon indeed, wi' his gowden een an' his gowden hair and all the truth o' his gowden life!" Then turning to me she said fiercely:

"Why did I warn ye that Lammas-tide was near? Go ask those that value the months and days thereof, when be Lammas and what it means to them that hae faith. See what they are; learn o' the comin' o' the moon and o' the flowin' o' the tides that follow!"

Without another word she turned and left me.

I went back to the hotel at once, determined to post myself as to Lammas-tide; its facts and constitutions, and the beliefs and traditions that hung around it. Also to learn the hours of the tides, and the age of the moon about the time of Lammas-tide. Doubtless I could have found out all I wanted from some of the ministers of the various houses of religion which hold in Cruden; but I was not wishful to make public, even so far, the mystery which was closing around me. My feeling was partly a saving sense of humour, or the fear of ridicule, and partly a genuine repugnance to enter upon the subject with any one who might not take it as seriously as I could wish. From which latter I gather that the whole affair was becoming woven into the structure of my life.

Possibly it was, that some trait, or tendency, or power which was individual to me was beginning to manifest itself and to find its means of expression. In my secret heart I not only believed but knew that some instinct within me was guiding my thoughts in some strange way. The sense of occult power which is so vital a part of divination was growing within me and asserting its masterdom, and with it came an equally forceful desire of secrecy. The Seer in me, latent so long, was becoming conscious of his strength, and jealous of it.

At this time, as the feeling of strength and consciousness grew, it seemed to lose something of its power from this very cause. Gradually it was forced upon me that for the full manifestation of such faculty as I might possess, some kind of abstraction or surrender of self was necessary. Even a few hours of experience had taught me much; for now that my mind was bent on the phenomena of Second

Sight the whole living and moving world around me became a veritable diorama of possibilities. Within two days from the episode at the Pier head I had had behind me a larger experience of effort of occult force than generally comes to a man in a lifetime. When I look back, it seems to me that all the forces of life and nature became exposed to my view. A thousand things which hitherto I had accepted in simple faith as facts, were pregnant with new meanings. I began to understand that the whole earth and sea, and air — all that of which human beings generally ordinarily take cognisance, is but a film or crust which hides the deeper moving powers or forces. With this insight I began to understand the grand guesses of the Pantheists, pagan and christian alike, who out of their spiritual and nervous and intellectual sensitiveness began to realise that there was somewhere a purposeful cause of universal action. An action which in its special or concrete working appeared like the sentience of nature in general, and of the myriad items of its cosmogony.

I soon learned that Lammas day is the first of August and is so often accompanied by heavy weather that Lammas floods are almost annually recurrent. The eve of the day is more or less connected with various superstitions.

This made me more eager for further information, and by the aid of a chance friend, I unearthed at Aberdeen a learned professor who gave me offhand all the information which I desired. In fact he was so full of astronomical learning that I had to stop him now and again in order to elucidate some point easily explainable to those who understood his terminology, but which wrapped my swaddling knowledge in a mystery all its own. I have a sneaking friendliness even now for anyone to whom the word ‘syzygy’ carries no special meaning.

I got at the bases of facts, however, and understood that on the night of July 31, which was the eve of Lammas-tide, the moon would be full at midnight. I learned also that from certain astronomical reasons the tide which would ostensibly begin its flow a little after midnight would in reality commence just on the stroke. As these were the points which concerned me I came away with a new feeling of awe upon me. It seemed as though the heavens as well as the earth were bending towards the realisation or fulfillment of the old prophecy. At this time my own connection with the mystery, or how it might affect me personally, did not even enter my head. I was content to be an obedient item in the general scheme of things.

It was now the 28th July so, if it were to take place at the Lammas-tide of the current year, we should know soon the full measure of the denouêment. There was but one thing wanting to complete the conditions of the prophecy. The weather had been abnormally dry, and there might after all be no Lammas floods. To-day, however, the sky had been heavily overcast. Great black clouds which seemed to roll along tumbling over and over, as the sail of a foundered boat does in a current, loomed up from the west. The air grew closer, and to breathe was an effort. A sort of shiver came over the wide stretch of open country. Darker and darker grew the sky, till it seemed so like night that the birds in the few low-lying coppices and the scanty hedgerows ceased to sing. The bleat of sheep and the low of cattle seemed to boom through the still air with a hollow sound, as if coming from a distance. The intolerable stillness which precedes the storm became so oppressive that I, who am abnormally susceptible to the moods of nature, could almost have screamed out.

Then all at once the storm broke. There was a flash of lightning so vivid that it lit up the whole country away to the mountains which encircle Braemar. The fierce crash and wide roll of the thunder followed with incredible quickness. And then the hot, heavy-dropped summer rain fell in torrents.

All that afternoon the rain fell, with only a few brief intervals of glowing sunshine. All night, too, it seemed to fall without ceasing, for whenever I woke — which I did frequently with a sense over me of something impending — I could hear the quick, heavy patter on the roof, and the rush and gurgle of the overcharged gutters.

The next day was one of unmitigated gloom. The rain poured down ceaselessly. There was little wind, just sufficient to roll north-eastwards the great masses of rain-laden clouds piled up by the Gulf Stream against the rugged mountains of the western coast and its rocky islands. Two whole days there were of such rain, and then there was no doubt as to the strength of the Lammas floods this year. All the wide uplands of Buchan were glistening with runnels of water whenever the occasional glimpses of sunshine struck them. Both the Water of Cruden and the Back Burn were running bank high. On all sides it was reported that the Lammas floods were the greatest that had been known in memory.

All this time my own spiritual and intellectual uneasiness was perpetually growing. The data for the working of the prophecy were all fixed with remarkable exactness. In theatrical parlance ‘the stage was set’ and all ready for the action which was to come. As the hours wore on, my uneasiness changed somewhat and apprehension became merged in a curious mixture of superstition and exaltation. I was growing eager to the coming time.

The afternoon of July 31 was fine. The sun shone brightly; the air was dry and, for the time of year, cool. It seemed as though the spell of wet weather was over and that fiery August was coming to its own again. The effects of the rainstorm were, however, manifest. Not only was every rill and stream and river in the North in spate but the bogs of the mountains were so saturated with wet that many days must elapse before they could cease to send their quota to swell the streams. The mountain valleys were generally lakes in miniature. As one went through the country the murmur or rush of falling water was forever in the ears. I suppose it was in my own case partly because I was concerned in the mere existence of Lammas floods that the whole of nature seemed so insistent on the subject. The sound of moving water in its myriad gamut was so perpetually in my ears that I could never get my mind away from it. I had a long walk that afternoon through roads still too wet and heavy for bicycling. I came back to dinner thoroughly tired out, and went to bed early.

CHAPTER V. THE MYSTERY OF THE SEA

I do not remember what woke me. I have a vague idea that it was a voice, but whether outside the house or within myself I know not.

It was eleven o'clock by my watch when I left the Kilmarnock Arms and took my way across the sandhills, heading for the Hawklaw which stood out boldly in the brilliant moonlight. I followed the devious sheep track amongst the dunes covered with wet bent-grass, every now and again stumbling amongst the rabbit burrows which in those days honeycombed the sandhills of Cruden Bay. At last I came to the Hawklaw, and, climbing the steep terraced edge near the sea, sat on the top to breathe myself after the climb.

The scene was one of exquisite beauty. Its natural loveliness was enhanced by the softness of the full yellow moonlight which seemed to flood the heavens and the earth alike. To the south-east the bleak promontory of Whinnyfold stood out stark and black as velvet and the rocks of the Skares were like black dots in the quivering sea of gold. I arose and went on my way. The tide was far out and as I stumbled along the rude path above the waste of boulders I had a feeling that I should be late. I hurried on, crossed the little rill which usually only trickled down beside the fishers' zigzag path at the back of Whinnyfold but which was now a rushing stream — again the noise of falling water, the voice of the Lammas floods — and took the cart track which ran hard by the cliff down to the point which looked direct upon the Skares.

When I reached the very edge of the cliff, where the long sea-grass and the deep clover felt underfoot like a luxurious carpet, I was not surprised to see Gormala seated, looking out seawards. The broad track of the moon lay right across the outmost rock of the Skares and falling across some of the jagged rocks, which seemed like fangs rising from the deep water as the heave of the waveless sea fell back and the white water streamed down, came up to where we stood and seemed to bathe both the Seer-woman and myself in light. There was no current anywhere, but only the silent rise and fall of the water in the everlasting movement of the sea. When she heard me behind her Gormala turned round, and the patient calmness of her face disappeared. She rose quickly, and as she did so pointed to a small boat which sailing up from the south was now drawing opposite to us and appeared to be making a course as close to shore as possible, just clearing the outer bulwark of the Skares.

"Look!" she said, "Lauchlane Macleod comes by his lanes. The rocks are around him, and his doom is at hand!"

There did not appear any danger in such a course; the wind was gentle, the tide was at the still moment between ebb and flow, and the smoothness of the water beyond the rock seemed to mark its great depth.

All at once the boat seemed to stand still, — we were too far off to hear a sound even on such a still night. The mast bent forward and broke short off, the sails hung limp in the water with the peak of the lug sail sticking up in a great triangle, like the fin of a mammoth shark. A few seconds after, a dark speck moved on the water which became agitated around it; it was evident that a swimmer was making for the land. I would have gone to help him had it been of use; but it was not, the outer rock was half a mile away. Indeed, though I knew it was no use, I was yet about to swim to meet him when Gormala's voice behind me arrested me:

"Do ye no see that gin ye meet him amid yon rocks, ye can, when the tide begins to race, be no help to any. If he can win through, ye may help him if ye bide here.” The advice was good and I stayed my feet. The swimmer evidently knew the danger, for he hurried frantically to win some point of safety before the tide should turn. But the rocks of the Skares are deadly steep; they rise from the water sheer everywhere, and to climb them from the sea is a hopeless task. Once and again the swimmer tried to find a chink or cranny where he could climb; but each time he tried to raise himself he fell back into the water. Moreover I could see that he was wounded, for his left hand hung idle. He seemed to realise the hopelessness of the task, and turning, made desperately for the part where we stood. He was now within the most dangerous spot in the whole region of the Skares. The water is of great depth everywhere and the needlepoints of rocks rise almost to the very surface. It is only when the waves are rough at low water that they can be seen at all, when the dip of the waves leaves them bare; but from the surface in calm weather they cannot be seen as the swirl of the tide around them is invisible. Here, too, the tide, rounding the point and having the current broken by the masses of the great rock, rolls with inconceivable rapidity. I had too often watched from the headland where my home was to be the set of the tide not to know the danger. I shouted as loudly as I could, but for some reason he did not hear me. The moments ere the tide should turn seemed like ages; and yet it was with a sudden shock that I heard the gurgle of moving water followed by the lap, lap, lap, getting quicker each second. Somewhere inland a clock struck twelve.

The tide had turned and was beginning to flow.

In a few seconds the swimmer felt its effects, though he did not seem to notice them. Then he was swept towards the north. All at once there was a muffled cry which seemed to reach slowly to where we stood, and the swimmer rolled over for an instant. It was only too apparent what had happened; he had struck his arm against one of the sunken rocks and injured it. Then he commenced a mad struggle for life, swimming without either arm in that deadly current which grew faster and faster every moment. He was breathless, and now and again his head dipped; but he kept on valiantly. At last in one of these dips, borne by the momentum of his own strength and the force of the current, he struck his head against another of the sunken rocks. For an instant he raised it, and I could see it run red in the glare of the moonlight.

Then he sank; from the height where I stood I could see the body roll over and over in the fierce current which made for the outmost point to the north-east of the promontory. I ran over as fast as I could, Gormala following. When I came to the rock, which here shelved, I plunged in and after a few strokes met by chance the body as it rolled upward. With a desperate effort I brought it to land.

The struggle to lift the body from the water and to bear it up the rock exhausted me, so that when I reached the top of the cliff I had to pause for a few seconds to breathe hard. Since the poor fellow's struggle for life had begun I had never for an instant given the prophecy a thought. But now, all at once, as I looked past the figure, lying limp before me with the poor arms twisted unnaturally and the head turned — away past the moonlit sea and the great, golden orb whose track was wrinkled over the racing tide, the full force of it burst upon me, and I felt a sort of spiritual transformation. The air seemed full of fluttering wings; sea and land alike teemed with life that I had not hitherto dreamed of. I fell in a sort of spiritual trance. But the open eyes were upon me; I feared the man was dead, but Briton-like I would not accept the conviction without effort. So I raised the body to my shoulders, determined to make with what speed I could for Whinnyfold where fire and willing hands could aid in restoration. As I laid the limp body across my shoulders, holding the two hands in my right hand to steady the burden whilst with the left I drew some of the clothing tight, I caught Gormala's eye. She had not helped me in any possible way, though more than once in distress I had called to her. So now I said angrily:

"Get away woman! You should be ashamed of yourself never to help at such a time," and I took my way unaided. I did not heed at the time her answer, spoken with a certain measure of deprecation, though it afterwards came back to me:

"Am I to wark against the Fates when They have spoken! The Dead are dead indeed when the Voice has whispered in their ears!"

Now, as I passed along with the hands of the dead man in mine — the true shell of a man whose spirit could be but little space away whilst the still blood in the veins was yet warm — a strange thing began to happen. The spirits of earth and sea and air seemed to take shape to me, and all the myriad sounds of the night to have a sentient cause of utterance. As I panted and struggled on, my physical effort warring equally with the new spiritual experience so that nothing remained except sentience and memory, I could see Gormala walking abreast me with even steps. Her eyes glared balefully with a fierce disappointment; never once did she remit the vigilant, keen look which seemed to pierce into my very soul.

For a short space of time there was something of antagonism to her; but this died away imperceptibly, and I neither cared nor thought about her, except when my attention would be called to her. I was becoming wrapped in the realisation of the mightier forces around me.

Just where the laneway from the cliff joins Whinnyfold there is a steep zigzag path running down to the stony beach far below where the fishers keep their boats and which is protected from almost the wildest seas by the great black rock — the Caudman, — which fills the middle of the little bay, leaving deep channels on either hand. When I was come to this spot, suddenly all the sounds of the night seemed to cease. The very air grew still so that the grasses did not move or rustle, and the waters of the swirling tide ceased to run in grim silence on their course. Even to that inner sense, which was so new to me that the change in everything to which it was susceptible became at once noticeable, all things stood still. It was as though the spirits of earth and air and water were holding their breath for some rare portent. Indeed I noticed as my eye ranged the surface of the sea, that the moon track was for the time no longer rippled, but lay in a broad glistening band.

The only living thing in all the wide world was, it seemed to me, the figure of Gormala as, with lowering eyes and suspended breath, she stood watching me with uncompromising, persistent sternness.

Then my own heart seemed to stand still, to be a part of the grim silence of the waiting forces of the world. I was not frightened; I was not even amazed. All seemed so thoroughly in keeping with the prevailing influence of the time that I did not feel even a moment of surprise.

Up the steep path came a silent procession of ghostly figures, so misty of outline that through the grey green of their phantom being the rocks and moonlit sea were apparent, and even the velvet blackness of the shadows of the rocks did not lose their gloom. And yet each figure was defined so accurately that every feature, every particle of dress or accoutrement could be discerned. Even the sparkle of their eyes in that grim waste of ghostly grey was like the lambent flashes of phosphoric light in the foam of moving water cleft by a swift prow. There was no need for me to judge by the historical sequence of their attire, or by any inference of hearing; I knew in my heart that these were the ghosts of the dead who had been drowned in the waters of the Cruden Skares.

Indeed the moments of their passing — and they were many for the line was of sickening length — became to me a lesson of the long flight of time. At the first were skin-clad savages with long, wild hair matted; then others with rude, primitive clothing. And so on in historic order men, aye, and here and there a woman, too, of many lands, whose garments were of varied cut and substance. Red-haired Vikings and black-haired Celts and Phoenicians, fair-haired Saxons and swarthy Moors in flowing robes. At first the figures, chiefly of the barbarians, were not many; but as the sad procession passed along I could see how each later year had brought its ever-growing tale of loss and disaster, and added more and faster to the grim harvest of the sea. A vast number of the phantoms had passed when there came along a great group which at once attracted my attention. They were all swarthy, and bore themselves proudly under their cuirasses and coats of mail, or their garb as fighting men of the sea. Spaniards they were, I knew from their dress, and of three centuries back. For an instant my heart leapt; these were men of the great Armada, come up from the wreck of some lost galleon or patache to visit once again the glimpses of the Moon. They were of lordly mien, with large aquiline features and haughty eyes. As they passed, one of them turned and looked at me. As his eyes lit on me, I saw spring into them, as though he were quick, dread, and hate, and fear.

Hitherto I had been impressed, awed, by the indifference of the passing ghosts. They had looked nowhere, but with steady, silent, even tread had passed on their way. But when this one looked at me it was a glance from the spirit world which chilled me to the very soul.

But he too passed on. I stood at the head of the winding path, having the dead man still on my shoulders and looking with sinking heart at the sad array of the victims of the Cruden Skares. I noticed that most who came now were seamen, with here and there a group of shoresmen and a few women amongst them. The fishermen were many, and without exception wore great sea boots. And so with what patience I could I waited for the end.

At length it came in the shape of a dim figure of great stature, and both of whose arms hung limp. The blood from a gash on his forehead had streamed on to his golden beard, and the golden eyes looked far away. With a shudder I saw that this was the ghost of the man whose body, now less warm, lay upon my shoulders; and so I knew that Lauchlane Macleod was dead. I was relieved when I saw that he did not even look at me; though as I moved on, following the procession, he walked beside me with equal steps, stopping and moving as I stopped and moved.

The silence of death was upon the little hamlet of Whinnyfold. There was not a sign of life; not a dog barked as the grim procession had moved up the steep path or now filed across the running stream and moved along the footpath toward Cruden. Gormala with eager eyes kept watching me; and as the minutes wore on I began to resume my double action of thought, for I could see in her face that she was trying to reason out from my own expression something of what I was looking at. As we moved along she now began to make suggestions to me in a fierce whisper, evidently hoping that she might learn something from my acquiescence in, or negation of, her thought. Through that ghostly silence her living voice cut with the harshness of a corncrake.

“Shearing the silence of the night with ragged edge.”

Perhaps it was for the best; looking back now on that awful experience, I know that no man can say what his mind may suffer in the aftertime who walks alone with the Dead. That I was strung to some amazing pitch was manifested by the fact that I did not seem to feel the great weight which lay upon my shoulders. I have naturally vast strength and the athletic training of my youth had developed it highly. But the weight of an ordinary man is much to hold or carry for even a short time, and the body which I bore was almost that of a giant.

The path across the neck of land which makes the Skares a promontory is flat, with here and there a deep cleft like a miniature ravine where the water from the upland rushes in flood time down to the sea. All these rills were now running strong, but I could hear no sound of murmuring water, no splash as the streams leapt over the edge of the cliff on the rocks below in whitening spray. The ghostly procession did not pause at any of these streams, but moved on impassively to the farther side where the path trends down to the sands of Cruden Bay. Gormala stood a moment watching my eyes as they swept the long line passing the angle so that I could see them all at once. That she guessed something was evident from her speech:

“They are many; his eyes range wide!” I started, and she knew that she had guessed aright. This one guess seemed to supply her with illimitable data; she evidently knew something of the spirit world, though she could not see into its mysteries. Her next words brought enlightenment to me:

"They are human spirits; they follow the path that the feet o' men hae made!"

It was so. The procession did not float over the surface of field or sand, but took its painful way down the zigzag of the cliff and over the rocky path through the great boulders of the foreshore. When the head of it reached the sand, it passed along the summit of the ridge, just as every Sunday night the fishermen of Whinnyfold and Collieston did in returning to their herring boats at Peterhead.

The tramp across the sands was long and dreary. Often as I had taken that walk in rain or storm, with the wind almost sweeping me off my feet whilst the sand drift from the bent-covered hills almost cut my cheeks and ears, I had never felt the way to be so long or so hard to travel. Though I did not realise it at the time, the dead man's weight was beginning to tell sorely upon me. Across the Bay I could see the few lights in the village of Port Erroll that were to be seen at such a time of night; and far over the water came the cold grey light which is the sign of the waning of the night rather than of the coming of the morning.

When we came to the Hawklaw, the head of the procession turned inward through the sandhills. Gormala, watching my eyes, saw it and an extraordinary change came over her. For an instant she was as if stricken, and stood stock still. Then she raised her hands in wonder, and said in an awed whisper:

"The Holy Well! They gang to St. Olaf's well! The Lammas floods will aye serve them weel."

With an instinct of curiosity strong upon me I hurried on so as to head the procession. As I moved along the rough path amongst the sandhills I felt the weight of the burden on my shoulders grow heavier and heavier, so that my feet dragged as do the feet of one in a night-mare. As I moved on, I looked round instinctively and saw that the shade of Lauchlane Macleod no longer kept pace with me, but retained its place in the procession. Gormala's evil eye was once more upon me, but with her diabolical cunning she guessed the secret of my looking round. She moved along, not with me but at the rate she had been going as though she liked or expected to remain in juxtaposition to the shade of the dead man; some purpose of her own was to be fulfilled.

As I pressed on, the shades around me seemed to grow dimmer and dimmer still; till at the last I could see little more than a film or haze. When I came to St. Olaf's well — then merely a rough pool at the base of the high land that stretches back from the Hawklaw — the ghostly mist was beginning to fade into the water. I stood hard by, and the weight upon my shoulders became dreadful. I could hardly stand; I determined, however, to hold on as long as I could and see what would happen. The dead man, too, was becoming colder! I did not know whether the dimming of the shadows was from this cause, or because the spirit of the man was farther away. It was possibly both, for as the silent, sad procession came on I could see more distinctly. When the wraith of the Spaniard turned and looked at me, he seemed once more to look with living eyes from a living soul. Then there was a dreary wait whilst the rest came along and passed in awesome stillness down into the well and disappeared. The weight upon my shoulders now became momentarily more intolerable. At last I could bear it no longer, and half bending I allowed the body to slip to the ground, I only holding the hands to steady the descent. Gormala was now opposite to me, and seeing what I had done leaped towards me with a loud cry. For one dim moment the wraith of the dead man stood above its earthly shell; and then I saw the ghostly vision no more.

At that instant, just as Gormala was about to touch the dead body, there was a loud hiss and murmur of waters. The whole pool burst up in a great fountain, scattering sand and water around for a wide space. I rushed back; Gormala did the same.

Then the waters receded again, and when I looked, the corpse of Lauchlane Macleod was gone. It was swallowed up in the Holy Well.

Overcome with physical weariness and strange horror of the scene I sank down on the wet sand. The scene whirled round me.... I remember no more.

CHAPTER VI. THE MINISTERS OF THE DOOM

When at last I looked around me I was not surprised at anything I saw; not even at the intense face of Gormala whose eyes, bright in the full moonlight, were searching my face more eagerly than ever. I was lying on the sand, and she was bending over me so closely that her face almost touched mine. It was evident, even to my half-awake sensibilities, that she was listening intently, lest even a whispered word from me should be missed.

The witch-woman was still seemingly all afire, but withal there was manifested in her face and bearing a sense of disappointment which comforted me. I waited a few minutes until I felt my brain clear, and my body rested from the intolerable strain which it had undergone in carrying that terrific burden from Whinnyfold.

When I looked up again Gormala recognised the change in me, and her own expression became different. The baleful glitter of her eyes faded, and the blind, unreasoning hate and anger turned to keen inquiry. She was not now merely baffled in her hopes, and face to face with an unconscious man; there was at least a possibility of her gaining some knowledge, and all the energy of her nature woke again as she spoke:

"So ye are back wi' the moon and me. Whither went ye when ye lay down upon the sand. Was it back ye went, or forrart; wi' the ghaists into the Holy Well and beyond in their manifold course; or back to their comin' frae the sea and all that could there be told? Oh! mon, what it is to me that any ither can gang like that into spirit land, and me have to wait here by my lanes; to wring my hands an' torture my hairt in broken hopes!" I answered her question with another:

"How do you mean that ghosts go into the well and beyond?" Her answer was at the first given in a stern tone which became, however, softer, as she went on.

"Knew ye not, that the Lammas Floods are the carriers o' the Dead; that on Lammas nicht the Dead can win their way to where they will, under the airth by wherever there is rinnin' watter. Happy be they that can gain a Holy Well, an' so pass into the bowels o' the airth to where they list."

"And how and when do they return?"

"Dinna jest wi' Fate an' the Dead. They in their scope can gang and return again; no een, save your ain, o' man or Seer has seen the method o' their gangin'. No een, even yours, can see them steal out again in the nicht, when the chosen graves that they hae sought hae taken from them the dross o' the airth." I felt it was not wise to talk further, so without a word I turned and walked home by the sheep tracks amongst the sand hills. Now and again I stumbled in a rabbit hole, and as I would sink forward the wet bent would brush against my face.

The walk back in the dark dawn seemed interminable. All this time my mind was in a turmoil. I did not even seem to remember anything definitely, or think consecutively; but facts and fancies swept through my mind in a chaotic whirl. When I got to the house, I undressed quickly and got into bed; I must have instantly fallen into a deep sleep.

Next afternoon I walked by the shore to Whinnyfold. It was almost impossible to believe that I was looking at the same place as on last night. I sat on the cliff where I had sat last night, the hot August sun and the cool breeze from the sea being inconceivably soothing. So I thought and thought.... The lack of sufficient sleep the night before and the tired feeling of the physical strain I had undergone — my shoulders still ached — told upon me, and I fell asleep.

When I waked Gormala stood in front of me.

After a long pause she spoke:

“I see that ye remember, else would ye ha’ spoken to me. Will ye no tell me all that ye saw? Then, wi’ your Seer’s een an’ my knowledge o’ the fact we may thegither win oot the great Secret o’ the Sea.” I felt stronger than ever the instinctive conviction that I must remain keenly on guard with her. So I said nothing; waiting thus I should learn something, whether from her words or her silence. She could not stand this. I saw her colour rise till her face was all aglow with a red flush that shamed the sunset; and at last the anger blazed in her eyes. It was in a threatening tone which she spoke, though the words were themselves sufficiently conciliatory:

“The Secrets o’ the Sea are to be won; and tae thee and me it is given to win them. What hae been is but an earnest of what will be. For ages ithers have tried to win but hae failed; and if we fail too for lack o’ purpose or because ye like me not, then to ithers will come in time the great reward. For the secrets are there, and the treasures lie awaiting. The way is open for those to whom are the Gifts. Throw not away the favour of the Fates. For if they be kind to give where they will, they are hard to thwart, and their revenge is sure!” I must confess that her words began to weaken my purpose. In one way inexorable logic was on her side. Powers such as were mine were surely given for some purpose. Might I not be wrong in refusing to use them. If the Final Cause of my powers were purposeful, then might not a penalty be exacted from me because I had thwarted the project. Gormala, with that diabolical cunning of hers, evidently followed the workings of my mind, for her face lit up. How she knew, I know not, but I do know that her eyes never left mine. I suppose it may be that the eyes which have power to see at times the inwardness of things have some abnormal power also of expressing the thoughts behind them. I felt, however, that I was in danger. All my instincts told me that once in Gormala's power I should rue it, so I spoke out on the instant strongly:

"I shall have nothing to do with you whatever. Last night when you refused to help me with the wounded man — whom you had followed, remember, for weeks, hoping for his death — I saw you in your true colours; and I mean to have nothing to do with you." Fierce anger blazed again in her eyes; but again she controlled herself and spoke with an appearance of calm, though it was won with great effort, as I could see by the tension of her muscles:

"An' so ye would judge me that I would not help ye to bring the Dead to life again! I knew that Lauchlane was dead! Aye! and ye kent it too as weel as I did masel'. It needed no Seer to tell that, when ye brocht him up the rocks oot o' the tide. Then, when he was dead, for why wad ye no use him? Do the Dead themselves object that they help the livin' to their ends while the blood is yet warm in them? Is it ye that object to the power of the Dead? You whose veins have the power o' divination of the quick; you to whom the heavens themselves opened, and the airth and the watters under the airth, when the spirit of the Dead that ye carried walked beside ye as ye ganged to St. Olaf's Well. An' as for me, what hae I done that you should object. I saw, as you did, that Lauchlane's sands were run. You and I are alike in that. To us baith was given to see, by signs that ages have made sacred, that Fate had spoken in his ears though he had himself not heard the Voice. Nay more, to me was only given to see that the Voice had spoken. But to you was shown how, and when, and where the Doom should come, though you yersel' that can read the future as no ither that is known, canna read the past; and so could na tell what a lesser one would ha' guessed at lang syne. I followed the Doom; you followed the Doom. I by my cunnin'; you when ye waked frae yer sleep, followin' yer conviction, till we met thegither for Lauchlane's death, amid Lammas floods and under the gowden moon on the gowden sea. Through his aid — aye, young sir — for wi'oot a fresh corp to aid, no Seer o' airth could hae seen as ye did, that lang line o' ghaists ye saw last nicht. Through his aid the wonders o' the heavens and the deep, o' airth and air, was opened till ye. Wha then be ye that condemn me that only saw a sign an' followed? Gin I be guilty, what be you?"

It would be impossible to describe the rude, wild, natural eloquence with which this was spoken. In the sunset, the gaunt woman seemed to tower above me; and as she moved her arms, the long shadows of them stretched over the green down before us and away over the wrinkled sea as though her gestures were, giant like, appealing to all nature.

I was distinctly impressed, for all that she said was quite true. She had in reality done nothing that the law would call wrong. Lauchlane's death was in no possible way due to any act of hers. She had only watched him; and as he did not even know that she watched he could not have been influenced in any way by it or by her. As to my own part! Her words gave me a new light. Why had I risen in the night and come out to Whinnyfold? Was it intuition, or a call from the witch-woman, who in such case must have had some hypnotic influence over me? Or was it —— ?

I stood appalled at the unspoken thought. Could it be that the powers of Nature which had been revealed to me in the dread hour had not only sentience but purpose!

I felt that my tone was more conciliatory as I answered her:

“I did not mean to blame you for anything you had done. I see now that your wrong was only passive.” I felt that my words were weak, and my feeling was emphasised by the scorn of her reply:

“My wrang was only passive! My wrang! What wrang hae I done that you should sit in judgment on me. Could I hae helpit it when Lauchlane met his death amang the rocks in the tide. Why you yoursel’ sat here beside me, an’ ye no helpit him or tried to, strong man though ye be, that could carry his corp frae here to St. Olaf’s Well; for ye kenned that no livin’ arm could aid him in that hour o’ doom. Aye! laddie, the Fates know their wark o’er weel to hae ony such betterment o’ their plans! An’ div ye think that by any act o’ yer ain, or by any refusal o’ act or speech, ye can baffle the purpose o’ the Doom. Ye are yet young and ye must learn; then learn it now whiles ye can, that when the Word is spoken all follows as ordained. Aye! though the Ministers o’ the Doom be many an’ various, an’ though they hae to gather in ane from many ages an’ frae the furthermost ends o’ the airth!”

Gormala’s logic and the exactness of her statement were too much for me. I felt that I owed her some reparation and told her so. She received it in her gaunt way with the dignity of an empress.

But there her dignity stopped; for seeing that she had got a lever in her hands she began at once, womanlike, to use it. Without any hesitation or delay she asked me straightly to tell her what I had seen the night before. The directness of her questioning was my best help; my heart hardened and my lips closed. She saw my answer before I had spoken it, and turned away with an eloquent, rugged gesture of despair. She felt that her last hope was gone; that her last bolt had been sped in vain.

With her going, the link with last night seemed to break, and as she passed up the road the whole of that strange experience became dimmer and dimmer.

I walked home by Cruden sands in a sort of dream. The chill and strain of the night before seemed to affect me more and more with each hour. Feeling fatigued and drowsy I lay down on my bed and sank into a heavy, lethargic sleep.

The last thing I remember is the sounding of the dinner-gong, and a dim resolution not to answer its call....

* * * * *

It was weeks after, when the fever had passed away, that I left my bed in the Kilmarnock Arms.

CHAPTER VII. FROM OTHER AGES AND THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

The last week in June of next year, 1898, found me back in Cruden. My own house was in process of building. I had purposely arranged with the builders that the fitting up and what the conveyancers call "beautifyings" should not be done until I should be on the spot myself next year, to be consulted about everything. Every day I went over to see the place and become familiar with it before the plans for decoration should be taken in hand. Still there was no enjoyment in getting wet every time I went and came, or in remaining in wet clothes, so that my day was mainly spent at home.

One of my first visits was to Peterhead which seemed to be in a state of absolute activity, for the herring fishing had been good and trade of all kinds was brisk. At the market place which was half full of booths, could be had almost everything required for the needs or comfort of life such as it can be on a fishing boat. Fruit and all sorts of summer luxuries were abundant. Being Saturday the boats had returned early and had got their nets away to the drying-grounds, and the men had been able to shave and dress tidily. The women, too, had got their dressing done early — the fish first and themselves afterwards.

For awhile I wandered about aimlessly amongst the booths, with that sort of unsatisfaction upon me which had of late been the prelude to many of the manifestations of the power of Second Sight. This used to be just as if something within me was groping or searching unsuccessfully for something unknown, the satisfaction coming with the realization of the objective of the search.

Presently I came to an itinerant auctioneer who was dealing with a small cart-load of odds and ends, evidently picked up in various places. His auction or "roup" was on the "Dutch" plan; an extravagant price, according to his own idea, being placed on each article, and the offer decreasing in default of bidders. The auctioneer was ready with his tongue; his patter showed how well he understood the needs and ideas of the class whom he addressed.

"Here's the works of the Reverend Robert William McAlister of Trottermaverish in twal volumes, wantin' the first an' the last twa; three damaged by use, but still full of power in dealing with the speeritual necessities o' men who go down to the great deep in ships. A sermon for every day in the year, in the Gaelic for them as has na got the English, an' in good English for them as has. How much for the twal volumes, wantin' but three? Not a bawbee less than nine shellin', goin' goin'. Wha says eight shellin' for the lot. Seven shellin' an' no less. Goin' for six. Five shellin' for you sir. Any bidder at four shellin'. Not a bawbee less than three shellin'; Half a croon. Any bidder at twa shellin'. Gone for you sir!" the nine volumes were handed over to a grave-looking old man, and the two shillings which he produced from a heavy canvas bag duly pocketed by the auctioneer.

Everything he had, found some buyer; even a blue-book seemed to have its attraction. The oddness of some of the odd lots was occasionally amusing. When I had been round the basins of the harbour and had seen the dressings and barrelling of the fish, I again came across the auctioneer in the market place. He had evidently been using his time well, for the cart was almost empty. He was just putting up the last article, an old oak chest which up to now he had used as a sort of table on which to display the object for sale. An old oak chest has always charms for me, and I was about furnishing a house. I stepped over, opened the lid and looked in; there were some papers tossed on the bottom of it. I asked the auctioneer if the contents went with the chest, my real object being to get a look at the lock which seemed a very old one of steel, though it was much damaged and lacked a key. I was answered with a torrent of speech in true auctioneer fashion:

"Aye, good master. Take the lot just as it stands. An oaken kist, hundreds of years aud and still worthy a rest in the house-place of any man who has goods to guard. It wants a key, truth to tell; but the lock is a fine aud one and you can easy fit a key. Moreover the contents, be they what they may, are yours also. See! aud letters in some foreign tongue — French I think. Yellow in age an' the ink faded. Somebody's love letters, I'm thinkin'. Come now, young men here's a chance. Maybe if ye're no that fameeliar in writin' yer hairts oot to the lassies, ye can get some hints frae these. They can learn ye, I warrant!"

I was not altogether unaccustomed to auctions, so I affected a nonchalance which I did not feel. Indeed, I was unaccountably excited. It might have been that my feelings and memories had been worked up by the seeing again the pier where first I had met Lauchlane Macleod, and the moving life which then had environed him. I felt coming over me that strange impalpable influence or tendency which had been a part of my nature in the days immediately before the drowning of the Out-islander. Even as I looked, I seemed to feel rather than see fixed upon me the baleful eyes of the man in the ghostly procession on that Lammas eve. I was recalled to myself by the voice of the auctioneer:

"The kist and its contents will be sold for a guinea and not a bawbee less."

"I take it!" I cried impulsively. The auctioneer who in his wildest dreams had no hope of such a price seemed startled into momentary comparative silence. He quickly recovered himself and said: "The kist is yours, good master; and that concludes the roup!"

I looked around to see if there was present any one who could even suggest in any way the appearance of the man in the ghostly procession. But there was no such person. I met only *mirabile dictu*, the greedy eyes of Gormala MacNiel.

That evening in my room at the Kilmarnock Arms, I examined the papers as well as I could by lamplight. They were in an old-fashioned style of writing with long tails and many flourishes which made an added difficulty to me. The language was Spanish, which tongue I did not know; but by aid of French and what little Latin I could remember I made out a few words here and there. The dates ranged between 1598 and 1610. The letters, of which there were eight, were of manifest unimportance, short notes directed: "Don de Escoban" and merely arranging meetings. Then there were a number of loose pages of some printed folio, used perhaps as some kind of tally or possibly a cipher, for they were marked all over with dots. The lot was completed by a thin, narrow strip of paper covered with figures — possibly some account. Papers of three centuries ago were valuable, were it only for their style of writing. So I locked them all up carefully before I went to bed, with full intention to examine them thoroughly some day. The appearance of Gormala just at the time when I had become possessed of them seemed to connect them in some mysterious way with the former weird experiences in which she had so prominent a part.

That night I dreamed as usual, though my dreaming was of a scattered and incoherent character. Gormala's haunting presence and all that had happened during the day, especially the buying of the chest with the mysterious papers, as well as what had taken place since my arrival at Cruden was mixed up in perpetually recurring images with the beginning of my Second Sight and the death of Lauchlane Macleod. Again, and again, and again, I saw with the eyes of memory, in fragmentary fashion, the grand form of the fisherman standing in a blaze of gold, and later fighting his way through a still sea of gold, of which the only reliefs were the scattered piles of black rock and the pale face patched with blood. Again, and again, and again, the ghostly procession came up the steep path from the depths of the sea, and passed in slow silent measure into St. Olaf's Well.

Gormala's words were becoming a truth to me; that above and around me was some force which was impelling to an end all things of which I could take cognizance, myself amongst the rest. Here I stopped, suddenly arrested by the thought that it was Gormala herself who had set my mind working in this direction; and the words with which she had at once warned and threatened me when after the night of Lauchlane's death we stood at Witsennan point:

"*When the Word is spoken all follows as ordained. Aye! though the Ministers of the Doom may be many and various, and though they may have to gather in one from many ages and from the furthermost ends of the earth!*"

The next few days were delightfully fine, and life was one long enjoyment. On Monday evening there was a sunset which I shall never forget. The whole western sky seemed ablaze with red and gold; great masses of cloud which had rolled up seemed like huge crimson canopies looped with gold over the sun throned on the western mountains. I was standing on the Hawklaw, whence I could get a good view; beside me was a shepherd whose flock patched the steep green hillside as with snow. I turned to him and said:

“Is not that a glorious sight?”

“Aye! ’Tis grand. But like all beauty o’ the warld it fadeth into naught; an’ is only a mask for dool.”

“You do not seem to hold a very optimistic opinion of things generally.” He deliberately stoked himself from his snuff mull before replying:

“Optimist nor pessimist am I, eechie nor ochie. I’m thinkin’ the optimist and the pessimist are lears alike; takin’ a pairt for the whole, an’ so guilty o’ the logical sin o’ *a particulari ad universale*. Sophism they misca’ it; as if there were anything but a lee in a misstatement o’ fac’. Fac’s is good eneuch for me; an’ that, let me tell ye, is why I said that the splendour o’ the sunset is but a mask for dool. Look yon! The clouds are all gold and glory, like a regiment goin’ oot to the battle. But bide ye till the sun drops, not only below the horizon but beyond the angle o’ refraction. Then what see ye? All grim and grey, and waste, and dourness and dool; like the army as it returns frae the fecht. There be some that think that because the sun sets fine i’ the nicht, it will of necessity rise fine i’ the morn. They seem to no ken that it has to traverse one half o’ the warld ere it returns; and that the averages of fine and foul, o’ light and dark hae to be aye maintained. It may be that the days o’ fine follow ane anither fast; or that the foul times linger likewise. But in the end, the figures of fine and foul tottle up, in accord wi’ their ordered sum. What use is it, then, to no tak’ heed o’ fac’s? Weel I ken, that the fac’ o’ the morrow will differ sair frae the fac’s o’ this nicht. Not in vain hae I seen the wisdom and glory o’ the Lord in sunsets an’ dawns wi’oot learnin’ the lessons that they teach. Mon, I tell ye that it’s all those glories o’ pomp and pageantry — all the lasceevious luxuries o’ colour an’ splendour, that are the forerinners o’ disaster. Do ye no see the streaks o’ wind rinnin’ i’ the sky, frae the east to the west? Do ye ken what they portend? I’m tellin’ ye, that before the sun sets the morrow nicht there will be ruin and disaster on all this side o’ Scotland. The storm will no begin here. It is perhaps ragin’ the noo away to the east. But it will come quick, most likely wi’ the risin’ o’ the tide; and woe be then to them as has no made safe wi’ all they can. Hark ye the stillness!” Shepherd-like he took no account of his own sheep whose ceaseless bleating, sounding in every note of the scale, broke the otherwise universal silence of nature. “I’m thinkin’ it’s but the calm before the storm. Weel sir, I maun gang. The yowes say it is time for the hame comin’. An’ mark ye, the collie! He looks at me reproachful, as though I had forgot the yowes! My sairvice to ye, sir!”

“Good night” I answered, “I hope I shall meet you again.”

“I’m thinkin’ the same masel’. I hae much enjoyed yer pleasin’ converse. I hope it’s mony a crack we yet may hae thegither!” And so my philosophical egoist moved homewards, blissfully unconscious of the fact that my sole contribution to the “pleasing converse” was the remark that he did not seem optimistic.

The whole mass of his charge moved homewards at an even footpace, the collie making frantic dashes here and there to keep his flock headed in the right direction. Presently I saw the herd pouring like a foam-white noisy river across the narrow bridge over the Water of Cruden.

The next morning was fine, very hot, and of an unusual stillness. Ordinarily I should have rejoiced at such a day; but the warning of the erudite and philosophical shepherd made me mistrust. To me the worst of the prophecy business was that it became a disturbing influence. To-day, perforce, because it was fine, I had to expect that it would end badly. About noon I walked over to Whinnyfold; it being Saturday I knew that the workmen would have gone away early, and I wanted to have the house to myself so that I could go over it quietly and finally arrange the scheme of colouring. I remained there some hours, and then, when I had made up my mind as to things, I set off for the hotel.

In those few hours the weather had changed marvellously. Busy within doors and thinking of something else, I had not noticed the change, which must have been gradual however speedy. The heat had increased till it was most oppressive; and yet through it all there was now and then a cold shiver in the air which almost made me wince. All was still, so preternaturally still that occasional sounds seemed to strike the ear as disturbances. The screaming of the seagulls had mainly ceased, and the sound of breaking waves on rocks and shore was at variance with the silence over the sea; the sheep and cattle were so quiet that now and again the "moo" of a cow or the bleat of a sheep seemed strangely single. As I stood looking out seaward there seemed to be rising a cold wind; I could not exactly feel it, but I knew it was there. As I came down the path over the beach I thought I heard some one calling — a faint far-away sound. At first I did not heed it, as I knew it could not be any one calling to me; but when I found it continued, I looked round. There is at least a sufficient amount of curiosity in each of us to make us look round when there is a calling. At first I could not locate it; but then sight came to aid of sound, and I saw out on a rock two women waving handkerchiefs. The calling manifestly came from them. It was not good for any one to be isolated on a rock at a time when a storm was coming up; and I knew well the rocks which these women were amongst. I hurried on as quickly as I could, for there was a good way to go to reach them.

Near the south end of Cruden Bay there is a cluster of rocks which juts out from shore, something like a cock’s spur. Beyond this cluster are isolated rocks, many of them invisible at high tide. These form part of the rocky system of the Skares, which spread out fan-like from the point of Whinnyfold. Amongst these rocks the sea runs at change of tide with great force; more than once when swimming there I had been almost carried away. What it was to be carried away amongst the rocks of the Skares I knew too well from the fate of Lauchlane Macleod. I ran as fast as I could down the steep pathway and along the boulder-strewn beach till I came to the Sand Craigs. As I ran I could see from the quick inrush of waves, which though not much at present were gathering force every instant, that the storm which the shepherd had predicted was coming fast upon us. In such case every moment was precious. Indeed it might mean life; and so in breathless haste I scrambled over the rocks. Behind the main body of the Sand Craigs are two isolated rocks whose tops are just uncovered at high tide, but which are washed with every wave. The near one of these is at low water not separated from the main mass, but only joined by a narrow isthmus a few feet long, over which the first waves of the turning tide rush vigourously, for it is in the direct sweep of the flowing tide. Beyond this, some ninety or a hundred feet off and separated by a deep channel, is the outer rock, always in island form. From this spot at low water is the best view of the multitudinous rocks of the Skares. On all sides they rise round you as you stand, the granite seeming yellow with the washing of the sea between the lines of high and low water; above the latter the black seaweed ceases growing. This island is so hidden by the higher rocks around it that it cannot be seen from any part of Cruden Bay or from Port Erroll across it; it can only be seen from the path leading to Whinnyfold. It was fortunate that some one had been passing just then, or the efforts of the poor women to attract attention might have been made in vain.

When I reached the Sand Craigs I scrambled at once to the farthest point of the rocks, and came within sight of the isolated rock. Fortunately it was low water. The tide had only lately turned and was beginning to flow rapidly through the rocks. When I had scrambled on the second last rock I was only some thirty yards from the outermost one and could see clearly the two women. One was stout and elderly, the other young and tall and of exceeding beauty. The elderly one was in an almost frantic condition of fright; but the younger one, though her face was deadly pale — and I could see from the anxious glances which she kept casting round her that she was far from at ease — was outwardly calm. For an instant there was a curious effect as her pale face framed in dark hair stood out against the foam of the tide churning round the far off rocks. It seemed as though her head were dressed with white flowers. As there was no time to lose, I threw off my coat and shoes and braced myself for a swim. I called as I did so: "What has become of your boat?" The answer came back in a clear, young voice of manifestly American intonation:

"It drifted away. It has gone off amongst those rocks at the headland."

I had for a moment an idea that my best plan might be to fetch it first, but a glance at the distance and at the condition of the sea made me see the futility of any such hope. Already the waves were rising so fast that they were beginning to sweep over the crest of the rocks. Even that in front of me where the women stood was now topped by almost every wave. Without further delay I jumped into the sea and swam across. The girl gave me a hand up the rock, and I stood beside them, the old lady holding tight to me whilst I held the younger one and the rising waves washing round our feet. For a moment or two I considered the situation, and then asked them if either of them could swim. The answer was in the negative. “Then,” I said decisively, “you must leave yourselves to me, and I shall swim across with each of you in turn.” The old lady groaned. I pointed out that there was no other way, and that if we came at once it would not be difficult, as the distance was short and the waves were not as yet troublesome. I tried to treat the matter as though it were a nice holiday episode so that I might keep up their spirits; but all the same I felt gravely anxious. The distance to swim was only some thirty yards, but the channel was deep, and the tide running strong. Moreover the waves were rising, and we should have to get a foothold on the slippery seaweed-covered rock. However there was nothing to be done but to hasten; and as I was considering how best I should take the old lady across I said:

“What a pity it is that we haven’t even a strong cord, and then we could pull each other across.” The girl jumped at the idea and said:

“There was plenty in the boat, but of course it is gone. Still there should be a short piece here. I took care to fasten the painter to a piece of rock; but like a woman forgot to see that the other end was fixed to the boat, so that when the tide turned she drifted away with the stream. The fast end should be here still.” When the coming wave had rolled on she pointed to a short piece of rope tied round a jutting piece of rock; its loose end swayed to and fro with every wave. I jumped for it at once, for I saw a possible way out of our difficulty; even if the rope were short, so was the distance, and its strands ravelled might cover the width of the channel. I untied the rope as quickly as I could. It was not an easy task, for the waves made it impossible to work except for a few seconds at a time; however, I got it free at last and pulled it up. It was only a fragment some thirty feet in length; but my heart leaped for I saw my way clear now. The girl saw it too and said at once:

"Let me help you." I gave her one end of the rope and we commenced simultaneously to ravel the piles. It was a little difficult to do, standing as we did upon the uneven surface of the rock with the waves rushing over our feet and the old lady beside us groaning and moaning and imploring us to hasten. Mostly she addressed herself to me, as in some way the *deus ex machina* and thus superior to the occasion where helpless women were concerned; but occasionally the wail was directed to her companion, who would then, even in that time of stress and hurry, spare a moment to lay a comforting hand on her as she said:

"Hush! oh hush! Do not say anything, dear. You will only frighten yourself. Be brave!" and such phrases of kindness and endearment. Once the girl stopped as a wave bigger than the rest broke over her feet. The old lady tried to still her shriek into a moan as she held on to her, saying "Oh Miss Anita! Oh Miss Anita!" plaintively over and over again.

At last we had ravelled the four strands of the rope and I began to knot them together. The result was a rope long enough to reach from rock to rock, though it was in places of very doubtful strength. I made a big loop at one end of it and put it over the stout lady's head and under her armpits. I cautioned both women not to tax the cord too severely by a great or sudden strain. The elder lady protested against going first, but was promptly negatived by the young lady, whose wishes on the subject were to me a foregone conclusion. I took the loose end of the rope and diving into the water swam across to the other rock upon the top of which I scrambled with some little trouble, for the waves, though not as yet in themselves dangerous, made difficult any movement which exposed me to their force. I signed to the old lady to slide into the sea which, assisted by the girl, she did very pluckily. She gasped and gurgled a good deal and clutched the loop with a death grip; but I kept a steady even strain on the rope whose strength I mistrusted. In a few seconds she was safely across, and I was pulling her up by the hands up the rock. When she was firmly fixed I gave her the loose end of the cord to hold and swam back with the loop. The girl did not delay or give any trouble. As she helped me up the rock I could not but notice what strength she had; her grip of my wet hand was firm and strong, and there was in it no quiver of anxiety. I felt that she had no care for herself, now that her companion was safe. I signalled to the old lady to be ready; the girl slipped into the water, I going in at the same time and swimming beside her. The old lady pulled zealously. So absorbed was she in her work that she did not heed my warning cry not to pull too hard. She pulled as though on her strength rested the issue of life and death; with the result that before we were a third of the way across the rope broke and she fell sitting on the rock behind her. For an instant the girl was submerged and came up gasping. In the spasmodic impulse common at such moments she gripped me so hard round the neck that I felt we were both in danger. Before we sank I wrenched, though with some difficulty her hands away from me, so that when we rose I had her at arm’s length. For a few seconds I held her so that she could get her breath; and as I did so I could hear the old lady screaming out in an agonised way:

"Marjory! Marjory! Marjory!" With her breath came back the girl's reason, and she left herself to me passively. As I held her by the shoulder, a wave sweeping over the rock took us, and in my sudden effort to hold her I tore away the gown at her throat. It was quite evident her wits were all about her now for she cried out suddenly:

"Oh, my brooch! my brooch!" There was no time to waste and no time for questions. When a man has to swim for two in a choppy sea, and when the other one is a fully clothed woman, there is little to waste of strength or effort. So I swam as I had never done, and brought her up to the rock where the old lady helped her to scramble to her feet. When I had got my breath I asked her about her brooch. She replied:

"I would not have lost it for all the world. It is an heirloom."

"Was it gold?" I asked, for I wanted to know its appearance as I intended to dive for it.

"Yes!" she said, and without another word I jumped into the channel again to swim to the outer rock, for it was close there it must have been lost and I could dive from there. The channel between the rocks has a sandy bottom, and it would be easy to see the gold. As I went she called out to me to come back, not to mind, that she would rather lose it a thousand times than have me run any risk, and so forth; things mightily pleasant to hear when spoken by such lips. For myself I had only exultation. I had got off both the women without accident, and the sea was as yet, not such as to give any concern to a good swimmer. I dived from the rock and got bottom easily, the depth being only ten or twelve feet; and after a few seconds looking round me I saw the gleam of gold. When I had risen and swam to the inner rock the two women pulled me up to my feet.

When I gave her the brooch the young lady pressed it to her lips, and turning to me with tears in her eyes said:

“Oh you brave man! You kind, brave man! I would not have lost this for anything I call mine. Thank you that you have saved our lives; and that you have saved this for me.” Then with girlish impulsiveness and unpremeditation she put up her face and kissed me.

That moment, with her wet face to mine, was the happiest of my life.

CHAPTER VIII. A RUN ON THE BEACH

The girl’s kiss was so spontaneous and so natural that it could not convey any false impression to me. It was a manifest expression of gratitude, and that only. Nevertheless it set my heart beating and my veins tingling with delight. From that instant I did not feel quite a stranger to the giver; nor could I ever feel as quite a stranger again. Something of the same idea may have passed through the girl’s mind, for she blushed and looked around her shyly; but, with a proud lifting of her head and a slight stamp of her foot on the rock, she put the matter behind her, for the present. The old lady, in the midst of her concern for her companion and herself, was able to throw a glance of disapproval on me, as though I had done something wrong; from which I gathered that the younger lady was not only very dear to her, but held in some sort of unusual respect as well. It was peculiar that she should in the midst of her present condition be able to give a thought to so trivial a thing. For though death did not now stare her in the face, she was cold and wet; the rock she stood on was hard and slippery, and the foam of the breaking waves was even now curling around her feet.

She looked about her apprehensively; she did not know whether or no we were on another isolated rock. I reassured her on this subject, and we scrambled as quickly as we could over the rocks on our way shoreward. The elder lady took up most of my time. Here and there in a difficult place, for the wind by now blew so strongly that one found it hard to balance oneself as is necessary when walking on rocks, I offered the younger my hand. At first she firmly declined; but then, manifestly thinking it churlish, she relented and let me help her. That kiss was evidently rankling in her mind.

Both the women breathed more freely when we had reached the shore and stood secure from the sea. And indeed by this time the view, as we looked back, was enough to frighten one. Great waves topped with white were rolling in from as far as we could see; dashing over the rocks, sending up here and there white towers of spray, or rolling in on the flat shore in front of us with an ominous roar. Woe betide any one who might be isolated now on any rock beyond; he would be swept off, and beaten on the rocks. The old lady groaned as she saw it, and then said audibly a prayer of thankfulness. Even the girl grew white for a moment; then, to my secret joy, unconsciously she drew closer to me. I took control of the party.

"Come," I said, "you mustn't stand here in your wet clothes. Hurry to the hotel and get dried. You will get your death of cold. We must all run! Or hasten, at all events!" I added, as I took in the dimensions of the elder lady.

"We have left our trap at the hotel" said the younger lady as we began to walk quickly in the direction of Port Erroll.

As we were moving off it suddenly struck me that Gormala might have seen the episode of the rescue. The very thought of such a thing filled me with such dismay that I groaned aloud. Not for all the world would I have had her have a hand in this; it was too sacred — too delightful — too much apart from ordinary things! Whilst I was lost in a reverie of inexpressible sweetness for perhaps two or three seconds altogether, I was recalled to myself by the voice of the girl who came close to me:

"Are you hurt? Please tell me if you are. I am a First Aid."

"Hurt?" I asked, surprised "not at all. What on earth makes you think so?"

"I heard you groan!"

"Oh that — —" I began with a smile. Then I stopped, for again the haunting fear of Gormala's interference closed over my heart like a wet mist. With the fear, however, came a resolution; I would not have any doubt to torment me. In my glance about the shore, as we came off the rocks on to the beach, I had not seen a sign of anyone. At this part of the shore the sandhills have faded away into a narrow flat covered with bent-grass, beyond which the land slopes up directly to the higher plain. There was not room or place for any one to hide; even one lying amongst the long bents could be seen at a glance from above. Without a word I turned to the left and ran as quickly as I could across the beach and up the steep bank of the sandy plateau. With a certain degree of apprehension, and my heart beating like a trip-hammer — I had certainly taken this matter with much concern — I looked around. Then I breathed freely; there was not a sign of anyone as far as I could see. The wind, now coming fiercely in from the sea, swept the tall bent-grass till it lay over, showing the paler green of its under side; the blue-green, metallic shimmer which marks it, and which painters find it so hard to reproduce, had all vanished under the stress.

I ran back to join the ladies. The elder one had continued walking stolidly along the shore, leaving a track of wet on the half dry sand as she went; but the younger one had lingered and came towards me as I approached.

"I hope there was nothing wrong?" she asked in a most natural way.

"No," I said it without thinking, for there was something about the girl which made me feel as if we were old friends, and I spoke to her unconsciously in this strain. "It's all right. She's not there!"

"Who?" she asked with unconsciousness of any *arrière pensée*, an unconsciousness similar to my own.

“Gormala!” I answered.

“And who is Gormala?” For quite a minute or two I walked on without speaking, for I wanted to think before I answered. I felt that it would be hard to explain the odd way in which the Seer-woman seemed to have become tangled up in my life; and yet I wanted to tell this girl. I feared that she might laugh at me; that she might think me ridiculous; that she might despise me; or even that she might think me a lunatic! Then again Gormala might come and tell things to her. There was no accounting for what the woman might do. She might come upon us at any moment; she might be here even now! The effect of her following or watching me had begun to tell on my mind; her existence haunted me. I looked around anxiously, and breathed freely. There was no sign of her. My eyes finally fetched up on the face of the girl.... Her beautiful, dark eyes were fixed on me with interest and wonder.

“Well!” she said, after a pause, “I don’t suppose I’m more inquisitive than my neighbours, but I should just like to know, right here, what’s wrong with you. You looked round that time just as if you were haunted! Why did you run away that time and search round as if some one had taken a pot-shot at you and you wanted to locate him? Why did you groan before you went, and come back humming? Who is Gormala, anyhow; and why were you glad that you didn’t see her? Why didn’t you answer me when I asked you who she was? Why did you walk along with your head up and your eyes staring, as though you were seeing visions? And why — —”

All at once she stopped, and a swift blush swept over her face and even her neck. “Oh,” she said in a low tone with a note of pathos in her voice, “I beg your pardon! my unruly tongue ran away with me. I have no right to ask so many questions — and from a stranger too!" She stopped as suddenly as she had begun.

"You might have spared me that!" I said "I know I have been rude in delaying to answer your question about Gormala; but the fact is that there are so many odd things in connection with her that I was really considering whether you would think me a fool or a lunatic if I told them to you. And you certainly would not understand why I didn't want to see her, if I didn't. And perhaps not even if I did," I added as an afterthought. The girl's awkwardness slipped from her like a robe; the blush merged into a smile as she turned to me and said:

"This is most interesting. O! do tell me — if you don't mind."

"I shall be delighted" I said, and I only expressed my thought. "Gormala" I began; but just then the stout lady in front of us, who was now a considerable way ahead, turned round and called to us. I could only hear "Miss Anita;" but the girl evidently understood, for she called out:

"All right! We are coming at once!" and she hurried on. It gave me a thrill of pleasure that she said "we" not "I;" it was sweet to have a part in such a comprehension. As we went she turned to me and said:

"You must tell me all about it; I shan't be happy till I hear the whole story, whatever it is. This is all too lovely and exciting. I hadn't an idea when we went out sleepily this morning that there would be so much in the day to think of afterwards." I felt that I had taken my courage in both hands as I said:

"You'll both dine with me at the hotel, won't you. You have missed lunch and must be hungry, so we can dine early. It will be such a true pleasure to me; and I can tell you all about everything afterwards, if we can manage to get a moment alone."

She paused, and I waited anxiously. Then she spoke with a delightful smile:

"That must be as Mrs. Jack says. But we shall see!" With this I had to be content for the present.

When we came up to her, Mrs. Jack said in a woeful way:

"Oh, Miss Anita, I don't know what to do. The sand is so heavy, and my clothes are so weighty with the wet, and my boots squish so with the water in them that I'm beginning to think I'll never be able to get warm or dry again; though I'm both warm enough and dry enough in other ways." As she spoke she moved her feet somewhat after the manner of a bear dancing, so as to make her wet boots squeak. I would have liked to have laughed, though I really pitied the poor thing; but a glance at the concern on Miss Anita's face checked me. Very tenderly she began to help and comfort the old lady, and looked at me pleadingly to help her. "Why dear" she said "no wonder it is hard walking for you with your clothes so wringing wet," and she knelt down on the wet sand and began to wring them out. I looked around to see what I could do to help. Just opposite, where we were the outcrop of rock on which the Hawklaw is based sent up a jagged spur of granite through the sand, close under the bent-covered hillocks. I pointed to this and we led the old lady over to it and made her sit down on a flat rock. Then we proceeded to wring her out, she all the while protesting against so much trouble being taken about her. We pulled off her spring-side boots, emptied them out and, with considerable difficulty, forced them on again. Then we all stood up, and the girl and I took her arms and hurried her along the beach; we all knew that nothing could be done for real comfort till we should have reached the hotel. As we went she said with gratitude in every note of her voice, the words joggling out of her as she bumped along:

“Oh, my dears, you are very good to me.”

Once again the use of the plural gave me pleasure. This time, however, it was my head, rather than my heart, which was affected; to be so bracketted with Miss Anita was to have hope as well as pleasure.

Things were beginning to move fast with me.

When we got to Cruden there was great local excitement, and much running to and fro on the part of the good people of the hotel to get dry clothes for the strange ladies. None of us gave any detail as to how the wetting took place; by some kind of common consent it was simply made known for the time that they had been overtaken by the tide. When once the incomplete idea had been started I took care not to elaborate it. I could see plainly enough that though the elder lady had every wish to be profuse in the expression of her gratitude to me, the younger one not only remained silent but now and again restrained her companion by a warning look. Needless to say, I let things go in their own way; it was too sweet a pleasure to me to share anything in the way of a secret with my new friend, to imperil such a bliss by any breach of reticence. The ladies were taken away to bedrooms to change, and I asked that dinner for the three of us might be served in my room. When I had changed my own clothes, over which operation I did not lose any time, I waited in the room for the arrival of my guests. Whilst the table was being laid I learned that the two ladies had come to the hotel early in the day in a dogcart driven by the younger one. They had given no orders except that the horse should be put up and well cared for.

It was not long before the ladies appeared. Mrs. Jack began to express her gratitude to me. I tried to turn it aside, for though it moved me a little by its genuineness, I felt somewhat awkward, as though I were accepting praise under false pretences. Such service as I had been able to render, though of the utmost importance to them, had been so easy of execution to me that more than a passing expression of thanks seemed out of place. After all I had only accepted a wetting on behalf of two ladies placed in an awkward position. I was a good swimmer; and my part of the whole proceeding was unaccompanied by any danger whatever, I thought, of course, had it been later in the coming of the storm, things might have been very different. Here I shuddered as my imagination gave me an instantaneous picture of the two helpless women in the toils of the raging sea amongst those grim rocks and borne by that racing tide which had done poor Lauchlane Macleod to death. As if to emphasise my fears there now came a terrific burst of wind which seemed to sweep over the house with appalling violence. It howled and roared above us, so that every window, chimney and door, seemed to bear the sound right in upon us. Overhead was heard, between the burst which shook the windows and doors, that vague, booming sound, which conveys perhaps a better sense of nature's forces when let loose, than even the concrete expression of their violence. In this new feeling of the possibilities of the storm, I realised the base and the truth of the gratitude which the ladies felt; and I also realised what an awful tragedy might have come to pass had I or some one else not come down the path from Whinnyfold just when I did.

I was recalled to myself by an expression of concern by Mrs. Jack:

"Look how pale he has got. I do hope he has not been hurt."

Mechanically I answered:

"Hurt! I was never better in my life," then I felt that my pallor must have left me and that I grew red with pleasure as I heard Miss Anita say:

"Ah! I understand. He did not have any fear for himself; but he is beginning to feel how terrible it was for us." The fulness of understanding on the part of the beautiful girl, her perfect and ready sympathy, the exactness of her interpretation of my mind, made for me an inexpressible pleasure.

When I told Mrs. Jack that I had ventured to claim them both as my guests, and hoped that they would honour me by dining with me, she looked at her companion in the same inquiring way which I had already noticed. I could not see the face of the younger lady at the moment as it was turned away from me, but her approval was manifest; the answer was made gladly in the affirmative. Then I put forth a hope that they would allow me to have a carriage ready to take them home, whenever they might desire, so that they might feel at ease in remaining till they had been thoroughly restored after their fatigue. I added that perhaps it would be good for Miss Anita. Mrs. Jack raised her eyebrows slightly, and I thought there was a note of distance in her voice, as though she resented in a quiet way my mentioning the name:

"Miss Anita!" she said; and there was that unconscious stiffening of the back which evidences that one is on guard. I felt somewhat awkward, as though I had taken a liberty. The younger lady saw my difficulty, and with a quick smile jumped to the rescue.

"Oh Mrs. Jack" she said "I quite forgot that we were never introduced; but of course he heard you mention my name. It was rather hurried our meeting; wasn't it? We must set it right now."

Then she added very demurely:

“Dear Mrs. Jack, will you present to Miss Anita, Mr. — —” she looked at me interrogatively.

“Archibald Hunter” I said, and the presentation was formally made. Then Miss Anita answered my question about the carriage:

“Thank you for your kind offer, Mr. Archibald Hunter” I thought she dwelt on the name, “but we shall drive back as we came. The storm will not be quite so bad inland, and as it does not rain the cart will be all right; we have plenty of wraps. The lamps are good, and I know the road; I noted it well as we came. Is not that right?” she added, turning to her companion.

“Quite right, my dear! Do just as you like,” and so the manner of their going was arranged.

Then we had dinner; a delightful, cosy meal. The fire leaped whenever the wind roared; and as the darkness of the storm made a sort of premature nightfall, it gave a pleasant, homely look to everything. After dinner we sat round the fire, and I think for a time we were all content. To me it was so like a dream. To sit there close to the beautiful stranger, and to think of the romantic beginning of our acquaintance, was enjoyment beyond words. As yet I did not dare to cast a glance forwards; but I was content to wait for that. I had a conviction that my own mind was made up.

After a little while we all became silent. Mrs. Jack was beginning to doze in her chair, and we two young folk instinctively banded ourselves together with our youthful superiority over sleep and fatigue. I sat quite still; there was something so sweet in this organised companionship of silence that it enraptured me. I did not need Miss Anita’s look of caution to remain quiet; there was something in her face, some power or quality which was as eloquent as speech. I began to think of it; and the habit of introspection, which had now become a part of my nature, asserted itself. How much of this quality I thought, was in her face, how much in my own eyes and the brain that lay behind them. I was recalled to myself by a whisper:

"I thought for a moment you were going to sleep too. Hsh!" she placed a finger on her lip a moment and then tiptoed over to the sofa; taking a soft cushion she placed it under Mrs. Jack's head, which had now fallen over sideways upon the arm of the chair. Then she sat beside me again, and bending over said softly:

"While she is asleep would you mind walking down to the beach, I want to see the waves. They must be big by now; I can hear their roaring from here."

"I will go with delight;" I said "but you must wrap up properly. It will not do to run any chance of a chill."

"All right, oh wise man! I obey, King Solomon! I shall wait to put on my own clothes till I get back; and you can lend me a mackie-coat if you will." I got one of mine for her, the newest; and we walked over the sandhills to the beach.

The wind was blowing furiously. It never left off for a moment; but occasionally there were bursts of such added violence that we found it difficult to keep our feet. We clung to each other at such moments, and the very sense of the strength which enabled me to shield her somewhat from the violence of the storm, made a new feeling of love — I could not now disguise it from myself. Something went out from me to her; some subtle feeling which must, I suppose, have manifested itself in some way, how I know not, for I kept guard upon myself. For one blissful moment, possibly of forgetfulness, she clung to me as the weak cling to the strong, the clinging of self-surrender which is equally dear to the weak and the strong, to the woman and the man. And then she drew herself sharply away from me.

There was no misunderstanding the movement; it was an intentional and conscious one, and the motive which lay behind both was her woman's mystery. I did not know much about women, but I could make no mistake as to this. Inasmuch as Providence has thought fit in its wisdom to make men and women different, it is just as well that each sex should at critical times use its own potentialities for its protection and advancement. Herein comes, in the midst of an unnatural civilisation, the true utility of instinct. Since we have lost the need of early information of the presence of game or of predatory animals or hostile men, even our instincts adapt themselves to our surroundings. Many an act which may afterwards seem the result of long and careful premeditation is, on reflection, found to be simply the result of that form of momentary impulse which is in reality a blind obedience to some knowledge of our ancestors gained through painful experience. Some protective or militant instinct whose present exercise is but a variant of its primal use. For an instant the man and the woman were antagonistic. The woman shrank, therefore it was the man's interest to advance; all at once the man in me spoke through the bashfulness and reticence of years:

"Why do you shrink from me? Have I done anything?"

"Oh no!"

"Then why?" A hot blush mantled her face and neck. Had she been an English girl I should not probably have had a direct answer; she would have switched conversation on some safer track, or have, after some skirmishing, forbidden the topic altogether. This girl's training, however, had been different. Her equal companionship in study with boys in school and college had taught her the futility of trying to burke a question when her antagonist was masculine; and the natural pluck and dominance — the assertion of individuality which is a part of an American woman's birthright — brought up her pride. Still blushing, but bearing herself with additional dignity, she spoke. Had she been more self-conscious, and could she have seen herself at the moment, she would have recognised to the full that with so much pride and so much dignity she could well afford to discuss any topic that she chose.

"The fault is not yours. It is, or it was, my own."

"You mean when I gave you back your brooch?" The blood deepened and deepened to a painful intensity. In a low voice, in the tone of speech, but with only the power of a whisper she answered me:

"Yes!" This was my chance and I said with all the earnestness I had, and which I felt to the full:

"Let me say something. I shall not ever allude to it again unless you wish. I took that sweet acknowledgment of your gratitude exactly as it was meant. Do believe that I am a gentleman. I have not got a sister, I am sorry to say, but if I had, I should not mind her giving a kiss to a stranger under such circumstances. It was a sweet and womanly act and I respect — and — like you more for it. I wouldn't, of course, for all the world you hadn't done it; and I shall never forget it. But believe me I shall never forget myself on account of it. If I did I should be a howling cad; — and — that's all."

As I spoke her face brightened and she sighed with an expression of relief. The blush almost faded away, and a bright smile broke over her face. With a serious deep look in the eyes which glistened through her smile she held out her hand and said:

“You are a good fellow, and I thank you with all my heart.”

I felt as if I walked on air as we forced our way through the storm which roared around us, over the sandhills towards the sea. It was with an exultation that made my head swim that I noticed that she kept step with me.

CHAPTER IX. CONFIDENCES AND SECRET WRITING

The shore was a miracle of wild water and white foam. When the wind blows into Cruden Bay there is no end or limit to the violence of waves, which seem to gather strength as they rush over the flat expanse of shore. The tide was now only half in, and ordinarily there would have been a great stretch of bare sand between the dunes and the sea. To-night, however, the piling up of the waters sent in an unnatural tide which swept across the flat shore with exceeding violence. The roaring was interminable, and as we stood down on the beach we were enveloped in sheets of flying foam. The fierce blasts came at moments with such strength that it was physically impossible for us to face them. After a little we took shelter behind one of the wooden bathing-boxes fastened down under the sandhills. Here, protected from the direct violence of the storm, the shelter seemed like a calm from which we heard the roaring of wind and wave as from far off. There was a sense of cosiness in the shelter which made us instinctively draw close together. I could have remained happy in such proximity forever, but I feared that it would end at any moment. It was therefore, with delight that I heard the voice of Miss Anita, raised to suit the requirements of the occasion:

"Now that we are alone, won't you tell me about Gormala and the strange occurrences?" I tried to speak, but the storm was too great for the purposes of narrative. So I suggested that we should come behind the sandhill. We went accordingly, and made a nest in a deep hollow behind the outer range of hillocks. Here crouched among the tall bent, which flew like whip lashes when the wilder bursts of the storm came, and amid a never-ending scourge of fine sand swept from the top of the sandhills, I told her of all my experiences of Gormala and Second Sight.

She listened with a rapt attention. At times I could not see her face, for the evening was closing in and the driving clouds overhead, which kept piling up in great masses along the western horizon, shut out the remnants of the day. When, however, in the pauses of drifting sand and flying foam I could see her properly, I found her face positively alight with eager intelligence. Throughout, she was moved at times, and now and again crept a little closer to me; as for instance when I told her of the dead child and of Lauchlane Macleod's terrible struggle for life in the race of the tide amongst the Skares. Her questions were quite illuminating to me at moments, for her quick woman's intuition grasped possibilities at which my mere logical faculties had shied. Beyond all else, she was interested in the procession of ghosts on Lammas Eve. Only once during my narrative of this episode she interrupted me; not an intentional interruption but a passing comment of her own, candidly expressed. This was where the body of armed men came along; at which she said with a deep hissing intake of her breath through her teeth:

"Spaniards! I knew it! They were from some lost ship of the Armada!" When I spoke of the one who turned and looked at me with eyes that seemed of the quick, she straightened her back and squared her shoulders, and looking all round her alertly as though for some hidden enemy, clenched her hands and shut her lips tightly. Her great dark eyes seemed to blaze; then she grew calm again in a moment.

When I had finished she sat silent for a while, her eyes fixed in front of her as with one whose mind is occupied with introspection. Suddenly she said:

“That man had some secret, and he feared you would discover it. I can see it all! He, coming from his grave, could see with his dead eyes what you could see with your living ones. Nay, more; he could, perhaps, see not only that you saw, and what you saw, but where the knowledge would lead you. That certainly is a grand idea of Gormala’s, that of winning the Secret of the Sea!” After a pause of a few moments she went on, standing up as she did so and walking restlessly to and fro with clenched hands and flashing eyes:

“And if there be any Secrets of the Sea why not win them? If they be of Spain and the Spaniard, why not, a thousand times more, win them. If the Spaniard had a secret, be sure it was of no good to our Race. Why—” she moved excitedly as she went on: “Why this is growing interesting beyond belief. If his dead eyes could for an instant become quick, why should not the change last longer? He might materialise altogether.” She stopped suddenly and said: “There! I am getting flighty as usual. I must think it all over. It is all too wonderful and too exciting for anything. You will let me ask you more about it, won’t you, when we meet again?”

When we meet again! Then we would meet again: The thought was a delight to me; and it was only after several rapturous seconds that I answered her:

“I shall tell you all I know; everything. You will be able to help me in discovering the Mystery; perhaps working together we can win the Secret of the Sea.”

“That would be too enchanting!” she said impulsively, and then stopped suddenly as if remembering herself. After a pause she said sedately:

“I’m afraid we must be going back now. We have a long way to drive; and it will be quite late enough anyhow.”

As we moved off I asked her if I might not see her and Mrs. Jack safely home. I could get a horse at the hotel and drive with them. She laughed lightly as she answered:

"You are very kind indeed. But surely we shall not need any one! I am a good driver; the horse is perfect and the lamps are bright. You haven't any 'hold-ups' here as we have Out West; and as I am not within Gormala's sphere of influence, I don't think there is anything to dread!" Then after a pause she added:

"By the way have you ever seen Gormala since?" It was with a queer feeling which I could not then analyse, but which I found afterwards contained a certain proportion of exultation I answered:

"Oh yes! I saw her only two days ago—" Here I stopped for I was struck with a new sense of the connection of things. Miss Anita saw the wonder in my face and drawing close to me said:

"Tell me all about it!" So I told her of the auction at Peterhead and of the chest and the papers with the mysterious marks, and of how I thought it might be some sort of account— "or," I added as a new idea struck me— "secret writing." When I had got thus far she said with decision:

"I am quite sure it is. You must try to find it out. Oh, you must, you must!"

"I shall," said I, "if you desire it." She said nothing, but a blush spread over her face. Then she resumed her movement towards the hotel.

We walked in silence; or rather we ran and stumbled, for the fierce wind behind us drove us along. The ups and downs of the surface were veiled with the mist of flying sand swept from amongst the bent-grass on the tops of the sandhills. I would have liked to help her, but a judicious dread of seeming officious — and so losing a step in her good graces — held me back. I felt that I was paying a price of abstinence for that kiss. As we went, the silence between us seemed to be ridiculous; so to get over it I said, after searching in my mind for a topic which would not close up her sympathies with me:

"You don't seem to like Spaniards?"

"No," she answered quickly, "I hate them! Nasty, cruel, treacherous wretches! Look at the way they are treating Cuba! Look at the *Maine*!" Then she added suddenly:

"But how on earth did you know I dislike them." I answered:

"Your voice told me when you spoke to yourself whilst I was telling you about the ghosts and the man with the eyes."

"True," she said reflectively. "So I did. I must keep more guard on myself and not let my feelings run away with me. I give myself away so awfully." I could have made a reply to this, but I was afraid. That kiss seemed like an embodied spirit of warning, holding a sword over my head by a hair.

It was not long before I found the value of my silence. The lady's confidence in my discretion was restored, and she began, of her own initiative, to talk. She spoke of the procession of ghosts; suddenly stopping, however, as if she had remembered something, she said to me:

"But why were you so anxious that Gormala should not have seen you saving us from the rock?"

"Because," I answered, "I did not want her to have anything to do with this."

"What do you mean by 'this'?" There was something in the tone of her query which set me on guard. It was not sincere; it had not that natural intonation, even, all through, which marks a question put in simple faith. Rather was it in the tone of one who asks, knowing well the answer which will or may be given. As I have said, I did not know much about women, but the tone of coquetry, no matter how sweet, no matter how ingenuous, no matter how lovable, cannot be mistaken by any man with red blood in his veins! Secretly I exulted, for I felt instinctively that there rested some advantage with me in the struggle of sex. The knowledge gave me coolness, and brought my brain to the aid of my heart. Nothing would have delighted me more at the moment than to fling myself, actually as well as metaphorically, at the girl's feet. My mind was made up to try to win her; my only thought now was the best means to that end. I felt that I was a little sententious as I replied to her question:

"By 'this' I mean the whole episode of my meeting with you."

"And Mrs. Jack," she added, interrupting me.

"And Mrs. Jack, of course," I went on, feeling rejoiced that she had given me an opportunity of saying something which I would not otherwise have dared to say. "Or rather I should perhaps say, my meeting with Mrs. Jack and her friend. It was to me a most delightful thing to meet with Mrs. Jack; and I can honestly say this day has been the happiest of my life."

"Don't you think we had better be getting on? Mrs. Jack will be waiting for us!" she said, but without any kind of reproach in her manner.

"All right," I answered, as I ran up a steep sandhill and held out my hand to help her. I did not let her hand go till we had run down the other side, and up and down another hillock and came out upon the flat waste of sand which lay between us and the road, and over which a sort of ghostly cloud of sand drifted.

Before we left the sand, I said earnestly:

"Gormala's presence seems always to mean gloom and sorrow, weeping and mourning, fear and death. I would not have any of them come near you or yours. This is why I thanked God then, and thank Him now, that in our meeting Gormala had no part!"

She gave me her hand impulsively. As for an instant her soft palm lay in my palm and her strong fingers clasped mine, I felt that there was a bond between us which might some day enable me to shield her from harm.

When Mrs. Jack, and 'her friend', were leaving the hotel, I came to the door to see them off. She said to me, in a low voice, as I bade farewell:

"We shall, I daresay, see you before long. I know that Mrs. Jack intends to drive over here again. Thank you for all your kindness. Good night!" There was a shake of the reins, a clatter of feet on the hard road, a sweeping round of the rays of light from the lamp as the cart swayed at the start under the leap forward of the high-bred horse and swung up the steep inland roadway. The last thing I saw was a dark, muffled figure, topped by a tam-o'-shanter cap, projected against the mist of moving light from the lamp.

Next morning I was somewhat *distrait*. Half the night I had lain awake thinking; the other half I had dreamt. Both sleeping and waking dreams were mixed, ranging from all the brightness of hope to the harrowing possibilities of vague, undefined fear.

Sleeping dreams have this difference over day dreams, that the possibilities become for the time actualities, and thus for good and ill, pleasure or pain, multiply the joys or sufferings. Through all, however, there remained one fixed hope always verging toward belief, I should see Miss Anita — Marjory — again.

Late in the afternoon I got a letter directed in a strange hand, fine and firm, with marked characteristics and well formed letters, and just enough of unevenness to set me at ease. I am never quite happy with the writer whose hand is exact, letter by letter, and word by word, and line by line. So much can be told by handwriting, I thought, as I looked at the letter lying beside my plate. A hand that has no characteristics is that of a person insipid; a hand that is too marked and too various is disconcerting and undependable. Here my philosophising came to an end, for I had opened the envelope, and not knowing the writing, had looked at the signature, “Marjory Anita.”

I hoped that no one at the table d’hote breakfast noticed me, for I felt that I was red and pale by turns. I laid the letter down, taking care that the blank back page was uppermost; with what nonchalance I could I went on with my smoked haddie. Then I put the letter in my pocket and waited till I was in my own room, secure from interruption, before I read it.

That one should kiss a letter before reading it, is conceivable, especially when it is the first which one has received from the girl he loves.

It was not dated nor addressed. A swift intuition told me that she had not given the date because she did not wish to give the address; the absence of both was less marked than the presence of the one alone. It addressed me as “Dear Mr. Hunter.” She knew my name, of course, for I had told it to her; it was on the envelope. The body of the letter said that she was asked by Mrs. Jack to convey her warm thanks for the great service rendered; to which she ventured to add the expression of her own gratitude. That in the hurry and confusion of mind, consequent on their unexpected position, they had both quite forgotten about the boat which they had hired and which had been lost. That the owner of it would no doubt be uneasy about it, and that they would both be grateful if I would see him — he lived in one of the cottages close to the harbour of Port Erroll — and find out from him the value of the boat so that Mrs. Jack might pay it to him, as well as a reasonable sum for the loss of its use until he should have been able to procure another. That Mrs. Jack ventured to give him so much trouble, as Mr. Hunter had been already so kind that she felt emboldened to trespass upon his goodness. And was "yours faithfully, 'Marjory Anita.'" Of course there was a postscript — it was a woman's letter! It ran as follows:

"Have you deciphered those papers? I have been thinking over them as well as other things, and I am convinced they contain some secret. You must tell me all about them when I see you on Tuesday.

M."

I fear that logic, as understood in books, had little to do with my kiss on reading this; the reasoning belonged to that higher plane of thought on which rests the happiness of men and women in this world and the next. There was not a thought in the postscript which did not give me joy — utter and unspeakable joy; and the more I thought of it and the oftener I read it the more it seemed to satisfy some aching void in my heart, "Have you deciphered the papers" — the papers whose existence was only known to her and me! It was delightful that we should know so much of a secret in common. She had been 'thinking over them' — and other things! 'Other things!' — I had been thinking of other things; thinking of them so often that every detail of their being or happening was photographed not only on my memory but seemingly on my very soul. And of all these 'other things' there was one!!...

To see her again; to hear her voice; to look in her eyes; to see her lips move and watch each varying expression which might pass across that lovely face, evoked by thoughts which we should hold in common; to touch her hand....

I sat for a while like one in a rapturous dream, where one sees all the hopes of the heart fulfilled in completeness and endlessly. And this was all to be on Tuesday next — Only six days off!...

I started impulsively and went to the oak chest which stood in the corner of my room and took out the papers.

After looking over them carefully I settled quietly down to a minute examination of them. I felt instinctively that my mandate or commission was to see if they contained any secret writing. The letters I placed aside, for the present at any rate. They were transparently simple and written in a flowing hand which made anything like the necessary elaboration impossible. I knew something of secret writing, for such had in my boyhood been a favourite amusement with me. At one time I had been an invalid for a considerable period and had taken from my father's library a book by Bishop Wilkins, the brother-in-law of Oliver Cromwell, called "Mercury: or the Secret and Swift Messenger." Herein were given accounts of many of the old methods of secret communication, ciphers, string writing, hidden meanings, and many of the mechanical devices employed in an age when the correspondence of ambassadors, spies and secret agents was mainly conducted by such means. This experience had set my mind somewhat on secret writing, and ever after when in the course of miscellaneous reading I came across anything relating to the subject I made a note of it. I now looked over the papers to see if I could find traces of any of the methods with which I was acquainted; before long I had an idea.

It was only a rudimentary idea, a surmise, a possibility; but still it was worth going into. It was not any cause of undue pride to me, for it came as a corollary to an established conclusion, rather than as a fine piece of reasoning from acute observation. The dates of the letters gave the period as the end of the sixteenth century, when one of the best ciphers of that time had been conceived, the “Biliteral Cipher” of Francis Bacon. To this my attention had been directed by the work of John Wilkins and I had followed it out with great care. As I was familiar with the principle and method of this cipher I was able to detect signs of its existence; and this being so, I had at once strong hopes of being able to find the key to it. The Biliteral cipher has as its great advantage, that it can be used in any ordinary writing, and that its forms and methods are simply endless. All that it requires in the first instance is that there be some method arranged on between the writer and the reader of distinguishing between different forms of the same letter. In my desk I had a typewritten copy of a monograph on the subject of the Biliteral cipher, in which I half suggested that possibly Bacon’s idea might be worked out more fully so that a fewer number of symbols than his five would be sufficient. Leaving my present occupation for a moment I went and got it; for by reading it over I might get some clue to aid me. Some thought which had already come to me, or some conclusion at which I had already arrived might guide me in this new labyrinth of figures, words and symbols.

When I had carefully read the paper, occasionally referring to the documents before me, I sat down and wrote a letter to Miss Anita telling her that I had undertaken the task at once on her suggestion and that I surmised that the method of secret writing adopted if any, was probably a variant of the Biliteral cipher. I therefore sent her my own monograph on the subject so that if she chose she might study it and be prepared to go into the matter when we met. I studiously avoided saying anything which might frighten her or make any barrier between us; matters were shaping themselves too clearly for me to allow myself to fall into the folly of over-precipitation. It was only when I had placed the letter with its enclosure in the envelope and written Marjory's — Miss Anita's — name that I remembered that I had not got her address. I put it in my pocket to keep for her till we should meet on Tuesday.

When I resumed my work I began on the two remaining exhibits. The first was a sheaf of some thirty pages torn out of some black-letter law-book. The only remarkable thing about it was that every page seemed covered with dots — hundreds, perhaps thousands on each page. The second was quite different: a narrow slip of paper somewhat longer than a half sheet of modern note paper, covered with an endless array of figures in even lines, written small and with exquisite care. The paper was just such a size as might be put as marker in an ordinary quarto; that it had been so used was manifest by the discolouration of a portion of it that had evidently stuck out at the top of the volume. Fortunately, in its long dusty rest in the bookshelf the side written on had been downward so that the figures, though obscured by dust and faded by light and exposure to the air, were still decipherable. This paper I examined most carefully with a microscope; but could see in it no signs of secret writing beyond what might be contained in the disposition of the numbers themselves. I got a sheet of foolscap and made an enlarged copy, taking care to leave fair space between the rows of figures and between the figures themselves.

Then I placed the copy of figures and the first of the dotted pages side by side before me and began to study them.

I confined my attention at first chiefly to the paper of figures, for it struck me that it would of necessity be the simpler of the two systems to read, inasmuch as the symbols should be self-contained. In the dotted letters it was possible that more than one element existed, for the disposition of significants appeared to be of endless variety, and the very novelty of the method — it being one to which the eyes and the senses were not accustomed — made it a difficult one to follow at first. I had little doubt, however, that I should ultimately find the dot cipher the more simple of the two, when I should have learned its secret and become accustomed to its form. Its mere bulk made the supposition likely that it was in reality simple; for it would be indeed an endless task, to work out in this laborious form two whole sheets of a complicated cipher.

Over and over and over again I read the script of numbers. Forward and backward; vertically; up and down, for the lines both horizontal and vertical were complete and exact, I read it. But nothing struck me of sufficient importance to commence with as a beginning.

Of course there were here and there repetitions of the same combination of figures, sometimes two, sometimes three, sometimes four together; but of the larger combinations the instances were rare and did not afford me any suggestion of a clue!

So I became practical, and spent the remainder of my work-time that day in making by aid of my microscope an exact but enlarged copy, but in Roman letters, of the first of the printed pages.

Then I reproduced the dots as exactly as I could. This was a laborious task indeed. When the page was finished, half-blinded, I took my hat and went out along the shore towards Whinnyfold. I wanted to go to the Sand Craigs; but even to myself I said ‘Whinnyfold’ which lay farther on.

“Men are deceivers ever,” sang Balthazar in the play: they deceive even themselves at times. Or they pretend they do — which is a new and advanced form of the same deceit.

See Appendix A.

CHAPTER X. A CLEAR HORIZON

If any ordinary person be afflicted with ennui and want something to take his thoughts away from a perpetual consideration of his own weariness let me recommend him to take up the interpretation of secret writing. At first, perhaps, he may regard the matter lightly and be inclined to smile at its triviality. But after a little while, if he have in him at all any of the persistence or doggedness which is, and should be, a part of a man's nature, he will find the subject take possession of him to the almost entire exclusion of all else. Turn from it how he will; make he never so many resolutions to put the matter behind him; try he never so hard to find some more engrossing topic, he will still find the evasive mystery ever close before him. For my own part I can honestly say that I ate, drank, slept and dreamed secret writing during the entire of the days and nights which intervened between my taking up the task and the coming of Miss Anita to Cruden Bay. All day long the hidden mystery was before me; wherever I was, in my room, still or contorting myself; walking on the beach; or out on the headlands, with the breezes singing in my ears, and the waves lapping below my feet. Hitherto in my life my only experience of haunting had been that of Gormala; but even that experience failed before the ever-hopeful, ever-baffling subject of the cryptograms. The worst of my feeling, and that which made it more poignant, was that I was of the firm belief not only that there was a cryptogram but that my mind was already on the track of it. Every now and again, sometimes when the MS. or its copy was before me and sometimes when I was out in the open, for the moment not thinking of it at all, a sort of inspiration would come to me; some sort of root idea whose full significance I felt it difficult to grasp.

My first relief came on Tuesday when at noon I saw the high dog-cart dash past the gate and draw up short opposite the post-office.

I did not lose any time in reaching the cart so as to be able to help the ladies down. Marjory gave me both her hands and jumped lightly, but the elder lady required a good deal of help. It is always thus; the experience of every young man is the same. Every woman, old or young, except the one whom he likes to lift or carry tenderly, is willing to be lifted or carried in the most leisurely or self-denying manner.

When Mrs. Jack and 'her friend' had come into the hotel sitting-room the latter said to me:

"I hope you forgive us for all the trouble we have put you to."

"No trouble at all," I answered — and oh! it sounded so tame—"only a pleasure!" "Thank you," she continued gravely, "that is very nice of you. Now we want you to add to your kindness and take us out again on that rock. I have not yet finished my sketch, and I don't like to be baffled."

"Finished your sketch, my dear," said Mrs. Jack, in a tone which manifestly showed that the whole thing was new to her. "Why, Marjory, it was washed into the sea before Mr. Hunter came to help us!" The slight, quick blush which rose to her face showed that she understood the false position in which the maladroit remark placed her; but she went on pluckily:

"Oh, yes, dear, I know! What I mean is, that having set my heart on making that sketch, I want to do it; even if my first effort went wrong. That is, dear Mrs. Jack, if you do not mind our going out there again."

"Oh, my dear," said the elder lady, "of course I will do just whatever you wish. But I suppose it will do if I sit on the rock near at hand? Somehow, since our experience there, I seem to prefer the mainland than any place where you may have to swim to get away from it." Marjory smiled at me as she said to her:

"That will do capitally. And you can keep the lunch basket; and have your eye on me and the rising of the tide all the time."

So I sent to Whinnyfold to have a boat ready when we should drive over. Whilst the ladies were preparing themselves for the boating trip I went to my room and took in my pocket the papers from the chest and my rescripts. I took also the letter which I had not been able to deliver.

At Whinnyfold Miss Anita and I took the steep zigzag to the beach, piloted by one of John Hay's boys whilst the other took Mrs. Jack across the neck of the headland to the Sand Craigs.

As we went down the steep path, the vision of the procession of ghosts moving steadily up it on Lammas Eve, came back to me; instinctively I looked round to see if Gormala was watching. I breathed more freely when I saw she was not about.

I should dearly have liked to take Miss Anita alone in the boat, but I feared that such was not safe. Rowing amongst the rocks of the Skares is at the best of times no child's play, and I was guardian of too great a treasure to be willing to run any risks. Young Hay and I pulled, the boy being in the bow and doing the steering. This position of affairs suited me admirably, for it kept me close to my companion and facing her. It was at all times a pleasure to me as it would have been to any man, to watch her face; but to-day her eager joy at the beauty of all around her made me thrill with delight. The day was ideal for the place; a bright, clear day with just a ripple of wind from the water which took the edge from the July heat. The sea quivered with points of light, as though it were strewn with diamonds, and the lines of the racing tide threading a way amongst the rocks below were alone an endless source of interest. We rowed slowly which is much the safest way of progression in these waters, and especially when, as now, the tide was running towards the end of the ebb. As the boy seemed to know every one of the myriad rocks which topped the water, and by a sort of instinct even those that lay below, we steered a devious course. I had told him to take us round by the outer rocks from which thousands of seabirds rose screaming as we approached; and as we crept in under the largest of them we felt that mysterious sense of unworthiness which comes to one in deep water under the shadow of rocks. I could see that Marjory had the sense of doubt, or of possible danger, which made her clutch hard at each gunwale of the boat till her knuckles grew white. As we rounded the Reivie o' Pircappies, and found the tide swirling amongst the pointed rocks, she grew so deadly pale that I felt concerned. I should have liked to question her, but as I knew from my experience of her courage that she would probably prefer that I remained silent, I pretended not to notice. Male pretence does not count for much with women. She saw through me at once, and with a faint smile, which lit the pallor of her face like sunshine on snow, she said in so low a whisper that it did not reach the fisher boy:

"I was thinking what it would have been for us that day — only for you."

"I was glad," I answered in an equally low voice, "to be able to render any help to — to Mrs. Jack and her friend."

"Mrs. Jack — and her friend — are very much obliged to you," she answered gaily in her natural voice and tone. I could see that she had fully regained her courage, as involuntarily she took her hands from the sides of the boat. We kept now well out from the rocks and in deep water, and shortly sighted the Sand Craigs. As we could see Mrs. Jack and her escort trudging leisurely along the sand, and as we did not wish to hurry her, I asked young Hay with my companion's consent, to keep round the outermost of the Sand Craigs, which was now grey-white with sea-gulls. On our approach the birds all rose and wheeled round with myriad screaming; the wonder and admiration of the girl's eyes as they eagerly followed the sweep of the cloud of birds was good to see.

We hung around the great pointed rock till we saw Mrs. Jack making her way cautiously along the rocks. We rowed at once to the inner rock and placed the luncheon basket in a safe place. We then prepared a little sheltered nook for Mrs. Jack, with rugs and cushions so that she might be quite at ease. Miss Anita chose the place herself. I am bound to say it was not just as I should have selected; for when she sat down, her back was towards the rock from which she had been rescued. It was doubtless the young girl's thoughtfulness in keeping her mind away from a place fraught with such unpleasant memories.

When she was safely installed we dismissed the boys till the half tide. Mrs. Jack was somewhat tired with her trudge over the sand, and even when we left her she was nodding her head with coming sleep. Then Miss Anita got out her little easel which I fixed for her as she directed; when her camp stool was rightly placed and her palette prepared I sat down on the rock at her feet and looked at her whilst she began her work. For a little while she painted in silence: then turning to me she said suddenly:

"What about those papers? Have you found anything yet?" It was only then I bethought me of the letter in my pocket. Without a word I took it out and handed it to her. There was a slight blush as well as a smile on her face as she took it. When she saw the date she said impulsively:

"Why did I not get it before?"

"Because I had not got your address, and did not know how to reach you."

"I see!" she answered abstractedly as she began to read. When she had gone right through it she handed it to me and said:

"Now you read it out loud to me whilst I paint; and let me ask questions so that I may understand." So I read; and now and again she asked me searching questions. Twice or three times I had to read over the memorandum; but each time she began to understand better and better, and at last said eagerly:

"Have you ever worked out such reductions?"

"Not yet, but I could do so. I have been so busy trying to decipher the secret writing that I have not had time to try any such writing myself."

"Have you succeeded in any way?"

"No!" I answered. "I am sorry to say that as yet I have nothing definite; though I am bound to say I am satisfied that there is a cipher."

"Have you tried both the numbers and the dots?"

"Both," I answered; "but as yet I want a jumping-off place."

"Do you really think from what you have studied that the cipher is a biliteral one, or on the basis of a biliteral cipher?"

"I do! I can't say exactly how I came to think so; but I certainly do."

“Are there combinations of five?”

“Not that I can see.”

“Are there combinations of less than five?”

“There may be. There are certainly.”

“Then why on earth don’t you begin by reducing the biliteral cipher to the lowest dimensions you can manage? You may light on something that way.”

A light began to dawn upon me, and I determined that my task — so soon as my friends had left Cruden — would be to reduce Bacon’s biliteral. It was with genuine admiration for her suggestion that I answered Miss Anita:

“Your woman’s intuition is quicker than my man’s ratiocination. ‘I shall in all my best obey you, Madam!’” She painted away steadily for some time. I was looking at her, covertly but steadily when an odd flash of memory came to me; without thinking I spoke:

“When I first saw you, as you and Mrs. Jack stood on the rock, and away beyond you the rocks were all fringed with foam, your head looked as if it was decked with flowers.” For a moment or two she paused before asking:

“What kind of flowers?”

Once again in our brief acquaintance I stood on guard. There was something in her voice which made me pause. It made my brain whirl, too, but there was a note of warning. At this time, God knows, I did not want any spurring. I was head over heels in love with the girl, and my only fear was lest by precipitancy I should spoil it all. Not for the wide world would I have cancelled the hopes that were dawning in me and filling me with a feverish anxiety. I could not help a sort of satisfied feeling as I answered:

"White flowers!"

"Oh!" she said impulsively, and then with a blush continued, painting hard as she spoke:

"That is what they put on the dead! I see!" This was a counter-stroke with a vengeance. It would not do to let it pass so I added:

"There is another 'first-column' function also in which white flowers are used. Besides, they don't put flowers on the head of corpses."

"Of whom then?" The note of warning sounded again in the meekness of the voice. But I did not heed it. I did not want to heed it. I answered:

"Of Brides!" She made no reply — in words. She simply raised her eyes and sent one flashing glance through me, and then went on with her work. That glance was to a certain degree encouragement; but it was to a much greater degree dangerous, for it was full of warning. Although my brain was whirling, I kept my head and let her change the conversation with what meekness I could.

We accordingly went back to the cipher. She asked me many questions, and I promised to show her the secret writings when we should go back to the hotel. Here she struck in:

"We have ordered dinner at the hotel; and you are to dine with us." I tried not to tremble as I answered:

"I shall be delighted."

"And now," she said "if we are to have lunch here to-day we had better go and wake Mrs. Jack. See! the tide has been rising all the time we have been talking. It is time to feed the animals."

Mrs. Jack was surprised when we wakened her; but she too was ready for lunch. We enjoyed the meal hugely.

At half-tide the Hay boys came back. Miss Anita thought that there was enough work for them both in carrying the basket and helping Mrs. Jack back to the carriage. “You will be able to row all right, will you not?” she said, turning to me. “You know the way now and can steer. I shall not be afraid!”

When we were well out beyond the rock and could see the figures of Mrs. Jack and the boys getting further away each step, I took my courage in both hands; I was getting reckless now, and said to her:

“When a man is very anxious about a thing, and is afraid that just for omitting to say what he would like to say, he may lose something that he would give all the rest of the world to have a chance of getting — do — do you think he should remain silent?” I could see that she, too, could realise a note of warning. There was a primness and a want of the usual reality in her voice as she answered me:

“Silence, they say, is golden.” I laughed with a dash of bitterness which I could not help feeling as I replied:

“Then in this world the gold of true happiness is only for the dumb!” she said nothing but looked out with a sort of steadfast introspective eagerness over the million flashing diamonds of the sea; I rowed on with all my strength, glad to let go on something. Presently she turned to me, and with all the lambency of her spirit in her face, said with a sweetness which tingled through me:

“Are you not rowing too hard? You seem anxious to get to Whinnyfold. I fear we shall be there too soon. There is no hurry; we shall meet the others there in good time. Had you not better keep outside the dangerous rocks. There is not a sail in sight; not one, so far as I know, over the whole horizon, so you need not fear any collision. Remember, I do not advise you to cease rowing; for, after all, the current may bear us away if we are merely passive. But row easily; and we may reach the harbour safely and in good time!”

Her speech filled me with a flood of feeling which has no name. It was not love; it was not respect; it was not worship; it was not, gratitude. But it was compounded of them all. I had been of late studying secret writing so earnestly that there was now a possible secret meaning in everything I read. But oh! the poverty of written words beside the gracious richness of speech! No man who had a heart to feel or a brain to understand could have mistaken her meaning. She gave warning, and hope, and courage, and advice; all that wife could give husband, or friend give friend. I only looked at her, and without a word held out my hand. She placed hers in it frankly; for a brief, blissful moment my soul was at one with the brightness of sea and sky.

There, in the very spot where I had seen Lauchlane Macleod go down into the deep, my own life took a new being.

CHAPTER XI. IN THE TWILIGHT

It was not without misgiving that I climbed the steep zigzag at Whinnyfold, for at every turn I half expected to see the unwelcome face of Gormala before me. It seemed hardly possible that everything could go on so well with me, and that yet I should not be disturbed by her presence. Miss Anita, I think, saw my uneasiness and guessed the cause of it; I saw her follow my glances round, and then she too kept an eager look out. We won the top, however, and got into the waiting carriage without mishap. At the hotel she asked me to bring to their sitting-room the papers with the secret writing. She gave a whispered explanation that we should be quite alone as Mrs. Jack always took a nap, when possible, before dinner.

She puzzled long and anxiously over the papers and over my enlarged part copy of them. Finally she shook her head and gave it up for the time. Then I told her the chief of the surmises which I had made regarding the means by which the biliteral cipher, did such exist, might be expressed. That it must be by marks of some sort was evident; but which of those used were applied to this purpose I could not yet make out. When I had exhausted my stock of surmises she said:

"More than ever I am convinced that you must begin by reducing the biliteral cipher. Every time I think of it, it seems plainer to me that Bacon, or any one else using such a system, would naturally perfect it if possible. And now let us forget this for the present. I am sure you must want a rest from thinking of the cipher, and I feel that I do. Dinner is ready; after it, if you will, I should like another run down to the beach."

"*Another*" run to the beach! then she remembered our former one as a sort of fixed point. My heart swelled within me, and my resolution to take my own course, even if it were an unwise one, grew.

After dinner, we took our way over the sandhills and along the shore towards the Hawklaw, keeping on the line of hard sand just below high-water mark.

The sun was down and the twilight was now beginning. In these northern latitudes twilight is long, and at the beginning differs little from the full light of day. There is a mellowed softness over everything, and all is grey in earth and sea and air. Light, however, there is in abundance at the first. The mystery of twilight, as Southerns know it, comes later on, when the night comes creeping up from over the sea, and the shadows widen into gloom. Still twilight is twilight in any degree of its changing existence; and the sentiment of twilight is the same all the world over. It is a time of itself; between the stress and caution of the day, and the silent oblivion of the night: It is an hour when all living things, beasts as well as human, confine themselves to their own business. With the easy relaxation comes something of self-surrender; soul leans to soul and mind to mind, as does body to body in moments of larger and more complete intention. Just as in the moment after sunset, when the earth is lit not by the narrow disc of the sun but by the glory of the wide heavens above, twin shadows merge into one, so in the twilight two natures which are akin come closer to the identity of one. Between daylight and dark as the myriad sounds of life die away one by one, the chirp of birds, the lowing of cattle, the bleating of sheep, the barking of dogs, so do the natural sounds such as the rustle of trees, the plash of falling water, or the roar of breaking waves wake into a new force that strikes on the ear with a sense of intention or conscious power. It is as though in all the wide circle of nature's might there is never to be such a thing as stagnation; no moment of poise, save when the spirits of nature proclaim abnormal silence, such as ruled when earth stood "at gaze, like Joshua's moon on Ajalon."

The spirits of my companion and myself yielded to this silent influence of the coming night. Unconsciously we walked close together and in step; and were silent, wrapt in the beauty around us. To me it was a gentle ecstasy. To be alone with her in such a way, in such a place, was the good of all heaven and all earth in one. And so for many minutes we went slowly on our way along the deserted sand, and in hearing of the music of the sounding sea and the echoing shore.

But even Heaven had its revolt. It seems that whether it be on Earth or in Heaven intelligence is not content to remain in a condition of poise. Ever there are heights to be won. Out of my own very happiness and the peace that it gave me, came afresh the wild desire to scale new heights and to make the present altitude which I had achieved a stepping-off place for a loftier height. All arguments seemed to crowd in my mind to prove that I was justified in asking Marjory to be my wife. Other men had asked women whom they had known but a short time to marry them; and with happy result. It was apparent that at the least she did not dislike me. I was a gentleman, of fair stock, and well-to-do; I could offer her a true and a whole heart. She, who was seemingly only companion to a wealthy woman, could not be offended at a man's offering to her all he had to give. I had already approached the subject, and she had not warned me off it; she had only given me in a sweetly artful way advice in which hope held a distinct place. Above all, the days and hours and moments were flying by. I did not know her address or when I should see her again, or if at all. This latest thought decided me. I would speak plainly to-night.

Oh, but men are dull beside women in the way of intuition. This girl seemed to be looking over the sea, and yet with some kind of double glance, such as women have at command, she seemed to have been all the time looking straight through and through me and getting some idea of her own from my changing expression. I suppose the appearance of determination frightened her or set her on guard, for she suddenly said:

"Ought we not to be turning home?"

"Not yet!" I pleaded, all awake in a moment from my dreams. "A few minutes, and then we can go back."

"Very well," she said with a smile, and then added demurely; "we must not be long." I felt that my hour had come and spoke impulsively:

"Marjory, will you be my wife?" Having got out the words I stopped. My heart was beating so heavily that I could not speak more. For a few seconds, which seemed ages to me, we were both silent. I daresay that she may have been prepared for something; from what I know now I am satisfied that her own intention was to ward off any coming difficulty. But the suddenness and boldness of the question surprised her and embarrassed her to silence. She stopped walking, and as she stood still I could see her bosom heave — like my own. Then with a great effort, which involved a long breath and the pulling up of her figure and the setting back of her shoulders, she spoke:

"But you know nothing of me!"

"I know all of you that I want to know!" This truly Hibernian speech amused her, even through her manifest emotion and awkwardness, if one can apply the word to one compact of so many graces. I saw the smile, and it seemed to set us both more at ease.

“That sounds very rude,” she said “but I understand what you mean, and take it so.” This gave me an opening into which I jumped at once. She listened, seeming not displeased at my words; but on the whole glad of a moment’s pause to collect her thoughts before again speaking:

“I know that you are beautiful; the most beautiful and graceful girl I ever saw. I know that you are brave and sweet and tender and thoughtful. I know that you are clever and resourceful and tactful. I know that you are a good comrade; that you are an artist with a poet’s soul. I know that you are the one woman in all the wide world for me; that having seen you there can never be any one else to take your place in my heart. I know that I would rather die with you in my arms, than live a king with any other queen!”

“But you have only seen me twice. How can you know so many nice things about me. I wish they were all true! I am only a girl; and I must say it is sweet to hear them, whether they be true or not. Anyhow, supposing them all true, how could you have known them?”

Hope was stepping beside me now. I went on:

“I did not need a second meeting to know so much. To-day was but a repetition of my joy; an endorsement of my judgment; a fresh rivetting of my fetters!” She smiled in spite of herself as she replied:

“You leave me dumb. How can I answer or argue with such a conviction.” Then she laid her hand tenderly on my arm as she went on:

“Oh, I know what you mean, my friend. I take it all in simple truth; and believe me it makes me proud to hear it, though it also makes me feel somewhat unworthy of so much faith. But there is one other thing which you must consider. In justice to me you must.” She paused and I felt my heart grow cold. “What is it?” I asked. I tried to speak naturally but I felt that my voice was hoarse. Her answer came slowly, but it seemed to turn me to ice:

“But I don’t know you!”

There was a pity in her eyes which gave me some comfort, though not much; a man whose soul is crying out for love does not want pity. Love is a glorious self-surrender; all spontaneity; all gladness, all satisfaction, in which doubt and forethought have no part. Pity is a conscious act of the mind; wherein is a knowledge of one’s own security of foothold. The two can no more mingle than water and oil.

The shock had come, and I braced myself to it. I felt that now if ever I should do my devoir as a gentleman. It was my duty as well as my privilege to shield this woman from unnecessary pain and humiliation. Well I knew, that it had been pain to her to say such a thing to me; and the pain had come from my own selfish impulse. She had warned me earlier in the day, and I had broken through her warning. Now she was put in a false position through my act; it was necessary I should make her feelings as little painful as I could. I had even then a sort of dim idea that my best plan would have been to have taken her in my arms and kissed her. Had we both been older I might have done so; but my love was not built in this fashion. Passion was so mingled with respect that the other course, recognition of, and obedience to, her wishes seemed all that was open to me. Besides it flashed across me that she might take it that I was presuming on her own impulsive act on the rock. I said with what good heart I could:

“That is an argument unanswerable, at present. I can only hope that time will stand my friend. Only” I added and my voice choked as I said it “Do, do believe that I am in deadly earnest; that all my life is at stake; and that I only wait, and I will wait loyally with what patience I can, in obedience to your will. My feelings and my wish, and — and my request will stand unaltered till I die!” She said not a word, but the tears rose up in her beautiful eyes and ran down her blushing cheeks as she held out her hand to me. She did not object when I raised it to my lips and kissed it with all my soul in the kiss!

We turned instinctively and walked homewards. I felt dejected, but not broken. At first the sand seemed to be heavy to my feet; but when after a little I noticed that my companion walked with a buoyancy unusual even to her, I too became gay again. We came back to the hotel much in the spirit in which we had set out.

We found Mrs. Jack dressed, all but her outer cloak, and ready for the road. She went away with Marjory to finish her toilet, but came back before her younger companion. When we were alone she said to me after a few moments of ‘hum’ing and ‘ha’ing and awkward preparation of speech:

“Oh Mr. Hunter, Marjory tells me that she intends to ride on her bicycle down to Aberdeen from Braemar where we are going on Friday. I am to drive from Braemar to Ballater and then go on by train so that I shall be in before her, though I am to leave later. But I am fearful about the girl riding such a journey by herself. We have no gentleman friend here, and it would be so good of you to take charge of her, if you happened to be anywhere about there. I know I can trust you to take care of her, you have been so good to her, and to me, already.”

My heart leaped. Here was an unexpected chance come my way.

Time was showing himself to be my friend already.

"Be quite assured," I said as calmly as I could "I shall be truly glad to be of the least service. And indeed it will just suit my plans, as I hoped to go to Braemar on my bicycle one day very soon and can arrange to go just as may suit you. But of course you understand that I must not go unless Miss Anita wishes it. I could not presume to thrust myself upon her."

"Oh that is all right!" she answered quickly, so quickly that I took it that she had already considered the matter and was satisfied about it. "Marjory will not object." Just then the young lady entered the room and Mrs. Jack turning to her said:

"I have asked Mr. Hunter my dear to ride down with you from Braemar; and he says that as it just suits his plans as he was going there he will be very happy if you ask him." She smiled as she said:

"Oh since you asked him and he had said yes I need not ask him too; but I shall be very glad!" I bowed. When Mrs. Jack went out, Marjory turning to me said:

"When did you plan to go to Braemar?"

"When Mrs. Jack told me you were going" I answered boldly.

"Oh! I didn't mean that," she said with a slight blush "but at what time you were to be there." To which I said:

"That will be just to suit your convenience. Will you write and let me know?" She saw through my ruse of getting a letter, and smilingly held up a warning finger.

As we strolled up the road, waiting for the dog-cart to be got ready, she said to me:

"Now you can be a good comrade I know; and you said that, amongst other things, I was a good comrade. So I am; and between Braemar and Aberdeen we must both be good comrades. That and nothing more! Whatever may come after, for good or ill, that time must be kept apart."

"Agreed!" I said and felt a secret exultation as we joined Mrs. Jack. Before they started Marjory said:

"Mrs. Jack I also have asked Mr. Hunter to come on the ride from Braemar. I thought it would please him if we both asked him, since he is so diffident and unimpulsive!"

With a smile she said good-bye and waved it with her whip as they started.

CHAPTER XII. THE CIPHER

I went straight to my own room and commenced to work afresh on the biliteral cipher. More than ever had I the conviction upon me that the reading of the secret writing would be the first step to the attainment of my wishes regarding Marjory. It would have been strange therefore if I had not first attempted the method which she had herself suggested, the reducing the Baconian cipher to its lowest elements.

For many hours I laboured at this work, and finally when I had reduced the Baconian five symbols to three I felt that I had accomplished all that was possible in that way.

When I had arrived at this result, and had tested its accuracy in working, I felt in a position to experiment with my new knowledge on the old number cipher. First I wrote out my method of reduction as a sort of addendum to the paper which I had prepared for Marjory. Then I made a key to cipher and one to de-cipher. By this time the night was well on and the grey of early morning was beginning to steal in by the edges of the blinds; I was not sleepy, however; I was too much excited to think of sleep, for the solving of the problem seemed almost within my grasp. Excited to a state which almost frightened me by its intensity, I got ready my copy of the number cipher and my newly prepared key. With an effort which took me all my resolution I went on steadily writing its proper letter under each combination without once looking back; for I knew that even should some of the letters be misplaced in the key the chance of recognising the right ones would be largely increased by seeing a considerable number of letters together.

Then I glanced over the whole and found that many of the symbols made up letters. With such a basis to work on, the rest was only labour. A few tentative efforts and I had corrected the key to agreement with some of the combinations in the cipher.

I found, however, that only here and there were letters revealed; try how I would, I could not piece out the intervening symbols. At last it occurred to me that there might be in the paper two or more ciphers. On trying to follow out the idea, it became apparent that there were at least a quantity of impeding numbers scattered through the cipher. These might be only put in to baffle pursuit, as I had surmised might be done when I made the cipher; or they might have a more definite purpose. At any rate they hampered my work, so I struck them out as I went along. That I continued till I had exhausted the whole list of numbers in the script.

When I looked back over the letters translated from the cipher thus depleted, I found to my inexpressible joy that the sequence and sense were almost complete. The translation read as follows:

"To read the history of the Trust use cipher of Fr. Bacon. The senses and the figures are less worthy than the Trinity B. de E."

One step more and my work was done. I set the discarded numbers in sequence on another sheet of paper, and found to my intense satisfaction they formed an inner record readable by the same key. The "encloased" words, to use Bacon's phrase, were:

"Treasure Cave cliff one and half degree Northe of East from outer rock."

Then and then only did I feel tired. The sun was well up but I tumbled into bed and was asleep in a moment.

The gong was sounding for breakfast when I awoke. After breakfast when I resumed my work I set myself to construct a variant of my number key to suit the dotted letters, for my best chance, now that I was on the track was to construct rather than to decipher. After some hard work I at last constructed a cipher on this plan.

I then began therefore to apply my new key to the copy of the cipher in the printed pages.

I worked steadily and completed the whole of the first page, writing down only the answer to those combinations which fitted into my scheme, and leaving all doubtful matters blank. Then I laid aside my key, and with a beating heart glanced over the result.

It more than satisfied me, for in the scattered letters though there were many blanks, was manifestly a connected narrative. Then I took the blanks and worked at them altering my key to suit the scheme of the original writer, till by slow degrees I had mastered the secret of the cipher construction.

From that hour on, till I had translated the cipher writing from beginning to end I knew no rest that I could avoid. I had to take my meals, and to snatch a few hours of sleep now and again; for the labour of translation was very arduous and slow, and the strain on my eyes was too great to be kept up continuously; with each hour, however, I acquired greater facility in the work. It was the evening of the fourth day, however, before my work was complete. I was then absolute master of the writer's intent.

All this time I had not heard from Marjory, and this alone made excessive work a necessary anodyne. Had I not had the long and overwhelming preoccupation to keep my mind from dwelling on the never ending disappointment, I do not know what I should have done. I fully expected a letter by the last post that night. I knew Marjory was staying somewhere in the County; it was by that post that we received local letters. None came, however, and that night I spent in making a fair transcript of the whole translation.

The first part of it was in the shape of a letter, and ran as follows:

"My deare Sonne, These from the towne of Aberdeyne in Scotland wherin I lie sick, and before I go on my quest for the fullfillment of my Trust. I have written, from time to time during my long sickness, a full narrative of what has been; so that you may know all as though your own ears had heard and your own eyes had seen. All that I have written is to the one end — that you my eldest sonne and the rest of my children, may, should I fail — and I am weak in bodie to so strive — carry on the Trust to which I have pledged you as well as myself; so that untill that Trust be yielded up complete, neither I nor you nor they are free to any that may clash with the purpose to which our race is henceforth now devoted. But that mine oath may not press overhard on my children, and if need be on their children and their children's children to the end, it will suffice if one alone at all times shall hold himself or herself pledged to the fullfillment of the Trust. To this end I charge herewith all of my blood and race that the eldest sonne of each generation do hold himself pledged to the purpose of the Trust, unless some other of the direct lineage do undertake it on his behalf. In default of which, or if such undertaken Trust shall fail, then the duty reverteth back and back till one be found whose duty it is by priority of inheritance, unless by some other of the direct lineage the Trust be undertaken on his behalf. And be mindful one and all to whom is this sacred duty that secrecy is of its very essence. The great Trust was to me in the first instance in that His Holiness Pope Sixtus Fifth and my good kinsman known as the Spanish Cardinal held graciouslly that I was one in whose heart the ancient honour of our dear Spain had a place of lodgement so secure that time alone could not efface it nor its continuance in the hearts of my children. To the purpose then of this great Trust His Holiness hath himself given to me and mine full powers of all kinds so to deal with such circumstances as may arise that the labour which we have undertaken may in all cases be brought to a successful issue. To the which His Holiness hath formulated a Quittance which shall be co-existent with the Trust and which shall purge the natural sin of any to whom in the discharge of the duties of the Trust any necessity may arise. But inasmuch as the Trust is a secret one and the undue publication of such Quittance might call the attention of the curious to its existence, such Document is filed in the secret record of the Vatican, where, should necessity hereafter arise, it may be found by the Holy Father who may then occupy the Chair of St. Peter on application made to him on behalf of any who may so offend against law or the rules of well-being which govern the children of Christ. And I charge you, oh! my sonne to ever bear in mind that though there be some strange things in the narrative they are in mine own eyes true in all ways, though it may appear to you that they accord not with what may be said hereafter of these time's by other men.

"And oh, my sonne, and my children all, take this my last blessing and with it my counsel that ye walk always in Faith and Righteousness, in Honour and in Good Report, with your duty ever to Holy Church and to the King in loyal service. Farewell! God and the Blessed Virgin and the Saintes and Angels watch over you and help you that your duty be done.

"Your father in all love,

"Bernardino de Escoban."

"These will be brought by a trusty hand, for I fear lest they shall fall into the hands of the English Queene, or any of her hereticall surroundings. If it be that you fail at the first in the speedy fullfillment of the Trust — as may be, now that the purpose of our great Armada hath been checked — it may be well that whoso to whom is the Trust may come hither and dwell upon these shores so that he may watch over the purpose of the Trust and be at hand for its fullfillment when occasion may serve. But be mindful ever, oh my sonne, that who so guardeth the Trust will be ever surrounded by enemies, heathenish and without remorse, whose greed should it ever be awakened to this purpose would be fatal to all which we cherish. Dixi."

Following this came:

"Narrative of Bernardino de Escoban, Knight of the Cross of the Holy See and Grandee of Spain.

In this was set out at full length the history of the great Treasure gathered by Pope Sixtus Fifth for the subjugation of England, and which he entrusted to the writer of the narrative who had at his own cost built and manned one of the vessels of the Armada the *San Cristobal* flagship of the Squadron of the Galleons of Castile. The Pope, wearied by the demands of Philip of Spain and offended by his claim to appoint bishops under the new domain and further incensed by the incautious insolence of Count de Olivares the Spanish ambassador to Rome, has chosen to make this a secret trust and has on the suggestion of the Spanish Cardinal chosen Don Bernardino de Escoban for the service. In furtherance of his design he has sent him for his new galleon a "figurehead" wrought in silver and gold for his own galley by Benvenuto Cellini. Also he has given him as a souvenir a brooch wrought by the same master-hand, the figurehead wrought *in petto*. Don Bernardino gives account of the defeat of the Armada and tells how his vessel being crippled and he being fearful of the seizure of the treasure entrusted to him buries it and the coveted figurehead in a water cave at the headland of a bay on the coast of Aberdeyne. He has blown up the opening of the cave for safety. In the narrative were certain enlightening phrases such as when the Pope says:

"'To which end I am placing with you a vastness of treasure such as no nation hath ever seen." Which was to be applied to only the advancement of the True Faith, and which was in case of failure of the enterprise of the Armada to be given to the custody of whatever King should, after the death of Sixtus V, sit upon the throne. And again:

"'The Cave was a great one on the south side of the Bay with many windings and blind offsets.... 'The black stone on one hand and the red on the other giving back the blare of the lantern.'"

The memoranda which follow give the future history of the Trust:

"The narrative of my father, the great and good Don Bernardino de Escoban, I have put in the present form for the preservation of the secret. For inasmuch as the chart to which he has alluded is not to be found, though other papers and charts there be, it may be necessary that a branch of our house may live in this country in obedience to the provision of the Trust and so must learn to speak the English as though it were the mother tongue. As I was but a youth when my father wrote, so many years have elapsed that death has wrought many changes and the hand that should have carried the message and given me the papers and the chart is no more, lying as is thought beside my father amongst the surges of the Skyres. So that only a brief note pointing to the contents of an oaken chest wherein I found them, though incomplete, was all that I had to guide me. The tongue that might have spoken some added words of import was silent for ever

“Francisco de Escoban.”

“23, October, 1599.”

“The narrative of my grandfather, together with my father’s note have I Englished faithfully and put in this secret form for the guidance of those who may follow me, and whose life must be passed in this rigorous clime untill the sacred Trust committed to us by Pope Sixtus the Fifth be fullfilled. When on the death of my elder brother, I being but the second son, I was sent to join my father in Aberdeyne, I made grave preparation for bearing worthily the burden laid upon us by the Trust and so schooled myself in the English that it is now as my mother tongue. Then when my father, having completed the building of his castle, set himself to the finding of the cave whereof the secret was lost, in which emprise he, like my grandfather lost his life amongst the waters of the Skyres of Crudene. Ye that may follow me in the trust regard well this secret writing, made for the confusion of the curious but to the preservation of our secret. Bear ever in mind that not all that is shows on the surface of even simple words. The cipher of my Grandfather devised by Fr. Bacon now High Chancellor of England has many mouths, all of which may speak if there be aught to say.

“Bernardino de Escoban.”

“4, July, 1620.”

In addition to the cipher narrative I found on close examination that there was a separate cipher running through the marginal notes on the earlier of the printed pages. When translated it ran as follows:

“Cave mouthe northe of outer rock one degree and half North of East. Reef lies from shore point three and half degrees South of

South East.”

See Appendix B.

See Appendix C.

See Appendix D.

See Appendix E.

CHAPTER XIII. A RIDE THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS

I read Don Escoban's narrative over and over again, till I had thoroughly mastered every detail of it; then I studied the key of the number cipher till I had it by heart. I had an instinct that memory on this subject would be a help and a safety to me now or hereafter. For now new doubts had begun to assail me. What I had learned was in reality a State secret and had possible consequences or eventualities which, despite the lapse of three centuries, might prove far-reaching and dangerous. The treasure in question was so vast, its purpose so definite, and its guardianship so jealously protected against time and accident, that there was but little chance of forgetfulness regarding it. I was not assailed by moral scruples in any way. The treasure had been amassed and dedicated to the undoing of England; and for those who had gathered it and sent it forth I had no concern. That it had been hidden in Britain by Britain's enemies during time of war surely deprived them of all right to recover by legal means. What the law might be on the subject I did not know, and till I knew I cared little. It was a case of "finders keepers," and if I could find it first I held myself justified in using it to my own purposes. All the same I made up my mind to look up the law of Treasure Trove, which I had a hazy idea was in a pretty uncertain condition. At first none of these issues troubled me. They were indeed side issues till the treasure should be found; when they would become of prime importance. I had felt that my first step to winning the hand of Marjory Anita was to read the cipher. This I had done; and in the doing had made discovery of a secret of such a nature that it might place me beyond the dreams of avarice, and in a position to ask any girl in the world to marry me. I believe that I regarded the treasure as already my own; as much as though I had already recovered it from the bowels of the earth.

Early in the morning I took my way to Whinnyfold, bringing with me a pocket compass so that I could locate the exact spot where the mouth of the cave had been closed. I knew of course that even granite rocks cannot withstand untouched the beating of three centuries of stormy sea, the waste of three hundred summers and winters, and the thousands of nights of bitter frost and days of burning sun which had come to pass since the entrance of the cave had been so rudely shaken down. But I was, I confess, not prepared for the utter annihilation which had come to every trace of its whereabouts. Time after time the sea had bitten into the land; and falling rocks, and creeping verdure, and drifting sand had changed the sea-front beyond all recognition.

I did what I could, however, to take the bearings of the place as laid down by Don de Escoban by walking along the top of the cliff, beginning at the very edge of Witsennan Point till I reached a spot where the south end of the outer rock of the Skares stood out.

Then to my surprise I found that it was as near as possible in the direction of my own house. In fact when I looked at the plan which the local surveyor had made of my house I found that the northern wall made a bee line for the south end of the main rock of the Skares. As it was manifest that what had originally been the front of the cave had fallen in and been partly worn and worked away, my remaining hope was that the cave itself lay under part of my ground if not under the house itself. This gave a new feature to the whole affair. If my surmise were correct I need not hurry at all; the safest thing I could do would be to quietly make an opening from my house into the cave, and explore at leisure. All seemed clear for this proceeding. The workmen who had done the building were gone, and the coming of the decorators had not yet been fixed. I could therefore have the house to myself. As I went back to the hotel, I planned out in my mind how I should get from Glasgow or Aberdeen proper implements for digging and cutting through the rock into the house; these would be sent in cases, so that no one would suspect what I was undertaking. The work would have to be done by myself if I wished to preserve secrecy. I had now so much to tell Marjory when we should meet that I felt I should hardly know where to begin, and the business side of my mind began to plan and arrange so that all things might come in due order and to the best effect.

When I got to the hotel I found awaiting me a letter from Marjory which had come by the last post. I took it away to my room and locked the door before opening it. It had neither address nor date, and was decidedly characteristic:

“My dear Sir: Mrs. Jack asks me to write for her to say that we shall be leaving Braemar on Tuesday. We shall be staying at the Fife Arms Hotel, and she will be very happy if you will breakfast with us at nine o’clock A. M. Room No. 16. This is all of course in case you care to ride down to Aberdeen. We are breakfasting so early as the ride is long, sixty miles, and Mrs. Jack thinks that I should have a rest at least twice on the way. As I believe you know the road, she will be glad if you will kindly arrange our stopping places. Mrs. Jack will leave Braemar at about three o’clock and drive down to Ballater to catch the half-past five train. She asks me to say that she hopes you will pardon her for the trouble she is giving you, and to impress on you that in case you would rather not come, or should anything occur to prevent you, she will quite understand a telegram with the single word 'regret.' By the way she will be obliged if you will kindly not mention her name — either her surname or her Christian name — before any of the people — strangers or hotel people, at Braemar or during the journey — or indeed during the day. Believe me,

Yours very truly,

"Marjory Anita."

"P.S. — How about the cipher; have you reduced the biliteral, or got any clue yet?

"P.P.S. — I don't suppose that anything, unless it be really serious, will prevent your coming. Mrs. Jack is so looking forward to my having that bicycle ride.

"P.P.P.S. — Have you second-sighted any ships yet? Or any more white flowers — for the Dead?"

For long I sat with the letter in my hand after I had read it over and over again many many times. Each time I read it its purpose seemed more luminous. It may have been that my old habit of a year ago of finding secret meanings in everything was creeping back to me. I thought and thought; and the introspective habit made me reason out causes even in the midst of imaginative flights. "Might not" I thought "it be possible that there be minor forms of Second Sight; Day Dreams based on some great effort of truth. In the real world there are manifestations of life in lower as well as higher forms; and yet all alike are instinct with some of that higher principle which divides the quick and the dead. The secret voices of the brain need not always speak in thunder; the Dream-Painter within us need not always have a full canvas for the exercise of his craft."

On Tuesday morning when at nine o'clock to the minute I went to the Fife Arms at Braemar, I found Marjory alone. She came forward with a bright, frank smile and shook hands. “It’s real good to see you” was all she said. Presently she added:

“Mrs. Jack will be here in a minute or two. Before she comes, it is understood that between this and Aberdeen and indeed for to-day, you and I are only to be comrades.”

“Yes!” said I, and then added: “Without prejudice!” She showed her pearly teeth in a smile as she answered:

“All right. Without prejudice! Be it so!” Then Mrs. Jack came in, and having greeted me warmly, we sat down to breakfast. When this was over, Marjory cut a good packet of sandwiches and tied them up herself. These she handed to me saying:

“You will not mind carrying these. It will be nicer having our lunch out than going to a hotel; don’t you think so?” Needless to say I cordially acquiesced. Both our bicycles were ready at the door, and we lost no time in getting under weigh. Indeed my companion showed some anxiety to be off quickly, as though she wished to avoid observation.

The day was glorious. There was bright sunshine; and a sky of turquoise with here and there a flock of fleecy clouds. The smart easterly breeze swept us along as though we were under sail. The air was cool and the road smooth as asphalt, but with the springiness of well-packed gravel. With the least effort of pedalling we simply seemed to fly. I could see the exhilaration on my companion’s face as clearly as I could feel it in my own nature. All was buoyancy, above, below, around us; and I doubt if in all the wide circle of the sun’s rays there were two such glad hearts as Marjory’s and my own.

As we flew along, the lovely scenery on either hand seemed like an endless panorama. Of high mountains patched with heather which here and there, early in the year as it was, broke out in delicate patches of pink; of overarching woods whose creaking branches swaying in the wind threw kaleidoscopic patterns of light along our way; of a brown river fed by endless streams rushing over a bed of stones which here and there lifted their dark heads through the foam of the brown-white water; of green fields stretching away on either side of the river or rising steeply from our feet to the fringes of high-lying pines or the black mountains which rose just beyond; of endless aisles of forest where, through the dark shade of the brown trunks, rose from the brown mass of long-fallen pine needles which spread the ground below, and where patches of sunlight fell in places with a seemingly intolerable glare! Then out into the open again where the sunlight seemed all natural and even the idea of shade unreal. Down steep hills where the ground seemed to slide back underneath our flying wheels, and up lesser hills, swept without effort by the wind behind us and the swift impetus of our pace.

After a while the mountains before us, which at first had seemed like an unbroken line of frowning giants barring our course, seemed to open a way to us. Round and round we swept, curve after curve yielding and falling back and opening new vistas; till at the last we passed into the open gap between the hills around Ballater. Here in the face of possible danger we began to crawl cautiously down the steep hill to the town. Mrs. Jack had proposed that we should make our first halt at Ballater. As, however, we put on pace again at the foot of the hill Marjory said:

“Oh do not let us stop in a town. I could not bear it just after that lovely ride through the mountains.”

“Agreed!” I said “let us push on! That twenty miles seems like nothing. Beyond Cambus-o-May there is a lake on the northern side; we can ride round it and come back to the road again at Dinnet. If you like we can have our lunch in the shelter of a lovely wood at the far side of it."

"That will be enchanting!" she said, and the happy girlish freshness of her voice was like a strain of music which suited well the scene. When we had passed Ballater and climbed the hill up to the railway bridge we stopped to look back; and in sheer delight she caught hold of my arm and stood close to me. And no wonder she was moved, for in the world there can be few places of equal beauty of a similar kind. Right above us to the right, and again across the valley, towered mountains of rich brown with patches of purple and lines of green; and in front of us in the centre of the amphitheatre, two round hills, looming large in a delicate mist, served as portals to the valley which trended upward between the hills beyond. The road to Braemar seemed like a veritable road of mystery, guarded by an enchanted gate. With a sigh we turned our backs on all this beauty, and skirting the river, ran by Cambus-o-May and between woods of pine in an opening vista of new loveliness. Eastward before us lay a mighty sweep of hill and moor, backed on every side by great mountains which fell away one behind the other into misty distance of delicate blue. At our feet far below, lay two spreading lakes of sapphire hue, fringed here and there with woods, and dotted with little islands whose trees bent down to the water's edge. Marjory stood rapt for awhile, her breast heaving and her face glowing. At last she turned to me with a sigh; her beautiful eyes were bright with unshed tears as she said:

"Oh, was there ever in the world anything so beautiful as this Country! And was there ever so exquisite a ride as ours to-day!"

Does ever a man love a woman more than when she shows herself susceptible to beauty, and is moved to the fulness and simplicity of emotion which is denied to his own sex? I thought not, as Marjory and I swept down the steep road and skirted by the crystal lakes of Ceander and Davan to the wood in which we were to have our *al fresco* lunch. Here, sheltered from the wind, the sunshine seemed too strong to make sitting in the open pleasant; and we were glad to have the shade of the trees. As we sat down and I began to unpack the luncheon, Marjory said:

"And now tell me how you have been getting on with the cipher."

I stood still for so long that she raised her head and took a sharp glance of surprise at me.

In the charm of her presence I had absolutely forgotten all about the cipher and what might grow from it.

CHAPTER XIV. A SECRET SHARED

“There is so much to tell” I said “that I hardly know where to begin. Perhaps I had better tell you all here, where we are alone and not likely to be disturbed. We have come so fast that we have lots of time and we need not hurry. When you have had your lunch I shall tell you all.”

“Oh please don’t wait till then,” she said, “I am all impatience. Let me know right away.”

“Young woman” I said sternly “you are at present insincere. You *know* you are ravenously hungry, as you should be after a twenty mile ride; and you are speaking according to your idea of convention and not out of your heart. This is not convention; there is nothing conventional in the whole outfit. Eat the food prepared for you by the thoughtfulness of a very beautiful and charming girl!” She held up a warning finger and said:

“Remember ‘*Bon Camarade* — without prejudice.’”

“All right” I answered “so it shall be. But if the lady wants to hold me up for criminal libel I shall undertake to repeat the expression when, and where, and how she will. I shall repeat the assertion and abide by the consequences.” She went on eating her sandwiches, not, I thought, displeased. When we had both finished she turned to me and said:

“Now!” I took from my pocket the rescript of Don Bernardino de Escoban’s narrative and handed it to her. She looked at it, turned over the pages, and glanced at them as she went. Then she returned to the beginning, and after reading the first few lines, said to me with an eager look in her eyes:

“Is this really the translation of the secret writing? Oh, I am so glad you have succeeded. You are cute!” She took out her watch, and having looked at it, went on: “We have loads of time. Won’t you read it for me? It will be so much nicer! And let me ask you questions.”

“Delighted!” I answered, “But would it not be better if I read it right through first, and then let you ask questions! Or better still you read it yourself right through, and then ask.” I had a purpose in this. If I had to read it, my eyes must be wholly engrossed in my work; but if she read, I need never take them off her face. I longed to see the varying expression with which she would follow every phase of the strange story. She thought for a few seconds before answering, and as she thought looked me straight in the eyes. I think she read my secret, or at any rate enough of it to fathom my wish; nothing else could account for the gentle blush that spread over her face. Then she said in quite a meek tone:

“I shall read it myself if you think it best!”

I shall never forget that reading. Her face, always expressive, was to me like an open book. I was by this time quite familiar with de Escoban’s narrative, as I had with infinite patience dug it out letter by letter from the cipher in which it had been buried for so long. As also I had written it out fair twice over, it was little wonder that I knew it well. As she read I so followed that I could have told to a sentence how far she had got in the history. Once she unconsciously put her hand to her throat and felt the brooch; but immediately drew it away again, glancing for a moment at me from under her eyelashes to see whether I had observed. She saw I had, shook her head with a smile, and read on.

When she had finished reading, she gave a long sigh and then held out her hand to me saying:

“Bravo! I congratulate you with all my heart!” Her touch thrilled me; she was all on fire, and there was a purposeful look in her face which was outside and beyond any joy that she could have with regard to any success of mine. This struck me so much that I said impulsively:

“Why are you so glad?” She answered instinctively and without thought:

“Because you will keep it from the Spaniards!” Then she stopped suddenly, with a gesture of self repression.

I felt a little piqued. I would have thought that her concern would have been rather individual than political. That in such a matter even before racial hatred would have come gladness at the well-doing of even such a friend — without prejudice — as I was. Looking at me, she seemed to see through me and said

“With her two white hands extended, as if praying one offended:”

“Oh, I am sorry! I did not mean to hurt you. I can’t explain yet; not to-day, which is for comradeship only. — Yes without prejudice” — for she saw my look and answered it “But some day you will understand.” She was so evidently embarrassed and pained at having for some reason which I did not comprehend to show reticence to me who had been so open with her, that I felt it my duty to put her at ease. This I tried to do by assuring her that I quite understood that she had some good reason, and that I was quite content to wait. I could not help adding before I stopped: “This is a small thing to have to wait for after all; when I have to wait for something so much more important.” The warning finger was held up again with a smile.

Then we went over the whole of the narrative again, I reading this time and she stopping to ask me questions. There was not much to ask; all the story was so plain that the proceeding did not take very long. Then she asked me to explain how I had come to decipher the cryptogram. I took out my pocket book and proceeded to make a key to the cipher, explaining as I went on the principle. “To me,” I said, “it is very complete, and can be used in an infinity of ways. Any mode of expression can be used that has two objects with five varieties of each.” Here she interrupted me. As I was explaining I was holding out my hands with the fingers spread as a natural way of expressing my meaning. She saw at once what had escaped me, and clasping her hands exclaimed impulsively:

“Like your two hands! It is delightful! Two hands, and five fingers on each. We can talk a new deaf and dumb alphabet; which no one but ourselves can understand!” Her words thrilled through me. One more secret to share with her; one more secret which would be in perpetual exercise, in pursuance of a common thought. I was about to speak when she stopped me with a gesture. “Sorry!” she said. “Go on; explain to me! We can think of variety later!” So I continued:

“So long as we have means that are suitable, we have only to translate into the biliteral, and we who know this can understand. Thus we have a double guard of secrecy. There are some who could translate into symbols with which they are familiar, symbols with which they are not; but in this method we have a buffer of ignorance or mystery between the known and the unknown. There is also this advantage; the cipher as it stands is sufficiently on a basis of science or at any rate of order, that its key is easily capable of reproduction. As you have seen, I can make a key without any help. Bacon’s biliteral cipher is scientifically accurate. It can, therefore, be easily reproduced; the method of exclusions is also entirely rational, so that we need have no difficulty in remembering it. If two people would take the trouble to learn the symbols of the biliteral, as kept after the exclusions and which are used in this cipher, they might with very little practice be able to write or read off-hand. Indeed the suggestion, which you have just made, of a deaf-and-dumb alphabet is capital. It is as simple as the daylight! You have only to decide whether the thumb or the little finger means 1 or 2; and then reproduce by right hand or left, and using the fingers of each hand, the five symbols of the amended biliteral, and you can talk as well and as easily as do the deaf mutes!" Again she spoke out impulsively:

"Let us both learn off by heart the symbols of our cipher; and then we shan't want even to make a key. We can talk to each other in a crowd, and no one be the wiser of what we are saying."

This was very sweet to me. When a man is in love, as I was, anything which links him to his lady, and to her alone, has a charm beyond words. Here was a perpetual link, if we cared to make it so, and if the Fates would be good to us.

"The Fates!" With the thought came back Gormala's words to me at the beginning. She had told me, and somehow I seemed to have always believed the same, that the Fates worked to their own end and in their own way. Kindness or unkindness had no part in their workings; pity had no place at the beginning of their interest, no more than had remorse at the end. Was it possible that in the scheme of Fate, in which Gormala and I and Lauchlane Macleod had places, there was also a place for Marjory? The Witch-woman had said that the Fates would work their will, though for the doing of it came elements out of past centuries and from the ends of the earth. The cipher of Don de Escoban had lain hidden three centuries, only to be revived at its due time. Marjory had come from a nation which had no existence when the Don had lived, and from a place which in his time was the far home of the red man and the wolf and the bison and the bear.

But yet what was there to connect Marjory with Don de Escoban and his secret? As I thought, I saw Marjory who had turned her back to me, quietly take something from her throat and put it into her pocket. Here was the clue indeed.

The brooch! When I had taken it up from the sea at the Sand Craigs I had returned it to her with only a glance; and as I had often seen it since, without any mystery, I had hardly noticed it. It rushed in on my mind that it was of the same form as that described by Don de Escoban as having been given by the Pope. I had only noticed a big figure and a little one; but surely it could be none other than a figure of St. Christopher. I should have liked to have asked Marjory about it at once; but her words already spoken putting off explanation, and her recent act, of which I was supposed to know nothing, in putting it out of sight, forbade me to inquire. All the more I thought, however; and other matters regarding it crowded into my mind.

The chain was complete, the only weak link being the connection between Marjory and the St. Christopher brooch. And even here there was a mystery, acknowledged in her concealment, which might explain itself when the time came.

Matters took such a grave turn for me with my latest surmise, that I thought it would be well to improve the occasion with Marjory, in so far as it might be possible to learn something of her surroundings. I was barred from asking questions by her own wish; but still I did not like to lose the chance without an effort, so I said to her:

“We have learned a lot to-day, haven’t we?”

“Indeed we have. It hardly seems possible that a day could make such a change!”

“I suppose we should take it that new knowledge should apply new conditions to established fact?” I said this with some diffidence; and I could see that the change in my tone, much against my will, attracted her attention. She evidently understood my wish, for she answered with decision:

“If you mean by ‘new conditions’ any alteration of the compact made between us for to-day — yes, I remember ‘without prejudice’ — there is nothing in our new knowledge to alter the old ones. Do remember, sir, that this day is one set apart, and nothing that is not a very grave matter indeed can be allowed to alter what is established regarding it.”

“Then,” said I, “at all events let us learn the cipher — our cipher as you very properly called it.”

“Oh no! surely?” this was said with a rising blush.

“Indeed, yes — I am glad to say!”

“Take care!” she replied, meaningly, then she added:

“Very well! Ours let it be. But really and truly I have no right to its discovery; it makes me feel like a fraud to hear you say so.”

“Be easy,” I replied. “You helped me more than I can say. It was your suggestion to reduce the terms of the biliteral; and it was by that means that I read the cipher. But at any rate when we call it ‘ours’ it will content me if the word ‘ours’” — I could not help repeating the word for it was delight to me; it did not displease her either, though it made her blush— “is applied not to invention but to possession!”

“All right,” she said. “That is good of you. I cannot argue with you. Amendment accepted! Come, let us get on our wheels again. You have the key of *our* cipher with you; you can tell me the items one by one, and we will learn them as we go along.”

And so as we swept round Davan Lake, with the wind behind us driving us along except just before we regained the high road at Dinnet, I repeated the symbols of the reduced biliteral. We went over and over them again and again, till we were unable to puzzle each other questioning up and down, ‘dodging’ as the school-boys say.

Oh, but that ride was delightful! There was some sort of conscious equality between us which I could see my comrade felt as well as myself. Down the falling road we sped almost without effort, our wheels seeming to glide on air. When we came to the bridge over the railway just above Aboyne, where the river comes north and runs in under a bank of shale and rock, we dismounted and looked back. Behind us was our last view of the gorge above Ballater, where the two round hills stood as portals, and where the cloud rack hanging above and beyond made a mystery which was full of delightful fascination and no less delightful remembrance. Then with a sigh we turned.

There, before us lay a dark alley between the closing pines. No less mysterious, but seemingly dark and grim.

CHAPTER XV. A PECULIAR DINNER-PARTY

We did not stop at Aboyne, but ran on beyond Kincardine O'Neill, and took our second rest close to the Bridge of Potarch where we had tea at the little hotel on the right bank of the river. Then for a while we leaned over the parapet and looked at the water flowing swiftly far below as the river narrows from its pebbly bed to the gorge of rock on which the bridge rests. There is something soothing, perhaps something hypnotic, in the ceaseless rush of water. It unconsciously takes one's thoughts on and on, till the reality of the present is in some measure lost and the mind wanders towards imagination through the regions of the unknown. As I looked at Marjory, with the afternoon sun falling on her superb figure and showing up her clear-cut profile with all the finish of a cameo, I could not but be struck with the union of gentleness and independence which was so clearly manifested in her. Without thinking, I spoke out my mind. It is a privilege of those who understand each other, or of the very young, to give voice to the latter portion of a train of thought without feeling it necessary to enlighten the hearer as to what has gone to make up the conclusion. The feeling was hourly growing upon me that, even if I could not quite understand Marjory, at least she understood me.

"But then all you American girls are so independent!" She did not seem a bit surprised by this fag end of reasoning; she had evidently been following up some train of thought of her own, and by some happy instinct my words fitted in with it. Without turning towards me, but still keeping her eyes fixed down the stream to where far away it swayed to the right through a gap between pine clad hills she answered:

"Yes! We are as a rule brought up to be independent. It seems to be a part of what our people call the ‘genius’ of the country. Indeed for many, women as well as men, it is a sort of necessity. Our nation is so vast, and it expands so quickly, that there is nearly everywhere a family separation. In the main, all the children of one generation become the heads of families of the next. Somehow, the bulk of our young people still follow the sunset; and in the new life which comes to each, whether in the fields or in the city or in the reclamation of the wilderness, the one thing which makes life endurable is this independence which is another form of self-reliance. This it is which enables them to brave hunger and thirst and all danger which comes to pioneers; which in the cities makes the solitude of lonely life bearable to the young as well as to the old; which makes them work and study in patience; which makes them self-sacrificing, and thrifty, and long enduring. I tell you it is this which makes a race of patriots, whose voices swell in unison till the great voice of the nation, raised in some good cause, can ring and echo through the world!” As she spoke she got more and more earnest, more and more enthusiastic, till her voice began to vibrate and her face to flush. When she turned towards me at the end, her eyes were full of spiritual light. I looked at her, and I suppose my love as well as my admiration must have expressed itself, for her eyes fell and the flush on her face melted into a soft blush. She turned, looked at the water again, and then went on speaking:

“This is the good side of our independence and *faute de mieux* it serves; those who know no better do not miss what might be. But oh! it has to be paid for. The little sufferings of day by day can grow into a mass which in the end outweighs those seemingly far greater ills which manifest themselves all at once. No one knows, no one ever will know, how much quiet, dull pain goes to tame a woman's heart to the solitude of life. I have not seen so much of it as some others; my life has been laid in pleasant places, and only through the small accidents of life have I come to know of the negative pain which other girls have to endure. It is so much to have round one the familiar faces of our youth; to meet sympathy at every turn of life, and to know that there is understanding for us always. We women have to give something in order to be happy. The stronger-minded ones, as we call them, blame the Creator for this disposition of things — or else I do not know who or what they blame; but the rest of us, who are wise enough to accept what cannot be altered, try to realise what can be done for the best. We all want to care for some one or something, if it is only a cat or a dog. For myself, so far back as I can remember, I longed to have a brother or sister, but I think that in my secret heart it was a brother I wanted. Of course as I merged into my actual surroundings I grew out of this; but once it was brought home to me with new force. We were staying for a few days in one of those great English houses where there was a growing family of boys and girls. There was one sweet young girl, just about my own age, who seemed idolised by all her brothers. When we arrived they were all going in to evening prayers. The last of the sunlight was falling through the old stained glass window of the great baronial hall, and lit up the little family group. The girl sat between two of her young brothers, great stalwart lads who had all the characteristics of a family of soldiers. During prayers each of them held one of her hands; and when they all knelt, her arms went round their necks. I could not help feeling deeply — down into the very depths of my soul — how good it was for them all. I would have given everything I have, or am ever likely to have, that mine had been such an upbringing. Think, how in after years it will come back to those boys in hours of trial, or pain, or prosperity, or passion; in all times when their manhood or their honour or their worth is to be tried; how they will remember the words which were spoken to them as those were spoken, and were listened to as those were listened to, in the midst of sympathy and love. Many and many a time in years to come those boys will bless such hours, and God Himself will surely rejoice that His will was being wrought in so sweet a way. And the same thing is going on in a thousand English homes!" She paused and turned to me and the feeling in her heart found expression in the silent tears that ran down her cheeks. Again she turned her eyes to the running water and gazed awhile before speaking again. Then looking at me, she went on:

"And the girl, too, how good it was for her! What an antidote to selfishness! How much of self-control, of sympathy, of love, of toleration was begun and fostered and completed in those moments of the expression of her heart! What place can there really be for selfish want and sorrows in the heart of a woman so trained to sympathise with and help others? It is good! good! good! and I pray that in the later development of my own dear country, all such things may have a part. Expansion at its present rate must soon cease; and then some predominant idea must take the place of the eternal self-independence. We shall, I trust, moult no feather of our national feeling of personal duty; but I am sure that our people, and more especially our women, will lead happier as well as healthier lives."

This present phase of Marjory's character was new to me, fresh and enchanting. Every hour seemed to bring out new worths and beauties of the girl's character, of her intellectual gifts, of the endless wealth of her heart.

When she ceased speaking I took her hand in mine, she not resenting, and kissed it. I said only one word “Marjory!” but it was enough. I could see that in her eyes which made my heart leap.

Then a new life seemed to come to both of us. With one accord we moved towards our bicycles, and mounted in silence. After a few minutes of rapid spin down the sloping road from the bridge, we began to chat again gaily. For myself I was in wildly joyous spirits. Even a self-doubting lover could not fail to understand such a look in his mistress’s eyes. If ever love spoke out in eloquent silence it was then, all doubt melted from my heart, as the night shadows pale before the dawn. I was content to wait now, illimitably and in silence. She, too, seemed altogether happy, and accepted in unquestioning faith all the little pleasures which came in the progress of our journey. And such pleasures are many. As we drew down the valley of the Dee, with the mountains falling back and the dark pinewoods running up them like tongues of flame and emphasising by their gloom the brightness of grass and heather which cropped up amongst the rocks beyond, every turn of the road brought us to some new scene of peaceful beauty. From under the splendid woods of Crathes Castle we saw the river running like a blue ribbon far to the east and on either side of it fields and gardens and woods spreading wide. On we sped with delight in every moment, till at last through miles of shady woods we came to the great stone bridge, and ended our jaunt over the rough granite cobblestones of Aberdeen.

We were a little before the time the train was due; so leaving our wheels in the Palace Hotel we went down on the platform to meet Mrs. Jack on her arrival.

We met her in due course, and brought her up to the hotel. At the stairway Marjory, who had lingered half a flight behind her companion, whispered to me:

“You have been a good boy to-day, a real good boy; and you shall before long have your reward.” As she gave me her hand, I whispered:

“I am content to wait now Marjory; dear Marjory!” She blushed and smiled, and fled upstairs with a warning finger laid upon her lips.

It had been understood that I was to dine with Mrs. Jack and her friend, so I went up to the room which I had secured, to change my clothes. When I came down, in what I thought was a reasonable time, I went to the private sitting-room and knocked. As there was no answer I knocked again; then receiving no reply I took it for granted that the ladies had not yet come from their rooms and entered.

The room was empty but on the table which was laid for dinner for three was a note in Marjory’s hand directed to me. With a sinking of the heart I opened it, and stood for a few minutes amazed. It had no apostrophe and ran as follows: —

“We have had to leave suddenly, but Mrs. Jack wants you to oblige her very much if you will be so good. Stay in the room, and when dinner is served sit down by yourself and eat it. Please, please do not think hardly of Mrs. Jack’s request; and do not fail to carry it out. There is good reason for it, as you will very soon know. More depends on your doing as Mrs. Jack” — the “Mrs. Jack” was written over an obliterated “I”— “asks than you may think. I am sure that by this time you know you can trust me.

“Marjory.”

The situation was disappointing and both humiliating and embarrassing. To be a guest under such conditions was almost ridiculous; and under ordinary circumstances I should have refused. But then I remembered that last look of Marjory’s eyes at the bridge of Potarch! Without a word, or another thought, of revolt I sat down to the dinner which the waiter was just now bringing into the room.

As it was evident to me that my staying in the room was for some purpose of delay, I lingered over my wine and had two cigars before I came away.

CHAPTER XVI. REVELATIONS

In the hall I met together two men whom I knew well. The first was Adams of the American Embassy in London; the second Cathcart of the British Embassy at Washington, now on leave. I had not seen either for two years, and it was with mutual pleasure that we met. After our preliminary handshaking, and the inevitable drink at the American's request, Adams slapped me on the shoulder and said heartily:

"Well, old fellow, I congratulate you; or rather am I to congratulate you?"

"What do you mean?" I asked in feeble embarrassment.

"All right, old chap!" he said heartily. "Your blush is enough. I see it hasn't come off yet at all events!" A man never lets well alone when he is in an awkward position. If I had only held my tongue I might not have made a guy of myself; but as I was in doubt as to what might be the issue of my suit to Marjory, I felt additionally constrained to affect ignorance of his meaning. So I floundered on:

"'Come off yet'? What on earth do you mean?" Again he slapped me on the back as he said in his chaffing way:

"My dear boy I saw you come in over the bridge. You had had a long ride I could see by your wheels; and I am bound to say that you did seem on excellent terms with each other!" This was getting dangerous ground, so I tried to sheer off. "Oh," I said, "you mean my bike ride with Miss Anita" — I was interrupted by his sudden whistle.

"Oh," he said in exact imitation of my own manner. "You mean Miss Anita! So it has come to that already! Anyhow I congratulate you heartily, whether it has come, or may come, or will come to anything else.”

“I don’t see,” I said, with a helpless feeling of having been driven into a corner, “that there is anything especially remarkable in a man having a bicycle ride with a young lady of his acquaintance.”

“Keep your hair on, old man!” he said with a smile. “There is nothing remarkable about a man riding with a young lady; but there is something very remarkable about any man riding with this particular young lady. Why, man alive, don’t you know that there isn’t a man in America, or out of it, that wouldn’t give the eyes out of his head to take your place on such an occasion. To ride alone with Marjory Drake—”

“With whom?” I said impulsively; and having spoken could have bitten out my tongue. Adams paused; he was silent so long that I began to grow uneasy. His face grew very grave, and there spread over it that look between cunning and dominance which was his official expression. Then he spoke, but his words had not the same careless ring in them. There was a manifest caution and a certain indefinable sense of distance.

“Look here, Archie Hunter! Is it possible that you don’t know who it is that you were with. All right! I know of course that you are acquainted with her personally,” for he saw I was about to protest, “the very fact of your being with her and your knowing the name that she seldom uses answer for that; and you may take it from me that the lady needs no character for discretion from me. But how is it that you are on such good terms with her, and yet don’t seem even to know her name?” For fully a minute there was silence between us. Cathcart had as yet said not a word, and Adams was thinking. For myself I was in a sea of multitudinous concerns; whichever way I turned I was face to face with some new difficulty. It would not do to leave these men under the impression that there was any social irregularity in my friendship with Marjory; I was too jealous of her good name to allow such a thing to be possible. And yet I could not explain at length how we had come to be such good friends. Already there were so many little mysteries; right up to this very evening when she and Mrs. Jack had gone away so strangely, leaving me in the ridiculous position of a guest with no host. It was not easy to explain these things; it was impossible to avoid them. In the midst of this chaotic whirl of thoughts Adams spoke:

"I think I had better say no more, anyhow. After all, if Miss Drake chooses to keep a secret, or to make one, it is not my business to give it, or her, away. She knows what she's doing. You will excuse me, old fellow, won't you; but as it is manifestly a lady's wish, I think I can do best by holding my tongue."

"Any wish of that lady's," said I, and I felt that I must seem to speak grandiloquently, "can only have my most loyal support."

There was an awkward silence which was relieved by Cathcart, who said to me:

"Come up to my room, Archie; I want to tell you something. You'll join us, too, Sam, won't you?"

"All right, Billy," said Adams, "I'll come in a few minutes. I want to give some directions about a horse for to-morrow."

When we were in Cathcart's room, he closed the door and said to me with the most genuine good feeling:

"I didn't like to say a word downstairs, old chap; but I could see you were in some difficulty. Of course I know it's all right; but ought you not to know something of the lady? With any one else but Sam and myself such a thing might have conveyed a false impression.

Surely you can best protect the lady by knowing how to avoid anything that might embarrass her!” This was all good sound common sense. For a moment I weighed up the matter against the possibility of Marjory’s wishing to keep her name a secret. Looking back, however, I could see that any concealment that had been was rather positive than negative. The original error had been mine; she had simply allowed it to pass. The whole thing had probably been the passing fancy of a bright, spirited young girl; to take it too seriously, or to make too much of it might do harm. Why, even these men might, were I to regard it as important, take it as some piece of deliberate deceit on her part. Thus convinced of the wisdom of Cathcart’s proposition I spoke:

“You are quite right! and I shall be much obliged if you will — if you will enlighten me.” He bowed and smiled, and went on genially:

“The lady you called Miss Anita, you so far called quite correctly. Her name is Anita; but it is only her second Christian name. She is known to the world as Miss Marjory Drake, of Chicago.”

“Known to the world.” Was this a mere phrase, or the simple expression of a fact! I asked directly:

“How known to the world? Do you mean that is the name known amongst her circle of acquaintances? Is — is there any cause why the great world outside that circle should know her at all?” He smiled and laid his hand on my shoulder in a very brotherly way as he answered:

“Yes, old fellow. There is a reason, and a good one, why the great world should know her. I see you are all in the dark; so I had better tell you what I know. Marjory Anita Drake is an heiress, a great heiress, a very great heiress; perhaps a long way the greatest heiress in America, or out of it. Her father, who died when she was a baby, left her a gigantic fortune; and her trustees have multiplied it over and over again." He paused; so I said — it seeming necessary to say something:

"But being an heiress is not sufficient reason why a girl should be known to the world."

"It is a pretty good one. Most people wouldn't want any better. But this is not the reason in her case. She is the girl who gave the battle ship to the American Government!"

"Gave the battle ship! I don't understand!"

"It was this way. At the time the reports kept crowding in of the Spanish atrocities on the *reconcentrados*; when public feeling was rising in the United States, this girl got all on fire to free Cuba. To this end she bought a battle ship that the Cramp's had built for Japan. She had the ship armed with Krupp cannon which she bought through friends in Italy; and went along the Eastern coast amongst the sailors and fishermen till she had recruited a crew. Then she handed the whole thing over to the Government as a spur to it to take some action. The ship is officered with men from the Naval Academy at Annapolis; and they tell me there isn't one of the crew — from the cabin boy to the captain — that wouldn't die for the girl to-morrow."

"Bravo!" I said instinctively! "That's a girl for a nation to be proud of!"

"She is all that!" said Cathcart enthusiastically. "Now you can understand why Adams congratulated you; and why he was so surprised when you did not seem to know who she was." I stood for a moment thinking, and all the clouds which wrapped Marjory's purpose in mystery seemed to disperse. This, then, was why she allowed the error of her name to pass. She had not made an *incognita*; chance had done this for her, and she had simply accepted it. Doubtless, wearied with praise and with publicity and notoriety in all its popular forms, she was glad to get away and hide herself for a while. Fortune had thrown in her way a man who was manifestly ignorant of her very existence; and it was a pleasure to play with him at hide-and-seek!

It was, after all, an up-to-date story of the Princess in disguise; and I was the young man, all unknowing, with whom she had played.

Here a terrible doubt assailed me. Other Princesses had played hide-and-seek; and, having had their sport, had vanished; leaving desolation and an empty heart behind them. Was it possible that she too was like this; that she had been all the while playing with me; that even whilst she was being most gracious, she was taking steps to hide even her whereabouts from me? Here was I, who had even proposed marriage; and yet who did not even know when or where I should see her again — if indeed I should ever see her again at all. I could not believe it. I had looked into her eyes, and had seen the truth. Here was no wanton playing at bowls with men's hearts. My life upon her faith!

I seemed to have lost myself in a sort of trance. I was recalled from it by Cathcart, who seeing me in a reverie had gone over to the fireplace and stood with his back to me, filling his pipe at the mantelpiece:

"I think I hear Adams coming. Pardon me, old fellow, but though I am sure he knows I have told you about Miss Drake, and though he probably made an excuse for delay so that I might have an opportunity to do so, he wants to appear not to enter on the subject. He is *diplomat* all over. Remember he is of the U. S. Embassy; and Miss Drake, as an American citizen, is theoretically under his care in this foreign country. Let us be talking of something else when he comes in!” Sam came along the passage softly whistling a bar of “Yankee Doodle.” Cathcart nodded to me and whispered:

“I told you so! He takes good care that he may not surprise us.” When he came in we were talking of the prospects of the Autumn fishing on the Dee.

When we left Cathcart’s room, after a cigar, I, being somewhat tired with my long ride, went at once to my room. Adams came with me as far as the door.

I was just getting into bed when I heard a slight tap at the door. I unlocked it and found Adams without. He raised a warning hand, and said in a whisper:

“May I come in? I want to say something very privately.” More than ever mystified — everything seemed a mystery now — I opened the door. He came in and I closed it softly and locked it.

CHAPTER XVII. SAM ADAMS’S TASK

Adams began at once: “Archie I want to tell you something; but it is in the strictest confidence. You must promise me not to mention to any one, mind *any one*, what I say; or even that I have spoken to you on the subject.” I thought for a moment before replying. It flashed across me that what he had to say must concern Marjory, so I answered:

“I fear I cannot make such a promise, if the matter is regarding some one other than myself.” A shade of annoyance passed across his face as he said:

“Well, it is about some one else; but really you must trust me. I would not for the world, old fellow, ask you to do anything that was not correct.”

“I know that” I said “I know it right well; but you see it might be regarding some one with whom my relations might be peculiar — not fixed you know. It might be necessary for me to speak. Perhaps not now; but later on.” I was stumbling blindly, so sought refuge in fact and query, “Tell me” I said “does it relate to Miss Drake?”

“It does; but I thought that you who are a friend of hers might like to do her a service.”

“Of course I would.” I answered. “There is nothing I would not do for her if it were in my power.”

“Except hold your tongue!” he said with a touch of bitterness unusual with him. I could see that anxious as I was to hear he was still more anxious to tell me; so I was able to keep my temper and not make matters worse by answering back sarcastically. I said:

“Yes, old chap, even by holding my tongue. If I could see that I would benefit her by holding my tongue, or by cutting out my tongue, I would do it. What I must refuse is to *promise* to hold my tongue. Come, old fellow, don't put me in a wrong position. You don't know all that I do, or exactly how I am placed. Why don't you trust me? I am willing to promise that I won't speak at all of the matter unless it be necessary; and that I won't speak at all in any case of having been told anything by you." He brightened up at once and said:

"All right, then we can drive on. I take it that since we met last" — that was a few minutes ago, but he was a diplomatist— "you have learned more about Miss Drake, or rather of her history and her position and importance, than you knew at that time?"

"Yes," I answered, and I could not help smiling.

"Then we needn't go into that. We take facts for granted. Well, that fine act of hers — you know what I mean — has brought her, or may bring her, a peck of trouble. There are, or there were, a certain lot of Spaniards — Copperheads — at home who look on her as a sort of embodiment of the American antagonism to their own nation. They are the low lot; for mind you, though we are at war with them I say it, the good Spaniard is a fine fellow. It came to the ears of the authorities in Washington that there was some sort of plot on foot to do her a harm. The Secret Service was a little at fault, and couldn't get accurate or full information; for naturally enough the Spaniards didn't trust any but themselves in such a matter. We know enough, however, to be somewhat concerned for her; and it was arranged that a secret watch should be kept on her, so that no harm should come that could be prevented. The proper men had been detailed off for the work; when to our surprise, and a little to our consternation, it turned out that the young lady had disappeared. We knew of course that her going was voluntary; she had left word to that effect, so that there might not be any bother made about her. But the trouble was that she did not know of the danger which threatened her; and as our people didn't know where she was, no step could be taken to protect or warn her. It is clear that my lady got tired of fireworks and of the Joan of Arc business, and bolted. It was considered necessary at headquarters that we should in the meantime all keep our heads shut. But we were advised at the Embassy in London that the plot was on, and that we should hump ourselves a bit to look after her in case she was in England. The matter was handed over to me, and I have been on the run ever since; but I have not been able to hear tale or tiding of her. Two days ago we got a cable in our cipher which told us that, from information received and the rest of it, they suspected she was in England, or probably in Scotland; and that there was later evidence that the plot was more active than ever. Unfortunately we have as yet no details, and not even a clue. That is why I am here. I came down with Cathcart, who fortunately was bound for the North, as it covered up my purpose. I have been in a regular stew for days past. Marjory Drake is too good to have any trouble come to her that any American can help. You can imagine my delight when I saw her this evening; for now that I have located her, I can take steps to look after her safety if necessary. You two went so fast on your wheels that I lost you at the Bridge; but I surmised that you would be coming here anyhow after your ride. So I came up as quickly as I could, and saw you two and the old lady come up from the railway station. I couldn't get to see Miss Drake to-night; but I expect to look her up pretty early in the morning."

Here was a new entanglement. It seemed to me as more than likely that Marjory, having seen Adams and knowing his diplomatic position, suspected some interference with her liberty, and made an escape at once. This, then, was the reason why she had asked me to stay and eat dinner alone; I was to cover up her tracks and secure her a night's delay. Thus, even to Adams, my tongue was tied as to her movements. I did not wish to seem to deceive him, so avoided the subject. In answer to him I asked:

"But tell me, old fellow, how and where do I come into your story? Why do you tell me this?" He answered very gravely:

"Because I want your help. This is, or rather may be, a very serious matter to Miss Drake. The whole business is entrusted by our government to my chief, who has detailed me on the service. It is of so delicate and secret a nature that I cannot make confidence with many people, and I am loth to trust any one but a gentleman. Besides Miss Drake is a very peculiar girl. She is absolutely independent, thoroughly determined, and more than plucky. If she knew there was a plot on foot, as likely as not she would try to encourage it out of mere recklessness; and would try to counterplot all by herself. Her enemies know this, and will avail themselves of every chance and of every false move of hers; so that she might help to work out herself the evil intended for her. This we cannot permit; and I am quite sure that you, who are a friend of hers, are at one with me here. Now, if you want to know exactly how you can help I will tell you; and you will, I am sure, pardon me if I say too much — or too little. If she were to know that the matter of her protection was a Government one, nothing on earth would make her yield herself to our views. But if it were suggested by a — a friend whom she — she valued, her action would probably be quite the opposite. She is a girl all heart and soul. When she is taken rightly you can lead her with a thread; but you can't drag her with gun-ropes. From what I saw yesterday, I am inclined to think that you might have more influence with her than any one else I could pick out."

I could not say anything to this, either positive or negative, so I remained silent. He went on:

"There is one other reason why I ask you to help, but it is secondary to the other one, believe me, and one I only use to fortify a better one. I ask you as an old friend to help me in a matter which, even if you are not concerned in it, may be of the utmost importance to me in my diplomatic career. This matter has been placed in my hands, and it would not do for me to fail. There is not much κυδος to be got out of it if all be well — except with my immediate chiefs; but if I failed it would go far against me. If Marjory Drake should suffer from this Spanish plot, she who had, so to speak, fired the torch of the nation in the war, it would be formal, official ruin to me. There wouldn't be a man from Maine to California, from the Lakes to the Gulf, who wouldn't look on me as an imbecile, or worse!" Whilst he was speaking I was thinking, and trying to make up my mind as to what I should do. Manifestly, I could not tell him of the dawning relations between Marjory and myself. I was not yet prepared to speak of the Pope's treasure. I could not in honour give away Marjory's confidence in me in asking me to cover up her escape, or the implied promise of my acceptance of it. Still, Adams's confidence required some measure of frankness from me. His last appeal to me as an old friend to help him as an individual in an important work, which might mar if it could not make him, demanded that I should stretch every point I could in his favour. So I said:

"Sam, I shall do all I honestly or honourably can. But I must ask you to wait a while and trust me. The fact is I am not at liberty just at present to turn any way I choose. I am already committed to certain confidences, which were made before I saw you or had any knowledge of what you tell me. Moreover, I am in certain ways ignorant in matters that you would not expect. I shall at once take every step I can to be in a position to speak to you more freely. I am more deeply stirred, old fellow, by what you have told me than I can say; and out of the depths of my heart I am grateful to you and your Government for your care for Miss Anita — Miss Drake. I may say this, that until to-morrow at all events, I am unable to help you in any possible way. Were I to try to do anything till a certain thing happens, it would hinder rather than help your purpose. So wait patiently and do please try to understand me."

He replied with unwonted sarcasm:

"Try to understand you! Why man alive I've been trying whilst you were speaking, until my brain reels. But I'm blamed if I can make head or tail of what you say. You seem to be snarled up in more knots than a conjuror. What the hell does it all mean? You don't seem to be able to turn anywhere or do anything, even when the safety or the life of such a girl as Marjory Drake is in question. On my faith Mr. Hunter I hope I don't make any mistake about you!"

"Yes, you do, Sam!" I said quietly, for I could not but feel that he had good cause for disappointment or even anger. "At the first moment I am free to do so, I shall tell you all I can; and you shall then see that I am only doing what you would under similar circumstances do yourself. Won't you trust me, old friend!" He gazed at me steadily for a few seconds, and then his look softened.

"By God I will!" he said, as he held out his hand.

"Now tell me," I said "what can I do to keep in touch with you. I must go back to Cruden in the morning. It is necessary." This was in answer to his questioning look. "It is the first step in my doing as you wish.” I knew that Marjory would send to me, if at all, to Cruden. “But tell me how or where I can wire you in case we are not within hail.” For answer he pulled out of his pocket a bundle of “priority” telegrams addressed to the United States Embassy in London.

“Take them and use them as may be required. I am in constant touch with the Embassy and they will know where to find me. How will I find you?”

“Send to me care of Post-office, Cruden Bay,” I said, “I shall keep you advised of wherever I may be.” With that we said good night.

“I shall see you in the morning,” he said as he went out.

CHAPTER XVIII. FIREWORKS AND JOAN OF ARC

For some time I did not sleep. Things were hurrying on so fast; and so many new events and facts and dangers were coming to light, that I hardly knew where to begin to think. Of course all things concerning Marjory, principally her safety, took the first place. What could be this Spanish plot; what could be its method or its purpose? At first when Adams had told me of it, I had not been much concerned; it seemed so far away, so improbable, that I fear I did not take it with sufficient gravity. I had not thought at the time that the two nations were actually at war, and that already, both before the war and during it, deeds of desperate treachery had been done, the memory of which were not even obliterated by the valour and chivalry which had been shown by the nobler of America's foes. "*Remember The Maine*" was still a watchword and war cry. There were many scoundrels, such as chiefly come to the surface in war time, who would undertake any work, however deadly, however brutal, however dangerous. Such villains might be at work even now! With a bound I was out upon the floor. In that moment of concrete thought of danger to Marjory I realised to the full the danger of my own ignorance of her situation, and even of the locality where she might be. This impotence to do anything was simply maddening; when I felt it I could not but understand the annoyance of Adams in feeling a measure of the same impotence, with what looked like my obstinacy added. But think how I would, I could do nothing till I should see Marjory or hear from her. With this thought, which, under the circumstances, was more than harrowing, I went back to bed.

I was waked by the knocking of Adams who in reply to my "Come," slipped in and shut the door behind him.

“They are gone!”

“Who?” I asked mechanically, though I well knew.

“Miss Drake and her friend. They went away last night, just after you came back from the station. By the way, I thought you dined with them?” he said interrogatively, and with a dash of suspicion in his tone.

“I was to dine with them;” I answered “but they were not there.” He made a long pause.

“I don’t understand!” he said. I felt that as the time which I was to cover had passed, I might speak; for all sakes I wanted to avoid collision with Adams or the appearance of deceiving him. So I said:

“I can tell you now, Sam. I was asked to dine last night with Mrs. Jack and Miss Anita — Miss Drake. When I came down to the room I found a letter saying that they had to go away and making a special request that I would dine alone, just as though they were there. I was not to say a word to any one about their being away. Please understand, my dear fellow — and I must ask you to take it that this is only a hint which you must accept and not attempt to follow up — that there are reasons why I should act on any request of Miss Drake’s, blindfold. I told you last night that my hands were tied; this was one of the cords. To-day I hold myself free to explain I may now also tell you more. Last night I could do nothing. I could take no step myself, nor could I help you to take one; simply for the reason that I do not know where Miss Drake is staying. She is I know stopping, or was till lately, somewhere on the eastern side of Aberdeen County; but where the place is I have not the faintest idea. I expect to know very shortly; and the moment I know I will try to inform you, unless I am forbidden. You will know in time that I have spoken exact truth; though you may have found my words or meaning hard to understand. I am more than anxious to put Marjory on guard. When you left me last night, the whole deadly seriousness of the matter grew on me, till I was as miserable as a man can be.” His face lightened as I spoke.

“Well,” he said “at least we are one in the matter; that is something. I feared you were, and would be, working against me. Now look here, I have been thinking the matter over, and I daresay I have come nearer to understanding your position than you imagine. I don’t want to limit or hamper you in working in your own way for Miss Drake’s good; but I may tell you this. I mean to find her if I can, and in my own way. I am not fettered anywhere, except by the necessary secrecy. Outside of this I am free to act. I shall keep you advised at Cruden.”

Before I was dressed I had another visitor. This time it was Cathcart who, with considerable diffidence and all the shamefaced embarrassment of an Englishman when doing a kindly action in which he may be taken as intruding, offered me his services. I tried to set him at ease by the heartiness of my thanks. Upon which he expanded enough to say:

“From something Adams let drop — in all confidence believe me — I gather you are or may be in trouble about some friend. If this should be, and from my heart I trust it may not, I hope you will bear in mind that I am a friend, and unattached. I am pretty well alone in the world so far as family is concerned, and there is no one to interfere with me. Indeed there are some who would be happy, for testamentary reasons, to attend my funeral. I hope you will remember this, old chap, if there is any fun going.” Then he went away, easy of carriage and debonair as usual. It was in such wise that this gallant gentleman made me a proffer of his life. It moved me more than I can tell.

I went down to Cruden by the next train, and arranged with the postmaster to send on to me at once by messenger or wire any telegram that might come directed as I had told Adams.

Towards dusk a letter was brought to me. It was in Marjory's hand, and on my asking at once how it had come, I was told that it was brought by a mounted man who on handing it in had said "no answer" and had ridden away.

With hope and joy and misgiving mingled I opened it. All these feelings were justified by the few words it contained:

"Meet me to-morrow at eleven at Pircappies."

I passed the night with what patience I could, and rose early. At ten I took a light boat and rowed by myself from Port Erroll across the bay. I hung round outside the Skares, ostensibly fishing but keeping watch for any sign of Marjory; for from this point I could see the road to Whinnyfold and the path by the beach. A little before eleven I saw a woman wheeling a bicycle down the Whinnyfold laneway. Taking in my lines, I pulled, quietly and avoiding any appearance of hurry, for I knew not whether any one might see us, into the tiny harbour behind the jutting rock. Marjory arrived just at the same time, and I rejoiced to see that her face bore no mark or sign of care. As yet nothing had happened. We met with a slight hand shake; but there was a look in her eyes which made my heart leap. For the past thirty-six hours my anxiety for her had put aside every other feeling. I had not thought of myself, and therefore not of my love for her; but now my selfish instinct woke again in full force. In her presence, and in the jubilance of my own heart, fear in all forms seemed as impossible to realise as that the burning sun above us should be blotted out with falling snow. With one of her mysterious signs of silence she pointed to the rock that here stretches out into the sea, and whose top is crowned with long sea grass. Together we climbed the face of the cliff, and bearing across the narrow promontory passed over the top of the rock. We found a cosy nest hidden behind it. Here we were absolutely isolated from the world; out of earshot of every one, and out of sight except from beyond the stretch of rocky sea. In a demure way she acknowledged my satisfaction.

"Isn't it a nice place. I chose it out yesterday when I was here!" For an instant I felt as though she had struck me. Just to think that she had been here yesterday, whilst I was waiting for her only across the bay, eating my heart out. However, there was no use looking back. She was with me now, and we were alone. The whole delight of the thing swept away every other feeling. With a pretty little motion of settling herself comfortably, and which to me seemed to prelude a long talk, she began:

"I suppose you know a lot about me now?"

"How do you mean?"

"Come now, don't prevaricate. I saw Sam Adams in Aberdeen, and of course he told you all about me." I interrupted:

"No he didn't." The very tone of my voice enlightened her. With a smile she said:

"Then some one else did. Answer me some questions. What is my name?"

"Marjory Anita Drake."

"Am I poor?"

"In the way of money, no."

"Right! Why did I leave America?"

“To run away from the fireworks and the Joan of Arc business.”

“Right again; but that sounds mighty like Sam Adams. Well, that’s all right; now we may begin. I want to tell you something which you don’t know.” She paused. Half in delight and half in fear, for her appearance of purpose alarmed me, I set myself to listen.

CHAPTER XIX. ON CHANGING ONE’S NAME

With a smile Marjory began:

“You are satisfied that it was because of the fireworks and Joan of Arc business that I came away?”

“Oh yes!”

“And that this was the final and determining cause?”

“Why certainly!”

“Then you are wrong!” I looked at her in wonder and in some secret concern. If I were wrong in this belief, then why not in others? If Adams’s belief and my acceptance of it were erroneous, what new mystery was there to be revealed? Just at present things had been looking so well for the accomplishment of my wishes that any disturbance must be unwelcome. Marjory, watching me from under her eyelashes, had by this time summed me up. The stern look which she always had when her brows were fixed in thought, melted into a smile which was partly happy, partly mischievous, and wholly girlish.

“Make your mind easy, Archie” she said, and oh! how my heart leaped when she addressed me by my Christian name for the first time. “There isn’t anything to get uneasy about. I’ll tell you what it was if you wish.”

“Certainly I wish, if you don’t dislike telling me.”

So she went on:

“I did not mind the fireworks; that is I did mind them and liked them too. Between you and me, there has to be a lot of fireworks for one to object to them. People may say what they please, but it’s only those who have not tasted popular favour that say they don’t like it. I don’t know how Joan of Arc felt, but I’ve a pretty cute idea that she was like other girls. If she enjoyed being cheered and made much of as well as I did, no wonder that she kept up the game as long as she could. What broke me all up was the proposals of marriage! It's all very well getting proposed to by people you know, and that you don't dislike. But when you get a washing basket full of proposals every morning by the post; when seedy looking scallywags ogle you; when smug young men with soft hats and no chins wait outside your door to hand you their own poems; and when greasy cranks stop your carriage to proffer their hearts to you before your servants, it becomes too much. Of course you can burn the letters, though there are some of them too good and too honest not to treat their writers with respect. But the cranks and egotists, and scallywags and publicans and sinners, the loafers that float round one like an unwholesome miasma; these are too many and too various, and too awful to cope with. I felt the conviction so driven in to me that the girl, or at any rate her personality, counts for so little, but that her money, or her notoriety, or celebrity or whatever it is, counts for so much, that I couldn't bear to meet strangers at all. Burglars and ghosts and tigers and snakes and all kinds of things that dart out on you are bad enough; but I tell you that proposers on the pounce are a holy terror. Why, at last I began to distrust everyone. There wasn't an unmarried man of my acquaintance that I didn't begin to suspect of some design; and then the funny part of it was that if they didn't come up to the scratch I felt aggrieved. It was awfully unfair wasn't it? But I could not help it. I wonder if there is a sort of moral jaundice which makes one see colours all wrong! If there is, I had it; and so I just came away to get cured if I could.

"You can't imagine the freedom which it was to me not to be made much of and run after. Of course there was a disappointing side to it; I'm afraid people's heads swell very quick! But, all told, it was delightful. Mrs. Jack had come with me, and I had covered up my tracks at home so that no one would be worried. We ran up to Canada, and at Montreal took a steamer to Liverpool. We got out, however, at Moville. We had given false names, so that we couldn't be tracked." Here she stopped; and a shy look grew over her face. I waited, for I thought it would embarrass her less to tell things in her own way than to be asked questions. The shy look grew into a rosy blush, through which came that divine truth which now and again can shine from a girl's eyes. She said in quite a different way from any in which she had spoken to me as yet; with a gentle appealing gravity:

"That was why I let you keep the wrong impression as to my name. I couldn't bear that you, who had been so good to me, should, at the very start of our — our friendship, find me out in a piece of falsity. And then when we knew each other better, and after you had treated me with so much confidence about the Second Sight and Gormala and the Treasure, it made me feel so guilty every time I thought of it that I was ashamed to speak." She stopped and I ventured to take her hand. I said in as consolatory a way as I could:

"But my dear, that was not any deceit — to me at any rate. You took another name to avoid trouble before ever I even saw you; how then could I be aggrieved. Besides" I added, feeling bolder as she did not make any effort to draw away her hand, "I should be the last person in the world to object to your changing your name!"

"Why?" she asked raising her eyes to mine with a glance which shot through me. This was pure coquetry; she knew just as well as I did what I meant. All the same, however, I said:

"Because I too want you to change it!" She did not say a word, but looked down.

I was now sure of my ground, and without a word I bent over and kissed her. She did not draw back. Her arms went round me; and in an instant I had a glimpse of heaven.

Presently she put me away gently and said:

"There was another reason why I did not speak all that time. I can tell it to you now."

"Pardon me" I interrupted "but before you tell me, am I to take it that — well, what has just been between us — is an affirmative answer to my question?" Her teeth flashed as well as her eyes as she answered:

"Have you any doubt? Was there any imperfection in the answer? If so, perhaps we had better read it as 'no.'"

My answer was not verbal; but it was satisfactory to me. Then she went on:

"I can surely tell you now at all events. Have you still doubts?"

"Yes" said I, "many, very many, hundreds, thousands, millions, all of which are clamouring for instant satisfaction!" She said quietly and very demurely, at the same time raising that warning hand which I already well knew, and which I could not but feel was apt to have an influence on my life, though I had no doubt but that it would always be for good:

"Then as there are so many, there is not the slightest use trying to deal with them now."

"All right" I said "we shall take them in proper season and deal with them seriatim." She said nothing, but she looked happy.

I felt so happy myself that the very air round us, and the sunshine, and the sea, seemed full of joyous song. There was music even in the screaming of the myriad seagulls sweeping overhead, and in the wash of the rising and falling waves at our feet. I kept my eyes on Marjory as she went on to speak:

"Oh, it is a delight to be able to tell you now what a pleasure it was to me to know that you, who knew nothing of me, of my money, or my ship, or all the fireworks and Joan of Arc business — I shall never forget that phrase — had come to me for myself alone. It was a pleasure which I could not help prolonging. Even had I had no awkwardness in telling my name, I should have kept it back if possible; so that, till we had made our inner feelings known to each other, I should have been able to revel in this assurance of personal attraction;" I was so happy that I felt I could interrupt:

"That sounds an awfully stilted way of putting it, is it not?" I said. "May I take it that what you mean is, that though you loved me a little — of course after I had shown you that I loved you a great deal — you still wished to keep me on a string; so that my ignorance of your extrinsic qualities might add a flavour to your enjoyment of my personal devotion?"

"You talk" she said with a joyful smile "like a small book with gilt edges! And now, I know you want to know more of my surroundings, where we are living and what are our plans."

Her words brought a sort of cold shiver to me. In my great happiness I had forgotten for the time all anxiety for her safety. In a rush there swept over me all the matters which had caused me such anguish of mind for the last day and a half. She saw the change in me, and with poetic feeling put in picturesque form her evident concern:

"Archie, what troubles you? your face is like a cloud passing over a cornfield!"

“I am anxious about you” I said. “In the perfection of happiness which you have given me, I forgot for the moment some things that are troubling me.” With infinite gentleness, and with that sweet tenderness which is the sympathetic facet of love, she laid her hand on mine and said:

“Tell me what troubles you. I have a right to know now, have I not?” For answer I raised her hand and kissed it; then holding it in mine I went on:

“At the same time that I learned about you, I heard of some other things which have caused me much anxiety. You will help to put me at ease, won’t you?”

“Anything you like I shall do. I am all yours now!”

“Thank you, my darling, thank you!” was all I could say; her sweet surrender of herself overwhelmed me. “But I shall tell you later; in the meantime tell me all about yourself, for that is a part of what I wait for.” So she spoke:

“We are living, Mrs. Jack and I, in an old Castle some miles back in the country from here. First I must tell you that Mrs. Jack is my old nurse. Her husband had been a workman of my father’s in his pioneer days. When Dad made his own pile he took care of Jack — Jack Dempsey his name was, but we never called him anything but Jack. His wife was Mrs. Jack then, and has been so ever since to me. When mother died, Mrs. Jack, who had lost her husband a little while before, came to take care of me. Then when father died she took care of everything; and has been like a mother to me ever since. As I dare say you have noticed, she has never got over the deferential manner which she used to have in her poorer days. But Mrs. Jack is a rich woman as women go; if some of my proposers had an idea of how much money she has they would never let her alone till she married some one. I think she got a little frightened at the way I was treated; and there was a secret conviction that she might be the next to suffer. If it hadn't been for that, I doubt if she would ever, even to please me, have fallen in with my mad scheme of running away under false names. When we came to London we saw the people at Morgan's; and the gentleman who had charge of our affairs undertook to keep silence as to us. He was a nice old man, and I told him enough of the state of affairs for him to understand that I had a good reason for lying dark. I thought that Scotland might be a good place to hide in for a time; so we looked about amongst the land agents for a house where we would not be likely to be found. They offered us a lot; but at last they told us of one between Ellon and Peterhead, way back from the road. We found it in a dip between a lot of hills where you would never suspect there was a house at all, especially as it was closely surrounded with a wood. It is in reality an old castle, built about two or three hundred years ago. The people who own it — Barnard by name, are away, the agent told us, and the place was to let year after year but no one has ever taken it. He didn't seem to know much about the owners as he had only seen their solicitor; but he said they might come some time and ask to visit the house. It is an interesting old place, but awfully gloomy. There are steel trellis gates, and great oak doors bound with steel, that rumble like thunder when you shut them. There are vaulted roofs; and windows in the thickness of the wall, which though they are big enough to sit in, are only slits at the outside. Oh! it is a perfect daisy of an old house. You must come and see it! I will take you all over it; that is, over all I can, for there are some parts of it shut off and locked up."

"When may I go?" I asked.

"Well, I had thought," she answered, "that it would be very nice if you were to get your wheel and ride over with me to-day."

"Count me in every time! By the way what is the name of the place?"

"Crom Castle. Crom is the name of the little village, but it is a couple of miles away." I paused a while thinking before I spoke. Then with my mind made up I said:

"Before we leave here I want to speak of something which, however unimportant you may think it, makes me anxious. You will let me at the beginning beg, won't you, that you do not ask me who my informant is, or not to tell you anything except what I think advisable." Her face grew grave as she said:

"You frighten me! But Archie, dear, I trust you. I trust you; and you may speak plainly. I shall understand."

CHAPTER XX. COMRADESHIP

"I want you to promise me that you will not hide yourself where I cannot find you. I have grave reason for the request. Also, I want you, if you will, to let some others know where you are." At first there was instinctive defiance in her mouth and nostrils. Then her brows wrinkled in thought; the sequence was an index to character which I could not but notice. However the war was not long; reason, whatever was the outcome of its dominance, triumphed over impulse. I thought I could understand the logical process which led to her spoken conclusion:

"You want to report me to 'Uncle Sam'."

"That's about it!" I answered, and hurried on to give her a reason before she made up her mind to object.

"Remember, my dear, that your nation is at war; and, though you are at present safe in a country friendly to both belligerents, there are evil-minded people in all countries who will take advantage of anything unusual, to work their own ends. That splendid gift of yours to the nation, while it has made you a public favourite and won for you millions of friends — and proposals — has yet made for you a host of enemies. It is not as if you had given a hospital-ship or an ambulance. Your gift belongs to the war side and calls out active hatred; and no doubt there are men banded together to do you harm. This cannot be allowed. Your friends, and the nation as a whole, would take any step to prevent such a thing; but they might all be powerless if you were hidden anywhere where they could not find you." As I spoke, Marjory looked at me keenly, not with hostility, but with genuine interest. When I had finished she said quietly:

"That is very well; but now tell me, dear" — how the word thrilled me; it was the first time she had used it to me— "did Sam Adams fill you up with that argument, or is it your own? Don't think me nasty; but I want to know something of what is going on. Believe me, I am willing to do all *you* wish if it is your own will; and I am grateful for your thought for me. But I don't want you to be a mere mouthpiece for any party moves by the politicians at home."

"How do you mean?"

"My dear boy, I don't suppose you know enough of American politics to see how a certain lot would use to their own advantage anything that came in their way. Anybody or anything which the public takes an interest in would be, and is, used by them unscrupulously. Why, if the hangers-on to the war party wanted to make a show, they might enroll my proposers and start a new battalion."

"But," I remonstrated, "you don't think the Government is like that?" In reply she smiled:

"I don't altogether know about that. Parties are parties all the world over. But of course the Washington people wouldn't do things that are done by local politicians. And one other thing. Don't imagine for a moment that I think Sam Adams is anything of the kind. He belongs to the service of the nation and takes his orders from his chief. How can he, or any one fixed like him, know the ins and outs of things; except from what he hears privately from home, or gathers from what goes on around him if he is cute?" It appeared to me that all this was tending to establish an argument against taking the American Embassy into confidence, so I struck in before it should be complete. As I was not at liberty to take Marjory into confidence with regard to my source of information, I had to try to get her to agree to what I thought right or necessary on other grounds:

“My dearest, can you not leave out politics, American or otherwise. What on earth have politics to do with us?” She opened her eyes in wonder; she was reasoning better than I was. With an air of conviction she said:

“Why, everything! If any one wants to do me harm, it must be on the grounds of politics. I don’t believe there is any one in the world who could want to injure me on private grounds. Oh! my dear, I don’t want to talk about it, not even to you; but all my life I have tried to help other people in a quiet way. My guardians would tell you that I have asked them for too much money to give to charities; and personally I have tried to do what a girl can in a helpful way to others. I have been in hospitals and homes of all kinds; and I have classes of girls in my own house and try to make them happier and better. Archie, don’t think poorly of me for speaking like this; but I couldn’t bear that *you* should think I had no sense of the responsibility of great wealth. I have always looked on it as a trust; and I hope, my dear, that in time to come you will help me to bear the burden and to share the trust!” I had thought up to now that I couldn’t love her more than I did. But when I heard her words, and recognised the high purpose that lay behind them, and saw the sweet embarrassment which came to her in speaking them to me, I felt that I had been mistaken. She looked at me lovingly, and, holding my hand in both of hers, went on:

“What then could hurt me except it came from the political side. I could quite understand it if Spaniards wished to harm me, for I have done what I can to hinder them from murdering and torturing other victims. And I could understand if some of our own low-down politicians would try to use me as a stalking horse, though they wouldn't harm me. I want to keep clear of politics; and I tell you frankly that I shall if I can."

"But Marjory dear, there may be, I believe there are, Spaniards who would try to harm you. If you were in America you would be safer from them; for there at present, whilst the war is on, every stranger is a marked man. Here, on neutral ground, foreigners are free; and they are not watched and observed in the same way. If there were such fiends, and I am told there are, they might do you a harm before any one could know their intention or have time to forestall them."

All the native independence of Marjory's race and nature stood out in strong relief as she answered me:

"My dear Archie, I come from a race of men who have held their lives in their hands from the cradle to the grave. My father, and my grandfather, and my great grandfather were pioneers in Illinois, in Kentucky, in the Rockies and California. They knew that there were treacherous foes behind them every hour of their lives; and yet they were not afraid. And I am not afraid either. Their blood is in my veins, and speaks loudly to me when any sense of fear comes near me. Their brains, as well as their hands, kept guard on their lives; and my brains are like theirs. I do not fear any foe, open or secret. Indeed, when I think of a secret foe all the keenness of my people wakes in me, and I want to fight. And this secret work is a way in which a woman can fight in an age like ours. If my enemies plot, I can counter-plot; if they watch without faltering to catch me off guard, I can keep guard unflinchingly. A woman can't go out now-a-days, except at odd times, and fight with weapons like Joan of Arc, or the Maid of Saragossa; but she can do her fighting in her own way, level with her time. I don't see that if there is to be danger around me, why I shouldn't do as my ancestors did, fight harder than their foes. Here! let me tell you something now, that I intended to say later. Do you know what race of men I come from? Does my name tell you nothing? If not, then this will!"

She took from her neck, where again it had been concealed by a lace collar, the golden jewel which I had rescued from the sea. As I took it in my hand and examined it she went on:

"That came to me from my father, who got it from his, and he from his, on and on till our story of it, which is only verbal, for we have no records, is lost in the legend that it is a relic of the Armada brought to America by two cousins who had married, both being of the family to which the great Sir Francis Drake belonged. I didn't know, till lately, and none of us ever did, where exactly in the family the last owners of the brooch came in, or how they became possessed of such a beautiful jewel. But you have told me in your translation of Don de Escoban's narrative. That was the jewel that Benvenuto Cellini made in duplicate when he wrought the figurehead for the Pope's galley. The Pope gave it to Bernardino de Escoban, and he gave it to Admiral Pedro de Valdes. I have been looking up the history of the time since I saw you, and I found that Admiral de Valdes when he was taken prisoner by Sir Francis Drake at the fight with the Armada was kept, pending his ransom, in the house of Richard Drake, kinsman of Sir Francis. How the Drake family got possession of the brooch I don't know; but anyhow I don't suppose they stole it. They were a kindly lot in private, any of them that I ever knew; though when they were in a fight they fought like demons. The old Spanish Dons were generous and free with their presents, and I take it that when Pedro de Valdes got his ransom he made the finest gift he could to those who had been kind to him. That is the way I figure it out."

Whilst she was speaking, thoughts kept crowding in upon me. Here was indeed the missing link in the chain of Marjory's connection with the hidden treasure; and here was the beginning of the end of Gormala's prophecy, for as such I had come to regard it. The Fates were at work upon us. Clotho was spinning the thread which was to enmesh Marjory and myself and all who were in the scheme of the old prophecy of the Mystery of the Sea and its working out.

Once more the sense of impotence grew upon me. We were all as shuttlecocks, buffeted to and fro without power to alter our course. With the thought came that measure of resignation which is the anodyne to despair. In a sort of trance of passivity I heard Marjory's voice run on:

"Therefore, my dear Archie, I will trust to you to help me. The comradeship which has been between us, will never through this grow less; though nearer and dearer and closer ties may seem to overshadow it."

I could not answer such reasoning; but I took her in my arms and kissed her. I understood, as she did, that my kisses meant acquiescence in her wishes. After a while I said to her:

"One thing I must do. I owe it as a duty of honour to tell my informant that I am unable to give your address to the American Embassy, and that I cannot myself take a part in anything which is to be done except by your consent. But oh! my dear, I fear we are entering on a dangerous course. We are all staying deliberately in the dark, whilst there is light to be had; and we shall need all the light which we can get." Then a thought struck me and I added, "By the way, I suppose I am free to give information how I can, so long as you are not committed or compromised?” She thought for quite a few minutes before she answered. I could see that she was weighing up the situation, and considering it from all points of view. Then she said, putting both her hands in mine:

“In this, as in all ways, Archie, I know that I can trust you. There is so much more than even this between us, that I should feel mean to give it a thought hereafter!”

CHAPTER XXI. THE OLD FAR WEST AND THE NEW

Presently Marjory jumped up and said:

“Now you must get your wheel and come over to Crom. I am burning to show it to you!” We crossed the little isthmus and climbed the rocks above the Reivie o’ Pircappies. As we topped the steep path I almost fell back with the start I gave.

There sat Gormala MacNiel, fixed and immovable as though she were of stone. She looked so unconcerned that I began to suspect her. At first she seemed not to notice us; but I could see that she was looking at us under her eyelashes. I was anxious to find out how long she had been there, so I said, mentioning her name in order that Marjory might know who she was:

“Why, Gormala, what has become of you? I thought you were off again to the Islands. We haven’t seen you for a long time.” She replied in her usual uncompromising way:

“I hae nae doot that ye thocht me far, gin ye did na see me. Aye! Aye! the time has been lang; but I could wait: I could wait!”

“What were you waiting for?” Marjory’s voice seemed almost as that of a being from another world. It was so fresh, so true, so independent that it seemed at variance with Gormala and her whole existence. As a man beside two women, I felt more as a spectator than as a participant, and my first general impression was that the New World was speaking to the Old. Gormala seemed to me absolutely flabbergasted. She stared, and looked in a dazed way, at the girl, standing up as she did so with the instinctive habit, ingrained through centuries of custom, of an inferior to a superior. Then she moved her hand across her forehead, as though to clear her brain, before she replied:

“What was I waitin’ for? I’ll tell ye, an ye will. I was waitin’ for the fulfillment o’ the Doom. The Voices hae spoken; and what they hae said, will be. There be them that would stand in the way o’ Fate, and would try to hinder the comin’ that must be. But they will fail; they will fail! They can no more block the river o’ time wi’ ony deeds o’ mon, than they can dam the spate wi’ a bairn’s playtoy.” Again came Marjory’s searching question, with all the mystery-dispelling freshness of her unfettered youth; and indeed it seemed as if the Old-world mystery could not hold its dignity in the face of overt, direct questioning:

“By the way, what was it that the Doom said? Was it anything that an American girl can understand?” Gormala gazed at her in manifest wonder. To her, reared in the atmosphere of the Old Far West, this product of the New Far West seemed like a being of another world. Had Marjory been less sweet in her manner than she was, or less fair to look upon, less dignified, or less grave, the old woman would probably have shown hostility at once. But it seemed to me impossible that even a witch-woman could be hostile to Marjory to-day. She looked so sweet, and kind and happy; so bright and joyous; so much like the incarnation of ideal girlhood, that criticism was disarmed, and hostility could not force a way into the charmed circle of that radiant presence. To me, her attitude towards Gormala was incomprehensible. She knew Gormala, for I had told her of who and what the Seer was, and of the prophecies and warnings that she had already uttered; and yet from her manner she appeared ignorant of all concerning both her and them. She was not conciliatory after the manner of the young who wish to please the old, or to ingratiate themselves with them. She was not hostile, as would be one who had determined on opposition. About her or her manner there was nothing hard, or frivolous or contradictory. And yet it was apparent to me that she had some fixed, determined purpose of her own; and it became before long apparent to me also, that the other woman knew, or at any rate suspected, such an existence, though she could neither comprehend nor locate it. Gormala seemed once, twice, as though she were about to speak, but hesitated; at last with an effort she spoke out:

"The Voice o' the Doom no sounds in words such as mortals can hear. It is spoken in sounds that are heard of the inner ear. What matter the words, when the ear that hearkens can understan'!"

"But," said Marjory, "could I not be told the words, or if there were no actual words, could you not give me in your own words what the sounds uttered seemed to you to mean?" To anyone but a Seer such a request would seem reasonable enough; but visionaries who have a receptive power of their own, and who learn by means whose methods are unconscious to them, can hardly undertake to translate the dim, wide-stretching purpose of the powers of the Unknown into bald, narrow, human speech. Gormala's brows wrinkled up in thought; then a scowl of disappointment swept over her face. In an angry tone she turned to me and said:

"Wha be yon lassie that questions so blithely the truth o' the Voice that is kent by ye an' me? Why dinna ye tak her awa' before she mocks me, an' in me the Doom; an' I speak oot to her?" Marjory spoke up for herself.

"Please do not think it a liberty to ask you; but I should like so much to know exactly what was said. It is so easy for people to confuse ideas when words are loosely used. Don't you find it so?" I do not think Gormala MacNiel had any humour at all; if she had, I had certainly never seen any trace of it. Had it been there it would have surely saved her from anger; for there was something delicious in the way in which Marjory put her question, as though to one of her own kind and holding the same views as herself on general matters. Gormala did not like it. Though there was a blank in her mind as to the existence of humour, she must have felt conscious of the blank. She could not understand the other woman; and for a little while sought refuge in a silence composed of about equal parts of sulk and dignity. But Marjory was not content with silence; she pressed home her question in the most polite but most matter of fact way, till I could see the Witch-woman mentally writhe. I should have interfered, for I did not want any unpleasant scene in which Marjory must have a part; but I felt that the girl had some purposeful meaning in her persistence. Had Gormala had a pause in the attack she would, I felt, have gone away and bided her time: but in such a pushing of the matter as Marjory braced herself to, there could be no withdrawal, unless under defeat. Gormala looked round now and again, as one, man or animal, does when hunted; but each time she restrained herself by an effort. At last her temper began to rise; her face flushed, and the veins, of passion stood out on her forehead. Her eyes flashed, and white marks began to come and go about the face, especially round the nose. I could see from the leap of fire in Marjory's eyes that this was what she was waiting for. She lowered her voice, and the tone of her speaking, till both matter and manner were icily chill; but all the time she persisted in her matter-of-fact questioning.

At last Gormala's temper broke, and she turned on the girl in such a fury that for a few seconds I thought she was going to attack her physically. I stood ready to hold her off if necessary. At the first moment the passion in her was so great that she spoke in Gaelic; blind, white-hot fury will not allow a choice of tongues. The savage in her was speaking, and it spoke in the tongue it knew best. Of course neither of us could understand it, and we only stood smiling. Marjory smiled deliberately as though to exasperate her; I smiled because Marjory was smiling. Presently, through the tumult of her passion, Gormala began to realise that we did not understand her; and, with an effort which shook her, began to speak in English. With the English which she had, came intention and the restraint which it implies. Her phrases were not common curses, but rather a picturesque half prophecy with a basis of hate. The gravamen of her charge was that Marjory had scoffed against the Doom and Fate and the Voices. To me, who had suffered the knowledge to which she appealed, the attack was painful. What was charged was a sort of natural sacrilege; and it wounded me and angered me to see Marjory made the subject of any attack. I was about to interfere, when with a gesture, which the Witch-woman did not see, she warned me to silence. She struck into the furious woman's harangue with quiet, incisive, cultured voice which made the other pause:

"Indeed you do me a wrong; I scoffed at nothing. I should not scoff at your religion any more than I should at my own. I only asked you a few questions as to facts which seemed to touch a friend of mine." The point of this speech which, strange to say, affected the woman most was regarding her religion:

"Wha be ye, ye hizzie, that wad daur to misca' me that is a Christian woman all my days. What be your releegion, that ye try to shame me wi' mine." Marjory said deliberately, but with all the outward appearance of courtesy:

“But I did not know that in the scheme of the Christian belief there were such things as the Doom and the Voice and Fate!” The old woman towered up; for a moment she was all Seer and Prophet. Her words thrilled through me; and I could see through Marjory also. Though she held herself proudly, her lips grew pale:

“Then learn while ye may that there be lesser powers as well as greater in the scheme o’ God’s warld, and o’ His working o’ the wonders therein. Ye may scoff at me wha’ am after all but an aud wife; though one to whom are Visions given, and in whose ears the Voice has spoken. Ye may pride yersel’ that yer ignorance is mair than the knowledge o’ ithers. Ye may doot the truths that hae been garnered oot o’ centuries o’ dour experience, an’ tak’ the cloak o’ yer ignorance as an answer to a’ the mysteries that be. But mark me weel! the day will come — it is no far aff the noo — when ye will wring yer honds, and pray wi’ all the power an’ bitter grief o’ yer soul for some licht to guide ye that ye no hae had yet!” She paused and stood in a sort of trance, stiffening all over like a pointer at mark. Then she raised one hand high over her head, so that the long arm seemed to extend her gaunt form to an indefinite length. With a far-away solemn voice she spoke:

“I see ye too, though no by yer lanes, in the wild tide-race amang the rocks in the dark nicht, mid leaping waves. An’ lo! o’er the waste o’ foam is a floatin’ shrood!” Then she stopped, and in a few seconds came back to herself. In the meantime Marjory, whose lips had grown white as death, though she never lost her proud bearing, groped blindly for my hand and held it hard. She never for a moment took her eyes off the other.

When Gormala was quite her own woman again, she turned without a word and walked away in her gaunt, stately manner, feeling I am sure, as we did, that she did not go without the honours of war. Marjory continued to watch her until she had passed up the track, and had disappeared behind the curve of the hill.

Then, all at once, she seemed to collapse in a faint; and had I not held her hand, and so was able to draw her into my arms, she must have fallen to the ground.

In a wonderfully short time she recovered her senses, and then with a great effort stood up; though she still had to steady herself by my hand. When she was all right again she said to me:

"I suppose you wonder why I attacked her like that. Oh! yes, I did attack her; I meant to," for she saw the question in my eyes. "It was because she was so hostile to you. What right had she to force you to do anything? She is harmful to you, Archie. I know it! I know it! I know it! and I determined not to let her have her way. And besides," — this with a shy loving look at me, "as she is hostile to you she must be to me also. I want to be with you, even in the range of the hate and the love of others. That is to be one; and as we are to fight together I must share your lot in all!" I took her in my arms, and for some divine moments, our hearts beat together.

In those moments my mind was made up as to the wishes of Adams. How could I refuse in any way to fight the battle, as she might wish it fought, of a girl who so loyally shared my lot!

Then we arranged that I should go home for my bicycle, and meet Marjory at the bridge by the Parish Church.

CHAPTER XXII. CROM CASTLE

When I rejoined Marjory, we went up the high road and then turned off by a by-way which took us round innumerable slopes and mounds, so characteristic of this part of Aberdeen. The entire county, seen from high places, looks bare and open; but it has its hills and hollows in endless variety. From the cross road we turned up another and still another, till I lost my bearings entirely.

The part of the country where we now were was a sort of desolation of cultivation; endless low hills clad with fields of wheat and barley with never a house to be seen, except some far off cottage or the homestead of a laird perched on the top of a hill. At last we entered through an open gateway with broken pillars, still bearing the remains of some armorial device in statuary. There was an avenue, fringed with tall trees on either side, and beyond a broad belt of undergrowth. The avenue wound round and round in an endless series of curves. From the gate where we entered was a thick, close wood nearly a quarter of a mile in width. Here the trees stood so close, and their locking branches made such a screen, that it was quite gloomy within. Here too the road was made in perpetual curves, so that it was not possible to see far ahead. Indeed I remarked to Marjory as we rode along:

“No wonder you chose this as a place to hide in; it looks as if it was made for concealment. It is a regular Rosamund’s Bower!”

When we had passed through the wood, we came out on a great piece of level ground with a wide mound some twenty feet high, in the midst of it. On this was built of granite, a crenelated castle. It was not very high, but extended wide in a square, with a low arched doorway in front of us through which it might be possible to drive with care. The doorway was closed by two gates; first a massive network of interlocking steel bars of seemingly foreign workmanship, and secondly great gates of oak fortified with steel bands and massive bosses of hammered iron. Before going in, Marjory took me right round the castle and I saw that it was the same on all four sides. It was built by the points of the compass; but there was no gateway except on one side. The ordinary way of entering was by a more modern door on the south side. From inside the castle it was not possible to see anywhere beyond the wood. Even from the stone roof, made for defence, where Marjory took me, it was only possible to get a glimpse through the tree tops here and there of round-topped hills yellow with ripening grain or crowned with groves of scanty wind-swept pine trees. Altogether it was as gloomy a place as I had ever seen. It was cut off altogether from the outer world; one might remain in it for a life-time unknown.

Inside it was, if possible, more gloomy. Small rooms almost everywhere, except the great hall, and one room at the top facing the south side which lay just under the roof and which was lined with old oak. Here there were quite a number of windows such as Marjory had described, all of them, though wide on the inner side, narrowed to mere slits on the outer. In castles and houses built, like this, for defence, it did not do to allow opportunities to an attacking force to send missiles within.

Mrs. Jack and Marjory had made this their living room, and here were all the pretty treasures and knick-knacks which they had gathered on their travels. The old lady welcomed me warmly. Then Marjory took her aside and told her something in whispers. I could guess what it was; but any doubts I might have had were dispelled when she came over and kissed me and said:

"Indeed, I congratulate you with all my heart. You have won the best, and sweetest, and dearest girl that ever drew breath. I have been with her all my life; and I have not found a flaw in her yet. And I am glad that it is you whom she has chosen. Somehow, I wished it from the first moment I saw you. That you may both be happy, I pray the good Lord God! And I know you will; for you are true, and Marjory has a heart of gold."

"A heart of gold!" Her words had given me more than pleasure; but the last phrase pulled my joy up short. A cold shiver ran through me. A golden man had been a part of the prophecy of the Mystery of the Sea; and only a little while ago Gormala had in her vision seen Marjory struggling in the tide-race with a shroud in the air.

I think Marjory felt something of the same kind, for she looked at me anxiously and grew a little pale. She said nothing, however, and I thought it better to pass the matter by. Although Marjory had heard the expression of the Witch-woman's vision, and though I had told her of my first experience of the old rhyming prophecy, the former was at a time when neither I myself nor the whole mystery was of any special importance to her. She might not have remembered it; I trusted that this was so.

However, we could not either of us be sad for long to-day. Our joy was too fresh to be dimmed by any thought of gloom, except momentarily as a mirror is by a passing breath.

Tea in the old oak room was a delight, with the afternoon sun coming in slantwise through the narrow windows and falling in lines of light across the floor. Marjory made the tea and served me; and each time I took anything from her hand our fingers met, she no more than myself avoiding the touch. Then, leaving the old lady upstairs, she took me through the various rooms; and in her pretty, impulsive way she told me all the romances which she had already woven about them in her brain. She came and saw me off; with her kiss of good-bye on my lips I rode back through the gloomy wood, feeling as proud and valiant as a knight of old.

I found my way to Ellon and went on the train to Aberdeen, for I felt it due to Adams that I should see him at once. It was impossible to write all I had to say; and besides I wanted to retain his good will, and to arrange for securing his aid, if he would consent to do so under our altered conditions.

I found him in his room hard at work. He was writing something which I suppose he considered important, for he put it carefully away and locked his despatch box before we began to talk. Of course it might have been only his diplomatic habit; but he seemed grave over it. I entered at once on the matter between us, for I thought to get the disagreeable side over first and let concessions and alterations follow:

"I am sorry, Sam, I shall not be able to help you with information regarding Miss Drake."

"Why? Haven't you heard from her?"

"It is not that; but I am not free to do what you wish." Adams looked at me for a long time. Then he said quietly:

"I see. You have your orders! Well, I am sorry for it; it may bring dreadful harm to her, and I daresay to you too, now. Say, old chap, is that decision of yours final? The matter is more grave than I thought when I saw you last. We have had more information, and they are pressing us from Washington to take all precautions we can. Come, won't you help me — help her?"

"I can't, the way you say. Sam Adams, you know I would do anything I could for you; but in this matter I am pledged. I have been given a secret, and I must keep it honourably at all hazards. But look here, I am anxious all the same. Can't you trust me a little bit and tell me what to look for. I won't give you away; and I may be able to carry out your wishes as to helping to guard her, though I have to do it in my own way." He smiled, though very bitterly and ironically. I was glad to see the smile anyhow, for we were old and tried friends and I should not like there to be any break between us. Besides I wanted his help; his knowledge now, and his resources later on, if need should be. He was an official, and the matter was an official one though his heart was in it; it was not as if his personal feelings or his honour had been involved.

"Well," he said, "you have a fine gall anyhow! You refuse point blank to give me the slightest help, though I ask it on all grounds, official for America, personal as I am in charge, and for the sake of your own girl; and then you expect me to tell you all I can. Well, look here, I'll tell you anything that will help you as soon as I know it, if you will keep me advised of exactly where you are — so — so that I may be able to find you if I wish."

I told him heartily that I would keep him posted as to my movements. Then, as there was nothing to remain for, I said good-bye — a good-bye, I am glad to say, given and taken with our old heartiness. Before I went I said:

"Sam, you know how a message can find me if there is anything you should think it well to tell me." To which he replied:

"All right, Archie, I'll remember. You understand that as I shall have to work this racket alone I must do it in my own way: otherwise we shall have complications. But if there is anything I can do on your side, I shall do it all the same. You know how to reach me. If you send for me I shall come any hour of the day or night. And say, old chap, I go heeled!” he pointed to his pistol pocket. “Let me advise you to do the same just at present!”

I took his advice and bought in Aberdeen, before returning to Cruden, two of the finest revolvers I could get. One of them was made for a lady; the other I always carried myself from that day forward.

CHAPTER XXIII. SECRET SERVICE

Next morning after breakfast I wheeled over to Crom, bringing in my bicycle bag the revolver and ammunition for Marjory. I could not but feel alarmed for her safety as I rode through the wood which surrounded the house. It would need a regiment to guard one from a stray assassin. For myself I did not have any concern; but the conviction grew and grew on me to the point of agony that harm which I should be powerless to prevent might happen here to Marjory. When I was inside the house the feeling was easier. Here, the place was to all intents and purposes fortified, for nothing short of cannon or dynamite could make any impression on it.

Marjory received my present very graciously; I could see from the way that she handled the weapon that she had little to learn of its use. I suppose the thought must have crossed her that I might think it strange to find her so familiar with a lethal weapon, for she turned to me and said with that smoothness of tone which marks the end rather than the beginning of a speech:

"Dad always wished me to know how to use a gun. I don't believe he was ever without one himself, even in his bed, from the time he was a small boy. He used to say 'It never does any one any harm to be ready to get the drop first, in case of a scrap!' I have a little beauty in my dressing-case that he got made for me. I am doubly armed now."

I stayed to lunch, but went away immediately after as I was anxious to find if Adams had sent me any message. Before going, I asked Marjory to be especially careful not to be out alone in the woods round the house, for a few days at any rate. She demurred at first; but finally agreed— ‘to please you’ as she put it — not to go out at all till I had come again. I told her that as I was coming to breakfast the next morning if I might, it was not a very long time of imprisonment.

When I asked for telegrams at the post-office, which was in the hotel, I was told that a gentleman was waiting to see me in the coffee room. I went in at once and found Sam Adams reading an old newspaper. He started up when he saw me and straightway began:

“I hurried over to tell you that we have had further news. Nothing very definite to-day; but the Washington people hope to have a lot of detail by to-morrow night. So be ready, old chap!” I thanked him, but even in the act of doing so it struck me that he had taken a deal of trouble to come over when he could have sent me a wire. I did not say so, however; doubts of an act of this kind can always wait.

Sam had tea with me, and then we smoked a cigar outside on the little terrace before the hotel. There were some fishermen and workmen, as usual sitting on or leaning against the wall across the road, and three men who were lounging about, evidently trippers waiting for their tea to be served. When we came out and had passed them, the little group went into the coffee room. They were, all three, keen-looking, alert men, and I had a passing wonder what they were doing in Cruden as they had no golf bags with them. Sam did not remain long but caught the six-ten train back to Aberdeen.

I cannot say that my night was an easy one. Whilst I lay awake I imagined new forms of danger to Marjory; and when I fell asleep I dreamt them. I was up early, and after a sharp ride on my bicycle came to Crom in time for breakfast.

As we had a long forenoon, Marjory took me over the house. It was all of some interest, as it represented the life and needs of life in the later days of Queen Elizabeth in a part of the country where wars and feuds had to be prepared for. The Castle was arranged for siege, even to the water supply; there was a well of immense depth situated in a deep dungeon under the angle of the castle which they called the Keep. They did not, however, ordinarily depend on this, as there was otherwise an excellent water supply. In the dungeon were chains and manacles and some implements of torture, all covered with the rust of centuries. We hoped that they had not been used. Marjory consoled herself with the thought that they had been placed there at the time of the building as part of the necessary furnishing of a mediæval castle. One room, the library, was of great interest. It had not been built for the purpose, for there was no provision of light; but it must have been adapted to this use not long after the place was built. The woodwork of carved oak was early seventeenth century. I did not have time to look over the books, and there was no catalogue; but from the few which I glanced at I could see that whoever had gathered the library must have been a scholar and an enthusiast.

In the course of our survey of the castle, Marjory showed me the parts which were barred up and the rooms which were locked. That such a thing should be in a house in which she lived was a never-ending source of curiosity. There was a dozen times as much room as she could possibly want; but here was something unknown and forbidden. She being a woman, it became a Tree of Knowledge and a Bluebeard's Chamber in one. She was so eager about it that I asked if she could not get permission from the agent to go through the shut rooms and places so as to satisfy herself. She replied that she had already done so, the very day after she had arrived, and had had an answer that the permission could not be given without the consent of the owner; but that as he was shortly expected in Scotland her request would be forwarded to him and his reply when received would be at once communicated to her. Whilst we were talking of the subject a telegram to Mrs. Jack came from the agent, saying that the owner had arrived and was happy to give permission required and that further he would be obliged if the tenant would graciously accord him permission to go some day soon through the house which he had not seen for many years. A telegram was at once sent in Mrs. Jack's name, thanking him for the permission and saying that the owner would be most welcome to go through the house when he pleased.

As I was anxious to hear if there was any news from Adams I said good-bye at the door, and rode back on my bicycle. I had asked Marjory to renew her promise of not going out alone for another day, and she had acceded; 'only to please you,' she said this time.

I found a wire from Adams sent at six o'clock:

"Important news. Come here at once." I might catch the train if I hurried, so jumped on my bicycle and got to the station just in time.

I found Adams in his room at the Palace Hotel, walking up and down like a caged panther. When I came in he rushed over to me and said eagerly as he handed me a sheet of note paper:

"Read that; it is a translation of our cipher telegram. I thought you would never come!" I took it with a sinking heart; any news that was so pressing could not be good, and bad must affect Marjory somehow. I read the document over twice before I fully understood its meaning. It ran as follows:

"Secret Service believe that Drake plot is to kidnap and ransom. Real plotters are understood to be gang who stole Stewart's body. Are using certain Spanish and other foreigners as catspaw. Heads of plot now in Europe, Spain, England, Holland. Expect more details.

Use all precautions.”

“What do you think of that?” said Adams when I had taken my eyes off the paper.

“I hardly know yet. What do you make of it? You have thought of it longer than I have.”

“Just what I have thought all along. The matter is serious, very serious! In one way that wire is something of a relief. If that kidnapping gang are behind it, it doesn’t mean political vengeance, but only boodle; so that the fear of any sudden attack on her life is not so imminent. The gang will take what care they can to keep from killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. But then, the political desperadoes who would enter on such a matter are a hard crowd; if they are in power, or at any rate in numerical force, they may not be easy to keep back. Indeed, it is possible that they too may have their own game to play, and may be using the blackmailers for their own purpose. I tell you, old man, we are in a very tight place, and must go to work pretty warily. The whole thing swings so easily to one side or the other, that any false move on the part of any of us may give the push to the side we would least care should win. By the way, I take it that you are of the same mind still regarding Miss Drake’s wishes.”

“Now and always! But as you can guess I am anxious to know all I can that can help me to guard her.” Somewhat to my astonishment he answered heartily:

“All right, old chap, of course I will tell you; but I will depend on your letting me know of anything you are free to tell which might serve me in my work.”

“Certainly! I say,” I added, “you don’t mind my not having worked with you about finding her address.”

“Not a bit! I have to find it in my own way; that is all!” There was a sort of satisfaction, if not of triumph, in his tone which set me thinking.

"Then you know it already?" I said.

"Not yet; but I hope to before the night is over."

"Have you a clue?" He laughed.

"Clue? a hundred. Why, man, none of us were born yesterday. There isn't a thing on God's earth that mayn't be a clue now and again if it is properly used. You are a clue yourself if it comes to that." In a flash I saw it all. Adams had come to Cruden to point me out to his detectives. These were the keen-looking men who were at Cruden when he was. Of course they had followed me, and Marjory's secret was no secret now. I said nothing for a little while; for at the first I was angry that Adams should have used me against my will. Then two feelings strove for mastery; one of anxiety lest my unconscious betrayal of her secret might hurt me in Marjory's eyes, the other relief that now she was in a measure protected by the resources of her great country. I was easier in my mind concerning her safety when I thought of those keen, alert men looking after her. Then again I thought that Adams had done nothing which I could find fault with. I should doubtless have done the same myself had occasion arisen. I was chagrined, however, to think that it had all been so childishly simple. I had not even contemplated such a contingency. If I couldn't plot and hide my tracks better than that, I should be but a poor ally for Marjory in the struggle which she had voluntarily undertaken against her unknown foes.

Before I left Adams, I told him that I would come back on the to-morrow evening. I went to bed early in the Palace hotel, as I wanted to catch the first train back to Cruden.

CHAPTER XXIV. A SUBTLE PLAN

It was now a serious matter of thought to me how I could take Marjory into proper confidence, without spoiling things and betraying Adams’s confidence. As I pondered, the conviction grew upon me that I had better be quite frank with her and ask her advice. Accordingly when I saw her at Crom at noon I entered on the matter, though I confess with trepidation. When I told her I wanted to ask her advice she was all attention. I felt particularly nervous as I began:

“Marjory, when a man is in a hole he ought to consult his best friend; oughtn’t he?”

“Why certainly!”

“And you are my best friend; are you not?”

“I hope so! I should certainly like to be.”

“Well, look here, dear, I am in such a tangle that I can’t find a way out, and I want you to help me.” She must have guessed at something like the cause of my difficulty, for a faint smile passed over her face as she said:

“The old trouble? Sam Adams’s diplomacy, eh?”

“It is this. I want to know how you think I should act so as to give least pain to a very dear friend of mine, and at the same time do a very imperative duty. You may see a way out that I don’t.”

“Drive on dear; I’m listening.”

“Since we met I have had some very disturbing information from a source which I am not at liberty to mention. I can tell you all about this, though you must not ask me how I know it. But first there is something else. I believe, though I do not know for certain, that your secret is blown; that the detectives have discovered where you live.” She sat up at once.

“What!” I went on quickly:

“And I am sorry to say that if it is discovered it has been through me; though not by any act or indeed by any fault of mine.” She laid her hand on mine and said reassuringly:

“If you are in it, I can look at it differently. May I ask how you came into that gallery?”

“Certainly! I am not pledged as to this. It was by the most simple and transparent of means. You and I were seen together. They did not know where to look for you or follow you up, when they had lost the scent; but they knew me and watched me. Voila!”

“That’s simple enough anyhow!” was her only comment. After a while she asked:

“Do you know how far they have got in their search?”

“I do not; I only know that they expected to find where you lived two days ago. I suppose they have found it out by this.”

“Sam Adams is getting too clever. They will be making him President, or Alderman or something, if he doesn’t look out. But do you know yet why all this trouble is being taken about me.”

“I can tell you,” I answered “but you must not tell any one, for it would not do for the sake of others if it got about. There is a plan got up by a gang of blackmailers to kidnap you for a ransom.” She jumped up with excitement and began to clap her hands.

“Oh, that is too delicious!” she said. “Tell me all you know of it. We may be able to lead them on a bit. It will be an awful lark!” I could not possibly share her mirth; the matter was really too grave. She saw my feeling in my face and stopped. She thought for a minute or two with her brows wrinkled and then she said:

“Are you really serious, Archie, as to any danger in the matter?”

“My dear, there is always danger in a conspiracy of base men. We have to fear, for we don't know the power or numbers of the conspiracy. We have no idea of their method of working, or where or how we may expect attack. The whole thing is a mystery to us. Doubtless it will only come from one point; but we must be ready to repel, all round the compass."

"But, look here, it is only danger."

"The danger is to you; if it were to me, I think I could laugh myself. But, my darling, remember that it is out of my love for you that my fear comes. If you were nothing to me, I could, I suppose, bear it easily enough. You have taken new responsibilities on you, Marjory, since you let a man love you. His heart is before you to walk on; so you have to tread carefully."

"I can avoid treading on it, can't I?" she said falling into the vein of metaphor. "Surely, if there is anything in the world that by instinct I could know is in danger, it would be your heart!"

"Ah, my dear, it does not stay still. It will keep rolling along with you wherever you go; hopping back and forward and sideways in every conceivable way. You must now and again tread on it for all your care; in the dark or in the light."

"I had no idea," she said "that I had taken such a responsibility on my shoulders when I said I would marry you."

"It is not the marrying" I said "but the loving that makes the trouble!"

"I see!" she replied and was silent for a while. Then she turned to me and said very sweetly:

"Anyhow Archie, whatever we may settle about what we are to do, I am glad you came to consult me and to tell me frankly of your trouble. Do this always, my dear. It will be best for you, and best for me too, to feel that you trust me. You have given me a pleasure to-day that is beyond words."

Then we spoke of other things, and we agreed to wait till the next day before arranging any fixed plan of action. Before I went away, and whilst the sentiment of parting was still on her, she said to me — and I could see that the thought had been in her mind for some time:

"Archie, you and I are to live together as man and wife. Is it not so? I think we both want to be as nearly one as a man and a woman can be — flesh of each other's flesh, and bone of bone, and soul of soul. Don't you think we shall become this better by being joined, us two, against all comers. We have known each other only a short time as yet. What we have seen of each other has been good enough to make us cling together for life. But, my dear, what has been, has been only the wishing to cling; the clinging must be the struggle that is to follow. Be one with me in this fight. It is my fight, I feel, begun before I ever knew you. When your fight comes, and I can see you have it before you with regard to that treasure, you will know that you can count on me. It may be only a fancy of mine, but the comradeship of pioneers, when the men and women had to fight together against a common foe, runs in my blood! Let me feel, before I give myself altogether to your keeping, or you to mine, that there is something of this comradeship between us; it will make love doubly dear!"

What could a man in love say to this? It seemed like the very essence of married love, and was doubly dear to me on that account. Pledged by my kisses I came away, feeling as if I had in truth left my wife behind.

When I got back to Cruden I took up the matter of the treasure whilst I was waiting for news from Adams. In the stir of the events of the last few days I had almost forgotten it. I read the papers over again, as I wished to keep myself familiar with the facts; I also went over the cipher, for I did not wish to get stale in it. As I laboured through it, all Marjory's sweetness to me on that day of the ride from Braemar came back to me; and as I read I found myself unconsciously drumming out the symbols on the table with the fingers of my right hand and my left after the fashion of Marjory's variant. When I was through, I sat pondering, and all sorts of new variants kept rising before me in that kind of linked succession when the mind runs free in day-dreaming and one idea brings up another. I was not altogether easy, for I was now always expecting some letter or telegram of a disconcerting kind; anxiety had become an habitual factor in my working imagination. All sorts of possibilities kept arising before me, mostly with reference to Marjory. I was glad that already we understood in common one method of secret communication; and I determined then and there that when I went over to Crom on the next day I would bring the papers with me, and that Marjory and I would renew our lesson, and practice till we were quite familiar with the cipher.

Just then a message was brought to me that a gentleman wished to see me, so I asked the maid to bring him up. I do not think that I was altogether surprised to find that he was one of the three men whom I had seen at Cruden before. He handed me in silence a letter which I found to be from Adams. I read it with a sinking heart. In it he told me that it was now ascertained that two members of the blackmail gang had come to England. They had been seen to land at Dover, but got out between there and London; and their trace was lost. He said he wished to advise me at once, so that I might be on the alert. He would himself take his own steps as I understood. The messenger, when he saw I had read the letter, asked me if there was any answer. I said "only thanks" and he went away. It was not till afterwards that I remembered that I might have asked the man to tell me something of the appearance of the suspected men, so that I might know them if I should come across them. Once again I fell in my own esteem as a competent detective. In the meantime I could do nothing; Marjory's last appeal to me made it impossible for me to take steps against her wishes. She manifestly wanted the fight with the kidnappers to go on; and she wanted me to be with her in it heart and soul. Although this community of purpose was sweet, there grew out of our very isolation a new source of danger, a never-ending series of dangers. The complications were growing such that it would soon be difficult to take any step at all with any prospect of utility. Marjory would now be watched with all the power and purpose of the American Secret Service. That she would before long infallibly find it out, and that she would in such case endeavour at all hazards to escape from it, was apparent. If she did escape from their secret surveillance, she would be playing into the hands of her enemies; and so might incur new danger. I began to exercise my brain as to how I could best help her wishes. If we were to fight together and alone, we would at least make as good a battle as we could.

I thought, and thought, and thought till my head began to spin; and then an idea all at once sprang into my view. It was so simple, and so much in accord with my wishes; so delightful, that I almost shouted out with joy.

I did not lose a minute, but hurried a change of clothes into a bag and caught the train for Aberdeen *en route* for London.

I did not lose any time. Next morning I was in London and went with my solicitor to Doctor's Commons. There I got a license of the

Archbishop of Canterbury entitling Archibald Hunter and Marjory Anita Drake to be married anywhere in England — there being no similar license in Scotland. I returned at once, stopping at Carlisle to make arrangements with a local clergyman to be ready to perform a marriage service at eight o’clock of the second morning.

CHAPTER XXV. INDUCTIVE RATIOCINATION

I think Marjory must have suspected that I had something strange to say, for almost as soon as I came in the morning room I saw that queer little lift of her eyebrows and wrinkle in her brows which I was accustomed to see when she was thinking. She held out her two hands towards me so that I could see them without Mrs. Jack being able to. She held up her fingers in the following succession:

Left index finger, right middle finger, left little finger, right little finger, left thumb, right fourth finger, right index finger, left thumb, right index finger; thus spelling “wait” in her own variant of our biliteral cipher. I took her hint, and we talked commonplaces. Presently she brought me up to the long oak-lined room at the top of the Castle. Here we were all alone; from the window seat at the far end we could see that no one came into the room unknown to us. Thus we were sure of not being overhead. Marjory settled herself comfortably amongst a pile of cushions, “Now” she said “go on and tell me all about it!”

“About what?” said I, fencing a little.

“The news that you are bursting to tell me. Hold on! I’ll guess at it. You are elated, therefore it is not bad; but being news and not bad it must be good — from your point of view at any rate. Then you are jubilant, so there must be something personal in it — you are sufficiently an egoist for that. I am sure that nothing business-like or official, such as the heading off the kidnappers, would have such a positive effect on you. Then, it being personal, and you having rather more of a dominant air than usual about you — Let me see — Oh!” she stopped in confusion, and a bright blush swept over her face and neck. I waited. It frightened me just a wee bit to see the unerring accuracy with which she summed me up; but she was clearing the ground for me rapidly and effectively. After a pause she said in a small voice:

“Archie show me what you have got in your waistcoat pocket.” It was my turn to blush a bit now. I took out the tiny case which held the gold ring and handed it to her. She took it with a look of adorable sweetness and opened it. I think she suspected only an engagement ring, for when she saw it was one of plain gold she shut the box with a sudden “Oh!” and kept it hidden in her hand, whilst her face was as red as sunset. I felt that my time had come.

“Shall I tell you now?” I asked putting my arms round her.

“Yes! if you wish.” This was said in a low voice “But I am too surprised to think. What does it all mean? I thought that this — this sort of thing came later, and after some time was mutually fixed for — for — *it*!”

“No time like the present, Marjory dear!” As she was silent, though she looked at me wistfully, I went on:

“I have made a plan and I think you will approve of it. That is as a whole; even if you dislike some of the details. What do you think of an escape from the espionage of both the police and the other fellows. You got hidden before; why not again, when once you have put them off the scent. I have as a matter of fact planned a little movement which will at any rate try whether we can escape the watchfulness of these gentlemen.”

“Good!” she said with interest.

“Well, first of all” I went on, getting nervous as I drew near the subject “Don’t you think that it will be well to prevent anyone talking about us, hereafter, in an unpleasant way?”

“I’m afraid I don’t quite understand!”

“Well, look here, Marjory. You and I are going to be much thrown together in these matters that seem to be coming on; if there is any escaping to be done, there will be watchful eyes on us before it, and gossiping tongues afterwards; and inquiries and comparing of notes everywhere. We shall have to go off together, often alone or under odd circumstances. You can’t fight a mystery in the open, you know; and you can’t by walking out boldly, bamboozle trained detectives who have already marked you down.”

“Not much; but it doesn’t need any torturing of our brains with thinking to know that.”

“Well then my suggestion is that we be married at once. Then no one can ever say anything in the way of scandal; no matter what we do, or where we go!” My bolt was sped, and somehow my courage began to ooze away. I waited to hear what she would say. She waited quite a while and then said quietly:

“Don’t be frightened, Archie, I am thinking it over. I must think; it is all too serious and too sudden to decide on in a moment. I am glad, anyhow, that you show such decision of character, and turn passing circumstances into the direction in which you wish them to work. It argues well for the future!”

“Now you are satirical!”

“Just a little. Don’t you think there is an excuse?” She was not quite satisfied; and indeed I could not be surprised. I had thought of the matter so unceasingly for the last twenty-four hours that I did not miss any of the arguments against myself; my natural dread of her refusal took care of that. As, however, I almost expected her to begin with a prompt negative, I was not unduly depressed by a shade of doubt. I was, however, so single-minded in my purpose — my immediate purpose — that I could endure to argue with her doubts. As it was evident that she, naturally enough, thought that I wanted her to marry me at once out of the ardour of my love, I tried to make her aware as well as I could of my consideration for her wishes. Somehow, I felt at my best as I spoke; and I thought that she felt it too:

"I'm not selfish in the matter, Marjory dear; at least I don't wish to be. In this I am thinking of you altogether; and to prove it let me say that all I suggest is the formal ceremony which will make us one in form. Later on — and this shall be when you choose yourself and only then — we can have a real marriage, where and when you will; with flowers and bridesmaids and wedding cake and the whole fit out. We can be good comrades still, even if we have been to church together; and I will promise you faithfully that till your own time I won't try to make love to you even when you're my wife — of course any more than I do now. Surely that's not too much to ask in the way of consideration."

My dear Marjory gave in at once. It might have been that she liked the idea of an immediate marriage; for she loved me, and all lovers like the seal of possession fixed upon their hopes:

"Time goes on crutches, till love have all his rites."

But be this as it may, she wished at any rate to believe in me. She came to me and put both her hands in mine and said with a gentle modesty, which was all tenderness in fact, and all wifely in promise:

"Be it as you will, Archie! I am all yours in heart now; and I am ready to go through the ceremony when you will."

"Remember, dear" I protested "it is only on your account, and to try to meet your wishes at any sacrifice, that I suggested the interval of comradeship. As far as I am concerned I want to go straight to the altar — the real altar — now.” Up went her warning finger as she said lovingly:

“I know all that dear; and I shall remember it when the time comes. But what have we to do to prepare for — for the wedding. Is it to be in a church or at a registry. I suppose it doesn’t matter which under the circumstances — and as we are to have the real marriage later. When do you wish it to be, and where?”

“To-morrow!” She started slightly as she murmured:

“So soon! I did not think it could be so soon.”

“The sooner the better” said I “If we are to carry out our plans. All’s ready; see here” I handed her the license which she read with glad eyes and a sweet blush. When she had come to the end of it I said:

“I have arranged with the clergyman of St. Hilda’s Church in Carlisle to be ready at eight o’clock to-morrow morning.” She sat silent a while and then asked me:

“And how do you suggest that I am to get there without the detectives seeing me?”

“That is to be our experiment as to escape. I would propose that you should slip out in some disguise. You will of course have to arrange with Mrs. Jack, and at least one servant, to pretend that you are still at home. Why not let it be understood that you have a headache and are keeping your room. Your meals can be taken to you as would be done, and the life of the household seem to go on just as usual.”

“And what disguise had you thought of?”

“I thought that if you went dressed as a man it would be best.”

"Oh that would be a lark!" she said. Then her face fell. "But where am I to get a man's dress? There is not time if I am to be in Carlisle to-morrow morning."

"Be easy as to that, dear. A man's dress is on its way to you now by post. It should be here by now. I am afraid you will have to take chance as to its fit. It is of pretty thick cloth, however, so that it will look all right."

"What sort of dress is it?"

"A servant's, a footman's. I thought it would probably avoid suspicion easier than any other."

"That goes! Oh this is too thrilling;" she stopped suddenly and said:

"But how about Mrs. Jack?"

"She will go early this afternoon to Carlisle and put up at a little hotel out of the way. I have got rooms in one close to the station. At first I feared it would not be possible for her to be with us; but then when I thought it over, I came to the conclusion that you might not care to let the matter come off at all unless she were present. And besides you would want her to be with you to-night when you are in a strange place." Again she asked after another pause of thought:

"But how am I to change my clothes? I can't be married as a footman; and I can't go to a strange hotel as one, and come out as a young lady."

"That is all thought out. When you leave here you will find me waiting for you with a bicycle in the wood on the road to Ellon. You will have to start about half past five. No one will notice that you are using a lady's wheel. You will come to Whinnyfold where you will find a skirt and jacket and cap. They are the best I could get. We shall ride into Aberdeen as by that means we shall minimise the chance of being seen. There we will catch the eight train to Carlisle where we shall arrive about a quarter to two. Mrs. Jack will be there ready for you and will have the dress you will want to-morrow."

"Oh, poor dear won't she be flustered and mystified! How lucky it is that she likes you, and is satisfied with you; otherwise I am afraid she would never agree to such precipitancy. But hold on a minute! Won't it look odd to our outside friends on the watch if a footman goes out and doesn't return."

"You will return to-morrow late in the evening. Mrs. Jack will be home by then; she must arrange to keep the servants busy in some distant part of the house, so that you can come in unobserved. Besides, the detectives have to divide their watches; the same men will not be on duty I take it. Anyhow, if they do not consider the outgoing of a footman as sufficiently important to follow him up they will not trouble much about his incoming."

This all seemed feasible to Marjory; so we talked the matter over and arranged a hundred little details. These things she wrote down for Mrs. Jack's enlightenment, and to aid her memory when she would be alone to carry out the plans as arranged.

Mrs. Jack was a little hard to convince; but at last she came round. She persisted to almost the end of our interview in saying that she could not understand the necessity for either the hurry or the mystery. She was only convinced when at last Marjory said:

"Do you want us to have all the Chicago worry over again, dear? You approve of my marrying Archie do you not? Well, I had such a sickener of proposals and all about it, that if I can't marry this way now, I won't marry at all. My dear, I want to marry Archie; you know we love each other."

"Ah, that I do, my dears!"

“Well then you must help us; and bear with all our secrecy for a bit; won’t you dear?”

“That I will, my child!” she said wiping tears from the corners of her eyes.

So it was all settled.

CHAPTER XXVI. A WHOLE WEDDING DAY

Fortune favoured us admirably in our plans. Mrs. Jack, taking only her dressing bag and a few odd parcels, went by the afternoon train from Ellon to Aberdeen. In hearing of the household she regretted that she had to go alone, as Miss Marjory was unable to leave her room. About five o'clock I was in the wood as appointed; and in about half an hour Marjory joined me in her footman's livery. I had a flannel coat in my bag which we exchanged for that which she wore and which we hid in the wood. We were thus less noticeable. We reached Whinnyfold a little after six, and Marjory went into the house and changed her dress which was left ready. She was not long; and we were soon flying on our road to Aberdeen. We arrived a little before eight and caught the mail; arriving at Carlisle at ten minutes to two o'clock. In the hotel we found Mrs. Jack anxiously awaiting us.

In the early morning we were ready; and at eight o'clock we all went together to St. Hilda's Church, where the clergyman was waiting as had been arranged. All formalities were gone through and Marjory and I were made one. She looked oh! so sweet in her plain white frock; and her manner was gentle and solemn. It all seemed to me like a dream of infinite happiness; from which every instant I feared I should wake, and find in its stead some grim reality of pain, or terror, or unutterable commonplace.

When we went back to breakfast at the hotel, we did not even go through the form of regarding it as in any way a wedding feast. Marjory and I had each our part to play, and we determined — I certainly did — to play it well. Mrs. Jack had been carefully coached by Marjory as to how she should behave; and though now and again she looked from one to the other of us wistfully, she did not make any remark.

After a little shopping we got the 12:53 train, arriving at Aberdeen at 6:20. Mrs. Jack was to go on by the 7 train to Ellon where the carriage was to meet her. My wife and I got our bicycles and rode to Whinnyfold by Newburgh and Kirkton so as to avoid observation. When she had changed her clothes in our own house, we started for Crom. In the wood she changed her coat and left her bicycle.

Before we parted she gave me a kiss and a hug that made my blood tingle.

“You have been good” she said “and that is for my husband!” Once again she held up that warning finger which I had come to know so well, and slipped away. She then went on alone to the Castle, whilst I waited in nervous expectancy of hearing the whistle which she was to blow in case of emergency. Then I rode home like a man in a dream.

I left my bicycle at the hotel, and after some supper walked by the sands to Whinnyfold, stopping to linger at each spot which was associated with my wife. My wife! it was almost too much to think of; I could hardly realise as yet that it was all real. As I sat on the Sand Craigs I almost fancied I could see Marjory’s figure once again on the lonely rock. It seemed so long ago, for so much had happened since then.

And yet it was but a few days, all told, since we had first met. Things had gone in a whirl indeed. There seemed to have been no pause; no room for a pause. And now I was married. Marjory was my wife; mine for good or ill, till death did us part. Circumstances seemed to have driven us so close together that we seemed not new lovers, not bride and groom, but companions of a lifetime.

And yet.... There was Marjory in Crom, compassed round by unknown dangers, whilst I, her husband of a few hours, was away in another place, unable even to gaze on her beauty or to hear her voice. Why, it was not like a wedding day or a honeymoon at all. Other husbands instead of parting with their wives were able to remain with them, free to come and go as they pleased, and to love each other unfettered as they would. Why....

I brought myself up sharp. This was grumbling already, and establishing a grievance. I, who had myself proposed the state of things to Marjory, to my wife. She was my wife; mine against all the rest of the world. My love was with her, and my duty was to her. My heart and soul were in her keeping, and I trusted her to the full. This was not my wedding day in the ordinary sense of the word at all. This was *not* my honeymoon. Those things would come later, when our joy would be unfettered by circumstances. Surely I had reason to rejoice. Already Marjory had called me her husband, she had kissed me as such; the sweetness of her kiss was still tingling on my lips. If anything but love and trust could come to me from sitting still and sentimentalising and brooding, then the sooner I started in to do some active work the better!...

I rose straightway and went across the headland to my house, unpacked the box of tools which had come from Aberdeen, and set about my task of trying to make an opening into the cave.

I chose for various reasons the cellar as the spot at which to make the first attempt. In the first place it was already dug down to a certain depth, so that the labour would be less; and in the second, my working could be kept more secret. In clearing the foundations of the house the workmen had gone down to the rock nearly all round. Just at the end of Witsennan point there seemed to be a sort of bowl-like hollow, where the thin skin of earth lay deeper than elsewhere. It was here that the cellar was dug out, and the labour of cutting or blasting the rock saved. With a pick-axe I broke and stripped away a large patch of the concrete in the centre of the cellar, and in a short time had dug and shovelled away the earth and sand which lay between the floor level and the bed rock. I cleared away till the rock was bare some four or five feet square, before I commenced to work on it. I laboured furiously. What I wanted was work, active work which would tire my muscles and keep my thoughts from working into channels of gloom and disintegration.

It took me some time to get into the way of using the tools. It is all very well in theory for a prisoner to get out of a jail or a fortress by the aid of a bit of scrap iron. Let any one try it in real life; under the most favourable conditions, and with the best tools available, he will come to the conclusion that romancing is easy work. I had the very latest American devices, including a bit-and-brace which one could lean on and work without stooping, and diamond patent drills which could, compared with ordinary tools of the old pattern, eat their way into rock at an incredible rate. My ground was on the gneiss side of the geological division. Had it been on the granite side of the line my labour and its rapidity might have been different.

I worked away hour after hour, and fatigue seemed to come and go. I was not sleepy, and there was a feverish eagerness on me which would not let me rest. When I paused to ease my muscles cramped with work, thought came back to me of how different this night might have been.... And then I set furiously to work again. At last I took no heed of the flying hours; and was only recalled to time by the flickering of my lamp, which was beginning to go out. When I stood up from my task, I was annoyed to see how little I had done. A layer of rock of a few inches deep had been removed; and that was all.

When I went up the steps after locking the cellar door behind me and taking away the key, I saw the grey light of dawn stealing in through the windows. Somewhere in the village a cock crew. As I stepped out of the door to return home, the east began to quicken with coming day. My wedding night had passed.

As I went back to Cruden across the sands my heart went out in love without alloy to my absent wife; and the first red bolt of dawn over the sea saw only hope upon my face.

When I got to my room I tumbled into bed, tired beyond measure. In an instant I was asleep, dreaming of my wife and all that had been, and all that was to be.

Marjory had arranged that she and Mrs. Jack were for the coming week at least, to come over to Cruden every day, and lunch at the hotel; for my wife had set her heart on learning to swim. I was to be her teacher, and I was enthusiastic about the scheme. She was an apt pupil; and she was strong and graceful, and already skilled in several other physical accomplishments, we both found it easy work. The training which she had already had, made a new accomplishment easy. Before the week was over she was able to get along so well, that only practice was needed to make her a good swimmer. All this time we met in public as friends, but no more; we were scrupulously careful that no one should notice even an intimacy between us. When we were alone, which was seldom and never for long, we were good comrades as before; and I did not venture to make love in any way. At first it was hard to refrain, for I was wildly in love with my wife; but I controlled myself in accordance with my promise. I soon began to have a dawning feeling that this very obedience was my best means to the end I wished for. Marjory grew to have such confidence in me that she could be more demonstrative than before, and I got a larger share of affection than I expected. Besides I could see with a joy unspeakable that her love for me was growing day by day; the tentative comradeship — without prejudice — was wearing thin!

All this week, whilst Marjory was not near, I worked in the cellar at Whinnyfold. As I became more expert with the tools, I made greater progress, and the hole in the rock was becoming of some importance. One day on coming out after a spell of afternoon work, I found Gormala seated on a stone against the corner of the house. She looked at me fixedly and said:

"Be yon a grave that ye thole?" The question staggered me. I did not know that any one suspected that I was working in the house, or even that I visited it so often as I did. Besides, it did not suit my purpose that any one should be aware, under any circumstances, that I was digging a hole. I thought for a moment before answering her:

"What do you mean?"

"Eh! but I'm thinkin' ye ken weel eneuch. I'm no to be deceived i' the soond. I've heard ower mony a time the chip o' the pick, not to ken it though there be walls atween. I wondered why ye came by yer lanes to this dreary hoose when ye sent yon bonnie lassie back to her hame. Aye she is bonnie though her pride be cruel to the aud. Ah, weel! The Fates are workin' to their end, whatsoe'er it may be. I maun watch, so that I may be nigh when the end cometh!"

There was no use arguing with her; and besides anything that I could say would only increase her suspicion. Suspicion abroad about my present task was the last thing I wished for.

She was round about the headland the next morning, and the next, and the next. During the day I never saw her; but at night she was generally to be found on the cliff above the Reivie o’Pircappies. I was glad of one thing; she did not seem to suspect that I was working all the time. Once I asked her what she was waiting for; she answered without looking at me:

“In the dark will be a struggle in the tide-race, and a shrood floatin’ in the air! When next death an’ the moon an’ the tide be in ane, the seein’ o’ the Mystery o’ the Sea may be mine!”

It made me cold to hear her. This is what she foretold of Marjory; and she was waiting to see her prophecy come to pass.

CHAPTER XXVII. ENTRANCE TO THE CAVERN

One night, when I had got down a considerable depth into the rock, I took the pick to loosen out some stone which I had drilled. As I struck, the sound of the rock was hollower than I had before noticed. My heart leaped into my mouth, and I had to pause. Then I struck again harder, and the sound was more hollow still. Whether or no it was the place I was looking for, there was some cave in the rock below me. I would have gone on working straightway had there been anyone with me; but being alone I had to be careful. I was now standing on, evidently, only a layer of rock, over an opening of whose depth I was in ignorance. Should this piece of stone break away, as was quite possible from my working on it, I might be precipitated into a living tomb. The very secrecy in which I had kept my work, might tend to insure my death. Therefore I made all preparation for such a casualty. Henceforth I worked with round my waist a short rope the other end of which was fastened to a heavy staple in the wall. Even if the rock should give way underneath me, a foot or two would limit my fall. This precaution taken, I worked more furiously than ever. With a large hammer I struck the rock at the bottom of the shaft, again and again, with all my might. Then I heard a dull sound of something rattling below me; the top of the cave was falling in. I redoubled my efforts; and all at once a whole mass of rock sunk beneath my hammer and disappeared into a black chasm which sent up a whiff of cold air. I had seized my rope to scramble out, fearing asphyxiation; but when I smelled salt water I did not fear. Then I knew that I had got an opening into a sea cave of some sort. I stuck to my work till I had hammered an irregular hole some three feet square. Then I came up to rest and think. I lowered a rope with a stone at the end, and found that the depth was some thirty feet. The stone had gone into water before it touched bottom. I could hear the "plop" as it struck the surface. As I thought it better not to descend by myself, lest there should be any danger of returning, I spent the rest of my stay for that evening in rigging up a pulley in the roof over the hole so that I might be lowered down when the time should come. Then I went home, for I feared lest the fascinating temptation to make the descent at once would overcome me.

After breakfast I rode over to Crom, and when I was alone with Marjory told her of my discovery. She was wild with excitement, and I rejoiced to find that this new pleasure drew us even closer together. We agreed that she should come to help me; it would not do to take any one else into our confidence, and she would not hear of my going down into the cave alone. In order to avoid comment we thought it better that she should come late in the evening. The cave being dark, it was of course immaterial whether day or night was appointed for the experiment. Then it was, I could not help it, that I said to her:

"You see now the wisdom of our being married. We can go where we like; and if we should be found out no one can say a word!" She said nothing; there was nothing to say. We decided that she had better slip out, as she had done before, in the footman's dress. I went off and made preparation for her coming, bringing in food for supper and plenty of candles and matches and lamps and rope; for we did not know how long the exploration might take.

A little before nine o'clock I met her as before in the wood. She changed her livery coat for the flannel one, and we rode off to Whinnyfold. We got into the house without being noticed.

When I took her down to the cellar and turned into the hole the reflector of the strong lamp, she held on to me with a little shiver.

The opening did certainly look grim and awesome. The black rock was slimy with sea moisture, and the rays of the light were lost far below in the gloom. I told her what she would have to do in lowering me down, and explained the rude mechanism which I had constructed. She was, I could see, a little nervous with the responsibility; and was anxious to know any detail so thoroughly that no accident of ignorance could occur.

When the rope was round me and I was ready to descend, she kissed me more fondly than she had ever done yet, and held on to me as though loth to part. As I sank into the opening, holding the gasoline bicycle lamp which I had elected to take with me, I saw her pretty forehead wrinkled up in anxiety as she gave all her mind to the paying out of the rope. Even then I was delighted with the ease and poise of her beautiful figure, fully shown in the man’s dress which she had not changed, as it was so suitable for the work she had to do.

When I had been lowered some twenty feet, I turned my lantern down and saw through the sheen of water a bottom of rock with here and there a cluster of loose stones; one big slab which stuck up endwise, was evidently that which had fallen from the roof under my hammer. It was manifest that there was, in this part of the cave at any rate, not sufficient water to make it a matter of any concern. I called to Marjory to lower slowly, and a few seconds later I stood in the cave, with the water just above my knees. I moved the new-fallen slab to one side lest it might injure any one who was descending. Then I took the strong rope from me, and knotted round my waist the end of the thin rope which I had brought for the purpose. This formed a clue, in case such should be necessary, and established a communication with Marjory which would tend to allay her anxiety. With the cord running through her fingers, she would know I was all right. I went cautiously through the cave, feeling my way carefully with the long stick which I had brought with me. When I had got some distance I heard Marjory's voice echoing through the cave:

"Take care there are no octopuses!" She had been thinking of all sorts of possible dangers. For my own part the idea of an octopus in the cave never crossed my mind. It was a disconcerting addition to my anxieties; but there was nothing to do. I was not going to abandon my project for this fear; and so I went on.

Further inland the cave shelved down on one side, following the line of the rock so that I passed through an angular space which, though wide in reality, seemed narrow by comparison with the wide and lofty chamber into which I had descended. A little beyond this again, the rock dipped, so that only a low tunnel, some four feet high, rose above the water. I went on, carefully feeling my way, and found that the cave ended in a point or narrow crevice.

All this time I had been thinking that the appearance of the place did not quite tally with the description in de Escoban's narrative. No mention had been made of any such difficulties; as the few men had carried in what must have been of considerable bulk and weight there would have been great difficulties for them.

So I retraced my steps, intending to see if there was any other branch nearer to the sea. I kept the line taut so that Marjory might not be alarmed. I think I was as glad as she was when I saw the light through the opening, and the black circle of her head as she looked down eagerly. When underneath, I told her of my adventure, and then turned seawards to follow the cave down. The floor here was more even, as though it had been worn smooth by sea wash and the endless rolling of pebbles. The water deepened only a few inches in all. As I went, I threw the rays of my lamp around, anxiously looking for some opening. The whole distance from the place where I had made the entry to the face of the cliff was not very great; but distance in the open seems very different from that within an unknown cavern. Presently I came to a place where the floor of the cave was strewn with stones, which grew bigger and more as I went on; till at last I was climbing up a rising pile of rocks. It was slippery work, for there seemed some kind of ooze or slime over the stones which made progress difficult. When I had climbed up about half way towards the roof, I noticed that on my left side the slope began to fall away. I moved over and raising my lamp saw to my inexpressible joy that there was an opening in the rock. Getting close I found that though it was nearly blocked with stones there was still a space large enough to creep through. Also with pleasure I saw that the stones here were small. With a very slight effort I dislodged some of them and sent them rolling down, thus clearing the way. The clatter of the stones evidently alarmed Marjory for I heard her calling to me. I hurried back under the opening — the way seemed easy enough now I knew it — and told her of my fresh discovery.

Then I went back again and climbed down the slope of fallen stones; this was evidently the debris of the explosion which had choked the mouth of the cave. The new passage trended away a little to the right, making a sharp angle with the cave I had left. Then after deflecting to the left it went on almost straight for a considerable distance, thus lying, as I made it out, almost parallel to the first cave. I had very little anxiety as to the safety of the way. The floor seemed more level than even that of the entrance to the first cave. There was a couple of feet of water in the deepest part, but not more; it would not have been difficult to carry the treasure here. About two hundred feet in, the cave forked, one arm bending slightly to the left and the other to the right. I tried the former way and came to a sheer dip in the rock such as I had met with before. Accordingly I came back and tried the second. When I had gone on a little way, I found my line running out; so I went back and asked Marjory to throw me down the end. I was so sure of the road now that I did not need a clue. At first she demurred, but I convinced her; taking the rope I fixed one end of it within the cave before it branched. Then I started afresh on my way, carrying the coil of rope with me.

This branch of the cave went on crookedly with occasionally strange angles and sharp curves. Here and there, on one side or the other and sometimes on both, the rock walls bellied out, making queer chambers or recesses, or narrowing the cave to an aperture only a few feet wide. The roof too was raised or fell in places, so that I had now and again to bend my head and even to stoop; whilst at other times I stood under a sort of high dome. In such a zigzag course I lost my bearings somewhat; but I had an idea that the general tendency was inland to the right. Strange to say, the floor of the cave remained nearly level. Here again, ages of tide and rolling pebbles had done their work effectively. My cord ran out again and I had to lose the far end and bring it on, fixing it afresh, as I did not like to proceed without keeping a clue behind me. Somewhat further on, the cave dipped and narrowed so that I had to bend nearly double to pass, my face being just above the water as I went. It was with difficulty that I kept the lamp from touching the water below or knocking against the rock above. I was much chagrined to find this change in the structure of the cave, for since I had entered on this branch of it I had completely made up my mind that I was on the right road and that only a short time and a little distance lay between me and the treasure. However there was nothing to do but to go on.

A few feet more and the roof began to rise; at first in a very gentle slope, but then suddenly. Stretching my cramped back and raising my head, I looked around. I raised my lamp high, turning it so that its rays might let me take in a wide circle.

I stood at the side of a large, lofty cave, quaint of outline, with here and there smooth walls from which great masses of red rock projected ominously. So threatening did these overhanging masses look, that for a few seconds I feared to stir lest some of them should topple over on me. Then, when my eyes had become accustomed to the greater glare, I saw that they were simply masses of the rugged rock itself. The whole cave, so far as I could see, was red granite, formed of the great rock flung upward in the pristine upheaval which had placed the Skares in the sea.

CHAPTER XXVIII. VOICES IN THE DARK

I looked round the cave with mingled feelings. The place itself was, as a natural wonder, superb; but to me as a treasure hunter it was a disappointment. In no way did it answer the description of Don de Escoban. However I did not despair; there were many openings, and some one of them might bring me to the required spot. I passed to the centre of the cavern and looked round. As I did so, I got a momentary fright, for several of the openings were so much alike that only for my rope I would not have been able to distinguish that by which I had come in. The lesson of this shock should not be lost; I must make a mark by which I could distinguish this entrance from the others. No matter where the other openings might lead to, this alone, so far as I could tell, was the one which could lead me to safety. With a heavy pebble I hammered away at the right side of the entrance till I had chipped off a piece of rock. I could tell this place again by sight or by touch. Then I went round the cave examining the various branches. It was here that I began to feel the disadvantage of my imperfect light. I wanted some kind of torch which would give sufficient light to see the whole place at once. One could get no fit idea of proportion by merely making the little patch of dim light from the bicycle lamp travel along the rocky walls. I felt that all this time Marjory must be anxious about me, doubly so since she had no clue to where I had gone. So I determined to come back at once, and postpone the thorough examination of the place until I should have proper appliances. Accordingly I made my way back to the place where Marjory anxiously awaited me.

Her reception of me was sweet and tender. It was so natural that its force was hardly manifest. It may have been that my mind was so full of many things that I did not receive her caress with the same singleness of devotion as was my wont. Now that I was assured of her love for me, and since I had called her my wife, my love lost its element of anxiety. It is this security which marks the difference of a husband's love from that of a lover; doubt is an element of passion, but not of true conjugal love. It was only afterwards, when I was alone, and Marjory's enchanting presence was not with me, that I began to realise through the lenses of memory and imagination the full sweetness of my wife's greeting in her joy at the assurance of my safety. It took a very few moments to tell her all the details of my adventure, and of the conclusion which I had come to as to the need for postponement. She thoroughly agreed with me in the necessity; and we then and there settled that it would be wiser for her to go back to Crom to-night. We were to settle later, when all preparations had been made, when we should again attempt the investigation of the cave.

When I had put on dry clothes, we set out for Crom. We walked our bicycles past Whinnyfold, and were grateful for the unique peculiarity of that village, an absence of dogs. We did not light our lamps till we got on the Peterhead road; and we put them out when we got into the mesh of crossroads near Crom. In the wood Marjory once more resumed her footman's coat, and we set out for the castle. On our way we had agreed that it would be best to try the other side of the castle where it was not likely that any stranger would attempt to approach, as there was only the mossy foot track through the wood by the old chapel. In the later days both Marjory and I had used our opportunities of finding new paths through the wood round the castle; and we had already marked down several tracks which we could follow even in the dark with a little care. This was almost a necessity, as we had noticed of late traces of the watchers round the main gateway through which all in the castle were accustomed to come and go.

The path which we took to-night required a long detour of the wood, as it lay right on the other side from the entrance gate. It was only a narrow grass path, beginning between two big trees which stood closely together not very far from one of the flanking mounds or hillocks which here came closer down to the castle than any of the others. The path wound in and out among the tree trunks, till finally it debouched at the back of the old chapel which stood on a rising rock, hidden in the wood, some three hundred feet from the west side of the castle. It was a very old chapel, partly in ruins and antedating the castle by so many centuries that it was manifestly a relic of the older castle on whose site Crom was built. It may have been used for service early in the sixteenth century; but it could not even have been in repair, or even weather-proof, for there were breaches at the end of it in which had taken root seedlings which were now forest trees. There was one old oak whose girth and whose gnarled appearance could not have been achieved within two centuries. Not merely the roots but the very trunk and branches had pushed aside the great stones which lay firmly and massively across the long low windows peculiar to the place. These windows were mere longitudinal slits in the wall, a sort of organised interstices between great masses of stone. Each of the three on either side of the chapel was about two feet high and some six feet in length; one stone support, irregularly placed, broke the length of each. There was some kind of superstition amongst the servants regarding this place. None of them would under any circumstances go near it at night; and not even in daytime if they could decently excuse themselves.

In front of the chapel the way was very much wider. Originally there had been a clear space leading through the wood: but centuries of neglect had done their work. From fallen pine-cone, and beech-mast, and acorn, here and there a tree had grown which now made of the original broad alleyway a number of tortuous paths between the towering trunks. One of the reasons why we had determined to use this path was that it was noiseless. Grass and moss and rusty heaps of pine needles betrayed no footfall; with care one could come and go unheard. If once she could get through the wood unnoticed, Marjory might steal up to the doorway in the shadow of the castle and let herself in, unobserved.

We went hand in hand slowly and cautiously, hardly daring to breathe; and after a time that seemed endless came out at the back of the chapel. Then we stole quietly along by the southern wall. As we passed the first window, Marjory who was ahead of me stopped and gripped my hand so hard that I knew there must be some good cause for her agitation. She pressed back so that we both stood away from the window opening which we could just see dimly outlined on the granite wall, the black vacancy showing against the lichen-covered stone. Putting her lips close to my ear she whispered:

"There are people there. I heard them talking!" My blood began to run cold. In an instant all the danger in which Marjory stood rushed back upon me. Of late we had been immune from trouble, so that danger which we did not know of seemed to stand far off; but now the place and the hour, the very reputation of the old chapel, all sent back in a flood the fearful imaginings which had assailed me since first I had known of the plot against Marjory. Instinctively my first act was to draw my wife close to me and hold her tight. Even in that moment it was a joy to me to feel that she let herself come willingly.

For a few moments we stood silent, with our hearts beating together; then she whispered to me again:

“We must listen. We may perhaps find out who they are, and what they intend.”

Accordingly we drew again close to the opening, Marjory standing under the aperture, and I beside it as I found I could hear better in this position. The stooping made the coursing of my own blood sound in my ears. The voice which we first heard was a strong one, for even when toned to a whisper it was resonant as well as harsh and raucous:

“Then it’s settled we wait till we get word from Whiskey Tommy. How long is it likely to be?” The answering voice, also a whisper, was smooth and oily, but penetrating:

“Can’t say. He has to square the Dutchy: and they take a lot of sugar, his kind. They’re mighty pious when they’re right end up; but Lordy! when they’re down they’re holy terrors. This one is a peach. But he’s clever — I will say that; and he knows it. I’m almost sorry we took him in now, though he is so clever. He’d better mind out, though, for none of us love him; and if he goes back on us, or does not come up to the mark—” He stopped, and the sentence was finished by a click which I knew was the snapping of the spring of a bowie knife when it is thrown open.

“And quite right too. I’m on if need be!” and there was another click. The answering voice was strong and resolute, but somehow, for all the wicked intent spoken, it did not sound so evil as the other. I looked at Marjory, and saw through the darkness that her eyes were blazing. My heart leaped again; the old pioneer spirit was awake in her, and somehow my dread for her was not the same. She drew close to me and whispered again:

“Be ready to get behind the trees at the back, I hear them rising.” She was evidently right, for now the voices were easier to hear since the mouths of the speakers were level with the window. A voice, a new one, said:

“We must git now. Them boys of Mac’s ‘ll be on their round soon.” With a quick movement Marjory doubled under the window and came to me. She whispered as before:

“Let us get behind trees in front. We may see them coming through the door, and it will be well to know them.” So motioning to her to go on the side we were on, I slipped round the back, and turning by the other side of the chapel, and taking care to duck under the windows, hid myself behind one of the great oak trees in front, to the north of the original clearing. From where I stood I could see Marjory behind a tree across the glade. From where we were we could see any one who left the chapel; for one or other of us commanded the windows, and we both commanded the ruined doorway. We waited, and waited, and waited, afraid to stir hand or foot lest we should give a warning to our foes. The time seemed interminable; but no one came out and we waited on, not daring to stir.

Presently I became conscious of two forms stealing between the trees up towards the chapel. I glided further round behind my sheltering tree, and, throwing an anxious glance toward Marjory, was rejoiced to see that she was doing the same. Closer and closer the two forms came. There was not the faintest sound from them. Approaching the door-way from either side they peered in, listened, and then stole into the darkness between the tree trunks which marked the breach in the wall. I ventured out and slipped behind a tree somewhat nearer; Marjory on her side did the same, and at last we stood behind the two nearest trees and could both note the doorway and each of us the windows on one side. Then there was a whisper from within; somehow I expected to hear a pistol shot or to see a rush of men out through the jagged black of the doorway. Still nothing happened. Then a match was struck within. In the flash I could see the face of the man who had made the light — the keen-eyed messenger of Sam Adams. He held up the light, and to our amazement we could see that, except for the two men whom we had seen go in, the chapel was empty.

Marjory flitted over to me and whispered:

“Don’t be afraid. Men who light up like that aren’t likely to stumble over us, if we are decently careful.” She was right. The two men, seeing that the place was empty, seemed to cast aside their caution. They came out without much listening, stole behind the chapel, and set off along the narrow pathway through the wood. Marjory whispered to me:

“Now is my chance to get in before they come back. You may come with me to the edge of the wood. When I get in, dear, go back home as fast as you can. You must be tired and want rest. Come to-morrow as soon as you can. We have lots to talk over. That chapel must be seen to. There is some mystery there which is bigger than anything we have struck yet. It’s no use going into it now; it wants time and thinking over!” We were whispering as we walked along, still keeping carefully in the shadow of the trees. Behind the last tree Marjory kissed me. It was her own act, and as impulsively I clasped her tight in my arms, she nestled in to me as though she felt that she belonged there. With a mutual ‘good-night’ and a whispered blessing she stole away into the shadow. I saw her reach the door and disappear through it.

I went back to Cruden with my mind in a whirl of thoughts and feelings. Amongst them love was first; with all the unspeakable joy which comes with love that is returned.

I felt that I had a right to call Marjory my very own now. Our dangers and hopes and sympathies made a tie which seemed even closer than that tied in the church at Carlisle.

CHAPTER XXIX. THE MONUMENT

For the remainder of that night, whether rushing home on my bicycle, preparing for rest, lying awake, or even in my sleep, I thought over the mystery of the disappearance of the speakers in the old chapel. Certainly I went to sleep on the thought, and woke with it. It never left me even after breakfast as I rode out towards Crom. It was manifest that there must be some secret vault or hiding place in the chapel; or it might be that there was some subterranean passage. If the latter, where did it lead to? Where else, unless to the castle; such would be the natural inference. The very thought made my blood run cold; it was no wonder that it overspread my mind to the exclusion of all else. In such case Marjory's enemies were indeed dangerous, since they held a secret way to her at all times; once within the castle it would not be hard to work evil to her.

I thought that this morning I would do a little prospecting on my own account. Accordingly I left my bicycle in the wood and went a long circuit, keeping in the shadow of the woods where possible, and elsewhere stealing behind the hedgerows, till I got to the far side of the hill or spur which came nearest to the old chapel. This was one of the hills up whose base the trees ran in flame-shaped patches. Half way up, the woods ceased, and there was a belt of barrenness — outcropping rock fringed with green grass. The top, like most of the hills or mounds around the castle, was covered with woods, close-growing masses of pine which made a dusk even in the noonday.

I took my way up the back of the hill and stole through the wood, carefully keeping a watchful look out all round me, for I feared the presence of either of the sets of spies. At the very top I came upon a good sized circle of masonry, low but heavily built of massive stones completely covered with rich green lichen. The circle was some fifteen feet diameter, and the top was slightly arched as though forming a roof. Leaning over it I could hear a faint trickle of water; this was evidently the source of the castle supply.

I walked round it, examining it carefully; anything which had any direct communication with the castle was at present of possibly the supremest importance. There was no flaw or opening anywhere; and from the unbroken covering of the stones by the lichen, it was apparent that there had been no disturbance for years.

I sat down on the edge of the stonework and for a long time thought over matters of probability. If underneath me, as was almost to be taken for granted, lay the reservoir of the castle, it must have been made coevally with Crom itself, or even with the older castle on whose ruins it was built. It must be fed by springs in the rock which formed the base of the hill and cropped out all over it; and if it was not approachable from without, there must be some way of reaching the water from within. It might be that the chamber which contained the reservoir had some other entrance from the hill top, or from some lower level. Accordingly I made as I conceived a bee line for the castle, till I came to the very base of the hill, for I knew that in matters of water conduit the direct way is always chosen where work has to be done. As I went, I conned the ground carefully; not merely the surface for that was an uniform thick coating of brown pine needles, but the general conformation. Where a trench has been made, there is ever after some trace of it to be found. Even if the workmen level the trench most carefully there and then, the percolation of rain through the softer broken earth will make discovery of the change by shrinkage. Here, however, there was no such sign; the ground, so far as one could judge, had never been opened. The trees grew irregularly, and there was no gap such as would be, had one ever been removed. Here and there particles of rock cropped out amongst the pine needles just as anywhere else. If any opening existed it was not on the direct line between the reservoir and the castle.

Back again I went to the reservoir, and, using it as a base, began to cast around for some opening or sign. I made circles in all directions, just as a retriever does when looking for a fallen partridge in a dry stubble when the scent is killed by heat.

At last I came upon something, though whether or no it might have any point of contact with my purpose, I could not at once decide. It was a rude monument of some kind, a boulder placed endwise on a slab of rock roughly hewn to form a sort of square plinth. This again was surrounded on the outside, for the whole monument was on the very edge of a steeply-dipping crag, by a few tiers of rough masonry. The stones were roughly cut and laid together without mortar; or if mortar or cement there had ever been, time and weather had washed it away. In one respect this structure was in contrast to that above the reservoir, there was not a sign of moss or lichen about it. The trees of the wood came close up behind it; in front it was shut out from view below by the branches of a few pine trees which grew crookedly from a precarious foothold amongst the ledges of rock beneath. As I stood in front of it, I could see nothing immediately below me; however, when I had scrambled to a ledge a few feet lower down, the back wall of the old chapel became visible, though partly obscured by trunks and branches of intervening trees. I searched all over the monument for some inscription, but could see none. Then I stood on the plinth to see if there might be any inscription on the top of the boulder. As I stood, looking over the top of it from the bank, I could just see through a natural alleyway amongst the tree tops, the top of one corner of the castle, that on the side of, and farthest from the old chapel. As I looked, a bright thought struck me. Here was a place from which one might correspond with the castle, unseen by any one save at the one spot. I determined then and there, that Marjory and I should arrange some method of signalling to one another.

Somehow this place impressed me, possibly because it was the only thing, except the reservoir, which seemed to have a purpose in the whole scheme of the hill top. Where there was labour and manifest purpose, there must surely be some connection. I examined all round the place minutely, scrambling down the rocks below and on either side, but always keeping a bright look out in case of spies. The only thing I noticed was that there seemed a trace of some kind of a pathway through the wood here. It was not sufficiently marked to allow one to accept it with certainty as a pathway; but there is something about a place which is even occasionally trodden, which marks it from its surroundings virgin of footsteps. I could not find where the path ended or where it began. It seemed to grow from the monument, but here underfoot was stone and hard gravel; and the wind coming over the steep slope swept the fallen pine needles back amongst the shelter of the trees. After a few hundred yards any suggestion of a pathway disappeared, lost in the aisles of the pine trees spreading round on every side. There was no need of a pathway here where all was open. Once or twice as I searched the thought came to me that there might be some opening here to a secret way or hiding place; but look how I would, I could not find the faintest trace or suggestion of any opening. In the end I had to take it that the erection was merely a monument or mark of some kind, whose original purpose was probably lost in time.

At last, as the day was well on, I made my way back to where my bicycle was hidden, always taking care to keep from observation. Then emerging on the road, I went as usual through the old ruined gateway and the long winding avenue to the castle.

Marjory met me with an anxious look, and hung on to my arm lovingly as she said:

“Oh, you are late! I have been quite nervous all the morning lest anything should have happened to you!” Mrs. Jack, after we had greeted, discreetly left us alone; and I told my wife of all that I had thought since we had parted, and of what I had seen on the hill top. She was delighted at the idea of a means of signalling; and insisted on my coming at once to the roof to make further arrangements and discoveries.

We found the spot which I had indicated admirably adapted for our purpose. One could sit on the stone roof, well back from the wall, and through one of the openings in the castellation see the top of the monument amongst the tree tops; and could yet be unobserved oneself from any other spot around. The angles of the castellation of the various walls shut out the tops of the other hills or mounds on every side. As the signs of our code were already complete we had only to fix on some means of signalling ‘A’ and ‘B’. This we did by deciding that by daylight A should be signified by red and B by white and at night A by red and B by green. Thus by daylight two pocket handkerchiefs of red and white or two flowers of white and red; or a piece of paper and a red leaf or flower would suffice. We fixed on colour as the best representative, as the distance made simplicity necessary. By night an ordinary bicycle lamp with the lens covered could be used; the ordinary red and green side lights could be shown as required. Then and there we arranged that that very afternoon when I had left the castle I should steal back to the monument and we should make a trial of our signalling.

Then we talked of other things. Alone there on the roof we could talk freely; and the moments flew swiftly by in a sweet companionship. Even if the subjects which we had to discuss were grim ones of danger and intrigue; of secret passages and malignant enemies; of spies and possibilities of harm to one or both of us, still mutuality of our troubles and dangers made their existence to us sweet. That we shared in common even such matters was dear to us both. I could not but be conscious of Marjory's growing love for me; and if I had to restrain myself now and again from throwing my arms round her and pressing her beautiful body close to me and sweeping her face with kisses, I was repaid when, as we descended she put both her hands in mine and said:

"Oh Archie! you are good to me! and — and — I love you so!" Then she sank into my arms and our mouths met in a long, loving kiss.

We decided that as there must be some hidden opening in the old chapel, we should make search for it the next day. I was to come soon after sunrise, for this we judged would be the time when the spies of both kinds would least expect movement from the castle. I was to come by the grass path between the trees into the old chapel where she would meet me and we should make our investigations together.

After tea I came away. Marjory came out on the steps with me to see me off. As we bade each other good-bye she said aloud in case any one might be listening:

"Remember, you are to come to tea to-morrow and to bring me the book. I am quite anxious to know how it ends. It is too bad of the librarian not to send us all the volumes at once!”

When I got to the road I hid my bicycle in the old place, and took my way secretly to the monument. Marjory had been much struck by the suggestion of the footpath, and, woman-like, had made up her mind on the subject. She had suggested that we should test whether any one came or went by it, and to this end gave me a spool of the finest thread so that I might lay a trap. Before I should leave the place I was to stretch threads across it here and there between the tree trunks. If on the next visit I should find them broken, we might take it that some one had been there.

From the top of the boulder I made signal and was immediately answered. My own signal was simply the expression of my heart’s feeling:

“I love you, my wife!” The answer came quickly back filling me with joy:

“I love you, my husband! Don’t forget me! Think of me!”

CHAPTER XXX. THE SECRET PASSAGE

That night was one of rest. I was physically tired out, and after I had posted a few letters to merchants in Aberdeen, giving orders for various goods to be sent at once to Whinnyfold, I went to bed and slept till the early morning. I got up at daylight, and after my morning swim rode off to Crom. Again I left my bicycle in the wood and took my way round to the back of the hill and up through the wood to the monument beyond the reservoir. It was still early morning, as it is counted in the cities, though the sun was well up. I went with extra caution, stealing from tree to tree; for I knew nothing of the locality of the watchers at this hour. I saw no sign of anyone; and coming at last to where the rudimentary pathway lay, examined carefully where I had placed the first thread. As I did so I straightened myself quickly and looked round with apprehension. The thread was broken across, though the two ends were tied where I had placed them!

With a beating heart I examined all the others in turn, with the same result. It was quite evident that some one, or some thing had passed along the track. In spite of my concern I rejoiced, for something had been found. It was at least probable that there was a regular route somewhere at hand. Accordingly I prepared my traps afresh, this time placing them in various directions, and at irregular distances along the path and all round the monument. I might thus be able to trace the exact route of anyone who might disturb them. This done, and it took some time, I went back to the wood, and thence rode to the castle.

Marjory was eager for news, but it thrilled me to see that her eagerness was not all from this cause; hour by hour I found myself growing in her affection. When I told her of the broken threads, she clapped her hands with delight; the hunter spirit hereditary in her was pleased. She gave her opinion that on the next morning I should be able to locate the entrance to the passage, if one there was. In the midst of her speaking thus she stopped; a bright, keen light came into her eyes, and her brows knitted.

"Why," she said, "how stupid I am. I never once thought of doing the same at my end. Yesterday, after you left, I spent an hour in the old chapel and went over every inch of it; but it never occurred to me to do there what you had gone to do at the monument. If I had done so, I might this morning have been able to discover the secret of the disappearance of the kidnappers. I shall take good care to do it this evening."

While she was speaking a fear grew upon me lest being alone in the ruin she might give her enemies the very opportunity they wanted. She saw my distress, and with her quick woman's wit guessed the cause of it. With a very tender movement she placed her hand on the back of mine, and without squeezing it held it there firmly as she said:

"Don't be frightened for me, dear. These are expert workmen that we are dealing with. They won't move till their plans are all ready. They don't wish to get hold of me for five minutes and let "Mac's men" — as lacking due respect for President McKinley, they call the Secret Service agents of my country — catch them red-handed. They are only laying their plans as yet. Perhaps we may have cause to be anxious when that is done; but as yet it's all right. Anyhow, my dear, as I know it will make you easier in your mind, when you are not at hand to protect me, I shall lay the traps whilst you are with me. There now! Am I good to my husband, or am I not?" I made her aware in my own way — I could not help it — that she was good! and she let the incident pass unrebuked. Even lovers, though they have not the status of the husband, must be allowed a little latitude now and again.

We talked over all the possibilities that we could either of us think of with regard to a secret passage between the castle and the monument. It was apparent that in old time such a hidden way might have been of the utmost importance; and it was more than possible that such a passage might exist. Already we had reason to believe that there was a way between the ruined chapel and the top of the reservoir hill, and we knew that there must be existing some secret hiding place gained from the interior of the chapel. What we had still to discover, and this was the most important of all, was whether there was a method of communication between the castle and the chapel. After tea we started out together; and as we had arranged between us before starting, managed in our strolling to go quite round the castle and through many of the grassy alleys between the woods. Then, lest there should be any listener, I said:

"Let us go into the old chapel. I haven't had a good look at it since I have been coming here!" So we went into the chapel and began to lay our traps. Of course we could not guard against any one spying upon us. There might be eyes of enemies bent on us through some secret chink or cranny or organised spy-hole. This we could not help, and had to take our chances of it; but if anyone were within ear-shot and unable to see us, we guarded our movements by our misleading remarks concerning history and art. Deftly Marjory stretched sections of her gossamer thread from place to place, so that if any one went in the chapel their course must be marked by the broken threads. We finished near the door, and our artless, innocent, archæological conversation stopped there, too. We strolled back to the castle, feeling sure that if there were any secret hiding place within the ruin we should have located the entrance to it in the morning.

That afternoon I went to the house at Whinnyfold. Most of the things which I had ordered had arrived, and when I had had the various boxes and bundles moved inside I felt able to start on my work.

First I rigged up a proper windlass over the hole into the cave; and fixed it so that any one could manipulate it easily and safely from above. It could be also worked from below by aid of an endless chain round the axle. I hammered the edges of the hole somewhat smoother, so that no chance friction might cut the rope; and I fixed candles and lanterns in various places, so that all the light which might be necessary could be had easily. Then I furnished a room with rugs and pillows, and with clothes for Marjory for changing. She would be sure to require such, when our search after the treasure should come off. I had ready some tins of provisions, and I had arranged at the hotel that as I might sometimes stay and work in my own home — I was supposed to be an author — some fresh provisions were to be sent over each morning, and left ready for me with Mrs. Hay at Whinnyfold. By the time my work was through, it was late in the evening, and I went to the hotel to sleep. I had arranged with Marjory to be with her early in the morning. It was hardly daylight when I woke, but I got up at once and took my way towards Crom, for the experience of the day before had shown me that whoever used the path near the monument used it in the grey of the dawn. As usual I hid my bicycle and took my way cautiously to the monument. By this time the sun was up and the day was bright; the dew lay heavy, and when I came on any of my threads I could easily distinguish them by the shimmering beads which made each thread look like a miniature rope of diamonds.

Again the strings across the path were broken. My heart beat heavily as I began to follow back towards the monument the track of the broken thread. It led right up to it, on the side away from the castle, and then stopped. The other threads all round the monument were intact. Having learned so much, my first act was to prevent discovery of my own plan. Accordingly I carefully removed all the threads, broken and unbroken. Then I began to make minute investigation of the monument itself. As it was evident that whoever had broken the threads had come straight from it, there was a presumption that there was an opening somewhere. The rock below was unbroken and the stonework was seemingly fixed on the rock itself. By a process of exclusions I came to the belief that possibly the monument itself might be moveable.

Accordingly I began to experiment. I pressed against it, this way and that. I tried to move it by exercising pressure top and bottom in turn; but always without avail. Then I began to try to move it sideways as though it might be on a pivot. At first there was no yielding, no answer of any kind to my effort; but suddenly I thought I perceived a slight movement. I tried again and again, using my strength in the same way; but with no result. Then I tried turning it in the suspected direction, holding both my hands low down on the corners of the boulder; then going gradually up higher I pursued the same effort; again no response. Still I felt I was on the track and began to make efforts in eccentric ways. All at once, whilst I was pressing with my left hand low down whilst I pulled with my right high up on the other edge, the whole great stone began to move in a slow easy way, as though in perfect poise. I continued the movement and the stone turned lazily over on one side, revealing at my very feet a dark opening of oval form some three feet across its widest part. Somehow I was not altogether surprised; my head kept cool in what was to me a wonderful way. With an impulse which was based on safety, lest the opening of the hole should make discovery of my presence, I reversed the action; and the stone rolled slowly over to its old position. Several times I moved it from its place and then back again, so that I might become accustomed to its use.

For a while I hesitated as to whether I should explore the opening immediately; but soon came to the conclusion that I had better begin at once. So I went back to my bicycle and took the lamp with me. I had matches in my case, and as I had the revolver which I always carried now, I felt equal to any emergency. I think I was finally influenced in my decision to attempt the passage at once by the remembrance of Marjory's remark that the kidnappers would make no effort until their plans were quite complete. They, more than I, might fear discovery; and on this hope I was strong as I lowered myself down through the narrow opening. I was glad to see that there was no difficulty in moving the stone from the inside; there were two iron handles let into the stone for the purpose.

I cannot say I was at ease in my mind, I was, however, determined to go on; and with a prayer to God for protection, and a loving thought of Marjory, I went on my way.

The passage was doubtless of natural origin, for it was evident that the seams in the rock were much like those on the coast where the strata of different geological formations joined. Art had, however improved the place wonderfully. Where the top had come too low it had been quarried away; the remnants still lay adjacent where the cave broadened out. The floor where the slope was steep was cut into rough steps. Altogether, there were signs of much labour in the making of the passage. As I went down, I kept an eye on the compass whenever I came to a turn, so that I might have a rough idea of the direction in which I was going. In the main the road, with counterbalancing curves and angles, led straight down.

When I had got to what I considered must be half way, allowing for the astounding magnitude which seems to be the characterisation of even a short way under ground; the passage forked, and at a steep angle another passage, lower and less altered than that along which I had come, turned away to the left. Going a few feet up it I could hear the sound of running water.

This was evidently the passage to the reservoir.

CHAPTER XXXI. MARJORY’S ADVENTURE

As I felt that time, in which I had the passage all to myself, was precious, I turned back to the main way down. The path was very steep and low and the rock underfoot was cut in rude steps; as I held the lantern before me I had to droop it so that I could smell the hot metal where the flame touched the back. It was indeed a steep and difficult way, made for others than men of my own stature. As I went, I felt my first fears passing away. At first I had dreaded a lack of air, and all sorts of horrors which come to those who essay unknown passages. There came back to my recollection passages in Belzoni’s explorations in the Pyramids when individuals had got lost, and when whole parties were stopped by the first to advance jamming in a narrow passage as he crawled along on his belly. Here, though the roof came down in places dangerously low, there was still ample room, and the air came up sweet and cool. To any one unused to deep burrows, whether the same be natural or artificial, there is a dread of being underground. One is cut off from light and air; and burial alive in all its potential horrors is always at hand. However, the unexpected clearness and easiness of the way reassured me; and I descended the steep passage with a good heart. All distance underground seems extravagantly long to those unaccustomed to it; and to me the mere depth I had descended seemed almost impossible when the way before me became somewhat level again. At the same time the roof rose so that I could stand upright. I guessed that I must be now somewhere at the foot of the hillock and not far from the old chapel; so I went forward carefully, keeping my hand ready to cover up the front of the lamp. As the ground was fairly level, I could in a way pace it; and as I knew that there was only about two hundred feet distance from the foot of the hill to the chapel, I was not surprised when after some eighty paces I found the passage end in a sort of rude chamber cut in the rock. At right angles to the place of my entry there was a regular stairway, partly cut in rock and partly built, leading upward. Before I ascended I looked around carefully and could see that sections of the walls of the chamber were built of great blocks of stone. Leaving further investigation for the future I went upward with a beating heart.

The stair was rudely circular, and I had counted thirty steps when I saw the way blocked by a great stone. For a few seconds I was in fear lest I should find this impossible; then I looked carefully for any means of moving the obstacle. I thought it more than likely that something of the same process would be adopted for both ends of the passage.

Luck was certainly on my side to-day! Here were two iron handles, much the same as those with which I had been enabled to move the monument from within. I grasped them firmly, and began to experiment as to which way the stone moved. It trembled under my first effort; so exerting a very little of my strength in the same direction the great stone began to move. I saw a widening line of open space through which a dim light shone in upon me. Holding the stone in poise with one hand, I covered the front of the lamp with my cap, and then resumed the opening process. Slowly, slowly, the stone rolled back till a clear way lay abreast of me through which, doubled up, I could pass. From where I stood I could see part of the wall of a building, a wall with long low windows in massive stone; and I knew that at last I had reached the old chapel. A joyous feeling rushed over me; after the unknown perils of the cavern passage at last I had reached safety. I bent low and began to step out through the narrow opening. There was fully four feet in the circumference of the stone so that two such steps as were possible to me were necessary to take me out. I had taken one and my foot was lifted for the second when a clear firm voice said in a whisper:

“Hands up! If you move you are a dead man!” I stopped of course, and raising my face, for my head was bent low in the necessary effort of stooping, I found myself opposite the muzzle of a revolver. For an instant I looked at it; it was firm as the rock around me, and I felt that I must obey. Then I looked beyond it, to the hand which held it, and the eyes which directed. These too were inflexible; but a great joy came over me when I recognised that the hand and eyes were those of Marjory. I would have sprung forward to her, but for that ominous ring of steel in front of me. I waited a few seconds, for it seemed strange that she did not lower the revolver on seeing who it was. As, however, the pistol still covered me unpleasantly, I said:

“Marjory!” In an instant her hand dropped to her side. I could not but notice with an admiration for her self-control and the strength of her resolution, that she still held the revolver in her grasp. With a glad cry she leaped towards me with a quick impulsive movement which made my heart bound, for it was all love and spontaneity. She put her left hand on my shoulder; and as she looked into my eyes I could feel the glad tremor that swept through her.

For several seconds she stood, and then with a sigh said in a voice of self-reproach:

“And *I* did not know *you*!” The way she spoke the words “I” “you” was luminous! Had I not already known her heart, she would in that moment have stood self-revealed.

We were manifestly two thoroughly practical people, for even in the rapture of our meeting — to me it was no less than rapture to come from so grim an aperture in the secret cavern passage — we had our wits about us. I think she was really the first to come to a sense of our surroundings; for just as I was opening my mouth to speak she held up a warning finger.

"Hush! Some one may come; though I think there is no one near. Wait dear, whilst I look!" she seemed to flit noiselessly out of the doorway and I saw her vanish amongst the trees. In a few minutes she returned carrying carefully a wicker basket. As she opened it she said:

"Some one might suspect something if they saw you in that state." She took from the basket a little bowl of water, soap, towel and a clothes-brush. Whilst I washed my face and hands she was brushing me down. A very short time completed a rough toilet. Then she poured the water carefully into a crack in the wall, and putting the things together with my lamp, back in the basket, she said:

"Come now! Let us get to the Castle before any one finds us. They will think that I have met you in the wood." We went as unobtrusively as we could to the Castle; and entered, I think, unobserved. I had a thorough clean up before I let any one see me; our secret was too precious to risk discovery by suspicion. When I had seen Mrs. Jack, Marjory took me to her boudoir in the top of the castle, and there, whilst she sat by me holding my hands, I told her every detail of my adventure. I could feel how my story moved her; when there was any passage of especial interest the pressure of her clasp grew tense. She, who had seemingly no fear for herself, was all in fear for me!

Then we talked matters over. We had now a good clue to the comings and goings of the kidnappers; and we felt that by a little thoughtful organisation we might find their hours, and be able to trace them one by one. By lunch time we had decided on our plan of action. We took our idea from one of the old “Tales of the Genii” where the conquered king was brought by his faithful vizier into a cavern and asked to cut a rope which was stretched before him, and which he soon discovered released the great rock which roofed the pavilion specially built by the vizier to be seen and occupied by the conqueror. We would fix a fine thread to the top of the monument and bring it secretly to the castle, where its breaking would apprise Marjory of the opening of the passage; thus she would discover the hour of the coming of the kidnappers to the chapel. We arranged another ingenious device, whereby a second thread, fastened to the stone in the old chapel, would be broken by the opening of the stone, and would cause a book to fall on Marjory’s bed and wake her if she were asleep. The better part of the afternoon was taken up by us carrying out these ideas, for we went slowly and cautiously to work. Then I went home.

I was early at the monument in the morning, and getting behind the stone signalled to the Castle roof in case Marjory should happen to expect me and be there. But there was no answer. So I sat down to wait till it would be decent time to go to the Castle for an early breakfast.

As I sat waiting I thought I heard a sound, either close to me and muffled, or else distant; I could hardly tell which. Matters might be lively if I were discovered; so I got my revolver ready. With my heart beating so heavily that I mistook it at moments for the foreign sound, I listened and listened, all ears.

It was as I had suspected; the sound came from the tunnel beneath me. I hardly knew whether to stay or go. If I waited I could see who came from the opening; but on the other hand I should at once be known to have discovered the secret. Still as the stone might roll back at any moment, it was necessary that I should make up my mind; I should either go or stay. I decided that I would stay and make discovery at once. In any case should I succeed in capturing a blackmailer, or even in discovering or partially discovering his identity, I should be aiding in Marjory's safety. So I got my revolver ready; and standing back so that I could not be seen at once by any one emerging, waited.

No one came; but I could still hear a slight sound. Filled with a growing unrest, I determined to take the initiative, and began to move close to the stone. As I looked, it began to quiver, and then to move slowly. As it rolled softly back I kept behind it so that I might not be seen; and waited with revolver ready and what patience I could.

There was dead silence; and then a hand holding a revolver rested a moment on the edge of the opening.

I knew the hand, and I knew the revolver, and I knew the quickness of both. I did not say a word or make a sound, till Marjory with an alert movement seemed to sweep up out of the opening and whirled round with ready pistol, as though suspecting an enemy on every side.

Marjory, all covered with dust, her cheeks as white as snow, so that the smears of dust lay on them like soot; and eyes with pupils distended as in coming from the dark. For a few seconds she seemed hardly to recognise me; but when she did she sprang gladly into my arms.

"Oh! Archie, I am glad to see you. It was so terrible and lonely in the dark. I began to fear I might never find my way out!” In the dark! I began to fear, and asked her:

“But, dear one, how did you come; and why? Hadn’t you got a light with you? Surely you didn’t come unprepared, if you did venture into the cave!” Then in a rush she told me the whole story. How before dawn she had been waked by the dropping of the book and had hurried to the castle roof to watch the stone. With her field glass she had presently seen it move. She was then satisfied that the watchers had gone home; and had determined on a little adventure on her own account.

“I put on a grey tweed dress, and taking my revolver and bicycle lamp, stole out of the castle and reached the old chapel. Having lit my lamp, I rolled back the stone and set out to explore the tunnel. I followed from your description, the passage to its bifurcating, and determined to explore the other arm to the reservoir. I easily found it, a deep, dark tank cut in the rock and seemingly fed by springs which bubbled up from patches of fine sand, the accumulation of years of wasting rock. Whilst I was trying to look into the depth of the reservoir, holding my bicycle lamp so as to throw its light downwards, I saw something white at the bottom. Just then the lamp from its inverted position began to smoke, but as I looked in that last moment through the crystal pure water I recognised that the white object was a skull. In the sudden shock of the discovery, the lamp dropped from my hand and disappeared hissing and bubbling in the last flicker of light.” As she told me this, I took her hand for I feared that the memory of such an appalling moment must have unnerved her; but to my surprise her nerves were as firm as my own. She let her hand remain in mine; but she had evidently understood my thought for she said:

“Oh! it’s all right now, Archie. For a moment or two I do believe I was frightened. You can have the laugh on me there if you like! But then common sense came to my aid. I was in a tight place, and it would need all I knew to get out. I thought the matter over as coolly as I could; and do you know that coolness seemed to grow with the effort! I was in the dark, in a cave, deep underground, the entrance to which was secret; I had no means of getting a light even for an instant, for though I had taken plenty of wax matches they were all in my lamp. The only thing I could do was to try to grope my way out. I had noted the passage as I came along, but I found so soon as I had felt my way out of the reservoir chamber, how little use an abstract recollection is when every second there is a new detail. I found, too, the astonishing difference between sight and touch; what I had remembered had been with my eyes and not with my fingers. I had to guard all round me, my head, my feet, my sides. I am amazed, now when I think of it, how many different kinds of mistakes and calculations I made in a few yards. It seemed a terribly long time till I came to the place where the passage forks. There I weighed up the matter of whether it would be better to go back by the way I had come to the old chapel, or to go up the other passage to the monument of which you told me. Somehow the latter seemed to me the more feasible. I think it must have been that I trusted you more than myself. You had not shrunk from going into that passage; and I would not shrink from going out.”

I squeezed her hands hard, I had got both by this time. She blushed a little and looked at me fondly and went on:

“There was something cheering in the mere fact of going up instead of down. It was like coming towards the air and light again;

and the time did not seem so long till I came to the end of the passage, for so far as I could feel there was nothing but solid rock all round me. For a little bit my heart sank again; but I soon bucked up. I knew that this must be the way out; and I felt around for the iron handles of which you had told me. And then, Thank God for His goodness! when the stone began to turn I saw the light, and breathed fresh air again. They seemed to give me back all my courage and caution. Up to this I had not troubled about kidnappers; there was quite enough to think of in getting along the passage. But now I was my own woman again, and I determined to take no chances. When I saw it was your gun that was aimed at me I was glad!”

CHAPTER XXXII. THE LOST SCRIPT

After a little consideration of ways and means, we decided that the best thing we could do was to pass through the passage to the old chapel. It was still very early, so early that in all probability none of the household were yet awake; if Marjory could regain her room before being seen, it would avoid curiosity. She was certainly in a shocking condition of dust and dishevelment. Her groping in the dark through that long rugged passage had not been accomplished without many hardships. Her dress was torn in several places, and her hat was simply knocked to pieces; even her hair was tumbled about, and had been put up again and again with dusty fingers. She saw me smiling; I think it pained her a little for she suddenly said:

"Come along quick; it's simply awful standing here in the light of day in this filthy state. It won't feel half so bad in the dark passage!" Without more ado I lit my lamp, and having, of course, closed the entrance behind us, we went back into the cavern.

The tramp back through the tunnel did not seem nearly so long or so difficult as at first. It may have been that comparative familiarity made it easier; it certainly eased its terrors. Or it is possible that our companionship, each to the other, made the bearing of fears and difficulties lighter.

Anyhow, it was something of a surprise to both of us to find ourselves so quickly in the rude chamber whence the steps led up to the old chapel. Before we left this, we made a rough examination of it, turning the lantern over walls and floor and ceiling; for I had an idea that the passage from the castle, which I was satisfied must exist, made its exit here. We could not, however, see any external sign of an opening; the walls were built up of massive unmortared stones, and were seemingly as solid as the rock itself.

When we got into the chapel we found the utility of Marjory's foresight. In a corner was her little basket with soap and towel, water and clothes brush; and together we restored her to some semblance of decency. Then she went back to the castle and got in unobserved, as I, watching from the shelter of the trees, could see. I took my way back through the passage; and so to the wood where my bicycle was hidden. I washed my hands in the stream and lay down in the shelter of a thick grove of hazel, where I slept till breakfast time. When I rode up to the castle, I found Marjory with her kodak on the sweep outside, taking views of its various points.

The morning was intensely hot; and here, in the shelter of the little valley and the enclosing wood, the air was sultry, and the sun beat down pitilessly. We had a table set out under the shelter of the trees and breakfasted *al fresco*.

When we were alone in her boudoir I settled with Marjory that we would on that evening attempt to find the treasure, as the tide would be out at midnight. So we went down to the library and got out Don de Escoban's narrative and began to read it afresh, noting as we went every word and sign of the secret writing, in the hope that we might in thus doing stumble on some new secret or hidden meaning.

Whilst we were thus engaged a servant came looking for Mrs. Jack, for whom a stranger had brought a letter. Marjory told where she might be found, and for some time we went on with our work.

Suddenly the door opened, and Mrs. Jack entered, speaking over her shoulder as she came to a high-bred looking, dark man who followed her. As she saw us she stopped and said to Marjory:

"Oh! my dear, I didn't know you were here. I thought you were in the ladies' room." This was what they usually called the big room at the top of the castle. We both rose, seeing a stranger. For my own part there was something in his face which set me thinking; as to Marjory I could not help noticing that she drew herself up to her full height, and held herself at tension in that haughty way which now and again marked her high spirit and breeding. There seemed so little cause for this attitude that my own thinking of the new-comer was lost in the contemplation of hers. Mrs. Jack noticed that there was some awkwardness, and spoke hurriedly:

"This is the gentleman, my dear, that the agent wrote about; and as he wanted to look over the house I brought him myself." The stranger probably taking his cue from her apologetic tone spoke:

"I trust I have not disturbed the Senora; if I have, pardon! I have but come to renew my memory of a place, dear to me in my youth, and which through the passing of time and of some who were, is now my own heritage." Marjory smiled, and swept him a curtsey as she said, but still in her distant arm's-length manner:

"Then you are the owner of the castle, sir. I hope that we do not disturb you. Should you wish to be anywhere alone we shall gladly withdraw and wait your pleasure." He raised a hand of eloquent protest, a well-kept, gentleman's hand, as he said in tones sweet and deferent:

"Oh! I pray you, do not stir. May I say that when my house is graced with the presence of so much loveliness I am all too full of gratitude to wish for any change. I shall but look around me, for I have a certain duty to do. Alas! this my heritage comes not only as a joy, but with grave duties which I must fulfill. Well I know this room. Many a time as a boy I have sat here with my kinsman, then so old and distant from me in my race; and yet I am his next successor. Here has he told me of old times, and of my race of which we who have the name are so proud; and of the solemn duty which might some day come to me. Could I but tell....” Here he stopped suddenly.

His eyes had been wandering all over the room, up and down the bookshelves, and at the few pictures which the walls contained. When they rested on the table, a strange look came into them. Here lay the type-script which we had been reading, and the secret writing of the dotted printing. It was on the latter that his eyes were fixed absorbingly.

“Where did you get that?” he said suddenly, pointing to it. The question in its bald simplicity was in word rude, but his manner of asking it was so sweet and deferential that to me it robbed it of all offence. I was just about to answer when my eye caught that of Marjory, and I paused. There was such meaning in her eyes that my own began roving to find the cause of it. As I looked she put her hands on the table before her, and her fingers seemed to drum nervously. To me, however, it was no nervous trifling; she was speaking to me in our own cipher.

“Be careful!” she spelled out “there is some mystery! Let me speak.” Then turning to the stranger she said:

“It is curious is it not?”

“Ah, Senora, though curious it be in itself, it is nothing to the strangeness of its being here. If you only knew how it had been searched for; how the whole castle had been ransacked from roof to dungeon to find it, and always without avail. Did you but understand the import of that paper to me and mine — if indeed the surmises of many generations of anxious men availed aught — you would pardon my curiosity. In my own youth I assisted in a search of the whole place; no corner was left untouched, and even the secret places were opened afresh.” As he went on, Marjory’s eyes were resting on his face unflinchingly, but her fingers were spelling out comments to me.

"There are secret places, then; and he knows them. Wait" the stranger went on:

"See, I shall convince you that I speak from no idle curiosity, but from a deep conviction of a duty that was mine and my ancestors' for ages." There was a sternness mingled with his grave sweetness now; it was evident that he was somewhat chagrined or put out by our silence. Leaving the table he went over to one of the bookshelves, and after running his eye over it for a moment, put his hand up and from a shelf above his head took down a thick leather-covered volume. This he laid on the table before us. It was a beautiful, old black letter law book, with marginal notes in black letter and headings in roman type. The pagination was, I could see as he turned it over, by folios. He turned to the title-page, which was an important piece of printing in many types, explanatory of the matter of the book. He began to read the paragraphs, placed in the triangular in form in vogue at that day; following the text with his forefinger he read:

"A collection in English of the Statutes now in force, continued from the beginning of Magna Charta made in the 9. yeere of the reigne of King H. 3. until the ende of the Session of Parliament holden in the 28 yeere of the reigne of our gracious Queene Elizabeth under Titles placed by order of Alphabet. Wherein is performed (touching the Statutes wherewith Justices of the Peace have to deale) so much as was promised in the Booke of their office lately published. For which purpose" — &c. &c., — Then turning over the page he pointed to a piece of faded writing on the back of it which had been left blank of printing. We bent down and read in the ink, faded to pale brown by time:

"My sonnes herein you will find the law which binds the stranger in this land, wherein a stranger is a Vagabond. F. de E.

XXIII. X. MDLXLIX."

Then he turned rapidly over the leaves, till towards the end there was a gap. On the right hand page, where the folio number was all along placed was the number 528.

"See," he said, turning back and pointing to the bottom of the title page "Anno 1588. Three hundred years, since first my people used it."

Turning back he looked at the folio before the gap; it was 510. "See" he said, placing his hand on the pinmarked pages. "Folio 511 and the heading of 'Vagabonds, Beggars, et cetera.'" He folded his arms in a dignified way and stood silent.

All along I had been following my own train of thought, even whilst I had been taking in the stranger's argument, and at the same time noting Marjory's warning. If this man who owned the Castle knew of the existence of the secret writing; whose ancestors had owned the book in which was the clue signed F. de E., surely then this could be none other than the descendant of the Don Bernardino who had hidden the treasure. This was his castle; no wonder that he knew its secret ways.

Matters were getting complicated. If this man were now the hereditary guardian of the hidden treasure — and from his likeness to the ghostly Spaniard whom I had seen in the procession at Whinnyfold I saw no reason to doubt it — he might be an enemy with whom we should have to cope. I was all in a whirl, and for a few seconds I think quite lost my head. Then rushed over me the conviction that the mere lapse of time passed in these few minutes of agonised silence was betraying our secret. This brought me up with a round turn, and I looked about me. The strange man was standing still as marble; his face was set, and there was no sign of life in him except his eyes which blazed as they wandered around, taking everything in. Mrs. Jack saw that there was something going on which she did not understand, and tried to efface herself. Marjory was standing by the table, still, erect and white. Her fingers began to drum softly as she caught my eye, and spelled out:

"Give him the paper, from Mrs. Jack. Lately found in old oak chest. Say nothing of interpretation." This seemed such a doubtful move that with my eyes I queried it. She nodded in reply. So I gathered myself together and said:

"I'm afraid, sir, that there is some mystery here which I cannot undertake to understand. I think I may say, however, for my friend Mrs. Jack, that there will be no trouble in your having full possession of your book. I am told that these pages were lately found in an old oak chest. It is remarkable that they should have been missing so long. We were attracted by the funny marks. We thought that there might be some sort of cryptogram; and I suppose I may take it, from the fact of your looking for them so long, that this is so?"

He grew suspicious in a moment, and stiffened all over. Marjory saw, and appreciated the reason. She smiled at me with her eyes as she drummed on the table:

"The herring is across his path!" As the awkward pause was this time with the stranger, we waited with comparative ease. I saw with a feeling of wonder that there was, through all her haughtiness, a spice of malice in Marjory's enjoyment of his discomfiture. I looked at Mrs. Jack and said: "May I give these papers to Mr. — —" She answered promptly:

“Why cert’nly! If Mr. Barnard wants them.” Marjory turned round suddenly and in a surprised voice said:

“Mr. Barnard?”

“That is the name given in the letter which he brought, my dear!” The stranger at once spoke out:

“I am Mr. Barnard here; but in my own country I am of an older name. I thank you, sir, and Madam” turning to Mrs. Jack “for your courteous offer. But it will be time enough for me to consider the lost pages when through the unhappiness of your departure from my house, I am enabled to come hither to live. In the meantime, all I shall ask is that the pages be replaced in this book and that it be put in its place on the shelf where none shall disturb it.” As he spoke in his sweet, deferential way there was something in his look or manner which did not accord with his words; a quick eager shifting of his eyes, and a breathing hard which were at variance with his words of patience. I did not pretend, however, to notice it; I had my own game to play. So without a word I placed the pages carefully in the book and put the latter back on the shelf from which he had taken it. There was an odd look in Marjory’s face which I did not quite understand; and as she gave me no clue to her thoughts by our sign language, I waited. Looking at the stranger haughtily, and with a distinctly militant expression she said:

“The agent told us that the Barnard family owned this castle!” He bowed gravely, but a hot, angry flush spread over his face as he replied:

“He spoke what truth he knew.” Marjory’s reply came quickly:

“But you say you are one of the family, and the very memorandum you pointed out was signed F. de E.” Again the hot flush swept his face; but passed in an instant, leaving him as pale as the dead. After a pause of a few moments he spoke in a tone of icy courtesy:

"I have already said, Senora, that in this country our name — my name, is Barnard. A name taken centuries ago when the freedom of the great land of England was not as now; when tolerance for the stranger was not. In my own land, the land of my birth, the cradle of my race, I am called Don Bernardino Yglesias Palealogue y Santordo y Castelnuova de Escoban, Count of Minurca and Marquis of Salvaterra!" As he rehearsed his titles he drew himself up to his full height; and pride of race seemed actually to shine or emanate from him. Marjory, too, on her side of the table drew herself up proudly as she said in a voice in which scorn struggled for mastery with dignity:

"Then you are a Spaniard!"

CHAPTER XXXIII. DON BERNARDINO

The stranger held himself with, if possible, greater hauteur as he answered:

“I have that great honour.”

“And I, sir,” said Marjory, with a pride rivalling his own, “am an American!” Issue was joined.

For a period which from its strain seemed very long, though it was probably but a few seconds, they stood facing each other; types of the two races whose deadly contest was then the interest of the world. The time was at any rate sufficiently long for me to consider the situation, and to admire the types. It would have been hard to get a better representative of either, of the Latin as well as of the Anglo-Saxon. Don Bernardino, with his high aquiline nose and black eyes of eagle keenness, his proud bearing and the very swarthiness which told of Moorish descent, was, despite his modern clothes, just such a picture as Velasquez would have loved to paint, or as Fortuny might have made to live again.

And Marjory! She looked like the spirit of her free race, incarnate. The boldness of her pose; her free bearing; her manifest courage and self belief; the absence of either prudery or self-consciousness; her picturesque, noble beauty, as with set white face and flashing eyes she faced the enemy of her country, made a vision never to be forgotten. Even her racial enemy had unconsciously to fall into admiration; and through it the dominance of his masculine nature spoke. His words were gracious, and the easy gracefulness of their delivery was no less marked because the calm was forced:

“Our nations alas! Senora are at war; but surely not even the courtesies of the battlefield need be strained when individuals, even of the most loyal each to their own, meet on neutral soil!" It was evident that even Marjory's quick wit did not grasp at a suitable reply. The forgiveness of enemies is not the strong point of any woman's nature, or of her education. The only remark she made was to again repeat:

"I am an American!" The Spaniard felt the strength of his position; again his masculinity came out in his reply:

"And all good women, as well as all men, should be loyal to their Flag. But oh Senora, before even your nationality comes your sex. The Spanish nation does not make war on women!" He seemed really to believe what he said; for the proud light in his face could not have been to either a dastard or a liar. I confess it was with a shock that I heard Marjory's words:

"In the *reconcentrados* were as many women as men. More, for the men were fighting elsewhere!" The passionate, disdainful sneer on her lips gave emphasis to the insult; and blood followed the stab. A red tide rushed to the Spaniard's swarthy face, over forehead and ears and neck; till, in a moment of quick passion of hate, he seemed as if bathed in red light.

And then in truth I saw the very man of my vision at Whinnyfold.

Marjory, womanlike, feeling her superiority over the man's anger, went on mercilessly:

"Women and children herded together like beasts; beaten, starved, tortured, mocked at, shamed, murdered! Oh! it is a proud thought for a Spaniard, that when the men cannot be conquered, even in half a century of furious oppression, their baffled foes can wreak their vengeance on the helpless women and children!"

The Spaniard's red became white; a deathly pallor which looked grey in the darkened room. With his coldness came the force of coldness, self-command. I had a feeling that in those few moments of change had come to him some grim purpose of revenge. It was borne in upon me by flashes of memory and instinct that the man was of the race and class from which came the rulers and oppressors of the land, the leaders of the Inquisition. Eyes like his own, burning in faces of deathly white, looked on deeds of torture, whose very memory after centuries can appal the world. But with all his passion of hate and shame he never lost the instinct of his dignity, or his grace of manner. One could not but feel that even when he struck to kill he would strike with easeful grace. Something of the feeling was in his speech, perhaps in the manner rather than the words, when after a pause he said:

"For such foul acts I have nought but indignation and grief; though in the history of a nation such things must be. It is the soldier's duty to obey; even though his heart revolt. I have memory of hearing that even your own great nation has exercised not so much care as might be" — how he sneered with polished sarcasm as he turned the phrase— "in the dealing with Indians. Nay more, even in your great war, when to kill was fratricidal, there were hardships to the conquered, even to the helpless women and children. Have I not heard that one of your most honoured generals, being asked what was to become of the women in a great march of devastation that he was about to make, replied, "The women? I would leave them nothing but their eyes to weep with!" But, indeed, I grieve that in this our mutual war the Senora grieves. Is it that she has suffered in herself, or through others dear to her?" Marjory's eyes flashed; pulling herself to full height she said proudly:

"Sir, I am not one who whines for pain of my own. I and mine know how to bear our own troubles, as our ancestors did before us.

We do not bend before Spain; no more to-day than when my great ancestors swept the Spaniard from the Western Main, till the seas were lit with blazing masts and the shores were fringed with wreckage! We Americans are not the stuff of which you make *reconcentrados*. We can die! As for me, the three hundred years that have passed without war, are as a dream; I look on Spain and the Spaniard with the eyes, and feel with the heart, of my great uncle Francis Drake."

Whilst she was speaking Don Bernardino was cooling down. He was still deadly pale, and his eyes had something of the hollow glare of phosphorus in the sockets of a skull. But he was master of himself; and it seemed to me that he was straining every nerve to recover, for some purpose of his own, his lost ground. It may have been that he was ashamed of his burst of passion, with and before a woman; but anyhow he was manifestly set on maintaining calm, or the appearance of it. With the fullness of his grace and courtesy he said, turning to Mrs. Jack:

"I thank you for the permission, so graciously granted to me, to visit again this my house. You will permit me, however, I hope without any intention of offence, to withdraw from where my presence has brought so much of disturbance; the which I deplore, and for which I crave pardon."

To me he bowed stiffly with a sort of lofty condescension; and finally, looking towards Marjory, he said:

"The Senora will I trust believe that even a Spaniard may have pity to give pain; and that there are duties which gentlemen must observe because they are gentlemen, and because they reverence the trust that is reposed in them more than do common men. She can appreciate the call of duty I know; for she can be none other than the new patriot who restores in the west our glorious memories of the Maid of Saragossa. I pray that the time may come when she shall understand these things and believe!" Then, with a bow which seemed the embodiment of old-fashioned grace and courtesy, he bent almost to the ground. Marjory instinctively bowed. Her training as to good manners, here stood her in good stead; not even patriotic enthusiasm can at times break the icy barrier of social decorum.

When the Spaniard left the room, which he did with long strides but bearing himself with inconceivable haughtiness, Mrs. Jack, with a glance at us, went with him. Instinctively I started to take her place; in the first instance to relieve her from an awkward duty, and beyond this with a feeling that I was not quite satisfied with him. No one could be in antagonism with Marjory, and acquire or retain my good will. As I moved, Marjory held up her hand and whispered to me to stay. I did so, and waited for her to explain. She listened intently to the retreating footsteps; when we heard the echoing sound of the closing the heavy outer door, she breathed freely and said to me with relief in her voice:

"I know you two would have fought if you had got alone together just now!"

I smiled, for I was just beginning to understand that that was just how I felt. Marjory remained standing at the table, and I could see that she was buried in thought. Presently she said:

"I felt it was cruel to say such things to that gentleman. Oh! but he is a gentleman; the old idea seems embodied in him. Such pride, such haughtiness; such disdain of the commoner kind; such adherence to ideas; such devotion to honour! Indeed, I felt it very cruel and ungenerous; but I had nothing else to do. I had to make him angry; and I knew he couldn't quarrel with me. Nothing else would have taken us all away from the cipher.” Her words gave me quite a shock. “Do you mean to say Marjory,” I asked, “that you were acting a part all the time?”

“I don’t know” she answered pensively, “I meant every word I said, even when it hurt him most. I suppose that was the American in me. And yet all the time I had a purpose or a motive of my own which prompted me. I suppose that was the woman in me.”

“And what was the motive or purpose?” I asked again, for I wondered.

“I don’t know!” she said naively. I felt that she was concealing something from me; but that it was a something so tender or so deep in her heart that its very concealment was a shy compliment. So I smiled happily as I said:

“And that is the girl in you. The girl that is American, and European, and Asiatic, and African, and Polynesian. The girl straight out of the Garden of Eden, with the fragrance of God’s own breath in her mouth!”

“Darling!” she said, looking at me lovingly. That was all.

During the day, we discussed the visitor of the morning. Mrs. Jack said very little, but now and again implored Marjory to be cautious; when she was asked her reason for the warning her only reply was:

“I don’t like a man who can look like that. I don’t know which is worst, when he is hot or cold!” I gathered that Marjory in the main agreed with her; but did not feel the same concern. Marjory would have been concerned if the danger had been to anyone else; but she was not habituated to be anxious about herself. Besides, she was young; and the antagonist was a man; and haughty and handsome, and interesting.

In the afternoon we completed our arrangements for the visit to the treasure cave. We both felt the necessity for pressing on this matter, since the existence of the secret writing was known to Don Bernardino. He had not hesitated to speak openly, though he did not know of course the extent of our own knowledge of the subject, of a grave duty which he had undertaken from hereditary motives, or of the tragic consequences which might ensue. It was whilst we were speaking of the possibility of his being able to decipher the cryptogram, that Marjory suddenly said:

“Did you understand exactly why I asked you to give him the paper at once?”

“Far be it from me” I answered “to profess to understand *exactly* the motives of any charming woman.”

“Not even when she tells you herself?”

“Ah! then the real mystery only begins!” I said bowing. She smiled as she replied:

“You and I are both fond of mysteries. So I had better tell you at once. That man doesn’t know the secret. I am sure of it. He knows there is a secret; and he knows a part, but only a part. That eager look wouldn’t have been in his eye if he had known already. I daresay there is, somewhere, some duplicate of what the original Don Bernardino put down in his story. And of course there must be some allusion to the treasure in the secret records at Simancas or the Quirinal or the Vatican. Neither the kings of Spain nor the Popes would let such a treasure pass out of mind. Indeed it is possible that there is some key or clue to it which he holds. Did you notice how he referred at once to the secret meaning of the memorandum in the beginning of the law book? If we had not given it up at once, he would have forced on the question and wished to take the paper away; and we could not have refused without letting him know something by our very refusal. Do you understand any more of my meaning now? And can you forgive me any more for my ill-mannered outbreak? That is what I am most sorry for, of all that has been in the interview to-day. Is that also any more light to you on the mystery of a woman's mind?"

"It is, you dear! it is!" I said as I took her for a moment in my arms. She came easily and lovingly to me, and I could not but be assured that the yielding even momentarily to tenderness helped to ease the strain which had been bearing upon her for so long. For my Marjory, though a strong and brave one, was but a woman after all.

At six o'clock I took my way back to Whinnyfold; for I wanted to have all ready for our enterprise, and take full advantage of the ebb tide. We arranged that on this occasion Marjory should come alone to join me at the house — our house.

CHAPTER XXXIV. THE ACCOLADE

When Marjory arrived, I had all ready for our exploration. There were several packages waiting for her, and when she emerged from the room where she had gone to change, their purpose was manifest. She appeared in a flannel tennis frock, short enough to show that she had put on her sand shoes on her bare feet. She saw that I noticed and said with a little blush:

"You see I am dressed for the part; you came back so wet the last time that I thought I had better prepare for it too."

"Quite right, my dear," I said. "That pretty head of yours is level." We went to the cellar at once where I had lamps and candles prepared and ready to light. I showed Marjory how to get up and down by herself, in case anything should happen to me. This made the gravity of our enterprise apparent. Her face grew a trifle anxious, though she did not change colour; I could see that all her anxiety was for me and none for herself. We took care to bring a plentiful supply of matches and candles, as well as an extra lamp and an oil can, and some torches and red and white lights. All these were in a tin box to insure their being kept dry. I had a meal of bread and meat packed ready; also a bottle of water and a flask of brandy, for the exploration might take a long time. The tide was not quite out, and there was still in places a couple of feet of water; but we decided to go on at once as it would give us more time if we started on a falling tide.

I took Marjory first up the passage inland, so that she might understand something of the lines of the cave system. There was, however, too much tide just then to show her where I surmised there might be some deep opening, perhaps permanently under water, into some of the other caves. Then we retraced our steps and gained the pile of debris of the explosion at the cave's mouth. I could not but notice how much Marjory was impressed by the stillness of the place. Here, the tide, filtering in by innumerable crevices and rifts between the vast pile of stones, showed no sign of the force of waves without. There was not time for the rise and fall of waves to be apparent; but the water maintained its level silently, except for that ceaseless gurgle which comes with the piling in of water anywhere, and is so constant that it does not strike one as a sound. It was borne in upon us that the wildest storm without, would make no impress upon us here in this cavern deep; and with it, as an inevitable corollary, came the depressing thought of our helplessness should aught go wrong in the fastnesses of this natural prison.

Marjory bounded over the slippery stones like a young deer, and when we passed through the natural archway into the cave beyond, her delight was manifest. She was hurrying on so quickly that I found it necessary to tell her she must go slow so as to be able to take stock of all around her as she went. It was needful to look back as well as forward, so that she might recognise the places when coming the other way. I reminded her of caution by holding up the great ball of stout cord which I carried, the end of which was attached to the rope of the windlass in the cellar. "Remember, dear," I said, "that you have to be prepared for all eventualities; if necessary to go back alone and in the dark." She shuddered a little and drew closer to me; I felt that the movement was one of protection rather than of fear.

When we went along the passage, where on the first occasion I had found the water rise nearly to the roof, we had to wait; a little way ahead of us, where the cave dipped to its lowest, the water was still touching the top. We possessed our souls with what patience we could, and in about half an hour's time we were able to pass. We were quite wet, however, for only our faces and our lamps were above water; with the exception, of course, of the tin box with the candles and matches and our provisions, which I took care to keep dry.

Marjory's delight at the sight of the huge red cave was unspeakable. When I lit one of the red lights the blinding glow filled the place, exposing every nook and corner, and throwing shadows of velvet blackness. The natural red of the granite suited the red light, the effect being intensely rich. Whilst the light lasted it was all like a dream of fairyland; and Marjory hung on to me in an ecstasy of delight. Then, when the light died down and the last sparks fell into the natural darkness, it seemed as if we and all around us were steeped in gloom. The little patches of faint light from our lamps seemed to our dazzled eyes to openly emphasise the surrounding blackness.

Marjory suggested that we should explore the great cavern before we did anything else. I acquiesced, for it was just as well that we should be thoroughly acquainted with the various ramifications of the cave. I was not by any means sure as yet that we should be able to get to the cave of the treasure. Here, all around us, was red; we were entirely within the sienite formation. When I had been first in the cave I had not seen it lit up. Only where the comparatively feeble light of my bicycle lantern had fallen had I seen anything at all. Of course it may have been that the red light which I had burned had misled me by overwhelming everything in its lurid glow. So this time I got a white light out of the box and lit it. The effect was more ghastly and less pleasant. In the revealing glare, the edges of everything stood out hard and cold, and so far repulsive that instinctively Marjory drew closer to me. While the light remained, however, I was able to satisfy myself of one thing; all around was only the red granite. Colour and form and texture all told the same thing; we had passed the stratification of gneiss and entered on that of the sienite. I began to wonder and to think, though I did not at once mention the matter to Marjory. The one guiding light as to locality in the Don's narrative was the description of the cave "the black stone on one hand and the red on the other." Now at Broad Haven the gneiss and the red sienite join, and the strata in places seem as if welded together or fused by fire. Here and there can be found patches in the cliff where it is hard to say where one class of rock ends and the other begins. In the centre bay, however, to the north of my house, there is a sort of dip in the cliff covered deep with clay, and bright with grass and wild flowers. Through this a tiny stream rushes in wet weather, or in dry trickles down the steep incline. This is the natural or main division between the geological formations; for on either side of it is a different kind of rock — it was here that I expected to find that the treasure cave was situated. It had been of course impossible for me, though I had had a compass with me, to fix exactly the windings of the cave. I knew, however, that the general trend was to the right; we must, therefore, have passed behind the treasure cave and come into the region of red granite. I began to have an idea, or rather the rudiment of one, that later on we should have to go back on our tracks. Inasmuch as my own house stood on the gneiss formation, we should have to find whereabout in the cave windings the red and the black rocks joined. From this point we might be able to make new and successful progress towards discovery of the treasure itself. In the meantime I was content to linger a few minutes in the great cavern. It was evident that Marjory was in love with it, and was at present in a whirl of delight. And, after all, she was my world, and her happiness my sunshine. I fully realised in the delightful passages of our companionship the truth of the lover's prayer in Herrick's pretty poem.

"Give me but what this Ribbon bound, Take all the rest the sun goes round."

Every day, every hour, seemed to me to be revealing new beauties of my wife's character and nature. She was herself becoming reconciled to our new relationship; and in the confidence of her own happiness, and in her trust of her husband, the playful and sweet sides of her nature were gaining a new development. I could not help feeling at times that all was going on for the best; that the very restraint of the opening of our married life was formative of influence for good on us both. If all young husbands and wives could but understand the true use of the old-fashioned honeymoon, the minute knowledge of character coming in moments of unconscious self-revelation, there might be more answers in the negative to the all important nineteenth century philosophical query, "Is marriage a failure?" It was evident that Marjory was reluctant to leave the cave. She lingered and lingered; at last in obedience to a command of hers, conveyed — for she said nothing — in some of those subtle feminine ways, which, though I did not understand their methods, I was beginning to learn to obey, I lit a torch. Holding it aloft, and noticing with delight how the light danced in my wife's beautiful eyes as she clapped her hands joyously with the overt pleasure of a child, I said:

"Her Majesty wishes to inspect her new kingdom. Her slave awaits her pleasure!"

"Lead on!" she said. "Her Majesty is pleased with the ready understanding of her Royal Consort, and with his swift obedience to her wishes; and oh! Archie isn't this simply too lovely for anything!"

The quick change into the vernacular made us both laugh; and taking hands like two children we walked round the cavern. At the upper end of it, almost at the furthest point from where we entered, we came across a place where, under an overhanging red wall which spread out overhead like a canopy, a great rock rose from the level floor. It was some nodule of especial hardness which in the general trituration had not been worn away by the wash of the water and the rolling of pebbles which at one time undoubtedly helped to smooth the floor. In the blinking light of the torch, the strength of which was dimmed in the vastness of the cavern, the isolated rock, standing as it did under the rocky canopy whose glistening surface sent down a patchy reflex of the glare, seemed like a throne. The idea occurred simultaneously to both of us; even as I spoke I could see that she was prepared to take her seat:

"Will not Her Majesty graciously take her seat upon the throne which the great Over-Lord, Nature, has himself prepared for her?"

She took the stick which she carried to steady her in the wading, and holding it like a sceptre, said, and oh, but her sweet voice sounded like far music stealing through the vastness of the cavern:

"Her Majesty, now that she has ascended her throne, and so, formally taken possession of her Kingdom, hereby decrees that her first act of power shall be to confer the honour of Knighthood on her first and dearest subject. Kneel therefore at the feet of your Queen. Answer me by your love and loyalty. Do you hereby promise and vow obedience to the wishes of your Queen? Shall you love her faithfully and truly and purely? Shall you hold her in your heart of hearts, yielding obedience to all true wishes of hers, and keeping the same steadfastly to the end? Do — you — love — me?"

Here she paused; the rising emotion was choking her words. The tears welled into her eyes and her mouth quivered. I was all at once in a fire of devotion. I could then, and indeed when I think of it I can now, realise how of old, in the days when loyalty was a passion, a young knight's heart flowered and blossomed in the moment of his permitted devotion. It was with all the truth of my soul and my nature that I answered:

"I do love you, oh, my gracious Queen. I hereby take all the vows you have meted to me. I shall hold you ever, as I do now, in my very heart of hearts. I shall worship and cherish you till death parts us. I shall reverence and obey your every true wish; even as I have already promised beside the sea and at the altar. And whithersoever my feet may go in obedience to your will, my Queen and my Love, they shall go on steadfast, to the end." Here I stopped, for I feared to try to say more; I was trembling myself and the words were choked in my throat. Marjory bent over as I knelt, laid her wand on my shoulder and said:

"Rise up, Sir Archibald, my own True Knight and Loyal Lover!" Before I rose I wanted to kiss her hand, but as I bent, her foot was temptingly near. I stooped lower to kiss it. She saw my intention and saying impulsively: "Oh, Archie dear, not that wet, dirty shoe," kicked it off. I stooped still lower and kissed her bare foot.

As I looked up at her face adoringly, a blush swept over it and left her pale; but she did not flinch. Then I stood up and she stepped down from her throne, and into my arms. She laid her head against my shoulder, and for a few moments of ecstasy our hearts beat together.

CHAPTER XXXV. THE POPE'S TREASURE

"Now," said Marjory, at last disengaging herself from me, "let us get down to business. We've got to find the treasure, you know!" So we set ourselves down to a systematic search.

We explored one after another all the caves leading out of the main cavern. Some of them were narrow and tortuous; some were wide and low with roof dropping down, down, until it was impossible for anything in the shape of humanity to pass. All these, however, with one exception, ended in those fissure-like clefts, running somewhere to a point, which characterise cavern formations. The exception was at the north west side of the cavern where a high, fairly wide passage extended, with an even floor as though it too had been levelled by rolling pebbles. It kept on straight for a good length, and then curved round gently to the right, all the while fairly maintaining its proportions. Presently it grew so high that it was like a narrow way between tall houses. I lit a white light, and in the searching glare noticed that far overhead the rocky walls leaned together till they touched. This spot, just above us, was evidently the highest point; the roof thence fell rapidly till at last it was only some ten feet high. A little further on it came to a sudden end.

Here there was a great piled-up mass of huge, sharp-edged rocks, at the base of which were stones of all sizes, some round and some jagged. Scattered near and isolated were many stones rounded by constant friction.

As I looked, the whole circumstances seemed to come to me. "See," I cried to Marjory, "this was evidently another entrance to the cave. The tides, ebbing or flowing, drove in through one way and out at the other; and the floor was worn level in process of countless years by rolling pebbles like these. Then came some upheaval or wearing away by water drift of supporting walls of rock; and this mouth of the cave fell in. We must be by now somewhere at the Cruden side of Whinnyfold; we are facing almost due north."

As there was manifestly nothing to be done here, we took our way back to the main cavern. When we began to look around us for a new place to explore, Marjory said:

"There doesn't seem to be any treasure cave at all here. We have now tried everywhere." Then it was that my mind went back again to the Don's description "Black on the one hand and red on the other." "Come," I said, "let us go back till we find the joining of the gneiss and granite." As we went back the floor was almost dry; only a few pools of water here and there, lying in the depressions, called attention to the fact that we were under tidal influence. As we went we kept a careful look-out for the fusion of the rocks; and found it where the passage with the descending roof debouched into that which led from the blocked up entrance of the cave. There was here, however, no sign of another passage, and the main one outside was like that under my own house, entirely through the gneiss.

I could not help feeling a little disappointed. For many weeks my mind had been set on finding the Pope's treasure; and though I believe it was not greed which controlled me even to any great extent, I was deeply chagrined. I had a sort of unworthy fear that it might lower me in the eyes of Marjory. This feeling, however, was only momentary; and when it went, it went for good. Drawing in my note-book a rough outline of Whinnyfold, I dotted lines where I took the various branches of the cave to lie and then marked in the line of fusion of the gneiss and the granite as it was manifest on the cliffs and on the shore beyond. Marjory was at once convinced; indeed when I saw my surmise put down in black and white it seemed to me quite apparent that it must be correct. The treasure cave must be within that space which lay between the dismantled entrance on the side of the Skares, and that which had fallen in on the north side. The logical inference was that if there was an entrance to be found at all it would be close to the debris from the Don's explosion. So we took in silence, our way back to that point and began at once to examine the debris for any sign of an opening in the rock to the north side. Marjory scrambled up to the top of the pile whilst I explored the base. Turning my lantern on the rocky wall I began to examine it foot by foot and inch by inch.

Suddenly Marjory cried out. I raised my head and looked at her. Her face, lit by the rays of my own lamp which, with the habit of searching now familiar to me I had turned as my eyes turned, was radiant with joy and excitement.

"Look! look!" she cried. "Oh, Archie, there is the top of an opening here. The stones fill it up." As she spoke she pushed at a stone on the top of the pile; under her hand it moved and disappeared with a hollow rattle. By this time I had scrambled up the slippery pile and was beside her. The disappearance of the stone had enlarged the opening, and something like a foot square was discovered.

So we began to work at the heap of stones, only we pulled and threw them into the cave where we were so as not to block the place we aimed at. The top layer of stones was easy to move, as they were comparatively small, and were not interlocked, but below them we found a much more difficult task. Here the rocks were larger and more irregular in shape, and their points and edges interlocked. We did not mind, however, but toiled on. I could not but notice as we did so, a trait of Marjory's coolness of head in the midst of all her excitement, when she took from her pocket a pair of heavy gloves and put them on.

In some fifteen or twenty minutes we had unmasked a hole sufficiently large to pass through comfortably. I found that the oil of my lamp was running low; so I refilled it and Marjory's also. Then holding my own lamp carefully, whilst Marjory turned hers in the direction I was going, I passed over the top of the miniature moraine, and in a few seconds was on the floor of the other cave. Marjory threw me the ball of string and scrambling down joined me at once. We went along carefully, for the roof of the cave dipped very low and we had in more than one place to bend considerably; even then we were walking in a couple of feet of water as the floor dipped as well as the roof. When we had gone some distance, however, the roof rose as the cave turned sharp to the left, round a corner of very broken and jagged rock in which I could see signs of the fusion of the two geological formations. Our hearts beat high and we took hands instinctively; we were now confident that we were in the treasure house at last.

As we went up the cave, here running, so far as I could ascertain by the compass, straight in and from the sea, we could note, as we turned our lamps now and again to either side, that on our left was all black rock whilst on the right was all red. The cave was not a long one; nothing to compare with those we had left. It was not very many seconds, though we had to go slow as we did not know for certain as to the floor level, before the cave began to expand.

When, however, it widened and became more lofty, the floor rose in all some three feet and we went up a sharp incline though not of very great magnitude. This dipped a little again forming a pool which spread ahead of us so far as we could see by the dim light of our bicycle lamps. As we did not know the depth I waded in, Marjory enjoining me anxiously to be careful. I found it deepened very slowly; so she joined me and we went on together. By my advice, Marjory kept a few feet in the rear, so that in case I should stumble or meet with a deep hole and so lose my light, hers would still be safe. I was so intent on my feet, for I feared lest Marjory following so close might get into some trouble, that I hardly looked ahead, but kept cautiously on my way. Marjory, who was flashing her lamp all around as she went, suddenly called out:

"Look! look! There to the right, the figure of the San Cristobal with the golden Christ on his shoulder."

I turned my lantern to the angles of the cave to the right to which we were now close. The two lamps gave us light enough to see well.

There, rising from the water under the shelf of rock, was the figure that Benvenuto had wrought, as Don Bernardino had left it three centuries ago.

As I moved forwards I stumbled; in trying to save myself the lamp was shaken from my hand and fell hissing in the dark water. As it fell I saw by the flash of light the white bones of a skeleton under the San Cristobal. Instinctively I called out to Marjory:

"Stand still and take care of your lamp; I've dropped mine!"

"All right!" came back her answer coolly; she had quite command of herself. She turned the lamp downwards, so that we could see into the water, and I found I had stumbled against an iron box, beside which, in about two feet of water, lay my lamp. I picked this up first and shook the water from it and laid it on the shelf of rock. "Wait here a moment," I said, "I shall run back and get a torch." For I had left the tin box on the top of the heap of debris when we had scrambled through the hole. I was starting back at once when she said after me, and in that cave the voice came after me “monotonous and hollow like a ghost’s:”

“Take my lamp with you dear. How can you find the box, or even the way to it, in the dark?”

“But I can’t leave you alone here; all in the dark, too.”

“Oh, I’m all right,” she answered gaily, “I don’t mind a bit! And besides it will be a new sensation to be here alone — with Olgaref and the treasure. You won’t be long, will you, dear?” I felt that her query almost belied her brave words; but I knew that behind the latter lay her pride which I must not offend; so I took the lamp she was holding out to me and hurried on. In a few minutes I had found the box and brought it back; but I could see that even those minutes had been a trying time to Marjory, who was deathly white. When I came close, she clung to me; after a second or two she said, as she drew herself away, looking at me diffidently as though to excuse herself, or rather to account for her perturbation:

“The moment you had gone and I was alone in the dark with the treasure, all the weird prophecying of Gormala came back to me. The very darkness itself made light patches, and I saw shrouds floating everywhere. But it’s all right now that you are here. Light a torch, and we shall look at the Pope’s treasure.” I took a torch out of the box and lit it; she laid it so that the lighted end projected well beyond the shelf of rock and gave a fine if fitful, light to all around. We found water about three feet deep at its worst; in the glare of the torch and because of its crystal purity, it did not look even so much. We stooped down to examine the box, which was only one of several lying in front of a great heap of something, all dark with rust and age, which filled up a whole corner of the cave.

The hasp was eaten through with rust, as well it might be after three centuries in the water, and only retained its form. This was doubtless due to the stillness of the water, for even the shock of my striking the box with my boot had broken it across. When I pulled at it, it crumbled to pieces in my fingers. In the same way the iron of the box itself was rusted right through; and as I tried to lift the lid which was annealed by corrosion to the sides of the box, it broke in my hands. I was able to tear it away like matchwood. The contents were not corroded, but were blackened by the sea. It was all money, but whether silver or gold we could not tell, and did not stop to see. Then we opened box after box in the same way, and in all but one found coins. This took a considerable time; but we did not in our excitement note its flying. The heap in the corner was composed of great ingots, to lift any of which took a distinct effort of strength. The one box unfilled with coins contained smaller boxes or caskets which were uncorroded and were, we presumed, of some superior metal, silver or gold. They were all locked; I lifted one of them and laid it on the shelf of rock whilst I searched for a key. It was a difficult matter to find any definite thing whilst stooping in the water, so I took my knife and tried with its point to prise open the casket. The lock must have been of iron and corroded; it gave way instantly under pressure, disclosing a glittering heap of stones which, even through all the cloudiness of the saline deposit of centuries, flashed red lights everywhere.

“Rubies!” cried Marjory who stood close to me, clapping her hands. “Oh! how lovely. Darling!” she added kissing me, for her expression of delight had to find a vent on something.

“Next!” I said as I bent to the iron chest to lift out another of the caskets.

I drew back with a shudder; Marjory looking anxiously at my face divined the cause and cried in genuine alarm:

“The tide! The tide is rising; and is shutting us in!”

CHAPTER XXXVI. THE RISING TIDE

I think there must be some provision of nature which in times of real danger keeps men's minds away from personal fears. I can honestly say that not a thought of danger for myself crossed my mind; though I was harrowed up and appalled by fears for Marjory. My mental excitement, however, took a practical shape, and thought after thought flashed through my brain as to how I could best serve my wife. The situation with its woeful possibilities came first; and afterwards, in quick succession, the efforts which might be made. But first I must see how we really stood. I did not know this cave and the lengths and levels of it well enough to be sure whether the tide could block us completely in. If there were but head-room the actual distance was not far to swim. This I could soon settle; taking Marjory's lamp which stood on the ledge of rock I ran down the cave calling out as I went:

"Stay here a minute, dear, I want to see how far the tide is in." The double winding of the cave made it hard for me to judge at a glance; it was only when I came to the piece of straight passage leading up from the sea that I could judge. From the time I left the treasure chamber of the cave the water got deeper and deeper as I went, but the difficulty was not in this way; I knew that so long as there was headway I could swim for it and take Marjory with me. But when I came down the straight, my hopes were altogether dashed. As the floor dipped towards the sea so did the roof in much greater degree. I knew that there was one place where at low water there was only barely headway even when we stooped low; but I was not prepared for what I saw. The water had already risen so far that this place was, from where I stood waist high in water, obliterated;

the rocky roof sank into the still, level water. For a moment I considered whether it would not be best to dive through it. I had the cord to guide me, and I knew that towards its mouth the cave roof rose again. But then there was Marjory. She was not like myself an accomplished diver. It might be possible if the worst should come to the worst to draw her through the water-choked piece of tunnel by the guiding cord. But if the cord should break or anything go wrong.... The thought was too dreadful! I hurried back to Marjory to see how far it might be advisable to make the attempt, however dangerous, rather than be drowned in the deepening water of the cave, or asphyxiated if the space left were too small to allow us breathing till the falling of the tide.

I found Marjory standing on the shelf of rock, to which she had climbed by the aid of the San Cristobal figurehead. She was holding up the torch and examining carefully the walls and roof of the cave. When she heard the splash of my coming through the water, she turned; I could see that though her face was pale she was very calm and self-possessed. She said quietly:

“I have been looking for high-water mark, but I can hardly see any sign of it. I suppose in this dark cave, where neither seaweed nor zoophyte exists, there is no such thing. Unless of course it be that the whole cave is under the water line; in which case we must be ready for the worst.” As she spoke she was raising the torch till its light illuminated, so far as was possible, the extreme angle of the cavern where it ran up to a sort of point. I scrambled up beside her, and making use of my greater height, took the torch and keeping it away at arm’s length put my hand into the narrowing angle. I had a sort of secret hope that there might be some long crack or rift which, though it might be impossible for our bodies, might still give us air. Any such half-formed hope was soon shattered; the angle of the cave was in the solid rock, and there was no fissure or even crack beyond.

As there was no clue to the level reached by the tide, I tried back on the possibility of gauging it by measuring from low water, so far as my memory of the tides might serve. Judging by the depth of the water, so far as I had gone, the fall of the floor level must here have been some three feet. The floor level of the cave was almost that of low water, except where it dipped under the overhanging roof, or where was the ascending grade up to the pool in which the treasure boxes lay. As here on the border of the North Sea, with no estuary to increase tidage, the normal rise of the tide is between eleven and twelve feet, we had to account for another eight or nine feet for the rise of the tide. The ledge was about a foot above the surface of the water. If my calculations were correct there was head room and breathing space, for as I stood on the ledge the top of my head was still about two feet from the highest point of roof over us. I could not, however, be certain of my calculations, within a couple of feet. If, therefore, we could keep our place on the shelf of rock and endure the cold we might yet win through. The cold was a serious matter. At Cruden where the full sweep of the icy current from the North Sea runs in shore, the water is grievously cold, even in the hottest summer time. Already we were feeling the effects of our wet clothes, even in this silent cavern where the heat seemed to be much more than outside. When we had been looking at the jewels, I had myself felt the chill, and could feel Marjory shiver now and again. Indeed, I had been about to suggest our returning when I made the discovery of the rising tide.

It was no use regretting, however. We were caged in the cavern; and our only chance was to hold on somehow, till the tide should fall again. The practical side of Marjory's mind was all awake. It was she who quietly refilled the two lamps, and, with much spluttering of the wick at first, lighted again the one which I had let fall into the water. When both lamps were ready, she put out the torch and placed it in the tin box which she handed to me, saying:

"We may need all the air we can get for our breathing, and the torches would burn it up. We must have two lamps lest one should fail. Shove the box as far as it will go into the corner of the cave; it will be safe there — as safe as us at any rate, for it will be over our heads."

As she spoke a new idea occurred to me. I might raise the level of the ledge by piling the ingots on it! I did not lose any time, but jumping down began at once to lift them one by one on the ledge. It was heavy work, and no one but a very strong man could have lifted them from off the ground, much less have placed them on a ledge over where he stood. Moreover I had to bend into the water to reach them, and in the years which they had lain there in juxtaposition some deposit of salt or sea lime of some kind had glued them together. After the separation of the first, however, this difficulty grew less. Marjory aided me in placing the bars in position; when they were once fixed their great weight kept them in place.

It was odd how little in these moments the treasure counted for. The little heap of rubies lay on the shelf of rock unnoticed, and when in the strain of placing the ingots some of them were brushed off into the water, neither Marjory nor I took the trouble even to sweep them with a brush of the hand into a safer place. One of the metal caskets was tumbled bodily into the water without a thought.

When the ingots were all in place, and shaken into steady position, we got on the ledge together and began to test the security of our platform; it would be too late to find out any flaw of construction when the tide should have risen. We had made a foothold nearly two feet above the surface of the ledge, and this might give us at the last an additional chance. At any rate, even if we should not be so hard pressed as to have to raise our heads so high, it would give us a longer period of comparative dryness. We were already beginning to feel the chill of the tide. In those caves the air is all right, and we had not felt chilled, although we were more or less wet through; but I dreaded lest it might numb either of us so much as to prevent our taking every chance. When we stood together on the pile of gold and silver, our heads were so close to the roof that I felt safe so far as actually drowning or asphyxiation were concerned if the tide did not rise higher than I had computed. If we could only hold out till the tide had fallen sufficiently, we might get back.

And then we began the long, dreary wait for the rising tide. The time seemed endless, for our apprehension and suspense multiplied the real danger whatever it might be. We stood on the cave floor till the water had reached our waists, and all this time tried to keep moving, to dance up and down, to throw about arms and legs so as to maintain the circulation of the blood. Then we climbed up and sat on the platform of bullion till the water rose round our knees again. Then we stood on the ledge and took what exercise we could till the water climbed up over our feet and knees. It was a terrible trial to feel the icy, still water creep up, and up, and up. There was not a sound, no drip or ripple of water anywhere; only silence as deadly as death itself. Then came the time when we had to stand together on the pile of bullion which we had built up. We stood close, for there was merely foothold; I held Marjory up as well as I could, so as to lessen for her the strain of standing still. Our hearts beat together. We felt it, and we knew it; it was only the expression of both our thoughts when Marjory said:

"Thank God! dear, at the worst we can die together." In turn we held the lamp well over the water, and as we looked in aching suspense we saw the dark flood rise up to the sloping roof of the cave and steal towards us with such slow, relentless precision that for my own part I felt I must scream. I felt Marjory tremble; the little morsel of hysterics which goes to make up the sum total of every woman was beginning to assert itself. Indeed there was something hypnotic in that silent line of death creeping slowly towards us. At this time, too, the air began to feel less fresh. Our own breaths and the exhalations of the lamp was vitiating our breathing space. I whispered to Marjory:

"We must put out the light!" She shuddered, but said with as brave a voice as she could:

"All right! I suppose it is necessary. But, darling, hold me tight and do not let me away from you, or I shall die!"

I let the lantern fall into the water; its hissing for a moment drowned my own murmur of grief and Marjory's suppressed groan.

And now, in the darkness, the terror of the rising flood grew worse and worse. The chill water crept up, and up, and up; till at last it was only by raising her head that Marjory could breathe. I leaned back against the rock and bending my legs outward lifted her so that she rested her feet upon my knees. Up and up rose the chill water till it reached my chin, and I feared that the last moments had come.

There was one chance more for Marjory: and though it cut me to the soul to speak it, for I knew it would tear at her very heartstrings, I had to try it:

"Marjory, my wife, the end is close! I fear we may not both live.

In a few minutes more, at most, the water will be over my mouth. When that time comes I shall sink over the pile of treasure on which we rest. You must then stand on me; it will raise you sufficiently to let you hold out longer.” A dreadful groan broke from her.

“Oh, my God!” was all she said, but every nerve in her body seemed to quiver. Then without a word she seemed to become limp and was sliding out of my arms. I held her up strongly, for I feared she had swooned: she groaned out:

“Let me go, let me go! Either of us can rest on the other’s body. I shall never leave this if you die.”

“Dear one” I said “do as I wish, and I shall feel that even death will be a happy thing, since it can help you.” She said nothing but clung to me and our mouths met. I knew what she meant; if die we must, we should die together in a kiss.

In that lover’s kiss our very souls seemed to meet. We felt that the Gates of the Unknown World were being unbarred to us, and all its glorious mysteries were about to be unveiled. In the impassive stillness of that rising tide, where never a wave or ripple broke the dreadful, silent, calm, there was no accidental fall or rise which might give added uneasiness or sudden hope. We had by this time become so far accustomed to its deadly perfection as to accept its conditions. This recognition of inevitable force made for resignation; and I think that in those moments both Marjory and I realised the last limitations of humanity. When one has accepted the inevitable, the mere act of dying is easy of accomplishment.

But there is a contra to everything in the great ledgers of the Books of Life and Death, and it is only a final balance which counts for gain or loss. The very resignation which makes the thought of death easy to bear, is but a balance of power which may not be gainsayed. In the struggle of hope and despair the Winged One submits, and that is all. His wings are immortal; out of fire or water, or pestilence, or famine, or the red mist of battle they ever rise again, when once there is light of any kind to animate them.

Even when Marjory's mouth was bent to mine in a fond kiss of love and death, the wings of Hope fluttered around her head. For an instant or two she paused, as if listening or waiting, and then with a glad cry, which in that narrow space seemed to ring exultingly, she said:

"You are saved! You are saved! The water is falling; it has sunk below your lips." Even in that dread moment of life and death, I could not but be touched by her way of rejoicing in the possibility of our common safety. Her only thought was for me.

But her words were true. The tide had reached its full; the waters were falling. Minute by minute we waited, waited in breathless suspense; clinging to each other in an ecstasy of hope and love. The chill which had been upon us for so long, numbing every sense and seeming to make any idea of effort impossible, seemed to have lost its power. In the new quickening of hope, our hearts seemed to beat more warmly, till the blood tingled in our veins. Oh! but the time was long, there in the dark, with the silent waters receding inch by inch with a slowness which was inconceivable. The strain of waiting became after a while almost unbearable; I felt that I must speak to Marjory, and make her speak and keep speaking, lest we should both break down, even at the very last. In the time of our waiting for death we had held on to our determination, blindly resolute to struggle to the last; even though we had accepted the inevitable. But now there was impatience added to our apprehension. We did not know the measure of our own endurance; and Terror seemed to brood over us with flapping wings.

Truly, the moments of coming Life are longer than hours of coming Death.

CHAPTER XXXVII. ROUND THE CLOCK

When the water had fallen so far that we could sit on the ledge, we rested for a few minutes to relieve the long and terrible strain of standing, cramped and chilled as we were. But we soon felt the chill of the water and stood again till the rocky ledge was quite free. Then we enjoyed a rest, if the word "enjoyment" could be applied to our wearied, teeth-chattering, exhausted condition. I made Marjory sit on my lap, so that we could get some warmth together, and that she might be saved from the benumbing coldness of the rock. We wrung out our clothes as well as we could, and with braver hearts set ourselves down to the second spell of our dark captivity. Well we knew that the tide had risen higher than the tin box in the corner of the cave, and tacitly put off the moment of assured knowledge. Presently when the chill had somewhat passed from her and she shivered less, she stood up and tried to get down the box. She could not reach it, so I rose and took it down. Then we resumed our places on the ledge, and, with the box beside us, began to investigate.

It was a sadly helpless performance. In the dark everything seemed strange, with regard to size as well as to shape. Our wet hands could not of themselves discriminate as to whether anything was wet or dry. It was only when we found that the box was quite full of water that we realised that there was no hope of light in this quarter, and that we must have patience through the darkness as well as we could. I think that Marjory cried a little. She covered it up for me in some womanly way. But there are eyes in the soul that can see even through cimmerian gloom; and I knew that she cried, though my senses could detect no sign. When I touched her face, my wet hands and my own wet face could tell me nothing. Still we were happy in a way. The fear of death had passed, and we were only waiting for light and warmth. We knew that every minute, every breath we drew, the tide was falling; and we knew too that we could grope our way through the cavern. We rejoiced now that there was no labyrinth of offshoots of the cave; and we were additionally glad that our clue, the cord which we had taken with us, remained. We could easily pick it up when we should begin to move, for there was no stir of water to shift it and draw it away.

When we thought that a sufficient time must have elapsed, even at the deadly slow pace at which it crawled, we kissed each other and began our first effort to escape.

We easily found the cord, and keeping hold of it, felt our way slowly along the rugged wall. I made Marjory keep close behind me, a little to the right, for I was feeling way by the left hand alone. I feared lest she should get bruised by the jagged rock which protruded here and there. It was well I did so, for in the first dozen yards I got some severe knocks that might have permanently scarred her tender skin. The experience made me careful, however, and after it I took care to feel my way all round before advancing a step. I found by experience that it was the cord which had misled me by straining where there was a curve or an angle, and so taking me close to the rock instead of in the middle of the passage where we had originally dropped it as we went along.

When we had passed the first two bends, the anxious time came; it was here that the roof dropped, and we did not know if the tide had fallen low enough to let us through. We pushed on however into the deepening water, Marjory still keeping close behind me, though I wished to go on alone and explore. We found that the rock dipped below the water level when we had gone some way into the tunnel.

So we came back and waited a good while — it seemed a long, long time. Then we essayed again, and found that though the water was still high there were some inches of space between rock and water.

Joyfully we pushed on slowly; our hearts beat gladly when we could raise our heads from the stooping position and raise them freely in the air. It only took us a few minutes to reach the pile of rocks; then holding the cord as a clue to the narrow opening we scrambled up as well as we could. I helped Marjory as much as possible, but in this matter she was as good as I was; nay better, for all her woman's instinct came to aid, and it was she who first got through the narrow hole. Then very carefully we climbed down the other side, and, still holding our guiding cord, came at last to the tackle by which we had lowered ourselves into the cave. It was rather a surprise to us when we reached it, for we expected to see the welcome light through the opening before we had come under it.

At first, in the whirl of thoughts, I imagined that something had gone wrong, a rock fallen in, or some sort of general collapse. Then I fancied that we had been tracked down, and that some one had tried to bury us in the cave. It is wonderful what strange thoughts come to one in a prolonged spell of absolute darkness; no wonder that even low-grade, violent, unimaginative criminals break down in the black hole! Marjory said nothing; but when she spoke, it was evident from her words that she had some of the same ideas herself. There was a tone of relief in her voice which was unmistakable, and which must have followed some disconcerting thought:

"Of course not! It is only that the lamps and candles have burned out. We have forgotten the long time which has passed; but the lights haven't!" It was evident enough now. We had been so many hours in the cave that the lights were exhausted; and at no time was there a gleam of natural light in the cellar.

I found it a little difficult to work the tackle in the dark with my numbed hands. Hope, however, is a paramount force, and very soon Marjory was swinging up through the hole in the rock. I called to her to get light as soon as she could; but she refused point blank to do anything until I was beside her. When I got the rope round me, we both pulled; and in a very few seconds I too was up through the hole and in the cellar. I found the matches easily enough and oh! the glorious sight of the light even in this spluttering form. We did not linger an instant but moved to the door, which I unlocked, and we stepped out and ran up the steps. The lantern on the roof which lit the staircase was all ablaze with sunshine, and we felt bathed in light. For a second or two we could not realise it, and blinked under the too magnificent glare.

And then, with inconceivable rapidity, we came back to the serenity and confidence which comes with daylight. In less than a second we were again in the realities of life; and the whole long night of darkness and fear was behind us like a dream.

I hurried Marjory into the room where she had dressed, and where were a store of her clothes; and then I proceeded to make up a fire. The chimney place in the dining room was made after the old fashion, wide and deep, and had in the back a beautiful old steel rack with brackets on which to hang pots and kettles. I thought this would be the best place for a fire, as it was the biggest in the house. So I got from the fuel house off the kitchen an armful of dry furze and another of cut billets of pine which I dumped on top of it. A single match was sufficient, and in an instant, there was a large fire roaring up the chimney. I filled a great copper kettle with water and slung it in the blaze, and then, when I found myself in a cloud of steam from my wet clothes, ran into my own room. After a hard rub down which made my skin glow, and a wash which was exquisite, I put myself into dry clothes. When I came back to the dining room I found Marjory busy getting ready a meal — supper, breakfast, dinner, we did not know what to call it. One glad moment in each other's arms, and then kneeling together we thanked God for the great mercy which He had shown us. Then we resumed preparations to eat, for we were ravenous. The kettle was beginning to sing, and we soon had hot delicious tea, which sent a glow through us. There were plenty of cooked provisions, and we did not wait to warm them: such luxuries as hot food would come into our lives later. It was only when we had satisfied our appetites that we thought of looking at the time. My own watch had stopped when I had first tried the entrance to the great cave and had been waist high in water, but Marjory had left hers in her room when she had changed her dress for the expedition. It was now one o'clock and as the sun was high in the heavens it was — P. M. Allowing for the time of dressing and eating, we must have been in all in the caves some twelve hours. I looked amongst my books and found Whittaker's Almanach, from which I gathered that as the tide was full at half past six o'clock we must as the normal rise of the tide was between eleven and twelve feet have been immersed in the water some four hours. The very thought of it made us shudder; with an instinctive remembrance of our danger and misery we drew close together.

Then a heavy sleepiness seemed all at once to settle on us. Marjory would not leave me, and I did not wish her to. I felt, as she did, that we could not sleep easily if separated. So I got great armloads of rugs and cushions and made up two nests close to the fire which I built up with solid logs. I wrapped her in a great, warm plaid and myself in another, and we sank down on our couches, holding hands and with her head upon my shoulder.

When I woke it was almost pitch dark; only for a slight glow which came from the mass of red embers on the hearth the darkness would have been as complete as that of the cave. It is true that the sunblinds were down and the curtains drawn; but even so, when there was light outside some gleams of it even, if only reflected, found their way in. Marjory was still sleeping as I stole softly to the window and looked out.

All was dark. The moon was hidden behind a bank of cloud, only the edges of which tinged with light showed its place in the heavens. I looked at Marjory's watch which she had laid upon the table, having wound it up instinctively before the sleepiness had come upon her. It was now a few minutes past one.

We had slept right round the clock.

I began to make up the fire as softly as I could, for I did not wish to wake Marjory. I felt that sleep and plenty of it was the best thing for her after the prolonged strain and trial which she had undergone. I got ready clean plates and knives and forks, and put on the kettle again. Whilst I was moving about, she woke. For an instant or two she looked round in a dazed uncomprehending way; and then all at once the whole remembrance of the night swept across her. In a single bound, with the agility of a young panther, she sprang to her feet, and in an instant her arms were round me, half protectingly and whole lovingly.

We had another hearty meal. It was pic-nic-ing *in excelsis*, and I doubt if the whole world held two happier beings. Presently we began to talk of the cave and of the treasure, and I was rejoiced to find that all the trial and anxiety had left no trace on Marjory's courage. It was she herself who suggested that we should go back to the cave and take out what she called those dear little boxes. We put on once more our cave clothes, which were dry again but which had shrunk lamentably, and laughing at each other's grotesque appearance we went down into the cellar again. Having renewed the lamps and made all safe for our return, we took lamps and torches and matches and set out on our quest. I think we both felt a little awed — we were certainly silent — as we crept through the hole over the moraine and took our way up the treasure cave. I confess that my own heart sank within me when we saw the ledge, with the San Cristobal and the infant Christ seeming to keep guard upon it; and I felt a pity, which I had not felt before, for the would-be thief, Olgaref. Marjory I think felt the same way as I did, for she kept very close to me and now and again held on to me; but she said nothing. We lit a torch and renewed our search. Whilst I stooped over the box and took out other caskets containing gems, Marjory held the light with one hand whilst she gathered the little heap of rubies from the first box and put them in the pocket of my jacket. Her feminine care was shown in her searching for the box and the rubies which had fallen into the water so that none might be lost. There were not many of the little caskets — it is astounding what a small space will contain a many precious gems. They easily fitted into the bag which I had brought for the purpose. Then we took our way back to the house.

When we had ascended, we put out the lights and locked the cellar. We changed our clothes again, Marjory putting on her livery; it was now nearly four o'clock in the morning, and it was time to be getting back to Crom.

CHAPTER XXXVIII. THE DUTY OF A WIFE

Just as we were about to start Marjory said to me, half in jest but wholly in earnest:

“I wonder what has become of Gormala these times. If she knew of the last two nights, she would simply become desperate; and there is no knowing what she might prophecy!”

Strangely enough, I had been myself thinking of the Witch-woman. I suppose it was that the memory of the finding of the treasure, and of the hovering near us of death, had recalled her weirds. With the thought of her, came once more that strange feeling which I had before experienced, a feeling as if she were present. Motioning to Marjory to put out the light, I stole to the window. The heavy curtains, when I had passed through them, shut out the glimmer of the firelight. Marjory came and joined me, and we looked out together. There were drifting clouds, and thus, moments of light and shadow. In one of the former I saw a dark mass on the edge of the deep grass that crowns the rock just over the entrance of Witsennan Point. If it was a woman it was probably Gormala; and if it was Gormala she was probably watching me, for of course she could not know that Marjory was with me. I determined to find out if I could; so I told Marjory to slip out by the back door whilst I went to the point. We arranged to join at the upper village of old Whinnyfold.

Having placed my bicycle ready to start, and shut the door behind me softly, I stole over to the cliff. Lying just below the edge, but so that her head was at the top lay Gormala, asleep. At first I thought it was pretence, for I knew the wily nature of the old woman; but on examining closely I found her sleep was real. She looked worn and tired out, and I concluded that it was the second night of watching on end which had finished her. It was well she slept, for had she been awake she must have seen us. The place she had chosen commanded both paths away from the house left and right; only by stealing back over the hill and keeping the house all the time between us and herself could we have avoided her prying eyes. Even then, were there light enough, she might have seen us debouching on the roadway had we gone inland by Whinnyfold. I could not but be sorry for her; she looked so old and feeble, and yet with such purpose in her strong, stern face. I could afford to be pitiful now; my life was running on happy lines. I had won Marjory, and we had found the treasure!

I left her undisturbed; I would have put some rug or covering over her; but I was afraid lest I should awake her, and so make discovery of our plans. Besides it would be hard to account for my being awake myself and about at that hour of the night — or morning, I hardly knew which it was. Almost as hard as it would have been for Gormala to explain why she was in similar case.

When I joined Marjory, we took our way as quickly as possible to Crom; we were both anxious that she should get into the castle before daylight. It was with a certain dread, for the experiences of the night were not yet hardened in memory, that I saw Marjory descend into the cave when we rolled away the stone. She too was not free from misgiving; I knew it from the emphasis with which she impressed on me that I was not to fear for her. She was to wave a white handkerchief from the roof when she had got in safely.

Looking over the stone towards the castle whence must come her signal I waited with an anxiety which I could not conceal from myself. The grey dawn grew paler and paler as I looked, and the sky began to quicken. Here and there around me came every now and again the solitary pipe of an awakening bird. I could just see the top of the castle, looking bare and cold through the vista between the treetops. In a short time, almost shorter than I could have anticipated, I saw on the roof the flutter of a white handkerchief. My heart leaped; Marjory was safe. I waved my own handkerchief; she answered again, and there was no more sign. I came away satisfied, and wheeled back to Cruden with what speed I could. It was still very early morning, when I reached Whinnyfold. Not a soul was up as I passed on my way, and I crept in secretly by the back of the house.

When I looked carefully out of a window in front, I could see in the growing light of morning that Gormala still lay on the edge of the cliff, motionless and manifestly asleep.

I lay down for a while and dozed till the morning was sufficiently advanced. Then after a cold bath and a cup of hot tea, took my way to Crom, timing myself so as to arrive for an early breakfast.

Mrs. Jack met me, beaming. She was so hearty, and so manifestly glad to see me, that I bent over and kissed her. She was not a bit displeased; she seemed a little touched by the act, and smiled at me. Then Marjory came in, looking radiant. She greeted me with a smile, and went over to and kissed Mrs. Jack affectionately. Then she kissed me too, and there was a glad look in her eyes which made my heart thrill.

After breakfast she sat in the window with Mrs. Jack, and I went to the fireplace to light a cigarette. I stood with my back to the fire and looked over at Marjory; it was always a joy to me when she was in my sight. Presently she said to Mrs. Jack:

“Weren’t you frightened when I didn’t come back the night before last?” The elderly lady smiled complacently as she answered:

“Not a bit, my dear!” Marjory was astonished into an exclamation:

“Why not?” The affectionate old woman looked at her gravely and tenderly:

“Because I knew you were with your husband; the safest place where a young woman can be. And oh! my dear, I was rejoiced that it was so; for I was beginning to be anxious, and almost unhappy about you. It didn’t seem right or natural for two young people like you and your husband to be living, one in one place and one in another.” As she spoke she took Marjory’s hand in hers and stroked it lovingly. Marjory turned her head away from her, and, after one swift glance at me from under her eyelashes, from me also. Mrs. Jack went on in a grave, sweet way, lecturing the girl she loved and that she had mothered; not as a woman lectures a child but as an old woman advises her junior:

“For oh! Marjory, my dear one, when a woman takes a husband she gives up herself. It is right that she should; and it is better too, for us women. How can we look after our mankind, if we’re thinking of ourselves all the time! And they want a lot of looking after too, let me tell you. They’re only men after all — the dears! Your bringing-up, my child, has not made you need them. But you would well understand it, if when you was a child, you was out on the plains and among the mountains, like I was; if you didn’t know when you saw your daddy, or your brother, or your husband go out in the morning whether you’d ever see him come back at night, or would see him brought back. And then, when the work was over, or the fight or whatever it might be, to see them come home all dirty and ragged and hungry, and may be sick or wounded — for the Indians made a lot of harm in my time with their good old bows and their bad new guns — where would we women and girls have been. Or what sort of women at all at all, if we didn't have things ready for them! My dear, as I suppose you know now, a man is a mighty good sort of a thing after all. He may be cross, or masterful, or ugly to deal with when he has got his shirt out; but after all he's a man, and that's what we love them for. I was beginning to wonder if you was a girl at all, when I see you let your husband go away from you day after day and you not either holdin' him back, or goin' off with him, way the girls did in my time. I tell you it would have been a queer kind of girl in Arizony that'd have let her man go like that, when once they had said the word together. Why, my dear, I lay awake half the night sayin' my prayers for the both of you, and blessin' God that He had sent you such a happiness as true love; when there might have been them that would have ben runnin' after your fortun' and gettin' on your weak side enough to throw dust in your eyes. And when in the grey of the dawn I looked into your room and found you hadn't come, why I just tip-toed back to my bed and went to sleep happy. And I was happy all day, knowin' you were happy too. And last night I just went to sleep at once and didn't bother my head about listenin' for your comin'; for well I knew you wouldn't be home then. Ah! my dear, you've done the right thing. At the least, your husband's wishes is as much as your own, seein' as how there's two of you. But a woman only learns her true happiness when she gives up all her own wishes, and thinks only for her husband. And, mind you, child, it isn't givin' up much after all — at least we didn't think so in my time — when she pleases her husband that she loves, by goin' off to share his home."

I listened full of deep emotion as the old lady spoke. I felt that every word she said was crystallised truth; and there was no questioning the deep, earnest, loving-kindness of her intent. I was half afraid to look at Marjory lest I should disconcert her; so I turned round quietly till I faced the fireplace, and leaning on the plinth of it stole a glance in the old oval mirror above. Marjory sat there with her hand in Mrs. Jack's. Her head was bent, and there was a flush on her neck and arms which told its own story. I felt that she was silently crying, or very near it; and a lump rose in my own throat. This was one of the crises in her life. It was so borne in upon me; and I knew its truth. We have all, as the Scotch say, to "dree our own weird," this was a battle with her own soul which Marjory must fight alone. The old woman's wise words sounded a trumpet note of duty. She was face to face with it, and must judge for herself. Even with all my love, I could not help her. I stood silent, scarcely daring to breathe lest I should disturb or distract her. I tried to efface myself, and for a few minutes did not even look in the mirror. The old woman too, knew the value of silence, for she sat still; there was not even the rustle of her dress. At last I could hear Marjory's in-drawn breath, and looked in the mirror. Her attitude had not changed, except that she had raised her head; I could tell by its proud poise that she was her own woman again. She still kept her face away; and there was the veil of recent tears over her sweet voice as she spoke tenderly:

"Thank you, dear. I am so glad you have spoken to me so freely and so lovingly." I could see from the motion of the two hands and her own whitening knuckles that she was squeezing her companion's fingers. Then, after a few moments she rose quietly, and, still keeping her head averted, sailed quietly out of the room in her own graceful manner. I did not stir; I felt that I could please her best by keeping quiet.

But oh! how my heart went with her in her course.

CHAPTER XXXIX. AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

I chatted with Mrs. Jack for a few minutes with what nonchalance I could muster, for I wanted to cover up Marjory's retreat. I have not the faintest idea what we talked about; I only know that the dear old lady sat and beamed on me, with her lips pursed up in thought, and went on with her knitting. She agreed with everything I said, whatever it was. I longed to follow Marjory and comfort her. I could see that she was distressed, though I did not know the measure of it. I waited patiently, however, for I knew that she would either come to me, or send me word to join her when she wanted me.

She must have come back very quietly, almost tip-toe, for I had not heard a sound when I saw her in the doorway. She was beckoning to me, but in such a manner that Mrs. Jack could not see her. I was about to go quietly, but she held up a warning hand with five fingers outspread; from which I took it that I was to follow in five minutes.

I stole away quietly, priding myself on the fact that Mrs. Jack did not notice my departure; but on thinking the matter over later, I came to the conclusion that the quiet old lady knew a good deal more of what was going on round her than appeared on the surface. Her little homily to Marjory on a wife's duty has set me thinking many a time since.

I found Marjory, as I expected, in the Ladies' Room. She was looking out of the window when I came in. I took her in my arms for an instant, and she laid her head on my shoulder. Then she drew herself away, and pointed to a great chair close by for me to sit down. When I was seated she took a little stool, and placing it beside me, sat at my feet. From our position I had to look down at her, and she had to look up at me. Often and often since then have I recalled the picture she made, sitting there in her sweet graceful simplicity. Well may I remember it, for through many and many an aching hour has every incident of that day, however trivial, been burned into my brain. Marjory leant one elbow on the arm of my chair, and put the other hand in mine with a sweet confiding gesture which touched me to the heart. Since our peril of two nights before, she was very, very dear to me. All the selfishness seemed to have disappeared from my affection for her, and I was her true lover as purely as it is given to a man to be. She wanted to speak; I could see that it was an effort to do so, for her breast heaved a few times, as a diver breathes before making his downward leap. Then she mastered herself, and with infinite grace and tenderness spoke:

"I'm afraid I have been very selfish and inconsiderate. Oh! yes I have" for I was commencing a protest. "I know it now. Mrs. Jack was quite right. It never occurred to me what a brute I have been; and you so good to me, and so patient. Well, dear, that's all over now! I want to tell you, right here, that if you like I'll go away with you to-morrow — to-day if you wish; and we'll let every one know that we are married, and go and live together." She stopped, and we sat hand in hand with our fingers clasping. I remained quite still with a calm that amazed me, for my brain was in a whirl. But somehow there came to me, even as it had come to her, a sense of duty. How could I accept such a sweet sacrifice. The very gravity of her preparation for thought and speech showed me that she was loth to leave the course on which she had entered. That she loved me I had no doubt; was it not for me that she was willing to give it all up. And then my course of action rose clear before me. Instinctively I stood up as I spoke to her, and I felt that big stalwart man as I was, the pretty self-denying girl at my feet ruled me, for she was more to me than my own wishes, my own hopes, my own soul.

"Marjory, do you remember when you sat on the throne in the cave, and gave me the accolade?" She bowed her head in acquiescence; her eyes fell, and her face and ears grew rosy pink. "Well, when you dubbed me your knight, and I took the vow, I meant all I said! Your touch on my shoulder was more to me than if it had come from the Queen on her throne, with all the glory of a thousand years behind her. Oh, my dear, I was in earnest — in earnest then, as I am in earnest now. I was, and am, your true knight! You are my lady; to serve, and make her feet walk in easy ways! It is a terrible temptation to me to take what you have offered as done, and walk straightway into Paradise in our new life. But, my dear! my dear! I too can be selfish if I am tempted too far; and I must not think of my own wishes alone. Since I first saw your face I have dreamt a dream. That a time would come when you, with all the world to choose from, would come to me of your own free will. When you wouldn't want to look back with regret at anything, done or undone. I want you to be happy; to look forward only — unless the backward thought is of happiness. Now, if you give up your purpose and come to me with the feeling that you have only made a choice, the regret that you did not have the opportunity you longed for, may grow and grow, till — till it may become an unhappiness. Let me be sententious for a moment. 'Remember Lot's wife' was not merely the warning of a fact; it touched a great allegory. You and I are young; we are both happy; we have all the world before us, and numberless good things to thank God for. I want you to enjoy them to the full; and, my dear one, I will not stand in your way in anything which you may wish. Be free, Marjory, be quite free! The girl I want beside my hearth is one who would rather be there than anywhere else in the wide world. Isn't that worth wishing for; isn't it worth waiting for? It may be selfish in the highest plane of selfishness; I suppose it is. But anyhow, it is my dream; and I love you so truly and so steadfastly that I am not afraid to wait!"

As I spoke, Marjory looked at me lovingly, more and more. Then all at once she broke down, and began to sob and cry as if her heart would break. That swept away in a moment all my self-command; I took her in my arms and tried to comfort her. Kisses and sweet words fairly rained upon her. Presently she grew calm, and said as she gently disengaged herself:

"You don't know how well you argue. I'm nearer at this moment to giving up all my plans, than I ever thought I should be in my life. Wait a little longer, dear. Only a little; the time may be shorter than you think. But this you may take for your comfort now, and your remembrance later; that in all my life, whatever may come, I shall never forget your goodness to me, your generosity, your love, your sympathy — your — ! But there, you are indeed my Knight; and I love you with all my heart and soul!" and she threw herself into my arms.

When I left Crom after lunch the weather seemed to have changed. There was a coldness in the air which emphasised the rustling of the dry leaves as they were swept by intermittent puffs of wind. Altogether there was a sense of some presage of gloom — or disaster — of discontent, I knew not what. I was loth to part with Marjory, but we both felt it was necessary I should go. I had not had my letters for three days; and besides there were a thousand things to be attended to about the house at Whinnyfold. Moreover, we began to think of the treasure, the portable part of which — the jewels — was left almost open in the dining room. I did not want to alarm Marjory by any dim fears of my own; I knew that, in any case, there might be a reaction from her present high spirits. The remembrance of the trials and anxieties of the past few days would come back to her in the silence of the night. She saw, however, with the new eyes of her wifely love, that I was anxious about something; justly inferring that it was about her, she said to me quietly:

"You need not be alarmed about me, darling. I promise you I shall not stir out of the house till you come. But you will come as early as you can to-morrow; won't you. Somehow, I don't like your leaving me now. I used not to mind it; but to-day it all seems different. We don't seem to be the same to each other, do we, since we felt that water creep up us in the dark. However, I shall be very good. I have a lot of work to do, and letters to write; and the time may not go so very slowly, or seem so very long, till I see my husband again."

Oh! it was sweet to look in her eyes, and see the love that shone from them; to hear the delicate cooing music of her voice. My heart seemed to fly back to her as I moved away; and every step I took, its strings seemed nearer and nearer to the breaking point. When I looked back at the turn of the winding avenue between the fir trees, the last I saw through my dimming eyes was the wave of her hand and the shining of her eyes blending into one mass of white light.

In my rooms at the hotel I found a lot of letters about business, and a few from friends. There was one however which made me think. It was in the writing of Adams, and was as follows, no place or date being given:

"The people at Crom had better be careful of their servants! There is a footman who often goes out after dark and returns just before morning. He may be in league with enemies. Anyhow, where he gets out and in, and how, others may do the same. Verb. sap, suff. A."

We had been watched then, and by the Secret Service detectives. I was glad that Marjory had promised not to go out till I came. If "Mac's men" had seen her, others might also; and the eyes of the others might have been more penetrating, or their reasoning powers more keen. However, I thought it well to send her a word of warning. I copied Adams's letter into mine, with just a word or two of love added. I was amazed to find that altogether it ran to several pages! The gillie of the hotel took it over in a pony cart, with instructions to bring me back an answer to Whinnyfold. For safety I enclosed it in an envelope to Mrs. Jack. Then, when I had written a few notes and telegrams, I biked over to my house on the cliff.

It was a bleak afternoon and everything seemed grey, sky and sea alike; even the rocks, with their crowning of black seaweed swept with the foam of lapping waves. Inside the house nothing had of course been stirred; but it seemed so bleak without a fire and with the curtains wide, that I made up a fire of billets and drew the heavy curtains close. As I stood in the great bay window and looked out on the fretting sea, and listened to the soughing of the rising wind, a great melancholy seemed to steal over me, so that I became in a way lost in a mist of gloom. So far as I remember, my thoughts were back with the time when I had seen the procession of the dead coming up out of the sea from the Skares beyond, and of the fierce looking Spaniard who walked alone in their ranks and looked at me with living eyes. I must have been in a sort of day-dream and unconscious of all around me; for, though I had not noticed any one approaching, I was startled by a knocking at the door. The house was not quite finished; there were electric bells in position, but they had not yet been charged, and there was no knocker on the door. The knocking was that of bare knuckles on a panel. I thought of course that it was the gillie back from Crom, for I did not expect any one else; so I went at once and opened the door. I recoiled with pure wonder. There, looking grave and dignified, an incarnation of the word ‘gentleman’ stood Don Bernardino. His eyes, though now serene, and even kindly, were the eyes of the dead man from the sea. Behind him, a few yards off, stood Gormala MacNiel with an eager look on her face, half concealed by such a grin as made me feel as though I had been trapped, or in some way brought to book. The Spaniard at once spoke:

“Sir, your pardon! I wish much that I may speak with you in private, and soon. Forgive me if that I trouble you, but it is on a matter of such moment, to me at the least, that I have ventured an intrusion. I learned at the hotel that you had hither come; so with the guidance of this good lady, who did me much inform, I have found.” As he spoke of Gormala, he half turned and made a gesture towards her. She had been watching our every movement with cat-like eagerness; but when she saw that we were speaking of her, a dark look swept her face, and she moved away scowling. The Spaniard went on:

“What I have to say is secret, and I would be alone with you. May it be that I enter your house; or will you come to mine? I do not mean my castle of Crom, but the house at Ellon which I have taken, until such time as the Senora Jack and that so fair patriot of hers shall wish to leave it.” His manner was so gravely courteous and his bearing so noble, that I found it almost impossible to mistrust him, even when there flashed across my memory that dark red-eyed look of his at Crom, which recalled so vividly the dead Spaniard with the living eyes of hate in the procession of ghosts from the Skares. I felt that, in any case, it could not do any harm to hear what he had to say: ‘Forewarned is forearmed’ is a good apothegm in dealing with an enemy. I motioned him into the house; he bowed gravely and entered. As I shut the door behind us, I caught sight of Gormala with an eager look on her face stealing swiftly towards the house. She evidently wanted to be near enough to watch, and to hear if she could.

As I was opening the door of the drawing-room for Don Bernardino to enter, a sudden glimpse of its interior, seen in the dim light through the chinks of the shutters, changed my plans. This was the room improvised as a dressing room for Marjory, and the clothes which she had worn in the cave were scattered about the room, hung over the backs of chairs to dry. Her toilet matters also were on the table. Altogether I felt that to bring the stranger into the room would not only be an indelicacy towards my wife, but might in some way give a clue to our enemy to guess our secret. With a hasty excuse I closed the door and motioned my guest into the dining room across the hall. I asked him to be seated, and then went over to the window and pulled aside the curtains to give us light. I felt that somehow I was safer in the light, and that it might enable me to learn more than I could have done in the dim twilight of the curtained room.

When I turned round, the Spaniard was still standing, facing me. He appeared to be studiously keeping himself still; but I could see that under his long black lashes his eyes were roaming round the room. Unconsciously to myself, as I know now, my eyes followed his and took in the frightful untidiness of the place. The great hearth was piled with extinct ashes; the table was littered with unwashed cups and plates and dishes, for we had not cleared up anything after our night in the cave. Rugs and pillows were massed untidily on the floor, and the stale provisions on the table made themselves manifest in the close atmosphere of the room. I was moving over to throw up the window so as to let in a little fresh air, when I remembered that Gormala was probably outside with her ears strained close to the wall to hear anything that we might say. So, instead, I apologised for the disorder, saying that I had camped me there for some days whilst working at my book — the excuse I had given at the hotel for my spells of solitary life.

The Spaniard bowed low with grave courtesy, and implored that I would make no apology. If there were anything not perfect, and for himself he did not see it, such deficiencies were swept away and lost in the tide of honour with which I had overwhelmed him in the permission to enter my house; and much more to the same effect.

Then he came to the serious side of things and began to speak to the point.

CHAPTER XL. THE REDEMPTION OF A TRUST

“Senor, you may wonder why I am here, and why I would speak with you alone and in secret. You have seen me only in a place, which though my own by birthright, was dominated by the presence of ladies, who alas! by their nationality and the stress of war were mine enemies. From you is not such. Our nations are at peace, and there is no personal reason why we should not be of the most friendly. I come to you, Senor, because it is borne to me that you are cavalier. You can be secret if you will, and you will recognise the claims of honour and duty, of the highest. The common people know it not; and for the dear ladies who have their own honour, our duties in such are not a part of their lives — nay! they are beyond and above the life as it is to us. I need not tell you of a secret duty of my family, for it is known to me that all of such is already with you. The secret of the Pope’s treasure and of the duty of my House to guard and restore it has been in your mind. Oh yes, this I know” for he saw I was about to speak. “Have I not seen in your hands that portion of the book, so long lost!” Here he stopped and his eyes narrowed; some thought of danger, necessitating caution, had come to him. I, too, was silent; I wanted to think. Unless I had utterly misconceived him, he had made an extraordinary admission; one which had given him away completely. The only occasion on which I had seen him was when he had pointed out to us that the pages which I had found belonged to the book in the library. It is true that we had suggested to him that there was a cipher in the marking of the letters, but he had not acknowledged it. At the time he certainly did not convey the idea to us that he believed we had grasped the secret. How then did he know; or on what assumption did he venture to state that I knew his secret. Here was a difficult point to pass. If I were silent he would take all for granted; in such case I might not learn anything of his purpose. So I spoke:

"Your pardon, Sir, but you presume a knowledge on my part of some secret history of your family and of a treasure of the Pope; and then account for it that you have seen in my hand the book, a part of which was long lost. Am I to take it that because there is, or may be, a secret, any one who suspects that there is one must know it?" The steady eyes of the Spaniard closed, narrower and narrower still, till the pupils looked like those of a cat in the dark; a narrow slit with a cavern of fire within. For fully half a minute he continued to look at me steadily, and I own that I felt disconcerted. In this matter he had the advantage of me. I knew that what he said was true; I did know the secret of the buried treasure. He had some way of knowing the extent of my knowledge of the matter. He was, so far, all truth; I was prevaricating — and we both knew it! All at once he spoke; as though his mind were made up, and he would speak openly and frankly. The frankness of a Latin was a fell and strange affair:

"Why shall we beat about the bush. I know; you know; and we both know that the other knows. I have read what you have written of the secret which you have drawn from those marked pages of the law book."

As he spoke the whole detail of his visit to Crom rose before me. At that time he had only seen the printed pages of the cipher; he had not seen my transcript which had lain, face down, upon the table. We had turned it, on hearing some one coming in.

"Then you have been to the castle again!" I said suddenly. My object was to disconcert him, but it did not succeed. In his saturnine frankness had been a complete intention, which was now his protection against surprise.

"Yes!" he said slowly, and with a smile which showed his teeth, like the wolf's to Red Ridinghood.

"Strange, they did not tell me at Crom," I said as though to myself.

"They did not know!" he answered. "When next I visited my own house, it was at night, and by a way not known, save to myself." As he spoke, the canine teeth began to show. He knew that what he had to tell was wrong; and being determined to brazen it out, the cruelty which lay behind his strength became manifest at once. Somehow at that moment the racial instinct manifested itself. Spain was once the possession of the Moors, and the noblest of the old families had some black blood in them. In Spain, such is not, as in the West, a taint. The old diabolism whence sprung fantee and hoo-doo seemed to gleam out in the grim smile of incarnate, rebellious purpose. It was my cue to throw my antagonist off his guard; to attack the composite character in such way that one part would betray the other.

"Strange!" I said, as though to myself again. "To come in secret into a house occupied by another is amongst civilised people regarded as an offence!"

"The house is my own!" he retorted quickly, with a swarthy flush.

"Strange, again!" I said. "When Mrs. Jack rented the castle, there was no clause in her agreement of a right to the owner to enter by a secret way! On the contrary such rights as the owner reserved were exactly specified."

"A man has a right to enter his own house, when and how he will; and to protect the property which is being filched from him by strangers!" He said the last words with such manifest intention of offence that I stood on guard. Evidently he wanted to anger me, as I had angered him. I determined that thenceforward I should not let anything which he might say ruffle me. I replied with deliberate exasperation:

"The law provides remedies for any wrongs done. It does not, that I know of, allow a man to enter secretly into a house that he has let to another. There is an implied contract of peaceful possession, unless entry be specified in the agreement." He answered disdainfully:

"My agent had no right to let, without protecting such a right."

"Ah, but he did; and in law we are bound by the acts of our agents. '*Facit per alium*' is a maxim of law. And as to filching, let me tell you that all your property at Crom is intact. The pieces of paper that you claimed were left in the book; and the book has remained as you yourself placed it on the shelf. I have Mrs. Jack's word that it would be so." He was silent; so, as it was necessary that the facts as they existed should be spoken of between us, I went on:

"Am I to take it that you read the private papers on the table of the library during your nocturnal visit? By the way, I suppose it was nocturnal."

"It was."

"Then sir," I spoke sharply now, "who has done the filching? We — Miss Drake and I — by chance discovered those papers. As a matter of fact they were in an oaken chest which I bought at an auction in the streets of Peterhead. We suspected a cipher and worked at it till we laid bare the mystery. This is what we have done; we who were even ignorant of your name! Now, what have you done? You come as an admitted guest, by permission, into a house taken in all good faith by strangers. When there you recognised some papers which had been lost. We restored them to you. Honour demanded that you should have been open with us after this. Did you ask if we had discovered the secret of the trust? No! You went away openly; and came back like a thief in the night and filched our secret. Yes sir, you did!" He had raised his hand in indignant protest. "It was our secret then, not yours. Had you interpreted the secret cipher for yourself, you would have been within your rights; and I should have had nothing to say. We offered to let you take the book with you; but you refused. It is evident that you did not know the whole secret of the treasure. That you knew there was a treasure and a secret I admit; but the key of it, which we had won through toil, you stole from us!"

"Senor!" the voice was peremptory and full of all that was best and noblest in the man. "A de Escoban is not wont to hear such an allegation; and he who makes such shall in the end have his own death to answer for!" He stopped suddenly, and at his stopping I exulted secretly; though I wished to punish him for his insinuation that Marjory had filched from him, I had no desire to become entangled in a duel. I was determined to go on, however; for I would not, at any hazard, pass a slight upon my peerless wife. I think that his sudden pause meant thought; and thought meant a peaceful solution of things on my own lines. Nevertheless, I went on forcing the issue:

"I rejoice, sir, that you are not accustomed to hear such allegations; I trust that you are also not accustomed to deserve them!" By this time he was calm again, icily calm. It was wonderful with what rapidity, and how widely, the pendulum of his nature swung between pride and passion. All at once he smiled again, the same deadly, dreadful smile which he imagined to be the expression of frankness.

"I see I am punished! 'Twas I that first spoke of stealing. Senor, you have shown me that I was wrong. My pardon to that so good lady who is guest of my house; and also to that other patriotic one who so adorns it. Now let me say, since to defend myself is thrust upon me, that you, who have, with so much skill made clear the hidden mystery of that law book which I have only lately read, know best of all men how I am bound to do all things to protect my trust. I am bound, despite myself, even if it were not a duty gladly undertaken for the sake of the dead. It was not I who so undertook; but still I am bound even more than he who did. I stand between law and honour, between life and death, helpless. Senor, were you in my place, would you not, too, have acted as I did? Would you not do so, knowing that there was a secret which you could not even try to unravel, since long ago that in which it was hidden had been stolen or lost. Would you not do so, knowing, too, that some other — in all good faith and innocence let us say — had already made discovery which might mock your hopes and nullify the force of that long vigil, to which ten generations of men, giving up all else, had sacrificed themselves? Would not you, too, have come in secret and made what discovery you could. Discovery of your own, mark you! Would not also that lady so patriotic, to whom all things come after that devotion to her country, which so great she holds?"

Whilst he was speaking I had been thinking. The pretence of ignorance was all over to both of us; he knew our knowledge of the secret trust, and we knew that he knew. The only thing of which he was yet ignorant, was that we had discovered the treasure itself. There was nothing to be gained by disputing points of conjectural morals. Of course he was right; had either Marjory or myself considered ourselves bound by such a duty as lay so heavy on him we should have done the same. I bowed as I answered;

"Sir, you are right! Any man who held to such a duty would have done the same."

"Senor," he answered quickly, "I thank you with all my heart!" Poor fellow, at that moment I pitied him. The sudden flash of joy that leaped to his face showed by reaction in what a hell he must have of late been living. This momentary episode seemed to have wiped away all his bitterness; it was in quite a different way that he spoke again:

"And now, Senor, since your engaging frankness has made my heart so glad, may I ask further of your kindness. Believe me that it is not of my own will, but from an unbending sense of duty that I do and may have to do such things; my life till lately has been otherwise, oh! so much so! You have the feelings of honour yourself; like me you are also man of the world, and as such we can sacrifice all things save honour. Is there no way in which you can aid me to fulfill my trust; and let there be peace between us?" He looked at me anxiously; I said:

"I fear I hardly understand?" With manifest embarrassment he went on;

"You will forgive me if I err again; but this time I must make myself clear. It is manifest to me that in these days of science nothing can long remain hidden, when once a clue has been found. You already know so much that I am placed almost as though the treasure has already been found. Thereafter where am I; what am I? One who has failed in his trust. Who has allowed another to step in; and so dishonour him! A moment, Senor, and I am done," for he saw that I was about to speak. "It is not the treasure itself that I value, but the trust. If I could make it safe by the sacrifice of all my possessions I would gladly do so. Senor, you are still free. You have but to abandon your quest. It is not to you a duty; and therefore you sacrifice naught of honour should you abandon it. Here I pledge to you — and, oh Senor, I pray have patience that you take no affront that I do so — that in such case I shall give to you all that I have. Give it gladly! So, I may redeem the trust of my House; and go out into the wide world, though it may be as a beggar, yet free — free! Oh! pause, Senor, and think. I am rich in the world's goods. My ancestors were of vast wealth; even at that time when the great Bernardino did give his ship to his king. And for three centuries all have been prudent; and all their possessions have grown. There are vast lands of corn, great forests, many castles, whole ranges of mountains as yet untouched for their varied treasures which are vast. There are seaports and villages; and in all, the dwellers are happy and content. I am the last of my race. There is none to inherit; so I am free to pledge myself." He did not bow or bend; there was no persistence of request in his voice, or tone, or manner. In all there was no feeling of a bargain. It was an offer, based on the fulfillment of his own desires; given in such a lordly way that there could be no offence in it. He recognised so thoroughly the strength of my own position, that the base side of barter became obliterated; it was an exchange of goods between gentlemen. Such, at least, I recognised was his intellectual position; my own remained the same. How could I, or any man, take advantage of such an offer. After thinking a few seconds I said to him:

"Sir, you have honoured me by grouping us as men of honour. What would you do in my place?" His eye brightened, and his breath came more quickly as he replied:

"Were it my case, I should say: 'Senor, your duty is one of honour; mine is one of gain. There can be no comparisons. Fulfill your debt to your forefathers! Redeem the pledge that they have made in your name! Discover your treasure; and be free!'" There was infinite pride in his voice and manner; I think he really meant what he said. I went on with my questioning:

"And what about the taking of your estate as a reward of forbearance?"

He shrugged his shoulders: "For that," he said, "it matters not."

"Ah, for you to give you mean?" He nodded.

"But what for me to take? Would you do so in my place?" He was manifestly in a dilemma. I could see something of the working of his mind in his face. If he said he would himself take it, he would manifestly lower himself in his own eyes; and to such pride as his, his own self-respect was more than the respect of others, in proportion to his self-value. If he said he would not, then he might peril his chance of getting what he desired. The temptation was a cruel one; with all my heart I honoured him for his answer, given with the fullness of his mighty pride:

"Senor, I can die; I cannot stoop! But what avails my own idea? The answer is not for me! I have offered all I have. I will in addition pledge myself to hold my life at your service when this great trust is relieved. To this my honour is guardian; you need not fear it shall be redeemed! Now Senor, you have my answer! To redeem the trust of my sires I give all I have in the world, except my honour! The answer rests with you!"

CHAPTER XLI. TREASURE TROVE

There was no doubt that the Spaniard's devotion to his cause placed me in a considerable difficulty. I could not disguise from myself that he put forward a very strong claim for the consideration of one gentleman by another. It was only on hurriedly thinking the matter over that the weakness of his cause was apparent. Had the whole affair been a private or personal one; had the treasure belonged to his ancestors, I should have found it in my own heart a very difficult matter to gainsay him, and be subsequently at ease with myself. I remembered, however, that the matter was a public one. The treasure was collected by enemies of England for the purpose of destroying England's liberty, and so the liberty of the whole human race for which it made. It was sent in charge of a personal enemy of the country in a ship of war, one of many built for the purpose of invading and conquering England. In time of national stress, when the guns were actually thundering along our coast from the Thames to the Tyne, the treasure had been hidden so as to preserve it for future use in its destined way. Though centuries had passed, it was still held in mind; and the very men who had guarded it were, whilst professing to be Britons, secret enemies of the country, and devoted to her ultimate undoing. Beyond this again, there was another reason for not giving it up which appealed to me more strongly than the claim of my own natural duty, because it came to me through Marjory. Though Spain was at peace with my country, it was at war with hers; the treasure collected to harm England might — nay, would — be used to harm America. Spain was impoverished to the last degree. Her treasuries were empty, her unpaid soldiers clamourous for their arrears. Owing to want at home, there was in places something like anarchy; abroad there was such lack of all things, ships, men, stores, cannon, ammunition, that the evil of want came across the seas to the statesmen of the Quirinal with heart-breaking persistence. America, unprepared for war at first, was day by day becoming better equipped. The panic had abated which had set in on the seaboard towns from Maine to California, when each found itself at the mercy of a Spanish fleet sweeping the seas, no man knew where. Now if ever, money would be of value to impoverished Spain. This great treasure, piled up by the Latin for the conquering of the Anglo-Saxon, and rescued from its burial of three centuries, would come in the nick of time to fulfill its racial mission; though that mission might be against a new branch of the ancient foe of Spain, whose roots only had been laid when the great Armada swept out in all its pride and glory on its conquering essay. I needed no angel to tell me what would be Marjory's answer, were such a proposition made to her. I could see in my mind's eye the uprearing of her tall figure in all its pride and beauty, the flashing of her eyes with that light of patriotic fire which I knew so well, the set of her mouth, the widening of her nostril, the wrinkling of her ivory forehead as the brows were raised in scorn ——

"Sir," said I with what dignity I had, "the matter is not for you or me to decide. Not for us both! This is an affair of two nations, or rather of three: The Papacy, the Spaniard, the Briton. Nay, it touches another also, for the lady who shares the secret with me represents the country with which your nation is at war!" The Spaniard was manifestly baffled; the red, hellish light shone in his eyes again. His anger found expression in a sneer:

"Ah! so I suppose you do not propose to deal with the treasure, when found, as a private matter; but shall hand it over to your government to deal with!” The best answer to his scorn was complacency; so I said quietly:

“There again we are in a difficulty. You see, my dear fellow, no one exactly knows how we stand in this matter. The law of Treasure Trove, as we call it in this country, is in a most chaotic state. I have been looking it up since I undertook this quest; and I am rather surprised that in all the years that have elapsed since our practical law-making began, nothing has been done to put such matters on an exact basis. The law, such as it is, seems to rest on Royal Prerogative; but what the base of that prerogative is, no one seems exactly to know. And besides, in the various constitutional changes, and the customs of different dynasties, there are, or certainly there may be, barriers to the assertion of any Crown right — certainly to the fulfillment of such!” He seemed staggered. He had manifestly never regarded the matter as other than the recovery of property entrusted to him through his ancestors. I took advantage of his mental disturbance; and as I myself wanted time to think, so that I might fix on some course of action which would suit Marjory’s wishes as well as my own, I began to tell him the impression left on my mind by such study of the subject of Treasure Trove as I had been able to achieve. I quoted now and again from notes made in my pocket book.

“The Scotch law is much the same as the English; and as we are in Scotland, we are of course governed by the former. The great point of difference, seen with the eyes of a finder, is that in Scotland the fraudulent concealment of Treasure Trove is not a criminal offence, as it is in England. Thus, from my point of view, I have nothing to fear as to results; for though by the General Police Act the finder is bound to report the find to the Chief Constable, the statute only applies to things found on roads or in public places. So far as this treasure is concerned, it may turn out that it can, in a sense, be no treasure trove at all." —

"According to Blackstone, treasure trove is where any money or coin, gold, silver, plate or bullion is found hidden *in* the earth or other private place, the owner thereof being unknown. If found *upon* the earth, or in the sea, it belongs, not to the Crown, but to the finder, if no owner appears. It is the hiding, not the abandoning, which gives the Crown the property." —

"Coin or bullion found at the bottom of a lake or in the bed of a river is not treasure trove. It is not hidden in the earth." —

"The right of the Crown is ... limited to gold or silver, bullion or coin. It extends to nothing else."...

When I had got thus far the Spaniard interrupted me:

"But sir, in all these that you say, the rights of the owner seem to be recognised even in your law."

"Ah, but there comes in again a fresh difficulty; or rather a fresh series of difficulties, beginning with what is, in the eye of the law, the 'owner.' Let us for a moment take your case. You claim this treasure — if it can be found — as held by you for the original possessor. The original possessor was, I take it, the Pope, who sent it with the Armada, to be used for the conversion or subduing of England. We will take the purpose later, but in the meantime we are agreed that the original owner was Pope Sixtus V. Now, the Popedom is an office, and on the death of one incumbent his successor takes over all his rights and powers and privileges whatever they may be. Thus, the Pope of to-day stands in exactly the same position as did Pope Sixtus V, when he sent through King Philip, and in trust of Bernardino de Escoban the aforesaid treasure." I felt that the words 'aforesaid treasure' sounded very legal; it helped to consolidate even my own ideas as I went along. "So, too, you as the representative of your own family, are in the same position of original trustee as was your great ancestor of which this record takes cognisance." This too was convincingly legal in sound. "I do not think that British law would recognise your position, or that of your predecessors in the trust, in the same way as it would the continuation of the ownership, if any, on the part of the succession of the Popes. However, for the sake of the argument, let us take it they would be of equal force. If this be so, the claim of ownership and guardianship would be complete." As I paused, the Spaniard who had been listening to me with pent up breath, breathed more freely. With a graceful movement, which was almost a bow, he said:

"If so that you recognise the continued ownership, and if you speak as the exponent of the British law, wherein then is the difficulty of ownership at all; should it be that the treasure may be found?" Here was the real difficulty of both my own argument and Don Bernardino's. For my own part, I had not the faintest idea of what the law might be; but I could see easily enough that great issues might be raised for the British side against the Spanish. As I had to 'bluff' my opponent to a certain extent, I added the impressions of personal conviction to my manner as I answered:

"Have you considered what you, or rather your predecessors in title and trust, have done to forfeit any rights which you may have had?" He paled and was visibly staggered; it was evident that this view of the question had not entered his mind. The mere suggestion of the matter now opened up for him grave possibilities. His lips grew dry, and it was with a voice hoarser than hitherto that, after a pause, he said:

“Go on!”

“This treasure was sent, in time of war, by the enemies of England, for the purpose of her undoing — that is her undoing from the point of view of the established government of the time. It was in itself an act of war. The very documents that could, or can, prove the original ownership, would serve to prove the hostile intent of such owners in sending it. Remember, that it came in a warship, one of the great Armada built and brought together to attack this country. The owner of the treasure, the Pope, gave it in trust for the *cestui que trust*, the King of Spain to your ancestor Bernardino de Escoban, as hereditary trustee. Your ancestor himself had the battleship *San Cristobal* built at his own cost for the King’s service in the war against England. You see, they were all — the individual as well as the nation — hostile to England; and the intention of evil towards that country, what British law calls ‘malice prepense’ or the ‘*mens rea*’ was manifest in all!” The Spaniard watched me intently; I could see by the darkening of his swarthy face and the agonised contraction of his brows that the argument was striking home to his very heart. The man was so distressed that, enemy as I felt him to be, it was with a pang that I went on:

“It remains to be seen what view the British law would take of your action, or what is the same, that of your predecessor in the trust, in hiding the treasure in the domains of Britain. As a foreigner you would not have, I take it, a right in any case. And certainly, as a foreigner in arms against this country, you would have — could have — no right in either domestic or international law. The right was forfeit on landing from your warship in time of war on British shores!”

There was a long pause. Now that I came to piece out into an argument the scattered fragments of such legal matters as I had been able to learn, and my own ideas on the subject, the resulting argument was stronger than I had at first imagined. A whole host of collateral matters also cropped up. As I was expounding the law, as I saw it, the subject took me away with it:

“This question would then naturally arise: if the forfeiture of the rights of the original owner would confer a right upon the Crown of Britain, standing as it does in such a matter as the ‘remainder man.’ Also whether the forfeited treasure having been hidden, being what the law calls ‘*bona vacantia*,’ can be acquired by the finder, subject to the law relating to the Royal prerogative. In both the above cases there would arise points of law. In either, for instance, the nature of the treasure might limit the Crown claim as over against an individual claiming rights as finder.”

“How so?” asked Don Bernardino. He was recovering his *sang froid*, and manifestly was wishful to reassert himself.

“According to the statement of Don Bernardino, which would assuredly be adduced in evidence on either side, the treasure was, or is, of various classes; coined money, bullion, gems and jewel work. By one of the extracts which I have read you, the Crown prerogative only applies to precious metals or bullion. Gems or jewellery are therefore necessarily excluded; for it could not, I think, be claimed that such baubles were contraband of war.”

“Again, the place of hiding may make a bar to Crown claim as treasure trove. According to the cipher narrative the place of hiding was a sea cave. This could not be either ‘on’ the ground, which would give title to the finder; or ‘in’ the ground which would give Crown claim. But beyond this again, there might arise the question as to whether the treasure should in any way come into the purview of the law at all. You will remember, in one of my excerpts Blackstone excepts the sea from the conditions of treasure trove. It might have to be fought out in the Law Courts, right up to the House of Lords which is our final Court of Appeal, whether the definition of ‘sea’ would include a cave into which the tide ran.” Here I stopped; my argument was exhausted of present possibilities. The Spaniard’s thought now found a voice:

“But still ownership might be proved. Our nations have been at peace ever since that unhappy time of the Invincible Armada. Nay more, have not the nations fought side by side in the Peninsula! Besides, at no time has there been war between England and the Pope, even when his priests were proscribed and hunted, and imprisoned when captured. The friendship of these countries would surely give a base for the favourable consideration of an international claim. Even if there may have been a constructive forfeiture, such was never actually exacted; England might, in her wisdom, yield the point to a friendly nation, when three hundred years had elapsed.” Here another idea struck me.

“Of course” I said “such might be so. England is rich and need not enforce her right to a treasure, however acquired. But let me remind you that lawyers are very tenacious of points of law, and this would have to be decided by lawyers who are the servants of the state and the advisers of the governments. Such would, no doubt, be guided by existing principles of law, even if the specific case were not on all fours with precedents. I learn that in India, which is governed by laws made by Britons and consonant with the scheme of British law, there is actually an act in existence which governs Treasure Trove. By this, the magisterial decision can be held over to allow the making of a claim of previous ownership within a hundred years. So you see that by analogy your claim of three hundred years of peace would put you clean out of court." We both remained silent. Then the Spaniard, with a long sigh, rose up and said courteously:

"I thank you Senor, for the audience which you have given to me. As there is to be no *rapprochement* to us, what I can say may not avail. I must now take my own course. I am sad; for what that course may have to be, I know not. I would have given my fortune and my life to have acquitted me honourably of the trust imposed on me. But such happiness may not alas! be mine. Senor" this he said very sternly "I trust that you will always remember that I tried all ways that I know of, of peace and honour, to fulfill my duty. Should I have to take means other to discharge my duty, even to the point of life and death, you will understand that I have no alternative."

"Would you take life?" I said impulsively, half incredulous.

"I would not scruple regarding my own life; why should I, regarding that of another?" he said simply, then he went on:

"But oh! Senor, it is not the taking of life, my own or another's, which I dread. It is that I may have to walk in devious ways, where honour is not; have I not already tasted of its bitterness! Understand me that this duty of guardianship of the trust is not of my choosing. It was set to me and mine by other and greater powers than ourselves, by the Vicegerent of God Himself; and what is ordained by him I shall do in all ways that are demanded of me."

I was sorry for him, very sorry; but his words made a new fear. Hitherto I had been dealing with a gentleman, and there is much protection in this thought to any opponent. Now, however, he calmly announced that he would act without scruple. I was in future to dread, not fair fighting alone, but crooked ways and base acts. So I spoke out:

"Am I not then to look on you as a man of honour?" His face darkened dangerously; but all its haughty pride was obliterated by a look of despair and grief as he said sadly:

"Alas I know not. I am in the hands of God! He may deal mercifully with me, and allow me to pass to my grave not dishonoured; but for myself my path has been set in ways that may lead I know not whither."

Somehow his words made me feel like a cad. I didn't mind fighting a man fair; or indeed fighting him anyway, so long as we understood the matter from the first. But this was against the grain. The man had shown himself willing to give up everything he had, so as to fulfill his trust and be free; and for me now to have a part in forcing him into ways of dishonour seemed too bad. It didn't seem altogether fair to me either. I had always tried to act honourably and mercifully, so that to have my own hand forced to acquiesce in the downfall of another man was in its way hard lines on me too. Truly, the ways of wealth are full of thorns; and when war and politics and intrigue are joined in the chase for gold, there is much suffering for all who are so unhappy as to be drawn within the spell. I was weakening in my resolve regarding the treasure, and would, I am sure, in a moment of impulse have made some rash proffer to the Spaniard; when once more there came back to me the purpose of the treasure, and what Marjory might think if I allowed it to go back where it might be used against her country. Whatever I might do, there was no hope of compromise on the part of Don Bernardino. His one purpose, blind and set, was to fulfill the obligation set by his forefather and to restore the treasure to Spain, by whom it might or might not be restored to the Pope. The intensity of my thought had concentrated my interests to such an extent that I did not consciously notice what was going on around me. Only in a sort of dim way did I know that the Spaniard's eyes were roving round the room; seeking, in the blind agony of the despair which was upon his soul for a clue or opening somewhere.

All at once I became broad awake to the situation of things which had happened in those few seconds. He was gazing with eyes of amazement on the heap of metal caskets, dimmed with three centuries of sea water, which were piled on the side table amongst the scattered heaps of odds and ends of various kinds, made manifest by some trick of light. Then there came a light into his eyes as he raised his hand and pointed saying:

"So the treasure has been found!"

CHAPTER XLII. A STRUGGLE

I think that at first sheer amazement had controlled the Spaniard’s thoughts. But whatever the cause of the control was, it soon passed away; then the whole fiery nature of the man seemed to sweep from him like a torrent:

“And so all the learned arguments with which you have overwhelmed me, were but a cloak to cover your possession of the treasure which it was given to me and mine to guard. I might have guessed, that without the certainty of possession you would not have been so obdurate to my offer, given in all sincerity as it was. From other things, too, I might have known! That woman, so old, who watches you with eyes that see more than is to see, and who have reason of her own to mistrust you, she telled to me that nightly she has heard you dig in the rock as though you make grave. Take care it is not so! I am guardian of that treasure; and I am desperate! Already have I told you that all things are to me, all ways to fulfill the trust of my fathers. We are here alone! I am armed; and already my life is forfeit to this course. Yield yourself, then, to me!”

Like a flash of light he had drawn a dagger from his breast; and with an upward sweep of his hand held it poised, either to strike or throw. But already I had taken warning from his eyes. Ever since danger had threatened Marjory, I had carried my revolver with me; even at night it rested under my pillow. The practice which Marjory and I had often had, till she had taught me the old trick which her father had taught her of getting “the drop” on an adversary, stood me now in good stead. Whilst he had been drawing his dagger, I had already covered him; he finished the words of his command straight into the muzzle of my six-shooter. I said as quietly as I could, for it was with a mighty effort I kept approximately calm under stress of such a sudden attack:

"Drop that dagger! Quick; or I shall shoot it from your hands!" He recognised his helplessness in the matter. With a despairing sigh he opened his fingers; the dagger fell jingling to the floor. I went on:

"Now hold up your hands, well above your head! Move back to the wall!" He did so, and stood facing me with a disdainful smile. I stooped, and with my right hand picked up the dagger, still keeping him covered with my left. I put the weapon on the far side of the table, and approached him. He did not move, but I could see that he was sizing me up. This gave me no anxiety, for I knew my own strength; and I had also a shrewd idea that if he had any other arm about him he would not be calculating his chances for a physical struggle. Cautioning him that his life depended on his stillness, for I still held my revolver to his breast, I passed my hand lightly over him; he had manifestly no other weapon. The only sign of one was the sheath of his dagger; this I took from him. I placed the dagger in it and put it in my own pocket; then I drew a chair to the middle of the room and motioned him to sit down. He obeyed sullenly. Having by this time regained something of my serenity of mind, I spoke:

"Your pardon, Sir, for the indignity to which I have been obliged to submit you; but I am sure you will remember that it was not I who began the question of force. When you thought it right to draw arms upon me in my own house, you made it necessary that I should protect myself. Now, let me say something in answer to your charge against me. The finding of the treasure has nothing whatever to do with my theory of action; I should hold my present view just as strongly had we not made the discovery. Indeed, I may say that since we have had actual possession of the treasure, it seems not nearly so desirable as it had been. So far as I am concerned, I don't care a straw whether I have ultimate possession of it or not; but I am so fixed up that if I waive my rights — that is if I have any to waive — that I may aid in doing a repugnant thing to a very dear friend. That I shall not do. I shall oppose its doing by any means in my power!" The Spaniard saw a chance, and spoke:

"But if I undertake — —" I cut him short:

"Sir, in this matter you are not in a position to undertake. By your own showing, you are simply bound to fulfill your trust and to restore the treasure to the King, who will restore it to the Pope; or to restore it to the Pope direct." He answered quickly:

"But I can stipulate — —" again I interrupted him for this was a useless road to travel;

"How can you stipulate? You would, or might, be told to simply fulfill the duty that had been undertaken for you. Did you refuse, from whatever motive, no matter how justly founded, on ground of right or honour, you would not be holding to the simple terms of your trust. No! sir. This is no private affair to be settled by you or me, or by us both together. It belongs to politics! and international politics at that. The Government of Spain is desperately in want of money. How do you know to what shift, or to what specious argument it will condescend in its straits. I have no doubt that, should anything be done contrary to your idea of fair play, you would be grievously pained; but that is not to the point. Your Government would not take thought for any wish of yours, any more than for aught of mine. Your King is a minor; his regent is a woman, and his councillors and governors are all men chosen to do what they can to save their country. Sir, but a few minutes ago you professed it your duty to take any step, even to crime and dishonour, to carry out your duty. Indeed, you drew a weapon upon me, a presumably unarmed man, in my own house in which you are a self-invited guest. Suppose some of the Government of Spain hold ideas of their duty, equally strong and equally unscrupulous; who then is to answer for what they do. Why, in such case, they would undertake anything, until they had got possession of the treasure; and would then act entirely upon what they would call their 'better judgment.'" His native pride awoke in an instant for he said hotly:

"I would have you know, Senor, and remember always when you talk with a Spaniard, that our statesmen are not criminals, but men of honour." I bowed instinctively as I answered him:

"Sir, I have no doubt whatever, and I speak in all sincerity, that you yourself are, under normal circumstances, a man of the highest honour. Your self-sacrificing offer has shewn me that; and I have added to that knowledge by seeing the pain you have suffered at even the thought of dishonour." Here he bowed low, and there was a look of gratitude in his eyes which touched me to the quick. "And yet even you have openly told me that all your belief in honour, all your life-long adherence to its behests, will not keep you from fulfilling a duty should these things clash. Nay more, you have already done things which I take it are at variance with your principles. How then can you, or I, believe that other men, of less lofty lineage and less delicate sense of honour, will forego an advantage for their country in distress, yielding to a theoretical point of right or wrong. No sir" I went on pitilessly, for I felt that it would be a kindness to him to shut absolutely this door of hope, "We must take no step which will place in the hands of others the guardianship of that treasure, of which you have hitherto conceived yourself trustee, and of which I now believe myself to be the owner." For fully several minutes we faced each other in silence. His face grew more and more fixed and stern; at last he stood up with such a look of resolution that instinctively my fingers tightened round the butt of my revolver. I thought that he might be about to throw himself upon me, and attempt even at such odds as were against him, a struggle for present mastery. Then, without moving from his place, he spoke:

“When I have done all I can to fulfill my trust in its completeness, and have failed, I shall ask the government of my country to make representation to her friend England of a friendly claim, so that we may get even a part of the treasure; and then I will devote myself to the avenging of my honour on those who have foiled me in my duty!” This was a sort of speech which braced me up again. It was a promise of war, man to man, and I could understand it better than the subtleties which now enmeshed us. I put my pistol back in my pocket, and bowed to my opponent as I answered:

“And when that time comes, Sir, you will find me at your service; how you will; where you will; and when you will. In the meantime, when first you place the matter on the international plane, I shall take care that the American government, in which dear friends of mine are interested, shall make friendly demand of her friend, England, that she shall take no step with regard to this particular treasure — if indeed it be then in her possession — which may be used to the detriment of the trans-Atlantic power. Thus you see, sir, that time must in any case elapse before a final settlement. Nothing can be done till the close of the present war, when I take it that immediate need of the sinews of war shall have ceased to exist. Be very careful, then, how you take any steps to bring upon the scene other powers than ourselves; powers vastly more strong, and vastly less scrupulous — perhaps.” He answered nothing, but looked at me a long time in silent cold disdain. Then he said quietly:

"Have I your permission, Senor, to depart?" I bowed, and brought him to the door. When outside he turned, and, lifting his hat high in an old-fashioned, stately way, bowed. He passed up the laneway towards Whinnyfold, without once glancing back.

As I stood looking at him, I saw in the dusk Gormala's head now and again showing above the low green bank which guarded the edge of the cliff. She was bent double, and was in secret following the Spaniard.

I went back to the house to think over matters. Altogether, we were getting so complicated that there did not seem any straight road to take. In the back of my mind I had a firm idea that the best thing I could do would be to hand over the treasure to the custody of the police; inform the Sheriff; and get my solicitor to enter a formal claim of ownership, wherever the claim should be made. Then I should get Marjory to come upon our honeymoon. I could see that her mind was almost, if not quite, made up to accept this step; and for a while I lost myself in a day dream.

I came back to the reality of things by dimly and gradually realising that it had grown dark. So I made preparation for the night, bearing in mind that I had a vast treasure in my possession, and that a desperate man who claimed to represent its ownership was aware that I had it in the house. It was not till I had seen to the fastenings of every window and door, that I began to prepare a meal.

By this time I was exceedingly hungry; when I had eaten I seated myself before a rousing fire of pine logs, lit my pipe, and began to think. Without, the wind was rising. I could hear it whistle along the roof, and now and again it roared and boomed down the chimney; the leaping fire seemed to answer its call. I could not think definitely; my thoughts kept whirling in a circle from the Spaniard to the treasure, from the treasure to Gormala, from Gormala to Marjory, and from Marjory back to the Spaniard again. Every time the cycle became complete and my thoughts came back to Marjory, my rapture as I thought of her and of our future, became clouded by a vague uneasiness. It was out of this that the thought of Don Bernardino came to commence the next round of thought. In all my mental wanderings he became a dominant character; his pride, his sense of duty which subordinated even honour, his desperation, his grief, all seemed to be with me and around me. Now and again I trembled, when I thought that such self-sacrificing forces might be turned against Marjory.

Little by little, despite all my anxiety, stole over me the disposition of sleep. I was indeed almost worn out. The events of the past few days had crowded together so quickly that I had had no time for pause. Even the long sleep which had crowned the vigil in the water cave had not enabled me to lay in, so to speak, a provision of sleep; it had been the payment of a debt to nature rather than the putting by of capital. I had the consoling thought that Marjory had promised me she would not leave Crom Castle till I came. Safe in this thought I rolled myself in rugs — choosing those that she had used — and fell asleep.

I think that even in sleep I did not lose the sense of my surroundings, for in dreams my thoughts ran in their waking channel. Here again, all the disturbing elements of my life of late became jumbled together; and a sort of anxiety regarding something unknown seemed to brood over me. So far as I remember, I slept fitfully; waking often in a sort of agony of indefinite apprehension. A couple of times I made up the fire which was falling low, for there was a sort of companionship in it. Without, the wind howled more loudly, and each time as I sank back to rest I pulled the rugs more closely around me.

Once, I started broad awake. I thought I heard a cry, and naturally, in my present frame of mind, my thoughts flew to Marjory in some danger; she was calling me. Whatever the cause was, it reached my brain through a thick veil of sleep; my body answered, and before I had time to think of why or wherefore, I was standing on the floor broad awake, alert and panting. Again there came a sharp cry outside, which threw me in an instant into a cold sweat. Marjory was in danger and was calling me! Instinctively I ran to the window, and pulling open the shutters, threw up the sash. All was dark outside, with just that cold line on the far Eastern horizon which told of coming dawn. The wind had risen high, and swept past me into the room, rustling papers and making the flames dance. Every now and again a bird swept by me on the wings of the wind, screaming as it flew; for the house was so close to the sea that the birds took no note of it as they would ordinarily do of a human habitation. One of them came so close that its scream seemed to sound loudly in my ears; it was doubtless just such a cry as this which had torn me from my sleep. For a while I hesitated whether I should go right away to Crom; but second thoughts prevailed. I could not get into the house at such an hour, without creating alarm and causing comment. So I went back to the chimney corner, and, piling on fresh logs and snuggling into my nest of rugs, soon found sleep again descending on me. The serenity of thought which comes with the day was using its force....

This time I woke more slowly. The knocking was continuous and imperative; but it was not a terrifying sound. We are all more or less used to such sounds. I listened; and gradually consciousness of my surroundings came back to me. The knocking was certainly persistent.... I put on my shoes and went to the door.

Outside was Mrs. Jack, looking troubled and hot in spite of the cold of the wind which seemed to sing around the house. As I opened the door, she slipped past me and closed it behind her. Her first words made my heart sink, and my blood run cold with vague terror:

“Is Marjory here?”

CHAPTER XLIII. THE HONOUR OF A SPANIARD

Mrs. Jack saw the answer in my eyes before speech came, and staggered back against the wall.

“No,” I said “Why do you ask?”

“She is not here! Then there is something wrong; she was not in her room this morning!”

This morning! The words set my thoughts working. I looked at my watch; it was past ten o’clock. In a dazed kind of way I heard Mrs. Jack go on.

“I did not say a word to any of the servants at first, for I didn’t want to set them talking. I went all over the house myself. Her bed had not been slept in; I pulled the clothes off it and threw them on again roughly so that the maid might not suspect. Then I asked quietly if any of the maids had seen her; but none had. So I said as quietly as I could that she must have gone out for an early walk; and I took my breakfast. Then I had the cart got ready, and drove over here myself. What can it be? She told me last night that she was not going out until you came; and she is always so exact when she says a thing, that there must be something wrong. Come back with me at once! I am so anxious that I don’t know what to do.”

Two minutes sufficed for my toilet; then shutting the door behind us, we got into the cart and drove to Crom. At the first and at the last we went quietly, so as not to arouse attention by our speed; but in the middle space we flew. During the journey Mrs. Jack had told me that last night she had gone to bed as usual, leaving in the drawing room Marjory, who had told her that she was going presently into the library to write as she had a lot of letters to get through, and that no one was to wait up for her. This was her usual habit when she sat late; it therefore excited no extra attention. Mrs. Jack who was an early riser, had been dressed for an hour before she went to Marjory's room. In the course of her enquiries amongst the servants, one of them, whose business it was to open the hall door, told her that she had found it locked and chained as usual.

Within the house at Crom we found all quiet. I went at once into the library, as that was presumably the last place where Marjory had been. As we went, I asked Mrs. Jack if any letters had been left out to post. She said no! that the usual habit was to put such in the box on the hall table, but she had herself, looked, when she came down to put in a letter for America. I went over at once to the table near the fire where Marjory usually sat at night. There were plenty of writing materials and blank paper and envelopes; but not a sign of a letter or anything written. I looked all round the room but could see nothing to attract my attention. Once more I asked Mrs. Jack what Marjory had said to her about her intention of not leaving the castle till I had come. With some hesitation at first, as though she were fearful of breaking confidence, but afterwards more freely as if glad to be able to speak, she told me all:

"The dear child took to heart what I said yesterday about her living with her husband. After you had gone she came to me and laid her head on my breast, as she used to do as a little child, and began to cry; and told me that I had been very good to her. The darling! And that her mind was made up. She realised now her duty to her husband; and that as he wished her to stay in the house, nothing in the world would induce her to leave it till he came. That was the first act of her new duty! And, oh my dear! that is why I was so concerned when I found that after all she was not in the house. I don't understand it; there must be something on foot that I don't know; and I am full of fear!” Here the old lady quite broke down. I felt that any self control now was precious. It would not do to leave Mrs. Jack in ignorance of the danger, so I told her in as few words as I could of the blackmailing going on and of the watch set by the United States Secret Service. At first she was overwhelmed; but her early apprenticeship to dangers of all kinds stood her in good stead. Very soon her agitation took practical shape. I told her I was off to seek for help, and that she must keep the house till I returned. I would have tried the secret tunnel, but from what Mrs. Jack had said I was convinced that Marjory had never left the house of her own accord. If she had been captured she was doubtless far away by this time. It was possible that the blackmailers had found the secret passage into the Castle by which Don Bernardino had come. Here the thought came to me in full force; that was how they had discovered it. They had seen and watched the Don!... I felt that another debt for our day of reckoning had been piled up against him.

I got in the cart again and went to Cruden as hard as the mare could go. As I went, I formed my plans, and had my telegrams made up in my mind ready to write them out at once. For a while I doubted whether I should go to another telegraph office, lest the Cruden people might come to know too much. But there was no need of concealment now. I was not afraid of any one knowing, though I determined to be discreet and secret if possible. The circuit was occupied, so I found the use of the priority telegraph forms Adams had sent me. There was not a moment lost; one was being despatched whilst I was writing the next. To Adams I said:

“They have succeeded: Wire men see me at Crom right away. Come if you can. Want all help can get. Time vital....”

To Cathcart I wired at his house in Invernesshire:

“Come to me without moment’s delay. Vital. Want every kind of help.” I knew he would understand, and would come armed.

As it would be some little time before anything could be done, I determined to find Don Bernardino if possible; and induce him to show me the secret exit. Without knowledge of this we would be powerless; with it we might find some clue. I did not make up my mind as to what I would do if he refused; but to myself the instinctive grinding of my teeth, and clenching of my fingers, seemed to answer my question. Of one thing I was glad, he was a gentleman. In such a matter as that in which I was engaged, there were possibilities, if even there were not definite hope.

I drove to Ellon; and from the agent there got his address. I soon found it; an old-fashioned house near the town, in a tiny park surrounded with great trees. I left the cart on the road, with the mare tethered to the gate post, there being no lodgekeeper or no lodge. Before I rang the hall-door bell I saw that my revolver was ready to my hand. The instant the door was opened I stepped in, and said to the old woman who opened it:

“Mr. Barnard is in the study I suppose? I have pressing business with him!” She was so taken aback by the suddenness of my entry and speech that she pointed to a door saying: “He is in there.”

As I entered the room, closing the door behind me, the Don, who had been seated in a large chair with his back to the door turned unconcernedly. He had evidently not expected any disturbing visitor. The instant he saw me, however, he leaped to his feet, all his hostility awake. As he scanned my face his concern grew; and he glanced around, as though seeking for some weapon. I put my hand on my revolver, and said as quietly as I could, remembering his own precision of manner:

"Forgive my intrusion, Sir; but I have urgent need of speech with you." I suppose there was something in my tone which bore home to his brain the idea that I had changed in some way since we had met. Do what I would, I could not conceal the anxiety of my voice. After a pause he said:

"Regarding the treasure?"

"No!" said I: "Since last night I have not even given it a thought." A strange, new look came over his face, a look in which hope and concern seemed to have equal parts. He paused again; I could see he was thinking. Mechanically I tapped my foot on the floor with impatience; the golden moments were flying by. He realised my gravity of purpose, and, manifestly turning his attention to me, said:

"Speak on Senor!" By this time I had well in my mind what I intended to say. It was not my purpose to further antagonise the Spaniard; at the outset at any rate. Later on, that might be necessary; but I should exhaust other means first.

"I have come, Sir, to ask your aid, the help of a gentleman; and I feel at a loss how to ask it." Through the high-bred courtesy of the Spaniard's manner came a note of bitterness, as he answered:

"Alas! Senor, I know the feeling. Have not I myself asked on such a plea; and stooped in vain!" I had nothing to say in reply to this, so went on:

"Sir, I am aware that you can make much sacrifice: I ask, not for myself, but for a lady in peril!" He answered quickly:

"A lady! in peril! Say on Senor!" There was such hope and purpose in his quick tone that my heart instinctively leaped as I went on:

"In peril, sir; of life; of honour. To you I appeal to lay aside your feelings of hate towards me, however just they may be; and come like a true gentleman to her aid. I am emboldened to ask this because it was, I think, by your act that the peril — the immediate peril, has come to her.” He flushed at once:

“Through me! Peril to a lady’s honour through me! Have a care, sir! Have a care!” With a rush I went on:

“By your going into the castle through a secret passage, other enemies of the lady, low, base and unscrupulous who have been plotting to carry her off for ransom, have doubtless made an entry otherwise impossible to them. Now we must find a clue, and at once. Tell me, I implore you, of the secret way; that thus we may at once begin our search.” For a few seconds he looked me through and through; I think he suspected some plot or trap, for he said slowly:

“And the treasure; can you leave it?” I answered hotly:

“The treasure! I have not even thought of it since the news came of Marjory’s disappearance!” Here I took it that he was beginning his unscrupulous purpose, and was playing my loss against his own; and a thought came to me that had not even crossed my mind before — had he been the abductor for the purpose of just such a bargain? I took from my pocket the key of the house in Whinnyfold and held it out to him. “Here Sir” I said “is the key of my house. Take it with all it contains, and all it leads to! The treasure is as you left it last night; only help me in my need.”

He waved my hand aside with an impatient gesture as he said simply:

“I do not bargain with a woman’s honour. Such comes before all the treasures of Popes or Kings; before the oath and duty of a de Escoban. Come! Senor, there is no time to lose. Let us settle this affair first; later we can arrange matters that rest between thee and me!”

“Your hand, Sir” was all I could say. “In such trouble as mine, there is no help like that of a gentleman. But will you not honour me by keeping the key? This other is a trust which you have won by honour; as your great ancestor won his glorious duty long ago.” He did not hesitate; all he said as he took the key was:

“It is a part of my duty which I must not forego.”

As we left the house he looked like a new man — a man born again; there was such joyous gladness in his face and voice and movements that I wondered. I could not help saying when we had got into the cart and were on our way:

“You seem happy, Sir. I would that I could feel the same.”

“Ah, Senor, I am happy beyond belief. I am happy as one raised from Hell to Heaven. For now my honour is no more perilled. God has been good to me to show a way, even to death, without dishonour.”

As we flew along to Crom I told him what I knew of the secret passage between the chapel and the monument. He wondered at my having discovered the secret; but when I told him of how the blackmailing gang had used the way to evade the Secret Service men, he suddenly cried out:

“There was but one who ever knew the secret of that passage; my kinsman, with whom I stayed in Crom when young, told me of him. He tried much to find the entrance to the Castle, and finally under threat he went away to America. He was a base-born and a thief. It must be he who has come back after these years and has told of the secret way. Alas! they must have watched me when I went, all unsuspicious; and so discovered the other secret.” Then he tried to explain where the entrance was. It was not in the chamber where we had expected it would be, but in a narrow corner of the stair, the whole corner being one stone and forming the entrance.

When we arrived at Crom we found that the Secret Service men were waiting for me, having been instructed from London. There were also telegrams from Adams and Cathcart saying that they were on the way to join me. Adams wired from Aberdeen, and Cathcart from Kingussie. Mrs. Jack was with the detectives and had taken them through the rooms which Marjory had used. They had had up the servants one by one and examined them as to what they knew. The chief man had insisted on this; he said matters were now too serious to play the fool any longer. The servants were not told anything, even that Marjory was missing; but of course they had their suspicions. A peremptory order was given that no one should leave the house without permission. The chief confided to me that Mrs. Jack had quite broken down when she was telling him that Marjory knew all along about the blackmailers and had never told her. “But she’s all right now, Sir,” he concluded. “That old lady is just full of sand; and I tell you her head is level. She’s been thinking of everything which could possibly be of use to us. I guess I have heard more of this racket within the last half hour than I have done in the last two weeks.”

By the instructions of Don Bernardino we went into the library. I asked Mrs. Jack to send for lamps and candles, and these were brought shortly. In the meantime I asked that one of the detectives should be sent into the old chapel and another to the monument on the hill. Both were warned to have their guns ready, and to allow no one to pass at any hazard. To each before going I explained the secret mode of entry.

The Don went over to one of the book-cases — the very section containing the shelf in which I had replaced the old law book. Taking out that particular volume, he put his hand in and pressed a spring. There was a faint click. He replaced the book and pressed against the bookcase with slow level pressure. Very slowly it seemed to give way before him; and then turning on a hinge at one side, left an open cavity through which a man could easily pass. I was about to rush in, and was quite ready, with a lamp in one hand and a revolver in the other, when the chief of the detectives laid a restraining hand on my arm as he said:

"Wait a moment. If you go too fast you may obliterate some sign which would give us a clue!" The wisdom of his speech was not to be gainsaid. Instinctively I fell back; two of the trained observers drew close to the doorway, and holding their lamp in such wise as to throw light all round the opening, began an exact scrutiny. One of them knelt down and examined the flooring; the other confined his attention to roof and walls. After a silence, lasting perhaps a minute, the man kneeling stood up and said:

"Not a doubt about it! There has been a violent struggle here at the doorway!"

CHAPTER XLIV. THE VOICE IN THE DUST

One of the men produced his note book and began taking down in shorthand the rapid utterances of the chief, repeating it so as to check the accuracy as he went on:

“Easy to see the marks; the floor is deep in dust, and the walls are thick with it. On floor, mark of several feet — confused in struggle, may articulate separately later on — one woman’s — also trailing of long skirt. On walls marks of hands, fingers outspread, as if trying to grasp. Some of the long marks down the wall others across.” The speaker here raised his lamp and held it in the opening as far as his arm would go; then he went on:

“Steps wind downwards to right. Struggle seems to have stopped. Footmarks more clear.”... Then the chief turned to us:

“I think gentlemen, we may follow in now. The footmarks may be discriminated and identified later. We must chance destroying them, or we cannot pass in this narrow passage.” Here I spoke; a thought had been surging up in my brain ever since the detective had pointed out the finger marks on the wall “down and across”:

“Stop a moment please! Let me see the marks on the wall before any one enters; the passage is narrow and they may be rubbed off.” A glance was enough, just time enough to formulate which was the symbol of “a” and which of “b.” The perpendicular strokes were “a” and the horizontal “b.” Marjory had kept her head, even at this trying time, and was leaving a message for me as she was forced along. I understood why the struggle had ceased. Seized and forced through the narrow doorway, she had at first struggled hard. Then, when she realised that she could leave a clue behind her, she had evidently agreed to go quietly; for so she might have her hands free. It would be a hard job to carry or force along an unwilling captive through that narrow uneven passage; doubtless the captors were as willing as she was that she should go quietly. I said to the detectives:

“These marks on the wall are in a cipher which I can read. Give me the best lamp we have, and let me go first.”

So, in an orderly procession, leaving two men in the library with Mrs. Jack to guard the entrance, we passed into the secret passage. As I read off the words written on the wall, the man with the notebook took them down, his companion holding a candle so as to enable him to do so. How my heart beat as I read my dear girl’s message, marked on the wall on the inner side whichever way the curves ran. Obviously it would create less attention by guiding herself in this wise as she passed. She had kept her hand well down so that her signs should not be confused with the marks made by the men who, guiding themselves likewise, had held their hands at a natural height. Her sign marks ran continuously, even after we had passed into the passage between the chapel and the monument; the writing ran as follows:

“Four men came in — two waiting in passage through bookcase — late — striking one — struggled — then quiet — hands free — same voice we heard in Chapel. Feathers thin voice, small man, dark — all masked — Whisky Tommy hoarse voice, big man, sandy, large hands — Dago, deep voice, swarthy, little finger missing left hand — Max, silent, nods for speech, think dumb — two others on ahead too far see, hear.”

In a pause I heard the chief detective murmur:

“That girl’s a peach. We’ll get her yet!” The spot at which we were pausing was where the way to the reservoir branched off. Here Marjory probably stood with her back to the wall and used her hands behind her back, for the strokes were smaller and more uneven. There were faults which put me out and I could only read a few words— “whispering”— “only word can hear ‘manse.’” There was evidently some conversation going on between her captors, and she was making use of her opportunities. Then we went on and found the signs renewed. It cut me to the heart when I saw a smear of blood on one of the marks; the rough uncertain movement and the sharp edges of the rock had told on her delicate skin. But later on, the blood marks were continued, and I could not but think that she had cut her fingers on purpose to make a more apparent clue. When I mentioned my surmise to the detective, his instinct having been trained in such matters, showed a keener insight than my own:

“More likely she is preparing to leave a mark which we can see when they get her out of the tunnel. They may not suspect intention if her fingers are bleeding already!” The words following the stop where I had read “manse” were:

“Boat ready — Seagull — Coffin — Hearse — bury isl—” Here the next mark instead of being horizontal took a sudden angle down, and the blood was roughly rubbed off. It was as though her hand had been struck in the act of making the mark. Her captors had suspected her. There were no more marks on the wall. I could not imagine, however, that Marjory would be entirely baffled. She had infinite resource, and would doubtless find some other means of leaving a clue. Telling the others therefore to keep back I threw the rays of the lamp over roof and walls and floor as we proceeded.

It was a strange scene. The candles and lamp showing up but patches of light in the inky black darkness; the moving figures projected against the lights as I looked back; the silence broken by the shuffling tread of stumbling feet on the rock floor; the eager intense faces, when a change in the light flashed them into view. It all moved me at moments, for there was a gleam of hope in its earnestness.

I tried to put myself in Marjory's position. If her hands were useless, as they would be if she could not use them without suspicion — even were they not tied now as was probable — her next effort would be with her feet; I therefore looked out carefully for any sign made this way. Presently I came across a mark which I suspected. It was only a few steps beyond the last mark on the wall. It was a sort of drag of the foot, where there was any slight accumulation of dust, or rubbish, or sand. There were more such traces ahead. So motioning to the others to keep back, I followed them up, taking care not to disturb any of them. They were but the rough marks made during a stumbling progress; and for a time I was baffled; though I could distinguish the traces of Marjory's little feet amongst the great ones. Then I went back and looked at them afresh from the beginning, and a light burst upon me. They were made with the right or left foot as required; thus she could reproduce the bi-literal symbol. Interpretation was now easy enough, and hence on, to the exit from the tunnel, I could tell almost every word written. There being only a few cases where the sign was not sufficiently marked for me to read it.

"Suspicious. Hands tied — gagged — find Seagull — find Manse."

It was sadly slow work, and my heart at times sank within me at the exasperating delay in our progress. However, it was progress after all; and that sustained us. All along, as we worked our way towards the monument, I had been thinking of the word "manse;" and now its repetition showed its importance. It would be necessary that the abductors have some place in which to conceal their captive, before they should be able to get her out of the country. That this latter would be a necessary step towards their object was manifest; but the word *Seagull* settled it.

When we got to the entrance of the tunnel we examined every inch of the way; this was the wish of the detective rather than my own. Marjory would, it seemed to me, go quietly through the entrance. She would know that she was being watched here with extra carefulness; and would reserve herself for a less suspicious opportunity. She would also know that if I were on her track at all, I would be able to follow through the secret entrance.

Outside, on the ground beside the monument, were no unusual signs of passage. The patch of bare earth and gravel, which we had before noticed, left no trace of footsteps. Those who had used it had evidently taken care that there should be no sign. We went slowly along the route, which, by my former experiments with the thread, I had found was habitually used. Presently one of the Americans asked me to stop, as he had seen a trace of feet. For my life I could distinguish nothing in the seemingly undisturbed mass of pine needles. But the man, who in his youth had been in Indian country, had learned something of tracking; he could interpret signs unseen to others with less highly developed instincts. He went down on his knees and examined the ground, inch by inch, using a microscope. For some ten yards he crawled along on hands and knees engaged in this way. Then he stood up and said:

“There’s no error about it now. There are six men and a woman. They have been carrying her, and have let her down here!” We did not challenge his report, or even ask how he had arrived at it; we were all well content to accept it.

We then moved on in the manifest direction in which the ground trended; we were working towards the high road which ran past the gates of Crom. I asked the others to let me go first now, for I knew this would be Marjory's chance to continue her warning. Surely enough, I saw presently a slight disturbance in the pine needles, and then another and another. I spelled out the word "Manse" and again "Manse" and later on "try all Manses near." Then the sign writing ceased; we had come out of the wood on to a grass field which ran down to the high road. Here, outside a gap at the bottom of the field, were the marks in the dust of several feet, the treading of horses, and the ruts of wheels. A little further on, the wheel marks — some four-wheeled vehicle — were heavy; and from the backward propulsion of the dust and gravel in the hoof-tracks we could easily see that the horses were galloping.

We stopped and held a council of war. It was, of course understood by us all that some one should follow on the track of the carriage, and try to reach the quarry this way. For my own part, I felt that to depend on a wheel mark, in such a country of cross roads, was only the off chance. In any case, this stern chase must be a long one; whereas time was vital, every moment being precious. I determined to try to follow out Marjory's clue. "Try every Manse near." To do this we should get to some centre where we could obtain a list of all the churches in the neighbourhood. Ellon was naturally the place, as it was in the centre of the district. They all acquiesced in my view; so we hurried back to Crom, leaving two men, the tracker and another, to follow the fugitives. Hitherto Don Bernardino had hardly said a word. He was alert, and the eager light of his eye was helpful; but after he had shown us the secret way, and found that already I knew the outer passage as well as he did, or better, he had contented himself with watchfulness. Now he suggested:

“There is also the boat! May it not be well that some one should follow up that side of the matter? Thus we shall be doubly armed.”

His advice commended itself to the chief of the detectives; though I could see that he took it suspiciously from the Spaniard. It was with manifest purpose of caution that he answered:

“Quite right! But that we shall see to ourselves; when Mr. Adams comes he will work that racket!” The Spaniard bowed, and the American returned the courtesy with a stiff back. Even in such a time of stress, racial matters were not to be altogether forgotten.

In the hall at Crom, we found, when we came back through the old chapel, Sam Adams. He had arrived just after we had set out on our search, but was afraid to follow over-ground lest he should miss us; wisely he did not attempt the underground way as he had no proper light. His coming had been a great comfort to Mrs. Jack, who, always glad to see a countryman of her own, now almost clung to him. He had brought with him two young men, the very sight of whom made my heart warmer. One of them he introduced as “Lootenant Jackson of West Point” and the other as “Lootenant Montgomery of Annapolis.” “These boys are all right!” he added, laying a hand affectionately on the shoulder of each.

“I am sure they are! Gentlemen, I thank you with all my heart for coming!” I said as I wrung their hands. They were both fine specimens of the two war Academies of the United States. Clean-built from top to toe; bright-eyed, resolute and alert; the very type of highly bred and trained gentlemen. The young soldier Jackson answered me:

“I was too delighted to come, when Adams was good enough to get leave for me.”

“Me too!” echoed the sailor “When I heard that Miss Drake was in trouble, and I was told I might come, I think I danced. Why, Sir, if you want them, we’ve only to pass the word, and we can get you a man of war’s crew — if every man of them has to desert!”

Whilst we were speaking there was a sound of rapid wheels, and a carriage from Ellon drew up at the door. Out jumped Cathcart, followed by a tall, resolute looking young man who moved with the freedom of an athlete.

“Am I in time?” was Cathcart’s greeting as he rushed towards me. I told him exactly how we stood. “Thank God!” he said fervently “we may be in time yet.” Then he introduced his friend MacRae of Strathspiel. This was the host with whom he had been staying; and who had volunteered to come, on hearing of his summons:

“You may trust Donald!” was his simple evidence of the worth of his friend.

This addition to our forces gave us great hope. We had now a sufficiency of intelligent, resolute men to follow up several clues at once; and in a brief council we marked out the various duties of each. Cathcart was to go to Ellon and get a list of all the manses in the region of Buchan, and try to find out if any of them had been let to strangers. We took it for granted that none of the clergy of the place were themselves concerned in the plot. MacRae was to go with Cathcart and to get all the saddle horses he could without attracting public attention, and bring them, or have them brought, to Crom as soon as possible. Secrecy of movement was insisted on with almost agonised fervour by Adams and the Secret Service men. “You don’t know these wretches,” said the chief of the latter “They are the most remorseless and cruel villains in the world; and if they are driven to bay will do anything however cruel or base. They are well plucked too, and don't know what fear means. They will take any chances, and do anything to get their way and protect themselves. If we don't go right in this matter, we may regret it to the last of our days."

The silence in the room was only broken by the grinding of teeth, and by Mrs. Jack's suppressed sobs.

Adams was to go to Aberdeen as a working centre, and was to look after the nautical side of the adventure; he was to have Montgomery in this work with him. Before he left Crom, he wrote some cipher telegrams to the Embassy. He explained to me that one of his suggestions was that an American war-ship which was cruising in the North Sea should, if possible, be allowed to lie off the coast of Aberdeen ready for any emergency. When Montgomery heard it, he asked that if possible a message should be sent from him to the first officer of the *Keystone*: "Tell the men privately that they are helping Marjory Drake! — There will be a thousand pair of eyes on the watch then!" he added by way of explanation.

I was to wait with the detectives till we should get word from any of our sources as to what could be done.

For there were several possibilities. The trackers might mark down the locality where the prisoner was hidden. Cathcart might, before this, come with the list of manses and their occupants. Adams or Montgomery might get wind of the *Seagull*; for Montgomery had already orders to go to Petershead and Fraserburgh, where the smacks for the summer fishing were gathered.

Don Bernardino remained with me at Crom.

CHAPTER XLV. DANGER

The time of waiting was inconceivably long and dreary. When Marjory and I had been waiting for death in the water-cave, we thought that nothing could be so protracted; but now I knew better. Then, we had been together, and whatever came, even death itself, would be shared by us. But now I was alone; and Marjory away, and in danger. In what danger I knew not, I could only imagine; and at every new thought of fear and horror I ground my teeth afresh and longed for action. Fortunately there was something to do. The detectives wanted to know all I could tell them. At the first, the chief had asked that Mrs. Jack would get all the servants of the house together so that he might see them. She had so arranged matters that they would be together in the servants' hall, and he went down to inspect. He did not stay long; but came back to me at once with an important look on his face. He closed the door and coming close to me said:

"I knew there was something wrong below stairs! That footman has skipped!" For a few seconds I did not realise what he meant, and asked him to explain.

"That footman that went out gallavantin' at nights. He's in it, sure. Why isn't he in the hall where the others are? Just you ask the old lady about him. It'll be less suspicious than me doing it." Then it dawned on me what he meant.

"There is no footman in the house!" I said.

"That's so, Mister. That's just what I'm tellin'! Where is he?"

"There is none; they don't have any male servants in the house. The only men are in the stables in the village."

"Then that makes it worse still. There is a man who I've seen myself steal out of the house after dark, or in the dusk; and sneak back again out of the wood in the grey of the dawn. Why, I've reported it to Mr. Adams. Didn't he warn you about it; he said he would."

"He did that."

"And didn't you take his tip?"

"No!" here from the annoyed expression of his face I took warning. It would never do to chagrin the man and set him against me by any suspicion of ridicule. So I went on:

"The fact is, my friend, that this was a disguise. It was Mar — Miss Drake who used it!" He was veritably surprised; his amazement was manifest in his words:

"Miss Drake! And did she put on the John Thomas livery? In the name of thunder, why?"

"To escape you!"

"To escape me! Wall, I'm damned! That elegant young lady to put on livery; and to escape me!"

"Yes; you and the others. She knew you were watching her! Of course she was grateful for it!" I added, for his face fell "but she couldn't bear it all the same. You know what girls are," I went on apologetically, "They don't like to be cornered or forced to do anything. She knew you were all clever fellows at your work and didn't take any chances." I was trying to conciliate him; but I need not have feared. He was of the right sort. He broke into a laugh, slapping his thigh loudly with his open hand as he said heartily:

"Well, that girl's a daisy! she's a peach; she's "It"! To think of her walking out under our noses, and us not having an idea that it might be her, just because we didn't think she'd condescend to put on the breeches — and the footman's at that. Well, it's a pity we didn't get on to her curves; for it might have been different! Never mind! We'll take her out of her trouble before long; and Mr. Whisky Tommy and his push will have to look out for their skins!"

This little episode passed some of the time; but the reaction to the dreary waiting was worse than ever. As I began again an endless chain of surmises and misgivings, it occurred to me that Don Bernardino might be made of some use. The blackmailers had evidently watched him; it might be that they would watch him again. If so, he could be the means of a trap being laid. I turned the matter over in my mind, but at present could see no way to realise the idea. It gave me another thought, however. The Don had been very noble in his attitude to me; and I might repay some of his goodness. Although he was so quiet and silent, I knew well that he must be full of his own anxiety regarding the treasure, now exposed as it might be to other eyes than his own. I could ask him to go to see after it. With some diffidence I broached the matter to him, for I did not want in any way to wound him. Since I had determined to relinquish the treasure if necessary, I was loth to make the doing so seem like an ungracious act. At first he almost took offence, reminding me with overt haughtiness that he had already assured me that all the treasures of Spain or of the Popedom were secondary to a woman's honour. I liked him all the better for his attitude; and tried to persuade him that it was his duty to guard this trust, as otherwise it might fall into bad hands. Then a brilliant idea struck me, one which at once met the case and made the possibility of a trap. I told him that as the blackmailers had watched him once they might have done so again, and have even followed him to my house. As I was speaking, the thought struck me of how well Providence arranges all for the best. If

Don Bernardino had not taken from the library the typescript of the secret writing, it might have fallen into the hands of the gang. When I mentioned the idea to him he said in surprise:

"But I did not take the papers! I read them on the table; but did not think of moving them. Why, had I done so, I should have at once made suspicion; and it was my purpose to keep the secret if I could." An idea struck me and I ran over to the table to look where the papers usually were.

There was not a sign of them about. Somebody had secured them; it could hardly have been Marjory who lacked any possible motive for doing so. The Spaniard, eagerly following my face, saw the amazement which I felt; he cried out:

"Then they have taken them. The treasure may yet prove a lure through which we may catch them. If it be that they have followed me to your house, and if they have any suspicions that came to me on reading that paper, then they will surely make some attempt." If anything were to be tried on this line, there was no time to lose. I had to carry out the matter privately; for on mentioning to Don Bernardino that I should ask one of the detectives to go with him, he at once drew back.

"No!" he said, "I have no right to imperil further this trust. The discovery was yours, and you knew of the hiding place before I did; but I could not with my consent allow any other person to know the secret. Moreover, these men are enemies of my country; and it is not well that they should know, lest they should use their knowledge for their country's aid. You and I, Senor, are *caballero*. To us there is, somewhere, a high rule of honour; but to these people there is only law!"

"Well," I said, "if you are going, you had better lose no time.

These people have had nearly six hours already; I left the house with Mrs. Jack a little after ten. But you had better go carefully. The men are desperate; and if they find you alone, you may have a bad time."

For answer he pulled a revolver from his pocket. "Since yesterday," he said, "I go armed, till these unhappy businesses are all over!"

I then told him of the entrance to the caves, and gave him the key of the cellar. "Be sure you have light." I cautioned him "Plenty of light and matches. It will be towards low water when you get there. The rope which we used as a clue is still in its place; we did not take it away." I could see that this thought was a new source of anxiety to him; if the gang were before him it would have served to lead them to the treasure itself. As he was going, I bade him remember that if there was any sign of the men about, he was to return at once or send us word, so that we could come and catch them like rats in a trap. In any case he was to send us word, so that we might have knowledge of his movements, and inferentially of those of our enemies. In such a struggle as ours, knowledge was everything.

Not long after he had gone, Cathcart and MacRae arrived on horseback. They said there were three other saddle horses coming after them. Cathcart had a list of all the churches, and the manses of all the clergy of all shades of doctrine, in Buchan; and a pretty formidable list it made. He had also a map of Aberdeen County, and a list of such houses as had been let for the summer or at any period during it. Such was of course only an agent's list, and would not contain every letting privately.

We set to work at once with the map and the lists; and soon marked the names which were likely to be of any use to us, those which had at any time lately been let to strangers. Then Cathcart and

Gordon and all the detectives, except the chief, went off on horseback with a list of places to visit. They were all to return to report as soon as possible. The chief kept tab of the places to be visited by each. When the rest had gone, I asked him if he knew where any of those supposed to be of the gang lived in the neighbourhood. He said he felt awkward in answering the question, and he certainly looked it. "The fact is," he said sheepishly, "since that young lady kicked those names on the dirt, and so into my thick head, I know pretty well who they are. Had I known before, I could easily have got those who could identify them; for I never saw them myself. I take it that 'Feathers' is none other than Featherstone who was with Whisky Tommy — which was Tom Mason — in the A. T. Stewart ransom case. If those two are in it, most likely the one they called the 'Dago' is a half-bred Spaniard that comes from somewheres over here. That Max that she named, if he's the same man, is a Dutchman; he's about the worst of the bunch. Then for this game there's likely to be two Chicago bums from the Levee, way-down politicians and heelers. It's possible that there are two more; a man from Frisco that they call Sailor Ben — what they call a cosmopolite for he doesn't come from nowhere in particular; and a buck nigger from Noo Orleans. A real bad 'un he is; of all the.... But I hope he isn't in the gang. If he is, we haven't no time to lose."

His words made my blood run cold. Was this the crowd, within whose danger I had consented that Marjory should stand. The worst kind of scoundrels from all over the earth. Oh! what it was to be powerless, and to know that she was in their hands. It took me all my strength of purpose not to weep, out of very despair. I think the detective must have wished to cheer me a little, for he went on:

"Of course it's not their game to do her any harm, or let harm come to her. She's worth too many millions, alive and unharmed, for them to spoil their market by any foolishness. It's here that I trust Whisky Tommy to keep the rest straight. I suppose you know, Sir, that criminals always work in the same way every time. We know that when the Judge wouldn't pay up for old A. T., Featherstone threatened to burn up the stiff; but Whisky Tommy knew better than to kill the golden goose like that. Why he went and stole it from Featherstone and hid it somewhere about Trenton till the old lady coughed up about twenty-five thousand. Tommy's head's level; and if that black devil isn't in the squeeze, he'll keep them up to the collar every time."

"Who is the negro?" I asked, for I wanted to know the worst. "What has he done?"

"What hasn't he done that's vile, is what I'd like to know. They're a hard crowd in the darkey side of Noo Orleans; and a man doesn't get a bad name there easily, I tell you. There are dens there that'd make God Almighty blush, or the Devil either; a darkey that is bred in them and gets to the top of the push, doesn't stick at no trifles!

"But you be easy in your mind as yet, Sir; at present there's naught to fear. But if once they get safe away, they will try to put the screw on. God knows then what may happen. In the meantime, the only fear is lest, if they're in a tight place, they may kill her!"

My heart turned to ice at his words. What horrible possibilities were there, when death for my darling was the "only" fear. It was in a faint enough voice I asked him:

"Would they really kill her?"

"Of course they would; if it was their best course. But don't you be downhearted, Sir. There's not much fear of killing — as yet at all events. These men are out for dough; and for a good heap of it, too.

They’re not going to throw away a chance till the game’s up. If we get on to their curves quick, they’ll have to think of their own skins. It’s only when all’s up that they’ll act; when they themselves must croak if she doesn’t!”

Oh! if I had known! If I had had any suspicion of the dangerous nature of the game we were playing — that I had consented that Marjory should play — I’d have cut my tongue out before I’d have agreed. I might have known that a great nation like the United States would not have concerned itself as to any danger to an individual, unless there had been good cause. Oh fool! fool! that I had been!

If I had been able to do anything, it might not have been so bad. It was necessary, however, that I should be at the very heart and centre of action; for I alone knew the different ramifications of things, and there was always something cropping up of which I had better knowledge than the others. And so I had to wait in what patience I could pray for. Patience and coolness of head were what were demanded of me for the present. Later on, the time might come when there would be action; and I never doubted that when that time did come it would not find me wanting — even in the issues of life and death.

CHAPTER XLVI. ARDIFFERY MANSE

In the dreary time of waiting I talked with the detective chief. Everything which he told me seemed to torture me; but there was a weird fascination in his experience as it bore on our own matter. I was face to face, for the first time in my life, with that callousness which is the outcome of the hard side of the wicked world. Criminal-hunters, as well as criminals, achieve it; so I suppose do all whose fortunes bring them against the sterner sides of life. Now and again it amazed me to hear this man, unmistakably a good fellow and an upright one, weighing up crime and criminals in a matter-of-fact way, without malice, without anger, without vindictiveness. He did seem to exercise in his habitual thought of his *clientele* that constructive condemnation which sways the rest of us in matters of moral judgment. The whole of his work, and attitude, and purpose, seemed to be only integral parts of a game which was being played. At that time I thought light of this, and consequently of him; but looking back, with judgment in better perspective, I am able to realise the value of just such things. There was certainly more chance of cooler thought and better judgment under these conditions, than when the ordinary passions and motives of human life held sway. This man did not seem to be chagrined, or put out personally in any way, by the failure of his task, or to have any rancour, from this cause, in his heart for those to whom the failure was due. On the contrary, he, like a good sportsman, valued his opponent more on account of the cleverness which had baffled him. I imagined that at first he would have been angry when he learned how all the time in which he and his companions had been watching Crom Castle, and were exulting in the security which their presence caused, their enemies had been coming and going as they wished by a safe way, unknown; and had themselves been the watchers. But there was nothing of the kind; I really believe that, leaving out of course the possibly terrible consequences of his failure, he enjoyed the defeat which had come to him. In his own way he put it cleverly:

"Those ducks knew their work well. I tell you this, in spite of the softies we have been, it isn't easy to play any of us for a sucker. Just fancy! the lot of us on sentry-go day and night round the castle, for, mind you, we never neglected the job for one half hour; and all the time, three lots of people — this push, you and the girl, and this Dago lord of yours — all going and coming like rabbits in a warren. What puzzles me is how you and Miss Drake managed to escape the observation of Whisky Tommy's lot, even if you went through us!"

It had been after five o'clock when the party set out to visit the manses; at six o'clock the reports began to come in. The first was a message scribbled on a leaf torn from a note book, and sent in one of the envelopes taken for the purpose.

"All right at Auquharney." From this on, messengers kept arriving, some on foot, some on horseback, some in carts: but each bearing a similar message, though couched in different terms. They came from Auchlenchries, Heila, Mulonachie, Ardendraught, Inverquohomery, Skelmuir, and Auchorachan. At nine o'clock the first of the searchers returned. This was Donald MacRae; knowing the country he had been able to get about quicker than any of the others who had to keep to the main roads. His report was altogether satisfactory; he had been to six places, and in each of them there was no ground for even suspicion.

It was nearly three hours before the rest were in, but all with the same story; in none of the manses let to visitors through an agent, and in none if occupied by their incumbents, could the fugitives have hidden. The last to come in were the two trackers, disappointed and weary. They had lost the track several times; but had found it again on some cross road. They had finally lost it in a dusty road near Ardiffery and had only given up when the light had altogether gone. They themselves thought their loss was final, for they could not take up the track within a quarter of a mile of either side of the spot where they had lost it.

It was now too late to do anything more for this night; so, after a meal, all the men, except one who remained on watch, went to sleep for a few hours. We must start again before dawn. For myself I could not rest; I should have gone mad, I think, if I had to remain the night without doing something. So I determined to wheel over to Whinnyfold and see how Don Bernardino had progressed. I was anxious, as I had not heard from him.

At Whinnyfold all was still, and there was no sign of light in the house. I had brought with me the duplicate key which I had given to Marjory, and which Mrs. Jack found for me on her dressing table; but when I inserted it, it would not turn. It was a Yale lock; and it was not likely that it should have got out of order without the use of some force or clumsiness. I put it down in the first instance to the inexperience of the Don in such mechanism. Anyhow, there was nothing to be done as to entry by that way, so I went round to the back to see if I could make an entry there. It was all safe, however; I had taken care to fasten every door and window on the previous night. As the front door was closed to me, it was only by force that I could effect entrance to my own house. I knocked softly at the door, and then louder; I thought perhaps, for some reason to be explained, the Don had remained in the house and might now be asleep. There was no sound, however, and I began to have grave doubts in my own mind as to whether something serious might have happened. If so, there was no time to lose. Anything having gone wrong meant that the blackmailers had been there. If I had to break open the door I might as well do it myself; for if I should get help from the village, discussion and gossip would at once begin, if only from the fact that I could not wait till morning.

I got a scaffold pole from the yard where some of the builder's material still remained, and managed by raising it on my shoulder and making a quick run forward to strike the door with it just over the lock. The blow was most efficacious; the door flew open so quickly that the handle broke against the wall of the passage. For a few seconds I paused, looking carefully round to see if the sound had brought any one to the spot; but all was still. Then carefully, and with my revolver ready in my right hand and the lamp of my bicycle in my left, I entered the house.

A glance into each of the two sitting-rooms of the ground floor showed me that there was no one there; so I closed the hall-door again, and propped it shut with the scaffold pole. Quickly I ran over the house from top to bottom, looking into every room and space where anyone could hide. The cellar door was locked. It was odd indeed; there was not a sign of Don Bernardino anywhere. With a sudden suspicion I turned into the dining-room and looked on the table, where the several caskets which we had taken from the cave had lain.

There was not a sign of them! Some one had carried them off.

For a while I thought it must have been Don Bernardino. There came back to me very vividly the conversation which we had had in that very room only a day before; I seemed to see the red light of his eyes blaze again, as when he had told me that he would not stop at anything to gain possession of the treasure. It must have been, that when he found himself in possession, the desire overcame him to take away the treasure to where he could himself control it.

But this belief was only momentary. Hard upon its heels came the remembrance of his noble attitude when I had come to ask his help for a woman in distress — I who had refused his own appeal to my chivalry only a few hours before. No! I would not believe that he could act so now. In strength of my belief I spoke aloud: "No! I will not believe it!"

Was it an echo to my words? or was it some mysterious sound from the sea beneath? Sound there certainly was, a hollow, feeble sound that seemed to come from anywhere, or nowhere. I could not locate it at all. There was but one part of the house unsearched, so I got a great piece of wood and broke open the door of the cellar. There was no one in it, but the square hole in the centre of it seemed like a mystery itself. I listened a moment; and the hollow sound came again, this time through the hole.

There was some one in the cave below, and the sound was a groan.

I lit a torch and leaning over the hole looked down. The floor below was covered with water, but it was only a few inches deep and out of it came the face of the Spaniard, looking strangely white despite its natural swarthiness. I called to him. He evidently heard me, for he tried to answer; but I could distinguish nothing, I could only hear a groan of agony. I rigged up the windlass, and taking with me a spare piece of rope lowered myself into the cave. I found Don Bernardino just conscious; he was unable, seemingly, to either understand my questions or to make articulate reply. I tied the spare rope round him, there being no time or opportunity to examine him as he lay in the water, and taking the spare end with me pulled myself up again. Then, putting the rope to which he was attached on the windlass, I easily drew him up to the cellar.

A short time sufficed to give him some brandy, and to undress him and wrap him in rugs. He shivered at first, but the warmth soon began to affect him. He got drowsy, and seemed all at once to drop asleep. I lit a fire and made some tea and got provisions ready. In less than half an hour he awoke, refreshed and quite coherent. Then he told me all that had passed. He had opened the door without trouble, and had looked into the dining-room where he found the caskets still on the table. He did not think of searching the house. He got a light and went into the cellar, leaving the door open, and set about examining the winch, so as to know the mechanism sufficiently well as to be able to raise and lower himself. Whilst stooping over the hole, he got a violent blow on the back of the head which deprived him of his senses. When he became conscious again there were four men in the cellar, all masked. He himself was tied up with ropes and gagged. The men lowered each other till only one remained on guard. He heard them calling to each other. After a long wait they had come back, all of them carrying heavy burdens which they began to haul up by the windlass. He said that it creaked loudly with the weight as they worked it. He had the unutterable chagrin of seeing them pack up in sacks and bags, extemporised from the material in the house, the bullion of the treasure which his ancestor had undertaken to guard, and to which he had committed his descendants until the trust should have been fulfilled. When all was ready for departure — which was not for many hours, and when two of the men had returned with a cart of some sort, whose wheels he heard rumbling

— they consulted as to what they should do with him. There was no disguise made of their intent; all was spoken in his hearing with the most brutal frankness. One man, whom he described as with grey lips of terrific thickness, and whose hands were black, was for knifing him at once or cutting his throat, and announced his own readiness to do the job. He was overruled, however, by another, presumably the leader of the gang, who said there was no use taking extra risks. "Let us put him into the cave," he said. "He may break his neck; but anyhow it does not matter for the tide is rising fast and if anyone should come they will find that he met his death by an accident."

This suggestion was carried out; he was, after the ropes and gag were removed with the utmost care but with the utmost brutality, lowered into the cave. He remembered no more till the deadly silence around him was broken by the sound, seemingly far away, of a heavy blow on wood which reverberated.

I examined him all over carefully, but could find no definite harm done to him. This knowledge in itself cheered him up, and his strength and nerve began to come back; with his strength came determination. He could, however, tell me nothing of the men who had attacked him. He said he would know their voices again, but, what with their masks and his cramped position, he could not see enough to distinguish anything.

Whilst he was recovering himself I looked carefully round the room and house. From the marks at one of the windows at the back I gathered that this was the means by which they had gained admission. They were expert housebreakers; and as I gathered from the detective that Whisky Tommy was a bank burglar — most scientific and difficult of all criminal trades, except perhaps, banknote forgery — I was not surprised that they had been able to gain admittance. None of the jewels which Marjory and I had taken from the cave were left behind. The robbers had evidently made accurate search; even the rubies, which I had left in the pocket of the shooting-coat which I had worn in the cave, had disappeared.

One thing I gathered from their visit; they evidently felt secure as to themselves. They dared not risk so long delay had not their preparations been complete; and they must have been satisfied as to the mechanism of their escape since they could burden themselves with such weight of treasure. Moreover, their hiding place, wherever it was, could not be far off. There were engaged in this job four men; besides, there were probably watchers. Marjory had only recorded in her cipher six engaged in her abduction, when presumably their full strength would have been needed in case of unexpected difficulties or obstacles. The Secret Service chief presumed at least eight. I determined, therefore, that I would get back to Crom as soon as possible, and, with the aid of this new light, consult as to what was best to be done. I wanted to take Don Bernardino with me, or to try to get a trap to take him on; but he said he would be better remaining where he was. “I can be of no use to any one till I get over this shock,” he said. “The rest here, if I remain longer, will do me good; and in the morning I may be able to help.” I asked him if he was not afraid to be left alone in his present helpless condition: His reply showed great common sense:

“The only people whom I have to fear are the last who will come to this place!”

I made him as comfortable as I could, and fixed the catch of the door so that the lock would snap behind me. Then I got on my bicycle and rode to Crom as quickly as I could. As it was now nearly

early morning the men were getting ready for their day's work. Cathcart and I discussed the new development with the detective chief. I did not tell him of the treasure. It was gone; and all I could do was to spare the Spaniard's feelings. It was enough that they knew of the attack on Don Bernardino, and that they had taken from my house whatever was of value in it. As I went over the practical side of the work before us, I had an idea. It was evident that these men had some secret hiding place not far away; why should it not be an empty house? I made the suggestion to my two companions, who agreed with me that we should at once make search for such a place. Accordingly we arranged that one man of the force should go into Ellon, as soon as it was possible to find any one up, and another into Aberdeen to try to find out from various agents what houses in the district were at present unoccupied. In the meantime I looked over the list of Manses and found that there were two which were open for letting, but had not yet been occupied, Aucheries and Ardiffery. We determined to visit the latter first, as it was nearer, amid a network of cross roads on the high road to Fraserburgh. When we were arranging plans of movement, the two trackers who wanted to resume their work said that we might put them down on our way, as the spot they aimed for lay in the same direction. We left two men behind; the rest of us kept together.

As we drove along in the brake, the trackers showed us how they had followed the carriage. It brought an agonising hope to me to think that we were actually travelling on the same road as Marjory had gone. I had a secret conviction that we were going right. Something within me told me so. I had in former days — days that now seemed so long ago — when I realised that I had the Second Sight, come to have such confidence in my own intuition that now something of the same feeling came back to me as a reality. Oh! how I longed that the mysterious gift might now be used on behalf of her I loved. What would I not have given for one such glimpse of her in her present situation, as I had before seen of Lauchlane Macleod, or of the spirits of the Dead from the Skares. But it is of the essence of such supernatural power that it will not work to command, to present need, to the voice of suffering or of prayer; but only in such mysterious way and time as none can predicate. Whilst I thought thus, and hoped thus, and prayed with all the intensity of my poor breaking heart, I seemed to feel in me something of the mood in which the previous visions had come. I became lost to all surroundings; and it was with surprise that I became conscious that the carriage had stopped and that the trackers were getting off. We arranged with them that after our visit to the Manse at Ardiffery we should return for them, or to see how they had got on with their task. They were not hopeful of following a two-day-old trail of a carriage on these dusty roads.

The cross road to Ardiffery branched off to our left, and then to the left again; so that when we came near the place, we were still within easy distance, as the crow flies, from where we had left our men.

The Manse at Ardiffery is a lonely spot, close to the church, but quite away from the little clachan. The church stands in its own graveyard, in a hollow surrounded with a wall of considerable dimensions. The garden and policies of the house seem as though carved out of the woodland growth. There is a narrow iron gate, sheer in the roadway, and a straight path up to the front of the house; one arm branches to the right in a curved lane-way through fir trees leading to the stable and farm offices at the back of the house. At the gateway was a board with a printed notice that the house, with grounds, gardens and policies, was to be let until Christmas. The key could be had from, and details supplied by, Mrs. MacFie, merchant at the Ardiffery cross roads. The whole place had a deserted air; weeds were growing everywhere, and, even from the roadway, one could see that the windows were fouled from disuse.

As we drew near, the odd feeling of satisfaction — I can hardly describe it more fully — seemed to grow in me. I was not exultant, I was scarcely hopeful; but somehow the veil seemed to be lifting from my soul. We left the brake on the road, and went up the little avenue to the front of the house. For form's sake we knocked, though we knew well that if those we sought should be within there would be little chance of their responding to our call. We left one man at the door, in case by any chance any one should come; the rest of us took the other way round to the back of the house. We had got about half way along it, where there was an opening into the fields, when the detective chief who was in front of us held up his hand to stop. I saw at a glance what had struck him.

Whilst the rest of the rough roadway was unkempt and weed-grown, the gravel from this on, to the back of the house, had been lately raked.

"Why?"

The only answer to the unspoken query of each of us was that Marjory had made some marks, intentionally or unintentionally — or some one had; and the gang had tried to efface them.

Fools! their very effort to obliterate their trace was a help to us.

CHAPTER XLVII. THE DUMB CAN SPEAK

The Secret Service men spread round the house, moving off silently right and left, in accordance with the nods of their chief in answer to their looks of query. As they moved, keeping instinctively in shelter from any possible view from the house so far as the ground afforded opportunity, I could see that each felt that his gun was in its place. They all knew the gang they had to deal with, and they were not going to take any chances. MacRae said to me:

"I'll go and get the key! I know this country better than any of you; I can run over to the cross roads in a few minutes and it will be less marked than driving there." As he went out at the gate he told the driver to pull down the road, till the curve shut him out of sight. Whilst he was gone, the men surrounded the house, keeping guard at such points that nothing coming from it could escape our notice. The chief tried the back door but it was shut; from its rigidity it was manifestly bolted top and bottom.

In less than a quarter of an hour MacRae returned and told us that Mrs. MacFie was coming with the key as quickly as she could. He offered to take it, telling her who he was; but she said she would come herself and make her service, as it would not be respectful to him and the other gentlemen to let them go alone. In a few minutes she was with us; the chief detective, Cathcart, and I stayed with MacRae, the rest of the men remaining on watch and hidden. There was a little difficulty with the lock, but we shortly got in, Mrs. MacFie leading the way. Whilst she was opening the shutters of the back room, which was evidently the Minister's study, Cathcart and the chief left the room, and made a hurried, though thorough, search of the house. They came back before the old lady was well through her task, and shook their heads.

When the light was let in, the room presented a scene of considerable disorder. It was evident that it had been lately inhabited, for there were scattered about, a good many things which did not belong to it. These included a washing jug, and a bowl full of dirty water; a rug and pillows on the sofa; and a soiled cup and plate on the table. On the mantlepiece was a guttered out candle. When the old woman saw the state of the room, she lifted her hands in horrified amazement as she spoke:

"Keep's 'a! The tramps must ha' been here. In the Meenester's own study, too! An' turnin' the whole place topsal-teerie. Even his bukes all jumm'lt up thegither. Ma certes! but won't he be upset by yon!"

Whilst she had been speaking, my eyes had been taking in everything. All along one side of the room was a bookcase, rough shelves graduated up in height to suit the various sizes of books. There were in the room more than enough books to fill them; but still some of the shelves towards the right hand end were vacant and a great quantity of books lay on the floor. These were not tumbled about as if thrown down recklessly, but were laid upon the floor in even rows. It looked as if they had been taken down in masses and laid out in the same order as though ready to put back. But the books on the shelves! It was no wonder that the old woman, who did not understand the full meaning, was shocked; for never was seen such seeming disorder in any library. Seldom did a volume of a series seem to be alongside its fellow; even when several were grouped together, the rest of the selection would be missing, or seen in another part of the shelf. Some of the volumes were upside down; others had the fronts turned out instead of the back. Altogether there was such disorder as I had never seen. And yet!...

And yet the whole was planned by a clever and resolute woman, fighting for her life — her honour. Marjory, evidently deprived of any means of writing — there was neither pen nor ink nor pencil in the room — and probably forbidden under hideous threats to leave any message, had yet under the very eyes of her captors left a veritable writing on the wall, full and open for all to read, did they but know how. The arrangement of the books was but another variant of our biliteral cipher. Books as they should be, represented A; all others B. I signed to the man with the notebook, who took down the words wrought in the cipher as I read them off. Oh, how my heart beat with fear and love and pride as I realised in the message of my dear girl the inner purpose of her words:

"To-morrow off north east of Banff *Seagull* to meet whaler *Wilhelmina*. To be Shanghaied — whatever that means. Frightful threats to give me to the negro if any trouble, or letters to friends. Don't fear, dear, shall die first. Have sure means. God with us. Remember the cave. Just heard Gardent—" Here the message ended. The shelf was empty; and the heap of books, from which she had selected so many items, remained as they had been placed ready to her hand. She had been coerced; or else she feared interruption in her task, and did not want to cause suspicion.

Coerced! I felt as though choking!

There was nothing further to be gained here; so we told the old lady that we should write regarding the rental if we decided to take the house. When we went back to our wagonette, we picked up our two trackers — there was no use for them now — and went back to Crom as fast as the horses could gallop. It was necessary that we should arrange from headquarters our future plans; such maps and papers as we had were at Crom, where also any telegrams might await us. In the carriage I asked the detective chief what was meant by ‘Shanghaied’ for it was evidently a criminal class word.

“Don’t you know the word,” he said surprised. “Why I thought every one knew that. It isn’t altogether a criminal class word, for it belongs partly to a class that call themselves traders. The whalers and others do it when they find it hard to get men; as a rule men nowadays don’t like shipping on long whaling voyages. They get such men delivered on board by the crimps, drunk or, more generally, hocussed. Then when they get near a port they make them drunk again, which isn’t much of a job after all, and they don’t make no kick; or if things are serious they hocus them a bit again. So they keep them one way or another out of sight for months or perhaps years. Sometimes, when those that are not too particular want to get rid of an inconvenient relative — or mayhap a witness, or a creditor, or an inconvenient husband — they just square some crimp. When he gets his hooks on the proper party, there ain’t no more jamboree for him, except between the bulwarks, till the time is up, or the money spent, or whatever he is put away for is fixed as they want it.”

This was a new and enlightening horror to me. It opened up fresh possibilities of distress for both Marjory and myself. As I thought of this, I could not but be grateful to Montgomery for his message to the man-of-war’s men. If once they succeeded in getting Marjory on board the *Seagull* we should, in the blindness of our ignorance as to her whereabouts, be powerless to help her. The last word of her message through the books might be a clue. It was some place, and was east of Banff. I got the big map out at once and began to search. Surely enough, there it was. Some seven or eight miles east of Banff was a little port in a land-locked bay called Gardentown. At once I sent off a wire to Adams at Aberdeen, and another to Montgomery to Peterhead on chance that it might reach him even before that which Adams, whom he kept posted as to his every movement, would be sure to send to him! It was above all things necessary that we should locate first the *Seagull* and then the *Wilhelmina*. If we could get hold of either vessel we might frustrate the plans of the miscreants. I asked Adams to have the touching of the *Wilhelmina* at any port telegraphed to him at once from Lloyds.

He was quite awake at his end of the wire; I got back an answer in an incredibly short time:

"*Wilhelmina* left Lerwick for Arctic seas yesterday."

Very shortly afterwards another telegram came from him:

"Montgomery reports *Seagull* fishing this summer at Fraserburgh. Went out with fleet two days ago." Almost immediately after this came a third telegram from him:

"*Keystone* notified. Am coming to join you."

After a consultation we agreed that it was better that some of us should wait at Crom for the arrival of Adams, who had manifestly some additional knowledge. In the meantime we despatched two of the Secret Service men up to the north of Buchan. One was to go to Fraserburgh, and the other to Banff. Both were to follow the cliffs or the shore to Gardentown. On their way they would get a personal survey of the coast and might pick up some information. MacRae went off himself to send a telegram ordering his yacht, which was at Inverness, to be taken to Peterhead, where he would join her. "It may be handy to have her at the mouth of the Firth," he said. "She's a clipper, and if we should want to overhaul the *Seagull* or the *Wilhelmina*, she can easily do it."

It was a long, long wait till Adams arrived. I did not think that a man could endure such misery as I suffered, and live. Every minute, every second, was filled with some vague terror. *Omne ignotum pro mirifico.* When Fear and Fancy join hands, there is surely woe and pain to some poor human soul.

When Adams at last arrived he had much to tell; but it was the amplification of what we had heard, rather than fresh news. The U. S. cruiser *Keystone* had been reached from Hamburgh, and was now on her way to a point outside the three-mile limit off Peterhead; and a private watch had been set on every port and harbour between Wick and Aberdeen. The American Embassy was doing its work quietly as befits such an arm of the State; but its eyes and ears were open, and I had no doubts its pockets, too. Its hand was open now; but it would close, did there be need.

When Adams learned our purpose he became elated. He came over to me and laid his hand tenderly on my shoulder as he said:

"I know how it is with you, old fellow; a man don't want more than two eyes for that. But there's a many men would give all they have to stand in your shoes, for all you suffer. Cheer up! At the worst now it's her death! For myself I feared at first there might be worse; but it's plain to me that Miss Drake is up to everything and ready for everything. My! but she's a noble girl! If anything goes wrong with her there's going to be some scrapping round before the thing's evened up!" He then went on to tell me that Montgomery would be joined at Peterhead by two other naval fellows who were qualified in all ways to do whatever might be required. "Those boys won't stop at much, I can tell you," he said. "They're full of sand, the lot; and I guess that when this thing is over, it won't harm them at Washington to know that they've done men's work of one kind or another."

It was comfort to me to hear him talk. Sam Adams knew what he meant, when he wanted to help a friend; thinking it all over I don't see what better he could have said to me — things being as they were. He went back to Aberdeen to look out for news or instructions, but was to join us later at Banff.

We left two men at Crom; one to be always on the spot, and the other to be free to move about and send telegrams, etc. Then the rest of us drove over to Fyvie and caught the train to Macduff.

When we arrived we sent one man in the hotel in Banff in case we should want to communicate, and the rest of us drove over in a carriage to Gardentown. It is a lovely coast, this between Banff and Gardentown, but we should have preferred it to be less picturesque and more easy to watch.

When our man met us, which he did with exceeding caution, he at once began:

"They've got off, some of them; but I think the rest of the gang's ashore still. That's why I'm so particular; they may be watchin' us now for all I can tell." Then he proceeded to give us all the information he had gleaned.

"The *Seagull* was here until yesterday when she went out into the Firth to run down to Fifeshire, as the fish were reported going south. She had more than her complement of men, and her skipper volunteered the information that two of them were friends whom they were taking to join their own boat which was waiting for them at Burnt Island. From all accounts I gather," he went on, "that they wasn't anything extra high-toned. Most of them were drunk or getting a jag on them; and it took the two sober ones and the Skipper to keep them in order. The Skipper was mighty angry; he seemed somehow ashamed of them, and hurried out of port as quick as he could when he made his mind up. They say he swore at them frightful; though that was not to be wondered at when he himself had to help bring the nets on board. One of the men on the quay told me that he said if that was the effect on his men of waiting round for weeks doing nothing, he would see that another time their double-dashed noses were kept to the grindstone. I've been thinking since I heard of the trouble they had in carrying on the nets, that there was something under them that they meant to hide. The men here tell me that the hand-barrow they carried would have been a job for six men, not three, for it was piled shoulder high with nets. That's why the skipper was so wrathy with them. They say he's a sort of giant, a Dutchman with an evil, cunning face; and that all the time he was carrying the back handles he never stopped swearing at the two in front, though they was nigh speechless with the effort of carrying, and their faces as red as blazes. If I'm right we've missed them this time. They've got the girl on the fishing boat; and they're off for the whaler. She's the one we'll have to find next!"

As he spoke my heart kept sinking deeper and deeper down. My poor girl, if alive, was in the hands of her enemies. In all the thoughts which filled me with anguish unspeakable there was but one gleam of consolation — the negro was not on board, too. I had come to think of this miscreant as in some way the active principle of whatever evil might be.

Here, we were again at a fault in our pursuit. We must wait for the reports of Montgomery who was making local inquiries. We had wired him to join us, or send us word to Gardentown; and he had replied that he was on the way.

CHAPTER XLVIII. DUNBUY HAVEN

We had to-day been so hot in the immediate pursuit of Marjory that we had hardly been able to think of the other branches of our work; but all at once, the turn of the wheel brought up as the most important matter before us what had been up to now only a collateral. Hitherto the *Seagull* had been our objective; but now it must be the *Wilhelmina*. Adams had been in charge of the general investigation as to these boats, whilst Montgomery had been attending to local matters. It was to the former, therefore, rather than the latter, that we had to look for enlightenment. Montgomery and MacRae were the first to arrive, coming on horseback from Fraserburgh, the former with all the elan and abandonment of a sailor ashore. He was frightfully chagrined when he heard that the *Seagull* had got safely away. “Just like my luck!” he said, “I might have got her in time if I had known enough; but I never even heard of Gardentown till your wire came to me. It isn’t on the map.” He was still full of lamentings, though I could tell from the way he was all nerved and braced up that we should hear of him when the time for action came. When we arrived at the station at Macduff to meet Adams, we hurried him at once into the carriage which we had waiting; he gave us his news as we hurried off to Gardentown. We felt that it might be a mistake our going there, for we should be out of the way of everything; but we had made arrangements for news to be sent there, and it was necessary we should go there before holding our council of war. Adams told us that the whaler *Wilhelmina* had been reported at Lerwick two days ago, but that she had suddenly left on receipt of a telegram, hurrying in the last of her stores at such a rate that some of them had been actually left behind. He had not been able to gain any specific information by wire. The Master of the ship had said to the Harbour Master that he was going to Nova Zembla; but nothing more definite could be obtained.

When we got together in the hotel at Gardentown we were surprised by another arrival; none other than Don Bernardino, who had come by the same train as Adams, but had had to wait to get a carriage. We had got away so quickly that none of us had seen him.

Things were now at such a stage that it would not do to have any concealment whatever; and so after a moment in private with the Don, I told my companions of the attack on the Spaniard in my house, and of the carrying off the great treasure. I did not give any details of the treasure or its purpose; nor did I even mention the trust. This was now the Don's secret, and there was no need to mention it. We all agreed that if we should have any chance at all of finding Marjory, it would be by finding and following the members of the gang left on shore. Sam Adams who was, next to the Secret Service men, the coolest-headed of our party, summed up the situation.

"Those fellows haven't got off yet. It is evident that they only came to look for the treasure after Miss Drake had been shipped off from Gardentown. And I'm pretty sure that they are waiting somewhere round the coast for the *Wilhelmina* to pick them up; or for them to get aboard her somehow. They've got a cartload of stuff at the very least to get away; and you may bet your sweet life that they don't mean to leave it to chance. Moreover, you can't lay your hand at any minute on a whaler ready for shanghaieing any one. This one has been fixed up on purpose, and was waiting up at Lerwick for a long time ready to go when told. I think myself that it's more than likely she has orders to take them off herself, for a fishing smack like the *Seagull* that has to be in and out of these ports all the time, doesn't want to multiply the chances of her discovery. Now that she has done a criminal thing and is pretty sure that it can't be proved against her, she'll take her share of the swag, or whatever was promised her, and clear out. If the *Wilhelmina* has to get off the gang it'll have to be somewhere off this coast. They are nearly all strangers to start with, and wouldn't know where else to go. If they go south they get at once into more thickly peopled shores, where the chances of getting off in secret would be less. They daren't go anywhere along the shore of the Firth, for their ship might be cut off at the mouth, and they might be taken within the three-mile limit and searched. Beyond the Firth they can know nothing. Therefore, we have got to hunt them along this shore; and from the lie of the land I should say that they will try to get off somewhere between Old Slains and Peterhead. And I'll say further that, in-as-much-as the shore dips in between Whinnyfold and Girdleness outside Aberdeen, the ship will prefer to keep up the north side, so that she can beat out to sea at once, when she has got her cargo aboard."

"Sam is about right!" broke in Montgomery "I have been all along the coast since we met, surveying the ground for just this purpose. I tried to put myself in the place of that crowd, and to find a place just such as they would wish. They could get out at Peterhead or at Boddam, and so I have set a watch at these places. Some of our sailors who were sent up to me from London are there now, and I'll stake my word that if the *Wilhelmina* tries to come in to either of these places she won't get out again with Marjory Drake on board. But it's not their game to come near a port. They've got to lie off shore, somewhere agreed on, and take off their friends in a boat. There are dozens of places between Cruden and Peterhead where a boat could lie hidden, and slip out safely enough. When they got aboard they could hoist in the boat or scuttle her; and then, up sails and off before any one was the wiser. What I propose, therefore, is this, for I take it I'm the naval expert here such as it is. We must set a watch along this bit of coast, so as to be ready to jump on them when they start out. We can get the *Keystone* to lie off Buchan; and we can signal her when we get sign of our lot. She'll be well on the outside, and these scallywags don't know that she'll be there to watch them. When the time comes, she'll crowd them into shore; and we'll be ready for them there. If she can hunt the *Wilhelmina* into the Firth it will be easy enough to get her. "Fighting Dick" Morgan isn't a man to stand on ceremony; and you can bet your bottom dollar that if he gets a sight of the Dutchman he'll pretty well see that she hasn't any citizen of the United States aboard against her will. Dick wouldn't mind the people in Washington much, and he'd take on the Dutch to-morrow as well as the Spaniards. Now, if in addition this gentleman's yacht is to the fore, with any one of us here aboard to take responsibility, I guess we can overhaul the whaler without losing time."

"I'll be aboard!" said Donald MacRae quietly. "The *Sporran* is due at Peterhead this afternoon. Just you fit me up with signals so that we'll know what to do when we get word; and I'll see to the rest. My men are of my own clan, and I'll answer for them. They'll not hang back in anything, when I'm in the front of them."

I wrung the hands of the two young fellows. East and West, it was all the same! The old fighting gallantry was in their hearts; and with the instinct of born Captains they were ready to accept all responsibility. All they asked was that their men should follow them.

They immediately sat down to arrange their signals. Montgomery was of course trained in this work, and easily fixed up a simple scheme by which certain orders could be given by either flags, or lights, or rockets. There was not need for much complication; it was understood that when the *Wilhelmina* should be sighted she should be boarded at once, wherever or however she might be. We were, one and all of us, prepared to set at defiance every law — international, maritime, national or local. Under the circumstances we felt that, given we could once get on track with our enemy, we held a great power in our hands.

Before long, MacRae was off to Peterhead to join his yacht, which would at once start on a sort of sentry-go up and down the coast. The rest of us set about arranging to spread ourselves along the shore between Cruden and Peterhead. We did not arrange watches, for time was now precious to all, on both sides of the encounter. If an attempt was to be made to take off the treasure, it would in all probability be made before morning; every hour that passed multiplied the difficulties and dangers of the blackmailers. The weather was becoming misty, which was a source of inconvenience to us all. Thick patches of white fog began to drift in from the north east, and there was ominous promise in the rising wind of there being danger on sea and shore before many hours had passed. We each took provision with us for the night, and a sufficiency of rockets and white and red lights for our signalling work, in case there might be need of such.

In disposing of our forces, we had not of course a sufficiency of men to form a regular cordon; but we so arranged ourselves that there was no point at which a boat could land which was not in view of some of us. I was terribly anxious, for as the evening came on, the patches of white mist came driving in more quickly, and getting thicker and more dense. Between them the sea was clear, and there was no difficulty in keeping accurate observation; but as each fog belt came down on the rising wind our hearts fell. It would come on like a white cloud, which would seem to strike the land and then close in on every side, as though wrapping the shore in a winding sheet. My own section for watching was between Slains Castle and Dunbuy, as wild and rocky a bit of coast as any one could wish to see. Behind Slains runs in a long narrow inlet with beetling cliffs, sheer on either side, and at its entrance a wild turmoil of rocks are hurled together in titanic confusion. From this point northward, the cliffs are sheer, to where the inlet of Dunbuy has its entrance guarded by the great rock, with its myriad of screaming wildfowl and the white crags marking their habitation. Midway between those parts of my sentry-go is a spot which I could not but think would be eminently suited for their purpose, and on this for some time I centred my attention. It is a place where in old days the smugglers managed to get in many a cargo safe, almost within earshot of the coastguards. The *modus operandi* was simple. On a dark night when it was known that the coastguards were, intentionally or by chance, elsewhere, a train of carts would gather quickly along the soft grass tracks, or through the headlands of the fields. A crane was easily improvised of two crossed poles, with a longer one to rest on them; one end held inland, could be pushed forward or drawn back, so as to make the other end hang over the water or fall back over the inner edge of the cliff. A pulley at the end of this pole, and a long rope with its shore end attached to the harness of a strong horse completed the equipment. Then, when the smugglers had come under the cliff, the rope was lowered and the load attached; the waiting horse was galloped inland, and in a few seconds the cluster of barrels or cases was swung up on the cliff and distributed amongst the waiting carts.

It would be an easy matter to invert the process. If all were ready — and I knew that the gang were too expert to have any failing in that respect — a few minutes would suffice to place the whole of the treasure in a waiting boat. The men, all save one, could be lowered the same way, and the last man could be let down by the rope held from below. I knew that the blackmailers had possession of at least one cart; in any case, to men so desperate and reckless to get temporary possession of a few carts in a farming country like this would be no difficult task. So I determined to watch this spot with extra care. It was pretty bare at top; but there was a low wall of stone and clay, one of those rough fences which are so often seen round cliff fields. I squatted down behind a corner of this wall, from which I could see almost the whole stretch of my division. No boat could get into Dunbuy or Lang Haven, or close to the Castle rocks without my seeing it; the cliff from there up to where I was was sheer, and I could see well into the southern passage of the Haven inside Dunbuy Rock. Sometimes when the blanket of fog spread over the sea, I could hear the trumpeting of some steamer far out; and when the fog would lift, I would see her funnels spouting black smoke in her efforts to clear so dangerous a coast. Sometimes a fishing boat on its way up or down would run in shore, close hauled; or a big sailing vessel would move onward with that imperceptible slowness which marks the progress of a ship far out at sea. When any fishing boat came along, my heart beat as I scanned her with the field glass which I had brought with me. I was always hoping that the *Seagull* would appear, though why I know not, for there was now little chance indeed that Marjory would be on board her.

After a spell of waiting, which seemed endless and unendurable, in one of the spells of mist I thought I saw on the cliff a woman, taking shelter of every obstacle, as does one who is watching another. At that moment the mist was thick; but when it began to thin, and to stream away before the wind in trails like smoke, I saw that it was Gormala. Somehow the sight of her made my heart beat wildly. She had been a factor of so many strange incidents in my life of late years — incidents which seemed to have some connection or fatal sequence — that her presence seemed to foretell something fresh, and to have some kind of special significance. I crouched still lower behind the corner of the wall, and watched with enhanced eagerness. A very short study of her movements showed me that she was not watching any specific individual. She was searching for some one, or some thing; and was in terror of being seen, rather than of missing the object of her search. She would peer carefully over the edge of the cliff, lying down on her face to do so, and putting her head forward with the most elaborate care. Then, when she had satisfied herself that what she sought was not within sight, she would pass on a little further and begin her survey over again. Her attitude during the prevalence of a mist was so instructive, that I found myself unconsciously imitating her. She would remain as still as if turned to stone, with one ear to windward, listening with sharp, preternatural intentness. I wondered at first that I could not hear the things that she manifestly did, for the expression of her face was full of changes. When, however, I remembered that she was born and reared amongst the islands, and with fisher folk and sea folk of all kinds whose weather instincts are keener than is given to the inland born, her power was no longer a mystery. How I longed at that moment to have something of her skill! And then came the thought that she had long ago offered to place that very power at my disposal; and that I might still gain her help. Every instant, as past things crowded back to my memory, did that help seem more desirable. Was it not her whom I had seen watching Don Bernardino when he left my house; mayhap she had guided him to it. Or might it not have been Gormala who had brought the blackmailers to my door. If she had no knowledge of them, what was she doing here now? Why had she sought this place of all places; why at this time of all times? What or whom was she seeking amongst the cliffs?

I determined not to lose sight of her at present, no matter what might happen; later, when I had come at her purpose, either by guessing or by observation, I could try to gain her services. Though she had been enraged with me, I was still to her a Seer; and she believed — must believe from what had passed — that I could read for her the Mystery of the Sea.

As she worked along the cliff above Dunbuy Haven, where the rock overhung the water, she seemed to increase both her interest and her caution. I followed round the rude wall which ran parallel to the cliff, so that I might be as near to her as possible.

Dunbuy Haven is a deep cleft in the granite rock in the shape of a Y, the arms of which run seawards and are formed by the mother cliff on either hand and the lofty crags of the island of Dunbuy. In both these arms there is deep water; but when there is a sea on, or when the wind blows strong, they are supremely dangerous. Even the scour of the tide running up or down makes a current difficult to stem. In fair weather, however, it is fairly good for boating; though the swell outside may be trying to those who are poor sailors. I had often tossed on that swell when I had been out with the salmon fishers, when they had been drawing their deep floating nets.

Presently I saw Gormala bend, and then disappear out of sight. She had passed over the edge of the cliff. I went cautiously after her, and throwing myself on my face so that she could not see me, peered over.

There was a sort of sheep track along the face of the cliff, leading downward in a zigzag. It was so steep, and showed so little foothold, that even in the state of super-excitement in which I then was, it made me dizzy to look at it. But the old woman, trained on the crags of the western islands, passed along it as though it were the broad walk of a terraced garden.

CHAPTER XLIX. GORMALA’S LAST HELP

After Gormala had disappeared down the zigzag under the rock, where I could no longer see her movements, I waited for her return. At the end of the Haven, where the little beach runs up to the edge of the cliff, there is a steep path. Even this is so steep that it is impracticable to ordinary persons; only fisher folk, dalesmen and hunters can use such ways. For myself I dare not leave my post; from the end of the Haven I could not see any part at all of the coast I had come to watch, except the narrow spot between great cliffs where the channels ran right and left of the Rock of Dunbuy. So I crept back to my hiding place behind the angle of the wall, from which I could watch the entrance to the track down which she had passed.

Time wore away slowly, slowly; and the mist kept coming in more frequent belts, heavier and more dank. After the sunset the fog seemed to come more heavily still, so that the promise of the night was darkness invincible. In Aberdeen, however, the twilight is long, and under ordinary conditions it is easy to see for hours after sunset. All at once, after the passing of a belt of mist, I was startled by a voice behind me:

“And for what is it ye watch, the nicht? Is it the Mystery o’ the Sea that holds ye to the dyke; or maybe it is the treasure that ye seek!” Gormala had evidently come up the path at the end of the Haven. For a while I did not say a word, but thought the matter over. Now, if ever, was there need to use my wits, and I could best deal with Gormala if I should know something of her own wishes beforehand; so I tried to master her purpose and her difficulties. Firstly, she must have been in search of some hiding place herself, or she would not have come behind the wall; I was quite sure that she had not known of my presence before she went down the sheep track. If she wanted cover, what then was it she was watching? She had been down to the beach of the Haven, and so must have known whether or no it was bare of interest. As she was choosing a corner whence she could watch the track, it was at least likely that she expected some one to go up or down by it. If she were looking for some one to go down, she would surely rather watch its approaches than the place itself. It was, therefore, for some one to come up for whom she wished to watch. As, instead of hurrying away or hiding herself from me when she had seen me without my seeing her, she had deliberately engaged with me in conversation, it was evident that she did not expect whomever she watched for to come up at once. In fine I concluded, she intended to watch for some one who *might* come; with this knowledge I drew a bow at a venture:

"So your friend isn't coming up yet? Why didn't you fix matters when you were down below?" For an instant she was betrayed into showing astonishment; the surprise was in both her expression and in the tones of her voice as she replied:

"How kent ye that I was doon the Haven?" Then she saw her mistake and went on with a scowl:

"Verra clever ye are wi' yer guesses; and a daft aud wife am I to no ken ye better? Why did — —"

"Did you find him down below?" even whilst I was speaking the conviction came to me — I scarcely know how, but it was there as though deep-rooted in my brain all my life — that our enemies were down below, or that they had some hiding place there. Gormala must have seen the change in my face, for she exclaimed with jubilation:

"It would hae been better for ye that ye had taken my sairvice. The een that watched others micht hae been watchin' to yer will. But it's a' ower the noo. What secret there was is yours nae mair; an' it may be waur for ye that ye flouted me in the days gone." As she spoke, the bitterness of her manner was beyond belief; the past rushed back on me so fiercely that I groaned. Then came again, but with oh! what pain, the thought of my dear one in the hands of her enemies.

Let no man question the working of the Almighty's hand. In that moment of the ecstasy of pain, something had spoken to the heart of the old woman beside me; for when I came back to myself they were different eyes which looked into mine. They were soft and full of pity. All the motherhood which ever had been, or might have been, in that lonely soul was full awake. It was with a tender voice that she questioned me:

"Ye are muckle sad laddie. Do I no ken a look like that when I speer it, and know that the Fates are to their wark. What maks ye greet laddie; what maks ye greet?" for by this time the revulsion of tenderness had been too much for me and I was openly weeping. "Is it that the lassie is gone frae ye? Weel I ken that nane but a lassie can mak a strong man greet." I felt that the woman's heart was open to me; and spoke with all the passion of my soul:

"Oh, Gormala help me! Perhaps you can, and it may not be too late. She is stolen away and is in the hands of her enemies; wicked and desperate men who have her prisoner on a ship somewhere out at sea. Her life, her honour are at stake. Help me if you can; and I will bless you till the last hour of my life!" The old woman's face actually blazed as I spoke. She seemed to tower up in the full of her gaunt height to the stature of her woman's pride, as with blazing eyes she answered me:

"What! a woman, a lassie, in the hands o' wicked men! Aye an' sic a bonnie, gran’ lassie as yon, though she did flout me in the pride of her youth and strength. Laddie, I’m wi’ ye in all ye can dae! Wi’ a’ the strength o’ my hairt an’ the breath o’ my body; for life or for death! Ne’er mind the past; bad or good for me it is ower; and frae this oot I’m to your wark. Tell me what I can dae, an’ the grass’ll no grow under my feet. A bonnie bit lassie in the power o’ wicked men! I may hae been ower eager to win yer secret; but I’m no that bad to let aught sic come between me and the duty to what is pure and good!” She seemed grand and noble in her self-surrender; such a figure as the poets of the old sagas may have seen in their dreams, when the type of noble old womanhood was in their hearts; in the times when the northern nations were dawning. I was quite overcome; I could not speak. I took her hand and kissed it. This seemed to touch her to the quick; with a queer little cry she gasped out:

“Oh, laddie, laddie!” and said no more. Then I told her of how Marjory had been carried off by the blackmail gang; I felt that she was entitled to this confidence. When I had spoken, she beat with her shut hand on the top of the wall and said in a smothered way:

“Och! if I had but kent; if I had but kent! To think that I might hae been watchin’ them instead o’ speerin’ round yon hoose o’ yours, watchin’ to wring yer secret frae ye, an’ aidin’ yer enemies in their wark. First the outland man wi’ the dark hair; an’ then them along wi’ the black man wi’ the evil face that sought ye the nicht gone. Wae is me! Wae is me! that I ha’ done harm to a’ in the frenzy o’ my lust, and greed, and curiosity!” She took on so badly that I tried to comfort her. I succeeded to a measure, when I had pointed out that the carrying off of Marjory was altogether a different matter from what had gone on in my house. Suddenly she stopped rocking herself to and fro; holding up one long gaunt arm as I had seen her do several times before, she said:

"But what matters it after a'! We're in the hands o' Fate! An' there are Voices that speak an' Een that see. What is ordered of old will be done for true; no matter how we may try to work our own will. 'Tis little use to kick against the pricks."

Then all at once she became brisk and alert. In a most practical tone of voice she said:

"Noo tell me what I can dae! Weel I ken, that ye hae a plan o' yer ain; an' that you and ithers are warkin' to an end that ye hae set. Ye hae one ither wi' ye the nicht; for gude or ill." She paused, and I asked her:

"Why did you go down the sheep path to the Haven. For what or for whom were you looking?"

"I was lookin' for the treasure that I suspect was ta'en frae your hoose; an' for them that took it! 'Twas I that guided them, after the dark man had gone; and watched whiles they were within. Then they sent me on a lang errand away to Ellon; and when I got back there was nane there. I speered close, and saw the marks o' a cairt heavy loaden. It was lost on the high road; an' since then, nicht an' day hae I sought for any trace; but all in vain. But I'm thinkin' that it's nigh to here they've hid it; I went down the yowes' roadie, an' alang the rock, an' up the bit beach; but never a sign did I see. There's a many corners aboot the crags here, where a muckle treasure might lie hid, an' nane the wiser save them that pit it there!" Whilst she was talking I was scribbling a line in my pocket-book; I tore out the page and handed it to her:

"If you would help me take that letter for I must not leave here. Give it to the dark gentleman whom you know by sight. He is somewhere on the rocks beyond the Castle." My message was to tell Don Bernardino that I believed the treasure was hidden somewhere near me, and that the bearer of the note would guide him if he thought wise to join me.

Then I waited, waited. The night grew darker and darker; and the fog belts came so thick and so heavy that they almost became one endless mass. Only now and again could I get a glimpse of the sea outside the great rock. Once, far off out at sea but floating in on the wind, I heard eight bells sound from a ship. My heart beat at the thought; for if the *Keystone* were close at hand it might be well for us later on. Then there was silence, long and continuous. A silence which was of the night alone; every now and again when some sound of life from near or far came to break its monotony the reaction became so marked that silence seemed to be a positive quality.

All at once I became conscious that Gormala was somewhere near me. I could not see her, I could not hear her; but it was no surprise to me when through the darkness I saw her coming close to me, followed by Don Bernardino. They both looked colossal through the mist.

As quickly as I could, I told the Don of my suspicions; and asked his advice. He agreed with me as to the probabilities of the attempt to escape, and announced his willingness to go down the path to Dunbuy Haven and explore it thoroughly so far as was possible. Accordingly, with Gormala to guide him, he went to the end of the Haven and descended the steep moraine — it was a declension rather than a path. For myself I was not sanguine as to a search. The night was now well on us, and even had the weather been clear it would have been a difficult task to make search in such a place, where the high cliffs all around shut out the possibilities of side light.

Moreover, along the Haven, as with other such openings on this iron-bound coast, there were patches of outlying rock under the cliffs. Occasionally these were continuous, so that at the proper state of the tide a fairly good climber could easily make way along them. Here, however, there was no such continuity; the rocks rising from the sea close under the cliffs were in patches; without a boat it would be useless to attempt a complete exploration. I waited, however, calmly; I was gaining patience now out of my pain. A good while elapsed before the Don returned, still accompanied by Gormala. He told me that only the beach had been possible for examination; but as far as he could see out by either channel, there was no sign of anyone hiding, or any bulk which could be such as we sought.

He considered it might be advisable if he went to warn the rest of our party of our belief as to the place appointed, and so took his way up north. Gormala remained with me so as to be ready to take any message if occasion required. She looked tired, so tired and weary that I made her lie down behind the rough wall. For myself sleep was an impossibility; I could not have slept had my life or sanity depended on it. To soothe, her and put her mind at rest, I told her what she had always wanted to know; what I had seen that night at Whinnyfold when the Dead came up from the sea. That quieted her, and she soon slept. So I waited and waited, and the time crept slowly away.

All at once Gormala sat up beside me, broad awake and with all her instincts at her keenest. “Whish!” she said, raising a warning hand. At this moment the fog belt was upon us, and on the wind, now risen high, the white wreaths swept by like ghosts. She held her ear as before towards seaward and listened intently. This time there could be no mistake; from far off through the dampness of the fog came the sound of a passing ship. I ran out from behind the wall and threw myself face down at the top of the cliff. I was just at the angle of the opening of the Haven and I could see if a boat entered by either channel. Gormala came beside me and peered over; then she whispered:

"I shall gang doon the yowes' roadie; it brings me to the Haven's mooth, and frae thence I can warn ye if there be aught!" Before I replied she had flitted away, and I saw her pass over the edge of the cliff and proceed on her perilous way. I leaned over the edge of the cliff listening. Down below I heard now and again the sound of a falling pebble, dislodged from the path, but I could see nothing whatever. Below me the black water showed now and again in the lifting of the fog.

The track outwards leads down to the sea at the southern corner of the opening of the Haven; so I moved on here to see if I could get any glimpse of Gormala. The fog was now on in a dense mass, and I could see nothing a couple of feet from me. I heard, however, a sort of scramble; the rush and roll of stones tumbling, and the hollow reverberating plash as they struck the water. My heart jumped, for I feared that some accident might have happened to Gormala. I listened intently; but heard no sound. I did not stay, however, for I knew that the whole effort of the woman, engaged on such a task, would be to avoid betraying herself. I was right in my surmise, for after a few minutes of waiting I heard a very faint groan. It was low and suppressed, but there was no mistaking it as it came up to me through the driving mist. It was evident that Gormala was in some way in peril, and common humanity demanded that I should go down to help her if I could. It was no use my attempting the sheep track; if she had failed on it there would not be much chance of my succeeding. Besides, there had been a manifest slip or landslide; and more than probably the path, or some necessary portion of it, had been carried away. It would have been madness to attempt it, so I went to the southern side of the cliff where the rock was broken, and where there was a sort of rugged path down to the sea. There was also an advantage about this way; I could see straight out to sea to the south of Dunbuy Rock. Thus I need not lose sight of any shore-coming boat; which might happen were I on the other path which opened only in the Haven.

It was a hard task, and by daylight I might have found it even more difficult. In parts it actually overhung the water, with an effect of dizziness which was in itself dangerous. However, I persevered; and presently got down on the cluster of rocks overhung by the cliff. Here, at the very corner of the opening to the Haven, under the spot where the sheep track led down, I found Gormala almost unconscious. She revived a little when I lifted her and put my flask to her lips. For a few seconds she leaned gasping against my breast with her poor, thin, grey hair straggling across it. Then, with a great effort, she moaned out feebly, but of intention keeping her voice low lest even in that lone spot amid the darkness of the night and the mist there might be listeners:

“I’m done this time, laddie; the rocks have broke me when the roadie gav way. Listen tae me, I’m aboot to dee; a’ the Secrets and the Mysteries ‘ll be mine soon. When the end is comin’ haud baith my hands in ane o’ yours, an’ keep the ither ower my een. Then, when I’m passin’ ye shall see what my dead eyes see; and hear wi’ the power o’ my dead ears. Mayhap too, laddie, ye may ken the secrets and the wishes o’ my hairt. Dinna lose yer chance, laddie! God be wi’ ye an’ the bonny lass. Tell her, an’ ye will, that I forgie her floutin’ me; an’ that I bade the gude God keep her frae all harm, and send peace and happiness to ye both — till the end. God forgie me all my sins!”

As she was speaking her life seemed slowly ebbing away. I could feel it, and I knew it in many ways. As I took her hand in mine, a glad smile was on her face, together with a look of eager curiosity. This was the last thing I saw in the dim light, as my hand covered her filming eyes.

And then a strange and terrible thing began to happen.

CHAPTER L. THE EYES OF THE DEAD

As I knelt with the dead woman's hands in one of mine and the other over her eyes, I seemed to be floating high up in the air; and with amazing vision to see all round for a great distance. The fog still hung thick over the water. Around, the vast of the air and the depths of the sea were as open as though sunshine was on them and I was merely looking through bright water. In the general panorama of things, so far as the eye could range, all lay open. The ships on the sea, and the floor under it; the iron-bound coast, and the far-lying uplands were all as though marked on a picture chart. Far away on the horizon were several craft, small and large. A few miles out was a ship of war; and to the north of her but much closer in shore lay a graceful yacht, slowly moving with the tide and under shortened sail. The war ship was all alert; on every top, and wherever there was a chance of seeing anything, was the head of a man on the look-out. The search-light was on, and sea and sky were lit alternately with its revolving rays. But that which drew my eyes, as the magnet draws the iron, was a clumsily rigged ship close in shore, seemingly only a few hundred yards beyond the Dunbuy Rock. She was a whaler I knew, for on her deck were the great boats for use in rough seas, and the furnace where the blubber was melted. With unconscious movement, as though my soul were winged as a bird, I hung poised over this vessel. It was strange indeed, but she seemed all as though composed of crystal; I could see through her, and down into the deep below her where her shadow lay, till my eyes rested on the patches of bare sand or the masses of giant seaweed which swayed with the tide above the rocks on which it grew. In and out amongst the seaweed the fishes darted, and the flower-like limpets moved ceaselessly outside their shells on the rocks. I could even see the streaks on the water which wind and current invariably leave on their course. Within the ship, all was clear as though I were looking into a child’s toy-house; but a toy-house wrought of glass. Every nook and cranny was laid bare; and the details, even when they did not interest me, sank into my mind. I could evermore, by closing my eyes, have seen again anything on which in those moments of spiritual vision the eyes of my soul had rested.

All the time there was to me a dual consciousness. Whatever I saw before me was all plain and real; and yet I never lost for a moment the sense of my own identity. I knew I was on shore amid the rocks under the cliff, and that Gormala’s dead body was beside me as I knelt. But there was some divine guiding principle which directed my thought — it must have been my thought, for my eyes followed as my wishes led, as though my whole being went too. They were guided from the very bow of the ship along the deck, and down the after hatchway. I went down, step by step, making accurate and careful scrutiny of all things around me. I passed into the narrow cabin, which seemed even to me to smell evilly. The rank yellow light from the crude oil lamp with thick smoky wick made the gloom seem a reality, and the shadows as monstrous. From this I passed aft into a tiny cabin, where on a bunk lay Marjory asleep. She looked pale and wan; it made my heart sick to see the great black circles round her eyes. But there was resolution in her mouth and nostrils; resolution fixed and untameable. Knowing her as I did, and with her message “I can die” burned into my heart, it did not need any guessing to know what was in the hand clenched inside the breast of her dress. The cabin door was locked; on the outside was a rough bolt, newly placed; the key was not in the lock. I would have lingered, for the lightning-like glimpse made me hungry for more; but the same compelling force moved me on. In the next cabin lay a man, also asleep. He was large of frame, with a rugged red beard streaked with grey; what hair remained on his head, which was all scarred with cicatrices, was a dull red turning white. On a rack above him, under the chronometer — which marked Greenwich time as 2.15, — ready to his hand, were two great seven shooters; from his pocket peeped the hilt of a bowie knife. It was indeed strange to me that I could look without passion or vindictiveness on such a person so disposed. I suppose it was the impersonal spirit within me which was at the moment receptive, and that all human passion, being ultimately of the flesh, was latent. At the time, though I was conscious of it, it did not strike me as strange; no more strange than that I could see far and near at the same glance, and take in great space and an impossible wilderness of detail. No more strange, than that all things were for me resolved into their elements; that fog ceased to deaden or darkness to hide; that timber and iron, deck and panel and partition, beam and door and bulkhead were as transparent as glass. In my mind was a vague intention of making examination of every detail which could bear on the danger of Marjory. But even whilst such an idea was in its incipient stage, so swift is the mechanism of thought, my eyes beheld, as though it were through the sides of the ship, a boat pass out from a watercave in the cliffs behind the Rock of Dunbuy. In it I saw, with the same seeing eye which gave me power in aught else, seven men some of whom I knew at a glance to be those whom Marjory had described in the tunnel. All but one I surveyed calmly, and weighed up as it were with complacency; but this one was a huge coal-black negro, hideous, and of repulsive aspect. A glimpse of him made my blood run cold, and filled my mind at once with hate and fear. As I looked, the boat came towards the ship with inconceivable rapidity. It was not that she moved fast through the water, for her progress was in reality slow and laboured. The wind and the sea had risen; half a gale was blowing and the seas were running so high that the ship rose and fell, pitched and rolled and tossed about like a toy. It was, that time, like distance, was in my mind obliterated. Truly, I was looking with spirit eyes, and under all spiritual conditions.

The boat drew close to the whaler on the port side, and I saw, as if from the former, the faces of several men who at the sound of oars came rushing from the other side of the ship and leaned over the bulwarks. It was evident that they had expected arrival from the starboard. With some difficulty the boat got close, for the sea was running wilder every moment; and one by one the men began to climb the ladder and disappear over the bulwark. With the extraordinary action of sight and mind and memory which was to me at present, I followed each and all of them at the same time. They hurriedly rigged up a whip and began to raise from the boat parcels of great weight. In the doing of this one of them, the negro, was officious and was always trying to examine each parcel as it came on board; but he was ever and always repulsed. The others would not allow him to touch anything; at each rebuff he retired scowling. All this must, under ordinary conditions, have taken much time, but to my spirit-ruled eyes it all passed with wondrous rapidity....

I became conscious that things around me were growing less clear. The fog seemed to be stealing over the sea, as I had seen it earlier in the evening, and to wrap up details from my sight. The great expanse of the sea and the ships upon it, and all the wonders of the deep became lost in the growing darkness. I found, quicker and quicker, my thoughts like my eyes, centred on the deck of the ship. At a moment, when all others were engaged and did not notice him, I saw the great negro, his face over-much distorted with an evil smile, steal towards the after hatchway and disappear. With the growing of the fog and the dark, I was losing the power to see through things opaque and material; and it came to me as an actual shock that the negro passed beyond my vision. With his going, the fear in my heart grew and grew; till, in my frantic human passion, all that was ethereal around me faded and went out like a dying flame....

The anguish of my soul, in my fear for my beloved, tore my true spirit out of its phantom existence back to stern working life....

I found myself, chilled and sick at heart, kneeling by the marble-cold, stiffening body of Gormala, on the lone rock under the cliff. The rising wind whistled by me in the crannies above, and the rising sea in angry rushes leaped at us by the black shining rocks. All was so dark around me that my eyes, accustomed to the power given in my vision of making their own light, could not pierce the fog and the gloom. I tried to look at my watch, but could only see the dial dimly; I could not distinguish the figures on it and I feared to light a match lest such might betray my presence. Fortunately my watch could strike the hours and minutes, and I found it was now half past one o'clock. I still, therefore, had three-quarters of an hour, for I remembered the lesson of the whaler's chronometer. I knew there would be no time nor opportunity to bring Gormala's body to the top of the cliff — at present; so I carried her up to the highest point of the underlying rock, which was well above high water mark.

Reverently and with blessing I closed her dead eyes, which still looked up at the sky with a sort of ghostly curiosity. Then I clambered up the steep pathway and made my way as quickly as I could round to the other side of the Haven, to try if I could discover any trace of the blackmailers, or any indication of the water-cave in which their boat was hidden. The cliffs here are wofully steep, and hang far over the sea; so that there is no possibility of lying on the cliff edge and peering over. Round here also the stark steepness forbids the existence of even the tiniest track; a hare could not find its way along these beetling cliffs. The only way of making search of this channel would be to follow round in a boat. The nearest point to procure one would be at the little harbour beside the Bullers O'Buchan, and for this there was not time. I was in dire doubt as to what was best to do; and I longed with a sickening force for the presence of Montgomery or some of our party who would know how to deal with such a situation. I was not anxious for the present moment; but I wanted to take all precautions against the time which was coming. Well I knew that the vision I had seen with the eyes of the dead Gormala was no mere phantasm of the mind; that it was no promise of what might be, but a grim picture of what would be. There was never a doubt in my mind as to its accuracy. Oh! if I could have seen more of what was to happen; if I could have lingered but a few instants longer! For with the speed at which things had passed before my inner eye in that strange time, every second might have meant the joy or sorrow of a lifetime. How I groaned with regret, and cursed my own precipitancy, that I could not wait and learn through the medium of the dead woman's spiritual eyes the truths that were to be borne in mind!

But it was of no use to fret; action of some sort would be necessary if Marjory was to be saved. In one way I might help. Even alone I might save her, if I could get out to the whaler unknown to her crew. I knew I could manage this, for anyhow I could swim; for a weapon which the water could not render useless I had the dagger I had taken from Don Bernardino. Should other weapons be necessary I might be able to lay hands on them in the cabin next Marjory's, where the red-bearded man lay asleep. I did not know whether it would be better to go in search of some of my comrades, or to wait the arrival of the Don, who was to be back within an hour of the time of leaving. I was still trying to make up my mind when the difficulty was settled for me by the arrival of the Spaniard, accompanied by one of the young American naval officers.

When I told them of my vision I could see, even in the darkness which prevailed, that neither of them was content to accept its accuracy in blind faith. I was at first impatient; but this wore away when I remembered that neither of them had any knowledge of my experiences in the way of Second Sight, or indeed of the phenomenon at all. Neither in Spain nor America does such a belief prevail; and I have no doubt that to both of them came the idea that worry and anxiety had turned my brain. Even when I told them how I meant to back my belief by swimming out beyond the Dunbuy Rock in time to reach the ship before the boat would arrive, they were not convinced. The method of reception of the idea by each was, however, characteristic of his race and nation. To the high-bred Spaniard, whose life had been ruled by laws of honour and of individual responsibility, no act done in the cause of chivalry could be other than worthy; he did not question the sanity of the keeping of such a purpose. The practical American, however, though equally willing to make self-sacrifice, and to dare all things in the course of honour and duty, looked at my intention with regard to its result; was I taking the step which would have the best result with regard to the girl whom we were all trying to save. Whilst the Spaniard raised his hat and said:

"May God watch over your gallant enterprise, Senor; and hold your life, and that of her whom you love, in the hollow of His hand!" The American said:

"Honest injun! old chap, is that the best you can do? If it's only a man and a life you want, count me in every time. I'm a swimmer, too; and I'm a youngster that don't count. So far as that goes, I'm on. But you've got to find the ship, you know! If she was there now, I should say 'risk it'; and I'd come with you if you liked. But there's the whole North Sea out there, with room for a hundred million of whalers without their jostling. No, no! Come, I say, let us find another way round; where we can help the girl all together!" He was a good young fellow, as well as a fine one, and it was evident he meant well. But there was no use arguing; my mind was made up, and, after assuring him that I was in earnest, I told him that I was taking a couple of rockets with me which I would try to keep dry so that should occasion serve I would make manifest the whereabouts of the whaler. He already knew what to do with regard to signalling from shore, in case the boats of the whaler should be seen.

When we had made what preparations we could for the work each of us had in hand, the time came for my starting on my perilous enterprise. As my purpose became more definite, my companions, who I think doubted in their hearts its sincerity, became somewhat more demonstrative. It was one thing to have a vague intention of setting out on a wild journey of the kind, and even here common sense rebelled. But on the edge of the high cliff, in the dark, amid the fog which came boiling up from below as the wind puffs drove it on shore; when below our feet the rising waves broke against the rocks with an ominous sound, made into a roar by the broken fastnesses of the cliffs, the whole thing must have seemed as an act of madness. When through a break in the fog-belt we could catch a glimpse of the dark water leaping far below into furious, scattering lines of foam, to dare the terrors of such a sea at such a time was like going deliberately to certain death. My own heart quailed at moments; when I saw through the fog wreaths the narrow track, down which I must again descend to where Gormala's body lay, fading into a horrid gloom; or when the sound of breaking water drove up, muffled by the dark mist. My faith in the vision was strong, however, and by keeping my mind fixed on it I could shut out present terrors. I shook hands with my two friends, and, taking courage from the strong grip of their hands, set myself resolutely to my journey down the cliff. The last words the young navy man said to me were:

"Remember, if you do reach the whaler, that a gleam of light of any kind will give us a hint of where you are. Once the men of the *Keystone* see it, they'll do the rest at sea; as we shall on land. Give us such a light when the time comes — if you have to fire the ship to get it!"

At the foot of the cliff path the prospect was almost terrifying. The rocks were so washed with the churning water, as the waves leaped at them, that now and again only black tops could be seen rising out of the waste of white water; and a moment after, as the wave fell back, there would be a great mass of jagged rocks, all stark and grim, blacker than their own blackness, with the water streaming down them, and great rifts yawning between. Outside, the sea was a grim terror, a wildness of rising waves and lines of foam, all shrouded in fog and gloom. Through all came a myriad of disconcerting sounds, vague and fearsome, from where the waves clashed or beat into the sounding caverns of Dunbuy. Nothing but the faith which I had in the vision of Marjory, which came to me with the dead eyes of the western Seer, could have carried me out into that dreadful gloom. All its possibilities of horror and danger woke to me at once, and for a moment appalled me.

But Faith is a conquering power; even the habit of believing, in which I had been taught, stood to me in this wild hour. No sceptic, no doubter, could have gone forth as I did into that unknown of gloom and fear.

I waited till a great wave was swept in close under my bare feet. Then, with a silent prayer, and an emboldening thought: 'For Marjory!' I leaped into the coming water.

CHAPTER LI. IN THE SEA FOG

For a few minutes I was engaged in a wild struggle to get away from the rocks, and not to be forced back by the shoreward rush and sweep of the waves. I was buffeted by them, and half-choked by the boiling foam; but I kept blindly and desperately to my task, and presently knew that I had only to deal with the current and the natural rise and fall of the rollers. Down on the water the air was full of noises, so that it was hard to distinguish any individual sound; but the fog lay less dense on the surface than above it, so that I could see a little better around me.

On the sea there is always more or less light; even in this time of midnight gloom, with moon and stars hidden by the fog, and with none of that phosphorescence which at times makes a luminous glow of its own over the water, I could see things at an unexpected distance. More than all, was I surprised as well as cheered to find that I could distinguish the features of the land from the sea, better than I could from land discern anything at sea. When I looked back, the shore rose, a dark uneven line, unbroken save where the Haven of Dunbuy running inland made an angle against the sky. But beside me, the great Rock of Dunbuy rose gigantic and black; it was like a mountain towering over me. The tide was running down so that when I had got out of the current running inland behind the rock I was in comparatively calm water. There was no downward current, but only a slow backwater, which insensibly took me closer to the Rock. Keeping in this shelter, I swam on and out; I saved myself as much as I could, for I knew of the terrible demand on my strength which lay before me. It must have been about ten minutes, though it seemed infinitely longer, when I began to emerge from the shelter of the

Rock and to find again the force of the outer current. The waves were wilder here too; not so wild as just in shore before they broke, but they were considerably larger in their rise and fall. As I swam on, I looked back now and then, and saw Dunbuy behind me towering upward, though not so monstrously as when I had been under its lee. The current was beginning already to bear me downwards; so I changed my course, and got back to the sheltered water again. Thus I crept round under the lee of the Rock, till all at once I found myself in the angry race, where the current beat on and off the cliff. It took me all my strength and care to swim through this; when the force of the current began to slacken, as I emerged from the race, I found myself panting and breathless with the exertion.

But when I looked around me from this point, where the east opened to me, there was something which restored all my courage and hope, though it did not still the beating of my heart.

Close by, seemingly only a couple of hundred yards off to the north east, lay a ship whose masts and spars stood out against the sky. I could see her clearly, before a coming belt of fog bore down on her.

The apprehension lest I should miss her in the fog chilled me more than the sea water in which I was immersed; for all possibilities of evil became fears to me, now that the realisation of my vision was clear. I was glad of the darkness; it was a guarantee against discovery. I swam on quietly, and was rejoiced to find as I drew close that I was on the port side of the ship; well I remembered how in my vision the boat approached to port, to the surprise of the men who were looking out for it on the other side. I found the rope ladder easily enough, and did not have much difficulty in getting a foothold on it. Ascending cautiously, and watching every inch of the way, I climbed the bulwark and hid behind a water barrel close to the mast. From this security I looked out, and saw the backs of several men ranged along the starboard bulwark. They were intent on their watching, and unsuspicious of my proximity; so I stole out and glided as silently as I could into the cabin's entrance. It was not new to me; I had a sense of complete security as to my knowledge. The eyes of Gormala's soul were keen!

In the cabin I recognised at once the smoky lamp and the rude preparations for food. Thus emboldened, I came to the door, behind which I knew Marjory lay. It was locked and bolted, and the key was gone. I slid back the bolt, but the lock baffled me. I was afraid to make the slightest noise, lest I should court discovery; so I passed on to the next cabin where was her jailer. He lay just as, in the vision, I had seen him; the chronometer was above him and the two heavy revolvers hung underneath it. I slipped in quietly — there were not shoes to remove — and reaching over so that the water would not drip from my wet underclothing on his face, unhooked the two weapons. I belted them round my waist with the strap on which they hung. Then I looked round for the key, but could see no sign of it. There was no time to lose, and it was neither time nor place to stand on ceremony; so I took the man by the throat with my left hand, the dagger being in my right, and held with such a grip that the blood seemed to leap into his face in a second. He could utter no sound, but instinctively his hand went back and up to where the revolvers had hung. I whispered in a low tone:

"It's no use. Give me the key. I don't value your life a pin!" He was well plucked, and he was manifestly used to tight places. He did not attempt to speak or parley; but whilst I had been whispering, his right hand had got hold of a knife. It was a bowie, and he was dexterous with it. With some kind of sharp wrench he threw it open; there was a click as the back-spring worked. If I had not had my dagger ready it would have been a bad time for me. But I was prepared; whilst he was making the movement to strike at me, I struck. The keen point of the Spanish dagger went right through the upturned wrist, and pinned his hand down to the wooden edge of the bunk. Whilst, however, he had been trying to strike with his right hand, his left had clutched my left wrist. He tried now to loose my grasp from his throat, whilst bending his chin down he made a furious effort to tear at my hand with his teeth. Never in my life did I more need my strength and weight. The man was manifestly a fighter, trained in many a wild ‘rough-and-tumble’, and his nerves were like iron. I feared to let go the hilt of the dagger, lest in his violent struggling he should tear his wrist away and so free his hand. Having, however, got my right knee raised, I pressed down with it his arm on the edge of the bunk and so freed my right hand. He continued to struggle ferociously. I knew well it was life and death, not only for me, but for Marjory.

It was his life or mine; and he had to pay the penalty of his crime.

So intent was I on the struggle that I had not heard the approach of the boat with his comrades. It was only when I stood panting, with the limp throat between my fingers which were white at the knuckles with the strain, that the sound of voices and the tramp of feet on deck reached my intelligence. Then indeed I knew there was no time to lose. I searched the dead man’s pockets and found a key, which I tried in the lock of Marjory’s cabin. When I opened the door she started up; the hand in her bosom was whipped out with a flash, and in an instant a long steel bonnet pin was ready to drive into her breast. My agonised whisper:

"Marjory, it is I!" only reached her mind in time to hold her hand. She did not speak; but never can I forget the look of joy that illumined her poor, pale face. I put my finger on my lip, and held out my hand to her. She rose, with the obedience of a child, and came with me. I was just going out into the cabin, when I heard the creak of a heavy footstep on the companion way. So I motioned her back, and, drawing the dagger from my belt, stood ready. I knew who it was that was coming; yet I dared not use the pistols, save as a last resource.

I stood behind the door. The negro did not expect anyone, or any obstacle; he came on unthinkingly, save for whatever purpose of evil was in his mind. He was armed, as were all the members of the blackmail gang. In a belt across his shoulder, slung Kentucky fashion, were two great seven shooters; and across his waist behind was a great bowie knife, with handle ready to grasp. Moreover, nigger-like, the handle of a razor rose out of the breast pocket of his dark flannel shirt. He did not, however, manifestly purpose using his weapons — at present at any rate; there was not any sign of danger or opposition in front of him. His comrades were busy at present in embarking the treasure, and would be for many an hour to come, in helping to work the ship clear into safety. Every minute now the wind was rising, and the waves swelling to such proportions that the anchored ship rocked like a bell-buoy in a storm. In the cabin I had to hold on, or I should have been shot from my place into view. But the huge negro cared for none of these things. He was callous to everything, and there was such a wicked, devilish purpose in his look that my heart hardened grimly in the antagonism of man to man. Nay more, it was not a man that I loathed; I would have killed this beast with less compunction than I would kill a rat or a snake. Never in my life did I behold such a wicked face. In feature and expression there was every trace and potentiality of evil; and these superimposed on a racial brutality which made my gorge rise. Well indeed did I understand now the one terror which had in all her troubles come to Marjory, and how these wretches had used it to mould her to their ends. I knew now why, sleeping or waking, she held that steel spike against her heart. If —

The thought was too much for me. Even now, though I was beside her, she was beset by her enemies. We were both still practically prisoners on a hostile ship, and even now this demon was intent on unspeakable wrong. I did not pause; I did not shrink from the terrible task before me. With a bound I was upon him, and I had struck at his heart; struck so truly and so terrible a blow, that the hilt of the dagger struck his ribs with a thud like the blow of a cudgel. The blood seemed to leap out at me, even as the blow fell. With spasmodic reaction he tumbled forwards; fell without a sound, and so quickly that had not I, fearing lest the noise of his falling might betray me, caught him, he would have dropped like a stricken bullock.

Never before did I understand the pleasure of killing a man. Since then, it makes me shudder when I think of how so potent a passion, or so keen a pleasure, can rest latent in the heart of a righteous man. It may have been that between the man and myself was all the antagonism that came from race, and fear, and wrongdoing; but the act of his killing was to me a joy unspeakable. It will rest with me as a wild pleasure till I die.

I took all the arms he had about him, two revolvers and a knife; they would give me fourteen more shots were I hard pressed. In any case they were safer, so far as Marjory and I were concerned, in my hands than in those of our enemies. I dragged the body of the negro into the cabin with the other dead man; then I closed the door on them, and when Marjory joined me, I locked the door of her cabin and took away the key. In case of suspicion this might give us a few minutes of extra time.

Marjory came with me up on deck; and as she caught sight of the open sea there was an unspeakable gladness on her face. We seized a favourable opportunity, when no one was looking, for all on deck were busy hauling up the treasure; and slipped behind the cask fastened to the mast. There we breathed freely. We both felt that should the worst come to the worst we could get away before any one could touch us. One rush to the bulwarks and over. They would never attempt to follow us, and there was a chance of a swim to shore. I gave Marjory a belt with two revolvers. As she strapped it on she felt safer; I knew it by the way she drew herself up, and threw back her shoulders.

When the last of the bags which held the treasure came on board, the men who had come with it closed in a ring around the mass as it lay on deck. They were all armed; I could see that they did not trust the sailors, for each moment some one's hand would go back to his gun. We heard one of them ask as he looked round: "What has become of that damned nigger? He must take his share of work!" Marjory was very brave and very still; I could see that her nerve was coming back to her. After a little whispered conversation, the newcomers began to carry the bags down to the cabin; it was slow work, for two always stood guard above, and two remained down below evidently on similar duty. Discovery of the dead man must come soon, so Marjory and I stole behind the foremast which was well away from every one. She was first, and as she began to pass behind she recoiled; she got the drop on some one in front of her.

There was a smothered ‘h-s-s-sh’ and she lowered her weapon. Turning to me she said in a faint whisper:

“It is the Spaniard; what is he doing here?” I whispered back:

“Be good to him. He is a noble fellow, and has behaved like a knight of old!” I pressed forward and took his hand. “How did you get here?” I asked. His answer was given in so faint a voice that I could see that he was spent and tired, if not injured:

“I swam, too. When I saw their boat pull out of the northern channel, I managed to scramble down part of the cliff, and then jumped. Fortunately I was not injured. It was a long, weary swim, and I thought I should never be able to get through; but at last the current took me and carried me to the ship. She was anchored with a hawser, not a cable. I managed to climb up it; and when I was on board I cut it nearly through.”

Even as he spoke there was a queer lurch of the ship which lay stern forward, and a smothered ejaculation from all the seamen.

The hawser had parted and we were drifting before wind and tide. Then it was that I felt we should give warning to the yacht and the battleship. I knew that they were not far off; had I not seen them in my vision, which had now been proven. Then it was also that the words of the young American came back to me: “Give us a light, if you have to fire the ship to get it.”

All this time, from the moment when I had set foot on the whaler’s deck till this instant, events had moved with inconceivable rapidity. There had been one silent, breathless rush; during which two lives had been taken and Marjory set free. Only a few minutes had elapsed in all; and when I looked around under the altered conditions, things seemed to be almost where they had been. It was like the picture in one's mind made by a lightning flash; when the period of reception is less than the time of the smallest action, and movement is lost in time. The fog belt was thinning out, and there was in the night air a faint suggestion that one might see, if there were anything to be seen.

The great Rock of Dunbuy towered up; I could just distinguish so much on the land side. Whilst I was looking, there came a sudden light and then a whirr; high overhead through the sea fog we could see faintly the fiery trail of a rocket.

Instantly out at sea was an answer; a great ray of light shot upwards, and we could see its reflection in the sky. None of us said anything; but instinctively Marjory and I clasped hands. Then the light ray seemed to fall downward to the sea. But as it came down, the fog seemed to grow thicker and thicker till the light was lost in its density. There was stir of all on our ship. No loud word was spoken, but whispered directions, given with smothered curses, flew. Each man of the crew seemed to run to his post, and with a screeching and straining the sails rose. The vessel began to slip through the water with added speed. Now, if ever, was our time to warn our friends. The little rockets which I had brought had been sodden with water and were useless, and besides we had no way of getting a light. The only way of warning was by sound, and the only sound to carry was a pistol shot. For an instant I hesitated, for a shot meant a life if we should be pushed to it. But it must be done; so signing to the others I ran aft and when close to the mast fired my revolver. Instantly around me was a chorus of curses. I bent double and ran back, seeing through the darkness vague forms rush to where I had been. The fog was closing thicker around us; it seemed to boil over the bulwarks as we passed along. We had either passed into another belt of fog, or one was closing down upon us with the wind. The sound of the pistol shot had evidently reached the war ship. She was far off us, and the sounds came faintly over the waste of stormy sea; but there was no mistaking the cheer followed by commands. These sounded faint and hoarsely; a few words were spoken with a trumpet, and then came the shrill whistle of the boatswain's pipe.

On our own deck was rushing to and fro, and frenzied labour everywhere. The first object was to get away from the searchlight; they would seek presently, no doubt, for who had fired the betraying shot. If I could have known what to do, so as to stay our progress, there would have been other shots; for now that we were moving through the water, every second might take us further from the shore and place us deeper in the toils of our foes.

CHAPTER LII. THE SKARES

I whispered to Marjory and Don Bernardino:

“If they once get away we are lost! We must stop them at all hazards!” The Spaniard nodded and Marjory squeezed my hands; there was no need of speech. Then I fixed the order of battle. I was to fire first, then the Spaniard, then Marjory, each saving his fire till we knew whether another shot was required. This precaution was necessary, as we had no reserve ammunition. We took it for granted that the chambers of the revolvers were full; my one shot had been satisfactory in this respect. When the sails were set and we began rushing through the water I saw that even at the risk of betraying ourselves to our enemies we must give warning again, and so fired. There was an answering cheer from the *Keystone* through the fog; and then a sudden rush forward of those on our own deck. When they were close to us, the seamen hung back; but the men of the gang kept on firing as they came. Fortunately we were in a line behind cover, for I could hear the ‘ping’ and the tearing wood as the bullets struck the mast. I fired a shot just to show that we were armed; and heard a sharp cry. Then they fell back. In a moment or two they also had formed their plan of battle. These were men used to such encounters; and as they knew that at such times a quick rush may mean everything, they did not let the grass grow under their feet. I could see one of the seamen remonstrating with them, and hear the quick, angry tones of his voice, though I could not distinguish the words.

He pointed out into the fog, where now there was distinctly a luminous patch of light: the searchlight was moving towards us. The *Keystone* was coming down on us.

The blackmailer shook off the seaman and, then gave some directions to his comrades; they spread out right and left of us, and tried to find some kind of cover. I lifted Marjory and put her standing on the barrel fastened behind the mast, for I thought that as the flash of my pistol had come from the deck they would not expect any one to be raised so high. Don Bernardino and I curled down on the deck, and our opponents began to fire. In the thickening fog, and with the motion of the ship which threw us all about like ninepins, their aim was vague; fortunately no one was hit. When I thought I had a chance I fired, but there was no response; the Don got a shot and Marjory another, but there was no sound, save that of the bullets striking on wood or iron. Then Marjory, whose traditional instinct was coming into play, fired twice in rapid succession; there was a quick exclamation and then a flood of horrible profanity, the man was only winged. Again and again they fired, and I heard a groan behind me from the Don.

"What's that?" I whispered, not daring to stop or even to look back:

"My arm! Take my pistol, I cannot shoot with my left hand." I put my hand back, and he placed the revolver in it. I saw a dark form rush across the deck and fired — and missed. I tried another shot; but the weapon only answered with a click; the chambers were exhausted. So I used the other revolver. And so for a few minutes a furious fight went on. Marjory seldom fired, she was holding herself in reserve; but before I knew what was happening my second revolver was empty. Our antagonists were no chickens at their work; there was little to teach any of them in such a method of contest as this. Some one had evidently been counting the shots, for he suddenly called out:

"Not yet boys! They've at least three shots still!" With a sudden simultaneous rush they ran back into shelter.

During this time we had been tearing through the water at our full speed. But behind us on the port quarter was the sound of a great ship steaming on. The roar of the furnaces could be heard in the trumpeting of the funnels. The boatswain’s whistles were piping, and there were voices of command cutting hoarsely through the fog. The searchlight too was at work; we could see its rays high up on the mist, though they did not at the moment penetrate sufficiently to expose us to the lookout of the *Keystone*. Closer on our starboard quarter was another sound which came on the trailing wind, the rush of a small vessel running fast. We could hear down the wind the sharp ‘slap slap’ of the waves on the bows, and the roaring of the wind among the cordage. This must be the *Sporran* following us close with grim disregard of danger. The commander of the whaler, recognising the possibility of discovery, put his helm hard to starboard. I could myself not see through the darkness; but the seaman did and took his chance of grounding in Cruden Bay. When we had run in a little way the helm was jammed hard down again, and we ran on the other tack; for the moment we were lost to both the war ship and the yacht. Marjory looked at me appealingly and I nodded; the situation was not one to be risked. She fired another shot from her pistol. There was an immediate reply from far out on our port side in the shape of more directions spoken with the trumpet and answering piping from the boatswains. Several shots were fired towards us by the gang; they were manifestly on chance, for they went wildly wide of us. Then we could hear an angry remonstrance from the whaler captain, and a threat that if there were any more firing, he would down with his sails and take chance of being captured. One of the gang answered him:

"That packet can't capture you within the three-mile limit; it's a cruiser of Uncle Sam's and they won't risk having to lie up in harbour here till the war is over." To which the other surlily replied:

"I wouldn't put money on it. Anyhow someone will! You keep quiet if you can. There's enough against us already if we should be caught!" The reply of the blackmailer was at least practical. I could not see what he did, but I took it that he put his pistol to the captain's head as he said with a frightful oath:

"You'll go on as you arranged with me; or I'll blow your brains out where you stand. There's quite enough against any of us, you included; so your one chance anyhow is to get out of this hole. See?" The captain accepted the position and gave his orders with a quiet delivery, to the effect that we ran first shorewards and then to starboard again till we were running back on our tracks like a hare.

Suddenly, however, this course was brought to an end by our almost running into a small vessel which as we passed I could see by its trim appearance was a yacht. We were so close for a few seconds, whilst we ran across her stern, that I shouted out:

"All right, MacRae. All safe as yet. She's trying to run out to sea. Try to tell the *Keystone*." The answer was a cheer from all aboard.

As our ship swept into the fog, several of our enemies ran at us. I handed Don Bernardino his own dagger and took the bowie knife myself. Then we stood ready in case our foes should get to close quarters. They got nearly up to us, firing as they came; but we were just then sheltering behind the mast and no injury was done. They hesitated to come on, not seeing us; and we waited. As we stood with beating hearts the ship began to come to starboard again. We must have been sheltered in some way, for we did not seem to feel either wind or tide so much as before. Suddenly one of the seamen said:

“Whist! I hear breakers!” The rest paused and listened, and the captain called out:

“Hard to starboard; we are running on shore!” The ship answered at once, and we began to run across the wind, feeling the tide at the same time. But as we went, a searchlight flashed on the fog before us. We could not stop or change quick enough to quite avoid the ship from which it came, but the helm was put hard to starboard again and we ran close along side a great war ship. I could see her tower with protruding cannon as we ran by. A voice came through a speaking trumpet, and I could just catch the first words as the vessel swept by us:

“Rocks ahead!” The instinct of the seaman spoke, even at such a time, to keep another vessel from harm. The answer from our vessel was a volley of curses. Then the searchlight swept our deck, and we could see all our enemies. They were round us in a great ring and closing in upon us. They saw us, too, and with a shout began to run in. I took Marjory by the waist and ran with her to the bow of the ship; I flung her up on the bulwark and jumped up beside her. Don Bernardino joined us in a moment, and we saw the searchlight as it passed us and pierced into the fog ahead. Already the bulk of the battleship was almost lost in the mist; there was only a faint indication of her presence in a monstrous mass behind the searchlight, and the end of a spar rising above the fog. In front of us there was a great roaring of water and that sharp rushing sound which comes from the back sweep of a broken wave. Our skipper saw the danger, and in a voice like a trumpet gave his orders.

But it was too late to do anything. As the searchlight again swept our deck, I saw the ring of men break up and scatter; almost at the same moment the rays passing beyond us, fell on a low rock rising from the sea up whose sides great waves were dashing. We were rushing to it, borne by wind and tide in a terrible haste.

At that instant we struck a rock below the water. With the shock we three were thrown forward into the sea. I heard a despairing shout behind us; and then the water closed over my head.

When I rose it was in a wild agony of fear for Marjory. She had been sitting to my left on the bulwark and must therefore have fallen to seaward of me. I raised myself as well as I could and looked around; and, by God's grace, saw two hands rising above the water a few yards from me. With all my might I struggled towards them, and was able to drag my wife up to the surface. When I had her with me, though my terror and anxiety increased, I could think. At such moments the mind acts with lightning speed, and in a second or two I came to the conclusion that the rock we had struck must be amongst the Skares. If so, the only chance was to edge in with the tide and try to avoid striking any of the underlying rocks which I knew well were so deadly. Had not I seen Lauchlane Macleod come to his death through them.

It was a desperate struggle before us. The tide was racing amongst the rocks, and even were there no waves it would have been a difficult task to have won through it into shore. For myself I was a strong enough swimmer to have found my way in, even if I had had to round the outer rock and keep up to the harbour of Whinnyfold. But with Marjory to care for, too — Marjory who had only lately learned to swim.... The prospect was indeed a terrible one. We must not lose a chance, and so I made my wife loose her skirts which fell away in the drag of the water; she could then swim more freely and to the best of her power.

The wind beat fiercely, and the tops of the breaking waves nearly choked us as they flew. There was just light enough down on the water level to see rocks a few yards ahead; the line of the shore rose like one dim opaque mass. In the darkness and the stress of the tide race there was little I could do, save keep Marjory’s head and my own above the water and let the current bear us on. I must avoid the rocks as well as I could, and let all my efforts tend to bring us shorewards. There was not time for fears or doubting, or hoping; the moments must pass and the struggle be made, never-ending though it seemed to be.

After a few minutes I began to tire; the strain of the last few days and my late effort in reaching the whaler had begun to tell on me. I had now and again a passing thought of Don Bernardino and the friends who had been helping us; but they were all far off. The Spaniard I should probably never seen again; the others might never see us.... I was relapsing into the lethargy of despair.

With a violent effort I woke to the task before me, and kept sternly on my way. Marjory was striving her utmost; but her strength was failing. Her weight was becoming deader.... That nerved me to further effort, and I swam on so frantically that I drew closer to the mainland. Here there was shelter of a kind; the waves broken by the outer rocks were less forceful. The crested tops which the wind had driven on us were weakening also. There was hope in this and it kept me up. On I fought — on — on — on. Oh! would the struggle never end! I shut my teeth, and forged on fiercely. I could feel that we were going with the rush of the waves through a gully between sunken rocks.

Joy! there was shore beneath my feet, rough pebbles which rolled and worked against each other. The wave pulled us back. But my heart was renewed again. I made one more frantic effort, and swam closer to the land. Then as I saw the wave began to recoil I put down my feet, and with the last of my strength lifting Marjory in my arms I fought fiercely with the retreating wave. Staggering over the screaming pebbles, exhausted to the point of death, I bore her high up on the beach and laid her down. Then I sank lifeless beside her cold body.

The last thing I remember was the faint light of the coming dawn, falling on her marble-white face as she lay on the shore.

CHAPTER LIII. FROM THE DEEP

It could not have been more than a few minutes before I recovered consciousness, if indeed I were ever absolutely unconscious. It was rather the inevitable yielding to a strain on nerve and muscle and brain, than a time of oblivion. I think that I always knew that I was by the sea, and that Marjory was beside me and in trouble; but that was all. I was in the nightmare stage, when one can understand danger and realise terror; and when the only thing impossible to one is to do anything. Certainly, when I came to myself I was fully conscious of my surroundings. I was even surprised that I did not see on Marjory's pale face, the cold faint gleam of light which had been there when last I saw her. The general light had, however, increased. The strand and the rocks looked now not black, but inexpressibly drear in the uniform grey which seemed to make all colour and shape and distance into one sad flat screen. My first work was of course to attend Marjory. For a while I feared that she was dead, so white was she amid the surrounding grey. But her heart still beat, and her breast moved, though very slightly, with her breathing. I could now see that we were in Broad Haven and, so, close to my own home. I could see through the pierced rock called the "Puir Mon." I took my wife in my arms and carried her, though with infinite difficulty for I was sorely exhausted, up the steep path, and brought her into the house. I had to break the door in again, but there was no one to help me or to interfere in the matter. I got some brandy and poured a few drops into her mouth, and laid her in a pile of rugs whilst I lit the fire. The supply of whin bushes in the wood house was not exhausted, and very soon there was a roaring fire. When Marjory opened her eyes and looked around the room, a certain amount of consciousness came to her. She imagined the occasion of her being with me was the same as when we had escaped from the flooded cave; holding out her arms she said to me with infinite love and sweetness:

"Thank God, dear, you are safe!" A moment later she rubbed her eyes and sat up, looking wildly around as one does after a hideous dream. In her survey, however, her eyes lit on her own figure, and a real wave of shame swept over her; she hastily pulled the rug round her shoulders and sank back. The habit of personal decorum had conquered fear. She closed her eyes for a moment or two to remember, and when she opened them was in full possession of all her faculties and her memory.

"It was no dream! It is all, all real! And I owe my life to you, darling, once again!" I kissed her, and she sank back with a sigh of happiness. A moment later, however, she started up, crying out to me:

"But the others, where are they? Quick! quick! let us go to help them if we can!" She looked wildly round. I understood her wishes, and hurrying into the other room brought her an armful of her clothes.

In a few minutes she joined me; and hand in hand we went out on the edge of the cliff. As we went, I told her of what had happened since she became unconscious in the water.

The wind was now blowing fiercely, almost a gale. The sea had risen, till great waves driving amongst the rocks had thrashed the whole region of the Skares into a wild field of foam. Below us, the waves dashing over the sunken rocks broke on the shore with a loud roaring, and washed high above the place where we had lain. The fog had lifted, and objects could be seen even at a distance. Far out, some miles away, lay a great ship; and by the outermost of the Skares a little to the north of the great rock and where the sunken reef lies, rose part of a broken mast. But there was nothing else to be seen, except away to south a yacht tossing about under double-reefed sails. Sea and sky were of a leaden grey, and the heavy clouds that drifted before the gale came so low as to make us think that they were the fog belts risen from the sea.

Marjory would not be contented till we had roused the whole village of Whinnyfold, and with them had gone all round the cliffs and looked into every little opening to see if there were trace or sign of any of those who had been wrecked with us. But it was all in vain.

We sent a mounted messenger off to Crom with a note, for we knew in what terrible anxiety Mrs. Jack must be. In an incredibly short time the good lady was with us; and was rocking Marjory in her arms, crying and laughing over her wildly. By and bye she got round the carriage from the village and said to us:

"And now my dears, I suppose we had better get back to Crom, where you can rest yourselves after this terrible time." Marjory came over to me, and holding my arm looked at her old nurse lovingly as she said with deep earnestness:

"You had better go back, dear, and get things ready for us. As for me, I shall never willingly leave my husband's side again!"

The storm continued for a whole day, growing rougher and wilder with each hour. For another day it grew less and less, till finally the wind had died away and only the rough waves spoke of what had been. Then the sea began to give up its dead. Some seamen presumably those of the *Wilhelmina* were found along the coast between Whinnyfold and Old Slains, and the bodies of two of the blackmailers, terribly mangled, were washed ashore at Cruden Bay.

The rest of the sailors and of the desperadoes were never found. Whether they escaped by some miracle, or were swallowed in the sea, will probably never be known.

Strangest of all was the finding of Don Bernardino. The body of the gallant Spanish gentleman was found washed up on shore behind the Lord Nelson rock, just opposite where had been the opening to the cave in which his noble ancestor had hidden the Pope's treasure. It was as though the sea itself had respected his devotion, and had laid him by the place of his Trust. Marjory and I saw his body brought home to Spain when the war was over, and laid amongst the tombs of his ancestors. We petitioned the Crown; and though no actual leave was given, no objection was made to our removing the golden figure of San Cristobal which Benvenuto had wrought for the Pope. It now stands over the Spaniard's tomb in the church of San Cristobal in far Castile.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

"In the First Edition of his work "The Two Bookes of Francis Bacon, of the proficience and advancement of Learning, divine and humane" published at London in 1605, the Author only alludes briefly to his Bi-literal Cipher. Speaking of Ciphers generally (Booke II) he says:

"But the vertues of them, whereby they are to be preferred, are three; that they be not laborious to write and reade; that they bee impossible to discypher; and in some cases, that they bee without suspicion. The highest Degree whereof, is to write OMNIA PER OMNIA; which is undoubtedly possible, with a proportion Quintuple at most, of the writing infoulding, to the writing infoulded, and no other restrainte whatsoever."

It was not till eighteen years later that he gave to the public an explanation of this 'infoulding' writing. In the rarely beautiful edition of the work in Latin printed in London by Haviland in 1623, the passage relating to secret writing is much amplified. Indeed the entire work is completed in many ways and greatly enlarged as is shown by its title.

"De Dignitate et Augmentis Scientiarum. Libros IX."

The following is his revised statement:

"Ut vero suspicio omnis absit, aliud Juventum subijciemus, quod certe, cum Adolescentuli essemus Parisiis, excogitavimus; nec etiam adhuc visa vobis res digna est, quae pereat. Habet enim gradum Ciphrae altissimum; nimirum ut *Omnia per Omnia* significari possint: ita tamen, ut Scriptis quae involuitut, quintuplo minor sit, quam ea cui involvatur: Alia nulla omnino requiritur Conditio, aut

Restrictio. Id hoc modo fiet. Primo, universae literae Alphabeti in duas tantummodo Literas soluantur, per Transpositionem earum. Nam Transpositis duarum Literarum, per Locos quinque, Differentiis triginta duabus, multo magis viginti quatuor (qui est Numerus Alphabeti apud nos) sufficiet. Huius *Alphabeti*. Exemplum tale est.”

“But for avoiding suspicion altogether, I will add another contrivance, which I devised myself when I was at Paris in my early youth, and which I still think worthy of preservation. For it has the perfection of a cipher, which is to make anything signifying anything; subject however to this condition, that the infolding writing shall contain at least five times as many letters as the writing infolded; no other condition or restriction is required. The way to do it is this: First let all the letters of the Alphabet be resolved into transpositions of two letters only. For the transposition of two letters through five places will yield thirty-two differences; much more twenty-four, which is the number of letters in our Alphabet. Here is an example of such an Alphabet.

[illegible]

aab[illegible]

[illegible]

abb[illegible]

[illegible]

bab[illegible]

“Nor is it a slight thing which is thus by the way effected. For heare we see how thoughts may be communicated at any distance of place by means of any objects perceptible either to the eye or ear, provided only that those objects are capable of two differences; as by bells, trumpets, torches, gunshots, and the like. But to proceed with our business. When you prepare to write, you must reduce the interior epistle to this bi-literal alphabet. Let the interior epistle be:

Fly.

Example of reduction.

F Y

aabab babba

“Have by you at the same time another alphabet in two forms; I mean in which each of the letters of the common alphabet, both capitals and small, are exhibited in two different forms, — any forms that you find convenient.”

[For instance, Roman and Italic letters; “a” representing Roman and “b” representing Italic.]

“Then take your interior epistle, reduced to the bi-literal shape, and adapt it, letter by letter, to your exterior epistle in the biform character; and then write it out. Let the exterior epistle be:

“Do not go till I come.”

Example of reduction

F Y

aabab babba

DO NOT — *E*

Do not go till come

From the above given dates it would almost seem as if Bacon had treated the matter in a purely academic manner, and had drawn out of his remembrance of his younger days a method of secret communication which had not seen any practical service. Spedding mentions in his book “Francis Bacon and his Times” that Bacon may have got the hint of the ‘bi-literal cypher’ from the work of John Baptist Porta, “De occultis literarum notis,” reprinted in Strasburg in

1606, but the first edition of which was published when Porta was a young man. It is however manifest from certain evidence, that Bacon practised his special cipher and used it for many years. Lady Bacon, mother of the philosopher, writing in 1593, to her son Anthony, elder brother of Francis, speaking of him, Francis, says, "I do not understand his enigmatical folded writing." Indeed it is possible that many years before he had tried to have his invention made use of for public service. His was an age of secret writing. Every Ambassador had to send his despatches in cipher, for thus — and even then not always — could they be safe from hostile eyes. The thousands of pages of reports to King Philip made by Don Bernardino de Mendoza, the Spanish Ambassador at the Court of Queen Elizabeth, before the time of the Armada, were all written in this form; the groaning shelves of the records at Simancas bear evidence of the industry of such political officials and of their spies and secretaries. An ambitious youth like Francis Bacon, son of the Lord Keeper, and so traditionally and familiarly in touch with Court and Council, who in his baby days was addressed by Elizabeth as her "young Lord Keeper," and who spent the time between his sixteenth and eighteenth years in the suite of the English Ambassador in Paris, Sir Amyas Paulet, must have had constant experience of the need of a cipher which would fulfill the conditions which he laid down as essential in 1605 — facility of execution, impossibility of discovery, and lack of suspiciousness. When, in a letter of 16 Sept. 1580, to his uncle Lord Burghley, he made suit to the Queen for some special employment, it is possible that the post he sought was that of secret writer to Her Majesty. His letter, though followed up with a more pressing one on 18th October of the same year, remained unanswered. Whatever the motive or purpose of these last two letters may have been, it remained on his mind; for eleven years later we find him again writing to his uncle the Lord Keeper: “I ever have a mind to serve Her Majesty,” and again, “the meanness of my estate doth somewhat move me.” In the interval, on 25th August, 1585, he wrote to the Right Hon. Sir Francis Walsingham, Principal Secretary to the Queen: “In default of getting it, will go back to course of practice (at Bar) I must and will follow, not for my necessity of estate but for my credit’s sake, which I fear by being out of action will wear.” His brother Anthony spent the best part of his life abroad, presumably on some secret missions; and as Francis was the recipient of his letters it was doubtless that “folded writing” which so puzzled their mother which was used for the safety and secrecy of their correspondence. Indeed to what a fine point the biliteral method must have been brought by Bacon and his correspondents is shown by the extraordinarily minute differences given in his own setting forth of the symbols for “a” and “b” etc., in the “*De Augmentis*” of 1623 and later. In the edition printed in Latin in Paris the next year, 1624, by Peter Mettayer, the differences, possibly through some imperfection of printing, are so minute that even the reader studying the characters set before him, with the extra elucidation of their being placed under their proper headings, finds it almost impossible to understand them. The cutting for instance of the “n” which represents “a” and that which represents “b” seems, even after prolonged study, to be the same.

It is to be noticed that Bacon in setting forth the cipher in its completeness directs attention to its infinite possibilities and variations. The organised repetition of any two symbols in combinations of not more than five for one or both symbols may convey ideas. Not letters only but colours, bells, cannon, or other sounds may be used with effect. All the senses may be employed, or any or some of them, in endless combinations.

Again it is to be noted that even in his first allusion to the system in 1605, he says, "to write Omnia per Omnia, which is undoubtedly possible, with a proportion *Quintuple at most*, of the writing infoulding, to the writing infoulded."

"Quintuple at most!" But in the instances of his system which he gives eighteen years later, when probably his time for secret writing as a matter of business had ceased, and when from the lofty altitude of the Woolsack he could behold unmoved any who had concealments to make — provided of course that they were not connected with bribes — there is only one method given, that of five infolding letters for each one infolded. In the later and fuller period he speaks also of the one necessary condition "that the infoulding writing shall contain *at least five times as many letters* as the writing infoulded" —

Even in the example which he gives "Do not go till I come," there is a superfluous letter, — the final "e;" as though he wished to mislead the reader by inference as well as by direct statement.

Is it possible that he stopped short in his completion of this marvellous cipher? Can we believe that he who openly spoke from the first of symbols "*quintuple at most*," was content to use so large a number of infolding letters when he could possibly do with less? Why, the last condition of excellence in a cipher which he himself laid down, namely, that it should "bee without suspicion," would be endangered by a larger number than was actually necessary. It is by repetition of symbols that the discovery of secret writing is made; and in a cipher where, manifestly, the eye or the ear or the touch or the taste must be guided by such, and so marked and prolonged, symbols, the chances of discovery are enormously increased. Doubtless, then, he did not rest in his investigation and invention until he had brought his cipher to its least dimensions; and it was for some other reason or purpose that he thus tried to divert the mind of the student from his earlier suggestion. It will probably be proved hereafter that more than one variant and reduction to lower dimensions of his biliteral cipher was used between himself and his friends. When the secrets of that "Scrivenry" which, according to Mr. W. G. Thorpe in his interesting volume, "The Hidden Lives of Shakespeare and Bacon," Bacon kept at work in Twickenham Park, are made known, we shall doubtless know more on the subject. Of one point, however, we may rest assured, that Bacon did not go back in his pursuance of an interesting study; and the change from "Quintuple at most" of the infolding writing of 1605, to "Quintuple at least," of 1623, was meant for some purpose of misleading or obscuration, rather than as a limitation of his original setting forth of the powers and possibilities of his great invention. It will some day be an interesting theme of speculation and study what use of his biliteral cipher had been made between 1605 and 1623; and what it was that he wished to conceal.

That the original cipher, as given, can be so reduced is manifest. Of the Quintuple biliteral there are thirty-two combinations. As in the Elizabethan alphabet, as Bacon himself points out, there were but twenty-four letters, certain possibilities of reduction at once unfold themselves, since at the very outset one entire fourth of the symbols are unused.

APPENDIX B

ON THE REDUCTION OF THE NUMBER OF SYMBOLS IN BACON’S BILITERAL CIPHER

When I examined the scripts together, both that of the numbers and those of the dots, I found distinct repetitions of groups of symbols; but no combinations sufficiently recurrent to allow me to deal with them as entities. In the number cipher the class of repetitions seemed more marked. This may have been, however, that as the symbols were simpler and of a kind with which I was more familiar, the traces or surmises were easier to follow. It gave me hope to find that there was something in common between the two methods. It might be, indeed, that both writings were but variants of the same system. Unconsciously I gave my attention to the simpler form — the numbers — and for a long weary time went over them forward, backward, up and down, adding, subtracting, multiplying, dividing; but without any favorable result. The only encouragement which I got was that I got additions of eight and nine, each of these many times repeated. Try how I would, however, I could not scheme out of them any coherent result.

When in desperation I returned to the dotted papers I found that this method was still more exasperating, for on a close study of them I could not fail to see that there was a cipher manifest; though what it was, or how it could be read, seemed impossible to me. Most of the letters had marks in or about them; indeed there were very few which had not. Examining more closely still I found that the dots were disposed in three different ways: (a) in the body of the letter itself: (b) above the letter: (c) below it. There was never more than one mark in the body of the letter; but those above or below were sometimes single and sometimes double. Some letters had only the dot in the body; and others, whether marked on the body or not, had no dots either above or below. Thus there was every form and circumstance of marking within these three categories. The only thing which my instinct seemed to impress upon me continually was that very few of the letters had marks both above and below. In such cases two were above and one below, or *vice versa*; but in no case were there marks in the body and above and below also. At last I came to the conclusion that I had better, for the time, abandon attempting to decipher; and try to construct a cipher on the lines of Bacon's Biliteral — one which would ultimately accord in some way with the external conditions of either, or both, of those before me.

But Bacon's Biliteral as set forth in the *Novum Organum* had five symbols in every case. As there were here no repetitions of five, I set myself to the task of reducing Bacon's system to a lower number of symbols — a task which in my original memorandum I had held capable of accomplishment.

For hours I tried various means of reduction, each time getting a little nearer to the ultimate simplicity; till at last I felt that I had mastered the principle.

Take the Baconian biliteral cipher as he himself gives it and knock out repetitions of four or five aaaaa: aaaab: abbbb: baaaa: bbbba: and bbbbb. This would leave a complete alphabet with two extra symbols for use as stops, repeats, capitals, etc. This method of deletion, however, would not allow of the reduction of the number of symbols used; there would still be required five for each letter to be infolded. We have therefore to try another process of reduction, that affecting the variety of symbols without reference to the number of times, up to five, which each one is repeated.

Take therefore the Baconian Biliteral and place opposite to each item the number of symbols required. The first, (aaaaa) requires but one symbol "a," the second, (aaaab) two, "a" and "b;" the third (aaaba) three, "a" "b" and "a;" and so on. We shall thus find that the 11th (ababa) and the 22nd (babab) require five each, and that the 6th, 10th, 12th, 14th, 19th, 21st, 23rd and 27th require four each. If, therefore, we delete all these biliteral combinations which require four or five symbols each — ten in all — we have still left twenty-two combinations, necessitating at most not more than two changes of symbol in addition to the initial letter of each, requiring up to five quantities of the same symbol. Fit these to the alphabet; and the scheme of cipher is complete.

If, therefore, we can devise any means of expressing, in conjunction with each symbol, a certain number of repeats up to five; and if we can, for practical purposes, reduce our alphabet to twenty-two letters, we can at once reduce the biliteral cipher to three instead of five symbols.

The latter is easy enough, for certain letters are so infrequently used that they may well be grouped in twos. Take "X" and "Z" for instance. In modern printing in English where the letter "e" is employed seventy times, "x" is only used three times, and "z" twice. Again, "k" is only used six times, and "q" only three times. Therefore we may very well group together "k" and "q," and "x" and "z." The lessening of the Elizabethan alphabet thus effected would leave but twenty-two letters, the same number as the combinations of the biliteral remaining after the elision. And further, as "W" is but "V" repeated, we could keep a special symbol to represent the repetition of this or any other letter, whether the same be in the body of a word, or if it be the last of one word and the first of that which follows. Thus we give a greater elasticity to the cipher and so minimise the chance of discovery.

As to the expression of numerical values applied to each of the symbols “a” and “b” of the biliteral cipher as above modified, such is simplicity itself in a number cipher. As there are two symbols to be represented and five values to each — four in addition to the initial — take the numerals, one to ten — which latter, of course, could be represented by 0. Let the odd numbers according to their values stand for “a”:

a=1
aa=3
aaa=5
aaaa=7
aaaaa=9

and the even numbers according to their values stand for “b”:

b=2
bb=4
bbb=6
bbbb=8
bbbbb=0

and then? Eureka! We have a Biliteral Cipher in which each letter is represented by one, two, or three, numbers; and so the five symbols of the Baconian Biliteral is reduced to three at maximum.

Variants of this scheme can of course, with a little ingenuity, be easily reconstructed.

APPENDIX C

THE RESOLVING OF BACON’S BILITERAL REDUCED TO THREE SYMBOLS IN A NUMBER CIPHER

Place in their relative order as appearing in the original arrangement the selected symbols of the Biliteral:

a a a a a
a a a a b
&c

Then place opposite each the number arrived at by the application of odd and even figures to represent the numerical values of the symbols “a” and “b.”

Thus aaaaa 9 will be as shown
aaaab 721 will be as shown
aaaba 521 will be as shown

and so on. Then put in sequence of numerical value. We shall then have: 0. 9. 18. 27. 36. 45. 54. 63. 72. 81. 125. 143. 161. 216. 234. 252. 323. 341. 414. 432. 521. 612. An analysis shows that of these there are two of one figure; eight of two figures; and twelve of three figures. Now as regards the latter series — the symbols composed of three figures — we will find that if we add together the component figures of each of those which begins and ends with an even number they will tot up to nine; but that the total of each of those commencing and ending with an odd number only total up to eight. There are no two of these symbols which clash with one another so as to cause confusion.

To fit the alphabet to this cipher the simplest plan is to reserve one symbol (the first—”0”) to represent the repetition of a foregoing letter. This would not only enlarge possibilities of writing, but would help to baffle inquiry. There is a distinct purpose in choosing “0” as the symbol of repetition for it can best be spared; it would invite curiosity to begin a number cipher with “0,” were it in use in any combination of figures representing a letter.

Keep all the other numbers and combinations of numbers for purely alphabetical use. Then take the next five — 9 to 45 to represent the vowels. The rest of the alphabet can follow in regular sequence, using up of the triple combinations, first those beginning and ending with even numbers and which tot up to nine, and when these have been exhausted, the others, those beginning and ending with odd numbers and which tot up to eight, in their own sequence.

If this plan be adopted, any letter of a word can be translated into numbers which are easily distinguishable, and whose sequence can be seemingly altered, so as to baffle inquisitive eyes, by the addition of any other numbers placed anywhere throughout the cipher. All of these added numbers can easily be discovered and eliminated by the scribe who undertakes the work of decipheration, by means of the additions of odd or even numbers, or by reference to his key. The whole cipher is so rationally exact that any one who knows the principle can make a key in a few minutes.

As I had gone on with my work I was much cheered by certain resemblances or coincidences which presented themselves, linking my new construction with the existing cipher. When I hit upon the values of additions of eight and nine as the component elements of some of the symbols, I felt sure that I was now on the right track. At the completion of my work I was exultant for I felt satisfied in believing that the game was now in my own hands.

APPENDIX D

ON THE APPLICATION OF THE NUMBER CIPHER TO THE DOTTED PRINTING

The problem which I now put before myself was to make dots in a printed book in which I could repeat accurately and simply the setting forth of the biliteral cipher. I had, of course, a clue or guiding principle in the combinations of numbers with the symbols of “a” and “b” as representing the Alphabetical symbols. Thus it was easy to arrange that “a” should be represented by a letter untouched and “b” by one with a mark. This mark might be made at any point of the letter. Here I referred to the cipher itself and found that though some letters were marked with a dot in the centre or body of the letter, those both above and below wherever they occurred showed some kind of organised use. “Why not,” said I to myself, “use the body for the difference between “a” and “b;” and the top and bottom for numbers?”

No sooner said than done. I began at once to devise various ways of representing numbers by marks or dots at top and bottom. Finally I fixed, as being the most simple, on the following:

Only four numbers — 2, 3, 4, 5 — are required to make the number of times each letter of the symbol is repeated, there being in the original Baconian cipher, after the elimination of the ten variations already made, only three changes of symbol to represent any letter. Marks at the top might therefore represent the even numbers “2” and “4” — one mark standing for “two” and two marks for “four”; marks at the bottom would represent the odd numbers “3” and “5” — one mark standing for “three” and two marks for “five.”

Thus “a a a a a” would be represented by “a̤” or any other letter with two dots below: “a a a a b” by ä b, or any other letters similarly treated. As any letter left plain would represent “a” and any letter dotted in the body would represent "b" the cipher is complete for application to any printed or written matter. As in the number cipher, the repetition of a letter could be represented by a symbol which in this variant would be the same as the symbol for ten or "0." It would be any letter with one dot in the body and two under it, thus—$\underset{..}{\dot{t}}$.

For the purpose of adding to the difficulty of discovery, where two marks were given either above or below the letter, the body mark (representing the letter as "b" in the Biliteral) might be placed at the opposite end. This would create no confusion in the mind of an advised decipherer, but would puzzle the curious.

On the above basis I completed my key and set to my work of deciphering with a jubilant heart; for I felt that so soon as I should have adjusted any variations between the systems of the old writer and my own, work only was required to ultimately master the secret.

The following tables will illustrate the making and working — both in ciphering and de-ciphering — of the amended Biliteral Cipher of Francis Bacon:

CIPHER FOR NUMBERS AND DOTS.

D (Dot) means letter with dot in body
P (Plain) means letter left untouched

One Dot — (.) at Top (t) = 2
One Dot — (.) at Bottom (b) = 3

Two Dots — (..) at Top (t) = 4
Two Dots — (..) at Bottom (b) = 5

[illegible] in order.

No. Values of Symbols reported.

A — a a a

B. 2 — P. 2 a a b D

C. 2. P. 3 a b a D — P

D. 4 — B 4 a b b D.t

E.2.P5 a t b a D — P.t

F.2.1.6 a b a b

G.4.R.7 a b b D.t — P

H.6 D 8 a t b b D.b

I.2.P 9 b a D a — P.b

K.3.4.10 a a b

L.2.5.D 11 a b a

M.2.4.12 a b b

N.4.R 13 b D a t — P.t

O.4.1.14 b a b

P.6.R 15 b D a b — P

Q.8 R 16 b D.t

R.7 D 17 a a P.t

S.5.D 18 a P b b — D

T.3.3.19 a b a

V.3.D 20 a P b t — D.t

W.1.3.21 b a a

X.1.5.22 a a b

Y.1.4.23 b b a

Z.1.D 24 b P b — D.b

25 D b t a a P.b

26.3 D b t a b P.t — D

27.1.3.b a b a

28.1.D b t a b P — D.t

29 D b b a a P.t

30.1.D b b a b P — D

31 D b t b b a P

32 Repeat b

Note. — When there are to be two dots at either top or bottom of a letter, the dot usually put in the body of a letter which is to indicate "b" can be placed at the opposite end of the letter to the double dotting. This will help to baffle investigation without puzzling the skilled interpreter.

KEY TO NUMBER CIPHER

Divide off into additions of nine or eight. Thus if extraneous figures have been inserted, they can be detected and deleted.

[illegible] Cipher.

[illegible] Repeat Letter

[illegible]5

[illegible]3

[illegible]1

[illegible]8

[illegible]16

[illegible]

[illegible] or Q

[illegible]7

[illegible]

[illegible] or Z

[illegible]2

[illegible]

[illegible]2

[illegible] or V

[illegible]

[illegible]1

[illegible]

[illegible]V

2Z

21

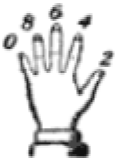
Repeat

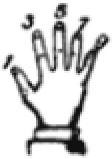
Finger Cipher.

Values the same as Number Cipher.

The RIGHT hand, beginning at the thumb, represent the ODD numbers,

The LEFT hand, beginning at the thumb, represent the EVEN numbers.





KEY TO DOT CIPHER

P — Letter left plain.

D — Dot in centre or where are two dots t or b in other end (b or t).

b — bottom of letter.

Dot Cipher.

Ab — D

Bb D D

Cbt P D

Sbt D D

Ett D P

Ntto PZ

Cb D

Ht D —

[illegible] P

[illegible]

[illegible] —— —

[illegible] D

[illegible] P

[illegible] P

[illegible] P

[illegible] D

[illegible]

[illegible] V

[illegible] —

[illegible] D

[illegible]

[illegible] repeated)

Memoranda.

Begin fresh with each line.

Take no account of stops.

Take no account of Capitals or odd words.

y^{e} is one letter.

APPENDIX E

Page ——

NARRATIVE OF BERNARDINO DE ESCOBAN, KNIGHT OF THE CROSS OF THE HOLY SEE AND GRANDEE OF SPAIN

When my kinsman who was known as the "Spanish Cardinal" heard of my arrival in Rome in obedience to his secret summons, he sent one to me who took me to see him at the Vatican. I went at once and found that though the carriage of his great office had somewhat aged my kinsman it had not changed the sweet bearing which he had ever had towards me. He entered at once on the matter regarding which he had summoned me, leaving to later those matters of home and family which were close to us both, and prefacing his speech with an assurance — unnecessary I enforced on him — that he would not have urged me to so great a voyage, and at a time when the concerns of home and of His Catholic Majesty so needed me in my own place, had there not been strictest need of my presence at Rome. This he then explained, ever anticipating my ignorance, so lucidly and with sweet observance of my needs, that I could not wonder at his great advancement.

Entering at once on the enterprise of the King as to the restoration of England to the fold of the True Church he made clear to me that the one great wish of His Holinesse was to aid in all ways the achievement of the same. To such end he was willing to devote a vast treasure, the which he had accumulated for the purpose through many years. “But” said my kinsman, and with so much smiling as might become his grave office “the King hath here at the Court of Rome one to represent him, who, though doubtless a zealous and faithful servant of his Royal Master, hath not those qualities of discretion and discernment, of the subjugation of self and the discipline of his own ideas, which go to make up the perfection of the Ambassador. He hath already many times and in many ways, to many persons and in many Countries, said of His Holinesse such things as, even if true — and they are not so — were, in the high discretion of his office as Ambassador, better unspoken. This, moreover, in an Embassy wherein he wishes to acquire much which the mundane world holds to be of great worth. The Count de Olivares hath spoken freely and without reserve of the Holy Father's reticence in handing over vast sums of money to His Catholic Majesty as due to parsimony, to avarice, to meanness of spirit, and to other low qualities which, though common enough in men, are soil to the name of God's Vicegerent on Earth! Nay" he went on, seeing that my horror was such as to verge on doubt, "trust me in this, for of the verity of these things I am assured. Rome hath many eyes, and the hearing of her ears is widecast. The Pope and his Cardinals are well served throughout the world. Little indeed happens in Christendom — aye and beyond it — which is not echoed in secret in the Vatican. I know that not only has Count de Olivares spoken of his beliefs regarding the Holy Father to his mundane friends, but he has not hesitated in his formal despatches to say the same to his Royal Master. It hath grieved His Holinesse much that any could so misunderstand him, and it hath grieved him more that His Catholic Majesty should receive such calumnies without demur. Wherefore he would take some other means than the hand of the King of Spain to accomplish his own secret ends. He knoweth well the high purpose of His Catholic Majesty, your Royal Master, in the restoration of England to the True Faith; but yet his mind is much disturbed by his recent pronouncements regarding the Bishoprics. The See of Rome is the Arch Episcopate of the Earth, and to its Bishop belongs by God's very ordinance the ruling of all the bishoprics of the Church. "Upon this Rock shall I build my Church." Now His Holinesse hath already promised a million crowns towards the great emprise of the Armada; and he hath promised it so that it be handed over to the King when his emprise, which is after all for the enlargement of his own kingdom, hath begun to bear fruit. But Count de Olivares is not content with this promise — the promise remember of God's Vicegerent — and he is ever clamorous, not only for the immediate payment of this promised sum, but for other sums. His new request is for another million crowns. And even in the very presence of His Holinesse, he so bears himself as if the non-compliance with his demand were a wrong to him and to his Master. From all which His Holinesse, consulting in privacy with me who am also his friend — such is the greatness with which he honoureth me — hath determined that, whereas he will of course keep to the last letter his promise of help, and will even exceed largely the same, he will dispose in other ways of the great treasure which he had already set aside for this English affair. When he honoured me by asking my advice as to whom should be entrusted with this high endeavour, and had shown that of necessity it should be some Spaniard so that hereafter it might not be said that the emprise of the Armada had not his full sanction and support, I ventured to suggest that in you first of all men this high trust should be reposed. For yourself, I said that I had known you from childhood, and had found you without a flaw; and that you came from a race that had gone clothed in honour since the time of the Moors."

Much other of like kind, my children, did my kinsman tell me that he had said to His Holinesse; which so satisfied him that he had commanded him to send for me so that he could have the assurance of his own seeing what manner of man I was. My kinsman then went on to tell me how he had told His Holinesse of what I had already taken in hand regarding the Great Armada. How I had promised the King a galleon fully equipped and manned with seamen and soldiers from our old Castile; and how His Majesty was so pleased, since my offer had been the first he had received, that he had sworn that my vessel should carry the flag of the squadron of the galleons of Castile. He told him also that the galleon was to be called the *San Cristobal* from my patron saint; and also that so her figurehead should bear the image of the Christ into English waters the first of all things that came from my Province. Which idea so wrought upon the mind of His Holinesse that he said: “Good man! Good Spaniard! Good Christian! I shall provide the figurehead for the *San Cristobal* myself. When Don de Escoban comes here I shall arrange it with him.”

When my kinsman had so informed me as to many things he left me a while, saying that he would ask the Pope to arrange for an audience with me. Shortly he returned with haste, saying that the Holy Father wished me to come to him at once. I went in exaltation mingled with fear; and all my unworthiness of such high honour rose before me. But when I came to His Holinesse and knelt before him he blessed me and raised me up himself. And when he bade me, I raised my eyes and looked at him in the face. Whereat he turned to the Spanish Cardinal and said: “You have spoken under the mark, my brother. Here is a man indeed in whom I can trust to the full.”

And so, my children, he made me sit by him, and for a long time — it was more than two hours by the clock — he talked with me about his wish. And, oh my children, I would that you and others could hear the wise words of that great and good man. He was so worldly-wise, in addition to his Saintly wisdom, that nothing seemed to lack in his reasoning; nothing was too small to be outside his understanding and considerations of the motives and arts of men. He told me with exceeding frankness of his views of the situation. All the while, my kinsman smiled and nodded approval now and again; and it filled me with pride that one of my own blood should stand so close to the counsels of His Holinesse. He told me that though war was a sad necessity, which he as himself an earthly monarch was compelled to understand and accept, yet he preferred infinitely the ways of peace; and moreover believed in them. In his own wise words, "the logic of the cannon, though more loud, speaks not so forcibly as the logic of the living day between sunrise and sunset." When later he added to this conviction that, "the chink of the money-bag speaks more loudly than either," I ventured an impulsive word of protest. Whereupon he stopped and looking at me sharply asked if I knew how to bribe. To which I replied that as yet I had given none, nor taken none. Then smilingly he laid his hand in friendlinesse on my shoulder and said: "My friend, Saint Escoban, these be two things, not one; and though to take a bribe is to be unforgiven, yet to give one at high command is but a duty, like the soldier's duty to kill which is not murder, which it would be without such behest." Then raising his hand to silence my protest he said: "I know what you would say: 'Woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh,' but such argument, my friend, is my province; and its responsibility is mine. Ere you proceed on your mission you shall have indemnity for the carriage of all my commands. You go into an enemy's country; a country which is the professed and malignant enemy of Holy Church, and where faith and honour are not. God's work is to be done in many ways. It is sufficient that He has allowed instruments that are unworthy and unholy; and as unworthy and unholy we must use them to His ends. You, Don de Escoban, shall have no pain in such matters, and no shame. My commands shall cover you!" Then, when I had bowed my recognition of his will, he resumed his instructions. He said that in England in high places were many men who were open to sell their knowledge or their power, and that when once they had accepted payment it were needful for their own credit and even for their safety, that they should further the end which they had undertaken. "These English," he said, "are pagans; and it was said of this our Holy City in pagan times '*Omnia Romae venalia sunt!*'" Whereupon there was borne upon me a recollection of years before when I was in the suite of the Ambassador at Paris, how a boy in the British Embassy who was shewing me a cipher of encloased writing which he had just perfected had written in it with uncouth lettering as an illustration "*Omnia Britaniae venalia sunt.*" And further did remember how we had enlarged and perfected the cipher when we resided together at Tours. His Holinesse told me that in great seasons it were needful to scatter favours with a lavish hand, and that no season was or could be so great as that which foreran the restoring to the fold a great and active nation who was already beginning to rule the seas. "To which end," he said, "I am placing with you a vastness of treasure such as no nation hath ever seen. The gifts of the Faithful have begun it and enlarged it; and the fruits of many victories have enhanced it. Regarding it, there is only one promise which I will exact from you, and that I shall exact in the most solemn way of which the Church has knowledge; that this vast treasure be applied to onely that purpose to which it is ordained — the advancement of the True Faith. It will add also, of course, to the honour and glory of the Kingdom of Spain, so that for all time the world may know that the comfort of the Roman See is on the emprise of the Great Armada! In proof of which should, for the sins of men, the great emprise fail, you or those who may succeed you in the Trust are, if I myself be not then living, to hand the Treasure to the custody of whatever monarch may then sit upon the throne of Spain for his good guardianship, in trust with me."

So he proceeded to detail; and gave full instructions as to the amount of the treasure. How it was to be placed in my hands, and when; and all details of its using when the Armada should have made landing on English shores. And how I should use it myself, in case I were not told to hand it over to some other. If I were to yield up the treasure, the mandate should be enforced by letter, together with the showing of a ring, which he took from the purse where he kept the Fisherman's ring wherewith he signs all briefs, and allowed me to examine it so that I might recognize it if shown to me hereafter. All of which things of using are not now of importance to you, my children, for the time of their usefulness has passed by; but only to show that the treasure is to be guarded, and finally given to the custody of the King of Spain.

Then His Holiness spoke to me of my own vessel. He promised me that a suitable figurehead, one wrought for his own galley by the great Benvenuto Cellini, and blessed by Himself, should be duly sent on to me. He promised also that the Quittance to me and mine, which he had named should be completed and lodged in the secret archives of the Papacy. Then once more he blessed me, and on parting gave me a relic of San Cristobal, whose possession, together with the honour done me, made me feel as I left the Vatican as though I walked upon air.

On my return to Spain I visited the ship yard at San Lucar, where already the building of the *San Cristobal* was in progress. I arranged in private with the master builder that there should be constructed in the centre of the galleon a secret chamber, well encased round with teak wood from the Indies, and with enforcement of steel plates; and with a lock to the iron door, such as Pedro the Venetian hath already constructed for the treasure chest of the King. By my suggestion, and his wisdom in the doing of the matter, the secret chamber was so arranged in disposition, and so masked in with garniture of seeming unimportance, that none, unless of the informed, might tell its presence, or indeed of its very existence. It was placed as though in a well of teak wood and steel, hemmed in on all sides; without entrance whatever from the lower parts, and only approachable from the top which lay under my own cabin, down deep in the centre of the galleon. Men in single and detachments, were brought from other ship yards for the doing of this work, and all so disposed in Port that none might have greater knowledge than of that item which he completed at the time. Save only those few of the guilds whose faith had long been made manifest by their rectitude of life and their discretion of silence.

Into this secret receptacle (to continue this narrative out of its due sequence) when the final outfitting of the Invincible Armada came to pass, was placed, under my own supervision, in the night time and in secret, all the vast treasure which had before then been sent to me secretly by agents of His Holinesse. Full tally and reckoning made I with my own hand, nominating the coined money by its value in crowns and doubloons, and the gold and silver in bullion by their weight. I made a list in separate also of the endless array of precious stones, both those enriched in carvings and inriching the jewells of gold and silver wrought by the cunning of the great artizans. I made list also of the gems unplanted, which were of innumerable number and of various bigness. These latter I specified by kind and number, singling out some of rare size and quality for description. The whole table of the list I signed and sent by his messengers to the Pope, specifying thereon that I had them in trust for His Holinesse to dispose of them as he might direct; or to yield over to whomsoever he might depute to receive them whenever and wherever they might be in the guardianship of me or mine, the order of His Holinesse being verified by the exhibition by the new trustee of the Eagle Ring.

Before the *San Cristobal* had left San Lucar, there arrived from Rome, in a package of great bulk — brought by a ship accredited by the Pope, so that corsairs other than Turks and pagans might respect the flag, and so abstain from plunder — the figurehead of the galleon which His Holinesse had promised to supply. With it came a sealed missive cautioning me that I should open the package in privacy, and deal with its contents only by means of those in whom I had full trust, since it was even in its substance most precious. In addition to which it had been specially wrought by Benvenuto Cellini, the Master goldsmith whose work was contended for by the Kings of the earth. It was the wish of His Holinesse himself that on the conversion of England being completed, either through peace or war, this figurehead of the *San Cristobal* should be set over the High Altar of the Cathedral at Westminster, where it would serve for all time of an emblem of the love of the Pope for the wellbeing of the souls of his English children.

I opened the case with only present a chosen few; and truly we were wonderstruck with the beauty and richness of the jewell, for it was none other, which was discloased to us. The great figure of San Cristobal was silver gilded to look like gold, and of such thickness that the hollow within rang sweetly at a touch as though a bell sounded there. But the Figure of the child Christ which he bore upon his shoulder was of none other than solid gold. When we who were present saw it, we sank to our knees in gratitude for so great a tribute of Holinesse, and also the beauty of the tribute to the Divine Excellence. Truly the kindness of the Pope and the zeal of his artist were without bound; for with the figurehead came a jewell made in the form of a brooch carven in gold which represented it *in petto*. It was known to all the Squadron that the Pope himself had sent the figurehead of the *San Cristobal*; and as our vessel moved along the line of galleons and ships, and hulks, and pataches, and galleys of the Armada, the heads of all were uncovered and the knees of all were bent. We had not any christening of the galleon, for the blessing of the Holy Father was already on the figurehead of the ship and encompassed it round about.

None knew on board the *San Cristobal* of the existence of the treasure, save only the Captain of the galleons and ships, and hulks, and pataches, and galleys of the Squadron of Castile, to both of whom I entrusted the secret of the treasure (though not the giver nor the nature of the Trust nor the amount thereof), lest ill should befall me, and in ignorance the whole through some disaster be lost. And let me here say to their honour that my confidence was kept faithfully to the last; though it may be that had they known the magnitude of the treasure it might have been otherwise, men being but as flax before the fire of cupidity.

For myself after I embarked, I went on the journey with mixed feelings; for my body unaccustomed to the sea warred mightily with my soul that had full trust in the enterprise. The many days of storm and trial after we had left Lisbon, until we had found a refuge in Corunna did seem as though the comings of eternity had been made final. For the turmoil of the winds and the waves was indeed excessive, and even those most skilled in the ways and the wonders of the deep asseverated that never had been known weather so unpropitious to the going forth of ships. Truly this time, though less than three weeks in all, did seem of a durance inconceivable to one on land.

Whilst we lay in the harbour of Corunna, which was for more than four weary weeks, we effected some necessary repairs. The *San Cristobal* had been taking water at the prow, and we should find the cause and remedy it. Possibly it was that the bow was left unfinished at San Lucar for the better fixing of the figurehead, and that some small flaw thus begun met enlargement from the straining of the timbers in the prolonged storm. To the end of this repairing the work was given to some of the ship-men on board, Swedes and other Northerns, the same being expert calkers on account of their much experience of their repair of ships injured in their troublous seas. Among them was one whom I mistrusted much, as did all on board, so that he should not have been retained save only that he was a nimble and fearless mariner who be the seas never so great would take his place in the furlment of sails or in other perilous labour of the sea. He was a Russian Finn and like all these heathen people had strange powers of evill, or was by all accredited with the same. For be it known that these Finns can, by some subtile and diabolic means, suck or otherwise derive the strength from timbers; so that many a tall ship has through this agency gone down to the deep unknown. This Finn, Olgaref by name, was a notable calker and with some others was slung over the bow to calk the gaping seams. I made it to myself a necessity to be present, for I regarded ever the cupidity of man together with the inestimable value of the Pope’s gift. Right sure was I that no Spaniard or no Christian would lay a sacrilegious hand on the Sacred Figure of Our Lord or of the good Saint who bore Him; and hitherto the esteem of all had been so great that none would dare so much. But with a pagan such considerations avail not, and I feared lest even his suspicions might be aroused. Well indeed were my fears justified. For as I leaned over the prow, I saw him touch the metal of the Christ and of the Saint as though some of the same diabolic instinct which had taught him to deal infamously with the timbers of ships had guided him to the discernment of the metals also. Then as I looked, he, all unknowing of my observation, tapped softly with his calking-mallet on both the metals which in turn gave out sounds which no one could mistake. He seemed satisfied with his quest, and resumed his work upon the oakum with renewed zeal. Thenceforth during our stay in Corunna I so arranged matters that ever both day and night there was a sentinel on the prow of the *San Cristobal*. When the day came when, praise be to God, 8,000 soldiers and sailors confessed to the friars of the fleet on an island in the harbour in which the Archbishop of Santiago had arranged altars — for we had no Bishop on the Armada — I feared lest Olgaref should make, through some inadvertence of those left behind, some attempt upon the precious gift. He was too wary, however, and behaved with such discretion that for the time my suspicion was disarmed.

On the 22nd. July, after a Council of War in the Royal Galleon in which the chief Admirals of the Fleet took part, our squadron, which had been waiting outside the harbour of Corunna with the squadron of Andalusia, the Guipuzcoan Squadron and the squadron of Ojeda, set sail on our great emprise.

Truly it did seem as though the powers of the seas and the winds was leagued against us; for after but three days of fair weather we met with calms and fogs and a very hurricane which was as none other of the same ever known in the month of Leo. The waves mounted to the very heavens, and some of them broke over the ships of the fleet doing thereby a vast of damage which could not be repaired whilst at sea. In this storm the whole of the stern gallery of our galleon was carried away, and it was only by the protection of the Most High that the breach so made was not the means of ultimately whelming us in the sea. With the coming of the day we found that forty of the ships of the Armada were missing. On this day it was that that great and bold mariner the Admiral Don Pedro de Valdes by his great daring and the hazard of his life saved my own life, when I had been swept overboard by a mighty sea. In gratitude for which I sent him that which I held most dear of my possessions, the jewell of the San Cristobal given me by the Pope.

Thenceforth for a whole week were we hourly harassed by the enemy, who, keeping aloof from us, yet managed by their superior artillery to inflict upon us incalculable damage; so that our carpenters and divers had to work endlessly to stop the shot holes above water and below it with tow and leaden plates.

On the last day of July two disasters befell, in both of which our galleon afterwards had a part. The first, was to the ship *San Salvador* of Admiral Miguel de Aquendo's squadron, through the diabolic device of a German gunmaster, who in revenge for punishment inflicted on him by Captain Preig, threw, after firing his gun, his lighted linstock into a barrel of powder, to the effect of blowing up the two afterdecks and the poop castle, and killing over two hundred men. As on this ship was Juan de Huerta the Paymaster General with a great part of the treasure of the King, it was necessary that she should if possible be saved from the enemy who were rushing in upon her. The Duke, therefore firing a signal gun to the fleet to follow, stood by her to the dismay of the English, thus baulked of so rich a prey. In the strategy of getting the wounded ship back to her place in the formation came the second disaster; for the foremast of the flagship of Don Pedro de Valdes *Nuestra Senora del Rosario* gave way at the hatches, falling on the mainsail boom. The rising sea forbade the giving her a hawser; the Duke ordered Captain Ojeda to stand by her with our pataches together with Don Pedro's own vice flagship the *San Francisco* and our own *San Cristobal.* A galleon also was to try to fix a hawser for towing; but the night shut down on us, and the wiser counsel of the Admiral-in-Chief advised by Diego Flores forbade so many ships to remain absent from the going on of the Armada lest they too should be cut off. So we said farewell to that gallant mariner Don Pedro de Valdes.

That same evening the wind began to blow and the sea to rise so that the injured ship of Admiral Oquendo was in danger of sinking; wherefore the High Admiral, on such word being brought to him, gave orders that we should keep close to her and take in our care the mariners and soldiers on board her and also the King's treasure chest; for it was said that His Catholic Majesty had on the Armada half a million crowns in bullion and coined money. It was dark as pitch when we saw the signal made when the flagship shortened sail — two lanterns at the poop and one halfway up the rigging, put out for the guidance of the fleet. Fearsome their lights looked shining over the dark heaving waters which now and again so broke with the oncoming waves that the tracks of light seemed in places to rise and fall about as though they could never be reunited. But our Mariners answered to the call, and the boats soon rocked by our sides and with a flash of our blades in the lamplight — for the battle lanterns were lit to aid them — one by one they were swept into the dark. It was long before they came back, for the wild sea made their venture impossible. But before noon of the next day they again made essay; and in several voyages brought back many men and great store of heavy boxes, which latter were forthwith lodged in the powder room which was guarded by night and day. This made greater anxiety for Senor de las Alas, in that his seamen and mariners, and worse still the foreigners, knew that there was such a store of wealth aboard.

Thenceforth we bore our part in the running fight which ensued between our Armada and the Squadrons of Drake and the Lord Admiral Howard; and also that of John Hawkins which assailed us with such insistence that we fain thought the Devil himself must have some hand in his work. At last came a time when by God's grace the flagship of the enemy was almost within our grasp, for she lay amongst us disabled. But many oar-boats of her consorts flocked to her, and towed her to safety in the calm which forbade us to follow. In this action a dire disaster had almost befallen us, and Christendom too, for a shot struck us athwart the bow and so loosened the girding of our precious figurehead that almost it had fallen into the sea. San Cristobal watched over his own, however; and presently we had with ropes haled it aboard and held it firmly with cables so that it was immediately safe. It was covered up with tow and sacking and so hidden under pretence of safety that none might discover the secret of its intrinsic preciosity. Ere this was completed we were again called to action, as for our fleetness we were required to chase with the *San Juan* of Portugal, the flagship of the enemy which was flying from our attack. For the English ships, though not so large, were swift as our own and more easy of handling; and by their prerogative of nimble steerage could so thwart our purposes that ere we could recover on following their tacking, they were well away with full-bellied sail. By this, however, we were saved much pain of concern, for when off Calais roads the Armada lay at anchor we, coming amongst the latermost, were placed on the skirts of the fleet. Thus when the English on the night of Sunday August 7th. sent their fire ships floating with wind and tide down on the Armada, so that in panic most of the great vessels had to slip their anchors or even to cut their cables, we could weigh with due deliberance and set sail northerly according to our orders from the Duke.

When by Newcastle we saw the English ships drop off in their pursuit we knew thereby that their finding was at an end and their magazines empty. Whereupon, setting our course ever northwards, so that rounding Scotland and Ireland we might seek Spain once more, we began our task of counting our scars, and thence to the work of the leech. Truly we were in pitiable plight, for the long continued storm and strain had opened our seams and we took water abominably. In that we were of the most swift of the vessels of the fleet, our galleon and the *Trinidad* of our own squadron outsailed the rest, and bearing away to the eastward, though not too much so, and thence north, found ourselves on the 11th day of August, off the coast of Aberdeyne. The sea had now fallen so far that though the waves were more than we had reckoned upon at the first yet they were but mild in comparison with what had been. Here in a sandy bay close under Buquhan Ness we cast anchor and began to overhaul.

Both our ships had been very seriously damaged, and repairs were indeed necessary which required careening, had such been possible.

But it could not be in a latitude where, even in the summer, the seas rose so fast and broke so wildly. Our consort the *Trinidad*, though in sad plight, was not so bad as we were; and it was greatly to be feared that if occasion was not to be had for making good the ravages of the storm and the enemy she might meet with disaster. But such amending might not be at this time. The weather was threatening; and moreover the enemy would soon be following hard behind us. From one of our foreign seamen, a Scotchman who in secret visited Aberdeyne, we learned that Queen Elizabeth was sending out a swift patache to scour the whole northern coast for any traces of the Armada. Though we were two galleons, we yet feared such a meeting; for our stores were exhausted and our powder had run low. Of ball we had none, for such fighting as these dogged Englishmen are prone to. Moreover it is the way of these islanders to so hold together that when one is touched all others run to aid; whereby were but one gun of ours fired, even off that desolate coast, in but a little while would be an army on the shore and a squadron of ships upon the sea. It began therefore sorely to exercise my conscience as to how I should best protect the treasure entrusted to me. Were it to fall into the hands of our enemies it were the worst that could happen; and matters had already so disastrously arranged themselves that it was to be feared we should not hold ourselves in safety. Therefore, taking much counsel with Heaven, whose treasure indeed it was that I was guarding, I began to look about for some secret place of storage, to the which I might resort in case danger should threaten before we could get safely away from the shore. The Artificers said that two days, or perhaps three, would be required to complete our restorations; and on the first of these I took a small boat, and with two trusty mariners of my own surroundings I set out to explore the land close to us, which was of a veritable desolation. The shallow bay, in whose mouth we were anchored in a sufficiency of water at all tides, was lined with great sandhills from end to end save at the extremities, where rocks of exceeding durability manifested themselves even at high tide, but which shewed with ferocity at low water. We essayed at first the northern side, but presently abandoned the quest, for though there were many deep indentures, wherein the sea ran at times with exceeding violence, the simple contours of the rocks and of the land above gave little promise of a secret place of storage.

But the south side was different. There had been in times long past much upheaval of various kinds, and now were many little bays, all iron-bound and full of danger, lying between outflanking rocks of a steepness unsurpassable. Seaweed was on many great rocks rising from the sea whereon multitudinous wild fowl sat screaming; between them rose numberless points often invisible, save when the surges fell from them in their course, and amongst which the tide set with a wonderful current, most perilous. Here, after we had many times escaped overturning, being borne by the side of sunken rocks, I at last made discovery of such a place as we required. Elsewhere I have recorded for your guidance its bearings and all such details as may be needful for the fullfillment of your duty. The cave was a great one on the south side of the bay, with many windings and blind offsets; and as best met my wishes in accordance with my task, the entrance was not easy to be discovered, being small and of a rare quality for concealment. Here I made preparation for the landing of the treasure, in so far as that I took note of all things and made perfect my designs. I had left the mariners in the boat, enjoining them to remain in her in case of need, so that none of them, much though I trusted them, knew of the discovered cave. When we had returned to the galleon night had fallen.

Forthwith, after secret consultation with our admiral, I visited the captain of the *Trinidad* and obtained his permission to use on that same night one of his boats with a crew for some special private service. For I had thought that it were better that none of our own crew, who might have had suspicion of what wealth we carried, should have a part in our undertaking. This my own kinsman Admiral de las Alas had advised. When night came, he had so disposed matters on the *San Cristobal* that whilst our debarkation was being made, not even the sentries on deck or in the passage ways could see aught — they being sent below. The Captain himself onely remained on deck.

We made several voyages between the ship and the shore, piling after each our weighty packets on the pebble beach. None were left to guard them, there being no one to molest. Last of all we took the great figurehead of silver and gold, which Benvenuto had wrought and which the Pope had blessed, and placed it on the shore beside the rest. Then the boat went back to the *Trinidad*. Climbing on the rock overhead, I saw a lantern flashed on her deck, as signal to assure me that the boat had returned.

Presently a boat of our own vessel drew near, as had been arranged, manned by three trusty men of my own; and in silence we brought the treasure into the cave. In the doing so we were mightily alarmed by a shot from a harquebuss from one of the ships in the bay. Eagerly we climbed the rocks and looked around as well as we could in the darkness. But all was still; what so had been, was completed. In the darkness, and whilst the tide was low, we placed the treasure in a far branch of the cave, placing most of it in the shallow water. The sides of the rock were sheer in this far chamber, save onely at the end where was a great shelf of rock. On this we placed the image of San Cristobal, not thinking it well that the Sacred Figure should lie prone. In this far cave the waters rose still and silent, for the force of the waves was broken by the rocks without. It was risen so high in places as to cause us disquietude as we made our way out. My chosen mariners made, before we left the shore, solemn oath on the Holy Relic of San Cristobal which the Pope had given to me that they would never reveal aught of the doings of the night.

Before dawn, which cometh early in these latitudes, we were back on board ship; and sought our various quarters silently that none who knew of our absence might guess whence we came.

Morning brought only more trouble to me. I was told that in the night the harquebussier on sentry had seen a man swim from the ship and had fired at him. He could not tell in the darkness if his aim had been true. I said nothing of my suspicion; but later on discovered that the Russian Finn, Olgaref, had disappeared. I knew then that this man, having suspicions, had watched us; and that if he was still alive he perhaps knew of the entrance of the cave.

All day I took much counsel with myself as to how I should act; and at the last my mind was made up. I had a sacred duty in protecting the treasure. I should seek Olgaref if he had reached the shore and should if need be kill him; and by this and other means, secure the secret of the entrance of the cave. Thus, you will see, oh! my children, the heavy nature of the Pope’s Trust, and what stern duty it may entail on all of us who guard it.

Secretly during the day I made preparation for my enterprise. I placed on board the small boat which we had used, some barrels of gunpowder, wherein I had very much difficulty for our store of armament had run low indeed and only the Admiral's knowledge of the greatness of my Trust and the measure of my need inclined him to part with even so much. I rowed myself ashore in the afternoon, and harquebuss in hand made search of all the many promontories and their secret recesses for the Finn. For some hours I searched, examining every cranny in the rock; but no sign could I find of Olgaref. At last I gave up my search and came to the cave to complete the work which I had determined upon. Lighting my lantern I waded into the shallow water which lay in the entrance and stretched inland under the great overhanging rock flanked by two great masses of stone that towered up on either hand. Patiently I waded on, for the tide was low, through the curvings of the cave; the black stone on one hand and the red on the other giving back the flare of the lantern. Turning to the right I waded on, knowing that I would see before me the golden figure of San Cristobal. But suddenly I came to an end and for a moment stood appalled. The Figure no longer stood erect as placed on the wide shelf of rock, but lay prone resting on something which raised one end of it. Lifting high the lantern, I saw that this mass was none other than the dead body of Olgaref.

The wretched man had after all escaped from the galleon and in secret followed us to the cave. He had climbed upon the shelf and in an endeavour to steal the precious figure had pulled it over on himself; and the weight of the gold which formed the Christ had in falling killed him. He had evidently not known of the other treasure, and had followed only this of which he had knowledge. As I was about to shut the entrance to the cave until such time as I could come with safety to open it, I did not disturb the body, but left it underneath the Holy Image which he had dared to touch with sacrilegious hand.

At the Judgment Day, should the treasure not be recovered, he will find it hard to rise from that encumbrance that his evil deed had brought upon him.

With sad heart I came away; and then, for that I had to guard the Pope's treasure, I fixed the barrels of gunpowder in place to best wreak the effect I wished. After piling them with rocks as mighty as I could lift, I laid a slow match which I lighted; then I stood afar off to wait and watch.

Presently the end came. With a sound as of many cannon, though muffled in its coming, the charge was fired, and with a great puff of white smoke which rose high in air together with stones and earth and the upheaval of a great mass of rock which seemed to shake the far off place on which I rested, the whole front of the cave blew up. Then the white cloud sank lower and floated away over the grass; and for a few minutes only a dark thin vapour hung over the spot. When this had gone too I came close and saw that the great stone pinnacles had been overthrown, and that so many great rocks had fallen around that the entrance to the cave was no more, there being no sign of it. Even the channel of water which led up to it was so overwhelmed with great stones that no trace of it remained.

Then I breathed more freely, for the Pope's treasure was for the present safe, and enclosed in the great cave in the bowels of the earth, where I or mine though with much labour could find it again, in good season.

In the dark I came back to the *San Cristobal* where my kinsman the admiral told me that already rumours were afloat that I had gone to hide some treasure. Whereupon we conferred together, and late that night, but making such noise that many of the soldiers and mariners could hear what was being done and give news in secret of our movements, we made pretense of making a great shipment into the *Trinidad* so that the suspicions of all were thereupon allayed.

In the morning the Armada — all that was left of it — hove in sight; and joining it we began a dreary voyage, amid storms and tempests and trials and the loss of many of our great ships on the inhospitable coast of Ireland, which lasted many days till we found ourselves back again in Spain.

Thence, in due season, anxious to see that the Pope's treasure had not been discovered, I made my way in secret again to Aberdeyne where there overtook me, from the rigours of this northern climate and from many hardships undergone, the sickness whereof I am weary.

Where and how the place of hiding will be found I have told in the secret writing deposited in the place prepared for it, the chart being exact. I have written all these matters, because it is well that you my sonne, and ye all my children who may have to look forward so much and so long to the fullfillment of the Trust, may know how to look back as well.

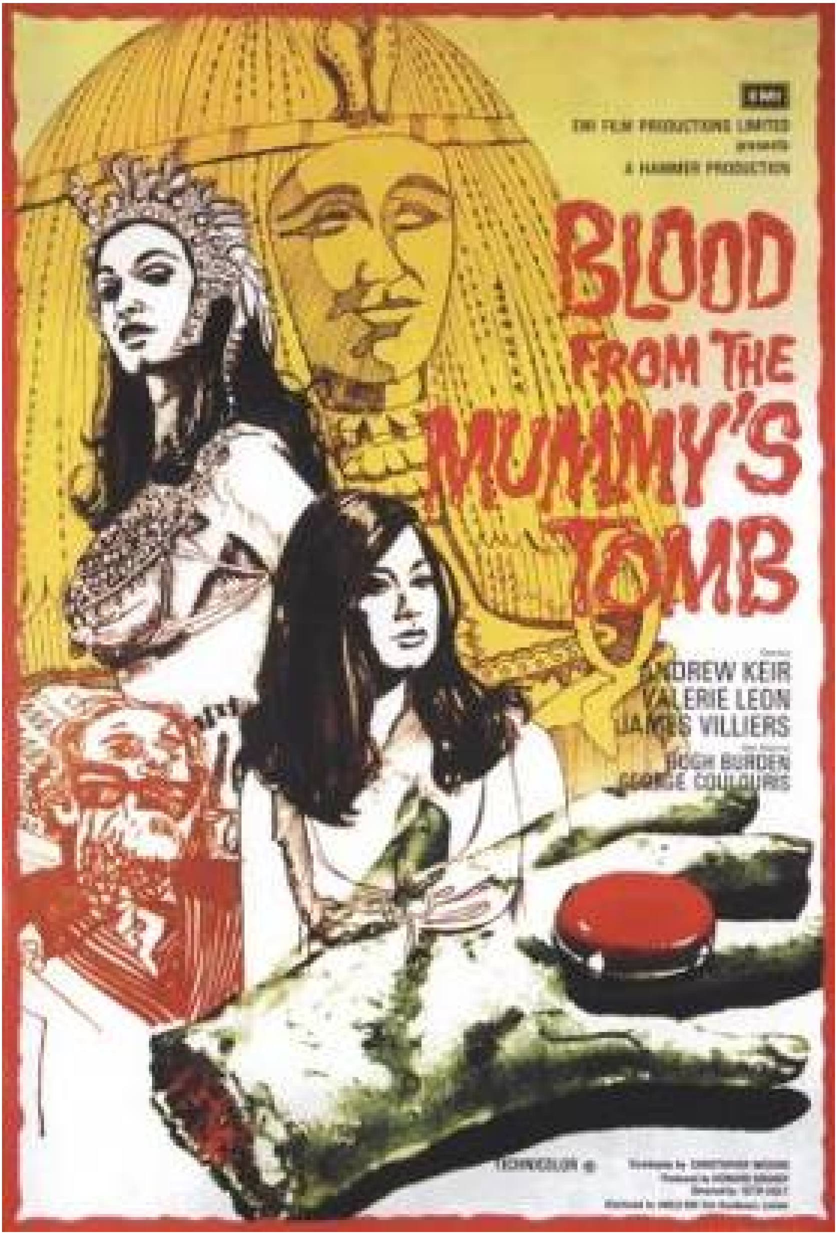
These letters and papers, should I fail to return from that wild headland, shall be placed in your hands by one whose kindness I have reason to trust, and who has sworn to deliver them safely on your application. Vale.

Bernardino de Escoban.

The Jewel of Seven Stars — 1903 Version

This horror novel was first published in 1903 and concerns an archaeologist’s endeavours to revive from the dead Queen Tera, an ancient Egyptian mummy. When *The Jewel of Seven Stars* was first released in 1903 the publishers received a great deal of criticism from both critics and readers because of its gruesome ending. Shortly before his death in 1912, Stoker attempted to republish the book and he was told he would have to change the ending. As a result, Stoker removed Chapter XVI “Powers – Old and New” and gave the novel a new and happier ending. For many years the original ending was unavailable to most readers. The novel has since influenced many – if not all - Mummy movies.

This is the original 1903 version, which features the ‘unhappy’ ending.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TECHNICOLOR

The first theatrical adaption of 'The Jewel of Seven Stars' was Hammer Studios' 'Blood from the Mummy's Tomb' in 1971.

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Chapter I. A Summons in the Night

IT ALL SEEMED SO REAL THAT I COULD HARDLY IMAGINE that it had ever occurred before; and yet each episode came, not as a fresh step in the logic of things, but as something expected. It is in such wise that memory plays its pranks for good or ill; for pleasure or pain; for weal or woe. It is thus that life is bitter-sweet, and that which has been done becomes eternal.

Again, the light skiff, ceasing to shoot through the lazy water as when the oars flashed and dripped, glided out of the fierce July sunlight into the cool shade of the great drooping willow branches — I standing up in the swaying boat, she sitting still and with deft fingers guarding herself from stray twigs or the freedom of the resilience of moving boughs. Again, the water, looked golden-brown under the canopy of translucent green; and the grassy bank was of emerald hue. Again, we sat in the cool shade, with the myriad noises of nature both without and within our bower merging into that drowsy hum in whose sufficing environment the great world with its disturbing trouble, and its more disturbing joys, can be effectually forgotten. Again, in that blissful solitude the young girl lost the convention of her prim, narrow up-bringing and told me in a natural, dreamy way of the loneliness of her new life. With an undertone of sadness she made me feel how in that spacious home each one of the household was isolated by the personal magnificence of her father and herself; that there confidence had no altar, or sympathy no shrine; and that there even her father's face was as distant as the old country life seemed now. Once more, the wisdom of my manhood and the experience of my years laid themselves at the girl's feet. It was seemingly their own doing; for the individual 'I' had no say in the matter, but only just obeyed imperative orders. And once again the flying seconds multiplied themselves endlessly. For it is in the arcana of dreams that existences merge and renew themselves,' change and yet keep the same — like the soul of a musician in a fugue. And so memory swooned, again and again, in sleep.

It seems that there is never to be any perfect rest. Even in Eden the snake rears its head among the laden boughs of the Tree of Knowledge. The silence of the dreamless night is broken by the roar of the avalanche; the hissing of sudden floods; the clanging of the engine bell marking its sweep through a sleeping American town; the clanking of distant paddles over the sea.... Whatever it is, it is breaking the charm of my Eden. The canopy of greenery above us, starred with diamond-points of light, seems to quiver in the ceaseless beat of paddles; and the restless bell seems as though it would never cease....

All at once the gates of Sleep were thrown wide open, and my waking ears took in the cause of the disturbing sounds. Waking existence is prosaic enough — there was somebody knocking and ringing at someone's street door.

I was pretty well accustomed in my Jermyn Street chambers to passing sounds; usually I did not concern myself, sleeping or waking, with the doings, however noisy, of my neighbours. But this noise was too continuous, too insistent, too imperative to be ignored. There was some active intelligence behind that ceaseless sound; and some stress or need behind the intelligence. I was not altogether selfish, and at the thought of someone's need I was, without premeditation, out of bed.

Instinctively I looked at my watch. It was just three o'clock; there was a faint edging of grey round the green blind which darkened my room. It was evident that the knocking and ringing were at the door of our own house; and it was evident, too, that there was no one awake to answer the call. I slipped on my dressing-gown and slippers, and went down to the hall door. When I opened it, there stood a dapper groom, with one hand pressed unflinchingly on the electric bell whilst with the other he raised a ceaseless clangour with the knocker. The instant he saw me the noise ceased; one hand went up instinctively to the brim of his hat, and the other produced a letter from his pocket. A neat brougham was opposite the door, the horses were breathing heavily as though they had come fast.

A policeman, with his night lantern still alight at his belt, stood by attracted to the spot by the noise.

‘Beg pardon, sir, I’m sorry for disturbing you, but my orders was imperative; I was not to lose a moment, but to knock and ring till someone came. May I ask you, sir, if Mr. Malcolm Ross lives here?’

I am Mr. Malcolm Ross.’

“Then this letter is for you, sir, and the bro’am is for you too, sir!’

I took, with a strange curiosity, the letter which he handed to me. As a barrister I had had, of course, odd experiences now and then, including sudden demands upon my time; but never anything like this. I stepped back into the hall, closing the door, but leaving it ajar; then I switched on the electric light. The letter was directed in a strange hand, a woman’s. It began at once without ‘dear sir’ or any such address:

You said you would like to help me if I needed it; and I believe you meant what you said. The time has come sooner than I expected. I am in dreadful trouble, and do not know where to turn, or to whom to apply. An attempt has, I fear, been made to murder my Father; though, thank God, he still lives. But he is quite unconscious. The doctors and police have been sent for; but there is no one here whom I can depend on. Come at once, if you are able to; and forgive me if you can. I suppose I shall realise later what I have done in asking such a favour; but at present I cannot think. Come! Come at once!

Pain and exultation struggled in my mind as I read; but the mastering thought was that she was in trouble and had called on me — me! My dreaming of her, then, was not altogether without a cause. I called out to the groom: ‘Wait! I shall be with you in a minute!’ Then I flew upstairs.

A very few minutes sufficed to wash and dress; and we were soon driving through the streets as fast as the horses could go. It was market morning, and when we got out on Piccadilly there was an endless stream of carts coming from the west; but for the rest the roadway was clear, and we went quickly. I had told the groom to come into the brougham with me so that he could tell me what had happened as we went along. He sat awkwardly, with his hat on his knees as he spoke.

‘Miss Trelawny, sir, sent a man to tell us to get out a carriage at once; and when we was ready she come herself and gave me the letter and told Morgan — the coachman, sir — to fly. She said as I was to lose not a second, but to keep knocking till someone come.’

“Yes, I know, I know — you told me! What I want to know is, why she sent for me. What happened in the house?’

‘I don’t quite know myself, sir; except that master was found in his room senseless, with the sheets all bloody, and a wound on his head. He couldn’t be waked nohow. ’Twas Miss Trelawny herself as found him.’

‘How did she come to find him at such an hour? It was late in the night, I suppose?’

‘I don’t know, sir; I didn’t hear nothing at all of the details.’

As he could tell me no more, I stopped the carriage for a moment to let him get out on the box; then I turned the matter over in my mind as I sat alone. There were many things which I could have asked the servant; and for a few moments after he had gone I was angry with myself for not having used my opportunity. On second thought, however, I was glad the temptation was gone. I felt that it would be more delicate to learn what I wanted to know of Miss Trelawny’s surroundings from herself, rather than from her servants.

We bowled swiftly along Knightsbridge, the small noise of our well-appointed vehicle sounding hollowly in the morning air. We turned up the Kensington Palace Road and presently stopped opposite a great house on the left-hand side, nearer, so far as I could judge, the Netting Hill than the Kensington end of the avenue. It was a truly fine house, not only with regard to size but to architecture. Even in the dim grey light of the morning, which tends to diminish the size of things, it looked big.

Miss Trelawny met me in the hall. She was not in anyway shy. She seemed to rule all around her with a sort of high-bred dominance, all the more remarkable as she was greatly agitated and as pale as snow. In the great hall were several servants, the men standing together near the hall door, and the women clinging together in the further corners and doorways. A police superintendent had been talking to Miss Trelawny; two men in uniform and one plain-clothes man stood near him. As she took my hand impulsively there was a look of relief in her eyes, and she gave a gentle sigh of relief. Her salutation was simple.

‘I knew you would come!’

The clasp of the hand can mean a great deal, even when it is not intended to mean anything especially. Miss Trelawny’s hand somehow became lost in my own. It was not that it was a small hand; it was fine and flexible, with long delicate fingers — a rare and beautiful hand; it was the unconscious self-surrender. And though at the moment I could not dwell on the cause of the thrill which swept me, it came back to me later.

She turned and said to the police superintendent:

‘This is Mr. Malcolm Ross.’ The police officer saluted as he answered:

T know Mr. Malcolm Ross, miss. Perhaps he will remember I had the honour of working with him in the Brixton Coining case.’ I had not at first glance noticed who it was, my whole attention having been taken with Miss Trelawny.

‘Of course, Superintendent Dolan, I remember very well!’ I said as we shook hands. I could not but note that the acquaintanceship seemed a relief to Miss Trelawny. There was a certain vague uneasiness in her manner which took my attention; instinctively I felt that it would be less embarrassing for her to speak with me alone. So I said to the Superintendent:

‘Perhaps it will be better if Miss Trelawny will see me alone for a few minutes. You, of course, have already heard all she knows; and I will understand better how things are if I may ask some questions. I will then talk the matter over with you if I may.’

I shall be glad to be of what service I can, sir,’ he answered heartily.

Following Miss Trelawny, I moved over to a dainty room which opened from the hall and looked out on the garden at the back of the house. When we had entered and I had closed the door she said:

‘I will thank you later for your goodness in coming to me in my trouble; but at present you can best help me when you know the facts.’

‘Go on,’ I said. ‘Tell me all you know and spare no detail, however trivial it may at the present time seem to be.’ She went on at once:

‘I was awakened by some sound; I do not know what. I only know that it came through my sleep; for all at once I found myself awake, with my heart beating wildly, listening anxiously for some sound from my Father’s room. My room is next to Father’s, and I can often hear him moving about before I fall asleep. He works late at night, sometimes very late indeed; so that when I wake early, as I do occasionally, or in the grey of the dawn, I hear him still moving. I tried once to remonstrate with him about staying up so late, as it cannot be good for him; but I never ventured to repeat the experiment. You know how stern and cold he can be — at least you may remember what I told you about him; and when he is polite in this mood he is dreadful. When he is angry I can bear it much better; but when he is slow and deliberate, and the side of his mouth lifts up to show the sharp teeth, I think I feel — well, I don’t know how! Last night I got up softly and stole to the door, for I really feared to disturb him. There was not any noise of moving, and no kind of cry at all; but there was a queer kind of dragging sound, and a slow, heavy breathing. Oh! it was dreadful, waiting there in the dark and the silence, and fearing — fearing I did not know what!

‘At last I took my courage *a deux mains,* and turning the handle of the door as softly as I could, I opened the door a tiny bit. It was quite dark within; I could just see the outline of the windows. But in the darkness the sound of breathing, becoming more distinct, was appalling. As I listened, this continued; but there was no other sound.

I pushed the door open all at once. I was afraid to open it slowly; I felt as if there might be some dreadful thing behind it ready to pounce out on me! Then I switched on the electric light, and stepped into the room. I looked first at the bed. The sheets were all crumpled up, so that I knew Father had been in bed; but there was a great dark red patch in the centre of the bed, and spreading to the edge of it, that made my heart stand still. As I was gazing at it the sound of the breathing came across the room, and my eyes followed to it. There was Father on his right side with the other arm under him, just as if his dead body had been thrown there all in a heap. The track of blood went across the room up to the bed, and there was a pool all around him which looked terribly red and glittering as I bent over to examine him. The place where he lay was right in front of the big safe. He was in his pyjamas. The left sleeve was torn, showing his bare arm, and stretched out toward the safe. It looked — oh! so terrible, patched all with blood, and with the flesh torn or cut-all around a gold chain bangle on his wrist. I did not know he wore such a thing, and it seemed to give me a new shock of surprise.'

She paused a moment; and as I wished to relieve her by a moment's divergence of thought, I said:

'Oh, that need not surprise you. You will see the most unlikely men wearing bangles. I have seen a judge condemn a man to death and the wrist of the hand he held up had a gold bangle.' She did not seem to heed much the words or the idea; the pause, however, relieved her somewhat, and she went on in a steadier voice:

'I did not lose a moment in summoning aid, for I feared he might bleed to death. I rang the bell, and then went out and called for help as loudly as I could. In what must have been a very short time — though it seemed an incredibly long one to me — some of the servants came running up; and then others, till the room seemed full of staring eyes, and dishevelled hair, and night clothes of all sorts.

‘We lifted Father on a sofa; and the housekeeper, Mrs. Grant, who seemed to have her wits about her more than any of us, began to look where the flow of blood came from. In a few seconds it became apparent that it came from the arm which was bare. There was a deep wound — not clean-cut as with a knife, but like a jagged rent or tear — close to the wrist, which seemed to have cut into the vein. Mrs. Grant tied a handkerchief round the cut, and screwed it up tight with a silver paper-cutter; and the flow of blood seemed to be checked at once. By this time I had come to my senses — or such of them as remained; and I sent off one man for the doctor and another for the police. When they had gone, I felt that, except for the servants, I was all alone in the house, and that I knew nothing — of my Father or anything else; and a great longing came to me to have someone with me who could help me. Then I thought of you and your kind offer in the boat under the willow-tree; and, without waiting to think, I told the men to get a carriage ready at once, and I scribbled a note and sent it on to you.’

She paused. I did not like to say just then anything of how I felt. I looked at her, I think she understood, for her eyes were raised to mine for a moment and then fell, leaving her cheeks as red as peony roses. With a manifest effort she went on with her story.

‘The Doctor was with us in an incredibly short time. The groom had met him letting himself into his house with his latchkey, and he came to the house running. He made a proper tourniquet for poor Father’s arm, and then went home to get some appliances. I dare say he will be back here almost immediately. Then a policeman came, and he sent a message to the station; and very soon the

Superintendent was here. Then you came.'

There was a long pause, and I ventured to take her hand for an instant. Without a word more we opened the door, and joined the Superintendent in the hall. He hurried up to us, saying as he came:

'I have been examining everything myself, and have sent off a message to Scotland Yard. You see, Mr. Ross, there seemed so much that was odd about the case that I thought we had better have the best man of the Criminal Investigation Department that we could get. So I sent a note asking to have Sergeant Daw sent at once. You remember him, sir, in that American Poisoning case at Hoxton.'

'Oh yes,' I said, 'I remember him well; in that and other cases, for I have benefited several times by his skill and acumen. He has a mind that works as truly as any that I know. When I have been for the defence, and believed my man was innocent, I was glad to have him against us!'

'That is high praise, sir!' said the Superintendent gratified: 'I am glad you approve of my choice; that I did well in sending for him.'

I answered heartily:

'Could not be better. I do not doubt that between you we shall get at the facts — and what lies behind them!'

We ascended to Mr. Trelawny's room, where we found everything exactly as his daughter had described.

There came a ring at the house bell, and a minute later a man was shown into the room. A young man with aquiline features, keen grey eyes, and a forehead that stood out square and broad as that of a thinker. In his hand he had a black bag which he at once opened. Miss Trelawny introduced us: 'Doctor Winchester, Mr. Ross, Superintendent Dolan.' We bowed mutually, and he, without a moment's delay, began his work. We all waited, and eagerly watched him as he proceeded to dress the wound. As he went on he turned now and again to call the Superintendent's attention to some point about the wound, the latter proceeding to enter the fact at once in his notebook.

'See! Several parallel cuts or scratches beginning on the left side of the wrist and in some places endangering the Radial artery.

"These small wounds here, deep and jagged, seem as if made with a blunt instrument. This in particular would seem as if made with some kind of sharp wedge; the flesh round it seems torn as if with lateral pressure.'

Turning to Miss Trelawny he said presently:

'Do you think we might remove this bangle? It is not absolutely necessary, as it will fall lower on the wrist where it can hang loosely; but it might add to the patient's comfort later on.' The poor girl flushed deeply as she answered in a low voice:

'I do not know. I — I have only recently come to live with my Father; and I know so little of his life or his ideas that I fear I can hardly judge in such a matter.' The Doctor, after a keen glance at her, said in a very kindly way:

'Forgive me! I did not know. But in any case you need not be distressed. It is not required at present to move it. Were it so I should do so at once on my own responsibility. If it be necessary later on, we can easily remove it with a file. Your Father doubtless has some object in keeping it as it is. See! there is a tiny key attached to it....' As he was speaking he stopped and bent lower, taking from my hand the candle which I held and lowering it till his light fell on the bangle. Then motioning me to hold the candle in the same position, he took from his pocket a magnifying-glass which he adjusted. When he had made a careful examination he stood up and handed the magnifying-glass to Dolan, saying as he did so:

'You had better examine it yourself. That is no ordinary bangle. The gold is wrought over triple steel links; see where it is worn away. It is manifestly not meant to be removed lightly; and it would need more than an ordinary file to do it.'

The Superintendent bent his great body; but not getting close enough that way knelt down by the sofa as the Doctor had done. He examined the bangle minutely, turning it slowly round so that no particle of it escaped observation. Then he stood up and handed the magnifying-glass to me. 'When you have examined it yourself,' he said, 'let the lady look at it if she will,' and he commenced to write at length in his notebook.

I made a simple alteration in his suggestion. I held out the glass toward Miss Trelawny saying:

'Had you not better examine it first?' She drew back, raising slightly her hand in disclaimer, as she said impulsively:

'Oh no! Father would doubtless have shown it to me had he wished me to see it. I would not like to without his consent.' Then she added, doubtless fearing lest her delicacy of view should give offence to the rest of us:

'Of course it is right that you should see it. You have to examine and consider everything; and indeed — indeed I am grateful to you....'

She turned away; I could see that she was crying quietly. It was evident to me that even in the midst of her trouble and anxiety there was a chagrin that she knew so little of her father; and that her ignorance had to be shown at such a time and amongst so many strangers. That they were all men did not make the shame more easy to bear, though there was a certain relief in it. Trying to interpret her feelings I could not but think that she must have been glad that no woman's eyes — of understanding greater than man's — were upon her in that hour.

When I stood up from my examination, which verified to me that of the Doctor, the latter resumed his place beside the couch and went on with his ministrations. Superintendent Dolan said to me in a whisper:

'I think we are fortunate in our doctor!' I nodded, and was about to add something in praise of his acumen, when there came a low tapping at the door.

Chapter II. Strange Instructions

SUPERINTENDENT DOLAN WENT QUIETLY TO THE DOOR; by a sort of natural understanding he had taken possession of affairs in the room. The rest of us waited. He opened the door a little way, and then with a gesture of manifest relief threw it wide, and a young man stepped in. A young man clean-shaven, tall and slight; with an eagle face and bright, quick eyes that seemed to take in everything around him at a glance. As he came in, the Superintendent held out his hand; the two men shook hands warmly.

‘I came at once, sir, the moment I got your message. I am glad I still have your confidence.’

‘That you’ll always have,’ said the Superintendent heartily. ‘I have not forgotten our old Bow Street days, and I never shall!’ Then, without a word of preliminary, he began to tell everything he knew up to the moment of the newcomer’s entry. Sergeant Daw asked a few questions — a very few — when it was necessary for his understanding of circumstances or the relative positions of persons; but as a rule Dolan, who knew his work thoroughly, forestalled every query, and explained all necessary matters as he went on. Sergeant Daw threw occasionally swift glances round him; now at one of us; now at the room or some part of it; now at the wounded man lying senseless on the sofa.

When the Superintendent had finished, the Sergeant turned to me and said:

‘Perhaps you remember me, sir. I was with you in that Hoxton case.’

‘I remember you very well,’ I said as I held out my hand. The Superintendent spoke again:

‘You understand, Sergeant Daw, that you are put in full charge of this case.’

‘Under you I hope, sir,’ he interrupted. The other shook his head and smiled as he said:

‘It seems to me that this is a case that will take all a man’s time and his brains. I have other work to do; but I shall be more than interested, and if I can help in any possible way I shall be glad to do so!’

‘All right, sir,’ said the other, accepting his responsibility with a sort of modified salute; straightway he began his investigation.

First he came over to the Doctor and, having learned his name and address, asked him to write a full report which he could use, and which he could refer to headquarters if necessary- Doctor Winchester bowed gravely as he promised. Then the Sergeant approached me and said *sotto voce:*

‘I like the look of your doctor. I think we can work together!’ Turning to Miss Trelawny he asked:

Please let me know what you can of your Father. His ways of life, his history — in fact of anything of whatsoever kind which interests him, or in which he may be concerned.’ I was about to interrupt to tell him what she had already said of her ignorance in all matters of her father and his ways, but her warning hand was raised to me pointedly and she spoke herself.

‘Alas! I know little or nothing. Superintendent Dolan and Mr. Ross know already all I can say.’

‘Well, ma’am, we must be content to do what we can,’ said the officer genially. ‘I’ll begin by making a minute examination. You say that you were outside the door when you heard the noise?’

‘I was in my room when I heard the queer sound — indeed it must have been the early part of whatever it was which woke me. I came out of my room at once. Father's door was shut, and I could see the whole landing and the upper slopes of the staircase. No one could have left by the door unknown to me, if that is what you mean!'

'That is just what I do mean, miss. If everyone who knows anything will tell me as well as that, we shall soon get to the bottom of this. Then I may take it that whoever made the attack is still in the room?' He said this half interrogatively, but no one answered. He knew as much as we did on that point.

He then went over to the bed; looked at it carefully, and asked:

'Has the bed been touched?'

'Not to my knowledge,' said Miss Trelawny, 'but I shall ask Mrs. Grant — the housekeeper' she added as she rang the bell. Mrs. Grant answered it in person. 'Come in,' said Miss Trelawny. 'These gentlemen want to know, Mrs. Grant, if the bed has been touched.'

'Not by me, ma'am.'

'Then,' said Miss Trelawny, turning to Sergeant Daw, 'it cannot have been touched by anyone. Either Mrs. Grant or I myself was here all the time, and I do not think any of the servants who came when I gave the alarm were near the bed at all. You see, Father lay here just under the great safe, and everyone crowded round him. We sent them all away in a very short time.' Daw, with a motion of his hand, asked us all to stay at the other side of the room whilst with a magnifying-glass he examined the bed, taking care as he moved each fold of the bedclothes to replace it in exact position. Then he examined with his magnifying-glass the floor beside it, taking especial pains where the blood had trickled over the side of the bed, which was of heavy red wood handsomely carved. Inch by inch, down on his knees, carefully avoiding any touch with the stains on the floor, he followed the blood-marks over to the spot, close under the great safe, where the body had lain. All around and about this spot he went for a radius of some yards; but seemingly did not meet with anything to arrest special attention. Then he examined the front of the safe; round the lock, and along the bottom and top of the double- doors, more especially at the places of their touching in front.

Next he went to the windows, which were fastened down with the hasps.

'Were the shutters closed?' he asked Miss Trelawny in a casual way as though he expected the negative answer, which came.

All this time Doctor Winchester was attending to his patient; now dressing the wounds in the wrist or making minute examination all over the head and throat, and over the heart. More than once he put his nose to the mouth of the senseless man and sniffed. Each time he did so he finished up by unconsciously looking round the room, as though in search of something.

Then we heard the deep strong voice of the Detective:

'So far as I can see, the object was to bring that key to the lock of the safe. There seems to be some secret in the mechanism that I am unable to guess at, though I served a year in Chubb's before I joined the police. It is a combination lock of seven letters; but there seems to be a way of locking even the combination. It is one of Chatwood's; I shall call at their place and find out something about it.' Then turning to the Doctor, as though his own work were for the present done, he said:

'Have you anything you can tell me at once, Doctor, which will not interfere with your full report? If there is any doubt I can wait, but the sooner I know something definite the better.' Doctor Winchester answered at once:

For my own part I see no reason in waiting. *I* shall make a full report of course. But in the meantime I shall tell you all I know — which is after all not very much, and all I think — which is less definite. There is no wound on the head which could account for the state of stupor in which the patient continues. I must, therefore, take it that either he has been drugged or is under some hypnotic influence. So far as I can judge, he has not been drugged — at least by means of any drug of whose qualities I am aware. Of course, there is ordinarily in this room so much of mummy smell that it is difficult to be certain about anything having a delicate aroma. I dare say that you have noticed the peculiar Egyptian scents, bitumen, nard, aromatic gums and spices, and so forth. It is quite possible that somewhere in this room, amongst the curios and hidden by stronger scents, is some substance or liquid which may have the effect we see. It is possible that the patient has taken some drug, and that he may in some sleeping phase have injured himself. I do not think this is likely; and circumstances, other than those which I have myself been investigating, may prove that this surmise is not correct. But in the meantime it is possible; and must, till it be disproved, be kept within our purview.' Here Sergeant Daw interrupted:

'That may be, but if so, we should be able to find the instrument with which the wrist was injured. There would be marks of blood somewhere.'

'Exactly so!' said the Doctor, fixing his glasses as though preparing for an argument. 'But if it be that the patient has used some strange drug, it may be one that does not take effect at once. As we are as yet ignorant of its potentialities — if, indeed, the whole surmise is correct at all — we must be prepared at all points.'

Here Miss Trelawny joined in the conversation:

“That would be quite right, so far as the action of the drug was concerned; but according to the second part of your surmise the wound may have been self-inflicted, and this *after* the drug had taken effect.’

‘True!’ said the Detective and the Doctor simultaneously. She went on.

‘As however, Doctor, your guess does not exhaust the possibilities, we must bear in mind that some other variant of the same root-idea may be correct I take it, therefore, that our first search, to be made on this assumption, must be for the weapon with which the injury was done to my Father’s wrist.’

‘Perhaps he put the weapon in the safe before he became quite unconscious,’ said I, giving voice foolishly to a half-formed thought.

‘That could not be,’ said the Doctor quickly. ‘At least I think it could hardly be,’ he added cautiously, with a brief bow to me. ‘You see, the left hand is covered with blood; but there is no blood mark whatever on the safe.’

‘Quite right!’ I said, and there was a long pause.

The first to break the silence was the Doctor.

‘We shall want a nurse here as soon as possible; and I know the very one to suit. I shall go at once to get her if I can. I must ask that till I return some of you will remain constantly with the patient. It may be necessary to remove him to another room later on; but in the meantime he is best left here. Miss Trelawny, may I take it that either you or Mrs. Grant will remain here — not merely in the room, but close to the patient and watchful of him — till I return?’

She bowed in reply, and took a seat beside the sofa. The Doctor gave her some directions as to what she should do in case her father should become conscious before his return.

The next to move was Superintendent Dolan, who came close to Sergeant Daw as he said:

‘I had better return now to the station — unless, of course, you should wish me to remain for a while.’

He answered, ‘Is Johnny Wright still in your division?’

‘Yes! Would you like him to be with you?’ The other nodded reply. ‘Then I will send him on to you as soon as can be arranged. He shall then stay with you as long as j you wish. I will tell him that he is to take his instructions entirely from you.’

The Sergeant accompanied him to the door, saying as he went:

‘Thank you, sir, you are always thoughtful for men who are working with you. It is a pleasure to me to be with you again. I shall go back to Scotland Yard and report to my chief. Then I shall call at Chatwood’s; and I shall return here as soon as possible. I suppose I may take it, miss, that I may put up here for a day or two, if required. It may be some help, or possibly some comfort to you, if I am about, until we unravel this mystery.’

‘I shall be very grateful to you.’ He looked keenly at her for a few seconds before he spoke again.

‘Before I go have I permission to look about your Father’s table and desk? There might be something which would give us a clue — or a lead at all events.’ Her answer was so unequivocal as almost to surprise him.

‘You have the fullest possible permission to do anything which may help us in this dreadful trouble — to discover what it is that is wrong with my Father, or which may shield him in the future!’

He began at once, a systematic search of the dressing-table, and after that of the writing-table in the room. In one of the drawers he found a letter sealed; this he brought at once across the room and handed to Miss Trelawny.

‘A letter — directed to me — and in my Father’s hand!’ she said as she eagerly opened it. I watched her face as she began to read; but seeing at once that Sergeant Daw kept his keen eyes on her face, unflinchingly watching every flitting expression, I kept my eyes henceforth fixed on his. When Miss Trelawny had read her letter through, I had in my-mind a conviction, which, however, I kept locked in my own heart. Amongst the suspicions in the mind of the Detective was one, rather perhaps potential than definite, of Miss Trelawny herself.

For several minutes Miss Trelawny held the letter in her hand with her eyes downcast, thinking. Then she read it carefully again; this time the varying expressions were intensified, and I thought I could easily follow them. When she had finished the second reading, she paused again. Then, though with some reluctance, she handed the letter to the Detective, He read it eagerly but with unchanging face; read it a second time, and then handed it back with a bow. She paused a little again, and then handed it to me. As she did so she raised her eyes to mine for a single moment appealingly; a swift blush spread over her pale cheeks and forehead.

With mingled feelings I took it, but, all said, I was glad. She did not show any perturbation in giving the letter to the Detective — she might not have shown any to any one else. But to me... I feared to follow the thought further; but read on, conscious that the eyes of both Miss Trelawny and the Detective were fixed on me.

My dear daughter — I want you to take this letter as an instruction — absolute and imperative, and admitting of no deviation whatever — in case anything untoward or unexpected by you or by others should happen to *me*. If I should be suddenly and mysteriously stricken down — either by sickness, accident or attack — you must follow these directions implicitly. If I am not already in my bedroom when you are made cognisant of my state,! am to be brought there as quickly as possible. Even should I be dead, my body is to be brought there. Thenceforth, until I am either conscious and able to give instructions on my own account, or buried, I am never to be left alone — not for a single instant. From nightfall to sunrise at least two persons must remain in the room. It will be well that a trained nurse be in the room from time to time, and will note any symptoms, either permanent or changing, which may strike her. My solicitors, Marvin and Jewkes, of 27B Lincoln's Inn, have full instructions in case of my death; and Mr. Marvin has himself undertaken to see personally my wishes carried out. I should advise you, my dear Daughter, seeing that you have no relative to apply to, to get some friend whom you can trust to either remain within the house where instant communication can be made, or to come nightly to aid in the watching, or to be within call. Such friend may be either male or female; but, whichever it may be, there should be added one other watcher or attendant at hand of the opposite sex. Understand, that it is of the very essence of my wish that there should be, awake and exercising themselves to my purposes, both masculine and feminine intelligences. Once more, my dear Margaret, let me impress on you the need for observation and just reasoning to conclusions, howsoever strange. If I am taken ill or injured, this will be no ordinary occasion; and I wish to warn you, so that your guarding may be complete.

Nothing in my room — I speak of the curios — must be removed or displaced in any way, or for any cause whatever. I have a special reason and a special purpose in the placing of each; so that any moving of them would thwart my plans.

Should you want money or counsel in anything, Mr. Marvin will carry out your wishes; to the which he has my full instructions.

Abel Trelawny

I read the letter a second time before speaking, for I feared to betray myself. The choice of a friend might be a momentous occasion for me. I had already ground for hope, in that she had asked me to help her in the first throe of her trouble; but love makes its own doublings, and I feared. My thoughts seemed to whirl with lightning rapidity, and in a few seconds a whole process of reasoning became formulated. I must not volunteer to be the friend that the father advised his daughter to have to aid in her vigil; and yet that one glance had a lesson which I must not ignore. Also, did not she, when she wanted help, send to me — to me a stranger, except for one meeting at a dance and one brief afternoon of companionship on the river? Would it not humiliate her to make her ask me twice? Humiliate her! No! That pain I could at all events save her; it - is not humiliation to refuse. So, as I handed her back the letter, I said:

‘I know you will forgive me, Miss Trelawny, if I presume too much; but if you will permit me to aid in the watching I shall be proud. Though the occasion is a sad one, I shall be so far happy to be allowed the privilege.’

Despite her manifest and painful effort at self-control, the red tide swept her face and neck. Even her eyes seemed suffused, and in stern contrast with her pale cheeks when the tide had rolled back. She answered in a low voice:

‘I shall be very grateful for your help!’ Then in an afterthought she added: ‘But you must not let me be selfish in my need! I know you have many duties to engage you; and though I shall value your help highly — most highly — it would not be fair to monopolize your time.'

'As to that,' I answered at once, 'my time is yours. I can for today easily arrange my work so that I can come here in the afternoon, and stay till morning. After that, if the occasion still demands it, I can so arrange my work that I shall have more time still at disposal.' She was much moved. I could see the tears gather in her eyes, and she turned away her head. The Detective spoke:

'I am glad you will be here, Mr. Ross, I shall be in the house myself, as Miss Trelawny will allow me, if my people in Scotland Yard will permit. That letter seems to put a different complexion on everything; though the mystery remains greater than ever. If you can wait here an hour or two I shall go to headquarters, and then to the safe-makers. After that I shall return; and you can go away easier in your mind, for I shall be here.'

When he had gone, we two, Miss Trelawny and I, remained in silence. At least she raised her eyes and looked at me for a moment; after that I would not have exchanged places with a king. For a while she busied herself round the extemporized bedside of her father. Then, asking me to be sure not to take my eyes off him till she returned, she hurried out.

In a few minutes she came back with Mrs. Grant and two maids and a couple of men, who bore the entire frame and furniture of a light iron bed. This they proceeded to put together and to make. When the work was completed, and the servants had withdrawn, she said to me:

'It will be well to be all ready when the Doctor returns. He will surely want to have Father put to bed; and a proper bed will be better for him than the sofa.' She then got a chair close beside her father, and sat down watching him.

I went about the room, taking accurate note of all I saw. And truly there were enough things in the room to evoke the curiosity of any man — even though the attendant circumstances were less strange. The whole place, excepting those articles of furniture necessary to a well-furnished bedroom, was filled with magnificent curios, chiefly Egyptian. As the room was of immense size there was opportunity for the placing of a large number of them, even if, as with these, they were of huge proportions.

Whilst I was still investigating the room there came the sound of wheels on the gravel outside the house. There was a ring at the hall door, and a few minutes later, after a preliminary tap at the door and an answering ‘Come in!’ Doctor Winchester entered, followed by a young woman in the dark dress of a nurse.

‘I have been fortunate!’ he said as he came in. ‘I found her at once and free. Miss Trelawny, this is Nurse Kennedy!’

Chapter III. The Watchers

I WAS STRUCK BY THE WAY THE TWO YOUNG WOMEN looked at each other. I suppose I have been so much in the habit of weighing up in my own mind the personality of witnesses and of forming judgement by their unconscious action and mode of bearing themselves, that the habit extends to my life outside as well as within the court-house. At this moment of my life anything that interested Miss Trelawny interested me; and as she had been struck by the newcomer I instinctively weighed her up also. By comparison of the two I seemed somehow to gain a new knowledge of Miss Trelawny. Certainly, the two women made a good contrast. Miss Trelawny was of fine figure, dark, straight-featured. She had marvelous eyes; great, wide-open, and as black and soft as velvet, with a mysterious depth. To look in them was like gazing at a black mirror such as Doctor Dee used in his wizard rites. I heard an old gentleman at the picnic, a great oriental traveller, describe the effect of her eyes 'as looking at night at the great distant lamps of a mosque through the open door'. The eyebrows were typical. Finely arched and rich in long curling hair, they seemed like the proper architectural environment of the deep, splendid eyes. Her hair was black also, but was as fine as silk. Generally black hair is a type of animal strength and seems as if some strong expression of the forces of a strong nature; but in this case there could be no such thought. There were refinement and high breeding; and though there was no suggestion of weakness, any sense of -power there was, was rather spiritual than animal. The whole harmony of her being seemed complete. Carriage, figure, hair, eyes; the mobile, full mouth, whose scarlet lips and white teeth seemed to light up the lower part -of the face — as the eyes did the upper; the wide sweep of the jaw from chin to ear; the long, fine fingers; the hand which seemed to move from the wrist as though it had a sentience of its own. All these perfections went to make up a personality that dominated, either by its grace, its sweetness, its beauty, or its charm.

Nurse Kennedy, on the other hand, was rather under than over a woman's average height. She was firm and thickset, with full limbs and broad, strong, capable hands. Her colour was in the general effect that of an autumn leaf. The yellow-brown hair was thick and long, and the golden-brown eyes sparkled from the freckled, sunburnt skin. Her rosy cheeks gave a general idea of rich brown. The red lips and white teeth did not alter the colour scheme, but only emphasized it. She had a snub nose — there was no possible doubt about it; but Eke such noses in general it showed a nature generous, untiring, and full of good nature. Her broad white forehead, which even the freckles had spared, was full of forceful thought and reason.

Doctor Winchester had on their journey from the hospital, coached her in the necessary particulars, and without a word she took charge of the patient and set to work

Having examined the new-made bed and shaken the pillows, she spoke to the Doctor, who gave instructions; presently we all four, stepping together, lifted the unconscious man from the sofa.

Early in the afternoon, when Sergeant Daw had returned, I called-at my rooms in Jermyn Street and sent out such clothes, books, and papers as I should be likely to want within a few days. Then I went on to keep my legal engagements.

The Court sat late that day as an important case was ending; it was striking six as I drove in at the gate of the Kensington Palace Road. I found myself installed in a large room close to the sick chamber.

That night we were not yet regularly organized for watching, so that the early part of the evening showed an unevenly balanced guard. Nurse Kennedy, who had been on duty all day, was lying down, as she had arranged to come on again by twelve o'clock. Doctor Winchester, who was dining in the house, remained in the room until dinner was announced; and went back at once when it was over. During dinner Mrs. Grant remained in the room, and with her Sergeant Daw, who wished to complete a minute examination which he had undertaken of everything in the room and near it. At nine o'clock Miss Trelawny and I went in to relieve the Doctor. She had lain down for a few hours in the afternoon so as to be refreshed for her work at night. She told me that she had determined that for this night at least she would sit up and watch. I did not try to dissuade her, for I knew that her mind was made up. Then and there I made up my mind that I would watch with her — unless, of course, I should see that she really did not wish it. I said nothing of my intentions for the present. We came in on tiptoe, so silently that the Doctor, who was bending over the bed, did not hear us, and seemed a little startled when suddenly looking up he saw our eyes upon him. I felt that the mystery of the whole thing was getting on his nerves, as it had already got on the nerves of some others of us. He was, I fancied, a little annoyed with himself for having been so startled, and at once began to talk in a hurried manner as though to get over our idea of his embarrassment:

'I am really and absolutely at my wits' end to find any fit cause for this stupor. I have made again as accurate an examination as I know how, and I am satisfied that there is no injury to the brain, that is, no external injury. Indeed, all his vital organs seem unimpaired. I have given him, as you know, food several times and it has manifestly done him good. His breathing is strong and regular, and his pulse is slower and stronger than it was this morning. I cannot find evidence of any known drug, and his unconsciousness does not resemble any of the many cases of hypnotic sleep which I saw in the Charcot Hospital in Paris. And as to these wounds' — he laid his finger gently on the bandaged wrist which lay outside the coverlet as he spoke, 'I do not know what to make of them. They might have been made by a carding-machine; but that supposition is untenable. It is within the bounds of possibility that they might have been made by a wild animal if it had-taken care to sharpen its claws. That, too, is, I take it, impossible. By the way, have you any strange pets here in the house; anything of an exceptional kind, such as a tiger-cat or anything out of the common?' Miss Trelawny smiled a sad smile which made my heart ache, as she made answer:

'Oh no! Father does not like animals about the house, unless they are dead and mummied.' This was said with a touch of bitterness — or jealousy, I could hardly tell which. 'Even my poor kitten was only allowed in the house on sufferance; and though he is the dearest and best-conducted cat in the world, he is now on a sort of parole, and is not allowed into this room.'

As she was speaking a faint rattling of the door handle was heard. Instantly Miss Trelawny's face brightened. She sprang up and went over to the door, saying as she went:

'There he is! That is my Silvio. He stands on his hind legs and rattles the door handle when he wants to come into a room.' She opened the door, speaking to the cat as though he were a baby: 'Did him want his mower? Come then; but he must stay with her!' She lifted the cat, and came back with him in her arms. He was certainly a magnificent animal. A chinchilla grey Persian with long silky hair;

a really lordly animal with a haughty bearing, despite his gentleness; and with great paws which spread out as he placed them on the ground. Whilst she was fondling him, he suddenly gave a wriggle like an eel and slipped out of her arms. He ran across the room and stood opposite a low table on which stood the mummy of an animal, and began to mew and snarl. Miss Trelawny was after him in an instant and lifted him in her arms, kicking and struggling and wriggling to get away; but not biting or scratching, for evidently he loved his beautiful mistress. He ceased to make a noise the moment he was in her arms; in a whisper she admonished him:

‘O you naughty Silvio! You have broken your parole that mother gave for you. Now, say good-night to the gentlemen, and come away to mother’s room!’ As she was speaking she held out the cat’s paw to me to shake. As I did so I could not but admire its size and beauty. ‘Why,’ said I, ‘his paw seems like a little boxing-glove full of claws.’ She smiled:

‘So it ought to. Don’t you notice that my Silvio has seven toes see!’ she opened the paw; and surely enough there were seven separate claws, each of them seamed in a delicate, fine, shell-like case. As I gently stroked the foot the claws emerged and one of them accidentally — there was no anger now and the cat was purring — struck into my hand. Instinctively I said as I drew back:

‘Why, his claws are like razors!’

Doctor Winchester had come close to us and was bending over looking at die- cat’s claws; as I spoke he said in a quick, sharp way:

‘Eh!’ I could hear the quick intake of his breath. Whilst I was stroking the now quiescent cat, the Doctor went to the table and tore off a piece of blotting-paper from the writing-pad and came back. He laid the paper on his palm, and, with a simple ‘pardon me!’ to Miss

Trelawny, placed the cat's paw on it and pressed it down with his other hand. The haughty cat seemed to resent somewhat the familiarity, and tried to draw its foot away. This was plainly what the Doctor wanted, for in the act the cat opened the sheathes of its claws and made several reefs in the soft paper. Then Miss Trelawny took her pet away. She returned in a couple of minutes; as she came in she said:

'It is most odd about that mummy! When Silvio came into the room first — indeed I took him in as a kitten to show to Father — he went on just the same way. He jumped up on the table, and tried to scratch and bite the mummy. That was what made Father so angry, and brought the decree of banishment on poor Silvio. Only his parole, given through me, kept him in the house.'

Whilst she had been gone, Doctor Winchester had taken the bandage from her father's wrist. The wound was now quite clear, as the separate cuts showed out in fierce red lines. The Doctor folded the blotting-paper across the line of punctures made by the cat's claws, and held it down close to the wound. As he did so, he looked up triumphantly and beckoned us over to him.

The cuts in the paper corresponded with the wounds in the wrist! No explanation was needed, as he said:

'It would have been better if master Silvio had not broken his parole!'

We were all silent for a little while. Suddenly Miss Trelawny said:

'But Silvio was not in here last night!'

'Are you sure? Could you prove that if necessary?' She hesitated before replying:

'I am certain of it; but I fear it would be difficult to prove. Silvio sleeps in a basket in my room. I certainly put him to bed last night; I remember distinctly laying his little blanket over him, and tucking him in. This morning I took him out of the basket myself. I certainly never noticed him in here; though, of course, that would not mean much, for I was too concerned about poor Father, and too much occupied with him, to notice even Silvio.'

The Doctor shook his head as he said with a certain sadness:

'Well, at any rate it is no use trying to prove anything now. Any cat in the world would have cleaned blood-marks — did any exist — from his paws in a hundredth part of the time that has elapsed.'

Again we were all silent; and again the silence was broken by Miss Trelawny:

'But now that I think of it, it could not have been poor Silvio that injured Father. My door was shut when I first heard the sound; and Father's was shut when I listened at it. When I went in, the injury had been done; so that it must have been before Silvio could possibly have got in.' This reasoning commended itself, especially to me as a barrister, for it was proof to satisfy a jury. It gave me a distinct pleasure to have Silvio acquitted of the crime — possibly because he was Miss Trelawny's cat and was loved by her. Happy cat! Silvio's mistress was manifestly pleased as I said:

'Verdict, "not guilty!" ' Doctor Winchester after a pause observed:

'My apologies to master Silvio on this occasion; but I am still puzzled to know why he is so keen against that mummy. Is he the same toward the other mummies in the house? There are, I suppose, a lot of them. I saw three in the hall as I came in.'

There are lots of them,' she answered. 'I sometimes don't know whether I am in a private house or the British Museum. But Silvio never concerns himself about any of them except that particular one.

I suppose it must be because it is of an animal, not a man or a woman.'

'Perhaps it is of a cat!' said the Doctor as he started up and went across the room to look at the mummy more closely. 'Yes,' he went on, 'it is the mummy of a cat; and a very fine one, too. If it hadn't been a special favourite of some very special person it would never have received so much honour. See! A painted case and obsidian eyes — just like a human mummy. It is an extraordinary thing, that knowledge of kind to kind. Here is a dead cat — that is all; it is perhaps four or five thousand years old — and another cat of another breed, in what is practically another world, is ready to fly at it, just as it would if it were not dead. I should like to experiment a bit about that cat if you don't mind, Miss Trelawny.' She hesitated before replying:

'Of course, do anything you may think necessary or wise; but I hope it will not be anything to hurt or worry my poor Silvio.' The Doctor smiled as he answered:

'Oh, Silvio would be all right: it is the other one that my sympathies would be reserved for?'

'How do you mean?'

'Master Silvio will do the attacking, the other one will do the suffering.'

'Suffering?' There was a note of pain in her voice. The Doctor smiled more broadly:

'Oh, please make your mind easy as to that. The other won't suffer as we understand it; except perhaps in his structure and outfit.'

'What on earth do you mean?'

'Simply this, my dear young lady, that the antagonist will be a mummy cat like this one. There are, I take it, plenty of them to be had in Museum Street. I shall get one and place it here instead of that one — you won't think that a temporary exchange will violate your Father's instructions, I hope. We shall then find out, to begin with, whether Silvio objects to all mummy cats, or only to this one in particular.')

'I don't know,' she said doubtfully. 'Father's instructions | seem very uncompromising.' Then after a pause she went on: 'But of course under the circumstances anything that is to be ultimately for his good must be done. I suppose there ; can't be anything very particular about the mummy of a 1 cat'

Doctor Winchester said nothing. He sat rigid, with so grave a look on his face that his extra gravity passed on to me; and in its enlightening perturbation I began to realize more than I had yet done the strangeness of the case in which I was now so deeply concerned. When once this ; thought had begun there was no end to it. Indeed it grew, and blossomed, and reproduced itself in a thousand different ways. The room and all in it gave grounds for strange thoughts. There were so many ancient relics that unconsciously one was taken back to strange lands and strange times. There were so many mummies or mummy objects, round which there seems to cling for ever the penetrating odours of bitumen, and spices and gums— 'Nard and Cir-cassia's balmy smells' — that one was unable to forget the past. Of course, there was but little light in the room, and that carefully shaded; so that there was no glare anywhere. None of that direct-light which can manifest itself as a power or an entity, and so make for companionship. The room was a large one, and lofty in proportion to its size.

In its vastness was place for a multitude of things not often found in a bedchamber. In far corners of the room were shadows of uncanny shape. More than once as I thought, the multitudinous presence of the dead and the past took such hold on me that I caught myself looking round fearfully as though some strange personality or influence was present. Even the manifest presence of Doctor Winchester and Miss Trelawny could not altogether comfort or satisfy me at such moments. It was with a distinct sense of relief that I saw a new personality in the room in the shape of Nurse Kennedy. There was no doubt that that businesslike, self-reliant, capable young woman added an element of security to such wild imaginings as my own. She had a quality of common-sense that seemed to pervade everything around her, as though it were some kind of emanation. Up to that moment I had been building fancies around the sick man; so that finally all about him, including myself, had become involved in them, or enmeshed, or saturated, or... But now that she had come, he relapsed into his proper perspective as a patient; the room was a sick-room, and the shadows lost their fearsome quality. The only thing which it could not altogether abrogate was the strange Egyptian smell. You may put a mummy in a glass case and hermetically seal it so that no corroding air can get within; but all the same it will exhale its odour. One might think that four or five thousand years would exhaust the olfactory qualities of anything; but experience teaches us that these smells remain, and that their secrets are unknown to us. Today they are as much mysteries as they were when the embalmers put the body in the bath of matron.

All at once I sat up. I had become lost in an absorbing reverie. The Egyptian smell had seemed to' get on my nerves — on my memory — on my very will.

At that moment I had a thought which was like an inspiration. If I was influenced in such a manner by the smell, might it not *be* that the sick man, who lived half his life or more in the atmosphere, had gradually and by slow but sure process taken into his system something which had permeated him to such degree that it had a new power derived from quantity — or strength — or...

I was becoming lost again in a reverie. This would not do. I must take such precaution that I could remain awake, or free from such entrancing thought. I had had but half a night's sleep last night; and this night I must remain awake. Without stating my intention, for I feared that I might add to the trouble and uneasiness of Miss Trelawny, I went downstairs and out of the house. I soon found a chemist's shop, and came away with a respirator. When I got back, it was ten o'clock; the Doctor was going for the night. The Nurse came with him to the door of the sick-room, taking her last instructions. Miss Trelawny sat still beside the bed. Sergeant Daw, who had entered as the Doctor went out, was some little distance off.

When Nurse Kennedy joined us, we arranged that she should sit up till two o'clock, when Miss Trelawny would relieve her. Thus, in accordance with Mr. Trelawny's instructions, there would always be a man and a woman in the room; and each one of us would overlap, so that at no time would a new set of watchers come on duty without someone to tell of what — if anything — had occurred. I lay down on a sofa in my own room, having arranged that one of the servants should call me a little before twelve. In a few moments I was asleep.

When I was waked, it took me several seconds to get back my thoughts so as to recognize my own identity and surroundings. The short sleep had, however, done me good, and I could look on things around me in a more practical light than I had been able to do earlier in the evening. I bathed my face, and thus refreshed went into the sick-room. I moved very softly. The Nurse was sitting by the bed, quiet and alert; the Detective sat in an armchair across the room in deep shadow. He did not move when I crossed, until I got close to him, when he said in a dull whisper.

‘It is all right; I have not been asleep!’ An unnecessary thing to say, I thought — it always is, unless it be untrue in spirit. When I told him that his watch was over, that he might go to bed till I should call him at six o’clock, he seemed relieved and went with alacrity. At the door he turned and, coming back to me, said in a whisper.

‘I sleep lightly and I shall have my pistols with me. I won’t feel so heavy-headed when I get out of this mummy smell.’

He too, then, had shared my experience of drowsiness!

I asked the Nurse if she wanted anything. I noticed that she had a vinaigrette in her lap. Doubtless she, too, had felt some of the influence which had so affected me. She said that she had all she required,, but that if she should want anything she would at once let me know. I wished to keep her from noticing my respirator, so I went to the chair in the shadow where her back was toward me. Here I quietly put it on, and made myself comfortable.

For what seemed a long time, I sat and thought and thought. It was a wild medley of thoughts, as might have been expected from the experiences of the previous day and night. Again I found myself thinking of the Egyptian smell; and I remember that I felt a delicious satisfaction that I did not experience it as I had done. The respirator was doing its work.

It must have been that the passing of this disturbing thought made for repose of mind, which is the corollary of bodily rest, for, though I really cannot remember being asleep or waking from it, I saw a vision — I dreamed a dream. I scarcely know which.

I was still in the room, seated in the chair. I had on my respirator and knew that I breathed freely. The Nurse sat in her chair with her back toward me. She sat quite still. The sick man lay as still as the dead. It was rather like the picture of a scene than the reality; all were still and silent; and the stillness and silence were continuous. Outside, in the distance I could hear the sounds of a city, the occasional roll of wheels, the shout of a reveller, the far-away echo of whistles and the rumbling of trains. The light was very, very low; the reflection of it under the green-shaded lamp was a dim relief to the darkness, rather than light. The green silk fringe of the lamp had merely the colour of an emerald seen in the moonlight. The room, for all its darkness, was full of shadows. It seemed in my whirling thoughts as though all the real things had become shadows — shadows which moved, for they passed the dim outline of the high windows. Shadows which had sentience. I even thought there was sound, a faint sound as of the mew of a cat — the rustle of drapery and a metallic clink as of metal faintly touching metal. I sat as one entranced. At last I felt, as in nightmare, that this was sleep, and that in the passing of its portals all my will had gone.

All at once my senses were full awake. A shriek rang in my ears. The room was filled suddenly with a blaze of light. There was the sound of pistol shots — one, two; and a haze of white smoke in the room. When my waking eyes regained their power, I could have shrieked with horror myself at what I saw before me.

Chapter IV. The Second Attempt

THE SIGHT WHICH MET MY EYES HAD THE HORROR OF a dream within a dream, with the certainty of reality added. The room was as I had seen it last; except that the shadowy look had gone in the glare of the many lights, and every article in it stood stark and solidly real.

By the empty bed sat Nurse Kennedy, as my eyes had last seen her, sitting bolt upright in the armchair beside the bed. She had placed a pillow behind her, so that her back might be erect: but her neck was fixed as that of one in a cataleptic trance. She was, to all intents and purposes, turned into stone. There was no special expression on her face — no fear, no horror; nothing such as might be expected of one in such a condition. Her open eyes showed neither wonder nor interest. She was simply a negative existence, warm, breathing, placid; but absolutely unconscious of the world around her. The bedclothes were disarranged, as though the patient had been drawn from under them without throwing them back. The corner of the upper sheet hung upon the floor; close by it lay one of the bandages with which the Doctor had dressed the wounded wrist. Another and another lay further along the floor, as though forming a clue to where the sick man now lay. This was almost exactly where he had been found on the previous night, under the great safe. Again, the left arm lay toward the safe. But there had been a new outrage, an attempt had been made to sever the arm close to the bangle which held the tiny key. A heavy Kukri knife — one of the leaf-shaped knives which the Gurkhas and others of the hill tribes of India use with such effect — had been made. It was manifest that just at the moment of striking, the blow had been arrested, for only the point of the knife and not the edge of the blade had struck the flesh. As it was, the outer side of the arm had been cut to the bone and the blood was pouring out. In addition, the former wound in front of the arm had been cut or torn about terribly, one of the cuts seemed to jet out blood as if with each pulsation of the heart. By the side of her father knelt Miss Trelawny, her white nightdress stained with the blood in which she knelt. In the middle of the room Sergeant Daw, in his shirt and trousers and stocking feet, was putting fresh cartridges into his revolver in a dazed mechanical kind of way. His eyes were red and heavy, and he seemed only half awake, and less than half-conscious of what was going on around him. Several servants, bearing lights of various kinds, were clustered round the doorway.

As I rose from my chair and came forward, Miss Trelawny raised her eyes toward me. When she saw me she shrieked and started to her feet, pointing towards me. Never shall I forget the strange picture she made, with her white drapery all smeared with blood which, as she rose from the pool, ran in streaks toward her bare feet. I believe that I had only been asleep; that whatever influence had worked on Mr. Trelawny and Nurse Kennedy — and in less degree on Sergeant Daw — had not touched me. The respirator had been of some service, though it had not kept off the tragedy whose dire evidence were before me. I can understand now — I could understand even then — the fright, added to that which had gone before, which my appearance must have evoked. I had still on the respirator, which covered mouth and nose; my hair had been tossed in my sleep. Coming suddenly forward, thus enwrapped and dishevelled, in that horrified crowd, I must have had, in the strange mixture of lights, an extraordinary and terrifying appearance. It was well that I recognized all this in time to avert another catastrophe; for the half-dazed, mechanically acting Detective put in the cartridges and had raised his revolver to shoot at me when I succeeded in wrenching off the respirator and shouting to him to hold his hand. In this also he acted mechanically; the red, half-awake eyes had not in them even then the intention of conscious action. The danger, however, was averted. The relief of the situation, strangely enough, came in a simple fashion. Mrs. Grant, seeing that her young mistress had on only her nightdress, had gone to fetch a dressing-gown, which she now threw over her. This simple act brought us all back to the region of fact. With a long breath, one and all seemed to devote themselves to the most pressing matter before us, that of staunching the flow of blood from the arm of the wounded man. Even as the thought of action came, I rejoiced; for the bleeding was very proof that Mr. Trelawny still lived.

Last night's lesson was not thrown away. More than one of those present knew now what to do in such an emergency, and within a few seconds willing hands were at work on a tourniquet. A man was at once dispatched for the doctor, and several of the servants disappeared to make themselves respectable. We lifted Mr. Trelawny on to the sofa where he had lain yesterday; and, having done what we could for him, turned our attention to the Nurse. In all the turmoil she had not stirred; she sat there as before, erect and rigid, breathing softly and naturally and with a placid smile. As it was manifestly of no use to attempt anything with her till the doctor had come, we began to think of the general situation.

Mrs. Grant had by this time taken her mistress away and changed her clothes; for she was back presently in a dressing-gown and slippers, and with the traces of blood removed from her hands. She was now much calmer, though she trembled sadly, and her face was ghastly white. When she had looked at her father's wrist, I holding the tourniquet, she turned her eyes round the room, resting them now and again on each one of us present in turn, but seeming to find no comfort. It was so apparent to me that she did not know where to begin or whom to trust that, to reassure her, I said:

'I am all right now; I was only asleep.' Her voice had a gulp in it as she said in a low voice:

'Asleep! You! And my Father in danger! I thought you were on the watch!' I felt the sting of justice in the reproach; but I really wanted to help her, so I answered:

'Only asleep. It is bad enough, I know; but there is something more than an "only" round us here. Had it not been that I took a definite precaution I might have been like the Nurse there.' She turned her eyes swiftly on the weird figure, sitting grimly upright like a painted statue; and then her face softened. With the action of habitual courtesy she said:

'Forgive me! I did not mean to be rude. But I am in such distress and fear that I hardly know what I am saying. Oh, it is dreadful! I fear for fresh trouble and horror and mystery every moment.' This cut me to the very heart, and out of the heart's fulness I spoke:

'Don't give me a thought! I don't deserve it. I was on guard, and yet I slept. All that I can say is that I didn't mean to, and I tried to avoid it; but it was over me before I knew it. Anyhow, it is done now; and can't be undone. Probably some day we may understand it all; but now let us try to get at some idea of what has happened. Tell me what you remember!' The effort to recollect seemed to stimulate her; she became calmer as she spoke:

'I was asleep, and woke suddenly with the same horrible feeling on me that Father was in great and immediate danger. I jumped up and ran, just as I was, into his room. It was nearly pitch dark, but as I opened the door there was light enough to see Father's nightdress as he lay on the floor under the safe, just as on that first awful night. Then I think I must have gone mad for a moment.' She stopped and shuddered. My eyes lit on Sergeant Daw, still fiddling in an aimless way with the revolver. Mindful of my Work with the tourniquet, I said calmly:

'Now tell us, Sergeant Daw, what did you fire at?' The Policeman seemed to pull himself together with the habit of obedience. Looking around at the servants remaining in the room, he said with that air of importance which, I take it, is the regulation attitude of an official of the law before strangers:

'Don't you think, sir, that we can allow the servants to go away? We can then better go into the matter." I nodded approval; the servants took the hint and withdrew though unwillingly, the last one closing the door behind him. Then the Detective went on:

'I think I had better tell you my impressions, sir, rather than recount my actions. That is, so far as I remember them.' There was a mortified deference now in his manner, which probably arose from his consciousness of the awkward position in which he found himself. 'I went to sleep half-dressed — as I am now, with a revolver under my pillow. It was the last thing I remember thinking of. I do not know how long I slept. I had turned off the electric light, and it was quite dark. I thought I heard a scream; but I can't be sure, for I felt thickheaded as a man does when he is called too soon after an extra long stretch of work. Not that such "was the case this time. Anyhow my thoughts flew to the pistol. I took it out, and ran on to the landing. Then I heard a sort of scream, or rather a call for help, and ran into this room. The room was dark, for the lamp beside the

Nurse was out, and the only light was that from the landing, coming through the open door. Miss Trelawny was kneeling on the floor beside her father, and was screaming. I thought I saw something move between me and the window; so, without thinking, and being half-dazed and only half-awake, I shot at it. It moved a little more to the right between the windows, and I shot again. Then you came up out of the big chair with all that muffling on your face. It seemed to me, being as I say half-dazed and only half-awake — I know, sir, you will take this into account — as if it had been you, being in the same direction as the thing 1 had fired at. And so I was about to fire again when you pulled off the wrap.' Here I asked him — I was cross-examining now and felt at home:

You say you thought I was the thing you fired at. What thing?' The man scratched his head, but made no reply.

'Come, sir,' I said, 'what thing; what was it like?' The answer came in a low voice:

'I don't know, sir. I thought there was something; but what it was, or what it was like, I haven't the faintest notion. I suppose it was because I had been thinking of the pistol before I went to sleep, and because when I came in here I was half-dazed and only half-awake — which I hope you will in future, sir, always remember.' He clung to that formula of excuse as though it were his sheet-anchor. I did not want to antagonize the man; on the contrary I wanted to have him with us. Besides, I had on me at that time myself the shadow of my own default; so I said as kindly as I knew how:

'Quite right! Sergeant. Your impulse was correct; though of course in the half-somnolent condition in which you were, and perhaps partly affected by the same influence — whatever it may be — which made me sleep and which has put the Nurse in that cataleptic trance, it could not be expected that you would pause to weigh matters. But now, whilst the matter is fresh, let me see exactly where you stood and where I sat. We shall be able to trace the course of your bullets.' The prospect of action and the exercise of his habitual skill seemed to brace him at once; he seemed a different man as he set about his work. I asked Mrs. Grant to hold the tourniquet, and went and stood where he had stood and looked where, in the darkness, he had pointed. I could not but notice the mechanical exactness of his mind, as when he showed me where he had stood, or drew, as a matter of course, the revolver from his pistol pocket, and pointed with it. The chair from which I had risen still stood in its place. Then I asked him to point with his hand only, as I wished to move in the track of his *shot*

Just behind my chair, and a little back of it, stood a high buhl cabinet. The glass door was shattered. I asked:

'Was this the direction of your first shot or your second?' The answer came promptly:

'The second; the first was over there!'

He turned a little to the left, more toward the wall where the great safe stood, and pointed. I followed the direction of his hand and came to the low table whereon rested, amongst other curios, the mummy of the cat which had raised Silvio's ire. I got a candle and easily found the mark of the bullet. It had broken a little glass vase and a tazza of black basalt, exquisitely engraved with hieroglyphics, the graven lines being filled with some faint green cement and the whole thing being polished to an equal surface. The bullet, flattened against the wall, lay on the table.

I then went to the broken cabinet. It was evidently a receptacle for valuable curios; for in it were some great scarabs of gold, agate, green jasper, amethyst, lapis lazuli, opal, granite, and blue-green china. None of these things happily were touched. The bullet had gone through the back of the cabinet; but no other damage, save the shattering of the glass, had been done. I could not but notice the strange arrangement of the curios on the shelf of the cabinet. All the scarabs, rings, amulets, etc., were arranged in an uneven oval round an exquisitely-carved golden miniature figure of a hawk-headed God crowned with a disk and plumes. I did not wait to look further at present, for my attention was demanded by more pressing things; but I determined to make a more minute examination when I should have time. It was evident that some of the strange Egyptian smell clung to these old curios; through the broken glass came an added whiff of spice and gum and bitumen, almost stronger than those I had already noticed as coming from others in the room.

All this had really taken but a few minutes. I was surprised when my eye met, through the chinks between the dark window blinds and the window cases, the brighter light of the coming dawn. When I went back to the sofa and took the tourniquet from Mrs. Grant, she went over and pulled up the blinds.

It would be hard to imagine anything more ghastly than the appearance of the room with the faint grey light of early morning coming in upon it. As the windows faced north, any light that came was a fixed grey light without any of the rosy possibility of dawn which comes in the eastern quarter of the heavens. The electric lights seemed dull and yet glaring; and every shadow was of a hard intensity. There was nothing of morning freshness; nothing of the softness of night. All was hard and cold, and inexpressibly dreary. The face of the senseless man on the sofa seemed of a ghastly yellow; and the Nurse's face had taken a suggestion of green from the shade of the lamp near her. Only Miss Trelawny's face looked white; and it was of a pallor which made my heart ache. It looked as if nothing on God's earth could ever again bring back to it the colour of life and happiness.

It was a relief to us all when Doctor Winchester came in, breathless with running. He only asked one question:

'Can anyone tell me anything of how this wound was gotten?' On seeing the headshake which went round us under his glance, he said no more, but applied himself to his surgical work. For an instant he looked up at the Nurse sitting so still; but then bent himself to his task, a grave frown contracting his brows. It was not till the arteries were tied and the wounds completely dressed that he spoke again, except, of course, when he had asked for anything to be handed to him or to be done for him. When Mr. Trelawny's wounds had been thoroughly cared for, he said to Miss Trelawny:

'What about Nurse Kennedy?' She answered at once:

'I really do not know. I found her when I came into the room at half-past two o'clock, sitting exactly as she does now. We have not moved her, or changed her position. She has not wakened since. Even Sergeant Daw's pistol shots did not disturb her.'

'Pistol shots? Have you then discovered any cause for this new outrage?' The rest were silent, so I answered:

'We have discovered nothing. I was in the room watching with the Nurse. Earlier in the evening I fancied that the mummy smells were making me drowsy, so I went out and got a respirator. I had it on when I came on duty; but it did not keep me from going to sleep. I awoke to see the room full of people; that is, Miss Trelawny and Sergeant Daw and the servants. The Nurse was sitting in her chair just as I had seen her. Sergeant Daw, being only half-awake and still stupefied by the same scent or influence which had affected us, fancied that he saw something moving through the shadowy darkness of the room, and fired twice. When I rose out of my chair, with my face swathed in the respirator, he took me for the cause of the trouble. Naturally enough, was about to fire again when I was fortunately in time to manifest my identity. Mr. Trelawny was lying beside the safe, just as he was found last night; and was bleeding profusely from the new wound in his wrist. We lifted him on the sofa, and made a tourniquet. That is, literally and absolutely, all that any of us know as yet. We have not touched the knife, which you see lies close by the pool of blood. Look!' I said, going over and lifting it, 'the point is red with the blood which has dried.'

Doctor Winchester stood quite still a few minutes before speaking:

"Then the doings of this night are quite as mysterious as those of last night?'

'Quite!' I answered. He said nothing in reply, but turning to Miss Trelawny said:

'We had better take Nurse Kennedy into another room. I suppose there is nothing to prevent it?'

'Nothing! Please, Mrs. Grant, see' that Nurse Kennedy's room is ready; and ask two of the men to come and carry her in.' Mrs. Grant went out immediately; and in a few minutes came back saying:

'The room is quite ready; and the men are here.' By her direction two footmen came into the room and, lifting up the rigid body of Nurse Kennedy under the supervision of the Doctor, carried her out of the room. Miss Trelawny remained with me in the sick chamber, and Mrs. Grant went with the Doctor into the Nurse's room.

When we were alone Miss Trelawny-came over to me, and taking both my hands in hers, said: ‘I hope you won’t remember what I said. I did not mean it, and I was distraught.’ I did not make reply; but I held her hands and kissed them. There are different ways of kissing a lady’s hands. This way was intended as homage and respect; and it was accepted as such in the high-bred, dignified way which marked Miss Trelawny’s bearing and every movement. I went over to the sofa and looked down at the senseless man. The dawn had come much nearer in the last few minutes, and there was something of the clearness of day in the light. As I looked at the stern, cold, set face, now as white as a marble monument in the pale grey light, I could not but feel that there was some deep mystery beyond all that had happened within the last twenty-six hours. Those beetling brows screened some massive purpose; that high, broad forehead held some finished train of reasoning, which the broad chin and massive jaw would help to carry into effect. As I looked and wondered, there began to steal over me again that phase of wandering thought which had last night heralded the approach of sleep. I resisted it, and held myself sternly to the present. This was easier to do when Miss Trelawny came close to me, and, leaning her forehead against my shoulder, began to cry silently. Then all the manhood in me woke, and to present purpose. It was of little use trying to speak; words were inadequate to thought. But we understood each other: she did not draw away when I put my arm protectingly over her shoulder as I used to do with my little sister long ago when in her childish trouble she would come to her big brother to be comforted. That very act or attitude of protection made me more resolute in my purpose, and seemed to clear my brain of idle, dreamy wandering in thought. With an instinct of greater protection, however, I took away my arm as I heard the Doctor’s footstep outside the door.

When Doctor Winchester came in he looked intently at the patient before speaking. His brows were set, and his mouth was a thin, hard line. Presently he said:

‘There is much in common between the sleep of your Father and Nurse Kennedy. Whatever influence has brought it about has probably worked the same way in both cases. In Kennedy’s case the coma is less marked. I cannot but feel, however, that with her we may be able to do more and more quickly than with this patient, as our hands are not tied. I have placed her in a draught; and already she shows some signs, though very faint ones, of ordinary unconsciousness. The rigidity of her limbs is less, and her skin seems more sensitive — or perhaps I should ‘say less insensitive — to pain.’

‘How is it, then,’ I asked, ‘that Mr. Trelawny is still in this state of insensibility; and yet, so far as we know, his body has not had such rigidity at all?’

“That I cannot answer. The problem is one which we may solve in a few hours; or it may need a few days. But it will be a useful lesson in diagnosis to us all; and perhaps to many and many others after us, who knows!’ he added, with the genuine fire of an enthusiast.

As the morning wore on, he flitted perpetually between the two rooms, watching anxiously over both patients. He made Mrs. Grant remain with the Nurse, but either Miss Trelawny or I, generally both of us, remained with the wounded man. We each managed, however, to get bathed and dressed; the Doctor and Mrs. Grant remained with Mr. Trelawny whilst we had breakfast.

Sergeant Daw went off to report at Scotland Yard the progress of the night; and then to the local station to arrange for the coming of his comrade, Wright, as fixed with Superintendent Dolan. When he returned I could not but think that he had been hauled over the coals for shooting in a sick-room; or perhaps for shooting at all without certain and proper cause. His remark to me enlightened me in the matter:

‘A good character is worth something, sir, in spite of what some of them say. See! I’ve still got leave to carry my revolver.’

That day was a long and anxious one. Towards nightfall Nurse Kennedy so far improved that the rigidity of her limbs entirely disappeared. She still breathed quietly and regularly; but the fixed expression of her face, though it was a calm enough expression, gave place to fallen eyelids and the negative look of sleep. Doctor Winchester had, towards evening, brought two more nurses, one of whom was to remain with Nurse Kennedy and the other to share in the watching with Miss Trelawny, who had insisted on remaining up herself. She had, in order to prepare for the duty, slept for several hours in the afternoon. We had all taken counsel together, and had arranged thus for the watching in Mr. Trelawny’s room. Mrs. Grant was to remain beside the patient till twelve, when Miss Trelawny would relieve her. The new nurse was to sit in Miss Trelawny’s room, and to visit the sick chamber each quarter of an hour. The Doctor would remain till twelve; when I was to relieve him. One or other of the detectives was to remain within hail of the room all night: and to pay periodical visits to see that all was well. Thus, the watchers would be watched; and the possibility of such events as last night, when the watchers were both overcome, would be avoided.

When the sun set, a strange and grave anxiety fell on all of us; and in our separate ways we prepared for the vigil. Doctor Winchester had evidently been thinking of my respirator, for he told me he would go out and get one. Indeed, he took to the idea so kindly that I persuaded Miss Trelawny also to have one which she could put on when her time for watching came.

And so the night drew on.

Chapter V. More Strange Instructions

WHEN I CAME FROM MY ROOM AT HALF-PAST ELEVEN o'clock I found all well in the sick-room. The new nurse, prim, neat, and watchful, sat in the chair by the bedside where Nurse Kennedy had sat last night. A little way off, between the bed and the safe, sat Doctor Winchester alert and wakeful, but looking strange and almost comic with the respirator over mouth and nose. As I stood in the doorway looking at them I heard a slight sound; turning round I saw the new detective, who nodded, held up the finger of silence and withdrew quietly. Hitherto no one of the watchers was overcome by sleep.

I took a chair outside the door. As yet there was no need for me to risk coming again under the subtle influence of last night. Naturally my thoughts went revolving round the main incidents of the last day and night and I found myself arriving at strange conclusions, doubts, conjectures; but I did not lose myself, as on last night, in the trains of thought. The sense of the present was ever with me, and I really felt as should a sentry on guard. Thinking is not a slow process; and when it is earnest the time can pass quickly. It seemed a very short time indeed till the door, usually left ajar, was pulled open and Doctor Winchester emerged, taking off his respirator as he came. His act, when he had it off, was demonstrative of his keenness. He turned up the outside of the wrap and smelled it carefully.

'I am going now,' he said. 'I shall come early in the morning; unless, of course, I am sent for before. But all seems well tonight.'

The next to appear was Sergeant Daw, who went quietly into the room and took the seat vacated by the Doctor. I still remained outside; but every few minutes looked into the room. This was rather a form than a matter of utility, for the room was so dark that coming even from the dimly lighted corridor it was hard to distinguish anything.

A little before twelve o'clock Miss Trelawny came from her room. Before coming to her father's she went into that occupied by Nurse Kennedy. After a couple of minutes she came out, looking, I thought, a trifle more cheerful. She had her respirator in her hand, but before putting it on, asked me if anything special had occurred since she had gone to lie down. I answered in a whisper — there was no loud talking in the house tonight — that all was safe, was well. She then put on her respirator, and I mine; and we entered the room. The Detective and the Nurse rose up, and we took their places. Sergeant Daw was the last to go out; he closed the door behind him as we had arranged.

For a while I sat quiet, my heart beating. The place was grimly dark. The only light was a faint one from the top of the lamp which threw a white circle on the high ceiling, except the emerald sheen of the shade as the light took its under edges. Even the light only seemed to emphasize the blackness of the shadows. These presently began to seem, as on last night, to have a sentience of their own. I did not myself feel the least sleepy; and each time I went softly over to look at the patient, which I did about every ten minutes, I could see that Miss Trelawny was keenly alert Every quarter of an hour one or other of the policemen looked in through the partly opened door. Each time both Miss Trelawny and I said through our mufflers, 'all right,' and the door was closed again.

As the time wore on, the silence and the darkness seemed to increase. The circle of light on the ceiling was still there, but it seemed less brilliant than at first. The green edging of the lampshade became like Maori greenstone rather than emerald. The sounds of the night without the house, and the starlight spreading pale lines along the edges of the window-cases, made the pall of black within more solemn and more mysterious.

We heard the clock in the corridor chiming the quarters with its silver bell till two o'clock; and then a strange feeling came over me. I could see from Miss Trelawny's movement as she looked round, that she also had some new sensation. The new detective had just looked in; we two were alone with the unconscious patient for another quarter of an hour.

My heart began to beat wildly. There was a sense of fear over me. Not for myself; my fear was impersonal. It seemed as though some new person had entered the room, and that a strong intelligence was awake close to me. Something brushed against my leg. I put my hand down hastily and touched the furry coat of Silvio. With a very faint far-away sound of a snarl he turned and Scratched at me. I felt blood on my hand. I rose gently and came over to the bedside. Miss Trelawny, too, had stood up and was looking behind her, as though there was something close to her. Her eyes were wild, and her breast rose and fell as though she were fighting for air. When I touched her she did not seem to feel me; she worked her hands in front of her, as though she was fending off something.

There was not an instant to lose. I seized her in my arms and rushed over to the door, threw it open, and strode into the passage, calling loudly:

'Help! Help!'

In an instant the two Detectives, Mrs. Grant, and the Nurse appeared on the scene. Close on their heels came several of the servants, both men and women. Immediately Mrs. Grant came near enough, I placed Miss Trelawny in her arms and rushed back into the room, turning up the electric light as soon as I could lay my hand on it. Sergeant Daw and the Nurse followed me.

We were just in time. Close under the great safe, where on the two successive nights he had been found, lay Mr. Trelawny with his left arm, bare save for the bandages, stretched out. Close by his side was a leaf-shaped Egyptian knife which had lain amongst the curios on the shelf of the broken cabinet. Its point was stuck in the parquet floor, whence had been removed the bloodstained rug.

But there was no sign of disturbance anywhere; nor any sign of any one or anything unusual. The Policemen and I searched the room accurately, whilst the Nurse and two of the servants lifted the wounded man back to bed; but no sign or clue could we get. Very soon Miss Trelawny returned to the room. She was pale but collected. When she came close to me she said in a low voice:

'I felt myself fainting. I did not know why; but I was afraid!'

The only other shock I had was when Miss Trelawny cried out to me, as I placed my hand on the bed to lean over and look carefully at her father:

'You are wounded. Look! Look! Your hand is bloody. There is blood on the sheets!' I had, in the excitement, quite forgotten Silvio's scratch. As I looked at it, the recollection came back to me; but before I could say a word Miss Trelawny had caught hold of my hand and lifted it up. When she saw the parallel lines of the cuts she cried out again:

'It is the same wound as Father's!' Then she laid my hand down gently but quickly, and said to me and to Sergeant Daw:

'Come to my room! Silvio is there in his basket.' We followed her, and found Silvio sitting in his basket awake. He was licking his paws. The Detective said:

‘He is there sure enough; but why licking his paws?’

Margaret — Miss Trelawny gave a moan as she bent over and took one of the forepaws in her hand; but the cat seemed to resent it and snarled. At that Mrs. Grant came into the room. When she saw that we were looking at the cat she said:

‘The Nurse tells me that Silvio was asleep on Nurse Kennedy’s bed ever since you went[4]to your Father’s room until a while ago. He came there just after you had gone to master’s room. Nurse says that Nurse Kennedy is moaning and muttering in her sleep as though she had a nightmare. I think we should send for Doctor Winchester.’

‘Do so at once, please!’ said Miss Trelawny; and we went back to the room.

For a while Miss Trelawny stood looking at her father, with her brows wrinkled. Then, turning to me, as though her mind were made up, she said:

‘Don’t you think we should have a consultation on Father? Of course I have every confidence in Doctor Winchester; he seems an immensely clever young man. But he *is* a young man: and there must be men who have devoted themselves to this branch of science. Such a man would have more knowledge and more experience; and his knowledge and experience might help to throw light on poor Father’s case. As it is, Doctor Winchester seems to be quite in the dark. Oh! I don’t know what to do. It is all so terrible!’ Here she broke down a little and cried; and I tried to comfort her.

Doctor Winchester arrived quickly. His first thought was for his patient; but when he found him without further harm, he visited Nurse Kennedy. When he saw her, a hopeful look came into his eyes. Taking a towel, he clipped a corner of it in cold water and flicked her on the face. The skin coloured, and she stirred slightly. He said quietly to the new nurse — sister Doris he called her:

‘She is all right. She will wake in a few hours at latest. She may be dizzy and distraught at first, or perhaps hysterical. If so, you know how to treat her.’

‘Yes, sir!’ answered sister Doris demurely; and we went back to Mr. Trelawny’s room. As soon as we had entered, Mrs. Grant and the Nurse went out so that only Doctor Winchester, Miss Trelawny, and myself remained in the room. When the door had been closed Doctor Winchester asked me as to what had occurred. I told him fully, giving exactly every detail so far as I could remember. Throughout my narrative, which did not take long, however, he kept asking me questions as to who had been present and the order in which each one had come into the room. He asked other things, but nothing of any importance; these were all that took my attention, or remained in my memory. When our conversation was finished, he said, in a very decided way indeed, to Miss Trelawny:

‘I think, Miss Trelawny, that we had better have a consultation on this case.’ She answered at once, seemingly a little to his surprise:

‘I am glad you have mentioned it. I quite agree. Who would you suggest?’

‘Have you any choice yourself?’ he asked. ‘Anyone to whom your Father is known? Has he ever consulted anyone?’

‘Not to my knowledge. But I hope you will choose whomsoever you think would be best. My dear Father should have all the help that can be had: and I shall be deeply obliged by your choosing. Who is the best man in London — anywhere else — in such a case?’

‘There are several good men; but they are scattered all over the world. Somehow, the brain specialist is born, not made; though a lot of hard work goes to the completing of him and fitting him for his work. He comes from no country. The most daring investigator up to the present is Chiuni, the Japanese; but he is rather a surgical experimentalist than a practitioner. Then there is Zammerfest of Uppsala, and Fenelon of the University of Paris, and Morfessi of Naples. These, of course, are in addition to our own men, Morrison of Aberdeen and Richardson of Birmingham. But before them all I would put Frere of King's College. Of all that I have named he best unites theory and practice. He has no hobbies — that have been discovered at all events; and his experience is immense. It is the regret of all of us who admire him that the nerve so firm and the hand so dexterous must yield to time. For my own part I would rather have Frere than anyone living.'

'Then,' said Miss Trelawny decisively, 'let us have Doctor Frere — by the way, is he "Doctor" or "Mister"? — as early as we can get him in the morning!'

A weight seemed removed from him, and he spoke with greater ease and geniality than he had yet shown:

'He is Sir James Frere. I shall go to him myself as early as it is possible to see him, and shall ask him to come here at once.' Then turning to me he said:

"You had better let me dress your hand.'

'It is nothing,' I said.

'Nevertheless it should be seen to. A scratch from any animal might turn out dangerous; there is nothing like being safe.' I submitted; forthwith he began to dress my hand. He examined with a magnifying glass the several parallel wounds, and compared them with the slip of blotting-paper, marked with Silvio's claws, which he took from his pocket-book. He put back the paper, simply remarking:

‘It’s a pity that Silvio slips in — and out — -just when he shouldn’t.’

The morning wore slowly on. By ten o’clock Nurse Kennedy had so far recovered that she was able to sit up and talk intelligibly. But she was still hazy in her thoughts; and could not remember anything that had happened on the previous night, after her taking her place by the sick bed. As yet she seemed neither to know nor care what had happened.

It was nearly eleven o’clock when Doctor Winchester returned with Sir James Frere. Somehow I felt my heart sink when from the landing I saw them in the hall below, I knew that Miss Trelawny was to have the pain of telling yet another stranger of her ignorance of her father’s life.

Sir James Frere was a man who commanded attention followed by respect. He knew so thoroughly what he wanted himself, that he placed at once on one side all wishes and ideas of less definite persons. The mere flash of his piercing eyes, or the set of his resolute mouth, or the lowering of his great eyebrows, seemed to compel immediate and willing obedience to his wishes. Somehow, when we had all been introduced and he was well amongst us, all sense of mystery seemed to melt away. It was with a hopeful spirit that I saw him pass into the sick-room with Doctor Winchester.

They remained in the room a long time; once they sent for the Nurse, the new one, sister Doris, but she did not remain long. Again they both went into Nurse Kennedy’s room. He sent out the nurse attendant on her. Doctor Winchester told me afterward that Nurse Kennedy, though she was ignorant of later matters, gave full and satisfactory answers to all Doctor Frere’s questions relating to her patient up to the time she became unconscious. Then they went to the study, where they remained so long, and their voices raised in heated discussion seemed in such determined opposition, that I began to be uneasy. As for Miss Trelawny, she was almost in a state of collapse from nervousness before they joined us. Poor girl! She had had a sadly anxious time of it, and her nervous strength had almost broker, down.

They came out at last, Sir James first, his grave face looking as unenlightening as that of the sphinx. Doctor Winchester followed him closely: his face was pale, but with that kind of pallor which looked like a reaction. It gave me the idea that it had been red not long before. Sir James asked that Miss Trelawny would come into the study. He suggested that I should come also. When we had entered, Sir James turned to me and said:

1 understand from Doctor Winchester that you are a friend of Miss Trelawny, and that you have already considerable knowledge of this case. Perhaps it will be well that you should be with us. I know you already as a keen lawyer, Mr. Ross, though I never had the pleasure of meeting you. As Doctor Winchester tells me that there are some strange matters outside this case which seem to puzzle him — and others — and in which he thinks you may yet be specially interested, it might be as well that you should know every phase of the case. For myself I do not take much account of mysteries — except those of science; and as there seems to be some idea of an attempt at assassination or robbery, all I can say is that if assassins were at work they ought to take some elementary lessons in anatomy before their next job, for they seem thoroughly ignorant. If robbery were their purpose, they seem to have worked with marvellous inefficiency. That, however, is not my business.’ Here he took a big pinch of snuff, and turning to Miss Trelawny, went on: ‘Now as to

the patient. Leaving out the cause of his illness, all we can say at present is that he appears to be suffering from a marked attack of catalepsy. At present nothing can be done, except to sustain his strength. The treatment of my friend Doctor Winchester is mainly such as I approve of; and I am confident that should any slight change arise he will be able to deal with it satisfactorily. It is an interesting case — most interesting; and should any new or abnormal development arise I shall be happy to come at any time. There is just one thing to which I wish to call your attention; and I put it to you, Miss Trelawny, directly, since it is your responsibility. Doctor Winchester informs me that you are not yourself free in the matter, but are bound by an instruction given by your Father in case just such a condition of things should arise. I would strongly advise that the patient be removed to another room; or, as an alternative, that those mummies and all such things should be removed from his chamber. Why, it's enough to put any man into an abnormal condition, to have such an assemblage of horrors round him, and to breathe the atmosphere which they exhale. You have evidence already of how such mephitic odour may act. That Nurse — Kennedy, I think you said, Doctor — isn't yet out of her state of catalepsy; and you, Mr. Ross, have, I am told, experienced something of the same effects. I know this' — here his eyebrows came down more than ever, and his mouth hardened— 'If I were in charge here I should insist on the patient having a different atmosphere; or I would throw up the case. Doctor Winchester already knows that I can only be again consulted on this condition being fulfilled. But I trust that you will see your way, as a good daughter to my mind should, to looking to your Father's health and sanity rather than to any whim of his — whether supported or not by a foregoing fear, or by any number of “penny dreadful” mysteries. The day has hardly come yet, I am glad to say, when the British Museum and St Thomas’s Hospital have exchanged their normal functions. Good-day, Miss Trelawny. I earnestly hope that I may soon see your Father restored. Remember, that should you fulfil the elementary condition which I have laid down, I am at your service day or night. Good-morning, Mr. Ross. I hope you will be able to report to me soon, Doctor Winchester.’

When he had gone we stood silent, till the rumble of his carriage wheels died away. The first to speak was Doctor Winchester:

‘I think it well to say that to my mind, speaking purely as a physician, he is quite right. I feel as if I could have -assaulted him when he made it a condition of not giving up the case; but all the same he is right as to treatment. He does not understand that there is something odd about this special case; and he will not realize the knot that we are all tied up in by Mr. Trelawny’s instructions. Of course—’ He was interrupted by Miss Trelawny:

‘Doctor Winchester, do you, too, wish to give up the case; or are you willing to continue it under the conditions which you know?’

‘Give it up! Less now than ever. Miss Trelawny, I shall never give it up, so long as life is left to him or any of us!’ She said nothing, but held out her hand, which he took warmly.

‘Now,’ said she, ‘if Sir James Frere is a type of the cult of Specialists, I want no more of them. To start with, he does not seem to know any more than you do about my Father’s condition; and if he were a hundredth part as much interested in it as you are, he would not stand on such punctilio. Of course, I am only too anxious about my poor Father; and if I can see a way to meet either of Sir James Frere’s conditions, I shall do so. I shall ask Mr. Marvin to come here today, and advise me as to the limit of Father's wishes. If he thinks I am free to act in any way on my own responsibility, I shall not hesitate to do so." Then Doctor Winchester took his leave.

Miss Trelawny sat down and wrote a letter to Mr. Marvin, telling him of the state of affairs, and asking him to come and see her and to bring with him any papers which might throw any light on the subject. She sent the letter off with a carriage to bring back the solicitor; we waited with what patience we could for his coming.

It is not a very long journey for oneself from Kensington Palace Gardens to Lincoln's Inn Fields; but it seemed endlessly long when waiting for someone else to take it. All things, however, are amenable to Time; it was less than an hour all told when Mr. Marvin was with us.

He recognized Miss Trelawny's impatience, and when he had learned sufficient of her father's illness, he said to her:

'Whenever you are ready I can go with you into particulars regarding your Father's wishes.'

'Whenever you like,' she said, with an evident ignorance of his meaning. "Why not now?' He looked at me, as to a fellow man of business, and stammered out:

'We are not alone.'

'I have brought Mr. Ross here on purpose,' she answered. 'He knows so much at present, that I want him to know more.' The solicitor was a little disconcerted, a thing which those knowing him only in courts would hardly have believed. He answered, however, with some hesitation:

'But, my dear young lady — Your Father's wishes! — Confidence between father and child—'

Here she interrupted him; there was a tinge of red in her pale cheeks as she did so:

‘Do you really think that applies to the present circumstances, Mr. Marvin? My Father never told me anything of his affairs; and I can now, in this sad extremity, only learn his wishes through a gentleman who is a stranger to me and of whom I never even heard till I got my Father’s letter, written to be shown to me only in extremity. Mr. Ross is a new friend; but he has all my confidence, and I should like him to be present. Unless, of course,’ she added, ‘such a thing is forbidden by my Father. Oh! Forgive me, Mr. Marvin, if I seem rude; but I have been in such dreadful trouble and anxiety lately, that I have hardly command of myself.’ She covered her eyes with her hand for a few seconds; we two men looked at each other and waited, trying to appear unmoved. She went on more firmly; she had recovered herself:

‘Please! Please do not think I “am ungrateful to you for your kindness in coming here and so ‘quickly. I really am grateful; and I have every confidence in your judgement. If you wish, or think it best, we can be alone.’ I stood up; but Mr. Marvin made a dissentient gesture. He was evidently pleased with her attitude; there was geniality in his voice and manner as he spoke:

‘Not at all! Not at all! There is no restriction on your Father’s part; and on my own I am quite willing. Indeed, all told, it may be better. From what you have said of Mr. Trelawny’s illness, and the other — incidental — matters, it will be well in ‘case of any — grave — eventuality, that it was understood from the first, that circumstances were ruled by your Father’s own imperative instructions. For, please, understand me, his instructions are imperative — most imperative. They are so unyielding that he has given me a Power of Attorney, under which I have undertaken to act, authorizing me to see his written wishes carried out. Please believe once for all, that he intended fully everything mentioned in that letter to you! Whilst he is alive he is to remain in his own room; and none of his property is to be removed from it under any circumstances whatever. He has even given an inventory of the articles which are not to be displaced.'

Miss Trelawny was silent. She looked somewhat distressed; so, thinking that I understood the immediate cause, I asked:

'May we see the list?' Miss Trelawny's face at once brightened; but it fell again as the lawyer answered promptly — he was evidently prepared for the question:

'Not unless I am compelled to take action on the Power of Attorney. I have brought that instrument with me. You will recognize, Mr. Ross,' he said this with a sort of business conviction which I had noticed in his professional work, as he handed me the deed, 'how strongly it is worded, and how the grantor made his wishes apparent in such a way as to leave no loophole. It is his own wording, except for certain legal formalities; and I assure you I have seldom seen a more iron-clad document. Even I myself have no power to make the slightest relaxation of the instructions, without committing a distinct breach of faith. And that, I need not tell you, is impossible.' He evidently added the last words in order to prevent an appeal to his personal consideration. He did not like the seeming harshness of his words, however, for he added:

'I do hope, Miss Trelawny, that you understand that I am willing — frankly and unequivocally willing — to do anything I can, within the limits of my power, to relieve your distress. But your Father had, in all his doings, some purpose of his own which he did not disclose to me. So far as I can see, there is not a word of his instructions that he had not thought over fully. Whatever idea he had in his mind was the idea of a lifetime; he had studied it in every possible phase, and was prepared to guard it at every point.

‘Now I fear I have distressed you, and I am truly sorry for it; for I see you have much — too much — to bear already. But I have no alternative. If you want to consult me at any time about anything, I promise you I will come without a moment’s delay, at any hour of the day or night.

‘There is my private address,’ he scribbled in his pocket-book as he spoke, ‘and under it the address of my club, where I am generally to be found in the evening.’ He tore out the paper and handed it to her. She thanked him. He shook hands with her and with me, and withdrew.

As soon as the hall door was shut on him, Mrs. Grant tapped at the door and came in. There was such a look of distress in her face that Miss Trelawny stood up, deadly white, and asked her:

‘What is it, Mrs. Grant? What is it? Any new trouble?”

‘I grieve to say, miss, that the servants, all but two, have given notice and want to leave the house today. They have talked the matter over among themselves; the butler has spoken for the rest. He says as how they are willing to forgo their wages, and even to pay their legal obligations instead of notice; but that go today they must.’

‘What reason do they give?’

‘None, miss. They say as how they’re sorry, but that they’ve nothing to say. I asked Jane, the upper housemaid, miss, who is not with the rest but stops on; and she tells me confidential that they’ve got some notion in their silly heads that me house is haunted!’

We ought to have laughed, but we didn’t. I could not look in Miss Trelawny’s face and laugh. The pain and horror there showed no sudden paroxysm of fear; there was a fixed idea of which this was a confirmation. For myself, it seemed as if my brain had found a voice. But the voice was not complete; there was some other thought, darker and deeper, which lay, behind it, whose voice had not sounded as yet.

Chapter VI. Suspicions

THE FIRST TO GET FULL SELF-COMMAND WAS MISS Trelawny. There was a haughty dignity in her bearing as she said:

'Very well, Mrs. Grant; let them go! Pay them up to today, and a month's wages. They have hitherto been very good servants; and the occasion of their leaving is not an ordinary one. We must not expect much faithfulness from anyone who is beset with fears. Those who remain are to have in future double wages; and please send these to me presently when I send word.' Mrs. Grant bristled with smothered indignation; all the housekeeper in her was outraged by such generous treatment of servants who had combined to give notice:

'They don't deserve it, miss; them to go on so, after the way they have been treated here. Never in my life have I seen servants so well treated, or any one so good to them and gracious to them as you have been. They might be in the household of a King for treatment. And now, just as there is trouble, to go and act like this. It's abominable, that's what it is!'

Miss Trelawny was very gentle with her, and smothered her ruffled dignity; so that presently she went away with, in her manner, a lesser measure of hostility to the undeserving. In quite a different frame of mind she returned presently to ask if her mistress would like her to engage a full staff of other servants, or at any rate try to do so. 'For you know, ma'am,' she went on, 'When once a scare has been established in the servants' hall, it's well-nigh impossible to get rid of it. Servants may come: but they-go away just as quick. There's no holding them. They simply won't stay; or even if they work out their month's notice, they lead you that life that you wish every hour of the day that you hadn't kept them. The women are bad enough, the hussies; but the men are worse!’ There was neither anxiety nor indignation in Miss Trelawny’s voice or manner as she said:

‘I think, Mrs. Grant, we had better try to do with those we have. Whilst my dear Father is ill we shall not be having any company, so that there will be only three now in the house to attend to. If those servants who are willing to stay are not enough, I should only get sufficient to help them to do the work. It will not, I should think, be difficult to get a few maids; perhaps some that you know already. And please bear in mind, that those whom you get, and who are suitable and will stay, are henceforth to have the same wages as those who are remaining. Of course, Mrs. Grant, you well understand that though I do not group you in any way with the servants, the rule of double salary applies to you too.’ As she spoke she extended her long, fine-shaped hand, which the other took and then, raising it to her lips, kissed it impressively with the freedom of an elder woman to a younger. I could not but admire the generosity of her treatment of her servants. In my mind I endorsed Mrs. Grant’s *sotto voce* remark as she left the room:

“No wonder the house is like a King’s house, when the mistress is a Princess!’

‘A Princess!’ That was it. The idea seemed to satisfy my mind, and to bring back in a wave of light the first moment when she swept across my vision at the ball in Belgrave Square. A queenly figure! tall and slim, bending, swaying, undulating as the lily or the lotus. Clad in a flowing gown of some filmy black material shot with gold. For ornament in her hair she wore an old Egyptian jewel, a tiny crystal disc, set between rising plumes carved in lapis lazuli. On her wrist was a broad bangle or bracelet of antique work, in the shape of a pair of spreading wings wrought in gold, with the feathers made of coloured gems. For all her gracious bearing toward me, when our hostess introduced me, I was then afraid of her. It was only when later, at the picnic on the river, I had come to realize her sweet and gentle nature, that my awe changed to something else.

For a while she sat, making some notes or memoranda. Then putting them away, she sent for the faithful servants. I thought that she had better have this interview alone, and so left her. When I came back there were traces of tears in her eyes.

The next phase in which I had a part was even more disturbing, and infinitely more painful. Late in the afternoon Sergeant Daw came into the study where I was sitting. After closing the door carefully and looking all round the room to make certain that we were alone, he came close to me.

‘What is it?’ I asked him. ‘I see you wish to speak to me privately.’

‘Quite so, sir! May I speak in absolute confidence?’

‘Of course you may. In anything that is for the good of Miss Trelawny — and of course of Mr. Trelawny — you may be perfectly frank. I take it that we both want to serve them to the best of our powers.’ He hesitated before replying:

‘Of course you know that I have my duty to do; and I think you know me well enough to know that I will do it. I am a policeman, a detective; and it is my duty to find out the facts of any case I am put on, without fear or favour to anyone. I would rather speak to you alone, in confidence if I may, without reference to any duty of anyone to anyone, except mine to Scotland Yard.’

‘Of course! of course!’ I answered mechanically, my heart sinking, I did not know why. ‘Be quite frank with me. I assure you of my confidence.’

‘Thank you, sir. I take it that what I say is not to pass beyond you — -not to anyone. Not to Miss Trelawny herself, or even to Mr. Trelawny when he becomes well again.’

‘Certainly, if you make it a condition!’ I said a little more stiffly. The man recognized the change in my voice or manner, and said apologetically:

‘Excuse me, sir, but I am going outside my duty in speaking to you at all on the subject. I know you, however, of old; and I feel that I can trust you. Not your word, sir, that is all right; but your discretion!’

I bowed. ‘Go on!’ I said. He began at once:

‘I have gone over this case, sir, till my brain begins to reel; but I can’t find any ordinary solution of it. At the time of each attempt no one has seemingly come into the house; and certainly no one has gone out. What does it strike you is the inference?’

‘That the somebody — or the something — was in the house already,’ I answered, smiling in spite of myself.

‘That’s just what I think,’ he said, with a manifest sigh of relief. “Very well! Who can be that someone?’

‘ “Someone, or something,” was what I said,’ I answered.

‘Let us make it “someone,” Mr. Ross! That cat, though he might have scratched or bit, never pulled the old gentleman out of bed, and tried to get the bangle with the key off his arm. Such things are all very well in books where your amateur detectives, who know everything before it’s done, can fit them into theories; but in Scotland Yard, where the men aren’t all idiots either, we generally find that when crime is done, or attempted, it’s people, not things, that are at the bottom of it.’

“Then make it “people” by all means, Sergeant.’

‘We were speaking of “someone,” sir.’

‘Quite right, *someone,* be it!’

‘Did it ever strike you, sir, that on each of the three separate occasions where outrage was effected, or attempted, there was one person who was the first to be present and to give the alarm?’

‘Let me see! Miss Trelawny, I believe, gave the alarm on the first occasion. I was present myself, if fast asleep, on the second; and so was Nurse Kennedy. When I woke there were several people in the room; you were one of them. I understand that on that occasion also Miss Trelawny was before you. At the last attempt I was in the room when Miss Trelawny fainted. I carried her out and went back. In returning, I was first; and I think you were close behind me.’

Sergeant Daw thought for a moment before replying:

‘She was present, or first, in the room on all the occasions; there was only damage done in the first and second!’

The inference was one which I, as a lawyer, could not mistake. I thought the best thing to do was to meet it halfway. I have always found that the best way to encounter an inference is to cause it to be turned into a statement.

‘You mean,’ I said, ‘that as on the only occasions when actual harm was done, Miss Trelawny’s being the first to discover it is a proof that she did it; or was in some way connected with the attempt, as well as the discovery?’

‘I didn’t venture to put it as clear as that; but that is where the doubt which I had leads.’ Sergeant Daw was a man of courage; he evidently did not shrink from any conclusion of his reasoning on facts.

We were both silent for a while. Fears began crowding in on my own mind. Not doubts of Miss Trelawny, or of any act of hers; but fears lest such acts should be misunderstood. There was evidently a mystery somewhere; and if no solution to it could be found, the doubt would be cast on someone. In such cases the guesses of the majority are bound to follow the line of least resistance; and if it could be proved that any personal gain to anyone would follow Mr. Trelawny's death, should such ensue, it might prove a difficult task for anyone to prove innocence in the face of suspicious facts. I found myself instinctively taking that deferential course which, until the plan of battle of the prosecution is unfolded, is so safe an attitude for the defence. It would never do for me, at this stage, to combat any theories which a detective might form. I could best help Miss Trelawny by listening and understanding. When the time should come for the dissipation and obliteration of the theories, I should be quite willing to use all my militant ardour, and all the weapons at my command.

'You will of course do your duty, I know,' I said, 'and without fear. What course do you intend to take?'

'I don't know as yet, sir. You see, up to now it isn't with me even a suspicion. If anyone else told me that that sweet young lady had a hand in such a matter, I would think him a fool; but I'm bound to follow my own conclusions. I know well that just as unlikely persons have been proved guilty, when a whole court — all except the prosecution who knew the facts, and the judge who had taught his mind to wait — would have sworn to innocence. I wouldn't, for all the world, wrong such a young lady; more especial when she has such a cruel weight to bear. And you may be sure that I won't say a word that'll prompt anyone else to make such a charge. That's why I speak to you now in confidence, man to man. You are skilled in proofs; that is your profession. Mine only gets so far as suspicions, and what we call our own proofs — which are nothing but *ex parte* evidence after all. You know Miss Trelawny better than I do; and though I watch round the sick-room, and go where I like about the house and in and out of it, I haven't the same opportunities as you have of knowing the lady and what her life is, or her means are; or of anything else which might give me a clue to her actions. *If 1* were to try to find out from her, it would at once arouse her suspicions. Then, if she were guilty, all possibility of ultimate proof would go; for she would easily find a way to baffle discovery. But if she be innocent, as I hope she is, it would be doing a cruel wrong to accuse her. I have thought the matter over according to my lights before I spoke to you: and if I have taken a liberty, sir, I am truly sorry.'

'No liberty in the world, Daw,' I said warmly, for the man's courage and honesty and consideration compelled respect. 'I am glad you have spoken to me so frankly. We both want to find out the truth; and there is so much about this-case that is strange — so strange as to go beyond all experiences — that to aim at truth is our only chance of making anything clear in the long-run — no matter what our views are, or what object we wish to achieve ultimately!' The Sergeant looked pleased as he went on:

'I thought, therefore, that if you had it once in your mind that somebody else held to such a possibility, you would by degrees get proof; or at any rate such ideas as would convince yourself, either for or against it. Then we would come to some conclusion; or at any rate we should so exhaust all other possibilities that the most likely one would remain as the nearest thing to proof, or strong suspicion, that we could get. After that we should have to—'

Just at this moment the door opened and Miss Trelawny entered the room. The moment she-saw us she drew back quickly, saying:

‘Oh, I beg pardon! I did not know you were here, and engaged.’ By the time I had stood up, she was about to go back.

‘Do come in,’ I said. ‘Sergeant Daw and I were only talking matters over.’

Whilst she was hesitating, Mrs. Grant appeared, saying as she entered the room: ‘Doctor Winchester is conic, miss, and is asking for you.’

I obeyed Miss Trelawny’s look; together we left the room.

When the Doctor had made his examination, he told us that there was seemingly no change. He added that nevertheless he would like to stay in the house that night if he might. Miss Trelawny looked glad, and sent word to Mrs. Grant to get a room ready for him. Later in the day, when he and I happened to be alone together, he said suddenly:

‘I have arranged to stay here tonight because I want to have a talk with you. And as I wish it to be quite private, I thought the least suspicious way would be to have a cigar together late in the evening when Miss Trelawny is watching her father.’ We still kept to our arrangement that either the sick man’s daughter or I should be on watch all night. We were to share the duty at the early hours of the morning. I was anxious about this, for I knew from our conversation that the Detective would watch in secret himself, and would be particularly alert about that time.

The day passed uneventfully. Miss Trelawny slept in the afternoon; and after dinner went to relieve the Nurse. Mrs. Grant remained with her, Sergeant Daw being on duty in the corridor. Doctor Winchester and I took our coffee in the library. When we had lit our cigars he said quietly:

‘Now that we are alone I want to have a confidential talk We are “tiled”, of course; for the present at all events?’

‘Quite so!’ I said, my heart sinking as I thought of my conversation with Sergeant Daw in the morning, and of the disturbing and harrowing fears which it had left in my mind. He went on:

‘This case *is* enough to try the sanity of all of us concerned in it. The more I think of it, the madder I seem to get; and the two lines, each continually strengthened, seem to pull harder in opposite directions.’

‘What two lines?’ He looked at me keenly for a moment before replying. Doctor Winchester’s look at such moments was apt to be disconcerting. It would have been so to me had I had a personal part, other than my interest in Miss Trelawny, in the matter. As it was, however, I stood it unruffled. I was now an attorney in the case; an *amicus curiae* in one sense, in another retained for the defence. The mere thought that in this clever man’s mind were two lines, equally strong and opposite, was in itself so consoling as to neutralize my anxiety as to a new attack. As he began to speak, the Doctor’s face wore an inscrutable smile; this, however, gave place to a stern gravity as he proceeded:

‘Two lines: Fact and — Fancy! In the first there is this whole thing: attacks; attempts at robbery and murder; stupefyings; organized catalepsy which points to either criminal hypnotism and thought suggestion, or some simple form of poisoning unclassified yet in our toxicology. In the other there is some influence at work which is not classified in any book that I know — outside the pages of romance. I never felt in my life so strongly the truth of Hamlet’s words:

“There are more things in Heaven and earth... Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”

‘Let us take the “Fact” side first. Here we have a man in his home; amidst his own household; plenty of servants of different classes in the house, which forbids the possibility of an organized attempt made from the servants’ hall. He is wealthy, learned, clever. From his physiognomy there is no doubting that he is a man of iron will and determined purpose. His daughter — his only child, I take it, a young girl bright and clever — is sleeping in the very next room to his. There is seemingly no possible reason for expecting any attack or disturbance of any kind; and no reasonable opportunity for any outsider to effect it. And yet we have an attack made; a brutal and remorseless attack, made in the middle of the night. Discovery is made quickly; made with that rapidity which in criminal cases generally is found to be not accidental, but of premeditated intent. The attacker, or attackers, are manifestly disturbed before the completion of their work, whatever their ultimate intent may have been. And yet there is no possible sign of their escape; no clue, no disturbance of anything; no open door or window; no sound. Nothing whatever to show who had done the deed, or even that a deed has been done; except the victim, and his surroundings incidental to the deed!

‘The next night a similar attempt is made, though the house is full of wakeful people; and though there are on watch in the room and around it a detective officer, a trained nurse, an earnest friend, and the man’s own daughter. The nurse is thrown into a catalepsy, and the watching friend — though protected by a respirator — into a deep sleep. Even the detective is so far overcome with some phase of stupor that he fires off his pistol in the sick-room, and can’t even tell what he thought he was firing at. That respirator of yours is the only thing that seems to have a bearing on the "fact" side of the affair. That you did not lose your head as the others did — the effect in such case being in proportion to the amount of time each remained in the room — points to the probability that the stupefying medium was not hypnotic, whatever else it may have been. But again, there is a fact which is contradictory. Miss Trelawny, who was in the room more than any of you — for she was in and out all the time and did her share of permanent watching also — did not seem to be affected at all. This would show that the influence, whatever it is, does not affect generally — unless, of course, it was that she was in some way inured to it. If it should turn out that it be some strange exhalation from some of those Egyptian curios, that might account for it; only, we are then face to face with the fact that Mr. Trelawny, who was most of all in the room — who, in fact, lived more than half his life in it — was affected worst of all. What kind of influence could it be which would account for all these different and contradictory effects? No! The more I think of this form of the dilemma, the more I am bewildered! Why, even if it were that the attack, the physical attack, on Mr. Trelawny had been made by someone residing in the house and not within the sphere of suspicion, the oddness of the stupefyings would still remain a mystery. It is not easy to put anyone into a catalepsy. Indeed, so far as is known yet in science, there is no way to achieve such an object at will. The crux of the whole matter is Miss Trelawny, who seems to be subject to none of the influences, or possibly of the variants of the same influence at work. Through all she goes unscathed, except for that one slight semi faint. It is most strange!'

I listened with a sinking heart; for, though his manner was not illuminative of distrust, his argument was disturbing. Although it was not so direct as the suspicion of the Detective, it seemed to single out Miss Trelawny as different from all others concerned; and in a mystery to be alone is to be suspected, ultimately if not immediately. I thought it better not to say anything. In such a case silence is indeed golden; and if I said nothing now I might have less to defend, or explain; or take back later. I was, therefore, secretly glad that his form of putting his argument did not require any answer from me — for the present, at all events. Doctor Winchester did not seem to expect any answer — a fact which, when I recognized it, gave me pleasure, I hardly knew why. He paused for a while, sitting with his chin in his hand, his eyes staring at vacancy, whilst his brows were fixed. His cigar was held limp between his fingers; he had apparently forgotten it. In an even voice, as though commencing exactly where he had left off, he resumed his argument:

"The other horn of the dilemma is a different affair altogether, and if we once enter on it we must leave everything in the shape of science and experience behind us. I confess that it has its fascinations for me; though at every new thought I find myself romancing in a way that makes me pull up suddenly and look facts resolutely in the face. I sometimes wonder whether the influence or emanation from the sick-room at times affects me as it did the others — the Detective, for instance. Of course it may be that if it is anything chemical, any drug, for example, in vaporeal form, its effects may be cumulative. But then, what could there be that could produce such an effect? The room is, I know, full of mummy smell; and no wonder, with so many relics from the tomb, let alone the actual mummy of that animal which Silvio attacked. By the way, I am going to test him tomorrow; I have been on the trace of a mummy cat, and am to get possession of it in the morning. When I bring it here we shall find out if it be a fact that racial instinct can survive a few thousand years in the grave. However, to get back to the subject in hand. These very mummy smells arise from the presence of substances, and combinations of substances, which the Egyptian priests, who were the learned men and scientists of their time, found by the experience of centuries to be strong enough to arrest the natural forces of decay. There must be powerful agencies at work to effect such a purpose; and it is possible that we may have here some rare substance or combination whose qualities and powers are not understood in this later and more prosaic age. I wonder if Mr. Trelawny has any knowledge, or even suspicion, of such a kind? I only know this for certain, that a worse atmosphere for a sick-chamber could not possibly be imagined; and I admire the courage of Sir James Frere in refusing to have anything to do with a case under such conditions. These instructions of Mr. Trelawny to his daughter, and from what you have told me, the care with which he has protected his wishes through his solicitor, show that he suspected something, at any rate. Indeed, it would almost seem as if he expected something to happen.... I wonder if it would be possible to learn anything about that! Surely his papers would show or suggest something.... It is a difficult matter to tackle; but it might have to be done. His present condition cannot go on for ever, and if anything should happen there would have to be an inquest. In such case full examination would have to be made into everything.... As it stands, the police evidence would show a murderous attack more than once repeated. As no clue is apparent, it would be necessary to seek one in a motive.'

He was silent. The last words seemed to come in a lower and lower tone as he went on. It. had the effect of hopelessness. It came to me as a conviction that now was my time to find out if he had any definite suspicion; and as if in obedience to some command, I asked:

‘Do you suspect anyone?’ He seemed in a way startled rather than surprised as he turned his eyes on me:

‘Suspect anyone? Anything, you mean. I certainly suspect that there is some influence; but at present my suspicion is held within such limit. Later on, if there be any sufficiently definite conclusion to my reasoning, or my thinking — for there are not proper data for reasoning — I may suspect; at present, however — -’

He stopped suddenly and looked at the door. There was a faint sound as the handle turned. My own heart seemed to stand still. There was over me some grim, vague apprehension. The interruption in the morning, when I was talking with the Detective, came back upon me with a rush.

The door opened, and Miss Trelawny entered the room.

When she saw us, she started back and a deep flush swept her face. For a few seconds she paused; at such a time a few succeeding seconds seem to lengthen in geometrical progression. The strain upon me, and, as I could easily see, on the Doctor also, relaxed as she spoke:

‘Oh, forgive me. I did not know that you were engaged. I was looking for you, Doctor Winchester, to ask you if I might go to bed tonight with safety, as you will be here. I feel so tired and worn out that I fear I may break down; and tonight I would certainly not be of any use.’ Doctor Winchester answered heartily:

‘Do! Do go to bed by all means, and get a good night’s sleep. God knows you want it! I am more than glad you have made the suggestion, for I feared when I saw you tonight that I might have you on my hands as a patient next.’

She gave a sigh of relief, and the tired look seemed to melt from her face. Never shall I forget the deep, earnest look in her great, beautiful black eyes as she said to me:

“You will guard Father tonight, won’t you, with Doctor Winchester? I am so anxious about him that every second brings new fears. But I am really worn out; and if I don’t get a good sleep, I think I shall go mad. I will change my room for tonight. I’m afraid that if I stay so close to Father’s room I shall multiply every sound into a new terror. But, of course, you will have me waked if there be any cause. I shall be in the bedroom of the little suite next the boudoir off the hall. I had those rooms when first I came to live with Father, and I had no care then.... It will be easier to rest there; and perhaps for a few hours I may forget. I shall be all right in the morning. Good-night!’

When I had dosed the door behind her and come back to the little table at which we had been sitting, Doctor Winchester said:

‘That poor girl is overwrought to a terrible degree. I am delighted that she is to get a rest. It will be life to her; and in the morning she will be all right. Her nervous system is on the verge of a breakdown. Did you notice how fearfully disturbed she was, and how red she got when she came in and found us talking? An ordinary thing like that, in her own house with her own guests, wouldn’t under normal circumstances disturb her!’

I was about to tell him, as an explanation in her defence, how her entrance was a repetition of her finding the Detective and myself alone together earlier in the day, when I remembered that that conversation was so private that even an allusion to it might be awkward in evoking curiosity. So I remained silent.

We stood up to go to the sick-room; but as we took our way through the dimly lighted corridor I could not help thinking, again, and again, and again — ay, and for many a day after — how strange it was that she had interrupted me on two such occasions when touching on such a theme.

There was certainly some strange web of accidents, in whose meshes we were all involved.

Chapter VII. The Traveller's Loss

THAT NIGHT EVERYTHING WENT WELL. KNOWING THAT Miss Trelawny herself was not on guard, Doctor Winchester and I doubled our vigilance. The Nurses and Mrs. Grant kept watch, and the Detectives made their visit each quarter of an hour. All night the patient remained in his trance. He looked healthy, and his chest rose and fell with the easy breathing of a child. But he never stirred; only for his breathing he might have been of marble. Doctor Winchester and I wore our respirators, and irksome they were on that intolerably hot night. Between midnight and three o'clock I felt anxious, and had once more that creepy feeling to which these last few nights had accustomed me; but the grey of the dawn, stealing round the edges of the blinds, came with inexpressible relief. In the cool, hopeful darkness, with the east quickening into pallor, I could breathe freely; the same relief, followed by restfulness, went through the household. During the hot night my ears, strained to every sound, had been almost painfully troubled; as though my brain or sensoria were in anxious touch with them. Every breath of the Nurse or the rustle of her dress; every soft pat of slippered feet, as the Policeman went his rounds; every moment of watching life, seemed to be a new impetus to guardianship. Something of the same feeling must have been abroad in the house; now and again I could hear upstairs the sound of restless feet, and more than once downstairs the opening of a window. With the coming of the dawn, however, all this ceased, and the whole household seemed to rest. Doctor Winchester went home when sister Doris came to relieve Mrs. Grant. He was, I think, a little disappointed or chagrined that nothing of an exceptional nature had happened during his long night vigil.'

At eight o'clock Miss Trelawny joined us, and I was amazed as well as delighted to see how much good her night's sleep had done her. She was fairly radiant; just as I had seen her at our first meeting and at the picnic. There was even a suggestion of colour in her cheeks, which, however, looked startlingly white in contrast with her black brows and scarlet lips. With her restored strength, there seemed to have "come a tenderness even exceeding that which she had at first shown to her sick father. I could not but be moved by the loving touches as she fixed his pillows and brushed the hair from his forehead.

I was wearied out myself with my long spell of watching; and now that she was on guard I started off to bed, blinking my tired eyes in the full light and feeling the weariness of a sleepless night on me all at once.

I had a good sleep, and after lunch I was about to start out to walk to Jermyn Street, when I noticed an importunate man at the hall door. The servant in charge was the one called Morris, formerly the 'odd man,' but since the exodus of the servants promoted to be butler *pro tern.* The stranger was speaking rather loudly, so that there was no difficulty in understanding his grievance. The servant man was respectful in both words and demeanour; but he stood squarely in front of the great double door, so that the other could not enter. The first words which I heard from the visitor sufficiently explained the situation:

'That's all very well, but I tell you I must see Mr. Trelawny! What is the use of your saying I can't, when I tell you I must. You put me off, and off, and off. I came here at nine; you said then that he was not up, and that as he was not well he could not be disturbed. I came at twelve; and you told me again he was not up. I asked then to see any of his household; you told me that Miss Trelawny was not up. Now I come again at three, and you tell me he is still in bed, and is not awake yet. Where is Miss Trelawny? “She is occupied and must not be disturbed!” Well, she must be disturbed! Or someone must. I am here about Mr. Trelawny’s special business; and I have come from a place where servants always begin by saying No. “No” isn’t good enough for me this time! I’ve had three years of it, waiting outside doors and tents, when it took longer to get in than it did into the tombs; and then you would think, too, the men inside were as dead as the mummies. I’ve had about enough of it, I tell- you. And when I come home, and find the door of the man I’ve been working for barred, in just the same way and with the same old answers, it stirs me up the wrong way. Did Mr. Trelawny leave orders that he would not see me when I should come?’

He paused and excitedly mopped his forehead. The servant answered very respectfully:

‘I am very sorry, sir, if in doing my duty I have given any offence. But I have my orders, and must obey them. If you would like to leave any message, I will give it to Miss Trelawny; and if you will leave your address, she can communicate with you if she wishes.’ The-answer came in such a way that it was easy to see that the speaker was a kind-hearted man, and a just one.

‘My good fellow, I have no fault to find with you personally; and I am sorry if I have hurt your feelings. I must be just, even if I am angry. But it is enough to anger any man to find himself in the position I am. Time is pressing. There is not an hour — not a minute — to lose! And yet here I am, kicking my heels for six hours; knowing all the time that your master will be a hundred times angrier than I am, when he hears how the time has been fooled away. He would rather be waked out of a thousand sleeps than not see me just at present — and before it is too late. My God? it's simply dreadful, after all I've gone through, to have my work spoiled at the last and be foiled in the very doorway by a stupid flunky! Is there no one with sense in the house; or with authority, even if he hasn't got sense? I could mighty soon convince him that your master must be awakened; even if he sleeps like the Seven Sleepers—'

There was no mistaking the man's sincerity, or the urgency and importance of his business; from his point of view at any rate. I stepped forward.

'Morris,' I said, 'you had better tell Miss Trelawny that this gentleman wants to see her particularly. *If* she is busy, ask Mrs. Grant to tell her!'

"Very good, sir!' he answered in a tone of relief, and hurried away.

I took the stranger into the little boudoir across the hall. As we went he asked me:

'Are you the secretary?'

'No! I am a friend of Miss Trelawny's. My name is Ross.'

'Thank you very much, Mr. Ross, for your kindness!' he said. 'My name is Corbeck. I would give you my card; but they don't use cards where I've come from. And if I had had any, I suppose they, too, would have gone last night—'

He stopped suddenly, as though conscious that he had said too much. We both remained silent; as we waited I took stock of him. A short, sturdy man, brown as a coffee-berry, possibly inclined to be fat, but now lean exceedingly. The deep wrinkles in his face and neck were not merely from time and exposure; there were those unmistakable signs where flesh or fat has fallen away, and the skin has become loose. The neck was simply an intricate surface of seams and wrinkles, and was sun-scarred with the burning of the Desert. The Far East, the Tropic Seasons, and the Desert — each can have its colour mark. But all three are quite different; and an eye which had once known, can thenceforth easily distinguish them. The dusky pallor of one; the fierce red-brown of the other; and of the third, the dark, ingrained burning, as though it had become a permanent colour. Mr. Corbeck had a big head, massive and full; with shaggy, dark red-brown hair, but bald on the temples. His forehead was a fine one, high and broad; with, to use the terms of physiognomy, the frontal sinus boldly marked. The squareness of it showed 'ratiocination'; and the fullness under the eyes 'language'. He had the short, broad nose that marks energy; the square chin — marked despite a thick, unkempt beard — and massive jaw that showed great resolution.

'No bad man for the desert!' I thought as I looked.

Miss Trelawny came very quickly. When Mr. Corbeck saw her, he seemed somewhat surprised. But his annoyance and excitement had not disappeared; quite enough remained to cover up any such secondary and purely exoteric feeling as surprise. But as she spoke he never took his eyes off her; and I made a mental note that I would find some early opportunity of investigating the cause of his surprise. She began with an apology which quite smoothed down his ruffled feelings:

'Of course, had my Father been well you would not have been kept waiting. Indeed, had not I been on duty in the sick-room when you called the first time, I should have seen you at once. Now will you kindly tell me what is the matter which so presses?' He looked at me and hesitated. She spoke at once:

'You may say before Mr. Ross anything which you can tell me.

He has my fullest confidence, and is helping me in my trouble. I do not think you quite understand how serious my Father's condition is. For three days he has not waked, or given any sign of consciousness; and I am in terrible trouble about him. Unhappily I am in great ignorance of my Father and his life. I only came to live with him a year ago; and I know nothing whatever of his affairs. I do not even know who you are, or in what way your business is associated with him.' She said this with a little deprecating smile, all conventional and altogether graceful; as though to express in the most genuine way her absurd ignorance.

He looked steadily at her for perhaps a quarter of a minute; then he spoke, beginning at once as though his mind were made up and his confidence established;

'My name is Eugene Corbeck. I am a Master of Arts and Doctor of Laws and Master of Surgery of Cambridge; Doctor of Letters of Oxford; Doctor of Science and Doctor of Languages of London University; Doctor of Philosophy of Berlin; Doctor of Oriental Languages of Paris. I have some other degrees, honorary and otherwise, but I need not trouble you with them. Those I have named will show you that I am sufficiently feathered with diplomas to fly into even a sick-room. Early in life — fortunately for my interests and pleasures, but unfortunately for my pocket — 1 fell in with Egyptology. I must have been bitten by some powerful scarab, for I took it bad. I went out tomb-hunting; and managed to get a living of a sort, and to learn some things that you can't get out of books. I was in pretty low water when I met your Father, who was doing some explorations on his own account; and since then I haven't found that I have many unsatisfied wants. He is a real patron of the arts; no mad Egyptologist can ever hope for a better chief!'

He spoke with feeling; and I was glad to see that Miss Trelawny coloured -up with pleasure at the praise of her father. I could not help noticing, however, that Mr. Corbeck was, in a measure, speaking as if against time. I took it that he wished, while speaking, to study his ground; to see how far he would be justified in making confidence with the two strangers before him. As he went on, I could see that his confidence kept increasing. When I thought of it afterward, and remembered what he had said, I realized that the mea sure of the information which he gave us marked his growing trust.

'I have been several times out on expeditions in Egypt for your Father; and I have always found it a delight to work for him. Many of his treasures — and he has some rare ones, I tell you — he has procured through me, either by my exploration or by purchase — or — or — otherwise. Your Father, Miss Trelawny, has a rare knowledge. He sometimes makes up his mind that he wants to find a particular thing, of whose existence — if it still exists — he has become aware; and he will follow it all over the world till he gets it. I've been on just such a chase now.'

He stopped suddenly, as suddenly as though his mouth had been shut by the jerk of a string.-We waited; when he went on he spoke with a caution that was new to him, as though he wished to forestall our asking any questions:

'I am not at liberty to mention anything of my mission; where it was to, what it was for, or anything at all about it. Such matters are in confidence between Mr. Trelawny and myself; I am pledged to absolute secrecy.'

He paused, and an embarrassed look crept over his face. Suddenly he said:

'You are sure, Miss Trelawny, your Father is not well enough to see me today?’

A look of wonderment was on her face in turn. But it cleared at once; — she stood up, saying in a tone in which dignity and graciousness were blended:

‘Come and see for yourself!’ She moved toward her father’s room; he followed, and I brought up the rear.

Mr. Corbeck entered the sick-room as though he knew it. There is an unconscious attitude or bearing to persons in new surroundings which there is no mistaking. Even in his anxiety to see his powerful friend, he glanced for a moment round the room, as at a familiar place. Then all his attention became fixed on the bed. I watched him narrowly, for somehow I felt that on this man depended much of our enlightenment regarding the strange matter in which we were involved.

It was not that I doubted him. The man was of transparent honesty; it was this very quality which we had to dread. He was of that courageous, fixed trueness to his undertaking that if he should deem it his duty to guard a secret he would do it to the last. The case before us was, at least, an unusual one; and it would, consequently, require more liberal recognition of bounds of the duty of secrecy than would hold under ordinary conditions. To us, ignorance was helplessness. If we could learn anything of the past we might at least form some idea of the conditions antecedent to the attack; and might, so, achieve some means of helping the patient to recovery. There were curios which might be removed.... My thoughts were beginning to whirl once again; I pulled myself up sharply and watched. There was a look of infinite pity on the sun-stained, rugged face as he gazed at his friend, lying so helpless. The sternness of Mr. Trelawny’s face had not relaxed in sleep; but somehow it made the helplessness more marked. It would not have troubled one to see a weak or an ordinary face under such conditions; but this purposeful, masterful man, lying before us wrapped in impenetrable sleep, had all the pathos of a great ruin. The sight was, not a new one to us; but I could see that Miss Trelawny, like myself, was moved afresh by it in the presence of the stranger. Mr. Corbeck's face grew stern. All the pity died away; and in its stead came a grim, hard look which boded ill for whoever had been the cause of this mighty downfall. This look in turn gave place to one of decision; the volcanic energy of the man was working to some definite purpose. He glanced around at us; and as his eyes lighted on Nurse Kennedy his eyebrows went up a trifle. She noted the look, and glanced interrogatively at Miss Trelawny, who flashed back a reply with a glance. She went quietly from the room, closing the door behind her. Mr. Corbeck looked first at me, with a strong man's natural impulse to learn from a man rather than a woman; then at Miss Trelawny, with a remembrance of the duty of courtesy, and said:

'Tell me all about it. How it began and when!' Miss Trelawny looked at me appealingly; and forthwith I told him all that I knew. He seemed to make no motion during the whole time; but insensibly the bronze face became steel. When, at the end, I told him of Mr. Marvin's visit and of the Power of Attorney, his look began to brighten. And when, seeing his interest in the matter, I went more into detail as to its terms, he spoke:

'Good? Now I know where my duty lies!'

With a sinking heart I heard him. Such a phrase, coming at such a time, seemed to close the door to my hopes of enlightenment.

'What do you mean?' I asked, feeling that my question was a feeble one.

His answer emphasized my fears:

‘Trelawny knows what he is doing. He had some definite purpose in all that he did; and we must not thwart him. He evidently expected something to happen, and guarded himself at all points.’

‘Not at all points!’ I said impulsively. ‘There must have been a weak spot somewhere, or he wouldn’t be lying there like that!’ Somehow his impassiveness surprised me. I had expected that he would find a valid argument in my phrase; but it did not move him, at least not in the way I thought. Something like a smile flickered over his swarthy face as he answered me:

‘This is not the end! Trelawny did not guard himself to no purpose. Doubtless, he expected this too; or at any rate the possibility of it.’

‘Do you know what he expected, or from what source?’ The questioner was Miss Trelawny.

The answer came at once: ‘No! I know nothing of either. I can guess ...’ He stopped suddenly.

‘Guess what?’ The suppressed excitement in the girl’s voice was akin to anguish. The steely look came over the swarthy face again: but there was tenderness and courtesy in both voice and manner as he replied:

‘Believe me, I would do anything I honestly could to relieve your anxiety. But in this I have a higher duty.’

‘What duty?’

‘Silence!’ As he spoke the word, the strong mouth closed like a steel trap.

We all remained silent for a few minutes. In the intensity of our thinking, the silence became a positive thing; the small sounds of life within and without the house seemed intrusive. The first to break it was Miss Trelawny. I had seen an idea — a hope — flash in her eyes; but she steadied herself before speaking:

‘What was the urgent subject on which you wanted to see me, knowing that my Father was — not available?’ The pause showed her mastery of her thoughts.

The instantaneous change in Mr. Corbeck was almost ludicrous. His start of surprise, coming close upon his ironclad impassiveness, was like a pantomimic change. But all idea of comedy was swept away by the tragic earnestness with which he remembered his original purpose.

‘My God!’ he said, as he raised his hand from the chair back on which it rested, and beat it down with a violence which would in itself have arrested attention. His brows corrugated as he went on: ‘*I* quite forgot! What a loss! Now of all times! Just at the moment of success! He lying there helpless, and my tongue tied! Not able to raise hand or foot in my ignorance of his wishes!’

‘What is it? Oh, do tell us! I am so anxious about my dear Father! Is it any new trouble! I hope not! Oh, I hope not! I have had such anxiety and trouble already! It alarms me afresh to hear you speak so! Won’t you tell me something to allay this terrible anxiety and uncertainty?’

He drew his sturdy form up to his full height as he said:

‘Alas! I cannot, may not, tell you anything. It is his secret.’ He pointed to the bed. ‘And yet — and yet I came here for his advice, his Counsel, his assistance. And he lies there helpless.... And time is flying by us! It may soon be too late!’

‘What is it? What is it?’ broke in Miss Trelawny in a sort of passion of anxiety, her face drawn with pain, ‘Oh, speak! Say something! This anxiety, and horror, and mystery are killing me!’

Mr. Corbeck calmed himself by a great effort.

'I may not tell you details; but I have had a great loss. My mission, in which I have spent three years, was successful. I discovered all that I sought — and more; and brought them home with me safely. Treasures, priceless in themselves, but doubly precious to him by whose wishes and instructions I sought them. I arrived in London only last night; and when I woke this morning my precious charge was stolen. Stolen in some mysterious way. Not a soul in London knew that I was arriving. No one but myself knew what war in the shabby portmanteau that I carried. My room had but one door, and that I locked and bolted. The room was high in the house, five storeys up, so that no entrance could have been obtained-by the window. Indeed, I had closed the window myself and shut the hasp, for I wished to be secure in every way. This morning the hasp was untouched... And yet-my portmanteau was empty. The lamps were gone!... There! It is out. I went to Egypt to search for a set of antique lamps which Mr. Trelawny wished to trace. With incredible labour, and through many dangers, I followed them. I brought them safe home... And now!' He turned away much moved. Even his iron nature was breaking down under the sense of loss.

Miss Trelawny stepped over and laid her hand on his arm. I looked at her in amazement. All the passion and pain which had so moved her seemed to have taken the form of resolution. Her form was erect, her eyes blazed; energy was manifest in every nerve and fibre of her being. Even her voice was full of nervous power as she spoke. It was apparent that she was a marvellously strong woman, and that her strength could answer when called upon.

'We must act at once! My Father's wishes must be carried out, if it is possible to us. Mr. Ross, you are a lawyer. We have actually in the house a man whom you consider one of the best detectives in London. Surely we can do something. We can begin at once!' Mr. Corbeck took new life from her enthusiasm.

'Good! You are your Father's daughter!' was all he said. But his admiration for her energy was manifested by the impulsive way in which he took her hand. I moved over to the door. I was going to bring Sergeant Daw: and from her look of approval, I knew that Margaret — Miss Trelawny — understood. I was at the door when Mr. Corbeck called me back.

'One moment,' he said, 'before we bring a stranger on the scene. It must be borne in mind that he is not to know what you know now, that the lamps were the objects of a prolonged and difficult and dangerous search. All I can tell him, all that he must know from any source, is that some of my property has been stolen. I must describe some of the lamps, especially one, for it is of gold: and my fear is lest the thief, ignorant of its historic worth, may, in order to cover up his crime, have it melted. I would willingly pay ten, twenty, a hundred, a thousand times its intrinsic value rather than have it destroyed. I shall tell him only what is necessary. So, please, let me answer any questions he may ask; unless, of course, I ask you or refer to either of you for the answer.' We both nodded acquiescence. Then a thought struck me and I said:

'By the way, if it be necessary to keep this matter quiet it will be better to have it if possible a private job for the Detective. If once a thing gets to Scotland Yard it is out of our power to keep it quiet, and further secrecy may be impossible. I shall sound Sergeant Daw before he comes up. If I say nothing, it will mean that he accepts the task and will deal with it privately.' Mr. Corbeck answered at once:

'Secrecy is everything. The one thing I dread is that the lamps, or some of them, may be destroyed at once.’ To my’ intense astonishment Miss Trelawny spoke out at once, but quietly in a decided voice:

‘They will not be destroyed; nor any of them!’ Mr. Corbeck actually smiled in amazement.

‘How on earth do you know?’ he asked. Her answer was still more incomprehensible:

‘I don’t know how I know it; but know it I do. I feel it all through me; as though it were a conviction which has been with me all my life!’

Chapter VIII. The Finding of the Lamps

SERGEANT DAW AT FIRST MADE SOME DEMUR; BUT FINALLY agreed to advise privately on a matter which might be suggested to him. He added that I was to remember that he only undertook to advise; for if action were required he might have to refer the matter to headquarters. With this understanding I left him in the study, and brought Miss Trelawny and Mr. Corbeck to him. Nurse Kennedy resumed her place at the bedside before we left the room.

I could not but admire the cautious, cool-headed precision with which the traveller stated his case. He did not seem to conceal anything, and yet he gave the least possible description of the objects missing. He did not enlarge on the mystery of the case; he seemed to look on it as an ordinary hotel theft. Knowing, as I did, that his one object was to recover the articles before their identity could be obliterated, I could see the rare intellectual skill with which he gave the necessary matter and held back all else, though without seeming to do so. ‘Truly,’ thought I, ‘this man has learned the lesson of the Eastern bazaars; and with Western intellect has improved upon his masters!’ He quite conveyed his idea to the Detective, who, after thinking the matter over for a few moments, said:

‘Pot or scale? That is the question!’

‘What does that mean?’ asked the other, keenly alert.

‘An old thieves’ phrase from Birmingham. I thought that in these days of slang everyone knew mat. In old times at Brum, which had a lot of small metal industries, the gold-and silversmiths used to buy metal from almost anyone who came along. And as metal in small quantities could generally be had cheap when they didn’t ask where it came from, it got to be a custom to ask only one thing — whether the customer wanted the goods melted, in which case the buyer made the price, and the melting-pot was always on the fire. If it was to be preserved in its present state at the buyer's option, it went into the scale and fetched standard price for old metal.

'There is a good deal of such work done still, and in other places than Brum. When we're looking for stolen watches we often come across the works, and it's not possible- to identify wheels and springs out of a heap; but it's not often that we come across cases that are wanted. Now, in the present instance much will depend on whether the thief is a good man — that's what they call a man who knows his- work A first-class crook will know whether a thing is of more value than merely the metal in it; and in such case he would put it with someone who could place it later on — in America or France perhaps. By the way, do you think anyone but yourself could identify your lamps?'

'No one but myself!'

'Are there others like them?'

'Not that I know of,' answered Mr. Corbeck; 'though there may be others that resemble them in many particulars.' The Detective paused before asking again: 'Would any other skilled person — at the British Museum, for instance, or a dealer, or a collector like Mr. Trelawny, know the value — the artistic value — of the lamps?'

'Certainly! Anyone with a head on his shoulders would see at a glance that the things were valuable.'

The Detective's face brightened. 'Then there is a chance. If your door was locked and the window shut, the goods were not stolen by the chance of a-chambermaid or a boots coming along. Whoever did the job went after it special; and he ain't going to part with his swag without his price. This must be a case of notice to the pawnbrokers. There's one good thing about it, anyhow, that the hue and cry needn't be given. We needn't tell Scotland Yard unless you like; we can work the thing privately. If you wish to keep the thing dark, as you told me at the first, that is our chance.' Mr. Corbeck, after a pause, said quietly:

'I suppose you couldn't hazard a suggestion as to how the robbery was effected?' The Policeman smiled the smile of knowledge and experience.

'In a very simple way, I have no doubt, sir. That is how all these mysterious crimes turn out in the long-run. The criminal knows his work and all the tricks of it; and he is always on the watch for chances. Moreover, he knows by experience what these chances are likely to be, and how they usually come. The other person is only careful; he doesn't know all the tricks and pits that may be made for him, and by some little oversight or other he falls into the trap. When we know all about this case, you will wonder that you did not see the method of it all along!' This seemed to annoy Mr. Corbeck a little; there was decided heat in his manner as he answered:

'Look here, my good friend, there is not anything simple about this case — except that the things were taken. The window was closed; the fireplace was bricked up. There is only one door to the room, and that I locked and bolted. There is no transom; I have heard all about hotel robberies-through the transom; I never left my room in the night. I looked at the things before going to bed; and I went to look at them again when I woke up. If you can rig up any kind of simple robbery out of these facts you are a clever man. That's all I say; clever enough to go right away and get my things back' Miss Trelawny laid her hand upon his arm in a soothing way, and said quietly:

‘Do not distress yourself unnecessarily. I am sure they will turn up.’ Sergeant Daw turned to her so quickly that I could not help remembering vividly his suspicions of her, already formed, as he said:

‘May I ask, miss, on what you base that opinion?’

I dreaded to hear the answer, given to ears already awake to suspicion; but it came to me as a new pain or shock all the same:

‘I cannot tell you how I know. But I am sure of it!’ The Detective looked at her for some, seconds in silence, and then threw a quick glance at me.

Presently he had a little more conversation with Mr. Corbeck as to his own movements, the details of the hotel and the room, and the means of identifying the goods. Then he went away to commence his enquiries, Mr. Corbeck impressing on him the necessity for secrecy lest the thief should get wind of his danger and destroy the lamps. Mr. Corbeck promised, when going away to attend to various matters of his own business, to return early in the evening, and to stay in the house.

All that day Miss Trelawny was in better spirits and looked in better strength than she had yet been, despite the new shock and annoyance of the thief which must ultimately bring so much disappointment to her father.

We spent most of the day looking over the curio treasures of Mr. Trelawny. From what I had heard from Mr. Corbeck, I began to have some idea of the vastness of his enterprise in the world of Egyptian research; and with this light everything around me began to have a new interest. As I went on, the interest grew; any lingering doubts which I might have had changed to wonder and admiration. The house seemed to be a veritable storehouse of marvels of antique art. In addition to the curios, big and little, in Mr. Trelawny's own room — from the great sarcophagi down to the scarabs of all kinds in the cabinets — the great hall, the staircase landings, the study, and even the boudoir were full of antique pieces which would have made a collector's mouth water.

. Miss Trelawny from the first came with me, and looked with growing interest at everything. After having examined some-cabinets of exquisite amulets she said to me in quite a naive way:

'You will hardly believe that I have of late seldom even looked at any of these things. It is only since Father has been ill that I seem to have even any curiosity about them. But now, they grow and grow on me to quite an absorbing degree. I wonder if it is that the collector's blood which I have in my veins is beginning to manifest itself. If so, the strange thing is that I have not felt the call of it before. Of course I know most of the big things, and have examined them more or less; but really, in a sort of way I have always taken them for granted, as though they had always been there. I have noticed the same thing now and again with family pictures, and the way they are taken for granted by the family. If you will let me examine them with you it will be delightful!'

It was a joy to me to hear her talk in such a way; and her last suggestion quite thrilled me. Together we went round the various rooms and passages, examining and admiring the magnificent curios. There was such a bewildering amount and variety of objects that we could only glance at most of them; but as we went along we arranged that we should take them *seriatim,* day by day, and examine them more closely. In the hall was a sort of big frame of floriated steel work which Margaret said her father used for lifting the heavy stone lid of the sarcophagi. It was not heavy and could be moved about easily enough. By aid of this we raised the covers in turn and looked at the endless series of hieroglyphic pictures cut in most of them. In spite of her profession of ignorance Margaret knew a good deal about them; her year of life with her father had had unconsciously its daily and hourly lesson. She was a remarkably clever and acute-minded girl, and with a prodigious memory; so that her store of knowledge, gathered unthinkingly bit by bit, had grown to proportions that many a scholar might have envied.

And yet it was all so naive and unconscious; so girlish and simple. She was so fresh in her views and ideas, and had so little thought of self, that in her companionship I forgot for the time all the troubles and mysteries which enmeshed the house; and I felt like a boy again....

The most interesting of the sarcophagi were undoubtedly the three in Mr. Trelawny's room. Of these, two were of dark stone, one of porphyry and the other of a sort of ironstone. These were wrought with some hieroglyphs. But the third was strikingly different. It was of some yellow-brown substance of the dominating colour effect of Mexican onyx, which it resembled in many ways, excepting that the natural pattern of its convolutions was less marked. Here and there were patches almost transparent — certainly translucent. The whole chest, cover and all, was wrought with hundreds, perhaps thousands, of minute hieroglyphics, seemingly in an endless series. Back, front, sides, edges, bottom, all had their quota of the dainty pictures, the deep blue of their colouring showing up fresh and sharply edged in the yellow stone. It was very long, nearly nine feet; and perhaps a yard wide. The sides undulated, so that there was no hard line. Even the corners took such excellent curves that they pleased the eye.

‘Truly,’ I said, ‘this must have been made for a giant!’

‘Or for a giantess!’ said Margaret.

This sarcophagus stood near to one of the windows. It was in one respect different from all the other sarcophagi in the place. All the others in the house, of whatever material — granite, porphyry, ironstone, basalt, slate, or wood — were quite simple in form within. Some of them were plain of interior surface; others were engraved, in whole or part, with hieroglyphics. But each and all of them had no protuberances or uneven surface anywhere. They might have been used for baths; indeed, they resembled in many ways Roman baths of stone or marble which I had seen. Inside this, however, was a raised space, outlined like a human figure. I asked Margaret if she could explain it in any way. For answer she said:

‘Father never wished to speak about this. It attracted my attention from the first; but when I asked him about it he said: “I shall tell you all about it some day, little girl — if I live! But not yet! The story is not yet told, as I hope to tell it to you! Some day, perhaps soon, I shall know all; and then we shall go over it together. And a-mighty interesting story you will find it — from first to last!” Once afterward I said, rather lightly I am afraid: “Is that story of the sarcophagus told yet, Father?” He shook his head, and looked at me gravely as he said: “Not yet, little girl; but it will be — if I live — if I live!” His repeating that phrase about his living rather frightened me; I never ventured to ask him again.’

Somehow this thrilled me. I could not exactly say how or why; but it seems like a gleam of light at last. There are, I think, moments when the mind accepts something as true; though it can account for neither the course of the thought, nor, if there *be* more than one thought, the connection between them. Hitherto we had been in such outer darkness regarding Mr. Trelawny, and the strange visitation which had fallen on him, that anything which afforded a clue, even of the faintest and most shadowy kind, had at the outset the enlightening satisfaction of a certainty. Here were two lights of our puzzle. The first that Mr. Trelawny associated with this particular curio a doubt of his own living. The second that lie had some purpose or expectation with regard to it, which he would not disclose, even to his daughter, till complete. Again it was to be borne in mind that this sarcophagus differed internally from all the others. What meant that odd raised place? I said nothing to Miss Trelawny, for I feared lest I should either frighten her or buoy her up with future hopes; but I made up my mind that I would take an early opportunity for further investigation.

Close beside the sarcophagus was a low table of green stone with red veins in ft, like bloodstone. The feet were fashioned like the paws of a jackal, and round each leg was twined a full-throated snake wrought exquisitely in pure gold. On it rested a strange and very beautiful coffer or casket of stone of a peculiar shape. It was something like a small coffin, except that the longer sides, instead of being cut off square like the upper or level part were continued to a point. Thus it was an irregular septahedron, there being two planes on each of the two sides, one end and a top and bottom. The stone, of one piece of which it was wrought, was such as I had never seen before. At the base it was of a full green, the colour of emerald without, of course, its gleam. It was not by any means dull, however, either in colour or substance, and was of infinite hardness and fineness of texture. The surface was almost that of a jewel. The colour grew lighter as it rose, with gradation so fine as to be imperceptible, changing to a fine yellow almost of the colour of ‘mandarin’ china. It was quite unlike anything I had ever seen, and did not resemble any stone or gem that I knew. I took it to be some unique mother-stone, or matrix of some gem. It was wrought all over, except in a few spots, with fine hieroglyphics, exquisitely done and coloured with the same blue-green cement or pigment that appeared on the sarcophagus. In length it was about two feet and a half; in breadth about half this, and was nearly a foot high. The vacant spaces were irregularly distributed about the top running to the pointed end. These places seemed less opaque than the rest of the stone. I tried to lift up the lid so that I might see if they were translucent; but it was securely fixed. It fitted so exactly that the whole coffer seemed like a single piece of stone mysteriously hollowed from within. On the sides and edges were some odd-looking protuberances wrought just as finely as any other portion of the coffer which had been sculptured by manifest design in the cutting of the stone. They had queer-shaped holes or hollows, different in each; and, like the rest, were covered with the hieroglyphic figures, cut finely and filled in with the same blue-green cement.

On the other side of the great sarcophagus stood another small table of alabaster, exquisitely chased with symbolic figures of gods and the signs of the zodiac. On this table stood a case of about a foot square composed of slabs of rock crystal set in a skeleton of bands of red gold, beautifully engraved with hieroglyphics, and coloured with a blue green, very much the tint of the figures on the sarcophagus and the coffer. The whole work was quite modern.

But if the case was modern what it held was not. Within, on a cushion of cloth of gold as fine as silk, and with the peculiar softness of old gold, rested a mummy hand, so perfect that it startled one to see it. A woman's hand, fine and long, with slim tapering fingers and nearly as perfect as when it was given to the embalmer thousands of years before. In the embalming it had lost nothing of its beautiful shape; even the wrist seemed to maintain its pliability as the gentle curve lay on the cushion. The skin was of a rich creamy or old ivory colour; a dusky fair skin which suggested heat, but heat in shadow. The great peculiarity of it, as a hand, was that it had in all seven fingers, there being two middle and two index fingers. The upper end of the wrist was jagged, as though it had been broken off, and was stained with a red-brown stain. On the cushion near the hand was a small scarab, exquisitely wrought of emerald.

'That is another of Father's mysteries. When I asked him about it he said that it was perhaps the most valuable thing he had, except one. When I asked him what that one was, he refused to tell me, and forbade me to ask him anything concerning it. "I will tell you," he said, "all about it, too, in good time — if I live!" '

'If I live!' the phrase again. These three things grouped together, the Sarcophagus, the Coffer, and the Hand, seemed to make a trilogy of mystery indeed!

At this time Miss Trelawny was sent for on some domestic matter. I looked at the other curios in the room; but they did not seem to have anything like the same charm for me, now that she was away. Later on in the day I was sent for to the boudoir where she was consulting with Mrs. Grant as to the lodgement of Mr. Corbeck. They were in doubt as to whether he should have a room close to Mr. Trelawny's or quite away from it, and had thought it well to ask my advice on the subject. I came to the conclusion that he had better not be too near; for the first at all events, he could easily be moved closer if necessary. When Mrs. Grant had gone, I asked Miss Trelawny how it came that the furniture of this room, the boudoir in which we were, was so different from the other rooms of the house.

‘Father’s forethought!’ she answered. ‘When I first came, he thought, and rightly enough, that I might get frightened with so many records of death and the tomb everywhere. So he had this room and the little suite off it — that door opens into the sitting-room — where I slept last night, furnished with pretty things. You see, they are all beautiful. That cabinet belonged to the great Napoleon.’

‘There is nothing Egyptian in these rooms at all then?’ I asked, rather to show interest in what she had said than anything else, for the furnishing of the room was apparent. ‘What a lovely cabinet! May I look at it?’

‘Of course! with the greatest pleasure!’ she answered, with a smile. ‘Its finishing within and without, Father says, is absolutely complete.’ I stepped over and looked at it closely. It was made of tulip wood, inlaid *in* pattern; and was mounted 4n ormolu. I pulled open one of the drawers, a deep one where I could see the work to great advantage. As I pulled it, something rattled inside as though rolling; there was a tinkle as of metal on metal.

‘Hullo!’ I said. ‘There is something in here. Perhaps I had better not open it.’

‘There is nothing that I know of’ she answered. ‘Some of the housemaids may have used it to put something by for the time and forgotten it. Open it by all means!’

I pulled open the drawer; as I did so, both Miss Trelawny and I started back in amazement.

There before our eyes lay a number of ancient Egyptian lamps, of various sizes and of strangely varied shapes.

We leaned over them and looked closely. My own heart was beating like a trip-hammer; and I could see by the heaving of Margaret's bosom that she was strangely excited.

Whilst we looked, afraid to touch and almost afraid to think, there was a ring at the front door; immediately afterwards Mr. Corbeck, followed by Sergeant Daw, came into the hall. The door of the boudoir was open, and when they saw us Mr. Corbeck came running in, followed more slowly by the Detective. There was a sort of chastened joy in his face and manner as he said impulsively:

'Rejoice with me, my dear Miss Trelawny, my luggage has come and all my things are intact!' Then his face fell as he added, 'Except the lamps. The lamps that were worth all the rest a thousand times....' He stopped, struck by the strange pallor of her face. Then his eyes, following her look and mine, lit on the cluster of lamps in the drawer. He gave a sort of cry of surprise and joy as he bent over and touched them:

'My lamps! My lamps! Then they are safe — safe — safe!... But how, in the name of God — of all the Gods — did they come here?'

We all stood silent. The Detective made a deep sound of intaking breath. I looked at him, and as he caught my glance he turned his eyes on Miss Trelawny whose back was toward him.

There was in them the same look of suspicion which had been there when he had spoken to me of her being the first to find her father on the occasions of the attack.

Chapter IX. The Need of Knowledge

MR CORBECK SEEMED TO GO ALMOST OFF HIS HEAD AT the recovery of the lamps. He took them up one by one and looked them all over tenderly, as though they were things that he loved. In his delight and excitement he breathed so hard that it seemed almost like a cat purring. Sergeant Daw said quietly, his voice breaking the silence like a discord in a melody:

‘Are you quite sure those lamps are the ones you had, and that were stolen?’

His answer was in an indignant tone: ‘Sure! Of course I’m sure. There isn’t another set of lamps like these in the world!’

‘So far as you know!’ The Detective’s words were smooth enough, but his manner was so exasperating that I was sure he had some motive in it; so I waited in silence. He went on:

‘Of course there may be some in the British Museum; or Mr. Trelawny may have had these already. There’s nothing new under the sun, you know, Mr. Corbeck; not even in Egypt. These may be the originals, and yours may have been the copies. Are there any points by which you can identify these as yours?’

Mr. Corbeck was really angry by this time. He forgot his reserve; and in his indignation poured forth a torrent of almost incoherent, but enlightening, broken sentences:

‘Identify! Copies of them! British Museum! Rot! Perhaps they keep a set in Scotland Yard for teaching idiot policemen Egyptology! Do I know them? When I have carried them about my body, in the desert, for three months; and lay awake night after night to watch them! When I have looked them over with a magnifying-glass, hour after hour, till my eyes ached; till every tiny blotch, and chip, and dinge became as familiar to me as his chart to a captain; as familiar as they doubtless have been all the time to every thick-headed area-prowler within the bounds of mortality. See here, young man, look at these!' He ranged the lamps in a row on the top of the cabinet. 'Did you ever see a set of lamps of these shapes — of any one of these shapes? Look at these dominant figures on them! Did you ever see so complete a set — even in Scotland Yard; even in Bow Street? Look! one on each, the seven forms of Hathor. Look at that figure of the Ka, of a Princess of the Two Egypts, standing between Ra and Osiris in the Boat of the Dead, with the Eye of Sleep, supported on legs, bending before her; and Harmochis rising in the north. Will you find that, in the British Museum — or Bow Street? Or perhaps your studies in the Gizeh Museum, or the Fitzwilliam, or Paris, or Leyden, or Berlin, have shown you that the episode is common in hieroglyphics; and that this is only a copy. Perhaps you can tell me what that figure of Ptah-Seker-Ausar holding the Tet wrapped in the Sceptre of Papyrus means? Did you ever see it before; even in the British Museum, or Gizeh, or Scotland Yard?

He broke off suddenly; and then went on in quite a different way:

'Look here! it seems to me that the thick-headed idiot is myself! I beg your pardon, old fellow, for my rudeness. I quite lost my temper at the suggestion that I do not know these lamps. You don't mind, do you?' The Detective answered heartily:

'Lord, sir, not I. I like to see folks angry when I am dealing with them, whether they are on my side or the other. It is when people are angry that you learn the truth from them. I keep cool; that is my trade! Do you know, you have told me more about those lamps in the past two minutes than when you filled me up with details of how to identify them.'

Mr. Corbeck grunted; he was not pleased at having given himself away. All at once he turned to me and said in his natural way:

‘Now tell me how you got them back?’ I was so surprised that I said without thinking:

We didn’t get them back!’ The traveller laughed openly.

“What on earth do you mean?’ he asked. ‘You didn’t get them back! Why, there they are before your eyes! We found you looking at them when we came in.’ By this time I had recovered my surprise and had my wits about me.

‘Why, that’s just it,’ I said, ‘We had only come across them, by accident, that very moment!’

Mr. Corbeck drew back and looked hard at Miss Trelawny and myself; turning his eyes from one to the other as he asked:

‘Do you mean to tell me that no one brought them here; that you found them in that drawer? That, so to speak, no one at all brought them back?’

‘I suppose someone must have brought them here; they couldn’t have come of their own accord. But who it was, or when, or how, neither of us knows. We shall have to make enquiry, and see if any of the servants know anything of it.’

We all stood silent for several seconds. It seemed a long time. The first to speak was the Detective, who said in an unconscious way:

‘Well, I’m damned! I beg your pardon, miss!’ Then his mouth shut like a steel trap.

We called up the servants, one by one, and asked them if they knew anything of some articles placed in a drawer in the. boudoir; but none of them could throw any light on the circumstances. We did not tell them what the articles were; or let them see them.

Mr. Corbeck packed the lamps in cotton wool, and placed them in a tin box. This, I may mention incidentally, was then brought up to the detectives' room, where one of the men stood guard over them with a revolver the whole night. Next day we got a small safe into the house, and placed them in it. There were two different keys. One of them I kept myself; the other I placed in my drawer in the Safe Deposit vault. We were all determined that the lamps should not be lost again.

About an hour after we had found the lamps, Doctor Winchester arrived. He had a large parcel: with him, which, when unwrapped, proved to be the mummy of a cat. With Miss Trelawny's permission he placed this in the boudoir; and Silvio was brought close to it. To the surprise of us all, however, except perhaps Doctor Winchester, he did not manifest the least annoyance; he took no notice of it whatever. He stood on the table close beside it, purring loudly. Then, following out his plan, the Doctor brought him into Mr. Trelawny's room, we all following. Doctor Winchester was excited; Miss Trelawny anxious. I was more than interested myself, for I began to have a glimmering of the Doctor's idea. The Detective was calmly and coldly superior: but Mr. Corbeck, who was an enthusiast, was full of eager curiosity.

The moment Doctor Winchester got into the room, Silvio began to mew and wriggle; and, jumping out of his arms, ran over to the cat mummy and began to scratch angrily at it. Miss Trelawny had some difficulty in taking him away; but soon as he was out of the room he became quiet. When she came back there was a clamour of comments:

'I thought so!' from the Doctor.

'What can it mean?' from Miss Trelawny.

'That's a very strange thing!' from Mr. Corbeck

‘Odd! but it doesn’t prove anything!’ from the Detective.

‘I suspend my judgement!’ from myself, thinking it advisable to say something.

Then by common consent we dropped the theme — for the present.

In my room that evening I was making some notes of what had happened, when there came a low tap on the door. In obedience to my summons Sergeant Daw came in, carefully closing the door behind him.

‘Well, Sergeant,’ said I, ‘sit down. What is it?’

‘I wanted to speak to you, sir, about those lamps.’ I nodded and waited: he went on: ‘You know that that room where they were found opens directly into the room where Miss Trelawny slept last night?’

‘Yes.’

‘During the night a window somewhere in that part of the house was opened, and shut again. I heard it, and took a look round; but I could see no sign of anything.’

‘Yes, I know that!’ I said; ‘I heard a window moved myself’

‘Does nothing strike you as strange about it, sir?’

‘Strange!’ I said, ‘strange! why it’s all the most bewildering, maddening thing I have ever encountered. It is all so strange that one seems to wonder; and simply waits for what will happen next. But what do you mean by strange?’ The Detective paused, as if choosing his words to begin; and then said deliberately:

‘You see, I am not one who believes in magic and such things. I am for facts all the time; and I always find in the long-run that there is a reason and a cause for everything. This new gendeman says these things were stolen out of his room in the hotel. The lamps, I take it from some things he has said, really belong to Mr. Trelawny. His daughter, the lady of the house, having left the room she usually occupies, sleeps that night on the ground floor. A window is heard to open and shut during the night. When we, who have been during the day trying to find a clue to the robbery, come to the house, we find the stolen goods in a room close to where she slept, and opening out of it!'

He stopped. I felt that same sense of pain and apprehension, which I had experienced when he had spoken to me before, creeping, or rather rushing, over me again. I had to face the matter out, however. My relations with her, and the feeling toward her which I now knew full well meant a very deep love and devotion, demanded so much. I said as calmly as I could, for I knew the keen eyes of the skilful investigator were on me: 'And the inference?'

He answered with the cool audacity of conviction: 'The inference to me is that there was no robbery at all. The goods were taken by someone to this house, where they were received through a window on the ground floor. They were placed in the cabinet, ready to be discovered when the proper time should come!'

Somehow I felt relieved: the assumption was too monstrous. I did not want, however, my relief to be apparent, so I answered as gravely as I could:

'And who do you suppose brought them to the house?'

'I keep my mind open as to mat. Possibly Mr. Corbeck himself; the matter might be too risky to trust to a third party.'

'Then the natural extension of your inference is that Mr. Corbeck is a liar and a fraud; and that he is in conspiracy with Miss Trelawny to deceive someone or other about those lamps.'

“Those are harsh words, Mr. Ross. They're so plain-spoken that they bring a man up standing, and make new doubts for him. But I have to go where my reason points. It may be that there is another party than Miss Trelawny in it. Indeed, if it hadn't been for the other matter that set me thinking and bred doubts of its own about her, I wouldn't dream of mixing her up in this. But I'm safe on Corbeck. Whoever else is in it, he is! The things couldn't have been taken without his connivance — if what he says is true. If it isn't — well! he is a liar anyhow. I would mink it a bad job to have him stay in the house with so many valuables, only that it will give me and my mate a chance of watching him. We'll keep a pretty good look-out, too, I tell you. He's up in my room now, guarding those lamps; but Johnny Wright is mere, too. I go on before he comes off; so there won't be much chance of another house-breaking. Of course, Mr. Ross, all this, too, is between you and me.'

'Quite so! You may depend on my silence!' I said; and he went away to keep a close eye on the Egyptologist.

It seemed as though all my painful experiences were to go in pairs, and that the sequence of the previous day was to be repeated; for before Long I had another private visit from Doctor Winchester who had now paid his nightly visit to his patient and was on his way home. He took the seat which I profferred and began at once:

'This is a strange affair altogether. Miss Trelawny has just been telling me about the stolen lamps, and of the finding of them in the Napoleon cabinet. It would seem to be another complication of the mystery: and yet, do you know, it is a relief to me. I have exhausted all human and natural possibilities' of the case, and am beginning to fall back on superhuman and supernatural possibilities. Here are such strange things that, if I am not going mad, I think we must have a solution before long. I wonder if I might ask some questions and some help from Mr. Corbeck, without making further complications and embarrassing us. He seems to know an amazing amount regarding Egypt and all relating to it. Perhaps he wouldn't mind translating a little bit of hieroglyphic. It is child's play to him. What do you think?'

When I had thought the matter over a few seconds I spoke. We wanted all the help we could get. For myself, I had perfect confidence in both men; and any comparing notes, or mutual assistance, might bring good results. Such could hardly bring evil.

'By all means I should ask him. He seems an extraordinarily learned man in Egyptology: and he seems to me a good fellow as well as an enthusiast. By the way, it will be necessary to be a little guarded as to whom you speak regarding any information which he may give you.'

'Of course!' he answered. 'Indeed I should not dream of saying anything to anybody, excepting yourself. We have to remember that when Mr. Trelawny recovers he may not like to think that we have been chattering unduly over his affairs.'

'Look here!' I said, 'why not stay for a while: and I shall ask him to come and have a pipe with us. We can then talk over things."

He acquiesced: so I went to the room where Mr. Corbeck was, and brought him back with me. I thought the detective were pleased at his going. On the way to my room he said:

'I don't half like leaving those things there, with only those men to guard them. They're a deal sight too precious to be left to the police!'

From which it would appear that suspicion was not confined to Sergeant Daw.

Mr. Corbeck and Doctor Winchester, after a quick glance at each other, became at once on most friendly terms. The traveller professed his willingness to be of any assistance which he could, provided, he added, that it was anything about which he was free to speak. This was not very promising; but Doctor Winchester began at once:

‘I want you, if you will, to translate some hieroglyphic for me.’

‘Certainly, with the greatest pleasure, so far as I can. For I may tell you that hieroglyphic writing is not quite mastered yet; though we are getting at it! We are getting at it! What is the inscription?’

‘There are two,’ he answered. ‘One of them I shall bring here.’

He went out, and returned in a minute with the mummy cat which he had that evening introduced to Silvio. The scholar took it; and, after a short examination, said:

“There is nothing especial in this. It is an appeal to Bast, the Lady of Bubastis, to give her good bread and milk in the Elysian Fields. There may be more inside; and if you will care to unroll it, I will do my best. I do not think, however, that there is anything special. From the method of wrapping I should say it is from Delta; and of a late period, when such mummy work was common and cheap. What is the other inscription you wish me to see?’

‘The inscription on the mummy cat in Mr. Trelawny’s room.’

Mr. Corbeck’s face fell. ‘No!’ he said, ‘I cannot do that! I am, for the present at all events, practically bound to secrecy regarding any of the things in Mr. Trelawny’s room.’

Doctor Winchester’s comment and my own were made at the same moment. I said only the one word ‘Checkmate!’ from which I think he may have gathered that I guessed more of his idea and purpose than perhaps I had intentionally conveyed to him. He murmured:

‘Practically bound to secrecy?’

Mr. Corbeck at once took up the challenge conveyed:

'Do not misunderstand me! I am not bound by any definite pledge of secrecy; but I am bound in honour to respect Mr. Trelawny's confidence, given to me, I may tell you, in' a very large measure. Regarding many of the objects in his room he has a definite purpose in view; and it would not be either right or becoming for me, his trusted friend and confidant, to forestall that purpose. Mr. Trelawny, you may know — or rather you do not know or you would not have so construed my remark — is a scholar, a very great scholar. He has worked for years toward a certain end. For this he has spared no labour, no expense, no personal danger or self-denial. He is on the line of a result which will place him amongst the foremost discoverers or investigators of this age. And now, just at the time when any hour might bring him success, he is stricken down!'

He stopped, seemingly overcome with emotion. After a time he recovered himself and went on:

'Again, do not misunderstand me as to another point. I have said that Mr. Trelawny has made much confidence with me; but I do not mean to lead you to believe that I know all his plans, or his aims or objects, I know the period which he has been studying; and the definite historical individual whose life he has been investigating, and whose records he has been following up one by one with infinite patience. But beyond this I know nothing. That he has some aim or object in the completion of this knowledge I am convinced. What it is I may guess; but I must say nothing. Please td remember, gentlemen, that I have voluntarily accepted the position of recipient of a partial confidence. I have respected that; and I must ask any of my friends to do the same.'

He spoke with great dignity, and he grew, moment by moment, in the respect and esteem of both Doctor Winchester and myself. We understood that he had not done speaking; so we waited in silence till he continued:

'I have spoken this much, although 1 know well that even such a hint as either of you might gather from my words might jeopardize the success of his work. But I am convinced that you both wish to help him — and his daughter,' he said this looking me fairly between the eyes, 'to the best of your power, honestly and unselfishly. He is so stricken down, and the manner of it is so mysterious that I cannot but think that it is in some way a result of his own work That he calculated on some set-back is manifest to us all. God knows! I am willing to do what I can, and to use any knowledge I have in his behalf. I arrived in England full of exultation at the thought that I had fulfilled the mission with which he had trusted me. I had got what he said were the last objects of his search; and I felt assured that he would now be able to begin the experiment of which he had often hinted to me. It is too dreadful that at just such a time such a calamity should have fallen on him. Doctor Winchester, you are a physician; and, if your face does not belie you, you are a clever and a bold one. Is there no way which you can devise to wake this man from his unnatural stupor?'

There was a pause; then the answer came slowly and deliberately:

'There is no ordinary remedy that I know of. There might possible be some extraordinary one. But there would be no use in trying to find it, except on one condition.'

'And that?'

'Knowledge! I am completely ignorant of Egyptian matters, language, writing, history, secrets, medicines, poisons, occult powers — all that go to make up the mystery of that mysterious land. This disease, or condition, or whatever it may be called, from which Mr. Trelawny is suffering, is in some way connected with Egypt. I have had a suspicion of this from the first; and later it grew into a certainty, though without proof. What you have said tonight confirms my conjecture, and makes me believe that a proof is to be had. I do not think that you quite know all that has gone on in this house since the night of the attack — of the finding of Mr. Trelawny's body. Now I propose that we confide in you. If Mr. Ross agrees, I shall ask him to tell you. He is more skilled than I am in putting facts before other people. He can speak by his brief; and in this case he has the best of all brief, the experience of his own eyes and ears, and the evidence that he has himself taken on the spot from participators in, or spectators, of, what has happened. When you know all, you will, I hope, be in a position to judge as to whether you can best help Mr. Trelawny; and further his secret wishes, by your silence or your speech.'

I nodded approval. Mr. Corbeck jumped up, and in his impulsive way held out a hand to each.

'Done!' he said. 'I acknowledge the honour of your confidence; and on my part I pledge myself that if I find my duty to Mr. Trelawny's wishes will, in his own interest, allow my lips to open on his affairs, I shall speak so freely as I may.'

Accordingly I began, and told him, as exactly as I could, everything that had happened from the moment of my waking at the knocking on the door in Jermyn Street. The only reservations I made were as to my own feeling toward Miss Trelawny and the matters of small import to the main subject which followed it; and my conversations with Sergeant Daw, which were in themselves private, and which would have demanded discretionary silence in any case.

As I spoke, Mr. Corbeck followed with breathless interest. Sometimes he would stand up and pace about the room in uncontrollable excitement; and then recover himself suddenly, and sit down again. Sometimes he would be able to speak, but would, with an effort, restrain himself. I think the narration helped me to make up my own mind: for even as I talked, things seemed to appear in a clearer light. Things big and little, in relation of their importance to the case, fell into proper perspective. The story up to date became coherent, except as to its cause, which seemed a greater mystery than ever. This is the merit of entire, or collected, narrative. Isolated facts, doubts, suspicions, conjectures, give way to a homogeneity which is convincing.

That Mr. Corbeck was convinced was evident. He did not go through any process of explanation or limitation, but spoke right out at once to the point, and fearlessly, like a man:

‘That settles me! There is in activity some Force that needs special care. If we all go on working in the dark we shall get in one another’s way, and by hampering each other, undo the good that any or each of us, working in different directions, might do. It seems to me that the first thing we have to accomplish is to get Mr. Trelawny waked out of that unnatural sleep. That he can be waked is apparent from the way the Nurse has recovered; though what additional harm may have been done to him in the time he has been lying in that room I suppose no one can tell. We must chance that, however. He has lain there, and whatever the effect might be, it is there now; and we have, and shall have, to deal with it as a fact. A day more or less won’t hurt in the long-run. It is late now; and we shall probably have tomorrow a task before us that will require our energies fresh. You, Doctor, will want to get to your sleep; for I suppose you have other work as well as this to do tomorrow. As for you, Mr. Ross, I understand that you are to have a spell of watching in the sick-room tonight I shall get you a book which will help to pass the time for you. I shall go look for it in the library. I know where it was when I was here last; and I don't suppose Mr. Trelawny has used it since. He knew long ago all that was in it which was or might be of interest to him. But it will be necessary, or at least helpful, to understand other things which I shall tell you later. You will be able to tell Doctor Winchester all that would aid him. For I take it that our work will branch out pretty soon. We shall each have our own end to hold up; and it will take each of us all our time and understanding to get through his own tasks. It will not be necessary for you to read the whole book. All that will interest you — with regard to our matter I mean of course, for the whole book is interesting as a record of travel in a country then quite unknown — is the preface, and two or three chapters which I shall mark for you.'

He shook hands warmly with Doctor Winchester who had stood up to go.

Whilst he was away I sat lonely, thinking. As I thought, the world around me seemed to be illimitably great. The only little spot in which I was interested seemed like a tiny speck in the midst of a wilderness. Without and around it were darkness and unknown danger, pressing in from every side. And the central figure in our little oasis was one of sweetness and beauty. A figure one could love; could work for; could the for...!

Mr. Corbeck came back in a very short time with the book; he had found it at once in the spot where he had seen it three years before. Having placed in it several slips of paper, marking the places where I was to read, he put it into my hands saying:

‘That is what started Mr. Trelawny; what started me when I read it; and which will, I have no doubt, be to you an interesting beginning to a special study — whatever the end may be. If, indeed, any of us here may ever see the end.’

At the door he paused and said:

‘I want to take back one thing. That Detective is a good fellow. What you have told me of him puts him in a new light. The best proof of it is that I can go quietly to sleep tonight, and leave the lamps in his care!’

When he had gone I took the book with me, put on my respirator, and went to my spell of duty in the sick-room!

Chapter X. The Valley of the Sorcerer

I PLACED THE BOOK ON THE LITTLE TABLE ON WHICH the shaded lamp rested, and moved the screen to one side. Thus I could have the light on my book; and by looking up, see the bed, and the Nurse, and the door. I cannot say that the conditions were enjoyable, or calculated to allow of that absorption in the subject which is advisable for effective study. However, I composed myself to the work as well as I could. The book was one which, on the very face of it, required special attention. It was a folio in Dutch, printed in Amsterdam in 1650. Someone had made a literal translation, writing generally the English word under the Dutch, so that the grammatical differences between the two tongues made even the reading of the translation a difficult matter. One had to dodge backward and forward among the words. This was in addition to the difficulty of deciphering a strange handwriting of two hundred years ago. I found, however, that after a short time I got into the habit of following in conventional English the Dutch construction; and, as I became more familiar with the writing, my task became easier.

At first the circumstances of the room, and the fear lest Miss Trelawny should return unexpectedly and find me reading the book, disturbed me somewhat. For we had arranged amongst us, before Doctor Winchester had gone home, that she was not to be brought into the range of the coming investigation. We considered that there might be some shock to a woman's mind in matters of apparent mystery; and further, that she, being Mr. Trelawny's daughter, might be placed in a difficult position with him afterwards if she took part in, or even had a personal knowledge of, the disregarding of his expressed wishes. But when I remembered that she did not come on nursing duty till two o’clock, the fear of interruption passed away. I had still nearly three hours before me. Nurse Kennedy sat in her chair by the bedside, patient and alert. A clock ticked on the landing; other clocks in the house ticked; the life of the city without manifested itself in the distant hum, now and again swelling into a roar as a breeze floating westward took the concourse of sounds with it. But still the dominant idea was of silence. The light on my book, and the soothing fringe of green silk round the shade intensified, whenever I looked up, the gloom of the sick-room. With every line I read, this seemed to grow deeper and deeper; so that when my eyes came back to the page the light seemed to dazzle me. I stuck to my work, however, and presently began to get sufficiently into the subject to become interested in it.

The book was by one Nicholas van Huyn of Hoorn. In the preface he told how, attracted by the work of John Greaves of Merton College, *Pyramidographia,* he himself visited Egypt, where he became so interested in its wonders that he devoted some years of his life to visiting strange places, and exploring the ruins of many temples and tombs. He had come across many variants of the story of the building of the Pyramids as told by the Arabian historian, Ibn Abd Alhokin, some of which he set down. These I did not stop to read, but went on to the marked pages.

As soon as I began to read these, however, there grew on me some sense of a disturbing influence. Once or twice I looked to see if the Nurse had moved, for there was a feeling as though someone were near me. Nurse Kennedy sat in her place, as steady and alert as ever; and I came back to my book again.

The narrative went on to tell how, after passing for several days through the mountains to the east of Aswan, the explorer came to a certain place. Here I give his own words, simply putting the translation into modern English.

'Toward evening we came to the entrance of a narrow, deep valley, running east to west. I wished to proceed through this; for the sun, now nearly down on the horizon, showed a wide opening beyond the narrowing of the cliffs. But the fellaheen absolutely refused to enter the valley at such a time, alleging that they might be caught by the night before they could emerge from the other end. At first they would give no reason for their fear. They had hitherto gone anywhere I wished, and at any time, without demur. On being pressed, however, they said that the place was the Valley of the Sorcerer, where none might come in the night. On being asked to tell of the Sorcerer, they refused, saying that there was no name, and that they knew nothing. On the next morning, however, when the sun was up and shining down the valley, their fears had somewhat passed away. Then they told me that a great Sorcerer in ancient days— "millions of millions of years" was the term they used — a King or a Queen, they could not say which, was buried there. They could not give the name, persisting to the last that there was no name; and that anyone who should name it would waste away in life so that at death nothing of him would remain to be raised again in the Other World. In passing through the valley they kept together in a cluster, hurrying on in front of me. None dared to remain behind. They gave, as their reason for so proceeding, that the arms of the Sorcerer were long, and that it was dangerous to be the last. The which was of little comfort to me who of this necessity took that honourable post. In the narrowest part of the valley, on the south side, was a great cliff of rock, rising sheer, of smooth and even surface. Hereon were graven certain cabalistic signs, and many figures of men and animals, fishes, reptiles, and birds; suns and stars; and many quaint symbols. Some of these latter were disjointed limbs and features, such as arms and legs, fingers, eyes, noses, ears, and lips. Mysterious symbols which will puzzle the Recording Angel to interpret at the Judgment Day. The cliff faced exactly north. There was something about it so strange, and so different from the other carved rocks which I had visited, that I called a halt and spent the day in examining the rock front as well as I could with my telescope. The Egyptians of my company were terribly afraid, and used every kind of persuasion to induce me to pass on. I stayed till late in the afternoon, by which time I had failed to make out aright the entry of any tomb, for I suspected that such was the purpose of the sculpture of the rock By this time the men were rebellious; and I had to leave the valley if I did not wish my whole retinue to desert. But I secretly made up my mind to discover the tomb, and explore it. To this end I went further into the mountains, where I met with an Arab sheik who was willing to take service with me. The Arabs were not bound by the same superstitious fears as the Egyptians; Sheik Abu Soma and his following were willing to take a part in the explorations.

‘When I returned to the valley with these Bedouins, I made effort to climb the face of the rock, but failed, it being of one impenetrable smoothness. The stone, generally flat and smooth by nature, had been chiselled to completeness. That there had been projecting steps was manifest, for there remained, untouched by the wondrous climate of that strange land, the marks of saw and chisel and mallet where the steps had been cut or broken away.

‘Being thus baffled of winning the tomb from below, and being unprovided with ladders to scale, I found a way by much circuitous journeying to the top of the cliff. Thence I caused myself to be lowered by ropes, till I had investigated that portion of the rock face wherein I expected to find the opening. I found that there was an entrance, closed however by a great stone slab. This was cut in the rock more than a hundred feet up, being two-thirds the height of the cliff. The hieroglyphic and cabalistic symbols cut in the rock were so managed as to disguise it. The cutting was deep, and was continued through the rock and the portals of the doorway, and through the great slab which formed the door itself. This was fixed in place with such incredible exactness that no stone chisel or cutting implement which I had with me could find a lodgement in the interstices. I used much force, however; and by many heavy strokes won a way into the tomb, for such I found it to be. The stone door having fallen into the entrance I passed over it into the tomb, noting as I went a long iron chain which hung coiled on a bracket close to the doorway.

'The tomb I found to be complete, after the manner of the finest Egyptian tombs, with chamber and shaft leading down to the corridor, ending in the Mummy Pit. It had the table of pictures, which seems some kind of record — whose meaning is now for ever lost — graven in a wondrous colour on a wondrous stone.

'All the walls of the chamber and the passage were carved with strange writings in the uncanny, form mentioned. The huge stone coffin or sarcophagus in the deep pit was marvellously graven throughout with signs. The Arab chief and two others who ventured into the tomb with me, and who were evidently used to such grim explorations, managed to take the cover from the sarcophagus without breaking it. At which they wondered; for such good fortune, they said, did not usually attend such efforts. Indeed they seemed not over careful; and did handle the various furniture of the tomb with such little concern that, only for its great strength and thickness, even the coffin itself might have been injured. Which gave me much concern, for it was very beautifully wrought of rare stone, such as I had no knowledge of. Much I grieved that it were not possible to carry it away. But time and desert journeyings forbade such; I could only take with me such small matters as could be carried on the person.

'Within the sarcophagus was a body, manifestly of a woman, swathed with many wrappings of linen, as is usual with all mummies. From certain embroiderings thereon, I gathered that she was of high rank. Across the breast was one hand, unwrapped. In the mummies which I had seen, the arms and hands are within the wrappings, and certain adornments of wood, shaped and painted to resemble arms and hands, lie outside the enwrapped body.

'But this hand was strange to see, for it was the real hand of her who lay enwrapped there; the arm projecting from the cerements being of flesh, seemingly made as Eke marble in the process of embalming. Arm and hand were of dusky white, being of the hue of ivory that hath lain long in air. The skin and the nails were complete and whole, as though the body had been placed for burial overnight. I touched the hand and moved it, the arm being something flexible as a live arm; though stiff with long disuse, as are the arms of those fakirs which I have seen in the Indies. There was, too, an added wonder that on this ancient hand were no less than seven fingers, the same all being fine and long, and of great beauty. Sooth to say, it made me shudder and my flesh creep to touch that hand that had lain there undisturbed for so many thousands of years, and yet was like unto living flesh. Underneath the hand, as though guarded by it, lay a huge jewel of ruby; a great stone of wondrous bigness, for the ruby is in the main a small jewel. This one was of wondrous colour, being as of fine blood whereon the light shineth. But its wonder lay not in its size or colour, though these were, as I have said, of priceless rarity; but in that the light of it shone from seven stars, each of seven points, as clearly as though the stars were in reality there imprisoned. When the hand was lifted, the sight of that wondrous stone lying there struck me with a shock almost to momentary paralysis. I stood gazing on it, as did those with me, as though it were that fabled head of the Gorgon Medusa with the snakes in her hair, whose sight struck into stone those who beheld. So strong was the feeling that I wanted to hurry away from the place. So, too, those with me; therefore, taking this rare jewel, together with certain amulets of strangeness and richness being wrought of jewel-stones, I made haste to depart. I would have remained longer, and made further research in the wrappings of the mummy, but that I feared so to do. For it came to me all at once that I was in a desert place, with strange men who were with me because they were not over-scrupulous. That we were in a lone cavern of the dead, a hundred feet above the ground, where none could find me were ill done to me, nor would any ever seek. But in secret I determined that I would come again, though with more secure following. Moreover, was I tempted to seek further, as in examining the wrappings I saw many things of strange import in that wondrous tomb; including a casket of eccentric shape made of some strange stone, which methought might have contained other jewels, inasmuch as it had secure lodgement in the great sarcophagus itself. There was in the tomb also another coffer which, though of rare proportion and adornment, was more simply shaped. It was of ironstone of great thickness; but the cover was lightly cemented down with what seemed gum and Paris plaster, as though to ensure that no air could penetrate. The Arabs with me so insisted in its opening, thinking that from its thickness much treasure was stored therein, that I consented thereto. But their hope was a false one, as it proved. Within, closely packed, stood four jars finely wrought and carved with various adornments. Of these one was the head of a man, another of a dog, another of a jackal, and another of a hawk. I had before known that such burial urns as these were used to contain the entrails and other Organs of the mummied dead; but on opening these, for the fastening of wax, though complete, was thin, and yielded easily, we found that they held but oil. The Bedouins, spilling most of the oil in the process, groped with their hands in the jars lest treasure should have been there concealed. But their searching was of no avail; no treasure was there. I was warned of my danger by seeing in the eyes of the Arabs certain covetous glances. Whereon, in order to hasten their departure, I wrought upon those fears of superstition which even in these callous men were apparent. The chief of the Bedouins ascended, from the Pit to give the signal to those above to raise us; and I, not caring to remain with the men whom I mistrusted, followed him immediately. The others did nor come at once; from which I feared that they were rifling the tomb afresh on their own account. I refrained to speak of it, however, lest worse should befall. At last they came. One of them, who ascended first, in landing at the top of the cliff lost his foothold and fell below. He was instantly killed. The other followed, but in safety. The chief came next, and I came last. Before coming away I pulled into its place again, as well as I could, the slab of stone that covered the entrance to the tomb. I wished, if possible, to preserve it for my own examination should I come again.

‘When we all stood on the hill above the cliff, the burning sun that was bright and full of glory was good to see after the darkness and strange mystery of the tomb. Even was I glad that the poor Arab who fell down the cliff and lay dead below, lay in the sunlight and not in that gloomy cavern. I would fain have gone with my companions to seek him and give him sepulture of some kind; but the Sheik made light of it, and sent two of his men to see to it whilst we went on our way.

‘That night as we camped, one of the men only returned, saying that a lion of the desert had killed his companion after they had buried the dead man in a deep sand without the valley, and had covered the spot where he lay with many great rocks, so that jackals or other preying beasts might not dig him up again as is their wont.

‘Later, in the light of the fire round which the men sat or lay, I saw him exhibit to his fellows something white which they seemed to regard with special awe and reverence. So I drew near silently, and saw that it was none other than the white hand of the mummy which had lain protecting the Jewel in the great sarcophagus. I heard the Bedouin tell how he had found it on the body of him who had fallen from the cliff; There was no mistaking it, for there were the seven fingers which I had noted before. This man must have wrenched it off the dead body whilst his chief and I were otherwise engaged: and from the awe of the others I doubted not that he had hoped to use it as an Amulet, or charm. Whereas if powers it had, they were not for him who had taken it from the dead; since his death followed hard upon his theft. Already his Amulet had had an awesome baptism; for the wrist of the dead hand was stained with red as though it had been dipped in recent blood.

‘That night I was in certain fear lest there should be some violence done to me; for if the poor dead hand was so valued as a charm, what must be the worth in such wise of the rare Jewel which it had guarded. Though only the chief knew of it, my doubt was perhaps even greater; for he could so order matters as to have me at his mercy when he would. I guarded myself, therefore, with wakefulness so well as I could, determined that at my earliest opportunity I should leave this party, and complete my journeying home. First to the Nile bank, and then down its” course by boat to Alexandria: with other guides who knew not what strange matters I had with me.

‘At last there came over me a disposition of sleep, so potent that I felt it would be resistless. Fearing attack, or that being searched in my sleep the Bedouin might find the Star Jewel which he had seen me place with others in my dress, I took it out unobserved and held it in my hand. It seemed to give back the light of the flickering fire and the light of the stars — for there was no moon — with equal fidelity; and I could note that on its reverse it was graven deeply with certain signs such as I had seen in the tomb. As I sank into the unconsciousness of sleep, the graven Star Jewel was hidden in the hollow of my clenched hand.

‘I waked out of sleep with the light of the morning sun on my face. I sat up and looked around me. The fire was out, and the camp was desolate; save for one figure which lay prone close to me. It was that of the Arab chief, who lay on his back, dead. His face was almost black; and his eyes were open, and staring horribly up at the sky, as though he saw there some dreadful vision. He had evidently been strangled; for on looking, I found on his throat the red marks where fingers had pressed. There seemed so many of these marks that I counted them. There were seven; and all parallel, except the thumb mark, as though made with one hand. This thrilled me as I thought of the mummy hand with the seven fingers. Seven there, in the open desert, it seemed as if there could be enchantments!

‘In my surprise, as I bent over him, I opened my right hand, which up to now I had held shut with the feeling, instinctive even in sleep, of keeping safe that which it held. As I did so, the Star Jewel held there fell out and struck the dead man on the mouth. *Mirabile dictu* there came forth at once from the dead mouth a great gush of blood, in which the red jewel was for the moment lost. I turned the dead man over to look for it, and found that he lay with his right hand bent under him as though he had fallen on it; and in it he held a great knife, keen of point and edge, such as Arabs carry at the belt. It may have been that he was about to murder me when vengeance came on him, whether from man or God, or the Gods of Old, I know not. Suffice it, that when I found my Ruby Jewel, which shone up as a living star from the mess of blood wherein it lay, I paused not, but fled from the place. I journeyed on alone through the hot desert; till, by God’s grace, I came upon an Arab tribe camping by a well, who gave me salt. With them I rested till they had set me on my way.

‘I know not what became of the mummy hand, or of those who had it. What strife, or suspicion, or disaster, or greed went with it I know not; but some such cause there must have been, since those who had it fled with it. It doubtless is used as a charm of potence by some desert tribe.

‘At the earliest opportunity I made examination of the Star Ruby as I wished to try to understand what was graven on it. The symbols — whose meaning, however, I could not understand — were as follows...’

Twice, whilst I had been reading this engrossing narrative, I had thought that I had seen across the page streaks of shade, which the weirdness of the subject had made to seem like the shadow of a hand.

On the first of these occasions I found that the illusion came from the fringe of green silk around the lamp; but on the second I had looked up, and my eyes had lit on the mummy hand across the room on which the starlight was falling under the edge of the blind. It was of little wonder that I had connected it with such a narrative; for if my eyes told me truly, here, in this room with me, was the very hand of which the traveller Van Huyn had written. I looked over at the bed; and it comforted me to think that the Nurse still sat there, calm and wakeful. At such a time, with such surroundings, during such a narrative, it was well to have assurance of the presence of some living person.

I sat looking at the book on the table before me; and so many strange thoughts crowded on me that my mind began to whirl. It was almost as if the light on the white fingers in front of me was beginning to have some hypnotic effect. All at once, all thoughts seemed to stop; and for an instant the world and time stood still.

There lay a real hand across the book! What was there to so overcome me, as was the case? I knew the Band that I saw on the book — and loved it. Margaret Trelawny's hand was a joy to me to see — to touch; and yet at that moment, coming after other marvelous things, it had a strangely moving effect on me. It was but momentary, however, and had passed even before her voice had reached me.

'What disturbs you? What are you staring at the book for? I thought for an instant that you must have been overcome again!' I jumped up.

'I was reading,' I said, 'an old book from the library.' As I spoke I closed it and put it under my arm. 'I shall now put it back, as I understand that your Father wishes all things, especially books, kept in their proper places.' My words were intentionally misleading; for I did not wish her to know what I was reading, and thought it best not to wake her curiosity by leaving the book about. I went away, but not to the library; I left the book in my room where I could get it when I had had my sleep in the day. When I returned Nurse Kennedy was ready to go to bed; so Miss Trelawny watched with me in the room. I did not want any book whilst she was present. We sat close together and talked in a whisper whilst the moments flew by. It was with surprise that I noted the edge of the curtains changing from grey to yellow light. What we talked of had nothing to do with the sick man, except in so far that all which concerned his daughter must ultimately concern him. But it had nothing to say to Egypt, or mummies, or the dead, or caves, or Bedouin chiefs. I could well take note in the growing light that Margaret's hand had not seven fingers, but five; for it lay in mine.

When Doctor Winchester arrived in the morning and had made his visit to his patient, he came to see me as I sat in the dining-room having a little meal — breakfast or supper, I hardly knew which it was — before I went to lie down. Mr.-Corbeck came in at the same time; and we resumed our conversation where we had left it the night before. I told Mr. Corbeck that I had read the chapter about the finding of the tomb, and that I thought Doctor Winchester should read it, too. The latter said that, if he might, he would take it with him; he had that morning to make a railway journey to Ipswich, and would read it on the train. He said he would bring it back with him when he came again in the evening. I went up to. my room to bring it down; but I could not find it anywhere. I had a distinct recollection of having left it on the little table beside my bed, when I had come up after Miss Trelawny's going on duty into the sick-room. It was very strange; for the book was not of a kind that any of the servants would be likely to take. I had to come back and explain to the others that I could not find it. When Doctor Winchester had gone, Mr. Corbeck, who seemed to know the Dutchman's work by heart, talked the whole matter over with me. I told him that I was interrupted by a change- of nurses, just as I had come to the description of the ring. He smiled as he said:

'So far as that is concerned, you need not be disappointed. Not in Van Huyn's time, nor for nearly two centuries later, could the meaning of that engraving have been understood. It was only when the work was taken up and followed by Young and Champollion, by Birch and Lepsius and Rosellini and Salvolini, by Mariette Bey and by Wallis Budge and Flinders Petrie and the former scholars of their times that great results ensued, and that the true meaning of hieroglyphic was known.

'Later, I shall explain to you, if Mr. Trelawny does not explain it himself, or if he does not forbid me to, what it means in that particular place. I think it will be better for you to know what followed Van Huyn's narrative; for with the description of the stone, and the account pf his bringing it to Holland at the termination of his travels, the episode ends. Ends so far as his book is concerned. The chief tiling about the book is that it set others thinking — and acting. Amongst them were Mr. Trelawny and myself. Mr. Trelawny is a good linguist of the Orient, but he does not know Northern tongues. As for me I have a faculty for learning languages; and when I was pursuing my studies in Leyden I learned Dutch so that I might more easily make references in the library there. Thus-it was, that at the very time when Mr. Trelawny, who, in making his great collection of works on Egypt, had, through a booksellers' catalogue, acquired this volume with the manuscript translation, was studying it, I was reading another copy, in the original Dutch, in Leyden. We were both struck by the description of the lonely tomb in the rock; cut so high up as to be inaccessible to ordinary seekers: with all means of reaching it carefully obliterated; and yet with such an elaborate ornamentation of the smoothed surface of the cliff as Van Huyn has described.

It also struck us both as an odd thing — for in the years between Van Huyn's time and our own the general knowledge of Egyptian curios and records has increased marvellously — that in the case of such a tomb, made in such a place, and which must have cost an immense sum of money, there was no seeming record or effigy to point out who lay within. Moreover, the very name of the place, "the Valley of the Sorcerer", had, in a prosaic age, attractions of its own. When we met, which we did through his seeking the assistance of other Egyptologists in his work, we talked over this as we did over many other things; and we determined to make search for the mysterious valley.

Whilst we were waiting to start on the travel, for many things were required which Mr. Trelawny undertook to see to himself, I went to Holland to try if I could by any traces verify Van Huyn's narrative. I went straight to Hoorn, and set patiently to work to find the house of the traveller and his descendants, if any. I need not trouble you with details of my seeking — and finding. Hoorn is a place that has not changed much since Van Huyn's time, except that it has lost the place which it held amongst commercial cities. Its externals are such as they had been then; in such a sleepy old place a century or two does not count for much. I found the house, and discovered that none of the descendants were alive. I searched records; but only to one end — death and extinction. Then I set me to work to find what had become of his treasures; for that such a traveller must have had great treasures was apparent. I traced a good many to museums in Leyden, Utrecht, and Amsterdam; and some few to the private houses of rich collectors. At last, in the shop of an old watchmaker and jeweller at Hoorn, I found what he considered his chiefest treasure: a great ruby, carven like a scarab, with seven stars, and engraven with hieroglyphics. The old man did not know hieroglyphic character, and in his old-world, sleepy life, the philological discoveries of recent years had not reached him. He did not know anything of Van Huyn, except that such a person had been, and that his name was, during two centuries, venerated in the town as a great traveller. He valued the jewel as only a rare stone, spoiled in part by the cutting; and though he was at first loth to part with such a unique gem, he became amenable ultimately to commercial reason. I had a full purse, since I bought for Mr. Trelawny, who is, as I suppose you know, immensely wealthy. I was shortly on my way back to London, with the Star Ruby safe in my pocket-book; and in my heart a joy and exultation which knew no bounds.

'For here we were with proof of Van Huyn's wonderful story. The jewel was put in security in Mr. Trelawny's great safe; and we started out on our journey of exploration in full hope.

'Mr. Trelawny was, at the last, loth to leave his young wife whom he dearly loved; but she, who loved him equally, knew his longing to prosecute the search. So keeping to herself, as all good women do, all her anxieties — which in her case were special — she bade him follow out his bent.'

Chapter XI. A Queen's Tomb

'MR TRELAWNY'S HOPE WAS AT LEAST AS GREAT AS MY OWN. He is not so volatile a man as I am, prone to ups and downs of hope and despair; but he has a fixed purpose which crystallizes hope into belief. At times I had feared that there might have been two such stones, or that the adventures of Van Huyn were traveller's fictions, based on some ordinary acquisition' of the curio in Alexandria or Cairo, or London or Amsterdam. But Mr. Trelawny never faltered in his belief. We had many things to distract our minds from belief or disbelief. This was soon after Arabia, Pasha, and Egypt was no safe place for travellers, .especially if they were English. But Mr. Trelawny is a fearless man; and I almost come to think at times that I am not a coward myself. We got together a band of Arabs whom one or other of us had known in former trips to the desert, and whom we could trust; that is, we did not distrust them as much as others. We were numerous enough to protect ourselves from chance marauding bands, and we took with us large impedimenta. We had secured the consent and passive co-operation of the officials still friendly to Britain; in the acquiring of which consent I need hardly say that Mr. Trelawny's riches were of chief importance. We found our way in Dhahabiyehs to Aswan; whence, having got some Arabs from the Sheik and having given our usual baksheesh, we set out on our journey through the desert.

'Well, after much wandering and trying every winding in the interminable jumble of hills, we came at last at nightfall on just such a valley as Van Huyn had described. A valley with high, steep cliffs; narrowing in the centre, and widening out to the eastern and western ends. At daylight we were opposite the cliff and could easily note the opening high up in the rock, and the hieroglyphic figures which were evidently intended originally to conceal it.

‘But the signs which had baffled Van Huyn and those of his time — and later, were no secrets to us. The host of scholars who have given their brains and their lives to this work, had wrested open the mysterious prison-house of Egyptian language. On the hewn face of the rocky cliff we, who had learned the secrets, could read what the Theban priesthood had had there inscribed nearly fifty centuries before.

‘For dial the external inscription was the work of the priesthood — and a hostile priesthood at that — there could be no living doubt. The inscription on the rock, written in hieroglyphic, ran thus:

‘ “Hither the Gods come not at any summons. The ‘Nameless One’ has insulted them and is for ever alone. Go not nigh, lest their vengeance wither you away!”

“The warning must have been a terribly potent one at the time it was written and for thousands of years afterwards; even when the language in which it was given had become a dead mystery to the people of the land. The tradition of such a terror lasts longer than its cause. Even in the symbols used there was an added significance of alliteration. “For ever” is given in the hieroglyphics as “millions of years”. This symbol was repeated nine times, in three groups of three; and after each group a symbol of the Upper World, the Under World, and the Sky. So that for this Lonely One there could be, through the vengeance of all the Gods, resurrection in neither the World of Sunlight, in the World of the Dead, or for the soul in the region of the Gods.

‘Neither Mr. Trelawny nor I dared to tell any of our people what the writing meant. For though they did not believe in the religion whence the curse came, or in the Gods whose vengeance was threatened; yet they were so superstitious that they would probably, had they known of it, have thrown up the whole task and run away.

‘Their ignorance, however, and our discretion preserved us. We made an encampment close at hand; but behind a jutting rock a little further along the valley, so that they might not have the inscription always before them. For even that traditional name of the place: “The Valley of the Sorcerer”, had a fear for them: and for us through them. With the timber which we had brought, we made a ladder up the face of the rock. We hung a pulley on a beam fixed to project from the top of the cuff. We found the great slab of rock, which formed the door, placed clumsily in its place and secured by a few stones. Its own weight kept it in safe position. In order to enter, we had to push it in; and we passed over it. We found the great coil of chain which Van Huyn had described fastened into the rock. There were, however, abundant evidences amid the wreckage of the great stone door, which had revolved on iron hinges at top and bottom, that ample provision had been originally made for closing and fastening it from within.

‘Mr. Trelawny and I went alone into the tomb. We had brought plenty of lights with us: and we fixed them as we went along. We wished to get a complete survey at first, and then make examination of all in detail. As we went on, we were filled with ever-increasing wonder and delight. The tomb was one of the most magnificent and beautiful which either of us had ever seen. From the elaborate nature of the sculpture and paintings, and the perfection of the workmanship, it was evident that the tomb was prepared during the lifetime of her for whose resting-place it was intended. The drawing of the hieroglyphic pictures was fine, and the colouring superb; and in that high cavern, far away from even the damp of the Nile-flood, all was as fresh as when the artists had laid down their palettes. There was one thing which we could not avoid seeing. That although the cutting on the outside rock was the work of the priesthood, the smoothing of the cliff face was probably a part of the tomb-builder’s original design. The symbolism of the painting and cutting within all gave the same idea. The outer cavern, partly natural and partly hewn, was regarded architecturally as only an ante-chamber. At the end of it, so that it would face the east, was a pillared portico, hewn out of the solid rock. The pillars were massive and were seven-sided, a thing which we had not come across in any other tomb. Sculptured on the architrave was the Boat of the Moon, containing Hathor, cow-headed and bearing the disc and plumes, and the dog-headed Hapi, the God of the North. It was steered by Harpocrotes towards the north, represented by the Pole Star surrounded by Draco and Ursa Major. In the latter the stars that form what we call the “Plough” were cut larger than any of the other stars; and were filled with gold so mat, in the light of torches, they seemed to flame with a special significance. Passing within the portico, we found two of the architectural features of a rock tomb, the Chamber, or Chapel, and the Pit, all complete as Van Huyn had noticed, though in his day the names given to these parts by the Egyptians of old were unknown.

‘The Stele, or record, which had its place low down on the western wall, was so remarkable that we examined it minutely, even before going on our way to find the mummy which was the object of our search. This Stele was a great slab of lapis lazuli, cut all over with hieroglyphic figures of small size and of much beauty. The cutting was filled in with some cement of exceeding fineness, and of the colour of pure vermilion. The inscription began:

‘ “Tera, Queen of the Egypts, daughter of Antef. Monarch of the

North and the South.” “Daughter of the Sun”, “Queen of the Diadems.”

‘It then set out, in full record, the history of her life and reign.

‘The signs of sovereignty were given with a truly feminine profusion of adornment. The united Crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt were, in especial, cut with exquisite precision. It was new to us both to find the Hejet and the Desher — the White and the Red crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt — on the Stele of a queen; for it was a rule, without exception in the records, that in ancient Egypt their crown was worn only by a king; though they are to be found on goddesses-’ Later on we found an explanation, of which I shall say more presently.

‘Such an inscription was in itself a matter so startling as to arrest attention from anyone anywhere at any time; but you can have no conception of the effect which it had upon us. Though our eyes were not the first which had seen it, they were the first which could see it with understanding since first die’ slab of rock was fixed in the cliff opening nearly five thousand years before. To us was given to read this message from the dead. This message of one who had warred against the Gods of Old, and claimed to have controlled them at a time when the hierarchy professed to be the only means of exciting their fears or gaining their good will.

‘The walls of the upper chamber of the Pit and the sarcophagus Chamber were profusely inscribed; all the inscriptions, except that on the Stele, being coloured with bluish-green pigment. The effect when seen sideways as the eye caught the green facets, was that of an old, discoloured Indian turquoise.

‘We descended the *Pit* by the aid of the tackle we had brought with us. Trelawny went first. It was -a deep pit, more than seventy feet; but it had never been filled up. The passage at the bottom sloped up to the sarcophagus Chamber, and was longer than is usually found. It had not been walled up.

‘Within, we found a great sarcophagus of yellow stone. But that I need not describe; you have seen it in Mr. Trelawny’s chamber. The cover of it lay on the ground; it had not been cemented, and was just as Van Huyn had described it. Needless to say, we were excited as we looked within. There must, however, be one sense of disappointment. I could not help feeling how different must have been the sight which met the Dutch traveller’s eyes when he looked within and found that white hand lying lifelike above the shrouding mummy cloths. It is true that a part of the arm was there, white and ivory like.

But there was a thrill to us which came not to Van Huyn!.

‘The end of the wrist was covered with dried blood! It was as though the body had bled after death! The jagged ends of the broken wrist were rough with the clotted blood; through this the white bone, sticking out, looked like the matrix of opal. The blood had streamed down and stained the brown wrappings as with rust. Here, then, was full confirmation of the narrative. With such evidence of the narrator’s truth before us, we could not doubt the other matters which he had told, such as the blood on the mummy hand, or marks of the seven ringers on the throat of the strangled Sheik.

‘I shall not trouble you with details of all we saw, or how we learned all we knew. Part of it was from knowledge common to scholars; part we read on the Stele in the tomb, and in the sculptures and .hieroglyphic paintings on the walls.

‘Queen Tera was of the Eleventh, or Theban, Dynasty of Egyptian Kings which held sway between twenty-ninth and twenty-fifth centuries before Christ. She succeeded as the only child of her father, Antef. She must have been a girl of extraordinary character as well as ability, for she was but a young girl when her father died. Her youth and sex encouraged the ambitious priesthood, which had then achieved immense power. By their wealth and numbers and learning they dominated all Egypt, more especially the Upper portion. They were then secretly ready to make an effort for the achievement of their bold and long-considered design, that of transferring the governing power from a Kingship to a Hierarchy. But King Antef had suspected some such movement, and had taken the precaution of securing to his daughter the allegiance of the army. He had also had her taught statecraft, and had even made her learned in the lore, of the very priests themselves. He had used those of one cult against the other; each being hopeful of some present gain on its own part by the influence of the King, or of some ultimate gain from its own influence over his daughter. Thus, the Princess had been brought up amongst scribes, and was herself no mean artist. Many of these things were told on the walls in picture or in hieroglyphic writing of great beauty; and we came to the conclusion that not a few of them had been done by the Princess herself. It was not without cause that she was inscribed on the Stele as “Protector of the Arts”.

‘But the King had gone to further lengths, and had had his daughter taught magic, by which she had power over Sleep and Will. This was real magic— “black” magic; not the magic of the temples, which, I may explain, was of the harmless or “white” order, and was intended to impress rather than to effect. She had been an apt pupil; and had gone further than her teachers. Her power and her resources had given her great opportunities, of which she had availed herself to the full. She had won secrets from nature in strange ways; and had even gone to the length of going down into the tomb herself, having been swathed and coffined and left as dead for a whole month. The priests had tried to make out that the real Princess Tera had died in the experiment, and that another girl had been substituted; but she had conclusively proved their error. All this was told in pictures of great merit. It was probably in her time that the impulse was given in the restoring the artistic greatness of the Fourth Dynasty which had found its perfection in the days of Chufu.

‘In the Chamber of the sarcophagus were pictures and writings to show that she had achieved victory over Sleep. Indeed, there was everywhere a symbolism, wonderful even in a land and an age of symbolism. Prominence was given to the fact that she, though a Queen, claimed all the privileges of kingship and masculinity. In one place she was pictured in man’s dress, and wearing the White and Red Crowns. In the following picture she was in female dress, but still wearing the Crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt, while the discarded male raiment lay at her feet. In every picture where hope, or aim, or resurrection was expressed there was the added symbol of the North; and in many places — always in representations of important events, past, present, or future — was a grouping of the stars of the Plough. She evidently regarded this constellation as in some way peculiarly associated with herself.

‘Perhaps the most remarkable statement in the records, both on the Stele and in the mural writings, was that Queen Tera had power to compel the Gods. This, by the way, was not an isolated belief in Egyptian history; but was different in its cause. She had engraved on a ruby, carven like a scarab, and having seven stars of seven points, Master Words to compel all the Gods, both of the Upper and the Under Worlds.

‘In the statement it was plainly set forth that the hatred of the priests Was, she knew, stored up for her, and that they would after her death try to suppress her name. This was a terrible revenge, I may tell you, in Egyptian mythology, for without a name no one can after death be introduced to the Gods, or have prayers said for him. Therefore, she had intended her resurrection to be after long time and in a more northern land, under the constellation whose seven stars had ruled her birth. To this end, her hand was to be in the air— “unwrapped” — and in it the Jewel of Seven Stars, so that wherever was air she might move even as her Ka could move! This, after thinking it over, Mr. Trelawny and I agreed meant that her body could become astral at command, and so move, particle by particle, and become whole again when and where required. Then there was apiece of writing in which allusion was made to a chest or casket in which were contained all the Gods, and Will, and Sleep, the two latter being personified by symbols. The box was mentioned as with seven sides. It was not much of a surprise to us when, underneath the feet of the mummy, we found the seven-sided casket, which you have also seen in Mr. Trelawny’s room. On the underneath part of the wrapping linen of the left foot was painted, in the same vermilion colour as that used in the Stele, the hieroglyphic symbol for much water: Z —— and underneath the right foot the symbol of the earth: *L.* We made out the symbolism to be that her body, immortal and transferable at will, ruled both the land and water, air and fire — the latter being exemplified by the light of the Jewel Stone, and further by the flint and iron which lay outside the mummy wrappings.

‘As we lifted the casket from the sarcophagus, we noticed on its sides the strange protuberances which you have al* ready seen; but we were unable at the time to account for them. There were a few amulets in the sarcophagus, but none of any special worth or significance. We took it that if there were such, they were within the wrappings; or more probably in the strange casket underneath the mummy's feet. This, however, we could not open. There were signs of there being a cover: certainly the upper portion and the lower were each in one piece. The fine line, a little way from the top, appeared to be where the cover was fixed; but it was made with such exquisite fineness and finish that the joining could hardly be seen. Certainly the top could not be moved. We took it, that it was in some way fastened from within. I tell you all this in order that you may understand things with which you may be in contact later. You must suspend your judgement entirely. Such strange things have happened regarding this mummy and all around it, that there is a necessity for new belief somewhere. It is absolutely impossible to reconcile certain things which have happened with the ordinary currents of life or knowledge.

'We stayed around the Valley of the Sorcerer, till we had copied roughly all the drawings and writings on the walls, ceiling, and floor. We took with us the Stele of lapis lazuli, whose graven record was coloured with vermilion pigment. We took the sarcophagus and the mummy; the stone chest with the alabaster jars; the tables of bloodstone and alabaster and onyx and carnelian; and the ivory pillow whose arch rested on "buckles", round each of which was twisted a uraeus wrought in gold. -We took all the articles which lay in the Chapel, and the Mummy Pit; the wooden boats with crews and the ushaptiu figures, and the symbolic amulets.

'When corning away we took down the ladders, and at a distance buried them in the sand under a cliff, which we noted so that if necessary we might find them again. Then with our heavy baggage, we set out on our laborious journey back to the Nile. It was no easy task, I tell you, to bring the case with that great sarcophagus over the desert. We had a rough cart and sufficient men to draw it; but the progress seemed terribly slow, for we were anxious to get our treasures into a place of safety. The night was an anxious time with us, for we feared attack from marauding band. But more still we feared some of those with us. They were, after all, but predatory, unscrupulous men; and we had with us a considerable bulk of precious things. They, or at least the dangerous ones amongst them, did not know why it was so precious; they took it for granted that it was material treasure of some kind that we carried. We had taken the mummy from the sarcophagus, and packed it for safety of travel in a separate case. During the first night two attempts were made to steal things from the cart; and two men were found dead in the morning.

‘On the second night there came on a violent storm, one of those terrible storms of the desert which makes one feel his helplessness. We were overwhelmed with the drifting sand. Some of our Bedouins had fled before the storm, hoping to find shelter; the rest of us, wrapped in our bournous, endured with what patience we could. In the morning, when the storm had passed, we recovered from under the piles of sand what we could of our impediments. We found the case in which the mummy had been packed all broken, but the mummy itself could nowhere be found. We searched everywhere around, and dug up the sand which had piled around us; but in vain. We did not know what to do, for Trelawny had his heart set on taking home that mummy. We waited a whole day in hopes that the Bedouins,*who had fled, would return; we had a blind hope that they might have in some way removed the mummy from the cart, and would restore it. That night, just before dawn, Mr. Trelawny woke me up and whispered in my ear.

‘ “We must go back to the tomb in the Valley of the Sorcerer. Show no hesitation in the morning when I give the orders! If you ask any questions as to where we are going it will create suspicion, and will defeat our purpose.”

‘ “All right!” I answered. “But why shall we go there?” His answer seemed to thrill through me as though it had struck some chord ready tuned within:

‘ “We shall find the mummy there! I am*sure of it!” Then anticipating doubt or argument he added:

‘ “Wait, and you shall see!” and he sank back into his blanket again.

“The Arabs *were surprised when we retraced our steps; and some of them were not satisfied. There was a good deal of friction, and there were several desertions; so that it was with a diminished following that we took our way eastward again. At first the Sheik did not manifest any curiosity as to our definite destination; but when it became apparent that we were again making for the Valley of the Sorcerer, he too showed concern. This grew as we drew near; till finally at the entrance of the valley he halted and refused to go further. He said he would await our return if we chose to go on alone. That he would wait three days; but if by that time we had not returned he would leave. No offer of money would tempt him to depart from this resolution. The only concession he would make was that he would find the ladders and bring them near the cliff. This he did; and then with the rest of the troop, he went back to wait at the entrance of the valley.

‘Mr. Trelawny and I took ropes and torches, and again ascended to the tomb. It was evident that someone had been there in our absence, for the stone slab which protected the entrance to the tomb was lying flat inside, and a rope was dangling from the cliff summit. Within, there was another rope hanging into the shaft of the Mummy Pit. We looked at each other; but neither said a word. We fixed our own rope, and as arranged Trelawny descended first, I following at once. It was not till we stood together at the foot of the shaft that the thought flashed across me that we might be in some sort of a trap; that someone might descend the rope from the cliff, and by cutting the rope by which we had lowered ourselves into the Pit, bury us there alive. The thought was horrifying; but it was too late to do anything. I remained silent. We both had torches, so that there was ample light as we passed through the passage and entered the Chamber where the sarcophagus had stood. The first thing noticeable was the emptiness of the place. Despite all its magnificent adornment, the tomb was made a desolation by the absence of the great sarcophagus, to hold which it was hewn in the rock; of the” chest with the alabaster jars; of the tables which had held the implements and food for the use of the dead, and the ushaptiu figures.

‘It was made more infinitely desolate still by the shrouded figure of the mummy of Queen Tera which lay on the floor where the great sarcophagus had stood! Beside it lay, in the strange contorted attitudes of violent death, three of the Arabs who had deserted from our party. Their faces were black and their hands and necks were smeared with blood which had burst from mouth and nose and eyes.

‘On the throat of each were the marks, now blackening, of a hand of seven fingers. Trelawny and I drew close, and clutched each other in awe and fear as we looked.

For, most wonderful of all, across the breast of the mummied

Queen lay an Ivory white wrist only showing a scar like a jagged red line, from which seemed to descend drops of blood.’

Chapter XII. The Magic Coffer

‘WHEN WE RECOVERED OUR AMAZEMENT, WHICH SEEMED TO LAST unduly long, we did not lose any time carrying the mummy through the passage, and hoisting it up the *Pit* shaft. I went first, to receive it at the top. As I looked down, I saw Mr. Trelawny lift the severed hand and put it in his breast, manifestly to save it from being injured or lost. We left the dead Arabs where they lay. With our ropes we lowered our precious burden to the ground; and then took it to the entrance of the valley where our escort was to wait To our astonishment we found them on the move. When we remonstrated with the Sheik, he answered that he had fulfilled his contract to the letter, he had waited the three days as arranged. I thought that he was lying to cover up his base intention of deserting us; and I found when we compared notes that Trelawny had the same suspicion. It was not till we arrived at Cairo that we found he was correct. It was the 3rd of November 1884 when we entered the Mummy Pit for the second time; we had reason to remember the date.

‘We had lost three whole days of our reckoning — out of our lives — whilst we had stood wondering in that chamber of the dead. Was it strange, then, that we had a superstitious feeling with regard to the dead Queen Tera and all belonging to her? Is it any wonder that it rests with us now, with a bewildering sense of some power outside ourselves or our comprehension? Will it be any wonder if it go down to the grave with us at the appointed time? If, indeed, there be any graves for us who have robbed the grave!’ He was silent for quite a minute before he went on:

‘We got to Cairo all right, and from there to Alexandria where we were to take ship by the Messagerie service to Marseilles, and go thence by express to London. But

“The best laid schemes o’ mice and men
Gang aft agley.”

At Alexandria, Trelawny found waiting a cable stating that Mrs. Trelawny had died in giving birth to a daughter.

‘Her stricken husband hurried off at once by the Orient Express; and I had to bring the treasures alone to the desolate house. I got to London all safe; there seemed to be some special good fortune to our journey. When I got to this house, the funeral had long been over. The child had been put out to nurse, and Mr. Trelawny had so far recovered from the shock of his loss that he had set himself to take up again the broken threads of his life and his work. That he had had a shock, and a bad one, was apparent. The sudden grey in his black hair was proof enough in itself; but in addition, the strong cast of his features had become set and stern. Since he received that cable in the shipping office at Alexandria I have never seen a happy smile on his face.

‘Work is the best thing in such a case; and to his work he devoted himself heart and soul. The strange tragedy of his loss and gain — for the child was born after the mother’s death — -took place during the time that we stood in that trance in the Mummy Pit of Queen Tera. It seemed to have become in some way associated with his Egyptian studies, and more especially with the mysteries connected with the Queen. He told me very little about his daughter; but that two forces struggled in his mind regarding her was apparent. I could see that he loved, almost idolized her. Yet he could never forget that her birth had cost her mother’s life. Also, there was something whose existence seemed to wring his father’s heart, though he would never tell me what it was. Again, he once said in a moment of relaxation of his purpose of silence:

‘ “She is unlike her mother; but in both feature and colour she is a marvellous resemblance to the pictures of Queen Tera.”

‘He said that he had sent her away to people who would care for her as he could not; and that till she became a woman she should have all the simple pleasures that a young girl might have, and that were best for her. I would often have talked with him about her; but he would never say much. Once he said to me: “There are reasons why I should not speak more than is necessary. Some day you will know — and understand!” I respected his reticence; and beyond asking after her on my return after a journey, I have never spoken of her again. I had never seen her till I did so in your presence.

‘Well, when the treasures which we had — ah! — -taken from the tomb had been brought here, Mr. Trelawny arranged their disposition himself. The mummy, all except the severed hand, he placed in the great ironstone sarcophagus in the hall. This -was wrought for the Theban High Priest Uni, and is, as “you may have remarked, all inscribed with wonderful invocations to the old Gods of Egypt. The rest of the things from* the tomb he disposed about his own room, as you have seen. Amongst them he placed, for special reasons of his own, the mummy hand. I think he regards this as the most sacred of his possessions, with perhaps one exception. That is the carven ruby which he calls the “Jewel of Seven Stars”, which he keeps in that great safe which is locked and guarded by various devices, as you know.

1 dare say you find this tedious; but I have had to explain it, so that you should understand all up to the present. It was a long time after my return with the mummy of Queen Tera when Mr. Trelawny

reopened the subject with me. He had been several times to Egypt, sometimes with me and sometimes alone; and I had been several trips, on my own account or for him. But in all that time, nearly sixteen years, he never mentioned the subject, unless when some pressing occasion suggested, if it did not necessitate, a reference.

‘One morning early he sent for me in a hurry; I was then studying in the British Museum, and had rooms in Hart Street. When I came, he was all on fire with excitement. I had not seen him in such a glow since before the news of his wife’s death. He took me at once into his room. The window blinds were down and the shutters closed; not a ray of daylight came in. The ordinary lights in the room were not lit, but there were a lot of powerful electric lamps, fifty candle-power at least, arranged on one side of the room. The little bloodstone table on which the septagonal coffer stands was drawn to the centre of the room. The coffer looked exquisite in the glare of light which shone on it. It actually seemed to glow as if lit in some way from within.

‘ “What do you think of it?” he asked.

‘ “It is like a jewel,” I answered. “You may well call it the ‘Sorcerer’s Magic Coffer’, if it often looks like that. It almost seems to be alive.”

‘ “Do you know why it seems so?”

‘ “From the glare of the light, I suppose?”

‘ “Light of course,” he answered, “but it is rather the disposition of light.” As he spoke he turned up the ordinary lights of the room and switched off the special ones. The effect on the stone box was surprising, in a second it lost all its glowing effect. It was still a very beautiful stone, as always; but it was stone and no more.

‘ “Do you notice anything in the arrangement of the lamps?” he asked.

'"No!"

' "They were in the shape of the stars in the Plough, as the stars are in the ruby!" The statement came to me with a certain sense of conviction. I do not know why, except that there had been so many mysterious associations with the mummy and all belonging to it that any new one seemed enlightening. I listened as Trelawny went on to explain:

' "For sixteen years I have never ceased to think of that adventure, or to try to find a clue to the mysteries which came before us; but never until last night did I seem to find a solution. I think I must have dreamed of it, for I woke all on fire about it. I jumped out of bed with a determination of doing something, before I quite knew what it was that I wished to do. Then, all at once, the purpose was clear before me. There were allusions in the writing on the walls of the tomb to the seven stars of the Great Bear that go to make up the Plough; and the North was again and again emphasized. The same symbols were repeated with regard to the 'Magic Box' as we called it. We had already noticed those peculiar translucent spaces in the stone of the box. You remember the hieroglyphic writing had told that the jewel came from the heart of an aerolite, and that the coffer was cut from it also. It might be, I thought, that the light of the seven stars, shining in the right direction, might have some effect on the box, or something within it. I raised the blind and looked put. The Plough was high in the heavens, and both its stars and the Pole Star were straight opposite the window. I pulled the table with the coffer out into the light, and shifted it until the translucent patches were in the direction of the stars. Instantly the box began to glow, as you saw it under the lamps, though but slightly. I waited and waited; but the sky clouded over, and the light died away. So I got wires and lamps — you know how often I use them in experiments — and tried the effect of electric light. It took me some time to get the lamps properly placed, so that they would correspond to the parts of the stone, but the moment I got them right the whole thing began to glow as you have seen it.

‘ “I could get no further, however. There was evidently something wanting. All at once it came to me that if light could have some effect there should be in the tomb some means of producing light; for there could not be starlight in the Mummy Pit in the cavern. Then the whole thing seemed to become clear. On the bloodstone table which has a hollow carved in its -top, into which the bottom of the coffer fits, I laid the Magic Coffer; and I at once saw that the odd protuberances so carefully wrought in the substance of the stone corresponded in a way to the stars in the constellation. These, then, were to hold lights.

‘ *“Eureka!* I cried. All we want now is the lamps. I tried placing the electric lights on, or close to, the protuberances. But the glow never came to the stone. So the conviction grew on me that there were special lamps made for the purpose. If we could find them, a step on the road to solving the mystery should be gained.”

‘ “But what about the lamps?” I asked. “Where are they? When are we to discover them? How are we to know them if we do find them? What—” ‘He stopped me at once:

‘ “One thing at a time!” he said quietly. “Your first question contains all the rest. Where are these lamps? I shall tell you: In the tomb!”

‘ “In the tomb!” I repeated in surprise. “Why you and I searched the place ourselves from end to end; and there was not a sign of a lamp. Not a sign of anything remaining when we came away the first time; or on the second, except the bodies of the Arabs.”

‘Whilst I was speaking, he had uncoiled some large sheets of paper which he had brought in his hand from his own room. These he spread out on the great table, keeping their edges down with books and weights. I knew them at a glance; they were the careful copies which he had made of our first transcripts from the writing in the tomb. When he had all ready, he turned to me and said slowly:

‘ “Do you remember wondering, when we examined the tomb, at the lack of one thing which is usually found in such a tomb?”

‘ “Yes! There was no serdab.” ‘

‘The serdab. I may perhaps explain,’ said Mr. Corbeck to me, ‘is a sort of niche built or hewn in the wall of a tomb. Those which have as yet been examined bear no inscriptions, and contain only effigies of the dead for whom the tomb was made.’ Then he went on with his narrative: ‘Trelawny, when he saw that I had caught his meaning, went on speaking with something of his-old enthusiasm:

‘ “I have come to the conclusion that there must be a serdab — a secret one. We were dull not to have thought of it before. We might have known that the maker of such a tomb — a woman, who had shown in other ways such a sense of beauty and completeness, and who had finished every detail with a feminine richness of elaboration — would not have neglected such an architectural feature. Even if it had not its own special significance in ritual, she would have had it as an adornment. Others had had it, and she liked her own work to be complete. Depend upon it, there was — there is — a serdab; and that in it, when it is discovered, we shall find the’ lamps. Of course, had we known then what we now know or at all events surmise, that there were lamps, we might have suspected some hidden spot, some cachet. I am going to ask you to go out to Egypt again; to seek the tomb; to find the serdab; and to bring back the lamps!”

‘ “And if I find there is no serdab, or if discovering it I find no lamps in it, what then?” He smiled grimly with that saturnine smile of his, so rarely seen for years past, as he spoke slowly:

‘ “Then you will have to hustle till you find them!” ‘ “Good!” I said. He pointed to one of the Sheets: ‘ “Here are the transcripts from the Chapel at the south and the east. I have been looking over the writings again; and I find that in seven places round this corner are the symbols of the constellation which we call the Plough, which Queen Tera held to rule her birth and her destiny. I have examined them carefully, and I notice that they are all representations of the grouping of the stars, as the constellation appears in different parts of the heavens. They are all astronomically correct; and as in the real sky the Pointers indicate the Pole Star, so these all point to one spot in the wall where usually the serdab is to be found!”

‘ “Bravo!” I shouted, for such a piece of reasoning demanded applause. He seemed pleased as he went on:

‘ “When you are in the tomb, examine this spot. There is probably some spring or mechanical contrivance for opening the receptacle. What it may be, there is no use guessing. You will know what best to do, when you are on the spot.”

‘I started the next week for Egypt; and never rested till I stood again in the tomb. I had found some of our old following; and was fairly well provided with help. The country was now in a condition very different to that in which it had been sixteen years before; there was no need for troops or armed men.

‘I climbed the rock face alone. There was no difficulty, for in that fine climate the woodwork of the ladder was still dependable. It was easy to see that in the years that had elapsed there had been other visitors to the tomb; and my heart sank within me when I thought that some of them might by chance have come across the secret place. It would be a bitter discovery indeed to find that they had forestalled me: and that my journey had been in vain.

“The bitterness was realized when I lit my torches, and passed between the seven-sided columns to the Chapel of the tomb.

‘There, in the very spot where I had expected to find it, was the opening of a serdab. And the serdab was empty.

‘But the Chapel was not empty; for the dried-up body of a man in Arab dress lay close under the opening, as though he had been stricken down. I examined all round the walls to see if Trelawny’s surmise was correct; and I found that in all the positions of the stars as given, the Pointers of the Plough indicated a spot to the left hand, or south side, of the opening of the serdab, where was a single star in gold.

‘I pressed this, and it gave way. The stone which had marked the front of the serdab, and which lay back against the wall within, moved slightly. On further examining the other side of the opening, I found a similar spot, indicated by other representations of the constellation; but this was itself a figure of the seven stars, and each was wrought in burnished gold. I pressed each star in turn; but without result. Then it struck me that if the opening spring was on the left, this on me right might have been intended for the simultaneous pressure of all the stars by one hand of seven fingers. By using both my hands, I managed to effect this.

‘With a loud click, a metal figure seemed to dart from close to the opening of the serdab; the stone slowly swung back to its place, and shut with a click. The glimpse which I had of the descending figure appalled me for the moment. It was like that grim guardian which according to the Arabian historian Ibn Abd Alhokin, the builder of the Pyramids, King Saurid Ibn Salhouk placed in the Western Pyramid to defend its treasure: “A marble figure, upright, with lance in hand; with on his head a serpent wreathed. When any approached, the serpent would bite him on one side, and twining about his throat and killing him, would return again to his place.”

I knew well that such a figure was not wrought to pleasantry; and that to brave it was no child’s play. The dead Arab at my feet was proof of what could be done! So I examined again along the wall; and found here and mere chippings as if someone had been tapping with a heavy hammer. This then had been what happened: The grave-robber more expert at his work than we had been, and suspecting the presence of a hidden serdab, had made easy to find it. He had struck the spring by chance; had released the avenging “Treasurer”, as the Arabian writer designated him. The issue spoke for itself. I got a piece of wood, and, standing at a safe distance, pressed with the end of it upon the star.

‘Instantly the stone flew back. The hidden figure within darted forward and thrust out its lance. Then it rose up and disappeared. I thought I might now safely press on the seven stars; and did so. Again the stone rolled back; and the “Treasurer” flashed by to his hidden lair.

‘I repeated both experiments several times; with always the same result. I should have liked to examine the mechanism of that figure of such malignant mobility; but it was not possible without such tools as could not easily be had. It might be necessary to cut into a whole section of the rock. Some day I hope to go back, properly equipped, and attempt it.

‘Perhaps you do not know that the entrance to a serdab is almost always very narrow; sometimes a hand can hardly be inserted. Two things I learned from this serdab. The first was that the lamps, if lamps at all there had been, could not have been of large size; and secondly that they would be in some way associated with Hathor, whose symbol, the hawk in a square with the right top corner forming a smaller square, was cut in relief on the wall within, and coloured the bright vermilion which we had found on the Stele. Hathor is the goddess who in Egyptian mythology answers to Venus of the Greeks, in as far as she is the presiding deity of beauty and pleasure. In the Egyptian mythology, however, each God has many forms; and in some aspects Hathor has to do with the idea of resurrection. There are seven forms or variants of the Goddess; why should not these correspond in some way to the seven lamps! That there had been such lamps, I was convinced. The first grave-robber had met his death; the second had found the contents of the serdab. The first attempt had been made years since; the stare of the body beside me proved this. I had no clue to the second attempt. It might have been long ago; or it might have been recently. If, however, others had been to the tomb, it was probable that the lamps had been taken long ago. Well! all the more difficult would be my search; for undertaken it must be!

‘That was nearly three years ago; and for all that time I have been like the man in the Arabian Nights, seeking old lamps, not for new, but for cash. I dared not say what I was looking for, or attempt to give any description; for such would have defeated my purpose. But I had in my own mind at the start a vague idea of what I must find. In process of time this grew more and more clear; till at the last I almost overshot my mark by searching for something which might have been wrong.

‘The disappointments I suffered, and the wild-goose chases I made, would fill a volume; but I persevered. At last, not two months ago, I was shown by an old dealer in Mossul one lamp such as I had looked for. I had been tracing it for nearly a year, always suffering disappointment, but always buoyed up to further endeavour by a growing hope that I was on the track.

‘I do not know how I restrained myself when I realized that, at last, I was at least close to success. I was skilled, however, in the finesse of Eastern trade; and the Jew-Arab-Portugee trader met his match. I wanted to see all his stock before buying; and one by one he produced, amongst masses of rubbish, seven different lamps. Each of them had a distinguishing mark; and each and all was some form of the symbol of Hathor. I think I shook the imperturbability of my swarthy friend by the magnitude of my purchases; for in order to prevent him guessing what form of goods I sought, I nearly cleared out his shop. At the end he nearly wept, and-said I had ruined him; for now he had nothing to sell. He would have torn his hair had he known what price I should ultimately have given for’ some of his stock, that perhaps he valued least.

‘I parted with most of my merchandise at normal price as I hurried home. I did hot dare to give it away, or even lose it, least I should incur suspicion. My burden was far too precious to be risked by any foolishness now. I got on as fast as it is possible to travel in such countries; and arrived in London with only the lamps and certain portable curios and papyri which I had” picked up on my travels. ‘Now, Mr. Ross, you know all I know; and I leave it to your discretion how much, if any of it, you will tell Miss Trelawny.’

As he finished a clear young voice said behind us: “What about Miss Trelawny? She is here!’ We turned, startled; and looked at each other enquiringly. Miss Trelawny stood in the doorway. We did not know how long she had been present, or how much she had heard.

Chapter XIII. Awaking from the Trance

THE FIRST UNEXPECTED WORDS MAY ALWAYS STARTLE A hearer; but when the shock is over, the listener's reason has asserted itself, and he can judge of the manner, as well as of the matter, of speech. Thus it was on this occasion. With intelligence now alert, I could not doubt of the simple sincerity of Margaret's next question:

'What have you two men been talking about all this time, Mr. Ross? I suppose, Mr. Corbeck has been telling you all his adventures' in finding the lamps. I hope yon will tell me too, some day, Mr. Corbeck; but that must not be until my poor Father is better. He would like, I am sure, to tell me all about these things himself; or to be present when I heard them.' She glanced sharply from one to the other. 'Oh! that was what you were saying as I came in? All right! I shall wait; but I hope it won't be long. The continuance of Father's condition is, I feel, breaking me down. A little while ago I felt that my nerves were giving out; so I determined to go out for a walk in the Park. I am sure it will do me good. I want you, if you will, Mr. Ross, to be with Father whilst I am away. I shall feel secure then!'

I rose with alacrity, rejoicing that the poor girl was going out, even for half an hour. She was looking terribly wearied and haggard; and the sight of her pale cheeks made my heart ache. I went to the sick-room; and sat down in my usual place. Mrs. Grant was then on duty; we had not found it necessary to have more than one person in the room during the day. When I came in, she took occasion to go about some household duty. The blinds were up, but the north aspect of the room softened the hot glare of the sunlight without.

I sat for a long time thinking over all that Mr. Corbeck had told me; and weaving its wonders into the tissue of strange things which had come to pass since I had entered the house. At times I was inclined to doubt; to doubt everything and everyone; to doubt even the evidences of my own senses. The warnings of the skilled detective kept coming back to my mind. He had put down Mr. Corbeck as a clever liar and- a confederate of Miss Trelawny. Of Margaret! That settled it! Face to face with such a proposition as that, doubt vanished. Each time when her image, her name, the merest thought of her, came before my mind, each event stood out stark as a living fact. My life upon her faith!

I was recalled from my reverie, which was fast becoming a dream of love, in a startling manner. A voice came from the bed; a deep, strong, masterful voice. The first note of it called up like a clarion my eyes and my ears. The sick man was awake and speaking!

'Who are you? What are you doing here?'

Whatever ideas any of us had ever formed of his waking, I am quite sure that none of us expected to see him start up all awake and full master of himself. I was so surprised that I answered almost mechanically:

'Ross is my name. I have been watching by you!' He looked surprised for an instant, and then I could see that his habit' of judging for himself came into play.

'Watching by me! How do you mean? Why watching by me?' His eye had now lit on his heavily bandaged wrist. He went on in a different tone; less aggressive, more genial, as of one accepting facts:

'Are you a doctor?' I felt myself almost smiling as I answered; the relief from the long pressure of anxiety regarding his life was beginning to tell:

'No, sir!'

'Then why are you here? If you are not a doctor, what are you?' His tone was again more dictatorial. Thought is quick; the whole train of reasoning on which my answer must be based flooded through my brain before the words could leave my lips. Margaret! I must think of Margaret! This was her father, who as yet knew nothing of me; even of my very existence. He would be naturally curious, if not anxious, to know why I amongst men had been chosen as his daughter's friend on the occasion of his illness. Fathers are naturally a little jealous in such matters as a daughter's choice, and in the undeclared state of my love for Margaret I must do nothing which could ultimately embarrass her.

'I am a Barrister. It is not, however, in that capacity I am here; but simply as a friend of your daughter. It was probably her knowledge of my being a lawyer which first determined her to ask me to come when she thought you had been murdered. Afterwards she was good enough to consider me to be a friend, and to allow me to remain in accordance with your expressed wish that someone should remain to watch.'

Mr. Trelawny was manifestly a man of quick thought, and of few words. He gazed at me keenly as I spoke, and his piercing eyes seemed to read my thought. To my relief he said no more on the subject just then, seeming to accept my words in simple faith. There was evidently in his own mind some cause for the acceptance deeper than my own knowledge. His eyes flashed, and there was an unconscious movement of the mouth — it could hardly *be* called a twitch — which betokened satisfaction. He was following out some train of reasoning in his own mind. Suddenly he said: 'She thought I had been murdered! Was that last night?' 'No! Four days ago.' He seemed surprised. Whilst he had been speaking the first time he had sat up in bed; now he made a movement as though he would jump out. With an effort, however, he restrained himself; leaning back on his pillows he said quietly:

‘Tell me all about it! All you know! Every detail! Omit nothing! But stay; first lock the door! I want to know, before I see anyone, exactly how things stand.’

Somehow his last words made my heart leap. ‘Anyone!’ He evidently accepted me, then, as an exception. In my present state of feeling for his daughter, this was a comforting thought I felt exultant as I went over to the door and softly turned the key. When I came back I found him sitting up again. He said: ‘Go on!’

Accordingly, I told him every detail; even of the slightest which I could remember, of what had happened from the moment of my arrival at the house. Of course I said nothing of my feeling towards Margaret, and spoke only concerning those things already within his own knowledge. With regard to Corbeck, I simply said that he had brought back some lamps of which he had been in quest. Then I proceeded to tell him fully of their loss, and of their rediscovery in the house.

He listened with a self-control which, under the circumstances, was to me little less man marvellous. It was not impassiveness, for at times his eyes would flash or blaze, and the strong fingers of his uninjured hand would grip the sheet, pulling it into far-extending wrinkles. This was most noticeable when I told him of the return of Corbeck, and the finding of the lamps in the boudoir. At times he spoke, but only a few words, and as if unconsciously in emotional comment. The mysterious parts, those which had most puzzled us, seemed to have no special interest for him; he seemed to know them already. The utmost concern he showed was when I told him of Daw's shooting. His muttered comment: 'Stupid ass!' together with a quick glance across the room at the injured cabinet, marked the measure of his disgust. As I told him of his daughter's harrowing anxiety for him, of her unending care and devotion, of the tender love which she had shown, he seemed much moved. There was a sort of veiled surprise in his unconscious whisper:

'Margaret! Margaret!'

When I had finished my narration, bringing matters up to the moment when Miss Trelawny had gone out for her walk — I thought of her as 'Miss Trelawny', not as 'Margaret' now, in the presence of her father — he remained silent for quite a long time. It was probably two or three minutes; but it seemed interminable. All at once he turned to me and said briskly:

'Now tell me all about yourself!' This was something of a floorer; I felt myself grow red hot. Mr. Trelawny's eyes were upon me; they were now calm and enquiring, but never ceasing in their soul-searching scrutiny. There was just a suspicion of a smile on the mouth which, though it added to my embarrassment, gave me a certain measure of relief. I was, however, face to face with difficulty; and the habit of my life stood me in good stead. I looked him straight in the eyes as I spoke:

' "My name, as I told you, is Ross, Malcolm Ross. I am by profession a Barrister. I was made a QC in the last year of the Queen's reign. I have been fairly successful in my work.' To my relief he said:

'Yes, I know. I have always heard well of you! Where and when did you meet Margaret?'

'First at the Hay's in Belgrave Square, ten days ago. Then at a picnic up the river with Lady Strathconnell. We went from Windsor to Cookham. Mar — Miss Trelawny was in ‘my boat. I scull a little, and I had my own boat at Windsor. We had a good deal of conversation — naturally.’

‘Naturally!’ There was just a suspicion of something sardonic in the tone of acquiescence; but there was no other intimation of his feeling. I began to think that as I was in the presence of a strong man, I should show something of my own strength. My friends, and sometimes my opponents, say that I am a strong man. In my present circumstances, not to be absolutely truthful would be to be weak. So I stood up to the difficulty before me; always bearing in mind, however, that my words might affect Margaret’s happiness through her love for her father. I went on:

‘In conversation at a place and time and amid surroundings so pleasing, and in a solitude inviting to confidence, I got a glimpse of her inner life. Such a glimpse as a man of my years and experience may get from a young girl!’ The father’s face grew graver as I went on: but he said nothing. I was committed now to a definite line of speech, and went on with such mastery of my mind as I could exercise. The occasion might be fraught with serious consequences to me too:

‘I could not but see that there was over her spirit a sense of loneliness which was habitual to her. I thought I understood it; I am myself an only child. I ventured to encourage her to speak to me freely; and was happy enough to succeed. A sort of confidence became established between us.’’ There was something in the father’s face which made me add hurriedly:

‘Nothing was said by her, sir, as you can well imagine, which was not right and proper. She only told me in the impulsive way of one longing to give voice to thoughts long carefully concealed, of her yearning to be closer to the fat (her whom she loved; more *en rapport* with him; more in his confidence; closer within the circle of his sympathies.' Oh, believe me, sir, that it was all good! All that a father's heart could hope or wish for! It was all loyal! That she spoke it to me was perhaps because I was almost a stranger with whom there was no previous barrier to confidence.'

Here I paused. It was hard to go on; and I feared lest I might in my zeal do Margaret a disservice. The relief of the strain came from her father.

'And you?'

'Sir, Miss Trelawny is very sweet and beautiful! She is young; and her mind is like crystal! Her sympathy is a joy! I am not an old man, and my affections were not engaged. They never had been till then. I hope I may say so much, even to a father!' My eyes involuntarily dropped. When I raised them again, Mr. Trelawny was still gazing at me keenly. All the kindliness of his nature seemed to wreathe itself in a smile as he held out his hand and said:

'Malcolm Ross I have always heard of you as a fearless and honourable gentleman. I am glad my girl has such a friend! Go on!'

My heart leaped. The first step to the winning of Margaret's father was gained. I dare say I was somewhat more effusive in my words and my manner as I went on. I certainly felt that way.

'One thing we gain as we grow older: to use our age judiciously! I have had much experience. I have fought for it and worked for it all my life; and I felt that I was justified in using it. I ventured to ask Miss Trelawny to count on me as a friend; to let me serve her should occasion arise. She promised me that she would. I had little idea that my chance of serving her should come so soon or in such a way; but that very night you were stricken down. In her desolation and anxiety she sent for me!' I paused. He continued to look at me as I went on:

'When your letter of instructions was found, I offered my services. They were accepted, as you know!'

'And these days, how did they pass for you?' The question startled me. There was in it something of Margaret's own voice and manner; something so greatly resembling her lighter moments that it brought out all the masculinity in me. I felt more sure of my ground now as I said:

'These days, sir, despite all their harrowing anxiety, despite all the pain they held for a girl whom I grew to love more and more with each passing hour, have been the happiest of my life!' He kept silence for a long time; so long that, as I waited for him to speak, with my heart beating, I began to wonder if my frankness had been too effusive. At last he said:

'I suppose it is hard to say so much vicariously. Her poor mother should have heard you; it would have made her heart glad!' Then a shadow swept across his face; and he went on more hurriedly:

'But are you quite sure of all this?' 'I know my own heart, sir; or, at least, I think I do!' 'No! no!' he answered, 'I don't mean you. That is all right! But you spoke of my girl's affection for me... and yet...! And yet she has been living here, in my house, a whole year.... Still, she spoke to you of her loneliness — her desolation. I never — it grieves me to say it, but it is true — I never saw sign of such affection towards myself in all the year!...' His voice trembled away into sad, reminiscent introspection.

'Then, sir,' I said, 'I have been privileged to see more in a few days than you in her whole lifetime!' My words seemed to call him up from himself; and I thought that it was with pleasure as well as surprise that he said:

‘I had no idea of it. I thought that she was indifferent to me. That what seemed the neglect of her youth was revenging itself on me. That she was cold of heart.... It is a joy unspeakable to me that her mother’s daughter loves me too!’ Unconsciously he sank back upon his pillow, lost in memories of the past.

How he must have loved her mother! It was the love of her mother’s child, rather than the love of his own daughter, that appealed to him. My heart went out to him in a great wave of sympathy and kindliness. I began to under-. stand. To understand the passion of these two great, silent, reserved natures, that successfully concealed the burning hunger for the other’s love! It did not surprise me when presently he murmured to himself:

‘Margaret, my child! Tender and thoughtful, and strong, and true, and brave! Like her dear mother! Like her dear mother!’

And then to the very depths of my heart I rejoiced that I had spoken frankly.

Presently Mr. Trelawny said:

‘Four days! The sixteenth! Then this is the twentieth of July?’ I nodded affirmation; he went on:

‘So I have been lying in a trance for four days. It is not the first time. I was in a trance once under strange conditions for three days; and never even suspected it till I was told of the lapse of time. I shall tell you all about it some day, if you care to hear.’

That made me thrill with pleasure. That he, Margaret’s father, would so take me into his confidence made it possible.... The businesslike, everyday alertness of his voice as he spoke next quite recalled me:

‘I had better get up now. When Margaret comes in, tell her yourself that I am all right. It will avoid any shock! And will you tell Corbeck that I would like to see him as soon as I can. I want to see those lamps, and hear all about them!'

His attitude towards me filled me with delight. There was a possible father-in-law aspect that would have raised me from a deathbed. I was hurrying away to carry out his wishes; when, however, my hand was on the key of the door, his voice recalled me:

'Mr. Ross!'

I did not like to hear him say 'Mr.'. After he knew of my friendship with his daughter he had called me Malcolm Ross; and this obvious return to formality not only pained, but filled me with apprehension. It must be something about Margaret. I thought of her as 'Margaret' and not as 'Miss Trelawny', now that there was danger of losing her. I know now what I felt then: that I was determined to fight for her rather than lose her. I came back, unconsciously holding myself erect. Mr. Trelawny, the keen observer of men, seemed to read my thought; his face, which was set in a new anxiety, relaxed as he said:

'Sit down a minute, it is better that we speak now than later. We are both men, and men of the world. All this about my daughter is very new to me, and very sudden; and I want to know exactly how and where I stand. Mind, I am making no objection; but as a father I have duties which are grave, and may prove to be painful. I — I' — he seemed slightly at a loss how to begin, and this gave me hope — -'I suppose I am to take it, from what you have said to me of your feelings towards my girl, that it is in your mind to be a suitor for her hand, later on?' I answered at once:

'Absolutely! Firm and fixed; it was my intention the evening after I had been with her on the river, to seek you, of course after a proper and respectful interval, and to ask you if I might approach her on the subject. Events forced me into closer relationship more quickly than I had dared to hope would be possible; but that first purpose has remained fresh in my heart, and has grown in intensity, and multiplied itself with every hour which has passed since then.' His face seemed to soften as he looked at me; the memory of his own youth was coming back to him instinctively. After a pause he said:

'I suppose I may take it, too, Malcolm Ross' — the return to the familiarity of address swept through me with a glorious thrill— 'that as yet you have not made any protestation to my daughter?'

'Not in words, sir.' The *arriere pense* of my phrase struck me, not by its own inherent humour, but through the grave, kindly smile on the father's face. There was a pleasant sarcasm in his comment:

'Not in words! That is dangerous! She might have doubted words, or even disbelieved them.'

I felt myself blushing to the roots of my hair as I went on:

'The duty of delicacy in her defenceless position; my respect for her father — I did not know you then, sir, as yourself, but only as her father — restrained me. But even had not these barriers existed, I should not have dared in the presence of such grief and anxiety to have declared myself. Mr. Trelawny, I assure you on my word of honour that your daughter and I are as yet, on her part, but friends and nothing more!' Once again he held out his hands, and we clasped each other warmly. Then he said heartily: - 'I am satisfied, Malcolm Ross. Of course, I take it that until I have seen her and have given you permission, you will not make any declaration to my daughter — in words,' he added, with an indulgent smile. But his face became stern again as he went on:

'Time presses; and I have to think of some matters so urgent and so strange that I dare not lose an hour. Otherwise I should not have been prepared to enter, at so short a notice and to so new a friend, on the subject of my daughter's settlement in life, and for her future happiness.' There was a dignity and a certain proudness in his manner which impressed me much.

'I shall respect your wishes, sir!' I said as I went back and opened the door. I heard him lock it behind me.

When I told Mr. Corbeck that Mr. Trelawny had quite recovered, he began to dance about like a wild man. But he suddenly stopped, and asked me to be careful not to draw any inferences, at all events at first, when in the future speaking of the finding of the lamps, or of the first visits to ' the tomb. This was in case Mr. Trelawny should speak to me on the subject; 'as, of course, he will,' he added, with a sidelong look at me which meant knowledge of the affairs of my heart. I agreed to this, feeling that it was quite right I did not quite understand why; but I knew that Mr. Trelawny was a peculiar man. In no case could one make a mistake by being reticent. Reticence is a quality which a strong man always respects.

The manner in which the others of the house took the news of the recovery varied much. Mrs. Grant wept with emotion; then she hurried off to see if she could do anything personally, and to set the house in order for 'Master', as she always called him. The Nurse's face fell; she was deprived of an interesting case. But the disappointment was only momentary; and she rejoiced that the trouble was over. She was ready to come to the patient the moment she should be wanted; but in the meantime she occupied herself in packing her portmanteau.

I took Sergeant Daw into the study, so that we should be alone when I told him the news. It surprised even his iron self-control when I told him the method of the waking. I was myself surprised in turn by his first words:

'And how did he explain the first attack? He was unconscious when the second was made.'

Up to that moment the nature of the attack, which was the cause of my coming to the house, had never even crossed my mind, except when I had simply narrated the various occurrences in sequence to Mr. Trelawny. The Detective did not seem to think much of my answer:

'Do you know, it never occurred to me to ask him?' The professional instinct was strong in the man, and seemed to supersede everything else.

'That is why so few cases are ever followed out,' he said, 'unless our people are in them. Your amateur detective never hunts down to the end. As for ordinary people, the moment things begin to mend, and the strain of suspense is off them, they drop the matter in hand. It is like seasickness,' he added philosophically after a pause, 'the moment you touch the shore you never, give it a thought, but run off to the buffet to feed! Well, Mr. Ross, I'm glad the case is over; for over it is, so far as I am concerned. I suppose that Mr. Trelawny knows his own business; and that now he is well again, he will take it up himself. Perhaps, however, he will not do anything. As he seemed to expect something to happen, but did not ask for protection from the police in any way, I take it that he don't want them to interfere with an eye to punishment. We'll be told officially, I suppose, that it was an accident, or sleep-walking, or something of the kind, to satisfy the conscience of our Record Department; and that will be the end. As for me, I tell you frankly, sir, that it will be the saving of me. I verily believe I was beginning to get dotty over it all. There were too many mysteries, that aren't in my line, for me to be really satisfied as to either facts or the causes of them. Now, I'll be able to wash my hands of it, and get back to clean, wholesome, criminal work. Of course, sir, I'll be glad to know if you ever do light on a cause of any kind. And I'll be grateful if you can ever tell me how the man was dragged out of bed when the cat bit him, and who used the knife the second time. For master Silvio could never have done it by himself. But there! I keep thinking of it still.

I must look out and keep a check on myself, or I shall think of it when I have to keep my mind on other things!'

When Margaret returned from her walk, I met her in the hall. -She was still pale and sad; somehow, I had expected to see her radiant after her walk. The moment she saw me her eyes brightened, and she looked at me keenly.

'You have some good news for me?' she said. 'Is Father better?'

'He is! Why did you think so?'

'I saw it in your face. I must go to him at once.' She was hurrying away when I stopped her.

'He said he would send for you the moment he was dressed.'

'He said he would send for me!' she repeated in amazement. 'Then he is awake again, and conscious? I had no idea he was so well as that! O Malcolm!'

She sat down on the nearest chair and began to cry. I felt overcome myself. The sight of her joy and emotion, the mention of my own name in such a way and at such a time, the rush of glorious possibilities all coming together, quite unmanned me. She saw my emotion, and seemed to understand. She put out her hand. I held it hard, and kissed it Such moments as these, the opportunities of lovers, are gifts of the gods! Up to this instant, though I knew I loved her, and though I believed she returned my affection, I had had only hope. Now, however, the self-surrender manifest in her willingness to let me squeeze her hand, the ardour of her pressure in return, and the glorious flush of love in her beautiful, deep, dark eyes as she lifted them to mine, were all the eloquences which the most impatient or exacting lover could expect or demand.

No word was spoken; none was needed. Even had I not been pledged to verbal silence, words would have been poor and dull to express what we felt. Hand in hand, like two little children, we went up the staircase and waited on the landing, till the summons from Mr. Trelawny should come.

I whispered in her ear — it was -nicer than speaking aloud and at a greater distance — how her father had awakened, and what he had said; and all that had passed between us, except when she herself had been the subject of conversation.

Presently a bell rang from the room. Margaret slipped from me, and looked back with warning finger on lip. She went over to her father's door and knocked softly.

'Come in!' said the strong voice.

'It is I, Father!' The voice was tremulous with love and hope.

There was a quick step inside the room; the door was hurriedly thrown open, and in an instant Margaret, who had sprung forward, was clasped in her father's arms. There was little speech; only a few broken phrases.

'Father! Dear, dear Father!'

'My child! Margaret! My dear, dear child!'

'O Father, Father! At last! At last!'

Here the father and daughter went into the room together, and the door closed.

Chapter XIV. The Birthmark

DURING MY WAITING FOR THE SUMMONS TO MR Trelawny's room, which I knew would come, the time was long and lonely. After the first few moments of emotional happiness at Margaret's joy, I somehow felt apart and alone; and for a little time the selfishness of a lover possessed me. But it was not for long. Margaret's happiness was all in all to me; and in the conscious sense of it I lost my baser self. Margaret's last words as the door closed on them gave the key to the whole situation, as it had been and as it was. These two proud, strong people, though father and daughter, had only come to know each other when the girl was grown up. Margaret's nature was of that kind which matures early.

The pride and strength of each, and the reticence which was their corollary, made a barrier at the beginning. Each had respected the other's reticence too much thereafter, and the misunderstanding grew to habit. And so these two loving hearts, each of which yearned for sympathy from the other, were kept apart. But now all was well, and in my heart of hearts I rejoiced that at last Margaret was happy. Whilst I was still musing on the subject, and dreaming dreams of a personal nature, the door was opened, and Mr. Trelawny beckoned to me.

'Come in, Mr. Ross!' he said cordially, but with a certain formality which I dreaded. I entered the room, and he closed the door again. He held out his hand, and I put mine in it. He did not let it go, but still held it as he drew me over toward his daughter. Margaret looked from me to him, and back again; and her eyes fell. When I was close to her, Mr. Trelawny let go my hand, and, looking his daughter straight in the face, said:

‘If things are as I fancy, we shall not have any secrets between us. Malcolm Ross knows so much of my affairs already, that I take it he must either let matters stop where they are and go away in silence, or else he must — know more. Margaret! are you willing to let Mr. Ross see your wrist?’

She threw one swift look of appeal in his eyes; but even as she did so she seemed to make up her mind. Without a word she raised her right hand, so that the bracelet of spreading wings which covered the wrist fell back, leaving the flesh bare. Then an icy chill shot through me.

On her wrist was a thin red jagged line, from which seemed to hang red stains like drops of blood!

She stood mere, a veritable figure of patient pride.

Oh! But she looked proud! Through all her sweetness, all her dignity, all the high-souled negation of self which I had known, and which never seemed more marked than now — through all the fire that seemed to shine from the dark depths of her eyes into my very soul, pride shone conspicuously. The pride that has failed; the pride that is born of conscious purity; the pride of a veritable queen of Old Time, when to be royal was to be the first and greatest and bravest in all high things. As we stood thus for some seconds, the deep, grave voice-of her father seemed to sound a challenge in my ears: ‘What do you say now?’ My answer was not in words. I caught Margaret’s right hand in mine as it fell, and, holding it tight, whilst with the other I pushed back the golden cincture, stooped and kissed the wrist. As I looked up at her, but never letting go her hand, there was a look of joy on her face such as I dream of when I think of heaven. Then I faced her father:

‘You have my answer, sir!’ His strong face looked gravely sweet.

He only said one word as he laid his hand on our clasped ones, whilst he bent over and kissed his daughter. ‘Good!’

We were interrupted by a knock at the door. In answer to an impatient ‘Come in!’ from Mr. Trelawny, Mr. Corbeck entered. When he saw us grouped he would have drawn back; but in an instant Mr. Trelawny had sprung forward and dragged him forward. As he shook him by both hands, he seemed a transformed man. All the enthusiasm of his youth, of which Mr. Corbeck had told us, seemed to have come back to him in an instant.

‘So you have got the lamps!’ he almost shouted. ‘My reasoning was right after all. Come to the library, where we will be alone, and tell me all about it! And while he does it, Ross,’ said he, turning to me, ‘do you like a good fellow, get the key from the safe deposit, so that I may have a look at the lamps!’

Then the three of them, the daughter lovingly holding her father’s arm, went into the library, whilst I hurried off to Chancery Lane.

When I returned with the key, I found them still engaged in the narrative; but Doctor Winchester, who had arrived soon after I left, was with them. Mr. Trelawny, on hearing from Margaret of his great attention and kindness, and how he had, under much pressure to the contrary, steadfastly obeyed his written wishes, *-had* asked him to remain and listen: ‘It will interest you, perhaps,’ he said, ‘to learn the end of the story!’

We all had an early dinner together. We sat after it a good while, and then Mr. Trelawny said:

‘Now, I think we had all better separate and go quietly to bed early. We may have much to talk about tomorrow; and tonight I want to think.’

Doctor Winchester went away, taking, with a courteous forethought, Mr. Corbeck with him, and leaving me behind. When the others had gone Mr. Trelawny said:

‘I think it will be well if you, too, will go home for tonight. I want to be quite alone with my daughter; there are things I wish to speak of to her, and to her alone. Perhaps, even tomorrow, I may be able to tell you also of them; but in the meantime there will be less distraction to us both if we are alone in the house.’ I quite understood and sympathized with his feelings; but the experience of the last few days were strong on me, and with some hesitation I said:

‘But may it not be dangerous? If you knew as we do—’ To my surprise Margaret interrupted me:

“There will be no danger, Malcolm. I shall be with Father!’ As she spoke she clung to him in a protective way. I said no more, but stood up to go at once. Mr. Trelawny said heartily:

‘Come as early as you please, Ross. Come “to breakfast. After it, you and I will want to have a word together.’ He went out of the room quietly, leaving us together. I clasped and kissed Margaret’s hands, which she held out to me, and then drew her close to me, and our lips met for the first time.

I did not sleep much that night. Happiness on the one side of my bed and Anxiety on the other kept sleep away. But if I had anxious care, I had also happiness which had not equal in my life — or ever can have. The night went by so quickly that the dawn seemed to rush on me, not stealing as is its wont.

Before nine o’clock I was at Kensington. All anxiety seemed to float away like a cloud as I met Margaret, and saw that already the pallor of her face had given way to the rich bloom which I knew. She told me that her father had slept well, and that he would be with us soon.

‘I do believe,’ she whispered, ‘that my dear and thoughtful Father has kept back on purpose, so that I might meet you first, and alone!’

After breakfast Mr. Trelawny took us into the study, saying as he passed in:

‘I have asked Margaret to come too.’ When we were seated, he said gravely:

‘I told you last night that we might have something to say to each other. I dare say that you may have thought that it was about Margaret and yourself. Isn’t that so?’ ‘I thought so.’

“Well, my boy, that is all right. Margaret and I have been talking, and I know her wishes.’ He held out his hand. When I had wrung it, and had kissed Margaret, who drew her chair close to mine, so that we could hold hands as we listened, he went on, but with a certain Hesitation — it could hardly be called nervousness — which was new to me:

‘You know a good deal of my hunt after this mummy and her belongings: and I dare say you have guessed a good deal of my theories. But these at any rate I shall explain later, concisely and categorically, if it be necessary. What I want to consult you about now is this: Margaret and I disagree on one point. I am about to make an experiment; the experiment which is to crown all that I have devoted twenty years of research, and danger, and labour to prepare for. Through it we may learn things that have been hidden from the eyes and the knowledge of men for centuries; for scores of centuries. I do not want my daughter to be present; for I cannot blind myself to the fact that there may be danger in it — great danger, and of an unknown kind. I have, however, already faced very great dangers, and of an unknown kind: and so has that brave scholar who has helped me in the work. As to myself, I am willing to run any risk.

For science, and history, and philosophy may benefit; and we may turn one old page of a wisdom unknown in this prosaic age. But for my daughter to run such a risk I am loth. Her young bright life is too precious to throw lightly away; now especially when she is on the very threshold of new happiness. I do not wish to see her life given, as her dear mother's was—'

He broke down for a moment, and covered his eyes with his hands. In an instant Margaret was beside him, clasping him close, and kissing him, and comforting him with loving words. Then, standing erect, with one hand on his head, she said:

'Father! mother did not bid you stay beside her, even when you wanted to go on that journey of unknown danger to Egypt; though that country was then upset from end to end with war and the dangers that follow war. You have told me how she left you free to go as you wished; though that she thought of danger for you, and feared it for you, is proved by this!' She held up her wrist with the scar that seemed to run blood. 'Now, mother's daughter does as mother would have done herself!' Then she turned to me:

'Malcolm, you know I love you! But love is trust; and you must trust me in danger as well as in joy. You and I must stand beside Father in this unknown peril. Together we shall come through it; or together we shall fail; together we shall die. That is my wish; my first wish to my husband that is to be! Do you think that, as a daughter, I am right? Tell my Father what you think!'

She looked like a Queen stooping to plead. My love for her grew and grew. I stood up beside her; and took her hand and said:

'Mr. Trelawny! In this Margaret and I are one!' He took both our hands and held them hard. Presently he said with deep emotion:

'It is as her mother would have done!' Mr. Corbeck and Doctor

Winchester came exactly at the time appointed, and joined us in the library. Despite my great happiness I felt our meeting to be a very solemn function. For I could never forget the strange things that had been; and the idea of the strange things which might be, was with me like a cloud, pressing down on us all. From the gravity of my companions I gathered that each of them also was ruled by some such dominating thought.

Instinctively we gathered our chairs into a circle round Mr. Trelawny who had taken the great armchair near the window. Margaret sat by him on his right, and I was next to her. Mr. Corbeck was on his left with Doctor Winchester on the other side. After a few seconds of silence Mr. Trelawny said to Mr. Corbeck.

'You have told Dr Winchester all up to the present, as we arranged:'

'Yes,' he answered; so Mr. Trelawny said: 'And I have told Margaret, so we all know!' Then, turning to the Doctor, he asked:

'And am I to take it that you, knowing all as we know it who have followed the matter for years, wish to share in the experiment which we hope to make?' His answer was direct and uncompromising:

'Certainly! Why, when this matter was fresh to me, I offered to go on with it to the end. Now that it is of such strange interest, I would not miss it for anything which you could name. Be quite easy in your mind, Mr. Trelawny. I am a scientist and an investigator of phenomena. I have no one belonging to me or dependent on me. I am quite alone, and free to do what I like with my own — including my life!' Mr. Trelawny bowed gravely, and turning to Mr. Corbeck said:

'I have known your ideas for many years past, old friend; so I need ask you nothing. As to 'Margaret and Malcolm Ross, they have already told me their wishes in no uncertain way.' He paused a few seconds, as though to put his thoughts or his words in order; then he began to explain his views and intentions. He spoke very carefully, seeming always to bear in mind that some of us who listened were ignorant of the very root and nature of some things touched upon, and explaining them to us as he went on:-

'The experiment which is before us is to try whether or no there is any force, any reality, in the old Magic. There could not possibly be more favourable conditions for the test; and it is my own desire to do all that is possible to make the original design effective. That there is some such existing power I firmly believe.' It might not be possible to create, or arrange, or organize such a power in our own time; but I take it that if in Old Time such a power existed, it may have some exceptional survival. After all, the Bible is not a myth; and we read there that the sun stood still at a man's command, and that an ass — not a human one — spoke. And if the Witch at Endor could call up to Saul the spirit of Samuel, why may not there have been others with equal powers; and why may not one among them survive? Indeed, we are told in the Book of Samuel that the Witch of Endor was only one of many, and her being consulted by Saul was a matter of chance. He only sought one among the many whom he had driven out of Israel; "all those that had Familiar Spirits, and the Wizards". This Egyptian Queen, Tera, who reigned nearly two thousand years before Saul, had a Familiar, and was a Wizard too. See how the priests of her time, and those after it tried to wipe out her name from the face of the earth, and put a curse over the very door of her tomb so that none might ever discover the lost name. Ay, and they succeeded so well that even Manetho, the historian of the Egyptian Kings, writing in the tenth century before Christ, with all the lore of the priesthood for forty centuries behind him, and with possibility of access to every existing record, could not even find her name. Did it strike any of you, in thinking of the late events, who or what her Familiar was?’ There was an interruption, for Doctor Winchester struck one hand loudly on the other as he ejaculated:

‘The cat! The mummy cat! I knew it!’ Mr. Trelawny smiled over at him.

‘You are right! There is every indication that the Familiar of the Wizard Queen was that cat which was mummied when she was, and was not only placed in her tomb, but was laid in the sarcophagus with her. That was what bit into my wrist, what cut me with sharp claws.’ He paused Margaret’s comment was a purely girlish one:

‘Then my poor Silvio is acquitted. I am glad!’ Her father stroked her hair and went on:

‘This woman seems to have had extraordinary foresight. Foresight far, far beyond her age and the philosophy of her time. She seems to have seen through the weakness of her own religion, and even prepared for emergence into a different world. All her aspirations were for the North, the point of the compass whence blew the cool invigorating breezes that make life a joy. From the first, her eyes seem to have been attracted to the seven stars of the Plough from the fact, as recorded in the hieroglyphics in her tomb, that at her birth a great aerolite fell, from whose heart was finally extracted that Jewel of Seven Stars which she regarded as the talisman of her life. It seems to have so far ruled her destiny that all her thought and care circled round it. The Magic Coffer, so wondrously wrought with seven sides, we learn from the same source, came from the aerolite. Seven was to her a magic number; and no wonder. With seven fingers on one hand, and seven toes on one foot. With a talisman of a rare ruby with seven stars in the same position as in that constellation which ruled her birth, each star of the seven having seven points — in itself a geological wonder — it would have been odd if she had not been attracted by it. Again, she was born, we learn in the Stele of her tomb, in the seventh month of the year — the month beginning with the Inundation of the Nile. Of which month the presiding Goddess was Hathor, the Goddess of her own house, of the Antefs of the Theban line — the Goddess who in various forms symbolizes beauty, and pleasure, and resurrection. Again, in this seventh month — which, by later Egyptian astronomy began on October 28th, and ran to the 27th of our November — on the seventh day the Pointer of the Plough just rises above the horizon of the sky at Thebes.

'In a marvellously strange way, therefore, are grouped into this woman's life these various things. The number seven; the Pole Star, with the constellation of seven stars; the God of the month, Hathor, who was her own particular God, the God of her family, the Antefs of the Theban Dynasty whose Kings' symbol it was, and whose seven forms ruled love and the delights of life and resurrection. If ever there was ground for magic; for the power of symbolism carried into mystic use; for a belief in finite spirits in an age which knew not the Living God, it is here.

'Remember, too, that this woman was skilled in all the science of her time. Her wise and cautious father took care of that, knowing that by her own wisdom she must ultimately combat the intrigues of the Hierarchy. Bear in mind that in old Egypt the science of Astronomy began and was developed to an extraordinary height; and that Astrology followed Astronomy in its progress. And it is possible that in the later developments of science with regard to light rays, we may yet find that Astrology is on a scientific basis. Our next wave of scientific thought may deal with this. I shall have something special to call your minds to on this point presently. Bear in mind also that the Egyptians knew sciences, of which today, despite all our advantages, we are profoundly ignorant. Acoustics, for instance, an exact science with the builders of the temples of Karnak, of Luxor, of the Pyramids, is today a mystery to Bell, and Kelvin, and Edison, and Marconi. Again, these old miracle-workers probably understood some practical way of using other forces, and amongst them the forces of light that at present we do not dream of. But of this matter I shall speak later. That Magic Coffer of Queen Tera is probably a magic box in more ways than one. It may — possibly it does — contain forces that we wot not of. We cannot open it; it must be closed from within. How then was it closed? It is a coffer of solid stone, of amazing hardness, more like a jewel than an ordinary marble, with a lid equally solid; and yet all is so finely wrought that the finest tool made today cannot be inserted under the flange. How was it wrought to such perfection? How was the stone *so* chosen that those translucent patches match the relations of the seven stars of the constellation. How is it, or from what cause, that when the starlight shines on it, it glows from within — that when I fix the lamps in similar form the glow grows greater still; and yet the box is irresponsive to ordinary light however great. I tell you that that box hides some great mystery of science. We shall find that the light will open it in some way; either by striking on some substance, sensitive in a peculiar way to its effect, or in releasing some greater power. I only trust that in our ignorance we may not so bungle things as to do harm to its mechanism; and so deprive the knowledge of our time of a lesson handed down, as by a miracle, through nearly five thousand years.

‘In another way, too, there may be hidden in that box secrets which, for good or ill, may enlighten the world. We know from their records, and inferentially also, that the Egyptians studied the properties of herbs and minerals for magic purposes — white magic as well as black. We know that some of the wizards of old could induce from sleep dreams of any given kind. That this purpose was mainly effected by hypnotism, which was another art or science of Old Nile, I have little doubt. But still, they must have had a mastery of drugs that is far beyond anything we know. With our own pharmacopoeia we can, to a certain extent, induce dreams. We may even differentiate between good and bad — dreams of pleasure, or disturbing and harrowing dreams. But these old practitioners seemed to have been able to command at will any form or colour of dreaming; could work round any given subject or thought in almost any way required. In that coffer, which you have seen, may rest a very armoury of dreams. Indeed, some of the forces that lie within it may have been already used in my household.' Again there was an interruption from Dr Winchester:

'But if in your case some of these imprisoned forces were used, what set. them free at the opportune time, or how? Besides, you and Mr. Corbeck were once before put into a trance for three whole days, when you were in the Queen's tomb for the second time. And then, as I garnered from Mr. Corbeck's story, the coffer was not back in the tomb, though the mummy was. Surely *in* both these cases there must have been some active intelligence awake, and with some other power to wield.' Mr. Trelawny's answer was equally to the point:

'There was some active intelligence awake. I am convinced of it. And it wielded a power which it never lacks. I believe that on both those occasions hypnotism was the power wielded.'

'And wherein is that power contained? What view do you hold on the subject?' Doctor Winchester's voice vibrated with the intensity of his excitement as he leaned forward, breathing hard, and with eyes staring. Mr. Trelawny said solemnly:

" 'In the mummy of the Queen Tera! I was coming to that presently. Perhaps we had better wait till I clear the ground a little. What I hold is, that the preparation of that box was made for a special occasion; as indeed were all the preparations of the tomb and all belonging to it. Queen Tera did not trouble herself to guard against snakes and scorpions, in that rocky tomb cut in the sheer cliff face a hundred feet above the level of the valley, and fifty down from the summit. Her precautions were against the disturbances of human hands; against the jealousy and hatred of the priests who, had they known of her real aims, would have tried to baffle them. From her point of view, she made all ready for the time of resurrection, whenever that might be. I gather from the symbolic pictures in the tomb that she so far differed from the belief of her time that she looked for a resurrection in the flesh. It was doubtless this that intensified the hatred of the priesthood, and gave them an acceptable cause for obliterating the very existence, present' and future, of one who had outraged their theories and blasphemed their gods. All that she might require, either in the accomplishment of the resurrection or after it, were contained in that almost hermetically sealed suite of chambers in the rock. In the great sarcophagus, which as you know is of a size quite unusual even for kings, was the mummy of her Familiar, the cat, which from its great size I take to be a sort of tiger-cat. In the tomb, also in a strong receptacle, were the canopic jars usually containing those internal organs which are separately embalmed, but which in this case had no such contents. So that, I take it, there was ~in her case a departure in embalming; and that the organs were restored to the body, each in its proper place — if, indeed, they had ever been removed. If this surmise be ‘ true, we shall find that the brain of the Queen either was never extracted in the usual way, or, if so taken out, that it was duly replaced, instead of being enclosed within the mummy wrappings. Finally, in the sarcophagus there was the Magic Coffer on which her feet rested. Mark you also, the care taken in the preservance of her power to control the elements. According to her belief, the open hand outside the wrappings controlled the Air, and the strange Jewel Stone with the shining stars controlled Fire. The symbolism inscribed on the soles of her feet gave sway over Land and Water. About the Star Stone I shall tell you later; but whilst we are speaking of the sarcophagus, mark how she guarded her secret in case of grave-wrecking or intrusion. None could open her Magic Coffer without the lamps, for we know now that ordinary light will not be effective. The great lid of the sarcophagus was not sealed down as usual, because she wished to control the air. But she hid the lamps, which in structure belong to the Magic Coffer, in a place where none could find them, except by following the secret guidance which she had prepared for only the eyes of wisdom. And even here she had guarded against chance discovery, by preparing a bolt of death for the unwary discoverer. To do this she had applied the lesson of the tradition of the avenging guard of the treasures of the pyramid, built by her great predecessor of the Fourth Dynasty of the throne of Egypt.

You have noted, I suppose, how there were, in the case of her tomb, certain deviations from the usual rules. For instance, the shaft of the Mummy Pit, which is usually filled up solid with stones and rubbish, was left open. Why was this? I take it that she had made arrangements for leaving the tomb when, after her resurrection, she should be a new woman, with a different personality, and less inured to the hardships that in her first existence she had suffered. So far as we can judge of her intent, all things needful for her exit into the world had been thought of, even to the iron chain, described by Van Huyn, close to the door in the rock, by which she might be able to lower herself to the ground. That she expected a long -period to elapse was shown in the choice of material. An ordinary rope would be rendered weaker or unsafe in process of time, but she imagined, and rightly, that the iron would endure.

'What her intentions were when once she trod the open earth afresh we do not know, and we never shall, unless her own dead lips can soften and speak.

Chapter XV. The Purpose of Queen Tera

‘NOW, AS TO THE STAR JEWEL! THIS SHE MANIFESTLY regarded as the greatest of her treasures. On it she had engraven words which none of her time dared to speak.

‘In the old Egyptian belief it was held that there were words, which, if used properly — for the method of speaking them was as important as the words themselves — could command the Lords of the Upper and the Lower Worlds. The “hekau”, or word of power, was all important in certain ritual. On the Jewel of Seven Stars, which, as you know, is carved into the image of a scarab, are graven in hieroglyphic two such hekau, one above, the other underneath. But you will understand better when you see it! Wait here! Do not stir!’

As he spoke, he rose and left the room. A great fear for him came over me; but I was in some strange way relieved when I looked at Margaret. Whenever there had been any possibility of danger to her father, she had shown great fear for him; now she was calm and placid. I said nothing, but waited.

In two or three minutes Mr. Trelawny returned. He held in his hand a little golden box. This, as he resumed his seat, he placed before him on the table. We all leaned forward as he opened it.

On a lining of white satin lay a wondrous ruby of immense size, almost as big as the top joint of Margaret’s little finger. It was carven — it could not possibly have been its natural shape, but jewels do not show the working of the tool — into the shape of a scarab, with its wings folded, and its legs and feelers pressed back to its sides. Shining through its wondrous ‘pigeon’s blood’ colour were seven different stars, each of seven points, in such position that they reproduced exactly the figure of the Plough. There could be no possible mistake as to this in the mind of anyone who had ever noted the constellation. On it were some hieroglyphic figures, cut with the most exquisite precision, as I could see when it came to my turn to use the magnifying glass, which Mr. Trelawny took from his pocket and handed to us.

When we had all seen it fully, Mr. Trelawny turned it over so that it rested on its back in a cavity made to hold it in the upper half of the box. The reverse was no less wonderful than the upper, being carved to resemble the underside of the beetle. It, too, had some hieroglyphic figures cut on it. Mr. Trelawny resumed his lecture as we all sat with our heads close to this wonderful jewel:

‘As you see, there are two words, one on the top, the other underneath. The symbols on the top represent a single word, composed of one syllable prolonged, with its determinatives. You know, all of you, I suppose, that the Egyptian language was phonetic, and that the hieroglyphic symbol represented the sound. The first symbol here, the hoe, means “mer”, and the two pointed ellipses the prolongation of the final r: mer-r-r. The sitting figure with the hand to its face is what we call the “determinative” of “thought”; and the roll of papyrus that of “abstraction”. Thus we get the word “mer”, love, in its abstract, general, and fullest sense. This is the hekau which can command the Upper World.’

Margaret’s face was a glory as she said in a deep, low, ringing tone:

‘Oh, but it is true. How the old wonder-workers guessed at almighty Truth!’ Then a hot blush swept her face, and her eyes fell. Her father smiled at her lovingly as he resumed:

‘The symbolization of the word on the reverse is simpler, though the meaning is more abstruse. The first symbol means “men”, “abiding”, and the second, “ab”, “the heart”. So that we get “abiding of heart”, or in our own language “patience”. And this is the hekau to control the Lower World!’

He closed the box, and motioning us to remain as we were, he went back to his room to replace the Jewel in the safe. When he had returned and resumed his seat, he went on:

“That Jewel, with its mystic words, and which Queen Tera held under her hand in her sarcophagus, was to be an important factor — probably the most important — in the working out of the act of her resurrection. From the first, I seemed by a sort of instinct to realize this. I kept the Jewel within my great safe, whence none could extract it; not even Queen Tera herself with her astral body.’

‘Her “astral body?” What is that, Father? What does it mean?’ There was a keenness in Margaret’s voice as she asked the question which surprised me a little; but Trelawny smiled a sort of indulgent parental smile, which came through his grim solemnity like sunshine through a rifted cloud, as he spoke:

‘The astral body, which is a part of Buddhist belief, long subsequent to the time I speak of, and which is an accepted fact of modern mysticism, had its rise in Ancient Egypt; at least, so far as we know. It is that the gifted individual can at will, quick as thought itself, transfer his body whithersoever he chooses, by the dissolution and reincarnation of particles. In the ancient belief there were several parts of a human being. You may as well know them; so that you will understand matters relative to them or dependent on them as they occur.

‘First there is the “Ka”, or “Double”, which, as Doctor Budge explains, may be defined as- “an abstract individuality of personality” which was imbued with all the characteristic attributes of the individual it represented, and possessed an absolutely independent existence. It was free to move from place to place upon the earth at will; and it could enter into heaven and hold converse with the gods. Then there was the "Ba", or "soul", which dwelt in the "Ka", and had the power of becoming corporeal or incorporeal at will; "it had both substance and form.... It had power to leave the tomb.... It could revisit the body in the tomb... and could reanimate it and hold converse with it." Again, there was the "Khu", the "spiritual intelligence", or spirit. It took the form of "a shining, luminous, intangible shape of the body".... Then again there was the "Sekhem", or "power" of a man, his strength or vital force personified. These with the "Khaibit", or "shadow", the "Ren", or "name", the "Khat", or "physical body", and "Ab", the "heart", in which life was seated, went to the full making up of a man.

'Thus you will see, that if this division of functions, spiritual and bodily, ethereal and corporeal, ideal and actual, be accepted as exact, there are all the possibilities and capabilities of corporeal transference, guided always by an unimprisonable will or intelligence.' As he paused I murmured the lines from Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound':

The Magus Zoroaster... Met his own image walking in the garden.

Mr. Trelawny was. not displeased. 'Quite so!' he said, in his quiet way. 'Shelley had a better conception of ancient beliefs than any of our poets.' With a voice changed again he resumed his lecture, for so k was to some of us:

There is another belief of the ancient Egyptian which you must bear in mind; that regarding the ushaptiu figures of Osiris, which were placed with the dead to do its work in the Under World. The enlargement of this idea came to a belief that it was possible to transmit, by magical formulae, the soul and qualities of any living creature to a figure made in its image. This would give a terrible extension of power to one who held the gift of magic.

‘It is from a union of these various beliefs, and their natural corollaries, that I have come to the conclusion that Queen Tera expected to be able to effect her own resurrection, when, and where, and how, she would. That she may have held before her a definite time for making her effort is not only possible but likely. I shall not stop now to explain it, but shall enter upon the subject later on. With a soul with the Gods, a spirit which could wander the earth at will, and a power of corporeal transference, or an astral body, there need be no bounds or limits to her ambition. The belief is forced upon us that for these forty or fifty centuries she lay dormant in her tomb — waiting. Waiting with that “patience” which could rule the Gods of the Under World, for that “love” which could command those of the Upper World. What she may have dreamt we know not; but her dream must have been broken when the Dutch explorer entered her sculptured cavern, and his follower violated the sacred privacy of her tomb by his rude outrage in the theft of her hand.

“That theft, with all that followed, proved to us one thing, however: that each part of her body, though separated from the rest, can be a central point or rallying place for the items or particles of her astral body. That hand in my. room could ensure her instantaneous presence in the flesh, and its equally rapid dissolution.

‘Now comes the crown of my argument. The purpose of the attack on me was to get the safe open, so that the sacred Jewel of Seven Stars could be extracted. That immense door of the safe could not keep out her astral body, which, or any part of it, could gather itself as well within as without the safe. And I doubt not that in the darkness of the night that mummied hand sought often the Talisman Jewel, and drew new inspiration from its touch. But despite all its power, the astral body could not remove the Jewel through the chinks of the safe. The Ruby is not astral; and it could only be moved in the ordinary way by the opening of the doors. To this end, the Queen used her astral body and the fierce force of her Familiar, to bring to the keyhole of the safe the master key which debarred her wish. For years I have suspected, nay, have believed as much; and I, too, guarded myself against powers of the Nether World. I, too, waited in patience till I should have gathered together all the factors required for the opening of the Magic Coffer and the resurrection of the mummied Queen!' He paused, and his daughter's voice came out sweet and clear, and full of intense feeling:

'Father, in the Egyptian belief, was the power of resurrection of a mummied body a general one, or was it limited? That is: could it achieve resurrection many times in the course of ages; or only once, and that one final?'

There was but one resurrection,' he answered. 'There were some who believed that this was to be a definite resurrection of the body into the real world. But in the common belief, the Spirit found joy in the Elysian Fields, where there was plenty of food and no fear of famine. Where there was moisture and deep-rooted reeds, and all the joys that are to be expected by the people of an arid land and burning clime.'

Then Margaret spoke with an earnestness which showed the conviction of her inmost soul:

'To me, then, it is given to understand what was the dream of this great and far-thinking and high-souled lady of old; the dream that held her soul in patient waiting for its realization through the passing of all those tens of centuries. The dream of a love that might be; a love that she felt she might, even under new conditions, herself evoke. The love that is the dream of every woman's life; of the Old and of the New; Pagan or Christian; under -whatever sun; in whatever rank or calling; however may have been the joy or pain of her life in other ways. Oh! I know it! I know it! I am a woman, and I know a woman's heart. What were the lack of food or the plenitude of it; what were feast or famine to this woman, born in a palace, with the shadow of the Crown of the Two Egypts on her brows! What were reedy morasses or the tinkle of running water to her whose barges could sweep the great Nile from the mountains to the sea. What were petty joys and absence of petty fears to her, the raising of whose hand could hurl armies, or draw to the water-stairs of her palaces the commerce of the world! At whose word rose temples filled with all the artistic beauty of the Times of Old which it was her aim and pleasure to restore! Under whose guidance the solid rock yawned into the sepulchre that she designed!

'Surely, surely, such a one had nobler dreams! I can feel them in my heart; I can see them with my sleeping eyes!'

As she spoke she seemed to be inspired; and her eyes had a far-away look as though they saw something beyond mortal sight. And then the deep eyes filled up with unshed tears of great emotion. The very soul of the woman seemed to speak in her voice; whilst we who listened sat entranced.

'I can see her in her loneliness and in the silence of her mighty pride, dreaming her own dream of things far different from those around her. Of some other land, far, far away under-the canopy of the silent night, lit by the cool, beautiful light of the stars. A land under that Northern star, whence blew the sweet winds that cooled the feverish desert air. A land of wholesome greenery, far, far away. Where were no scheming and malignant priesthood; whose ideas were to lead to power through gloomy temples and more gloomy caverns of the dead, through an endless ritual of death! A land where love was not base, but a divine possession of the soul! Where there might be some one kindred spirit which could speak to hers through mortal lips like her own; whose being could merge with hers in a sweet communion of soul to “soul, even as their breaths could mingle in the ambient air! I know the feeling for I have shared it myself. I may speak of it now, since the blessing has come into my own life. I may speak of it since it enables me to interpret the feelings, the very longing soul, of that sweet and lovely Queen, so different from her surroundings, so high above her time! Whose nature, put into a word, could control the forces of the Under World; and the name of whose aspiration, though but graven on a starlit jewel, could command all the powers in the Pantheon of the High Gods.

‘And in the realization of that dream she will surely be content to rest!’

We men sat silent, as the young girl gave her powerful interpretation of the design or purpose of the woman of old. Her every word and tone carried with it the conviction of her own belief. The loftiness of her thoughts seemed to uplift us all as we listened. Her noble words, flowing in musical cadence and vibrant with internal force, seemed to issue from some great instrument of elemental power. Even her tone was new to us all; so that we listened as to some new and strange being from a new and strange world. Her father’s face was full of delight. I knew now its cause. I understood the happiness that had come into his life, on his return to the world that he knew, from that prolonged sojourn in the world of dreams. To find in his daughter, whose nature he had never till now known, such a wealth of affection, such a splendour of spiritual insight, such a scholarly imagination, such... The rest of his feeling was of hope!

The two other men were silent unconsciously. One man had had his dreaming; for the other, his dreams were to come.

For myself, I was like one in a trance. Who was this new, radiant being who had won to existence out of the mist and darkness of our fears. Love has divine possibilities for the lover's heart! The wings of the soul may expand at any time from the shoulders of the loved one, who then may sweep into angel form. I knew that in my Margaret's nature were divine possibilities of many kinds. When under the shade of the overhanging willow-tree on the river, I had gazed into the depths of her beautiful eyes, I had thenceforth a strict belief in the manifold beauties and excellences of her nature; but this soaring and understanding spirit was, indeed, a revelation. My pride, like her father's, was outside myself; my joy and rapture were complete and supreme!

When we had all got back to earth again in our various ways, Mr. Trelawny, holding his daughter's hand in his, went on with his discourse:

'Now, as to the time at which Queen Tera intended her resurrection to take place! We are in contact with some of the higher astronomical calculations in connection with true orientation. As you knew, the stars shift their relative positions in the heavens; but though the real distances traversed are beyond all ordinary comprehension, the effects as we see them are small. Nevertheless, they are susceptible of measurement, not by years, indeed, but by centuries. It was by this means that Sir John Herschel arrived at the date of the building of the Great Pyramid — a date fixed by the time necessary to change the star of the true north from Draconis to the Pole Star, and since then verified by later discoveries. From the above there can be no doubt whatever that astronomy was an exact science with the Egyptians at least a thousand years before the time of Queen Tera. Now, the stars that go to make up a constellation change in process of time their relative positions, and the Plough is a notable example. The changes in the position of stars in even forty, centuries is so small as to be hardly noticeable by an eye not trained to minute observances, but they can be measured and verified. Did you, or any of you, notice how exactly the stars in the Ruby correspond to the position of the stars in the Plough; or how the same holds with regard to the translucent places in the Magic Coffer?'

We all assented. He went on:

'You are quite correct. They correspond exactly. And yet when Queen Tera was laid in her tomb, neither the stars in the Jewel nor the translucent places in the Coffer corresponded to the position of the stars in the Constellation as they then were!'

We looked at each other as he paused; a new light was breaking upon us. With a ring of mastery in his voice he went on:

'Do you not see the meaning of this? Does it not throw a light on the intention of the Queen? She, who was guided by augury, and magic, and superstition, naturally chose a time for her resurrection which seemed to have been pointed out by the High Gods themselves, who had sent their message on a thunderbolt from other worlds. When such a time was fixed by supernal wisdom, would it not be the height of human wisdom to avail of it? Thus it is' — here his voice deepened and trembled with the intensity of his feeling— 'that to us and our time is given the opportunity of this wondrous peep into the old world, such as has been the privilege of none other of our time; which may never be again.

‘From first to last the cryptic writing and symbolism of that wondrous tomb of that wondrous woman is full of guiding light; and the key of the many mysteries lies in that most wondrous Jewel which she held in her dead hand over the dead heart, which she hoped and believed would beat again in a newer and nobler world!

‘There are only loose ends now to consider. Margaret has given us the true inwardness of the feeling of the other Queen!’ He looked at her fondly, and stroked her hand as he said it: ‘For my own part I sincerely hope she is right; for in such case it will be a joy, I am sure, to all of us to assist at such a realization of hope. But we must not go too fast, or believe too much in our present state of knowledge. The voice that we hearken for comes out of times strangely other than our own; when human life counted for little, and when the morality of the time made little account of the removing of obstacles in the way to achievement of desire. We must keep our eyes fixed on the scientific side, and wait for the developments on the psychical side.

‘Now, as to this stone box, which we call the Magic Coffer. As I have said, I am convinced that it opens only in obedience to some principle of light, or the exercise of some of its forces at present unknown to us. There is here much ground for conjecture and for experiment; for as yet the scientists have not thoroughly differentiated the kinds, and powers, and degrees of light. Without analysing various rays we may, I think, take it for granted that there are different qualities and powers of light; and this great field of scientific investigation is almost virgin soil. We know as yet so little of natural forces, that imagination need set no bounds to its, flights in considering the possibilities of the future. Within but a few years we have made such discoveries as two centuries ago would have sent the discoveries to the flames. The liquefaction of oxygen; the existence of radium, of helium, of polonium, -of argon; the different powers ‘of Rontgen and Cathode and Becquerel rays. And as we may finally prove that there are different kinds and qualities of light, so we may find that combustion may have its own powers of differentiation; that there are qualities in some flames non-existent in others. It may be that some of the essential conditions of substance are continuous, even in the destruction of their bases. Last night I was thinking of this, and reasoning that as there are certain qualities in some oils which are not in others, so there may be certain similar or corresponding qualities or powers in the combination of each. I suppose we have all noticed some time or other that the light of colza oil is not quite the same as that of paraffin, or that the flames of coal gas and whale oil are different. They find it so in the lighthouses! All at once it occurred to me that there might be some special virtue in the oil which had been found in the jars when Queen Tera’s tomb was opened. These had not been used to pre-serve the intestines as usual, so they must have been placed there for some other purpose. I remembered that in Van Huyn’s narrative he had commented on the way the jars were sealed. This was lightly, though effectually; they could be opened without force. The jars were themselves preserved in a sarcophagus which, though of immense strength and hermetically sealed, could be opened easily. Accordingly, I went at once to examine the jars. A little — very little of the oil still remained, but it had grown thick in the two and a half centuries in which the jars had been open. Still, it was not rancid; and on examining it I found it was cedar oil, and that it still exhaled something of its original aroma.

This gave me the idea that it was to be used to fill the lamps. Whoever had placed "the oil in the jars, and the jars in the sarcophagus, knew that there might be shrinkage in process of time, even in vases of alabaster, and fully allowed for it; for each of the jars would have filled the lamps half a dozen times. With part of the oil remaining I made some experiments, therefore, which may give useful results. You know, Doctor, that cedar oil, which was much used in the preparation and ceremonials of the Egyptian dead, has a certain refractive power which we do not find in other oils. For instance, we use it on the lenses of our microscopes to give additional clearness of vision. Last night I put some in one of the lamps, and placed it near a translucent part of the Magic Coffer. The effect was very great; the glow of light within was fuller and more intense than I could have imagined, where an electric light similarly placed had little, if any, effect. I should have tried others of the seven lamps, but that my supply of oil ran out. This, however, is on the road to rectification. I have sent for more cedar oil, and expect to have before long an ample supply. Whatever may happen from other causes, our experiment shall not, at all events, fail from this. We shall see! We shall see!'

Doctor Winchester had evidently been following the logical process of the other's mind, for his comment was: 'I do hope that when the light is effective in opening the box, the mechanism will not be impaired or destroyed.' His doubt as to this gave anxious thought to some of us.

Chapter XVI. Powers — Old and New

THE TIME WORE AWAY, WONDROUS SLOWLY IN SOME ways, wonderfully quickly in others. Today, in the new-found joyous certainty of the return of my love, I should have liked to have had Margaret all to myself. But this day was not for love or for lovemaking. The shadow of fearful expectation was over it. The more I thought over the coming experiment, the more strange it all seemed; and the more foolish were we who were deliberately entering upon it. It was all so stupendous, so mysterious, so unnecessary! The issues were so vast; the danger so strange, so unknown. Even if it should be successful, what new difficulties would it not raise. What changes might happen, did men know that the portals of the House of Death were not in very truth eternally fixed; and that the Dead could come forth again! Could we realize what it was for us modern mortals to be arrayed against the Gods of Old, with their mysterious powers gotten from natural forces, or begotten of them when the world was young. When land and water were forming themselves from out the primeval slime. When the very air was purifying itself from elemental dross. When the ‘dragons of the prime’ were changing their forms and their powers, made only to combat with geologic forces, to grow in accord with the new vegetable life which was springing up around them. When animals, when even man himself and man’s advance were growths as natural as the” planetary movements, or the shining of the stars. Ay! and further back still, when as yet the Spirit which moved on the face of the waters had not spoken the words commanding to come into existence Light and the Life which followed it.

Nay, even beyond this was a still more overwhelming conjecture.

The whole possibility of the Great Experiment to which we were now pledged was based on the reality of the existence of the Old Forces which seemed to be coming in contact with the New Civilization. That there were, and are, such cosmic forces we cannot doubt, and that the Intelligence, which is behind them, was and is. Were those primal and elemental forces controlled at any time by other than that Final Cause which Christendom holds as its very essence? If there were truth at all in the belief of Ancient Egypt then their Gods had real existence, real power, real force. Godhead is not a quality subject to the ills of mortals: as in its essence it is creative and recreative, it cannot die. Any belief to the contrary would be antagonistic to reason; for it would hold that a part is greater than the whole. If then the Old Gods held their forces, wherein was the supremacy of the new? Of course, if the Old Gods had lost their power, or if they never had any, the Experiment could not succeed. But if it should indeed succeed, or if there were a possibility of success, then we should be face to face with an inference so overwhelming that one hardly dared to follow it to its conclusion. This would be: that the struggle between Life and Death would no longer be a matter of the earth, earthy; that the war of supra-elemental forces would be moved from the tangible world of facts to the Mid-Region, wherever it may be, which is the home of the Gods. Did such a region exist? What was it that Milton saw with his blind eyes in the rays of poetic light falling between him and Heaven? Whence came that stupendous vision of the Evangelist which has for eighteen centuries held spellbound the intelligence of Christendom. Was there room in the Universe for opposing Gods; or if such there were, would the stronger allow manifestations of power on the part of the opposing Force which would tend to the weakening of His own teaching and designs? Surely, surely if this supposition were correct there would be some strange and awful development — something unexpected and unpredictable — before the end should be allowed to come!

The subject was too vast and, under the present conditions, too full of strange surmises. I dared not follow it! I set myself to wait in patience till the time should come.

Margaret remained divinely calm. I think I envied her, even whilst I admired and loved her for it. Mr. Trelawny was nervously anxious, as indeed were the other men. With him it took the form of movement; movement both of body and mind. In both respects he was restless, going from one place to another with or without a cause, or even a pretext; and changing from one subject of thought to another. Now and again he would show glimpses of the harrowing anxiety which filled him, by his manifest expectation of finding a similar condition in myself. He would be ever explaining things. And in his explanations I could see the way. in which he was turning over in his mind all the phenomena; all the possible causes; all the possible results. Once, in the midst of a most learned dissertation on the growth of Egyptian Astrology, he broke put on a different subject, or rather a branch or corollary of the same:

‘I do not see why starlight may not have some subtle quality of its own! We know that other lights have special forces. The Rontgen Ray is not the only discovery to be made in the world of light. Sunlight has its own forces, that are not given to other lights. It warms wine; it quickens fungoid growth. Men are often moonstruck. Why not, then, a more subtle, if less active or powerful, force in the light of the stars. It should be a pure light coming through such vastness of space, and may have a quality which a pure, unimpulsive force may have. The time may not be far off when Astrology shall be accepted on a scientific basis. In the recrudescence of the art, many new experiences will be brought to bear; many new phases of old wisdom will appear in the light of fresh discovery, and afford bases for new reasoning. Men may find that what seemed empiric deductions were in reality the results of a loftier intelligence and a learning greater than our own. We know already that the whole of the living world is full of microbes of varying powers and of methods of working quite antagonistic. We do not know yet whether they can lie latent until quickened by some ray of light as yet unidentified as a separate and peculiar force. As yet we know nothing of what goes to create or evoke the active spark of life. We have no knowledge of the methods of conception; of the laws which govern molecular or foetal growth, of the final influences which attend birth. Year by year, day by day, hour by hour, we are learning; but the end is far, far off. It seems to me that we are now in that stage of intellectual progress in which the rough machinery for making discovery is being invented. Later on, we shall have enough of first principles to help us in the development of equipment for the true study of the inwardness of things. Then we may perhaps arrive at the perfection of means to an end which the scholars of Old Nile achieved at a time when Methuselah was beginning to brag about the number of his years, perhaps even when the great-grandchildren of Adam were coming to regard the old man as what our Transatlantic friends call a "back number". Is it possible, for instance, that the people who invented Astronomy did not finally use instruments of extraordinary precision; that applied optics was not a cult of some of the specialists in the Colleges of the Theban priesthood. The Egyptians were essentially specialists. It is true that, in so far as we can judge, the range of their study was limited to subjects connected with their aims of government on earth by controlling all that bore on the life to follow it. But can anyone imagine that by the eyes of men, unaided by lenses of wondrous excellence, Astronomy was brought to such a pitch that the true orientation of temples and pyramids and tombs followed for four thousand years the wanderings of the planetary systems in space. If an instance of their knowledge of microscopy is wanted let me hazard a conjecture. How was it that in their hieroglyphic writing they took as the symbol or determinative of “flesh” the very form which the science of today, relying on the revelations of a microscope of a thousand powers, gives to protoplasm — that unit of living organism which has been differentiated as Flagellula. If they could make analysis like this, why may they not have gone further? In that wonderful atmosphere of theirs, where sunlight fierce and clear is perpetually coexistent with day, where the dryness of earth and air gives perfect refraction, why may they not have learned secrets of light hidden from us in the density of our northern mists? May it not have been possible that they learned to store light, just as we have learned to store electricity. Nay more, is it not even possible that they did so: They must have had some form of artificial light which they used in the construction and adornment of those vast caverns hewn in the solid rock which became whole cemeteries of the dead. Why, some of these caverns, with their labyrinthine windings and endless passages and chambers, all sculptured and graven and painted with an elaboration of detail which absolutely bewilders one, must have taken years and years to complete. And yet in them is no mark of smoke, such as lamps or torches would have left behind them. Again, if they knew how to store light, is it not possible that they had learned to understand and separate its component elements? And if these men of old arrived at such a point, may not we too in the fullness of time? We shall see! We shall see!

'There is another matter, too, on which recent discoveries in science throw a light. It is only a glimmer at present; a glimmer sufficient to illuminate probabilities, rather than actualities, or even possibilities. The discoveries of the Curies and Laborde, of Sir William Crookes and Becquerel, may have far-reaching results on Egyptian investigation. This new metal, radium — or rather this old metal of which our knowledge is new — may have been known to the ancients. Indeed it may have been used thousands of years ago in greater degree than seems possible today. As yet Egypt has not been named as a place where the discovery of pitchblende, in which only as far as is known yet radium is contained, may be made. And yet-it is more than probable that radium exists in Egypt. That country has perhaps the greatest masses of granite to be found in the world; and pitchblende is found as a vein in granitic rocks. In no place, at no time, has granite ever been quarried in such proportions as in Egypt during the earlier dynasties. Who may say what great' veins of pitchblende may not have been found in the gigantic operations of hewing out columns for the temples, or great stones for the pyramids. Why, veins of pitchblende, of a richness unknown in our recent mines in Cornwall, or Bohemia, or Saxony, or Hungary, or Turkey, or Colorado, may have been found by these old quarrymen of Aswan, or Turra, or Mokattam, or Elephantine.

'Beyond this again, it is possible that here and there amongst these vast granite quarries may have been found not merely veins but masses or pockets of pitchblende. In such case the power at the disposal of those who knew how to use it must have been wonderful.

The learning of Egypt was kept amongst its priests, and in their vast colleges must have been men of great learning, men who knew well how to exercise to the best advantage, and in the direction they wished, the terrific forces at their command. And if pitchblende did and does exist in Egypt, do you not think that much of it must have been freed by the gradual attrition and wearing down of the granitic rocks? Time and weather bring in time all rocks to dust; the very sands of the desert, which in centuries have buried in this very land some of the greatest monuments of man's achievement, are the evidences of the fact. If, then, radium is divisible into such minute particles as the scientists tell us, it too must have been freed in time from its granite prison and left to work in the air. One might almost hazard a suggestion that the taking the scarab as the symbol of life may not have been without an empiric basis. Might it not be possible that Co-prophagi have power or instinct to seize upon the minute particles of heat-giving, light-giving — perhaps life-giving — radium, and enclosing them with their ova in those globes of matter which they roll so assiduously, and from which they take their early name, Pilulariae. In the billions of tons of the desert waste there is surely mingled some proportion of each of the earths and rocks and metals of their zone; and, each to each, nature forms her living entities to flourish on those without life.

'Travellers tell us that glass left in tropic deserts changes colour, and darkens in the fierce sunlight, just as it does under the influence of the rays of radium. Does not this imply some sort of similarity between the two forces yet to be identified!'

These scientific, or quasi-scientific discussions soothed me. They took my mind from brooding on the mysteries" of the occult, by attracting it to the wonders of nature.

Chapter XVII. The Cavern

IN THE EVENING MR TRELAWNY TOOK AGAIN THE whole party into the study. When we were all attention he began to unfold his plans:

'I have come to the conclusion that for the proper carrying out of what we will call our Great Experiment we must have absolute and complete isolation. Isolation not merely for a day or two, but for as long as we may require. Here such a thing would be impossible; the needs and habits of a great city with its ingrained possibilities of interruption would, or might, quite upset us. Telegrams, registered letters, or express messengers would alone be sufficient; but the great army of those who want to get something would make disaster certain. In addition, the occurrences of the last week have drawn police attention to this house. Even if special instructions to keep an eye on it have not been issued from Scotland Yard or the District Station, you may be sure that the individual policeman on his rounds Will keep it well under observation. Besides, the servants who have discharged themselves will before long begin to talk. They must; for they have, for the sake of their own characters, to give some reason for the termination of a service which has I should say a position in the neighbourhood. The servants of the neighbours will begin to talk, and, perhaps the neighbours themselves. Then the active and intelligent Press will, with its usual zeal for the enlightenment of the public and its eye to increase of circulation, get hold of the matter. When the reporter is after us we shall not have much chance of privacy. Even if we were to bar ourselves in, we should not be free from interruption, possibly from intrusion. Either would ruin our plans, and so we must take measures to effect a retreat, carrying all our impedimenta with us. For this I am prepared. For a long time past I have foreseen such a possibility, and have made preparation for it. Of course, I had no foreknowledge of what has happened; but I knew something would, or might, happen. For more than two years past my house in Cornwall has been made ready to receive all the curios which are preserved here. When Corbeck went off on his search for the lamps I had the old house at Kyllion made ready; it is fitted with electric light all over, and all the appliances for manufacture of the light are complete. I had perhaps better tell you, for none of you, not even Margaret, knows anything of it, that the house is absolutely shut out from public access or even from view. It stands on a little rocky promontory behind a steep hill, and except from the sea cannot be seen. Of old it was fenced in by a high stone wall, for the house which is succeeded was built -by an ancestor of mine in the days when a great house far away from a centre had to be prepared to defend itself. Here, then, is a place so well adapted to our needs that it. might have been prepared on purpose. I shall explain it to you when we are all there. This will not be long, for already our movement is in train. I have sent word to Marvin to have all preparation for our transport ready. He is to have a special train, which is to run at night so as to avoid notice. Also a number of carts and stone-wagons, with sufficient men and appliances to take all our packing-cases to Paddington. We shall be away before the Argus-eyed Pressman is on the watch. We shall today begin our packing up; and I dare say that by tomorrow night we shall be ready. In the outhouses I have all the packing-cases which were used for bringing the things from Egypt, and I am satisfied that as they were sufficient for the journey across the desert and down the Nile to Alexandria and thence on to London, they will serve without fail between here and

Kyllion. We four men, with Margaret to hand us such things as we may require, will be able to get the things packed safely; and the carrier's men will take them to the trucks.

'Today the servants go to Kyllion, and Mrs. Grant will make such arrangements as may be required. She will take a stock of necessaries with her, so that we will not attract local attention by our daily needs; and will keep us supplied with perishable food from London. Thanks to Margaret's wise and generous treatment of the servants who decided to remain, we have got a staff on which we can depend. They have been already cautioned to secrecy, so that we need not fear gossip from within. Indeed, as the servants will be in London after their preparations at Kyllion are complete, there will not be much subject for gossip, in detail at any rate.

'As, however, we should commence the immediate work of packing at once, we will leave over the after proceedings till later when we have leisure.'

Accordingly we set about our work Under Mr. Trelawny's guidance, and aided by the servants, we took from the outhouses great packing-cases. Some of these were of enormous strength, fortified by many thicknesses of wood, and by iron bands and rods with screw-ends and nuts. We placed them throughout the house, each close to the object which it was to contain. When this preliminary work had been effected, and there had been placed in each room and in the hall great masses of new hay, cotton-waste, and paper, the servants were sent away. Then we set about packing.

No one, not accustomed to packing, could have the slightest idea of the amount of work involved in such a task as that in which we were engaged. For my own part I had had a vague idea that there were a large number of Egyptian objects in Mr. Trelawny's house;

but until I came to deal with them *seriatim I* had little idea of either their importance, the size of some of them, or of their endless number. Far into the night we worked. At times we used all the strength which we could muster on a single object; again we worked separately, but always under Mr. Trelawny's immediate direction. He himself, assisted by Margaret, kept an exact tally of each piece.

It was only when we sat down, utterly wearied, to a long-delayed supper that we began to realise that a large part of the work was done. Only a few of the packing-cases, however, were closed; for a vast amount of work still remained. We had finished some of the cases, each of which held only one of the great sarcophagi. The cases which held many objects could not be closed till all had been differentiated and packed.

I slept that night without movement or without dreams; and on our comparing notes in the morning, I found that each of the others had had the same experience.

By dinnertime next evening the whole work was complete, and all was ready for the carriers who were to come at midnight. A little before the appointed time we heard the rumble of carts; then we were shortly invaded by an army of workmen, who seemed by sheer force of numbers to move without effort, in an endless procession, all our prepared packages. A little over an hour sufficed them, and when the carts had rumbled away; we all got ready to follow them to Paddington. Silvio was of course to be taken as one of our party.

Before leaving we went in a body over the house, which looked desolate indeed. As the servants had all gone to Cornwall there had been no attempt at tidying up; every room and passage in which we had worked, and all the stairways, were strewn with paper and waste, and marked with dirty feet.

The last-thing which Mr. Trelawny did before coming away was to take from the great safe the Ruby with the Seven Stars. As he put it safely into his pocketbook, Margaret, who had all at once seemed to grow deadly tired and stood beside her father pale and rigid, suddenly became all aglow, as though the sight of the Jewel had inspired her. She smiled at her father approvingly as she said:

'You are right, Father. There will not be any trouble tonight. She will not wreck your arrangements for any cause. I would stake my life upon it.'

'She — or something — wrecked us in the desert when we had come from the tomb in the Valley of the Sorcerer!' was the grim comment of Corbeck, who was standing by. Margaret answered him like a flash:

'Ah! she was then near her tomb from which for thousands of years her body had not been moved. She must know that things are different now.'

'How must she know?' asked Corbeck keenly.

'If she has that astral body that Father spoke of, surely she must know! How can she fail to, with an invisible presence and an intellect that can roam abroad even to the stars and the worlds beyond us!' She paused, and her father said solemnly:

'It is on that supposition that we are proceeding. We must have the courage of our convictions, and act on them — to the last!'

Margaret took his hand and held it in a dreamy kind of way as we filed out of the house. She was holding it still when he locked the hall door, and when we moved up the road to the gateway whence we took a cab to Paddington.

When all the goods were loaded at the station, the whole of the workmen went on to the train; this took also some of the stone-wagons used for carrying the cases with the great sarcophagi. Ordinary carts and plenty of horses were to be found at Westerton, which was our station for Kyllion. Mr. Trelawny had ordered a sleeping-carriage for our party; as soon as the train had started we all turned into our cubicles.

That night I slept sound. There was over me a conviction of security which was absolute and supreme. Margaret's definite announcement: 'There will not be any trouble tonight!' seemed to carry assurance with it. I did not question it; nor did anyone else. It was only afterwards that I began to think as to how she was so sure. The train was a slow one, stopping many times and for considerable intervals. As Mr. Trelawny did not wish to arrive at Westerton before dark, there was no need to hurry; and arrangements had been made to feed the workmen at certain places on the journey. We had our own hampers with us in the private car.

All that afternoon we talked over the Great Experiment, which seemed to have become a definite entity in our thoughts. Mr. Trelawny became more and more enthusiastic as the time wore on; hope was with him becoming certainty. Doctor Winchester seemed to become imbued with some of his spirit, though at times he would throw out some scientific fact which would either make an impasse to the other's line of argument, or would come as an arresting shock. Mr. Corbeck, on the other hand, seemed slightly antagonistic to the theory. It may have been that whilst the opinions of the others advanced, his own stood still; but the effect was an attitude which appeared negative, if not wholly one of negation.

As for Margaret, she seemed to be in some way overcome. Either it was some new phase of feeling with her, or else she was taking the issue more seriously than she had. yet done. She was generally more or less *distraite,* as though sunk in a brown study; from this she would recover herself with a start. This was usually when there occurred some marked episode in the journey, such as stopping at a station, or when the thunderous rumble of crossing a viaduct woke the echoes of the hills or cliffs around us. On each such occasion she would plunge into the conversation, taking such a part in it as to show that, whatever had been her abstracted thought, her senses had taken in fully all that had gone on around her. Towards myself her manner was strange. Sometimes it was marked by a distance, half shy half haughty, which was new to me. At other times there were moments of passion in look and gesture and voice which almost made me dizzy with delight. Little, however, of a marked nature transpired during the journey. There was but one episode which had in it any element of alarm, but as we were all asleep at the time it did not disturb us. We only learned it from a communicative guard in the morning. Whilst running between Dawlish and Teignmouth the train was stopped by a warning given by someone who moved a torch to and fro right on the very track. The driver had found on puffing up that just ahead of the train a small landslip had taken place, some of the red earth from the high bank having fallen away. It did riot however reach to the metals; and the driver had resumed his way, none too well pleased at the delay. To use his own words, the guard thought 'there was too much bally caution on this 'ere line!'

We arrived at Westerton about nine o'clock in the evening. Carts and horses were in waiting, and the work of unloading the train began at once. Our own party did not wait to see the work done, as it was in the hands of competent people. We took the carriage which was in waiting, and through the darkness of the night sped on to Kyllion.

We were all impressed by the house as it appeared in the bright moonlight. A great grey stone mansion of the Jacobean period; vast and spacious, standing high over the sea on the very verge of a high cliff. When we had swept round the curve of the avenue cut through the rock, and come out on the high plateau on which the house stood, the crash and murmur of waves breaking against rock far below us came with an invigorating breath of moist sea air. We understood then in an instant how well we were shut out from the world on that rocky shelf above the sea.

Within the house we found all ready. Mrs. Grant and her staff had worked well, and all was bright and fresh and clean. We took a brief survey-of the chief rooms, and then separated to have a wash and to change our clothes after our long journey of more than four-and-twenty hours.

We had supper in the great dining-room on the south side, the walls of which actually hung over the sea. The' murmur came up muffled, but it never ceased. As the little promontory stood well out into the sea, the northern side of the house was open; and the due north was in no way shut out by the great mass of rock, which reared high above us, shut out the rest of the world. Far off across the bay we could see the trembling lights of the castle, and here and there along the shore the faint light of a fisher's window. For the rest the sea was a dark blue plain with here and there a flicker of light as the gleam of starlight fell on the slope of a swelling wave.

When supper was over we all adjourned to the room which Mr. Trelawny had set aside as his study, his bedroom being close to it. As we entered, the first thing I noticed was a great safe, somewhat similar to that which stood in his room in London. When we were in the room Mr. Trelawny went over to the table, and, taking out his pocket-book, laid it on the table. As he did so he pressed down on it with the palm of his hand. A strange pallor came over his face. With ringers that trembled he opened the book, saying as he did so:

‘Its bulk does not seem the same; I hope nothing has happened!’

All three of us men crowded round close. Margaret alone remained calm: she stood erect and silent, and still as a statue. She had a faraway look in her eyes, as though she did not either know or care what was going on around her.

With a despairing gesture Trelawny threw open the pouch of the pocketbook wherein he had placed the Jewel of Seven Stars. As he sank down on the chair which stood close to him, he said in a hoarse voice:

‘My God! it is gone. Without it the Great Experiment can come to nothing!’

His words seemed to wake Margaret from her introspective mood. An agonized spasm swept her face; but almost on the instant she was calm. She almost smiled as she said:

‘You may have left it in your room, Father. Perhaps it has fallen out of the pocketbook whilst you were changing.’ Without a word we all hurried into the next room through the open door between the study and the bedroom. And then a sudden calm fell on us like a cloud of fear.

There! on the table, lay the Jewel of Seven Stars, shining and sparkling with lurid light, as though each of the seven points of each of the seven stars gleamed through blood!

Timidly we each looked behind us, and then at each other. Margaret was now like the rest of us. She had lost her statuesque calm. All the introspective rigidity had gone from her; and she clasped her hands together till the knuckles were white.

Without a word Mr. Trelawny raised the Jewel, and hurried with it into the next room. As quietly as he could he opened the door of the safe with the key fastened to his wrist and placed the Jewel within. When the heavy doors were closed and locked he seemed to breathe more freely.

Somehow this episode, though a disturbing one in many ways, seemed to bring us back to our old selves. Since we had left London we had all been overstrained; and this was a sort of relief. Another step in our strange enterprise had been effected.

The change back was more marked in Margaret than in any of us. Perhaps it was that she was a woman, whilst we were men; perhaps it was that she was younger than the rest; perhaps both reasons were effective, each in its own way. At any rate the change was there, and I was happier than I had been through the long journey. All her buoyancy, her tenderness, her deep feeling seemed to shine forth once more; now and again as her father's eyes rested on her, his face seemed to light up.

Whilst we waited for the carts to arrive, Mr. Trelawny took us through the house, pointing out and explaining where the objects which we had brought with us were to be placed. In one respect only did he withhold confidence. The positions of all those things which had connection with the Great Experiment were not indicated. The cases containing them were to be left in the outer hall, for the present.

By the time we had made the survey, the carts began to arrive; and the stir and bustle of the previous night were renewed. Mr. Trelawny stood in the hall beside the massive ironbound door, and gave directions as to the placing of each of the great packing-cases. Those containing many items were placed in the inner hall where they were to be unpacked.

In an incredibly short time the whole consignment was delivered; and the men departed with *a douceur* for each, given through their foreman, which made them effusive in their thanks. Then we all went to our own rooms. There was a strange confidence over us all. I do not think that any one of us had a doubt as to the quiet passing of the remainder of the night.

The faith was justified, for on our reassembling in the morning we found that all had slept well and peaceably.

During that day all the curios, except those required for the Great Experiment, were put into the places designed for them. Then it was arranged that all the servants should go back with Mrs. Grant to London ‘on the next morning.

When they had all gone Mr. Trelawny, having seen the doors locked, took us into the study.

‘Now,’ said he when we were seated, ‘I have a secret to impart; but, according to an old promise which does not leave me free, I must ask you each to give me a solemn promise not to reveal it. For three hundred years at least such a promise has been exacted from everyone to whom it was told, and more than once life and safety were secured through loyal observance of the promise. Even as it is, I am breaking the spirit, if not the letter of the tradition; for I should only tell it to the intimate members of my family.”

We all gave the promise required. Then he went on:

‘There is a secret place in this house, a cave, natural originally but finished by labour, underneath this house. I will not undertake to say that it has always been used according to the law. During the Bloody Assize more than a few Cornishmen found refuge in it; and later, and earlier, it formed, I have no doubt whatever, a useful place for storing contraband goods. “Tre Pol and Pert”, I suppose you know, have always been smugglers; and their relations and friends and neighbours have not held back from the enterprise. For all such reasons a safe hiding-place was always considered *A* valuable possession; and as die. heads of our House have always insisted on preserving the secret, I am in honour bound to it. Later on, if all be well, I shall *of* course tell you, Margaret, and you too, Ross, under the conditions that I am bound to make.’

He rose up, and we all followed him. Leaving us in the outer hall, he went away alone for a few minutes; and returning, beckoned us to follow him.

In the inside hall we found a whole section of an outstanding angle moved away, and from the cavity saw a great hole dimly dark, and the beginning of a rough staircase cut in the rock. As it was not pitch dark there was manifestly some means of lighting it naturally, so without pause we followed our host as he descended. After some forty or fifty steps cut in a winding passage, we came to a great cave whose further end tapered away into blackness. It was a huge place, dimly lit by a few irregular long slits of eccentric shape. Manifestly these were faults in the rock which would easily allow the windows to be disguised; Close to each of them was a hanging shutter which could be easily swung across by means of a dangling rope. The sound of the ceaseless beat of the waves came up muffled from far below. Mr. Trelawny at once began to speak:

‘This is the spot which I have chosen, as the best I know, for the sceneÂ«of our Great Experiment. In a hundred different ways it fulfils the conditions which I am led to believe are primary with regard to success. Here, we are, and shall be, as isolated as Queen Tera herself would have been in her rocky tomb in the Valley of the

Sorcerer, and still in a rocky cavern. For good or ill we must here stand by our chances, and abide by results. If we are successful we shall be able to let in on the world of modern science such a flood of light from the Old World as will change every condition of thought and experiment and practice. If we fail, then even the knowledge of our attempt will the with us. For this, and all else which may come, I believe we are prepared!' He paused. No one spoke, but we all bowed our heads gravely in acquiescence. He resumed, but with a certain hesitancy:

'It is not yet too late! If any of you have a doubt or a misgiving, for God's sake speak it now! Whoever it may be, can go hence without let or hindrance. The rest of us can go on our way alone!'

Again he paused, and looked keenly at us in turn. We looked at each other; but no one quailed. For my own part, if I had had any doubt as to going on, the look on Margaret's face would have reassured me. It was fearless; it was intense; it was full of a divine calm.

Mr. Trelawny took a long breath, and in a more cheerful, as well as in a more decided, tone went on:

'As we are all of one mind, the sooner we get the necessary matters in train the better. Let me tell you that this place, like all the rest of the house, can be lit with electricity. We could not join the wires to the mains lest our secret should become known, but I have a cable here which we can attach in the hall and complete the circuit!' As he was speaking, he began to ascend the steps. From close to the entrance he took the end of a cable; this he drew forward and attached to a switch in the wall. Then, turning on a tap, he flooded the whole vault and staircase below with light. I could now see from the volume of light streaming up into the hallway that the hole beside the staircase went direct into the cave. Above it was a pulley and a mass of strong tackle with multiplying blocks of the Smeaton order. Mr. Trelawny, seeing me looking at this, said, correctly interpreting my thoughts:

"Yes! it is new. I hung it myself there on purpose. I knew we should have to lower great weights; and as I did not wish to take too many into my confidence, I arranged a tackle which I could work alone if necessary.'

We set to work at once; and before nightfall had lowered, had unhooked, and placed in the positions designated for each by Trelawny, all the great sarcophagi and all the curios and other matters which we had taken with us.

It was a strange and weird proceeding the placing of those wonderful monuments of a bygone age in that great cavern, which represented in its cutting and purpose and up-to-date mechanism and electric lights both the old world and the new. But as time went on I grew more and more to recognize the wisdom and correctness of Mr. Trelawny's choice. I was much disturbed when Silvio, who had been brought into the cave in the arms of his mistress, and who was lying asleep on my coat which I had taken off, sprang up when the cat mummy had been unpacked, and flew at it with the same ferocity which he had previously exhibited. The incident showed Margaret in a new phase, and one which gave my heart a pang. She had been standing quite still at one side of the cave leaning on a sarcophagus, in one of those fits of abstraction which had of late come upon her; but on hearing the sound, and seeing Silvio's violent onslaught, she seemed to fall into a positive fury of passion. Her eyes blazed, and her mouth took a hard, cruel tension which was new to me. Instinctively she stepped towards Silvio as if to interfere in the attack. But I too had stepped forward; and as she caught my eye a strange spasm came upon her, and she stopped. Its intensity made me hold my breath; and I put up my hand to clear my eyes. When I had done this, she had on the instant recovered her calm, and, there was a look of brief wonder on her face. With all her old grace and sweetness she swept over and lifted Silvio, just as she had done on former occasions, and held him in her arms, petting him and treating him as though he were a little child who had erred.

As I looked a strange fear came over me. The Margaret that I knew seemed to be changing; and in my inmost heart I prayed that the disturbing cause might soon come to an end. More than ever I longed at that moment that our terrible Experiment should come to a prosperous termination.

When all had been arranged in the room as Mr. Trelawny wished he turned to us, one after another, till he had concentrated the intelligence of us all upon him. Then he said:

'All is now ready in this place. We must only await the proper time to begin.'

We were silent for a while. Doctor Winchester was the first to speak:

' 'What is the proper time? Have you any approximation, even if you are not satisfied as to the exact day.' He answered at once:

'After the most anxious thought I have fixed on July 31!'

'May I ask why that date?' He spoke his answer slowly:

'Queen Tera was ruled in great degree by mysticism and there are so many evidences that she looked for resurrection that naturally she would choose a period ruled over by a God specialized to such a purpose. Now, the fourth month of the season of Inundation was ruled by Harmachis, this being the name for "Ra" the Sun-God, at his rising in the morning, and therefore typifying the awakening or arising. This arising is manifestly to physical life, since it is of the mid-world of human daily life. Now as this month begins on our 25th July, the seventh day would be July 31st, for you may be sure that the mystic Queen would not have chosen any day but the seventh or some power of seven.

‘I dare say that some of you have wondered why our preparations have been so deliberately undertaken. This is why! We must be ready in every possible way when the time comes; but there was no use in having to wait round for a needless number of days.’

And so we waited only for the 31st of July, the next day but one, when the Great Experiment would be made.

Chapter XVIII. Doubts and Fears

WE LEARN OF GREAT THINGS BY IITTLE EXPERIENCES. The history of ages is but an indefinite repetition of the history of hours. The record of a soul is but a multiple of the story of a moment. The Recording Angel writes in the Great Book in no rainbow tints; his pen is dipped in no colours but light and darkness. For the eye of infinite wisdom there is no need of shading. All things, all thoughts, all emotions, all experiences, all doubts and hopes and fears, all intentions, all wishes seen down to the lower strata of their concrete and multitudinous elements, are finally resolved into direct opposites.

Did any human being wish for the epitome of a life wherein were gathered and grouped all the experiences that a child of Adam could have, the history, fully and frankly written, of my own mind during the next forty-eight hours would afford him all that could be wanted. And the Recorder could have wrought as usual in sunlight and shadow, which may be taken to represent the final expressions of Heaven and Hell. For in the highest Heaven is Faith; and Doubt hangs over the yawning blackness of Hell.

There were of course times of sunshine in those two days; moments when, in the realization of Margaret's sweetness and her love for me, all doubts dissipated like morning mist before the sun. But the balance of the time — and an overwhelming balance it was — gloom hung over me like a pall. The hour, in whose coming I had acquiesced, was approaching so quickly and was already so near that the sense of finality was bearing upon me! The issue was perhaps life or death to any of us; but for this we were all prepared. Margaret and I were one as to the risk. The question of the moral aspect of the case, which involved the religious belief in which I had been reared, was not one to trouble me; for the issues, and the causes that lay behind them, were not within my power even to comprehend. The doubt of the success of the Great Experiment was such a doubt as exists in all enterprises which have great possibilities. To me, whose life was passed in a series of intellectual struggles, this form of doubt was a stimulus, rather than deterrent. What then was it that made for me a trouble, which became an anguish when my thoughts dwelt long on it?

I was beginning to doubt Margaret!

What it was that I doubted I knew not. *If* was not her love, or her honour, or her truth, or her kindness, or her zeal. What then was it?

It was herself!

Margaret was changing! At times during the past few days I had hardly known her as the same girl whom I had met at the picnic, and whose vigils I had shared in the sickroom of her father. Then, even in her moments of greatest sorrow or fright or anxiety, she was all life and thought and keenness. Now she was generally *distraite,* and at times in a sort of negative condition as though her mind — her very being — was not present. At such moments she would have full possession of observation and memory. She would know and remember all that was going on, and had gone on around her; but her coming back to her old self had to me something the sensation of a new person coming into the room. Up to the time of leaving London I had been content whenever she was present. I had over me that delicious sense of security which comes with the consciousness that love is mutual. But now doubt had taken its place. I never knew whether the personality present was my Margaret — the old Margaret whom I had loved at the first glance — or the other new

Margaret, whom I hardly understood, and whose intellectual aloofness made an impalpable barrier between us. Sometimes she would become, as it were, awake all at once. At such times, though she would say to me sweet and pleasant things which she had often said before, she would seem most unlike herself. It was almost as if she were speaking parrot-like or at dictation of one who could read words or acts, but not thoughts. After one or two experiences of this kind, my own doubting began to make a barrier; for I could not speak with the ease and freedom which were usual to me. And so hour by hour we drifted further apart Were it not for the few odd moments when the old Margaret was back with me full of her charm I do not know what would have happened. As it was, each such moment gave me a fresh start and kept my love from changing.

I would have given the world for a confidant; but such was impossible. How could I speak a doubt of Margaret to anyone, even her father! How could I speak a doubt to Margaret, when Margaret herself was the theme! I could only endure — and hope. And of the two the endurance was the lesser pain.

I think that-Margaret must have at times felt that there was some cloud between us, for towards the end of the first day she began to shun me a little; or perhaps it was that she had become more diffident than usual about me. Hitherto she had sought every opportunity of being with me, just as I had tried to be with her; so that now any avoidance, one of the other, made a new pain to us both.

On this day the household seemed very still. Each one of us was about his own work, or occupied with his own thoughts. We only met at mealtimes; and then, though we talked, all seemed more or less preoccupied. There was not in the house even the stir of the routine of service. The precaution of Mr. Trelawny in having three rooms prepared for each of us had rendered servants unnecessary. The dining-room was solidly prepared with cooked provisions for several days. Towards evening I went out by myself for a stroll. I had looked for Margaret to ask her to come with me; but when I found her, she was in one of her apathetic moods; and the charm of her presence seemed lost to me. Angry with myself, but unable to quell my own spirit of discontent, I went out alone over the rocky headland.

On the cliff, with the wide expanse of wonderful sea before me, and no sound but the dash of waves below and the harsh screams of the seagulls above, my thoughts ran free. Do what I would, they returned continuously to one subject, the solving of the doubt that was upon me. Here in the solitude, amid the wide circle of Nature's force and strife, my mind began to work truly. Unconsciously I found myself asking a question which I would not allow myself to answer. At last the persistence of a mind working truly prevailed; I found myself face to face with my doubt. The habit of my life began to assert itself, and I analysed the evidence before me.

It was so startling that I had to force myself into obedience to logical effort. My starting-place was this: Margaret was changed — in what way, and by what means. Was it her character, or her mind, or her nature; for her physical appearance remained the same. I began to group all that I had ever heard of her, beginning at her birth.

It was strange at the very first. She had been, according to Corbeck's statement, born of a dead mother during the time that her father and his friend were in a trance in the tomb at Aswah.

That trance was presumably effected by a woman; a woman mummied, yet preserving as we had every reason to believe from after experience, an astral body subject to a free will and an active intelligence. With that astral body, space ceased to exist. The vast distance between London and Aswan became as naught; and whatever power of necromancy, the Sorceress had might have been exercised over the dead mother, and possibly the dead child.

The dead child! Was it possible that the child was dead and was made alive again? Whence then came the animating spirit — the soul? Logic was pointing the way to me now with a vengeance!

If the Egyptian belief was true for Egyptians, then the 'Ka' of the dead Queen and her 'Khu' could animate what she might choose. In such case Margaret would not be an individual at all, but simply a phase of Queen Tera herself: an astral body obedient to her will!

Here I revolted against logic. Every fibre of my being resented such a conclusion. How could I believe that there was no Margaret at all; but just an animated image, used by the Double of a woman of forty centuries ago to its own ends...! Somehow, the outlook was brighter to me now, despite the new doubts.

At least I had Margaret!

Back swung the logical pendulum again. The child then was not dead. If so, had the Sorceress had anything to do with her birth at all? It was evident — so I took it again from Corbeck — -that there was a strange likeness between Margaret and the pictures of Queen Tera. How could this be? It could not be any birthmark reproducing what had been in the mother's mind; for Mrs. Trelawny had never seen the pictures. Nay, even her father had not seen them till he had found his way into the tomb only a few days before her birth. This phase I could not get rid of so easily as the last; the fibres of my being remained quiet. There remained to me the horror of doubt. And even then, so strange is the mind of man, Doubt itself took a concrete image; a vast and impenetrable gloom, through which flickered irregularly and spasmodically tiny-points of evanescent light, which seemed to quicken the darkness into a positive existence.

The remaining possibility of relations between Margaret and the mummied Queen was, that in some occult way the Sorceress had power to change places with the other. This view of things could not be so lightly thrown aside. There were too many suspicious circumstances to warrant this, now that my attention was fixed on it and my intelligence recognized the possibility. Hereupon there began to come into my mind all the strange incomprehensible matters which had whirled through our lives in the last few days. At first they all crowded in upon me in a jumbled mass; but again the habit of mind of my working life prevailed, and they took order. I found it now easier to control myself; for there was something to grasp, some work to be done; though it was of a sorry kind, for it was or might be antagonistic to Margaret. But Margaret was herself at stake! I was thinking of her and fighting for her; and yet if I were to work in the dark, I might be even harmful to her. My first weapon in her defence was truth. I must know and understand; I might then be able to act. Certainly, I could not act beneficently without a just conception and recognition of the facts. Arranged in order these were as follows:

Firstly: the strange likeness of Queen Tera to Margaret who had been born in another country a thousand miles away, where her mother could not possibly have had even a passing knowledge of her appearance.

Secondly: the disappearance of Van Huyn's book when I had read up to the description of the Star Ruby.

Thirdly: the finding of the lamps in the boudoir. Tera with her astral body could have unlocked the door of Corbeck's room in the hotel, and have locked it again after her exit with the lamps. She could in the same way have opened the window, and put the lamps in the boudoir. It need not have been that Margaret in her own person should have had any hand in this; but — but it was at least strange.

Fourthly: here the suspicions of the Detective and the Doctor came back to me with renewed force, and with a larger understanding.

Fifthly: there were the occasions on which Margaret foretold with accuracy the coming occasions of quietude, as though she had some conviction or foreknowledge of the intentions of the astral-bodied Queen.

Sixthly: there was her suggestion of the finding of the Ruby which her father had lost. As I thought now afresh over this episode in the light of suspicion in which her own powers were involved, the only conclusion I could come to was — always supposing that the theory of the Queen's astral power was correct — that Queen Tera being anxious that all should go well in the movement from London to Kyllion had in her own way taken the jewel from Mr. Trelawny's pocketbook, finding it of some use in her supernatural guardianship of the journey. Then in some mysterious way she had, through Margaret, made the suggestion of its loss and finding.

Seventhly, and lastly, was the strange dual existence which Margaret seemed of late to be leading; and which in some way seemed a consequence or corollary of all that had gone before.

The dual existence! This was indeed the conclusion" which overcame all difficulties and reconciled opposites. If indeed Margaret were not in all ways a free agent, but could be compelled to speak or act as she might be instructed; or if her whole being could be changed for another without the possibility of anyone noticing the doing of it, then all things were possible. All would depend on the spirit of the individuality by which she could be so compelled. If this individuality were just and kind and clean, all might be well. But if not!... The thought was too awful for words. I ground my teeth with futile rage, as the ideas of horrible possibilities swept through me.

Up to this morning Margaret's lapses into her new self had been few and hardly noticeable, save when once or twice her attitude towards myself had been marked by a bearing strange to me. But today the contrary was the case; and the change presaged badly. It might be that that other individuality was of the lower not of the better sort! Now that I thought of it I had reason to fear. In the history of the mummy, from the time of Van Huyn's breaking into the tomb, the record of deaths that we knew of, presumably effected by her will and agency, was a startling one. The Arab who had stolen the hand from the mummy; and the one who had taken it from his body. The Arab chief who had tried to steal the Jewel from Van Huyn, and whose throat bore the marks of seven fingers. The two men found dead on the first night of Trelawny's taking away the sarcophagus; and the three on the return to the tomb. The Arab who had opened the secret serdab. Nine dead men, one of them slain manifestly by the Queen's own hand! And beyond this again the several savage attacks on Mr. Trelawny in his own room, in which, aided by her Familiar, she had tried to open the safe and to extract the Talisman jewel. His device of fastening the key to his wrist by a steel bangle, though successful in the end, had welhnigh cost him his life.

If then the Queen, intent on her resurrection under her own conditions had, so to speak, waded to it through blood, what might she not do were her purpose thwarted? What terrible step might she not take to effect her wishes? Nay, what were her wishes; what was her ultimate purpose? As yet we had had only Margaret's statement of them, given in all the glorious enthusiasm of her lofty soul. In her record there was no expression of a love to be sought or found. All we knew for certain was that she had set before her the object of resurrection, and that in it the North which she had manifestly loved was to have a special part. But that the resurrection was to be accomplished in the lonely tomb in the Valley of the Sorcerer was apparent. All preparations had been carefully made for accomplishment from within, and for her ultimate exit in her new and living form. The sarcophagus was unlidded. The oil jars, though hermetically sealed, were to be easily opened by hand; and in them provision was made for shrinkage through a vast period of time. Even flint and steel were provided for the production of flame. The Mummy Pit was left open in violation of usage; and beside the stone door on the cliff side was fixed an imperishable chain by which she might in safety descend to earth. But as to what her after intentions were we had no clue. If it was that she meant to begin life again as a humble individual, there was something so noble in the thought that it even warmed my heart to her and turned my wishes to her success.

The very idea seemed to endorse Margaret's magnificent tribute to her purpose, and helped to calm my troubled spirit.

Then and there, with this feeling strong upon me, I determined to warn Margaret and her father of dire possibilities; and to await, as well content as I could in my ignorance, the development of things over which I had no power.

I returned to the house in a different frame of mind to that in which I had left it; and was enchanted to find Margaret — the old Margaret — waiting me.

After dinner, when I was alone for a time with the father and daughter, I opened the subject, though with considerable hesitation:

‘Would it not be well to take every possible precaution, in case the Queen may not wish what we are doing, with regard to what may occur before the Experiment; and at or after her waking, if it comes off?’ Margaret’s answer came back quickly; so quickly that I was convinced she must have had it ready for someone:

‘But she does approve! Surely it cannot be otherwise. Father is doing, with all his brains and all his energy and all his great courage, just exactly what the great Queen had arranged!’

‘But,’ I answered, ‘that can hardly be. All that she arranged was in a tomb high up in a rock, in a desert solitude, shut away from the world by *every conceivable means.* She seems to have depended on this isolation to insure against accident. Surely, here in another country and age, with quite different conditions, she may in her anxiety make mistakes and treat any of you — of us — as she did those others in times gone past. Nine men that we know of have been slain by her own hand or by her instigation. She can be remorseless if she will.’ It did not strike me till afterwards when I was thinking over this conversation, how thoroughly I had accepted the living and conscious condition of Queen Tera as a fact. Before I spoke, I had feared I might offend Mr. Trelawny; but to my pleasant surprise he smiled quite genially as he answered me:

‘My dear fellow, in a way you are quite right. The Queen did undoubtedly intend isolation; and, all told, it would be best that her experiment should be made as she arranged it. But just think, that became impossible when once the Dutch explorer had broken into her tomb. That was not my doing. I am innocent of it, though it was the cause of my setting out to rediscover the sepulchre. Mind, I do not say for a moment that I would not have done just the same as

Van Huyn. I went into the tomb from curiosity; and I took away what I did, being fired with the zeal of acquisitiveness which animates the collector. But, remember also, that at this time I did not know of the Queen's intention of resurrection; I had no idea of the completeness of her preparations. All that came long afterwards. But when it did come, I have done all that I could to carry out her wishes to the full. My only fear is that I may have misinterpreted some of her cryptic instructions, or have omitted or overlooked something. But of this I am certain; I have left undone nothing that I can imagine right to be done; and I have done nothing that I know of to clash with Queen Tera's arrangement. I want her Great Experiment to succeed. To this end I have not spared labour or time or money — or myself. I have endured hardship, and braved danger. All my brains; all my knowledge and learning, such as they are; all my endeavours such as they can be, have been, are, and shall be devoted to this end. Till we either win or lose the great stake that we play for.'

"The great stake?' I repeated; 'the resurrection of the woman, and the woman's life? The proof that resurrection can be accomplished; by magical powers; by scientific knowledge; or by use of some force which at present the world does not know?'

Then Mr. Trelawny spoke out the hopes of his heart which up to now he had indicated rather than expressed. Once or twice I had heard Corbeck speak of the fiery energy of his youth; but, save for the noble words of Margaret when she had spoken of Queen Tera's hope — which coming from his daughter made possible a belief that her power was in some sense due to heredity — I had seen no marked sign of it. But now his words, sweeping before them like a torrential antagonistic thought, gave me a new idea of the man.

' "A woman's life!" What is a woman's life in the scale with what we hope for! Why, we are risking already a woman's life; the dearest life to me in all the world, and that grows more dear with every hour that passes. We are risking as well the lives of four men; yours and my own, as well as those two others who have been won to our confidence. "The proof that resurrection can be accomplished!" That is much. A marvellous thing in this age of science, and the scepticism that knowledge makes. But life and resurrection are themselves but items in what may be won by the accomplishment of this Great Experiment. Imagine what it will be for the world of thought — the true world of human progress — the veritable road to the Stars, the *itur ad astro,* of the Ancients — if there can come back to us out of the unknown past one who can yield to us the lore stored in the great Library of Alexandria, and lost in its consuming flames. Not only history can be set right, and the teachings of science made veritable from their beginnings; but we can be placed on the road to the knowledge of lost arts, lost learning, lost sciences, so that our feet may tread on the indicated path to their ultimate and complete restoration. Why, this woman can tell us what the world was like before what is called "the Hood"; can give us the origin of that vast astounding myth; can set the mind back to the consideration of things which to us now seem primeval, but which were old stories before the days of the Patriarchs. But this is not the end! No, not even the beginning! If the story of this woman be all that we think — which some of us most firmly believe; if her powers and the restoration of them prove to be what we expect, why, then we may yet achieve a knowledge beyond what our age has ever known — beyond what is believed today possible for the children of men. If indeed this resurrection can be accomplished, how can we doubt the old knowledge, the old magic, the old belief! And if this be so, we must take it that the “Ka” of this great and learned Queen has won secrets of more than mortal worth from her surroundings amongst the stars. This’ woman in her life voluntarily went down living to the grave, and came back again, as we learn from the records in her tomb; she chose to the her mortal death whilst young, so that at her resurrection in another age, beyond a trance of countless magnitude, she might emerge from her tomb in all the fullness and splendour of her youth and power. Already we have evidence that though her body slept in patience through those many centuries, her intelligence never passed away, that her resolution never nagged, that her will remained supreme; and, most important of all, that her memory was unimpaired. Oh, what possibilities are there in the coming of such a being into our midst! One whose experience began before the concrete teaching of our Bible; whose experiences were antecedent to the formulation of the Gods of Greece; who can link together the Old and the New, Earth and Heaven, and yield to the known worlds of thought and physical existence the mystery of the Unknown — of the Old World in its youth, and of Worlds beyond our ken!’

He paused almost overcome. Margaret had taken his hand when he spoke of her being so dear to him, and held it hard. As he spoke she continued to hold it. But there came over her face that change which I had so often seen of late; that mysterious veiling of her own personality which gave me the subtle sense of separation from her. In his impassioned vehemence her father did not notice; but when he stopped she seemed all at once to be herself again. In her glorious eyes came the added brightness of unshed tears; and with a gesture of passionate love and admiration, she stooped and kissed her father’s hand. Then, turning to me, she too spoke:

‘Malcolm, you have spoken of the deaths that came from the poor

Queen; or rather that justly came from meddling with her arrangements and thwarting her purpose. Do you not think that, in putting it as you have done, you have been unjust? Who would not have done just as she did? Remember she was fighting for her life! Ay, and for more than her life! For life, and love, and all the glorious possibilities of that dim future in the unknown world of the North which had such enchanting hopes for her! Do you not think that she, with all the learning of her time, and with all the great and resistless force of her mighty nature, had hopes of spreading in a wider way the lofty aspirations of her soul! That she hoped to bring to the conquering of unknown worlds, and using to the advantage of her people, all that she had won from sleep and death and time; all of which might and could have been frustrated by the ruthless hand of an assassin or a thief. Were it you, in such case would you not struggle by all means to achieve the object of your life and hope; whose possibilities grew and grew in the passing of those endless years. Can you think that that active brain was at rest during all those weary centuries, whilst her mortal body, swathed in all the protecting environment ordained by the religion and the science of her time, waited the destined hour; whilst her free soul was flitting from world to world amongst the boundless regions of the stars. Had these stars in their myriad and varied life no lessons for her; as they have had for us since we followed the glorious path which she and her people marked for us, when they sent their winged imaginations circling amongst the lamps of the night!'

Here she paused. She 'too was overcome, and the welling tears ran down her cheeks. I was myself more moved than I can say. This was indeed my Margaret; and in the consciousness of her presence my heart leapt. Out of my happiness came boldness, and I dared to say now what I had feared would be impossible: something which would call the attention of Mr. Trelawny to what I imagined was the dual existence of his daughter. As I took Margaret's hand in mine and kissed it, I said to her father:

'Why, sir! she couldn't speak more eloquently if the very spirit of Queen Tera was with her to animate her and suggest thoughts!'

Mr. Trelawny's answer simply overwhelmed me with surprise. It manifested to me that he too had gone through just such a process of thought as my own.

'And what if it was; if it is! I know well that the spirit of her mother is within her. If in addition there be the spirit of that great and wondrous Queen, then she would be no less dear to me, but doubly dear! Do not have fear for her, Malcolm Ross; at least have no more fear than you may have for the rest of us!' Margaret took up the theme, speaking so quickly that her words seemed a continuation of her father's, rather than an interruption of them.

'Have no special fear for me, Malcolm. Queen Tera knows, and will offer us no harm. I know it! I know it, as surely as I am lost in the depth of my own love for you!'

There was something in her voice so strange to me that I looked quickly into her eyes. They were bright as ever, but as veiled to my seeing the inward thought behind them as are the eyes of a caged lion.

Then the two other men came in,- and the subject changed.

Chapter XIX. The Lesson of the ‘Ka’

THAT NIGHT WE ALL WENT TO BED EARLY. THE NEXT NIGHT would be an anxious one, and Mr. Trelawny thought that we should all be fortified with what sleep we could get. The day, too, would be full of work. Everything in connection with the Great Experiment would have to be gone over, so that at the last we might not fail from any unthought-of flaw in our working. We made, of course, arrangements for summoning aid in case such should be needed; but I do not think that any of us had any real apprehension of danger. Certainly we had no fear of such danger from violence as we had had to guard against in London during Mr. Trelawny’s long trance.

For my own part I felt a strange sense of relief in the matter. I had accepted Mr. Trelawny’s reasoning that if the Queen were indeed such as we surmised — such as indeed we now took for granted — there would not be any opposition on her part; for we were carrying out her own wishes to the very last. So far I was at ease — far more at ease than earlier in the day I should have thought possible; but there were other sources of trouble which I could not blot out from my mind. Chief amongst them was Margaret’s strange condition. If it was indeed that she had in her own person a dual existence, what might happen when the two existences became one? Again, and again, and again I turned this matter over in my mind, till I could have shrieked out in nervous anxiety. It was no consolation to me to remember that Margaret was herself satisfied, and her father acquiescent. Love is, after all, a selfish thing; and it throws a black shadow on anything between which and the light it stands. I seemed to hear the hands go round the dial of the clock; I saw darkness turn to gloom, and gloom to grey, and grey to light without pause or hindrance to the succession of my miserable feelings. At last, when it was decently possible without the fear of disturbing others, I got up. I crept along the passage to find if all was well with the others; for we had arranged that the door of each of our rooms should be left slightly open so that any sound of disturbance would be easily and distinctly heard.

One and all slept; I could hear the regular breathing of each, and my heart rejoiced that this miserable night of anxiety was safely passed. As I knelt in my own room in a burst of thankful prayer, I knew in the depths of my own heart the measure of my fear. I found my way out of the house, and went down to the water by the long stairway cut in the rock. A swim in the cool bright sea braced my nerves and made me my own man again.

As I came back to the top of the steps I could see the bright sunlight, rising from behind me, turning the rocks across the bay to glittering gold. And yet I felt somehow disturbed. It was all too bright; as it sometimes is before the coming of a storm. As I paused to watch it, I felt a soft hand on my shoulder; and, turning, found Margaret close to me; Margaret as bright and radiant as the morning glory of the sun! It was my own Margaret this time! My old Margaret, without alloy of arty other; and I felt that, at least, this last and fatal day was well begun.

But alas! the joy did not last. When we got back to the house from a stroll around the cliffs, the same old routine of yesterday was resumed: gloom and anxiety, hope, high spirits, deep depression, and apathetic aloofness.

But it was to be a day of work; and we all braced ourselves to it with an energy which wrought its own salvation.

After breakfast we all adjourned to the cave, where Mr. Trelawny went over, point by point, the position of each item of our paraphernalia. He explained as he went on why each piece was so placed. He had with him the great rolls of paper with the measured plans and the signs and drawings which he had had made from his own and Corbeck's rough notes. As he had told us, these contained the whole of the hieroglyphics on walls and ceilings and floor of the tomb in the Valley of the Sorcerer. Even had not the measurements, made to scale, recorded the position of each piece of furniture, we could have eventually placed them by a study of the cryptic writings and symbols.

Mr. Trelawny explained to us certain other things, not laid down on the chart. Such as, for instance, that the hollowed part of the table was exactly fitted to the bottom of the Magic Coffer, which was therefore intended to be placed on it. The respective legs of this table were indicated by differently shaped uraei outlined on the floor, the head of each being extended in the direction of the similar uraeus twined round the leg. Also that the mummy, when laid on the raised portion in the bottom of the sarcophagus, seemingly made to fit the form, would lie head to the West and feet to the East, thus receiving the natural earth currents. 'If this be intended,' he said 'as I presume it is, I gather that the force to be used has something to do with magnetism or electricity, or both. It may be, of course, that some other force, such, for instance, as that emanating from radium, is to be employed. I have experimented with the latter, but only in such small quantity as I could obtain: but so far as I can ascertain the stone of the Coffer is absolutely impervious to its influence. There must be some such unsusceptible substances in nature. Radium does not seemingly manifest itself when distributed through pitchblende; and there are doubtless other such substances in which it can be imprisoned. Possibly these may belong to that class of “inert” elements discovered or isolated by Sir William Ramsay. It is therefore possible that in this Coffer, made from an aerolite and therefore perhaps containing some element unknown in our world, maybe contained some mighty power which is to be released on its opening.’

This appeared to be an end of this branch of the subject; but as he still kept the fixed look of one who is still engaged in a theme we all waited in silence. After a pause he went on:

‘There is one thing which has up to now, I confess, puzzled me. It may not be of prime importance; but in a matter like this, where all is unknown, we must take it that everything is important. I cannot think that in a matter worked out with such extraordinary scrupulosity such a thing should be overlooked. As you may see by the ground-plan of the tomb the sarcophagus stands near the north wall, with the Magic Coffer to the sound of it. The space covered by the former is left quite bare of symbol or ornamentation of any kind. At the first glance this would seem to imply that the drawings had been made *after* the sarcophagus had been put into its place. But a more minute examination will show that the symbolization on the floor is so arranged that a definite effect is produced. See, here the writings run in correct order as though they had jumped across the gap. It is only from certain effects that it becomes clear that there is a meaning of some kind. What that meaning may be is what we want to know. Look at the top and bottom of the vacant space, which lies West and East corresponding to the head and foot of the sarcophagus. In body are duplications of the same symbolization, but so arranged that the parts of each one of them are integral portions of some other writing running crosswise. It is only when we get a *coup d'oeil* from either the head or the foot that you recognize that there are symbolizations. See! they are in triplicate at the corners and the centre of body top and bottom. In every case there is a sun cut in half by the line of the sarcophagus, as by the horizon. Close behind each of these and faced away from it, as though in some way dependent on it, is the vase which in hieroglyphic writing symbolizes the heart— "Ab" the Egyptians called it. Beyond each of these again is the figure of a pair of widespread arms turned upwards from the elbow; this is the determinative of the "Ka" or "Double". But its relative position is different at top and bottom. At the head of the sarcophagus the top of the "Ka" is turned towards the mouth of the vase, but at the foot the extended arms point away from it.

'The symbolization seems to mean that during the passing of the Sun from West to East — from sunset to sunrise, or through the Under World, otherwise night — die Heart, which is material even in the tomb and cannot leave it, simply revolves, so that it can always rest on "Ra" the Sun-God, the origin of all good; but that the Double, which represents the active principle, goes whither it will, the same by night as by day. If this be correct it is a warning — a caution — a reminder that the consciousness of the mummy does not rest but is to be reckoned with.

'Or it may be intended to convey that after the particular night of the resurrection, the "Ka" would leave the heart altogether. Thus typifying that in her resurrection the Queen would be restored to a lower and purely physical existence. In such case what would become of her memory and the experiences of her wide-wandering soul? The chiefest value of her resurrection would be lost to the world! This, however, does not alarm me. It is only guesswork after all, and is contradictory to the intellectual belief of the Egyptian theology, that the “Ka” is an essential portion of humanity.’ He paused and we all waited. The silence was broken by Doctor Winchester:

‘But would not all this imply that the Queen feared intrusion of her tomb?’ Mr. Trelawny smiled as he answered:

‘My dear sir, she was prepared for it. The grave-robber is no modern application of endeavour; he was probably known in the Queen’s own dynasty. Not only was she prepared for intrusion, but, as shown in several ways, she expected it. The hiding of the lamps in the serdab, and the institution of the avenging “treasurer” shows that there was defence, positive as well as negative. Indeed, from the many indications afforded in the clues laid out with the most consummate thought, we may almost gather that she entertained it as a possibility that others — like ourselves, for instance — might in all seriousness undertake the work which she had made ready for her own hands when the time should have come. This very matter that I have been speaking of is an instance. The clue is intended for seeing eyes!’

Again we were silent. It was Margaret who spoke:

‘Father, may I have that chart? I should like to study it during the day!’

‘Certainly, my dear!’ answered Mr. Trelawny heartily, as he handed it to her. He resumed his instructions in a different tone, a more matter-of-fact one suitable to a practical theme which had no mystery about it:

‘I think you had better all understand the working of the electric light in case any sudden contingency should arise. I dare say you have noticed that we have a complete supply in every part of the house, so that there need not be a dark corner anywhere. This I had specially arranged. It is worked by a set of turbines moved by the flowing and ebbing tide, after the manner of the turbines at Niagara. I hope by this means to nullify accident and to have without fail a full supply ready at any time. Come with me and I will explain the system of circuits, and point out to you the taps and the fuses.' I could not but notice, as we went with him all over the house, how absolutely complete the system was, and how he had guarded himself against any disaster that human thought could foresee.

But out of the very completeness came a fear! In such an enterprise as ours the bounds of human thought were but narrow. Beyond it lay the vast of Divine wisdom, and Divine power!

When we came back to the cave, Mr. Trelawny took up another theme:

'We have now to settle definitely the exact hour at which the Great Experiment is to be made. So far as science and mechanism go, if the preparations are complete, all hours are the same. But as we have to deal with preparations made by a woman of extraordinary subtle mind, and who had full belief in magic and had a cryptic meaning in everything, we should place ourselves in her position before deciding. It is now manifest that the sunset has an important place in the arrangements. As those suns, cut so mathematically by the edge of the sarcophagus, were arranged of full design, we must take our cue from this. Again, we find all along that the number seven has had an important bearing on every phase of the Queen's thought and reasoning and action. The logical result is that the seventh hour after sunset was the time fixed on. This is borne out by the fact that on each of the occasions when action was taken in my house, this was the time chosen. As the sun sets tonight in Cornwall at eight, our hour is to be three in the morning!' He spoke in a matter-of-fact way, though with great gravity; but there was nothing of mystery in his words or manner. Still, we were all impressed to a remarkable degree. I could see this in the other men by the pallor that came on some of their faces, and by the stillness and unquestioning silence with which the decision was received. The only one who remained in any way at ease was Margaret, who had lapsed into one of her moods of abstraction, but who seemed to wake up to a note of gladness. Her father, who was watching her intently, smiled; her mood was to him a direct confirmation of his theory.

For myself I was almost overcome. The definite fixing of the hour seemed like the voice of Doom. When I think of it now, I can realize how a condemned man feels at his sentence, or at the last sounding of the hour he is to hear.

There could be no going back now! We were in the hands of God!

The hands of God...! And yet...! What other forces were arrayed? ... What would become of us all, poor atoms of earthly dust whirled in the wind which cometh whence and goeth whither no man may know. It was not for myself...! Margaret...!

I was recalled by Mr. Trelawny's firm voice:

'Now we shall see to the lamps and finish our preparations.' Accordingly we set to work, and under his supervision made ready the Egyptian lamps, seeing that they were well filled with the cedar oil, and that the wicks were adjusted and in good order. We lighted and tested them one by one, and left them ready so that they would light at once and evenly. When this was done we had a general look round; and fixed all in readiness for our work at night.

All this had taken time, and we were I think all surprised when as we emerged from the cave we heard the great clock in the hall chime four.

We had a late lunch, a thing possible without trouble in the present state of our commissariat arrangements. After it, by Mr. Trelawny's advice, we separated; each to prepare in our own way for the strain of the coming night. Margaret looked pale and somewhat overwrought, so I advised her to lie down and try to sleep. She promised that she would. The abstraction which had been upon her fitfully all day lifted for the time; with all her old sweetness and loving delicacy she kissed me goodbye for the present! With the sense of happiness which this gave me I went out for a walk on the cliffs. I did not want to think; and I had an instinctive feeling that fresh air and God's sunlight, and the myriad beauties of the works of His hand would be the best preparation of fortitude for what was to come... When I got back, all the party were assembling for a late tea. Coming fresh from the exhilaration of nature, it struck me as almost comic that we, who were nearing the end of so strange — almost monstrous — an undertaking, should be yet bound by the needs and habits of our lives.

All the men of the party were grave; the time of seclusion, even if it had given them rest, had also given opportunity for thought. Margaret was bright, almost buoyant; but I missed about her something of her usual spontaneity. Towards myself there was a shadowy air of reserve, which brought back something of my suspicion. When tea was over, she went out of the room; but returned in a minute with the roll of drawing which she had taken with her earlier in the day. Coming close to Mr. Trelawny, she said:

'Father, I have been carefully considering what you said today about the hidden meaning of those suns and hearts and "Kas", and I have been examining the drawings again.'

‘And with what result, my child?’ asked Mr. Trelawny eagerly.

‘There is another reading possible!’

‘And that?’ His voice was now tremulous with anxiety. Margaret spoke with a strange ring in her voice; a ring that cannot be unless there is the consciousness of truth behind it:

‘It means that at the sunset the “Ka” is to enter the “Ab”; and it is only at the sunrise that it will leave it!’

‘Go on!’ said her father hoarsely. ‘It means that for this night the Queen’s Double, which is otherwise free, will remain in her heart, which is mortal and cannot leave its prison-place in the mummy shrouding. It means that when the sun has dropped into the sea, Queen Tera will cease to exist as a conscious power, till sunrise; unless the Great Experiment can recall her to waking life. It means that there will be nothing whatever for you or others to fear from her in such way as we have all cause to remember. Whatever change may come from the working of the Great Experiment, there can come none from the poor, helpless, dead woman who has waited all those centuries for this night; who has given up to the coming hour all the freedom of eternity, won in the old way, in hope of a new life in a new world such as she longed for...!’ She stopped suddenly. As she had gone on speaking there had come with her words a strange pathetic, almost pleading, tone which touched me to the quick. As she stopped, I could see, before she turned away her head, that her eyes were full of tears.

For once the heart of her father did not respond to her feeling. He looked exultant, but with a grim masterfulness which reminded me of the set look of his stern face as he had lain in the trance. He did not offer any consolation to his daughter in her sympathetic pain. He only said:

‘We may test the accuracy of your surmise, and of her feeling, when the time comes!’ Having said so, he went up the stone stairway and into his own room. Margaret’s face had a troubled look as she gazed after him.

Strangely enough her trouble did not as usual touch me to the quick. When Mr. Trelawny had gone, silence reigned. I do not think that any of us wanted to talk Presently Margaret went to her room, and I went out on the terrace over the sea. The fresh air and the beauty of all before me helped to restore the good spirits which I had known earlier in the day. Presently I felt myself actually rejoicing in the belief that the danger which I had feared from the Queen’s violence on the coming night was obviated. I believed in Margaret’s belief so thoroughly that it did not occur to me to dispute her reasoning. In a lofty frame of mind, and with less anxiety than I had felt for days, I went to my room and lay down on the sofa.

I was awaked by Corbeck calling to me, hurriedly:

‘Come down to the cave as quickly as you can. Mr. Trelawny wants to see us all there at once. Hurry!’

I jumped up and ran down to the cave. All were there except Margaret, who came immediately after me carrying Silvio in her arms. When the cat saw his old enemy he struggled to get down; but Margaret held him fast and soothed him. I looked at my watch. It was close to eight.

When Margaret was with us her father said directly, with a quiet insistence which was new to me:

‘You believe, Margaret, that Queen Tera has voluntarily undertaken to give up her freedom for this night? To become a mummy and nothing more, till the Experiment has been completed? To be content that she shall be powerless under all and any circumstances until after all is over and the act of resurrection has been accomplished, or the effort has failed?' After a pause Margaret answered in a low voice:

'Yes!

In the pause her whole being, appearance, expression, voice, manner had changed. Even Silvio noticed it, and with a violent effort wriggled away from her arms; she did not seem to notice the act. I expected that the cat, when he had achieved his freedom, would have attacked the mummy; but on this occasion he did not. He seemed too cowed to approach it. He shrunk away, and with a piteous 'miaou' came over and rubbed himself against my ankles. I took him up in my arms, and he nestled there content Mr. Trelawny spoke again:

'You are sure of what you say! You believe it with all your soul?' Margaret's face had lost the abstracted look; it now seemed illuminated with the devotion of one to whom is given to speak of great things. She answered in a voice which, though quiet, vibrated with conviction:

'I know it! My knowledge is beyond belief!' Mr. Trelawny spoke again.

'Then you are so sure, that were you Queen Tera herself, you would be willing to prove it in any way that I might suggest?'

'Yes, any way!' the answer rang out fearlessly. He spoke again, in a voice in which was no note of doubt:

'Even in the abandonment of your Familiar to death — to annihilation.'

She paused, and I could see that she suffered — suffered horribly. There was in her eyes a haunted look, which no man can, unmoved, ace in the eyes of his beloved. I was about to interrupt, when her father's eyes, glancing round with a fierce determination, met mine. I stood silent, almost spellbound; so also the other men. Something was going on before us which we did not understand!

With a few long strides Mr. Trelawny went to the west side of the cave and tore back the shutter which obscured the window. The cool air blew in, and the sunlight streamed over them both, for Margaret was now by his side. He pointed to where the sun was sinking into the sea in a halo of golden fire, and his face was as set as flint. In a voice whose absolute uncompromising hardness I shall hear in my ears at times till my dying day; he said:

'Choose! Speak! When the sun has dipped below the sea, it will be too late!' The glory of the dying sun seemed to light up Margaret's face, till it shone as if lit from within by a noble light, as she answered:

'Even that!'

Then stepping over to where the mummy cat stood on the little table, she placed her hand on it. She had now left the sunlight, and the shadows looked dark and deep over her. In a clear voice she said:

'Were I Tera, I would say "Take all I have! This night is for the Gods alone!" '

As she spoke the sun dipped, and the cold shadow suddenly fell on us. We all stood still for a while. Silvio jumped from my arms and ran over to his mistress, rearing himself up against her dress as if asking to be lifted. He took no notice whatever of the mummy now.

Margaret was glorious with all her wonted sweetness as she said sadly:

'The sun is down, Father! Shall any of us see it again? The night of nights is come!'

Chapter XX. The Great Experiment

IF ANY EVIDENCE HAD BEEN WANTED OF HOW Absolutely one and all of us had come to believe in the spiritual existence of the Egyptian Queen, it would have been found in the change which in a few minutes had been effected in us by the statement of voluntary negation made, we all believed, through Margaret. Despite the coming of the fearful ordeal, the sense of which it was impossible to forget, we looked and acted as though a great relief had come to us. We had indeed lived in such a state of terrorism during the days when Mr. Trelawny was lying in a trance that the feeling had bitten deeply into us. No one knows till he has experienced it, what it is to be in constant dread of some unknown danger which may come at any time and in any form.

The change was manifested in different ways, according to each nature. Margaret was sad. Doctor Winchester was in high spirits, and keenly observant; the process of thought which had served as an antidote to fear, being now relieved from this duty, added to his intellectual enthusiasm. Mr. Corbeck seemed to be in a retrospective rather than a speculative mood. I was myself rather inclined to be gay: the relief from certain anxiety regarding Margaret was sufficient for me for the time.

As to Mr. Trelawny he seemed less changed than any. Perhaps this was only natural, as he had had in his mind the intention for so many years of doing that in which we were tonight engaged, that any event connected with it could only seem to him as an episode, a step to the end. His was that commanding nature which looks so to the end of an undertaking that all else is of secondary importance. Even now, though his terrible sternness relaxed under the relief from the strain, he never flagged nor faltered for a moment in his purpose. He asked us men to come with him; and going to the hall we presently managed to lower into the cave an oak table, fairly long and not too wide, which stood against the wall in the hall. This we placed under the strong cluster of electric lights in the middle of the cave. Margaret looked on for a while; then all at once her face blanched, and in an agitated voice she said:

‘What are you going to do, Father?”

To unroll the mummy of the cat! Queen Tera will not need her Familiar tonight. *If* she should want him, it might be dangerous to us; so we shall make him safe. You are not alarmed, dear?’

‘Oh no!’ she answered quickly. ‘But I was thinking of my Silvio, and how I should feel if he had been the mummy that was to be unswathed!’

Mr. Trelawny got knives and scissors ready, and placed the cat on the table. It was a grim beginning to our work; and it made my heart sink when I thought of what might happen in that lonely house in the mid-gloom of the night. The sense of loneliness and isolation from the world was increased by the moaning of the wind which had now risen ominously, and by the beating of waves on the rocks below. But we had too grave a task before us to be swayed by external manifestations: the unrolling of the mummy began.

There was an incredible number of bandages; and the tearing sound — they being stuck fast to each other by bitumen and gums and spices — and the little cloud of red pungent dust that arose, pressed on the senses of all of us. As the last wrappings came away we saw the animal seated before us. He was all hunkered up; his hair and teeth and claws were complete. The eyes were closed, but the eyelids had not the fierce look which I expected. The whiskers had been pressed down on the side of the face by the bandaging; but when the pressure was taken away they stood out, just as they would have done in life. He was a magnificent creature, a tiger-cat of great size. But as we looked at him, our first glance of admiration changed to one of fear, and a shudder ran through each one of us; for here was a confirmation of the fears which we had endured.

His mouth and his claws were smeared with the dry, red stains of recent blood!

Doctor Winchester was the first to recover; blood in itself had small disturbing quality for him. He had taken out his magnifying-glass and was examining the stains on the cat's mouth. Mr. Trelawny breathed loudly, as though a strain had been taken from him.

'It is as I expected,' he said. "This "promises well for what is to follow.'

By this time Doctor Winchester was looking at the red stained paws. 'As I expected!' he said. 'He has seven claws, too!' Opening his pocketbook, he took out the piece of blotting-paper marked by Silvio's claws, on which was also marked in pencil a diagram of the cuts made on Mr. Trelawny's wrist. He placed the paper under the mummy cat's paw. The marks fitted exactly.

When we had carefully examined the cat, finding, however, nothing strange about it but its wonderful preservation, Mr. Trelawny lifted it from the table. Margaret started forward, crying out:

'Take care, Father! Take care! He may injure you!'

'Not now, my dear!' he answered as he moved towards the stairway. Her face fell. 'Where are you going?' she asked in a faint voice.

'To the kitchen,' he answered. Tire will take away all danger for the future; even an astral body cannot materialize from ashes!' He signed to us to follow him. Margaret turned away with a sob. I went to her; but she motioned me back and whispered:

‘No, no! Go with the others. Father may want you. Oh! it seems like murder! The poor Queen’s pet...!’ The tears were dropping from under the fingers that covered her eyes.

In the kitchen was a fire of wood ready laid. To this Mr. Trelawny applied a match; in a few seconds the kindling had caught and the flames leaped. When the fire was solidly ablaze, he threw the body of the cat into it. For a few seconds it lay a dark mass amidst the flames, and the room was rank with the smell of burning hair. Then the dry body caught fire too. The inflammable substances used in embalming became new fuel, and the flames roared. A few minutes of fierce conflagration; and then we breathed freely. Queen Tera’s Familiar was no more!

When we went back to the cave we found Margaret sitting in the dark. She had switched off the electric light, and only a faint glow of the evening light came through the narrow openings. Her father went quickly over to her and put his arms round her in a loving protective way. She laid her head on his shoulder for a minute, and seemed comforted. Presently she called to me:

‘Malcolm, turn up the light!’ I carried out her orders, and could see that, though she had been crying, her eyes were now dry. Her father saw it too and looked glad. He said to us in a grave tone:

‘Now we had better prepare for our great work. It will not do to leave anything to the last!’ Margaret must have had a suspicion of what was coming, for it was with a sinking voice that she asked:

‘What are you going to do now?’ Mr. Trelawny too must have had a suspicion of her feelings, for he answered in a low tone:

‘To unroll the mummy of Queen Tera!’ She came close to him and said pleadingly in a whisper:

‘Father, you are not going to unswathe her! All you men...! And in the glare of light!’

‘But why not, my dear?’

‘Just think, Father, a woman! All alone! In such a way! In such a place! Oh! It’s cruel, cruel!’ She was manifestly much overcome. Her cheeks were flaming red, and her eyes were full of indignant tears. Her father saw her distress; and, sympathizing with it, began to comfort her. I was moving off; but he signed to me to stay. I took it that after the usual manner of men he wanted help on such an occasion, and manlike wished to throw on someone else the task of dealing with a woman in indignant distress. However, he began to appeal first to her reason:

‘Not a woman, dear; a mummy! She has been dead nearly five thousand years!’

‘What does that matter? Sex is not a matter of years! A woman is a woman, if she had been dead five thousand centuries! And you expect her to arise out of that long sleep! It could not be real death, if she is to rise out of it! You have led me to believe that she will come alive when the Coffer is opened!’

‘I did, my dear, and I believe it! But if it isn’t death that has been the matter with her all these years, it is something uncommonly like it. Then again, just think; it was men who embalmed her. They didn’t have women’s rights or lady doctors in ancient Egypt, my dear! And besides,’ he went on more freely, seeing that she was accepting his argument, if not yielding to it, ‘we men are accustomed to such things. Corbeck and I have unrolled a hundred mummies; and there were as many women as men amongst them. Doctor Winchester in his work has had to deal with women as well as men, till custom has made him think nothing of sex. Even Ross has in his work as a barrister...' He stopped suddenly.

'You were going to help, too!' she said to me, with an indignant look.

I said nothing; I thought silence was best. Mr. Trelawny went on hurriedly; I could see that he was glad of interruption, for the part of his argument concerning a barrister's work was becoming decidedly weak:

'My child, you will be with us yourself. Would we do anything which would hurt or offend you? Come now! Be reasonable! We are not at a pleasure party. We are all grave men, entering gravely on an experiment which may unfold the wisdom of old times, and enlarge human knowledge indefinitely; which may put the minds of men on new tracks of thought and research. An experiment,' as he went on his voice deepened, 'which may be fraught with death to any one of us — to us all! We know from what has been, that there are, or may be, vast and unknown dangers ahead of us, of which none in the house today may ever see the end. Take it, my child, that we are not acting lightly; but with all the gravity of deeply earnest men! Besides, my dear, whatever feelings you or any of us may have on the subject, it is necessary for the success of the experiment to unswathe her. I think that under any circumstances it would be necessary to remove the wrappings before she became again a live human being instead of a spiritualized corpse with an astral body. Were her original intention carried out, and did she come to new life within her mummy wrappings, it might be to exchange a coffin for a grave! She would die the death of the buried alive! But now, when she has voluntarily abandoned for the time her astral power, there can be no doubt on the subject.'

Margaret's face cleared. 'All right, Father!' she said as she kissed him. 'But oh! It seems a horrible indignity to a Queen, and a woman.'

I was moving away to the staircase when -she called to me:

'Where are you going?' I came back and took her hand and stroked it as I answered:

'I shall come back when the unrolling is over!' She looked at me long, and a faint suggestion of a smile came over her face as she said:

'Perhaps you had better stay, too! It may be useful to you in your work as a barrister!' She smiled out as she met my eyes: but in an instant she changed. Her face grew grave, and deadly white. In a far away voice she said:

'Father is right! It is a terrible occasion; we need all to be serious over it. But all the same — nay, for that very reason you had better stay, Malcolm! You may be glad, later on, that you were present tonight!'

My heart sank down, down, at her words; but I thought it better to say nothing. Fear was stalking openly enough amongst us already!

By this time Mr. Trelawny, assisted by Mr. Corbeck and Doctor Winchester, had raised the lid of the ironstone sarcophagus which contained the mummy of the Queen. It was a large one; but it was none too big. The mummy was both long and broad and high: and was of such weight that it was no easy task, even for the four of us, to lift it out. Under Mr. Trelawny's direction we laid it out on the table prepared for it.

Then, and then only, did the full horror of the whole thing burst upon me! There, in the full glare of the light, the whole material and sordid side of death seemed startlingly real. The outer wrappings, torn and loosened by rude touch, and with the colour either darkened by dust or worn light by friction, seemed creased as by rough treatment; the jagged edges of the wrapping-cloths looked fringed; the painting was patchy, and the varnish chipped. The coverings were evidently many, for the bulk was great. But through all, showed that unhidable human figure, which seems to look more horrible when partially concealed than at any other time. What was before us was Death, and nothing else. All the romance and sentiment of fancy had disappeared. The two elder men, enthusiasts who had often done such work, were not disconcerted; and Doctor Winchester seemed to hold himself in a business-like attitude, as if before the operating-table. But I felt low-spirited, and miserable, and ashamed; and besides I was pained and alarmed by Margaret's ghastly pallor.

Then the work began. The unrolling of the mummy cat had prepared me somewhat for it; but this was so much larger, and so infinitely more elaborate, that it seemed a different thing. Moreover, in addition to the ever present sense of death and humanity, there was a feeling of something finer in all this. The cat had been embalmed with coarser materials; here, all, when once the outer coverings were removed, was more delicately done. It seemed as if only the finest gums and spices had been used in this embalming. But there were the same surroundings, the same attendant red dust and pungent presence of bitumen; there was the same sound of rending which marked the tearing away of the bandages. There were an enormous number of these, and their bulk when opened was great. As the men unrolled them, I grew more and more excited. I did not take a part in it myself; Margaret had looked at me gratefully as I drew back. We clasped hands, and held each other hard. As the unrolling went on, the wrappings became finer, and the smell less laden with bitumen, but more pungent. We all, I think, began to feel it as though it caught or touched us in some special way. This, however, did not interfere with the work; it went on uninterruptedly. Some of the inner wrappings bore symbols or pictures. These were done sometimes wholly in pale green colour sometimes in many colours; but always with a prevalence of green. Now and again Mr. Trelawny or Mr. Corbeck would point out some special drawing before laying the bandage on the pile behind them, which kept growing to a monstrous height.

At last we knew that the wrappings were coming to an end. Already the proportions were reduced to those of a normal figure of the manifest height of the Queen, who was more than average tall. And as the end drew nearer, so Margaret's pallor grew; and her heart beat more and more wildly, till her breast heaved in a way that frightened me.

Just as her father was taking away the last of the bandages, he happened to look up and caught the pained and anxious look of her pale face. He paused, and taking her concern to be as to the outrage on modesty, said in a comforting way:

'Do not be uneasy, dear! See! there is nothing to harm you. The Queen has on a robe. — Ay, and a royal robe, too!'

The wrapping was a wide piece the whole length of the body. It being removed, a profusely full robe of white linen had appeared, covering the body from the throat to the feet.

And such linen! We all bent over to look at it.

Margaret lost her concern, in her woman's interest in fine stuff. Then the rest of us looked with admiration; for surely such linen was never seen by the eyes of our age. It was as fine as the finest silk. But never was spun or woven silk which lay in such gracious folds, constrict though they were by the close wrappings of the mummy cloth, and fixed into hardness by the passing of thousands of years.

Round the neck it was delicately embroidered in pure gold with tiny sprays of sycamore; and round the feet, similarly worked, was an endless line of lotus plants of unequal height, and with all the graceful abandon of natural growth.

Across the body, but manifestly not surrounding it, was a girdle of jewels. A wondrous girdle, which shone and glowed with all the forms and phases and colours of the sky!

The buckle was a great yellow stone, round of outline, deep and curved, as if a yielding globe had been pressed down. It shone and glowed, as though a veritable sun lay within; the rays of its light seemed to strike out and illumine all round. Flanking it were two great moonstones of lesser size, whose glowing, beside the glory of the sun-stone, was like the silvery sheen of moonlight.

And then on either side, linked by golden clasps of exquisite shape, was a line of flaming jewels, of which the colours seemed to glow. Each of these stones seemed to hold a living star, which twinkled in every phase of changing light.

Margaret raised her hands in ecstasy. She bent over to examine more closely; but suddenly drew back and stood fully erect at her grand height. She seemed to speak with the conviction of absolute knowledge as she said:

‘That is no cerement! It was not meant for the clothing of death! It is a marriage robe!’

Mr. Trelawny leaned over and touched the linen robe. He lifted a fold at the neck, and I knew from the quick intake of his breath that something had surprised him. He lifted yet a little more; and then he, too, stood back and pointed, saying:

‘Margaret is right! That dress is not intended to be worn by the dead! See! 'her figure is not robed in it. It is but laid upon her.' He lifted the zone of jewels and handed it to Margaret. Then with both hands he raised the ample robe, and laid it across the arms which she extended in a natural impulse. Things of such beauty were too precious to be handled with any but the greatest care.

We all stood awed at the beauty of the figure which, save for the face cloth, now lay completely nude before us. Mr. Trelawny bent over, and with hands that trembled slightly, raised this linen cloth which was of the same fineness as the robe. As he stood back and the whole glorious beauty of the Queen was revealed, I felt a rush of shame sweep over me. It was not right that we should be there, gazing with irreverent eyes on such unclad beauty: it was indecent; it was almost sacrilegious! And yet the white wonder of that beautiful form was something to dream of. It was not like death at all; it was like a statue carven in ivory by the hand of a Praxiteles. There was nothing of that horrible shrinkage which death seems to effect in a moment. There was none of the wrinkled toughness which seems to be a leading characteristic of most mummies. There was not the shrunken attenuation of a body dried in the sand, as I had seen before in museums. All the pores of the body seemed to have been preserved in some wonderful way. The flesh was full and round, as in a living person; and the skin was as smooth as satin. The colour seemed extraordinary. It was like ivory; except where the right arm, with shattered, bloodstained wrist and missing hand had lain bare to exposure in the sarcophagus for so many tens of centuries.

With a womanly impulse; with a mouth that drooped with pity, with eyes-that flashed with anger, and cheeks that flamed, Margaret threw over the body the beautiful robe which lay across her arm. Only the face was then to be seen. This was more startling even than the body, for it seemed not dead, but alive. The eyelids were closed; but the long, black, curling lashes lay over on the cheeks. The nostrils, set in grave pride, seemed to have the repose which, when it is seen in life, is greater than the repose of death. The full, red lips, though the mouth was not open, showed the tiniest white line of pearly teeth within. Her hair, glorious in quantity and glossy black as the raven's wing, was piled in great masses over the white forehead, on which a few curling tresses strayed like tendrils. I was amazed at the likeness to Margaret, though I had had my mind prepared for such by Mr. Corbeck's quotation of her father's statement. This woman — I could not think of her as a mummy or a corpse — was the image of Margaret as my eyes had first lit on her. The likeness was increased by the jewelled ornament which she wore in her hair, the 'Disc and Plumes', such as Margaret too, had worn. It, too, was a glorious jewel; one noble pearl of moonlight lustre, flanked by carven pieces of moonstone.

Mr. Trelawny was overcome as he looked. He quite broke down; and when Margaret flew to him and held him close in her arms and comforted him, I heard him murmur brokenly:

'It looks as if you were dead, my child!'

There was a long silence. I could hear without the roar of the wind, which was now risen to a tempest, and the furious dashing of the waves far below. Mr. Trelawny's voice broke the spell:

'Later on we must try and find out the process of embalming. It is not like any that I know. There does not seem to have been any opening cut for the withdrawing of the viscera and organs, which apparently remain intact within the body. Then, again, there is no moisture in the flesh; but its place is supplied with something else, as though wax or stearine had been conveyed into the veins by some subtle process. I wonder could it be possible that at that time they could have used paraffin. It might have been, by some process that we know not, pumped into the veins, where it hardened!'

Margaret, having thrown a white sheet over the Queen's body, asked us to bring it to her own room, where we laid it on her bed. Then she sent us away, saying:

'Leave her alone with me. There are still many hours to pass, and I do not like to leave her lying there, all stark in the glare of light. This may be the Bridal she prepared for — the Bridal of Death; and at least she shall wear her pretty robes.'

When presently she brought me back to her room, the dead Queen was dressed in the robe of fine linen with the embroidery of gold; and all her beautiful jewels were in place. Candles were lit around her, and white flowers lay upon her breast.

Hand in hand we stood looking at her for a while. Then with a sigh, Margaret covered her with one of her own snowy sheets. She turned away; and after softly closing the door of the room, went back with me to the others who had now come into the dining-room. Here we all began to talk over the things that had been, and that were to be.

Now and again I could feel that one or other of us was forcing conversation, as if we were not sure of ourselves. The long wait was beginning *to* tell on our nerves. It was apparent to me that Mr. Trelawny had suffered in that strange trance more than we suspected, or than he cared to show. True, his will and his determination were as strong as ever; but the purely physical side of him had been weakened somewhat. It was indeed only natural that it should be. No man can go through a period of four days of absolute negation of life, without being weakened by it somehow.

As the hours crept by, the time passed more and more slowly. The other men seemed to get unconsciously a little drowsy. I wondered if in the case of Mr. Trelawny and Mr. Corbeck, who had already been under the hypnotic influence of the Queen, the same dormance was manifesting itself. Doctor Winchester had periods of distraction which grew longer and more frequent as the time wore on.

As to Margaret, the suspense told on her exceedingly, as might have been expected in the case of a woman. She grew paler and paler still; till at last about midnight, I began to be seriously alarmed about her. I got her to come into the library with me, and tried to make her lie down on a sofa for a little while. As Mr. Trelawny had decided that the experiment was to be made exactly at the seventh hour after sunset, it would be as nearly as possible three o'clock in the morning when the great trial should be made. Even allowing a whole hour for the final preparations, we had still two hours of waiting to go through. I promised faithfully to watch her, and to awake her at any time she might name; but she would not hear of resting. She thanked me sweetly, and smiled as she did so. But she assured me that she was not sleepy, and that she was quite able to bear up; that it was only the suspense and excitement of waiting that made her pale. I agreed perforce, but I kept her talking of many things in the library for more 'than an hour; so that at last, when she insisted on going back to her father, I felt that I had at least done something to help her pass the time.

We found the three men sitting patiently in the dining-room in silence. With man's fortitude they were content to be still, when they felt they had done all in their power.

And so we waited.

The striking of two o'clock seemed to freshen us all up. Whatever shadows had been settling over us ‘during the long hours preceding seemed to lift at once, and we all went about our separate duties alert and with alacrity. We looked first to the windows to see that they were closed; for now the storm raged so fiercely that we feared it might upset our plans which, after all, were based on perfect stillness.

Then we got ready our respirators to put them on when the time should be close at hand. We had from the first arranged to use them, for we did not know whether some noxious fume might not come from the Magic Coffer when it should be opened. Somehow it never seemed to occur to any of us that there was any doubt as<o its opening.

Then, under Margaret’s guidance, we carried the body of Queen Tera, still clad in her Bridal robes, from her room into the cavern.

It was a strange sight, and a strange experience. The group of grave silent men carrying away from the lighted candles and the white flowers the white still figure, which looked like an ivory statue when through our moving the robe fell back.

We laid her in the sarcophagus, and placed the severed hand in its true position on her breast. Under it was laid the Jewel of Seven Stars, which Mr. Trelawny had taken from the safe. It seemed to flash and blaze as he put it in its place. The glare of the electric lights shone cold on the great sarcophagus fixed ready for the final experiment — the Great Experiment, consequent on the researches during a lifetime of these two travelled scholars. Again, the startling likeness between Margaret and the mummy, intensified by her own extraordinary pallor, heightened the strangeness of it all.

When all was finally fixed, three-quarters of an hour had gone; for we were deliberate in all our doings. Margaret beckoned me, and I went with her to her room. There she did a thing which moved me strangely, and brought home to me keenly the desperate nature of the enterprise on which we were embarked. One by one, she blew out the candles carefully, and placed them back in their usual places. When she had finished she said to me.

‘They are done with! Whatever comes — Life or Death — there will be no purpose in their using now!’

We returned to. the cavern with a strange thrill as of finality. There was to be no going back now!

We put on our respirators, and took our places as had been arranged. I was to stand by the taps of the electric lights, ready to turn them off or on as Mr. Trelawny should direct. His last caution to me to carry out his instructions exactly was almost like a menace; for he warned me that death to any or all of us might come from any error or neglect on my part Margaret and Doctor Winchester were to stand between the sarcophagus and the wall, so that they would not be between the mummy and the Magic Coffer. They were to note accurately all that should happen with regard to the Queen.

Mr. Trelawny and Mr. Corbeck were to see the lamps lighted: and then to take their places, the former at the foot, the latter at the head, of the sarcophagus.

When the hands of the clock were close to the hour, they stood ready with their lit tapers, like gunners in old days with their linstocks.

For the few minutes that followed, the passing of time was a slow horror. Mr. Trelawny stood with his watch in his hand, ready to give the signal.

The time approached with inconceivable slowness; but at last came the whirring of wheels which warns that the hour is at hand.

The striking of the silver bell of the clock seemed to smite on our hearts like the knell of doom. One! Two! Three!

The wicks of the lamps caught, and I turned out the electric light. In the dimness of the struggling lamps, and after the bright glow of the electric light, the room and all within it took weird shape, and everything seemed in an instant to change. We waited, with our hearts beating. I know mine did; and I fancied I could hear the pulsation of the others. Without, the storm raged; the shutters of the narrow windows shook and strained and raided, as though something was striving for entrance.

The seconds seemed to pass with leaden wings; it was as though all the world were standing still. The figures of the others stood out dimly, Margaret's white dress alone showing clearly in the gloom. The thick respirators, which we all wore, added to the strange appearance. The thin light of the lamps, as the two men bent over the Coffer, showed Mr. Trelawny's square jaw and strong mouth, and the brown, wrinkled face of Mr. Corbeck. Their eyes seemed to glare in the light. Across the room Doctor Winchester's eyes twinkled like stars, and Margaret's blazed like black suns.

Would the lamps never burn up!

It was only a few seconds in all till they did blaze up. A slow, steady light, growing more and more bright; and changing in colour from blue to crystal white. So they stayed for a couple of minutes, without any change in the Coffer being noticeable. At last there began to appear all over it a delicate glow. This grew and grew, till it became like a blazing jewel; and then like a living thing, whose essence was light. Mr. Trelawny and Mr. Corbeck moved silently to their places beside the sarcophagus.

We waited and waited, our hearts seeming to stand still.

All at once there was a sound like a tiny muffled explosion, and the cover of the Coffer lifted right up on a level plane a few inches; there was no mistaking anything now, for the whole cavern was full of light. Then the cover, staying fast at one side, rose slowly up on the other, as though yielding to some, pressure of balance. I could not see what was within, for the risen cover stood between. The Coffer still continued to glow; from it began to steal a faint greenish vapour which floated in the direction of the sarcophagus as though impelled or drawn towards it. I could not smell it fully on account of the respirator; but, even through that, I was conscious of a strange, pungent odour. The vapour got somewhat denser after a few seconds, and began to pass directly into the open sarcophagus. It was evident now that the mummied body had some attraction for it; and also that it had some effect on the body, for the sarcophagus slowly became illumined as though the body had begun to glow. I could not see within from where I stood, but I garnered from the faces of all the four watchers that something strange was happening.

I longed to run over and take a look for myself; but I remembered Mr. Trelawny's solemn warning, and remained at my post.

The storm still thundered round the house, and I could feel the rock on which it was built tremble under the furious onslaught of the waves. The shutters strained as though the screaming wind without would in very anger have forced an entrance. In that dread hour of expectancy, when the forces of Life and Death were struggling for the mastery, imagination was awake. I almost fancied that the storm was a living thing, and animated with the wrath of the quick!

All at once the eager faces round the sarcophagus were bent forward. The look of speechless wonder in the eyes, lit by that supernatural glow from within the sarcophagus, had a more than mortal brilliance. -

My own eyes were nearly blinded by the awful, paralysing light, so that I could hardly trust them. I saw something white rising up from the open sarcophagus. Something which appeared to my tortured eyes to be filmy, like a white mist. In the heart of this mist, which was cloudy and opaque like an opal, was something like a hand holding a fiery jewel flaming with many lights. As the fierce glow of the Coffer met this new living light, the green vapour floating between them seemed like a cascade of brilliant points — a miracle of light!

But at that very moment there came a change. The fierce storm, battling with the shutters of the narrow openings, won victory. With the sound of a pistol shot, one of the heavy shutters broke its fastening and was hurled on its hinges back against the wall. In rushed a fierce blast which blew the flames of the lamps to and fro, and drifted the green vapour from its course.

On the very instant came a change in the outcome from the Coffer. There was a moment's quick flame and a muffled explosion; and black smoke began to pour out. This got thicker and thicker with frightful rapidity, in volumes of ever-increasing density, till the whole cavern began to get obscure, and its outlines were lost. The screaming wind tore in and whirled it about. At a sign from Mr. Trelawny Mr. Corbeck went and closed the shutter and jammed it fast with a wedge.

I should have liked to help; but I had to wait directions from Mr. Trelawny, who inflexibly held his post at the head of the sarcophagus. I signed to him with my hand, but he motioned me back. Gradually the figures of all close to the sarcophagus became indistinct in the smoke which rolled round them in thick billowy clouds. Finally, I lost sight of them altogether. I had a terrible desire to rush over so as to be near Margaret; but again I restrained myself. If the Stygian gloom continued, light would be a necessity of safety; and I was the guardian of the light! My anguish of anxiety as I stood to my post was almost unendurable.

The Coffer was now but a dull colour; and the lamps were growing dim, as though they were being overpowered by the thick smoke. Absolute darkness would soon be upon us.

I waited and waited, expecting every instant to hear the command to turn up the light; but none came. I waited still, and looked with harrowing intensity at the rolling billows of smoke still pouring out of the casket whose glow was fading. The lamps sank down, and went out; one by one.

Finally, there was but one lamp alight, and that was dimly blue and flickering. I kept my eyes fixed towards Margaret, in the hope that I might see her in some lifting of the gloom; it was for her now that all my anxiety was claimed. I could just see her white frock beyond the dim outline of the sarcophagus.

Deeper and deeper grew the black mist, and its pungency began to assail my nostrils as well as my eyes. Now the volume of smoke coming from the Coffer seemed to lessen, and the smoke itself to be less dense. Across the room I saw a movement of something white where the sarcophagus was. There were several such movements. I could just catch the quick glint of white through the dense smoke in the fading light; for now even the last lamp began to flicker with the quick leaps before extinction. Then the last glow disappeared. I felt that the time had come to speak; so I pulled off my respirator and called out: ‘

‘Shall I turn on the light?’ There was no answer. Before the thick smoke choked me, I called again, but more loudly:

‘Mr. Trelawny, shall I turn on the light? Answer me! If you do not forbid me, I shall turn it on!’

As there was no reply, I turned the tap. To my horror there was no response; something had gone wrong with the electric light! I moved, intending to run up the staircase to seek the cause, but I could now see nothing, all was pitch dark.

I groped my way across the room to where I thought Margaret was. As I went I stumbled across a body. I could feel by her dress that it was a woman. My heart sank; Margaret was unconscious, or perhaps dead. I lifted the body in my arms, and went straight forward till I touched a wall. Following it round I came to the stairway: and hurried up (he steps with what haste I could make, hampered as I was with my dear burden. It may have been that hope lightened my task; but as I went the weight that I bore seemed to grow less as I ascended from the cavern.

I laid the body in the” hall, and groped my way to Margaret’s room, where I knew there were matches, and the candles which she had placed beside the Queen. I struck a match; and oh! It was good to see the light. I lit two candles, and taking one in each hand, hurried back to the hall where I had left, as I had supposed, Margaret.

Her body was not there. But on the spot where I had laid her was Queen Tera’s Bridal robe, and surrounding it the girdle of wondrous gems. Where the heart had been, lay the Jewel of Seven Stars.

Sick at heart, and with a terror which has no name, I went down into the cavern. My two candles were like mere points of light in the black, impenetrable smoke. I put up again to my mouth the respirator which hung round my neck, and went to look for my companions.

I found them all where they had stood. They had sunk down on the floor, and were gazing upward with fixed eyes of unspeakable terror. Margaret had put her hands before her face, but the glassy stare of her eyes through her fingers was more terrible than an open glare.

I pulled back the shutters of all the windows to let in what air I could. The storm was dying away as quickly as it had risen, and now it only came in desultory puffs. It might well be quiescent; its work was done!

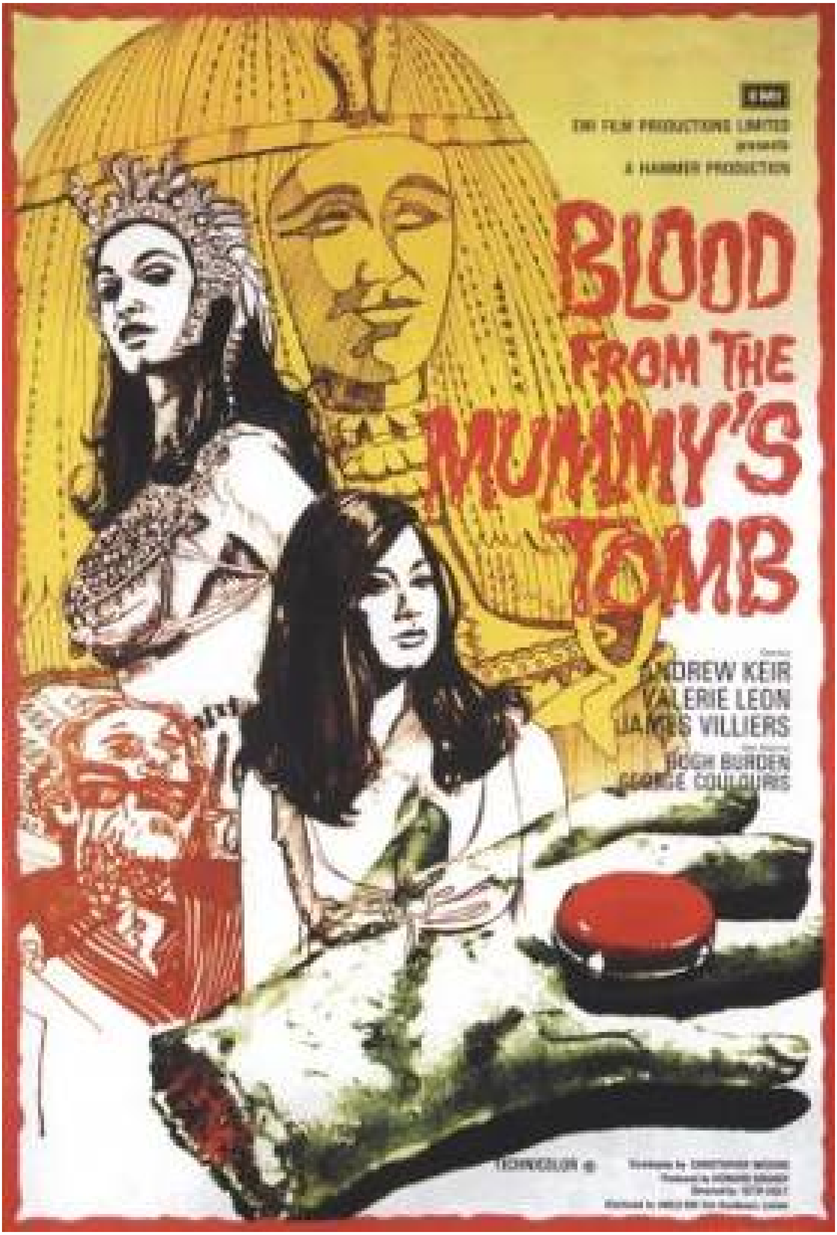
I did what I could for my companions: but there was nothing that could avail. There, in that lonely house, far away from aid of man, naught could avail.

It was merciful that I was spared the pain of hoping.

The Jewel of Seven Stars — 1912 Version

This horror novel was first published in 1903. The story concerns an archaeologist's endeavours to revive from the dead Queen Tera, an ancient Egyptian mummy. When *The Jewel of Seven Stars* was first released in 1903 the publishers received a great deal of criticism from both critics and readers because of its gruesome ending. Shortly before his death in 1912 when Stoker attempted to republish the book he was told that he would have to change the ending if he didn't want it to go out of publication. As a result, Stoker removed Chapter XVI "Powers – Old and New" and gave the novel a new and happier ending. For many years the original ending was unavailable to most readers. The novel has since influenced many – if not all - Mummy movies.

This is the revised 1912 version, which features a 'happy' ending.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The first theatrical adaption of 'The Jewel of Seven Stars' was Hammer Studios' 'Blood from the Mummy's Tomb' in 1971.

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Chapter I

A Summons in the Night

It all seemed so real that I could hardly imagine that it had ever occurred before; and yet each episode came, not as a fresh step in the logic of things, but as something expected. It is in such a wise that memory plays its pranks for good or ill; for pleasure or pain; for weal or woe. It is thus that life is bittersweet, and that which has been done becomes eternal.

Again, the light skiff, ceasing to shoot through the lazy water as when the oars flashed and dripped, glided out of the fierce July sunlight into the cool shade of the great drooping willow branches — I standing up in the swaying boat, she sitting still and with deft fingers guarding herself from stray twigs or the freedom of the resilience of moving boughs. Again, the water looked golden-brown under the canopy of translucent green; and the grassy bank was of emerald hue. Again, we sat in the cool shade, with the myriad noises of nature both without and within our bower merging into that drowsy hum in whose sufficing environment the great world with its disturbing trouble, and its more disturbing joys, can be effectually forgotten. Again, in that blissful solitude the young girl lost the convention of her prim, narrow upbringing, and told me in a natural, dreamy way of the loneliness of her new life. With an undertone of sadness she made me feel how in that spacious home each one of the household was isolated by the personal magnificence of her father and herself; that there confidence had no altar, and sympathy no shrine; and that there even her father's face was as distant as the old country life seemed now. Once more, the wisdom of my manhood and the experience of my years laid themselves at the girl’s feet. It was seemingly their own doing; for the individual “I” had no say in the matter, but only just obeyed imperative orders. And once again the flying seconds multiplied themselves endlessly. For it is in the arcana of dreams that existences merge and renew themselves, change and yet keep the same — like the soul of a musician in a fugue. And so memory swooned, again and again, in sleep.

It seems that there is never to be any perfect rest. Even in Eden the snake rears its head among the laden boughs of the Tree of Knowledge. The silence of the dreamless night is broken by the roar of the avalanche; the hissing of sudden floods; the clanging of the engine bell marking its sweep through a sleeping American town; the clanking of distant paddles over the sea.... Whatever it is, it is breaking the charm of my Eden. The canopy of greenery above us, starred with diamond-points of light, seems to quiver in the ceaseless beat of paddles; and the restless bell seems as though it would never cease....

All at once the gates of Sleep were thrown wide open, and my waking ears took in the cause of the disturbing sounds. Waking existence is prosaic enough — there was somebody knocking and ringing at someone’s street door.

I was pretty well accustomed in my Jermyn Street chambers to passing sounds; usually I did not concern myself, sleeping or waking, with the doings, however noisy, of my neighbours. But this noise was too continuous, too insistent, too imperative to be ignored. There was some active intelligence behind that ceaseless sound; and some stress or need behind the intelligence. I was not altogether selfish, and at the thought of someone’s need I was, without premeditation, out of bed. Instinctively I looked at my watch. It was just three o’clock; there was a faint edging of grey round the green blind which darkened my room. It was evident that the knocking and ringing were at the door of our own house; and it was evident, too, that there was no one awake to answer the call. I slipped on my dressing-gown and slippers, and went down to the hall door. When I opened it there stood a dapper groom, with one hand pressed unflinchingly on the electric bell whilst with the other he raised a ceaseless clangour with the knocker. The instant he saw me the noise ceased; one hand went up instinctively to the brim of his hat, and the other produced a letter from his pocket. A neat brougham was opposite the door, the horses were breathing heavily as though they had come fast. A policeman, with his night lantern still alight at his belt, stood by, attracted to the spot by the noise.

“Beg pardon, sir, I’m sorry for disturbing you, but my orders was imperative; I was not to lose a moment, but to knock and ring till someone came. May I ask you, sir, if Mr. Malcolm Ross lives here?”

“I am Mr. Malcolm Ross.”

“Then this letter is for you, sir, and the bro’am is for you too, sir!”

I took, with a strange curiosity, the letter which he handed to me. As a barrister I had had, of course, odd experiences now and then, including sudden demands upon my time; but never anything like this. I stepped back into the hall, closing the door to, but leaving it ajar; then I switched on the electric light. The letter was directed in a strange hand, a woman’s. It began at once without “dear sir” or any such address:

“You said you would like to help me if I needed it; and I believe you meant what you said. The time has come sooner than I expected. I am in dreadful trouble, and do not know where to turn, or to whom to apply. An attempt has, I fear, been made to murder my Father;

though, thank God, he still lives. But he is quite unconscious. The doctors and police have been sent for; but there is no one here whom I can depend on. Come at once if you are able to; and forgive me if you can. I suppose I shall realise later what I have done in asking such a favour; but at present I cannot think. Come! Come at once! MARGARET TRELAWNY.”

Pain and exultation struggled in my mind as I read; but the mastering thought was that she was in trouble and had called on me — me! My dreaming of her, then, was not altogether without a cause. I called out to the groom:

“Wait! I shall be with you in a minute!” Then I flew upstairs.

A very few minutes sufficed to wash and dress; and we were soon driving through the streets as fast as the horses could go. It was market morning, and when we got out on Piccadilly there was an endless stream of carts coming from the west; but for the rest the roadway was clear, and we went quickly. I had told the groom to come into the brougham with me so that he could tell me what had happened as we went along. He sat awkwardly, with his hat on his knees as he spoke.

“Miss Trelawny, sir, sent a man to tell us to get out a carriage at once; and when we was ready she come herself and gave me the letter and told Morgan — the coachman, sir — to fly. She said as I was to lose not a second, but to keep knocking till someone come.”

“Yes, I know, I know — you told me! What I want to know is, why she sent for me. What happened in the house?”

“I don’t quite know myself, sir; except that master was found in his room senseless, with the sheets all bloody, and a wound on his head. He couldn’t be waked nohow. Twas Miss Trelawny herself as found him.”

“How did she come to find him at such an hour? It was late in the night, I suppose?”

“I don’t know, sir; I didn’t hear nothing at all of the details.”

As he could tell me no more, I stopped the carriage for a moment to let him get out on the box; then I turned the matter over in my mind as I sat alone. There were many things which I could have asked the servant; and for a few moments after he had gone I was angry with myself for not having used my opportunity. On second thought, however, I was glad the temptation was gone. I felt that it would be more delicate to learn what I wanted to know of Miss Trelawny’s surroundings from herself, rather than from her servants.

We bowled swiftly along Knightsbridge, the small noise of our well-appointed vehicle sounding hollowly in the morning air. We turned up the Kensington Palace Road and presently stopped opposite a great house on the left-hand side, nearer, so far as I could judge, the Notting Hill than the Kensington end of the avenue. It was a truly fine house, not only with regard to size but to architecture. Even in the dim grey light of the morning, which tends to diminish the size of things, it looked big.

Miss Trelawny met me in the hall. She was not in any way shy. She seemed to rule all around her with a sort of high-bred dominance, all the more remarkable as she was greatly agitated and as pale as snow. In the great hall were several servants, the men standing together near the hall door, and the women clinging together in the further corners and doorways. A police superintendent had been talking to Miss Trelawny; two men in uniform and one plain-clothes man stood near him. As she took my hand impulsively there was a look of relief in her eyes, and she gave a gentle sigh of relief. Her salutation was simple.

“I knew you would come!”

The clasp of the hand can mean a great deal, even when it is not intended to mean anything especially. Miss Trelawny’s hand somehow became lost in my own. It was not that it was a small hand; it was fine and flexible, with long delicate fingers — a rare and beautiful hand; it was the unconscious self-surrender. And though at the moment I could not dwell on the cause of the thrill which swept me, it came back to me later.

She turned and said to the police superintendent:

“This is Mr. Malcolm Ross.” The police officer saluted as he answered:

“I know Mr. Malcolm Ross, miss. Perhaps he will remember I had the honour of working with him in the Brixton Coining case.” I had not at first glance noticed who it was, my whole attention having been taken with Miss Trelawny.

“Of course, Superintendent Dolan, I remember very well!” I said as we shook hands. I could not but note that the acquaintanceship seemed a relief to Miss Trelawny. There was a certain vague uneasiness in her manner which took my attention; instinctively I felt that it would be less embarrassing for her to speak with me alone. So I said to the Superintendent:

“Perhaps it will be better if Miss Trelawny will see me alone for a few minutes. You, of course, have already heard all she knows; and I shall understand better how things are if I may ask some questions. I will then talk the matter over with you if I may.”

“I shall be glad to be of what service I can, sir,” he answered heartily.

Following Miss Trelawny, I moved over to a dainty room which opened from the hall and looked out on the garden at the back of the house. When we had entered and I had closed the door she said:

"I will thank you later for your goodness in coming to me in my trouble; but at present you can best help me when you know the facts."

"Go on," I said. "Tell me all you know and spare no detail, however trivial it may at the present time seem to be." She went on at once:

"I was awakened by some sound; I do not know what. I only know that it came through my sleep; for all at once I found myself awake, with my heart beating wildly, listening anxiously for some sound from my Father's room. My room is next Father's, and I can often hear him moving about before I fall asleep. He works late at night, sometimes very late indeed; so that when I wake early, as I do occasionally, or in the grey of the dawn, I hear him still moving. I tried once to remonstrate with him about staying up so late, as it cannot be good for him; but I never ventured to repeat the experiment. You know how stern and cold he can be — at least you may remember what I told you about him; and when he is polite in this mood he is dreadful. When he is angry I can bear it much better; but when he is slow and deliberate, and the side of his mouth lifts up to show the sharp teeth, I think I feel — well, I don't know how! Last night I got up softly and stole to the door, for I really feared to disturb him. There was not any noise of moving, and no kind of cry at all; but there was a queer kind of dragging sound, and a slow, heavy breathing. Oh! it was dreadful, waiting there in the dark and the silence, and fearing — fearing I did not know what!

"At last I took my courage a deux mains, and turning the handle as softly as I could, I opened the door a tiny bit. It was quite dark within; I could just see the outline of the windows. But in the darkness the sound of breathing, becoming more distinct, was appalling. As I listened, this continued; but there was no other sound. I pushed the door open all at once. I was afraid to open it slowly; I felt as if there might be some dreadful thing behind it ready to pounce out on me! Then I switched on the electric light, and stepped into the room. I looked first at the bed. The sheets were all crumpled up, so that I knew Father had been in bed; but there was a great dark red patch in the centre of the bed, and spreading to the edge of it, that made my heart stand still. As I was gazing at it the sound of the breathing came across the room, and my eyes followed to it. There was Father on his right side with the other arm under him, just as if his dead body had been thrown there all in a heap. The track of blood went across the room up to the bed, and there was a pool all around him which looked terribly red and glittering as I bent over to examine him. The place where he lay was right in front of the big safe. He was in his pyjamas. The left sleeve was torn, showing his bare arm, and stretched out toward the safe. It looked — oh! so terrible, patched all with blood, and with the flesh torn or cut all around a gold chain bangle on his wrist. I did not know he wore such a thing, and it seemed to give me a new shock of surprise."

She paused a moment; and as I wished to relieve her by a moment's divergence of thought, I said:

"Oh, that need not surprise you. You will see the most unlikely men wearing bangles. I have seen a judge condemn a man to death, and the wrist of the hand he held up had a gold bangle." She did not seem to heed much the words or the idea; the pause, however, relieved her somewhat, and she went on in a steadier voice:

"I did not lose a moment in summoning aid, for I feared he might bleed to death. I rang the bell, and then went out and called for help as loudly as I could. In what must have been a very short time — though it seemed an incredibly long one to me — some of the servants came running up; and then others, till the room seemed full of staring eyes, and dishevelled hair, and night clothes of all sorts.

“We lifted Father on a sofa; and the housekeeper, Mrs. Grant, who seemed to have her wits about her more than any of us, began to look where the flow of blood came from. In a few seconds it became apparent that it came from the arm which was bare. There was a deep wound — not clean-cut as with a knife, but like a jagged rent or tear — close to the wrist, which seemed to have cut into the vein. Mrs. Grant tied a handkerchief round the cut, and screwed it up tight with a silver paper-cutter; and the flow of blood seemed to be checked at once. By this time I had come to my senses — or such of them as remained; and I sent off one man for the doctor and another for the police. When they had gone, I felt that, except for the servants, I was all alone in the house, and that I knew nothing — of my Father or anything else; and a great longing came to me to have someone with me who could help me. Then I thought of you and your kind offer in the boat under the willow-tree; and, without waiting to think, I told the men to get a carriage ready at once, and I scribbled a note and sent it on to you.”

She paused. I did not like to say just then anything of how I felt. I looked at her; I think she understood, for her eyes were raised to mine for a moment and then fell, leaving her cheeks as red as peony roses. With a manifest effort she went on with her story:

“The Doctor was with us in an incredibly short time. The groom had met him letting himself into his house with his latchkey, and he came here running. He made a proper tourniquet for poor Father’s arm, and then went home to get some appliances. I dare say he will be back almost immediately. Then a policeman came, and sent a message to the station; and very soon the Superintendent was here. Then you came."

There was a long pause, and I ventured to take her hand for an instant. Without a word more we opened the door, and joined the Superintendent in the hall. He hurried up to us, saying as he came:

"I have been examining everything myself, and have sent off a message to Scotland Yard. You see, Mr. Ross, there seemed so much that was odd about the case that I thought we had better have the best man of the Criminal Investigation Department that we could get. So I sent a note asking to have Sergeant Daw sent at once. You remember him, sir, in that American poisoning case at Hoxton."

"Oh yes," I said, "I remember him well; in that and other cases, for I have benefited several times by his skill and acumen. He has a mind that works as truly as any that I know. When I have been for the defence, and believed my man was innocent, I was glad to have him against us!"

"That is high praise, sir!" said the Superintendent gratified: "I am glad you approve of my choice; that I did well in sending for him."

I answered heartily:

"Could not be better. I do not doubt that between you we shall get at the facts — and what lies behind them!"

We ascended to Mr. Trelawny's room, where we found everything exactly as his daughter had described.

There came a ring at the house bell, and a minute later a man was shown into the room. A young man with aquiline features, keen grey eyes, and a forehead that stood out square and broad as that of a thinker. In his hand he had a black bag which he at once opened. Miss Trelawny introduced us: "Doctor Winchester, Mr. Ross, Superintendent Dolan.” We bowed mutually, and he, without a moment’s delay, began his work. We all waited, and eagerly watched him as he proceeded to dress the wound. As he went on he turned now and again to call the Superintendent’s attention to some point about the wound, the latter proceeding to enter the fact at once in his notebook.

“See! several parallel cuts or scratches beginning on the left side of the wrist and in some places endangering the radial artery.

“These small wounds here, deep and jagged, seem as if made with a blunt instrument. This in particular would seem as if made with some kind of sharp wedge; the flesh round it seems torn as if with lateral pressure.”

Turning to Miss Trelawny he said presently:

“Do you think we might remove this bangle? It is not absolutely necessary, as it will fall lower on the wrist where it can hang loosely; but it might add to the patient’s comfort later on.” The poor girl flushed deeply as she answered in a low voice:

“I do not know. I — I have only recently come to live with my Father; and I know so little of his life or his ideas that I fear I can hardly judge in such a matter. The Doctor, after a keen glance at her, said in a very kindly way:

“Forgive me! I did not know. But in any case you need not be distressed. It is not required at present to move it. Were it so I should do so at once on my own responsibility. If it be necessary later on, we can easily remove it with a file. Your Father doubtless has some object in keeping it as it is. See! there is a tiny key attached to it....” As he was speaking he stopped and bent lower, taking from my hand the candle which I held and lowering it till its light fell on the bangle. Then motioning me to hold the candle in the same position, he took from his pocket a magnifying-glass which he adjusted. When he had made a careful examination he stood up and handed the magnifying-glass to Dolan, saying as he did so:

"You had better examine it yourself. That is no ordinary bangle. The gold is wrought over triple steel links; see where it is worn away. It is manifestly not meant to be removed lightly; and it would need more than an ordinary file to do it."

The Superintendent bent his great body; but not getting close enough that way knelt down by the sofa as the Doctor had done. He examined the bangle minutely, turning it slowly round so that no particle of it escaped observation. Then he stood up and handed the magnifying-glass to me. "When you have examined it yourself," he said, "let the lady look at it if she will," and he commenced to write at length in his notebook.

I made a simple alteration in his suggestion. I held out the glass toward Miss Trelawny, saying:

"Had you not better examine it first?" She drew back, slightly raising her hand in disclaimer, as she said impulsively:

"Oh no! Father would doubtless have shown it to me had he wished me to see it. I would not like to without his consent." Then she added, doubtless fearing lest her delicacy of view should give offence to the rest of us:

"Of course it is right that you should see it. You have to examine and consider everything; and indeed — indeed I am grateful to you..."

She turned away; I could see that she was crying quietly. It was evident to me that even in the midst of her trouble and anxiety there was a chagrin that she knew so little of her father; and that her ignorance had to be shown at such a time and amongst so many strangers. That they were all men did not make the shame more easy to bear, though there was a certain relief in it. Trying to interpret her feelings I could not but think that she must have been glad that no woman's eyes — of understanding greater than man's — were upon her in that hour.

When I stood up from my examination, which verified to me that of the Doctor, the latter resumed his place beside the couch and went on with his ministrations. Superintendent Dolan said to me in a whisper:

"I think we are fortunate in our doctor!" I nodded, and was about to add something in praise of his acumen, when there came a low tapping at the door.

Chapter II

Strange Instructions

Superintendent Dolan went quietly to the door; by a sort of natural understanding he had taken possession of affairs in the room. The rest of us waited. He opened the door a little way; and then with a gesture of manifest relief threw it wide, and a young man stepped in. A young man clean-shaven, tall and slight; with an eagle face and bright, quick eyes that seemed to take in everything around him at a glance. As he came in, the Superintendent held out his hand; the two men shook hands warmly.

"I came at once, sir, the moment I got your message. I am glad I still have your confidence."

"That you'll always have," said the Superintendent heartily. "I have not forgotten our old Bow Street days, and I never shall!" Then, without a word of preliminary, he began to tell everything he knew up to the moment of the newcomer's entry. Sergeant Daw asked a few questions — a very few — when it was necessary for his understanding of circumstances or the relative positions of persons; but as a rule Dolan, who knew his work thoroughly, forestalled every query, and explained all necessary matters as he went on. Sergeant Daw threw occasionally swift glances round him; now at one of us; now at the room or some part of it; now at the wounded man lying senseless on the sofa.

When the Superintendent had finished, the Sergeant turned to me and said:

"Perhaps you remember me, sir. I was with you in that Hoxton case."

"I remember you very well," I said as I held out my hand. The Superintendent spoke again:

"You understand, Sergeant Daw, that you are put in full charge of this case."

"Under you I hope, sir," he interrupted. The other shook his head and smiled as he said:

"It seems to me that this is a case that will take all a man's time and his brains. I have other work to do; but I shall be more than interested, and if I can help in any possible way I shall be glad to do so!"

"All right, sir," said the other, accepting his responsibility with a sort of modified salute; straightway he began his investigation.

First he came over to the Doctor and, having learned his name and address, asked him to write a full report which he could use, and which he could refer to headquarters if necessary. Doctor Winchester bowed gravely as he promised. Then the Sergeant approached me and said sotto voce:

"I like the look of your doctor. I think we can work together!" Turning to Miss Trelawny he asked:

"Please let me know what you can of your Father; his ways of life, his history — in fact of anything of whatsoever kind which interests him, or in which he may be concerned." I was about to interrupt to tell him what she had already said of her ignorance in all matters of her father and his ways, but her warning hand was raised to me pointedly and she spoke herself.

"Alas! I know little or nothing. Superintendent Dolan and Mr. Ross know already all I can say."

"Well, ma'am, we must be content to do what we can," said the officer genially. "I'll begin by making a minute examination. You say that you were outside the door when you heard the noise?"

"I was in my room when I heard the queer sound — indeed it must have been the early part of whatever it was which woke me. I came out of my room at once. Father's door was shut, and I could see the whole landing and the upper slopes of the staircase. No one could have left by the door unknown to me, if that is what you mean!"

"That is just what I do mean, miss. If every one who knows anything will tell me as well as that, we shall soon get to the bottom of this."

He then went over to the bed, looked at it carefully, and asked:

"Has the bed been touched?"

"Not to my knowledge," said Miss Trelawny, "but I shall ask Mrs. Grant — the housekeeper," she added as she rang the bell. Mrs. Grant answered it in person. "Come in," said Miss Trelawny. "These gentlemen want to know, Mrs. Grant, if the bed has been touched."

"Not by me, ma'am."

"Then," said Miss Trelawny, turning to Sergeant Daw, "it cannot have been touched by any one. Either Mrs. Grant or I myself was here all the time, and I do not think any of the servants who came when I gave the alarm were near the bed at all. You see, Father lay here just under the great safe, and every one crowded round him. We sent them all away in a very short time." Daw, with a motion of his hand, asked us all to stay at the other side of the room whilst with a magnifying-glass he examined the bed, taking care as he moved each fold of the bed-clothes to replace it in exact position. Then he examined with his magnifying-glass the floor beside it, taking especial pains where the blood had trickled over the side of the bed, which was of heavy red wood handsomely carved. Inch by inch, down on his knees, carefully avoiding any touch with the stains on the floor, he followed the blood-marks over to the spot, close under the great safe, where the body had lain. All around and about this spot he went for a radius of some yards; but seemingly did not meet with anything to arrest special attention. Then he examined the front of the safe; round the lock, and along the bottom and top of the double doors, more especially at the places of their touching in front.

Next he went to the windows, which were fastened down with the hasps.

"Were the shutters closed?" he asked Miss Trelawny in a casual way as though he expected the negative answer, which came.

All this time Doctor Winchester was attending to his patient; now dressing the wounds in the wrist or making minute examination all over the head and throat, and over the heart. More than once he put his nose to the mouth of the senseless man and sniffed. Each time he did so he finished up by unconsciously looking round the room, as though in search of something.

Then we heard the deep strong voice of the Detective:

"So far as I can see, the object was to bring that key to the lock of the safe. There seems to be some secret in the mechanism that I am unable to guess at, though I served a year in Chubb's before I joined the police. It is a combination lock of seven letters; but there seems to be a way of locking even the combination. It is one of Chatwood's; I shall call at their place and find out something about it." Then turning to the Doctor, as though his own work were for the present done, he said:

"Have you anything you can tell me at once, Doctor, which will not interfere with your full report? If there is any doubt I can wait, but the sooner I know something definite the better." Doctor Winchester answered at once:

“For my own part I see no reason in waiting. I shall make a full report of course. But in the meantime I shall tell you all I know — which is after all not very much, and all I think — which is less definite. There is no wound on the head which could account for the state of stupor in which the patient continues. I must, therefore, take it that either he has been drugged or is under some hypnotic influence. So far as I can judge, he has not been drugged — at least by means of any drug of whose qualities I am aware. Of course, there is ordinarily in this room so much of a mummy smell that it is difficult to be certain about anything having a delicate aroma. I dare say that you have noticed the peculiar Egyptians scents, bitumen, nard, aromatic gums and spices, and so forth. It is quite possible that somewhere in this room, amongst the curios and hidden by stronger scents, is some substance or liquid which may have the effect we see. It is possible that the patient has taken some drug, and that he may in some sleeping phase have injured himself. I do not think this is likely; and circumstances, other than those which I have myself been investigating, may prove that this surmise is not correct. But in the meantime it is possible; and must, till it be disproved, be kept within our purview.” Here Sergeant Daw interrupted:

“That may be, but if so, we should be able to find the instrument with which the wrist was injured. There would be marks of blood somewhere.”

“Exactly so!” said the Doctor, fixing his glasses as though preparing for an argument. “But if it be that the patient has used some strange drug, it may be one that does not take effect at once. As we are as yet ignorant of its potentialities — if, indeed, the whole surmise is correct at all — we must be prepared at all points.”

Here Miss Trelawny joined in the conversation:

"That would be quite right, so far as the action of the drug was concerned; but according to the second part of your surmise the wound may have been self-inflicted, and this after the drug had taken effect."

"True!" said the Detective and the Doctor simultaneously. She went on:

"As however, Doctor, your guess does not exhaust the possibilities, we must bear in mind that some other variant of the same root-idea may be correct. I take it, therefore, that our first search, to be made on this assumption, must be for the weapon with which the injury was done to my Father's wrist."

"Perhaps he put the weapon in the safe before he became quite unconscious," said I, giving voice foolishly to a half-formed thought.

"That could not be," said the Doctor quickly. "At least I think it could hardly be," he added cautiously, with a brief bow to me. "You see, the left hand is covered with blood; but there is no blood mark whatever on the safe."

"Quite right!" I said, and there was a long pause.

The first to break the silence was the Doctor.

"We shall want a nurse here as soon as possible; and I know the very one to suit. I shall go at once to get her if I can. I must ask that till I return some of you will remain constantly with the patient. It may be necessary to remove him to another room later on; but in the meantime he is best left here. Miss Trelawny, may I take it that either you or Mrs. Grant will remain here — not merely in the room, but close to the patient and watchful of him — till I return?"

She bowed in reply, and took a seat beside the sofa. The Doctor gave her some directions as to what she should do in case her father should become conscious before his return.

The next to move was Superintendent Dolan, who came close to Sergeant Daw as he said:

"I had better return now to the station — unless, of course, you should wish me to remain for a while."

He answered, "Is Johnny Wright still in your division?"

"Yes! Would you like him to be with you?" The other nodded reply. "Then I will send him on to you as soon as can be arranged. He shall then stay with you as long as you wish. I will tell him that he is to take his instructions entirely from you."

The Sergeant accompanied him to the door, saying as he went:

"Thank you, sir; you are always thoughtful for men who are working with you. It is a pleasure to me to be with you again. I shall go back to Scotland Yard and report to my chief. Then I shall call at Chatwood's; and I shall return here as soon as possible. I suppose I may take it, miss, that I may put up here for a day or two, if required. It may be some help, or possibly some comfort to you, if I am about, until we unravel this mystery."

"I shall be very grateful to you." He looked keenly at her for a few seconds before he spoke again.

"Before I go have I permission to look about your Father's table and desk? There might be something which would give us a clue — or a lead at all events." Her answer was so unequivocal as almost to surprise him.

"You have the fullest possible permission to do anything which may help us in this dreadful trouble — to discover what it is that is wrong with my Father, or which may shield him in the future!"

He began at once a systematic search of the dressing-table, and after that of the writing-table in the room. In one of the drawers he found a letter sealed; this he brought at once across the room and handed to Miss Trelawny.

“A letter — directed to me — and in my Father’s hand!” she said as she eagerly opened it. I watched her face as she began to read; but seeing at once that Sergeant Daw kept his keen eyes on her face, unflinchingly watching every flitting expression, I kept my eyes henceforth fixed on his. When Miss Trelawny had read her letter through, I had in my mind a conviction, which, however, I kept locked in my own heart. Amongst the suspicions in the mind of the Detective was one, rather perhaps potential than definite, of Miss Trelawny herself.

For several minutes Miss Trelawny held the letter in her hand with her eyes downcast, thinking. Then she read it carefully again; this time the varying expressions were intensified, and I thought I could easily follow them. When she had finished the second reading, she paused again. Then, though with some reluctance, she handed the letter to the Detective. He read it eagerly but with unchanging face; read it a second time, and then handed it back with a bow. She paused a little again, and then handed it to me. As she did so she raised her eyes to mine for a single moment appealingly; a swift blush spread over her pale cheeks and forehead.

With mingled feelings I took it, but, all said, I was glad. She did not show any perturbation in giving the letter to the Detective — she might not have shown any to anyone else. But to me... I feared to follow the thought further; but read on, conscious that the eyes of both Miss Trelawny and the Detective were fixed on me.

“MY DEAR DAUGHTER, I want you to take this letter as an instruction — absolute and imperative, and admitting of no deviation whatever — in case anything untoward or unexpected by you or by others should happen to me. If I should be suddenly and mysteriously stricken down — either by sickness, accident or attack — you must follow these directions implicitly. If I am not already in my bedroom when you are made cognisant of my state, I am to be brought there as quickly as possible. Even should I be dead, my body is to be brought there. Thenceforth, until I am either conscious and able to give instructions on my own account, or buried, I am never to be left alone — not for a single instant. From nightfall to sunrise at least two persons must remain in the room. It will be well that a trained nurse be in the room from time to time, and will note any symptoms, either permanent or changing, which may strike her. My solicitors, Marvin & Jewkes, of 27B Lincoln's Inn, have full instructions in case of my death; and Mr. Marvin has himself undertaken to see personally my wishes carried out. I should advise you, my dear Daughter, seeing that you have no relative to apply to, to get some friend whom you can trust to either remain within the house where instant communication can be made, or to come nightly to aid in the watching, or to be within call. Such friend may be either male or female; but, whichever it may be, there should be added one other watcher or attendant at hand of the opposite sex. Understand, that it is of the very essence of my wish that there should be, awake and exercising themselves to my purposes, both masculine and feminine intelligences. Once more, my dear Margaret, let me impress on you the need for observation and just reasoning to conclusions, howsoever strange. If I am taken ill or injured, this will be no ordinary occasion; and I wish to warn you, so that your guarding may be complete.

"Nothing in my room — I speak of the curios — must be removed or displaced in any way, or for any cause whatever. I have a special reason and a special purpose in the placing of each; so that any moving of them would thwart my plans.

"Should you want money or counsel in anything, Mr. Marvin will carry out your wishes; to the which he has my full instructions."

"ABEL TRELAWNY."

I read the letter a second time before speaking, for I feared to betray myself. The choice of a friend might be a momentous occasion for me. I had already ground for hope, that she had asked me to help her in the first throe of her trouble; but love makes its own doubtings, and I feared. My thoughts seemed to whirl with lightning rapidity, and in a few seconds a whole process of reasoning became formulated. I must not volunteer to be the friend that the father advised his daughter to have to aid her in her vigil; and yet that one glance had a lesson which I must not ignore. Also, did not she, when she wanted help, send to me — to me a stranger, except for one meeting at a dance and one brief afternoon of companionship on the river? Would it not humiliate her to make her ask me twice? Humiliate her! No! that pain I could at all events save her; it is not humiliation to refuse. So, as I handed her back the letter, I said:

"I know you will forgive me, Miss Trelawny, if I presume too much; but if you will permit me to aid in the watching I shall be proud. Though the occasion is a sad one, I shall be so far happy to be allowed the privilege."

Despite her manifest and painful effort at self-control, the red tide swept her face and neck. Even her eyes seemed suffused, and in stern contrast with her pale cheeks when the tide had rolled back. She answered in a low voice:

"I shall be very grateful for your help!" Then in an afterthought she added:

“But you must not let me be selfish in my need! I know you have many duties to engage you; and though I shall value your help highly — most highly — it would not be fair to monopolise your time.”

“As to that,” I answered at once, “my time is yours. I can for today easily arrange my work so that I can come here in the afternoon and stay till morning. After that, if the occasion still demands it, I can so arrange my work that I shall have more time still at my disposal.”

She was much moved. I could see the tears gather in her eyes, and she turned away her head. The Detective spoke:

“I am glad you will be here, Mr. Ross. I shall be in the house myself, as Miss Trelawny will allow me, if my people in Scotland Yard will permit. That letter seems to put a different complexion on everything; though the mystery remains greater than ever. If you can wait here an hour or two I shall go to headquarters, and then to the safe-makers. After that I shall return; and you can go away easier in your mind, for I shall be here.”

When he had gone, we two, Miss Trelawny and I, remained in silence. At last she raised her eyes and looked at me for a moment; after that I would not have exchanged places with a king. For a while she busied herself round the extemporised bedside of her father. Then, asking me to be sure not to take my eyes off him till she returned, she hurried out.

In a few minutes she came back with Mrs. Grant and two maids and a couple of men, who bore the entire frame and furniture of a light iron bed. This they proceeded to put together and to make. When the work was completed, and the servants had withdrawn, she said to me:

"It will be well to be all ready when the Doctor returns. He will surely want to have Father put to bed; and a proper bed will be better for him than the sofa." She then got a chair close beside her father, and sat down watching him.

I went about the room, taking accurate note of all I saw. And truly there were enough things in the room to evoke the curiosity of any man — even though the attendant circumstances were less strange. The whole place, excepting those articles of furniture necessary to a well-furnished bedroom, was filled with magnificent curios, chiefly Egyptian. As the room was of immense size there was opportunity for the placing of a large number of them, even if, as with these, they were of huge proportions.

Whilst I was still investigating the room there came the sound of wheels on the gravel outside the house. There was a ring at the hall door, and a few minutes later, after a preliminary tap at the door and an answering "Come in!" Doctor Winchester entered, followed by a young woman in the dark dress of a nurse.

"I have been fortunate!" he said as he came in. "I found her at once and free. Miss Trelawny, this is Nurse Kennedy!"

Chapter III

The Watchers

I was struck by the way the two young women looked at each other. I suppose I have been so much in the habit of weighing up in my own mind the personality of witnesses and of forming judgment by their unconscious action and mode of bearing themselves, that the habit extends to my life outside as well as within the court-house. At this moment of my life anything that interested Miss Trelawny interested me; and as she had been struck by the newcomer I instinctively weighed her up also. By comparison of the two I seemed somehow to gain a new knowledge of Miss Trelawny. Certainly, the two women made a good contrast. Miss Trelawny was of fine figure; dark, straight-featured. She had marvellous eyes; great, wide-open, and as black and soft as velvet, with a mysterious depth. To look in them was like gazing at a black mirror such as Doctor Dee used in his wizard rites. I heard an old gentleman at the picnic, a great oriental traveller, describe the effect of her eyes "as looking at night at the great distant lamps of a mosque through the open door." The eyebrows were typical. Finely arched and rich in long curling hair, they seemed like the proper architectural environment of the deep, splendid eyes. Her hair was black also, but was as fine as silk. Generally black hair is a type of animal strength and seems as if some strong expression of the forces of a strong nature; but in this case there could be no such thought. There were refinement and high breeding; and though there was no suggestion of weakness, any sense of power there was, was rather spiritual than animal. The whole harmony of her being seemed complete. Carriage, figure, hair, eyes;

the mobile, full mouth, whose scarlet lips and white teeth seemed to light up the lower part of the face — as the eyes did the upper; the wide sweep of the jaw from chin to ear; the long, fine fingers; the hand which seemed to move from the wrist as though it had a sentience of its own. All these perfections went to make up a personality that dominated either by its grace, its sweetness, its beauty, or its charm.

Nurse Kennedy, on the other hand, was rather under than over a woman's average height. She was firm and thickset, with full limbs and broad, strong, capable hands. Her colour was in the general effect that of an autumn leaf. The yellow-brown hair was thick and long, and the golden-brown eyes sparkled from the freckled, sunburnt skin. Her rosy cheeks gave a general idea of rich brown. The red lips and white teeth did not alter the colour scheme, but only emphasised it. She had a snub nose — there was no possible doubt about it; but like such noses in general it showed a nature generous, untiring, and full of good-nature. Her broad white forehead, which even the freckles had spared, was full of forceful thought and reason.

Doctor Winchester had on their journey from the hospital, coached her in the necessary particulars, and without a word she took charge of the patient and set to work. Having examined the new-made bed and shaken the pillows, she spoke to the Doctor, who gave instructions; presently we all four, stepping together, lifted the unconscious man from the sofa.

Early in the afternoon, when Sergeant Daw had returned, I called at my rooms in Jermyn Street, and sent out such clothes, books and papers as I should be likely to want within a few days. Then I went on to keep my legal engagements.

The Court sat late that day as an important case was ending; it was striking six as I drove in at the gate of the Kensington Palace Road. I found myself installed in a large room close to the sick chamber.

That night we were not yet regularly organised for watching, so that the early part of the evening showed an unevenly balanced guard. Nurse Kennedy, who had been on duty all day, was lying down, as she had arranged to come on again by twelve o'clock. Doctor Winchester, who was dining in the house, remained in the room until dinner was announced; and went back at once when it was over. During dinner Mrs. Grant remained in the room, and with her Sergeant Daw, who wished to complete a minute examination which he had undertaken of everything in the room and near it. At nine o'clock Miss Trelawny and I went in to relieve the Doctor. She had lain down for a few hours in the afternoon so as to be refreshed for her work at night. She told me that she had determined that for this night at least she would sit up and watch. I did not try to dissuade her, for I knew that her mind was made up. Then and there I made up my mind that I would watch with her — unless, of course, I should see that she really did not wish it. I said nothing of my intentions for the present. We came in on tiptoe, so silently that the Doctor, who was bending over the bed, did not hear us, and seemed a little startled when suddenly looking up he saw our eyes upon him. I felt that the mystery of the whole thing was getting on his nerves, as it had already got on the nerves of some others of us. He was, I fancied, a little annoyed with himself for having been so startled, and at once began to talk in a hurried manner as though to get over our idea of his embarrassment:

"I am really and absolutely at my wits' end to find any fit cause for this stupor. I have made again as accurate an examination as I know how, and I am satisfied that there is no injury to the brain, that is, no external injury. Indeed, all his vital organs seem unimpaired. I have given him, as you know, food several times and it has manifestly done him good. His breathing is strong and regular, and his pulse is slower and stronger than it was this morning. I cannot find evidence of any known drug, and his unconsciousness does not resemble any of the many cases of hypnotic sleep which I saw in the Charcot Hospital in Paris. And as to these wounds" — he laid his finger gently on the bandaged wrist which lay outside the coverlet as he spoke, "I do not know what to make of them. They might have been made by a carding-machine; but that supposition is untenable. It is within the bounds of possibility that they might have been made by a wild animal if it had taken care to sharpen its claws. That too is, I take it, impossible. By the way, have you any strange pets here in the house; anything of an exceptional kind, such as a tiger-cat or anything out of the common?" Miss Trelawny smiled a sad smile which made my heart ache, as she made answer:

"Oh no! Father does not like animals about the house, unless they are dead and mummied." This was said with a touch of bitterness — or jealousy, I could hardly tell which. "Even my poor kitten was only allowed in the house on sufferance; and though he is the dearest and best-conducted cat in the world, he is now on a sort of parole, and is not allowed into this room."

As she was speaking a faint rattling of the door handle was heard. Instantly Miss Trelawny's face brightened. She sprang up and went over to the door, saying as she went:

"There he is! That is my Silvio. He stands on his hind legs and rattles the door handle when he wants to come into a room." She opened the door, speaking to the cat as though he were a baby: "Did him want his movver? Come then; but he must stay with her!" She lifted the cat, and came back with him in her arms. He was certainly a magnificent animal. A chinchilla grey Persian with long silky hair; a really lordly animal with a haughty bearing despite his gentleness; and with great paws which spread out as he placed them on the ground. Whilst she was fondling him, he suddenly gave a wriggle like an eel and slipped out of her arms. He ran across the room and stood opposite a low table on which stood the mummy of an animal, and began to mew and snarl. Miss Trelawny was after him in an instant and lifted him in her arms, kicking and struggling and wriggling to get away; but not biting or scratching, for evidently he loved his beautiful mistress. He ceased to make a noise the moment he was in her arms; in a whisper she admonished him:

"O you naughty Silvio! You have broken your parole that mother gave for you. Now, say goodnight to the gentlemen, and come away to mother's room!" As she was speaking she held out the cat's paw to me to shake. As I did so I could not but admire its size and beauty. "Why," said I, "his paw seems like a little boxing-glove full of claws." She smiled:

"So it ought to. Don't you notice that my Silvio has seven toes, see!" she opened the paw; and surely enough there were seven separate claws, each of them sheathed in a delicate, fine, shell-like case. As I gently stroked the foot the claws emerged and one of them accidentally — there was no anger now and the cat was purring — stuck into my hand. Instinctively I said as I drew back:

"Why, his claws are like razors!"

Doctor Winchester had come close to us and was bending over looking at the cat's claws; as I spoke he said in a quick, sharp way:

"Eh!" I could hear the quick intake of his breath. Whilst I was stroking the now quiescent cat, the Doctor went to the table and tore off a piece of blotting-paper from the writing-pad and came back. He laid the paper on his palm and, with a simple "pardon me!" to Miss Trelawny, placed the cat's paw on it and pressed it down with his other hand. The haughty cat seemed to resent somewhat the familiarity, and tried to draw its foot away. This was plainly what the Doctor wanted, for in the act the cat opened the sheaths of its claws and and made several reefs in the soft paper. Then Miss Trelawny took her pet away. She returned in a couple of minutes; as she came in she said:

"It is most odd about that mummy! When Silvio came into the room first — indeed I took him in as a kitten to show to Father — he went on just the same way. He jumped up on the table, and tried to scratch and bite the mummy. That was what made Father so angry, and brought the decree of banishment on poor Silvio. Only his parole, given through me, kept him in the house."

Whilst she had been gone, Doctor Winchester had taken the bandage from her father's wrist. The wound was now quite clear, as the separate cuts showed out in fierce red lines. The Doctor folded the blotting-paper across the line of punctures made by the cat's claws, and held it down close to the wound. As he did so, he looked up triumphantly and beckoned us over to him.

The cuts in the paper corresponded with the wounds in the wrist! No explanation was needed, as he said:

"It would have been better if master Silvio had not broken his parole!"

We were all silent for a little while. Suddenly Miss Trelawny said:

"But Silvio was not in here last night!"

"Are you sure? Could you prove that if necessary?" She hesitated before replying:

"I am certain of it; but I fear it would be difficult to prove. Silvio sleeps in a basket in my room. I certainly put him to bed last night; I remember distinctly laying his little blanket over him, and tucking him in. This morning I took him out of the basket myself. I certainly never noticed him in here; though, of course, that would not mean much, for I was too concerned about poor father, and too much occupied with him, to notice even Silvio."

The Doctor shook his head as he said with a certain sadness:

"Well, at any rate it is no use trying to prove anything now. Any cat in the world would have cleaned blood-marks — did any exist — from his paws in a hundredth part of the time that has elapsed."

Again we were all silent; and again the silence was broken by Miss Trelawny:

"But now that I think of it, it could not have been poor Silvio that injured Father. My door was shut when I first heard the sound; and Father's was shut when I listened at it. When I went in, the injury had been done; so that it must have been before Silvio could possibly have got in." This reasoning commended itself, especially to me as a barrister, for it was proof to satisfy a jury. It gave me a distinct pleasure to have Silvio acquitted of the crime — possibly because he was Miss Trelawny's cat and was loved by her. Happy cat! Silvio's mistress was manifestly pleased as I said:

"Verdict, 'not guilty!'" Doctor Winchester after a pause observed:

"My apologies to master Silvio on this occasion; but I am still puzzled to know why he is so keen against that mummy. Is he the same toward the other mummies in the house? There are, I suppose, a lot of them. I saw three in the hall as I came in."

"There are lots of them," she answered. "I sometimes don't know whether I am in a private house or the British Museum. But Silvio never concerns himself about any of them except that particular one. I suppose it must be because it is of an animal, not a man or a woman."

"Perhaps it is of a cat!" said the Doctor as he started up and went across the room to look at the mummy more closely. "Yes," he went on, "it is the mummy of a cat; and a very fine one, too. If it hadn't been a special favourite of some very special person it would never have received so much honour. See! A painted case and obsidian eyes — just like a human mummy. It is an extraordinary thing, that knowledge of kind to kind. Here is a dead cat — that is all; it is perhaps four or five thousand years old — and another cat of another breed, in what is practically another world, is ready to fly at it, just as it would if it were not dead. I should like to experiment a bit about that cat if you don't mind, Miss Trelawny." She hesitated before replying:

"Of course, do anything you may think necessary or wise; but I hope it will not be anything to hurt or worry my poor Silvio." The Doctor smiled as he answered:

"Oh, Silvio would be all right: it is the other one that my sympathies would be reserved for."

"How do you mean?"

"Master Silvio will do the attacking; the other one will do the suffering."

"Suffering?" There was a note of pain in her voice. The Doctor smiled more broadly:

"Oh, please make your mind easy as to that. The other won't suffer as we understand it; except perhaps in his structure and outfit."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Simply this, my dear young lady, that the antagonist will be a mummy cat like this one. There are, I take it, plenty of them to be had in Museum Street. I shall get one and place it here instead of that one — you won't think that a temporary exchange will violate your Father's instructions, I hope. We shall then find out, to begin with, whether Silvio objects to all mummy cats, or only to this one in particular."

"I don't know," she said doubtfully. "Father's instructions seem very uncompromising." Then after a pause she went on: "But of course under the circumstances anything that is to be ultimately for his good must be done. I suppose there can't be anything very particular about the mummy of a cat."

Doctor Winchester said nothing. He sat rigid, with so grave a look on his face that his extra gravity passed on to me; and in its enlightening perturbation I began to realise more than I had yet done the strangeness of the case in which I was now so deeply concerned. When once this thought had begun there was no end to it. Indeed it grew, and blossomed, and reproduced itself in a thousand different ways. The room and all in it gave grounds for strange thoughts. There were so many ancient relics that unconsciously one was taken back to strange lands and strange times. There were so many mummies or mummy objects, round which there seemed to cling for ever the penetrating odours of bitumen, and spices and gums— "Nard and Circassia's balmy smells" — that one was unable to forget the past. Of course, there was but little light in the room, and that carefully shaded; so that there was no glare anywhere. None of that direct light which can manifest itself as a power or an entity, and so make for companionship. The room was a large one, and lofty in proportion to its size. In its vastness was place for a multitude of things not often found in a bedchamber. In far corners of the room were shadows of uncanny shape. More than once as I thought, the multitudinous presence of the dead and the past took such hold on me that I caught myself looking round fearfully as though some strange personality or influence was present. Even the manifest presence of Doctor Winchester and Miss Trelawny could not altogether comfort or satisfy me at such moments. It was with a distinct sense of relief that I saw a new personality in the room in the shape of Nurse Kennedy. There was no doubt that that business-like, self-reliant, capable young woman added an element of security to such wild imaginings as my own. She had a quality of common sense that seemed to pervade everything around her, as though it were some kind of emanation. Up to that moment I had been building fancies around the sick man; so that finally all about him, including myself, had become involved in them, or enmeshed, or saturated, or... But now that she had come, he relapsed into his proper perspective as a patient; the room was a sick-room, and the shadows lost their fearsome quality. The only thing which it could not altogether abrogate was the strange Egyptian smell. You may put a mummy in a glass case and hermetically seal it so that no corroding air can get within; but all the same it will exhale its odour. One might think that four or five thousand years would exhaust the olfactory qualities of anything; but experience teaches us that these smells remain, and that their secrets are unknown to us. Today they are as much mysteries as they were when the embalmers put the body in the bath of natron...

All at once I sat up. I had become lost in an absorbing reverie. The Egyptian smell had seemed to get on my nerves — on my memory — on my very will.

At that moment I had a thought which was like an inspiration. If I was influenced in such a manner by the smell, might it not be that the sick man, who lived half his life or more in the atmosphere, had gradually and by slow but sure process taken into his system something which had permeated him to such degree that it had a new power derived from quantity — or strength — or...

I was becoming lost again in a reverie. This would not do. I must take such precaution that I could remain awake, or free from such entrancing thought. I had had but half a night's sleep last night; and this night I must remain awake. Without stating my intention, for I feared that I might add to the trouble and uneasiness of Miss Trelawny, I went downstairs and out of the house. I soon found a chemist's shop, and came away with a respirator. When I got back, it was ten o'clock; the Doctor was going for the night. The Nurse came with him to the door of the sick-room, taking her last instructions. Miss Trelawny sat still beside the bed. Sergeant Daw, who had entered as the Doctor went out, was some little distance off.

When Nurse Kennedy joined us, we arranged that she should sit up till two o'clock, when Miss Trelawny would relieve her. Thus, in accordance with Mr. Trelawny's instructions, there would always be a man and a woman in the room; and each one of us would overlap, so that at no time would a new set of watchers come on duty without some one to tell of what — if anything — had occurred. I lay down on a sofa in my own room, having arranged that one of the servants should call me a little before twelve. In a few moments I was asleep.

When I was waked, it took me several seconds to get back my thoughts so as to recognise my own identity and surroundings. The short sleep had, however, done me good, and I could look on things around me in a more practical light than I had been able to do earlier in the evening. I bathed my face, and thus refreshed went into the sick-room. I moved very softly. The Nurse was sitting by the bed, quiet and alert; the Detective sat in an arm-chair across the room in deep shadow. He did not move when I crossed, until I got close to him, when he said in a dull whisper:

"It is all right; I have not been asleep!" An unnecessary thing to say, I thought — it always is, unless it be untrue in spirit. When I told him that his watch was over; that he might go to bed till I should call him at six o'clock, he seemed relieved and went with alacrity. At the door he turned and, coming back to me, said in a whisper:

"I sleep lightly and I shall have my pistols with me. I won't feel so heavy-headed when I get out of this mummy smell."

He too, then, had shared my experience of drowsiness!

I asked the Nurse if she wanted anything. I noticed that she had a vinaigrette in her lap. Doubtless she, too, had felt some of the influence which had so affected me. She said that she had all she required, but that if she should want anything she would at once let me know. I wished to keep her from noticing my respirator, so I went to the chair in the shadow where her back was toward me. Here I quietly put it on, and made myself comfortable.

For what seemed a long time, I sat and thought and thought. It was a wild medley of thoughts, as might have been expected from the experiences of the previous day and night. Again I found myself thinking of the Egyptian smell; and I remember that I felt a delicious satisfaction that I did not experience it as I had done. The respirator was doing its work.

It must have been that the passing of this disturbing thought made for repose of mind, which is the corollary of bodily rest, for, though I really cannot remember being asleep or waking from it, I saw a vision — I dreamed a dream, I scarcely know which.

I was still in the room, seated in the chair. I had on my respirator and knew that I breathed freely. The Nurse sat in her chair with her back toward me. She sat quite still. The sick man lay as still as the dead. It was rather like the picture of a scene than the reality; all were still and silent; and the stillness and silence were continuous. Outside, in the distance I could hear the sounds of a city, the occasional roll of wheels, the shout of a reveller, the far-away echo of whistles and the rumbling of trains. The light was very, very low; the reflection of it under the green-shaded lamp was a dim relief to the darkness, rather than light. The green silk fringe of the lamp had merely the colour of an emerald seen in the moonlight. The room, for all its darkness, was full of shadows. It seemed in my whirling thoughts as though all the real things had become shadows — shadows which moved, for they passed the dim outline of the high windows. Shadows which had sentience. I even thought there was sound, a faint sound as of the mew of a cat — the rustle of drapery and a metallic clink as of metal faintly touching metal. I sat as one entranced. At last I felt, as in nightmare, that this was sleep, and that in the passing of its portals all my will had gone.

All at once my senses were full awake. A shriek rang in my ears. The room was filled suddenly with a blaze of light. There was the sound of pistol shots — one, two; and a haze of white smoke in the room. When my waking eyes regained their power, I could have shrieked with horror myself at what I saw before me.

Chapter IV

The Second Attempt

The sight which met my eyes had the horror of a dream within a dream, with the certainty of reality added. The room was as I had seen it last; except that the shadowy look had gone in the glare of the many lights, and every article in it stood stark and solidly real.

By the empty bed sat Nurse Kennedy, as my eyes had last seen her, sitting bolt upright in the arm-chair beside the bed. She had placed a pillow behind her, so that her back might be erect; but her neck was fixed as that of one in a cataleptic trance. She was, to all intents and purposes, turned into stone. There was no special expression on her face — no fear, no horror; nothing such as might be expected of one in such a condition. Her open eyes showed neither wonder nor interest. She was simply a negative existence, warm, breathing, placid; but absolutely unconscious of the world around her. The bedclothes were disarranged, as though the patient had been drawn from under them without throwing them back. The corner of the upper sheet hung upon the floor; close by it lay one of the bandages with which the Doctor had dressed the wounded wrist. Another and another lay further along the floor, as though forming a clue to where the sick man now lay. This was almost exactly where he had been found on the previous night, under the great safe. Again, the left arm lay toward the safe. But there had been a new outrage, an attempt had been made to sever the arm close to the bangle which held the tiny key. A heavy "kukri" knife — one of the leaf-shaped knives which the Gurkhas and others of the hill tribes of India use with such effect — had been taken from its place on the wall, and with it the attempt had been made. It was manifest that just at the moment of striking, the blow had been arrested, for only the point of the knife and not the edge of the blade had struck the flesh. As it was, the outer side of the arm had been cut to the bone and the blood was pouring out. In addition, the former wound in front of the arm had been cut or torn about terribly, one of the cuts seemed to jet out blood as if with each pulsation of the heart. By the side of her father knelt Miss Trelawny, her white nightdress stained with the blood in which she knelt. In the middle of the room Sergeant Daw, in his shirt and trousers and stocking feet, was putting fresh cartridges into his revolver in a dazed mechanical kind of way. His eyes were red and heavy, and he seemed only half awake, and less than half conscious of what was going on around him. Several servants, bearing lights of various kinds, were clustered round the doorway.

As I rose from my chair and came forward, Miss Trelawny raised her eyes toward me. When she saw me she shrieked and started to her feet, pointing towards me. Never shall I forget the strange picture she made, with her white drapery all smeared with blood which, as she rose from the pool, ran in streaks toward her bare feet. I believe that I had only been asleep; that whatever influence had worked on Mr. Trelawny and Nurse Kennedy — and in less degree on Sergeant Daw — had not touched me. The respirator had been of some service, though it had not kept off the tragedy whose dire evidences were before me. I can understand now — I could understand even then — the fright, added to that which had gone before, which my appearance must have evoked. I had still on the respirator, which covered mouth and nose; my hair had been tossed in my sleep. Coming suddenly forward, thus enwrapped and dishevelled, in that horrified crowd, I must have had, in the strange mixture of lights, an extraordinary and terrifying appearance. It was well that I recognised all this in time to avert another catastrophe; for the half-dazed, mechanically-acting Detective put in the cartridges and had raised his revolver to shoot at me when I succeeded in wrenching off the respirator and shouting to him to hold his hand. In this also he acted mechanically; the red, half-awake eyes had not in them even then the intention of conscious action. The danger, however, was averted. The relief of the situation, strangely enough, came in a simple fashion. Mrs. Grant, seeing that her young mistress had on only her nightdress, had gone to fetch a dressing-gown, which she now threw over her. This simple act brought us all back to the region of fact. With a long breath, one and all seemed to devote themselves to the most pressing matter before us, that of staunching the flow of blood from the arm of the wounded man. Even as the thought of action came, I rejoiced; for the bleeding was very proof that Mr. Trelawny still lived.

Last night's lesson was not thrown away. More than one of those present knew now what to do in such an emergency, and within a few seconds willing hands were at work on a tourniquet. A man was at once despatched for the doctor, and several of the servants disappeared to make themselves respectable. We lifted Mr. Trelawny on to the sofa where he had lain yesterday; and, having done what we could for him, turned our attention to the Nurse. In all the turmoil she had not stirred; she sat there as before, erect and rigid, breathing softly and naturally and with a placid smile. As it was manifestly of no use to attempt anything with her till the doctor had come, we began to think of the general situation.

Mrs. Grant had by this time taken her mistress away and changed her clothes; for she was back presently in a dressing-gown and slippers, and with the traces of blood removed from her hands. She was now much calmer, though she trembled sadly; and her face was ghastly white. When she had looked at her father's wrist, I holding the tourniquet, she turned her eyes round the room, resting them now and again on each one of us present in turn, but seeming to find no comfort. It was so apparent to me that she did not know where to begin or whom to trust that, to reassure her, I said:

"I am all right now; I was only asleep." Her voice had a gulp in it as she said in a low voice:

"Asleep! You! and my Father in danger! I thought you were on the watch!" I felt the sting of justice in the reproach; but I really wanted to help her, so I answered:

"Only asleep. It is bad enough, I know; but there is something more than an "only" round us here. Had it not been that I took a definite precaution I might have been like the Nurse there." She turned her eyes swiftly on the weird figure, sitting grimly upright like a painted statue; and then her face softened. With the action of habitual courtesy she said:

"Forgive me! I did not mean to be rude. But I am in such distress and fear that I hardly know what I am saying. Oh, it is dreadful! I fear for fresh trouble and horror and mystery every moment." This cut me to the very heart, and out of the heart's fulness I spoke:

"Don't give me a thought! I don't deserve it. I was on guard, and yet I slept. All that I can say is that I didn't mean to, and I tried to avoid it; but it was over me before I knew it. Anyhow, it is done now; and can't be undone. Probably some day we may understand it all; but now let us try to get at some idea of what has happened. Tell me what you remember!" The effort to recollect seemed to stimulate her; she became calmer as she spoke:

"I was asleep, and woke suddenly with the same horrible feeling on me that Father was in great and immediate danger. I jumped up and ran, just as I was, into his room. It was nearly pitch dark, but as I opened the door there was light enough to see Father's nightdress as he lay on the floor under the safe, just as on that first awful night. Then I think I must have gone mad for a moment." She stopped and shuddered. My eyes lit on Sergeant Daw, still fiddling in an aimless way with the revolver. Mindful of my work with the tourniquet, I said calmly:

"Now tell us, Sergeant Daw, what did you fire at?" The policeman seemed to pull himself together with the habit of obedience. Looking around at the servants remaining in the room, he said with that air of importance which, I take it, is the regulation attitude of an official of the law before strangers:

"Don't you think, sir, that we can allow the servants to go away? We can then better go into the matter." I nodded approval; the servants took the hint and withdrew, though unwillingly, the last one closing the door behind him. Then the Detective went on:

"I think I had better tell you my impressions, sir, rather than recount my actions. That is, so far as I remember them." There was a mortified deference now in his manner, which probably arose from his consciousness of the awkward position in which he found himself. "I went to sleep half-dressed — as I am now, with a revolver under my pillow. It was the last thing I remember thinking of. I do not know how long I slept. I had turned off the electric light, and it was quite dark. I thought I heard a scream; but I can't be sure, for I felt thick-headed as a man does when he is called too soon after an extra long stretch of work. Not that such was the case this time. Anyhow my thoughts flew to the pistol. I took it out, and ran on to the landing. Then I heard a sort of scream, or rather a call for help, and ran into this room. The room was dark, for the lamp beside the Nurse was out, and the only light was that from the landing, coming through the open door. Miss Trelawny was kneeling on the floor beside her father, and was screaming. I thought I saw something move between me and the window; so, without thinking, and being half dazed and only half awake, I shot at it. It moved a little more to the right between the windows, and I shot again. Then you came up out of the big chair with all that muffling on your face. It seemed to me, being as I say half dazed and half awake — I know, sir, you will take this into account — as if it had been you, being in the same direction as the thing I had fired at. And so I was about to fire again when you pulled off the wrap." Here I asked him — I was cross-examining now and felt at home:

"You say you thought I was the thing you fired at. What thing?" The man scratched his head, but made no reply.

"Come, sir," I said, "what thing; what was it like?" The answer came in a low voice:

"I don't know, sir. I thought there was something; but what it was, or what it was like, I haven't the faintest notion. I suppose it was because I had been thinking of the pistol before I went to sleep, and because when I came in here I was half dazed and only half awake — which I hope you will in future, sir, always remember." He clung to that formula of excuse as though it were his sheet-anchor. I did not want to antagonise the man; on the contrary I wanted to have him with us. Besides, I had on me at that time myself the shadow of my own default; so I said as kindly as I knew how:

"Quite right! Sergeant. Your impulse was correct; though of course in the half-somnolent condition in which you were, and perhaps partly affected by the same influence — whatever it may be — which made me sleep and which has put the Nurse in that cataleptic trance, it could not be expected that you would paused to weigh matters. But now, whilst the matter is fresh, let me see exactly where you stood and where I sat. We shall be able to trace the course of your bullets.” The prospect of action and the exercise of his habitual skill seemed to brace him at once; he seemed a different man as he set about his work. I asked Mrs. Grant to hold the tourniquet, and went and stood where he had stood and looked where, in the darkness, he had pointed. I could not but notice the mechanical exactness of his mind, as when he showed me where he had stood, or drew, as a matter of course, the revolver from his pistol pocket, and pointed with it. The chair from which I had risen still stood in its place. Then I asked him to point with his hand only, as I wished to move in the track of his shot.

Just behind my chair, and a little back of it, stood a high buhl cabinet. The glass door was shattered. I asked:

“Was this the direction of your first shot or your second?” The answer came promptly.

“The second; the first was over there!”

He turned a little to the left, more toward the wall where the great safe stood, and pointed. I followed the direction of his hand and came to the low table whereon rested, amongst other curios, the mummy of the cat which had raised Silvio’s ire. I got a candle and easily found the mark of the bullet. It had broken a little glass vase and a tazza of black basalt, exquisitely engraved with hieroglyphics, the graven lines being filled with some faint green cement and the whole thing being polished to an equal surface. The bullet, flattened against the wall, lay on the table.

I then went to the broken cabinet. It was evidently a receptacle for valuable curios; for in it were some great scarabs of gold, agate, green jasper, amethyst, lapis lazuli, opal, granite, and blue-green china. None of these things happily were touched. The bullet had gone through the back of the cabinet; but no other damage, save the shattering of the glass, had been done. I could not but notice the strange arrangement of the curios on the shelf of the cabinet. All the scarabs, rings, amulets, &c. were arranged in an uneven oval round an exquisitely-carved golden miniature figure of a hawk-headed God crowned with a disk and plumes. I did not wait to look further at present, for my attention was demanded by more pressing things; but I determined to make a more minute examination when I should have time. It was evident that some of the strange Egyptian smell clung to these old curios; through the broken glass came an added whiff of spice and gum and bitumen, almost stronger than those I had already noticed as coming from others in the room.

All this had really taken but a few minutes. I was surprised when my eye met, through the chinks between the dark window blinds and the window cases, the brighter light of the coming dawn. When I went back to the sofa and took the tourniquet from Mrs. Grant, she went over and pulled up the blinds.

It would be hard to imagine anything more ghastly than the appearance of the room with the faint grey light of early morning coming in upon it. As the windows faced north, any light that came was a fixed grey light without any of the rosy possibility of dawn which comes in the eastern quarter of heaven. The electric lights seemed dull and yet glaring; and every shadow was of a hard intensity. There was nothing of morning freshness; nothing of the softness of night. All was hard and cold and inexpressibly dreary.

The face of the senseless man on the sofa seemed of a ghastly yellow; and the Nurse's face had taken a suggestion of green from the shade of the lamp near her. Only Miss Trelawny's face looked white; and it was of a pallor which made my heart ache. It looked as if nothing on God's earth could ever again bring back to it the colour of life and happiness.

It was a relief to us all when Doctor Winchester came in, breathless with running. He only asked one question:

"Can anyone tell me anything of how this wound was gotten?" On seeing the headshake which went round us under his glance, he said no more, but applied himself to his surgical work. For an instant he looked up at the Nurse sitting so still; but then bent himself to his task, a grave frown contracting his brows. It was not till the arteries were tied and the wounds completely dressed that he spoke again, except, of course, when he had asked for anything to be handed to him or to be done for him. When Mr. Trelawny's wounds had been thoroughly cared for, he said to Miss Trelawny:

"What about Nurse Kennedy?" She answered at once:

"I really do not know. I found her when I came into the room at half-past two o'clock, sitting exactly as she does now. We have not moved her, or changed her position. She has not wakened since. Even Sergeant Daw's pistol-shots did not disturb her."

"Pistol-shots? Have you then discovered any cause for this new outrage?" The rest were silent, so I answered:

"We have discovered nothing. I was in the room watching with the Nurse. Earlier in the evening I fancied that the mummy smells were making me drowsy, so I went out and got a respirator. I had it on when I came on duty; but it did not keep me from going to sleep. I awoke to see the room full of people; that is, Miss Trelawny and

Sergeant Daw, being only half awake and still stupefied by the same scent or influence which had affected us, fancied that he saw something moving through the shadowy darkness of the room, and fired twice. When I rose out of my chair, with my face swathed in the respirator, he took me for the cause of the trouble. Naturally enough, he was about to fire again, when I was fortunately in time to manifest my identity. Mr. Trelawny was lying beside the safe, just as he was found last night; and was bleeding profusely from the new wound in his wrist. We lifted him on the sofa, and made a tourniquet. That is, literally and absolutely, all that any of us know as yet. We have not touched the knife, which you see lies close by the pool of blood. Look!" I said, going over and lifting it. "The point is red with the blood which has dried."

Doctor Winchester stood quite still a few minutes before speaking:

"Then the doings of this night are quite as mysterious as those of last night?"

"Quite!" I answered. He said nothing in reply, but turning to Miss Trelawny said:

"We had better take Nurse Kennedy into another room. I suppose there is nothing to prevent it?"

"Nothing! Please, Mrs. Grant, see that Nurse Kennedy's room is ready; and ask two of the men to come and carry her in." Mrs. Grant went out immediately; and in a few minutes came back saying:

"The room is quite ready; and the men are here." By her direction two footmen came into the room and, lifting up the rigid body of Nurse Kennedy under the supervision of the Doctor, carried her out of the room. Miss Trelawny remained with me in the sick chamber, and Mrs. Grant went with the Doctor into the Nurse's room.

When we were alone Miss Trelawny came over to me, and taking both my hands in hers, said:

"I hope you won't remember what I said. I did not mean it, and I was distraught." I did not make reply; but I held her hands and kissed them. There are different ways of kissing a lady's hands. This way was intended as homage and respect; and it was accepted as such in the high-bred, dignified way which marked Miss Trelawny's bearing and every movement. I went over to the sofa and looked down at the senseless man. The dawn had come much nearer in the last few minutes, and there was something of the clearness of day in the light. As I looked at the stern, cold, set face, now as white as a marble monument in the pale grey light, I could not but feel that there was some deep mystery beyond all that had happened within the last twenty-six hours. Those beetling brows screened some massive purpose; that high, broad forehead held some finished train of reasoning, which the broad chin and massive jaw would help to carry into effect. As I looked and wondered, there began to steal over me again that phase of wandering thought which had last night heralded the approach of sleep. I resisted it, and held myself sternly to the present. This was easier to do when Miss Trelawny came close to me, and, leaning her forehead against my shoulder, began to cry silently. Then all the manhood in me woke, and to present purpose. It was of little use trying to speak; words were inadequate to thought. But we understood each other; she did not draw away when I put arm protectingly over her shoulder as I used to do with my little sister long ago when in her childish trouble she would come to her big brother to be comforted. That very act or attitude of protection made me more resolute in my purpose, and seemed to clear my brain of idle, dreamy wandering in thought. With an instinct of greater protection, however, I took away my arm as I heard the Doctor's footstep outside the door.

When Doctor Winchester came in he looked intently at the patient before speaking. His brows were set, and his mouth was a thin, hard line. Presently he said:

"There is much in common between the sleep of your Father and Nurse Kennedy. Whatever influence has brought it about has probably worked the same way in both cases. In Kennedy's case the coma is less marked. I cannot but feel, however, that with her we may be able to do more and more quickly than with this patient, as our hands are not tied. I have placed her in a draught; and already she shows some signs, though very faint ones, of ordinary unconsciousness. The rigidity of her limbs is less, and her skin seems more sensitive — or perhaps I should say less insensitive — to pain."

"How is it, then," I asked, "that Mr. Trelawny is still in this state of insensibility; and yet, so far as we know, his body has not had such rigidity at all?"

"That I cannot answer. The problem is one which we may solve in a few hours; or it may need a few days. But it will be a useful lesson in diagnosis to us all; and perhaps to many and many others after us, who knows!" he added, with the genuine fire of an enthusiast.

As the morning wore on, he flitted perpetually between the two rooms, watching anxiously over both patients. He made Mrs. Grant remain with the Nurse, but either Miss Trelawny or I, generally both of us, remained with the wounded man. We each managed, however, to get bathed and dressed; the Doctor and Mrs. Grant remained with Mr. Trelawny whilst we had breakfast.

Sergeant Daw went off to report at Scotland Yard the progress of the night; and then to the local station to arrange for the coming of his comrade, Wright, as fixed with Superintendent Dolan. When he returned I could not but think that he had been hauled over the coals for shooting in a sick-room; or perhaps for shooting at all without certain and proper cause. His remark to me enlightened me in the matter:

“A good character is worth something, sir, in spite of what some of them say. See! I’ve still got leave to carry my revolver.”

That day was a long and anxious one. Toward nightfall Nurse Kennedy so far improved that the rigidity of her limbs entirely disappeared. She still breathed quietly and regularly; but the fixed expression of her face, though it was a calm enough expression, gave place to fallen eyelids and the negative look of sleep. Doctor Winchester had, towards evening, brought two more nurses, one of whom was to remain with Nurse Kennedy and the other to share in the watching with Miss Trelawny, who had insisted on remaining up herself. She had, in order to prepare for the duty, slept for several hours in the afternoon. We had all taken counsel together, and had arranged thus for the watching in Mr. Trelawny’s room. Mrs. Grant was to remain beside the patient till twelve, when Miss Trelawny would relieve her. The new nurse was to sit in Miss Trelawny’s room, and to visit the sick chamber each quarter of an hour. The Doctor would remain till twelve; when I was to relieve him. One or other of the detectives was to remain within hail of the room all night; and to pay periodical visits to see that all was well. Thus, the watchers would be watched; and the possibility of such events as last night, when the watchers were both overcome, would be avoided.

When the sun set, a strange and grave anxiety fell on all of us; and in our separate ways we prepared for the vigil. Doctor Winchester had evidently been thinking of my respirator, for he told me he would go out and get one. Indeed, he took to the idea so kindly that I persuaded Miss Trelawny also to have one which she could put on when her time for watching came.

And so the night drew on.

Chapter V

More Strange Instructions

When I came from my room at half-past eleven o'clock I found all well in the sick-room. The new nurse, prim, neat, and watchful, sat in the chair by the bedside where Nurse Kennedy had sat last night. A little way off, between the bed and the safe, sat Dr. Winchester alert and wakeful, but looking strange and almost comic with the respirator over mouth and nose. As I stood in the doorway looking at them I heard a slight sound; turning round I saw the new detective, who nodded, held up the finger of silence and withdrew quietly. Hitherto no one of the watchers was overcome by sleep.

I took a chair outside the door. As yet there was no need for me to risk coming again under the subtle influence of last night. Naturally my thoughts went revolving round the main incidents of the last day and night, and I found myself arriving at strange conclusions, doubts, conjectures; but I did not lose myself, as on last night, in trains of thought. The sense of the present was ever with me, and I really felt as should a sentry on guard. Thinking is not a slow process; and when it is earnest the time can pass quickly. It seemed a very short time indeed till the door, usually left ajar, was pulled open and Dr. Winchester emerged, taking off his respirator as he came. His act, when he had it off, was demonstrative of his keenness. He turned up the outside of the wrap and smelled it carefully.

"I am going now," he said. "I shall come early in the morning; unless, of course, I am sent for before. But all seems well tonight."

The next to appear was Sergeant Daw, who went quietly into the room and took the seat vacated by the Doctor. I still remained outside; but every few minutes looked into the room. This was rather a form than a matter of utility, for the room was so dark that coming even from the dimly-lighted corridor it was hard to distinguish anything.

A little before twelve o'clock Miss Trelawny came from her room. Before coming to her father's she went into that occupied by Nurse Kennedy. After a couple of minutes she came out, looking, I thought, a trifle more cheerful. She had her respirator in her hand, but before putting it on, asked me if anything special had occurred since she had gone to lie down. I answered in a whisper — there was no loud talking in the house tonight — that all was safe, was well. She then put on her respirator, and I mine; and we entered the room. The Detective and the Nurse rose up, and we took their places. Sergeant Daw was the last to go out; he closed the door behind him as we had arranged.

For a while I sat quiet, my heart beating. The place was grimly dark. The only light was a faint one from the top of the lamp which threw a white circle on the high ceiling, except the emerald sheen of the shade as the light took its under edges. Even the light only seemed to emphasise the blackness of the shadows. These presently began to seem, as on last night, to have a sentience of their own. I did not myself feel in the least sleepy; and each time I went softly over to look at the patient, which I did about every ten minutes, I could see that Miss Trelawny was keenly alert. Every quarter of an hour one or other of the policemen looked in through the partly opened door. Each time both Miss Trelawny and I said through our mufflers, "all right," and the door was closed again.

As the time wore on, the silence and the darkness seemed to increase. The circle of light on the ceiling was still there, but it seemed less brilliant than at first. The green edging of the lamp-shade became like Maori greenstone rather than emerald. The sounds of the night without the house, and the starlight spreading pale lines along the edges of the window-cases, made the pall of black within more solemn and more mysterious.

We heard the clock in the corridor chiming the quarters with its silver bell till two o'clock; and then a strange feeling came over me. I could see from Miss Trelawny's movement as she looked round, that she also had some new sensation. The new detective had just looked in; we two were alone with the unconscious patient for another quarter of an hour.

My heart began to beat wildly. There was a sense of fear over me. Not for myself; my fear was impersonal. It seemed as though some new person had entered the room, and that a strong intelligence was awake close to me. Something brushed against my leg. I put my hand down hastily and touched the furry coat of Silvio. With a very faint far-away sound of a snarl he turned and scratched at me. I felt blood on my hand. I rose gently and came over to the bedside. Miss Trelawny, too, had stood up and was looking behind her, as though there was something close to her. Her eyes were wild, and her breast rose and fell as though she were fighting for air. When I touched her she did not seem to feel me; she worked her hands in front of her, as though she was fending off something.

There was not an instant to lose. I seized her in my arms and rushed over to the door, threw it open, and strode into the passage, calling loudly:

"Help! Help!"

In an instant the two Detectives, Mrs. Grant, and the Nurse appeared on the scene. Close on their heels came several of the servants, both men and women. Immediately Mrs. Grant came near enough, I placed Miss Trelawny in her arms, and rushed back into the room, turning up the electric light as soon as I could lay my hand on it. Sergeant Daw and the Nurse followed me.

We were just in time. Close under the great safe, where on the two successive nights he had been found, lay Mr. Trelawny with his left arm, bare save for the bandages, stretched out. Close by his side was a leaf-shaped Egyptian knife which had lain amongst the curios on the shelf of the broken cabinet. Its point was stuck in the parquet floor, whence had been removed the blood-stained rug.

But there was no sign of disturbance anywhere; nor any sign of any one or anything unusual. The Policemen and I searched the room accurately, whilst the Nurse and two of the servants lifted the wounded man back to bed; but no sign or clue could we get. Very soon Miss Trelawny returned to the room. She was pale but collected. When she came close to me she said in a low voice:

“I felt myself fainting. I did not know why; but I was afraid!”

The only other shock I had was when Miss Trelawny cried out to me, as I placed my hand on the bed to lean over and look carefully at her father:

“You are wounded. Look! look! your hand is bloody. There is blood on the sheets!” I had, in the excitement, quite forgotten Silvio’s scratch. As I looked at it, the recollection came back to me; but before I could say a word Miss Trelawny had caught hold of my hand and lifted it up. When she saw the parallel lines of the cuts she cried out again:

“It is the same wound as Father’s!” Then she laid my hand down gently but quickly, and said to me and to Sergeant Daw:

“Come to my room! Silvio is there in his basket.” We followed her, and found Silvio sitting in his basket awake. He was licking his paws. The Detective said:

"He is there sure enough; but why licking his paws?"

Margaret — Miss Trelawny — gave a moan as she bent over and took one of the forepaws in her hand; but the cat seemed to resent it and snarled. At that Mrs. Grant came into the room. When she saw that we were looking at the cat she said:

"The Nurse tells me that Silvio was asleep on Nurse Kennedy's bed ever since you went to your Father's room until a while ago. He came there just after you had gone to master's room. Nurse says that Nurse Kennedy is moaning and muttering in her sleep as though she had a nightmare. I think we should send for Dr. Winchester."

"Do so at once, please!" said Miss Trelawny; and we went back to the room.

For a while Miss Trelawny stood looking at her father, with her brows wrinkled. Then, turning to me, as though her mind were made up, she said:

"Don't you think we should have a consultation on Father? Of course I have every confidence in Doctor Winchester; he seems an immensely clever young man. But he is a young man; and there must be men who have devoted themselves to this branch of science. Such a man would have more knowledge and more experience; and his knowledge and experience might help to throw light on poor Father's case. As it is, Doctor Winchester seems to be quite in the dark. Oh! I don't know what to do. It is all so terrible!" Here she broke down a little and cried; and I tried to comfort her.

Doctor Winchester arrived quickly. His first thought was for his patient; but when he found him without further harm, he visited Nurse Kennedy. When he saw her, a hopeful look came into his eyes.

Taking a towel, he dipped a corner of it in cold water and flicked on the face. The skin coloured, and she stirred slightly. He said to the new nurse — Sister Doris he called her:

"She is all right. She will wake in a few hours at latest. She may be dizzy and distraught at first, or perhaps hysterical. If so, you know how to treat her."

"Yes, sir!" answered Sister Doris demurely; and we went back to Mr. Trelawny's room. As soon as we had entered, Mrs. Grant and the Nurse went out so that only Doctor Winchester, Miss Trelawny, and myself remained in the room. When the door had been closed Doctor Winchester asked me as to what had occurred. I told him fully, giving exactly every detail so far as I could remember. Throughout my narrative, which did not take long, however, he kept asking me questions as to who had been present and the order in which each one had come into the room. He asked other things, but nothing of any importance; these were all that took my attention, or remained in my memory. When our conversation was finished, he said in a very decided way indeed, to Miss Trelawny:

"I think, Miss Trelawny, that we had better have a consultation on this case." She answered at once, seemingly a little to his surprise:

"I am glad you have mentioned it. I quite agree. Who would you suggest?"

"Have you any choice yourself?" he asked. "Any one to whom your Father is known? Has he ever consulted any one?"

"Not to my knowledge. But I hope you will choose whoever you think would be best. My dear Father should have all the help that can be had; and I shall be deeply obliged by your choosing. Who is the best man in London — anywhere else — in such a case?"

"There are several good men; but they are scattered all over the world. Somehow, the brain specialist is born, not made; though a lot of hard work goes to the completing of him and fitting him for his work. He comes from no country. The most daring investigator up to the present is Chiuni, the Japanese; but he is rather a surgical experimentalist than a practitioner. Then there is Zammerfest of Uppsala, and Fenelon of the University of Paris, and Morfessi of Naples. These, of course, are in addition to our own men, Morrison of Aberdeen and Richardson of Birmingham. But before them all I would put Frere of King's College. Of all that I have named he best unites theory and practice. He has no hobbies — that have been discovered at all events; and his experience is immense. It is the regret of all of us who admire him that the nerve so firm and the hand so dexterous must yield to time. For my own part I would rather have Frere than any one living."

"Then," said Miss Trelawny decisively, "let us have Doctor Frere — by the way, is he 'Doctor' or 'Mister'? — as early as we can get him in the morning!"

A weight seemed removed from him, and he spoke with greater ease and geniality than he had yet shown:

"He is Sir James Frere. I shall go to him myself as early as it is possibly to see him, and shall ask him to come here at once." Then turning to me he said:

"You had better let me dress your hand."

"It is nothing," I said.

"Nevertheless it should be seen to. A scratch from any animal might turn out dangerous; there is nothing like being safe." I submitted; forthwith he began to dress my hand. He examined with a magnifying-glass the several parallel wounds, and compared them with the slip of blotting-paper, marked with Silvio's claws, which he took from his pocket-book. He put back the paper, simply remarking:

"It's a pity that Silvio slips in — and out — just when he shouldn't."

The morning wore slowly on. By ten o'clock Nurse Kennedy had so far recovered that she was able to sit up and talk intelligibly. But she was still hazy in her thoughts; and could not remember anything that had happened on the previous night, after her taking her place by the sick-bed. As yet she seemed neither to know nor care what had happened.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when Doctor Winchester returned with Sir James Frere. Somehow I felt my heart sink when from the landing I saw them in the hall below; I knew that Miss Trelawny was to have the pain of telling yet another stranger of her ignorance of her father's life.

Sir James Frere was a man who commanded attention followed by respect. He knew so thoroughly what he wanted himself, that he placed at once on one side all wishes and ideas of less definite persons. The mere flash of his piercing eyes, or the set of his resolute mouth, or the lowering of his great eyebrows, seemed to compel immediate and willing obedience to his wishes. Somehow, when we had all been introduced and he was well amongst us, all sense of mystery seemed to melt away. It was with a hopeful spirit that I saw him pass into the sick-room with Doctor Winchester.

They remained in the room a long time; once they sent for the Nurse, the new one, Sister Doris, but she did not remain long. Again they both went into Nurse Kennedy's room. He sent out the nurse attendant on her. Doctor Winchester told me afterward that Nurse Kennedy, though she was ignorant of later matters, gave full and satisfactory answers to all Doctor Frere's questions relating to her patient up to the time she became unconscious. Then they went to the study, where they remained so long, and their voices raised in heated discussion seemed in such determined opposition, that I began to feel uneasy. As for Miss Trelawny, she was almost in a state of collapse from nervousness before they joined us. Poor girl! she had had a sadly anxious time of it, and her nervous strength had almost broken down.

They came out at last, Sir James first, his grave face looking as unenlightening as that of the sphinx. Doctor Winchester followed him closely; his face was pale, but with that kind of pallor which looked like a reaction. It gave me the idea that it had been red not long before. Sir James asked that Miss Trelawny would come into the study. He suggested that I should come also. When we had entered, Sir James turned to me and said:

"I understand from Doctor Winchester that you are a friend of Miss Trelawny, and that you have already considerable knowledge of this case. Perhaps it will be well that you should be with us. I know you already as a keen lawyer, Mr. Ross, though I never had the pleasure of meeting you. As Doctor Winchester tells me that there are some strange matters outside this case which seem to puzzle him — and others — and in which he thinks you may yet be specially interested, it might be as well that you should know every phase of the case. For myself I do not take much account of mysteries — except those of science; and as there seems to be some idea of an attempt at assassination or robbery, all I can say is that if assassins were at work they ought to take some elementary lessons in anatomy before their next job, for they seem thoroughly ignorant. If robbery were their purpose, they seem to have worked with marvellous inefficiency. That, however, is not my business." Here he took a big pinch of snuff, and turning to to Miss Trelawny, went on: “Now as to the patient. Leaving out the cause of his illness, all we can say at present is that he appears to be suffering from a marked attack of catalepsy. At present nothing can be done, except to sustain his strength. The treatment of my friend Doctor Winchester is mainly such as I approve of; and I am confident that should any slight change arise he will be able to deal with it satisfactorily. It is an interesting case — most interesting; and should any new or abnormal development arise I shall be happy to come at any time. There is just one thing to which I wish to call your attention; and I put it to you, Miss Trelawny, directly, since it is your responsibility. Doctor Winchester informs me that you are not yourself free in the matter, but are bound by an instruction given by your Father in case just such a condition of things should arise. I would strongly advise that the patient be removed to another room; or, as an alternative, that those mummies and all such things should be removed from his chamber. Why, it’s enough to put any man into an abnormal condition, to have such an assemblage of horrors round him, and to breathe the atmosphere which they exhale. You have evidence already of how such mephitic odour may act. That nurse — Kennedy, I think you said, Doctor — isn’t yet out of her state of catalepsy; and you, Mr. Ross, have, I am told, experienced something of the same effects. I know this” — here his eyebrows came down more than ever, and his mouth hardened— “if I were in charge here I should insist on the patient having a different atmosphere; or I would throw up the case. Doctor Winchester already knows that I can only be again consulted on this condition being fulfilled. But I trust that you will see your way, as a good daughter to my mind should, to looking to your Father’s health and sanity rather than to any whim of his — whether supported or not by a foregoing fear, or by any number of "penny dreadful" mysteries. The day has hardly come yet, I am glad to say, when the British Museum and St. Thomas's Hospital have exchanged their normal functions. Good-day, Miss Trelawny. I earnestly hope that I may soon see your Father restored. Remember, that should you fulfil the elementary condition which I have laid down, I am at your service day or night. Good-morning, Mr. Ross. I hope you will be able to report to me soon, Doctor Winchester."

When he had gone we stood silent, till the rumble of his carriage wheels died away. The first to speak was Doctor Winchester:

"I think it well to say that to my mind, speaking purely as a physician, he is quite right. I feel as if I could have assaulted him when he made it a condition of not giving up the case; but all the same he is right as to treatment. He does not understand that there is something odd about this special case; and he will not realise the knot that we are all tied up in by Mr. Trelawny's instructions. Of course—" He was interrupted by Miss Trelawny:

"Doctor Winchester, do you, too, wish to give up the case; or are you willing to continue it under the conditions you know?"

"Give it up! Less now than ever. Miss Trelawny, I shall never give it up, so long as life is left to him or any of us!" She said nothing, but held out her hand, which he took warmly.

"Now," said she, "if Sir James Frere is a type of the cult of Specialists, I want no more of them. To start with, he does not seem to know any more than you do about my Father's condition; and if he were a hundredth part as much interested in it as you are, he would not stand on such punctilio. Of course, I am only too anxious about my poor Father; and if I can see a way to meet either of Sir James

Frere's conditions, I shall do so. I shall ask Mr. Marvin to come here today, and advise me as to the limit of Father's wishes. If he thinks I am free to act in any way on my own responsibility, I shall not hesitate to do so." Then Doctor Winchester took his leave.

Miss Trelawny sat down and wrote a letter to Mr. Marvin, telling him of the state of affairs, and asking him to come and see her and to bring with him any papers which might throw any light on the subject. She sent the letter off with a carriage to bring back the solicitor; we waited with what patience we could for his coming.

It is not a very long journey for oneself from Kensington Palace Gardens to Lincoln's Inn Fields; but it seemed endlessly long when waiting for someone else to take it. All things, however, are amenable to Time; it was less than an hour all told when Mr. Marvin was with us.

He recognised Miss Trelawny's impatience, and when he had learned sufficient of her father's illness, he said to her:

"Whenever you are ready I can go with you into particulars regarding your Father's wishes."

"Whenever you like," she said, with an evident ignorance of his meaning. "Why not now?" He looked at me, as to a fellow man of business, and stammered out:

"We are not alone."

"I have brought Mr. Ross here on purpose," she answered. "He knows so much at present, that I want him to know more." The solicitor was a little disconcerted, a thing which those knowing him only in courts would hardly have believed. He answered, however, with some hesitation:

"But, my dear young lady — Your Father's wishes! — Confidence between father and child—"

Here she interrupted him; there was a tinge of red in her pale cheeks as she did so:

"Do you really think that applies to the present circumstances, Mr. Marvin? My Father never told me anything of his affairs; and I can now, in this sad extremity, only learn his wishes through a gentleman who is a stranger to me and of whom I never even heard till I got my Father's letter, written to be shown to me only in extremity. Mr. Ross is a new friend; but he has all my confidence, and I should like him to be present. Unless, of course," she added, "such a thing is forbidden by my Father. Oh! forgive me, Mr. Marvin, if I seem rude; but I have been in such dreadful trouble and anxiety lately, that I have hardly command of myself." She covered her eyes with her hand for a few seconds; we two men looked at each other and waited, trying to appear unmoved. She went on more firmly; she had recovered herself:

"Please! please do not think I am ungrateful to you for your kindness in coming here and so quickly. I really am grateful; and I have every confidence in your judgment. If you wish, or think it best, we can be alone." I stood up; but Mr. Marvin made a dissentient gesture. He was evidently pleased with her attitude; there was geniality in his voice and manner as he spoke:

"Not at all! Not at all! There is no restriction on your Father's part; and on my own I am quite willing. Indeed, all told, it may be better. From what you have said of Mr. Trelawny's illness, and the other — incidental — matters, it will be well in case of any grave eventuality, that it was understood from the first, that circumstances were ruled by your Father's own imperative instructions. For, please understand me, his instructions are imperative — most imperative. They are so unyielding that he has given me a Power of Attorney, under which I have undertaken to act, authorising me to see his written wishes carried out. Please believe me once for all, that he intended fully everything mentioned in that letter to you! Whilst he is alive he is to remain in his own room; and none of his property is to be removed from it under any circumstances whatever. He has even given an inventory of the articles which are not to be displaced."

Miss Trelawny was silent. She looked somewhat distressed; so, thinking that I understood the immediate cause, I asked:

"May we see the list?" Miss Trelawny's face at once brightened; but it fell again as the lawyer answered promptly — he was evidently prepared for the question:

"Not unless I am compelled to take action on the Power of Attorney. I have brought that instrument with me. You will recognise, Mr. Ross" — he said this with a sort of business conviction which I had noticed in his professional work, as he handed me the deed— "how strongly it is worded, and how the grantor made his wishes apparent in such a way as to leave no loophole. It is his own wording, except for certain legal formalities; and I assure you I have seldom seen a more iron-clad document. Even I myself have no power to make the slightest relaxation of the instructions, without committing a distinct breach of faith. And that, I need not tell you, is impossible." He evidently added the last words in order to prevent an appeal to his personal consideration. He did not like the seeming harshness of his words, however, for he added:

"I do hope, Miss Trelawny, that you understand that I am willing — frankly and unequivocally willing — to do anything I can, within the limits of my power, to relieve your distress. But your Father had, in all his doings, some purpose of his own which he did not disclose to me. So far as I can see, there is not a word of his instructions that he had not thought over fully. Whatever idea he had in his mind was the idea of a lifetime; he had studied it in every possible phase, and was prepared to guard it at every point.

"Now I fear I have distressed you, and I am truly sorry for it; for I see you have much — too much — to bear already. But I have no alternative. If you want to consult me at any time about anything, I promise you I will come without a moment's delay, at any hour of the day or night. There is my private address," he scribbled in his pocket-book as he spoke, "and under it the address of my club, where I am generally to be found in the evening." He tore out the paper and handed it to her. She thanked him. He shook hands with her and with me and withdrew.

As soon as the hall door was shut on him, Mrs. Grant tapped at the door and came in. There was such a look of distress in her face that Miss Trelawny stood up, deadly white, and asked her:

"What is it, Mrs. Grant? What is it? Any new trouble?"

"I grieve to say, miss, that the servants, all but two, have given notice and want to leave the house today. They have talked the matter over among themselves; the butler has spoken for the rest. He says as how they are willing to forego their wages, and even to pay their legal obligations instead of notice; but that go today they must."

"What reason do they give?"

"None, miss. They say as how they're sorry, but that they've nothing to say. I asked Jane, the upper housemaid, miss, who is not with the rest but stops on; and she tells me confidential that they've got some notion in their silly heads that the house is haunted!"

We ought to have laughed, but we didn't. I could not look in Miss Trelawny's face and laugh. The pain and horror there showed no sudden paroxysm of fear; there was a fixed idea of which this was a confirmation. For myself, it seemed as if my brain had found a voice. But the voice was not complete; there was some other thought, darker and deeper, which lay behind it, whose voice had not sounded as yet.

Chapter VI

Suspicions

The first to get full self-command was Miss Trelawny. There was a haughty dignity in her bearing as she said:

"Very well, Mrs. Grant; let them go! Pay them up to today, and a month's wages. They have hitherto been very good servants; and the occasion of their leaving is not an ordinary one. We must not expect much faithfulness from any one who is beset with fears. Those who remain are to have in future double wages; and please send these to me presently when I send word." Mrs. Grant bristled with smothered indignation; all the housekeeper in her was outraged by such generous treatment of servants who had combined to give notice:

"They don't deserve it, miss; them to go on so, after the way they have been treated here. Never in my life have I seen servants so well treated or anyone so good to them and gracious to them as you have been. They might be in the household of a King for treatment. And now, just as there is trouble, to go and act like this. It's abominable, that's what it is!"

Miss Trelawny was very gentle with her, and smothered her ruffled dignity; so that presently she went away with, in her manner, a lesser measure of hostility to the undeserving. In quite a different frame of mind she returned presently to ask if her mistress would like her to engage a full staff of other servants, or at any rate try to do so. "For you know, ma'am," she went on, "when once a scare has been established in the servants' hall, it's wellnigh impossible to get rid of it. Servants may come; but they go away just as quick. There's no holding them. They simply won't stay; or even if they work out their month's notice, they lead you that life that you wish every hour of the day that you hadn't kept them. The women are bad enough, the huzzies; but the men are worse!" There was neither anxiety nor indignation in Miss Trelawny's voice or manner as she said:

"I think, Mrs. Grant, we had better try to do with those we have. Whilst my dear Father is ill we shall not be having any company, so that there will be only three now in the house to attend to. If those servants who are willing to stay are not enough, I should only get sufficient to help them to do the work. It will not, I should think, be difficult to get a few maids; perhaps some that you know already. And please bear in mind, that those whom you get, and who are suitable and will stay, are henceforth to have the same wages as those who are remaining. Of course, Mrs. Grant, you well enough understand that though I do not group you in any way with the servants, the rule of double salary applies to you too." As she spoke she extended her long, fine-shaped hand, which the other took and then, raising it to her lips, kissed it impressively with the freedom of an elder woman to a younger. I could not but admire the generosity of her treatment of her servants. In my mind I endorsed Mrs. Grant's sotto voce remark as she left the room:

"No wonder the house is like a King's house, when the mistress is a Princess!"

"A Princess!" That was it. The idea seemed to satisfy my mind, and to bring back in a wave of light the first moment when she swept across my vision at the ball in Belgrave Square. A queenly figure! tall and slim, bending, swaying, undulating as the lily or the lotos. Clad in a flowing gown of some filmy black material shot with gold. For ornament in her hair she wore an old Egyptian jewel, a tiny crystal disk, set between rising plumes carved in lapis lazuli. On her wrist was a broad bangle or bracelet of antique work, in the shape of a pair of spreading wings wrought in gold, with the feathers made of coloured gems. For all her gracious bearing toward me, when our hostess introduced me, I was then afraid of her. It was only when later, at the picnic on the river, I had come to realise her sweet and gentle, that my awe changed to something else.

For a while she sat, making some notes or memoranda. Then putting them away, she sent for the faithful servants. I thought that she had better have this interview alone, and so left her. When I came back there were traces of tears in her eyes.

The next phase in which I had a part was even more disturbing, and infinitely more painful. Late in the afternoon Sergeant Daw came into the study where I was sitting. After closing the door carefully and looking all round the room to make certain that we were alone, he came close to me.

“What is it?” I asked him. “I see you wish to speak to me privately.”

“Quite so, sir! May I speak in absolute confidence?”

“Of course you may. In anything that is for the good of Miss Trelawny — and of course Mr. Trelawny — you may be perfectly frank. I take it that we both want to serve them to the best of our powers.” He hesitated before replying:

“Of course you know that I have my duty to do; and I think you know me well enough to know that I will do it. I am a policeman — a detective; and it is my duty to find out the facts of any case I am put on, without fear or favour to anyone. I would rather speak to you alone, in confidence if I may, without reference to any duty of anyone to anyone, except mine to Scotland Yard.”

“Of course! of course!” I answered mechanically, my heart sinking, I did not know why. “Be quite frank with me. I assure you of my confidence.”

“Thank you, sir. I take it that what I say is not to pass beyond you — not to anyone. Not to Miss Trelawny herself, or even to Mr. Trelawny when he becomes well again.”

“Certainly, if you make it a condition!” I said a little more stiffly. The man recognised the change in my voice or manner, and said apologetically:

“Excuse me, sir, but I am going outside my duty in speaking to you at all on the subject. I know you, however, of old; and I feel that I can trust you. Not your word, sir, that is all right; but your discretion!”

I bowed. “Go on!” I said. He began at once:

“I have gone over this case, sir, till my brain begins to reel; but I can’t find any ordinary solution of it. At the time of each attempt no one has seemingly come into the house; and certainly no one has got out. What does it strike you is the inference?”

“That the somebody — or the something — was in the house already,” I answered, smiling in spite of myself.

“That’s just what I think,” he said, with a manifest sigh of relief. “Very well! Who can be that someone?”

“‘Someone, or something,’ was what I said,” I answered.

“Let us make it ‘someone,’ Mr. Ross! That cat, though he might have scratched or bit, never pulled the old gentleman out of bed, and tried to get the bangle with the key off his arm. Such things are all very well in books where your amateur detectives, who know everything before it’s done, can fit them into theories; but in Scotland Yard, where the men aren’t all idiots either, we generally find that when crime is done, or attempted, it’s people, not things, that are at the bottom of it."

"Then make it 'people' by all means, Sergeant."

"We were speaking of 'someone,' sir."

"Quite right. Someone, be it!"

"Did it ever strike you, sir, that on each of the three separate occasions where outrage was effected, or attempted, there was one person who was the first to be present and to give the alarm?"

"Let me see! Miss Trelawny, I believe, gave the alarm on the first occasion. I was present myself, if fast asleep, on the second; and so was Nurse Kennedy. When I woke there were several people in the room; you were one of them. I understand that on that occasion also Miss Trelawny was before you. At the last attempt I was Miss Trelawny fainted. I carried her out and went back. In returning, I was first; and I think you were close behind me."

Sergeant Daw thought for a moment before replying:

"She was present, or first, in the room on all the occasions; there was only damage done in the first and second!"

The inference was one which I, as a lawyer, could not mistake. I thought the best thing to do was to meet it half-way. I have always found that the best way to encounter an inference is to cause it to be turned into a statement.

"You mean," I said, "that as on the only occasions when actual harm was done, Miss Trelawny's being the first to discover it is a proof that she did it; or was in some way connected with the attempt, as well as the discovery?"

"I didn't venture to put it as clear as that; but that is where the doubt which I had leads." Sergeant Daw was a man of courage; he evidently did not shrink from any conclusion of his reasoning on facts.

We were both silent for a while. Fears began crowding in on my own mind. Not doubts of Miss Trelawny, or of any act of hers; but fears lest such acts should be misunderstood. There was evidently a mystery somewhere; and if no solution to it could be found, the doubt would be cast on someone. In such cases the guesses of the majority are bound to follow the line of least resistance; and if it could be proved that any personal gain to anyone could follow Mr. Trelawny's death, should such ensue, it might prove a difficult task for anyone to prove innocence in the face of suspicious facts. I found myself instinctively taking that deferential course which, until the plan of battle of the prosecution is unfolded, is so safe an attitude for the defence. It would never do for me, at this stage, to combat any theories which a detective might form. I could best help Miss Trelawny by listening and understanding. When the time should come for the dissipation and obliteration of the theories, I should be quite willing to use all my militant ardour, and all the weapons at my command.

"You will of course do your duty, I know," I said, "and without fear. What course do you intend to take?"

"I don't know as yet, sir. You see, up to now it isn't with me even a suspicion. If any one else told me that that sweet young lady had a hand in such a matter, I would think him a fool; but I am bound to follow my own conclusions. I know well that just as unlikely persons have been proved guilty, when a whole court — all except the prosecution who knew the facts, and the judge who had taught his mind to wait — would have sworn to innocence. I wouldn't, for all the world, wrong such a young lady; more especial when she has such a cruel weight to bear. And you will be sure that I won't say a word that'll prompt anyone else to make such a charge. That's why I speak to you in confidence, man to man. You are skilled in proofs; that is your profession. Mine only gets so far as suspicions, and what we call our own proofs — which are nothing but ex parte evidence after all. You know Miss Trelawny better than I do; and though I watch round the sick-room, and go where I like about the house and in and out of it, I haven't the same opportunities as you have of knowing the lady and what her life is, or her means are; or of anything else which might give me a clue to her actions. If I were to try to find out from her, it would at once arouse her suspicions. Then, if she were guilty, all possibility of ultimate proof would go; for she would easily find a way to baffle discovery. But if she be innocent, as I hope she is, it would be doing a cruel wrong to accuse her. I have thought the matter over according to my lights before I spoke to you; and if I have taken a liberty, sir, I am truly sorry."

"No liberty in the world, Daw," I said warmly, for the man's courage and honesty and consideration compelled respect. "I am glad you have spoken to me so frankly. We both want to find out the truth; and there is so much about this case that is strange — so strange as to go beyond all experiences — that to aim at truth is our only chance of making anything clear in the long-run — no matter what our views are, or what object we wish to achieve ultimately!" The Sergeant looked pleased as he went on:

"I thought, therefore, that if you had it once in your mind that somebody else held to such a possibility, you would by degrees get proof; or at any rate such ideas as would convince yourself, either for or against it. Then we would come to some conclusion; or at any rate we should so exhaust all other possibilities that the most likely one would remain as the nearest thing to proof, or strong suspicion, that we could get. After that we should have to—"

Just at this moment the door opened and Miss Trelawny entered the room. The moment she saw us she drew back quickly, saying:

"Oh, I beg pardon! I did not know you were here, and engaged." By the time I had stood up, she was about to go back.

"Do come in," I said; "Sergeant Daw and I were only talking matters over."

Whilst she was hesitating, Mrs. Grant appeared, saying as she entered the room: "Doctor Winchester is come, miss, and is asking for you."

I obeyed Miss Trelawny's look; together we left the room.

When the Doctor had made his examination, he told us that there was seemingly no change. He added that nevertheless he would like to stay in the house that night is he might. Miss Trelawny looked glad, and sent word to Mrs. Grant to get a room ready for him. Later in the day, when he and I happened to be alone together, he said suddenly:

"I have arranged to stay here tonight because I want to have a talk with you. And as I wish it to be quite private, I thought the least suspicious way would be to have a cigar together late in the evening when Miss Trelawny is watching her father." We still kept to our arrangement that either the sick man's daughter or I should be on watch all night. We were to share the duty at the early hours of the morning. I was anxious about this, for I knew from our conversation that the Detective would watch in secret himself, and would be particularly alert about that time.

The day passed uneventfully. Miss Trelawny slept in the afternoon; and after dinner went to relieve the Nurse. Mrs. Grant remained with her, Sergeant Daw being on duty in the corridor. Doctor Winchester and I took our coffee in the library. When we had lit our cigars he said quietly:

"Now that we are alone I want to have a confidential talk. We are 'tiled,' of course; for the present at all events?"

"Quite so!" I said, my heart sinking as I thought of my conversation with Sergeant Daw in the morning, and of the disturbing and harrowing fears which it had left in my mind. He went on:

"This case is enough to try the sanity of all of us concerned in it. The more I think of it, the madder I seem to get; and the two lines, each continually strengthened, seem to pull harder in opposite directions."

"What two lines?" He looked at me keenly for a moment before replying. Doctor Winchester's look at such moments was apt to be disconcerting. It would have been so to me had I had a personal part, other than my interest in Miss Trelawny, in the matter. As it was, however, I stood it unruffled. I was now an attorney in the case; an amicus curiae in one sense, in another retained for the defence. The mere thought that in this clever man's mind were two lines, equally strong and opposite, was in itself so consoling as to neutralise my anxiety as to a new attack. As he began to speak, the Doctor's face wore an inscrutable smile; this, however, gave place to a stern gravity as he proceeded:

"Two lines: Fact and — Fancy! In the first there is this whole thing; attacks, attempts at robbery and murder; stupefyings; organised catalepsy which points to either criminal hypnotism and thought suggestion, or some simple form of poisoning unclassified yet in our toxicology. In the other there is some influence at work which is not classified in any book that I know — outside the pages of romance. I never felt in my life so strongly the truth of Hamlet's words:

‘There are more things in Heaven and earth...
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.’

“Let us take the ‘Fact’ side first. Here we have a man in his home; amidst his own household; plenty of servants of different classes in the house, which forbids the possibility of an organised attempt made from the servants” hall. He is wealthy, learned, clever. From his physiognomy there is no doubting that he is a man of iron will and determined purpose. His daughter — his only child, I take it, a young girl bright and clever — is sleeping in the very next room to his. There is seemingly no possible reason for expecting any attack or disturbance of any kind; and no reasonable opportunity for any outsider to effect it. And yet we have an attack made; a brutal and remorseless attack, made in the middle of the night. Discovery is made quickly; made with that rapidity which in criminal cases generally is found to be not accidental, but of premeditated intent. The attacker, or attackers, are manifestly disturbed before the completion of their work, whatever their ultimate intent may have been. And yet there is no possible sign of their escape; no clue, no disturbance of anything; no open door or window; no sound. Nothing whatever to show who had done the deed, or even that a deed has been done; except the victim, and his surroundings incidental to the deed!

“The next night a similar attempt is made, though the house is full of wakeful people; and though there are on watch in the room and around it a detective officer, a trained nurse, an earnest friend, and the man’s own daughter. The nurse is thrown into a catalepsy, and the watching friend — though protected by a respirator — into a deep sleep. Even the detective is so far overcome with some phase of stupor that he fires off his pistol in the sick-room, and can't even tell what he thought he was firing at. That respirator of yours is the only thing that seems to have a bearing on the 'fact' side of the affair. That you did not lose your head as the others did — the effect in such case being in proportion to the amount of time each remained in the room — points to the probability that the stupefying medium was not hypnotic, whatever else it may have been. But again, there is a fact which is contradictory. Miss Trelawny, who was in the room more than any of you — for she was in and out all the time and did her share of permanent watching also — did not seem to be affected at all. This would show that the influence, whatever it is, does not affect generally — unless, of course, it was that she was in some way inured to it. If it should turn out that it be some strange exhalation from some of those Egyptian curios, that might account for it; only, we are then face to face with the fact that Mr. Trelawny, who was most of all in the room — who, in fact, lived more than half his life in it — was affected worst of all. What kind of influence could it be which would account for all these different and contradictory effects? No! the more I think of this form of the dilemma, the more I am bewildered! Why, even if it were that the attack, the physical attack, on Mr. Trelawny had been made by some one residing in the house and not within the sphere of suspicion, the oddness of the stupefyings would still remain a mystery. It is not easy to put anyone into a catalepsy. Indeed, so far as is known yet in science, there is no way to achieve such an object at will. The crux of the whole matter is Miss Trelawny, who seems to be subject to none of the influences, or possibly of the variants of the same influence at work. Through all she goes unscathed, except for that one slight semi-faint. It is most strange!"

I listened with a sinking heart; for, though his manner was not illuminative of distrust, his argument was disturbing. Although it was not so direct as the suspicion of the Detective, it seemed to single out Miss Trelawny as different from all others concerned; and in a mystery to be alone is to be suspected, ultimately if not immediately. I thought it better not to say anything. In such a case silence is indeed golden; and if I said nothing now I might have less to defend, or explain, or take back later. I was, therefore, secretly glad that his form of putting his argument did not require any answer from me — for the present, at all events. Doctor Winchester did not seem to expect any answer — a fact which, when I recognised it, gave my pleasure, I hardly knew why. He paused for a while, sitting with his chin in his hand, his eyes staring at vacancy, whilst his brows were fixed. His cigar was held limp between his fingers; he had apparently forgotten it. In an even voice, as though commencing exactly where he had left off, he resumed his argument:

“The other horn of the dilemma is a different affair altogether; and if we once enter on it we must leave everything in the shape of science and experience behind us. I confess that it has its fascinations for me; though at every new thought I find myself romancing in a way that makes me pull up suddenly and look facts resolutely in the face. I sometimes wonder whether the influence or emanation from the sick-room at times affects me as it did the others — the Detective, for instance. Of course it may be that if it is anything chemical, any drug, for example, in vaporeal form, its effects may be cumulative. But then, what could there be that could produce such an effect? The room is, I know, full of mummy smell; and no wonder, with so many relics from the tomb, let alone the actual mummy of that animal which Silvio attacked. By the way, I am going to test him tomorrow; I have been on the trace of a mummy cat, and am to get possession of it in the morning. When I bring it here we shall find out if it be a fact that racial instinct can survive a few thousand years in the grave. However, to get back to the subject in hand. These very mummy smells arise from the presence of substances, and combinations of substances, which the Egyptian priests, who were the learned men and scientists of their time, found by the experience of centuries to be strong enough to arrest the natural forces of decay. There must be powerful agencies at work to effect such a purpose; and it is possible that we may have here some rare substance or combination whose qualities and powers are not understood in this later and more prosaic age. I wonder if Mr. Trelawny has any knowledge, or even suspicion, of such a kind? I only know this for certain, that a worse atmosphere for a sick chamber could not possibly be imagined; and I admire the courage of Sir James Frere in refusing to have anything to do with a case under such conditions. These instructions of Mr. Trelawny to his daughter, and from what you have told me, the care with which he has protected his wishes through his solicitor, show that he suspected something, at any rate. Indeed, it would almost seem as if he expected something to happen.... I wonder if it would be possible to learn anything about that! Surely his papers would show or suggest something.... It is a difficult matter to tackle; but it might have to be done. His present condition cannot go on for ever; and if anything should happen there would have to be an inquest. In such case full examination would have to be made into everything.... As it stands, the police evidence would show a murderous attack more than once repeated. As no clue is apparent, it would be necessary to seek one in a motive."

He was silent. The last words seemed to come in a lower and lower tone as he went on. It had the effect of hopelessness. It came to me as a conviction that now was my time to find out if he had any definite suspicion; and as if in obedience to some command, I asked:

“Do you suspect anyone?” He seemed in a way startled rather than surprised as he turned his eyes on me:

“Suspect anyone? Any thing, you mean. I certainly suspect that there is some influence; but at present my suspicion is held within such limit. Later on, if there be any sufficiently definite conclusion to my reasoning, or my thinking — for there are not proper data for reasoning — I may suspect; at present however—”

He stopped suddenly and looked at the door. There was a faint sound as the handle turned. My own heart seemed to stand still. There was over me some grim, vague apprehension. The interruption in the morning, when I was talking with the Detective, came back upon me with a rush.

The door opened, and Miss Trelawny entered the room.

When she saw us, she started back; and a deep flush swept her face. For a few seconds she paused; at such a time a few succeeding seconds seem to lengthen in geometrical progression. The strain upon me, and, as I could easily see, on the Doctor also, relaxed as she spoke:

“Oh, forgive me, I did not know that you were engaged. I was looking for you, Doctor Winchester, to ask you if I might go to bed tonight with safety, as you will be here. I feel so tired and worn-out that I fear I may break down; and tonight I would certainly not be of any use.” Doctor Winchester answered heartily:

“Do! Do go to bed by all means, and get a good night’s sleep. God knows! you want it. I am more than glad you have made the suggestion, for I feared when I saw you tonight that I might have you on my hands a patient next."

She gave a sigh of relief, and the tired look seemed to melt from her face. Never shall I forget the deep, earnest look in her great, beautiful black eyes as she said to me:

"You will guard Father tonight, won't you, with Doctor Winchester? I am so anxious about him that every second brings new fears. But I am really worn-out; and if I don't get a good sleep, I think I shall go mad. I will change my room for tonight. I'm afraid that if I stay so close to Father's room I shall multiply every sound into a new terror. But, of course, you will have me waked if there be any cause. I shall be in the bedroom of the little suite next the boudoir off the hall. I had those rooms when first I came to live with Father, and I had no care then.... It will be easier to rest there; and perhaps for a few hours I may forget. I shall be all right in the morning. Good-night!"

When I had closed the door behind her and come back to the little table at which we had been sitting, Doctor Winchester said:

"That poor girl is overwrought to a terrible degree. I am delighted that she is to get a rest. It will be life to her; and in the morning she will be all right. Her nervous system is on the verge of a breakdown. Did you notice how fearfully disturbed she was, and how red she got when she came in and found us talking? An ordinary thing like that, in her own house with her own guests, wouldn't under normal circumstances disturb her!"

I was about to tell him, as an explanation in her defence, how her entrance was a repetition of her finding the Detective and myself alone together earlier in the day, when I remembered that that conversation was so private that even an allusion to it might be awkward in evoking curiosity. So I remained silent.

We stood up to go to the sick-room; but as we took our way through the dimly-lighted corridor I could not help thinking, again and again, and again — ay, and for many a day after — how strange it was that she had interrupted me on two such occasions when touching on such a theme.

There was certainly some strange web of accidents, in whose meshes we were all involved.

Chapter VII

The Traveller's Loss

That night everything went well. Knowing that Miss Trelawny herself was not on guard, Doctor Winchester and I doubled our vigilance. The Nurses and Mrs. Grant kept watch, and the Detectives made their visit each quarter of an hour. All night the patient remained in his trance. He looked healthy, and his chest rose and fell with the easy breathing of a child. But he never stirred; only for his breathing he might have been of marble. Doctor Winchester and I wore our respirators, and irksome they were on that intolerably hot night. Between midnight and three o'clock I felt anxious, and had once more that creepy feeling to which these last few nights had accustomed me; but the grey of the dawn, stealing round the edges of the blinds, came with inexpressible relief, followed by restfulness, went through the household. During the hot night my ears, strained to every sound, had been almost painfully troubled; as though my brain or sensoria were in anxious touch with them. Every breath of the Nurse or the rustle of her dress; every soft pat of slippered feet, as the Policeman went his rounds; every moment of watching life, seemed to be a new impetus to guardianship. Something of the same feeling must have been abroad in the house; now and again I could hear upstairs the sound of restless feet, and more than once downstairs the opening of a window. With the coming of the dawn, however, all this ceased, and the whole household seemed to rest. Doctor Winchester went home when Sister Doris came to relieve Mrs. Grant. He was, I think, a little disappointed or chagrined that nothing of an exceptional nature had happened during his long night vigil.

At eight o'clock Miss Trelawny joined us, and I was amazed as well as delighted to see how much good her night's sleep had done her. She was fairly radiant; just as I had seen her at our first meeting and at the picnic. There was even a suggestion of colour in her cheeks, which, however, looked startlingly white in contrast with her black brows and scarlet lips. With her restored strength, there seemed to have come a tenderness even exceeding that which she had at first shown to her sick father. I could not but be moved by the loving touches as she fixed his pillows and brushed the hair from his forehead.

I was wearied out myself with my long spell of watching; and now that she was on guard I started off to bed, blinking my tired eyes in the full light and feeling the weariness of a sleepless night on me all at once.

I had a good sleep, and after lunch I was about to start out to walk to Jermyn Street, when I noticed an importunate man at the hall door. The servant in charge was the one called Morris, formerly the "odd man," but since the exodus of the servants promoted to be butler pro tem. The stranger was speaking rather loudly, so that there was no difficulty in understanding his grievance. The servant man was respectful in both words and demeanour; but he stood squarely in front of the great double door, so that the other could not enter. The first words which I heard from the visitor sufficiently explained the situation:

"That's all very well, but I tell you I must see Mr. Trelawny! What is the use of your saying I can't, when I tell you I must. You put me off, and off, and off! I came here at nine; you said then that he was not up, and that as he was not well he could not be disturbed. I came at twelve; and you told me again he was not up. I asked then to see any of his household; you told me that Miss Trelawny was not up. Now I come again at three, and you tell me he is still in bed, and is not awake yet. Where is Miss Trelawny? ‘She is occupied and must not be disturbed!’ Well, she must be disturbed! Or some one must. I am here about Mr. Trelawny’s special business; and I have come from a place where servants always begin by saying No. ‘No’ isn’t good enough for me this time! I’ve had three years of it, waiting outside doors and tents when it took longer to get in than it did into the tombs; and then you would think, too, the men inside were as dead as the mummies. I’ve had about enough of it, I tell you. And when I come home, and find the door of the man I’ve been working for barred, in just the same way and with the same old answers, it stirs me up the wrong way. Did Mr. Trelawny leave orders that he would not see me when I should come?”

He paused and excitedly mopped his forehead. The servant answered very respectfully:

“I am very sorry, sir, if in doing my duty I have given any offence. But I have my orders, and must obey them. If you would like to leave any message, I will give it to Miss Trelawny; and if you will leave your address, she can communicate with you if she wishes.” The answer came in such a way that it was easy to see that the speaker was a kind-hearted man, and a just one.

“My good fellow, I have no fault to find with you personally; and I am sorry if I have hurt your feelings. I must be just, even if I am angry. But it is enough to anger any man to find himself in the position I am. Time is pressing. There is not an hour — not a minute — to lose! And yet here I am, kicking my heels for six hours; knowing all the time that your master will be a hundred times angrier than I am, when he hears how the time has been fooled away. He would rather be waked out of a thousand sleeps than not see me just at present — and before it is too late. My God! it's simply dreadful, after all I've gone through, to have my work spoiled at the last and be foiled in the very doorway by a stupid flunkey! Is there no one with sense in the house; or with authority, even if he hasn't got sense? I could mighty soon convince him that your master must be awakened; even if he sleeps like the Seven Sleepers—"

There was no mistaking the man's sincerity, or the urgency and importance of his business; from his point of view at any rate. I stepped forward.

"Morris," I said, "you had better tell Miss Trelawny that this gentleman wants to see her particularly. If she is busy, ask Mrs. Grant to tell her."

"Very good, sir!" he answered in a tone of relief, and hurried away.

I took the stranger into the little boudoir across the hall. As we went he asked me:

"Are you the secretary?"

"No! I am a friend of Miss Trelawny's. My name is Ross."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Ross, for your kindness!" he said. "My name is Corbeck. I would give you my card, but they don't use cards where I've come from. And if I had had any, I suppose they, too, would have gone last night—"

He stopped suddenly, as though conscious that he had said too much. We both remained silent; as we waited I took stock of him. A short, sturdy man, brown as a coffee-berry; possibly inclined to be fat, but now lean exceedingly. The deep wrinkles in his face and neck were not merely from time and exposure; there were those unmistakable signs where flesh or fat has fallen away, and the skin has become loose. The neck was simply an intricate surface of seams and wrinkles, and sun-scarred with the burning of the Desert. The Far East, the Tropic Seasons, and the Desert — each can have its colour mark. But all three are quite different; and an eye which has once known, can thenceforth easily distinguish them. The dusky pallor of one; the fierce red-brown of the other; and of the third, the dark, ingrained burning, as though it had become a permanent colour. Mr. Corbeck had a big head, massive and full; with shaggy, dark red-brown hair, but bald on the temples. His forehead was a fine one, high and broad; with, to use the terms of physiognomy, the frontal sinus boldly marked. The squareness of it showed "ratiocination"; and the fulness under the eyes "language". He had the short, broad nose that marks energy; the square chin — marked despite a thick, unkempt beard — and massive jaw that showed great resolution.

"No bad man for the Desert!" I thought as I looked.

Miss Trelawny came very quickly. When Mr. Corbeck saw her, he seemed somewhat surprised. But his annoyance and excitement had not disappeared; quite enough remained to cover up any such secondary and purely exoteric feeling as surprise. But as she spoke he never took his eyes off her; and I made a mental note that I would find some early opportunity of investigating the cause of his surprise. She began with an apology which quite smoothed down his ruffled feelings:

"Of course, had my Father been well you would not have been kept waiting. Indeed, had not I been on duty in the sick-room when you called the first time, I should have seen you at once. Now will you kindly tell me what is the matter which so presses?" He looked at me and hesitated. She spoke at once:

“You may say before Mr. Ross anything which you can tell me. He has my fullest confidence, and is helping me in my trouble. I do not think you quite understand how serious my Father’s condition is. For three days he has not waked, or given any sign of consciousness; and I am in terrible trouble about him. Unhappily I am in great ignorance of my Father and his life. I only came to live with him a year ago; and I know nothing whatever of his affairs. I do not even know who you are, or in what way your business is associated with him.” She said this with a little deprecating smile, all conventional and altogether graceful; as though to express in the most genuine way her absurd ignorance.

He looked steadily at her for perhaps a quarter of a minute; then he spoke, beginning at once as though his mind were made up and his confidence established:

“My name is Eugene Corbeck. I am a Master of Arts and Doctor of Laws and Master of Surgery of Cambridge; Doctor of Letters of Oxford; Doctor of Science and Doctor of Languages of London University; Doctor of Philosophy of Berlin; Doctor of Oriental Languages of Paris. I have some other degrees, honorary and otherwise, but I need not trouble you with them. Those I have name will show you that I am sufficiently feathered with diplomas to fly into even a sick-room. Early in life — fortunately for my interests and pleasures, but unfortunately for my pocket — I fell in with Egyptology. I must have been bitten by some powerful scarab, for I took it bad. I went out tomb-hunting; and managed to get a living of a sort, and to learn some things that you can’t get out of books. I was in pretty low water when I met your Father, who was doing some explorations on his own account; and since then I haven’t found that I have many unsatisfied wants. He is a real patron of the arts; no mad

Egyptologist can ever hope for a better chief!"

He spoke with feeling; and I was glad to see that Miss Trelawny coloured up with pleasure at the praise of her father. I could not help noticing, however, that Mr. Corbeck was, in a measure, speaking as if against time. I took it that he wished, while speaking, to study his ground; to see how far he would be justified in taking into confidence the two strangers before him. As he went on, I could see that his confidence kept increasing. When I thought of it afterward, and remembered what he had said, I realised that the measure of the information which he gave us marked his growing trust.

"I have been several times out on expeditions in Egypt for your Father; and I have always found it a delight to work for him. Many of his treasures — and he has some rare ones, I tell you-he has procured through me, either by my exploration or by purchase — or — or — otherwise. Your Father, Miss Trelawny, has a rare knowledge. He sometimes makes up his mind that he wants to find a particular thing, of whose existence — if it still exists — he has become aware; and he will follow it all over the world till he gets it. I've been on just such a chase now."

He stopped suddenly, as suddenly as thought his mouth had been shut by the jerk of a string. We waited; when he went on he spoke with a caution that was new to him, as though he wished to forestall our asking any questions:

"I am not at liberty to mention anything of my mission; where it was to, what it was for, or anything at all about it. Such matters are in confidence between Mr. Trelawny and myself; I am pledged to absolute secrecy."

He paused, and an embarrassed look crept over his face. Suddenly he said:

“You are sure, Miss Trelawny, your Father is not well enough to see me today?”

A look of wonderment was on her face in turn. But it cleared at once; — she stood up, saying in a tone in which dignity and graciousness were blended:

“Come and see for yourself!” She moved toward her father’s room; he followed, and I brought up the rear.

Mr. Corbeck entered the sick-room as though he knew it. There is an unconscious attitude or bearing to persons in new surroundings which there is no mistaking. Even in his anxiety to see his powerful friend, he glanced for a moment round the room, as at a familiar place. Then all his attention became fixed on the bed. I watched him narrowly, for somehow I felt that on this man depended much of our enlightenment regarding the strange matter in which we were involved.

It was not that I doubted him. The man was of transparent honesty; it was this very quality which we had to dread. He was of that courageous, fixed trueness to his undertaking, that if he should deem it his duty to guard a secret he would do it to the last. The case before us was, at least, an unusual one; and it would, consequently, require more liberal recognition of bounds of the duty of secrecy than would hold under ordinary conditions. To us, ignorance was helplessness. If we could learn anything of the past we might at least form some idea of the conditions antecedent to the attack; and might, so, achieve some means of helping the patient to recovery. There were curios which might be removed.... My thoughts were beginning to whirl once again; I pulled myself up sharply and watched. There was a look of infinite pity on the sun-stained, rugged face as he gazed at his friend, lying so helpless. The sternness of Mr. Trelawny’s face had not relaxed in sleep; but somehow it made the helplessness more marked. It would not have troubled one to see a weak or an ordinary face under such conditions; but this purposeful, masterful man, lying before us wrapped in impenetrable sleep, had all the pathos of a great ruin. The sight was not a new one to us; but I could see that Miss Trelawny, like myself, was moved afresh by it in the presence of the stranger. Mr. Corbeck's face grew stern. All the pity died away; and in its stead came a grim, hard look which boded ill for whoever had been the cause of this mighty downfall. This look in turn gave place to one of decision; the volcanic energy of the man was working to some definite purpose. He glanced around at us; and as his eyes lighted on Nurse Kennedy his eyebrows went up a trifle. She noted the look, and glanced interrogatively at Miss Trelawny, who flashed back a reply with a glance. She went quietly from the room, closing the door behind her. Mr. Corbeck looked first at me, with a strong man's natural impulse to learn from a man rather than a woman; then at Miss Trelawny, with a remembrance of the duty of courtesy, and said:

"Tell me all about it. How it began and when!" Miss Trelawny looked at me appeallingly; and forthwith I told him all that I knew. He seemed to make no motion during the whole time; but insensibly the bronze face became steel. When, at the end, I told him of Mr. Marvin's visit and of the Power of Attorney, his look began to brighten. And when, seeing his interest in the matter, I went more into detail as to its terms, he spoke:

"Good! Now I know where my duty lies!"

With a sinking heart I heard him. Such a phrase, coming at such a time, seemed to close the door to my hopes of enlightenment.

"What do you mean?" I asked, feeling that my question was a feeble one.

His answer emphasised my fears:

“Trelawny knows what he is doing. He had some definite purpose in all that he did; and we must not thwart him. He evidently expected something to happen, and guarded himself at all points.”

“Not at all points!” I said impulsively. “There must have been a weak spot somewhere, or he wouldn’t be lying here like that!” Somehow his impassiveness surprised me. I had expected that he would find a valid argument in my phrase; but it did not move him, at least not in the way I thought. Something like a smile flickered over his swarthy face as he answered me:

“This is not the end! Trelawny did not guard himself to no purpose. Doubtless, he expected this too; or at any rate the possibility of it.”

“Do you know what he expected, or from what source?” The questioner was Miss Trelawny.

The answer came at once: “No! I know nothing of either. I can guess...” He stopped suddenly.

“Guess what?” The suppressed excitement in the girl’s voice was akin to anguish. The steely look came over the swarthy face again; but there was tenderness and courtesy in both voice and manner as he replied:

“Believe me, I would do anything I honestly could to relieve you anxiety. But in this I have a higher duty.”

“What duty?”

“Silence!” As he spoke the word, the strong mouth closed like a steel trap.

We all remained silent for a few minutes. In the intensity of our thinking, the silence became a positive thing; the small sounds of life within and without the house seemed intrusive. The first to break it was Miss Trelawny. I had seen an idea — a hope — flash in her eyes; but she steadied herself before speaking:

"What was the urgent subject on which you wanted to see me, knowing that my Father was — not available?" The pause showed her mastery of her thoughts.

The instantaneous change in Mr. Corbeck was almost ludicrous. His start of surprise, coming close upon his iron-clad impassiveness, was like a pantomimic change. But all idea of comedy was swept away by the tragic earnestness with which he remembered his original purpose.

"My God!" he said, as he raised his hand from the chair back on which it rested, and beat it down with a violence which would in itself have arrested attention. His brows corrugated as he went on: "I quite forgot! What a loss! Now of all times! Just at the moment of success! He lying there helpless, and my tongue tied! Not able to raise hand or foot in my ignorance of his wishes!"

"What is it? Oh, do tell us! I am so anxious about my dear Father! Is it any new trouble? I hope not! oh, I hope not! I have had such anxiety and trouble already! It alarms me afresh to hear you speak so! Won't you tell me something to allay this terrible anxiety and uncertainty?"

He drew his sturdy form up to his full height as he said:

"Alas! I cannot, may not, tell you anything. It is his secret." He pointed to the bed. "And yet — and yet I came here for his advice, his counsel, his assistance. And he lies there helpless.... And time is flying by us! It may soon be too late!"

"What is it? what is it?" broke in Miss Trelawny in a sort of passion of anxiety, her face drawn with pain. "Oh, speak! Say something! This anxiety, and horror, and mystery are killing me!" Mr. Corbeck calmed himself by a great effort.

"I may not tell you details; but I have had a great loss. My mission, in which I have spent three years, was successful. I discovered all that I sought — and more; and brought them home with me safely. Treasures, priceless in themselves, but doubly precious to him by whose wishes and instructions I sought them. I arrived in London only last night, and when I woke this morning my precious charge was stolen. Stolen in some mysterious way. Not a soul in London knew that I was arriving. No one but myself knew what was in the shabby portmanteau that I carried. My room had but one door, and that I locked and bolted. The room was high in the house, five stories up, so that no entrance could have been obtained by the window. Indeed, I had closed the window myself and shut the hasp, for I wished to be secure in every way. This morning the hasp was untouched.... And yet my portmanteau was empty. The lamps were gone! ... There! it is out. I went to Egypt to search for a set of antique lamps which Mr. Trelawny wished to trace. With incredible labour, and through many dangers, I followed them. I brought them safe home.... And now!" He turned away much moved. Even his iron nature was breaking down under the sense of loss.

Miss Trelawny stepped over and laid her hand on his arm. I looked at her in amazement. All the passion and pain which had so moved her seemed to have taken the form of resolution. Her form was erect, her eyes blazed; energy was manifest in every nerve and fibre of her being. Even her voice was full of nervous power as she spoke. It was apparent that she was a marvellously strong woman, and that her strength could answer when called upon.

"We must act at once! My Father's wishes must be carried out if it is possible to us. Mr. Ross, you are a lawyer. We have actually in the house a man whom you consider one of the best detectives in London. Surely we can do something. We can begin at once!” Mr. Corbeck took new life from her enthusiasm.

“Good! You are your Father’s daughter!” was all he said. But his admiration for her energy was manifested by the impulsive way in which he took her hand. I moved over to the door. I was going to bring Sergeant Daw; and from her look of approval, I knew that Margaret — Miss Trelawny — understood. I was at the door when Mr. Corbeck called me back.

“One moment,” he said, “before we bring a stranger on the scene. It must be borne in mind that he is not to know what you know now, that the lamps were the objects of a prolonged and difficult and dangerous search. All I can tell him, all that he must know from any source, is that some of my property has been stolen. I must describe some of the lamps, especially one, for it is of gold; and my fear is lest the thief, ignorant of its historic worth, may, in order to cover up his crime, have it melted. I would willingly pay ten, twenty, a hundred, a thousand times its intrinsic value rather than have it destroyed. I shall tell him only what is necessary. So, please, let me answer any questions he may ask; unless, of course, I ask you or refer to either of you for the answer.” We both nodded acquiescence. Then a thought struck me and I said:

“By the way, if it be necessary to keep this matter quiet it will be better to have it if possible a private job for the Detective. If once a thing gets to Scotland Yard it is out of our power to keep it quiet, and further secrecy may be impossible. I shall sound Sergeant Daw before he comes up. If I say nothing, it will mean that he accepts the task and will deal with it privately.” Mr. Corbeck answered at once:

“Secrecy is everything. The one thing I dread is that the lamps, or some of them, may be destroyed at once.” To my intense astonishment Miss Trelawny spoke out at once, but quietly, in a decided voice:

“They will not be destroyed; nor any of them!” Mr. Corbeck actually smiled in amazement.

“How on earth do you know?” he asked. Her answer was still more incomprehensible:

“I don’t know how I know it; but know it I do. I feel it all through me; as though it were a conviction which has been with me all my life!”

Chapter VIII

The Finding of the Lamps

Sergeant Daw at first made some demur; but finally agreed to advise privately on a matter which might be suggested to him. He added that I was to remember that he only undertook to advise; for if action were required he might have to refer the matter to headquarters. With this understanding I left him in the study, and brought Miss Trelawny and Mr. Corbeck to him. Nurse Kennedy resumed her place at the bedside before we left the room.

I could not but admire the cautious, cool-headed precision with which the traveller stated his case. He did not seem to conceal anything, and yet he gave the least possible description of the objects missing. He did not enlarge on the mystery of the case; he seemed to look on it as an ordinary hotel theft. Knowing, as I did, that his one object was to recover the articles before their identity could be obliterated, I could see the rare intellectual skill with which he gave the necessary matter and held back all else, though without seeming to do so. "Truly," thought I, "this man has learned the lesson of the Eastern bazaars; and with Western intellect has improved upon his masters!" He quite conveyed his idea to the Detective, who, after thinking the matter over for a few moments, said:

"Pot or scale? that is the question."

"What does that mean?" asked the other, keenly alert.

"An old thieves phrase from Birmingham. I thought that in these days of slang everyone knew that. In old times at Brum, which had a lot of small metal industries, the gold- and silver-smiths used to buy metal from almost anyone who came along. And as metal in small quantities could generally be had cheap when they didn't ask where it came from, it got to be a custom to ask only one thing — whether the customer wanted the goods melted, in which case the buyer made the price, and the melting-pot was always on the fire. If it was to be preserved in its present state at the buyer's option, it went into the scale and fetched standard price for old metal.

"There is a good deal of such work done still, and in other places than Brum. When we're looking for stolen watches we often come across the works, and it's not possible to identify wheels and springs out of a heap; but it's not often that we come across cases that are wanted. Now, in the present instance much will depend on whether the thief is a good man — that's what they call a man who knows his work. A first-class crook will know whether a thing is of more value than merely the metal in it; and in such case he would put it with someone who could place it later on — in America or France, perhaps. By the way, do you think anyone but yourself could identify your lamps?"

"No one but myself!"

"Are there others like them?"

"Not that I know of," answered Mr. Corbeck; "though there may be others that resemble them in many particulars." The Detective paused before asking again: "Would any other skilled person — at the British Museum, for instance, or a dealer, or a collector like Mr. Trelawny, know the value — the artistic value — of the lamps?"

"Certainly! Anyone with a head on his shoulders would see at a glance that the things were valuable."

The Detective's face brightened. "Then there is a chance. If your door was locked and the window shut, the goods were not stolen by the chance of a chambermaid or a boots coming along. Whoever did the job went after it special; and he ain't going to part with his swag without his price. This must be a case of notice to the pawnbrokers. There's one good thing about it, anyhow, that the hue and cry needn't be given. We needn't tell Scotland Yard unless you like; we can work the thing privately. If you wish to keep the thing dark, as you told me at the first, that is our chance." Mr. Corbeck, after a pause, said quietly:

"I suppose you couldn't hazard a suggestion as to how the robbery was effected?" The Policeman smiled the smile of knowledge and experience.

"In a very simple way, I have no doubt, sir. That is how all these mysterious crimes turn out in the long-run. The criminal knows his work and all the tricks of it; and he is always on the watch for chances. Moreover, he knows by experience what these chances are likely to be, and how they usually come. The other person is only careful; he doesn't know all the tricks and pits that may be made for him, and by some little oversight or other he falls into the trap. When we know all about this case, you will wonder that you did not see the method of it all along!" This seemed to annoy Mr. Corbeck a little; there was decided heat in his manner as he answered:

"Look here, my good friend, there is not anything simple about this case — except that the things were taken. The window was closed; the fireplace was bricked up. There is only one door to the room, and that I locked and bolted. There is no transom; I have heard all about hotel robberies through the transom. I never left my room in the night. I looked at the things before going to bed; and I went to look at them again when I woke up. If you can rig up any kind of simple robbery out of these facts you are a clever man. That's all I say; clever enough to go right away and get my things back." Miss

Trelawny laid her hand upon his arm in a soothing way, and said quietly:

“Do not distress yourself unnecessarily. I am sure they will turn up.” Sergeant Daw turned to her so quickly that I could not help remembering vividly his suspicions of her, already formed, as he said:

“May I ask, miss, on what you base that opinion?”

I dreaded to hear her answer, given to ears already awake to suspicion; but it came to me as a new pain or shock all the same:

“I cannot tell you how I know. But I am sure of it!” The Detective looked at her for some seconds in silence, and then threw a quick glance at me.

Presently he had a little more conversation with Mr. Corbeck as to his own movements, the details of the hotel and the room, and the means of identifying the goods. Then he went away to commence his inquiries, Mr. Corbeck impressing on him the necessity for secrecy lest the thief should get wind of his danger and destroy the lamps. Mr. Corbeck promised, when going away to attend to various matters of his own business, to return early in the evening, and to stay in the house.

All that day Miss Trelawny was in better spirits and looked in better strength than she had yet been, despite the new shock and annoyance of the theft which must ultimately bring so much disappointment to her father.

We spent most of the day looking over the curio treasures of Mr. Trelawny. From what I had heard from Mr. Corbeck I began to have some idea of the vastness of his enterprise in the world of Egyptian research; and with this light everything around me began to have a new interest. As I went on, the interest grew; any lingering doubts which I might have had changed to wonder and admiration. The house seemed to be a veritable storehouse of marvels of antique art. In addition to the curios, big and little, in Mr. Trelawny's own room — from the great sarcophagi down to the scarabs of all kinds in the cabinets — the great hall, the staircase landings, the study, and even the boudoir were full of antique pieces which would have made a collector's mouth water.

Miss Trelawny from the first came with me, and looked with growing interest at everything. After having examined some cabinets of exquisite amulets she said to me in quite a naive way:

"You will hardly believe that I have of late seldom even looked at any of these things. It is only since Father has been ill that I seem to have even any curiosity about them. But now, they grow and grow on me to quite an absorbing degree. I wonder if it is that the collector's blood which I have in my veins is beginning to manifest itself. If so, the strange thing is that I have not felt the call of it before. Of course I know most of the big things, and have examined them more or less; but really, in a sort of way I have always taken them for granted, as though they had always been there. I have noticed the same thing now and again with family pictures, and the way they are taken for granted by the family. If you will let me examine them with you it will be delightful!"

It was a joy to me to hear her talk in such a way; and her last suggestion quite thrilled me. Together we went round the various rooms and passages, examining and admiring the magnificent curios. There was such a bewildering amount and variety of objects that we could only glance at most of them; but as we went along we arranged that we should take them seriatim, day by day, and examine them more closely. In the hall was a sort of big frame of floriated steel work which Margaret said her father used for lifting the heavy stone lids of the sarcophagi. It was not heavy and could be moved about easily enough. By aid of this we raised the covers in turn and looked at the endless series of hieroglyphic pictures cut in most of them. In spite of her profession of ignorance Margaret knew a good deal about them; her year of life with her father had had unconsciously its daily and hourly lesson. She was a remarkably clever and acute-minded girl, and with a prodigious memory; so that her store of knowledge, gathered unthinkingly bit by bit, had grown to proportions that many a scholar might have envied.

And yet it was all so naive and unconscious; so girlish and simple. She was so fresh in her views and ideas, and had so little thought of self, that in her companionship I forgot for the time all the troubles and mysteries which enmeshed the house; and I felt like a boy again....

The most interesting of the sarcophagi were undoubtedly the three in Mr. Trelawny's room. Of these, two were of dark stone, one of porphyry and the other of a sort of ironstone. These were wrought with some hieroglyphs. But the third was strikingly different. It was of some yellow-brown substance of the dominating colour effect of Mexican onyx, which it resembled in many ways, excepting that the natural pattern of its convolutions was less marked. Here and there were patches almost transparent — certainly translucent. The whole chest, cover and all, was wrought with hundreds, perhaps thousands, of minute hieroglyphics, seemingly in an endless series. Back, front, sides, edges, bottom, all had their quota of the dainty pictures, the deep blue of their colouring showing up fresh and sharply edge in the yellow stone. It was very long, nearly nine feet; and perhaps a yard wide. The sides undulated, so that there was no hard line. Even the corners took such excellent curves that they pleased the eye. “Truly,” I said, “this must have been made for a giant!”

“Or for a giantess!” said Margaret.

This sarcophagus stood near to one of the windows. It was in one respect different from all the other sarcophagi in the place. All the others in the house, of whatever material — granite, porphyry, ironstone, basalt, slate, or wood — were quite simple in form within. Some of them were plain of interior surface; others were engraved, in whole or part, with hieroglyphics. But each and all of them had no protuberances or uneven surface anywhere. They might have been used for baths; indeed, they resembled in many ways Roman baths of stone or marble which I had seen. Inside this, however, was a raised space, outlined like a human figure. I asked Margaret if she could explain it in any way. For answer she said:

“Father never wished to speak about this. It attracted my attention from the first; but when I asked him about it he said: ‘I shall tell you all about it some day, little girl — if I live! But not yet! The story is not yet told, as I hope to tell it to you! Some day, perhaps soon, I shall know all; and then we shall go over it together. And a mighty interesting story you will find it — from first to last!’ Once afterward I said, rather lightly I am afraid: ‘Is that story of the sarcophagus told yet, Father?’ He shook his head, and looked at me gravely as he said: ‘Not yet, little girl; but it will be — if I live — if I live!’ His repeating that phrase about his living rather frightened me; I never ventured to ask him again.”

Somehow this thrilled me. I could not exactly say how or why; but it seemed like a gleam of light at last. There are, I think, moments when the mind accepts something as true; though it can account for neither the course of the thought, nor, if there be more than one thought, the connection between them. Hitherto we had been in such outer darkness regarding Mr. Trelawny, and the strange visitation which had fallen on him, that anything which afforded a clue, even of the faintest and most shadowy kind, had at the outset the enlightening satisfaction of a certainty. Here were two lights of our puzzle. The first that Mr. Trelawny associated with this particular curio a doubt of his own living. The second that he had some purpose or expectation with regard to it, which he would not disclose, even to his daughter, till complete. Again it was to be borne in mind that this sarcophagus differed internally from all the others. What meant that odd raised place? I said nothing to Miss Trelawny, for I feared lest I should either frighten her or buoy her up with future hopes; but I made up my mind that I would take an early opportunity for further investigation.

Close beside the sarcophagus was a low table of green stone with red veins in it, like bloodstone. The feet were fashioned like the paws of a jackal, and round each leg was twined a full-throated snake wrought exquisitely in pure gold. On it rested a strange and very beautiful coffer or casket of stone of a peculiar shape. It was something like a small coffin, except that the longer sides, instead of being cut off square like the upper or level part were continued to a point. Thus it was an irregular septahedron, there being two planes on each of the two sides, one end and a top and bottom. The stone, of one piece of which it was wrought, was such as I had never seen before. At the base it was of a full green, the colour of emerald without, of course, its gleam. It was not by any means dull, however, either in colour or substance, and was of infinite hardness and fineness of texture. The surface was almost that of a jewel. The colour grew lighter as it rose, with gradation so fine as to be imperceptible, changing to a fine yellow almost of the colour of "mandarin" china. It was quite unlike anything I had ever seen, and did not resemble any stone or gem that I knew. I took it to be some unique mother-stone, or matrix of some gem. It was wrought all over, except in a few spots, with fine hieroglyphics, exquisitely done and coloured with the same blue-green cement or pigment that appeared on the sarcophagus. In length it was about two feet and a half; in breadth about half this, and was nearly a foot high. The vacant spaces were irregularly distributed about the top running to the pointed end. These places seemed less opaque than the rest of the stone. I tried to lift up the lid so that I might see if they were translucent; but it was securely fixed. It fitted so exactly that the whole coffer seemed like a single piece of stone mysteriously hollowed from within. On the sides and edges were some odd-looking protuberances wrought just as finely as any other portion of the coffer which had been sculptured by manifest design in the cutting of the stone. They had queer-shaped holes or hollows, different in each; and, like the rest, were covered with the hieroglyphic figures, cut finely and filled in with the same blue-green cement.

On the other side of the great sarcophagus stood another small table of alabaster, exquisitely chased with symbolic figures of gods and the signs of the zodiac. On this table stood a case of about a foot square composed of slabs of rock crystal set in a skeleton of bands of red gold, beautifully engraved with hieroglyphics, and coloured with a blue green, very much the tint of the figures on the sarcophagus and the coffer. The whole work was quite modern.

But if the case was modern what it held was not. Within, on a cushion of cloth of gold as fine as silk, and with the peculiar softness of old gold, rested a mummy hand, so perfect that it startled one to see it. A woman's hand, fine and long, with slim tapering fingers and nearly as perfect as when it was given to the embalmer thousands of years before. In the embalming it had lost nothing of its beautiful shape; even the wrist seemed to maintain its pliability as the gentle curve lay on the cushion. The skin was of a rich creamy or old ivory colour; a dusky fair skin which suggested heat, but heat in shadow. The great peculiarity of it, as a hand, was that it had in all seven fingers, there being two middle and two index fingers. The upper end of the wrist was jagged, as though it had been broken off, and was stained with a red-brown stain. On the cushion near the hand was a small scarab, exquisitely wrought of emerald.

"That is another of Father's mysteries. When I asked him about it he said that it was perhaps the most valuable thing he had, except one. When I asked him what that one was, he refused to tell me, and forbade me to ask him anything concerning it. 'I will tell you,' he said, 'all about it, too, in good time — if I live!'"

"If I live!" the phrase again. These three things grouped together, the Sarcophagus, the Coffer, and the Hand, seemed to make a trilogy of mystery indeed!

At this time Miss Trelawny was sent for on some domestic matter. I looked at the other curios in the room; but they did not seem to have anything like the same charm for me, now that she was away. Later on in the day I was sent for to the boudoir where she was consulting with Mrs. Grant as to the lodgment of Mr. Corbeck. They were in doubt as to whether he should have a room close to Mr. Trelawny's or quite away from it, and had thought it well to ask my advice on the subject. I came to the conclusion that he had better not be too near; for the first at all events, he could easily be moved closer if necessary. When Mrs. Grant had gone, I asked Miss Trelawny how it came that the furniture of this room, the boudoir in which we were, was so different from the other rooms of the house.

"Father's forethought!" she answered. "When I first came, he thought, and rightly enough, that I might get frightened with so many records of death and the tomb everywhere. So he had this room and the little suite off it — that door opens into the sitting-room — where I slept last night, furnished with pretty things. You see, they are all beautiful. That cabinet belonged to the great Napoleon."

"There is nothing Egyptian in these rooms at all then?" I asked, rather to show interest in what she had said than anything else, for the furnishing of the room was apparent. "What a lovely cabinet! May I look at it?"

"Of course! with the greatest pleasure!" she answered, with a smile. "Its finishing, within and without, Father says, is absolutely complete." I stepped over and looked at it closely. It was made of tulip wood, inlaid in patterns; and was mounted in ormolu. I pulled open one of the drawers, a deep one where I could see the work to great advantage. As I pulled it, something rattled inside as though rolling; there was a tinkle as of metal on metal.

"Hullo!" I said. "There is something in here. Perhaps I had better not open it."

"There is nothing that I know of," she answered. "Some of the housemaids may have used it to put something by for the time and forgotten it. Open it by all means!"

I pulled open the drawer; as I did so, both Miss Trelawny and I started back in amazement.

There before our eyes lay a number of ancient Egyptian lamps, of various sizes and of strangely varied shapes.

We leaned over them and looked closely. My own heart was beating like a trip-hammer; and I could see by the heaving of Margaret's bosom that she was strangely excited.

Whilst we looked, afraid to touch and almost afraid to think, there was a ring at the front door; immediately afterwards Mr. Corbeck, followed by Sergeant Daw, came into the hall. The door of the boudoir was open, and when they saw us Mr. Corbeck came running in, followed more slowly by the Detective. There was a sort of chastened joy in his face and manner as he said impulsively:

"Rejoice with me, my dear Miss Trelawny, my luggage has come and all my things are intact!" Then his face fell as he added, "Except the lamps. The lamps that were worth all the rest a thousand times...." He stopped, struck by the strange pallor of her face. Then his eyes, following her look and mine, lit on the cluster of lamps in the drawer. He gave a sort of cry of surprise and joy as he bent over and touched them:

"My lamps! My lamps! Then they are safe — safe — safe! ... But how, in the name of God — of all the Gods — did they come here?"

We all stood silent. The Detective made a deep sound of in-taking breath. I looked at him, and as he caught my glance he turned his eyes on Miss Trelawny whose back was toward him.

There was in them the same look of suspicion which had been there when he had spoken to me of her being the first to find her father on the occasions of the attacks.

Chapter IX

The Need of Knowledge

Mr. Corbeck seemed to go almost off his head at the recovery of the lamps. He took them up one by one and looked them all over tenderly, as though they were things that he loved. In his delight and excitement he breathed so hard that it seemed almost like a cat purring. Sergeant Daw said quietly, his voice breaking the silence like a discord in a melody:

"Are you quite sure those lamps are the ones you had, and that were stolen?"

His answer was in an indignant tone: "Sure! Of course I'm sure. There isn't another set of lamps like these in the world!"

"So far as you know!" The Detective's words were smooth enough, but his manner was so exasperating that I was sure he had some motive in it; so I waited in silence. He went on:

"Of course there may be some in the British Museum; or Mr. Trelawny may have had these already. There's nothing new under the sun, you know, Mr. Corbeck; not even in Egypt. These may be the originals, and yours may have been the copies. Are there any points by which you can identify these as yours?"

Mr. Corbeck was really angry by this time. He forgot his reserve; and in his indignation poured forth a torrent of almost incoherent, but enlightening, broken sentences:

"Identify! Copies of them! British Museum! Rot! Perhaps they keep a set in Scotland Yard for teaching idiot policemen Egyptology! Do I know them? When I have carried them about my body, in the desert, for three months; and lay awake night after night to watch them! When I have looked them over with a magnifying-glass, hour after hour, till my eyes ached; till every tiny blotch, and chip, and dinge became as familiar to me as his chart to a captain; as familiar as they doubtless have been all the time to every thick-headed area-prowler within the bounds of mortality. See here, young man, look at these!" He ranged the lamps in a row on the top of the cabinet. "Did you ever see a set of lamps of these shapes — of any one of these shapes? Look at these dominant figures on them! Did you ever see so complete a set — even in Scotland Yard; even in Bow Street? Look! one on each, the seven forms of Hathor. Look at that figure of the Ka of a Princess of the Two Egypts, standing between Ra and Osiris in the Boat of the Dead, with the Eye of Sleep, supported on legs, bending before her; and Harmochis rising in the north. Will you find that in the British Museum — or Bow Street? Or perhaps your studies in the Gizeh Museum, or the Fitzwilliam, or Paris, or Leyden, or Berlin, have shown you that the episode is common in hieroglyphics; and that this is only a copy. Perhaps you can tell me what that figure of Ptah-Seker-Ausar holding the Tet wrapped in the Sceptre of Papyrus means? Did you ever see it before; even in the British Museum, or Gizeh, or Scotland Yard?"

He broke off suddenly; and then went on in quite a different way:

"Look here! it seems to me that the thick-headed idiot is myself! I beg your pardon, old fellow, for my rudeness. I quite lost my temper at the suggestion that I do not know these lamps. You don't mind, do you?" The Detective answered heartily:

"Lord, sir, not I. I like to see folks angry when I am dealing with them, whether they are on my side or the other. It is when people are angry that you learn the truth from them. I keep cool; that is my trade! Do you know, you have told me more about those lamps in the past two minutes than when you filled me up with details of how to identify them."

Mr. Corbeck grunted; he was not pleased at having given himself away. All at once he turned to me and said in his natural way:

"Now tell me how you got them back?" I was so surprised that I said without thinking:

"We didn't get them back!" The traveller laughed openly.

"What on earth do you mean?" he asked. "You didn't get them back! Why, there they are before your eyes! We found you looking at them when we came in." By this time I had recovered my surprise and had my wits about me.

"Why, that's just it," I said. "We had only come across them, by accident, that very moment!"

Mr. Corbeck drew back and looked hard at Miss Trelawny and myself; turning his eyes from one to the other as he asked:

"Do you mean to tell me that no one brought them here; that you found them in that drawer? That, so to speak, no one at all brought them back?"

"I suppose someone must have brought them here; they couldn't have come of their own accord. But who it was, or when, or how, neither of us knows. We shall have to make inquiry, and see if any of the servants know anything of it."

We all stood silent for several seconds. It seemed a long time. The first to speak was the Detective, who said in an unconscious way:

"Well, I'm damned! I beg your pardon, miss!" Then his mouth shut like a steel trap.

We called up the servants, one by one, and asked them if they knew anything of some articles placed in a drawer in the boudoir; but none of them could throw any light on the circumstance. We did not tell them what the articles were; or let them see them.

Mr. Corbeck packed the lamps in cotton wool, and placed them in a tin box. This, I may mention incidentally, was then brought up to the detectives' room, where one of the men stood guard over them with a revolver the whole night. Next day we got a small safe into the house, and placed them in it. There were two different keys. One of them I kept myself; the other I placed in my drawer in the Safe Deposit vault. We were all determined that the lamps should not be lost again.

About an hour after we had found the lamps, Doctor Winchester arrived. He had a large parcel with him, which, when unwrapped, proved to be the mummy of a cat. With Miss Trelawny's permission he placed this in the boudoir; and Silvio was brought close to it. To the surprise of us all, however, except perhaps Doctor Winchester, he did not manifest the least annoyance; he took no notice of it whatever. He stood on the table close beside it, purring loudly. Then, following out his plan, the Doctor brought him into Mr. Trelawny's room, we all following. Doctor Winchester was excited; Miss Trelawny anxious. I was more than interested myself, for I began to have a glimmering of the Doctor's idea. The Detective was calmly and coldly superior; but Mr. Corbeck, who was an enthusiast, was full of eager curiosity.

The moment Doctor Winchester got into the room, Silvio began to mew and wriggle; and jumping out of his arms, ran over to the cat mummy and began to scratch angrily at it. Miss Trelawny had some difficulty in taking him away; but so soon as he was out of the room he became quiet. When she came back there was a clamour of comments:

"I thought so!" from the Doctor.

“What can it mean?” from Miss Trelawny.

“That’s a very strange thing!” from Mr. Corbeck.

“Odd! but it doesn’t prove anything!” from the Detective.

“I suspend my judgment!” from myself, thinking it advisable to say something.

Then by common consent we dropped the theme — for the present.

In my room that evening I was making some notes of what had happened, when there came a low tap on the door. In obedience to my summons Sergeant Daw came in, carefully closing the door behind him.

“Well, Sergeant,” said I, “sit down. What is it?”

“I wanted to speak to you, sir, about those lamps.” I nodded and waited: he went on: “You know that that room where they were found opens directly into the room where Miss Trelawny slept last night?”

“Yes.”

“During the night a window somewhere in that part of the house was opened, and shut again. I heard it, and took a look round; but I could see no sign of anything.”

“Yes, I know that!” I said; “I heard a window moved myself.”

“Does nothing strike you as strange about it, sir?”

“Strange!” I said; “Strange! why it’s all the most bewildering, maddening thing I have ever encountered. It is all so strange that one seems to wonder, and simply waits for what will happen next. But what do you mean by strange?”

The Detective paused, as if choosing his words to begin; and then said deliberately:

“You see, I am not one who believes in magic and such things. I am for facts all the time; and I always find in the long-run that there is a reason and a cause for everything. This new gentleman says these things were stolen out of his room in the hotel. The lamps, I take it from some things he has said, really belong to Mr. Trelawny. His daughter, the lady of the house, having left the room she usually occupies, sleeps that night on the ground floor. A window is heard to open and shut during the night. When we, who have been during the day trying to find a clue to the robbery, come to the house, we find the stolen goods in a room close to where she slept, and opening out of it!"

He stopped. I felt that same sense of pain and apprehension, which I had experienced when he had spoken to me before, creeping, or rather rushing, over me again. I had to face the matter out, however. My relations with her, and the feeling toward her which I now knew full well meant a very deep love and devotion, demanded so much. I said as calmly as I could, for I knew the keen eyes of the skilful investigator were on me:

"And the inference?"

He answered with the cool audacity of conviction:

"The inference to me is that there was no robbery at all. The goods were taken by someone to this house, where they were received through a window on the ground floor. They were placed in the cabinet, ready to be discovered when the proper time should come!"

Somehow I felt relieved; the assumption was too monstrous. I did not want, however, my relief to be apparent, so I answered as gravely as I could:

"And who do you suppose brought them to the house?"

"I keep my mind open as to that. Possibly Mr. Corbeck himself;

the matter might be too risky to trust to a third party."

"Then the natural extension of your inference is that Mr. Corbeck is a liar and a fraud; and that he is in conspiracy with Miss Trelawny to deceive someone or other about those lamps."

"Those are harsh words, Mr. Ross. They're so plain-spoken that they bring a man up standing, and make new doubts for him. But I have to go where my reason points. It may be that there is another party than Miss Trelawny in it. Indeed, if it hadn't been for the other matter that set me thinking and bred doubts of its own about her, I wouldn't dream of mixing her up in this. But I'm safe on Corbeck. Whoever else is in it, he is! The things couldn't have been taken without his connivance — if what he says is true. If it isn't — well! he is a liar anyhow. I would think it a bad job to have him stay in the house with so many valuables, only that it will give me and my mate a chance of watching him. We'll keep a pretty good look-out, too, I tell you. He's up in my room now, guarding those lamps; but Johnny Wright is there too. I go on before he comes off; so there won't be much chance of another house-breaking. Of course, Mr. Ross, all this, too, is between you and me."

"Quite so! You may depend on my silence!" I said; and he went away to keep a close eye on the Egyptologist.

It seemed as though all my painful experiences were to go in pairs, and that the sequence of the previous day was to be repeated; for before long I had another private visit from Doctor Winchester who had now paid his nightly visit to his patient and was on his way home. He took the seat which I proffered and began at once:

"This is a strange affair altogether. Miss Trelawny has just been telling me about the stolen lamps, and of the finding of them in the Napoleon cabinet. It would seem to be another complication of the mystery; and yet, do you know, it is a relief to me. I have exhausted all human and natural possibilities of the case, and am beginning to fall back on superhuman and supernatural possibilities. Here are such strange things that, if I am not going mad, I think we must have a solution before long. I wonder if I might ask some questions and some help from Mr. Corbeck, without making further complications and embarrassing us. He seems to know an amazing amount regarding Egypt and all relating to it. Perhaps he wouldn't mind translating a little bit of hieroglyphic. It is child's play to him. What do you think?"

When I had thought the matter over a few seconds I spoke. We wanted all the help we could get. For myself, I had perfect confidence in both men; and any comparing notes, or mutual assistance, might bring good results. Such could hardly bring evil.

"By all means I should ask him. He seems an extraordinarily learned man in Egyptology; and he seems to me a good fellow as well as an enthusiast. By the way, it will be necessary to be a little guarded as to whom you speak regarding any information which he may give you."

"Of course!" he answered. "Indeed I should not dream of saying anything to anybody, excepting yourself. We have to remember that when Mr. Trelawny recovers he may not like to think that we have been chattering unduly over his affairs."

"Look here!" I said, "why not stay for a while: and I shall ask him to come and have a pipe with us. We can then talk over things."

He acquiesced: so I went to the room where Mr. Corbeck was, and brought him back with me. I thought the detectives were pleased at his going. On the way to my room he said:

"I don't half like leaving those things there, with only those men to guard them. They're a deal sight too precious to be left to the police!"

From which it would appear that suspicion was not confined to Sergeant Daw.

Mr. Corbeck and Doctor Winchester, after a quick glance at each other, became at once on most friendly terms. The traveller professed his willingness to be of any assistance which he could, provided, he added, that it was anything about which he was free to speak. This was not very promising; but Doctor Winchester began at once:

"I want you, if you will, to translate some hieroglyphic for me."

"Certainly, with the greatest pleasure, so far as I can. For I may tell you that hieroglyphic writing is not quite mastered yet; though we are getting at it! We are getting at it! What is the inscription?"

"There are two," he answered. "One of them I shall bring here."

He went out, and returned in a minute with the mummy cat which he had that evening introduced to Silvio. The scholar took it; and, after a short examination, said:

"There is nothing especial in this. It is an appeal to Bast, the Lady of Bubastis, to give her good bread and milk in the Elysian Fields. There may be more inside; and if you will care to unroll it, I will do my best. I do not think, however, that there is anything special. From the method of wrapping I should say it is from the Delta; and of a late period, when such mummy work was common and cheap. What is the other inscription you wish me to see?"

"The inscription on the mummy cat in Mr. Trelawny's room."

Mr. Corbeck's face fell. "No!" he said, "I cannot do that! I am, for the present at all events, practically bound to secrecy regarding any of the things in Mr. Trelawny's room."

Doctor Winchester's comment and my own were made at the same moment. I said only the one word “Checkmate!” from which I think he may have gathered that I guessed more of his idea and purpose than perhaps I had intentionally conveyed to him. He murmured:

“Practically bound to secrecy?”

Mr. Corbeck at once took up the challenge conveyed:

“Do not misunderstand me! I am not bound by any definite pledge of secrecy; but I am bound in honour to respect Mr. Trelawny’s confidence, given to me, I may tell you, in a very large measure. Regarding many of the objects in his room he has a definite purpose in view; and it would not be either right or becoming for me, his trusted friend and confidant, to forestall that purpose. Mr. Trelawny, you may know — or rather you do not know or you would not have so construed my remark — is a scholar, a very great scholar. He has worked for years toward a certain end. For this he has spared no labour, no expense, no personal danger or self-denial. He is on the line of a result which will place him amongst the foremost discoverers or investigators of his age. And now, just at the time when any hour might bring him success, he is stricken down!”

He stopped, seemingly overcome with emotion. After a time he recovered himself and went on:

“Again, do not misunderstand me as to another point. I have said that Mr. Trelawny has made much confidence with me; but I do not mean to lead you to believe that I know all his plans, or his aims or objects. I know the period which he has been studying; and the definite historical individual whose life he has been investigating, and whose records he has been following up one by one with infinite patience. But beyond this I know nothing. That he has some aim or object in the completion of this knowledge I am convinced. What it is I may guess; but I must say nothing. Please to remember, gentlemen, that I have voluntarily accepted the position of recipient of a partial confidence. I have respected that; and I must ask any of my friends to do the same."

He spoke with great dignity; and he grew, moment by moment, in the respect and esteem of both Doctor Winchester and myself. We understood that he had not done speaking; so we waited in silence till he continued:

"I have spoken this much, although I know well that even such a hint as either of you might gather from my words might jeopardise the success of his work. But I am convinced that you both wish to help him — and his daughter," he said this looking me fairly between the eyes, "to the best of your power, honestly and unselfishly. He is so stricken down, and the manner of it is so mysterious that I cannot but think that it is in some way a result of his own work. That he calculated on some set-back is manifest to us all. God knows! I am willing to do what I can, and to use any knowledge I have in his behalf. I arrived in England full of exultation at the thought that I had fulfilled the mission with which he had trusted me. I had got what he said were the last objects of his search; and I felt assured that he would now be able to begin the experiment of which he had often hinted to me. It is too dreadful that at just such a time such a calamity should have fallen on him. Doctor Winchester, you are a physician; and, if your face does not belie you, you are a clever and a bold one. Is there no way which you can devise to wake this man from his unnatural stupor?"

There was a pause; then the answer came slowly and deliberately:

"There is no ordinary remedy that I know of. There might possibly be some extraordinary one. But there would be no use in trying to find it, except on one condition."

"And that?"

"Knowledge! I am completely ignorant of Egyptian matters, language, writing, history, secrets, medicines, poisons, occult powers — all that go to make up the mystery of that mysterious land. This disease, or condition, or whatever it may be called, from which Mr. Trelawny is suffering, is in some way connected with Egypt. I have had a suspicion of this from the first; and later it grew into a certainty, though without proof. What you have said tonight confirms my conjecture, and makes me believe that a proof is to be had. I do not think that you quite know all that has gone on in this house since the night of the attack — of the finding of Mr. Trelawny's body. Now I propose that we confide in you. If Mr. Ross agrees, I shall ask him to tell you. He is more skilled than I am in putting facts before other people. He can speak by his brief; and in this case he has the best of all briefs, the experience of his own eyes and ears, and the evidence that he has himself taken on the spot from participators in, or spectators of, what has happened. When you know all, you will, I hope, be in a position to judge as to whether you can best help Mr. Trelawny, and further his secret wishes, by your silence or your speech."

I nodded approval. Mr. Corbeck jumped up, and in his impulsive way held out a hand to each.

"Done!" he said. "I acknowledge the honour of your confidence; and on my part I pledge myself that if I find my duty to Mr. Trelawny's wishes will, in his own interest, allow my lips to open on his affairs, I shall speak so freely as I may."

Accordingly I began, and told him, as exactly as I could, everything that had happened from the moment of my waking at the knocking on the door in Jermyn Street. The only reservations I made were as to my own feeling toward Miss Trelawny and the matters of small import to the main subject which followed it; and my conversations with Sergeant Daw, which were in themselves private, and which would have demanded discretionary silence in any case. As I spoke, Mr. Corbeck followed with breathless interest. Sometimes he would stand up and pace about the room in uncontrollable excitement; and then recover himself suddenly, and sit down again. Sometimes he would be about to speak, but would, with an effort, restrain himself. I think the narration helped me to make up my own mind; for even as I talked, things seemed to appear in a clearer light. Things big and little, in relation of their importance to the case, fell into proper perspective. The story up to date became coherent, except as to its cause, which seemed a greater mystery than ever. This is the merit of entire, or collected, narrative. Isolated facts, doubts, suspicions, conjectures, give way to a homogeneity which is convincing.

That Mr. Corbeck was convinced was evident. He did not go through any process of explanation or limitation, but spoke right out at once to the point, and fearlessly like a man:

“That settles me! There is in activity some Force that needs special care. If we all go on working in the dark we shall get in one another’s way, and by hampering each other, undo the good that any or each of us, working in different directions, might do. It seems to me that the first thing we have to accomplish is to get Mr. Trelawny waked out of that unnatural sleep. That he can be waked is apparent from the way the Nurse has recovered; though what additional harm may have been done to him in the time he has been lying in that room I suppose no one can tell. We must chance that, however. He has lain there, and whatever the effect might be, it is there now; and we have, and shall have, to deal with it as a fact. A day more or less won't hurt in the long-run. It is late now; and we shall probably have tomorrow a task before us that will require our energies afresh. You, Doctor, will want to get to your sleep; for I suppose you have other work as well as this to do tomorrow. As for you, Mr. Ross, I understand that you are to have a spell of watching in the sick-room tonight. I shall get you a book which will help to pass the time for you. I shall go and look for it in the library. I know where it was when I was here last; and I don't suppose Mr. Trelawny has used it since. He knew long ago all that was in it which was or might be of interest to him. But it will be necessary, or at least helpful, to understand other things which I shall tell you later. You will be able to tell Doctor Winchester all that would aid him. For I take it that our work will branch out pretty soon. We shall each have our own end to hold up; and it will take each of us all our time and understanding to get through his own tasks. It will not be necessary for you to read the whole book. All that will interest you — with regard to our matter I mean of course, for the whole book is interesting as a record of travel in a country then quite unknown — is the preface, and two or three chapters which I shall mark for you."

He shook hands warmly with Doctor Winchester who had stood up to go.

Whilst he was away I sat lonely, thinking. As I thought, the world around me seemed to be illimitably great. The only little spot in which I was interested seemed like a tiny speck in the midst of a wilderness. Without and around it were darkness and unknown danger, pressing in from every side. And the central figure in our little oasis was one of sweetness and beauty. A figure one could love;

could work for; could die for...!

Mr. Corbeck came back in a very short time with the book; he had found it at once in the spot where he had seen it three years before. Having placed in it several slips of paper, marking the places where I was to read, he put it into my hands, saying:

"That is what started Mr. Trelawny; what started me when I read it; and which will, I have no doubt, be to you an interesting beginning to a special study — whatever the end may be. If, indeed, any of us here may ever see the end."

At the door he paused and said:

"I want to take back one thing. That Detective is a good fellow. What you have told me of him puts him in a new light. The best proof of it is that I can go quietly to sleep tonight, and leave the lamps in his care!"

When he had gone I took the book with me, put on my respirator, and went to my spell of duty in the sick-room!

Chapter X

The Valley of the Sorcerer

I placed the book on the little table on which the shaded lamp rested and moved the screen to one side. Thus I could have the light on my book; and by looking up, see the bed, and the Nurse, and the door. I cannot say that the conditions were enjoyable, or calculated to allow of that absorption in the subject which is advisable for effective study. However, I composed myself to the work as well as I could. The book was one which, on the very face of it, required special attention. It was a folio in Dutch, printed in Amsterdam in 1650. Some one had made a literal translation, writing generally the English word under the Dutch, so that the grammatical differences between the two tongues made even the reading of the translation a difficult matter. One had to dodge backward and forward among the words. This was in addition to the difficulty of deciphering a strange handwriting of two hundred years ago. I found, however, that after a short time I got into the habit of following in conventional English the Dutch construction; and, as I became more familiar with the writing, my task became easier.

At first the circumstances of the room, and the fear lest Miss Trelawny should return unexpectedly and find me reading the book, disturbed me somewhat. For we had arranged amongst us, before Doctor Winchester had gone home, that she was not to be brought into the range of the coming investigation. We considered that there might be some shock to a woman's mind in matters of apparent mystery; and further, that she, being Mr. Trelawny's daughter, might be placed in a difficult position with him afterward if she took part in, or even had a personal knowledge of, the disregarding of his expressed wishes. But when I remembered that she did not come on nursing duty till two o'clock, the fear of interruption passed away. I had still nearly three house before me. Nurse Kennedy sat in her chair by the bedside, patient and alert. A clock ticked on the landing; other clocks in the house ticked; the life of the city without manifested itself in the distant hum, now and again swelling into a roar as a breeze floating westward took the concourse of sounds with it. But still the dominant idea was of silence. The light on my book, and the soothing fringe of green silk round the shade intensified, whenever I looked up, the gloom of the sick-room. With every line I read, this seemed to grow deeper and deeper; so that when my eyes came back to the page the light seemed to dazzle me. I stuck to my work, however, and presently began to get sufficiently into the subject to become interested in it.

The book was by one Nicholas van Huyn of Hoorn. In the preface he told how, attracted by the work of John Greaves of Merton College, Pyramidographia, he himself visited Egypt, where he became so interested in its wonders that he devoted some years of his life to visiting strange places, and exploring the ruins of many temples and tombs. He had come across many variants of the story of the building of the Pyramids as told by the Arabian historian, Ibn Abd Alhokin, some of which he set down. These I did not stop to read, but went on to the marked pages.

As soon as I began to read these, however, there grew on me some sense of a disturbing influence. Once or twice I looked to see if the Nurse had moved, for there was a feeling as though some one were near me. Nurse Kennedy sat in her place, as steady and alert as ever; and I came back to my book again.

The narrative went on to tell how, after passing for several days through the mountains to the east of Aswan, the explorer came to a certain place. Here I give his own words, simply putting the translation into modern English:

“Toward evening we came to the entrance of a narrow, deep valley, running east and west. I wished to proceed through this; for the sun, now nearly down on the horizon, showed a wide opening beyond the narrowing of the cliffs. But the fellaheen absolutely refused to enter the valley at such a time, alleging that they might be caught by the night before they could emerge from the other end. At first they would give no reason for their fear. They had hitherto gone anywhere I wished, and at any time, without demur. On being pressed, however, they said that the place was the Valley of the Sorcerer, where none might come in the night. On being asked to tell of the Sorcerer, they refused, saying that there was no name, and that they knew nothing. On the next morning, however, when the sun was up and shining down the valley, their fears had somewhat passed away. Then they told me that a great Sorcerer in ancient days— ‘millions of millions of years’ was the term they used — a King or a Queen, they could not say which, was buried there. They could not give the name, persisting to the last that there was no name; and that anyone who should name it would waste away in life so that at death nothing of him would remain to be raised again in the Other World. In passing through the valley they kept together in a cluster, hurrying on in front of me. None dared to remain behind. They gave, as their reason for so proceeding, that the arms of the Sorcerer were long, and that it was dangerous to be the last. The which was of little comfort to me who of this necessity took that honourable post. In the narrowest part of the valley, on the south side, was a great cliff of rock, rising sheer, of smooth and even surface. Hereon were graven certain cabalistic signs, and many figures of men and animals, fishes, reptiles and birds; suns and stars; and many quaint symbols. Some of these latter were disjointed limbs and features, such as arms and legs, fingers, eyes, noses, ears, and lips. Mysterious symbols which will puzzle the Recording Angel to interpret at the Judgment Day. The cliff faced exactly north. There was something about it so strange, and so different from the other carved rocks which I had visited, that I called a halt and spent the day in examining the rock front as well as I could with my telescope. The Egyptians of my company were terribly afraid, and used every kind of persuasion to induce me to pass on. I stayed till late in the afternoon, by which time I had failed to make out aright the entry of any tomb, for I suspected that such was the purpose of the sculpture of the rock. By this time the men were rebellious; and I had to leave the valley if I did not wish my whole retinue to desert. But I secretly made up my mind to discover the tomb, and explore it. To this end I went further into the mountains, where I met with an Arab Sheik who was willing to take service with me. The Arabs were not bound by the same superstitious fears as the Egyptians; Sheik Abu Some and his following were willing to take a part in the explorations.

"When I returned to the valley with these Bedouins, I made effort to climb the face of the rock, but failed, it being of one impenetrable smoothness. The stone, generally flat and smooth by nature, had been chiselled to completeness. That there had been projecting steps was manifest, for there remained, untouched by the wondrous climate of that strange land, the marks of saw and chisel and mallet where the steps had been cut or broken away.

"Being thus baffled of winning the tomb from below, and being unprovided with ladders to scale, I found a way by much circuitous journeying to the top of the cliff. Thence I caused myself to be lowered by ropes, till I had investigated that portion of the rock face wherein I expected to find the opening. I found that there was an entrance, closed however by a great stone slab. This was cut in the rock more than a hundred feet up, being two-thirds the height of the cliff. The hieroglyphic and cabalistic symbols cut in the rock were so managed as to disguise it. The cutting was deep, and was continued through the rock and the portals of the doorway, and through the great slab which formed the door itself. This was fixed in place with such incredible exactness that no stone chisel or cutting implement which I had with me could find a lodgment in the interstices. I used much force, however; and by many heavy strokes won a way into the tomb, for such I found it to be. The stone door having fallen into the entrance I passed over it into the tomb, noting as I went a long iron chain which hung coiled on a bracket close to the doorway.

“The tomb I found to be complete, after the manner of the finest Egyptian tombs, with chamber and shaft leading down to the corridor, ending in the Mummy Pit. It had the table of pictures, which seems some kind of record — whose meaning is now for ever lost — graven in a wondrous colour on a wondrous stone.

“All the walls of the chamber and the passage were carved with strange writings in the uncanny form mentioned. The huge stone coffin or sarcophagus in the deep pit was marvellously graven throughout with signs. The Arab chief and two others who ventured into the tomb with me, and who were evidently used to such grim explorations, managed to take the cover from the sarcophagus without breaking it. At which they wondered; for such good fortune, they said, did not usually attend such efforts. Indeed they seemed not over careful; and did handle the various furniture of the tomb with such little concern that, only for its great strength and thickness, even the coffin itself might have been injured. Which gave me much concern, for it was very beautifully wrought of rare stone, such as I had no knowledge of. Much I grieved that it were not possible to carry it away. But time and desert journeyings forbade such; I could only take with me such small matters as could be carried on the person.

“Within the sarcophagus was a body, manifestly of a woman, swathed with many wrappings of linen, as is usual with all mummies. From certain embroiderings thereon, I gathered that she was of high rank. Across the breast was one hand, unwrapped. In the mummies which I had seen, the arms and hands are within the wrappings, and certain adornments of wood, shaped and painted to resemble arms and hands, lie outside the enwrapped body.

“But this hand was strange to see, for it was the real hand of her who lay enwrapped there; the arm projecting from the cerements being of flesh, seemingly made as like marble in the process of embalming. Arm and hand were of dusky white, being of the hue of ivory that hath lain long in air. The skin and the nails were complete and whole, as though the body had been placed for burial over night. I touched the hand and moved it, the arm being something flexible as a live arm; though stiff with long disuse, as are the arms of those faqueers which I have seen in the Indees. There was, too, an added wonder that on this ancient hand were no less than seven fingers, the same all being fine and long, and of great beauty. Sooth to say, it made me shudder and my flesh creep to touch that hand that had lain there undisturbed for so many thousands of years, and yet was like unto living flesh. Underneath the hand, as though guarded by it, lay a huge jewel of ruby; a great stone of wondrous bigness, for the ruby is in the main a small jewel. This one was of wondrous colour, being as of fine blood whereon the light shineth. But its wonder lay not in its size or colour, though these were, as I have said, of priceless rarity; but in that the light of it shone from seven stars, each of seven points, as clearly as though the stars were in reality there imprisoned. When that the hand was lifted, the sight of that wondrous stone lying there struck me with a shock almost to momentary paralysis. I stood gazing on it, as did those with me, as though it were that faded head of the Gorgon Medusa with the snakes in her hair, whose sight struck into stone those who beheld. So strong was the feeling that I wanted to hurry away from the place. So, too, those with me; therefore, taking this rare jewel, together with certain amulets of strangeness and richness being wrought of jewel-stones, I made haste to depart. I would have remained longer, and made further research in the wrappings of the mummy, but that I feared so to do. For it came to me all at once that I was in a desert place, with strange men who were with me because they were not over-scrupulous. That we were in a lone cavern of the dead, an hundred feet above the ground, where none could find me were ill done to me, nor would any ever seek. But in secret I determined that I would come again, though with more secure following. Moreover, was I tempted to seek further, as in examining the wrappings I saw many things of strange import in that wondrous tomb; including a casket of eccentric shape made of some strange stone, which methought might have contained other jewels, inasmuch as it had secure lodgment in the great sarcophagus itself. There was in the tomb also another coffer which, though of rare proportion and adornment, was more simply shaped. It was of ironstone of great thickness; but the cover was lightly cemented down with what seemed gum and Paris plaster, as though to insure that no air could penetrate. The Arabs with me so insisted in its opening, thinking that from its thickness much treasure was stored therein, that I consented thereto. But their hope was a false one, as it proved. Within, closely packed, stood four jars finely wrought and carved with various adornments. Of these one was the head of a man, another of a dog, another of a jackal, and another of a hawk. I had before known that such burial urns as these were used to contain the entrails and other organs of the mummied dead; but on opening these, for the fastening of wax, though complete, was thin, and yielded easily, we found that they held but oil. The Bedouins, spilling most of the oil in the process, groped with their hands in the jars lest treasure should have been there concealed. But their searching was of no avail; no treasure was there. I was warned of my danger by seeing in the eyes of the Arabs certain covetous glances. Whereon, in order to hasten their departure, I wrought upon those fears of superstition which even in these callous men were apparent. The chief of the Bedouins ascended from the Pit to give the signal to those above to raise us; and I, not caring to remain with the men whom I mistrusted, followed him immediately. The others did not come at once; from which I feared that they were rifling the tomb afresh on their own account. I refrained to speak of it, however, lest worse should befall. At last they came. One of them, who ascended first, in landing at the top of the cliff lost his foothold and fell below. He was instantly killed. The other followed, but in safety. The chief came next, and I came last. Before coming away I pulled into its place again, as well as I could, the slab of stone that covered the entrance to the tomb. I wished, if possible, to preserve it for my own examination should I come again.

“When we all stood on the hill above the cliff, the burning sun that was bright and full of glory was good to see after the darkness and strange mystery of the tomb. Even was I glad that the poor Arab who fell down the cliff and lay dead below, lay in the sunlight and not in that gloomy cavern. I would fain have gone with my companions to seek him and give him sepulture of some kind; but the Sheik made light of it, and sent two of his men to see to it whilst we went on our way.

“That night as we camped, one of the men only returned, saying that a lion of the desert had killed his companion after that they had buried the dead man in a deep sand without the valley, and had covered the spot where he lay with many great rocks, so that jackals or other preying beasts might not dig him up again as is their wont.

“Later, in the light of the fire round which the men sat or lay, I saw him exhibit to his fellows something white which they seemed to regard with special awe and reverence. So I drew near silently, and saw that it was none other than the white hand of the mummy which had lain protecting the Jewel in the great sarcophagus. I heard the Bedouin tell how he had found it on the body of him who had fallen from the cliff. There was no mistaking it, for there were the seven fingers which I had noted before. This man must have wrenched it off the dead body whilst his chief and I were otherwise engaged; and from the awe of the others I doubted not that he had hoped to use it as an Amulet, or charm. Whereas if powers it had, they were not for him who had taken it from the dead; since his death followed hard upon his theft. Already his Amulet had had an awesome baptism; for the wrist of the dead hand was stained with red as though it had been dipped in recent blood.

“That night I was in certain fear lest there should be some violence done to me; for if the poor dead hand was so valued as a charm, what must be the worth in such wise of the rare Jewel which it had guarded. Though only the chief knew of it, my doubt was perhaps even greater; for he could so order matters as to have me at his mercy when he would. I guarded myself, therefore, with wakefulness so well as I could, determined that at my earliest opportunity I should leave this party, and complete my journeying home, first to the Nile bank, and then down its course to Alexandria; with other guides who knew not what strange matters I had with me.

"At last there came over me a disposition of sleep, so potent that I felt it would be resistless. Fearing attack, or that being searched in my sleep the Bedouin might find the Star Jewel which he had seen me place with others in my dress, I took it out unobserved and held it in my hand. It seemed to give back the light of the flickering fire and the light of the stars — for there was no moon — with equal fidelity; and I could note that on its reverse it was graven deeply with certain signs such as I had seen in the tomb. As I sank into the unconsciousness of sleep, the graven Star Jewel was hidden in the hollow of my clenched hand.

"I waked out of sleep with the light of the morning sun on my face. I sat up and looked around me. The fire was out, and the camp was desolate; save for one figure which lay prone close to me. It was that of the Arab chief, who lay on his back, dead. His face was almost black; and his eyes were open, and staring horribly up at the sky, as though he saw there some dreadful vision. He had evidently been strangled; for on looking, I found on his throat the red marks where fingers had pressed. There seemed so many of these marks that I counted them. There were seven; and all parallel, except the thumb mark, as though made with one hand. This thrilled me as I thought of the mummy hand with the seven fingers.

"Even there, in the open desert, it seemed as if there could be enchantments!

"In my surprise, as I bent over him, I opened my right hand, which up to now I had held shut with the feeling, instinctive even in sleep, of keeping safe that which it held. As I did so, the Star Jewel held there fell out and struck the dead man on the mouth. Mirabile dictu there came forth at once from the dead mouth a great gush of blood, in which the red jewel was for the moment lost. I turned the dead man over to look for it, and found that he lay with his right hand bent under him as though he had fallen on it; and in it he held a great knife, keen of point and edge, such as Arabs carry at the belt. It may have been that he was about to murder me when vengeance came on him, whether from man or God, or the Gods of Old, I know not. Suffice it, that when I found my Ruby Jewel, which shone up as a living star from the mess of blood wherein it lay, I paused not, but fled from the place. I journeyed on alone through the hot desert, till, by God's grace, I came upon an Arab tribe camping by a well, who gave me salt. With them I rested till they had set me on my way.

"I know not what became of the mummy hand, or of those who had it. What strife, or suspicion, or disaster, or greed went with it I know not; but some such cause there must have been, since those who had it fled with it. It doubtless is used as a charm of potence by some desert tribe.

"At the earliest opportunity I made examination of the Star Ruby, as I wished to try to understand what was graven on it. The symbols — whose meaning, however, I could not understand — were as follows..."

Twice, whilst I had been reading this engrossing narrative, I had thought that I had seen across the page streaks of shade, which the weirdness of the subject had made to seem like the shadow of a hand. On the first of these occasions I found that the illusion came from the fringe of green silk around the lamp; but on the second I had looked up, and my eyes had lit on the mummy hand across the room on which the starlight was falling under the edge of the blind. It was of little wonder that I had connected it with such a narrative; for if my eyes told me truly, here, in this room with me, was the very hand of which the traveller Van Huyn had written. I looked over at the bed; and it comforted me to think that the Nurse still sat there, calm and wakeful. At such a time, with such surrounds, during such a narrative, it was well to have assurance of the presence of some living person.

I sat looking at the book on the table before me; and so many strange thoughts crowded on me that my mind began to whirl. It was almost as if the light on the white fingers in front of me was beginning to have some hypnotic effect. All at once, all thoughts seemed to stop; and for an instant the world and time stood still.

There lay a real hand across the book! What was there to so overcome me, as was the case? I knew the hand that I saw on the book — and loved it. Margaret Trelawny’s hand was a joy to me to see — to touch; and yet at that moment, coming after other marvellous things, it had a strangely moving effect on me. It was but momentary, however, and had passed even before her voice had reached me.

“What disturbs you? What are you staring at the book for? I thought for an instant that you must have been overcome again!” I jumped up.

“I was reading,” I said, “an old book from the library.” As I spoke

I closed it and put it under my arm. “I shall now put it back, as I understand that your Father wishes all things, especially books, kept in their proper places.” My words were intentionally misleading; for I did not wish her to know what I was reading, and thought it best not to wake her curiosity by leaving the book about. I went away, but not to the library; I left the book in my room where I could get it when I had had my sleep in the day. When I returned Nurse Kennedy was ready to go to bed; so Miss Trelawny watched with me in the room. I did not want any book whilst she was present. We sat close together and talked in a whisper whilst the moments flew by. It was with surprise that I noted the edge of the curtains changing from grey to yellow light. What we talked of had nothing to do with the sick man, except in so far that all which concerned his daughter must ultimately concern him. But it had nothing to say to Egypt, or mummies, or the dead, or caves, or Bedouin chiefs. I could well take note in the growing light that Margaret’s hand had not seven fingers, but five; for it lay in mine.

When Doctor Winchester arrived in the morning and had made his visit to his patient, he came to see me as I sat in the dining-room having a little meal — breakfast or supper, I hardly knew which it was — before I went to lie down. Mr. Corbeck came in at the same time; and we resumed out conversation where we had left it the night before. I told Mr. Corbeck that I had read the chapter about the finding of the tomb, and that I thought Doctor Winchester should read it, too. The latter said that, if he might, he would take it with him; he had that morning to make a railway journey to Ipswich, and would read it on the train. He said he would bring it back with him when he came again in the evening. I went up to my room to bring it down; but I could not find it anywhere. I had a distinct recollection of having left it on the little table beside my bed, when I had come up after Miss Trelawny's going on duty into the sick-room. It was very strange; for the book was not of a kind that any of the servants would be likely to take. I had to come back and explain to the others that I could not find it.

When Doctor Winchester had gone, Mr. Corbeck, who seemed to know the Dutchman's work by heart, talked the whole matter over with me. I told him that I was interrupted by a change of nurses, just as I had come to the description of the ring. He smiled as he said:

"So far as that is concerned, you need not be disappointed. Not in Van Huyn's time, nor for nearly two centuries later, could the meaning of that engraving have been understood. It was only when the work was taken up and followed by Young and Champollion, by Birch and Lepsius and Rosellini and Salvolini, by Mariette Bey and by Wallis Budge and Flinders Petrie and the other scholars of their times that great results ensued, and that the true meaning of hieroglyphic was known.

"Later, I shall explain to you, if Mr. Trelawny does not explain it himself, or if he does not forbid me to, what it means in that particular place. I think it will be better for you to know what followed Van Huyn's narrative; for with the description of the stone, and the account of his bringing it to Holland at the termination of his travels, the episode ends. Ends so far as his book is concerned. The chief thing about the book is that it sets others thinking — and acting. Amongst them were Mr. Trelawny and myself. Mr. Trelawny is a good linguist of the Orient, but he does not know Northern tongues. As for me I have a faculty for learning languages; and when I was pursuing my studies in Leyden I learned Dutch so that I might more easily make references in the library there. Thus it was, that at the very time when Mr. Trelawny, who, in making his great collection of works on Egypt, had, through a booksellers' catalogue, acquired this volume with the manuscript translation, was studying it, I was reading another copy, in original Dutch, in Leyden. We were both struck by the description of the lonely tomb in the rock; cut so high up as to be inaccessible to ordinary seekers: with all means of reaching it carefully obliterated; and yet with such an elaborate ornamentation of the smoothed surface of the cliff as Van Huyn has described. It also struck us both as an odd thing — for in the years between Van Huyn's time and our own the general knowledge of Egyptian curios and records has increased marvellously — that in the case of such a tomb, made in such a place, and which must have cost an immense sum of money, there was no seeming record or effigy to point out who lay within. Moreover, the very name of the place, 'the Valley of the Sorcerer', had, in a prosaic age, attractions of its own. When we met, which we did through his seeking the assistance of other Egyptologists in his work, we talked over this as we did over many other things; and we determined to make search for the mysterious valley. Whilst we were waiting to start on the travel, for many things were required which Mr. Trelawny undertook to see to himself, I went to Holland to try if I could by any traces verify Van Huyn's narrative. I went straight to Hoorn, and set patiently to work to find the house of the traveller and his descendants, if any. I need not trouble you with details of my seeking — and finding. Hoorn is a place that has not changed much since Van Huyn's time, except that it has lost the place which it held amongst commercial cities. Its externals are such as they had been then; in such a sleepy old place a century or two does not count for much. I found the house, and discovered that none of the descendants were alive. I searched records; but only to one end — death and extinction. Then I set me to work to find what had become of his treasures; for that such a traveller must have had great treasures was apparent. I traced a good many to museums in Leyden, Utrecht, and Amsterdam; and some few to the private houses of rich collectors. At last, in the shop of an old watchmaker and jeweller at Hoorn, I found what he considered his chiefest treasure; a great ruby, carven like a scarab, with seven stars, and engraven with hieroglyphics. The old man did not know hieroglyphic character, and in his old-world, sleepy life, the philological discoveries of recent years had not reached him. He did not know anything of Van Huyn, except that such a person had been, and that his name was, during two centuries, venerated in the town as a great traveller. He valued the jewel as only a rare stone, spoiled in part by the cutting; and though he was at first loth to part with such an unique gem, he became amenable ultimately to commercial reason. I had a full purse, since I bought for Mr. Trelawny, who is, as I suppose you know, immensely wealthy. I was shortly on my way back to London, with the Star Ruby safe in my pocket-book; and in my heart a joy and exultation which knew no bounds.

“For here we were with proof of Van Huyn’s wonderful story. The jewel was put in security in Mr. Trelawny’s great safe; and we started out on our journey of exploration in full hope.

“Mr. Trelawny was, at the last, loth to leave his young wife whom he dearly loved; but she, who loved him equally, knew his longing to prosecute the search. So keeping to herself, as all good women do, all her anxieties — which in her case were special — she bade him follow out his bent.”

Chapter XI

A Queen's Tomb

"Mr. Trelawny's hope was at least as great as my own. He is not so volatile a man as I am, prone to ups and downs of hope and despair; but he has a fixed purpose which crystallises hope into belief. At times I had feared that there might have been two such stones, or that the adventures of Van Huyn were traveller's fictions, based on some ordinary acquisition of the curio in Alexandria or Cairo, or London or Amsterdam. But Mr. Trelawny never faltered in his belief. We had many things to distract our minds from belief or disbelief. This was soon after Arabi Pasha, and Egypt was so safe place for travellers, especially if they were English. But Mr. Trelawny is a fearless man; and I almost come to think at times that I am not a coward myself. We got together a band of Arabs whom one or other of us had known in former trips to the desert, and whom we could trust; that is, we did not distrust them as much as others. We were numerous enough to protect ourselves from chance marauding bands, and we took with us large impedimenta. We had secured the consent and passive co-operation of the officials still friendly to Britain; in the acquiring of which consent I need hardly say that Mr. Trelawny's riches were of chief importance. We found our way in dhahabiyehs to Aswan; whence, having got some Arabs from the Sheik and having given our usual backsheesh, we set out on our journey through the desert.

"Well, after much wandering and trying every winding in the interminable jumble of hills, we came at last at nightfall on just such a valley as Van Huyn had described. A valley with high, steep cliffs; narrowing in the centre, and widening out to the eastern and western ends. At daylight we were opposite the cliff and could easily note the opening high up in the rock, and the hieroglyphic figures which were evidently intended originally to conceal it.

"But the signs which had baffled Van Huyn and those of his time — and later, were no secrets to us. The host of scholars who have given their brains and their lives to this work, had wrested open the mysterious prison-house of Egyptian language. On the hewn face of the rocky cliff we, who had learned the secrets, could read what the Theban priesthood had had there inscribed nearly fifty centuries before.

"For that the external inscription was the work of the priesthood — and a hostile priesthood at that — there could be no living doubt. The inscription on the rock, written in hieroglyphic, ran thus:

"'Hither the Gods come not at any summons. The "Nameless One" has insulted them and is for ever alone. Go not nigh, lest their vengeance wither you away!'

"The warning must have been a terribly potent one at the time it was written and for thousands of years afterwards; even when the language in which it was given had become a dead mystery to the people of the land. The tradition of such a terror lasts longer than its cause. Even in the symbols used there was an added significance of alliteration. 'For ever' is given in the hieroglyphics as 'millions of years'. This symbol was repeated nine times, in three groups of three; and after each group a symbol of the Upper World, the Under World, and the Sky. So that for this Lonely One there could be, through the vengeance of all the Gods, resurrection in neither the World of Sunlight, in the World of the Dead, or for the soul in the region of the Gods.

"Neither Mr. Trelawny nor I dared to tell any of our people what the writing meant. For though they did not believe in the religion whence the curse came, or in the Gods whose vengeance was threatened, yet they were so superstitious that they would probably, had they known of it, have thrown up the whole task and run away.

"Their ignorance, however, and our discretion preserved us. We made an encampment close at hand, but behind a jutting rock a little further along the valley, so that they might not have the inscription always before them. For even that traditional name of the place: 'The Valley of the Sorcerer', had a fear for them; and for us through them. With the timber which we had brought, we made a ladder up the face of the rock. We hung a pulley on a beam fixed to project from the top of the cliff. We found the great slab of rock, which formed the door, placed clumsily in its place and secured by a few stones. Its own weight kept it in safe position. In order to enter, we had to push it in; and we passed over it. We found the great coil of chain which Van Huyn had described fastened into the rock. There were, however, abundant evidences amid the wreckage of the great stone door, which had revolved on iron hinges at top and bottom, that ample provision had been originally made for closing and fastening it from within.

"Mr. Trelawny and I went alone into the tomb. We had brought plenty of lights with us; and we fixed them as we went along. We wished to get a complete survey at first, and then make examination of all in detail. As we went on, we were filled with ever-increasing wonder and delight. The tomb was one of the most magnificent and beautiful which either of us had ever seen. From the elaborate nature of the sculpture and painting, and the perfection of the workmanship, it was evident that the tomb was prepared during the lifetime of her for whose resting-place it was intended. The drawing of the hieroglyphic pictures was fine, and the colouring superb; and in that high cavern, far away from even the damp of the Nile-flood, all was as fresh as when the artists had laid down their palettes. There was one thing which we could not avoid seeing. That although the cutting on the outside rock was the work of the priesthood, the smoothing of the cliff face was probably a part of the tomb-builder’s original design. The symbolism of the painting and cutting within all gave the same idea. The outer cavern, partly natural and partly hewn, was regarded architecturally as only an ante-chamber. At the end of it, so that it would face the east, was a pillared portico, hewn out of the solid rock. The pillars were massive and were seven-sided, a thing which we had not come across in any other tomb. Sculptured on the architrave was the Boat of the Moon, containing Hathor, cow-headed and bearing the disk and plumes, and the dog-headed Hapi, the God of the North. It was steered by Harpocrates towards the north, represented by the Pole Star surrounded by Draco and Ursa Major. In the latter the stars that form what we call the ‘Plough’ were cut larger than any of the other stars; and were filled with gold so that, in the light of torches, they seemed to flame with a special significance. Passing within the portico, we found two of the architectural features of a rock tomb, the Chamber, or Chapel, and the Pit, all complete as Van Huyn had noticed, though in his day the names given to these parts by the Egyptians of old were unknown.

“The Stele, or record, which had its place low down on the western wall, was so remarkable that we examined it minutely, even before going on our way to find the mummy which was the object of our search. This Stele was a great slab of lapis lazuli, cut all over with hieroglyphic figures of small size and of much beauty. The cutting was filled in with some cement of exceeding fineness, and of the colour of pure vermilion. The inscription began:

"'Tera, Queen of the Egypts, daughter of Antef, Monarch of the North and the South.' 'Daughter of the Sun,' 'Queen of the Diadems'.

"It then set out, in full record, the history of her life and reign.

"The signs of sovereignty were given with a truly feminine profusion of adornment. The united Crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt were, in especial, cut with exquisite precision. It was new to us both to find the Hejet and the Desher — the White and the Red crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt — on the Stele of a queen; for it was a rule, without exception in the records, that in ancient Egypt either crown was worn only by a king; though they are to be found on goddesses. Later on we found an explanation, of which I shall say more presently.

"Such an inscription was in itself a matter so startling as to arrest attention from anyone anywhere at any time; but you can have no conception of the effect which it had upon us. Though our eyes were not the first which had seen it, they were the first which could see it with understanding since first the slab of rock was fixed in the cliff opening nearly five thousand years before. To us was given to read this message from the dead. This message of one who had warred against the Gods of Old, and claimed to have controlled them at a time when the hierarchy professed to be the only means of exciting their fears or gaining their good will.

"The walls of the upper chamber of the Pit and the sarcophagus Chamber were profusely inscribed; all the inscriptions, except that on the Stele, being coloured with bluish-green pigment. The effect when seen sideways as the eye caught the green facets, was that of an old, discoloured Indian turquoise.

"We descended the Pit by the aid of the tackle we had brought with us. Trelawny went first. It was a deep pit, more than seventy feet; but it had never been filled up. The passage at the bottom sloped up to the sarcophagus Chamber, and was longer than is usually found. It had not been walled up.

"Within, we found a great sarcophagus of yellow stone. But that I need not describe; you have seen it in Mr. Trelawny's chamber. The cover of it lay on the ground; it had not been cemented, and was just as Van Huyn had described it. Needless to say, we were excited as we looked within. There must, however, be one sense of disappointment. I could not help feeling how different must have been the sight which met the Dutch traveller's eyes when he looked within and found that white hand lying lifelike above the shrouding mummy cloths. It is true that a part of the arm was there, white and ivory like.

"But there was a thrill to us which came not to Van Huyn!

"The end of the wrist was covered with dried blood! It was as though the body had bled after death! The jagged ends of the broken wrist were rough with the clotted blood; through this the white bone, sticking out, looked like the matrix of opal. The blood had streamed down and stained the brown wrappings as with rust. Here, then, was full confirmation of the narrative. With such evidence of the narrator's truth before us, we could not doubt the other matters which he had told, such as the blood on the mummy hand, or marks of the seven fingers on the throat of the strangled Sheik.

"I shall not trouble you with details of all we saw, or how we learned all we knew. Part of it was from knowledge common to scholars; part we read on the Stele in the tomb, and in the sculptures and hieroglyphic paintings on the walls.

"Queen Tera was of the Eleventh, or Theban Dynasty of Egyptian

Kings which held sway between the twenty-ninth and twenty-fifth centuries before Christ. She succeeded as the only child of her father, Antef. She must have been a girl of extraordinary character as well as ability, for she was but a young girl when her father died. Her youth and sex encouraged the ambitious priesthood, which had then achieved immense power. By their wealth and numbers and learning they dominated all Egypt, more especially the Upper portion. They were then secretly ready to make an effort for the achievement of their bold and long-considered design, that of transferring the governing power from a Kingship to a Hierarchy. But King Antef had suspected some such movement, and had taken the precaution of securing to his daughter the allegiance of the army. He had also had her taught statecraft, and had even made her learned in the lore of the very priests themselves. He had used those of one cult against the other; each being hopeful of some present gain on its own part by the influence of the King, or of some ultimate gain from its own influence over his daughter. Thus, the Princess had been brought up amongst scribes, and was herself no mean artist. Many of these things were told on the walls in pictures or in hieroglyphic writing of great beauty; and we came to the conclusion that not a few of them had been done by the Princess herself. It was not without cause that she was inscribed on the Stele as ‘Protector of the Arts’.

“But the King had gone to further lengths, and had had his daughter taught magic, by which she had power over Sleep and Will. This was real magic— “black” magic; not the magic of the temples, which, I may explain, was of the harmless or “white” order, and was intended to impress rather than to effect. She had been an apt pupil; and had gone further than her teachers. Her power and her resources had given her great opportunities, of which she had availed herself to the full. She had won secrets from nature in strange ways; and had even gone to the length of going down into the tomb herself, having been swathed and coffined and left as dead for a whole month. The priests had tried to make out that the real Princess Tera had died in the experiment, and that another girl had been substituted; but she had conclusively proved their error. All this was told in pictures of great merit. It was probably in her time that the impulse was given in the restoring the artistic greatness of the Fourth Dynasty which had found its perfection in the days of Chufu.

"In the Chamber of the sarcophagus were pictures and writings to show that she had achieved victory over Sleep. Indeed, there was everywhere a symbolism, wonderful even in a land and an age of symbolism. Prominence was given to the fact that she, though a Queen, claimed all the privileges of kingship and masculinity. In one place she was pictured in man's dress, and wearing the White and Red Crowns. In the following picture she was in female dress, but still wearing the Crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt, while the discarded male raiment lay at her feet. In every picture where hope, or aim, of resurrection was expressed there was the added symbol of the North; and in many places — always in representations of important events, past, present, or future — was a grouping of the stars of the Plough. She evidently regarded this constellation as in some way peculiarly associated with herself.

"Perhaps the most remarkable statement in the records, both on the Stele and in the mural writings, was that Queen Tera had power to compel the Gods. This, by the way, was not an isolated belief in Egyptian history; but was different in its cause. She had engraved on a ruby, carved like a scarab, and having seven stars of seven points, Master Words to compel all the Gods, both of the Upper and the

Under Worlds.

“In the statement it was plainly set forth that the hatred of the priests was, she knew, stored up for her, and that they would after her death try to suppress her name. This was a terrible revenge, I may tell you, in Egyptian mythology; for without a name no one can after death be introduced to the Gods, or have prayers said for him. Therefore, she had intended her resurrection to be after a long time and in a more northern land, under the constellation whose seven stars had ruled her birth. To this end, her hand was to be in the air—‘unwrapped’ — and in it the Jewel of Seven Stars, so that wherever there was air she might move even as her Ka could move! This, after thinking it over, Mr. Trelawny and I agreed meant that her body could become astral at command, and so move, particle by particle, and become whole again when and where required. Then there was a piece of writing in which allusion was made to a chest or casket in which were contained all the Gods, and Will, and Sleep, the two latter being personified by symbols. The box was mentioned as with seven sides. It was not much of a surprise to us when, underneath the feet of the mummy, we found the seven-sided casket, which you have also seen in Mr. Trelawny’s room. On the underneath part of the wrapping — linen of the left foot was painted, in the same vermilion colour as that used in the Stele, the hieroglyphic symbol for much water, and underneath the right foot the symbol of the earth. We made out the symbolism to be that her body, immortal and transferable at will, ruled both the land and water, air and fire — the latter being exemplified by the light of the Jewel Stone, and further by the flint and iron which lay outside the mummy wrappings.

“As we lifted the casket from the sarcophagus, we noticed on its sides the strange protuberances which you have already seen; but we were unable at the time to account for them. There were a few amulets in the sarcophagus, but none of any special worth or significance. We took it that if there were such, they were within the wrappings; or more probably in the strange casket underneath the mummy’s feet. This, however, we could not open. There were signs of there being a cover; certainly the upper portion and the lower were each in one piece. The fine line, a little way from the top, appeared to be where the cover was fixed; but it was made with such exquisite fineness and finish that the joining could hardly be seen. Certainly the top could not be moved. We took it, that it was in some way fastened from within. I tell you all this in order that you may understand things with which you may be in contact later. You must suspend your judgment entirely. Such strange things have happened regarding this mummy and all around it, that there is a necessity for new belief somewhere. It is absolutely impossible to reconcile certain things which have happened with the ordinary currents of life or knowledge.

“We stayed around the Valley of the Sorcerer, till we had copied roughly all the drawings and writings on the walls, ceiling and floor. We took with us the Stele of lapis lazuli, whose graven record was coloured with vermilion pigment. We took the sarcophagus and the mummy; the stone chest with the alabaster jars; the tables of bloodstone and alabaster and onyx and carnelian; and the ivory pillow whose arch rested on ‘buckles’, round each of which was twisted an uraeus wrought in gold. We took all the articles which lay in the Chapel, and the Mummy Pit; the wooden boats with crews and the ushaptiu figures, and the symbolic amulets.

“When coming away we took down the ladders, and at a distance buried them in the sand under a cliff, which we noted so that if necessary we might find them again. Then with our heavy baggage, we set out on our laborious journey back to the Nile. It was no easy task, I tell you, to bring the case with that great sarcophagus over the desert. We had a rough cart and sufficient men to draw it; but the progress seemed terribly slow, for we were anxious to get our treasures into a place of safety. The night was an anxious time with us, for we feared attack from some marauding band. But more still we feared some of those with us. They were, after all, but predatory, unscrupulous men; and we had with us a considerable bulk of precious things. They, or at least the dangerous ones amongst them, did not know why it was so precious; they took it for granted that it was material treasure of some kind that we carried. We had taken the mummy from the sarcophagus, and packed it for safety of travel in a separate case. During the first night two attempts were made to steal things from the cart; and two men were found dead in the morning.

"On the second night there came on a violent storm, one of those terrible simooms of the desert which makes one feel his helplessness. We were overwhelmed with drifting sand. Some of our Bedouins had fled before the storm, hoping to find shelter; the rest of us, wrapped in our bournous, endured with what patience we could. In the morning, when the storm had passed, we recovered from under the piles of sand what we could of our impedimenta. We found the case in which the mummy had been packed all broken, but the mummy itself could nowhere be found. We searched everywhere around, and dug up the sand which had piled around us; but in vain. We did not know what to do, for Trelawny had his heart set on taking home that mummy. We waited a whole day in hopes that the Bedouins, who had fled, would return; we had a blind hope that they might have in some way removed the mummy from the cart, and would restore it.

That night, just before dawn, Mr. Trelawny woke me up and whispered in my ear:

"'We must go back to the tomb in the Valley of the Sorcerer. Show no hesitation in the morning when I give the orders! If you ask any questions as to where we are going it will create suspicion, and will defeat our purpose."

"'All right!" I answered. "But why shall we go there?' His answer seemed to thrill through me as though it had struck some chord ready tuned within:

"'We shall find the mummy there! I am sure of it!' Then anticipating doubt or argument he added:

"'Wait, and you shall see!' and he sank back into his blanket again.

"The Arabs were surprised when we retraced our steps; and some of them were not satisfied. There was a good deal of friction, and there were several desertions; so that it was with a diminished following that we took our way eastward again. At first the Sheik did not manifest any curiosity as to our definite destination; but when it became apparent that we were again making for the Valley of the Sorcerer, he too showed concern. This grew as we drew near; till finally at the entrance of the valley he halted and refused to go further. He said he would await our return if we chose to go on alone. That he would wait three days; but if by that time we had not returned he would leave. No offer of money would tempt him to depart from this resolution. The only concession he would make was that he would find the ladders and bring them near the cliff. This he did; and then, with the rest of the troop, he went back to wait at the entrance of the valley.

"Mr. Trelawny and I took ropes and torches, and again ascended to the tomb. It was evident that someone had been there in our absence, for the stone slab which protected the entrance to the tomb was lying flat inside, and a rope was dangling from the cliff summit. Within, there was another rope hanging into the shaft of the Mummy Pit. We looked at each other; but neither said a word. We fixed our own rope, and as arranged Trelawny descended first, I following at once. It was not till we stood together at the foot of the shaft that the thought flashed across me that we might be in some sort of a trap; that someone might descend the rope from the cliff, and by cutting the rope by which we had lowered ourselves into the Pit, bury us there alive. The thought was horrifying; but it was too late to do anything. I remained silent. We both had torches, so that there was ample light as we passed through the passage and entered the Chamber where the sarcophagus had stood. The first thing noticeable was the emptiness of the place. Despite all its magnificent adornment, the tomb was made a desolation by the absence of the great sarcophagus, to hold which it was hewn in the rock; of the chest with the alabaster jars; of the tables which had held the implements and food for the use of the dead, and the ushaptiu figures.

“It was made more infinitely desolate still by the shrouded figure of the mummy of Queen Tera which lay on the floor where the great sarcophagus had stood! Beside it lay, in the strange contorted attitudes of violent death, three of the Arabs who had deserted from our party. Their faces were black, and their hands and necks were smeared with blood which had burst from mouth and nose and eyes.

“On the throat of each were the marks, now blackening, of a hand of seven fingers.

“Trelawny and I drew close, and clutched each other in awe and fear as we looked.

“For, most wonderful of all, across the breast of the mummied Queen lay a hand of seven fingers, ivory white, the wrist only showing a scar like a jagged red line, from which seemed to depend drops of blood.”

Chapter XII

The Magic Coffer

"When we recovered our amazement, which seemed to last unduly long, we did not lose any time carrying the mummy through the passage, and hoisting it up the Pit shaft. I went first, to receive it at the top. As I looked down, I saw Mr. Trelawny lift the severed hand and put it in his breast, manifestly to save it from being injured or lost. We left the dead Arabs where they lay. With our ropes we lowered our precious burden to the ground; and then took it to the entrance of the valley where our escort was to wait. To our astonishment we found them on the move. When we remonstrated with the Sheik, he answered that he had fulfilled his contract to the letter; he had waited the three days as arranged. I thought that he was lying to cover up his base intention of deserting us; and I found when we compared notes that Trelawny had the same suspicion. It was not till we arrived at Cairo that we found he was correct. It was the 3rd of November 1884 when we entered the Mummy Pit for the second time; we had reason to remember the date.

"We had lost three whole days of our reckoning — out of our lives — whilst we had stood wondering in that chamber of the dead. Was it strange, then, that we had a superstitious feeling with regard to the dead Queen Tera and all belonging to her? Is it any wonder that it rests with us now, with a bewildering sense of some power outside ourselves or our comprehension? Will it be any wonder if it go down to the grave with us at the appointed time? If, indeed, there be any graves for us who have robbed the dead!" He was silent for quite a minute before he went on:

"We got to Cairo all right, and from there to Alexandria, where we were to take ship by the Messagerie service to Marseilles, and go thence by express to London. But

'The best-laid schemes o' mice and men Gang aft agley.'

At Alexandria, Trelawny found waiting a cable stating that Mrs. Trelawny had died in giving birth to a daughter.

"Her stricken husband hurried off at once by the Orient Express; and I had to bring the treasure alone to the desolate house. I got to London all safe; there seemed to be some special good fortune to our journey. When I got to this house, the funeral had long been over. The child had been put out to nurse, and Mr. Trelawny had so far recovered from the shock of his loss that he had set himself to take up again the broken threads of his life and his work. That he had had a shock, and a bad one, was apparent. The sudden grey in his black hair was proof enough in itself; but in addition, the strong cast of his features had become set and stern. Since he received that cable in the shipping office at Alexandria I have never seen a happy smile on his face.

"Work is the best thing in such a case; and to his work he devoted himself heart and soul. The strange tragedy of his loss and gain — for the child was born after the mother's death — took place during the time that we stood in that trance in the Mummy Pit of Queen Tera. It seemed to have become in some way associated with his Egyptian studies, and more especially with the mysteries connected with the Queen. He told me very little about his daughter; but that two forces struggled in his mind regarding her was apparent. I could see that he loved, almost idolised her. Yet he could never forget that her birth had cost her mother's life. Also, there was something whose existence seemed to wring his father's heart, though he would never tell me what it was. Again, he once said in a moment of relaxation of his purpose of silence:

"'She is unlike her mother; but in both feature and colour she has a marvellous resemblance to the pictures of Queen Tera.'

"He said that he had sent her away to people who would care for her as he could not; and that till she became a woman she should have all the simple pleasures that a young girl might have, and that were best for her. I would often have talked with him about her; but he would never say much. Once he said to me: 'There are reasons why I should not speak more than is necessary. Some day you will know — and understand!' I respected his reticence; and beyond asking after her on my return after a journey, I have never spoken of her again. I had never seen her till I did so in your presence.

"Well, when the treasures which we had — ah! — taken from the tomb had been brought here, Mr. Trelawny arranged their disposition himself. The mummy, all except the severed hand, he placed in the great ironstone sarcophagus in the hall. This was wrought for the Theban High Priest Uni, and is, as you may have remarked, all inscribed with wonderful invocations to the old Gods of Egypt. The rest of the things from the tomb he disposed about his own room, as you have seen. Amongst them he placed, for special reasons of his own, the mummy hand. I think he regards this as the most sacred of his possessions, with perhaps one exception. That is the carven ruby which he calls the 'Jewel of Seven Stars', which he keeps in that great safe which is locked and guarded by various devices, as you know.

"I dare say you find this tedious; but I have had to explain it, so that you should understand all up to the present. It was a long time after my return with the mummy of Queen Tera when Mr. Trelawny re-opened the subject with me. He had been several times to Egypt, sometimes with me and sometimes alone; and I had been several trips, on my own account or for him. But in all that time, nearly sixteen years, he never mentioned the subject, unless when some pressing occasion suggested, if it did not necessitate, a reference.

"One morning early he sent for me in a hurry; I was then studying in the British Museum, and had rooms in Hart Street. When I came, he was all on fire with excitement. I had not seen him in such a glow since before the news of his wife's death. He took me at once into his room. The window blinds were down and the shutters closed; not a ray of daylight came in. The ordinary lights in the room were not lit, but there were a lot of powerful electric lamps, fifty candle-power at least, arranged on one side of the room. The little bloodstone table on which the heptagonal coffer stands was drawn to the centre of the room. The coffer looked exquisite in the glare of light which shone on it. It actually seemed to glow as if lit in some way from within.

"'What do you think of it?' he asked.

"'It is like a jewel,' I answered. 'You may well call it the 'sorcerer's Magic Coffer', if it often looks like that. It almost seems to be alive.'

"'Do you know why it seems so?'

"'From the glare of the light, I suppose?'

"'Light of course,' he answered, 'but it is rather the disposition of light.' As he spoke he turned up the ordinary lights of the room and switched off the special ones. The effect on the stone box was surprising; in a second it lost all its glowing effect. It was still a very beautiful stone, as always; but it was stone and no more.

"'Do you notice anything about the arrangement of the lamps?' he asked.

“‘No!’

“‘They were in the shape of the stars in the Plough, as the stars are in the ruby!’ The statement came to me with a certain sense of conviction. I do not know why, except that there had been so many mysterious associations with the mummy and all belonging to it that any new one seemed enlightening. I listened as Trelawny went on to explain:

“‘For sixteen years I have never ceased to think of that adventure, or to try to find a clue to the mysteries which came before us; but never until last night did I seem to find a solution. I think I must have dreamed of it, for I woke all on fire about it. I jumped out of bed with a determination of doing something, before I quite knew what it was that I wished to do. Then, all at once, the purpose was clear before me. There were allusions in the writing on the walls of the tomb to the seven stars of the Great Bear that go to make up the Plough; and the North was again and again emphasised. The same symbols were repeated with regard to the “Magic Box”, as we called it. We had already noticed those peculiar translucent spaces in the stone of the box. You remember the hieroglyphic writing had told that the jewel came from the heart of an aerolite, and that the coffer was cut from it also. It might be, I thought, that the light of the seven stars, shining in the right direction, might have some effect on the box, or something within it. I raised the blind and looked out. The Plough was high in the heavens, and both its stars and the Pole Star were straight opposite the window. I pulled the table with the coffer out into the light, and shifted it until the translucent patches were in the direction of the stars. Instantly the box began to glow, as you saw it under the lamps, though but slightly. I waited and waited; but the sky clouded over, and the light died away. So I got wires and lamps — you know how often I use them in experiments — and tried the effect of electric light. It took me some time to get the lamps properly placed, so that they would correspond to the parts of the stone, but the moment I got them right the whole thing began to glow as you have seen it.

"'I could get no further, however. There was evidently something wanting. All at once it came to me that if light could have some effect there should be in the tomb some means of producing light, for there could not be starlight in the Mummy Pit in the cavern. Then the whole thing seemed to become clear. On the bloodstone table, which has a hollow carved in its top, into which the bottom of the coffer fits, I laid the Magic Coffer; and I at once saw that the odd protuberances so carefully wrought in the substance of the stone corresponded in a way to the stars in the constellation. These, then, were to hold lights.

"'Eureka!' I cried. 'All we want now is the lamps.'" I tried placing the electric lights on, or close to, the protuberances. But the glow never came to the stone. So the conviction grew on me that there were special lamps made for the purpose. If we could find them, a step on the road to solving the mystery should be gained.

"'But what about the lamps?' I asked. 'Where are they? When are we to discover them? How are we to know them if we do find them? What—"

"He stopped me at once:

"'One thing at a time!' he said quietly. 'Your first question contains all the rest. Where are these lamps? I shall tell you: In the tomb!'

"'In the tomb!' I repeated in surprise. 'Why you and I searched the place ourselves from end to end; and there was not a sign of a lamp. Not a sign of anything remaining when we came away the first time; or on the second, except the bodies of the Arabs.’

“Whilst I was speaking, he had uncoiled some large sheets of paper which he had brought in his hand from his own room. These he spread out on the great table, keeping their edges down with books and weights. I knew them at a glance; they were the careful copies which he had made of our first transcripts from the writing in the tomb. When he had all ready, he turned to me and said slowly:

“‘Do you remember wondering, when we examined the tomb, at the lack of one thing which is usually found in such a tomb?’

“‘Yes! There was no serdab.’

“The serdab, I may perhaps explain,” said Mr. Corbeck to me, “is a sort of niche built or hewn in the wall of a tomb. Those which have as yet been examined bear no inscriptions, and contain only effigies of the dead for whom the tomb was made.” Then he went on with his narrative:

“Trelawny, when he saw that I had caught his meaning, went on speaking with something of his old enthusiasm:

“‘I have come to the conclusion that there must be a serdab — a secret one. We were dull not to have thought of it before. We might have known that the maker of such a tomb — a woman, who had shown in other ways such a sense of beauty and completeness, and who had finished every detail with a feminine richness of elaboration — would not have neglected such an architectural feature. Even if it had not its own special significance in ritual, she would have had it as an adornment. Others had had it, and she liked her own work to be complete. Depend upon it, there was — there is — a serdab; and that in it, when it is discovered, we shall find the lamps. Of course, had we known then what we now know or at all events surmise, that there were lamps, we might have suspected some hidden spot, some cachet. I am going to ask you to go out to Egypt again; to seek the tomb; to find the serdab; and to bring back the lamps!'"

"'And if I find there is no serdab; or if discovering it I find no lamps in it, what then?' He smiled grimly with that saturnine smile of his, so rarely seen for years past, as he spoke slowly:

"'Then you will have to hustle till you find them!'

"'Good!' I said. He pointed to one of the sheets.

"'Here are the transcripts from the Chapel at the south and the east. I have been looking over the writings again; and I find that in seven places round this corner are the symbols of the constellation which we call the Plough, which Queen Tera held to rule her birth and her destiny. I have examined them carefully, and I notice that they are all representations of the grouping of the stars, as the constellation appears in different parts of the heavens. They are all astronomically correct; and as in the real sky the Pointers indicate the Pole Star, so these all point to one spot in the wall where usually the serdab is to be found!'

"'Bravo!' I shouted, for such a piece of reasoning demanded applause. He seemed pleased as he went on:

"'When you are in the tomb, examine this spot. There is probably some spring or mechanical contrivance for opening the receptacle. What it may be, there is no use guessing. You will know what best to do, when you are on the spot.'

"I started the next week for Egypt; and never rested till I stood again in the tomb. I had found some of our old following; and was fairly well provided with help. The country was now in a condition very different to that in which it had been sixteen years before; there was no need for troops or armed men.

"I climbed the rock face alone. There was no difficulty, for in that fine climate the woodwork of the ladder was still dependable. It was easy to see that in the years that had elapsed there had been other visitors to the tomb; and my heart sank within me when I thought that some of them might by chance have come across the secret place. It would be a bitter discovery indeed to find that they had forestalled me; and that my journey had been in vain.

“The bitterness was realised when I lit my torches, and passed between the seven-sided columns to the Chapel of the tomb.

“There, in the very spot where I had expected to find it, was the opening of a serdab. And the serdab was empty.

“But the Chapel was not empty; for the dried-up body of a man in Arab dress lay close under the opening, as though he had been stricken down. I examined all round the walls to see if Trelawny’s surmise was correct; and I found that in all the positions of the stars as given, the Pointers of the Plough indicated a spot to the left hand, or south side, of the opening of the serdab, where was a single star in gold.

“I pressed this, and it gave way. The stone which had marked the front of the serdab, and which lay back against the wall within, moved slightly. On further examining the other side of the opening, I found a similar spot, indicated by other representations of the constellation; but this was itself a figure of the seven stars, and each was wrought in burnished gold. I pressed each star in turn; but without result. Then it struck me that if the opening spring was on the left, this on the right might have been intended for the simultaneous pressure of all the stars by one hand of seven fingers. By using both my hands, I managed to effect this.

“With a loud click, a metal figure seemed to dart from close to the opening of the serdab; the stone slowly swung back to its place, and shut with a click. The glimpse which I had of the descending figure appalled me for the moment. It was like that grim guardian which, according to the Arabian historian Ibn Abd Alhokin, the builder of the Pyramids, King Saurid Ibn Salhouk placed in the Western Pyramid to defend its treasure: ‘A marble figure, upright, with lance in hand; with on his head a serpent wreathed. When any approached, the serpent would bite him on one side, and twining about his throat and killing him, would return again to his place.’

“I knew well that such a figure was not wrought to pleasantry; and that to brave it was no child’s play. The dead Arab at my feet was proof of what could be done! So I examined again along the wall; and found here and there chippings as if someone had been tapping with a heavy hammer. This then had been what happened: The grave-robber, more expert at his work than we had been, and suspecting the presence of a hidden serdab, had made essay to find it. He had struck the spring by chance; had released the avenging ‘Treasurer’, as the Arabian writer designated him. The issue spoke for itself. I got a piece of wood, and, standing at a safe distance, pressed with the end of it upon the star.

“Instantly the stone flew back. The hidden figure within darted forward and thrust out its lance. Then it rose up and disappeared. I thought I might now safely press on the seven stars; and did so. Again the stone rolled back; and the ‘Treasurer’ flashed by to his hidden lair.

“I repeated both experiments several times; with always the same result. I should have liked to examine the mechanism of that figure of such malignant mobility; but it was not possible without such tools as could not easily be had. It might be necessary to cut into a whole section of the rock. Some day I hope to go back, properly equipped, and attempt it.

“Perhaps you do not know that the entrance to a serdab is almost always very narrow; sometimes a hand can hardly be inserted. Two things I learned from this serdab. The first was that the lamps, if lamps at all there had been, could not have been of large size; and secondly, that they would be in some way associated with Hathor, whose symbol, the hawk in a square with the right top corner forming a smaller square, was cut in relief on the wall within, and coloured the bright vermilion which we had found on the Stele. Hathor is the goddess who in Egyptian mythology answers to Venus of the Greeks, in as far as she is the presiding deity of beauty and pleasure. In the Egyptian mythology, however, each God has many forms; and in some aspects Hathor has to do with the idea of resurrection. There are seven forms or variants of the Goddess; why should not these correspond in some way to the seven lamps! That there had been such lamps, I was convinced. The first grave-robber had met his death; the second had found the contents of the serdab. The first attempt had been made years since; the state of the body proved this. I had no clue to the second attempt. It might have been long ago; or it might have been recently. If, however, others had been to the tomb, it was probable that the lamps had been taken long ago. Well! all the more difficult would be my search; for undertaken it must be!

“That was nearly three years ago; and for all that time I have been like the man in the Arabian Nights, seeking old lamps, not for new, but for cash. I dared not say what I was looking for, or attempt to give any description; for such would have defeated my purpose. But I had in my own mind at the start a vague idea of what I must find. In process of time this grew more and more clear; till at last I almost overshot my mark by searching for something which might have been wrong.

"The disappointments I suffered, and the wild-goose chases I made, would fill a volume; but I persevered. At last, not two months ago, I was shown by an old dealer in Mossul one lamp such as I had looked for. I had been tracing it for nearly a year, always suffering disappointment, but always buoyed up to further endeavour by a growing hope that I was on the track.

"I do not know how I restrained myself when I realised that, at last, I was at least close to success. I was skilled, however, in the finesse of Eastern trade; and the Jew-Arab-Portugee trader met his match. I wanted to see all his stock before buying; and one by one he produced, amongst masses of rubbish, seven different lamps. Each of them had a distinguishing mark; and each and all was some form of the symbol of Hathor. I think I shook the imperturbability of my swarthy friend by the magnitude of my purchases; for in order to prevent him guessing what form of goods I sought, I nearly cleared out his shop. At the end he nearly wept, and said I had ruined him; for now he had nothing to sell. He would have torn his hair had he known what price I should ultimately have given for some of his stock, that perhaps he valued least.

"I parted with most of my merchandise at normal price as I hurried home. I did not dare to give it away, or even lose it, lest I should incur suspicion. My burden was far too precious to be risked by any foolishness now. I got on as fast as it is possible to travel in such countries; and arrived in London with only the lamps and certain portable curios and papyri which I had picked up on my travels.

"Now, Mr. Ross, you know all I know; and I leave it to your discretion how much, if any of it, you will tell Miss Trelawny."

As he finished a clear young voice said behind us:

"What about Miss Trelawny? She is here!"

We turned, startled; and looked at each other inquiringly. Miss Trelawny stood in the doorway. We did not know how long she had been present, or how much she had heard.

Chapter XIII

Awaking From the Trance

The first unexpected words may always startle a hearer; but when the shock is over, the listener's reason has asserted itself, and he can judge of the manner, as well as of the matter, of speech. Thus it was on this occasion. With intelligence now alert, I could not doubt of the simple sincerity of Margaret's next question.

"What have you two men been talking about all this time, Mr. Ross? I suppose, Mr. Corbeck has been telling you all his adventures in finding the lamps. I hope you will tell me too, some day, Mr. Corbeck; but that must not be till my poor Father is better. He would like, I am sure, to tell me all about these things himself; or to be present when I heard them." She glanced sharply from one to the other. "Oh, that was what you were saying as I came in? All right! I shall wait; but I hope it won't be long. The continuance of Father's condition is, I feel, breaking me down. A little while ago I felt that my nerves were giving out; so I determined to go out for a walk in the Park. I am sure it will do me good. I want you, if you will, Mr. Ross, to be with Father whilst I am away. I shall feel secure then."

I rose with alacrity, rejoicing that the poor girl was going out, even for half an hour. She was looking terribly wearied and haggard; and the sight of her pale cheeks made my heart ache. I went to the sick-room; and sat down in my usual place. Mrs. Grant was then on duty; we had not found it necessary to have more than one person in the room during the day. When I came in, she took occasion to go about some household duty. The blinds were up, but the north aspect of the room softened the hot glare of the sunlight without.

I sat for a long time thinking over all that Mr. Corbeck had told me; and weaving its wonders into the tissue of strange things which had come to pass since I had entered the house. At times I was inclined to doubt; to doubt everything and every one; to doubt even the evidences of my own five senses. The warnings of the skilled detective kept coming back to my mind. He had put down Mr. Corbeck as a clever liar, and a confederate of Miss Trelawny. Of Margaret! That settled it! Face to face with such a proposition as that, doubt vanished. Each time when her image, her name, the merest thought of her, came before my mind, each event stood out stark as a living fact. My life upon her faith!

I was recalled from my reverie, which was fast becoming a dream of love, in a startling manner. A voice came from the bed; a deep, strong, masterful voice. The first note of it called up like a clarion my eyes and my ears. The sick man was awake and speaking!

"Who are you? What are you doing here?"

Whatever ideas any of us had ever formed of his waking, I am quite sure that none of us expected to see him start up all awake and full master of himself. I was so surprised that I answered almost mechanically:

"Ross is my name. I have been watching by you!" He looked surprised for an instant, and then I could see that his habit of judging for himself came into play.

"Watching by me! How do you mean? Why watching by me?" His eye had now lit on his heavily bandaged wrist. He went on in a different tone; less aggressive, more genial, as of one accepting facts:

"Are you a doctor?" I felt myself almost smiling as I answered; the relief from the long pressure of anxiety regarding his life was beginning to tell:

“No, sir!”

“Then why are you here? If you are not a doctor, what are you?” His tone was again more dictatorial. Thought is quick; the whole train of reasoning on which my answer must be based flooded through my brain before the words could leave my lips. Margaret! I must think of Margaret! This was her father, who as yet knew nothing of me; even of my very existence. He would be naturally curious, if not anxious, to know why I amongst men had been chosen as his daughter’s friend on the occasion of his illness. Fathers are naturally a little jealous in such matters as a daughter’s choice, and in the undeclared state of my love for Margaret I must do nothing which could ultimately embarrass her.

“I am a Barrister. It is not, however, in that capacity I am here; but simply as a friend of your daughter. It was probably her knowledge of my being a lawyer which first determined her to ask me to come when she thought you had been murdered. Afterwards she was good enough to consider me to be a friend, and to allow me to remain in accordance with your expressed wish that someone should remain to watch.”

Mr. Trelawny was manifestly a man of quick thought, and of few words. He gazed at me keenly as I spoke, and his piercing eyes seemed to read my thought. To my relief he said no more on the subject just then, seeming to accept my words in simple faith. There was evidently in his own mind some cause for the acceptance deeper than my own knowledge. His eyes flashed, and there was an unconscious movement of the mouth — it could hardly be called a twitch — which betokened satisfaction. He was following out some train of reasoning in his own mind. Suddenly he said:

“She thought I had been murdered! Was that last night?”

"No! four days ago." He seemed surprised. Whilst he had been speaking the first time he had sat up in bed; now he made a movement as though he would jump out. With an effort, however, he restrained himself; leaning back on his pillows he said quietly:

"Tell me all about it! All you know! Every detail! Omit nothing! But stay; first lock the door! I want to know, before I see anyone, exactly how things stand."

Somehow his last words made my heart leap. "Anyone!" He evidently accepted me, then, as an exception. In my present state of feeling for his daughter, this was a comforting thought. I felt exultant as I went over to the door and softly turned the key. When I came back I found him sitting up again. He said:

"Go on!"

Accordingly, I told him every detail, even of the slightest which I could remember, of what had happened from the moment of my arrival at the house. Of course I said nothing of my feeling towards Margaret, and spoke only concerning those things already within his own knowledge. With regard to Corbeck, I simply said that he had brought back some lamps of which he had been in quest. Then I proceeded to tell him fully of their loss, and of their re-discovery in the house.

He listened with a self-control which, under the circumstances, was to me little less than marvellous. It was impassiveness, for at times his eyes would flash or blaze, and the strong fingers of his uninjured hand would grip the sheet, pulling it into far-extending wrinkles. This was most noticeable when I told him of the return of Corbeck, and the finding of the lamps in the boudoir. At times he spoke, but only a few words, and as if unconsciously in emotional comment. The mysterious parts, those which had most puzzled us, seemed to have no special interest for him; he seemed to know them already. The utmost concern he showed was when I told him of Daw's shooting. His muttered comment: "stupid ass!" together with a quick glance across the room at the injured cabinet, marked the measure of his disgust. As I told him of his daughter's harrowing anxiety for him, of her unending care and devotion, of the tender love which she had shown, he seemed much moved. There was a sort of veiled surprise in his unconscious whisper:

"Margaret! Margaret!"

When I had finished my narration, bringing matters up to the moment when Miss Trelawny had gone out for her walk — I thought of her as "Miss Trelawny', not as 'Margaret' now, in the presence of her father — he remained silent for quite a long time. It was probably two or three minutes; but it seemed interminable. All at once he turned and said to me briskly:

"Now tell me all about yourself!" This was something of a floorer; I felt myself grow red-hot. Mr. Trelawny's eyes were upon me; they were now calm and inquiring, but never ceasing in their soul-searching scrutiny. There was just a suspicion of a smile on the mouth which, though it added to my embarrassment, gave me a certain measure of relief. I was, however, face to face with difficulty; and the habit of my life stood me in good stead. I looked him straight in the eyes as I spoke:

"My name, as I told you, is Ross, Malcolm Ross. I am by profession a Barrister. I was made a Q. C. in the last year of the Queen's reign. I have been fairly successful in my work." To my relief he said:

"Yes, I know. I have always heard well of you! Where and when did you meet Margaret?"

“First at the Hay’s in Belgrave Square, ten days ago. Then at a picnic up the river with Lady Strathconnell. We went from Windsor to Cookham. Mar — Miss Trelawny was in my boat. I scull a little, and I had my own boat at Windsor. We had a good deal of conversation — naturally.”

“Naturally!” there was just a suspicion of something sardonic in the tone of acquiescence; but there was no other intimation of his feeling. I began to think that as I was in the presence of a strong man, I should show something of my own strength. My friends, and sometimes my opponents, say that I am a strong man. In my present circumstances, not to be absolutely truthful would be to be weak. So I stood up to the difficulty before me; always bearing in mind, however, that my words might affect Margaret’s happiness through her love for her father. I went on:

“In conversation at a place and time and amid surroundings so pleasing, and in a solitude inviting to confidence, I got a glimpse of her inner life. Such a glimpse as a man of my years and experience may get from a young girl!” The father’s face grew graver as I went on; but he said nothing. I was committed now to a definite line of speech, and went on with such mastery of my mind as I could exercise. The occasion might be fraught with serious consequences to me too.

“I could not but see that there was over her spirit a sense of loneliness which was habitual to her. I thought I understood it; I am myself an only child. I ventured to encourage her to speak to me freely; and was happy enough to succeed. A sort of confidence became established between us.” There was something in the father’s face which made me add hurriedly:

“Nothing was said by her, sir, as you can well imagine, which was not right and proper. She only told me in the impulsive way of one longing to give voice to thoughts long carefully concealed, of her yearning to be closer to the father whom she loved; more en rapport with him; more in his confidence; closer within the circle of his sympathies. Oh, believe me, sir, that it was all good! All that a father's heart could hope or wish for! It was all loyal! That she spoke it to me was perhaps because I was almost a stranger with whom there was no previous barrier to confidence."

Here I paused. It was hard to go on; and I feared lest I might, in my zeal, do Margaret a disservice. The relief of the strain came from her father.

"And you?"

"Sir, Miss Trelawny is very sweet and beautiful! She is young; and her mind is like crystal! Her sympathy is a joy! I am not an old man, and my affections were not engaged. They never had been till then. I hope I may say as much, even to a father!" My eyes involuntarily dropped. When I raised them again Mr. Trelawny was still gazing at me keenly. All the kindliness of his nature seemed to wreath itself in a smile as he held out his hand and said:

"Malcolm Ross, I have always heard of you as a fearless and honourable gentleman. I am glad my girl has such a friend! Go on!"

My heart leaped. The first step to the winning of Margaret's father was gained. I dare say I was somewhat more effusive in my words and my manner as I went on. I certainly felt that way.

"One thing we gain as we grow older: to use our age judiciously! I have had much experience. I have fought for it and worked for it all my life; and I felt that I was justified in using it. I ventured to ask Miss Trelawny to count on me as a friend; to let me serve her should occasion arise. She promised me that she would. I had little idea that my chance of serving her should come so soon or in such a way; but that very night you were stricken down. In her desolation and anxiety she sent for me!” I paused. He continued to look at me as I went on:

“When your letter of instructions was found, I offered my services. They were accepted, as you know.”

“And these days, how did they pass for you?” The question startled me. There was in it something of Margaret’s own voice and manner; something so greatly resembling her lighter moments that it brought out all the masculinity in me. I felt more sure of my ground now as I said:

“These days, sir, despite all their harrowing anxiety, despite all the pain they held for the girl whom I grew to love more and more with each passing hour, have been the happiest of my life!” He kept silence for a long time; so long that, as I waited for him to speak, with my heart beating, I began to wonder if my frankness had been too effusive. At last he said:

“I suppose it is hard to say so much vicariously. Her poor mother should have heard you; it would have made her heart glad!” Then a shadow swept across his face; and he went on more hurriedly.

“But are you quite sure of all this?”

“I know my own heart, sir; or, at least, I think I do!”

“No! no!” he answered, “I don’t mean you. That is all right! But you spoke of my girl’s affection for me ... and yet...! And yet she has been living here, in my house, a whole year... Still, she spoke to you of her loneliness — her desolation. I never — it grieves me to say it, but it is true — I never saw sign of such affection towards myself in all the year!...” His voice trembled away into sad, reminiscent introspection.

“Then, sir,” I said, “I have been privileged to see more in a few days than you in her whole lifetime!” My words seemed to call him up from himself; and I thought that it was with pleasure as well as surprise that he said:

“I had no idea of it. I thought that she was indifferent to me. That what seemed like the neglect of her youth was revenging itself on me. That she was cold of heart.... It is a joy unspeakable to me that her mother’s daughter loves me too!” Unconsciously he sank back upon his pillow, lost in memories of the past.

How he must have loved her mother! It was the love of her mother’s child, rather than the love of his own daughter, that appealed to him. My heart went out to him in a great wave of sympathy and kindliness. I began to understand. To understand the passion of these two great, silent, reserved natures, that successfully concealed the burning hunger for the other’s love! It did not surprise me when presently he murmured to himself:

“Margaret, my child! Tender, and thoughtful, and strong, and true, and brave! Like her dear mother! like her dear mother!”

And then to the very depths of my heart I rejoiced that I had spoken so frankly.

Presently Mr. Trelawny said:

“Four days! The sixteenth! Then this is the twentieth of July?” I nodded affirmation; he went on:

“So I have been lying in a trance for four days. It is not the first time. I was in a trance once under strange conditions for three days; and never even suspected it till I was told of the lapse of time. I shall tell you all about it some day, if you care to hear.”

That made me thrill with pleasure. That he, Margaret’s father, would so take me into his confidence made it possible.... The business-like, every-day alertness of his voice as he spoke next quite recalled me:

"I had better get up now. When Margaret comes in, tell her yourself that I am all right. It will avoid any shock! And will you tell Corbeck that I would like to see him as soon as I can. I want to see those lamps, and hear all about them!"

His attitude towards me filled me with delight. There was a possible father-in-law aspect that would have raised me from a death-bed. I was hurrying away to carry out his wishes; when, however, my hand was on the key of the door, his voice recalled me:

"Mr. Ross!"

I did not like to hear him say "Mr." After he knew of my friendship with his daughter he had called me Malcolm Ross; and this obvious return to formality not only pained, but filled me with apprehension. It must be something about Margaret. I thought of her as "Margaret" and not as "Miss Trelawny", now that there was danger of losing her. I know now what I felt then: that I was determined to fight for her rather than lose her. I came back, unconsciously holding myself erect. Mr. Trelawny, the keen observer of men, seemed to read my thought; his face, which was set in a new anxiety, relaxed as he said:

"Sit down a minute; it is better that we speak now than later. We are both men, and men of the world. All this about my daughter is very new to me, and very sudden; and I want to know exactly how and where I stand. Mind, I am making no objection; but as a father I have duties which are grave, and may prove to be painful. I — I" — he seemed slightly at a loss how to begin, and this gave me hope— "I suppose I am to take it, from what you have said to me of your feelings towards my girl, that it is in your mind to be a suitor for her hand, later on?" I answered at once:

"Absolutely! Firm and fixed; it was my intention the evening after I had been with her on the river, to seek you, of course after a proper and respectful interval, and to ask you if I might approach her on the subject. Events forced me into closer relationship more quickly than I had to hope would be possible; but that first purpose has remained fresh in my heart, and has grown in intensity, and multiplied itself with every hour which has passed since then." His face seemed to soften as he looked at me; the memory of his own youth was coming back to him instinctively. After a pause he said:

"I suppose I may take it, too, Malcolm Ross" — the return to the familiarity of address swept through me with a glorious thrill— "that as yet you have not made any protestation to my daughter?"

"Not in words, sir." The arriere pensee of my phrase struck me, not by its own humour, but through the grave, kindly smile on the father's face. There was a pleasant sarcasm in his comment:

"Not in words! That is dangerous! She might have doubted words, or even disbelieved them."

I felt myself blushing to the roots of my hair as I went on:

"The duty of delicacy in her defenceless position; my respect for her father — I did not know you then, sir, as yourself, but only as her father — restrained me. But even had not these barriers existed, I should not have dared in the presence of such grief and anxiety to have declared myself. Mr. Trelawny, I assure you on my word of honour that your daughter and I are as yet, on her part, but friends and nothing more!" Once again he held out his hands, and we clasped each other warmly. Then he said heartily:

"I am satisfied, Malcolm Ross. Of course, I take it that until I have seen her and have given you permission, you will not make any declaration to my daughter — in words," he added, with an indulgent smile. But his face became stern again as he went on:

"Time presses; and I have to think of some matters so urgent and so strange that I dare not lose an hour. Otherwise I should not have been prepared to enter, at so short a notice and to so new a friend, on the subject of my daughter's settlement in life, and of her future happiness." There was a dignity and a certain proudness in his manner which impressed me much.

"I shall respect your wishes, sir!" I said as I went back and opened the door. I heard him lock it behind me.

When I told Mr. Corbeck that Mr. Trelawny had quite recovered, he began to dance about like a wild man. But he suddenly stopped, and asked me to be careful not to draw any inferences, at all events at first, when in the future speaking of the finding of the lamps, or of the first visits to the tomb. This was in case Mr. Trelawny should speak to me on the subject; "as, of course, he will," he added, with a sidelong look at me which meant knowledge of the affairs of my heart. I agreed to this, feeling that it was quite right. I did not quite understand why; but I knew that Mr. Trelawny was a peculiar man. In no case could one make a mistake by being reticent. Reticence is a quality which a strong man always respects.

The manner in which the others of the house took the news of the recovery varied much. Mrs. Grant wept with emotion; then she hurried off to see if she could do anything personally, and to set the house in order for "Master", as she always called him. The Nurse's face fell: she was deprived of an interesting case. But the disappointment was only momentary; and she rejoiced that the trouble was over. She was ready to come to the patient the moment she should be wanted; but in the meantime she occupied herself in packing her portmanteau.

I took Sergeant Daw into the study, so that we should be alone when I told him the news. It surprised even his iron self-control when I told him the method of the waking. I was myself surprised in turn by his first words:

"And how did he explain the first attack? He was unconscious when the second was made."

Up to that moment the nature of the attack, which was the cause of my coming to the house, had never even crossed my mind, except when I had simply narrated the various occurrences in sequence to Mr. Trelawny. The Detective did not seem to think much of my answer:

"Do you know, it never occurred to me to ask him!" The professional instinct was strong in the man, and seemed to supersede everything else.

"That is why so few cases are ever followed out," he said, "unless our people are in them. Your amateur detective neer hunts down to the death. As for ordinary people, the moment things begin to mend, and the strain of suspense is off them, they drop the matter in hand. It is like sea-sickness," he added philosophically after a pause; "the moment you touch the shore you never give it a thought, but run off to the buffet to feed! Well, Mr. Ross, I'm glad the case is over; for over it is, so far as I am concerned. I suppose that Mr. Trelawny knows his own business; and that now he is well again, he will take it up himself. Perhaps, however, he will not do anything. As he seemed to expect something to happen, but did not ask for protection from the police in any way, I take it that he don't want them to interfere with an eye to punishment. We'll be told officially, I suppose, that it was an accident, or sleep-walking, or something of the kind, to satisfy the conscience of our Record Department; and that will be the end. As for me, I tell you frankly, sir, that it will be the saving of me. I verily believe I was beginning to get dotty over it all. There were too many mysteries, that aren't in my line, for me to be really satisfied as to either facts or the causes of them. Now I'll be able to wash my hands of it, and get back to clean, wholesome, criminal work. Of course, sir, I'll be glad to know if you ever do light on a cause of any kind. And I'll be grateful if you can ever tell me how the man was dragged out of bed when the cat bit him, and who used the knife the second time. For master Silvio could never have done it by himself. But there! I keep thinking of it still. I must look out and keep a check on myself, or I shall think of it when I have to keep my mind on other things!"

When Margaret returned from her walk, I met her in the hall. She was still pale and sad; somehow, I had expected to see her radiant after her walk. The moment she saw me her eyes brightened, and she looked at me keenly.

"You have some good news for me?" she said. "Is Father better?"

"He is! Why did you think so?"

"I saw it in your face. I must go to him at once." She was hurrying away when I stopped her.

"He said he would send for you the moment he was dressed."

"He said he would send for me!" she repeated in amazement. "Then he is awake again, and conscious? I had no idea he was so well as that! O Malcolm!"

She sat down on the nearest chair and began to cry. I felt overcome myself. The sight of her joy and emotion, the mention of my own name in such a way and at such a time, the rush of glorious possibilities all coming together, quite unmanned me. She saw my emotion, and seemed to understand. She put out her hand. I held it hard, and kissed it. Such moments as these, the opportunities of lovers, are gifts of the gods! Up to this instant, though I knew I loved her, and though I believed she returned my affection, I had had only hope. Now, however, the self-surrender manifest in her willingness to let me squeeze her hand, the ardour of her pressure in return, and the glorious flush of love in her beautiful, deep, dark eyes as she lifted them to mine, were all the eloquences which the most impatient or exacting lover could expect or demand.

No word was spoken; none was needed. Even had I not been pledged to verbal silence, words would have been poor and dull to express what we felt. Hand in hand, like two little children, we went up the staircase and waited on the landing, till the summons from Mr. Trelawny should come.

I whispered in her ear — it was nicer than speaking aloud and at a greater distance — how her father had awakened, and what he had said; and all that had passed between us, except when she herself had been the subject of conversation.

Presently a bell rang from the room. Margaret slipped from me, and looked back with warning finger on lip. She went over to her father's door and knocked softly.

"Come in!" said the strong voice.

"It is I, Father!" The voice was tremulous with love and hope.

There was a quick step inside the room; the door was hurriedly thrown open, and in an instant Margaret, who had sprung forward, was clasped in her father's arms. There was little speech; only a few broken phrases.

"Father! Dear, dear Father!"

"My child! Margaret! My dear, dear child!"

"O Father, Father! At last! At last!"

Here the father and daughter went into the room together, and the door closed.

Chapter XIV

The Birth-Mark

During my waiting for the summons to Mr. Trelawny's room, which I knew would come, the time was long and lonely. After the first few moments of emotional happiness at Margaret's joy, I somehow felt apart and alone; and for a little time the selfishness of a lover possessed me. But it was not for long. Margaret's happiness was all to me; and in the conscious sense of it I lost my baser self. Margaret's last words as the door closed on them gave the key to the whole situation, as it had been and as it was. These two proud, strong people, though father and daughter, had only come to know each other when the girl was grown up. Margaret's nature was of that kind which matures early.

The pride and strength of each, and the reticence which was their corollary, made a barrier at the beginning. Each had respected the other's reticence too much thereafter; and the misunderstanding grew to habit. And so these two loving hearts, each of which yearned for sympathy from the other, were kept apart. But now all was well, and in my heart of hearts I rejoiced that at last Margaret was happy. Whilst I was still musing on the subject, and dreaming dreams of a personal nature, the door was opened, and Mr. Trelawny beckoned to me.

"Come in, Mr. Ross!" he said cordially, but with a certain formality which I dreaded. I entered the room, and he closed the door again. He held out his hand, and I put mine in it. He did not let it go, but still held it as he drew me over toward his daughter. Margaret looked from me to him, and back again; and her eyes fell. When I was close to her, Mr. Trelawny let go my hand, and, looking his daughter straight in the face, said:

"If things are as I fancy, we shall not have any secrets between us. Malcolm Ross knows so much of my affairs already, that I take it he must either let matters stop where they are and go away in silence, or else he must know more. Margaret! are you willing to let Mr. Ross see your wrist?"

She threw one swift look of appeal in his eyes; but even as she did so she seemed to make up her mind. Without a word she raised her right hand, so that the bracelet of spreading wings which covered the wrist fell back, leaving the flesh bare. Then an icy chill shot through me.

On her wrist was a thin red jagged line, from which seemed to hang red stains like drops of blood!

She stood there, a veritable figure of patient pride.

Oh! but she looked proud! Through all her sweetness, all her dignity, all her high-souled negation of self which I had known, and which never seemed more marked than now — through all the fire that seemed to shine from the dark depths of her eyes into my very soul, pride shone conspicuously. The pride that has faith; the pride that is born of conscious purity; the pride of a veritable queen of Old Time, when to be royal was to be the first and greatest and bravest in all high things. As we stood thus for some seconds, the deep, grave voice of her father seemed to sound a challenge in my ears:

"What do you say now?"

My answer was not in words. I caught Margaret's right hand in mine as it fell, and, holding it tight, whilst with the other I pushed back the golden cincture, stooped and kissed the wrist. As I looked up at her, but never letting go her hand, there was a look of joy on her face such as I dream of when I think of heaven. Then I faced her father.

“You have my answer, sir!” His strong face looked gravely sweet. He only said one word as he laid his hand on our clasped ones, whilst he bent over and kissed his daughter:

“Good!”

We were interrupted by a knock at the door. In answer to an impatient “Come in!” from Mr. Trelawny, Mr. Corbeck entered. When he saw us grouped he would have drawn back; but in an instant Mr. Trelawny had sprung forth and dragged him forward. As he shook him by both hands, he seemed a transformed man. All the enthusiasm of his youth, of which Mr. Corbeck had told us, seemed to have come back to him in an instant.

“So you have got the lamps!” he almost shouted. “My reasoning was right after all. Come to the library, where we will be alone, and tell me all about it! And while he does it, Ross,” said he, turning to me, “do you, like a good fellow, get the key from the safe deposit, so that I may have a look at the lamps!”

Then the three of them, the daughter lovingly holding her father’s arm, went into the library, whilst I hurried off to Chancery Lane.

When I returned with the key, I found them still engaged in the narrative; but Doctor Winchester, who had arrived soon after I left, was with them. Mr. Trelawny, on hearing from Margaret of his great attention and kindness, and how he had, under much pressure to the contrary, steadfastly obeyed his written wishes, had asked him to remain and listen. “It will interest you, perhaps,” he said, “to learn the end of the story!”

We all had an early dinner together. We sat after it a good while, and then Mr. Trelawny said:

"Now, I think we had all better separate and go quietly to bed early. We may have much to talk about tomorrow; and tonight I want to think."

Doctor Winchester went away, taking, with a courteous forethought, Mr. Corbeck with him, and leaving me behind. When the others had gone Mr. Trelawny said:

"I think it will be well if you, too, will go home for tonight. I want to be quite alone with my daughter; there are many things I wish to speak of to her, and to her alone. Perhaps, even tomorrow, I will be able to tell you also of them; but in the meantime there will be less distraction to us both if we are alone in the house." I quite understood and sympathised with his feelings; but the experiences of the last few days were strong on me, and with some hesitation I said:

"But may it not be dangerous? If you knew as we do—" To my surprise Margaret interrupted me:

"There will be no danger, Malcolm. I shall be with Father!" As she spoke she clung to him in a protective way. I said no more, but stood up to go at once. Mr. Trelawny said heartily:

"Come as early as you please, Ross. Come to breakfast. After it, you and I will want to have a word together." He went out of the room quietly, leaving us together. I clasped and kissed Margaret's hands, which she held out to me, and then drew her close to me, and our lips met for the first time.

I did not sleep much that night. Happiness on the one side of my bed and Anxiety on the other kept sleep away. But if I had anxious care, I had also happiness which had not equal in my life — or ever can have. The night went by so quickly that the dawn seemed to rush on me, not stealing as is its wont.

Before nine o'clock I was at Kensington. All anxiety seemed to float away like a cloud as I met Margaret, and saw that already the pallor of her face had given to the rich bloom which I knew. She told me that her father had slept well, and that he would be with us soon.

"I do believe," she whispered, "that my dear and thoughtful Father has kept back on purpose, so that I might meet you first, and alone!"

After breakfast Mr. Trelawny took us into the study, saying as he passed in:

"I have asked Margaret to come too." When we were seated, he said gravely:

"I told you last night that we might have something to say to each other. I dare say that you may have thought that it was about Margaret and yourself. Isn't that so?"

"I thought so."

"Well, my boy, that is all right. Margaret and I have been talking, and I know her wishes." He held out his hand. When I wrung it, and had kissed Margaret, who drew her chair close to mine, so that we could hold hands as we listened, he went on, but with a certain hesitation — it could hardly be called nervousness — which was new to me.

"You know a good deal of my hunt after this mummy and her belongings; and I dare say you have guessed a good deal of my theories. But these at any rate I shall explain later, concisely and categorically, if it be necessary. What I want to consult you about now is this: Margaret and I disagree on one point. I am about to make an experiment; the experiment which is to crown all that I have devoted twenty years of research, and danger, and labour to prepare for. Through it we may learn things that have been hidden from the eyes and the knowledge of men for centuries; for scores of centuries.

I do not want my daughter to be present; for I cannot blind myself to the fact that there may be danger in it — great danger, and of an unknown kind. I have, however, already faced very great dangers, and of an unknown kind; and so has that brave scholar who has helped me in the work. As to myself, I am willing to run any risk. For science, and history, and philosophy may benefit; and we may turn one old page of a wisdom unknown in this prosaic age. But for my daughter to run such a risk I am loth. Her young bright life is too precious to throw lightly away; now especially when she is on the very threshold of new happiness. I do not wish to see her life given, as her dear mother's was—"

He broke down for a moment, and covered his eyes with his hands. In an instant Margaret was beside him, clasping him close, and kissing him, and comforting him with loving words. Then, standing erect, with one hand on his head, she said:

"Father! mother did not bid you stay beside her, even when you wanted to go on that journey of unknown danger to Egypt; though that country was then upset from end to end with war and the dangers that follow war. You have told me how she left you free to go as you wished; though that she thought of danger for you and and feared it for you, is proved by this!" She held up her wrist with the scar that seemed to run blood. "Now, mother's daughter does as mother would have done herself!" Then she turned to me:

"Malcolm, you know I love you! But love is trust; and you must trust me in danger as well as in joy. You and I must stand beside Father in this unknown peril. Together we shall come through it; or together we shall fail; together we shall die. That is my wish; my first wish to my husband that is to be! Do you not think that, as a daughter, I am right? Tell my Father what you think!"

She looked like a Queen stooping to plead. My love for her grew and grew. I stood up beside her; and took her hand and said:

"Mr. Trelawny! in this Margaret and I are one!"

He took both our hands and held them hard. Presently he said with deep emotion:

"It is as her mother would have done!"

Mr. Corbeck and Doctor Winchester came exactly at the time appointed, and joined us in the library. Despite my great happiness I felt our meeting to be a very solemn function. For I could never forget the strange things that had been; and the idea of the strange things which might be, was with me like a cloud, pressing down on us all. From the gravity of my companions I gathered that each of them also was ruled by some such dominating thought.

Instinctively we gathered our chairs into a circle round Mr. Trelawny, who had taken the great armchair near the window. Margaret sat by him on his right, and I was next to her. Mr. Corbeck was on his left, with Doctor Winchester on the other side. After a few seconds of silence Mr. Trelawny said to Mr. Corbeck:

"You have told Doctor Winchester all up to the present, as we arranged?"

"Yes," he answered; so Mr. Trelawny said:

"And I have told Margaret, so we all know!" Then, turning to the Doctor, he asked:

"And am I to take it that you, knowing all as we know it who have followed the matter for years, wish to share in the experiment which we hope to make?" His answer was direct and uncompromising:

"Certainly! Why, when this matter was fresh to me, I offered to go on with it to the end. Now that it is of such strange interest, I would not miss it for anything which you could name. Be quite easy in your mind, Mr. Trelawny. I am a scientist and an investigator of phenomena. I have no one belonging to me or dependent on me. I am quite alone, and free to do what I like with my own — including my life!” Mr. Trelawny bowed gravely, and turning to Mr. Corbeck said:

“I have known your ideas for many years past, old friend; so I need ask you nothing. As to Margaret and Malcolm Ross, they have already told me their wishes in no uncertain way.” He paused a few seconds, as though to put his thoughts or his words in order; then he began to explain his views and intentions. He spoke very carefully, seeming always to bear in mind that some of us who listened were ignorant of the very root and nature of some things touched upon, and explaining them to us as he went on:

“The experiment which is before us is to try whether or no there is any force, any reality, in the old Magic. There could not possibly be more favourable conditions for the test; and it is my own desire to do all that is possible to make the original design effective. That there is some such existing power I firmly believe. It might not be possible to create, or arrange, or organise such a power in our own time; but I take it that if in Old Time such a power existed, it may have some exceptional survival. After all, the Bible is not a myth; and we read there that the sun stood still at a man’s command, and that an ass — not a human one — spoke. And if the Witch at Endor could call up to Saul the spirit of Samuel, why may not there have been others with equal powers; and why may not one among them survive? Indeed, we are told in the Book of Samuel that the Witch of Endor was only one of many, and her being consulted by Saul was a matter of chance. He only sought one among the many whom he had driven out of Israel; ‘all those that had Familiar Spirits, and the Wizards.’ This Egyptian Queen, Tera, who reigned nearly two thousand years before Saul, had a Familiar, and was a Wizard too. See how the priests of her time, and those after it tried to wipe out her name from the face of the earth, and put a curse over the very door of her tomb so that none might ever discover the lost name. Ay, and they succeeded so well that even Manetho, the historian of the Egyptian Kings, writing in the tenth century before Christ, with all the lore of the priesthood for forty centuries behind him, and with possibility of access to every existing record, could not even find her name. Did it strike any of you, in thinking of the late events, who or what her Familiar was?" There was an interruption, for Doctor Winchester struck one hand loudly on the other as he ejaculated:

"The cat! The mummy cat! I knew it!" Mr. Trelawny smiled over at him.

"You are right! There is every indication that the Familiar of the Wizard Queen was that cat which was mummied when she was, and was not only placed in her tomb, but was laid in the sarcophagus with her. That was what bit into my wrist, what cut me with sharp claws." He paused. Margaret's comment was a purely girlish one:

"Then my poor Silvio is acquitted! I am glad!" Her father stroked her hair and went on:

"This woman seems to have had an extraordinary foresight. Foresight far, far beyond her age and the philosophy of her time. She seems to have seen through the weakness of her own religion, and even prepared for emergence into a different world. All her aspirations were for the North, the point of the compass whence blew the cool invigorating breezes that make life a joy. From the first, her eyes seem to have been attracted to the seven stars of the Plough from the fact, as recorded in the hieroglyphics in her tomb, that at her birth a great aerolite fell, from whose heart was finally extracted that

Jewel of Seven Stars which she regarded as the talisman of her life. It seems to have so far ruled her destiny that all her thought and care circled round it. The Magic Coffer, so wondrously wrought with seven sides, we learn from the same source, came from the aerolite. Seven was to her a magic number; and no wonder. With seven fingers on one hand, and seven toes on one foot. With a talisman of a rare ruby with seven stars in the same position as in that constellation which ruled her birth, each star of the seven having seven points — in itself a geological wonder — it would have been odd if she had not been attracted by it. Again, she was born, we learn in the Stele of her tomb, in the seventh month of the year — the month beginning with the Inundation of the Nile. Of which month the presiding Goddess was Hathor, the Goddess of her own house, of the Antefs of the Theban line — the Goddess who in various forms symbolises beauty, and pleasure, and resurrection. Again, in this seventh month — which, by later Egyptian astronomy began on October 28th, and ran to the 27th of our November — on the seventh day the Pointer of the Plough just rises above the horizon of the sky at Thebes.

“In a marvellously strange way, therefore, are grouped into this woman’s life these various things. The number seven; the Pole Star, with the constellation of seven stars; the God of the month, Hathor, who was her own particular God, the God of her family, the Antefs of the Theban Dynasty, whose Kings’ symbol it was, and whose seven forms ruled love and the delights of life and resurrection. If ever there was ground for magic; for the power of symbolism carried into mystic use; for a belief in finites spirits in an age which knew not the Living God, it is here.

“Remember, too, that this woman was skilled in all the science of her time. Her wise and cautious father took care of that, knowing that by her own wisdom she must ultimately combat the intrigues of the Hierarchy. Bear in mind that in old Egypt the science of Astronomy began and was developed to an extraordinary height; and that Astrology followed Astronomy in its progress. And it is possible that in the later developments of science with regard to light rays, we may yet find that Astrology is on a scientific basis. Our next wave of scientific thought may deal with this. I shall have something special to call your minds to on this point presently. Bear in mind also that the Egyptians knew sciences, of which today, despite all our advantages, we are profoundly ignorant. Acoustics, for instance, an exact science with the builders of the temples of Karnak, of Luxor, of the Pyramids, is today a mystery to Bell, and Kelvin, and Edison, and Marconi. Again, these old miracle-workers probably understood some practical way of using other forces, and amongst them the forces of light that at present we do not dream of. But of this matter I shall speak later. That Magic Coffer of Queen Tera is probably a magic box in more ways than one. It may — possibly it does — contain forces that we wot not of. We cannot open it; it must be closed from within. How then was it closed? It is a coffer of solid stone, of amazing hardness, more like a jewel than an ordinary marble, with a lid equally solid; and yet all is so finely wrought that the finest tool made today cannot be inserted under the flange. How was it wrought to such perfection? How was the stone so chosen that those translucent patches match the relations of the seven stars of the constellation? How is it, or from what cause, that when the starlight shines on it, it glows from within — that when I fix the lamps in similar form the glow grows greater still; and yet the box is irresponsive to ordinary light however great? I tell you that that box hides some great mystery of science. We shall find that the light will open it in some way: either by striking on some substance, sensitive in a peculiar way to its effect, or in releasing some greater power. I only trust that in our ignorance we may not so bungle things as to do harm to its mechanism; and so deprive the knowledge of our time of a lesson handed down, as by a miracle, through nearly five thousand years.

"In another way, too, there may be hidden in that box secrets which, for good or ill, may enlighten the world. We know from their records, and inferentially also, that the Egyptians studied the properties of herbs and minerals for magic purposes — white magic as well as black. We know that some of the wizards of old could induce from sleep dreams of any given kind. That this purpose was mainly effected by hypnotism, which was another art or science of Old Nile, I have little doubt. But still, they must have had a mastery of drugs that is far beyond anything we know. With our own pharmacopoeia we can, to a certain extent, induce dreams. We may even differentiate between good and bad — dreams of pleasure, or disturbing and harrowing dreams. But these old practitioners seemed to have been able to command at will any form or colour of dreaming; could work round any given subject or thought in almost any was required. In that coffer, which you have seen, may rest a very armoury of dreams. Indeed, some of the forces that lie within it may have been already used in my household." Again there was an interruption from Doctor Winchester.

"But if in your case some of these imprisoned forces were used, what set them free at the opportune time, or how? Besides, you and Mr. Corbeck were once before put into a trance for three whole days, when you were in the Queen's tomb for the second time. And then, as I gathered from Mr. Corbeck's story, the coffer was not back in the tomb, though the mummy was. Surely in both these cases there must have been some active intelligence awake, and with some other power to wield.” Mr. Trelawny’s answer was equally to the point:

“There was some active intelligence awake. I am convinced of it. And it wielded a power which it never lacks. I believe that on both those occasions hypnotism was the power wielded.”

“And wherein is that power contained? What view do you hold on the subject?” Doctor Winchester’s voice vibrated with the intensity of his excitement as he leaned forward, breathing hard, and with eyes staring. Mr. Trelawny said solemnly:

“In the mummy of the Queen Tera! I was coming to that presently. Perhaps we had better wait till I clear the ground a little. What I hold is, that the preparation of that box was made for a special occasion; as indeed were all the preparations of the tomb and all belonging to it. Queen Tera did not trouble herself to guard against snakes and scorpions, in that rocky tomb cut in the sheer cliff face a hundred feet above the level of the valley, and fifty down from the summit. Her precautions were against the disturbances of human hands; against the jealousy and hatred of the priests, who, had they known of her real aims, would have tried to baffle them. From her point of view, she made all ready for the time of resurrection, whenever that might be. I gather from the symbolic pictures in the tomb that she so far differed from the belief of her time that she looked for a resurrection in the flesh. It was doubtless this that intensified the hatred of the priesthood, and gave them an acceptable cause for obliterating the very existence, present and future, of one who had outrage their theories and blasphemed their gods. All that she might require, either in the accomplishment of the resurrection or after it, were contained in that almost hermetically sealed suite of chambers in the rock. In the great sarcophagus, which as you know is of a size quite unusual even for kings, was the mummy of her Familiar, the cat, which from its great size I take to be a sort of tiger-cat. In the tomb, also in a strong receptacle, were the canopic jars usually containing those internal organs which are separately embalmed, but which in this case had no such contents. So that, I take it, there was in her case a departure in embalming; and that the organs were restored to the body, each in its proper place — if, indeed, they had ever been removed. If this surmise be true, we shall find that the brain of the Queen either was never extracted in the usual way, or, if so taken out, that it was duly replaced, instead of being enclosed within the mummy wrappings. Finally, in the sarcophagus there was the Magic Coffer on which her feet rested. Mark you also, the care taken in the preservance of her power to control the elements. According to her belief, the open hand outside the wrappings controlled the Air, and the strange Jewel Stone with the shining stars controlled Fire. The symbolism inscribed on the soles of her feet gave sway over Land and Water. About the Star Stone I shall tell you later; but whilst we are speaking of the sarcophagus, mark how she guarded her secret in case of grave-wrecking or intrusion. None could open her Magic Coffer without the lamps, for we know now that ordinary light will not be effective. The great lid of the sarcophagus was not sealed down as usual, because she wished to control the air. But she hid the lamps, which in structure belong to the Magic Coffer, in a place where none could find them, except by following the secret guidance which she had prepared for only the eyes of wisdom. And even here she had guarded against chance discovery, by preparing a bolt of death for the unwary discoverer. To do this she had applied the lesson of the tradition of the avenging guard of the treasures of the pyramid, built by her great predecessor of the Fourth Dynasty of the throne of Egypt.

“You have noted, I suppose, how there were, in the case of her tomb, certain deviations from the usual rules. For instance, the shaft of the Mummy Pit, which is usually filled up solid with stones and rubbish, was left open. Why was this? I take it that she had made arrangements for leaving the tomb when, after her resurrection, she should be a new woman, with a different personality, and less inured to the hardships that in her first existence she had suffered. So far as we can judge of her intent, all things needful for her exit into the world had been thought of, even to the iron chain, described by Van Huyn, close to the door in the rock, by which she might be able to lower herself to the ground. That she expected a long period to elapse was shown in the choice of material. An ordinary rope would be rendered weaker or unsafe in process of time, but she imagined, and rightly, that the iron would endure.

“What her intentions were when once she trod the open earth afresh we do not know, and we never shall, unless her own dead lips can soften and speak.”

Chapter XV

The Purpose of Queen Tera

"Now, as to the Star Jewel! This she manifestly regarded as the greatest of her treasures. On it she had engraven words which none of her time dared to speak.

"In the old Egyptian belief it was held that there were words, which, if used properly — for the method of speaking them was as important as the words themselves — could command the Lords of the Upper and the Lower Worlds. The 'hekau', or word of power, was all-important in certain ritual. On the Jewel of Seven Stars, which, as you know, is carved into the image of a scarab, are graven in hieroglyphic two such hekau, one above, the other underneath. But you will understand better when you see it! Wait here! Do not stir!"

As he spoke, he rose and left the room. A great fear for him came over me; but I was in some strange way relieved when I looked at Margaret. Whenever there had been any possibility of danger to her father, she had shown great fear for him; now she was calm and placid. I said nothing, but waited.

In two or three minutes, Mr. Trelawny returned. He held in his hand a little golden box. This, as he resumed his seat, he placed before him on the table. We all leaned forward as he opened it.

On a lining of white satin lay a wondrous ruby of immense size, almost as big as the top joint of Margaret's little finger. It was carven — it could not possibly have been its natural shape, but jewels do not show the working of the tool — into the shape of a scarab, with its wings folded, and its legs and feelers pressed back to its sides. Shining through its wondrous "pigeon's blood" colour were seven different stars, each of seven points, in such position that they reproduced exactly the figure of the Plough. There could be no possible mistake as to this in the mind of anyone who had ever noted the constellation. On it were some hieroglyphic figures, cut with the most exquisite precision, as I could see when it came to my turn to use the magnifying-glass, which Mr. Trelawny took from his pocket and handed to us.

When we all had seen it fully, Mr. Trelawny turned it over so that it rested on its back in a cavity made to hold it in the upper half of the box. The reverse was no less wonderful than the upper, being carved to resemble the under side of the beetle. It, too, had some hieroglyphic figures cut on it. Mr. Trelawny resumed his lecture as we all sat with our heads close to this wonderful jewel:

"As you see, there are two words, one on the top, the other underneath. The symbols on the top represent a single word, composed of one syllable prolonged, with its determinatives. You know, all of you, I suppose, that the Egyptian language was phonetic, and that the hieroglyphic symbol represented the sound. The first symbol here, the hoe, means 'mer', and the two pointed ellipses the prolongation of the final r: mer-r-r. The sitting figure with the hand to its face is what we call the 'determinative' of 'thought'; and the roll of papyrus that of 'abstraction'. Thus we get the word 'mer', love, in its abstract, general, and fullest sense. This is the hekau which can command the Upper World."

Margaret's face was a glory as she said in a deep, low, ringing tone:

"Oh, but it is true. How the old wonder-workers guessed at almighty Truth!" Then a hot blush swept her face, and her eyes fell. Her father smiled at her lovingly as he resumed:

"The symbolisation of the word on the reverse is simpler, though the meaning is more abstruse. The first symbol means 'men', 'abiding', and the second, 'ab', 'the heart'. So that we get 'abiding of heart', or in our own language 'patience'. And this is the hekau to control the Lower World!"

He closed the box, and motioning us to remain as we were, he went back to his room to replace the Jewel in the safe. When he had returned and resumed his seat, he went on:

"That Jewel, with its mystic words, and which Queen Tera held under her hand in the sarcophagus, was to be an important factor — probably the most important — in the working out of the act of her resurrection. From the first I seemed by a sort of instinct to realise this. I kept the Jewel within my great safe, whence none could extract it; not even Queen Tera herself with her astral body."

"Her 'astral body'? What is that, Father? What does that mean?" There was a keenness in Margaret's voice as she asked the question which surprised me a little; but Trelawny smiled a sort of indulgent parental smile, which came through his grim solemnity like sunshine through a rifted cloud, as he spoke:

"The astral body, which is a part of Buddhist belief, long subsequent to the time I speak of, and which is an accepted fact of modern mysticism, had its rise in Ancient Egypt; at least, so far as we know. It is that the gifted individual can at will, quick as thought itself, transfer his body whithersoever he chooses, by the dissolution and reincarnation of particles. In the ancient belief there were several parts of a human being. You may as well know them; so that you will understand matters relative to them or dependent on them as they occur.

"First there is the 'Ka', or 'Double', which, as Doctor Budge explains, may be defined as ‘an abstract individuality of personality’ which was imbued with all the characteristic attributes of the individual it represented, and possessed an absolutely independent existence. It was free to move from place to place on earth at will; and it could enter into heaven and hold converse with the gods. Then there was the ‘Ba’, or ‘soul’, which dwelt in the ‘Ka’, and had the power of becoming corporeal or incorporeal at will; ‘it had both substance and form.... It had power to leave the tomb.... It could revisit the body in the tomb ... and could reincarnate it and hold converse with it.’ Again there was the ‘Khu’, the ‘spiritual intelligence’, or spirit. It took the form of ‘a shining, luminous, intangible shape of the body.’... Then, again, there was the ‘Sekhem’, or ‘power’ of a man, his strength or vital force personified. These were the ‘Khaibit’, or ‘shadow’, the ‘Ren’, or ‘name’, the ‘Khat’, or ‘physical body’, and ‘Ab’, the ‘heart’, in which life was seated, went to the full making up of a man.

“Thus you will see, that if this division of functions, spiritual and bodily, ethereal and corporeal, ideal and actual, be accepted as exact, there are all the possibilities and capabilities of corporeal transference, guided always by an unimprisonable will or intelligence.” As he paused I murmured the lines from Shelley’s “Prometheus Unbound”:

“‘The Magnus Zoroaster...
Met his own image walking in the garden.’”

Mr. Trelawny was not displeased. “Quite so!” he said, in his quiet way. “Shelley had a better conception of ancient beliefs than any of our poets.” With a voice changed again he resumed his lecture, for so it was to some of us:

“There is another belief of the ancient Egyptian which you must bear in mind; that regarding the ushaptiu figures of Osiris, which were placed with the dead to its work in the Under World. The enlargement of this idea came to a belief that it was possible to transmit, by magical formulae, the soul and qualities of any living creature to a figure made in its image. This would give a terrible extension of power to one who held the gift of magic.

"It is from a union of these various beliefs, and their natural corollaries, that I have come to the conclusion that Queen Tera expected to be able to effect her own resurrection, when, and where, and how, she would. That she may have held before her a definite time for making her effort is not only possible but likely. I shall not stop now to explain it, but shall enter upon the subject later on. With a soul with the Gods, a spirit which could wander the earth at will, and a power of corporeal transference, or an astral body, there need be no bounds or limits to her ambition. The belief is forced upon us that for these forty or fifty centuries she lay dormant in her tomb — waiting. Waiting with that 'patience' which could rule the Gods of the Under World, for that 'love' which could command those of the Upper World. What she may have dreamt we know not; but her dream must have been broken when the Dutch explorer entered her sculptured cavern, and his follower violated the sacred privacy of her tomb by his rude outrage in the theft of her hand.

"That theft, with all that followed, proved to us one thing, however: that each part of her body, though separated from the rest, can be a central point or rallying place for the items or particles of her astral body. That hand in my room could ensure her instantaneous presence in the flesh, and its equally rapid dissolution.

"Now comes the crown of my argument. The purpose of the attack on me was to get the safe open, so that the sacred Jewel of

Seven Stars could be extracted. That immense door of the safe could not keep out her astral body, which, or any part of it, could gather itself as well within as without the safe. And I doubt not that in the darkness of the night that mummied hand sought often the Talisman Jewel, and drew new inspiration from its touch. But despite all its power, the astral body could not remove the Jewel through the chinks of the safe. The Ruby is not astral; and it could only be moved in the ordinary way by the opening of the doors. To this end, the Queen used her astral body and the fierce force of her Familiar, to bring to the keyhole of the safe the master key which debarred her wish. For years I have suspected, nay, have believed as much; and I, too, guarded myself against powers of the Nether World. I, too, waited in patience till I should have gathered together all the factors required for the opening of the Magic Coffer and the resurrection of the mummied Queen!" He paused, and his daughter's voice came out sweet and clear, and full of intense feeling:

"Father, in the Egyptian belief, was the power of resurrection of a mummied body a general one, or was it limited? That is: could it achieve resurrection many times in the course of ages; or only once, and that one final?"

"There was but one resurrection," he answered. "There were some who believed that this was to be a definite resurrection of the body into the real world. But in the common belief, the Spirit found joy in the Elysian Fields, where there was plenty of food and no fear of famine. Where there was moisture and deep-rooted reeds, and all the joys that are to be expected by the people of an arid land and burning clime."

Then Margaret spoke with an earnestness which showed the conviction of her inmost soul:

"To me, then, it is given to understand what was the dream of this great and far-thinking and high-souled lady of old; the dream that held her soul in patient waiting for its realisation through the passing of all those tens of centuries. The dream of a love that might be; a love that she felt she might, even under new conditions, herself evoke. The love that is the dream of every woman's life; of the Old and of the New; Pagan or Christian; under whatever sun; in whatever rank or calling; however may have been the joy or pain of her life in other ways. Oh! I know it! I know it! I am a woman, and I know a woman's heart. What were the lack of food or the plenitude of it; what were feast or famine to this woman, born in a palace, with the shadow of the Crown of the Two Egypts on her brows! What were reedy morasses or the tinkle of running water to her whose barges could sweep the great Nile from the mountains to the sea. What were petty joys and absence of petty fears to her, the raising of whose hand could hurl armies, or draw to the water-stairs of her palaces the commerce of the world! At whose word rose temples filled with all the artistic beauty of the Times of Old which it was her aim and pleasure to restore! Under whose guidance the solid rock yawned into the sepulchre that she designed!

"Surely, surely, such a one had nobler dreams! I can feel them in my heart; I can see them with my sleeping eyes!"

As she spoke she seemed to be inspired; and her eyes had a far-away look as though they saw something beyond mortal sight. And then the deep eyes filled up with unshed tears of great emotion. The very soul of the woman seemed to speak in her voice; whilst we who listened sat entranced.

"I can see her in her loneliness and in the silence of her mighty pride, dreaming her own dream of things far different from those around her. Of some other land, far, far away under the canopy of the silent night, lit by the cool, beautiful light of the stars. A land under that Northern star, whence blew the sweet winds that cooled the feverish desert air. A land of wholesome greenery, far, far away. Where were no scheming and malignant priesthood; whose ideas were to lead to power through gloomy temples and more gloomy caverns of the dead, through an endless ritual of death! A land where love was not base, but a divine possession of the soul! Where there might be some one kindred spirit which could speak to hers through mortal lips like her own; whose being could merge with hers in a sweet communion of soul to soul, even as their breaths could mingle in the ambient air! I know the feeling, for I have shared it myself. I may speak of it now, since the blessing has come into my own life. I may speak of it since it enables me to interpret the feelings, the very longing soul, of that sweet and lovely Queen, so different from her surroundings, so high above her time! Whose nature, put into a word, could control the forces of the Under World; and the name of whose aspiration, though but graven on a star-lit jewel, could command all the powers in the Pantheon of the High Gods.

“And in the realisation of that dream she will surely be content to rest!”

We men sat silent, as the young girl gave her powerful interpretation of the design or purpose of the woman of old. Her every word and tone carried with it the conviction of her own belief. The loftiness of her thoughts seemed to uplift us all as we listened. Her noble words, flowing in musical cadence and vibrant with internal force, seemed to issue from some great instrument of elemental power. Even her tone was new to us all; so that we listened as to some new and strange being from a new and strange world. Her father's face was full of delight. I knew now its cause. I understood the happiness that had come into his life, on his return to the world that he knew, from that prolonged sojourn in the world of dreams. To find in his daughter, whose nature he had never till now known, such a wealth of affection, such a splendour of spiritual insight, such a scholarly imagination, such... The rest of his feeling was of hope!

The two other men were silent unconsciously. One man had had his dreaming; for the other, his dreams were to come.

For myself, I was like one in a trance. Who was this new, radiant being who had won to existence out of the mist and darkness of our fears? Love has divine possibilities for the lover's heart! The wings of the soul may expand at any time from the shoulders of the loved one, who then may sweep into angel form. I knew that in my Margaret's nature were divine possibilities of many kinds. When under the shade of the overhanging willow-tree on the river, I had gazed into the depths of her beautiful eyes, I had thenceforth a strict belief in the manifold beauties and excellences of her nature; but this soaring and understanding spirit was, indeed, a revelation. My pride, like her father's, was outside myself; my joy and rapture were complete and supreme!

When we had all got back to earth again in our various ways, Mr. Trelawny, holding his daughter's hand in his, went on with his discourse:

"Now, as to the time at which Queen Tera intended her resurrection to take place! We are in contact with some of the higher astronomical calculations in connection with true orientation. As you know, the stars shift their relative positions in the heavens; but though the real distances traversed are beyond all ordinary comprehension, the effects as we see them are small. Nevertheless, they are susceptible of measurement, not by years, indeed, but by centuries. It was by this means that Sir John Herschel arrived at the date of the building of the Great Pyramid — a date fixed by the time necessary to change the star of the true north from Draconis to the Pole Star, and since then verified by later discoveries. From the above there can be no doubt whatever that astronomy was an exact science with the Egyptians at least a thousand years before the time of Queen Tera. Now, the stars that go to make up a constellation change in process of time their relative positions, and the Plough is a notable example. The changes in the position of stars in even forty centuries is so small as to be hardly noticeable by an eye not trained to minute observances, but they can be measured and verified. Did you, or any of you, notice how exactly the stars in the Ruby correspond to the position of the stars in the Plough; or how the same holds with regard to the translucent places in the Magic Coffer?”

We all assented. He went on:

“You are quite correct. They correspond exactly. And yet when Queen Tera was laid in her tomb, neither the stars in the Jewel nor the translucent places in the Coffer corresponded to the position of the stars in the Constellation as they then were!”

We looked at each other as he paused: a new light was breaking upon us. With a ring of mastery in his voice he went on:

“Do you not see the meaning of this? Does it not throw a light on the intention of the Queen? She, who was guided by augury, and magic, and superstition, naturally chose a time for her resurrection which seemed to have been pointed out by the High Gods themselves, who had sent their message on a thunderbolt from other worlds. When such a time was fixed by supernal wisdom, would it not be the height of human wisdom to avail itself of it? Thus it is” —

here his voice deepened and trembled with the intensity of his feeling — “that to us and our time is given the opportunity of this wondrous peep into the old world, such as has been the privilege of none other of our time; which may never be again.

“From first to last the cryptic writing and symbolism of that wondrous tomb of that wondrous woman is full of guiding light; and the key of the many mysteries lies in that most wondrous Jewel which she held in her dead hand over the dead heart, which she hoped and believed would beat again in a newer and nobler world!

“There are only loose ends now to consider. Margaret has given us the true inwardness of the feeling of the other Queen!” He looked at her fondly, and stroked her hand as he said it. “For my own part I sincerely hope she is right; for in such case it will be a joy, I am sure, to all of us to assist at such a realisation of hope. But we must not go too fast, or believe too much in our present state of knowledge. The voice that we hearken for comes out of times strangely other than our own; when human life counted for little, and when the morality of the time made little account of the removing of obstacles in the way to achievement of desire. We must keep our eyes fixed on the scientific side, and wait for the developments on the psychic side.

“Now, as to this stone box, which we call the Magic Coffer. As I have said, I am convinced that it opens only in obedience to some principle of light, or the exercise of some of its forces at present unknown to us. There is here much ground for conjecture and for experiment; for as yet the scientists have not thoroughly differentiated the kinds, and powers, and degrees of light. Without analysing various rays we may, I think, take it for granted that there are different qualities and powers of light; and this great field of scientific investigation is almost virgin soil. We know as yet so little of natural forces, that imagination need set no bounds to its flights in considering the possibilities of the future. Within but a few years we have made such discoveries as two centuries ago would have sent the discoverer's to the flames. The liquefaction of oxygen; the existence of radium, of helium, of polonium, of argon; the different powers of Roentgen and Cathode and Bequerel rays. And as we may finally prove that there are different kinds and qualities of light, so we may find that combustion may have its own powers of differentiation; that there are qualities in some flames non-existent in others. It may be that some of the essential conditions of substance are continuous, even in the destruction of their bases. Last night I was thinking of this, and reasoning that as there are certain qualities in some oils which are not in others, so there may be certain similar or corresponding qualities or powers in the combinations of each. I suppose we have all noticed some time or other that the light of colza oil is not quite the same as that of paraffin, or that the flames of coal gas and whale oil are different. They find it so in the light-houses! All at once it occurred to me that there might be some special virtue in the oil which had been found in the jars when Queen Tera's tomb was opened. These had not been used to preserve the intestines as usual, so they must have been placed there for some other purpose. I remembered that in Van Huyn's narrative he had commented on the way the jars were sealed. This was lightly, though effectually; they could be opened without force. The jars were themselves preserved in a sarcophagus which, though of immense strength and hermetically sealed, could be opened easily. Accordingly, I went at once to examine the jars. A little — a very little of the oil still remained, but it had grown thick in the two and a half centuries in which the jars had been open. Still, it was not rancid; and on examining it I found it was cedar oil, and that it still exhaled something of its original aroma. This gave me the idea that it was to be used to fill the lamps. Whoever had placed the oil in the jars, and the jars in the sarcophagus, knew that there might be shrinkage in process of time, even in vases of alabaster, and fully allowed for it; for each of the jars would have filled the lamps half a dozen times. With part of the oil remaining I made some experiments, therefore, which may give useful results. You know, Doctor, that cedar oil, which was much used in the preparation and ceremonials of the Egyptian dead, has a certain refractive power which we do not find in other oils. For instance, we use it on the lenses of our microscopes to give additional clearness of vision. Last night I put some in one of the lamps, and placed it near a translucent part of the Magic Coffer. The effect was very great; the glow of light within was fuller and more intense than I could have imagined, where an electric light similarly placed had little, if any, effect. I should have tried others of the seven lamps, but that my supply of oil ran out. This, however, is on the road to rectification. I have sent for more cedar oil, and expect to have before long an ample supply. Whatever may happen from other causes, our experiment shall not, at all events, fail from this. We shall see! We shall see!"

Doctor Winchester had evidently been following the logical process of the other's mind, for his comment was:

"I do hope that when the light is effective in opening the box, the mechanism will not be impaired or destroyed."

His doubt as to this gave anxious thought to some of us.

Chapter XVI

The Cavern

In the evening Mr. Trelawny took again the whole party into the study. When we were all attention he began to unfold his plans:

"I have come to the conclusion that for the proper carrying out of what we will call our Great Experiment we must have absolute and complete isolation. Isolation not merely for a day or two, but for as long as we may require. Here such a thing would be impossible; the needs and habits of a great city with its ingrained possibilities of interruption, would, or might, quite upset us. Telegrams, registered letters, or express messengers would alone be sufficient; but the great army of those who want to get something would make disaster certain. In addition, the occurrences of the last week have drawn police attention to this house. Even if special instructions to keep an eye on it have not been issued from Scotland Yard or the District Station, you may be sure that the individual policeman on his rounds will keep it well under observation. Besides, the servants who have discharged themselves will before long begin to talk. They must; for they have, for the sake of their own characters, to give some reason for the termination of a service which has I should say a position in the neighbourhood. The servants of the neighbours will begin to talk, and, perhaps the neighbours themselves. Then the active and intelligent Press will, with its usual zeal for the enlightenment of the public and its eye to increase of circulation, get hold of the matter. When the reporter is after us we shall not have much chance of privacy. Even if we were to bar ourselves in, we should not be free from interruption, possibly from intrusion. Either would ruin our plans, and so we must take measures to effect a retreat, carrying all our impedimenta with us. For this I am prepared. For a long time past I have foreseen such a possibility, and have made preparation for it. Of course, I had no foreknowledge of what has happened; but I knew something would, or might, happen. For more than two years past my house in Cornwall has been made ready to receive all the curios which are preserved here. When Corbeck went off on his search for the lamps I had the old house at Kyllion made ready; it is fitted with electric light all over, and all the appliances for manufacture of the light are complete. I had perhaps better tell you, for none of you, not even Margaret, knows anything of it, that the house is absolutely shut out from public access or even from view. It stands on a little rocky promontory behind a steep hill, and except from the sea cannot be seen. Of old it was fenced in by a high stone wall, for the house which it succeeded was built by an ancestor of mine in the days when a great house far away from a centre had to be prepared to defend itself. Here, then, is a place so well adapted to our needs that it might have been prepared on purpose. I shall explain it to you when we are all there. This will not be long, for already our movement is in train. I have sent word to Marvin to have all preparation for our transport ready. He is to have a special train, which is to run at night so as to avoid notice. Also a number of carts and stone-wagons, with sufficient men and appliances to take all our packing-cases to Paddington. We shall be away before the Argus-eyed Pressman is on the watch. We shall today begin our packing up; and I dare say that by tomorrow night we shall be ready. In the outhouses I have all the packing-cases which were used for bringing the things from Egypt, and I am satisfied that as they were sufficient for the journey across the desert and down the Nile to Alexandria and thence on to London, they will serve without fail between here and Kyllion. We four men, with Margaret to hand us such things as we may require, will be able to get the things packed safely; and the carrier's men will take them to the trucks.

"Today the servants go to Kyllion, and Mrs. Grant will make such arrangements as may be required. She will take a stock of necessaries with her, so that we will not attract local attention by our daily needs; and will keep us supplied with perishable food from London. Thanks to Margaret's wise and generous treatment of the servants who decided to remain, we have got a staff on which we can depend. They have been already cautioned to secrecy, so that we need not fear gossip from within. Indeed, as the servants will be in London after their preparations at Kyllion are complete, there will not be much subject for gossip, in detail at any rate.

"As, however, we should commence the immediate work of packing at once, we will leave over the after proceedings till later when we have leisure."

Accordingly we set about our work. Under Mr. Trelawny's guidance, and aided by the servants, we took from the outhouses great packing-cases. Some of these were of enormous strength, fortified by many thicknesses of wood, and by iron bands and rods with screw-ends and nuts. We placed them throughout the house, each close to the object which it was to contain. When this preliminary work had been effected, and there had been placed in each room and in the hall great masses of new hay, cotton-waste and paper, the servants were sent away. Then we set about packing.

No one, not accustomed to packing, could have the slightest idea of the amount of the amount of work involved in such a task as that in which in we were engaged. For my own part I had had a vague idea that there were a large number of Egyptian objects in Mr. Trelawny's house; but until I came to deal with them seriatim I had little idea of either their importance, the size of some of them, or of their endless number. Far into the night we worked. At times we used all the strength which we could muster on a single object; again we worked separately, but always under Mr. Trelawny's immediate direction. He himself, assisted by Margaret, kept an exact tall of each piece.

It was only when we sat down, utterly wearied, to a long-delayed supper that we began to realised that a large part of the work was done. Only a few of the packing-cases, however, were closed; for a vast amount of work still remained. We had finished some of the cases, each of which held only one of the great sarcophagi. The cases which held many objects could not be closed till all had been differentiated and packed.

I slept that night without movement or without dreams; and on our comparing notes in the morning, I found that each of the others had had the same experience.

By dinner-time next evening the whole work was complete, and all was ready for the carriers who were to come at midnight. A little before the appointed time we heard the rumble of carts; then we were shortly invaded by an army of workmen, who seemed by sheer force of numbers to move without effort, in an endless procession, all our prepared packages. A little over an hour sufficed them, and when the carts had rumbled away, we all got ready to follow them to Paddington. Silvio was of course to be taken as one of our party.

Before leaving we went in a body over the house, which looked desolate indeed. As the servants had all gone to Cornwall there had been no attempt at tidying-up; every room and passage in which we had worked, and all the stairways, were strewn with paper and waste, and marked with dirty feet.

The last thing which Mr. Trelawny did before coming away was to take from the great safe the Ruby with the Seven Stars. As he put it safely into his pocket-book, Margaret, who had all at once seemed to grow deadly tired and stood beside her father pale and rigid, suddenly became all aglow, as though the sight of the Jewel had inspired her. She smiled at her father approvingly as she said:

"You are right, Father. There will not be any more trouble tonight. She will not wreck your arrangements for any cause. I would stake my life upon it."

"She — or something — wrecked us in the desert when we had come from the tomb in the Valley of the Sorcerer!" was the grim comment of Corbeck, who was standing by. Margaret answered him like a flash:

"Ah! she was then near her tomb from which for thousands of years her body had not been moved. She must know that things are different now."

"How must she know?" asked Corbeck keenly.

"If she has that astral body that Father spoke of, surely she must know! How can she fail to, with an invisible presence and an intellect that can roam abroad even to the stars and the worlds beyond us!" She paused, and her father said solemnly:

"It is on that supposition that we are proceeding. We must have the courage of our convictions, and act on them — to the last!"

Margaret took his hand and held it in a dreamy kind of way as we filed out of the house. She was holding it still when he locked the hall door, and when we moved up the road to the gateway, whence we took a cab to Paddington.

When all the goods were loaded at the station, the whole of the workmen went on to the train; this took also some of the stone-wagons used for carrying the cases with the great sarcophagi. Ordinary carts and plenty of horses were to be found at Westerton, which was our station for Kyllion. Mr. Trelawny had ordered a sleeping-carriage for our party; as soon as the train had started we all turned into our cubicles.

That night I slept sound. There was over me a conviction of security which was absolute and supreme. Margaret's definite announcement: "There will not be any trouble tonight!" seemed to carry assurance with it. I did not question it; nor did anyone else. It was only afterwards that I began to think as to how she was so sure. The train was a slow one, stopping many times and for considerable intervals. As Mr. Trelawny did not wish to arrive at Westerton before dark, there was no need to hurry; and arrangements had been made to feed the workmen at certain places on the journey. We had our own hamper with us in the private car.

All that afternoon we talked over the Great Experiment, which seemed to have become a definite entity in our thoughts. Mr. Trelawny became more and more enthusiastic as the time wore on; hope was with him becoming certainty. Doctor Winchester seemed to become imbued with some of his spirit, though at times he would throw out some scientific fact which would either make an impasse to the other's line of argument, or would come as an arresting shock. Mr. Corbeck, on the other hand, seemed slightly antagonistic to the theory. It may have been that whilst the opinions of the others advanced, his own stood still; but the effect was an attitude which appeared negative, if not wholly one of negation.

As for Margaret, she seemed to be in some way overcome. Either it was some new phase of feeling with her, or else she was taking the issue more seriously than she had yet done. She was generally more or less distraite, as though sunk in a brown study; from this she would recover herself with a start. This was usually when there occurred some marked episode in the journey, such as stopping at a station, or when the thunderous rumble of crossing a viaduct woke the echoes of the hills or cliffs around us. On each such occasion she would plunge into the conversation, taking such a part in it as to show that, whatever had been her abstracted thought, her senses had taken in fully all that had gone on around her. Towards myself her manner was strange. Sometimes it was marked by a distance, half shy, half haughty, which was new to me. At other times there were moments of passion in look and gesture which almost made me dizzy with delight. Little, however, of a marked nature transpired during the journey. There was but one episode which had in it any element of alarm, but as we were all asleep at the time it did not disturb us. We only learned it from a communicative guard in the morning. Whilst running between Dawlish and Teignmouth the train was stopped by a warning given by someone who moved a torch to and fro right on the very track. The driver had found on pulling up that just ahead of the train a small landslip had taken place, some of the red earth from the high bank having fallen away. It did not however reach to the metals; and the driver had resumed his way, none too well pleased at the delay. To use his own words, the guard thought "there was too much bally caution on this 'ere line!'"

We arrived at Westerton about nine o'clock in the evening. Carts and horses were in waiting, and the work of unloading the train began at once. Our own party did not wait to see the work done, as it was in the hands of competent people. We took the carriage which was in waiting, and through the darkness of the night sped on to Kyllion.

We were all impressed by the house as it appeared in the bright moonlight. A great grey stone mansion of the Jacobean period; vast and spacious, standing high over the sea on the very verge of a high cliff. When we had swept round the curve of the avenue cut through the rock, and come out on the high plateau on which the house stood, the crash and murmur of waves breaking against rock far below us came with an invigorating breath of moist sea air. We understood then in an instant how well we were shut out from the world on that rocky shelf above the sea.

Within the house we found all ready. Mrs. Grant and her staff had worked well, and all was bright and fresh and clean. We took a brief survey of the chief rooms and then separated to have a wash and to change our clothes after our long journey of more than four-and-twenty hours.

We had supper in the great dining-room on the south side, the walls of which actually hung over the sea. The murmur came up muffled, but it never ceased. As the little promontory stood well out into the sea, the northern side of the house was open; and the due north was in no way shut out by the great mass of rock, which, reared high above us, shut out the rest of the world. Far off across the bay we could see the trembling lights of the castle, and here and there along the shore the faint light of a fisher's window. For the rest the sea was a dark blue plain with an occasional flicker of light as the gleam of starlight fell on the slope of a swelling wave.

When supper was over we all adjourned to the room which Mr. Trelawny had set aside as his study, his bedroom being close to it. As we entered, the first thing I noticed was a great safe, somewhat similar to that which stood in his room in London. When we were in the room Mr. Trelawny went over to the table, and, taking out his pocket-book, laid it on the table. As he did so he pressed down on it with the palm of his hand. A strange pallor came over his face. With fingers that trembled he opened the book, saying as he did so:

"Its bulk does not seem the same; I hope nothing has happened!"

All three of us men crowded round close. Margaret alone remained calm; she stood erect and silent, and still as a statue. She had a far-away look in her eyes, as though she did not either know or care what was going on around her.

With a despairing gesture Trelawny threw open the pouch of the pocket-book wherein he had placed the Jewel of Seven Stars. As he sank down on the chair which stood close to him, he said in a hoarse voice:

"My God! it is gone. Without it the Great Experiment can come to nothing!"

His words seemed to wake Margaret from her introspective mood. An agonised spasm swept her face; but almost on the instant she was calm. She almost smiled as she said:

"You may have left it in your room, Father. Perhaps it has fallen out of the pocket-book whilst you were changing." Without a word we all hurried into the next room through the open door between the study and the bedroom. And then a sudden calm fell on us like a cloud of fear.

There! on the table, lay the Jewel of Seven Stars, shining and sparkling with lurid light, as though each of the seven points of each the seven stars gleamed through blood!

Timidly we each looked behind us, and then at each other. Margaret was now like the rest of us. She had lost her statuesque calm. All the introspective rigidity had gone from her; and she clasped her hands together till the knuckles were white.

Without a word Mr. Trelawny raised the Jewel, and hurried with it into the next room. As quietly as he could he opened the door of the safe with the key fastened to his wrist and placed the Jewel within. When the heavy doors were closed and locked he seemed to breathe more freely.

Somehow this episode, though a disturbing one in many ways, seemed to bring us back to our old selves. Since we had left London we had all been overstrained; and this was a sort of relief. Another step in our strange enterprise had been effected.

The change back was more marked in Margaret than in any of us. Perhaps it was that she was a woman, whilst we were men; perhaps it was that she was younger than the rest; perhaps both reasons were effective, each in its own way. At any rate the change was there, and I was happier than I had been through the long journey. All her buoyancy, her tenderness, her deep feeling seemed to shine forth once more; now and again as her father's eyes rested on her, his face seemed to light up.

Whilst we waited for the carts to arrive, Mr. Trelawny took us through the house, pointing out and explaining where the objects which we had brought with us were to be placed. In one respect only did he withhold confidence. The positions of all those things which had connection with the Great Experiment were not indicated. The cases containing them were to be left in the outer hall, for the present.

By the time we had made the survey, the carts began to arrive; and the stir and bustle of the previous night were renewed. Mr. Trelawny stood in the hall beside the massive ironbound door, and gave directions as to the placing of each of the great packing-cases. Those containing many items were placed in the inner hall where they were to be unpacked.

In an incredibly short time the whole consignment was delivered; and the men departed with a douceur for each, given through their foreman, which made them effusive in their thanks. Then we all went to our own rooms. There was a strange confidence over us all. I do not think that any one of us had a doubt as the the quiet passing of the remainder of the night.

The faith was justified, for on our re-assembling in the morning we found that all had slept well and peaceably.

During that day all the curios, except those required for the Great Experiment, were put into the places designed for them. Then it was arranged that all the servants should go back with Mrs. Grant to London on the next morning.

When they had all gone Mr. Trelawny, having seen the doors locked, took us into the study.

"Now," said he when we were seated, "I have a secret to impart; but, according to an old promise which does not leave me free, I must ask you each to give me a solemn promise not to reveal it. For three hundred years at least such a promise has been exacted from everyone to whom it was told, and more than once life and safety were secured through loyal observance of the promise. Even as it is, I am breaking the letter, if not the spirit of the tradition; for I should only tell it to the immediate members of my family."

We all gave the promise required. Then he went on:

"There is a secret place in this house, a cave, natural originally but finished by labour, underneath this house. I will not undertake to say that it has always been used according to the law. During the Bloody

Assize more than a few Cornishmen found refuge in it; and later, and earlier, it formed, I have no doubt whatever, a useful place for storing contraband goods. 'Tre Pol and Pen', I suppose you know, have always been smugglers; and their relations and friends and neighbours have not held back from the enterprise. For all such reasons a safe hiding-place was always considered a valuable possession; and as the heads of our House have always insisted on preserving the secret, I am in honour bound to it. Later on, if all be well, I shall of course tell you, Margaret, and you too, Ross, under the conditions that I am bound to make."

He rose up, and we all followed him. Leaving us in the outer hall, he went away alone for a few minutes; and returning, beckoned us to follow him.

In the inside hall we found a whole section of an outstanding angle moved away, and from the cavity saw a great hole dimly dark, and the beginning of a rough staircase cut in the rock. As it was not pitch dark there was manifestly some means of lighting it naturally, so without pause we followed our host as he descended. After some forty or fifty steps cut in a winding passage, we came to a great cave whose further end tapered away into blackness. It was a huge place, dimly lit by a few irregular slits of eccentric shape. Manifestly these were faults in the rock which would readily allow the windows be disguised. Close to each of them was a hanging shutter which could be easily swung across by means of a dangling rope. The sound of the ceaseless beat of the waves came up muffled from far below. Mr. Trelawny at once began to speak:

"This is the spot which I have chosen, as the best I know, for the scene of our Great Experiment. In a hundred different ways it fulfils the conditions which I am led to believe are primary with regard to success. Here, we are, and shall be, as isolated as Queen Tera herself would have been in her rocky tomb in the Valley of the Sorcerer, and still in a rocky cavern. For good or ill we must here stand by our chances, and abide by results. If we are successful we shall be able to let in on the world of modern science such a flood of light from the Old World as will change every condition of thought and experiment and practice. If we fail, then even the knowledge of our attempt will die with us. For this, and all else which may come, I believe we are prepared!" He paused. No one spoke, but we all bowed our heads gravely in acquiescence. He resumed, but with a certain hesitancy:

"It is not yet too late! If any of you have a doubt or misgiving, for God's speak it now! Whoever it may be, can go hence without let or hindrance. The rest of us can go on our way alone!"

Again he paused, and looked keenly at us in turn. We looked at each other; but no one quailed. For my own part, if I had had any doubt as to going on, the look on Margaret's face would have reassured me. It was fearless; it was intense; it was full of a divine calm.

Mr. Trelawny took a long breath, and in a more cheerful, as well as in a more decided tone, went on:

"As we are all of one mind, the sooner we get the necessary matters in train the better. Let me tell you that this place, like all the rest of the house, can be lit with electricity. We could not join the wires to the mains lest our secret should become known, but I have a cable here which we can attach in the hall and complete the circuit!" As he was speaking, he began to ascend the steps. From close to the entrance he took the end of a cable; this he drew forward and attached to a switch in the wall. Then, turning on a tap, he flooded the whole vault and staircase below with light. I could now see from the volume of light streaming up into the hallway that the hole beside the staircase went direct into the cave. Above it was a pulley and a mass of strong tackle with multiplying blocks of the Smeaton order. Mr. Trelawny, seeing me looking at this, said, correctly interpreting my thoughts:

"Yes! it is new. I hung it there myself on purpose. I knew we should have to lower great weights; and as I did not wish to take too many into my confidence, I arranged a tackle which I could work alone if necessary."

We set to work at once; and before nightfall had lowered, unhooked, and placed in the positions designated for each by Trelawny, all the great sarcophagi and all the curios and other matters which we had taken with us.

It was a strange and weird proceeding, the placing of those wonderful monuments of a bygone age in that green cavern, which represented in its cutting and purpose and up-to-date mechanism and electric lights both the old world and the new. But as time went on I grew more and more to recognise the wisdom and correctness of Mr. Trelawny's choice. I was much disturbed when Silvio, who had been brought into the cave in the arms of his mistress, and who was lying asleep on my coat which I had taken off, sprang up when the cat mummy had been unpacked, and flew at it with the same ferocity which he had previously exhibited. The incident showed Margaret in a new phase, and one which gave my heart a pang. She had been standing quite still at one side of the cave leaning on a sarcophagus, in one of those fits of abstraction which had of late come upon her; but on hearing the sound, and seeing Silvio's violent onslaught, she seemed to fall into a positive fury of passion. Her eyes blazed, and her mouth took a hard, cruel tension which was new to me.

Instinctively she stepped towards Silvio as if to interfere in the attack. But I too had stepped forward; and as she caught my eye a strange spasm came upon her, and she stopped. Its intensity made me hold my breath; and I put up my hand to clear my eyes. When I had done this, she had on the instant recovered her calm, and there was a look of brief wonder on her face. With all her old grace and sweetness she swept over and lifted Silvio, just as she had done on former occasions, and held him in her arms, petting him and treating him as though he were a little child who had erred.

As I looked a strange fear came over me. The Margaret that I knew seemed to be changing; and in my inmost heart I prayed that the disturbing cause might soon come to an end. More than ever I longed at that moment that our terrible Experiment should come to a prosperous termination.

When all had been arranged in the room as Mr. Trelawny wished he turned to us, one after another, till he had concentrated the intelligence of us all upon him. Then he said:

"All is now ready in this place. We must only await the proper time to begin."

We were silent for a while. Doctor Winchester was the first to speak:

"What is the proper time? Have you any approximation, even if you are not satisfied as to the exact day?" He answered at once:

"After the most anxious thought I have fixed on July 31!"

"May I ask why that date?" He spoke his answer slowly:

"Queen Tera was ruled in great degree by mysticism, and there are so many evidences that she looked for resurrection that naturally she would choose a period ruled over by a God specialised to such a purpose. Now, the fourth month of the season of Inundation was ruled by Harmachis, this being the name for ‘Ra’, the Sun-God, at his rising in the morning, and therefore typifying the awakening or arising. This arising is manifestly to physical life, since it is of the mid-world of human daily life. Now as this month begins on our 25th July, the seventh day would be July 31st, for you may be sure that the mystic Queen would not have chosen any day but the seventh or some power of seven.

“I dare say that some of you have wondered why our preparations have been so deliberately undertaken. This is why! We must be ready in every possible way when the time comes; but there was no use in having to wait round for a needless number of days.”

And so we waited only for the 31st of July, the next day but one, when the Great Experiment would be made.

Chapter XVII

Doubts and Fears

We learn of great things by little experiences. The history of ages is but an indefinite repetition of the history of hours. The record of a soul is but a multiple of the story of a moment. The Recording Angel writes in the Great Book in no rainbow tints; his pen is dipped in no colours but light and darkness. For the eye of infinite wisdom there is no need of shading. All things, all thoughts, all emotions, all experiences, all doubts and hopes and fears, all intentions, all wishes seen down to the lower strata of their concrete and multitudinous elements, are finally resolved into direct opposites.

Did any human being wish for the epitome of a life wherein were gathered and grouped all the experiences that a child of Adam could have, the history, fully and frankly written, of my own mind during the next forty-eight hours would afford him all that could be wanted. And the Recorder could have wrought as usual in sunlight and shadow, which may be taken to represent the final expressions of Heaven and Hell. For in the highest Heaven is Faith; and Doubt hangs over the yawning blackness of Hell.

There were of course times of sunshine in those two days; moments when, in the realisation of Margaret's sweetness and her love for me, all doubts were dissipated like morning mist before the sun. But the balance of the time — and an overwhelming balance it was — gloom hung over me like a pall. The hour, in whose coming I had acquiesced, was approaching so quickly and was already so near that the sense of finality was bearing upon me! The issue was perhaps life or death to any of us; but for this we were all prepared.

Margaret and I were one as to the risk. The question of the moral aspect of the case, which involved the religious belief in which I had been reared, was not one to trouble me; for the issues, and the causes that lay behind them, were not within my power even to comprehend. The doubt of the success of the Great Experiment was such a doubt as exists in all enterprises which have great possibilities. To me, whose life was passed in a series of intellectual struggles, this form of doubt was a stimulus, rather than deterrent. What then was it that made for me a trouble, which became an anguish when my thoughts dwelt long on it?

I was beginning to doubt Margaret!

What it was that I doubted I knew not. It was not her love, or her honour, or her truth, or her kindness, or her zeal. What then was it?

It was herself!

Margaret was changing! At times during the past few days I had hardly known her as the same girl whom I had met at the picnic, and whose vigils I had shared in the sick-room of her father. Then, even in her moments of greatest sorrow or fright or anxiety, she was all life and thought and keenness. Now she was generally distraite, and at times in a sort of negative condition as though her mind — her very being — was not present. At such moments she would have full possession of observation and memory. She would know and remember all that was going on, and had gone on around her; but her coming back to her old self had to me something the sensation of a new person coming into the room. Up to the time of leaving London I had been content whenever she was present. I had over me that delicious sense of security which comes with the consciousness that love is mutual. But now doubt had taken its place. I never knew whether the personality present was my Margaret — the old

Margaret whom I had loved at the first glance — or the other new Margaret, whom I hardly understood, and whose intellectual aloofness made an impalpable barrier between us. Sometimes she would become, as it were, awake all at once. At such times, though she would say to me sweet and pleasant things which she had often said before, she would seem most unlike herself. It was almost as if she was speaking parrot-like or at dictation of one who could read words or acts, but not thoughts. After one or two experiences of this kind, my own doubting began to make a barrier; for I could not speak with the ease and freedom which were usual to me. And so hour by hour we drifted apart. Were it not for the few odd moments when the old Margaret was back with me full of her charm I do not know what would have happened. As it was, each such moment gave me a fresh start and kept my love from changing.

I would have given the world for a confidant; but this was impossible. How could I speak a doubt of Margaret to anyone, even her father! How could I speak a doubt to Margaret, when Margaret herself was the theme! I could only endure — and hope. And of the two the endurance was the lesser pain.

I think that Margaret must have at times felt that there was some cloud between us, for towards the end of the first day she began to shun me a little; or perhaps it was that she had become more diffident that usual about me. Hitherto she had sought every opportunity of being with me, just as I had tried to be with her; so that now any avoidance, one of the other, made a new pain to us both.

On this day the household seemed very still. Each one of us was about his own work, or occupied with his own thoughts. We only met at meal times; and then, though we talked, all seemed more or less preoccupied. There was not in the house even the stir of the routine of service. The precaution of Mr. Trelawny in having three rooms prepared for each of us had rendered servants unnecessary. The dining-room was solidly prepared with cooked provisions for several days. Towards evening I went out by myself for a stroll. I had looked for Margaret to ask her to come with me; but when I found her, she was in one of her apathetic moods, and the charm of her presence seemed lost to me. Angry with myself, but unable to quell my own spirit of discontent, I went out alone over the rocky headland.

On the cliff, with the wide expanse of wonderful sea before me, and no sound but the dash of waves below and the harsh screams of the seagulls above, my thoughts ran free. Do what I would, they returned continuously to one subject, the solving of the doubt that was upon me. Here in the solitude, amid the wide circle of Nature's force and strife, my mind began to work truly. Unconsciously I found myself asking a question which I would not allow myself to answer. At last the persistence of a mind working truly prevailed; I found myself face to face with my doubt. The habit of my life began to assert itself, and I analysed the evidence before me.

It was so startling that I had to force myself into obedience to logical effort. My starting-place was this: Margaret was changed — in what way, and by what means? Was it her character, or her mind, or her nature? for her physical appearance remained the same. I began to group all that I had ever heard of her, beginning at her birth.

It was strange at the very first. She had been, according to Corbeck's statement, born of a dead mother during the time that her father and his friend were in a trance in the tomb at Aswan. That trance was presumably effected by a woman; a woman mummied, yet preserving as we had every reason to believe from after experience, an astral body subject to a free will and an active intelligence. With that astral body, space ceased to exist. The vast distance between London and Aswan became as naught; and whatever power of necromancy the Sorceress had might have been exercised over the dead mother, and possibly the dead child.

The dead child! Was it possible that the child was dead and was made alive again? Whence then came the animating spirit — the soul? Logic was pointing the way to me now with a vengeance!

If the Egyptian belief was true for Egyptians, then the "Ka" of the dead Queen and her "Khu" could animate what she might choose. In such case Margaret would not be an individual at all, but simply a phase of Queen Tera herself; an astral body obedient to her will!

Here I revolted against logic. Every fibre of my being resented such a conclusion. How could I believe that there was no Margaret at all; but just an animated image, used by the Double of a woman of forty centuries ago to its own ends...! Somehow, the outlook was brighter to me now, despite the new doubts.

At least I had Margaret!

Back swung the logical pendulum again. The child then was not dead. If so, had the Sorceress had anything to do with her birth at all? It was evident — so I took it again from Corbeck — that there was a strange likeness between Margaret and the pictures of Queen Tera. How could this be? It could not be any birth-mark reproducing what had been in the mother's mind; for Mrs. Trelawny had never seen the pictures. Nay, even her father had not seen them till he had found his way into the tomb only a few days before her birth. This phase I could not get rid of so easily as the last; the fibres of my being remained quiet. There remained to me the horror of doubt. And even then, so strange is the mind of man, Doubt itself took a concrete image; a vast and impenetrable gloom, through which flickered irregularly and spasmodically tiny points of evanescent light, which seemed to quicken the darkness into a positive existence.

The remaining possibility of relations between Margaret and the mummied Queen was, that in some occult way the Sorceress had power to change places with the other. This view of things could not be so lightly thrown aside. There were too many suspicious circumstances to warrant this, now that my attention was fixed on it and my intelligence recognised the possibility. Hereupon there began to come into my mind all the strange incomprehensible matters which had whirled through our lives in the last few days. At first they all crowded in upon me in a jumbled mass; but again the habit of mind of my working life prevailed, and they took order. I found it now easier to control myself; for there was something to grasp, some work to be done; though it was of a sorry kind, for it was or might be antagonistic to Margaret. But Margaret was herself at stake! I was thinking of her and fighting for her; and yet if I were to work in the dark, I might be even harmful to her. My first weapon in her defence was truth. I must know and understand; I might then be able to act. Certainly, I could not act beneficently without a just conception and recognition of the facts. Arranged in order these were as follows:

Firstly: the strange likeness of Queen Tera to Margaret who had been born in another country a thousand miles away, where her mother could not possibly have had even a passing knowledge of her appearance.

Secondly: the disappearance of Van Huyn's book when I had read up to the description of the Star Ruby.

Thirdly: the finding of the lamps in the boudoir. Tera with her astral body could have unlocked the door of Corbeck's room in the hotel, and have locked it again after her exit with the lamps. She could in the same way have opened the window, and put the lamps in the boudoir. It need not have been that Margaret in her own person should have had any hand in this; but — but it was at least strange.

Fourthly: here the suspicions of the Detective and the Doctor came back to me with renewed force, and with a larger understanding.

Fifthly: there were the occasions on which Margaret foretold with accuracy the coming occasions of quietude, as though she had some conviction or knowledge of the intentions of the astral-bodied Queen.

Sixthly: there was her suggestion of the finding of the Ruby which her father had lost. As I thought now afresh over this episode in the light of suspicion in which her own powers were involved, the only conclusion I could come to was — always supposing that the theory of the Queen's astral power was correct — that Queen Tera being anxious that all should go well in the movement from London to Kyllion had in her own way taken the Jewel from Mr. Trelawny's pocket-book, finding it of some use in her supernatural guardianship of the journey. Then in some mysterious way she had, through Margaret, made the suggestion of its loss and finding.

Seventhly, and lastly, was the strange dual existence which Margaret seemed of late to be leading; and which in some way seemed a consequence or corollary of all that had gone before.

The dual existence! This was indeed the conclusion which overcame all difficulties and reconciled opposites. If indeed Margaret were not in all ways a free agent, but could be compelled to speak or act as she might be instructed; or if her whole being could be changed for another without the possibility of any one noticing the doing of it, then all things were possible. All would depend on the spirit of the individuality by which she could be so compelled. If this individuality were just and kind and clean, all might be well. But if not! ... The thought was too awful for words. I ground my teeth with futile rage, as the ideas of horrible possibilities swept through me.

Up to this morning Margaret's lapses into her new self had been few and hardly noticeable, save when once or twice her attitude towards myself had been marked by a bearing strange to me. But today the contrary was the case; and the change presaged badly. It might be that that other individuality was of the lower, not of the better sort! Now that I thought of it I had reason to fear. In the history of the mummy, from the time of Van Huyn's breaking into the tomb, the record of deaths that we knew of, presumably effected by her will and agency, was a startling one. The Arab who had stolen the hand from the mummy; and the one who had taken it from his body. The Arab chief who had tried to steal the Jewel from Van Huyn, and whose throat bore the marks of seven fingers. The two men found dead on the first night of Trelawny's taking away the sarcophagus; and the three on the return to the tomb. The Arab who had opened the secret serdab. Nine dead men, one of them slain manifestly by the Queen's own hand! And beyond this again the several savage attacks on Mr. Trelawny in his own room, in which, aided by her Familiar, she had tried to open the safe and to extract the Talisman jewel. His device of fastening the key to his wrist by a steel bangle, though successful in the end, had wellnigh cost him his life.

If then the Queen, intent on her resurrection under her own conditions had, so to speak, waded to it through blood, what might she not do were her purpose thwarted? What terrible step might she not take to effect her wishes? Nay, what were her wishes; what was her ultimate purpose? As yet we had had only Margaret's statement of them, given in all the glorious enthusiasm of her lofty soul. In her record there was no expression of love to be sought or found. All we knew for certain was that she had set before her the object of resurrection, and that in it the North which she had manifestly loved was to have a special part. But that the resurrection was to be accomplished in the lonely tomb in the Valley of the Sorcerer was apparent. All preparations had been carefully made for accomplishment from within, and for her ultimate exit in her new and living form. The sarcophagus was unlidded. The oil jars, though hermetically sealed, were to be easily opened by hand; and in them provision was made for shrinkage through a vast period of time. Even flint and steel were provided for the production of flame. The Mummy Pit was left open in violation of usage; and beside the stone door on the cliff side was fixed an imperishable chain by which she might in safety descend to earth. But as to what her after intentions were we had no clue. If it was that she meant to begin life again as a humble individual, there was something so noble in the thought that it even warmed my heart to her and turned my wishes to her success.

The very idea seemed to endorse Margaret's magnificent tribute to her purpose, and helped to calm my troubled spirit.

Then and there, with this feeling strong upon me, I determined to warn Margaret and her father of dire possibilities; and to await, as well content as I could in my ignorance, the development of things over which I had no power.

I returned to the house in a different frame of mind to that in which I had left it; and was enchanted to find Margaret — the old Margaret — waiting for me.

After dinner, when I was alone for a time with the father and daughter, I opened the subject, though with considerable hesitation:

"Would it not be well to take every possible precaution, in case the Queen may not wish what we are doing, with regard to what may occur before the Experiment; and at or after her waking, if it comes off?" Margaret's answer came back quickly; so quickly that I was convinced she must have had it ready for some one:

"But she does approve! Surely it cannot be otherwise. Father is doing, with all his brains and all his energy and all his great courage, just exactly what the great Queen had arranged!"

"But," I answered, "that can hardly be. All that she arranged was in a tomb high up in a rock, in a desert solitude, shut away from the world by every conceivable means. She seems to have depended on this isolation to insure against accident. Surely, here in another country and age, with quite different conditions, she may in her anxiety make mistakes and treat any of you — of us — as she did those others in times gone past. Nine men that we know of have been slain by her own hand or by her instigation. She can be remorseless if she will." It did not strike me till afterwards when I was thinking over this conversation, how thoroughly I had accepted the living and conscious condition of Queen Tera as a fact. Before I spoke, I had feared I might offend Mr. Trelawny; but to my pleasant surprise he smiled quite genially as he answered me:

"My dear fellow, in a way you are quite right. The Queen did undoubtedly intend isolation; and, all told, it would be best that her experiment should be made as she arranged it. But just think, that became impossible when once the Dutch explorer had broken into her tomb. That was not my doing. I am innocent of it, though it was the cause of my setting out to rediscover the sepulchre. Mind, I do not say for a moment that I would not have done just the same as

Van Huyn. I went into the tomb from curiosity; and I took away what I did, being fired with the zeal of acquisitiveness which animates the collector. But, remember also, that at this time I did not know of the Queen's intention of resurrection; I had no idea of the completeness of her preparations. All that came long afterwards. But when it did come, I have done all that I could to carry out her wishes to the full. My only fear is that I may have misinterpreted some of her cryptic instructions, or have omitted or overlooked something. But of this I am certain; I have left undone nothing that I can imagine right to be done; and I have done nothing that I know of to clash with Queen Tera's arrangement. I want her Great Experiment to succeed. To this end I have not spared labour or time or money — or myself. I have endured hardship, and braved danger. All my brains; all my knowledge and learning, such as they are; all my endeavours such as they can be, have been, are, and shall be devoted to this end, till we either win or lose the great stake that we play for."

"The great stake?" I repeated; "the resurrection of the woman, and the woman's life? The proof that resurrection can be accomplished; by magical powers; by scientific knowledge; or by use of some force which at present the world does not know?"

Then Mr. Trelawny spoke out the hopes of his heart which up to now he had indicated rather than expressed. Once or twice I had heard Corbeck speak of the fiery energy of his youth; but, save for the noble words of Margaret when she had spoken of Queen Tera's hope — which coming from his daughter made possible a belief that her power was in some sense due to heredity — I had seen no marked sign of it. But now his words, sweeping before them like a torrent all antagonistic thought, gave me a new idea of the man.

"'A woman's life!' What is a woman's life in the scale with what we hope for! Why, we are risking already a woman's life; the dearest life to me in all the world, and that grows more dear with every hour that passes. We are risking as well the lives of four men; yours and my own, as well as those two others who have been won to our confidence. 'The proof that resurrection can be accomplished!' That is much. A marvellous thing in this age of science, and the scepticism that knowledge makes. But life and resurrection are themselves but items in what may be won by the accomplishment of this Great Experiment. Imagine what it will be for the world of thought — the true world of human progress — the veritable road to the Stars, the itur ad astra of the Ancients — if there can come back to us out of the unknown past one who can yield to us the lore stored in the great Library of Alexandria, and lost in its consuming flames. Not only history can be set right, and the teachings of science made veritable from their beginnings; but we can be placed on the road to the knowledge of lost arts, lost learning, lost sciences, so that our feet may tread on the indicated path to their ultimate and complete restoration. Why, this woman can tell us what the world was like before what is called 'the Flood'; can give us the origin of that vast astounding myth; can set the mind back to the consideration of things which to us now seem primeval, but which were old stories before the days of the Patriarchs. But this is not the end! No, not even the beginning! If the story of this woman be all that we think — which some of us most firmly believe; if her powers and the restoration of them prove to be what we expect, why, then we may yet achieve a knowledge beyond what our age has ever known — beyond what is believed today possible for the children of men. If indeed this resurrection can be accomplished, how can we doubt the old knowledge, the old magic, the old belief! And if this be so, we must take it that the ‘Ka’ of this great and learned Queen has won secrets of more than mortal worth from her surroundings amongst the stars. This woman in her life voluntarily went down living to the grave, and came back again, as we learn from the records in her tomb; she chose to die her mortal death whilst young, so that at her resurrection in another age, beyond a trance of countless magnitude, she might emerge from her tomb in all the fulness and splendour of her youth and power. Already we have evidence that though her body slept in patience through those many centuries, her intelligence never passed away, that her resolution never flagged, that her will remained supreme; and, most important of all, that her memory was unimpaired. Oh, what possibilities are there in the coming of such a being into our midst! One whose history began before the concrete teaching of our Bible; whose experiences were antecedent to the formulation of the Gods of Greece; who can link together the Old and the New, Earth and Heaven, and yield to the known worlds of thought and physical existence the mystery of the Unknown — of the Old World in its youth, and of Worlds beyond our ken!”

He paused, almost overcome. Margaret had taken his hand when he spoke of her being so dear to him, and held it hard. As he spoke she continued to hold it. But there came over her face that change which I had so often seen of late; that mysterious veiling of her own personality which gave me the subtle sense of separation from her. In his impassioned vehemence her father did not notice; but when he stopped she seemed all at once to be herself again. In her glorious eyes came the added brightness of unshed tears; and with a gesture of passionate love and admiration, she stooped and kissed her father’s hand. Then, turning to me, she too spoke:

“Malcolm, you have spoken of the deaths that came from the poor

Queen; or rather that justly came from meddling with her arrangements and thwarting her purpose. Do you not think that, in putting it as you have done, you have been unjust? Who would not have done just as she did? Remember she was fighting for her life! Ay, and for more than her life! For life, and love, and all the glorious possibilities of that dim future in the unknown world of the North which had such enchanting hopes for her! Do you not think that she, with all the learning of her time, and with all the great and resistless force of her mighty nature, had hopes of spreading in a wider way the lofty aspirations of her soul! That she hoped to bring to the conquering of unknown worlds, and using to the advantage of her people, all that she had won from sleep and death and time; all of which might and could have been frustrated by the ruthless hand of an assassin or a thief. Were it you, in such case would you not struggle by all means to achieve the object of your life and hope; whose possibilities grew and grew in the passing of those endless years? Can you think that that active brain was at rest during all those weary centuries, whilst her free soul was flitting from world to world amongst the boundless regions of the stars? Had these stars in their myriad and varied life no lessons for her; as they have had for us since we followed the glorious path which she and her people marked for us, when they sent their winged imaginations circling amongst the lamps of the night!"

Here she paused. She too was overcome, and the welling tears ran down her cheeks. I was myself more moved than I can say. This was indeed my Margaret; and in the consciousness of her presence my heart leapt. Out of my happiness came boldness, and I dared to say now what I had feared would be impossible: something which would call the attention of Mr. Trelawny to what I imagined was the dual existence of his daughter. As I took Margaret's hand in mine and kissed it, I said to her father:

"Why, sir! she couldn't speak more eloquently if the very spirit of Queen Tera was with her to animate her and suggest thoughts!"

Mr. Trelawny's answer simply overwhelmed me with surprise. It manifested to me that he too had gone through just such a process of thought as my own.

"And what if it was; if it is! I know well that the spirit of her mother is within her. If in addition there be the spirit of that great and wondrous Queen, then she would be no less dear to me, but doubly dear! Do not have fear for her, Malcolm Ross; at least have no more fear than you may have for the rest of us!" Margaret took up the theme, speaking so quickly that her words seemed a continuation of her father's, rather than an interruption of them.

"Have no special fear for me, Malcolm. Queen Tera knows, and will offer us no harm. I know it! I know it, as surely as I am lost in the depth of my own love for you!"

There was something in her voice so strange to me that I looked quickly into her eyes. They were bright as ever, but veiled to my seeing the inward thought behind them as are the eyes of a caged lion.

Then the two other men came in, and the subject changed.

Chapter XVIII

The Lesson of the “Ka”

That night we all went to bed early. The next night would be an anxious one, and Mr. Trelawny thought that we should all be fortified with what sleep we could get. The day, too, would be full of work. Everything in connection with the Great Experiment would have to be gone over, so that at the last we might not fail from any unthought-of flaw in our working. We made, of course, arrangements for summoning aid in case such should be needed; but I do not think that any of us had any real apprehension of danger. Certainly we had no fear of such danger from violence as we had had to guard against in London during Mr. Trelawny’s long trance.

For my own part I felt a strange sense of relief in the matter. I had accepted Mr. Trelawny’s reasoning that if the Queen were indeed such as we surmised — such as indeed we now took for granted — there would not be any opposition on her part; for we were carrying out her own wishes to the very last. So far I was at ease — far more at ease than earlier in the day I should have thought possible; but there were other sources of trouble which I could not blot out from my mind. Chief amongst them was Margaret’s strange condition. If it was indeed that she had in her own person a dual existence, what might happen when the two existences became one? Again, and again, and again I turned this matter over in my mind, till I could have shrieked out in nervous anxiety. It was no consolation to me to remember that Margaret was herself satisfied, and her father acquiescent. Love is, after all, a selfish thing; and it throws a black shadow on anything between which and the light it stands. I seemed to hear the hands go round the dial of the clock; I saw darkness turn to gloom, and gloom to grey, and grey to light without pause or hindrance to the succession of my miserable feelings. At last, when it was decently possible without the fear of disturbing others, I got up. I crept along the passage to find if all was well with the others; for we had arranged that the door of each of our rooms should be left slightly open so that any sound of disturbance would be easily and distinctly heard.

One and all slept; I could hear the regular breathing of each, and my heart rejoiced that this miserable night of anxiety was safely passed. As I knelt in my own room in a burst of thankful prayer, I knew in the depths of my own heart the measure of my fear. I found my way out of the house, and went down to the water by the long stairway cut in the rock. A swim in the cool bright sea braced my nerves and made me my old self again.

As I came back to the top of the steps I could see the bright sunlight, rising from behind me, turning the rocks across the bay to glittering gold. And yet I felt somehow disturbed. It was all too bright; as it sometimes is before the coming of a storm. As I paused to watch it, I felt a soft hand on my shoulder; and, turning, found Margaret close to me; Margaret as bright and radiant as the morning glory of the sun! It was my own Margaret this time! My old Margaret, without alloy of any other; and I felt that, at least, this last and fatal day was well begun.

But alas! the joy did not last. When we got back to the house from a stroll around the cliffs, the same old routine of yesterday was resumed: gloom and anxiety, hope, high spirits, deep depression, and apathetic aloofness.

But it was to be a day of work; and we all braced ourselves to it with an energy which wrought its own salvation.

After breakfast we all adjourned to the cave, where Mr. Trelawny went over, point by point, the position of each item of our paraphernalia. He explained as he went on why each piece was so placed. He had with him the great rolls of paper with the measured plans and the signs and drawings which he had had made from his own and Corbeck's rough notes. As he had told us, these contained the whole of the hieroglyphics on walls and ceilings and floor of the tomb in the Valley of the Sorcerer. Even had not the measurements, made to scale, recorded the position of each piece of furniture, we could have eventually placed them by a study of the cryptic writings and symbols.

Mr. Trelawny explained to us certain other things, not laid down on the chart. Such as, for instance, that the hollowed part of the table was exactly fitted to the bottom of the Magic Coffer, which was therefore intended to be placed on it. The respective legs of this table were indicated by differently shaped uraei outlined on the floor, the head of each being extended in the direction of the similar uraeus twined round the leg. Also that the mummy, when laid on the raised portion in the bottom of the sarcophagus, seemingly made to fit the form, would lie head to the West and feet to the East, thus receiving the natural earth currents. "If this be intended," he said, "as I presume it is, I gather that the force to be used has something to do with magnetism or electricity, or both. It may be, of course, that some other force, such, for instance, as that emanating from radium, is to be employed. I have experimented with the latter, but only in such small quantity as I could obtain; but so far as I can ascertain the stone of the Coffer is absolutely impervious to its influence. There must be some such unsusceptible substances in nature. Radium does not seemingly manifest itself when distributed through pitchblende; and there are doubtless other such substances in which it can be imprisoned. Possibly these may belong to that class of “inert” elements discovered or isolated by Sir William Ramsay. It is therefore possible that in this Coffer, made from an aerolite and therefore perhaps containing some element unknown in our world, may be imprisoned some mighty power which is to be released on its opening.”

This appeared to be an end of this branch of the subject; but as he still kept the fixed look of one who is engaged in a theme we all waited in silence. After a pause he went on:

“There is one thing which has up to now, I confess, puzzled me. It may not be of prime importance; but in a matter like this, where all is unknown, we must take it that everything is important. I cannot think that in a matter worked out with such extraordinary scrupulosity such a thing should be overlooked. As you may see by the ground-plan of the tomb the sarcophagus stands near the north wall, with the Magic Coffer to the south of it. The space covered by the former is left quite bare of symbol or ornamentation of any kind. At the first glance this would seem to imply that the drawings had been made after the sarcophagus had been put into its place. But a more minute examination will show that the symbolisation on the floor is so arranged that a definite effect is produced. See, here the writings run in correct order as though they had jumped across the gap. It is only from certain effects that it becomes clear that there is a meaning of some kind. What that meaning may be is what we want to know. Look at the top and bottom of the vacant space, which lies West and East corresponding to the head and foot of the sarcophagus. In both are duplications of the same symbolisation, but so arranged that the parts of each one of them are integral portions of some other writing running crosswise. It is only when we get a coup d'oeil from either the head or the foot that you recognise that there are symbolisations. See! they are in triplicate at the corners and the centre of both top and bottom. In every case there is a sun cut in half by the line of the sarcophagus, as by the horizon. Close behind each of these and faced away from it, as though in some way dependent on it, is the vase which in hieroglyphic writing symbolises the heart— 'Ab' the Egyptians called it. Beyond each of these again is the figure of a pair of widespread arms turned upwards from the elbow; this is the determinative of the 'Ka' or 'Double'. But its relative position is different at top and bottom. At the head of the sarcophagus the top of the 'Ka' is turned towards the mouth of the vase, but at the foot the extended arms point away from it.

"The symbolisation seems to mean that during the passing of the Sun from West to East — from sunset to sunrise, or through the Under World, otherwise night — the Heart, which is material even in the tomb and cannot leave it, simply revolves, so that it can always rest on 'Ra' the Sun-God, the origin of all good; but that the Double, which represents the active principle, goes whither it will, the same by night as by day. If this be correct it is a warning — a caution — a reminder that the consciousness of the mummy does not rest but is to be reckoned with.

"Or it may be intended to convey that after the particular night of the resurrection, the 'Ka' would leave the heart altogether, thus typifying that in her resurrection the Queen would be restored to a lower and purely physical existence. In such case what would become of her memory and the experiences of her wide-wandering soul? The chiefest value of her resurrection would be lost to the world! This, however, does not alarm me. It is only guess-work after all, and is contradictory to the intellectual belief of the Egyptian theology, that the ‘Ka’ is an essential portion of humanity.” He paused and we all waited. The silence was broken by Doctor Winchester:

“But would not all this imply that the Queen feared intrusion of her tomb?” Mr. Trelawny smiled as he answered:

“My dear sir, she was prepared for it. The grave robber is no modern application of endeavour; he was probably known in the Queen’s own dynasty. Not only was she prepared for intrusion, but, as shown in several ways, she expected it. The hiding of the lamps in the serdab, and the institution of the avenging ‘treasurer’ shows that there was defence, positive as well as negative. Indeed, from the many indications afforded in the clues laid out with the most consummated thought, we may almost gather that she entertained it as a possibility that others — like ourselves, for instance — might in all seriousness undertake the work which she had made ready for her own hands when the time should have come. This very matter that I have been speaking of is an instance. The clue is intended for seeing eyes!”

Again we were silent. It was Margaret who spoke:

“Father, may I have that chart? I should like to study it during the day!”

“Certainly, my dear!” answered Mr. Trelawny heartily, as he handed it to her. He resumed his instructions in a different tone, a more matter-of-fact one suitable to a practical theme which had no mystery about it:

“I think you had better all understand the working of the electric light in case any sudden contingency should arise. I dare say you have noticed that we have a complete supply in every part of the house, so that there need not be a dark corner anywhere. This I had specially arranged. It is worked by a set of turbines moved by the flowing and ebbing tide, after the manner of the turbines at Niagara. I hope by this means to nullify accident and to have without fail a full supply ready at any time. Come with me and I will explain the system of circuits, and point out to you the taps and the fuses.” I could not but notice, as we went with him all over the house, how absolutely complete the system was, and how he had guarded himself against any disaster that human thought could foresee.

But out of the very completeness came a fear! In such an enterprise as ours the bounds of human thought were but narrow. Beyond it lay the vast of Divine wisdom, and Divine power!

When we came back to the cave, Mr. Trelawny took up another theme:

“We have now to settle definitely the exact hour at which the Great Experiment is to be made. So far as science and mechanism go, if the preparations are complete, all hours are the same. But as we have to deal with preparations made by a woman of extraordinarily subtle mind, and who had full belief in magic and had a cryptic meaning in everything, we should place ourselves in her position before deciding. It is now manifest that the sunset has an important place in the arrangements. As those suns, cut so mathematically by the edge of the sarcophagus, were arranged of full design, we must take our cue from this. Again, we find all along that the number seven has had an important bearing on every phase of the Queen’s thought and reasoning and action. The logical result is that the seventh hour after sunset was the time fixed on. This is borne out by the fact that on each of the occasions when action was taken in my house, this was the time chosen. As the sun sets tonight in Cornwall at eight, our hour is to be three in the morning!" He spoke in a matter-of-fact way, though with great gravity; but there was nothing of mystery in his word or manner. Still, we were all impressed to a remarkable degree. I could see this in the other men by the pallor that came on some of their faces, and by the stillness and unquestioning silence with which the decision was received. The only one who remained in any way at ease was Margaret, who had lapsed into one of her moods of abstraction, but who seemed to wake up to a note of gladness. Her father, who was watching her intently, smiled; her mood was to him a direct confirmation of his theory.

For myself I was almost overcome. The definite fixing of the hour seemed like the voice of Doom. When I think of it now, I can realise how a condemned man feels at his sentence, or at the sounding of the last hour he is to hear.

There could be no going back now! We were in the hands of God!

The hands of God...! And yet...! What other forces were arrayed? ... What would become of us all, poor atoms of earthly dust whirled in the wind which cometh whence and goeth whither no man may know. It was not for myself... Margaret...!

I was recalled by Mr. Trelawny's firm voice:

"Now we shall see to the lamps and finish our preparations." Accordingly we set to work, and under his supervision made ready the Egyptian lamps, seeing that they were well filled with the cedar oil, and that the wicks were adjusted and in good order. We lighted and tested them one by one, and left them ready so that they would light at once and evenly. When this was done we had a general look round; and fixed all in readiness for our work at night.

All this had taken time, and we were I think all surprised when as we emerged from the cave we heard the great clock in the hall chime four.

We had a late lunch, a thing possible without trouble in the present state of our commissariat arrangements. After it, by Mr. Trelawny's advice, we separated; each to prepare in our own way for the strain of the coming night. Margaret looked pale and somewhat overwrought, so I advised her to lie down and try to sleep. She promised that she would. The abstraction which had been upon her fitfully all day lifted for the time; with all her old sweetness and loving delicacy she kissed me good-bye for the present! With the sense of happiness which this gave me I went out for a walk on the cliffs. I did not want to think; and I had an instinctive feeling that fresh air and God's sunlight, and the myriad beauties of the works of His hand would be the best preparation of fortitude for what was to come.

When I got back, all the party were assembling for a late tea. Coming fresh from the exhilaration of nature, it struck me as almost comic that we, who were nearing the end of so strange — almost monstrous — an undertaking, should be yet bound by the needs and habits of our lives.

All the men of the party were grave; the time of seclusion, even if it had given them rest, had also given opportunity for thought. Margaret was bright, almost buoyant; but I missed about her something of her usual spontaneity. Towards myself there was a shadowy air of reserve, which brought back something of my suspicion. When tea was over, she went out of the room; but returned in a minute with the roll of drawing which she had taken with her earlier in the day. Coming close to Mr. Trelawny, she said:

"Father, I have been carefully considering what you said today about the hidden meaning of those suns and hearts and ‘Ka’s’, and I have been examining the drawings again.”

“And with what result, my child?” asked Mr. Trelawny eagerly.

“There is another reading possible!”

“And that?” His voice was now tremulous with anxiety. Margaret spoke with a strange ring in her voice; a ring that cannot be, unless there is the consciousness of truth behind it:

“It means that at the sunset the ‘Ka’ is to enter the ‘Ab’; and it is only at the sunrise that it will leave it!”

“Go on!” said her father hoarsely.

“It means that for this night the Queen’s Double, which is otherwise free, will remain in her heart, which is mortal and cannot leave its prison-place in the mummy-shrouding. It means that when the sun has dropped into the sea, Queen Tera will cease to exist as a conscious power, till sunrise; unless the Great Experiment can recall her to waking life. It means that there will be nothing whatever for you or others to fear from her in such way as we have all cause to remember. Whatever change may come from the working of the Great Experiment, there can come none from the poor, helpless, dead woman who has waited all those centuries for this night; who has given up to the coming hour all the freedom of eternity, won in the old way, in hope of a new life in a new world such as she longed for...!” She stopped suddenly. As she had gone on speaking there had come with her words a strange pathetic, almost pleading, tone which touched me to the quick. As she stopped, I could see, before she turned away her head, that her eyes were full of tears.

For once the heart of her father did not respond to her feeling. He looked exultant, but with a grim masterfulness which reminded me of the set look of his stern face as he had lain in the trance. He did not offer any consolation to his daughter in her sympathetic pain. He only said:

"We may test the accuracy of your surmise, and of her feeling, when the time comes!" Having said so, he went up the stone stairway and into his own room. Margaret's face had a troubled look as she gazed after him.

Strangely enough her trouble did not as usual touch me to the quick.

When Mr. Trelawny had gone, silence reigned. I do not think that any of us wanted to talk. Presently Margaret went to her room, and I went out on the terrace over the sea. The fresh air and the beauty of all before helped to restore the good spirits which I had known earlier in the day. Presently I felt myself actually rejoicing in the belief that the danger which I had feared from the Queen's violence on the coming night was obviated. I believed in Margaret's belief so thoroughly that it did not occur to me to dispute her reasoning. In a lofty frame of mind, and with less anxiety than I had felt for days, I went to my room and lay down on the sofa.

I was awaked by Corbeck calling to me, hurriedly:

"Come down to the cave as quickly as you can. Mr. Trelawny wants to see us all there at once. Hurry!"

I jumped up and ran down to the cave. All were there except Margaret, who came immediately after me carrying Silvio in her arms. When the cat saw his old enemy he struggled to get down; but Margaret held him fast and soothed him. I looked at my watch. It was close to eight.

When Margaret was with us her father said directly, with a quiet insistence which was new to me:

"You believe, Margaret, that Queen Tera has voluntarily undertaken to give up her freedom for this night? To become a mummy and nothing more, till the Experiment has been completed? To be content that she shall be powerless under all and any circumstances until after all is over and the act of resurrection has been accomplished, or the effort has failed?” After a pause Margaret answered in a low voice:

“Yes!”

In the pause her whole being, appearance, expression, voice, manner had changed. Even Silvio noticed it, and with a violent effort wriggled away from her arms; she did not seem to notice the act. I expected that the cat, when he had achieved his freedom, would have attacked the mummy; but on this occasion he did not. He seemed too cowed to approach it. He shrunk away, and with a piteous “miaou” came over and rubbed himself against my ankles. I took him up in my arms, and he nestled there content. Mr. Trelawny spoke again:

“You are sure of what you say! You believe it with all your soul?” Margaret’s face had lost the abstracted look; it now seemed illuminated with the devotion of one to whom is given to speak of great things. She answered in a voice which, though quiet, vibrated with conviction:

“I know it! My knowledge is beyond belief!” Mr. Trelawny spoke again:

“Then you are so sure, that were you Queen Tera herself, you would be willing to prove it in any way that I might suggest?”

“Yes, any way!” the answer rang out fearlessly. He spoke again, in a voice in which was no note of doubt:

“Even in the abandonment of your Familiar to death — to annihilation.”

She paused, and I could see that she suffered — suffered horribly.

There was in her eyes a hunted look, which no man can, unmoved, see in the eyes of his beloved. I was about to interrupt, when her father's eyes, glancing round with a fierce determination, met mine. I stood silent, almost spellbound; so also the other men. Something was going on before us which we did not understand!

With a few long strides Mr. Trelawny went to the west side of the cave and tore back the shutter which obscured the window. The cool air blew in, and the sunlight streamed over them both, for Margaret was now by his side. He pointed to where the sun was sinking into the sea in a halo of golden fire, and his face was as set as flint. In a voice whose absolute uncompromising hardness I shall hear in my ears at times till my dying day, he said:

"Choose! Speak! When the sun has dipped below the sea, it will be too late!" The glory of the dying sun seemed to light up Margaret's face, till it shone as if lit from within by a noble light, as she answered:

"Even that!"

Then stepping over to where the mummy cat stood on the little table, she placed her hand on it. She had now left the sunlight, and the shadows looked dark and deep over her. In a clear voice she said:

"Were I Tera, I would say 'Take all I have! This night is for the Gods alone!'"

As she spoke the sun dipped, and the cold shadow suddenly fell on us. We all stood still for a while. Silvio jumped from my arms and ran over to his mistress, rearing himself up against her dress as if asking to be lifted. He took no notice whatever of the mummy now.

Margaret was glorious with all her wonted sweetness as she said sadly:

"The sun is down, Father! Shall any of us see it again? The night of nights is come!”

Chapter XIX

The Great Experiment

If any evidence had been wanted of how absolutely one and all of us had come to believe in the spiritual existence of the Egyptian Queen, it would have been found in the change which in a few minutes had been effected in us by the statement of voluntary negation made, we all believed, through Margaret. Despite the coming of the fearful ordeal, the sense of which it was impossible to forget, we looked and acted as though a great relief had come to us. We had indeed lived in such a state of terrorism during the days when Mr. Trelawny was lying in a trance that the feeling had bitten deeply into us. No one knows till he has experienced it, what it is to be in constant dread of some unknown danger which may come at any time and in any form.

The change was manifested in different ways, according to each nature. Margaret was sad. Doctor Winchester was in high spirits, and keenly observant; the process of thought which had served as an antidote to fear, being now relieved from this duty, added to his intellectual enthusiasm. Mr. Corbeck seemed to be in a retrospective rather than a speculative mood. I was myself rather inclined to be gay; the relief from certain anxiety regarding Margaret was sufficient for me for the time.

As to Mr. Trelawny he seemed less changed than any. Perhaps this was only natural, as he had had in his mind the intention for so many years of doing that in which we were tonight engaged, that any event connected with it could only seem to him as an episode, a step to the end. His was that commanding nature which looks so to the end of an undertaking that all else is of secondary importance. Even now, though his terrible sternness relaxed under the relief from the strain, he never flagged nor faltered for a moment in his purpose. He asked us men to come with him; and going to the hall we presently managed to lower into the cave an oak table, fairly long and not too wide, which stood against the wall in the hall. This we placed under the strong cluster of electric lights in the middle of the cave. Margaret looked on for a while; then all at once her face blanched, and in an agitated voice she said:

"What are you going to do, Father?"

"To unroll the mummy of the cat! Queen Tera will not need her Familiar tonight. If she should want him, it might be dangerous to us; so we shall make him safe. You are not alarmed, dear?"

"Oh no!" she answered quickly. "But I was thinking of my Silvio, and how I should feel if he had been the mummy that was to be unswathed!"

Mr. Trelawny got knives and scissors ready, and placed the cat on the table. It was a grim beginning to our work; and it made my heart sink when I thought of what might happen in that lonely house in the mid-gloom of the night. The sense of loneliness and isolation from the world was increased by the moaning of the wind which had now risen ominously, and by the beating of waves on the rocks below. But we had too grave a task before us to be swayed by external manifestations: the unrolling of the mummy began.

There was an incredible number of bandages; and the tearing sound — they being stuck fast to each other by bitumen and gums and spices — and the little cloud of red pungent dust that arose, pressed on the senses of all of us. As the last wrappings came away, we saw the animal seated before us. He was all hunkered up; his hair and teeth and claws were complete. The eyes were closed, but the eyelids had not the fierce look which I expected. The whiskers had been pressed down on the side of the face by the bandaging; but when the pressure was taken away they stood out, just as they would have done in life. He was a magnificent creature, a tiger-cat of great size. But as we looked at him, our first glance of admiration changed to one of fear, and a shudder ran through each one of us; for here was a confirmation of the fears which we had endured.

His mouth and his claws were smeared with the dry, red stains of recent blood!

Doctor Winchester was the first to recover; blood in itself had small disturbing quality for him. He had taken out his magnifying-glass and was examining the stains on the cat's mouth. Mr. Trelawny breathed loudly, as though a strain had been taken from him.

"It is as I expected," he said. "This promises well for what is to follow."

By this time Doctor Winchester was looking at the red stained paws. "As I expected!" he said. "He has seven claws, too!" Opening his pocket-book, he took out the piece of blotting-paper marked by Silvio's claws, on which was also marked in pencil a diagram of the cuts made on Mr. Trelawny's wrist. He placed the paper under the mummy cat's paw. The marks fitted exactly.

When we had carefully examined the cat, finding, however, nothing strange about it but its wonderful preservation, Mr. Trelawny lifted it from the table. Margaret started forward, crying out:

"Take care, Father! Take care! He may injure you!"

"Not now, my dear!" he answered as he moved towards the stairway. Her face fell. "Where are you going?" she asked in a faint voice.

"To the kitchen," he answered. "Fire will take away all danger for the future; even an astral body cannot materialise from ashes!" He signed to us to follow him. Margaret turned away with a sob. I went to her; but she motioned me back and whispered:

"No, no! Go with the others. Father may want you. Oh! it seems like murder! The poor Queen's pet...!" The tears were dropping from under the fingers that covered her eyes.

In the kitchen was a fire of wood ready laid. To this Mr. Trelawny applied a match; in a few seconds the kindling had caught and the flames leaped. When the fire was solidly ablaze, he threw the body of the cat into it. For a few seconds it lay a dark mass amidst the flames, and the room was rank with the smell of burning hair. Then the dry body caught fire too. The inflammable substances used in embalming became new fuel, and the flames roared. A few minutes of fierce conflagration; and then we breathed freely. Queen Tera's Familiar was no more!

When we went back to the cave we found Margaret sitting in the dark. She had switched off the electric light, and only a faint glow of the evening light came through the narrow openings. Her father went quickly over to her and put his arms round her in a loving protective way. She laid her head on his shoulder for a minute and seemed comforted. Presently she called to me:

"Malcolm, turn up the light!" I carried out her orders, and could see that, though she had been crying, her eyes were now dry. Her father saw it too and looked glad. He said to us in a grave tone:

"Now we had better prepare for our great work. It will not do to leave anything to the last!" Margaret must have had a suspicion of what was coming, for it was with a sinking voice that she asked:

"What are you going to do now?" Mr. Trelawny too must have had a suspicion of her feelings, for he answered in a low tone:

“To unroll the mummy of Queen Tera!” She came close to him and said pleadingly in a whisper:

“Father, you are not going to unswathe her! All you men...! And in the glare of light!”

“But why not, my dear?”

“Just think, Father, a woman! All alone! In such a way! In such a place! Oh! it’s cruel, cruel!” She was manifestly much overcome. Her cheeks were flaming red, and her eyes were full of indignant tears. Her father saw her distress; and, sympathising with it, began to comfort her. I was moving off; but he signed to me to stay. I took it that after the usual manner of men he wanted help on such an occasion, and man-like wished to throw on someone else the task of dealing with a woman in indignant distress. However, he began to appeal first to her reason:

“Not a woman, dear; a mummy! She has been dead nearly five thousand years!”

“What does that matter? Sex is not a matter of years! A woman is a woman, if she had been dead five thousand centuries! And you expect her to arise out of that long sleep! It could not be real death, if she is to rise out of it! You have led me to believe that she will come alive when the Coffer is opened!”

“I did, my dear; and I believe it! But if it isn’t death that has been the matter with her all these years, it is something uncommonly like it. Then again, just think; it was men who embalmed her. They didn’t have women’s rights or lady doctors in ancient Egypt, my dear! And besides,” he went on more freely, seeing that she was accepting his argument, if not yielding to it, “we men are accustomed to such things. Corbeck and I have unrolled a hundred mummies; and there were as many women as men amongst them. Doctor Winchester in his work has had to deal with women as well of men, till custom has made him think nothing of sex. Even Ross has in his work as a barrister...” He stopped suddenly.

“You were going to help too!” she said to me, with an indignant look.

I said nothing; I thought silence was best. Mr. Trelawny went on hurriedly; I could see that he was glad of interruption, for the part of his argument concerning a barrister’s work was becoming decidedly weak:

“My child, you will be with us yourself. Would we do anything which would hurt or offend you? Come now! be reasonable! We are not at a pleasure party. We are all grave men, entering gravely on an experiment which may unfold the wisdom of old times, and enlarge human knowledge indefinitely; which may put the minds of men on new tracks of thought and research. An experiment,” as he went on his voice deepened, “which may be fraught with death to any one of us — to us all! We know from what has been, that there are, or may be, vast and unknown dangers ahead of us, of which none in the house today may ever see the end. Take it, my child, that we are not acting lightly; but with all the gravity of deeply earnest men! Besides, my dear, whatever feelings you or any of us may have on the subject, it is necessary for the success of the experiment to unswathe her. I think that under any circumstances it would be necessary to remove the wrappings before she became again a live human being instead of a spiritualised corpse with an astral body. Were her original intention carried out, and did she come to new life within her mummy wrappings, it might be to exchange a coffin for a grave! She would die the death of the buried alive! But now, when she has voluntarily abandoned for the time her astral power, there can be no doubt on the subject."

Margaret's face cleared. "All right, Father!" she said as she kissed him. "But oh! it seems a horrible indignity to a Queen, and a woman."

I was moving away to the staircase when she called me:

"Where are you going?" I came back and took her hand and stroked it as I answered:

"I shall come back when the unrolling is over!" She looked at me long, and a faint suggestion of a smile came over her face as she said:

"Perhaps you had better stay, too! It may be useful to you in your work as a barrister!" She smiled out as she met my eyes: but in an instant she changed. Her face grew grave, and deadly white. In a far away voice she said:

"Father is right! It is a terrible occasion; we need all to be serious over it. But all the same — nay, for that very reason you had better stay, Malcolm! You may be glad, later on, that you were present tonight!"

My heart sank down, down, at her words; but I thought it better to say nothing. Fear was stalking openly enough amongst us already!

By this time Mr. Trelawny, assisted by Mr. Corbeck and Doctor Winchester, had raised the lid of the ironstone sarcophagus which contained the mummy of the Queen. It was a large one; but it was none too big. The mummy was both long and broad and high; and was of such weight that it was no easy task, even for the four of us, to lift it out. Under Mr. Trelawny's direction we laid it out on the table prepared for it.

Then, and then only, did the full horror of the whole thing burst upon me! There, in the full glare of the light, the whole material and sordid side of death seemed staringly real. The outer wrappings, torn and loosened by rude touch, and with the colour either darkened by dust or worn light by friction, seemed creased as by rough treatment; the jagged edges of the wrapping-cloths looked fringed; the painting was patchy, and the varnish chipped. The coverings were evidently many, for the bulk was great. But through all, showed that unhidable human figure, which seems to look more horrible when partially concealed than at any other time. What was before us was Death, and nothing else. All the romance and sentiment of fancy had disappeared. The two elder men, enthusiasts who had often done such work, were not disconcerted; and Doctor Winchester seemed to hold himself in a business-like attitude, as if before the operating-table. But I felt low-spirited, and miserable, and ashamed; and besides I was pained and alarmed by Margaret's ghastly pallor.

Then the work began. The unrolling of the mummy cat had prepared me somewhat for it; but this was so much larger, and so infinitely more elaborate, that it seemed a different thing. Moreover, in addition to the ever present sense of death and humanity, there was a feeling of something finer in all this. The cat had been embalmed with coarser materials; here, all, when once the outer coverings were removed, was more delicately done. It seemed as if only the finest gums and spices had been used in this embalming. But there were the same surroundings, the same attendant red dust and pungent presence of bitumen; there was the same sound of rending which marked the tearing away of the bandages. There were an enormous number of these, and their bulk when opened was great. As the men unrolled them, I grew more and more excited. I did not take a part in it myself; Margaret had looked at me gratefully as I drew back. We clasped hands, and held each other hard. As the unrolling went on, the wrappings became finer, and the smell less laden with bitumen, but more pungent. We all, I think, began to feel it as though it caught or touched us in some special way. This, however, did not interfere with the work; it went on uninterruptedly. Some of the inner wrappings bore symbols or pictures. These were done sometimes wholly in pale green colour, sometimes in many colours; but always with a prevalence of green. Now and again Mr. Trelawny or Mr. Corbeck would point out some special drawing before laying the bandage on the pile behind them, which kept growing to a monstrous height.

At last we knew that the wrappings were coming to an end. Already the proportions were reduced to those of a normal figure of the manifest height of the Queen, who was more than average height. And as the end drew nearer, so Margaret's pallor grew; and her heart beat more and more wildly, till her breast heaved in a way that frightened me.

Just as her father was taking away the last of the bandages, he happened to look up and caught the pained and anxious look of her pale face. He paused, and taking her concern to be as to the outrage on modesty, said in a comforting way:

"Do not be uneasy, dear! See! there is nothing to harm you. The Queen has on a robe. — Ay, and a royal robe, too!"

The wrapping was a wide piece the whole length of the body. It being removed, a profusely full robe of white linen had appeared, covering the body from the throat to the feet.

And such linen! We all bent over to look at it.

Margaret lost her concern, in her woman's interest in fine stuff. Then the rest of us looked with admiration; for surely such linen was never seen by the eyes of our age. It was as fine as the finest silk. But never was spun or woven silk which lay in such gracious folds, constrict though they were by the close wrappings of the mummy cloth, and fixed into hardness by the passing of thousands of years.

Round the neck it was delicately embroidered in pure gold with tiny sprays of sycamore; and round the feet, similarly worked, was an endless line of lotus plants of unequal height, and with all the graceful abandon of natural growth.

Across the body, but manifestly not surrounding it, was a girdle of jewels. A wondrous girdle, which shone and glowed with all the forms and phases and colours of the sky!

The buckle was a great yellow stone, round of outline, deep and curved, as if a yielding globe had been pressed down. It shone and glowed, as though a veritable sun lay within; the rays of its light seemed to strike out and illumine all round. Flanking it were two great moonstones of lesser size, whose glowing, beside the glory of the sunstone, was like the silvery sheen of moonlight.

And then on either side, linked by golden clasps of exquisite shape, was a line of flaming jewels, of which the colours seemed to glow. Each of these stones seemed to hold a living star, which twinkled in every phase of changing light.

Margaret raised her hands in ecstasy. She bent over to examine more closely; but suddenly drew back and stood fully erect at her grand height. She seemed to speak with the conviction of absolute knowledge as she said:

“That is no cerement! It was no meant for the clothing of death! It is a marriage robe!”

Mr. Trelawny leaned over and touched the linen robe. He lifted a fold at the neck, and I knew from the quick intake of his breath that something had surprised him. He lifted yet a little more; and then he, too, stood back and pointed, saying:

“Margaret is right! That dress is not intended to be worn by the dead! See! her figure is not robed in it. It is but laid upon her.” He lifted the zone of jewels and handed it to Margaret. Then with both hands he raised the ample robe, and laid it across the arms which she extended in a natural impulse. Things of such beauty were too precious to be handled with any but the greatest care.

We all stood awed at the beauty of the figure which, save for the face cloth, now lay completely nude before us. Mr. Trelawny bent over, and with hands that trembled slightly, raised this linen cloth which was of the same fineness as the robe. As he stood back and the whole glorious beauty of the Queen was revealed, I felt a rush of shame sweep over me. It was not right that we should be there, gazing with irreverent eyes on such unclad beauty: it was indecent; it was almost sacrilegious! And yet the white wonder of that beautiful form was something to dream of. It was not like death at all; it was like a statue carven in ivory by the hand of a Praxiteles. There was nothing of that horrible shrinkage which death seems to effect in a moment. There was none of the wrinkled toughness which seems to be a leading characteristic of most mummies. There was not the shrunken attenuation of a body dried in the sand, as I had seen before in museums. All the pores of the body seemed to have been preserved in some wonderful way. The flesh was full and round, as in a living person; and the skin was as smooth as satin. The colour seemed extraordinary. It was like ivory, new ivory; except where the right arm, with shattered, bloodstained wrist and missing hand had lain bare to exposure in the sarcophagus for so many tens of centuries.

With a womanly impulse; with a mouth that drooped with pity, with eyes that flashed with anger, and cheeks that flamed, Margaret threw over the body the beautiful robe which lay across her arm. Only the face was then to be seen. This was more startling even than the body, for it seemed not dead, but alive. The eyelids were closed; but the long, black, curling lashes lay over on the cheeks. The nostrils, set in grave pride, seemed to have the repose which, when it is seen in life, is greater than the repose of death. The full, red lips, though the mouth was not open, showed the tiniest white line of pearly teeth within. Her hair, glorious in quantity and glossy black as the raven's wing, was piled in great masses over the white forehead, on which a few curling tresses strayed like tendrils. I was amazed at the likeness to Margaret, though I had had my mind prepared for this by Mr. Corbeck's quotation of her father's statement. This woman — I could not think of her as a mummy or a corpse — was the image of Margaret as my eyes had first lit on her. The likeness was increased by the jewelled ornament which she wore in her hair, the "Disk and Plumes", such as Margaret, too, had worn. It, too, was a glorious jewel; one noble pearl of moonlight lustre, flanked by carven pieces of moonstone.

Mr. Trelawny was overcome as he looked. He quite broke down; and when Margaret flew to him and held him close in her arms and comforted him, I heard him murmur brokenly:

"It looks as if you were dead, my child!"

There was a long silence. I could hear without the roar of the wind, which was now risen to a tempest, and the furious dashing of the waves far below. Mr. Trelawny's voice broke the spell:

"Later on we must try and find out the process of embalming. It is not like any that I know. There does not seem to have been any opening cut for the withdrawing of the viscera and organs, which apparently remain intact within the body. Then, again, there is no moisture in the flesh; but its place is supplied with something else, as though wax or stearine had been conveyed into the veins by some subtle process. I wonder could it be possible that at that time they could have used paraffin. It might have been, by some process that we know not, pumped into the veins, where it hardened!”

Margaret, having thrown a white sheet over the Queen’s body, asked us to bring it to her own room, where we laid it on her bed. Then she sent us away, saying:

“Leave her alone with me. There are still many hours to pass, and I do not like to leave her lying there, all stark in the glare of light. This may be the Bridal she prepared for — the Bridal of Death; and at least she shall wear her pretty robes.”

When presently she brought me back to her room, the dead Queen was dressed in the robe of fine linen with the embroidery of gold; and all her beautiful jewels were in place. Candles were lit around her, and white flowers lay upon her breast.

Hand in hand we stood looking at her for a while. Then with a sigh, Margaret covered her with one of her own snowy sheets. She turned away; and after softly closing the door of the room, went back with me to the others who had now come into the dining room. Here we all began to talk over the things that had been, and that were to be.

Now and again I could feel that one or other of us was forcing conversation, as if we were not sure of ourselves. The long wait was beginning to tell on our nerves. It was apparent to me that Mr. Trelawny had suffered in that strange trance more than we suspected, or than he cared to show. True, his will and his determination were as strong as ever; but the purely physical side of him had been weakened somewhat. It was indeed only natural that it should be. No man can go through a period of four days of absolute negation of life without being weakened by it somehow.

As the hours crept by, the time passed more and more slowly. The other men seemed to get unconsciously a little drowsy. I wondered if in the case of Mr. Trelawny and Mr. Corbeck, who had already been under the hypnotic influence of the Queen, the same dormance was manifesting itself. Doctor Winchester had periods of distraction which grew longer and more frequent as the time wore on.

As to Margaret, the suspense told on her exceedingly, as might have been expected in the case of a woman. She grew paler and paler still; till at last about midnight, I began to be seriously alarmed about her. I got her to come into the library with me, and tried to make her lie down on a sofa for a little while. As Mr. Trelawny had decided that the experiment was to be made exactly at the seventh hour after sunset, it would be as nearly as possible three o'clock in the morning when the great trial should be made. Even allowing a whole hour for the final preparations, we had still two hours of waiting to go through, and I promised faithfully to watch her and to awake her at any time she might name. She would not hear of it, however. She thanked me sweetly and smiled at me as she did so; but she assured me that she was not sleepy, and that she was quite able to bear up. That it was only the suspense and excitement of waiting that made her pale. I agreed perforce; but I kept her talking of many things in the library for more than an hour; so that at last, when she insisted on going back to her father's room I felt that I had at least done something to help her pass the time.

We found the three men sitting patiently in silence. With manlike fortitude they were content to be still when they felt they had done all in their power. And so we waited.

The striking of two o'clock seemed to freshen us all up. Whatever shadows had been settling over us during the long hours preceding seemed to lift at once; and we went about our separate duties alert and with alacrity. We looked first to the windows to see that they were closed, and we got ready our respirators to put them on when the time should be close at hand. We had from the first arranged to use them for we did not know whether some noxious fume might not come from the magic coffer when it should be opened. Somehow, it never seemed to occur to any of us that there was any doubt as to its opening.

Then, under Margaret's guidance, we carried the mummied body of Queen Tera from her room into her father's, and laid it on a couch. We put the sheet lightly over it, so that if she should wake she could at once slip from under it. The severed hand was placed in its true position on her breast, and under it the Jewel of Seven Stars which Mr. Trelawny had taken from the great safe. It seemed to flash and blaze as he put it in its place.

It was a strange sight, and a strange experience. The group of grave silent men carried the white still figure, which looked like an ivory statue when through our moving the sheet fell back, away from the lighted candles and the white flowers. We placed it on the couch in that other room, where the blaze of the electric lights shone on the great sarcophagus fixed in the middle of the room ready for the final experiment, the great experiment consequent on the researches during a lifetime of these two travelled scholars. Again, the startling likeness between Margaret and the mummy, intensified by her own extraordinary pallor, heightened the strangeness of it all. When all was finally fixed three-quarters of an hour had gone, for we were deliberate in all our doings. Margaret beckoned me, and I went out with her to bring in Silvio. He came to her purring. She took him up and handed him to me; and then did a thing which moved me strangely and brought home to me keenly the desperate nature of the enterprise on which we were embarked. One by one, she blew out the candles carefully and placed them back in their usual places. When she had finished she said to me:

“They are done with now. Whatever comes — life or death — there will be no purpose in their using now.” Then taking Silvio into her arms, and pressing him close to her bosom where he purred loudly, we went back to the room. I closed the door carefully behind me, feeling as I did so a strange thrill as of finality. There was to be no going back now. Then we put on our respirators, and took our places as had been arranged. I was to stand by the taps of the electric lights beside the door, ready to turn them off or on as Mr. Trelawny should direct. Doctor Winchester was to stand behind the couch so that he should not be between the mummy and the sarcophagus; he was to watch carefully what should take place with regard to the Queen. Margaret was to be beside him; she held Silvio ready to place him upon the couch or beside it when she might think right. Mr. Trelawny and Mr. Corbeck were to attend to the lighting of the lamps. When the hands of the clock were close to the hour, they stood ready with their linstocks.

The striking of the silver bell of the clock seemed to smite on our hearts like a knell of doom. One! Two! Three!

Before the third stroke the wicks of the lamps had caught, and I had turned out the electric light. In the dimness of the struggling lamps, and after the bright glow of the electric light, the room and all within it took weird shapes, and all seemed in an instant to change. We waited with our hearts beating. I know mine did, and I fancied I could hear the pulsation of the others.

The seconds seemed to pass with leaden wings. It were as though all the world were standing still. The figures of the others stood out dimly, Margaret's white dress alone showing clearly in the gloom. The thick respirators which we all wore added to the strange appearance. The thin light of the lamps showed Mr. Trelawny's square jaw and strong mouth and the brown shaven face of Mr. Corbeck. Their eyes seemed to glare in the light. Across the room Doctor Winchester's eyes twinkled like stars, and Margaret's blazed like black suns. Silvio's eyes were like emeralds.

Would the lamps never burn up!

It was only a few seconds in all till they did blaze up. A slow, steady light, growing more and more bright, and changing in colour from blue to crystal white. So they stayed for a couple of minutes without change in the coffer; till at last there began to appear all over it a delicate glow. This grew and grew, till it became like a blazing jewel, and then like a living thing whose essence of life was light. We waited and waited, our hearts seeming to stand still.

All at once there was a sound like a tiny muffled explosion and the cover lifted right up on a level plane a few inches; there was no mistaking anything now, for the whole room was full of a blaze of light. Then the cover, staying fast at one side rose slowly up on the other, as though yielding to some pressure of balance. The coffer still continued to glow; from it began to steal a faint greenish smoke. I could not smell it fully on account of the respirator; but, even through that, I was conscious of a strange pungent odour. Then this smoke began to grow thicker, and to roll out in volumes of ever increasing density till the whole room began to get obscure. I had a terrible desire to rush over to Margaret, whom I saw through the smoke still standing erect behind the couch. Then, as I looked, I saw Doctor Winchester sink down. He was not unconscious; for he waved his hand back and forward, as though to forbid any one to come to him. At this time the figures of Mr. Trelawny and Mr. Corbeck were becoming indistinct in the smoke which rolled round them in thick billowy clouds. Finally I lost sight of them altogether. The coffer still continued to glow; but the lamps began to grow dim. At first I thought that their light was being overpowered by the thick black smoke; but presently I saw that they were, one by one, burning out. They must have burned quickly to produce such fierce and vivid flames.

I waited and waited, expecting every instant to hear the command to turn up the light; but none came. I waited still, and looked with harrowing intensity at the rolling billows of smoke still pouring out of the glowing casket, whilst the lamps sank down and went out one by one.

Finally there was but one lamp alight, and that was dimly blue and flickering. The only effective light in the room was from the glowing casket. I kept my eyes fixed toward Margaret; it was for her now that all my anxiety was claimed. I could just see her white frock beyond the still white shrouded figure on the couch. Silvio was troubled; his piteous mewing was the only sound in the room. Deeper and denser grew the black mist and its pungency began to assail my nostrils as well as my eyes. Now the volume of smoke coming from the coffer seemed to lessen, and the smoke itself to be less dense. Across the room I saw something white move where the couch was. There were several movements. I could just catch the quick glint of white through the dense smoke in the fading light; for now the glow of the coffer began quickly to subside. I could still hear Silvio, but his mewing came from close under; a moment later I could feel him piteously crouching on my foot.

Then the last spark of light disappeared, and through the Egyptian darkness I could see the faint line of white around the window blinds. I felt that the time had come to speak; so I pulled off my respirator and called out:

“Shall I turn up the light?” There was no answer; so before the thick smoke choked me, I called again but more loudly:

“Mr. Trelawny, shall I turn up the light?” He did not answer; but from across the room I heard Margaret’s voice, sounding as sweet and clear as a bell:

“Yes, Malcolm!” I turned the tap and the lamps flashed out. But they were only dim points of light in the midst of that murky ball of smoke. In that thick atmosphere there was little possibility of illumination. I ran across to Margaret, guided by her white dress, and caught hold of her and held her hand. She recognised my anxiety and said at once:

“I am all right.”

“Thank God!” I said. “How are the others? Quick, let us open all the windows and get rid of this smoke!” To my surprise, she answered in a sleepy way:

“They will be all right. They won’t get any harm.” I did not stop to inquire how or on what ground she formed such an opinion, but threw up the lower sashes of all the windows, and pulled down the upper. Then I threw open the door.

A few seconds made a perceptible change as the thick, black smoke began to roll out of the windows. Then the lights began to grow into strength and I could see the room. All the men were overcome. Beside the couch Doctor Winchester lay on his back as though he had sunk down and rolled over; and on the farther side of the sarcophagus, where they had stood, lay Mr. Trelawny and Mr. Corbeck. It was a relief to me to see that, though they were unconscious, all three were breathing heavily as though in a stupor. Margaret still stood behind the couch. She seemed at first to be in a partially dazed condition; but every instant appeared to get more command of herself. She stepped forward and helped me to raise her father and drag him close to a window. Together we placed the others similarly, and she flew down to the dining-room and returned with a decanter of brandy. This we proceeded to administer to them all in turn. It was not many minutes after we had opened the windows when all three were struggling back to consciousness. During this time my entire thoughts and efforts had been concentrated on their restoration; but now that this strain was off, I looked round the room to see what had been the effect of the experiment. The thick smoke had nearly cleared away; but the room was still misty and was full of a strange pungent acrid odour.

The great sarcophagus was just as it had been. The coffer was open, and in it, scattered through certain divisions or partitions wrought in its own substance, was a scattering of black ashes. Over all, sarcophagus, coffer and, indeed, all in the room, was a sort of black film of greasy soot. I went over to the couch. The white sheet still lay over part of it; but it had been thrown back, as might be when one is stepping out of bed.

But there was no sign of Queen Tera! I took Margaret by the hand and led her over. She reluctantly left her father to whom she was administering, but she came docilely enough. I whispered to her as I held her hand:

“What has become of the Queen? Tell me! You were close at hand, and must have seen if anything happened!” She answered me very softly:

“There was nothing that I could see. Until the smoke grew too dense I kept my eyes on the couch, but there was no change. Then, when all grew so dark that I could not see, I thought I heard a movement close to me. It might have been Doctor Winchester who had sunk down overcome; but I could not be sure. I thought that it might be the Queen waking, so I put down poor Silvio. I did not see what became of him; but I felt as if he had deserted me when I heard him mewing over by the door. I hope he is not offended with me!” As if in answer, Silvio came running into the room and reared himself against her dress, pulling it as though clamouring to be taken up. She stooped down and took him up and began to pet and comfort him.

I went over and examined the couch and all around it most carefully. When Mr. Trelawny and Mr. Corbeck recovered sufficiently, which they did quickly, though Doctor Winchester took longer to come round, we went over it afresh. But all we could find was a sort of ridge of impalpable dust, which gave out a strange dead odour. On the couch lay the jewel of the disk and plumes which the Queen had worn in her hair, and the Star Jewel which had words to command the Gods.

Other than this we never got clue to what had happened. There was just one thing which confirmed our idea of the physical annihilation of the mummy. In the sarcophagus in the hall, where we had placed the mummy of the cat, was a small patch of similar dust.

In the autumn Margaret and I were married. On the occasion she wore the mummy robe and zone and the jewel which Queen Tera had worn in her hair. On her breast, set in a ring of gold make like a twisted lotus stalk, she wore the strange Jewel of Seven Stars which held words to command the God of all the worlds. At the marriage the sunlight streaming through the chancel windows fell on it, and it seemed to glow like a living thing.

The graven words may have been of efficacy; for Margaret holds to them, and there is no other life in all the world so happy as my own.

We often think of the great Queen, and we talk of her freely. Once, when I said with a sigh that I was sorry she could not have waked into a new life in a new world, my wife, putting both her hands in mine and looking into my eyes with that far-away eloquent dreamy look which sometimes comes into her own, said lovingly:

“Do not grieve for her! Who knows, but she may have found the joy she sought? Love and patience are all that make for happiness in this world; or in the world of the past or of the future; of the living or the dead. She dreamed her dream; and that is all that any of us can ask!”

THE END

The Man

This is Bram Stoker's ninth novel, which was first published in 1905 by William Heinemann of London. It is a romance novel and has also been published under the title *The Gates of Life*.

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FORE-GLIMPSE

'I would rather be an angel than God!'

The voice of the speaker sounded clearly through the hawthorn tree. The young man and the young girl who sat together on the low tombstone looked at each other. They had heard the voices of the two children talking, but had not noticed what they said; it was the sentiment, not the sound, which roused their attention.

The girl put her finger to her lips to impress silence, and the man nodded; they sat as still as mice whilst the two children went on talking.

* * * * *

The scene would have gladdened a painter's heart. An old churchyard. The church low and square-towered, with long mullioned windows, the yellow-grey stone roughened by age and tender-hued with lichens. Round it clustered many tombstones tilted in all directions. Behind the church a line of gnarled and twisted yews.

The churchyard was full of fine trees. On one side a magnificent cedar; on the other a great copper beech. Here and there among the tombs and headstones many beautiful blossoming trees rose from the long green grass. The laburnum glowed in the June afternoon sunlight; the lilac, the hawthorn and the clustering meadowsweet which fringed the edge of the lazy stream mingled their heavy sweetness in sleepy fragrance. The yellow-grey crumbling walls were green in places with wrinkled harts-tongues, and were topped with sweet-williams and spreading house-leek and stone-crop and wild-flowers whose delicious sweetness made for the drowsy repose of perfect summer.

But amid all that mass of glowing colour the two young figures seated on the grey old tomb stood out conspicuously. The man was in conventional hunting-dress: red coat, white stock, black hat, white breeches, and top-boots. The girl was one of the richest, most glowing, and yet withal daintiest figures the eye of man could linger on. She was in riding-habit of hunting scarlet cloth; her black hat was tipped forward by piled-up masses red-golden hair. Round her neck was a white lawn scarf in the fashion of a man's hunting-stock, close fitting, and sinking into a gold-buttoned waistcoat of snowy twill. As she sat with the long skirt across her left arm her tiny black top-boots appeared underneath. Her gauntleted gloves were of white buckskin; her riding-whip was plaited of white leather, topped with ivory and banded with gold.

Even in her fourteenth year Miss Stephen Norman gave promise of striking beauty; beauty of a rarely composite character. In her the various elements of her race seemed to have cropped out. The firm-set jaw, with chin broader and more square than is usual in a woman, and the wide fine forehead and aquiline nose marked the high descent from Saxon through Norman. The glorious mass of red hair, of the true flame colour, showed the blood of another ancient ancestor of Northern race, and suited well with the voluptuous curves of the full, crimson lips. The purple-black eyes, the raven eyebrows and eyelashes, and the fine curve of the nostrils spoke of the Eastern blood of the far-back wife of the Crusader. Already she was tall for her age, with something of that lankiness which marks the early development of a really fine figure. Long-legged, long-necked, as straight as a lance, with head poised on the proud neck like a lily on its stem.

Stephen Norman certainly gave promise of a splendid womanhood. Pride, self-reliance and dominance were marked in every feature; in her bearing and in her lightest movement.

Her companion, Harold An Wolf, was some five years her senior, and by means of those five years and certain qualities had long stood in the position of her mentor. He was more than six feet two in height, deep-chested, broad-shouldered, lean-flanked, long-armed and big-handed. He had that appearance strength, with well-poised neck and forward set of the head, which marks the successful athlete.

The two sat quiet, listening. Through the quiet hum of afternoon came the voices of the two children. Outside the lich-gate, under the shade of the spreading cedar, the horses stamped occasionally as the flies troubled them. The grooms were mounted; one held the delicate-limbed white Arab, the other the great black horse.

‘I would rather be an angel than God!’

The little girl who made the remark was an ideal specimen of the village Sunday-school child. Blue-eyed, rosy-cheeked, thick-legged, with her straight brown hair tied into a hard bunch with a much-creased, cherry-coloured ribbon. A glance at the girl would have satisfied the most sceptical as to her goodness. Without being in any way smug she was radiant with self-satisfaction and well-doing. A child of the people; an early riser; a help to her mother; a good angel to her father; a little mother to her brothers and sisters; cleanly in mind and body; self-reliant, full of faith, cheerful.

The other little girl was prettier, but of a more stubborn type; more passionate, less organised, and infinitely more assertive. Black-haired, black-eyed, swarthy, large-mouthed, snub-nosed; the very type and essence of unrestrained, impulsive, emotional, sensual nature. A seeing eye would have noted inevitable danger for the early years of her womanhood. She seemed amazed by the self-abnegation implied by her companion's statement; after a pause she replied:

'I wouldn't! I'd rather be up at the top of everything and give orders to the angels if I chose. I can't think, Marjorie, why you'd rather take orders than give them.'

'That's just it, Susan. I don't want to give orders; I'd rather obey them. It must be very terrible to have to think of things so much, that you want everything done your own way. And besides, I shouldn't like to have to be just!'

'Why not?' the voice was truculent, though there was wistfulness in it also.

'Oh Susan. Just fancy having to punish; for of course justice needs punishing as well as praising. Now an angel has such a nice time, helping people and comforting them, and bringing sunshine into dark places. Putting down fresh dew every morning; making the flowers grow, and bringing babies and taking care of them till their mothers find them. Of course God is very good and very sweet and very merciful, but oh, He must be very terrible.'

'All the same I would rather be God and able to do things!'

Then the children moved off out of earshot. The two seated on the tombstone looked after them. The first to speak was the girl, who said:

'That's very sweet and good of Marjorie; but do you know, Harold, I like Susie's idea better.'

'Which idea was that, Stephen?'

'Why, didn't you notice what she said: "I'd like to be God and be able to do things"?'

'Yes,' he said after a moment's reflection. 'That's a fine idea in the abstract; but I doubt of its happiness in the long-run.'

'Doubt of its happiness? Come now? what could there be better, after all? Isn't it good enough to be God? What more do you want?'

The girl's tone was quizzical, but her great black eyes blazed with some thought of sincerity which lay behind the fun. The young man shook his head with a smile of kindly tolerance as he answered:

'It isn't that — surely you must know it. I'm ambitious enough, goodness knows; but there are bounds to satisfy even me. But I'm not sure that the good little thing isn't right. She seemed, somehow, to hit a bigger truth than she knew: "fancy having to be just."'

'I don't see much difficulty in that. Anyone can be just!'

'Pardon me,' he answered, 'there is perhaps nothing so difficult in the whole range of a man's work.' There was distinct defiance in the girl's eyes as she asked:

'A man's work! Why a man's work? Isn't it a woman's work also?'

'Well, I suppose it ought to be, theoretically; practically it isn't.'

'And why not, pray?' The mere suggestion of any disability of woman as such aroused immediate antagonism. Her companion suppressed a smile as he answered deliberately:

'Because, my dear Stephen, the Almighty has ordained that justice is not a virtue women can practise. Mind, I do not say women are unjust. Far from it, where there are no interests of those dear to them they can be of a sincerity of justice that can make a man's blood run cold. But justice in the abstract is not an ordinary virtue: it has to be considerate as well as stern, and above all interest of all kinds and of every one—' The girl interrupted hotly:

'I don't agree with you at all. You can't give an instance where women are unjust. I don't mean of course individual instances, but classes of cases where injustice is habitual.' The suppressed smile cropped out now unconsciously round the man's lips in a way which was intensely aggravating to the girl.

'I'll give you a few,' he said. 'Did you ever know a mother just to a boy who beat her own boy at school?' The girl replied quietly:

'Ill-treatment and bullying are subjects for punishment, not justice.'

'Oh, I don't mean that kind of beating. I mean getting the prizes their own boys contended for; getting above them in class; showing superior powers in running or cricket or swimming, or in any of the forms of effort in which boys vie with each other.' The girl reflected, then she spoke:

'Well, you may be right. I don't altogether admit it, but I accept it as not on my side. But this is only one case.'

'A pretty common one. Do you think that Sheriff of Galway, who in default of a hangman hanged his son with his own hands, would have done so if he had been a woman?' The girl answered at once:

'Frankly, no. I don't suppose the mother was ever born who would do such a thing. But that is not a common case, is it? Have you any other?' The young man paused before he spoke:

'There is another, but I don't think I can go into it fairly with you.'

'Why not?'

'Well, because after all you know, Stephen, you are only a girl and you can't be expected to know.' The girl laughed:

'Well, if it's anything about women surely a girl, even of my tender age, must know something more of it, or be able to guess at, than any young man can. However, say what you think and I'll tell you frankly if I agree — that is if a woman can be just, in such a matter.’

‘Shortly the point is this: Can a woman be just to another woman, or to a man for the matter of that, where either her own affection or a fault of the other is concerned?’

‘I don’t see any reason to the contrary. Surely pride alone should ensure justice in the former case, and the consciousness of superiority in the other.’ The young man shook his head:

‘Pride and the consciousness of superiority! Are they not much the same thing. But whether or no, if either of them has to be relied on, I’m afraid the scales of Justice would want regulating, and her sword should be blunted in case its edge should be turned back on herself. I have an idea that although pride might be a guiding principle with you individually, it would be a failure with the average. However, as it would be in any case a rule subject to many exceptions I must let it go.’

Harold looked at his watch and rose. Stephen followed him; transferring her whip into the hand which held up the skirt, she took his arm with her right hand in the pretty way in which a young girl clings to her elders. Together they went out at the lich-gate. The groom drew over with the horses. Stephen patted hers and gave her a lump of sugar. Then putting her foot into Harold’s ready hand she sprang lightly into the saddle. Harold swung himself into his saddle with the dexterity of an accomplished rider.

As the two rode up the road, keeping on the shady side under the trees, Stephen said quietly, half to herself, as if the sentence had impressed itself on her mind:

‘To be God and able to do things!’

Harold rode on in silence. The chill of some vague fear was upon him.

CHAPTER I — STEPHEN

Stephen Norman of Normanstand had remained a bachelor until close on middle age, when the fact took hold of him that there was no immediate heir to his great estate. Whereupon, with his wonted decision, he set about looking for a wife.

He had been a close friend of his next neighbour, Squire Rowly, ever since their college days. They had, of course, been often in each other's houses, and Rowly's young sister — almost a generation younger than himself, and the sole fruit of his father's second marriage — had been like a little sister to him too. She had, in the twenty years which had elapsed, grown to be a sweet and beautiful young woman. In all the past years, with the constant opportunity which friendship gave of close companionship, the feeling never altered. Squire Norman would have been surprised had he been asked to describe Margaret Rowly and found himself compelled to present the picture of a woman, not a child.

Now, however, when his thoughts went womanward and wifeward, he awoke to the fact that Margaret came within the category of those he sought. His usual decision ran its course. Semi-brotherly feeling gave place to a stronger and perhaps more selfish feeling. Before he even knew it, he was head over ears in love with his pretty neighbour.

Norman was a fine man, stalwart and handsome; his forty years sat so lightly on him that his age never seemed to come into question in a woman's mind. Margaret had always liked him and trusted him; he was the big brother who had no duty in the way of scolding to do. His presence had always been a gladness; and the sex of the girl, first unconsciously then consciously, answered to the man's overtures, and her consent was soon obtained.

When in the fulness of time it was known that an heir was expected, Squire Norman took for granted that the child would be a boy, and held the idea so tenaciously that his wife, who loved him deeply, gave up warning and remonstrance after she had once tried to caution him against too fond a hope. She saw how bitterly he would be disappointed in case it should prove to be a girl. He was, however, so fixed on the point that she determined to say no more. After all, it might be a boy; the chances were equal. The Squire would not listen to any one else at all; so as the time went on his idea was more firmly fixed than ever. His arrangements were made on the base that he would have a son. The name was of course decided. Stephen had been the name of all the Squires of Normanstand for ages — as far back as the records went; and Stephen the new heir of course would be.

Like all middle-aged men with young wives he was supremely anxious as the time drew near. In his anxiety for his wife his belief in the son became passive rather than active. Indeed, the idea of a son was so deeply fixed in his mind that it was not disturbed even by his anxiety for the young wife he idolised.

When instead of a son a daughter was born, the Doctor and the nurse, who knew his views on the subject, held back from the mother for a little the knowledge of the sex. Dame Norman was so weak that the Doctor feared lest anxiety as to how her husband would bear the disappointment, might militate against her. Therefore the Doctor sought the Squire in his study, and went resolutely at his task.

‘Well, Squire, I congratulate you on the birth of your child!’ Norman was of course struck with the use of the word ‘child’; but the cause of his anxiety was manifested by his first question:

‘How is she, Doctor? Is she safe?’ The child was after all of secondary importance! The Doctor breathed more freely; the question had lightened his task. There was, therefore, more assurance in his voice as he answered:

‘She is safely through the worst of her trouble, but I am greatly anxious yet. She is very weak. I fear anything that might upset her.’

The Squire’s voice came quick and strong:

‘There must be no upset! And now tell me about my son?’ He spoke the last word half with pride, half bashfully.

‘Your son is a daughter!’ There was silence for so long that the Doctor began to be anxious. Squire Norman sat quite still; his right hand resting on the writing-table before him became clenched so hard that the knuckles looked white and the veins red. After a long slow breath he spoke:

‘She, my daughter, is well?’ The Doctor answered with cheerful alacrity:

‘Splendid! — I never saw a finer child in my life. She will be a comfort and an honour to you!’ The Squire spoke again:

‘What does her mother think? I suppose she’s very proud of her?’

‘She does not know yet that it is a girl. I thought it better not to let her know till I had told you.’

‘Why?’

‘Because — because — Norman, old friend, you know why! Because you had set your heart on a son; and I know how it would grieve that sweet young wife and mother to feel your disappointment. I want your lips to be the first to tell her; so that on may assure her of your happiness in that a daughter has been born to you.’

The Squire put out his great hand and laid it on the other’s shoulder. There was almost a break in his voice as he said:

‘Thank you, my old friend, my true friend, for your thought. When may I see her?’

‘By right, not yet. But, as knowing your views, she may fret herself till she knows, I think you had better come at once.’

All Norman’s love and strength combined for his task. As he leant over and kissed his young wife there was real fervour in his voice as he said:

‘Where is my dear daughter that you may place her in my arms?’ For an instant there came a chill to the mother’s heart that her hopes had been so far disappointed; but then came the reaction of her joy that her husband, her baby’s father, was pleased. There was a heavenly dawn of red on her pale face as she drew her husband’s head down and kissed him.

‘Oh, my dear,’ she said, ‘I am so happy that you are pleased!’ The nurse took the mother’s hand gently and held it to the baby as she laid it in the father’s arms.

He held the mother’s hand as he kissed the baby’s brow.

The Doctor touched him gently on the arm and beckoned him away. He went with careful footsteps, looking behind as he went.

After dinner he talked with the Doctor on various matters; but presently he asked:

‘I suppose, Doctor, it is no sort of rule that the first child regulates the sex of a family?’

‘No, of course not. Otherwise how should we see boys and girls mixed in one family, as is nearly always the case. But, my friend,’ he went on, ‘you must not build hopes so far away. I have to tell you that your wife is far from strong. Even now she is not so well as I could wish, and there yet may be change.’ The Squire leaped impetuously to his feet as he spoke quickly:

‘Then why are we waiting here? Can nothing be done? Let us have the best help, the best advice in the world.’ The Doctor raised his hand.

‘Nothing can be done as yet. I have only fear.’

‘Then let us be ready in case your fears should be justified! Who are the best men in London to help in such a case?’ The Doctor mentioned two names; and within a few minutes a mounted messenger was galloping to Norcester, the nearest telegraph centre. The messenger was to arrange for a special train if necessary. Shortly afterwards the Doctor went again to see his patient. After a long absence he came back, pale and agitated. Norman felt his heart sink when he saw him; a groan broke from him as the Doctor spoke:

‘She is much worse! I am in great fear that she may pass away before the morning!’ The Squire’s strong voice was clouded, with a hoarse veil as he asked:

‘May I see her?’

‘Not yet; at present she is sleeping. She may wake strengthened; in which case you may see her. But if not—’

‘If not?’ — the voice was not like his own.

‘Then I shall send for you at once!’ The Doctor returned to his vigil. The Squire, left alone, sank on his knees, his face in his hands; his great shoulders shook with the intensity of his grief.

An hour or more passed before he heard hurried steps. He sprang to the door:

‘Well?’

‘You had better come now.’

‘Is she better?’

‘Alas! no. I fear her minutes are numbered. School yourself, my dear old friend! God will help you in this bitter hour. All you can do now is to make her last moments happy.'

'I know! I know!' he answered in a voice so calm that his companion wondered.

When they came into the room Margaret was dozing. When her eyes opened and she found her husband beside her bed there spread over her face a glad look; which, alas! soon changed to one of pain. She motioned to him to bend down. He knelt and put his head beside her on the pillow; his arms went tenderly round her as though by his iron devotion and strength he would shield her from all harm. Her voice came very low and in broken gasps; she was summoning all her strength that she might speak:

'My dear, dear husband, I am so sad at leaving you! You have made me so happy, and I love you so! Forgive me, dear, for the pain I know you will suffer when I am gone! And oh, Stephen, I know you will cherish our little one — yours and mine — when I am gone. She will have no mother; you will have to be father and mother too.'

'I will hold her in my very heart's core, my darling, as I hold you!' He could hardly speak from emotion. She went on:

'And oh, my dear, you will not grieve that she is not a son to carry on your name?' And then a sudden light came into her eyes; and there was exultation in her weak voice as she said:

'She is to be our only one; let her be indeed our son! Call her the name we both love!' For answer he rose and laid his hand very, very tenderly on the babe as he said:

'This dear one, my sweet wife, who will carry your soul in her breast, will be my son; the only son I shall ever have. All my life long I shall, please Almighty God, so love her — our little Stephen

— as you and I love each other!’

She laid her hand on his so that it touched at once her husband and her child. Then she raised the other weak arm, and placed it round his neck, and their lips met. Her soul went out in this last kiss.

CHAPTER II — THE HEART OF A CHILD

For some weeks after his wife's death Squire Norman was overwhelmed with grief. He made a brave effort, however, to go through the routine of his life; and succeeded so far that he preserved an external appearance of bearing his loss with resignation. But within, all was desolation.

Little Stephen had winning ways which sent deep roots into her father's heart. The little bundle of nerves which the father took into his arms must have realised with all its senses that, in all that it saw and heard and touched, there was nothing but love and help and protection. Gradually the trust was followed by expectation. If by some chance the father was late in coming to the nursery the child would grow impatient and cast persistent, longing glances at the door. When he came all was joy.

Time went quickly by, and Norman was only recalled to its passing by the growth of his child. Seedtime and harvest, the many comings of nature's growth were such commonplaces to him, and had been for so many years, that they made on him no impressions of comparison. But his baby was one and one only. Any change in it was not only in itself a new experience, but brought into juxtaposition what is with what was. The changes that began to mark the divergence of sex were positive shocks to him, for they were unexpected. In the very dawn of babyhood dress had no special import; to his masculine eyes sex was lost in youth. But, little by little, came the tiny changes which convention has established. And with each change came to Squire Norman the growing realisation that his child was a woman. A tiny woman, it is true, and requiring more care and protection and devotion than a bigger one; but still a woman. The pretty little ways, the eager caresses, the graspings and holdings of the childish hands, the little roguish smiles and pantings and flirtings were all but repetitions in little of the dalliance of long ago. The father, after all, reads in the same book in which the lover found his knowledge.

At first there was through all his love for his child a certain resentment of her sex. His old hope of a son had been rooted too deeply to give way easily. But when the conviction came, and with it the habit of its acknowledgment, there came also a certain resignation, which is the halting-place for satisfaction. But he never, not then nor afterwards, quite lost the old belief that Stephen was indeed a son. Could there ever have been a doubt, the remembrance of his wife's eyes and of her faint voice, of her hope and her faith, as she placed her baby in his arms would have refused it a resting-place. This belief tinged all his after-life and moulded his policy with regard to his girl's upbringing. If she was to be indeed his son as well as his daughter, she must from the first be accustomed to boyish as well as to girlish ways. This, in that she was an only child, was not a difficult matter to accomplish. Had she had brothers and sisters, matters of her sex would soon have found their own level.

There was one person who objected strongly to any deviation from the conventional rule of a girl's education. This was Miss Laetitia Rowly, who took after a time, in so far as such a place could be taken, that of the child's mother. Laetitia Rowly was a young aunt of Squire Rowly of Norwood; the younger sister of his father and some sixteen years his own senior. When the old Squire's second wife had died, Laetitia, then a conceded spinster of thirty-six, had taken possession of the young Margaret. When Margaret had married Squire Norman, Miss Rowly was well satisfied; for she had known Stephen Norman all her life. Though she could have wished a younger bridegroom for her darling, she knew it would be hard to get a better man or one of more suitable station in life. Also she knew that Margaret loved him, and the woman who had never found the happiness of mutual love in her own life found a pleasure in the romance of true love, even when the wooer was middle-aged. She had been travelling in the Far East when the belated news of Margaret's death came to her. When she had arrived home she announced her intention of taking care of Margaret's child, just as she had taken care of Margaret. For several reasons this could not be done in the same way. She was not old enough to go and live at Normanstand without exciting comment; and the Squire absolutely refused to allow that his daughter should live anywhere except in his own house. Educational supervision, exercised at such distance and so intermittently, could neither be complete nor exact.

Though Stephen was a sweet child she was a wilful one, and very early in life manifested a dominant nature. This was a secret pleasure to her father, who, never losing sight of his old idea that she was both son and daughter, took pleasure as well as pride out of each manifestation of her imperial will. The keen instinct of childhood, which reasons in feminine fashion, and is therefore doubly effective in a woman-child, early grasped the possibilities of her own will. She learned the measure of her nurse's foot and then of her father's; and so, knowing where lay the bounds of possibility of the achievement of her wishes, she at once avoided trouble and learned how to make the most of the space within the limit of her tether.

It is not those who 'cry for the Moon' who go furthest or get most in this limited world of ours. Stephen's pretty ways and unfailing good temper were a perpetual joy to her father; and when he found that as a rule her desires were reasonable, his wish to yield to them became a habit.

Miss Rowly seldom saw any individual thing to disapprove of. She it was who selected the governesses and who interviewed them from time to time as to the child's progress. Not often was there any complaint, for the little thing had such a pretty way of showing affection, and such a manifest sense of justified trust in all whom she encountered, that it would have been hard to name a specific fault.

But though all went in tears of affectionate regret, and with eminently satisfactory emoluments and references, there came an irregularly timed succession of governesses.

Stephen's affection for her 'Auntie' was never affected by any of the changes. Others might come and go, but there no change came. The child's little hand would steal into one of the old lady's strong ones, or would clasp a finger and hold it tight. And then the woman who had never had a child of her own would feel, afresh each time, as though the child's hand was gripping her heart.

With her father she was sweetest of all. And as he seemed to be pleased when she did anything like a little boy, the habit of being like one insensibly grew on her.

An only child has certain educational difficulties. The true learning is not that which we are taught, but that which we take in for ourselves from experience and observation, and children's experiences and observation, especially of things other than repressive, are mainly of children. The little ones teach each other. Brothers and sisters are more with each other than are ordinary playmates, and in the familiarity of their constant intercourse some of the great lessons, so useful in after-life, are learned. Little Stephen had no means of learning the wisdom of give-and-take. To her everything was given, given bountifully and gracefully. Graceful acceptance of good things came to her naturally, as it does to one who is born to be a great lady. The children of the farmers in the neighbourhood, with whom at times she played, were in such habitual awe of the great house, that they were seldom sufficiently at ease to play naturally. Children cannot be on equal terms on special occasions with a person to whom they have been taught to bow or courtesy as a public habit. The children of neighbouring landowners, who were few and far between, and of the professional people in Norcester, were at such times as Stephen met them, generally so much on their good behaviour, that the spontaneity of play, through which it is that sharp corners of individuality are knocked off or worn down, did not exist.

And so Stephen learned to read in the Book of Life; though only on one side of it. At the age of six she had, though surrounded with loving care and instructed by skilled teachers, learned only the accepting side of life. Giving of course there was in plenty, for the traditions of Normanstand were royally benevolent; many a blessing followed the little maid's footsteps as she accompanied some timely aid to the sick and needy sent from the Squire's house. Moreover, her Aunt tried to inculcate certain maxims founded on that noble one that it is more blessed to give than to receive. But of giving in its true sense: the giving that which we want for ourselves, the giving that is as a temple built on the rock of self-sacrifice, she knew nothing. Her sweet and spontaneous nature, which gave its love and sympathy so readily, was almost a bar to education: it blinded the eyes that would have otherwise seen any defect that wanted altering, any evil trait that needed repression, any lagging virtue that required encouragement — or the spur.

CHAPTER III — HAROLD

Squire Norman had a clerical friend whose rectory of Carstone lay some thirty miles from Normanstand. Thirty miles is not a great distance for railway travel; but it is a long drive. The days had not come, nor were they ever likely to come, for the making of a railway between the two places. For a good many years the two men had met in renewal of their old University days. Squire Norman and Dr. An Wolf had been chums at Trinity, Cambridge, and the boyish friendship had ripened and lasted. When Harold An Wolf had put in his novitiate in a teeming Midland manufacturing town, it was Norman's influence which obtained the rectorship for his friend. It was not often that they could meet, for An Wolf's work, which, though not very exacting, had to be done single-handed, kept him to his post. Besides, he was a good scholar and eked out a small income by preparing a few pupils for public school. An occasional mid-week visit to Normanstand in the slack time of school work on the Doctor's part, and now and again a drive by Norman over to the rectory, returning the next day, had been for a good many years the measure of their meeting. Then An Wolf's marriage and the birth of a son had kept him closer to home. Mrs. An Wolf had been killed in a railway accident a couple of years after her only child had been born; and at the time Norman had gone over to render any assistance in his power to the afflicted man, and to give him what was under the circumstances his best gift, sympathy. After an interval of a few years the Squire's courtship and marriage, at which his old friend had assisted, had confined his activities to a narrower circle. The last time they had met was when An Wolf had come over to Norcester to aid in the burial of his friend's wife. In the process of years, however, the shadow over Norman's life had begun to soften; when his baby had grown to be something of a companion, they met again. Norman, 'who had never since his wife's death been able to tear himself, even for a night, away from Normanstand and Stephen, wrote to his old friend asking him to come to him. An Wolf gladly promised, and for a week of growing expectation the Squire looked forward to their meeting. Each found the other somewhat changed, in all but their old affection.

An Wolf was delighted with the little Stephen. Her dainty beauty seemed to charm him; and the child, seeming to realise what pleasure she was giving, exercised all her little winning ways. The rector, who knew more of children than did his, friend, told her as she sat on his knee of a very interesting person: his own son. The child listened, interested at first, then enraptured. She asked all kinds of questions; and the father's eyes brightened as he gladly answered the pretty sympathetic child, already deep in his heart for her father's sake. He told her about the boy who was so big and strong, and who could run and leap and swim and play cricket and football better than any other boy with whom he played. When, warmed himself by the keen interest of the little girl, and seeing her beautiful black eyes beginning to glow, he too woke to the glory of the time; and all the treasured moments of the father's lonely heart gave out their store. And the other father, thrilled with delight because of his baby's joy with, underlying all, an added pleasure that the little Stephen's interest was in sports that were for boys, looked on approvingly, now and again asking questions himself in furtherance of the child's wishes.

All the afternoon they sat in the garden, close to the stream that came out of the rock, and An Wolf told father's tales of his only son.

Of the great cricket match with Castra Puerorum when he had made a hundred not out. Of the school races when he had won so many prizes. Of the swimming match in the Islam River when, after he had won the race and had dressed himself, he went into the water in his clothes to help some children who had upset a boat. How when Widow Norton's only son could not be found, he dived into the deep hole of the intake of the milldam of the great Carstone mills where Wingate the farrier had been drowned. And how, after diving twice without success, he had insisted on going down the third time though people had tried to hold him back; and how he had brought up in his arms the child all white and so near death that they had to put him in the ashes of the baker's oven before he could be brought back to life.

When her nurse came to take her to bed, she slid down from her father's knee and coming over to Dr. An Wolf, gravely held out her hand and said: 'Good-bye!' Then she kissed him and said:

'Thank you so much, Mr. Harold's daddy. Won't you come soon again, and tell us more?' Then she jumped again upon her father's knee and hugged him round the neck and kissed him, and whispered in his ear:

'Daddy, please make Mr. Harold's daddy when he comes again, bring Harold with him!'

After all it is natural for women to put the essence of the letter in the postscript!

Two weeks afterwards Dr. An Wolf came again and brought Harold with him. The time had gone heavily with little Stephen when she knew that Harold was coming with his father. Stephen had been all afire to see the big boy whose feats had so much interested her, and for a whole week had flooded Mrs. Jarrold with questions which she was unable to answer. At last the time came and she went out to the hall door with her father to welcome the guests. At the top of the great granite steps, down which in time of bad weather the white awning ran, she stood holding her father's hand and waving a welcome.

'Good morning, Harold! Good morning, Mr. Harold's daddy!'

The meeting was a great pleasure to both the children, and resulted in an immediate friendship. The small girl at once conceived a great admiration for the big, strong boy nearly twice her age and more than twice her size. At her time of life the convenances are not, and love is a thing to be spoken out at once and in the open. Mrs. Jarrold, from the moment she set eyes on him, liked the big kindly-faced boy who treated her like a lady, and who stood awkwardly blushing and silent in the middle of the nursery listening to the tiny child's proffers of affection. For whatever kind of love it is that boys are capable of, Harold had fallen into it. 'Calf-love' is a thing habitually treated with contempt. It may be ridiculous; but all the same it is a serious reality — to the calf.

Harold's new-found affection was as deep as his nature. An only child who had in his memory nothing of a mother's love, his naturally affectionate nature had in his childish days found no means of expression. A man child can hardly pour out his full heart to a man, even a father or a comrade; and this child had not, in a way, the consolations of other children. His father's secondary occupation of teaching brought other boys to the house and necessitated a domestic routine which had to be exact. There was no place for little girls in a boys' school; and though many of Dr. An Wolf's friends who were mothers made much of the pretty, quiet boy, and took him to play with their children, he never seemed to get really intimate with them. The equality of companionship was wanting. Boys he knew, and with them he could hold his own and yet be on affectionate terms. But girls were strange to him, and in their presence he was shy. With this lack of understanding of the other sex, grew up a sort of awe of it. His opportunities of this kind of study were so few that the view never could become rectified.

And so it was that from his boyhood up to his twelfth year, Harold's knowledge of girlhood never increased nor did his awe diminish. When his father had told him all about his visit to Normanstand and of the invitation which had been extended to him there came first awe, then doubt, then expectation. Between Harold and his father there was love and trust and sympathy. The father's married love so soon cut short found expression towards his child; and between them there had never been even the shadow of a cloud. When his father told him how pretty the little Stephen was, how dainty, how sweet, he began to picture her in his mind's eye and to be bashfully excited over meeting her.

His first glimpse of Stephen was, he felt, one that he never could forget. She had made up her mind that she would let Harold see what she could do. Harold could fly kites and swim and play cricket; she could not do any of these, but she could ride. Harold should see her pony, and see her riding him all by herself. And there would be another pony for Harold, a big, big, big one — she had spoken about its size herself to Topham, the stud-groom. She had coaxed her daddy into promising that after lunch she should take Harold riding. To this end she had made ready early. She had insisted on putting on the red riding habit which Daddy had given her for her birthday, and now she stood on the top of the steps all glorious in hunting pink, with the habit held over her arms, with the tiny hunting-hoots all shiny underneath. She had no hat on, and her beautiful hair of golden red shone in its glory. But even it was almost outshone by the joyous flush on her cheeks as she stood waving the little hand that did not hold Daddy's. She was certainly a picture to dream of! Her father's eyes lost nothing of her dainty beauty. He was so proud of her that he almost forgot to wish that she had been a boy. The pleasure he felt in her appearance was increased by the fact that her dress was his own idea.

During luncheon Stephen was fairly silent; she usually chattered all through as freely as a bird sings. Stephen was silent because the occasion was important. Besides, Daddy wasn't all alone, and therefore had not to be cheered up. Also — this in postscript form — Harold was silent! In her present frame of mind Harold could do no wrong, and what Harold did was right. She was unconsciously learning already a lesson from his presence.

That evening when going to bed she came to say good-night to Daddy. After she had kissed him she also kissed 'old Mr. Harold,' as she now called him, and as a matter of course kissed Harold also. He coloured up at once. It was the first time a girl had ever kissed him.

The next day from early morning until bed-time was one long joy to Stephen, and there were few things of interest that Harold had not been shown; there were few of the little secrets which had not been shared with him as they went about hand in hand. Like all manly boys Harold was good to little children and patient with them. He was content to follow Stephen about and obey all her behests. He had fallen in love with her to the very bottom of his boyish heart.

When the guests were going, Stephen stood with her father on the steps to see them off. When the carriage had swept behind the farthest point in the long avenue, and when Harold's cap waving from the window could no longer be seen, Squire Norman turned to go in, but paused in obedience to the unconscious restraint of Stephen’s hand. He waited patiently till with a long sigh she turned to him and they went in together.

That night before she went to bed Stephen came and sat on her father’s knee, and after sundry pattings and kissings whispered in his ear:

‘Daddy, wouldn’t it be nice if Harold could come here altogether? Couldn’t you ask him to? And old Mr. Harold could come too. Oh, I wish he was here!’

CHAPTER IV — HAROLD AT NORMANSTAND

Two years afterwards a great blow fell upon Harold. His father, who had been suffering from repeated attacks of influenza, was, when in the low condition following this, seized with pneumonia, to which in a few days he succumbed. Harold was heart-broken. The affection which had been between him and his father had been so consistent that he had never known a time when it was not.

When Squire Norman had returned to the house with him after the funeral, he sat in silence holding the boy's hand till he had wept his heart out. By this time the two were old friends, and the boy was not afraid or too shy to break down before him. There was sufficient of the love of the old generation to begin with trust in the new.

Presently, when the storm was past and Harold had become his own man again, Norman said:

'And now, Harold, I want you to listen to me. You know, my dear boy, that I am your father's oldest friend, and right sure I am that he would approve of what I say. You must come home with me to live. I know that in his last hours the great concern of your dear father's heart would have been for the future of his boy. And I know, too, that it was a comfort to him to feel that you and I are such friends, and that the son of my dearest old friend would be as a son to me. We have been friends, you and I, a long time, Harold; and we have learned to trust, and I hope to love, one another. And you and my little Stephen are such friends already that your coming into the house will be a joy to us all. Why, long ago, when first you came, she said to me the night you went away: "Daddy, wouldn't it be nice if Harold could come here altogether?"'

And so Harold An Wolf came back with the Squire to

Normanstand, and from that day on became a member of his house, and as a son to him. Stephen's delight at his coming was of course largely qualified by her sympathy with his grief; but it would have been hard to give him more comfort than she did in her own pretty way. Putting her lips to his she kissed him, and holding his big hand in both of her little ones, she whispered softly:

'Poor Harold! You and I should love each other, for we have both lost our mother. And now you have lost your father. But you must let my dear daddy be yours too!'

At this time Harold was between fourteen and fifteen years old. He was well educated in so far as private teaching went. His father had devoted much care to him, so that he was well grounded in all the Academic branches of learning. He was also, for his years, an expert in most manly exercises. He could ride anything, shoot straight, fence, run, jump or swim with any boy more than his age and size.

In Normanstand his education was continued by the rector. The Squire used often to take him with him when he went to ride, or fish, or shoot; frankly telling him that as his daughter was, as yet, too young to be his companion in these matters, he would act as her locum tenens. His living in the house and his helping as he did in Stephen's studies made familiarity perpetual. He was just enough her senior to command her childish obedience; and there were certain qualities in his nature which were eminently calculated to win and keep the respect of women as well as of men. He was the very incarnation of sincerity, and had now and again, in certain ways, a sublime self-negation which, at times, seemed in startling contrast to a manifestly militant nature. When at school he had often been involved in fights which were nearly always on matters of principle, and by a sort of unconscious chivalry he was generally found fighting on the weaker side. Harold's father had been very proud of his ancestry, which was Gothic through the Dutch, as the manifestly corrupted prefix of the original name implied, and he had gathered from a constant study of the Sagas something of the philosophy which lay behind the ideas of the Vikings.

This new stage of Harold's life made for quicker development than any which had gone before. Hitherto he had not the same sense of responsibility. To obey is in itself a relief; and as it is an actual consolation to weak natures, so it is only a retarding of the strong. Now he had another individuality to think of. There was in his own nature a vein of anxiety of which the subconsciousness of his own strength threw up the outcrop.

Little Stephen with the instinct of her sex discovered before long this weakness. For it is a weakness when any quality can be assailed or used. The using of a man's weakness is not always coquetry; but it is something very like it. Many a time the little girl, who looked up to and admired the big boy who could compel her to anything when he was so minded, would, for her own ends, work on his sense of responsibility, taking an elfin delight in his discomfiture.

The result of Stephen's harmless little coquetries was that Harold had occasionally either to thwart some little plan of daring, or else cover up its results. In either case her confidence in him grew, so that before long he became an established fact in her life, a being in whose power and discretion and loyalty she had absolute, blind faith. And this feeling seemed to grow with her own growth. Indeed at one time it came to be more than an ordinary faith. It happened thus:

The old Church of St. Stephen, which was the parish church of

Normanstand, had a peculiar interest for the Norman family. There, either within the existing walls or those which had preceded them when the church was rebuilt by that Sir Stephen who was standard-bearer to Henry VI., were buried all the direct members of the line. It was an unbroken record of the inheritors since the first Sir Stephen, who had his place in the Domesday Book. Without, in the churchyard close to the church, were buried all such of the collaterals as had died within hail of Norcester. Some there were of course who, having achieved distinction in various walks of life, were further honoured by a resting-place within the chancel. The whole interior was full of records of the family. Squire Norman was fond of coming to the place; and often from the very beginning had taken Stephen with him. One of her earliest recollections was kneeling down with her father, who held her hand in his, whilst with the other he wiped the tears from his eyes, before a tomb sculptured beautifully in snowy marble. She never forgot the words he had said to her:

'You will always remember, darling, that your dear mother rests in this sacred place. When I am gone, if you are ever in any trouble come here. Come alone and open out your heart. You need never fear to ask God for help at the grave of your mother!' The child had been impressed, as had been many and many another of her race. For seven hundred years each child of the house of Norman had been brought alone by either parent and had heard some such words. The custom had come to be almost a family ritual, and it never failed to leave its impress in greater or lesser degree.

Whenever Harold had in the early days paid a visit to Normanstand, the church had generally been an objective of their excursions. He was always delighted to go. His love for his own ancestry made him admire and respect that of others; so that Stephen's enthusiasm in the matter was but another cord to bind him to her.

In one of their excursions they found the door into the crypt open; and nothing would do Stephen but that they should enter it. To-day, however, they had no light; but they arranged that on the morrow they would bring candles with them and explore the place thoroughly. The afternoon of the next day saw them at the door of the crypt with a candle, which Harold proceeded to light. Stephen looked on admiringly, and said in a half-conscious way, the half-consciousness being shown in the implication:

'You are not afraid of the crypt?'

'Not a bit! In my father's church there was a crypt, and I was in it several times.' As he spoke the memory of the last time he had been there swept over him. He seemed to see again the many lights, held in hands that were never still, making a grim gloom where the black shadows were not; to hear again the stamp and hurried shuffle of the many feet, as the great oak coffin was borne by the struggling mass of men down the steep stairway and in through the narrow door . . . And then the hush when voices faded away; and the silence seemed a real thing, as for a while he stood alone close to the dead father who had been all in all to him. And once again he seemed to feel the recall to the living world of sorrow and of light, when his inert hand was taken in the strong loving one of Squire Norman.

He paused and drew back.

'Why don't you go on?' she asked, surprised.

He did not like to tell her then. Somehow, it seemed out of place. He had often spoken to her of his father, and she had always been a sympathetic listener; but here, at the entrance of the grim vault, he did not wish to pain her with his own thoughts of sorrow and all the terrible memories which the similarity of the place evoked. And even whilst he hesitated there came to him a thought so laden with pain and fear that he rejoiced at the pause which gave it to him in time. It was in that very crypt that Stephen's mother had been buried, and had they two gone in, as they had intended, the girl might have seen her mother's coffin as he had seen his father's, but under circumstances which made him shiver. He had been, as he said, often in the crypt at Carstone; and well he knew the sordidness of the chamber of death. His imagination was alive as well as his memory; he shuddered, not for himself, but for Stephen. How could he allow the girl to suffer in such a way as she might, as she infallibly would, if it were made apparent to her in such a brutal way? How pitiful, how meanly pitiful, is the aftermath of death. Well he remembered how many a night he woke in an agony, thinking of how his father lay in that cold, silent, dust-strewn vault, in the silence and the dark, with never a ray of light or hope or love! Gone, abandoned, forgotten by all, save perhaps one heart which bled . . . He would save little Stephen, if he could, from such a memory. He would not give any reason for refusing to go in.

He blew out the candle, and turned the key in the lock, took it out, and put it in his pocket.

'Come, Stephen!' he said, 'let us go somewhere else. We will not go into the crypt to-day!'

'Why not?' The lips that spoke were pouted mutinously and the face was flushed. The imperious little lady was not at all satisfied to give up the cherished project. For a whole day and night she had, whilst waking, thought of the coming adventure; the thrill of it was not now to be turned to cold disappointment without even an explanation. She did not think that Harold was afraid; that would be ridiculous. But she wondered; and mysteries always annoyed her. She did not like to be at fault, more especially when other people knew. All the pride in her revolted.

‘Why not?’ she repeated more imperiously still.

Harold said kindly:

‘Because, Stephen, there is really a good reason. Don’t ask me, for I can’t tell you. You must take it from me that I am right. You know, dear, that I wouldn’t willingly disappoint you; and I know that you had set your heart on this. But indeed, indeed I have a good reason.’

Stephen was really angry now. She was amenable to reason, though she did not consciously know what reason was; but to accept some one else’s reason blindfold was repugnant to her nature, even at her then age. She was about to speak angrily, but looking up she saw that Harold’s mouth was set with marble firmness. So, after her manner, she acquiesced in the inevitable and said:

‘All right! Harold.’

But in the inner recesses of her firm-set mind was a distinct intention to visit the vault when more favourable circumstances would permit.

CHAPTER V — THE CRYPT

It was some weeks before Stephen got the chance she wanted. She knew it would be difficult to evade Harold's observation, for the big boy's acuteness as to facts had impressed itself on her. It was strange that out of her very trust in Harold came a form of distrust in others. In the little matter of evading him she inclined to any one in whom there was his opposite, in whose reliability she instinctively mistrusted. 'There is nothing bad or good but thinking makes it so!' To enter that crypt, which had seemed so small a matter at first, had now in process of thinking and wishing and scheming become a thing to be much desired. Harold saw, or rather felt, that something was in the girl's mind, and took for granted that it had something to do with the crypt. But he thought it better not to say anything lest he should keep awake a desire which he hoped would die naturally.

One day it was arranged that Harold should go over to Carstone to see the solicitor who had wound up his father's business. He was to stay the night and ride back next day. Stephen, on hearing of the arrangement, so contrived matters that Master Everard, the son of a banker who had recently purchased an estate in the neighbourhood, was asked to come to play with her on the day when Harold left. It was holiday time at Eton, and he was at home. Stephen did not mention to Harold the fact of his coming; it was only from a chance allusion of Mrs. Jarrold before he went that he inferred it. He did not think the matter of sufficient importance to wonder why Stephen, who generally told him everything, had not mentioned this.

During their play, Stephen, after pledging him to secrecy, told Leonard of her intention of visiting the crypt, and asked him to help her in it. This was an adventure, and as such commended itself to the schoolboy heart. He entered at once into the scheme con amore; and the two discussed ways and means. Leonard's only regret was that he was associated with a little girl in such a project. It was something of a blow to his personal vanity, which was a large item in his moral equipment, that such a project should have been initiated by the girl and not by himself. He was to get possession of the key and in the forenoon of the next day he was to be waiting in the churchyard, when Stephen would join him as soon as she could evade her nurse. She was now more than eleven, and had less need of being watched than in her earlier years. It was possible, with strategy, to get away undiscovered for an hour.

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At Carstone Harold got though what he had to do that same afternoon and arranged to start early in the morning for Normanstand. After an early breakfast he set out on his thirty-mile journey at eight o'clock. Littlejohn, his horse, was in excellent form, notwithstanding his long journey of the day before, and with his nose pointed for home, put his best foot foremost. Harold felt in great spirits. The long ride the day before had braced him physically, though there were on his journey times of great sadness when the thought of his father came back to him and the sense of loss was renewed with each thought of his old home. But youth is naturally buoyant. His visit to the church, the first thing on his arrival at Carstone, and his kneeling before the stone made sacred to his father's memory, though it entailed a silent gush of tears, did him good, and even seemed to place his sorrow farther away. When he came again in the morning before leaving Carstone there were no tears. There was only a holy memory which seemed to sanctify loss; and his father seemed nearer to him than ever.

As he drew near Normanstand he looked forward eagerly to seeing Stephen, and the sight of the old church lying far below him as he came down the steep road over Alt Hill, which was the short-cut from Norcester, set his mind working. His visit to the tomb of his own father made him think of the day when he kept Stephen from entering the crypt.

The keenest thought is not always conscious. It was without definite intention that when he came to the bridle-path Harold turned his horse's head and rode down to the churchyard. As he pushed open the door of the church he half expected to see Stephen; and there was a vague possibility that Leonard Everard might be with her.

The church was cool and dim. Coming from the hot glare the August sunshine it seemed, at the first glance, dark. He looked around, and a sense of relief came over him. The place was empty.

But even as he stood, there came a sound which made his heart grow cold. A cry, muffled, far away and full of anguish; a sobbing cry, which suddenly ceased.

It was the voice of Stephen. He instinctively knew where it came from; the crypt. Only for the experience he had had of her desire to enter the place, he would never have suspected that it was so close to him. He ran towards the corner where commenced the steps leading downward. As he reached the spot a figure came rushing up the steps. A boy in Eton jacket and wide collar, careless, pale, and agitated. It was Leonard Everard. Harold seized him as he came.

'Where is Stephen?' he cried in a quick, low voice.

'In the vault below there. She dropped her light and then took mine, and she dropped it too. Let me go! Let me go!' He struggled to get away; but Harold held him tight.

‘Where are the matches?’

‘In my pocket. Let me go! Let me go!’

‘Give me them — this instant!’ He was examining the frightened boy’s waistcoat pockets as he spoke. When he had got the matches he let the boy go, and ran down the steps and through the open door into the crypt, calling out as he came:

‘Stephen! Stephen dear, where are you? It is I — Harold!’ There was no response; his heart seemed to grow cold and his knees to weaken. The match spluttered and flashed, and in the momentary glare he saw across the vault, which was not a large place, a white mass on the ground. He had to go carefully, lest the match should be blown out by the wind of his passage; but on coming close he saw that it was Stephen lying senseless in front of a great coffin which rested on a built-out pile of masonry. Then the match went out. In the flare of the next one he lit he saw a piece of candle lying on top of the coffin. He seized and lit it. He was able to think coolly despite his agitation, and knew that light was the first necessity. The bruised wick was slow to catch; he had to light another match, his last one, before it flamed. The couple of seconds that the light went down till the grease melted and the flame leaped again seemed of considerable length. When the lit candle was placed steadily on top of the coffin, and a light, dim, though strong enough to see with, spread around, he stooped and lifted Stephen in his arms. She was quite senseless, and so limp that a great fear came upon him that she might be dead. He did not waste time, but carried her across the vault where the door to the church steps stood out sharp against the darkness, and bore her up into the church. Holding her in one arm, with the other hand he dragged some long cushions from one of the pews and spread them on the floor; on these he laid her. His heart was smitten with love and pity as he looked. She was so helpless; so pitifully helpless! Her arms and legs were doubled up as though broken, disjointed; the white frock was smeared with patches of thick dust. Instinctively he stooped and pulled the frock down and straightened out the arms and feet. He knelt beside her, and felt if her heart was still beating, a great fear over him, a sick apprehension. A gush of thankful prayer came from his heart. Thank God! she was alive; he could feel her heart beat, though faintly underneath his hand. He started to his feet and ran towards the door, seizing his hat, which lay on a seat. He wanted it to bring back some water. As he passed out of the door he saw Leonard a little distance off, but took no notice of him. He ran to the stream, filled his hat with water, and brought it back. When he came into the church he saw Stephen, already partially restored, sitting up on the cushions with Leonard supporting her.

He was rejoiced; but somehow disappointed. He would rather Leonard had not been there. He remembered — he could not forget — the white face of the boy who fled out of the crypt leaving Stephen in a faint within, and who had lingered outside the church door whilst he ran for water. Harold came forward quickly and raised Stephen, intending to bring her into the fresh air. He had a shrewd idea that the sight of the sky and God's greenery would be the best medicine for her after her fright. He lifted her in his strong arms as he used to do when she was a very little child and had got tired in their walks together; and carried her to the door. She lent herself unconsciously to the movement, holding fast with her arm round his neck as she used to do. In her clinging was the expression of her trust in him. The little sigh with which she laid her head on his shoulder was the tribute to his masculine power, and her belief in it. Every instant her senses were coming back to her more and more. The veil of oblivion was passing from her half-closed eyes, as the tide of full remembrance swept in upon her. Her inner nature was expressed in the sequence of her emotions. Her first feeling was one of her own fault. The sight of Harold and his proximity recalled to her vividly how he had refused to go into the crypt, and how she had intentionally deceived him, negatively, as to her intention of doing that of which he disapproved. Her second feeling was one of justice; and was perhaps partially evoked by the sight of Leonard, who followed close as Harold brought her to the door. She did not wish to speak of herself or Harold before him; but she did not hesitate to speak of him to Harold:

‘You must not blame Leonard. It was all my fault. I made him come!’ Her generosity appealed to Harold. He was angry with the boy for being there at all; but more for his desertion of the girl in her trouble.

‘I’m not blaming him for being with you!’ he said simply. Leonard spoke at once. He had been waiting to defend himself, for that was what first concerned that young gentleman; next to his pleasure, his safety most appealed to him.

‘I went to get help. You had let the candle drop; and how could I see in the dark? You would insist on looking at the plate on the coffin!’

A low moan broke from Stephen, a long, low, trembling moan which went to Harold’s heart. Her head drooped over again on his shoulder; and she clung close to him as the memory of her shock came back to her. Harold spoke to Leonard over his shoulder in a low, fierce whisper, which Stephen did not seem to hear:

‘There! that will do. Go away! You have done enough already.

Go! Go!' he added more sternly, as the boy seemed disposed to argue. Leonard ran a few steps, then walked to the lich-gate, where he waited.

Stephen clung close to Harold in a state of agitation which was almost hysterical. She buried her face in his shoulder, sobbing brokenly:

'Oh, Harold! It was too awful. I never thought, never for a moment, that my poor dear mother was buried in the crypt. And when I went to look at the name on the coffin that was nearest to where I was, I knocked away the dust, and then I saw her name: "Margaret Norman, aetat 22." I couldn't bear it. She was only a girl herself, only just twice my age — lying there in that terrible dark place with all the thick dust and the spiders' webs. Oh, Harold, Harold! How shall I ever bear to think of her lying there, and that I shall never see her dear face? Never! Never!'

He tried to soothe her by patting and holding her hands. For a good while the resolution of the girl faltered, and she was but as a little child. Then her habitual strength of mind asserted itself. She did not ask Harold how she came to be out in the church instead of in the crypt when she recovered her senses. She seemed to take it for granted that Leonard had carried her out; and when she said how brave it had been of him, Harold, with his customary generosity, allowed her to preserve the belief. When they had made their way to the gate Leonard came up to them; but before he could speak Stephen had begun to thank him. He allowed her to do so, though the sight of Harold's mouth set in scorn, and his commanding eyes firmly fixed on him, made him grow hot and cold alternately. He withdrew without speaking; and took his way home with a heart full of bitterness and revengeful feelings.

In the park Stephen tried to dust herself, and then Harold tried to assist her. But her white dress was incurably soiled, the fine dust of the vault seemed to have got ingrained in the muslin. When she got to the house she stole upstairs, so that no one might notice her till she had made herself tidy.

The next day but one she took Harold for a walk in the afternoon. When they were quite alone and out of earshot she said:

'I have been thinking all night about poor mother. Of course I know she cannot be moved from the crypt. She must remain there. But there needn't be all that dust. I want you to come there with me some time soon. I fear I am afraid to go alone. I want to bring some flowers and to tidy up the place. Won't you come with me this time? I know now, Harold, why you didn't let me go in before. But now it is different. This is not curiosity. It is Duty and Love. Won't you come with me, Harold?'

Harold leaped from the edge of the ha-ha where he had been sitting and held up his hand. She took it and leaped down lightly beside him.

'Come,' he said, 'let us go there now!' She took his arm when they got on the path again, and clinging to him in her pretty girlish way they went together to the piece of garden which she called her own; there they picked a great bunch of beautiful white flowers. Then they walked to the old church. The door was open and they passed in. Harold took from his pocket a tiny key. This surprised her, and heightened the agitation which she naturally suffered from revisiting the place. She said nothing whilst he opened the door to the crypt. Within, on a bracket, stood some candles in glass shades and boxes of matches. Harold lit three candles, and leaving one of them on the shelf, and placing his cap beside it, took the other two in his hands. Stephen, holding her flowers tightly to her breast with her right hand, took Harold's arm with the left, and with beating heart entered the crypt.

For several minutes Harold kept her engaged, telling her about the crypt in his father's church, and how he went down at his last visit to see the coffin of his dear father, and how he knelt before it. Stephen was much moved, and held tight to his arm, her heart beating. But in the time she was getting accustomed to the place. Her eyes, useless at first on coming out of the bright sunlight, and not able to distinguish anything, began to take in the shape of the place and to see the rows of great coffins that stood out along the far wall. She also saw with surprise that the newest coffin, on which for several reasons her eyes rested, was no longer dusty but was scrupulously clean. Following with her eyes as well as she could see into the further corners she saw that there the same reform had been effected. Even the walls and ceiling had been swept of the hanging cobwebs, and the floor was clean with the cleanliness of ablution. Still holding Harold's arm, she moved over towards her mother's coffin and knelt before it. Harold knelt with her; for a little while she remained still and silent, praying inwardly. Then she rose, and taking her great bunch of flowers placed them lovingly on the lid of the coffin above where she thought her mother's heart would be. Then she turned to Harold, her eyes flowing and her cheeks wet with tears, and laid her head against his breast. Her arms could not go round his neck till he had bent his head, for with his great height he simply towered above her. Presently she was quiet; the paroxysm of her grief had passed. She took Harold's hand in both hers, and together they went to the door. With his disengaged hand, for he would not have disturbed the other for worlds, Harold put out the lights and locked the door behind them.

In the church she held him away from her, and looked him fairly in the face. She said slowly:

‘Harold, was it you who had the crypt cleaned?’ He answered in a low voice:

‘I knew you would want to go again!’

She took the great hand which she held between hers, and before he knew what she was doing and could prevent her, raised it to her lips and kissed it, saying lovingly:

‘Oh, Harold! No brother in all the wide world could be kinder. And — and—’ this with a sob, ‘we both thank you; mother and I!’

CHAPTER VI — A VISIT TO OXFORD

The next important move in the household was Harold's going to Cambridge. His father had always intended this, and Squire Norman had borne his wishes in mind. Harold joined Trinity, the college which had been his father's, and took up his residence in due course.

Stephen was now nearly twelve. Her range of friendships, naturally limited by her circumstances in life, was enlarged to the full; and if she had not many close friends there were at least of them all that was numerically possible. She still kept up to certain degree the little gatherings which in her childhood were got together for her amusement, and in the various games then instituted she still took a part. She never lost sight of the fact that her father took a certain pleasure in her bodily vigour. And though with her growing years and the conscious acceptance of her womanhood, she lost sight of the old childish fancy of being a boy instead of a girl, she could not lose sight of the fact that strength and alertness are sources of feminine as well as of masculine power.

Amongst the young friends who came from time to time during his holidays was Leonard Everard, now a tall, handsome boy. He was one of those boys who develop young, and who seem never to have any of that gawky stage so noticeable in the youth of men made in a large pattern. He was always well-poised, trim-set, alert; fleet of foot, and springy all over. In games he was *facile princeps*, seeming to make his effort always in the right way and without exertion, as if by an instinct of physical masterdom. His universal success in such matters helped to give him an easy debonair manner which was in itself winning. So physically complete a youth has always a charm. In its very presence there is a sort of sympathetic expression, such as comes with the sunshine.

Stephen always in Leonard's presence showed something of the common attitude. His youth and beauty and sex all had their influence on her. The influence of sex, as it is understood with regard to a later period of life, did not in her case exist; Cupid's darts are barbed and winged for more adult victims. But in her case Leonard's masculine superiority, emphasised by the few years between their age, his sublime self-belief, and, above all, his absolute disregard for herself or her wishes or her feelings, put him on a level at which she had to look up to him. The first step in the ladder of pre-eminence had been achieved when she realised that he was not on her level; the second when she experienced rather than thought that he had more influence on her than she had on him. Here again was a little morsel of hero worship, which, though based on a misconception of fact, was still of influence. In that episode of the crypt she had always believed that it was Leonard who had carried her out and laid her on the church floor in light and safety. He had been strong enough and resolute enough to do this, whilst she had fainted! Harold's generous forbearance had really worked to a false end.

It was not strange, therefore, that she found occasional companionship with the handsome, wilful, domineering boy somewhat of luxury. She did not see him often enough to get tired of him; to find out the weakness of his character; to realise his deep-seated, remorseless selfishness. But after all he was only an episode in a young life which was full of interests. Term after term came and went; the holidays had their seasonable pleasures, occasionally shared in common. That was all.

Harold's attitude was the same as ever. He was of a constant nature; and now that manhood was within hail the love of his boyhood was ripening to a man's love. That was all. He was with regard to Stephen the same devoted, worshipping protector, without thought of self; without hope of reward. Whatever Stephen wished Harold did; and Stephen, knowing their old wishes and their old pleasures, was content with their renewal. Each holiday between the terms became mainly a repetition of the days of the old life. They lived in the past.

Amongst the things that did not change was Stephen's riding dress. The scarlet habit had never been a thing for everyday wear, but had from the first been kept for special occasions. Stephen herself knew that it was not a conventional costume; but she rather preferred it, if on that account alone. In a certain way she felt justified in using it; for a red habit was a sort of tradition in the family.

It was on one of these occasions that she had gone with Harold into the churchyard where they had heard the discussion regarding God and the Angels.

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When Stephen was about sixteen she went for a short visit to Oxford. She stayed at Somerville with Mrs. Egerton, an old friend of her mother's, who was a professor at the college. She sent back her maid who had travelled with her, as she knew that the college girls did not have servants of their own. The visit was prolonged by mutual consent into a duration of some weeks. Stephen fell in love with the place and the life, and had serious thoughts of joining the college herself. Indeed she had made up her mind to ask her father to allow her, knowing well that he would consent to that or to any other wholesome wish of hers. But then came the thought that he would be all alone at home; and following that came another thought, and one of more poignant feeling. He was alone now! Already, for many days, she had left him, for the first time in her life! Stephen was quick to act; well she knew that at home there would be no fault found with her for a speedy return. Within a few hours she had brought her visit to an end, and was by herself, despite Mrs. Egerton's protest, in the train on the way back to Norcester.

In the train she began to review, for the first time, her visit to the university. All had been so strange and new and delightful to her that she had never stopped for retrospect. Life in the new and enchanting place had been in the moving present. The mind had been receptive only, gathering data for later thought. During her visit she had had no one to direct her thought, and so it had been all personal, with the freedom of individuality at large. Of course her mother's friend, skilled in the mind-workings of average girls, and able to pick her way through intellectual and moral quagmires, had taken good care to point out to her certain intellectual movements and certain moral lessons; just as she had in their various walks and drives pointed out matters of interest — architectural beauties and spots of historic import. And she had taken in, loyally accepted, and thoroughly assimilated all that she had been told. But there were other lessons which were for her young eyes; facts which the older eyes had ceased to notice, if they had ever noticed them at all. The self-content, the sex-content in the endless tide of young men that thronged the streets and quads and parks; the all-sufficing nature of sport or study, to whichever their inclinations tended. The small part which womankind seemed to have in their lives. Stephen had had, as we know, a peculiar training; whatever her instincts were, her habits were largely boy habits. Here she was amongst boys, a glorious tide of them; it made now and again her heart beat to look at them. And yet amongst them all she was only an outsider. She could not do anything better than any of them. Of course, each time she went out, she became conscious of admiring glances; she could not be woman without such consciousness. But it was as a girl that men looked at her, not as an equal. As well as personal experience and the lessons of eyes and ears and intelligence, there were other things to classify and adjust; things which were entirely from the outside of her own life. The fragments of common-room gossip, which it had been her fortune to hear accidentally now and again. The half confidences of scandals, borne on whispered breaths. The whole confidences of dormitory and study which she had been privileged to share. All were parts of the new and strange world, the great world which had swum into her ken.

As she sat now in the train, with some formulation of memory already accomplished in the two hours of solitude, her first comment, spoken half audibly, would have surprised her teachers as much as it would have surprised herself, if she had been conscious of it; for as yet her thinking was not self-conscious:

'Surely, I am not like that!'

It was of the women she had been thinking, not of the men. The glimpse which she had had of her own sex had been an awakening to her; and the awakening had not been to a pleasant world. All at once she seemed to realise that her sex had defects — littlenesses, meannesses, cowardices, falsenesses. That their occupations were apt to be trivial or narrow or selfish; that their desires were earthly, and their tastes coarse; that what she held to be goodness was apt to be realised only as fear. That innocence was but ignorance, or at least baffled curiosity. That . . .

A flood of shame swept over her, and instinctively she put her hands before her burning face. As usual, she was running all at once into extremes.

And above all these was borne upon her, and for the first time in her life, that she was herself a woman!

For a long time she sat quite still. The train thrilled and roared on its way. Crowded stations took and gave their quantum of living freight; but the young girl sat abstracted, unmoved, seemingly unconscious. All the dominance and energy of her nature were at work.

If, indeed, she was a woman, and had to abide by the exigencies of her own sex, she would at least not be ruled and limited by woman's weakness. She would plan and act and manage things for herself, in her own way.

Whatever her thoughts might be, she could at least control her acts. And those acts should be based not on woman's weakness, but on man's strength!

CHAPTER VII — THE NEED OF KNOWING

When Stephen announced her intention of going with her father to the Petty Sessions Court, there was consternation amongst the female population of Normanstand and Norwood. Such a thing had not been heard of in the experiences of any of them. Courts of Justice were places for men; and the lower courts dealt with a class of cases . . . It was quite impossible to imagine where any young lady could get such an idea . . .

Miss Laetitia Rowly recognised that she had a difficult task before her, for she was by now accustomed to Stephen's quiet method of having her own way.

She made a careful toilet before driving over to Normanstand. Her wearing her best bonnet was a circumstance not unattended with dread for some one. Behold her then, sailing into the great drawing-room at Normanstand with her mind so firmly fixed on the task before her as to be oblivious of minor considerations. She was so fond of Stephen, and admired so truly her many beauties and fine qualities, that she was secure and without flaw in her purpose. Stephen was in danger, and though she doubted if she would be able to effect any change, she was determined that at least she should not go into danger with her eyes unopened.

Stephen entered hastily and ran to her. She loved her great-aunt; really and truly loved her. And indeed it would have been strange if she had not, for from the earliest hour which she could recollect she had received from her nothing but the truest, fondest affection. Moreover she deeply respected the old lady, her truth, her resolution, her kindliness, her genuine common-sense ability. Stephen always felt safe with her aunt. In the presence of others she might now and again have a qualm or a doubt; but not with her. There was an abiding calm in her love, answering love realised and respected. Her long and intimate knowledge of Laetitia made her aware of her moods. She could read the signs of them. She knew well the meaning of the bonnet which actually seemed to quiver as though it had a sentience of its own. She knew well the cause of her aunt's perturbation; the pain which must be caused to her was perhaps the point of most resistance in herself — she having made up her mind to her new experience. All she could do would be to try to reconcile her by the assurance of good intention; by reason, and by sweetness of manner. When she had kissed her and sat beside her, holding her hand after her pretty way, she, seeing the elder woman somewhat at a loss, opened the subject herself:

'You look troubled, auntie! I hope it is nothing serious?'

'It is, my dear! Very serious! Everything is serious to me which touches you.'

'Me, Auntie!' Hypocrisy is a fine art.

'Yes! yes, Stephen. Oh! my dear child, what is this I hear about your going to Petty Sessions with your father?'

'Oh, that! Why, Auntie dear, you must not let that trouble you. It is all right. That is necessary!'

'Necessary!' the old lady's figure grew rigid and her voice was loud and high. 'Necessary for a young lady to go to a court house. To hear low people speaking of low crimes. To listen to cases of the most shocking kind; cases of low immorality; cases of a kind, of a nature of a — a — class that you are not supposed to know anything about. Really, Stephen! . . . ' She was drawing away her hand in indignation. But Stephen held it tight, as she said very sweetly:

'That is just it, Auntie. I am so ignorant that I feel I should know more of the lives of those very people!' Miss Laetitia interrupted:

'Ignorant! Of course you are ignorant. That is what you ought to be. Isn't it what we have all been devoting ourselves to effect ever since you were born? Read your third chapter of Genesis and remember what came of eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.'

'I think the Tree of Knowledge must have been an orange tree.' The old lady looked up, her interest aroused:

'Why?'

'Because ever since Eden other brides have worn its blossom!' Her tone was demure. Miss Rowly looked sharply at her, but her sharpness softened off into a smile.

'H'm!' she said, and was silent. Stephen seized the opportunity to put her own case:

'Auntie dear, you must forgive me! You really must, for my heart is set on this. I assure you I am not doing it merely to please myself. I have thought over the whole matter. Father has always wished me to be in a position — a position of knowledge and experience — to manage Normanstand if I should ever succeed him. From the earliest time I can remember he has always kept this before me, and though of course I did not at first understand what it meant, I have seemed in the last few years to know better. Accordingly I learned all sorts of things under his care, and sometimes even without his help. I have studied the estate map, and I have been over the estate books and read some of the leases and all such matters which they deal with in the estate office. This only told me the bones of the thing. I wanted to know more of our people; and so I made a point of going now and again to each house that we own. Of seeing the people and talking with them familiarly; as familiarly as they would let me, and indeed so far as was possible considering my position. For, Auntie dear, I soon began to learn — to learn in a way there was no mistaking — what my position is. And so I want to get to know more of their ordinary lives; the darker as well as the lighter side. I would like to do them good. I can see how my dear daddy has always been a sort of power to help them, and I would like to carry on his work; to carry it further if I may. But I must know.'

Her aunt had been listening with growing interest, and with growing respect too, for she realised the intense earnestness which lay behind the girl's words and her immediate purpose. Her voice and manner were both softened:

'But, my dear, surely it is not necessary to go into the Court to know these things. The results of each case become known.'

'That is just it, Auntie,' she answered quickly. 'The magistrates have to hear the two sides of the case before even they can make up their minds. I want to hear both sides, too! If people are guilty, I want to know the cause of their guilt. If they are innocent, I want to know what the circumstances can be which make innocence look like guilt. In my own daily life I may be in the way of just such judgments; and surely it is only right that judgment should be just!'

Again she paused; there rose before her mind that conversation in the churchyard when Harold had said that it was difficult for women to be just.

Miss Rowly reflected too. She was becoming convinced that in principle the girl was right. But the details were repugnant as ever to her; concentrating her mind on the point where she felt the ground firm under her, she made her objection:

'But, Stephen dear, there are so many cases that are sordid and painful!'

‘The more need to know of sordid things; if sordidness plays so important a part in the tragedy of their lives!’

‘But there are cases which are not within a woman’s province. Cases that touch sin . . .’

‘What kind of sin do you mean? Surely all wrong-doing is sin!’ The old lady was embarrassed. Not by the fact, for she had been for too many years the mistress of a great household not to know something of the subject on which she spoke, but that she had to speak of such a matter to the young girl whom she so loved.

‘The sin, my dear, of . . . of woman’s wrong-doing . . . as woman . . . of motherhood, without marriage!’ All Stephen’s nature seemed to rise in revolt.

‘Why, Auntie,’ she spoke out at once, ‘you yourself show the want of the very experience I look for!’

‘How? what?’ asked the old lady amazed and bristling. Stephen took her hand and held it affectionately as she spoke:

‘You speak of a woman’s wrong-doing, when surely it is a man’s as well. There does not seem to be blame for him who is the more guilty. Only for poor women! . . . And, Auntie dear, it is such poor women that I should like to help . . . Not when it is too late, but before! But how can I help unless I know? Good girls cannot tell me, and good women won’t! You yourself, Auntie, didn’t want to speak on the subject; even to me!’

‘But, my dear child, these are not things for unmarried women. I never speak of them myself except with matrons.’ Stephen’s answer flashed out like a sword; and cut like one:

‘And yet you are unmarried! Oh, Auntie dear, I did not and I do not mean to be offensive, or to hurt you in any way. I know, dear, your goodness and your kindness to all. But you limit yourself to one side!’ The elder lady interrupted:

‘How do you mean? one side! which side?’

‘The punishment side. I want to know the cause of that which brings the punishment. There surely is some cross road in a girl’s life where the ways part. I want to stand there if I can, with warning in one hand and help in the other. Oh! Auntie, Auntie, can’t you see that my heart is in this . . . These are our people; Daddy says they are to be my people; and I want to know their lives right through; to understand their wants, and their temptations, and their weakness. Bad and good, whatever it be, I must know it all; or I shall be working in the dark, and may injure or crush where I had looked to help and raise.’

As she spoke she looked glorified. The afternoon autumn sun shone full through the great window and lighted her up till she looked like a spirit. Lighted her white diaphanous dress till it seemed to take shape as an ethereal robe; lighted her red hair till it looked like a celestial crown; lighted her great dark eyes till their black beauty became swept in the tide of glory.

The heart of the old woman who loved her best heaved, and her bosom swelled with pride. Instinctively she spoke:

‘Oh, you noble, beautiful creature! Of course you are right, and your way is God’s way!’ With tears that rained down her furrowed cheeks, she put her arms round the girl and kissed her fondly. Still holding her in her arms she gave her the gentle counsel which was the aftermath of her moment of inspiration.

‘But Stephen dear, do be careful! Knowledge is a two-edged sword, and it is apt to side with pride. Remember what was the last temptation of the serpent to Eve: “Your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.”’

‘I shall be very careful,’ she said gravely; and then added as if by an afterthought, ‘of course you understand that my motive is the acquisition of knowledge?’

‘Yes?’ the answer was given interrogatively.

‘Don’t you think, dear, that Eve’s object was not so much the acquisition of knowledge as the gratification of curiosity.’

‘That may be,’ said the elder lady in a doubtful tone; ‘but my dear, who is to enlighten us as to which is which? We are apt in such matters to deceive ourselves. The more we know, the better are we able to deceive others; and the better we are able to deceive others the better we are able to deceive ourselves. As I tell you, dear, knowledge is two-edged and needs extra carefulness in its use!’

‘True!’ said Stephen reflectively. Long after her aunt had gone she sat thinking.

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Once again did Miss Rowly try to restrain Stephen from a project. This was when a little later she wished to go for a few days to the University Mission House in the East end of London. Ever since her visit to Oxford she had kept up a correspondence with her mother’s old friend. It was this lady’s habit to spend a part of vacation in the Mission; and Stephen had had much correspondence with her regarding the work. At last she wrote that if she might, she would like to come and see for herself. The answer was a cordial invitation, armed with which she asked her father to allow her to go. He at once assented. He had been watching keenly the development of her character, and had seen with pride and satisfaction that as time went on she seemed to acquire greater resolution, larger self-dependence. She was becoming more and more of his ideal. Without losing any of her womanhood, she was beginning to look at things more from a man’s point of view than is usually done by, or possible to, women.

When she returned at the end of a week she was full of new gravity. After a while this so far changed that her old lighter moods began to have their place, but it seemed that she never lost, and that she never would lose, the effect of that week of bitter experience amongst the ‘submerged tenth.’

The effect of the mental working was shown by a remark made by Harold when home on his next college vacation. He had been entering with her on a discussion of an episode on the estate:

‘Stephen, you are learning to be just!’

At the moment she was chagrined by the remark, though she accepted it in silence; but later, when she had thought the matter over, she took from it infinite pleasure. This was indeed to share man’s ideas and to think with the workings of man’s mind. It encouraged her to further and larger ideas, and to a greater toleration than she had hitherto dreamed of.

Of all those who loved her, none seemed to understand so fully as Laetitia Rowly the change in her mental attitude, or rather the development of it. Now and again she tried to deflect or modify certain coming forces, so that the educational process in which she had always had a part would continue in the right direction. But she generally found that the girl had been over the ground so thoroughly that she was able to defend her position. Once, when she had ventured to remonstrate with her regarding her attitude of woman’s equality with man, she felt as if Stephen’s barque was indeed entering on dangerous seas. The occasion had arisen thus: Stephen had been what her aunt had stigmatised as ‘laying down the law’ with regard to the position a married woman, and Miss Rowly, seeing a good argumentative opening, remarked:

‘But what if a woman does not get the opportunity of being married?’ Stephen looked at her a moment before saying with conviction:

‘It is a woman’s fault if she does not get the opportunity!’ The old lady smiled as she answered:

‘Her fault? My dear, what if no man asks her?’ This seemed to her own mind a poser.

‘Still her own fault! Why doesn’t she ask him?’ Her aunt’s lorgnon was dropped in horrified amazement.

Stephen went on impassively.

‘Certainly! Why shouldn’t she? Marriage is a union. As it is in the eye of the law a civil contract, either party to it should be at liberty to originate the matter. If a woman is not free to think of a man in all ways, how is she to judge of the suitability of their union? And if she is free in theory, why not free to undertake if necessary the initiative in a matter so momentous to herself?’ The old lady actually groaned and wrung her hands; she was horrified at such sentiments. They were daring enough to think; but to put them in words! . . .

‘Oh, my dear, my dear!’ she moaned, ‘be careful what you say. Some one might hear you who would not understand, as I do, that you are talking theory.’ Stephen’s habit of thought stood to her here. She saw that her aunt was distressed, and as she did not wish to pain her unduly, was willing to divert the immediate channel of her fear. She took the hand which lay in her lap and held it firmly whilst she smiled in the loving old eyes.

‘Of course, Auntie dear, it is theory. But still it is a theory which I hold very strongly!’ . . . Here a thought struck her and she said suddenly:

‘Did you ever . . . How many proposals did you have, Auntie?’ The old lady smiled; her thoughts were already diverted.

‘Several, my dear! It is so long ago that I don’t remember!’

‘Oh yes, you do, Auntie! No woman ever forgets that, no matter what else she may or may not remember! Tell me, won’t you?’ The old lady blushed slightly as she answered:

‘There is no need to specify, my dear. Let it be at this, that there were more than you could count on your right hand!’

‘And why did you refuse them?’ The tone was wheedling, and the elder woman loved to hear it. Wheedling is the courtship, by the young of the old.

‘Because, my dear, I didn’t love them.’

‘But tell me, Auntie, was there never any one that you did love?’

‘Ah! my dear, that is a different matter. That is the real tragedy of a woman’s life.’ In flooding reminiscent thought she forgot her remonstrating; her voice became full of natural pathos:

‘To love; and be helpless! To wait, and wait, and wait; with your heart all aflame! To hope, and hope; till time seems to have passed away, and all the world to stand still on your hopeless misery! To know that a word might open up Heaven; and yet to have to remain mute! To keep back the glances that could enlighten; to modulate the tones that might betray! To see all you hoped for passing away . . . to another! . . .’

Stephen bent over and kissed her, then standing up said:

‘I understand! Isn’t it wrong, Auntie, that there should be such tragedies? Should not that glance be given? Why should that tone be checked? Why should one be mute when a single word might, would, avert the tragedy? Is it not possible, Auntie, that there is something wrong in our social system when such things can happen; and can happen so often?’

She looked remorseless as well as irresistible in the pride of her youthful strength as with eyes that blazed, not flashing as in passion but with a steady light that seemed to burn, she continued:

‘Some day women must learn their own strength, as well as they have learned their own weakness. They are taught this latter from their cradles up; but no one ever seems to teach them wherein their power lies. They have to learn this for themselves; and the process and the result of the self-teaching are not good. In the University Settlement I learned much that made my heart ache; but out of it there seemed some lesson for good.’ She paused; and her aunt, wishing to keep the subject towards higher things, asked:

‘And that lesson, Stephen dear?’ The blazing eyes turned to her so that she was stirred by them as the answer came:

‘It is bad women who seem to know men best, and to be able to influence them most. They can make men come and go at will. They can turn and twist and mould them as they choose. And *they* never hesitate to speak their own wishes; to ask for what they want. There are no tragedies, of the negative kind, in *their* lives. Their tragedies have come and gone already; and their power remains. Why should good women leave power to such as they? Why should good women’s lives be wrecked for a convention? Why in the blind following of some society fetish should life lose its charm, its possibilities? Why should love eat its heart out, in vain? The time will come when women will not be afraid to speak to men, as they should speak, as free and equal. Surely if a woman is to be the equal and lifelong companion of a man, the closest to him — nay, the only one really close to him: the mother of his children — she should be free at the very outset to show her inclination to him just as he would to her. Don’t be frightened, Auntie dear; your eyes are paining me! . . . There! perhaps I said too much. But after all it is only theory. Take for your comfort, Auntie dear, that I am free an heart-whole. You need not fear for me; I can see what your dear eyes tell me. Yes! I am very young; perhaps too young to think such things. But I have thought of them. Thought them all over in every way and phase I can imagine.’

She stopped suddenly; bending over, she took the old lady in her arms and kissed her fondly several times, holding her tight. Then, as suddenly releasing her, she ran away before she could say a word.

CHAPTER VIII — THE T-CART

When Harold took his degree, Stephen’s father took her to Cambridge. She enjoyed the trip very much; indeed, it seemed under conditions that were absolutely happy.

When they had returned to Normanstand, the Squire took an early opportunity of bringing Harold alone into his study. He spoke to him with what in a very young man would have seemed diffidence:

‘I have been thinking, Harold, that the time has come when you should be altogether your own master. I am more than pleased, my boy, with the way you have gone through college; it is, I am sure, just as your dear father would have wished it, and as it would have pleased him best.’ He paused, and Harold said in a low voice:

‘I tried hard, sir, to do what I thought he would like; and what you would.’ The Squire went on more cheerfully:

‘I know that, my boy! I know that well. And I can tell you that it is not the least of the pleasures we have all had in your success, how you have justified yourself. You have won many honours in the schools, and you have kept the reputation as an athlete which your father was so proud of. Well, I suppose in the natural order of things you would go into a profession; and of course if you so desire you can do that. But if you can see your way to it I would rather that you stayed here. My house is your home as long as I live; but I don’t wish you to feel in any way dependent. I want you to stay here if you will; but to do it just because you wish to. To this end I have made over to you the estate at Camp which was my father’s gift to me when I came of age. It is not a very large one; but it will give you a nice position of your own, and a comfortable income. And with it goes my blessing, my dear boy. Take it as a gift from your father and myself!’

Harold was much moved, not only by the act itself but by the gracious way of doing it. There were tears in his eyes as he wrung the Squire’s hand; his voice thrilled with feeling as he said:

‘Your many goodnesses to my father’s son, sir, will, I hope, be justified by his love and loyalty. If I don’t say much it is because I do not feel quite master of myself. I shall try to show in time, as I cannot say it all at once, all that I feel.’

Harold continued to live at Normanstand. The house at Camp was in reality a charming cottage. A couple of servants were installed, and now and again he stayed there for a few days as he wished to get accustomed to the place. In a couple of months every one accepted the order of things; and life at Normanstand went on much as it had done before Harold had gone to college. There was a man in the house now instead of a boy: that was all. Stephen too was beginning to be a young woman, but the relative positions were the same as they had been. Her growth did not seem to make an ostensible difference to any one. The one who might have noticed it most, Mrs. Jarrold, had died during the last year of Harold’s life at college.

When the day came for the quarterly meeting of the magistrates of the county of Norcester, Squire Rowly arranged as usual to drive Squire Norman. This had been their habit for good many years. The two men usually liked to talk over the meeting as they returned home together. It was a beautiful morning for a drive, and when Rowly came flying up the avenue in his T-cart with three magnificent bays, Stephen ran out on the top of the steps to see him draw up. Rowly was a fine whip, and his horses felt it. Squire Norman was ready, and, after a kiss from Stephen, climbed into the high cart. The men raised their hats and waved good-bye. A word from Rowly; with a bound the horses were off. Stephen stood looking at them delighted; all was so sunny, so bright, so happy. The world was so full of life and happiness to-day that it seemed as if it would never end; that nothing except good could befall.

Harold, later on that morning, was to go into Norcester also; so Stephen with a lonely day before her set herself to take up loose-ends of all sorts of little personal matters. They would all meet at dinner as Rowly was to stop the night at Normanstand.

Harold left the club in good time to ride home to dinner. As he passed the County Hotel he stopped to ask if Squire Norman had left; and was told that he had started only a short time before with Squire Rowly in his T-cart. He rode on fast, thinking that perhaps he might overtake them and ride on with them. But the bays knew their work, and did it. They kept their start; it was only at the top of the North hill, five miles out of Norcester, that he saw them in the distance, flying along the level road. He knew he would not now overtake them, and so rode on somewhat more leisurely.

The Norcester highroad, when it has passed the village of Brackling, turns away to the right behind the great clump of oaks. From this the road twists to the left again, making a double curve, and then runs to Norling Parva in a clear stretch of some miles before reaching the sharp turn down the hill which is marked 'Dangerous to Cyclists.' From the latter village branches the by-road over the hill which is the short cut to Normanstand.

When Harold turned the corner under the shadow of the oaks he saw a belated road-mender, surrounded by some gaping peasants, pointing excitedly in the distance. The man, who of course knew him, called to him to stop.

‘What is it?’ he asked, reining up.

‘It be Squire Rowly’s bays which have run away with him. Three on ‘em, all in a row and comin’ like the wind. Squire he had his reins all right, but they ‘osses didn’t seem to mind ‘un. They was fair mad and bolted. The leader he had got frightened at the heap o’ stones theer, an’ the others took scare from him.’

Without a word Harold shook his reins and touched the horse with his whip. The animal seemed to understand and sprang forward, covering the ground at a terrific pace. Harold was not given to alarms, but here might be serious danger. Three spirited horses in a light cart made for pace, all bolting in fright, might end any moment in calamity. Never in his life did he ride faster than on the road to Norling Parva. Far ahead of him he could see at the turn, now and again, a figure running. Something had happened. His heart grew cold: he knew as well as though he had seen it, the high cart swaying on one wheel round the corner as the maddened horses tore on their way; the one jerk too much, and the momentary reaction in the crash! . . .

With beating heart and eyes aflame in his white face he dashed on.

It was all too true. By the side of the roadway on the inner curve lay the cart on its side with broken shafts. The horses were prancing and stamping about along the roadway not recovered from their fright. Each was held by several men.

And on the grass two figures were still lying where they had been thrown out. Rowly, who had of course been on the off-side, had been thrown furthest. His head had struck the milestone that stood back on the waste ground before the ditch. There was no need for any one to tell that his neck had been broken. The way his head lay on one side, and the twisted, inert limbs, all told their story plainly enough.

Squire Norman lay on his back stretched out. Some one had raised him to a sitting posture and then lowered him again, straightening his limbs. He did not therefore look so dreadful as Rowly, but there were signs of coming death in the stertorous breathing, the ooze of blood from nostrils and ears as well as mouth. Harold knelt down by him at once and examined him. Those who were round all knew him and stood back. He felt the ribs and limbs; so far as he could ascertain by touch no bone was broken.

Just then the local doctor, for whom some one had run, arrived in his gig. He, too, knelt beside the injured man, a quick glance having satisfied him that there was only one patient requiring his care. Harold stood up and waited. The doctor looked up, shaking his head. Harold could hardly suppress the groan which was rising in his throat. He asked:

‘Is it immediate? Should his daughter be brought here?’

‘How long would it take her to arrive?’

‘Perhaps half an hour; she would not lose an instant.’

‘Then you had better send for her.’

‘I shall go at once!’ answered Harold, turning to jump on his horse, which was held on the road.

‘No, no!’ said the doctor, ‘send some one else. You had better stay here yourself. He may become conscious just before the end; and he may want to say something!’ It seemed to Harold that a great bell was sounding in his ears.— ‘Before the end! Good God! Poor Stephen!’ . . . But this was no time for sorrow, or for thinking of it. That would come later. All that was possible must be done; and to do it required a cool head. He called to one of the lads he knew could ride and said to him:

‘Get on my horse and ride as fast as you can to Normanstand. Send at once to Miss Norman and tell her that she is wanted instantly. Tell her that there has been an accident; that her father is alive, but that she must come at once without a moment’s delay. She had better ride my horse back as it will save time. She will understand from that the importance of time. Quick!’

The lad sprang to the saddle, and was off in a flash. Whilst Harold was speaking, the doctor had told the men, who, accustomed to hunting accidents, had taken a gate from its hinges and held it in readiness, to bring it closer. Then under his direction the Squire was placed on the gate. The nearest house was only about a hundred yards away; and thither they bore him. He was lifted on a bed, and then the doctor made fuller examination. When he stood up he looked very grave and said to Harold:

‘I greatly fear she cannot arrive in time. That bleeding from the ears means rupture of the brain. It is relieving the pressure, however, and he may recover consciousness before he dies. You had better be close to him. There is at present nothing that can be done. If he becomes conscious at all it will be suddenly. He will relapse and probably die as quickly.’

All at once Norman opened his eyes, and seeing him said quietly, as he looked around:

‘What place is this, Harold?’

‘Martin’s — James Martin’s, sir. You were brought here after the accident.’

‘Yes, I remember! Am I badly hurt? I can feel nothing!’

‘I fear so, sir! I have sent for Stephen.’

‘Sent for Stephen! Am I about to die?’ His voice, though feeble, was grave and even.

‘Alas! sir, I fear so!’ He sank on his knees as he spoke and took him, his second father, in his arms.

‘Is it close?’

‘Yes.’

‘Then listen to me! If I don’t see Stephen, give her my love and blessing! Say that with my last breath I prayed God to keep her and make her happy! You will tell her this?’

‘I will! I will!’ He could hardly speak for the emotion which was choking him. Then the voice went on, but slower and weaker:

‘And Harold, my dear boy, you will look after her, will you not? Guard her and cherish her, as if you were indeed my son and she your sister!’

‘I will. So help me God!’ There was a pause of a few seconds which seemed an interminable time. Then in a feebler voice Squire Norman spoke again:

‘And Harold — bend down — I must whisper! If it should be that in time you and Stephen should find that there is another affection between you, remember that I sanction it — with my dying breath. But give her time! I trust that to you! She is young, and the world is all before her. Let her choose . . . and be loyal to her if it is another! It may be a hard task, but I trust you, Harold. God bless you, my other son!’ He rose slightly and listened. Harold’s heart leaped. The swift hoof-strokes of a galloping horse were heard . . . The father spoke joyously:

‘There she is! That is my brave girl! God grant that she may be in time. I know what it will mean to her hereafter!’

The horse stopped suddenly.

A quick patter of feet along the passage and then Stephen half dressed with a peignoir thrown over her, swept into the room. With the soft agility of a leopard she threw herself on her knees beside her father and put her arms round him. The dying man motioned to Harold to raise him. When this had been done he laid his hand tenderly on his daughter's head, saying:

'Let now, O Lord, Thy servant depart in peace! God bless and keep you, my dear child! You have been all your life a joy and a delight to me! I shall tell your mother when I meet her all that you have been to me! Harold, be good to her! Good-bye — Stephen! . . . Margaret! . . .'

His head fell over, and Harold, laying him gently down, knelt beside Stephen. He put his arm round her; and she, turning to him, laid her hand on his breast and sobbed as though her heart would break.

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The bodies of the two squires were brought to Normanstand. Rowly had long ago said that if he died unmarried he would like to lie beside his half-sister, and that it was fitting that, as Stephen would be the new Squire of Norwood, her dust should in time lie by his. When the terrible news of her nephew's and of Norman's death came to Norwood, Miss Laetitia hurried off to Normanstand as fast as the horses could bring her.

Her coming was an inexpressible comfort to Stephen. After the first overwhelming burst of grief she had settled into an acute despair. Of course she had been helped by the fact that Harold had been with her, and she was grateful for that too. But it did not live in her memory of gratitude in the same way. Of course Harold was with her in trouble! He had always been; would always be.

But the comfort which Aunt Laetitia could give was of a more positive kind.

From that hour Miss Rowly stayed at Normanstand. Stephen wanted her; and she wanted to be with Stephen.

After the funeral Harold, with an instinctive delicacy of feeling, had gone to live in his own house; but he came to Normanstand every day. Stephen had so long been accustomed to consulting him about everything that there was no perceptible change in their relations. Even necessary business to be done did not come as a new thing.

And so things went on outwardly at Normanstand very much as they had done before the coming of the tragedy. But for a long time Stephen had occasional bursts of grief which to witness was positive anguish to those who loved her.

Then her duty towards her neighbours became a sort of passion. She did not spare herself by day or by night. With swift intuition she grasped the needs of any ill case which came before her, and with swift movement she took the remedy in hand.

Her aunt saw and approved. Stephen, she felt, was in this way truly fulfilling her duty as a woman. The old lady began to secretly hope, and almost to believe, that she had laid aside those theories whose carrying into action she so dreaded.

But theories do not die so easily. It is from theory that practice takes its real strength, as well as its direction. And did the older woman whose life had been bound under more orderly restraint but know, Stephen was following out her theories, remorselessly and to the end.

CHAPTER IX — IN THE SPRING

The months since her father's death spread into the second year before Stephen began to realise the loneliness of her life. She had no companion now but her aunt; and though the old lady adored her, and she returned her love in full, the mere years between them made impossible the companionship that youth craves. Miss Rowly's life was in the past. Stephen's was in the future. And loneliness is a feeling which comes unbidden to a heart.

Stephen felt her loneliness all round. In old days Harold was always within hail, and companionship of equal age and understanding was available. But now his very reticence in her own interest, and by her father's wishes, made for her pain. Harold had put his strongest restraint on himself, and in his own way suffered a sort of silent martyrdom. He loved Stephen with every fibre of his being. Day by day he came toward her with eager step; day by day he left her with a pang that made his heart ache and seemed to turn the brightness of the day to gloom. Night by night he tossed for hours thinking, thinking, wondering if the time would ever come when her kisses would be his . . . But the tortures and terrors of the night had their effect on his days. It seemed as if the mere act of thinking, of longing, gave him ever renewed self-control, so that he was able in his bearing to carry out the task he had undertaken: to give Stephen time to choose a mate for herself. Herein lay his weakness — a weakness coming from his want of knowledge of the world of women. Had he ever had a love affair, be it never so mild a one, he would have known that love requires a positive expression. It is not sufficient to sigh, and wish, and hope, and long, all to oneself. Stephen felt instinctively that his guarded speech and manner were due to the coldness — or rather the trusting abated worship — of the brotherhood to which she had been always accustomed. At the time when new forces were manifesting and expanding themselves within her; when her growing instincts, cultivated by the senses and the passions of young nature, made her aware of other forces, new and old, expanding themselves outside her; at the time when the heart of a girl is eager for new impressions and new expansions, and the calls of sex are working within her all unconsciously, Harold, to whom her heart would probably have been the first to turn, made himself in his effort to best show his love, a *quantité negligeable*.

Thus Stephen, whilst feeling that the vague desires of budding womanhood were trembling within her, had neither thought nor knowledge of their character or their ultimate tendency. She would have been shocked, horrified, had that logical process, which she applied so freely to less personal matters, been used upon her own intimate nature. In her case logic would of course act within a certain range; and as logic is a conscious intellectual process, she became aware that her objective was man. Man — in the abstract. ‘Man,’ not ‘a man.’ Beyond that, she could not go. It is not too much to say that she did not ever, even in her most errant thought, apply her reasoning, or even dream of its following out either the duties, the responsibilities, or the consequences of having a husband. She had a vague longing for younger companionship, and of the kind naturally most interesting to her. There thought stopped.

One only of her male acquaintances did not at this time appear. Leonard Everard, who had some time ago finished his course at college, was living partly in London and partly on the Continent. His very absence made him of added interest to his old play-fellow. The image of his grace and comeliness, of his dominance and masculine force, early impressed on her mind, began to compare favourably with the actualities of her other friends; those of them at least who were within the circle of her personal interest. ‘Absence makes the heart grow fonder.’ In Stephen’s mind had been but a very mustard-seed of fondness. But new lights were breaking for her; and all of them, in greater or lesser degree, shone in turn on the memory of the pretty self-willed dominant boy, who now grew larger and more masculine in stature under the instance of each successive light. Stephen knew the others fairly well through and through. The usual mixture of good and evil, of strength and weakness, of purpose and vacillation, was quite within the scope of her own feeling and of her observation. But this man was something of a problem to her; and, as such, had a prominence in her thoughts quite beyond his own worthiness.

In movement of some form is life; and even ideas grow when the pulses beat and thought quickens. Stephen had long had in her mind the idea of sexual equality. For a long time, in deference to her aunt’s feelings, she had not spoken of it; for the old lady winced in general under any suggestion of a breach of convention. But though her outward expression being thus curbed had helped to suppress or minimise the opportunities of inward thought, the idea had never left her. Now, when sex was, consciously or unconsciously, a dominating factor in her thoughts, the dormant idea woke to new life. She had held that if men and women were equal the woman should have equal rights and opportunities as the man. It had been, she believed, an absurd conventional rule that such a thing as a proposal of marriage should be entirely the prerogative of man.

And then came to her, as it ever does to woman, opportunity.

Opportunity, the cruelest, most remorseless, most unsparing, subtlest foe that womanhood has. Here was an opportunity for her to test her own theory; to prove to herself, and others, that she was right. They — 'they' being the impersonal opponents of, or unbelievers in, her theory — would see that a woman could propose as well as a man; and that the result would be good.

It is a part of self-satisfaction, and perhaps not the least dangerous part of it, that it has an increasing or multiplying power of its own. The desire to do increases the power to do; and desire and power united find new ways for the exercise of strength. Up to now Stephen's inclination towards Leonard had been vague, nebulous; but now that theory showed a way to its utilisation it forthwith began to become, first definite, then concrete, then substantial. When once the idea had become a possibility, the mere passing of time did the rest.

Her aunt saw — and misunderstood. The lesson of her own youth had not been applied; not even of those long hours and days and weeks at which she hinted when she had spoken of the tragedy of life which by inference was her own tragedy: 'to love and to be helpless. To wait, and wait, and wait, with your heart all aflame!'

Stephen recognised her aunt's concern for her health in time to protect herself from the curiosity of her loving-kindness. Her youth and readiness and adaptability, and that power of play-acting which we all have within us and of which she had her share, stood to her. With but little effort, based on a seeming acquiescence in her aunt's views, she succeeded in convincing the old lady that her incipient feverish cold had already reached its crisis and was passing away. But she had gained certain knowledge in the playing of her little part. All this self-protective instinct was new; for good or ill she had advanced one more step in not only the knowledge but the power of duplicity which is so necessary in the conventional life of a woman.

Oh! did we but see! Could we but see! Here was a woman, dowered in her youth with all the goods and graces in the power of the gods to bestow, who fought against convention; and who yet found in convention the strongest as well as the readiest weapon of defence.

For nearly two weeks Stephen's resolution was held motionless, neither advancing nor receding; it was veritably the slack water of her resolution. She was afraid to go on. Not afraid in sense of fear as it is usually understood, but with the opposition of virginal instincts; those instincts which are natural, but whose uses as well as whose powers are unknown to us.

CHAPTER X — THE RESOLVE

The next few days saw Stephen abnormally restless. She had fairly well made up her mind to test her theory of equality of the sexes by asking Leonard Everard to marry her; but her difficulty was as to the doing it. She knew well that it would not do to depend on a chance meeting for an opportunity. After all, the matter was too serious to allow of the possibility of levity. There were times when she thought she would write to him and make her proffer of affection in this way; but on every occasion when such thought recurred it was forthwith instantly abandoned. During the last few days, however, she became more reconciled to even this method of procedure. The fever of growth was unabated. At last came an evening which she had all to herself. Miss Laetitia was going over to Norwood to look after matters there, and would remain the night. Stephen saw in her absence an opportunity for thought and action, and said that, having a headache, she would remain at home. Her aunt offered to postpone her visit. But she would not hear of it; and so she had the evening to herself.

After dinner in her boudoir she set herself to the composition of a letter to Leonard which would convey at least something of her feelings and wishes towards him. In the depths of her heart, which now and again beat furiously, she had a secret hope that when once the idea was broached Leonard would do the rest. And as she thought of that ‘rest’ a languorous dreaminess came upon her. She thought how he would come to her full of love, of yearning passion; how she would try to keep towards him, at first, an independent front which would preserve her secret anxiety until the time should come when she might yield herself to his arms and tell him all. For hours she wrote letter after letter, destroying them as quickly as she wrote, as she found that she had but swayed pendulum fashion between overtness and coldness. Some of the letters were so chilly in tone that she felt they would defeat their own object. Others were so frankly warm in the expression of — regard she called it, that with burning blushes she destroyed them at once at the candle before her.

At last she made up her mind. Just as she had done when a baby she realised that the opposing forces were too strong for her; she gave in gracefully. It would not do to deal directly in a letter with the matter in hand. She would write to Leonard merely asking him to see her. Then, when they were together without fear of interruption, she would tell him her views.

She got as far as 'Dear Mr. Leonard,' when she stood up, saying to herself:

'I shall not be in a hurry. I must sleep on it before I write!' She took up the novel she had been reading in the afternoon, and read on at it steadily till her bedtime.

That night she did not sleep. It was not that she was agitated. Indeed, she was more at ease than she had been for days; she had after much anxious thought made up her mind to a definite course of action. Therefore her sleeplessness was not painful. It was rather that she did not want to sleep, than that she could not. She lay still, thinking, thinking; dreaming such dreams as are the occasions of sanctified privacy to her age and sex.

In the morning she was no worse for her vigil. When at luncheon-time Aunt Laetitia had returned she went into all the little matters of which she had to report. It was after tea-time when she found herself alone, and with leisure to attend to what was, she felt, directly her own affair. During the night she had made up her mind exactly what to say to Leonard; and as her specific resolution bore the test of daylight she was satisfied. The opening words had in their inception caused her some concern; but after hours of thought she had come to the conclusion that to address, under the circumstance, the recipient of the letter as ‘Dear Mr. Everard’ would hardly do. The only possible justification of her unconventional act was that there existed already a friendship, an intimacy of years, since childhood; that there were already between them knowledge and understanding of each other; that what she was doing, and about to do, was but a further step in a series of events long ago undertaken.

She thought it better to send by post rather than messenger, as the latter did away with all privacy with regard to the act.

The letter was as follows:

‘Dear Leonard, — Would it be convenient for you to meet me to-morrow, Tuesday, at half-past twelve o’clock on the top of Caester Hill? I want to speak about a matter that may have some interest to you, and it will be more private there than in the house. Also it will be cooler in the shade on the hilltop. —

Yours sincerely, Stephen Norman.’

Having posted the letter she went about the usual routine of her life at Normanstand, and no occasion of suspicion or remark regarding her came to her aunt.

In her room that night when she had sent away her maid, she sat down to think, and all the misgivings of the day came back. One by one they were conquered by one protective argument:

‘I am free to do as I like. I am my own mistress; and I am doing nothing that is wrong. Even if it is unconventional, what of that? God knows there are enough conventions in the world that are wrong, hopelessly, unalterably wrong. After all, who are the people who are most bound by convention? Those who call themselves “smart!” If Convention is the god of the smart set, then it is about time that honest people chose another!’

* * * * *

Leonard received the letter at breakfast-time. He did not give it any special attention, as he had other letters at the same time, some of which were, if less pleasant, of more immediate importance. He had of late been bombarded with dunning letters from tradesmen; for during his University life, and ever since, he had run into debt. The moderate allowance his father made him he had treated as cash for incidental expenses, but everything else had been on credit. Indeed he was beginning to get seriously alarmed about the future, for his father, who had paid his debts once, and at a time when they were by comparison inconsiderable, had said that he would not under any circumstances pay others. He was not sorry, therefore, for an opportunity of getting away for a few hours from home; from himself — from anxieties, possibilities. The morning was a sweltering one, and he grumbled to himself as he set out on his journey through the woods.

* * * * *

Stephen rose fresh and in good spirits, despite her sleepless night. When youth and strength are to the fore, a night’s sleep is not of much account, for the system once braced up is not allowed to slacken. It was a notable sign of her strong nature that she was not even impatient, but waited with calm fixity the hour at which she had asked Leonard Everard to meet her. It is true that as the time grew closer her nerve was less marked. And just before it she was a girl — and nothing more; with all girl’s diffidence, a girl’s self-distrust, a girl’s abnegation, a girl’s plasticity.

In the more purely personal aspect of her enterprise Stephen's effort was more conscious. It is hardly possible for a pretty woman to seek in her study of perfection the aid of her mirror and to be unconscious of her aims. There must certainly be at least one dominant purpose: the achievement of success. Stephen did not attempt to deny her own beauty; on the contrary she gave it the fullest scope. There was a certain triumph in her glance as she took her last look in her mirror; a gratification of her wish to show herself in the best way possible. It was a very charming picture which the mirror reflected.

It may be that there is a companionship in a mirror, especially to a woman; that the reflection of oneself is an emboldening presence, a personality which is better than the actuality of an unvalued stranger. Certainly, when Stephen closed the door and stood in the wainscoted passage, which was only dimly lit by the high window at either end, her courage seemed at once to ooze away.

Probably for the first time in her life, as she left the shade of the long passage and came out on the staircase flooded with the light of the noonday sun, Stephen felt that she was a girl— 'girl' standing as some sort of synonym for weakness, pretended or actual. Fear, in whatever form or degree it may come, is a vital quality and must move. It cannot stand at a fixed point; if it be not sent backward it must progress. Stephen felt this, and, though her whole nature was repugnant to the task, forced herself to the effort of repression. It would, she felt, have been to her a delicious pleasure to have abandoned all effort; to have sunk in the lassitude of self-surrender.

The woman in her was working; her sex had found her out!

She turned and looked around her, as though conscious of being watched. Then, seeing that she was alone, she went her way with settled purpose; with flashing eyes and glowing cheeks — and a beating heart. A heart all woman's since it throbbed the most with apprehension when the enemy, Man, was the objective of her most resolute attack. She knew that she must keep moving; that she must not stop or pause; or her whole resolution must collapse. And so she hurried on, fearful lest a chance meeting with any one might imperil her purpose.

On she went through the faint moss-green paths; through meadows rich with flowering grasses and the many reds of the summer wild-flowers. And so up through the path cut in the natural dipping of the rock that rose over Caester Hill and formed a strong base for the clump of great trees that made a landmark for many a mile around. During the first part of her journey between the house and the hilltop, she tried to hold her purpose at arm's length; it would be sufficient to face its terrors when the time had come. In the meantime the matter was of such overwhelming importance that nothing else could take its place; all she could do was to suspend the active part of the thinking faculties and leave the mind only receptive.

But when she had passed through the thin belt of stunted oak and beech which hedged in the last of the lush meadows, and caught sight of the clump of trees on the hilltop, she unconsciously braced herself as a young regiment loses its tremors when the sight of the enemy breaks upon it. No longer her eyes fell earthward; they were raised, and raised proudly. Stephen Norman was fixed in her intention. Like the woman of old, her feet were on the ploughshares and she would not hesitate.

As she drew near the appointed place her pace grew slower and slower; the woman in her was unconsciously manifesting itself. She would not be first in her tryst with a man. Unconsciousness, however, is not a working quality which can be relied upon for staying power; the approach to the trysting-place brought once more home to her the strange nature of her enterprise. She had made up her mind to it; there was no use in deceiving herself. What she had undertaken to do was much more unconventional than being first at a meeting. It was foolish and weak to delay. The last thought braced her up; and it was with a hurried gait, which alone would have betrayed her to an intelligent observer, that she entered the grove.

CHAPTER XI — THE MEETING

Had Stephen been better acquainted with men and women, she would have been more satisfied with herself for being the first at the tryst. The conventional idea, in the minds of most women and of all men, is that a woman should never be the first. But real women, those in whom the heart beats strong, and whose blood can leap, know better. These are the commanders of men. In them sex calls to sex, all unconsciously at first; and men answer to their call, as they to men's.

Two opposite feelings strove for dominance as Stephen found herself on the hilltop, alone. One a feeling natural enough to any one, and especially to a girl, of relief that a dreaded hour had been postponed; the other of chagrin that she was the first.

After a few moments, however, one of the two militant thoughts became dominant: the feeling of chagrin. With a pang she thought if she had been a man and summoned for such a purpose, how she would have hurried to the trysting-place; how the flying of her feet would have vied with the quick rapturous beating of her heart! With a little sigh and a blush, she remembered that Leonard did not know the purpose of the meeting; that he was a friend almost brought up with her since boy and girl times; that he had often been summoned in similar terms and for the most trivial of social purposes.

For nearly half an hour Stephen sat on the rustic seat under the shadow of the great oak, looking, half unconscious of its beauty and yet influenced by it, over the wide landscape stretched at her feet.

In spite of her disregard of conventions, she was no fool; the instinct of wisdom was strong within her, so strong that in many ways it ruled her conscious efforts. Had any one told her that her preparations for this interview were made deliberately with some of the astuteness that dominated the Devil when he took Jesus to the top of a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the earth at His feet, she would have, and with truth, denied it with indignation. Nevertheless it was a fact that she had, in all unconsciousness, chosen for the meeting a spot which would evidence to a man, consciously or unconsciously, the desirability for his own sake of acquiescence in her views and wishes. For all this spreading landscape was her possession, which her husband would share. As far as the eye could reach was within the estate which she had inherited from her father and her uncle.

The half-hour passed in waiting had in one way its advantages to the girl: though she was still as high strung as ever, she acquired a larger measure of control over herself. The nervous tension, however, was so complete physically that all her faculties were acutely awake; very early she became conscious of a distant footstep.

To Stephen's straining ears the footsteps seemed wondrous slow, and more wondrous regular; she felt instinctively that she would have liked to have listened to a more hurried succession of less evenly-marked sounds. But notwithstanding these thoughts, and the qualms which came in their turn, the sound of the coming feet brought great joy. For, after all, they were coming; and coming just in time to prevent the sense of disappointment at their delay gaining firm foothold. It was only when the coming was assured that she felt how strong had been the undercurrent of her apprehension lest they should not come at all.

Very sweet and tender and beautiful Stephen looked at this moment. The strong lines of her face were softened by the dark fire in her eyes and the feeling which glowed in the deep blushes which mantled her cheeks. The proudness of her bearing was no less marked than ever, but in the willowy sway of her body there was a yielding of mere sorry pride. In all the many moods which the gods allow to good women there is none so dear or so alluring, consciously as well as instinctively, to true men as this self-surrender. As Leonard drew near, Stephen sank softly into a seat, doing so with a guilty feeling of acting a part. When he actually came into the grove he found her seemingly lost in a reverie as she gazed out over the wide expanse in front of her. He was hot after his walk, and with something very like petulance threw himself into a cane armchair, exclaiming as he did so with the easy insolence of old familiarity:

'What a girl you are, Stephen! dragging a fellow all the way up here. Couldn't you have fixed it down below somewhere if you wanted to see me?'

Strangely enough, as it seemed to her, Stephen did not dislike his tone of mastery. There was something in it which satisfied her. The unconscious recognition of his manhood, as opposed to her womanhood, soothed her in a peaceful way. It was easy to yield to a dominant man. She was never more womanly than when she answered him softly:

'It was rather unfair; but I thought you would not mind coming so far. It is so cool and delightful here; and we can talk without being disturbed.' Leonard was lying back in his chair fanning himself with his wide-brimmed straw hat, with outstretched legs wide apart and resting on the back of his heels. He replied with grudging condescension:

'Yes, it's cool enough after the hot tramp over the fields and through the wood. It's not so good as the house, though, in one way:

a man can't get a drink here. I say, Stephen, it wouldn't be half bad if there were a shanty put up here like those at the Grands Mulets or on the Matterhorn. There could be a tap laid on where a fellow could quench his thirst on a day like this!'

Before Stephen's eyes floated a momentary vision of a romantic châlet with wide verandah and big windows looking over the landscape; a great wide stone hearth; quaint furniture made from the gnarled branches of trees; skins on the floor; and the walls adorned with antlers, great horns, and various trophies of the chase. And amongst them Leonard, in a picturesque suit, lolling back just as at present and smiling with a loving look in his eyes as she handed him a great blue-and-white Munich beer mug topped with cool foam. There was a soft mystery in her voice as she answered:

'Perhaps, Leonard, there will some day be such a place here!' He seemed to grumble as he replied:

'I wish it was here now. Some day seems a long way off!'

This seemed a good opening for Stephen; for the fear of the situation was again beginning to assail her, and she felt that if she did not enter on her task at once, its difficulty might overwhelm her. She felt angry with herself that there was a change in her voice as she said:

'Some day may mean — can mean everything. Things needn't be a longer way off than we choose ourselves, sometimes!'

'I say, that's a good one! Do you mean to say that because I am some day to own Brindehow I can do as I like with it at once, whilst the governor's all there, and a better life than I am any day? Unless you want me to shoot the old man by accident when we go out on the First.' He laughed a short, unmeaning masculine laugh which jarred somewhat on her. She did not, however, mean to be diverted from her main purpose, so she went on quickly:

'You know quite well, Leonard, that I don't mean anything of the kind. But there was something I wanted to say to you, and I wished that we should be alone. Can you not guess what it is?'

'No, I'll be hanged if I can!' was his response, lazily given.

Despite her resolution she turned her head; she could not meet his eyes. It cut her with a sharp pain to notice when she turned again that he was not looking at her. He continued fanning himself with his hat as he gazed out at the view. She felt that the critical moment of her life had come, that it was now or never as to her fulfilling her settled intention. So with a rush she went on her way:

'Leonard, you and I have been friends a long time. You know my views on some points, and that I think a woman should be as free to act as a man!' She paused; words and ideas did not seem to flow with the readiness she expected. Leonard's arrogant assurance completed the dragging her back to earth which her own self-consciousness began:

'Drive on, old girl! I know you're a crank from Crankville on some subjects. Let us have it for all you're worth. I'm on the grass and listening.'

Stephen paused. 'A crank from Crankville!' — this after her nights of sleepless anxiety; after the making of the resolution which had cost her so much, and which was now actually in process of realisation. Was it all worth so much? why not abandon it now? . . . Abandon it! Abandon a resolution! All the obstinacy of her nature — she classed it herself as firmness — rose in revolt. She shook her head angrily, pulled herself together, and went on:

'That may be! though it's not what I call myself, or what I am usually called, so far as I know. At any rate my convictions are honest, and I am sure you will respect them as such, even if you do not share them.’ She did not see the ready response in his face which she expected, and so hurried on:

‘It has always seemed to me that a — when a woman has to speak to a man she should do so as frankly as she would like him to speak to her, and as freely. Leonard, I — I,’ as she halted, a sudden idea, winged with possibilities of rescuing procrastination came to her. She went on more easily:

‘I know you are in trouble about money matters. Why not let me help you?’ He sat up and looked at her and said genially:

‘Well, Stephen, you are a good old sort! No mistake about it. Do you mean to say you would help me to pay my debts, when the governor has refused to do so any more?’

‘It would be a great pleasure to me, Leonard, to do anything for your good or your pleasure.’

There was a long pause; they both sat looking down at the ground. The woman’s heart beat loud; she feared that the man must hear it. She was consumed with anxiety, and with a desolating wish to be relieved from the strain of saying more. Surely, surely Leonard could not be so blind as not to see the state of things! . . . He would surely seize the occasion; throw aside his diffidence and relieve her! . . . His words made a momentary music in her ears as he spoke:

‘And is this what you asked me to come here for?’

The words filled her with a great shame. She felt herself a dilemma. It had been no part of her purpose to allude his debts. Viewed in the light of what was to follow, it would seem to him that she was trying to foreclose his affection. That could not be allowed to pass; the error must be rectified. And yet! . . . And yet this very error must be cleared up before she could make her full wish apparent. She seemed to find herself compelled by inexorable circumstances into an unlooked-for bluntness. In any case she must face the situation. Her pluck did not fail her; it was with a very noble and graceful simplicity that she turned to her companion and said:

'Leonard, I did not quite mean that. It would be a pleasure to me to be of that or any other service to you, if I might be so happy! But I never meant to allude to your debts. Oh! Leonard, can't you understand! If you were my husband — or — or going to be, all such little troubles would fall away from you. But I would not for the world have you think . . .'

Her very voice failed her. She could not speak what was in her mind; she turned away, hiding in her hands her face which fairly seemed to burn. This, she thought, was the time for a true lover's opportunity! Oh, if she had been a man, and a woman had so appealed, how he would have sprung to her side and taken her in his arms, and in a wild rapture of declared affection have swept away all the pain of her shame!

But she remained alone. There was no springing to her side; no rapture of declared affection; no obliteration of her shame. She had to bear it all alone. There, in the open; under the eyes that she would fain have seen any other phase of her distress. Her heart beat loud and fast; she waited to gain her self-control.

Leonard Everard had his faults, plenty of them, and he was in truth composed of an amalgam of far baser metals than Stephen thought; but he had been born of gentle blood and reared amongst gentlefolk. He did not quite understand the cause or the amount of his companion's concern; but he could not but recognise her distress. He realised that it had followed hard upon her most generous intention towards himself. He could not, therefore, do less than try to comfort her, and he began his task in a conventional way, but with a blundering awkwardness which was all manlike. He took her hand and held it in his; this much at any rate he had learned in sitting on stairs or in conservatories after extra dances. He said as tenderly as he could, but with an impatient gesture unseen by her:

‘Forgive me, Stephen! I suppose I have said or done something which I shouldn’t. But I don’t know what it is; upon my honour I don’t. Anyhow, I am truly sorry for it. Cheer up, old girl! I’m not your husband, you know; so you needn’t be distressed.’

Stephen took her courage *à deux mains*. If Leonard would not speak she must. It was manifestly impossible that the matter could be left in its present state.

‘Leonard,’ she said softly and solemnly, ‘might not that some day be?’

Leonard, in addition to being an egotist and the very incarnation of selfishness, was a prig of the first water. He had been reared altogether in convention. Home life and Eton and Christchurch had taught him many things, wise as well as foolish; but had tended to fix his conviction that affairs of the heart should proceed on adamantine lines of conventional decorum. It never even occurred to him that a lady could so far step from the confines of convention as to take the initiative in a matter of affection. In his blind ignorance he blundered brutally. He struck better than he knew, as, meaning only to pass safely by an awkward conversational corner, he replied:

‘No jolly fear of that! You’re too much of a boss for me!’ The words and the levity with which they were spoken struck the girl as with a whip. She turned for an instant as pale as ashes; then the red blood rushed from her heart, and face and neck were dyed crimson. It was not a blush, it was a suffusion. In his ignorance Leonard thought it was the former, and went on with what he considered his teasing.

'Oh yes! You know you always want to engineer a chap your own way and make him do just as you wish. The man who has the happiness of marrying you, Stephen, will have a hard row to hoe!' His 'chaff' with its utter want of refinement seemed to her, in her high-strung earnest condition, nothing short of brutal, and for a few seconds produced a feeling of repellence. But it is in the nature of things that opposition of any kind arouses the fighting instinct of a naturally dominant nature. She lost sight of her femininity in the pursuit of her purpose; and as this was to win the man to her way of thinking, she took the logical course of answering his argument. If Leonard Everard had purposely set himself to stimulate her efforts in this direction he could hardly have chosen a better way. It came somewhat as a surprise to Stephen, when she heard her own words:

'I would make a good wife, Leonard! A husband whom I loved and honoured would, I think, not be unhappy!' The sound of her own voice speaking these words, though the tone was low and tender and more self-suppressing by far than was her wont, seemed to peal like thunder in her own ears. Her last bolt seemed to have sped. The blood rushed to her head, and she had to hold on to the arms of the rustic chair or she would have fallen forward.

The time seemed long before Leonard spoke again; every second seemed an age. She seemed to have grown tired of waiting for the sound of his voice; it was with a kind of surprise that she heard him say:

'You limit yourself wisely, Stephen!'

'How do you mean?' she asked, making a great effort to speak.

'You would promise to love and honour; but there isn't anything about obeying.’

As he spoke Leonard stretched himself again luxuriously, and laughed with the intellectual arrogance of a man who is satisfied with a joke, however inferior, of his own manufacture. Stephen looked at him with a long look which began in anger — that anger which comes from an unwonted sense of impotence, and ends in tolerance, the intermediate step being admiration. It is the primeval curse that a woman’s choice is to her husband; and it is an important part of the teaching of a British gentlewoman, knit in the very fibres of her being by the remorseless etiquette of a thousand years, that she be true to him. The man who has in his person the necessary powers or graces to evoke admiration in his wife, even for a passing moment, has a stronghold unconquerable as a rule by all the deadliest arts of mankind.

Leonard Everard was certainly good to look upon as he lolled at his ease on that summer morning. Tall, straight, supple; a typical British gentleman of the educated class, with all parts of the body properly developed and held in some kind of suitable poise.

As Stephen looked, the anxiety and chagrin which tormented her seemed to pass. She realised that here was a nature different from her own, and which should be dealt with in a way unsuitable to herself; and the conviction seemed to make the action which it necessitated more easy as well as more natural to her. Perhaps for the first time in her life Stephen understood that it may be necessary to apply to individuals a standard of criticism unsuitable to self-judgment. Her recognition might have been summed up in the thought which ran through her mind:

‘One must be a little lenient with a man one loves!’

Stephen, when once she had allowed the spirit of toleration to work within her, felt immediately its calming influence. It was with brighter thoughts and better humour that she went on with her task. A task only, it seemed now; a means to an end which she desired.

‘Leonard, tell me seriously, why do you think I gave you the trouble of coming out here?’

‘Upon my soul, Stephen, I don’t know.’

‘You don’t seem to care either, lolling like that when I am serious!’ The words were acid, but the tone was soft and friendly, familiar and genuine, putting quite a meaning of its own on them. Leonard looked at her indolently:

‘I like to loll.’

‘But can’t you even guess, or try to guess, what I ask you?’

‘I can’t guess. The day’s too hot, and that shanty with the drinks is not built yet.’

‘Or may never be!’ Again he looked at her sleepily.

‘Never be! Why not?’

‘Because, Leonard, it may depend on you.’

‘All right then. Drive on! Hurry up the architect and the jerry-builder!’

A quick blush leaped to Stephen’s cheeks. The words were full of meaning, though the tone lacked something; but the news was too good. She could not accept it at once; she decided to herself to wait a short time. Ere many seconds had passed she rejoiced that she had done so as he went on:

‘I hope you’ll give me a say before that husband of yours comes along. He might be a blue-ribbonite; and it wouldn’t do to start such a shanty for rot-gut!’

Again a cold wave swept over her. The absolute difference of feeling between the man and herself; his levity against her earnestness, his callous blindness to her purpose, even the commonness of his words chilled her. For a few seconds she wavered again in her intention; but once again his comeliness and her own obstinacy joined hands and took her back to her path. With chagrin she felt that her words almost stuck in her throat, as summoning up all her resolution she went on:

'It would be for you I would have it built, Leonard!' The man sat up quickly.

'For me?' he asked in a sort of wonderment.

'Yes, Leonard, for you and me!' She turned away; her blushes so overcame her that she could not look at him. When she faced round again he was standing up, his back towards her.

She stood up also. He was silent for a while; so long that the silence became intolerable, and she spoke:

'Leonard, I am waiting!' He turned round and said slowly, the absence of all emotion from his face chilling her till her face blanched:

'I don't think I would worry about it!'

Stephen Norman was plucky, and when she was face to face with any difficulty she was all herself. Leonard did not look pleasant; his face was hard and there was just a suspicion of anger. Strangely enough, this last made the next step easier to the girl; she said slowly:

'All right! I think I understand!'

He turned from her and stood looking out on the distant prospect. Then she felt that the blow which she had all along secretly feared had fallen on her. But her pride as well as her obstinacy now rebelled. She would not accept a silent answer. There must be no doubt left to torture her afterwards. She would take care that there was no mistake. Schooling herself to her task, and pressing one hand for a moment to her side as though to repress the beating of her heart, she came behind him and touched him tenderly on the arm.

'Leonard,' she said softly, 'are you sure there is no mistake? Do you not see that I am asking you,' she intended to say 'to be my husband,' but she could not utter the words, they seemed to stick in her mouth, so she finished the sentence: 'that I be your wife?'

The moment the words were spoken — the bare, hard, naked, shameless words — the revulsion came. As a lightning flash shows up the blackness of the night the appalling truth of what she had done was forced upon her. The blood rushed to her head till cheeks and shoulders and neck seemed to burn. Covering her face with her hands she sank back on the seat crying silently bitter tears that seemed to scald her eyes and her cheeks as they ran.

Leonard was angry. When it began to dawn upon him what was the purpose of Stephen's speech, he had been shocked. Young men are so easily shocked by breaches of convention made by women they respect! And his pride was hurt. Why should he have been placed in such a ridiculous position! He did not love Stephen in that way; and she should have known it. He liked her and all that sort of thing; but what right had she to assume that he loved her? All the weakness of his moral nature came out in his petulance. It was boyish that his eyes filled with tears. He knew it, and that made him more angry than ever. Stephen might well have been at a loss to understand his anger, as, with manifest intention to wound, he answered her:

'What a girl you are, Stephen. You are always doing something or other to put a chap in the wrong and make him ridiculous. I thought you were joking — not a good joke either! Upon my soul, I don't know what I've done that you should fix on me! I wish to goodness—'

If Stephen had suffered the red terror before, she suffered the white terror now. It was not injured pride, it was not humiliation, it was not fear; it was something vague and terrible that lay far deeper than any of these. Under ordinary circumstances she would have liked to have spoken out her mind and given back as good as she got; and even as the thoughts whirled through her brain they came in a torrent of vague vituperative eloquence. But now her tongue was tied. Instinctively she knew that she had put it out of her power to revenge, or even to defend herself. She was tied to the stake, and must suffer without effort and in silence.

Most humiliating of all was the thought that she must propitiate the man who had so wounded her. All love for him had in the instant passed from her; or rather she realised fully the blank, bare truth that she had never really loved him at all. Had she really loved him, even a blow at his hands would have been acceptable; but now . . .

She shook the feelings and thoughts from her as a bird does the water from its wings; and, with the courage and strength and adaptability of her nature, addressed herself to the hard task which faced her in the immediate present. With eloquent, womanly gesture she arrested the torrent of Leonard's indignation; and, as he paused in surprised obedience, she said:

'That will do, Leonard! It is not necessary to say any more; and I am sure you will see, later on, that at least there was no cause for your indignation! I have done an unconventional thing, I know; and I dare say I shall have to pay for it in humiliating bitterness of thought later on! But please remember we are all alone! This is a secret between us; no one else need ever know or suspect it!'

She rose as she concluded. The quiet dignity of her speech and bearing brought back Leonard in some way to his sense of duty as a gentleman. He began, in a sheepish way, to make an apology:

‘I’m sure I beg your pardon, Stephen.’ But again she held the warning hand:

‘There is no need for pardon; the fault, if there were any, was mine alone. It was I, remember, who asked you to come here and who introduced and conducted this melancholy business. I have asked you several things, Leonard, and one more I will add— ’tis only one: that you will forget!’

As she moved away, her dismissal of the subject was that of an empress to a serf. Leonard would have liked to answer her; to have given vent to his indignation that, even when he had refused her offer, she should have the power to treat him if he was the one refused, and to make him feel small and ridiculous in his own eyes. But somehow he felt constrained to silence; her simple dignity outclassed him.

There was another factor too, in his forming his conclusion of silence. He had never seen Stephen look so well, or so attractive. He had never respected her so much as when her playfulness had turned to majestic gravity. All the boy and girl strife of the years that had gone seemed to have passed away. The girl whom he had played with, and bullied, and treated as frankly as though she had been a boy, had in an instant become a woman — and such a woman as demanded respect and admiration even from such a man.

CHAPTER XII — ON THE ROAD HOME

When Leonard Everard parted from Stephen he did so with a feeling of dissatisfaction: firstly, with Stephen; secondly, with things in general; thirdly, with himself. The first was definite, concrete, and immediate; he could give himself chapter and verse for all the girl's misdoing. Everything she had said or done had touched some nerve painfully, or had offended his feelings; and to a man of his temperament his feelings are very sacred things, to himself.

'Why had she put him in such a ridiculous position? That was the worst of women. They were always wanting him to do something he didn't want to do, or crying . . . there was that girl at Oxford.'

Here he turned his head slowly, and looked round in a furtive way, which was getting almost a habit with him. 'A fellow should go away so that he wouldn't have to swear lies. Women were always wanting money; or worse: to be married! Confound women; they all seemed to want him to marry them! There was the Oxford girl, and then the Spaniard, and now Stephen!' This put his thoughts in a new channel. He wanted money himself. Why, Stephen had spoken of it herself; had offered to pay his debts. Gad! it was a good idea that every one round the countryside seemed to know his affairs. What a flat he had been not to accept her offer then and there before matters had gone further. Stephen had lots of money, more than any girl could want. But she didn't give him time to get the thing fixed . . . If he had only known beforehand what she wanted he could have come prepared . . . that was the way with women! Always thinking of themselves! And now? Of course she wouldn't stump up after his refusing her. What would his father say if he came to hear of it? And he must speak to him soon, for these chaps were threatening to

County Court him if he didn't pay. Those harpies in Vere Street were quite nasty . . . ' He wondered if he could work Stephen for a loan.

He walked on through the woodland path, his pace slower than before. 'How pretty she had looked!' Here he touched his little moustache. 'Gad! Stephen was a fine girl anyhow! If it wasn't for all that red hair . . . I like 'em dark better! . . . And her being such an infernal boss!'. . . Then he said unconsciously aloud:

'If I was her husband I'd keep her to rights!'

Poor Stephen!

'So that's what the governor meant by telling me that fortune was to be had, and had easily, if a man wasn't a blind fool. The governor is a starchy old party. He wouldn't speak out straight and say, "Here's Stephen Norman, the richest girl you are ever likely to meet; why don't you make up to her and marry her?" But that would be encouraging his son to be a fortune-hunter! Rot! . . . And now, just because she didn't tell me what she wanted to speak about, or the governor didn't give me a hint so that I might be prepared, I have gone and thrown away the chance. After all it mightn't be so bad. Stephen is a fine girl! . . . But she mustn't ever look at me as she did when I spoke about her not obeying. I mean to be master in my own house anyhow!

'A man mustn't be tied down too tight, even if he is married. And if there's plenty of loose cash about it isn't hard to cover up your tracks . . . I think I'd better think this thing over calmly and be ready when Stephen comes at me again. That's the way with women. When a woman like Stephen fixes her cold grey on a man she does not mean to go asleep over it. I daresay my best plan will be to sit tight, and let her work herself up a bit. There's nothing like a little wholesome neglect for bringing a girl to her bearings!' . . .

For a while he walked on in satisfied self-complacency.

'Confound her! why couldn't she have let me know that she was fond of me in some decent way, without all that formal theatrical proposing? It's a deuced annoying thing in the long run the way the women get fond of me. Though it's nice enough in some ways while it lasts!' he added, as if in unwilling recognition of fact. As the path debouched on the highroad he said to himself half aloud:

'Well, she's a mighty fine girl, anyhow! And if she is red I've had about enough of the black! . . . That Spanish girl is beginning to kick too! I wish I had never come across . . .'

'Shut up, you fool!' he said to himself as he walked on.

When he got home he found a letter from his father. He took it to his room before breaking the seal. It was at least concise and to the point:

'The enclosed has been sent to me. You will have to deal with it yourself. You know my opinion and also my intention. The items which I have marked have been incurred since I spoke to you last about your debts. I shall not pay another farthing for you. So take your own course!

'Jasper Everard.'

The enclosed was a jeweller's bill, the length and the total of which lengthened his face and drew from him a low whistle. He held it in his hand for a long time, standing quite still and silent. Then drawing a deep breath he said aloud:

'That settles it! The halter is on me! It's no use squealing. If it's to be a red head on my pillow! . . . All right! I must only make the best of it. Anyhow I'll have a good time to-day, even if it must be the last!'

That day Harold was in Norcester on business. It was late when he went to the club to dine. Whilst waiting for dinner he met Leonard Everard, flushed and somewhat at uncertain in his speech. It was something of a shock to Harold to see him in such a state.

Leonard was, however, an old friend, and man is as a rule faithful to friends in this form of distress. So in his kindly feeling Harold offered to drive him home, for he knew that he could thus keep him out of further harm. Leonard thanked him in uncertain speech, and said he would be ready. In the meantime he would go and play billiards with the marker whilst Harold was having his dinner.

At ten o'clock Harold's dogcart was ready and he went to look for Leonard, who had not since come near him. He found him half asleep in the smoking-room, much drunker than he had been earlier in the evening.

The drive was fairly long, so Harold made up his mind for a prolonged term of uneasiness and anxiety. The cool night-air, whose effect was increased by the rapid motion, soon increased Leonard's somnolence and for a while he slept soundly, his companion watching carefully lest he should sway over and fall out of the trap. He even held him up as they swung round sharp corners.

After a time he woke up, and woke in a nasty temper. He began to find fault in an incoherent way with everything. Harold said little, just enough to prevent any cause for further grievance. Then Leonard changed and became affectionate. This mood was a greater bore than the other, but Harold managed to bear it with stolid indifference. Leonard was this by time making promises to do things for him, that as he was what he called a 'goo' fell',' he might count on his help and support in the future. As Harold knew him to be a wastrel, over head and ears in debt and with only the succession to a small estate, he did not take much heed to his maunderings. At last the drunken man said something which startled him so much that he instinctively drew himself together with such suddenness as to frighten the horse and almost make him rear up straight.

‘Woa! Woa! Steady, boy. Gently!’ he said, quieting him. Then turning to his companion said in a voice hollow with emotion and vibrant with suppressed passion:

‘What was it you said?’

Leonard, half awake, and not half of that half master of himself, answered:

‘I said I will make you agent of Normanstand when I marry Stephen.’

Harold grew cold. To hear of any one marrying Stephen was to him like plunging him in a glacier stream; but to hear her name so lightly spoken, and by such a man, was a bewildering shock which within a second set his blood on fire.

‘What do you mean?’ he thundered. ‘You marry Ste . . . Miss Norman! You’re not worthy to untie her shoe! You indeed! She wouldn’t look on the same side of the street with a drunken brute like you! How dare you speak of her in such a way!’

‘Brute!’ said Leonard angrily, his vanity reaching inward to heart and brain through all the numbing obstacle of his drunken flesh. ‘Who’s brute? Brute yourself! Tell you goin’ to marry Stephen, ‘cos Stephen wants it. Stephen loves me. Loves me with all her red head! Wha’re you doin’! Wha!!’

His words merged in a lessening gurgle, for Harold had now got him by the throat.

‘Take care what you say about that lady! damn you!’ he said, putting his face close the other’s with eyes that blazed. ‘Don’t you dare to mention her name in such a way, or you will regret it longer than you can think. Loves you, you swine!'

The struggle and the fierce grip on his throat sobered Leonard somewhat. Momentarily sobbed him to that point when he could be coherent and vindictive, though not to the point where he could think ahead. Caution, wisdom, discretion, taste, were not for him at such a moment. Guarding his throat with both hands in an instinctive and spasmodic manner he answered the challenge:

'Who are you calling swine? I tell you she loves me. She ought to know. Didn't she tell me so this very day!' Harold drew back his arm to strike him in the face, his anger too great for words. But the other, seeing the motion and in the sobering recognition of danger, spoke hastily:

'Keep your hair on! You know so jolly much more than I do. I tell you that she told me this and a lot more this morning when she asked me to marry her.'

Harold's heart grew cold as ice. There is something in the sound of a voice speaking truthfully which a true man can recognise. Through all Leonard's half-drunken utterings came such a ring of truth; and Harold recognised it. He felt that his voice was weak and hollow as he spoke, thinking it necessary to give at first a sort of official denial to such a monstrous statement:

'Liar!'

'I'm no liar!' answered Leonard. He would like to have struck him in answer to such a word had he felt equal to it. 'She asked me to marry her to-day on the hill above the house, where I went to meet her by appointment. Here! I'll prove it to you. Read this!' Whilst he was speaking he had opened the greatcoat and was fumbling in the breast-pocket of his coat. He produced a letter which he handed to Harold, who took it with trembling hand. By this time the reins had fallen slack and the horse was walking quietly. There was moonlight, but not enough to read by. Harold bent over and lifted the driving-lamp next to him and turned it so that he could read the envelope. He could hardly keep either lamp or paper still, his hand trembled so when he saw that the direction was in Stephen's handwriting. He was handing it back when Leonard said again:

'Open it! Read it! You must do so; I tell you, you must! You called me a liar, and now must read the proof that I am not. If you don't I shall have to ask Stephen to make you!' Before Harold's mind flashed a rapid thought of what the girl might suffer in being asked to take part in such a quarrel. He could not himself even act to the best advantage unless he knew the truth . . . he took the letter from the envelope and held it before the lamp, the paper fluttering as though in a breeze from the trembling of his hand. Leonard looked on, the dull glare of his eyes brightening with malignant pleasure as he beheld the other's concern. He owed him a grudge, and by God he would pay it. Had he not been struck — throttled — called a liar! . . .

As he read the words Harold's face cleared. 'Why, you infernal young scoundrel!' he said angrily, 'that letter is nothing but a simple note from a young girl to an old friend — playmate asking him to come to see her about some trivial thing. And you construe it into a proposal of marriage. You hound!' He held the letter whilst he spoke, heedless of the outstretched hand of the other waiting to take it back. There was a dangerous glitter in Leonard's eyes. He knew his man and he knew the truth of what he had himself said, and he felt, with all the strength of his base soul, how best he could torture him. In the very strength of Harold's anger, in the poignancy of his concern, in the relief to his soul expressed in his eyes and his voice, his antagonist realised the jealousy of one who honours — and loves. Second by second Leonard grew more sober, and more and better able to carry his own idea into act.

‘Give me my letter!’ he began.

‘Wait!’ said Harold as he put the lamp back into its socket. ‘That will do presently. Take back what you said just now!’

‘What? Take back what?’

‘That base lie; that Miss Norman asked you to marry her.’

Leonard felt that in a physical struggle for the possession of the letter he would be outmatched; but his passion grew colder and more malignant, and in a voice that cut like the hiss of a snake he spoke slowly and deliberately. He was all sober now; the drunkenness of brain and blood was lost, for the time, in the strength of his cold passion.

‘It is true. By God it is true; every word of it! That letter, which you want to steal, is only a proof that I went to meet her on Caester Hill by her own appointment. When I got there, she was waiting for me. She began to talk about a châlet there, and at first I didn’t know what she meant—’

There was such conviction, such a triumphant truth in his voice, that Harold was convinced.

‘Stop!’ he thundered; ‘stop, don’t tell me anything. I don’t want to hear. I don’t want to know.’ He covered his face with his hands and groaned. It was not as though the speaker were a stranger, in which case he would have been by now well on in his death by strangulation; he had known Leonard all his life, and he was a friend of Stephen’s. And he was speaking truth.

The baleful glitter of Leonard’s eyes grew brighter still. He was as a serpent when he goes to strike. In this wise he struck.

‘I shall not stop. I shall go on and tell you all I choose. You have called me liar — twice. You have also called me other names. Now you shall hear the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. And if you won’t listen to me some one else will.’ Harold groaned again; Leonard’s eyes brightened still more, and the evil smile on his face grew broader as he began more and more to feel his power. He went on to speak with a cold deliberate malignancy, but instinctively so sticking to absolute truth that he could trust himself to hurt most. The other listened, cold at heart and physically; his veins and arteries seemed stagnant.

‘I won’t tell you anything of her pretty embarrassments; how her voice fell as she pleaded; how she blushed and stammered. Why, even I, who am used to women and their pretty ways and their passions and their flushings and their stormy upbraidings, didn’t quite know for a while what she was driving at. So at last she spoke out pretty plainly, and told me what a fond wife she’d make me if I would only take her!’ Harold said nothing; he only rocked a little as one in pain, and his hands fell. The other went on:

‘That is what happened this morning on Caester Hill under the trees where I met Stephen Norman by her own appointment; honestly what happened. If you don’t believe me now you can ask Stephen. My Stephen!’ he added in a final burst of venom as in a gleam of moonlight through a rift in the shadowy wood he saw the ghastly pallor of Harold’s face. Then he added abruptly as he held out his hand:

‘Now give me my letter!’

In the last few seconds Harold had been thinking. And as he had been thinking for the good, the safety, of Stephen, his thoughts flew swift and true. This man’s very tone, the openness of his malignity, the underlying scorn when he spoke of her whom others worshipped, showed him the danger — the terrible immediate danger in which she stood from such a man. With the instinct of a mind working as truly for the woman he loved as the needle does to the Pole he spoke quietly, throwing a sneer into the tone so as to exasperate his companion — it was brain against brain now, and for Stephen’s sake:

‘And of course you accepted. You naturally would!’ The other fell into the trap. He could not help giving an extra dig to his opponent by proving him once more in the wrong.

‘Oh no, I didn’t! Stephen is a fine girl; but she wants taking down a bit. She’s too high and mighty just at present, and wants to boss a chap too much. I mean to be master in my own house; and she’s got to begin as she will have to go on. I’ll let her wait a bit: and then I’ll yield by degrees to her lovemaking. She’s a fine girl, for all her red head; and she won’t be so bad after all!’

Harold listened, chilled into still and silent amazement. To hear Stephen spoken of in such a way appalled him. She of all women! . . . Leonard never knew how near sudden death he was, as he lay back in his seat, his eyes getting dull again and his chin sinking. The drunkenness which had been arrested by his passion was reasserting itself. Harold saw his state in time and arrested his own movement to take him by the throat and dash him to the ground. Even as he looked at him in scornful hate, the cart gave a lurch and Leonard fell forward. Instinctively Harold swept an arm round him and held him up. As he did so the unconsciousness of arrested sleep came; Leonard’s chin sank on his breast and he breathed stertorously.

As he drove on, Harold’s thoughts circled in a tumult. Vague ideas of extreme measures which he ought to take flashed up and paled away. Intention revolved upon itself till its weak side was exposed, and, it was abandoned. He could not doubt the essential truth of Leonard's statement regarding the proposal of marriage. He did not understand this nor did he try to. His own love for the girl and the bitter awaking to its futility made him so hopeless that in his own desolation all the mystery of her doing and the cause of it was merged and lost.

His only aim and purpose now was her safety. One thing at least he could do: by fair means or foul stop Leonard's mouth, so that others need not know her shame! He groaned aloud as the thought came to him. Beyond this first step he could do nothing, think of nothing as yet. And he could not take this first step till Leonard had so far sobered that he could understand.

And so waiting for that time to come, he drove on through the silent night.

CHAPTER XIII — HAROLD'S RESOLVE

As they went on their way Harold noticed that Leonard's breathing became more regular, as in honest sleep. He therefore drove slowly so that the other might be sane again before they should arrive at the gate of his father's place; he had something of importance to say before they should part.

Seeing him sleeping so peacefully, Harold passed a strap round him to prevent him falling from his seat. Then he could let his thoughts run more freely. Her safety was his immediate concern; again and again he thought over what he should say to Leonard to ensure his silence.

Whilst he was pondering with set brows, he was startled by Leonard's voice at his side:

'Is that you, Harold? I must have been asleep!' Harold remained silent, amazed at the change. Leonard went on, quite awake and coherent:

'By George! I must have been pretty well cut. I don't remember a thing after coming down the stairs of the club and you and the hall-porter helping me up here. I say, old chap, you have strapped me up all safe and tight. It was good of you to take charge of me. I hope I haven't been a beastly nuisance!' Harold answered grimly:

'It wasn't exactly what I should have called it!' Then, after looking keenly at his companion, he said: 'Are you quite awake and sober now?'

'Quite.' The answer came defiantly; there was something in his questioner's tone which was militant and aggressive. Before speaking further Harold pulled up the horse. They were now crossing bare moorland, where anything within a mile could have easily been seen. They were quite alone, and would be undisturbed. Then he turned to his companion.

‘You talked a good deal in your drunken sleep — if sleep it was. You appeared to be awake!’ Leonard answered:

‘I don’t remember anything of it. What did I say?’

‘I am going to tell you. You said something so strange and so wrong that you must answer for it. But first I must know its truth.’

‘Must! You are pretty dictatorial,’ said Leonard angrily. ‘Must answer for it! What do you mean?’

‘Were you on Caester Hill to-day?’

‘What’s that to you?’ There was no mistaking the defiant, quarrelsome intent.

‘Answer me! were you?’ Harold’s voice was strong and calm.

‘What if I was? It is none of your affair. Did I say anything in what you have politely called my drunken sleep?’

‘You did.’

‘What did I say?’

‘I shall tell you in time. But I must know the truth as I proceed. There is some one else concerned in this, and I must know as I go on. You can easily judge by what I say if I am right.’

‘Then ask away and be damned to you!’ Harold’s calm voice seemed to quell the other’s turbulence as he went on:

‘Were you on Caester Hill this morning?’

‘I was.’

‘Did you meet Miss — - a lady there?’

‘What . . . I did!’

‘Was it by appointment?’ Some sort of idea or half-recollection seemed to come to Leonard; he fumbled half consciously in his breast-pocket. Then he broke out angrily:

'You have taken my letter!'

'I know the answer to that question,' said Harold slowly. 'You showed me the letter yourself, and insisted on my reading it.' Leonard's heart began to quail. He seemed to have an instinctive dread of what was coming. Harold went on calmly and remorselessly:

'Did a proposal of marriage pass between you?'

'Yes!' The answer was defiantly given; Leonard began to feel that his back was against the wall.

'Who made it?' The answer was a sudden attempt at a blow, but Harold struck down his hand in time and held it. Leonard, though a fairly strong man, was powerless in that iron grasp.

'You must answer! It is necessary that I know the truth.'

'Why must you? What have you to do with it? You are not my keeper! Nor Stephen's; though I dare say you would like to be!' The insult cooled Harold's rising passion, even whilst it wrung his heart.

'I have to do with it because I choose. You may find the answer if you wish in your last insult! Now, clearly understand me, Leonard Everard. You know me of old; and you know that what I say I shall do. One way or another, your life or mine may hang on your answers to me — if necessary!' Leonard felt himself pulled up. He knew well the strength and purpose of the man. With a light laugh, which he felt to be, as it was, hollow, he answered:

'Well, schoolmaster, as you are asking questions, I suppose I may as well answer them. Go on! Next!' Harold went on in the same calm, cold voice:

'Who made the proposal of marriage?'

'She did.'

‘Did . . . Was it made at once and directly, or after some preliminary suggestion?’

‘After a bit. I didn’t quite understand at first what she was driving at.’ There was a long pause. With an effort Harold went on:

‘Did you accept?’ Leonard hesitated. With a really wicked scowl he eyed his big, powerfully-built companion, who still had his hand as in a vice. Then seeing no resource, he answered:

‘I did not! That does not mean that I won’t, though!’ he added defiantly. To his surprise Harold suddenly released his hand. There was a grimness in his tone as he said:

‘That will do! I know now that you have spoken the truth, sober as well as drunk. You need say no more. I know the rest. Most men — even brutes like you, if there are any — would have been ashamed even to think the things you said, said openly to me, you hound. You vile, traitorous, mean-souled hound!’

‘What did I say?’

‘I know what you said; and I shall not forget it.’ He went on, his voice deepening into a stern judicial utterance, as though he were pronouncing a sentence of death:

‘Leonard Everard, you have treated vilely a lady whom I love and honour more than I love my own soul. You have insulted her to her face and behind her back. You have made such disloyal reference to her and to her mad act in so trusting you, and have so shown your intention of causing, intentionally or unintentionally, woe to her, that I tell you here and now that you hold henceforth your life in your hand. If you ever mention to a living soul what you have told me twice to-night, even though you should be then her husband; if you should cause her harm though she should then be your wife; if you should cause her dishonour in public or in private, I shall kill you.

So help me God!’

Not a word more did he say; but, taking up the reins, drove on in silence till they arrived at the gate of Brindehow, where he signed to him to alight.

He drove off in silence.

When he arrived at his own house he sent the servant to bed, and then went to his study, where he locked himself in. Then, and then only, did he permit his thoughts to have full range. For the first time since the blow had fallen he looked straight in the face the change in his own life. He had loved Stephen so long and so honestly that it seemed to him now as if that love had been the very foundation of his life. He could not remember a time when he had not loved her; away back to the time when he, a big boy, took her, a little girl, under his care, and devoted himself to her. He had grown into the belief that so strong and so consistent an affection, though he had never spoken it or even hinted at it or inferred it, had become a part of her life as well as of his own. And this was the end of that dreaming! Not only did she not care for him, but found herself with a heart so empty that she needs must propose marriage to another man! There was surely something, more than at present he knew of or could understand, behind such an act done by her. Why should she ask Everard to marry her? Why should she ask any man? Women didn’t do such things! . . . Here he paused. ‘Women didn’t do such things.’ All at once there came back to him fragments of discussions — in which Stephen had had a part, in which matters of convention had been dealt with. Out of these dim and shattered memories came a comfort to his heart, though his brain could not as yet grasp the reason of it. He knew that Stephen had held an unconventional idea as to the equality of the sexes. Was it possible that she was indeed testing one of her theories?

The idea stirred him so that he could not remain quiet. He stood up, and walked the room. Somehow he felt light beginning to dawn, though he could not tell its source, or guess at the final measure of its fulness. The fact of Stephen having done such a thing was hard to bear; but it was harder to think that she should have done such a thing without a motive; or worse: with love of Leonard as a motive! He shuddered as he paused. She could not love such a man. It was monstrous! And yet she had done this thing . . . 'Oh, if she had had any one to advise her, to restrain her! But she had no mother! No mother! Poor Stephen!'

The pity of it, not for himself but for the woman he loved, overcame him. Sitting down heavily before his desk, he put his face on his hands, and his great shoulders shook.

Long, long after the violence of his emotion had passed, he sat there motionless, thinking with all the power and sincerity he knew; thinking for Stephen's good.

When a strong man thinks unselfishly some good may come out of it. He may blunder; but the conclusion of his reasoning must be in the main right. So it was with Harold. He knew that he was ignorant of women, and of woman's nature, as distinguished from man's. The only woman he had ever known well was Stephen; and she in her youth and in her ignorance of the world and herself was hardly sufficient to supply to him data for his present needs. To a clean-minded man of his age a woman is something divine. It is only when in later life disappointment and experience have hammered bitter truth into his brain, that he begins to realise that woman is not angelic but human. When he knows more, and finds that she is like himself, human and limited but with qualities of purity and sincerity and endurance which put his own to shame, he realises how much better a helpmate she is for man than could be the vague, unreal creations of his dreams. And then he can thank God for His goodness that when He might have given us Angels He did give us women!

Of one thing, despite the seeming of facts, he was sure: Stephen did not love Leonard. Every fibre of his being revolted at the thought. She of so high a nature; he of so low. She so noble; he so mean. Bah! the belief was impossible.

Impossible! Herein was the manifestation of his ignorance; anything is possible where love is concerned! It was characteristic of the man that in his mind he had abandoned, for the present at all events, his own pain. He still loved Stephen with all the strength of his nature, but for him the selfish side ceased to exist. He was trying to serve Stephen; and every other thought had to give way. He had been satisfied that in a manner she loved him in some way and in some degree; and he had hoped that in the fulness of time the childish love would ripen, so that in the end would come a mutual affection which was of the very essence of Heaven. He believed still that she loved him in some way; but the future that was based on hope had now been wiped out with a sudden and unsparing hand. She had actually proposed marriage to another man. If the idea of a marriage with him had ever crossed her mind she could have had no doubt of her feeling toward another. . . . And yet? And yet he could not believe that she loved Leonard; not even if all trains of reasoning should end by leading to that point. One thing he had at present to accept, that whatever might be the measure of affection Stephen might have for him, it was not love as he understood it. He resolutely turned his back on the thought of his own side of the matter, and tried to find some justification of Stephen's act.

'Seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened to ye' has perhaps a general as well as a special significance. It is by patient tireless seeking that many a precious thing has been found. It was after many a long cycle of thought that the seeking and the knocking had effectual result. Harold came to believe, vaguely at first but more definitely as the evidence nucleated, that Stephen's act was due to some mad girlish wish to test her own theory; to prove to herself the correctness of her own reasoning, the fixity of her own purpose. He did not go on analysing further; for as he walked the room with a portion of the weight taken from his heart he noticed that the sky was beginning to quicken. The day would soon be upon him, and there was work to be done. Instinctively he knew that there was trouble in store for Stephen, and he felt that in such an hour he should be near her. All her life she had been accustomed to him. In her sorrows to confide in him, to tell him her troubles so that they might dwindle and pass away; to enhance her pleasures by making him a sharer in them.

Harold was inspirited by the coming of the new day. There was work to be done, and the work must be based on thought. His thoughts must take a practical turn; what was he to do that would help Stephen? Here there dawned on him for the first time the understanding of a certain humiliation which she had suffered; she had been refused! She who had stepped so far out of the path of maidenly reserve in which she had always walked as to propose marriage to a man, had been refused! He did not, could not, know to the full the measure of such humiliation to a woman; but he could guess at any rate a part. And that guessing made him grind his teeth in impotent rage.

But out of that rage came an inspiration. If Stephen had been humiliated by the refusal of one man, might not this be minimised if she in turn might refuse another? Harold knew so well the sincerity of his own love and the depth of his own devotion that he was satisfied that he could not err in giving the girl the opportunity of refusing him. It would be some sort of balm to her wounded spirit to know that Leonard's views were not shared by all men. That there were others who would deem it a joy to serve as her slaves. When she had refused him she would perhaps feel easier in her mind. Of course if she did not refuse him . . . Ah! well, then would the gates of Heaven open . . . But that would never be. The past could not be blotted out! All he could do would be to serve her. He would go early. Such a man as Leonard Everard might make some new complication, and the present was quite bad enough.

It was a poor enough thing for him, he thought at length. She might trample on him; but it was for her sake. And to him what did it matter? The worst had come. All was over now!

CHAPTER XIV — THE BEECH GROVE

On the morning following the proposal Stephen strolled out into a beech grove, some little distance from the house, which from childhood had been a favourite haunt of hers. It was not in the immediate road to anywhere, and so there was no occasion for any of the household or the garden to go through it or near it. She did not put on a hat, but took only a sunshade, which she used in passing over the lawn. The grove was on the side of the house away from her own room and the breakfast-room. When she had reached its shade she felt that at last she was alone.

The grove was a privileged place. Long ago a great number of young beeches had been planted so thickly that as they grew they shot up straight and branchless in their struggle for the light. Not till they had reached a considerable altitude had they been thinned; and then the thinning had been so effected that, as the high branches began to shoot out in the freer space, they met in time and interlaced so closely that they made in many places a perfect screen of leafy shade. Here and there were rifts or openings through which the light passed; under such places the grass was fine and green, or the wild hyacinths in due season tinged the earth with blue. Through the grove some wide alleys had been left: great broad walks where the soft grass grew short and fine, and to whose edges came a drooping of branches and an upspringing of undergrowth of laurel and rhododendron. At the far ends of these walks were little pavilions of marble built in the classic style which ruled for garden use two hundred years ago. At the near ends some of them were close to the broad stretch of water from whose edges ran back the great sloping banks of emerald sward dotted here and there with great forest trees.

The grove was protected by a ha-ha, so that it was never invaded from without, and the servants of the house, both the domestics and the gardeners and grooms, had been always forbidden to enter it. Thus by long usage it had become a place of quiet and solitude for the members of the family.

To this soothing spot had come Stephen in her pain. The long spell of self-restraint during that morning had almost driven her to frenzy, and she sought solitude as an anodyne to her tortured soul. The long anguish of a third sleepless night, following on a day of humiliation and terror, had destroyed for a time the natural resilience of a healthy nature. She had been for so long in the prison of her own purpose with Fear as warder; the fetters of conventional life had so galled her that here in the accustomed solitude of this place, in which from childhood she had been used to move and think freely, she felt as does a captive who has escaped from an irksome durance. As Stephen had all along been free of movement and speech, no such opportunities of freedom called to her. The pent-up passion in her, however, found its own relief. Her voice was silent, and she moved with slow steps, halting often between the green tree-trunks in the cool shade; but her thoughts ran free, and passion found a vent. No stranger seeing the tall, queenly girl moving slowly through the trees could have imagined the fierce passion which blazed within her, unless he had been close enough to see her eyes. The habit of physical restraint to which all her life she had been accustomed, and which was intensified by the experience of the past thirty-six hours, still ruled her, even here. Gradually the habit of security began to prevail, and the shackles to melt away. Here had she come in all her childish troubles. Here had she fought with herself, and conquered herself. Here the spirits of the place were with her and not against her. Here memory in its second degree, habit, gave her the full sense of spiritual freedom.

As she walked to and fro the raging of her spirit changed its objective: from restraint to its final causes; and chief amongst them the pride which had been so grievously hurt. How she loathed the day that had passed, and how more than all she hated herself for her part in it; her mad, foolish, idiotic, self-importance which gave her the idea of such an act and urged her to the bitter end of its carrying out; her mulish obstinacy in persisting when every fibre of her being had revolted at the doing, and when deep in her inmost soul was a deterring sense of its futility. How could she have stooped to have done such a thing: to ask a man . . . oh! the shame of it, the shame of it all! How could she have been so blind as to think that such a man was worthy! . . .

In the midst of her whirlwind of passion came a solitary gleam of relief: she knew with certainty that she did not love Leonard; that she had never loved him. The coldness of disdain to him, the fear of his future acts which was based on disbelief of the existence of that finer nature with which she had credited him, all proved to her convincingly that he could never really have been within the charmed circle of her inner life. Did she but know it, there was an even stronger evidence of her indifference to him in the ready manner in which her thoughts flew past him in their circling sweep. For a moment she saw him as the centre of a host of besetting fears; but her own sense of superior power nullified the force of the vision. She was able to cope with him and his doings, were there such need. And so her mind flew back to the personal side of her trouble: her blindness, her folly, her shame.

In truth she was doing good work for herself. Her mind was working truly and to a beneficent end. One by one she was overcoming the false issues of her passion and drifting to an end in which she would see herself face to face and would place so truly the blame for what had been as to make it a warning and ennobling lesson of her life. She moved more quickly, passing to and fro as does a panther in its cage when the desire of forest freedom is heavy upon it.

That which makes the irony of life will perhaps never be understood in its casual aspect by the finite mind of man. The ‘why’ and ‘wherefore’ and the ‘how’ of it is only to be understood by that All-wise intelligence which can scan the future as well as the present, and see the far far-reaching ramifications of those schemes of final development to which the manifestation of completed character tend.

To any mortal it would seem a pity that to Stephen in her solitude, when her passion was working itself out to an end which might be good, should come an interruption which would throw it back upon itself in such a way as to multiply its malignant force. But again it is a part of the Great Plan that instruments whose use man’s finite mind could never predicate should be employed: the seeming good to evil, the seeming evil to good.

As she swept to and fro, her raging spirit compelling to violent movement, Stephen’s eyes were arrested by the figure of a man coming through the aisles of the grove. At such a time any interruption of her passion was a cause for heightening anger; but the presence of a person was as a draught to a full-fed furnace. Most of all, in her present condition of mind, the presence of a man — for the thought of a man lay behind all her trouble, was as a tornado striking a burning forest. The blood of her tortured heart seemed to leap to her brain and to suffuse her eyes. She ‘saw blood’!

It mattered not that the man whom she saw she knew and trusted. Indeed, this but added fuel to the flame. In the presence of a stranger some of her habitual self-restraint would doubtless have come back to her. But now the necessity for such was foregone; Harold was her alter ego, and in his presence was safety. He was, in this aspect, but a higher and more intelligent rendering of the trees around her. In another aspect he was an opportune victim, something to strike at. When the anger of a poison snake opens its gland, and the fang is charged with venom, it must strike at something. It does not pause or consider what it may be; it strikes, though it may be at stone or iron. So Stephen waited till her victim was within distance to strike. Her black eyes, fierce with passion and blood-rimmed as a cobra's, glittered as he passed among the tree-trunks towards her, eager with his errand of devotion.

Harold was a man of strong purpose. Had he not been, he would never have come on his present errand. Never, perhaps, had any suitor set forth on his quest with a heavier heart. All his life, since his very boyhood, had been centred round the girl whom to-day he had come to serve. All his thought had been for her: and to-day all he could expect was a gentle denial of all his hopes, so that his future life would be at best a blank.

But he would be serving Stephen! His pain might be to her good; ought to be, to a certain extent, to her mental ease. Her wounded pride would find some solace . . . As he came closer the feeling that he had to play a part, veritably to act one, came stronger and stronger upon him, and filled him with bitter doubt as to his power. Still he went on boldly. It had been a part of his plan to seem to come eagerly, as a lover should come; and so he came. When he got close to Stephen, all the witchery of her presence came upon him as of old. After all, he loved her with his whole soul; and the chance had come to tell her so. Even under the distressing conditions of his suit, the effort had its charm.

Stephen schooled herself to her usual attitude with him; and that, too, since the effort was based on truth came with a certain ease to her. At the present time, in her present frame of mind, nothing in the wide world could give her pleasure; the ease which came, if it did not change her purpose, increased her power. Their usual salutation, begun when she was a little baby, was ‘Good morning, Stephen!’ ‘Good morning, Harold!’ It had become so much a custom that now it came mechanically on her part. The tender reference to childhood’s days, though it touched her companion to the quick, did not appeal to her since she had no special thought of it. Had such a thought come to her it might have softened her even to tears, for Harold had been always deep in her heart. As might have been expected from her character and condition of mind, she was the first to begin:

‘I suppose you want to see me about something special, Harold, you have come so early.’

‘Yes, Stephen. Very special!’

‘Were you at the house?’ she asked in a voice whose quietness might have conveyed a warning. She was so suspicious now that she suspected even Harold of — of what she did not know. He answered in all simplicity:

‘No. I came straight here.’

‘How did you know I should be here?’ Her voice was now not only quiet but sweet. Without thinking, Harold blundered on. His intention was so single-minded, and his ignorance of woman so complete, that he did not recognise even elementary truths:

‘I knew you always came here long ago when you were a child when you were in—’ Here it suddenly flashed upon him that if he seemed to expect that she was in trouble as he had purposed saying, he would give away his knowledge of what had happened and so destroy the work to which he had set himself. So he finished the sentence in a lame and impotent manner, which, however, saved complete annihilation as it was verbally accurate: ‘in short frocks.’ Stephen needed to know little more. Her quick intelligence grasped the fact that there was some purpose afoot which she did not know or understand. She surmised, of course, that it was some way in connection with her mad act, and she grew cooler in her brain as well as colder in her heart as she prepared to learn more. Stephen had changed from girl to woman in the last twenty-four hours; and all the woman in her was now awake. After a moment’s pause she said with a winning smile:

‘Why, Harold, I’ve been in long frocks for years. Why should I come here on this special day on that account?’ Even as she was speaking she felt that it would be well to abandon this ground of inquiry. It had clearly told her all it could. She would learn more by some other means. So she went on in a playful way, as a cat — not a kitten — does when it has got a mouse:

‘That reason won’t work, Harold. It’s quite rusty in the joints. But never mind it! Tell me why you have come so early?’ This seemed to Harold to be a heaven-sent opening; he rushed in at once:

‘Because, Stephen, I wanted to ask you to be my wife! Oh! Stephen, don’t you know that I love you? Ever since you were a little girl! When you were a little girl and I a big boy I loved you. I have loved you ever since with all my heart, and soul, and strength. Without you the world is a blank to me! For you and your happiness

I would do anything — anything!'

This was no acting. When once the barrier of beginning had been broken, his soul seemed to pour itself out. The man was vibrant through all his nature; and the woman's very soul realised its truth. For an instant a flame of gladness swept through her; and for the time it lasted put all other thought aside.

But suspicion is a hard metal which does not easily yield to fire. It can come to white heat easily enough, but its melting-point is high indeed. When the flame had leaped it had spent its force; the reaction came quick. Stephen's heart seemed to turn to ice, all the heat and life rushing to her brain. Her thoughts flashed with convincing quickness; there was no time for doubting amid their rush. Her life was for good or ill at the crossing of the ways. She had trusted Harold thoroughly. The habit of her whole life from her babyhood up had been to so look to him as comrade and protector and sympathetic friend. She was so absolutely sure of his earnest devotion that this new experience of a riper feeling would have been a joy to her, if it should be that his act was all spontaneous and done in ignorance of her shame. 'Shame' was the generic word which now summarised to herself her thought of her conduct in proposing to Leonard. But of this she must be certain. She could not, dare not, go farther till this was settled. With the same craving for certainty with which she convinced herself that Leonard understood her overtures, and with the same dogged courage with which she pressed the matter on him, she now went on to satisfy her mind.

'What did you do yesterday?'

'I was at Norcester all day. I went early. By the way, here is the ribbon you wanted; I think it's exactly the same as the pattern.' As he spoke he took a tissue-piper parcel from his pocket and handed it to her.

‘Thanks!’ she said. ‘Did you meet any friends there?’

‘Not many.’ He answered guardedly; he had a secret to keep.

‘Where did you dine?’

‘At the club!’ He began to be uneasy at this questioning; but he did not see any way to avoid answering without creating some suspicion.

‘Did you see any one you knew at the club?’ Her voice as she spoke was a little harder, a little more strained. Harold noticed the change, rather by instinct than reason. He felt that there was danger in it, and paused. The pause seemed to suddenly create a new fury in the breast of Stephen. She felt that Harold was playing with her. Harold! If she could not trust him, where then was she to look for trust in the world? If he was not frank with her, what then meant his early coming; his seeking her in the grove; his proposal of marriage, which seemed so sudden and so inopportune? He must have seen Leonard, and by some means have become acquainted with her secret of shame . . . His motive?

Here her mind halted. She knew as well as if it had been trumpeted from the skies that Harold knew all. But she must be certain . . . Certain!

She was standing erect, her hands held down by her sides and clenched together till the knuckles were white; all her body strung high — like an over-pitched violin. Now she raised her right hand and flung it downward with a passionate jerk.

‘Answer me!’ she cried imperiously. ‘Answer me! Why are you playing with me? Did you see Leonard Everard last night? Answer me, I say. Harold An Wolf, you do not lie! Answer me!’

As she spoke Harold grew cold. From the question he now knew that Stephen had guessed his secret. The fat was in the fire with a vengeance. He did not know what to do, and still remained silent. She did not give him time to think, but spoke again, this time more coldly. The white terror had replaced the red:

‘Are you not going to answer me a simple question, Harold? To be silent now is to wrong me! I have a right to know!’

In his trouble, for he felt that say what he would he could only give her new pain, he said humbly:

‘Don’t ask me, Stephen! Won’t you understand that I want to do what is best for you? Won’t you trust me?’ Her answer came harshly. A more experienced man than Harold, one who knew women better, would have seen how overwrought she was, and would have made pity the pivot of his future bearing and acts and words while the interview lasted; pity, and pity only. But to Harold the high ideal was ever the same. The Stephen whom he loved was no subject for pity, but for devotion only. He knew the nobility of her nature and must trust it to the end. When her silence and her blazing eyes denied his request, he answered her query in a low voice:

‘I did!’ Even whilst he spoke he was thankful for one thing, he had not been pledged in any way to confidence. Leonard had forced the knowledge on him; and though he would have preferred a million times over to be silent, he was still free to speak. Stephen’s next question came more coldly still:

‘Did he tell you of his meeting with me?’

‘He did.’

‘Did he tell you all?’ It was torture to him to answer; but he was at the stake and must bear it.

‘I think so! If it was true.’

‘What did he tell you? Stay! I shall ask you the facts myself; the broad facts. We need not go into details . . .’

‘Oh, Stephen!’ She silenced his pleading with an imperious hand.

‘If I can go into this matter, surely you can. If I can bear the shame of telling, you can at least bear that of listening. Remember that knowing — knowing what you know, or at least what you have heard — you could come here and propose marriage to me!’ This she said with a cold, cutting sarcasm which sounded like the rasping of a roughly-sharpened knife through raw flesh. Harold groaned in spirit; he felt a weakness which began at his heart to steal through him. It took all his manhood to bear himself erect. He dreaded what was coming, as of old the once-tortured victim dreaded the coming torment of the rack.

CHAPTER XV — THE END OF THE MEETING

Stephen went on in her calm, cold voice:

‘Did he tell you that I had asked him to marry me?’ Despite herself, as she spoke the words a red tide dyed her face. It was not a flush; it was not a blush; it was a sort of flood which swept through her, leaving her in a few seconds whiter than before. Harold saw and understood. He could not speak; he lowered his head silently. Her eyes glittered more coldly. The madness that every human being may have once was upon her. Such a madness is destructive, and here was something more vulnerable than herself.

‘Did he tell you how I pressed him?’ There was no red tide this time, nor ever again whilst the interview lasted. To bow in affirmation was insufficient; with an effort he answered:

‘I understood so.’ She answered with an icy sarcasm:

‘You understood so! Oh, I don’t doubt he embellished the record with some of his own pleasantries. But you understood it; and that is sufficient.’ After a pause she went on:

‘Did he tell you that he had refused me?’

‘Yes!’ Harold knew now that he was under the torture, and that there was no refusing. She went on, with a light laugh, which wrung his heart even more than her pain had done . . . Stephen to laugh like that!

‘And I have no doubt that he embellished that too, with some of his fine masculine witticisms. I understood myself that he was offended at my asking him. I understood it quite well; he told me so!’ Then with feminine intuition she went on:

‘I dare say that before he was done he said something kindly of the poor little thing that loved him; that loved him so much, and that she had to break down all the bounds of modesty and decorum that had made the women of her house honoured for a thousand years! And you listened to him whilst he spoke! Oh-h-h!' she quivered with her white-hot anger, as the fierce heat in the heart of a furnace quivers. But her voice was cold again as she went on:

'But who could help loving him? Girls always did. It was such a beastly nuisance! You "understood" all that, I dare say; though perhaps he did not put it in such plain words!' Then the scorn, which up to now had been imprisoned, turned on him; and he felt as though some hose of deathly chill was being played upon him.

'And yet you, knowing that only yesterday, he had refused me — refused my pressing request that he should marry me, come to me hot-foot in the early morning and ask me to be your wife. I thought such things did not take place; that men were more honourable, or more considerate, or more merciful! Or at least I used to think so; till yesterday. No! till to-day. Yesterday's doings were my own doings, and I had to bear the penalty of them myself. I had come here to fight out by myself the battle of my shame . . .'

Here Harold interrupted her. He could not bear to hear Stephen use such a word in connection with herself.

'No! You must not say "shame." There is no shame to you, Stephen. There can be none, and no one must say it in my presence!' In her secret heart of hearts she admired him for his words; she felt them at the moment sink into her memory, and knew that she would never forget the mastery of his face and bearing. But the blindness of rage was upon her, and it is of the essence of this white-hot anger that it preys not on what is basest in us, but on what is best. That Harold felt deeply was her opportunity to wound him more deeply than before.

‘Even here in the solitude which I had chosen as the battleground of my shame you had need to come unasked, unthought of, when even a lesser mind than yours, for you are no fool, would have thought to leave me alone. My shame was my own, I tell you; and I was learning to take my punishment. My punishment! Poor creatures that we are, we think our punishment will be what we would like best: to suffer in silence, and not to have spread abroad our shame!’ How she harped on that word, though she knew that every time she uttered it, it cut to the heart of the man who loved her. ‘And yet you come right on top of my torture to torture me still more and illimitably. You come, you who alone had the power to intrude yourself on my grief and sorrow; power given you by my father’s kindness. You come to me without warning, considerately telling me that you knew I would be here because I had always come here when I had been in trouble. No — I do you an injustice. “In trouble” was not what you said, but that I had come when I had been in short frocks. Short frocks! And you came to tell me that you loved me. You thought, I suppose, that as I had refused one man, I would jump at the next that came along. I wanted a man. God! God! what have I done that such an affront should come upon me? And come, too, from a hand that should have protected me if only in gratitude for my father’s kindness!’ She was eyeing him keenly, with eyes that in her unflinching anger took in everything with the accuracy of sun-painting. She wanted to wound; and she succeeded.

But Harold had nerves and muscles of steel; and when the call came to them they answered. Though the pain of death was upon him he did not flinch. He stood before her like a rock, in all his great manhood; but a rock on whose summit the waves had cast the wealth of their foam, for his face was as white as snow. She saw and understood; but in the madness upon her she went on trying new places and new ways to wound:

‘You thought, I suppose, that this poor, neglected, despised, rejected woman, who wanted so much to marry that she couldn’t wait for a man to ask her, would hand herself over to the first chance comer who threw his handkerchief to her; would hand over herself — and her fortune!’

‘Oh, Stephen! How can you say such things, think such things?’ The protest broke from him with a groan. His pain seemed to inflame her still further; to gratify her hate, and to stimulate her mad passion:

‘Why did I ever see you at all? Why did my father treat you as a son; that when you had grown and got strong on his kindness you could thus insult his daughter in the darkest hour of her pain and her shame!’ She almost choked with passion. There was now nothing in the whole world that she could trust. In the pause he spoke:

‘Stephen, I never meant you harm. Oh, don’t speak such wild words. They will come back to you with sorrow afterwards! I only meant to do you good. I wanted . . . ‘ Her anger broke out afresh:

‘There; you speak it yourself! You only wanted to do me good. I was so bad that any kind of a husband . . . Oh, get out of my sight! I wish to God I had never seen you! I hope to God I may never see you again! Go! Go! Go!’

This was the end! To Harold’s honest mind such words would have been impossible had not thoughts of truth lain behind them. That Stephen — his Stephen, whose image in his mind shut out every other woman in the world, past, present, and future — should say such things to any one, that she should think such things, was to him a deadly blow. But that she should say them to him! . . .

Utterance, even the utterance which speaks in the inmost soul, failed him. He had in some way that he knew not hurt — wounded — killed Stephen; for the finer part was gone from the Stephen that he had known and worshipped so long. She wished him gone; she wished she had never seen him; she hoped to God never to see him again. Life for him was over and done! There could be no more happiness in the world; no more wish to work, to live! . . .

He bowed gravely; and without a word turned and walked away.

Stephen saw him go, his tall form moving amongst the tree trunks till finally it was lost in their massing. She was so filled with the tumult of her passion that she looked, unmoved. Even the sense of his going did not change her mood. She raged to and fro amongst the trees, her movements getting quicker and quicker as her excitement began to change from mental to physical; till the fury began to exhaust itself. All at once she stopped, as though arrested by a physical barrier; and with a moan sank down in a helpless heap on the cool moss.

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Harold went from the grove as one seems to move in a dream. Little things and big were mixed up in his mind. He took note, as he went towards the town by the byroads, of everything around him in his usual way, for he had always been one of those who notice unconsciously, or rather unintentionally. Long afterwards he could shut his eyes and recall every step of the way from the spot where he had turned from Stephen to the railway station outside Norcester. And on many and many such a time when he opened them again the eyelids were wet. He wanted to get away quickly, silently, unobserved. With the instinct of habitual thought his mind turned London-ward. He met but few persons, and those only cottiers. He saluted them in his usual cheery way, but did not stop to speak with any. He was about to take a single ticket to London when it struck him that this might look odd, so he asked for a return. Then, his mind being once more directed towards concealment of purpose, he sent a telegram to his housekeeper telling her that he was called away to London on business. It was only when he was far on his journey that he gave thought to ways and means, and took stock of his possessions. Before he took out his purse and pocket-book he made up his mind that he would be content with what it was, no matter how little. He had left Normanstand and all belonging to it for ever, and was off to hide himself in whatever part of the world would afford him the best opportunity. Life was over! There was nothing to look forward to; nothing to look back at! The present was a living pain whose lightest element was despair. As, however, he got further and further away, his practical mind began to work; he thought over matters so as to arrange in his mind how best he could dispose of his affairs, so to cause as little comment as might be, and to save the possibility of worry or distress of any kind to Stephen.

Even then, in his agony of mind, his heart was with her; it was not the least among his troubles that he would have to be away from her when perhaps she would need him most. And yet whenever he would come to this point in his endless chain of thought, he would have to stop for a while, overcome with such pain that his power of thinking was paralysed. He would never, could never, be of service to her again. He had gone out of her life, as she had gone out of his life; though she never had, nor never could out of his thoughts. It was all over! All the years of sweetness, of hope, and trust, and satisfied and justified faith in each other, had been wiped out by that last terrible, cruel meeting. Oh! how could she have said such things to him! How could she have thought them! And there she was now in all the agony of her unrestrained passion. Well he knew, from his long experience of her nature, how she must have suffered to be in such a state of mind, to have so forgotten all the restraint of her teaching and her life! Poor, poor Stephen! Fatherless now as well as motherless; and friendless as well as fatherless! No one to calm her in the height of her wild abnormal passion! No one to comfort her when the fit had passed! No one to sympathise with her for all that she had suffered! No one to help her to build new and better hopes out of the wreck of her mad ideas! He would cheerfully have given his life for her. Only last night he was prepared to kill, which was worse than to die, for her sake. And now to be far away, unable to help, unable even to know how she fared. And behind her eternally the shadow of that worthless man who had spurned her love and flouted her to a chance comer in his drunken delirium. It was too bitter to bear. How could God lightly lay such a burden on his shoulders who had all his life tried to walk in sobriety and chastity and in all worthy and manly ways! It was unfair! It was unfair! If he could do anything for her? Anything! Anything! . . . And so the unending whirl of thoughts went on!

The smoke of London was dim on the horizon when he began to get back to practical matters. When the train drew up at Euston he stepped from it as one to whom death would be a joyous relief!

He went to a quiet hotel, and from there transacted by letter such business matters as were necessary to save pain and trouble to others. As for himself, he made up his mind that he would go to Alaska, which he took to be one of the best places in the as yet uncivilised world for a man to lose his identity. As a security at the start he changed his name; and as John Robinson, which was not a name to attract public attention, he shipped as a passenger on the *Scoriac* from London to New York.

The *Scoriac* was one of the great cargo boats which take a certain number of passengers. The few necessaries which he took with him were chosen with an eye to utility in that frozen land which he sought. For the rest, he knew nothing, nor did he care how or whither he went. His vague purpose was to cross the American Continent to San Francisco, and there to take passage for the high latitudes north of the Yukon River.

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When Stephen began to regain consciousness her first sensation was one of numbness. She was cold in the back, and her feet did not seem to exist; but her head was hot and pulsating as though her brain were a living thing. Then her half-open eyes began to take in her surroundings. For another long spell she began to wonder why all around her was green. Then came the inevitable process of reason. Trees! It is a wood! How did I come here? why am I lying on the ground?

All at once wakened memory opened on her its flood-gates, and overwhelmed her with pain. With her hands pressed to her throbbing temples and her burning face close to the ground, she began to recall what she could of the immediate past. It all seemed like a terrible dream. By degrees her intelligence came back to its normal strength, and all at once, as does one suddenly wakened from sleep to the knowledge of danger, she sat up.

Somehow the sense of time elapsed made Stephen look at her watch. It was half-past twelve. As she had come into the grove immediately after breakfast, and as Harold had almost immediately joined her, and as the interview between them had been but short, she must have lain on the ground for more than three hours. She rose at once, trembling in every limb. A new fear began to assail her; that she had been missed at home, and that some one might have come to look for her. Up to now she had not been able to feel the full measure of pain regarding what had passed, but which would, she knew, come to her in the end. It was too vague as yet; she could not realise that it had really been. But the fear of discovery was immediate, and must be guarded against without delay. As well as she could, she tidied herself and began to walk slowly back to the house, hoping to gain her own room unnoticed. That her general intelligence was awake was shown by the fact that before she left the grove she remembered that she had forgotten her sunshade. She went back and searched till she had found it.

Gaining her room without meeting any one, she at once change her dress, fearing that some soil or wrinkle might betray her. Resolutely she put back from her mind all consideration of the past; there would be time for that later on. Her nerves were already much quieter than they had been. That long faint, or lapse into insensibility, had for the time taken the place of sleep. There would be a price to be paid for it later; but for the present it had served its purpose. Now and again she was disturbed by one thought; she could not quite remember what had occurred after Harold had left, and just before she became unconscious. She dared not dwell upon it, however. It would doubtless all come back to her when she had leisure to think the whole matter over as a connected narrative.

When the gong sounded for lunch she went down, with a calm exterior, to face the dreaded ordeal of another meal.

Luncheon passed off without a hitch. She and her aunt talked as usual over all the small affairs of the house and the neighbourhood, and the calm restraint was in itself soothing. Even then she could not help feeling how much convention is to a woman's life. Had it not been for these recurring trials of set hours and duties she could never have passed the last day and night without discovery of her condition of mind. That one terrible, hysterical outburst was perhaps the safety valve. Had it been spread over the time occupied in conventional duties its force even then might have betrayed her; but without the necessity of nerving herself to conventional needs, she would have infallibly betrayed herself by her negative condition.

After lunch she went to her own boudoir where, when she had shut the inner door, no one was allowed to disturb her without some special need in the house or on the arrival of visitors. This 'sporting oak' was the sign of 'not at home' which she had learned in her glimpse of college life. Here in the solitude of safety, she began to go over the past, resolutely and systematically.

She had already been so often over the memory of the previous humiliating and unhappy day that she need not revert to it at present. Since then had she not quarrelled with Harold, whom she had all her life so trusted that her quarrel with him seemed to shake the very foundations of her existence? As yet she had not remembered perfectly all that had gone on under the shadow of the beech grove. She dared not face it all at once, even as yet. Time must elapse before she should dare to cry; to think of her loss of Harold was to risk breaking down altogether. Already she felt weak. The strain of the last forty-eight hours was too much for her physical strength. She began to feel, as she lay back in her cushioned chair, that a swoon is no worthy substitute for sleep. Indeed it had seemed to make the need for sleep even more imperative.

It was all too humiliating! She wanted to think over what had been; to recall it as far as possible so as to fix it in her mind, whilst it was still fresh. Later on, some action might have to be based on her recollection. And yet . . . How could she think when she was so tired . . . tired . . .

Nature came to the poor girl’s relief at last, and she fell into a heavy sleep . . .

It was like coming out of the grave to be dragged back to waking life out of such a sleep, and so soon after it had begun. But the voice seemed to reach to her inner consciousness in some compelling way. For a second she could not understand; but as she rose from the cushions the maid’s message repeated, brought her wide awake and alert in an instant:

‘Mr. Everard, young Mr. Everard, to see you, miss!’

CHAPTER XVI — A PRIVATE CONVERSATION

The name braced Stephen at once. Here was danger, an enemy to be encountered; all the fighting blood of generations leaped to the occasion. The short spell of sleep had helped to restore her. There remained still quite enough of mental and nervous excitement to make her think quickly; the words were hardly out of the maid's mouth before her resolution was taken. It would never do to let Leonard Everard see she was diffident about meeting him; she would go down at once. But she would take the precaution of having her aunt present; at any rate, till she should have seen how the land lay. Her being just waked from sleep would be an excuse for asking her aunt to see the visitor till she came down. So she said to the maid:

'I have been asleep. I must have got tired walking in the wood in the heat. Ask Auntie to kindly see Mr. Everard in the blue drawing-room till I come down. I must tidy my hair; but I will be down in a few minutes.'

'Shall I send Marjorie to you, miss?'

'No! Don't mind; I can do what I want myself. Hurry down to Miss Rowly!'

How she regarded Leonard Everard now was shown in her instinctive classing him amongst her enemies.

When she entered the room she seemed all aglow. She wanted not only to overcome but to punish; and all the woman in her had risen to the effort. Never in her life had Stephen Norman looked more radiantly beautiful, more adorable, more desirable. Even Leonard Everard felt his pulses quicken as he saw that glowing mass of beauty standing out against the cold background of old French tapestry. All the physical side of him leaped in answer to the call of her beauty; and even his cold heart and his self-engrossed brain followed with slower gait. He had been sitting opposite Miss Rowly in one of the windows, twirling his hat in nervous suspense. He jumped up, and, as she came towards him, went forward rapidly to greet her. No one could mistake the admiration in his eyes. Ever since he had made up his mind to marry her she had assumed a new aspect in his thoughts. But now her presence swept away all false imaginings; from the moment that her loveliness dawned upon him something like love began to grow within his breast. Stephen saw the look and it strengthened her. He had so grievously wounded her pride the previous day that her victory on this was a compensation which set her more at her old poise.

Her greeting was all sweetness: she was charmed to see him. How was his father, and what was the news? Miss Rowly looked on with smiling visage. She too had seen the look of admiration in his eyes, and it pleased her. Old ladies, especially when they are maiden ladies, always like to see admiration in the eyes of young men when they are turned in the direction of any girl dear to them.

They talked for some time, keeping all the while, by Stephen's clever generalship, to the small-talk of the neighbourhood and the minor events of social importance. As the time wore on she could see that Leonard was growing impatient, and evidently wanted to see her alone. She ignored, however, all his little private signalling, and presently ordered tea to be brought. This took some little time; when it had been brought and served and drunk, Leonard was in a smothered fume of impatience. She was glad to see that as yet her aunt had noticed nothing, and she still hoped that she would be able to so prolong matters, that she would escape without a private interview. She did not know the cause of Leonard's impatience: that he must see her before the day passed. She too was an egoist, in her own way; in the flush of belief of his subjugation she did not think of attributing to him any other motive than his desire for herself. As she had made up her mind on the final issue she did not want to be troubled by a new ‘scene.’

But, after all, Leonard was a man; and man’s ways are more direct than woman’s. Seeing that he could not achieve his object in any other way, he said out suddenly, thinking, and rightly, that she would not wish to force an issue in the presence of her aunt:

‘By the way, Miss Norman,’ he had always called her ‘Miss Norman’ in her aunt’s presence: ‘I want to have two minutes with you before I go. On a matter of business,’ he added, noticing Miss Rowly’s surprised look. The old lady was old-fashioned even for her age; in her time no young man would have asked to see a young lady alone on business. Except on one kind of business; and with regard to that kind of business gentlemen had to obtain first the confidence and permission of guardians. Leonard saw the difficulty and said quickly:

‘It is on the matter you wrote to me about!’

Stephen was prepared for a nasty shock, but hardly for so nasty a one as this. There was an indelicacy about it which went far beyond the bounds of thoughtless conventionality. That such an appeal should be made to her, and in such a way, savoured of danger. Her woman’s intuition gave her the guard, and at once she spoke, smilingly and gently as one recalling a matter in which the concern is not her own:

‘Of course! It was selfish of me not to have thought of it, and to have kept you so long waiting. The fact is, Auntie, that Leonard — I like to call him Leonard, since we were children together, and he is so young; though perhaps it would be more decorous nowadays to say “Mr. Everard” — has consulted me about his debts. You know, Auntie dear, that young men will be young men in such matters; or perhaps you do not, since the only person who ever worried you has been myself. But I stayed at Oxford and I know something of young men’s ways; and as I am necessarily more or less of a man of business, he values my help. Don’t you, Leonard?’ The challenge was so direct, and the position he was in so daringly put, that he had to acquiesce. Miss Rowly, who had looked on with a frown of displeasure, said coldly:

‘I know you are your own mistress, my dear. But surely it would be better if Mr. Everard would consult with his solicitor or his father’s agent, or some of his gentlemen friends, rather than with a young lady whose relations with him, after all, are only those of a neighbour on visiting terms. For my own part, I should have thought that Mr. Everard’s best course would have been to consult his own father! But the things that gentlemen, as well as ladies do, have been sadly changed since my time!’ Then, rising in formal dignity, she bowed gravely to the visitor before leaving the room.

But the position of being left alone in the room with Leonard did not at all suit Stephen’s plans. Rising quickly she said to her aunt:

‘Don’t stir, Auntie. I dare say you are right in what you say; but I promised Mr. Everard to go into the matter. And as I have brought the awkwardness on myself, I suppose I must bear it. If Mr. Everard wants to see me alone, and I suppose he is diffident in speaking on such a matter before you — he didn’t play with you, you know! — we can go out on the lawn. We shan’t be long!’ Before Leonard could recover his wits she had headed him out on the lawn.

Her strategy was again thoroughly good. The spot she chose, though beyond earshot, was quite in the open and commanded by all the windows in that side of the house. A person speaking there might say what he liked, but his actions must be discreet.

On the lawn Stephen tripped ahead; Leonard followed inwardly raging. By her clever use of the opening she had put him in a difficulty from which there was no immediate means of extrication. He could not quarrel overtly with Stephen; if he did so, how could he enter on the pressing matter of his debts? He dared not openly proclaim his object in wishing to marry her, for had he done so her aunt might have interfered, with what success he could not be sure. In any case it would cause delay, and delay was what he could not afford. He felt that in mentioning his debts at just such a movement he had given Stephen the chance she had so aptly taken. He had to be on his good behaviour, however; and with an apprehension that was new to him he followed her.

An old Roman marble seat was placed at an angle from the house so that the one of the two occupants within its curve must almost face the house, whilst the other gave to it at least a quarter-face. Stephen seated herself on the near side, leaving to Leonard the exposed position. As soon as he was seated, she began:

‘Now, Leonard, tell me all about the debts?’ She spoke in tones of gay friendliness, but behind the mask of her cheerfulness was the real face of fear. Down deep in her mind was a conviction that her letter was a pivotal point of future sorrow. It was in the meantime quite apparent to her that Leonard kept it as his last resource; so her instinct was to keep it to the front and thus minimise its power.

Leonard, though inwardly weakened by qualms of growing doubt, had the animal instinct that, as he was in opposition, his safety was in attacking where his opponent most feared. He felt that there was some subtle change in his companion; this was never the same Stephen Norman whom only yesterday he had met upon the hill! He plunged at once into his purpose.

‘But it wasn’t about my debts you asked me to meet you, Stephen.’

‘You surprise me, Leonard! I thought I simply asked you to come to meet me. I know the first subject I mentioned when we began to talk, after your grumbling about coming in the heat, was your money matters.’ Leonard winced, but went on:

‘It was very good of you, Stephen; but really that is not what I came to speak of to-day. At first, at all events!’ he added with a sublime naïvetté, as the subject of his debts and his imperative want of money rose before him. Stephen’s eyes flashed; she saw more clearly than ever through his purpose. Such as admission at the very outset of the proffer of marriage, which she felt was coming, was little short of monstrous. Her companion did not see the look of mastery on her face; he was looking down at the moment. A true lover would have been looking up.

‘I wanted to tell you, Stephen, that I have been thinking over what you said to me in your letter, and what you said in words; and I want to accept!’ As he was speaking he was looking her straight in the face.

Stephen answered slowly with a puzzled smile which wrinkled up her forehead:

‘Accept what I said in my letter! why, Leonard, what do you mean? That letter must have had a lot more in it than I thought. I seem to remember that it was simply a line asking you to meet me. Just let me look at it; I should like to be sure of what actually is!’ As she spoke she held out her hand. Leonard was nonplussed; he did not know what to say. Stephen made up her mind to have the letter back. Leonard was chafing under the position forced upon him, and tried to divert his companion from her purpose. He knew well why she had chosen that exposed position for their interview. Now, as her outstretched hand embarrassed him, he made reprisal; he tried to take it in his in a tender manner.

She instantly drew back her hand and put it behind her in a decided manner. She was determined that whatever might happen she would not let any watcher at the windows, by chance or otherwise, see any sign of tenderness on her part. Leonard, thinking that his purpose had been effected, went on, breathing more freely:

'Your letter wasn't much. Except of course that it gave me the opportunity of listening to what you said; to all your sweet words. To your more than sweet proposal!'

'Yes! It must have been sweet to have any one, who was in a position to do so, offer to help you when you knew that you were overwhelmed with debts!' The words were brutal. Stephen felt so; but she had no alternative. Leonard had some of the hard side of human nature; but he had also some of the weak side. He went on blindly:

'I have been thinking ever since of what you said, and I want to tell you that I would like to do as you wish!' As he spoke, his words seemed even to him to be out of place. He felt it would be necessary to throw more fervour into the proceedings. The sudden outburst which followed actually amused Stephen, even in her state of fear:

'Oh, Stephen, don't you know that I love you! You are so beautiful! I love you! I love you! Won't you be my wife?'

This was getting too much to close quarters. Stephen said in a calm, business-like way:

'My dear Leonard, one thing at a time! I came out here, you know, to speak of your debts; and until that is done, I really won't go into any other matter. Of course if you'd rather not . . . ' Leonard really could not afford this; matters were too pressing with him. So he tried to affect a cheery manner; but in his heart was a black resolve that she should yet pay for this.

'All right! Stephen. Whatever you wish I will do; you are the queen of my heart, you know!'

'How much is the total amount?' said Stephen.

This was a change to the prosaic which made sentiment impossible. He gave over, for the time.

'Go on!' said Stephen, following up her advantage. 'Don't you even know how much you owe?'

'The fact is, I don't. Not exactly. I shall make up the amount as well as I can and let you know. But that's not what I came about to-day.' Stephen was going to make an angry gesture of dissent. She was not going to have that matter opened up. She waited, however, for Leonard was going on after his momentary pause. She breathed more freely after his first sentence. He was unable evidently to carry on a double train of thought.

'It was about that infernal money-lenders' letter that the Governor got!' Stephen got still less anxious. This open acknowledgment of his true purpose seemed to clear the air.

'What is the amount?' Leonard looked quickly at her; the relief of her mind made her tone seem joyful.

'A monkey! Five hundred pounds, you know. But then there's three hundred for interest that has to be paid also. It's an awful lot of money, isn't it?' The last phrase was added on seeing Stephen's surprised look.

‘Yes!’ she answered quietly. ‘A great deal of money — to waste!’ They were both silent for a while. Then she said:

‘What does your father say to it?’

‘He was in an awful wax. One of these beastly duns had written to him about another account and he was in a regular fury. When I told him I would pay it within a week, he said very little, which was suspicious; and then, just when I was going out, he sprung this on me. Mean of him! wasn’t it? I need expect no help from him.’ As he was speaking he took a mass of letters from his pocket and began to look among them for the money-lenders’ letter.

‘Why, what a correspondence you have there. Do you keep all your letters in your pockets?’ said Stephen quietly.

‘All I don’t tear up or burn. It wouldn’t do to let the Governor into my secrets. He might know too much!’

‘And are all those letters from duns?’

‘Mostly, but I only keep those letters I have to attend to and those I care for.’

‘Show me the bundle!’ she said. Then seeing him hesitate, added:

‘You know if I am to help you to get clear you must take me into your confidence. I dare say I shall have to see a lot more letters than these before you are quite clear!’ Her tone was too quiet. Knowing already the silent antagonism between them he began to suspect her; knowing also that her own letter was not amongst them, he used his wits and handed them over without a word. She, too, suspected him. After his tacit refusal to give her the letter, she almost took it for granted that it was not amongst them. She gave no evidence of her feeling, however, but opened and read the letters in due sequence; all save two, which, being in a female hand, she gave back without a word. There was a calmness and an utter absence of concern, much less of jealousy, about this which disconcerted him. Throughout her reading Stephen's face showed surprise now and again; but when she came to the last, which was that of the usurers, it showed alarm. Being a woman, a legal threat had certain fears of its own.

'There must be no delay about this!' she said.

'What am I to do?' he answered, a weight off his mind that the fiscal matter had been practically entered on.

'I shall see that you get the money!' she said quietly. 'It will be really a gift, but I prefer it to be as a loan for many reasons.' Leonard made no comment. He found so many reasons in his own mind that he thought it wise to forbear from asking any of hers. Then she took the practical matter in hand:

'You must wire to these people at once to say that you will pay the amount on the day after to-morrow. If you will come here to-morrow at four o'clock the money will be ready for you. You can go up to town by the evening train and pay off the debt first thing in the morning. When you bring the receipt I shall speak to you about the other debts; but you must make out a full list of them. We can't have any half-measure. I will not go into the matter till I have all the details before me!' Then she stood up to go.

As they walked across the lawn, she said:

'By the way, don't forget to bring that letter with you. I want to see what I really did say in it!' Her tone was quiet enough, and the wording was a request; but Leonard knew as well as if it had been spoken outright as a threat that if he did not have the letter with him when he came things were likely to be unpleasant.

The farther he got from Normanstand on his way home the more discontented Leonard grew. Whilst he had been in Stephen's presence she had so dominated him, not only by her personality but by her use of her knowledge of his own circumstances, that he had not dared to make protest or opposition; but now he began to feel how much less he was to receive than he had expected. He had come prepared to allow Stephen to fall into his arms, fortune and all. But now, although he had practical assurance that the weight of his debts would be taken from him, he was going away with his tail between his legs. He had not even been accepted as a suitor, he who had himself been wooed only a day before. His proposal of marriage had not been accepted, had not even been considered by the woman who had so lately broken ironclad convention to propose marriage to him. He had been treated merely as a scapegrace debtor who had come to ask favours from an old friend. He had even been treated like a bad boy; had been told that he had wasted money; had been ordered, in no doubtful way, to bring the full schedule of his debts. And all the time he dared not say anything lest the thing shouldn't come off at all. Stephen had such an infernally masterly way with her! It didn't matter whether she was proposing to him, or he was proposing to her, he was made to feel small all the same. He would have to put up with it till he had got rid of the debts!

And then as to the letter. Why was she so persistent about seeing it? Did she want to get it into her hands and then keep it, as Harold An Wolf had done? Was it possible that she suspected he would use it to coerce her; she would call it 'blackmail,' he supposed. This being the very thing he had intended to do, and had done, he grew very indignant at the very thought of being accused of it. It was, he felt, a very awkward thing that he had lost possession of the letter. He might need it if Stephen got nasty. Then Harold might give it to her, as he had threatened to do. He thought he would call round that evening by Harold's house, and see if he couldn't get back the letter.

It belonged to him; Harold had no right to keep it. He would see him before he and Stephen got putting their heads together. So, on his way home, he turned his steps at once to Harold's house.

He did not find him in. The maid who opened the door could give him no information; all she could say was that Mrs. Dingle the housekeeper had got a telegram from Master saying that he had been called suddenly away on business.

This was a new source of concern to Leonard. He suspected a motive of some sort; though what that motive could be he could not hazard the wildest guess. On his way home he called at the post-office and sent a telegram to Cavendish and Cecil, the name of the usurers' firm, in accordance with Stephen's direction. He signed it: 'Jasper Everard.'

CHAPTER XVII — A BUSINESS TRANSACTION

When Stephen had sent off her letter to the bank she went out for a stroll; she knew it would be no use trying to get rest before dinner. That ordeal, too, had to be gone through. She found herself unconsciously going in the direction of the grove; but when she became aware of it a great revulsion overcame her, and she shuddered.

Slowly she took her way across the hard stretch of finely-kept grass which lay on the side of the house away from the wood. The green sward lay like a sea, dotted with huge trees, singly, or in clumps as islands. In its far-stretching stateliness there was something soothing. She came back to the sound of the dressing-gong with a better strength to resist the trial before her. Well she knew her aunt would have something to say on the subject of her interference in Leonard Everard's affairs.

Her fears were justified, for when they had come into the drawing-room after dinner Miss Rowly began:

'Stephen dear, is it not unwise of you to interfere in Mr. Everard's affairs?'

'Why unwise, Auntie?'

'Well, my dear, the world is censorious. And when a young lady, of your position and your wealth, takes a part in a young man's affairs tongues are apt to wag. And also, dear, debts, young men's debts, are hardly the subjects for a girl's investigation. Remember, that we ladies live very different lives from men; from some men, I should say, for your dear father was the best of men, and I should think that in all his life there was nothing which he would have wished concealed. But, my dear, young men are less restrained in their ways than we are, than we have to be for our own safety and protection.' The poor lady was greatly perturbed at having to speak in such a way. Stephen saw her distress; coming over to her, she sat down and took her hand. Stephen had a very tender side to her nature, and she loved very truly the dear old lady who had taken her mother's place and had shown her all a mother's love. Now, in her loneliness and woe and fear, she clung to her in spirit. She would have liked to have clung to her physically; to have laid her head on her bosom, and have cried her heart out. The time for tears had not come. Hourly she felt more and more the weight that a shameful secret is to carry. She knew, however, that she could set her aunt's mind at rest on the present subject; so she said:

'I think you are right, Auntie dear. It would have been better if I had asked you first; but I saw that Leonard was in distress, and wormed the cause of it from him. When I heard that it was only debt I offered to help him. He is an old friend, you know, Auntie. We were children together; and as I have much more money than I can ever want or spend, I thought I might help him. I am afraid I have let myself in for a bigger thing than I intended; but as I have promised I must go on with it. I dare say, Auntie, that you are afraid that I may end by getting in love with him, and marrying him. Don't you, dear?' This was said with a hug and a kiss which gave the old lady delight. Her instinct told her what was coming. She nodded her head in acquiescence. Stephen went on gravely:

'Put any such fear out of your mind. I shall never marry him. I can never love him.' She was going to say 'could never love him,' when she remembered.

'Are you sure, my dear? The heart is not always under one's own control.'

‘Quite sure, Auntie. I know Leonard Everard; and though I have always liked him, I do not respect him. Why, the very fact of his coming to me for money would make me reconsider any view I had formed, had nothing else ever done so. You may take it, Auntie dear, that in the way you mean Leonard is nothing to me; can never be anything to me!’ Here a sudden inspiration took her. In its light a serious difficulty passed, and the doing of a thing which had a fear of its own became easy. With a conviction in her tone, which in itself aided her immediate purpose, she said:

‘I shall prove it to you. That is, if you will not mind doing something which will save me an embarrassment.’

‘You know I will do anything, my dearest, which an old woman can do for a young one!’ Stephen squeezed the mittened hand which she held as she went on:

‘As I said, I have promised to lend him some money. The first instalment is to be given him to-morrow; he is to call for it in the afternoon. Will you give it to him for me?’

‘Gladly, my dear,’ said the old lady, much relieved. Stephen continued:

‘One other thing, Auntie, I want you to do for me: not to think of the amount, or to say a word to me about it. It is a large sum, and I dare say it will frighten you a little. But I have made up my mind to it. I am learning a great deal out of this, Auntie dear; and I am quite willing to pay for my knowledge. After all, money is the easiest and cheapest way of paying for knowledge! Don’t you agree with me?’

Miss Rowly gulped down her disappointment. She felt that she ought not to say too much, now that Stephen had set aside her graver fears. She consoled herself with the thought that even a large amount of money would cause no inconvenience to so wealthy a woman as

Stephen. Beyond this, as she would have the handing over of the money to Leonard, she would know the amount. If advisable, she could remonstrate. She could if necessary consult, in confidence, with Harold. Her relief from her greater fear, and her gladness at this new proof of her niece's confidence, were manifested in the extra affection with which she bade her good-night.

Stephen did not dare to breathe freely till she was quite alone; and as she lay quiet in her bed in the dark she thought before sleep came.

Her first feeling was one of thankfulness that immediate danger was swerving from her. Things were so shaping themselves that she need not have any fear concerning Leonard. For his own sake he would have to keep silent. If he intended to blackmail her she would have the protection of her aunt's knowledge of the loan, and of her participation in it. The only weapon that remained to him was her letter; and that she would get from him before furnishing the money for the payment of his other debts.

These things out of the way, her thoughts turned to the matter of the greater dread; that of which all along she had feared to think for a moment: Harold!

Harold! and her treatment of him!

The first reception of the idea was positive anguish. From the moment he had left her till now there had been no time when a consideration of the matter was possible. Time pressed, or circumstances had interfered, or her own personal condition had forbidden. Now, when she was alone, the whole awful truth burst on her like an avalanche. Stephen felt the issue of her thinking before the thinking itself was accomplished; and it was with a smothered groan that she, in the darkness, held up her arms with fingers linked in desperate concentration of appeal.

Oh, if she could only take back one hour of her life, well she knew what that hour would be! Even that shameful time with Leonard on the hill-top seemed innocuous beside the degrading remembrance of her conduct to the noble friend of her whole life.

Sadly she turned over in her bed, and with shut eyes put her burning face on the pillow, to hide, as it were, from herself her abject depth of shame.

Leonard lounged through the next morning with what patience he could. At four o'clock he was at the door of Normanstand in his dogcart. This time he had a groom with him and a suitcase packed for a night's use, as he was to go on to London after his interview with Stephen. He had lost sight altogether of the matter of Stephen's letter, or else he would have been more nervous.

He was taken into the blue drawing-room, where shortly Miss Rowly joined him. He had not expected this. His mental uneasiness manifested itself in his manner, and his fidgeting was not unobserved by the astute old lady. He was disconcerted; 'overwhelmed' would better have described his feelings when she said:

'Miss Norman is sorry she can't see you to-day as she is making a visit; but she has given me a message for you, or rather a commission to discharge. Perhaps you had better sit down at the table; there are writing materials there, and I shall want a receipt of some sort.'

'Stephen did not say anything about a receipt!' The other smiled sweetly as she said in a calm way:

'But unfortunately Miss Norman is not here; and so I have to do the best I can. I really must have some proof that I have fulfilled my trust. You see, Mr. Everard, though it is what lawyers call a "friendly" transaction, it is more or less a business act; and I must protect myself.'

Leonard saw that he must comply, for time pressed. He sat down at the table. Taking up a pen and drawing a sheet of paper towards him, he said with what command of his voice he could:

'What am I to write?' The old lady took from her basket a folded sheet of notepaper, and, putting on her reading-glasses, said as she smoothed it out:

'I think it would be well to say something like this— "I, Leonard Everard, of Brindehow, in the Parish of Normanstand, in the County of Norcester, hereby acknowledge the receipt from Miss Laetitia Rowly of nine hundred pounds sterling lent to me in accordance with my request, the same being to clear me of a pressing debt due by me.'

When he had finished writing the receipt Miss Rowly looked it over, and handing it back to him, said:

'Now sign; and date!' He did so with suppressed anger.

She folded the document carefully and put it in her pocket. Then taking from the little pouch which she wore at her belt a roll of notes, she counted out on the table nine notes of one hundred pounds each. As she put down the last she said:

'Miss Norman asked me to say that a hundred pounds is added to the sum you specified to her, as doubtless the usurers would, since you are actually behind the time promised for repayment, require something extra as a solatium or to avoid legal proceedings already undertaken. In fact that they would "put more salt on your tail." The expression, I regret to say, is not mine.'

Leonard folded up the notes, put them into his pocket-book, and walked away. He did not feel like adding verbal thanks to the document already signed. As he got near the door the thought struck him; turning back he said:

‘May I ask if Stephen said anything about getting the document?’

‘I beg your pardon,’ she said icily, ‘did you speak of any one?’

‘Miss Norman, I meant!’ Miss Rowly’s answer to this came so smartly that it left an added sting. Her arrow was fledged with two feathers so that it must shoot true: her distrust of him and his own impotence.

‘Oh no! Miss Norman knows nothing of this. She simply asked me to give you the money. This is my own doing entirely. You see, I must exercise my judgment on my dear niece’s behalf. Of course it may not be necessary to show her the receipt; but if it should ever be advisable it is always there.’

He looked at her with anger, not unmixed with admiration, as, bowing rather lower than necessary, he went out of the door, saying sotto voce, between his teeth:

‘When my turn comes out you go! Neck and crop! Quick! Normanstand isn’t big enough to hold us both!’

CHAPTER XVIII — MORE BUSINESS

When Leonard tendered the eight hundred pounds in payment of his debt of five hundred, Mr. Cavendish at first refused to take it. But when Leonard calmly but firmly refused to pay a single penny beyond the obligations already incurred, including interest on the full sum for one day, he acquiesced. He knew the type of man fully; and knew also that in all probability it would not be long before he would come to the Firm again on a borrowing errand. When such time should come, he would put an extra clause into his Memorandum of Agreement which would allow the Firm full power to make whatever extra charge they might choose in case of the slightest default in making payment.

Leonard's visits to town had not of late been many, and such as he had had were not accompanied with a plethora of cash. He now felt that he had earned a holiday; and it was not till the third morning that he returned to Brindehow. His father made no comment on his absence; his only allusion to the subject was:

'Back all right! Any news in town?' There was, however, an unwonted suavity in his manner which made Leonard a little anxious. He busied himself for the balance of the morning in getting together all his unpaid accounts and making a schedule of them. The total at first amazed almost as much as it frightened him. He feared what Stephen would say. She had already commented unfavourably on the one amount she had seen. When she was face to face with this she might refuse to pay altogether. It would therefore be wise to propitiate her. What could he do in this direction? His thoughts naturally turned to the missing letter. If he could get possession of it, it would either serve as a sop or a threat. In the one case she would be so glad to have it back that she would not stick at a few pounds; in the other it would 'bring her to her senses' as he put in his own mind his intention of blackmail.

He was getting so tightened up in situation that as yet he could only do as he was told, and keep his temper as well as he could.

Altogether it was in a chastened mood that he made his appearance at Normanstand later in the afternoon. He was evidently expected, for he was shown into the study without a word. Here Miss Rowly and Stephen joined him. Both were very kind in manner. After the usual greetings and commonplaces Stephen said in a brisk, businesslike way:

'Have you the papers with you?' He took the bundle of accounts from his pocket and handed them to her. After his previous experience he would have suggested, had he dared, that he should see Stephen alone; but he feared the old lady. He therefore merely said:

'I am afraid you will find the amount very large. But I have put down everything!'

So he had; and more than everything. At the last an idea struck him that as he was getting so much he might as well have a little more. He therefore added several good-sized amounts which he called 'debts of honour.' This would, he thought, appeal to the feminine mind. Stephen did not look at the papers at once. She stood up, holding them, and said to Miss Rowly:

'Now, if you will talk to Mr. Everard I will go over these documents quietly by myself. When I have been through them and understand them all I shall come back; and we will see what can be done.' She moved gracefully out of the room, closing the door behind her. As is usual with women, she had more than one motive for her action in going away. In the first place, she wished to be alone whilst she went over the schedule of the debts. She feared she might get angry; and in the present state of her mind towards Leonard the expression of any feeling, even contempt, would not be wise. Her best protection from him would be a manifest kindly negation of any special interest. In the second place, she believed that he would have her letter with the other papers, and she did not wish her aunt to see it, lest she should recognise the writing. In her boudoir, with a beating heart, she untied the string and looked through the papers.

Her letter was not among them.

For a few seconds she stood stock still, thinking. Then, with a sigh, she sat down and began to read the list of debts, turning to the originals now and again for details. As she went on, her wonder and disgust grew; and even a sense of fear came into her thoughts. A man who could be so wildly reckless and so selfishly unscrupulous was to be feared. She knew his father was a comparatively poor man, who could not possibly meet such a burden. If he were thus to his father, what might he be to her if he got a chance.

The thought of what he might have been to her, had he taken the chance she had given him, never occurred to her. This possibility had already reached the historical stage in her mind.

She made a few pencil notes on the list; and went back to the study. Her mind was made up.

She was quite businesslike and calm, did not manifest the slightest disapproval, but seemed to simply accept everything as facts. She asked Leonard a few questions on subjects regarding which she had made notes, such as discounts. Then she held the paper out to him and without any preliminary remark said:

‘Will you please put the names to these?’

‘How do you mean?’ he asked, flushing.

‘The names of the persons to whom these sums marked “debt of honour” are due.’ His reply came quickly, and was a little aggressive; he thought this might be a good time to make a bluff:

‘I do not see that that is necessary. I can settle them when I have the money.’ Slowly and without either pause or flurry Stephen replied, looking him straight in the eyes as she handed him the papers:

‘Of course it is not necessary! Few things in the world really are! I only wanted to help you out of your troubles; but if you do not wish me to . . . !’ Leonard interrupted in alarm:

‘No! no! I only spoke of these items. You see, being “debts of honour” I ought not to give the names.’ Looking with a keen glance at her set face he saw she was obdurate; and, recognising his defeat, said as calmly as he could, for he felt raging:

‘All right! Give me the paper!’ Bending over the table he wrote. When she took the paper, a look half surprised, half indignant, passed over her face. Her watchful aunt saw it, and bending over looked also at the paper. Then she too smiled bitterly.

Leonard had printed in the names! The feminine keenness of both women had made his intention manifest. He did not wish for the possibility of his handwriting being recognised. His punishment came quickly. With a dazzling smile Stephen said to him:

‘But, Leonard, you have forgotten to put the addresses!’

‘Is that necessary?’

‘Of course it is! Why, you silly, how is the money to be paid if there are no addresses?’

Leonard felt like a rat in a trap; but he had no alternative. So irritated was he, and so anxious to hide his irritation that, forgetting his own caution, he wrote, not in printing characters but in his own handwriting, addresses evolved from his own imagination. Stephen's eyes twinkled as he handed her the paper: he had given himself away all round.

Leonard having done all that as yet had been required of him, felt that he might now ask a further favour, so he said:

'There is one of those bills which I have promised to pay by Monday.'

'Promised?' said Stephen with wide-opened eyes. She had no idea of sparing him, she remembered the printed names. 'Why, Leonard, I thought you said you were unable to pay any of those debts?'

Again he had put himself in a false position. He could not say that it was to his father he had made the promise; for he had already told Stephen that he had been afraid to tell him of his debts. In his desperation, for Miss Rowly's remorseless glasses were full on him, he said:

'I thought I was justified in making the promise after what you said about the pleasure it would be to help me. You remember, that day on the hilltop?'

If he had wished to disconcert her he was mistaken; she had already thought over and over again of every form of embarrassment her unhappy action might bring on her at his hands. She now said sweetly and calmly, so sweetly and so calmly that he, with knowledge of her secret, was alarmed:

'But that was not a promise to pay. If you will remember it was only an offer, which is a very different thing. You did not accept it then!' She was herself somewhat desperate, or she would not have sailed so close to the wind.

‘Ah, but I accepted later!’ he said quickly, feeling in his satisfaction in an epigrammatic answer a certain measure of victory. He felt his mistake when she went on calmly:

‘Offers like that are not repeated. They are but phantoms, after all. They come at their own choice, when they do come; and they stay but the measure of a breath or two. You cannot summon them!’ Leonard fell into the current of the metaphor and answered:

‘I don’t know that even that is impossible. There are spells which call, and recall, even phantoms!’

‘Indeed!’ Stephen was anxious to find his purpose.

Leonard felt that he was getting on, that he was again acquiring the upper hand; so he pushed on the metaphor, more and more satisfied with himself:

‘And it is wonderful how simple some spells, and these the most powerful, can be. A remembered phrase, the recollection of a pleasant meeting, the smell of a forgotten flower, or the sight of a forgotten letter; any or all of these can, through memory, bring back the past. And it is often in the past that the secret of the future lies!’

Miss Rowly felt that something was going on before her which she could not understand. Anything of this man’s saying which she could not fathom must be at least dangerous; so she determined to spoil his purpose, whatever it might be.

‘Dear me! That is charmingly poetic! Past and future; memory and the smell of flowers; meetings and letters! It is quite philosophy. Do explain it all, Mr. Everard!’ Leonard was not prepared to go on under the circumstances. His own mention of ‘letter,’ although he had deliberately used it with the intention of frightening Stephen, had frightened himself. It reminded him that he had not brought, had not got, the letter; and that as yet he was not certain of getting the money. Stephen also had noted the word, and determined not to pass the matter by. She said gaily:

'If a letter is a spell, I think you have a spell of mine, which is a spell of my own weaving. You were to show me the letter in which I asked you to come to see me. It was in that, I think you said, that I mentioned your debts; but I don't remember doing so. Show it to me!'

'I have not got it with me!' This was said with mulish sullenness.

'Why not?'

'I forgot.'

'That is a pity! It is always a pity to forget things in a business transaction; as this is. I think, Auntie, we must wait till we have all the documents, before we can complete this transaction!'

Leonard was seriously alarmed. If the matter of the loan were not gone on with at once the jeweller's bill could not be paid by Monday, and the result would be another scene with his father. He turned to Stephen and said as charmingly as he could, and he was all in earnest now:

'I'm awfully sorry! But these debts have been so worrying me that they put lots of things out of my head. That bill to be paid on Monday, when I haven't a feather to fly with, is enough to drive a fellow off his chump. The moment I lay my hands on the letter I shall keep it with me so that I can't forget it again. Won't you forgive me for this time?'

'Forgive!' she answered, with a laugh. 'Why it's not worth forgiveness! It is not worth a second thought! All right! Leonard, make your mind easy; the bill will be paid on Monday!' Miss Rowly said quietly:

'I have to be in London on Monday afternoon; I can pay it for you.’ This was a shock to Leonard; he said impulsively:

‘Oh, I say! Can’t I . . . ‘ His words faded away as the old lady again raised her lorgnon and gazed at him calmly. She went on:

‘You know, my dear, it won’t be even out of my way, as I have to call at Mr. Malpas’s office, and I can go there from the hotel in Regent Street.’ This was all news to Stephen. She did not know that her aunt had intended going to London; and indeed she did not know of any business with Mr. Malpas, whose firm had been London solicitor to the Rowlys for several generations. She had no doubt, however, as to the old lady’s intention. It was plain to her that she wanted to help. So she thanked her sweetly. Leonard could say nothing. He seemed to be left completely out of it. When Stephen rose, as a hint to him that it was time for him to go, he said humbly, as he left:

‘Would it be possible that I should have the receipt before Monday evening? I want to show it to my father.’

‘Certainly!’ said the old lady, answering him. ‘I shall be back by the two o’clock train; and if you happen to be at the railway station at Norcester when I arrive I can give it to you!’

He went away relieved, but vindictive; determined in his own mind that when he had received the money for the rest of the debts he would see Stephen, when the old lady was not present, and have it out with her.

CHAPTER XIX — A LETTER

On Monday evening after dinner Mr. Everard and his son sat for a while in silence. They had not met since morning; and in the presence of the servants conversation had been scrupulously polite. Now, though they were both waiting to talk, neither liked to begin. The older man was outwardly placid, when Leonard, a little flushed and a little nervous of voice, began:

‘Have you had any more bills?’ He had expected none, and thus hoped to begin by scoring against his father. It was something of a set-down when the latter, taking some papers from his breast-pocket, handed them to him, saying:

‘Only these!’ Leonard took them in silence and looked at them. All were requests for payment of debts due by his son.

In each case the full bill was enclosed. He was silent a while; but his father spoke:

‘It would almost seem as if all these people had made up their minds that you were of no further use to them.’ Then without pausing he said, but in a sharper voice:

‘Have you paid the jewellers? This is Monday!’ Without speaking Leonard took leisurely from his pocket folded paper. This he opened, and, after deliberately smoothing out the folds, handed it to his father. Doubtless something in his manner had already convinced the latter that the debt was paid. He took the paper in as leisurely a way as it had been given, adjusted his spectacles, and read it. Seeing that his son had scored this time, he covered his chagrin with an appearance of paternal satisfaction.

‘Good!’ For many reasons he was glad the debt was paid He was himself too poor a man to allow the constant drain his son’s debts, and too careful of his position to be willing have such exposure as would come with a County Court action against his son. All the same, his exasperation continued. Neither was his quiver yet empty. He shot his next arrow:

‘I am glad you paid off those usurers!’ Leonard did not like the definite way he spoke. Still in silence, he took from his pocket a second paper, which he handed over unfolded. Mr. Everard read it, and returned it politely, with again one word:

‘Good!’ For a few minutes there was silence. The father spoke again:

‘Those other debts, have you paid them?’ With a calm deliberation so full of tacit rudeness that it made his father flush Leonard answered:

‘Not yet, sir! But I shall think of them presently. I don’t care to be bustled by them; and I don’t mean to!’ It was apparent that though he spoke verbally of his creditors, his meaning was with regard to others also.

‘When will they be paid?’ As his son hesitated, he went on:

‘I am alluding to those who have written to me. I take it that as my estate is not entailed, and as you have no income except from me, the credit which has been extended to you has been rather on my account than your own. Therefore, as the matter touches my own name, I am entitled to know something of what is going on.’ His manner as well as his words was so threatening that Leonard was a little afraid. He might imperil his inheritance. He answered quickly:

‘Of course, sir, you shall know everything. After all, you know, my affairs are your affairs!’

‘I know nothing of the sort. I may of course be annoyed by your affairs, even dishonoured, in a way, by them. But I accept no responsibility whatever. As you have made your bed, so must you lie on it!'

'It's all right, sir, I assure you. All my debts, both those you know of and some you don't, I shall settle very shortly.'

'How soon?' The question was sternly put.

'In a few days. I dare say a week at furthest will see everything straightened out.'

The elder man stood, saying gravely as he went to the door:

'You will do well to tell me when the last of them is paid. There is something which I shall then want to tell you!' Without waiting for reply he went to his study.

Leonard went to his room and made a systematic, though unavailing, search for Stephen's letter; thinking that by some chance he might have recovered it from Harold and had overlooked it.

The next few days he passed in considerable suspense. He did not dare go near Normanstand until he was summoned, as he knew he would be when he was required.

* * * * *

When Miss Rowly returned from her visit to London she told Stephen that she had paid the bill at the jeweller's, and had taken the precaution of getting a receipt, together with a duplicate for Mr. Everard. The original was by her own request made out as received from Miss Laetitia Rowly in settlement of the account of Leonard Everard, Esq.; the duplicate merely was 'recd. in settlement of the account of — ,' etc. Stephen's brows bent hit thought as she said:

'Why did you have it done that way, Auntie dear?' The other answered quietly:

'I had a reason, my dear; good reason! Perhaps I shall tell you all about it some day; in the meantime I want you not to ask me anything about it. I have a reason for that too. Stephen, won't you trust me in this, blindfold?' There was something so sweet and loving in the way she made the request that Stephen was filled with emotion. She put her arms round her aunt's neck and hugged her tight. Then laying her head on her bosom she said with a sigh:

'Oh, my dear, you can't know how I trust you; or how much your trust is to me. You never can know!'

The next day the two women held a long consultation over the schedule of Leonard's debts. Neither said a word of disfavour, or even commented on the magnitude. The only remark touching on the subject was made by Miss Rowly:

'We must ask for proper discounts. Oh, the villainy of those tradesmen! I do believe they charge double in the hope of getting half. As to jewellers . . . !' Then she announced her intention of going up to town again on Thursday, at which visit she would arrange for the payment of the various debts. Stephen tried to remonstrate, but she was obdurate. She held Stephen's hand in hers and stroked it lovingly as she kept on repeating:

'Leave it all to me, dear! Leave it all to me! Everything shall be paid as you wish; but leave it to me!'

Stephen acquiesced. This gentle yielding was new in her; it touched the elder lady to the quick, even whilst it pained her. Well she knew that some trouble must have gone to the smoothing of that imperious nature.

Stephen's inner life in these last few days was so bitterly sad that she kept it apart from all the routine of social existence. Into it never came now, except as the exciting cause of all the evil, a thought of Leonard. The saddening memory was of Harold. And of him the sadness was increased and multiplied by a haunting fear. Since he had walked out of the grove she had not seen him nor heard from him. This was in itself strange; for in all her life, when she was at home and he too, never a day passed without her seeing him. She had heard her aunt say that word had come of his having made a sudden journey to London, from which he had not yet returned. She was afraid to make inquiries. Partly lest she might hear bad news — this was her secret fear; partly lest she might bring some attention to herself in connection with his going. Of some things in connection with her conduct to him she was afraid to think at all. Thought, she felt, would come in time, and with it new pains and new shames, of which as yet she dared not think.

One morning came an envelope directed in Harold's hand. The sight made her almost faint. She rejoiced that she had been first down, and had opened the postbag with her own key. She took the letter to her room and shut herself in before opening it. Within were a few lines of writing and her own letter to Leonard in its envelope. Her head beat so hard that she could scarcely see; but gradually the writing seemed to grow out of the mist:

'The enclosed should be in your hands. It is possible that it may comfort you to know that it is safe. Whatever may come, God love and guard you.'

For a moment joy, hot and strong, blazed through her. The last words were ringing through her brain. Then came the cold shock, and the gloom of fear. Harold would never have written thus unless he was going away! It was a farewell!

For a long time she stood, motionless, holding the letter in her hand. Then she said, half aloud:

'Comfort! Comfort! There is no more comfort in the world for me! Never, never again! Oh, Harold! Harold!'

She sank on her knees beside her bed, and buried her face in her cold hands, sobbing in all that saddest and bitterest phase of sorrow which can be to a woman's heart: the sorrow that is dry-eyed and without hope.

Presently the habit of caution which had governed her last days woke her to action. She bathed her eyes, smoothed her hair, locked the letter and its enclosure in the little jewel-safe let into the wall, and came down to breakfast.

The sense of loss was so strong on her that she forgot herself. Habit carried her on without will or voluntary effort, and, so faithfully worked to her good that even the loving eyes of her aunt — and the eyes of love are keen — had no suspicion that any new event had come into her life.

Not till she was alone in her room that night did Stephen dare to let her thoughts run freely. In the darkness her mind began to work truly, so truly that she began at the first step of logical process: to study facts. And to study them she must question till she found motive.

Why had Harold sent her the letter? His own words said that it should be in her hands. Then, again, he said it might comfort her to know the letter was safe. How could it comfort her? How did he get possession of the letter?

There she began to understand; her quick intuition and her old knowledge of Harold's character and her new knowledge of Leonard's, helped her to reconstruct causes. In his interview with her he had admitted that Leonard had told him much, all. He would no doubt have refused to believe him, and Leonard would have shown him, as proof, her letter asking him to meet her. He would have seen then, as she did now, how much the possession of that letter might mean to any one.

Good God! to 'any one.' Could it have been so to Harold himself . . . that he thought to use it as an engine, to force her to meet his wishes — as Leonard had already tried to do! The mistrust, founded on her fear, was not dead yet . . . No! no! no! Her whole being resented such a monstrous proposition! Besides, there was proof. Thank God! there was proof. A blackmailer would have stayed close to her, and would have kept the letter; Harold did neither. Her recognition of the truth was shown in her act, when, stretching out her arms in the darkness, she whispered pleadingly:

'Forgive me, Harold!'

And Harold, far away where the setting sun was lying red on the rim of the western sea, could not hear her. But perhaps God did.

As, then, Harold's motive was not of the basest, it must have been of the noblest. What would be a man's noblest motive under such circumstances? Surely self-sacrifice!

And yet there could be no doubt as to Harold's earnestness when he had told her that he loved her . . .

Here Stephen covered her face in one moment of rapture. But the gloom that followed was darker than the night. She did not pursue the thought. That would come later when she should understand.

And yet, so little do we poor mortals know the verities of things, so blind are we to things thrust before our eyes, that she understood more in that moment of ecstasy than in all the reasoning that preceded and followed it. But the reasoning went on:

If he really loved, and told her so, wherein was the self-sacrifice? She had reproached him with coming to her with his suit hotfoot upon his knowledge of her shameful proffer of herself to another man; of her refusal by him. Could he have been so blind as not to have seen, as she did, the shameful aspect of his impulsive act? Surely, if he had thought, he must have seen! . . . And he must have thought; there had been time for it. It was at dinner that he had seen Leonard; it was after breakfast when he had seen her . . . And if he had seen then . . .

In an instant it all burst upon her; the whole splendid truth. He had held back the expression of his long love for her, waiting for the time when her maturity might enable her to understand truly and judge wisely; waiting till her grief for the loss of her father had become a story of the past; waiting for God knows what a man's mind sees of obstacles when he loves. But he had spoken it out when it was to her benefit. What, then, had been his idea of her benefit? Was it that he wished to meet the desire that she had manifested to have some man to — to love? . . . The way she covered her face with her hands whilst she groaned aloud made her answer to her own query a perfect negative.

Was it, then, to save her from the evil of marrying Leonard in case he should repent of his harshness, and later on yield himself to her wooing? The fierce movement of her whole body, which almost threw the clothes from her bed, as the shameful recollection rolled over her, marked the measure of her self-disdain.

One other alternative there was; but it seemed so remote, so far-fetched, so noble, so unlike what a woman would do, that she could only regard it in a shamefaced way. She put the matter to herself questioningly, and with a meekness which had its roots deeper than she knew. And here out of the depths of her humility came a noble thought. A noble thought, which was a noble truth. Through the darkness of the night, through the inky gloom of her own soul came with that thought a ray of truth which, whilst it showed her her own shrivelled unworthiness, made the man whom she had dishonoured with insults worse than death stand out in noble relief. In that instant she guessed at, and realised, Harold's unselfish nobility of purpose, the supreme effort of his constant love. Knowing the humiliation she must have suffered at Leonard's hands, he had so placed himself that even her rejection of him might be some solace to her wounded spirit, her pride.

Here at last was truth! She knew it in the very marrow of her bones.

This time she did not move. She thought and thought of that noble gentleman who had used for her sake even that pent-up passion which, for her sake also, he had suppressed so long.

In that light, which restored in her eyes and justified so fully the man whom she had always trusted, her own shame and wrongdoing, and the perils which surrounded her, were for the time forgotten.

And its glory seemed to rest upon her whilst she slept.

CHAPTER XX — CONFIDENCES

Miss Rowly had received a bulky letter by the morning's post. She had not opened it, but had allowed it to rest beside her plate all breakfast-time. Then she had taken it away with her to her own sitting-room. Stephen did not appear to take any notice of it. She knew quite well that it was from some one in London whom her aunt had asked to pay Leonard's bills. She also knew that the old lady had some purpose in her reticence, so she waited. She was learning to be patient in these days. Miss Rowly did say anything about it that day, or the next, or the next. The third-morning, she received another letter which she had read in an enlightening manner. She began its perusal with set brow frowning, then she nodded her head and smiled. She put the letter back in its envelope and placed it in the little bag always carried. But she said nothing. Stephen wondered, but waited.

That night, when Stephen's maid had left her, there came a gentle tap at her door, and an instant after the door opened. The tap had been a warning, not a request; it had in a measure prepared Stephen, who was not surprised to see her Aunt in dressing-gown, though it was many a long day since she had visited her niece's room at night. She closed the door behind her, saying:

'There is something I want to talk to you about, dearest, and I thought it would be better to do so when there could not be any possible interruption. And besides,' here there was a little break in her voice, 'I could hardly summon up my courage in the daylight.' She stopped, and the stopping told its own story. In an instant Stephen's arm's were round her, all the protective instinct in her awake, at the distress of the woman she loved. The old lady took comfort from the warmth of the embrace, and held her tight whilst she went on:

‘It is about these bills, my dear. Come and sit down and put a candle near me. I want you to read something.’

‘Go on, Auntie dear,’ she said gravely. The old lady, after a pause, spoke with a certain timidity:

‘They are all paid; at least all that can be. Perhaps I had better read you the letter I have had from my solicitors:

‘“Dear Madam, — In accordance with your instructions we have paid all the accounts mentioned in Schedule A (enclosed). We have placed for your convenience three columns: (1) the original amount of each account, (2) the amount of discount we were able to arrange, and (3) the amount paid. We regret that we have been unable to carry out your wishes with regard to the items enumerated in Schedule B (enclosed). We have, we assure you, done all in our power to find the gentlemen whose names and addresses are therein given. These were marked ‘Debt of honour’ in the list you handed to us. Not having been able to obtain any reply to our letters, we sent one of our clerks first to the addresses in London, and afterwards to Oxford. That clerk, who is well used to such inquiries, could not find trace of any of the gentlemen, or indeed of their existence. We have, therefore, come to the conclusion that, either there must be some error with regard to (a) names, (b) addresses, or (c) both; or that no such persons exist. As it would be very unlikely that such errors could occur in all the cases, we can only conclude that there have not been any such persons. If we may hazard an opinion: it is possible that, these debts being what young men call ‘debts of honour,’ the debtor, or possibly the creditors, may not have wished the names mentioned. In such case fictitious names and addresses may have been substituted for the real ones. If you should like any further inquiry instituted we would suggest that you ascertain the exact names and addresses from the debtor. Or should you prefer it we would see the gentleman on your behalf, on learning from you his name and address. We can keep, in the person of either one of the Firm or a Confidential Clerk as you might prefer, any appointment in such behalf you may care to make.

'"We have already sent to you the receipted account from each of the creditors as you directed, viz. 'Received from Miss Laetitia Rowly in full settlement to date of the account due by Mr. Leonard Everard the sum of,' etc. etc. And also, as you further directed, a duplicate receipt of the sum-total due in each case made out as 'Received in full settlement to date of account due by,' etc. etc. The duplicate receipt was pinned at the back of each account so as to be easily detachable.

'"With regard to finance we have carried out your orders, etc."' She hurried on the reading. "These sums, together with the amounts of nine hundred pounds sterling, and seven hundred pounds sterling lodged to the account of Miss Stephen Norman in the Norcester branch of the Bank as repayment of moneys advanced to you as by your written instructions, have exhausted the sum, etc."' She folded up the letter with the schedules, laying the bundle of accounts on the table. Stephen paused; she felt it necessary to collect herself before speaking.

'Auntie dear, will you let me see that letter? Oh, my dear, dear Auntie, don't think I mistrust you that I ask it. I do because I love you, and because I want to love you more if it is possible to do so.' Miss Rowly handed her the letter. She rose from the arm of the chair and stood beside the table as though to get better light from the candle than she could get from where she had sat.

She read slowly and carefully to the end; then folded up the letter and handed it to her aunt. She came back to her seat on the edge of the chair, and putting her arms round her companion's neck looked her straight in the eyes. The elder woman grew embarrassed under the scrutiny; she coloured up and smiled in a deprecatory way as she said:

'Don't look at me like that, darling; and don't shake your head so. It is all right! I told you I had my reasons, and you said you would trust me. I have only done what I thought best!'

'But, Auntie, you have paid away more than half your little fortune. I know all the figures. Father and uncle told me everything. Why did you do it? Why did you do it?' The old woman held out her arms as she said:

'Come here, dear one, and sit on my knee as you used to when you were a child, and I will whisper you.' Stephen sprang from her seat and almost threw herself into the loving arms. For a few seconds the two, clasped tight to each other's heart, rocked gently to and fro. The elder kissed the younger and was kissed impulsively in return. Then she stroked the beautiful bright hair with her wrinkled hand, and said admiringly:

'What lovely hair you have, my dear one!' Stephen held her closer and waited.

'Well, my dear, I did it because I love you!'

'I know that, Auntie; you have never done anything else my life!'

'That is true, dear one. But it is right that I should do this. Now you must listen to me, and not speak till I have done. Keep your thoughts on my words, so that you may follow my thoughts. You can do your own thinking about them afterwards. And your own talking too; I shall listen as long as you like!'

'Go on, I'll be good!'

'My dear, it is not right that you should appear to have paid the debts of a young man who is no relation to you and who will, I know well, never be any closer to you than he is now.' She hurried on, as though fearing an interruption, but Stephen felt that her clasp tightened. 'We never can tell what will happen as life goes on. And, as the world is full of scandal, one cannot be too careful not to give the scandalmongers anything to exercise their wicked spite upon. I don't trust that young man! he is a bad one all round, or I am very much mistaken. And, my dear, come close to me! I cannot but see that you and he have some secret which he is using to distress you!' She paused, and her clasp grew closer still as Stephen's head sank on her breast. 'I know you have done something or said something foolish of which he has a knowledge. And I know my dear one, that whatever it was, and no matter how foolish it may have been, it was not a wrong thing. God knows, we are all apt to do wrong things as well as foolish ones; the best of us. But such is not for you! Your race, your father and mother, your upbringing, yourself and the truth and purity which are yours would save you from anything which was in itself wrong. That I know, my dear, as well as I know myself! Ah! better, far better! for the gods did not think it well to dower me as they have dowered you. The God of all the gods has given you the ten talents to guard; and He knows, as I do, that you will be faithful to your trust.'

There was a solemn ring in her voce as the words were spoken which went through the young girl's heart. Love and confidence demanded in return that she should have at least the relief of certain acquiescence; there is a possible note of pain in the tensity of every string! Stephen lifted her head proudly and honestly, though her cheeks were scarlet, saying with a consciousness of integrity which spoke directly soul to soul:

'You are right, dear! I have done something very foolish; very, very foolish! But it was nothing which any one could call wrong. Do not ask me what it was. I need only tell you this: that it was an outrage on convention. It was so foolish, and based on such foolish misconception; it sprang from such over-weening, arrogant self-opinion that it deserves the bitter punishment which will come; which is coming; which is with me now! It was the cause of something whose blackness I can't yet realise; but of which I will tell you when I can speak of it. But it was not wrong in itself, or in the eyes of God or man!' The old woman said not a word. No word was needed, for had she not already expressed her belief? But Stephen felt her relief in the glad pressure of her finger-tips. In a voice less strained and tense Miss Rowly went on:

'What need have I for money, dear? Here I have all that any woman, especially at my age, can need. There is no room even for charity; you are so good to all your people that my help is hardly required. And, my dear one, I know — I know,' she emphasised the word as she stroked the beautiful hair, 'that when I am gone my own poor, the few that I have looked after all my life, will, not suffer when my darling thinks of me!' Stephen fairly climbed upon her as she said, looking in the brave old eyes:

'So help me God, my darling, they shall never want!'

Silence for a time; and then Miss Rowly's voice again:

'Though it would not do for the world to know that a young maiden lady had paid the debts of a vicious young man, it makes no matter if they be paid by an old woman, be the same maid, wife, or widow! And really, my dear, I do not see how any money I might have could be better spent than in keeping harm away from you.'

'There need not be any harm at all, Auntie.'

'Perhaps not, dear! I hope not with all my heart. But I fear that young man. Just fancy him threatening you, and in your own house; in my very presence! Oh! yes, my dear. He meant to threaten, anyhow! Though I could not exactly understand what he was driving at, I could see that he was driving at something. And after all that you were doing for him, and had done for him! I mean, of course, after all that I had done for him, and was doing for him. It is mean enough, surely, for a man to beg, and from a woman; but to threaten afterwards. Ach! But I think, my dear, it is checkmate to him this time. All along the line the only proof that is of there being any friendliness towards him from this house points to me. And moreover, my dear, I have a little plan in my head that will tend to show him up even better, in case he may ever try to annoy us. Look at me when next he is here. I mean to do a little play-acting which will astonish him, I can tell you, if it doesn't frighten him out of the house altogether. But we won't talk of that yet. You will understand when you see it!' Her eyes twinkled and her mouth shut with a loud snap as she spoke.

After a few minutes of repose, which was like a glimpse of heaven to Stephen's aching heart, she spoke again:

'There was something else that troubled you more than even this. You said you would tell me when you were able to speak of it . . . Why not speak now? Oh! my dear, our hearts are close together to-night; and in all your life, you will never have any one who will listen with greater sympathy than I will, or deal more tenderly with your fault, whatever it may have been. Tell me, dear! Dear!' she whispered after a pause, during which she realised the depth of the girl's emotion by her convulsive struggling to keep herself in check.

All at once the tortured girl seemed to yield herself, and slipped inertly from her grasp till kneeling down she laid her head in the motherly lap and sobbed. Miss Rowly kept stroking her hair in silence. Presently the girl looked up, and with a pang the aunt saw that her eyes were dry. In her pain she said:

'You sob like that, my child, and yet you are not crying; what is it, oh! my dear one? What is it that hurts you so that you cannot cry?'

And then the bitter sobbing broke out again, but still alas! without tears. Crouching low, and still enclosing her aunt's waist with her outstretched arms and hiding her head in her breast; she said:

'Oh! Auntie, I have sent Harold away!'

'What, my dear? What?' said the old lady astonished. 'Why, I thought there was no one in the world that you trusted so much as Harold!'

'It is true. There was — there is no one except you whom I trust so much. But I mistook something he said. I was in a blind fury at the time, and I said things that I thought my father's daughter never could have said. And she never thought them, even then! Oh, Auntie, I drove him away with all the horrible things I could say that would wound him. And all because he acted in a way that I see now was the most noble and knightly in which any man could act. He that my dear father had loved, and honoured, and trusted as another son. He that was a real son to him, and not a mock sop like me. I sent him away with such fierce and bitter pain that his poor face was ashen grey, and there was woe in his eyes that shall make woe in mine whenever I shall see them in my mind, waking or sleeping. He, the truest friend . . . the most faithful, the most tender, the most strong, the most unselfish! Oh! Auntie, Auntie, he just turned and bowed and went away. And he couldn't do anything else with the way I spoke to him; and now I shall never see him again!'

The young girl's eyes ware still dry, but the old woman's were wet. For a few minutes she kept softly stroking the bowed heat till the sobbing grew less and less, and then died away; and the girl lay still, collapsed in the abandonment of dry-eyed grief.

Then she rose, and taking off her dressing-gown, said tenderly:

'Let me stay with you to-night, dear one? Go to sleep in my arms, as you did long ago when there was any grief that you could not bear.'

So Stephen lay in those loving arms till her own young breast ceased heaving, and she breathed softly. Till dawn she slept on the bosom of her who loved her so well.

CHAPTER XXI — THE DUTY OF COURTESY

Leonard was getting tired of waiting when he received his summons to Normanstand. But despite his impatience he was ill pleased with the summons, which came in the shape of a polite note from Miss Rowly asking him to come that afternoon at tea-time. He had expected to hear from Stephen.

'Damn that old woman! You'd think she was working the whole show!' However, he turned up at a little before five o'clock, spruce and dapper and well dressed and groomed as usual. He was shown, as before, into the blue drawing-room. Miss Rowly, who sat there, rose as he entered, and coming across the room, greeted him, as he thought, effusively. He actually winced when she called him 'my dear boy' before the butler.

She ordered tea to be served at once, and when it had been brought she said to the butler:

'Tell Mannerly to bring me a large thick envelope which is on the table in my room. It is marked L.E. on the outside.' Presently an elderly maid handed her the envelope and withdrew. When tea was over she opened the envelope, and taking from it a number of folios, looked over them carefully; holding them in her lap, she said quietly:

'You will find writing materials on the table. I am all ready now to hand you over the receipts.' His eyes glistened. This was good news at all events; the debts were paid. In a rapid flash of thought he came to the conclusion that if the debts were actually paid he need not be civil to the old lady. He felt that he could have been rude to her if he had actual possession of the receipts. As it was, however, he could not yet afford to have any unpleasantness. There was still to come that lowering interview with his father; and he could not look towards it satisfactorily until he had the assurance of the actual documents that he was safe. Miss Rowly was, in her own way, reading his mind in his face. Her lorgnon seemed to follow his every expression like a searchlight. He remembered his former interview with her, and how he had been bested in it; so he made up his mind to acquiesce in time. He went over to the table and sat down. Taking a pen he turned to Miss Rowly and said:

'What shall I write?' She answered calmly:

'Date it, and then say, "Received from Miss Laetitia Rowly the receipts for the following amounts from the various firms hereunder enumerated."' She then proceeded to read them, he writing and repeating as he wrote. Then she added:

'"The same being the total amount of my debts which she has kindly paid for me."' He paused here; she asked.

'Why don't you go on?'

'I thought it was Stephen — Miss Norman,' he corrected, catching sight of her lorgnon, 'who was paying them.'

'Good Lord, man,' she answered, 'what does it matter who has paid them, so long as they are paid?'

'But I didn't ask you to pay them,' he went on obstinately. There was a pause, and then the old lady, with a distinctly sarcastic smile, said:

'It seems to me, young man, that you are rather particular as to how things are done for you. If you had begun to be just a little bit as particular in making the debts as you are in the way of having them paid, there would be a little less trouble and expense all round. However, the debts have been paid, and we can't unpay them. But of course you can repay me the money if you like. It amounts in all to four thousand three hundred and seventeen pounds, twelve shillings and sixpence, and I have paid every penny of it out of my own pocket. If you can't pay it yourself, perhaps your father would like to do so.'

The last shot told; he went on writing: '"Kindly paid for me,"' she continued in the same even voice:

'"In remembrance of my mother, of whom she was an acquaintance." Now sign it!' He did so and handed it to her. She read it over carefully, folded it, and put it in her pocket. She then stood. He rose also; and as he moved to the door — he had not offered to shake hands with her — he said:

'I should like to see, Miss Norman.'

'I am afraid you will have to wait.'

'Why?'

'She is over at Heply Regis. She went there for Lady Heply's ball, and will remain for a few days. Good afternoon!' The tone in which the last two words were spoken seemed in his ears like the crow of the victor after a cock-fight.

As he was going out of the room a thought struck her. She felt he deserved some punishment for his personal rudeness to her. After all, she had paid half her fortune for him, though not on his account; and not only had he given no thanks, but had not even offered the usual courtesy of saying good-bye. She had intended to have been silent on the subject, and to have allowed him to discover it later. Now she said, as if it was an after-thought:

'By the way, I did not pay those items you put down as "debts of honour"; you remember you gave the actual names and addresses.'

'Why not?' the question came from him involuntarily. The persecuting lorgnon rose again:

'Because they were all bogus! Addresses, names, debts, honour!

Good afternoon!'

He went out flaming; free from debt, money debts; all but one. And some other debts — not financial — whose magnitude was exemplified in the grinding of his teeth.

After breakfast next morning he said to his father:

'By the way, you said you wished to speak to me, sir.' There was something in the tone of his voice which called up antagonism.

'Then you have paid your debts?'

'All!'

'Good! Now there is something which it is necessary I should call your attention to. Do you remember the day on which I handed you that pleasing epistle from Messrs. Cavendish and Cecil?'

'Certainly, sir.'

'Didn't you send a telegram to them?'

'I did.'

'You wrote it yourself?'

'Certainly.'

'I had a courteous letter from the money-lenders, thanking me for my exertions in securing the settlement of their claim, and saying that in accordance with the request in my telegram they had held over proceedings until the day named. I did not quite remember having sent any telegram to them, or any letter either. So, being at a loss, I went to our excellent postmaster and requested that he would verify the sending of a telegram to London from me. He courteously looked up the file; which was ready for transference to the G.P.O., and showed me the form. It was in your handwriting.' He paused so long that Leonard presently said:

'Well!'

'It was signed Jasper Everard. Jasper Everard! my name; and yet it was sent by my son, who was christened, if I remember rightly, Leonard!' Then he went on, only in a cold acrid manner which made his son feel as though a February wind was blowing on his back:

'I think there need not have been much trouble in learning to avoid confusing our names. They are really dissimilar. Have you any explanation to offer of the — the error, let us call it?' A bright thought struck Leonard.

'Why, sir,' he said, 'I put it in your name as they had written to you. I thought it only courteous.' The elder man winced; he had not expected the excuse. We went on speaking in the same calm way, but his tone was more acrid than before:

'Good! of course! It was only courteous of you! Quite so! But I think it will be well in the future to let me look after my own courtesy; as regards my signature at any rate. You see, my dear boy, a signature is queer sort of thing, and judges and juries are apt to take a poor view of courtesy as over against the conventions regarding a man, writing his own name. What I want to tell you is this, that on seeing that signature I made a new will. You see, my estate is not entailed, and therefore I think it only right to see that in such a final matter justice is done all round. I therefore made a certain provision of which I am sure you will approve. Indeed, since I am assured of the payment of your debts, I feel justified in my action. I may say, inter alia, that I congratulate you on either the extent of your resources or the excellence of your friendships, or both. I confess that the amounts brought to my notice were rather large; more especially in proportion to the value of the estate which you are some day to inherit. For you are of course to inherit some day, my dear boy. You are my only son, and it would be hardly — hardly courteous of me not to leave it to you. But I have put a clause in my will to the effect that the trustee's are to pay all debts of your accruing which can be proved against you, before handing over to you either the estate itself or the remainder after its sale and the settlement of all claims. That's all. Now run away, my boy; I have some important work to do.'

* * * * *

The day after her return from Heply Regis, Stephen was walking in the wood when she thought she heard a slight rustling of leaves some way behind her. She looked round, expecting to see some one; but the leafy path was quite clear. Her suspicion was confirmed; some one was secretly following her. A short process of exclusions pointed to the personality of the some one. Tramps and poachers were unknown in Normanstand, and there was no one else whom she could think of who had any motive in following her in such a way; it must be Leonard Everard. She turned and walked rapidly in the opposite direction. As this would bring her to the house Leonard had to declare his presence at once or else lose the opportunity of a private interview which he sought. When she saw him she said at once and without any salutation:

'What are you doing there; why are you following me?'

'I wanted to see you alone. I could not get near you on account of that infernal old woman.' Stephen's face grew hard.

'On account of whom?' she asked with dangerous politeness.

'Miss Rowly; your aunt.'

'Don't you think, Mr. Everard,' she said icily, 'that it is at least an unpardonable rudeness to speak that way, and to me, of the woman I love best in all the world?'

'Sorry!' he said in the offhand way of younger days, 'I apologise. Fact is, I was angry that she wouldn't let me see you.'

‘Not let you see me!’ she said as if amazed. ‘What do mean?’

‘Why, I haven’t been able to see you alone ever since I went to meet you on Caester Hill.’

‘But why should you see me alone?’ she asked as if still in amazement. ‘Surely you can say anything you have to say before my aunt.’ With an unwisdom for which an instant later he blamed himself he blurted out:

‘Why, old girl, you yourself did not think her presence necessary when you asked me to meet you on the hill.’

‘When was that?’ She saw that he was angry and wanted to test him; to try how far he would venture. He was getting dangerous; she must know the measure of what she had to fear.

He fell into the trap at once. His debts being paid, fear was removed, and all the hectoring side of the man was aroused. His antagonist was a woman; and he had already had in his life so many unpleasant scenes with women that this was no new experience. This woman had, by her own indiscretion, put a whip into his hand; and, if necessary to secure his own way, by God! he meant to use it! These last days had made her a more desirable possession in his eyes. The vastness of her estate had taken hold on him, and his father’s remorseless intention with regard to his will would either keep him with very limited funds, or leave him eventually a pauper if he forestalled his inheritance. The desire of her wealth had grown daily, and it was now the main force in bringing him here to-day. And to this was now added the personal desire which her presence evoked. Stephen, at all times beautiful, had never looked more lovely. In the days since she had met him on the hilltop, a time that to her seemed so long ago, she had grown to be a woman, and there is some subtle inconceivable charm in completed womanhood. The reaction from her terrible fear and depression had come, and her strong brilliant youth was manifesting itself. Her step was springy and her eyes were bright; and the glow of fine health, accentuated by the militant humour of the present moment, seemed to light up her beautiful skin. In herself she was desirable, very desirable; Leonard felt his pulses quicken and his blood leap as he looked at her. Even his prejudice against her red hair had changed to something like hungry admiration. Leonard felt for the first moment since he had known her that she was a woman; and that, with relation to her, he was a man.

And at the moment all the man in him asserted itself. It was with half love, as he saw it, and half self-assertion that he answered her question:

‘The day you asked me to marry you! Oh! what a fool I was not to leap at such a chance! I should have taken you in my arms then and kissed you till I showed you how much I loved you. But that will all come yet; the kissing is still to come! Oh! Stephen, don’t you see that I love you? Won’t you tell me that you love me still? Darling!’ He almost sprang at her, his arms extended to clasp her.

‘Stop!’ Her voice rang like a trumpet. She did not mean to submit to physical violence, and in the present state of her feeling, an embrace from him would be a desecration. He was now odious to her; she positively loathed him.

Before her uplifted hand and those flashing eyes, he stopped as one stricken into stone. In that instant she knew she was safe; and with a woman’s quickness of apprehension and resolve, made up her mind what course to pursue. In a calm voice she said quietly:

‘Mr. Everard, you have followed me in secret, and without my permission. I cannot talk here with you, alone. I absolutely refuse to do so; now or at any other time. If you have anything especial to say to me you will find me at home at noon to-morrow. Remember, I do not ask you to come. I simply yield to the pressure of your importunity. And remember also that I do not authorise you in any way to resume this conversation. In fact, I forbid it. If you come to my house you must control yourself to my wish!'

Then with a stately bow, whose imperious distance inflamed him more than ever, and without once looking back she took her way home, all agitated inwardly and with fast beating heart.

CHAPTER XXII — FIXING THE BOUNDS

Leonard came towards Normanstand next forenoon in considerable mental disturbance. In the first place he was seriously in love with Stephen, and love is in itself a disturbing influence.

Leonard's love was all of the flesh; and as such had power at present to disturb him, as it would later have power to torture him. Again, he was disturbed by the fear of losing Stephen, or rather of not being able to gain her. At first, ever since she had left him on the path from the hilltop till his interview the next day, he had looked on her possession as an 'option,' to the acceptance of which circumstances seemed to be compelling him. But ever since, that asset seemed to have been dwindling; and now he was almost beginning to despair. He was altogether cold at heart, and yet highly strung with apprehension, as he was shown into the blue drawing-room.

Stephen came in alone, closing the door behind her. She shook hands with him, and sat down by a writing-table near the window, pointing to him to sit on an ottoman a little distance away. The moment he sat down he realised that he was at a disadvantage; he was not close to her, and he could not get closer without manifesting his intention of so doing. He wanted to be closer, both for the purpose of his suit and for his own pleasure; the proximity of Stephen began to multiply his love for her. He thought that to-day she looked better than ever, of a warm radiant beauty which touched his senses with unattainable desire. She could not but notice the passion in his eyes, and instinctively her eyes wandered to a silver gong placed on the table well within reach. The more he glowed, the more icily calm she sat, till the silence between them began to grow oppressive. She waited, determined that he should be the first to speak. Recognising the helplessness of silence, he began huskily:

‘I came here to-day in the hope that you would listen to me.’ Her answer, given with a conventional smile, was not helpful:

‘I am listening.’

‘I cannot tell you how sorry I am that I did not accept your offer. If I had know when I was coming that day that you loved me . . . ‘ She interrupted him, calm of voice, and with uplifted hand:

‘I never said so, did I? Surely I could not have said such a thing! I certainly don’t remember it?’ Leonard was puzzled.

‘You certainly made me think so. You asked me to marry you, didn’t you?’ Her answer came calmly, though in a low voice:

‘I did.’

‘Then if you didn’t love me, why did you ask me to marry you?’ It was his nature to be more or less satisfied when he had put any one opposed to him proportionally in the wrong; and now his exultation at having put a poser manifested itself in his tone. This, however, braced up Stephen to cope with a difficult and painful situation. It was with a calm, seemingly genial frankness, that she answered, smilingly:

‘Do you know, that is what has been puzzling me from that moment to this!’ Her words appeared to almost stupefy Leonard. This view of the matter had not occurred to him, and now the puzzle of it made him angry.

‘Do you mean to say,’ he asked hotly, ‘that you asked a man to marry you when you didn’t even love him?’

‘That is exactly what I do mean! Why I did it is, I assure you, as much a puzzle to me as it is to you. I have come to the conclusion that it must have been from my vanity. I suppose I wanted to dominate somebody; and you were the weakest within range!'

'Thank you!' He was genuinely angry by this time, and, but for a wholesome fear of the consequences, would have used strong language.

'I don't see that I was the weakest about.' Somehow this set her on her guard. She wanted to know more, so she asked:

'Who else?'

'Harold An Wolf! You had him on a string already!' The name came like a sword through her heart, but the bitter comment braced her to further caution. Her voice seemed to her to sound as though far away:

'Indeed! And may I ask you how you came to know that?' Her voice seemed so cold and sneering to him that he lost his temper still further.

'Simply because he told me so himself.' It pleased him to do in ill turn to Harold. He did not forget that savage clutch at his throat; and he never would. Stephen's senses were all alert. She saw an opportunity of learning something, and went on with the same cold voice:

'And I suppose it was that pleasing confidence which was the cause of your refusal of my offer of marriage; of which circumstance you have so thoughtfully and so courteously reminded me.' This, somehow, seemed of good import to Leonard. If he could show her that his intention to marry her was antecedent to Harold's confidence, she might still go back to her old affection for him. He could not believe that it did not still exist; his experience of other women showed him that their love outlived their anger, whether the same had been hot or cold.

'It had nothing in the world to do with it. He never said a word about it till he threatened to kill me — the great brute!' This was learning something indeed! She went on in the same voice:

'And may I ask you what was the cause of such sanguinary intention?'

'Because he knew that I was going to marry you!' As he spoke he felt that he had betrayed himself; he went on hastily, hoping that it might escape notice:

'Because he knew that I loved you. Oh! Stephen, don't you know it now! Can't you see that I love you; and that I want you for my wife!'

'But did he threaten to kill you out of mere jealousy? Do you still go in fear of your life? Will it be necessary to arrest him?' Leonard was chagrined at her ignoring of his love-suit, and in his self-engrossment answered sulkily:

'I'm not afraid of him! And, besides, I believe he has bolted. I called at his house yesterday, and his servant said they hadn't heard a word from him.' Stephen's heart sank lower and lower. This was what she had dreaded. She said in as steady a voice as she could muster:

'Bolted! Has he gone altogether?'

'Oh, he'll come back all right, in time. He's not going to give up the jolly good living he has here!'

'But why has he bolted? When he threatened to kill you did he give any reason?' There was too much talk about Harold. It made him angry; so he answered in an offhand way:

'Oh, I don't know. And, moreover, I don't care!'

'And now,' said Stephen, having ascertained what she wanted to know, 'what is it that you want to speak to me about?'

Her words fell on Leonard like a cold douche. Here had he been talking about his love for her, and yet she ignored the whole thing, and asked him what he wanted to talk about.

'What a queer girl you are. You don't seem to attend to what a fellow is saying. Here have I been telling you that I love you, and asking you to marry me; and yet you don't seem to have even heard me!' She answered at once, quite sweetly, and with a smile of superiority which maddened him:

'But that subject is barred!'

'How do you mean? Barred!'

'Yes. I told you yesterday!'

'But, Stephen,' he cried out quickly, all the alarm in him and all the earnestness of which he was capable uniting to his strengthening, 'can't you understand that I love you, with all my heart? You are so beautiful; so beautiful!' He felt now in reality what he was saying.

The torrent of his words left no opening for her objection; it swept all merely verbal obstacles before it. She listened, content in a measure. So long as he sat at the distance which she had arranged before his coming she did not fear any personal violence. Moreover, it was a satisfaction to her now to hear him, who had refused her, pleading in vain. The more sincere his eloquence, the larger her satisfaction; she had no pity for him now.

'I know I was a fool, Stephen! I had my chance that day on the hilltop; and if I had felt then as I feel now, as I have felt every moment since, I would not have been so cold. I would have taken you in my arms and held you close and kissed you, again, and again, and again. Oh, darling! I love you! I love you! I love you!' He held out his arms imploringly. 'Won't you love me? Won't—'

He stopped, paralysed with angry amazement. She was laughing.

He grew purple in the face; his hands were still outstretched. The few seconds seemed like hours.

‘Forgive me!’ she said in a polite tone, suddenly growing grave. ‘But really you looked so funny, sitting there so quietly, and speaking in such a way, that I couldn’t help it. You really must forgive me! But remember, I told you the subject was barred; and as, knowing that, you went on, you really have no one but yourself to blame!’ Leonard was furious, but managed to say as he dropped his arms:

‘But I love you!’

‘That may be, now,’ she went on icily. ‘But it is too late. I do not love you; and I have never loved you! Of course, had you accepted my offer of marriage you should never have known that. No matter how great had been my shame and humiliation when I had come to a sense of what I had done, I should have honourably kept my part of the tacit compact entered into when I made that terrible mistake. I cannot tell you how rejoiced and thankful I am that you took my mistake in such a way. Of course, I do not give you any credit for it; you thought only of yourself, and did that which you liked best!’

‘That is a nice sort of thing to tell a man!’ he interrupted with cynical frankness.

‘Oh, I do not want to hurt you unnecessarily; but I wish there to be no possible misconception in the matter. Now that I have discovered my error I am not likely to fall into it again; and that you may not have any error at all, I tell you now again, that I have not loved you, do not love you, and never will and never can love you.’ Here an idea struck Leonard and he blurted out:

‘But do you not think that something is due to me?’

‘How do you mean?’ Her brows were puckered with real wonder this time.

‘For false hopes raised in my mind. If I did not love you before, the very act of proposing to me has made me love you; and now I love you so well that I cannot live without you!’ In his genuine agitation he was starting up, when the sight of her hand laid upon the gong arrested him. She laughed as she said:

‘I thought that the privilege of changing one’s mind was a female prerogative! Besides, I have done already something to make reparation to you for the wrong of . . . of — I may put it fairly, as the suggestion is your own — of not having treated you as a woman!’

‘Damn!’

‘As you observe so gracefully, it is annoying to have one’s own silly words come back at one, boomerang fashion. I made up my mind to do something for you; to pay off your debts.’ This so exasperated him that he said out brutally:

‘No thanks to you for that! As I had to put up with the patronage and the lecturings, and the eyeglass of that infernal old woman, I don’t intend . . .’

Stephen stood up, her hand upon the gong:

‘Mr. Everard, if you do not remember that you are in my drawing-room, and speaking of my dear and respected aunt, I shall not detain you longer!’

He sat down at once, saying surlily:

‘I beg your pardon. I forgot. You make me so wild that — that . . . ‘ He chewed the ends of his moustache angrily. She resumed her seat, taking her hand from the gong. Without further pause she continued:

‘Quite right! It has been Miss Rowly who paid your debts. At first I had promised myself the pleasure; but from something in your speech and manner she thought it better that such an act should not be done by a woman in my position to a man in yours. It might, if made public, have created quite a wrong impression in the minds of many of our friends.'

There was something like a snort from Leonard. She ignored it:

'So she paid the money herself out of her own fortune. And, indeed, I must say that you do not seem to have treated her with much gratitude.'

'What did I say or do that put you off doing the thing yourself?'

'I shall answer it frankly: It was because you manifested, several times, in a manner there was no mistaking, both by words and deeds, an intention of levying blackmail on me by using your knowledge of my ridiculous, unmaidenly act. No one can despise, or deplore, or condemn that act more than I do; so that rather than yield a single point to you, I am, if necessary, ready to face the odium which the public knowledge of it might produce. What I had intended to do for you in the way of compensation for false hopes raised to you by that act has now been done. That it was done by my aunt on my behalf, and not by me, matters to you no more than it did to your creditors, who, when they received the money, made no complaint of injury to their feelings on that account.

'Now, when you think the whole matter over in quietness, you will, knowing that I am ready at any time to face if necessary the unpleasant publicity, be able to estimate what damage you would do to yourself by any exposé. It seems to me that you would come out of it pretty badly all round. That, however, is not my affair; it entirely rests with yourself. I think I know how women would regard it. I dare say you best know how men would look at it; and at you!'

Leonard knew already how the only man who knew of it had taken it, and the knowledge did not reassure him!

‘You jade! You infernal, devilish, cruel, smooth-tongued jade!’ He stood as bespoke. She stood too, and stood watching him with her hand on the gong. After a pause of a couple of seconds she said gravely:

‘One other thing I should wish to say, and I mean it. Understand me clearly, that I mean it! You must not come again into my grounds without my special permission. I shall not allow my liberty to be taken away, or restricted, by you. If there be need at any time to come to the house, come in ceremonious fashion, by the avenues which are used by others. You can always speak to me in public, or socially, in the most friendly manner; as I shall hope to be able to speak to you. But you must never transgress the ordinary rules of decorum. If you do, I shall have to take, for my own protection, another course. I know you now! I am willing to blot out the past; but it must be the whole past that is wiped out!’

She stood facing him; and as he looked at her clear-cut aquiline face, her steady eyes, her resolute mouth, her carriage, masterly in its self-possessed poise, he saw that there was no further hope for him. There was no love and no fear.

‘You devil!’ he hissed.

She struck the gong; her aunt entered the room.

‘Oh, is that you, Auntie? Mr. Everard has finished his business with me!’ Then to the servant, who had entered after Miss Rowly:

‘Mr. Everard would like his carriage. By the way,’ she added, turning to him in a friendly way as an afterthought, ‘will you not stay, Mr. Everard, and take lunch with us? My aunt has been rather moping lately; I am sure your presence would cheer her up.’

‘Yes, do stay, Mr. Everard!’ added Miss Rowly placidly. ‘It would make a pleasant hour for us all.’

Leonard, with a great effort, said with conventional politeness:

‘Thanks, awfully! But I promised my father to be home for lunch!’ and he withdrew to the door which the servant held open.

He went out filled with anger and despair, and, sad for him, with a fierce, overmastering desire — love he called it — for the clever, proud, imperious beauty who had so outmatched and crushed him.

That beautiful red head, which he had at first so despised, was henceforth to blaze in his dreams.

CHAPTER XXIII — THE MAN

On the *Scoriac* Harold An Wolf, now John Robinson, kept aloof from every one. He did not make any acquaintances, did not try to. Some of those at table with him, being ladies and gentlemen, now and again made a polite remark; to which he answered with equal politeness. Being what he was he could not willingly offend any one; and there was nothing in his manner to repel any kindly overture to acquaintance. But this was the full length his acquaintanceship went; so he gradually felt himself practically alone. This was just what he wished; he sat all day silent and alone, or else walked up and down the great deck that ran from stem to stern, still always alone. As there were no second-class or steerage passengers on the *Scoriac*, there were no deck restraints, and so there was ample room for individual solitude. The travellers, however, were a sociable lot, and a general feeling of friendliness was abroad. The first four days of the journey were ideally fine, and life was a joy. The great ship, with bilge keels, was as steady as a rock.

Among the other passengers was an American family consisting of Andrew Stonehouse, the great ironmaster and contractor, with his wife and little daughter.

Stonehouse was a remarkable man in his way, a typical product of the Anglo-Saxon under American conditions. He had started in young manhood with nothing but a good education, due in chief to his own industry and his having taken advantage to the full of such opportunities as life had afforded to him. By unremitting work he had at thirty achieved a great fortune, which had, however; been up to then entirely invested and involved in his businesses. With, however, the colossal plant at his disposal, and by aid of the fine character he had won for honesty and good work, he was able within the next ten years to pile up a fortune vast even in a nation where multi-millionaires are scattered freely. Then he had married, wisely and happily. But no child had come to crown the happiness of the pair who so loved each other till a good many years had come and gone. Then, when the hope of issue had almost passed away, a little daughter came. Naturally the child was idolised by her parents, and thereafter every step taken by either was with an eye to her good. When the rigour of winter and the heat of summer told on the child in a way which the more hardy parents had never felt, she was whirled away to some place with more promising conditions of health and happiness. When the doctors hinted that an ocean voyage and a winter in Italy would be good, those too were duly undertaken. And now, the child being in perfect health, the family was returning before the weather should get too hot to spend the summer at their châlet amongst the great pines on the slopes of Mount Ranier. Like the others on board, Mr. and Mrs. Stonehouse had proffered travellers' civilities to the sad, lonely young man. As to the others, he had shown thanks for their gracious courtesy; but friendship, as in other cases, did not advance. The Stonehouses were not in any way chagrined; their lives were too happy and too full for them to take needless offence. They respected the young man's manifest desire for privacy; and there, so far as they were concerned, the matter rested.

But this did not suit the child. Pearl was a sweet little thing, a real blue-eyed, golden-haired little fairy, full of loving-kindness. All the mother-instinct in her, and even at six a woman-child can be a mother — theoretically, went out towards the huge, lonely, sad, silent young man. She insisted on friendship with him; insisted shamelessly, with the natural inclination of innocence which rises high above shame. Even the half-hearted protests of the mother, who loved to see the child happy, did not deter her; after the second occasion of Pearl's seeking him, as she persisted, Harold could but remonstrate with the mother in turn; the ease of the gentle lady and the happiness of her child were more or less at stake. When Mrs. Stonehouse would say:

'There, darling! You must be careful not to annoy the gentleman,' Pearl would turn a rosy all-commanding face to her and answer:

'But, mother, I want him to play with me. You must play with me!' Then, as the mother would look at him, he would say quickly, and with genuine heartiness too:

'Oh please, madam, do let her play with me! Come, Pearl, shall you ride a cock-horse or go to market the way the gentleman rides?' Then the child would spring on his knee with a cry of delight, and their games began.

The presence of the child and her loving ways were unutterably sweet to Harold; but his pleasure was always followed by a pain that rent him as he thought of that other little one, now so far away, and of those times that seemed so long since gone.

But the child never relaxed in her efforts to please; and in the long hours of the sea voyage the friendship between her and the man grew, and grew. He was the biggest and strongest and therefore most lovely thing on board the ship, and that sufficed her. As for him, the child manifestly loved and trusted him, and that was all-in-all to his weary, desolate heart.

The fifth day out the weather began to change; the waves grew more and more mountainous as the day wore on and the ship advanced west. Not even the great bulk and weight of the ship, which ordinarily drove through the seas without pitch or roll, were proof against waves so gigantic. Then the wind grew fiercer and fiercer, coming in roaring squalls from the south-west. Most of those on board were alarmed, for the great waves were dreadful to see, and the sound of the wind was a trumpet-call to fear.

The sick stayed in their cabins; the rest found an interest if not a pleasure on deck. Among the latter were the Stonehouses, who were old travellers. Even Pearl had already had more sea-voyages than fall to most people in their lives. As for Harold, the storm seemed to come quite naturally to him and he paced the deck like a ship-master.

It was fortunate for the passengers that most of them had at this period of the voyage got their sea legs; otherwise walking on the slippery deck, that seemed to heave as the rolling of the vessel threw its slopes up or down, would have been impossible. Pearl was, like most children, pretty sure-footed; holding fast to Harold's hand she managed to move about ceaselessly. She absolutely refused to go with any one else. When her mother said that she had better sit still she answered:

'But, mother, I am quite safe with The Man!' 'The Man' was the name she had given Harold, and by which she always now spoke of him. They had had a good many turns together, and Harold had, with the captain's permission, taken her up on the bridge and showed her how to look out over the 'dodger' without the wind hurting her eyes. Then came the welcome beef-tea hour, and all who had come on deck were cheered and warmed with the hot soup. Pearl went below, and Harold, in the shelter of the charthouse, together with a good many others, looked out over the wild sea.

Harold, despite the wild turmoil of winds and seas around him, which usually lifted his spirits, was sad, feeling lonely and wretched; he was suffering from the recoil of his little friend's charming presence. Pearl came on deck again looking for him. He did not see her, and the child, seeing an opening for a new game, avoided both her father and mother, who also stood in the shelter of the charthouse, and ran round behind it on the weather side, calling a loud 'Boo!' to attract Harold's attention as she ran.

A few seconds later the *Scoriac* put her nose into a coming wave at just the angle which makes for the full exercise of the opposing forces. The great wave seemed to strike the ship on the port quarter like a giant hammer; and for an instant she stood still, trembling. Then the top of the wave seemed to leap up and deluge her. The wind took the flying water and threw it high in volumes of broken spray, which swept not only the deck but the rigging as high as the top of the funnels. The child saw the mass of water coming, and shrieking flew round the port side of the charthouse. But just as she turned down the open space between it and the funnel the vessel rolled to starboard. At the same moment came a puff of wind of greater violence than ever. The child, calling out, half in simulated half in real fear, flew down the slope. As she did so the gale took her, and in an instant whirled her, almost touching her mother, over the rail into the sea.

Mrs. Stonehouse shrieked and sprang forward as though to follow her child. She was held back by the strong arm of her husband. They both slipped on the sloping deck and fell together into the scuppers. There was a chorus of screams from all the women present. Harold, with an instinctive understanding of the dangers yet to be encountered, seized a red tam-o'-shanter from the head of a young girl who stood near.

Her exclamation of surprise was drowned in the fearful cry ‘Man overboard!’ and all rushed down to the rail and saw Harold, as he emerged from the water, pull the red cap over his head and then swim desperately towards the child, whose golden hair was spread on the rising wave.

The instant after Pearl’s being swept overboard might be seen the splendid discipline of a well-ordered ship. Every man to his post, and every man with a knowledge of his duty. The First Officer called to the Quartermaster at the wheel in a voice which cut through the gale like a trumpet:

‘Hard a port! Hard!’

The stern of the great ship swung away to port in time to clear the floating child from the whirling screw, which would have cut her to pieces in an instant. Then the Officer after tearing the engine-room signal to ‘Starboard engine full speed astern,’ ran for the lifebuoy hanging at the starboard end of the bridge. This he hurled far into the sea. As it fell the attached rope dragged with it the signal, which so soon as it reaches water bursts into smoke and flame — signal by day and night. This done, and it had all been done in a couple of seconds, he worked the electric switch of the syren, which screamed out quickly once, twice, thrice. This is the dread sound which means ‘man overboard,’ and draws to his post every man on the ship, waking or sleeping.

The Captain was now on the bridge and in command, and the First Officer, freed from his duty there, ran to the emergency boat, swung out on its davits on the port side.

All this time, though only numbered by seconds, the *Scoriac* was turning hard to starboard, making a great figure of eight; for it is quicker to turn one of these great sea monsters round than to stop her in mid career. The aim of her Captain in such cases is to bring her back to the weather side of the floating buoy before launching the boat.

On deck the anguish of the child's parents was pitiable. Close to the rail, with her husband's arms holding her tight to it, the distressed mother leaned out; but always moving so that she was at the nearest point of the ship to her child. As the ship passed on it became more difficult to see the heads. In the greater distance they seemed to be quite close together. All at once, just as a great wave which had hidden them in the farther trough passed on, the mother screamed out:

'She's sinking! she's sinking! Oh, God! Oh, God!' and she fell on her knees, her horrified eyes, set in a face of ashen grey, looking out between the rails.

But at the instant all eyes saw the man's figure rise in the water as he began to dive. There was a hush which seemed deadly; the onlookers feared to draw breath. And then the mother's heart leaped and her cry rang out again as two heads rose together in the waste of sea:

'He has her! He has her! He has her! Oh, thank God! Thank God!' and for a single instant she hid her face in her hands.

Then when the fierce 'hurrah' of all on board had been hushed in expectation, the comments broke forth. Most of the passengers had by this time got glasses of one kind or another.

'See! He's putting the cap on the child's head. He's a cool one that. Fancy him thinking of a red cap at such a time!'

'Ay! we could see that cap, when it might be we couldn't see anything else.'

'Look!' this from an old sailor standing by his boat, 'how he's raisin' in the water. He's keeping his body between her an' the spindrift till the squall has passed. That would choke them both in a wind like this if he didn't know how to guard against it. He's all right; he is! The little maid is safe wi' him.'

'Oh, bless you! Bless you for those words,' said the mother, turning towards him. 'At this moment the Second Officer, who had run down from the bridge, touched Mr. Stonehouse on the shoulder.

'The captain asked me to tell you, sir, that you and Mrs. Stonehouse had better come to him on the bridge. You'll see better from there.'

They both hurried up, and the mother again peered out with fixed eyes. The Captain tried to comfort her; laying his strong hand on her shoulder, he said:

'There, there! Take comfort, ma'am. She is in the hands of God! All that mortal man can do is being done. And she is safer with that gallant young giant than she could be with any other man on the ship. Look, how he is protecting her! Why he knows that all that can be done is being done. He is waiting for us to get to him, and is saving himself for it. Any other man who didn't know so much about swimming as he does would try to reach the lifebuoy; and would choke the two of them with the spindrift in the trying. Mind how he took the red cap to help us see them. He's a fine lad that; a gallant lad!'

CHAPTER XXIV — FROM THE DEEPS

Presently the Captain handed Mrs. Stonehouse a pair of binoculars. For an instant she looked through them, then handed them back and continued gazing out to where the two heads appeared — when they did appear on the crest of the waves like pin-heads. The Captain said half to himself and half to the father:

‘Mother’s eyes! Mother’s eyes!’ and the father understood.

As the ship swept back to the rescue, her funnels sending out huge volumes of smoke which the gale beat down on the sea to leeward, the excitement grew tenser and tenser. Men dared hardly breathe; women wept and clasped their hands convulsively as they prayed. In the emergency boat the men sat like statues, their oars upright, ready for instant use. The officer stood with the falls in his hand ready to lower away.

When opposite the lifebuoy, and about a furlong from Harold and Pearl, the Captain gave the signal ‘Stop,’ and then a second later: ‘Full speed astern.’

‘Ready, men! Steady!’ As the coming wave slipping under the ship began to rise up her side, the officer freed the falls and the boat sank softly into the lifting sea.

Instantly the oars struck the water, and as the men bent to them a cheer rang out.

* * * * *

Harold and Pearl heard, and the man turning his head for a moment saw that the ship was close at hand, gradually drifting down to the weather side of them. He raised the child in his arms, saying:

‘Now, Pearl, wave your hand to mother and say, hurrah!’ The child, fired into fresh hope, waved her tiny hand and cried ‘Hurrah!

Hurrah!' The sound could not reach the mother's ears; but she saw, and her heart leaped. She too waved her hand, but she uttered no sound. The sweet high voice of the child crept over the water to the ears of the men in the boat, and seemed to fire their arms with renewed strength.

A few more strokes brought them close, Harold with a last effort raised the child in his arms as the boat drove down on them. The boatswain leaning over the bow grabbed the child, and with one sweep of his strong arm took her into the boat. The bow oarsman caught Harold by the wrist. The way of the boat took him for a moment under water; but the next man; pulling his oar across the boat, stooped over and caught him by the collar, and clung fast. A few seconds more and he was hauled abroad. A wild cheer from all on the *Scoriac* came, sweeping down on the wind.

When once the boat's head had been turned towards the ship, and the oars had bent again to their work, they came soon within shelter. When they had got close enough ropes were thrown out, caught and made fast; and then came down one of the bowlines which the seamen held ready along the rail of the lower deck. This was seized by the boatswain, who placed it round him under his armpits. Then, standing with the child in his arms he made ready to be pulled up. Pearl held out her arms to Harold, crying in fear:

'No, no, let The Man take me! I want to go with The Man!' He said quietly so as not to frighten her:

'No, no, dear! Go with him! He can do this better than I can!' So she clung quietly to the seaman, holding her face pressed close against his shoulder. As the men above pulled at the rope, keeping it as far as possible from the side of the vessel, the boatswain fended himself off with his feet. In a few seconds he was seized by eager hands and pulled over the rail, tenderly holding and guarding the child all the while. In an instant she was in the arms of her mother, who had thrown herself upon her knees and pressed her close to her loving heart. The child put her little arms around her neck and clung to her. Then looking up and seeing the grey pallor of her face, which even her great joy could not in a moment efface, she stroked it and said:

'Poor mother! Poor mother! And now I have made you all wet!' Then, feeling her father's hand on her head she turned and leaped into his arms, where he held her close.

Harold was the next to ascend. He came amid a regular tempest of cheers, the seamen joining with the passengers. The officers, led by the Captain waving his cap from the bridge, joined in the paean.

The boat was cast loose. An instant after the engine bells tinkled: 'Full speed ahead.'

Mrs. Stonehouse had no eyes but for her child, except for one other. When Harold leaped down from the rail she rushed at him, all those around instinctively making way for her. She flung her arms around him and kissed him, and then before he could stop her sank to her knees at his feet, and taking his hand kissed it. Harold was embarrassed beyond all thinking. He tried to take away his hand, but she clung tight to it.

'No, no!' she cried. 'You saved my child!'

Harold was a gentleman and a kindly one. He said no word till she had risen, still holding his hand, when he said quietly:

'There! there! Don't cry. I was only too happy to be of service. Any other man on board would have done the same. I was the nearest, and therefore had to be first. That was all!'

Mr. Stonehouse came to him and said as he grasped Harold's hand so hard that his fingers ached:

‘I cannot thank you as I would. But you are a man and will understand. God be good to you as you have been good to my child; and to her mother and myself!’ As he turned away Pearl, who had now been holding close to her mother’s hand, sprang to him holding up her arms. He raised her up and kissed her. Then he placed her back in her mother’s arms.

All at once she broke down as the recollection of danger swept back upon her. ‘Oh, Mother! Mother!’ she cried, with a long, low wail, which touched every one of her hearers to the heart’s core.

‘The hot blankets are all ready. Come, there is not a moment to be lost. I’ll be with you when I have seen the men attended to!’

So the mother, holding her in her arms and steadied by two seamen lest she should slip on the wet and slippery deck, took the child below.

Harold was taken by another set of men, who rubbed him down till he glowed, and poured hot brandy and water into him till he had to almost use force against the superabundance of their friendly ministrations.

For the remainder of that day a sort of solemn gladness ruled on the *Scoriac*. The Stonehouse family remained in their suite, content in glad thankfulness to be with Pearl, who lay well covered up on the sofa sleeping off the effects of the excitement and the immersion, and the result of the potation which the Doctor had forced upon her. Harold was simply shy, and objecting to the publicity which he felt to be his fate, remained in his cabin till the trumpet had blown the dinner call.

CHAPTER XXV — A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD

After dinner Harold went back to his cabin; locking himself in, he lay down on the sofa. The gloom of his great sorrow was heavy on him; the reaction from the excitement of the morning had come.

He was recalled to himself by a gentle tapping. Unlocking and opening the door he saw Mr. Stonehouse, who said with trouble in his voice:

'I came to you on account of my little child.' There he stopped with a break in his voice. Harold, with intent to set his mind at ease and to stave off further expressions of gratitude, replied:

'Oh, pray don't say anything. I am only too glad that I was privileged to be of service. I only trust that the dear little girl is no worse for her — her adventure!'

'That is why I am here,' said the father quickly. 'My wife and I are loth to trouble you. But the poor little thing has worked herself into a paroxysm of fright and is calling for you. We have tried in vain to comfort or reassure her. She will not be satisfied without you. She keeps calling on "The Man" to come and help her. I am loth to put you to further strain after all you have gone through to-day; but if you would come—' Harold was already in the passage as he spoke:

'Of course I'm coming. If I can in any way help it is both a pleasure and a duty to be with her.' Turning to the father he added:

'She is indeed a very sweet and good child. I shall never forget how she bore herself whilst we waited for aid to come.'

'You must tell her mother and me all about it,' said the father; much moved.

When they came close to the Stonehouses' suite of rooms they heard Pearl's voice rising with a pitiful note of fear:

'Where is The Man? Oh! where is The Man? Why doesn't he come to me? He can save me! I want to be with The Man!' When the door opened and she saw him she gave shriek of delight, and springing from the arms of her mother fairly leaped into Harold's arms which were outstretched to receive her. She clung to him and kissed him again and again, rubbing her little hands all over his face as though to prove to herself that he was real and not a dream. Then with a sigh she laid her head on his breast, the reaction of sleep coming all at once to her. With a gesture of silence Harold sat down, holding the child in his arms. Her mother laid a thick shawl over and sat down close to Harold. Mr. Stonehouse stood quiet in the doorway with the child's nurse peering anxiously over his shoulder.

After a little while, when he thought she was asleep, Harold rose and began to place her gently in the bunk. But the moment he did so she waked with a scream. The fright in her eyes was terrible. She clung to him, moaning and crying out between her sobs:

'Don't leave me! Don't leave me! Don't leave me!' Harold was much moved and held the little thing tight in his strong arms, saying to her:

'No darling! I shan't leave you! Look in my eyes, dear, and I will promise you, and then you will be happy. Won't you?'

She looked quickly up in his face. Then she kissed him lovingly, and rested her head, but not sleepily this time, on his breast said:

'Yes! I'm not afraid now! I'm going to stay with The Man!' Presently Mrs. Stonehouse, who had been thinking of ways and means, and of the comfort of the strange man who had been so good to her child, said:

'You will sleep with mother to-night, darling. Mr. . . . The Man,' she said this with an appealing look of apology to Harold, 'The Man will stay by you till you are asleep . . . ' But she interrupted, not fretfully or argumentatively, but with a settled air of content:

'No! I'm going to sleep with The Man!'

'But, dear one,' the mother expostulated, 'The Man will want sleep too.'

'All right, mother. He can sleep too. I'll be very good and lie quite quiet; but oh! mother, I can't sleep unless his arms are round me. I'm afraid if they're not the sea will get me!' and she clung closer to Harold, tightening her arms round his neck.

'You will not mind?' asked Mrs. Stonehouse timidly to Harold; and, seeing acquiescence in his face, added in a burst of tearful gratitude:

'Oh! you are good to her to us all!'

'Hush!' Harold said quietly. Then he said to Pearl, in a cheerful matter-of-fact way which carried conviction to the child's mind:

'Now, darling, it is time for all good little girls to be asleep, especially when they have had an — an interesting day. You wait here till I put my pyjamas on, and then I'll come back for you. And mother and father shall come and see you nicely tucked in!'

'Don't be long!' the child anxiously called after him as he hurried away. Even trust can have its doubts.

In a few minutes Harold was back, in pyjamas and slipper and a dressing-gown. Pearl, already wrapped in a warm shawl by her mother, held out her arms to Harold, who lifted her.

The Stonehouses' suite of rooms was close to the top of the companion-way, and as Harold's stateroom was on the saloon deck, the little procession had, much to the man's concern, run the gauntlet of the thong of passengers whom the bad weather had kept indoors.

When he came out of the day cabin carrying the child there was a rush of all the women to make much of the little girl. They were all very kind and no troublesome; their interest was natural enough, and Harold stopped whilst they petted the little thing.

The little procession followed. Mr. and Mrs. Stonehouse coming next, and last the nurse, who manifested a phase of the anxiety of a hen who sees her foster ducklings waddling toward a pond.

When Harold was in his bunk the little maid was brought in.

When they had all gone and the cabin was dark, save for the gleam from the nightlight which the careful mother had placed out of sight in the basin at the foot of the bunk, Harold lay a long time in a negative state, if such be possible, in so far as thought was concerned.

Presently he became conscious of a movement of the child his arms; a shuddering movement, and a sort of smothered groan. The little thing was living over again in sleep the perils and fears of the day. Instinctively she put up her hands and felt the a round her. Then with a sigh clasped her arms round his neck, and with a peaceful look laid her head upon his breast. Even through the gates of sleep her instinct had recognised and realised protection.

And then this trust of a little child brought back the man to his nobler self. Once again came back to him that love which he had had, and which he knew now that he had never lost, for the little child that he had seen grow into full womanhood; whose image must dwell in his heart of hearts for evermore.

The long night's sleep quite restored Pearl. She woke fairly early and without any recurrence of fear. At first she lay still, fearing she would wake The Man, but finding that he was awake — he had not slept a wink all night — she kissed him and then scrambled out of bed.

It was still early morning, but early hours rule on shipland. Harold rang for the steward, and when the man came he told him to tell Mr. Stonehouse that the child was awake. His delight when he found the child unfrightened looking out of the port was unbounded.

CHAPTER XXVI — A NOBLE OFFER

That day Harold passed in unutterable gloom. The reaction was strong on him; and all his woe, his bitter remembrance of the past and his desolation for the future, were with him unceasingly.

In the dusk of the evening he wandered out to his favourite spot, the cable-tank on top of the aft wheelhouse. Here he had been all alone, and his loneliness had the added advantage that from the isolated elevation he could see if anyone approached. He had been out there during the day, and the Captain, who had noticed his habit had had rigged up a canvas dodger on the rail on the weather side. When he sat down on the coiled hawsers in the tank he was both secluded and sheltered. In this peaceful corner his thoughts ran freely and in sympathy with the turmoil of wind and wave.

How unfair it all was! Why had he been singled out for such misery? What gleam of hope or comfort was left to his miserable life since he had heard the words of Stephen; those dreadful words which had shattered in an instant all the cherished hopes of his life. Too well he remembered the tone and look of scorn with which the horrible truths had been conveyed to him. In his inmost soul he accepted them as truths; Stephen's soul had framed them and Stephen's lips had sent them forth.

From his position behind the screen he did not see the approaching figure of Mr. Stonehouse, and was astonished when he saw his head rise above the edge of the tank as he climbed the straight Jacob's ladder behind the wheelhouse. The elder man paused as he saw him and said in an apologetic way:

'Will you forgive my intruding on your privacy? I wanted to speak to you alone; and as I saw you come here a while ago I thought it would be a good opportunity.' Harold was rising as he spoke.

'By all means. This place is common property. But all the same I am honoured in your seeking me.' The poor fellow wished to be genial; but despite his efforts there was a strange formality in the expression of his words. The elder man understood, and said as he hurried forward and sank beside him:

'Pray don't stir! Why, what a cosy corner this is. I don't believe at this moment there is such peace in the ship!'

Once again the bitterness of Harold's heart broke out in sudden words:

'I hope not! There is no soul on board to whom I could wish such evil!' The old man said as he laid his hand softly on the other's shoulder:

'God help you, my poor boy, if such pain is in your heart!' Mr. Stonehouse looked out at the sea, at last turning his face to him again he spoke:

'If you feel that I intrude on you I earnestly ask you to forgive me; but I think that the years between your age and mine as well as my feeling towards the great obligation which I owe you will plead for excuse. There is something I would like to say to you, sir; but I suppose I must not without your permission. May I have it?'

'If you wish, sir. I can at least hear it.'

The old man bowed and went on:

'I could not but notice that you have some great grief bearing upon you; and from one thing or another — I can tell you the data if you wish me to do so — I have come to the conclusion that you are leaving your native land because of it.' Here Harold, wakened to amazement by the readiness with which his secret had been divined, said quickly, rather as an exclamation than interrogation:

‘How on earth did you know that!’ His companion, taking it as a query, answered:

‘Sir, at your age and with your strength life should be a joy; and yet you are sad: Companionship should be a pleasure; yet you prefer solitude. That you are brave and unselfish I know; I have reason, thank God! to know it. That you are kindly and tolerant is apparent from your bearing to my little child this morning; as well as your goodness of last night, the remembrance of which her mother and I will bear to our graves; and to me now. I have not lived all these years without having had trouble in my own heart; and although the happiness of late years has made it dim, my gratitude to you who are so sad brings it all back to me.’ He bowed, and Harold, wishing to avoid speaking of his sorrow, said:

‘You are quite right so far as I have a sorrow; and it is because of it I have turned my back on home. Let it rest at that!’ His companion bowed gravely and went on.

‘I take it that you are going to begin life afresh in the new country. In such case I have a proposition to make. I have a large business; a business so large that I am unable to manage it all myself. I was intending that when I arrived at home I would set about finding a partner. The man I want is not an ordinary man. He must have brains and strength and daring.’ He paused. Harold felt what was coming, but realised, as he jumped at the conclusion, that it would not do for him to take for granted that he was the man sought. He waited; Mr. Stonehouse went on:

‘As to brains, I am prepared to take the existence of such on my own judgment. I have been reading men, and in this aspect specially, all my life. The man I have thought of has brains. I am satisfied of that, without proof. I have proof of the other qualities.’ He paused again; as Harold said nothing he continued in a manner ill at ease:

'My difficulty is to make the proposal to the man I want. It is so difficult to talk business to a man to whom you under great obligation; to whom you owe everything. He might take a friendly overture ill.' There was but one thing to be said and Harold said it. His heart warmed to the kindly old man and he wished to spare him pain; even if he could not accept him proposition:

'He couldn't take it ill; unless he was an awful bounder.'

'It was you I thought of!'

'I thought so much, sir;' said Harold after a pause, 'and I thank you earnestly and honestly. But it is impossible.'

'Oh, my dear sir!' said the other, chagrined as well as surprised. 'Think again! It is really worth your while to think of it, no matter what your ultimate decision may be!'

Harold shook his head. There was a long silence. The old man wished to give his companion time to think; and indeed he thought that Harold was weighing the proposition in his mind. As for Harold, he was thinking how best he could make his absolute refusal inoffensive. He must, he felt, give some reason; and his thoughts were bent on how much of the truth he could safely give without endangering his secret. Therefore he spoke at last in general terms:

'I can only ask you, sir, to bear with me and to believe that I am very truly and sincerely grateful to you for your trust. But the fact is, I cannot go anywhere amongst people. Of course you understand that I am speaking in confidence; to you alone and to none other?'

'Absolutely!' said Mr. Stonehouse gravely. Harold went on:

'I must be alone. I can only bear to see people on this ship because it is a necessary way to solitude.'

'You "cannot go anywhere amongst people"! Pardon me. I don't wish to be unduly inquisitive; but on my word I fail to understand!' Harold was in a great difficulty. Common courtesy alone forbade that he should leave the matter where it was; and in addition both the magnificently generous offer which had been made to him, and the way in which accident had thrown him to such close intimacy with Pearl's family, required that he should be at least fairly frank. At last in a sort of cold desperation he said:

'I cannot meet anyone . . . There it something that happened . . . Something I did . . . Nothing can make it right . . . All I can do is to lose myself in the wildest, grimmest, wilderness in the world; and fight my pain . . . my shame . . . !'

A long silence. Then the old man's voice came clear and sweet, something like music, in the shelter from the storm:

'But perhaps time may mend things. God is very good . . . !' Harold answered out of the bitterness of his heart. He felt that his words were laden with an anger which he did not feel, but he did not see his way to alter them:

'Nothing can mend this thing! It is at the farthest point of evil; and there is no going on or coming back. Nothing can wipe out what is done; what is past!'

Again silence, and again the strong, gentle voice:

'God can do much! Oh my dear young friend, you who have been such a friend to me and mine, think of this.'

'God Himself can do nothing here! It is done! And that is the end!' He turned his head; it was all he could do to keep from groaning. The old man's voice vibrated with earnest conviction as he spoke:

'You are young and strong and brave! Your heart is noble! You can think quickly in moments of peril; therefore your brain is sound and alert. Now, may I ask you a favour? it is not much. Only that you will listen, without interruption, to what, if I have your permission, I am going to say. Do not ask me anything; do not deny; do not interrupt! Only listen! May I ask this?'

'By all means! It is not much!' he almost felt like smiling as he spoke. Mr. Stonehouse, after a short pause, as if arranging his thoughts, spoke:

'Let me tell you what I am. I began life with nothing but a fair education such as all our American boys get. But from a good mother I got an idea that to be honest was the best of all things; from a strenuous father, who, however, could not do well for himself, I learned application to work and how best to use and exercise such powers as were in me. From the start things prospered with me. Men who knew me trusted me; some came with offers to share in my enterprise. Thus I had command of what capital I could use; I was able to undertake great works and to carry them through. Fortune kept growing and growing; for as I got wealthier I found newer and larger and more productive uses for my money. And in all my work I can say before God I never willingly wronged any man. I am proud to be able to say that my name stands good wherever it has been used. It may seem egotistical that I say such things of myself. It may seem bad taste; but I speak because I have a motive in so doing. I want you to understand at the outset that in my own country, wherever I am known and in my own work, my name is a strength.'

He paused a while. Harold sat still; he knew that such man would not, could not, speak in such a way without a strong motive; and to learn that motive he waited.

'When you were in the water making what headway you could in that awful sea — when my little child's life hung in the balance, and the anguish of my wife's heart nearly tore my heart in two, I said to myself, "If we had a son I should wish him to be like that." I meant it then, and I mean it now! Come to me as you are! Faults, and past, and all. Forget the past! Whatever it was we will together try to wipe it out. Much may be done in restoring where there has been any wrong-doing. Take my name as your own. It will protect you from the result of what ever has been, and give you an opportunity to find your place again. You are not bad in heart I know. Whatever you have done has not been from base motives. Few of us are spotless as to facts. You and I will show ourselves — for unless God wills to the opposite we shall confide in none other — that a strong, brave man may win back all that was lost. Let me call you by my name and hold you as the son of my heart; and it will be a joy and pleasure to my declining years.'

As he had spoken, Harold's thought's had at first followed in some wonderment. But gradually, as his noble purpose unfolded, based as it was on a misconception as to the misdoing of which he himself had spoken, he had been almost stricken dumb. At the first realisation of what was intended he could not have spoken had he tried; but at the end he had regained his thoughts and his voice. There was still wonderment in it, as realising from the long pause that the old man had completed his suggestion, he spoke:

'If I understand aright you are offering me your name! Offering to share your honour with me. With me, whom, if again I understand, you take as having committed some crime?'

'I inferred from what you said and from your sadness, your desire to shun your kind, that there was, if not a crime, some fault which needed expiation.'

'But your honour, sir; your honour!' There was a proud look in the old man’s eyes as he said quietly:

‘It was my desire, is my desire, to share with you what I have that is best; and that, I take it, is not the least valuable of my possessions, such as they are! And why not? You have given to me all that makes life sweet; without which it would be unbearable. That child who came to my wife and me when I was old and she had passed her youth is all in all to us both. Had your strength and courage been for barter in the moments when my child was quivering between life and death, I would have cheerfully purchased them with not half but all! Sir, I should have given my soul! I can say this now, for gratitude is above all barter; and surely it is allowed to a father to show gratitude for the life of his child!’

This great-hearted generosity touched Harold to the quick. He could hardly speak for a few minutes. Then instinctively grasping the old man’s hand he said:

‘You overwhelm me. Such noble trust and generosity as you have shown me demands a return of trust. But I must think! Will you remain here and let me return to you in a little while?’

He rose quickly and slipped down the iron ladder, passing into the darkness and the mist and the flying spray.

CHAPTER XXVII — AGE'S WISDOM

Harold went to and fro on the deserted deck. All at once the course he had to pursue opened out before him. He was aware that what the noble-minded old man offered him was fortune, great fortune in any part of the world. He would have to be refused, but the refusal should be gently done. He, believing that the other had done something very wrong, had still offered to share with him his name, his honour. Such confidence demanded full confidence in return; the unwritten laws which governed the men amongst whom he had been brought up required it.

And the shape that confidence should take? He must first disabuse his new friend's mind of criminal or unworthy cause for his going away. For the sake of his own name and that of his dead father that should be done. Then he would have to suggest the real cause . . . He would in this have to trust Mr. Stonehouse's honour for secrecy. But he was worthy of trust. He would, of course, give no name, no clue; but he would put things generally in a way that he could understand.

When his mind was so far made up he wanted to finish the matter, so he turned to the wheelhouse and climbed the ladder again. It was not till he sat in the shelter by his companion that he became aware that he had become wet with the spray. The old man wishing to help him in his embarrassment said:

'Well?' Harold began at once; the straightforward habit of his life stood to him now:

'Let me say first, sir, what will I know give you pleasure.' The old man extended his hand; he had been hoping for acceptance, and this seemed like it. Harold laid his hand on it for an instant only, and then raised it as if to say ‘Wait’:

‘You have been so good to me, so nobly generous in your wishes that I feel I owe you a certain confidence. But as it concerns not myself alone I will ask that it be kept a secret between us two. Not to be told to any other; not even your wife!’

‘I will hold your secret sacred. Even from my wife; the first secret I shall have ever kept from her.’

‘First, then, let me say, and this is what I know will rejoice you, that I am not leaving home and country because of any crime I have committed; not from any offence against God or man, or law. Thank God! I am free from such. I have always tried to live uprightly . . . ‘ Here a burst of pain overcame him, and with a dry sob he added: ‘And that is what makes the terrible unfairness of it all!’

The old man laid a kindly hand on his shoulder and kept it there for a few moments.

‘My poor boy! My poor boy!’ was all he said. Harold shook himself as if to dislodge the bitter thoughts. Mastering himself he went on:

‘There was a lady with whom I was very much thrown in contact since we were children. Her father was my father’s friend. My friend too, God knows; for almost with his dying breath he gave sanction to my marrying his daughter, if it should ever be that she should care for me in that way. But he wished me to wait, and, till she was old enough to choose, to leave her free. For she is several years younger than I am; and I am not very old yet — except in heart! All this, you understand, was said in private to me; none other knew it. None knew of it even till this moment when I tell you that such a thing has been.’ He paused; the other said:

‘Believe me that I value your confidence, beyond all words!’

Harold felt already the good effects of being able to speak of his pent-up trouble. Already this freedom from the nightmare loneliness of his own thoughts seemed to be freeing his very soul.

‘I honestly kept to his wishes. Before God, I did! No man who loved a woman, honoured her, worshipped her, could have been more scrupulously careful as to leaving her free. What it was to me to so hold myself no one knows; no one ever will know. For I loved her, do love her, with every nerve and fibre of my heart. All our lives we had been friends; and I believed we loved and trusted each other. But . . . but then there came a day when I found by chance that a great trouble threatened her. Not from anything wrong that she had done; but from something perhaps foolish, harmlessly foolish except that she did not know . . . ‘ He stopped suddenly, fearing he might have said overmuch of Stephen’s side of the affair. ‘When I came to her aid, however, meaning the best, and as single-minded as a man can be, she misunderstood my words, my meaning, my very coming; and she said things which cannot be unsaid. Things . . . matters were so fixed that I could not explain; and I had to listen. She said things that I did not believe she could have said to me, to anyone. Things that I did not think she could have thought . . . I dare say she was right in some ways. I suppose I bungled in my desire to be unselfish. What she said came to me in new lights upon what I had done . . . But anyhow her statements were such that I felt I could not, should not, remain. My very presence must have been a trouble to her hereafter. There was nothing for it but to come away. There was no place for me! No hope for me! There is none on this side of the grave! . . . For I love her still, more than ever. I honour and worship her still, and ever will, and ever must! . . . I am content to forego my own happiness; but I feel there is a danger to her from what has been. That there is and must be to her unhappiness even from the fact that it was I who was the object of her wrath; and this adds to my woe. Worst of all is . . . the thought and the memory that she should have done so; she who . . . she . . .'

He turned away overcome and hid his face in his hands. The old man sat still; he knew that at such a moment silence is the best form of sympathy. But his heart glowed; the wisdom of his years told him that he had heard as yet of no absolute bar to his friend's ultimate happiness.

'I am rejoiced, my dear boy, at what you tell me of your own conduct. It would have made no difference to me had it been otherwise. But it would have meant a harder and longer climb back to the place you should hold. But it really seems that nothing is so hopeless as you think. Believe me, my dear young friend who are now as a son to my heart, that there will be bright days for you yet . . . ' He paused a moment, but mastering himself went on in a quiet voice:

'I think you are wise to go away. In the solitudes and in danger things that are little in reality will find their true perspective; and things that are worthy will appear in their constant majesty.'

He stood, and laying once again his hand on the young man's shoulder said:

'I recognise that I — that we, for my wife and little girl would be at one with me in my wish, did they know of it, must not keep you from your purpose of fighting out your trouble alone. Every man, as the Scotch proverb says, must "dree his own weird." I shall not, I must not, ask you for any promise; but I trust that if ever you do come back you will make us all glad by seeing you. And remember that what I said of myself and of all I have — all — holds good so long as I shall live!’

Before Harold could reply he had slipped down the ladder and was gone.

During the rest of the voyage, with the exception of one occasion, he did not allude to the subject again by word or implication, and Harold was grateful to him for it.

On the night before Fire Island should be sighted Harold was in the bow of the great ship looking out with eyes in which gleamed no hope. To him came through the darkness Mr. Stonehouse. He heard the footsteps and knew them; so with the instinct of courtesy, knowing that his friend would not intrude on his solitude without purpose, he turned and met him. When the American stood beside him he said, studiously avoiding looking at his companion:

‘This is the last night we shall be together, and, if I may, there is one thing I would like to say to you.’

‘Say all you like, sir,’ said Harold as heartily as he could, ‘I am sure it is well meant; and for that at any rate I shall be grateful to you.’

‘You will yet be grateful, I think!’ he answered gravely. ‘When it comes back to you in loneliness and solitude you will, I believe, think it worth being grateful for. I don’t mean that you will be grateful to me, but for the thing itself. I speak out of the wisdom of many years. At your time of life the knowledge cannot come from observation. It may my poor boy, come through pain; and if what I think is correct you will even in due time be grateful to the pain which left such golden residuum.’ He paused, and Harold grew interested. There was something in the old man’s manner which presaged a truth; he, at least, believed it. So the young man listened at first with his ears; and as the other spoke, his heart listened too:

‘Young men are apt to think somewhat wrongly of women they love and respect. We are apt to think that such women are of a different clay from ourselves. Nay! that they are not compact of clay at all, but of some faultless, flawless material which the Almighty keeps for such fine work. It is only in middle age that men — except scamps, who learn this bad side of knowledge young — realise that women are human beings like themselves. It may be, you know, that you may have misjudged this young lady! That you have not made sufficient allowance for her youth, her nature, even the circumstances under which she spoke. You have told me that she was in some deep grief or trouble. May it not have been that this in itself unnerved her, distorted her views, aroused her passion till all within and around was tinged with the jaundice of her concern, her humiliation — whatever it was that destroyed for the time that normal self which you had known so long. May it not have been that her bitterest memory even since may be of the speaking of these very words which sent you out into the wide world to hide yourself from men. I have thought, waking and sleeping, of your position ever since you honoured me with your confidence; and with every hour the conviction has strengthened in me that there is a way out of this situation which sends a man like you into solitude with a heart hopeless and full of pain; and which leaves her perhaps in greater pain, for she has not like you the complete sense of innocence. But at present there is no way out but through time and thought. Whatever may be her ideas or wishes she is powerless. She does not know your thoughts, no matter how she may guess at them. She does not know where you are or how to reach you, no matter how complete her penitence may be. And oh! my dear young friend, remember that you are a strong man, and she is a woman. Only a woman in her passion and her weakness after all. Think this all over, my poor boy! You will have time and opportunity where you are going. God help you to judge wisely!' After a pause of a few seconds he said abruptly: 'Good night!' and moved quickly away.

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When the time for parting came Pearl was inconsolable. Not knowing any reason why The Man should not do as she wished she was persistent in her petitions to Harold that he should come with her, and to her father and mother that they should induce him to do so. Mrs. Stonehouse would have wished him to join them if only for a time. Her husband, unable to give any hint without betraying confidence, had to content himself with trying to appease his little daughter by vague hopes rather than promises that her friend would join them at some other time.

When the *Scoriac* was warped at the pier there was a tendency on the part of the passengers to give Harold a sort of public send-off; but becoming aware of it he hurried down the gangway without waiting. Having only hand luggage, for he was to get his equipment in New York, he had cleared and passed the ring of customs officers before the most expeditious of the other passengers had collected their baggage. He had said good-bye to the Stonehouses in their own cabin. Pearl had been so much affected at saying good-bye, and his heart had so warmed to her, that at last he had said impulsively:

'Don't cry, darling. If I am spared I shall come back to you within three years. Perhaps I will write before then; but there are not many post-offices where I am going to!'

Children are easily satisfied. Their trust makes a promise a real thing; and its acceptance is the beginning of satisfaction. But for weeks after the parting she had often fits of deep depression, and at such times her tears always flowed. She took note of the date, and there was never a day that she did not think of and sigh for The Man.

And The Man, away in the wilds of Alaska, was feeling, day by day and hour by hour, the chastening and purifying influences of the wilderness. Hot passions cooled before the breath of the snowfield and the glacier. The moaning of a tortured spirit was lost in the roar of the avalanche and the scream of the cyclone. Pale sorrow and cold despair were warmed and quickened by the fierce sunlight which came suddenly and stayed only long enough to vitalise all nature.

And as the first step to understanding, The Man forgot himself.

CHAPTER XXVIII — DE LANNOY

Two years!

Not much to look back upon, but a world to look forward to. To Stephen, dowered though she was with rare personal gifts and with wealth and position accorded to but few, the hours of waiting were longer than the years that were past. Yet the time had new and startling incidents for her. Towards Christmas in the second year the Boer war had reached its climax of evil. As the news of disaster after disaster was flashed through the cable she like others felt appalled at the sacrifices that were being exacted by the God of War.

One day she casually read in The Times that the Earl de Lannoy had died in his London mansion, and further learned that he had never recovered from the shock of hearing that his two sons and his nephew had been killed. The paragraph concluded: "By his death the title passes to a distant relative. The new Lord de Lannoy is at present in India with his regiment, the 35th or 'Grey' Hussars, of which he is Colonel." She gave the matter a more than passing thought, for it was sad to find a whole family thus wiped out at a blow.

Early in February she received a telegram from her London solicitor saying that he wished to see her on an important matter. Her answer was: "Come at once"; and at tea-time Mr. Copleston arrived. He was an old friend and she greeted him warmly. She was a little chilled when he answered with what seemed unusual deference:

'I thank your Ladyship for your kindness!' She raised her eyebrows but made no comment: she was learning to be silent under surprise. When she had handed the old gentleman his tea she said:

‘My aunt has chosen to remain away, thinking that you might wish to see me privately. But I take it that there is nothing which she may not share. I have no secrets from her.’

He rubbed his hands genially as he replied:

‘Not at all; not at all! I should like her to be present. It will, I am sure, be a delight to us all.’

Again raised eyebrows; again silence on the subject. When a servant answered her bell she told him to ask Miss Rowly if she would kindly join them.

Aunt Laetitia and the solicitor were old cronies, and their greeting was most friendly. When the old gentlewoman had seated herself and taken her cup of tea, Mr. Copleston said to Stephen, with a sort of pomposity:

‘I have to announce your succession to the Earldom de Lannoy!’

Stephen sat quite still. She knew the news was true; Mr. Copleston was not one who would jest on a business subject, and too accurate a lawyer to make an error in a matter of fact. But the fact did not seem to touch her. It was not that she was indifferent to it; few women could hear such news without a thrill. Mr. Copleston seemed at a loss. Miss Rowly rose and quietly kissed her, and saying simply, ‘God bless you, my dear!’ went back to her seat.

Realising that Mr. Copleston expected some acknowledgment, Stephen held out her hand to him and said quietly:

‘Thank you!’

After a long pause she added quietly:

‘Now, won’t you tell us about it? I am in absolute ignorance; and don’t understand.’

‘I had better not burden you, at first, with too many details, which can come later; but give you a rough survey of the situation.’

‘Your title of Countess de Lannoy comes to you through your ancestor Isobel, third and youngest daughter of the sixth Earl; Messrs Collinbrae and Jackson, knowing that my firm acted for your family, communicated with us. Lest there should be any error we followed most carefully every descendant and every branch of the family, for we thought it best not to communicate with you till your right of inheritance was beyond dispute. We arrived independently at the same result as Messrs. Collinbrae and Jackson. There is absolutely no doubt whatever of your claim. You will petition the Crown, and on reference to the House of Lords the Committee for Privileges will admit your right. May I offer my congratulations, Lady de Lannoy on your acquisition? By the way, I may say that all the estates of the Earldom, which have been from the first kept in strict entail, go with the title de Lannoy.’

During the recital Stephen was conscious of a sort of bitter comment on the tendencies of good fortune.

‘Too late! too late!’ something seemed to whisper, ‘what delight it would have been had Father inherited . . . If Harold had not gone . . . !’ All the natural joy seemed to vanish, as bubbles break into empty air.

To Aunt Laetitia the new title was a source of pride and joy, far greater than would have been the case had it come to herself. She had for so many years longed for new honours for Stephen that she had almost come to regard them as a right whose coming should not be too long delayed. Miss Rowly had never been to Lannoy; and, indeed, she knew personally nothing of the county Angleshire in which it was situated. She was naturally anxious to see the new domain; but kept her feeling concealed during the months that elapsed until Stephen’s right had been conceded by the Committee for Privileges. But after that her impatience became manifest to Stephen, who said one day in a teasing, caressing way, as was sometimes her wont:

‘Why, Auntie, what a hurry you are in! Lannoy will keep, won’t it?’

‘Oh, my dear,’ she replied, shaking her head, ‘I can understand your own reticence, for you don’t want to seem greedy and in a hurry about your new possessions. But when people come to my age there’s no time to waste. I feel I would not have complete material for happiness in the World-to-come, if there were not a remembrance of my darling in her new home!’

Stephen was much touched; she said impulsively:

‘We shall go to-morrow, Auntie. No! Let us go to-day. You shall not wait an hour that I can help!’ She ran to the bell; but before her hand was on the cord the other said:

‘Not yet! Stephen dear. It would flurry me to start all at once; to-morrow will be time enough. And that will give you time to send word so that they will be prepared for your coming.’

How often do we look for that to-morrow which never comes? How often do we find that its looked-for rosy tints are none other than the gloom-laden grey of the present?

Before the morrow’s sun was high in the heavens Stephen was hurriedly summoned to her aunt’s bedside. She lay calm and peaceful; but one side of her face was alive and the other seemingly dead. In the night a paralytic stroke had seized her. The doctors said she might in time recover a little, but she would never be her old active self again. She herself, with much painful effort, managed to convey to Stephen that she knew the end was near. Stephen, knowing the wish of her heart and thinking that it might do her good to gratify her wish, asked if she should arrange that she be brought to Lannoy. Feebly and slowly, word by word, she managed to convey her idea.

‘Not now, dear one. I shall see it all in time! — Soon! And I shall understand and rejoice!’ For a long time she lay still, holding with her right hand, which was not paralysed, the other’s hand. Then she murmured:

‘You will find happiness there!’ She said no more; but seemed to sleep.

From that sleep she never woke, but faded slowly, softly away.

Stephen was broken-hearted. Now, indeed, she felt alone and desolate. All were gone. Father, uncle, aunt! — And Harold. The kingdoms of the Earth which lay at her feet were of no account. One hour of the dead or departed, any of them, back again were worth them all!

Normanstand was now too utterly lonely to be endurable; so Stephen determined to go, for a time at any rate, to Lannoy. She was becoming accustomed to be called ‘my lady’ and ‘your ladyship,’ and the new loneness made her feel better prepared to take her place amongst new surroundings.

In addition, there was another spur to her going. Leonard Everard, knowing of her absolute loneliness, and feeling that in it was a possibility of renewing his old status, was beginning to make himself apparent. He had learned by experience a certain wisdom, and did not put himself forward obtrusively. But whenever they met he looked at her so meekly and so lovingly that it brought remembrances which came with blushes. So, all at once, without giving time for the news to permeate through the neighbourhood, she took her way to Lannoy with a few servants.

Stephen's life had hitherto been spent inland. She had of course now and again been for short periods to various places; but the wonder of the sea as a constant companion had been practically unknown to her.

Now at her new home its full splendour burst upon her; and so impressed itself upon her that new life seemed to open.

Lannoy was on the north-eastern coast, the castle standing at the base of a wide promontory stretching far into the North Sea. From the coast the land sloped upward to a great rolling ridge. The outlook seaward was over a mighty expanse of green sward, dotted here and there with woods and isolated clumps of trees which grew fewer and smaller as the rigour of the northern sea was borne upon them by the easterly gales.

The coast was a wild and lonely one. No habitation other than an isolated fisher's cottage was to be seen between the little fishing-port at the northern curve away to the south, where beyond a waste of sandhills and strand another tiny fishing-village nestled under a high cliff, sheltering it from northerly wind. For centuries the lords of Lannoy had kept their magnificent prospect to themselves; and though they had treated their farmers and cottagers well, none had ever been allowed to settle in the great park to seaward of the castle.

From the terrace of the castle only than one building, other than the cottage on the headland, could be seen. Far off on the very crest of the ridge was the tower of an old windmill.

CHAPTER XXIX — THE SILVER LADY

When it was known that Lady de Lannoy had come to Lannoy there was a prompt rush of such callers as the county afforded. Stephen, however, did not wish to see anyone just at present. Partly to avoid the chance meeting with strangers, and partly because she enjoyed and benefited by the exercise, she was much away from home every day. Sometimes, attended only by a groom, she rode long distances north or south along the coast; or up over the ridge behind the castle and far inland along the shaded roads through the woods; or over bleak wind-swept stretches of moorland. Sometimes she would walk, all alone, far down to the sea-road, and would sit for hours on the shore or high up on some little rocky headland where she could enjoy the luxury of solitude.

Now and again in her journeyings she made friends, most of them humble ones. She was so great a lady in her station that she could be familiar without seeming to condescend. The fishermen of the little ports to north and south came to know her, and to look gladly for her coming. Their goodwives had for her always a willing curtsy and a ready smile. As for the children, they looked on her with admiration and love, tempered with awe. She was so gentle with them, so ready to share their pleasures and interests, that after a while they came to regard her as some strange embodiment of Fairydom and Dreamland. Many a little heart was made glad by the arrival of some item of delight from the Castle; and the hearts of the sick seemed never to hope, or their eyes to look, in vain.

One friend she made who became very dear and of great import. Often she had looked up at the old windmill on the crest of the ridge and wondered who inhabited it; for that some one lived in it, or close by, was shown at times by the drifting smoke. One day she made up her mind to go and see for herself. She had a fancy not to ask anyone about it. The place was a little item of mystery; and as such to be treasured and exploited, and in due course explored. The mill itself was picturesque, and the detail at closer acquaintance sustained the far-off impression. The roadway forked on the near side of the mill, reuniting again the further side, so that the place made a sort of island — mill, out-offices and garden. As the mill was on the very top of the ridge the garden which lay seawards was sheltered by the building from the west, and from the east by a thick hedge of thorn and privet, which quite hid it from the roadway. Stephen took the lower road. Finding no entrance save a locked wooden door she followed round to the western side, where the business side of the mill had been. It was all still now and silent, and that it had long fallen into disuse was shown by the grey faded look of everything. Grass, green and luxuriant, grew untrodden between the cobblestones with which the yard was paved. There was a sort of old-world quietude about everything which greatly appealed to Stephen.

Stephen dismounted and walked round the yard admiring everything. She did not feel as if intruding; for the gateway was wide open.

A low door in the base of the mill tower opened, and a maid appeared, a demure pretty little thing of sixteen or seventeen years, dressed in a prim strait dress and an old-fashioned Puritan cap. Seeing a stranger, she made an ejaculation and drew back hastily. Stephen called out to her:

‘Don’t be afraid, little girl! Will you kindly tell me who lives here?’ The answer came with some hesitation:

‘Sister Ruth.’

‘And who is Sister Ruth?’ The question came instinctively and without premeditation. The maid, embarrassed, held hard to the half-open door and shifted from foot to foot uneasily.

‘I don’t know!’ she said at last. ‘Only Sister Ruth, I suppose!’ It was manifest that the matter had never afforded her anything in the nature of a problem. There was an embarrassing silence. Stephen did not wish to seem, or even to be, prying; but her curiosity was aroused. What manner of woman was this who lived so manifestly alone, and who had but a Christian name! Stephen, however, had all her life been accustomed to dominance, and at Normanstand and Norwood had made many acquaintances amongst her poorer neighbours. She was just about to ask if she might see Sister Ruth, when behind the maid in the dark of the low passage-way appeared the tall, slim figure of a silver woman. Truly a silver woman! The first flash of Stephen’s thought was correct. White-haired, white-faced, white-capped, white-kerchiefed; in a plain-cut dress of light-grey silk, without adornment of any kind. The whole ensemble was as a piece of old silver. The lines of her face were very dignified, very sweet, very beautiful. Stephen felt at once that she was in the presence of no common woman. She looked an admiration which all her Quaker garments could not forbid the other to feel. She was not the first to speak; in such a noble presence the dignity of Stephen’s youth imperatively demanded silence, if not humility. So she waited. The Silver Lady, for so Stephen ever after held her in her mind, said quietly, but with manifest welcome:

‘Didst thou wish to see me? Wilt thou come in?’ Stephen answered frankly:

‘I should like to come in; if you will not think me rude. The fact is, I was struck when riding by with the beautiful situation of the mill. I thought it was only an old mill till I saw the garden hedges; and I came round to ask if I might go in.' The Silver Lady came forward at a pace that by itself expressed warmth as she said heartily:

'Indeed thou mayest. Stay! it is tea-time. Let us put thy horse in one of the sheds; there is no man here at present to do it. Then thou shalt come with me and see my beautiful view!' She was about to take the horse herself, but Stephen forestalled her with a quick: 'No, no! pray let me. I am quite accustomed.' She led the horse to a shed, and having looped the rein over a hook, patted him and ran back. The Silver Lady gave her a hand, and they entered the dark passage together.

Stephen was thinking if she ought to begin by telling her name. But the Haroun al Raschid feeling for adventure incognito is an innate principle of the sons of men. It was seldom indeed that her life had afforded her such an opportunity.

The Silver Lady on her own part also wished for silence, as she looked for the effect on her companion when the glory of the view should break upon her. When they had climbed the winding stone stair, which led up some twenty feet, there was a low wide landing with the remains of the main shaft of the mill machinery running through it. From one side rose a stone stair curving with the outer wall of the mill tower and guarded by a heavy iron rail. A dozen steps there were, and then a landing a couple of yards square; then a deep doorway cut in the thickness of the wall, round which the winding stair continued.

The Silver Lady, who had led the way, threw open the door, and motioned to her guest to enter. Stephen stood for a few moments, surprised as well as delighted, for the room before her as not like anything which she had ever seen or thought of.

It was a section of almost the whole tower, and was of considerable size, for the machinery and even the inner shaft had been removed. East and south and west the wall had been partially cut away so that great wide windows nearly the full height of the room showed the magnificent panorama. In the depths of the ample windows were little cloistered nooks where one might with a feeling of super-solitude be away from and above the world.

The room was beautifully furnished and everywhere were flowers, with leaves and sprays and branches where possible.

Even from where she stood in the doorway Stephen had a bird's-eye view of the whole countryside; not only of the coast, with which she was already familiar, and on which her windows at the Castle looked, but to the south and west, which the hill rising steep behind the castle and to southward shut out.

The Silver Lady could not but notice her guest's genuine admiration.

'Thou likest my room and my view. There is no use asking thee, I see thou dost!' Stephen answered with a little gasp.

'I think it is the quaintest and most beautiful place I have ever seen!'

'I am so glad thou likest it. I have lived here for nearly forty years; and they have been years of unutterable peace and earthly happiness! And now, thou wilt have some tea!'

Stephen left the mill that afternoon with a warmth of heart that she had been a stranger to for many a day. The two women had accepted each other simply. 'I am called Ruth,' said the Silver Lady. 'And I am Stephen,' said the Countess de Lannoy in reply. And that was all; neither had any clue to the other's identity. Stephen felt that some story lay behind that calm, sweet personality;

much sorrow goes to the making of fearless quietude. The Quaker lady moved so little out of her own environment that she did not even suspect the identity of her visitor. All that she knew of change was a notice from the solicitor to the estate that, as the headship had lapsed into another branch of the possessing family, she must be prepared, if necessary, to vacate her tenancy, which was one ‘at will.’

It was not long before Stephen availed herself of the permission to come again. This time she made up her mind to tell who she was, lest the concealment of her identity might lead to awkwardness. At that meeting friendship became union.

The natures of the two women expanded to each other; and after a very few meetings there was established between them a rare confidence. Even the personal austerity of Quakerdom, or the state and estate of the peeress, could not come between. Their friendship seemed to be for the life of one. To the other it would be a memory.

The Silver Lady never left the chosen routine of her own life. Whatever was the reason of her giving up the world, she kept it to herself; and Stephen respected her reticence as much as she did her confidence.

It had become a habit, early in their friendship, for Stephen to ride or walk over to the windmill in the dusk of the evening when she felt especially lonely. On one such occasion she pushed open the outer door, which was never shut, and took her way up the stone stair. She knew she would find her friend seated in the window with hands folded on lap, looking out into the silent dusk with that absorbed understanding of things which is holier than reverence, and spiritually more active than conscious prayer.

She tapped the door lightly, and stepped into the room.

With a glad exclamation, which coming through her habitual sedateness showed how much she loved the young girl, Sister Ruth started to her feet. There was something of such truth in the note she had sounded, that the lonely girl's heart went out to her in abandoned fulness. She held out her arms; and, as she came close to the other, fell rather than sank at her feet. The elder woman recognised, and knew. She made no effort to restrain her; but sinking back into her own seat laid the girl's head in her lap, and held her hands close against her breast.

'Tell me,' she whispered. 'Won't you tell me, dear child, what troubles you? Tell me! dear. It may bring peace!'

'Oh, I am miserable, miserable, miserable!' moaned Stephen in a low voice whose despair made the other's heart grow cold. The Silver Lady knew that here golden silence was the best of help; holding close the other's hands, she waited. Stephen's breast began to heave; with an impulsive motion she drew away her hands and put them before her burning face, which she pressed lower still on the other's lap. Sister Ruth knew that the trouble, whatever it was, was about to find a voice. And then came in a low shuddering whisper a voice muffled in the folds of the dress:

'I killed a man!'

In all her life the Silver Lady had never been so startled or so shocked. She had grown so to love the bright, brilliant young girl that the whispered confession cut through the silence of the dusk as a shriek of murder goes through the silent gloom of night. Her hands flew wide from her breast, and the convulsive shudder which shook her all in an instant woke Stephen through all her own deep emotion to the instinct of protection of the other. The girl looked up, shaking her head, and said with a sadness which stilled all the other's fear:

'Ah! Don't be frightened! It is not murder that I tell you of.

Perhaps if it were, the thought would be easier to bear! He would have been hurt less if it had been only his body that I slew. Well I know now that his life would have been freely given if I wished it; if it had been for my good. But it was the best of him that I killed; his soul. His noble, loving, trusting, unselfish soul. The bravest and truest soul that ever had place in a man's breast! . . . ' Her speaking ended with a sob; her body sank lower.

Sister Ruth's heart began to beat more freely. She understood now, and all the womanhood, all the wifehood, motherhood suppressed for a lifetime, awoke to the woman's need. Gently she stroked the beautiful head that lay so meekly on her lap; and as the girl sobbed with but little appearance of abatement, she said to her softly:

'Tell me, dear child. Tell me all about it! See! we are alone together. Thou and I; and God! In God's dusk; with only the silent land and sea before us! Won't thou trust me, dear one, and speak!'

And then, as the shadows fell, and far-off lights at sea began to twinkle over the waste of waters, Stephen found voice and told without reserve the secret of her shame and her remorse.

At last, when her broken voice had trailed away into gentle catchings of the breath, the older woman, knowing that the time come for comfort, took her in her strong arms, holding her face wet against her own, their tears mingling.

'Cry on, dear heart!' she said as she kissed her. 'Cry on! It will do thee good!' She was startled once again as the other seemed for an instant to grow rigid in her arms, and raising her hands cried out in a burst of almost hysterical passion:

'Cry! cry! Oh my God! my God!' Then becoming conscious of her wet face she seemed to become in an instant all limp, and sank on her knees again. There was so different a note in her voice that the other's heart leaped as she heard her say:

'God be thanked for these tears! Oh, thank God! Thank God!' Looking up she saw through the gloom the surprise in her companion's eyes and answered their query in words:

'Oh! you don't know! You can't know what it is to me! I have not cried since last I saw him pass from me in the wood!'

* * * * *

That time of confession seemed to have in some way cleared, purified and satisfied Stephen's soul. Life was now easier to bear. She was able to adapt herself, justifiably to the needs of her position; and all around her and dependent on her began to realise that amongst them was a controlling force, far-reaching sympathy, and a dominant resolution that made for good.

She began to shake off the gloom of her sorrows and to take her place in her new high station. Friends there were in many, and quondam lovers by the score. Lovers of all sorts. Fortune-hunters there were be sure, not a few. But no need was there for baseness when the lady herself was so desirable; so young, so fair, so lovable. That she was of great estate and 'richly left' made all things possible to any man who had sufficient acquisitiveness, or a good conceit of himself. In a wide circle of country were many true-lovers who would have done aught to win her praise.

And so in the East the passing of the two years of silence and gloom seemed to be the winning of something brighter to follow.

CHAPTER XXX — THE LESSON OF THE WILDERNESS

In the West the two years flew. Time seemed to go faster there, because life was more strenuous. Harold, being mainly alone, found endless work always before him. From daylight to dark labour never ceased; and for his own part he never wished that it should. In the wilderness, and especially under such conditions as held in Northern Alaska, labour is not merely mechanical. Every hour of the day is fraught with danger in some new form, and the head has to play its part in the strife against nature. In such a life there is not much time for thinking or brooding.

At first, when the work and his surroundings were strange to him, Harold did many useless things and ran many unnecessary risks. But his knowledge grew with experience. Privations he had in plenty; and all the fibre of his body and the strength of his resolution and endurance were now and again taxed to their utmost. But with a man of his nature and race the breaking strain is high; and endurance and resolution are qualities which develop with practice.

Gradually his mind came back to normal level; he had won seemingly through the pain that shadowed him. Without anguish he could now think, remember, look forward. Then it was that the kindly wisdom of the American came back to him, and came to stay. He began to examine himself as to his own part of the unhappy transaction; and stray moments of wonderment came as to whether the fault may not, at the very base, have his own. He began to realise that it is insufficient in this strenuous world to watch and wait; to suppress one's self; to put aside, in the wish to benefit others, all the hopes, ambitions, cravings which make for personal gain.

Thus it was that Harold's thoughts, ever circling round Stephen, came back with increasing insistence to his duty towards her. He often thought, and with a bitter feeling against himself that it came too late, of the dying trust of her father:

'Guard her and cherish her, as if you were indeed my son and she your sister . . . If it should be that you and Stephen should find that there is another affection between you remember I sanction it. But give her time! I trust that to you! She is young, and the world is all before her. Let her choose . . . And be loyal to her, if it is another! It may be a hard task; but I trust you, Harold!'

Here he would groan, as all the anguish of the past would rush back upon him; and keenest of all would be the fear, suspicion, thought which grew towards belief, that he may have betrayed that trust. . . .

At first the side of this memory personal to his own happiness was faintly emphasised; the important side was of the duty to Stephen. But as time went on the other thought became a sort of corollary; a timid, halting, blushing thought which followed sheepishly, borne down by trembling hope. No matter what adventure came to him, the thought of neglected duty returned ever afresh. Once, when he lay sick for weeks in an Indian wigwam, the idea so grew with each day of the monotony, that when he was able to crawl out by himself into the sunshine he had almost made up his mind to start back for home.

Luck is a strange thing. It seems in some mysterious way to be the divine machinery for adjusting averages. Whatever may be the measure of happiness or unhappiness, good or evil, allotted to anyone, luck is the cause or means of counter-balancing so that the main result reaches the standard set.

From the time of Harold's illness Dame Fortune seemed to change her attitude to him. The fierce frown, nay! the malignant scowl, to which he had become accustomed, changed to a smile. Hitherto everything seemed to have gone wrong with him; but now all at once all seemed to go right. He grew strong and hardy again. Indeed, he seemed by contrast to his late helplessness to be so strong and hard that it looked as if that very illness had done him good instead of harm. Game was plentiful, and he never seemed to want. Everywhere he went there were traces of gold, as though by some instinct he was tracking it to its home. He did not value gold for its own sake; but he did for the ardour of the search. Harold was essentially a man, and as a man an adventurer. To such a man of such a race adventure is the very salt of existence.

The adventurer's instinct took with it the adventurer's judgment; Harold was not content with small results. Amidst the vast primeval forces there were, he felt, vast results of their prehistoric working; and he determined to find some of them. In such a quest, purpose is much. It was hardly any wonder, then, that in time Harold found himself alone in the midst of one of the great treasure-places of the world. Only labour was needed to take from the earth riches beyond the dreams of avarice. But that labour was no easy problem; great and difficult distance had to be overcome; secrecy must be observed, for even a whisper of the existence of such a place would bring a horde of desperadoes. But all these difficulties were at least sources of interest, if not in themselves pleasures. The new Harold, seemingly freshly created by a year of danger and strenuous toil, of self-examining and humiliation, of the realisation of duty, and — though he knew it not as yet — of the dawning of hope, found delight in the thought of dangers and difficulties to be overcome.

Having taken his bearings exactly so as to be safe in finding the place again, he took his specimens with him and set out to find the shortest and best route to the nearest port.

At length he came to the port and set quietly about finding men. This he did very carefully and very systematically. Finally, with the full complement, and with ample supply of stores, he started on his expedition to the new goldfields.

It is not purposed to set out here the extraordinary growth of Robinson City, for thus the mining camp soon became. Its history has long ago been told for all the world. In the early days, when everything had to be organised and protected, Harold worked like a giant, and with a system and energy which from the first established him as a master. But when the second year of his exile was coming to a close, and Robinson City was teeming with life and commerce, when banks and police and soldiers made life and property comparatively safe, he began to be restless again. This was not the life to which he had set himself. He had gone into the wilderness to be away from cities and from men; and here a city had sprung up around him and men claimed him as their chief. Moreover, with the restless feeling there began to come back to him the old thoughts and the old pain.

But he felt strong enough by this time to look forward in life as well as backward. With him now to think was to act; so much at least he had gained from his position of dominance in an upspringing city. He quietly consolidated such outlying interests as he had, placed the management of his great estate in the hands of a man he had learned to trust, and giving out that he was going to San Francisco to arrange some business, left Robinson City. He had already accumulated such a fortune that the world was before him in any way he might choose to take.

Knowing that at San Francisco, to which he had booked, he would have to run the gauntlet of certain of his friends and business connections, he made haste to leave the ship quietly at Portland, the first point she touched on her southern journey. Thence he got on the Canadian Pacific Line and took his way to Montreal.

What most arrested his attention, and in a very disconcerting way, were the glimpses of English life one sees reproduced so faithfully here and there in Canada. The whole of the past rushed back on him so overpoweringly that he was for the moment unnerved. The acute feeling of course soon became mitigated; but it was the beginning of a re-realisation of what had been, and which grew stronger with each mile as the train swept back eastward.

At first he tried to fight it; tried with all the resources of his strong nature. His mind was made up, he assured himself over and over again. The past was past, and what had been was no more to him than to any of the other passengers of the train. Destiny had long ago fulfilled itself. Stephen no doubt had by now found some one worthy of her and had married. In no dream, sleeping or waking, could he ever admit that she had married Leonard; that was the only gleam of comfort in what had grown to be remorse for his neglected duty.

And so it was that Harold An Wolf slowly drifted, though he knew it not, into something of the same intellectual position which had dominated him when he had started on his journeying and the sunset fell nightly on his despairing face. The life in the wilderness, and then in the dominance and masterdom of enterprise, had hardened and strengthened him into more self-reliant manhood, giving him greater forbearance and a more practical view of things.

When he took ship in the *Dominion*, a large cargo-boat with some passengers running to London, he had a vague purpose of visiting in secret Norcester, whence he could manage to find out how matters were at Normanstand. He would then, he felt, be in a better position to regulate his further movements. He knew that he had already a sufficient disguise in his great beard. He had nothing to fear from the tracing of him on his journey from Alaska or the interest of his fellow-passengers. He had all along been so fortunate as to be able to keep his identity concealed. The name John Robinson told nothing in itself, and the width of a whole great continent lay between him and the place of his fame. He was able to take his part freely amongst both the passengers and the officers. Even amongst the crew he soon came to be known; the men liked his geniality, and instinctively respected his enormous strength and his manifest force of character. Men who work and who know danger soon learn to recognise the forces which overcome both. And as sufficient time had not elapsed to impair his hardihood or lower his vast strength he was facile princeps. And so the crew acknowledged him; to them he was a born Captain whom to obey would be a natural duty.

After some days the weather changed. The great ship, which usually rested even-keeled on two waves, and whose bilge keels under normal conditions rendered rolling impossible, began to pitch and roll like a leviathan at play. The decks, swept by gigantic seas, were injured wherever was anything to injure. Bulwarks were torn away as though they had been compact of paper. More than once the double doors at the head of the companion stairs had been driven in. The bull’s eye glasses of some of the ports were beaten from their brazen sockets. Nearly all the boats had been wrecked, broken or torn from their cranes as the great ship rolled heavily in the trough, or giant waves had struck her till she quivered like a frightened horse.

At that season she sailed on the far northern course. Driven still farther north by the gales, she came within a short way of south of Greenland. Then avoiding Moville, which should have been her place of call, she ran down the east of Britain, the wild weather still prevailing.

CHAPTER XXXI — THE LIFE-LINE

On the coast of Angleshire the weather in the early days of September had been stormy. With the south-west wind had come deluges of rain, not a common thing for the time of year on the east coast. Stephen, whose spirits always rose with high wind, was in a condition of prolonged excitement. She could not keep still; every day she rode long distances, and found a wonderful satisfaction in facing the strong winds. Like a true horsewoman she did not mind the wet, and had glorious gallops over the grassy ridge and down the slopes on the farther side, out on the open road or through the endless grass rides amid the pine woods.

On the Tuesday morning the storm was in full sweep, and Stephen was in wild spirits. Nothing would do her but to go out on the tower of the castle where she could walk about, and leaning on the crenellated parapet look over all the coast stretching far in front and sweeping away to the left and right. The prospect so enchanted her, and the fierce sweep of the wind so suited her exalted mood, that she remained there all the morning. The whole coast was a mass of leaping foam and flying spray, and far away to the horizon white-topped waves rolled endlessly. That day she did not even ride out, but contented herself with watching the sea and the storm from the tower. After lunch she went to her tower again; and again after tea. The storm was now furious. She made up her mind that after dinner she would ride down and see its happenings close at hand.

When she had finished dinner she went to her room to dress for her ride. The rush and roar of the storm were in her ears, and she was in wild tumultuous spirits. All her youth seemed to sweep back on her; or perhaps it was that the sickness of the last two years was swept away. Somewhere deep down in Stephen's heart, below her intention or even her consciousness, was a desire to be her old self if only for an hour. And to this end externals were of help. Without weighing the matter in her mind, and acting entirely on impulse, she told her maid to get the red habit she had not worn for years. When she was dressed she sent round to have out her white Arab; while it was getting ready she went once more to the tower to see the storm-effect in the darkening twilight. As she looked, her heart for an instant stood still. Half-way to the horizon a great ship, ablaze in the bows, was driving through the waves with all her speed. She was heading towards the little port, beyond which the shallows sent up a moving wall of white spray.

Stephen tore down the turret stair, and gave hurried directions to have beds prepared in a number of rooms, fires everywhere, and plenty of provisions. She also ordered that carriages should be sent at once to the fishing port with clothing and restoratives. There would, she felt, be need for such help before a time to be measured by minutes should have passed; and as some of her servants were as yet strange to her ways she did not leave anything to chance. One carriage was to go for the doctor who lived at Lannoy, the village over the hill, whence nothing could be seen of what was happening. She knew that others within sight or hailing would be already on their way. Work was afoot, and had she time, or thought of it, she would have chosen a more sedate garb. But in the excitement no thought of herself came to her.

In a few seconds she was in the saddle, tearing at full speed down the road that led to the port. The wind was blowing so strongly in her face that only in the lulls could she hear the hoof-strokes of the groom's horse galloping behind her.

At first the height of the road allowed her to see the ship and the port towards which she was making. But presently the road dipped, and the curving of the hill shut both from her sight; it was only when she came close that she could see either again.

Now the great ship was close at hand. The flames had gained terribly, and it was a race for life or death. There was no time do more than run her aground if life was to be saved at all. The captain, who in the gaps of the smoke could be seen upon the bridge, knew his work well. As he came near the shoal he ran a little north, and then turned sharply so as to throw the boat's head to the south of the shoal. Thus the wind would drive fire and smoke forward and leave the after part of the vessel free for a time.

The shock of her striking the sand was terrific, though the tinkle of the bell borne in on the gale showed that the engines had been slowed down. The funnels were shaken down, and the masts broke off, falling forward. A wild shriek from a hundred throats cleft the roaring of wind and wave. The mast fell, the foremast, with all its cumbering top-hamper on the bridge, which was in an instant blotted out of existence, together with the little band of gallant men who stood on it, true to their last duty. As the wind took the smoke south a man was seen to climb on the wreck of the mast aft and make fast the end of a great coil of rope which he carried. He was a huge man with a full dark beard. Two sailors working with furious haste helped him with the rope. The waves kept raising the ship a little, each time bumping her on the sand with a shock. The people on deck held frantically to the wreckage around them.

Then the bearded man, stripping to his waist and cutting off his trousers above the knee, fastened an end of the rope round his waist. The sailors stood ready one behind the other to pay it out. As a great wave rolled under the ship, he threw himself into the sea.

In the meantime the coastguard had fixed Board of Trade rocket-apparatus, and in a few seconds the prolonged roar of a rocket was heard. It flew straight towards the ship, rising at a high angle so as to fall beyond it. But the force of the wind took it up as it rose, and the gale increased so that it rose nearly vertically; and in this position the wind threw it south of its objective, and short of it. Another rocket was got ready at once, and blue lights were burned so that the course of the venturous swimmer might be noted. He swam strongly; but the great weight of the rope behind kept pulling him back, and the southern trend of the tide current and the force of the wind kept dragging him from the pier. Within the bar the waves were much less than without; but they were still so unruly that no boat in the harbour — which was not a lifeboat station — could venture out. Indeed, in the teeth of the storm it would have been a physical impossibility to have driven one seaward.

As the gathered crowd saw Stephen approach they made way for her. She had left her horse with the groom, and despite the drenching spray fought a way against the wind out on the pier. As in the glare of the blue light, which brought many things into harsh unnatural perspective, she caught sight of the set face of the swimmer rising and falling with the waves, her heart leaped. This was indeed a man! a brave man; and all the woman in her went out to him. For him, and to aid him and his work, she would have given everything, done anything; and in her heart, which beat in an ecstasy of anxiety, she prayed with that desperate conviction of hope which comes in such moments of exaltation.

But it soon became apparent that no landing could be effected. The force of the current and the wind were taking the man too far southward for him ever to win a way back. Then one of coastguards took the lead-topped cane which they use for throwing practice, and, after carefully coiling the line attached it so that it would run free, managed with a desperate effort to fling it far out. The swimmer, to whom it fell close, fought towards it frantically; and as the cord began to run through the water, managed to grasp it. A wild cheer rose from the shore and the ship. A stout line was fastened to the shore end of the cord, and the swimmer drew it out to him. He bent it on the rope which trailed behind him; then, seeing that he was himself a drag on it, with the knife which he drew from the sheath at the back of his waist, he cut himself free. One of the coastguards on the pier, helped by a host of willing hands, began drawing the end of the rope on shore. The swimmer still held the line thrown to him, and several men on the pier began to draw on it. Unhappily the thin cord broke under the strain, and within a few seconds the swimmer had drifted out of possible help. Seeing that only wild rocks lay south of the sea-wall, and that on them seas beat furiously, he turned and made out for sea. In the light beyond the glare he could see vaguely the shore bending away to the west in a deep curve of unbroken white leaping foam. There was no hope of landing there. To the south was the headland, perhaps two miles away as the crow flies. Here was the only chance for him. If he could round the headland, he might find shelter beyond; or somewhere along the farther shore some opening might present itself. Whilst the light from the blue fires still reached him he turned and made for the headland.

In the meantime on ship and on shore men worked desperately. Before long the end of the hawser was carried round on the high cliff, and pulled as taut as the force at hand could manage, and made fast.

Soon endless ropes were bringing in passengers and crew as fast as place could be found for them. It became simply a race for time. If the fire, working against the wind, did not reach the hawser, and if the ship lasted the furious bumping on the sandbank, which threatened to shake her to pieces each moment, all on board might yet be saved.

Stephen's concern was now for the swimmer alone. Such a gallant soul should not perish without help, if help could be on this side of heaven. She asked the harbour-master, an old fisherman who knew every inch of the coast for miles, if anything could be done. He shook his head sadly as he answered:

'I fear no, my lady. The lifeboat from Granport is up north, no boat from here could get outside the harbour. There's never a spot in the bay where he could land, even in a less troubled sea than this. Wi' the wind ashore, there's no hope for ship or man here that cannot round the point. And a stranger is no like to do that.'

'Why not?' she asked breathlessly.

'Because, my lady, there's a wheen o' sunken rocks beyond the Head. No one that didn't know would ever think to keep out beyond them, for the cliff itself goes down sheer. He's a gallant soul yon; an' it's a sore pity he's goin' to his death. But it must be! God can save him if He wishes; but I fear none other!'

Even as he spoke rose to Stephen's mind a memory of an old churchyard with great trees and the scent of many flowers, and a child's voice that sounded harsh through the monotonous hum of bees:

'To be God, and able to do things!'

Oh; to be God, if but an hour; and able to do things! To do anything to help a brave man! A wild prayer surged up in the girl's heart:

‘Oh! God, give me this man’s life! Give it to me to atone for the other I destroyed! Let me but help him, and do with me as Thou wilt!’

The passion of her prayer seemed to help her, and her brain cleared. Surely something could be done! She would do what she could; but first she must understand the situation. She turned again to the old harbour-master:

‘How long would it take him to reach the headland, if he can swim so far?’ The answer came with a settled conviction bearing hope with it:

‘The wind and tide are wi’ him, an’ he’s a strong swimmer. Perhaps half an hour will take him there. He’s all right in himself. He can swim it, sure. But alack! it’s when he gets there his trouble will be, when none can warn him. Look how the waves are lashing the cliff; and mark the white water beyond! What voice can sound to him out in those deeps? How could he see if even one were there to warn?’

Here was a hope at any rate. Light and sound were the factors of safety. Some good might be effected if she could get a trumpet; and there were trumpets in the rocket-cart. Light could be had — must be had if all the fences round the headland had to be gathered for a bonfire! There was not a moment to be lost. She ran to the rocket-cart, and got a trumpet from the man in charge. Then she ran to where she had left her horse. She had plenty of escort, for by this time many gentlemen had arrived on horseback from outlying distances, and all offered their services. She thanked them and said:

‘You may be useful here. When all these are ashore send on the rocket-cart, and come yourselves to the headland as quick as you can. Tell the coastguards that all those saved are to be taken to the castle. In the rocket-cart bring pitch and tar and oil, and anything that will flame. Stay!' she cried to the chief boatman. 'Give me some blue lights!' His answer chilled her:

'I'm sorry, my lady, but they are all used. There are the last of them burning now. We have burned them ever since that man began to swim ashore.'

'Then hurry on the rocket-cart!' she said as she sprang to the saddle, and swept out on the rough track that ran by the cliffs, following in bold curves the windings of the shore. The white Arab seemed to know that his speed was making for life. As he swept along, far outdistancing the groom, Stephen's heart went out in silent words which seemed to keep time to the gallop:

'Oh, to be God, and be able to do things! Give me this man's life, oh, God! Give me this man's life, to atone for that noble one which I destroyed!'

Faster and faster, over rough road, cattle track, and grassy sward; over rising and falling ground; now and again so close to the edge of the high cliff that the spume swept up the gulleys in the rocks like a snowstorm, the white Arab swept round the curve of the bay, and came out on the high headland where stood the fisher's house. On the very brink of the cliff all the fisher folk, men, women and children, stood looking at the far-off burning ship, from which the flames rose in leaping columns.

So intent were all on the cliff that they did not notice her coming; as the roar of the wind came from them to her, they could not hear her voice when she spoke from a distance. She had drawn quite close, having dismounted and hung her rein over the post of the garden paling, when one of the children saw her, and cried out:

‘The lady! the lady! an’ she’s all in red!’ The men were so intent on something that they did not seem to hear. They were peering out to the north, and were arguing in dumb show as though on something regarding which they did not agree. She drew closer, and touching the old fisherman on the shoulder, called out at his ear:

‘What is it?’ He answered without turning, keeping his eyes fixed:

‘*I* say it’s a man swimmin’. Joe and Garge here say as it’s only a piece o’ wood or sea-wrack. But I know I’m right. That’s a man swimmin’, or my old eyes have lost their power!’ His words carried conviction; the seed of hope in her beating heart grew on the instant into certainty.

‘It *is* a man. I saw him swim off towards here when he had taken the rope on shore. Do not turn round. Keep your eyes on him so that you may not lose sight of him in the darkness!’ The old man chuckled.

‘This darkness! Hee! hee! There be no differ to me between light and dark. But I’ll watch him! It’s you, my lady! I shan’t turn round to do my reverence as you tell me to watch. But, poor soul, it’ll not be for long to watch. The Skyres will have him, sure enow!’

‘We can warn him!’ she said, ‘when he comes close enough. I have a trumpet here!’ He shook his head sorrowfully:

‘Ah! my lady, what trumpet could sound against that storm an’ from this height?’ Stephen’s heart sank. But there was still hope. If the swimmer’s ears could not be reached, his eyes might. Eagerly she looked back for the coming of the rocket-cart. Far off across the deep bay she could see its lamp sway as it passed over the rough ground; but alas! it would never arrive in time. With a note of despair in her voice she asked:

‘How long before he reaches the rocks?’ Still without turning the old man answered:

‘At the rate he’s going he will be in the sweep of the current through the rocks within three minutes. If he’s to be saved he must turn seaward ere the stream grips him.’

‘Would there be time to build a bonfire?’

‘No, no! my lady. The wood couldn’t catch in the time!’

For an instant a black film of despair seemed to fall on her. The surging of the blood in her head made her dizzy, and once again the prayer of the old memory rang in her brain:

‘Oh to be God, and able to do things!’

On the instant an inspiration flashed through her. She, too could do things in a humble way. She could do something at any rate. If there was no time to build a fire, there was a fire already built.

The house would burn!

The two feet deep of old thatch held down with nets and battened with wreck timber would flare like a beacon. Forthwith she spoke:

‘Good people, this noble man who has saved a whole shipload of others must not die without an effort. There must be light so that he can see our warning to pass beyond the rocks! The only light can be from the house. I buy it of you. It is mine; but I shall pay you for it and build you such another as you never thought of. But it must be fired at once. You have one minute to clear out all you want. In, quick and take all can. Quick! quick! for God’s sake! It is for a brave man’s life!’

The men and women without a word rushed into the house. They too knew the danger, and the only hope there was for a life. The assurance of the Countess took the sting from the present loss. Before the minute, which she timed watch in hand, was over, all came forth bearing armloads of their lares and penates. Then one of the younger men ran in again and out bearing a flaming stick from the fire. Stephen nodded, he held it to the northern edge of the thatch. The straw caught in a flash and the flame ran up the slope and along the edge of the roof like a quick match. The squeaking of many rats was heard and their brown bodies streamed over the roof. Before another minute had passed a great mass of flame towered into the sky and shed a red light far out over the waste of sea.

It lit up the wilderness of white water where the sea churned savagely amongst the sunken rocks; and it lit too the white face of a swimmer, now nearly spent, who rising and falling with each wave, drifted in the sea whose current bore him on towards the fatal rocks.

CHAPTER XXXII— 'TO BE GOD AND ABLE TO DO THINGS'

When the swimmer saw the light he looked up; even at the distance they could see the lift of his face; but he did not seem to realise that there was any intention in the lighting, or that it was created for his benefit. He was manifestly spent with his tremendous exertions, and with his long heavy swim in the turbulent sea. Stephen's heart went out to him in a wave of infinite pity. She tried to use the trumpet. But simple as it is, a trumpet needs skill or at least practice in its use; she could only make an unintelligible sound, and not much even of that. One of the young men said:

'Let me try it, my lady!' She handed him the trumpet and he in turn used with a will. But it was of no avail; even his strong lungs and lusty manhood availed nothing in the teeth of that furious gale. The roof and the whole house was now well alight, and the flame roared and leapt. Stephen began to make gestures bidding the swimmer, in case he might see her and understand, move round the rocks. But he made no change in his direction, and was fast approaching a point in the tide-race whence to avoid the sunken rocks would be an impossibility. The old whaler, accustomed to use all his wits in times of difficulty, said suddenly:

'How can he understand when we're all between him and the light. We are only black shadows to him; all he can see are waving arms!' His sons caught his meaning and were already dashing towards the burning house. They came back with piles of blazing wood and threw them down on the very edge of the cliff; brought more and piled them up, flinging heaps of straw on the bonfire and pouring on oil and pitch till the flames rose high. Stephen saw what was necessary and stood out of the way, but close to the old whaler, where the light fell on both of their faces as they looked in the direction of the swimmer. Stephen's red dress itself stood out like a flame. The gale tearing up the front of the cliff had whirled away her hat; in the stress of the wind her hair was torn from its up-pinning and flew wide, itself like leaping flame.

Her gestures as she swept her right arm round, as though demonstrating the outward curve of a circle, or raising the hand above her head motioned with wide palm and spread fingers 'back! back!' seemed to have reached the swimmer's intelligence. He half rose in the water and looked about. As if seeing something that he realised, he sank back again and began swim frantically out to sea. A great throb of joy made Stephen almost faint. At last she had been able to do something to help this gallant man. In half a minute his efforts seemed to tell in his race for life. He drew sufficiently far from dangerous current for there to be a hope that he might be saved if he could last out the stress to come.

The fishermen kept watch in silent eagerness; and in their presence Stephen felt a comfort, though, like her, they could do nothing at present.

When the swimmer had passed sufficiently far out to be clear of the rocks, the fire began to lose its flame, though not its intensity. It would be fiery still for hours to come, and of great heat; but the flames ceased to leap, and in the moderated light Stephen only saw the white face for one more instant ere it faded out of her ken, when, turning, the man looked towards the light and made a gesture which she did not understand: for he put for an instant both hands before his face.

Just then there was a wild noise on the cliff. The rocket-cart drawn by sixteen splendid horses, some of them hunters, came tearing up the slope, and with it many men on horseback afoot. Many of the runners were the gentlemen who had given their horses for the good work.

As the coastguards jumped from the cart, and began to get out the rocket stand, the old whaler pointed out the direction where the swimmer's head could still be seen. Some of the sailors could see it too; though to Stephen and the laymen it was invisible. The chief boatman shook his head:

'No use throwing a line there! Even if he got it we could never drag him alive through these rocks. He would be pounded to death before twenty fathom!' Stephen's heart grew cold as she listened. Was this the end? Then with a bitter cry she wailed:

'Oh! can nothing be done? Can nothing be done? Can no boat come from the other side of the point? Must such a brave man be lost!' and her tears began to flow.

One of the young men who had just arrived, a neighbouring squire, a proved wastrel but a fine horseman, who had already regarded Stephen at the few occasions of their meeting with eyes of manifest admiration, spoke up:

'Don't cry, Lady de Lannoy. There's a chance for him yet. I'll see what I can do.'

'Bless you! oh! bless you!' she cried impulsively as she caught his hand. Then came the chill of doubt. 'But what can you do?' she added despairingly.

'Hector and I may be able to do something together.' Turning to one of the fishermen he asked:

'Is there any way down to the water in the shelter of the point?'

'Ay! ay! sir,' came the ready answer. 'There's the path as we get down by to our boats.'

'Come on, then!' he said. 'Some of you chaps show us a light on the way down. If Hector can manage the scramble there's a chance. You see,' he said, turning again to Stephen, 'Hector can swim like a fish. When he was a racer I trained him in the sea so that none of the touts could spy out his form. Many's the swim we've had together; and in rough water too, though in none so wild as this!'

'But it is a desperate chance for you!' said Stephen, woman-like drawing somewhat back from a danger she had herself evoked. The young man laughed lightly:

'What of that! I may do one good thing before I die. That fine fellow's life is worth a hundred of my wasted one! Here! some of you fellows help me with Hector. We must take him from the cart and get a girth on him instead of the saddle. We shall want something to hold on to without pulling his head down by using the bridle.'

He, followed by some others, ran to the rocket-cart where the horses stood panting, their steam rising in a white cloud in the glow of the burning house. In an incredibly short time the horse was ready with only the girth. The young squire took him by the mane and he followed eagerly; he had memories of his own. As they passed close to Stephen the squire said to one of his friends:

'Hold him a minute, Jack!' He ran over to Stephen and looked at her hard:

'Good-bye! Wish me luck; and give us light!' Tears were in her eyes and a flush on her cheek as she took his hand and clasped it hard:

'Oh, you brave man! God bless you!' He stooped suddenly and impulsively kissed the back of her hand lightly and was gone. For a fleeting moment she was angry. No man had kissed her hand before; but the thought of his liberty was swept away by another:

'Little enough when he may be going to his death!'

It was a sight to see that man and horse, surrounded by an eager crowd of helpers, scrambling down the rough zigzag, cut and worn in the very face of the cliff. They stumbled, and slipped; pebbles and broken rock fell away under their feet. Alone close to the bonfire stood Stephen, following every movement with racing blood and beating heart. The bonfire was glowing; a constant stream of men and women were dragging and hauling all sorts of material for its increase. The head of the swimmer could be seen, rising and falling amid the waves beyond the Skyres.

When about twenty feet from the water-level the path jutted out to one side left of the little beach whereon the sea now broke fiercely. This was a place where men watched, and whence at times they fished with rods; the broad rock overhung the water. The fire above, though it threw shadows, made light enough for everything. The squire held up his hand.

'Stop! We can take off this rock, if the water is deep enough. How much is it?'

'Ten fathoms sheer.'

'Good!' He motioned to them all to keep back. Then threw off all his clothes except shirt and trousers. For an instant he patted Hector and then sprang upon his back. Holding him by the mane he urged him forward with a cry. The noble animal did not hesitate an instant. He knew that grasp of the mane; that cry; that dig of the spurless heels. He sprang forward with wide dilated nostrils, and from the edge of the jutting rock jumped far out into the sea. Man and horse disappeared for a few seconds, but rose safely. The man slid from the horse's back; and, holding by the girth with one hand, swam beside him out to sea in the direction the swimmer must come on rounding the sunken rocks.

A wild cheer broke from all on the cliff above and those already scrambling back up the zigzag. Stephen kept encouraging the men to bring fuel to the bonfire:

'Bring everything you can find; the carts, the palings, the roofs, the corn, the dried fish; anything and everything that will burn. We must have light; plenty of light! Two brave men's lives are at stake now!'

The whole place was a scene of activity. Stephen stood on the edge of the cliff with the old whaler and the chief boatman and some of the women. The rest of the coastguards were by orders of their chief rigging up a whip which they thought might be necessary to hoist the men up from the water, if they could ever get close enough. One of the young men who had ridden with the rocket-cart kept tight hold of Hector's bridle; he knew it would be wanted if the horse ever had a chance of landing.

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When Harold turned away from the dazzling blue lights on the pier, and saw the far white line of the cliffs beyond the bay, his heart sank within him. Even his great strength and hardihood, won by work and privation in the far North-West, had been already taxed in the many days of the battling with the gale when all on board who could lend a hand were taken into service. Again by the frantic struggle of the last hour or two, when the ship ran shoreward at the utmost of her speed in the last hope of beaching in time to save life. Finally in that grim struggle to draw the life-line shoreward. The cold and then the great heat, and on top of it the chill of the long swim, seemed to have struck at him. Alone on the dark sea, for soon the current and his own exertions were taking him away from the rocks, the light of the burning ship was ceasing to be effective. It was just enough to hinder his vision; looking from the patch of light which bathed the light and him he could just see far off the white water which marked the cliff fronts, and on the edge of his horizon the grim moving white wall where the waves broke on the headland.

On and on he toiled. His limbs were becoming more cramped with the cold and the terrible strain of swimming in such waves. But still the brave heart bore him up; and resolutely, sternly he forced himself afresh to the effort before him. He reasoned that where there was such a headland standing out so stark into the sea there ought to be some shelter in its lee. If he could pass it he might find calmer water and even a landing-place beyond.

Here at least was hope. He would try to round the point at any rate. Now he drew so close that the great rocks seemed to tower vast above him. He was not yet close enough to feel as though lapped in their shadow; but even the overcast sky seemed full of light above the line of the cliff. There was a strange roaring, rushing sound around him. He thought that it was not merely the waves dashing on the rocks, but that partly it came from his own ears; that his ebbing strength was feeling the frantic struggle which he was making. The end was coming, he thought; but still he kept valiantly on, set and silent, as is the way with brave men.

Suddenly from the top of the cliff a bright light flashed. He looked at it sideways as he fought his way on, and saw the light rise and fall and flicker as the flames leaped. High over him he saw fantastic figures which seemed to dance on the edge of the high cliff. They had evidently noticed him, and were making signals of some sort; but what the motions were he could not see or understand, for they were but dark silhouettes, edged with light, against the background of fire. The only thing he could think was that they meant to encourage him, and so he urged himself to further effort. It might be that help was at hand!

Several times as he turned his head sideways he saw the figures and the light, but not so clearly; it was as though the light was lessening in power. When again he looked he saw a new fire leap out on the edge of the cliff, and some figures to the right of it. They were signalling in some way. So, pausing in his swimming, he rose a little from the water and looked at them.

A thrill shot through him, and a paralysing thought that he must have gone mad. With his wet hand he cleared his eyes, though the touching them pained him terribly, and for an instant saw clearly:

There on the edge of the cliff, standing beside some men and waving her arms in a wild sweep as though motioning frantically 'Keep out! keep out!' was a woman. Instinctively he glanced to his left and saw a white waste of leaping water, through which sharp rocks rose like monstrous teeth. On the instant he saw the danger, and made out seaward, swimming frantically to clear the dangerous spot before the current would sweep him upon the rocks.

But the woman! As one remembers the last sight when the lightning has banished sight, so that vision seemed burned into his brain. A woman with a scarlet riding-habit and masses of long red hair blowing in the gale like leaping flame! Could there be two such persons in the world? No! no! It was a vision! A vision of the woman he loved, come to save him in the direst moment of great peril!

His heart beat with new hope; only the blackness of the stormy sea was before him as he strove frantically on.

Presently when he felt the current slacken, for he had been swimming across it and could feel its power, he turned and looked back. As he did so he murmured aloud:

'A dream! A vision! She came to warn me!' For as he looked all had disappeared. Cliff and coastline, dark rocks and leaping seas, blazing fire, and the warning vision of the woman he loved.

Again he looked where the waste of sea churning amongst the sunken rocks had been. He could hear the roaring of waters, the thunder of great waves beating on the iron-bound coast; but nothing could he see. He was alone on the wild sea; in the dark.

Then truly the swift shadow of despair fell upon him.

'Blind Blind!' he moaned, and for the moment, stricken with despair, sank into the trough of the waves. But the instinctive desire for life recalled him. Once more he fought his way up to the surface, and swam blindly, desperately on. Seeing nothing, he did not know which way he was going. He might have heard better had his eyes been able to help his ears; but in the sudden strange darkness all the senses were astray. In the agony of his mind he could not even feel the pain of his burnt face; the torture of his eyes had passed. But with the instinct of a strong man he kept on swimming blindly, desperately.

* * * * *

It seemed as if ages of untold agony had gone by, when he heard a voice seemingly beside him:

'Lay hold here! Catch the girth!' The voice came muffled by wind and wave. His strength was now nearly at its last.

The shock of his blindness and the agony of the moments that had passed had finished his exhaustion. But a little longer and he must have sunk into his rest. But the voice and the help it promised rallied him for a moment. He had hardly strength to speak, but he managed to gasp out:

‘Where? where? Help me! I am blind!’ A hand took his and guided it to a tightened girth. Instinctively his fingers closed round it, and he hung on grimly. His senses were going fast. He felt as if it was all a strange dream. A voice here in the sea! A girth! A horse; he could hear its hard breathing.

The voice came again.

‘Steady! Hold on! My God! he’s fainted! I must tie him on!’ He heard a tearing sound, and something was wound round his wrists. Then his nerveless fingers relaxed their hold; and all passed into oblivion.

CHAPTER XXXIII — THE QUEEN'S ROOM

To Stephen all that now happened seemed like a dream. She saw Hector and his gallant young master forge across the smoother water of the current whose boisterous stream had been somewhat stilled in the churning amongst the rocks, and then go north in the direction of the swimmer who, strange to say, was drifting in again towards the sunken rocks. Then she saw the swimmer's head sink under the water; and her heart grew cold. Was this to be the end! Was such a brave man to be lost after such gallant effort as he had made, and just at the moment when help was at hand!

The few seconds seemed ages. Instinctively she shut her eyes and prayed again. 'Oh! God. Give me this man's life that I may atone!'

God seemed to have heard her prayer. Nay, more! He had mercifully allowed her to be the means of averting great danger. She would never, could never, forget the look on the man's face when he saw, by the flame that she had kindled, ahead of him the danger from the sunken rocks. She had exulted at the thought. And now . . .

She was recalled by a wild cheer beside her. Opening her eyes she saw that the man's head had risen again from the water. He was swimming furiously, this time seaward. But close at hand were the heads of the swimming horse and man . . . She saw the young squire seize the man . . .

And then the rush of her tears blinded her. When she could see again the horse had turned and was making back again to the shelter of the point. The squire had his arm stretched across the horse's back; he was holding up the sailor's head, which seemed to roll helplessly with every motion of the cumbering sea.

For a little she thought he was dead, but the voice of the old whaler reassured her:

‘He was just in time! The poor chap was done!’ And so with beating heart and eyes that did not flinch now she watched the slow progress to the shelter of the point. The coastguards and fishermen had made up their minds where the landing could be made, and were ready; on the rocky shelf, whence Hector had at jumped, they stood by with lines. When the squire had steered and encouraged the horse, whose snorting could be heard from the sheltered water, till he was just below the rocks, they lowered a noosed rope. This he fastened round the senseless man below his shoulders. One strong, careful pull, and he was safe on land; and soon was being borne up the steep zigzag on the shoulders of the willing crowd.

In the meantime other ropes were passed down to the squire. One he placed round his own waist; two others he fastened one on each side of the horse’s girth. Then his friend lowered the bridle, and he managed to put it on the horse and attached a rope to it. The fishermen took the lines, and, paying out as they went so as to leave plenty of slack line, got on the rocks just above the little beach whereon, sheltered though it was, the seas broke heavily. There they waited, ready to pull the horse through the surf when he should have come close enough.

Stephen did not see the rescue of the horse; for just then a tall grave man spoke to her:

‘Pardon me, Lady de Lannoy, but is the man to be brought up to the Castle? I am told you have given orders that all the rescued shall be taken there.’ She answered unhesitatingly:

‘Certainly! I gave orders before coming out that preparation was to be made for them.’

‘I am Mr. Hilton. I have just come down to do lacum tenens for

Dr. Winter at Lannoch Port. I rode over on hearing there was a wreck, and came here with the rocket-cart. I shall take charge of the man and bring him up. He will doubtless want some special care.’

‘If you will be so good!’ she answered, feeling a diffidence which was new to her. At that moment the crowd carrying the senseless man began to appear over the cliff, coming up the zig-zag. The Doctor hurried towards him; she followed at a little distance, fearing lest she should hamper him. Under his orders they laid the patient on the weather side of the bonfire so that the smoke would not reach him. The Doctor knelt by his side.

An instant after he looked up and said:

‘He is alive; his heart is beating, though faintly. He had better be taken away at once. There is no means here of shelter.’

‘Bring him in the rocket-cart; it is the only conveyance here,’ cried Stephen. ‘And bring Mr. Hepburn too. He also will need some care after his gallant service. I shall ride on and advise my household of your coming. And you good people come all to the Castle. You are to be my guests if you will so honour me. No! No! Really I should prefer to ride alone!’

She said this impulsively, seeing that several of the gentlemen were running for their horses to accompany her. ‘I shall not wait to thank that valiant young gentleman. I shall see him at Lannoy.’

As she was speaking she had taken the bridle of her horse. One of the young men stooped and held his hand; she bowed, put her foot in it and sprang to the saddle. In an instant she was flying across country at full speed, in the dark. A wild mood was on her, reaction from the prolonged agony of apprehension. There was little which she would not have done just then.

The gale whistled round her and now and again she shouted with pure joy. It seemed as if God Himself had answered her prayer and given her the returning life!

By the time she had reached the Castle the wild ride had done its soothing work. She was calm again, comparatively; her wits and feelings were her own.

There was plenty to keep her occupied, mind and body. The train of persons saved from the wreck were arriving in all sorts of vehicles, and as clothes had to be found for them as well as food and shelter there was no end to the exertions necessary. She felt as though the world were not wide enough for the welcome she wished to extend. Its exercise was a sort of reward of her exertions; a thank-offering for the response to her prayer. She moved amongst her guests, forgetful of herself; of her strange attire; of the state of dishevelment and grime in which she was, the result of the storm, her long ride over rough ground with its share of marshes and pools, and the smoke from the bonfire and the blazing house. The strangers wondered at first, till they came to understand that she was the Lady Bountiful who had stretched her helpful hands to them. Those who could, made themselves useful with the new batches of arrivals. The whole Castle was lit from cellar to tower. The kitchens were making lordly provision, the servants were carrying piles of clothes of all sorts, and helping to fit those who came still wet from their passage through or over the heavy sea.

In the general disposition of chambers Stephen ordered to be set apart for the rescued swimmer the Royal Chamber where Queen Elizabeth had lain; and for Mr. Hepburn that which had been occupied by the Second George. She had a sort of idea that the stranger was God’s guest who was coming to her house; and that nothing could be too good for him. As she waited for his coming, even though she swept to and fro in her ministrations to others, she felt as though she trod on air. Some great weight seemed to have been removed from her. Her soul was free again!

At last the rocket-cart arrived, and with it many horsemen and such men and women as could run across country with equal speed to the horses labouring by the longer road.

The rescued man was still senseless, but that alone did not seem to cause anxiety to the Doctor, who hurried him at once into the prepared room. When, assisted by some of the other men, he had undressed him, rubbed him down and put him to bed, and had seen some of the others who had been rescued from the wreck, he sought out Lady de Lannoy. He told her that his anxiety was for the man's sight; an announcement which blanched his hearer's cheeks. She had so made up her mind as to his perfect safety that the knowledge of any kind of ill came like a cruel shock. She questioned Mr. Hilton closely; so closely that he thought it well to tell her at once all that he surmised and feared:

'That fine young fellow who swam out with his horse to him, tells me that when he neared him he cried out that he was blind. I have made some inquiries from those on the ship, and they tell me that he was a passenger, named Robinson. Not only was he not blind then, but he was the strongest and most alert man on the ship. If it be blindness it must have come on during that long swim. It may be that before leaving the ship he received some special injury — indeed he has several cuts and burns and bruises — and that the irritation of the sea-water increased it. I can do nothing till he wakes. At present he is in such a state that nothing can be done for him. Later I shall if necessary give him a hypodermic to ensure sleep. In the morning when I come again I shall examine him fully.'

‘But you are not going away to-night!’ said Stephen in dismay. ‘Can’t you manage to stay here? Indeed you must! Look at all these people, some of whom may need special attention or perhaps treatment. We do not know yet if any may be injured.’ He answered at once:

‘Of course I shall stay if you wish it. But there are two other doctors here already. I must go over to my own place to get some necessary instruments for the examination of this special patient. But that I can do in the early morning.’

‘Can I not send for what you want; the whole household are at your service. All that can be done for that gallant man must be done. You can send to London for special help if you wish. If that man is blind, or in danger of blindness, we must have the best oculist in the world for him.’

‘All shall be done that is possible,’ said he earnestly. ‘But till I examine him in the morning we can do nothing. I am myself an oculist; that is my department in St. Stephen’s Hospital. I have an idea of what is wrong, but I cannot diagnose exactly until I can use the ophthalmoscope.’ His words gave Stephen confidence. Laying her hand on his arm unconsciously in the extremity of pity she said earnestly:

‘Oh, do what you can for him. He must be a noble creature; and all that is possible must be done. I shall never rest happily if through any failing on my part he suffers as you fear.’

‘I shall do all I can,’ he said with equal earnestness, touched with her eager pity. ‘And I shall not trust myself alone, if any other can be of service. Depend upon it, Lady de Lannoy, all shall be as you wish.’

There was little sleep in the Castle that night till late. Mr. Hilton slept on a sofa in the Queen’s Room after he had administered a narcotic to his patient.

As soon as the eastern sky began to quicken, he rode, as he had arranged during the evening, to Dr. Winter’s house at Lannoch Port where he was staying. After selecting such instruments and drugs as he required, he came back in the dogcart.

It was still early morning when he regained the Castle. He found Lady de Lannoy up and looking anxiously for him. Her concern was somewhat abated when he was able to tell her that his patient still slept.

It was a painful scene for Mr. Hilton when his patient woke. Fortunately some of the after-effects of the narcotic remained, for his despair at realising that he was blind was terrible. It was not that he was violent; to be so under his present circumstances would have been foreign to Harold’s nature. But there was a despair which was infinitely more sad to witness than passion. He simply moaned to himself:

‘Blind! Blind!’ and again in every phase of horrified amazement, as though he could not realise the truth: ‘Blind! Blind!’ The Doctor laid his hand on his breast and said very gently:

‘My poor fellow, it is a dreadful thing to face, to think of. But as yet I have not been able to come to any conclusion; unable even to examine you. I do not wish to encourage hopes that may be false, but there are cases when injury is not vital and perhaps only temporary. In such case your best chance, indeed your only chance, is to keep quiet. You must not even think if possible of anything that may excite you. I am now about to examine you with the ophthalmoscope. You are a man; none of us who saw your splendid feat last night can doubt your pluck. Now I want you to use some of it to help us both. You, for your recovery, if such is possible; me, to help me in my work. I have asked some of your late companions who tell me that on shipboard you were not only well and of good sight, but that you were remarkable even amongst strong men. Whatever it is you suffer from must have come on quickly. Tell me all you can remember of it.'

The Doctor listened attentively whilst Harold told all he could remember of his sufferings. When he spoke of the return of old rheumatic pains his hearer said involuntarily: 'Good!' Harold paused; but went on at once. The Doctor recognised that he had rightly appraised his remark, and by it judged that he was a well-educated man. Something in the method of speaking struck him, and he said, as nonchalantly as he could:

'By the way, which was your University?'

'Cambridge. Trinity.' He spoke without thinking, and the instant he had done so stopped. The sense of his blindness rushed back on him. He could not see; and his ears were not yet trained to take the place of his eyes. He must guard himself. Thenceforward he was so cautious in his replies that Mr. Hilton felt convinced there was some purpose in his reticence. He therefore stopped asking questions, and began to examine him. He was unable to come to much result; his opinion was shown in his report to Lady de Lannoy:

'I am unable to say anything definite as yet. The case is a most interesting one; as a case and quite apart from the splendid fellow who is the subject of it. I have hopes that within a few days I may be able to know more. I need not trouble you with surgical terms; but later on if the diagnosis supports the supposition at present in my mind I shall be able to speak more fully. In the meantime I shall, with your permission, wait here so that I may watch him myself.'

‘Oh you are good. Thank you! Thank you!’ said Stephen. She had so taken the man under her own care that she was grateful for any kindness shown to him.

‘Not at all,’ said Mr. Hilton. ‘Any man who behaved as that fellow did has a claim on any of us who may help him. No time of mine could be better spent.’

When he went back to the patient’s room he entered softly, for he thought he might be asleep. The room was, according to his instructions, quite dark, and as it was unfamiliar to him he felt his way cautiously. Harold, however, heard the small noise he made and said quietly:

‘Who is there?’

‘It is I; Hilton.’

‘Are you alone?’

‘Yes.’

‘Look round the room and see. Then lock the door and come and talk to me if you will. You will pity a poor blind fellow, I know. The darkness has come down upon me so quickly that I am not accustomed to it!’ There was a break in his voice which moved the other. He lit a candle, feeling that the doing so would impress his patient, and went round the room; not with catlike movement this time — he wanted the other to hear him. When he had turned the key in the lock, as sharply as he could, he came to the bedside and sat down. Harold spoke again after a short pause:

‘Is that candle still lit?’

‘Yes! Would you like it put out?’

‘If you don’t mind! Again I say pity me and pardon me. But I want to ask you something privately, between our two selves; and I will feel more of equality than if you were looking at me, whilst I cannot see you.' Mr Hilton blew out the candle.

'There! We are equal now.'

'Thank you!' A long pause; then he went on:

'When a man becomes suddenly blind is there usually, or even occasionally, any sort of odd sight? . . . Does he see anything like a dream, a vision?'

'Not that I know of. I have never heard of such a case. As a rule people struck blind by lightning, which is the most common cause, sometimes remember with extraordinary accuracy the last thing they have seen. Just as though it were photographed on the retina!'

'Thank you! Is such usually the recurrence of any old dream or anything they have much thought of?'

'Not that I know of. It would be unusual!' Harold waited a long time before he spoke again. When he did so it was in a different voice; a constrained voice. The Doctor, accustomed to take enlightenment from trivial details, noted it:

'Now tell me, Mr. Hilton, something about what has happened. Where am I?'

'In Lannoy Castle.'

'Where is it?'

'In Angleshire!'

'Who does it belong to?'

'Lady de Lannoy. The Countess de Lannoy; they tell me she is a Countess in her own right.'

'It is very good of her to have me here. Is she an old lady?'

'No! A young one. Young and very beautiful.' After a pause before his query:

'What's she like? Describe her to me!'

'She is young, a little over twenty. Tall and of a very fine figure.

She has eyes like black diamonds, and hair like a flame!' For a long time Harold remained still. Then he said:

'Tell me all you know or have learned of this whole affair. How was I rescued, and by whom?' So the Doctor proceeded to give him every detail he knew of. When he was quite through, the other again lay still for a long time. The silence was broken by a gentle tap at the door. The Doctor lit a candle. He turned the key softly, so that no one would notice that the door was locked. Something was said in a low whisper. Then the door was gently closed, and the Doctor returning said:

'Lady Lannoy wants, if it will not disturb you, to ask how you are. Ordinarily I should not let anyone see you. But she is not only your hostess, but, as I have just told you, it was her ride to the headland, where she burned the house to give you light, which was the beginning of your rescue. Still if you think it better not . . . !'

'I hardly like anybody to see me like this!' said Harold, feebly seeking an excuse.

'My dear man,' said the other, 'you may be easy in your mind, she won't see much of you. You are all bandages and beard. She'll have to wait a while before she sees you.'

'Didn't she see me last night?'

'Not she! Whilst we were trying to restore you she was rushing back to the Castle to see that all was ready for you, and for the others from the wreck.' This vaguely soothed Harold.

If his surmise was correct, and if she had not seen him then, it was well that he was bandaged now. He felt that it would not do to refuse to let her see him; it might look suspicious. So after pausing a short while he said in a low voice:

'I suppose she had better come now. We must not keep her waiting!' When the Doctor brought her to his bedside Stephen felt in a measure awed. His bandaged face and head and his great beard, singed in patches, looked to her in the dim light rather awesome. In a very gentle voice she said kind things to the sick man, who acknowledged them in a feeble whisper. The Doctor, a keen observer, noticed the change in his voice, and determined to understand more. Stephen spoke of his bravery, and of how it was due to him that all on the ship were saved; and as she spoke her emotion moved her so much that her sweet voice shook and quivered. To the ears of the man who had now only sound to guide him, it was music of the sweetest he had ever heard. Fearing lest his voice should betray him, he whispered his own thanks feebly and in few words.

When Stephen went away the Doctor went with her; it was more than an hour before he returned. He found his patient in what he considered a state of suppressed excitement; for, though his thoughts were manifestly collected and his words were calm, he was restless and excited in other ways. He had evidently been thinking of his own condition; for shortly after the Doctor came in he said:

'Are we alone?'

'Quite!'

'I want you to arrange that there shall not be any nurse with me.'

'My dear sir! Don't handicap me, and yourself, with such a restriction. It is for your own good that you should have regular and constant attention.'

'But I don't wish it. Not for the present at all events. I am not accustomed to a nurse, and shall not feel comfortable. In a few days perhaps . . . ' The decided tone of his voice struck the other. Keeping his own thoughts and intentions in abeyance, even to himself, he answered heartily:

‘All right! I shall not have any nurse, at present.’

‘Thanks!’ There was relief in the tone which seemed undue, and Mr. Hilton again took mental note. Presently he asked a question, but in such a tone that the Doctor pricked up his ears. There was a premeditated self-suppression, a gravity of restraint, which implied some falsity; some intention other than the words conveyed:

‘It must have been a job to carry me up those stairs.’ The Doctor was doubting everything, but as the safest attitude he stuck to literal truth so far as his words conveyed it:

‘Yes. You are no light weight!’ To himself he mused:

‘How did he know there were stairs? He cannot know it; he was senseless! Therefore he must be guessing or inquiring!’ Harold went on:

‘I suppose the Castle is on high ground. Can you see far from the windows? I suppose we are up a good height?’

‘From the windows you can see all round the promontory. But we are not high up; that is, the room is not high from the ground, though the Castle is from the sea.’ Harold asked again, his voice vibrating in the note of gladness:

‘Are we on the ground floor then?’

‘Yes.’

‘And I suppose the gardens are below us?’

‘Yes.’ The answer was given quickly, for a thought was floating through him: Why did this strong brave man, suddenly stricken blind, wish to know whether his windows were at a height? He was not surprised when his patient reaching out a hand rested it on his arm and said in an imploring tone:

‘It should be moonlight; full moon two nights ago. Won’t you pull up the blind and describe to me all you see? . . . Tell me fully . . . Remember, I am blind!'

This somehow fixed the Doctor's thought:

'Suicide! But I must convey the inutility of such effort by inference, not falsity.'

Accordingly he began to describe the scene, from the very base of the wall, where below the balcony the great border was glorious with a mass of foliage plants, away to the distant sea, now bathed in the flood of moonlight. Harold asked question after question; the Doctor replying accurately till he felt that the patient was building up a concrete idea of his surroundings near and far. Then he left him. He stood for a long time out in the passage thinking. He said to himself as he moved away:

'The poor fellow has some grim intention in his mind. I must not let him know that I suspect; but to-night I will watch without his knowing it!'

CHAPTER XXXIV — WAITING

Mr. Hilton telegraphed at once countermanding, for the present, the nurse for whom he had sent.

That night, when the household had all retired, he came quietly to his patient's room, and entering noiselessly, sat silent in a far corner. There was no artificial right; the patient had to be kept in darkness. There was, however, a bright moonlight; sufficient light stole in through the edges of the blinds to allow him, when his eyes grew accustomed, to see what might happen.

Harold lay quite still till the house was quiet. He had been thinking, ever since he had ascertained the identity of Stephen. In his weakness and the paralysing despair of his blindness all his former grief and apprehension had come bank upon him in a great wave; veritably the tide of circumstances seemed to run hard against him. He had had no idea of forcing himself upon Stephen; and yet here he was a guest in her house, without her knowledge or his own. She had saved his life by her energy and resource. Fortunately she did not as yet know him; the bandages, and his act in suppressing his voice, had so far protected him. But such could not last for long. He could not see to protect himself, and take precautions as need arose. And he knew well that Stephen's nature would not allow her to be satisfied without doing all that was possible to help one who had under her eyes made a great effort on behalf of others, and to whom there was the added bond that his life was due to her. In but a little time she must find out to whom she ministered.

What then would happen? Her kindness was such that when she realised the blindness of her old friend she might so pity him that out of the depths of her pity she would forgive. She would take back all the past; and now that she knew of his old love for her, would perhaps be willing to marry him. Back flooded the old memory of her independence and her theory of sexual equality. If out of any selfish or mistaken idea she did not hesitate to ask a man to marry her, would it be likely that when the nobler and more heroic side of her nature spoke she would hesitate to a similar act in pursuance of her self-sacrifice?

So it might be that she would either find herself once again flouted, or else married to a man she did not love.

Such a catastrophe should not happen, whatever the cost to him. He would, blind as he was, steal away in the night and take himself out of her life; this time for ever. Better the ingratitude of an unknown man, the saving of whose life was due to her, than the long dull routine of a spoiled life, which would otherwise be her unhappy lot.

When once this idea had taken root in his mind he had taken such steps as had been open to him without endangering the secrecy of his motive. Thanks to his subtle questioning of the Doctor, he now knew that his room was close to the ground, so that he would easily drop from the window and steal away with out immediate danger of any restraining accident. If he could once get away he would be all right. There was a large sum to his credit in each of two London banks. He would manage somehow to find his way to London; even if he had to walk and beg his way.

He felt that now in the silence of the night the time had come. Quietly he rose and felt his way to the door, now and again stumbling and knocking against unknown obstacles in the manner of the recently blind. After each such noise he paused and listened. He felt as if the very walls had ears. When he reached the door he turned the key softly. Then he breathed more freely. He felt that he was at last alone and free to move without suspicion.

Then began a great and arduous search; one that was infinitely difficult and exasperating; and full of pathos to the sympathetic man who watched him in silence. Mr. Hilton could not understand his movements as he felt his way about the room, opening drawers and armoires, now and again stooping down and feeling along the floor. He did not betray his presence, however, but moved noiselessly away as the other approached. It was a hideously real game of blindman's-buff, with perhaps a life as the forfeit.

Harold went all over the room, and at last sat down on the edge of his bed with a hollow suppressed groan that was full of pain. He had found his clothes, but realised that they were now but rags. He put on the clothes, and then for a long time sat quiet, rocking gently to and fro as one in pain, a figure of infinite woe. At last he roused himself. His mind was made up; the time for action had come. He groped his way towards the window looking south. The Doctor, who had taken off his shoes, followed him with catlike stealthiness.

He easily threw open the window, for it was already partly open for ventilation.

When Mr. Hilton saw him sit on the rail of the balcony and begin to raise his feet, getting ready to drop over, he rushed forward and seized him. Harold instinctively grappled with him; the habit of his Alaskan life amidst continual danger made in such a case action swift as thought. Mr. Hilton, with the single desire to prevent him from killing himself, threw himself backward and pulled Harold with him to the stone floor.

Harold, as he held him in a grip of iron, thundered out, forgetful in the excitement of the moment the hushed voice to which he had limited himself:

‘What do you want? who are you?’

‘H-s-s-sh! I am Mr. Hilton.’ Harold relaxed the rigour of his grasp but still held him firmly:

‘How did you come here? I locked my door!’

‘I have been in the room a long time. I suspected something, and came to watch; to prevent your rash act.’

‘Rash act! How?’

‘Why, man, if you didn’t kill, you would at least cripple yourself.’

‘How can I cripple myself when the flower-bed is only a few feet below?’

‘There are other dangers for a man who — a man in your sad state. And, besides, have I no duty to prevent a suicide!’ Here a brilliant idea struck Harold. This man had evidently got some wrong impression; but it would serve to shield his real purpose. He would therefore encourage it. For the moment, of course, his purpose to escape unnoticed was foiled; but he would wait, and in due time seize another opportunity. In a harder and more determined tone than he had yet used he said:

‘I don’t see what right you have to interfere. I shall kill myself if I like.’

‘Not whilst you are in my care!’ This was spoken with a resolution equal to his own. Then Mr. Hilton went on, more softly and with infinite compassion: ‘Moreover, I want to have a talk with you which may alter your views.’ Harold interrupted, still playing the game of hiding his real purpose:

‘I shall do as I wish; as I intend.’

‘You are injuring yourself even now by standing in the draught of that open window. Your eyes will feel it before long . . . Are you mad . . . ?'

Harold felt a prick like a pin in his neck; and turned to seize his companion. He could not find him, and for a few moments stumbled through the dark, raging . . .

It seemed a long time before he remembered anything. He had a sense of time lapsed; of dreamland thoughts and visions. Then gradually recollection came back. He tried to move; but found it impossible. His arms and legs were extended wide and were tied; he could feel the cord hurting his wrists and ankles as he moved. To him it was awful to be thus blind and helpless; and anger began to surge up. He heard the voice of Mr. Hilton close by him speaking in a calm, grave, sympathetic tone:

'My poor fellow, I hated to take such a step; but it was really necessary for your own safety. You are a man, and a brave one. Won't you listen to me for a few minutes? When you have heard what I have to say I shall release you. In the meantime I apologise for the outrage, as I dare say you consider it!' Harold was reasonable; and he was now blind and helpless. Moreover, there was something in the Doctor's voice that carried a sense of power with it.

'Go on! I shall listen!' He compelled himself to quietude. The Doctor saw, and realised that he was master of himself. There were some snips of scissors, and he was free.

'See! all I want is calm for a short time, and you have it. May I go on?'

'Go on!' said Harold, not without respect. The Doctor after a pause spoke:

'My poor fellow, I want you to understand that I wish to help you, to do all in my power to restore to you that which you seem to have lost! I can sympathise with your desire to quit life altogether now that the best part of it, sight, seems gone. I do not pretend to judge the actions of my fellows; and if you determine to carry out your purpose I shall not be able to prevent you for ever. I shall not try to. But you certainly shall not do so till you know what I know! I had wished to wait till I could be a little more certain before I took you into confidence with regard to my guessing as to the future. But your desire to destroy yourself forces my hand. Now let me tell you that there is a possibility of the removal of the cause of your purpose.'

'What do you mean?' gasped Harold. He was afraid to think outright and to the full what the other's words seemed to imply.

'I mean,' said the other solemnly, 'that there is a possibility, more than a possibility, that you may recover your sight!' As he spoke there was a little break in his voice. He too was somewhat unnerved at the situation.

Harold lay still. The whole universe seemed to sway, and then whirl round him in chaotic mass. Through it at length he seemed to hear the calm voice:

'At first I could not be sure of my surmise, for when I used the ophthalmoscope your suffering was too recent to disclose the cause I looked for. Now I am fairly sure of it. What I have since heard from you has convinced me; your having suffered from rheumatic fever, and the recrudescence of the rheumatic pain after your terrible experience of the fire and that long chilling swim with so seemingly hopeless an end to it; the symptoms which I have since noticed, though they have not been as enlightening to me as they might be. Your disease, as I have diagnosed it, is an obscure one and not common. I have not before been able to study a case. All these things give me great hopes.'

'Thank God! Thank God!' the voice from the bed was now a whisper.

‘Thank God! say I too. This that you suffer from is an acute form of inflammation of the optic nerve. It may of course end badly; in permanent loss of sight. But I hope — I believe, that in your case it will not be so. You are young, and you are immensely strong; not merely muscularly, but in constitution. I can see that you have been an athlete, and no mean one either. All this will stand to you. But it will take time. It will need all your own help; all the calm restraint of your body and your mind. I am doing all that science knows; you must do the rest!’ He waited, giving time to the other to realise his ideas. Harold lay still for a long time before he spoke:

‘Doctor.’ The voice was so strangely different that the other was more hopeful at once. He had feared opposition, or conflict of some kind. He answered as cheerily as he could:

‘Yes! I am listening.’

‘You are a good fellow; and I am grateful to you, both for what you have done and what you have told me. I cannot say how grateful just yet; hope unmans me at present. But I think you deserve that I should tell you the truth!’ The other nodded; he forgot that the speaker could not see.

‘I was not intending to commit suicide. Such an idea didn’t even enter my head. To me, suicide is the resource of a coward. I have been in too many tight places to ever fear that.’

‘Then in the name of goodness why were you trying to get out of that window?’

‘I wanted to escape; to get away!’

‘In your shirt and trousers; and they are not over much! Without even slippers!’ A faint smile curled round the lips of the injured man. Hope was beginning to help already.

‘Even that way!’

‘But man alive! you were going to your death. How could you expect to get away in such an outfit without being discovered? When you were missed the whole countryside would have been up, and even before the hue-and-cry the first person who saw you would have taken charge of you.’

‘I know! I know! I had thought of it all. But I was willing to chance it. I had my own reasons!’ He was silent a while. The Doctor was silent too. Each man was thinking in his own way. Presently the Doctor spoke:

‘Look here, old chap! I don’t want to pry into your secrets; but, won’t you let me help you? I can hold my tongue. I want to help you. You have earned that wish from any man, and woman too, who saw the burning ship and what you did to save those on board. There is nothing I would not do for you. Nothing! I don’t ask you to tell me all; only enough for me to understand and help. I can see that you have some overpowering wish to get away. Some reason that I cannot fathom, certainly without a clue. You may trust me, I assure you. If you could look into my face, my eyes, you would understand. But — There! take my hand. It may tell you something!’

Harold took the hand placed in his, and held it close. He pressed his other hand over it also, as though the effect of the two hands would bring him double knowledge. It was infinitely pathetic to see him trying to make his untrained fingers do the duty of his trained eyes. But, trained or not, his hands had their instinct. Laying down gently the hand he held he said, turning his bandaged eyes in the direction of his companion:

‘I shall trust you! Are we alone; absolutely alone?’

‘Absolutely!’

‘Have I your solemn promise that anything I say shall never go beyond yourself?’

‘I promise. I can swear, if it will make your mind more easy in the matter.’

‘What do you hold most sacred in the world?’ Harold had an odd thought; his question was its result.

‘All told, I should think my profession! Perhaps it doesn’t seem to you much to swear by; but it is all my world! But I have been brought up in honour, and you may trust my promise — as much as anything I could swear.’

‘All right! My reason for wanting to get away was because I knew Lady de Lannoy!’

‘What!’ Then after a pause: ‘I should have thought that was a reason for wanting to stay. She seems not only one of the most beautiful, but the sweetest woman I ever met.’

‘She is all that! And a thousand times more!’

‘Then why — Pardon me!’

‘I cannot tell you all; but you must take it that my need to get away is imperative.’ After pondering a while Mr. Hilton said suddenly:

‘I must ask your pardon again. Are you sure there is no mistake. Lady de Lannoy is not married; has not been. She is Countess in her own right. It is quite a romance. She inherited from some old branch of more than three hundred years ago.’ Again Harold smiled; he quite saw what the other meant.

He answered gravely

‘I understand. But it does not alter my opinion; my purpose. It is needful — absolutely and imperatively needful that I get away without her recognising me, or knowing who I am.’

‘She does not know you now. She has not seen you yet.’

‘That is why I hoped to get away in time; before she should recognise me. If I stay quiet and do all you wish, will you help me?’

‘I will! And what then?’

‘When I am well, if it should be so, I shall steal away, this time clothed, and disappear out of her life without her knowing. She may think it ungrateful that one whom she has treated so well should behave so badly. But that can’t be helped. It is the lesser evil of the two.’

‘And I must abet you? All right! I will do it; though you must forgive me if you should ever hear that I have abused you and said bad things of you. It will have to be all in the day’s work if I am not ultimately to give you away. I must take steps at once to keep her from seeing you. I shall have to invent some story; some new kind of dangerous disease, perhaps. I shall stay here and nurse you myself!’ Harold spoke in joyful gratitude:

‘Oh, you *are* good. But can you spare the time? How long will it all take?’

‘Some weeks! Perhaps!’ He paused as if thinking. ‘Perhaps in a month’s time I shall unbandage your eyes. You will then see; or . . .’

‘I understand! I shall be patient!’

In the morning Mr. Hilton in reporting to Lady de Lannoy told her that he considered it would be necessary to keep his patient very quiet, both in mind and body. In the course of the conversation he said:

‘Anything which might upset him must be studiously avoided. He is not an easy patient to deal with; he doesn’t like people to go near him. I think, therefore, it will be well if even you do not see him.

He seems to have an odd distrust of people, especially of women. It may be that he is fretful in his blindness, which is in itself so trying to a strong man. But besides, the treatment is not calculated to have a very buoyant effect. It is apt to make a man fretful to lie in the dark, and know that he has to do so for indefinite weeks. Pilocarpin, and salicylate of soda, and mercury do not tend towards cheerfulness. Nor do blisters on the forehead add to the content of life!'

'I quite understand,' said Stephen, 'and I will be careful not to go near him till he is well. Please God! it may bring him back his sight. Thank you a thousand times for your determination to stay with him.'

So it was that for more than two weeks Harold was kept all alone. No one attended him but the Doctor. He slept in the patient's room for the whole of the first week, and never had him out of sight for more than a few minutes at a time. He was then able to leave him alone for longer periods, and settled himself in the bedroom next to him. Every hour or two he would visit him. Occasionally he would be away for half a day, but never for more. Stephen rigidly observed the Doctor's advice herself, and gave strict orders that his instructions were to be obeyed.

Harold himself went through a period of mental suffering. It was agony to him to think of Stephen being so near at hand, and yet not to be able to see her, or even to hear her voice. All the pain of his loss of her affection seemed to crowd back on him, and with it the new need of escaping from her unknown. More than ever he felt it would not do that she should ever learn his identity. Her pity for him, and possibly her woman's regard for a man's effort in time of stress, might lead through the gates of her own self-sacrifice to his restoration to his old place in her affections. Nay! it could not be his old place; for at the close of those days she had learned of his love for her.

CHAPTER XXXV — A CRY

The third week had nearly elapsed, and as yet no one was allowed to see the patient.

For a time Stephen was inclined to be chagrined. It is not pleasant to have even the most generous and benevolent intentions thwarted; and she had set her mind on making much of this man whom fate and his own bravery had thrown athwart her life. But in these days Stephen was in some ways a changed woman. She had so much that she wished to forget and that she would have given worlds to recall, that she could not bear even to think of any militant or even questioning attitude. She even began to take herself to task more seriously than she had ever done with regard to social and conventional duties. When she found her house full of so many and so varied guests, it was borne in upon her that such a position as her own, with such consequent duties, called for the presence of some elder person of her own sex and of her own class.

No better proof of Stephen's intellectual process and its result could be adduced than her first act of recognition: she summoned an elderly lady to live with her and matronise her house. This lady, the widow of a distant relation, complied with all the charted requirements of respectability, and had what to Stephen's eyes was a positive gift: that of minding her own business and not interfering in any matter whatever. Lady de Lannoy, she felt, was her own master and quite able to take care of herself. Her own presence was all that convention required. So she limited herself to this duty, with admirable result to all, herself included. After a few days Stephen would almost forget that she was present.

Mr. Hilton kept bravely to his undertaking. He never gave even a hint of his hopes of the restoration of sight; and he was so assiduous in his attention that there arose no opportunity of accidental discovery of the secret. He knew that when the time did come he would find himself in a very unpleasant situation. Want of confidence, and even of intentional deceit, might be attributed to him; and he would not be able to deny nor explain. He was, however; determined to stick to his word. If he could but save his patient's sight he would be satisfied.

But to Stephen all the mystery seemed to grow out of its first shadowy importance into something real. There was coming to her a vague idea that she would do well not to manifest any concern, any anxiety, any curiosity. Instinct was at work; she was content to trust it, and wait.

One forenoon she received by messenger a letter which interested her much. So much that at first she was unwilling to show it to anyone, and took it to her own boudoir to read over again in privacy. She had a sort of feeling of expectancy with regard to it; such as sensitive natures feel before a thunderstorm. The letter was natural enough in itself. It was dated that morning from Varilands, a neighbouring estate which marched with Lannoy to the south.

'My Dear Madam, — Will you pardon me a great liberty, and allow my little girl and me to come to see you to-day? I shall explain when we meet. When I say that we are Americans and have come seven thousand miles for the purpose, you will, I am sure, understand that it is no common interest which has brought us, and it will be the excuse for our eagerness. I should write you more fully, but as the matter is a confidential one I thought it would be better to speak. We shall be doubly grateful if you will have the kindness to see us alone. I write as a mother in making this appeal to your kindness; for my child — she is only a little over eight years old — has the matter so deeply in her heart that any disappointment or undue delay would I fear affect her health. We presume to take your kindness for granted and will call a little before twelve o'clock.

'I may perhaps say (in case you should feel any hesitation as to my *bona fides*) that my husband purchased some years ago this estate. We were to have come here to live in the early summer, but were kept in the West by some important business of his.

'Believe me, yours sincerely,

'Alice Stonehouse.'

Stephen had, of course, no hesitation as to receiving the lady. Even had there been objection, the curiosity she had in common with her kind would have swept difficulties aside. She gave orders that when Mrs. Stonehouse arrived with her daughter they were to be shown at once into the Mandarin drawing-room. That they would probably stay for lunch. She would see them alone.

A little before twelve o'clock Mrs. Stonehouse and Pearl arrived, and were shown into the room where Lady de Lannoy awaited them. The high sun, streaming in from the side, shone on her beautiful hair, making it look like living gold. When the Americans came in they were for an instant entranced by her beauty. One glance at Mrs. Stonehouse's sweet sympathetic face was enough to establish her in Stephen's good graces forever. As for Pearl, she was like one who has unexpectedly seen a fairy or a goddess. She had been keeping guardedly behind her mother, but on the instant she came out fearlessly into the open.

Stephen advanced quickly and shook hands with Mrs. Stonehouse, saying heartily:

'I am so glad you have come. I am honoured in being trusted.'

‘Thank you so much, Lady de Lannoy. I felt that you would not mind, especially when you know why we came. Indeed I had no choice. Pearl insisted on it; and when Pearl is urgent — we who love her have all to give way. This is Pearl!’

In an instant Stephen was on her knees by the beautiful child.

The red rosebud of a mouth was raised to her kiss, and the little arms went lovingly round her neck and clung to her. As the mother looked on delighted she thought she had never seen a more beautiful sight. The two faces so different, and yet with so much in common. The red hair and the flaxen, both tints of gold. The fine colour of each heightened to a bright flush in their eagerness. Stephen was so little used to children, and yet loved them so, that all the womanhood in her, which is possible motherhood, went out in an instant to the lovely eager child. She felt the keenest pleasure when the little thing, having rubbed her silk-gloved palms over her face, and then holding her away so that she could see her many beauties, whispered in her ear:

‘How pretty you are!’

‘You darling!’ whispered Stephen in reply. ‘We must love each other very much, you and I!’

When the two ladies had sat down, Stephen holding Pearl in her lap, Mrs. Stonehouse said:

‘I suppose you have wondered, Lady de Lannoy, what has brought us here?’

‘Indeed I was very much interested.’

‘Then I had better tell you all from the beginning so that you may understand.’ She proceeded to give the details of the meeting with Mr. Robinson on the *Scoriac*. Of how Pearl took to him and insisted on making him her special friend; of the terrible incident of her being swept overboard, and of the gallant rescue. Mrs. Stonehouse was much moved as she spoke. All that fearful time, of which the minutes had seemed years of agony, came back to her so vividly at times that she could hardly speak. Pearl listened too; all eagerness, but without fear. Stephen was greatly moved and held Pearl close to her all the time, as though protecting her. When the mother spoke of her feeling when she saw the brave man struggling up and down the giant waves, and now and again losing sight of him in the trough of the sea, she put out one hand and held the mother's with a grasp which vibrated in sympathy, whilst the great tears welled over in her eyes and ran down her cheeks. Pearl, watching her keenly, said nothing, but taking her tiny cambric handkerchief from her pocket silently wiped the tears away, and clung all the tighter. It was her turn to protect now!

Pearl's own time for tears came when her mother began to tell this new and sympathetic friend of how she became so much attached to her rescuer that when she knew he would not be coming to the West with them, but going off to the wildest region of the far North, her health became impaired; and that it was only when Mr. Robinson promised to come back to see her within three years that she was at all comforted. And how, ever since, she had held the man in her heart and thought of him every day; sleeping as well as waking, for he was a factor in her dreams!

Stephen was more than ever moved, for the child's constancy touched her as well as her grief. She strained the little thing in her strong young arms, as though the fervency of her grasp would bring belief and comfort; as it did. She in her turn dried the others' eyes. Then Mrs. Stonehouse went on with her story:

'We were at Banff, high up in the Rockies, when we read of the burning and wrecking of the *Dominion*. It is, as you know, a Montreal boat of the Allan Line; so that naturally there was a full telegraphic report in all the Canadian papers. When we read of the brave man who swam ashore with the line and who was unable to reach the port but swam out across the bay, Pearl took it for granted that it must have been "The Man," as she always called Mr. Robinson. When by the next paper we learned that the man's name *was* Robinson nothing would convince her that it was not *her* Mr. Robinson. My husband, I may tell you, had firmly come to the same conclusion. He had ever since the rescue of our child always looked for any news from Alaska, whither he knew Mr. Robinson had gone. He learned that up away in the very far North a new goldfield had been discovered by a man of the same name; and that a new town, Robinson City, began to grow up in the wilderness, where the condition of life from the cold was a new experience to even the most hardy gold miners. Then we began to think that the young hero who had so gallantly saved our darling was meeting some of his reward . . . !'

She paused, her voice breaking. Stephen was in a glow of holy feeling. Gladness, joy, gratitude, enthusiasm; she knew not which. It all seemed like a noble dream which was coming true. Mrs. Stonehouse went on:-

'From Californian papers of last month we learned that Robinson, of Robinson City, had sailed for San Francisco, but had disappeared when the ship touched at Portland; and then the whole chain of his identity seemed complete. Nothing would satisfy Pearl but that we should come at once to England and see "The Man," who was wounded and blind, and do what we could for him. Her father could not then come himself; he had important work on hand which he could not leave without some preparation. But he is following us and may be here at any time.

‘And now, we want you to help us, Lady de Lannoy. We are not sure yet of the identity of Mr. Robinson, but we shall know the instant we see him, or hear his voice. We have learned that he is still here. Won’t you let us? Do let us see him as soon as ever you can!’ There was a pleading tone in her voice which alone would have moved Stephen, even had she not been wrought up already by the glowing fervour of her new friend.

But she paused. She did not know what to say; how to tell them that as yet she herself knew nothing. She, too, in the depths of her own heart knew — *knew* — that it was the same Robinson. And she also knew that both identities were one with another. The beating of her heart and the wild surging of her blood told her all. She was afraid to speak lest her voice should betray her.

She could not even think. She would have to be alone for that.

Mrs. Stonehouse, with the wisdom and power of age, waited, suspending judgment. But Pearl was in a fever of anxiety; she could imagine nothing which could keep her away from The Man. But she saw that there was some difficulty, some cause of delay. So she too added her pleading. Putting her mouth close to Lady de Lannoy’s ear she whispered very faintly, very caressingly:

‘What is your name? Your own name? Your very own name?’

‘Stephen, my darling!’

‘Oh, won’t you let us see The Man, Stephen; dear Stephen! I love him so; and I do *so* want to see him. It is ages till I see him! Won’t you let me? I shall be so good — Stephen!’ And she strained her closer in her little arms and kissed her all over face, cheeks and forehead and eyes and mouth wooingly. Stephen returned the embrace and the kisses, but remained silent a little longer. Then she found voice:

‘I hardly know what to say. Believe me, I should — I shall, do all I can; but the fact is that I am not in authority. The Doctor has taken him in charge and will not let anyone go near him: He will not even have a nurse, but watches and attends to him himself. He says it might be fatal if anything should occur to agitate him. Why, even I am not allowed to see him!’

‘Haven’t you seen him yet at all; ever, ever, Stephen?’ asked Pearl, all her timidity gone. Stephen smiled — a wan smile it was, as she answered:

‘I saw him in the water, but it was too far away to distinguish. And it was only by firelight.’

‘Oh yes, I know,’ said Pearl; ‘Mother and Daddy told me how you had burned the house down to give him light. Didn’t you want to see him more after that? I should!’ Stephen drew the impulsive child closer as she answered:

‘Indeed I did, dear. But I had to think of what was good for him. I went to his room the next day when he was awake, and the Doctor let me come in for only a moment.’

‘Well! What did you see. Didn’t you know him?’ She forgot that the other did not know him from her point of view. But the question went through Stephen’s heart like a sword. What would she not have given to have known him! What would she not give to know him now! . . . She spoke mechanically:

‘The room was quite dark. It is necessary, the Doctor says, that he be kept in the dark. I saw only a big beard, partly burned away by the fire; and a great bandage which covered his eyes!’ Pearl’s hold relaxed, she slipped like an eel to the floor and ran over to her mother. Her new friend was all very well, but no one would do as well as mother when she was in trouble.

‘Oh mother, mother! My Robinson had no beard!’ Her mother stroked her face comfortingly as she answered:

‘But, my dear, it is more than two years since you saw him. Two years and three months, for it was in June that we crossed.’ How the date thrilled Stephen. It verified her assumption.

Mrs. Stonehouse did not notice, but went on:

‘His beard would have grown. Men wear beards up in the cold place where he was.’ Pearl kissed her; there was no need for words. Throwing herself again on Stephen’s knees she went on with her questioning:

‘But didn’t you hear him?’

‘I heard very little, darling. He was very weak. It was only the morning after the wreck, and he spoke in a whisper!’ Then with an instinct of self-preservation she added: ‘But how could I learn anything by hearing him when he was a stranger to me? I had never even heard of Mr. Robinson!’

As she was speaking she found her own ideas, the proofs of her own conviction growing. This was surely another link in the chain of proving that all three men were but one. But in such case Harold must know; must have tried to hide his identity!

She feared, with keen eyes upon her, to pursue the thought. But her blood began to grow cold and her brain to swim. With an effort she went on:

‘Even since then I have not been allowed to go near him. Of course I must obey orders. I am waiting as patiently as I can. But we must ask the Doctor if he thinks his patient will see you — will let you see him — though he will not let me.’ This she added with a touch of what she felt: regret rather than bitter ness. There was no room for bitterness in her full heart where Harold was concerned.

'Will you ask the Doctor now?' Pearl did not let grass grow under her feet. For answer Stephen rang the bell, and when a servant appeared asked:

'Is Mr. Hilton in the house?'

'I think not, your Ladyship. He said he was going over to Port Lannoch. Shall I inquire if he left word at what time he would be back?'

'If you please!' The man returned in a few minutes with the butler, who said:

'Mr. Hilton said, your Ladyship, that he expected to be back by one o'clock at latest.'

'Please ask him on his arrival if he will kindly come here at once. Do not let us be disturbed until then.' The butler bowed and withdrew.

'Now,' said Stephen, 'as we have to wait till our tyrant comes, won't you tell me all that went on after The Man had left you?' Pearl brightened up at once. Stephen would have given anything to get away even for a while. Beliefs and hopes and fears were surging up, till she felt choking. But the habit of her life, especially her life of the last two years, gave her self-control. And so she waited, trying with all her might to follow the child's prattle.

After a long wait Pearl exclaimed: 'Oh! I do wish that Doctor would come. I want to see The Man!' She was so restless, marching about the room, that Stephen said:

'Would you like to go out on the balcony, darling; of course if Mother will let you? It is quite safe, I assure you, Mrs. Stonehouse. It is wide and open and is just above the flower-borders, with a stone tail. You can see the road from it by which Mr. Hilton comes from Port Lannoch. He will be riding.' Pearl yielded at once to the diversion. It would at any rate be something to do, to watch. Stephen opened the French window and the child ran out on the balcony.

When Stephen came back to her seat Mrs. Stonehouse said quietly:

'I am glad she is away for a few minutes. She has been over wrought, and I am always afraid for her. She is so sensitive. And after all she is only a baby!'

'She is a darling!' said Stephen impulsively; and she meant it. Mrs. Stonehouse smiled gratefully as she went on:

'I suppose you noticed what a hold on her imagination that episode of Mollie Watford at the bank had. Mr. Stonehouse is, as perhaps you know, a very rich man. He has made his fortune himself, and most honourably; and we are all very proud of him, and of it. So Pearl does not think of the money for itself. But the feeling was everything; she really loves Mr. Robinson; as indeed she ought! He has done so much for us that it would be a pride and a privilege for us to show our gratitude. My husband, between ourselves, wanted to make him his partner. He tells me that, quite independent of our feeling towards him, he is just the man he wanted. And if indeed it was he who discovered the Alaskan goldfield and organised and ruled Robinson City, it is a proof that Mr. Stonehouse's judgment was sound. Now he is injured, and blind; and our little Pearl loves him. If indeed he be the man we believe he is, then we may be able to do something which all his millions cannot buy. He will come to us, and be as a son to us, and a brother to Pearl. We will be his eyes; and nothing but love and patience will guide his footsteps!' She paused, her mouth quivering; then she went on:

'If it is not our Mr. Robinson, then it will be our pleasure to do all that is necessary for his comfort. If he is a poor man he will never want . . . It will be a privilege to save so gallant a man from hardship . . . ' Here she came to a stop.

Stephen too was glad of the pause, for the emotion which the words and their remembrances evoked was choking her. Had not Harold been as her own father's son. As her own brother! . . . She turned away, fearing lest her face should betray her.

All at once Mrs. Stonehouse started to her feet, her face suddenly white with fear; for a cry had come to their ears. A cry which even Stephen knew as Pearl's. The mother ran to the window.

The balcony was empty. She came back into the room, and, ran to the door.

But on the instant a voice that both women knew was heard from without:

'Help there! Help, I say! The child has fainted. Is there no one there? And I am blind!'

CHAPTER XXXVI — LIGHT

Harold had been in a state of increasing restlessness. The month of waiting which Dr. Hilton had laid down for him seemed to wear away with extraordinary slowness; this was increased by the lack of companionship, and further by the cutting off of even the little episodes usual to daily life. His patience, great as it was naturally and trained as it had been by the years of self-repression, was beginning to give way. Often and often there came over him a wild desire to tear off the irksome bandages and try for himself whether the hopes held out to him were being even partially justified. He was restrained only by the fear of perpetual blindness, which came over him in a sort of cold wave at each reaction. Time, too, added to his fear of discovery; but he could not but think that his self-sought isolation must be a challenge to the curiosity of each and all who knew of it. And with all these disturbing causes came the main one, which never lessened but always grew: that whatever might happen Stephen would be further from him than ever. Look at the matter how he would; turn it round in whatsoever possible or impossible way, he could see no relief to this gloomy conclusion.

For it is in the nature of love that it creates or enlarges its own pain. If troubles or difficulties there be from natural causes, then it will exaggerate them into nightmare proportions. But if there be none, it will create them. Love is in fact the most serious thing that comes to man; where it exists all else seem as phantoms, or at best as actualities of lesser degree. During the better part of two years his troubles had but slept; and as nothing wakes the pangs of old love better than the sound of a voice, all the old acute pain of love and the agony that followed its denial were back with him. Surely he could never, never believe that Stephen did not mean what she had said to him that morning in the beech grove. All his new resolution not to hamper her with the burden of a blind and lonely-hearted man was back to the full.

In such mood had he been that morning. He was additionally disturbed because the Doctor had gone early to Port Lannoch; and as he was the only person with whom he could talk, he clung to him with something of the helpless feeling of a frightened child to its nurse.

The day being full of sunshine the window was open, and only the dark-green blind which crackled and rustled with every passing breeze made the darkness of the room. Harold was dressed and lay on a sofa placed back in the room, where the few rays of light thus entering could not reach him. His eyes and forehead were bandaged as ever. For some days the Doctor, who had his own reasons and his own purpose, had not taken them off; so the feeling of blind helplessness was doubly upon him. He knew he was blind; and he knew also that if he were not he could not in his present condition see.

All at once he started up awake. His hearing had in the weeks of darkness grown abnormally acute, and some trifling sound had recalled him to himself. It might have been inspiration, but he seemed to be conscious of some presence in the room.

As he rose from the sofa, with the violent motion of a strong man startled into unconscious activity, he sent a shock of fear to the eager child who had strayed into the room through the open window. Had he presented a normal appearance, she would not have been frightened. She would have recognised his identity despite the changes, and have sprung to him so impulsively that she would have been in his arms before she had time to think. But now all she saw was a great beard topped with a mass of linen and lint, which obscured all the rest of the face and seemed in the gloom like a gigantic and ominous turban.

In her fright she screamed out. He in turn, forgetful for the moment of his intention of silence, called aloud:

‘Who is that?’ Pearl, who had been instinctively backing towards the window by which she had entered, and whose thoughts in her fright had gone back to her mother — refuge in time of danger — cried out:

‘Mother, Mother! It is him! It is The Man!’ She would have run towards him in spite of his forbidding appearance; but the shock had been too much for her. The little knees trembled and gave way; the brain reeled; and with a moan she sank on the floor in a swoon.

Harold knew the voice the instant she spoke; there was no need for the enlightening words

‘Pearl! Pearl!’ he cried. ‘Come to me, darling!’ But as he spoke he heard her moan, and the soft thud of her little body on the thick carpet. He guessed the truth and groped his way towards where the sound had been, for he feared lest he might trample upon her in too great eagerness. Kneeling by her he touched her little feet, and then felt his way to her face. And as he did so, such is the double action of the mind, even in the midst of his care the remembrance swept across his mind of how he had once knelt in just such manner in an old church by another little senseless form. In his confusion of mind he lost the direction of the door, and coming to the window pushed forward the flapping blind and went out on the balcony. He knew from the freshness of the air and the distant sounds that he was in the open. This disturbed him, as he wished to find someone who could attend to the fainting child. But as he had lost the way back to the room now, he groped along the wall of the Castle with one hand, whilst he held Pearl securely in the other. As he went he called out for help.

When he came opposite the window of the Mandarin room Mrs. Stonehouse saw him; she ran to him and caught Pearl in her arms. She was so agitated, so lost in concern for the child that she never even thought to speak to the man whom she had come so far to seek. She wailed over the child:

‘Pearl! Pearl! What is it, darling? It is Mother!’ She laid the girl on the sofa, and taking the flowers out of a glass began to sprinkle water on the child’s face. Harold knew her voice and waited in patience. Presently the child sighed; the mother, relieved, thought of other things at last and looked around her.

There was yet another trouble. There on the floor, where she had slipped down, lay Lady de Lannoy in a swoon. She called out instinctively, forgetting for the moment that the man was blind, but feeling all the old confidence which he had won in her heart:

‘Oh! Mr. Robinson, help me! Lady de Lannoy has fainted too, and I do not know what to do!’ As she spoke she looked up at him and remembered his blindness. But she had no time to alter her words; the instant she had spoken Harold, who had been leaning against the window-sash, and whose mind was calmer since with his acute hearing he too had heard Pearl sigh, seemed to leap into the room.

‘Where is she? Where is she? Oh, God, now am I blind indeed!’

It gave her a pang to hear him and to see him turn helplessly with his arms and hands outstretched as though he would feel for her in the air.

Without pause, and under an instinctive and uncontrollable impulse, he tore the bandages from his eyes. The sun was streaming in. As he met it his eyes blinked and a cry burst from him; a wild cry whose joy and surprise pierced even through the shut portals of the swooning woman's brain. Not for worlds would she ever after have lost the memory of that sound:

'Light! light! Oh, God! Oh, God! I am not blind!'

But he looked round him still in terrified wonder:

'Where is she? Where is she? I cannot see her! Stephen! Stephen! where are you?' Mrs. Stonehouse, bewildered, pointed where Stephen's snow-white face and brilliant hair seemed in the streaming sunlight like ivory and gold:

'There! There!' He caught her arm mechanically, and putting his eyes to her wrist, tried to look along her pointed finger. In an instant he dropped her arm moaning.

'I cannot see her! What is it that is over me? This is worse than to be blind!' He covered his face with his hands and sobbed.

He felt light strong fingers on his forehead and hands; fingers whose touch he would have known had they been laid on him were he no longer quick. A voice whose music he had heard in his dreams for two long years said softly:

'I am here, Harold! I am here! Oh! do not sob like that; it breaks my heart to hear you!' He took his hands from his face and held hers in them, staring intently at her as though his passionate gaze would win through every obstacle.

That moment he never forgot. Never could forget! He saw the room all rich in yellow. He saw Pearl, pale but glad-eyed, lying on a sofa holding the hand of her mother, who stood beside her. He saw the great high window open, the lines of the covered stone balcony without, the stretch of green sward all vivid in the sunshine, and beyond it the blue quivering sea. He saw all but that for which his very soul longed; without to see which sight itself was valueless . . . But still he looked, and looked; and Stephen saw in his dark eyes, though he could not see her, that which made her own eyes fill and the warm red glow on her face again . . . Then she raised her eyes again, and the gladness of her beating heart seemed the answer to his own.

For as he looked he saw, as though emerging from a mist whose obscurity melted with each instant, what was to him the one face in all the world. He did not think then of its beauty — that would come later; and besides no beauty of one born of woman could outmatch the memorised beauty which had so long held his heart. But that he had so schooled himself in long months of gloomy despair, he would have taken her in his arms there and then; and, heedless of the presence of others, have poured out his full heart to her.

Mrs. Stonehouse saw and understood. So too Pearl, who though a child was a woman-child; softly they rose up to steal away. But Stephen saw them; her own instincts, too, told her that her hour had not come. What she hoped for must come alone! So she called to her guests:

‘Don’t go! Don’t go, Mrs. Stonehouse. You know now that Harold and I are old friends, though neither of us knew it — till this moment. We were brought up as . . . almost as brother and sister. Pearl, isn’t it lovely to see your friend . . . to see The Man again?’

She was so happy that she could only express herself, with dignity, through the happiness of others.

Pearl actually shrieked with joy as she rushed across the room and flung herself into Harold’s arms as he stooped to her. He raised her;

and she kissed him again and again, and put her little hands all over his face and stroked, very, very gently, his eyes, and said:

'Oh, I am so glad! And so glad your poor eyes are unbind again! May I call you Harold, too?'

'You darling!' was all he could say as he kissed her, and holding her in one arm went across and shook hands with Mrs. Stonehouse, who wrung his hand hard.

There was a little awkwardness in the group, for none of them knew what would be best to do next. In the midst of it there came a light knock at the door, and Mr. Hilton entered saying:

'They told me you wished to see me at once — Hulloa!' He rushed across the room and took Harold by the shoulders, turning his face to the light. He looked in his eyes long and earnestly, the others holding their breaths. Presently he said, without relaxing his gaze:

'Did you see mistily at first?'

'Yes.'

'Seeing at the periphery; but the centre being opaque?'

'Yes! How did you know? Why, I couldn't see' — see pointing to Stephen— 'Lady de Lannoy; though her face was right in front of me!'

Dr. Hilton took his hands from his patient's shoulders and shook him warmly by both hands:-

'I am glad, old fellow! It was worth waiting for, wasn't it? But I say, it was a dangerous thing to take off those bandages before I permitted. However, it has done no harm! But it was lucky that I mistrusted your patience and put the time for the experiment a week later than I thought necessary . . . What is it?' He turned from one to the other questioningly; there was a look on Harold's face that he did not quite comprehend.

'H-s-h,' said the latter warningly, 'I'll tell you all about it . . . some time!'

The awkward pause was broken by Pearl, who came to the Doctor and said:

'I must kiss you, you know. It was you who saved The Man's eyes. Stephen has told me how you watched him!' The Doctor was somewhat taken aback; as yet he was ignorant of Pearl's existence. However, he raised the child in his arms and kissed her, saying:

'Thank you, my dear! I did all I could. But he helped much himself; except at the very last. Don't you ever go and take off bandages, if you should ever have the misfortune to have them on, without the doctor's permission!' Pearl nodded her head wisely and then wriggled out of his arms and came again to Harold, looking up at him protectingly and saying in an old-fashioned way:

'How are you feeling now? None the worse, I hope, *Harold*!'

The Man lifted her up and kissed her again. When he set her down she came over to Lady de Lannoy and held up her arms to be lifted:

'And I must kiss you again too, Stephen!' If Lady de Lannoy hadn't loved the sweet little thing already she would have loved her for that!

The door was opened, and the butler announced:

'Luncheon is served, your Ladyship.'

* * * * *

After a few days Harold went over to Varilands to stay for a while with the Stonehouses. Mr. Stonehouse had arrived, and both men were rejoiced to meet again. The elder never betrayed by word or sign that he recognised the identity of the other person of the drama of whom he had told him and who had come so accidentally into his life; and the younger was grateful to him for it. Harold went almost every day to Lannoy, and sometimes the Stonehouses went with him; at other times Stephen paid flying visits to Varilands. She did not make any effort to detain Harold; she would not for worlds have made a sign which might influence him. She was full now of that diffidence which every woman has who loves. She felt that she must wait; must wait even if the waiting lasted to her grave. She felt, as every woman does who really loves, that she had found her Master.

And Harold, to whom something of the same diffidence was an old story, got the idea that her reticence was a part of the same feeling whose violent expression had sent him out into the wilderness. And with the thought came the idea of his duty, implied in her father's dying trust: 'Give her time! . . . Let her choose!' For him the clock seemed to have stopped for two whole years, and he was back at the time when the guardianship of his boy life was beginning to yield to the larger and more selfish guardianship of manhood.

Stephen, noticing that he did not come near her as closely as she felt he might, and not realising his true reason — for when did love ever realise the true reason of the bashfulness of love? — felt a chillness which in turn reacted on her own manner.

And so these two ardent souls, who yearned for each other's love and the full expression of it, seemed as if they might end after all in drifting apart. Each thought that their secret was concealed. But both secrets were already known to Mrs. Stonehouse, who knew nothing; and to Mr. Stonehouse, who knew everything. Even Pearl had her own ideas, as was once shown in a confidence when they were alone in Stephen's bedroom after helping her to finish her dressing, just as Stephen herself had at a similar age helped her

Uncle Gilbert. After some coy leading up to the subject of pretty dresses, the child putting her little mouth to the other's ear whispered:

'May I be your bridesmaid, Stephen?' The woman was taken aback; but she had to speak at once, for the child's eyes were on her:

'Of course you will, darling. But I — I may never be married.'

'You! You must! I know someone who will make you!' Stephen's heart beat hard and rapidly. The child's talk, though sweet and dear, was more than embarrassing. With, however, the desire to play with fire, which is a part of the nature of women, she answered:

'You have some queer ideas, little one, in that pretty knowledge-box of yours.'

'Oh! he never told me. But I know it all the same! And you know it too, Stephen!' This was getting too close to be without danger; so she tried to divert the thought from herself:

'My darling, you may guess about other people, though I don't say you ought; but you must not guess about me!'

'All right!' then she held up her arms to be lifted on the other's knee and said:

'I want to whisper to you!' Her voice and manner were so full of feeling that somehow the other was moved. She bent her head, and Pearl taking her neck in her little palms, said:

'I thought, oh! long ago, that I would marry him myself. But you knew him first . . . And he only saved me . . . But you saved him!' . . . And then she laid her head down on the throbbing bosom, and sobbed . . .

And Stephen sobbed too.

Before they left the room, Stephen said to her, very gravely, for the issue might be one of great concern:

‘Of course, Pearl dear, our secrets are all between ourselves!’ Pearl crossed her two forefingers and kissed them. But she said nothing; she had sworn! Stephen went on:

‘And, darling, you will remember too that one must never speak or even think if they can help it about anyone’s marrying anyone else till they say so themselves! What is it, dear, that you are smiling at?’

‘I know, Stephen! I musn’t take off the bandage till the Doctor says so!’

Stephen smiled and kissed her. Hand in hand, Pearl chattering merrily, they went down to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XXXVII — GOLDEN SILENCE

Each day that passed seemed to add to the trouble in the heart of these young people; to widen the difficulty of expressing themselves. To Stephen, who had accepted the new condition of things and whose whole nature had bloomed again under the sunshine of hope, it was the less intolerable. She had set herself to wait, as had countless thousands of women before her; and as due proportion will, till the final cataclysm abolishes earthly unions. But Harold felt the growth, both positive and negative, as a new torture; and he began to feel that he would be unable to go through with it. In his heart was the constant struggle of hope; and in opposition to it the seeming realisation of every new fancy of evil. That bitter hour, when the whole of creation was for him turned upside down, was having its sad effect at last. Had it not been for that horrid remembrance he would have come to believe enough in himself to put his future to the test. He would have made an opportunity at which Stephen and himself would have with the fires of their mutual love burned away the encircling mist. There are times when a single minute of commonsense would turn sorrow into joy; and yet that minute, our own natures being the opposing forces, will be allowed to pass.

Those who loved these young people were much concerned about them. Mrs. Stonehouse took their trouble so much to heart that she spoke to her husband about it, seriously advising that one or other of them should make an effort to bring things in the right way for their happiness. The woman was sure of the woman’s feeling. It is from men, not women, that women hide their love. By side-glances and unthinking moments women note and learn. The man knew already, from his own lips, of the man's passion. But his lips were sealed by his loyalty; and he said earnestly:

'My dear, we must not interfere. Not now, at any rate; we might cause them great trouble. I am as sure as you are that they really love each other. But they must win happiness by themselves and through themselves alone. Otherwise it would never be to them what it ought to be; what it might be; what it will be!'

So these friends were silent, and the little tragedy developed. Harold's patience began to give way under the constant strain of self-suppression. Stephen tried to hide her love and fear, under the mask of a gracious calm. This the other took for indifference.

At last there came an hour which was full of new, hopeless agony to Stephen. She heard Harold, in a fragment of conversation, speak to Mr. Stonehouse of the need of returning to Alaska. That sounded like a word of doom. In her inmost heart she knew that Harold loved her; and had she been free she would have herself spoken the words which would have drawn the full truth to them both. But how could she do so, having the remembrance of that other episode; when, without the reality of love, she had declared herself? . . . Oh! the shame of it . . . The folly! . . . And Harold knew it all! How could he ever believe that it was real this time! . . .

By the exercise of that self-restraint which long suffering had taught her, Stephen so managed to control herself that none of her guests realised what a blow she had received from a casual word. She bore herself gallantly till the last moment. After the old fashion of her youth, she had from the Castle steps seen their departure. Then she took her way to her own room, and locked herself in. She did not often, in these days, give way to tears; when she did cry it was as a luxury, and not from poignant cause. Her deep emotion was dry-eyed as of old. Now, she did not cry, she sat still, her hands clasped below her knees, with set white face gazing out on the far-off sea. For hours she sat there lonely; staring fixedly all the time, though her thoughts were whirling wildly. At first she had some vague purpose, which she hoped might eventually work out into a plan. But thought would not come. Everywhere there was the same beginning: a wild, burning desire to let Harold understand her feeling towards him; to blot out, with the conviction of trust and love, those bitter moments when in the madness of her overstrung passion she had heaped such insult upon him. Everywhere the same end: an impasse. He seemingly could not, would not, understand. She knew now that the man had diffidences, forbearances, self-judgments and self-denials which made for the suppression, in what he considered to be her interest, of his own desires. This was tragedy indeed! Again and again came back the remembrance of that bitter regret of her Aunt Laetitia, which no happiness and no pain of her own had ever been able to efface:

‘To love; and be helpless! To wait, and wait, and wait; with heart all aflame! To hope, and hope; till time seemed to have passed away, and all the world to stand still on your hopeless misery! To know that a word might open up Heaven; and yet to have to remain mute! To keep back the glances that could enlighten, to modulate the tones that might betray! To see all you hoped for passing away . . . !’

At last she seemed to understand the true force of pride; which has in it a thousand forces of its own, positive, negative, restrainful. Oh! how blind she had been! How little she had learned from the miseries that the other woman whom she loved had suffered! How unsympathetic she had been; how self-engrossed; how callous to the sensibilities of others! And now to her, in her turn, had come the same suffering; the same galling of the iron fetters of pride, and of convention which is its original expression! Must it be that the very salt of youth must lose its savour, before the joys of youth could be won! What, after all, was youth if out of its own inherent power it must work its own destruction! If youth was so, why not then trust the wisdom of age? If youth could not act for its own redemption . . .

Here the rudiment of a thought struck her and changed the current of her reason. A thought so winged with hope that she dared not even try to complete it! . . . She thought, and thought till the long autumn shadows fell around her. But the misty purpose had become real.

After dinner she went up alone to the mill. It was late for a visit, for the Silver Lady kept early hours. But she found her friend as usual in her room, whose windows swept the course of the sun. Seeing that her visitor was in a state of mental disturbance such as she had once before exhibited, she blew out the candles and took the same seat in the eastern window she had occupied on the night which they both so well remembered.

Stephen understood both acts, and was grateful afresh. The darkness would be a help to her in what she had to say; and the resumption of the old seat and attitude did away with the awkwardness of new confidence. During the weeks that had passed Stephen had kept her friend informed of the rescue and progress of the injured man. Since the discovery of Harold’s identity she had allowed her to infer her feeling towards him.

Shyly she had conveyed her hopes that all the bitter part of the past might be wiped out. To the woman who already knew of the love that had always been, but had only awakened to consciousness in the absence of its object, a hint was sufficient to build upon. She had noticed the gloom that had of late been creeping over the girl's happiness; and she had been much troubled about it. But she had thought it wiser to be silent; she well knew that should unhappily the time for comfort come, it must be precluded by new and more explicit confidence. So she too had been anxiously waiting the progress of events. Now; as she put her arms round the girl she said softly; not in the whisper which implies doubt of some kind, but in the soft voices which conveys sympathy and trust:

'Tell me, dear child!'

And then in broken words shyly spoken, and spoken in such a way that the silences were more eloquent than the words, the girl conveyed what was in her heart. The other listened, now and again stroking the beautiful hair. When all was said, there was a brief pause. The Silver Lady spoke no word; but the pressure of her delicate hand conveyed sympathy.

In but a half-conscious way, in words that came so shrinkingly through the darkness that they hardly reached the ear bent low to catch them, came Stephen's murmured thought:

'Oh, if he only knew! And I can't tell him; I can't! dare not! I must not. How could I dishonour him by bearing myself towards him as to that other . . . worthless . . . ! Oh! the happy, happy girls, who have mothers . . . !' All the muscles of her body seemed to shrink and collapse, till she was like an inert mass at the Silver Lady's feet.

But the other understood!

After a long, long pause; when Stephen's sobbing had died away; when each muscle of her body had become rigid on its return to normal calm; the Silver Lady began to talk of other matters, and conversation became normal. Stephen's courage seemed somehow to be restored, and she talked brightly.

Before they parted the Silver Lady made a request. She said in her natural voice:

‘Couldst thou bring that gallant man who saved so many lives, and to whom the Lord was so good in the restoration of his sight, to see me? Thou knowest I have made a resolution not to go forth from this calm place whilst I may remain. But I should like to see him before he returns to that far North where he has done such wonders. He is evidently a man of kind heart; perhaps he will not mind coming to see a lonely woman who is no longer young. There is much I should like to ask him of that land of which nothing was known in my own youth. Perhaps he will not mind seeing me alone.’ Stephen’s heart beat furiously. She felt suffocating with new hope, for what could be but good from Harold’s meeting with that sweet woman who had already brought so much comfort into her own life? She was abashed, and yet radiant; she seemed to tread on air as she stood beside her friend saying farewell. She did not wish to speak. So the two women kissed and parted.

It had been arranged that two days hence the Stonehouse party were to spend the day at Lannoy, coming before lunch and staying the night, as they wanted in the afternoon to return a visit at some distance to the north of Lannoy. Harold was to ride over with them.

When the Varilands party arrived, Stephen told them of Sister Ruth’s wish to see Harold. Pearl at once proffered a request that she also should be taken at some other time to see the Silver Lady. Harold acquiesced heartily; and it was agreed that some time in the late afternoon he should pay the visit. Stephen would bring him.

Strangely enough, she felt no awkwardness, no trepidation, as they rode up the steep road to the Mill.

When the introduction had been effected, and half an hour had been consumed in conventional small talk, Stephen, obedience to a look from the Silver Lady, rose. She said in they most natural way she could:

'Now Sister Ruth, I will leave you two alone, if you do not mind. Harold can tell you all you want to know about Alaska; and perhaps, if you are very good, he will tell some of his adventures! Good afternoon, dear. I wish you were to be with us to-night; but I know your rule. I go for my ride. Sultan has had no exercise for five days; and he looked at me quite reproachfully when we met this morning. Au revoir, Harold. We shall meet at dinner!'

When she had gone Harold came back from the door, and stood in the window looking east. The Silver Lady came and stood beside him. She did not seem to notice his face, but in the mysterious way of women she watched him keenly. She wished to satisfy her own mind before she undertook her self-appointed task.

Her eyes were turned towards the headland towards which Stephen on her white Arab was galloping at breakneck speed. He was too good a horseman himself, and he knew her prowess on horseback too well to have any anxiety regarding such a rider at Stephen. It was not fear, then, that made his face so white, and his eyes to have such an illimitable sadness.

The Silver Lady made up her mind. All her instincts were to trust him. She recognised a noble nature, with which truth would be her surest force.

'Come,' she said, 'sit here, friend; where another friend has often sat with me. From this you can see all the coastline, and all that thou wilt!' Harold put a chair beside the one she pointed out; and when she was seated he sat also. She began at once with a desperate courage:

‘I have wanted much to see thee. I have heard much of thee, before thy coming.’ There was something in the tone of her voice which arrested his attention, and he looked keenly at her. Here, in the full light, her face looked sadly white and he noticed that her lips trembled. He said with all the kindliness of his nature, for from the first moment he had seen her he had taken to her, her purity and earnestness and sweetness appealing to some aspiration within him:

‘You are pale! I fear you are not well! May I call your maid? Can I do anything for you?’ She waved her hand gently:

‘Nay! It is nothing. It is but the result of a sleepless night and much thought.’

‘Oh! I wish I had known! I could have put off my visit; and I could have come any other time to suit you.’ She smiled gently:

‘I fear that would have availed but little. It was of thy coming that I was concerned.’ Seeing his look of amazement, she went on quickly, her voice becoming more steady as she lost sight of herself in her task:

‘Be patient a little with me. I am an old woman; and until recently it has been many and many years since the calm which I sought here has been ruffled. I had come to believe that for me earthly troubles were no more. But there has come into my life a new concern. I have heard so much of thee, and before thy coming.’ The recurrence of the phrase struck him. He would have asked how such could be, but he deemed it better to wait. She went on:

‘I have been wishful to ask thy advice. But why should not I tell thee outright that which troubles me? I am not used, at least for these many years, to dissemble. I can but trust thee in all; and lean on thy man’s mercy to understand, and to aid me!’

‘I shall do all in my power, believe me!’ said Harold simply. ‘Speak freely!’ She pointed out of the window, where Stephen’s white horse seemed on the mighty sweep of green sward like a little dot.

‘It is of her that I would speak to thee!’ Harold’s heart began to beat hard; he felt that something was coming. The Silver Lady went on:

‘Why thinkest thou that she rideth at such speed? It is her habit!’ He waited. She continued:

‘Doth it not seem to thee that such reckless movement is the result of much trouble; that she seeketh forgetfulness?’ He knew that she was speaking truly; and somehow the conviction was borne upon him that she knew his secret heart, and was appealing to it. If it was about Stephen! If her disquiet was about her; then God bless her! He would be patient and grateful. The Quaker’s voice seemed to come through his thought, as though she had continued speaking whilst he had paused:

‘We have all our own secrets. I have had mine; and I doubt not that thou hast had, may still have, thine own. Stephen hath hers! May I speak to thee of her?’

‘I shall be proud! Oh! madam, I thank you with all my heart for your sweet kindness to her. I cannot say what I feel; for she has always been very dear to me!’ In the pause before she spoke again the beating of his own heart seemed to re-echo the quick sounds of Stephen’s galloping horse. He was surprised at the method of her speech when it did come; for she forgot her Quaker idiom, and spoke in the phrasing of her youth:

‘Do you love her still?’

‘With all my soul! More than ever!’

‘Then, God be thanked; for it is in your power to do much good. To rescue a poor, human, grieving soul from despair!’ Her words conveyed joy greater than she knew. Harold did not himself know why the air seemed filled with sounds that seemed to answer every doubt of his life. He felt, understood, with that understanding which is quicker than thought. The Silver Lady went on now with a rush:

‘See, I have trusted you indeed! I have given away another woman’s secret; but I do it without fear. I can see that you also are troubled; and when I look back on my own life and remember the trouble that sent me out of the world; a lonely recluse here in this spot far from the stress of life, I rejoice that any act of mine can save such another tragedy as my own. I see that I need not go into detail. You know that I am speaking truth. It was before you came so heroically on this new scene that she told me her secret. At a time when nothing was known of you except that you had disappeared. When she laid bare her poor bleeding heart to me, she did it in such wise that for an instant I feared that it was a murder which she had committed. Indeed, she called it so! You understand that I know all your secret; all her part in it at least. And I know that you understand what loving duty lies before you. I see it in your eyes; your brave, true eyes! Go! and the Lord be with thee!’ Her accustomed idiom had returned with prayer. She turned her head away, and, standing up, leaned against the window. Bending over, he took her hand and said simply:

‘God bless you! I shall come back to thank you either to-night or to-morrow; and I hope that she will be with me.’

He went quickly out of the room. The woman stood for long looking out of the window, and following with tear-dimmed eyes the movement of his great black horse as he swept across country straight as the crow flies, towards the headland whither Stephen had gone.

* * * * *

Stephen passed over the wide expanse without thought; certainly without memory of it. Never in her after-life could she recall any thought that had passed through her mind from the time she left the open gate of the windmill yard till she pulled up her smoking, panting horse beside the ruin of the fisher's house.

Stephen was not unhappy! She was not happy in any conscious form. She was satisfied rather than dissatisfied. She was a woman! A woman who waited the coming of a man!

For a while she stood at the edge of the cliff, and looked at the turmoil of the tide churning on the rocks below. Her heart went out in a great burst of thankfulness that it was her hand which had been privileged to aid in rescuing so dear a life. Then she looked around her. Ostensibly it was to survey the ruined house; but in reality to search, even then under her lashes, the whole green expanse sloping up to the windmill for some moving figure. She saw that which made her throat swell and her ears to hear celestial music. But she would not allow herself to think, of that at all events. She was all woman now; all-patient, and all-submissive. She waited the man; and the man was coming!

For a few minutes she walked round the house as though looking at it critically for some after-purpose. After the wreck Stephen had suggested to Trinity House that there should be a lighthouse on the point; and offered to bear the expense of building it. She was awaiting the answer of the Brethren; and of course nothing would be done in clearing the ground for any purpose till the answer had come. She felt now that if that reply was negative, she would herself build there a pleasure-house of her own.

Then she went to the edge of the cliff, and went down the zigzag by which the man and horse had gone to their gallant task. At the edge of the flat rock she sat and thought.

And through all her thoughts passed the rider who even now was thundering over the green sward on his way to her. In her fancy at first, and later in her ears, she could hear the sound of his sweeping gallop.

It was thus that a man should come to a woman!

She had no doubts now. Her quietude was a hymn of grateful praise!

The sound stopped. With all her ears she listened, her heart now beginning to beat furiously. The sea before her, all lines and furrows with the passing tide, was dark under the shadow of the cliff; and the edge of the shadow was marked with the golden hue of sunset.

And then she saw suddenly a pillar of shadow beyond the line of the cliff. It rested but a moment, moved swiftly along the edge, and then was lost to her eyes.

But to another sense there was greater comfort: she heard the clatter of rolling pebbles and the scramble of eager feet. Harold was hastening down the zigzag.

Oh! the music of that sound! It woke all the finer instincts of the woman. All the dross and thought of self passed away. Nature, sweet and simple and true, reigned alone. Instinctively she rose and came towards him. In the simple nobility of her self-surrender and her purpose, which were at one with the grandeur of nature around her, to be negative was to be false.

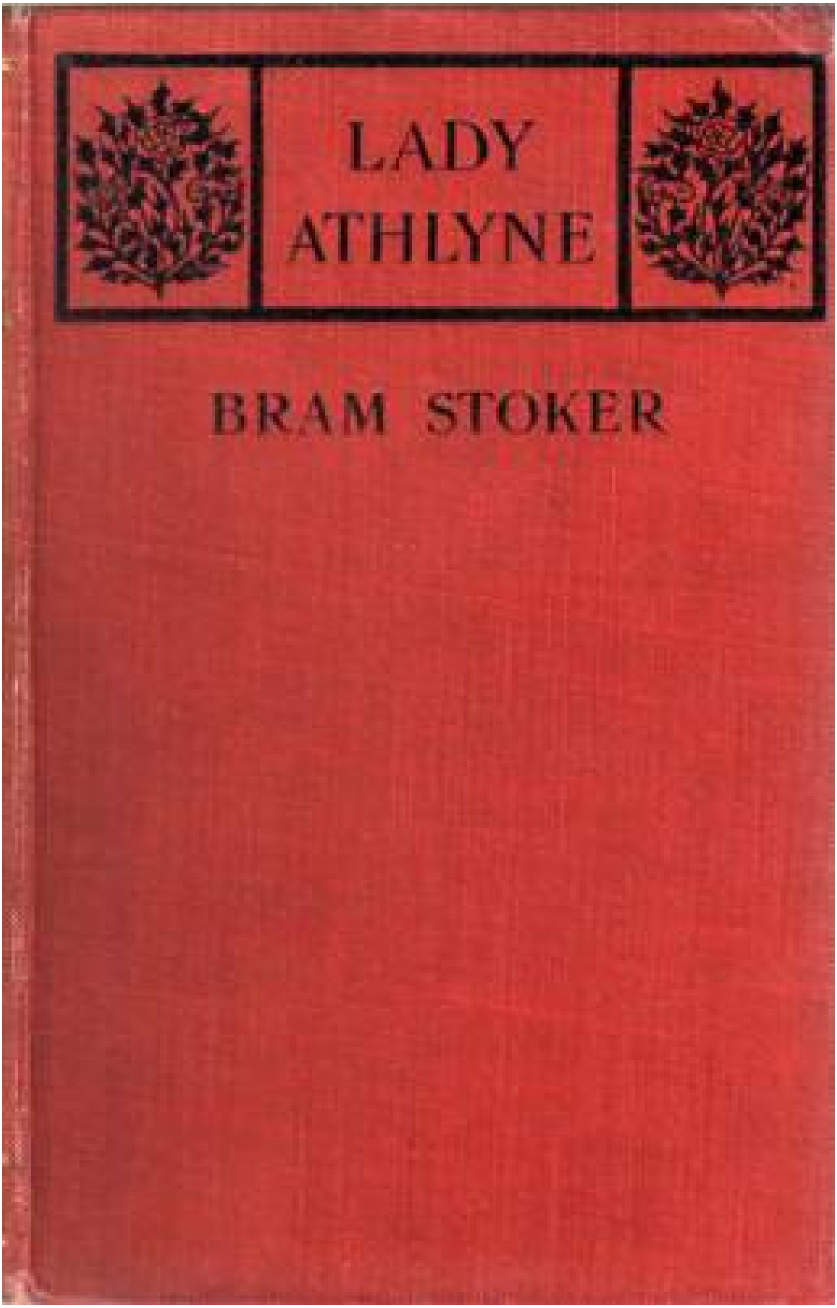
Since he had spoken with the Silver Lady Harold had swept through the air; the rush of his foaming horse over the sward had been but a slow physical progress, which mocked the on-sweep of his mind. In is rapid ride he too had been finding himself. By the reading of his own soul he knew now that love needs a voice; that a man's love, to be welcomed to the full, should be dominant and self-believing.

When the two saw each other's eyes there was no need for words. Harold came close, opening wide his arms, Stephen flew to them.

In that divine moment, when their mouths met, both knew that their souls were one.

Lady Athlyne

First published in 1908 by William Heinemann of London, Stoker’s tenth novel tells the story of Joy Ogilvie, the beautiful young daughter of a Kentucky colonel. She plays a joke on her friends, pretending to be “Lady Athlyne”, after hearing a story about the dashing Irish nobleman Lord Athlyne. Little does she know that half a world away, the real Lord Athlyne is a prisoner of war in a South African camp, where word reaches him that a woman in America is impersonating his wife.



LADY ATHLYNE

BRAM STOKER

The first edition

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CHAPTER 1

ON THE ‘CRYPTIC’

On the forenoon of a day in February 1899, the White Star S.S. Cryptic forced her way from Pier No. 48 out into the Hudson River through a mass of floating ice, which made a moving carpet over the whole river from Poughkeepsie to Sandy Hook. It was little wonder that the hearts of the outwardbound passengers were cheered with hope; outside on the wide ocean there must be somewhere clear skies and blue water, and perchance here and there a slant of sunshine. Come what might, however, it must be better than what they were leaving behind them in New York. For three whole weeks the great city had been beleaguered by cold; held besieged in the icy grip of a blizzard which, moving from northwest to south, had begun on the last day of January to devastate the central North American States. In one place, Breckenridege in Colorado, there fell in five days — and this on the top of an accumulation of six feet of snow — an additional forty-five inches. In the track swept by the cold wave, a thousand miles wide, record low temperatures were effected, ranging from 15° below zero in Indiana to 54° below at White River on the northern shore of Lake Superior.

In New York city the temperature had sunk to 6.2° below zero, the lowest ever recorded, and an extraordinary temperature for a city almost entirely surrounded by tidal currents. The city itself was in a helpless condition, paralyzed and impotent. The snow fell so fast that even the great snow-ploughs driven by the electric current on the tram lines could not keep the avenues clear. And the cold was so great that the street-clearing operations — in which eight thousand men with four thousand carts dumping some fifty thousand tons of snow daily into the river were concerned — had to be suspended. Neither men nor horses could endure the work. The "dead boat" which takes periodically the city's unclaimed corpses to Potter's Field on Hart's Island was twice beaten back and nearly wrecked; it carried on the later voyage 161 corpses. Before its ghastly traffic could be resumed there were in the city mortuaries over a thousand bodies waiting sepulchre. The "Scientific editor" of one of the great New York dailies computed that the blanket of snow which lay on the twenty-two square miles of Manhattan Island would form a solid wall a thousand feet high up the whole sixty feet width of Broadway in the two and a half miles between the Battery and Union Square, weighing some two and a half million tons. Needless to say the streets were almost impassable. In the chief thoroughfares were narrow passages heaped high with piled-up snow now nearly compact to ice. In places where the falling snow had drifted it reached to the level of, and sometimes above, the first floor windows.

As the Cryptic forced her way through the rustling masses of drifting ice the little company of passengers stood on deck watching at first the ferry-boats pounding and hammering their strenuous way into the docks formed by the floating guards or screens by whose aid they shouldered themselves to their landing stages; and later on, when the great ship following the wide circle of the steering buoys, opened up the entrance of Sandy Hook, the great circle around them of Arctic desolation. Away beyond the sweep of the river and ocean currents the sea was frozen and shimmering with a carpet of pure snow, whose luminous dreariness not even the pall of faint chill mist could subdue. Here and there, to north and south, were many vessels frozen in, spar and rope being roughly outlined with clinging snow.

The hills of Long Island and Staten Island and the distant ranges of New Jersey stood out white and stark into the sky of steel.

All was grimly, deadly silent so that the throb of the engines, the rustle and clatter of the drifting ice-pack, as the great vessel, getting faster way as the current became more open, or the hard scrunch as she cut through some solid floating ice-field, sounded like something unnatural — some sound of the living amid a world of the dead.

When the Narrows had been reached and passed and the flag of smoke from the great chimney of the Standard Oil Refining Works lay far behind on the starboard quarter; when Fire Island was dropping down on the western horizon, all became changed as though the wand of some beneficent fairy had obliterated all that was ugly or noxious in its beneficent sweep. Sky and wave were blue; the sun beamed out; and the white-breasted gulls sweeping above and around the ship seemed like the spirit of nature freed from the thrall of the Ice Queen.

Naturally the spirits of the travellers rose. They too found their wings free; and the hum and clash of happy noises arose. Unconsciously there was a general unbending each to the other. All the stiffness which is apt to characterize a newly gathered company of travellers seemed to melt in the welcome sunshine; within an hour there was established an easiness of acquaintanceship generally to be found only towards the close of a voyage. The happiness coming with the sunshine and the open water, and the relief from the appalling gloom of the blizzard, had made the freed captives into friends.

At such moments like gravitates to like. The young to young; the grave to the grave; the pleasure-lovers to their kind; free sex to its free opposite. On the Cryptic the complement of passengers was so small that the choice of kinds was limited. In all there were only some thirty passengers. None but adventurous spirits, or those under stress of need, challenged a possible recurrence of Atlantic dangers which had marked the beginning of the month, when ship after ship of the giant liners arrived in port maimed and battered and listed with the weight of snow and frozen spray and fog which they carried.

Naturally the ladies were greatly in the minority. After all, travel is as a rule, men's work; and this was no time for pleasure trips. The dominant feeling on board on this subject was voiced in a phrase used in the Chart room where the Captain was genially pointing out the course to a tall, proud old man. The latter, with an uneasy gesture of stroking his long white moustache, which seemed to be a custom or habit at certain moments of emotion, said:

"And I quite agree with you, seh; I don't mind men travelling in any weather. That's man's share. But why in hell, seh, women want to go gallivantin' round the world in weather that would make any respectable dog want to lie quiet by the fireside, I don't know. Women should learn—" He was interrupted by a tall young girl who burst into the room without waiting for a reply to her breathless: "May I come in?"

"I saw you go in, Daddy, and I wanted to see the maps too; so I raced for all I was worth. And now I find I've come just in time to get another lesson about what women ought to do!" As she spoke she linked her arm in her father's with a fearlessness and security which showed that none of the natural sternness which was proclaimed in the old man's clear-cut face was specially reserved for her. She squeezed his arm in a loving way and looked up in his face saucily — the way of an affectionate young girl towards a father whom she loves and trusts. The old man pulled his arm away and put it round her shoulder. With a shrug which might if seen alone have denoted constraint, but with a look in the dark eyes and a glad tone in the strong voice which nullified it absolutely, he said to the Captain:

"Here comes my tyrant, Captain. Now I must behave myself."

The girl standing close to him went on in the same loving half-bantering way:

"Go on, Daddy! Tell us what women should learn!"

"They should learn, Miss Impudence, to respect their fathers!" Though he spoke lightly in a tone of banter and with a light of affection beaming in his eyes, the girl grew suddenly grave, and murmured quickly:

"That is not to be learned, Father. That is born with one, when the father is like mine!" Then turning to the Captain she went on:

"Did you ever hear of the Irishman who said: There's some subjects too sarious for jestin'; an' pitaties is wan iy them? I can't sauce my father, or chaff him, or be imprudent — though I believe he likes me to be imprudent — to him. when he talks of respect. He has killed men before now for want of that. But he won't kill me. He knows that my respect for him is as big as my love — and there isn't room for any more of either of them in me. Don't you Daddy?"

For answer the old man drew her closer to him; but he said nothing. Really there was no need for speech. The spirits and emotions of both were somewhat high strung in the sudden change to brightness from the gloom that had prevailed for weeks. At such times even the most staid are apt to be suddenly moved.

A diversion came from the Captain, a grave, formal man as indeed becomes one who has with him almost perpetually the responsibility of many hundreds of lives:

"Did I understand righty, Colonel Ogilvie that you have killed men for such a cause?" The old gentleman lifted his shaggy white eyebrows in faint surprise, and answered slowly and with an easiness which only half hid an ineffable disdain:

"Why, cert'nly!" The simple acceptance of the truth left the Captain flabbergasted. He grew red and was beginning: "I thought" — when the girl who considered it possible that a quick quarrel might arise between the two strong men, interrupted:

"Perhaps Captain, you don't understand our part of the world. In Kentucky we still hold with the old laws of Honour which we sometimes hear are dead — or at any rate back numbers — in other countries. My father has fought duels all his life. The Ogilvies have been fighters way back to the time of the settlement by Lord Baltimore. My Cousin Dick tells me — for father never talks of them unless he has to — that they never forced quarrels for their own ends; though I must say that they are pretty touchy" — She was in turn interrupted by her father who said quickly:

"'Touchy' is the word, my girl, though I fear you use it too lightly. A man should be touchy where honour is concerned. For Honour is the first thing in all the world. What men should live for; what men should die for! To a gentleman there is nothing so holy. And if he can't fight for such a sacred thing, he does not deserve to have it. He does not know what it means."

Through the pause came the grave voice of the Captain, a valiant man who on state occasions wore on his right breast in accordance with the etiquette of the occasion the large gold medal of the Royal Humane Society-

"There are many things that men should fight for — and die for if need be. But I am bound to say that I don't hold that the chiefest among them is a personal grievance; even if it be on the subject of the measure of one's own self-respect." Noticing the coming frown on the Kentuckian's face, he went on a thought more quickly: "But, though I don't hold with duelling, Colonel Ogilvie, for any cause, I am bound to say that if a man thinks and believes that it is right to fight, then it becomes a duty which he should fulfil!"

For answer the Colonel held out his hand which the other took warmly. That handshake cemented a friendship of two strong men who understood each other well enough to tolerate the other's limitations.

"And I can tell you this, seh," said Colonel Ogilvie, "there are some men who want killing — want it badly!"

The girl glowed. She loved to see her father strong and triumphant; and when toleration was added to his other fine qualities, there was an added measure in her pride of him.

There came a tap on the panelling and the doorway was darkened by the figure of a buxom pleasant-faced woman, who spoke in a strong Irish accent:

"I beg yer pardon, Miss Ogilvie, but yer Awnt is yellin' out for ye. She's thinkin' that now the wather's deep the ship is bound to go down in it; an' she sez she wants ye to be wid her whin the ind comes, as she's afeard to die alone!"

"That's very thoughtful of her! Judy was always an unselfish creature!" said the Colonel with an easy sarcasm. "Run along to her anyhow, little girl. That's the sort of fighting a woman has to do." And turning to the Captain "by Ged, seh! she's got plenty of that sort of fighting between her cradle and her grave!" As she went out of the door girl said over her shoulder:

"That reminds me, daddy. Don't go on with that lecture of yours of what women should learn until I come back. Remember I'm only ‘a child emerging into womanhood’ — that’s what you wrote to mother when you wouldn’t let me travel to her alone. Some one might kill me I suppose, or steal me between this and Ischia. So it is well I should be forewarned, and so forearmed, at all points!”

The Captain looked after her admiringly; then turning to Colonel Ogilvie he said almost unconsciously — he had daughters of his own:

“I shouldn’t be surprised if a lot want to steal her, Colonel. And I don’t know but they’d be right!”

“I agree with you, by Ged, seh!” said the Colonel reflectively, as he looked after his daughter pacing with free strides along the deck with the stout little stewardess over whom she towered by a full head.

Miss Ogilvie found her aunt, Miss Judith Hayes, in her bunk. From the clothes hung round and laid, neatly folded, on the upper berth it was apparent that she had undressed as for the night. When the young girl realised this she said impulsively:

“Oh, Aunt Judy, I hope you are not ill. Do come up on deck. The sun is shining and it is such a change from the awful weather in New York. Do come, dear; it will do you good.”

“I am not ill Joy — in the way you mean. Indeed I was never in better physical health in my life.” She said this with grave primness. The girl laughed outright:

“Why on earth Aunt Judy, if you’re well, do you go to bed at ten o’clock in the morning?” Miss Hayes was not angry; there was a momentary gleam in her eye as she said with a manifestedly exaggerated dignity:

“You forget my dear, that I am an old maid!”

“What has old-maidenhood to do with it? But anyhow you are not an old maid. You are only forty!”

“Not forty, Joy! Only forty, indeed! My dear child when that unhappy period comes a single lady is put on the shelf — out of reach of all masculine humanity. For my part I have made up my mind to climb up there, of my own accord, before the virginal undertakers come for me. I am in for it anyhow; and I want to play the game as well as I can.”

Joy bent down and kissed her affectionately. Then taking her face between her strong young hands, and looking steadily in her eyes, she said:

“Aunt Judy you are not an old anything. You are a deal younger than I am. You mustn’t get such ideas into your head. And even if you do you mustn’t speak them. People would begin to believe you. What is forty anyhow!” The other answered sententiously:

“What is forty? Not old for a wife! Young for a widow! Death for a maid!” “Really Aunt Judy” said the girl smiling “one would think you wish to be an old maid. Even I know better than that — and Father thinks I am younger and more ignorant than the yellow chick that has just pecked its way out of the shell. The woman has not yet been born — nor ever will be — who wants to be an old maid.”

Judith Hayes raised herself on one elbow and said calmly: “Or a young one, my dear!” Then as if pleased with her epigram she sank back on her pillow with a smile. Joy paused; she did not know what to say. A diversion came from the stewardess who had all the time stood in the doorway waiting for some sort of instructions:

“Bedad, Miss Hayes, it’s to Ireland ye ought to come. A lovely young lady like yerself — for all yer jabber about an ould maid iy forty — wouldn’t be let get beyant Queenstown, let alone the Mall in Cork. Bedad if ye was in Athlone its the shillelaghs that would be out an’ the byes all fightin’ for who’d get the hould on to ye first. Whisper me now, is it coddin’ us ye be doin’ or what?” Joy, turned round to her, her face all dimpled with laughter, and said:

“That’s the way to talk to her Mrs. O’Brien. You just take her in hand; and when we get to Queenstown find some nice big Irishman to carry her off.”

“Bedad I will! An sorra the shtruggle she’d make agin it anyhow I’m thinkin’!” Aunt Judy laughed:

“Joy” she said “you’d better be careful yourself or maybe she’d put on some of her bachelor press-gang to abduct you.”

“Don’t you be onaisy about that ma’am,” said Mrs. O’Brien quietly “I’ve fixed that already! When I seen Miss Joy come down the companion shtairs I sez to meself: There’s only wan man in Ireland — an that’s in all the wurrld — that’s good enough for you, me darlin’. An he’ll have you for sure or I’m a gandher!”

“Indeed!” said Joy, blushing in spite of herself. “And may I be permitted to know my ultimate destination in the way of matrimony? You won’t think me inquisitive or presuming I trust.” Her eyes were dancing with the fun of the thing. Mrs. O’Brien laughed heartily; a round, cheery, honest laugh which was infectious:

“Wid all the plisure in life Miss. Shure there’s only the wan, an him the finest and beautifullest young man ye iver laid yer pritty eyes on. An him an Earrl, more betoken; wid more miles iy land iy his own then there does be pitaties in me ould father’s houldin! Musha, he’s the only wan that’s at all fit to take yer swate self in his charge.”

“H’m! Quite condescending of him I am sure. And now what may be his sponsorial and patronymic appellatives?” Mrs. O’Brien at once became grave. To an uneducated person, and more especially an Irish person, an unknown phrase is full of mystery. It makes the listener feel small and disconcerted, touching the personal pride which is so marked a characteristic of all degrees of the Irish race. Joy, with the quick understanding which was not the least of her endowments, saw that she had made a mistake and hastened to set matters right before the chagrin had time to bite deep:

"Forgive me, but that was my fun. What I meant to ask are the name and tide of my destined Lord and Master?" The stewardess answered heartily, the ruffle of her face softening into an amiable smile:

"Aren't I tellin' ye miss. Shure there is only the wan!"

"And who may he be?"

"Faix he may be anything. It's a King or a Kazer or an Imperor or a Czaar he'd be if I had the ordherin' iy it. But what he is is the Right Honourable the Earl ay Athlyne. Lord Liftinant ay the County iy Roscommon — an' a fool!"

"'Oh, an Irishman!" said Miss Judy. Mrs. O'Brien snorted; her national pride was hurt:

"An Irishman! God be thanked he is. But me Lady, ay it'll plaze ye betther he's an Englishman too, an' a Welshman an' a Scotchman as well! Oh, th' injustice t' Ireland. Him borrn in Roscommon, an yit a Scotchman they call him bekase his biggest tide is Irish!"

"Mrs. O'Brien, that's all nonsense," said Miss Judy tardy. "We may be Americans; but we're not to be played for suckers for all that! How can a Scotchman have an Irish tide?"

"That's all very well, Miss Hayes, yous Americans is very cliver; but yez don't know everything. An' I may be an ignorant ould fool; but I'm not so ignorant as ye think, ayther. Wasn't there a Scotchman thit was marrid on the granddaughther iy Quane Victory hersilf — An Errll begob, what owned the size iy a counthry in Scotland. An him all the time wid an Irish Errldom, till they turned him into a Sassenach be makin' him a Juke. Begorra! isn't it proud th' ould Laady should ha' been to git an Irishman iy any kind for the young girrl! Shure an isn't Athlyne as good as Fife any day. Hasn't he casdes an' estates in Scotland an' England an Wales, as well as in Ireland. Isn't he an ould Bar'n iy some kind in Scotland an him but a young man! Begob! ay it's Ireland y' objict to ye can take him as Scotch — where they say he belongs an' where he chose to live whin he became a grown man, before he wint into th' Army!"

Somehow or other the announcement and even the grandiose manner of its making gave pleasure to Joy. After all, the compliment of the stewardess was an earnest one. She had chosen for her the best that she knew. What more could she do? With a sudden smile she made a sweeping curtsey, the English Presentation curtsey which all American girls are taught, and said:

"Let me convey to you the sincere thanks of the Countess of Athlyne! Aunt Judy do you feel proud of having a Peeress for a niece? Any time you wish to be presented you can call on the services of Lady Athlyne." She suddenly straightened herself to her full height as Mrs. O'Brien spoke with a sort of victorious howl:

"Hurroo! Now ye've done it. Ye've said the wurrds yerself; an' we all know what that manes!"

"'What does it mean?" Joy spoke somewhat sharply, her face all aflame. It appeared that she had committed some unmaidenly indiscretion.

"It manes that it manes the same as if ye said 'yis!' to me gentleman when persooin' iy his shute. It's for all the wurrld the same as bein' marrid on to him!"

In spite of the ridiculousness of the statement Joy thrilled inwardly. Unconsciously she accepted the position of peeress thus thrust upon her.

After all, the Unknown has its own charms for the human heart. Those old Athenians who built the altars ‘To the Unknown God,” did but put into classic phrase the aspirations of a people by units as well as in mass. Mrs. O’Brien’s enthusiastic admiration laid seeds of some kind in the young girl’s heart.

Her instinct was, however, not to talk of it; and as a protective measure she changed the conversation:

“But you haven’t told me yet, Aunt Judy, why you went to bed in the morning because you pretend to be an old maid.” The Irishwoman here struck in:

“I’m failin’ to comprehind that meself too. If ye was a young wife now I could consave it, maybe. Or an ould widda-woman like meself that does have to be gettin’ up in the night to kape company wid young weemin that doesn’t like to die, alone...” she burst into hearty laughter in which Miss Judith Hayes joined. Joy took advantage of the general hilarity to try to persuade her aunt to come on deck. She finished her argument-

“And the Captain is such a nice man. He’s just a wee bit too grave. I think he must be a widower.” Aunt Judy made no immediate reply, but after some more conversation she said to the stewardess:

“I think I will get up Mrs. O’Brien. Perhaps a chair on deck in the sunshine will be better for me than staying down here. And, after all, if I have to die it will be better to die in the open than in a bed the size of a coffin!”

When Joy rejoined her father in the Chart-room she said to the Captain: “That stewardess of yours is a dear!” He warmly acquiesced: “She is really a most capable person; and all the ladies whom she attends grow to be quite fond of her. She is always kind and cheery and hearty and makes them forget that they are ill or afraid. When I took command of the Cryptic I asked the company to let her come with me."

"And quite right too, Captain. That brogue of hers is quite wonderful!" "It is indeed. But, my dear young lady, its very perfection makes me doubt it. It is so thick and strong and ready, and the way she twists words into its strength and makes new ones to suit it give me an idea at times that it is partly put on. I sometimes think it is impossible that any one can be so absolutely and imperatively Irish as she is. However, it serves her in good stead; she can say, without offence, whatever she chooses in her own way to any one. She is a really clever woman and a kind one; and I have the greatest respect for her." When Aunt Judy was left alone with the stewardess, she asked: "Who is Lord Athlyne? — What kind of man is he? Where does he live?" "Where does he live? — Why everywhere! In Athlyne for one, but a lot iy other places as well, He was brought up at the Casde where the' ould Earrl always lived afther he lift Parlimint; and whin he was a boy he was the wildest young dare-devil iver ye seen. Faix, the County Roscommon itself wasn't big enough for him. When he was a young man he wint away shootin' lions and tigers and elephants and crockodiles and such like. Thin he wint into th' army an began to setde down. He has a whole lot ay different houses, and he goes to them all be times. He says that no man has a right to be an intire absentee landlord — even when he's livin' in his own house!"

"But what sort of man is he personally?" she asked persistendy. The Irishwoman's answer was direct and comprehensive:

"The bist!"

“How do you know that?”

“An’ how do I know it! Anm’t I a Roscommon woman, borrn, an’ wan ay the tinants? Wouldn’t that be enough? But that’s only the beginnin’. Shure wasn’t I his fosthermother, God bless him! Wasn’t he like me own child when I tuk him to me breast whin his poor mother died the day he was borrn. Ah, Miss Hayes there’s nothin’ ye don’t know about the child ye have given suck to. More, betoken, than if he was yer own child; for he might be thinkin’ too much of him an puttin’ the bist consthruction on ivery little thing he iver done, just because he was yer own. Troth I didn’t want any tellin’ about Athlyne. The sweetest wean that iver a woman nursed; the dndherest hearted, wid the wee little hands upon me face an his rosebud ay a mouth puttin’ up to me for a kiss! An’ yit the pride ay him; more’n a King on his throne. An’ th’ indepindince! Him wantin’ to walk an’ run before he was able to shtand. An’ ordherin’ about the pig an’ the gandher, let alone the dog. Shure the masterfullest man-child that iver was, and the masterfullest man that is. Sorra wan like him in the whole wide wurrld!”

“You seem to love him very much,” said Miss Hayes with grave approval.

“In coorse I do! An’ isn’t it me own boy that was his fosther brother that loves him too. Whin the Lard wint out to fight the Boors, Mick wint wid him as his own body man until he was invalided home wid a bad knee; an’ him a coachman now an’ doin’ nothin’ but take his wages; And whin he kem to Liverpool to say good-bye when the Cryptic should come in I tould him to take care of his Masther. ‘Ay ye don’t,’ sez I, ‘ye’re no son iy mine, nor iy yer poor dear father, rest his sowl! Kape betune him an’ any bullet that’s comin’ his way’ I sez. An’ wid that he laughed out loud in me face. That’s good, mother,' sez he, 'an iy coorse I'd be proud to; but I'd like to set eyes on the man that'd dar to come betune Athlyne an' a bullet, or to prevint him cutdn' slices from aff iy the Boors wid his big cav-a-lary soord,' he sez. 'Begob,' he sez, t'would be worse nor fightin' the Boors themselves to intherfere wid him whin he's set on his way!'"

"That's loyal stock! He's a Man, that son of yours!" said Miss Judy enthusiastically, forgetting her semi-cynical role of old maid in the ardour of the moment. The stewardess seeing that she had a good listener went on:

"And 'tis the thoughtful man he is. He niver writes to me, bekase he knows well I can't read. But he sends me five pounds every Christmas. On me birthday ne gey me this, Lord love him!" She took a gold watch from her bosom and showed it with pride.

When she was dressed, Miss Hayes looked into the Library; and finding it empty took down the "de Brett," well thumbed by American use. Here is what she saw on looking up "Athlyne."

ATHLYNE EARL OF FITZGERALD

Calinus Patrick Richard Westerna Hardy Mowbray Fitz-Gerald 2nd Earl of Athlyne (in the Peerage of the United Kingdom). 2nd Viscount Roscommon (in the Peerage of Ireland). 30th Baron Ceann-da-Shail (in the Peerage of Scotland), b. 6 June 1875 s. 1886 ed. Eton and University of Dublin; is D. L. for Counties of Ross and Roscommon: J. P. for Counties of Wilts, Ross and Roscommon.

Patron of three livings: — Raphoon, New Sands, and Politore.

Seats. Ceann-da-Shail Casde and Casde of Elandonan in Ross-shire, Athlyne Casde C. Roscommon. Travy Manor, Gloucestershire and The Rock Beach, Cornwall, &c. &c. Town Residence. 40 St. James's Square S. W.

Clubs. Reform. Marlborough. United Service. Naval and Military.

Garick. Arts Bath &c.

Predecessors. Sir Calinus FitzGerald — descended from Calinus FitzGerald the first of the name settled in Rossshire, to which he came from Ireland in the XII century — was created by Robert the Bruce Baron Ceann-da-Shail, 1314, and endowed with the Castle of Elandonan (Gift of the King) as the reward of a bold rally of the Northern troops at Bannockburn. Before his death in 1342 he built for himself a strongly fortified Castle on the Island of Ceann-da-Shail (from which his estate took its name) celebrated from time immemorial for a wonderful spring of water. The Barony has been held in direct descent with only two breaks. The first was in 1642 when direct male issue having failed through the death of the only son of Calinus the XXth Baron the Peerage and estates reverted to Robert Calinus e. s. of James, 2nd s. of Robert XVIII Baron. The second was in 1826 when, again through the early decease of an only son, the Barony reverted to Robert e. s. of Malcolm 2nd s. of Colin XXVII Baron. The father of this heritor, Malcolm FitzGerald, had settled in Ireland in 1782. There he had purchased a great estate fronting on the River Shannon in Roscommon on which he had built a castle, Athlyne. Malcolm FitzGerald entered the Parliament of the United Kingdom in 1805 and sat for 22 years when he was succeeded in Parliamentary honours by his son Robert on his coming of age in 1827. Robert held his seat until the creation of the Viscounty of Roscommon 1870. Three years after his retirement from the House of Commons he was raised to an Earldom — Athlyne.

When she went out on deck she found her niece taking with her father the beef tea which had just been brought round. She did not mention to Colonel Ogilvie the little joke about Lady Athlyne, and strange to say found that Joy to whom a joke or a secret was a matter of fungoid growth, multiplying and irrepressible, had not mentioned it either.

CHAPTER 2

IN ITALY

During the voyage, which had its own vicissitudes, the joke was kept up amongst the three women. The stewardess, seeing that the two ladies only spoke of it in privacy, exemplified that discretion which the Captain had commended. Only once did she forget herself, but even then fortune was on her side. It was during a day when Joy was upset by a spell of heavy weather and had to keep her cabin. In the afternoon her father paid a visit to her; and Mrs. O'Brien in reporting progress to him said that "her Ladyship" was now on the road to recovery and would be on deck very shortly. Colonel Ogilvie made quite a lot of the error which he read in his own way. He said to his sister-in-law as they paced the deck together:

"Capital woman that stewardess! There is a natural deference and respect in her manner which you do not always find in people of her class. Will you oblige me, Judy, by seeing, when the voyage is over, that she gets an extra honorarium!" Judy promised, and deftly turned the conversation; she felt that she was on dangerous ground.

Judith Hayes called herself an old maid, not believing it to be true; but all the same there was in her make-up a distinctive trait of it: the manner in which she regarded a romance. Up to lately, romance however unlikely or improbable, had a personal bearing; it did not occur to her that it might not drift in her direction. But now she felt unconsciously that such romance must have other objective than herself. The possibility, therefore, of a romance for Joy whom she very sincerely loved was a thing to be cherished. She could see, as well as feel, that her niece by keeping it a secret from her father had taken the matter with at least a phase of seriousness. This alone was sufficient to feed her own imaginings; and in the glow her sympathies quickened. She had instinctively at the beginning determined not to spoil sport; now it became a conscious intention.

Mrs. O'Brien, too, in her own way helped to further the matter. She felt that she had a good audience for her little anecdotes of the child whose infancy she had fostered, and towards whom in his completed manhood she had a sort of almost idolatrous devotion. Seeing the girl so sympathetic and listening so patiently, she too began to see something like the beginnings of a fact. And so the game went merrily on.

The telegrams at Queenstown were not very reassuring, and Colonel Ogilvie and his party pressed on at once to Sorrento whence his wife had moved on the completion of her series of baths at Ischia. Naturally the whole of the little party was depressed, until on arrival they found Mrs. Ogilvie, who was something of a valetudinarian, much better than they expected. The arrival of her husband and daughter and sister seemed to complete her cure; she brightened up at once, and even after a few days began to enjoy herself.

One day after lunch as she drove along the road to Amalfi with Judith and Joy — the Colonel was lazy that day and preferred to sit on the terrace over the sea and smoke — she began to ask all the details of the journey. Judy who had not had a chance of speaking alone with safety began to tell the little secret. Her method of commencement was abrupt, and somewhat startling to the convalescent:

"We've got a husband for Joy, at last'"

"Gracious!" said Mrs. Ogilvie. "What do you mean, Judy? Is this one of your pranks?"

"Prank indeed!" she answered back, tossing her head. "A real live lord! A belted Earl if you please — whatever that may mean."

"Is this true, Joy?" said her mother beaming anxiously on her — if such a combination is understandable. Joy took her hand and stroked it lovingly:

"Do you think, Mother dear, that if there was such a thing I should leave you all this time in ignorance of it. It is only a jest made up by the stewardess who attended us on the Cryptic. Aunt Judy seems to have taken it all in; I think dear you had better ask her, she seems to know all about it — which is certainly more than I do."

"And how did this common woman dare to jest on such a subject. I don't think Judy that this would have happened had I been with her myself!"

"Oh my dear, get off that high horse. There's nothing to be alarmed about. The stewardess — who is a most worthy and attentive person—"

"She is a dear!" interrupted Joy.

" — took such a fancy to Joy that she said there was only 'wan' in all the world who was worthy of her — a young nobleman to whom she had been foster-mother. It was certainly meant as a very true compliment, and I am bound to say that if the young man merits a hundredth part of all she said of him there's certainly no cause of offence in the mere mentioning his name."

"What is his name?" There was a shade of anxiety in the mother's voice.

"Lord Athlyne!"

"The Earl of Athlyne!" said Joy speaking without thought Then she turned quickly away to hide her blushing.

"I — I — I really don't understand!" said Mrs. Ogilvie, looking around helplessly. Then with the shadow of a shade of annoyance in her voice she went on:

"I really think that in a serious matter of this kind I should have been consulted. But I seem not to count for anything any more. Colonel Ogilvie has not even mentioned the matter to me. I think I ought to have some say in anything of importance relating to my little girl."

"Lord bless the woman!" said Aunt Judy throwing up her hands and lifting her eyes. "Sally dear don't you comprehend that this was all a joke. We never saw this young Lord, never heard of him till the stewardess mentioned him; and as for him he doesn't know or care whether there is such a person in the world as Joy Ogilvie—" The mother interrupted hotly — it seemed want of respect to her child:

"Then he ought to care. I'd like to know who he is to consider himself so high and mighty that even my little girl isn't... Oh! I have no patience with him."

There was silence in the carriage. Mrs. Ogilvie had come to the end of her remonstrance, and both the others were afraid to speak. It was all so supremely ridiculous. And vet the mother was taking it all so seriously that respect for her forbade laughter. The road was here steep and the horses were laboriously climbing their way. Presently Judy turned to Joy saving:

"Wouldn't you like to look at the view from the edge of the cliff?" As she spoke she looked menacingly at her niece who took the hint and got down.

When she was out of earshot and the driver had stopped the horses Judy turned to her sister and said with a quiet, incisive directness quite at variance with all her previous moods:

"Sally dear I want to speak a moment to you quite frankly and, believe me, very earnestly. I know you don’t usually credit me with much earnestness; but this is about Joy, and that is always earnest with me.” All the motherhood in Mrs. Ogilvie answered to the call. She sat up with eager intensity, receptive to the full and without any disturbing chagrin. Judy went on.

“You have been thinking of your little girl’ — and actually speaking of her as such. That is the worst of mothers — their one fault With them time seems to stand still. The world goes flying by them, but in their eyes the child remains the same. Gold hair or black turns to white, wrinkles come, knees totter and steps become unsteady; but the child goes on — still, in the mother’s eyes, dressing dolls and chasing butterflies. They don’t even seem to realise facts when the child puts her own baby into the grandmother’s arms. Look round for a moment where Joy is standing there outlined against that Moorish tower on the edge of the cliff. Tell me what do you see?”

“I see my dear, beautiful little girl!” said the mother faintly.

“Hm!” said Judy defiantly. “That’s not exactly what I see. I agree with the ‘dear’ and “beautiful’; she’s all that and a thousand times more.”

‘Tell me what you do see, Judy!” said the mother in a whisper as she laid a gentle hand imploringly on her sister’s arm. She was trembling slightly. Judy took her hand and stroked it tenderly. “I know!” she said gently “I know. I know!” The mother took heart from her tenderness and said in an imploring whisper “Be gentle with me, Judy. She is all I have; and I fear her passing away from “Not that — not yet at all events!” she answered quickly. “The time is coming no doubt. But it is because we should be ready for it that I want to speak. We at least ought to know the exact truth!”

“The exact truth... Oh Judy...!”

"Don't be frightened, dear. There is nothing to fear. The truth is all love and goodness. But my dear we are all but mortal after all, and the way to keep right is to think truly."

"Tell me exactly what you see! Tell me everything no matter how small. I shall perhaps understand better that way!"

Judy paused a while, looking at the young girl lovingly. Then she spoke in a level absent voice as though unconsciously.

"I don't see a child — now. I see a young woman of twenty, and a fine well-grown young woman at that. Look at her figure, straight and clean as a young pine. Type of figure that is the most alluring of all to men; what the French call fausse matgre. She has great gray eyes as deep as the sky or the sea; eyes that can drag the soul out of a man's body and throw it down beneath her dainty feet. I may be an old maid; but I know that much anyhow. Her hair is black — that isn't black, but with a softness that black cannot give. Her skin is like ivory seen in the sunset, Her mouth is like a crimson rosebud. Her teeth are like pearls, and her ears like pink shell. Her head is poised on her graceful neck like a lily on its stem. Her nose is a fine aquiline — that means power and determination. Her forehead can wrinkle — that means thought, and may mean misery. Her hands are long and fine; patrician hands that can endure — and suffer. Sally, there is there the making of a splendid woman and of a noble life; she is not out of her girlhood yet, but she is very near it Ignorance is no use to her. She will understand; and then she will take her own course. She has feeling deep and strong in the very marrow of her bones. Ah! my dear, and she has passion too. Passion that can make or mar. That woman will do anything for love. She can believe and trust. And when she believes and trusts she will hold the man as her master; put him up on a pedestal and be content to sit at his feet and worship —

and obey... She...”

Here the mother struck in with surprised consternation “How on earth do you know all this?” Judy turned towards her with a light in her eyes which her sister had never seen there:

“How do I know it! Because she is of my blood and yours. Have I not seen a lot of it in you in our babyhood. Have I not gone through it all myself — the longing part of it — the wishing and hoping and praying and suffering. Do you think Sally that I have arrived at old maidhood without knowing what a young maid thinks and feels; without having any share of the torture that women must bear in some form or another. I know it all as well as though it was all fresh before me instead of a lurid memory. Ah, my dear she has all our nature — and her father’s too. And he never learned the restraint that we had to learn — and practice. When she is face to face with passion she may find herself constrained to take it as he has always done: for life or death!”... She paused a moment, panting with the intensity of her feeling. Then she went on more quietly:

“Sally, isn’t it wiser to let her, in her youth and ignorance of herself and the world, break herself in to passion and romance. It would be hard to get a safer object for sentimental affection than a man she never saw and is never likely to meet. After all, he is only an idea; at best a dream. In good time he will pass out of her mind and give place to something more real. But in the meantime she will have learned — learned to understand, to find herself.” Then she sat silent till Joy turned round and began to walk towards them. At this the mother said quietly:

“Thank you, dear Judy. I think I understand. You are quite right, and I am glad you told me.”

That journey round the Sorrentine Peninsula became a part of

Joy’s life. It was not merely that every moment was a new pleasure, a fresh delight to the eye; her heart was in some mysterious way beginning to be afire. Hitherto her thoughts of that abstract creation, Lord Athlyne, had been impersonal: an objective of her own unconscious desires, rather than a definite individuality. Up to now, though he had been often in her thoughts, he had never taken shape there. The image was so inchoate, indefinite, vague and nebulous. She had never tried or even wished to find for him in her imagination features or form. But now she had begun to picture him in various ways. As she stood beside the Moorish tower looking down across the rugged slope of rock and oleander at the wrinkled sea beneath, his image seemed to flit before the eyes of her soul in kaleidoscopic form. It was an instance of true feminine receptivity: the form did not matter, she was content to accept the Man.

The cause — the sudden cause of this change was her mother’s attitude. She had accepted him as a reality and had not hesitated to condemn him as though he was a conscious participant in what had passed. Joy had found herself placed in a position in which she had to hear him unfairly treated, without being able to make any kind of protest. It was too ridiculous to argue. What on earth could her mother know about him that she should take it for granted that he had done wrong? He who had never seen her or even heard of her! He who was the very last man in the world to be wanting to a woman in the way of respect — of tenderness — of love... Here she started and looked around cautiously as one does who is suspicious of being watched. For it flashed across her all at once that she knew no more of him than did her mother. As yet he was only an abstraction; and her mother’s conception of him differed from hers. And as she thought, and thought truly for she was a clever girl, she began to realise that she had all along been clothing an abstract individuality with her own wishes and dreams — and hopes... The last thought brought her up sharply. With a quick shake of the head she threw aside for the present all thoughts on the subject, and impulsively went back to the carriage.

There were however a few root thoughts left which would not be thrown aside. They could not be, for they were fixed in her womanhood. Another woman had accepted her dream as a reality; and now, as that reality was her doing, he was her own man. And he was misunderstood and blamed and unfairly treated! It was her duty to protect him!

Had Aunt Judy been aware of her logical process and its conclusion she could have expressed it thus:

“Hm! a man in her mind. — Her man. Her duty to protest... We all know what that means. He’s only in her mind at present... Hm!”

The whole day was spent on the road, for the beauty was such that the stoppages were endless. Joy, with the new-arisen soul which took her out of her own thoughts, found delight in every moment She could hardly contain her rapture as fresh vistas of beauty burst upon her. When the curve of the promontory began to cut off the view of Vesuvius and the plain seaward of it, she got out of the carriage and ran back to where she could have a full view. Underneath her lay the wonderful scene of matchless beauty. To the right rose Vesuvius a mass of warm colour, with its cinder cone staring boldly into the blue sky, a faint cloud hanging over it like a flag. Below it was the sloping plain dotted with trees and villas and villages, articulated in the clear air like a miniature map. Then the great curve of the bay, the sapphire sea marked clearly on the outline of the coast from Ischia which rose like a jewel from a jewel. Past Naples, a clustering mass with San Martino standing nobly out and the great fortress crowning grimly the hill above it. Past Portici and the buried Herculaneum; till getting closer the roofs and trees and gardens seemed to run up to where she stood. To the left, a silhouette of splendid soft purple, rose the island of Capri from the sea of sapphire which seemed to quiver in the sunshine. Long she looked, and then closing her eyes to prove that the lovely image still held in the darkness, she turned with a long sigh of ecstasy and walked slowly to the waiting carriage.

Again and again she stooped, till at last she made up her mind to walk altogether until she should get tired. The driver took his cue from her movements when to stop and when to go on.

The road round the Peninsula runs high up the mountain side with mostly a steep precipice to seaward and on the other hand towering rocks. But such rocks! And so clad with the finest vegetation! Rocks rich in colour and quaint in shape; with jagged points and deep crevices in which earth could gather and where trees and shrubs and flowers could cling. High over-head hung here and there a beautiful stone-pine with red twisted trunk and spreading branches. Fig and lemon trees rose in the sheltered angles, the long yellow shoots of the new branches of the lemon cutting into the air like lances. Elsewhere beech and chestnut, oak and palm. Trailing over the rock, both seaward and landward, creepers of soft green and pink. And above all, high up on the skyline, the semi-transparent, smoke-coloured foliage of the olives that crowned the slopes.

Then the towns! Maggiore and Amalfi quaint close-drawn irregular relics of a more turbulent age, climbing up the chasms in the hillside. Narrow streets, so steep as to look impossible to traffic. Queer houses of all sorts of irregular design and variety of stone. Small windows, high doors, steep, rugged irregularly-sloping steps as though time and some mighty force had shaken the very rock on which they were built. Joy felt as though she could stay there for ever, and that each day would be a dream, and each fresh exploration a time of delight. In her secret heart of hearts she registered a vow that if ever she should go on a wedding journey it should be to there.

At Amalfi they had tea, and then made up their minds that they would drive on to Salerno and there take train home; for it would be time to travel quick when so long a journey had been taken.

When they were at the end of the peninsula a sudden storm came on. For awhile they had seen far out at sea a dark cloud gathering, but it was so far away that they did not think it would affect them. The driver knew and began to make ready, for there was no escaping from it. He turned his horses' heads to the rock and wedged up the wheels of the carriage with heavy stones so that in case the horses should get frightened their plunging could not be too harmful.

Heavier and heavier grew the cloud out at sea, and as it grew denser it moved landward. Its grey changed to dark blue and then to a rich purple, almost black. A keen coldness presaged a coming storm.

There was stillness all round the mountain road; a positive desolation of silence from which even the wondrous beauty of the scene could not distract the mind. Joy absolutely refused to sit in the carriage which was now properly hooded. She threw on the cloak which she had brought with her and stood out on the open road where she could enjoy the scene undisturbed by human proximity. As she stood, the velvet black cloud was relit by a blinding sheet of lightning which seemed for a moment to be shaped like a fiery tree, roots upward in the sky. Close following came such a mighty peal of thunder that her heart shook. Ordinarily Joy was not timorous, and for thunder she had no fear. But this was simply terrific; it seemed to burst right over her head and to roll around her in a prolonged titanic roar. She was about to run to the carriage when she heard the shrieks of fear from the two women; the driver was on his knees on the road praying. Joy felt that all she could do to help her mother and aunt would be to keep calm — as calm as she could. So she moved her hand and called out cheerfully:

"Don't be afraid! It is all right; the lightning has passed us!" As she spoke the rain came down in torrents. It was tropical; in a few seconds the open road was running like a river, ankle deep. By the exercise of her will the girl's courage had risen. She could now actually enjoy what was before her. Far out to sea the black cloud still hung, but it was broken up in great masses which seemed to dip into the sea. It was almost as dark as night; so dark that the expanse became lit by the lightning flashes. In one of these she saw three separate water-spouts. The sea appeared to have risen as the cloud sank, and now were far apart three great whirling pillars like hour-glasses. And then, wonder of wonders, without turning her head but only her eyes she could see away to the left a whole world of green expanse backed up by the mountains of Calabria. With each second the sinking sun brought into view some new hilltop flaming in the glow. A little way in front of her at the southern side of the peninsula the copper dome of the church at Vietri glowed like a ball of fire. Away to the south on the edge of the sea rose the many columns of the majestic ruins of Paestum standing still and solemn as if untouchable by stress of storm or time.

Joy stood entranced, as though the eyes of her soul had opened on a new world. She hardly dared to breathe. The pelting of the rainstorm, the rush of the water round her feet, the crash and roar of the thunder or the hissing glare of the lightning did not move or disturb her. It was all a sort of baptism into a new life.

Joy Ogilvie, like all persons of emotional nature, had quick sympathy with natural forces and the moods of nature. The experience of the day, based on the superlative beauty around her, had waked all the emotional nature within her. Naples is always at spring time; and the young heart finding naturally its place amongst the things that germinate and develop unconsciously, swayed with and was swayed by the impulses of her sex. Beauty and manhood had twin position in her virgin breast.

Aunt Judy's insight or prophesy was being realised quicker than she thought. Joy's sex had found her out!

CHAPTER 3

DE HOOGE'S SPRUIT

In Italy Joy Ogilvie learned to the full, consciously and unconsciously, all the lessons which a younger civilisation can learn from an elder. To the sympathetic there are lessons in everything; every spot that a stranger foot has pressed has something to teach. Especially to one coming from the rush of strenuous life, which is the note of America, the old-world calm and luxury of repose have lessons in toleration which can hardly be otherwise acquired. In the great battle of life we do not match ourselves against individuals but against nations and epochs; and when it is finally borne in on us that others, fashioned as we ourselves and with the same strength and ambitions and limitations, have lived and died and left no individual mark through the gathering centuries, we can, without sacrifice of personal pride, be content to humbly take each his place.

The month spent at and round Naples had been a never-ending dream of delight; and this period of quiescence told on her naturally sensuous nature. Already she had accepted the idea of a man worthy of love; and the time went to the strengthening of the image. There was a subtle satisfactoriness in the received idea; the wealth of her nature had found a market — of a kind. That is to say: she was satisfied to export, and that was the end of her thoughts — for the present. Importation might come later, "The mind's Rialto hath its merchandise."

None of the family ever alluded to Lord Athlyne in the presence of her father. Each in her own way knew that he would not like the idea; and so the secret — it had by this very reticence grown to be a secret by now — was kept.

On the voyage back to New York Joy's interest in Lord Athlyne became revived by the surroundings. They had not been able to secure cabins in the Cryptic, and so had come by the Hamburg-American Line from Southampton. By this time Aunt Judy's interest in the matter had begun to wane. To her it had been chiefly a jest, with just that spice of earnest which came from the effect which she supposed the episode would have on Joy's life. As Joy did not ever allude to the matter she had almost ceased to remember it It was Joy's duty — she thought of it as her privilege to make her father's morning cocktail which he always took before breakfast. One morning it was brought by Judy. Colonel Ogilvie thanking her asked why he had the privilege of her ministration. Unthinkingly she answered:

"Oh it's all right. The Countess made it herself, but she asked me to take it to you as she is feeling the rolling of the ship and wants to keep in bed."

"The who?" asked the Colonel his brows wrinkled in wonder. "What Countess? I did not know we had one on board."

"'Lady Athlyne of course. Oh!" she had suddenly recollected herself. As she saw she was in for an explanation she faced the situation boldly and went on:

"'That is the name you know, that we call Joy."

"'The name you call Joy — the Countess! Lady Athlyne! What on earth do you mean, Judy? I don't understand." In a laughing, offhand way, full of false merriment she tried to explain, her brother-in-law listening the while with increasing gravity. When she had done he said quietly:

"Is this one of your jokes, Judy; or did this Countess make two cocktails?” He stopped and then added: “Forgive me I should not have said that. But is it a joke, dear?”

“‘Not a bit!” she answered spiritedly. “That is, this particular occasion is not a joke. It is the whole thing that is that.”

“A joke to take... Is there a real man of the name of the Earl of Athlyne?”

“I believe so,” she said this faintly; she had an idea of what was coming.

“‘Then Judith I should like some rational explanation of how you come to couple my daughter’s name in such a way with that of a strange man. It is not seemly to say the least of it. Does my daughter allow this to be done?”

“Oh Colonel, it is only a joke amongst ourselves. I hope you won’t make too much of it.”

“Too much of it! I couldn’t make enough of it! If the damned fellow was here I’d shoot him!”

“But, my God, the man doesn’t know anything about it; no more than you did a minute ago.” Miss Judith was really alarmed; she knew the Colonel. He waved his hand as though dismissing her from the argument:

“Don’t worry yourself, my dear: this is a matter amongst men. We know how to deal with such things!” He said no more on the subject, but talked during breakfast as usual. When he rose to go on deck Judy followed him timidly. When they were away from the few already on deck she touched him on the arm.

“Give me just a minute?” she entreated.

“A score if you like, my dear!” he answered heartily as he led her to a seat in a sheltered corner behind the saloon skylight, and sat beside her. “What is it?”

"Lucius you have always been very good to me. All these years that I have lived in your house as your very sister you never had a word for me that wasn't kind..." He interrupted her, laying his hand on hers which was on the arm of her deck chair:

"Why else, my dear Judy! You and I have always been the best of friends. And my dear you have never brought anything but sunshine and sweetness into the house. Your merriment has kept care away from us whenever he tried to show his nose... Why my dear what is it? There! You mustn't cry!" As he spoke he had taken out a folded silk pocket-handkerchief and was very tenderly wiping her eyes. Judy went on sobbing a little at moments:

"I have always tried to make happiness, and I have never troubled you with asking favours, have I?"

"No need to ask, Judy. All I have is yours just as it is Sally's or Joy's." Suddenly she smiled, her eyes still gleaming with recent tears:

"I am asking a favour now — by way of a change. Lucius on my honour — and I know no greater oath with you than that — this has been a perfectly harmless piece of fun. It arose from a remark of that nice Irish stewardess on the Cryptic that no one was good enough to marry Joy except one man: the young nobleman whom she had nursed. And she really came to believe that it would come off. She says she has some sort of foreknowledge of things." The Colonel smiled:

"Granted all this, my dear; what is it you want me to do?"

"To do nothing!" she answered quickly. Then she went with some hesitation:

"Lucius you are so determined when you take up an idea, and I know you are not pleased with this little joke. You are mixing it up with honour — the honour that you fight about; and if you go on, it may cause pain to us all. We are only a pack of women, after all, and you mustn't be hard on us."

"Judy, my dear, I am never hard on a woman, am I?"

"No! Indeed you're not," she avowed heartily. "You're the very incarnation of sweetness, and gentleness, and tenderness, and chivalry, with them... But then you take it out of the men that cross you!"

"That's as a gentleman should be, I take it" he said reflectively, unconsciously stroking his white moustache. Then he said briskly:

"Now Judy seriously tell me what you wish me to do or not to do. I must have some kind of clue to your wishes, you know." As she was silent for the moment he went on gravely. "I think I understand, my dear. Be quite content, I take it all for a joke and a joke between us it shall remain. But I must speak to Joy about it. There are some things which if used as subjects for jokes lead to misunderstandings. Be quite easy in your mind. You know I love my daughter too well to give her a moment's pain that I can spare her. Thank you Judy for speaking to me. I might have misunderstood and gone perhaps too far. But you know how sensitive— 'touchy' Joy calls it — about my name and my family I am; and I hope you will always bear that in mind. And besides my dear, there is the other gentleman to be considered. He too, may have a word to say. As he is a nobleman he ought to be additionally scrupulous about any misuse of his name; and of course I should have to resent any implication made by him against any member of my family!"

"Good Lord!" said Judy to herself, as he stood up and left her with his usual courtly bow. "What a family to deal with. This poor little joke is as apt to end in bloodshed as not. The Colonel is on the war-path already; I can see that by his stateliness!"

Colonel Ogilvie thought over the matter for a whole day before he spoke to Joy; he was always very grave and serious regarding subjects involving honour and duty.

Joy knew that he had something on his mind from his abstraction, and rather kept out of his way. This was not on her own account for she had no idea that she was involved in the matter, but simply because it was her habit to sympathise with him and to think of and for him. She was just a little surprised when the next afternoon he said to her as they stood together at the back of the wheel-house over the screw, the quietest place on the ship for a talk:

"Joy dear, I want you to listen to me a minute."

"Yes, Daddy!"

"About that joke you had on the Cryptic"

'Yes, Daddy." She was blushing furiously; she understood now.

"My dear, I don't object to your having any little harmless romance of that kind. I don't suppose it would make any difference if I did. A young girl will have her dreaming quite independent of her old daddy. Isn't it so, little girl?"

"I suppose so, dear Daddy, since you say it" She nestled up close to him comfortably as she spoke: this was nicer talk than she expected.

"But there is one thing that you must be careful about There must be no names!"

"How do you mean, Daddy?"

"I gather that there has been a joke amongst some of you as to calling you the Countess or Lady Athlyne, or some of that kind of foolishness. My dear child, that is not right. You are not the Countess, nor Lady Athlyne, nor Lady anything. A name my dear when it is an honourable one is a very precious possession. A woman must cherish the name she does possess as a part of her honour."

"I am proud of my name, Father, very, very proud of it; and I always shall be!" She had drawn herself upright and had something of her father's splendid personal pride. The very use of the word 'Father' instead of 'Daddy' showed that she was conscious of formality.

"Quite right, little girl. That is your name now; and will in a way always be. But you may marry you know and then your husband's name will be your name, and you will on your side be the guardian of his honour. We must never trifle with a name, dear. Those people who go under an alias are to my mind the worst of criminals."

"Isn't that rather strong, Daddy, when murder and burglary and theft and wife-beating and cheating at cards are about!" She felt that she was through the narrow place now and could go back to her raillery. But her father was quite grave. He walked up and down a few paces as though arranging his thoughts and words. When he spoke he did so carefully and deliberately:

"Not so, little girl. These, however hard they may be, are individual offences and are punished by law. But a false name — even in jest, my dear — is an offence against society generally, and hurts and offends every one. And in addition it is every one of the sins you have named; and all the others in the calendar as well."

"How on earth do you make out that, Daddy?"

"Take them in order as you mentioned them. Murder, burglary, theft, wife-beating, cheating at cards! What is murder? Killing without justification! Does not one who approaches another in false guise kill something? The murderer takes the life; the other kills what is often more than life: self respect, belief in human nature, faith. One only kills the body, but the other kills the soul. Burglary and theft are the same offence differently expressed; theft is the meaner crime that is all. Well, disguise is the thiefs method. Sometimes he relies on absence of others, sometimes on darkness, sometimes on a mask, sometimes on the appearance or identity of some one else. But he never deals with the normal condition of things; pretence of some kind must always be his aid. The man, therefore, who relies on pretence, when he knows that the truth would be his undoing, is a thief."

"Daddy you argue as well as a Philadelphia lawyer!"

"I don't believe much in lawyers!" said the old man dryly. "As to wife-beating!"

"I'm afraid you've struck a snag there, Daddy! There isn't much pretence about that crime, anyhow!"

"Not at all, my dear. That comes within the category of murder. The man who descends to that abominable crime would kill the woman if he dared. He is a coward as well as a murderer, and should be killed like a mad dog!"

"Bravo! Daddy. I wish there was a man like you to deal with them in every county. But how about cheating at cards. That's a poser, I think!"

"No trouble about that, Joy. It is cheating at cards."

"How do you argue that out, Daddy?"

"Any game of cards is a game of honour. So many cards, so much skill in playing them according to the recognised rules of the game; and, over all, a general belief in the honour of all the players. I have seen a man shot across a handkerchief — in honourable duel, my dear — for hesitating markedly at poker when he stood pat on a 'full house.' That was pretence, and against the laws of honour; and he paid for it with his life.” Joy wrinkled her brows; “I see it’s quite wrong, father, but I don’t quite see how it fits into the argument,” she said.

“That is simple enough, daughter. As I say, it is a pretence. Don’t you see that after all a game of cards is a simple thing compared with the social life of which it is only an occasional episode. If a man, — or a woman either, Joy — misleads another it must be with some intention to deceive. And in that deception, and by means of it, there is some gain — something he or she desires and couldn’t otherwise get. Isn’t that plain enough!”

“All right, Father; I quite see. I understand now what you mean. I did not ever look at things in quite that way. Thank you very much, dear, for warning me so kindly too. I’ll stop the joke, and not allow it to go on — so far as I can stop it”

“How do you mean? Does anyone else know it?”

“I may have written to one or two girls at home, Daddy. You know girls are always fond of such foolishness.”

“Had you not better write to them and tell them not to mention it”

“Good Gracious! Why you dear, old goose of a Daddy it is evident you don’t know girls. That would be the very way to make things buzz. Oh no! we’ll simply drop it; and they’ll soon forget it. I may have to tell them something else, though, to draw them away from it.”

“Hm!” said her father. She looked at him with a sly archness: “I suppose, Daddy, it wouldn’t do to have it that an Italian Grand Duke proposed for me — to you of course!”

“Certainly not, Miss Impudence! I’m not to be drawn into any of your foolish girls’ chatter. There, run away and let me smoke in peace!” She turned away, but came back.

"Am I forgiven, Daddy?"

"Forgiven! Lord bless the child, why there's nothing to forgive. I only caution. I know well that my little girl is clear grit, straight through; and I trust her as I do myself. Why Joy, darling" he put his arm affectionately round her shoulder "you are my little girl! The only one I have or ever shall have; and so, God willing, you shall be to me to the end."

"Thank you dear, dear Daddy. And I pray so too. I shall always be your little girl to you and shall come to you to cheer you or to be comforted myself. Mother has of late taken to treating me like a grown-up which she always keeps firing off at me so that I don't know whether I am myself or not But whatever I am to anyone else, I never shall be anything to you but your 'little girl!'" And that compact was sealed then and there with a kiss. Nine months later whilst Colonel Ogilvie was in the library of his own house, "Air" in Airlville, Joy came in and closed the door carefully; she came close and whispered:

"Am I still your little girl, Daddy?"

"Always my dear! Always!"

"Then you don't mind having a secret with me?"

"Mind my dear! I love it What is it you want to tell me?" She took a folded newspaper from her pocket and handed it to him, saving:

"I came across this in the New York Tribune. Read it!" Colonel Ogilvie turned it over with a rueful look as he said: "The whole of it!"

"Oh Daddy, don't be tiresome; of course not." Her father's face brightened: "Then you read what you want me to know. Your eyes are better than mine!" Joy at once began to read:

"From our own Correspondent, Capetown. Some details of the lamentable occurrence at de Hooge's Spruit which was heliographed from the front yesterday have now come to hand. It appears that a battery of field artillery was ordered to proceed from Bloomgroot to Neswick escorted by a Squadron of mixed troops taken from the Scottish Horse and the Mounted Yeoman. When they had begun to cross the river, which here runs so rapidly that great care has to be observed lest the horses should be swept away, a terrific fusillade from an entrenched force of overwhelming numbers was opened on them. Colonel Seawright who commanded ordered a retreat until the disposition of the enemy could be ascertained. But before the manoeuvre could be effected the British force was half wiped out. Accurate fire had been concentrated on the artillery horses, and as the guns were all on the river bank ready for the crossing it was impossible to rescue them. Gallant efforts were made by the gunners and the cavalry escort, but in the face of the hail of bullets the only result was a terrible addition to the list of killed and wounded. Seeing that the ground was partly clear, a number of Boers crept out of cover and tried to reach the guns. At this our troops made another gallant effort and the Boers disappeared. Still it was almost hopeless to try to save the guns. One only of the battery was saved and this by as gallant an effort on the part of one young officer as has been as yet recorded in the war. Captain Lord Athlyne" Here Joy looked up for an instant and saw a frown suddenly darken her father's brow—"who was tentatively in command of a yeomanry troop took a great coil of rope one end of which was held by some of his men. When he was ready he rode for the guns at a racing pace, loosing the rope as he went. It was a miracle that he came through the terrific fire aimed at him by the Boer sharp-shooters. Having gained the last gun, behind which there was a momentary shelter, he attached the end of the rope. Then mounting again he swept like a hurricane across the zone of fire. There was a wild cheer from the British, and a number of horsemen began to ride out whilst the firing ran along the front of the waiting line. But the instant the rope was attached the men began to pull and the gun actually raced along the open space. In the middle of his ride home the gallant Irishman's cap was knocked off by a bullet. He reined up his charger, dismounted and picked up the cap and dusted it with his handkerchief before again mounting. Despite their wounds and the chagrin of defeat the whole force cheered him as he swept into the lines."

"Daddy I call that something like a man! Don't you?" Her colour was high and her eyes were blazing. She looked happy when her father echoed her enthusiasm:

"I do! daughter. That was the action of a gallant gentleman!" There was a silence of perhaps half a minute. Then Colonel Ogilvie spoke:

"But why, my dear, did you tell this to me?"

"I had to tell some one, Daddy. It is too splendid to enjoy all one's self; and I was afraid if I told Mother she might not understand — she's only a woman you know, and might put a wrong construction on my telling her, and so worry herself about me. And I didn't dare to tell Aunt Judy, for she's so chock full of romance that she would have simply gone crazy and chaffed me out of all reason. There is no holding back Aunt Judy when she is chasing after a romance! And besides, Daddy dear" here she took his arm and looked up in his face "I wanted you to know that Lord Athlyne is a gentleman." Her father frowned:

"Why should I know — or care?"

"Not on your own part Daddy — but — but only because I want you to. It is hard to explain, but I think you took a prejudice against him from the first; and you see it makes it less awkward to be coupled with a man's name, when the name and the man are good ones." The Colonel's frown was this time one of puzzlement.

"I'm afraid I don't understand. You never saw the man. Why should you dislike less to be coupled with him because he did a brave thing? Besides, the whole thing is mere nonsense."

"Of course it is, Daddy. All nonsense. But it is better to be good nonsense than bad nonsense."

"Look here daughter — my little girl — I'm afraid you have got or may get too fond of thinking of that fellow. Take care!"

"Oh, that's all right, Daddy. He is only an abstraction to me. But somehow he interests me. Don't you be worrying about me. I promise you solemnly that I will tell you everything I hear about him. Then you can gauge my feelings, and keep tab of my folly."

"All right; little girl! There can't be anything very dangerous when you tell your father all about it."

It was three months before Joy mentioned the name of Lord Athlyne again to her father. One morning she came to him as he sat smoking in the garden at Air. Her eyes were glistening, and she walked slowly and dejectedly. In her hand she held a copy of the New York Tribune. She held it out, pointing with her finger to a passage.

"Read it for me, little girl!" In answer she said with a break in her voice:

'You read it, Daddy. Don't make me. It hurts me and I should only break down. It is only a dream I know; but it is a sad dream and is over all too soon!" Colonel Ogilvie read the passage which was an account of the fighting at Durk River in which numbers of the British were carried away by the rapid stream, the hale and those wounded by the terrible fire of the Boers alike. The list of the missing was headed by a name he knew.

"Major the Earl of Athlyne, of the Irish Hussars."

The old gentleman rose up as stiff as at the salute and raised his hat reverently as he said:

"A very gallant gentleman. My heart is with you, my little girl! A dream it may have been; but a sad ending to any dream!"

A week after Joy sought her father again in the garden. This time her step was buoyant, her face radiant, and her eyes bright. The moment her father saw he felt that it had something to do with what he called in his own mind "that infernal fellow." When she was close to him she said in a low voice that thrilled:

"He is not dead, Daddy! He was wounded and carried down the river and was captured by the Boers and taken up to Pretoria. They have put him in the Birdcage. Beasts! It's all here in the Tribune."

Colonel Ogilvie was distinctly annoyed. When he could look on Lord Athlyne as dead he could admire his bravery, and even tolerate the existence that had been. But this chopping and changing — this being dead and coming to life again — was disturbing. What sort of fellow was he that couldn't make up his mind on any subject? Couldn't he remain dead like a gentleman? He had died like one; wasn't that enough! Joy saw that he was not pleased. She was too glad for the moment to take her father's attitude to heart; but every instinct in her told her not to remain. So she laid the paper on his knee and said quietly:

"I'll leave it with you, Daddy. You can read it yourself; it's worth reading. You are glad, I know, because your little girl is glad that there is one more brave man in the world.”

Just as she was going her father called her back. When she was close he said in a kindly manner but with great gravity:

“No more mentioning names now, little girl!” She put her finger to her lip as registering a vow of secrecy. Then she blew a kiss at him and tripped away.

CHAPTER 4

THE BIRD-CAGE

The “Bird-cage” at Pretoria was the enclosure wherein the captured British officers were imprisoned during the second quarter of the year 1900. Here at the beginning of May two men were talking quietly as they lay on the bare ground in the centre of the compound. The Bird-cage was no home of luxury; but the men who had perforce to live in it tried to make the best of things, and grumbling was tacitly discountenanced. These two had become particular chums. For more than a month they had talked over everything which seemed of interest. At first of course it was the war and all connected with it which interested them most They were full of hope; for though six months of constant reverses were behind them they could not doubt that Time and General Roberts would prevail. These two items of expected success were in addition to the British Army generally and the British soldier’s belief in it. When every battle or engagement which either of them had been in had been fought over again, and when their knowledge of other engagements and skirmishes had come to an end they fell back on sport. This subject held out for some time. The memories of both were copious of pleasant days and interesting episodes; and hopes ran high of repetitions and variations when the war should be over and the Boers reduced to that acquiescence in British methods and that loyalty to the British flag which British pride now demanded. Then “woman” had its turn, and every flirtation with the bounds of memory was recalled, without names or identification marks.

Then, when they knew each other better, they talked of the future in this respect. Young men, whatever exceptions these may be, are very sentimental. They are at once imaginative and reticent. Unlike girls their bashfulness is internal. The opening of their hearts, even in a measure, to each other in this respect was the crowning of their confidence. At this time they were occasionally getting letters. These had of course gone through the hands of the censor and their virginity thus destroyed; but the craving of all the prisoners for news of any kind, from home or elsewhere, was such that every letter received became in a measure common property. Even from intimate letters from their own womenkind parts were read out that had any colourable bearing on public matters. A few days before one of the men had a letter from his wife who was in Capetown; a letter which though it was nothing but a letter of affection from a loving wife, was before the day was over read by every man in the place. It had puzzled the husband at first, for though it was in his wife's writing the manner of it was not hers. It was much more carefully written than was her wont. Then it dawned on him that it had a meaning. He thought over it, till in a flash he saw it all. It was written by her, but she had copied it for some one else and signed it The passage of the letter that now most interested him read:

"I do so long to see you, my darling, that if I do not see you before, I am going to ask to be allowed to come up to Pretoria and see you there if I may, if it is only a glimpse through that horrid barbed wire netting that we hear of. You remember my birthday is on Waterloo day; and I am promising myself, as my birthday treat, a glimpse of the face of my dear husband."

It did not do to assemble together, for the eyes of the jailors were sharp and an organised meeting of the prisoners was suspicious and meant the tightening of bonds. So one by one he talked with his fellows, telling them what he thought and always imploring them to maintain the appearance of listless indifference which they had amongst themselves decided was the attitude best calculated to avert suspicion. Some did not at first understand the cryptic meaning; but the general belief was that it was a warning that the capture of Pretoria was expected not later than the fifteenth of June. This created enormous hopes. Thenceforth all the talk in private was as to what each would do when the relief came.

To-day the conversation was mainly about Athlyne's affairs. He had been unfolding plans to his friend Captain Vachell of the Yeomanry and the latter asked him suddenly:

"By the way, Athlyne, are you married."

"What! — Me married! Lord bless you man, no! Why do you ask?"

"I gathered so from what you have been saying just now. Don't be offended at my asking; but I have a special purpose."

"I'm not a bit offended; why should I be? Why do you ask me?"

"That's what I want to tell you. But old chap this is a delicate subject and I want to clear the ground first. It is wiser." Athlyne sat up:

"Look here, Vachell, this is getting interesting. Clear away!" The other hesitated and then said suddenly:

"You never went through a ceremony of marriage, or what professed to be one, with anyone I suppose? I really do ask pardon for this."

"Honesty, Vachell, I'm not that sort of man. I have lots of sins on me; more than my fair share perhaps. But whatever I have done has been above board." The other went on with dogged persistence:

'You will understand when I explain why I ask; but this is your matter, not mine, and I want to avoid making matters still more complicated. That is of course if there should be any complication that you may have overlooked or forgotten.”

“Good God! man, a marriage is not a thing a man could overlook or forget.”

“Oh that’s all right with a real marriage; or even with a mock marriage if a man didn’t make a practice of it. But there might be some woman, with whom one had some kind of intrigue or irregular union, who might take advantage of it to place herself in better position. Such things have been you know, old chap!” he added sententiously. Athlyne laughed.

“Far be it from me to say what a woman might or might not do if she took it into her pretty head; but I don’t think there’s any woman who would, or who would ever think she had the right to, do that with me. There are women, lots of them I am afraid, who answer the bill on the irregular union or intrigue side; but I should certainly be astonished if any of them ever set out to claim a right. Now I have made a clean breast of it Won’t you tell me what all this is about?” The other looked at him steadily, as though to see how he took it, as he answered:

“There is, I am told, a woman in New York who is passing herself off as your wife!”

Athlyne sprang to his feet and cried out:

“What’”

“That’s what I took it to mean! By the way— “this was said as if it was a sudden idea “I take it that your mother is not alive. I had it in my mind that she died shortly after you were born?”

“Unhappily that is so!”

“There is no dowager Countess?”

“Not for more than thirty years. Why?”

“The letter says ‘Countess of Athlyne.’ I took it to be your wife.”

“Let me see the letter.” He held out his hand. Vachell took from his pocket — the only private storage a man had in the Bird-cage — an envelope which he handed to his comrade, who took from it a torn fragment of a letter. He read it then turned it over. As he did so his eyes lit up; he had seen his own name. He read it over several times, then he looked up:

“Have you read it?”

‘Yes. I was told to do so.”

“All right! Then we can discuss it together.” He read it out loud:

“So Athlyne is married. At least I take it so, for there is a woman in New York, I am told, who calls herself the Countess of Athlyne. I know nothing of her only this: a casual remark made in a gossipy letter.”

“Now tell me, Vachell, can you throw any light on this?”

“Not on the subject but only on the way it has come to you. I had better tell you all I know from the beginning.” Athlyne nodded, he went on:

“Whilst we were in the trenches at Volks Spruit waiting for the attack to sound, Meldon and I were together — you remember Meldon of the Connaught Fusiliers?”

“Well! We often hunted together.”

“He asked me that if anything should happen to him I would look over his things and send them home, and so forth. I promised, but I asked him why he so cast down about the fight that was coming; was it a presentiment or anything of that kind. ‘Not a bit,’ he said, ‘it’s not spiritualism but logic! You see it’s about my turn next. All our lot have been wiped out, going up the line in sequence. Rawson, my junior, was last; and now I come on. And there is a message I want you to carry on in case I'm done for. You will find among my papers an envelope directed to Lord Athlyne. It has only a scrap of paper in it so I had better explain. The last time I saw Ebbfleet of the Guards — in Hospital just before he died — he asked me to take the message. You know Athlyne' he said 'I got a letter saying a woman in New York was calling herself his wife, and as I know he is not married I think it only right that he should know of this. It will put him on his guard.' Well you know poor Meldon went under at Sandaal; and so I took over the message. When you and I met up here I thought we were in for a long spell and as we couldn't do anything I came to the conclusion that there was no use giving you one more unpleasant thing to think of and grind your teeth over. But now that we know Bobs and Kitchener are coming up before long I want to hand over to you. It is evident that they expect us to be ready to help the force from within when they come, or else they wouldn't run the chance of telling us. Four thousand men, even without arms, are not to be despised in a scrimmage. If the wily Boer tumbles to it they will take us up the mountains in several sections, and I may not have another chance."

"That is all you know of the matter I take it?"

"Absolutely! Of course should I hear anything more I shall at once let you know. Though frankly I don't see how that can be; both men who sent the message are dead. I haven't the faintest idea of who sent the original report. Of course, old chap, I am mum on the subject unless you ever tell me to speak."

"Thanks, old man. I fancy there won't be much time for looking after private affairs for a good spell to come after we have shifted our quarters. There will be a devil of a lot of clearing up when the house changes hands and continues to ‘run under new management,’ as Bung says.”

All that had been spoken of came off as arranged by the various parties. On the fifth of June Roberts took Pretoria in his victorious march. Mafeking and Ladysmith had been relieved, and Johannesberg had fallen. Now, Kruger and the remainder of his forces were hurrying into the Lydenburg mountains to make what stand they could; and not the least keen of their foes were those who had been their guests in the Bird-cage. Athlyne rejoined his regiment and was under Buller’s command till the routed army escaped into Portuguese territory. Then he was sent by Kitchener along the ranges of block houses whose segregations slowly brought the war to an end.

When his turn came for going home three years had elapsed. London and his club claimed him for his spells of his short leave, for there was still much work to be done with his regiment. When he began to tire of the long round of work and distractions he commenced to think seriously of a visit to America.

His experience of the war had sobered him down. He was now thirty-two years of age, the time when most men, who have not arrived there already, think seriously of settling down to matrimony. In other respects he wanted to be free. He was tired of obeying orders; even of giving them. The war was over and Britain was at peace with the world. Had there been still fighting going on anywhere such thought would not have occurred to him; he would still have wanted to be in the thick of it. But the long months of waiting and inactivity, the endless routine, the impossibility of doing anything which would have an immediate effect; all these things had worn out much of his patience, and stirred the natural restlessness of his disposition. At home there seemed no prospect of following soldiering in the way he wished: some form in which excitement had a part. Indeed the whole scheme of War and Army seemed to be shaping themselves on lines unfamiliar to him. The idea of the old devil-may-care life which had first attracted him and of which he had had a taste did not any longer exist, or, if it existed it was not for him. Outside actual fighting the life of a soldier was not now to consist of a series of seasonable amusements. And even if it did the very routine of amusements not only did not satisfy him, but became irksome. What, after all, he thought, was to a grown man a life of games in succession. Polo and cricket, fishing, shooting, hunting in due course; racquets and tennis, yachting and racing were all very well individually. But they did not seem to lead anywhere.

In fact such pastimes now seemed inadequate to a man who had been actively taking a part in the biggest game of them all, war!

When once the idea had come to him it never left him. Each new disappointment, the unfulfilled expectation of interest, drove it further and further home. There was everywhere a lack of his old companions; always a crowd of new faces. The girls he had known and liked because they were likable, had got married within the few years of his absence. The matrons had made fresh companionships which held possession. Bridge had arisen as a new society fetish which drew to itself the interests and time of all. A new order of "South African Millionaires" had arisen who by their wealth and extravagance had set at defiance the old order of social caste, and largely changed the whole scheme of existing values.

When he fled away from London he found something of the same changes elsewhere. In the stir of war, and even in the long weariness of waiting which followed it, the whirling along of the great world was, if not forgotten, unthought of. The daily work and the daily interest were so personal and so absorbing that abstract thinking was not.

In the country, of course, the changes were less, but they were more marked. The few years had their full tally of loss; of death, and decay. The eyes that saw them were so far fresh eyes, that unchecked memory had not a perpetual ease of comparison.

For a while he tried hard to find a fresh interest in his work. But here again was change with which he could feel neither sympathy nor toleration. Great schemes of reform were on foot; schemes of organization, of recruiting, of training. The ranks in the Service, of which he had experience, were becoming more mechanical than ever. Had he by this time acquired higher rank in the army it is possible that he would have entered with ardour into the new conditions. He was fitted for such; young, and energetic, and daring. Those in the Cabinet or in the Army Council have material for exercising broader views of the machinery of war, and to the eyes of such many things which looked at in detail seem wrong or foolish stand out in their true national importance.

His dissatisfaction with the army changes was the last straw. He took it into his head that in future the army had no place for him. The idea multiplied day by day with an ever-increasing exasperation. At last his mind was definitely made up. He sent in his papers; and in due time retired.

It is generally the way with human beings that they expect some radical change in themselves and their surroundings to follow close on some voluntary act. They cannot understand, at once at all events, that the "eternal verities" are eternal. "I may die but the grass will grow" says Tennyson in one of his songs. And this is the whole story in epitome. After all, what is one life, howsoever perfect or noble it may be, in the great moving world of fact. The great Globe floats in a sea of logic which encompasses it about everywhere. What is ordained is ordained to an end, and no puny hopes or fears or wishes of an individual can sway or change its course. Conclusions follow premises, results follow causes. We rebel against facts and conditions because they are facts and conditions. Then for some new whim or purpose entirely, our own we take a new step — forward or backward it matters not — and lo! we expect the whole world with its million years of slow working up to that particular moment to change too.

This belief that things must change in accordance with our desires has its base deep down in our nature. At the lowest depth it is founded on Vanity. We are so important to ourselves that we cannot but think that that importance is sustained through all creation.

For a little while Lord Athlyne tried to persuade himself that now, at last, he was enjoying freedom. No more parades or early hours; no more orderly rooms or dinners, or duties at functions; no more of the bald, stale conventionalities of an occupation which had lost its charm. He expected each day to be now joyous with the realization of ancient hopes.

But the expectations were not realised. The days seemed longer than ever, and he actually yearned for something to fill up his time. Naturally his thoughts turned, as in the case of sportsmen they ever do, on big game. The idea took him and he began to plan out in his mind where he would go. Africa for lions?

No! no! He had had enough of Africa to last him for some time. India for tigers; the Rockies for bear?

Happy thought. Bear would just suit. He could put in two things:

look up that woman in New York who claimed to be his wife and silence her. He wouldn't like such an idea to go abroad in case he should ever marry. Then he would go on to the Rockies or Colorado and have a turn at the grizzlies.

He went straightway into the reading room of the club he was in and began to study Bradshaw.

At last he had found a new interest in life. For a week he devoted himself to the work in hand, until his whole sporting outfit was prepared. Then he began to think of the other quest; and the more he thought of it the more it puzzled him.

CHAPTER 5

AN ADVENTURE

With regard to his quest after his alleged wife the first conclusion Lord Athlyne came to was that he must go incognito— “under an alias” he expressed it to himself. Otherwise he would give warning of his presence, and that was the very thing which he wished to avoid. The woman must be an unscrupulous one or she would not have entered on such a scheme of fraud; and she would naturally be quick to protect herself by concealment or flight. An ordinary individual would have left such an investigation to his solicitors who would have procured the services of local detectives. But then Athlyne was not an ordinary individual. He liked to do things for himself in most matters which interested him; and in this case there was so distinctly a personal bearing that he would not have been satisfied to leave it to any one else.

When, however, he began to work out details of his alias he found that he had landed in a perfect hornet’s nest of difficulties. The mere matter of clothing and luggage was, he found, almost enough to turn his hair prematurely grey. What was the use of taking a false name when his true one was engraved on the brass plates of his portmanteaux and bags so that every porter would know everything about him within five minutes of his arrival; the chambermaid and laundress would see the marking of his linen. He very soon found that he would have to set about this branch of his effort very systematically if he did not want to give himself away hopelessly even before he started. He had already come to the conclusion that he must not take a valet with him. It would be quite enough to support an alias amongst his equals, whose habits and breeding had at least a certain amount of reticence, without running the risk of the world of servants who were much more inquisitive than their employers and much more skilled in matters of suspicion and detection.

First he had to decide on the name, and to get familiar with it in all sorts of ways; speaking, writing, and hearing it spoken. The latter he could only effect by hearing his own voice; he was conscious that he must, for some time at all events, be open to the danger of a surprise. He shrank in a certain way from using a name not his own; so he salved his conscience by selecting two of the simplest of his many names. Thus he became for his own purposes Richard Hardy. He fixed his domicile as "Sands End," a small place in the middle of Wiltshire which he had inherited from his mother. It was too small to be included in his 'list of seats' in Debrett, and thus answered his purpose. Then he got quite fresh store of linen from a new shop and had it marked 'R Hardy' or 'RH.' He bought new trunks and kit of all kinds. He had them marked with the same letters, and sent to a lodging which he had taken for the purpose under his new name. He had cards printed and got plain notepaper as he had to avoid a crest Then he found that all his sporting things, which had already been packed, had to be unpacked and overhauled lest the real name should remain anywhere. When all this was done, and it took weeks to complete, he began to feel an unmitigated fraud and a thorough scoundrel. To a man who takes honour to be a part of a gentleman's equipment any form of dissimulation must always be obnoxious.

One person alone he took into his confidence: his solicitor. It was necessary that he should have a bank account opened in New York. Also that in case of any unforeseen accident it would be at least advisable to be able to explain his actions. When the solicitor remonstrated he explained his purpose and made a special request that he should not be subjected to any opposition. “I go to protect myself’ he said. The other shrugged his shoulders and remained silent. He arranged before he terminated the interview that his letters should be sent to him under cover to his new name at his bankers in New York. In due time an account for a large sum was opened there. Then, when all was as complete as he could think of, he took a cabin in one of the French boats as he thought that in a foreign ship he would run less risk of running up against some acquaintance than would be likely on a British or American vessel.

He had hardly got clear of land when he began to realise in what a false position he had placed himself. He felt that any acquaintanceship which he could make might possibly lead to some imbroglio. To those who took him in good faith and made friends he must either reveal his purpose or accept a false position from which he might never be able to extricate himself. As the former was impossible, without creating a suspicion which would destroy his purpose, he had to take chance for the latter. The result was that had to be aloof and unresponsive to any of the proffered friendlinesses of the voyage; and seeing this the other passengers did not press friendliness on him or even repeat their overtures. He felt this acutely, for he had been always in the habit of making friends. Such is one of the delights of travel, as all know who have been about the world. Those who once “rub shoulders” in a casual way often make acquaintanceships which ripen into friendship and are life-long. Perhaps this is from the fact that in such cases each is taken from the first on his personal merits. There being no foreknowledge there cannot be any premeditation of purpose of gain of any kind. Like meets like, recognises natural kinship; and union is the result.

When after a somewhat tedious and uneventful voyage he landed in New York he was altogether in a disappointed and a discontented frame of mind. The acute cause of this was the filling up of the immigration paper which is so exhaustive as to details as to become inquisitorial. The answering of each question seemed to him like telling a lie — as indeed it was. As, however, he had nothing to declare and was without obvious objection he had no trouble. The only effect from the Customs examination that he noticed on himself was that when he drove out of the gates he felt somewhat as he had done when he passed from the prison pen at Pretoria into the cheering ranks of the victorious British army. He was lucky enough to escape from the ranks of the journalists who make copy out of any stranger of distinction who lands. His name was not sufficiently striking to even attract attention. He took quiet rooms high up in the "Manhattan," and for two days kept his own company.

The third day he went out. He walked through street after street; took trolley-cars now and again; went "up town" and "down town" on the road. Crossed the ferries to New Jersey and Long Island. Lunched at Martin's and dined at Delmonico's; and returned to his hotel without having made so far as he knew a step towards discovery. The only thing which he brought back was a slight knowledge of local geography. He had seen something of New York — from the streets; but except to ask his way from policemen or for food from foreign waiters he had not spoken to anybody.

The next few days he spent in walking about the streets. In summing up this afternoon he came to the conclusion that there was, for him, nothing so bad in Pretoria. All the time he felt with increasing force that he was a fraud, and constantly found himself evolving schemes as to how he could shed his incognito. The question of clubs alone made him unhappy. He had always been a clubbable man; in London he belonged to a number of the best. Whenever he had been in any city where there was a club its doors had always through the forethought of some friend been thrown open to him. Here was a city so full of those masculine refuges that it might be called the "City of Clubs." In every fashionable street was at least one, palatial places where men who were of the great circle met their friends. And yet he felt like the Peri outside the gates of Paradise. The feeling grew on him that he could not enter any one of them, even if he got the chance. How could he explain to men that he was not what he seemed — what he professed to be. Club-land is in some ways to men holy ground. Here they can afford to be natural — to be true. Except the club laws, written or unwritten, there is no conventional demand. As a man who had grown old knowing little of any other life put it; 'In a club you can afford not to lie." (It is to be presumed, by the way, that the speaker did not take a part in the conversations regarding episodes of fishing or bonnes fortunes!)

He could not see any way in which he could even begin to make his inquiry; or he could get honesty within any house he had seen. He became sorry he had ever thought of making the inquiry himself — that he had ever come at all. Dimly at the back of his thoughts was an intention to go back to London, resume his proper name, and then perhaps return in an upright way — as a gentleman should. Still he was a masterful man and did not like giving up... He thought a ride would do him good; it would clear his mind and freshen him up. A horseman is never lonely so long as he has a horse.

He asked the hotel clerk where he would get one. The man gave him several addresses. Then he added:

"By the way do you want to buy or only to hire?"

"'Either. I should buy if I could get something exceptionally good."

"Then take my advice. Go up to Seventh Avenue right at the top near the Park. There is an auction there this morning of fine horses. You will I daresay, get what you want; but you will doubtless have to pay for it."

"I don't mind that!" he smiled as he spoke; he did not remember that he had smiled since he left London. The very prospect of a horse brightened him up.

Before going to the Auction he called at the bank and drew out a handsome sum. In horse buying ready money is often a matter of importance.

At the Horse Exchange there was a good show, some of the horses being of real excellence. Prices ran high for these, and competition was spirited. But he got what he wanted: a big "Blue Grass" thoroughbred well up to his weight. His warranty was complete. The Auctioneer at his request brought to him presently a livery man on whom he might, he said, depend; and with him he arranged for the proper keeping of the horse.

For a few days Athlyne was really happy. His horse was as good as it looked, and had evidently been trained by some one who understood him. His month was as fine as possible and he realised an inflexion of the voice. Lord Athlyne rode well, and he knew it; and the horse knew it too from the first moment when his hand touched the bridle. After the first ride up the Riverside Drive the two became understanding friends.

The effect of the exercise on Lord Athlyne was to do away with his intention of trying to discover the identity of the offending lady. He would start soon for the Rockies and get after the grizzlies. Or better still he would go home, shake off his alias, and return — a free man.

On the Sunday afternoon he went for a ride in the direction he liked best, up the Riverside Drive. He went quietly till he got near the University where there was a long stretch of proper riding ground. There he let the black horse go, and the noble beast went along at a splendid pace. It was still a little early, and though there were a good many pedestrians there were but few persons in carriages or "horsebacking" and so the "ride" was fairly free. Horse and man were a noble pair. The one jet black, full of fire and mettle, every movement charged with power and grace; the other tall and slim, hard as nails with his long spell of South African soldiering, sitting like a centaur. Man and horse together moved as one. All eyes were turned on them as they swept by, with admiring glances from both women and men, each in their respective ways. Two park policemen, a sergeant and a roundsman, both finely mounted, were jogging quietly along. As the black horse came dashing up the roundsman said:

"Shall I stop him, sergeant?" The other looked on admiringly and answered quietly:

"Guess not! T'would be a burnin' shame to stop them two. An there won't be any need nevther, they know what they're doin, Halloran. They ain't goin' to ride down nobody. Did ye iver see a finer seat. I'd bet that's an English cavalry man. Look at the spring of him. Be the Lord I'd like to be in his shoes this minute!"

Amongst the few riders Athlyne passed on his course were an old man and a young woman. The man tall with a big white moustache, a haughty bearing, and steely eyes under shaggy white brows. The girl tall and slim and graceful with black hair and big gray eyes. Both were fairly well mounted, but the girl's mare was restive and shying at anything. As the black horse came thundering along she had to use considerable skill and force to keep her from bolting. Athlyne had just time for a passing glance as he swept by; but in that instant the face and figure became photographed on his memory. The girl turned and looked after him; she was in the receptive period of her young womanhood when every man has a charm, and when such a noble figure as was now presented is a power. With a sigh she turned and said to her companion:

"That is the horse that we saw sold at the Horse Exchange. I was jealous of whoever bought it then. I'm not now; a man who can ride like that deserves him. Daddy, don't you think he is something like what a man ought to be? I do!"

"You're right, little girl! But you'd better not say things like that to any one else but me; they mightn't understand!" Joy made no answer but she smiled to herself. During the hour or two that followed she chatted happily with her father. They had occasional canters and gallops until the road got too crowded when they went along more sedately. Whenever her father suggested turning homeward she always pleaded for one more turn.

"Just one more, Daddy. It is so delightful here; and the river is so lovely." Of course she had her way. The old man found more true happiness in pleasing her than in any other way. In her heart, though she did not tell her father for she felt that even he mightn't understand, she had a wish that the man on the black horse would return the same way. She had a feeling that he would.

After his gallop Athlyne went quietly along the road past Grant's Tomb and followed the course of the Drive. Here the road descended, circling round the elevation on which the Tomb is erected. Below it is the valley of some old watercourse into the Hudson. This valley has been bridged by a viaduct over which the Drive continues its course up the side of the river for many miles. To-day however, it was necessary to make a detour, descend the steep on the hither side of the valley and rise up the other side. Some settlement had affected the base of the up-river end of the bridge and it had given way. The rock on which New York is based is of a very soft nature, and rots slowly away, so that now and again a whole front of a house will slide down a slope, the underlying rock having perished. Not long before, this had actually happened to a group of houses in Park Row. Now the bridge had fallen away; the road ended abruptly, and below lay a great shapeless mass of twisted metal and stone. The near end of the viaduct was barred off with wooden rails, and in the centre was a great board with a warning that the thoroughfare was closed.

Athlyne rode up as far as the Up-Town Club, sat for awhile amongst the trees on the river bank and thought of many things. Amongst these of the girl with the gray eyes who looked so admiringly at his horse — or himself. Perhaps he accepted the latter alternative, for as his thoughts ran he smiled and stroked his big moustache.

When he rode towards town again he kept a sharp look out, unconsciously slackening speed when any old man and young woman riding together came in sight. He had ascended the eastern side of the valley, over which lay the broken viaduct, and commenced to traverse the curved slope leading up to Grant’s Tomb when he heard a sudden shouting on the road in front and saw a rush of people to both sides and up the steps to the Tomb. An instant after a mounted constable appeared urging his horse to a gallop as he cried out:

“Clear the road! Clear the road! It’s a run-a-way!” Instinctively Athlyne drew to the roadside, a double purpose in his mind; to keep the way clear as directed, and to be able to render assistance if possible. The noise and cries drew closer and there was on the hard road a thunder of many hoof strokes. Then round the curve swept a brown mare dashing madly in a frenzied gallop — the neck stretched out and the eyes flaming. The woman who rode her, a tall girl with black hair and great gray eyes, sat easily, holding her reins so as to be able to use them when the time should come. She was in full possession of herself. She did not look frightened, though her face was very pale. Behind her but a little war off came two mounted policemen and the old man with the big white moustache. Other men variously mounted came hurrying in the background; beyond them a whole long series of horse vehicles and motor cars.

As he saw her Athlyne’s heart leaped. This was the girl whose face had attracted him; his time had come quicker than he had dared to hope. He shook his reins and started his horse, spurring him with his heels as he did so. If he was to be of service he should be able to keep at least equal pace; and that would require a quick start, for the runaway was going at a great pace.

And then a great fear fell on him, not for himself but for the girl. He knew what perhaps she did not, that the viaduct was broken, and that her course lay down the steep roadway to the bottom of the little valley. He rode in earnest now, the sloping curved road was so short that if he was to stop the mare the effort should be made at once. He rode close by her, his powerful horse keeping pace almost without an effort, and said quietly to the girl:

“Try to hold her in if ever so little, there is a steep road which you must go down. The viaduct is broken and the road barred.”

“I can’t,” she said “she has the bit and I am powerless.” He struck his heels sharply and the black horse bounded forward. The girl saw the movement and understood:

‘Take care” she said quickly. “One policeman tried that and was thrown over, he may be killed.” As she spoke, the words died on her lips; they had rounded the curve and the danger ahead lay open to them. It was a choice of evils: a dash down the steep incline with a maddened mare, or a crash against the barrier cutting off the viaduct.

But the woman had no choice; the maddened mare took her own course. Down the curving slope she dashed and went straight for the barrier. This was made of heavy balks of timber below, but the rails above were light. These she broke through as she leaped; hurling a cloud of broken rails and splinters right and left. The girl had nerved herself to the effort when she had seen what was coming and held up as at a jump on the hunting field.

The moment that Athlyne had realised the situation he too was ready. Seeing that the mare was making for the right side of the barrier he went for the left, and they leaped together. The instant they had landed on the other side he was ready and rode alongside the mare. Ahead of them was the chasm — with death beneath. The girl saw it and her pale face grew ashy white. Athlyne, riding level and holding his reins in his left hand, hurriedly cried:

“Loose your stirrup and when I get my arm round you take hold of my collar with your left hand. Then try to jump to me as I pull you towards me.”

The girl loosened her boot from the stirrup and let go her rein, bending towards him as his arm went round her waist and catching his collar as directed.

“Go!” he cried and she sprang towards him as well as she could. He drew her towards him with all his strength, and in a second the girl was landed on the pommel of his saddle. She knew what she had to do: to leave his right hand free, so she clasped both her arms round his neck. He pulled at his reins with all his might — it was two lives now — and cried to the horse. The noble animal seemed to understand and threw himself back on his haunches.

He stopped only a few yards from the open chasm, into which the mare went with a wild rush.

Athlyne slid from the saddle, holding the girl in his arms. As the terrible danger came to an end her eves closed and she sank senseless to the ground.

Then the deluge!

Through the barrier, which appeared to melt away before them, came a rush of people. Some were on horseback, some on foot, others in buggies, carriages, motor cars. Foremost came Colonel Ogilvie who leaped the broken barrier, then after him a policeman whose horse had manifestly been trained to timber. At last several mounted police fearing that some terrible accident might occur from the crowding on the viaduct ranged themselves in front of the opening and protected it till the coming of a sufficient number of policemen, on foot and panting, had arrived to hold it.

Colonel Ogilvie threw himself from his horse and knelt down beside Joy. When he saw that she was only fainting he stood up and lifted his hat to her rescuer.

“I don’t know how to thank you, sir,” he said in a voice broken with emotion. “Twas a gallant act! Some day, when you have children of your own, you may understand what it is to me!” Athlyne who was kneeling, still holding up Joy’s head, said in the disconnected way usual to such circumstances:

“Do not mention it. It has been a pleasure to me to be of any service,” and so forth. Then, seeing signs in the girl’s face of returning animation, he said aloud so as to divert some of the attention:

“Has any one seen after the mare? The poor brute must be mangled, if it has not been killed; it ought to be put out of pain.”

The poor brute was indeed a pitiable sight; there was a sigh of relief from the crowd round it down below when a policeman put it out of pain with a revolver shot.

Seeing that the lady, was now recovering and in the charge of her father, Athlyne wanted to get away. He hated all such fuss and publicity. He could not let her go lest she should be hurt, but he signed to her father who took his place; then he arose. The girl’s eyelids quivered and she gave a heavy sigh. Then the eyes opened and she stared wildly at the sea of faces around her. She seemed to recall everything in an instant, and with a shudder and a violent movement sprang to her feet.

“Where is he?” she said anxiously. Then, recovering her full presence of mind and seeing her father, she turned to him and putting her arms round him began to cry on his shoulder.

CHAPTER 6

TRUE HEART'S-CONTENT

Athlyne's one idea was now to get away quickly. The crowd was gathering closely and were beginning to ask questions. One big, intelligent-looking sergeant of police had out his note-book: "May I ask your name, sorr?" "Is that necessary, my good man?"

"Well, we have to report, sorr, but" this he said with a confidential look "it mayn't be necessary to make it public. You see, the lady's all right, and no one is goin' to make trouble over a dead horse. Though why any man would want to keep his name out of the papers for a deed like that, bates me!" Athlyne beckoned him aside; they leaned against the parapet with their faces towards the river. He had by now taken out his pocket-book and handed the sergeant a bill with a yellow back. The man's eyes opened when he saw it; and there was more than respect in his voice as he said: "Thank you very much, sorr! Be sure I'll do all I can. An' I don't know that we can't pull it off nayther, but ye must look out for them blasted kodaks!"

"All right sergeant. I'm much obliged for the hint. By the way wasn't one of your men tumbled over?"

'Yes, sorr; but I'm tould he wasn't hurt, only a bruise or two an' the skin from off iy his nose."

"Good! You'll tell the lady, she is sure to be distressed about him. Give him this for me, please. And here is my card. I am at the Manhattan."

"Thank you again, sorr. Tis mighty kind of ye. An' sorr if I may make so bould. If ye want not to be in all the paapers to-morra betther not ride back. There'll be a million kodaks on the

Boulevard.”

Just then a tall man raised his hat to Colonel Ogilvie and said: “My motor is here, sir, and I shall be very happy if you will use it for the lady. The chauffeur will leave you where you wish.”

“Thank you exceedingly. I shall be very grateful. I dare say I can get somebody to bring my horse to the stables; I couldn’t leave my daughter alone after such a shock.”

“I’ll see to it, sorr,” said the sergeant, who had come close. Colonel Ogilvie gave him his card and said:

“We are at the Holland House. Come up and see me some time to-morrow morning. I have some gratitude to express to you and your men!”

Whilst this conversation was going on a slim young man came up to Athlyne and raising his hat said:

“Can I do anything for you, sir. It will be a pleasure I assure you.” Athlyne summed him up a glance as a soldier.

“Thanks, old fellow,” he said, impulsively holding out his hand. “You’re a soldier aren’t you — a cavalry man?”

“No. Field Artillery 27th Battery. But we’re all cavalry at West Point. I knew you were a soldier when I saw you ride — let alone what you did. What can I do?”

“If it wouldn’t trouble you too much I wish you’d get some one to bring my horse to the Exchange in Seventh Avenue. You see I want to avoid all this fuss and kodaking.”

“I should love to; what a noble animal he is. But I shan’t send him. If you don’t mind I’ll ride him myself. Catch me missing a ride on a horse like that. May I come and see you after.”

“Delighted. Manhattan Hotel.” They bowed and parted. Athlyne went to Colonel Ogilvie, he felt it would be indecorous to leave without a word.

“I hope your daughter is all right, sir.”

“Thanks to you, my brave friend. I am Colonel Ogilvie of Airlville. Joy this is Mr.—” Athlyne felt in an instant like a cad. He realised now, in all its force, the evil of deception. Silently he handed his card. “Mr. Hardy” her father said. Joy held out her hand and he took it.

“I’m not able to thank you, now and here!” she said, raising to him her glorious grey eyes. He mumbled out a few words in reply and raised his hat to part. As he was turning away Joy whispered to her father “Daddy, won’t you ask him to come to see us. Mother will want to thank him too. Ask him to come to dinner to-night”

“My dear, you will be far too upset. Better—”

“Nonsense, Daddy dear. I’m all right now. Indeed, dear, it will seem strange if you don’t, after what he has done for — for you, Daddy dear — and for me.”

In his own formal and kindly way Colonel Ogilvie gave the invitation. Athlyne answered with equal kindly ceremony; and they parted.

By this time the stranger’s motor had been taken in through the broken barrier. Colonel Ogilvie insisted that their host should not leave them, and they drove off together.

In the public excitement at their going Athlyne escaped unnoticed. He took the street at right angles and shortly got a down-town West-End Avenue car.

An hour later he had a call from his military friend, who announced himself as “Lootenant R. Flinders Breckenridge.” Athlyne had now made up his mind how to meet him. He said at once:

“I am going to try your patience, old chap, and perhaps your friendship; but I want you to keep a secret. I can’t deceive a comrade; and we military men are that to each other all the world over. I am here under a false name. I had reasons for keeping my identity concealed as I came for a special purpose. So I want you to bear with me and keep even that much a secret between you and me.

“That’s all right!” said the boy with a hearty smile. “On my honour I’ll keep your secret as my own.”

“And when I can I’ll write and let you know!” And so a friendship began.

“Mr. Hardy” left word at the desk that he would not see any one, especially any newspaper man. But on the Riverside Drive the kodaks had been hard at work; the black horse was recognised, and the morning papers had many execrable likenesses of Lootenant Breckenridge as he appeared galloping.

In the hall of the Holland House Lord Athlyne found Colonel Ogilvie waiting for him with that old-fashioned hospitality which is still to be found in the South. He cordially greeted his guest, and when they had come from the elevator took his arm to lead him into his own suite. Athlyne was quite touched with the greeting extended to him. He had not for years been in the way of receiving anything of the nature of family affection. But now when his host’s warmth was followed by a tearful gratitude on the part of his wife which found expression of a quick bending forward and kissing the hand which she held in hers — to the great consternation of the owner thereof — he was sensible of feeling foolish.

“Oh, pray! pray!” he said, and then remained silent; for what could he do but submit gracefully to such an overt outcome of the feelings of a grateful mother. Joy was a girl in whom were the elements of passion; was it strange that the same emotional yeast worked in her as in her mother's nature.

The introduction to Miss Judith Hayes was a relief. She too felt strongly; no less strongly when she realised that the valiant stranger was so handsome and of so distinguished an appearance. But after all the matter was not so vitally close to her. An aunt, howsoever loving her nature may be, cannot be actuated by the overwhelming impulses of mother-hood. This very difference, however made speech easier, she it was who of all the grateful little party gave best verbal expression to her feelings. In frank phrases, touched with the native warmth of her heart and emphasised by the admiring glances of her fine eyes, she told him of the gratitude which they all felt for his gallant rescue of her dear niece. She finished up with an uncontrollable sob as she said:

"If it hadn't been for your bravery and resource and strength there would be no more sorrowful band of poor souls in all the wide world than — than" she turned her head and walked over to the window. Athlyne could see that for quite a minute or two afterwards her shoulders shook. When at last she did turn round, her glassy eyes but ill accorded with her incisive humorous phrases or her ringing laugh. The effect on Athlyne was peculiar, without analysing the intellectual process too closely, he felt in his mind with a secret exultation that he had "found an ally." It may have been the soldier instinct, to which he had been so long accustomed, working in his mind; or it may have had another basis. Anyhow he was content.

His meeting with Joy surprised whilst it satisfied them both. They looked into each other's eyes for an instant and to them both the whole world became crystal. The "whole world" to them both — their world — the only world that was to them at that moment, that ever could be, than had been since the ordination of things. This is the true heart's-content. It is the rapture of hearts, the communion of souls. Passion may later burn the rapture into fixed belief, as the furnace fixes the painted design on the potter's clay; but in that first moment of eyes looking into answering eyes is the dawn of love — the coming together of those twin halves of a perfect soul which was at once the conception and realisation of Platonic belief.

At dinner Athlyne was placed between Mrs. Ogilvie and Joy, Colonel Ogilvie being next his daughter and Miss Hayes next her sister. Thus Aunt Judy, being opposite both her niece and the guest, could watch them both without seeming to stare. In the early part of the dinner she was abnormally, for her, silent; but later on, when she felt that things were going dully with some of the party, she manifested her usual buoyancy of spirits. She had in the meantime come to certain conclusions of her own.

Somehow there was an air of constraint over all the party, but in different ways and from different causes. Athlyne was ill at ease because they all made so much of him; and as he was painfully conscious of his false position in accepting the hospitality of such persons under an alias, their kindness only emphasised to him his own chagrin. Colonel Ogilvie conscious, rather by instinct than from any definite word or action, that his guest was more reticent than he would have thought a young man would be under the circumstances, was rather inclined to resent it The Ogilvies had from the earliest times been very important people in their own place; and many generations of them had grown up to the understanding that their friendship, even their acquaintance, was an honour. Now when he had asked into his family circle a young man known personally to him only by his visiting card and by the fact that he had saved his daughter's life — very gallantly it was true — he found his friendly interest in his new acquaintance was not received with equal heartiness. The truth was that Athlyne was afraid. He felt instinctively that he was not his own master whilst those great grey eyes were upon him — most certainly not when he was looking into the mystery of their depths. And so he feared lest he should become confused and weave himself into a further tangle of falseness. In the background of his own mind he knew what he wished — what he intended; that this beautiful grey-eyed girl should become his wife. He knew that he must first get clear of his false position; and he was determined at any cost not to let anything interfere with this. At first Colonel Ogilvie's allusions to his home and his place in the world were purely kindly; he thought it only right, under the circumstances of his great obligation, to show such all interest as a man of his age might with another so much his junior. But he could not help feeling that though his guest's manner was all that was winning and that though his words were adequate there was no loosening of the strings of self-possession. Such a thing was new to the Colonel, and new things, especially those that he could not understand, were not pleasing to him. Still, the man was his guest; and only a few hours before had rendered him the greatest service that one could to another. He must not let him, therefore, feel that there was any constraint on his part. And so he acted what was to him an unfamiliar part; that of an exuberant man.

Joy was constrained, for with her deep knowledge of her father's character she saw that he was upset by something; and, as that something could only be in connection with the guest, she was uneasy. She knew well what her opinion of that guest was; and she had a feeling of what her hopes would be, dare she give them, a voice. But that must be postponed — till when she should be alone. In the meantime she wanted to enjoy every moment when that guest was by her side. And now her breast was stirred with some vague uneasiness.

Mrs. Ogilvie had her own disturbing cause. She could not but see that her daughter was very much absorbed in this strange gentleman whom she had not ever even seen till that afternoon, and she wanted to know more of him before she could allow matters to become more definite. She knew that he was brave and she could see that he was a gentleman and a handsome one. But still — A mother's heart has its own anxieties about her child. And this Mother knew that her child was of no common nature, but had her own share of passions which might lead her into unhappiness. Too well from herself she knew the urging of a passionate nature. Joy had not been tested yet, as she had herself been. She had not yet heard that call of sex which can alter a woman's whole life.

As to Judy her sympathy with romance in any form and her love for Joy acted like the two ingredients in a seidlitz-powder. Each by itself was placid and innocuous, but when united there was a boiling over. It needed no spirit come from the grave, or from anywhere else, to tell her of the power which this handsome, gallant, young man had already over her niece. A single lifting of the girl's eyes with that adorable look which no habit of convenience could restrain; a single lifting or falling of the silky black lashes; a single sympathetic movement of the beautiful mouth in its receptive mood as she took in her companion's meaning told her all these things and a hundred others — told her a story, which brought back heart-aching reminiscence of her own youth. She was not jealous, not a particle — honesty and truly. But after all, life is a serious thing, serious to look back on, though it seems easy enough to look forward to. The heart knoweth its own bitterness. “A sorrow’s crown of sorrow is remembering happier things.”

So far, as to possibilities. Judith was much too clever and too sympathetic a person to go wrong as to facts on which they were based. She was a natural physiognomist, like other animals who have learned to trust their instincts and within a very few minutes had satisfied herself as to the worthiness of “Joy’s man” — that is how she tabulated him in her own mind. She felt quite satisfied as to her own judgment, not always the case with her. In her own mind, living as she had done for so long in a little world of her own thoughts, she was in the habit of arguing out things just as she would were she talking with some one else, a man for preference. She always wanted to know the truth, even if she did not use it. She had once said to her sister when they were considering how they should act with regard to a scandal in a neighbouring family:

“Well, Sally, it’s all very well not being inquisitive; but you know, my dear, we can’t begin to lie properly till we know what we are to lie about. There’s nothing so destructive of after happiness- — no kindliness so full of pitfalls, as a useless lie.”

Now, her argument ran:

“You can’t be all wrong about a man. You have thought too much on the subject not to be able to form an opinion. And even if your old maid’s instinct — for you are an old maid, my dear, despite your saying that you are so to prove that you are not — warps your judgment in favour of the man. The pride that is in that man’s features never came out of merely one or two generations of command. It takes a couple of centuries at any rate to put that stamp on a face. He is bold — well we know that from to-day’s work; he is courtly — a man doesn't do nice things unconsciously, unless it has been his habit. He's in love with Joy — no doubt about that; and small blame to him for it. He's in her father's house, an honoured guest as he should be. He's sitting next to her and she's looking straight into his soul with those big lamps of eyes of hers. He saved her life a few hours ago, and now he can see — if he's not a fool and he's not that whatever else he may be — that she adores him — and yet he's not at his ease... What is it? What does it mean? For Joy's sake I must find that out. I may have to lie a bit; but at least I'll know what I am doing!"

With this object in view she took, when the charm of the meeting began to lose its lustre, the conversation in hand herself. She felt that the time had come. Well she understood when she saw on Colonel Ogilvie's face the very faintest shade of a shadow of that dark look which in earlier years had meant trouble for some one. "Lucius is thinking!" was the way she put it to herself. To a woman of her bringing up, the acts of the men of the family, and especially of its head, were not within the women's sphere. In the old slave-owning families there was perpetuated something of the spirit of subordination — some survival of old feudal principle. This was especially so in everything relating to quarrels or fighting. It was not women's work, and women were trained not to take any part in it, not even to manifest any concern. Indeed the free-spirited Judy having lived so many years in that particular atmosphere, before being able to look round her in wider communities, compared the dominance of view of a man in his own family life to that of a cock who lords it over the farmyard, struts about masterfully, and summons his household round him with no other purpose than his own will. Woman-like she was content to yield herself to the situation.

“We’re all the same,” she once said to a farmer’s wife, women or hens. When the master clucks we come!”

As it was quite apparent to her that both her sister and brother-in-law were uneasy, she began to take on herself the responsibility of action, even if it should have to be followed by the odium.

“What’s the use of being an old maid if you can’t do something.” she said to herself as a sort of rallying cry to her own nerves. Such gathering of one’s courage is not uncommon; it is, in unusual circumstances, to many men and to most women. It does not as a rule apply to professional or accustomed duties. To the soldier, the lawyer, the engineer, the man of commerce, each as such, the faculties which wait on the intelligence are already braced by habit. And to the woman in her hours of social self-consciousness the same applies. When a woman puts on her best frock she is armed and ready as completely as is the cavalry man with the thunder of the squadron behind him; as the artillery man when “Action!” has been sounded. Ordinarily Miss Judith was equal to all demands made on her; now she was engaging in a matter in which she did not thoroughly understand either the purpose or the end. Now she spoke:

“Have you been staying long in New York Mr. Hardy?” At the moment Athlyne was talking with his hostess and did not seem to hear; but Joy heard and said gently: “Mr. Hardy!” He turned suddenly red, even to his ears.

“I beg your pardon, I didn’t...” There he stopped, suddenly realising that he had almost betrayed himself. The fact was that he heard the question but forgot for an instant the part he was playing. His ears had been tuned to the music of Joy’s voice, and he did not wake at once to the less welcome sound. Partly it was of course due to the fact that as yet he had heard but little of Aunt Judy's speech; her intentional silence had a drawback as well as an advantage. He stopped his explanation just in time to save suspicion from the rest of the family, but not from Judy, who having an intention of her own was alert to everything. She made a mental note to be afterwards excogitated: "I didn't — what?"

She repeated the question. He answered with what nonchalance he could:

"No. Only a few days."

"Do you remain long?"

"I am sorry to say that I cannot I had promised myself a few weeks after grizzlies; but that has to be foregone for the present. Something has happened which requires my going back at once. But I hope to renew my visit before long." He was pleased with himself for the verbal accuracy of the statement, and this reassured him.

"What a pity you have to give up your hunting," said Colonel Ogilvie, heartily. 'You would find it really excellent sport. I haven't had any of it for twenty years; but I'd dearly like to have another turn at it if I could."

"What boat do you go by?" asked Mrs. Ogilvie.

"By the French boat. The Mignonette which sails on Saturday." He answered with confidence for he had spent a quarter of an hour looking it up before he had dressed; and had already posted a letter to the Office asking to have the best cabin open kept for him.

"What a pity," said Joy. "We are going on the Graphic on the Wednesday after; you might have come with us." She coloured up as she became conscious of the dead silence — lasting for a few seconds — of the rest of the party.

"H'm!" said the Colonel.

"Perhaps dear, Mr. Hardy has reasons of his own for choosing his own route," said Mrs. Ogilvie, determined that her daughter should not appear to be too ardent in pressing the new acquaintanceship.

Athlyne hastened to set matters right, as well as he could. He knew from his own bringing up that such a request should come rather from the parents than from the girl herself; but he understood and tried to protect her. He addressed himself therefore to Mrs. Ogilvie and not her daughter as he spoke:

"It would I assure you, be a delight to me to go on your ship. But unhappily it would not be possible. Some business matters, not altogether my own, are dependent on my arriving in England. If I had only known that you were going — Indeed I may say," he added with a smile which all three women accepted as "winning" "that if I had known, to begin with, that such delightful people existed... But until that... that accident I had no such knowledge. I must not say that 'happy' accident for it was fraught with such danger to one whom you hold dear. But, that apart, it was a happy accident to me that has given me the opportunity of making friends whom I already value so highly!" This was for him quite a long speech; he breathed more freely when it was over.

When the ladies had gone, he and his host had a long chat over their cigars. He was now more at ease, and as the conversation was all about sport and horses, matters in which he was thoroughly at home, he could speak more freely and more naturally than he had yet done. There was not any personal element which would require him to be on guard and so cause constraint. The result was that Colonel Ogilvie got quite over his stiffness and began to warm to his genial influence.

It was quite a sign of his existing attitude that he now took on himself to say just what he had reprehended in his daughter:

“I am really sorry you can’t come on the Graphic with us. It would make the voyage a new pleasure for us all!” As he spoke he took the young man’s arm in a most friendly way, and to Joy’s secret delight, they came in this wise into the drawing-room.

CHAPTER 7

A DISCUSSION

On reflection Lord Athlyne was glad that circumstances had not allowed him to travel on the Graphic with his new friends. At first he felt horribly disappointed; as if Fate had in a measure checkmated him. Had he known that the Ogilvies were to travel on the White Star boat he could have easily arranged his plans. The voyage would in some ways — one way — have been delightful. Well he knew that; but as he should have to keep up his alias he would have been in a perpetual state of anxiety and humiliation.

This feeling made it easier for him therefore to come to a definite conclusion regarding his journey home: he would keep to himself, as far as possible, during the journey and try to get at the earliest possible moment out of his present humiliating position. Under any ordinary circumstances he would have gone to Colonel Ogilvie and told him frankly of the state of matters, relying on his good feeling to understand and sympathise with his difficulty. Had there been opportunity for reflection he would have done so; but all was so hurried at the scene of the accident that there had not been time for thought. He had accepted of necessity the invitation to dinner. Then, or before going to the Holland House would have been his chance. But again the Colonel meeting him and taking him at once to his family made present explanation difficult. Dinner finished him. When first on the Drive he had seen Joy he had thought her a beautiful girl. The act of rescuing her had made her of the supreme interest to him. But it was not till he had sat beside her and looked into her eyes that he felt that love had come. No man could look into those beautiful eyes and remain untouched. But this man, heart-hungry and naturally susceptible after some years of campaigning, fell madly in love. His very soul had gone down into the depths of those unfathomable eyes, and come back purified and sweetened — like the smoke drawn through the rosewater of a hookah. Even' instant that he sat beside her the spell grew upon him. Joy was a woman in whom the sex-instinct was very strong. She was woman all over; type of woman who seems to draw man to her as the magnet draws the steel. Athlyne was a very masculine person and therefore peculiarly sensitive to the influence. That deep thinking young madman who committed suicide at twenty-three, Otto Weininger, was probably right in that wonderful guess of his as to the probable solution of the problem of sex. All men and all women, according to him, have in themselves the cells of both sexes; and the accredited masculinity or femininity of the individual is determined by the multiplication and development of these cells. Thus the ideal man is entirely or almost entirely masculine, and the ideal woman is entirely or almost entirely feminine. Each individual must have a preponderance, be it ever so little, of the cells of its own sex; and the attraction of each individual to the other sex depends upon its place in the scale between the highest and the lowest grade of sex. The most masculine man draws the most feminine woman, and vice versa; and so down the scale till close to the border line is the great mass of persons who, having only development of a few of the qualities of sex, are easily satisfied to mate with any one. This is the true principle of selection which is one of the most important of Nature's laws; one which holds in the lower as well as in the higher orders of life, zoological and botanical as well as human. It accounts for the way in which such a vast number of persons are content to make marriages and even liaisons, which others, higher strung, are actually unable to understand.

As yet, of course, Joy being a young woman had not her power developed. Such an unconscious power takes in the course of its development its own time. Instinct is a directing principle, and obedience can be given to it in many different ways. With Joy its course had been slow, the growth of time alone. Up to now there had been no disturbing element in her life; most of her years had been spent in a quiet house in a quiet neighbourhood where there were but few inhabitants of her own class; and where, therefore, the percentage of eligible men was small. There was even to her, as there must be to any girl like her, certain protecting oppositions. She was at once practical and sentimental, sensuous and dainty. Her taste was her first line of defence to the attacks of the baser qualities of her own nature. Nothing could appeal to her thoroughly which did not answer widely divergent conditions. Aunt Judy had summed her up well in saying that she would, if she ever fell in love, give herself absolutely. But it must be the right man to whom she did so give herself; one who must comply with all the conditions which she had laid down for herself. A girl of her up-bringing — with a father and mother who adored her each in special way; with an aunt who represented impulsive youth all the more actively because she professed the staidness of age which is without hope; and with no intimate relationships or friendships of the male kind — had not only a leaning to, but a conviction of romance as a prime factor of life. “Life” was to her not that which is, but that which is to be. As the world of the present, where such thoughts are, is not one which is lit and coloured by love, the world of the future is the World of Love. The Fairy Prince who is to bring so much happiness — when he comes — is no mere casual visitor to feminine childhood. He is as real to the child's imagination as the things of her waking life, though his nodding plume has little in common with the material things which surround her. As she grows older so does he change form, coming more into harmony with Irving fact; till at last in some lofty moment, whose memory is a treasure for after life, the ideal and the real merge in one.

To Joy the hour had come. The Prince Charming who had swept across her path in such heroic fashion was all that she had ever longed for. He was tall and strong and handsome and brave. He was a gentleman with all a gentleman's refined ways. He had taste and daintiness, though they were expressed in masculine ways. He too had love and passion. How could she not know it who had seen — had felt — his soul sink into the deeps of her eyes, where mermaid-like her own soul peeping from behind the foliage of the deep had smiled on him to lead him on. How could she forget that strong arm which was thrown around her waist and which tore her from her saddle just in time to save her from a horrible death. How could she forget the seconds when she hung on to him for life, her arms clasped around his neck.

Whilst he was beside her at dinner she was in an ecstasy. Every fibre of her being quivered in response to his. And yet, such is the influence of teaching and convention, all this did not detract from her outward calm. When the ladies had left the table she had gone out with her arm round Aunt Judy's waist as was the convention of the time, and her smile had not lost its frank geniality. But in very truth she did not feel like smiling. She would have given anything to have stolen away to her own room and have lain on her bed, face down, and have thought, and thought, and thought. The whole thing had come on her so suddenly. Even the little preparation which she had

had at the auction — the beautiful horse and the fine-looking masterful man who had bought him — did not seem to count. As he had swept past her in the Drive, man and horse seen singly seemed superb; but together a dream. Still there was nothing to fix it in her mind. There needs some personal quality to fix a dream; just as the painter requires a mordant to hold his colours to the canvas. But such luxury of thought would have to be postponed. It would come, of course — later in the night when there would be loneliness and silence. So she had to contain herself, and wait.

When “Mr. Hardy” came back to the drawing-room arm in arm with her father her heart thrilled. It seemed like a promise of hope if not hope itself. Aunt Judy, ever watchful, saw and understood. To her seeing eyes and understanding nature there was no mistaking the meaning of the girl’s unconscious pantomime — those impulsive expressions of thought made through the nerves: the eager half turning of the ear to catch the sound of the opening of the dining room door and the passing of the feet in the passage way; the uplifting of the head as the drawing-room door began to open; the glad look in the eyes and the quick intake of the breath as she saw the attitude of the two men, each to the other.

As he came in Athlyne looked at her, a look that seemed to lay any ghost of a doubt in her mind. She was glad when he went straight across the room and began to talk with her mother. She was content to wait till when, having done his social duties, he would find his way to her. Mrs. Ogilvie had much to say and detained him, Judy thought, unduly; but Joy gave no possible sign of impatience. When in due course he spoke a few words to Judy herself that estimable young lady managed to find something to say to her sister.

When the guest was at last beside her in her corner of the room

Joy felt that all was right and becoming. No matter how willing a woman may be to take steps to the accomplishment of her own wishes, it is an added pleasure to her when she is the objective of man rather than his pursuer. Even the placid pussy-cat when her thoughts tend to flirtation runs — slowly — from her mate until she sees that he notices her going. Then she stops and sings to him — in her own manner of music — as he approaches.

The two young people did not use many words in their speech; such seemed inadequate for what they had to say. Suffice it that what they did say was thoroughly understood.

Athlyne did not prolong his stay, much as he would have enjoyed staying. He felt that it would be better, in every way, if he did not enforce his first opportunity. Mrs. Ogilvie very graciously hoped that he would manage to make them a visit before sailing. Joy said nothing — in words. He had a little conversation with Colonel Ogilvie who was standing away from the rest and leaning on the chimney piece.

When he had gone Joy said good-night to them all; she felt that at present she could not talk the little commonplaces of affectionate life; and she could not bear to hear "him" discussed. If that acute reasoner on causes and effects in the female mind, Aunt Judy, had been able to permeate her heart and brain she would at once have understood that simple way of accepting a man's personality — simulacrum. What need is there to differentiate when there is but one. Names are given as aids to memory; and at times memory ceases to be an important matter.

The next evening after dinner "Mr. Hardy" became the subject of conversation, and Joy was not comfortable. She knew that there must be divergent views regarding any one, and was content to let them all have their own opinions. She had hers. Indeed she would not have been wholly content to hear him praised even up to the perfection which she allowed him. He was by far too personal a possession of her own to share even community of feeling regarding him with any one.

In the night that had passed her own feeling had grown, multiplied; the feelings of the others had changed too, but in a different way. The glamour which had become for her intensified had for them been lost in the exactness of perspective. Perhaps it was that Joy's night had been different from theirs. To her had come all the evils of reaction. Now and again with wearing recurrency came the exciting memories of the day; but always with that kaleidoscopic inconsistency which is the condition of dreaming. The brains of most people are not accustomed to self-analysis, else we should perhaps more widely understand that this very inconsistency is mere reproduction. Whilst we think we do not think that we are thinking, and memory does not adjust our thoughts to comparison. But, all the time, our thoughts are really errant; reflections of the night, which seem to be exaggerations or caricatures, are but just surveys taken from an altitude which is not our own. In the day time thought is too often initiated by carnal or material considerations. Selfishness, and need, and ambition, and anxiety are bases on which thought is built in working and waking hours. But in the dark and freedom of the night the mind borrows the wings of the soul and soars away from the body which is held down by all its weighty restraints. It is perhaps in such moments that we realise that passion, however earthly may be its exciting cause, is in itself an attribute or emanation of the Soul. Over and over again did Joy live through the mad moments of that ride towards death. Over and over again did that heroic figure sweep up beside her out of the great unknown. She began to understand now whence came her calmness and quickness of apprehension as she realised his presence — the presence of a man who dominated her — even whose horse in the easiness of its calm intention outstripped the wildness of her own maddened steed. Here again the abstract mind was working truly; the horse had its own proper place in her memories of the heroic deed. Over and over again did that strong hand and arm seize her, and over and over again did her body sway to him and yield itself to the clasp, so that at his command it went to him as though of its own volition. And then, over and over again, came the remembrance of the poor mad mare disappearing over the edge; of the sickening crash from below and the wild scream of agony; of the confused rush and whirl; of the crowding in of people; of the vista of moving carriages and crowds down the curve of the road. And then all kept fading away, into a blind half consciousness of the strong arm supporting her and her wearied head resting on his shoulder.

This evening Mrs. Ogilvie was very quietly inclined to be tearful. She too had had a bad night; constant wakings from vague apprehensions, horrible imaginings of unknown dangers; dread that she could not localise or specify. Altogether she was upset, something as one is in the low stage following an attack of hysteria; nervous, weak, apprehensive, inclined to misunderstand things on the melancholy side.

Colonel Ogilvie was in that state of mind following a high pressure, which is a masculine reaction. He was very hard to please about anything. His wife always thought of this nervous and intellectual condition as “one of Lucius’s humours,” to others she said “the Colonel is worried about something.” Judy called it: “one of his tantrums." This however did not affect his manner, outwardly. At such times he was perhaps even more precise than usual in his observance of the little etiquettes and courtesies of social life. It had perhaps been unfortunate that his household was exclusively female, for want of opposition rather encouraged the tendency. In his club or amongst men such irritation or ill feeling as he had found more outward expression; and the need to keep himself so that standard of personal hearing which his own self esteem had set, perpetually recalled him to himself. But at home, this, though it would not have been possible for a stranger to find fault with any part of his manner or bearing, still kept the rest of the family in a sort of hushed self-surrender. Even Judy the daring kept her natural exuberance in control at such times and was content to rest in unnoticed quiet. Joy knew well the storm signals and effaced herself as far as possible; she loved her father too well and respected him too much to do or say anything which might cause him disquiet or tend to lower him in his own eyes.

Judy on this as on other occasions maintained a strictly neutral position. But her wits were keener and her eyes more observant even than usual on that very account. She did not know the cause of her brother-in-law's disturbance, but she understood it all the same. Few things there are which lead so directly to the elucidation of truth as a clever, unselfish woman on the watch.

Silence rather than speech was the order of the day, and the talking, such as it was, began with Colonel Ogilvie. Men when they are carrying out a settled intention or policy can be more silent than women; their nerves are stronger and their nature more fixed. But in the casual matters of life they are children in the hands of women. Here were three women, all of them clever, all of them attached to the man and all respecting him; but they had only to remain neutral, each in her individual way, and let him overcome the vis inertia as well as he could. He could not but be aware that the subject of the guest of last evening had been tacitly avoided. He had been conscious of such in his own case, and with the egotism which was so marked a part of his own character he took it for granted that the avoidance was with the others due to the same cause as with himself. It was therefore with something like complacency — if such a thing could be synchronous with irritability, even if one of the two be in a latent condition — that he began on the deferred subject; "I am afraid that our guest last night did not enjoy himself!" There was silence for a few seconds. Then each of the three listeners, feeling that some remark must be made by some one, spoke suddenly and simultaneously:

"Why, Lucius, what do you mean?"

"You surprise me, Colonel!"

"Is that so, Daddy!"

He waited deliberately before saying more; he had been thinking over the subject and knew what he wanted to say. Then he spoke with an air of settled conviction:

"Yes, my dear!" He spoke to Joy alone, and thus, to all three, unconsciously gave away his purpose. I thought at the time, and to-day, whenever I have considered the matter, the conviction has increased." Mrs. Ogilvie, seeing on her daughter's face a certain hardening of the muscles, took it for granted that it was some form of chagrin; in a protective spirit she tried to make that matter right:

"My dear Lucius, I really cannot see how you arrive at such a conclusion. It seemed to me that the young man was in rather an exalted condition of happiness. I could not help noticing the way he kept looking at Joy. And indeed no wonder after the gallant way he had saved her life." She added the last sentence as a subtle way of reminding her husband that they were all under obligation to the young gentleman. Moreover there was in her heart as a mother — and all mothers are the same in this respect — that feeling of pride in her daughter which demands that all men shall be attracted by her charms. No matter how detrimental a man may be, nor how determined she is that his suit shall not be finally successful, a mother considers it the duty of the young man to love her daughter and desire her.

Joy somehow felt humiliated. It was not merely that she should be the centre of such a discussion — for, after all, it was through rescuing her that he was there at all; but she was hurt and disappointed that this particular man should be discussed in any way. She had seen no fault in him; nothing to discuss in his conduct or his bearing or his words or his person. She herself had admired him immensely. He was somehow different from all the other men she had ever seen... Then pride came to her rescue. Not pride for herself, but for him. In her heart he was her man, and she had to protect his honour; and she would do so, if necessary. This idea at once schooled her to restraint, and steeled her to endure. With an unconscious shrug she remained silent.

But Judy's keen eyes had been on her, and both her natural sympathy and the experience of her own heart allowed her to interpret pretty well. She saw that for Joy's sake — either now or hereafter — some opposition to the Colonel's idea was necessary. She had noticed the settled look — it had not yet become a frown — which came over his face when his wife spoke of his looking at Joy. In just such moments and on subjects as this it is that a father's and a mother's ideas join issue. Whilst the mother expects the singling out of the daughter for devotion, the father's first impulse is to resent it Colonel Ogilvie's resentment had all his life been habitually expressed with force and rapidity; even in a tender matter of this kind the habit unconsciously worked.

"All the more reason, Sarah, for his being candid about himself. For my own part I can understand one attitude or the other, but certainly not both at once!"

Joy began to get seriously alarmed. The mere use of her mother's formal name was a danger-signal of rare use. By its light she could realise that her father had what he considered in his own mind to be a real cause of complaint. She did not like to speak herself; she feared that just at present it might complicate matters. So she looked over appealing at Judy, who understood and spoke:

"What two attitudes? I'm afraid I for one, don't understand. You are talking in riddles to-night!" She spoke in a gay debonair manner so like her usual self that her brother-in-law was unsuspicious of any underlying intent of opposition. This was just the opportunity for which he was waiting. With a sardonic smile he went on, singling out Joy, as before:

'Your mother, my dear, has told us one of them. Perhaps the young man did look at you. There's little wonder in that. Were I a young man and a stranger I should look at you myself; and I would also have looked at any other man who dared to look at you too. If this is a man's attitude he should be more genial — more explicit-more open — less constrained to her relatives. That my dear Judy," — he turned to her as he spoke "is the other attitude." Mrs. Ogilvie answered — the conversation to-night was decidedly oblique:

"Really, Colonel, I can't agree with you. For my own part I thought his attitude towards her relatives was all that was courteous and respectful. Certainly to her mother!" She bridled, and Joy grew more serious. Her mother calling her husband "Colonel" was another danger signal; and she knew that if once her father and mother got to loggerheads over him— "him" was her way of thinking of Mr. Hardy — it might keep him away from her. She summoned up her courage and said with all the affectionate raillery which was usually so effective with her father "Daddy dear do you remember Aesop's fable about the Boy and the Frogs?" "I suppose I ought to, little girl; but I'm afraid I have forgotten. What was it about5"

"The Boys were throwing stones at the Frogs, and when the Frogs remonstrated the Boys said they were doing it for fun. So the Frogs answered: It may be fun to you but it is death to us!'" Colonel Ogilvie puckered up his eyebrows:

"I remember, now, my dear; but for the life of me don't see its application here." Joy said with a preternatural demureness:

"It means Daddy, that you are the Boy and I am the Frog!" Her father's gravity became intensified:

"That does not help me much, daughter!"

"Well, you see, Daddy, here are you and mother commenting on how a man looked at me — and — so forth. But you don't take into consideration the sensitiveness of a woman's heart — let alone her vanity. I think you've forgotten that I am not now 'merely a child emerging into womanhood' — don't you remember on the Cryptic — but a staid woman to whose waning attractions everything relating to a man is sacred. One who looks on man, her possible rescuer from the terrors of old maidhood with the desperation of accomplished years." As she had spoken unthinkingly the word "rescuer" a hot tide of blood had rushed to her face, but she went bravely on to the end of her sentence. There was not one of the three who did not understand the meaning. Her mother and aunt were concerned at the self-betrayal. Her father's face grew fixed, now to sternness. With a faint heart Joy felt that she had made a terrible mistake, and inwardly condemned herself for its foolishness. Colonel Ogilvie now went on with grave deliberateness, he was determined that there should be no error regarding his disapprobation. All the time he was inwardly fuming against Mr. Hardy whom he held responsible:

"As I was saying, that fellow's attitude, as it appeared to me, was wanting in both openness and that confidence which underlies respect." Here Joy quivered. Judy, watching her, noticed it and for a moment was scared. But the girl at once forced herself into calm, and Judy's anxiety quite disappeared. She knew that Joy was now quite master of herself, and would remain so. The Colonel, accepting the dejected silence as a request to continue, went on:

"Of course there is no need for me to say that he is a very gallant fellow and a superb horseman, and that his manners are those of a polished gentleman.

Nor, further still, that I and mine are under a deep debt of gratitude to him. But there are some things which a man can do, or what is worse which he can leave undone, that show distrust."

"What things, for instance?" It was Judy who asked the question falteringly; but it was to Joy that the answer was directed:

"Well, my dear, I shall illustrate. When I, wishing to show that we all took an interest in him and his surroundings, mentioned Airlville and spoke of clubs and such matters he did not proffer me any information. Still, thinking that his reserve might be that usually attributed to the stand-off-ness of the English as often accepted here — that it was due to habit rather than intent — I asked him where he lived in London. He wrote an address on one of his cards — which by the way has no address graven on it — and handed it to me, saying: That is only a lodging. I have not got a house yet.’ Then I asked what clubs he belonged to; and he simply said ‘Several’ and began to ask me questions about what sport we usually have in Kentucky. Now my dear, I am not usually inquisitive; and as this man was my guest I could not proceed in face of such a — a snub.” He winced at the word. “But as I was really anxious that we should see more of one who rendered us so signal a service, I expressed a hope that when we were in England in the summer we might have pleasure of seeing him. I am bound to say that he reciprocated the wish very eagerly. He asked me a host of questions as to our plans; and I told him what we had arranged about the Lake Country and the Border of which we have such traditions in our family. He certainly has a very winning way with him, and I quite forgot at the time want of trust about his residence and his clubs!”

“Perhaps he may have no home; he may be a poor man,” suggested Aunt Judy. The Colonel answered her, this time directly:

“He may not be a rich man, but he is certainly not a poor one. You and I” this to Joy “saw him pay three thousand for that horse. And he is free with his money in other ways. That police sergeant who was with me this morning — and who, my dear, asked me to convey his gratitude to you; I gave it for you — told me that the gentleman had given him on the Viaduct a hundred dollars for himself, and then another hundred for the officer who was run down.”

“How generous” said Judy. Joy said nothing; but she leaned forward, gladness in her eyes. There is some chord in a woman’s heart which sounds to any touch of generosity or even of liberality. It is some survival of conditions of primitive life, and a permanent female attribute. Judy, anxious to propitiate her brother-in-law, and to preserve the absent man's character, said as though it were the conclusion of some process of reasoning:

"He must be some important person who is here on private business." Ogilvie smiled genially:

"Our dear Judy will find a romance in everything — even in a man's distrust!" Judy, somewhat nettled, felt like defending her own position. This had nothing to do with Joy so she felt she could argue freely about it:

"It needn't be a romance, Lucius, only fact!"

"My dear Judy, I don't see why a man should give so extravagantly merely because he is on private business. Why, it is the very way to attract attention." Judy was made more obstinate by the apparent appositeness of the remark and by the tolerant tone of the speaker.

"I don't mean that he gives because he is on private business, surely you know that; but that he may be an important man who gives handsomely as a habit. He may be keeping his identity concealed."

"How do you mean exactly. How keep his identity concealed? He never told me; and he has been my guest!" Colonel Ogilvie had a puzzled look on his face.

"Well, for instance by taking another name for the occasion. Perhaps—" Here she caught sight of the look of positive horror on Joy's face and stopped short. Joy had seen in what direction the conversation was drifting, but was afraid to interfere lest she should bring on the very catastrophe which she dreaded. She had never forgotten her father's expressions regarding an alias; and she had reason to fear that should his suspicions be in any way directed towards the new friend whose accidental acquaintanceship already promised so much, some evil or hindrance must ensue. But her hypothetical concern was lost in a real one. As Judy spoke, the Colonel started to his feet, his manner full of suppressed fury. He was bristling all over, preliminary of his most dangerous mood.

Joy rose to the occasion. It was now or never. It was apparent that her father had taken that form of offense which is generally expressed in idiom or slang. Cornishmen call it a "scunner," Cockneys "the hump," Irishman "an edge," Americans "shirty." It is a condition antecedent to active offence; a habitat of the germ of misunderstanding; a searchlight for cause of quarrel. Joy felt cold, into the very marrow of her bones; well she knew that her father would never forgive any such offence to him as was implied in an assumed name. His remarks on the subject flamed before her like fiery handwriting on the walls of her memory. Moreover Judy's incautious remark had but echoed her own thought. All day she had been dreaming of this man who had plunged so gallantly into her life. Naturally enough to a young woman, she had been weaving romances in various forms round that very identity which, even to her, had been unexpressed if not hidden. Naturally her dreams had in them some element of concealment; romances always have. She had in her secret heart taken it for granted that this man must be distinguished — how could he be otherwise; and now her father's suspicion might result in some breach which might result in her never seeing him again... It was a possible tragedy! To her, grim and real from her knowledge of her own heart; and none the less a real tragedy or less potent because its bounds were lost in the vagueness of mist and fear... She was pale and inwardly trembling but, all the same, her light laugh rang true; she was desperate and fighting for her man, and so was strung up to nature's pitch:

"Why, Daddy, if you're going to kill anyone it will have to be dear Aunt Judy. She's the one who has made the alias. The poor man himself — who by the way is not here to answer for himself and explain — hasn't done any conceivable thing wrong that we know of — even you Daddy know that; except not having a house and not bragging of his clubs!"

This seemed to strike her father; it touched him on the point of justice. The lightness of his daughter's laugh reassured him.

'True!" he said. "That is quite true. I was too hasty. And he saved my little girl's life!" He rose from the table and putting his arm round her shoulders kissed her. Then they went into the drawing-room.

Joy bore up bravely for the rest of the evening. But when she was in bed and assured that she was alone, the reaction came. She was as cold as a stone and trembled all over. Putting her face down into her pillow she pulled the sheet over her head and wept her very heart out.

"Oh what it might have been if all went well. But what might be if Daddy took some queer idea... and quarrelled...!"

CHAPTER 8

“LOOK AT ME!”

When on Tuesday afternoon “Mr. Hardy” visited at the Holland House he found only the single ladies at home. Colonel Ogilvie had gone out in the morning to see after several matters of business, both in connection with Air and relating to the forthcoming visit to Europe. He had said he would probably not be back till dinner time. Mrs. Ogilvie had gone out after lunch for a drive and would pay some visits before returning home. Joy pleaded headache as an excuse for remaining at home. Indeed her excuse was quite real; no one can pass so melancholy a part of a night as she had done without suffering the next morning. As the day wore on, however, the headache insensibly departed; something else had taken its place. Joy would not admit to herself what that something was; but that afternoon she took unusual pains with her toilet. Judy noticed it with her usual acute observation, understood it with her understanding sympathy; with her wonted discretion she remained silent. She felt, and righty, that the time had not yet come when she could either be serious with Joy or jest with her on the subject nearest to her heart. One thing she did which can never be out of place, especially when it is true: she showed pleasure in her niece’s looks, taking care, however to put her own reason for it on a non-offensive basis.

“Joy,” she said “that terrible experience of Sunday has not told on you a bit. You are looking simply lovely.” Ordinarily Joy would have known it, and would not have shrunk from admitting it to herself, or possibly even to her aunt; but to-day she was full of self doubting. Her very flush of happy excitement when her aunt spoke would have betrayed her secret to a much less sympathetic or experienced person than Judy.

It is love more than any other cause or emotion or feeling which creates self-distrust with the young. And sometimes with the old, for the matter of that.

When she found that Aunt Judy did not "chaff' her or ask her questions, which she rather feared would happen, Joy beamed. Indeed it looked to Judy's loving eyes as if she visibly blossomed. Judy spoke of her dress, remarking how well the dark full-coloured green silk became her slender figure; but she was careful not to overdo her praise, or to suggest any special cause for so elaborate a toilet.

But Judy was of a distinctly practical nature. She took care to send a message to the hall that if any visitors should come, though both Colonel and Mrs. Ogilvie were out, Miss Ogilvie and Miss Hayes were at home.

Athlyne found both ladies busily idle. Joy was reading a novel; which by the way she put down hurriedly without as Judy noticed, marking the place. Judy was knitting; that sort of heavy uninteresting knitting which is manifestly for the poor! She was used to say that such was the proper sort of occupation for an old maid. She, too, put down the cause of her occupation, but deliberately; thereby giving time for the guest to salute her niece without the need of interruption. It did not matter, then, if Joy's hand did remain an instant longer in his than formality demanded, nor if — when released — it was white in patches as when extra force is applied to delicate flesh. For a few minutes Judy joined in the conversation with her usual brilliancy. But to-day she was distinctly restless, sitting down and jumping up again; moving out of the room quietly and coming back noisily —

the proper way as she said on an after occasion for all old maids to move. Whenever she came back she would join in the conversation in a sort of butterfly fashion till she flitted away again.

In one of these trios when Mr. Hardy happened to remark that he would like to know what the movements of the Ogilvies would be, and what address they gave for letters when they were away, Joy answered:

“Daddy always has our letters sent to Brown Shipleys in Pall Mall. But we shall be moving about a good deal I expect. Mother has to take baths at Ischia again, and one of us will stay with her; but Daddy wants to go about a bit and see something of England. He is set on seeing the Border counties this summer.

“Then how am I to know where you are?” he asked impulsively. With a bright smile Joy nodded over to Miss Hayes:

“You had better ask Aunt Judy. She might keep you advised. She’s the letter writer of the family!”

When in her turn Joy had moved away on some little domestic duty he turned to Judy and said:

“Won’t you let me know the moves on the board, Miss Hayes. It would be very kind of you.” He looked so earnest over it that she felt her heart flutter. She said at once:

“Of course I shall, if you will let me have an address to write to.” He had evidently thought over this part of the matter, for he took from his pocketbook a card on which he had written below his printed name: care Jonathan Goldsworth, Solicitor. 47B Lincoln’s Inn Fields, London, W. C. That will always find me. I may be away or travelling; but my letters are sent on every day.”

Judy thanked him, and seeing that Joy was out of earshot added on her own account:

"It is only right that you, who did so much for my dear niece — and so for us all — should know at least where she is."

"Thank you very, very much!" said Athlyne impulsively. He had all an Irishman's instinctive knowledge of woman's character and felt that Judy was to be trusted, that she was heart-wholly devoted to her niece. On her part Judy knew that he could be trusted to the full, especially where Joy was concerned. And from that moment she began to take an interest in the love affair; an interest quite personal to herself and independent of her love for the girl. She felt that she was a participant in all schemes which were to be; and that, she came to the conclusion, was about all the real romance that an old maid could share in. "Thank God there's that left at any rate!" was her prayer of gratitude.

Athlyne felt a powerful impulse to make a confidante a/'her. This was the first chance he had of disclosing the reality of things, and he was just about to begin when Joy returned. Once again did that self-distrust, incidental to his state of mind, cramp him. He fancied that it might be premature. Not knowing how deeply Joy cared for him already, he was unwilling to take any chance which might militate against his ultimate success. There was also another hampering feeling coincident with the self-distrust: he thought it might be possible that a confidence made to Judy might be embarrassing to her with her own folk. Already his devotion was deep enough and pure enough to prevent his doing intentionally anything which might cause her pain. Could Aunt Judy have looked into his heart, as she could and would have done had he been a woman, she would have been satisfied of the genuineness of his affection; and so she would have had no doubts at all to the end of Joy's love affair.

Joy's return, however, brought somehow a sense of restraint. She had herself originated or initiated a mechanism of correspondence and she feared that Mr. Hardy might notice that she had done so. In her present state of feeling towards the man, the very idea of such a thing was fraught with humiliation. It is extraordinary how much people take to heart the belief on the part of others of that they have intended. Truth, truly, is a bright weapon; even the flash of it has its own terrors!

Judy did not comprehend exactly what the trouble was. She could see that there was restraint on both sides, and was wondering whether it had been possible that he had been speaking too impulsively— "going too quick" was the way she put it to herself — and that Joy had resented or feared it. Not the fact but the rapidity. Well Judy knew that in her youth a woman most holds back when the wildest desire of her heart is to rush forward; that the instinct of woman being to draw man on, she will spend the last ounce of her strength in pushing him back. Judy had once said:

"A woman wants a man to be master, and specially to be her master. She wants to feel that when it comes to a struggle she hasn't got a chance with him, either to fight or to run away. That's why we like to make a man follow when in truth we are dying to run after him — and to catch him up!" Some of her circle to whom the heterodox saying had been repeated professed to be very indignant as well as horrified. This was chiefly noticeable in such of the most elderly of the good ladies as had a lurid past or a large family, or both.

If, however, Judy had any doubts as to the cause she had none whatever of the fact. There was no mistaking the droop of Joy's eyes, or the sudden lifting and quick dropping of the lids which makes the densest man's heart flutter; no mistaking his eager look; the glowing eyes ranging over face and form when the windows of her soul were closed, and entranced in their light when they were open. Judy herself knew the power of those gray, deep eyes. Even when her niece had been a baby there seemed something hypnotic about them. They could disarm anger, or change the iron of theory into the water of fact. Often and often after some such episode when she had thought the matter over she had said to herself:

"Lord! if she's like that as a baby with me, what will she be with a man when she's a woman!" Judy who was a self-observer knew instinctively that in Joy was an inherent influence over men. There was some very subtle, delicate force which seemed to emanate from her; some force at once compelling and tranquillising, for the explanation of which mere will-power was insufficient. The power was now in active exercise; but it was turned inwards. Joy was in love! Judy knew it as well as if she had herself acknowledged it; indeed better, for the acknowledgment of such a secret, except to the man himself, is given with reserve. And so she made up her mind to further the affair; but to prevent Joy betraying herself unduly during such furtherance. By, "unduly," Judy really, meant "unwisely" as to ultimate and most complete efficacy.

She had an idea that Joy herself would approve, at present, of such discretion. It seemed a direct confirmation of such idea when presently the girl said to her in a faint whisper:

"Don't go away again Aunt Judy!"

When however, in the course of conversation as the three sat chatting together happily, Mr. Hardy mentioned that his ship sailed in the early morning and she saw the colour leave the girl's cheeks for a moment, just as a white squall sweeps a sunlit sea, Judy's heart softened. She understood that retreating wave of colour. Nature has its own analogies to its own anomalies; there is a white blackbird, why not a white blush! So when the time drew near for the departure of the visitor Judy slipped away for a minute. When she had gone the two sat still. Athlyne's eyes were on Joy, eager, burning. Her eyes were down, the black lashes curling against her cheeks. In a voice rather husky he said in a low tone:

"Won't you think of me sometimes till we meet again?" Her answer was given in what she wished to be a matter-of-fact tone, but the slight quaver in it told another story:

"Of course I shall! How can I help it? You saved my life!" There was an entrancing demureness in the downcast eyes. But it was not enough for the man. He wanted to see the eyes, to gaze in them, to lose himself in them once again. There is for each individual nature some distinctive way of expressing itself. Sometimes it is the mouth which tells the story; sometimes it is by simple existence such as the lines of the nose or forehead, by the shape and movement of the hands; sometimes by a characteristic habit. Joy's nature spoke through the eyes; perhaps it is, that intention is best given by the eyes. Anyhow the lover wanted to see them.

In a low voice — not a whisper — that thrilled with intensity he said:

"Joy, look at me!" He spoke her name, though it was for the first time, quite unconsciously. As she heard it Joy's heart beat so that she feared he would notice it, and all the self-protective instincts of womanhood rose at the thought. For an instant her face glowed; then it grew pale again. She did not hesitate, however. She raised her eyes and looked him full in the face. Her cheeks were flaming now, but she did not heed it. In the face of nature what, after all, is convention. As Athlyne lost himself in those wonderful eyes he had a wild almost over-mastering desire to take her in his arms and kiss her straight on the beautiful mouth. He was bending towards her for the purpose, she was swaying towards him, he believed; but for long afterwards he could not be sure of the matter.

But suddenly he saw a change in the girl's face, a look of something like terror which seemed in an instant to turn her to stone. It was but a momentary change, however. The spasm passed, and, just as though it was to his eyes as if he had waked from a dream, she was her easeful self again. At the same moment the outer door of the piece opened and Mrs. Ogilvie's voice was heard as she entered:

"Judy, I am so glad! I am told he has not gone yet. I should have been so sorry if I had not seen him!" When she entered the room, three seconds later, she found the two young people talking quietly according to the demure commonplace of convention.

Mrs. Ogilvie was very hearty in her manner; a little more hearty than usual, for she had a sort of feeling as if something extra in the way of civility was due to him after the way her husband had spoken of him. This was illustrative of two things. First the woman's unconscious acceptance of an unfavourable criticism of an absent person, as if it had been made to and not merely of him; second the way the sternness of a man's judgment is viewed by the females of his family. She insisted that Mr. Hardy should stay for tea and asked Joy to ring and order it Joy had been at once relieved and disappointed by the sudden entry of her mother. The maidenhood in her was glad of the postponement of the necessity for her surrender; the womanhood in her was disappointed by it She was both maid and woman; let the female reader say, and the male reader guess, which feeling most predominated. She was glad that he was staying a little longer; for so she might at least feast her eyes on him again; but it was at best a chastened gladness, for well she knew that that thrilling moment would not come again — during that interview. And he was going away next morning!

Athlyne, too, was ill at ease. He, too, knew there would be no more opportunity now to follow up his declaration. The chagrin of his disappointment almost made him cross, such being the nature of man. Here, however, both his breeding and the kindliness of his nature stood to him; the shadow quickly passed. Later on in the evening, when he was thinking the matter over, he came to the conclusion that the interposition, though he did not attribute it to any divine origin, was after all perhaps best. It could not, or might not, suit him to declare himself so quickly. He felt that under the circumstances of his false name it would be necessary, or at any rate wise, to take Colonel Ogilvie into his confidence before declaring himself to his daughter.

It is thus that we poor mortals deceive ourselves. He had been just about to declare himself in the most passionate and overt way a man can; by taking the girl in his arms and kissing her, without even a passing thought of her father.

But now, from some other cause, quite outside the girl and not even within her knowledge, he found his duty. One might with this knowledge easily differentiate the values of “necessary” and “wise” in his mind regarding his confession to her father.

Joy found a very distinct, though shy, pleasure in handing him tea and cake. Judy as usual presided at the tea-table. She did not interfere unduly with her niece’s ministrations, but she took care that she had plenty of opportunities. “Joy dear won’t you see if Mr. Hardy will take more tea?”— “has Mr. Hardy enough sugar?” and so forth. She had noticed those sudden liftings of the girl’s eyes, and knew what they meant to a woman — and to a man. Athlyne did not as a rule make tea a “square” meal, but this time he got in that direction. He refused nothing she offered. He would have accepted death at her hands now, if it would have pleased her; and it was only the gid’s discretion which saved the situation.

In due time he made his adieux and took his leave. With Joy there was no more than a handshake. It was perhaps part of a second longer than customary, but the force with which the squeeze was given lingered long in her memory. Perhaps it was the pain inflicted in the operation which made her often during the evening, when she was alone, caress the possibly wounded hand! That night she went to sleep with her right hand pressed to her heart.

Judy had a wild impulse to tell Joy to go to the door with the departing guest, but in the presence of her mother she did not dare to suggest it. Had she been alone she would probably have done so.

Athlyne walked away with his mind in a whirl. In his heart was ever surging up through all other thoughts that one sublime recognition which comes to every man at least once in his life: that which Sir Geraint voiced:

“Here, by God’s rood is the one maid for me!” To this all other thoughts gave way. It obsessed him. When he came to Forty Second Street he did not turn towards the hotel but kept straight on up Fifth Avenue till he reached Central Park. He felt the need of movement. He wanted to be alone in the open. At Central Park his steps took him seemingly of their own accord towards the Riverside Drive. When he came to a place amongst trees seeming to hang over the river he sat on a seat and gave way to his thoughts. There was no one near him. Below him was the quiet river with its passing life; beyond, the Jersey shore so distant that details of life were not apparent. He took off his hat, more in reverence than for ease, as he thought of the beautiful girl who had so strangely come into life. Over and over again he said to himself in endless repetition:

"Joy! Joy! Joy! Joy!" He sat till the light began to fail and for long after the sudden darkness of the American night had swooped down. Then he went home.

In the hotel he found a visitor waiting for him. Mr. Breckenridge had come to say good-bye. He did so with so much heartiness that Athlyne could not bear to be aught but hearty himself. Though he longed to be alone he insisted on the young fellow coming up to his own rooms.

The boy was not quite at ease so Athlyne said to him:

"There is something on your mind. What is it?"

"Well, look here, sir," he answered gravely. "You have treated me like a comrade, and I want to treat you like one!"

"Go on, old chap. I'm listening." Not without some nervousness the other proceeded:

"I saw in the journal last evening that you had dined on Sunday evening in the Holland with Colonel Ogilvie."

'Those damned reporters!" interrupted Athlyne, but at once told him with a wave of his hand to proceed:

"That hung in my mind from something you said to me the other evening. That confidence which I shall always value." Athlyne nodded. He went on:

"I know something of that family. I'm from Kentucky myself; and I was there for a while — that time of the nigger disturbance you know — and I was quartered not far from Airlville. I have met Colonel Ogilvie; but it was on duty and amongst a good many others so he would not remember me. I never met any of his family; but I need not tell you that I fell in love with Miss Ogilvie. No fellow could help that; one glimpse of her is enough — However — I heard a lot down there about the old man, and as I was keen about the girl I took it all in and remembered it. I want to tell you this, because he is a very peculiar man. He is a splendid old chap. As brave as a lion, and as masterful as Teddy Roosevelt himself. But all the same he has his ideas which are hardly up to date. He is as stern as Fate in matters of — of — well, social matters. They told me a story of him which when I recalled it has troubled me since I saw you. It was about a man whose identity he mistook and who for a jest allowed the error to go, and kept it up. He was a Northern of course, for a Southern would have understood, and our boys are sometimes very keen on a joke. But it was no joke when the old man tumbled to it. He called it an unforgivable outrage and insisted on fighting over it. I tell you it nearly cost the joker his life. He was drilled right through, and only escaped death by a miracle. I tell you all this, sir, because of your confidence in me. If I might make a suggestion — you won't think it beasty presumptuous of me will you?" Athlyne held out his hand; the other after shaking it, went on:

"I would venture to suggest that — of course if you have not done so already — you should take him into your confidence before leaving here. It might be awkward if the old man were to find out for himself. He would think it a want of trust, and he might never forgive it. I am sure you would like to meet him and his again — you know you can't save the life of a girl like that every day—" He stopped there, confused and blushing.

Athlyne was touched by the young man's kindly frankness and sincerity. He thanked him heartily but in a regretful way added:

"Unfortunately I didn't tell him. It was all so quick, and there was no opportunity when we did meet; and now I may not have the chance for some time. It would not do to write; I must see him and explain. And I go away early to-morrow. But be sure of this: the very first chance I get I shall tell him. I do wish for the friendship of him and his; and I should be main sorry if any foolishness hindered it. I shall have to do it carefully, I can see from what you tell me that he may construe my accepting his hospitality in my assumed name as an offence.” He went to the door with his friend, but before parting he said:

“By the way I should like you to do something for me if you don’t mind. I have asked the Horse Exchange people to get me another mount of the same strain as my black, a mare this time. I have given them full instructions, and if you will, I shall tell them that they must have your approval. I want some one who knows a good horse; and as I have given them carte blanche as to price it is right I should have some one to refer to. They are to send it to England for me.”

When Breckenridge was gone he set about his preparations for his early start. Strange to say he never thought of dinner at all that day; the omission may have been due to his hearty tea! As he worked he thought gravely over what his young friend had told him. He could see good cause for concern. Colonel Ogilvie’s attitude towards misrepresentation only echoed his own feeling. He came to the conclusion that there lay before him much thought; and possibly much action.

But all the same this branch of the subject did not monopolise his thoughts that night. As he lay awake he kept repeating to himself again, and again, and again: continued in his heart.

CHAPTER 9

THE CAR OF DESTINY

Athlyne did not feel safe till the French vessel was dipping her nose into the open Atlantic seas, and the Long Island Hills were a faint blue line on the western horizon. The last dozen hours of his stay in New York had been as though spent in prison. He knew well now that he really loved Joy; that this was no passing fancy, no mere desire of possession of a pretty woman. All phases of the passion of love, from the solely physical to the purely spiritual, have their own forces commanding different sets of nerves. Any one of these many phases may be all-compelling — for a time. But it is rather the blind dogged reckless pursuit of an immediate purpose than the total abandonment to a settled conviction. All the passions — or rather the phases of one passion — are separate and co-ordinate. Inasmuch as they are centered in one physical identity they are correlated. Nature has its own mysteries; and the inter-relations of various functions of a human being form not the least of them. As there are broad divisions of them — Christians accept three, the ancient Egyptians held to eight — so must we accept their uses and consequences. "Body and soul," so runs the saying of the illiterate, not seldom used in objurgation. "Body, mind and soul" says the quasi-thinker who believes that he has grasped the truth of the great parcelling-out of qualities. "Heart, soul and flesh" says the lover who knows that he understands. The lover alone it is who knows as distinguished from believing. For his world is complete; in it there is no striving after knowledge, no vain desire of many things, no self-seeking. For the true lover's one idea is to give. In such a world there can be no doubting, no fearing, no hoping. Before its creation Pandora's box has been emptied to the last It may be that the lover's world is only a phantasm, a condition. It may be that it is a reality which can only be grasped by those who have been gifted with special powers. It may be that it is an orb as real as our own world, whirling in space in darkness, and can only be seen by those who have a new sense of vision. Surely it is not too much to believe, following the great analogies, that the soul as well as the body has eyes, and that all eyes of all sorts and degrees have vision of one kind or another; that there may be even a power of choice. We know that in the great manifestation which we call Light are various rays, each with its own distinctive powers and limitations. When these are all classified and understood, then science may take breathing time for its next great effort at investigation. Why, then, may not certain visual organs be adapted to specific purposes! We know through our sensoria that there is response in various ways to seekings of our own; whatever be the means of communication; whatever it be — electrical or magnetic, or through some other of the occult root forces, the message is conveyed. Why may it not be, again following the great analogies, that two forces of varying kind coming together are necessary for creation of any kind. We know it of lightning, we know it of protoplasm, and of whatever lies between them of which we know anything. We find or have ground for believing that the same conditions hold in all the worlds which germinate and increase and multiply. May it then not be that in love— "creation's final law" — the meeting of the two forces of sex may create a new light; a light strange to either sex alone; a light in which that other world, spinning in the darkness through ether, swims into view in that new-created light In physical life when flesh touches flesh the whole body responds, provided that the two are opposite yet sympathetic. When ideas are exchanged, mind come forth to mind till each understands with a common force. When soul meets soul some finer means of expression comes into play. Something so fine and of condition so rare that other senses can neither realise nor conceive.

But in the lover all the voices speak, and speak simultaneously; the soul and the mind and the body all call, each to its new-found mate. What we call "heart" gives the note for that wonderful song of love; that song of songs whose music is as necessary in a living world as light or air, and which is more potent in the end than the forces of winds or seas.

To Athlyne this new world had dawned. In the light which made it visible to him other things looked small; some of them base. And this, though the consciousness of love was still wanting; it had only spoken instinctively. The completeness only comes with that assurance of reciprocity which need not be spoken in words. Athlyne had been very close to it. The yearning of his own nature had spoken in that call out of the depths of his heart: "Joy look at me!" And if there had been time for the girl's new-wakened love to surge up through the deep waters of her virgin timidity his happiness might have been by now complete. As yet he only believed that there might yet be happiness for him; he did not know! Had he seen in Joy's beautiful eyes the answering look which he hoped for, he would have been justified in a change of his plans. He would then have spoken to her father at the earliest possible opportunity, have told him the entire story of his visit to America under an assumed name, and trusted to his good feeling to understand and absolve him. As it was he had to accept existing circumstances; and so he prepared himself for the future. First he would get rid of his alias; then he would try to see Joy again and form some idea of his fate. After that he would make his confession to Colonel Ogilvie; and if the latter still remained friendly he would press his suit.

If some impartial reasoner, like Judy for instance, had been summing up the matter for him the same would have said: “What are you troubling yourself about. You are as good as he is, you are a suitable match for the girl in every way. You have a tide, a large estate, a fine social position personally. You have a more than good record as a soldier. You are young, handsome, strong, popular. You saved the girl’s life at the risk of your own. Then why, in the name of common sense, are you worrying? The old man is not an ass; he will understand at once that you had a good reason for assuming another name. He will see that the circumstances of your meeting were such that you had no time to undeceive him. He owes you already the deepest debt of gratitude that a father can owe. The girl owes you also her life. What in the world better chance do you want? You love the girl yourself...”

Aye! there it was. He loved the girl! That hampered him.

During the whole time of the voyage he kept to himself. He made no new friends, not even acquaintances; he had begun to feel that so long as he remained under the shadow of that accursed alias each momentarily pleasant episode of his life was only the beginning of a new series of social embarrassments. When the ship arrived at Havre he got off and went at once to London. There he staved for a few days in the lodgings which he had taken in the name of Hardy. He set himself gravely to work to wipe out from his belongings eventrace of the false name. It was carefully cut or scraped from the new luggage, obliterated from the new linen and underclothes by the simple process of scissors. The cards and stationery were burned. It was with a sigh of relief that having discharged all his obligations, he drove to his chambers in the Albany and resumed his own name and his old life. He was, however, somewhat restless. He tried to satisfy himself with long rides but even the speed of the Kentucky horse who got more than his share of work did not satisfy him. There was some new uneasiness in his life; an overwhelming want which nothing of the old routine, no matter how pleasant it might be, could fill.

When "Mr Hardy" had said good bye to her, Joy's new life began. New life indeed, for Love is a new birth, a re-creation. Whenever she thought of herself she seemed to be leading a double life. All the routine, the cares and the duties of the old life remained unchanged; but superimposed on it was quite a new existence, one of self-surrender, of infinite yearning, of infinite hope, of endless doubting as to whether she was worthy of all that which she shyly believed really existed. She was all sweetness to those around her, to whom she seemed happy — but with a tinge of sadness. Both her father and mother believed that she was feeling the reaction from the shock of the Riverside adventure. Her mother possibly had at first an idea that she had given some thought to the handsome young man who had saved her; but when she herself reviewed in her mind how quietly, not to say unconcernedly, the young man had taken the whole episode she was content to let it take a minor place in both her concern and her recollection.

In due course the Ogilvie family set out on their European journey, and in due course without any occurrence of note they arrived at their destination.

HOTEL BELLEVUE CASAMICCIOLA, ISCHIA.

DEAR MR. HARDY:

As I promised to write to you I now try to keep my word. I dare say you will think that an old maid is glad to get a chance of writing to a man! Perhaps she is! But I may say a word in your ear: the habit of personal reticence begins younger and lingers longer than you would think. However this is not the time or place — or weather for philosophising. The scenery is far too lovely to think of anything unpleasant. We got here all right after a voyage which was nice enough, though rather dull, and with no opportunities of making new friends. We can't have runaway horses on shipboard! My sister will remain here for some weeks and I shall stay with her as it wouldn't do to leave her all alone. It brought the whole caboodle of us hurrying over from America through a blizzard the last time! No, thank you! And Colonel Ogilvie doesn't care to travel by himself. He is set on going up to Westmoreland which he says is the original Country of his branch of the Ogilvies. He is complaining of getting no riding here; and yet he says that when he gets to London he will hire a motor. Men are queer things, aren't they? The rest of us are quite well and looking forward to our English visit where we may meet some friends. How are you? I suppose spending your time as usual galloping about like a knight-errant on a big black horse rescuing distressed ladies. And writing letters to a pack of women not all old maids! I suppose you will spare a moment to write to one in answer to this, just to say where you are and where you will be in the next few weeks. My brother's section of our party leaves here next week. As I am an old maid I am shy of telling my sister, and most of the rest of us, that I am writing to a gentleman; but if they knew it they too would send their love. For my own part I must confine myself to kind remembrance.

Believe me, Yours faithfully, JUDITH HAYES.

P. S. — By the way, I forgot to say that the first contingent will after a few days in London go on to Cumberland or Westmoreland — I know it is the "Lake" country!

Athlyne read the letter eagerly; but when he had finished he dropped it impatiently. There was not a thing in it that he wanted to know — not once the name he wanted to see. He sat for a while thinking; then he took it up again saying to himself:

"She's no fool; it must have taken her some pains to say so little." As he read it the second time, more carefully this time and not merely looking for what he wished to find, the letter told its own story, and in its own way. Then he smiled heartily as he sat thinking it over and commenting to himself:

"Not a word about her, not even her name! And yet she must know that it would be of some interest to me to hear of her. I wonder if it would do to run over to Ischia. There seems to be a party of them..." He read over the letter again with a puzzled look, which all at once changed to a smile. "Good old Judy! So that's it is it! That's not the first letter Miss Judy has written with a double meaning in it She hasn't those fine eyes and that quick wit for nothing. Why it's as clever and as secret as that sent to Basing at Pretoria." For a good while he pondered over it, making notes on the back of the envelope. Then he read these over:

"We are at Ischia.

"I am writing because I promised.

"The habit of personal reticence (that means not saying a thing for yourself) is for both young and old.

"Our voyage was dull, no adventure, no meeting any one like you.

"Mrs. Ogilvie and Judy remain at Ischia some weeks.

"Colonel Ogilvie doesn't like going alone and goes to the Lake County (who is to be with him but Joy?)

"He wants to go motoring (seems more in this — think it over).

The rest of us — (that can only mean Joy) are looking forward to meeting friends in England — (that proves she is going with her father).

"Let me know where you will be during the coming weeks.

"My brother's section of our party — (He and Joy) — leave here next week.

"I haven't told Mrs. Ogilvie or most of the rest of us (Besides Mrs. O. there are only two so that most of them must mean the bigger — that is Colonel Ogilvie — she has not told that one of the two — then she has told the other. And the other is Joy!)

"If any of those kept in ignorance knew they too would send their love!

""Toot Then one does. Judy sends her own 'kind remembrance.' The only other one, Joy, sends her love — to me.

"Joy sends her love to me!"

He sat for a moment in an ecstasy, holding the letter loosely in his hand. Then he raised it to his lips and kissed it. Then he kissed it a second time, a lighter kiss, murmuring:

"That's for Aunt Judy!" He proceeded with his comment:

"The postscript: 'After a few days in London — will go on to Cumberland or Westmoreland.' No address in either place, what does that mean? She has been so clever over the rest that she can't be dull in this. She must know the London address... she thinks it best not to tell it to me — why?”

That puzzled him. He could not make out any reason from her point of view. He was willing to accept the fact and obey directions, but Judy had been so subtle in the other matter that he felt she must have some shrewd design in this. But the simple fact was that in this matter she had no design whatever. She intended to write to him again on hearing from him and to give him all details.

But for his own part Athlyne had several reasons for not seeing Colonel Ogilvie in London. Knowing that the father might make some quarrel out of his coming to his home in a false name he wanted to make sure of the daughter’s affection before explaining it to him. Besides there was the matter of continuing the fraud — even to Judy. Until things had been explained, meeting and any form of familiarity or even of hospitality on either side was dangerous. He could neither declare himself nor continue as they knew him. He was known in London to too many people to avoid possible contretemps, even if he decided to continue the alias with them and take chance, until he could seize a favourable opportunity. And as he could not introduce the old gentleman to his friends and his clubs it would be wiser not to see him at all. When all was said and done the pain of patient waiting might be the least of many ills.

All the morning and afternoon he thought over the letter which he was to write to Judy. He despaired of writing anything which could mean so much; and beyond that again he felt that he could say nothing which would be so important to its recipient as the message of Judy’s letter had been to him. How could he hope for such a thing! The letter, which just before the time of collection he posted with much trepidation, ran:

“MY DEAR MISS HAYES:

“Thank you very much for your most kind letter and for all that you have said and left unsaid. I too had a dull journey from New York and found London duller still. As a town it seems to have fallen off; but it will brighten up again I am sure before long! I am glad you are all well. I suppose your party will re-unite after Mrs. Ogilvie’s cure has been completed. It is strange how we are all taking to motor cars. I am myself getting one, and I hope in the early summer to have some lovely drives. I am looking out for a companion. But it is a difficult thing to get exactly the one you want, and without such it is lonely work. Even going the utmost pace possible could not keep one’s mind away from the want When I went to America that time I was feeling lonely and dull; and I have felt lonelier and duller ever since. But when I get my motor I hope all that will shortly cease. I hope that when you arrive — if you and Mrs. Ogilvie do come over — that you will honour my car by riding in it I shall hope to have some one with me whom you must like very much — you seem to like nice people and nice people seem to be fond of you. I greatly fear it will not be possible for me to see Colonel Ogilvie in London, for I have to be away very shortly on some business, and I probably shall not be back in time; but I am going up North in a few weeks in my new car if it is ready — and I shall hope to see my friends. Perhaps Colonel Ogilvie and some of his friends will come for a drive with me. Won’t you let me know where he will be staying after he leaves London. Please give, if occasion serves, my warm remembrance to all. I have not forgotten that delightful conversation we had before tea the day I called. Tell Miss Joy that I wish we could renew and continue it Miss Ogilvie must be a very happy girl to have, in addition to such nice parents who love her so much, an aunt like you so much her own age, so sympathetic, so understanding. I cannot tell you how much I am obliged to you for writing. I look eagerly for another letter.

Believe me, “Yours very sincerely.”

There he hesitated. He had meant never to write again the name Richard Hardy. Here the letter seemed to demand it. He had already thought the matter over in all ways and from all points of view and had, he thought, made up his mind to go through with the fraud as long as it was absolutely necessary. There was no other way. But now when he had to write out the lie — as it appeared to him to be — his very soul revolted at it. It seemed somehow to dishonour Joy. Since he had looked into the depth of her eyes, scruples had come to him which had not ever before troubled him. It was unworthy of her, and of himself, to continue a lie. And so with him began again the endless circle of reasoning on a basis of what was false.

A lie, little or big, seems gifted with immortality. At its creation it seems to receive that vitality which belongs to noxious things. The germs which preserve disease survive the quick lime of the plague-pit and continue after the seething mass of corruption has settled into earthly dust; and when the very bones have been resolved into their elements the waiting germs come forth on disturbance of the soil strong and baneful as ever.

Sometimes Athlyne grumbled to himself of the hardness of his lot. It was too bad that from such a little thing as taking another name, and merely for the purpose of a self-protective investigation of a lie, he should find himself involved in such a net-work of deceit. Other people did things a hundred times worse every day of their lives. He had often done so himself; but nothing ever came of it. But now, when his whole future might depend upon it, he was face to face with an actual danger. If Colonel Ogilvie quarrelled with him about it that would mean the end of all. Joy would never quarrel with her father; of that he felt as surely as that he loved her. All unknown to himself Athlyne had an instinctive knowledge of character. Any one who had ever seen him exercise the faculty would have been astonished by the rapidity of its working. The instant he had seen Joy he had recognised her qualities. He had understood young Breckenridge at a glance; otherwise he was too shrewd a man to trust him as he had done. It is not often that a man will entrust the first comer in a crowd with a valuable horse. To this man, too, an utter stranger, he had entrusted his secret, the only person who now knew it on the entire American continent. So also with Colonel Ogilvie. He was assured in his inner consciousness that that old gentleman would be hard to convince of the necessity for disguise. There was something about his fine stern-cut features — -so exquisitely modified in his daughter — and in his haughty bearing which was obnoxious to any form of deceit One of these grumbling fits came on him now, and so engrossed him that he quite forgot to sign the letter. It was in the post “box when he recollected the omission. He rejoiced when he did so that he had not written the lie. It was queer how sensitive his conscious was becoming!

One immediate effect of the awakened conscience was that he went about a motor car that very afternoon. He had said to Miss Judy that he was getting one, and his words had to be made good. Moreover he had, in addition to the train of reasons induced by Miss Judy’s mention of Colonel Ogilvie’s getting a car, a sort of intuition that it would be of service to him. Of service to him, meant of course, in his present state of mind with regard to Joy — of service in furthering his love affair. He had wished for a horse and got one, and it had brought him to Joy. Now he wanted a motor... The chain of reasoning seemed so delightfully simple that it would be foolish to dispute it. Sub-conscious intuition supplied all lacunae.

The logic of fact seemed to support that of theory. He looked in at his club to find the name of a motor agency. There in the hall he met an old diplomatic friend, who after greeting him said:

"This is good-bye as well."

"How so?" he asked.

"I am off for Persia. Ballentyre got a stroke just as he was starting and they sent for me in a hurry and offered me the post. It is too good to refuse, so I am booked for another three years. I was promising myself a long rest, or a spell in a civilised place anyhow. It is too bad, just when I was expecting home my new Delaunay-Belleville car which has been nearly a year in hand."

"Do you take the car with you?" asked Athlyne feeling a queer kind of beating of his heart.

"No. It would be useless there; at all events until I see what the country and the roads are like. I was just off to the agents to tell them to sell it for me."

"Strange we should meet. I came here to look up the address of an agent. I want to buy a car."

"Look here, Athlyne; why not take over this? I shall have to sell it at a sacrifice, and why shouldn't you have the advantage. I'll let you have it cheap; I would rather clear it all up before I go."

"All right, old chap. Ill take it. What's the figure?"

"I agreed to pay £1,000. You may have it at what you think fair!"

"All right. Can we settle it now?"

"By all means." Athlyne took out his cheque-book and wrote a cheque which he handed to the other.

"I say," said Chetwynd. "You have made this for the full sum."

“Quite so! What else could I offer. Why man, do you think I would beat you down because you are in a hurry. If there is any huckstering it is I who should pay. I get my car at once, the very car I wanted. I should have to wait another year.”

Three days after, the car arrived. Athlyne had spent the time in getting lessons at a garage and learning something of the mechanism. He was already a fair mechanic and a fine driver of horses; so that before another week was out he had learned to know his car. He got a good chauffeur so that he would always have help in case of need and before the next letter arrived from Miss Judy he was able to fly about all over the country. The new car was a beauty. It was 100-110 h. p. and could do sixty miles an hour easily.

The next letter which he received from Miss Hayes was short and devoid, so far as he could discern after much study, of any cryptic meaning whatever. She thus made allusion to the fact that he had not signed his letter “By the way I notice that you forgot to sign your letter. I suppose you were thinking at the time of other things.” The later sentence was underlined. The information in the letter was that Colonel Ogilvie and “his daughter” expected to be in London on the Saturday following her letter and would stay at Brown’s Hotel, Albemarle Street “where I have no doubt they will be happy to see you if you should chance to be in London at the time. I think Lucius intends to write you.”

The latter sentence was literally gall to him. He knew that he must not be in London during their stay there. To be away was the only decent way of avoiding meeting them. He must not meet Colonel Ogilvie until he had made certain of

Joy's feeling towards him, for he could not make his identity known till he had that certainty. He could then explain his position... The rest of the possibilities remained unspoken; but they were definite in his own mind.

As he had to go away he thought it would be well to study up the various branches of the Ogilvie as well as of the Ogilvie family. He would then make a tour on his own account to the various places where were their ancient seats. As Colonel Ogilvie was interested in the matter some knowledge on his part might lead... somewhere.

CHAPTER 10

A LETTER

Before he set out for London, Colonel Ogilvie wrote a letter to “Mr. Hardy” which he sent to the address given on the card handed to him at New York. He had thought over the matter of writing with the seriousness which he always gave to social matters. Indeed he was careful to be even more punctilious than usual with this young man; firstly because he had got the idea that his overtures had not been cordially received and he wished to be just, secondly because he felt he must not forget the great service rendered to his daughter and himself. In his letter he apprised Mr. Hardy that with his daughter he was coming to London for a week or more, that they would be staying at Brown’s Hotel, Albemarle Street, and that they would be very pleased to see him there if he would honour them with a visit, and that perhaps he would make it convenient to dine with them an evening which he himself might select. He also told him that Mrs. Ogilvie and her sister were to remain some weeks longer in Italy, and that they would join him in the North of England, whence they would go all together to some bracing part of Scotland, to be decided later on when the time came for the aftercure. Of course, as he did not know that Athlyne was already in correspondence with Miss Judy, and was particular to give details of his future movements. Before posting it he showed the letter to Joy so that he might have her opinion as to whether all was correct. Joy was secretly fluttered but she preserved admirably her self-control and came well through the ordeal, leaving no suspicion in the mind of her father as to the real state of things. She was now very deeply in love; the days that had passed had each and all fed the flame of her incipient passion. Time and the brain working together have a period of growth of their own which the physiopsychistsI have called "unconscious cerebration," a sort of intellectual process whereby crude thoughts are throughout the darkness of suspended effort developed into logical results. Again, one of Nature's mysterious workings; again one of her analogies to the inner and outer worlds of growth. As the hibernating seed, as the child in the womb, so the thought of man. Growth without ceasing, in light or darkness. Logical development, from the gates of life to the gates of Death.

Joy was so deeply in love that all her thoughts, all her acts, all her hopings and fearings were tinged by it. Dreams need a physical basis somewhere; and whatever is the outward condition of man or woman so will be the mind. Whatever the inward, so will be the outward; each is the true index to the other. Her father, though an acute enough man in other respects, was sublimely unconscious of any change in his little girl; indeed he held her in his mind as but a child to whom the realities of life had not yet presented themselves. And yet even as a father he was feeling the effects of her developed affection. All the sweetness of her childhood had ripened. Somehow her nature had become more buoyant, more elastic. Sweetness and thoughtful understanding of his wishes seemed to breathe from her. Now and again were languorous moments when her whole being seemed to yield itself involuntarily to a wish outside her own. To a woman these are times of danger. For when the will ceases, passivity is no longer negative; it is simply a doubling of the external domination — as though an active spirit had been breathed into inertness. There are many readings to any of the Parables. When certain devils have been cast out and the house has been swept and garnished may it not be that spirits other than devils may find place therein. May it not also be that there is a virtue in even selfishness; if only that its protective presence keeps out devils that would fain enter the house where it abides.

With a spirit of meekness Joy waited the coming of the friend who had been bidden. She had every confidence that he would come. True that he had not written to her; but she had seen his unsigned letter to Judy, and into its barrenness had read meanings of her own. How could he not come to her when she would have so gladly flown to him? Besides there was always with her the memory of that rapturous moment when he had spoken her name: “Joy look at me!” It was not hard to remember that; it was the only time she had heard her name upon his lips. As the weeks had gone by, that little sentence impulsively spoken had arrived at the dignity of a declaration of passion. It had grown in her mind from a request to a command; and she felt the sweetness of being commanded by a man she loved. In that moment she had accepted him as her Master; and that acceptance on a woman’s part remains as a sacred duty of obedience so long as love lasts. This is one of the mysteries of love. Like all other mysteries, easy of acceptance to those who believe; an acceptance which needs no doubting investigation, no proof, no consideration of any kind whatever. She had faith in him, and where Faith reigns Patience ceases to be a virtue.

Her father waited also, though not in the same meekness of spirit. Indeed his feeling was fast becoming an exasperation in which the feeling of gratitude was merging. He felt that he had done all that was right and correct with regard to the young man. He had gone out of his way to be nice to him; but with only the result of insult — that was the way in which he was beginning to construe the silence of

Mr. Hardy. Insult to his daughter as well as himself; and that was a thing which could not be brooked from anyone no matter how strong or how numerous were his claims for leniency! Joy saw that there was some cause of displeasure with her father, and with a sinking heart had to attribute it to the real cause. She knew — which her father did not — from his letter to Judy that Mr. Hardy would have to be away from London just at the time of their visit; but she was afraid to speak lest she should precipitate catastrophe. It was not that she had fear in the ordinary sense. Much as she loved her father she would face him if necessary. But she felt that it would be unwise to force the issue prematurely; her father was a man of such strong prejudices — he called them convictions! — that once they were aroused they mastered his judgment What might happen if he should give them scope on this occasion! Her heart sank more deeply still at the very thought.

In her anxiety she took what was probably the wisest course; she kept him perpetually busy, trotting about with her to see the sights of London. This was a pleasure which she had long promised herself with — since the adventure with the run-away horse — the added interest of having present a nice Englishman to point out and explain. This special charm had now to be foregone; and the denial made her secretly sad. However, the best anodyne to pain is pain; her anxiety regarding her father's case was a counteractant to her own. Father and daughter were so busy, morning noon and night, and the girl appeared to be so tired when the day's programme as laid down had been exhausted, that occasion was lacking for consideration of a disagreeable subject. Towards the end of the first week, however, Colonel Ogilvie's patience began to fail. He felt that he must speak of his annoyance to some one, and there was no choice. Joy felt that the moment had come, and she did not flinch. She had a grim foreboding that there would be something said which would give her pain to hear. Her hands were tied. She could not even mention that Mr. Hardy was away; her father would be sure to ask how she knew it. If he did so, she would not dare to tell him; for she knew well that if he learned that the man who had not even answered his own letter was in secret correspondence with the ladies of his own family — that is how he would put it — the fact would add fuel to the flame, would change chagrin to fury. And so she steeled herself to the quiet endurance of suffering.

The blow fell at breakfast time when her father had looked through the few letters which lay beside his plate.

"Well, I do think that that young man's rudeness is unpardonable!"

Joy looked up with a pleasant smile which belied the chilly feeling about her heart. She felt that she must pretend ignorance; her father might, later on, hold a too ready acceptance as suspicious:

"What, Daddy? Who? Whose rudeness?"

"That — that gentleman whom I asked to dine with us. Mr. Hardy."

"Perhaps he may not have got your letter."

"How do you mean, daughter? He must have got it; I directed it to the address he gave me himself."

"But Daddy, he may be away. You remember he told you at dinner that day in the Holland that he had important business. It may have been prolonged you know. He may not even be in London."

"Then he should see that his letters are duly sent on to him."

"Certainly he ought. But perhaps Daddy he's not as careful as we are. He may not be a man of business!" Colonel Ogilvie smiled:

"I'm afraid that is a very bad argument my dear. You have just used the opposite!"

"How so, Daddy?" she asked wrinkling up her brows.

"You said he might be away on business!" He was so pleased with his combating of her argument that her purpose was effected; he abandoned the subject — for a time.

The next morning, however, he renewed it again under similar circumstances:

"I think, my dear, that we had better give up any idea of keeping that young man on the list of our friends. It is quite evident that he does not care to continue our acquaintanceship." Joy suffered much this time; all the more because there was nothing that she could say which would be wise. She had to content herself with a commonplace acceptance of his views. So she answered with as steady a voice as she could manage:

"Of course, Daddy! Whatever you think right!" The answer pleased her father; he showed it in his reply:

"I am sorry about it, my dear; for he seemed a fine young fellow, and he saved you very bravely. However we cannot help it. We did all we could to make him welcome; but we can't force him to come to us. It isn't an occasion for wain-ropes!" After a pause she ventured to say meekly:

"Yes. It would be a pity if we had to quarrel with a man who did so much for us. I suppose if he could show that he did not get your letter, then it would be — you could forgive him."

"Of course I would, my dear. But these English are so stand-off that there is no understanding them. I wanted to be friends with the man who saved my little girl... But there, it is no use wishing anything when people are pig-headed His words somehow made

Joy's heart glow. It might be all right yet, if only But the present was sadly un-right. The suspense, the uncertainty, the waiting in the dark were hard to bear. It was little wonder that in the middle of the following week her father noticed that she had grown pale and listless. Deep down in his mind he connected it somehow with "that damned fellow" but he took care not to betray his thought to his daughter in any way. His present wish was that even the existence of the fellow should fall out of the memory of his family. As for himself he never let a grievance fall out of his memory; there had to be a day of reckoning for all concerned in such.

He quietly made preparations for their northern tour, and when all was ready told Joy who joined with alacrity in the move. London was now growing hateful to her.

In the meantime Athlyne, living either in his castle of Ceann-da-Shail — which he had long looked on as his home — as a centre, was flying about in his new motor, learning each day fresh mysteries of driving. The speeds of the motor are so much above those of other vehicles that a driver, howsoever experienced he may be in other ways, seems here to be dealing with a new force. The perspective changes so fast as the machine eats up the space that the mind requires to be practised afresh in judging distances and curves. It had been a bitter regret to him that he had to keep out of London just when Joy had come to it. His mind was always running on what a delight it would be to be with her when all the interesting things came before her; to note the sudden flushes of delight, to see the quick lifting of the beautiful eyes, to look into their mysterious, bewildering depths. At first when such ideas took him whilst driving, he nearly ran into danger. Unconsciously his hands would turn the wheel for speed, and in his eagerness he would make such swerves and jumps that undesirable things almost happened. However, after a few such experiences his nerves learned their own business. It is part of the equipment of a chauffeur to be able to abstract and control his driving senses from all other considerations; and such dual action of the mind requires habit and experience for its realisation. The constant watchfulness and anxiety had at least this beneficent use: that for a part of the day at all events his mind was kept from brooding over his personal trouble.

The arrival of Colonel Ogilvie's letter, sent on to him from London, made in a way a new trouble for him; for whilst he was delighted to get so friendly an overture it was he saw but another difficulty ahead of him. He must either reply in his false name, which was now hateful to him; or he must leave the letter, for the present, unanswered. This latter alternative would be dangerous with a man so sensitive and so punctilious; but, all told, it was the lesser evil. He had had opportunity to make up his mind on the subject before the letter came, for Aunt Judy had said in her last letter that Colonel Ogilvie had spoken about writing to him before they should arrive in London. Still it was a sore trial to him to be so discourteous, with the added chagrin that it might — probably would — stand in his way with the one man in the world whom he wished to propitiate.

As he did not know anything about the history of Colonel Ogilvie's family he went to the peerage books and made lists of the bearers of that name in its different spellings; and then as he decided to go to many of the places named, he made runs into Perthshire and Forfar. He came to the conclusion that he must have misunderstood Colonel Ogilvie in alluding to the "Border Counties." He laid up, however, a good deal of local information which might be pleasing to his prospective father-in-law.

One morning he had a letter which quite fluttered him. It was from Aunt Judy telling him that Colonel Ogilvie had announced his intention of starting on the then coming Thursday for the north, and that he had given as the direction of his letters till further notice the "Inn of Greeting," Ambleside. The unqualified pleasure which he received from this news was neutralised by the postscript:

"By the way — this of course in your private ear, now and hereafter — Colonel Ogilvie is vastly disappointed that you have not been to see him in London, and that you have not even replied to his letter. Surely there must be some mistake about this. I sincerely hope so, for he looks on any breach of courtesy, or any defect in it, as an unpardonable sin. I know from the fact of his mentioning it to his womenkind that he has taken it to heart. Do, do my dear friend, who have done so much for us and whose friendship we wish to hold, repair this without delay. He is an old man and may possibly expect more from a younger man than from one of his own standing. I am sure that if there has been any omission there is on your part a good reason for it. But do not lose any time. If you wish to please us all — and I am sure you do — you would do well to go up to Ambleside — if you have not seen him already — and call on him there. And do like a dear man drop me a line at once to say you have received this and telling me what you intend to do."

He sat for a while quite still, putting his thoughts in order. It was now Monday so that Colonel Ogilvie would have been already some days at Ambleside. He took it for granted that Joy was with him, but he could not help a qualm of doubt about even that. Aunt Judy had not mentioned her in the matter. The only possible allusion was in the underlining of the word "all." Otherwise the letter was too direct and too serious for any cryptic meaning.

He came to the conclusion that his best plan would be to go at once to some place on Windermere, and from there go quietly to Ambleside and find out for himself how things lay. The best place for him to stay at would, for his purposes, be Bowness. There he would leave his car with the chauffeur and drive in a carriage to Ambleside. When there he would contrive to meet if possible Joy alone. He would surely be able to form from her attitude some opinion of her disposition towards him. If he were satisfied as to this he would at once go to her father, tell him the whole story, and place himself in his hands.

But then he thought that if he were so near, his name might become known to Colonel Ogilvie; that infernal alias seemed to be always standing in his way! He was so obsessed by the subject that at times he quite overlooked the fact that neither the Colonel nor any of his family knew anything whatever of the matter. It took him an hour's hard thought before this idea presented itself to him. It took a weight off his mind. If by any chance Colonel Ogilvie should hear that an individual called Lord Athlyne was in the neighbourhood it would mean nothing to him. Nothing except the proximity of one more of that "bloated aristocracy," which one class of Americans run down — and another run after.

He was then up in Ross. As he did not wish to "rush" matters he decided to start next day. When that time came he had fully made up his plan of action. As the Ogilvies were at Ambleside he would go to Bowness. As there was a service of public coaches he could go between the places mentioned — without even the isolation of a carriage for his sole use. He would go quietly to the Inn of Greeting and learn what he could about their movements. The rest must depend on circumstances. But there must be no hurry; the matter was too serious now and the issue too important to take any risk. But when he should have seen Joy and knew, or believed, or understood... Then he would lose not a moment in seeing her father. But he might not get a chance of seeing him alone and under circumstances favourable to his purpose. He must be ready. All at once an idea struck him...

All these weeks Athlyne had now and again had a vague feeling of uneasiness which he could not understand: a sort of feeling that he would some time wake and wonder what he had been fretting and fuming about. Why could he not have written to Colonel Ogilvie at any time? Even before he had left New York, or whilst he had been on board ship, or whilst the American family had been in Italy, or even when the Colonel had been in London? Why not now? After all, there was nothing in any way wrong; nothing to be ashamed of. He was of good social position; at least as good as Joy's father was. He was himself rich and wanted no fortune with his wife. He had won certain honours — a man to whose name had been suffixed V.C. and D.S.O. must be considered personally adequate for ordinary purposes. And so on. Vanity and self-interest, in addition to the working of the higher qualities, supplied many good reasons.

And yeti... He was always being brought up against one of two things: Colonel Ogilvie's peculiar views and character, or his own position towards him with regard to the alias. He could always find in either of these something which might cause pain or trouble to Joy. Moreover there was another matter which was a powerful factor in his conclusions, although it was one which he did not analyse or even realise. It was one that worked unconsciously; a disposition rather than an activity; a tendency rather than a thought. Lord Athlyne was Scotch and Irish; a Celt of Celts on his mother's side.

He had all that underlying desire of the unknown which creates sentiment, and which is so pronounced a part of the Celtic character. This it is whence comes that clinging to the place of birth which has made the peasantry of the Green Isle for seven hundred years fight all opposing forces, from hunger to bayonets, to hold possession of their own. This it is which animated a race, century after century, to suffer and endure from their Conquerors of a more prosaic race all sorts of pain and want, and for reasons not understandable by others. Those who have lived amongst those Celts of the outlying fringes, amongst whom racial tendencies remain unaltered by changing circumstances, and by whom traditions are preserved not by historical purpose but by the exercise of faith, know that there is a Something which has a name but no external bounds or limitations, no quick principle, no settled purpose. Something which to an alien can only be described by negatives; if any idea can at all be arrived by such — any idea however rudimentary, phantasmal or vague — it can only be acquired at all by a process of exclusions. The name is “The Gloom”; the rest is a birthright. Those who can understand it need no telling or explaining; others can no more understand it than those born without eyes can see. It is a quality opposed to no other; it can exist with any. It can co-exist with fighting, with song, with commerce. It makes no change in other powers or qualities of the children of Adam. Those who possess it can be good or bad, clever or silly, heroic or mean. It can add force to imagination, understand nature, give quiet delight or spiritual pain. And the bulk of those who have it do not think of it or even know it: or if they do, hardly ever speak of it.

Athlyne had his full share of it. Being young and strong and of a class in life which seldom lacks amusement he had not been given to self-analysis. But all the same, though he did not think of it, the force was there. In his present emotional crisis it brought the lover in him up to the Celtic ideal. An ideal so strangely saturated with love that his whole being, his aims and ambitions, his hopes and fears, his pleasures and pains yielded place to it and for the time became merged in it. To him the whole world seemed to revolve round Joy as a pivotal point. Nothing could be of any use or interest which did not have touch of her or lead to her. So, he wanted to know beyond the mere measure of intellectual belief if Joy loved him or was on the way to doing so. When he was satisfied as to this he would be free to act; but not before.

On the journey he had allowed the chauffeur to drive, as he wanted to think over the whole matter without fear of interruption. He had sat in the tonneau and made from time to time notes in his pocket-book. He had now made up his mind that he would write a letter to Colonel Ogilvie telling him the whole circumstances. This he would keep in his pocket so that at the first moment when he was satisfied as to Joy's views he could post it, in case he could not have the opportunity of a personal explanation. After dinner the second night of the journey and then in his bedroom he sat up writing the letter and then copying it out on his own note paper of which he had for the purpose brought a supply with him. When it was completed it left nothing that he could think of open to doubt. When he had got this off his mind sleep came to him.

Next day he took the wheel himself; and that day when there was fitting opportunity the car hummed along merrily at top speed. Before sunset they arrived at Bowness. There he left the car in charge of the chauffeur, on whom he again impressed the necessity for absolute silence. The man was naturally discreet, and he saw that he was in a good situation. Athlyne was satisfied on leaving him that his orders would be thoroughly carried out.

In the forenoon of the next day he took the steamer which plies along the Lake, and in due course landed at Ambleside. His heart beat quickly now and his eyes searched keenly all around him as he moved. He would not miss a chance of seeing Joy.

CHAPTER 11

THE BEAUTIFUL TWILIGHT

THE first couple of days at Ambleside were a delight to Joy. In the change from the roar and ceaseless whirl of London was such a sense of peace that it influenced even the pain of her heart-hunger. Here in this lovely place, where despite the life and movement of the little town nature seemed to reign, was something to calm nerves overstrung with waiting and apprehension. It was a relief to her at first, a pleasure later, to walk about the pleasant roads with her father, to take long drives beneath shady trees or up on the hillside where the lake lay below like a panorama; to sit on the steamer's deck and drift along the beautiful lake.

Her father was now and again impatient, not with her but because of the non-arrival of the motor which he had ordered in London. It had not been quite ready when they left and so it was arranged that it should follow them. He wanted to have it in possession so that they could fly all over the region; the American in him was clamorous for movement for speed and progress! He kept up an endless telegraphing with the motor people in London, and when at last they wired that the car was nearly ready he got a map and traced out the route. Each day he marked out a space that he thought it ought to have covered, crediting it for every hour of daylight with top speed. After all, no matter what our ages may be, we are but children and the new toy but renews the old want and the old impatience bringing in turn the old disillusionment and the old empty-hearted discontent. And the new toy may be of any shape: even that of a motor-car — or a heating human heart.

Partly out of affection for her father and so from sympathy with him, and partly as a relief to herself, Joy looked eagerly for the coming of the car. She used to go with him to the post office when he was sending his telegrams. Indeed she never left him; and be sure he was glad of her companionship. Now and again would come over her an overwhelming wave of disappointment — grief — regret — she knew not what — when — she thought of the friendship so romantically begun but failing so soon. The letters from Aunt Judy used to worry and even humiliate her. For Judy could not understand why there was no meeting; and her questions made altogether for the girl's happiness but made in the helplessness of complete ignorance, gave her niece new concern. She had to give reasons, invent excuses. This in itself, for she was defending the man, only added fuel to her own passion. Joy's love was ripening very fast; all her nature was yielding to it. Each day seemed to make her a trifle thinner. Her eyes seemed to grow bigger and at times to glow like lamps. Whenever she could, she kept looking out on the road by which He might come. Walking or driving or in the hotel it was all the same. In the sitting-room her seat was near the window, her place at table where she could command a view. All this added to her beauty and so her father took no concern from it. He thought she was looking well; and as she was hearty and always, whilst with him, in good spirits and vivacious and even eager in her movements, he was more than satisfied.

One morning as she was sitting alone close to the window, presumably reading for she had a book in her lap, she caught sight with the tail of her eye of a figure that she knew. There was no mistaking on her part that tall, upright man with the springy step; the image was too deeply burned into her heart for that. For a fraction of a second her heart stood still; and then the wave of feeling went over her. Instinctively she drew back and kept her head low so that only her eyes were over the line of the window sill. She did not wish to be recognised — all at once. With the realisation of her woman's wishes came all the instinctive exercise of her woman's wiles. He was walking so slowly that she had time to observe him fully, to feast her eyes on him. He was looking up at the hotel, not eagerly she thought, but expectantly. This, though it did not chill her, somehow put her on guard. She slipped behind the window curtain and peeped cautiously. As he came closer to the hotel he went still more slowly. He did not come to the door as she expected, but moved along the street.

This all puzzled her; puzzled her very much. She knew that Judy had written to him of their coming to London, she had seen his reply to her letter; and Judy with her usual thoughtful kindness had mentioned — as though by chance, for she was the very soul of kindly discretion — that when she knew what locality and hotel had been fixed on for the visit to the Lakes she would tell him. It was evident, that he knew they were there and in the hotel; why, then, did he not come to see them. How she would have hurried, she thought, had she been the man and loved as she did! She had no doubting whatever of his good faith. "Perfect love casteth out fear." And doubt is but fear in a timid form. She accepted in simple good faith that he had some purpose or reason of his own. Her manifest duty to him, therefore, was not to let any wish or act of hers clash with it. So she set herself to think it all out, feeling in reality far happier than she had done for many weeks. It was not merely that she had, after long waiting, seen the man; but she was now able to do something for him — if indeed it was only the curbing of her own curiosity, her own desires.

She rose quietly and went to her bed-room which was at another side of the house — on the side towards which He had passed. Her father was writing letters and would not want her; he had said at breakfast that he would not be able to go out for an hour or two. In her room she went cautiously to her window and, again hiding behind the curtains, glanced into the street. She felt quite sad when she only saw his back as he walked slowly, along. Every now and again he would stop and look round him as though admiring the place and the views as the openings between the houses allowed him to see the surrounding country. Once or twice she could see him look out under his eyebrows as though watching the hotel without appearing to do so. Presently he turned the corner of the next street to the left, moving as though he wished to go all round the hotel.

She sat down and thought, her heart beating hard. Her face was covered with both her hands. Forehead and cheeks and neck were deeply flushed; and when she took away her hands her eyes were bright and seemed to glow. She seemed filled with happiness, but all the same looked impossibly demure; as is woman's nature, playing to convention even when alone.

Before she left her room she had changed her clothes, putting on after several experiments the frock which she thought the most becoming. She did not send for her maid, but did everything for herself; even to hanging up the discarded frocks. Then she went back to the sitting room and took as before her seat at the window, keeping however a little more in the background. She wanted to see rather than to be seen. With her eyes seemingly on her book, but in reality sweeping under her lashes the approaches to the hotel like searchlights, she sat quite quietly for some time. At length the eyes suddenly fell for an instant under an uncontrollable wave of diffidence; she had seen Him pass into the garden opposite to the hotel and go secretively behind some lilac bushes opposite the doorway. But after that one droop of the eyes, there was scarce even the flicker of an eyelid; she did not want to lose a single glimpse of him.

Sitting by the window, where he could see her, for a full hour until her father appeared, she thought over the new phase of the matter. If she had ever had any real doubt as to whether Mr. Richard Hardy loved her it was all resolved now. For certain he loved her — and as much, she hoped, as she loved him! He had sought her out at Ambleside; for even in her own secret mind she never went through the pretence of trying to persuade herself that it may have been some one else that he was looking for.

But why was he so secret? Why did he not come at once into the hotel and ask to see her father. He had been invited to come; he had been made a welcome guest at the Holland. He knew their movements; he had written to Judy. But why did he keep so aloof? If he wanted to avoid them altogether he had only to keep away. Why then did he keep coming round the house and looking at it secretively? She was absolutely at a standstill every time her thinking led her to this impasse. But, all the same, she never questioned or doubted the man. In her own mind she was sure that he had some good reason for all he did; and it was her duty not to thwart but to help him.

She had already accepted the position of a true wife, a true lover: The man’s will was law!

Then her thoughts turned as to how best she could help him. Here all her brains as well as all the instincts of her womanhood came into play; and this is a strong combination in a man’s service. Her arguments ran:

As he evidently wishes his presence to be unknown she must not seem to know of it.

As he evidently wanted to know something about her she would take care that he knew what he wished, so far as she could know or effect it.

As (perhaps) he wished to see her (from afar, or at all events without proclaiming himself) she would take care that he would have plenty of opportunities.

But as he did not want Daddy to see him — at present (this last qualification she insisted on to herself) she would have to be careful that her father did not notice his presence. This she felt would be difficult, and might be dangerous; she feared that if the two men should meet just at present (another qualification equally insisted on) her father might make some quarrel or trouble.

As Daddy might make trouble this way, she must keep very close to him. She might thus be able to smooth matters, or do something if any occasion came.

And she must be careful that he did not notice that she saw him. This argument came straight out of her sex-artfulness. Every instinct of her being told her that such would be the most effective way of bringing the man to her. And Oh! but she did long to see him, close to her where they could see each other clearly. "Look at me!" seemed to throb through her every nerve, and make a clang of great music in her brain.

When presently Colonel Ogilvie, having finished his letters, asked her what she would like to do that morning she said she would like to go for a drive. She knew that there would be more security in the isolation of a carriage than when walking, where a chance meeting might occur at any moment.

When Athlyne, who was watching the hotel from the garden where the shrubs gave him cover, saw the landau at the door he thought he would wait and see if by any chance it might be for the Ogilvies' use. His hopes were justified when he saw Joy follow her father from the doorway. She looked radiantly beautiful; so beautiful that all his love and passion surged up in him till he felt almost suffocated. He had quite a good view of her, for she stood for a minute or two in front of the horses giving them lumps of sugar and stroking their noses. He heard the voices of both father and daughter. Colonel Ogilvie's was strong and resonant; Joy's was sweet and clear. Moreover, she spoke on purpose a little more loudly than usual; she knew that He was listening and would like to hear her voice.

'Tell him where you would like to go, little girl."

"Anywhere you think best, coachman; provided we get a good view. We had better be back here in about an hour. Then, Daddy, we shall keep quiet after lunch — if that will suit you, dear. After tea we can go out again and have a long drive and come back in the lovely English twilight. Of course if you would like to, Daddy. I must say there is one institution that I wish we had in America."

"And what is that daughter?"

"The twilight! Since I have seen it, our own night seems very cruel! It shuts down too fast. For my own part if ever I fall in love—" here the words became indistinct; she was entering the carriage.

She had chosen her words on purpose. She wished to let Him know the plans for the day. She knew well that at the end of the hour he would be waiting, hidden in the garden, to see their return. Thus he would see her again, and she by going quickly to the window would perhaps see him again. She had spoken of not going out again till after tea, because she did not wish to keep him all day at his post; she knew that this would happen if he were in ignorance of her movements. He, poor fellow! would have to get lunch... She was exercising for him already the solicitude of a wife for a husband. As to the remarks about twilight, that had a double origin. Firstly it was quite true; she had long had it in her mind. Secondly it was a sort of ballon d’essai; it might point or lead somewhere. Where that might be she knew not; but she had a vague hopeful feeling that there was an answer — somewhere.

As to the remark about ever loving. Well! she could not have explained that herself. All she knew was that she had a sudden desire to mention the word...

Athlyne profited by the lesson; but his acts were not quite what Joy had anticipated. She, thinking from the feminine standpoint, had taken it that he would remain at his post until the return and then avail himself of the longer period for rest and food. But Athlyne was a soldier and had as such long ago learned the maxim that in route marching the camp should be set beyond the bridge. Moreover in the strenuous life of the Boer war he had superadded the wisdom of taking his meal at the first opportunity. As soon as the carriage had disappeared from view he went straight into the hotel and ordered his lunch in the Coffee-room. He was really hungry, and the lamb and salad were excellent; but had he not been hungry, and had the food been poor, he would have enjoyed it without knowing its inferiority. Everything was good to him this morning; he had seen Joy!

He was out in the garden in good time. Fortunately so, from his point of view. For Joy, believing that he would be still waiting, kept the coachman up to time. It might well have been that they had met in the hall.

The drive had increased the girl's loveliness, if such were possible. Her eyes were bright, there was fine colour in her checks, and her voice and manner were full of vivacity. The bright-lit sun and the sweet, strong air had braced her; and perhaps some inward emotion had exercised the same effect. One quick glance under her eyelashes as they drove towards the hotel had shewn her the outline of a tall figure close to the lilacs in the garden. As her father helped her from the carriage with all his habitual gallantry, of manner she said in a clear voice — Athlyne across the street heard every word:

"That drive was exquisite! Wasn't it Daddy? Thank you so much for it! The lights and shadows on the hills were simply divine. It would be nice to go again to-morrow in something of the same direction. We might go about the same hour, if it would suit you, and see the same effects again!"

When they had gone in Athlyne waited a little while in the garden. He sat in the sunshine on a garden seat placed in the centre of the grass plot. He was not afraid of being seen at present, and as he knew that Joy and her father were in the house he did not even try to look for them. Had he chosen a position for the purpose of giving Joy pleasure he could not have done better than this. From behind her window curtain she could see him plainly. To her he made a beautiful picture, of which the natural setting was complete: the background of sweet pale lilac, the dropping gold of the laburnum and the full red of scarlet hawthorn; his feet in the uncut grass starred with daisies. She had a long, long view of him, watching every movement and expression with eager eyes. One thing he did which she could not understand. He took from his breast-pocket an envelope; this he opened and took from it a letter. Instead of reading it, however, he sat for a long time with it in his hand. Then with a quick movement he put it back in the envelope, moistened the flap with his lips and closed it. Joy's idea had been that it might have been Judy's letter which he had intended to re-read; but this could not be. For an instant a spasm of pain had gripped her heart as the thought came that it might have been from some other woman. But that idea she swept aside imperiously. Now she knew that it was some letter of his own, and the questioning of her brain began to assail her heart:

Whom could he be writing to? What could he be writing about? Why did he have a finished letter in his pocket, not even sealed up?

If she had known the truth she would have sat quiet, not with perturbation but in a silent ecstasy. Athlyne had made up his mind that if occasion did not serve for his seeing Joy alone he would send the letter to Colonel Ogilvie and risk being refused. In such case he would have to take another course, and try to obtain her consent in spite of her father's wishes. He did not, however, intend to send the letter yet His first hope was too sweet to abandon without good cause. His closing the letter was but an impulsive expression of his feeling.

Suddenly he stood up and moved out of the garden. This did not puzzle her, but awoke all her curiosity. She had a wild desire to see where he was going; but as she could not follow him she made up her mind to present patience. She watched from her window till he had passed out of sight. She was glad that she was concealed behind the curtain when she saw him at the furthest point of sight turn and give a long look back at the hotel. Then she went to her room to get ready for lunch.

Athlyne felt that he must do something to let off steam. Movement of some kind was necessary in his present frame of mind.

For his pleasure was not unmixed. He had seen Joy, and she was looking more radiantly beautiful than ever. But she had said one thing that sent a pang through him: “if I ever fall in love.” There could hardly be any doubt of her sincerity; she was talking to her father quite alone and unconscious that he of all men was within earshot. “If I ever fall in love,” that meant that she had not yet done so. It would be wise to wait before sending the letter so that he might see if that happy time had come or had even begun to peep above the horizon. Unconsciously he took from his pocket the letter and his pocket-book, put the former into the latter and returned it to its place.

Athlyne was no fool; but he was only a man, and as such took for gospel every word spoken by the woman he loved. Had Joy been present and known his difficulty, and had cared to express herself then as she would have done later, she would have smiled at him as she said:

“Why you dear old goose how could I fall in love with you when I had done that already!”

Had Aunt Judy been commenting on the comment she would have said in her genial cynicism:

“A woman — or a man either — can only fall in love once in a life time; with the same person!”

Athlyne telephoned his chauffeur to whom he had already sent a wire to be prepared, and in a time to be computed by minutes met him outside Ambleside. There he took the wheel himself, telling the man to meet him a little before five o’clock. He felt that he must be alone. He went slowly so long as he was near the town; but when he found himself on a clear road, over which he could see for a long way ahead, the index went round to “speed” and as the car swept over the ground its rush kept pace with his own thoughts.

He went about a hundred miles before he regained anything like calm. Trying afterwards to recall the sequence of his thoughts he never could arrive at any sort of conclusion regarding them.

The only thing definite in his mind was that he wanted to see Joy again, and soon. He knew they would be starting out after tea time which meant, he knew, something after five o'clock; and not for a world of chrysolite would he miss being there. Outside Ambleside he met the chaffeur whom he sent back to Bowness; he did not want his car to he too much en evidence at Ambleside at present. He had a wash and a cup of tea at another hotel; and at five strolled back to his nook in the garden.

By this time Joy had made up her mind that he might come back that evening though — with still her protective instinct, partly for herself but more for him — she had quite made up her mind that even if he should not come she would not be disappointed. He was not to be blamed in any way, now or hereafter. How could he be? It would not be fair. A few minutes before five she took her place at the window, but sitting so far back this time that she could not be seen from without. She herself could see out, but only by raising her head high. This she did now and again, but very cautiously. She felt a sort of diffidence, a certain measure of shamefacedness lest he should see her again and suspect anything. We are very sensitive as to the discovery of truth by others when we are ourselves trying to deceive ourselves! The few minutes passed slowly, very slowly.

Then when once more she looked out a great thrill of joy shook her. He had come. If doubt there had been, it could no longer exist. Her heart beat, her face flushed, she trembled with a sort of ecstasy; the waves of high passion swept her. She was half inclined to stand boldly in the window and let him see her; to let him see that she saw him; to run out to him and fall into his arms. There is no boldness that love will not commit when it is true! She felt this, though not consciously. There was no need for consciousness, for thought, for argument. She knew!

It was perhaps just as well that her father came into the room. He brought a sense of sanity with him; she felt that consciously enough. Her mere faint sigh of regret was sufficient proof.

Joy did not walk down the staircase; she floated, as though matter had ceased to exist and the soul was free. She stood for a minute on the step looking out at the view; but presently kept changing her pose so that her face might be seen with both profiles, as well as the full face. If He had come there to see her he should not be disappointed — if she could help it.

That drive was a dream, an ecstasy. At first there was a miserable sense that each turn of the wheels took them farther apart; but shortly this was lost in the overwhelming sense of gladness. She could have sung — danced — shouted. She wanted some physical expression of her feeling. Then the excitement settled down to a quiet tingling happiness, a sense of peace which was ineffable and complete.

"... if that all of animated nature Be but organic harps diversely framed That tremble into thought as o'er them sweeps Plastic and vast one intellectual breeze At once the soul of each and God of all."

So sung, a century before, a poet of that sweet cult of the school centred in the very area in which she moved; and if his thoughts were true there was a true act of worship that sunny afternoon on the rising hills beyond the lake head. For happiness is not merely to be at rest It is to be with God, to carry out to the full His wish that His children should appreciate and enjoy the powers and good things given them by His hands. And when that happiness is based on love — and there is no true happiness on aught that is not high — the love itself is of the soul and quivers with the flapping of its wings. Then indeed can we realise that marvellous promise of the words of the Master:

“Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.” Wordsworth and those who held with him saw God and worshipped Him in those myriad beauties of the lake they loved; and as the beauty and its immortal truth soothed and purified their souls, so was the spirit of the love-sick girl cleansed of all dross. How at such a time, when the soul swam free in grateful worship, was there place for anything that was not clean? Her father thought, as he looked at her and heard the ring of her voice, that he had never seen her look better or happier. She was full of spirit gay, sweet, tender; and yet there was over her such a grace of gentle gravity that the old man felt himself saying to himself: “My little girl is a woman.”

That mellow afternoon was to her lovely; the trees and shrubs, the flowers, the fields. The singing of the birds was ethereal music; the lights and shadows were the personal manifestation of Nature’s God. Her heart, her sympathy, her nature were at full tide; all overflowing and in their plenitude full.

The long summer afternoon faded into the softness of twilight during the homeward journey. Perhaps it was the yielding to its mysterious influence which made Joy so still; perhaps it was that she was drawing nearer to the man whom she adored. Her father neither knew nor took note of it. He saw that his little girl was silent in an ecstasy of happiness in that soft twilight of which she had spoken so tenderly; and he was content. He too sat silent, yielding himself to the influence of the beauty around him.

When they reached the hotel Joy seemed to wake from a dream; but she lost none of her present placidity, none of her content. One form of happiness had given way to another, that was all. As she stood on the steps, waiting whilst her father was giving the coachman his instructions for the morrow, she tried to peer into the lilac bushes in the garden. She had a sort of intuition — nay more than an intuition an actual certainty — that He was again behind them. And once more she so stood and moved that he might see her face as he would. When her father turned to come in she took his arm and pointed to the sky:

"Oh look, Daddy, the beautiful twilight! Is it not exquisite!" Then impulsively she put her hand to her lips and threw a kiss to it- — over the square by way of the lilacs. Her voice was languishing music as she said softly, but clearly enough to heard in the garden:

"Good night; Good night beloved! Good night! Good night!" And Athlyne peering through the bushes heard the words with a beating of his heart which made his temples throb. His only wish at the moment was that it might have been that the words had been addressed to him.

That evening before going to dress for dinner Joy went to the window and pulled aside the blind so that she stood outside it. The dusk was now thick; the day had gone, but the moon had not yet risen. It was impossible to see much; only the outline of the trees, and out on the grass the shadowy form of a man seated. There was one faint red spark of brightness, face high, such as might be the tip of a cigar.

When she came back into the room her father raised his face from his book: "Why how pale you are little girl. I am afraid that long drive must have tired you. You were quite rosy when we arrived home. You had better sleep it out in the morning. If mother sees you pale she will blame me, you know. And Judy — well Judy will be Judy in her own way.”

CHAPTER 12

ECHO OF TRAGEDY

Athlyne had one other day almost similar to the last. This time he came to Ambleside a little earlier; fortunately so, for Joy had got up early. When he came into the square she was standing in the window looking out. Not in his direction; did a woman ever do such a stupid thing when at the first glance she had caught sight of the man far off. No, this time she appeared to be eagerly watching two tiny children toddling along the street hand in hand. He had time for a good look at her before she changed her position. This was only when the children had disappeared — and he had gained the shelter of the lilacs.

Love is a blindness — in certain ways. It never once occurred to Athlyne that Joy might have seen him, might have even known of his being at Ambleside or in its neighbourhood. Any independent onlooker or any one not bound by the simplicity and unquestioning faith of ardent love would at least have doubted whether there was not some possible intention in Joy's movements, His faith however saved him from pain, that one pain from which true love can suffer however baseless it may be — doubt. Early morning took him to Ambleside; he only went back to Bowness when those windows of the hotel which he knew were darkened for the night The second day of waiting and watching was just like the first, with only the addition that the hearts of both the young people were more clamant, each to each; and that the rising passion of each was harder to control. The same routine of going out and returning was observed by the Ogilvies, and each of the lovers had tumultuous moments when the other was within view. More than once Athlyne was tempted to put his letter in the post or to leave it at the hotel; but each time Joy's chance phrase: "If I ever fall in love" came back to him as a grim warning. He knew that if he once declared himself to Colonel Ogilvie the whole truth must come out, and then his tide and fortune might be extraneous inducements to the girl. Whenever he came to this point in his reasoning he thrust the letter deeper into his pocket and his lips shut tight. He would win Joy on his mere manhood and his manhood's love — if at all!

By the post next morning Colonel Ogilvie and Joy both got letters from Italy. That of the former was from his wife who announced that they were just starting for London where they wished to remain for a few days in order to do some shopping. When this was done she would wire him and he could run up to London and bring them down with him. This pleased him, for he was certain that by then he would have his automobile. He felt in a way that his pride was at stake on this point He had told his women folk that the car would be ready, and he wished to justify. He wired off at once to the agents, in even a sterner spirit than usual, as to the cause of delay. For excuses had come in a most exasperating way. Long after it had been reported that the car had started and had even proceeded a considerable distance on the way he was told that there had been an error and that by some strange mistake the progress made by a car long previously ordered by another customer had been reported; but that Colonel Ogilvie's esteemed order was well in hand and that delivery of the car was daily — hourly — expected; and that at once on its receipt by the writer it would be forwarded to Ambleside either with a trusty chaffeur or by train as the purchaser might wish. Colonel Ogilvie fumed but was powerless. He wanted the car and at once; so it was useless for him to cancel the contract. He could only wait and hope; and console himself with such attenuated expressions of disapproval as were permissible in the ethics of the telegraphic system.

Joy's letter was from Judy. It was in her usual bright style and full of affection, sympathy and understanding, as was customary in her letters to her niece. Judy had of late been much disturbed in her mind about the future, and as she feared Joy might be taking to heart the same matters as she did and in the same way, she tried to help the other. She knew from Colonel Ogilvie's letters to his wife which they talked over together that he was seriously hurt and pained by the neglect of Mr. Hardy. Indeed in his last letter he had declared that in spite of the high opinion he had formed of him from his brave and ready action he never wished to see his face again. To Judy this meant much, the most that could be of possible ill; Joy's happiness might be at stake. The aunt, steeped through and through with knowledge of the world and character — a knowledge gained from her own heart, its hopes and pains and from bitter experience of the woes of others — knew that her niece would suffer deeply in case of any rupture between her father and the man who had saved her life. It was not merely from imaginative sympathy that she derived her belief. She had had many and favourable opportunities of studying Joy closely, and she had in her own mind no doubt whatever that the girl's affections were given beyond recall to the handsome stranger. So in her letter she tried to guard her from the pain of present imaginings and yet to prepare her subtly for the possibility of disappointment in the future. Her letter in its important part ran:

"Your father is undoubtedly very angry with Mr. Hardy; and though I believe that his anger may have a slight basis it is altogether excessive. We do not know yet what Mr. Hardy's limitations of freedom may be. After all, darling, we do not know anything as yet of his circumstances or his surroundings. He may have a thousand calls on his time which we neither know nor understand. For all we can tell he may have a wife already — though this I do not believe or accept for a moment. And you don't either, my dear! Of course this is all a joke. We know he is free as to marriage, though I don't believe his heart is — Eh! Puss! But seriously if you ever get a chance tell him to try to be very nice to your father. Old men are often more sensitive in some things than young ones, more sensitive than even we women are supposed to be. So when he does come to see you both for he will come soon (if he hasn't come already) — don't keep him all to yourself, but contrive somehow that your father can have a little chat with him. You needn't go altogether away you know, my dear. Don't sit so far away that he can't see you nor you him (this is a whisper expressed in writing) and I dare say you will like to hear all they say to each other. But if he says a word about seeing your daddy alone for a moment, if he begins to look ill at ease or to get red and then pale and red again, or stammers and clears his throat do you just get up quietly and go out of the room without a word in the most natural way in the world, just as if you were doing some little household duty. I suppose I needn't tell you this; you know it just as well as I do, though I have known it by experience and you can not. You know how I know it darling thought I never told you this part of it. Women are Cowards. We know it though we don't always say so, and we even disguise it from others now and then. But in such a time as I have mentioned we are all Cowards. We couldn't stay if we would. We want to get away and hide our heads just as we do when it thunders. But what an awful lot of rot I am talking. When Mr. Hardy and your father meet they will, I am sure, have plenty to talk about without either you or me being the subject of it They are both sportsmen and fond of horses — and a lot of things. It is only if they don't meet that I am afraid of. I am writing by the way to Mr. Hardy this post to know where he is at present and where he has been. I shall of course write you when I hear; or if there be anything important I shall wire. We are off to London and it is possible that whilst we are there we may have unexpected meetings with all sorts of friends and calls from them. I hope, darling, that by the time we reach Ambleside we shall find you blooming full of happiness and health and freshness, the very embodiment of your name."

The letter both disquieted Joy, and soothed her. There were suggestions of fear, but there was also a consistent strain of hope. Judy would never have said such things if she did not believe them. Moreover she herself knew what Judy did not; her aunt hadn't peeped from behind window blinds at a tall figure behind lilac bushes or sitting in the darkness with only a fiery cigar tip to mark his presence. Poor Judy! The girl's sympathetic heart, made more sympathetic by her own burning love, ached when she thought of the older woman's lonely, barren life. She too had loved — and been loved; had hoped and feared, and waited. The very knowledge of how a woman would feel when the man was asking formally for parental sanction disclosed something of which the girl had never thought. She had always known Judy in such a motherly and elderly aspect that she had never realised the possibility of her having ever been in love; any more than she had given consideration to the love-making of her own mother. Now she was surprised to find that she too had been young, had loved, and had pleasures and heart-pains of her own. This set her thinking. The process of thought was silent, but its conclusion found outward expression; the girl understood now. The secret of her life — the true secret was unveiled at last:

"Poor Aunt Judy. Oh, poor Aunt Judy!"

Athlyne's letter reached him a day later, having been sent from London. It was a fairly bulky one, with a good many sheets of foreign post, written hastily in a large bold hand.

"MY DEAR FRIEND:

I have been, and am, much concerned about you. I gather from his letters that Colonel Ogilvie has been much disappointed at not having heard from you. And I want, if you will allow me to take the liberty, to speak to you seriously about it. You will give me this privilege I know — if only for the fact that I am an old maid; for the same powers that made me an old maid have made me an old woman, and such is entitled, I take it, to forbearance, if not to respect. You should — you really should be more considerate towards Colonel Ogilvie. He is an old man — much older than you perhaps think, for he bears himself as proudly as in his younger days. But the claim on you is not merely from his years; that claim must appeal to all. From you there is one more imperative still, one which is personal and paramount: he is under so very deep an obligation to you. A matter which from another would pass unconsidered as an act of thoughtfulness must now, when it is due to you, seem to him like a studied affront. I put it this way because I know you are a man of noble nature, and that generosity is to such even a stronger urge than duty — if such a thing be possible. In certain matters he is sensitive beyond belief. Even to a degree marked in a place where men still hold that their lives rest behind every word and deed, every thought or neglect towards another. I have some hesitation in mentioning this lest you should think I am summoning Fear to the side of Duty. But you are above such a misunderstanding, I am sure. Oh my dear friend do think of some of the rest of us. You have saved the life of our darling Joy — the one creature in whom all our loves are centred. Naturally we all want to see you again — to make much of you — to show you in our own, poor way how deeply we hold you in our hearts. But if Colonel Ogilvie thinks himself insulted — that is how he regards any neglect however trivial — he acts on that belief, and there is no possible holding him back. He looks on it as a sacred duty to avenge affront. You must not blame him for it. In your peaceful English life you have I think no parallel to the ungovernable waves of passion that rage in the hearts of Kentuckians when they consider their honour is touched. Ah! we poor women know it who have to suffer in silence and wait and wait, and wait; and when the worst is made known to us, to seal up the founts of our grief and pretend that we too agree with the avenging of wrong. For it is our life to be silent in men's quarrels. We are not given a part — any part. We are not supposed to even look on. It is another world from ours, and we have to accept it so. Please God may you never know what it is to be in or on the fringe of a Feud. Well I know its dread, its horror! My own life that years ago was as bright and promising as any young life can be; when the Love that had dawned on my girlhood rose and beat with noonday heat on my young-womanhood made it seem as if heaven had come down to earth. And then the one moment of misunderstanding — the quick accusation — the quicker retort — and my poor heart lying crushed between the bodies of two men whom I loved each in his proper way... Think of what I say, if only on account of what I have suffered.

"Forgive me! But my anxiety lest any such blight should come across a young life that I love far far beyond my own is heavy on me.

I have lost myself in sad thoughts of a bitter past... Indeed you must take it that my earnestness in this matter is shown in the lurid light of that past. I have been silent on it always. Never since the black cloud burst over me have I said a word to a soul — not to my sister — nor to Joy whom I adore and whose questioning to me of my love affair' — as they still call it when they speak of it- — is so sweet a tightening bond between us. I have only said to her: ‘and then he died,’ and my heart has seemed to stop beating. Be patient with me and don’t blame me. You are a man and can be tolerant. Think not of me or any gloom of my life but only that makes me sadly, grimly, terribly in earnest when I see similar elements of tragedy drawing close to each other before my eyes. You may be inclined to laugh at me — though I know you will not — and to put down my thinking of possible great quarrels arising from such small causes as an old maid’s fears. But when I have known the awful effect of a mere passing word, misunderstood to such disastrous result, no wonder that I have fears. It is due to that very cause that my fears are those of an old maid. I suppose I need not ask you to be sure to keep all this locked in your own breast. It is my secret; I have shared it with you because I deem such necessary for the happiness of — of others. I have kept it so close that not even those nearest and dearest to me have even suspected it. The rowdiness of spirit — as it seems to me — which other friends call fun and brightness and high spirits and other such insulting terms — has been my domino as I have passed through the hollow hearted carnival of life. Judge then how earnest I am when I put it aside and raise my mask for you a stranger whom I have seen but twice; I who even then was but an accessory — a super on the little stage where we began to act our little — comedy or tragedy which is it to be?

There! I have opened to you my memory, not my heart. That you have no use for. After such a letter as this I shall not pretend to go back to the Proprieties, the Convenances. If I am right in my surmise — you can guess what that is or why, have you written to the old rowdy aunt instead... there is every reason why I should be frank. But remember that I hold — and have hitherto held — what I believe to be your secret as sacredly as I hope you will hold mine. And if I am right — and from my knowledge and insight won by past suffering I pray to God that I am — you have no time to lose to make matters right and possibly to save the world one more sorrowful heart like my own. It is only a word that is wanted — a morning call — a visit of ceremony. Anything that will keep open the doors of friendship which you unlocked by your own bravery. We are going in a day or two to Ambleside. In the meantime we shall be in London at Brown's Hotel Albermarle Street where my sister, and incidentally myself, shall be glad to see you...

"Won't you let me have a line as soon as you can after you get this. I am torn with anxiety till I know what you intend to do about visiting Colonel Ogilvie. Again forgive me, Your true friend, Judy.

"P. S. — I shall not dare to read this over, lest when I had I should not have courage to send it. Accept it then with all its faults and be tolerant of them — and of me."

Athlyne read the letter through without making a pause or even an internal comment. That is how a letter should be read; to follow the writer's mind, not one's own, and so take in the sequence of thoughts and the general atmosphere as well as the individual facts. As he read he felt deeply moved. There was in the letter that manifest sincerity which showed that it was straight from the heart. And heart speaks to heart, whatever may be the medium, if the purpose is sincere. It was a surprise to him to learn that Miss Judy's high and volatile spirits rested on so sad a base. His appreciation of her worthiness came in his unconscious resolution that when he and Joy were married Aunt Judy should be an honoured guest in the house, and that they would try to lighten, with what sympathy and kindness they could, the dark shadows of her life.

He sat with the letter in his hand for some time. He was sitting in the window of the hotel at Bowness looking out on the lake. It was still early and the life of the day had hardly begun. At Bowness the life was that of the tourists and visitors and it would still be an hour or more before they began to move out on their objectives. He had very many various and whirling thoughts, but supreme amongst them was one: Time was flying. He must not delay, for every hour was more and more jeopardising his chance of winning the woman he loved. He realised to the full that his neglect of Colonel Ogilvie, for so it was being construed, was making — had made — a difficulty for him. Each day, perhaps each hour, was widening the breach; if he did not take care he might end with the door permanency closed against him. As he came to the conclusion of his reasoning he drew once more from his pocket the sealed letter to Colonel Ogilvie, and stood up. He fancied that his determination was made that he would see Colonel Ogilvie as soon as possible and broach the subject to him. As however he went towards the boat — for he was going to Ambleside by water — he postponed the intention of an immediate interview. He would wait this one day and see what would turn up. If nothing happened likely to further his wishes he would whilst at Ambleside the next morning put the letter in the post. Then he would hold himself ready for the interview with Joy's father for which the letter asked.

At Ambleside he took his place behind the lilacs in the garden and kept watch on the window where Joy was wont to appear. A little before breakfast-time she appeared there for a brief space, and then moved back into the room. He waited with what patience he could till nearly eleven o'clock when the same carriage which they used drove up to the door; waiting became then an easier task. Presently Colonel Ogilvie came out and stood on the steps. Athlyne wondered; this was the first time that Joy had not been before him. Throwing his eyes around in vague wondering as to the cause he saw Joy standing in the window dressed and pulling on her gloves. She was radiantly beautiful. Her colour was a little heightened and her lovely grey eyes shone like stars. Her gaze was fixed so that her eyes seemed to look straight before her but beyond him.

The look made him quiver as though he felt it were directed at him, and his knees began to tremble with a mighty, vague longing. For quite a minute she stood there, till her eyes falling she caught sight of her father standing by the carriage below. She drew back quickly and almost immediately appeared at the hall-door, saving:

"I am so sorry, Daddy. I hope I did not keep you waiting too long!"

"Not a bit little girl. It is a pleasure to me to wait for you; to do anything for you, my dear. Whatever else is the use of being a father."

"You dear! May we go to-day up the mountain road where we can look over the lake. I want you to have a nice glimpse of it again before you go."

Here Athlyne's heart sank for an instant This was the first idea he had of any intention of moving, and it actually shook him. Joy had as usual a handful of sugar for the horses. She went to the off side horse first and gave him his share. Then when she stood at the head of the other, her face toward the lilacs, she turned to her father and said in a low, thrilling tone:

"Daddy, am I nice to-day? Look at me!" She stood still whilst the old man looked at her admiringly, proudly, fondly.

"You are peerless, little girl. Peerless! that's it'" She was evidently pleased at the compliment, for her colour rose to a deep flush. Her grey eyes shone through it like two great grey suns. Whilst her father was speaking to the coachman she gave the other horse, now impatient, his share of the sugar and stood looking across the road. Athlyne could hardly contain himself. The few seconds, although flying so fast, were momentous. Past and present rushed together to the creation of a moment of ecstasy. The sound of the words swept him; the idea and all it rewoke and intensified, transfigured his very soul. And then he heard her say in a low languorous voice which vibrated:

"Thank you Daddy for such a sweet compliment. I am glad I said "Look at me'.'" As she spoke it seemed to Athlyne that her eyes fixed across the road sent their lightnings straight into his heart. And yet it did not even occur to him at the moment that the words could have been addressed to him.

During the drive Joy kept her father interested in all around them. He saw that she was elated and happy, and it made his heart glad to that receptive mood which is the recrudescence of youth. In the girl's mind to-day several trains of thought, all of them parental of action, went on together. She did not analyze them; indeed she was hardly conscious of them. The mechanism of mind was working to a set purpose, but one which was temperamental rather than intentional — of sex and individual character rather than of a studied conclusion.

For that morning was to her momentous. She knew it with all her instincts. Unconsciously she drew conclusions from facts without waiting to develop their logical sequence.

A telegram had arrived from Mrs. Ogilvie saying that she and Judy were now ready to leave London and, as her husband had said that he wished to escort them to Ambleside, they would be prepared on his coming to leave on the next morning or whatever later time he might fix. After a glance at the time-table he had wired back that he would go up on that night, and that they would all start on the following morning. Joy had offered to accompany him, but he would not have it: "No, little girl," he said. "Travel at night is all very well for men; but it takes it out of women. I want your mother to see the bright, red-checked girl that has been with me for the last week, and not a pale, worn-out draggled young woman with her eyes heavy with weariness. You stay here, my dear and get plenty of air and sunshine. You will not be afraid to be here alone with your maid!" Joy smiled:

"Not a bit, Daddy! I shall walk and drive all day and perhaps go down the Lake in a boat. If I do the latter I shall take Eugenie with me and we shall lunch down at Newby Bridge. We shall be home here in good time to drive over and meet you all at the station at Windermere."

From that moment Joy hardly left her father out of her sight. Instinctively she knew that the chance of her life had come. She had a conviction — it was more than a mere idea or even a belief — that if she were alone whilst her father was up in London or on the way down, that figure which even now was hidden by the lilacs would abandon secretive ways and come out into the open where she could see him close, and hear the sound of his voice — that voice whose every note made music in her ears. It was the presence of her father which kept him hidden. It was imperative, both in accordance with his wishes as well as from her own apprehensions of what might happen if they should meet unexpectedly before she had time to warn him, that no mischance should prevent an early meeting, free from any suspicion between herself and Mr. Hardy. When Daddy was well on his way... Here she would close her eyes; definite thought was lost in a languorous ecstasy. The coming day would mean to her everything or...

The drive was a fairly long one and they did not get back till nearly one o'clock. Colonel Ogilvie had said to Joy:

"I shall have a good time to-day, have plenty of fresh air and be ready for sleep when I get into the train. As I shall arrive early in the morning I shall have time to express my opinions on their conduct to those automobile people. They won't expect my coming and be able to get out of the way. I fancy it will do me good to say what I feel; or at any rate enough to give them some indication of what I could say, and shall say if there is any further delay in the matter."

When they arrived Joy went at once into the hotel leaving her father to tell the coachman at what hour to be ready for the afternoon drive. She went straight to the window and, keeping as usual behind the curtain, looked over at the lilac hushes. She could see through the foliage that there was some one there, and that satisfied her. She would have liked to have instructed the driver herself so that she would have been sure that he knew; but on this occasion a wave of diffidence suddenly overwhelmed her. Times were coming when she would not be able to afford the luxury of such an emotion, so she grasped it whilst she could.

Colonel Ogilvie was to catch the train from Windermere at nine o’clock, so the second drive should come after lunch and not after tea; and when she was in her own room, Joy feared that He might miss them. When, however, before going downstairs she looked out of the window she saw that he was still at his post. Athlyne’s campaigning experience had had its own psychology. Seeing that there was some change in the Ogilvie day he had arranged his own plans to meet it Whilst they had been taking their morning drive he had provided himself with some sandwiches; he had determined not to leave his post until he knew more. Joy’s words had all day rung in his ears, and he was now and again distracted with doubts. Was it possible that there had been any meaning or intention in her words more than was apparent? Was the spontaneity consequent on some deep feeling which evoked memory? Could he believe that she really... He would wait now before sending the letter, whatever came. In that he was adamant.

During the drive Joy was mainly silent. It was not the silence of thought; it was simply spiritual quiescence. She knew that the rest of the day was so laid out that it was unlikely it could be marred by an untoward accident. There was this in His persistent waiting that she had come to trust it. There was some intention, so manifest, though what it was was unknown to her, that it was hardly to he disturbed by any sudden exigency. She lived at the moment in a world of calm, a dream-world of infinite happiness. Now and again she woke to the presence of her father and then poured on him in every way in which a young woman can all the treasures of her thought and affection. This made the old man so happy that he too was content to remain silent when she ceased to speak.

When they got back to the hotel, she spoke to the driver:

“You will be here at eight o’clock please, as you will have to drive Colonel Ogilvie to the station at Windermere in good time to catch the nine o'clock train. I shall not want you in the morning as I intend to take a walk; but you must be at Windermere to meet my father at five o'clock. If to-morrow afternoon there is any change in his plans he will wire the hotel people and they will let you know. Perhaps you had better call here on your way to Windermere as I may go over in the carriage. But if I am not here do not wait for me; I may possibly walk over. When you have left Colonel Ogilvie at Windermere to-night you will have to leave me back here. I am going to the depot with him."

Then she went into the doorway, and hurried to the sitting-room where she looked out into the garden — where the lilacs grew.

CHAPTER 13

INSTINCTIVE PLANNING

Man’s unconscious action is a strange thing. Athlyne had just heard words which took from him a strain under which he had suffered for a whole week of waiting and watching; words which promised him the opportunity for which he had longed for many weeks. His nerves had been strung to tension so high that now it would seem only natural if the relief sent him into a sort of delirium. But he quietly lit a cigar, taking care that it was properly cut and properly lit, and smoked luxuriously as he moved across the garden and into the street. Joy from her window saw him go, and her admiration of his ease and self possession and magnificent self-reliance sent fresh thrills through her flesh.

When Athlyne went out of the garden he had evidently made up his mind, consciously, or unconsciously, to some other point in connection with the motor for he visited such shops as were open and made some purchases — caps, veils, cloaks and such like gear suitable for the use of a tall young lady. These he took with him in a hired carriage to the hotel at Bowness, where he added them to certain others already sent from London. Then he told the chauffeur to give the car a careful overhauling so that it be in perfect order, and went for a stroll up the Lake.

Shortly he was in a mental and physical tumult; the period which had elapsed since he heard the news of Colonel Ogilvie’s coming departure had been but the prelude to the storm. At first he could not think; he had no words, no sequence of ideas, not even vague intentions. He had only sensations; and these though they moved and concentrated every nerve in his body were without even physical purpose. He went like one in a dream. But in the background of his mind was a fact which stood out firm and solid like the profile of a mountain seen against the glow of a western sunset. Joy would be alone to-morrow; the opportunity he waited for was at last at hand! The recognition of this seemed to pull him together, to set all his faculties working simultaneously; and as each had a different method the tumult was in reducing them to unison — in achieving one resultant from all the varying forces. Gradually out of the chaos came the first clear intent: he must so master the whole subject that when the opportunity had come he should be able to avail himself of it to the full. From this he proceeded to weigh the various possibilities, till gradually he began to realise what vague purpose had been behind his wish to have his automobile in perfect working order. It did not even occur to him that with such machinery at his command he might try to carry her off, either without her consent or with it. All that he wanted in the first instance was to have fitting opportunity of discovering how Joy regarded him. The last twenty-four hours had opened to his mind such glorious possibilities that every word she had said, every look on her eloquent face (though such looks had manifestly not been intended for him) had a place in a chain which linked her heart to his. "Look at me!" "I am glad I asked you to look at me!" though spoken to her father seemed to have another significance. It was as though an eager thought had at last found expression. "Good night! Good night, beloved!" though ostensibly spoken to the twilight was breathed with such fervour, with such languishing eyes and with such soft pouting of scarlet lips that it seemed impossible that it should have other than a human objective. These thoughts swept the man into a glow of passion. He was young and strong and ardent, and he loved the woman with all his heart; with all his soul; with all the strength of human passion. It is a mistake to suppose — as some abstract thinkers seem to do always, and most people at some moment of purely spiritual exaltation — that the love of a man and a woman each for each other is, even at its very highest, devoid of physical emotion. The original Creator did not manifestly so intend. The world of thought is an abstract world whose inner shrine is where soul meets soul. The world of life is the world of the heart, and its beating is the sway of the pendulum between soul and flesh. The world of flesh is the real world; wrought of physical atoms in whose recurrent groupings is the elaborated scheme of nature. Into this world has been placed Man to live and rule. To this end his body is fixed with various powers and complications and endurances; with weaknesses and impulses and yieldings; with passions to animate, with desires to attract, and animosities to repel. And as the final crowning of this wondrous work, the last and final touch of the Creator's hand, Sex for the eternal renewing of established forces. How can souls be drawn to souls when such are centred in bodies which mutually repel? How can the heart quicken its beats when it may not come near enough to hear the answering throb? No! If physical attraction be not somewhere, naught can develop. Judy, the outspoken, had once almost horrified a little group of matrons who were discussing the interest which a certain young cleric was beginning to take in one of the young female parishioners. When one of them said, somewhat sanctimoniously, that his interest was only in the salvation of her immortal soul, that he was too good a man to ever think of falling in love as ordinary men do, the vivacious old maid replied:

"Not a bit of it, my dear! When a man troubles himself about an individual young woman's soul you may be quite certain that his eyes have not neglected her body. And moreover you will generally, if not always, find that she has a pair of curving red lips, or a fine bust, or a well-developed figure somewhere!"

Athlyne loved Joy in all ways, so that the best of his nature regulated the standard of his thoughts. His was no passing fancy which might or might not develop, flame up, and fade away. He had, he felt, found the other half of him, lost in the primeval chaos; and he wanted the union to be so complete that it would outlive the clashing worlds in the final cataclysm. Healthy people are healthy in their loves and even in their passions. These two young people were both healthy, both red-blooded, both of ardent, passionate nature; and they were drawn together each to each by all the powers that rule sex and character. To say that their love was all of earth would be as absurd as to say that it was all of heaven. It was human, all human, and all that such implies. Heaven and earth had both their parts in the combination; and perhaps, since both were of strong nature and marked individuality, Hell had its due share in the amalgam.

Athlyne thought, and thought, and thought till the length of his own shadow recalled the passing of time. He postponed the thinking over his plans for to-morrow — the active part of them, and hastened back to his place behind the lilacs.

He was just in time. The carriage stood at the door with Colonel Ogilvie's "grip-sack" at the driver's feet. Then the Boots ran down the steps and held the carriage door open. Joy came holding her father's arm. They got into the carriage and drove away. Athlyne waited, sitting on the seat on the grass lawn smoking luxuriously. He forgot that he was hungry and thirsty, forgot everthing except that he would before long see Joy again, this time alone. His thoughts were evidently pleasant, for the time flew fast. Indeed he must have been in something like a waking dream which absorbed all his faculties for he did not notice the flight of time at all. It was only when, recalled to himself the passing of a carriage, he looked up and saw Joy that he came back to reality. To his disappointment her head was turned away. When within sight of the garden, she had noticed him and as she did not wish him, just yet, to know that she knew of his presence, she found her eyes fixed on the other side of the street. It was the easiest and most certain way of avoiding complexities. He slipped over to the lilacs to see her alight. When she had done so she turned to the coachman and said:

"You understand I shall not want you in the morning as I shall be out walking; but if I don't send for you in the afternoon, or if you don't get any message you will meet my father at Windermere station at a quarter to five."

She went to the front of the carriage and stroked the horses' noses and necks after her usual fashion. He had as good a view of her profile as the twilight would allow. Then with a pleasant "Good evening!" to the coachman she tripped up the steps and disappeared. For more than a quarter of an hour Athlyne watched the windows; but she did not appear. This was natural enough, for she was behind the curtains peeping out to see if he went back to his seat on the lawn.

When she saw that he did not return Joy, with a gentle sigh, went to her room.

That sigh meant a lot. It was the reaction from an inward struggle. All day she had been suffering from the dominance of two opposing ideas, between which her inward nature swayed pendulum-wise. This "inward nature" comprised her mind, her reason, her intelligence, her fears, her hopes, her desires — the whole mechanism and paraphernalia of her emotional and speculative psychology. She would fain have gone out boldly into the garden and there met Mr. Hardy face to face — of course by pure accident. But this vague intention was combated by a maiden fear; one of those delicious, conscious apprehensions made to be combated unless thoroughly supported by collateral forces; one of those gentle fears of sex which makes yielding so sweet. Following this came the fixed intention of that walk to be taken in the morning. The morning was still far off and its apprehensive possibilities were not very dreadful. Indeed she did not really fear them at all for she had privately made up her mind that, fear or no fear, she was going on that walk. The only point left open was its direction. The hour was positively settled; an hour earlier than that at which for the past few days she had driven out with Daddy! Even to herself she would not admit that her choice of time was in any way controlled or influenced by the fact that it was the same hour about which Mr. Hardy made his appearance in the garden.

But all the same her thoughts and her intentions were becoming conscious. For good or evil she was getting more reckless in her desires; passion was becoming dominant — and she knew it This is perhaps the most dangerous phase of a woman's trial. She knows that there is at work a growing desire for self-surrender which it is her duty to combat. She knows that all contra reasons which can be produced will be — must be — overcome. She knows with all the subtle instincts of her sex that she is deliberately setting her feet on a slope down which some impulse, perhaps but momentary, will carry her with resistless force. It is the preparatory struggle to defeat; the clearing away of difficulties which might later be hampering or even obstructive; the clamant wish for defeat which makes for the conquered the satisfaction if not the happiness of finality. To all children of Adam, of either sex, this phase may come. To the strongest and most resolute warrior must be a moment when he can no more; when the last blow has been struck and the calling of another world is ringing in his ears; to the resolute amongst men this moment is the moment of death. To women it is surrender of self; surrender to the embrace of Death — or to the embrace of Love. It is the true end of the battle. The rest is but the carrying out of the Treaty of Peace, the Triumph of the Victory in which she is now proud to have a part — if it be only that of captive!

There was no sleep for Joy that night. She heard the hours strike one after the other, never missing one. She was not restless. She lay still, and quiet, and calm; patient with that patience which is an acceptance that what is to come is good. In all the long vigil she never faltered in her intention to take that walk in the forenoon. What was to happen in it she did not guess. She had a conviction that that tall figure would follow her discreetly; and that when she was alone they would somehow meet. It might be that she would hear his voice before she saw him; that was most likely, indeed almost certain, for she would not turn till he had spoken... or at any rate till she knew that he was close behind her... Here her thoughts would stop. She would lie in a sort of ecstasy... whatever might come after that would be happiness. She would see Him... look into His eyes... “Look at me, Joy!” seemed to sound in her ears in sweet low music like a whisper. Then she would close her eyes and lie motionless, passive, breathing as gently as a child; high-strung, conscious, awake and devoid of any definite intent When she was dressing for the day she put on one of the simplest and prettiest of her dresses, one which she had directed over night to be got ready; a sort of heavy gauze of dull white which fell in long full folds showing her tall slim figure to its perfect grace. Her maid who was a somewhat silent person, not given to volubility unless encouraged, looked at her admiringly as she said:

"I do think miss that is the most becoming of all your frocks!" This pleased her and sent a red glow through her cheeks. Then, fearing if she seemed to think too much of the matter it might seem suspicious as to some purpose, she said quietly:

"Perhaps then it would be better if I put on one of the lawn dresses. I am going for a walk this morning and as it may be dusty a frock that will not catch the dust may be better."

"It does seem a pity miss to wear such a pretty frock and spoil it when there is no one here to see it; not even your father." This gave Joy an opening of which she quickly availed herself. She had not the least intention of changing the frock or of looking, if she could avoid it, one whit below her best.

"Fie, Eugenie! one doesn't put on frocks to attract. If you think that way, I shall wear it; even if it is to get dusty." The Abigail who was a privileged person answered gravely:

"That's quite true, Miss, exactly as you say it One doesn't put on nice frocks to attract; and that one is yourself. But all the rest do!" Joy's merry laugh showed the measure of her ebullient happiness.

"Dear me! Eugenie. You are quite an orthoepist — indeed a precisionist I shall have to polish up my grammar. However I'll keep on the frock if only in compliment to your sense of terminological exactitude!"

A little after breakfast, when the time for starting on the walk drew nigh, Joy did not feel so elated. Woman-like she was not anxious to begin. It was not that she in any way faltered in her purpose, but merely that she was suffering from the nervousness which comes to those of high strung temperaments in momentous crises. Humming merrily she put on her hat and finished her toilet for her walk. In the sitting room from the shelter of the curtain she looked out of the window, as she tried to think, casually. Her eyes turned towards the lilac bushes, but caught no indication of the tall figure that she sought Her heart fell. But a second later it leaped almost painfully as she saw Mr. Hardy sitting out openly on the seat, and strange to say — for she had come to identify that seat with the practice — not smoking. He evidently had no present thought of being concealed. Why? The answer to her own question came in a rush of blood to her face, a rush so quick and thorough that it seemed for the moment to deplete her heart which beat but faintly... When she looked again he had risen and was moving toward the lilacs.

Without a word she walked downstairs and out through the hall-door.

Athlyne had not slept either that night. But the manner and range of his thoughts showed the difference between the sexes. Both his imagining and his reasoning were to practical purpose. He wanted to see Joy, to speak with her, to prove to himself if his hoping was in any way justified by fact. He had for so long been concentrating his thoughts on one subject that doubts at first shadowy had become real. It seemed therefore to him that in his planning for the morrow he was dealing with real things, not imaginative ones. And, after all, there is nothing more real than doubt — so far as it goes. Victor Cousin took from its reality, his subtlest argument for belief: “At this point scepticism itself vanishes; for if a man doubt everything else, at least he cannot doubt that he doubts.” So with Athlyne. By accepting doubt as reality he began the experiment for its cure.

In the silence of the night, with nerves high-strung and with brain excited he tried in those most earnest hours of his life, when for good or ill he was to organise his intellectual forces, to arrange matters so that at the earliest time he might with certainty learn his fate. He had an idea that in such a meeting as was before him he must not be over-precipitated. And yet he must not check impulsiveness as long as its trend was in the right direction. He knew that a woman's heart is oftener won by assault than by siege. For himself he had plenty of patience as well as a sufficiency of spirit; his task at present therefore was one of generalship alone: the laying out of the battle plans, the disposition of his forces. As he thought, and as his ideas and his intentions came into order, he began to understand better the purpose of those two preparations of his which were already complete: the overhauling of his automobile and the supplying it with female wraps. He intended by some means or other, dependent on developing opportunity, to bring her for a ride in the motor. There, all alone he would be able to learn, perhaps at first from her bearing and then from her own lips, how she regarded him.

Athlyne was a young man, a very, young man in his real knowledge of the sex. There are hundreds, thousands, of half-pulseless boys, flabby of flesh and pallid with enervating dissipation, who would have smiled cynically — they have not left in them grit enough for laughter — at his doubting.

He would not frighten her at first. Here for a time he took himself to task for seeming to plot against the woman he loved. Surely it would be better to treat her with perfect fairness; to lay his heart at her feet; tell her with all the passionate force that swept him how he loved her — tell it with what utterance he had. Then he should wait her decision. No, not decision! That was too cold a word — thought.

If indeed there was any answering love to his, little decision would be required. Had he made any decision! From the first moment he had looked in her beautiful grey eyes and lost himself in their depths, his very soul had gone out to her. And it might be that she too had felt something of the same self-abandonment. He could never forget how on that afternoon visit at the Holland she had raised her eyes to his in answer to his passionate appeal: “Joy, Look at me!” Then at that memory, and at the later memory when she had spoken the words herself only the day before — the sweetness of her voice was still tingling in his ears, a sort of tidal wave of lover’s rapture swept over him. It overwhelmed him so completely that it left him physically gasping for breath. He was in a tumult; he could not lie in bed. He leaped to his feet and walked to and fro with long, passionate strides. He threw up the lower sash of the window, and looked out into the moonlight, craning his neck round to the right so that his eyes were in the direction of Ambleside as though the very ardour of his gaze could pierce through distance and stone walls and compel Joy’s white eyelids to raise so that he might once more lose himself in those grey deeps wherein his soul alone found peace.

In this passion of adoration all his doubts seemed to disappear, as the sun drinks up the mist. He felt as though uplifted. At the very idea of Joy’s loving him as he loved her he felt more worthy, more strong, and with a sense of triumph which had no parallel in his life. He stood looking out at the beauty of the scene before him, till gradually it became merged in his thoughts with Joy and his hopes which the morrow might realise. He never knew exactly how long he stood there. It must have been a long time, for when he realised any sense of time at all he was cramped and chill; and the forerunner of the morning light coming from far away behind him was articulating the fields on the hill-slopes across the lake.

He was then calm. All the thinking and reasoning and planning and passion of the night had been wrought into unity. His mind was made up as to the first stage of his undertaking. He would bring the car to Ambleside and leave it with the chauffeur outside the town. Then he would take his place in the garden and wait till she came out for that walk of which she had told her father. He would cautiously follow her; and when there was a fair opportunity for uninterrupted speech would come to her. If he found there was no change in her manner to him — and here once again the memory of those lifting eyes made him tremble — he would try to get her to come for a ride in his car. There, wrapped in the glory of motion and surrounded by all the grandeur of natural beauty, he would pour out his soul to her and put his fate to the touch. Then if all were well he would send on the letter to her father and would pay his formal visit as soon as might be. He would take care to have ready a luncheon basket so that if she would ride with him they might have together an ethereal banquet.

It is strange that even those who are habitually cautious, whose thoughts and deeds alike are compelled and ruled by reason, will in times of exaltation forget their guiding principle. They will refuse to acknowledge the existence of chance; and will proceed calmly on their way as though life was as a simple cord, with Inclination pulling at one end of it and Fact yielding at the other.

CHAPTER 14

A BANQUET ON OLYMPUS

On this occasion Athlyne did not continue to sit out on the lawn. Now that he wished to overtake Joy unawares he was as careful to hide his presence from her as he had previously hidden it from her father. He had hardly ensconced himself in his usual cover when Joy came out on the steps. Her maid was with her and together they stood on the steps speaking. As she turned to come down the steps Joy said:

"Perhaps I had better arrange to come back after a short walk; there might be some telegram from father to be attended to. If there is not, I can then go for a real, long walk." She did not say more but moved briskly down the roadway without ever turning her head. Athlyne slipped through the gate of the garden, following at such distance that he could easily keep out of view in case she should turn. When she had cleared the straggling houses which made the outskirts of the little town she walked slowly, and then more slowly still. Finally she sat on a low wall by the roadside with her back partially turned to Ambleside and looked long at the beautiful view before her where, between the patches of trees which here shut out the houses altogether and heightened the air of privacy of the bye road, the mountain slopes rose before her.

This was the opportunity for which Athlyne was waiting. He had hardly dared to hope that it would be in a spot so well adapted to his wishes. Dear simple soul! he never imagined that it had been already chosen — marked down by a keener intellect than his own, and that intellect a woman's!

Joy knew that he was coming; that he was drawing closer, that he was at hand. It was not needed that she had now and again thrown a half glance behind her at favourable moments as she went There was at work a subtler sense than any dealing with mere optics; a sense that can float on ether waves as surely as can any other potent force. Nay, may it not be the same sense specialised. The sense that makes soul known to soul, sex to sex; that tells of the presence of danger; that calls kind to kind and race to race, from the highest of creation to the lowest. And so she was prepared and waited, calm after the manner of her sex. For when woman waits for the coming of man her whole being is in suspense. Though in secret her heart beat painfully Joy did not look round, made no movement till the spoken words reached her:

"Miss Ogilvie is it not!"

Slowly she turned, as to a voice but partly heard or partly remembered. Athlyne felt his heart sink down, down as he saw the slowness of the movement and realised the absence of that quick response which he had by long and continuous thinking since last night encouraged himself to expect. The quick gleam of pleasure in the face as she turned, the light in her marvellous grey eyes, the gentle blush which despite herself passed like an Alpenglow from forehead to neck did not altogether restore his equanimity or even encourage him sufficiently to try to regain that pinnacle of complacent hope on which up to then he had stood.

"Why Mr. Hardy," she said warmly as she rose quickly to her feet. "This is real nice. I was afraid we were not going to see you whilst we were in England."

It was beautifully done; no wonder that some women can on the stage carry a whole audience with them, when off it so many can deceive intellects more powerful than their own. And yet it was not all acting. She did not intend it as such not for a moment did she wish or intend to deceive. It was only the habit of obedience to convention which was guiding natural impulse into safe channels. For who shall say where nature — the raw, primeval crude article — ends or where convention, which is the artfulness necessitated by the elaboration of organised society, begins. A man well known in New York used to say. “All men are equal after the fish!” Kipling put the same idea in another way:... “the Colonel’s Lady and Judy O’Grady are sisters under their skins!”

When Athlyne looked into Joy’s eyes — and there was full opportunity for so doing — all his intentions of reserve went from him. He was lover all over; nothing but lover, with wild desire to be one with her he loved. His eyes began to glow, his knees to tremble, then every muscle of his body became braced; and when he spoke his voice at once deepened and had a masterful ring which seemed to draw Joy’s very soul out towards him. Well it was for her main purpose that her instinct had given that first chill of self-possession; had the man been able to go on from where he had first started nothing that she knew of reserve or self-restraint could have prevented her from throwing herself straightway into his arms. Had Athlyne not begun with that same chill, which to him took the measure of a repulse, he would have caught her to him with all the passions of many kinds which were beginning to surge in him.

But what neither of them could effect alone, together they did. The pause of the fraction of a second in the springing of their passion made further restraint possible. There is no fly-wheel in the mechanism of humanity to carry the movement of the crank beyond its level. Such machinery was not invented at the time of the organisation of Eden.

"I have longed for this moment more than I can say; more than words can tell!" His voice vibrated with the very intensity of his truth. Joy's eyes, despite her efforts to keep them fixed, fell. Her bosom rose and fell quickly and heavily with the stress of her breathing. Her knees trembled and a slow pallor took the place of the flush on her face. Seemingly unconsciously she murmured so faintly that only a lover's ear could hear or follow it:

"I have longed for it too — oh so much!" The words dropped from her lips like faint music. Instinctively she put her hand on the wall beside her to steady herself; she feared she was going to faint.

Athlyne, seeing and hearing, thrilled through to the very marrow of his bones. His great love controlled, compelled him. He made no movement towards her but looked with eyes of rapture. Such a moment was beyond personal satisfaction; it was of the gods, not of men. And so they stood.

Then the tears welled over in Joy's eyes beneath the fallen lids. They hung on the dark, curly lashes and rolled like silver beads down the softness of her cheeks. Still Athlyne made no sign; he felt that the time had not yet come. The woman was his own now, he felt instinctively; and it was his duty — his sacred privilege to protect her. Unthinkingly he moved a step back on the road he had come. Instinctively Joy did the same. It was without thought or intention on the part of either; all instinctive, all natural. The usage of the primeval squaw to follow her master outlives races.

Then he paused. She came up to him and they walked level. Not another word had been spoken; but there are silences that speak more than can be written in ponderous tomes. These two — this man and this woman — knew. They had in their hearts in those glorious moments all the wisdom won by joy and suffering through all the countess ages since the Lord rested on that first Sabbath eve and felt that His finished work was good.

When, keeping even step, they had taken a few quiet paces, Athlyne spoke in a soft whisper that thrilled:

“Joy, look at me!”

Without question or doubt of any kind she raised her shining eyes to his. And then, slowly and together as though in obedience to some divine command, their lips met in a long, loving kiss in which their very souls went out each to the other.

When their mouths parted, with a mutual sigh, each gave a quick glance up and down the road; neither had thought of it before.

The tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil did not die in Eden bower. It flourishes still in even the most unlikely places all the wide world over. And they who taste its fruit must look with newly-opened eyes on the world around them.

Together, still keeping step, not holding each other, not touching except by the chance of movement, they walked to where the bye-road joined the main one. As yet they had spoken between them less than threescore words. They wondered later in the day when they talked together how so much as they had thought and felt and conveyed had been packed into such compass. Now, as they paused at the joining of the roads, Athlyne said — and strange to say it was in an ordinary commonplace voice:

“Joy won’t you come with me for a tide. I have my motor here, and we can go alone. There is much I want to say to you — much to tell you, and the speed will help us. I want to rush along — to fly. Earth is too prosaic for me — now!” Joy looking softy up caught the lightning that flashed from his eyes, and her own fell. A tide of red swept her face; this passed in a moment, however, leaving a divine pink like summer sunset on snowy heights. Her voice was low and thrilling as she answered with eyes still cast down.

"I'll go with you where you will — to the end of the world — or Heaven or Hell if you wish — now!"

And then as if compelled by a force beyond control she raised her eyes to his.

"Shall you come with me to the car; or shall I bring it to the hotel?" He spoke once more in something like his ordinary voice.

"Neither!" she answered with her eyes still fixed on his unflinchingly. He felt their witchery run through him like fire now; his blood seemed to boil as it rushed through his veins. Love and passion were awake and at one.

"I must go back to see if there is any wire from Daddy, and to leave word that I am going for a drive. I shall tell my maid that I shall return in good time. Father and Mother and Aunt Judy are to arrive at Windermere at five o'clock unless we hear to the contrary. You bring up the motor to — to there where we met." Her eyes burned through him as without taking them from his she raised an arm and pointed gracefully, up the bye-road, towards where they had sat "Don't come with me," she said as he moved with her. "It will be sweeter to keep our secret to ourselves."

And so, he raising his cap as he stood aside, she passed on after sending one flashing look of love right through him.

At the hotel she found a wire from her father to the effect that they would not be able to leave Euston at 11.30 as intended but that they hoped to reach Windermere at 7.05. This pleased her, for it gave her another two hours for that motor drive to which she looked forward with beating heart. She told her maid that she would be out till late in the afternoon as she was going motoring with a friend; and that she, Eugenie, could please herself as to how she would pass the time. When the maid asked her what she wished as to lunch she answered:

"I shall not want any lunch; but if we feel hungry we can easily get some on the way."

"Which way shall you be going, Miss, in case any one should ask."

"I really don't know Eugenie. I just said I would join in the drive. I daresay it is up somewhere amongst the lakes. That is where the fine scenery is."

"And what about wraps, miss? You will want something warm for motoring. That dress you have on is rather thin for the purpose."

"Oh dear; oh dear!" she answered with chagrin. "This will do well enough, I think. We shall not, I expect, be going very far. If I find I want a wrap I can borrow one." And off she set for the rendezvous.

In the meantime Athlyne had found the car, and had given instructions to the chauffeur to remain at an inn at Ambleside which he had already noted for the purpose and where a telegram would find him in case it might be necessary to give any instructions. He had made sure that the luncheon basket which he had ordered at Bowness was in its place. Then he had driven back to the bye-road and waited with what patience he could for the coming of Joy.

She came up the bye-road walking fast enough. Up to that point she had walked leisurely, but when she saw the great car all flaming magnificently in scarlet and gold she forgot everything in the way of demureness, and hurried forward. She had also seen Mr. Hardy. That morning he had put on his motor clothes, for he knew he had to look forward to a long spell of hard work before him — work of a kind which needs special equipment. More than ever did he look tall and lithe and elegant in his well-fitting suit of a soft dark leather. When he caught sight of Joy, and saw that she was still in her pretty white frock he began to lift from the bottom of the tonneau a pile of wraps which he spread on the side. Joy did not notice the things at first; her eyes were all for him. He stepped forward to meet her and, after a quick glance round to see that they were alone, took her in his arms and kissed her. She received the kiss in the most natural way — as if it was a matter of course, and returned it. It is surprising what an easy art to learn kissing is, and how soon even the most bashful of lovers become reconciled to its exacting rules!

Then she began to admire his car, partly to please him, partly because it was really a splendid machine admirably wrought to its special purpose — speed. He lifted a couple of coats and asked:

"Which will you wear?"

"Must I wear one? It is warm enough isn't it without a coat?"

"At present, yes! But when our friend here" he slapped the car affectionately "wakes up and knows who he has the honour of carrying you'll want it. You have no idea what a difference a fifty or sixty mile breeze makes."

"I'll take this one, please," she said without another word; a ready acquiescence to his advice which made him glow afresh. One after another she took all the articles which his loving forethought had provided, and put them on prettily. She felt, and he felt too, that each fresh adornment was something after the manner of an embrace. At the last he lifted the motor cap and held it out to her. She took it with a smile and a blush.

"I really quite forgot my hat," she said. "Tis funny how your memory goes when you're very eager!" This little speech, unconsciously uttered, sent a wave of sweet passion through the man.

“Very Eager!” She went on:

“But where on earth am I to put it? I think I had almost better hide it here behind the hedge and retrieve it when we get back!” Athlyne smiled superiorly — that sort of affectionate tolerant superiority which a woman admires in a man she loves and which the least sentimental man employs unconsciously at times. He stooped into the tonneau and from under one of the seats drew out a leather bonnet-box which ran in and out on a slide. As he touched a spring this flew open, showing space and equipment for several hats and a tiny dressing bag.

“Why, dear, there is everything in the world in your wonderful car.”

How he was thrilled by her using the word — the first time her lips had used it to him. It was none the less sweet because spoken without thought. She herself had something of the same feeling. She quivered in a languorous ecstasy. But she did not even blush at the thought, it had been but the natural expression of her feeling and she was glad she had said it. Their eyes searched each other and told their own eloquent tale.

“Darling!” he said, and bending over kissed again the rosy mouth that was pouted to meet him.

In silence he opened the door of the tonneau. She drew back.

“Must I go in there — alone?”

“I can’t go with you, darling. I must sit in the seat to drive. Unless you would rather we had the chauffeur!”

“You stupid old... dead” this in a whisper. “I want to sit beside you — as close as I can... darling’ She sank readily into the arms which instinctively opened.

True love makes its own laws, its own etiquettes. When lovers judge harshly each the conduct of the other it is time for the interference or the verdict of strangers. But not till then.

Athlyne took the wheel, feeling in a sort of triumphant glory; in every way other than he had expected. He thought that he would be ardent and demonstrative; he was protective. The very trustfulness of her reception of his caresses and her responsiveness to them made for a certain intellectual quietude.

Joy too was in a sort of ecstatic calm. There was such completeness about her happiness that all thought of self disappeared. She did not want anything to be changed in the whole universe. She did not want time to fly betwixt now and her union with the man she loved. That might — would — come later, but in the meanwhile happiness was so complete as to transcend ambition, hope, time.

Athlyne, who had made up his mind as to the direction of the drive, came down on the high road and drove a moderate speed to Ambleside; he thought that it would be wise to go slowly so as not to be too conspicuous. He had given Joy a dust-veil but she had not yet adjusted it. The present pace did not require such protection, and the idea of concealing her identity did not even enter into her head. When they were passing the post-office a sudden recollection came to Athlyne, and he stopped the car suddenly. Joy for an instant was a little alarmed and looked towards him inquiringly.

“Only a letter which I want to post!” he said in reply as he stepped down on the pavement. He opened his jacket and took from his pocket a letter which he placed in the box. Joy surmised afresh about the letter; she vaguely wondered if it was the same that she had seen him close and put into his pocketbook. The thought was, however, only a passing one. She had something else than other people’s letters to think about at present.

Just as he was turning back from the post box Eugenie, who was taking advantage of her freedom, passed along the pavement. She stopped to admire the tall chauffeur whom she thought the handsomest man she had ever seen. She did not know him. Her service with Miss Ogilvie had only commenced with the visit to London: up to the time of her leaving Italy Mrs. Ogilvie's maid had attended to Joy. She stood back and pretended to be looking in at a window as she did not care to be seen staring openly at him. Then she saw that he was no ordinary' chauffeur. It was with a sigh that she said to herself:

'Voila! Un vrai Monsieur.' Her eyes following him as he turned the starting handle and took his seat behind the wheel, she saw that his companion was her mistress. Not wishing to appear as if prying on her either, she instinctively turned away.

As Athlyne was arranging himself to his driving work he said quietly to Joy: "Sorry for delaying, but it was a most important letter, which I want to be delivered to-night. It might be late if it was not posted till Carlisle." This was the first knowledge Joy had of the direction of the journey. Eugenie heard only the last word as the car moved off.

The pace was comparatively slow until the outskirts of Ambleside had been passed; then he told Joy to put on her spectacles and donned his own. When they were both ready he increased the pace, and they flew up to the shores of Rydal Water. At Joy's request they slowed down whilst the lake was in sight; but raced again till the road ran close to the peaceful water of Grasmere. But when Grasmere with its old church and Coleridge's tomb lay away to their left they flew again up the steep road to Thirlmere. Athlyne was a careful driver and the car was a good hill climber. It was only when the road was quite free ahead that they went at great speed. They kept steadily on amongst the rising mountains, only slackening as they passed to Thirlmere and dropped down to Keswick. They did not stop here, but passing by the top of Derwent-water drew up for a few minutes to look down the lake whose wooded islands add so much to the loveliness of the view. Then on again full speed by the borders of Bassenthwaite Lake and on amongst the frowning hills to Cockermouth.

Joy was in a transport of delight the whole time. Her soul seemed to be lifted by the ever-varying beauty of the panorama as they swept along; and the rushing speed stirred her blood. She was silent, save at ecstatic moments when she was quite unable to control herself. Athlyne was silent too. He had been over the ground already, and besides such driving required constant care and attention. He was more than ever careful in his work, for was not Joy — his Joy! — his passenger.

They did not stop at Cockermouth but turned into the main road and, passing Bride-kirk — and Bothel, flew up to Carlisle. As he slowed down at the city wall looking at his watch said quietly:

"An hour and a half and some fifty miles. Let us go on and eat our lunch in Scotland."

"Oh do! Go on! Go on — darling! I forgot to tell you that I have had a wire; they don't get in till seven; so we have two more hours," cried Joy enthusiastically. This time she used the word of endearment instinctively and without a pause. "Practice makes perfect" says the old saw.

Athlyne controlled himself and went at quiet pace through the Cumberland capital. He would like to have put the engine at full speed; the last word had fired him afresh. However, he did not want to get into police trouble. When he came out on the Northern road and climbed the steep hill to Stanwix he felt freer. The road was almost a dead level and there was little traffic, only a stray cart here and there. Then he let go, and the car jumped forward like an eager horse. Athlyne felt proud of it, just as though it had an intention of its own — that it wanted to show Joy how it loved to carry her. Joy almost held her breath as they swept along here. The wind whistled around her head and she had to keep her neck stiff against the pressure of the fifty-mile breeze. They slowed at the forking of the road beyond Kingstown; and at the Esk bridge and its approaches; otherwise they went at terrific speed till they reached the border where the road crossed the Sark. Then, keeping the Lochberie road to the right, they rushed away through Annan towards Dumfries.

Joy did not know that at that turning off to Annan they were almost in touch with Gretna Green. Athlyne did not think of it at the time. Had the knowledge or the thought of either been engaged on the subject the temptation it would have brought might have been too much for lovers in their rapturous condition... and the course of this history, might have been different.

The run to the outskirts of Dumfries, where the traffic increased, was another wild rush which wrought both the occupants of the car to a high pitch of excitement.

To Joy it seemed a sort of realisation. On the drive to Carlisle, and from that on over the Border, the fringing hills of the Solway had been a dim and mystery-provoking outline. But now the hills were at hand, before them and to the north; whilst far across the waste of banks and shoals of Solway Firth rose the Cumberland mountains, a mighty piling mass of serrated blue haze. It was a convincing recognition of the situation; this was Scotland, and England was far behind! Instinctively she leaned closer to her companion at the thought.

Between Dumfries and Casde Douglas was a long hill to climb within a stretch of seven miles. But the Delaunay-Belleville breasted it nobly and went up with unyielding energy. Then, when the summit at Crocketford was reached, she ran down the hill to Urr Water with a mighty rush which seemed to carry her over the lesser hill to Casde Douglas. From thence the road to Dairy was magnificent for scenery. At Crossmicheal it came close to the Ken whose left bank it followed right up by Parton to St. John's Town of Dalry where it crossed the river. Athlyne had intended to rest a while somewhere about here; but the old coach road, winding with the curves of the river, looked so inviting that he ran a few miles up north towards Carsphairn. Coming to a bye-road where grew many fine trees of beech and stone pine which gave welcome shade, he ran up a few hundred yards to where the road curved a little. Here was an ideal spot for a picnic, and especially for a picnic of two like the present.

The curving of the road made an open space, which the spreading trees above shaded. Deep grass was on the wide margin of the flat road which presently dipped to cross a shallow rill of bright water which fell from a little rocky ledge, tinkling happily through the hum of summer insect life. Wildflowers grew everywhere. It was idyllic and delightful and beautiful in every way, even to where, towering high above a Druidic ruin in the foreground, the lofty-hills of Carsphairn rose far away between them and the western sky. In itself the scene wanted for absolute perfection some figures in the foreground. And presently it had them in a very perfect form. Joy clapped her hands with delight like a happy child as she glanced around her. Athlyne drew up sharp, and jumping from his seat held out his hand to Joy who sprang beside him on the road. As they stood together when Joy's wrap had been removed they made a handsome couple. Both tall and slim and elegant and strong. Both straight as lances; both bright and eager; with the light of love and happiness shining on them more notably than even the flicker of sunlight between the great stems and branches of the trees. His brown hair seemed to match her black; the brown eyes and the grey, both were lit with a "light that never came from land or sea!" Joy's eyes fell under the burning glances of her lover; the time had not vet come for that absolutely fearless recognition which, being a man's unconscious demand, a woman instinctively resists. Athlyne recognised the delicacy and acquiesced. All this without a single spoken word. Then he spoke:

"Was there ever such a magnificent run in the world. More than a hundred miles on end without a break or pause. And every moment a lifetime of bliss — to me at all events — Darling!"

"And to me!" Joy's eyes flashed grey lightning as she raised them for a moment to his, and held them there. Athlyne's knees trembled with delight; his voice quivered also as he spoke:

"And all the time I never left my duty once for an instant. I think I ought to get a medal!"

"You should indeed, darling. And I never once distracted you from it did I?"

"Unhappily, no!" His eyes danced.

"So I ought to get more than a medal."

"What? What should you get — now?" His voice was a little hoarse. He drew closer to her. She made no answer in words; but her eyes were more eloquent. With a mutual movement she was in his arms and their mouths met.

“And now for lunch!” he said as after a few entrancing seconds she drew her face away.” I am sure you must be starving.”

“I am hungry!” she confessed. Her face was still flushed and her eyes were like stars. She bustled about to help him. He took the seats and cushions from the tonneau and made a comfortable nest for her, with a seat for himself close, very close beside her. He lifted off the luncheon basket and unstrapped it. Whilst she took out the plates and packets and spread the cloth he put a bottle of champagne and one of fizzy water in the cool of the running stream.

They may have had some delightful picnics on Olympus in the days of the old gods who were so human and who loved so much — and so often. But surely there was none so absolutely divine as on that day that under the trees, looking over at the grey piling summits of the mountains of Carsphairn. The food was a dream, the wine was nectar. The hearts of the two young people beat as one heart Love surely was so triumphant that there never could come a cloud into the sky which hung over them like a blue canopy. Life and nature and happiness and beauty and love took hands and danced around them fairy-like as they sat together, losing themselves and their very souls in the depths of each other’s eyes.

CHAPTER 15

“STOP!”

Under the shading trees the time flew fast It is ever thus in the sylvan glades where love abides:

“... The halcyon hours with double swiftness run And in the splendour of Arcadian summers.

The quicker climb the coursers of the sun.”

Athlyne and Joy sat in a gentle rapture of happiness. She had made him draw up his cushion close to her so that she could lean against him. They sat hand in hand for a while, and then one arm stole round her and drew her close to him. She came yieldingly, as though such a moment had been ordained since the beginning of the world. Her hand stole inside his arm and held him right; and so they sat locked together, with their faces so close that their mouths now and again met in long, sweet kisses. More than once was asked by either the old question of lovers — which has no adequate or final answer: “Do you love me?” And at each such time the answer was given in the fashion which ruled in Eden — and ever since.

Presently Athlyne, drawing Joy closer than ever to him, said:

“Joy darling there is something I want to say to you!” He paused; she drew him closer to her, and held him tighter. She realised that his voice had changed a little; he was under some nervousness or anxiety. This woke the protective instinct which is a part of woman’s love.

“We love each other?”

“I do!” As she spoke she looked at him with her great gray eyes blazing. He kissed her “And I love you, my darling, more than I have words to say. More than words can express. I am lost in you. You are my world, my hope, my heaven! Beyond measure I love you, and honour you, and trust you; and now that I feel you love me too... My dear!... my dear! the whole world seems to swim around me and the heavens to open..."

"Dear, go on. It is music to me — all music — that I have so longed for!"

"Darling! It seems like sacrilege to say anything just now — but — but — You know I love you?"

"Yes!" The simple word was stronger than any embellishment; it was of the completeness, the majesty, of sincerity in its expression.

"Then there is no need to say more of that now... But before I say something else which I long to hear — in words, dear, for its truth is already in my heart..."

"Darling!" she spoke the word lingeringly as though grudging that its saying must end...

"Before such time I must speak with your father!" He spoke the words with a gravity which brought a chill to her heart; her face blanched suddenly as does liquid in the final crystallization of frost Her voice was faint — she was only a girl after all, despite her pride and bravery — as she asked: "Oh, I hope it is nothing..."

"Nothing, darling" he said as he stroked tenderly the hand that lay in his — he had taken his arm from her waist to do it— "except the courtesy which is due to an old man... and one other thing, small in itself — absolutely nothing in my own mind — which makes it necessary, in respect to his... his... his convictions that I should speak to him before..." He stopped suddenly, remembering that if he went on he must betray the secret which as yet he wished to keep. Not on his own account did he wish to keep it. But there was Joy's happiness to be considered. Until he knew how Colonel Ogilvie would take the knowledge of his having introduced himself under a false name he must not do or say anything which might ultimately make difference between her and her father.

Joy erred in her interpretation of his embarrassment, of his sudden stopping. Again the pallor grew over her face which had under her lover's earlier words regained its normal colour. More faintly even than before she whispered: "It is nothing I hope that would keep us..." He saw her distress and cut quickly into her question:

"No! No! No! Nothing that could ever come between you and me. It is only this, Joy darling. Your father belongs to another country from my own and an older generation than mine. His life has been different, and the ideas that govern him are very masterful in their convention. Were I to neglect this I might make trouble which would, without our wish or part, come between us. Believe me, dear, that in this I am wise." Then seeing the trouble still in her eyes he went on: "I know well, Joy, that it is not necessary for me to justify myself in your eyes." Here she strained him a little closer and held his arm and his hand harder "but my dearest, I am going to do it all the same. I want to say something, but which I mustn't say yet, so that you must be tolerant with me if I say unneeded things which are still open to me. Truly, darling, there is absolutely nothing which could possibly come between you and me. I have done no wrong — in that way at all events. There should be no more difference between you and me for anything that is now in my mind than there is between your soul and the blue sky, above us; between you and heaven..." She put her hand over his mouth:

"Oh hush, hush, dear... By the way what am I to call you — darling?" For the moment he was taken aback. To give her his own name as yet would be to break the resolution of present secrecy; to give her a false name now would be sacrilege. His native Irish wit stood him in good stead:

"That is the name for to-day — darling. There can be none like that for to-day. We began with it. It took me on its wings up to heaven. Let me stay there — for to-day. For to-day we are true husband and wife — are we not?" 'Yes dear!" she answered simply. He went on:

"To-morrow... we can be grave to-morrow; and then I can give you another name to use — if you wish it!"

"I do!" she said with reverence. She accepted and returned the kiss which followed. This closed the incident, and for a little space they sat hand in hand, his arm again round her whilst again she had linked her arm in his. Presently he said:

"And now Joy dear, won't you tell me all about yourself. You know that as yet you and I know very little about each other's surroundings. I want specially to know to-day dear, for to-morrow I want to see your father and it will be better to go equipped." Joy felt quite in a flutter. At last she was going to learn something about the man she loved. She would tell him everything, and he would... Her thoughts were interrupted by her companion going on:

"And then to-morrow when we have talked I can tell you everything..." "Everything!" then there was something to conceal! Her heart fell. But as the man continued, her train of thought was again interrupted: "When you see him to-night you had better..."

Suddenly she jumped to her feet in a sort of fright. Seeing her face he too sprang up, giving, with the instinct of his campaigning a quick look around as though some danger threatened:

"What is it Joy? What is wrong?..." She almost gasped out: "My father! He will be home by seven! It must be late in the afternoon now and we are more than a hundred miles from home!...” Athlyne in turn was staggered. In his happiness in being with Joy and talking of love he had quite overlooked the passing of time. Instinctively he looked at his watch. It was now close on four o’clock. Joy was the first to speak:

“Oh do let us hurry! No one knows where I am; and if when Daddy gets home and finds I am not there he will be alarmed — and he may be upset. And Mother and Aunt Judy too!... Oh do not lose a moment! If we do not get home before they arrive... and Daddy finds I have been out all day with you... Oh, hurry, hurry!”

Athlyne had been thinking hard whilst she spoke, and his thoughts had been arranging themselves. His intelligence was all awake now. He could see at a glance that Joy’s absence might make trouble for all. Colonel Ogilvie was a man of covenance, and his daughter’s going out with him in such a way was at least unconventional. She must get back in time! His conclusion was reached before she had finished speaking. His military habit of quick action asserted itself; already he was replacing the things in the carriage. Joy saw, and with feverish haste began to help him. When he saw her at work he ran to the engine and began to prepare for starting. When that was ready he held Joy’s coat for her and helped her into her seat. As he took the wheel he said as he began to back down the road which was hardly wide enough to turn in:

“Forgive me, dear. It was all my selfish pleasure. But we shall do all we can. Bar accident we may do it; we have over three hours!” He set his teeth as he saw the struggle before him. It would be a glorious run... and there was no use forestalling trouble... Joy saw the smile on his face, recognised the man’s strength, and was comforted.

They backed into the road and sprang southward. Without taking his eyes off his work, Athlyne said:

“Tell me dear as we go along all that I must bear in mind in speaking to your father of our marriage...”

“There! It was out unconsciously. Joy thrilled, but he did not himself seem to notice his self-betrayal. He went on unconcernedly:

“It may be a little uphill at first if we do not get in line in time.” Joy looked under her lashes at the strong face now set as a stone to his work and kept silence as to the word. She was glad that she could blush unseen. After a little pause she said in a meek voice:

“Very well, dear. I shall tell you whenever we are on a straight bit of road, but I will be silent round the curves.” They were then flying along the old coach road. The road was well-made, broad and with good surface and they went at a terrific pace. Athlyne felt that the only chance of reaching Ambleside was by taking advantage of every opportunity for speed. Already he knew from the morning’s journey that there were great opportunities as long stretches of the road were level and in good order and were not unduly impeded with traffic. The motor was running splendidly, it seemed as if the run in the morning had put every part of it in good working order. He did not despair of getting to Ambleside in time. The train was not due at Windmere till seven. And it might be a little late. In any case it would take the arriving party a little while to get their things together and then drive to Ambleside. As they were sweeping down towards the bridge at Dairy he said to Joy without looking round: “It will be all right. I have been thinking it over. We can do it!” “Thank God!” she exclaimed fervently. She too had been thinking. “Stop!”

“The voice rang out imperiously; and a policeman, stepping from behind the trunk of a great beech, held up his hand. Instinctively

Athlyne began to slow. He shouted back "All right!" He had grasped the situation and as they were out of earshot of the policeman said quickly to Joy:

"We are arrested! Oh, I am sorry darling. If they won't let me pay a fine and go at once you must take the car on. I shall try to arrange that. But do be cautious dear — you are so precious to me. If you are delayed anywhere and can't make it in time wire to your father tell him you are motoring and have been delayed. It will soften matters, even if he is angry. I shall go on by train in the morning. And darling if you are not getting on as you wish, take a train the best you can — a special. Don't stop at any expense. But get on! And don't tell your name to any one, under any circumstances. Don't forget the telegram if delayed." As he was speaking the car was slowing and the panting policeman was coming up behind. When the car stopped, Athlyne jumped out and walked towards the officer; he wanted to be as conciliatory as possible.

"I am very sorry, officer. That beautiful bit of road tempted me; and being all quite clear I took a skim down it?"

"Ye did! Man, but it was fine! But I hae to arrest ye all the same. Duty is duty!"

"Certainly. I suppose the station is across the bridge?"

"Ave sir." The policeman, who at first sight had from his dress taken him for a chauffeur, had by now recognised him as a gentleman.

"Will you come in the car? It's all right. I'll go slow."

"Thank ye sir. I've had a deal o' walkin' the day!" When the man was in the tonneau Athlyne who had been thinking of what was to be done said to him affably:

"It was silly of me going at such a pace. But I wanted my wife to see how the new car worked.” He had a purpose in saying this: to emphasise to Joy the necessity of not mentioning her name. It was the only way to keep off the subject when they should get to the station. Joy turned away her head. She did not wish either man to see her furious blushing at hearing the word. She took the hint; silence was her cue.

At the station Joy sat in the car whilst Athlyne went inside with the officer. The sergeant was a grave elderly man, not unkindly. He too recognised, but at once, that the chauffeur was a gentleman. There was an air of distinction about Athlyne which no one, especially an official, could fail to appreciate. He was not surprised when he read the card which Athlyne handed to him. He frowned a little and scratched his head.

“I fear this’ll be a bit awkward my lord. Ye come frae o’er the Border and ye’ll hae to attend the summons at New Galloway. I dinna want to inconvenience you and her ladyship but...”

“Will it not be possible to let the car go on. My wife has to meet her father and mother who are coming up to Ambleside to-night, and they will be so disappointed. Her mother is an invalid and is coming from Italy. I shall be really greatly obliged if it can be managed.”

The sergeant shook his head and said slowly:

“‘Tis a fine car. A valuable commodity to take out of the jurisdiction and intil a foreign country.” Athlyne had already taken out his pocket-book. Fortunately he had provided himself well with money before coming north.

“I paid a thousand pounds for the car. Will it not suit if I leave that amount in your custody.” The official was impressed.

“Losh! man what wad I be daen wi’ a thoosan poons in a wee bit station like this, or carryin’ it aboot in me claes. Na! na! if ye’ll depo-sit say a ten poon note for the guarantee I'm thinkin' 'twill be a' reet. But how can the leddy get ava; ye'll hae to bide till the morn's morn."

"Oh that's all right, officer, she's a licensed driver. Unhappily she has not got her license with her. She left it in Ambleside as I was driving myself and had mine." He said this to avert her being questioned on the neglect; in which case there might be more trouble about the pace.

"Ooh! aye. Then that's a' reet! A maun ax her masel forbye she mayn't hae the license aboot her. Wimmen is feckless cattle anyhow!"

"Do you think sergeant she may get away at once. It is a long drive, and the day is getting on. I shall be very grateful indeed if you can manage it!" The sergeant was still impressed by the pocket book.

"Weel A'll see what A can dae!" He went outside with Athlyne to the automobile, and touching his cap said:

"Yer pardon ma leddy, we're the wife o' the defender?" Joy was glad that she had put on the motor veil attached to her cap.

"Yes! My husband told you, did he not?" she said. The thrill that came to her with the speaking of the word "husband" she kept for later thought The sergeant answered respectfully:

"He did ma leddy. But as an offeecial o' the law I hae to make sure as ye're aboot to travel oot o' the jurisdiction. He says ye hae left yer licence at hame; but as ye hae answered me that ye are his wife I will accept it, an' ye may go. The defender remains here; but I'm thinkin' there's a chance that he may no hae to remain so lang as he's fearin! Ma service to ye ma leddy." He touched his cap and went back into the station.

Athlyne came forward and said in a low voice, for the policeman who had effected the arrest was now standing outside the door "You will be careful darling. You may be able to do it But if you are late and your father be angry say as little as you can. Unhappily I must remain here, but I shall do all I possibly can to settle things quietly. I shall follow in the morning; but not too early. Don't forget to wire your father if you are delayed anywhere, or are certain to be late. For my own part I shall leave proof everywhere of my own presence as we shall be in different countries!" He said this as it occurred to him that if she should be delayed it might later avert a scandal. Then he spoke up for the benefit of the policeman:

"As the time is so short, and we have learned the lesson of the danger of going too fast, you might ask when you get to Carlisle whether it is not quicker to return by Penrith and Patterdale. That way is some miles shorter." The policeman who had heard — and had also seen the pocketbook — came close and said with a respectful touch of his cap:

"If A may make sae bold, the leddy can save a wheen o' miles by takin' the road to Dumfries by Ken Brig an' Crocketford up yon. A saw ye the morn comin' up there." Athlyne nodded and touched his pocket; the man drew back into the station. One last word to Joy:

"I wish you knew the machine darling. But we must take chance for all going well." As he spoke he was turning the starting handle. Joy in a low voice said:

"Good bye my darling!" Resolutely she touched the levers, and the car moved off quietly to the "God bless you!" of each.

Athlyne watched the car as long as it was in sight; then he went back into the station. He spoke at once to the sergeant.

"Now sergeant is there nothing that can possibly be done to hasten the matter. You see I have done all I can to obey rules — once having broken them. I am most anxious to get back home as I have some very important business in the morning. I shall of course do exactly as is necessary; but I shall be deeply obliged if I can get away, quietly, and double deeply to you if you can arrange it"

"Well ma lord I dinna think yell hae much trouble or be delayed o'er lang neither. For masel A canna do aught, but A'm thinkin that the Sheriff o' Galloway himsel will be here ony moment. He nearly always rides by when the fair at Casde Douglas is on, as it is to be in the morn. A'll hae a sharp look oot for him. He's a kind good man; an A'm thinkin that he'll no fash yer lordship. He can take responsibeelity that even a sargeant o' polis daurn't. So it's like ye'll get ava before the nicht."

Athlyne sat himself down to wait with what patience he could muster. Once again nature's pendulum began to swing in his thoughts; on one side happiness, on the other anxiety. The delight of the day wherein he had realised to the full that Joy indeed loved him, even as he loved her; the memory of those sweet kisses which still tingled on his lips and momentarily exalted him to a sort of rapture; and then the fear which was manifold, selfish and unselfish. She might get into any one of many forms of trouble if only from her anxiety to reach home before the arrival of her parents. She was, after all, not a practiced driver; and was in control of the very latest type of machine of whose special mechanism she could know nothing. If she should break down far from any town she would be in the most difficult position possible: a girl all alone in a country she did not know. And all this apart from the possibility of accident, of mischance of driving; of the act of other travellers; of cattle on the road; of any of the countess mishaps which can be with so swift and heavy a machine as a motor.

And then should she not arrive in time, what pain or unpleasantness might there not be with her father. He would be upset and anxious at first, naturally. He might be angry with her for going out on such a long excursion with a man alone; he would most certainly be angry with him for taking her, for allowing her to go. And at such a time too! Just when everything was working — had worked towards the end he aimed at. He knew that Colonel Ogilvie was and had been incensed with him for a neglect which under the circumstances was absolute discourtesy. And here he bitterly took himself to task for his selfishness — he realised now that it was such — in wanting to make sure of Joy's love before consulting her father, or even explaining to him the cause of his passing under a false name. Might it not be too late to set that right now... And there he was, away in Scotland, kicking his heels in a petty little police station while she poor girl would have to bear all the brunt of the pain and unpleasantness. And that after a long, wearying, wearing drive of a hundred miles, with her dear heart eternally thumping away lest she might lose in her race against Time. And what was worse still that it would all follow a day which he did not attempt to doubt had been, up to the rime of the arrest, one of unqualified happiness. "... nessun maggoir dolore Che ricordasi del tempo felice Nella miseria."

("A sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things.") The contrast would be terrible. He knew what the thought of it was to him; what would it be to her! Her sweet, gentle, loving heart would be hurt, crushed to the very dust.

He sprang to his feet and walked about the room, till noticing the sergeant was watching him with surprise and suspicion, he controlled himself.

He talked with the sergeant for a while genially. It was positively necessary that there should not be any doubt in the mind of the latter when the Sheriff should arrive. This episode took the strain from his mind — for a rime. He expressed to the officer how anxious he was to get on and interested the worthy man so much that he sent over to the hotel to borrow a time-table. There Athlyne learned that it would be practically impossible for him to get on to Ambleside that night. Not even if he could get a special train at Carlisle — there was no possibility of getting one from a nearer place. When he asked the sergeant his opinion, that grave individual condescended to smile:

"Losh! man they don't run specials on these bit lines. Tis as much as they can do to run a few trains a day. A'm thinkin' that if ye asked the stationmaster anywheer along the Dumfries and Kircudbright line for a special he'd hae ye in the daft-hoose, or he'd be there himsel!" Athlyne went back to his seat; once again the pendulum of his thoughts swung to and fro.

He was now face to face with one certainty amongst many possibilities: Whatever befel he could not give any immediate help to Joy. She, poor dear, must fend for herself and if need be, fight her battle alone. He could only try to make it up to her afterwards. And yet what could he do for her, what more give to her who had already all that was his! And here again he lost himself in memories of the immediate past; which presently merged into dreams of the future which has no end.

But again swung the pendulum with the thought of what he was next day to do which might help Joy. He began to realise out of the intensity of his thought, which was now all unselfish, in what a danger of misconception the girl stood already and how such might be multiplied by any accident of her arrival. In the eyes of her friends her very character might be at stake! And now he made up his mind definitely as to how he would protect her in that way. He could prove his time of leaving Ambleside by his chauffeur, the time of that swift journey would be its own proof; the time of his arrest was already proved. Likewise of Joy's departure for home. Henceforward till he should meet her father he would take care that his movements were beyond any mystery or suspicion whatever. In any case — even if she did not arrive at home till late — Joy would be actually in another country from that which held him, and the rapidity of her journey would in itself protect. He would stay in some hotel in a place where he could get a suitable train in the morning; and would arrange that his arrival and departure were noted.

Naturally the place he would rest for the night, if he should succeed in getting away, would be Casde Douglas; for here lines from Kirkcudbright, from Stranraer, and from Glasgow made junction so that he had a double chance of departure. If he were detained at Dairy the police themselves would be proof of his presence there.

He felt easier in his mind after this decision, and was able to await with greater patience the coming of the Sheriff.

CHAPTER 16

A PAINFUL JOURNEY

Joy started on her long journey in a very agitated frame of mind; though the habit of her life and her concern for her lover enabled her to so bear herself that she appeared calm. To start with, she was full of fears; some of them natural, others of that class which is due to the restrictions and conventions of a woman's life. She was by no means an expert driver. She merely had some lessons and was never in an automobile by herself before. Moreover she was not only in a country strange to her, but even the road to Dumfries on which she was started was absolutely new to her. In addition to it all she was — as an American — handicapped by the difference in the rules of the road. In America they follow the French and drive on the off side: in England the "on" rule is correct.

She had no option, however; she dared not make any difficulty or even ask advice or help, for such might betray her and she might not be allowed to proceed at all. So with as brave a face and bearing as she could muster, but with a sinking heart, she started on her journey, praying inwardly that she might not meet with any untoward accident or difficulty. For she did not know anything about mechanism; the use of the wheel and the levers in driving was all that had been embraced in her lessons.

At first all went well enough. The road was clear and she felt that she had the machine well in hand. As far as Balmaclellan she went slowly, carefully, climbing laboriously up the steep zig-zag road; and presently she began to feel in good heart. She did not know the name of the place; had never heard of it. But it was somewhere; one stage at least on the way home. When the village lay behind her she began to put on more speed. With the apprehension gone of not being able to get on at all, she began to think of her objective and of how long was the journey before it could be revealed. With increased speed, however, came fresh fears. The importance of the machine began to be manifest; such force and speed needed special thought. The road changed so rapidly that she felt that she wanted another pair of eyes. The wheel alone, with its speed and steering indices, took all attention. She hardly dared to look up from it. And yet if she did not how could she know the road to take; how could she look out for danger. Happily the mere movement was a tonic; the rush through the air braced her. Otherwise she would have been shortly in a state of panic.

Very soon she began to realise the difficulty of driving on an unknown road, when one is not skilled in the art. So many things have to be considered all at once, and the onus of choosing perpetually is of nightmare shadow. The openings of bye-roads and cross-roads are so much more important than is suspected that there is a passing doubt as to direction; and country roads generally wind about so that distant land-marks, which can guide one in general direction, come and go with embarrassing suddenness. At first every cart-track or farm-road made such doubts, and even when she got to understand such minor trends she got confused over bye-roads of more importance. Cross-roads there were before long, right or left making short-cuts for those who knew. These she had to pass; she could judge only of her course by the excellence of the main road — not always a safe guide in remote agricultural districts. One thing told in her favour the magnificent bracing air of that splendid high-hung moor through which she passed. By the time she got to

Corsock, however, she was beginning to feel the strain severely. She was hot and nervous and wearied; only the imperative need of getting on, and getting on quickly, enabled her to keep up at all. At Corsock she stopped to ask the way, but found it hard to understand the Lowland Scotch in which directions for her guidance were given. The result was that she started afresh with a blank despair gripping at her heart. Already she felt that her effort to reach home in time was destined to failure. The time seemed to fly so fast, the miles to be so long. She even began to feel a nervous doubt as to whether she should even be able to send word to her father. East of Corsock the nature of the road is confusing to a stranger. There are bye-roads leading south and up northwards into the mountains; and Urr Water has to be crossed. Joy began to lose the perspective of things; her doubts as to whether she was on the right road became oppressive. Somehow, things were changing round her. Look where she would, she could not see the hill tops that had been her landmarks. A mist was coming from the right hand — that was the south, where was Solway Firth. Then she gave up heart altogether. There came to her woman's breast the reaction from all the happy excitement of the day. It was too bright to last. And now came this shadow of trouble worse even than the mist which seemed to presage it... Oh, if only He were with her now... He!... Strange it was that in all that day she had not once spoken to him by name. "Dear" or "Darling" seemed more suitable when her hand was in his; when he was kissing her. She closed her eyes in an ecstasy of delightful remembrance... She was recalled to herself by a sudden jar; in her momentary forgetfulness she had run up a bank.

It was a shock to her when her eyes opened to see how different were her surroundings from her thoughts. Those hours when they sat together where the sunbeams stole through the trees would afford her many a comparison in the time to come. All was now dark and dank and chill. The mist was thickening every instant; she could hardly see the road ahead of her.

However, she had to go on, mist or no mist; at least till she should reach some place whence she could telegraph to her father. With a pang she realised that she must not wire also to Him as she would have loved to have done. It would only upset and alarm him, poor fellow! and he had quite anxiety enough in thinking of her already!... With a heavy heart she crawled along through the mist, steering by the road-bed as well as she could, keeping a sharp look-out for cross-roads and all the dangers of the way.

The time seemed to fly, but not the car; the road appeared to be endless. Would she never come to any hospitable place!... It was a surprise to her when she came on straggling cottages, and found herself between double rows of houses. Painted over a door she saw "Crocketford Post-Office." In her heart she thanked God that she was still on the right road, though she had only as vet come some dozen or more miles. It seemed as if a week had passed since she left Dairy... and... She drew up to the post-office and went in. There she sent a wire:

"Went out motoring caught here in mist am going on however but must arrive very late so do not be anxious about me. Love to Mother and Aunt Judy and dear Daddy. Joy."

When she had handed it in she looked at her watch. It was only half-past five o'clock!

It was still therefore on the verge of possibility that she might get back in time. She hurried out. Several people had gathered round the motor, which was throbbing away after the manner of motors, as though impatient to get to real work. A policeman who was amongst them, seeing that she was about to go on, suggested that she should have her lamps lit as it would be a protection as well as a help to her in the mist. She was about to say that she thought it would be better not; for she did not know anything about acetylene lamps and feared to expose her ignorance, when he very kindly offered to light them for her:

"Tis no wark for a bonny leddy!" he said in self-justification of bending his official dignity to the occasion. She felt that his courtesy demanded some explanation, and also that such explanation would, be accounting for her being all alone, avoid any questioning. So said sweedy:

"Thank you so much, officer. I really do not know much about lamps myself and I had to leave my... my husband, who was driving, at Dairy. He was going too fast, and your people had a word to say to him. However, I can get on all right now. This is a straight road to Dumfries is it not?" The road was pointed out and instructions given to keep the high road to Dumfries. With better heart and more courage than heretofore she drove out into the mist. There was comfort for her in the glare of the powerful lights always thrown out in front of her.

All went well now. The road was distinctly good, and the swift smooth motion restored her courage. When in about half an hour she began to note the cottages and houses grouping in the suburbs of Dumfries she got elated. She was now well on the way to England She knew from experience that the road to Annan, by which they had come, was fairly level. She did not mind the mist so much, now that she was accustomed to it; and she expected that as it was driving up northwards from the Firth she would be free from it altogether when she should have passed the Border and was on her way south to Carlisle.

In the meanwhile she was more anxious than as yet The mist seemed to have settled down more here than in the open country. There were lights in many windows in the suburbs, and the street lamps were lit. It is strange how the perspective of lines of lamps gets changed when one is riding or driving or cycling in mist or fog. If one kept the centre of the road it would be all right; but as one keeps of necessity to the left the lines between the lamps which guide the eye change with each instant. The effect is that straight lines appear to be curved; and if the driver loses nerve and trusts to appearances he will soon come to grief. This was Joy's first experience of driving in mist, and she naturally fell into the error. She got confused as to the right and wrong side of the road. She had to fight against the habit of her life, which instinctively took command when her special intention was in abeyance. She knew that from Dumfries the road dropped to the south-east and as the curve seemed away to the left from her side of the road she, thinking that the road to the left was the direct road, naturally inclined towards the right hand, when she came to a place where there were roads to choose. There was no one about from whom to ask the way; and she feared to descend from the car to look for a sign-post The onus of choice was on her, and she took the right hand thinking it was straight ahead. For some time now she had been going slow, and time and distance had both spun out to infinitude; she had lost sense of both. She was tired, wearied to death with chagrin and responsibility. Everything around her was new and strange and unknown, and so was full of terrors. She did not know how to choose. She feared to ask lest the doing so might land her in new embarrassments. She knew that unless she got home in something like reasonable time her father would be not only deeply upset but furiously angry — and all that anger would be visited on Him. Oh she must get on! It was too frightful to contemplate what might happen should she have to be out all night... and after having gone out with a man against whom her father had already a grievance, though he owed him so much!

The change in the road, however, gave her some consolation; it was straight and smooth, and as the wind was now more in her face she felt that she was making southward. But her physical difficulties were increasing. The wind was much stronger, and the mist came boiling up so fast that her goggles got blurred more than ever. Everything around her was becoming wet.

For a few miles — she could only guess at the distance — all went well, and she got back some courage. She still went slowly and carefully; she did not mean to have any mischance now if she could help it. It would not be so very long before she was over the Border. Then most likely she would be out of the mist and she could put on more speed.

Presently she felt that the car was going up a steep incline. When it had been running swiftly she had not felt such, but now it was apparent. It was not a big hill, however, and the run down the other side was exhilarating, though the fear of some obstacle in front damped such pleasure as there was. Even then the pace was not fast; ordinarily it would have been considered as little better than a rapid crawl. For a while, not long but seeming more than long, the road was up-and-down till she saw in the dimness of the mist glimpses of houses, then a few gleams of light from the chinks of shut windows. Here she went very slowly and tooted often. She feared she might do some harm; and the slightest harm now might mean delay. She breathed more freely when she was out in the open again. That episode of the arrest and the prolonged agitation which followed it had unnerved her more than she had thought; and now the mist and the darkness and the uncertainty were playing havoc with her. It was only when she was long past the little place that she regretted she had not stopped to ask if she was on the right road. There was nothing for it, however, but to go on. The road was all up and down, up and down; but the surface was fairly good, and as the powerful lamps showed her sufficient space ahead to steer she moved along, though it had to be with an agonising slowness. How different it all was, she thought, from that fairy-chariot driving with Him, in the morning. The road then seemed straight and level, and movement was an undiluted pleasure! For an instant she closed her wearied eyes as she sighed at the change — and ran off the road-bed.

Happily she was going slowly and recovered herself before more than the front wheels were on the rough mass of old road-scrapings. In a couple of seconds she had backed off and was under way again. She was preternaturally keen now in her outlook. She felt the strain acutely; for the road seemed to be always curving away from her. Moreover there was another cause of concern. Night was coming on. Even in the densest mist or the blackest fog the light or darkness of the sky is to some degree apparent. Now the sense came on her that over the thick mist was darkness. She stopped a moment and getting out looked at her watch in the light of the lamps.

Her heart fell away, away. It was now close to eight o’clock. There was no use worrying she felt; nothing to be done but to go on, carefully for the present. When she made up her mind to the worst, her courage began to come back and she could think. She felt that as the wind was now strongly in her face she must be nearing the Firth, and that in time she would pass the Border and be heading for home and father. She jumped into her seat and was off again.

The fog — she realised now that it was not mist but fog — was thicker than ever; the wind being strongly in her face, it seemed above the glare of the powerful lamps, to come boiling up out of the roadway which she could see but dimly. Fear, vague and gaunt, began to overshadow her. But there was no use worrying or thinking of anything except the immediate present which took the whole of her thought and attention. In the face of her surroundings she dared not go fast, dared not stop. And so for a time that seemed endless she pressed on through the fog. Presently she became aware that the wind was not so much in her teeth. As she was steering by the road-bed she did not notice curves; there was no doubt as to her route, as there did not seem to be any divergent roads at all. On, on, on, on! A road full of hills, not very high nor especially steep but enough to keep a driver on constant watch-out.

At last she felt that she was close to the sea. The wind came fiercely, and the drifting fog seen against the luminous area round the lamps seemed like a whirlpool. There was a salt smell in the air. This gave her some hope. If this were the Firth she must be close to the Border and would soon be at the bridge over which they had entered Scotland. Instinctively she went forward faster. And at last there surely was a bridge. A narrow enough bridge it was; as she went slowly across it she wondered how it was that they had seemed to fly over it in the morning.

However she could go on now in new hope. She was in England and bye and bye she would come through the fog-belt, and having passed Carlisle would drop down through the Lake roads to

Ambleside. Though the fog was dense as ever she did not feel the wind so much; she crowded on — she did not dare go much faster as vet and as she was now climbing a long steep hill she ceased to notice it. After a while, when there came a stronger puff than usual, she noticed that it was on her back — the high hood of the car had protected her for some time past. After a little however the old fear came back upon her. At the present rate of progress to reach home at any time, however late, seemed an impossibility. And all was so dark, and the fog was so dense; and the road didn't seem a bit like that they had come by between Carlisle and the Border. All at once she found that she was crying — crying bitterly. She did not want to stop the car, and so dared not take her hands from the wheel, even to find her pocket-handkerchief. She wept and wept; wept her heart out, whilst all the time mechanically steering by the light of the lamps on the road. Her weeping aided the density of the fog, and with her eyes set on the road and the driving wheel in her hands she did not notice that she was going between houses. She came to a bridge, manifestly of a little more importance than the one she had already passed, and crossed it. The road swayed away to the left; presently this was crossed by another almost at right angles, but she kept straight on. There was no one from whom to ask the way; and had there been anyone she probably would not have seen him. A little way on there was another cross-road but of minor importance; then further on she came to a place of difficult choice. Another cross-road,-again almost at right angles; but the continuance of the road she was on showed it to be but a poor road ill-kept. So, too, was that to her left; but the road to the right was broad and well kept. It was undoubtedly the main road; and so keeping to the rule she had hitherto obeyed, she followed it.

She was now feeling somehow in better heart; the fit of crying had relieved her, and some of her courage had come back. She wanted comforting — wanted it badly; but those whose comfort only could prevail were far away; one behind her in Scotland, the others still far away at Ambleside. The latter thought made her desperate. She put on more speed — and with her thoughts and anxieties not in the present but the future, ran up a steep bank. There was a quick snap of something in front of the car; the throbbing of the engine suddenly ceased. With the shock she had been thrown forward upon the wheel, but fortunately the speed had not been great enough to cause her serious injury. The lamps made the fogs sufficiently luminous for her movements, and she scrambled out of the car. She knew she could do nothing, for she was absolutely ignorant of the mechanism, and she had no mechanical skill. The only thing she could do was to go along the road on the blind chance of meeting or finding some one who could help her, or who might be able to assist her in finding better help. And so with a heavy heart, and feet that felt like lead, she went out into the fog. It was a wrench for her to leave the car which in the darkness and the unknown mystery of the fog seemed by comparison a sort of home or shelter. It was an evidence of the mechanical habit of the mind, which came back to her later, that through all her weariness and distress she thought to pin up her white frock before setting out on the dusty journey.

It was astonishing how soon the little patch of light disappeared. When she had taken but a few steps she looked back and found all as dark as it was before her. One thing alone there was which saved her from utter despair: the fog seemed not to be so absolutely dense. In reality it was not that the fog had lessened, but that her eyes, so long accustomed to the glare of the lamps which had prevented her seeing beyond the radius of their power, had now come back to their normal focus. Though the darkness seemed more profound than ever, since there was no point of light whatever, she was actually able to see better. After all, this fog was a sea mist unladen with city smoke, and its darkness was a very different thing from the Cimmerian gloom of a city fog. To her, not accustomed to winter fogs, it was difficult and terrifying. When, however, she began to realise, though unconsciously, that the nebulous wall in front of her fell back with every step she took, her heart began to beat more regularly, and she breathed more freely. It was a terrible position for a delicately nurtured girl to be in. Though she was a brave girl with a full share of self-reliance her absolute ignorance of all around her — even as to what part of the country she was in — had a somewhat paralysing effect upon her. However she had courage and determination. Her race as well as her nature told for her. Her heart might beat hard and her feet be heavy but at any rate she would go on her set road whilst life and strength and consciousness remained to her. She shut her teeth, and in blind despair moved forward in the fog.

In all her after life Joy could never recall the detail of that terrible walk. Like most American girls she was unused to long walks and after a couple of miles she felt wearied to death. The long emotional strain of the day had told sorely on her strength, and the hopeless nerve-racking tramp on the unknown road through the gloom and mystery of the fog had sapped her natural strength. Looking back on that terrible journey she could remember no one moment from the other, from the time that she lost sight of the lamps until she found herself in a dip in the road passing under a railway bridge. The recognition of the fact reanimated her. It was an evidence that there was some kind of civilisation somewhere — a fact that she had begun in a vague way to doubt. She would follow that line if she could, for it must lead her to some place where she might find help; where she could send reassuring word to her father, and where there would be shelter. Shelter! At the first gleam of hope her own deplorable position was forced upon her, and she realised all at once her desperate weariness. She could now hardly drag herself along.

Beyond the railway there was a branch road to the left and this she determined to follow, rather than the main road which went away from the line. She stumbled along it as well as she could. The time seemed endless. In her weariness the flicker of hope which her juxtaposition to the railway had given her died soon away. The fog seemed denser, and the darkness blacker than ever.

The road dipped again under the line; she was glad of that; manifestly she was not straying from it. She hurried on instinctively; found the road wider, and rougher with much use. Her heart beat hard once again, but this time it was with hope.

And then, right in front of her, was a dim gleam of light. This so overcame her that she had to sit down for a moment on the road side. The instant's rest cheered her; she jumped to her feet as though her strength had been at once restored. Feeling in her heart a prayer which her lips had not time to utter, she climbed over a wire fence between her and the light; stumbled across a rough jumble of sleepers and railway irons. Then the light was over her head — the rays were manifest on the fog. She called out:

“Hullo! Hullo! Is there any one awake?” Almost instantly the window through which the light shone was opened and a man looked out:

“Aye! A’m awake! Did ye think A’d be sleepin’ on a nicht like this. Tis nae time for a signal-man to be aught but awake A’m tellin’ ye."

"Thank God, oh thank God!" Joy's heart was too full for the moment to say more. The man leaned further out:

"Is yon a lassie? What are ye daein' here a nicht like this? Phew! A canna see ma ain hond!"

"Yes, I'm a girl and I'm lost. Will you let me come in?" The man's voice became instantly suspicious.

"Na! na! A canna let ye in. Tis no in accord wi' the Company's rules to let a lassie intil the signal-box. Why don't ye go intil the toon?"

"Oh do let me in for a moment," she pleaded. "I have been lost in the fog, and my motor broke down. I have had to walk so far that I am wearied and tired and frightened; and the sight of a light and the hope of help has finished me!" She sat right down on the ground and began to cry. He heard her sob, and it woke all the man in him. This was no wandering creature whose presence at such a time and place might make trouble for him. He knew from the voice that the woman was young and refined.

"Dinna greet puir lassie! — Dinna greet. A canna leave the box for an instant lest a signal come. But go roond to the recht and ye'll find a door. Com recht up! Rules or no rules A'm no gangin' to let ye greet there all by yer lanes. There's fire here, and when ye're warmed A can direct ye on yer way intil the toon!"

With glad steps she groped her way to the door. A flood of light seemed to meet her when she opened it, and she hurried up the steep stairs to where the signal-man held open the upper door.

"Coom in lassie an hae a soop o' ma tea. Tis fine and warrm!... Coom in and let me offer ye some refreshment, an' if A may mak sae bold may A offer ye all A hae that'll warm ye? Coom in ma'am.

Coom in ma leddie!" he said in a crescendo of welcome and respect as he saw Joy's fine motor coat and recognised her air of distinction.

Glad indeed was Joy to drink from the worthy fellow's tin tea-bottle which rested beside the stove; glad to sit down in front of the fire. Then indeed she felt the magnitude of her weariness, and in a minute would have been asleep.

But the thought of her father, and all that depended on her action and his knowledge, wakened her to full intellectual activity. She stood up at once and said quickly:

"What place is this?"

"The signal-box of Casde Douglas Junction."

"And where is that? I think I have heard the name before."

'Tis a toon as they ca' it here. The junction is o' the Glasgie an' South Western, the Caledonian, the Port Patrich an' Wigtownshire, the London an' North Western, an' the Midland lines. But for short there are but twa. One frae Kirkcudbright, an' th' ither frae Newton Stewart"

"In what country are we?" Seeing the astonishment in his face she went on: "I am an American, and not familiar with the district We came from England this morning — from Westmoreland — from Ambleside — and I am confused about the Border. I had to drive myself because my — we got into trouble for driving fast, and I had to come on alone. And then the fog overtook me. I went along as well as I could. Are we anywhere near Carlisle? Her face fell as she saw the shake of his head:

"Eh ma leddie but ye're mony a mile frae Carlisle. Ts over fifty miles be the line. Ye maun hae lost yer way sair. Ye're in Kirkcudbright-shire the noo." Her heart sank:

"Oh I must send a telegram at once."

“Ye canna telegraph the nicht ma leddie! The office is closed till eight the morn’s morn.”

“My God! What shall I do. My father arrived from London to-night and he does not know where I am. I came out for a drive and thought to be back in good time to meet him. He will be in despair. Is there no way in which I can send word? It is not a matter of expenses; I shall pay anything if it can be done!” She looked at him in an agony of apprehension. The man was stirred by the depth of emotion and by her youth and beauty; and his clever Scotch brain began to work. His mouth set fast in a hard line and his rough heavy brows began to wrinkle. After a pause he said:

“AH do what A can, ma leddie; though A can’t be sure if ‘twill wark. The telegraphs are closed. Even if we could find an operator it wouldn’t be possible to get the wires. Our own lines are closed, for we’ll hae no traffic till morn.” Here an idea struck Joy and she interrupted him:

“‘Could I not get a special train? I am willing to pay anything?”

“Lord love ye, ma leddy, they don’t have specials on bit lines like this. Ye couldn’t get one nigher than Glasgie an’ not there at this time o’ day. Let alone they’d no send in such a fog anyhow. But I’m thinkin’ that A can telephone to Dumfries. The operator o’ oor line there is a freend o’ mine, an’ if he’s on dooty he’ll telephone on to Carlisle wheer there’s sure to be some one at the place. An’ mayhap the latter’ll telephone on till Ambleside. So, if there be any awake there, they’ll send to the hotel. Is it a hotel yer faither’ll be in?”

“Oh thank you, thank you,” said Joy seizing his hand in a burst of gratitude. “I’ll be for ever grateful to you if you’ll be so good!”

“A’m thinkin’” he went on “that perhaps ‘twill cost yer ladyship a mickle — perhaps a muckle; but A dar say ye’ll no mind that...”

“Oh no, no! It will be pleasure to pay anything. See, I have plenty of money!” She pulled out her purse.

“Na! na! Not yet ma leddie. Tis no for masel — unless yer ladyship insists on it, later on. Tis for the laddies that will do what they can. Ye see there may be some trouble o’er this. We signal-men and offeecials generally are not supposed to attend to aught outside o’ the routine. But if it should be that there is trouble to us puir folk, A’m sure yer ladyship an’ some o’ yer graan’ freensll no see us wranged!”

“Oh no indeed. My father and Mr. — and all our friends will see to it that you shall never suffer, no matter what happens.”

“Well now, ma leddy — if ye’ll joost write down your message A’ll do what A can. But ‘twill be wiser if ye gang awa intil a hotel an’ rest ye. A can send the message better when A’m quit o’ ye. Forbye ye see ’tis no quite respectable to hae a bonny lassie here ower lang. Ma wife is apt to be a wee jalous; an’ it’s no wise to gie cause where nane there is.”

“But I do not know where to go—” she began. He interrupted her hastily: “There’s a graan hotel i’ the toon — verra fine it is; but A’m thinkin’ that ver ladyship, bein’ by yer lonesome, may rather care to go to a quieter house. An’ as A’d recommend ye to seek the ‘Walter Scott’ hotel. Tis kep by verra decent folk, an’ though small is verra respectable an’ verra clean. Say that yer kent by Tammas Macpherson an’ that will vouch for ye, seein’ that ye’re a bit lassie by yer lanes. Tis a most decent place entirely, an’ A’m tellin’ ye that the Sheriff o’ Galloway himsel’ aye rests there when he comes to the toon.”

Joy wrote her message on the piece of paper which he had provided whilst speaking:

“To Col. Ogilvie, Inn of Greeting, Ambleside: Dearest Daddy I have been caught in a heavy fog and lost, but happily found my way here. I shall return by the first train in the morning. Love to mother. I am well and safe. Joy.”

Then the signal man gave her explicit directions as to finding the house. As she was going away he said with a diffident anxiety:

‘To what figure will yer ladyship gang in this — this meenistration? A’d joost like to ken in case o’ neceesity? She answered quickly:

“Oh anything you like — twenty-five dollars — I mean five pounds — ten pounds — twenty — a hundred, anything, anything so that my father gets the message soon.” He looked amazed for a moment. Then as he held open the door deferentially he said in a voice in which awe blended with respect:

“Dinna fash yerself more ma leddie. Yer message will gang for sure; an’ gang quick. Ye may sleep easy the nicht, an’ wi’out a thocht o’ doobt. An’ll leave wi’ ma kinsman Jamie Macpherson o’ the Walter Scott ma neem an’ address in case yer ladyship wishes me to send to yon the memorandum o’ the twenty poons.”

Joy found her way without much difficulty to the Walter Scott. The house was all shut up, but she knocked and rang; and presently the door was unchained and opened. The Boots looked for a moment doubtful when he saw a lady alone; but when she said:

“I am lost in the fog, and Mr. Thomas Macpherson of the railway told me I should get lodging here,” he opened the door wide and she walked in. He chained the door, and left her for a few minutes; but returned with a young woman who eyed her up and down somewhat suspiciously. Joy seemed to smell danger and said at once:

“I got lost in the fog, and the motor met with an accident. So I had to leave it on the road and walk on."

"An' your shawfer? " asked the doubting young woman.

"He got into trouble for driving too fast, and had to be left behind."

"Very weel, ma'am. What name shall A put down?"

Joy's mind had been working. Her tiredness and her sleepiness were brushed aside by the pert young woman's manifest suspicion. She remembered Mr. Hardy's caution not to give her own name; and now, face to face with a direct query, remembered and used the one which had been given to her on the Cryptic. It had this advantage that it would put aside any suspicion or awkwardness arising from her unprotected position, arriving as she did in such an un-accredited way. So she answered at once:

"Athlyne. Lady Athlyne!" The young woman seemed impressed. Saying: "Excuse me a moment" she went into the bar where she lit a candle. She came back in a moment and said very deferentially:

"It's 'all recht yer ladyship. There's twa rooms, a sittin'-room an' a bed-room. They were originally kept for the Sheriff, but he sent word that he was no comin'. So when the wire came frae th' ither pairty the rooms were kept for him. When no one arrived the name was crossed aff the slate. But it's a' recht! Shall I light a fire yer Leddyship?"

"Oh no! I only require a bedroom. I must get away by the first train in the morning. I shall just lie down as I am. If you can get me a glass of milk and a biscuit that is all I require. If it were possible I should like the milk hot; but if that is not convenient it won't matter." As they went upstairs the girl said:

"Ye'll forgie me yer Leddyship, but I didna ken wha ye were. Mrs. Macpherson was early up to bed the nicht when the fog had settled doon and she knew there was no more traffic. To-morrow is a heavy day here, and things keep up late; and she wanted to be ready for it. An' she's michty discreet aboot ony comin' here wi'oot — wi'oot—" She realised that she was getting into deep water and turned the conversation. There is yer candle lit. The fire in the kitchen is hearty yet, an' I'll bring yer milk hot in the half-o' two-twos. I'll leave word that ye're to be called in good time in the morn."

Within a few minutes she came back with the hot milk. Joy was too tired and too anxious to eat; and refusing all proffers of service and of help as to clothing, bade the girl good night. She just drank the milk; and having divested herself of her shoes and stockings which were soiled with travel and of all but her under-clothing, crept in between the sheets. The warmth and the luxury of rest began to tell at once; within a very few minutes she was sound asleep.

CHAPTER 17

THE SHERIFF

It was late in the afternoon when the Sheriff rode into Dairy. The police sergeant spoke to him, and he kindly came into the station. There the sergeant put the matter before him. He was an elderly man, hearty and genial and with a pleasant manner which made every man his friend. When he heard the details of the case, regarding which the policeman asked his advice, he smiled and took snuff and said pleasantly to the officer:

"I don't think ye need be uneasy in your mind. After all 'tis only a matter of a fine; and as the chauffeur is ready to pay it, whatever it may be; and is actually in your custody having as you say more than sufficient money upon him to pay the maximum penalty hereto inflicted for furious driving in this shire, I think you will not get much blame for allowing the lady to go away in the car to a 'foreign country,' as you call it. I suppose sir" turning to Athlyne "you can get good bail if required?"

"I think so" said Athlyne smiling. "I suppose a Deputy Lieutenant of Ross Shire is good enough;" whereupon he introduced himself to the Sheriff. They chatted together a few minutes and then, as he went to his horse which a policeman was holding at the door, he said to the sergeant:

"I must not, as Sheriff, be bail myself. But if any bail is required I undertake to get it; so I think you needn't detain his lordship any longer. You'd better serve the summons on him for the next Session and then everything will be in order."

Athlyne walked down the village with him, he leading his horse.

When he knew that Athlyne was going to walk to Casde Douglas so as to be ready to catch his train to the south he said:

‘To-morrow is a busy day there and you may find it hard to get rooms at the Douglas, especially as the fog will detain many travellers. Now I had my rooms reserved at the Walter Scott, kept by an old servant of mine, where I always stay. An hour gone I wired countermanding them as I am going to stay the night with Mulgrave of Ennisfour where I am dining; so perhaps you had better wire over and secure them. I shall be there myself in the morning as I have work in Casde Douglas, but that need not interfere with you. If you go early you may be off before I get there.”

“I do not want to go South very early; so I hope you will breakfast with me if I am still there.” The genial old Sheriff shook his head:

“No, no. You must breakfast with me. I am in my own bailiwick and you must let me be your host.”

“All right!” said Athlyne heartily. The old man who had been looking at him kindly all the time now said:

“Tell me now — and you won’t think me rude or inquisitive; but you’re a young man and I’m an old one, and moreover sheriff — can I do anything for you? The Sergeant told me you were in a state of desperate anxiety to get away — or at any rate to let the lady get off; and I couldn’t help noticing myself that you are still anxious. The policeman said she was young, and much upset about it all. Can I serve you in any way? If I can, it will I assure you be a pleasure to me.” He was so frank and kind and hearty that Athlyne’s heart warmed to him. Moreover he was upset himself, poor fellow; and though he was a man and a strong one, was more than glad to unburden his heart to some one who would be a sympathetic listener:

“The fact is, sir, that the young lady who was with me came for a drive from Ambleside and we came on here on the spur of the moment. Her father had gone to London and returns this evening; and as no one knew that I — that she had gone out motoring he will be anxious about her. Naturally neither she nor I wish to make him angry. You will understand when I tell you that she and I are engaged to be married. He does not know this — though” here he remembered the letter he had posted at Ambleside “he will doubtless know soon. Unhappily he had some mistaken idea about me. A small matter which no one here would give a second thought to: but he is a Kentuckian and they take some things very much to heart. This was nothing wrong — not in any way; but all the same his taking further offence at me, as he would do if he heard from someone else that she had been motoring with me without his sanction, might militate against her happiness — and mine. So you can imagine Mr. Sheriff, how grateful I am to you for your kindness.” The sheriff paused before replying. He had been thinking — putting two and two together: “They are engaged — but her father doesn’t know it Then the engagement was made only to-day. No wonder they were upset and anxious. No wonder he drove fast... Ah, Youth! Youth!”...

“I understand, my lord. Well, you did quite right to get the lady away; though it was a hazardous thing for her to start off alone in the mist.”

“It hadn’t come on then, sir. Had it been so I should never have let her go alone — no matter what the consequences might be! But I hope she’s out of it and close to home by this time.”

“Aye that’s so. Still she was wise to go. It avoids all possibility of scandal. Poor bairn! I’m hoping she got off South before the fog came on too thick. It’s drifting up from the Firth so that when once she would have crossed the Border most like it would have been clear enow. Anyhow under the circumstances you are right to stay here. Then there can be no talk whatever. And her father will have had time to cool down by the time ye meet.

"We're parting here, my Lord. Good-bye and let me wish ye both every form of human happiness. Perhaps by morn you will have had some news; and I'm hoping yell be able to tell me of her safe arrival."

At the cross roads the men parted. The Sheriff rode on his way to Ennis-four, and Athlyne went back to Dairy. He ordered his dinner, and then went out to send a telegram at the little post office. His telegram ran: To WALTER SCOTT HOTEL CASTLE DOUGLAS

Keep rooms given up by Sheriff for to-night.

ATHLYNE.

He had written the telegram through without a pause. The signature was added unhesitatingly, though not merely instinctively. He had done with falsity; henceforth he would use his own name, and that only. He felt freer than he had done for many a day.

He ate his dinner quietly; he was astonished at himself that he could take matters so calmly. It was really that he now realised that he had done all he could. There was nothing left but to wait. In the earlier part of that waiting he was disturbed and anxious. Difficulties and dangers and all possible matters of concern obtruded themselves upon his thought in endless succession. But as time wore on the natural optimism of his character began to govern his thinking. Reason still worked freely enough, but she took her orders from the optimistic side and brought up arrays of comforting facts and deductions.

It was with renewed heart and with a hopeful spirit that he set out on his road to Casde Douglas. He had deliberately chosen to walk instead of taking a carriage or riding. He did not want to arrive early in the evening, and he calculated that the sixteen miles would take him somewhere about four hours to walk. The exercise would, whilst it killed the time which he had to get through, give him if not ease of mind at least some form of mental distraction. Such, he felt, must be his present anodyne — his guarantee of sanity. As he had no luggage of any kind he felt perfectly free; the only addition to his equipment was a handful of cigars to last him during the long walk.

He had left Dairy some miles behind him when he began to notice the thickening of the mist. After a while when this became only too apparent he began to hesitate as to whether it would not be wiser to return. By this time he realised that it was no mere passing cloud of vapour which was driving up from the south, but a sea fog led inward through the narrowing Firth; he could smell the iodine of the sea in his nostrils. But he decided to go on his way. He remembered fairly well the road which he had traversed earlier in the day. Though a rough road and somewhat serpentine as it followed the windings of the Ken and the Dee, it was so far easy to follow that there were no bifurcations and few cross-roads. And so with resolute heart — for there was something to overcome here — and difficulty meant to him distraction from pain — he pushed on into the growing obscurity of the fog.

On the high ground above Shirmers he felt the wind driving more keenly in his face; but he did not pause. He trudged on hopefully; every step he took was bringing him closer to England — and to Joy. Now it was that he felt the value of the stout walking cudgel that he had purchased from a passing drover. For in the fog he was like a blind man; sight needed the friendly aid of touch.

But it was dreadfully slow work, and at the end of a few hours he was wearied out with the overwhelming sense of impotence and the ceaseless struggling with the tiniest details of hampered movement. Being on foot and of slow progress he had one advantage over travelling on horseback or in a vehicle: he was able to take advantage of every chance opportunity of enlightenment. From passing pedestrians and at wayside cottages he gathered directions for his guidance. It was midnight — the town clock striking — when he entered Casde Douglas and began to inquire his way to the Walter Scott hotel.

After repeated knocking the door was opened by the Boot — a heavy, thick-headed, sleepy, tousled man, surly and grudging of speech. Athlyne pushed past him into the hall way and said:

“I wired here in the afternoon to have kept for me the Sheriffs rooms. Did my telegram arrive.”

“Aye. It kem a’recht. But that was all that kem. Ye was expectit, an’ the missis kep the rooms for ye till late; but when ye didna come she gied ye up an’ let anither pairty that was lost i’ the fog hae the bedroom. All that’s left is the parlour, an that we can hae an ye will. Forebye that ye’ll hae to sleep on the sofy. A’m thinkin’ it’s weel it’s o’er long than ordinair’, for ye’re no a ween yersel. Bide wheer y’ are, an’ A’ll fetch ye a rug or two an’ a cushion. Ye maun put up wi’ them the nicht for ye’ll git nane ither here.” He left him standing in the dark; and shuffled away down a dim stairway, to the basement.

In a few minutes he re-appeared with a bundle of rugs and pillows under his arm; in his hand was a bottle of whiskey, with the drawn cork partly re-inserted. With the deftness of an accomplished servitor he carried in his other hand, together with the candle, a pitcher of water and a tumbler. As he went up the staircase he said in a whisper:

“Man walk saft as ye gang; an’ dinna cough nor sneeze or mak’ a soond in the room or ye'll maybe waken th' ither body. Joost gang like a man at a carryin'. An' mind ye dinna snore! Lie ye like a bairn! What time shall A ca' ye?"

"I want to catch the morning train for the south."

"That'll be a'recht. A'll ca' ye braw an' airly!"

"Good night!" said Athlyne as he softy closed the door.

He spread one rug on the sofa, which supplemented by a chair, was of sufficient length; put the other ready to cover himself, and fixed the cushions.

Having stripped to his flannels he blew out the candle, and, without making a sound, turned in. He was wearied in mind and nerve and body, and the ease of lying down acted like a powerful narcotic. Within a minute he was sound asleep.

CHAPTER 18

PURSUIT

Colonel Ogilvie found his wife in excellent health and spirits. The cure had been effective, and the prospect of meeting Joy so filled her with delight that her youth seemed to be renewed. He could see, when the morning light was admitted to their bedroom, that her eyes were bright and her cheeks rosy; and all her movements were alert and springy. Judy too, when they went to breakfast, looked well and was in good spirits; but there was something about her which he could not understand. It was not that she was quick of intellect and speech, for such had been always her habit; it was not that she was eager, for she was not always so; it was not that she was exuberantly fond of Joy — she had never been anything else. But there seemed now to be some sort of elusive background to all her thoughts. He began to wonder in a vague way if it were possible that she had fallen in love. She asked, after her usual manner, a host of questions about Joy and about the visit to the Lakes; where they had been and who they had seen; and of all the little interests and happenings during the time of separation. Colonel Ogilvie felt a little wearied of it all. He had already covered the ground with the girl's mother, for arriving in the grey of the dawn, he had gone straight to his wife's room where he had rested till breakfast time. There he had told her all that he could remember. With, however, the patient courtesy which had not as yet in his life failed him with women he went over all the ground again with Judy. He could not but be struck with Judy's questioning on one subject: whether they had met at Ambleside any special acquaintance. He concluded that she meant

Mr. Hardy, and asked her if such were the case. She blushed so brightly when she admitted it that he conceived the idea that the peccant Englishman was the object of her affection. Then, as she dropped that subject of questioning, he, in order to draw her out, went on:

“But my dear Judy it was not possible that we could have seen him. He has not seemed particularly anxious to meet us; and even if he was anxious he could not have done it as he did not know where we were.”

“Oh, yes he did!” The Colonel was surprised; the tone of her words carried conviction of truthfulness. He answered quickly:

“He did! How on earth do you know that?” Judy in her emotional interest answered without thinking. “Because I told him so!”

“Oh, you saw him then?” Again she answered without thought:

“No, but I wrote to him.”

“How do you know that he got your letter?”

“Because he answered it!” She would have given all she possessed to have been silent or to have answered more discreetly when she saw her brother-in-law’s face wrinkle into a hard smile, and noted the cruel keenness of his eyes and the cynical smile on his mouth. She answered sharply; and, as is usual, began the instant after, to pay the penalty for such sharpness. His voice seemed to rasp her very soul as he said:

“I am glad to hear that the gentleman has consideration for some one — even a lady — who writes to him. But to my mind such but emphasises his rudeness — if for the moment I may call it so — of his conduct to others. As for myself when I meet the gentleman — should I ever have the good fortune to do so — I shall require him to answer for this insult — amongst others!” “Insult?” murmured Judy in a panic of apprehension.

“Yes, my dear Judith. There is no stronger word; had there been I should have used it. When the same man who does not answer my letters, or write even to accept or decline my proffered hospitality carries on at the same time a clandestine correspondence with ladies of my family he shall have to answer to me for it. By God he shall!” Judy thought silence wiser than any form of words, and remained mute. Colonel Ogilvie went on in the same cold, rasping voice:

“May I ask you, Miss Hayes,”— “Miss Hayes, my God!” thought poor Judy trembling. He went on: “if my daughter has had any meeting or correspondence with him?”

“No! No! No!” cried Judy. “I can answer for that”

“Indeed! May I ask how you can speak with certainty on such a subject. I thought you were in Italy and that my daughter had been with me.” In despair she spoke impulsively:

“I don’t know, Lucius. How could I — I only think so.”

“Exactly! Then you are but giving your opinion! For that my dear Judith I am much obliged; but it has been for so long my habit to judge for myself in matters of those mutual relations between men which we call ‘honour’ that I have somehow come to trust my own opinion in preference to that of any one else — even you my dear Judith — and to act upon it.” Then, seeing the red flush of anger and humiliation in her cheeks whilst the tears seemed to leap into her eyes, he felt that he had gone too far and added:

“I trust that you will forgive me, my dear sister, if I have caused you unnecessary pain. Unhappily pain must follow such dereliction of duty as has been shown by that young man, and by you too; but believe me I would spare you if I could. But I can promise — and do so now — that I shall not again forget myself and speak bitterly, out of the bitterness of my heart as I have done. I pray your forgiveness, and trust that it may be extended to me." The cynical words and tone of his apology, however it may have been meant, only added fuel to her anger. Words were inadequate so she sought refuge in flight. As she went out of the door she heard Colonel Ogilvie say as if to himself:

"I may not know how to speak to women; but thank God, I do know how to deal with that damned fellow!"

Judy threw herself on her bed in a storm of futile passion. She could not but feel that she had been brutally treated but she was powerless to either resent or explain. But well she knew that she had helped to leave matters worse for poor Joy than they had been. All the anger that Colonel Ogilvie had been repressing had now blazed out He had expressed himself, and she had never known such expression of his to fail in tragic consequences. He would now never forgive Mr. Hardy for his double sins of omissions and commission. She was sorry for the young man's sake; but was in anguish for the sake of the poor girl who had, she felt and knew, set her heart upon him. Joy's romance in which her heart — her whole being and her future happiness — had been embarked was practically over, though she did not know it as yet All the life-long brightness that even her father had ever hoped for her was gone. Henceforth she would be only a poor derelict, like Judy herself, wrecked on a lee shore! Judy had always pitied herself, but she had never realised the cause of that pity as she did now, seen as it was through the eyes of loving sympathy. "I pitied my own heart, As if I held it in my hand, Somewhat coldly, — with a sense Of fulfilled benevolence, And a "Poor thing' negligence."

Colonel Ogilvie went out in a very militant humour to interview the motor-agent He felt angry with himself for having lost his temper — and to a lady; and his anger had to be visited on some one. In any case he considered that the motor people had treated him scurvily and should suffer accordingly. In reality he was in a reaction from great happiness. He was an affectionate husband who had been deeply concerned at his wife's long illness, and lonely and distraught in her long absence. Only that morning he had met her again and had found her quite restored to health and as though she had regained her youth. He had shared in her pleasure at the good account he had to give of Joy. It was, after all, perhaps natural to a man of his peculiar temperament to visit heavily his displeasure on the man who had, to his mind, ill-used him, and on all concerned with him in the doing. Mr. Hardy it was who had jarred the wheels of his chariot of pleasure; and Mr. Hardy it was who must ultimately answer to him for so doing.

The expression of his opinions as to the moral and commercial worth of the motor-agent and of the manufacturer with whom he dealt seemed to relieve his feelings to some degree; he returned to Brown's in a much milder frame of mind than that in which he had gone out. He was kept pretty busy till the time of departure, but in his secret heart — made up to action during the time of his work — he determined to try to make amends to Judy for the pain he had given her. He rejoiced now that his wife had not been present at that scene which it already pained him to look back upon.

He was somewhat incensed that as he could not leave by his intended train he would have to postpone the journey by several hours. He could not now arrive at Ambleside till nearly midnight.

In the train he took the first opportunity of making the amende to Judy. Mrs. Ogilvie had fallen asleep — she had been awake since very early in the morning, so the Colonel said quietly to his sister-in-law:

"Judy I want you to forgive me, if you can." She thrilled with pleasure as he spoke her name in the familiar form. It seemed some sort of presage of a change for the better, a sort of lifting of the ban which had all day lain so heavy on her. As he went on her hopes grew; there were possibilities that, after all, Joy was not yet finally doomed to unhappiness. At all times Colonel Ogilvie was impressive in his manner; the old-fashioned courtesy on which he had long ago founded himself was permeated with conscious self-esteem. Now when the real earnestness of the moment was grafted upon this pronounced manner he seemed to the last degree dignified — almost pompous:

"I cannot tell you how sorry I am that I caused you pain this morning, or how ashamed I am for having so lost my temper before you. For more than twenty years I have honesty tried, my dear, to make you happy." Here she interrupted him: "And you succeeded Lucius!" He rose and bowed gravely:

"Thank you, my dear. I am grateful to you for that kindly expression. It does much, I assure you, to mitigate the poignancy of my present concern. It was too bad of me to let my bitterness so wound you. It shall not occur again. Moreover I feel that I owe you something; and I promise you that if I should be so — so overcome again by anger I shall try to obey you to the best of my power. You shall tell me what you wish me to do; and if I can I shall try to do it." Here a look of caution, rare to him, overspread his face: "I won't promise to give up a purpose of my life or brook any interference with the course of honour — that I can promise to no one, not even to you my dear. But if I can grant any consideration — or — or favour I shall certainly try to do so!”

Judy was not so well satisfied with the end of the promise as with the beginning. But it was hopeful of better things for the future; so she meekly and gratefully accepted it en bloc.

When they arrived at Ambleside it was dark and the lamps of the station lent but a dim light. It became evident to Mrs. Ogilvie and Judy that Colonel Ogilvie was disappointed at not finding Joy awaiting them on the platform. He had, during the journey, explained to them with some elaboration that they were not to expect her as he had said there was no need of her coming; but, all the same, he had himself expected her. As the train drew up he had leaned out of the window looking carefully along the whole range of the platform. When, however, he ascertained that she was not there, he turned his attention to Judy whom he observed prolonging the search. His mind at once went back to his original concern that there was something between her and Mr. Hardy. She heard him say to himself fiercely under his breath:

“That damned fellow again!” She did not of course understand that it was with reference to herself, and took it that it presaged ill to Joy. She knew from Colonel Ogilvie’s expression and bearing that the man he had now grown to hate was in his mind, and with a heavy heart she took her place in the waiting landau.

When the carriage arrived at the hotel Colonel Ogilvie jumped out and ran up the steps. This was so unlike his usual courtesy that it not only pained the two ladies but made them anxious. When Colonel Ogilvie forgot his habitual deference to women something serious indeed must have been in his mind! When they followed, which they did as quickly as they could, they found him in the hall reading a telegram. A railway envelope lay on the table, and beside it a little pile of letters. When he had finished reading the first telegram he opened the second and read it also. All the time his face was set in a grim frown, the only relief from which was the wrinkling of his forehead which betrayed an added anxiety. He handed the two transcripts to his wife, saying as he did so:

"I have put them in order; one is a few hours earlier than the other!" Mrs. Ogilvie read in silence and handed the forms to Judy, the Colonel remaining grimly silent. Mrs. Ogilvie said nothing. When Judy had turned over the last and looked at the back of it in that helpless manner which betrays inadequate knowledge, Colonel Ogilvie said: "Well?"

"I trust the poor child is not in any danger!" said the mother. "How thoughtful of her to have sent twice. She knew you would be so anxious about her!" said the aunt, wishing to propitiate the angry father. For fully a minute no more was said. Then the Colonel spoke:

"She went motoring. In whose car? I have not yet got my own!" As he was speaking the hotel proprietor came into the hall to pay his respects, as he usually did with incoming guests. He heard the last remark and said:

"Pardon me, Colonel Ogilvie. But your car has arrived. The chauffeur who had charge of it and came in the same train with it to Kirkby Stephen drove it here some time ago!" Colonel Ogilvie bowed a slight acknowledgment and turning to Judy said:

"Then it could not be in that car she went. If not, whose car was it? Whom did she go with? We know no one here who owns a car; and we did not make any new acquaintances during our stay. Indeed none even of our old acquaintances did us the honour of calling. But perhaps my dear Judy," he spoke with manifest and comforting self-restraint— "you can enlighten us. Do you know if your friend Mr.

Hardy whom you informed of our being here has a motor car?” Judy feared to precipitate disaster, and not knowing what to say answered feebly with a query:

“Why Colonel?” The storm cloud of the father’s wrath instantly broke:

“Why, madam ‘why’” he almost roared whilst the discreet proprietor withdrew closing the inner door of the hall behind him — the luggage was being taken in by the basement door:

“I’ll tell you why if you wish — though perhaps you know it already. Because I want to know under what circumstances my daughter has gone out motoring with some stranger — though indeed it may be that he is not quite a stranger — the moment my back was turned. Let me tell you that it is not usual for unmarried young ladies to go out motoring into far away places with men, unchaperoned. My honour — my honour through my daughter — is here concerned. And it is like that damned fellow to take her away in such an underhand manner. You need say nothing of him. It’s no use trying to palliate his conduct. True enough I don’t know for certain that it is he, or that she is alone with any man; but I have a conviction that it is so; and I tell you I shall lose no time in putting my convictions to the test. I mean to take no chances with regard to that damned fellow. I don’t trust him! He has already affronted me, and has been tampering with the women of my family. I have borne even that with what temper I could because I was under obligation to him. But if, as it would seem, he has run away with my daughter, I shall brook his insolence no longer. He shall render me a full account of his doings with me and mine!” He crammed his letters into his pocket and strode upstairs. There he rang the bell in such a violent manner that the proprietor himself attended to it. Colonel Ogilvie asked him to have the chauffeur sent up to him, and requested the proprietor to come also himself as he wished to ask him some questions on local matters. He had by now his temper in hand, and was all the more dangerous because cold. In a few minutes the proprietor brought in the chauffeur, a stolid, hard-featured, silent man; manifestly one to obey orders and to stand any amount of fatigue. When Colonel Ogilvie had looked at his credentials and asked him some questions, all of which he did with perfect self-control and courtesy, he turned to the proprietor and asked:

"Can you tell me whereabout is a place called Casde Douglas?"

"In Scotland, Colonel. In Galloway — the part of Scotland just beyond the Firth of Solway. It is I think in Kirkcudbrightshire."

"How far from here?"

"Something over a hundred miles I should say." The father started:

"Good God!" Judy's heart sank at the exclamation and the tone; his voice was laden with horror and despair. The new chauffeur's mouth opened. He spoke as if every word was grudgingly shot out:

"It is exactly ninety-one and a half miles." Colonel Ogilvie turned to him quickly:

"How do you know so accurately; have you driven it?"

"Never sir!"

"Then how do you know?"

"In the train coming down I spent my time looking over the maps and the distance as given in the books of the Motorists' Touring Club. I noted that."

"Had you any reason for examining that particular route?" asked the Colonel suspiciously. He was obsessed by an idea that the "damned fellow" was corrupting everybody so as to work against him, Colonel Ogilvie.

"None special; I was only trying to do my business well. I thought it likely that you might want me to stay with you a short time until you and your permanent chauffeur should become acquainted with the mechanism of your new car. You see, I was told you were an American, and the American makes differ somewhat from our own. And as I am myself looking out for a permanent situation where I should be well paid, made comfortable, and treated with whatever consideration is due to a first-rate mechanicien and driver I thought that if I showed zeal in your temporary service you might wish to retain me permanently. In a certain sense I took, I may say, special note of at least part of that particular route."

"Why?" Colonel Ogilvie's suspicions came up afresh at the admission.

"Simply because I took it that you might want to drive into Scotland, and Galloway is perhaps the most promising region for motoring on this side of that country. All the motor roads from this side of England run through Carlisle. Then you cross the Border close to Gretna Green..."

'To where?" The Colonel's voice was full of passion. The chauffeur went on calmly and explicitly:

"Gretna Green. That is where run-away marriages used to be made. That place was usually chosen because it was the first across the Border where Scotch law ruled. The simplifying of our marriage laws and the growth of sanity amongst parents of marriageable daughters generally has done away with the necessity of elopement Now we go by there without stopping, as Galloway is the modern objective. Indeed in going there you do not go into Gretna at all; you pass it by on the right when you have crossed the bridge over the

Sark and are making for Annan. And as to my knowledge of mileages that is a part of my trade. It is my business to arrange for the amount of petrol necessary for the run I am ordered to make. I don't think that you need disturb yourself about that one small item of my knowledge. It may set you more at ease if I tell you that it is one hundred and thirty-six and a half miles to Glasgow; a hundred and one to Abbotsford; seventy-five and a half to Dumfries; a hundred and thirty-five and a half to Edinburgh; two hundred and seventy-four and a half to Aberdeen; one hundred and fifty-eight and three quarters to..."

"Stop! Stop!" cried Colonel Ogilvie. "I am obliged to you for your zeal in my service; and I think I can promise you that if in every way you suit, you may look on the permanent post as your own. I shall want you to begin your duties this very night. But this is a special job; and with special reward, for it is difficult and arduous."

"I am willing sir, whatever it may be."

"That is well said. You are the sort of man I want."

"My orders sir?"

"I want you to take me to Casde Douglas to-night — now — as soon as you can get ready. I wish to get there as soon as I can. You will want to have everthing right, for we must have no break-down if we can help it. And you must have good lamps."

"Twill be all right, sir. We shan't, I expect, break down. But if we do — the motor is a new one and I did not make it — I shall put it right I am a first-rate mecbaniden and an accomplished driver..."

"All right; but don't talk. Get the car ready, and we shall start at once."

"We can start at once, so far as the car and I are concerned. But we lack something as yet. We must have a pilot." "A pilot! I thought you knew the way."

"On paper, yes; and I doubt not I could get there all right — in time. But you want to go quick; and we would lose time finding out the way. Remember we are going in the dark." Then turning to the proprietor he said:

"Perhaps you can help us here, sir. Have you any one who can pilot?" "Not a chauffeur; but I have a coachman who knows all round here for a couple of days' journey. I have no doubt that he knows that road amongst the others. He could sit beside you and direct you how to go!" "Right! Can you get him soon?"

"At once. He lives over the stables. I shall send for him now." He rang the bell and when the servant came gave his message. And so that matter was settled and the journey arranged. The chauffeur went to have a last look over the motor car, and to bring it round to the door.

All the time of the interview Colonel Ogilvie stood silent, keeping erect and rigid. He was so stern and so master of himself that Judy wished now that he had less self-control. She feared the new phase even more than the old. Then care for what had still to be done took hold of her. She took her sister away to prepare a little basket of food and wine for Colonel Ogilvie and the men with him; they would need some sustenance on their long, arduous journey. Those kindly offices kept both women busy whilst Colonel Ogilvie was putting on warm clothes for the night travelling. Presently Mrs. Ogilvie joined him. When they were alone she said to him somewhat timidly:

"You will be tender, dear, with Joy? The child is young, and a harsh word spoken in anger at a time when she is high-strung and nervous and tired and frightened might be a lasting sorrow to her!" She half expected that he would resent her speaking at all. She was surprised as well as pleased when, putting his hands kindly on her shoulders, he said:

"Be quite easy in your mind on that subject, wife. Joy has all my love; and, whatever comes, I shall use no harsh word to her. I love her too well to give her pain, at the moment or to think of afterwards. She shall have nothing but care and tenderness and such words as you would yourself wish spoken!" The mother was comforted for the moment. But then came a thought, born of her womanhood, that the keenest pain which could be for the woman would be through her concern for the man. She had little doubt as to what her husband's action would be if his surmises as to Mr. Hardy should prove to be correct. And such would mean the blighting of poor Joy's life. She would dearly have loved to remonstrate with her husband on the subject; and she would have done so, whatever might have been the consequences to herself, but that she feared that any ill-timed expostulation might be harmful to her daughter. All the motherhood in her was awake, and nerved her to endure in silence. The only other words she said as she kissed her husband were:

"Good-bye for a while, dear. God keep you in all dangers of the road — and — and in all the far greater dangers that may come to you at the end of it.

My love to Joy! Be good to her, and never forget that she can suffer most through any one dear to her. Bring her home to me, safe and — and happy! I..." Her voice broke and she wept on his shoulder. Colonel Ogilvie was a determined man, and in some ways a harsh and cruel one; but he was a man, and understood. He took his wife in his arms and kissed her fondly, stroking her dark hair wherein the silver threads were showing. Then he passed out in silence.

By the door of the car he found Judy who said:

"I have put in your supper — you will want it dear — and also supper for the men. And oh! Lucius, don't forget, for poor Joy's sake, that this day you hold her heart — which is her life — in your hand!"

This added responsibility filled the cup of Colonel Ogilvie's indignation. Already his conscience was quickening and his troubles — the agitation to his feelings — were almost more than he could bear. He would have liked to make some cynical remark to Judy; but before he could think of anything sufficiently biting, the motor which had been throbbing violently started.

Before the angry man could attempt to get back his self-possession he was gazing past the two shrouded figures before him and across the luminous arc of the lamps out into the night. The darkness seemed to sweep by him as he rushed on his way to Scotland.

When he had gone Judy turned to her sister and said:

"I was going to give him Jo/s dressing bag and a change of dress to take with him. She will want them, poor dear, after a long day of travel and a night in a strange place. But I have thought of a better plan."

"And that?" asked the anxious mother.

"To take them myself! Moreover it won't be any harm my being present in case the Colonel gets on the rampage. It will restrain him some. Now you go and lie down, dear. Don't say anything — except your prayers in case you feel you must say something. But sleep will be your best help in this pretty tough proposition. I'll go and get a hustle on that Dutch landlord. He's got to find an automobile and a chauffeur, and a pilot if necessary for me too!"

CHAPTER 19

DECLARATION OF WAR

Joy Ogilvie was so tired out that her body lay like a log all night How her mind was occupied she only knew afterwards. For the memory of dreams is an unconscious memory at the time; it is only when there is opportunity of comparison with actualities that dreams can be re-produced. Then, as at first, the dreams are real — as they are forever whilst memory lasts. Indeed regarding dreams and actualities, one might almost appeal to scientific analogy; and in comparing the world of imagination — which is the kingdom of dreams — with the material world, might adduce the utterance of Sir Oliver Lodge in comparing the density of aether with that of matter in the modern scientific view: “Matter is turning out to be a filmy thing in comparison with aether.”

This might well serve as a scientific comparison. Nay more, it might well be an induction. The analogies of nature are so marvellously constant, as exemplified by the higher discoveries in physics, that we might easily wander farther than in taking the inner world of Thought as compared with the outer world of Physical Being, as an analogy to the Seen and Unseen worlds.

In the meantime we may take it that Joy’s dreams that night were in some way reflective of the events of the day. No girl of healthy emotional power could fail to be influenced by such a sequence of experiences of passion and fear as she had gone through. The realised hoping of love, the quick-answering abandonment of expressed passion; long, long minutes of the bliss of communion with that other soul — minutes whose sweetness or whose length could not be computed until the leisure of thought gave opportunity. Unconscious cerebration goes on unceasingly; and be sure that with such data as she had in her mind, the workings of imagination were quick and by no means cold. Again she lived the moments of responsive passion; but so lived them that she had advanced further on the road to completed passion when the unconsciousness to physical surroundings began to disappear and on the senses the actualities began to consciously impress themselves. The dawn, stealing in between the chinks of the folded shutters, made strange lines on the floor without piercing through the walls of sleep. The myriad sounds of waking life from distant field and surrounding street brought no message to the closed eyes of weariness. The sun rose, and rose, and rose; and still she lay there unmoving.

At last that unaccountable impulse which moves all living things to sentience at the ending of sleep, stirred her. The waking grew on her. At first, when her eyes partially opened, she saw, but without comprehending, the dim room with its low ceiling; the wide window, masked in with shutters whose edges were brilliant with the early light; the odd furniture and all the unfamiliar surroundings. Then came the inevitable self-question: “where am I?”

The realization of waking from such dreaming as hers is a rude and jarring process, and when it does come, comes with something of a shock. For what seemed a long time Joy lay in a sort of languorous ecstasy whilst memory brought back to her those moments of the previous day which were sweeter even than her dreams. Again she heard the footsteps of the man she loved coming up rapidly behind her. Again she saw as she turned, in obedience to some new impulse which swayed her to surrender, the face of the man looking radiant with love and happiness. Again she felt the sweet satisfaction of living and loving when his arms closed round her and her arms closed round him and they strained each other strictly. Again there came to her the thrill which seemed to lift her from her earthly being as his mouth touched hers and they kissed each other in the absolute self-abandonment of reciprocated passion — the very passing memory of which set her blood tingling afresh; the thrill which set her soul floating in the expanse of air and made all conventions of the artificial world seen far below seem small and miserable and of neither power nor import. Again she was swept by that tide of wild desires, vague and nebulous as yet, inchoate, elusive, expansive, all-absorbing, which proclaimed her womanhood to herself. That desire of wife to husband, of sex to sex, of woman to man, which is the final expression of humanity — the love song of the children of Adam. It was as though memory and dreaming had become one. As if the day had merged in the night, and the night again in the coming day, each getting as it came all the thoughts and wishes and fancies and desires which follow in the train of the all-conquering Love-God.

In such receptive mood Joy awoke to life. When she realised where she was; and when the import of her new surroundings had broken in upon her, all the forces of her youth and strength began at once to manifest themselves. She slid softly from her bed — the instinct of self protection forbade noise or else she would have jumped to the floor. Doing must follow dreaming! The attitude of standing, once again helped to recall the previous evening, and she remembered that she had thought then that she must not open the windows in the morning because they faced directly other windows across a narrow street.

She remembered also that the next room, through which she had entered, had windows on two sides. Those on one side opened as did her own; but those on the other side looked out on an open space. And so, without further thought, she opened the door between and passed into the outer room. It too, like her own, was dark from the closed shutters. Instinctively she went softly, her bare feet making no sound on the carpet. With the same instinctive caution she had opened the door noiselessly; when the self-protective instinct has once been awakened, it does not easily relapse to sleep. She went over to one of the windows and tried to look out through the chinks. The day was bright outside and the sun was shining; the fog had entirely disappeared. In the sudden desire to breathe the fresh morning air, and to free in the sunlight her soul cramped by the long darkness of fog and night, she threw open the heavy shutters.

Athlyne slept so soundly that he never stirred. He lay on the sofa on his left side with his face out to the room. He too had been dreaming; and to his dreams the happiness of the day had brought a vivifying light. Through all his weariness of mind and body came to his spirit the glow of those moments when he knew that his love was reciprocated; when his call to his mate had been answered — answered in no uncertain voice. And so he, too, had lain with bodily nature all quiescent, whilst the emotional side of his mind ranged freely between memory and expectation. And in due process the imaginative power of the mind had worked on the nerves — and through them on the body — till he too lay in a languorous semi-trance — the mind ranging free whilst the abnormally receptive body quivered in unison. It was a dangerous condition of being in which to face the situation which awaited him.

The sound of the opening shutter wakened him, fully and all at once. The moment his eyes opened he saw a figure between him and the window; and at the knowledge that some stranger was in his room the habit of quick action which had prevailed in his years of campaigning re-asserted itself. On the instant he flung aside his blanket and sprang from his bed.

At the sound of a step on the floor Joy turned. The light streaming in through the unshuttered window showed them in completeness each to the other. The light struck Athlyne full in front. There was instant recognition, even in the unaccustomed garb, of that tall lithe form; of those fine aquiline features, of those dark flashing eyes. As to Joy, who standing against the light made her own shadow, Athlyne could have no doubt. He would have realised her presence in darkness and silence. As she stood in her fine linen, the morning light making, a sort of nimbus round the opacity of the upper part of her body, she looked to him like some fresh realization — some continuation in semi-ethereal form — of the being of his dreams. There was no pause for thought in either of the lovers. The instant of recognition was the realization of presence — unquestioning and the most natural thing in the world that the other should be there. Delight had sealed from within the ears of Doubt Unhesitatingly they ran to each other, and before a second had passed were locked tightly in each other’s arms.

In the secret belief of the Conventional world — that belief which is the official teaching of the churches of an artificial society, and not merely the world of Adam and Eve (and some others) — the ceremony of Marriage in itself changes the entire nature of the contracting parties. Whatever may have been the idiosyncrasies of these individuals such are forthwith changed, foregone, or otherwise altered to suit that common denominator of Human Nature which alone is officially catalogued in the records of the just It were as though the recorded promise of two love-stricken sufferers, followed by the formal blessings of the Church in any of its differentiations — or of the Registrar — should change baser mortals to more angelic counterpart; just as the “Philosopher’s Stone” which the mediaeval alchemist dreamed of and sought for, was expected to change baser metals to gold.

Perhaps it is because this transmutation is so complete that so many of those marriages which the Church does sanctify turn out so differently from the anticipations of the contractors and blessors!

But Dame Nature has her own church and her own ritual. In her case the Blessing comes before the Service; and the Benediction is but the official recognition that two souls — with their attendant bodies — have found a perfect communion for themselves. Those who believe in Human Nature — and many of them are seriously minded people too — realise and are thankful for the goodness of God who showers the possibilities of happiness with no stinting and no uncertain hand. “After all” they say “what about Eden?” There was no church’s blessing there — not even a Registrar; and yet we hold that Adam and Eve were united in Matrimony. Nor were their children or their children’s children made one with organised formality. What was it then that on these occasions stood between fornication and marriage? What could it be but the Blessing of God! And if God could make marriage by His Blessing in Eden, when did He forego that power. Or if indeed there be only a “Civil Contract” — as so many hold to-day — what proofs or writings must there be beyond that mere “parole” contract which is recognised in other matters by the Law of the Land.

So, the believers in natural religion and natural law — those who do not hold that personal licence, unchecked and boundless, is an appanage or logical result of freedom. To these, freedom is in itself a state bounded on all sides by restrictive laws — as must ever be, unless Anarchy is held to be the ultimate and controlling force. And in the end Anarchy is the denial of all Cosmic law — that systematised congeries of natural forces working in harmony to a common end.

But law, Cosmic or Anarchic, (if there be such a thing, and it may be that Hell — if there is one — has its own laws —) or any grade between these opposites, is a matter for coolness and reflection. Inter arma silent leges is a maxim of co-ordinate rulings in the Court of Cosmic law. And the principle holds whether the arms be opposed or locked together in any form of passion. When Love lifts the souls, whose bodies are already in earthly communion, I.aw ceases to be. From the altitude of accomplished serenity the mightiest law is puny; just as from a balloon the earth looks flat, and even steeples and towers have no perspective.

So it was with the two young people clasped in each other’s arms. The world they lived in at the moment was their world, bounded only by the compass of their arms. After all what more did they want — what could they want. They were together and alone. Shame was not for them, or to them, who loved with all their hearts — whose souls already felt as one. For shame, which is a conven- rional ordering of the blood, has no place — not even a servitor’s in the House of Love: that palace where reigns the love of husbandhood and wifehood, of fatherhood and motherhood — that true, realised Cosmos — the aim, the objective, the heaven of human life.

Their circumstances but intensified the pleasure of the embrace. Athlyne and Joy had both felt the same communion of spirits when they embraced at their first meeting out of Ambleside when their souls had met. This had been intensified when they sat in close embrace after lunch beyond Dairy, when heart consciously beat to heart. Now it was completed in this meeting, unexpected and therefore more free and unhampered by preparatory thoughts and intentions, when body met body in a close if tentative communion. The mere paucity of raiment had force and purpose. They could each feel as they hung together closely strained, the beating of each other's heart; the rising and falling of each other's lungs. Their breaths commingled as they held mouth to mouth. In such delirious rapture — for these two ardent young people loved each other with a love which both held to be but the very beginning of an eternal bond and which took in every phase, actual and possible, of human beings — there was no place for forethought or afterthought. It was the hour of life which is under the guidance of Nature; to be looked forward to with keen if ignorant anticipation; and which is to be looked back on for evermore as a time when the very heavens opened and the singing of the Angelic choir came through unmuffled.

For seconds, in which Time seemed to stand still, they stood body to body and mouth to mouth. The first to speak was the man:

"I thought you were in England by late in the evening — and you were there all the time!" He indicated the direction by turning his eyes towards her room. His words seemed to fire her afresh. Holding him more closely to her, she leaned back from her hips and gazed at him languorously; her words dropped slowly from her opened lips:

"Oh-h! If we had only known!" What exactly was in her mind she did not know — did not think of knowing — did not want to know. Perhaps she did not mean anything definite. It was only an expression of some feeling, of some want, some emotion, some longing — some primitive utterance couched in words of educated thought, as sweet and spontaneous as the singing of a bird in its native woods at springtime.

Somehow, it moved Athlyne strangely. Moved the manhood of him in many ways, chiefest among them his duty of protection. It is not a commonly-received idea that man — not primitive man but the partially-completed article of a partially-completed cosmic age — is scrupulous with regard to woman. The general idea to the contrary effect is true en gros but not en detaille. True of women; not true of a woman. An educated man, accustomed to judgment and action in matters requiring thought, thinks, perhaps unconsciously, all round him, backward as well as forward; but mainly forward. Present surroundings form his data; consequences represent the conclusion. Himself remains neutral, an onlooker, until he is called on for immediate decision and consequent action.

So it was with Athlyne. His instant ejaculation:

“Thank God we didn’t know!” would perhaps have been understood by a man. To a woman it was incomprehensible. Woman is, after all, more primitive than man. Her instincts are more self-centred than his. As her life moves in a narrower circle, her view is rather microscopic than telescopic; whilst his is the reverse. Inasmuch then as he naturally surveys a larger field, so his introspective view is wider.

Joy loved the man; and so, since he had already expressed himself, considered him as already her husband; or to speak more accurately considered herself as already his wife. It was, therefore, with something like chagrin that she heard his disavowal of her views. She did not herself quite understand what those views were, but all the same it was a disappointment that he did not really acquiesce in them; nay, more that he did not press them on his own account — press them relentlessly, as a woman loves a man to do, even when his wishes are opposed to her own.

A woman’s answer to chagrin is ultimate victory of her purpose; and the chagrin of love is perhaps the strongest passion with a purpose that can animate her.

When Joy became conscious, as she did in a few seconds, that her lover following out his protective purpose was about to separate himself from her — she quite understood without any telling or any experience both motive and purpose — she opposed it on her part. As the strictness of his embrace lessened, so in proportion did hers increase. Then came to the man the reaction — he was only a man, after all. His ardour redoubled, and her heart beat harder with new love as well as triumph as he drew her closer to him in a pythonic embrace. Then she, too, clung to him even closer than before. That embrace was all lover-like — an agony of rapture.

In its midst they were startled somewhat by the rumbling of a motor driven fast which seemed to stop close to them. Instinctively Joy tried to draw away from her lover; such is woman’s impulse. But Athlyne held her all the tighter — his embrace was not all love now, but the protection which comes from love. She understood, and resigned herself to him. And so they stood, heart to heart, and mouth to mouth, listening.

There was a clatter of tongues in the hall. Joy thought she recognised one voice — she could not be sure in the distance and through the closed door — and her heart sank. She would again have tried to draw away violently but that she was powerless. Her will was gone, like a bird’s under the stare of the snake. Athlyne, too, was in suspense, his heart beating wildly. He had a sort of presage of disaster which seemed in a way to paralyse him.

There were quick steps on the stairs. A voice said:

"There" and the door rattled. At this moment both the lovers were willing to separate. But before they could do so, the door opened and the figure of Colonel Ogilvie blocked the entrance.

"Good God!" The old man's face had grown white as though the sight had on the instant frozen him. So pallid was he, all in that second, that Joy and Athlyne received at once the same idea: that his moustache, which they had thought of snowy whiteness, was but grey against the marble face.

The father's instinct was protective too, and his action was quick. In the instant, without turning his face, he shut the door behind him and put his heel against it.

"Quick, daughter, quick!" he said in a whisper, low but so fierce that it cut the air like a knife, "Get into that room and dress yourself. And, get out if you can, by another way without being noticed!" As he spoke he pointed towards the open door through which in the darkened room the bed with clothing in disarray could be dimly seen. Joy fled incontinently. The movements of a young woman can be of extraordinary quickness, but never quicker than when fear lends her wings. It seemed to Athlyne that she made but one jump from where she stood through the door-wav. He could remember afterwards the flash of her bare heels as she turned in closing the door behind her.

"Now Sir!" Colonel Ogilivie's voice was stern to deadliness as he spoke. Athlyne realised its import. He felt that he was bound hand and foot, and knew that his part of the coming struggle would have to be passive. He braced himself to endure. Still, the Colonel's question had to be answered. The onus of beginning the explanation had been thrust upon him. It was due to Joy that there should be no delay on his part in her vindication. Almost sick at heart with apprehension he began:

"There has been no fault on Joy's part!" The instant he had spoken, the look of bitter haughtiness which came on Colonel Ogilvie's face warned him that he had made a mistake. To set the error right he must know what he had to meet; and so he waited.

"We had better, I think, leave Miss Ogilvie's name out of our conversation... And I may perhaps remind you, sir, that I am the best judge of my daughter's conduct. When I have said anything to my daughter's detriment it will be quite time for a stranger to interfere on her behalf... It is of your conduct, sir, that I ask — demand explanation!"

Athlyne would have liked to meet a speech of this kind with a blow. In the case of any other man he would have done so: but this man was Joy's father, and in all circumstances must be treated as such. He felt in a vague sort of way — a background of thought rather than thought itself — that his manhood was being tested, and by a fiery test. Come what might, he must be calm, or at least be master of himself; or else bitter woe would come to Joy. Of course it would come — perhaps had come already to himself; but to that he was already braced.

Colonel Ogilvie was skilled in the deadly preliminaries to lethal quarrel. More than once when a foe had been marked down for vengeance had he led him on to force the duel himself. In no previous quarrel of his life had he ever had the good cause that he had now, and be sure that he used that knowledge to the full. There was in his nature something of that stoical quality of the Red Indian which enables him to enjoy the torture of his foe, though the doing so entails a keen anguish to himself. Perhaps the very air of the "dark and bloody, ground" of Kentucky was so impregnated with the passions of those who made it so that the dwelling of some generations had imbued the dwellers with some of the old Indian spirit. As Athlyne stood face to face with him, watching for every sign of intention as a fencer watches his opponent, he realised that there would be for him no pity, no mercy, not even understanding. He would have to fight an uphill contest — If Joy was to be saved even a single pang. What he could do he would: sacrifice himself in any way that a man can accomplish it. Life and happiness had for him passed by! One of his greatest difficulties would be, he felt, that of so controlling himself that he would not of necessity shut behind him, by anything which he might say, or do, the door of conciliation. He began at once, therefore, to practice soft answering:

"My conduct, sir, has been bad — so far as doing an indiscreet thing, and in not showing to you that respect which is your due in any matter in which Miss Ogilvie may be concerned." For some reason which he could not at the moment understand this seemed to infuriate the Colonel more than ever. In quite a violent way he burst out:

"So I am to take it that no respect is due to me in my own person! Such, I gather from your words. You hint if you do not say that respect is only my due on my daughter's account!" At the risk of further offence Athlyne interrupted him. It would not do for him to accept this monstrous reading of what he meant for courtesy:

"Not so, sir. My respect is to you always and for all causes. I did but put it in that way as it is only in connection with your daughter that I dared to speak at all." Even this pacific explanation seemed to add fuel to the old man's choler:

"Let me tell you, sir, that this has nothing whatever to do with my daughter. Miss Ogilvie is my care. Her defence, if any be required, is my duty — my privilege. And I quite know how to exercise — and to defend — both.”

“Quite so, sir. I realise that, and I have no wish to arrogate to myself your right or your duty; for either of which I myself should be proud to die!” Athlyne’s voice and manner were so suave and deferential that Colonel Ogilvie began to have an idea that he was a poltroon; and in this belief the bully that was in him began to manifest itself. He spoke harshly, intending to convey this idea, though as he did so his heart smote him. Even as he spoke there rose before his bloodshot eyes the vision of a river shimmering with gold as the sunset fell on it, and projected against it the figure of a frightened woman tugging at the reins of a run-away mare; whilst close behind her rode a valiant man guiding with left hand a splendid black horse to her side, his right hand stretched out to drag her to his saddle. Before them both lay a deadly chasm. In the pause Athlyne took the opportunity of hurriedly putting on his outer clothing.

But even that touching vision did not check the father’s rage. His eyes were bloodshot and even such vision — any vision — could not linger in them. It passed, leaving in its place only a red splotch — as of blood; the emotion which the thought had quickened had become divergent in its own crooked way. But in the pause Athlyne had time to get in a word:

“Sir, whatever fault there has been was mine entirely. I acted foolishly perhaps, and unthinkingly. It placed us — placed me in such a position that every accident multiplied possibilities of misunderstanding. I cannot undo that now — I don’t even say that I would if I could. But whatever may be my fate — in the result that may follow my acts — I shall accept it without cavil. And may I say in continuance and development of your own suggestion, that no other name should be mentioned in whatever has to be spoken of between us." As he finished he unconsciously stood upon his dignity, drawing himself up to his full height and standing in soldierly attitude. This had a strange effect on Colonel Ogilvie. Realising that he could rely implicitly on the dignity of the man before him, he allowed himself a further latitude. He could afford, he felt, to be unrestrained in such a presence; and so proceeded to behave as though he was stark, staring raving mad. Athlyne saw the change and, with some instinct more enlightening than his reason, realised that the change might later, have some beneficent effect. More than ever did he feel now the need for his own absolute self-control. It was well that he had made up his mind to this, for it was bitterly tested in Colonel Ogilvie's mad outpour:

"Do you dare, sir, to lecture me as to what I shall not say or shall say about my own daughter. What shall I say to you who though you had not the courtesy to even acknowledge the kindness shown you by her parents, came behind my back when I was far away, and stole her from my keeping. Who took her far away, to the risk even of her reputation. Risk! Risk! When I find you here together, alone and almost naked in each other's arms! God's Death! that I should have seen such a thing — that such a thing should be..." Here his hot wrath changed to ice-cold deadly purpose, and he went on:

"You shall answer me with your life for that!" He paused, still glaring at the other with cold, deadly malevolence. Athlyne felt that the hour of the Forlorn Hope had come to him at last — he had been hot through all his seeming coolness at de Hooge's Spruit. His self-control, could, he felt never be more deeply tested than now; and he braced himself to it. He had now to so bear himself that Joy would suffer the minimum of pain. Pain she would have to endure — much pain; he could not save her from it. He would do what he could; that was all that remained. With real coolness he met the icy look of his antagonist as he said with all the grace and courtesy of which he was naturally master:

“Sir, I answer for my deeds with my life. That life is yours now. Take it, how and when you will! As to answering in words, such cannot be whilst you maintain your present attitude. I have tried already to answer — to explain.” “Explain sir! There is no explanation.”

“Pardon me!” Athlyne’s voice was calm as ever; his dignity so superb that the other checked the words on his lips as he went on:

“There is an explanation to be made — and made it must be, for the sake of...of another. I deny in no way your right of revenge. I think I have already told you that my life is yours to take as you will. But a dying man has, in all civilised places, a right to speak to the Court which condemns him. Such privilege is mine. I claim it — if you will force me to say so. And let me add, Colonel Ogilvie, that I hold it as a part of my submission to your will. We are alone now and can speak freely; but there must be a time — it will be for your own protection from the legal consequences of my death — when others, or at least one other, will know of your intention to kill. I shall speak then if I may not now.” Here the Colonel, whose anger was rising at being so successfully baffled, interrupted him with hard cynicism.

“Conditions in an affair of honour! To be enforced in a court of law I suppose.” He felt ashamed of himself as he made the remark which he felt to be both ungenerous and untrue. He was not surprised when the other answered his indignant irony with scorn:

“No sir! No law! Not any more appeal to law in my defence than there has been justice in your outrageous attack on me. But about that I shall answer you presently. In the meantime I adhere to my conditions. Aye, conditions. I do not hesitate to use the word."

Colonel Ogilvie, through all the madness of his anger, realised at that moment that the man before him was a strong man, as fearless and determined as he was himself. This brought back his duty of good manners as a first instalment of his self-possession. For a few seconds he actually withheld his speech. He even bowed slightly as the other proceeded:

"I have tried to explain... My fault was in venturing to ask... a lady to come for a tide in my car. I had no intention of evil. Nothing more than a mere desire to renew and further an — a friendship which had, from the first moment of my knowing her — or rather from the first moment I set eyes on her, become very dear to me. It was a selfish wish I know; and in my own happiness at her consent I overlooked — neglected — forgot the duty I owed to her father. For that I am bitterly sorry, and I feel that I owe to him a debt which I can never, never repay. But enough of that...That belongs to a different category, and it has to be atoned for in the only way by which an honourable man can atone... As I have already conceded my life to him I need... can say no more. But from the moment when that lady stepped into my car my respect has been for her that which I have always intended to be given to whatever lady should honour me by becoming my wife. Surely you, sir, as yourself an honourable man — a husband and a father, cannot condemn a man for speaking an honourable love to the woman to whom it has been given. When I have admitted that the making of the occasion was a fault I have said all that I accept as misdoing..." He folded his arms and stood on his dignity. For a few seconds, Colonel Ogilvie stood motionless, silent

He could not but recognise the truth that underlay all the dignity of the other. But he was in no way diverted by it from his purpose. His anger was in no way mitigated; his intention of revenge lessened by no whit. He was merely waiting to collect his thoughts so as to be in a position to attack with most deadly effect. He was opening his lips to speak when the other went on as though he had but concluded one section or division of what he had to say:

"And now sir as to the manifest doubt you expressed as to my bona fides in placing my life in your hands — your apprehension lest I should try to evade my responsibility to the laws of honour by an appeal in some way to a court of law. Let me set your mind at ease by placing before you my views; and my views, let me tell you, are ultimately my intentions. I have tried to assure you that with the exception of waiting to ask your consent to taking... a certain passenger for a drive, my conduct has from that moment been such as you could not find fault with. I take it for granted that you — nor no man — could honestly resent such familiarities as are customary to, and consequent on, a man offering marriage to a lady, and pressing his suit with such zeal as is, or should be, attendant on the expression of a passion which he feels very deeply!" Even whilst he was speaking, his subconsciousness was struck by his own coolness. He marvelled that he could, synchronously with the fearful effort necessary to his self-control and with despair gnawing at his heart, speak with such cold blooded preciseness. As is usual in such psychical stresses his memory took note for future reference of every detail.

His opponent on the contrary burst all at once into another fit of flaming passion. Athlyne's very preciseness seemed to have inflamed him afresh. He thundered out "Familiarities sir, on offering marriage!

Do you dare to trifle with me at a time like this. When but a few minutes ago I saw you here in this lonely place, at this hour of the morning after a night of absence, undressed as you were, holding in your arms my daughter undressed also... God's death! sir, be careful or you shall rue it!" He stopped almost choking with passion. Athlyne felt himself once more overwhelmed with the cold wave of responsibility. "Joy! Joy! Joy!" he kept repeating to himself as a sort of charm to keep off evil. To let go his anger now might — would be fatal to her happiness. He marvelled to himself as he went on in equal voice, seemingly calm:

"That sir was with no intent of evil. 'Twas but a natural consequence of the series of disasters which fell on the enterprise which had so crowned my happiness. When I turned to come home so that... so that the lady might be in time to meet her parents who were expected to arrive at — at her destination, I forgot, in my eagerness to meet her wishes, the regulations as to speed; and I was arrested for furious driving. In my anxiety to save her from any form of exposal to publicity, and in my perplexity as to how to manage it, I advised her returning by herself in my motor, I remaining at Dairy. When she had gone, and I had arranged for attending the summons served on me, I wired over to this hotel to keep me rooms. I thought it better that as J... that as the lady had gone to England I should remain in Scotland. I started to walk here; but I was overtaken by a fog and delayed for hours behind my time. The house was locked up — every one asleep. The night porter who let me in told me that as I had not arrived, as by my telegram, the bedroom I had ordered was let to some one else who had arrived in a plight similar to my own. 'Another party' were his words; I had no clue to whom or what the other visitor was. The only place left in the house unoccupied — for there were many unexpected guests through the fog — was that sofa. There I slept. Only a few minutes ago I was waked by some one coming into the room. When I saw that it was... when I saw who it was — the woman whom I loved and whom I intended to marry — I naturally took her in my arms without thinking." Then without pausing, for he saw the anger in the Colonel's face and felt that to prolong this part of the narration was dangerous, he went on quickly:

"I trust that you understand, Colonel Ogilvie, that this explanation in no way infringes your right of punishing me as you suggest. Please understand — and this is my answer to your suggestion as to my appealing to law — that I accept your wish to go through the form of a duel!" He was hotly interrupted by the Colonel:

"Form of a duel! Is this another insult? When I say fight I mean fight — understand that. I fight a l'outrance, and that way only." Athlyne's composure did not seem even ruffled:

"Exactly! I took no other meaning. But surely I am entitled to take it that even a real duel has the form of a duel!"

"Then what do you mean sir by introducing the matter that way?"

"Simply, Colonel Ogilvie, to protect myself from a later accusation on your part — either to me or of me — of a charge of poltroonery; or even a silent suspicion of it in your own mind!"

"How do you mean?"

"Sir, I only speak for myself. I have already said more than once that I hold my life at your disposal. From that I do not shrink; I accept the form of a duel for my execution."

"Your execution! Explain yourself, sir?" In a calm even voice came the answer.

"Colonel Ogilvie, I put it to you as man to man — if you will honour me with so simple a comparison, or juxtaposition whichever you like to consider it — how can I fight freely against the father of the woman whom I love. Pray, sir," for the Colonel made an angry gesture "be patient for a moment I intend no kind of plea or appeal. I feel myself forced to let you know my position from my point of view. You need bear no new anger towards me for this expression of my feelings. I do so with reluctance, and only because you must understand, here and now, or it may make, later on, further unhappiness for some one else — some one whom we both hold in our hearts." Colonel Ogilvie hesitated before replying. The bitter scowl was once again on his face as he spoke:

"Then I suppose I am to take it, sir, that you will begin our meeting on the field of honour by putting me publicly — through the expression of your intention — in the position of a murderer."

"Not so! Surely you know better than that. I did not think that any honourable man could have so mistaken another. If I have to speak explicitly, on this point — on which for your own sake and the sake of... of one dear to you, I would fain be reticent — let me reassure you on one point: I shall play the game fairly. For this duel is a game, and, so far as I am concerned at all events, one for a pretty large stake. If indeed that can be called a 'game' which can only end in one way. You need not, I assure you, feel the least uneasy as to my not going through with it properly. I am telling you this now so that you may not distort my intention yourself by some injudicious comment on my conduct, or speech, or action, made under a misapprehension or from distrust of me. Sir, your own honour shall be protected all along, so far as the doing so possibly rests with me." Here, seeing some new misunderstanding in the Colonel's eye he went on quickly:

"I venture to say this because I am aware that you doubt my being able to carry out my intention. When I say ‘rests with me,’ I mean the responsibility of acting properly the role I have undertaken. I shall conduct my part of the duel in all seriousness. It must be in some other country; this for your sake. For mine it will not have mattered. We have only to bear ourselves properly and none will suspect. I shall go through all the forms — with your permission — of fighting a L’outrance, so that no one can suspect. No one will be able afterwards to say that you could have been aware of my intention. I shall fire at you all right; but I shall not hit!”

Instinctively Colonel Ogilvie bowed. He did not intend to do so. He said no word. The rancour of his heart was not mitigated; his intention to kill in no way lessened. His action was simply a spontaneous recognition of the chivalry of another, and his appreciation of it.

Athlyne could not but be glad of even so slight a relaxation of the horrible tension. He stood quite still. He felt that in some way he had scored with his antagonist; and as he was fighting for Joy, he was unwilling to do anything which might not be good for her. He was standing well out in the room with his back to the door of the bedroom. As they stood he saw a look of surprise flash in Colonel Ogilvie’s face. This changed instantly to a fixed one of horror. His eyes seemed to look right through his antagonist to something beyond. Instinctively he turned to see what it might be that caused that strange look. And then he looked horrified himself.

In the open door-way of the bedroom stood Joy.

CHAPTER 20

KNOWLEDGE OF LAW

All three stood stone still. Not a sound was heard except faint quick breathing. Athlyne tried to think; but his brain seemed numb. He knew that now was a crisis if not the crisis of the whole affair. It chilled him with a deathly chill to think that Joy must have heard all the conversation between her father and himself. What a remembrance for her in all the empty years to come! What sorrow, what pain! Presently he heard behind him as he stood facing her a sound which was rather a groan than an ejaculation — a groan endowed with articulated utterance:

"Good God!" Unconsciously he repeated the word under his breath: "Good God!"

Joy, with a fixed high-strung look, stepped down into the room. She stood beside Athlyne who, as she came close to him, turned with her so that together they faced her father. Colonel Ogilvie said in a slow whisper, the words dropping out one by one:

"Have — you — been — there — all — the — time? Did — you — hear — all — we — said?" She answered boldly:

"Yes! I was there and heard everything!" Again a long pause of silence, ended by Colonel Ogilvie's next question:

"Why did you stay?" Joy answered at once; her quick speech following the slow tension sounded almost voluble.

"I could not get away. I wanted to; but there is no other door to the room. That is why I came out here when I woke... I could not get my boots which the maid had taken last night, and I wanted to get away as quickly as possible. And, Father, being there, though I had to move about dressing myself, I could not help hearing everything!" Her father had evidently expected that she would say something more, for as she stopped there he looked at her expectantly. There was a sort of dry sob in his throat. Athlyne stood still and silent; he hardly dared to breathe lest he should unintentionally thwart Joy's purpose. For with all his instincts he realised that she had a purpose. He knew that she understood her father and that she was the most potent force to deal with him; and knowing this he felt that the best thing he could do would be to leave her quite free and unhampered to take her own course. He kept his eyes on her face, gazing at her unwinkingly. Her face was fixed — not stern but set to a purpose. Somehow at that moment he began to realise how well he understood her. Without more help than his eyes could give him, he seemed to follow the workings of her mind. For her mind was changing. At the first her expression was of flinty fixedness; but as she continued to look at the old man it softened; and with the softening her intentioned silence gave way. Her lover's thoughts translated thus:

"I will protect my — him against my father. He has threatened him; he is forcing him to death. I shall not help him by sparing him a pang, an awkwardness. And yet — why that? He is an old man — and my father! That white hair demands respect. He is angry — hard and untender now; but his life has been a tender one to me — and he is my father! Though I am determined to save my lover — my husband, I need not in the doing cause that white head to sink in shame; I can spare him the pang of what he may think ingratitude in me. And, after all, he has what must seem to him just cause of offence... He cannot — will not understand... He is brave and proud, and has a code of honour which is more than a religion. And he my lover — my husband is brave too. And as unyielding as my father.

And he is willing to die — for me. To die for me — my honour my happiness. Though his dying is worse — far worse than death to me... But he is dying bravely, and I — that was to have been his wife — must die bravely, worthily too. If he can suffer and die in silence, so too must I...”

It seemed a natural sequence of thought when she said to her father:

“Daddy, do you know you have not said a word to me yet. What have I ever done in my life that you should not trust me now? Have I ever lied to you that you cannot trust me to answer truly when you ask me — ask me anything. Why don’t you ask me now? I know that things do not look well. I realise that you must have been shocked when you came into the room. But, Daddy dear, there are few things in the world that cannot be explained — at any rate in part. Don’t forget that I am a woman now. I am no longer a child whose ignorance is her innocence. Speak to me! Ask me what you will, and I will answer you truly! Hear me, even as you would listen to one dying! For indeed it is so. If you carry out your intention, as I have heard it expressed, I shall no longer live; there will be nothing for me to live for.”

“Do you mean that you will commit suicide?” said her father.

“Oh, no! I hope I have pluck enough to live — if I can. Do not fear for me, Daddy! I shall play the game full, as he will do.” As she spoke, she pointed a finger at Athlyne. She felt now, and for the first time, acutely that she did not know what to call him before a third person — even her father. Athlyne looked relieved by her words. When she spoke of dying he had grown sadly white; he shared her father’s apprehension. Colonel Ogilvie saw the change in his look, and took it ill. As may be surmised a part of his anger towards

Athlyne arose from jealousy. Until this man had appeared upon the scene his “little girl” was his alone; no other man shared in her affection. As she was an only child all his parental affection had been centered in her. Though he might have been prepared to see her mate with a man of his own choosing — or at any rate of his acceptance, he was jealous of the man who had stepped in, unaccredited and wanting in deference to himself. It must have been a tinge of this jealousy which prompted his next question. Turning with a bitter formality to Athlyne he said:

“I suppose you are satisfied, now, sir. Whatever may come, my daughter is estranged from me; and it is your doing!” In answer Joy and Athlyne spoke together. Said the latter:

“Oh sir!” There he stopped; he feared to say more lest his anger should master him. But the protest was effective; the old man flushed — over forehead and ears and neck. Joy spoke in a different vein:

“There is no estrangement, Daddy dear; and therefore it can be no one’s doing. Least of all could such a thing come from this man who loves me, and... and whom I love.” As she spoke she blushed divinely, and taking her lover’s right hand between both her hands held it tight. This seemed for some reason to infuriate her father afresh. He strode forward towards Athlyne as though about to strike him. But at the instant there came a quick rap on the door. Instinctively, he drew away, and, having called out “Come!” stood expectingly and seemingly calm. The door opened slightly and the voice of the Sheriff was heard:

“May I come in? I am Alexander Fenwick, Sheriff of Galloway!” As he was speaking he entered the room with a formal bow to each in turn. He continued to speak to Colonel Ogilvie:

“You will pardon this intrusion I hope, sir. Indeed I trust you will not look upon it as an intrusion at all when you know the reason of my coming.” Colonel Ogilvie’s habit of old-fashioned courtesy came at once to the fore with the coming of a stranger. With a bow which to those reared in a newer and less formal school of manners seemed almost grandiloquent he spoke:

“I came here on some business, and on my arrival a few minutes ago was asked by our landlady — an old servant of my own — who on that account thought that she might ask what she thought a favour — to come up here. She thought, poor anxious soul, that some unpleasantness might be afoot as she heard high words, and feared a quarrel. All the more on account of a sudden arrival of a gentleman who seemed somewhat incensed. This I took from her description of the personality, to be you sir. Indeed, I recognise all the points, except that of the anger!” As he spoke he bowed with pleasant courtesy. The other bowed too, partly in answer to the implied question and partly in recognition of the expressed courtesy of the words and manner.

Whilst he had been speaking, the Sheriff had been watching keenly those around him. He had been for so long a time in the habit of forming his opinion rather by looks than words that the situation seemed to explain itself; young lovers, angry father. This opinion was justified and sustained by the confidence which had been given to him by Athlyne on the previous afternoon. He had been, on entering the room, rather anxious at the state of affairs; but now he began to breathe more freely. He felt that his experience of life and of law might really be here of some service. But his profession had also taught him wariness and caution; also not to speak on side issues till he knew the ground thoroughly. Joy he read like an open book. There was no mistaking her love, her anxiety, her apprehension.

Athlyne he knew something of already, but he now saw in his face a warning look which bade him be silent regarding him. He diagnosed Colonel Ogilvie as a proud, masterful, vain, passionate man; something of a prig; tender, in a way he understood himself; faithful to his word; relentless to an expressed intention; just — according to his own ideas of right and wrong. Weighing these attributes for his own pacific purposes he came to the conclusion that his first effort at conciliation should be made with regard to the last-mentioned. So he began, speaking in a manner of courtly and deferential grace:

"I trust sir, you will yield to me the consideration often asked by, and sometimes granted to a well-intentioned man, however bungling the same might be in thought or method or manner." Colonel Ogilvie conceded the favour with a gracious bow. Thus emboldened, if not justified, he went on:

"I fain would ask that I might be allowed to make something in the nature of a short statement, and to make it without interruption or expostulation. You will understand why presently." Again the gracious acquiescence; he continued:

"You are, I take it, a stranger to this country; though, if I am not misled by name and lineament, claiming Scottish forbears?" Colonel Ogilvie's bow came more naturally this time. His in-lying pride was coming to the rescue of common sense. The Sheriff understood, and went on with better heart:

"The experience which I have had in the performance of my duties as sheriff has shewn me that such a group as I see before me — father, daughter and lover, if I mistake not — is not uncommon in this part of Scotland." No one answered his bow this time. All were grimly silent in expectancy. He felt that it was a dangerous topic; but the fact had been stated without being denied. He hurried on:

"Just across the Border, as we are, we have had very many occasions of run-away marriages; I have had myself in earlier days to explain for the good of all parties how the law stands in such matters. More than once the knowledge enabled those interested in it to spare much pain to others; generally to those whom they loved best I trust that now I may use that knowledge in your behalf — as a friend. I am not here in my official capacity — or perhaps I might not be so free to advise as I am now without, I trust, offence to any one." Colonel Ogilvie's gracious bow here answered for all the party. The Sheriff felt more at ease. He was now well into his subject; and the most difficult part of his duty had been, he thought, passed. All three of his hearers listened eagerly as he went on:

"A knowledge of the law can hurt no one; though it may now and again disappoint some one — when expounded too late. Well, there is a common belief in South Britain — and elsewhere that the marriage law in Scotland is a very filmy thing, with bounds of demarcation which are actually nebulous. This doubtless arises from the fact that all such laws are based on the theory that it is good to help such contracting parties to the secure and speedy fulfilment of their wishes. But anyone who thinks that they are loose in either purpose or action is apt to be rudely enlightened. The Scots' Marriage laws demand that there be a manifest and honest intention of marriage on the part of the contractors. This intention can be proved in many ways. Indeed the law in certain cases is willing to infer it, when direct proof is not attainable, from subsequent acts of the parties. I may fairly say that in all such cases courts of law will hold that mutuality of intention is of the essence of marriage rite. This followed by co-habitation is the marriage; though the latter to follow close on the declaration is not always deemed necessary. In our law the marriage may be either of two kinds. The most formal is that effected by a minister or proper official after due calling of banns, or by notice given to sheriff or registrar. The other form is by what is known in the law as ‘Irregular marriage.’ This is in legal parlance — for which I make no apology as it is necessary that all married folk, or those intending to enter that honourable condition should understand it — is known as ‘intention followed by copula.’ Now you must know that either form of marriage is equally binding — equal in law and honour, and when the conditions attached to each form have been duly fulfilled such marriage is irrefragable. In old days this facility of marriage made Gretna Green, which is the first place across the Border, the objective for eloping lovers matrimonially inclined; and as till 1856 no previous residence in Scotland was required, romance was supposed to stop at the Border. That is, the marriage could be effected and parental objections — did such exist — were overborne. There were many cynical souls who held that repentance for the hasty marriage could then begin. I feel bound to say that this is an opinion in which I do not myself share.

“In 1836 an Act of Parliament, 20th Vict Cap. 96, was passed, by which it became necessary for the validity of irregular marriage that at least one of the two contractors should have his or her usual residence in Scotland, or have been resident in Scotland for three full weeks next preceding the marriage.

“I thank you, Colonel Ogilvie, for having listened to me so patiently. But as I have no doubt that you three have much to say to each other I shall withdraw for the present. This will leave you free to discuss matters. And perhaps I may say, as an old man as well as a responsible officer of the Law, that I trust the effect will be to make for peace and amity. I am staying here in the hotel and I shall take it as a great pleasure and a great honour if you will breakfast with me in say an hour's time. All your family will be most welcome." With a bow, in which deference and geniality were mingled, he withdrew.

Each of the three left kept looking at each other in silence. Joy drew closer to Athlyne and took his hand. Colonel Ogilvie pretended not to notice the act an effort on his part which made his daughter radiant with hope. The first words spoken were by the Colonel:

"That man is a gentleman!" The two others felt that silence was present discretion; to agree with Colonel Ogilvie in his present mood was almost as dangerous as to disagree with him. His next words were in no way conciliatory though the arriere pensee made for hope.

"Now sir, what have you to say for yourself in this unhappy matter? Remember I in no way relax my intention of — of punishment; but I am willing to hear what you have to say." Athlyne winced at the word "punishment," which was not one which he was accustomed to hear applied to himself. But for Joy's sake he made no comment. He even kept his face fixed so as not to betray his anger. He felt that any change of subject, or drifting off that before them, must be for the better; things could, he felt, hardly be worse than at present. Moreover, it might smooth matters somewhat if Colonel Ogilvie could be brought to recollect that he was not himself an undesirable person for alliance, and that his intention of matrimony had been already brought before Joy's father. In this conviction he spoke:

"As in this country, sir, intention counts for so much, may I crave your indulgence for a moment and refer you back to my letter to you on the subject of a very dear wish of mine — a wish put before you with a very decided intention." Colonel Ogilvie's answer, given in manner of equal suavity, was disconcerting; the bitterness behind it was manifest.

“I think sir, there must be some error — which is not mine. I never received any letter from you! Your epistolary efforts seem to have been confined to the ladies of my family.” With an effort Athlyne restrained himself. When he felt equal to the task he spoke, still with a manner of utmost deference:

“An error there surely is; but it is not mine either. I posted yesterday at the Ambleside post office a letter to you...” He was interrupted by Colonel Ogilvie who said bluntly:

“I am not so sure, sir, that the fault of my not reading such a letter was not yours; though perhaps not in the direct manner you mean. When I arrived home last night and found the horrible state of things with regard to my daughter’s rash act — due to you” this with a look of actual malevolence “I was so upset that I did not look at the pile of letters awaiting me. I only read Joy’s messages.” As he said this Athlyne’s eyes flashed and there was an answering flash in the eyes of the woman who looked so keenly at him; this was the first time since his arrival that the father had condescended to even mention his daughter’s name. There might be some softening of that hard nature after all. Then the old man continued:

“I put them in my pocket; here they are!” — Whilst he looked at the envelopes in that futile way that some people unused to large correspondence love, Joy said with an easy calmness which made her lover glance at her in surprise:

“Daddy, hadn’t you better read your letters now; we shall wait.” The tone was so much that to which he was accustomed from her that he did not notice the compromising “we” which would otherwise have inflamed him afresh.

Drawing a chair close to one of the windows he opened the letters and began to read. Athlyne and Joy, instinctively and with unity of thought, moved towards the other window which was behind him. There they stood hand in hand, their eyes following every movement of the old man. Joy did not know, of course, what was in the letter; but she had seen it before in the garden at Ambleside and when he had posted it before setting out on their motor ride. And so, piecing her information with the idea conveyed by her lover's recent words, she was able to form some sort of idea of its general import. A soft, beautiful blush suffused her face, and her eyes glistened as she stood thinking; in the effort of thought she recalled many sweet passages. She now understood in a vague way what was the restraining influence which had moved her lover to reticence during all those hours when he had tried to tell her of his love and his hopes without actually speaking words, the knowledge of which given without his consent would have incensed her father against him, and so wrought further havoc. So moved was she that Athlyne, whose eyes were instinctively drawn to her from the observation of her father, was amazed and not a little disconcerted. There must be some strange undercurrent of feeling in her which he could not understand. Joy saw the look on his face and seemed to understand. She raised to her lips the hand that she so strongly clasped in hers and kissed it. Then she raised a finger of her other hand and touched her lips. Thus reassured of her love and understanding, Athlyne followed with his eyes the trend of hers; and so together they continued to watch her father, trying to gather from his bearing some indication of his thoughts. Indeed this was not a difficult matter. Colonel Ogilvie seemed to have lost himself in his task, and expressed his comments on what he read by a series of childlike movements and ejaculations. Athlyne who knew what the letter contained could apply these enlightening comments, and even Joy in her ignorance of detail could inferentially follow the text. Colonel Ogilvie did say a word of definite speech, but the general tendency of his comment was that of surprise — astonishment. When he had finished reading Athlyne's letter — it was the last of the batch — he sat for quite half a minute quite still and silent, holding the paper between finger and thumb of his dropped left hand. Then with a deep frown on his forehead he began to read it again. He was evidently looking for some passage, for when he had found it he stood up at once and turned to them. By this time Joy, warned by the movement, had dropped her lover's hand and now stood some distance away from him. The old man began:

"Sir... There is a passage in a letter here which I understand to be yours. So far I must acknowledge that I have been wrong. You evidently did send the letter, and I evidently received it. Listen to this: 'Having heard in a roundabout way that there was a woman in New York who was passing herself off as my wife I undertook a journey to that City to make investigation into the matter; and in order to secure the necessary secrecy as to my movements took for the time an assumed name — or rather used as Christian and surname two of those names in the middle of my full equipment which I do not commonly use.' What does all that mean? No, do not speak. Wait and I shall tell you. You say the lady — woman you call her — took your name. For saying such a thing, and for the disrespect in her description as a woman, you will have to answer me. Ether of them will cost you your life." Athlyne answered with a quiet, impressive dignity which helped in some degree to reassure Joy who stood motionless in open-eyed wonder — her heart seeming to her as cold as ice at the horror of this new phase of danger. It was a veritable “bolt from the blue,” incomprehensible to her in every way:

“Colonel Ogilvie, I regret I shall be unable to meet your wishes in this respect!” As the old man looked astonished in his turn, he proceeded:

“I already owe you a life on another count; and I have but one. But if I had ten you should have them all, could they, in any way assuage the sorrow which it seems must follow from my thoughtless act. I have told you already that I shall freely give my life in expiation of the wrong I have — all unintentionally — done to your daughter and yourself. And if any means could be found by which it could add to Joy’s happiness or lessen her sorrow I should in addition and as freely give my soul!”

Colonel Ogilvie’s reception of these words was characteristic of the man, as he took himself to be. He drew himself up to his full height and stood at attention. Then he saluted, and followed his salute with a grave bow. The soldier in him spoke first, the man after. Both Joy and Athlyne noticed with new hope that he allowed the speaking of her name to pass unchallenged as a further cause of offence. Presently, and in a new tone, he said:

“I have taken it for granted from the allusions in your letter that you are the writer, and from your mentioning an alias have not been surprised at seeing a strange name in the signature. But I have been and am surprised at the familiarity from a man of your years to a man of mine of a mere Christian name.”

It was now Athlyne’s turn to be surprised.

“A Christian name!” he said with a puzzled pucker of his brows. “I am afraid I don’t understand.” Then a light dawning on him he said with a slight laugh: “But that is not my Christian name.”

"Then your surname?" queried the Colonel.

"Nor my surname either." His laugh was now more pronounced, more boyish.

"Oh I see; still another alias!" The words were bitter; the tone of manifest offence.

Athlyne laughed again; it was not intentional but purely spontaneous. He was recalled to seriousness by the look of pain and apprehension on Joy's face and by the Colonel's angry words, given with a look of fury:

"I am not accustomed to be laughed at — and to my face Mr. — Mr. — Mr. Richard Hardy Athlyne et cetera."

His apology for inopportune mirth was given with contrition — even humbly:

"I ask your pardon, Colonel Ogilvie, very deeply, very, truly. But the fact is that Athlyne is my proper signature, though it is neither Christian name nor surname. I do hope you will attribute my rudeness rather to national habit than to any personal wish to wound. Surely you will see that I would at least be foolish to transgress in such a direction, if it be only that I aim at so much that it is in your power to grant" There was reason in this which there was no resisting. Colonel Ogilvie bowed — he felt that he could do no less. Athlyne wisely said no more; both men regarded the incident as closed.

With Joy it was different. The incident gave her the information she lacked for the completion of the circle of her knowledge. As with a flash she realised the whole secret that this man who had saved her life and whom now her father wanted to kill was none other than the man whose name she had taken — at first in sport and only lately in order to protect herself from troubles of inquisitiveness and scandal.

At the moment she was in reality the only one of the three — the only one at all — who had in her hand all the clues. Neither her father nor Athlyne knew that she had given to the maid at the hotel a name other than her own.

She began to have also an unconscious knowledge of something else. Something which she could not define, some intuition of some coming change; something which hinged on her giving of the name. Now, for the first time she realised how dangerous it may be for any one to take the name of any other person — for any purpose whatever, or from any cause. She could not see the end.

But though her brain did not classify the idea her blood did. She blushed so furiously that she had serious thoughts of escaping from the room. Nothing but the danger which might arise from such a step kept her in her place. But something must, she felt, be done. Things were so shaping towards reconciliation that it would be wise to prevent matters slipping back. For an instant she was puzzled as to what to do; then an inspiration came to her. Turning to her father she said:

"Daddy, let us ask the old Sheriff to come in again!" She felt that she could rely on his discretion, and that in his hands things might slide into calmer waters. Her father acquiesced willingly, and a courteous message was sent through a servant

CHAPTER 21

APPLICATION OF LAW

Whilst the servant was gone there was a great clatter of arrival of a motor at the hotel; but all in Athlyne's room were too deeply concerned with their own affairs to notice it.

Presently there was a light tap at the door, and the Sheriffs "May I come in?" was heard. Colonel Ogilvie went himself to the door and threw it open. Beside the Sheriff stood a lady, heavily clad and with a motor veil.

"Joy! Joy!" said the veiled figure, and Aunt Judy stepping forward took the girl in her arms. In the meantime the Sheriff was explaining the situation:

"I was just coming from my room in obedience to your summons, when this lady entered the hall. She was asking for you, Colonel, and for Miss Ogilvie. as who she had learned at the railway station, was stopping here. I ventured to offer my services, and as she was corning up here, undertook to pilot her."

Joy was delighted to see Judy. She had so long been accustomed to look with fixed belief on her love and friending that she now expected she would be able to set matters right. Had she had any doubt of her Aunt's affection such must have soon disappeared in the warmth of the embrace accorded by her. When this was concluded — which was soon for it was short, if strenuous — she turned to Colonel Ogilvie and held out her hand:

"Good morning, Lucius. I see you got here all right. I hope you had a good journey?" Then turning to Athlyne she said, as if in surprise:

“Why, Mr. Hardy, how are you? And how do you come to be here? We thought we were never going to see you again.” Then she rattled on; it was evident to Joy, and to Colonel Ogilvie also, that she was purposeful to baffle comment by flow of her own speech:

“Lucius, you must thank this gentleman who is, as the landlady whispered to me, the Sheriff of somewhere or other. He’s a nice man, but a funny sort of Sheriff. When I asked him where was his posse he didn’t know what I meant.” Here she was interrupted by the Sheriff who said with a low bow to her “It is enough for any man, dear lady, to be in esse in such a charming presence!” Judy did not comprehend the joke; but she knew, being a woman, that some sort of compliment was intended; and, being a woman, beamed accordingly:

“Thank you, sir, both for your kindness in helping me and for your pretty talk. Joy, I have brought your dressing bag and a fresh rig out. You must need them, poor dear. Now you must tell me all your adventures. I told them to bring the things presently to your room. I shall then come with you whilst you are changing. Now, Mr. Sheriff, we must leave you for a little; but I suppose that as you have to talk business — you told me they had sent for you — you will doubtless prefer to be without us?”

‘Your pardon,” said the Sheriff gracefully. “I hope the time will never come when I shall prefer to be without such charming company!” This was said with such a meaning look, and in such a meaning tone, that Judy coloured. Joy, unseen by the others, smiled at her, rejoicing. The Sheriff, thinking they were moving off, turned to the Colonel saying:

“Now, Colonel Ogilvie, I am at your disposal; likewise such knowledge of law and custom as I possess.” He purposely addressed himself to Colonel Ogilvie, evidently bearing in mind Athlyne’s look of warning to silence regarding himself.

Whilst he had been speaking, Joy stood still, holding Judy by the hand and keeping her close to her. Judy whispered, holding her mouth close to her ear and trying to avoid the observation of the others:

“Come away dear whilst they are talking. They will be freer alone!” Joy whispered in return:

“No, I must not go. I must stay here, I am wanted. Do not say anything, dear — not a word; but stay by me.” Judy in reply squeezed her hand and remained silent. Colonel Ogilvie, with manifest uneasiness and after clearing his throat, said to the Sheriff:

“As you have been so good sir, as to tell me some matters of law; and as you have very kindly offered us other services, may I trespass on your kindness in enlightening me as to some matters of fact.” The Sheriff bowed; he continued:

“I must crave your indulgence, for I am in some very deep distress, and possibly not altogether master of myself. But I need some advice, or at any rate enlightenment as to some matters of law. And as I am far from home and know no one here who is of legal authority — except yourself,” this with a bow, “I shall be deeply grateful if I may accept your kindness and speak to you as a friend.” Again the Sheriff bowed, his face beaming. Colonel Ogilvie, with a swift, meaning glance at each of the others in turn, went on:

“I must ask you all to keep silent I am speaking with this gentleman for my own enlightenment, and require no comments from any of you. Indeed, I forbid interruption!” Unpromising as this warning sounded, both Joy and Athlyne took a certain comfort from it. The point they both attached importance to was that Athlyne was simply classed with the rest without differentiation. The Sheriff, who feared lest the father's domineering tone might provoke hostilities, spoke quickly:

"Now, Colonel Ogilvie, I am at your disposal for whatever you may wish to ask me."

"I suppose Mr. Sheriff, I need not say, that I trust you will observe honourable silence regarding this whole painful affair; as I expect that all present will." This was said with a threatening smile. When the Sheriff bowed acceptance of the condition he went on:

"Since you spoke to us here a little while ago a strange enlightenment has come to me. Indeed a matter so strange and so little in accord with the experiences of my own life that I am in a quandary. I should really like to know exactly how I — how we all stand at present. From what you have said about the Scottish marriage laws I take it that you have an inkling of what has gone on. And so, as you are in our confidence, you will not perhaps mind if I confide further in you?"

"I shall be deeply honoured, Colonel Ogilvie."

"Thank you again, sir. You are a true friend to a man in deep distress and in much doubt... We are, as you perhaps know, Americans. My daughter's life was saved by a gentleman in New York. I think it right to say that it was on his part a very gallant act, and that we were all deeply grateful to him. He came to my house — at my own invitation; and my wife and her sister, Miss Judith Hayes" — the Sheriff turned to Judy and bowed as at an introduction; she curtsied in reply— "were very pleased with him. But we never saw him again. He returned very soon afterwards to England; and though we were coming to London he never came near us. Indeed his neglect was marked; for though I invited him to call, he ignored us." As he said this he looked straight at Athlyne with hard eyes. "I have reason to know that my daughter was much interested in him. Ordinarily speaking I should not mention a matter of this kind. But as I have received from him — it has only been made known to me in the interval since our meeting — an assurance of his affection and a proffer of marriage, I feel that I may speak." He turned away and began walking up and down the room as though trying to collect his thoughts.

As Joy heard him speak of her own interest in the man and of his proposal of marriage she blushed deeply, letting her eyes fall. But when, by some of the divine instinct of love, she knew that he was looking ardently at her she raised them, swimming, to his. And so once more they looked deep into each other's souls. Judy felt the trembling of the girl's hand and held it harder with a sympathetic clasp, palm to palm and with fingers interlaced. She felt that she understood; and her eyes, too, became sympathetically suffused. The Sheriff had now no eyes except for Judy. Whilst the Colonel had been speaking he had looked at him of course — he knew well that it would be a cause of offence if he did not. But the walking up and down gave him opportunity for his wishes. Judy could not but recognise the ardour of his glance, and she too blushed exceedingly. Somehow, she was glad of it; she knew that blushing became her, and she felt that she would like to look her best to the eyes of this fine, kindly old man.

When Colonel Ogilvie began to speak again there was a change in him. He seemed more thoughtful, more cautious, more self-controlled; altogether he was more like his old self. There was even a note of geniality in his voice.

"What I want to ask you in especial is this: How can we avoid any sort of scandal over this unhappy occurrence? My daughter has acted thoughtlessly in going out alone in a motor with a gentleman. Through a series of accidents it appears that that ride was unduly and unintentionally prolonged, and ended in her being caught in a fog and lost. By accident she came here, walking after the motor had broken down. She slept last night in that room; and the man, who had also found his way hither later, slept, unknowing of her proximity, in this. I need not tell you that such a state of things is apt to lead to a scandal. Now, and now only, is the time to prevent it"... He was interrupted by the Sheriff who spoke hurriedly, as one who had already considered the question and had his mind made up:

"There will be no scandal!" He spoke in so decided a way that the other was impressed.

"How do you know? What ground have you for speaking so decidedly?"

"It rests entirely on you — yourself, Colonel Ogilvie."

"What!" His tone was laden with both anger and surprise. "Do you think I would spread any ill report of my own daughter? Sir, you must—" Once more the Sheriff cut into his speaking:

"You misapprehend me, Colonel Ogilvie. You misapprehend me entirely. Why should I — how could I think such a thing! No! I mean that if you accept the facts as they seem to me to be, no one — not you, nor any one else, can make scandal if you do not."

"Explain yourself," he interrupted. "Nay, do not think me rude" — here he put up a deprecating hand— "but I am so deeply anxious about my daughter's happiness — her future welfare and happiness," he added as he remembered how his violent attitude had, only a few minutes ago imperilled — almost destroyed, that happiness. Joy had been, off and on, whispering a word to her aunt so that the latter was now fairly well posted in the late events.

"Quite so! quite so, my dear sir. Most natural thing in the world," said the Sheriff soothingly. "Usual thing under the circumstances is to kill the man; or want to kill him!" As he spoke he looked at Athlyne menacingly. The other understood and checked the words which were rising to his lips. Then, having tided over the immediate danger of explosion, the Sheriff went on:

"The fact is Colonel Ogilvie, that, the series of doings (and perhaps misdoings) and accidents, which have led to our all meeting here and now, has brought about a strange conclusion. So far as I can see" — here his manner grew grave and judicial— "these two young people are at the present moment man and wife. Lawfully married according to Scottish law!"

The reception of this dictum was varied. Colonel Ogilvie almost collapsed in overwhelming amazement. Joy, blushing divinely, looked at her husband adoringly. Athlyne seemed almost transfigured and glorified; the realisation of all his hopes in this sudden and unexpected way showed unmistakably how earnest they had been. Judy, alone of all the party, was able to express herself in conventional fashion. This she did by clapping her hands and, then by kissing the whole party — except the Sheriff who half stood forward as though in hope that some happy chance might include him in the benison. She began with Joy and went on to her brother-in-law, who accepted with a better grace than she feared would have been accorded. When she came to Athlyne she hesitated for a moment, but with a "now-or-never" rush completed the act, and fell back shyly with a belated amorousness.

The Sheriff, having paused for the completion of this little domestic ceremony, went on calmly:

"Since I left you a few minutes ago I have busied myself with making a few necessary inquiries from my old servant lane McBean, now McPherson. I made them, I assure you Colonel Ogilvie, very discreetly. Even Jane, who is in her way a clever woman, has no suspicion that I was even making inquiry. The result has been to confirm me in my original conjecture, which was to the effect that there has been executed between these two people an 'irregular' marriage!" At the mention of the words the Colonel exploded:

"God's death, sir, the women of the Ogilvies don't make irregular marriages!" The Sheriff went calmly on. only noticing the protest for the sake of answering it.

By this time Joy and Judith were close together, holding hands. Insensibly the girl drew her Aunt over to where Athlyne was standing and took him by the arm. He raised his other hand and with it covered the hand that lay on his arm. pressing it closer as he listened attentively to the Sheriffs expounding of the law:

"I gather that I did not express myself clearly when a short time ago I spoke of the Scottish marriage laws. Let me now be more precise. And as I am trying to put into words understandable by all a somewhat complex subject I shall ask that no one present will make any remark whatever till this part of my task has been completed. I shall then answer to the best of my power any question or questions which any of you may choose to ask me.

"Let me begin by assuring you all that what in Scottish law we call an 'irregular' marriage is equally binding in every way with a 'regular' marriage; the word only refers to form or method, and in no wise to the antecedents or to the result. In our law 'Mutual Consent' constitutes marriage. You will observe that I speak of marriage — not the proof of it. Proof is quite a different matter; and as it is formally to be certified by a Court it is naturally hedged in by formalities. This consent, whether proved or not, whether before witnesses or not, should of course be followed by co-habitation; but even this is not necessary. The dictum of Scots' law is 'Concensus non concuhitus facit matrimonium.' But I have a shrewd suspicion that the mind of the Court is helped to a declaration of validity when concensus has been followed by concuhitus.

"Now let us take the present case and examine it as though testing it in a Court of Law; for such is the true means to be exact. This man and woman — we don't know 'gentleman' and 'lady' in the Law — declared in the presence of witnesses that they were man and wife. That is, the man declared to the police sergeant at Dairy that the woman was his wife; and the woman declared timorously to the police officer who made the arrest that the man was her husband. These two statements, properly set out, would in themselves be evidence not only of inferred consent by declaration de prasenti but of the same thing by 'habit and repute.' The law has been thus stated:

"'It may be held that a man and a woman, by living together and holding themselves out as married persons, have sufficiently declared their matrimonial consent; and in that case they will be declared to be married although no specific promise of marriage or of de prasenti acknowledgement has been proved.'

"But there is a still more cogent and direct proof, should such be required. Each of these consenting parties to the contract of 'marriage by consent,' on coming separately to this hotel last night gave to the servant of the house who admitted them the name by which I hold they are now bound in honourable wedlock!" He spoke the last sentences gravely and impressively after the manner of an advocate pressing home on a jury the conclusion of an elaborate train of reasoning. Whilst speaking he had kept his eyes fixed on Colonel

Ogilvie. who unconsciously took it that an exhortation on patience and toleration was being addressed to him. The effect was increased by the action of Joy, who seeing him all alone and inferring his spiritual loneliness, left Judith but still holding Athlyne's arm drew the latter towards him. Then she took her father's arm and stood between the two men whom she loved. Judy quietly took Athlyne's other arm, and so all stood in line holding each other as they faced the Sheriff. No one said a word; all were afraid to break the silence.

"We now come to further proofs if such be required. The woman, who arrived first, gave the name of Lady Athlyne." Here Joy got fearfully red; she was conscious of her father's eyes on her, even before she heard him say: "That foolish joke again! Did not I forbid you to use it daughter?" She felt it would be unwise to answer, to speak at all just at present. In desperation she raised her eyes to the face of her lover — and was struck with a sort of horrified amazement. For an instant it had occurred to him that Joy must have known his identity — for some time past at all events. The thought was, however, but momentary. Her eyes fell again quickly, and she stood in abashed silence. There was nothing to do now but to wait. The calm voice of the Sheriff went on, like the voice of Doom:

"The man arrived later. He himself had wired in his own name for rooms; but by the time he had arrived the possibility of his coming had, owing to the fog, been given up. The other traveller had been given the bedroom, and he slept on the sofa in the sitting-room — this room." As he spoke he went over to the door of communication between the rooms and examined the door. There were no fastenings except the ordinary latch; neither lock nor bolt He did not say a word, but walked back to his place. Judy could not contain her curiosity any longer; she blurted out:

“What name did he give?” The Sheriff looked at her admiringly as he answered:

“The name he gave, dear lady, was ‘Athlyne’!”

“Is that your name?” she queried — this time to Athlyne.

“It is!” He pulled himself up to his full height and stood on his dignity as he said it. His name should not be dishonoured if he could help it.

Colonel Ogilvie stood by with an air of conscious superiority. He already knew the name from Athlyne’s letter, though he had not up to that moment understood the full import of it He was willing to be further informed through Judy’s questioning.

“And you are Lord Athlyne — the Earl of Athlyne?”

“Certainly!”

To the astonishment of every one of the company Judy burst into a wild peal of hysterical laughter. This closely followed a speech of broken utterance which only some of those present understood at all — and of those some only some few partly. “Athlyne!”— “kill him for it!”— “calling herself by his name,”— “oh! oh! A — h — h!” There was a prolonged screech and then hysterical laughter followed. At the first this unseemly mirth created a feeling of repulsion in all who heard. It seemed altogether out of place; in the midst of such a serious conversation, when the lives and happiness of some of those present were at stake, to have the train of thought broken by so inopportune a cachinnation was almost unendurable. Colonel Ogilvie was furious. Well was it for the possibilities of peace that his peculiar life and ideas had trained him to be tolerant of woman’s weakness, and to be courteous to them even under difficulties. For had he given any expression to his natural enough feelings such would inevitably have brought him into collision — intellectual if not physical — with both Athlyne and the Sheriff; and either was to be deplored. Joy was in her heart indignant, for several reasons. It was too hard that, just as things were possibly beginning to become right and the fine edge of tragedy to be turned, her father's mind should be taken back to anger and chagrin. But far beyond this on the side of evil was the fact that it imperilled afresh the life of — of the man she loved, her... her husband. Even the personal aspect to her could not be overlooked. The ill-timed laughter prevented her hearing more of... of the man who it now seemed was already her husband. However she restrained and suppressed herself and waited, still silent, for the development of things. But she did not consider looks as movements; she raised her eyes to Athlyne's adoringly, and kept them there. He in turn had been greatly upset for the moment; even now, whilst those wild peals of hysterical laughter continued to resound, he could not draw any conclusions from the wild whirl of inchoate thoughts. There was just one faint gleam of light which had its origin rather in instinct than reason, that perhaps the interruption had its beneficial side which would presently be made manifest. When Joy looked towards him there was a balm for his troubled spirit. In the depths of her beautiful eyes he lost himself — and his doubts and sorrows, and was content.

The only one unmoved was the Sheriff. His mental attitude allowed him to look at things more calmly than did those personally interested. With the exception of one phase — that of concern that this particular woman, who had already impressed her charming personality on his heart, should be in such distress — he could think, untroubled, of the facts before him. With that logical mind of his, and with his experience of law and the passions that lead to law-invoking, he knew that the realization of Athlyne's name and position was a troublesome matter which might have been attended with disastrous consequences. To a man of Colonel Ogilvie's courage and strong passion the presence of an antagonist worthy of his powers is rather an incentive to quarrel than a palliative.

As to poor Judy she was in no position to think at all. She was to all practical intents, except for the noise she was occasionally making — her transport was subsiding — as one who is not. She continued intermittendy her hysterical phrenzy — to laugh and cry, each at the top note — and commingling eternally. She struggled violently as she sat on the chair into which she had fallen when the attack began; she stamped her heels on the floor, making a sound like gigantic castanets. The sound and restless movement made an embarrassing milieu for the lucid expression of law and entangled facts; but through it all the Sheriff, whose purpose after all was to convince Ogilvie, went on with his statement By this time Joy, and Athlyne, whom with an appealing look she had summoned to help, were endeavouring to restore Judy. One at either side they knelt by her, holding her hands and slapping them and exercising such other ministrations as the girl out of her limited experience of such matters could, happily to soothing effect, suggest. The Sheriffs voice, as calm voices will, came through the disturbance seemingly unhindered:

"Thus you will note that in all this transaction the Earl of Athlyne had made no disguise of his purpose. To the police who arrested him he at once disclosed his identity, which the sergeant told me was verified by the name on his motor driver's license. He telegraphed to the hotel by his tide — as is fitting and usual; and he gave his tide when he arrived. As I have already said, he stated to the police, at first on his own initiative and later when interrogated directly on the point, that the woman in the motor was his wife. And the identity of the woman in the motor and the woman in the hotel can easily be proved. Thus on the man's part there is ample evidence of that matrimonial purpose which the law requires. All this without counting the letter to the woman's father, in which he stated his wish and intention to marry her.

"Now as to the woman — and I must really apologise to her for speaking of the matter in her presence." — Here Athlyne interrupted his ministrations with regard to Judy in order to expostulate:

"Oh, I say Mr. Sheriff. Surely it is not necessary." But the Sheriff shut him up quite shortly. He had a purpose in so doing: he wished in his secret heart to warn both Athlyne and Joy not to speak a word till he had indicated that the time had come for so doing.

"There is nothing necessary, my Lord; except that both you and the young lady should listen whilst I am speaking! I am doing so for the good of you both; and I take it as promised that neither of you will say a single word until I have told you that you may do so."

"Quite right!" this was said sotto voce by Colonel Ogilvie.

"You, young madam, have taken upon yourself the responsibilities of wifehood; and it is right as well as necessary that you understand them; such of them at least as have bearing upon the present situation.

"As to the woman. She, when questioned by the police as to her status for the purpose of verification of Lord Athlyne's statement, accepted that statement. Later on, she of her own free will and of her own initiative, gave her name as Lady Athlyne — only the bearer of which could be the wife of the Defender; I mean of Lord Athlyne." The interruption this time came from Colonel Ogilvie.

"If Lord Athlyne is Defender, who is the other party?"

"Lady Athlyne, or Miss Ogilvie, in whichever name she might take action, would he the Pursuer!"

"Sir!" thundered the Colonel, going off as usual at half-cock, "do you insinuate that my daughter is pursuer of a man?" He grew speechless with indignation. The Sheriffs coolness stood to him there, when the fury of the Kentuckian was directed to him personally. In the same even tone he went on speaking; "I must ask — I really must ask that you do not be so hasty in your conclusions whilst I am speaking, Colonel Ogilvie. You must understand that I am only explaining the law; not even giving any opinion of my own. The terminology of Scot's Law is peculiar, and differs from English law in such matters. For instance what in English law is 'Plaintiff and Defendant' becomes with us 'Pursuer and Defender.' There may be a female as well as a male Pursuer. Thus on the grounds of present consent as there is ample proof of Matrimonial Consent of either and both parties — sufficient for either to use against the other. I take it that the Court would hold the marriage proved; unless both parties repudiated the Intent. This I am sure would never be; for if there were any mutual affection neither would wish to cause such gossip as would inevitably ensue. And if either party preferred that the union should continue, either from motives of love or interest, the marriage could be held good. And I had better say at once, since it is a matter to be considered by any parent, that should there have been any valid ground for what you designate as 'scandal,' such would in the eyes of the law be only the proper and necessary completion of the act of marriage. And let me say also that the fact of the two parties, thus become one by the form of Irregular Marriage, having passed the night in this suite of rooms without bolt of fastening on the connecting door would be taken by a Court as proof of consummation. No matter by what entanglement of events — no matter how or by what accident or series of accidents the two parties came into this juxtaposition!

"'There is but one other point to be considered regarding the validity of this marriage. It is that of compliance with the terms of Lord Brougham's Act of 1856. The man has undoubted domicile in Scotland for certain legal purposes. But the marriage law requires a further and more rigid reading of residence than mere possession of estates. The words are that one of the parties to the marriage must 'have his or her usual place of residence' in this Country. But as I have shown you that in Lord Athlyne's case his living in Scotland for several weeks in one or other of his own houses would be certainly construed by any Court as compliance with the Act, I do not think that any question of legality could arise. Indeed it is within my own knowledge that as a Scottish peer — Baron of Ceann-da-Shail — who declared Scottish domicile on reaching his majority and whose 'domicile of origin' was not affected by his absence as an officer in foreign service, his status for the purpose of Scottish marriage is unassailable.

"In fine let me point out that I am speaking altogether of proof of the marriage itself. The actual marriage is in law the consent of the parties; and such has undoubtedly taken place. The only possible condition of its nullity would be the repudiation of the implied Consent by both of the parties. One alone would not be sufficient!

"And now, Colonel Ogilvie, as I believe it will be well that you and the two young people should consider the situation from this point of view, will you allow me to withdraw — still on the supposition that you will join me later at breakfast. And if this merry lady" — pointing to Judy who had gained composure sufficiently to hear the end of his explanation— "will honour me by coming to my sitting-room, just below this, where breakfast will be served, it may perhaps be better. I take it that you will be all able to speak more freely, you and your daughter — and her husband!”

He withdrew gracefully, giving his arm to Judy who having risen bashfully had taken his extended arm. She was blushing furiously.

The door closed behind him, leaving Joy standing between her father and Athlyne, and holding an arm of each.

CHAPTER 22

THE HATCHET BURIED

For a few minutes there was silence in the room; silence so profound that even sound of the street was clearly heard. Even the shutting of the Sheriffs door in the room below was distinct.

The first to speak was Colonel Ogilvie. Athlyne, who would have liked to break the silence refrained through prudence; he feared that were he to speak before Colonel Ogilvie did, that easily-irate gentleman might take offence. He knew that this might be disastrous, for it would renew the old strife in an acute form; as it was, there were distinct indications of coming peace. Joy, and Joy alone, was to be thought of now. By this time Athlyne was beginning to get the measure of Colonel Ogilvie's foot. He realised that the dictatorial, vindictive, blood-thirsty old man would perhaps do much if left to himself; but that if hindered or thwarted or opposed in any way his pride or his vanity — and they were united in him — would force him to keep his position at any cost.

"Well sir?" The tone was so peremptory and so "superior" that any man to whom it had been used might well have taken offence; but Athlyne was already schooled to bear, and moreover the statement made by the Sheriff filled his heart with such gladness that he felt that he could bear anything. As Joy was now his wife he could not quarrel with her father — nor receive any quarrel from him. Still, all the same, he felt that he must support and maintain his own independent position; such would be the best road to ultimate peace. Moreover, he had his own pride; and as he had already made up his mind to die if need be for Joy's sake, he could not go back on that resolution without seeming to be disloyal to her. There would — could — be no hiding anything from her as she had already heard the whole of the quarrel and of his acquiescence to her father's challenge. No one, however, would have thought he had any quarrel who heard his reply, spoken in exquisitely modulated accents of respect:

"Need I say, Colonel Ogilvie, that I am equally proud and happy in finding myself allied with your House by my marriage with your daughter. For, sir, I love her with all my soul, as well as with all my heart and mind. She is to me the sweetest, dearest and best thing in all the universe. I am proud of her and respect her as much as I love her; and to you, her father, I hope I may say that I bless- — and shall ever bless for so long as I live — the day that I could call her mine." As he spoke, Joy's hand on his arm, which had trembled at the beginning, now gripped him hard and firmly. Turning his eyes to hers he saw in them a look of adoration which made his heart leap and his blood seem on fire. The beautiful eyes fell for an instant as a red tide swept her face and neck; but in an instant more they were raised to his eyes and hung there, beaming with pride and love and happiness. This nerved and softened him at once, to even a gender feeling towards the old man; those lovely eyes had always looked trustingly and lovingly into her father's, and he would never disturb — so he vowed to himself — if he could avoid it by any sacrifice on his part, such filial and parental affection. And so, with gender voice and softened mien, he went on speaking.

"Now I must ask you to believe, sir, that with the exception of that one fault — a grave one I admit — of taking Miss Ogilvie out alone in my motor I have not willingly or consciously been guilty of any other disrespect towards you. You now understand, of course, that it was that unhappy, assumed name which prevented my having the pleasure of visiting you and your family on this side of the Atlantic. No one can deplore more than I do that unhappy alias. The other, though I regret — and regret deeply — the pain it has caused, I cannot be sorry for, since it has been the means of making Joy my wife."

Here he beamed down into the beautiful grey eyes of the said wife who was still holding his arm. As he finished she pinched gently the flesh of his arm. This sent a thrill through him; it was a kiss of sorts and had much the same effect as the real thing. Joy noted the change in his voice as he went on:

"I so respected your wishes, sir, that I did not actually ask in words Joy to be my wife until I should have obtained your permission to address myself to her. If you will look at that letter you will see that it was written at Ceann-da-Shail, my place in Ross-shire — days before I posted it."

"Then if you did not ask her to marry you; how is it that you are now married — according to the Sheriff?" He thought this a poser, and beamed accordingly. Athlyne answered at once:

"When two people love each other, sir, as Joy and I do, speech is the least adequate form of expression. We did not want words; we knew!" Again Joy squeezed his arm and they stood close together in a state of rapture. The Colonel, with some manifest hesitation, said:

"With regard to what the Sheriff spoke of as 'real cause of scandal,' was there...?"

"That, sir," said Athlyne interrupting with as fierce and truculent an aspect as had been to the Colonel at any moment of the interview "is a subject on which I refuse to speak, even to you." Then after a pause he added:

"This I will say to you as her father who is entitled to hear it: Joy's honour is as clear and stainless as the sunlight. Whatever has taken place has been my doing, and I alone am answerable for it." Whilst he was speaking Joy stood close to him, silent and with downcast eyes. In the prolonged silence which ensued she raised them, and letting go Athlyne's arm stepped forward towards her father with flashing eyes:

"Father what he says is God's truth. But there is one other thing which you should know, and you must know it from me since he will not speak. He is justified in speaking of my honour, for it was due — and due alone — to his nobility of character that I am as I am. That and your unexpected arrival. For my part I would have—"

"Joy!" Athlyne's voice though the tone was low, rang like a trumpet. Half protest it was, half command. Instinctively the woman recognised the tone and obeyed, as women have obeyed the commands of the men they loved, and were proud to do so, from Eden garden down the ages.

"Speak on, daughter! Finish what you were saying." His voice was strangely soft and his eyes were luminous beneath their shaggy white brows. Joy's answering tone was meek:

"I cannot, father. My... Mr. — Lord Athlyne desires that I should be silent." She was astonished at his reply following:

"'Well, perhaps he is right. Better so!" Then in sotto wee to Athlyne: "Women should not be allowed to talk sometimes. They go too far when they get to self-abasement!" Athlyne nodded. Again silence which Colonel Ogilvie broke:

"Well, sir. I suppose we must take it that the marriage is complete in Scotch law. So far for the past. What of the future?" In a low voice Athlyne replied: "Whose future?"

"Yours — yours and my daughter's." He was amazed at Athlyne's reply, spoken in a voice both low and sad: so too was Joy: "Of that I cannot say. It does not rest with me."

"Not rest with you, sir? Then with whom does it rest." Athlyne raised his eves and looked him straight in the face: "With you!"

"With me?" the Colonel's voice was faint with amazement. "Yes, with you! What future have I, already condemned to death! What future has my wife, whose sentence of widowhood came even before the knowledge of her marriage! Do you forget Colonel Ogilvie that my life is pledged to you? On your own doing, I took that obligation but having taken it I must abide by it Such future as may be for either of us rests with you!" Colonel Ogilvie did not pause before answering. He spoke quickly as one whose mind is made up: "But that is all over." Athlyne said quietly:

"You had not said so! In an affair of this kind the challenged man is not free to act. Pacific overture must be with the one who considering himself injured has sought this means of redress." Joy listening, with her heart sinking and her hand so trembling that she took it from his arm lest it should upset him, was amazed. He was at least as determined as her father. But she was rejoiced to see that his stiffness was having its effect; her father was evidently respecting this very quality so much that he was giving way, to his opponent. Seeing this, and recognising in her woman's way for the first time in her life this fundamental force, she made up her mind that she too would on her side keep steadfastly to her convictions just as... as... He had done. In silence she waited for what would follow this new development going on before her eyes. Presently Colonel Ogilvie spoke:

"I suppose 1/3rd Athlyne you are satisfied with the validity of the marriage?” He answered heartily:

“Of course I am! The Sheriff was quite clear about it; and what he says is sufficient for me.”

“And your intention?”

“Sir, from the first moment when my eyes lit on your daughter I had only one intention, and that was to make her my wife. Be quite satisfied as to me! I am fixed as Fate! If there is any hindrance to my wishes it can only come from my wife. But understand this: that if for any cause whatever she may wish this marriage annulled, or consider that it has not been valid, she has only to indicate her wish and I shall take any step in my power to set her free.”

“Father!” Colonel Ogilvie turned in astonishment at the sound of his daughter’s voice, which was in such tone as he had never heard from her. It rang; her mind was made up:

“Father, a while ago when you seemed in some grave trouble I asked you why you did not ask me anything. I told you I had never lied to you and should not do so then; but you asked me nothing. Why don’t you ask me now?”

“What should I ask you, little girl. You are married; and your duty is to some one else whose name you bear. Besides, I don’t ask women questions which may be painful to answer. Such I ask of men!”

To this she spoke in a calm voice which made Athlyne uneasy. He could not imagine what she was coming at; but he felt that whatever it might be it was out of the truth of her nature, and that he must support her. Her love he never doubted. In the meantime he must listen patiently and learn what she had to say.

“‘Well father, as you will not ask I must speak unasked. It is harder; that is all. The Sheriff said that mutual intention was necessary for marriage. Let me tell you that I had not then such intention! I must say it. I have never lied to you yet; and I don't intend to begin now. Especially when I am entering on a new life with a man whom I love and honour. For if this marriage be not good we shall soon have one that is — if he will have me." Athlyne took her hand; she sighed joyfully as she went on:

"I certainly did intend to marry Mr... Lord Athlyne when... when he should formally ask me; but I understood then that there was some obstacle to his doing so. This I now know to be that he was wanting to get your consent beforehand. But if I did not then intend that our coming for a run in the motor together was to be marriage, how can I by that act be married?" As she paused Athlyne realised what was the cause of that vague apprehension which had chilled him. Colonel Ogilvie was beset by a new difficulty by this new attitude of Joy. If she repudiated intention such would nullify the marriage, since Athlyne had signified his intention of letting her have her way. If there were no marriage, then there would be scandal. So before beginning to argue with his daughter on the subject of the validity of the marriage, he thought it well to bring to the aid of reason the forces of fear. He commenced by intimidation:

"Of course you understand, daughter, that if you and Lord Athlyne were not married through the accidents of your escapade, there will be scandal from it; there is no other alternative. In that case, such pacific measures as I have now acceded to will be abrogated; and the gentleman who was the cause of the evil must still answer to me for it" At this threat Joy grew ghastly pale. Athlyne, wrung to the heart by it, forgot his intention of discretion and said quickly and sharply:

"That is not fair, Colonel Ogilvie. She is a woman — if she is your daughter, and is not to be treated brutally. You must not strike at a man through a woman. If you want to strike a man do so direct! I am the man. Strike me, how and when you will; but this woman is my wife — at least she is until she repudiates our marriage! But till then by God! no man — not even her father himself — shall strike her or at her, or through her!” Both he and Joy were surprised at the meek way in which the old man received this tirade. But even whilst he had been uttering the cruel threat both his conscience and his courage had been against him. This, the man and the woman who heard could, from evidence, divine. But there was another cause of which they had no knowledge. The moment after speaking, when his blind passion began to cool, the last words of his wife came back to his memory: “Be good to her, and never forget that she can suffer most through any one dear to her.” Furthermore, the recollection of Judy’s words as he was leaving clinched the matter “You hold poor Joy’s life — which is her heart — in your hand!” He began his reply to Athlyne truculently — as was usual to him; but melted quickly as he went on:

“Hey-day my young bantam-cock; you flash your spurs boldly... But I don’t know but you’re right. I was wrong; I admit it! Joy my dear I apologise for it; and to you too, sir, who stand up so valiantly and so readily for your wife. I am glad my little girl has such a defender, though it is and will be a sad thought to me that I was myself the first to cause its evidence. But keep your hair on, young man! Men sometimes get hurt by running up against something that’s quite in its right place... It’s my place to look after my little girl — till such time as you have registered your bond-rights. And see, doesn’t she declare she had no idea she was being married. However, it’s all right in this case. I don’t mean her to give herself away over this part of the job any more than you did a while ago when you stopped her telling me something that it wouldn't have been wise to say. So, sir, guess we'll call it quits this time. Well, little girl, let me tell you that you've said all at once to me two different things. You said you didn't intend to marry Lord Athlyne that time, but that you did at some other. If that last doesn't make an intention to marry I'm a Dutchman. I think we'd better let it rest at that! Now as to you Lord Athlyne! You seem to want — and rightly enough I'll allow — that I make a formal retraction of my demand for your life. Well I do so now. There's my hand! I can give it to you freely, for you are a brave man and you love my little girl; and my little girl loves you. I'm right sorry I didn't know you at the first as I do now. But I suppose the fact is, I was jealous all along. You don't know — yet — what I know: that you were thrown at me in a lot of ways before I ever saw you, by the joke that my little girl and Judy put up on me. When I knew that my girl was calling herself by your name..."

"Daddy dear!" This was Joy's protest. "Yes, little girl, I won't give you away; but your husband should know this fact lest he keep a grudge in his heart against your old daddy — and I know you wouldn't like that. You can tell him, some of these days or nights, what you like yourself about the whole thing from the first. I dare say he'll want to know, and won't let you alone till you tell him. And I dare say not then; for he'll like — he's bound to — all you can say. Here, Athlyne — I suppose that's what I am to call you since you're my son now — at any rate my daughter's husband." As he spoke he held out his hand. Athlyne jumped forward and seized it warmly. The two men shook hands as do two strong men who respect each other. Joy stepped forward and took the clasped hands between her own. When the hands parted she kissed her husband and then her father; she had accepted the situation.

After a pause Athlyne said, quietly but with a very resolute look on his face: “I understand, sir, that the hatchet is now buried. But I want to say that this must be final. I do so lest you should ever from any cause wish to dig it up again. Oh, yes I understand” — for the Colonel was going to speak “but I have had a warning. Just now when it seemed that Joy was going to repudiate — though happily as it turned out for only a time — our marriage as an existing fact, you reopened that matter which I had then thought closed. Now as for the future Joy’s happiness is my duty as well as my privilege and my pleasure, I must take all precautions which I can to insure it. It would not do if she could ever have in her mind a haunting fear that you and I could quarrel. I know that for my own part I would be no party to a quarrel with you. But I also have reason to know that a man’s own purpose is nothing when some one else wants to quarrel with him. Therefore for our dear Joy’s sake—”

“Good!” murmured the Colonel. “Our dear Joy’s sake!” Athlyne repeated the phrase — he loved to do so:

“For our dear Joy’s sake will you not promise that you will never quarrel with me.”

“Indeed I will give the promise — and more. Listen here, little girl, for it is for your sake. I find I have been wrong to quarrel so readily and without waiting to understand. If a nigger did it I think I’d understand, for I don’t look for much from him. But I do expect much from myself; and therefore I’ll go back a bit and go a bit farther. Hear me promise, so help me God, I’ll never quarrel again! Quarrel to kill I mean of course. Now, sir, are you satisfied!” Joy flung herself into his arms cooing lovingly:

“Dear, dear Daddy. Oh thank you so much; you have made me so happy! That promise is the best wedding-gift you could possibly give me!" Athlyne took the hand extended to him and wrung it heartily:

"And I too, thank you, sir. And, as I want to share in all Joy's happiness and in her pleasant ways, I hope you will let me — as her husband — call you Daddy too?"

"Indeed you may, my boy; I'll be right glad!"

It was a happy trio that stood there, the two men's right hands clasping, and Joy once more holding the linked hands between hers.

"We may go join the Sheriff and Judy I think, little girl!" said the Colonel presently. He felt that he wanted to get back to himself from the unaccustomed atmosphere of sentiment which encompassed him.

"Just one moment — Daddy!" said Athlyne speaking the familiar name with an effort and looking at Joy as he did so. The approval shining from her beautiful eyes encouraged him, and he went on more freely:

"Now that our dear Joy is my care I should like to make a proposition. The Sheriffs suggestion is good, and his reading of the law seems as if it were all right; but, after all, there is no accounting for what judges and juries may decide. Now I want — and we all want — that there be no doubt about this marriage — now or hereafter. And I therefore suggest that presently Joy and I shall again exchange Matrimonial Intention and Consent, or whatever is the strongest way that can be devised to insure a flawless marriage. We can even write this down and both sign it, and you and the Sheriff and Judy shall witness. So that whatever has been before — though this will not disturb it — will be made all taut and secure!" Joy's comment was:

"And I shall be married to my husband a second time!" "Yes, darling" said Athlyne putting his arm round her and drawing her close to him. She came willingly and put her arms round him. They embraced and kissed each other and he said:

"Yes darling; but wait a moment, I have a further suggestion. In addition to this we can have a 'regular' marriage to follow these two irregular ones. I shall go to London and get a special license from the Archbishop of Canterbury, who is a connection of my own. With this we shall have a religious marriage to supplement the civil ones. We can be married, sir, in your own rooms, or in a church, just as Joy wishes — and, of course, as her mother and her Daddy wish. We can be married the third time, Joy darling, in Westminster Abbey if you so desire!"

"Anywhere you choose — darling!" she spoke the last word shyly "will be what I wish. I am glad I am to be married three times to you."

"Why darling?"

"Because darling" she spoke the word now without shyness or hesitation. "I love you enough for three husbands; and now we must have three honeymoons!" she danced about the room gaily, clapping her hands like a happy child.

When they were ready to go to breakfast Colonel Ogilvie instinctively offered his arm to Joy, but catching sight of Athlyne drew back and motioned to him to take the honourable place. The husband was pleased, but seeing a new opening for conciliation he said heartily:

"No, no. I hope the time will never come when my wife won't love to go with her father!" The old man was pleased and called to his daughter "Come, little girl, you have got to take us both!" She took her husband's arm as well as her father's; and all three moved towards the door. When they got there, however, some change was necessary, for it was not possible to pass through three abreast Each of the men was willing to give place to the other; but before either man could move, or indeed before either had his mind made up what to do, the quicker-witted woman slipped back behind them. There taking Athlyne's hand in hers she had placed it on her father's arm. As they both were about to protest against going in front of her she said hastily:

"Please, please Daddy and... Husband I would really rather you two went first, and arm in arm as father and son should go. For that is what it is to be from this on; isn't it? I would rather a thousand times see the two men I love best in all the world going so, than walk in front of them as a Queen."

"That's very prettily said!" was the comment of her father. Then with a fond look back at her he took the young man's hand from his own arm and placed his own hand on the other's arm. "That's better!" he said. "Age leaning on Youth, and Beauty smiling on both!"

And in this wise they entered the Sheriffs room, in time to see him sitting at one end of the sofa and Judy sitting at the furthest corner away from him — blushing.

CHAPTER 23

A HARMONY IN GRAY

As the trio entered the room Judy jumped from the sofa vivaciously. The Sheriff followed with an agility wonderful in a man of his age; he bade them all welcome with a compelling heartiness. Judy was full of animation; indeed she out-did herself to a degree which made Joy raise her eyebrows. Joy was a sympathetic soul, and unconsciously adapted herself to her Aunt's supra-vivacity.

To Colonel Ogilvie, less enthusiastic by nature and concern, it appeared that she was as he put it in his own mind "playing up to the old girl." He seemed to realise that the Sheriff was ardent in his intentions; and, with the calm, business-like aptitude of a brother-in-law to a not-young lady, had already made up his mind to give his consent.

Judy flew to Joy and kissed her fervently. The kisses were returned with equal warmth, and the two women rocked in each other's arms, to the envy, if delight, of certain of the onlookers viewing the circumstance from different standpoints. Judy took her niece to the now-vacated sofa, and an animated whispering began between them. Joy's attention was, however, distracted; her senses had different objectives. Her touch was to Judy sitting beside her and holding her close in a loving embrace; her ears were to her father who was talking to the Sheriff. But her eyes were all with her husband, devouring him. There came a timid knock at the door, and in answer to the Sheriffs "Come in," it was partly opened. The voice of the landlady was heard: "May I speak with ye a moment, Sheriff?" He went over to the door, and a whispered colloquy ensued, all his guests turning their eyes away and endeavouring in that way, as usual, to seem not to be listening. Then the Sheriff, having closed the door, said:

"Our good hostess tells me that there will be a full half hour of waiting before we can breakfast, if she is to have proper time to do justice to the food which she wishes to place before us. So I must ask pardon of you all."

"Capital! Capital!" said Colonel Ogilvie, "that half hour is just what we want. Mr. Sheriff, we have a little ceremony to go through before we breakfast. The fact is we are going to have an Irregular Marriage. If you are able to take part in such a thing I hope you will assist us." Joy rose up and stood beside Athlyne. The Sheriff answered:

"Be quite easy on that point, sir. I am not in my own shrieval district, and so, even if such were contra to my duties at home, I am free to act as an individual elsewhere. But who are the contracting parties? You are married already; so too are your daughter and my Lord Athlyne. Indeed it looks, Miss Hayes, as if you and I are the only available parties left. But I fear such great happiness is not for me; though I would give anything in the wide world to win it!" He bowed to her gallantly and took her hand. She looked quite embarrassed — though not distressed, and giggled like a schoolgirl.

"Indeed, Mr. Sheriff!" she said, "this is very sudden. Affairs of the heart seem to move quickly in this delightful country!" As she spoke she looked at Joy and Athlyne who happened to be at the moment standing hand in hand. Joy came over and sat beside her and kissed her. Athlyne, in obedience to a look from his wife, kissed her too. Then the Colonel gallantly followed suit. There was only the Sheriff left, and he, after a pause, took advantage of the occasion and kissed her also. Then to relieve her manifest embarrassment he spoke out:

"I fear I have diverted your purpose, Colonel Ogilvie. I am not sorry for it" — this with a look at Judy which made her blush afresh "but I apologize. I take it that you were alluding to something in which I am to have a less prominent part than I have suggested."

"The marriage, sir, is to be between Lord Athlyne and my daughter." As he spoke Athlyne went to a side table whereon were spread the Sheriffs writing materials. He took a sheet of paper and began to write. Colonel Ogilvie went on:

"We have come to the conclusion that, though the act of marriage which has already taken place between these two young people is in your view lawful and complete, it may be well to go through the ceremony in a more formal manner. There are, we all know, intricacies and pitfalls in law; and we are both agreed with the suggestion of my lord that it would be well not to allow any loophole for after attack. Therefore in your presence — if you will be so good," the Sheriff bowed, "they shall again pledge their mutual Matrimonial Consent. They will both sign the paper to that effect which I see Lord Athlyne is preparing; and we shall all sign it as witnesses. Then, when this new marriage is complete — and irrefragable as I understand from what you said awhile ago it will be — we shall be ready for breakfast. It will be more than perhaps you expected when you so kindly asked us to be your guests: a wedding breakfast!"

Judy whispered to her niece.

"Joy, you must come to your room and let me dress you properly. I have brought a dress with me."

"What dress dear?" she asked.

"The tweed tailor-made."

"But, Judy dear, I have on a white frock, and that is more suitable for my wedding."

"That was all right yesterday, dear. But to-day you shall not wear white. You are already a married lady, this is only a re-marriage." A beautiful blush swept over Joy's face as she looked at her husband writing away as hard as his pen could move.

"I shall wear white to-day!" she said in the same whisper, and stood up.

Just at that moment a fly drove quickly past the window. It stopped at the hotel door, and there was a sudden bustle of arrival. Voices raised to a high pitch were heard outside. Various comments were heard in the room.

"That's mother!"

"My wife!"

"Sally!"

"Why Aunt Judy that's the voice of Mrs. O'Brien.'"

"My Foster-mother!"

The door opened, and in swept Mrs. Ogilvie who flew first to her husband's arms; and then, after a quick embrace, seemed to close round Joy and obliterate her. A similar eclipse took place with regard to Athlyne; for Mrs. O'Brien dashed into the room and calling out as though invoking the powers of earth and heaven: "Me bhov! me bhov!" fell upon him. He seemed really glad to see her, and yielded himself to her embrace as freely as though he had been a child again.

"Joy dear," said Mrs. Ogilvie "I hope you are all right. After your father and then Judy had gone, I was so anxious about you, that I got the north mail stopped and caught it at Penrith. Just as I was going to get ready for the journey Mrs. O'Brien came in. She had written to me in London that she would like to pay her respects, and I had said we were going on to Ambleside but would be glad if she would come and see us there and spend a few days with us.” Mrs. O’Brien who was all ears, here cut into the conversation:

“Aye, an Miss Joy acushla, — my service to ye miss! — she sent me postal ordhers to cover me railway fare an me expinces. Oh! the kind heart iy her!”

She had by now released Athlyne and stood back from him pointing at him as she spoke:

“An comin’ here through yer ladyship’s goodness who do I find but me beautiful bhoy. Luk at him! Luk at him! Luk at him!” Her voice rose in crescendo at each repetition. “The finest, dearest, sweetest, bonniest child that ever a woman tuk to her breast. An now luk at him well. The finest, upstandiness, handsomest, dearest, lovinest man that the whole wurrld houlds. That doesn’t forget his ould fosther mother an him an Earrll, wid casdes iy his own, an medals on to him an Victory Crasses. An it’s a gineral he ought to be. Luk at him, God bless him!” She turned to one after another of the party in turn as though inviting their admiration. Joy came and, putting her arms round the old woman’s neck, hugged and kissed her. When she got free, Mrs. O’Brien said to Athlyne:

“An phwat are ye doin’ here me darlin’ acushla me lord — ay I may make so bould as t’ ask ye? How did ye come here; and phwat brung ye that yer ould nurse might have her eyes made glad wid sight iy ye?”

“I am here, my dear, because I am married to Joy Ogilvie, and we are going to be married again!”

Then the storm of comment broke, all the women speaking at once and in high voices suitable to a momentous occasion:

“What, what?” said Mrs. Ogilvie. “Married to my daughter!

Colonel Ogilvie, how is it that I was not informed of this coming event?"

"Faith, my dear I don't know" he answered "I never knew it — and — and I believe they didn't know it themselves... till the moment before it was done." He added the last part of the sentence in deference to the Sheriffs direction as to 'intention.' Fortunately the Sheriff had not heard his remark.

"Do explain yourself, Lucius. I am all anxiety."

"My dear, yesterday Joy made an irregular marriage with Lord Athlyne!"

"Good God!" The exclamation gave an indication of the social value of "irregular" marriage to persons unacquainted with Scottish law. Her husband saw that she was pained and tried to reassure her:

"You need not distress yourself, my dear. It is all right. 'Irregular' is only a name for a particular form of marriage in this Country. It is equally legal with any other marriage."

"But who is Lord Athlyne, and where is he? That is the name of the man who Mrs. O'Brien told Joy was the only man good enough for her."

"Lord Athlyne" said Colonel Ogilvie "at present our son-in-law, is none other than Mr. Richard Hardy with whom you shook hands just now!"

"Lucius, I am all amazed! There seems to be a sort of network of mystery all round us. But one thing: if Joy was married yesterday how on earth can she be going to be married to-day?"

'To avoid the possibility of legal complications later on! It is all right, my dear. You may take it from me that there is no cause for concern! But there were certain things, usually attended to beforehand, which on this occasion — owing to ignorance and hurry and unpremeditation — were not attended to. In order to prevent the possibility of anything going wrong by any quibble, they are to be married again just now."

"Where? when?"

"Here, in this room!"

"But where's the clergyman; where is the license?"

"There is neither. This is a Scottish marriage! Later on we can have a regular church marriage with a bishop if you wish or an archbishop; in a church or a room or a Cathedral — just as you prefer." Mrs. Ogilvie perceptibly stiffened as he spoke. Then she said, with what she thought was dignified gravity, which seemed to others like frigid acidity:

"Do I understand, Colonel Ogilvie, that you are a consenting party to another 'irregular'" — she quivered as she said the word— "marriage? And that my daughter is to be made a laughing stock amongst all our acquaintances by three different marriages?"

"That is so, my dear. It is for Joy's good!"

"Her good? Fiddlesticks! But in that case I have nothing more to say!" Some of her wrath seemed to be turned on both Athlyne and Joy; for she did not say a single word to either of them. She simply relapsed into stony silence.

Mrs. O'Brien's reception of the news afforded what might be termed the "comic relief' of the strained situation. She raised her hands, as though in protest to heaven for allowing such a thing, and emitted a loud wail such as a "keener" raises at an Irish wake. Then she burst into voluble speech:

"Oh wirrasthrue me darlin' bhoy, is it a haythen Turk y' are becomin', to take another wife whin ye've got one already only a day ould. An such a wan more betoken — the beautifullest darlinest young cratur what iver I seen! Her that I picked out long ago as the only wan that ye was good enough for. Shure, couldn't ye rist content wid Miss Joy, me darlin'? It's lookin' forward I was to nursin' her childher, as I nursed yerself me lord darlin', her childher, an yours! An' now it's another woman steppin' in betune ye; an' maybe there'll be no childher at all, at all. Wirrasthrue!"

"But look here, Nanny," said Athlyne with some impatience. "Can't you see that you're all wrong. It is to Joy that I am going to marry again! There's no other woman coming in between us. Tis only the dear girl herself!"

"Ah, that's all very well, me lord darlin'; but which iy them is to be the mother? Faix but I'll go an ax her Ladyship this minit!" And go she did, to Athlyne's consternation and Joy's embarrassment. All in a hurry she started up and went over to the sofa where Joy sat, and with a bob curtesy said to her:

"Me lady, mayn't I have the nursin' ay yer childher, the way I had their father before them? Though, be the same token, it's not the same nursin' I can give thim, wid me bein' ould an' rhun dhry!" Joy felt that the only thing to do was to postpone the difficulty to a more convenient season, when there should not be so many eyes — some of them strange ones — on her. To do this as kindly and as brightly as she could, she said:

"But dear Mrs. O'Brien, isn't it a little soon to think — or at any rate to speak — of such things?"

"Wasn't ye married yisterday?" interrupted the old woman. But looking at her lady's cheeks she went on in a different tone:

"But me darlin' — Lady, it's over bould an' too contagious for me to mintion such things, as yit. But I'll take, if I may, a more saysonable opportunity to ask ye to patthernise me. Some time whin ye’re more established as a wife thin ye are now!”

“Indeed” said Joy kindly. “I shall only be too happy to have you near me. And if I — if we are ever blessed with a little son I hope you will try to teach him to be as like his—” she stopped, blushing, but after a short pause went on “as like my dear husband as ever you can!” There was a break in her voice which moved the old woman strongly. She lifted the slim fine young hand to her withered lips and kissed it fervently.

“Glory be to God! me Lady, but it’s the proud woman I’ll be to keep and guard the young Earrll. An’ I’ll give my life for him if needs be!”

“Come now!” said the Sheriff who had been speaking with Colonel Ogilvie and Athlyne, and who had read over the paper written by the latter. “Come now all you good people! All sit round the room except you two principals to this solemn contract. You two stand before me and read over the paper. You, my Lord, read it first; and then you too, my Lady, do the same!” They sat round as they wished. Joy and Athlyne stood up before the Sheriff, who was also standing. Instinctively they took hands, and Athlyne holding the paper in his left hand, read as follows:

“We Calinus Patrick Richard Westerna Mowbray Hardy Fitzgerald, Earl of Athlyne, Viscount Roscommon and Baron Ceann-da-Shail and Joy Fitzgerald or Ogilvie late of Airlville in the State of Kentucky, United States of America, agree that we shall be and are united in the solemn bonds of matrimony according to the Law of Scotland and that we being of one mind as to the marriage, are and hereby declare ourselves man and wife.

Witness of above We the undersigned hereby declare that we have in the presence of the above signatories and of each other seen the foregoing signatures appended to this deed by the signatories themselves in our presence and in the presence of each other.

Alexander Fenwick (Sheriff of Galloway).

Lucius Ogilvie (father of the bride).

Mary Hayes Ogilvie (mother of the bride).

Bedelia Ann O'Brien, widow (formerly nurse and foster mother to the bridegroom).

Judith Hayes (aunt of the bride)."

When the document was completed by the signatures the Sheriff, having first scanned it carefully, offered it to Colonel Ogilvie, who raising a protesting hand said:

"No, no, Mr. Sheriff! I think we should all prefer that it should be kept in your custody, if you will so oblige us."

"With the greatest pleasure" he said; and Athlyne and Joy having consented to the scheme he folded the document and put it into his pocket. Just then the landlady, having knocked and being bidden to enter, came into the room followed by several maids and men bearing dishes.

"And now to breakfast" he went on. "Will the Bride kindly sit on my right hand, with her Husband next her. Mrs. Ogilvie, will you honour me by sitting on my left, with Colonel Ogilvie to support you on the other side. Miss Hayes will you kindly sit on Lord Athlyne's right" "And Mrs.... Mrs. O'Brien," whispered Judy. He went on:

"Mrs. O'Brien will you sit on Colonel Ogilvie's left"

"Deed an' I'll noti" said the Irishwoman sturdily.

"Do you mean" asked Colonel Ogilvie icily "that you do not care to sit next to me individually?"

"Faix an' I don't mane anything so foolish yer 'ann'r. Why should the likes o' me dar to object to the likes iy you? All I mane, sorr, is that an ould Biddy like me isn't fit to sit down alongside the quality — let alone an Earrll and his Laady whose unborn childher I'm to nurse. An', more betoken, on such an owdacious occasion — shure an I don't mane that but such a suspicious occasion."

"Mrs. O'Brien ma'am" said the Sheriff taking her hand "you're going, I hope to take your place at the table that all these good friends wish you to take."

"In troth no yer" — whispering to Joy "what's a Sheriff called Miss Joy? Is he 'yer Majesty' or 'me lord' or 'yer ann'r' or what is he anyhow?" "I think he is 'yer honour'" said Joy. So Mrs. O'Brien continued: "Yer Ann'r. Don't ask me fur to sit down wid the quality, where I don't belong. But let me give a hand to these nice girrls and byes to shling the hash. Shure it's a stewardess I am, an accustomed to shovin' the food."

"Nanny" said Athlyne kindly but in a strong voice "we all want you to sit at table with us to-day. And I hope you won't refuse us that pleasure."

"Certainly me darlin' lord!" she said instantly. "In coorse what plases ye!" The Master had spoken; she was content to obey without question. In the meantime Joy had been whispering to her mother who now spoke out:

"Mr. Sheriff, will you allow me to make a suggestion about the places at table?"

"With a thousand delights, madam. Pray make whatever disposition you think best I am only too grateful for your help."

"Thank you, sir. Well, if you do not mind I should like my sister, Miss Hayes, placed next to you; then Colonel Ogilvie and myself. On the other side if you will place next to my son-in-law his old nurse, I am right sure that both will be pleased."

“Hear, hear!” said Athlyne. “Come along, Nanny, and sit next your boy! Joy and I shall be delighted to have you close to us. Won’t you, darling.” Joy’s answer was quite satisfactory to him:

“Of course... Darling!” It was wonderful what a world of love she put into the utterance of those two syllables.

The breakfast was a great success, though but few of the party ate heartily. Neither Athlyne nor Joy did justice to the provender. They whispered a good deal and held hands surreptitiously under the table, and their eyes met constantly. The same want of appetite seemed to have affected both the Sheriff and Judy; but silence and a certain restraint and primness were their characteristics. Mrs. O’Brien, seated on the very edge of her chair, was too proud and too happy to eat. But she was storing up for future enjoyment fond memories of every incident, however trivial.

It was mid-day before any move was made. There were no speeches — in public, as all considered it would break the charm that was over the occasion if anything so overt took place. When all is understood, speech becomes almost banal. But there were lots of whisperings; whispers as soft in their tone as their matter was sweet. No one appeared to notice any one else at such moments; though be sure that there were words and tones and looks that were remembered later by the receivers, and looks and movements that were remembered by the others. Judy and the Sheriff had much to say to each other. Ample opportunity was given from the fact that the newly married pair found themselves occupied with each other almost exclusively. Occasionally, of course, Joy and the Sheriff conversed; but as a working rule he was quite content to devote himself to Judy who seemed quite able to hold up her end of the serious flirtation. When finally the patty broke up, preparatory to setting out for the south, the Sheriff asked Colonel Ogilvie if it might be possible that he should join in travel with the party, as he wished to spend a few days in Ambleside — a place which he had not visited for many years. Colonel Ogilvie cordially acquiesced. He was pretty sure by now that the meeting of Judy and this new friend would end in a match, and he was glad to do anything which might result in the happiness of his sister-in-law of whom he was really fond. But it was not on this account only that he made him welcome. The reaction from his evil temper was on him. Conscience was awake and pricking into him the fact that he had behaved brutally. His mind did not yet agree in the justice of the verdict but that would doubtless come later. He now wished to show to all that there was quite another side of his character. In this view he pressed that the Sheriff should be his guest. The other was about to object when he realised that by accepting he would be one of the household, and so much closer to Judy, and more and ottener in her society than would otherwise be possible. So he accepted gladly, and he and the Colonel soon became inseparable — except when Judy was speaking! In such case Colonel Ogilvie often felt himself rather left out in the cold. At the beginning of breakfast Athlyne had learned from Joy of the abandonment of the motor, and he had accordingly sent his father-in-law's chauffeur, with his pilot, to bring it back. They had to travel in a horse carriage; he could not drive two motors at once, and the pilot could not drive one. In due course the motor was retrieved, and having been made clean and taut by the "first-class mechanicien and driver" was ready for the road. Colonel Ogilvie's motor was also ready, and as the pilot could now be left to travel home by train so that the owner could sit by his chauffeur, there would be room for the new guest to sit between the two ladies in the tonneau. When he mentioned this arrangement, however, the Sheriff did not jump at it, but found difficulties in the way of incommoding the ladies. At last he said:

"I hope you will excuse me, Ogilvie, but I had already formed a little plan which I hoped with your sanction and that of your wife, to carry out. Before breakfast I — Miss Hayes and I had been talking of the old manner of posting. Her idea had, I think, been formed by seeing prints of breakdowns of carriages in run-away matches to Gretna Green, and I suggested... In fact I ventured to offer to drive her in old-fashioned postal style to Ambleside, and let her see what it was like. I have in my house at Galloway a fine old shay that my father and mother made their wedding trip in. It has always been kept in good trim, and it is all right for the journey. As Sheriff I have post-boys in my employ for great occasions and I have good horses of my own. So when J... Miss Hayes accepted my offer... of the journey, I wired off to have the trap sent down here. Indeed it should arrive within a very short time. I have also wired for relays of horses to be ready at Dumfries, Annan, Carlisle and Patterdale, so that when we start we should go without a hitch. My boys know the road, and four horses will spin us along in good style — even if we cannot keep up with your motor." So it was arranged that the pilot could occupy his old place with the chauffeur, and the Colonel and Mrs. Ogilvie would travel in the tonneau, Darby and Joan fashion. This settlement of affairs had only been arrived at after considerable discussion. When her father had told Joy that she was to ride with her mother, she had spoken out at once — without arrangement with Athlyne or even consultation with him:

"Athlyne will drive me, and we can take Mrs. O'Brien with us. There is stacks of room in the tonneau, and we have no luggage. I am sure my husband would like to have her with us.”

But when the arrangement was mentioned to the foster-mother she refused absolutely to obey any such order:

“What” she said “me go away in the coach wid the bride and groom! An ould corrn-crake like me wid the quality; an this none other than me own darlin’ lord and Miss Joy that I’m going to nurse the childher iy her. No, my Lady, I’ll do no such thing! Do ye think I’m goin’ to shpoil shport when me darlin’ does be drivin’ wid his beautiful wife by him an’ him kissin’ her be the yard an’ the mile an’ the hour, an’ huggin’ her be the ton, as he ought to be doin’, or he’s not the man I’ve always tuk him for. Shure ma’am” this to Mrs. Ogilvie “this is their day an’ their hour, an’ iviry minit iy it is goold an dimons to them! I’m telhin’ ye, I’d liefer put me eyes on Styx than do such a thing!” Mrs. Ogilvie, who recognised the excellence of her ideas, said:

“Then you must come with the Colonel and me. We’ve loads of room, and we are all alone.”

“An’ savin’ yer presence, so ye should be ma’am whin ye’re seein’ yer daughter goin’ aff wid her man. There’s loads iy things you and your man will want to be talkin’ about. Musha! if it’s only rememberin’ what ye said an’ done whin ye was aff on yer own honeymoon. Mind ye, ma’am, it’s not bad talkin’ or rememberin’, that’s not! No motors for me, ma’am — to-day at any rate. I’ll go by the thrain that I kem’ by; an’ when I get to yer hotel, if I’m before ye, I’ll shtraighten out things for ye, an’ have the rooms nice an’ ready. For mind ye, ma’am, me darlin’ Lord tould me that he’s goin’ to have a gran’ weddin’ to Miss Joy whin he gets his license! Be the way, does he get that, can ye tell me ma’am, from the polis or where the sheebeeners gits theirs? An’ ay there’s goin’ to be a weddin’ wid flowers an' gowns an' veils an' things in church, I suppose they won't be too previous about commin' together. Musha! but's it's a quare sort iy ways the quality has! Weddin's here be the Sheriff, an' thin be bishops, an' wid licenses. An' him in Bowness — for that's where he tells me he's shtoppin' — an' his wife in Ambleside — on their weddin' night! Begob! Ireland's changin' fast, fur that usen't to be the way. I'm thinkin' that the Shinn-Fayn'll have to wake up a bit if that's the way things is going to go. Or else there'll be millea murther, from the Giant's Causeway to Cape Clear!" As Mrs. Ogilvie did not wish to discuss this part of the question herself, she beckoned over Athlyne and told him that Mrs. O'Brien had refused to go in his motor.

"Not even if I ask you or tell you to?" he said to the old woman, having not the least intention of doing either.

"Not even thin, me Lord darlin'" she said with a cheery smile. "An' I'm thinkin' it's thankin' me — you an' yer lovely wife too— 'll be before ye're well out of sight of this place. Faix it's a nice sort iy ould gooseberry I'd be, sittin' in the carriage wid me arrums foulded, wid me darlin' Lord sittin' in front dhrivin' like a show-flure in a shute iy leather. An' his bride beside him, wid her arrums round him bekase both his own is busy wid the little wheel; an' her wondhrin', wid tears in her beautiful grey eyes, why he doesn't kiss her what she's pinin' fur. Augh! no! Not me, this time! I was a bride meself — wanst. An' I know betther nor me young Lady does now, what is what on the weddin' day afther the words is said. Though she'll pick up, so she will. She's not the soort that'll be long larnin'! Musha..." Her further revelations and prophesyings were cut short by Athlyne's kissing her and saying "Good-bye!"

If the journey up North had been Fairyland, the journey southward was heaven for both the young people. Athlyne felt all the triumph of a conqueror. If he had sung out loud, as he would like to have done, his song would have been a war-song rather than a love-song. There was the elan of the conqueror about him; the stress of love-longing and love-pining were behind him. The battle was won, and his conqueror's booty was beside him, well content to be in his train. Still even conqueror's love has its duties as well as its right, and he was more tender than ever to Joy. She, sitting beside him in all the radiancy of her new found wifehood, felt that their hearts were beating together; and that their thoughts swayed in unison. When her eyes would be lifted from the lean, strong, brown hands gripping the steering wheel — for in the rush of departure he had other things to think of than putting on the gloves which were squeezed behind him in his seat — and would look up into his face she would feel a sort of electric shock as his eyes, leaving for a moment their steering duty, would flash into hers with a look of love which made her quiver. But presently when his yielding to affection had been tested, and even her curiosity had been satisfied, she ceased such sudden looks. She realised his idea of the gravity of the situation when she saw, as his eyes returned to their necessary task, the hard look become fixed on his eagle face — the look which to one engaged in his task means safety to those under his care. She was all sympathy with him now. She was content that his will should prevail; that his duty should be the duty of both; that her service was to help him. And the first moment she realised this, she sighed happily as she sank back in her seat, her lover-rapture merged in wife-content. She had compensation for the foregoing in the exercise of her own pride. From her present standpoint all that came within the scope of her senses was supremely beautiful. The mountains grey and mysterious in their higher and further peaks; the dark woods running flamelike up into the glory of the mountain colouring; the scent of the new-mown hay, drifted across the track by the bracing winds sweeping over the hills; the glimmering sapphire of the water as they swept by lake or river, or caught flashes of the distant Forth through long green valleys. They went fast; Athlyne's wild excitement — the echo of the battle-phrenzy that had won him distinction on the field — found some relief in speed. He had thrown open the throttle of his powerful engine and swept along at such a speed that the whole landscape seemed to fly by the rushing car, giving only momentary glimpses of even the most far-flung beauty. He did not fear police traps now. He did not fear anything! Even the car seemed to have yielded itself like a living thing to the spell of the situation. Its wheels purred softly as it swept along, and the speed made a wind which seemed to roar in the ears of the two who were one.

Joy felt that she had a right to be content. This journey was of her own choosing entirely. The manner of it had been this: when the party had been arranged for starting her father had said to Athlyne:

"When you get to Ambleside, as I suppose you will do before us, will you give orders to have everything ready for our party. You can do this before you drive over to Bowness. You can come over to dinner if you like. I suppose you and Joy will want to see something of each other — all you can indeed, before the wedding comes off. That can be as soon as you like after you have got the license." To this he had replied:

"I should like to — and shall-do anything I can, sir, to meet your wishes. But I cannot promise to do anything now, on quite my own initiative. You see our dear girl has to be consulted; and I need not tell you that her wishes must prevail — so far as I am concerned!"

“Quite right, my boy! Quite right!” said the old man. Then we shall leave the orders to her. Here, Joy!” she came over, and her father put his suggestion to her. She hesitated gravely, and paused before she spoke; she evidently intended that there should be no mistake as to her deliberate intention:

“No! Daddy, that won’t do; I’m going with my husband!” She took his arm and clung to him lovingly, her finger tips biting sweedy into his flesh. “But, Daddy dear, we’ll come over to-morrow and lunch or breakfast with you, if we may. Call it early lunch or late breakfast. We shall be over about noon. Remember we have to come from Bowness!”

Athlyne seemed to float in air as he heard her. There was something so sweedy — so truly wifely, in her words and attitude that it won to his heart and set him in a state of rapture.

The late breakfast at Ambleside next day, though ostensibly a mere family breakfast, was hardly to be classed in that category. It was in reality regarded by all the family at present resident in that town as a wedding breakfast. They had one and all dressed themselves for the occasion. Not in complete marriage costume, which would have looked a little overdone, but in a modified form which sufficiently expressed in the mind of each the prevailing spirit of rejoicing. A few seconds before noon the “toot toot” of Athlyne’s powerful hooter was heard some distance off. All rushed to the windows to see the great red car swing round the corner. The chauffeur was driving; the bride and groom sat in the tonneau. As Athlyne was not driving he wore an ordinary morning dress — a well-cut suit of light grey which set out well his tall, lithe powerful figure. Joy was wrapped in a huge motor coat of soft grey, with her head shrouded in a veil of the same colour. In the hall they both took off their wraps, Athlyne helping his wife with the utmost tenderness. When they came into the room they made a grey pair, for with the exception of Athlyne's brown eyes and hair and a scarlet neck tie, and Joy's dark hair and a flash of the same scarlet as her husband's on her breast, they were grey — all grey. It would seem as if the whole colour-scheme of the couple had been built round Joy's eyes. She certainly looked lovely; there was a brilliant colour in her cheeks, and between her scarlet lips her teeth, when she smiled, flashed like pearls. She was in a state of buoyancy, seeming rather to float about than to move like a being on feet. She was all sweetness and affection, and flitted from one to another, leaving a wake of beaming happiness behind her.

Athlyne too was manifestly happy; but in quieter fashion, as is the way of a man. He was not overt or demonstrative in his attention to Joy; but his eyes followed her perpetually, and his ears seemed to hear every whisper regarding her, Her eyes too, kept turning to him wherever she might be or to whom speaking. Judy at first stood beaming at the pair with a look of proprietary interest; but after a while she began to be a trifle nettled by the husband's absorption in her niece. This feeling culminated when as Joy tripped slightly on the edge of the hearth-rug her husband started towards her with a swift movement and with that quick intake of breath which manifests alarmed concern. Judy's impulsiveness found its expression in a semi-humorous, semi-sarcastic remark:

"Why Athlyne you seem to look on the girl as if she was brittle! You weren't like that yesterday when you flashed her away from us at sixty miles an hour!" For a moment there was silence and all eyes were fixed on Joy who looked embarrassed and turn rosy-red. Athlyne to relieve her drew their attention on himself:

"No, my dear Judy — I'm not ever going to call you anything else you know. She wasn't my wife then!"

"Wasn't she!" came the answer tardy spoken. "She was just as much your wife then. She had been married to you only twice! And the first marriage was good enough for anything. I know that is so, for my sheriff says so! — Oh..." The ejaculation was due to the shame of sudden recognition of her confession. She blushed furiously; the Sheriff, looking radiantly happy, stepped over to her, took her hand, raised it to his lips, and kissed it.

"I think my dear," he said slowly and quietly, "that constitutes a marriage — if you will have it so?" She looked at him shyly and said quietly:

"If you like to count it a step on the way — like Joy's first marriage, do so — dear! Then if you like we can make it real when Joy becomes a wife — in the Church!"

Everyone in the room was so interested in this little episode that two of them only noticed a queer note of dissent or expostulation, coming in the shape of a sort of modified grunt from the two matrons of the party. Said Athlyne, still mindful of his intent to protect Joy:

"All right. Judy. I'll remember: 'my sheriff,' if there's any more chaffing. It seems that he'll be 'britde' before long!" Judy flashed one keen happy glance at him as she whispered close in his ear:

"Don't be ungenerous!" For reply he whispered back:

"Forgive me — dear. I did not intend to he nasty. I'm too happy for anything of that sort!"

As breakfast wore on and the familiarity of domestic life followed constraint, matters of the future came on the tapis. When Mrs. Ogilvie asked the young couple if they had yet settled when the marriage — the church marriage — was to come off, Joy looked down demurely at the table cloth as her husband answered:

"I go up to town early in the morning to get the License. It is all in hand and there will be no hitch and no delay. I had a wire this morning from my solicitor about it; and also one from the Archbishop congratulating me. I shall be home by the ten ten train on Thursday and we can have the wedding late that afternoon, if you will have the church and the parson ready."

"But, my dear boy, isn't that rather sudden?"

"Not sudden enough for me! But really, so far as I am concerned, I shall wait as long as Joy wishes. Now that we are married already, I fancy it doesn't much matter. Only that anything which could possibly bind me closer to Joy will always be a happiness to me, I don't care whether we have a third marriage at all." Mrs. Ogilvie caught her daughter's eye and answered at once:

"So be it then! Thursday afternoon at six. I suppose there can be no objection as to canonical hours?" The Sheriff answered:

"I can tell you that. The License of the Archbishop goes through and beyond all canonical hours and all places — in South Britain of course. Armed with that instrument you can celebrate the marriage when and where you will." Joy and Athlyne were by this time holding hands and whispering.

"Of course Joy will stay with us till then — Athlyne." Mrs. Ogilvie spoke the last word with a pause; it was the first time she had used his name.

"Not 'of course.'" he answered. "She is the head of her house now and must be free to do as she please. But I am sure she will like to come to you." Joy made a protesting "moue" at him as she said:

"Of course I'd like to be with Mother and Daddy, and Judy — if I — if I am not to be with you — Oh, darling! you're hurting me.

You're so frightfully strong!"

Breakfast being over, the party broke up and moved about the room. Joy was sitting on the sofa with her Mother when Mrs. O'Brien came sidling up by the wall. When she got close she curtsied and said:

"Won't ye tell me now, me Lady, if I'm to be the wan to nurse yer child-her?"

"Oh dear! But Mrs. O'Brien, I said only yesterday that I'd tell you that some other time. You are previous! — Didn't you hear that I am to be married on Thursday. Later on..."

"No time like the prisint, me Lady. It was yistherday ye shpoke; an to-day's to-day. Mayn't I nurse yer ch...

"Tell her, dear—" her Mother had begun, when Judy joined the group.

"What's all this about? Whose children are you talking of?" began the merry spinster. But her sister cut her short "Never you mind, Judy! You just go and sit down and try and get accustomed to silence so as to be ready to keep your Sheriff out of an asylum." Athlyne, too, with ears preternaturally sharp on Joy's account, had heard something of the conversation. Looking over at his wife, he saw her face divinely rosy, and with a troubled, hunted look in her eyes. He too instantly waded into the fray.

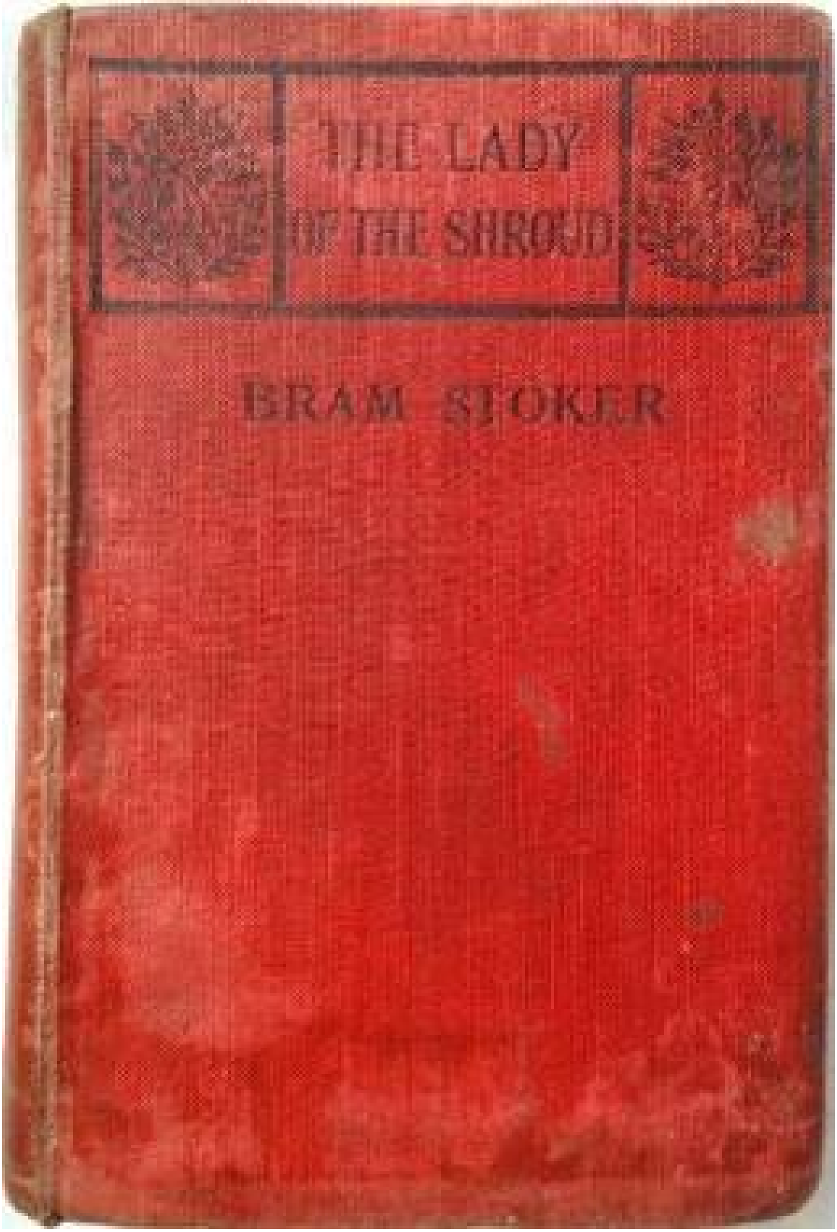
"I say, let her alone you all! I hope they're not teasing you darling?" Joy, fearing that something unpleasant might be said, on one side or the other, made haste to reassure him.

Then she closed his mouth in the very best way that a young wife can do — the way that seems to take his feet from earth and to raise him to heaven.

THE END

The Lady of the Shroud

This gothic novel was first published in 1909 and is noted for its mysterious opening. Adrift off the coast of the fictional Blue Mountains, a small coffin appears containing a white-shrouded woman. She rises from the sea, seeking refuge in the Castle of Vissarion in the middle of the night. The rich young Rupert Leger lets the mysterious beauty in, much to his puzzlement.


THE LADY OF THE SHROUD
BRAM STOKER

The first edition

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FROM THE SCRIPT OF THE VOIVODE, PETER VISSARION,

BOOK VII: THE EMPIRE OF THE AIR

FROM THE REPORT OF CRISTOFEROS, WAR-SCRIBE TO THE NATIONAL COUNCIL.
FROM RUPERT’S JOURNAL.
FROM THE REPORT OF CRISTOFEROS, SCRIBE OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE LAND OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS.
THE SAME (LATER IN THE SAME DAY).
FROM RUPERT’S JOURNAL.
JANET MACKELPIE’S NOTES.
JANET MACKELPIE’S NOTES.
THE SAME (LATER).
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RUPERT’S JOURNAL — *Continued.*

BOOK VIII: THE FLASHING OF THE HANDJAR

PRIVATE MEMORANDUM OF THE MEETING OF VARIOUS MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL, HELD AT THE STATE HOUSE OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS AT PLAZAC ON MONDAY, AUGUST 26, 1907.
THE SAME — *Continued.*
RECORD OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE LAND OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS, HELD AT PLAZAC ON MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 9TH, 1907, TO CONSIDER THE ADOPTION OF A NEW CONSTITUTION, AND TO GIVE PERMANENT EFFECT TO THE SAME IF, AND WHEN, DECIDED UPON.
THE SAME — *Continued.*
FROM “*The London Messenger.*”
FROM “*The London Messenger.*”

BOOK IX: BALKA

RUPERT’S JOURNAL — *Continued* (*Longe Intervallo*).
RUPERT’S JOURNAL — *Continued.*
THE VOIVODIN JANET MACKELPIE’S NOTES.
RUPERT’S JOURNAL — *Continued.*
RUPERT’S JOURNAL — *Continued.*
JANET MACKELPIE’S NOTES.
THE FEDERATION BALKA.

FROM “THE JOURNAL OF OCCULTISM” MID-JANUARY, 1907.

A strange story comes from the Adriatic. It appears that on the night of the 9th, as the Italia Steamship Company’s vessel “Victorine” was passing a little before midnight the point known as “the Spear of Ivan,” on the coast of the Blue Mountains, the attention of the Captain, then on the bridge, was called by the look-out man to a tiny floating light close inshore. It is the custom of some South-going ships to run close to the Spear of Ivan in fine weather, as the water is deep, and there is no settled current; also there are no outlying rocks. Indeed, some years ago the local steamers had become accustomed to hug the shore here so closely that an intimation was sent from Lloyd’s that any mischance under the circumstances would not be included in ordinary sea risks. Captain Mirolani is one of those who insist on a wholesome distance from the promontory being kept; but on his attention having been called to the circumstance reported, he thought it well to investigate it, as it might be some case of personal distress. Accordingly, he had the engines slowed down, and edged cautiously in towards shore. He was joined on the bridge by two of his officers, Signori Falamano and Destilia, and by one passenger on board, Mr. Peter Caulfield, whose reports of Spiritual Phenomena in remote places are well known to the readers of “The Journal of Occultism.” The following account of the strange occurrence written by him, and attested by the signatures of Captain Mirolani and the other gentleman named, has been sent to us.

“ . . . It was eleven minutes before twelve midnight on Saturday, the 9th day of January, 1907, when I saw the strange sight off the headland known as the Spear of Ivan on the coast of the Land of the

Blue Mountains. It was a fine night, and I stood right on the bows of the ship, where there was nothing to obstruct my view. We were some distance from the Spear of Ivan, passing from northern to southern point of the wide bay into which it projects. Captain Mirolani, the Master, is a very careful seaman, and gives on his journeys a wide berth to the bay which is tabooed by Lloyd's. But when he saw in the moonlight, though far off, a tiny white figure of a woman drifting on some strange current in a small boat, on the prow of which rested a faint light (to me it looked like a corpse-candle!), he thought it might be some person in distress, and began to cautiously edge towards it. Two of his officers were with him on the bridge — Signori Falamano and Destilia. All these three, as well as myself, saw It. The rest of the crew and passengers were below. As we got close the true inwardness of It became apparent to me; but the mariners did not seem to realise till the very last. This is, after all, not strange, for none of them had either knowledge or experience in Occult matters, whereas for over thirty years I have made a special study of this subject, and have gone to and fro over the earth investigating to the nth all records of Spiritual Phenomena. As I could see from their movements that the officers did not comprehend that which was so apparent to myself, I took care not to enlighten them, lest such should result in the changing of the vessel's course before I should be near enough to make accurate observation. All turned out as I wished — at least, nearly so — as shall be seen. Being in the bow, I had, of course, a better view than from the bridge. Presently I made out that the boat, which had all along seemed to be of a queer shape, was none other than a *Coffin*, and that the woman standing up in it was clothed in a shroud. Her back was towards us, and she had evidently not heard our approach. As we were creeping along slowly, the engines were almost noiseless, and there was hardly a ripple as our fore-foot cut the dark water. Suddenly there was a wild cry from the bridge — Italians are certainly very excitable; hoarse commands were given to the Quartermaster at the wheel; the engine-room bell clanged. On the instant, as it seemed, the ship's head began to swing round to starboard; full steam ahead was in action, and before one could understand, the Apparition was fading in the distance. The last thing I saw was the flash of a white face with dark, burning eyes as the figure sank down into the coffin — just as mist or smoke disappears under a breeze."

BOOK I: THE WILL OF ROGER MELTON

The Reading of the Will of Roger Melton and all that Followed

Record made by Ernest Roger Halbard Melton, law-student of the Inner Temple, eldest son of Ernest Halbard Melton, eldest son of Ernest Melton, elder brother of the said Roger Melton and his next of kin.

I consider it at least useful — perhaps necessary — to have a complete and accurate record of all pertaining to the Will of my late grand-uncle Roger Melton.

To which end let me put down the various members of his family, and explain some of their occupations and idiosyncrasies. My father, Ernest Halbard Melton, was the only son of Ernest Melton, eldest son of Sir Geoffrey Halbard Melton of Humcroft, in the shire of Salop, a Justice of the Peace, and at one time Sheriff. My great-grandfather, Sir Geoffrey, had inherited a small estate from his father, Roger Melton. In his time, by the way, the name was spelled Milton; but my great-great-grandfather changed the spelling to the later form, as he was a practical man not given to sentiment, and feared lest he should in the public eye be confused with others belonging to the family of a Radical person called Milton, who wrote poetry and was some sort of official in the time of Cromwell, whilst we are Conservatives. The same practical spirit which originated the change in the spelling of the family name inclined him to go into business. So he became, whilst still young, a tanner and leather-dresser. He utilized for the purpose the ponds and streams, and also the oak-woods on his estate — Torraby in Suffolk. He made a fine business, and accumulated a considerable fortune, with a part of which he purchased the Shropshire estate, which he entailed, and to which I am therefore heir-apparent.

Sir Geoffrey had, in addition to my grandfather, three sons and a daughter, the latter being born twenty years after her youngest brother. These sons were: Geoffrey, who died without issue, having been killed in the Indian Mutiny at Meerut in 1857, at which he took up a sword, though a civilian, to fight for his life; Roger (to whom I shall refer presently); and John — the latter, like Geoffrey, dying unmarried. Out of Sir Geoffrey's family of five, therefore, only three have to be considered: My grandfather, who had three children, two of whom, a son and a daughter, died young, leaving only my father, Roger and Patience. Patience, who was born in 1858, married an Irishman of the name of Sellenger — which was the usual way of pronouncing the name of St. Leger, or, as they spelled it, Sent Leger — restored by later generations to the still older form. He was a reckless, dare-devil sort of fellow, then a Captain in the Lancers, a man not without the quality of bravery — he won the Victoria Cross at the Battle of Amoaful in the Ashantee Campaign. But I fear he lacked the seriousness and steadfast strenuous purpose which my father always says marks the character of our own family. He ran through nearly all of his patrimony — never a very large one; and had it not been for my grand-aunt's little fortune, his days, had he lived, must have ended in comparative poverty. Comparative, not actual; for the Meltons, who are persons of considerable pride, would not have tolerated a poverty-stricken branch of the family. We don't think much of that lot — any of us.

Fortunately, my great-aunt Patience had only one child, and the premature decease of Captain St. Leger (as I prefer to call the name) did not allow of the possibility of her having more. She did not marry again, though my grandmother tried several times to arrange an alliance for her. She was, I am told, always a stiff, uppish person, who would not yield herself to the wisdom of her superiors. Her own child was a son, who seemed to take his character rather from his father's family than from my own. He was a wastrel and a rolling stone, always in scrapes at school, and always wanting to do ridiculous things. My father, as Head of the House and his own senior by eighteen years, tried often to admonish him; but his perversity of spirit and his truculence were such that he had to desist. Indeed, I have heard my father say that he sometimes threatened his life. A desperate character he was, and almost devoid of reverence. No one, not even my father, had any influence — good influence, of course, I mean — over him, except his mother, who was of my family; and also a woman who lived with her — a sort of governess — aunt, he called her. The way of it was this: Captain St. Leger had a younger brother, who made an improvident marriage with a Scotch girl when they were both very young. They had nothing to live on except what the reckless Lancer gave them, for he had next to nothing himself, and she was "bare" — which is, I understand, the indelicate Scottish way of expressing lack of fortune. She was, however, I understand, of an old and somewhat good family, though broken in fortune — to use an expression which, however, could hardly be used precisely in regard to a family or a person who never had fortune to be broken in! It was so far well that the MacKelpies — that was the maiden name of Mrs. St. Leger — were reputable — so far as fighting was concerned. It would have been too humiliating to have allied to our family, even on the distaff side, a family both poor and of no account. Fighting alone does not make a family, I think. Soldiers are not everything, though they think they are. We have had in our family men who fought; but I never heard of any of them who fought because they *wanted* to. Mrs. St. Leger had a sister; fortunately there were only those two children in the family, or else they would all have had to be supported by the money of my family.

Mr. St. Leger, who was only a subaltern, was killed at Maiwand; and his wife was left a beggar. Fortunately, however, she died — her sister spread a story that it was from the shock and grief — before the child which she expected was born. This all happened when my cousin — or, rather, my father's cousin, my first-cousin-once-removed, to be accurate — was still a very small child. His mother then sent for Miss MacKelpie, her brother-in-law's sister-in-law, to come and live with her, which she did — beggars can't be choosers; and she helped to bring up young St. Leger.

I remember once my father giving me a sovereign for making a witty remark about her. I was quite a boy then, not more than thirteen; but our family were always clever from the very beginning of life, and father was telling me about the St. Leger family. My family hadn't, of course, seen anything of them since Captain St. Leger died — the circle to which we belong don't care for poor relations — and was explaining where Miss MacKelpie came in. She must have been a sort of nursery governess, for Mrs. St. Leger once told him that she helped her to educate the child.

"Then, father," I said, "if she helped to educate the child she ought to have been called Miss MacSkelpie!"

When my first-cousin-once-removed, Rupert, was twelve years old, his mother died, and he was in the dolefuls about it for more than a year. Miss MacKelpie kept on living with him all the same. Catch her quitting! That sort don't go into the poor-house when they can keep out! My father, being Head of the Family, was, of course, one of the trustees, and his uncle Roger, brother of the testator, another. The third was General MacKelpie, a poverty-stricken Scotch laird who had a lot of valueless land at Croom, in Ross-shire. I remember father gave me a new ten-pound note when I interrupted him whilst he was telling me of the incident of young St. Leger's improvidence by remarking that he was in error as to the land. From what I had heard of MacKelpie's estate, it was productive of one thing; when he asked me "What?" I answered "Mortgages!" Father, I knew, had bought, not long before, a lot of them at what a college friend of mine from Chicago used to call "cut-throat" price. When I remonstrated with my father for buying them at all, and so injuring the family estate which I was to inherit, he gave me an answer, the astuteness of which I have never forgotten.

"I did it so that I might keep my hand on the bold General, in case he should ever prove troublesome. And if the worst should ever come to the worst, Croom is a good country for grouse and stags!" My father can see as far as most men!

When my cousin — I shall call him cousin henceforth in this record, lest it might seem to any unkind person who might hereafter read it that I wished to taunt Rupert St. Leger with his somewhat obscure position, in reiterating his real distance in kinship with my family — when my cousin, Rupert St. Leger, wished to commit a certain idiotic act of financial folly, he approached my father on the subject, arriving at our estate, Humcroft, at an inconvenient time, without permission, not having had even the decent courtesy to say he was coming. I was then a little chap of six years old, but I could not help noticing his mean appearance. He was all dusty and dishevelled. When my father saw him — I came into the study with him — he said in a horrified voice:

"Good God!" He was further shocked when the boy brusquely acknowledged, in reply to my father's greeting, that he had travelled third class. Of course, none of my family ever go anything but first class; even the servants go second. My father was really angry when he said he had walked up from the station.

"A nice spectacle for my tenants and my tradesmen! To see my — my — a kinsman of my house, howsoever remote, trudging like a tramp on the road to my estate! Why, my avenue is two miles and a perch! No wonder you are filthy and insolent!" Rupert — really, I cannot call him cousin here — was exceedingly impertinent to my father.

"I walked, sir, because I had no money; but I assure you I did not mean to be insolent. I simply came here because I wished to ask your advice and assistance, not because you are an important person, and have a long avenue — as I know to my cost — but simply because you are one of my trustees."

"*Your* trustees, sirrah!" said my father, interrupting him. "Your trustees?"

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, quite quietly. "I meant the trustees of my dear mother's will."

"And what, may I ask you," said father, "do you want in the way of advice from one of the trustees of your dear mother's will?" Rupert got very red, and was going to say something rude — I knew it from his look — but he stopped, and said in the same gentle way:

"I want your advice, sir, as to the best way of doing something which I wish to do, and, as I am under age, cannot do myself. It must be done through the trustees of my mother's will."

"And the assistance for which you wish?" said father, putting his hand in his pocket. I know what that action means when I am talking to him.

"The assistance I want," said Rupert, getting redder than ever, "is from my — the trustee also. To carry out what I want to do."

"And what may that be?" asked my father. "I would like, sir, to make over to my Aunt Janet—" My father interrupted him by asking — he had evidently remembered my jest:

"Miss MacSkelpie?" Rupert got still redder, and I turned away; I didn't quite wish that he should see me laughing. He went on quietly:

"*MacKelpie*, sir! Miss Janet MacKelpie, my aunt, who has always been so kind to me, and whom my mother loved — I want to have made over to her the money which my dear mother left to me." Father doubtless wished to have the matter take a less serious turn, for Rupert's eyes were all shiny with tears which had not fallen; so after a little pause he said, with indignation, which I knew was simulated:

"Have you forgotten your mother so soon, Rupert, that you wish to give away the very last gift which she bestowed on you?" Rupert was sitting, but he jumped up and stood opposite my father with his fist clenched. He was quite pale now, and his eyes looked so fierce that I thought he would do my father an injury. He spoke in a voice which did not seem like his own, it was so strong and deep.

"Sir!" he roared out. I suppose, if I was a writer, which, thank God, I am not — I have no need to follow a menial occupation — I would call it "thundered." "Thundered" is a longer word than "roared," and would, of course, help to gain the penny which a writer gets for a line. Father got pale too, and stood quite still. Rupert looked at him steadily for quite half a minute — it seemed longer at the time — and suddenly smiled and said, as he sat down again:

"Sorry. But, of course, you don't understand such things." Then he went on talking before father had time to say a word.

"Let us get back to business. As you do not seem to follow me, let me explain that it is *because* I do not forget that I wish to do this. I remember my dear mother's wish to make Aunt Janet happy, and would like to do as she did."

"*Aunt* Janet?" said father, very properly sneering at his ignorance. "She is not your aunt. Why, even her sister, who was married to your uncle, was only your aunt by courtesy." I could not help feeling that Rupert meant to be rude to my father, though his words were quite polite. If I had been as much bigger than him as he was than me, I should have flown at him; but he was a very big boy for his age. I am myself rather thin. Mother says thinness is an "appanage of birth."

"My Aunt Janet, sir, is an aunt by love. Courtesy is a small word to use in connection with such devotion as she has given to us. But I needn't trouble you with such things, sir. I take it that my relations on the side of my own house do not affect you. I am a Sent Leger!" Father looked quite taken aback. He sat quite still before he spoke.

"Well, Mr. St. Leger, I shall think over the matter for a while, and shall presently let you know my decision. In the meantime, would you like something to eat? I take it that as you must have started very early, you have not had any breakfast?" Rupert smiled quite genially:

"That is true, sir. I haven't broken bread since dinner last night, and I am ravenously hungry." Father rang the bell, and told the footman who answered it to send the housekeeper. When she came, father said to her:

"Mrs. Martindale, take this boy to your room and give him some breakfast." Rupert stood very still for some seconds. His face had got red again after his paleness. Then he bowed to my father, and followed Mrs. Martindale, who had moved to the door.

Nearly an hour afterwards my father sent a servant to tell him to come to the study. My mother was there, too, and I had gone back with her. The man came back and said:

"Mrs. Martindale, sir, wishes to know, with her respectful service, if she may have a word with you." Before father could reply mother told him to bring her. The housekeeper could not have been far off — that kind are generally near a keyhole — for she came at once. When she came in, she stood at the door curtseying and looking pale. Father said:

"Well?"

"I thought, sir and ma'am, that I had better come and tell you about Master Sent Leger. I would have come at once, but I feared to disturb you."

"Well?" Father had a stern way with servants. When I'm head of the family I'll tread them under my feet. That's the way to get real devotion from servants!

"If you please, sir, I took the young gentleman into my room and ordered a nice breakfast for him, for I could see he was half famished — a growing boy like him, and so tall! Presently it came along. It was a good breakfast, too! The very smell of it made even me hungry. There were eggs and frizzled ham, and grilled kidneys, and coffee, and buttered toast, and bloater-paste—"

"That will do as to the menu," said mother. "Go on!"

"When it was all ready, and the maid had gone, I put a chair to the table and said, 'Now, sir, your breakfast is ready!' He stood up and said, 'Thank you, madam; you are very kind!' and he bowed to me quite nicely, just as if I was a lady, ma'am!"

"Go on," said mother.

"Then, sir, he held out his hand and said, 'Good-bye, and thank you,' and he took up his cap.

"'But aren't you going to have any breakfast, sir?' I says.

"'No, thank you, madam,' he said; 'I couldn't eat here . . . in this house, I mean!' Well, ma'am, he looked so lonely that I felt my heart melting, and I ventured to ask him if there was any mortal thing I could do for him. 'Do tell me, dear,' I ventured to say. 'I am an old woman, and you, sir, are only a boy, though it's a fine man you will be — like your dear, splendid father, which I remember so well, and gentle like your poor dear mother.'

"'You're a dear!' he says; and with that I took up his hand and kissed it, for I remember his poor dear mother so well, that was dead only a year. Well, with that he turned his head away, and when I took him by the shoulders and turned him round — he is only a young boy, ma'am, for all he is so big — I saw that the tears were rolling down his cheeks. With that I laid his head on my breast — I've had children of my own, ma'am, as you know, though they're all gone. He came willing enough, and sobbed for a little bit. Then he straightened himself up, and I stood respectfully beside him.

"'Tell Mr. Melton,' he said, 'that I shall not trouble him about the trustee business.'

"'But won't you tell him yourself, sir, when you see him?' I says.

"'I shall not see him again,' he says; 'I am going back now!'

"Well, ma'am, I knew he'd had no breakfast, though he was hungry, and that he would walk as he come, so I ventured to say: 'If you won't take it a liberty, sir, may I do anything to make your going easier? Have you sufficient money, sir? If not, may I give, or lend, you some? I shall be very proud if you will allow me to.'

"'Yes,' he says quite hearty. 'If you will, you might lend me a shilling, as I have no money. I shall not forget it.' He said, as he took the coin: 'I shall return the amount, though I never can the kindness. I shall keep the coin.' He took the shilling, sir — he wouldn't take any more — and then he said good-bye. At the door he turned and walked back to me, and put his arms round me like a real boy does, and gave me a hug, and says he:

"'Thank you a thousand times, Mrs. Martindale, for your goodness to me, for your sympathy, and for the way you have spoken of my father and mother. You have seen me cry, Mrs. Martindale,' he said; 'I don't often cry: the last time was when I came back to the lonely house after my poor dear was laid to rest. But you nor any other shall ever see a tear of mine again.' And with that he straightened out his big back and held up his fine proud head, and walked out. I saw him from the window striding down the avenue. My! but he is a proud boy, sir — an honour to your family, sir, say I respectfully. And there, the proud child has gone away hungry, and he won't, I know, ever use that shilling to buy food!"

Father was not going to have that, you know, so he said to her:

"He does not belong to my family, I would have you to know. True, he is allied to us through the female side; but we do not count him or his in my family." He turned away and began to read a book. It was a decided snub to her.

But mother had a word to say before Mrs. Martindale was done with. Mother has a pride of her own, and doesn't brook insolence from inferiors; and the housekeeper's conduct seemed to be rather presuming. Mother, of course, isn't quite our class, though her folk are quite worthy and enormously rich. She is one of the

Dalmallingtons, the salt people, one of whom got a peerage when the Conservatives went out. She said to the housekeeper:

"I think, Mrs. Martindale, that I shall not require your services after this day month! And as I don't keep servants in my employment when I dismiss them, here is your month's wages due on the 25th of this month, and another month in lieu of notice. Sign this receipt." She was writing a receipt as she spoke. The other signed it without a word, and handed it to her. She seemed quite flabbergasted. Mother got up and sailed — that is the way that mother moves when she is in a wax — out of the room.

Lest I should forget it, let me say here that the dismissed housekeeper was engaged the very next day by the Countess of Salop. I may say in explanation that the Earl of Salop, K.G., who is Lord-Lieutenant of the County, is jealous of father's position and his growing influence. Father is going to contest the next election on the Conservative side, and is sure to be made a Baronet before long.

Letter from Major-General Sir Colin Alexander MacKelpie, *V.C.*, *K.C.B.*, *of Croom*, *Ross*, *N.B.*, *to Rupert Sent Leger*, *Esq.*, 14, *Newland Park*, *Dulwich*, *London*, *S.E.*

July 4, 1892.

My Dear Godson,

I am truly sorry I am unable to agree with your request that I should acquiesce in your desire to transfer to Miss Janet MacKelpie the property bequeathed to you by your mother, of which property I am a trustee. Let me say at once that, had it been possible to me to do so, I should have held it a privilege to further such a wish — not because the beneficiare whom you would create is a near kinswoman of my own. That, in truth, is my real difficulty. I have undertaken a trust made by an honourable lady on behalf of her only son — son of a man of stainless honour, and a dear friend of my own, and whose son has a rich heritage of honour from both parents, and who will, I am sure, like to look back on his whole life as worthy of his parents, and of those whom his parents trusted. You will see, I am sure, that whatsoever I might grant regarding anyone else, my hands are tied in this matter.

And now let me say, my dear boy, that your letter has given me the most intense pleasure. It is an unspeakable delight to me to find in the son of your father — a man whom I loved, and a boy whom I love — the same generosity of spirit which endeared your father to all his comrades, old as well as young. Come what may, I shall always be proud of you; and if the sword of an old soldier — it is all I have — can ever serve you in any way, it and its master's life are, and shall be, whilst life remains to him, yours.

It grieves me to think that Janet cannot, through my act, be given that ease and tranquillity of spirit which come from competence. But, my dear Rupert, you will be of full age in seven years more. Then, if you are in the same mind — and I am sure you will not change — you, being your own master, can do freely as you will. In the meantime, to secure, so far as I can, my dear Janet against any malign stroke of fortune, I have given orders to my factor to remit semi-annually to Janet one full half of such income as may be derived in any form from my estate of Croom. It is, I am sorry to say, heavily mortgaged; but of such as is — or may be, free from such charge as the mortgage entails — something at least will, I trust, remain to her. And, my dear boy, I can frankly say that it is to me a real pleasure that you and I can be linked in one more bond in this association of purpose. I have always held you in my heart as though you were my own son. Let me tell you now that you have acted as I should have liked a son of my own, had I been blessed with one, to have acted. God bless you, my dear.

Yours ever,

Colin Alex. Mackelpie.

Letter from Roger Melton, of Openshaw Grange, to Rupert Sent Leger, Esq., 14, *Newland Park, Dulwich, London, S.E.*

July 1, 1892.

My dear Nephew,

Your letter of the 30th ult. received. Have carefully considered matter stated, and have come to the conclusion that my duty as a trustee would not allow me to give full consent, as you wish. Let me explain. The testator, in making her will, intended that such fortune as she had at disposal should be used to supply to you her son such benefits as its annual product should procure. To this end, and to provide against wastefulness or foolishness on your part, or, indeed, against any generosity, howsoever worthy, which might impoverish you and so defeat her benevolent intentions regarding your education, comfort, and future good, she did not place the estate directly in your hands, leaving you to do as you might feel inclined about it. But, on the contrary, she entrusted the corpus of it in the hands of men whom she believed should be resolute enough and strong enough to carry out her intent, even against any cajolements or pressure which might be employed to the contrary. It being her intention, then, that such trustees as she appointed would use for your benefit the interest accruing annually from the capital at command, *and that only* (as specifically directed in the will), so that on your arriving at full age the capital entrusted to us should be handed over to you intact, I find a hard-and-fast duty in the matter of adhering exactly to the directions given. I have no doubt that my co-trustees regard the matter in exactly the same light. Under the circumstances, therefore, we, the trustees, have not only a single and united duty towards you as the object of the testator's wishes, but towards each other as regards the manner of the carrying out of that duty. I take it, therefore, that it would not be consonant with the spirit of the trust or of our own ideas in accepting it that any of us should take a course pleasant to himself which would or might involve a stern opposition on the part of other of the co-trustees. We have each of us to do the unpleasant part of this duty without fear or favour. You understand, of course, that the time which must elapse before you come into absolute possession of your estate is a limited one. As by the terms of the will we are to hand over our trust when you have reached the age of twenty-one, there are only seven years to expire. But till then, though I should gladly meet your wishes if I could, I must adhere to the duty which I have undertaken. At the expiration of that period you will be quite free to divest yourself of your estate without protest or comment of any man.

Having now expressed as clearly as I can the limitations by which I am bound with regard to the corpus of your estate, let me say that in any other way which is in my power or discretion I shall be most happy to see your wishes carried out so far as rests with me. Indeed, I shall undertake to use what influence I may possess with my co-trustees to induce them to take a similar view of your wishes. In my own thinking you are quite free to use your own property in your own way. But as, until you shall have attained your majority, you have only life-user in your mother's bequest, you are only at liberty to deal with the annual increment. On our part as trustees we have a first charge on that increment to be used for purposes of your maintenance, clothes, and education. As to what may remain over each half-year, you will be free to deal with it as you choose. On receiving from you a written authorization to your trustees, if you desire the whole sum or any part of it to be paid over to Miss Janet MacKelpie, I shall see that it is effected. Believe me, that our duty is to protect the corpus of the estate, and to this end we may not act on any instruction to imperil it. But there our warranty stops. We can deal during our trusteeship with the corpus only. Further, lest there should arise any error on your part, we can deal with any general instruction for only so long as it may remain unrevoked. You are, and must be, free to alter your instructions or authorizations at any time. Thus your latest document must be used for our guidance.

As to the general principle involved in your wish I make no comment. You are at liberty to deal with your own how you will. I quite understand that your impulse is a generous one, and I fully believe that it is in consonance with what had always been the wishes of my sister. Had she been happily alive and had to give judgment of your intent, I am convinced that she would have approved. Therefore, my dear nephew, should you so wish, I shall be happy for her sake as well as your own to pay over on your account (as a confidential matter between you and me), but from my own pocket, a sum equal to that which you wish transferred to Miss Janet MacKelpie. On hearing from you I shall know how to act in the matter. With all good wishes,

Believe me to be,
Your affectionate uncle,
Roger Melton.

To Rupert Sent Leger, Esq.

Letter from Rupert Sent Leger to Roger Melton,
July 5, 1892.

My Dear Uncle,

Thank you heartily for your kind letter. I quite understand, and now see that I should not have asked you as a trustee, such a thing. I see your duty clearly, and agree with your view of it. I enclose a letter directed to my trustees, asking them to pay over annually till further direction to Miss Janet MacKelpie at this address whatever sum may remain over from the interest of my mother's bequest after deduction of such expenses as you may deem fit for my maintenance, clothing, and education, together with a sum of one pound sterling per month, which was the amount my dear mother always gave me for my personal use— "pocket-money," she called it.

With regard to your most kind and generous offer to give to my dear Aunt Janet the sum which I would have given myself, had such been in my power, I thank you most truly and sincerely, both for my dear aunt (to whom, of course, I shall not mention the matter unless you specially authorize me) and myself. But, indeed, I think it will be better not to offer it. Aunt Janet is very proud, and would not accept any benefit. With me, of course, it is different, for since I was a wee child she has been like another mother to me, and I love her very much. Since my mother died — and she, of course, was all-in-all to me — there has been no other. And in such a love as ours pride has no place. Thank you again, dear uncle, and God bless you.

Your loving nephew,
Rupert Sent Leger.

ERNEST ROGER HALBARD MELTON'S RECORD — Continued.

And now *re* the remaining one of Sir Geoffrey's children, Roger. He was the third child and third son, the only daughter, Patience, having been born twenty years after the last of the four sons. Concerning Roger, I shall put down all I have heard of him from my father and grandfather. From my grand-aunt I heard nothing, I was a very small kid when she died; but I remember seeing her, but only once. A very tall, handsome woman of a little over thirty, with very dark hair and light-coloured eyes. I think they were either grey or blue, but I can't remember which. She looked very proud and haughty, but I am bound to say that she was very nice to me. I remember feeling very jealous of Rupert because his mother looked so distinguished. Rupert was eight years older than me, and I was afraid he would beat me if I said anything he did not like. So I was silent except when I forgot to be, and Rupert said very unkindly, and I think very unfairly, that I was "A sulky little beast." I haven't forgot that, and I don't mean to. However, it doesn't matter much what he said or thought. There he is — if he is at all — where no one can find him, with no money or nothing, for what little he had he settled when he came of age, on the MacSkelpie. He wanted to give it to her when his mother died, but father, who was a trustee, refused; and Uncle Roger, as I call him, who is another, thought the trustees had no power to allow Rupert to throw away his matrimony, as I called it, making a joke to father when he called it patrimony. Old Sir Colin MacSkelpie, who is the third, said he couldn't take any part in such a permission, as the MacSkelpie was his niece. He is a rude old man, that. I remember when, not remembering his relationship, I spoke of the MacSkelpie, he caught me a clip on the ear that sent me across the room. His Scotch is very broad. I can hear him say, "Hae some attempt at even Soothern manners, and dinna misca' yer betters, ye young puddock, or I'll wring yer snoot!" Father was, I could see, very much offended, but he didn't say anything. He remembered, I think, that the General is a V.C. man, and was fond of fighting duels. But to show that the fault was not his, *he* wrung *my* ear — and the same ear too! I suppose he thought that was justice! But it's only right to say that he made up for it afterwards. When the General had gone he gave me a five-pound note.

I don't think Uncle Roger was very pleased with the way Rupert behaved about the legacy, for I don't think he ever saw him from that day to this. Perhaps, of course, it was because Rupert ran away shortly afterwards; but I shall tell about that when I come to him. After all, why should my uncle bother about him? He is not a Melton at all, and I am to be Head of the House — of course, when the Lord thinks right to take father to Himself! Uncle Roger has tons of money, and he never married, so if he wants to leave it in the right direction he needn't have any trouble. He made his money in what he calls "the Eastern Trade." This, so far as I can gather, takes in the Levant and all east of it. I know he has what they call in trade "houses" in all sorts of places — Turkey, and Greece, and all round them, Morocco, Egypt, and Southern Russia, and the Holy Land; then on to Persia, India, and all round it; the Chersonese, China, Japan, and the Pacific Islands. It is not to be expected that we landowners can know much about trade, but my uncle covers — or alas! I must say "covered" — a lot of ground, I can tell you. Uncle Roger was a very grim sort of man, and only that I was brought up to try and be kind to him I shouldn't ever have dared to speak to him. But when was a child father and mother — especially mother — forced me to go and see him and be affectionate to him. He wasn't ever even civil to me, that I can remember — grumpy old bear! But, then, he never saw Rupert at all, so that I take it Master R — - is out of the running altogether for testamentary honours. The last time I saw him myself he was distinctly rude. He treated me as a boy, though I was getting on for eighteen years of age. I came into his office without knocking; and without looking up from his desk, where he was writing, he said: "Get out! Why do you venture to disturb me when I'm busy? Get out, and be damned to you!" I waited where I was, ready to transfix him with my eye when he should look up, for I cannot forget that when my father dies I shall be Head of my House. But when he did there was no transfixing possible. He said quite coolly:

"Oh, it's you, is it? I thought it was one of my office boys. Sit down, if you want to see me, and wait till I am ready." So I sat down and waited. Father always said that I should try to conciliate and please my uncle. Father is a very shrewd man, and Uncle Roger is a very rich one.

But I don't think Uncle R — - is as shrewd as he thinks he is. He sometimes makes awful mistakes in business. For instance, some years ago he bought an enormous estate on the Adriatic, in the country they call the "Land of Blue Mountains." At least, he says he bought it. He told father so in confidence. But he didn't show any title-deeds, and I'm greatly afraid he was "had." A bad job for me that he was, for father believes he paid an enormous sum for it, and as I am his natural heir, it reduces his available estate to so much less.

And now about Rupert. As I have said, he ran away when he was about fourteen, and we did not hear about him for years. When we — or, rather, my father — did hear of him, it was no good that he heard. He had gone as a cabin-boy on a sailing ship round the Horn. Then he joined an exploring party through the centre of Patagonia, and then another up in Alaska, and a third to the Aleutian Islands.

After that he went through Central America, and then to Western Africa, the Pacific Islands, India, and a lot of places. We all know the wisdom of the adage that “A rolling stone gathers no moss”; and certainly, if there be any value in moss, Cousin Rupert will die a poor man. Indeed, nothing will stand his idiotic, boastful wastefulness. Look at the way in which, when he came of age, he made over all his mother’s little fortune to the MacSkelpie! I am sure that, though Uncle Roger made no comment to my father, who, as Head of our House, should, of course, have been informed, he was not pleased. My mother, who has a good fortune in her own right, and has had the sense to keep it in her own control — as I am to inherit it, and it is not in the entail, I am therefore quite impartial — I can approve of her spirited conduct in the matter. We never did think much of Rupert, anyhow; but now, since he is in the way to be a pauper, and therefore a dangerous nuisance, we look on him as quite an outsider. We know what he really is. For my own part, I loathe and despise him. Just now we are irritated with him, for we are all kept on tenterhooks regarding my dear Uncle Roger’s Will. For Mr. Trent, the attorney who regulated my dear uncle’s affairs and has possession of the Will, says it is necessary to know where every possible beneficiary is to be found before making the Will public, so we all have to wait. It is especially hard on me, who am the natural heir. It is very thoughtless indeed of Rupert to keep away like that. I wrote to old MacSkelpie about it, but he didn’t seem to understand or to be at all anxious — he is not the heir! He said that probably Rupert Sent Leger — he, too, keeps to the old spelling — did not know of his uncle’s death, or he would have taken steps to relieve our anxiety. Our anxiety, forsooth! We are not anxious; we only wish to *know*. And if we — and especially me — who have all the annoyance of thinking of the detestable and unfair death-duties, are anxious, we should be so. Well, anyhow, he'll get a properly bitter disappointment and set down when he does turn up and discovers that he is a pauper without hope!

* * * * *

To-day we (father and I) had letters from Mr. Trent, telling us that the whereabouts of "Mr. Rupert Sent Leger" had been discovered, and that a letter disclosing the fact of poor Uncle Roger's death had been sent to him. He was at Titicaca when last heard of. So goodness only knows when he may get the letter, which "asks him to come home at once, but only gives to him such information about the Will as has already been given to every member of the testator's family." And that is nil. I dare say we shall be kept waiting for months before we get hold of the estate which is ours. It is too bad!

Letter from Edward Bingham Trent to Ernest Roger Halbard Melton.

176, Lincoln's Inn Fields,
December 28, 1906.

Dear Sir,

I am glad to be able to inform you that I have just heard by letter from Mr. Rupert St. Leger that he intended leaving Rio de Janeiro by the S.S. *Amazon*, of the Royal Mail Company, on December 15. He further stated that he would cable just before leaving Rio de Janeiro, to say on what day the ship was expected to arrive in London. As all the others possibly interested in the Will of the late Roger Melton, and whose names are given to me in his instructions regarding the reading of the Will, have been advised, and have expressed their intention of being present at that event on being apprised of the time and place, I now beg to inform you that by cable message received the date scheduled for arrival at the Port of London was January 1 prox. I therefore beg to notify you, subject to postponement due to the non-arrival of the *Amazon*, the reading of the Will of the late Roger Melton, Esq., will take place in my office on Thursday, January 3 prox., at eleven o'clock a.m.

I have the honour to be, sir,

Yours faithfully,

Edward Bingham Trent.

To Ernest Roger Halbard Melton, Esq.,

Humcroft,

Salop.

Cable: *Rupert Sent Leger to Edward Bingham Trent.*

Amazon arrives London January 1. Sent Leger.

Telegram (*per Lloyd's*): *Rupert Sent Leger to Edward Bingham Trent.*

The Lizard,

December 31.

Amazon arrives London to-morrow morning. All well. — Leger.

Telegram: *Edward Bingham Trent to Ernest Roger Halbard Mellon.*

Rupert Sent Leger arrived. Reading Will takes place as arranged. — Trent.

ERNEST ROGER HALBARD MELTON'S RECORD.

January 4, 1907.

The reading of Uncle Roger's Will is over. Father got a duplicate of Mr. Trent's letter to me, and of the cable and two telegrams pasted into this Record. We both waited patiently till the third — that is, we did not say anything. The only impatient member of our family was my mother. She *did* say things, and if old Trent had been here his ears would have been red. She said what ridiculous nonsense it was delaying the reading of the Will, and keeping the Heir waiting for the arrival of an obscure person who wasn't even a member of the family, inasmuch as he didn't bear the name. I don't think it's quite respectful to one who is some day to be Head of the House! I thought father was weakening in his patience when he said: "True, my dear — true!" and got up and left the room. Some time afterwards when I passed the library I heard him walking up and down.

Father and I went up to town on the afternoon of Wednesday, January 2. We stayed, of course, at Claridge's, where we always stay when we go to town. Mother wanted to come, too, but father thought it better not. She would not agree to stay at home till we both promised to send her separate telegrams after the reading.

At five minutes to eleven we entered Mr. Trent's office. Father would not go a moment earlier, as he said it was bad form to seem eager at any time, but most of all at the reading of a will. It was a rotten grind, for we had to be walking all over the neighbourhood for half an hour before it was time, not to be too early.

When we went into the room we found there General Sir Colin MacKelpie and a big man, very bronzed, whom I took to be Rupert St. Leger — not a very creditable connection to look at, I thought! He and old MacKelpie took care to be in time! Rather low, I thought it. Mr. St. Leger was reading a letter. He had evidently come in but lately, for though he seemed to be eager about it, he was only at the first page, and I could see that there were many sheets. He did not look up when we came in, or till he had finished the letter; and you may be sure that neither I nor my father (who, as Head of the House, should have had more respect from him) took the trouble to go to him. After all, he is a pauper and a wastrel, and he has not the honour of bearing our Name. The General, however, came forward and greeted us both cordially. He evidently had forgotten — or pretended to have — the discourteous way he once treated me, for he spoke to me quite in a friendly way — I thought more warmly than he did to father. I was pleased to be spoken to so nicely, for, after all, whatever his manners may be, he is a distinguished man — has won the V.C. and a Baronetcy. He got the latter not long ago, after the Frontier War in India. I was not, however, led away into cordiality myself. I had not forgotten his rudeness, and I thought that he might be sucking up to me. I knew that when I had my dear Uncle Roger's many millions I should be a rather important person; and, of course, he knew it too. So I got even with him for his former impudence. When he held out his hand I put one finger in it, and said, "How do?" He got very red and turned away. Father and he had ended by glaring at each other, so neither of us was sorry to be done with him. All the time Mr. St. Leger did not seem to see or hear anything, but went on reading his letter. I thought the old MacSkelpie was going to bring him into the matter between us, for as he turned away I heard him say something under his breath. It sounded like "Help!" but Mr. S — - did not hear. He certainly no notice of it.

As the MacS — - and Mr. S — - sat quite silent, neither looking at us, and as father was sitting on the other side of the room with his chin in his hand, and as I wanted to show that I was indifferent to the two S's, I took out this notebook, and went on with the Record, bringing it up to this moment.

THE RECORD — Continued.

When I had finished writing I looked over at Rupert.

When he saw us, he jumped up and went over to father and shook his hand quite warmly. Father took him very coolly. Rupert, however, did not seem to see it, but came towards me heartily. I happened to be doing something else at the moment, and at first I did not see his hand; but just as I was looking at it the clock struck eleven. Whilst it was striking Mr. Trent came into the room. Close behind him came his clerk, carrying a locked tin box. There were two other men also. He bowed to us all in turn, beginning with me. I was standing opposite the door; the others were scattered about. Father sat still, but Sir Colin and Mr. St. Leger rose. Mr. Trent not did shake hands with any of us — not even me. Nothing but his respectful bow. That is the etiquette for an attorney, I understand, on such formal occasions.

He sat down at the end of the big table in the centre of the room, and asked us to sit round. Father, of course, as Head of the Family, took the seat at his right hand. Sir Colin and St. Leger went to the other side, the former taking the seat next to the attorney. The General knows, of course, that a Baronet takes precedence at a ceremony. I may be a Baronet some day myself, and have to know these things.

The clerk took the key which his master handed to him, opened the tin box, and took from it a bundle of papers tied with red tape. This he placed before the attorney, and put the empty box behind him on the floor. Then he and the other man sat at the far end of the table; the latter took out a big notebook and several pencils, and put them before him. He was evidently a shorthand-writer. Mr. Trent removed the tape from the bundle of papers, which he placed a little distance in front of him. He took a sealed envelope from the top, broke the seal, opened the envelope, and from it took a parchment, in the folds of which were some sealed envelopes, which he laid in a heap in front of the other paper. Then he unfolded the parchment, and laid it before him with the outside page up. He fixed his glasses, and said:

"Gentlemen, the sealed envelope which you have seen me open is endorsed 'My Last Will and Testament — Roger Melton, *June*, 1906.' This document" — holding it up— "is as follows:

"'I Roger Melton of Openshaw Grange in the County of Dorset; of number one hundred and twenty-three Berkeley Square London; and of the Castle of Vissarion in the Land of the Blue Mountains, being of sound mind do make this my Last Will and Testament on this day Monday the eleventh day of the month of June in the year of Our Lord one thousand nine hundred and six at the office of my old friend and Attorney Edward Bingham Trent in number one hundred and seventy-six Lincoln's Inn Fields London hereby revoking all other wills that I may have formerly made and giving this as my sole and last Will making dispositions of my property as follows:

"'1. To my kinsman and nephew Ernest Halbard Melton Esquire, justice of the Peace, Humcroft the County of Salop, for his sole use and benefit the sum of twenty thousand pounds sterling free of all Duties Taxes and charges whatever to be paid out of my Five per centum Bonds of the City of Montreal, Canada.

"'2. To my respected friend and colleague as co-trustee to the Will of my late sister Patience late widow of the late Captain Rupert Sent Leger who predeceased her, Major-General Sir Colin Alexander MacKelpie, Baronet, holder of the Victoria Cross, Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath, of Croom in the county of Ross Scotland a sum of Twenty thousand pounds sterling free of all

Taxes and charges whatsoever; to be paid out of my Five per centum Bonds of the City of Toronto, Canada.

"'3. To Miss Janet MacKelpie presently residing at Croom in the County of Ross Scotland the sum of Twenty thousand pounds sterling free of all Duties Taxes and Charges whatsoever, to be paid out of my Five per centum Bonds of the London County Council.

"'4. To the various persons charities and Trustees named in the schedule attached to this Will and marked A. the various sums mentioned therein, all free of Duties and Taxes and charges whatsoever.'"

Here Mr. Trent read out the list here following, and announced for our immediate understanding of the situation the total amount as two hundred and fifty thousand pounds. Many of the beneficiaries were old friends, comrades, dependents, and servants, some of them being left quite large sums of money and specific objects, such as curios and pictures.

"'5. To my kinsman and nephew Ernest Roger Halbard Melton presently living in the house of his father at Humcroft Salop the sum of Ten thousand pounds sterling.

"'6. To my old and valued friend Edward Bingham Trent of one hundred and seventy-six Lincoln's Inn Fields sum of Twenty thousand pounds sterling free from all Duties Taxes and Charges whatsoever to be paid out of my Five per centum Bonds of the city of Manchester England.

"'7. To my dear nephew Rupert Sent Leger only son of my dear sister Patience Melton by her marriage with Captain Rupert Sent Leger the sum of one thousand pounds sterling. I also bequeath to the said Rupert Sent Leger a further sum conditional upon his acceptance of the terms of a letter addressed to him marked B, and left in the custody of the above Edward Bingham Trent and which letter is an integral part of this my Will. In case of the non-acceptance of the conditions of such letter, I devise and bequeath the whole of the sums and properties reserved therein to the executors herein appointed Colin Alexander MacKelpie and Edward Bingham Trent in trust to distribute the same in accordance with the terms of the letter in the present custody of Edward Bingham Trent marked C, and now deposited sealed with my seal in the sealed envelope containing my last Will to be kept in the custody of the said Edward Bingham Trent and which said letter C is also an integral part of my Will. And in case any doubt should arise as to my ultimate intention as to the disposal of my property the above-mentioned Executors are to have full power to arrange and dispose all such matters as may seem best to them without further appeal. And if any beneficiary under this Will shall challenge the same or any part of it, or dispute the validity thereof, he shall forfeit to the general estate the bequest made herein to him, and any such bequest shall cease and be void to all intents and purposes whatsoever.

"'8. For proper compliance with laws and duties connected with testamentary proceedings and to keep my secret trusts secret I direct my Executors to pay all Death, Estate, Settlement, Legacy, Succession, or other duties charges impositions and assessments whatever on the residue of my estate beyond the bequests already named, at the scale charged in the case of most distant relatives or strangers in blood.

"'9. I hereby appoint as my Executors Major-General Sir Colin Alexander MacKelpie, Baronet, of Croom in the County of Ross, and Edward Bingham Trent Attorney at Law of one hundred and seventy-six Lincoln's Inn Fields London West Central with full power to exercise their discretion in any circumstance which may arise in the carrying out my wishes as expressed in this Will. As reward for their services in this capacity as Executors they are to receive each out of the general estate a sum of one hundred thousand pounds sterling free of all Duties and impositions whatsoever.

"12. The two Memoranda contained in the letters marked B and C are Integral Parts of this my Last Will are ultimately at the Probate of the Will to be taken as Clauses 10 and 11 of it. The envelopes are marked B and C on both envelope and contents and the contents of each is headed thus: B to be read as Clause 10 of my Will and the other C to be read as Clause 11 of my Will.

"13. Should either of the above-mentioned Executors die before the completion of the above year and a half from the date of the Reading of my Will or before the Conditions rehearsed in Letter C the remaining Executor shall have all and several the Rights and Duties entrusted by my Will to both. And if both Executors should die then the matter of interpretation and execution of all matters in connection with this my Last Will shall rest with the Lord Chancellor of England for the time being or with whomsoever he may appoint for the purpose.

"'This my Last Will is given by me on the first day of January in the year of Our Lord one thousand nine hundred and seven.

"'Roger Melton.

"We Andrew Rossiter and John Colson here in the presence of each other and of the Testator have seen the Testator Roger Melton sign and seal this document. In witness thereof we hereby set our names

"'Andrew Rossiter clerk of 9 Primrose Avenue London W.C.

"'John Colson caretaker of 176 Lincoln's Inn Fields and Verger of St. Tabitha's Church Clerkenwell London.'"

When Mr. Trent had finished the reading he put all the papers together, and tied them up in a bundle again with the red tape. Holding the bundle in his hand, he stood up, saying as he did so:

"That is all, gentlemen, unless any of you wish to ask me any questions; in which case I shall answer, of course, to the best of my power. I shall ask you, Sir Colin, to remain with me, as we have to deal with some matters, or to arrange a time when we may meet to do so. And you also, Mr. Sent Leger, as there is this letter to submit to you. It is necessary that you should open it in the presence of the executors, but there is no necessity that anyone else should be present."

The first to speak was my father. Of course, as a county gentleman of position and estate, who is sometimes asked to take the chair at Sessions — of course, when there is not anyone with a title present — he found himself under the duty of expressing himself first. Old MacKelpie has superior rank; but this was a family affair, in which my father is Head of the House, whilst old MacKelpie is only an outsider brought into it — and then only to the distaff side, by the wife of a younger brother of the man who married into our family. Father spoke with the same look on his face as when he asks important questions of witnesses at Quarter Sessions.

"I should like some points elucidated." The attorney bowed (he gets his 120 thou', any way, so he can afford to be oily — suave, I suppose he would call it); so father looked at a slip of paper in his hand and asked:

"How much is the amount of the whole estate?"

The attorney answered quickly, and I thought rather rudely. He was red in the face, and didn't bow this time; I suppose a man of his class hasn't more than a very limited stock of manners:

"That, sir, I am not at liberty to tell you. And I may say that I would not if I could."

"Is it a million?" said father again. He was angry this time, and even redder than the old attorney. The attorney said in answer, very quietly this time:

"Ah, that's cross-examining. Let me say, sir, that no one can know that until the accountants to be appointed for the purpose have examined the affairs of the testator up to date."

Mr. Rupert St. Leger, who was looking all this time angrier than even the attorney or my father — though at what he had to be angry about I can't imagine — struck his fist on the table and rose up as if to speak, but as he caught sight of both old MacKelpie and the attorney he sat down again. *Mem.* — Those three seem to agree too well. I must keep a sharp eye on them. I didn't think of this part any more at the time, for father asked another question which interested me much:

"May I ask why the other matters of the Will are not shown to us?" The attorney wiped his spectacles carefully with a big silk bandanna handkerchief before he answered:

"Simply because each of the two letters marked 'B' and 'C' is enclosed with instructions regarding their opening and the keeping secret of their contents. I shall call your attention to the fact that both envelopes are sealed, and that the testator and both witnesses have signed their names across the flap of each envelope. I shall read them. The letter marked 'B,' directed to 'Rupert Sent Leger,' is thus endorsed:

"'This letter is to be given to Rupert Sent Leger by the Trustees and is to be opened by him in their presence. He is to take such copy or make such notes as he may wish and is then to hand the letter with envelope to the Executors who are at once to read it, each of them being entitled to make copy or notes if desirous of so doing. The letter is then to be replaced in its envelope and letter and envelope are to be placed in another envelope to be endorsed on outside as to its contents and to be signed across the flap by both the Executors and by the said Rupert Sent Leger.

"'(Signed) Roger Melton 1/6/'06.

"The letter marked 'C,' directed to 'Edward Bingham Trent,' is thus endorsed:

"'This letter directed to Edward Bingham Trent is to be kept by him unopened for a term of two years after the reading of my Last Will unless said period is earlier terminated by either the acceptance or refusal of Rupert Sent Leger to accept the conditions mentioned in my letter to him marked 'B' which he is to receive and read in the presence of my Executors at the same meeting as but subsequent to the Reading of the clauses (except those to be ultimately numbers ten and eleven) of my Last Will. This letter contains instructions as to what both the Executors and the said Rupert Sent Leger are to do when such acceptance or refusal of the said Rupert Sent Leger has been made known, or if he omit or refuse to make any such acceptance or refusal, at the end of two years next after my decease.

"'(Signed) Roger Melton 1/6/'06.'"

When the attorney had finished reading the last letter he put it carefully in his pocket. Then he took the other letter in his hand, and stood up. "Mr. Rupert Sent Leger," he said, "please to open this letter, and in such a way that all present may see that the memorandum at top of the contents is given as —

"'B. To be read as clause ten of my Will.'"

St. Leger rolled up his sleeves and cuffs just as if he was going to perform some sort of prestidigitation — it was very theatrical and ridiculous — then, his wrists being quite bare, he opened the envelope and took out the letter. We all saw it quite well. It was folded with the first page outward, and on the top was written a line just as the attorney said. In obedience to a request from the attorney, he laid both letter and envelope on the table in front of him. The clerk then rose up, and, after handing a piece of paper to the attorney, went back to his seat. Mr. Trent, having written something on the paper, asked us all who were present, even the clerk and the shorthand man, to look at the memorandum on the letter and what was written on the envelope, and to sign the paper, which ran:

"We the signatories of this paper hereby declare that we have seen the sealed letter marked B and enclosed in the Will of Roger Melton opened in the presence of us all including Mr. Edward Bingham Trent and Sir Colin Alexander MacKelpie and we declare that the paper therein contained was headed 'B. To be read as clause ten of my Will' and that there were no other contents in the envelope. In attestation of which we in the presence of each other append our signatures."

The attorney motioned to my father to begin. Father is a cautious man, and he asked for a magnifying-glass, which was shortly brought to him by a clerk for whom the clerk in the room called. Father examined the envelope all over very carefully, and also the memorandum at top of the paper. Then, without a word, he signed the paper. Father is a just man. Then we all signed. The attorney folded the paper and put it in an envelope. Before closing it he passed it round, and we all saw that it had not been tampered with. Father took it out and read it, and then put it back. Then the attorney asked us all to sign it across the flap, which we did. Then he put the sealing-wax on it and asked father to seal it with his own seal. He did so. Then he and MacKelpie sealed it also with their own seals, Then he put it in another envelope, which he sealed himself, and he and MacKelpie signed it across the flap.

Then father stood up, and so did I. So did the two men — the clerk and the shorthand writer. Father did not say a word till we got out into the street. We walked along, and presently we passed an open gate into the fields. He turned back, saying to me:

"Come in here. There is no one about, and we can be quiet. I want to speak to you." When we sat down on a seat with none other near it, father said:

"You are a student of the law. What does all that mean?" I thought it a good occasion for an epigram, so I said one word:

"Bilk!"

"H'm!" said father; "that is so far as you and I are concerned. You with a beggarly ten thousand, and I with twenty. But what is, or will be, the effect of those secret trusts?"

"Oh, that," I said, "will, I dare say, be all right. Uncle Roger evidently did not intend the older generation to benefit too much by his death. But he only gave Rupert St. Leger one thousand pounds, whilst he gave me ten. That looks as if he had more regard for the direct line. Of course—" Father interrupted me:

"But what was the meaning of a further sum?"

"I don't know, father. There was evidently some condition which he was to fulfil; but he evidently didn't expect that he would. Why, otherwise, did he leave a second trust to Mr. Trent?"

"True!" said father. Then he went on: "I wonder why he left those enormous sums to Trent and old MacKelpie. They seem out of all proportion as executors' fees, unless—"

"Unless what, father?"

"Unless the fortune he has left is an enormous one. That is why I asked."

"And that," I laughed, "is why he refused to answer."

"Why, Ernest, it must run into big figures."

"Right-ho, father. The death-duties will be annoying. What a beastly swindle the death-duties are! Why, I shall suffer even on your own little estate . . ."

"That will do!" he said curtly. Father is so ridiculously touchy. One would think he expects to live for ever. Presently he spoke again:

"I wonder what are the conditions of that trust. They are as important — almost — as the amount of the bequest — whatever it is. By the way, there seems to be no mention in the will of a residuary legatee. Ernest, my boy, we may have to fight over that."

"How do you make that out, father?" I asked. He had been very rude over the matter of the death-duties of his own estate, though it is entailed and I *must* inherit. So I determined to let him see that I know a good deal more than he does — of law, at any rate. "I fear that when we come to look into it closely that dog won't fight. In the first place, that may be all arranged in the letter to St. Leger, which is a part of the Will. And if that letter should be inoperative by his refusal of the conditions (whatever they may be), then the letter to the attorney begins to work. What it is we don't know, and perhaps even he doesn't — I looked at it as well as I could — and we law men are trained to observation. But even if the instructions mentioned as being in Letter C fail, then the corpus of the Will gives full power to Trent to act just as he darn pleases. He can give the whole thing to himself if he likes, and no one can say a word. In fact, he is himself the final court of appeal."

"H'm!" said father to himself. "It is a queer kind of will, I take it, that can override the Court of Chancery. We shall perhaps have to try it before we are done with this!" With that he rose, and we walked home together — without saying another word.

My mother was very inquisitive about the whole thing — women always are. Father and I between us told her all it was necessary for her to know. I think we were both afraid that, woman-like, she would make trouble for us by saying or doing something injudicious. Indeed, she manifested such hostility towards Rupert St. Leger that it is quite on the cards that she may try to injure him in some way. So when father said that he would have to go out shortly again, as he wished to consult his solicitor, I jumped up and said I would go with him, as I, too, should take advice as to how I stood in the matter.

The Contents of Letter marked "B" attached as an Integral Part to the Last Will of Roger Melton.

June 11, 1907.

"This letter an integral part of my Last Will regards the entire residue of my estate beyond the specific bequests made in the body of my Will. It is to appoint as Residuary Legatee of such Will — in case he may accept in due form the Conditions herein laid down — my dear Nephew Rupert Sent Leger only son of my sister Patience Melton now deceased by her marriage with Captain Rupert Sent Leger also now deceased. On his acceptance of the Conditions and the fulfilment of the first of them the Entire residue of my estate after payments of all specific Legacies and of all my debts and other obligations is to become his absolute property to be dealt with or disposed of as he may desire. The following are the conditions.

"1. He is to accept provisionally by letter addressed to my Executors a sum of nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand pounds sterling free of all Duties Taxes or other imposts. This he will hold for a period of six months from the date of the Reading of my Last Will and have user of the accruements thereto calculated at the rate of ten per centum per annum which amount he shall under no circumstances be required to replace. At the end of said six months he must express in writing directed to the Executors of my Will his acceptance or refusal of the other conditions herein to follow. But if he may so choose he shall be free to declare in writing to the Executors within one week from the time of the Reading of the Will his wish to accept or to withdraw altogether from the responsibility of this Trust. In case of withdrawal he is to retain absolutely and for his own use the above-mentioned sum of nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand pounds sterling free of all Duties Taxes and imposts whatsoever making with the specific bequest of one thousand pounds a clear sum of one million pounds sterling free of all imposts. And he will from the moment of the delivery of such written withdrawal cease to have any right or interest whatsoever in the further disposition of my estate under this instrument. Should such written withdrawal be received by my Executors they shall have possession of such residue of my estate as shall remain after the payment of the above sum of nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand pounds sterling and the payment of all Duties Taxes assessments or Imposts as may be entailed by law by its conveyance to the said Rupert Sent Leger and these my Executors shall hold the same for the further disposal of it according to the instructions given in the letter marked C and which is also an integral part of my Last Will and Testament.

“2. If at or before the expiration of the six months above-mentioned the said Rupert Sent Leger shall have accepted the further conditions herein stated, he is to have user of the entire income produced by such residue of my estate the said income being paid to him Quarterly on the usual Quarter Days by the aforesaid Executors to wit Major General Sir Colin Alexander MacKelpie Bart. and Edward Bingham Trent to be used by him in accordance with the terms and conditions hereinafter mentioned.

“3. The said Rupert Sent Leger is to reside for a period of at least six months to begin not later than three months from the reading of my Will in the Castle of Vissarion in the Land of the Blue Mountains. And if he fulfil the Conditions imposed on him and shall thereby become possessed of the residue of my estate he is to continue to reside there in part for a period of one year. He is not to change his British Nationality except by a formal consent of the Privy Council of Great Britain.

“At the end of a year and a half from the Reading of my Will he is to report in person to my Executors of the expenditure of amounts paid or due by him in the carrying out of the Trust and if they are satisfied that same are in general accord with the conditions named in above-mentioned letter marked C and which is an integral part of my Will they are to record their approval on such Will which can then go for final Probate and Taxation. On the Completion of which the said Rupert Sent Leger shall become possessed absolutely and without further act or need of the entire residue of my estate. In witness whereof, etc.

“(Signed) Roger Melton.”

This document is attested by the witnesses to the Will on the same date.

(*Personal and Confidential.*)

Memoranda made by Edward Bingham Trent in Connection with the Will of Roger Melton.

January 3, 1907.

The interests and issues of all concerned in the Will and estate of the late Roger Melton of Openshaw Grange are so vast that in case any litigation should take place regarding the same, I, as the solicitor, having the carriage of the testator's wishes, think it well to make certain memoranda of events, conversations, etc., not covered by documentary evidence. I make the first memorandum immediately after the event, whilst every detail of act and conversation is still fresh in my mind. I shall also try to make such comments thereon as may serve to refresh my memory hereafter, and which in case of my death may perhaps afford as opinions contemporaneously recorded some guiding light to other or others who may later on have to continue and complete the tasks entrusted to me.

I.

Concerning the Reading of the Will of Roger Melton.

When, beginning at 11 o'clock a.m. on this the forenoon of Thursday, the 3rd day of January, 1907, I opened the Will and read it in full, except the clauses contained in the letters marked "B" and "C"; there were present in addition to myself, the following:

1. Ernest Halbard Melton, J.P, nephew of the testator.
2. Ernest Roger Halbard Melton, son of the above.
3. Rupert Sent Leger, nephew of the testator.
4. Major-General Sir Colin Alexander MacKelpie, Bart., co-executor with myself of the Will.
5. Andrew Rossiter, my clerk, one of the witnesses of the testator's Will.

6. Alfred Nugent, stenographer (of Messrs. Castle's office, 21, Bream's Buildings, W.C.).

When the Will had been read, Mr. E. H. Melton asked the value of the estate left by the testator, which query I did not feel empowered or otherwise able to answer; and a further query, as to why those present were not shown the secret clauses of the Will. I answered by reading the instructions endorsed on the envelopes of the two letters marked "B" and "C," which were sufficiently explanatory.

But, lest any question should hereafter arise as to the fact that the memoranda in letters marked "B" and "C," which were to be read as clauses 10 and 11 of the Will, I caused Rupert Sent Leger to open the envelope marked "B" in the presence of all in the room. These all signed a paper which I had already prepared, to the effect that they had seen the envelope opened, and that the memorandum marked "B. To be read as clause ten of my Will," was contained in the envelope, of which it was to be the sole contents. Mr. Ernest Halbard Melton, J.P., before signing, carefully examined with a magnifying-glass, for which he had asked, both the envelope and the heading of the memorandum enclosed in the letter. He was about to turn the folded paper which was lying on the table over, by which he might have been able to read the matter of the memorandum had he so desired. I at once advised him that the memorandum he was to sign dealt only with the heading of the page, and not with the matter. He looked very angry, but said nothing, and after a second scrutiny signed. I put the memorandum in an envelope, which we all signed across the flap. Before signing, Mr Ernest Halbard Melton took out the paper and verified it. I then asked him to close it, which he did, and when the sealing-wax was on it he sealed it with his own seal. Sir Colin A. MacKelpie and I also appended our own seals. I put the envelope in another, which I sealed with my own seal, and my co-executor and I signed it across the flap and added the date. I took charge of this. When the others present had taken their departure, my co-executor and I, together with Mr. Rupert Sent Leger, who had remained at my request, went into my private room.

Here Mr. Rupert Sent Leger read the memorandum marked "B," which is to be read as clause 10 of the Will. He is evidently a man of considerable nerve, for his face was quite impassive as he read the document, which conveyed to him (subject to the conditions laid down) a fortune which has no equal in amount in Europe, even, so far as I know, amongst the crowned heads. When he had read it over a second time he stood up and said:

"I wish I had known my uncle better. He must have had the heart of a king. I never heard of such generosity as he has shown me. Mr. Trent, I see, from the conditions of this memorandum, or codicil, or whatever it is, that I am to declare within a week as to whether I accept the conditions imposed on me. Now, I want you to tell me this: must I wait a week to declare?" In answer, I told him that the testator's intention was manifestly to see that he had full time to consider fully every point before making formal decision and declaration. But, in answer to the specific question, I could answer that he might make declaration when he would, provided it was *within*, or rather not after, the week named. I added:

"But I strongly advise you not to act hurriedly. So enormous a sum is involved that you may be sure that all possible efforts will be made by someone or other to dispossess you of your inheritance, and it will be well that everything shall be done, not only in perfect order, but with such manifest care and deliberation that there can be no question as to your intention."

“Thank you, sir,” he answered; “I shall do as you shall kindly advise me in this as in other things. But I may tell you now — and you, too, my dear Sir Colin — that I not only accept my Uncle Roger’s conditions in this, but that when the time comes in the other matters I shall accept every condition that he had in his mind — and that I may know of — in everything.” He looked exceedingly in earnest, and it gave me much pleasure to see and hear him. It was just what a young man should do who had seen so generously treated. As the time had now come, I gave him the bulky letter addressed to him, marked “D” which I had in my safe. As I fulfilled my obligation in the matter, I said:

“You need not read the letter here. You can take it away with you, and read it by yourself at leisure. It is your own property, without any obligation whatever attached to it. By the way, perhaps it would be well if you knew. I have a copy sealed up in an envelope, and endorsed, ‘To be opened if occasion should arise,’ but not otherwise. Will you see me to-morrow, or, better still, dine with me alone here to-night? I should like to have a talk with you, and you may wish to ask me some questions.” He answered me cordially. I actually felt touched by the way he said good-bye before he went away. Sir Colin MacKelpie went with him, as Sent Leger was to drop him at the Reform.

Letter from Roger Melton to Rupert Sent Leger, *endorsed* “*D. re Rupert Sent Leger. To be given to him by Edward Bingham Trent if and as soon as he has declared* (*formally or informally*) *his intention of accepting the conditions named in Letter B.*, *forming Clause* 10 *in my Will. R. M.*, 1/1/’07.

“*Mem.* — Copy (sealed) left in custody of E. B. Trent, to be opened if necessary, as directed.”

June 11, 1906.

My Dear Nephew,

When (if ever) you receive this you will know that (with the exception of some definite bequests) I have left to you, under certain conditions, the entire bulk of my fortune — a fortune so great that by its aid as a help, a man of courage and ability may carve out for himself a name and place in history. The specific conditions contained in Clause 10 of my Will have to be observed, for such I deem to be of service to your own fortune; but herein I give my advice, which you are at liberty to follow or not as you will, and my wishes, which I shall try to explain fully and clearly, so that you may be in possession of my views in case you should desire to carry them out, or, at least, to so endeavour that the results I hope for may be ultimately achieved. First let me explain — for your understanding and your guidance — that the power, or perhaps it had better be called the pressure, behind the accumulation of my fortune has been ambition. In obedience to its compulsion, I toiled early and late until I had so arranged matters that, subject to broad supervision, my ideas could be carried out by men whom I had selected and tested, and not found wanting. This was for years to the satisfaction, and ultimately to the accumulation by these men of fortune commensurate in some measure to their own worth and their importance to my designs. Thus I had accumulated, whilst still a young man, a considerable fortune. This I have for over forty years used sparingly as regards my personal needs, daringly with regard to speculative investments. With the latter I took such very great care, studying the conditions surrounding them so thoroughly, that even now my schedule of bad debts or unsuccessful investments is almost a blank. Perhaps by such means things flourished with me, and wealth piled in so fast that at times I could hardly use it to advantage. This was all done as the forerunner of ambition, but I was over fifty years of age when the horizon of ambition itself opened up to me. I speak thus freely, my dear Rupert, as when you read it I shall have passed away, and not ambition nor the fear of misunderstanding, nor even of scorn can touch me. My ventures in commerce and finance covered not only the Far East, but every foot of the way to it, so that the Mediterranean and all its opening seas were familiar to me. In my journeyings up and down the Adriatic I was always struck by the great beauty and seeming richness — native richness — of the Land of the Blue Mountains. At last Chance took me into that delectable region. When the "Balkan Struggle" of '90 was on, one of the great Voivodes came to me in secret to arrange a large loan for national purposes. It was known in financial circles of both Europe and Asia that I took an active part in the *haute politique* of national treasuries, and the Voivode Vissarion came to me as to one able and willing to carry out his wishes. After confidential pour-parlers, he explained to me that his nation was in the throes of a great crisis. As you perhaps know, the gallant little Nation in the Land of the Blue Mountains has had a strange history. For more than a thousand years — ever since its settlement after the disaster of Rossoro — it had maintained its national independence under several forms of Government. At first it had a King whose successors became so despotic that they were dethroned. Then it was governed by its Voivodes, with the combining influence of a Vladika somewhat similar in power and function to the Prince-Bishops of Montenegro; afterwards by a Prince; or, as at present, by an irregular elective Council, influenced in a modified form by the Vladika, who was then supposed to exercise a purely spiritual function. Such a Council in a small, poor nation did not have sufficient funds for armaments, which were not immediately and imperatively necessary; and therefore the Voivode Vissarion, who had vast estates in his own possession, and who was the present representative a family which of old had been leaders in the land, found it a duty to do on his own account that which the State could not do. For security as to the loan which he wished to get, and which was indeed a vast one, he offered to sell me his whole estate if I would secure to him a right to repurchase it within a given time (a time which I may say has some time ago expired). He made it a condition that the sale and agreement should remain a strict secret between us, as a widespread knowledge that his estate had changed hands would in all probability result in my death and his own at the hands of the mountaineers, who are beyond everything loyal, and were jealous to the last degree. An attack by Turkey was feared, and new armaments were required; and the patriotic Voivode was sacrificing his own great fortune for the public good. What a sacrifice this was he well knew, for in all discussions regarding a possible change in the Constitution of the Blue Mountains it was always taken for granted that if the principles of the Constitution should change to a more personal rule, his own family should be regarded as the Most Noble. It had ever been on the side of freedom in olden time; before the establishment of the Council, or even during the rule of the Voivodes, the Vissarion had every now and again stood out against the King or challenged the Princedom. The very name stood for freedom, for nationality, against foreign oppression; and the bold mountaineers were devoted to it, as in other free countries men follow the flag.

Such loyalty was a power and a help in the land, for it knew danger in every form; and anything which aided the cohesion of its integers was a natural asset. On every side other powers, great and small, pressed the land, anxious to acquire its suzerainty by any means — fraud or force. Greece, Turkey, Austria, Russia, Italy, France, had all tried in vain. Russia, often hurled back, was waiting an opportunity to attack. Austria and Greece, although united by no common purpose or design, were ready to throw in their forces with whomsoever might seem most likely to be victor. Other Balkan States, too, were not lacking in desire to add the little territory of the Blue Mountains to their more ample possessions. Albania, Dalmatia, Herzegovina, Servia, Bulgaria, looked with lustful eyes on the land, which was in itself a vast natural fortress, having close under its shelter perhaps the finest harbour between Gibraltar and the Dardanelles.

But the fierce, hardy mountaineers were unconquerable. For centuries they had fought, with a fervour and fury that nothing could withstand or abate, attacks on their independence. Time after time, century after century, they had opposed with dauntless front invading armies sent against them. This unquenchable fire of freedom had had its effect. One and all, the great Powers knew that to conquer that little nation would be no mean task, but rather that of a tireless giant. Over and over again had they fought with units against hundreds, never ceasing until they had either wiped out their foes entirely or seen them retreat across the frontier in diminished numbers.

For many years past, however, the Land of the Blue Mountains had remained unassailable, for all the Powers and States had feared lest the others should unite against the one who should begin the attack.

At the time I speak of there was a feeling throughout the Blue Mountains — and, indeed, elsewhere — that Turkey was preparing for a war of offence. The objective of her attack was not known anywhere, but here there was evidence that the Turkish "Bureau of Spies" was in active exercise towards their sturdy little neighbour. To prepare for this, the Voivode Peter Vissarion approached me in order to obtain the necessary "sinews of war."

The situation was complicated by the fact that the Elective Council was at present largely held together by the old Greek Church, which was the religion of the people, and which had had since the beginning its destinies linked in a large degree with theirs. Thus it was possible that if a war should break out, it might easily become — whatever might have been its cause or beginnings — a war of creeds. This in the Balkans must be largely one of races, the end of which no mind could diagnose or even guess at.

I had now for some time had knowledge of the country and its people, and had come to love them both. The nobility of Vissarion's self-sacrifice at once appealed to me, and I felt that I, too, should like to have a hand in the upholding of such a land and such a people. They both deserved freedom. When Vissarion handed me the completed deed of sale I was going to tear it up; but he somehow recognised my intention, and forestalled it. He held up his hand arrestingly as he said:

"I recognise your purpose, and, believe me, I honour you for it from the very depths of my soul. But, my friend, it must not be. Our mountaineers are proud beyond belief. Though they would allow me — who am one of themselves, and whose fathers have been in some way leaders and spokesmen amongst them for many centuries — to do all that is in my power to do — and what, each and all, they would be glad to do were the call to them — they would not accept aid from one outside themselves. My good friend, they would resent it, and might show to you, who wish us all so well, active hostility, which might end in danger, or even death. That was why, my friend, I asked to put a clause in our agreement, that I might have right to repurchase my estate, regarding which you would fain act so generously."

Thus it is, my dear nephew Rupert, only son of my dear sister, that I hereby charge you solemnly as you value me — as you value yourself — as you value honour, that, should it ever become known that that noble Voivode, Peter Vissarion, imperilled himself for his country's good, and if it be of danger or evil repute to him that even for such a purpose he sold his heritage, you shall at once and to the knowledge of the mountaineers — though not necessarily to others — reconvey to him or his heirs the freehold that he was willing to part with — and that he has *de facto* parted with by the effluxion of the time during which his right of repurchase existed. This is a secret trust and duty which is between thee and me alone in the first instance; a duty which I have undertaken on behalf of my heirs, and which must be carried out, at whatsoever cost may ensue. You must not take it that it is from any mistrust of you or belief that you will fail that I have taken another measure to insure that this my cherished idea is borne out. Indeed, it is that the law may, in case of need — for no man can know what may happen after his own hand be taken from the plough — be complied with, that I have in another letter written for the guidance of others, directed that in case of any failure to carry out this trust — death or other — the direction become a clause or codicil to my Will. But in the meantime I wish that this be kept a secret between us two. To show you the full extent of my confidence, let me here tell you that the letter alluded to above is marked "C," and directed to my solicitor and co-executor, Edward

Bingham Trent, which is finally to be regarded as clause eleven of my Will. To which end he has my instructions and also a copy of this letter, which is, in case of need, and that only, to be opened, and is to be a guide to my wishes as to the carrying out by you of the conditions on which you inherit.

And now, my dear nephew, let me change to another subject more dear to me — yourself. When you read this I shall have passed away, so that I need not be hampered now by that reserve which I feel has grown upon me through a long and self-contained life. Your mother was very dear to me. As you know, she was twenty years younger than her youngest brother, who was two years younger than me. So we were all young men when she was a baby, and, I need not say, a pet amongst us — almost like our own child to each of us, as well as our sister. You knew her sweetness and high quality, so I need say nothing of these; but I should like you to understand that she was very dear to me. When she and your father came to know and love each other I was far away, opening up a new branch of business in the interior of China, and it was not for several months that I got home news. When I first heard of him they had already been married. I was delighted to find that they were very happy. They needed nothing that I could give. When he died so suddenly I tried to comfort her, and all I had was at her disposal, did she want it. She was a proud woman — though not with me. She had come to understand that, though I seemed cold and hard (and perhaps was so generally), I was not so to her. But she would not have help of any kind. When I pressed her, she told me that she had enough for your keep and education and her own sustenance for the time she must still live; that your father and she had agreed that you should be brought up to a healthy and strenuous life rather than to one of luxury; and she thought that it would be better for the development of your character that you should learn to be self-reliant and to be content with what your dear father had left you. She had always been a wise and thoughtful girl, and now all her wisdom and thought were for you, your father's and her child. When she spoke of you and your future, she said many things which I thought memorable. One of them I remember to this day. It was apropos of my saying that there is a danger of its own kind in extreme poverty. A young man might know too much want. She answered me: "True! That is so! But there is a danger that overrides it;" and after a time went on:

"It is better not to know wants than not to know want!" I tell you, boy, that is a great truth, and I hope you will remember it for yourself as well as a part of the wisdom of your mother. And here let me say something else which is a sort of corollary of that wise utterance:

I dare say you thought me very hard and unsympathetic that time I would not, as one of your trustees, agree to your transferring your little fortune to Miss MacKelpie. I dare say you bear a grudge towards me about it up to this day. Well, if you have any of that remaining, put it aside when you know the truth. That request of yours was an unspeakable delight to me. It was like your mother coming back from the dead. That little letter of yours made me wish for the first time that I had a son — and that he should be like you. I fell into a sort of reverie, thinking if I were yet too old to marry, so that a son might be with me in my declining years — if such were to ever be for me. But I concluded that this might not be. There was no woman whom I knew or had ever met with that I could love as your mother loved your father and as he loved her. So I resigned myself to my fate. I must go my lonely road on to the end. And then came a ray of light into my darkness: there was you. Though you might not feel like a son to me — I could not expect it when the memory of that sweet relationship was more worthily filled. But I could feel like a father to you. Nothing could prevent that or interfere with it, for I would keep it as my secret in the very holy of holies of my heart, where had been for thirty years the image of a sweet little child — your mother. My boy, when in your future life you shall have happiness and honour and power, I hope you will sometimes give a thought to the lonely old man whose later years your very existence seemed to brighten.

The thought of your mother recalled me to my duty. I had undertaken for her a sacred task: to carry out her wishes regarding her son. I knew how she would have acted. It might — would — have been to her a struggle of inclination and duty; and duty would have won. And so I carried out my duty, though I tell you it was a harsh and bitter task to me at the time. But I may tell you that I have since been glad when I think of the result. I tried, as you may perhaps remember, to carry out your wishes in another way, but your letter put the difficulty of doing so so clearly before me that I had to give it up. And let me tell you that that letter endeared you to me more than ever.

I need not tell you that thenceforth I followed your life very closely. When you ran away to sea, I used in secret every part of the mechanism of commerce to find out what had become of you. Then, until you had reached your majority, I had a constant watch kept upon you — not to interfere with you in any way, but so that I might be able to find you should need arise. When in due course I heard of your first act on coming of age I was satisfied. I had to know of the carrying out of your original intention towards Janet Mac Kelpie, for the securities had to be transferred.

From that time on I watched — of course through other eyes — your chief doings. It would have been a pleasure to me to have been able to help in carrying out any hope or ambition of yours, but I realised that in the years intervening between your coming of age and the present moment you were fulfilling your ideas and ambitions in your own way, and, as I shall try to explain to you presently, my ambitions also. You were of so adventurous a nature that even my own widely-spread machinery of acquiring information — what I may call my private "intelligence department" — was inadequate. My machinery was fairly adequate for the East — in great part, at all events. But you went North and South, and West also, and, in addition, you essayed realms where commerce and purely real affairs have no foothold — worlds of thought, of spiritual import, of psychic phenomena — speaking generally, of mysteries. As now and again I was baffled in my inquiries, I had to enlarge my mechanism, and to this end started — not in my own name, of course — some new magazines devoted to certain branches of inquiry and adventure. Should you ever care to know more of these things, Mr. Trent, in whose name the stock is left, will be delighted to give you all details. Indeed, these stocks, like all else I have, shall be yours when the time comes, if you care to ask for them. By means of *The Journal of Adventure*, *The Magazine of Mystery*, *Occultism*, *Balloon and Aeroplane*, *The Submarine*, *Jungle and Pampas*, *The Ghost World*, *The Explorer*, *Forest and Island*, *Ocean and Creek*, I was often kept informed when I should otherwise have been ignorant of your whereabouts and designs. For instance, when you had disappeared into the Forest of the Incas, I got the first whisper of your strange adventures and discoveries in the buried cities of Eudori from a correspondent of *The Journal of Adventure* long before the details given in *The Times* of the rock-temple of the primeval savages, where only remained the little dragon serpents, whose giant ancestors were rudely sculptured on the sacrificial altar. I well remember how I thrilled at even that meagre account of your going in alone into that veritable hell. It was from *Occultism* that I learned how you had made a stay alone in the haunted catacombs of Elora, in the far recesses of the Himalayas, and of the fearful experiences which, when you came out shuddering and ghastly, overcame to almost epileptic fear those who had banded themselves together to go as far as the rock-cut approach to the hidden temple.

All such things I read with rejoicing. You were shaping yourself for a wider and loftier adventure, which would crown more worthily your matured manhood. When I read of you in a description of Mihask, in Madagascar, and the devil-worship there rarely held, I felt I had only to wait for your home-coming in order to broach the enterprise I had so long contemplated. This was what I read:

"He is a man to whom no adventure is too wild or too daring. His reckless bravery is a byword amongst many savage peoples and amongst many others not savages, whose fears are not of material things, but of the world of mysteries in and beyond the grave. He dares not only wild animals and savage men; but has tackled African magic and Indian mysticism. The Psychical Research Society has long exploited his deeds of valiance, and looked upon him as perhaps their most trusted agent or source of discovery. He is in the very prime of life, of almost giant stature and strength, trained to the use of all arms of all countries, inured to every kind of hardship, subtle-minded and resourceful, understanding human nature from its elemental form up. To say that he is fearless would be inadequate. In a word, he is a man whose strength and daring fit him for any enterprise of any kind. He would dare and do anything in the world or out of it, on the earth or under it, in the sea or — in the air, fearing nothing material or unseen, not man or ghost, nor God nor Devil."

If you ever care to think of it, I carried that cutting in my pocket-book from that hour I read it till now.

Remember, again, I say, that I never interfered in the slightest way in any of your adventures. I wanted you to "dree your own weird," as the Scotch say; and I wanted to know of it — that was all. Now, as I hold you fully equipped for greater enterprise, I want to set your feet on the road and to provide you with the most potent weapon — beyond personal qualities — for the winning of great honour — a gain, my dear nephew, which, I am right sure, does and will appeal to you as it has ever done to me. I have worked for it for more than fifty years; but now that the time has come when the torch is slipping from my old hands, I look to you, my dearest kinsman, to lift it and carry it on.

The little nation of the Blue Mountains has from the first appealed to me. It is poor and proud and brave. Its people are well worth winning, and I would advise you to throw in your lot with them. You may find them hard to win, for when peoples, like individuals, are poor and proud, these qualities are apt to react on each other to an endless degree. These men are untamable, and no one can ever succeed with them unless he is with them in all-in-all, and is a leader recognised. But if you can win them they are loyal to death. If you are ambitious — and I know you are — there may be a field for you in such a country. With your qualifications, fortified by the fortune which I am happy enough to be able to leave you, you may dare much and go far. Should I be alive when you return from your exploration in Northern South America, I may have the happiness of helping you to this or any other ambition, and I shall deem it a privilege to share it with you; but time is going on. I am in my seventy-second year . . . the years of man are three-score and ten — I suppose you understand; I do . . . Let me point out this: For ambitious projects the great nationalities are impossible to a stranger — and in our own we are limited by loyalty (and common-sense). It is only in a small nation that great ambitions can be achieved. If you share my own views and wishes, the Blue Mountains is your ground. I hoped at one time that I might yet become a Voivode — even a great one. But age has dulled my personal ambitions as it has cramped my powers. I no longer dream of such honour for myself, though I do look on it as a possibility for you if you care for it. Through my Will you will have a great position and a great estate, and though you may have to yield up the latter in accordance with my wish, as already expressed in this letter, the very doing so will give you an even greater hold than this possession in the hearts of the mountaineers, should they ever come to know it. Should it be that at the time you inherit from me the Voivode Vissarion should not be alive, it may serve or aid you to know that in such case you would be absolved from any conditions of mine, though I trust you would in that, as in all other matters, hold obligation enforced by your own honour as to my wishes. Therefore the matter stands thus: If Vissarion lives, you will relinquish the estates. Should such not be the case, you will act as you believe that I would wish you to. In either case the mountaineers should not know from you in any way of the secret contracts between Vissarion and myself. Enlightenment of the many should (if ever) come from others than yourself. And unless such take place, you would leave the estates without any *quid pro quo* whatever. This you need not mind, for the fortune you will inherit will leave you free and able to purchase other estates in the Blue Mountains or elsewhere that you may select in the world.

If others attack, attack them, and quicker and harder than they can, if such be a possibility. Should it ever be that you inherit the Castle of Vissarion on the Spear of Ivan, remember that I had it secretly fortified and armed against attack. There are not only massive grilles, but doors of chilled bronze where such be needed. My adherent Rooke, who has faithfully served me for nearly forty years, and has gone on my behalf on many perilous expeditions, will, I trust, serve you in the same way. Treat him well for my sake, if not for your own. I have left him provision for a life of ease; but he would rather take a part in dangerous enterprises. He is silent as the grave and as bold as a lion. He knows every detail of the fortification and of the secret means of defence. A word in your ear — he was once a pirate. He was then in his extreme youth, and long since changed his ways in this respect; but from this fact you can understand his nature. You will find him useful should occasion ever arise. Should you accept the conditions of my letter, you are to make the Blue Mountains — in part, at least — your home, living there a part of the year, if only for a week, as in England men of many estates share the time amongst them. To this you are not bound, and no one shall have power to compel you or interfere with you. I only express a hope. But one thing I do more than hope — I desire, if you will honour my wishes, that, come what may, you are to keep your British nationality, unless by special arrangement with and consent of the Privy Council. Such arrangement to be formally made by my friend, Edward Bingham Trent, or whomsoever he may appoint by deed or will to act in the matter, and made in such a way that no act save that alone of Parliament in all its estates, and endorsed by the

King, may or can prevail against it.

My last word to you is, Be bold and honest, and fear not. Most things — even kingship — *somewhere* may now and again be won by the sword. A brave heart and a strong arm may go far. But whatever is so won cannot be held merely by the sword. Justice alone can hold in the long run. Where men trust they will follow, and the rank and file of people want to follow, not to lead. If it be your fortune to lead, be bold. Be wary, if you will; exercise any other faculties that may aid or guard. Shrink from nothing. Avoid nothing that is honourable in itself. Take responsibility when such presents itself. What others shrink from, accept. That is to be great in what world, little or big, you move. Fear nothing, no matter of what kind danger may be or whence it come. The only real way to meet danger is to despise it — except with your brains. Meet it in the gate, not the hall.

My kinsman, the name of my race and your own, worthily mingled in your own person, now rests with you!

Letter from Rupert Sent Leger, 32 *Bodmin Street*, *Victoria*, *S.W.*, *to Miss Janet MacKelpie*, *Croom*, *Ross-shire*.

January 3, 1907.

My dearest Aunt Janet,

You will, I know, be rejoiced to hear of the great good-fortune which has come to me through the Will of Uncle Roger. Perhaps Sir Colin will have written to you, as he is one of the executors, and there is a bequest to you, so I must not spoil his pleasure of telling you of that part himself. Unfortunately, I am not free to speak fully of my own legacy yet, but I want you to know that at worst I am to receive an amount many times more than I ever dreamt of possessing through any possible stroke of fortune. So soon as I can leave

London — where, of course, I must remain until things are settled — I am coming up to Croom to see you, and I hope I shall by then be able to let you know so much that you will be able to guess at the extraordinary change that has come to my circumstances. It is all like an impossible dream: there is nothing like it in the "Arabian Nights." However, the details must wait, I am pledged to secrecy for the present. And you must be pledged too. You won't mind, dear, will you? What I want to do at present is merely to tell you of my own good-fortune, and that I shall be going presently to live for a while at Vissarion. Won't you come with me, Aunt Janet? We shall talk more of this when I come to Croom; but I want you to keep the subject in your mind.

Your loving

Rupert.

From Rupert Sent Leger's Journal.

January 4, 1907.

Things have been humming about me so fast that I have had hardly time to think. But some of the things have been so important, and have so changed my entire outlook on life, that it may be well to keep some personal record of them. I may some day want to remember some detail — perhaps the sequence of events, or something like that — and it may be useful. It ought to be, if there is any justice in things, for it will be an awful swot to write it when I have so many things to think of now. Aunt Janet, I suppose, will like to keep it locked up for me, as she does with all my journals and papers. That is one good thing about Aunt Janet amongst many: she has no curiosity, or else she has some other quality which keeps her from prying as other women would. It would seem that she has not so much as opened the cover of one of my journals ever in her life, and that she would not without my permission. So this can in time go to her also.

I dined last night with Mr. Trent, by his special desire. The dinner was in his own rooms. Dinner sent in from the hotel. He would not have any waiters at all, but made them send in the dinner all at once, and we helped ourselves. As we were quite alone, we could talk freely, and we got over a lot of ground while we were dining. He began to tell me about Uncle Roger. I was glad of that, for, of course, I wanted to know all I could of him, and the fact was I had seen very little of him. Of course, when I was a small kid he was often in our house, for he was very fond of mother, and she of him. But I fancy that a small boy was rather a nuisance to him. And then I was at school, and he was away in the East. And then poor mother died while he was living in the Blue Mountains, and I never saw him again. When I wrote to him about Aunt Janet he answered me very kindly but he was so very just in the matter that I got afraid of him. And after that I ran away, and have been roaming ever since; so there was never a chance of our meeting. But that letter of his has opened my eyes. To think of him following me that way all over the world, waiting to hold out a helping hand if I should want it, I only wish I had known, or even suspected, the sort of man he was, and how he cared for me, and I would sometimes have come back to see him, if I had to come half round the world. Well, all I can do now is to carry out his wishes; that will be my expiation for my neglect. He knew what he wanted exactly, and I suppose I shall come in time to know it all and understand it, too.

I was thinking something like this when Mr. Trent began to talk, so that all he said fitted exactly into my own thought. The two men were evidently great friends — I should have gathered that, anyhow, from the Will — and the letters — so I was not surprised when Mr. Trent told me that they had been to school together, Uncle Roger being a senior when he was a junior; and had then and ever after shared each other's confidence. Mr. Trent, I gathered, had from the very first been in love with my mother, even when she was a little girl; but he was poor and shy, and did not like to speak. When he had made up his mind to do so, he found that she had by then met my father, and could not help seeing that they loved each other. So he was silent. He told me he had never said a word about it to anyone — not even to my Uncle Roger, though he knew from one thing and another, though he never spoke of it, that he would like it. I could not help seeing that the dear old man regarded me in a sort of parental way — I have heard of such romantic attachments being transferred to the later generation. I was not displeased with it; on the contrary, I liked him better for it. I love my mother so much — I always think of her in the present — that I cannot think of her as dead. There is a tie between anyone else who loved her and myself. I tried to let Mr. Trent see that I liked him, and it pleased him so much that I could see his liking for me growing greater. Before we parted he told me that he was going to give up business. He must have understood how disappointed I was — for how could I ever get along at all without him? — for he said, as he laid a hand quite affectionately, I thought — on my shoulder:

"I shall have one client, though, whose business I always hope to keep, and for whom I shall be always whilst I live glad to act — if he will have me." I did not care to speak as I took his hand. He squeezed mine, too, and said very earnestly:

"I served your uncle's interests to the very best of my ability for nearly fifty years. He had full confidence in me, and I was proud of his trust. I can honestly say, Rupert — you won't mind me using that familiarity, will you? — that, though the interests which I guarded were so vast that without abusing my trust I could often have used my knowledge to my personal advantage, I never once, in little matters or big, abused that trust — no, not even rubbed the bloom off it. And now that he has remembered me in his Will so generously that I need work no more, it will be a very genuine pleasure and pride to me to carry out as well as I can the wishes that I partly knew, and now realise more fully towards you, his nephew."

In the long chat which we had, and which lasted till midnight, he told me many very interesting things about Uncle Roger. When, in the course of conversation, he mentioned that the fortune Uncle Roger left must be well over a hundred millions, I was so surprised that I said out loud — I did not mean to ask a question:

"How on earth could a man beginning with nothing realise such a gigantic fortune?"

"By all honest ways," he answered, "and his clever human insight. He knew one half of the world, and so kept abreast of all public and national movements that he knew the critical moment to advance money required. He was always generous, and always on the side of freedom. There are nations at this moment only now entering on the consolidation of their liberty, who owe all to him, who knew when and how to help. No wonder that in some lands they will drink to his memory on great occasions as they used to drink his health."

"As you and I shall do now, sir!" I said, as I filled my glass and stood up. We drank it in bumpers. We did not say a word, either of us; but the old gentleman held out his hand, and I took it. And so, holding hands, we drank in silence. It made me feel quite choky; and

I could see that he, too, was moved.

From E. B. Trent's Memoranda.

January 4, 1907.

I asked Mr. Rupert Sent Leger to dine with me at my office alone, as I wished to have a chat with him. To-morrow Sir Colin and I will have a formal meeting with him for the settlement of affairs, but I thought it best to have an informal talk with him alone first, as I wished to tell him certain matters which will make our meeting to-morrow more productive of utility, as he can now have more full understanding of the subjects which we have to discuss. Sir Colin is all that can be in manhood, and I could wish no better colleague in the executorship of this phenomenal Will; but he has not had the privilege of a lifelong friendship with the testator as I have had. And as Rupert Sent Leger had to learn intimate details regarding his uncle, I could best make my confidences alone. To-morrow we shall have plenty of formality. I was delighted with Rupert. He is just what I could have wished his mother's boy to be — or a son of my own to be, had I had the good-fortune to have been a father. But this is not for me. I remember long, long ago reading a passage in Lamb's Essays which hangs in my mind: "The children of Alice call Bartrum father." Some of my old friends would laugh to see *me* write this, but these memoranda are for my eyes alone, and no one shall see them till after my death, unless by my own permission. The boy takes some qualities after his father; he has a daring that is disturbing to an old dryasdust lawyer like me. But somehow I like him more than I ever liked anyone — any man — in my life — more even than his uncle, my old friend, Roger Melton; and Lord knows I had much cause to like him. I have more than ever now. It was quite delightful to see the way the young adventurer was touched by his uncle's thought of him. He is a truly gallant fellow, but venturesome exploits have not affected the goodness of heart. It is a pleasure to me to think that Roger and Colin came together apropos of the boy's thoughtful generosity towards Miss MacKelpie. The old soldier will be a good friend to him, or I am much mistaken. With an old lawyer like me, and an old soldier like him, and a real old gentlewoman like Miss MacKelpie, who loves the very ground he walks on, to look after him, together with all his own fine qualities and his marvellous experience of the world, and the gigantic wealth that will surely be his, that young man will go far.

Letter from Rupert Sent Leger to Miss Janet MacKelpie, *Croom.*

January 5, 1907.

My dearest Aunt Janet,

It is all over — the first stage of it; and that is as far as I can get at present. I shall have to wait for a few days — or it may be weeks — in London for the doing of certain things now necessitated by my acceptance of Uncle Roger's bequest. But as soon as I can, dear, I shall come down to Croom and spend with you as many days as possible. I shall then tell you all I am at liberty to tell, and I shall thank you personally for your consent to come with me to Vissarion. Oh, how I wish my dear mother had lived to be with us! It would have made her happy, I know, to have come; and then we three who shared together the old dear, hard days would have shared in the same way the new splendour. I would try to show all my love and gratitude to you both . . . You must take the whole burden of it now, dear, for you and I are alone. No, not alone, as we used to be, for I have now two old friends who are already dear to me. One is so to you already. Sir Colin is simply splendid, and so, in his own way, is Mr. Trent. I am lucky, Aunt Janet, to have two such men to think of affairs for me. Am I not? I shall send you a wire as soon as ever I can see my way to get through my work; and I want you to think over all the things you ever wished for in your life, so that I may — if there is any mortal way of doing so — get them for you. You will not stand in the way of my having this great pleasure, will you, dear? Good-bye.

Your loving

Rupert.

E. B. Trent's Memoranda.

January 6, 1907.

The formal meeting of Sir Colin and myself with Rupert Sent Leger went off quite satisfactorily. From what he had said yesterday, and again last night, I had almost come to expect an unreserved acceptance of everything stated or implied in Roger Melton's Will; but when we had sat round the table — this appeared, by the way, to be a formality for which we were all prepared, for we sat down as if by instinct — the very first words he said were:

"As I suppose I must go through this formality, I may as well say at once that I accept every possible condition which was in the mind of Uncle Roger; and to this end I am prepared to sign, seal, and deliver — or whatever is the ritual — whatever document you, sir" — turning to me— "may think necessary or advisable, and of which you both approve." He stood up and walked about the room for a few moments, Sir Colin and I sitting quite still, silent. He came back to his seat, and after a few seconds of nervousness — a rare thing with him, I fancy — said: "I hope you both understand — of course, I know you do; I only speak because this is an occasion for formality — that I am willing to accept, and at once! I do so, believe me, not to get possession of this vast fortune, but because of him who has given it. The man who was fond of me, and who trusted me, and yet had strength to keep his own feelings in check — who followed me in spirit to far lands and desperate adventures, and who, though he might be across the world from me, was ready to put out a hand to save or help me, was no common man; and his care of my mother's son meant no common love for my dear mother. And so she and I together accept his trust, come of it what may. I have been thinking it over all night, and all the time I could not get out of the idea that mother was somewhere near me. The only thought that could debar me from doing as I wished to do — and intend to do — would be that she would not approve. Now that I am satisfied she would approve, I accept. Whatever may result or happen, I shall go on following the course that he has set for me. So help me, God!" Sir Colin stood up, and I must say a more martial figure I never saw. He was in full uniform, for he was going on to the King's levee after our business. He drew his sword from the scabbard and laid it naked on the table before Rupert, and said:

"You are going, sir, into a strange and danger country — I have been reading about it since we met — and you will be largely alone amongst fierce mountaineers who resent the very presence of a stranger, and to whom you are, and must be, one. If you should ever be in any trouble and want a man to stand back to back with you, I hope you will give me the honour!" As he said this pointed to his sword. Rupert and I were also standing now — one cannot sit down in the presence of such an act as that. "You are, I am proud to say, allied with my family: and I only wish to God it was closer to myself." Rupert took him by the hand and bent his head before him as answered:

"The honour is mine, Sir Colin; and no greater can come to any man than that which you have just done me. The best way I can show how I value it will be to call on you if I am ever in such a tight place. By Jove, sir, this is history repeating itself. Aunt Janet used to tell me when I was a youngster how MacKelpie of Croom laid his sword before Prince Charlie. I hope I may tell her of this; it would make her so proud and happy. Don’t imagine, sir, that I am thinking myself a Charles Edward. It is only that Aunt Janet is so good to me that I might well think I was.”

Sir Colin bowed grandly:

“Rupert Sent Leger, my dear niece is a woman of great discretion and discernment. And, moreover, I am thinking she has in her some of the gift of Second Sight that has been a heritage of our blood. And I am one with my niece — in everything!” The whole thing was quite regal in manner; it seemed to take me back to the days of the Pretender.

It was not, however, a time for sentiment, but for action — we had met regarding the future, not the past; so I produced the short document I had already prepared. On the strength of his steadfast declaration that he would accept the terms of the Will and the secret letters, I had got ready a formal acceptance. When I had once again formally asked Mr. Sent Leger’s wishes, and he had declared his wish to accept, I got in a couple of my clerks as witnesses.

Then, having again asked him in their presence if it was his wish to declare acceptance of the conditions, the document was signed and witnessed, Sir Colin and I both appending our signatures to the Attestation.

And so the first stage of Rupert Sent Leger’s inheritance is completed. The next step will not have to be undertaken on my part until the expiration of six months from his entry on his estate at

Vissarion. As he announces his intention of going within a fortnight, this will mean practically a little over six months from now.

BOOK II: VISSARION

Letter from Rupert Sent Leger, *Castle of Vissarion*, *the Spear of Ivan*, *Land of the Blue Mountains*, *to Miss Janet MacKelpie*, *Croom Castle*, *Ross-shire*, *N.B.*

January 23, 1907.

My dearest Aunt Janet,

As you see, I am here at last. Having got my formal duty done, as you made me promise — my letters reporting arrival to Sir Colin and Mr. Trent are lying sealed in front of me ready to post (for nothing shall go before yours) — I am free to speak to you.

This is a most lovely place, and I hope you will like it. I am quite sure you will. We passed it in the steamer coming from Trieste to Durazzo. I knew the locality from the chart, and it was pointed out to me by one of the officers with whom I had become quite friendly, and who kindly showed me interesting places whenever we got within sight of shore. The Spear of Ivan, on which the Castle stands, is a headland running well out into the sea. It is quite a peculiar place — a sort of headland on a headland, jutting out into a deep, wide bay, so that, though it is a promontory, it is as far away from the traffic of coast life as anything you can conceive. The main promontory is the end of a range of mountains, and looms up vast, towering over everything, a mass of sapphire blue. I can well understand how the country came to be called the "Land of the Blue Mountains," for it is all mountains, and they are all blue! The coast-line is magnificent — what is called "iron-bound" — being all rocky; sometimes great frowning precipices; sometimes jutting spurs of rock; again little rocky islets, now and again clad with trees and verdure, at other places stark and bare. Elsewhere are little rocky bays and indentations — always rock, and often with long, interesting caves. Some of the shores of the bays are sandy, or else ridges of beautiful pebbles, where the waves make endless murmur.

But of all the places I have seen — in this land or any other — the most absolutely beautiful is Vissarion. It stands at the ultimate point of the promontory — I mean the little, or, rather, lesser promontory — that continues on the spur of the mountain range. For the lesser promontory or extension of the mountain is in reality vast; the lowest bit of cliff along the sea-front is not less than a couple of hundred feet high. That point of rock is really very peculiar. I think Dame Nature must, in the early days of her housekeeping — or, rather, house-*building* — have intended to give her little child, man, a rudimentary lesson in self-protection. It is just a natural bastion such as a titanic Vauban might have designed in primeval times. So far as the Castle is concerned, it is alone visible from the sea. Any enemy approaching could see only that frowning wall of black rock, of vast height and perpendicular steepness. Even the old fortifications which crown it are not built, but cut in the solid rock. A long narrow creek of very deep water, walled in by high, steep cliffs, runs in behind the Castle, bending north and west, making safe and secret anchorage. Into the creek falls over a precipice a mountain-stream, which never fails in volume of water. On the western shore of that creek is the Castle, a huge pile of buildings of every style of architecture, from the Twelfth century to where such things seemed to stop in this dear old-world land — about the time of Queen Elizabeth. So it is pretty picturesque. I can tell you. When we got the first glimpse of the place from the steamer the officer, with whom I was on the bridge, pointed towards it and said:

“That is where we saw the dead woman floating in a coffin.” That was rather interesting, so I asked him all about it. He took from his pocket-book a cutting from an Italian paper, which he handed to me. As I can read and speak Italian fairly well, it was all right; but as you, my dear Aunt Janet, are not skilled in languages, and as I doubt if there is any assistance of the kind to be had at Croom, I do not send it. But as I have heard that the item has been produced in the last number of *The Journal of Occultism*, you will be easily able to get it. As he handed me the cutting he said: “I am Destilia!” His story was so strange that I asked him a good many questions about it. He answered me quite frankly on every point, but always adhering stoutly to the main point — namely, that it was no phantom or mirage, no dream or imperfect vision in a fog. “We were four in all who saw it,” he said— “three from the bridge and the Englishman, Caulfield — from the bows — whose account exactly agreed with what we saw. Captain Mirolani and Falamano and I were all awake and in good trim. We looked with our night-glasses, which are more than usually powerful. You know, we need good glasses for the east shore of the Adriatic and for among the islands to the south. There was a full moon and a brilliant light. Of course we were a little way off, for though the Spear of Ivan is in deep water, one has to be careful of currents, for it is in just such places that the dangerous currents run.” The agent of Lloyd’s told me only a few weeks ago that it was only after a prolonged investigation of the tidal and sea currents that the house decided to except from ordinary sea risks losses due to a too close course by the Spear of Ivan. When I tried to get a little more definite account of the coffin-boat and the dead lady that is given in *The Journal of Occultism* he simply shrugged his shoulders. “Signor, it is all,” he said. “That Englishman wrote everything after endless questioning.”

So you see, my dear, that our new home is not without superstitious interests of its own. It is rather a nice idea, is it not, to have a dead woman cruising round our promontory in a coffin? I doubt if even at Croom you can beat that. “Makes the place kind of homey,” as an American would say. When you come, Aunt Janet, you will not feel lonesome, at any rate, and it will save us the trouble of importing some of your Highland ghosts to make you feel at home in the new land. I don’t know, but we might ask the stiff to come to tea with us. Of course, it would be a late tea. Somewhere between midnight and cock-crow would be about the etiquette of the thing, I fancy!

But I must tell you all the realities of the Castle and around it. So I will write again within a day or two, and try to let you know enough to prepare you for coming here. Till then adieu, my dear.

Your loving
Rupert.

From Rupert Sent Leger, *Vissarion*, *to Janet MacKelpie*, *Croom.*

January 25, 1907.

I hope I did not frighten you, dear Aunt Janet, by the yarn of the lady in the coffin. But I know you are not afraid; you have told me too many weird stories for me to dread that. Besides, you have Second Sight — latent, at all events. However, there won’t be any more ghosts, or about ghosts, in this letter. I want to tell you all about our new home. I am so glad you are coming out so soon; I am beginning to feel so lonesome — I walk about sometimes aimlessly, and find my thoughts drifting in such an odd way. If I didn’t know better, I might begin to think I was in love! There is no one here to be in love with; so make your mind easy, Aunt Janet. Not that you would be unhappy, I know, dear, if I *did* fall in love. I suppose I must marry some day. It is a duty now, I know, when there is such an estate as Uncle Roger has left me. And I know this: I shall never marry any woman unless I love her. And I am right sure that if I do love her you will love her, too, Aunt Janet! Won't you, dear? It wouldn't be half a delight if you didn't. It won't if you don't. There, now!

But before I begin to describe Vissarion I shall throw a sop to you as a chatelaine; that may give you patience to read the rest. The Castle needs a lot of things to make it comfortable — as you would consider it. In fact, it is absolutely destitute of everything of a domestic nature. Uncle Roger had it vetted on the defence side, and so far it could stand a siege. But it couldn't cook a dinner or go through a spring-cleaning! As you know, I am not much up in domestic matters, and so I cannot give you details; but you may take it that it wants everything. I don't mean furniture, or silver, or even gold-plate, or works of art, for it is full of the most magnificent old things that you can imagine. I think Uncle Roger must have been a collector, and gathered a lot of good things in all sorts of places, stored them for years, and then sent them here. But as to glass, china, delft, all sorts of crockery, linen, household appliances and machinery, cooking utensils — except of the simplest — there are none. I don't think Uncle Roger could have lived here more than on a temporary picnic. So far as I only am concerned, I am all right; a gridiron and a saucepan are all *I* want — and I can use them myself. But, dear Aunt Janet, I don't want you to pig it. I would like you to have everything you can imagine, and all of the very best. Cost doesn't count now for us, thanks to Uncle Roger; and so I want you to order all. I know you, dear — being a woman — won't object to shopping. But it will have to be wholesale. This is an enormous place, and will swallow up all you can buy — like a quicksand. Do as you like about choosing, but get all the help you can. Don't be afraid of getting too much. You can't, or of being idle when you are here. I assure you that when you come there will be so much to do and so many things to think of that you will want to get away from it all. And, besides, Aunt Janet, I hope you won't be too long. Indeed, I don't wish to be selfish, but your boy is lonely, and wants you. And when you get here you will be an Empress. I don't altogether like doing so, lest I should offend a millionairess like you; but it may facilitate matters, and the way's of commerce are strict, though devious. So I send you a cheque for £1,000 for the little things: and a letter to the bank to honour your own cheques for any amount I have got.

I think, by the way, I should, if I were you, take or send out a few servants — not too many at first, only just enough to attend on our two selves. You can arrange to send for any more you may want later. Engage them, and arrange for their being paid — when they are in our service we must treat them well — and then they can be at our call as you find that we want them. I think you should secure, say, fifty or a hundred— 'tis an awfu' big place, Aunt Janet! And in the same way will you secure — and, of course, arrange for pay similarly — a hundred men, exclusive of any servants you think it well to have. I should like the General, if he can give the time, to choose or pass them. I want clansmen that I can depend on, if need be. We are going to live in a country which is at present strange to us, and it is well to look things in the face. I know Sir Colin will only have men who are a credit to Scotland and to Ross and to Croom — men who will impress the Blue Mountaineers. I know they will take them to their hearts — certainly if any of them are bachelors the girls will! Forgive me! But if we are to settle here, our followers will probably want to settle also. Moreover, the Blue Mountaineers may want followers also! And will want them to settle, too, and have successors!

Now for the description of the place. Well, I simply can't just now. It is all so wonderful and so beautiful. The Castle — I have written so much already about other things that I really must keep the Castle for another letter! Love to Sir Colin if he is at Croom. And oh, dear Aunt Janet, how I wish that my dear mother was coming out! It all seems so dark and empty without her. How she would have enjoyed it! How proud she would have been! And, my dear, if she could be with us again, how grateful she would have been to you for all you have done for her boy! As I am, believe me, most truly and sincerely and affectionately grateful.

Your loving

Rupert.

Rupert Sent Leger, *Vissarion*, *to Janet MacKelpie*, *Croom.*

January 26, 1907.

My dear Aunt Janet,

Please read this as if it was a part of the letter I wrote yesterday.

The Castle itself is so vast that I really can't describe it in detail. So I am waiting till you come; and then you and I will go over it together and learn all that we can about it. We shall take Rooke with us, and, as he is supposed to know every part of it, from the keep to the torture-chamber, we can spend a few days over it. Of course, I have been over most of it, since I came — that, is, I went at various times to see different portions — the battlements, the bastions, the old guard-room, the hall, the chapel, the walls, the roof. And I have been through some of the network of rock passages. Uncle Roger must have spent a mint of money on it, so far as I can see; and though I am not a soldier, I have been in so many places fortified in different ways that I am not entirely ignorant of the subject. He has restored it in such an up-to-date way that it is practically impregnable to anything under big guns or a siege-train. He has gone so far as to have certain outworks and the keep covered with armoured plating of what looks like harveyized steel. You will wonder when you see it. But as yet I really know only a few rooms, and am familiar with only one — my own room. The drawing-room — not the great hall, which is a vast place; the library — a magnificent one, but in sad disorder — we must get a librarian some day to put it in trim; and the drawing-room and boudoir and bedroom suite which I have selected for you, are all fine. But my own room is what suits me best, though I do not think you would care for it for yourself. If you do, you shall have it. It was Uncle Roger's own room when he stayed here; living in it for a few days served to give me more insight to his character — or rather to his mind — than I could have otherwise had. It is just the kind of place I like myself; so, naturally, I understand the other chap who liked it too. It is a fine big room, not quite within the Castle, but an outlying part of it. It is not detached, or anything of that sort, but is a sort of garden-room built on to it. There seems to have been always some sort of place where it is, for the passages and openings inside seem to accept or recognise it. It can be shut off if necessary — it would be in case of attack — by a great slab of steel, just like the door of a safe, which slides from inside the wall, and can be operated from either inside or outside — if you know how. That is from my room or from within the keep. The mechanism is a secret, and no one but Rooke and I know it. The room opens out through a great French window — the French window is modern, I take it, and was arranged by or for Uncle Roger; I think there must have been always a large opening there, for centuries at least — which opens on a wide terrace or balcony of white marble, extending right and left. From this a white marble stair lies straight in front of the window, and leads down to the garden. The balcony and staircase are quite ancient — of old Italian work, beautifully carved, and, of course, weather-worn through centuries. There is just that little tinging of green here and there which makes all outdoor marble so charming. It is hard to believe at times that it is a part of a fortified castle, it is so elegant and free and open. The first glance of it would make a burglar's heart glad. He would say to himself: "Here is the sort of crib I like when I'm on the job. You can just walk in and out as you choose." But, Aunt Janet, old Roger was cuter than any burglar. He had the place so guarded that the burglar would have been a baffled burglar. There are two steel shields which can slide out from the wall and lock into the other side right across the whole big window. One is a grille of steel bands that open out into diamond-shaped lozenges. Nothing bigger than a kitten could get through; and yet you can see the garden and the mountains and the whole view — much the same as you ladies can see through your veils. The other is a great sheet of steel, which slides out in a similar way in different grooves. It is not, of course, so heavy and strong as the safe-door which covers the little opening in the main wall, but Rooke tells me it is proof against the heaviest rifle-hall.

Having told you this, I must tell you, too, Aunt Janet, lest you should be made anxious by the *arrière-pensée* of all these warlike measures of defence, that I always sleep at night with one of these iron screens across the window. Of course, when I am awake I leave it open. As yet I have tried only, but not used, the grille; and I don't think I shall ever use anything else, for it is a perfect guard. If it should be tampered with from outside it would sound an alarm at the head of the bed, and the pressing of a button would roll out the solid steel screen in front of it. As a matter of fact, I have been so used to the open that I don’t feel comfortable shut in. I only close windows against cold or rain. The weather here is delightful — as yet, at all events — but they tell me that the rainy season will be on us before very long.

I think you will like my den, aunty dear, though it will doubtless be a worry to you to see it so untidy. But that can’t be helped. I must be untidy *somewhere*; and it is best in my own den!

Again I find my letter so long that I must cut it off now and go on again to-night. So this must go as it stands. I shall not cause you to wait to hear all I can tell you about our new home.

Your loving
Rupert.

From Rupert Sent Leger, *Vissarion*, *to Janet MacKelpie*, *Croom.*

January 29, 1907.

My dear Aunt Janet,

My den looks out, as I told you in my last letter, on the garden, or, to speak more accurately, on *one* of the gardens, for there are acres of them. This is the old one, which must be almost as old as the Castle itself, for it was within the defences in the old days of bows. The wall that surrounds the inner portion of it has long ago been levelled, but sufficient remains at either end where it joined the outer defences to show the long casemates for the bowmen to shoot through and the raised stone gallery where they stood. It is just the same kind of building as the stone-work of the sentry’s walk on the roof and of the great old guard-room under it.

But whatever the garden may have been, and no matter how it was guarded, it is a most lovely place. There are whole sections of garden here of various styles — Greek, Italian, French, German, Dutch, British, Spanish, African, Moorish — all the older nationalities. I am going to have a new one laid out for you — a Japanese garden. I have sent to the great gardener of Japan, Minaro, to make the plans for it, and to come over with workmen to carry it out. He is to bring trees and shrubs and flowers and stone-work, and everything that can be required; and you shall superintend the finishing, if not the doing, of it yourself. We have such a fine head of water here, and the climate is, they tell me, usually so lovely that we can do anything in the gardening way. If it should ever turn out that the climate does not suit, we shall put a great high glass roof over it, and *make* a suitable climate.

This garden in front of my room is the old Italian garden. It must have been done with extraordinary taste and care, for there is not a bit of it which is not rarely beautiful. Sir Thomas Browne himself, for all his *Quincunx*, would have been delighted with it, and have found material for another "Garden of Cyrus." It is so big that there are endless "episodes" of garden beauty I think all Italy must have been ransacked in old times for garden stone-work of exceptional beauty; and these treasures have been put together by some master-hand. Even the formal borders of the walks are of old porous stone, which takes the weather-staining so beautifully, and are carved in endless variety. Now that the gardens have been so long neglected or left in abeyance, the green staining has become perfect. Though the stone-work is itself intact, it has all the picturesque effect of the wear and ruin wrought by many centuries. I am having it kept for you just as it is, except that I have had the weeds and undergrowth cleared away so that its beauties might be visible.

But it is not merely the architect work of the garden that is so beautiful, nor is the assembling there of the manifold wealth of floral beauty — there is the beauty that Nature creates by the hand of her servant, Time. You see, Aunt Janet, how the beautiful garden inspires a danger-hardened old tramp like me to high-grade sentiments of poetic fancy! Not only have limestone and sandstone, and even marble, grown green in time, but even the shrubs planted and then neglected have developed new kinds of beauty of their own. In some far-distant time some master-gardener of the Vissarions has tried to realise an idea — that of tiny plants that would grow just a little higher than the flowers, so that the effect of an uneven floral surface would be achieved without any hiding of anything in the garden seen from anywhere. This is only my reading of what has been from the effect of what is! In the long period of neglect the shrubs have outlived the flowers. Nature has been doing her own work all the time in enforcing the survival of the fittest. The shrubs have grown and grown, and have overtopped flower and weed, according to their inherent varieties of stature; to the effect that now you see irregularly scattered through the garden quite a number — for it is a big place — of vegetable products which from a landscape standpoint have something of the general effect of statues without the cramping feeling of detail. Whoever it was that laid out that part of the garden or made the choice of items, must have taken pains to get strange specimens, for all those taller shrubs are in special colours, mostly yellow or white — white cypress, white holly, yellow yew, grey-golden box, silver juniper, variegated maple, spiraea, and numbers of dwarf shrubs whose names I don’t know. I only know that when the moon shines — and this, my dear Aunt

Janet, is the very land of moonlight itself! — they all look ghastly pale. The effect is weird to the last degree, and I am sure that you will enjoy it. For myself, as you know, uncanny things hold no fear. I suppose it is that I have been up against so many different kinds of fears, or, rather, of things which for most people have terrors of their own, that I have come to have a contempt — not an active contempt, you know, but a tolerative contempt — for the whole family of them. And you, too, will enjoy yourself here famously, I know. You'll have to collect all the stories of such matters in our new world and make a new book of facts for the Psychical Research Society. It will be nice to see your own name on a title-page, won't it, Aunt Janet?

From Rupert Sent Leger, *Vissarion*, *to Janet MacKelpie*, *Croom.*

January 30, 1907.

My dear Aunt Janet,

I stopped writing last night — do you know why? Because I wanted to write more! This sounds a paradox, but it is true. The fact is that, as I go on telling you of this delightful place, I keep finding out new beauties myself. Broadly speaking, it *is all* beautiful. In the long view or the little view — as the telescope or the microscope directs — it is all the same. Your eye can turn on nothing that does not entrance you. I was yesterday roaming about the upper part of time Castle, and came across some delightful nooks, which at once I became fond of, and already like them as if I had known them all my life. I felt at first a sense of greediness when I had appropriated to myself several rooms in different places — I who have never in my life had more than one room which I could call my own — and that only for a time! But when I slept on it the feeling changed, and its aspect is now not half bad. It is now under another classification —

under a much more important label — *proprietorship.* If I were writing philosophy, I should here put in a cynical remark:

“Selfishness is an appanage of poverty. It might appear in the stud-book as by ‘Morals’ out of ‘Wants.’”

I have now three bedrooms arranged as my own particular dens. One of the other two was also a choice of Uncle Roger’s. It is at the top of one of the towers to the extreme east, and from it I can catch the first ray of light over the mountains. I slept in it last night, and when I woke, as in my travelling I was accustomed to do, at dawn, I saw from my bed through an open window — a small window, for it is in a fortress tower — the whole great expanse to the east. Not far off, and springing from the summit of a great ruin, where long ago a seed had fallen, rose a great silver-birch, and the half-transparent, drooping branches and hanging clusters of leaf broke the outline of the grey hills beyond, for the hills were, for a wonder, grey instead of blue. There was a mackerel sky, with the clouds dropping on the mountain-tops till you could hardly say which was which. It was a mackerel sky of a very bold and extraordinary kind — not a dish of mackerel, but a world of mackerel! The mountains are certainly most lovely. In this clear air they usually seem close at hand. It was only this morning, with the faint glimpse of the dawn whilst the night clouds were still unpierced by the sunlight, that I seemed to realise their greatness. I have seen the same enlightening effect of aerial perspective a few times before — in Colorado, in Upper India, in Thibet, and in the uplands amongst the Andes.

There is certainly something in looking at things from above which tends to raise one’s own self-esteem. From the height, inequalities simply disappear. This I have often felt on a big scale when ballooning, or, better still, from an aeroplane. Even here from the tower the outlook is somehow quite different from below. One realises the place and all around it, not in detail, but as a whole. I shall certainly sleep up here occasionally, when you have come and we have settled down to our life as it is to be. I shall live in my own room downstairs, where I can have the intimacy of the garden. But I shall appreciate it all the more from now and again losing the sense of intimacy for a while, and surveying it without the sense of one's own self-importance.

I hope you have started on that matter of the servants. For myself, I don't care a button whether or not there are any servants at all; but I know well that you won't come till you have made your arrangements regarding them! Another thing, Aunt Janet. You must not be killed with work here, and it is all so vast . . . Why can't you get some sort of secretary who will write your letters and do all that sort of thing for you? I know you won't have a man secretary; but there are lots of women now who can write shorthand and typewrite. You could doubtless get one in the clan — someone with a desire to better herself. I know you would make her happy here. If she is not too young, all the better; she will have learned to hold her tongue and mind her own business, and not be too inquisitive. That would be a nuisance when we are finding our way about in a new country and trying to reconcile all sorts of opposites in a whole new country with new people, whom at first we shan't understand, and who certainly won't understand us; where every man carries a gun with as little thought of it as he has of buttons! Good-bye for a while.

Your loving

Rupert.

From Rupert Sent Leger, *Vissarion*, *to Janet MacKelpie*, *Croom.*

February 3, 1907.

I am back in my own room again. Already it seems to me that to get here again is like coming home. I have been going about for the last few days amongst the mountaineers and trying to make their acquaintance. It is a tough job; and I can see that there will be nothing but to stick to it. They are in reality the most primitive people I ever met — the most fixed to their own ideas, which belong to centuries back. I can understand now what people were like in England — not in Queen Elizabeth's time, for that was civilized time, but in the time of Coeur-de-Lion, or even earlier — and all the time with the most absolute mastery of weapons of precision. Every man carries a rifle — and knows how to use it, too. I do believe they would rather go without their clothes than their guns if they had to choose between them. They also carry a handjar, which used to be their national weapon. It is a sort of heavy, straight cutlass, and they are so expert with it as well as so strong that it is as facile in the hands of a Blue Mountaineer as is a foil in the hands of a Persian *maître d'armes*. They are so proud and reserved that they make one feel quite small, and an "outsider" as well. I can see quite well that they rather resent my being here at all. It is not personal, for when alone with me they are genial, almost brotherly; but the moment a few of them get together they are like a sort of jury, with me as the criminal before them. It is an odd situation, and quite new to me. I am pretty well accustomed to all sorts of people, from cannibals to Mahatmas, but I'm blessed if I ever struck such a type as this — so proud, so haughty, so reserved, so distant, so absolutely fearless, so honourable, so hospitable. Uncle Roger's head was level when he chose them out as a people to live amongst. Do you know, Aunt Janet, I can't help feeling that they are very much like your own Highlanders — only more so. I'm sure of one thing: that in the end we shall get on capitally together. But it will be a slow job, and will need a lot of patience. I have a feeling in my bones that when they know me better they will be very loyal and very true; and I am not a hair's-breadth afraid of them or anything they shall or might do. That is, of course, if I live long enough for them to have time to know me. Anything may happen with such an indomitable, proud people to whom pride is more than victuals. After all, it only needs one man out of a crowd to have a wrong idea or to make a mistake as to one's motive — and there you are. But it will be all right that way, I am sure. I am come here to stay, as Uncle Roger wished. And stay I shall even if it has to be in a little bed of my own beyond the garden — seven feet odd long, and not too narrow — or else a stone-box of equal proportions in the vaults of St. Sava's Church across the Creek — the old burial-place of the Vissarions and other noble people for a good many centuries back . . .

I have been reading over this letter, dear Aunt Janet, and I am afraid the record is rather an alarming one. But don't you go building up superstitious horrors or fears on it. Honestly, I am only joking about death — a thing to which I have been rather prone for a good many years back. Not in very good taste, I suppose, but certainly very useful when the old man with the black wings goes flying about you day and night in strange places, sometimes visible and at others invisible. But you can always hear wings, especially in the dark, when you cannot see them. *You* know that, Aunt Janet, who come of a race of warriors, and who have special sight behind or through the black curtain.

Honestly, I am in no whit afraid of the Blue Mountaineers, nor have I a doubt of them. I love them already for their splendid qualities, and I am prepared to love them for themselves. I feel, too, that they will love me (and incidentally they are sure to love you). I have a sort of undercurrent of thought that there is something in their minds concerning me — something not painful, but disturbing; something that has a base in the past; something that has hope in it and possible pride, and not a little respect. As yet they can have had no opportunity of forming such impression from seeing me or from any thing I have done. Of course, it may be that, although they are fine, tall, stalwart men, I am still a head and shoulders over the tallest of them that I have yet seen. I catch their eyes looking up at me as though they were measuring me, even when they are keeping away from me, or, rather, keeping me from them at arm's length. I suppose I shall understand what it all means some day. In the meantime there is nothing to do but to go on my own way — which is Uncle Roger's — and wait and be patient and just. I have learned the value of that, any way, in my life amongst strange peoples. Good-night.

Your loving

Rupert.

From Rupert Sent Leger, *Vissarion*, *to Janet MacKelpie*, *Croom.*

February 24, 1907.

My dear Aunt Janet,

I am more than rejoiced to hear that you are coming here so soon. This isolation is, I think, getting on my nerves. I thought for a while last night that I was getting on, but the reaction came all too soon. I was in my room in the east turret, the room on the *corbeille*, and saw here and there men passing silently and swiftly between the trees as though in secret. By-and-by I located their meeting-place, which was in a hollow in the midst of the wood just outside the "natural" garden, as the map or plan of the castle calls it. I stalked that place for all I was worth, and suddenly walked straight into the midst of them. There were perhaps two or three hundred gathered, about the very finest lot of men I ever saw in my life. It was in its way quite an experience, and one not likely to be repeated, for, as I told you, in this country every man carries a rifle, and knows how to use it. I do not think I have seen a single man (or married man either) without his rifle since I came here. I wonder if they take them with them to bed! Well, the instant after I stood amongst them every rifle in the place was aimed straight at me. Don't be alarmed, Aunt Janet; they did not fire at me. If they had I should not be writing to you now. I should be in that little bit of real estate or the stone box, and about as full of lead as I could hold. Ordinarily, I take it, they would have fired on the instant; that is the etiquette here. But this time they — all separately but all together — made a new rule. No one said a word or, so far as I could see, made a movement. Here came in my own experience. I had been more than once in a tight place of something of the same kind, so I simply behaved in the most natural way I could. I felt conscious — it was all in a flash, remember — that if I showed fear or cause for fear, or even acknowledged danger by so much as even holding up my hands, I should have drawn all the fire. They all remained stock-still, as though they had been turned into stone, for several seconds. Then a queer kind of look flashed round them like wind over corn — something like the surprise one shows unconsciously on waking in a strange place. A second after they each dropped the rifle to the hollow of his arm and stood ready for anything. It was all as regular and quick and simultaneous as a salute at St. James's Palace.

Happily I had no arms of any kind with me, so that there could be no complication. I am rather a quick hand myself when there is any shooting to be done. However, there was no trouble here, but the contrary; the Blue Mountaineers — it sounds like a new sort of Bond Street band, doesn't it? — treated me in quite a different way than they did when I first met them. They were amazingly civil, almost deferential. But, all time same, they were more distant than ever, and all the time I was there I could get not a whit closer to them. They seemed in a sort of way to be afraid or in awe of me. No doubt that will soon pass away, and when we know one another better we shall become close friends. They are too fine fellows not to be worth a little waiting for. (That sentence, by the way, is a pretty bad sentence! In old days you would have slippered me for it!) Your journey is all arranged, and I hope you will be comfortable. Rooke will meet you at Liverpool Street and look after everything.

I shan't write again, but when we meet at Fiume I shall begin to tell you all the rest. Till then, good-bye. A good journey to you, and a happy meeting to us both.

Rupert.

Letter from Janet MacKelpie, *Vissarion*, *to Sir Colin MacKelpie*, *United Service Club*, *London*.

February 28, 1907.

Dearest Uncle,

I had a very comfortable journey all across Europe. Rupert wrote to me some time ago to say that when I got to Vissarion I should be an Empress, and he certainly took care that on the way here I should be treated like one. Rooke, who seems a wonderful old man, was in the next compartment to that reserved for me. At Harwich he had everything arranged perfectly, and so right on to Fiume. Everywhere there were attentive officials waiting. I had a carriage all to myself, which I joined at Antwerp — a whole carriage with a suite of rooms, dining-room, drawing-room, bedroom, even bath-room. There was a cook with a kitchen of his own on board, a real chef like a French nobleman in disguise. There were also a waiter and a servant-maid. My own maid Maggie was quite awed at first. We were as far as Cologne before she summoned up courage to order them about. Whenever we stopped Rooke was on the platform with local officials, and kept the door of my carriage like a sentry on duty.

At Fiume, when the train slowed down, I saw Rupert waiting on the platform. He looked magnificent, towering over everybody there like a giant. He is in perfect health, and seemed glad to see me. He took me off at once on an automobile to a quay where an electric launch was waiting. This took us on board a beautiful big steam-yacht, which was waiting with full steam up and — how he got there I don't know — Rooke waiting at the gangway.

I had another suite all to myself. Rupert and I had dinner together — I think the finest dinner I ever sat down to. This was very nice of Rupert, for it was all for me. He himself only ate a piece of steak and drank a glass of water. I went to bed early, for, despite the luxury of the journey, I was very tired.

I awoke in the grey of the morning, and came on deck. We were close to the coast. Rupert was on the bridge with the Captain, and Rooke was acting as pilot. When Rupert saw me, he ran down the ladder and took me up on the bridge. He left me there while he ran down again and brought me up a lovely fur cloak which I had never seen. He put it on me and kissed me. He is the tenderest-hearted boy in the world, as well as the best and bravest! He made me take his arm whilst he pointed out Vissarion, towards which we were steering. It is the most lovely place I ever saw. I won't stop to describe it now, for it will be better that you see it for yourself and enjoy it all fresh as I did.

The Castle is an immense place. You had better ship off, as soon as all is ready here and you can arrange it, the servants whom I engaged; and I am not sure that we shall not want as many more. There has hardly been a mop or broom on the place for centuries, and I doubt if it ever had a thorough good cleaning all over since it was built. And, do you know, Uncle, that it might be well to double that little army of yours that you are arranging for Rupert? Indeed, the boy told me himself that he was going to write to you about it. I think old Lachlan and his wife, Sandy's Mary, had better be in charge of the maids when they come over. A lot of lassies like yon will be iller to keep together than a flock of sheep. So it will be wise to have authority over them, especially as none of them speaks a word of foreign tongues. Rooke — you saw him at the station at Liverpool Street — will, if he be available, go over to bring the whole body here. He has offered to do it if I should wish. And, by the way, I think it will be well, when the time comes for their departure, if not only the lassies, but Lachlan and Sandy's Mary, too, will call him *Mister* Rooke. He is a very important person indeed here. He is, in fact, a sort of Master of the Castle, and though he is very self-suppressing, is a man of rarely fine qualities. Also it will be well to keep authority. When your clansmen come over, he will have charge of them, too. Dear me! I find I have written such a long letter, I must stop and get to work. I shall write again.

Your very affectionate

Janet.

From the Same to the Same.

March 3, 1907.

Dearest Uncle,

All goes well here, and as there is no news, I only write because you are a dear, and I want to thank you for all the trouble you have taken for me — and for Rupert. I think we had better wait awhile before bringing out the servants. Rooke is away on some business for Rupert, and will not be back for some time; Rupert thinks it may be a couple of months. There is no one else that he could send to take charge of the party from home, and I don't like the idea of all those lassies coming out without an escort. Even Lachlan and Sandy's Mary are ignorant of foreign languages and foreign ways. But as soon as Rooke returns we can have them all out. I dare say you will have some of your clansmen ready by then, and I think the poor girls, who may feel a bit strange in a new country like this, where the ways are so different from ours, will feel easier when they know that there are some of their own mankind near them. Perhaps it might be well that those of them who are engaged to each other — I know there are some — should marry before they come out here. It will be more convenient in many ways, and will save lodgment, and, besides, these Blue Mountaineers are very handsome men. Good-night.

Janet.

Sir Colin MacKelpie, *Croom*, *to Janet MacKelpie*, *Vissarion.*

March 9, 1907.

My Dear Janet,

I have duly received both your letters, and am delighted to find you are so well pleased with your new home. It must certainly be a very lovely and unique place, and I am myself longing to see it. I came up here three days ago, and am, as usual, feeling all the better for a breath of my native air. Time goes on, my dear, and I am beginning to feel not so young as I was. Tell Rupert that the men are all fit, and longing to get out to him. They are certainly a fine lot of men. I don't think I ever saw a finer. I have had them drilled and trained as soldiers, and, in addition, have had them taught a lot of trades just as they selected themselves. So he shall have nigh him men who can turn their hands to anything — not, of course, that they all know every trade, but amongst them there is someone who can do whatever may be required. There are blacksmiths, carpenters, farriers, saddle-makers, gardeners, plumbers, cutlers, gunsmiths, so, as they all are farmers by origin and sportsmen by practice, they will make a rare household body of men. They are nearly all first-class shots, and I am having them practise with revolvers. They are being taught fencing and broadsword and ju-jitsu; I have organised them in military form, with their own sergeants and corporals. This morning I had an inspection, and I assure you, my dear, they could give points to the Household troop in matters of drill. I tell you I am proud of my clansmen!

I think you are quite wise about waiting to bring out the lassies, and wiser still about the marrying. I dare say there will be more marrying when they all get settled in a foreign country. I shall be glad of it, for as Rupert is going to settle there, it will be good for him to have round him a little colony of his own people. And it will be good for them, too, for I know he will be good to them — as you will, my dear. The hills are barren here, and life is hard, and each year there is more and more demand for crofts, and sooner or later our people must thin out. And mayhap our little settlement of MacKelpie clan away beyond the frontiers of the Empire may be some service to the nation and the King. But this is a dream! I see that here I am beginning to realise in myself one part of Isaiah's prophecy:

"Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams."

By the way, my dear, talking about dreams, I am sending you out some boxes of books which were in your rooms. They are nearly all on odd subjects that *we* understand — Second Sight, Ghosts, Dreams (that was what brought the matter to my mind just now), superstitions, Vampires, Wehr-Wolves, and all such uncanny folk and things. I looked over some of these books, and found your marks and underlining and comments, so I fancy you will miss them in your new home. You will, I am sure, feel more at ease with such old friends close to you. I have taken the names and sent the list to London, so that when you pay me a visit again you will be at home in all ways. If you come to me altogether, you will be more welcome still — if possible. But I am sure that Rupert, who I know loves you very much, will try to make you so happy that you will not want to leave him. So I will have to come out often to see you both, even at the cost of leaving Croom for so long. Strange, is it not? that now, when, through Roger Melton's more than kind remembrance of me, I am able to go where I will and do what I will, I want more and more to remain at home by my own ingle. I don't think that anyone but you or Rupert could get me away from it. I am working very hard at my little regiment, as I call it. They are simply fine, and will, I am sure, do us credit. The uniforms are all made, and well made, too. There is not a man of them that does not look like an officer. I tell you, Janet, that when we turn out the Vissarion Guard we shall feel proud of them. I dare say that a couple of months will do all that can be done here. I shall come out with them myself. Rupert writes me that he thinks it will be more comfortable to come out direct in a ship of our own. So when I go up to London in a few weeks' time I shall see about chartering a suitable vessel. It will certainly save a lot of trouble to us and anxiety to our people. Would it not be well when I am getting the ship, if I charter one big enough to take out all your lassies, too? It is not as if they were strangers. After all, my dear, soldiers are soldiers and lassies are lassies. But these are all kinsfolk, as well as clansmen and clanswomen, and I, their Chief, shall be there. Let me know your views and wishes in this respect. Mr. Trent, whom I saw before leaving London, asked me to "convey to you his most respectful remembrances" — these were his very words, and here they are. Trent is a nice fellow, and I like him. He has promised to pay me a visit here before the month is up, and I look forward to our both enjoying ourselves.

Good-bye, my dear, and the Lord watch over you and our dear boy.

Your affectionate Uncle,
Colin Alexander MacKelpie.

BOOK III: THE COMING OF THE LADY

Rupert Sent Leger's Journal.

April 3, 1907.

I have waited till now — well into midday — before beginning to set down the details of the strange episode of last night. I have spoken with persons whom I know to be of normal type. I have breakfasted, as usual heartily, and have every reason to consider myself in perfect health and sanity. So that the record following may be regarded as not only true in substance, but exact as to details. I have investigated and reported on too many cases for the Psychical Research Society to be ignorant of the necessity for absolute accuracy in such matters of even the minutest detail.

Yesterday was Tuesday, the second day of April, 1907. I passed a day of interest, with its fair amount of work of varying kinds. Aunt Janet and I lunched together, had a stroll round the gardens after tea — especially examining the site for the new Japanese garden, which we shall call "Janet's Garden." We went in mackintoshes, for the rainy season is in its full, the only sign of its not being a repetition of the Deluge being that breaks in the continuance are beginning. They are short at present but will doubtless enlarge themselves as the season comes towards an end. We dined together at seven. After dinner I had a cigar, and then joined Aunt Janet for an hour in her drawing-room. I left her at half-past ten, when I went to my own room and wrote some letters. At ten minutes past eleven I wound my watch, so I know the time accurately. Having prepared for bed, I drew back the heavy curtain in front of my window, which opens on the marble steps into the Italian garden. I had put out my light before drawing back the curtain, for I wanted to have a look at the scene before turning in. Aunt Janet has always had an old-fashioned idea of the need (or propriety, I hardly know which) of keeping windows closed and curtains drawn. I am gradually getting her to leave my room alone in this respect, but at present the change is in its fitful stage, and of course I must not hurry matters or be too persistent, as it would hurt her feelings. This night was one of those under the old régime. It was a delight to look out, for the scene was perfect of its own kind. The long spell of rain — the ceaseless downpour which had for the time flooded everywhere — had passed, and water in abnormal places rather trickled than ran. We were now beginning to be in the sloppy rather than the deluged stage. There was plenty of light to see by, for the moon had begun to show out fitfully through the masses of flying clouds. The uncertain light made weird shadows with the shrubs and statues in the garden. The long straight walk which leads from the marble steps is strewn with fine sand white from the quartz strand in the nook to the south of the Castle. Tall shrubs of white holly, yew, juniper, cypress, and variegated maple and spiraea, which stood at intervals along the walk and its branches, appeared ghost-like in the fitful moonlight. The many vases and statues and urns, always like phantoms in a half-light, were more than ever weird. Last night the moonlight was unusually effective, and showed not only the gardens down to the defending wall, but the deep gloom of the great forest-trees beyond; and beyond that, again, to where the mountain chain began, the forest running up their silvered slopes flamelike in form, deviated here and there by great crags and the outcropping rocky sinews of the vast mountains.

Whilst I was looking at this lovely prospect, I thought I saw something white flit, like a modified white flash, at odd moments from one to another of the shrubs or statues — anything which would afford cover from observation. At first I was not sure whether I really saw anything or did not. This was in itself a little disturbing to me, for I have been so long trained to minute observation of facts surrounding me, on which often depend not only my own life, but the lives of others, that I have become accustomed to trust my eyes; and anything creating the faintest doubt in this respect is a cause of more or less anxiety to me. Now, however, that my attention was called to myself, I looked more keenly, and in a very short time was satisfied that something was moving — something clad in white. It was natural enough that my thoughts should tend towards something uncanny — the belief that this place is haunted, conveyed in a thousand ways of speech and inference. Aunt Janet's eerie beliefs, fortified by her books on occult subjects — and of late, in our isolation from the rest of the world, the subject of daily conversations — helped to this end. No wonder, then, that, fully awake and with senses all on edge, I waited for some further manifestation from this ghostly visitor — as in my mind I took it to be. It must surely be a ghost or spiritual manifestation of some kind which moved in this silent way. In order to see and hear better, I softly moved back the folding grille, opened the French window, and stepped out, barefooted and pyjama-clad as I was, on the marble terrace. How cold the wet marble was! How heavy smelled the rain-laden garden! It was as though the night and the damp, and even the moonlight, were drawing the aroma from all the flowers that blossomed. The whole night seemed to exhale heavy, half-intoxicating odours! I stood at the head of the marble steps, and all immediately before me was ghostly in the extreme — the white marble terrace and steps, the white walks of quartz-sand glistening under the fitful moonlight; the shrubs of white or pale green or yellow, — all looking dim and ghostly in the glamorous light; the white statues and vases. And amongst them, still flitting noiselessly, that mysterious elusive figure which I could not say was based on fact or imagination. I held my breath, listening intently for every sound; but sound there was none, save those of the night and its denizens. Owls hooted in the forest; bats, taking advantage of the cessation of the rain, flitted about silently, like shadows in the air. But there was no more sign of moving ghost or phantom, or whatever I had seen might have been — if, indeed, there had been anything except imagination.

So, after waiting awhile, I returned to my room, closed the window, drew the grille across again, and dragged the heavy curtain before the opening; then, having extinguished my candles, went to bed in the dark. In a few minutes I must have been asleep.

"What was that?" I almost heard the words of my own thought as I sat up in bed wide awake. To memory rather than present hearing the disturbing sound had seemed like the faint tapping at the window. For some seconds I listened, mechanically but intently, with bated breath and that quick beating of the heart which in a timorous person speaks for fear, and for expectation in another. In the stillness the sound came again — this time a very, very faint but unmistakable tapping at the glass door.

I jumped up, drew back the curtain, and for a moment stood appalled.

There, outside on the balcony, in the now brilliant moonlight, stood a woman, wrapped in white grave-clothes saturated with water, which dripped on the marble floor, making a pool which trickled slowly down the wet steps. Attitude and dress and circumstance all conveyed the idea that, though she moved and spoke, she was not quick, but dead. She was young and very beautiful, but pale, like the grey pallor of death. Through the still white of her face, which made her look as cold as the wet marble she stood on, her dark eyes seemed to gleam with a strange but enticing lustre. Even in the unsearching moonlight, which is after all rather deceptive than illuminative, I could not but notice one rare quality of her eyes. Each had some quality of refraction which made it look as though it contained a star. At every movement she made, the stars exhibited new beauties, of more rare and radiant force. She looked at me imploringly as the heavy curtain rolled back, and in eloquent gestures implored me to admit her. Instinctively I obeyed; I rolled back the steel grille, and threw open the French window. I noticed that she shivered and trembled as the glass door fell open. Indeed, she seemed so overcome with cold as to seem almost unable to move. In the sense of her helplessness all idea of the strangeness of the situation entirely disappeared. It was not as if my first idea of death taken from her cerements was negatived. It was simply that I did not think of it at all; I was content to accept things as they were — she was a woman, and in some dreadful trouble; that was enough.

I am thus particular about my own emotions, as I may have to refer to them again in matters of comprehension or comparison. The whole thing is so vastly strange and abnormal that the least thing may afterwards give some guiding light or clue to something otherwise not understandable. I have always found that in recondite matters first impressions are of more real value than later conclusions. We humans place far too little reliance on instinct as against reason; and yet instinct is the great gift of Nature to all animals for their protection and the fulfilment of their functions generally.

When I stepped out on the balcony, not thinking of my costume, I found that the woman was benumbed and hardly able to move. Even when I asked her to enter, and supplemented my words with gestures in case she should not understand my language, she stood stock-still, only rocking slightly to and fro as though she had just strength enough left to balance herself on her feet. I was afraid, from the condition in which she was, that she might drop down dead at any moment. So I took her by the hand to lead her in. But she seemed too weak to even make the attempt. When I pulled her slightly forward, thinking to help her, she tottered, and would have fallen had I not caught her in my arms. Then, half lifting her, I moved her forwards. Her feet, relieved of her weight, now seemed able to make the necessary effort; and so, I almost carrying her, we moved into the room. She was at the very end of her strength; I had to lift her over the sill. In obedience to her motion, I closed the French window and bolted it. I supposed the warmth of the room — though cool, it was warmer than the damp air without — affected her quickly, for on the instant she seemed to begin to recover herself. In a few seconds, as though she had reacquired her strength, she herself pulled the heavy curtain across the window. This left us in darkness, through which I heard her say in English:

“Light. Get a light!”

I found matches, and at once lit a candle. As the wick flared, she moved over to the door of the room, and tried if the lock and bolt were fastened. Satisfied as to this, she moved towards me, her wet shroud leaving a trail of moisture on the green carpet. By this time the wax of the candle had melted sufficiently to let me see her clearly. She was shaking and quivering as though in an ague; she drew the wet shroud around her piteously. Instinctively I spoke:

“Can I do anything for you?”

She answered, still in English, and in a voice of thrilling, almost piercing sweetness, which seemed somehow to go straight to my heart, and affected me strangely: “Give me warmth.”

I hurried to the fireplace. It was empty; there was no fire laid. I turned to her, and said:

“Wait just a few minutes here. I shall call someone, and get help — and fire.”

Her voice seemed to ring with intensity as she answered without a pause:

“No, no! Rather would I be” — here she hesitated for an instant, but as she caught sight of her cerements went on hurriedly— “as I am. I trust you — not others; and you must not betray my trust.” Almost instantly she fell into a frightful fit of shivering, drawing again her death-clothes close to her, so piteously that it wrung my heart. I suppose I am a practical man. At any rate, I am accustomed to action. I took from its place beside my bed a thick Jaeger dressing-gown of dark brown — it was, of course, of extra length — and held it out to her as I said:

“Put that on. It is the only warm thing here which would be suitable. Stay; you must remove that wet — wet” — I stumbled about for a word that would not be offensive— “that frock — dress — costume — whatever it is.” I pointed to where, in the corner of the room, stood a chintz-covered folding-screen which fences in my cold sponge bath, which is laid ready for me overnight, as I am an early riser.

She bowed gravely, and taking the dressing-gown in a long, white, finely-shaped hand, bore it behind the screen. There was a slight rustle, and then a hollow “flop” as the wet garment fell on the floor; more rustling and rubbing, and a minute later she emerged wrapped from head to foot in the long Jaeger garment, which trailed on the floor behind her, though she was a tall woman. She was still shivering painfully, however. I took a flask of brandy and a glass from a cupboard, and offered her some; but with a motion of her hand she refused it, though she moaned grievously.

"Oh, I am so cold — so cold!" Her teeth were chattering. I was pained at her sad condition, and said despairingly, for I was at my wits' end to know what to do:

"Tell me anything that I can do to help you, and I will do it. I may not call help; there is no fire — nothing to make it with; you will not take some brandy. What on earth can I do to give you warmth?"

Her answer certainly surprised me when it came, though it was practical enough — so practical that I should not have dared to say it. She looked me straight in the face for a few seconds before speaking. Then, with an air of girlish innocence which disarmed suspicion and convinced me at once of her simple faith, she said in a voice that at once thrilled me and evoked all my pity:

"Let me rest for a while, and cover me up with rugs. That may give me warmth. I am dying of cold. And I have a deadly fear upon me — a deadly fear. Sit by me, and let me hold your hand. You are big and strong, and you look brave. It will reassure me. I am not myself a coward, but to-night fear has got me by the throat. I can hardly breathe. Do let me stay till I am warm. If you only knew what I have gone through, and have to go through still, I am sure you would pity me and help me."

To say that I was astonished would be a mild description of my feelings. I was not shocked. The life which I have led was not one which makes for prudery. To travel in strange places amongst strange peoples with strange views of their own is to have odd experiences and peculiar adventures now and again; a man without human passions is not the type necessary for an adventurous life, such as I myself have had. But even a man of passions and experiences can, when he respects a woman, be shocked — even prudish — where his own opinion of her is concerned. Such must bring to her guarding any generosity which he has, and any self-restraint also. Even should she place herself in a doubtful position, her honour calls to his honour. This is a call which may not be — *must* not be — unanswered. Even passion must pause for at least a while at sound of such a trumpet-call.

This woman I did respect — much respect. Her youth and beauty; her manifest ignorance of evil; her superb disdain of convention, which could only come through hereditary dignity; her terrible fear and suffering — for there must be more in her unhappy condition than meets the eye — would all demand respect, even if one did not hasten to yield it. Nevertheless, I thought it necessary to enter a protest against her embarrassing suggestion. I certainly did feel a fool when making it, also a cad. I can truly say it was made only for her good, and out of the best of me, such as I am. I felt impossibly awkward; and stuttered and stumbled before I spoke:

“But surely — the convenances! Your being here alone at night! Mrs. Grundy — convention — the—”

She interrupted me with an incomparable dignity — a dignity which had the effect of shutting me up like a clasp-knife and making me feel a decided inferior — and a poor show at that. There was such a gracious simplicity and honesty in it, too, such self-respecting knowledge of herself and her position, that I could be neither angry nor hurt. I could only feel ashamed of myself, and of my own littleness of mind and morals. She seemed in her icy coldness — now spiritual as well as bodily — like an incarnate figure of Pride as she answered:

“What are convenances or conventions to me! If you only knew where I have come from — the existence (if it can be called so) which I have had — the loneliness — the horror! And besides, it is for me to *make* conventions, not to yield my personal freedom of action to them. Even as I am — even here and in this garb — I am above convention. Convenances do not trouble me or hamper me. That, at least, I have won by what I have gone through, even if it had never come to me through any other way. Let me stay.” She said the last words, in spite of all her pride, appealingly. But still, there was a note of high pride in all this — in all she said and did, in her attitude and movement, in the tones of her voice, in the loftiness of her carriage and the steadfast look of her open, starlit eyes. Altogether, there was something so rarely lofty in herself and all that clad her that, face to face with it and with her, my feeble attempt at moral precaution seemed puny, ridiculous, and out of place. Without a word in the doing, I took from an old chiffonier chest an armful of blankets, several of which I threw over her as she lay, for in the meantime, having replaced the coverlet, she had lain down at length on the bed. I took a chair, and sat down beside her. When she stretched out her hand from beneath the pile of wraps, I took it in mine, saying:

“Get warm and rest. Sleep if you can. You need not fear; I shall guard you with my life.”

She looked at me gratefully, her starry eyes taking a new light more full of illumination than was afforded by the wax candle, which was shaded from her by my body . . . She was horribly cold, and her teeth chattered so violently that I feared lest she should have incurred some dangerous evil from her wetting and the cold that followed it. I felt, however, so awkward that I could find no words to express my fears; moreover, I hardly dared say anything at all regarding herself after the haughty way in which she had received my well-meant protest. Manifestly I was but to her as a sort of refuge and provider of heat, altogether impersonal, and not to be regarded in any degree as an individual. In these humiliating circumstances what could I do but sit quiet — and wait developments?

Little by little the fierce chattering of her teeth began to abate as the warmth of her surroundings stole through her. I also felt, even in this strangely awakening position, the influence of the quiet; and sleep began to steal over me. Several times I tried to fend it off, but, as I could not make any overt movement without alarming my strange and beautiful companion, I had to yield myself to drowsiness. I was still in such an overwhelming stupor of surprise that I could not even think freely. There was nothing for me but to control myself and wait. Before I could well fix my thoughts I was asleep.

I was recalled to consciousness by hearing, even through the pall of sleep that bound me, the crowing of a cock in some of the out-offices of the castle. At the same instant the figure, lying deathly still but for the gentle heaving of her bosom, began to struggle wildly. The sound had won through the gates of her sleep also. With a swift, gliding motion she slipped from the bed to the floor, saying in a fierce whisper as she pulled herself up to her full height:

“Let me out! I must go! I must go!”

By this time I was fully awake, and the whole position of things came to me in an instant which I shall never — can never — forget: the dim light of the candle, now nearly burned down to the socket, all the dimmer from the fact that the first grey gleam of morning was stealing in round the edges of the heavy curtain; the tall, slim figure in the brown dressing-gown whose over-length trailed on the floor, the black hair showing glossy in the light, and increasing by contrast the marble whiteness of the face, in which the black eyes sent through their stars fiery gleams. She appeared quite in a frenzy of haste; her eagerness was simply irresistible.

I was so stupefied with amazement, as well as with sleep, that I did not attempt to stop her, but began instinctively to help her by furthering her wishes. As she ran behind the screen, and, as far as sound could inform me, — began frantically to disrobe herself of the warm dressing-gown and to don again the ice-cold wet shroud, I pulled back the curtain from the window, and drew the bolt of the glass door. As I did so she was already behind me, shivering. As I threw open the door she glided out with a swift silent movement, but trembling in an agonised way. As she passed me, she murmured in a low voice, which was almost lost in the chattering of her teeth:

"Oh, thank you — thank you a thousand times! But I must go. I *must*! I *must*! I shall come again, and try to show my gratitude. Do not condemn me as ungrateful — till then." And she was gone.

I watched her pass the length of the white path, flitting from shrub to shrub or statue as she had come. In the cold grey light of the undeveloped dawn she seemed even more ghostly than she had done in the black shadow of the night.

When she disappeared from sight in the shadow of the wood, I stood on the terrace for a long time watching, in case I should be afforded another glimpse of her, for there was now no doubt in my mind that she had for me some strange attraction. I felt even then that the look in those glorious starry eyes would be with me always so long as I might live. There was some fascination which went deeper than my eyes or my flesh or my heart — down deep into the very depths of my soul. My mind was all in a whirl, so that I could hardly think coherently. It all was like a dream; the reality seemed far away. It was not possible to doubt that the phantom figure which had been so close to me during the dark hours of the night was actual flesh and blood. Yet she was so cold, so cold! Altogether I could not fix my mind to either proposition: that it was a living woman who had held my hand, or a dead body reanimated for the time or the occasion in some strange manner.

The difficulty was too great for me to make up my mind upon it, even had I wanted to. But, in any case, I did not want to. This would, no doubt, come in time. But till then I wished to dream on, as anyone does in a dream which can still be blissful though there be pauses of pain, or ghastliness, or doubt, or terror.

So I closed the window and drew the curtain again, feeling for the first time the cold in which I had stood on the wet marble floor of the terrace when my bare feet began to get warm on the soft carpet. To get rid of the chill feeling I got into the bed on which *she* had lain, and as the warmth restored me tried to think coherently. For a short while I was going over the facts of the night — or what seemed as facts to my remembrance. But as I continued to think, the possibilities of any result seemed to get less, and I found myself vainly trying to reconcile with the logic of life the grim episode of the night. The effort proved to be too much for such concentration as was left to me; moreover, interrupted sleep was clamant, and would not be denied. What I dreamt of — if I dreamt at all — I know not. I only know that I was ready for waking when the time came. It came with a violent knocking at my door. I sprang from bed, fully awake in a second, drew the bolt, and slipped back to bed. With a hurried "May I come in?" Aunt Janet entered. She seemed relieved when she saw me, and gave without my asking an explanation of her perturbation:

"Oh, laddie, I hae been so uneasy aboot ye all the nicht. I hae had dreams an' veesions an' a' sorts o' uncanny fancies. I fear that—" She was by now drawing back the curtain, and as her eyes took in the marks of wet all over the floor the current of her thoughts changed:

"Why, laddie, whativer hae ye been doin' wi' yer baith? Oh, the mess ye hae made! 'Tis sinful to gie sic trouble an' waste . . . " And so she went on. I was glad to hear the tirade, which was only what a good housewife, outraged in her sentiments of order, would have made. I listened in patience — with pleasure when I thought of what she would have thought (and said) had she known the real facts. I was well pleased to have got off so easily.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL — Continued.

April 10, 1907.

For some days after what I call "the episode" I was in a strange condition of mind. I did not take anyone — not even Aunt Janet — into confidence. Even she dear, and open-hearted and liberal-minded as she is, might not have understood well enough to be just and tolerant; and I did not care to hear any adverse comment on my strange visitor. Somehow I could not bear the thought of anyone finding fault with her or in her, though, strangely enough, I was eternally defending her to myself; for, despite my wishes, embarrassing thoughts *would* come again and again, and again in all sorts and variants of queries difficult to answer. I found myself defending her, sometimes as a woman hard pressed by spiritual fear and physical suffering, sometimes as not being amenable to laws that govern the Living. Indeed, I could not make up my mind whether I looked on her as a living human being or as one with some strange existence in another world, and having only a chance foothold in our own. In such doubt imagination began to work, and thoughts of evil, of danger, of doubt, even of fear, began to crowd on me with such persistence and in such varied forms that I found my instinct of reticence growing into a settled purpose. The value of this instinctive precaution was promptly shown by Aunt Janet's state of mind, with consequent revelation of it. She became full of gloomy prognostications and what I thought were morbid fears. For the first time in my life I discovered that Aunt Janet had nerves! I had long had a secret belief that she was gifted, to some degree at any rate, with Second Sight, which quality, or whatever it is, skilled in the powers if not the lore of superstition, manages to keep at stretch not only the mind of its immediate pathic, but of others relevant to it. Perhaps this natural quality had received a fresh impetus from the arrival of some cases of her books sent on by Sir Colin. She appeared to read and reread these works, which were chiefly on occult subjects, day and night, except when she was imparting to me choice excerpts of the most baleful and fearsome kind. Indeed, before a week was over I found myself to be an expert in the history of the cult, as well as in its manifestations, which latter I had been versed in for a good many years.

The result of all this was that it set me brooding. Such, at least, I gathered was the fact when Aunt Janet took me to task for it. She always speaks out according to her convictions, so that her thinking I brooded was to me a proof that I did; and after a personal examination I came — reluctantly — to the conclusion that she was right, so far, at any rate, as my outer conduct was concerned. The state of mind I was in, however, kept me from making any acknowledgment of it — the real cause of my keeping so much to myself and of being so *distrait*. And so I went on, torturing myself as before with introspective questioning; and she, with her mind set on my actions, and endeavouring to find a cause for them, continued and expounded her beliefs and fears.

Her nightly chats with me when we were alone after dinner — for I had come to avoid her questioning at other times — kept my imagination at high pressure. Despite myself, I could not but find new cause for concern in the perennial founts of her superstition. I had thought, years ago, that I had then sounded the depths of this branch of psychicism; but this new phase of thought, founded on the really deep hold which the existence of my beautiful visitor and her sad and dreadful circumstances had taken upon me, brought me a new concern in the matter of self-importance. I came to think that I must reconstruct my self-values, and begin a fresh understanding of ethical beliefs. Do what I would, my mind would keep turning on the uncanny subjects brought before it. I began to apply them one by one to my own late experience, and unconsciously to try to fit them in turn to the present case.

The effect of this brooding was that I was, despite my own will, struck by the similarity of circumstances bearing on my visitor, and the conditions apportioned by tradition and superstition to such strange survivals from earlier ages as these partial existences which are rather Undead than Living — still walking the earth, though claimed by the world of the Dead. Amongst them are the Vampire, or the Wehr-Wolf. To this class also might belong in a measure the

Doppelgänger — one of whose dual existences commonly belongs to the actual world around it. So, too, the denizens of the world of Astralism. In any of these named worlds there is a material presence — which must be created, if only for a single or periodic purpose. It matters not whether a material presence already created can be receptive of a disembodied soul, or a soul unattached can have a body built up for it or around it; or, again, whether the body of a dead person can be made seeming quick through some diabolic influence manifested in the present, or an inheritance or result of some baleful use of malefic power in the past. The result is the same in each case, though the ways be widely different: a soul and a body which are not in unity but brought together for strange purposes through stranger means and by powers still more strange.

Through much thought and a process of exclusions the eerie form which seemed to be most in correspondence with my adventure, and most suitable to my fascinating visitor, appeared to be the Vampire. Doppelgänger, Astral creations, and all such-like, did not comply with the conditions of my night experience. The Wehr-Wolf is but a variant of the Vampire, and so needed not to be classed or examined at all. Then it was that, thus focussed, the Lady of the Shroud (for so I came to hold her in my mind) began to assume a new force. Aunt Janet's library afforded me clues which I followed with avidity. In my secret heart I hated the quest, and did not wish to go on with it. But in this I was not my own master. Do what I would — brush away doubts never so often, new doubts and imaginings came in their stead. The circumstance almost repeated the parable of the Seven Devils who took the place of the exorcised one. Doubts I could stand. Imaginings I could stand. But doubts and imaginings together made a force so fell that I was driven to accept any reading of the mystery which might presumably afford a foothold for satisfying thought. And so I came to accept tentatively the Vampire theory — accept it, at least, so far as to examine it as judicially as was given me to do. As the days wore on, so the conviction grew. The more I read on the subject, the more directly the evidences pointed towards this view. The more I thought, the more obstinate became the conviction. I ransacked Aunt Janet's volumes again and again to find anything to the contrary; but in vain. Again, no matter how obstinate were my convictions at any given time, unsettlement came with fresh thinking over the argument, so that I was kept in a harassing state of uncertainty.

Briefly, the evidence in favour of accord between the facts of the case and the Vampire theory were:

Her coming was at night — the time the Vampire is according to the theory, free to move at will.

She wore her shroud — a necessity of coming fresh from grave or tomb; for there is nothing occult about clothing which is not subject to astral or other influences.

She had to be helped into my room — in strict accordance with what one sceptical critic of occultism has called "the Vampire etiquette."

She made violent haste in getting away at cock-crow.

She seemed preternaturally cold; her sleep was almost abnormal in intensity, and yet the sound of the cock-crowing came through it.

These things showed her to be subject to *some* laws, though not in exact accord within those which govern human beings. Under the stress of such circumstances as she must have gone through, her vitality seemed more than human — the quality of vitality which could outlive ordinary burial. Again, such purpose as she had shown in donning, under stress of some compelling direction, her ice-cold wet shroud, and, wrapt in it, going out again into the night, was hardly normal for a woman.

But if so, and if she was indeed a Vampire, might not whatever it may be that holds such beings in thrall be by some means or other exorcised? To find the means must be my next task. I am actually pining to see her again. Never before have I been stirred to my depths by anyone. Come it from Heaven or Hell, from the Earth or the Grave, it does not matter; I shall make it my task to win her back to life and peace. If she be indeed a Vampire, the task may be hard and long; if she be not so, and if it be merely that circumstances have so gathered round her as to produce that impression, the task may be simpler and the result more sweet. No, not more sweet; for what can be more sweet than to restore the lost or seemingly lost soul of the woman you love! There, the truth is out at last! I suppose that I have fallen in love with her. If so, it is too late for me to fight against it. I can only wait with what patience I can till I see her again. But to that end I can do nothing. I know absolutely nothing about her — not even her name. Patience!

RUPERT'S JOURNAL — Continued.

April 16, 1907.

The only relief I have had from the haunting anxiety regarding the Lady of the Shroud has been in the troubled state of my adopted country. There has evidently been something up which I have not been allowed to know. The mountaineers are troubled and restless; are wandering about, singly and in parties, and holding meetings in strange places. This is what I gather used to be in old days when intrigues were on foot with Turks, Greeks, Austrians, Italians, Russians. This concerns me vitally, for my mind has long been made up to share the fortunes of the Land of the Blue Mountains. For good or ill I mean to stay here: *J'y suis, j'y reste*. I share henceforth the lot of the Blue Mountaineers; and not Turkey, nor Greece, nor Austria, nor Italy, nor Russia — no, not France nor Germany either; not man nor God nor Devil shall drive me from my purpose. With these patriots I throw in my lot! My only difficulty seemed at first to be with the men themselves. They are so proud that at the beginning I feared they would not even accord me the honour of being one of them! However, things always move on somehow, no matter what difficulties there be at the beginning. Never mind! When one looks back at an accomplished fact the beginning is not to be seen — and if it were it would not matter. It is not of any account, anyhow.

I heard that there was going to be a great meeting near here yesterday afternoon, and I attended it. I think it was a success. If such is any proof, I felt elated as well as satisfied when I came away. Aunt Janet's Second Sight on the subject was comforting, though grim, and in a measure disconcerting. When I was saying good-night she asked me to bend down my head. As I did so, she laid her hands on it and passed them all over it. I heard her say to herself:

"Strange! There's nothing there; yet I could have sworn I saw it!" I asked her to explain, but she would not. For once she was a little obstinate, and refused point blank to even talk of the subject. She was not worried nor unhappy; so I had no cause for concern. I said nothing, but I shall wait and see. Most mysteries become plain or disappear altogether in time. But about the meeting — lest I forget!

When I joined the mountaineers who had assembled, I really think they were glad to see me; though some of them seemed adverse, and others did not seem over well satisfied. However, absolute unity is very seldom to be found. Indeed, it is almost impossible; and in a free community is not altogether to be desired. When it is apparent, the gathering lacks that sense of individual feeling which makes for the real consensus of opinion — which is the real unity of purpose. The meeting was at first, therefore, a little cold and distant. But presently it began to thaw, and after some fiery harangues I was asked to speak. Happily, I had begun to learn the Balkan language as soon as ever Uncle Roger's wishes had been made known to me, and as I have some facility of tongues and a great deal of experience, I soon began to know something of it. Indeed, when I had been here a few weeks, with opportunity of speaking daily with the people themselves, and learned to understand the intonations and vocal inflexions, I felt quite easy in speaking it. I understood every word which had up to then been spoken at the meeting, and when I spoke myself I felt that they understood. That is an experience which every speaker has in a certain way and up to a certain point. He knows by some kind of instinct if his hearers are with him; if they respond, they must certainly have understood. Last night this was marked. I felt it every instant I was talking and when I came to realise that the men were in strict accord with my general views, I took them into confidence with regard to my own personal purpose. It was the beginning of a mutual trust; so for peroration I told them that I had come to the conclusion that what they wanted most for their own protection and the security and consolidation of their nation was arms — arms of the very latest pattern. Here they interrupted me with wild cheers, which so strung me up that I went farther than I intended, and made a daring venture. "Ay," I repeated, "the security and consolidation of your country — of *our* country, for I have come to live amongst you. Here is my home whilst I live. I am with you heart and soul. I shall live with you, fight shoulder to shoulder with you, and, if need be, shall die with you!" Here the shouting was terrific, and the younger men raised their guns to fire a salute in Blue Mountain fashion. But on the instant the Vladika held up his hands and motioned them to desist. In the immediate silence he spoke, sharply at first, but later ascending to a high pitch of single-minded, lofty eloquence. His words rang in my ears long after the meeting was over and other thoughts had come between them and the present.

"Silence!" he thundered. "Make no echoes in the forest or through the hills at this dire time of stress and threatened danger to our land. Bethink ye of this meeting, held here and in secret, in order that no whisper of it may be heard afar. Have ye all, brave men of the Blue Mountains, come hither through the forest like shadows that some of you, thoughtless, may enlighten your enemies as to our secret purpose? The thunder of your guns would doubtless sound well in the ears of those who wish us ill and try to work us wrong. Fellow-countrymen, know ye not that the Turk is awake once more for our harming? The Bureau of Spies has risen from the torpor which came on it when the purpose against our Teuta roused our mountains to such anger that the frontiers blazed with passion, and were swept with fire and sword. Moreover, there is a traitor somewhere in the land, or else incautious carelessness has served the same base purpose. Something of our needs — our doing, whose secret we have tried to hide, has gone out. The myrmidons of the Turk are close on our borders, and it may be that some of them have passed our guards and are amidst us unknown. So it behoves us doubly to be discreet. Believe me that I share with you, my brothers, our love for the gallant Englishman who has come amongst us to share our sorrows and ambitions — and I trust it may be our joys. We are all united in the wish to do him honour — though not in the way by which danger might be carried on the wings of love. My brothers, our newest brother comes to us from the Great Nation which amongst the nations has been our only friend, and which has ere now helped us in our direst need — that mighty Britain whose hand has ever been raised in the cause of freedom. We of the Blue Mountains know her best as she stands with sword in hand face to face with our foes. And this, her son and now our brother, brings further to our need the hand of a giant and the heart of a lion. Later on, when danger does not ring us round, when silence is no longer our outer guard; we shall bid him welcome in true fashion of our land. But till then he will believe — for he is great-hearted — that our love and thanks and welcome are not to be measured by sound. When the time comes, then shall be sound in his honour — not of rifles alone, but bells and cannon and the mighty voice of a free people shouting as one. But now we must be wise and silent, for the Turk is once again at our gates. Alas! the cause of his former coming may not be, for she whose beauty and nobility and whose place in our nation and in our hearts tempted him to fraud and violence is not with us to share even our anxiety."

Here his voice broke, and there arose from all a deep wailing sound, which rose and rose till the woods around us seemed broken by a mighty and long-sustained sob. The orator saw that his purpose was accomplished, and with a short sentence finished his harangue: "But the need of our nation still remains!" Then, with an eloquent gesture to me to proceed, he merged in the crowd and disappeared.

How could I even attempt to follow such a speaker with any hope of success? I simply told them what I had already done in the way of help, saying:

"As you needed arms, I have got them. My agent sends me word through the code between us that he has procured for me — for us — fifty thousand of the newest-pattern rifles, the French Ingis-Malbron, which has surpassed all others, and sufficient ammunition to last for a year of war. The first section is in hand, and will soon be ready for consignment. There are other war materials, too, which, when they arrive, will enable every man and woman — even the children — of our land to take a part in its defence should such be needed. My brothers, I am with you in all things, for good or ill!"

It made me very proud to hear the mighty shout which arose. I had felt exalted before, but now this personal development almost unmanned me. I was glad of the long-sustained applause to recover my self-control.

I was quite satisfied that the meeting did not want to hear any other speaker, for they began to melt away without any formal notification having been given. I doubt if there will be another meeting soon again. The weather has begun to break, and we are in for another spell of rain. It is disagreeable, of course; but it has its own charm. It was during a spell of wet weather that the Lady of the Shroud came to me. Perhaps the rain may bring her again. I hope so, with all my soul.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL — Continued.

April 23, 1907.

The rain has continued for four whole days and nights, and the low-lying ground is like a quagmire in places. In the sunlight the whole mountains glisten with running streams and falling water. I feel a strange kind of elation, but from no visible cause. Aunt Janet rather queered it by telling me, as she said good-night, to be very careful of myself, as she had seen in a dream last night a figure in a shroud. I fear she was not pleased that I did not take it with all the seriousness that she did. I would not wound her for the world if I could help it, but the idea of a shroud gets too near the bone to be safe, and I had to fend her off at all hazards. So when I doubted if the Fates regarded the visionary shroud as of necessity appertaining to me, she said, in a way that was, for her, almost sharp:

"Take care, laddie. 'Tis ill jesting wi' the powers o' time Unknown."

Perhaps it was that her talk put the subject in my mind. The woman needed no such aid; she was always there; but when I locked myself into my room that night, I half expected to find her in the room. I was not sleepy, so I took a book of Aunt Janet's and began to read. The title was "On the Powers and Qualities of Disembodied Spirits." "Your grammar," said I to the author, "is hardly attractive, but I may learn something which might apply to her. I shall read your book." Before settling down to it, however, I thought I would have a look at the garden. Since the night of the visit the garden seemed to have a new attractiveness for me: a night seldom passed without my having a last look at it before turning in. So I drew the great curtain and looked out.

The scene was beautiful, but almost entirely desolate. All was ghastly in the raw, hard gleams of moonlight coming fitfully through the masses of flying cloud. The wind was rising, and the air was damp and cold. I looked round the room instinctively, and noticed that the fire was laid ready for lighting, and that there were small-cut logs of wood piled beside the hearth. Ever since that night I have had a fire laid ready. I was tempted to light it, but as I never have a fire unless I sleep in the open, I hesitated to begin. I went back to the window, and, opening the catch, stepped out on the terrace. As I looked down the white walk and let my eyes range over the expanse of the garden, where everything glistened as the moonlight caught the wet, I half expected to see some white figure flitting amongst the shrubs and statues. The whole scene of the former visit came back to me so vividly that I could hardly believe that any time had passed since then. It was the same scene, and again late in the evening. Life in Vissarion was primitive, and early hours prevailed — though not so late as on that night.

As I looked I thought I caught a glimpse of something white far away. It was only a ray of moonlight coming through the rugged edge of a cloud. But all the same it set me in a strange state of perturbation. Somehow I seemed to lose sight of my own identity. It was as though I was hypnotised by the situation or by memory, or perhaps by some occult force. Without thinking of what I was doing, or being conscious of any reason for it, I crossed the room and set light to the fire. Then I blew out the candle and came to the window again. I never thought it might be a foolish thing to do — to stand at a window with a light behind me in this country, where every man carries a gun with him always. I was in my evening clothes, too, with my breast well marked by a white shirt. I opened the window and stepped out on the terrace. There I stood for many minutes, thinking. All the time my eyes kept ranging over the garden. Once I thought I saw a white figure moving, but it was not followed up, so, becoming conscious that it was again beginning to rain, I stepped back into the room, shut the window, and drew the curtain. Then I realised the comforting appearance of the fire, and went over and stood before it.

Hark! Once more there was a gentle tapping at the window. I rushed over to it and drew the curtain.

There, out on the rain-beaten terrace, stood the white shrouded figure, more desolate-appearing than ever. Ghastly pale she looked, as before, but her eyes had an eager look which was new. I took it that she was attracted by the fire, which was by now well ablaze, and was throwing up jets of flame as the dry logs crackled. The leaping flames threw fitful light across the room, and every gleam threw the white-clad figure into prominence, showing the gleam of the black eyes, and fixing the stars that lay in them.

Without a word I threw open the window, and, taking the white hand extended to me, drew into the room the Lady of the Shroud.

As she entered and felt the warmth of the blazing fire, a glad look spread over her face. She made a movement as if to run to it. But she drew back an instant after, looking round with instinctive caution. She closed the window and bolted it, touched the lever which spread the grille across the opening, and pulled close the curtain behind it. Then she went swiftly to the door and tried if it was locked. Satisfied as to this, she came quickly over to the fire, and, kneeling before it, stretched out her numbed hands to the blaze. Almost on the instant her wet shroud began to steam. I stood wondering. The precautions of secrecy in the midst of her suffering — for that she did suffer was only too painfully manifest — must have presupposed some danger. Then and there my mind was made up that there should no harm assail her that I by any means could fend off. Still, the present must be attended to; pneumonia and other ills stalked behind such a chill as must infallibly come on her unless precautions were taken. I took again the dressing-gown which she had worn before and handed it to her, motioning as I did so towards the screen which had made a dressing-room for her on the former occasion. To my surprise she hesitated. I waited. She waited, too, and then laid down the dressing-gown on the edge of the stone fender. So I spoke:

"Won't you change as you did before? Your — your frock can then be dried. Do! It will be so much safer for you to be dry clad when you resume your own dress."

"How can I whilst you are here?"

Her words made me stare, so different were they from her acts of the other visit. I simply bowed — speech on such a subject would be at least inadequate — and walked over to the window. Passing behind the curtain, I opened the window. Before stepping out on to the terrace, I looked into the room and said:

"Take your own time. There is no hurry. I dare say you will find there all you may want. I shall remain on the terrace until you summon me." With that I went out on the terrace, drawing close the glass door behind me.

I stood looking out on the dreary scene for what seemed a very short time, my mind in a whirl. There came a rustle from within, and I saw a dark brown figure steal round the edge of the curtain. A white hand was raised, and beckoned me to come in. I entered, bolting the window behind me. She had passed across the room, and was again kneeling before the fire with her hands outstretched. The shroud was laid in partially opened folds on one side of the hearth, and was steaming heavily. I brought over some cushions and pillows, and made a little pile of them beside her.

"Sit there," I said, "and rest quietly in the heat." It may have been the effect of the glowing heat, but there was a rich colour in her face as she looked at me with shining eyes. Without a word, but with a courteous little bow, she sat down at once. I put a thick rug across her shoulders, and sat down myself on a stool a couple of feet away.

For fully five or six minutes we sat in silence. At last, turning her head towards me she said in a sweet, low voice:

"I had intended coming earlier on purpose to thank you for your very sweet and gracious courtesy to me, but circumstances were such that I could not leave my — my" — she hesitated before saying— "my abode. I am not free, as you and others are, to do what I will. My existence is sadly cold and stern, and full of horrors that appal. But I *do* thank you. For myself I am not sorry for the delay, for every hour shows me more clearly how good and understanding and sympathetic you have been to me. I only hope that some day you may realise how kind you have been, and how much I appreciate it."

"I am only too glad to be of any service," I said, feebly I felt, as I held out my hand. She did not seem to see it. Her eyes were now on the fire, and a warm blush dyed forehead and cheek and neck. The reproof was so gentle that no one could have been offended. It was evident that she was something coy and reticent, and would not allow me to come at present more close to her, even to the touching of her hand. But that her heart was not in the denial was also evident in the glance from her glorious dark starry eyes. These glances — veritable lightning flashes coming through her pronounced reserve — finished entirely any wavering there might be in my own purpose. I was aware now to the full that my heart was quite subjugated. I knew that I was in love — veritably so much in love as to feel that without this woman, be she what she might, by my side my future must be absolutely barren.

It was presently apparent that she did not mean to stay as long on this occasion as on the last. When the castle clock struck midnight she suddenly sprang to her feet with a bound, saying:

"I must go! There is midnight!" I rose at once, the intensity of her speech having instantly obliterated the sleep which, under the influence of rest and warmth, was creeping upon me. Once more she was in a frenzy of haste, so I hurried towards the window, but as I looked back saw her, despite her haste, still standing. I motioned towards the screen, and slipping behind the curtain, opened the window and went out on the terrace. As I was disappearing behind the curtain I saw her with the tail of my eye lifting the shroud, now dry, from the hearth.

She was out through the window in an incredibly short time, now clothed once more in that dreadful wrapping. As she sped past me barefooted on the wet, chilly marble which made her shudder, she whispered:

"Thank you again. You *are* good to me. You can understand."

Once again I stood on the terrace, saw her melt like a shadow down the steps, and disappear behind the nearest shrub. Thence she flitted away from point to point with exceeding haste. The moonlight had now disappeared behind heavy banks of cloud, so there was little light to see by. I could just distinguish a pale gleam here and there as she wended her secret way.

For a long time I stood there alone thinking, as I watched the course she had taken, and wondering where might be her ultimate destination. As she had spoken of her "abode," I knew there was some definitive objective of her flight.

It was no use wondering. I was so entirely ignorant of her surroundings that I had not even a starting-place for speculation. So I went in, leaving the window open. It seemed that this being so made one barrier the less between us. I gathered the cushions and rugs from before the fire, which was no longer leaping, but burning with a steady glow, and put them back in their places. Aunt Janet might come in the morning, as she had done before, and I did not wish to set her thinking. She is much too clever a person to have treading on the heels of a mystery — especially one in which my own affections are engaged. I wonder what she would have said had she seen me kiss the cushion on which my beautiful guest's head had rested?

When I was in bed, and in the dark save for the fading glow of the fire, my thoughts became fixed that whether she came from Earth or Heaven or Hell, my lovely visitor was already more to me than aught else in the world. This time she had, on going, said no word of returning. I had been so much taken up with her presence, and so upset by her abrupt departure, that I had omitted to ask her. And so I am driven, as before, to accept the chance of her returning — a chance which I fear I am or may be unable to control.

Surely enough Aunt Janet did come in the morning, early. I was still asleep when she knocked at my door. With that purely physical subconsciousness which comes with habit I must have realised the cause of the sound, for I woke fully conscious of the fact that Aunt Janet had knocked and was waiting to come in. I jumped from bed, and back again when I had unlocked the door. When Aunt Janet came in she noticed the cold of the room.

"Save us, laddie, but ye'll get your death o' cold in this room." Then, as she looked round and noticed the ashes of the extinct fire in the grate:

"Eh, but ye're no that daft after a'; ye've had the sense to light yer fire. Glad I am that we had the fire laid and a wheen o' dry logs ready to yer hand." She evidently felt the cold air coming from the window, for she went over and drew the curtain. When she saw the open window, she raised her hands in a sort of dismay, which to me, knowing how little base for concern could be within her knowledge, was comic. Hurriedly she shut the window, and then, coming close over to my bed, said:

"Yon has been a fearsome nicht again, laddie, for yer poor auld aunty."

"Dreaming again, Aunt Janet?" I asked — rather flippantly as it seemed to me. She shook her head:

"Not so, Rupert, unless it be that the Lord gies us in dreams what we in our spiritual darkness think are veesions." I roused up at this. When Aunt Janet calls me Rupert, as she always used to do in my dear mother's time, things are serious with her. As I was back in childhood now, recalled by her word, I thought the best thing I could do to cheer her would be to bring her back there too — if I could. So I patted the edge of the bed as I used to do when I was a wee kiddie and wanted her to comfort me, and said:

"Sit down, Aunt Janet, and tell me." She yielded at once, and the look of the happy old days grew over her face as though there had come a gleam of sunshine. She sat down, and I put out my hands as I used to do, and took her hand between them. There was a tear in her eye as she raised my hand and kissed it as in old times. But for the infinite pathos of it, it would have been comic:

Aunt Janet, old and grey-haired, but still retaining her girlish slimness of figure, petite, dainty as a Dresden figure, her face lined with the care of years, but softened and ennobled by the unselfishness of those years, holding up my big hand, which would outweigh her whole arm; sitting dainty as a pretty old fairy beside a recumbent giant — for my bulk never seems so great as when I am near this real little good fairy of my life — seven feet beside four feet seven.

So she began as of old, as though she were about to soothe a frightened child with a fairy tale:

"'Twas a veesion, I think, though a dream it may hae been. But whichever or whatever it was, it concerned my little boy, who has grown to be a big giant, so much that I woke all of a tremble. Laddie dear, I thought that I saw ye being married." This gave me an opening, though a small one, for comforting her, so I took it at once:

"Why, dear, there isn't anything to alarm you in that, is there? It was only the other day when you spoke to me about the need of my getting married, if it was only that you might have children of your boy playing around your knees as their father used to do when he was a helpless wee child himself."

"That is so, laddie," she answered gravely. "But your weddin' was none so merry as I fain would see. True, you seemed to lo'e her wi' all yer hairt. Yer eyes shone that bright that ye might ha' set her afire, for all her black locks and her winsome face. But, laddie, that was not all — no, not though her black een, that had the licht o' all the stars o' nicht in them, shone in yours as though a hairt o' love an' passion, too, dwelt in them. I saw ye join hands, an' heard a strange voice that talked stranger still, but I saw none ither. Your eyes an' her eyes, an' your hand an' hers, were all I saw. For all else was dim, and the darkness was close around ye twa. And when the benison was spoken — I knew that by the voices that sang, and by the gladness of her een, as well as by the pride and glory of yours — the licht began to glow a wee more, an' I could see yer bride. She was in a veil o' wondrous fine lace. And there were orange-flowers in her hair, though there were twigs, too, and there was a crown o' flowers on head wi' a golden band round it. And the heathen candles that stood on the table wi' the Book had some strange effect, for the reflex o' it hung in the air o'er her head like the shadow of a crown. There was a gold ring on her finger and a silver one on yours." Here she paused and trembled, so that, hoping to dispel her fears, I said, as like as I could to the way I used to when I was a child:

"Go on, Aunt Janet."

She did not seem to recognise consciously the likeness between past and present; but the effect was there, for she went on more like her old self, though there was a prophetic gravity in her voice, more marked than I had ever heard from her:

"All this I've told ye was well; but, oh, laddie, there was a dreadful lack o' livin' joy such as I should expect from the woman whom my boy had chosen for his wife — and at the marriage coupling, too! And no wonder, when all is said; for though the marriage veil o' love was fine, an' the garland o' flowers was fresh-gathered, underneath them a' was nane ither than a ghastly shroud. As I looked in my veesion — or maybe dream — I expectit to see the worms crawl round the flagstane at her feet. If 'twas not Death, laddie dear, that stood by ye, it was the shadow o' Death that made the darkness round ye, that neither the light o' candles nor the smoke o' heathen incense could pierce. Oh, laddie, laddie, wae is me that I hae seen sic a veesion — waking or sleeping, it matters not! I was sair distressed — so sair that I woke wi' a shriek on my lips and bathed in cold sweat. I would hae come doon to ye to see if you were hearty or no — or even to listen at your door for any sound o' yer being quick, but that I feared to alarm ye till morn should come. I've counted the hours and the minutes since midnight, when I saw the veesion, till I came hither just the now."

“Quite right, Aunt Janet,” I said, “and I thank you for your kind thought for me in the matter, now and always.” Then I went on, for I wanted to take precautions against the possibility of her discovery of my secret. I could not bear to think that she might run my precious secret to earth in any well-meant piece of bungling. That would be to me disaster unbearable. She might frighten away altogether my beautiful visitor, even whose name or origin I did not know, and I might never see her again:

“You must never do that, Aunt Janet. You and I are too good friends to have sense of distrust or annoyance come between us — which would surely happen if I had to keep thinking that you or anyone else might be watching me.”

RUPERT’S JOURNAL — Continued.

April 27, 1907.

After a spell of loneliness which has seemed endless I have something to write. When the void in my heart was becoming the receptacle for many devils of suspicion and distrust I set myself a task which might, I thought, keep my thoughts in part, at any rate, occupied — to explore minutely the neighbourhood round the Castle. This might, I hoped, serve as an anodyne to my pain of loneliness, which grew more acute as the days, the hours, wore on, even if it should not ultimately afford me some clue to the whereabouts of the woman whom I had now grown to love so madly.

My exploration soon took a systematic form, as I intended that it should be exhaustive. I would take every day a separate line of advance from the Castle, beginning at the south and working round by the east to the north. The first day only took me to the edge of the creek, which I crossed in a boat, and landed at the base of the cliff opposite. I found the cliffs alone worth a visit. Here and there were openings to caves which I made up my mind to explore later. I managed to climb up the cliff at a spot less beetling than the rest, and continued my journey. It was, though very beautiful, not a specially interesting place. I explored that spoke of the wheel of which Vissarion was the hub, and got back just in time for dinner.

The next day I took a course slightly more to the eastward. I had no difficulty in keeping a straight path, for, once I had rowed across the creek, the old church of St. Sava rose before me in stately gloom. This was the spot where many generations of the noblest of the Land of the Blue Mountains had from time immemorial been laid to rest, amongst them the Vissarions. Again, I found the opposite cliffs pierced here and there with caves, some with wide openings, — others the openings of which were partly above and partly below water. I could, however, find no means of climbing the cliff at this part, and had to make a long detour, following up the line of the creek till further on I found a piece of beach from which ascent was possible. Here I ascended, and found that I was on a line between the Castle and the southern side of the mountains. I saw the church of St. Sava away to my right, and not far from the edge of the cliff. I made my way to it at once, for as yet I had never been near it. Hitherto my excursions had been limited to the Castle and its many gardens and surroundings. It was of a style with which I was not familiar — with four wings to the points of the compass. The great doorway, set in a magnificent frontage of carved stone of manifestly ancient date, faced west, so that, when one entered, he went east. To my surprise — for somehow I expected the contrary — I found the door open. Not wide open, but what is called ajar — manifestly not locked or barred, but not sufficiently open for one to look in. I entered, and after passing through a wide vestibule, more like a section of a corridor than an ostensible entrance, made my way through a spacious doorway into the body of the church. The church itself was almost circular, the openings of the four naves being spacious enough to give the appearance of the interior as a whole, being a huge cross. It was strangely dim, for the window openings were small and high-set, and were, moreover, filled with green or blue glass, each window having a colour to itself. The glass was very old, being of the thirteenth or fourteenth century. Such appointments as there were — for it had a general air of desolation — were of great beauty and richness, — especially so to be in a place — even a church — where the door lay open, and no one was to be seen. It was strangely silent even for an old church on a lonesome headland. There reigned a dismal solemnity which seemed to chill me, accustomed as I have been to strange and weird places. It seemed abandoned, though it had not that air of having been neglected which is so often to be noticed in old churches. There was none of the everlasting accumulation of dust which prevails in places of higher cultivation and larger and more strenuous work.

In the church itself or its appending chambers I could find no clue or suggestion which could guide me in any way in my search for the Lady of the Shroud. Monuments there were in profusion — statues, tablets, and all the customary memorials of the dead. The families and dates represented were simply bewildering. Often the name of Vissarion was given, and the inscription which it held I read through carefully, looking to find some enlightenment of any kind. But all in vain: there was nothing to see in the church itself. So I determined to visit the crypt. I had no lantern or candle with me, so had to go back to the Castle to secure one.

It was strange, coming in from the sunlight, here overwhelming to one so recently accustomed to northern skies, to note the slender gleam of the lantern which I carried, and which I had lit inside the door. At my first entry to the church my mind had been so much taken up with the strangeness of the place, together with the intensity of wish for some sort of clue, that I had really no opportunity of examining detail. But now detail became necessary, as I had to find the entrance to the crypt. My puny light could not dissipate the semi-Cimmerian gloom of the vast edifice; I had to throw the feeble gleam into one after another of the dark corners.

At last I found, behind the great screen, a narrow stone staircase which seemed to wind down into the rock. It was not in any way secret, but being in the narrow space behind the great screen, was not visible except when close to it. I knew I was now close to my objective, and began to descend. Accustomed though I have been to all sorts of mysteries and dangers, I felt awed and almost overwhelmed by a sense of loneliness and desolation as I descended the ancient winding steps. These were many in number, roughly hewn of old in the solid rock on which the church was built.

I met a fresh surprise in finding that the door of the crypt was open. After all, this was different from the church-door being open; for in many places it is a custom to allow all comers at all times to find rest and comfort in the sacred place. But I did expect that at least the final resting-place of the historic dead would be held safe against casual intrusion. Even I, on a quest which was very near my heart, paused with an almost overwhelming sense of decorum before passing through that open door. The crypt was a huge place, strangely lofty for a vault. From its formation, however, I soon came to the conclusion that it was originally a natural cavern altered to its present purpose by the hand of man. I could hear somewhere near the sound of running water, but I could not locate it. Now and again at irregular intervals there was a prolonged booming, which could only come from a wave breaking in a confined place. The recollection then came to me of the proximity of the church to the top of the beetling cliff, and of the half-sunk cavern entrances which pierced it.

With the gleam of my lamp to guide me, I went through and round the whole place. There were many massive tombs, mostly rough-hewn from great slabs or blocks of stone. Some of them were marble, and the cutting of all was ancient. So large and heavy were some of them that it was a wonder to me how they could ever have been brought to this place, to which the only entrance was seemingly the narrow, tortuous stairway by which I had come. At last I saw near one end of the crypt a great chain hanging. Turning the light upward, I found that it depended from a ring set over a wide opening, evidently made artificially. It must have been through this opening that the great sarcophagi had been lowered.

Directly underneath the hanging chain, which did not come closer to the ground than some eight or ten feet, was a huge tomb in the shape of a rectangular coffer or sarcophagus. It was open, save for a huge sheet of thick glass which rested above it on two thick balks of dark oak, cut to exceeding smoothness, which lay across it, one at either end. On the far side from where I stood each of these was joined to another oak plank, also cut smooth, which sloped gently to the rocky floor. Should it be necessary to open the tomb, the glass could be made to slide along the supports and descend by the sloping planks.

Naturally curious to know what might be within such a strange receptacle, I raised the lantern, depressing its lens so that the light might fall within.

Then I started back with a cry, the lantern slipping from my nerveless hand and falling with a ringing sound on the great sheet of thick glass.

Within, pillowed on soft cushions, and covered with a mantle woven of white natural fleece sprigged with tiny sprays of pine wrought in gold, lay the body of a woman — none other than my beautiful visitor. She was marble white, and her long black eyelashes lay on her white cheeks as though she slept.

Without a word or a sound, save the sounds made by my hurrying feet on the stone flooring, I fled up the steep steps, and through the dim expanse of the church, out into the bright sunlight. I found that I had mechanically raised the fallen lamp, and had taken it with me in my flight.

My feet naturally turned towards home. It was all instinctive. The new horror had — for the time, at any rate — drowned my mind in its mystery, deeper than the deepest depths of thought or imagination.

BOOK IV: UNDER THE FLAGSTAFF

RUPERT'S JOURNAL — Continued.

May 1, 1907.

For some days after the last adventure I was in truth in a half-dazed condition, unable to think sensibly, hardly coherently. Indeed, it was as much as I could do to preserve something of my habitual appearance and manner. However, my first test happily came soon, and when I was once through it I reacquired sufficient self-confidence to go through with my purpose. Gradually the original phase of stupefaction passed, and I was able to look the situation in the face. I knew the worst now, at any rate; and when the lowest point has been reached things must begin to mend. Still, I was wofully sensitive regarding anything which might affect my Lady of the Shroud, or even my opinion of her. I even began to dread Aunt Janet's Second-Sight visions or dreams. These had a fatal habit of coming so near to fact that they always made for a danger of discovery. I had to realise now that the Lady of the Shroud might indeed be a Vampire — one of that horrid race that survives death and carries on a life-in-death existence eternally and only for evil. Indeed, I began to *expect* that Aunt Janet would ere long have some prophetic insight to the matter. She had been so wonderfully correct in her prophetic surmises with regard to both the visits to my room that it was hardly possible that she could fail to take cognizance of this last development.

But my dread was not justified; at any rate, I had no reason to suspect that by any force or exercise of her occult gift she might cause me concern by the discovery of my secret. Only once did I feel that actual danger in that respect was close to me. That was when she came early one morning and rapped at my door. When I called out, “Who is that? What is it?” she said in an agitated way:

“Thank God, laddie, you are all right! Go to sleep again.”

Later on, when we met at breakfast, she explained that she had had a nightmare in the grey of the morning. She thought she had seen me in the crypt of a great church close beside a stone coffin; and, knowing that such was an ominous subject to dream about, came as soon as she dared to see if I was all right. Her mind was evidently set on death and burial, for she went on:

“By the way, Rupert, I am told that the great church on time top of the cliff across the creek is St. Sava’s, where the great people of the country used to be buried. I want you to take me there some day. We shall go over it, and look at the tombs and monuments together. I really think I should be afraid to go alone, but it will be all right if you are with me.” This was getting really dangerous, so I turned it aside:

“Really, Aunt Janet, I’m afraid it won’t do. If you go off to weird old churches, and fill yourself up with a fresh supply of horrors, I don’t know what will happen. You’ll be dreaming dreadful things about me every night and neither you nor I shall get any sleep.” It went to my heart to oppose her in any wish; and also this kind of chaffy opposition might pain her. But I had no alternative; the matter was too serious to be allowed to proceed. Should Aunt Janet go to the church, she would surely want to visit the crypt. Should she do so, and there notice the glass-covered tomb — as she could not help doing — the Lord only knew what would happen. She had already Second-Sighted a woman being married to me, and before I myself knew that I had such a hope. What might she not reveal did she know where the woman came from? It may have been that her power of Second Sight had to rest on some basis of knowledge or belief, and that her vision was but some intuitive perception of my own subjective thought. But whatever it was it should be stopped — at all hazards.

This whole episode set me thinking introspectively, and led me gradually but imperatively to self-analysis — not of powers, but of motives. I found myself before long examining myself as to what were my real intentions. I thought at first that this intellectual process was an exercise of pure reason; but soon discarded this as inadequate — even impossible. Reason is a cold manifestation; this feeling which swayed and dominated me is none other than passion, which is quick, hot, and insistent.

As for myself, the self-analysis could lead to but one result — the expression to myself of the reality and definiteness of an already-formed though unconscious intention. I wished to do the woman good — to serve her in some way — to secure her some benefit by any means, no matter how difficult, which might be within my power. I knew that I loved her — loved her most truly and fervently; there was no need for self-analysis to tell me that. And, moreover, no self-analysis, or any other mental process that I knew of, could help my one doubt: whether she was an ordinary woman (or an extraordinary woman, for the matter of that) in some sore and terrible straits; or else one who lay under some dreadful condition, only partially alive, and not mistress of herself or her acts. Whichever her condition might be, there was in my own feeling a superfluity of affection for her. The self-analysis taught me one thing, at any rate — that I had for her, to start with, an infinite pity which had softened towards her my whole being, and had already mastered merely selfish desire. Out of it I began to find excuses for her every act. In the doing so I knew now, though perhaps I did not at the time the process was going on, that my view in its true inwardness was of her as a living woman — the woman I loved.

In the forming of our ideas there are different methods of work, as though the analogy with material life holds good. In the building of a house, for instance, there are many persons employed; men of different trades and occupations — architect, builder, masons, carpenters, plumbers, and a host of others — and all these with the officials of each guild or trade. So in the world of thought and feelings: knowledge and understanding come through various agents, each competent to its task.

How far pity reacted with love I knew not; I only knew that whatever her state might be, were she living or dead, I could find in my heart no blame for the Lady of the Shroud. It could not be that she was dead in the real conventional way; for, after all, the Dead do not walk the earth in corporal substance, even if there be spirits which take the corporal form. This woman was of actual form and weight. How could I doubt that, at all events — I, who had held her in my arms? Might it not be that she was not quite dead, and that it had been given to me to restore her to life again? Ah! that would be, indeed, a privilege well worth the giving my life to accomplish. That such a thing may be is possible. Surely the old myths were not absolute inventions; they must have had a basis somewhere in fact. May not the world-old story of Orpheus and Eurydice have been based on some deep-lying principle or power of human nature? There is not one of us but has wished at some time to bring back the dead. Ay, and who has not felt that in himself or herself was power in the deep love for our dead to make them quick again, did we but know the secret of how it was to be done?

For myself, I have seen such mysteries that I am open to conviction regarding things not yet explained. These have been, of course, amongst savages or those old-world people who have brought unchecked traditions and beliefs — ay, and powers too — down the ages from the dim days when the world was young; when forces were elemental, and Nature's handiwork was experimental rather than completed. Some of these wonders may have been older still than the accepted period of our own period of creation. May we not have to-day other wonders, different only in method, but not more susceptible of belief? Obi-ism and Fantee-ism have been exercised in my own presence, and their results proved by the evidence of my own eyes and other senses. So, too, have stranger rites, with the same object and the same success, in the far Pacific Islands. So, too, in India and China, in Thibet and in the Golden Chersonese. On all and each of these occasions there was, on my own part, enough belief to set in motion the powers of understanding; and there were no moral scruples to stand in the way of realization. Those whose lives are so spent that they achieve the reputation of not fearing man or God or devil are not deterred in their doing or thwarted from a set purpose by things which might deter others not so equipped for adventure. Whatever may be before them — pleasant or painful, bitter or sweet, arduous or facile, enjoyable or terrible, humorous or full of awe and horror — they must accept, taking them in the onward course as a good athlete takes hurdles in his stride. And there must be no hesitating, no looking back. If the explorer or the adventurer has scruples, he had better give up that special branch of effort and come himself to a more level walk in life. Neither must there be regrets. There is no need for such; savage life has this advantage: it begets a certain toleration not to be found in conventional existence.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL — Continued.

May 2, 1907.

I had heard long ago that Second Sight is a terrible gift, even to its possessor. I am now inclined not only to believe, but to understand it. Aunt Janet has made such a practice of it of late that I go in constant dread of discovery of my secret. She seems to parallel me all the time, whatever I may do. It is like a sort of dual existence to her; for she is her dear old self all the time, and yet some other person with a sort of intellectual kit of telescope and notebook, which are eternally used on me. I know they are *for* me, too — for what she considers my good. But all the same it makes an embarrassment. Happily Second Sight cannot speak as clearly as it sees, or, rather, as it understands. For the translation of the vague beliefs which it inculcates is both nebulous and uncertain — a sort of Delphic oracle which always says things which no one can make out at the time, but which can be afterwards read in any one of several ways. This is all right, for in my case it is a kind of safety; but, then, Aunt Janet is a very clever woman, and some time she herself may be able to understand. Then she may begin to put two and two together. When she does that, it will not be long before she knows more than I do of the facts of the whole affair. And her reading of them and of the Lady of the Shroud, round whom they circle, may not be the same as mine. Well, that will be all right too. Aunt Janet loves me — God knows I have good reason to know that all through these years — and whatever view she may take, her acts will be all I could wish. But I shall come in for a good lot of scolding, I am sure.

By the way, I ought to think of that; if Aunt Janet scolds me, it is a pretty good proof that I ought to be scolded. I wonder if I dare tell her all. No! It is too strange. She is only a woman, after all: and if she knew I loved . . . I wish I knew her name, and thought — as I might myself do, only that I resist it — that she is not alive at all. Well, what she would either think or do beats me. I suppose she would want to slipper me as she used to do when I was a wee kiddie — in a different way, of course.

May 3, 1907.

I really could not go on seriously last night. The idea of Aunt Janet giving me a licking as in the dear old days made me laugh so much that nothing in the world seemed serious then. Oh, Aunt Janet is all right whatever comes. That I am sure of, so I needn't worry over it. A good thing too; there will be plenty to worry about without that. I shall not check her telling me of her visions, however; I may learn something from them.

For the last four-and-twenty hours I have, whilst awake, been looking over Aunt Janet's books, of which I brought a wheen down here. Gee whizz! No wonder the old dear is superstitious, when she is filled up to the back teeth with that sort of stuff! There may be some truth in some of those yarns; those who wrote them may believe in them, or some of them, at all events. But as to coherence or logic, or any sort of reasonable or instructive deduction, they might as well have been written by so many hens! These occult book-makers seem to gather only a lot of bare, bald facts, which they put down in the most uninteresting way possible. They go by quantity only. One story of the kind, well examined and with logical comments, would be more convincing to a third party than a whole hecatomb of them.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL — Continued.

May 4, 1907.

There is evidently something up in the country. The mountaineers are more uneasy than they have been as yet. There is constant going to and fro amongst them, mostly at night and in the grey of the morning. I spend many hours in my room in the eastern tower, from which I can watch the woods, and gather from signs the passing to and fro. But with all this activity no one has said to me a word on the subject. It is undoubtedly a disappointment to me. I had hoped that the mountaineers had come to trust me; that gathering at which they wanted to fire their guns for me gave me strong hopes. But now it is apparent that they do not trust me in full — as yet, at all events. Well, I must not complain. It is all only right and just. As yet I have done nothing to prove to them the love and devotion that I feel to the country. I know that such individuals as I have met trust me, and I believe like me. But the trust of a nation is different. That has to be won and tested; he who would win it must justify, and in a way that only troublous times can allow. No nation will — can — give full meed of honour to a stranger in times of peace. Why should it? I must not forget that I am here a stranger in the land, and that to the great mass of people even my name is unknown. Perhaps they will know me better when Rooke comes back with that store of arms and ammunition that he has bought, and the little warship he has got from South America. When they see that I hand over the whole lot to the nation without a string on them, they may begin to believe. In the meantime all I can do is to wait. It will all come right in time, I have no doubt. And if it doesn't come right, well, we can only die once!

Is that so? What about my Lady of the Shroud? I must not think of that or of her in this gallery. Love and war are separate, and may not mix — cannot mix, if it comes to that. I must be wise in the matter; and if I have got the hump in any degree whatever, must not show it.

But one thing is certain: something is up, and it must be the Turks. From what the Vladika said at that meeting they have some intention of an attack on the Blue Mountains. If that be so, we must be ready; and perhaps I can help there. The forces must be organised; we must have some method of communication. In this country, where are neither roads nor railways nor telegraphs, we must establish a signalling system of some sort. *That* I can begin at once. I can make a code, or adapt one that I have used elsewhere already. I shall rig up a semaphore on the top of the Castle which can be seen for an enormous distance around. I shall train a number of men to be facile in signalling. And then, should need come, I may be able to show the mountaineers that I am fit to live in their hearts . . .

And all this work may prove an anodyne to pain of another kind. It will help, at any rate, to keep my mind occupied whilst I am waiting for another visit from my Lady of the Shroud.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL — Continued.

May 18, 1907.

The two weeks that have passed have been busy, and may, as time goes on, prove eventful. I really think they have placed me in a different position with the Blue Mountaineers — certainly so far as those in this part of the country are concerned. They are no longer suspicious of me — which is much; though they have not yet received me into their confidence. I suppose this will come in time, but I must not try to hustle them. Already they are willing, so far as I can see, to use me to their own ends. They accepted the signalling idea very readily, and are quite willing to drill as much as I like. This can be (and I think is, in its way) a pleasure to them. They are born soldiers, every man of them; and practice together is only a realization of their own wishes and a further development of their powers. I think I can understand the trend of their thoughts, and what ideas of public policy lie behind them. In all that we have attempted together as yet they are themselves in absolute power. It rests with them to carry out any ideas I may suggest, so they do not fear any assumption of power or governance on my part. Thus, so long as they keep secret from me both their ideas of high policy and their immediate intentions, I am powerless to do them ill, and I *may* be of service should occasion arise. Well, all told, this is much. Already they accept me as an individual, not merely one of the mass. I am pretty sure that they are satisfied of my personal *bona fides*. It is policy and not mistrust that hedges me in. Well, policy is a matter of time. They are a splendid people, but if they knew a little more than they do they would understand that the wisest of all policies is trust — when it can be given. I must hold myself in check, and never be betrayed into a harsh thought towards them. Poor souls! with a thousand years behind them of Turkish aggression, strenuously attempted by both force and fraud, no wonder they are suspicious. Likewise every other nation with whom they have ever come in contact — except one, my own — has deceived or betrayed them. Anyhow, they are fine soldiers, and before long we shall have an army that cannot be ignored. If I can get so that they trust me, I shall ask Sir Colin to come out here. He would be a splendid head for their army. His great military knowledge and tactical skill would come in well. It makes me glow to think of what an army he would turn out of this splendid material, and one especially adapted for the style of fighting which would be necessary in this country.

If a mere amateur like myself, who has only had experience of organising the wildest kind of savages, has been able to advance or compact their individual style of fighting into systematic effort, a great soldier like MacKelpie will bring them to perfection as a fighting machine. Our Highlanders, when they come out, will foregather with them, as mountaineers always do with each other. Then we shall have a force which can hold its own against any odds. I only hope that Rooke will be returning soon. I want to see those Ingis-Malbron rifles either safely stored in the Castle or, what is better, divided up amongst the mountaineers — a thing which will be done at the very earliest moment that I can accomplish it. I have a conviction that when these men have received their arms and ammunition from me they will understand me better, and not keep any secrets from me.

All this fortnight when I was not drilling or going about amongst the mountaineers, and teaching them the code which I have now got perfected, I was exploring the side of the mountain nearest to here. I could not bear to be still. It is torture to me to be idle in my present condition of mind regarding my Lady of the Shroud . . . Strange I do not mind mentioning the word to myself now. I used to at first; but that bitterness has all gone away.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL — Continued.

May 19, 1907.

I was so restless early this morning that before daylight I was out exploring on the mountain-side. By chance I came across a secret place just as the day was breaking. Indeed, it was by the change of light as the first sun-rays seemed to fall down the mountain-side that my attention was called to an opening shown by a light behind it. It was, indeed, a secret place — so secret that I thought at first I should keep it to myself. In such a place as this either to hide in or to be able to prevent anyone else hiding in might on occasion be an asset of safety.

When, however, I saw indications rather than traces that someone had already used it to camp in, I changed my mind, and thought that whenever I should get an opportunity I would tell the Vladika of it, as he is a man on whose discretion I can rely. If we ever have a war here or any sort of invasion, it is just such places that may be dangerous. Even in my own case it is much too near the Castle to be neglected.

The indications were meagre — only where a fire had been on a little shelf of rock; and it was not possible, through the results of burning vegetation or scorched grass, to tell how long before the fire had been alight. I could only guess. Perhaps the mountaineers might be able to tell or even to guess better than I could. But I am not so sure of this. I am a mountaineer myself, and with larger and more varied experience than any of them. For myself, though I could not be certain, I came to the conclusion that whoever had used the place had done so not many days before. It could not have been quite recently; but it may not have been very long ago. Whoever had used it had covered up his tracks well. Even the ashes had been carefully removed, and the place where they had lain was cleaned or swept in some way, so that there was no trace on the spot. I applied some of my West African experience, and looked on the rough bark of the trees to leeward, to where the agitated air, however directed, must have come, unless it was wanted to call attention to the place by the scattered wood-ashes, however fine. I found traces of it, but they were faint. There had not been rain for several days; so the dust must have been blown there since the rain had fallen, for it was still dry.

The place was a tiny gorge, with but one entrance, which was hidden behind a barren spur of rock — just a sort of long fissure, jagged and curving, in the rock, like a fault in the stratification. I could just struggle through it with considerable effort, holding my breath here and there, so as to reduce my depth of chest. Within it was tree-clad, and full of possibilities of concealment.

As I came away I marked well its direction and approaches, noting any guiding mark which might aid in finding it by day or night. I explored every foot of ground around it — in front, on each side, and above. But from nowhere could I see an indication of its existence. It was a veritable secret chamber wrought by the hand of Nature itself. I did not return home till I was familiar with every detail near and around it. This new knowledge added distinctly to my sense of security.

Later in the day I tried to find the Vladika or any mountaineer of importance, for I thought that such a hiding-place which had been used so recently might be dangerous, and especially at a time when, as I had learned at the meeting where they did *not* fire their guns that there may have been spies about or a traitor in the land.

Even before I came to my own room to-night I had fully made up my mind to go out early in the morning and find some proper person to whom to impart the information, so that a watch might be kept on the place. It is now getting on for midnight, and when I have had my usual last look at the garden I shall turn in. Aunt Janet was uneasy all day, and especially so this evening. I think it must have been my absence at the usual breakfast-hour which got on her nerves; and that unsatisfied mental or psychical irritation increased as the day wore on.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL — Continued.

May 20, 1907.

The clock on the mantelpiece in my room, which chimes on the notes of the clock at St. James's Palace, was striking midnight when I opened the glass door on the terrace. I had put out my lights before I drew the curtain, as I wished to see the full effect of the moonlight. Now that the rainy season is over, the moon is quite as beautiful as it was in the wet, and a great deal more comfortable. I was in evening dress, with a smoking-jacket in lieu of a coat, and I felt the air mild and mellow on the warm side, as I stood on the terrace.

But even in that bright moonlight the further corners of the great garden were full of mysterious shadows. I peered into them as well as I could — and my eyes are pretty good naturally, and are well trained. There was not the least movement. The air was as still as death, the foliage as still as though wrought in stone.

I looked for quite a long time in the hope of seeing something of my Lady. The quarters chimed several times, but I stood on unheeding. At last I thought I saw far off in the very corner of the old defending wall a flicker of white. It was but momentary, and could hardly have accounted in itself for the way my heart beat. I controlled myself, and stood as though I, too, were a graven image. I was rewarded by seeing presently another gleam of white. And then an unspeakable rapture stole over me as I realised that my Lady was coming as she had come before. I would have hurried out to meet her, but that I knew well that this would not be in accord with her wishes. So, thinking to please her, I drew back into the room. I was glad I had done so when, from the dark corner where I stood, I saw her steal up the marble steps and stand timidly looking in at the door. Then, after a long pause, came a whisper as faint and sweet as the music of a distant Æolian harp:

"Are you there? May I come in? Answer me! I am lonely and in fear!" For answer I emerged from my dim corner so swiftly that she was startled. I could hear from the quivering intake of her breath that she was striving — happily with success — to suppress a shriek.

"Come in," I said quietly. "I was waiting for you, for I felt that you would come. I only came in from the terrace when I saw you coming, lest you might fear that anyone might see us. That is not possible, but I thought you wished that I should be careful."

"I did — I do," she answered in a low, sweet voice, but very firmly. "But never avoid precaution. There is nothing that may not happen here. There may be eyes where we least expect — or suspect them." As she spoke the last words solemnly and in a low whisper, she was entering the room. I closed the glass door and bolted it, rolled back the steel grille, and pulled the heavy curtain. Then, when I had lit a candle, I went over and put a light to the fire. In a few seconds the dry wood had caught, and the flames were beginning to rise and crackle. She had not objected to my closing the window and drawing the curtain; neither did she make any comment on my lighting the fire. She simply acquiesced in it, as though it was now a matter of course. When I made the pile of cushions before it as on the occasion of her last visit, she sank down on them, and held out her white, trembling hands to the warmth.

She was different to-night from what she had been on either of the two former visits. From her present bearing I arrived at some gauge of her self-concern, her self-respect. Now that she was dry, and not overmastered by wet and cold, a sweet and gracious dignity seemed to shine from her, enwrapping her, as it were, with a luminous veil. It was not that she was by this made or shown as cold or distant, or in any way harsh or forbidding. On the contrary, protected by this dignity, she seemed much more sweet and genial than before. It was as though she felt that she could afford to stoop now that her loftiness was realised — that her position was recognised and secure. If her inherent dignity made an impenetrable nimbus round her, this was against others; she herself was not bound by it, or to be bound. So marked was this, so entirely and sweetly womanly did she appear, that I caught myself wondering in flashes of thought, which came as sharp periods of doubting judgment between spells of unconscious fascination, how I had ever come to think she was aught but perfect woman. As she rested, half sitting and half lying on the pile of cushions, she was all grace, and beauty, and charm, and sweetness — the veritable perfect woman of the dreams of a man, be he young or old. To have such a woman sit by his hearth and hold her holy of holies in his heart might well be a rapture to any man. Even an hour of such entrancing joy might be well won by a lifetime of pain, by the balance of a long life sacrificed, by the extinction of life itself. Quick behind the record of such thoughts came the answer to the doubt they challenged: if it should turn out that she was not living at all, but one of the doomed and pitiful Un-Dead, then so much more on account of her very sweetness and beauty would be the winning of her back to Life and Heaven — even were it that she might find happiness in the heart and in the arms of another man.

Once, when I leaned over the hearth to put fresh logs on the fire, my face was so close to hers that I felt her breath on my cheek. It thrilled me to feel even the suggestion of that ineffable contact. Her breath was sweet — sweet as the breath of a calf, sweet as the whiff of a summer breeze across beds of mignonette. How could anyone believe for a moment that such sweet breath could come from the lips of the dead — the dead *in esse* or *in posse* — that corruption could send forth fragrance so sweet and pure? It was with satisfied happiness that, as I looked at her from my stool, I saw the dancing of the flames from the beech-logs reflected in her glorious black eyes, and the stars that were hidden in them shine out with new colours and new lustre as they gleamed, rising and falling like hopes and fears. As the light leaped, so did smiles of quiet happiness flit over her beautiful face, the merriment of the joyous flames being reflected in ever-changing dimples.

At first I was a little disconcerted whenever my eyes took note of her shroud, and there came a momentary regret that the weather had not been again bad, so that there might have been compulsion for her putting on another garment — anything lacking the loathsomeness of that pitiful wrapping. Little by little, however, this feeling disappeared, and I found no matter for even dissatisfaction in her wrapping. Indeed, my thoughts found inward voice before the subject was dismissed from my mind:

“One becomes accustomed to anything — even a shroud!” But the thought was followed by a submerging wave of pity that she should have had such a dreadful experience.

By-and-by we seemed both to forget everything — I know I did — except that we were man and woman, and close together. The strangeness of the situation and the circumstances did not seem of moment — not worth even a passing thought. We still sat apart and said little, if anything. I cannot recall a single word that either of us spoke whilst we sat before the fire, but other language than speech came into play; the eyes told their own story, as eyes can do, and more eloquently than lips whilst exercising their function of speech. Question and answer followed each other in this satisfying language, and with an unspeakable rapture I began to realise that my affection was returned. Under these circumstances it was unrealizable that there should be any incongruity in the whole affair. I was not myself in the mood of questioning. I was diffident with that diffidence which comes alone from true love, as though it were a necessary emanation from that delightful and overwhelming and commanding passion. In her presence there seemed to surge up within me that which forbade speech. Speech under present conditions would have seemed to me unnecessary, imperfect, and even vulgarly overt. She, too, was silent. But now that I am alone, and memory is alone with me, I am convinced that she also had been happy. No, not that exactly. "Happiness" is not the word to describe either her feeling or my own. Happiness is more active, a more conscious enjoyment. We had been content. That expresses our condition perfectly; and now that I can analyze my own feeling, and understand what the word implies, I am satisfied of its accuracy. "Content" has both a positive and negative meaning or antecedent condition. It implies an absence of disturbing conditions as well as of wants; also it implies something positive which has been won or achieved, or which has accrued. In our state of mind — for though it may be presumption on my part, I am satisfied that our ideas were mutual — it meant that we had reached an understanding whence all that might come must be for good. God grant that it may be so!

As we sat silent, looking into each other's eyes, and whilst the stars in hers were now full of latent fire, perhaps from the reflection of the flames, she suddenly sprang to her feet, instinctively drawing the horrible shroud round her as she rose to her full height in a voice full of lingering emotion, as of one who is acting under spiritual compulsion rather than personal will, she said in a whisper:

"I must go at once. I feel the morning drawing nigh. I must be in my place when the light of day comes."

She was so earnest that I felt I must not oppose her wish; so I, too, sprang to my feet and ran towards the window. I pulled the curtain aside sufficiently far for me to press back the grille and reach the glass door, the latch of which I opened. I passed behind the curtain again, and held the edge of it back so that she could go through. For an instant she stopped as she broke the long silence:

"You are a true gentleman, and my friend. You understand all I wish. Out of the depth of my heart I thank you." She held out her beautiful high-bred hand. I took it in both mine as I fell on my knees, and raised it to my lips. Its touch made me quiver. She, too, trembled as she looked down at me with a glance which seemed to search my very soul. The stars in her eyes, now that the firelight was no longer on them, had gone back to their own mysterious silver. Then she drew her hand from mine very, very gently, as though it would fain linger; and she passed out behind the curtain with a gentle, sweet, dignified little bow which left me on my knees.

When I heard the glass door pulled-to gently behind her, I rose from my knees and hurried without the curtain, just in time to watch her pass down the steps. I wanted to see her as long as I could. The grey of morning was just beginning to war with the night gloom, and by the faint uncertain light I could see dimly the white figure flit between shrub and statue till finally it merged in the far darkness.

I stood for a long time on the terrace, sometimes looking into the darkness in front of me, in case I might be blessed with another glimpse of her; sometimes with my eyes closed, so that I might recall and hold in my mind her passage down the steps. For the first time since I had met her she had thrown back at me a glance as she stepped on the white path below the terrace. With the glamour over me of that look, which was all love and enticement, I could have dared all the powers that be.

When the grey dawn was becoming apparent through the lightening of the sky I returned to my room. In a dazed condition — half hypnotised by love — I went to bed, and in dreams continued to think, all happily, of my Lady of the Shroud.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL — Continued.

May 27, 1907.

A whole week has gone since I saw my Love! There it is; no doubt whatever is left in my mind about it now! Since I saw her my passion has grown and grown by leaps and bounds, as novelists put it. It has now become so vast as to overwhelm me, to wipe out all thought of doubt or difficulty. I suppose it must be what men suffered — suffering need not mean pain — under enchantments in old times. I am but as a straw whirled in the resistless eddies of a whirlpool. I feel that I *must* see her again, even if it be but in her tomb in the crypt. I must, I suppose, prepare myself for the venture, for many things have to be thought of. The visit must not be at night, for in such case I might miss her, did she come to me again here . . .

The morning came and went, but my wish and intention still remained; and so in the full tide of noon, with the sun in all its fiery force, I set out for the old church of St. Sava. I carried with me a lantern with powerful lens. I had wrapped it up secretly, for I had a feeling that I should not like anyone to know that I had such a thing with me.

On this occasion I had no misgivings. On the former visit I had for a moment been overwhelmed at the unexpected sight of the body of the woman I thought I loved — I knew it now — lying in her tomb. But now I knew all, and it was to see this woman, though in her tomb, that I came.

When I had lit my lantern, which I did as soon as I had pushed open the great door, which was once again unlocked, I turned my steps to the steps of the crypt, which lay behind the richly carven wood screen. This I could see, with the better light, was a noble piece of work of priceless beauty and worth. I tried to keep my heart in full courage with thoughts of my Lady, and of the sweetness and dignity of our last meeting; but, despite all, it sank down, down, and turned to water as I passed with uncertain feet down the narrow, tortuous steps. My concern, I am now convinced, was not for myself, but that she whom I adored should have to endure such a fearful place. As anodyne to my own pain I thought what it would be, and how I should feel, when I should have won for her a way out of that horror, at any rate. This thought reassured me somewhat, and restored my courage. It was in something of the same fashion which has hitherto carried me out of tight places as well as into them that at last I pushed open the low, narrow door at the foot of the rock-hewn staircase and entered the crypt.

Without delay I made my way to the glass-covered tomb set beneath the hanging chain. I could see by the flashing of the light around me that my hand which held the lantern trembled. With a great effort I steadied myself, and raising the lantern, turned its light down into the sarcophagus.

Once again the fallen lantern rang on the tingling glass, and I stood alone in the darkness, for an instant almost paralyzed with surprised disappointment.

The tomb was empty! Even the trappings of the dead had been removed.

I knew not what happened till I found myself groping my way up the winding stair. Here, in comparison with the solid darkness of the crypt, it seemed almost light. The dim expanse of the church sent a few straggling rays down the vaulted steps, and as I could see, be it never so dimly, I felt I was not in absolute darkness. With the light came a sense of power and fresh courage, and I groped my way back into the crypt again. There, by now and again lighting matches, I found my way to the tomb and recovered my lantern. Then I took my way slowly — for I wished to prove, if not my own courage, at least such vestiges of self-respect as the venture had left me — through the church, where I extinguished my lantern, and out through the great door into the open sunlight. I seemed to have heard, both in the darkness of the crypt and through the dimness of the church, mysterious sounds as of whispers and suppressed breathing; but the memory of these did not count for much when once I was free. I was only satisfied of my own consciousness and identity when I found myself on the broad rock terrace in front of the church, with the fierce sunlight beating on my upturned face, and, looking downward, saw far below me the rippled blue of the open sea.

RUPERT’S JOURNAL — Continued.

June 3, 1907.

Another week has elapsed — a week full of movement of many kinds and in many ways — but as yet I have had no tale or tidings of my Lady of the Shroud. I have not had an opportunity of going again in daylight to St. Sava's as I should have liked to have done. I felt that I must not go at night. The night is her time of freedom, and it must be kept for her — or else I may miss her, or perhaps never see her again.

The days have been full of national movement. The mountaineers have evidently been organising themselves, for some reason which I cannot quite understand, and which they have hesitated to make known to me. I have taken care not to manifest any curiosity, whatever I may have felt. This would certainly arouse suspicion, and might ultimately cause disaster to my hopes of aiding the nation in their struggle to preserve their freedom.

These fierce mountaineers are strangely — almost unduly — suspicious, and the only way to win their confidence is to begin the trusting. A young American attaché of the Embassy at Vienna, who had made a journey through the Land of the Blue Mountains, once put it to me in this form:

"Keep your head shut, and they'll open theirs. If you don't, they'll open it for you — down to the chine!"

It was quite apparent to me that they were completing some fresh arrangements for signalling with a code of their own. This was natural enough, and in no way inconsistent with the measure of friendliness already shown to me. Where there are neither telegraphs, railways, nor roads, any effective form of communication must — can only be purely personal. And so, if they wish to keep any secret amongst themselves, they must preserve the secret of their code. I should have dearly liked to learn their new code and their manner of using it, but as I want to be a helpful friend to them — and as this implies not only trust, but the appearance of it — I had to school myself to patience.

This attitude so far won their confidence that before we parted at our last meeting, after most solemn vows of faith and secrecy, they took me into the secret. This was, however, only to the extent of teaching me the code and method; they still withheld from me rigidly the fact or political secret, or whatever it was that was the mainspring of their united action.

When I got home I wrote down, whilst it was fresh in my memory, all they told me. This script I studied until I had it so thoroughly by heart that I *could* not forget it. Then I burned the paper. However, there is now one gain at least: with my semaphore I can send through the Blue Mountains from side to side, with expedition, secrecy, and exactness, a message comprehensible to all.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL — Continued.

June 6, 1907.

Last night I had a new experience of my Lady of the Shroud — in so far as form was concerned, at any rate. I was in bed, and just falling asleep, when I heard a queer kind of scratching at the glass door of the terrace. I listened acutely, my heart beating hard. The sound seemed to come from low down, close to the floor. I jumped out of bed, ran to the window, and, pulling aside the heavy curtains, looked out.

The garden looked, as usual, ghostly in the moonlight, but there was not the faintest sign of movement anywhere, and no one was on or near the terrace. I looked eagerly down to where the sound had seemed to come from.

There, just inside the glass door, as though it had been pushed under the door, lay a paper closely folded in several laps. I picked it up and opened it. I was all in a tumult, for my heart told me whence it came. Inside was written in English, in a large, sprawling hand, such as might be from an English child of seven or eight:

“Meet me at the Flagstaff on the Rock!”

I knew the place, of course. On the farthermost point of the rock on which the Castle stands is set a high flagstaff, whereon in old time the banner of the Vissarion family flew. At some far-off time, when the Castle had been liable to attack, this point had been strongly fortified. Indeed, in the days when the bow was a martial weapon it must have been quite impregnable.

A covered gallery, with loopholes for arrows, had been cut in the solid rock, running right round the point, quite surrounding the flagstaff and the great boss of rock on whose centre it was reared. A narrow drawbridge of immense strength had connected — in peaceful times, and still remained — the outer point of rock with an entrance formed in the outer wall, and guarded with flanking towers and a portcullis. Its use was manifestly to guard against surprise. From this point only could be seen the line of the rocks all round the point. Thus, any secret attack by boats could be made impossible.

Having hurriedly dressed myself, and taking with me both hunting-knife and revolver, I went out on the terrace, taking the precaution, unusual to me, of drawing the grille behind me and locking it. Matters around the Castle are in far too disturbed a condition to allow the taking of any foolish chances, either in the way of being unarmed or of leaving the private entrance to the Castle open. I found my way through the rocky passage, and climbed by the Jacob’s ladder fixed on the rock — a device of convenience in time of peace — to the foot of the flagstaff.

I was all on fire with expectation, and the time of going seemed exceeding long; so I was additionally disappointed by the contrast when I did not see my Lady there when I arrived. However, my heart beat freely again — perhaps more freely than ever — when I saw her crouching in the shadow of the Castle wall. From where she was she could not be seen from any point save that alone which I occupied; even from there it was only her white shroud that was conspicuous through the deep gloom of the shadow. The moonlight was so bright that the shadows were almost unnaturally black.

I rushed over towards her, and when close was about to say impulsively, "Why did you leave your tomb?" when it suddenly struck me that the question would be malapropos and embarrassing in many ways. So, better judgment prevailing, I said instead:

"It has been so long since I saw you! It has seemed an eternity to me!" Her answer came as quickly as even I could have wished; she spoke impulsively and without thought:

"It has been long to me too! Oh, so long! so long! I have asked you to come out here because I wanted to see you so much that I could not wait any longer. I have been heart-hungry for a sight of you!"

Her words, her eager attitude, the ineffable something which conveys the messages of the heart, the longing expression in her eyes as the full moonlight fell on her face, showing the stars as living gold — for in her eagerness she had stepped out towards me from the shadow — all set me on fire. Without a thought or a word — for it was Nature speaking in the language of Love, which is a silent tongue — I stepped towards her and took her in my arms. She yielded with that sweet unconsciousness which is the perfection of Love, as if it was in obedience to some command uttered before the beginning of the world. Probably without any conscious effort on either side — I know there was none on mine — our mouths met in the first kiss of love.

At the time nothing in the meeting struck me as out of the common. But later in the night, when I was alone and in darkness, whenever I thought of it all — its strangeness and its stranger rapture — I could not but be sensible of the bizarre conditions for a love meeting. The place lonely, the time night, the man young and strong, and full of life and hope and ambition; the woman, beautiful and ardent though she was, a woman seemingly dead, clothed in the shroud in which she had been wrapped when lying in her tomb in the crypt of the old church.

Whilst we were together, anyhow, there was little thought of the kind; no reasoning of any kind on my part. Love has its own laws and its own logic. Under the flagstaff, where the Vissarion banner was wont to flap in the breeze, she was in my arms; her sweet breath was on my face; her heart was beating against my own. What need was there for reason at all? *Inter arma silent leges* — the voice of reason is silent in the stress of passion. Dead she may be, or Un-dead — a Vampire with one foot in Hell and one on earth. But I love her; and come what may, here or hereafter, she is mine. As my mate, we shall fare along together, whatsoever the end may be, or wheresoever our path may lead. If she is indeed to be won from the nethermost Hell, then be mine the task!

But to go back to the record. When I had once started speaking to her in words of passion I could not stop. I did not want to — if I could; and she did not appear to wish it either. Can there be a woman — alive or dead — who would not want to hear the rapture of her lover expressed to her whilst she is enclosed in his arms?

There was no attempt at reticence on my part now; I took it for granted that she knew all that I surmised, and, as she made neither protest nor comment, that she accepted my belief as to her indeterminate existence. Sometimes her eyes would be closed, but even then the rapture of her face was almost beyond belief. Then, when the beautiful eyes would open and gaze on me, the stars that were in them would shine and scintillate as though they were formed of living fire. She said little, very little; but though the words were few, every syllable was fraught with love, and went straight to the very core of my heart.

By-and-by, when our transport had calmed to joy, I asked when I might next see her, and how and where I might find her when I should want to. She did not reply directly, but, holding me close in her arms, whispered in my ear with that breathless softness which is a lover's rapture of speech:

"I have come here under terrible difficulties, not only because I love you — and that would be enough — but because, as well as the joy of seeing you, I wanted to warn you."

"To warn me! Why?" I queried. Her reply came with a bashful hesitation, with something of a struggle in it, as of one who for some ulterior reason had to pick her words:

"There are difficulties and dangers ahead of you. You are beset with them; and they are all the greater because they are, of grim necessity, hidden from you. You cannot go anywhere, look in any direction, do anything, say anything, but it may be a signal for danger. My dear, it lurks everywhere — in the light as well as in the darkness; in the open as well as in the secret places; from friends as well as foes; when you are least prepared; when you may least expect it. Oh, I know it, and what it is to endure; for I share it for you — for your dear sake!"

"My darling!" was all I could say, as I drew her again closer to me and kissed her. After a bit she was calmer; seeing this, I came back to the subject that she had — in part, at all events — come to me to speak about:

"But if difficulty and danger hedge me in so everlastingly, and if I am to have no indication whatever of its kind or purpose, what can I do? God knows I would willingly guard myself — not on my own account, but for your dear sake. I have now a cause to live and be strong, and to keep all my faculties, since it may mean much to you. If you may not tell me details, may you not indicate to me some line of conduct, of action, that would be most in accord with your wishes — or, rather, with your idea of what would be best?"

She looked at me fixedly before speaking — a long, purposeful, loving look which no man born of woman could misunderstand. Then she spoke slowly, deliberately, emphatically:

"Be bold, and fear not. Be true to yourself, to me — it is the same thing. These are the best guards you can use. Your safety does not rest with me. Ah, I wish it did! I wish to God it did!" In my inner heart it thrilled me not merely to hear the expression of her wish, but to hear her use the name of God as she did. I understand now, in the calm of this place and with the sunlight before me, that my belief as to her being all woman — living woman — was not quite dead: but though at the moment my heart did not recognise the doubt, my brain did. And I made up my mind that we should not part this time until she knew that I had seen her, and where; but, despite my own thoughts, my outer ears listened greedily as she went on.

"As for me, you may not find *me*, but *I* shall find *you*, be sure! And now we must say 'Good-night,' my dear, my dear! Tell me once again that you love me, for it is a sweetness that one does not wish to forego — even one who wears such a garment as this — and rests where I must rest." As she spoke she held up part of her cerements for me to see. What could I do but take her once again in my arms and hold her close, close. God knows it was all in love; but it was passionate love which surged through my every vein as I strained her dear body to mine. But yet this embrace was not selfish; it was not all an expression of my own passion. It was based on pity — the pity which is twin-born with true love. Breathless from our kisses, when presently we released each other, she stood in a glorious rapture, like a white spirit in the moonlight, and as her lovely, starlit eyes seemed to devour me, she spoke in a languorous ecstasy:

"Oh, how you love me! how you love me! It is worth all I have gone through for this, even to wearing this terrible drapery." And again she pointed to her shroud.

Here was my chance to speak of what I knew, and I took it. "I know, I know. Moreover, I know that awful resting-place."

I was interrupted, cut short in the midst of my sentence, not by any word, but by the frightened look in her eyes and the fear-mastered way in which she shrank away from me. I suppose in reality she could not be paler than she looked when the colour-absorbing moonlight fell on her; but on the instant all semblance of living seemed to shrink and fall away, and she looked with eyes of dread as if in I some awful way held in thrall. But for the movement of the pitiful glance, she would have seemed of soulless marble, so deadly cold did she look.

The moments that dragged themselves out whilst I waited for her to speak seemed endless. At length her words came in an awed whisper, so faint that even in that stilly night I could hardly hear it:

"You know — you know my resting-place! How — when was that?" There was nothing to do now but to speak out the truth:

"I was in the crypt of St. Sava. It was all by accident. I was exploring all around the Castle, and I went there in my course. I found the winding stair in the rock behind the screen, and went down. Dear, I loved you well before that awful moment, but then, even as the lantern fell tingling on the glass, my love multiplied itself, with pity as a factor." She was silent for a few seconds. When she spoke, there was a new tone in her voice:

"But were you not shocked?"

"Of course I was," I answered on the spur of the moment, and I now think wisely. "Shocked is hardly the word. I was horrified beyond anything that words can convey that you — *you* should have to so endure! I did not like to return, for I feared lest my doing so might set some barrier between us. But in due time I did return on another day."

"Well?" Her voice was like sweet music.

"I had another shock that time, worse than before, for you were not there. Then indeed it was that I knew to myself how dear you were — how dear you are to me. Whilst I live, you — living or dead — shall always be in my heart." She breathed hard. The elation in her eyes made them outshine the moonlight, but she said no word. I went on:

"My dear, I had come into the crypt full of courage and hope, though I knew what dreadful sight should sear my eyes once again. But we little know what may be in store for us, no matter what we expect. I went out with a heart like water from that dreadful desolation."

"Oh, how you love me, dear!" Cheered by her words, and even more by her tone, I went on with renewed courage. There was no halting, no faltering in my intention now:

"You and I, my dear, were ordained for each other. I cannot help it that you had already suffered before I knew you. It may be that there may be for you still suffering that I may not prevent, endurance that I may not shorten; but what a man can do is yours. Not Hell itself will stop me, if it be possible that I may win through its torments with you in my arms!"

"Will nothing stop you, then?" Her question was breathed as softly as the strain of an Æolian harp.

"Nothing!" I said, and I heard my own teeth snap together. There was something speaking within me stronger than I had ever known myself to be. Again came a query, trembling, quavering, quivering, as though the issue was of more than life or death:

"Not this?" She held up a corner of the shroud, and as she saw my face and realised the answer before I spoke, went on: "With all it implies?"

"Not if it were wrought of the cerecloths of the damned!" There was a long pause. Her voice was more resolute when she spoke again. It rang. Moreover, there was in it a joyous note, as of one who feels new hope:

"But do you know what men say? Some of them, that I am dead and buried; others, that I am not only dead and buried, but that I am one of those unhappy beings that may not die the common death of man. Who live on a fearful life-in-death, whereby they are harmful to all. Those unhappy Un-dead whom men call Vampires — who live on the blood of the living, and bring eternal damnation as well as death with the poison of their dreadful kisses!

"I know what men say sometimes," I answered. "But I know also what my own heart says; and I rather choose to obey its calling than all the voices of the living or the dead. Come what may, I am pledged to you. If it be that your old life has to be rewon for you out of the very jaws of Death and Hell, I shall keep the faith I have pledged, and that here I pledge again!" As I finished speaking I sank on my knees at her feet, and, putting my arms round her, drew her close to me. Her tears rained down on my face as she stroked my hair with her soft, strong hand and whispered to me:

"This is indeed to be one. What more holy marriage can God give to any of His creatures?" We were both silent for a time.

I think I was the first to recover my senses. That I did so was manifest by my asking her: "When may we meet again?" — a thing I had never remembered doing at any of our former partings. She answered with a rising and falling of the voice that was just above a whisper, as soft and cooing as the voice of a pigeon:

"That will be soon — as soon as I can manage it, be sure. My dear, my dear!" The last four words of endearment she spoke in a low but prolonged and piercing tone which made me thrill with delight.

"Give me some token," I said, "that I may have always close to me to ease my aching heart till we meet again, and ever after, for love's sake!" Her mind seemed to leap to understanding, and with a purpose all her own. Stooping for an instant, she tore off with swift, strong fingers a fragment of her shroud. This, having kissed it, she handed to me, whispering:

"It is time that we part. You must leave me now. Take this, and keep it for ever. I shall be less unhappy in my terrible loneliness whilst it lasts if I know that this my gift, which for good or ill is a part of me as you know me, is close to you. It may be, my very dear, that some day you may be glad and even proud of this hour, as I am." She kissed me as I took it.

“For life or death, I care not which, so long as I am with you!” I said, as I moved off. Descending the Jacob’s ladder, I made my way down the rock-hewn passage.

The last thing I saw was the beautiful face of my Lady of the Shroud as she leaned over the edge of the opening. Her eyes were like glowing stars as her looks followed me. That look shall never fade from my memory.

After a few agitating moments of thought I half mechanically took my way down to the garden. Opening the grille, I entered my lonely room, which looked all the more lonely for the memory of the rapturous moments under the Flagstaff. I went to bed as one in a dream. There I lay till sunrise — awake and thinking.

BOOK V: A RITUAL AT MIDNIGHT

RUPERT’S JOURNAL — Continued.

June 20, 1907.

The time has gone as quickly as work can effect since I saw my Lady. As I told the mountaineers, Rooke, whom I had sent on the service, had made a contract for fifty thousand Ingis-Malbron rifles, and as many tons of ammunition as the French experts calculated to be a full supply for a year of warfare. I heard from him by our secret telegraph code that the order had been completed, and that the goods were already on the way. The morning after the meeting at the Flagstaff I had word that at night the vessel — one chartered by Rooke for the purpose — would arrive at Vissarion during the night. We were all expectation. I had always now in the Castle a signalling party, the signals being renewed as fast as the men were sufficiently expert to proceed with their practice alone or in groups. We hoped that every fighting-man in the country would in time become an expert signaller. Beyond these, again, we have always a few priests. The Church of the country is a militant Church; its priests are soldiers, its Bishops commanders. But they all serve wherever the battle most needs them. Naturally they, as men of brains, are quicker at learning than the average mountaineers; with the result that they learnt the code and the signalling almost by instinct. We have now at least one such expert in each community of them, and shortly the priests alone will be able to signal, if need be, for the nation; thus releasing for active service the merely fighting-man. The men at present with me I took into confidence as to the vessel’s arrival, and we were all ready for work when the man on the lookout at the

Flagstaff sent word that a vessel without lights was creeping in towards shore. We all assembled on the rocky edge of the creek, and saw her steal up the creek and gain the shelter of the harbour. When this had been effected, we ran out the boom which protects the opening, and after that the great armoured sliding-gates which Uncle Roger had himself had made so as to protect the harbour in case of need.

We then came within and assisted in warping the steamer to the side of the dock.

Rooke looked fit, and was full of fire and vigour. His responsibility and the mere thought of warlike action seemed to have renewed his youth.

When we had arranged for the unloading of the cases of arms and ammunition, I took Rooke into the room which we call my "office," where he gave me an account of his doings. He had not only secured the rifles and the ammunition for them, but he had purchased from one of the small American Republics an armoured yacht which had been especially built for war service. He grew quite enthusiastic, even excited, as he told me of her:

"She is the last word in naval construction — a torpedo yacht. A small cruiser, with turbines up to date, oil-fuelled, and fully armed with the latest and most perfect weapons and explosives of all kinds. The fastest boat afloat to-day. Built by Thorneycroft, engined by Parsons, armoured by Armstrong, armed by Crupp. If she ever comes into action, it will be bad for her opponent, for she need not fear to tackle anything less than a *Dreadnought*."

He also told me that from the same Government, whose nation had just established an unlooked-for peace, he had also purchased a whole park of artillery of the very latest patterns, and that for range and accuracy the guns were held to be supreme. These would follow before long, and with them their proper ammunition, with a shipload of the same to follow shortly after.

When he had told me all the rest of his news, and handed me the accounts, we went out to the dock to see the debarkation of the war material. Knowing that it was arriving, I had sent word in the afternoon to the mountaineers to tell them to come and remove it. They had answered the call, and it really seemed to me that the whole of the land must that night have been in motion.

They came as individuals, grouping themselves as they came within the defences of the Castle; some had gathered at fixed points on the way. They went secretly and in silence, stealing through the forests like ghosts, each party when it grouped taking the place of that which had gone on one of the routes radiating round Vissarion. Their coming and going was more than ghostly. It was, indeed, the outward manifestation of an inward spirit — a whole nation dominated by one common purpose.

The men in the steamer were nearly all engineers, mostly British, well conducted, and to be depended upon. Rooke had picked them separately, and in the doing had used well his great experience of both men and adventurous life. These men were to form part of the armoured yacht's crew when she should come into the Mediterranean waters. They and the priests and fighting-men in the Castle worked well together, and with a zeal that was beyond praise. The heavy cases seemed almost of their own accord to leave the holds, so fast came the procession of them along the gangways from deck to dock-wall. It was a part of my design that the arms should be placed in centres ready for local distribution. In such a country as this, without railways or even roads, the distribution of war material in any quantity is a great labour, for it has to be done individually, or at least from centres.

But of this work the great number of mountaineers who were arriving made little account. As fast as the ship's company, with the assistance of the priests and fighting-men, placed the cases on the quay, the engineers opened them and laid the contents ready for portage. The mountaineers seemed to come in a continuous stream; each in turn shouldered his burden and passed out, the captain of his section giving him as he passed his instruction where to go and in what route. The method had been already prepared in my office ready for such a distribution when the arms should arrive, and descriptions and quantities had been noted by the captains. The whole affair was treated by all as a matter of the utmost secrecy. Hardly a word was spoken beyond the necessary directions, and these were given in whispers. All night long the stream of men went and came, and towards dawn the bulk of the imported material was lessened by half. On the following night the remainder was removed, after my own men had stored in the Castle the rifles and ammunition reserved for its defence if necessary. It was advisable to keep a reserve supply in case it should ever be required. The following night Rooke went away secretly in the chartered vessel. He had to bring back with him the purchased cannon and heavy ammunition, which had been in the meantime stored on one of the Greek islands. The second morning, having had secret word that the steamer was on the way, I had given the signal for the assembling of the mountaineers.

A little after dark the vessel, showing no light, stole into the creek. The barrier gates were once again closed, and when a sufficient number of men had arrived to handle the guns, we began to unload. The actual deportation was easy enough, for the dock had all necessary appliances quite up to date, including a pair of shears for gun-lifting which could be raised into position in a very short time.

The guns were well furnished with tackle of all sorts, and before many hours had passed a little procession of them disappeared into the woods in ghostly silence. A number of men surrounded each, and they moved as well as if properly supplied with horses.

In the meantime, and for a week after the arrival of the guns, the drilling went on without pause. The gun-drill was wonderful. In the arduous work necessary for it the great strength and stamina of the mountaineers showed out wonderfully. They did not seem to know fatigue any more than they knew fear.

For a week this went on, till a perfect discipline and management was obtained. They did not practise the shooting, for this would have made secrecy impossible. It was reported all along the Turkish frontier that the Sultan's troops were being massed, and though this was not on a war footing, the movement was more or less dangerous. The reports of our own spies, although vague as to the purpose and extent of the movement, were definite as to something being on foot. And Turkey does not do something without a purpose that bodes ill to someone. Certainly the sound of cannon, which is a far-reaching sound, would have given them warning of our preparations, and would so have sadly minimized their effectiveness.

When the cannon had all been disposed of — except, of course, those destined for defence of the Castle or to be stored there — Rooke went away with the ship and crew. The ship he was to return to the owners; the men would be shipped on the war-yacht, of whose crew they would form a part. The rest of them had been carefully selected by Rooke himself, and were kept in secrecy at Cattaro, ready for service the moment required. They were all good men, and quite capable of whatever work they might be set to. So Rooke told me, and he ought to know. The experience of his young days as a private made him an expert in such a job.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL — Continued.

June 24, 1907.

Last night I got from my Lady a similar message to the last, and delivered in a similar way. This time, however, our meeting was to be on the leads of the Keep.

I dressed myself very carefully before going on this adventure, lest by any chance of household concern, any of the servants should see me; for if this should happen, Aunt Janet would be sure to hear of it, which would give rise to endless surmises and questionings — a thing I was far from desiring.

I confess that in thinking the matter over during the time I was making my hurried preparations I was at a loss to understand how any human body, even though it be of the dead, could go or be conveyed to such a place without some sort of assistance, or, at least, collusion, on the part of some of the inmates. At the visit to the Flagstaff circumstances were different. This spot was actually outside the Castle, and in order to reach it I myself had to leave the Castle privately, and from the garden ascend to the ramparts. But here was no such possibility. The Keep was an *imperium in imperio*. It stood within the Castle, though separated from it, and it had its own defences against intrusion. The roof of it was, so far as I knew, as little approachable as the magazine.

The difficulty did not, however, trouble me beyond a mere passing thought. In the joy of the coming meeting and the longing rapture at the mere thought of it, all difficulties disappeared. Love makes its own faith, and I never doubted that my Lady would be waiting for me at the place designated. When I had passed through the little arched passages, and up the doubly-grated stairways contrived in the massiveness of the walls, I let myself out on the leads. It was well that as yet the times were sufficiently peaceful not to necessitate guards or sentries at all such points.

There, in a dim corner where the moonlight and the passing clouds threw deep shadows, I saw her, clothed as ever in her shroud. Why, I know not. I felt somehow that the situation was even more serious than ever. But I was steeled to whatever might come. My mind had been already made up. To carry out my resolve to win the woman I loved I was ready to face death. But now, after we had for a few brief moments held each other in our arms, I was willing to accept death — or more than death. Now, more than before, was she sweet and dear to me. Whatever qualms there might have been at the beginning of our love-making, or during the progress of it, did not now exist. We had exchanged vows and confidences, and acknowledged our loves. What, then, could there be of distrust, or even doubt, that the present might not set at naught? But even had there been such doubts or qualms, they must have disappeared in the ardour of our mutual embrace. I was by now mad for her, and was content to be so mad. When she had breath to speak after the strictness of our embrace, she said:

“I have come to warn you to be more than ever careful.” It was, I confess, a pang to me, who thought only of love, to hear that anything else should have been the initiative power of her coming, even though it had been her concern for my own safety. I could not but notice the bitter note of chagrin in my voice as I answered:

"It was for love's sake that *I* came." She, too, evidently felt the undercurrent of pain, for she said quickly:

"Ah, dearest, I, too, came for love's sake. It is because I love you that I am so anxious about you. What would the world — ay, or heaven — be to me without you?"

There was such earnest truth in her tone that the sense and realization of my own harshness smote me. In the presence of such love as this even a lover's selfishness must become abashed. I could not express myself in words, so simply raised her slim hand in mine and kissed it. As it lay warm in my own I could not but notice, as well as its fineness, its strength and the firmness of its clasp. Its warmth and fervour struck into my heart — and my brain. Thereupon I poured out to her once more my love for her, she listening all afire. When passion had had its say, the calmer emotions had opportunity of expression. When I was satisfied afresh of her affection, I began to value her care for my safety, and so I went back to the subject. Her very insistence, based on personal affection, gave me more solid ground for fear. In the moment of love transports I had forgotten, or did not think, of what wonderful power or knowledge she must have to be able to move in such strange ways as she did. Why, at this very moment she was within my own gates. Locks and bars, even the very seal of death itself, seemed unable to make for her a prison-house. With such freedom of action and movement, going when she would into secret places, what might she not know that was known to others? How could anyone keep secret from such an one even an ill intent? Such thoughts, such surmises, had often flashed through my mind in moments of excitement rather than of reflection, but never long enough to become fixed into belief. But yet the consequences, the convictions, of them were with me, though unconsciously, though the thoughts themselves were perhaps forgotten or withered before development.

“And you?” I asked her earnestly. “What about danger to you?” She smiled, her little pearl-white teeth gleaming in the moonlight, as she spoke:

“There is no danger for me. I am safe. I am the safest person, perhaps the only safe person, in all this land.” The full significance of her words did not seem to come to me all at once. Some base for understanding such an assertion seemed to be wanting. It was not that I did not trust or believe her, but that I thought she might be mistaken. I wanted to reassure myself, so in my distress I asked unthinkingly:

“How the safest? What is your protection?” For several moments that spun themselves out endlessly she looked me straight in the face, the stars in her eyes seeming to glow like fire; then, lowering her head, she took a fold of her shroud and held it up to me.

“This!”

The meaning was complete and understandable now. I could not speak at once for the wave of emotion which choked me. I dropped on my knees, and taking her in my arms, held her close to me. She saw that I was moved, and tenderly stroked my hair, and with delicate touch pressed down my head on her bosom, as a mother might have done to comfort a frightened child.

Presently we got back to the realities of life again. I murmured:

“Your safety, your life, your happiness are all-in-all to me. When will you let them be my care?” She trembled in my arms, nestling even closer to me. Her own arms seemed to quiver with delight as she said:

“Would you indeed like me to be always with you? To me it would be a happiness unspeakable; and to you, what would it be?"

I thought that she wished to hear me speak my love to her, and that, woman-like, she had led me to the utterance, and so I spoke again of the passion that now raged in me, she listening eagerly as we strained each other tight in our arms. At last there came a pause, a long, long pause, and our hearts beat consciously in unison as we stood together. Presently she said in a sweet, low, intense whisper, as soft as the sighing of summer wind:

"It shall be as you wish; but oh, my dear, you will have to first go through an ordeal which may try you terribly! Do not ask me anything! You must not ask, because I may not answer, and it would be pain to me to deny you anything. Marriage with such an one as I am has its own ritual, which may not be foregone. It may . . . " I broke passionately into her speaking:

"There is no ritual that I fear, so long as it be that it is for your good, and your lasting happiness. And if the end of it be that I may call you mine, there is no horror in life or death that I shall not gladly face. Dear, I ask you nothing. I am content to leave myself in your hands. You shall advise me when the time comes, and I shall be satisfied, content to obey. Content! It is but a poor word to express what I long for! I shall shirk nothing which may come to me from this or any other world, so long as it is to make you mine!" Once again her murmured happiness was music to my ears:

"Oh, how you love me! how you love me, dear, dear!" She took me in her arms, and for a few seconds we hung together. Suddenly she tore herself apart from me, and stood drawn up to the full height, with a dignity I cannot describe or express. Her voice had a new dominance, as with firm utterance and in staccato manner she said:

"Rupert Sent Leger, before we go a step further I must say something to you, ask you something, and I charge you, on your most sacred honour and belief, to answer me truly. Do you believe me to be one of those unhappy beings who may not die, but have to live in shameful existence between earth and the nether world, and whose hellish mission is to destroy, body and soul, those who love them till they fall to their level? You are a gentleman, and a brave one. I have found you fearless. Answer me in sternest truth, no matter what the issue may be!"

She stood there in the glamorous moonlight with a commanding dignity which seemed more than human. In that mystic light her white shroud seemed diaphanous, and she appeared like a spirit of power. What was I to say? How could I admit to such a being that I had actually had at moments, if not a belief, a passing doubt? It was a conviction with me that if I spoke wrongly I should lose her for ever. I was in a desperate strait. In such a case there is but one solid ground which one may rest on — the Truth.

I really felt I was between the devil and the deep sea. There was no avoiding the issue, and so, out of this all-embracing, all-compelling conviction of truth, I spoke.

For a fleeting moment I felt that my tone was truculent, and almost hesitated; but as I saw no anger or indignation on my Lady's face, but rather an eager approval, I was reassured. A woman, after all, is glad to see a man strong, for all belief in him must be based on that.

"I shall speak the truth. Remember that I have no wish to hurt your feelings, but as you conjure me by my honour, you must forgive me if I pain. It is true that I had at first — ay, and later, when I came to think matters over after you had gone, when reason came to the aid of impression — a passing belief that you are a Vampire. How can I fail to have, even now, though I love you with all my soul, though I have held you in my arms and kissed you on the mouth, a doubt, when all the evidences seem to point to one thing? Remember that I have only seen you at night, except that bitter moment when, in the broad noonday of the upper world, I saw you, clad as ever in a shroud, lying seemingly dead in a tomb in the crypt of St. Sava's Church . . . But let that pass. Such belief as I have is all in you. Be you woman or Vampire, it is all the same to me. It is *you* whom I love! Should it be that you are — you are not woman, which I cannot believe, then it will be my glory to break your fetters, to open your prison, and set you free. To that I consecrate my life." For a few seconds I stood silent, vibrating with the passion which had been awakened in me. She had by now lost the measure of her haughty isolation, and had softened into womanhood again. It was really like a realization of the old theme of Pygmalion's statue. It was with rather a pleading than a commanding voice that she said:

"And shall you always be true to me?"

"Always — so help me, God!" I answered, and I felt that there could be no lack of conviction in my voice.

Indeed, there was no cause for such lack. She also stood for a little while stone-still, and I was beginning to expand to the rapture which was in store for me when she should take me again in her arms.

But there was no such moment of softness. All at once she started as if she had suddenly wakened from a dream, and on the spur of the moment said:

"Now go, go!" I felt the conviction of necessity to obey, and turned at once. As I moved towards the door by which I had entered, I asked:

"When shall I see you again?"

"Soon!" came her answer. "I shall let you know soon — when and where. Oh, go, go!" She almost pushed me from her.

When I had passed through the low doorway and locked and barred it behind me, I felt a pang that I should have had to shut her out like that; but I feared lest there should arise some embarrassing suspicion if the door should be found open. Later came the comforting thought that, as she had got to the roof though the door had been shut, she would be able to get away by the same means. She had evidently knowledge of some secret way into the Castle. The alternative was that she must have some supernatural quality or faculty which gave her strange powers. I did not wish to pursue that train of thought, and so, after an effort, shut it out from my mind.

When I got back to my room I locked the door behind me, and went to sleep in the dark. I did not want light just then — could not bear it.

This morning I woke, a little later than usual, with a kind of apprehension which I could not at once understand. Presently, however, when my faculties became fully awake and in working order, I realised that I feared, half expected, that Aunt Janet would come to me in a worse state of alarm than ever apropos of some new Second-Sight experience of more than usual ferocity.

But, strange to say, I had no such visit. Later on in the morning, when, after breakfast, we walked together through the garden, I asked her how she had slept, and if she had dreamt. She answered me that she had slept without waking, and if she had had any dreams, they must have been pleasant ones, for she did not remember them. "And you know, Rupert," she added, "that if there be anything bad or fearsome or warning in dreams, I always remember them."

Later still, when I was by myself on the cliff beyond the creek, I could not help commenting on the absence of her power of Second Sight on the occasion. Surely, if ever there was a time when she might have had cause of apprehension, it might well have been when I asked the Lady whom she did not know to marry me — the Lady of whose identity I knew nothing, even whose name I did not know — whom I loved with all my heart and soul — my Lady of the Shroud.

I have lost faith in Second Sight.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL — Continued.

July 1, 1907.

Another week gone. I have waited patiently, and I am at last rewarded by another letter. I was preparing for bed a little while ago, when I heard the same mysterious sound at the door as on the last two occasions. I hurried to the glass door, and there found another close-folded letter. But I could see no sign of my Lady, or of any other living being. The letter, which was without direction, ran as follows:

"If you are still of the same mind, and feel no misgivings, meet me at the Church of St. Sava beyond the Creek to-morrow night at a quarter before midnight. If you come, come in secret, and, of course, alone. Do not come at all unless you are prepared for a terrible ordeal. But if you love me, and have neither doubts nor fears, come. Come!"

Needless to say, I did not sleep last night. I tried to, but without success. It was no morbid happiness that kept me awake, no doubting, no fear. I was simply overwhelmed with the idea of the coming rapture when I should call my Lady my very, very own. In this sea of happy expectation all lesser things were submerged. Even sleep, which is an imperative force with me, failed in its usual effectiveness, and I lay still, calm, content.

With the coming of the morning, however, restlessness began. I did not know what to do, how to restrain myself, where to look for an anodyne. Happily the latter came in the shape of Rooke, who turned up shortly after breakfast. He had a satisfactory tale to tell me of the armoured yacht, which had lain off Cattaro on the previous night, and to which he had brought his contingent of crew which had waited for her coming. He did not like to take the risk of going into any port with such a vessel, lest he might be detained or otherwise hampered by forms, and had gone out upon the open sea before daylight. There was on board the yacht a tiny torpedo-boat, for which provision was made both for hoisting on deck and housing there. This last would run into the creek at ten o'clock that evening, at which time it would be dark. The yacht would then run to near Otranto, to which she would send a boat to get any message I might send. This was to be in a code, which we arranged, and would convey instructions as to what night and approximate hour the yacht would come to the creek.

The day was well on before we had made certain arrangements for the future; and not till then did I feel again the pressure of my personal restlessness. Rooke, like a wise commander, took rest whilst he could. Well he knew that for a couple of days and nights at least there would be little, if any, sleep for him.

For myself, the habit of self-control stood to me, and I managed to get through the day somehow without exciting the attention of anyone else. The arrival of the torpedo-boat and the departure of Rooke made for me a welcome break in my uneasiness. An hour ago I said good-night to Aunt Janet, and shut myself up alone here. My watch is on the table before me, so that I may make sure of starting to the moment. I have allowed myself half an hour to reach St.

Sava. My skiff is waiting, moored at the foot of the cliff on the hither side, where the zigzag comes close to the water. It is now ten minutes past eleven.

I shall add the odd five minutes to the time for my journey so as to make safe. I go unarmed and without a light.

I shall show no distrust of anyone or anything this night.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL — Continued.

July 2, 1907.

When I was outside the church, I looked at my watch in the bright moonlight, and found I had one minute to wait. So I stood in the shadow of the doorway and looked out at the scene before me. Not a sign of life was visible around me, either on land or sea. On the broad plateau on which the church stands there was no movement of any kind. The wind, which had been pleasant in the noontide, had fallen completely, and not a leaf was stirring. I could see across the creek and note the hard line where the battlements of the Castle cut the sky, and where the keep towered above the line of black rock, which in the shadow of the land made an ebon frame for the picture. When I had seen the same view on former occasions, the line where the rock rose from the sea was a fringe of white foam. But then, in the daylight, the sea was sapphire blue; now it was an expanse of dark blue — so dark as to seem almost black. It had not even the relief of waves or ripples — simply a dark, cold, lifeless expanse, with no gleam of light anywhere, of lighthouse or ship; neither was there any special sound to be heard that one could distinguish — nothing but the distant hum of the myriad voices of the dark mingling in one ceaseless inarticulate sound. It was well I had not time to dwell on it, or I might have reached some spiritually-disturbing melancholy.

Let me say here that ever since I had received my Lady's message concerning this visit to St. Sava's I had been all on fire — not, perhaps, at every moment consciously or actually so, but always, as it were, prepared to break out into flame. Did I want a simile, I might compare myself to a well-banked furnace, whose present function it is to contain heat rather than to create it; whose crust can at any moment be broken by a force external to itself, and burst into raging, all-compelling heat. No thought of fear really entered my mind. Every other emotion there was, coming and going as occasion excited or lulled, but not fear. Well I knew in the depths of my heart the purpose which that secret quest was to serve. I knew not only from my Lady's words, but from the teachings of my own senses and experiences, that some dreadful ordeal must take place before happiness of any kind could be won. And that ordeal, though method or detail was unknown to me, I was prepared to undertake. This was one of those occasions when a man must undertake, blindfold, ways that may lead to torture or death, or unknown terrors beyond. But, then, a man — if, indeed, he have the heart of a man — can always undertake; he can at least make the first step, though it may turn out that through the weakness of mortality he may be unable to fulfil his own intent, or justify his belief in his own powers. Such, I take it, was the intellectual attitude of the brave souls who of old faced the tortures of the Inquisition.

But though there was no immediate fear, there was a certain doubt. For doubt is one of those mental conditions whose calling we cannot control. The end of the doubting may not be a reality to us, or be accepted as a possibility. These things cannot forego the existence of the doubt. "For even if a man," says Victor Cousin, "doubt everything else, at least he cannot doubt that he doubts." The doubt had at times been on me that my Lady of the Shroud was a Vampire. Much that had happened seemed to point that way, and here, on the very threshold of the Unknown, when, through the door which I was pushing open, my eyes met only an expanse of absolute blackness, all doubts which had ever been seemed to surround me in a legion. I have heard that, when a man is drowning, there comes a time when his whole life passes in review during the space of time which cannot be computed as even a part of a second. So it was to me in the moment of my body passing into the church. In that moment came to my mind all that had been, which bore on the knowledge of my Lady; and the general tendency was to prove or convince that she was indeed a Vampire. Much that had happened, or become known to me, seemed to justify the resolving of doubt into belief. Even my own reading of the books in Aunt Janet's little library, and the dear lady's comments on them, mingled with her own uncanny beliefs, left little opening for doubt. My having to help my Lady over the threshold of my house on her first entry was in accord with Vampire tradition; so, too, her flying at cock-crow from the warmth in which she revelled on that strange first night of our meeting; so, too, her swift departure at midnight on the second. Into the same category came the facts of her constant wearing of her Shroud, even her pledging herself, and me also, on the fragment torn from it, which she had given to me as a souvenir; her lying still in the glass-covered tomb; her coming alone to the most secret places in a fortified Castle where every aperture was secured by unopened locks and bolts; her very movements, though all of grace, as she flitted noiselessly through the gloom of night.

All these things, and a thousand others of lesser import, seemed, for the moment, to have consolidated an initial belief. But then came the supreme recollections of how she had lain in my arms; of her kisses on my lips; of the beating of her heart against my own; of her sweet words of belief and faith breathed in my ear in intoxicating whispers; of . . . I paused. No! I could not accept belief as to her being other than a living woman of soul and sense, of flesh and blood, of all the sweet and passionate instincts of true and perfect womanhood.

And so, in spite of all — in spite of all beliefs, fixed or transitory, with a mind whirling amid contesting forces and compelling beliefs — I stepped into the church overwhelmed with that most receptive of atmospheres — doubt.

In one thing only was I fixed: here at least was no doubt or misgiving whatever. I intended to go through what I had undertaken. Moreover, I felt that I was strong enough to carry out my intention, whatever might be of the Unknown — however horrible, however terrible.

When I had entered the church and closed the heavy door behind me, the sense of darkness and loneliness in all their horror enfolded me round. The great church seemed a living mystery, and served as an almost terrible background to thoughts and remembrances of unutterable gloom. My adventurous life has had its own schooling to endurance and upholding one's courage in trying times; but it has its contra in fulness of memory.

I felt my way forward with both hands and feet. Every second seemed as if it had brought me at last to a darkness which was actually tangible. All at once, and with no heed of sequence or order, I was conscious of all around me, the knowledge or perception of which — or even speculation on the subject — had never entered my mind. They furnished the darkness with which I was encompassed with all the crowded phases of a dream. I knew that all around me were memorials of the dead — that in the Crypt deep-wrought in the rock below my feet lay the dead themselves. Some of them, perhaps — one of them I knew — had even passed the grim portals of time Unknown, and had, by some mysterious power or agency, come back again to material earth. There was no resting-place for thought when I knew that the very air which I breathed might be full of denizens of the spirit-world. In that impenetrable blackness was a world of imagining whose possibilities of horror were endless.

I almost fancied that I could see with mortal eyes down through that rocky floor to where, in the lonely Crypt, lay, in her tomb of massive stone and under that bewildering coverlet of glass, the woman whom I love. I could see her beautiful face, her long black lashes, her sweet mouth — which I had kissed — relaxed in the sleep of death. I could note the voluminous shroud — a piece of which as a precious souvenir lay even then so close to my heart — the snowy woollen coverlet wrought over in gold with sprigs of pine, the soft dent in the cushion on which her head must for so long have lain. I could see myself — within my eyes the memory of that first visit — coming once again with glad step to renew that dear sight — dear, though it scorched my eyes and harrowed my heart — and finding the greater sorrow, the greater desolation of the empty tomb!

There! I felt that I must think no more of that lest the thought should unnerve me when I should most want all my courage. That way madness lay! The darkness had already sufficient terrors of its own without bringing to it such grim remembrances and imaginings . . . And I had yet to go through some ordeal which, even to her who had passed and repassed the portals of death, was full of fear.

It was a merciful relief to me when, in groping my way forwards through the darkness, I struck against some portion of the furnishing of the church. Fortunately I was all strung up to tension, else I should never have been able to control instinctively, as I did, the shriek which was rising to my lips.

I would have given anything to have been able to light even a match. A single second of light would, I felt, have made me my own man again. But I knew that this would be against the implied condition of my being there at all, and might have had disastrous consequences to her whom I had come to save. It might even frustrate my scheme, and altogether destroy my opportunity. At that moment it was borne upon me more strongly than ever that this was not a mere fight for myself or my own selfish purposes — not merely an adventure or a struggle for only life and death against unknown difficulties and dangers. It was a fight on behalf of her I loved, not merely for her life, but perhaps even for her soul.

And yet this very thinking — understanding — created a new form of terror. For in that grim, shrouding darkness came memories of other moments of terrible stress.

Of wild, mystic rites held in the deep gloom of African forests, when, amid scenes of revolting horror, Obi and the devils of his kind seemed to reveal themselves to reckless worshippers, surfeited with horror, whose lives counted for naught; when even human sacrifice was an episode, and the reek of old deviltries and recent carnage tainted the air, till even I, who was, at the risk of my life, a privileged spectator who had come through dangers without end to behold the scene, rose and fled in horror.

Of scenes of mystery enacted in rock-cut temples beyond the Himalayas, whose fanatic priests, cold as death and as remorseless, in the reaction of their phrenzy of passion, foamed at the mouth and then sank into marble quiet, as with inner eyes they beheld the visions of the hellish powers which they had invoked.

Of wild, fantastic dances of the Devil-worshippers of Madagascar, where even the very semblance of humanity disappeared in the fantastic excesses of their orgies.

Of strange doings of gloom and mystery in the rock-perched monasteries of Thibet.

Of awful sacrifices, all to mystic ends, in the innermost recesses of Cathay.

Of weird movements with masses of poisonous snakes by the medicine-men of the Zuni and Mochi Indians in the far south-west of the Rockies, beyond the great plains.

Of secret gatherings in vast temples of old Mexico, and by dim altars of forgotten cities in the heart of great forests in South America.

Of rites of inconceivable horror in the fastnesses of Patagonia.

Of . . . Here I once more pulled myself up. Such thoughts were no kind of proper preparation for what I might have to endure. My work that night was to be based on love, on hope, on self-sacrifice for the woman who in all the world was the closest to my heart, whose future I was to share, whether that sharing might lead me to Hell or Heaven. The hand which undertook such a task must have no trembling.

Still, those horrible memories had, I am bound to say, a useful part in my preparation for the ordeal. They were of fact which I had seen, of which I had myself been in part a sharer, and which I had survived. With such experiences behind me, could there be aught before me more dreadful? . . .

Moreover, if the coming ordeal was of supernatural or superhuman order, could it transcend in living horror the vilest and most desperate acts of the basest men? . . .

With renewed courage I felt my way before me, till my sense of touch told me that I was at the screen behind which lay the stair to the Crypt.

There I waited, silent, still.

My own part was done, so far as I knew how to do it. Beyond this, what was to come was, so far as I knew, beyond my own control. I had done what I could; the rest must come from others. I had exactly obeyed my instructions, fulfilled my warranty to the utmost in my knowledge and power. There was, therefore, left for me in the present nothing but to wait.

It is a peculiarity of absolute darkness that it creates its own reaction. The eye, wearied of the blackness, begins to imagine forms of light. How far this is effected by imagination pure and simple I know not. It may be that nerves have their own senses that bring thought to the depository common to all the human functions, but, whatever may be the mechanism or the objective, the darkness seems to people itself with luminous entities.

So was it with me as I stood lonely in the dark, silent church. Here and there seemed to flash tiny points of light.

In the same way the silence began to be broken now and again by strange muffled sounds — the suggestion of sounds rather than actual vibrations. These were all at first of the minor importance of movement — rustlings, creakings, faint stirrings, fainter breathings. Presently, when I had somewhat recovered from the sort of hypnotic trance to which the darkness and stillness had during the time of waiting reduced me, I looked around in wonder.

The phantoms of light and sound seemed to have become real. There were most certainly actual little points of light in places — not enough to see details by, but quite sufficient to relieve the utter gloom. I thought — though it may have been a mingling of recollection and imagination — that I could distinguish the outlines of the church; certainly the great altar-screen was dimly visible. Instinctively I looked up — and thrilled. There, hung high above me, was, surely enough, a great Greek Cross, outlined by tiny points of light.

I lost myself in wonder, and stood still, in a purely receptive mood, unantagonistic to aught, willing for whatever might come, ready for all things, in rather a negative than a positive mood — a mood which has an aspect of spiritual meekness. This is the true spirit of the neophyte, and, though I did not think of it at the time, the proper attitude for what is called by the Church in whose temple I stood a "neo-nymph."

As the light grew a little in power, though never increasing enough for distinctness, I saw dimly before me a table on which rested a great open book, whereon were laid two rings — one of sliver, the other of gold — and two crowns wrought of flowers, bound at the joining of their stems with tissue — one of gold, the other of silver. I do not know much of the ritual of the old Greek Church, which is the religion of the Blue Mountains, but the things which I saw before me could be none other than enlightening symbols. Instinctively I knew that I had been brought hither, though in this grim way, to be married. The very idea of it thrilled me to the heart's core. I thought the best thing I could do would be to stay quite still, and not show surprise at anything that might happen; but be sure I was all eyes and ears.

I peered anxiously around me in every direction, but I could see no sign of her whom I had come to meet.

Incidentally, however, I noticed that in the lighting, such as it was, there was no flame, no "living" light. Whatever light there was came muffled, as though through some green translucent stone. The whole effect was terribly weird and disconcerting.

Presently I started, as, seemingly out of the darkness beside me, a man's hand stretched out and took mine. Turning, I found close to me a tall man with shining black eyes and long black hair and beard. He was clad in some kind of gorgeous robe of cloth of gold, rich with variety of adornment. His head was covered with a high, overhanging hat draped closely with a black scarf, the ends of which formed a long, hanging veil on either side. These veils, falling over the magnificent robes of cloth of gold, had an extraordinarily solemn effect.

I yielded myself to the guiding hand, and shortly found myself, so far as I could see, at one side of the sanctuary.

In the floor close to my feet was a yawning chasm, into which, from so high over my head that in the uncertain light I could not distinguish its origin, hung a chain. At the sight a strange wave of memory swept over me. I could not but remember the chain which hung over the glass-covered tomb in the Crypt, and I had an instinctive feeling that the grim chasm in the floor of the sanctuary was but the other side of the opening in the roof of the crypt from which the chain over the sarcophagus depended.

There was a creaking sound — the groaning of a windlass and the clanking of a chain. There was heavy breathing close to me somewhere. I was so intent on what was going on that I did not see that one by one, seeming to grow out of the surrounding darkness, several black figures in monkish garb appeared with the silence of ghosts. Their faces were shrouded in black cowls, wherein were holes through which I could see dark gleaming eyes. My guide held me tightly by the hand. This gave me a feeling of security in the touch which helped to retain within my breast some semblance of calm.

The strain of the creaking windlass and the clanking chain continued for so long that the suspense became almost unendurable. At last there came into sight an iron ring, from which as a centre depended four lesser chains spreading wide. In a few seconds more I could see that these were fixed to the corners of the great stone tomb with the covering of glass, which was being dragged upward. As it arose it filled closely the whole aperture. When its bottom had reached the level of the floor it stopped, and remained rigid. There was no room for oscillation. It was at once surrounded by a number of black figures, who raised the glass covering and bore it away into the darkness. Then there stepped forward a very tall man, black-bearded, and with head-gear like my guide, but made in triple tiers, he also was gorgeously arrayed in flowing robes of cloth of gold richly embroidered. He raised his hand, and forthwith eight other black-clad figures stepped forward, and bending over the stone coffin, raised from it the rigid form of my Lady, still clad in her Shroud, and laid it gently on the floor of the sanctuary.

I felt it a grace that at that instant the dim lights seemed to grow less, and finally to disappear — all save the tiny points that marked the outline of the great Cross high overhead. These only gave light enough to accentuate the gloom. The hand that held mine now released it, and with a sigh I realised that I was alone. After a few moments more of the groaning of the winch and clanking of the chain there was a sharp sound of stone meeting stone; then there was silence. I listened acutely, but could not hear near me the slightest sound. Even the cautious, restrained breathing around me, of which up to then I had been conscious, had ceased. Not knowing, in the helplessness of my ignorance, what I should do, I remained as I was, still and silent, for a time that seemed endless. At last, overcome by some emotion which I could not at the moment understand, I slowly sank to my knees and bowed my head. Covering my face with my hands, I tried to recall the prayers of my youth. It was not, I am certain, that fear in any form had come upon me, or that I hesitated or faltered in my intention. That much I know now; I knew it even then. It was, I believe, that the prolonged impressive gloom and mystery had at last touched me to the quick. The bending of the knees was but symbolical of the bowing of the spirit to a higher Power. When I had realised that much, I felt more content than I had done since I had entered the church, and with the renewed consciousness of courage, took my hands from my face, and lifted again my bowed head.

Impulsively I sprang to my feet and stood erect — waiting. All seemed to have changed since I had dropped on my knees. The points of light about time church, which had been eclipsed, had come again, and were growing in power to a partial revealing of the dim expanse. Before me was the table with the open book, on which were laid the gold and silver rings and the two crowns of flowers. There were also two tall candles, with tiniest flames of blue — the only living light to be seen.

Out of the darkness stepped the same tall figure in the gorgeous robes and the triple hat. He led by the hand my Lady, still clad in her Shroud; but over it, descending from the crown of her head, was a veil of very old and magnificent lace of astonishing fineness. Even in that dim light I could note the exquisite beauty of the fabric. The veil was fastened with a bunch of tiny sprays of orange-blossom mingled with cypress and laurel — a strange combination. In her hand she carried a great bouquet of the same. Its sweet intoxicating odour floated up to my nostrils. It and the sentiment which its very presence evoked made me quiver.

Yielding to the guiding of the hand which held hers, she stood at my left side before the table. Her guide then took his place behind her. At either end of the table, to right and left of us, stood a long-bearded priest in splendid robes, and wearing the hat with depending veil of black. One of them, who seemed to be the more important of the two, and took the initiative, signed to us to put our right hands on the open book. My Lady, of course, understood the ritual, and knew the words which the priest was speaking, and of her own accord put out her hand. My guide at the same moment directed my hand to the same end. It thrilled me to touch my Lady's hand, even under such mysterious conditions.

After the priest had signed us each thrice on the forehead with the sign of the Cross, he gave to each of us a tiny lighted taper brought to him for the purpose. The lights were welcome, not so much for the solace of the added light, great as that was, but because it allowed us to see a little more of each other's faces. It was rapture to me to see the face of my Bride; and from the expression of her face I was assured that she felt as I did. It gave me an inexpressible pleasure when, as her eyes rested on me, there grew a faint blush over the grey pallor of her cheeks.

The priest then put in solemn voice to each of us in turn, beginning with me, the questions of consent which are common to all such rituals. I answered as well as I could, following the murmured words of my guide. My Lady answered out proudly in a voice which, though given softly, seemed to ring. It was a concern — even a grief — to me that I could not, in the priest's questioning, catch her name, of which, strangely enough, — I was ignorant. But, as I did not know the language, and as the phrases were not in accord literally with our own ritual, I could not make out which word was the name.

After some prayers and blessings, rhythmically spoken or sung by an invisible choir, the priest took the rings from the open book, and, after signing my forehead thrice with the gold one as he repeated the blessing in each case, placed it on my right hand; then he gave my Lady the silver one, with the same ritual thrice repeated. I suppose it was the blessing which is the effective point in making two into one.

After this, those who stood behind us exchanged our rings thrice, taking them from one finger and placing them on the other, so that at the end my wife wore the gold ring and I the silver one.

Then came a chant, during which the priest swung the censer himself, and my wife and I held our tapers. After that he blessed us, the responses coming from the voices of the unseen singers in the darkness.

After a long ritual of prayer and blessing, sung in triplicate, the priest took the crowns of flowers, and put one on the head of each, crowning me first, and with the crown tied with gold. Then he signed and blessed us each thrice. The guides, who stood behind us, exchanged our crowns thrice, as they had exchanged the rings; so that at the last, as I was glad to see, my wife wore the crown of gold, and I that of silver.

Then there came, if it is possible to describe such a thing, a hush over even that stillness, as though some form of added solemnity were to be gone through. I was not surprised, therefore, when the priest took in his hands the great golden chalice. Kneeling, my wife and I partook together thrice.

When we had risen from our knees and stood for a little while, the priest took my left hand in his right, and I, by direction of my guide, gave my right hand to my wife. And so in a line, the priest leading, we circled round the table in rhythmic measure. Those who supported us moved behind us, holding the crowns over our heads, and replacing them when we stopped.

After a hymn, sung through the darkness, the priest took off our crowns. This was evidently the conclusion of the ritual, for the priest placed us in each other's arms to embrace each other. Then he blessed us, who were now man and wife!

The lights went out at once, some as if extinguished, others slowly fading down to blackness.

Left in the dark, my wife and I sought each other's arms again, and stood together for a few moments heart to heart, tightly clasping each other, and kissed each other fervently.

Instinctively we turned to the door of the church, which was slightly open, so that we could see the moonlight stealing in through the aperture. With even steps, she holding me tightly by the left arm — which is the wife's arm, we passed through the old church and out into the free air.

Despite all that the gloom had brought me, it was sweet to be in the open air and together — this quite apart from our new relations to each other. The moon rode high, and the full light, coming after the dimness or darkness in the church, seemed as bright as day. I could now, for the first time, see my wife's face properly. The glamour of the moonlight may have served to enhance its ethereal beauty, but neither moonlight nor sunlight could do justice to that beauty in its living human splendour. As I gloried in her starry eyes I could think of nothing else; but when for a moment my eyes, roving round for the purpose of protection, caught sight of her whole figure, there was a pang to my heart. The brilliant moonlight showed every detail in terrible effect, and I could see that she wore only her Shroud. In the moment of darkness, after the last benediction, before she returned to my arms, she must have removed her bridal veil. This may, of course, have been in accordance with the established ritual of her church; but, all the same, my heart was sore. The glamour of calling her my very own was somewhat obscured by the bridal adornment being shorn. But it made no difference in her sweetness to me. Together we went along the path through the wood, she keeping equal step with me in wifely way.

When we had come through the trees near enough to see the roof of the Castle, now gilded with the moonlight, she stopped, and looking at me with eyes full of love, said:

"Here I must leave you!"

"What?" I was all aghast, and I felt that my chagrin was expressed in the tone of horrified surprise in my voice. She went on quickly:

"Alas! It is impossible that I should go farther — at present!"

"But what is to prevent you?" I queried. "You are now my wife. This is our wedding-night; and surely your place is with me!" The wail in her voice as she answered touched me to the quick:

"Oh, I know, I know! There is no dearer wish in my heart — there can be none — than to share my husband's home. Oh, my dear, my dear, if you only knew what it would be to me to be with you always! But indeed I may not — not yet! I am not free! If you but knew how much that which has happened to-night has cost me — or how much cost to others as well as to myself may be yet to come — you would understand. Rupert" — it was the first time she had ever addressed me by name, and naturally it thrilled me through and through— "Rupert, my husband, only that I trust you with all the faith which is in perfect love — mutual love, I dare not have done what I have done this night. But, dear, I know that you will bear me out; that your wife's honour is your honour, even as your honour is mine. My honour is given to this; and you can help me — the only help I can have at present — by trusting me. Be patient, my beloved, be patient! Oh, be patient for a little longer! It shall not be for long. So soon as ever my soul is freed I shall come to you, my husband; and we shall never part again. Be content for a while! Believe me that I love you with my very soul; and to keep away from your dear side is more bitter for me than even it can be for you! Think, my dear one, I am not as other women are, as some day you shall clearly understand. I am at the present, and shall be for a little longer, constrained by duties and obligations put upon me by others, and for others, and to which I am pledged by the most sacred promises — given not only by myself, but by others — and which I must not forgo. These forbid me to do as I wish. Oh, trust me, my beloved — my husband!"

She held out her hands appealingly. The moonlight, falling through the thinning forest, showed her white cerements. Then the recollection of all she must have suffered — the awful loneliness in that grim tomb in the Crypt, the despairing agony of one who is helpless against the unknown — swept over me in a wave of pity. What could I do but save her from further pain? And this could only be by showing her my faith and trust. If she was to go back to that dreadful charnel-house, she would at least take with her the remembrance that one who loved her and whom she loved — to whom she had been lately bound in the mystery of marriage — trusted her to the full. I loved her more than myself — more than my own soul; and I was moved by pity so great that all possible selfishness was merged in its depths. I bowed my head before her — my Lady and my Wife — as I said:

"So be it, my beloved. I trust you to the full, even as you trust me. And that has been proven this night, even to my own doubting heart. I shall wait; and as I know you wish it, I shall wait as patiently as I can. But till you come to me for good and all, let me see you or hear from you when you can. The time, dear wife, must go heavily with me as I think of you suffering and lonely. So be good to me, and let not too long a time elapse between my glimpses of hope. And, sweetheart, when you *do* come to me, it shall be for ever!" There was something in the intonation of the last sentence — I felt its sincerity myself — some implied yearning for a promise, that made her beautiful eyes swim. The glorious stars in them were blurred as she answered with a fervour which seemed to me as more than earthly:

"For ever! I swear it!"

With one long kiss, and a straining in each others arms, which left me tingling for long after we had lost sight of each other, we parted. I stood and watched her as her white figure, gliding through the deepening gloom, faded as the forest thickened. It surely was no optical delusion or a phantom of the mind that her shrouded arm was raised as though in blessing or farewell before the darkness swallowed her up.

BOOK VI: THE PURSUIT IN THE FOREST

RUPERT'S JOURNAL — Continued.

July 3, 1907.

There is no anodyne but work to pain of the heart; and my pain is all of the heart. I sometimes feel that it is rather hard that with so much to make me happy I cannot know happiness. How can I be happy when my wife, whom I fondly love, and who I know loves me, is suffering in horror and loneliness of a kind which is almost beyond human belief? However, what is my loss is my country's gain, for the Land of the Blue Mountains is my country now, despite the fact that I am still a loyal subject of good King Edward. Uncle Roger took care of that when he said I should have the consent of the Privy Council before I might be naturalized anywhere else.

When I got home yesterday morning I naturally could not sleep. The events of the night and the bitter disappointment that followed my exciting joy made such a thing impossible. When I drew the curtain over the window, the reflection of the sunrise was just beginning to tinge the high-sailing clouds in front of me. I laid down and tried to rest, but without avail. However, I schooled myself to lie still, and at last, if I did not sleep, was at least quiescent.

Disturbed by a gentle tap at the door, I sprang up at once and threw on a dressing gown. Outside, when I opened the door, was Aunt Janet. She was holding a lighted candle in her hand, for though it was getting light in the open, the passages were still dark. When she saw me she seemed to breathe more freely, and asked if she might come in.

Whilst she sat on the edge of my bed, in her old-time way, she said in a hushed voice:

"Oh, laddie, laddie, I trust yer burden is no too heavy to bear."

"My burden! What on earth do you mean, Aunt Janet?" I said in reply. I did not wish to commit myself by a definite answer, for it was evident that she had been dreaming or Second Sighting again. She replied with the grim seriousness usual to her when she touched on occult matters:

"I saw your hairt bleeding, laddie. I kent it was yours, though how I kent it I don't know. It lay on a stone floor in the dark, save for a dim blue light such as corpse-lights are. On it was placed a great book, and close around were scattered many strange things, amongst them two crowns o' flowers — the one bound wi' silver, the other wi' gold. There was also a golden cup, like a chalice, o'erturned. The red wine trickled from it an' mingled wi' yer hairt's bluid; for on the great book was some vast dim weight wrapped up in black, and on it stepped in turn many men all swathed in black. An' as the weight of each came on it the bluid gushed out afresh. And oh, yer puir hairt, my laddie, was quick and leaping, so that at every beat it raised the black-clad weight! An' yet that was not all, for hard by stood a tall imperial shape o' a woman, all arrayed in white, wi' a great veil o' finest lace worn o'er a shrood. An' she was whiter than the snow, an' fairer than the morn for beauty; though a dark woman she was, wi' hair like the raven, an' eyes black as the sea at nicht, an' there was stars in them. An' at each beat o' yer puir bleeding hairt she wrung her white hands, an' the manin' o' her sweet voice rent my hairt in twain. Oh, laddie, laddie! what does it mean?"

I managed to murmur: "I'm sure I don't know, Aunt Janet. I suppose it was all a dream!"

"A dream it was, my dear. A dream or a veesion, whilka matters nane, for a' such are warnin's sent frae God . . . " Suddenly she said in a different voice:

"Laddie, hae ye been fause to any lassie? I'm no blamin' ye. For ye men are different frae us women, an' yer regard on recht and wrang differs from oors. But oh, laddie, a woman's tears fa' heavy when her hairt is for sair wi' the yieldin' to fause words. 'Tis a heavy burden for ony man to carry wi' him as he goes, an' may well cause pain to ithers that he fain would spare." She stopped, and in dead silence waited for me to speak. I thought it would be best to set her poor loving heart at rest, and as I could not divulge my special secret, spoke in general terms:

"Aunt Janet, I am a man, and have led a man's life, such as it is. But I can tell you, who have always loved me and taught me to be true, that in all the world there is no woman who must weep for any falsity of mine. If close there be any who, sleeping or waking, in dreams or visions or in reality, weeps because of me, it is surely not for my doing, but because of something outside me. It may be that her heart is sore because I must suffer, as all men must in some degree; but she does not weep for or through any act of mine."

She sighed happily at my assurance, and looked up through her tears, for she was much moved; and after tenderly kissing my forehead and blessing me, stole away. She was more sweet and tender than I have words to say, and the only regret that I have in all that is gone is that I have not been able to bring my wife to her, and let her share in the love she has for me. But that, too, will come, please God!

In the morning I sent a message to Rooke at Otranto, instructing him by code to bring the yacht to Vissarion in the coming night.

All day I spent in going about amongst the mountaineers, drilling them and looking after their arms. I *could* not stay still. My only chance of peace was to work, my only chance of sleep to tire myself out. Unhappily, I am very strong, so even when I came home at dark I was quite fresh. However, I found a cable message from Rooke that the yacht would arrive at midnight.

There was no need to summon the mountaineers, as the men in the Castle would be sufficient to make preparations for the yacht's coming.

Later.

The yacht has come. At half-past eleven the lookout signalled that a steamer without lights was creeping in towards the Creek. I ran out to the Flagstaff, and saw her steal in like a ghost. She is painted a steely blue-grey, and it is almost impossible to see her at any distance. She certainly goes wonderfully. Although there was not enough throb from the engines to mar the absolute stillness, she came on at a fine speed, and within a few minutes was close to the boom. I had only time to run down to give orders to draw back the boom when she glided in and stopped dead at the harbour wall. Rooke steered her himself, and he says he never was on a boat that so well or so quickly answered her helm. She is certainly a beauty, and so far as I can see at night perfect in every detail. I promise myself a few pleasant hours over her in the daylight. The men seem a splendid lot.

But I do not feel sleepy; I despair of sleep to-night. But work demands that I be fit for whatever may come, and so I shall try to sleep — to rest, at any rate.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL. — Continued.

July 4, 1907.

I was up with the first ray of sunrise, so by the time I had my bath and was dressed there was ample light. I went down to the dock at once, and spent the morning looking over the vessel, which fully justifies Rooke's enthusiasm about her. She is built on lovely lines, and I can quite understand that she is enormously fast. Her armour I can only take on the specifications, but her armament is really wonderful. And there are not only all the very newest devices of aggressive warfare — indeed, she has the newest up-to-date torpedoes and torpedo-guns — but also the old-fashioned rocket-tubes, which in certain occasions are so useful. She has electric guns and the latest Massillon water-guns, and Reinhardt electro-pneumatic "deliverers" for pyroxiline shells. She is even equipped with war-balloons easy of expansion, and with compressible Kitson aeroplanes. I don't suppose that there is anything quite like her in the world.

The crew are worthy of her. I can't imagine where Rooke picked up such a splendid lot of men. They are nearly all man-of-warsmen; of various nationalities, but mostly British. All young men — the oldest of them hasn't got into the forties — and, so far as I can learn, all experts of one kind or another in some special subject of warfare. It will go hard with me, but I shall keep them together.

How I got through the rest of the day I know not. I tried hard not to create any domestic trouble by my manner, lest Aunt Janet should, after her lurid dream or vision of last night, attach some new importance to it. I think I succeeded, for she did not, so far as I could tell, take any special notice of me. We parted as usual at half-past ten, and I came here and made this entry in my journal. I am more restless than ever to-night, and no wonder. I would give anything to be able to pay a visit to St. Sava's, and see my wife again — if it were only sleeping in her tomb. But I dare not do even that, lest she should come to see me here, and I should miss her. So I have done what I can. The glass door to the Terrace is open, so that she can enter at once if she comes. The fire is lit, and the room is warm. There is food ready in case she should care for it. I have plenty of light in the room, so that through the aperture where I have not fully drawn the curtain there may be light to guide her.

Oh, how the time drags! The clock has struck midnight. One, two! Thank goodness, it will shortly be dawn, and the activity of the day may begin! Work may again prove, in a way, to be an anodyne. In the meantime I must write on, lest despair overwhelm me.

Once during the night I thought I heard a footstep outside. I rushed to the window and looked out, but there was nothing to see, no sound to hear. That was a little after one o'clock. I feared to go outside, lest that should alarm her; so I came back to my table. I could not write, but I sat as if writing for a while. But I could not stand it, so rose and walked about the room. As I walked I felt that my Lady — it gives me a pang every time I remember that I do not know even her name — was not quite so far away from me. It made my heart beat to think that it might mean that she was coming to me. Could not I as well as Aunt Janet have a little Second Sight! I went towards the window, and, standing behind the curtain, listened. Far away I thought I heard a cry, and ran out on the Terrace; but there was no sound to be heard, and no sign of any living thing anywhere; so I took it for granted that it was the cry of some night bird, and came back to my room, and wrote at my journal till I was calm. I think my nerves must be getting out of order, when every sound of the night seems to have a special meaning for me.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL — Continued.

July 7, 1907

When the grey of the morning came, I gave up hope of my wife appearing, and made up my mind that, so soon as I could get away without exciting Aunt Janet's attention, I would go to St. Sava's. I always eat a good breakfast, and did I forgo it altogether, it would be sure to excite her curiosity — a thing I do not wish at present. As there was still time to wait, I lay down on my bed as I was, and — such is the way of Fate — shortly fell asleep.

I was awakened by a terrific clattering at my door. When I opened it I found a little group of servants, very apologetic at awaking me without instructions. The chief of them explained that a young priest had come from the Vladika with a message so urgent that he insisted on seeing me immediately at all hazards. I came out at once, and found him in the hall of the Castle, standing before the great fire, which was always lit in the early morning. He had a letter in his hand, but before giving it to me he said:

"I am sent by the Vladika, who pressed on me that I was not to lose a single instant in seeing you; that time is of golden price — nay, beyond price. This letter, amongst other things, vouches for me. A terrible misfortune has occurred. The daughter of our leader has disappeared during last night — the same, he commanded me to remind you, that he spoke of at the meeting when he would not let the mountaineers fire their guns. No sign of her can be found, and it is believed that she has been carried off by the emissaries of the Sultan of Turkey, who once before brought our nations to the verge of war by demanding her as a wife. I was also to say that the Vladika Plamenac would have come himself, but that it was necessary that he should at once consult with the Archbishop, Stevan Palealogue, as to what step is best to take in this dire calamity. He has sent out a search-party under the Archimandrite of Spazac, Petrof Vlastimir, who is to come on here with any news he can get, as you have command of the signalling, and can best spread the news. He knows that you, Gospodar, are in your great heart one of our compatriots, and that you have already proved your friendship by many efforts to strengthen our hands for war. And as a great compatriot, he calls on you to aid us in our need." He then handed me the letter, and stood by respectfully whilst I broke the seal and read it. It was written in great haste, and signed by the Vladika.

"Come with us now in our nation's peril. Help us to rescue what we most adore, and henceforth we shall hold you in our hearts. You shall learn how the men of the Blue Mountains can love faith and valour. Come!"

This was a task indeed — a duty worthy of any man. It thrilled me to the core to know that the men of the Blue Mountains had called on me in their dire need. It woke all the fighting instinct of my Viking forbears, and I vowed in my heart that they should be satisfied with my work. I called to me the corps of signallers who were in the house, and led them to the Castle roof, taking with me the young messenger-priest.

"Come with me," I said to him, "and see how I answer the Vladika's command."

The National flag was run up — the established signal that the nation was in need. Instantly on every summit near and far was seen the flutter of an answering flag. Quickly followed the signal that commanded the call to arms.

One by one I gave the signallers orders in quick succession, for the plan of search unfolded itself to me as I went on. The arms of the semaphore whirled in a way that made the young priest stare. One by one, as they took their orders, the signallers seemed to catch fire. Instinctively they understood the plan, and worked like demigods. They knew that so widespread a movement had its best chance in rapidity and in unity of action.

From the forest which lay in sight of the Castle came a wild cheering, which seemed to interpret the former stillness of the hills. It was good to feel that those who saw the signals — types of many — were ready. I saw the look of expectation on the face of the messenger-priest, and rejoiced at the glow that came as I turned to him to speak. Of course, he wanted to know something of what was going on. I saw the flashing of my own eyes reflected in his as I spoke:

"Tell the Vladika that within a minute of his message being read the Land of the Blue Mountains was awake. The mountaineers are already marching, and before the sun is high there will be a line of guards within hail of each other round the whole frontier — from Angusa to Ilsin; from Ilsin to Bajana; from Bajana to Ispazar; from Ispazar to Volok; from Volok to Tatra; from Tatra to Domitan; from Domitan to Gravaja; and from Gravaja back to Angusa. The line is double. The old men keep guard on the line, and the young men advance. These will close in at the advancing line, so that nothing can escape them. They will cover mountain-top and forest depth, and will close in finally on the Castle here, which they can behold from afar. My own yacht is here, and will sweep the coast from end to end. It is the fastest boat afloat, and armed against a squadron. Here will all signals come. In an hour where we stand will be a signal bureau, where trained eyes will watch night and day till the lost one has been found and the outrage has been avenged. The robbers are even now within a ring of steel, and cannot escape."

The young priest, all on fire, sprang on the battlements and shouted to the crowd, which was massing round the Castle in the gardens far below. The forest was giving up its units till they seemed like the nucleus of an army. The men cheered lustily, till the sound swung high up to us like the roaring of a winter sea. With bared heads they were crying:

"God and the Blue Mountains! God and the Blue Mountains!"

I ran down to them as quickly as I could, and began to issue their instructions. Within a time to be computed by minutes the whole number, organised by sections, had started to scour the neighbouring mountains. At first they had only understood the call to arms for general safety. But when they learned that the daughter of a chief had been captured, they simply went mad. From something which the messenger first said, but which I could not catch or did not understand, the blow seemed to have for them some sort of personal significance which wrought them to a frenzy.

When the bulk of the men had disappeared, I took with me a few of my own men and several of the mountaineers whom I had asked to remain, and together we went to the hidden ravine which I knew. We found the place empty; but there were unmistakable signs that a party of men had been encamped there for several days. Some of our men, who were skilled in woodcraft and in signs generally, agreed that there must have been some twenty of them. As they could not find any trail either coming to or going from the place, they came to the conclusion that they must have come separately from different directions and gathered there, and that they must have departed in something of the same mysterious way.

However, this was, at any rate, some sort of a beginning, and the men separated, having agreed amongst themselves to make a wide cast round the place in the search for tracks. Whoever should find a trail was to follow with at least one comrade, and when there was any definite news, it was to be signalled to the Castle.

I myself returned at once, and set the signallers to work to spread amongst our own people such news as we had.

When presently such discoveries as had been made were signalled with flags to the Castle, it was found that the marauders had, in their flight, followed a strangely zigzag course. It was evident that, in trying to baffle pursuit, they had tried to avoid places which they thought might be dangerous to them. This may have been simply a method to disconcert pursuit. If so, it was, in a measure, excellent, for none of those immediately following could possibly tell in what direction they were heading. It was only when we worked the course on the great map in the signaller's room (which was the old guard room of the Castle) that we could get an inkling of the general direction of their flight. This gave added trouble to the pursuit; for the men who followed, being ignorant of their general intent, could not ever take chance to head them off, but had to be ready to follow in any or every direction. In this manner the pursuit was altogether a stern chase, and therefore bound to be a long one.

As at present we could not do anything till the intended route was more marked, I left the signalling corps to the task of receiving and giving information to the moving bands, so that, if occasion served, they might head off the marauders. I myself took Rooke, as captain of the yacht, and swept out of the creek. We ran up north to Dalairi, then down south to Olesso, and came back to Vissarion. We saw nothing suspicious except, far off to the extreme southward, one warship which flew no flag. Rooke, however, who seemed to know ships by instinct, said she was a Turk; so on our return we signalled along the whole shore to watch her. Rooke held The Lady — which was the name I had given the armoured yacht — in readiness to dart out in case anything suspicious was reported. He was not to stand on any ceremony, but if necessary to attack. We did not intend to lose a point in this desperate struggle which we had undertaken. We had placed in different likely spots a couple of our own men to look after the signalling.

When I got back I found that the route of the fugitives, who had now joined into one party, had been definitely ascertained. They had gone south, but manifestly taking alarm from the advancing line of guards, had headed up again to the north-east, where the country was broader and the mountains wilder and less inhabited.

Forthwith, leaving the signalling altogether in the hands of the fighting priests, I took a small chosen band of the mountaineers of our own district, and made, with all the speed we could, to cut across the track of the fugitives a little ahead of them. The Archimandrite (Abbot) of Spazac, who had just arrived, came with us. He is a splendid man — a real fighter as well as a holy cleric, as good with his handjar as with his Bible, and a runner to beat the band. The marauders were going at a fearful pace, considering that they were all afoot; so we had to go fast also! Amongst these mountains there is no other means of progressing. Our own men were so aflame with ardour that I could not but notice that they, more than any of the others whom I had seen, had some special cause for concern.

When I mentioned it to the Archimandrite, who moved by my side, he answered:

"All natural enough; they are not only fighting for their country, but for their own!" I did not quite understand his answer, and so began to ask him some questions, to the effect that I soon began to understand a good deal more than he did.

Letter from Archbishop Stevan Palealogue, Head of the Eastern Church of the Blue Mountains, to the Lady Janet MacKelpie, Vissarion.

Written July 9, 1907.

Honoured Lady,

As you wish for an understanding regarding the late lamentable occurrence in which so much danger was incurred to this our Land of the Blue Mountains, and one dear to us, I send these words by request of the Gospodar Rupert, beloved of our mountaineers.

When the Voivode Peter Vissarion made his journey to the great nation to whom we looked in our hour of need, it was necessary that he should go in secret. The Turk was at our gates, and full of the malice of baffled greed. Already he had tried to arrange a marriage with the Voivodin, so that in time to come he, as her husband, might have established a claim to the inheritance of the land. Well he knew, as do all men, that the Blue Mountaineers owe allegiance to none that they themselves do not appoint to rulership. This has been the history in the past. But now and again an individual has arisen or come to the front adapted personally for such government as this land requires. And so the Lady Teuta, Voivodin of the Blue Mountains, was put for her proper guarding in the charge of myself as Head of the Eastern Church in the Land of the Blue Mountains, steps being taken in such wise that no capture of her could be effected by unscrupulous enemies of this our Land. This task and guardianship was gladly held as an honour by all concerned. For the Voivodin Teuta of Vissarion must be taken as representing in her own person the glory of the old Serb race, inasmuch as being the only child of the Voivode Vissarion, last male of his princely race —

the race which ever, during the ten centuries of our history, unflinchingly gave life and all they held for the protection, safety, and well-being of the Land of the Blue Mountains. Never during those centuries had any one of the race been known to fail in patriotism, or to draw back from any loss or hardship enjoined by high duty or stress of need. Moreover, this was the race of that first Voivode Vissarion, of whom, in legend, it was prophesied that he — once known as “The Sword of Freedom,” a giant amongst men — would some day, when the nation had need of him, come forth from his water-tomb in the lost Lake of Reo, and lead once more the men of the Blue Mountains to lasting victory. This noble race, then, had come to be known as the last hope of the Land. So that when the Voivode was away on his country’s service, his daughter should be closely guarded. Soon after the Voivode had gone, it was reported that he might be long delayed in his diplomacies, and also in studying the system of Constitutional Monarchy, for which it had been hoped to exchange our imperfect political system. I may say *inter alia* that he was mentioned as to be the first king when the new constitution should have been arranged.

Then a great misfortune came on us; a terrible grief overshadowed the land. After a short illness, the Voivodin Teuta Vissarion died mysteriously of a mysterious ailment. The grief of the mountaineers was so great that it became necessary for the governing Council to warn them not to allow their sorrow to be seen. It was imperatively necessary that the fact of her death should be kept secret. For there were dangers and difficulties of several kinds. In the first place it was advisable that even her father should be kept in ignorance of his terrible loss. It was well known that he held her as the very core of his heart and that if he should hear of her death, he would be too much prostrated to be able to do the intricate and delicate work which he had undertaken. Nay, more: he would never remain afar off, under the sad circumstances, but would straightway return, so as to be in the land where she lay. Then suspicions would crop up, and the truth must shortly be known afield, with the inevitable result that the Land would become the very centre of a war of many nations.

In the second place, if the Turks were to know that the race of Vissarion was becoming extinct, this would encourage them to further aggression, which would become immediate should they find out that the Voivode was himself away. It was well known that they were already only suspending hostilities until a fitting opportunity should arise. Their desire for aggression had become acute after the refusal of the nation, and of the girl herself, that she should become a wife of the Sultan.

The dead girl had been buried in the Crypt of the church of St. Sava, and day after day and night after night, singly and in parties, the sorrowing mountaineers had come to pay devotion and reverence at her tomb. So many had wished to have a last glimpse of her face that the Vladika had, with my own consent as Archbishop, arranged for a glass cover to be put over the stone coffin wherein her body lay.

After a little time, however, there came a belief to all concerned in the guarding of the body — these, of course, being the priests of various degrees of dignity appointed to the task — that the Voivodin was not really dead, but only in a strangely-prolonged trance. Thereupon a new complication arose. Our mountaineers are, as perhaps you know, by nature deeply suspicious — a characteristic of all brave and self-sacrificing people who are jealous of their noble heritage. Having, as they believed, seen the girl dead, they might not be willing to accept the fact of her being alive. They might even imagine that there was on foot some deep, dark plot which was, or might be, a menace, now or hereafter, to their independence. In any case, there would be certain to be two parties on the subject, a dangerous and deplorable thing in the present condition of affairs.

As the trance, or catalepsy, whatever it was, continued for many days, there had been ample time for the leaders of the Council, the Vladika, the priesthood represented by the Archimandrite of Spazac, myself as Archbishop and guardian of the Voivodin in her father's absence, to consult as to a policy to be observed in case of the girl awaking. For in such case the difficulty of the situation would be multiplied indefinitely. In the secret chambers of St. Sava's we had many secret meetings, and were finally converging on agreement when the end of the trance came.

The girl awoke!

She was, of course, terribly frightened when she found herself in a tomb in the Crypt. It was truly fortunate that the great candles around her tomb had been kept lighted, for their light mitigated the horror of the place. Had she waked in darkness, her reason might have become unseated.

She was, however, a very noble girl; brave, with extraordinary will, and resolution, and self-command, and power of endurance. When she had been taken into one of the secret chambers of the church, where she was warmed and cared for, a hurried meeting was held by the Vladika, myself, and the chiefs of the National Council. Word had been at once sent to me of the joyful news of her recovery; and with the utmost haste I came, arriving in time to take a part in the Council.

At the meeting the Voivodin was herself present, and full confidence of the situation was made to her. She herself proposed that the belief in her death should be allowed to prevail until the return of her father, when all could be effectively made clear. To this end she undertook to submit to the terrific strain which such a proceeding would involve. At first we men could not believe that any woman could go through with such a task, and some of us did not hesitate to voice our doubts — our disbelief. But she stood to her guns, and actually down-faced us. At the last we, remembering things that had been done, though long ages ago, by others of her race, came to believe not merely in her self-belief and intention, but even in the feasibility of her plan. She took the most solemn oaths not to betray the secret under any possible stress.

The priesthood undertook through the Vladika and myself to further a ghostly belief amongst the mountaineers which would tend to prevent a too close or too persistent observation. The Vampire legend was spread as a protection against partial discovery by any mischance, and other weird beliefs were set afoot and fostered. Arrangements were made that only on certain days were the mountaineers to be admitted to the Crypt, she agreeing that for these occasions she was to take opiates or carry out any other aid to the preservation of the secret. She was willing, she impressed upon us, to make any personal sacrifice which might be deemed necessary for the carrying out her father's task for the good of the nation.

Of course, she had at first terrible frights lying alone in the horror of the Crypt. But after a time the terrors of the situation, if they did not cease, were mitigated. There are secret caverns off the Crypt, wherein in troublous times the priests and others of high place have found safe retreat. One of these was prepared for the Voivodin, and there she remained, except for such times as she was on show — and certain other times of which I shall tell you. Provision was made for the possibility of any accidental visit to the church. At such times, warned by an automatic signal from the opening door, she was to take her place in the tomb. The mechanism was so arranged that the means to replace the glass cover, and to take the opiate, were there ready to her hand. There was to be always a watch of priests at night in the church, to guard her from ghostly fears as well as from more physical dangers; and if she was actually in her tomb, it was to be visited at certain intervals. Even the draperies which covered her in the sarcophagus were rested on a bridge placed from side to side just above her, so as to hide the rising and falling of her bosom as she slept under the narcotic.

After a while the prolonged strain began to tell so much on her that it was decided that she should take now and again exercise out of doors. This was not difficult, for when the Vampire story which we had spread began to be widely known, her being seen would be accepted as a proof of its truth. Still, as there was a certain danger in her being seen at all, we thought it necessary to exact from her a solemn oath that so long as her sad task lasted she should under no circumstances ever wear any dress but her shroud — this being the only way to insure secrecy and to prevail against accident.

There is a secret way from the Crypt to a sea cavern, whose entrance is at high-tide under the water-line at the base of the cliff on which the church is built. A boat, shaped like a coffin, was provided for her; and in this she was accustomed to pass across the creek whenever she wished to make excursion. It was an excellent device, and most efficacious in disseminating the Vampire belief.

This state of things had now lasted from before the time when the Gospodar Rupert came to Vissarion up to the day of the arrival of the armoured yacht.

That night the priest on duty, on going his round of the Crypt just before dawn, found the tomb empty. He called the others, and they made full search. The boat was gone from the cavern, but on making search they found it on the farther side of the creek, close to the garden stairs. Beyond this they could discover nothing. She seemed to have disappeared without leaving a trace.

Straightway they went to the Vladika, and signalled to me by the fire-signal at the monastery at Astrag, where I then was. I took a band of mountaineers with me, and set out to scour the country. But before going I sent an urgent message to the Gospodar Rupert, asking him, who showed so much interest and love to our Land, to help us in our trouble. He, of course, knew nothing then of all have now told you. Nevertheless, he devoted himself whole-heartedly to our needs — as doubtless you know.

But the time had now come close when the Voivode Vissarion was about to return from his mission; and we of the council of his daughter's guardianship were beginning to arrange matters so that at his return the good news of her being still alive could be made public. With her father present to vouch for her, no question as to truth could arise.

But by some means the Turkish "Bureau of Spies" must have got knowledge of the fact already. To steal a dead body for the purpose of later establishing a fictitious claim would have been an enterprise even more desperate than that already undertaken. We inferred from many signs, made known to us in an investigation, that a daring party of the Sultan's emissaries had made a secret incursion with the object of kidnapping the Voivodin. They must have been bold of heart and strong of resource to enter the Land of the Blue Mountains on any errand, let alone such a desperate one as this. For centuries we have been teaching the Turk through bitter lessons that it is neither a safe task nor an easy one to make incursion here.

How they did it we know not — at present; but enter they did, and, after waiting in some secret hiding-place for a favourable opportunity, secured their prey. We know not even now whether they had found entrance to the Crypt and stole, as they thought, the dead body, or whether, by some dire mischance, they found her abroad — under her disguise as a ghost. At any rate, they had captured her, and through devious ways amongst the mountains were bearing her back to Turkey. It was manifest that when she was on Turkish soil the Sultan would force a marriage on her so as eventually to secure for himself or his successors as against all other nations a claim for the suzerainty or guardianship of the Blue Mountains.

Such was the state of affairs when the Gospodar Rupert threw himself into the pursuit with fiery zeal and the Berserk passion which he inherited from Viking ancestors, whence of old came “The Sword of Freedom” himself.

But at that very time was another possibility which the Gospodar was himself the first to realise. Failing the getting the Voivodin safe to Turkish soil, the ravishers might kill her! This would be entirely in accord with the base traditions and history of the Moslems. So, too, it would accord with Turkish customs and the Sultan’s present desires. It would, in its way, benefit the ultimate strategetic ends of Turkey. For were once the Vissarion race at an end, the subjection of the Land of the Blue Mountains might, in their view, be an easier task than it had yet been found to be.

Such, illustrious lady, were the conditions of affairs when the Gospodar Rupert first drew his handjar for the Blue Mountains and what it held most dear.

Palealogue,

Archbishop of the Eastern Church, in the Land of the Blue Mountains.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL — Continued.

July 8, 1907.

I wonder if ever in the long, strange history of the world had there come to any other such glad tidings as came to me — and even then rather inferentially than directly — from the Archimandrite's answers to my questioning. Happily I was able to restrain myself, or I should have created some strange confusion which might have evoked distrust, and would certainly have hampered us in our pursuit. For a little I could hardly accept the truth which wove itself through my brain as the true inwardness of each fact came home to me and took its place in the whole fabric. But even the most welcome truth has to be accepted some time by even a doubting heart. My heart, whatever it may have been, was not then a doubting heart, but a very, very grateful one. It was only the splendid magnitude of the truth which forbade its immediate acceptance. I could have shouted for joy, and only stilled myself by keeping my thoughts fixed on the danger which my wife was in. My wife! My wife! Not a Vampire; not a poor harassed creature doomed to terrible woe, but a splendid woman, brave beyond belief, patriotic in a way which has but few peers even in the wide history of bravery! I began to understand the true meaning of the strange occurrences that have come into my life. Even the origin and purpose of that first strange visit to my room became clear. No wonder that the girl could move about the Castle in so mysterious a manner. She had lived there all her life, and was familiar with the secret ways of entrance and exit. I had always believed that the place must have been honeycombed with secret passages. No wonder that she could find a way to the battlements, mysterious to everybody else. No wonder that she could meet me at the Flagstaff when she so desired.

To say that I was in a tumult would be to but faintly express my condition. I was rapt into a heaven of delight which had no measure in all my adventurous life — the lifting of the veil which showed that my wife — mine — won in all sincerity in the very teeth of appalling difficulties and dangers — was no Vampire, no corpse, no ghost or phantom, but a real woman of flesh and blood, of affection, and love, and passion. Now at last would my love be crowned indeed when, having rescued her from the marauders, I should bear her to my own home, where she would live and reign in peace and comfort and honour, and in love and wifely happiness if I could achieve such a blessing for her — and for myself.

But here a dreadful thought flashed across me, which in an instant turned my joy to despair, my throbbing heart to ice:

“As she is a real woman, she is in greater danger than ever in the hands of Turkish ruffians. To them a woman is in any case no more than a sheep; and if they cannot bring her to the harem of the Sultan, they may deem it the next wisest step to kill her. In that way, too, they might find a better chance of escape. Once rid of her the party could separate, and there might be a chance of some of them finding escape as individuals that would not exist for a party. But even if they did not kill her, to escape with her would be to condemn her to the worst fate of all the harem of the Turk! Lifelong misery and despair — however long that life might be — must be the lot of a Christian woman doomed to such a lot. And to her, just happily wedded, and after she had served her country in such a noble way as she had done, that dreadful life of shameful slavery would be a misery beyond belief.

"She must be rescued — and quickly! The marauders must be caught soon, and suddenly, so that they may have neither time nor opportunity to harm her, as they would be certain to do if they have warning of immediate danger.

"On! on!"

And "on" it was all through that terrible night as well as we could through the forest.

It was a race between the mountaineers and myself as to who should be first. I understood now the feeling that animated them, and which singled them out even from amongst their fiery comrades, when the danger of the Voivodin became known. These men were no mean contestants even in such a race, and, strong as I am, it took my utmost effort to keep ahead of them. They were keen as leopards, and as swift. Their lives had been spent among the mountains, and their hearts and souls on were in the chase. I doubt not that if the death of any one of us could have through any means effected my wife's release, we should, if necessary, have fought amongst ourselves for the honour.

From the nature of the work before us our party had to keep to the top of the hills. We had not only to keep observation on the flying party whom we followed, and to prevent them making discovery of us, but we had to be always in a position to receive and answer signals made to us from the Castle, or sent to us from other eminences.

Letter from Petrof Vlastimir, Archimandrite of Spazac, to the Lady Janet MacKelpie, of Vissarion.

Written July 8, 1907.

Great Lady,

I am asked to write by the Vladika, and have permission of the Archbishop. I have the honour of transmitting to you the record of the pursuit of the Turkish spies who carried off the Voivodin Teuta, of the noble House of Vissarion. The pursuit was undertaken by the Gospodar Rupert, who asked that I would come with his party, since what he was so good as to call my "great knowledge of the country and its people" might serve much. It is true that I have had much knowledge of the Land of the Blue Mountains and its people, amongst which and whom my whole life has been passed. But in such a cause no reason was required. There was not a man in the Blue Mountains who would not have given his life for the Voivodin Teuta, and when they heard that she had not been dead, as they thought, but only in a trance, and that it was she whom the marauders had carried off, they were in a frenzy. So why should I — to whom has been given the great trust of the Monastery of Spazac — hesitate at such a time? For myself, I wanted to hurry on, and to come at once to the fight with my country's foes; and well I knew that the Gospodar Rupert, with a lion's heart meet for his giant body, would press on with a matchless speed. We of the Blue Mountains do not lag when our foes are in front of us; most of all do we of the Eastern Church press on when the Crescent wars against the Cross!

We took with us no gear or hamper of any kind; no coverings except what we stood in; no food — nothing but our handjars and our rifles, with a sufficiency of ammunition. Before starting, the Gospodar gave hurried orders by signal from the Castle to have food and ammunition sent to us (as we might signal) by the nearest hamlet.

It was high noon when we started, only ten strong — for our leader would take none but approved runners who could shoot straight and use the handjar as it should be used. So as we went light, we expected to go fast. By this time we knew from the reports signalled to Vissarion that the enemies were chosen men of no despicable prowess.

The Keeper of the Green Flag of Islam is well served, and as though the Turk is an infidel and a dog, he is sometimes brave and strong. Indeed, except when he passes the confines of the Blue Mountains, he has been known to do stirring deeds. But as none who have dared to wander in amongst our hills ever return to their own land, we may not know of how they speak at home of their battles here. Still, these men were evidently not to be despised; and our Gospodar, who is a wise man as well as a valiant, warned us to be prudent, and not to despise our foes over much. We did as he counselled, and in proof we only took ten men, as we had only twenty against us. But then there was at stake much beyond life, and we took no risks. So, as the great clock at Vissarion clanged of noon, the eight fastest runners of the Blue Mountains, together with the Gospodar Rupert and myself, swept out on our journey. It had been signalled to us that the course which the marauders had as yet taken in their flight was a zigzag one, running eccentrically at all sorts of angles in all sorts of directions. But our leader had marked out a course where we might intercept our foes across the main line of their flight; and till we had reached that region we paused not a second, but went as fast as we could all night long. Indeed, it was amongst us a race as was the Olympic race of old Greece, each one vying with his fellows, though not in jealous emulation, but in high spirit, to best serve his country and the Voivodin Teuta. Foremost amongst us went the Gospodar, bearing himself as a Paladin of old, his mighty form pausing for no obstacle. Perpetually did he urge us on. He would not stop or pause for a moment, but often as he and I ran together — for, lady, in my youth I was the fleetest of all in the race, and even that now can head a battalion when duty calls — he would ask me certain questions as to the Lady Teuta and of the strange manner of her reputed death, as it was gradually unfolded in my answers to his questioning. And as each new phase of knowledge came to him, he would rush on as one possessed of fiends: whereat our mountaineers, who seem to respect even fiends for their thoroughness, would strive to keep pace with him till they too seemed worked into diabolic possession. And I myself, left alone in the calmness of sacerdotal office, forgot even that. With surging ears and eyes that saw blood, I rushed along with best of them.

Then truly the spirit of a great captain showed itself in the Gospodar, for when others were charged with fury he began to force himself into calm, so that out of his present self-command and the memory of his exalted position came a worthy strategy and thought for every contingency that might arise. So that when some new direction was required for our guidance, there was no hesitation in its coming. We, nine men of varying kinds, all felt that we had a master; and so, being willing to limit ourselves to strict obedience, we were free to use such thoughts as well as such powers as we had to the best advantage of the doing.

We came across the trail of the flying marauders on the second morning after the abduction, a little before noon. It was easy enough to see, for by this time the miscreants were all together, and our people, who were woodlanders, were able to tell much of the party that passed. These were evidently in a terrified hurry, for they had taken no precautions such as are necessary baffle pursuit, and all of which take time. Our foresters said that two went ahead and two behind. In the centre went the mass, moving close together, as though surrounding their prisoner. We caught not even a single glimpse her — could not have, they encompassed her so closely. But our foresters saw other than the mass; the ground that had been passed was before them. They knew that the prisoner had gone unwillingly — nay, more: one of them said as he rose from his knees, where he had been examining of the ground:

"The misbegotten dogs have been urging her on with their yataghans! There are drops of blood, though there are no blood-marks on her feet."

Whereupon the Gospodar flamed with passion. His teeth ground together, and with a deep-breathed "On, on!" he sprang off again, handjar in hand, on the track.

Before long we saw the party in the distance. They this were far below us in a deep valley, although the track of their going passed away to the right hand. They were making for the base of the great cliff, which rose before us all. Their reason was twofold, as we soon knew. Far off down the valley which they were crossing we saw signs of persons coming in haste, who must be of the search party coming from the north. Though the trees hid them, we could not mistake the signs. I was myself forester enough to have no doubt. Again, it was evident that the young Voivodin could travel no longer at the dreadful pace at which they had been going. Those blood-marks told their own tale! They meant to make a last stand here in case they should be discovered.

Then it was that he, who amongst us all had been most fierce and most bent on rapid pursuit, became the most the calm. Raising his hand for silence — though, God knows, we were and had been silent enough during that long rush through the forest — he said, in a low, keen whisper which cut the silence like a knife:

“My friends, the time is come for action. God be thanked, who has now brought us face to face with our foes! But we must be careful here — not on our own account, for we wish nothing more than to rush on and conquer or die — but for the sake of her whom you love, and whom I, too, love. She is in danger from anything which may give warning to those fiends. If they know or even suspect for an instant that we are near, they will murder her . . .”

Here his voice broke for an instant with the extremity of his passion or the depth of his feeling — I hardly know which; I think both acted on him.

“We know from those blood-marks what they can do — even to her.” His teeth ground together again, but he went on without stopping further:

“Let us arrange the battle. Though we are but little distance from them as the crow flies, the way is far to travel. There is, I can see, but one path down to the valley from this side. That they have gone by, and that they will sure to guard — to watch, at any rate. Let us divide, as to surround them. The cliff towards which they make runs far to the left without a break. That to the right we cannot see from this spot; but from the nature of the ground it is not unlikely that it turns round in this direction, making the hither end of the valley like a vast pocket or amphitheatre. As they have studied the ground in other places, they may have done so in this, and have come hither as to a known refuge. Let one man, a marksman, stay here.”

As he spoke a man stepped to the front. He was, I knew, an excellent shot.

"Let two others go to the left and try to find a way down the cliff before us. When they have descended to the level of the valley — path or no path — let them advance cautiously and secretly, keeping their guns in readiness. But they must not fire till need. Remember, my brothers," said, turning to those who stepped out a pace or two to the left, "that the first shot gives the warning which will be the signal for the Voivodin's death. These men will not hesitate. You must judge yourselves of the time to shoot. The others of us will move to the right and try to find a path on that side. If the valley be indeed a pocket between the cliffs, we must find a way down that is not a path!"

As he spoke thus there was a blaze in his eyes that betokened no good to aught that might stand in his way. I ran by his side as we moved to the right.

It was as he surmised about the cliff. When we got a little on our way we saw how the rocky formation trended to our right, till, finally, with a wide curve, it came round to the other side.

It was a fearful valley that, with its narrow girth and its towering walls that seemed to topple over. On the farther side from us the great trees that clothed the slope of the mountain over it grew down to the very edge of the rock, so that their spreading branches hung far over the chasm. And, so far as we could understand, the same condition existed on our own side. Below us the valley was dark even in the daylight. We could best tell the movement of the flying marauders by the flashes of the white shroud of their captive in the midst of them.

From where we were grouped, amid the great tree-trunks on the very brow of the cliff, we could, when our eyes were accustomed to the shadow, see them quite well. In great haste, and half dragging, half carrying the Voivodin, they crossed the open space and took refuge in a little grassy alcove surrounded, save for its tortuous entrance, by undergrowth. From the valley level it was manifestly impossible to see them, though we from our altitude could see over the stunted undergrowth. When within the glade, they took their hands from her. She, shuddering instinctively, withdrew to a remote corner of the dell.

And then, oh, shame on their manhood! — Turks and heathens though they were — we could see that they had submitted her to the indignity of gagging her and binding her hands!

Our Voivodin Teuta bound! To one and all of us it was like lashing us across the face. I heard the Gospodar's teeth grind again. But once more he schooled himself to calmness ere he said:

"It is, perhaps, as well, great though the indignity be. They are seeking their own doom, which is coming quickly . . . Moreover, they are thwarting their own base plans. Now that she is bound they will trust to their binding, so that they will delay their murderous alternative to the very last moment. Such is our chance of rescuing her alive!"

For a few moments he stood as still as a stone, as though revolving something in his mind whilst he watched. I could see that some grim resolution was forming in his mind, for his eyes ranged to the top of the trees above cliff, and down again, very slowly this time, as though measuring and studying the detail of what was in front of him. Then he spoke:

"They are in hopes that the other pursuing party may not come across them. To know that, they are waiting. If those others do not come up the valley, they will proceed on their way. They will return up the path the way they came. There we can wait them, charge into the middle of them when she is opposite, and cut down those around her. Then the others will open fire, and we shall be rid of them!

Whilst he was speaking, two of the men of our party, who I knew to be good sharpshooters, and who had just before lain on their faces and had steadied their rifles to shoot, rose to their feet.

“Command us, Gospodar!” they said simply, as they stood to attention. “Shall we go to the head of the ravine road and there take hiding?” He thought for perhaps a minute, whilst we all stood as silent as images. I could hear our hearts beating. Then he said:

“No, not yet. There is time for that yet. They will not — cannot stir or make plans in any way till they know whether the other party is coming towards them or not. From our height here we can see what course the others are taking long before those villains do. Then we can make our plans and be ready in time.”

We waited many minutes, but could see no further signs the other pursuing party. These had evidently adopted greater caution in their movements as they came closer to where they expected to find the enemy. The marauders began to grow anxious. Even at our distance we could gather as much from their attitude and movements.

Presently, when the suspense of their ignorance grew too much for them, they drew to the entrance of the glade, which was the farthest place to which, without exposing themselves to anyone who might come to the valley, they could withdraw from their captive. Here they consulted together. We could follow from their gestures what they were saying, for as they did not wish their prisoner to hear, their gesticulation was enlightening to us as to each other. Our people, like all mountaineers, have good eyes, and the Gospodar is himself an eagle in this as in other ways. Three men stood back from the rest. They stacked their rifles so that they could seize them easily. Then they drew their scimitars, and stood ready, as though on guard.

These were evidently the appointed murderers. Well they knew their work; for though they stood in a desert place with none within long distance except the pursuing party, of whose approach they would have good notice, they stood so close to their prisoner that no marksman in the world — now or that ever had been; not William Tell himself — could have harmed any of them without at least endangering her. Two of them turned the Voivodin round so that her face was towards the precipice — in which position she could not see what was going on — whilst he who was evidently leader of the gang explained, in gesture, that the others were going to spy upon the pursuing party. When they had located them he, or one of his men, would come out of the opening of the wood wherein they had had evidence of them, and hold up his hand.

That was to be the signal for the cutting of the victim's throat — such being the chosen method (villainous even for heathen murderers) of her death. There was not one of our men who did not grind his teeth when we witnessed the grim action, only too expressive, of the Turk as he drew his right hand, clenched as though he held a yataghan in it, across his throat.

At the opening of the glade all the spying party halted whilst the leader appointed to each his place of entry of the wood, the front of which extended in an almost straight across the valley from cliff to cliff.

The men, stooping low when in the open, and taking instant advantage of every little obstacle on the ground, seemed to fade like spectres with incredible swiftness across the level mead, and were swallowed up in the wood.

When they had disappeared the Gospodar Rupert revealed to us the details of the plan of action which he had revolving in his mind. He motioned us to follow him: we threaded a way between the tree-trunks, keeping all the while on the very edge of the cliff, so that the space below was all visible to us. When we had got round the curve sufficiently to see the whole of the wood on the valley level, without losing sight of the Voivodin and her appointed assassins, we halted under his direction. There was an added advantage of this point over the other, for we could see directly the rising of the hill-road, up which farther side ran the continuation of the mountain path which the marauders had followed. It was somewhere on that path that the other pursuing party had hoped to intercept the fugitives. The Gospodar spoke quickly, though in a voice of command which true soldiers love to hear:

"Brothers, the time has come when we can strike a blow for Teuta and the Land. Do you two, marksmen, take position here facing the wood." The two men here lay down and got their rifles ready. "Divide the frontage of the wood between you; arrange between yourselves the limits of your positions. The very instant one of the marauders appears, cover him; drop him before he emerges from the wood. Even then still watch and treat similarly whoever else may take his place. Do this if they come singly till not a man is left. Remember, brothers, that brave hearts alone will not suffice at this grim crisis. In this hour the best safety of the Voivodin is in the calm spirit and the steady eye!" Then he turned to the rest of us, and spoke to me:

"Archimandrite of Plazac, you who are interpreter to God of the prayers of so many souls, my own hour has come. If I do not return, convey my love to my Aunt Janet — Miss MacKelpie, at Vissarion. There is but one thing left to us if we wish to save the Voivodin. Do you, when the time comes, take these men and join the watcher at the top of the ravine road. When the shots are fired, do you out handjar, and rush the ravine and across the valley. Brothers, you may be in time to avenge the Voivodin, if you cannot save her. For me there must be a quicker way, and to it I go. As there is not, and will not be, time to traverse the path, I must take a quicker way. Nature finds me a path that man has made it necessary for me to travel. See that giant beech-tree that towers above the glade where the Voivodin is held? There is my path! When you from here have marked the return of the spies, give me a signal with your hat — do not use a handkerchief, as others might see its white, and take warning. Then rush that ravine. I shall take that as the signal for my descent by the leafy road. If I can do naught else, I can crush the murderers with my falling weight, even if I have to kill her too. At least we shall die together — and free. Lay us together in the tomb at St. Sava's. Farewell, if it be the last!"

He threw down the scabbard in which he carried his handjar, adjusted the naked weapon in his belt behind his back, and was gone!

We who were not watching the wood kept our eyes fixed on the great beech-tree, and with new interest noticed the long trailing branches which hung low, and swayed even in the gentle breeze. For a few minutes, which seemed amazingly long, we saw no sign of him. Then, high up on one of the great branches which stood clear of obscuring leaves, we saw something crawling flat against the bark. He was well out on the branch, hanging far over the precipice. He was looking over at us, and I waved my hand so that he should know we saw him. He was clad in green — his usual forest dress — so that there was not any likelihood of any other eyes noticing him. I took off my hat, and held it ready to signal with when the time should come. I glanced down at the glade and saw the Voivodin standing, still safe, with her guards so close to her as to touch. Then I, too, fixed my eyes on the wood.

Suddenly the man standing beside me seized my arm and pointed. I could just see through the trees, which were lower than elsewhere in the front of the wood, a Turk moving stealthily; so I waved my hat. At the same time a rifle underneath me cracked. A second or two later the spy pitched forward on his face and lay still. At the same instant my eyes sought the beech-tree, and I saw the close-lying figure raise itself and slide forward to a joint of the branch. Then the Gospodar, as he rose, hurled himself forward amid the mass of the trailing branches. He dropped like a stone, and my heart sank.

But an instant later he seemed in poise. He had clutched the thin, trailing branches as he fell; and as he sank a number of leaves which his motion had torn off floated out round him.

Again the rifle below me cracked, and then again, and again, and again. The marauders had taken warning, and were coming out in mass. But my own eyes were fixed on the tree. Almost as a thunderbolt falls fell the giant body of the Gospodar, his size lost in the immensity of his surroundings. He fell in a series of jerks, as he kept clutching the trailing beech-branches whilst they lasted, and then other lesser verdure growing out from the fissures in the rock after the lengthening branches had with all their elasticity reached their last point.

At length — for though this all took place in a very few seconds the gravity of the crisis prolonged them immeasurably — there came a large space of rock some three times his own length. He did not pause, but swung himself to one side, so that he should fall close to the Voivodin and her guards. These men did not seem to notice, for their attention was fixed on the wood whence they expected their messenger to signal. But they raised their yataghans in readiness. The shots had alarmed them; and they meant to do the murder now — messenger or no messenger

But though the men did not see the danger from above, the Voivodin did. She raised her eyes quickly at the first sound, and even from where we were, before we began to run towards the ravine path, I could see the triumphant look in her glorious eyes when she recognised the identity of the man who was seemingly coming straight down from Heaven itself to help her — as, indeed, she, and we too, can very well imagine that he did; for if ever heaven had a hand in a rescue on earth, it was now.

Even during the last drop from the rocky foliage the Gospodar kept his head. As he fell he pulled his handjar free, and almost as he was falling its sweep took off the head of one of the assassins. As he touched ground he stumbled for an instant, but it was towards his enemies. Twice with lightning rapidity the handjar swept the air, and at each sweep a head rolled on the sward.

The Voivodin held up her tied hands. Again the handjar flashed, this time downwards, and the lady was free. Without an instant's pause the Gospodar tore off the gag, and with his left arm round her and handjar in right hand, stood face toward his living foes. The Voivodin stooped suddenly, and then, raising the yataghan which had fallen from the hand of one of the dead marauders, stood armed beside him.

The rifles were now cracking fast, as the marauders — those that were left of them — came rushing out into the open. But well the marksmen knew their work. Well they bore in mind the Gospodar's command regarding calmness. They kept picking off the foremost men only, so that the onward rush never seemed to get more forward.

As we rushed down the ravine we could see clearly all before us. But now, just as we were beginning to fear lest some mischance might allow some of them to reach the glade, there was another cause of surprise — of rejoicing.

From the face of the wood seemed to burst all at once a body of men, all wearing the national cap, so we knew them as our own. They were all armed with the handjar only, and they came like tigers. They swept on the rushing Turks as though, for all their swiftness, they were standing still — literally wiping them out as a child wipes a lesson from its slate.

A few seconds later these were followed by a tall figure with long hair and beard of black mingled with grey. Instinctively we all, as did those in the valley, shouted with joy. For this was the Vladika Milosh Plamenac himself.

I confess that, knowing what I knew, I was for a short space of time anxious lest, in the terrific excitement in which we were all lapped, someone might say or do something which might make for trouble later on. The Gospodar's splendid achievement, which was worthy of any hero of old romance, had set us all on fire. He himself must have been wrought to a high pitch of excitement to dare such an act; and it is not at such a time that discretion must be expected from any man. Most of all did I fear danger from the womanhood of the Voivodin. Had I not assisted at her marriage, I might not have understood then what it must have been to her to be saved from such a doom at such a time by such a man, who was so much to her, and in such a way. It would have been only natural if at such a moment of gratitude and triumph she had proclaimed the secret which we of the Council of the Nation and her father's Commissioners had so religiously kept. But none of us knew then either the Voivodin or the Gospodar Rupert as we do now. It was well that they were as they are, for the jealousy and suspicion of our mountaineers might, even at such a moment, and even whilst they throbbed at such a deed, have so manifested themselves as to have left a legacy of distrust. The Vladika and I, who of all (save the two immediately concerned) alone knew, looked at each other apprehensively. But at that instant the Voivodin, with a swift glance at her husband, laid a finger on her lip; and he, with quick understanding, gave assurance by a similar sign. Then she sank before him on one knee, and, raising his hand to her lips, kissed it, and spoke:

"Gospodar Rupert, I owe you all that a woman may owe, except to God. You have given me life and honour! I cannot thank you adequately for what you have done; my father will try to do so when he returns. But I am right sure that the men of the Blue Mountains, who so value honour, and freedom, and liberty, and bravery, will hold you in their hearts for ever!"

This was so sweetly spoken, with lips that trembled and eyes that swam in tears, so truly womanly and so in accord with the custom of our nation regarding the reverence that women owe to men, that the hearts of our mountaineers were touched to the quick. Their noble simplicity found expression in tears. But if the gallant Gospodar could have for a moment thought that so to weep was unmanly, his error would have had instant correction. When the Voivodin had risen to her feet, which she did with queenly dignity, the men around closed in on the Gospodar like a wave of the sea, and in a second held him above their heads, tossing on their lifted hands as if on stormy breakers. It was as though the old Vikings of whom we have heard, and whose blood flows in Rupert's veins, were choosing a chief in old fashion. I was myself glad that the men were so taken up with the Gospodar that they did not see the glory of the moment in the Voivodin's starry eyes; for else they might have guessed the secret. I knew from the Vladika's look that he shared my own satisfaction, even as he had shared my anxiety.

As the Gospodar Rupert was tossed high on the lifted hands of the mountaineers, their shouts rose to such a sudden volume that around us, as far as I could see, the frightened birds rose from the forest, and their noisy alarm swelled the tumult.

The Gospodar, ever thoughtful for others, was the first to calm himself.

"Come, brothers," he said, "let us gain the hilltop, where we can signal to the Castle. It is right that the whole nation should share in the glad tidings that the Voivodin Teuta of Vissarion is free. But before we go, let us remove the arms and clothing of these carrion marauders. We may have use for them later on."

The mountaineers set him down, gently enough. And he, taking the Voivodin by the hand, and calling the Vladika and myself close to them, led the way up the ravine path which the marauders had descended, and thence through the forest to the top of the hill that dominated the valley. Here we could, from an opening amongst the trees, catch a glimpse far off of the battlements of Vissarion. Forthwith the Gospodar signalled; and on the moment a reply of their awaiting was given. Then the Gospodar signalled the glad news. It was received with manifest rejoicing. We could not hear any sound so far away, but we could see the movement of lifted faces and waving hands, and knew that it was well. But an instant after came a calm so dread that we knew before the semaphore had begun to work that there was bad news in store for us. When the news did come, a bitter wailing arose amongst us; for the news that was signalled ran:

"The Voivode has been captured by the Turks on his return, and is held by them at Ilsin."

In an instant the temper of the mountaineers changed. It was as though by a flash summer had changed to winter, as though the yellow glory of the standing corn had been obliterated by the dreary waste of snow. Nay, more: it was as when one beholds the track of the whirlwind when the giants of the forest are levelled with the sward. For a few seconds there was silence; and then, with an angry roar, as when God speaks in the thunder, came the fierce determination of the men of the Blue Mountains:

"To Ilsin! To Ilsin!" and a stampede in the direction of the south began. For, Illustrious Lady, you, perhaps, who have been for so short a time at Vissarion, may not know that at the extreme southern point of the Land of the Blue Mountains lies the little port of Ilsin, which long ago we wrested from the Turk.

The stampede was checked by the command, "Halt!" spoken in a thunderous voice by the Gospodar. Instinctively all stopped. The Gospodar Rupert spoke again:

"Had we not better know a little more before we start on our journey? I shall get by semaphore what details are known. Do you all proceed in silence and as swiftly as possible. The Vladika and I will wait here till we have received the news and have sent some instructions, when we shall follow, and, if we can, overtake you. One thing: be absolutely silent on what has been. Be secret of every detail — even as to the rescue of the Voivodin — except what I send."

Without a word — thus showing immeasurable trust — the whole body — not a very large one, it is true — moved on, and the Gospodar began signalling. As I was myself expert in the code, I did not require any explanation, but followed question and answer on either side. The first words the Gospodar Rupert signalled were:

"Silence, absolute and profound, as to everything which has been." Then he asked for details of the capture of the Voivode. The answer ran:

"He was followed from Flushing, and his enemies advised by the spies all along the route. At Ragusa quite a number of strangers — travellers seemingly — went on board the packet. When he got out, the strangers debarked too, and evidently followed him, though, as yet, we have no details. He disappeared at Ilsin from the Hotel Reo, whither he had gone. All possible steps are being taken to trace his movements, and strictest silence and secrecy are observed."

His answer was:

"Good! Keep silent and secret. Am hurrying back. Signal request to Archbishop and all members of National Council to come to Gadaar with all speed. There the yacht will meet him. Tell Rooke take yacht all speed to Gadaar; there meet Archbishop and Council — give him list of names — and return full speed. Have ready plenty arms, six flying artillery. Two hundred men, provisions three days. Silence, silence. All depends on that. All to go on as usual at Castle, except to those in secret."

When the receipt of his message had been signalled, we three — for, of course, the Voivodin was with us; she had refused to leave the Gospodar — set out hot-foot after our comrades. But by the time we had descended the hill it was evident that the Voivodin could not keep up the terrific pace at which we were going. She struggled heroically, but the long journey she had already taken, and the hardship and anxiety she had suffered, had told on her. The Gospodar stopped, and said that it would be better that he should press on — it was, perhaps, her father's life — and said he would carry her.

"No, no!" she answered. "Go on! I shall follow with the Vladika. And then you can have things ready to get on soon after the Archbishop and Council arrive." They kissed each other after, on her part, a shy glance at me; and he went on the track of our comrades at a great pace. I could see him shortly after catch them up, — though they, too, were going fast. For a few minutes they ran together, he speaking — I could note it from the way they kept turning their heads towards him. Then he broke away from them hurriedly. He went like a stag breaking covert, and was soon out of sight. They halted a moment or two. Then some few ran on, and all the rest came back towards us. Quickly they improvised a litter with cords and branches, and insisted that the Voivodin should use it. In an incredibly short time we were under way again, and proceeding with great rapidity towards Vissarion. The men took it in turns to help with the litter; I had the honour of taking a hand in the work myself.

About a third of the way out from Vissarion a number of our people met us. They were fresh, and as they carried the litter, we who were relieved were free for speed. So we soon arrived at the Castle.

Here we found all humming like a hive of bees. The yacht, which Captain Rooke had kept fired ever since the pursuing party under the Gospodar had left Vissarion, was already away, and tearing up the coast at a fearful rate. The rifles and ammunition were stacked on the quay. The field-guns, too, were equipped, and the cases of ammunition ready to ship. The men, two hundred of them, were paraded in full kit, ready to start at a moment's notice. The provision for three days was all ready to put aboard, and barrels of fresh water to trundle aboard when the yacht should return. At one end of the quay, ready to lift on board, stood also the Gospodar's aeroplane, fully equipped, and ready, if need were, for immediate flight.

I was glad to see that the Voivodin seemed none the worse for her terrible experience. She still wore her shroud; but no one seemed to notice it as anything strange. The whisper had evidently gone round of what had been. But discretion ruled the day. She and the Gospodar met as two who had served and suffered in common; but I was glad to notice that both kept themselves under such control that none of those not already in the secret even suspected that there was any love between them, let alone marriage.

We all waited with what patience we could till word was signalled from the Castle tower that the yacht had appeared over the northern horizon, and was coming down fast, keeping inshore as she came.

When she arrived, we heard to our joy that all concerned had done their work well. The Archbishop was aboard, and of the National Council not one was missing. The Gospodar hurried them all into the great hall of the Castle, which had in the meantime been got ready. I, too, went with him, but the Voivodin remained without.

When all were seated, he rose and said:

"My Lord Archbishop, Vladika, and Lords of the Council all, I have dared to summon you in this way because time presses, and the life of one you all love — the Voivode Vissarion — is at stake. This audacious attempt of the Turk is the old aggression under a new form. It is a new and more daring step than ever to try to capture your chief and his daughter, the Voivodin, whom you love. Happily, the latter part of the scheme is frustrated. The Voivodin is safe and amongst us. But the Voivode is held prisoner — if, indeed, he be still alive. He must be somewhere near Ilsin — but where exactly we know not as yet. We have an expedition ready to start the moment we receive your sanction — your commands. We shall obey your wishes with our lives. But as the matter is instant, I would venture to ask one question, and one only: ‘Shall we rescue the Voivode at any cost that may present itself?’ I ask this, for the matter has now become an international one, and, if our enemies are as earnest as we are, the issue is war!”

Having so spoken, and with a dignity and force which is inexpressible, he withdrew; and the Council, having appointed a scribe — the monk Cristoferos, whom I had suggested — began its work.

The Archbishop spoke:

“Lords of the Council of the Blue Mountains, I venture to ask you that the answer to the Gospodar Rupert be an instant ‘Yes!’ together with thanks and honour to that gallant Englisher, who has made our cause his own, and who has so valiantly rescued our beloved Voivodin from the ruthless hands of our enemies.” Forthwith the oldest member of the Council — Nicolos of Volok — rose, and, after throwing a searching look round the faces of all, and seeing grave nods of assent — for not a word was spoken — said to him who held the door: “Summon the Gospodar Rupert forthwith!” When Rupert entered, he spoke to him:

“Gospodar Rupert, the Council of the Blue Mountains has only one answer to give: Proceed! Rescue the Voivode Vissarion, whatever the cost may be! You hold henceforth in your hand the handjar of our nation, as already, for what you have done in your valiant rescue of our beloved Voivodin, your breast holds the heart of our people. Proceed at once! We give you, I fear, little time; but we know that such is your own wish. Later, we shall issue formal authorization, so that if war may ensue, our allies may understand that you have acted for the nation, and also such letters credential as may be required by you in this exceptional service. These shall follow you within an hour. For our enemies we take no account. See, we draw the handjar that we offer you." As one man all in the hall drew their handjars, which flashed as a blaze of lightning.

There did not seem to be an instant's delay. The Council broke up, and its members, mingling with the people without, took active part in the preparations. Not many minutes had elapsed when the yacht, manned and armed and stored as arranged, was rushing out of the creek. On the bridge, beside Captain Rooke, stood the Gospodar Rupert and the still-shrouded form of the Voivodin Teuta. I myself was on the lower deck with the soldiers, explaining to certain of them the special duties which they might be called on to fulfil. I held the list which the Gospodar Rupert had prepared whilst we were waiting for the yacht to arrive from Gadaar.

Petrof Vlastimir.

FROM RUPERT'S JOURNAL — Continued.

July 9, 1907.

We went at a terrific pace down the coast, keeping well inshore so as to avoid, if possible, being seen from the south. Just north of Ilsin a rocky headland juts out, and that was our cover. On the north of the peninsula is a small land-locked bay, with deep water. It is large enough to take the yacht, though a much larger vessel could not safely enter. We ran in, and anchored close to the shore, which has a rocky frontage — a natural shelf of rock, which is practically the same as a quay. Here we met the men who had come from Ilsin and the neighbourhood in answer to our signalling earlier in the day. They gave us the latest information regarding the kidnapping of the Voivode, and informed us that every man in that section of the country was simply aflame about it. They assured us that we could rely on them, not merely to fight to the death, but to keep silence absolutely. Whilst the seamen, under the direction of Rooke, took the aeroplane on shore and found a suitable place for it, where it was hidden from casual view, but from which it could be easily launched, the Vladika and I — and, of course, my wife — were hearing such details as were known of the disappearance of her father.

It seems that he travelled secretly in order to avoid just such a possibility as has happened. No one knew of his coming till he came to Fiume, whence he sent a guarded message to the Archbishop, which the latter alone would understand. But this Turkish agents were evidently on his track all the time, and doubtless the Bureau of Spies was kept well advised. He landed at Ilsin from a coasting steamer from Ragusa to the Levant.

For two days before his coming there had been quite an unusual number of arrivals at the little port, at which arrivals are rare. And it turned out that the little hotel — the only fairly good one in Ilsin — was almost filled up. Indeed, only one room was left, which the Voivode took for the night. The innkeeper did not know the Voivode in his disguise, but suspected who it was from the description. He dined quietly, and went to bed. His room was at the back, on the ground-floor, looking out on the bank of the little River Silva, which here runs into the harbour. No disturbance was heard in the night. Late in the morning, when the elderly stranger had not made his appearance, inquiry was made at his door. He did not answer, so presently the landlord forced the door, and found the room empty. His luggage was seemingly intact, only the clothes which he had worn were gone. A strange thing was that, though the bed had been slept in and his clothes were gone, his night-clothes were not to be found, from which it was argued by the local authorities, when they came to make inquiry, that he had gone or been taken from the room in his night-gear, and that his clothes had been taken with him. There was evidently some grim suspicion on the part of the authorities, for they had commanded absolute silence on all in the house. When they came to make inquiry as to the other guests, it was found that one and all had gone in the course of the morning, after paying their bills. None of them had any heavy luggage, and there was nothing remaining by which they might be traced or which would afford any clue to their identity. The authorities, having sent a confidential report to the seat of government, continued their inquiries, and even now all available hands were at work on the investigation. When I had signalled to Vissarion, before my arrival there, word had been sent through the priesthood to enlist in the investigation the services of all good men, so that every foot of ground in that section of the Blue Mountains was being investigated. The port-master was assured by his watchmen that no vessel, large or small, had heft the harbour during the night. The inference, therefore, was that the Voivode's captors had made inland with him — if, indeed, they were not already secreted in or near the town.

Whilst we were receiving the various reports, a hurried message came that it was now believed that the whole party were in the Silent

Tower. This was a well-chosen place for such an enterprise. It was a massive tower of immense strength, built as a memorial — and also as a "keep" — after one of the massacres of the invading Turks.

It stood on the summit of a rocky knoll some ten miles inland from the Port of Ilsin. It was a place shunned as a rule, and the country all around it was so arid and desolate that there were no residents near it. As it was kept for state use, and might be serviceable in time of war, it was closed with massive iron doors, which were kept locked except upon certain occasions. The keys were at the seat of government at Plazac. If, therefore, it had been possible to the Turkish marauders to gain entrance and exit, it might be a difficult as well as a dangerous task to try to cut the Voivode out. His presence with them was a dangerous menace to any force attacking them, for they would hold his life as a threat.

I consulted with the Vladika at once as to what was best to be done. And we decided that, though we should put a cordon of guards around it at a safe distance to prevent them receiving warning, we should at present make no attack.

We made further inquiry as to whether there had been any vessel seen in the neighbourhood during the past few days, and were informed that once or twice a warship had been seen on the near side of the southern horizon. This was evidently the ship which Rooke had seen on his rush down the coast after the abduction of the Voivodin, and which he had identified as a Turkish vessel. The glimpses of her which had been had were all in full daylight — there was no proof that she had not stolen up during the night-time without lights. But the Vladika and I were satisfied that the Turkish vessel was watching — was in league with both parties of marauders — and was intended to take off any of the strangers, or their prey, who might reach Ilsin undetected. It was evidently with this view that the kidnappers of Teuta had, in the first instance, made with all speed for the south. It was only when disappointed there that they headed up north, seeking in desperation for some chance of crossing the border. That ring of steel had so far well served its purpose.

I sent for Rooke, and put the matter before him. He had thought it out for himself to the same end as we had. His deduction was:

"Let us keep the cordon, and watch for any signal from the Silent Tower. The Turks will tire before we shall. I undertake to watch the Turkish warship. During the night I shall run down south, without lights, and have a look at her, even if I have to wait till the grey of the dawn to do so. She may see us; but if she does I shall crawl away at such pace that she shall not get any idea of our speed. She will certainly come nearer before a day is over, for be sure the bureau of spies is kept advised, and they know that when the country is awake each day increases the hazard of them and their plans being discovered. From their caution I gather that they do not court discovery; and from that that they do not wish for an open declaration of war. If this be so, why should we not come out to them and force an issue if need be?"

When Teuta and I got a chance to be alone, we discussed the situation in every phase. The poor girl was in a dreadful state of anxiety regarding her father's safety. At first she was hardly able to speak, or even to think, coherently. Her utterance was choked, and her reasoning palsied with indignation. But presently the fighting blood of her race restored her faculties, and then her woman's quick wit was worth the reasoning of a camp full of men. Seeing that she was all on fire with the subject, I sat still and waited, taking care not to interrupt her. For quite a long time she sat still, whilst the coming night thickened. When she spoke, the whole plan of action, based on subtle thinking, had mapped itself out in her mind:

"We must act quickly. Every hour increases the risk to my father." Here her voice broke for an instant; but she recovered herself and went on:

"If you go to the ship, I must not go with you. It would not do for me to be seen. The Captain doubtless knows of both attempts: that to carry me off as well as that against my father. As yet he is in ignorance of what has happened. You and your party of brave, loyal men did their work so well that no news could go forth. So long, therefore, as the naval Captain is ignorant, he must delay till the last. But if he saw me he would know that *that* branch of the venture had miscarried. He would gather from our being here that we had news of my father's capture, and as he would know that the marauders would fail unless they were relieved by force, he would order the captive to be slain."

"Yes, dear, to-morrow you had, perhaps, better see the Captain, but to-night we must try to rescue my father. Here I think I see a way. You have your aeroplane. Please take me with you into the Silent Tower."

"Not for a world of chrysolite!" said I, horrified. She took my hand and held it tight whilst she went on:

"Dear, I know, I know! Be satisfied. But it is the only way. You can, I know, get there, and in the dark. But if you were to go in it, it would give warning to the enemies, and besides, my father would not understand. Remember, he does not know you; he has never seen you, and does not, I suppose, even know as yet of your existence. But he would know me at once, and in any dress. You can manage to lower me into the Tower by a rope from the aeroplane. The Turks as yet do not know of our pursuit, and doubtless rely, at all events in part, on the strength and security of the Tower. Therefore their guard will be less active than it would at first or later on. I shall post father in all details, and we shall be ready quickly. Now, dear, let us think out the scheme together. Let your man's wit and experience help my ignorance, and we shall save my father!"

How could I have resisted such pleading — even had it not seemed wise? But wise it was; and I, who knew what the aeroplane could do under my own guidance, saw at once the practicalities of the scheme. Of course there was a dreadful risk in case anything should go wrong. But we are at present living in a world of risks — and her father's life was at stake. So I took my dear wife in my arms, and told her that my mind was hers for this, as my soul and body already were. And I cheered her by saying that I thought it might be done.

I sent for Rooke, and told him of the new adventure, and he quite agreed with me in the wisdom of it. I then told him that he would have to go and interview the Captain of the Turkish warship in the morning, if I did not turn up. "I am going to see the Vladika," I said. "He will lead our own troops in the attack on the Silent Tower. But it will rest with you to deal with the warship. Ask the Captain to whom or what nation the ship belongs. He is sure to refuse to tell. In such case mention to him that if he flies no nation's flag, his vessel is a pirate ship, and that you, who are in command of the navy of the Blue Mountains, will deal with him as a pirate is dealt with — no quarter, no mercy. He will temporize, and perhaps try a bluff; but when things get serious with him he will land a force, or try to, and may even prepare to shell the town. He will threaten to, at any rate. In such case deal with him as you think best, or as near to it as you can." He answered:

"I shall carry out your wishes with my life. It is a righteous task. Not that anything of that sort would ever stand in my way. If he attacks our nation, either as a Turk or a pirate, I shall wipe him out. We shall see what our own little packet can do. Moreover, any of the marauders who have entered the Blue Mountains, from sea or otherwise, shall never get out by sea! I take it that we of my contingent shall cover the attacking party. It will be a sorry time for us all if that happens without our seeing you and the Voivodin; for in such case we shall understand the worst!" Iron as he was, the man trembled.

"That is so, Rooke," I said. "We are taking a desperate chance, we know. But the case is desperate! But we all have our duty to do, whatever happens. Ours and yours is stern; but when we have done it, the result will be that life will be easier for others — for those that are left."

Before he left, I asked him to send up to me three suits of the Masterman bullet-proof clothes of which we had a supply on the yacht.

"Two are for the Voivodin and myself," I said; "the third is for the Voivode to put on. The Voivodin will take it with her when she descends from the aeroplane into the Tower."

Whilst any daylight was left I went out to survey the ground. My wife wanted to come with me, but I would not let her. "No," said I; "you will have at the best a fearful tax on your strength and your nerves. You will want to be as fresh as is possible when you get on the aeroplane." Like a good wife, she obeyed, and lay down to rest in the little tent provided for her.

I took with me a local man who knew the ground, and who was trusted to be silent. We made a long detour when we had got as near the Silent Tower as we could without being noticed. I made notes from my compass as to directions, and took good notice of anything that could possibly serve as a landmark. By the time we got home I was pretty well satisfied that if all should go well I could easily sail over the Tower in the dark. Then I had a talk with my wife, and gave her full instructions:

"When we arrive over the Tower," I said, "I shall lower you with a long rope. You will have a parcel of food and spirit for your father in case he is fatigued or faint; and, of course, the bullet-proof suit, which he must put on at once. You will also have a short rope with a belt at either end — one for your father, the other for you. When I turn the aeroplane and come back again, you will have ready the ring which lies midway between the belts. This you will catch into the hook at the end of the lowered rope. When all is secure, and I have pulled you both up by the windlass so as to clear the top, I shall throw out ballast which we shall carry on purpose, and away we go! I am sorry it must be so uncomfortable for you both, but there is no other way. When we get well clear of the Tower, I shall take you both up on the platform. If necessary, I shall descend to do it — and then we shall steer for Ilsin."

"When all is safe, our men will attack the Tower. We must let them do it, for they expect it. A few men in the clothes and arms which we took from your captors will be pursued by some of ours. It is all arranged. They will ask the Turks to admit them, and if the latter have not learned of your father's escape, perhaps they will do so. Once in, our men will try to open the gate. The chances are against them, poor fellows! but they are all volunteers, and will die fighting. If they win out, great glory will be theirs."

"The moon does not rise to-night till just before midnight, so we have plenty of time. We shall start from here at ten. If all be well, I shall place you in the Tower with your father in less than a quarter-hour from that. A few minutes will suffice to clothe him in bullet-proof and get on his belt. I shall not be away from the Tower more than a very few minutes, and, please God, long before eleven we shall be safe. Then the Tower can be won in an attack by our mountaineers. Perhaps, when the guns are heard on the ship of war — for there is sure to be firing — the Captain may try to land a shore party. But Rooke will stand in the way, and if I know the man and *The Lady*, we shall not be troubled with many Turks to-night. By midnight you and your father can be on the way to Vissarion. I can interview the naval Captain in the morning."

My wife's marvellous courage and self-possession stood to her. At half an hour before the time fixed she was ready for our adventure. She had improved the scheme in one detail. She had put on her own belt and coiled the rope round her waist, so the only delay would be in bringing her father's belt. She would keep the bullet-proof dress intended to be his strapped in a packet on her back, so that if occasion should be favourable he would not want to put it on till he and she should have reached the platform of the aeroplane. In such case, I should not steer away from the Tower at all, but would pass slowly across it and take up the captive and his brave daughter before leaving. I had learned from local sources that the Tower was in several stories. Entrance was by the foot, where the great iron-clad door was; then came living-rooms and storage, and an open space at the top. This would probably be thought the best place for the prisoner, for it was deep-sunk within the massive walls, wherein was no loophole of any kind. This, if it should so happen, would be the disposition of things best for our plan. The guards would at this time be all inside the Tower — probably resting, most of them — so that it was possible that no one might notice the coming of the airship. I was afraid to think that all might turn out so well, for in such case our task would be a simple enough one, and would in all human probability be crowned with success.

At ten o'clock we started. Teuta did not show the smallest sign of fear or even uneasiness, though this was the first time she had even seen an aeroplane at work. She proved to be an admirable passenger for an airship. She stayed quite still, holding herself rigidly in the position arranged, by the cords which I had fixed for her.

When I had trued my course by the landmarks and with the compass lit by the Tiny my electric light in the dark box, I had time to look about me. All seemed quite dark wherever I looked — to land, or sea, or sky. But darkness is relative, and though each quarter and spot looked dark in turn, there was not such absolute darkness as a whole. I could tell the difference, for instance, between land and sea, no matter how far off we might be from either. Looking upward, the sky was dark; yet there was light enough to see, and even distinguish broad effects. I had no difficulty in distinguishing the Tower towards which we were moving, and that, after all, was the main thing. We drifted slowly, very slowly, as the air was still, and I only used the minimum pressure necessary for the engine. I think I now understood for the first time the extraordinary value of the engine with which my Kitson was equipped. It was noiseless, it was practically of no weight, and it allowed the machine to progress as easily as the old-fashioned balloon used to drift before a breeze. Teuta, who had naturally very fine sight, seemed to see even better than I did, for as we drew nearer to the Tower, and its round, open top began to articulate itself, she commenced to prepare for her part of the task. She it was who uncoiled the long drag-rope ready for her lowering. We were proceeding so gently that she as well as I had hopes that I might be able to actually balance the machine on the top of the curving wall — a thing manifestly impossible on a straight surface, though it might have been possible on an angle.

On we crept — on, and on! There was no sign of light about the Tower, and not the faintest sound to be heard till we were almost close to the line of the rising wall; then we heard a sound of something like mirth, but muffled by distance and thick walls. From it we took fresh heart, for it told us that our enemies were gathered in the lower chambers. If only the Voivode should be on the upper stage, all would be well.

Slowly, almost inch by inch, and with a suspense that was agonising, we crossed some twenty or thirty feet above the top of the wall. I could see as we came near the jagged line of white patches where the heads of the massacred Turks placed there on spikes in old days seemed to give still their grim warning. Seeing that they made in themselves a difficulty of landing on the wall, I deflected the plane so that, as we crept over the wall, we might, if they became displaced, brush them to the outside of the wall. A few seconds more, and I was able to bring the machine to rest with the front of the platform jutting out beyond the Tower wall. Here I anchored her fore and aft with clamps which had been already prepared.

Whilst I was doing so Teuta had leaned over the inner edge of the platform, and whispered as softly as the sigh of a gentle breeze:

"Hist! hist!" The answer came in a similar sound from some twenty feet below us, and we knew that the prisoner was alone. Forthwith, having fixed the hook of the rope in the ring to which was attached her belt, I lowered my wife. Her father evidently knew her whisper, and was ready. The hollow Tower — a smooth cylinder within — sent up the voices from it faint as were the whispers:

"Father, it is I — Teuta!"

"My child, my brave daughter!"

"Quick, father; strap the belt round you. See that it is secure. We have to be lifted into the air if necessary. Hold together. It will be easier for Rupert to lift us to the airship."

"Rupert?"

"Yes; I shall explain later. Quick, quick! There is not a moment to lose. He is enormously strong, and can lift us together; but we must help him by being still, so he won't have to use the windlass, which might creak." As she spoke she jerked slightly at the rope, which was our preconcerted signal that I was to lift. I was afraid the windlass might creak, and her thoughtful hint decided me. I bent my back to the task, and in a few seconds they were on the platform on which they, at Teuta's suggestion, lay flat, one at each side of my seat, so as to keep the best balance possible.

I took off the clamps, lifted the bags of ballast to the top of the wall, so that there should be no sound of falling, and started the engine. The machine moved forward a few inches, so that it tilted towards the outside of the wall. I threw my weight on the front part of the platform, and we commenced our downward fall at a sharp angle. A second enlarged the angle, and without further ado we slid away into the darkness. Then, ascending as we went, when the engine began to work at its strength, we turned, and presently made straight for Ilsin.

The journey was short — not many minutes. It almost seemed as if no time whatever had elapsed till we saw below us the gleam of lights, and by them saw a great body of men gathered in military array. We slackened and descended. The crowd kept deathly silence, but when we were amongst them we needed no telling that it was not due to lack of heart or absence of joy. The pressure of their hands as they surrounded us, and the devotion with which they kissed the hands and feet of both the Voivode and his daughter, were evidence enough for me, even had I not had my own share of their grateful rejoicing.

In the midst of it all the low, stern voice of Rooke, who had burst a way to the front beside the Vladika, said:

"Now is the time to attack the Tower. Forward, brothers, but in silence. Let there not be a sound till you are near the gate; then play your little comedy of the escaping marauders. And 'twill be no comedy for them in the Tower. The yacht is all ready for the morning, Mr. Sent Leger, in case I do not come out of the scrimmage if the bluejackets arrive. In such case you will have to handle her yourself. God keep you, my Lady; and you, too, Voivode! Forward!"

In a ghostly silence the grim little army moved forwards. Rooke and the men with him disappeared into the darkness in the direction of the harbour of Ilsin.

FROM THE SCRIPT OF THE VOIVODE, PETER VISSARION,

July 7, 1907.

I had little idea, when I started on my homeward journey, that it would have such a strange termination. Even I, who ever since my boyhood have lived in a whirl of adventure, intrigue, or diplomacy — whichever it may be called — statecraft, and war, had reason to be surprised. I certainly thought that when I locked myself into my room in the hotel at Ilsin that I would have at last a spell, however short, of quiet. All the time of my prolonged negotiations with the various nationalities I had to be at tension; so, too, on my homeward journey, lest something at the last moment should happen adversely to my mission. But when I was safe on my own Land of the Blue Mountains, and laid my head on my pillow, where only friends could be around me, I thought I might forget care.

But to wake with a rude hand over my mouth, and to feel myself grasped tight by so many hands that I could not move a limb, was a dreadful shock. All after that was like a dreadful dream. I was rolled in a great rug so tightly that I could hardly breathe, let alone cry out. Lifted by many hands through the window, which I could hear was softly opened and shut for the purpose, and carried to a boat. Again lifted into some sort of litter, on which I was borne a long distance, but with considerable rapidity. Again lifted out and dragged through a doorway opened on purpose — I could hear the clang as it was shut behind me. Then the rug was removed, and I found myself, still in my night-gear, in the midst of a ring of men. There were two score of them, all Turks, all strong-looking, resolute men, armed to the teeth. My clothes, which had been taken from my room, were thrown down beside me, and I was told to dress. As the Turks were going from the room — shaped like a vault — where we then were, the last of them, who seemed to be some sort of officer, said:

"If you cry out or make any noise whatever whilst you are in this Tower, you shall die before your time!" Presently some food and water were brought me, and a couple of blankets. I wrapped myself up and slept till early in the morning. Breakfast was brought, and the same men filed in. In the presence of them all the same officer said:

"I have given instructions that if you make any noise or betray your presence to anyone outside this Tower, the nearest man is to restore you to immediate quiet with his yataghan. It you promise me that you will remain quiet whilst you are within the Tower, I can enlarge your liberties somewhat. Do you promise?" I promised as he wished; there was no need to make necessary any stricter measure of confinement. Any chance of escape lay in having the utmost freedom allowed to me. Although I had been taken away with such secrecy, I knew that before long there would be pursuit. So I waited with what patience I could. I was allowed to go on the upper platform — a consideration due, I am convinced, to my captors' wish for their own comfort rather than for mine.

It was not very cheering, for during the daytime I had satisfied myself that it would be quite impossible for even a younger and more active man than I am to climb the walls. They were built for prison purposes, and a cat could not find entry for its claws between the stones. I resigned myself to my fate as well as I could. Wrapping my blanket round me, I lay down and looked up at the sky. I wished to see it whilst I could. I was just dropping to sleep — the unutterable silence of the place broken only now and again by some remark by my captors in the rooms below me — when there was a strange appearance just over me — an appearance so strange that I sat up, and gazed with distended eyes.

Across the top of the tower, some height above, drifted, slowly and silently, a great platform. Although the night was dark, it was so much darker where I was within the hollow of the Tower that I could actually see what was above me. I knew it was an aeroplane — one of which I had seen in Washington. A man was seated in the centre, steering; and beside him was a silent figure of a woman all wrapped in white. It made my heart beat to see her, for she was figured something like my Teuta, but broader, less shapely. She leaned over, and a whispered “Ssh!” crept down to me. I answered in similar way. Whereupon she rose, and the man lowered her down into the Tower. Then I saw that it was my dear daughter who had come in this wonderful way to save me. With infinite haste she helped me to fasten round my waist a belt attached to a rope, which was coiled round her; and then the man, who was a giant in strength as well as stature, raised us both to the platform of the aeroplane, which he set in motion without an instant’s delay.

Within a few seconds, and without any discovery being made of my escape, we were speeding towards the sea. The lights of Ilsin were in front of us. Before reaching the town, however, we descended in the midst of a little army of my own people, who were gathered ready to advance upon the Silent Tower, there to effect, if necessary, my rescue by force. Small chance would there have been of my life in case of such a struggle. Happily, however, the devotion and courage of my dear daughter and of her gallant companion prevented such a necessity. It was strange to me to find such joyous reception amongst my friends expressed in such a whispered silence. There was no time for comment or understanding or the asking of questions — I was fain to take things as they stood, and wait for fuller explanation.

This came later, when my daughter and I were able to converse alone.

When the expedition went out against the Silent Tower, Teuta and I went to her tent, and with us came her gigantic companion, who seemed not wearied, but almost overcome with sleep. When we came into the tent, over which at a little distance a cordon of our mountaineers stood on guard, he said to me:

“May I ask you, sir, to pardon me for a time, and allow the Voivodin to explain matters to you? She will, I know, so far assist me, for there is so much work still to be done before we are free of the present peril. For myself, I am almost overcome with sleep. For three nights I have had no sleep, but all during that time much labour and more anxiety. I could hold on longer; but at daybreak I must go out to the Turkish warship that lies in the offing. She is a Turk, though she does not confess to it; and she it is who has brought hither the marauders who captured both your daughter and yourself. It is needful that I go, for I hold a personal authority from the National Council to take whatever step may be necessary for our protection. And when I go I should be clear-headed, for war may rest on that meeting. I shall be in the adjoining tent, and shall come at once if I am summoned, in case you wish for me before dawn.” Here my daughter struck in:

“Father, ask him to remain here. We shall not disturb him, I am sure, in our talking. And, moreover, if you knew how much I owe to him — to his own bravery and his strength — you would understand how much safer I feel when he is close to me, though we are surrounded by an army of our brave mountaineers.”

“But, my daughter,” I said, for I was as yet all in ignorance, “there are confidences between father and daughter which none other may share. Some of what has been I know, but I want to know all, and it might be better that no stranger — however valiant he may be, or no matter in what measure we are bound to him — should be present.” To my astonishment, she who had always been amenable to my lightest wish actually argued with me:

“Father, there are other confidences which have to be respected in like wise. Bear with me, dear, till I have told you all, and I am right sure that you will agree with me. I ask it, father."

That settled the matter, and as I could see that the gallant gentleman who had rescued me was swaying on his feet as he waited respectfully, I said to him:

"Rest with us, sir. We shall watch over your sleep."

Then I had to help him, for almost on the instant he sank down, and I had to guide him to the rugs spread on the ground. In a few seconds he was in a deep sleep. As I stood looking at him, till I had realised that he vas really asleep, I could not help marvelling at the bounty of Nature that could uphold even such a man as this to the last moment of work to be done, and then allow so swift a collapse when all was over, and he could rest peacefully.

He was certainly a splendid fellow. I think I never saw so fine a man physically in my life. And if the lesson of his physiognomy be true, he is as sterling inwardly as his external is fair. "Now," said I to Teuta, "we are to all intents quite alone. Tell me all that has been, so that I may understand."

Whereupon my daughter, making me sit down, knelt beside me, and told me from end to end the most marvellous story I had ever heard or read of. Something of it I had already known from the Archbishop Paleologue's later letters, but of all else I was ignorant. Far away in the great West beyond the Atlantic, and again on the fringe of the Eastern seas, I had been thrilled to my heart's core by the heroic devotion and fortitude of my daughter in yielding herself for her country's sake to that fearful ordeal of the Crypt; of the grief of the nation at her reported death, news of which was so mercifully and wisely withheld from me as long as possible; of the supernatural rumours that took root so deep; but no word or hint had come to me of a man who had come across the orbit of her life, much less of all that has resulted from it. Neither had I known of her being carried off, or of the thrice gallant rescue of her by Rupert. Little wonder that I thought so highly of him even at the first moment I had a clear view of him when he sank down to sleep before me. Why, the man must be a marvel. Even our mountaineers could not match such endurance as his. In the course of her narrative my daughter told me of how, being wearied with her long waiting in the tomb, and waking to find herself alone when the floods were out, and even the Crypt submerged, she sought safety and warmth elsewhere; and how she came to the Castle in the night, and found the strange man alone. I said: "That was dangerous, daughter, if not wrong. The man, brave and devoted as he is, must answer me — your father." At that she was greatly upset, and before going on with her narrative, drew me close in her arms, and whispered to me:

"Be gentle to me, father, for I have had much to bear. And be good to him, for he holds my heart in his breast!" I reassured her with a gentle pressure — there was no need to speak. She then went on to tell me about her marriage, and how her husband, who had fallen into the belief that she was a Vampire, had determined to give even his soul for her; and how she had on the night of the marriage left him and gone back to the tomb to play to the end the grim comedy which she had undertaken to perform till my return; and how, on the second night after her marriage, as she was in the garden of the Castle — going, as she shyly told me, to see if all was well with her husband — she was seized secretly, muffled up, bound, and carried off. Here she made a pause and a digression. Evidently some fear lest her husband and myself should quarrel assailed her, for she said:

"Do understand, father, that Rupert's marriage to me was in all ways regular, and quite in accord with our customs. Before we were married I told the Archbishop of my wish. He, as your representative during your absence, consented himself, and brought the matter to the notice of the Vladika and the Archimandrites. All these concurred, having exacted from me — very properly, I think — a sacred promise to adhere to my self-appointed task. The marriage itself was orthodox in all ways — though so far unusual that it was held at night, and in darkness, save for the lights appointed by the ritual. As to that, the Archbishop himself, or the Archimandrite of Spazac, who assisted him, or the Vladika, who acted as Paranymph, will, all or any of them, give you full details. Your representative made all inquiries as to Rupert Sent Leger, who lived in Vissarion, though he did not know who I was, or from his point of view who I had been. But I must tell you of my rescue."

And so she went on to tell me of that unavailing journey south by her captors; of their bafflement by the cordon which Rupert had established at the first word of danger to "the daughter of our leader," though he little knew who the "leader" was, or who was his "daughter"; of how the brutal marauders tortured her to speed with their daggers; and how her wounds left blood-marks on the ground as she passed along; then of the halt in the valley, when the marauders came to know that their road north was menaced, if not already blocked; of the choosing of the murderers, and their keeping ward over her whilst their companions went to survey the situation; and of her gallant rescue by that noble fellow, her husband — my son I shall call him henceforth, and thank God that I may have that happiness and that honour!

Then my daughter went on to tell me of the race back to Vissarion, when Rupert went ahead of all — as a leader should do; of the summoning of the Archbishop and the National Council; and of their placing the nation's handjar in Rupert's hand; of the journey to Ilsin, and the flight of my daughter — and my son — on the aeroplane.

The rest I knew.

As she finished, the sleeping man stirred and woke — broad awake in a second — sure sign of a man accustomed to campaign and adventure. At a glance he recalled everything that had been, and sprang to his feet. He stood respectfully before me for a few seconds before speaking. Then he said, with an open, engaging smile:

"I see, sir, you know all. Am I forgiven — for Teuta's sake as well as my own?" By this time I was also on my feet. A man like that walks straight into my heart. My daughter, too, had risen, and stood by my side. I put out my hand and grasped his, which seemed to leap to meet me — as only the hand of a swordsman can do.

"I am glad you are my son!" I said. It was all I could say, and I meant it and all it implied. We shook hands warmly. Teuta was pleased; she kissed me, and then stood holding my arm with one hand, whilst she linked her other hand in the arm of her husband.

He summoned one of the sentries without, and told him to ask Captain Rooke to come to him. The latter had been ready for a call, and came at once. When through the open flap of the tent we saw him coming, Rupert — as I must call him now, because Teuta wishes it; and I like to do it myself — said:

"I must be off to board the Turkish vessel before it comes inshore. Good-bye, sir, in case we do not meet again." He said the last few words in so low a voice that I only could hear them. Then he kissed his wife, and told her he expected to be back in time for breakfast, and was gone. He met Rooke — I am hardly accustomed to call him Captain as yet, though, indeed, he well deserves it — at the edge of the cordon of sentries, and they went quickly together towards the port, where the yacht was lying with steam up.

BOOK VII: THE EMPIRE OF THE AIR

FROM THE REPORT OF CRISTOFEROS, WAR-SCRIBE TO THE NATIONAL COUNCIL.

July 7, 1907.

When the Gospodar Rupert and Captain Rooke came within hailing distance of the strange ship, the former hailed her, using one after another the languages of England, Germany, France, Russia, Turkey, Greece, Spain, Portugal, and another which I did not know; I think it must have been American. By this time the whole line of the bulwark was covered by a row of Turkish faces. When, in Turkish, the Gospodar asked for the Captain, the latter came to the gangway, which had been opened, and stood there. His uniform was that of the Turkish navy — of that I am prepared to swear — but he made signs of not understanding what had been said; whereupon the Gospodar spoke again, but in French this time. I append the exact conversation which took place, none other joining in it. I took down in shorthand the words of both as they were spoken:

The Gospodar. “Are you the Captain of this ship?”

The Captain. “I am.”

Gospodar. “To what nationality do you belong?”

Captain. “It matters not. I am Captain of this ship.”

Gospodar. “I alluded to your ship. What national flag is she under?”

Captain (*throwing his eye over the top-hamper*). “I do not see that any flag is flying.”

Gospodar. “I take it that, as commander, you can allow me on board with my two companions?”

Captain. “I can, upon proper request being made!”

Gospodar (*taking off his cap*). “I ask your courtesy, Captain. I am the representative and accredited officer of the National Council of the Land of the Blue Mountains, in whose waters you now are; and on their account I ask for a formal interview on urgent matters.”

The Turk, who was, I am bound to say, in manner most courteous as yet, gave some command to his officers, whereupon the companion-ladders and stage were lowered and the gangway manned, as is usual for the reception on a ship of war of an honoured guest.

Captain. “You are welcome, sir — you and your two companions — as you request.”

The Gospodar bowed. Our companion-ladder was rigged on the instant, and a launch lowered. The Gospodar and Captain Rooke — taking me with them — entered, and rowed to the warship, where we were all honourably received. There were an immense number of men on board, soldiers as well as seamen. It looked more like a warlike expedition than a fighting-ship in time of peace. As we stepped on the deck, the seamen and marines, who were all armed as at drill, presented arms. The Gospodar went first towards the Captain, and Captain Rooke and I followed close behind him. The Gospodar spoke:

“I am Rupert Sent Leger, a subject of his Britannic Majesty, presently residing at Vissarion, in the Land of the Blue Mountains. I am at present empowered to act for the National Council in all matters. Here is my credential!” As he spoke he handed to the Captain a letter. It was written in five different languages — Balkan, Turkish, Greek, English, and French. The Captain read it carefully all through, forgetful for the moment that he had seemingly been unable to understand the Gospodar's question spoken in the Turkish tongue. Then he answered:

"I see the document is complete. May I ask on what subject you wish to see me?"

Gospodar. "You are here in a ship of war in Blue Mountain waters, yet you fly no flag of any nation. You have sent armed men ashore in your boats, thus committing an act of war. The National Council of the Land of the Blue Mountains requires to know what nation you serve, and why the obligations of international law are thus broken."

The Captain seemed to wait for further speech, but the Gospodar remained silent; whereupon the former spoke.

Captain. "I am responsible to my own — chiefs. I refuse to answer your question."

The Gospodar spoke at once in reply.

Gospodar. "Then, sir, you, as commander of a ship — and especially a ship of war — must know that in thus violating national and maritime laws you, and all on board this ship, are guilty of an act of piracy. This is not even piracy on the high seas. You are not merely within territorial waters, but you have invaded a national port. As you refuse to disclose the nationality of your ship, I accept, as you seem to do, your status as that of a pirate, and shall in due season act accordingly."

Captain (*with manifest hostility*). "I accept the responsibility of my own acts. Without admitting your contention, I tell you now that whatever action you take shall be at your own peril and that of your National Council. Moreover, I have reason to believe that my men who were sent ashore on special service have been beleaguered in a tower which can be seen from the ship. Before dawn this morning firing was heard from that direction, from which I gather that attack was made on them. They, being only a small party, may have been murdered. If such be so, I tell you that you and your miserable little nation, as you call it, shall pay such blood-money as you never thought of. I am responsible for this, and, by Allah! there shall be a great revenge. You have not in all your navy — if navy you have at all — power to cope with even one ship like this, which is but one of many. My guns shall be trained on Ilsin, to which end I have come inshore. You and your companions have free conduct back to port; such is due to the white flag which you fly. Fifteen minutes will bring you back whence you came. Go! And remember that whatever you may do amongst your mountain defiles, at sea you cannot even defend yourselves."

Gospodar (*slowly and in a ringing voice*). "The Land of the Blue Mountains has its own defences on sea and land. Its people know how to defend themselves."

Captain (*taking out his watch*). "It is now close on five bells. At the first stroke of six bells our guns shall open fire."

Gospodar (*calmly*). "It is my last duty to warn you, sir — and to warn all on this ship — that much may happen before even the first stroke of six bells. Be warned in time, and give over this piratical attack, the very threat of which may be the cause of much bloodshed."

Captain (*violently*). "Do you dare to threaten me, and, moreover, my ship's company? We are one, I tell you, in this ship; and the last man shall perish like the first ere this enterprise fail. Go!"

With a bow, the Gospodar turned and went down the ladder, we following him. In a couple of minutes the yacht was on her way to the port.

FROM RUPERT'S JOURNAL.

July 10, 1907.

When we turned shoreward after my stormy interview with the pirate Captain — I can call him nothing else at present, Rooke gave orders to a quartermaster on the bridge, and *The Lady* began to make to a little northward of Ilsin port. Rooke himself went aft to the wheel-house, taking several men with him.

When we were quite near the rocks — the water is so deep here that there is no danger — we slowed down, merely drifting along southwards towards the port. I was myself on the bridge, and could see all over the decks. I could also see preparations going on upon the warship. Ports were opened, and the great guns on the turrets were lowered for action. When we were starboard broadside on to the warship, I saw the port side of the steering-house open, and Rooke's men sliding out what looked like a huge grey crab, which by tackle from within the wheel-house was lowered softly into the sea. The position of the yacht hid the operation from sight of the warship. The doors were shut again, and the yacht's pace began to quicken. We ran into the port. I had a vague idea that Rooke had some desperate project on hand. Not for nothing had he kept the wheel-house locked on that mysterious crab.

All along the frontage was a great crowd of eager men. But they had considerately left the little mole at the southern entrance, whereon was a little tower, on whose round top a signal-gun was placed, free for my own use. When I was landed on this pier I went along to the end, and, climbing the narrow stair within, went out on the sloping roof. I stood up, for I was determined to show the Turks that I was not afraid for myself, as they would understand when the bombardment should begin. It was now but a very few minutes before the fatal hour — six bells. But all the same I was almost in a state of despair. It was terrible to think of all those poor souls in the town who had done nothing wrong, and who were to be wiped out in the coming blood-thirsty, wanton attack. I raised my glasses to see how preparations were going on upon the warship.

As I looked I had a momentary fear that my eyesight was giving way. At one moment I had the deck of the warship focussed with my glasses, and could see every detail as the gunners waited for the word to begin the bombardment with the great guns of the barbettes. The next I saw nothing but the empty sea. Then in another instant there was the ship as before, but the details were blurred. I steadied myself against the signal-gun, and looked again. Not more than two, or at the most three, seconds had elapsed. The ship was, for the moment, full in view. As I looked, she gave a queer kind of quick shiver, prow and stern, and then sideways. It was for all the world like a rat shaken in the mouth of a skilled terrier. Then she remained still, the one placid thing to be seen, for all around her the sea seemed to shiver in little independent eddies, as when water is broken without a current to guide it.

I continued to look, and when the deck was, or seemed, quite still — for the shivering water round the ship kept catching my eyes through the outer rays of the lenses — I noticed that nothing was stirring. The men who had been at the guns were all lying down; the men in the fighting-tops had leaned forward or backward, and their arms hung down helplessly. Everywhere was desolation — in so far as life was concerned. Even a little brown bear, which had been seated on the cannon which was being put into range position, had jumped or fallen on deck, and lay there stretched out — and still. It was evident that some terrible shock had been given to the mighty war-vessel. Without a doubt or a thought why I did so, I turned my eyes towards where *The Lady* lay, port broadside now to the inside, in the harbour mouth. I had the key now to the mystery of Rooke's proceedings with the great grey crab.

As I looked I saw just outside the harbour a thin line of cleaving water. This became more marked each instant, till a steel disc with glass eyes that shone in the light of the sun rose above the water. It was about the size of a beehive, and was shaped like one. It made a straight line for the aft of the yacht. At the same moment, in obedience to some command, given so quietly that I did not hear it, the men went below — all save some few, who began to open out doors in the port side of the wheel-house. The tackle was run out through an opened gangway on that side, and a man stood on the great hook at the lower end, balancing himself by hanging on the chain. In a few seconds he came up again. The chain tightened and the great grey crab rose over the edge of the deck, and was drawn into the wheel-house, the doors of which were closed, shutting in a few only of the men.

I waited, quite quiet. After a space of a few minutes, Captain Rooke in his uniform walked out of the wheel-house. He entered a small boat, which had been in the meantime lowered for the purpose, and was rowed to the steps on the mole. Ascending these, he came directly towards the signal-tower. When he had ascended and stood beside me, he saluted.

"Well?" I asked.

"All well, sir," he answered. "We shan't have any more trouble with that lot, I think. You warned that pirate — I wish he had been in truth a clean, honest, straightforward pirate, instead of the measly Turkish swab he was — that something might occur before the first stroke of six bells. Well, something has occurred, and for him and all his crew that six bells will never sound. So the Lord fights for the Cross against the Crescent! Bismillah. Amen!" He said this in a manifestly formal way, as though declaiming a ritual. The next instant he went on in the thoroughly practical conventional way which was usual to him:

"May I ask a favour, Mr. Sent Leger?"

"A thousand, my dear Rooke," I said. "You can't ask me anything which I shall not freely grant. And I speak within my brief from the National Council. You have saved Ilsin this day, and the Council will thank you for it in due time."

"Me, sir?" he said, with a look of surprise on his face which seemed quite genuine. "If you think that, I am well out of it. I was afraid, when I woke, that you might court-martial me!"

"Court-martial you! What for?" I asked, surprised in my turn.

"For going to sleep on duty, sir! And the fact is, I was worn out in the attack on the Silent Tower last night, and when you had your interview with the pirate — all good pirates forgive me for the blasphemy! Amen! — and I knew that everything was going smoothly, I went into the wheel-house and took forty winks." He said all this without moving so much as an eyelid, from which I gathered that he wished absolute silence to be observed on my part. Whilst I was revolving this in my mind he went on:

"Touching that request, sir. When I have left you and the Voivode — and the Voivodin, of course — at Vissarion, together with such others as you may choose to bring there with you, may I bring the yacht back here for a spell? I rather think that there is a good deal of cleaning up to be done, and the crew of *The Lady* with myself are the men to do it. We shall be back by nightfall at the creek."

"Do as you think best, Admiral Rooke," I said.

"Admiral?"

"Yes, Admiral. At present I can only say that tentatively, but by to-morrow I am sure the National Council will have confirmed it. I am afraid, old friend, that your squadron will be only your flagship for the present; but later we may do better."

"So long as I am Admiral, your honour, I shall have no other flagship than *The Lady*. I am not a young man, but, young or old, my pennon shall float over no other deck. Now, one other favour, Mr. Sent Leger? It is a corollary of the first, so I do not hesitate to ask. May I appoint Lieutenant Desmond, my present First Officer, to the command of the battleship? Of course, he will at first only command the prize crew; but in such case he will fairly expect the confirmation of his rank later. I had better, perhaps, tell you, sir, that he is a very capable seaman, learned in all the sciences that pertain to a battleship, and bred in the first navy in the world."

"By all means, Admiral. Your nomination shall, I think I may promise you, be confirmed."

Not another word we spoke. I returned with him in his boat to *The Lady*, which was brought to the dock wall, where we were received with tumultuous cheering.

I hurried off to my Wife and the Voivode. Rooke, calling Desmond to him, went on the bridge of *The Lady*, which turned, and went out at terrific speed to the battleship, which was already drifting up northward on the tide.

FROM THE REPORT OF CRISTOFEROS, SCRIBE OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE LAND OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS.

July 8, 1907.

The meeting of the National Council, July 6, was but a continuation of that held before the rescue of the Voivodin Vissarion, the members of the Council having been during the intervening night housed in the Castle of Vissarion. When, in the early morning, they met, all were jubilant; for late at night the fire-signal had flamed up from Ilsin with the glad news that the Voivode Peter Vissarion was safe, having been rescued with great daring on an aeroplane by his daughter and the Gospodar Rupert, as the people call him — Mister Rupert Sent Leger, as he is in his British name and degree.

Whilst the Council was sitting, word came that a great peril to the town of Ilsin had been averted. A war-vessel acknowledging to no nationality, and therefore to be deemed a pirate, had threatened to bombard the town; but just before the time fixed for the fulfilment of her threat, she was shaken to such an extent by some sub-aqueous means that, though she herself was seemingly uninjured, nothing was left alive on board. Thus the Lord preserves His own! The consideration of this, as well as the other incident, was postponed until the coming Voivode and the Gospodar Rupert, together with who were already on their way hither.

THE SAME (LATER IN THE SAME DAY).

The Council resumed its sitting at four o'clock. The Voivode Peter Vissarion and the Voivodin Teuta had arrived with the "Gospodar Rupert," as the mountaineers call him (Mr. Rupert Sent Leger) on the armoured yacht he calls *The Lady*. The National Council showed great pleasure when the Voivode entered the hall in which the Council met. He seemed much gratified by the reception given to him. Mr. Rupert Sent Leger, by the express desire of the Council, was asked to be present at the meeting. He took a seat at the bottom of the hall, and seemed to prefer to remain there, though asked by the President of the Council to sit at the top of the table with himself and the Voivode.

When the formalities of such Councils had been completed, the Voivode handed to the President a memorandum of his report on his secret mission to foreign Courts on behalf of the National Council. He then explained at length, for the benefit of the various members of the Council, the broad results of his mission. The result was, he said, absolutely satisfactory. Everywhere he had been received with distinguished courtesy, and given a sympathetic hearing. Several of the Powers consulted had made delay in giving final answers, but this, he explained, was necessarily due to new considerations arising from the international complications which were universally dealt with throughout the world as "the Balkan Crisis." In time, however (the Voivode went on), these matters became so far declared as to allow the waiting Powers to form definite judgment — which, of course, they did not declare to him — as to their own ultimate action. The final result — if at this initial stage such tentative setting forth of their own attitude in each case can be so named — was that he returned full of hope (founded, he might say, upon a justifiable personal belief) that the Great Powers throughout the world — North, South, East, and West — were in thorough sympathy with the Land of the Blue Mountains in its aspirations for the continuance of its freedom. "I also am honoured," he continued, "to bring to you, the Great Council of the nation, the assurance of protection against unworthy aggression on the part of neighbouring nations of present greater strength."

Whilst he was speaking, the Gospodar Rupert was writing a few words on a strip of paper, which he sent up to the President. When the Voivode had finished speaking, there was a prolonged silence. The President rose, and in a hush said that the Council would like to hear Mr. Rupert Sent Leger, who had a communication to make regarding certain recent events.

Mr. Rupert Sent Leger rose, and reported how, since he had been entrusted by the Council with the rescue of the Voivode Peter of Vissarion, he had, by aid of the Voivodin, effected the escape of the Voivode from the Silent Tower; also that, following this happy event, the mountaineers, who had made a great cordon round the Tower so soon as it was known that the Voivode had been imprisoned within it, had stormed it in the night. As a determined resistance was offered by the marauders, who had used it as a place of refuge, none of these escaped. He then went on to tell how he sought interview with the Captain of the strange warship, which, without flying any flag, invaded our waters. He asked the President to call on me to read the report of that meeting. This, in obedience to his direction, I did. The acquiescent murmuring of the Council showed how thoroughly they endorsed Mr. Sent Leger's words and acts.

When I resumed my seat, Mr. Sent Leger described how, just before the time fixed by the "pirate Captain" — so he designated him, as did every speaker thereafter — the warship met with some under-sea accident, which had a destructive effect on all on board her. Then he added certain words, which I give verbatim, as I am sure that others will some time wish to remember them in their exactness:

"By the way, President and Lords of the Council, I trust I may ask you to confirm Captain Rooke, of the armoured yacht *The Lady*, to be Admiral of the Squadron of the Land of the Blue Mountains, and also Captain (tentatively) Desmond, late First-Lieutenant of *The Lady*, to the command of the second warship of our fleet — the as yet unnamed vessel, whose former Captain threatened to bombard Ilsin. My Lords, Admiral Rooke has done great service to the Land of the Blue Mountains, and deserves well at your hands. You will have in him, I am sure, a great official. One who will till his last breath give you good and loyal service."

He had sat down, the President put to the Council resolutions, which were passed by acclamation. Admiral Rooke was given command of the navy, and Captain Desmond confirmed in his appointment to the captaincy of the new ship, which was, by a further resolution, named *The Gospodar Rupert*.

In thanking the Council for acceding to his request, and for the great honour done him in the naming of the ship, Mr. Sent Leger said:

"May I ask that the armoured yacht *The Lady* be accepted by you, the National Council, on behalf of the nation, as a gift on behalf of the cause of freedom from the Voivodin Teuta?"

In response to the mighty cheer of the Council with which the splendid gift was accepted the Gospodar Rupert — Mr. Sent Leger — bowed, and went quietly out of the room.

As no agenda of the meeting had been prepared, there was for a time, not silence, but much individual conversation. In the midst of it the Voivode rose up, whereupon there was a strict silence. All listened with an intensity of eagerness whilst he spoke.

"President and Lords of the Council, Archbishop, and Vladika, I should but ill show my respect did I hesitate to tell you at this the first opportunity I have had of certain matters personal primarily to myself, but which, in the progress of recent events, have come to impinge on the affairs of the nation. Until I have done so, I shall not feel that I have done a duty, long due to you or your predecessors in office, and which I hope you will allow me to say that I have only kept back for purposes of statecraft. May I ask that you will come back with me in memory to the year 1890, when our struggle against Ottoman aggression, later on so successfully brought to a close, was begun. We were then in a desperate condition. Our finances had run so low that we could not purchase even the bread which we required. Nay, more, we could not procure through the National Exchequer what we wanted more than bread — arms of modern effectiveness; for men may endure hunger and yet fight well, as the glorious past of our country has proved again and again and again. But when our foes are better armed than we are, the penalty is dreadful to a nation small as our own is in number, no matter how brave their hearts. In this strait I myself had to secretly raise a sufficient sum of money to procure the weapons we needed. To this end I sought the assistance of a great merchant-prince, to whom our nation as well as myself was known. He met me in the same generous spirit which he had shown to other struggling nationalities throughout a long and honourable career. When I pledged to him as security my own estates, he wished to tear up the bond, and only under pressure would he meet my wishes in this respect. Lords of the Council, it was his money, thus generously advanced, which procured for us the arms with which we hewed out our freedom.

“Not long ago that noble merchant — and here I trust you will pardon me that I am so moved as to perhaps appear to suffer in want of respect to this great Council — this noble merchant passed to his account — leaving to a near kinsman of his own the royal fortune which he had amassed. Only a few hours ago that worthy kinsman of the benefactor of our nation made it known to me that in his last will he had bequeathed to me, by secret trust, the whole of those estates which long ago I had forfeited by effluxion of time, inasmuch as I had been unable to fulfil the terms of my voluntary bond. It grieves me to think that I have had to keep you so long in ignorance of the good thought and wishes and acts of this great man.

"But it was by his wise counsel, fortified by my own judgment, that I was silent; for, indeed, I feared, as he did, lest in our troublous times some doubting spirit without our boundaries, or even within it, might mistrust the honesty of my purposes for public good, because I was no longer one whose whole fortune was invested within our confines. This prince-merchant, the great English Roger Melton — let his name be for ever graven on the hearts of our people! — kept silent during his own life, and enjoined on others to come after him to keep secret from the men of the Blue Mountains that secret loan made to me on their behalf, lest in their eyes I, who had striven to be their friend and helper, should suffer wrong repute. But, happily, he has left me free to clear myself in your eyes. Moreover, by arranging to have — under certain contingencies, which have come to pass — the estates which were originally my own retransferred to me, I have no longer the honour of having given what I could to the national cause. All such now belongs to him; for it was his money — and his only — which purchased our national armament.

"His worthy kinsman you already know, for he has not only been amongst you for many months, but has already done you good service in his own person. He it was who, as a mighty warrior, answered the summons of the Vladika when misfortune came upon my house in the capture by enemies of my dear daughter, the

Voivodin Teuta, whom you hold in your hearts; who, with a chosen band of our brothers, pursued the marauders, and himself, by a deed of daring and prowess, of which poets shall hereafter sing, saved her, when hope itself seemed to be dead, from their ruthless hands, and brought her back to us; who administered condign punishment to the miscreants who had dared to so wrong her. He it was who later took me, your servant, out of the prison wherein another band of Turkish miscreants held me captive; rescued me, with the help of my dear daughter, whom he had already freed, whilst I had on my person the documents of international secrecy of which I have already advised you — rescued me whilst I had been as yet unsubjected to the indignity of search.

"Beyond this you know now that of which I was in partial ignorance: how he had, through the skill and devotion of your new Admiral, wrought destruction on a hecatomb of our malignant foes. You who have received for the nation the splendid gift of the little warship, which already represents a new era in naval armament, can understand the great-souled generosity of the man who has restored the vast possessions of my House. On our way hither from Ilsin, Rupert Sent Leger made known to me the terms of the trust of his noble uncle, Roger Melton, and — believe me that he did so generously, with a joy that transcended my own — restored to the last male of the Vissarion race the whole inheritance of a noble line.

"And now, my Lords of the Council, I come to another matter, in which I find myself in something of a difficulty, for I am aware that in certain ways you actually know more of it than even I myself do. It is regarding the marriage of my daughter to Rupert Sent Leger. It is known to me that the matter has been brought before you by the Archbishop, who, as guardian of my daughter during my absence on the service of the nation, wished to obtain your sanction, as till my return he held her safety in trust. This was so, not from any merit of mine, but because she, in her own person, had undertaken for the service of our nation a task of almost incredible difficulty. My Lords, were she child of another father, I should extol to the skies her bravery, her self-devotion, her loyalty to the land she loves. Why, then, should I hesitate to speak of her deeds in fitting terms, since it is my duty, my glory, to hold them in higher honour than can any in this land? I shall not shame her — or even myself — by being silent when such a duty urges me to speak, as Voivode, as trusted envoy of our nation, as father. Ages hence loyal men and women of our Land of the Blue Mountains will sing her deeds in song and tell them in story. Her name, Teuta, already sacred in these regions, where it was held by a great Queen, and honoured by all men, will hereafter be held as a symbol and type of woman's devotion. Oh, my Lords, we pass along the path of life, the best of us but a little time marching in the sunlight between gloom and gloom, and it is during that march that we must be judged for the future. This brave woman has won knightly spurs as well as any Paladin of old. So is it meet that ere she might mate with one worthy of her you, who hold in your hands the safety and honour of the State, should give your approval. To you was it given to sit in judgment on the worth of this gallant Englisher, now my son. You judged him then, before you had seen his valour, his strength, and skill exercised on behalf of a national cause. You judged wisely, oh, my brothers, and out of a grateful heart I thank you one and all for it. Well has he justified your trust by his later acts. When, in obedience to the summons of the Vladika, he put the nation in a blaze and ranged our boundaries with a ring of steel, he did so unknowing that what was dearest to him in the world was at stake. He saved my daughter's honour and happiness, and won her safety by an act of valour that outvies any told in history. He took my daughter with him to bring me out from the Silent Tower on the wings of the air, when earth had for me no possibility of freedom — I, that had even then in my possession the documents involving other nations which the Soldan would fain have purchased with the half of his empire.

"Henceforth to me, Lords of the Council, this brave man must ever be as a son of my heart, and I trust that in his name grandsons of my own may keep in bright honour the name which in glorious days of old my fathers made illustrious. Did I know how adequately to thank you for your interest in my child, I would yield up to you my very soul in thanks."

The speech of the Voivode was received with the honour of the Blue Mountains — the drawing and raising of handjars.

FROM RUPERT'S JOURNAL.

July 14, 1907.

For nearly a week we waited for some message from Constantinople, fully expecting either a declaration of war, or else some inquiry so couched as to make war an inevitable result. The National Council remained on at Vissarion as the guests of the Voivode, to whom, in accordance with my uncle's will, I had prepared to re-transfer all his estates. He was, by the way, unwilling at first to accept, and it was only when I showed him Uncle Roger's letter, and made him read the Deed of Transfer prepared in anticipation by Mr. Trent, that he allowed me to persuade him. Finally he said:

"As you, my good friends, have so arranged, I must accept, be it only in honour to the wishes of the dead. But remember, I only do so but for the present, reserving to myself the freedom to withdraw later if I so desire."

But Constantinople was silent. The whole nefarious scheme was one of the "put-up jobs" which are part of the dirty work of a certain order of statecraft — to be accepted if successful; to be denied in case of failure.

The matter stood thus: Turkey had thrown the dice — and lost. Her men were dead; her ship was forfeit. It was only some ten days after the warship was left derelict with every living thing — that is, everything that had been living — with its neck broken, as Rooke informed me, when he brought the ship down the creek, and housed it in the dock behind the armoured gates — that we saw an item in *The Roma* copied from *The Constantinople Journal* of July 9:

"LOSS OF AN OTTOMAN IRONCLAD WITH ALL HANDS.

"News has been received at Constantinople of the total loss, with all hands, of one of the newest and finest warships in the Turkish fleet — *The Mahmoud*, Captain Ali Ali — which foundered in a storm on the night of July 5, some distance off Cabrera, in the Balearic Isles. There were no survivors, and no wreckage was discovered by the ships which went in relief — the *Pera* and the *Mustapha* — or reported from anywhere along the shores of the islands, of which exhaustive search was made. *The Mahmoud* was double-manned, as she carried a full extra crew sent on an educational cruise on the most perfectly scientifically equipped warship on service in the Mediterranean waters."

When the Voivode and I talked over the matter, he said:

"After all, Turkey is a shrewd Power. She certainly seems to know when she is beaten, and does not intend to make a bad thing seem worse in the eyes of the world."

Well, 'tis a bad wind that blows good to nobody. As *The Mahmoud* was lost off the Balearics, it cannot have been her that put the marauders on shore and trained her big guns on Ilsin. We take it, therefore, that the latter must have been a pirate, and as we have taken her derelict in our waters, she is now ours in all ways. Anyhow, she is ours, and is the first ship of her class in the navy of the Blue Mountains. I am inclined to think that even if she was — or is still — a Turkish ship, Admiral Rooke would not be inclined to let her go. As for Captain Desmond, I think he would go straight out of his mind if such a thing was to be even suggested to him.

It will be a pity if we have any more trouble, for life here is very happy with us all now. The Voivode is, I think, like a man in a dream. Teuta is ideally happy, and the real affection which sprang up between them when she and Aunt Janet met is a joy to think of. I had posted Teuta about her, so that when they should meet my wife might not, by any inadvertence, receive or cause any pain. But the moment Teuta saw her she ran straight over to her and lifted her in her strong young arms, and, raising her up as one would lift a child, kissed her. Then, when she had put her sitting in the chair from which she had arisen when we entered the room, she knelt down before her, and put her face down in her lap. Aunt Janet's face was a study; I myself could hardly say whether at the first moment surprise or joy predominated. But there could be no doubt about it the instant after. She seemed to beam with happiness. When Teuta knelt to her, she could only say:

"My dear, my dear, I am glad! Rupert's wife, you and I must love each other very much." Seeing that they were laughing and crying in each other's arms, I thought it best to come away and leave them alone. And I didn't feel a bit lonely either when I was out of sight of them. I knew that where those two dear women were there was a place for my own heart.

When I came back, Teuta was sitting on Aunt Janet's knee. It seemed rather stupendous for the old lady, for Teuta is such a splendid creature that even when she sits on my own knee and I catch a glimpse of us in some mirror, I cannot but notice what a nobly-built girl she is.

My wife was jumping up as soon as I was seen, but Aunt Janet held her tight to her, and said:

"Don't stir, dear. It is such happiness to me to have you there. Rupert has always been my 'little boy,' and, in spite of all his being such a giant, he is so still. And so you, that he loves, must be my little girl — in spite of all your beauty and your strength — and sit on my knee, till you can place there a little one that shall be dear to us all, and that shall let me feel my youth again. When first I saw you I was surprised, for, somehow, though I had never seen you nor even heard of you, I seemed to know your face. Sit where you are, dear. It is only Rupert — and we both love him."

Teuta looked at me, flushing rosily; but she sat quiet, and drew the old lady's white head on her young breast.

JANET MACKELPIE'S NOTES.

July 8, 1907.

I used to think that whenever Rupert should get married or start on the way to it by getting engaged — I would meet his future wife with something of the same affection that I have always had for himself. But I know now that what was really in my mind was *jealousy*, and that I was really fighting against my own instincts, and pretending to myself that I was not jealous. Had I ever had the faintest idea that she would be anything the least like Teuta, that sort of feeling should never have had even a foothold. No wonder my dear boy is in love with her, for, truth to tell, I am in love with her myself. I don't think I ever met a creature — a woman creature, of course, I mean — with so many splendid qualities. I almost fear to say it, lest it should seem to myself wrong; but I think she is as good as a woman as Rupert is as a man. And what more than that can I say? I thought I loved her and trusted her, and knew her all I could, until this morning.

I was in my own room, as it is still called. For, though Rupert tells me in confidence that under his uncle's will the whole estate of Vissarion, Castle and all, really belongs to the Voivode, and though the Voivode has been persuaded to accept the position, he (the Voivode) will not allow anything to be changed. He will not even hear a word of my going, or changing my room, or anything. And Rupert backs him up in it, and Teuta too. So what am I to do but let the dears have their way?

Well, this morning, when Rupert was with the Voivode at a meeting of the National Council in the Great Hall, Teuta came to me, and (after closing the door and bolting it, which surprised me a little) came and knelt down beside me, and put her face in my lap. I stroked her beautiful black hair, and said:

"What is it, Teuta darling? Is there any trouble? And why did you bolt the door? Has anything happened to Rupert?" When she looked up I saw that her beautiful black eyes, with the stars in them, were overflowing with tears not yet shed. But she smiled through them, and the tears did not fall. When I saw her smile my heart was eased, and I said without thinking: "Thank God, darling, Rupert is all right."

"I thank God, too, dear Aunt Janet!" she said softly; and I took her in my arms and laid her head on my breast.

"Go on, dear," I said; "tell me what it is that troubles you?" This time I saw the tears drop, as she lowered her head and hid her face from me.

"I'm afraid I have deceived you, Aunt Janet, and that you will not — cannot — forgive me."

"Lord save you, child!" I said, "there's nothing that you could do that I could not and would not forgive. Not that you would ever do anything base, for that is the only thing that is hard to forgive. Tell me now what troubles you."

She looked up in my eyes fearlessly, this time with only the signs of tears that had been, and said proudly:

"Nothing base, Aunt Janet. My father's daughter would not willingly be base. I do not think she could. Moreover, had I ever done anything base I should not be here, for — for — I should never have been Rupert's wife!"

"Then what is it? Tell your old Aunt Janet, dearie." She answered me with another question:

"Aunt Janet, do you know who I am, and how I first met Rupert?"

"You are the Voivodin Teuta Vissarion — the daughter of the Voivode — Or, rather, you were; you are now Mrs. Rupert Sent Leger. For he is still an Englishman, and a good subject of our noble King."

"Yes, Aunt Janet," she said, "I am that, and proud to be it — prouder than I would be were I my namesake, who was Queen in the old days. But how and where did I see Rupert first?" I did not know, and frankly told her so. So she answered her question herself:

"I saw him first in his own room at night." I knew in my heart that in whatever she did had been nothing wrong, so I sat silent waiting for her to go on:

"I was in danger, and in deadly fear. I was afraid I might die — not that I fear death — and I wanted help and warmth. I was not dressed as I am now!"

On the instant it came to me how I knew her face, even the first time I had seen it. I wished to help her out of the embarrassing part of her confidence, so I said:

"Dearie, I think I know. Tell me, child, will you put on the frock . . . the dress . . . costume you wore that night, and let me see you in it? It is not mere idle curiosity, my child, but something far, far above such idle folly."

"Wait for me a minute, Aunt Janet," she said, as she rose up; "I shall not be long." Then she left the room.

In a very few minutes she was back. Her appearance might have frightened some people, for she was clad only in a shroud. Her feet were bare, and she walked across the room with the gait of an empress, and stood before me with her eyes modestly cast down. But when presently she looked up and caught my eyes, a smile rippled over her face. She threw herself once more before me on her knees, and embraced me as she said:

"I was afraid I might frighten you, dear." I knew I could truthfully reassure her as to that, so I proceeded to do so:

"Do not worry yourself, my dear. I am not by nature timid. I come of a fighting stock which has sent out heroes, and I belong to a family wherein is the gift of Second Sight. Why should we fear? We know! Moreover, I saw you in that dress before. Teuta, I saw you and Rupert married!" This time she herself it was that seemed disconcerted.

“Saw us married! How on earth did you manage to be there?”

“I was not there. My Seeing was long before! Tell me, dear, what day, or rather what night, was it that you first saw Rupert?” She answered sadly:

“I do not know. Alas! I lost count of the days as I lay in the tomb in that dreary Crypt.”

“Was your — your clothing wet that night?” I asked.

“Yes. I had to leave the Crypt, for a great flood was out, and the church was flooded. I had to seek help — warmth — for I feared I might die. Oh, I was not, as I have told you, afraid of death. But I had undertaken a terrible task to which I had pledged myself. It was for my father’s sake, and the sake of the Land, and I felt that it was a part of my duty to live. And so I lived on, when death would have been relief. It was to tell you all about this that I came to your room to-day. But how did you see me — us — married?”

“Ah, my child!” I answered, “that was before the marriage took place. The morn after the night that you came in the wet, when, having been troubled in uncanny dreaming, I came to see if Rupert was a’richt, I lost remembrance o’ my dreaming, for the floor was all wet, and that took off my attention. But later, the morn after Rupert used his fire in his room for the first time, I told him what I had dreamt; for, lassie, my dear, I saw ye as bride at that weddin’ in fine lace o’er yer shrood, and orange-flowers and ithers in yer black hair; an’ I saw the stars in yer bonny een — the een I love. But oh, my dear, when I saw the shrood, and kent what it might mean, I expeckit to see the worms crawl round yer feet. But do ye ask yer man to tell ye what I tell’t him that morn. ‘Twill interest ye to know how the hairt o’ men can learn by dreams. Has he ever tellt ye aught o’ this?”

“No, dear,” she said simply. “I think that perhaps he was afraid that one or other of us, if not both, might be upset by it if he did. You see, he did not tell you anything at all of our meeting, though I am sure that he will be glad when he knows that we both know all about it, and have told each other everything.”

That was very sweet of her, and very thoughtful in all ways, so I said that which I thought would please her best — that is, the truth:

“Ah, lassie, that is what a wife should be — what a wife should do. Rupert is blessed and happy to have his heart in your keeping.”

I knew from the added warmth of her kiss what I had said had pleased her.

Letter from Ernest Roger Halbard Melton, *Humcroft*, *Salop*, *to Rupert Sent Leger*, *Vissarion*, *Land of the Blue Mountains*.

July 29, 1907.

My dear Cousin Rupert,

We have heard such glowing accounts of Vissarion that I am coming out to see you. As you are yourself now a landowner, you will understand that my coming is not altogether a pleasure. Indeed, it is a duty first. When my father dies I shall be head of the family — the family of which Uncle Roger, to whom we were related, was a member. It is therefore meet and fitting that I should know something of our family branches and of their Seats. I am not giving you time for much warning, so am coming on immediately — in fact, I shall arrive almost as soon as this letter. But I want to catch you in the middle of your tricks. I hear that the Blue Mountaineer girls are peaches, so don’t send them *all* away when you hear I’m coming!

Do send a yacht up to Fiume to meet me. I hear you have all sorts of craft at Vissarion. The MacSkelpie, I hear, said you received her as a Queen; so I hope you will do the decent by one of your own flesh and blood, and the future Head of the House at that. I shan't bring much of a retinue with me. *I* wasn't made a billionaire by old Roger, so can only take my modest "man Friday" — whose name is Jenkinson, and a Cockney at that. So don't have too much gold lace and diamond-hilted scimitars about, like a good chap, or else he'll want the very worst — his wyges ryzed. That old image Rooke that came over for Miss McS., and whom by chance I saw at the attorney man's, might pilot me down from Fiume. The old gentleman-by-Act-of-Parliament Mr. Bingham Trent (I suppose he has hyphened it by this time) told me that Miss McS. said he "did her proud" when she went over under his charge. I shall be at Fiume on the evening of Wednesday, and shall stay at the Europa, which is, I am told, the least indecent hotel in the place. So you know where to find me, or any of your attendant demons can know, in case I am to suffer "substituted service."

Your affectionate Cousin,

Ernest Roger Halbard Melton.

Letter from Admiral Rooke to the Gospodar Rupert.

August 1, 1907.

Sir,

In obedience to your explicit direction that I should meet Mr. Ernest R. H. Melton at Fiume, and report to you exactly what occurred, "without keeping anything back," — as you will remember you said, I beg to report.

I brought the steam-yacht *Trent* to Fiume, arriving there on the morning of Thursday. At 11.30 p.m. I went to meet the train from St. Peter, due 11.40. It was something late, arriving just as the clock was beginning to strike midnight. Mr. Melton was on board, and with him his valet Jenkinson. I am bound to say that he did not seem very pleased with his journey, and expressed much disappointment at not seeing Your Honour awaiting him. I explained, as you directed, that you had to attend with the Voivode Vissarion and the Vladika the National Council, which met at Plazac, or that otherwise you would have done yourself the pleasure of coming to meet him. I had, of course, reserved rooms (the Prince of Wales's suite), for him at the Re d'Ungheria, and had waiting the carriage which the proprietor had provided for the Prince of Wales when he stayed there. Mr. Melton took his valet with him (on the box-seat), and I followed in a *Stadtwagen* with the luggage. When I arrived, I found the *maître d'hôtel* in a stupor of concern. The English nobleman, he said, had found fault with everything, and used to him language to which he was not accustomed. I quieted him, telling him that the stranger was probably unused to foreign ways, and assuring him that Your Honour had every faith in him. He announced himself satisfied and happy at the assurance. But I noticed that he promptly put everything in the hands of the headwaiter, telling him to satisfy the milor at any cost, and then went away to some urgent business in Vienna. Clever man!

I took Mr. Melton's orders for our journey in the morning, and asked if there was anything for which he wished. He simply said to me:

"Everything is rotten. Go to hell, and shut the door after you!" His man, who seems a very decent little fellow, though he is as vain as a peacock, and speaks with a Cockney accent which is simply terrible, came down the passage after me, and explained "on his own," as he expressed it, that his master, "Mr. Ernest," was upset by the long journey, and that I was not to mind. I did not wish to make him uncomfortable, so I explained that I minded nothing except what Your Honour wished; that the steam-yacht would be ready at 7 a.m.;

and that I should be waiting in the hotel from that time on till Mr. Melton cared to start, to bring him aboard.

In the morning I waited till the man Jenkinson came and told me that Mr. Ernest would start at ten. I asked if he would breakfast on board; he answered that he would take his *café-complet* at the hotel, but breakfast on board.

We left at ten, and took the electric pinnace out to the *Trent*, which lay, with steam up, in the roads. Breakfast was served on board, by his orders, and presently he came up on the bridge, where I was in command. He brought his man Jenkinson with him. Seeing me there, and not (I suppose) understanding that I was in command, he unceremoniously ordered me to go on the deck. Indeed, he named a place much lower. I made a sign of silence to the quartermaster at the wheel, who had released the spokes, and was going, I feared, to make some impertinent remark. Jenkinson joined me presently, and said, as some sort of explanation of his master's discourtesy (of which he was manifestly ashamed), if not as an amende:

"The governor is in a hell of a wax this morning."

When we got in sight of Meleda, Mr. Melton sent for me and asked me where we were to land. I told him that, unless he wished to the contrary, we were to run to Vissarion; but that my instructions were to land at whatever port he wished. Whereupon he told me that he wished to stay the night at some place where he might be able to see some "life." He was pleased to add something, which I presume he thought jocular, about my being able to "coach" him in such matters, as doubtless even "an old has-been like you" had still some sort of an eye for a pretty girl. I told him as respectfully as I could that I had no knowledge whatever on such subjects, which were possibly of some interest to younger men, but of none to me. He said no more; so after waiting for further orders, but without receiving any, I said:

"I suppose, sir, we shall run to Vissarion?"

"Run to the devil, if you like!" was his reply, as he turned away. When we arrived in the creek at Vissarion, he seemed much milder — less aggressive in his manner; but when he heard that you were detained at Plazac, he got rather "fresh" — I use the American term — again. I greatly feared there would be a serious misfortune before we got into the Castle, for on the dock was Julia, the wife of Michael, the Master of the Wine, who is, as you know, very beautiful. Mr. Melton seemed much taken with her; and she, being flattered by the attention of a strange gentleman and Your Honour's kinsman, put aside the stand-offishness of most of the Blue Mountain women. Whereupon Mr. Melton, forgetting himself, took her in his arms and kissed her. Instantly there was a hubbub. The mountaineers present drew their handjars, and almost on the instant sudden death appeared to be amongst us. Happily the men waited as Michael, who had just arrived on the quay-wall as the outrage took place, ran forward, wheeling his handjar round his head, and manifestly intending to decapitate Mr. Melton. On the instant — I am sorry to say it, for it created a terribly bad effect — Mr. Melton dropped on his knees in a state of panic. There was just this good use in it — that there was a pause of a few seconds. During that time the little Cockney valet, who has the heart of a man in him, literally burst his way forward, and stood in front of his master in boxing attitude, calling out:

"'Ere, come on, the 'ole lot of ye! 'E ain't done no 'arm. He honly kissed the gal, as any man would. If ye want to cut off somebody's 'ed, cut off mine. I ain't afride!" There was such genuine pluck in this, and it formed so fine a contrast to the other's craven attitude (forgive me, Your Honour; but you want the truth!), that I was glad he was an Englishman, too. The mountaineers recognised his spirit, and saluted with their handjars, even Michael amongst the number. Half turning his head, the little man said in a fierce whisper:

"Buck up, guv'nor! Get up, or they'll slice ye! 'Ere's Mr. Rooke; 'e'll see ye through it."

By this time the men were amenable to reason, and when I reminded them that Mr. Melton was Your Honour's cousin, they put aside their handjars and went about their work. I asked Mr. Melton to follow, and led the way to the Castle.

When we got close to the great entrance within the walled courtyard, we found a large number of the servants gathered, and with them many of the mountaineers, who have kept an organised guard all round the Castle ever since the abducting of the Voivodin. As both Your Honour and the Voivode were away at Plazac, the guard had for the time been doubled. When the steward came and stood in the doorway, the servants stood off somewhat, and the mountaineers drew back to the farther sides and angles of the courtyard. The Voivodin had, of course, been informed of the guest's (your cousin) coming, and came to meet him in the old custom of the Blue Mountains. As Your Honour only came to the Blue Mountains recently, and as no occasion has been since then of illustrating the custom since the Voivode was away, and the Voivodin then believed to be dead, perhaps I, who have lived here so long, may explain:

When to an old Blue Mountain house a guest comes whom it is wished to do honour, the Lady, as in the vernacular the mistress of the house is called, comes herself to meet the guest at the door — or, rather, *outside* the door — so that she can herself conduct him within. It is a pretty ceremony, and it is said that of old in kingly days the monarch always set much store by it. The custom is that, when she approaches the honoured guest (he need not be royal), she bends — or more properly kneels — before him and kisses his hand. It has been explained by historians that the symbolism is that the woman, showing obedience to her husband, as the married woman of the Blue Mountains always does, emphasises that obedience to her husband's guest. The custom is always observed in its largest formality when a young wife receives for the first time a guest, and especially one whom her husband wishes to honour. The Voivodin was, of course, aware that Mr. Melton was your kinsman, and naturally wished to make the ceremony of honour as marked as possible, so as to show overtly her sense of her husband's worth.

When we came into the courtyard, I held back, of course, for the honour is entirely individual, and is never extended to any other, no matter how worthy he may be. Naturally Mr. Melton did not know the etiquette of the situation, and so for that is not to be blamed. He took his valet with him when, seeing someone coming to the door, he went forward. I thought he was going to rush to his welcomer. Such, though not in the ritual, would have been natural in a young kinsman wishing to do honour to the bride of his host, and would to anyone have been both understandable and forgivable. It did not occur to me at the time, but I have since thought that perhaps he had not then heard of Your Honour's marriage, which I trust you will, in justice to the young gentleman, bear in mind when considering the matter. Unhappily, however, he did not show any such eagerness. On the contrary, he seemed to make a point of showing indifference.

It seemed to me myself that he, seeing somebody wishing to make much of him, took what he considered a safe opportunity of restoring to himself his own good opinion, which must have been considerably lowered in the episode of the Wine Master's wife.

The Voivodin, thinking, doubtless, Your Honour, to add a fresh lustre to her welcome, had donned the costume which all her nation has now come to love and to accept as a dress of ceremonial honour. She wore her shroud. It moved the hearts of all of us who looked on to see it, and we appreciated its being worn for such a cause. But Mr. Melton did not seem to care. As he had been approaching she had begun to kneel, and was already on her knees whilst he was several yards away. There he stopped and turned to speak to his valet, put a glass in his eye, and looked all round him and up and down — indeed, everywhere except at the Great Lady, who was on her knees before him, waiting to bid him welcome. I could see in the eyes of such of the mountaineers as were within my range of vision a growing animosity; so, hoping to keep down any such expression, which I knew would cause harm to Your Honour and the Voivodin, I looked all round them straight in their faces with a fixed frown, which, indeed, they seemed to understand, for they regained, and for the time maintained, their usual dignified calm. The Voivodin, may I say, bore the trial wonderfully. No human being could see that she was in any degree pained or even surprised. Mr. Melton stood looking round him so long that I had full time to regain my own attitude of calm. At last he seemed to come back to the knowledge that someone was waiting for him, and sauntered leisurely forward. There was so much insolence — mind you, not insolence that was intended to appear as such — in his movement that the mountaineers began to steal forward. When he was close up to the Voivodin, and she put out her hand to take his, he put forward *one finger*! I could hear the intake of the breath of the men, now close around, for I had moved forward, too. I thought it would be as well to be close to your guest, lest something should happen to him. The Voivodin still kept her splendid self-control. Raising the finger put forward by the guest with the same deference as though it had been the hand of a King, she bent her head down and kissed it. Her duty of courtesy now done, she was preparing to rise, when he put his hand into his pocket, and, pulling out a sovereign, offered it to her. His valet moved his hand forward, as if to pull back his arm, but it was too late. I am sure, Your Honour, that no affront was intended. He doubtless thought that he was doing a kindness of the sort usual in England when one "tips" a housekeeper. But all the same, to one in her position, it was an affront, an insult, open and unmistakable. So it was received by the mountaineers, whose handjars flashed out as one. For a second it was so received even by the Voivodin, who, with face flushing scarlet, and the stars in her eves flaming red, sprang to her feet. But in that second she had regained herself, and to all appearances her righteous anger passed away. Stooping, she took the hand of her guest and raised it — you know how strong she is — and, holding it in hers, led him into the doorway, saying:

"You are welcome, kinsman of my husband, to the house of my father, which is presently my husband's also. Both are grieved that, duty having called them away for the time, they are unable to be here to help me to greet you."

I tell you, Your Honour, that it was a lesson in self-respect which anyone who saw it can never forget. As to me, it makes my flesh quiver, old as I am, with delight, and my heart leap.

May I, as a faithful servant who has had many years of experience, suggest that Your Honour should seem — for the present, at any rate — not to know any of these things which I have reported, as you wished me to do. Be sure that the Voivodin will tell you her gracious self aught that she would wish you to know. And such reticence on your part must make for her happiness, even if it did not for your own.

So that you may know all, as you desired, and that you may have time to school yourself to whatever attitude you think best to adopt, I send this off to you at once by fleet messenger. Were the aeroplane here, I should take it myself. I leave here shortly to await the arrival of Sir Colin at Otranto.

Your Honour's faithful servant,
Rooke.

JANET MACKELPIE'S NOTES.

August 9, 1907.

To me it seems very providential that Rupert was not at home when that dreadful young man Ernest Melton arrived, though it is possible that if Rupert had been present he would not have dared to conduct himself so badly. Of course, I heard all about it from the maids; Teuta never opened her lips to me on the subject. It was bad enough and stupid enough for him to try to kiss a decent young woman like Julia, who is really as good as gold and as modest as one of our own Highland lassies; but to think of him insulting Teuta! The little beast! One would think that a champion idiot out of an Equatorial asylum would know better! If Michael, the Wine Master, wanted to kill him, I wonder what my Rupert and hers would have done? I am truly thankful that he was not present. And I am thankful, too, that I was not present either, for I should have made an exhibition of myself, and Rupert would not have liked that. He — the little beast! might have seen from the very dress that the dear girl wore that there was something exceptional about her. But on one account I should have liked to see her. They tell me that she was, in her true dignity, like a Queen, and that her humility in receiving her husband's kinsman was a lesson to every woman in the Land. I must be careful not to let Rupert know that I have heard of the incident. Later on, when it is all blown over and the young man has been got safely away, I shall tell him of it. Mr. Rooke — Lord High Admiral Rooke, I should say — must be a really wonderful man to have so held himself in check; for, from what I have heard of him, he must in his younger days have been worse than Old Morgan of Panama. Mr. Ernest Roger Halbard Melton, of Humcroft, Salop, little knows how near he was to being "cleft to the chine" also.

Fortunately, I had heard of his meeting with Teuta before he came to see me, for I did not get back from my walk till after he had arrived. Teuta's noble example was before me, and I determined that I, too, would show good manners under any circumstances. But I didn't know how mean he is. Think of his saying to me that Rupert's position here must be a great source of pride to me, who had been his nursery governess. He said "nursemaid" first, but then stumbled in his words, seeming to remember something. I did not turn a hair, I am glad to say. It is a mercy Uncle Colin was not here, for I honestly believe that, if he had been, he would have done the "cleaving to the chine" himself. It has been a narrow escape for Master Ernest, for only this morning Rupert had a message, sent on from Gibraltar, saying that he was arriving with his clansmen, and that they would not be far behind his letter. He would call at Otranto in case someone should come across to pilot him to Vissarion. Uncle told me all about that young cad having offered him one finger in Mr. Trent's office, though, of course, he didn't let the cad see that he noticed it. I have no doubt that, when he does arrive, that young man, if he is here still, will find that he will have to behave himself, if it be only on Sir Colin's account alone.

THE SAME (LATER).

I had hardly finished writing when the lookout on the tower announced that the *Teuta*, as Rupert calls his aeroplane, was sighted crossing the mountains from Plazac. I hurried up to see him arrive, for I had not as yet seen him on his "aero." Mr. Ernest Melton came up, too. Teuta was, of course, before any of us. She seems to know by instinct when Rupert is coming.

It was certainly a wonderful sight to see the little aeroplane, with outspread wings like a bird in flight, come sailing high over the mountains. There was a head-wind, and they were beating against it; otherwise we should not have had time to get to the tower before the arrival.

When once the "aero" had begun to drop on the near side of the mountains, however, and had got a measure of shelter from them, her pace was extraordinary. We could not tell, of course, what sort of pace she came at from looking at herself. But we gathered some idea from the rate at which the mountains and hills seemed to slide away from under her. When she got over the foot-hills, which are about ten miles away, she came on at a swift glide that seemed to throw the distance behind her. When quite close, she rose up a little till she was something higher than the Tower, to which she came as straight as an arrow from the bow, and glided to her moorings, stopping dead as Rupert pulled a lever, which seemed to turn a barrier to the wind.

The Voivode sat beside Rupert, but I must say that he seemed to hold on to the bar in front of him even more firmly than Rupert held to his steering-gear.

When they had alighted, Rupert greeted his cousin with the utmost kindness, and bade him welcome to Vissarion.

"I see," he said, "you have met Teuta. Now you may congratulate me, if you wish."

Mr. Melton made a long rodomontade about her beauty, but presently, stumbling about in his speech, said something regarding it being unlucky to appear in grave-clothes. Rupert laughed, and clapped him on the shoulder as he answered:

"That pattern of frock is likely to become a national dress for loyal women of the Blue Mountains. When you know something of what that dress means to us all at present you will understand. In the meantime, take it that there is not a soul in the nation that does not love it and honour her for wearing it." To which the cad replied:

"Oh, indeed! I thought it was some preparation for a fancy-dress ball." Rupert's comment on this ill-natured speech was (for him) quite grumpily given:

"I should not advise you to think such things whilst you are in this part of the world, Ernest. They bury men here for much less."

The cad seemed struck with something — either what Rupert had said or his manner of saying it — for he was silent for several seconds before he spoke.

"I'm very tired with that long journey, Rupert. Would you and Mrs. Sent Leger mind if I go to my own room and turn in? My man can ask for a cup of tea and a sandwich for me."

RUPERT'S JOURNAL.

August 10, 1907.

When Ernest said he wished to retire it was about the wisest thing he could have said or done, and it suited Teuta and me down to the ground. I could see that the dear girl was agitated about something, so thought it would be best for her to be quiet, and not worried with being civil to the Bounder. Though he is my cousin, I can't think of him as anything else. The Voivode and I had certain matters to attend to arising out of the meeting of the Council, and when we were through the night was closing in. When I saw Teuta in our own rooms she said at once:

"Do you mind, dear, if I stay with Aunt Janet to-night? She is very upset and nervous, and when I offered to come to her she clung to me and cried with relief."

So when I had had some supper, which I took with the Voivode, I came down to my old quarters in the Garden Room, and turned in early.

I was awakened a little before dawn by the coming of the fighting monk Theophrastos, a notable runner, who had an urgent message for me. This was the letter to me given to him by Rooke. He had been cautioned to give it into no other hand, but to find me wherever I might be, and convey it personally. When he had arrived at Plazac I had left on the aeroplane, so he had turned back to Vissarion.

When I read Rooke's report of Ernest Melton's abominable conduct I was more angry with him than I can say. Indeed, I did not think before that that I could be angry with him, for I have always despised him. But this was too much. However, I realised the wisdom of Rooke's advice, and went away by myself to get over my anger and reacquire my self-mastery. The aeroplane *Teuta* was still housed on the tower, so I went up alone and took it out.

When I had had a spin of about a hundred miles I felt better. The bracing of the wind and the quick, exhilarating motion restored me to myself, and I felt able to cope with Master Ernest, or whatever else chagrinable might come along, without giving myself away. As Teuta had thought it better to keep silence as to Ernest's affront, I felt I must not acknowledge it; but, all the same, I determined to get rid of him before the day was much older.

When I had had my breakfast I sent word to him by a servant that I was coming to his rooms, and followed not long behind the messenger.

He was in a suit of silk pyjamas, such as not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed in. I closed the door behind me before I began to speak. He listened, at first amazed, then disconcerted, then angry, and then cowering down like a whipped hound. I felt that it was a case for speaking out. A bumptious ass like him, who deliberately insulted everyone he came across — for if all or any of his efforts in that way were due to mere elemental ignorance he was not fit to live, but should be silenced on sight as a modern Caliban — deserved neither pity nor mercy. To extend to him fine feeling, tolerance, and such-like gentlenesses would be to deprive the world of them without benefit to any. So well as I can remember, what I said was something like this:

"Ernest, as you say, you've got to go, and to go quick, you understand. I dare say you look on this as a land of barbarians, and think that any of your high-toned refinements are thrown away on people here. Well, perhaps it is so. Undoubtedly, the structure of the country is rough; the mountains may only represent the glacial epoch; but so far as I can gather from some of your exploits — for I have only learned a small part as yet — you represent a period a good deal farther back. You seem to have given our folk here an exhibition of the playfulness of the hooligan of the Saurian stage of development; but the Blue Mountains, rough as they are, have come up out of the primeval slime, and even now the people aim at better manners. They may be rough, primitive, barbarian, elemental, if you will, but they are not low down enough to tolerate either your ethics or your taste. My dear cousin, your life is not safe here! I am told that yesterday, only for the restraint exercised by certain offended mountaineers on other grounds than your own worth, you would have been abbreviated by the head. Another day of your fascinating presence would do away with this restraint, and then we should have a scandal. I am a new-comer here myself — too new a comer to be able to afford a scandal of that kind — and so I shall not delay your going. Believe me, my dear cousin, Ernest Roger Halbard Melton, of Humcroft, Salop, that I am inconsolable about your resolution of immediate departure, but I cannot shut my eyes to its wisdom. At present the matter is altogether amongst ourselves, and when you have gone — if it be immediately — silence will be observed on all hands for the sake of the house wherein you are a guest; but if there be time for scandal to spread, you will be made, whether you be alive or dead, a European laughing-stock. Accordingly, I have anticipated your wishes, and have ordered a fast steam yacht to take you to Ancona, or to whatever other port you may desire. The yacht will be under the command of Captain Desmond, of one of our battleships — a most determined officer, who will carry out any directions which may be given to him. This will insure your safety so far as Italian territory. Some of his officials will arrange a special carriage for you up to Flushing, and a cabin on the steamer to Queenboro'. A man of mine will travel on the train and steamer with you, and will see that whatever you may wish in the way of food or comfort will be provided. Of course, you understand, my dear cousin, that you are my guest until you arrive in London. I have not asked Rooke to accompany you, as when he went to meet you, it was a mistake. Indeed, there might have been a danger to you which I never contemplated — a quite unnecessary danger, I assure you. But happily Admiral Rooke, though a man of strong passions, has wonderful self-control."

"Admiral Rooke?" he queried. "Admiral?"

"Admiral, certainly," I replied, "but not an ordinary Admiral — one of many. He is *the* Admiral — the Lord High Admiral of the Land of the Blue Mountains, with sole control of its expanding navy. When such a man is treated as a valet, there may be . . . But why go into this? It is all over. I only mention it lest anything of a similar kind should occur with Captain Desmond, who is a younger man, and therefore with probably less self-repression."

I saw that he had learned his lesson, and so said no more on the subject.

There was another reason for his going which I did not speak of. Sir Colin MacKelpie was coming with his clansmen, and I knew he did not like Ernest Melton. I well remembered that episode of his offering one finger to the old gentleman in Mr. Trent's office, and, moreover, I had my suspicions that Aunt Janet's being upset was probably in some measure due to some rudeness of his that she did not wish to speak about. He is really an impossible young man, and is far better out of this country than in it. If he remained here, there would be some sort of a tragedy for certain.

I must say that it was with a feeling of considerable relief that I saw the yacht steam out of the creek, with Captain Desmond on the bridge and my cousin beside him.

Quite other were my feelings when, an hour after, *The Lady* came flying into the creek with the Lord High Admiral on the bridge, and beside him, more splendid and soldier-like than ever, Sir Colin MacKelpie. Mr. Bingham Trent was also on the bridge.

The General was full of enthusiasm regarding his regiment, for in all, those he brought with him and those finishing their training at home, the force is near the number of a full regiment. When we were alone he explained to me that all was arranged regarding the non-commissioned officers, but that he had held over the question of officers until we should have had a suitable opportunity of talking the matter over together. He explained to me his reasons, which were certainly simple and cogent. Officers, according to him, are a different class, and accustomed to a different standard altogether of life and living, of duties and pleasures. They are harder to deal with and more difficult to obtain. "There was no use," he said, "in getting a lot of failures, with old-crusted ways of their own importance. We must have young men for our purpose — that is, men not old, but with some experience — men, of course, who know how to behave themselves, or else, from what little I have seen of the Blue Mountaineers, they wouldn't last long here if they went on as some of them do elsewhere. I shall start things here as you wish me to, for I am here, my dear boy, to stay with you and Janet, and we shall, if it be given to us by the Almighty, help to build up together a new 'nation' — an ally of Britain, who will stand at least as an outpost of our own nation, and a guardian of our eastern road. When things are organised here on the military side, and are going strong, I shall, if you can spare me, run back to London for a few weeks. Whilst I am there I shall pick up a lot of the sort of officers we want. I know that there are loads of them to be had. I shall go slowly, however, and carefully, too, and every man I bring back will be recommended to me by some old soldier whom I know, and who knows the man he recommends, and has seen him work. We shall have, I dare say, an army for its size second to none in the world, and the day may come when your old country will be proud of your new one. Now I'm off to see that all is ready for my people — your people now."

I had had arrangements made for the comfort of the clansmen and the women, but I knew that the good old soldier would see for himself that his men were to be comfortable. It was not for nothing that he was — is — looked on as perhaps the General most beloved by his men in the whole British Army.

When he had gone, and I was alone, Mr. Trent, who had evidently been waiting for the opportunity, came to me. When we had spoken of my marriage and of Teuta, who seems to have made an immense impression on him, he said suddenly:

"I suppose we are quite alone, and that we shall not be interrupted?" I summoned the man outside — there is always a sentry on guard outside my door or near me, wherever I may be — and gave orders that I was not to be disturbed until I gave fresh orders. "If," I said, "there be anything pressing or important, let the Voivodin or Miss MacKelpie know. If either of them brings anyone to me, it will be all right."

When we were quite alone Mr. Trent took a slip of paper and some documents from the bag which was beside him. He then read out items from the slip, placing as he did so the documents so checked over before him.

1. New Will made on marriage, to be signed presently.
2. Copy of the Re-conveyance of Vissarion estates to Peter

Vissarion, as directed by Will of Roger Melton.

3. Report of Correspondence with Privy Council, and proceedings following.

Taking up the last named, he untied the red tape, and, holding the bundle in his hand, went on:

"As you may, later on, wish to examine the details of the Proceedings, I have copied out the various letters, the originals of which are put safely away in my strong-room where, of course, they are always available in case you may want them. For your present information I shall give you a rough synopsis of the Proceedings, referring where advisable to this paper.

"On receipt of your letter of instructions regarding the Consent of the Privy Council to your changing your nationality in accordance with the terms of Roger Melton's Will, I put myself in communication with the Clerk of the Privy Council, informing him of your wish to be naturalized in due time to the Land of the Blue Mountains. After some letters between us, I got a summons to attend a meeting of the Council.

"I attended, as required, taking with me all necessary documents, and such as I conceived might be advisable to produce, if wanted.

"The Lord President informed me that the present meeting of the Council was specially summoned in obedience to the suggestion of the King, who had been consulted as to his personal wishes on the subject — should he have any. The President then proceeded to inform me officially that all Proceedings of the Privy Council were altogether confidential, and were not to be made public under any circumstances. He was gracious enough to add:

"'The circumstances of this case, however, are unique; and as you act for another, we have thought it advisable to enlarge your permission in the matter, so as to allow you to communicate freely with your principal. As that gentleman is settling himself in a part of the world which has been in the past, and may be again, united to this nation by some common interest, His Majesty wishes Mr. Sent Leger to feel assured of the good-will of Great Britain to the Land of the Blue Mountains, and even of his own personal satisfaction that a gentleman of so distinguished a lineage and such approved personal character is about to be — within his own scope — a connecting-link between the nations. To which end he has graciously announced that, should the Privy Council acquiesce in the request of Denaturalization, he will himself sign the Patent therefor.

"'The Privy Council has therefore held private session, at which the matter has been discussed in its many bearings; and it is content that the change can do no harm, but may be of some service to the two nations. We have, therefore, agreed to grant the prayer of the Applicant; and the officials of the Council have the matter of the form of Grant in hand. So you, sir, may rest satisfied that as soon as the formalities — which will, of course, require the formal signing of certain documents by the Applicant — can be complied with, the Grant and Patent will obtain.'"

Having made this statement in formal style, my old friend went on in more familiar way:

"And so, my dear Rupert, all is in hand; and before very long you will have the freedom required under the Will, and will be at liberty to take whatever steps may be necessary to be naturalized in your new country.

"I may tell you, by the way, that several members of the Council made very complimentary remarks regarding you. I am forbidden to give names, but I may tell you facts. One old Field-Marshal, whose name is familiar to the whole world, said that he had served in many places with your father, who was a very valiant soldier, and that he was glad that Great Britain was to have in the future the benefit of your father's son in a friendly land now beyond the outposts of our Empire, but which had been one with her in the past, and might be again.

"So much for the Privy Council. We can do no more at present until you sign and have attested the documents which I have brought with me.

"We can now formally complete the settlement of the Vissarion estates, which must be done whilst you are a British citizen. So, too, with the Will, the more formal and complete document, which is to take the place of that short one which you forwarded to me the day after your marriage. It may be, perhaps, necessary or advisable that, later on, when you are naturalized here, you shall make a new Will in strictest accordance with local law."

TEUTA SENT LEGER'S DIARY.

August 19, 1907.

We had a journey to-day that was simply glorious. We had been waiting to take it for more than a week. Rupert not only wanted the weather suitable, but he had to wait till the new aeroplane came home. It is more than twice as big as our biggest up to now. None of the others could take all the party which Rupert wanted to go. When he heard that the aero was coming from Whitby, where it was sent from Leeds, he directed by cable that it should be unshipped at Otranto, whence he took it here all by himself. I wanted to come with him, but he thought it better not. He says that Brindisi is too busy a place to keep anything quiet — if not secret — and he wants to be very dark indeed about this, as it is worked by the new radium engine. Ever since they found radium in our own hills he has been obsessed by the idea of an aerial navy for our protection. And after to-day's experiences I think he is right. As he wanted to survey the whole country at a glimpse, so that the general scheme of defence might be put in hand, we had to have an aero big enough to take the party as well as fast enough to do it rapidly, and all at once. We had, in addition to Rupert, my father, and myself, Sir Colin and Lord High Admiral Rooke (I do like to give that splendid old fellow his full title!). The military and naval experts had with them scientific apparatus of various kinds, also cameras and range-finders, so that they could mark their maps as they required. Rupert, of course, drove, and I acted as his assistant. Father, who has not yet become accustomed to aerial travel, took a seat in the centre (which Rupert had thoughtfully prepared for him), where there is very little motion. I must say I was amazed to see the way that splendid old soldier Sir Colin bore himself. He had never been on an aeroplane before, but, all the same, he was as calm as if he was on a rock. Height or motion did not trouble him. Indeed, he seemed to *enjoy* himself all the time. The Admiral is himself almost an expert, but in any case I am sure he would have been unconcerned, just as he was in the *Crab* as Rupert has told me.

We left just after daylight, and ran down south. When we got to the east of Ilsin, we kept slightly within the border-line, and went north or east as it ran, making occasional loops inland over the mountains and back again. When we got up to our farthest point north, we began to go much slower. Sir Colin explained that for the rest all would be comparatively plain-sailing in the way of defence; but that as any foreign Power other than the Turk must attack from seaward, he would like to examine the seaboard very carefully in conjunction with the Admiral, whose advice as to sea defence would be invaluable.

Rupert was fine. No one could help admiring him as he sat working his lever and making the great machine obey every touch. He was wrapped up in his work. I don't believe that whilst he was working he ever thought of even me. He *is* splendid!

We got back just as the sun was dropping down over the Calabrian Mountains. It is quite wonderful how the horizon changes when you are sailing away up high on an aeroplane. Rupert is going to teach me how to manage one all by myself, and when I am fit he will give me one, which he is to have specially built for me.

I think I, too, have done some good work — at least, I have got some good ideas — from our journey to-day. Mine are not of war, but of peace, and I think I see a way by which we shall be able to develop our country in a wonderful way. I shall talk the idea over with Rupert to-night, when we are alone. In the meantime Sir Colin and Admiral Rooke will think their plans over individually, and to-morrow morning together. Then the next day they, too, are to go over their idea with Rupert and my father, and something may be decided then.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL — Continued.

August 21, 1907.

Our meeting on the subject of National Defence, held this afternoon, went off well. We were five in all, for with permission of the Voivode and the two fighting-men, naval and military, I brought Teuta with me. She sat beside me quite quietly, and never made a remark of any kind till the Defence business had been gone through.

Both Sir Colin and Admiral Rooke were in perfect agreement as to the immediate steps to be taken for defence. In the first instance, the seaboard was to be properly fortified in the necessary places, and the navy largely strengthened. When we had got thus far I asked Rooke to tell of the navy increase already in hand. Whereupon he explained that, as we had found the small battleship *The Lady* of an excellent type for coast defence, acting only in home waters, and of a size to take cover where necessary at many places on our own shores, we had ordered nine others of the same pattern. Of these the first four were already in hand, and were proceeding with the greatest expedition. The General then supplemented this by saying that big guns could be used from points judiciously chosen on the seaboard, which was in all so short a length that no very great quantity of armament would be required.

"We can have," he said, "the biggest guns of the most perfect kind yet accomplished, and use them from land batteries of the most up-to-date pattern. The one serious proposition we have to deal with is the defence of the harbour — as yet quite undeveloped — which is known as the 'Blue Mouth.' Since our aerial journey I have been to it by sea with Admiral Rooke in *The Lady*, and then on land with the Vladika, who was born on its shores, and who knows every inch of it.

"It is worth fortifying — and fortifying well, for as a port it is peerless in Mediterranean seas. The navies of the world might ride in it, land-locked, and even hidden from view seawards. The mountains which enclose it are in themselves absolute protection. In addition, these can only be assailed from our own territory. Of course, Voivode, you understand when I say 'our' I mean the Land of the Blue Mountains, for whose safety and well-being I am alone concerned. Any ship anchoring in the roads of the Blue Mouth would have only one need — sufficient length of cable for its magnificent depth.

"When proper guns are properly placed on the steep cliffs to north and south of the entrance, and when the rock islet between has been armoured and armed as will be necessary, the Mouth will be impregnable. But we should not depend on the aiming of the entrance alone. At certain salient points — which I have marked upon this map — armour-plated sunken forts within earthworks should be established. There should be covering forts on the hillsides, and, of course, the final summits protected. Thus we could resist attack on any side or all sides — from sea or land. That port will yet mean the wealth as well as the strength of this nation, so it will be well to have it properly protected. This should be done soon, and the utmost secrecy observed in the doing of it, lest the so doing should become a matter of international concern."

Here Rooke smote the table hard.

"By God, that is true! It has been the dream of my own life for this many a year."

In the silence which followed the sweet, gentle voice of Teuta came clear as a bell:

"May I say a word? I am emboldened to, as Sir Colin has spoken so splendidly, and as the Lord High Admiral has not hesitated to mention his dreaming. I, too, have had a dream — a day-dream — which came in a flash, but no less a dream, for all that. It was when we hung on the aeroplane over the Blue Mouth. It seemed to me in an instant that I saw that beautiful spot as it will some time be — typical, as Sir Colin said, of the wealth as well as the strength of this nation; a mart for the world whence will come for barter some of the great wealth of the Blue Mountains. That wealth is as yet undeveloped. But the day is at hand when we may begin to use it, and through that very port. Our mountains and their valleys are clad with trees of splendid growth, virgin forests of priceless worth; hard woods of all kinds, which have no superior throughout the world. In the rocks, though hidden as yet, is vast mineral wealth of many kinds. I have been looking through the reports of the geological exports of the Commission of Investigation which my husband organised soon after he came to live here, and, according to them, our whole mountain ranges simply teem with vast quantities of minerals, almost more precious for industry than gold and silver are for commerce — though, indeed, gold is not altogether lacking as a mineral. When once our work on the harbour is done, and the place has been made secure against any attempt at foreign aggression, we must try to find a way to bring this wealth of woods and ores down to the sea.

"And then, perhaps, may begin the great prosperity of our Land, of which we have all dreamt."

She stopped, all vibrating, almost choked with emotion. We were all moved. For myself, I was thrilled to the core. Her enthusiasm was all-sweeping, and under its influence I found my own imagination expanding. Out of its experiences I spoke:

"And there is a way. I can see it. Whilst our dear Voivodin was speaking, the way seemed to clear. I saw at the back of the Blue Mouth, where it goes deepest into the heart of the cliffs, the opening of a great tunnel, which ran upward over a steep slope till it debouched on the first plateau beyond the range of the encompassing cliffs. Thither came by various rails of steep gradient, by timber-shoots and cable-rails, by aerial cables and precipitating tubes, wealth from over ground and under it; for as our Land is all mountains, and as these tower up to the clouds, transport to the sea shall be easy and of little cost when once the machinery is established. As everything of much weight goes downward, the cars of the main tunnel of the port shall return upward without cost. We can have from the mountains a head of water under good control, which will allow of endless hydraulic power, so that the whole port and the mechanism of the town to which it will grow can be worked by it.

"This work can be put in hand at once. So soon as the place shall be perfectly surveyed and the engineering plans got ready, we can start on the main tunnel, working from the sea-level up, so that the cost of the transport of material will be almost nil. This work can go on whilst the forts are building; no time need be lost.

"Moreover, may I add a word on National Defence? We are, though old in honour, a young nation as to our place amongst Great Powers. And so we must show the courage and energy of a young nation. The Empire of the Air is not yet won. Why should not we make a bid for it? As our mountains are lofty, so shall we have initial power of attack or defence. We can have, in chosen spots amongst the clouds, depots of war aeroplanes, with which we can descend and smite our enemies quickly on land or sea. We shall hope to live for Peace; but woe to those who drive us to War!"

There is no doubt that the Vissarions are a warlike race. As I spoke, Teuta took one of my hands and held it hard. The old Voivode, his eyes blazing, rose and stood beside me and took the other. The two old fighting-men of the land and the sea stood up and saluted.

This was the beginning of what ultimately became "The National

Committee of Defence and Development."

I had other, and perhaps greater, plans for the future in my mind; but the time had not come for their utterance.

To me it seems not only advisable, but necessary, that the utmost discretion be observed by all our little group, at all events for the present. There seems to be some new uneasiness in the Blue Mountains. There are constant meetings of members of the Council, but no formal meeting of the Council, as such, since the last one at which I was present. There is constant coming and going amongst the mountaineers, always in groups, small or large. Teuta and I, who have been about very much on the aeroplane, have both noticed it. But somehow we — that is, the Voivode and myself — are left out of everything; but we have not said as yet a word on the subject to any of the others. The Voivode notices, but he says nothing; so I am silent, and Teuta does whatever I ask. Sir Colin does not notice anything except the work he is engaged on — the planning the defences of the Blue Mouth. His old scientific training as an engineer, and his enormous experience of wars and sieges — for he was for nearly fifty years sent as military representative to all the great wars — seem to have become directed on that point. He is certainly planning it all out in a wonderful way. He consults Rooke almost hourly on the maritime side of the question. The Lord High Admiral has been a watcher all his life, and very few important points have ever escaped him, so that he can add greatly to the wisdom of the defensive construction. He notices, I think, that something is going on outside ourselves; but he keeps a resolute silence.

What the movement going on is I cannot guess. It is not like the uneasiness that went before the abduction of Teuta and the Voivode, but it is even more pronounced. That was an uneasiness founded on some suspicion. This is a positive thing, and has definite meaning — of some sort. We shall, I suppose, know all about it in good time. In the meantime we go on with our work. Happily the whole Blue Mouth and the mountains round it are on my own property, the portion acquired long ago by Uncle Roger, exclusive of the Vissarion estate. I asked the Voivode to allow me to transfer it to him, but he sternly refused and forbade me, quite peremptorily, to ever open the subject to him again. "You have done enough already," he said. "Were I to allow you to go further, I should feel mean. And I do not think you would like your wife's father to suffer that feeling after a long life, which he has tried to live in honour."

I bowed, and said no more. So there the matter rests, and I have to take my own course. I have had a survey made, and on the head of it the Tunnel to the harbour is begun.

BOOK VIII: THE FLASHING OF THE HANDJAR

PRIVATE MEMORANDUM OF THE MEETING OF VARIOUS MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL, HELD AT THE STATE HOUSE OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS AT PLAZAC ON MONDAY, AUGUST 26, 1907.

(*Written by Cristoferos*, *Scribe of the Council*, *by instruction of those present*.)

When the private meeting of various Members of the National Council had assembled in the Council Hall of the State House at Plazac, it was as a preliminary decided unanimously that now or hereafter no names of those present were to be mentioned, and that officials appointed for the purposes of this meeting should be designated by office only, the names of all being withheld.

The proceedings assumed the shape of a general conversation, quite informal, and therefore not to be recorded. The nett outcome was the unanimous expression of an opinion that the time, long contemplated by very many persons throughout the nation, had now come when the Constitution and machinery of the State should be changed; that the present form of ruling by an Irregular Council was not sufficient, and that a method more in accord with the spirit of the times should be adopted. To this end Constitutional Monarchy, such as that holding in Great Britain, seemed best adapted. Finally, it was decided that each Member of the Council should make a personal canvass of his district, talk over the matter with his electors, and bring back to another meeting — or, rather, as it was amended, to this meeting postponed for a week, until September 2nd — the opinions and wishes received. Before separating, the individual to be appointed King, in case the new idea should prove grateful to the nation, was discussed. The consensus of opinion was entirely to the effect that the Voivode Peter Vissarion should, if he would accept the high office, be appointed. It was urged that, as his daughter, the Voivodin Teuta, was now married to the Englishman, Rupert Sent Leger — called generally by the mountaineers "the Gospodar Rupert" — a successor to follow the Voivode when God should call him would be at hand — a successor worthy in every way to succeed to so illustrious a post. It was urged by several speakers, with general acquiescence, that already Mr. Sent Leger's services to the State were such that he would be in himself a worthy person to begin the new Dynasty; but that, as he was now allied to the Voivode Peter Vissarion, it was becoming that the elder, born of the nation, should receive the first honour.

THE SAME — Continued.

The adjourned meeting of certain members of the National Council was resumed in the Hall of the State House at Plazac on Monday, September 2nd, 1907. By motion the same chairman was appointed, and the rule regarding the record renewed.

Reports were made by the various members of the Council in turn, according to the State Roll. Every district was represented. The reports were unanimously in favour of the New Constitution, and it was reported by each and all of the Councillors that the utmost enthusiasm marked in every case the suggestion of the Voivode Peter Vissarion as the first King to be crowned under the new Constitution, and that remainder should be settled on the Gospodar Rupert (the mountaineers would only receive his lawful name as an alternative; one and all said that he would be "Rupert" to them and to the nation

— for ever).

The above matter having been satisfactorily settled, it was decided that a formal meeting of the National Council should be held at the State House, Plazac, in one week from to-day, and that the Voivode Peter Vissarion should be asked to be in the State House in readiness to attend. It was also decided that instruction should be given to the High Court of National Law to prepare and have ready, in skeleton form, a rescript of the New Constitution to be adopted, the same to be founded on the Constitution and Procedure of Great Britain, so far as the same may be applicable to the traditional ideas of free Government in the Land of the Blue Mountains.

By unanimous vote this private and irregular meeting of "Various National Councillors" was then dissolved.

RECORD OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE LAND OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS, HELD AT PLAZAC ON MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 9TH, 1907, TO CONSIDER THE ADOPTION OF A NEW CONSTITUTION, AND TO GIVE PERMANENT EFFECT TO THE SAME IF, AND WHEN, DECIDED UPON.

(*Kept by the Monk Cristoferos*, *Scribe to the National Council.*)

The adjourned meeting duly took place as arranged. There was a full attendance of Members of the Council, together with the Vladika, the Archbishop, the Archimandrites of Spazac, of Ispazar, of Domitan, and Astrag; the Chancellor; the Lord of the Exchequer; the President of the High Court of National Law; the President of the Council of Justice; and such other high officials as it is customary to summon to meetings of the National Council on occasions of great importance. The names of all present will be found in the full report, wherein are given the ipsissima verba of the various utterances made during the consideration of the questions discussed, the same having been taken down in shorthand by the humble scribe of this précis, which has been made for the convenience of Members of the Council and others.

The Voivode Peter Vissarion, obedient to the request of the Council, was in attendance at the State House, waiting in the "Chamber of the High Officers" until such time as he should be asked to come before the Council.

The President put before the National Council the matter of the new Constitution, outlining the headings of it as drawn up by the High Court of National Law, and the Constitution having been formally accepted *nem. con.* by the National Council on behalf of the people, he proposed that the Crown should be offered to the Voivode Peter Vissarion, with remainder to the "Gospodar Rupert" (legally, Rupert Sent Leger), husband of his only child, the Voivodin Teuta. This also was received with enthusiasm, and passed *nem. con.*

Thereupon the President of Council, the Archbishop, and the Vladika, acting together as a deputation, went to pray the attention of the Voivode Peter Vassarion.

When the Voivode entered, the whole Council and officials stood up, and for a few seconds waited in respectful silence with heads bowed down. Then, as if by a common impulse — for no word was spoken nor any signal given — they all drew their handjars, and stood to attention — with points raised and edges of the handjars to the front.

The Voivode stood very still. He seemed much moved, but controlled himself admirably. The only time when be seemed to lose his self-control was when, once again with a strange simultaneity, all present raised their handjars on high, and shouted: “Hail, Peter, King!” Then lowering their points till these almost touched the ground, they once again stood with bowed heads.

When he had quite mastered himself, the Voivode Peter Vissarion spoke:

“How can I, my brothers, sufficiently thank you, and, through you, the people of the Blue Mountains, for the honour done to me this day? In very truth it is not possible, and therefore I pray you to consider it as done, measuring my gratitude in the greatness of your own hearts. Such honour as you offer to me is not contemplated by any man in whose mind a wholesome sanity rules, nor is it even the dream of fervent imagination. So great is it, that I pray you, men with hearts and minds like my own, to extend to me, as a further measure of your generosity, a little time to think it over. I shall not want long, for even already, with the blaze of honour fresh upon me, I see the cool shadow of Duty, though his substance is yet hardly visible. Give me but an hour of solitude — an hour at most — if it do not prolong this your session unduly. It may be that a lesser time will serve, but in any case I promise you that, when I can see a just and fitting issue to my thought, I shall at once return.”

The President of the Council looked around him, and, seeing everywhere the bowing heads of acquiescence, spoke with a reverent gravity:

“We shall wait in patience whatsoever time you will, and may the God who rules all worthy hearts guide you to His Will!”

And so in silence the Voivode passed out of the hall.

From my seat near a window I could watch him go, as with measured steps he passed up the hill which rises behind the State House, and disappeared into the shadow of the forest. Then my work claimed me, for I wished to record the proceedings so far whilst all was fresh in my mind. In silence, as of the dead, the Council waited, no man challenging opinion of his neighbour even by a glance.

Almost a full hour had elapsed when the Voivode came again to the Council, moving with slow and stately gravity, as has always been his wont since age began to hamper the movement which in youth had been so notable. The Members of the Council all stood up uncovered, and so remained while he made announcement of his conclusion. He spoke slowly; and as his answer was to be a valued record of this Land and its Race, I wrote down every word as uttered, leaving here and there space for description or comment, which spaces I have since then filled in.

"Lords of the National Council, Archbishop, Vladika, Lords of the Council of Justice and of National Law, Archimandrites, and my brothers all, I have, since I left you, held in the solitude of the forest counsel with myself — and with God; and He, in His gracious wisdom, has led my thinking to that conclusion which was from the first moment of knowledge of your intent presaged in my heart. Brothers, you know — or else a long life has been spent in vain — that my heart and mind are all for the nation — my experience, my life, my handjar. And when all is for her, why should I shrink to exercise on her behalf my riper judgment though the same should have to combat my own ambition? For ten centuries my race has not failed in its duty. Ages ago the men of that time trusted in the hands of my ancestors the Kingship, even as now you, their children, trust me. But to me it would be base to betray that trust, even by the smallest tittle. That would I do were I to take the honour of the crown which you have tendered to me, so long as there is another more worthy to wear it. Were there none other, I should place myself in your hands, and yield myself over to blind obedience of your desires. But such an one there is; dear to you already by his own deeds, now doubly dear to me, since he is my son by my daughter's love. He is young, whereas I am old. He is strong and brave and true; but my days of the usefulness of strength and bravery are over. For myself, I have long contemplated as the crown of my later years a quiet life in one of our monasteries, where I can still watch the whirl of the world around us on your behalf, and be a counsellor of younger men of more active minds. Brothers, we are entering on stirring times. I can see the signs of their coming all around us. North and South — the Old Order and the New, are about to clash, and we lie between the opposing forces. True it is that the Turk, after warring for a thousand years, is fading into insignificance. But from the North where conquests spring, have crept towards our Balkans the men of a mightier composite Power. Their march has been steady; and as they came, they fortified every step of the way. Now they are hard upon us, and are already beginning to swallow up the regions that we have helped to win from the dominion of Mahound. The Austrian is at our very gates. Beaten back by the Irredentists of Italy, she has so enmeshed herself with the Great Powers of Europe that she seems for the moment to be impregnable to a foe of our stature. There is but one hope for us — the uniting of the Balkan forces to turn a masterly front to North and West as well as to South and East. Is that a task for old hands to undertake? No; the hands must be young and supple; and the brain subtle, as well as the heart be strong, of whomsoever would dare such an accomplishment. Should I accept the crown, it would only postpone the doing of that which must ultimately be done. What avail would it be if, when the darkness closes over me, my daughter should be Queen Consort to the first King of a new dynasty? You know this man, and from your record I learn that you are already willing to have him as King to follow me. Why not begin with him? He comes of a great nation, wherein the principle of freedom is a vital principle that quickens all things. That nation has more than once shown to us its friendliness; and doubtless the very fact that an Englishman would become our King, and could carry into our Government the spirit and customs which have made his own country great, would do much to restore the old friendship, and even to create a new one, which would in times of trouble bring British fleets to our waters, and British bayonets to support our own handjars. It is within my own knowledge, though as yet unannounced to you, that Rupert Sent Leger has already obtained a patent, signed by the King of England himself, allowing him to be denaturalized in England, so that he can at once apply for naturalization here. I know also that he has brought hither a vast fortune, by aid of which he is beginning to strengthen our hands for war, in case that sad eventuality should arise. Witness his late ordering to be built nine other warships of the class that has already done such effective service in overthrowing the Turk — or the pirate, whichever he may have been. He has undertaken the defence of the Blue Mouth at his own cost in a way which will make it stronger than Gibraltar, and secure us against whatever use to which the Austrian may apply the vast forces already gathered in the Bocche di Cattaro. He is already founding aerial stations on our highest peaks for use of the war aeroplanes which are being built for him. It is such a man as this who makes a nation great; and right sure I am that in his hands this splendid land and our noble, freedom-loving people will flourish and become a power in the world. Then, brothers, let me, as one to whom this nation and its history and its future are dear, ask you to give to the husband of my daughter the honour which you would confer on me. For her I can speak as well as for myself. She shall suffer nothing in dignity either. Were I indeed King, she, as my daughter, would be a Princess of the world. As it will be, she shall be companion and Queen of a great King, and her race, which is mine, shall flourish in all the lustre of the new Dynasty.

"Therefore on all accounts, my brothers, for the sake of our dear Land of the Blue Mountains, make the Gospodar Rupert, who has so proved himself, your King. And make me happy in my retirement to the cloister."

When the Voivode ceased to speak, all still remained silent and standing. But there was no mistaking their acquiescence in his most generous prayer. The President of the Council well interpreted the general wish when he said:

"Lords of the National Council, Archbishop, Vladika, Lords of the Councils of Justice and National Law, Archimandrites, and all who are present, is it agreed that we prepare at leisure a fitting reply to the Voivode Peter of the historic House of Vissarion, stating our agreement with his wish?"

To which there was a unanimous answer:

"It is." He went on:

"Further. Shall we ask the Gospodar Rupert of the House of Sent Leger, allied through his marriage to the Voivodin Teuta, daughter and only child of the Voivode Peter of Vissarion, to come hither to-morrow? And that, when he is amongst us, we confer on him the Crown and Kingship of the Land of the Blue Mountains?"

Again came the answer: "It is."

But this time it rang out like the sound of a gigantic trumpet, and the handjars flashed.

Whereupon the session was adjourned for the space of a day.

THE SAME — Continued.

September 10, 1907.

When the National Council met to-day the Voivode Peter Vissarion sat with them, but well back, so that at first his presence was hardly noticeable. After the necessary preliminaries had been gone through, they requested the presence of the Gospodar Rupert — Mr. Rupert Sent Leger — who was reported as waiting in the "Chamber of the High Officers." He at once accompanied back to the Hall the deputation sent to conduct him. As he made his appearance in the doorway the Councillors stood up. There was a burst of enthusiasm, and the handjars flashed. For an instant he stood silent, with lifted hand, as though indicating that he wished to speak. So soon as this was recognised, silence fell on the assembly, and he spoke:

"I pray you, may the Voivodin Teuta of Vissarion, who has accompanied me hither, appear with me to hear your wishes?" There was an immediate and enthusiastic acquiescence, and, after bowing his thanks, he retired to conduct her.

Her appearance was received with an ovation similar to that given to Gospodar Rupert, to which she bowed with dignified sweetness. She, with her husband, was conducted to the top of the Hall by the President, who came down to escort them. In the meantime another chair had been placed beside that prepared for the Gospodar, and these two sat.

The President then made the formal statement conveying to the "Gospodar Rupert" the wishes of the Council, on behalf of the nation, to offer to him the Crown and Kingship of the Land of the Blue Mountains. The message was couched in almost the same words as had been used the previous day in making the offer to the Voivode Peter Vissarion, only differing to meet the special circumstances. The Gospodar Rupert listened in grave silence. The whole thing was manifestly quite new to him, but he preserved a self-control wonderful under the circumstances. When, having been made aware of the previous offer to the Voivode and the declared wish of the latter, he rose to speak, there was stillness in the Hall. He commenced with a few broken words of thanks; then he grew suddenly and strangely calm as he went on:

"But before I can even attempt to make a fitting reply, I should know if it is contemplated to join with me in this great honour my dear wife the Voivodin Teuta of Vissarion, who has so splendidly proved her worthiness to hold any place in the government of the Land. I fain would . . ."

He was interrupted by the Voivodin, who, standing up beside him and holding his left arm, said:

"Do not, President, and Lords all, think me wanting in that respect of a wife for husband which in the Blue Mountains we hold so dear, if I venture to interrupt my lord. I am here, not merely as a wife, but as Voivodin of Vissarion, and by the memory of all the noble women of that noble line I feel constrained to a great duty. We women of Vissarion, in all the history of centuries, have never put ourselves forward in rivalry of our lords. Well I know that my own dear lord will forgive me as wife if I err; but I speak to you, the Council of the nation, from another ground and with another tongue. My lord does not, I fear, know as you do, and as I do too, that of old, in the history of this Land, when Kingship was existent, that it was ruled by that law of masculine supremacy which, centuries after, became known as the *Lex Salica.* Lords of the Council of the Blue Mountains, I am a wife of the Blue Mountains — as a wife young as yet, but with the blood of forty generations of loyal women in my veins. And it would ill become me, whom my husband honours — wife to the man whom you would honour — to take a part in changing the ancient custom which has been held in honour for all the thousand years, which is the glory of Blue Mountain womanhood. What an example such would be in an age when self-seeking women of other nations seek to forget their womanhood in the struggle to vie in equality with men! Men of the Blue Mountains, I speak for our women when I say that we hold of greatest price the glory of our men. To be their companions is our happiness; to be their wives is the completion of our lives; to be mothers of their children is our share of the glory that is theirs.

"Therefore, I pray you, men of the Blue Mountains, let me but be as any other wife in our land, equal to them in domestic happiness, which is our woman's sphere; and if that priceless honour may be vouchsafed to me, and I be worthy and able to bear it, an exemplar of woman's rectitude." With a low, modest, graceful bow, she sat down.

There was no doubt as to the reception of her renunciation of Queenly dignity. There was more honour to her in the quick, fierce shout which arose, and the unanimous upward swing of the handjars, than in the wearing of any crown which could adorn the head of woman.

The spontaneous action of the Gospodar Rupert was another source of joy to all — a fitting corollary to what had gone before. He rose to his feet, and, taking his wife in his arms, kissed her before all. Then they sat down, with their chairs close, bashfully holding hands like a pair of lovers.

Then Rupert arose — he is Rupert now; no lesser name is on the lips of his people henceforth. With an intense earnestness which seemed to glow in his face, he said simply:

"What can I say except that I am in all ways, now and for ever, obedient to your wishes?" Then, raising his handjar and holding it before him, he kissed the hilt, saying:

"Hereby I swear to be honest and just — to be, God helping me, such a King as you would wish — in so far as the strength is given me. Amen."

This ended the business of the Session, and the Council showed unmeasured delight. Again and again the handjars flashed, as the cheers rose "three times three" in British fashion.

When Rupert — I am told I must not write him down as "King Rupert" until after the formal crowning, which is ordained for Wednesday, October 16th, — and Teuta had withdrawn, the Voivode Peter Vissarion, the President and Council conferred in committee with the Presidents of the High Courts of National Law and of Justice as to the formalities to be observed in the crowning of the King, and of the formal notification to be given to foreign Powers. These proceedings kept them far into the night.

FROM "The London Messenger."

Coronation Festivities of the Blue Mountains.

(*From our Special Correspondent.*)

Plazac,

October 14, 1907.

As I sat down to a poorly-equipped luncheon-table on board the

Austro-Orient liner *Franz Joseph*, I mourned in my heart (and I may say incidentally in other portions of my internal economy) the comfort and gastronomic luxury of the King and Emperor Hotel at Trieste. A brief comparison between the menus of to-day's lunch and yesterday's will afford to the reader a striking object-lesson:

Trieste.	*Steamer.*
Scrambled eggs on toast.	Eggs à la coque.
Stewed chicken, with paprika.	Cold chicken.
Cold slices of Westphalian ham (boiled in wine).	Devilled ham.
Tunny fish, pickled.	Bismarck herrings.
Rice, dumplings in cream.	Stewed apples.
Swiss cheese.	Guava jelly.

Consequence: Yesterday I was well and happy, and looked forward to a good night's sleep, which came off. To-day I am dull and heavy, also restless, and I am convinced that at sleeping-time my liver will have it all its own way.

The journey to Ragusa, and thence to Plazac, is writ large with a pigment of misery on at least one human heart. Let a silence fall upon it! In such wise only can Justice and Mercy join hands.

Plazac is a miserable place. There is not a decent hotel in it. It was perhaps on this account that the new King, Rupert, had erected for the alleged convenience of his guests of the Press a series of large temporary hotels, such as were in evidence at the St. Louis Exposition. Here each guest was given a room to himself, somewhat after the nature of the cribs in a Rowton house. From my first night in it I am able to speak from experience of the sufferings of a prisoner of the third class. I am, however, bound to say that the dining and reception rooms were, though uncomfortably plain, adequate for temporary use. Happily we shall not have to endure many more meals here, as to-morrow we all dine with the King in the State House; and as the cuisine is under the control of that *cordon bleu*, Gaston de Faux Pas, who so long controlled the gastronomic (we might almost say Gastonomic) destinies of the Rois des Diamants in the Place Vendôme, we may, I think, look forward to not going to bed hungry. Indeed, the anticipations formed from a survey of our meagre sleeping accommodation were not realised at dinnertime to-night. To our intense astonishment, an excellent dinner was served, though, to be sure, the cold dishes predominated (a thing I always find bad for one's liver). Just as we were finishing, the King (nominated) came amongst us in quite an informal way, and, having bidden us a hearty welcome, asked that we should drink a glass of wine together. This we did in an excellent (if rather sweet) glass of Cliquot '93. King Rupert (nominated) then asked us to resume our seats. He walked between the tables, now and again recognising some journalistic friend whom he had met early in life in his days of adventure. The men spoken to seemed vastly pleased — with themselves probably. Pretty bad form of them, I call it! For myself, I was glad I had not previously met him in the same casual way, as it saved me from what I should have felt a humiliation — the being patronized in that public way by a prospective King who had not (in a Court sense) been born. The writer, who is by profession a barrister-at-law, is satisfied at being himself a county gentleman and heir to an historic estate in the ancient county of Salop, which can boast a larger population than the Land of the Blue Mountains.

Editorial Note. — We must ask our readers to pardon the report in yesterday's paper sent from Plazac. The writer was not on our regular staff, but asked to be allowed to write the report, as he was a kinsman of King Rupert of the Blue Mountains, and would therefore be in a position to obtain special information and facilities of description "from inside," as he puts it. On reading the paper, we cabled his recall; we cabled also, in case he did not obey, to have his ejectment effected forthwith.

We have also cabled Mr. Mordred Booth, the well-known correspondent, who was, to our knowledge, in Plazac for his own purposes, to send us full (and proper) details. We take it our readers will prefer a graphic account of the ceremony to a farrago of cheap menus, comments on his own liver, and a belittling of an Englishman of such noble character and achievements that a rising nation has chosen him for their King, and one whom our own nation loves to honour. We shall not, of course, mention our abortive correspondent's name, unless compelled thereto by any future utterance of his.

FROM "The London Messenger."

The Coronation of King Rupert of the Blue Mountains.

(*By our Special Correspondent*, *Mordred Booth*.)

Plazac,

October 17, 1907.

Plazac does not boast of a cathedral or any church of sufficient dimensions for a coronation ceremony on an adequate scale. It was therefore decided by the National Council, with the consent of the King, that it should be held at the old church of St. Sava at Vissarion — the former home of the Queen. Accordingly, arrangements had been made to bring thither on the warships on the morning of the coronation the whole of the nation's guests. In St. Sava's the religious ceremony would take place, after which there would be a banquet in the Castle of Vissarion. The guests would then return on the warships to Plazac, where would be held what is called here the "National Coronation."

In the Land of the Blue Mountains it was customary in the old days, when there were Kings, to have two ceremonies — one carried out by the official head of the national Church, the Greek Church; the other by the people in a ritual adopted by themselves, on much the same basis as the Germanic Folk-Moot. The Blue Mountains is a nation of strangely loyal tendencies. What was a thousand years ago is to be to-day — so far, of course, as is possible under the altered condition of things.

The church of St. Sava is very old and very beautiful, built in the manner of old Greek churches, full of monuments of bygone worthies of the Blue Mountains. But, of course, neither it nor the ceremony held in it to-day can compare in splendour with certain other ceremonials — for instance, the coronation of the penultimate Czar in Moscow, of Alfonso XII. in Madrid, of Carlos I. in Lisbon.

The church was arranged much after the fashion of Westminster Abbey for the coronation of King Edward VII., though, of course, not so many persons present, nor so much individual splendour. Indeed, the number of those present, outside those officially concerned and the Press of the world, was very few.

The most striking figure present — next to King Rupert, who is seven feet high and a magnificent man — was the Queen Consort, Teuta. She sat in front of a small gallery erected for the purpose just opposite the throne. She is a strikingly beautiful woman, tall and finely-formed, with jet-black hair and eyes like black diamonds, but with the unique quality that there are stars in them which seem to take varied colour according to each strong emotion. But it was not even her beauty or the stars in her eyes which drew the first glance of all. These details showed on scrutiny, but from afar off the attractive point was her dress. Surely never before did woman, be she Queen or peasant, wear such a costume on a festive occasion.

She was dressed in a white *Shroud*, and in that only. I had heard something of the story which goes behind that strange costume, and shall later on send it to you.

When the procession entered the church through the great western door, the national song of the Blue Mountains, "Guide our feet through darkness, O Jehovah," was sung by an unseen choir, in which the organ, supplemented by martial instruments, joined. The Archbishop was robed in readiness before the altar, and close around him stood the Archimandrites of the four great monasteries. The Vladika stood in front of the Members of the National Council. A little to one side of this body was a group of high officials, Presidents of the Councils of National Law and Justice, the Chancellor, etc. — all in splendid robes of great antiquity — the High Marshall of the Forces and the Lord high Admiral.

When all was ready for the ceremonial act of coronation, the Archbishop raised his hand, whereupon the music ceased. Turning around, so that he faced the Queen, who thereon stood up, the King drew his handjar and saluted her in Blue Mountain fashion — the point raised as high possible, and then dropped down till it almost touches the ground. Every man in the church, ecclesiastics and all, wear the handjar, and, following the King by the interval of a second, their weapons flashed out. There was something symbolic, as well as touching, in this truly royal salute, led by the King. His handjar is a mighty blade, and held high in the hands of a man of his stature, it overtowered everything in the church. It was an inspiriting sight. No one who saw will ever forget that noble flashing of blades in the thousand-year-old salute . . .

The coronation was short, simple, and impressive. Rupert knelt whilst the Archbishop, after a short, fervent prayer, placed on his head the bronze crown of the first King of the Blue Mountains, Peter. This was handed to him by the Vladika, to whom it was brought from the National Treasury by a procession of the high officers. A blessing of the new King and his Queen Teuta concluded the ceremony. Rupert's first act on rising from his knees was to draw his handjar and salute his people.

After the ceremony in St. Sava, the procession was reformed, and took its way to the Castle of Vissarion, which is some distance off across a picturesque creek, bounded on either side by noble cliffs of vast height. The King led the way, the Queen walking with him and holding his hand . . . The Castle of Vissarion is of great antiquity, and picturesque beyond belief. I am sending later on, as a special article, a description of it . . .

The "Coronation Feast," as it was called on the menu, was held in the Great Hall, which is of noble proportions. I enclose copy of the menu, as our readers may wish to know something of the details of such a feast in this part of the world.

One feature of the banquet was specially noticeable. As the National Officials were guests of the King and Queen, they were waited on and served by the King and Queen in person. The rest of the guests, including us of the Press, were served by the King's household, not the servants — none of that cult were visible — but by the ladies and gentlemen of the Court.

There was only one toast, and that was given by the King, all standing: "The Land of the Blue Mountains, and may we all do our duty to the Land we love!" Before drinking, his mighty handjar flashed out again, and in an instant every table at which the Blue Mountaineers sat was ringed with flashing steel. I may add parenthetically that the handjar is essentially the national weapon. I do not know if the Blue Mountaineers take it to bed with them, but they certainly wear it everywhere else. Its drawing seems to emphasise everything in national life . . .

We embarked again on the warships — one a huge, steel-plated Dreadnought, up to date in every particular, the other an armoured yacht most complete in every way, and of unique speed. The King and Queen, the Lords of the Council, together with the various high ecclesiastics and great officials, went on the yacht, which the Lord High Admiral, a man of remarkably masterful physiognomy, himself steered. The rest of those present at the Coronation came on the warship. The latter went fast, but the yacht showed her heels all the way. However, the King's party waited in the dock in the Blue Mouth. From this a new cable-line took us all to the State House at Plazac. Here the procession was reformed, and wound its way to a bare hill in the immediate vicinity. The King and Queen — the King still wearing the ancient bronze crown with which the Archbishop had invested him at St. Sava's — the Archbishop, the Vladika, and the four Archimandrites stood together at the top of the hill, the King and Queen being, of course, in the front. A courteous young gentleman, to whom I had been accredited at the beginning of the day — all guests were so attended — explained to me that, as this was the national as opposed to the religious ceremony, the Vladika, who is the official representative of the laity, took command here. The ecclesiastics were put prominently forward, simply out of courtesy, in obedience to the wish of the people, by whom they were all greatly beloved.

Then commenced another unique ceremony, which, indeed, might well find a place in our Western countries. As far as ever we could see were masses of men roughly grouped, not in any uniform, but all in national costume, and armed only with the handjar. In the front of each of these groups or bodies stood the National Councillor for that district, distinguishable by his official robe and chain. There were in all seventeen of these bodies. These were unequal in numbers, some of them predominating enormously over others, as, indeed, might be expected in so mountainous a country. In all there were present, I was told, over a hundred thousand men. So far as I can judge from long experience of looking at great bodies of men, the estimate was a just one. I was a little surprised to see so many, for the population of the Blue Mountains is never accredited in books of geography as a large one. When I made inquiry as to how the frontier guard was being for the time maintained, I was told:

"By the women mainly. But, all the same, we have also a male guard which covers the whole frontier except that to seaward. Each man has with him six women, so that the whole line is unbroken. Moreover, sir, you must bear in mind that in the Blue Mountains our women are trained to arms as well as our men — ay, and they could give a good account of themselves, too, against any foe that should assail us. Our history shows what women can do in defence. I tell you, the Turkish population would be bigger to-day but for the women who on our frontier fought of old for defence of their homes!"

"No wonder this nation has kept her freedom for a thousand years!" I said.

At a signal given by the President of the National Council one of the Divisions moved forwards. It was not an ordinary movement, but an intense rush made with all the *elan* and vigour of hardy and highly-trained men. They came on, not merely at the double, but as if delivering an attack. Handjar in hand, they rushed forward. I can only compare their rush to an artillery charge or to an attack of massed cavalry battalions. It was my fortune to see the former at Magenta and the latter at Sadowa, so that I know what such illustration means. I may also say that I saw the relief column which Roberts organised rush through a town on its way to relieve Mafeking; and no one who had the delight of seeing that inspiring progress of a flying army on their way to relieve their comrades needs to be told what a rush of armed men can be. With speed which was simply desperate they ran up the hill, and, circling to the left, made a ring round the topmost plateau, where stood the King. When the ring was complete, the stream went on lapping round and round till the whole tally was exhausted. In the meantime another Division had followed, its leader joining close behind the end of the first. Then came another and another. An unbroken line circled and circled round the hill in seeming endless array, till the whole slopes were massed with moving men, dark in colour, and with countless glittering points everywhere. When the whole of the Divisions had thus surrounded the King, there was a moment's hush — a silence so still that it almost seemed as if Nature stood still also. We who looked on were almost afraid to breathe.

Then suddenly, without, so far as I could see, any fugleman or word of command, the handjars of all that mighty array of men flashed upward as one, and like thunder pealed the National cry:

"The Blue Mountains and Duty!"

After the cry there was a strange subsidence which made the onlooker rub his eyes. It seemed as though the whole mass of fighting men had partially sunk into the ground. Then the splendid truth burst upon us — the whole nation was kneeling at the feet of their chosen King, who stood upright.

Another moment of silence, as King Rupert, taking off his crown, held it up in his left hand, and, holding his great handjar high in his right, cried in a voice so strong that it came ringing over that serried mass like a trumpet:

“To Freedom of our Nation, and to Freedom within it, I dedicate these and myself. I swear!”

So saying, he, too, sank on his knees, whilst we all instinctively uncovered.

The silence which followed lasted several seconds; then, without a sign, as though one and all acted instinctively, the whole body stood up. Thereupon was executed a movement which, with all my experience of soldiers and war, I never saw equalled — not with the Russian Royal Guard saluting the Czar at his Coronation, not with an impi of Cetewayo’s Zulus whirling through the opening of a kraal.

For a second or two the whole mass seemed to writhe or shudder, and then, lo! the whole District Divisions were massed again in completeness, its Councillors next the King, and the Divisions radiating outwards down the hill like wedges.

This completed the ceremony, and everything broke up into units. Later, I was told by my official friend that the King’s last movement — the oath as he sank to his knees — was an innovation of his own. All I can say is, if, in the future, and for all time, it is not taken for a precedent, and made an important part of the Patriotic Coronation ceremony, the Blue Mountaineers will prove themselves to be a much more stupid people than they seem at present to be.

The conclusion of the Coronation festivities was a time of unalloyed joy. It was the banquet given to the King and Queen by the nation; the guests of the nation were included in the royal party. It was a unique ceremony. Fancy a picnic-party of a hundred thousand persons, nearly all men. There must have been made beforehand vast and elaborate preparations, ramifying through the whole nation. Each section had brought provisions sufficient for their own consumption in addition to several special dishes for the guest-tables; but the contribution of each section was not consumed by its own members.

It was evidently a part of the scheme that all should derive from a common stock, so that the feeling of brotherhood and common property should be preserved in this monumental fashion.

The guest-tables were the only tables to be seen. The bulk of the feasters sat on the ground. The tables were brought forward by the men themselves — no such thing as domestic service was known on this day — from a wood close at hand, where they and the chairs had been placed in readiness. The linen and crockery used had been sent for the purpose from the households of every town and village. The flowers were plucked in the mountains early that morning by the children, and the gold and silver plate used for adornment were supplied from the churches. Each dish at the guest-tables was served by the men of each section in turn.

Over the whole array seemed to be spread an atmosphere of joyousness, of peace, of brotherhood. It would be impossible to adequately describe that amazing scene, a whole nation of splendid men surrounding their new King and Queen, loving to honour and serve them. Scattered about through that vast crowd were groups of musicians, chosen from amongst themselves. The space covered by this titanic picnic was so vast that there were few spots from which you could hear music proceeding from different quarters.

After dinner we all sat and smoked; the music became rather vocal than instrumental — indeed, presently we did not hear the sound of any instrument at all. Only knowing a few words of Balkan, I could not follow the meanings of the songs, but I gathered that they were all legendary or historical. To those who could understand, as I was informed by my tutelary young friend, who stayed beside me the whole of this memorable day, we were listening to the history of the Land of the Blue Mountains in ballad form. Somewhere or other throughout that vast concourse each notable record of ten centuries was being told to eager ears.

It was now late in the day. Slowly the sun had been dropping down over the Calabrian Mountains, and the glamorous twilight was stealing over the immediate scene. No one seemed to notice the coming of the dark, which stole down on us with an unspeakable mystery. For long we sat still, the clatter of many tongues becoming stilled into the witchery of the scene. Lower the sun sank, till only the ruddiness of the afterglow lit the expanse with rosy light; then this failed in turn, and the night shut down quickly.

At last, when we could just discern the faces close to us, a simultaneous movement began. Lights began to flash out in places all over the hillside. At first these seemed as tiny as glow-worms seen in a summer wood, but by degrees they grew till the space was set with little circles of light. These in turn grew and grew in both number and strength. Flames began to leap out from piles of wood, torches were lighted and held high. Then the music began again, softly at first, but then louder as the musicians began to gather to the centre, where sat the King and Queen. The music was wild and semi-barbaric, but full of sweet melody. It somehow seemed to bring before us a distant past; one and all, according to the strength of our imagination and the volume of our knowledge, saw episodes and phases of bygone history come before us. There was a wonderful rhythmic, almost choric, force in the time kept, which made it almost impossible to sit still. It was an invitation to the dance such as I had never before heard in any nation or at any time. Then the lights began to gather round. Once more the mountaineers took something of the same formation as at the crowning. Where the royal party sat was a level mead, with crisp, short grass, and round it what one might well call the Ring of the Nation was formed.

The music grew louder. Each mountaineer who had not a lit torch already lighted one, and the whole rising hillside was a glory of light. The Queen rose, and the King an instant after. As they rose men stepped forward and carried away their chairs, or rather thrones. The Queen gave the King her hand — this is, it seems, the privilege of the wife as distinguished from any other woman. Their feet took the time of the music, and they moved into the centre of the ring.

That dance was another thing to remember, won from the haunting memories of that strange day. At first the King and Queen danced all alone. They began with stately movement, but as the music quickened their feet kept time, and the swing of their bodies with movements kept growing more and more ecstatic at every beat till, in true Balkan fashion, the dance became a very agony of passionate movement.

At this point the music slowed down again, and the mountaineers began to join in the dance. At first slowly, one by one, they joined in, the Vladika and the higher priests leading; then everywhere the whole vast crowd began to dance, till the earth around us seemed to shake. The lights quivered, flickered, blazed out again, and rose and fell as that hundred thousand men, each holding a torch, rose and fell with the rhythm of the dance. Quicker, quicker grew the music, faster grew the rushing and pounding of the feet, till the whole nation seemed now in an ecstasy.

I stood near the Vladika, and in the midst of this final wildness I saw him draw from his belt a short, thin flute; then he put it to his lips and blew a single note — a fierce, sharp note, which pierced the volume of sound more surely than would the thunder of a cannon-shot. On the instant everywhere each man put his torch under his foot.

There was complete and immediate darkness, for the fires, which had by now fallen low, had evidently been trodden out in the measure of the dance. The music still kept in its rhythmic beat, but slower than it had yet been. Little by little this beat was pointed and emphasised by the clapping of hands — at first only a few, but spreading till everyone present was beating hands to the slow music in the darkness. This lasted a little while, during which, looking round, I noticed a faint light beginning to steal up behind the hills. The moon was rising.

Again there came a note from the Vladika's flute — a single note, sweet and subtle, which I can only compare with a note from a nightingale, vastly increased in powers. It, too, won through the thunder of the hand-claps, and on the second the sound ceased. The sudden stillness, together with the darkness, was so impressive that we could almost hear our hearts beating. And then came through the darkness the most beautiful and impressive sound heard yet. That mighty concourse, without fugleman of any sort, began, in low, fervent voice, to sing the National Anthem. At first it was of so low tone as to convey the idea of a mighty assembly of violinists playing with the mutes on. But it gradually rose till the air above us seemed to throb and quiver. Each syllable — each word — spoken in unison by the vast throng was as clearly enunciated as though spoken by a single voice:

"Guide our feet through darkness, O Jehovah."

This anthem, sung out of full hearts, remains on our minds as the last perfection of a perfect day. For myself, I am not ashamed to own that it made me weep like a child. Indeed, I cannot write of it now as I would; it unmans me so!

* * * * *

In the early morning, whilst the mountains were still rather grey than blue, the cable-line took us to the Blue Mouth, where we embarked in the King's yacht, *The Lady*, which took us across the Adriatic at a pace which I had hitherto considered impossible. The King and Queen came to the landing to see us off. They stood together at the right-hand side of the red-carpeted gangway, and shook hands with each guest as he went on board. The instant the last passenger had stepped on deck the gangway was withdrawn. The Lord High Admiral, who stood on the bridge, raised his hand, and we swept towards the mouth of the gulf. Of course, all hats were off, and we cheered frantically. I can truly say that if King Rupert and Queen Teuta should ever wish to found in the Blue Mountains a colony of diplomatists and journalists, those who were their guests on this great occasion will volunteer to a man. I think old Hempetch, who is the doyen of English-speaking journalists, voiced our sentiments when he said:

"May God bless them and theirs with every grace and happiness, and send prosperity to the Land and the rule!" I think the King and Queen heard us cheer, they turned to look at our flying ship again.

BOOK IX: BALKA

RUPERT’S JOURNAL — Continued (Longe Intervallo).

February 10, 1908.

It is so long since I even thought of this journal that I hardly know where to begin. I always heard that a married man is a pretty busy man; but since I became one, though it is a new life to me, and of a happiness undreamt of, I *know* what that life is. But I had no idea that this King business was anything like what it is. Why, it never leaves me a moment at all to myself — or, what is worse, to Teuta. If people who condemn Kings had only a single month of my life in that capacity, they would form an opinion different from that which they hold. It might be useful to have a Professor of Kingship in the Anarchists’ College — whenever it is founded!

Everything has gone on well with us, I am glad to say. Teuta is in splendid health, though she has — but only very lately — practically given up going on her own aeroplane. It was, I know, a great sacrifice to make, just as she had become an expert at it. They say here that she is one of the best drivers in the Blue Mountains — and that is in the world, for we have made that form of movement our own. Ever since we found the pitch-blende pockets in the Great Tunnel, and discovered the simple process of extracting the radium from it, we have gone on by leaps and bounds. When first Teuta told me she would “aero” no more for a while, I thought she was wise, and backed her up in it: for driving an aeroplane is trying work and hard on the nerves. I only learned then the reason for her caution — the usual one of a young wife. That was three months ago, and only this morning she told me she would not go sailing in the air, even with me, till she could do so "without risk" — she did not mean risk to herself. Aunt Janet knew what she meant, and counselled her strongly to stick to her resolution. So for the next few months I am to do my air-sailing alone.

The public works which we began immediately after the Coronation are going strong. We began at the very beginning on an elaborate system. The first thing was to adequately fortify the Blue Mouth. Whilst the fortifications were being constructed we kept all the warships in the gulf. But when the point of safety was reached, we made the ships do sentry-go along the coast, whilst we trained men for service at sea. It is our plan to take by degrees all the young men and teach them this wise, so that at the end the whole population shall be trained for sea as well as for land. And as we are teaching them the airship service, too, they will be at home in all the elements — except fire, of course, though if that should become a necessity, we shall tackle it too!

We started the Great Tunnel at the farthest inland point of the Blue Mouth, and ran it due east at an angle of 45 degrees, so that, when complete, it would go right through the first line of hills, coming out on the plateau Plazac. The plateau is not very wide — half a mile at most — and the second tunnel begins on the eastern side of it. This new tunnel is at a smaller angle, as it has to pierce the second hill — a mountain this time. When it comes out on the east side of that, it will tap the real productive belt. Here it is that our hardwood-trees are finest, and where the greatest mineral deposits are found. This plateau is of enormous length, and runs north arid south round the great bulk of the central mountain, so that in time, when we put up a circular railway, we can bring, at a merely nominal cost, all sorts of material up or down. It is on this level that we have built the great factories for war material. We are tunnelling into the mountains, where are the great deposits of coal. We run the trucks in and out on the level, and can get perfect ventilation with little cost or labour. Already we are mining all the coal which we consume within our own confines, and we can, if we wish, within a year export largely. The great slopes of these tunnels give us the necessary aid of specific gravity, and as we carry an endless water-supply in great tubes that way also, we can do whatever we wish by hydraulic power. As one by one the European and Asiatic nations began to reduce their war preparations, we took over their disbanded workmen though our agents, so that already we have a productive staff of skilled workmen larger than anywhere else in the world. I think myself that we were fortunate in being able to get ahead so fast with our preparations for war manufacture, for if some of the "Great Powers," as they call themselves, knew the measure of our present production, they would immediately try to take active measures against us. In such case we should have to fight them, which would delay us. But if we can have another year untroubled, we shall, so far as war material is concerned, be able to defy any nation in the world. And if the time may only come peacefully till we have our buildings and machinery complete, we can prepare war-stores and implements for the whole Balkan nations. And then — But that is a dream. We shall know in good time.

In the meantime all goes well. The cannon foundries are built and active. We are already beginning to turn out finished work. Of course, our first guns are not very large, but they are good. The big guns, and especially siege-guns, will come later. And when the great extensions are complete, and the boring and wire-winding machines are in working order, we can go merrily on. I suppose that by that time the whole of the upper plateau will be like a manufacturing town — at any rate, we have plenty of raw material to hand. The haematite mines seem to be inexhaustible, and as the raising of the ore is cheap and easy by means of our extraordinary water-power, and as coal comes down to the plateau by its own gravity on the cable-line, we have natural advantages which exist hardly anywhere else in the world — certainly not all together, as here. That bird's eye view of the Blue Mouth which we had from the aeroplane when Teuta saw that vision of the future has not been in vain. The aeroplane works are having a splendid output. The aeroplane is a large and visible product; there is no mistaking when it is there! We have already a large and respectable aerial fleet. The factories for explosives are, of course, far away in bare valleys, where accidental effects are minimized. So, too, are the radium works, wherein unknown dangers may lurk. The turbines in the tunnel give us all the power we want at present, and, later on, when the new tunnel, which we call the "water tunnel," which is already begun, is complete, the available power will be immense. All these works are bringing up our shipping, and we are in great hopes for the future.

So much for our material prosperity. But with it comes a larger life and greater hopes. The stress of organising and founding these great works is practically over. As they are not only self-supporting, but largely productive, all anxiety in the way of national expenditure is minimized. And, more than all, I am able to give my unhampered attention to those matters of even more than national importance on which the ultimate development, if not the immediate strength, of our country must depend.

I am well into the subject of a great Balkan Federation. This, it turns out, has for long been the dream of Teuta's life, as also that of the present Archimandrite of Plazac, her father, who, since I last touched this journal, having taken on himself a Holy Life, was, by will of the Church, the Monks, and the People, appointed to that great office on the retirement of Petrof Vlastimir.

Such a Federation had long been in the air. For myself, I had seen its inevitableness from the first. The modern aggressions of the Dual Nation, interpreted by her past history with regard to Italy, pointed towards the necessity of such a protective measure. And now, when Servia and Bulgaria were used as blinds to cover her real movements to incorporate with herself as established the provinces, once Turkish, which had been entrusted to her temporary protection by the Treaty of Berlin; when it would seem that Montenegro was to be deprived for all time of the hope of regaining the Bocche di Cattaro, which she had a century ago won, and held at the point of the sword, until a Great Power had, under a wrong conviction, handed it over to her neighbouring Goliath; when the Sandjack of Novi-Bazar was threatened with the fate which seemed to have already overtaken Bosnia and Herzegovina; when gallant little Montenegro was already shut out from the sea by the octopus-like grip of Dalmatia crouching along her western shore; when Turkey was dwindling down to almost ineptitude; when Greece was almost a byword, and when Albania as a nation — though still nominally subject — was of such unimpaired virility that there were great possibilities of her future, it was imperative that something must happen if the Balkan race was not to be devoured piecemeal by her northern neighbours. To the end of ultimate protection I found most of them willing to make defensive alliance.

And as the true defence consists in judicious attack, I have no doubt that an alliance so based must ultimately become one for all purposes. Albania was the most difficult to win to the scheme, as her own complications with her suzerain, combined with the pride and suspiciousness of her people, made approach a matter of extreme caution. It was only possible when I could induce her rulers to see that, no matter how great her pride and valour, the magnitude of northern advance, if unchecked, must ultimately overwhelm her.

I own that this map-making was nervous work, for I could not shut my eyes to the fact that German lust of enlargement lay behind Austria's advance. At and before that time expansion was the dominant idea of the three Great Powers of Central Europe. Russia went eastward, hoping to gather to herself the rich north-eastern provinces of China, till ultimately she should dominate the whole of Northern Europe and Asia from the Gulf of Finland to the Yellow Sea. Germany wished to link the North Sea to the Mediterranean by her own territory, and thus stand as a flawless barrier across Europe from north to south.

When Nature should have terminated the headship of the Empire-Kingdom, she, as natural heir, would creep southward through the German-speaking provinces. Thus Austria, of course kept in ignorance of her neighbour's ultimate aims, had to extend towards the south. She had been barred in her western movement by the rise of the Irredentist party in Italy, and consequently had to withdraw behind the frontiers of Carinthia, Carniola, and Istria.

My own dream of the new map was to make "Balka" — the Balkan Federation — take in ultimately all south of a line drawn from the Isle of Serpents to Aquileia. There would — must — be difficulties in the carrying out of such a scheme. Of course, it involved Austria giving up Dalmatia, Istria, and Sclavonia, as well as a part of Croatia and the Hungarian Banat. On the contrary, she might look for centuries of peace in the south. But it would make for peace so strongly that each of the States impinging on it would find it worth while to make a considerable sacrifice to have it effected. To its own integers it would offer a lasting settlement of interests which at present conflicted, and a share in a new world-power. Each of these integers would be absolutely self-governing and independent, being only united for purposes of mutual good. I did not despair that even Turkey and Greece, recognising that benefit and safety would ensue without the destruction or even minimising of individuality, would, sooner or later, come into the Federation. The matter is already so far advanced that within a month the various rulers of the States involved are to have a secret and informal meeting. Doubtless some larger plan and further action will be then evolved. It will be an anxious time for all in this zone — and outside it — till this matter is all settled. In any case, the manufacture of war material will go on until it is settled, one way or another.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL — Continued.

March 6, 1908.

I breathe more freely. The meeting has taken place here at Vissarion. Nominal cause of meeting: a hunting-party in the Blue Mountains. Not any formal affair. Not a Chancellor or Secretary of State or Diplomatist of any sort present. All headquarters. It was, after all, a real hunting-party. Good sportsmen, plenty of game, lots of beaters, everything organised properly, and an effective tally of results. I think we all enjoyed ourselves in the matter of sport; and as the political result was absolute unanimity of purpose and intention, there could be no possible cause of complaint.

So it is all decided. Everything is pacific. There is not a suggestion even of war, revolt, or conflicting purpose of any kind. We all go on exactly as we are doing for another year, pursuing our own individual objects, just as at present. But we are all to see that in our own households order prevails. All that is supposed to be effective is to be kept in good working order, and whatever is, at present, not adequate to possibilities is to be made so. This is all simply protective and defensive. We understand each other. But if any hulking stranger should undertake to interfere in our domestic concerns, we shall all unite on the instant to keep things as we wish them to remain. We shall be ready. Alfred's maxim of Peace shall be once more exemplified. In the meantime the factories shall work overtime in our own mountains, and the output shall be for the general good of our special community — the bill to be settled afterwards amicably. There can hardly be any difference of opinion about that, as the others will be the consumers of our surplus products. We are the producers, who produce for ourselves first, and then for the limited market of those within the Ring. As we undertake to guard our own frontiers — sea and land — and are able to do so, the goods are to be warehoused in the Blue Mountains until required — if at all — for participation in the markets of the world, and especially in the European market. If all goes well and the markets are inactive, the goods shall be duly delivered to the purchasers as arranged.

So much for the purely mercantile aspect.

THE VOIVODIN JANET MACKELPIE'S NOTES.

May 21, 1908.

As Rupert began to neglect his Journal when he was made a King, so, too, I find in myself a tendency to leave writing to other people. But one thing I shall not be content to leave to others — little Rupert. The baby of Rupert and Teuta is much too precious a thing to be spoken of except with love, quite independent of the fact that he will be, in natural course, a King! So I have promised Teuta that whatever shall be put into this record of the first King of the Sent Leger Dynasty relating to His Royal Highness the Crown Prince shall only appear in either her hand or my own. And she has deputed the matter to me.

Our dear little Prince arrived punctually and in perfect condition. The angels that carried him evidently took the greatest care of him, and before they left him they gave him dower of all their best. He is a dear! Like both his father and his mother, and that says everything. My own private opinion is that he is a born King! He does not know what fear is, and he thinks more of everyone else than he does of his dear little self. And if those things do not show a truly royal nature, I do not know what does . . .

Teuta has read this. She held up a warning finger, and said:

"Aunt Janet dear, that is all true. He is a dear, and a King, and an angel! But we mustn't have too much about him just yet. This book is to be about Rupert. So our little man can only be what we shall call a corollary." And so it is.

I should mention here that the book is Teuta's idea. Before little Rupert came she controlled herself wonderfully, doing only what was thought best for her under the circumstances. As I could see that it would be a help for her to have some quiet occupation which would interest her without tiring her, I looked up (with his permission, of course) all Rupert's old letters and diaries, and journals and reports — all that I had kept for him during his absences on his adventures. At first I was a little afraid they might harm her, for at times she got so excited over some things that I had to caution her. Here again came in her wonderful self-control. I think the most soothing argument I used with her was to point out that the dear boy had come through all the dangers safely, and was actually with us, stronger and nobler than ever.

After we had read over together the whole matter several times — for it was practically new to me too, and I got nearly as excited as she was, though I have known him so much longer — we came to the conclusion that this particular volume would have to be of selected matter. There is enough of Rupert's work to make a lot of volumes and we have an ambitious literary project of some day publishing an *edition de luxe* of his whole collected works. It will be a rare showing amongst the works of Kings. But this is to be all about himself, so that in the future it may serve as a sort of backbone of his personal history.

By-and-by we came to a part when we had to ask him questions; and he was so interested in Teuta's work — he is really bound up body and soul in his beautiful wife, and no wonder — that we had to take him into full confidence. He promised he would help us all he could by giving us the use of his later journals, and such letters and papers as he had kept privately. He said he would make one condition — I use his own words: "As you two dear women are to be my editors, you must promise to put in everything exactly as I wrote it. It will not do to have any fake about this. I do not wish anything foolish or egotistical toned down out of affection for me. It was all written in sincerity, and if I had faults, they must not be hidden. If it is to be history, it must be true history, even if it gives you and me or any of us away."

So we promised.

He also said that, as Sir Edward Bingham Trent, Bart. — as he is now — was sure to have some matter which we should like, he would write and ask him to send such to us. He also said that Mr. Ernest Roger Halbard Melton, of Humcroft, Salop (he always gives this name and address in full, which is his way of showing contempt), would be sure to have some relevant matter, and that he would have him written to on the subject. This he did. The Chancellor wrote him in his most grandiloquent style. Mr. E. R. H. Melton, of H., S., replied by return post. His letter is a document which speaks for itself:

Humcroft, Salop,
May 30, 1908.

My dear cousin King Rupert,

I am honoured by the request made on your behalf by the Lord High Chancellor of your kingdom that I should make a literary contribution to the volume which my cousin, Queen Teuta, is, with the help of your former governess, Miss MacKelpie, compiling. I am willing to do so, as you naturally wish to have in that work some contemporary record made by the Head of the House of Melton, with which you are connected, though only on the distaff side. It is a natural ambition enough, even on the part of a barbarian — or perhaps semi-barbarian — King, and far be it from me, as Head of the House, to deny you such a coveted privilege. Perhaps you may not know that I am now Head of the House; my father died three days ago. I offered my mother the use of the Dower House — to the incumbency of which, indeed, she is entitled by her marriage settlement. But she preferred to go to live at her seat, Carfax, in Kent. She went this morning after the funeral. In letting you have the use of my manuscript I make only one stipulation, but that I expect to be rigidly adhered to. It is that all that I have written be put in the book *in extenso*. I do not wish any record of mine to be garbled to suit other ends than those ostensible, or whatever may be to the honour of myself or my House to be burked. I dare say you have noticed, my dear Rupert, that the compilers of family histories often, through jealousy, alter matter that they are allowed to use so as to suit their own purpose or minister to their own vanity. I think it right to tell you that I have had a certified copy made by Petter and Galpin, the law stationers, so that I shall be able to verify whether my stipulation has been honourably observed. I am having the book, which is naturally valuable, carefully packed, and shall have it forwarded to Sir Edward Bingham Trent, Baronet (which he now is — Heaven save the mark!), the Attorney. Please see that he returns it to me, and in proper order. He is not to publish for himself anything in it about him. A man of that class is apt to advertise the fact of anyone of distinction taking any notice of him. I would bring out the MS. to you myself, and stay for a while with you for some sport, only your lot — subjects I suppose you call them! — are such bounders that a gentleman's life is hardly safe amongst them. I never met anyone who had so poor an appreciation of a joke as they have. By the way, how is Teuta? She is one of them. I heard all about the hatching business. I hope the kid is all right. This is only a word in your ear, so don't get cocky, old son. I am open to a godfathership. Think of that, Hedda! Of course, if the other godfather and the godmother are up to the mark; I don't want to have to boost up the whole lot! Savvy? Kiss Teuta and the kid for me. I must have the boy over here for a bit later on — when he is presentable, and has learned not to be a nuisance. It will be good for him to see something of a real first-class English country house like Humcroft. To a person only accustomed to rough ways and meagre living its luxury will make a memory which will serve in time as an example to be aimed at. I shall write again soon. Don't hesitate to ask any favour which I may be able to confer on you. So long!

Your affectionate cousin,

Ernest Roger Halbard Melton.

Extract from Letter from E. Bingham Trent to Queen Teuta of the Blue Mountains.

. . . So I thought the best way to serve that appalling cad would be to take him at his word, and put in his literary contribution in full. I have had made and attested a copy of his "Record," as he calls it, so as to save you trouble. But I send the book itself, because I am afraid that unless you see his words in his own writing, you will not believe that he or anyone else ever penned seriously a document so incriminating. I am sure he must have forgotten what he had written, for even such a dull dog as he is could never have made public such a thing knowingly. . . Such a nature has its revenges on itself. In this case the officers of revenge are his *ipsissima verba*.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL — Continued.

February 1, 1909.

All is now well in train. When the Czar of Russia, on being asked by the Sclavs (as was meet) to be the referee in the "Balkan Settlement," declined on the ground that he was himself by inference an interested party, it was unanimously agreed by the Balkan rulers that the Western King should be asked to arbitrate, as all concerned had perfect confidence in his wisdom, as well as his justice. To their wish he graciously assented. The matter has now been for more than six months in his hands, and he has taken endless trouble to obtain full information. He has now informed us through his Chancellor that his decision is almost ready, and will be communicated as soon as possible.

We have another hunting-party at Vissarion next week. Teuta is looking forward to it with extraordinary interest. She hopes then to present to our brothers of the Balkans our little son, and she is eager to know if they endorse her mother-approval of him.

RUPERT'S JOURNAL — Continued.

April 15, 1909.

The arbitrator's decision has been communicated to us through the Chancellor of the Western King, who brought it to us himself as a special act of friendliness. It met with the enthusiastic approval of all. The Premier remained with us during the progress of the hunting-party, which was one of the most joyous occasions ever known. We are all of good heart, for the future of the Balkan races is now assured. The strife — internal and external — of a thousand years has ceased, and we look with hope for a long and happy time. The Chancellor brought messages of grace and courtliness and friendliness to all. And when I, as spokesman of the party, asked him if we might convey a request of His Majesty that he would honour us by attending the ceremony of making known formally the Balkan Settlement, he answered that the King had authorized him to say that he would, if such were wished by us, gladly come; and that if he should come, he would attend with a fleet as an escort. The Chancellor also told me from himself that it might be possible to have other nationalities represented on such a great occasion by Ambassadors and even fleets, though the monarchs themselves might not be able to attend. He hinted that it might be well if I put the matter in train. (He evidently took it for granted that, though I was only one of several, the matter rested with me — possibly he chose me as the one to whom to make the confidence, as I was born a stranger.) As we talked it over, he grew more enthusiastic, and finally said that, as the King was taking the lead, doubtless all the nations of the earth friendly to him would like to take a part in the ceremony. So it is likely to turn out practically an international ceremony of a unique kind. Teuta will love it, and we shall all do what we can.

JANET MACKELPIE'S NOTES.

June 1, 1909.

Our dear Teuta is full of the forthcoming celebration of the Balkan Federation, which is to take place this day month, although I must say, for myself, that the ceremony is attaining to such dimensions that I am beginning to have a sort of vague fear of some kind. It almost seems uncanny. Rupert is working unceasingly — has been for some time. For weeks past he seems to have been out day and night on his aeroplane, going through and round over the country arranging matters, and seeing for himself that what has been arranged is being done. Uncle Colin is always about, too, and so is Admiral Rooke. But now Teuta is beginning to go with Rupert. That girl is simply fearless — just like Rupert. And they both seem anxious that little Rupert shall be the same. Indeed, he is the same. A few mornings ago Rupert and Teuta were about to start just after dawn from the top of the Castle. Little Rupert was there — he is always awake early and as bright as a bee. I was holding him in my arms, and when his mother leant over to kiss him good-bye, he held out his arms to her in a way that said as plainly as if he had spoken, “Take me with you.”

She looked appealingly at Rupert, who nodded, and said: “All right. Take him, darling. He will have to learn some day, and the sooner the better.” The baby, looking eagerly from one to the other with the same questioning in his eyes as there is sometimes in the eyes of a kitten or a puppy — but, of course, with an eager soul behind it — saw that he was going, and almost leaped into his mother’s arms. I think she had expected him to come, for she took a little leather dress from Margareta, his nurse, and, flushing with pride, began to wrap him in it. When Teuta, holding him in her arms, stepped on the aeroplane, and took her place in the centre behind Rupert, the young men of the Crown Prince’s Guard raised a cheer, amid which Rupert pulled the levers, and they glided off into the dawn.

The Crown Prince’s Guard was established by the mountaineers themselves the day of his birth. Ten of the biggest and most powerful and cleverest young men of the nation were chosen, and were sworn in with a very impressive ceremony to guard the young Prince. They were to so arrange and order themselves and matters generally that two at least of them should always have him, or the place in which he was, within their sight. They all vowed that the last of their lives should go before harm came to him. Of course, Teuta understood, and so did Rupert. And these young men are the persons most privileged in the whole Castle. They are dear boys, every one of them, and we are all fond of them and respect them. They simply idolize the baby.

Ever since that morning little Rupert has, unless it is at a time appointed for his sleeping, gone in his mother’s arms. I think in any other place there would be some State remonstrance at the whole royal family being at once and together in a dangerous position, but in the Blue Mountains danger and fear are not thought of — indeed, they can hardly be in their terminology. And I really think the child enjoys it even more than his parents. He is just like a little bird that has found the use of his wings. Bless him!

I find that even I have to study Court ritual a little. So many nationalities are to be represented at the ceremony of the "Balkan Settlement," and so many Kings and Princes and notabilities of all kinds are coming, that we must all take care not to make any mistakes. The Press alone would drive anyone silly. Rupert and Teuta come and sit with me sometimes in the evening when we are all too tired to work, and they rest themselves by talking matters over. Rupert says that there will be over five hundred reporters, and that the applications for permission are coming in so fast that there may be a thousand when the day comes. Last night he stopped in the middle of speaking of it, and said:

"I have an inspiration! Fancy a thousand journalists, — each wanting to get ahead of the rest, and all willing to invoke the Powers of Evil for exclusive information! The only man to look after this department is Rooke. He knows how to deal with men, and as we have already a large staff to look after the journalistic guests, he can be at the head, and appoint his own deputies to act for him. Somewhere and sometime the keeping the peace will be a matter of nerve and resolution, and Rooke is the man for the job."

We were all concerned about one thing, naturally important in the eyes of a woman: What robes was Teuta to wear? In the old days, when there were Kings and Queens, they doubtless wore something gorgeous or impressive; but whatever it was that they wore has gone to dust centuries ago, and there were no illustrated papers in those primitive days. Teuta was talking to me eagerly, with her dear beautiful brows all wrinkled, when Rupert who was reading a bulky document of some kind, looked up and said:

"Of course, darling, you will wear your Shroud?"

"Capital!" she said, clapping her hands like a joyous child. "The very thing, and our people will like it."

I own that for a moment I was dismayed. It was a horrible test of a woman's love and devotion. At a time when she was entertaining Kings and notabilities in her own house — and be sure they would all be decked in their finery — to have to appear in such a garment! A plain thing with nothing even pretty, let alone gorgeous, about it! I expressed my views to Rupert, for I feared that Teuta might be disappointed, though she might not care to say so; but before he could say a word Teuta answered:

"Oh, thank you so much, dear! I should love that above everything, but I did not like to suggest it, lest you should think me arrogant or presuming; for, indeed, Rupert, I am very proud of it, and of the way our people look on it."

"Why not?" said Rupert, in his direct way. "It is a thing for us all to be proud of; the nation has already adopted it as a national emblem — our emblem of courage and devotion and patriotism, which will always, I hope, be treasured beyond price by the men and women of our Dynasty, the Nation, that is — of the Nation that is to be."

Later on in the evening we had a strange endorsement of the national will. A "People's Deputation" of mountaineers, without any official notice or introduction, arrived at the Castle late in the evening in the manner established by Rupert's "Proclamation of Freedom," wherein all citizens were entitled to send a deputation to the King, at will and in private, on any subject of State importance. This deputation was composed of seventeen men, one selected from each political section, so that the body as a whole represented the entire nation. They were of all sorts of social rank and all degrees of fortune, but they were mainly "of the people." They spoke hesitatingly — possibly because Teuta, or even because I, was present — but with a manifest earnestness. They made but one request — that the Queen should, on the great occasion of the Balkan Federation, wear as robes of State the Shroud that they loved to see her in. The spokesman, addressing the Queen, said in tones of rugged eloquence:

"This is a matter, Your Majesty, that the women naturally have a say in, so we have, of course, consulted them. They have discussed the matter by themselves, and then with us, and they are agreed without a flaw that it will be good for the Nation and for Womankind that you do this thing. You have shown to them, and to the world at large, what women should do, what they can do, and they want to make, in memory of your great act, the Shroud a garment of pride and honour for women who have deserved well of their country. In the future it can be a garment to be worn only by privileged women who have earned the right. But they hope, and we hope with them, that on this occasion of our Nation taking the lead before the eyes of the world, all our women may wear it on that day as a means of showing overtly their willingness to do their duty, even to the death. And so" — here he turned to the King— "Rupert, we trust that Her Majesty Queen Teuta will understand that in doing as the women of the Blue Mountains wish, she will bind afresh to the Queen the loyal devotion which she won from them as Voivodin. Henceforth and for all time the Shroud shall be a dress of honour in our Land."

Teuta looked all ablaze with love and pride and devotion. Stars in her eyes shone like white fire as she assured them of the granting of their request. She finished her little speech:

"I feared that if I carried out my own wish, it might look arrogant, but Rupert has expressed the same wish, and now I feel that I am free to wear that dress which brought me to you and to Rupert" — here she beamed on him, and took his hand— "fortified as I am by your wishes and the command of my lord the King."

Rupert took her in his arms and kissed her fondly before them all, saying:

"Tell your wives, my brothers, and the rest of the Blue Mountain women, that that is the answer of the husband who loves and honours his wife. All the world shall see at the ceremony of the Federation of Balka that we men love and honour the women who are loyal and can die for duty. And, men of the Blue Mountains, some day before long we shall organise that great idea, and make it a permanent thing — that the Order of the Shroud is the highest guerdon that a noble-hearted woman can wear."

Teuta disappeared for a few moments, and came back with the Crown Prince in her arms. Everyone present asked to be allowed to kiss him, which they did kneeling.

THE FEDERATION BALKA.

By the Correspondents of "*Free America*."

The Editors of *Free America* have thought it well to put in consecutive order the reports and descriptions of their Special Correspondents, of whom there were present no less than eight. Not a word they wrote is omitted, but the various parts of their reports are placed in different order, so that, whilst nothing which any of them recorded is left out, the reader may be able to follow the proceedings from the various points of view of the writers who had the most favourable opportunity of moment. In so large an assemblage of journalists — there were present over a thousand — they could not all be present in one place; so our men, in consultation amongst themselves, arranged to scatter, so as to cover the whole proceeding from the various "coigns of vantage," using their skill and experience in selecting these points. One was situated on the summit of the steel-clad tower in the entrance to the Blue Mouth; another on the "Press-boat," which was moored alongside King Rupert's armoured yacht, *The Lady*, whereon were gathered the various Kings and rulers of the Balkan States, all of whom were in the Federation; another was in a swift torpedo-boat, with a roving commission to cruise round the harbour as desired; another took his place on the top of the great mountain which overlooks Plazac, and so had a bird's-eye view of the whole scene of operations; two others were on the forts to right and left of the Blue Mouth; another was posted at the entrance to the Great Tunnel which runs from the water level right up through the mountains to the plateau, where the mines and factories are situate; another had the privilege of a place on an aeroplane, which went everywhere and saw everything. This aeroplane was driven by an old Special Correspondent of *Free America*, who had been a chum of our Special in the Japanese and Russian War, and who has taken service on the Blue Mountain *Official Gazette*.

Plazac,
June 30, 1909.

Two days before the time appointed for the ceremony the guests of the Land of the Blue Mountains began to arrive. The earlier comers were mostly the journalists who had come from almost over the whole inhabited world. King Rupert, who does things well, had made a camp for their exclusive use. There was a separate tent for each — of course, a small one, as there were over a thousand journalists — but there were big tents for general use scattered about — refectories, reading and writing rooms, a library, idle rooms for rest, etc. In the rooms for reading and writing, which were the work-rooms for general use, were newspapers, the latest attainable from all over the world, Blue-Books, guides, directories, and all such aids to work as forethought could arrange. There was for this special service a body of some hundreds of capable servants in special dress and bearing identification numbers — in fact, King Rupert "did us fine," to use a slang phrase of pregnant meaning.

There were other camps for special service, all of them well arranged, and with plenty of facility for transport. Each of the Federating Monarchs had a camp of his own, in which he had erected a magnificent pavilion. For the Western King, who had acted as Arbitrator in the matter of the Federation, a veritable palace had been built by King Rupert — a sort of Aladdin's palace it must have been, for only a few weeks ago the place it occupied was, I was told, only primeval wilderness. King Rupert and his Queen, Teuta, had a pavilion like the rest of the Federators of Balka, but infinitely more modest, both in size and adornments.

Everywhere were guards of the Blue Mountains, armed only with the "handjar," which is the national weapon. They wore the national dress, but so arranged in colour and accoutrement that the general air of uniformity took the place of a rigid uniform. There must have been at least seventy or eighty thousand of them.

The first day was one of investigation of details by the visitors.

During the second day the retinues of the great Federators came. Some of these retinues were vast. For instance, the Soldan (though only just become a Federator) sent of one kind or another more than a thousand men. A brave show they made, for they are fine men, and drilled to perfection. As they swaggered along, singly or in mass, with their gay jackets and baggy trousers, their helmets surmounted by the golden crescent, they looked a foe not to be despised. Landreck Martin, the Nestor of journalists, said to me, as we stood together looking at them:

"To-day we witness a new departure in Blue Mountain history. This is the first occasion for a thousand years that so large a Turkish body has entered the Blue Mountains with a reasonable prospect of ever getting out again."

July 1, 1909.

To-day, the day appointed for the ceremony, was auspiciously fine, even for the Blue Mountains, where at this time of year the weather is nearly always fine. They are early folk in the Blue Mountains, but to-day things began to hum before daybreak. There were bugle-calls all over the place — everything here is arranged by calls of musical instruments — trumpets, or bugles, or drums (if, indeed, the drum can be called a musical instrument) — or by lights, if it be after dark. We journalists were all ready; coffee and bread-and-butter had been thoughtfully served early in our sleeping-tents, and an elaborate breakfast was going on all the time in the refectory pavilions. We had a preliminary look round, and then there was a sort of general pause for breakfast. We took advantage of it, and attacked the sumptuous — indeed, memorable — meal which was served for us.

The ceremony was to commence at noon, but at ten o'clock the whole place was astir — not merely beginning to move, but actually moving; everybody taking their places for the great ceremony. As noon drew near, the excitement was intense and prolonged. One by one the various signatories to the Federation began to assemble. They all came by sea; such of them as had sea-boards of their own having their fleets around them. Such as had no fleets of their own were attended by at least one of the Blue Mountain ironclads. And I am bound to say that I never in my life saw more dangerous craft than these little warships of King Rupert of the Blue Mountains. As they entered the Blue Mouth each ship took her appointed station, those which carried the signatories being close together in an isolated group in a little bay almost surrounded by high cliffs in the farthest recesses of the mighty harbour. King Rupert's armoured yacht all the time lay close inshore, hard by the mouth of the Great Tunnel which runs straight into the mountain from a wide plateau, partly natural rock, partly built up with mighty blocks of stone. Here it is, I am told, that the inland products are brought down to the modern town of Plazac. Just as the clocks were chiming the half-hour before noon this yacht glided out into the expanse of the "Mouth." Behind her came twelve great barges, royally decked, and draped each in the colour of the signatory nation. On each of these the ruler entered with his guard, and was carried to Rupert's yacht, he going on the bridge, whilst his suite remained on the lower deck. In the meantime whole fleets had been appearing on the southern horizon; the nations were sending their maritime quota to the christening of "Balka"! In such wonderful order as can only be seen with squadrons of fighting ships, the mighty throng swept into the Blue Mouth, and took up their stations in groups. The only armament of a Great Power now missing was that of the Western King. But there was time. Indeed, as the crowd everywhere began to look at their watches a long line of ships began to spread up northward from the Italian coast. They came at great speed — nearly twenty knots. It was a really wonderful sight — fifty of the finest ships in the world; the very latest expression of naval giants, each seemingly typical of its class — Dreadnoughts, cruisers, destroyers. They came in a wedge, with the King's yacht flying the Royal Standard the apex. Every ship of the squadron bore a red ensign long enough to float from the masthead to the water. From the armoured tower in the waterway one could see the myriad of faces — white stars on both land and sea — for the great harbour was now alive with ships and each and all of them alive with men.

Suddenly, without any direct cause, the white masses became eclipsed — everyone had turned round, and was looking the other way. I looked across the bay and up the mountain behind — a mighty mountain, whose slopes run up to the very sky, ridge after ridge seeming like itself a mountain. Far away on the very top the standard of the Blue Mountains was run up on a mighty Flagstaff which seemed like a shaft of light. It was two hundred feet high, and painted white, and as at the distance the steel stays were invisible, it towered up in lonely grandeur. At its foot was a dark mass grouped behind a white space, which I could not make out till I used my field-glasses.

Then I knew it was King Rupert and the Queen in the midst of a group of mountaineers. They were on the aero station behind the platform of the aero, which seemed to shine — shine, not glitter — as though it were overlaid with plates of gold.

Again the faces looked west. The Western Squadron was drawing near to the entrance of the Blue Mouth. On the bridge of the yacht stood the Western King in uniform of an Admiral, and by him his Queen in a dress of royal purple, splendid with gold. Another glance at the mountain-top showed that it had seemed to become alive. A whole park of artillery seemed to have suddenly sprung to life, round each its crew ready for action. Amongst the group at the foot of the Flagstaff we could distinguish King Rupert; his vast height and bulk stood out from and above all round him. Close to him was a patch of white, which we understood to be Queen Teuta, whom the Blue Mountaineers simply adore.

By this time the armoured yacht, bearing all the signatories to "Balka" (excepting King Rupert), had moved out towards the entrance, and lay still and silent, waiting the coming of the Royal Arbitrator, whose whole squadron simultaneously slowed down, and hardly drifted in the seething water of their backing engines.

When the flag which was in the yacht's prow was almost opposite the armoured fort, the Western King held up a roll of vellum handed to him by one of his officers. We onlookers held our breath, for in an instant was such a scene as we can never hope to see again.

At the raising of the Western King's hand, a gun was fired away on the top of the mountain where rose the mighty Flagstaff with the standard of the Blue Mountains. Then came the thunder of salute from the guns, bright flashes and reports, which echoed down the hillsides in never-ending sequence. At the first gun, by some trick of signalling, the flag of the Federated "Balka" floated out from the top of the Flagstaff, which had been mysteriously raised, and flew above that of the Blue Mountains.

At the same moment the figures of Rupert and Teuta sank; they were taking their places on the aeroplane. An instant after, like a great golden bird, it seemed to shoot out into the air, and then, dipping its head, dropped downward at an obtuse angle. We could see the King and Queen from time waist upwards — the King in Blue Mountain dress of green; the Queen, wrapped in her white Shroud, holding her baby on her breast. When far out from the mountain-top and over the Blue Mouth, the wings and tail of the great bird-like machine went up, and the aero dropped like a stone, till it was only some few hundred feet over the water. Then the wings and tail went down, but with diminishing speed. Below the expanse of the plane the King and Queen were now seen seated together on the tiny steering platform, which seemed to have been lowered; she sat behind her husband, after the manner of matrons of the Blue Mountains. That coming of that aeroplane was the most striking episode of all this wonderful day.

After floating for a few seconds, the engines began to work, whilst the planes moved back to their normal with beautiful simultaneity. There was a golden aero finding its safety in gliding movement. At the same time the steering platform was rising, so that once more the occupants were not far below, but above the plane. They were now only about a hundred feet above the water, moving from the far end of the Blue Mouth towards the entrance in the open space between the two lines of the fighting ships of the various nationalities, all of which had by now their yards manned — a manoeuvre which had begun at the firing of the first gun on the mountain-top. As the aero passed along, all the seamen began to cheer — a cheering which they kept up till the King and Queen had come so close to the Western King's vessel that the two Kings and Queens could greet each other. The wind was now beginning to blow westward from the mountain-top, and it took the sounds towards the armoured fort, so that at moments we could distinguish the cheers of the various nationalities, amongst which, more keen than the others, came the soft “Ban Zai!” of the Japanese.

King Rupert, holding his steering levers, sat like a man of marble. Behind him his beautiful wife, clad in her Shroud, and holding in her arms the young Crown Prince, seemed like a veritable statue.

The aero, guided by Rupert’s unerring hand, lit softly on the afterdeck of the Western King’s yacht; and King Rupert, stepping on deck, lifted from her seat Queen Teuta with her baby in her arms. It was only when the Blue Mountain King stood amongst other men that one could realise his enormous stature. He stood literally head and shoulders over every other man present.

Whilst the aeroplane was giving up its burden, the Western King and his Queen were descending from the bridge. The host and hostess, hand in hand — after their usual fashion, as it seems — hurried forward to greet their guests. The meeting was touching in its simplicity. The two monarchs shook hands, and their consorts, representatives of the foremost types of national beauty of the North and South, instinctively drew close and kissed each other. Then the hostess Queen, moving towards the Western King, kneeled before him with the gracious obeisance of a Blue Mountain hostess, and kissed his hand.

Her words of greeting were:

“You are welcome, sire, to the Blue Mountains. We are grateful to you for all you have done for Balka, and to you and Her Majesty for giving us the honour of your presence.”

The King seemed moved. Accustomed as he was to the ritual of great occasions, the warmth and sincerity, together with the gracious humility of this old Eastern custom, touched him, monarch though he was of a great land and many races in the Far East. Impulsively he broke through Court ritual, and did a thing which, I have since been told, won for him for ever a holy place in the warm hearts of the Blue Mountaineers. Sinking on his knee before the beautiful shroud-clad Queen, he raised her hand and kissed it. The act was seen by all in and around the Blue Mouth, and a mighty cheering rose, which seemed to rise and swell as it ran far and wide up the hillsides, till it faded away on the far-off mountain-top, where rose majestically the mighty Flagstaff bearing the standard of the Balkan Federation.

For myself, I can never forget that wonderful scene of a nation's enthusiasm, and the core of it is engraven on my memory. That spotless deck, typical of all that is perfect in naval use; the King and Queen of the greatest nation of the earth received by the newest King and Queen — a King and Queen who won empire for themselves, so that the former subject of another King received him as a brother-monarch on a history-making occasion, when a new world-power was, under his tutelage, springing into existence. The fair Northern Queen in the arms of the dark Southern Queen with the starry eyes. The simple splendour of Northern dress arrayed against that of almost peasant plainness of the giant King of the South. But all were eclipsed — even the thousand years of royal lineage of the Western King, Rupert's natural dower of stature, and the other Queen's bearing of royal dignity and sweetness — by the elemental simplicity of Teuta's Shroud. Not one of all that mighty throng but knew something of her wonderful story; and not one but felt glad and proud that such a noble woman had won an empire through her own bravery, even in the jaws of the grave.

The armoured yacht, with the remainder of the signatories to the Balkan Federation, drew close, and the rulers stepped on board to greet the Western King, the Arbitrator, Rupert leaving his task as personal host and joining them. He took his part modestly in the rear of the group, and made a fresh obeisance in his new capacity.

Presently another warship, *The Balka*, drew close. It contained the ambassadors of Foreign Powers, and the Chancellors and high officials of the Balkan nations. It was followed by a fleet of warships, each one representing a Balkan Power. The great Western fleet lay at their moorings, but with the exception of manning their yards, took no immediate part in the proceedings.

On the deck of the new-comer the Balkan monarchs took their places, the officials of each State grading themselves behind their monarch. The Ambassadors formed a foremost group by themselves.

Last came the Western King, quite alone (save for the two Queens), bearing in his hand the vellum scroll, the record of his arbitration. This he proceeded to read, a polyglot copy of it having been already supplied to every Monarch, Ambassador, and official present. It was a long statement, but the occasion was so stupendous — so intense — that the time flew by quickly. The cheering had ceased the moment the Arbitrator opened the scroll, and a veritable silence of the grave abounded.

When the reading was concluded Rupert raised his hand, and on the instant came a terrific salvo of cannon-shots from not only the ships in the port, but seemingly all up and over the hillsides away to the very summit.

When the cheering which followed the salute had somewhat toned down, those on board talked together, and presentations were made. Then the barges took the whole company to the armour-clad fort in the entrance-way to the Blue Mouth. Here, in front, had been arranged for the occasion, platforms for the starting of aeroplanes. Behind them were the various thrones of state for the Western King and Queen, and the various rulers of “Balka” — as the new and completed Balkan Federation had become — *de jure* as well as *de facto*. Behind were seats for the rest of the company. All was a blaze of crimson and gold. We of the Press were all expectant, for some ceremony had manifestly been arranged, but of all details of it we had been kept in ignorance. So far as I could tell from the faces, those present were at best but partially informed. They were certainly ignorant of all details, and even of the entire programme of the day. There is a certain kind of expectation which is not concerned in the mere execution of fore-ordered things.

The aero on which the King and Queen had come down from the mountain now arrived on the platform in the charge of a tall young mountaineer, who stepped from the steering-platform at once. King Rupert, having handed his Queen (who still carried her baby) into her seat, took his place, and pulled a lever. The aero went forward, and seemed to fall head foremost off the fort. It was but a dip, however, such as a skilful diver takes from a height into shallow water, for the plane made an upward curve, and in a few seconds was skimming upwards towards the Flagstaff. Despite the wind, it arrived there in an incredibly short time. Immediately after his flight another aero, a big one this time, glided to the platform. To this immediately stepped a body of ten tall, fine-looking young men. The driver pulled his levers, and the plane glided out on the track of the King. The Western King, who was noticing, said to the Lord High Admiral, who had been himself in command of the ship of war, and now stood close behind him:

“Who are those men, Admiral?”

“The Guard of the Crown Prince, Your Majesty. They are appointed by the Nation.”

"Tell me, Admiral, have they any special duties?"

"Yes, Your Majesty," came the answer: "to die, if need be, for the young Prince!"

"Quite right! That is fine service. But how if any of them should die?"

"Your Majesty, if one of them should die, there are ten thousand eager to take his place."

"Fine, fine! It is good to have even one man eager to give his life for duty. But ten thousand! That is what makes a nation!"

When King Rupert reached the platform by the Flagstaff, the Royal Standard of the Blue Mountains was hauled up under it. Rupert stood up and raised his hand. In a second a cannon beside him was fired; then, quick as thought, others were fired in sequence, as though by one prolonged lightning-flash. The roar was incessant, but getting less in detonating sound as the distance and the hills subdued it. But in the general silence which prevailed round us we could hear the sound as though passing in a distant circle, till finally the line which had gone northward came back by the south, stopping at the last gun to south'ard of the Flagstaff.

"What was that wonderful circle?" asked the King of the Lord High Admiral.

"That, Your Majesty, is the line of the frontier of the Blue Mountains. Rupert has ten thousand cannon in line."

"And who fires them? I thought all the army must be here."

"The women, Your Majesty. They are on frontier duty to-day, so that the men can come here."

Just at that moment one of the Crown Prince's Guards brought to the side of the King's aero something like a rubber ball on the end of a string. The Queen held it out to the baby in her arms, who grabbed at it. The guard drew back. Pressing that ball must have given some signal, for on the instant a cannon, elevated to perpendicular, was fired. A shell went straight up an enormous distance. The shell burst, and sent out both a light so bright that it could be seen in the daylight, and a red smoke, which might have been seen from the heights of the Calabrian Mountains over in Italy.

As the shell burst, the King's aero seemed once more to spring from the platform out into mid-air, dipped as before, and glided out over the Blue Mouth with a rapidity which, to look at, took one's breath away.

As it came, followed by the aero of the Crown Prince's Guard and a group of other aeros, the whole mountain-sides seemed to become alive. From everywhere, right away up to the farthest visible mountain-tops, darted aeroplanes, till a host of them were rushing with dreadful speed in the wake of the King. The King turned to Queen Teuta, and evidently said something, for she beckoned to the Captain of the Crown Prince's Guard, who was steering the plane. He swerved away to the right, and instead of following above the open track between the lines of warships, went high over the outer line. One of those on board began to drop something, which, fluttering down, landed on every occasion on the bridge of the ship high over which they then were.

The Western King said again to the Gospodar Rooke (the Lord High Admiral):

"It must need some skill to drop a letter with such accuracy."

With imperturbable face the Admiral replied:

"It is easier to drop bombs, Your Majesty."

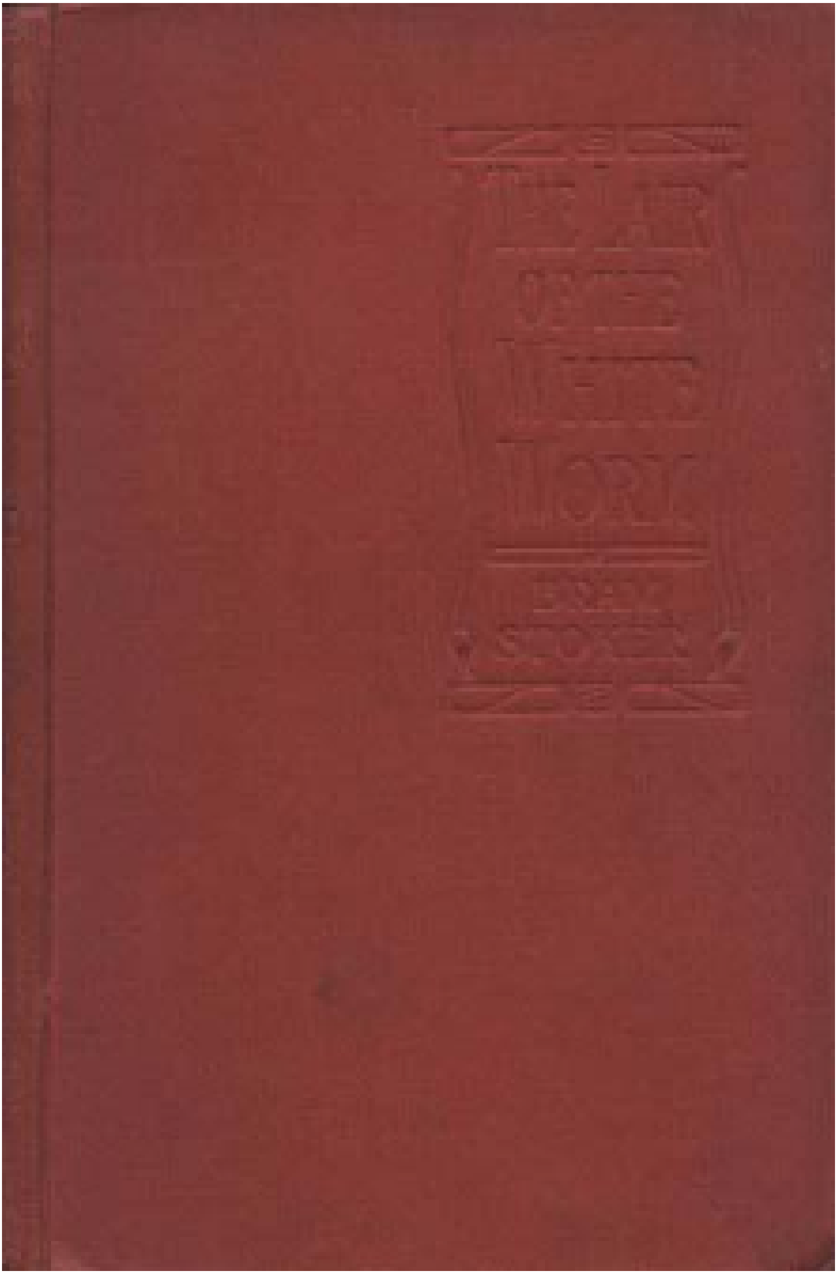
The flight of aeroplanes was a memorable sight. It helped to make history. Henceforth no nation with an eye for either defence or attack can hope for success without the mastery of the air.

In the meantime — and after that time, too — God help the nation that attacks “Balka” or any part of it, so long as Rupert and Teuta live in the hearts of that people, and bind them into an irresistible unity.

The Lair of the White Worm — 40 Chapter Version, 1911

This horror novel was published in 1911 by Rider and Son and is partly based on the legend of the Lambton Worm. The plot concerns Adam Salton, who is contacted by his great-uncle, Richard Salton, in 1860 Derbyshire, who wishes to make Adam his heir. Adam travels to Richard Salton's house in Mercia, Lesser Hill, and quickly finds himself at the centre of mysterious and supernatural occurrences.

In 1925 a highly abridged text of the novel was published, which was shortened by more than 100 pages, with only 28 chapters rather than the original 40. The final eleven chapters were cut down to only five, leading critics to complain that the ending was abrupt and inconsistent. Both texts are presented in this eBook.



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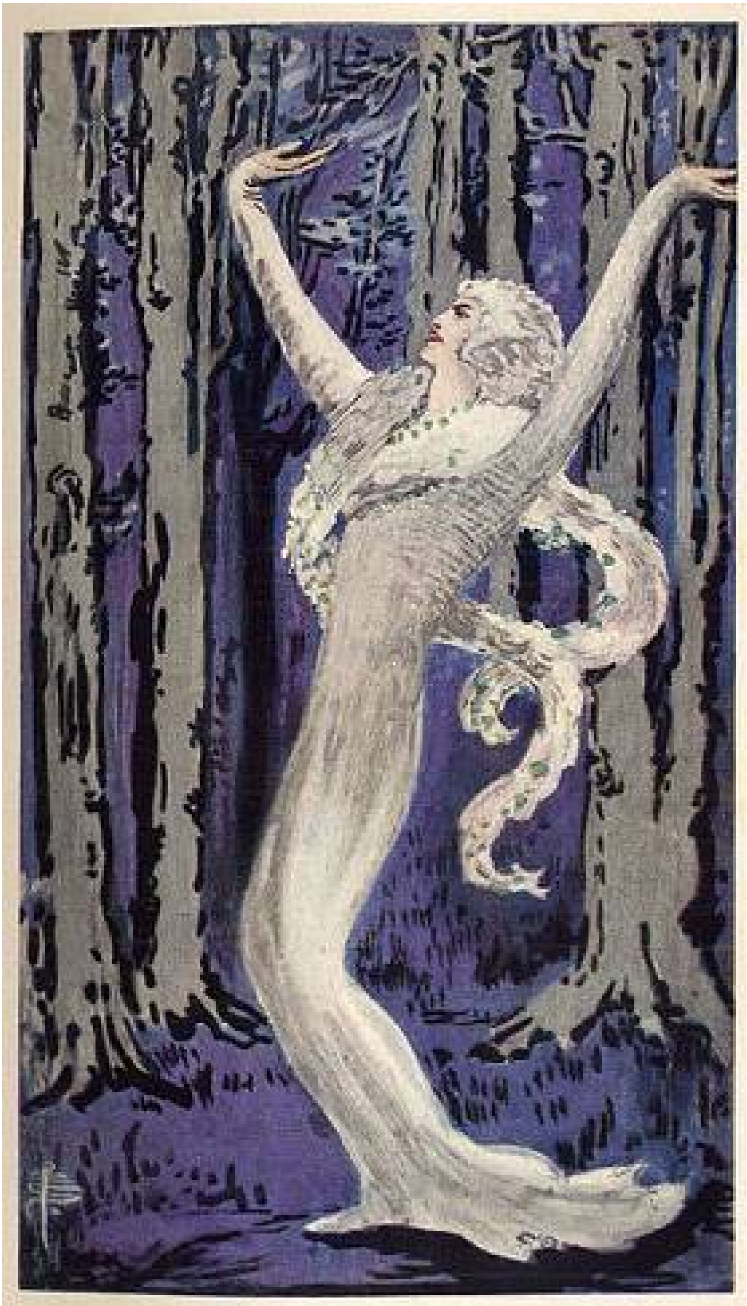

An original illustration

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TO MY FRIEND

BERTHA NICOLL

WITH AFFECTIONATE ESTEEM.

CHAPTER I

ADAM SALTON ARRIVES

WHEN ADAM SALTON arrived at the Great Eastern Hotel he found awaiting him a letter in the handwriting of his grand-uncle, Richard Salton, which he knew so well from the many kind letters which he had received from him in West Australia. The first of them had been written less than a year before, in which the old gentleman, who had in it claimed kinship, stated that he had been unable to write earlier because until then he did not know even of his existence, and it had taken him some time to find out his address. The last, sent after him, had only just arrived, and conveyed a most cordial invitation to stop with him at Lesser Hill for as long a time as he could spare "Indeed," his grand-uncle went on, "I am in hopes that you will make your permanent home here. You see, my dear boy, you and I are all that remain of our race, and it is but fitting that you should succeed me when the time comes, which cannot be long now. I am getting close on eighty years of age, and though we have been a long-lived race, the span of life cannot be prolonged beyond reasonable bounds. I am prepared to like you, and to make your home with me as happy a one as I can achieve. So do come at once on receipt of this, and find the welcome I am waiting to give you. I send, in case such may make matters easy for you, a banker's draft for £500. Come soon, so that we may both of us have such happy days as are still possible to us. For me this is all-important, as the sands of my life are fast running out; but for you I trust there are many happy years to come. If you are able to give me the pleasure of seeing you, send me as soon as you can a letter telling me to expect you. Then when you arrive at

Plymouth or Southampton (or whatever port you are bound for), send me a telegram, and I shall come to meet you at the earliest hour possible.”

On Monday, Adam Salton’s letter arrived by the morning post, saying that he hoped to travel by the boat which carried it, and that he would therefore be ready to meet his grand-uncle so soon after the arrival of the letter in Mercia as he should be able to reach London. “I shall wait your arrival, sir, on the ship. By this means we may avoid any cross purposes.”

Mr. Salton took it for granted that, no matter how fast he might travel, his guest would be awaiting him; so he gave instructions to have ready a carriage at seven the next morning to start for Stafford, where he would catch the 11.40 for Euston, arriving at 2.10. Thence, driving to Waterloo, he could catch the 3 P.M., due at Southampton at 5.38. He would that night stay with his grand-nephew, either on the ship, which would be a new experience for him, or, if his guest should prefer it, at a hotel. In either case they would start in the early morning for home. He had given instructions to his bailiff to send the postillion carriage on to Southampton to be ready for their journey home, and to arrange for relays of his own horses to be sent on at once. He intended that his grand-nephew, who had been all his life in Australia, should see something of central England on the drive. He had plenty of young horses of his own breeding and breaking, and could depend on a journey memorable to the young man. The luggage would be sent on by rail the same day to Stafford, where one of his carts would meet it. Mr. Salton, during the journey to Southampton, often wondered if his grand-nephew was as much excited as he was at the idea of meeting so near a relation for the first time; and it was with an effort that he controlled himself. The endless railway lines and switches round the Southampton Docks fired his anxiety afresh.

As the train drew up on the dockside, he was getting his hand traps together, when the carriage door was wrenched open and a young man jumped in, saying as he came:

"How are you, uncle? I wanted to meet you as soon as I could, but everything is so strange to me that I didn't quite know what to do. However, I took chance that the railway people knew something of their own business — and here I am. I am glad to see you, sir. I have been dreaming of the happiness for thousands of miles; and now I find that the reality beats all the dreaming!" As he spoke the old man and the young one were heartily wringing each other's hands. He went on: "I think I knew you the moment I set eyes on you. I am glad that that dream was only enhanced by the reality!"

The meeting so auspiciously begun proceeded well. Adam, seeing that the old man was interested in the novelty of the ship, suggested timidly that he should stay the night on board, and that he would himself be ready to start at any hour and go anywhere that the other suggested. This affectionate willingness to fall in with his own plans quite won the old man's heart. He warmly accepted the invitation, and at once they became not only on terms of affectionate relationship, but almost like old friends. The heart of the old man, which had been empty for so long, found a new delight. So, too, the young man found on landing in the old country a welcome and a surrounding in full harmony with all his dreams of such matters throughout all his wanderings and solitude, and the promise of a fresh and adventurous life. It was not long before the old man accepted him to full relationship by calling him by his Christian name. The other accepted the proffer with such companion, almost the child, of his old age. After a long talk on affairs of interest, they retired to the cabin, which the elder was to share. Richard Salton, putting his hands affectionately on the boy's shoulders — though Adam was in his twenty-seventh year, he was a boy, and always would be, to his grand-uncle, — said warmly:

"I am so glad to find you as you are, my dear boy — just such a young man as I had always hoped for as a son in the days when I still had such hopes. However, my dear boy, that is all past. But thank God there is a new life to begin for both of us. To you must be the larger part — but there is still time for some of it to be shared in common. I have waited till we should have seen each other to enter upon the subject; for I thought it better not to tie up your young life to my old one till we should have sufficient personal knowledge to justify such a venture. Now I can (so far as I am concerned) enter into it freely, since from the moment my eyes rested on you I saw my son — as he shall be, God willing — if he chooses such a course himself."

"Indeed I do, sir — with all my heart!"

"Thank you, Adam, for that." The old man's eyes filled and his voice trembled. Then, after a long silence between them, he went on: "When I heard you were coming I made my will. It was well that your interests should be protected from that moment on. Here is the deed — keep it, Adam. All I have shall belong to you; and if love and good wishes or the memory of them can make life sweeter, yours shall be a happy one. And now, my dear boy, let us turn in. We start early in the morning and have a long drive before us. I hope you don't mind driving? I was going to have sent down the old travelling carriage in which my grandfather, your great-grand-uncle, went to Court when William IV was king. It is all right — they built well in those days — and it has been kept in perfect order. But I think I have done better. I have sent the carriage in which I travel myself. The horses are of my own breeding, and relays of them shall take us all the way. I hope you like horses? They have long been one of my greatest interests in life."

"I love them, sir, and I am happy to say I have many of my own. My father gave me a horse farm for myself when I was sixteen. I devoted myself to it, and it has gone on. Before I came away, my steward gave me a memorandum that we have in my own places more than a thousand, nearly all good."

"I am glad, my boy. Another link between us."

"Just fancy what a delight it will be, sir, to see so much of middle England — and with you!"

"Thank you again, my boy. I shall tell you all about your future home and its surroundings as we go. We shall travel in old-fashioned state, I tell you. My grandfather always drove four-in-hand; and so shall we."

"Oh, thanks, sir, thanks. May I take the ribbons sometimes?"

"Whenever you choose, Adam. The team is your own. Every horse we use to-day is to be your own."

"You are too generous, uncle!"

"Not at all. Only an old man's selfish pleasure. It is not every day that an heir to the old home comes back. And — oh, by the way… No, we had better turn in now — I shall tell you the rest in the morning."

CHAPTER II

THE CASWALLS OF CASTRA REGIS

MR. SALTON HAD all his life been an early riser, and necessarily an early waker. But early as he woke on the next morning, and although there was an excuse for not prolonging sleep in the constant whirr and rattle of the "donkey" engine winches of the great ship, when he waked he met the eyes of Adam fixed on him from his berth. His grand-nephew had given him the sofa, occupying the lower berth himself. The old man, despite his great strength and normal activity, was somewhat tired by his long journey of the day before and the prolonged and exciting interview which followed it. So he was glad to lie still and rest his body, whilst his mind was actively exercised in taking in all he could of his strange surroundings. Adam, too, after the pastoral habit to which he had been bred, woke with the dawn, if not before it, and was ready to enter on the experiences of the new day whenever it might suit his elder companion. It was little wonder, then, that, so soon as each realised the other's readiness, they simultaneously jumped up and began to dress. The steward had by previous instructions early breakfast prepared, and it was not long before they went down the gangway on shore in search of the carriage.

They found Mr. Salton's bailiff waiting on the dock, and he brought them at once to where the carriage was waiting in the street. Richard Salton pointed out with pride to his young companion the suitability of the trap to every need of travel. To it were harnessed four fine, useful horses, with a postillion to each pair.

"See," said the old man proudly, "how it has all the luxuries of useful travel — silence and isolation as well as speed. There is nothing to obstruct the view of those travelling and no one to overhear what they may say. I have used that trap for a quarter of a century, and I never saw one more suitable for travel. You shall test it shortly. We are going to drive through the heart of England; and as we go I shall tell you what I was speaking of last night. Our route is to be by Salisbury, Bath, Bristol, Cheltenham, Worcester, Stafford; and so home."

After remaining silent a few minutes, what time he seemed all eyes, for he perpetually ranged the whole circle of the horizon, Adam said:

"Has our journey to-day, sir, any special relation to what you said last night that you wanted to tell me?"

"Not directly; but indirectly, everything."

"Won't you tell me now — I see we cannot be overheard — and if anything strikes you as we go along, just run it in. I shall understand."

So old Salton spoke:

"To begin at the beginning, Adam. That lecture of yours on 'The Romans in Britain' set me thinking — in addition to telling me where you were. I wrote to you at once and asked you to come home, for it struck me that if you were fond of historical research — as seemed a fact — this was exactly the place for you, in addition to its being the home of your own forbears. If you could learn so much of the British Romans so far away in West Australia, where there cannot be even a tradition of them, what might you not make of the same amount of study on the very spot. Where we are going is in the real heart of the old kingdom of Mercia, where there are traces of all the various nationalities which made up the conglomerate which became Britain."

After a slight pause Adam said:

"I rather gathered that you had some more definite — more personal reason for my hurrying. After all, history can keep — except in the making!"

"Quite right, my boy. I had a reason such as you very wisely guessed. I was anxious for you to be here when a rather important phase of our local history occurred."

"What is that, if I may ask, sir?"

"Certainly. The great owner of all this part of the county — of several of the counties — is on his way home, and there will be a great home-coming, which you may care to see. The fact is, that for more than a century the various owners in the succession here, with the exception of a short time, lived abroad."

"How is that, sir, if I may again ask?"

"By all means. That is why I wished you to be here — so that you might learn. We have a good stretch without incident before us till we get in sight of Salisbury, so I had better begin now:

"The great house and estate in this part of the world is Castra Regis, the family seat of the Caswall family. The last owner who lived here was Edgar Caswall, great-grand-uncle of the man who is coming here — and he was the only man who stayed even a short time. His grandfather, also named Edgar — they keep the tradition of the family Christian name — quarrelled with his family and went to live abroad, not keeping up any relations, good or bad, with his relatives. His son was born and lived abroad till he was over thirty, — his present age. This was the second line of absentees. The great-great-grandfather also cut himself off from his family and went abroad, from which sojourn he never returned. The consequence has been that the great estate of Castra Regis has had no knowledge of its owner for six generations — covering more than a hundred years. It has been well administered, however, and no tenant or other connected with it has had anything to complain of. All the same, there has been much natural anxiety to see the new owner, and we are all excited about the event of his coming. Even I am, though I own my own estate, which, though adjacent, is quite apart from Castra Regis. — Here we are now in new ground for you. That is the spire of Salisbury Cathedral, and when we leave that we shall be getting close to the old Roman county and you will naturally want your eyes. So we shall shortly have to keep our minds on old Mercia. However, you need not be disappointed. My old friend, Sir Nathaniel de Salis, who, like myself, is a freeholder near Castra Regis, though not on it — his estate, Doom Tower, is over the border of Derbyshire, on the Peak — is coming to stay with me for the festivities to welcome Edgar Caswall. He is just the sort of man you will like. He is devoted to history, and is President of the Mercian Archæological Society. He knows more of our own part of the country, with its history and its people, than anyone else. I expect he will have arrived before us, and we three can have a long chat after dinner. He is also our local geologist and natural historian. So you and he will have many interests in common. Amongst other things he has a special knowledge of the Peak and its caverns, and knows all the old legends of the days when prehistoric times were vital."

From this on till they came to Stafford, Adam's eyes were in constant employment on matters of the road; and it was not till Salton had declared that they had now entered on the last stage of their journey that he referred back to Sir Nathaniel's coming.

As the dusk was closing down they drove on to Lesser Hill, Mr.

Salton's house. It was now too dark to see detail of their surrounding. Adam could just see that it was on the top of a hill, not quite so high as that which was covered by the Castle, on whose tower flew the flag, and which was all ablaze with moving lights, manifestly used in the preparations for the festivities on the morrow. So Adam deferred his curiosity till daylight. His grand-uncle was met at the door by a fine old man, who said as he greeted him warmly:

"I came over early as you wished me to. I suppose this is your grand-nephew — I am glad to meet you, Mr. Adam Salton. I am Nathaniel de Salis, and your uncle is the oldest of my friends."

Adam, from the moment of their eyes meeting, felt as if they were already friends. The meeting was a new note of welcome to those that had already sounded in his ears.

The cordiality with which Sir Nathaniel and Adam met made the imparting of the former's information easy both to speak and to hear. Sir Nathaniel was quite a clever old man of the world, who had travelled much and within a certain area studied deeply. He was a brilliant conversationalist, as was to be expected from a successful diplomatist, even under unstimulating conditions. But he had been touched and to a certain extent fired by the younger man's evident admiration and willingness to learn from him. Accordingly the conversation, which began on the most friendly basis, soon warmed to an interest above proof as the old man spoke of it next day to Richard Salton. He knew already that his old friend wanted his grand-nephew to learn all he could of the subject in hand, and so had during his journey from the Peak put his thoughts in sequence for narration and explanation. Accordingly, Adam had only to listen and he must learn much that he wanted to know. When dinner was over and the servants had withdrawn, leaving the three men at their wine,

Sir Nathaniel began:

"I gather from your uncle — by the way, I suppose we had better speak of you as uncle and nephew, instead of going into exact relationship? In fact, your uncle is so old and dear a friend, that, with your permission, I shall drop formality with you altogether and speak of you and to you as Adam, as though you were his son."

"I would wish, sir," answered the young man, "nothing better in the world!"

The answer warmed the hearts of both the old men who heard. All the men felt touched, but, with the usual avoidance of Englishmen of emotional subjects personal to themselves, they instinctively moved to the previous question. Sir Nathaniel took the lead:

"I understand, Adam, that your uncle has posted you regarding the relationships of the Caswall family?"

"Partly, sir; but I understood that I was to hear minuter details from you — if you would be so good."

"I shall be delighted to tell you anything so far as my knowledge goes. Well, we have to remember, in connection with the events of to-morrow, that not less than ten generations of that family are involved. And I really believe that for a true understanding of the family ramifications you cannot begin better than having the list as a basis. Everything which we may consider as we go along will then take its natural place without extra trouble. The present branch of affairs begins only about something more than a hundred and fifty years ago. Later we may have to go further back, for the history of the Caswall family is coeval with that of England — we need not trouble ourselves with dates; the facts will be more easily grasped in a general way.

The first Caswall in our immediate record is an Edgar, who was head of the family and owner of the estate, who came into his kingdom just about the time that George III did. He had one son of about twenty-four. There was a violent quarrel between the two. No one of this generation has any idea of the cause of it; but, considering the family characteristics, we may take it for granted that though it was deep and violent, it was on the surface trivial.

“The result of the quarrel was that the son left the house without a reconciliation or without even telling his father where he was going. He never came back to the house again. A few years after, he died without having in the meantime exchanged a word or a letter with his father. He married abroad and left one son, who seems to have been brought up in ignorance of all belonging to him. The gulf between them appears to have been unbridgable; for in time this son married and in turn had a son, but neither joy nor sorrow brought the sundered together. Under such conditions no *rapprochement* was to be looked for, and an utter indifference, founded at best on ignorance, took the place of family affection — even on community of interests. It was only due to the watchfulness of the lawyers that the birth and death of a new heir was ever made known. In time a second son appeared, but without any effect of friendly advance.

“At last there arose a dim hope of some cessation of hostility, for though none of the separated made mention of the fact — knowledge of which was again due to the lawyers — a son was born to this youngest member of the voluntary exiles — the great-grandson of the Edgar whose son had left him. After this the family interest merely rested on heirship of the estate — any outside interest being submerged in the fact of a daughter being born to the grandson of the first Edgar. Some twenty years afterwards, the interest flickered up when it was made known — again through the lawyers — that the last two born had been married, thus shutting off any possibility of disputed heirship. As no other child had been born to any of the newer generations in the intervening twenty years, all hopes of heritage were now centred in the son of this last couple — the heir whose home-coming we are to celebrate to-morrow. The elder generations had all died away, and there were no collaterals, so there was no possibility of the heirship being disputed.

“Now, it will be well for you to bear in mind the prevailing characteristics of this race. These were well preserved and unchanging; one and all they are the same: cold, selfish, dominant, reckless of consequences in pursuit of their own will. It was not that they did not keep faith, though that was a matter which gave them little concern, but that they took care to think beforehand of what they should do in order to gain their ends. If they should make a mistake someone else should bear the burthen of it. This was so perpetually recurrent that it seemed to be a part of a fixed policy. It was no wonder indeed that whatever changes took place they were always ensured in their own possessions. They were absolutely cold, hard nature. Not one of them — so far as we have any knowledge — was ever known to be touched by the softer sentiments, to swerve from his purpose, or hold his hand in obedience to the dictates of his heart. Part of this was due to their dominant, masterful nature. The aquiline features which marked them seemed to justify every personal harshness. The pictures and effigies of them all show their adherence to the early Roman type. Their eyes were full; their hair, of raven blackness, grew thick and close and curly. Their figures were massive and typical of strength.

“The thick black hair growing low down on the neck told of vast physical strength and endurance. But the most remarkable characteristic is the eyes. Black, piercing, almost unendurable, they seem to contain in themselves a remarkable will power which there is no gainsaying. It is a power that is partly racial and partly individual: a power impregnated with some mysterious quality, partly hypnotic, partly mesmeric, which seems to take away from eyes that meet them all power of resistance, nay, deeper, all power of wishing to resist. With eyes like those set in that aquiline, all-commanding face one would need to be strong indeed to even think of resisting the inflexible will that lay beyond. Even the habit and the exercise of power which they implied was a danger to anyone who was conscious of a weakness on his own part.

"You may think, Adam, that all this is imagination on my part, especially as I have never seen any belonging to the generation I have spoken of. So it is. But imagination based on deep study. I have made use of all I know or can surmise logically regarding this strange race. And with this data, however received, I have thought out logical results, correcting, amending, intensifying accepted conclusions, till at times I see as though various members of the race had always been under my observation — that they are even under it still. With such strange compelling qualities, is it any wonder that there is abroad an idea that in the race there is some demoniac possession, which tends to a more definite belief that certain individuals have in the past sold themselves to the Devil? The Devil, I may say in this connection, is seldom mentioned *in propria persona,* but generally under some accepted guise, 'The Powers of Evil', 'The Enemy of Mankind', 'The Prince of the Air', etc. I don't know what it is in other places; but along this eastern coast it is not considered polite to speak the truth plainly, baldly, in such matters, but to cover up the idea with a veil of obscurity in which safety or security may be hidden.

"But I think we had better go to bed now. We have a lot to go through to-morrow, and I want you to have your brain clear, and all your susceptibilities fresh. Moreover, I want you to come with me in an early walk in which we may notice, whilst the matter is fresh in our minds, the peculiar disposition of this place — not merely your grandfather's estate, but the lie of the country around it. There are many things on which we may seek — and perhaps find — enlightenment. The more we know at the start, the more things which may come into our view will develop themselves."

So off they went to bed.

CHAPTER III

DIANA'S GROVE

CURIOSITY TOOK Adam Salton out of bed in the early morning, but when he had dressed and gone downstairs, he found that, early as he was, Sir Nathaniel was ahead of him. The old gentleman was quite prepared for a long walk if necessary, and they started at once. Sir Nathaniel, without speaking, led the way a little to the east down the hill. When they had descended and risen again, they found themselves on the eastern brink of a steep hill. It was of lesser height than that on which the Castle was seated; but it was so placed that it commanded the various hills that crowned the ridge. All along the ridge the rock cropped out, bare and bleak, but broken in rough formed natural castellation. The form of the ridge was a segment of a circle, with the higher points inland to the west. In the centre rose the Castle on the highest point of all. Between the various rocky excrescences were groups of trees of various sizes and heights, amongst some of which were what in the early morning light looked like ruins. These — whatever they were — were of massive grey stone, probably limestone, rudely cut — if indeed they were not shaped naturally. The largest of these clumps was of oak trees of great age. They crossed the least of the hills, that which lay to the eastward. The fall of the ground was steep all along the ridge, so steep that here and there both trees and rocks and buildings seemed to overhang the plain far below. Through this level ran many streams, and there was a number of blue pools, where was evidently fairly deep water.

Sir Nathaniel stopped and looked all around him, as though to lose nothing of the effect. The sun had climbed the eastern sky and was making all details clear. Sir Nathaniel pointed all around him with a sweeping gesture, as though calling Adam's attention to the wideness of the view. He did so rapidly as to suggest that he wished the other to take, in the first survey, rather the *coup d'œil* than any detail. Having done so, he covered the ground in a similar way, but more slowly, as though inviting attention to detail. Adam was a willing and attentive pupil, and followed his motions exactly, missing — or trying to miss — nothing. When they had made the rough survey round the whole sweep of the eastern horizon, Sir Nathaniel spoke:

"I have brought you here, Adam, because it seems to me that this is the spot on which to begin our investigations. You have now in front of you almost the whole of the ancient kingdom of Mercia. In fact, we see theoretically if not practically, the whole of it except that furthest part which is covered by the Welsh Marches and those parts which are hidden from where we stand by the high ground of the immediate west. We can see — again theoretically if not practically — the whole of the eastern bound of the kingdom which ran south from the Humber to the Wash. I want you to bear in mind the trend of the ground, for some time, sooner or later, we shall do well to have it in our mind's eye when we are considering the ancient traditions and even superstitions and are trying to find the *rationale* of them. I think we had better not try to differentiate between these, but let them naturally take their places as we go on. Each legend, each superstition which we receive will help in the understanding and possible elucidation of the others. And as all such have a local basis, we can come closer to the truth — or the probability — by knowing the local conditions as we go along. It will help us to bring to our aid even such geological truth as we may have between us. For instance, the building materials used in various ages can afford their own lessons to understanding eyes. The very heights and shapes and materials of these hills, nay, even of the wide plain that lies between us and the sea, have in themselves the materials of enlightening books."

"For instance, sir?" said Adam, venturing a question.

"Well, for instance, look at those hills which surround the main one where the site for the Castle was wisely chosen — on the highest ground. Take the others. There is something ostensible in each of them, and in all probability something unseen and unproved, but to be imagined, also."

"For instance?" continued Adam.

"Let us take them *seriatim*. That to the east, where the trees are, lower down. That was once the location of a Roman temple, possibly founded on a pre-existing Druidical one. Its name implies the former, and the grove of ancient oaks suggests the latter."

"Please explain."

"The old name translated means 'Diana's Grove'. Then the next one higher than it, but just beyond it, is called '*Mercy*'. In all probability a corruption or perhaps a familiarisation of the word *Mercia* with a Roman pun included. We learn from early manuscripts that the place was called *Vilula Misericordiæ*. It was originally a nunnery founded by Queen Bertha, but done away with by King Penda, the reactionary to Paganism after St. Augustine. Then comes your uncle's place — Lesser Hill. Though it is so close to the Castle, it is not connected with it. It is a freehold, and, so far as we know, of equal age. It has always belonged to your family."

"Then there only remains the Castle!"

“That is all; but its history contains the histories of all the others — in fact, the whole history of early England.”

Sir Nathaniel, seeing the expectant look on Adam’s face, went on:

“The history of the Castle has no beginning so far as we know. The furthest records or surmises or inferences simply accept it as existing. Some of these — guesses let us call them — seem to show that there was some sort of structure there when the Romans came, therefore it must have been a place of importance in Druid times — if indeed that was the beginning. Naturally the Romans accepted it, as they did everything of the kind that was, or might be, useful. The change is shown or inferred in the name Castra. It was the highest protected ground, and so naturally became the most important of their camps. A study of the map will show you that it must have been a most important centre. It both protected the advances already made to the north, and helped to dominate the sea coast to the east. It sheltered the western marches, beyond which lay savage Wales — and danger. It provided a means of getting to the Severn, round which lay the great Roman roads then coming into existence, and made possible the great waterway to the heart of England — through the Severn and its tributaries. And it brought the east and the west together by the swiftest and easiest ways known to those times. And, finally, it provided means of descent on London and all the expanse of country watered by the Thames.

“With such a centre, already known and organised, we can easily see that each fresh wave of invasion — the Angles, the Saxons, the Danes, and the Normans — found it a desirable possession and so ensured its upholding. In the earlier centuries it was merely a vantage ground. But when the victorious Romans brought with them the heavy solid fortifications impregnable to the weapons of the time, its commanding position alone ensured its adequate building and equipment. Then it was that the fortified camp of the Cæsars developed into the castle of the king. As we are as yet ignorant of even the names of the first kings of Mercia, no historian has been able to even guess what king made it his ultimate defence; and I suppose we shall never know now. In process of time, as the arts of war developed, it increased in size and strength, and although recorded details are lacking, the history is written not merely in the stone of its building, but is inferred in the changes of structure. Then the general sweeping changes which followed the Norman Conquest wiped out all lesser records than its own. To-day we must accept it as one of the earliest castles of the Conquest, probably not later than the time of Henry I. Roman and Norman were both wise in their retention of places of approved strength or utility. So it was that these surrounding heights, already established and to a certain extent proved, were retained. Indeed, such characteristics as already pertained to them were preserved and to-day afford to us lessons regarding things which have themselves long since passed away.

"So much for the fortified heights; but the hollows too have their own story. But how the time passes! We must hurry home, or your uncle will wonder what has become of us." As he spoke he was hurrying with long steps towards Lesser Hill, and Adam was furtively running to be able to keep up with him. When they had arrived close to the house, Sir Nathaniel said:

"I am sorry to cut short our interesting conversation. But it will be only postponed. I want to tell you, and I am sure you want to know, all that I know of this place. And, if I am not mistaken, our next instalment of history will be even more interesting than the first."

CHAPTER IV

THE LADY ARABELLA MARCH

BREAKFAST HAD JUST begun when Mr. Salton said:

“Now, There is no hurry, but so soon as you are both ready we shall start. I want to take you first to see a remarkable relic of Mercia, and then we shall go down to Liverpool through what is called ‘The Great Vale of Cheshire’. You may be disappointed, but take care not to prepare your mind” — this to Adam— “for anything stupendous or heroic. You would not think the place you are going through was a vale at all, unless you were told it beforehand, and had confidence in the veracity of the teller. We should get to the Landing Stage in time to meet the *West African*. We ought to meet Mr. Caswall as he comes ashore. We want to do him honour — and, besides, it will be more pleasant to have the introductions over before we go to his *féte* at the Castle.”

The carriage was ready, the same as was used the previous day. The postillions, too, were the same, but there were two pairs of different horses — magnificent animals, and keen for work. Breakfast was soon over, and they shortly took their places. The postillions had their orders, and they were soon on their way at an exhilarating pace.

Presently, in obedience to Mr. Salton’s signal, the carriage drew up near Stone, opposite a great heap of stones by the wayside. “Here, Adam,” he said, “is something that you of all men should not pass by unnoticed. That heap of stones brings us at once to the dawn of the Anglian kingdom. It was begun more than a thousand years ago, in the latter part of the seventh century, in memory of a murder.

Wulfere, King of Mercia, nephew of Penda, here murdered his two sons for embracing Christianity. As was the custom of the time, each passer-by added a stone to the memorial heap. Penda represented heathen reaction after St. Augustine's mission. Sir Nathaniel can tell you as much as you want about this, and put you, if you wish, on the track of such accurate knowledge as there is."

Whilst they were looking at the heap of stones, they noticed that another carriage had drawn up beside them, and the passenger — there was only one — was regarding them curiously. The carriage was an old heavy travelling one, with arms blazoned on it gorgeously. The coronet was an earl's, and there were many quarterings. Seeing then the occupant was a lady, the men took off their hats. The occupant spoke:

"How do you do, Sir Nathaniel? How do you do, Mr. Salton? I hope none of you has met with any accident. Look at me!"

As she spoke she pointed to where one of the heavy springs was broken across, the broken metal showing bright. Adam spoke up at once:

"Oh, that can soon be put right."

"Soon? I shall have to wait till we get to Wolverhampton. There is no one near who can mend a break like that."

"I can."

"You!" She looked incredulously at the dapper young gentleman who spoke. "You — why, it's a workman's job."

"All right, I am a workman — though that is not the only sort of work I do. Let me explain, I am an Australian, and, as we have to move about fast, we are all trained to farriery and such mechanics as come into travel — and I am quite at your service."

She said sweetly: "I hardly know how to thank you for your kindness, of which I gladly avail myself. I don't know what else I can do. My father is Lord Lieutenant of the County, and he asked me to take his carriage — he is abroad himself — and meet Mr. Caswall of Castra Regis, who arrives home from Africa to-day. It is a notable home-coming; his predecessor in the event made his entry more than a century ago, and all the countryside want to do him honour." She looked at the old men and quickly made up her mind as to the identity of the stranger. "You must be Mr. Salton — Mr. Adam Salton of Lesser Hill. I am Lady Arabella March of Diana's Grove." As she spoke she turned slightly to Mr. Salton, who took the hint and made a formal introduction.

So soon as this was done, Adam took some tools from his uncle's carriage, and at once began work on the broken spring. He was an expert workman, and the breach was soon made good. Adam was gathering the tools which he had been using, and which, after the manner of all workmen, had been scattered about, when he noticed that several black snakes had crawled out from the heap of stones and were gathering round him. This naturally occupied his mind, and he was not thinking of anything else when he noticed Lady Arabella, who had opened the door of the carriage, slip from it with a quick gliding motion. She was already among the snakes when he called out to warn her. But there seemed to be no need of warning. The snakes had turned and were wriggling back to the mound as quickly as they could. He laughed to himself behind his teeth as he whispered, "No need to fear there. They seem much more afraid of her than she of them." All the same he began to beat on the ground with a stick which was lying close to him, with the instinct of one used to such vermin. In an instant he was along beside the mound with Lady Arabella, who appeared quite unconcerned at the incident.

Then he took a long look at her. She was certainly good to look at in herself, and her dress alone was sufficient to attract attention. She was clad in some kind of soft white stuff, which clung close to her form, showing to the full every movement of her sinuous figure. She was tall and exceedingly thin. Her eyes appeared to be weak, for she wore large spectacles which seemed to be of green glass. Certainly in the centre they had the effect of making her naturally piercing eyes of a vivid green. She wore a close-fitting cap of some fine fur of dazzling white. Coiled round her white throat was a large necklace of emeralds, whose profusion of colour quite outshone the green of her spectacles — even when the sun shone on them. Her voice was very peculiar, very low and sweet, and so soft that the dominant note was of sibilation. Her hands, too, were peculiar — long, flexible, white, with a strange movement as of waving gently to and fro.

She appeared quite at ease, and, after thanking Adam, said that if any of his uncle's party were going to Liverpool she would be most happy to join forces. She added cordially:

"Whilst you are staying here, Mr. Salton, you must look on the grounds of Diana's Grove as your own, so that you may come and go just as you do in Lesser Hill. There are some fine views, and not a few natural curiosities which are sure to interest you. There are some views in the twilight which are, they say, unique. And if you are a student of natural history — specially of an earlier kind, when the world was younger — you shall not have your labour of discovery in vain."

The heartiness with which she spoke and warmth of her words — not of her manner, which was abnormally cold and distant — repelled him. made him suspicious. He felt as if he was standing on guard. In the meantime both his uncle and Sir Nathaniel had thanked her for the invitation — of which, however, they said they were unable to avail themselves. Adam had a sort of suspicion that though she answered regretfully, she was in reality relieved. When he had got into the carriage with the two old men and they had driven off, he was not surprised when Sir Nathaniel said:

“I could not but feel that she was glad to be rid of us. She can play her game better alone!”

“What is her game, sir?” asked Adam unthinkingly, but the old man answered without comment:

“All the county knows it, my boy. Caswall is a very rich man. Her husband was rich when she married him — or seemed to be. When he committed suicide it was found that he had nothing at all. Her father has a great position and a great estate — on paper. But the latter is mortgaged up to the hilt, and is held in male entail only, so that her only hope is in a rich marriage. I suppose I need not draw any conclusion. You can do that as well as I can.”

Adam remained silent nearly all the time they were travelling through the alleged Vale of Cheshire. He thought much during that journey and came to several conclusions, though his lips were unmoved. One of these conclusions was that he would be very careful about paying any attention to Lady Arabella. He was himself a rich man, how rich not even his uncle had the least idea, and would have been surprised had he known. The other resolution was that he would be very careful how he went moonlighting in Diana’s Grove, especially if he were unattended.

At Liverpool they went aboard the *West African*, which had just come to the landing-stage. There his uncle introduced himself to Mr. Caswall, and followed this up by introducing Sir Nathaniel and then Adam. The new-comer received them all very graciously, and said what a pleasure it was on coming home after so long an absence of his family from their old seat, and hoped they would see much of each other in the future. Adam was much pleased at the warmth of the reception; but he could not avoid a feeling of repugnance at the man's face. He was trying hard to overcome this when a diversion was caused by the arrival of Lady Arabella. The diversion was welcome to all; the two Saltons and Sir Nathaniel were shocked at Caswall's face — so hard, so ruthless, so selfish, so dominant. "God help any," was the common thought, "who is under the domination of such a one!"

But presently his African servant approached him, and at once their thoughts changed to a larger toleration. For by comparison with this man his face seemed to have a certain nobility hitherto lacking. Caswall looked indeed a savage — but a cultured savage. In him were traces of the softening civilisation of ages — of some of the higher instincts and education of man, no matter how rudimentary these might be. But the face of Oolanga, as his master at once called him, was pure pristine, unreformed, unsoftened savage, with inherent in it all the hideous possibilities of a lost, devil-ridden child of the forest and the swamp — the lowest and most loathsome of all created things which were in some form ostensibly human.

CHAPTER V

HOME-COMING

AS LADY ARABELLA and Oolanga arrived almost simultaneously, Adam began to surmize what effect their appearance would have on each other. They were exactly opposite in every quality of appearance, and, so far as he could judge, of mental or moral gifts or traits. The girl of the Caucasian type, beautiful, Saxon blonde, with a complexion of milk and roses, high-bred, clever, serene of nature. The other negroid of the lowest type; hideously ugly, cruel, brutal. If Adam expected her to show any repugnance he was disappointed. If Anything, her pride heightened into disdain. She seemed as if she would not — could not — condescend to exhibit any concern or interest in such a creature. On the other hand his bearing was such as in itself to justify her pride. He treated her not merely as a slave treats his master, but as a worshipper would treat a deity. He knelt before her with his hands outstretched and his forehead in the dust. So long as she remained he did not move; it was only when she went over to Caswall and spoke that he relaxed his attitude of devotion and simply stood by respectfully. His dress, which was a grotesque mixture, more than ever seemed absurd. He had on evening dress of an ill cut, an abnormally efflorescent white shirt with exaggerated cuffs and collar, all holding mock jewels of various colors. In his nose was a silver ring, and in his ears large ornaments, composed of trophies of teeth. He wore a tall hat, which had once been of a shape of *some* kind, with a band of gold lace. Altogether he looked like a horrible distortion of a gentleman's servant. All those around grinned or openly jeered. One of the stewards, who was carrying some of Mr.

Caswall's lighter luggage and making himself important, after the manner of stewards to debarking passengers, was attentive even to him.

Adam spoke of his own bailiff, Davenport, who was standing by, having arrived with the bailiff of Lesser Hill, who had followed Mr. Salton in a pony trap. As he spoke he pointed to the attentive ship's steward, and presently the two men were conversing.

After a little time Mr. Salton said to Adam:

"I think we ought to be moving. I have some things to do in Liverpool, and I am sure that both Mr. Caswall and Lady Arabella would like to get under way for Castra Regis." To which said Adam:

"I too, sir, would like to do something. I want to find out where Ross, the animal merchant, lives — you know, the local Jamrach. I want to take a small animal home with me, if you don't mind. He is only a little thing, and will be no trouble."

"Of course not, my boy. Whatever you like. What kind of animal is it that you want?"

"A mongoose."

"A mongoose! What on earth do you want it for?"

"To kill snakes."

"Good!" The old man remembered the mound at Stone. No explanation was needed.

Ross, the animal merchant, had had dealings with Adam chiefly in the way of mongooses. When he heard what was wanted, he asked:

"Do you want something special, or will an ordinary mongoose do?"

"Well, of course I want a good one. But I see no need for anything special. It is for ordinary use."

"I can let you have a choice of ordinary ones. I only asked because I have in stock a very special one which I got lately from Nepaul. He has a record of his own. He killed a king cobra that had been seen in the Rajah's garden. But I don't suppose we have any snakes of the kind in this cold climate — I daresay an ordinary one will do."

The bargain was effected. When Adam was coming away with the box under his arm, he said to Ross:

"I don't know anything of the snakes here. I wouldn't have believed there are any at all, only I saw some to-day. I shall try this mongoose, and if he is any good I shall be glad to keep him. But don't part with the other yet. I shall send you word if I want him."

When Adam got back to the carriage, carefully carrying the box with the mongoose, Sir Nathaniel said:

"Hullo! what have you got there?"

"A mongoose."

"What for?"

"To kill snakes!"

Sir Nathaniel laughed. "Well, even as yet, it seems you have come to the right place."

"How do you mean? Why 'as yet'?"

"Remember the snakes yesterday. But that is only a beginning."

"A beginning! How so?"

"That, my boy, belongs to the second section of our inquiry. It will have a direct bearing on it."

"You mean about the legends?"

"We shall begin on them."

"And then?"

"I heard Lady Arabella's invitation to you to come to Diana's Grove in the twilight."

"Well, what on earth has that got to do with it?"

"Nothing directly that I know of. But we shall see."

Adam waited, and the old man went on:

"Have you by any chance heard the other name which was given long ago to that place."

"No, sir."

"It was called — Look here, this subject wants a lot of talking over and listening. Suppose we wait till after dinner to-night, when we shall be alone and shall have lots of time before us."

"All right, sir. Let us wait!" Adam was filled with curiosity, but he thought it better not to hurry matters. All would come in good time.

His attention was then claimed by the events of the day. Shortly the Lesser Hill party set out for Castra Regis, and for the time he thought no more of Diana's Grove or of what mysteries it had contained — or might still contain.

The guests were crowding in and special places were marked for important guests. Some little time was occupied in finding their seats. Adam, seeing so many persons of varied degree, looked round for Lady Arabella, but could not locate her. It was only when he saw the old-fashioned travelling carriage approach and heard the sound of cheering which went with it, that he realised that Edgar Caswall had arrived. Then, on looking more closely, he saw that Lady Arabella, dressed as he had seen her last, was seated beside him. When the carriage drew up at the great flight of steps, the host jumped down and gave her his hand and led her up to the great daïs table, and placed her in the seat to the right of that kept for himself.

It was evident to all that she was the chief guest at the festivities. It was not long before the seats of the daïs were filled, while the tenants and guests of lesser importance had occupied all the coigns of vantage not reserved. The order of the day had been carefully arranged by a committee. There were some speeches, happily neither many nor long; and then festivities were suspended till the time for feasting arrived. In the interval Caswall walked among his guests, speaking to all in a friendly manner and expressing a general welcome. The other guests came down from the daïs and followed his example, so there was unceremonious meeting and greeting between gentle and simple. Adam Salton naturally followed with his eyes all that went on within their scope, taking note of all who seemed to afford any interest. He was young and a man and a stranger from a far distance; so on all these accounts he naturally took stock rather of the women than of the men, and of these, those who were young and attractive. There were lots of pretty girls among the crowd who had seemingly no dislike to be looked at; and Adam, who was a handsome young man and well set up, got his full share of admiring glances. These did not concern him much, and he remained unmoved until there came along a group of three, by their dress and bearing, of the farmer class. One was a sturdy old man; the other two were good-looking girls, one of a little over twenty, the other not quite grown — seventeen at most. So soon as Adam's eyes met those of the younger girl, who stood nearest to him, some sort of electricity flashed — that divine spark which begins by recognition, and ends in obedience. Men call it "Love."

Both the elders of the party noticed how much Adam was taken by the pretty girl, and spoke of her to him in a way which made his heart warm to them.

"Did you notice that party that passed? The old man is Michael Watford, one of the tenants of Mr. Caswall. He occupies Mercy Farm, which Sir Nathaniel tells me he pointed out to you to-day. The girls are his grand-daughters, the elder, Lilla, being the only child of his eldest son, who died when she came less than a year old. His wife died on the same day — in fact at the same time. She is a good girl — as good as she is pretty. The other is her first cousin, the daughter of Watford's second son. He went for a soldier when he was just over twenty, and was drafted abroad. He was not a good correspondent, though he was a good enough son. A few letters came, and then his father heard from the colonel of his regiment that he had been killed by dacoits in Burmah. He heard from the same source that his boy had been married to a Burmese, and that there was a daughter only a year old. Watford had the child brought home, and she grew up beside Lilla. The only thing that they heard of her birth was that her name was Mimi. The two children adored each other, and do to this day. Strange how different they are! Lilla all fair, like the old Saxon stock from which she is sprung from; Mimi almost as dark as the darkest of her mother's race. Lilla is as gentle as a dove, but Mimi's black eyes can glow whenever she is upset. The only thing that upsets her is when anything happens to injure or threaten or annoy Lilla. Then her eyes glow as do the eyes of a bird when her young are threatened."

CHAPTER VI

THE WHITE WORM

MR. SALTON INTRODUCED Adam to Mr. Watford and his granddaughters, and they all moved on together. Of course people, neighbours, in the position of the Watfords knew all about Adam Salton, his relationship, circumstances, and prospects. So it would have been strange indeed if both girls did not see or dream of possibilities of the future. In agricultural England, eligible men of any class are rare. This particular man was specially eligible, for he did not belong to a class in which barriers of caste were strong. So when it began to be noticed that he walked beside Mimi Watford and seemed to desire her society, all their friends seemed to give the promising affair a helping hand. When the gongs sounded for the banquet, he went with her into the tent where her grandfather had seats. Mr. Salton and Sir Nathaniel noticed that the young man did not come to claim his appointed place at the daïs table; but they understood and made no remark, or indeed did not seem to notice his absence. Lady Arabella sat as before at Edgar Caswall's right hand. She was certainly a striking and unusual woman, and to all it seemed fitting from her rank and personal qualities that she should be the chosen partner of the heir on his first appearance. Of course nothing was said openly by those of her own class who were present; but words were not necessary when so much could be expressed by nods and smiles. It seemed to be an accepted thing that at last there was to be a mistress of Castra Regis, and that she was present amongst them. There were not lacking some who, whilst admitting all her charm and beauty, placed her in only the second rank of beauty, Lilla

Watford being marked as first. There was sufficient divergence of type as well as of individual beauty to allow of fair commenting; Lady Arabella represented the aristocratic type, and Lilla that of the commonalty.

When the dusk began to thicken, Mr. Salton and Sir Nathaniel walked home — the trap had been sent away early in the day, leaving Adam to follow in his own time. He came in earlier than was expected, and seemed upset about something. Neither of the elders made any comment. They all lit cigarettes, and, as dinner-time was close at hand, went to their rooms to get ready. Adam had evidently been thinking in the interval. He joined the others in the drawing-room, looking ruffled and impatient — a condition of things seen for the first time. The others, with the patience — or the experience — of age trusted to time to unfold and explain things. They had not long to wait. After sitting down and standing up several times, Adam suddenly burst out:

"That fellow seems to think he owns the earth. Can't he let people alone! He seems to think that he has only to throw his handkerchief to any woman and be her master."

This outburst was in itself enlightening. Only thwarted affection in some guise could produce this feeling in an amiable young man. Sir Nathaniel, as an old diplomatist, had a way of understanding, as if by foreknowledge, the true inwardness of things, and asked suddenly, but in a matter-of-fact, indifferent voice:

"Was he after Lilla?"

"Yes, and he didn't lose any time either. Almost as soon as they met he began to butter her up, and to tell her how beautiful she was. Why, before he left her side he had asked himself to tea to-morrow at Mercy Farm. Stupid ass! He might see that the girl isn't his sort! I never saw anything like it. It was just like a hawk and a pigeon."

As he spoke, Sir Nathaniel turned and looked at Mr. Salton — a keen look which implied a full understanding. Then the latter said quietly:

"Tell us all about it, Adam. There are still ten minutes before dinner, and we shall all have better appetites when we have come to some conclusion on this matter."

Adam spoke with an unwonted diffidence:

"There is nothing to tell, sir; that is the worst of it. I am bound to say that there was not a word said that a human being could object to. He was very civil, and all that was proper — just what a landlord might be to a tenant's daughter… And yet — and yet — well, I don't know how it was, but it made my blood simply boil."

"How did the hawk and the pigeon come in?" Sir Nathaniel's voice was soft and soothing, nothing of contradiction or overdone curiosity in it — a tone eminently suited to win confidence.

"I can hardly explain it. I can only say that he looked like a hawk and she like a dove — and, now that I think of it, that is what they each did look like; and do look like in their normal condition."

"That is so!" came the soft voice of Sir Nathaniel.

Adam went on:

"Perhaps that early Roman look of his set me off. But I wanted to protect her; she seemed in danger."

"She seems in danger, in a way, from all you young men. I couldn't help noticing the way that even you looked as if you wished to absorb her!"

Here the kindly, temperate voice of Mr. Salton came in:

"I hope both you young men will keep your heads cool. You know, Adam, it won't do to have any quarrel between you, especially so soon after his home-coming and your arrival here. We must think of the feelings and happiness of our neighbours; mustn't we?"

"I hope so, sir. I assure you that, whatever may happen, or even threaten, I shall obey your wishes in this as in all things."

"Silence!" whispered Sir Nathaniel, who heard the servants in the passage bringing dinner.

After dinner, over the walnuts and the wine, Sir Nathaniel returned to the subject of the local legends, saying: "It will perhaps be a less dangerous topic for us to discuss than more recent ones."

"All right, sir," said Adam heartily. "I think you may depend on me now with regard to any topic. I can even discuss Mr. Caswall. Indeed, I may meet him to-morrow. He is going, as I said, to call at Mercy Farm at three o'clock — but I have an appointment at two."

"I notice," said Mr. Salton, "that you do not lose any time."

"No sir. Perhaps that is the reason why the part I came from has for its motto— 'Advance, Australia!'"

"All right, my boy. Advance is good — so long as you take care where you are going and how. There is a line in one of Shakespeare's plays, 'They stumble that run fast.' It is worth bearing in mind."

"All right again, sir; but I don't think you need fear me now I have had my kick."

The two old men once more looked at each other steadily. It was as much as to say, "Good! The boy has had his lesson. He will be all right!" Then, lest the mood of his listener should change with delay, Sir Nathaniel began at once:

"I don't propose to tell you all the legends of Mercia, or even to make a selection of them. It will be better, I think, for our purpose if we consider a few facts — recorded or unrecorded — about this neighbourhood. I shall try to remember, and you, Adam, shall ask me questions as we go along. We all want stimulation to memory. When we have nothing amongst us to remember it will be time enough to invent. I propose to go on where we left off yesterday morning, about the few places round here that we spoke of. I think we might begin with Diana's Grove. It has roots in the different epochs of our history, and each has, be sure, its special crop of legend. The Druid and the Roman are too far off for matters of detail; but it seems to me the Saxon and the Angles are near enough to yield material for legendary lore. If there were anything well remembered of an earlier period, we may take it that it had some beginning in what was accepted as fact. We find that this particular place had another name or sobriquet besides Diana's Grove. This was manifestly of Roman origin, or of Grecian accepted as Roman. The former is more pregnant of adventure and romance than the Roman name. In Mercian tongue it was 'The Lair of the White Worm'. This needs a word of explanation at the beginning.

"In the dawn of the language, the word 'worm' had a somewhat different meaning from that in use to-day. It was an adaptation of the Anglo-Saxon 'wyrm', meaning a dragon or snake; or from the Gothic 'waurms', a serpent; or the Icelandic 'ormur', or the German 'wurm'. We gather that it conveyed originally an idea of size and power, not as now in the diminutive of both these meanings. Here legendary history helps us. We have the well-known legend of the 'Worm Well' of Lambton Castle, and that of the 'Laidly Worm of Spindleston Heugh' near Bamborough. In both these legends the 'worm' was a monster of vast size and power — a veritable dragon or serpent, such as legend attributes to vast fens or quags where there was illimitable room for expansion. A glance at a geological map will show that whatever truth there may have been of the actuality of such monsters in the early geologic periods, at least there was plenty of possibility. In the eastern section of England there were originally vast plains where the plentiful supply of water could gather. There the streams were deep and slow, and there were holes of abysmal depth, where any kind and size of antediluvian monster could find a habitat. In places, which now we can see from our windows, were mud-holes a hundred or more feet deep. Who can tell us when the age of the monsters which flourished in slime came to an end? If such a time there was indeed, its limits could only apply to the vast number of such dangers. There must have been times and places and conditions which made for greater longevity, greater size, greater strength than was usual. Such overlappings may have come down even to our earlier centuries. Nay, are there not now creatures of a vastness of bulk regarded by the generality of men as impossible? Even in our own day there are here and there seen the traces of animals, if not the animals themselves, of stupendous size — veritable survivals from earlier ages, preserved by some special qualities in their habitats. I remember meeting a distinguished man in India, who had the reputation of being a great shikaree, who told me that the greatest temptation he had ever had in his life was to shoot a giant snake which he had come across in the Terai of Upper India. He was on a tiger-shooting expedition, and as his elephant was crossing a nullah, it squealed. He looked down from his howdah and saw that the elephant had stepped across the body of a snake which was dragging itself through the jungle. ‘So far as I could see,’ he said, ‘it must have been eighty or one hundred feet in length. Fully forty or fifty feet was on each side of the track, and though the weight which it dragged had thinned it to its least, it was as thick round as a man’s body. I suppose you know that when you are after tiger, it is a point of honour not to shoot at anything else, as life may depend on it. I could easily and with safety have spined this monster, but I felt that I must not — and so with regret I had to let it go.'

"Just imagine such a monster anywhere in this country, and at once we could get a sort of idea of the 'worms', which possibly did frequent the great morasses which spread round the mouths of many of the great European rivers."

Adam had been thinking; at last he spoke:

"I haven't the least doubt, sir, that there may have been such monsters as you have spoken of still existing at a much later period than is generally accepted. Also, that if there were such things, that this was the very place for them. I have tried to think over the matter since you pointed out the configuration of the ground. But if you will not be offended by my expressing — not indeed a doubt, but a difficulty — it seems to me that there is a hiatus somewhere."

"Where? What kind? Tell me frankly, where is your difficulty. You know I am always glad of an honest opinion in any difficulty."

"Well, sir, all that you say may be, probably is, true. But are there not mechanical difficulties?"

"As how?"

"Well, our antique monster must have been mighty heavy, and the distances he had to travel were long and the ways difficult. From where we are now sitting down to the level of the mud-holes even the top of them is a distance of several hundred feet — I am leaving out of consideration altogether for the present lateral distance. Is it possible that there was a way by which a monster could travel up and down, and yet no chance recorder have ever seen him? Of course we have the legends; but is not some more exact evidence necessary in a scientific investigation?"

“My dear Adam, all you say is perfectly right, and, were we starting on such an investigation, we could not do better than follow your reasoning. But, my dear boy, you must remember that all this took place thousands of years ago. You must remember, too, that all records of the kind that would help us are lacking. Also, that the places to be considered were desert so far as human habitation or population are considered. In the vast desolation of such a place as complied with the necessary conditions there must have been such profusion of natural growth as would bar the progress of men formed as we are. The lair of such a monster as we have in mind would not have been disturbed for hundreds — or thousands — of years. Moreover, these creatures must have occupied places quite inaccessible to man. A snake who could make himself comfortable in a quagmire a hundred feet deep would be protected even on the outskirts by such stupendous morasses as now no longer exist, or which, if they exist anywhere at all, can be on very few places on the earth’s surface. Far be it from me to say or even to think for a moment, that in more elemental times such things could not have been. The condition of things we speak of belongs to the geologic age — the great birth and growth of the world, when natural forces ran riot, when the struggle for existence was so savage that no vitality which was not founded in a gigantic form could have even a possibility of survival. That such a time was we have evidences in geology, but there only. We can never expect proofs such as this age demands. We can only imagine or surmise such things — or such conditions and such forces as overcame them.”

“Come, let us get to bed,” said Mr. Salton. “Like you both, I enjoy the conversation. But one thing is certain: we cannot settle it before breakfast.”

CHAPTER VII

HAWK AND PIGEON

AT BREAKFAST-TIME next morning Sir Nathaniel and Mr. Salton were seated when Adam came hurriedly into the room.

"Any news?" asked his uncle mechanically.

"Four."

"Four what?" asked Sir Nathaniel.

"Snakes," said Adam, helping himself to a grilled kidney.

"Four snakes. How? I don't understand."

"Mongoose," said Adam, and then added explanatorily: "I was out with the mongoose just after three."

"Four snakes in one morning! Why, I didn't know there were so many on the Brow" — the local name for the western cliff. "I hope that wasn't the consequence of our talk of last night?"

"It was, sir. But not directly."

"But, God bless my soul, you didn't expect to get a snake like the Lambton worm, did you? Why, a mongoose to tackle a monster like that — if there were one — would have to be bigger than a haystack."

"These were ordinary snakes, only about as big as a walking-stick."

"Well, it's well to be rid of them, big or little. That is a good mongoose, I suppose; he'll clear out all such vermin round here," said Mr. Salton.

Adam went quietly on with his breakfast. Killing a few snakes in a morning was no new experience to him. He left the room the moment breakfast was finished and went to the study that his uncle had arranged for him. Both Sir Nathaniel and Mr. Salton took it that he wanted to be by himself as so to avoid any questioning or talk of the visit that he was to make that afternoon. He stayed by himself either in the house or walking, till about half-an-hour before dinnertime. Then he came quietly into the smoking-room, where Mr. Salton and Sir Nathaniel were sitting together ready dressed. He too was dressed, and the old diplomatist noticed that his hand was, if possible, more steady than usual. He had actually shaved himself when making his toilet, but there was no sign of a cut or even of a quiver of the hand. Sir Nathaniel smiled to himself quietly as he said under his voice:

"He is all right. That is a sign there is no mistaking — for a man in love. He certainly was in love yesterday; and one way or another, if he can get rid of, or overcome, troubles of the heart like that, I think we needn't have any special apprehension about him." So he resumed the magazine which he had been reading.

After a few minutes of silence all round, Adam gave further evidence of his *aplomb*. He suddenly said, looking at the others:

"I suppose there is no use waiting. We had better get it over at once."

His uncle, thinking to make things easier to him, said:

"Get what over?"

There was a sign of shyness about him at this. He stammered a little at first, but his voice became more even as he went on.

"My visit to Mercy Farm."

Mr. Salton waited eagerly. The old diplomatist simply smiled easily.

"I suppose you both know that I was much interested yesterday in the Watfords?" There was no denial or fending off the question. Both the old men smiled acquiescence. Adam went on: “I meant you to see it — both of you. You, uncle, because you are my uncle and the nearest thing to me on earth — of my own kin, and, moreover, you couldn’t have been more kind to me or made me more welcome if you had been my own father.” Mr. Salton said nothing. He simply held out his hand, and the other took it and held it for a few seconds. “And you, sir, because you have shown me something of the same affection which in my wildest dreams of home I had no right to expect.” He stopped for an instant, much moved.

Sir Nathaniel answered softly, laying his hand on the youth’s shoulder:

“You are right, my boy; quite right. That is the proper way to look at it. And I may tell you that we old men, who have no children of our own, feel our hearts growing warm when we hear words like those.”

Then Adam hurried on, speaking with a rush, as if he wanted to come to the crucial point.

“Mr. Watford had not come in, but Lilla and Mimi were at home, and they made me feel very welcome. They have all a great regard for my uncle. I am glad of that any way, for I like them all — much. We were having tea when Mr. Caswall came to the door, attended by the Christy Minstrel.”

“The Christy Minstrel!” repeated Sir Nathaniel. His voice sounded simply as an acknowledgement, not as a comment of any kind.

Lilla opened the door herself. The window of the living-room at the farm, as of course you know, is a large one, and from within you cannot help seeing anyone coming. Mr. Caswall said he had ventured to call, as he wished to make the acquaintance of all his tenants in a less formal way and more individually than had been possible to him on the previous day. The girls made him very welcome. They are very sweet girls those, sir. Someone will be very happy some day there — with either of them."

"And that man may be you, Adam," said Mr. Salton heartily.

A sad look came over the young man's eyes, and the fire his uncle had seen there died out. Likewise the timbre left his voice, making it sound dreadfully lonely as he spoke:

"Such might crown my life. But that happiness, I fear, is not for me, or not without pain and loss and woe."

"Well, it's early days yet!" said Sir Nathaniel heartily.

The young man turned on him his eyes, which had now grown excessively sad, as he answered:

"Yesterday — a few hours ago — that remark would have given me new hope — new courage; but since then I have learned too much."

The old man, skilled in the human heart, did not attempt to argue in such a matter. He simply varied the idea and went on:

"Too early to give in, my boy."

"I am not of a giving-in kind," said the young man earnestly. "But, after all, it is wise to realise a truth. And when a man, though he is young, feels as I do — as I have felt since yesterday, when I first saw Mimi's eyes — his heart jumps. He does not need to learn things. He knows."

There was silence in the room, during which the twilight stole on imperceptibly. It was Adam who again broke the silence as he asked his uncle:

"Do you know, uncle, if we have any second sight in our family?"

"Second sight? No, not that I ever heard about. Why?"

“Because,” he answered slowly, “I have a conviction over me which seems to answer all the conditions of second sight that I have ever heard of.”

“And then?” asked the old man, much perturbed.

“And then the usual inevitable. What in the Hebrides and other places, where the Sight is a cult — a belief — is called ‘the doom’ — the court from which there is no appeal. I have often heard of second sight — you know we have many western Scots in Australia; but I have realised more of its true inwardness in an instant of this afternoon than I did in the whole of my life previously — a granite wall stretching up to the very heavens, so high and so dark that the eye of God Himself cannot see beyond. Well, if the Doom must come, it must. That is all.”

The voice of Sir Nathaniel broke in, smooth and sweet and grave, but very, very stern:

“Can there not be a fight for it? There can for most things.”

“For most things, yes, but for the Doom, no. What a man can do I shall do. There will be — must be — a fight. When and where and how I know not. But a fight there will be. But, after all, what is a man in such a case?”

“*A* man! Adam, there are three of us.” He looked at his old friend as he spoke, and that old friend’s eyes blazed.

“Ay, three of us,” he said, and his voice rang.

There was again a pause, and Sir Nathaniel, anxious to get back to less emotional and more neutral ground, said quietly:

“Tell us of the rest of the meeting. Omit no detail. It may be useful. Remember we are all pledged to this. It is a fight *á l’outrance*, and we can afford to throw away or forgo no chance.”

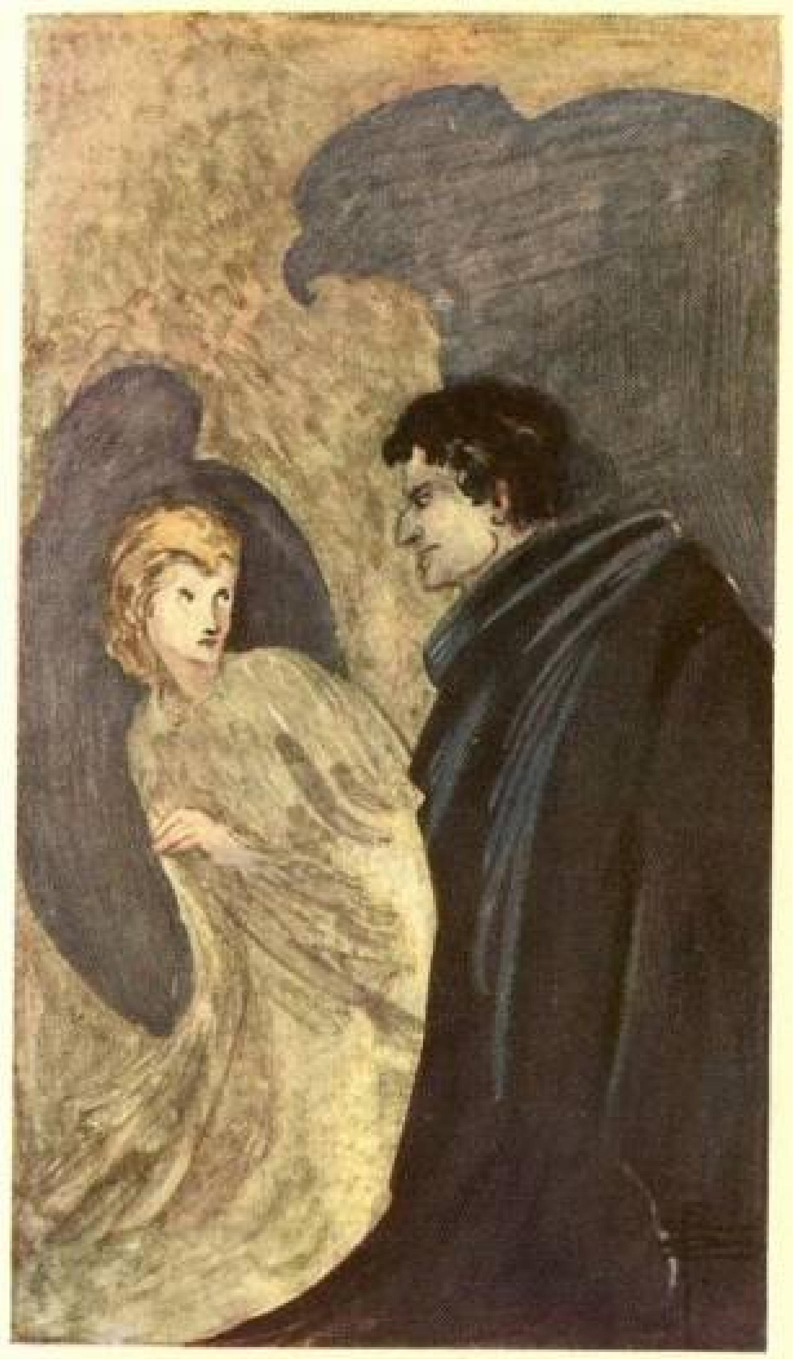
Adam said quietly looking at him:

“We shall throw away or lose nothing that we can help. We fight to win, and the stake is a life — perhaps more than one — we shall see.” Then he went on in a conversational tone, such as he had used when he spoke of the coming to the farm of Edgar Caswall: “When Mr. Caswall came in, the Christy Minstrel touched his ridiculous hat and went away — at least, he went a short distance and there remained. It gave one the idea that he expected to be called and intended to remain in sight, or within hail. Then Mimi got another cup and made fresh tea, and we all went on together.”

“Was there anything uncommon — were you all quite friendly?” asked Sir Nathaniel quietly.

Adam answered at once:

“Quite friendly. There was nothing that I could notice out of the common — except,” he went on, with a slight hardening of the voice, “except that he kept his eyes fixed on Lilla in a way which was quite intolerable to any man who might hold her dear.”



"Now, in what way did he look?" asked Sir Nathaniel. "I am not doubting, I only ask for information."

"I can hardly say," was the answer. "There was nothing in itself offensive; but no one could help noticing it."

"You did. Miss Watford herself, who was the victim, and Mr. Caswall, who was the offender, are out of range as witnesses. Was there anyone else who noticed?"

"Mimi did. I tell you her face flamed with anger as she saw the look."

"What kind of look was it? Over-ardent or too admiring, or what? Was it the look of a lover or one who fain would be? You understand?"

"Yes, sir, I quite understand. Anything of that sort I should of course notice. It would be part of my preparation for keeping my self-control — to which I am pledged."

"If it were not amatory, was it threatening? Where was the offence?"

Adam smiled kindly at the old man:

"It was not amatory. Even if it was, such was to be expected. I should be the last man in the world to object, since I am myself an offender in that respect. Moreover, not only have I been taught to fight fair, but by nature I really believe I am just. I would be as tolerant of and as liberal to a rival if he were one as I should expect him to be to me. No, the look I mean was nothing of that kind. And so long as it did not lack proper respect I should not of my own part condescend to notice it. Did you ever study the eyes of a hound?"

"At rest?"

"No, when he is following his instincts! Or, better still," Adam went on, "the eyes of a bird of prey when he is following his instincts. Not when he is swooping, but merely when he is watching his quarry?”

“No,” said Sir Nathaniel, “I don’t know that I ever did. Why, may I ask?”

“That was the look. Certainly not amatory or anything of that kind — and yet it was, it struck me, more dangerous, if not so deadly as an actual threatening.”

Again there was a silence, which Sir Nathaniel broke as he stood up:

“I think it would be well if we all thought over this by ourselves. Then we can renew the subject.”

CHAPTER VIII

OOLANGA

MR. SALTON HAD an appointment for six o’clock at Walsall. When he had driven off, Sir Nathaniel took Adam by the arm and said to him:

“May I come with you for a while to your study? I want to speak to you privately without your uncle knowing about it, or even what the subject is. You don’t mind, do you? It is not any idle curiosity. No, no. It is on the subject to which we are all committed.”

Adam said with some constraint:

“Is it necessary to keep my uncle in the dark about it? He might be offended.”

“It is not necessary; but it is advisable. It is for his sake that I asked. My friend is an old man, and it might concern him unduly — even alarm him. I promise you there shall be nothing that could cause him anxiety in our silence, or at which he could take umbrage.”

“Go on, sir!” said Adam simply.

When they were locked into the study he spoke:

“You see, your uncle is now an old man. I know it, for we were boys together. He has led an uneventful and somewhat self-contained life, so that any such condition of things as has now arisen is apt to perplex him from its very strangeness. In fact, any new matter is trying to old people. It has its own disturbances and its own anxieties, and neither of these things are good for lives that should be restful. Your uncle is a strong man with a very happy and placid nature. Given health and ordinary conditions of life, there is no reason why he should not live to be a hundred. You and I therefore, who both love him, though in different ways, should make it our business to protect him from all disturbing influences. Such care shall undoubtedly add to the magnitude of his span of life and the happiness of his days. I am sure you will agree with me that any labour to this end would be well spent. All right, my boy! I see your answer in your eyes; so we need say no more of that. And now," here his voice changed, "tell me all that took place at that interview. There are strange things in front of us — how strange we cannot at present even guess. Doubtless some of the difficult things to understand which lie behind the veil will in time be shown to us to see and to understand. In the meantime, all we can do is to think and work patiently, fearlessly, and unselfishly, to an end that we think is right. Tell me as well as you can — I shall try to help you. You had just got so far as where Lilla opened the door to Mr. Caswall, and the Christy Minstrel, who had followed him, went a distance away and lurked. You also observed that Mimi was disturbed in her mind at the way Mr. Caswall looked at her cousin."

"Certainly — though 'disturbed in her mind' is only a poor way of expressing her objection."

"Can you remember well enough to describe Caswall's eyes, and how Lilla looked, and what Mimi said and did? Also of the Christy Minstrel, who is, I take it, Oolanga, Caswall's West African servant. When you have said all you know of these things, I want you to tell me what you have heard in any way about the 'Christy Minstrel'. I take it this will be the most humorous way of bringing him in. Though indeed I doubt his being in any conceivable way a subject of humour. Tragedy would more probably be a follower in his train."

"I'll do what I can, sir. All the time Mr. Caswall was staring, he kept his eyes fixed and motionless — but not as if he was dead or in a trance. His forehead was wrinkled up as it is when one is trying to see through or into something. At the best of times his face is not of gentle expression; but when it was screwed up like that it was almost diabolical. It frightened poor Lilla so that she trembled, and after a bit got so pale that I thought she had fainted. However, she held up and tried to stare back, but in a feeble kind of way. Then Mimi came close and held her hand. That braced her up, and — still, never ceasing her return stare — she got colour again and seemed more like herself."

"Did he stare too?"

"More than ever. The weaker Lilla seemed the stronger he seemed to get, just as if he were feeding on her strength. All at once she turned round, threw up her hands, and fell down in a faint. I could not see what else happened just then, for Mimi had thrown herself on her knees beside her and hid her from me. Then there was something like a black shadow between us, and there was the pleasing form of Oolanga, looking more malignant than ever. He had better look out. I am not usually a patient man, and the sight of that ugly devil is enough to make an Eskimo's blood boil. When he saw my face he seemed to realise danger — immediate danger — and he slunk out of the room as noiselessly as if he had been blown out. I learned one thing, however. He is an enemy, if ever a man had one."

"That still leaves us three to two!" — this from Sir Nathaniel.

"Then Caswall slunk out much as the servant had done. When he had gone, Lilla recovered at once. I hope I won't see Mr. Christy look at Lilla again!" As he spoke he took a nickle-plated revolver from his pocket and put it back again with an ominous remark: "I don't know if he wishes to be buried on English soil. He can have his choice if he likes. Ordinarily speaking, he isn't worth a cartridge; but when there is a lady in the case—" The revolver clicked.

"Now," said Sir Nathaniel, anxious to restore peace, "have you found out anything yet regarding your friend the Christy Minstrel? I am anxious to be posted regarding him. I fear there will be, or may be, grave trouble with him."

"Yes, sir, I've heard a good deal about him — of course it is not official; but then hearsay must guide us at first. You know my man Davenport, I think. He really is my *alter ego* — private secretary, confidential man of business, and general factotum. He is devoted to me, and has my full confidence. I asked him to go on board the *West African* and have a good look round, and find out what he could about Mr. Caswall. Naturally, he was struck with the Caswall's servant. He found one of the ship's stewards who had been on the regular voyages to South Africa. He knew Oolanga and had made a study of him. He is a man who gets on well with Negros, and they opened their hearts to him. It seems that this Oolanga is quite a great person in the black world of the African West Coast. He has the two things which men of his own colour respect: he can make them afraid, and he is lavish with money. I don't know whose money — but that does not matter. They are always ready to trumpet his greatness. Evil greatness it is — but neither does that matter. Briefly, this is his history. He was originally a witch-finder — about as low an occupation as exists amongst the mangrove swamps. Then he got up in the world and became an Obi-man, which gives an opportunity to wealth *via* blackmail. Finally, he reached the highest honour in hellish service. He became a user of Voodoo, which seems to be a service of the utmost baseness and cruelty. I was told some of his deeds of cruelty, which are simply sickening. They made me long for an opportunity of helping to drive him back to hell. You might think to look at him that you could measure in some way the extent of his vileness; but it would be a vain hope. Monsters such as he is belong to an earlier and more rudimentary stage of barbarism. Whoever kills him when the time comes will not have to fear punishment, but to expect praise. He is in his way a clever fellow, but is none the less dangerous or the less hateful for that. The men in the ship told me that he was a collector: some of them had seen his collections. Such collections! All that was potent for evil in bird or beast, or even in fish. Beaks that could break and rend and tear. All the birds represented were of a predatory kind. Even the fishes are those which are born to destroy, to wound, to torture. The collection, I assure you, was an object lesson in human malignity. This being has enough evil in his face to frighten even a strong man. It is little wonder that the sight of it unexpectantly put that poor girl into a dead faint! If that other savage intends to keep him round here they may build a new prison at once; for there won't be a decent man or woman in his neighborhood that won't be a criminal at the very start, if indeed it be a crime to destroy such a thing."

Adam was up in the early morning and took a smart walk round the Brow. As he was passing Diana's Grove, he looked in on the short avenue of trees, and noticed the snakes killed on the previous morning by the mongoose. They all lay in a row, straight and rigid, as if they had been placed by hands. Their skins seemed damp and sticky, and they were covered all over with ants and other insects. They looked loathsome, so after a glance, he passed on. A little later, when his steps took him, naturally enough, past the entrance to Mercy Farm, he was passed by Oolanga moving quickly under the trees wherever there was shadow. Laid across one extended arm, and looking like dirty towels across a rail, he had the horrid looking snakes. He did not seem to see Adam, to the pleasant surprise of the latter. No one was to be seen at Mercy except a few workmen in the farmyard. So, after waiting round on a chance of seeing Mimi, he began to go slowly home. Once more he was passed on the way. This time it was by Lady Arabella, walking hurriedly and so furiously angry that she did not recognise him even to the extent of acknowledging his bow. He wondered, but simply went on his way. When he got to Lesser Hill, he went to the coach-house where the box with the mongoose was kept, and took it with him, intending to finish at the Mound of Stone what he had begun the previous morning with regard to the extermination. He found that the snakes were even more easily attacked than on the previous day; no less than six were killed in the first half-hour. As no more appeared, he took it for granted that the morning's work was over, and went towards home. The mongoose had by this time become accustomed to him, and was willing to let himself be handled freely. Adam lifted him up and put him on his shoulders and walked on. Presently he saw a lady advancing towards him, and as they drew nearer recognised Lady Arabella. Hitherto the mongoose had been quiet, like a playful affectionate kitten; but when the two got close he was horrified to see the mongoose, in a state of the wildest fury, with every hair standing on end, jump from his shoulder and run towards Lady Arabella. It looked so furious and so intent on attack that he called out:

"Look out — look out! The animal is furious and means to attack."

She looked more than ever disdainful and was passing on; the mongoose jumped at her in a furious attack. Adam rushed forward with his stick, the only weapon he had. But just as he got within striking distance the lady drew out a revolver and shot the animal, breaking his backbone. Not satisfied with this, she poured shot after shot into him till the magazine was exhausted. There was no coolness or hauteur about her now. She seemed more furious even than the animal, her face transformed with hate, and as determined to kill as he had appeared to be. Adam, not knowing exactly what to do, lifted his hat in apology and hurried on to Lesser Hill.

CHAPTER IX

SURVIVALS

AT BREAKFAST Sir Nathaniel noticed that Adam was put out about something. But he said nothing. The lesson of silence is better remembered in age than in youth. When they were both in the study, where Sir Nathaniel followed him, Adam at once began to tell his companion of what had happened. Sir Nathaniel looked graver and graver as the narration proceeded, and when Adam had stopped he remained silent for several minutes. At last he said:

"This is very grave. I have not formed my thought yet; but it seems to me at first impression that this is worse than anything we had thought of."

"Why, sir?" said Adam. "Is the killing of a mongoose — no matter by whom — so serious a thing as all that?"

The other smoked on quietly for quite another few minutes before he spoke.

"When I have properly thought it over, I may moderate my opinion. But in the meantime it seems to me that there is something dreadful behind all this — something that may affect all our lives — that may mean the issue of life or death to any of us."

Adam sat up quickly.

"Do tell me, sir, what is in your mind — if, of course, you have no objection, or do not think it better not."

"I have no objection, Adam. In fact, if I had, I should have to overcome it. I fear there can be no more hidden or reserved thoughts between us."

"Indeed, sir, that sounds serious, worse than serious!"

Again they both resumed their cigars, and presently Sir Nathaniel said gravely:

"Adam, I greatly fear the time has come for us — for you and me, at all events — to speak out plainly to one another. Does not there seem something very mysterious about this?"

"I have thought so, sir, all along. The only difficulty one has is what one is to think and where to begin."

"Let us begin with what you have told me. First take the conduct of the mongoose."

Adam waited; the other went on:

"He was quiet, even friendly and affectionate with you. He only attacked the snakes, which is, after all, only his business in life."

"That is so!"

"Then we must try to find out or imagine some reason why he attacked Lady Arabella."

"I fear we shall have to imagine; there is no logical answer to that question."

"Then let us imagine. He had not shown any disposition hitherto to attack strangers?"

"No; the opposite. He made friends at once with everyone he came across."

"Then even if his action is based on instinct, why does he single out one person in such a way?"

"In that, sir, I see a difficulty, or, if you will permit me, it may be only a flaw in your reasoning."

"Permit! I shall be glad. Go on."

"It seems to me that you take 'instinct' as a definite fixed thing concerning where there can be only one reading — even by the brute creation."

“Go on, Adam. This is very interesting.”

“We both may have erred in our idea of ‘instinct’. May it not be that a mongoose may have merely the instinct to attack, that nature does not allow or provide him with the fine reasoning powers to discriminate who he is to attack?”

“Good! Of course that may be so. But then, on the other hand, should we not satisfy ourselves why he does wish to attack anything? If for centuries in all parts of the world this particular animal is known to attack only one kind of other animal, are we not justified in assuming that when a case strange to us comes before us, if one of the first class attacks a hitherto unclassed animal, he recognises in that animal some quality which it has in common with the hitherto classed animal?”

“That is a good argument, sir,” Adam went on, “but a dangerous one. If we followed it out with pure logic it would lead us to believe that Lady Arabella is a snake. And I doubt if we — either of us — are prepared to go so far.”

“So far as I am concerned, I am to follow blindly the lead of logic. But before doing so we have a duty to fulfil.”

“What is that duty, sir?”

“The first of all duties, truth. We must be sure before going to such an end that there is no point as yet unconsidered which would account for the unknown thing which puzzles us.”

“As how?”

“Well, suppose the instinct works on some physical basis — sight, for instance, or smell. If there were anything in recent juxtaposition to the accused which would look like the cause or would carry the scent, surely that would supply the missing cause.”

“Of course!” Adam spoke with conviction.

Sir Nathaniel went on:

“Now, from what you tell me, your friend Oolanga had just come from the direction of Diana’s Grove carrying the dead snakes, which the mongoose had killed the previous morning. Might not the scent have been carried that way?”

“Of course it might, probably was. I never thought of that. Look here, sir, I really think it will be prudent of us not to draw final conclusions till we know more. At any rate that episode has a suggestive hint for us — one which we can follow up without saying anything to anybody. Then we shall be in a safer position for going on.”

“Good and sensible!” Sir Nathaniel spoke approvingly; and so it was tacitly arranged between the two to wait.

But whilst they were sitting in silence an idea struck Adam, and he thought it wise to make it known to the elder man.

“Two things I want to ask you, if I may. One is a sort of corollary to the other.” Sir Nathaniel listened. He went on: “Is there any possible way of even guessing approximately how long a scent will remain? You see this is a natural scent, and may derive from a place where it has been effective for thousands of years. Then, does a scent of any kind carry with it any form or quality of another kind, either good or evil? I ask you because one ancient name of the house lived in by the lady who was attacked by the mongoose was ‘The Lair of the White Worm’. If any of these things be so, our possibilities of knowledge and our difficulties have multiplied indefinitely. They may even change in kind. We may get into even moral entanglements; before we know it we may be even in the midst of a bedrock struggle between good and evil.”

Sir Nathaniel, after a pause, asked:

“Is that the question you wished to ask me?”

“Yes, sir.”

Sir Nathaniel smiled gravely.

“I don’t see on what the corollary rests. With regard to the first question — or the first part, though, so far as I know, there are no fixed periods with which a scent may be active — I think we may take it that that period does not run into thousands of years. As to whether any moral change accompanies a physical one, I can only say that I have met no argument of proof or even no assertion of the fact. At the same time, we must remember that ‘good’ and ‘evil’ are terms so wide as to take in the whole scheme of creation and all that is implied by them and by their mutual action and reaction. Generally, I would say that in the scheme of a First Cause anything is possible. So long as the inherent forces or tendencies of any one thing are veiled from us we must expect mystery. This hides from us more than we at first conceive, and as time goes on and *some* light gets into the darker places, we are able to understand that there are other darknesses. And so on, until the time shall come when the full light of understanding beats upon us.”

“Then I presume, sir,” said Adam, “that it would be at least wise of us to leave these questions alone till we know more.”

“Most certainly. To listen and remember should be our guiding principle in such an inquiry.”

“There is one other question on which I should like to ask your opinion. It is the last of my general questions — for the present. Suppose that there are any permanent forces appertaining to the past, what we may call ‘survivals’, do these belong to good as well as to evil? For instance, if the scent of the primaeval monster can so remain in proportion to the original strength, can the same be true of things of good import?"

Sir Nathaniel thought a while, then he answered:

"We must be careful from the beginning not to confuse the physical and the moral, to differentiate the two and to keep them differentiated. I can see that already you have switched on the moral entirely, so perhaps we had better follow it up first. On the side of the moral we have certain justification for belief in the utterances of revealed religion. For instance, 'the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much' is altogether for good. We have nothing of a similar kind on the side of evil. But if we accept this dictum we need have no more fear of 'mysteries': these become thenceforth merely obstacles."

Adam waited in silence, which was intended to be, and was, respectful. Then he suddenly changed to another phase of the subject.

"And now, sir, may I turn for a few minutes to purely practical things, or rather to matters of historical fact?"

Sir Nathaniel bowed acquiescence. He went on:

"We have already spoken of the history, so far as it is known, of some of the places round us— 'Castra Regis', 'Diana's Grove', and 'The Lair of the White Worm'. I would like to ask if there is anything not necessarily of evil import about any of the places?"

"Which?" asked Sir Nathaniel shrewdly.

"Well, for instance, this house and Mercy Farm?"

"Here we turn," said Sir Nathaniel, "to the other side, the light side of things. Let us take Mercy Farm first. You have no objections?"

"Thank you, sir." The young man's comment was complete and illuminative.

"Perhaps we had better remember the history of that particular place. The details may later on help us in coming to some useful, or at all events interesting, conclusion.

"When Augustine was sent by Pope Gregory to Christianise England in the time of the Romans, he was received and protected by Ethelbert, King of Kent, whose wife, daughter of Charibert, King of Paris, was a Christian, and did much for Augustine. She founded a nunnery in memory of Columba, which was named *Sedes misericordiæ*, the House of Mercy, and, as the region was Mercian, the two names became inextricably involved. As Columba is the Latin for dove, the dove became a sort of signification of the nunnery. She seized on the idea and made the newly-founded nunnery a house of doves. Someone sent her a freshly discovered dove, a sort of carrier, but which had in the white feathers of its head and neck the form of a religious cowl. And so in especial the bird became the symbol of the nuns of Mercy. The nunnery flourished for more than a century, when, in the time of Penda, who was the reactionary of heathendom, it fell into decay. In the meantime the doves, which, protected by religious feeling, had increased mightily, were known in all Catholic communities. When King Offa ruled in Mercia about a hundred and fifty years later, he restored Christianity, and under its protection the nunnery of St. Columba was restored and its doves flourished again. In process of time this religious house again fell into desuetude; but before it disappeared it had achieved a great name for good works, and in especial for the piety of its members. I think I see now where our argument leads. I do not know if you started it, having thought it out to the full. But in any case I will venture an opinion; that if deeds and prayers and hopes and earnest thinking leave anywhere any moral effect, Mercy Farm and all around it have almost the right to be considered holy ground."

“Thank you, sir,” said Adam earnestly, and was silent. Sir Nathaniel understood.

CHAPTER X

SMELLING DEATH

ADAM SALTON, THOUGH he made little talk, did not let the grass grow under his feet in any matter which he had undertaken, or in which he was interested. He had agreed with Sir Nathaniel that they should not *do* anything with regard to the mystery of Lady Arabella's fear of the mongoose, but he steadily pursued his course in being *prepared* to do whenever the opportunity might come. He was in his own mind perpetually casting about for information or clues which might lead to such. Baffled by the killing of the mongoose, he looked around for another line to follow. He did not intend to give up the idea of there being a link between the woman and the animal, but he was already preparing a second string to his bow. His new idea was to use the faculties of Oolanga, so far as he could, in the service of discovery. His first move was to send Davenport to Liverpool to try to find the steward of the *West African*, who had told him about Oolanga, and then to get him to try to induce (by bribery or other means) the Negro to come to the Brow. So soon as he himself would have speech of the Voodoo-man he would be able to learn from him something useful. Davenport went away in the early morning, and was successful in both his missions, for he had to get Ross to send another mongoose, and also the one reserved for sending when told; he was able to tell Adam that he had seen the steward, who already told him a lot he wanted to know, and had also arranged to have Oolanga brought to Lesser Hill the following day. At this point Adam saw his way sufficiently clear to adumbrate to Davenport with fair exactness what he wished him to find out. He had come to the conclusion that it would be better — certainly at first — not himself to appear in the matter, with which Davenport was fully competent to deal. It would be time for himself to take a personal part when matters had advanced a little further.

That evening, when Davenport arrived, he had a long interview with Adam, In which he told what he had learned, partly from the ship's service, and partly from Oolanga's own boasting. If what the Negro said was in any wise true, the man had a rare gift which might be useful in the quest they were after. He could, as it were, "smell death." If any one was dead, if any one had died, or if a place had been used in connection with death, he seemed to know the broad fact by intuition. Adam made up his mind that to test this faculty with regard to several places would be his first task. Naturally he was anxious for this, and the time passed slowly. The only comfort was the arrival the next morning of a strong packing case, locked, from Ross, the key being in the custody of Davenport. In the case were two smaller boxes, both locked. One of them contained a mongoose to replace that killed by Lady Arabella; the other was the reserved mongoose which had already killed the king-cobra in Nepaul. When both the animals had been safely put under lock and key in the place arranged for them, he felt that he might breathe more freely. Of course no one was allowed to know the secret of their existence in the house, except himself and Davenport. He arranged that Davenport should take Oolanga round the neighbourhood for a walk, stopping at each of the places which he designated. Having gone all along the Brow, he was to return the same way and induce him to touch on the same subjects in talking with Adam, who was to meet them as if by chance at the farthest part — that beyond Mercy Farm. Davenport was never to lose sight of him on board the ship, where he was to wait till his master should send for him.

The incidents of the day were just what Adam expected. At Mercy Farm, at Diana's Grove, at Castra Regis, and a few other spots, he stopped and, opening his wide nostrils as if to sniff boldly, said that he smelled death. It was not always in the same form. At Mercy Farm he said there were many small deaths. At Diana's Grove his bearing was different. There was a distinct sense of enjoyment about him, especially when he spoke of many great deaths long ago. Here, too, he sniffed in a strange way, like a bloodhound at check, and looked puzzled. He said no word in either praise or disparagement, but in the centre of the Grove where, hidden amongst ancient oak stumps, was a block of granite slightly hollowed on the top, he bent low and placed his forehead on the ground. This was the only place where he showed distinct reverence. At the Castle, though he spoke of much death, he showed no sign of respect. There was evidently something about Diana's Grove which both interested and baffled him. Before leaving, he moved all over the place unsatisfied, and in one spot where, close to the edge of the Brow, was a deep hollow, he appeared to be afraid. After returning several times to this place, he suddenly turned and ran in a panic of fear to the higher ground, crossing as he did so the outcropping rock. Then he seemed to breathe more freely, and recovered some of his jaunty impudence.

All this seemed to satisfy Adam's expectations. He went back to Lesser Hill with a serene and settled calm upon him.

When he went back to the house, Adam met Sir Nathaniel, who followed him into his study, saying as he closed the door behind him:

"By the way, I forgot to ask you details about one thing. When that extraordinary staring episode of Mr. Caswall went on, how did Lilla take it — how did she bear herself?"

“She looked frightened, and trembled just as I have seen a pigeon with a hawk, or a bird with a serpent.”

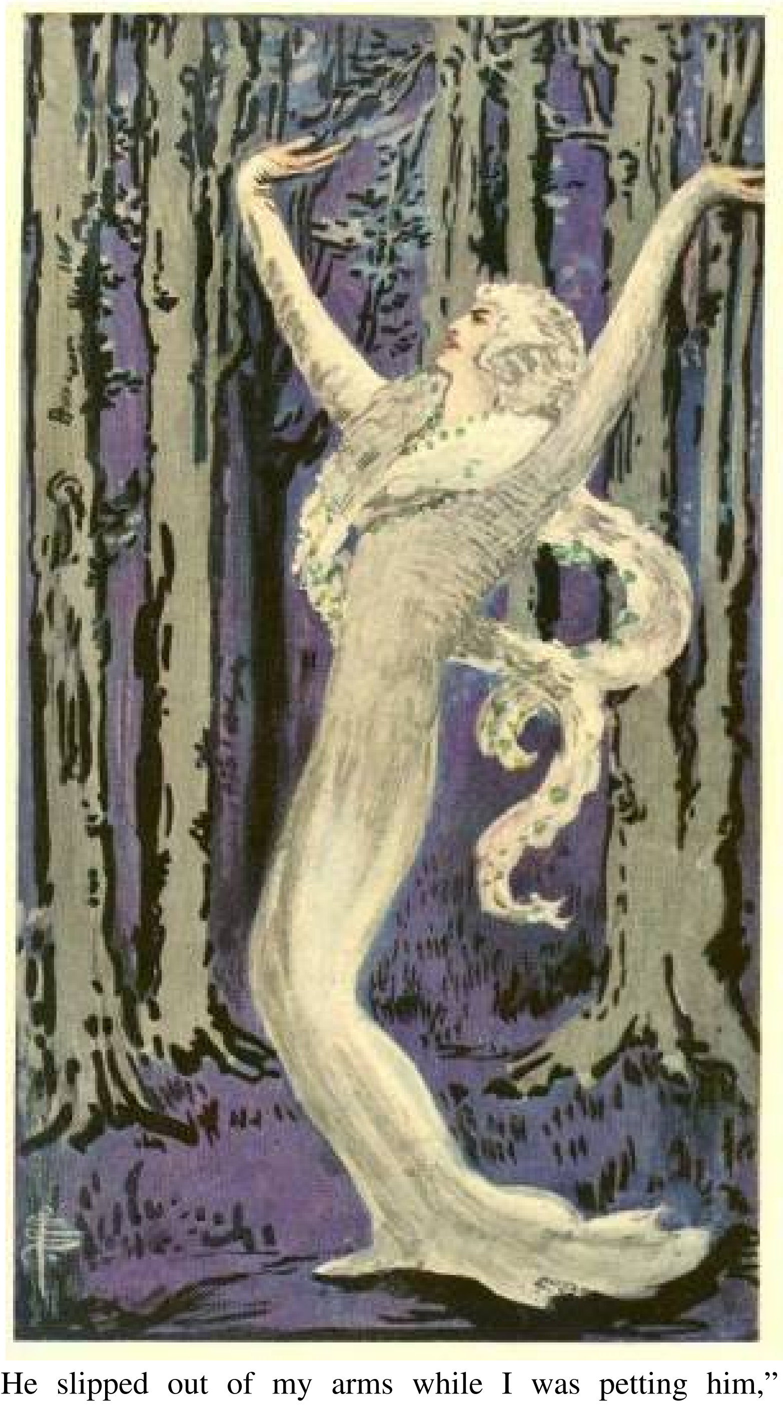
“Thanks. That will do. It is just as I expected. There have been circumstances in the Caswall family which lead one to believe that they have had from the earliest times some extraordinary mesmeric or hypnotic faculty. Indeed, a skilled eye could read so much in their physiognomy. That shot of yours, whether by instinct or intention, of the hawk and the pigeon was peculiarly apposite. I think we may settle on that as a fixed trait to be accepted throughout our investigation.”

When dusk had fallen, Adam took the new mongoose — not the one from Nepaul — and, carrying the box slung over his shoulder, strolled towards Diana’s Grove. Close to the gateway he met Lady Arabella, clad as usual in tightly fitting white, which showed off her extraordinarily slim figure.

To his intense astonishment the mongoose allowed her to pet him, take him up in her arms and fondle him. As she was coming in his direction he left him with her and walked on.

Round the roadway between the entrances of Diana’s Grove and Lesser Hill were many trees with tall thin trunks with not much foliage except at the top. In the dusk this place was shadowy, and the view of anyone was hampered by the clustering trunks. In the uncertain, tremulous light which fell through the tree-tops, it was hard to distinguish anything clearly, and as Adam looked back, it seemed to him that Lady Arabella was actually dancing in a fantastic sort of way. Her arms were opening and shutting and winding about strangely; the white fur which she wore round her throat was also twisting about, or seemed to be. Not a sound was to be heard. There was something uncanny in all this silent movement which struck

Adam as worthy of notice; so he waited, almost stopping his progress altogether, and walked with lingering steps, so as to let her overtake him. But as the dusk was thickening he could distinguish no more than he could at first. At last, somehow, he lost sight of her altogether, and turned back on his track to find her. Presently he came across her close to her own gate. She was leaning over the paling of split oak branches which formed the paling of the avenue. He could not see the mongoose, so he asked her where he had gone to.



“He slipped out of my arms while I was petting him,” she answered, “and disappeared under the hedges.”

As she spoke she was walking back with him looking for the little animal. They found him at a place where the avenue widened so as to let carriages pass each other. The little creature seemed quite changed. He had been ebulliently active; now he was dull and spiritless — seemed to be dazed. He allowed himself to be lifted by either of the pair; but when he was alone with Lady Arabella he kept looking round him in a strange way, as though trying to escape. When they had come out on the roadway Adam held the mongoose tight to him, and, lifting his hat to his companion, moved quickly towards Lesser Hill; he and Lady Arabella lost sight of each other in the thickening gloom.

When Adam got home, he put the mongoose in his box, which was left in the room where he had been, and locked the door. The other mongoose — the one from Nepaul — was safely locked in his own box, but he lay quiet and did not stir. When he got to his study Sir Nathaniel came in, shutting the door behind him.

“I have come,” he said, “while we have an opportunity of being alone, to tell you something of the Caswall family which I think will interest you. Somehow we got switched off when we were within touch of the subject this afternoon.”

Adam prepared himself to listen. The other began at once:

“The point I was coming to to-day, when we were diverted from the subject, was this: there is, or used to be, a belief in this part of the world that the Caswall family had some strange power of making the wills of other persons subservient to their own. There are many allusions to the subject in memoirs and other unimportant works, but I only know of one where the subject is spoken of definitely. It is *Mercia and its Worthies*, written by Ezra Toms more than a hundred years ago. The author more than infers that it was a mesmeric power, for he goes into the question of the close association of the then Edgar Caswall with Mesmer in Paris. He speaks of Caswall being a pupil and the fellow worker of Mesmer, and states that though, when the latter left France, he took away with him a vast quantity of philosophical and electric instruments, he was never known to use them again. He once made it known to a friend that he had given them to his old pupil. The term he used was odd, for it was 'bequeathed', but no such bequest of Mesmer was ever made known. At any rate the instruments were missing, and never turned up. I just thought I would call your attention to this, as you might want to make a note of it. We have not come, yet at all events, to the mystery of the 'hawk and the pigeon'."

Just as he finished speaking, a servant came into the room to tell Adam that there was some strange noise coming from the locked room into which he had gone when he came in. He hurried off to the place at once, Sir Nathaniel going with him. Having locked the door behind them, Adam opened the packing-case where the boxes of the two mongooses were locked up. There was no sound from one of them, but from the other a queer restless struggling. Having opened both boxes, he found that the noise was from the Nepaul animal, which, however, became quiet at once. In the other box the new mongoose lay dead, with every appearance of having been strangled.

There was nothing to be done that night. So Adam locked the boxes and the room again, taking with him the keys; and both he and Sir Nathaniel went off to bed.

CHAPTER XI

THE FIRST ENCOUNTER

ADAM SALTON WAS up with the dawn, and, taking a fast horse, rode off to Liverpool, bringing with him, slung across his shoulders, the box with the body of the mongoose. He was so early that he had to wake up Mr. Ross. From him he, however, got what he wanted, the address of a comparative anatomist, who helped him in dealing with the health of his menagerie. Dr. Cleaver lived not far away, and in a very short time Adam was ushered into his study. Unstrapping the box, he took out the body of the mongoose, now as stiff as wood, for the *rigor mortis* had long ago set in. Laying the body on Dr. Cleaver's table, he said:

"Last night this was frisky in my arms. Now it is dead. What did it die of?"

The doctor went methodically to work and made a full examination. Then he said gravely:

"It may be necessary to make a more exhaustive examination. But in the meantime, I may say that it has been choked to death. And, considering the nature of its uses and its enemies, I think it was killed by some powerful snake of the constrictor class. Vast pressure must have been exercised as every bone in its body seems to have been broken." As the doctor accompanied Adam to the door, he said: "Of course it is none of my business, but as I am a comparative anatomist, such things are of keen interest to me — I shall be really grateful if sometime you can possibly do so, supply me with weights and measures of both the animals."

Adam, on paying his fee, thanked him warmly, gave him his card, and promised that some time later on he would be happy to tell him all he himself knew. Then he rode back to Lesser Hill and got in just as his uncle and Sir Nathaniel were sitting down to breakfast.

When breakfast was over, Sir Nathaniel went with Adam to the study. When he had closed the door, and Adam had told him all up to the previous night, he looked at the young man with a grave, inquiring glance and said:

"Well?"

Adam told him all that occurred at his visit to Dr. Cleaver. He finished up with:

"I am at sea, sir. I am looking for your opinion."

"So am I for yours," said Sir Nathaniel. "This gets worse and worse. It seems to me that the mysteries are only beginning. We have now a detective story added. I suppose there is nothing to do but wait as we are doing for the other parts of the mystery."

"Do you want me specially for anything this afternoon?" asked Adam, adding, "Of course I am at your command if you do. If not, I thought of calling at Mercy Farm." He said this with a diffidence which made the old man's stern features relax.

"I suppose you would not wish me to come with you?" he asked playfully.

Adam at once replied:

"I should love it, sir; but to-day I think it would be better not." Then, seeing the other's inquiring look, he went on: "The fact is, sir, that Mr. Caswall is going to tea to-day, and I think it would be wiser if I were present."

"Quite so. Of course you will tell me later if there should take place anything which it would be well for me to know."

"Certainly. I shall try to see you as soon as I get home."

They said no more, and a little after four o'clock Adam set out for Mercy.

He was home just as the clocks were striking six. He was pale and upset, but otherwise looked strong and alert. The old man summed up his appearance and manner thus: "Braced up for battle." Realising that Adam wished to talk with him, he quietly went over and locked the door.

"Now!" said Sir Nathaniel, and settled down to listen, looking at Adam steadily and listening attentively that he might miss nothing — even the inflection of a word.

"I found Miss Watford and Mimi at home. Watford had been detained by business on the farm. Miss Watford received me as kindly as before. Mimi, too, seemed glad to see me. Mr. Caswall came so soon after I had arrived, that he or someone on his behalf must have been watching for me. He was followed closely by the Christy Minstrel, who was puffing hard as if he had been running — so it was probably he who watched. Mr. Caswall was very cool and collected, but there was a more than usually iron look about his face that I did not like. However, both he and I got on very well. He talked pleasantly on all sorts of questions. The Negro waited a while and then disappeared as on the other occasion. Mr. Caswall's eyes were, as usual, fixed on Lilla. True, they seemed to be very deep and earnest, but there was no offence in them. Had it not been for the drawing down of the brows and the stern set of the jaws, I should not at first have noticed anything. But the stare, when presently it began, increased in intensity. I could see that Lilla began to suffer from nervousness, as on the first occasion; but she carried herself bravely. However, the more nervous she grew, the harder Mr. Caswall stared. It was evident to me that he had come prepared for some sort of mesmeric or hypnotic battle. After a while he began to throw glances round him and then raised his hand, without letting either Lilla or Mimi see the action. It was evidently intended to give some sign to the Christy Minstrel, for he came, in his usual stealthy way, quietly in by the hall door, which was open. Then Mr. Caswall's efforts at staring became intensified, and poor Lilla's nervousness grew greater. Mimi, seeing that her cousin was distressed, came close to her, as if to comfort or strengthen her with the consciousness of her presence. This evidently made a difficulty for Mr. Caswall, for his efforts, without appearing to get feebler, seemed less effective. This continued for a little while, to the gain of both Lilla and Mimi. Then there was a diversion. Without word or apology the door opened, and Lady Arabella March entered the room. We had seen her coming through the great window. Without a word she crossed the room and stood beside Mr. Caswall. It really was very like a fight of a peculiar kind; and the longer it was sustained the more earnest — the fiercer — it grew. That combination of forces — the over-lord, the white woman, and the black man — would have cost some — probably all of them — their lives in the Southern States of America. To us all it was simply horrible. But all that you can understand. This time, to go on in sporting phrase, it was understood by all to be a 'fight to a finish', and the mixed group did not slacken a moment or relax their efforts. On Lilla the strain began to tell disastrously. She grew pale — a patchy pallor, which meant that her nerves were out of order. She trembled like an aspen, and though she struggled bravely, I noticed that her legs would hardly stiffen. A dozen times she seemed about to collapse in a faint, but each time, on catching sight of Mimi's eyes, she made a fresh struggle and pulled through.

"By now Mr. Caswall's face had lost its appearance of passivity.

No longer was it immobile. His eyes glowed with a red fiery light. He was still the old Roman in inflexibility of purpose; but grafted on to the Roman was a new Berserker fury. The statical force of his nature had entered on a new phase. It had become dynamical. His companions in the baleful work seemed to have taken on something of his feeling. Lady Arabella looked like a soulless, pitiless being, not human unless it revived old legends of transformed human beings who had lost their humanity in some transformation or in the sweep of natural savagery. As for the Christy Minstrel, the only comparison I can suggest was a fiend from hell, engaged in the active pursuit of his natural purpose. I think I have already given you my impression of his lofty natural beauty. That I take back, for then I only spoke of possibilities…Now that I have seen his devilry in full blast, such a belief is inadequate. I can only say, that it was solely due to the self-restraint which you impressed on me that I did not wipe him out as he stood — without warning, without fair play — without a single one of the graces of life and death. Lilla was silent in the helpless concentration of deadly fear; Mimi was all resolve and self-forgetfulness, so intent on the soul-struggle in which she was engaged that there was no possibility of any other thought. As for myself, the bonds of will which held me inactive seemed like bands of steel which numbed all my faculties, except sight and hearing. We seemed fixed in an *impasse*. Something must happen, though the power of guessing what was inactive. As in a dream, I saw Mimi's hand move restlessly, as if groping for something. It was like a hand grown blind. Mechanically it touched that of Lilla, and in that instant she was transformed. It was as if youth and strength entered afresh into something already dead to sensibility and intention. As if by inspiration, she grasped the other's hand with a force which blenched the knuckles. Her face suddenly flamed, as if some divine light shone through it. Her form rose and expanded till it stood out majestically. Lifting her right hand, she stepped forward towards Caswall, and with a bold sweep of her arm seemed to drive some strange force towards him. Again and again was the gesture repeated, the man falling back from her at each movement. Towards the door he retreated, she following. There was a sound as of the cooing sob of doves, which seemed to multiply and intensify with each second. The sound from the unseen source rose and rose as he retreated, till finally it swelled out in a triumphant peal, as she, with a fierce sweep of her arm, seemed to hurl something at her foe, and he, moving his hands blindly before his face, appeared to be swept through the doorway and out into the open sunlight. At the same moment as he went, the light of day became suddenly dimmed, as though a mighty shadow had swept over the face of the earth. The air was full of a fierce continuous sound as of whirring wings.

"All at once my own faculties were fully restored; I could see and hear everything, and be fully conscious of what was going on. Even the figures of the baleful group were there, though dimly seen as through a veil — a shadowy veil. I saw Lilla sink down in a swoon, and Mimi throw up her arms in a gesture of triumph. As I saw her through the great window, the sunshine flooded the landscape, which, however, was momentarily becoming eclipsed by an on-rush of a myriad birds."

"Hark to the rushing of their wings!"

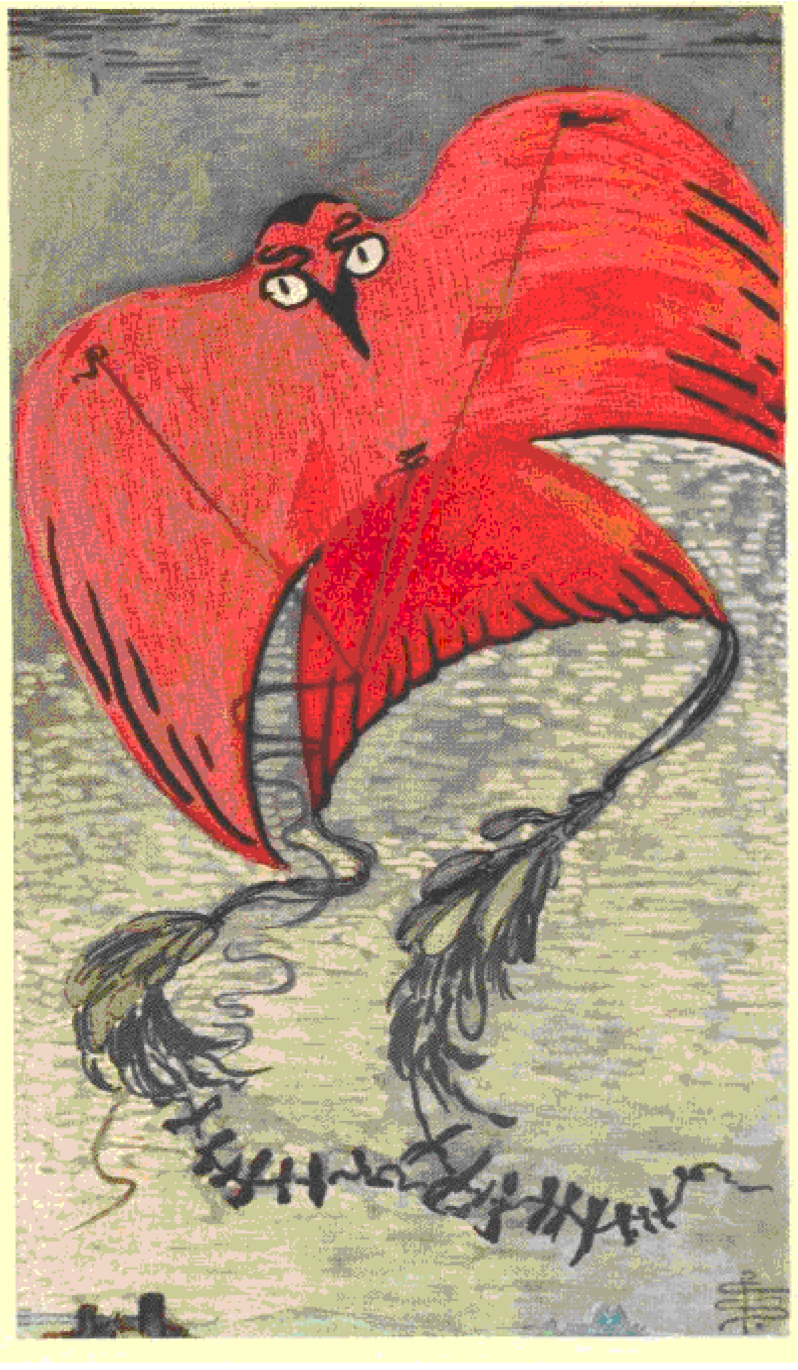
CHAPTER XII

THE KITE

BY THE NEXT morning, daylight showed the actual danger which threatened the east side of England. From every part of the eastern counties reports were received concerning the enormous immigration of birds. Experts were sending — on their own account, on behalf of learned societies, and through local and imperial governing bodies — reports dealing with the matter, and suggesting remedies. As might be expected, the latter were almost worthless. They were either disguised or undisguised advertisements with some personal object, or else merely the babble of persons desirous of notoriety on a quasi-scientific basis. The long-suffering public showed by its indifference to such reports forced upon them that they were not such fools as they were supposed to be. Of course the reports closer to home were more disturbing, even if more monotonous, for Castra Regis was the very centre of the trouble. All day long, and even all night long, it would seem that the birds were coming thicker from all quarters. Doubtless many were going as well as coming, but the mass seemed never to get less. Each bird seemed to sound some note of fear or anger or seeking, and the whirring of wings never ceased nor lessened. The air was full of a muttered throb. No window or barrier could shut out the sound, till the ears of any listener became partly paralysed by the ceaseless sound. So monotonous it was, so cheerless, so disheartening, so melancholy, that all longed, but in vain, for any variety, no matter how terrible it might be.

The second morning the reports from all the districts round were more alarming than ever. Farmers began to dread the coming of winter as they saw the dwindling of the timely fruitfulness of the earth. And as yet it was only a warning of evil, not the evil accomplished; the ground began to look bare whenever some passing sound temporarily frightened the birds.

Edgar Caswall tortured his brain for a long time unavailingly, to think of some means of getting rid of what he as well as his neighbours had come to regard as a plague of birds. At last he recalled a circumstance which promised a solution of the difficulty. The experience was of some years ago in China, far up-country, towards the head-waters of the Yang-tze-kiang, where the smaller tributaries spread out in a sort of natural irrigation scheme to supply the wilderness of paddy-fields. It was at the time of the ripening rice, and the myriads of birds which came to feed on the coming crop was a serious menace not only to the district, but to the country at large. The farmers, who were more or less afflicted with the same trouble every season, knew how to deal with it. They made a vast kite, which they caused to be flown over the centre spot of the incursion. The kite was shaped like a great hawk; and the moment it rose into the air the birds began to cower and seek protection and then to disappear. So long as that kite was flying overhead the birds lay low. The crop was saved. Accordingly, Caswall ordered his men to construct an immense kite, adhering as well as they could to the lines of a hawk. Then he and his men, with a sufficiency of string, began to fly it high overhead. The experience of China was repeated. The moment the kite rose, the birds hid or sought shelter. The following morning, the kite still flying high, no bird was to be seen as far as the eye could reach from Castra Regis. But there followed in turn what proved even a worse evil. All the birds were cowed; their sounds stopped. Neither song nor chirp was heard — silence seemed to have taken the place of the myriad voices of bird life. But that was not all. The silence spread to all animals.



The fear and restraint which brooded amongst the denizens of the air began to affect all life. Not only did the birds cease song or chirp, but the lowing of the cattle ceased in the fields and the myriad sounds of life died away. In the place of these things was only a soundless gloom, more dreadful, more disheartening, more soul-killing than any concourse of sounds, no matter how full of fear and dread. Pious individuals and bodies put up constant prayers for relief from the intolerable solitude. After a little there were signs of universal depression which who ran might read. One and all the faces of men and women seemed bereft of vitality, of interest, of thought, and, most of all, of hope. Men seemed to have lost the power of expression of their thoughts. The soundless air seemed to have the same effect as the universal darkness when men gnawed their tongues with pain.

From this infliction of silence there was no relief. Everything was affected; gloom was the predominant note. Joy appeared to have passed away as a factor of life, and this creative impulse had nothing to take its place. That giant spot in high air was a plague of evil influence. It seemed like a new misanthropic belief which had fallen on human beings, carrying with it the negation of all hope. After a few days, men began to grow desperate; their very words as well as their senses seemed to be in chains. Edgar Caswall again tortured his brain to find any antidote or palliative of this greater evil than before. He would gladly have destroyed the kite, or caused its flying to cease; but he dared not. The instant it was pulled down, the birds rose up in even greater numbers; all those who depended in any way on agriculture sent pitiful protests to Castra Regis.

It was strange indeed what influence that kite seemed to exercise. Even human beings were affected by it, as if both it and they were realities. As for the people at Mercy Farm, it was like a taste of actual death. Lilla felt it most. If she had been indeed a real dove, with a real kite hanging over her in the air, she could not have been more frightened or more affected by the fright this created.

Of course, some of those already drawn into the vortex noticed the effect on individuals. Those who were interested took care to compare their information. They felt that it might be of service later on. Strangely enough, as it seemed to the others, the person who took the ghastly silence least to heart was Oolanga. By nature he was not a man sensitive to, or afflicted by, nerves. This alone would not have produced the seeming indifference, so they set their minds to discover the real cause. Adam came quickly to the conclusion that there was for him some compensation that the others did not share; and he soon believed that that compensation was in one form or another enjoyment of the sufferings of others. Thus, he had a never-failing source of amusement. The birds alone seemed as if they would satisfy even him. He took delight in the oppression by the predatory birds of the others of their kind. And then, even of them he took the occasion to add to his collection of beaks. Lady Arabella's cold nature rendered her immune to anything in the way of pain or trouble to or of others. And Edgar Caswall was far too haughty a person, and too stern of nature, to concern himself about even poor or helpless people, much less the lower order of mere animals. Mr. Watford, Mr. Salton, and Sir Nathaniel were all concerned in the issue, partly from kindness of heart — for none of them could see suffering, even of wild birds, unmoved — and partly on account of their property, which had to be protected, or ruin would stare them in the face before long. Lilla suffered acutely. As time went on, her face became pinched, and her eyes dull with watching and crying. Mimi suffered too on account of her cousin's suffering. But as she could do nothing, she resolutely made up her mind to self-restraint and patience. The inhabitants of the district around took the matter with indifference. They had been freed from the noises and the silence did not trouble them. It is often so; people put a different and more lofty name on their own purposes. For instance, these people probably considered their own view founded on common weal, whereas it was merely indifference founded on selfishness.

CHAPTER XIII

MESMER'S CHEST

AFTER A COUPLE of weeks had passed, the kite seemed to give Edgar Caswall a new zest for life. It appeared to have a satisfying influence on him. He was never tired of looking at its movements. He had a comfortable armchair put out on the tower, wherein he sat sometimes all day long, watching as though the kite was a new toy and he a child lately come into possession of it. He did not seem to have lost interest in Lilla, for he still paid an occasional visit at Mercy Farm.

Indeed, his feeling towards her, whatever it had been at first, had now so far changed that it had become a distinct affection of a purely animal kind. In the change of the kind of affection, the peculiarly impersonal, philosophic, almost platonic, had shed all the finer qualities that had belonged to it. Indeed, it seemed as though the man's nature had become corrupted, and that all the baser and more selfish and more reckless qualities had become more conspicuous. There was not so much sternness apparent in his nature, because there was less self-restraint. Determination had become indifference. Sensitiveness, such as had been, became callousness. Altogether, there did not seem to be in his nature the same singleness of purpose, either in kind or degree. Strangely, as he unconsciously yielded to his demoralising process, he seemed to be achieving a new likeness to Oolanga. Sometimes as Adam — ever on the watch — noticed to growing change, he began to wonder whether the body was answering to the mind or the mind to the body. Accordingly, it was a never-ending thought to him which momentum — the physical or the moral — was antecedent. The thing which puzzled him most was, that the forbidding qualities in the African, which had at first evoked his attention and his disgust, remained the same. Had it been that the two men had been affected, one changing with the other by slow degrees — a sort of moral metabolism, — he could have better and more easily understood it. Transmutation of different bodies is, in a way, more understandable than changes in one body that have no equivalent equipoise in the other. The idea was recurrent to him that perhaps when a nature has reached its lowest point of decadence it loses the faculty of change of any kind. However it was, the fact remained. Oolanga preserved all his original brutal decadence, while Caswall slowly deteriorated without any hint of resilience.

The visible change in Edgar was that he grew morbid, sad, silent; the neighbours thought he was mad. He became absorbed in the kite, and watched it not only by day, but often all night long. It became an obsession to him.

Adam kept his eyes and ears open and his mouth shut. He felt that he was learning. And, indeed, he was not mistaken when he acted as if silence was a virtue. He took a certain amount of interest — pleasure would be too smooth a word — in the generally expressed opinions of the neighbours of Castra Regis. It was commonly held regarding Caswall that he was mad. He took a personal interest in the keeping of the great kite flying. He had a vast coil of string efficient for the purpose, which worked on a roller fixed on the parapet of the tower. There was a winch for the pulling in of the slack of the string; the outgoing line being controlled by a racket. There was invariably one man at least, day and night, on the tower to attend to it. At such an elevation there was always a strong wind, and at times the kite rose to an enormous height, as well as travelling for great distances laterally. In fact, the kite became, in a short time, one of the curiosities of Castra Regis and all around it. Edgar began to attribute to it, in his own mind, almost human qualities. It became to him a separate entity, with a mind and a soul of its own. Being idle-handed all day, he began to apply to what he considered the service of the kite some of his spare time, and found a new pleasure — a new object in life — in the old schoolboy game of sending up “runners” to the kite. The way this is done is to get round pieces of paper so cut that there is a hole in the centre, through which the string of the kite passes. The natural action of the wind-pressure takes the paper thus cut along the string, and so up to the kite itself, no matter how high or how far it may have gone. In the early days of this amusement Edgar Caswall spent hours. Hundreds of such messengers flew along the string, until soon he bethought him of writing messages on these papers so that he could make known his ideas to the kite. It may be that his brain gave way under the opportunities given by his foregone illusion of the entity of the toy and its power of separate thought. From sending messages he came to making direct speech to the kite — without, however, ceasing to send the runners. Doubtless, the height of the tower, seated as it was on the hill-top, the rushing of the ceaseless wind, the hypnotic effect of the lofty altitude of the speck in the sky at which he gazed, and the rushing of the paper messengers up the string till sight of them was lost in distance, all helped to further affect his brain, undoubtedly giving way under the strain of concatenation of beliefs and circumstances which were at once stimulating to the imagination, occupative of his mind, and absorbing.

The next step of intellectual decline was to bring to bear on the main idea of the conscious identity of the kite all sorts of subjects which had imaginative force or tendency of their own. He had, in Castra Regis, a large collection of curious and interesting things formed in the past by his forebears, of similar likes to his own. There were all sorts of strange anthropological specimens, both old and new, which had been collected through various travels in strange places: ancient Egyptian relics from tombs, and mummies; curios from Australia, New Zealand, and the South Seas; idols and images — from Tartar ikons to ancient Egyptian, Persian, and Indian objects of worship; objects of death and torture of American Indians; and, above all, a vast collection of lethal weapons of every kind and from every place — Chinese "high pinders," double knives, Afghan double-edged scimitars made to cut a body in two, heavy knives from all the Eastern countries, ghost daggers from Thibet, the terrible kukri of the Ghourka and other hill tribes of India, assassins' weapons from Italy and Spain, even the knife which was formerly carried by the slave-drivers of the Mississippi region. Death and pain of every kind were fully represented in that gruesome collection. That it had a fascination for Oolanga goes without saying. He was never tired of visiting the museum in the tower, and spent endless hours in inspecting the exhibits, till he was thoroughly familiar with every detail of all of them. He asked permission to clean and polish and sharpen them — a favour which was readily granted. In addition to the above objects, there were many things of a kind to awaken human fear. Stuffed serpents of the most objectionable and horrid kind; giant insects from the tropics, fearsome in every detail; fishes and crustaceans covered with weird spikes; dried octopuses of great size. Other things, too, there were not less deadly though seemingly innocuous — dried fungi, the touch of which was death and whose poison was carried on the air; also traps intended for birds, beasts, fishes, reptiles, and insects; machines which could produce pain of any kind and degree, and the only mercy of which was the power of producing speedy death. Caswall, who had never seen any of these things, except those which he had collected himself, found a constant amusement and interest in them. He studied them, their uses, their mechanism — where there was such, — and their places of origin, until he had an ample and real knowledge of all belonging to them. Many were secret and intricate, but he never rested till he found out all the secrets. When once he had become interested in strange objects and the way to use them, he began to explore various likely places for similar finds. He began to inquire of his household where strange lumber was kept. Several of the men spoke of old Simon Chester as one who knew everything in and about the house. Accordingly, he sent for the old man, who came at once. He was very old, nearly ninety years of age, and very infirm. He had been born in the Castle, and served its succession of masters — present or absent — ever since. When Edgar began to question him on the subject regarding which he had sent for him, old Simon exhibited much perturbation. In fact, he became so frightened that his master, fully believing that he was concealing something, ordered him to tell at once what remained unseen, and where such was hidden away. Face to face with discovery of his secret, the old man, in a pitiable state of concern, spoke out even more fully than Mr. Caswall had expected:

“Indeed, indeed, sir, everything is here in the tower that has ever been imported or put away in my time — except — except” — here he began to shake and tremble— “except the chest which Mr. Edgar — he who was Mr. Edgar when I first took service — brought back from France, after he had been with Dr. Mesmer. The trunk has been kept in my room for safety; but I shall send it down here now."

"What is in it?" asked Edgar sharply.

"That I do not know. Moreover, it is a peculiar trunk, without any visible means of opening it."

"Is there no lock?"

"I suppose so, sir; but I do not know. There is no keyhole."

"Send it here; and then come to me yourself."

The trunk, a heavy one with steel bands round it, but no lock or keyhole, was carried in by four men. Shortly afterwards old Simon attended his master. When he came into the room, Mr. Caswall himself went and closed the door; then he asked:

"How do you open it?"

"I do not know, sir."

"Do you mean to say you never opened it?"

With considerable and pathetic dignity, the old man answered:

"Most certainly I do say so, your honour. How could I? It was entrusted to me with the other things by my master. To open it would have been a breach of trust."

Caswall sneered as he said:

"Quite remarkable! Leave it with me. Close the door behind you. Stay — did no one ever tell you about it — say anything regarding it — make any remark?"

Old Simon turned pale, and put his trembling hands together as though imploring:

"Oh, sir, I entreat you not to touch it. That probably contains secrets which Dr. Mesmer told my master. Told them to his ruin!"

"How do you mean? What ruin?"

"Sir, he it was who, men said, sold his soul to the Evil One; I had thought that that time and the evil of it had all passed away."

“That will do. Go away; but remain in your own room, or within call. I may want you.”

The old man bowed deeply and went out trembling, but without speaking a word.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CHEST OPENED

LEFT ALONE IN the turret-room, Edgar Caswall carefully locked the door and hung a handkerchief over the keyhole. Next, he inspected the windows, and saw that they were not overlooked from any angle of the main building. Then he carefully examined the trunk, going over it with a magnifying glass. He found it intact: the steel bands were flawless; the whole trunk was compact into unity. After sitting opposite to it for some time, and the shades of evening beginning to melt into darkness, he gave up the task and took himself to his bedroom, after locking the door of the turret-room behind him and taking away the key.

He woke in the morning at daylight, and resumed his patient but unavailing study of the metal trunk. This he continued during the whole day with the same result — humiliating disappointment which overwrought his nerves and made his head ache. The result of the long strain was seen later in the afternoon, when he sat locked within the turret-room before the still baffling trunk, distrait, listless and yet agitated, sunk in a settled gloom. As the dusk was falling he told the steward to send him four men, strong ones. These he told to take the trunk to his bedroom. In that room he then sat on into the night, without pausing even to take any food. His mind was in a whirl, a fever of excitement. The result was that when late in the night he locked himself in his room his brain was full of odd fancies; he was on the high road to mental disturbance. He lay down on his bed in the dark, still brooding over the mystery of the closed trunk.

Gradually he yielded to the influences of silence and darkness.

After lying there quietly for some time his mind became active again. But this time there were round him no disturbing influences; his brain was active and able to work freely and to deal with memory. A thousand forgotten — or only half-known — incidents, fragments of conversations or theories long ago guessed at and long forgotten, crowded in on his mind. He seemed to hear again around him the legions of whirring wings to which he had been so lately accustomed. Even to himself he knew that that was an effort of imagination founded on imperfect memory. But he was content that imagination should work, for out of it might come some solution of the mystery which surrounded him. And in this frame of mind, sleep made another and more successful essay. This time he enjoyed peaceful slumber, restful alike to his wearied body and his overwrought brain.

In his sleep in the darkness he arose, and, as if in obedience to some influence beyond and greater than himself, lifted the great trunk and set it on a strong table at one side of the room, from which he had previously removed a quantity of books. To do this, he had to use an amount of strength which was, he knew, far beyond him in his normal state. As it was, it seemed easy enough; everything yielded before his touch. Then he became conscious that somehow — how, he never could remember — the chest was open. Again another wonder. He unlocked his door, and taking the chest on his shoulder, carried it up to the turret-room, the door of which also he unlocked. Even at the time he was amazed at his own strength, and wondered unavailingly whence it had come. His mind, lost in conjecture, was too far off to realise more immediate things. He knew that the chest was enormously heavy. He seemed, in a sort of vision which lit up the absolute blackness around, to see the four sturdy servant men staggering under its great weight. He locked himself again in the turret-room, and laid the opened chest on a table, and in the darkness began to carefully unpack it, laying out the contents, which were mainly of metal and glass — great pieces in strange forms, — on another table. He was conscious of being still asleep, and of acting rather in obedience to some unseen and unknown command than in accordance with any reasonable plan to be followed by results which he understood and was aiming at. This phase completed, he proceeded to arrange in order the component parts of some large instruments, formed mostly of glass. His fingers seemed to have acquired a new and exquisite subtlety and even a volition of their own. Then he brought some force to bear — how or where, he knew not, — and soon the room was filled with the whirr of machinery moving at great speed. Through the darkness, in its vicinity, came irregularly quick intermittent flashes of dazzling light. All else was still. Then weariness of brain came upon him; his head sank down on his breast, and little by little everything became wrapped in gloom.

He awoke in the early morning in his bedroom, and looked around him, now clear-headed, in amazement. In its usual place on the strong table stood the great steel-hooped chest without lock or key. But it was now locked. He arose quietly and stole to the turret-room. There everything was as it had been on the previous evening. He looked out of the window where high in air flew, as usual, the giant kite. He unlocked the wicket gate of the turret stair and went out on the roof. Close to him was the great coil of string on its reel. It was humming in the morning breeze, and when he touched the string it sent a quick thrill through hand and arm. There was no sign anywhere that there had been any disturbance or displacement of anything during the night.

Utterly bewildered, he sat down in his room to think. Now for the first time he *felt* that he was asleep and dreaming. Presently he fell asleep again, and slept for a long time. He awoke hungry and made a hearty meal. Then towards evening, having locked himself in, he fell asleep again. When he woke he was in darkness, and was quite at sea as to his whereabouts. He began feeling about the dark room, and was recalled to the consequences of his position by the breaking of a large piece of glass. This he, having obtained a light, discovered to be a glass wheel, part of an elaborate piece of mechanism which he must have in his sleep taken from the chest, which was opened. He had once again opened it whilst asleep, but he had no sort of recollection of the circumstances. He came to the conclusion that there had been some sort of dual action of his mind which might lead to some catastrophe or some discovery of his secret plans; so he resolved to forgo for a while the pleasure of making discoveries regarding the chest. To this end, he applied himself to quite another matter — an investigation of the other treasures and rare objects in his collections. He went amongst them in simple, idle curiosity, his main object being to discover some strange item which he might use for experiment with the kite. He had already resolved to try some runners other than those made of paper. He had a vague idea that with such a force as the great kite straining at its leash, this might be used to lift to the altitude of the kite itself heavier articles. His first experiment with articles of little but increasing weight was eminently successful. So he added by degrees more and more weight, until he found out that the lifting power of the kite was considerable. He then determined to take a step still further, and to use for sending to the kite some of the articles which lay in the steel-hooped chest. The last time he had opened it in sleep it had not been shut again, so he had inserted a wedge so that he could open it at will. He made examination of the contents, but came to the conclusion that the glass objects were unsuitable. They were too light for testing weight, and they were so frail as to be dangerous to send to such a height. So he looked around for something more solid with which to experiment. His eye caught sight of an object which at once attracted him. This was a small copy of one of the ancient Egyptian gods — that of Bes, who represented the destructive power of nature. It was so bizarre and mysterious as to commend itself to his humour. In lifting it from the cabinet, he was struck by its great weight in proportion to its size. He made accurate examination of it by the aid of some philosophical instruments, and came to the conclusion that it was carved from a lump of lodestone. He remembered that he had read somewhere of an ancient Egyptian god cut from a similar substance, and, thinking it over, he came to the conclusion that he must have read it in Sir Thomas Brown's *Popular Errors*, a book of the seventeenth century. He got the book from the library, and looked out the passage:

"A great example we have from the observation of our learned friend Mr. *Graves*, in an Ægyptian idol cut out of Loadstone and found among the *Mummies*; which still retains its attraction, though probably taken out of the mine about two thousand years ago."

— Book II., Chap. VII.

The strangeness of the figure, and its being so close akin to his own nature, attracted him. He made from thin wood a large circular runner and in front of it placed the weighty god, and sent it up to the flying kite along the throbbing string.

CHAPTER XV

OOLANGA'S HALLUCINATIONS

DURING THE LAST few days Lady Arabella had been getting exceedingly impatient. Her debts, always pressing, were growing to an embarrassing amount. The only hope she had of comfort in life was a good marriage; but the good marriage on which she had fixed her eye did not seem to move quickly enough — indeed, it did not seem to move at all — in the right direction. Edgar Caswall was not an ardent wooer. From the very first he seemed *difficile*, but he had been keeping to his own room ever since his struggle with Mimi Watford. On that occasion Lady Arabella had shown him in an unmistakable way what her feelings were; indeed, she had made it known to him, in a more overt way than pride should allow, that she wished to help and support him. The moment when she had gone across the room to stand beside him in his mesmeric struggle, had been the very limit of her voluntary action. It was quite bitter enough, she felt, that he did not come to her, but now that she had made that advance, she felt that any withdrawal on his part would, to a woman of her class, be nothing less than a flaming insult. Had she not classed herself with his negro servant, an unreformed savage? Had she not shown her preference for him at the festival of his home-coming? Had she not…Lady Arabella was cold-blooded, and she was prepared to go through all that might be necessary of indifference and even insult to become chatelaine of Castra Regis. In the meantime, she would show no hurry — she must wait. She would even, in an unostentatious way, come to him again. She knew him now, and could make a keen guess at his desires with regard to Lilla

Watford. With that secret in her possession, she could bring pressure to bear on him which would make it no easy matter for him to evade her. The great difficulty she had was how to get near him. He was shut up within his Castle, and guarded by a defence of convention which she could not pass without danger of ill repute to herself. Over this question she thought and thought for days and nights. At last she thought she had a way of getting at him. She would go to him openly at Castra Regis. Her individual rank and position would make such a thing possible if carefully done. She could explain matters afterwards if necessary. Then when they were alone — as she would manage — she would use her arts and her experience to make him commit himself. After all, he was only a man, with a man's dislike of difficult or awkward situations. She felt quite sufficient confidence in her own womanhood to carry her through any difficulty which might arise. From Diana's Grove she heard each day the luncheon-gong from Castra Regis sound, and knew the hour when the servants would be in the back of the house. She would enter the house at that hour, and, pretending that she could not make anyone hear her, would seek him in his own rooms. The tower was, she knew, away from all the usual sounds of the house, and moreover she knew that the servants had strict orders not to interrupt him when he was in the turret chamber. She had found out, partly by the aid of an opera-glass and partly by judicious questioning, that several times lately a heavy chest had been carried to and from his room, and that it rested in the room each night. She was, therefore, confident that he had some important work on hand which would keep him busy for long spells. And so she was satisfied that all was going well with her — that her designs were ripening.

Synchronously, another member of the household at Castra Regis had got ideas which he thought were working to fruition. A man in the position of a servant has plenty of opportunity of watching his betters and forming opinions regarding them. Oolanga, now living at the Castle, was in his way a clever, unscrupulous man, and he felt that with things moving round him in this great household there should be opportunities of self-advancement. Being unscrupulous and stealthy — and a savage — he looked to dishonest means. He saw plainly enough that Lady Arabella was making a dead set at his master, and he was watchful of the slightest sign of anything which might materialise this knowledge. Like the other men in the house, he knew of the carrying to and fro of the great chest, and had got it into his head that the care exercised in its porterage indicated that it was full of great treasure. He was for ever lurking around the turret-rooms on the chance of making some useful discovery. But he was as cautious as he was stealthy, and took care that no one else watched him. It was thus that he became aware of Lady Arabella's venture into the house, as she thought, unseen. He took more care than ever, since he was watching another, that the positions were not reversed. More than ever he kept his eyes and ears open and his mouth shut. Seeing Lady Arabella gliding up the stairs towards his master's room, he took it for granted that she was there for no good, and doubled his watching intentness and caution. She knew that sudden surprise occasions sudden sound, and that by this, in turn, others who were listeners would almost of necessity betray themselves. Oolanga was disappointed, but he dared not exhibit any feeling on the subject lest it should betray that he was hiding. Therefore he slunk downstairs again noiselessly, and waited for a more favourable opportunity of furthering his plans. It must be borne in mind that he thought that the heavy trunk was full of valuables, and that he believed that Lady Arabella had come to try to steal it. His purpose of using for his own advantage the combination of these two ideas was seen later in the day. When, after some time, Lady Arabella had given up the idea of seeing Caswall that afternoon, she moved quietly out of the Castle, taking care not to be noticed either within the house or outside it. Oolanga secretly followed her. He was an expert at this game, and succeeded admirably on this occasion. He watched her enter the private gate of Diana's Grove and then, taking a roundabout course and keeping altogether out of her sight, by following her at last overtook her in a thick part of the Grove where no one could see the meeting. Lady Arabella was at the moment much surprised. She had not seen him for several days, and had almost forgotten his existence. Oolanga would have been startled had he known and been capable of understanding the real value placed on him, his beauty, his worthiness, by other persons, and compared it with the value in these matters in which he held himself. But in some cases, if ignorance be bliss, bliss has a dynamic quality which later leads to destruction. Doubtless Oolanga had his dreams like other men. In such cases he doubtless saw himself — or would have done had he the knowledge with which to make the comparison — as a young sun-god, as beautiful as the eye of dusky or even white womanhood had ever dwelt upon. He would have been filled with all noble and captivating qualities regarded as such in West Africa. Women would have loved him, and would have told him so in the overt and fervid manner usual in the shadowy depths of the forest of the Gold Coast. After all, etiquette is a valuable factor in the higher circles of even Africa in reducing chaos to social order and in avoiding mistakes properly ending in lethal violence. Had he known of such an educational influence, the ambitious Oolanga might have regretted its absence from his curriculum. But as it was, intent on his own ends, he went on in blind ignorance of offence. He came close behind Lady Arabella, and in a hushed voice suitable to the importance of his task, and in deference to the respect he had for her and the place, began to unfold the story of his love. Lady Arabella was not usually a humorous person, but no man or woman born could have checked the laughter which rose spontaneously to her lips. The circumstances were too grotesque, the contrast too violent, for even subdued mirth. The man a servant, and of an ugliness which was simply devilish; the woman of high degree, beautiful, accomplished. She thought that her first moment's consideration of the outrage — it was nothing less in her eyes — had given her the full material for thought. But every instant after threw new and varied lights on the affront. Her indignation was too great for passion: only irony or satire would meet the situation. And so her temper was able to stand the test. Calmed by a few moments of irony, she found voice. Her cold, cruel nature helped, and she did not shrink to subject this ignorant savage to the merciless fire-lash of her scorn. Oolanga was dimly conscious, at most, that he was being flouted in a way he least understood; but his anger was no less keen because of the measure of his ignorance. So he gave way to it as does a tortured beast. He ground his great teeth together, he raved, he stamped, he swore in barbarous tongues and with barbarous imagery. Even Lady Arabella felt that it was well she was within reach of help, or he might have offered her brutal violence — even have killed her.

"Am I to understand," she said with cold disdain, so much more effective to wound than hot passion, "that you are offering me your love? *Your* — love?"

For reply he nodded his head. The scorn of her voice, in a sort of baleful hiss sounded — and felt — like the lash of a whip.

Then she continued, her passion rising as she spoke:

“And you dared! you — a savage — a slave — the basest thing in the world of vermin! Take care! I don’t value your worthless life more than I do that of a rat or a spider. Don’t let me ever see your hideous face here again, or I shall rid the earth of you. Have you anything to say for yourself why I should not kill you?”

As she was speaking, she had taken out her revolver and was pointing it at him. In the immediate presence of death his impudence forsook him, and he made a weak effort to justify himself. His speech was short, consisting of single words. To Lady Arabella it sounded mere gibberish, but it was in his own dialect, and meant love, marriage, wife. From the intonation of the words, she guessed, with her woman’s quick intuition, at their meaning; but she quite failed to follow when, becoming more pressing, he continued to urge his suit in a mixture of the grossest animal passion and ridiculous threats. In the latter he said that he knew she had tried to steal his master’s treasure, and that he had caught her in the act. So if she would be his he would share the treasure with her, and they could live in luxury in the African forests. But if she refused, he would tell his master, who would flog and torture her and then give her to the police, who would kill her.

Altogether it was a fine mixture of opposing base projects, just such as a savage like him might be expected to evolve out of his passions.

CHAPTER XVI

BATTLE RENEWED

THE CONSEQUENCES OF that meeting in the dusk of Diana's Grove were acute and far-reaching, and not only to the two engaged in it. Oolanga left the Grove with an absorbing hatred in his heart. His lust and greed were afire, and his vanity had been wounded to the core. Lady Arabella's icy nature was not so deeply stirred, though she too was in a seething passion. More than ever was she set upon bringing Edgar Caswall to her feet. The obstacles she had encountered, the insults she had endured, were only as fuel to the purpose of revenge which consumed her.

As she sought her own rooms in Diana's Grove, she went over the whole subject again and again, always finding in the face of Lilla Watford as a key to a problem which puzzled her — the problem of a way to turn Caswall's powers — his very existence — to aid her purpose.

When in her boudoir, she wrote a note, taking so much trouble over it that she wrote, destroyed, and rewrote, till her dainty waste-basket was half-full of torn sheets of notepaper. When quite satisfied, she copied out the last sheet afresh, and then carefully burned all the spoiled fragments. She put the copied note in an emblazoned envelope, and directed it to Edgar Caswall at Castra Regis. This she sent off by one of her grooms. The letter ran:

DEAR MR. CASWALL, — I want to have a little chat with you on a subject in which I believe you are interested. Will you kindly call for me to-day after lunch — say at three or four o'clock, and we can walk a little way together. Only as far as Mercy Farm, where I want to see Lilla and Mimi Watford. We can take a cup of tea at the Farm. Do not bring your African servant with you, as I am afraid his face frightens the girls. After all, he is not pretty, is he? I have an idea you will be pleased with your visit this time. — Yours sincerely,

ARABELLA MARCH

At half-past three Edgar Caswall called at Diana's Grove. Lady Arabella met him on the roadway outside the gate. She wished to take the servants into confidence as little as possible. She turned when she saw him coming, and walked beside him towards Mercy Farm, keeping step with him as they walked. When they got near Mercy, she turned and looked around her, expecting to see Oolanga or some sign of him. He was, however, not visible. He had received from his master peremptory orders to keep out of sight — an order for which the African scored a new offence up against her. They found Lilla and Mimi at home and seemingly glad to see them, though both the girls were surprised at the visit coming so soon after the other.

The proceedings were a simple repetition of the battle of souls of the former visit. On this occasion, however, Edgar Caswall seemed as if defeated, even before the strife began. This was the more strange, as on this occasion he had only the presence of Lady Arabella to support him — Oolanga being absent. Moreover, Mimi lacked on the present occasion the support of Adam Salton, which had been of such effective service before. This time the struggle for supremacy of will was longer and more determined. Caswall felt that if on this occasion he could not achieve supremacy, he had better give up the idea of trying to settle at Castra Regis, and so all his pride was enlisted against Mimi. When they had been waiting for the door to be opened, Lady Arabella, believing in a sudden attack, had said to him in a low, stern, voice, which somehow carried conviction:

"This time you should win. She is, after all, only a woman. Show her no mercy. That is weakness. Fight her, beat her, trample on her, kill her if need be. She stands in your way, and I hate her. Never take your eyes off her. Never mind Lilla — she is afraid of you. You are already her master. The other, Mimi, will try to make you look at her cousin. Do not. There lies defeat. Let nothing — no, not death itself, no matter of whom — take your attention from Mimi, and you will win. If she is overcoming you, take my hand and hold it hard whilst you are looking into her eyes. If she is too strong for you, I shall interfere. I shall make a diversion, and under the shade of it you must retire unbeaten, even if not victorious. Hush! Silence! they are coming. Be resolute and still."

The two girls came to the door together. They had been fixing up an Æolian harp which Adam had given Mimi. At the open door they listened for a few moments. Strange sounds were coming up over the Brow from the east. It was the rustling and crackling of the dry reeds and rushes from the low lands on the hither side of the Eastern Sea. The season had been an unusually dry one. Also the sound came from another cause: the strong east wind was helping forward enormous flocks of birds, most of them pigeons with white cowls. Not only were their wings whirring, but their cooing was plainly audible. From such a multitude of birds the mass of sound, individually small, assumed the volume of a storm. Surprised at the influx of birds, to which they had been strangers so long, they all looked towards Castra Regis, from whose high tower the great kite had been flying as usual. But even as they looked, the string broke, and the great kite fell headlong in a series of sweeping dives. Its own weight, and the aerial force opposed to it which caused it to rise, combined with the strong easterly breeze, had been too much for the great length of cord holding it.

Somehow, the mishap to the kite gave new hope to Mimi. It was as though the side issues had been shorn away, so that the main struggle was thenceforth on simpler lines. She had a feeling in her heart as though some religious chord had been newly touched. It may, of course, have been that with the renewal of the bird voices a fresh courage, a fresh belief in the good issue of the struggle came too. It may also have been that the unaccustomed sounds of the Æolian harp woke fresh trains of thought. In the misery of silence, from which they had all for so long suffered, any new train of thought was almost bound to be a boon. As the inrush of birds continued, their wings beating against the crackling rushes, Lady Arabella suddenly grew pale, and almost fainted. With strained ears she listened, and suddenly asked:

"What is that?"

To Mimi, bred in Siam, the sound was strangely like an exaggeration of the sound produced by a snake-charmer. It was doubtless the union of the crackling from the rushes and the weird sound of the harp; but no one asked explanation, and none offered it.

Edgar Caswall was the first to recover from the interruption of the falling kite. After a few minutes he seemed to have quite recovered his *sang froid*, and was able to use his brains to the end which he had in view. Mimi too quickly recovered herself, but from a different cause. With her it was a deep religious conviction that the struggle round her was of the powers of Good and Evil, and that Good was triumphing. The very appearance of the snowy birds, with the cowls of Saint Columba, heightened the impression. With this conviction strong upon her, it is hardly to be wondered at that she continued the strange battle with fresh vigour. She seemed to tower over Caswall, and he to give back before her oncoming. Once again her vigorous passes drove him to the door. He was just going out backward when Lady Arabella, who had been gazing at him with fixed eyes, caught his hand and tried to stop his retrograde movement. She was, however, unable to stop him, and so holding hands they passed out together. As they did so, the strange music which had so alarmed Lady Arabella suddenly stopped. Instinctively they all looked toward the tower of Castra Regis, and saw that the workmen had refixed the kite, which had risen again and was beginning to float out to its former station.

As they were looking, the door opened and Michael Watford came into the room. By that time all had recovered their self-possession, and there was nothing out of the common to attract his attention. As he came in, seeing inquiring looks all around him, he said:

“A telegram has come from the Agricultural Department. The new influx of birds is only the annual migration of pigeons from Africa. They say it will soon be over.”

CHAPTER XVII

THE SHUTTING OF THE DOOR

THE SECOND VICTORY of Mimi Watford made Edgar Caswall more moody than ever. He felt thrown back on himself, and this, superadded to his absorbing interest in the hope of a victory of his will, was now a deep and settled purpose of revenge. The chief object of his animosity was, of course, Mimi, whose will had overcome his, but it was obscured in greater or lesser degree by all who had opposed him. Lilla was next to Mimi in his hate — Lilla, the harmless, tender-hearted, sweet-natured girl, whose heart was so full of love for all things that in it was no room for the passions of ordinary life — whose nature resembled those doves of St. Columba, whose colour she wore, whose appearance she reflected. Adam Salton came next — after a gap; for against him Caswall had no direct animosity. He regarded him as an interference, a difficulty in the way to be got rid of or destroyed. The young Australian had been so discreet that the most he had against him was his knowledge of what had been. Caswall did not understand him, and to such a nature as his, ignorance was a cause of alarm, of dread. He resumed his habit of watching the great kite straining at its cord, varying his vigils in this way by a further examination of the mysterious treasures of his house, especially Mesmer's chest. He sat much on the roof of the tower, brooding over all his thwarted passion. The vast extent of his possessions visible to him at that altitude might, one would have thought, have restored some of his complacency. But not so; the very extent of his ownership thus perpetually brought before him made a fresh sense of grievance. How was it, he thought, that with so much at command that others wished for, he could not achieve the dearest wishes of his heart? It was the very cry of fallible humanity, which, because it yearns for something as yet unattainable, looks on disappointment to his wishes as a personal and malicious wrong done to himself by the powers that be. In this state of intellectual and moral depravity, he found a solace in the renewal of his experiments with the mechanical powers of the kite. This study helped to take him out of himself, to bring his esoteric woes in exoteric thought, even in his bafflements had an element of comfort, though a melancholy one. For quite a couple of weeks he did not see Lady Arabella, who was always on the watch for a chance of meeting him; neither did he see the Watford girls, who studiously kept out of his way. Adam Salton simply marked time, keeping himself ready to deal with anything at his hands that might affect his friends. He heard from Mimi of the last battle of wills, but it had only one consequence of one kind. He got from Ross several more mongooses, including a second king-cobra killer, which he generally carried with him in its box whenever he walked out.

He constantly saw Sir Nathaniel de Salis, and the two talked over the things that happened, and they remembered all the things that had been before these; so that the two who thought and remembered seemed also to know what would be, before it too happened.

Mr. Caswall's experiments with the kite went on successfully. Each day he tried the lifting of greater weight, and it seemed almost as if the machine had a sentience of its own, which was increasing with the obstacles placed before it. All this time the kite hung in the sky at an enormous height. The wind was steadily from the north, so the trend of the kite was to the south. All day long, runners of increasing magnitude were sent up. These were only a paper or thin cardboard, or leather, or other flexible materials. The great height at which the kite hung made a great concave curve in the string, so that as the runners went up they made a flapping sound. If one laid a hand or a finger on the string, the sound answered to the flapping of the runner in a sort of hollow intermittent murmur. Edgar Caswall, who was now wholly obsessed by the kite and all belonging to it, found a distinct resemblance between that intermittent rumble and the snake-charming music produced by the pigeons flying through the dry reeds whilst the Æolian harp was playing.

One day he made a discovery in Mesmer's chest which he thought he would utilise with regard to the runners. This was a great length of wire, "fine as human hair," coiled round a finely made wheel, which ran to a wondrous distance freely, and as lightly. He tried this on runners, and found it work admirably. Whether the runner was alone, or carried something much more weighty than itself, it worked equally well. Also it was strong enough and light enough to draw back the runner without undue strain. He tried this a good many times successfully, but it was now growing dusk and he found some difficulty in keeping the runner in sight. So he looked for something heavy enough to keep it still. He placed this, which happened to be the Egyptian image of Bes, on the fine wire which crossed the wooden ledge which protected it. Then, the darkness growing, he went indoors and forgot all about it. He had a strange feeling of uneasiness that night — not sleeplessness, for he was conscious of being asleep. At daylight he rose, and as usual looked out for the kite. He did not see it in its usual position in the sky, so looked round the points of the compass. He was more than astonished when presently he saw the missing kite struggling as customary against the controlling string. But it had gone to the further side of the tower, and now hung and strained *against the wind* to the north. He thought it so strange that he determined to investigate the phenomenon, and to say nothing about it in the meantime. In his many travels, Edgar Caswall had been accustomed to use the sextant, and was now an expert in the matter. By the aid of this and other instruments of the kind, he was able to fix the exact position of the kite and the point over which it hung. He was actually startled to find exactly under it — so far as he could ascertain — was Diana's Grove. He had an inclination to take Lady Arabella into his confidence in the matter, but he thought better of it and wisely refrained. For some reason which he did not even try to explain to himself, he was glad of his silence, when on the following morning he found, on looking out, that the point over which the kite then hovered was Mercy Farm. When he had verified this with his instruments, he sat before the window of the tower, looking out and thinking. The new locality was more to his liking than the other; but the why of it puzzled him, all the same. He spent the rest of the day in the turret-room, which he did not leave all day. It seemed to him that he was now drawn by forces which he could not control — of which, indeed, he had no knowledge — in directions which he did not understand, and which were without his own volition. In sheer helpless inability to think the problem out satisfactorily, he called up a servant and told him to tell Oolanga that he wanted to see him at once in the turret-room. The answer came back that the African had not been seen since the previous evening. He was now so irritable that even this small thing upset him. As he was distrait and wanted to talk to somebody, he sent for Simon Chester, who came at once, breathless with hurrying and upset by the unexpected summons. Caswall made him sit down, and when the old man was in a less uneasy frame of mind, he again asked him if he had ever seen what was in Mesmer’s chest or heard it spoken of. Chester admitted that he had once in the time of “the then Mr. Edgar,” seen the chest open, which, knowing something of its history and guessing more, so upset him that he had fainted. When he recovered, the chest was closed. From that time the then Mr. Edgar had never spoken about it again.

When Caswall asked him to describe what he had seen when the chest was open, he got very agitated, and, despite all his efforts to remain calm, he suddenly went off into a faint. Caswall summoned servants, who applied the usual remedies. Still the old man did not recover. After the lapse of a considerable time, the doctor who had been summoned made his appearance. A glance was sufficient for him to make up his mind. Still, he knelt down by the old man, and made a careful examination. Then he rose to his feet, and in a hushed voice said:

“I grieve to say, sir, that he has passed away.”

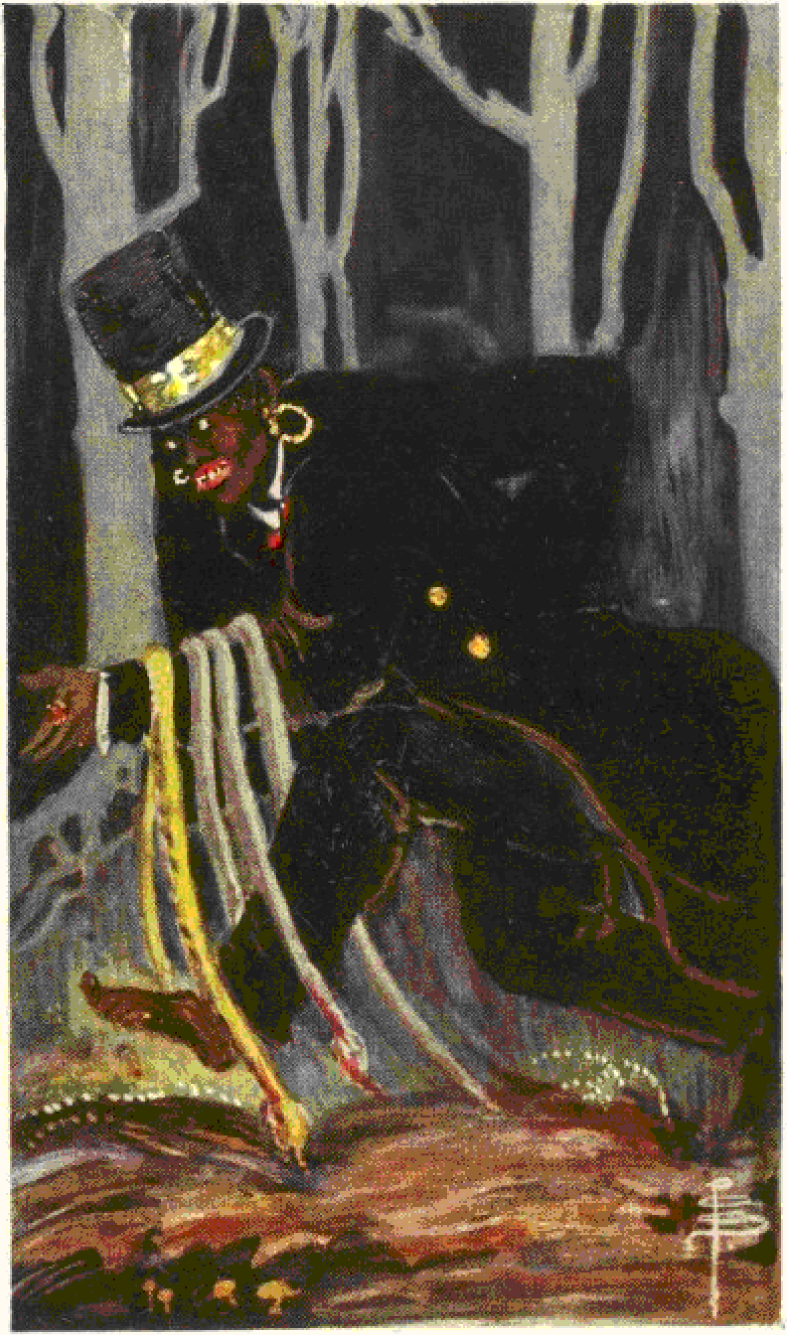
CHAPTER XVIII

ON THE TRACK

THOSE WHO HAD seen Edgar Caswall familiarly since his arrival, and had already estimated his cold-blooded nature at something of its true value, were surprised that he took so to heart the death of old Chester. The fact was that not one of them had guessed correctly at his character. Good, simple souls, they had estimated it by their own. They thought, and naturally enough, that the concern which he felt was that of a master for a faithful old servant of his family. They little thought that it was merely the selfish expression of his disappointment, that he had lost the only remaining clue to an interesting piece of family history — one which was now and would be for ever wrapped in mystery. Caswall knew enough of the life of his ancestor in Paris to wish to know more fully and more thoroughly all that had been. The period covered by that ancestor's life in Paris was one inviting every form of curiosity. The only one who *seemed* to believe in the sincerity of his sorrow was Lady Arabella, who had her own game to play, and who saw in the *métier* of sympathetic friend a series of meetings with the man she wanted to get hold of. She made the first use of the opportunity the day after old Chester's death; indeed, as soon as ever the news had filtered in through the back door of Diana's Grove. At that meeting, she played her part so well that even Caswall's cold nature was impressed. Oolanga was the only one who did not credit her with at least some sense of fine feeling in the matter. But this was only natural, for he was perhaps the only one who did not know what fine feeling meant. In emotional, as in other matters, Oolanga was distinctly a utilitarian, and as he could not understand anyone feeling grief except for his own suffering pain or for the loss of money, he could not understand anyone simulating such an emotion except for show intended to deceive. He thought that she had come to Castra Regis again for the opportunity of stealing something, and was determined that on this occasion the chance of pressing his advantage over her should not pass. He felt, therefore, that the occasion was one for extra carefulness in the watching of all that went on. Ever since he had come to the conclusion that Lady Arabella was trying to steal the treasure-chest, he suspected nearly everyone of the same design, and, as the night generally is friendly to thieves, he made it a point to watch all suspicious persons and places when night is merging into dawn and dawn into day. At that time, too, the active faculties of the mind are not at their best. Sleep is a factor of carelessness to be counted on, and, as it affects both thief and guardian, may be doubly useful both to learn and to do. The dawn, therefore, generally found him on the watch, and as this was the period also when Adam was engaged on his own researches regarding Lady Arabella, it was only natural that there should be some crossing of each other's tracks. This is what did actually happen. Nature is a logician, and what does happen is generally what ought to happen if the chances are in its favour. Adam had gone for an early morning survey of the place in which he was interested, taking with him, as usual, the mongoose in its box. He arrived at the gate of Diana's Grove just as Lady Arabella was preparing to set out for Castra Regis on what she considered her mission of comfort. And she, seeing from her window Adam in a mysterious way going through the shadows of the trees round the gate, thought that he must be engaged on some purpose similar to her own. So, quickly making her toilet, she quietly left the house without arousing anybody, and, taking advantage of every shadow and substance which could hide her from him, followed him on his walk. Oolanga, the experienced tracker, followed her, but succeeded in hiding his movements better than she did. He saw that Adam had hung on his shoulder the mysterious box, which he took to contain something valuable. Seeing that Lady Arabella was secretly following him, confirmed this idea. His mind — such as it was — was fixed on her trying to steal, and he credited her at once with making use of this new opportunity. In his walk, Adam went into the grounds of Castra Regis, and Oolanga saw her follow him with great secrecy. He feared to go closer, as now on both sides of him were enemies who might make discovery. Therefore, when he ascertained that Lady Arabella was bound for the Castle, he devoted himself to following her with singleness of purpose. He therefore missed seeing that Adam branched off the track he was following and returned to the high road, and that she, seemingly not interested in his further movements, took her course to the Castle.

That night Edgar Caswall had slept badly. The tragic occurrence of the day was on his mind, and he kept waking and thinking of it. At the early dawn he rose and, wrapping himself in a heavy dressing-gown, sat at the open window watching the kite and thinking of many things. From his room he could see all round the neighbourhood, and as the morning advanced, its revealing light showed him all the little happenings of the place. His life had not had much interest for him in the doings of other people, and he had no distinct idea of how many little things went to make up the sum of an ordinary person's daily life. This bird's-eye view of a community engaged in its ordinary avocations at even this early hour was something new to him. He set himself to watch it as a new interest.

His cold nature had no place for sympathy for lesser things than himself; but this was a study to be followed just as he would have watched the movements of a colony of ants or bees or other creatures of little interest individually. He saw, as the light grew more searching, the beginnings of the day for humble people. He saw the movements which followed waking life. He even began to exercise his imagination in trying to understand the why and the wherefore of each individual movement. As soon as he was able to recognise individual houses as they emerged from the mass of darkness or obscurity, he became specially interested in all that went on around him. The two places that interested him most were Mercy Farm and Diana's Grove. At first the movements were of a humble kind — those that belonged to domestic service or agricultural needs — the opening of doors and windows, the sweeping and brushing, and generally the restoration of habitual order. Then the farm servants made preparations for the comfort of the cattle and other animals; the drawing of water, the carrying of food, the alterations of beddings, the removal of waste, and the thousand offices entailed by the needs of living things. To Caswall, self-absorbed, disdainful, selfish, egotist, this bird's-eye view was a new and interesting experience of the revolution of cosmic effort. He was so interested with this new experience that the dim hours of the morning slipped by unnoticed. The day was in full flow when he bethought him of his surroundings. He could now distinguish things and people, even at a distance. He could see Lady Arabella whose blinds had been drawn and windows opened, move about in her room, the white dress which she wore standing out against the darker furniture of her room. He saw that she was already dressed for out of doors. As he looked, he saw her suddenly rise and look out of the window, keeping herself carefully concealed behind the curtain, and, following the direction in which her face was turned, he saw Adam Salton, with a box slung on his shoulder, moving in the shadow of the clump of trees outside her gate. He noticed that she quickly left the room, and in another minute was following Salton down the road in the direction of Castra Regis, carefully avoiding observation as she went. Then he was surprised to see Oolanga’s black face and rolling white eyeballs peering out from a clump of evergreens in the avenue. He too was watching.



From his high window — whose height was alone a screen from the observation of others — he saw the chain of watchers move into his own grounds, and then presently break up — Adam Salton going one way, and Lady Arabella, followed by the negro, another. Then Oolanga disappeared amongst the trees; but Caswall could see that he was still watching. Lady Arabella, after looking around her, slipped in by the open door, and he could, of course, see her no longer.

Presently, however, he heard a light tap at his door — a tap so light that he only knew it was a tap at all when it was repeated. Then the door opened very, very slowly, and he could see the flash of Lady Arabella's white dress through the opening.

CHAPTER XIX

A VISIT OF SYMPATHY

CASWALL WAS GENUINELY surprised when he saw Lady Arabella, though he need not have been surprised after what had already occurred in the same way. The look of surprise on his face was so much greater than Lady Arabella had expected — though she thought she was prepared to meet anything that might occur — that she stood still, open-eyed in sheer amazement. Cold-blooded as she was and ready for all social emergencies, she was nonplussed how to go on. She was plucky, however, and began to speak at once, although she had not the slightest idea what she was going to say. Had she been told that she was beginning to propose to a man, she would have indignantly denied it.

"I came to offer you my very, very warm sympathy with the grief you have so lately experienced."

There was a new surprise in his voice as he said:

"My grief? I'm afraid I must be very dull; but I really do not understand."

Already she felt at a disadvantage, and hesitated as she went on:

"I mean about the old man who died so suddenly — your old… retainer."

Caswall's face relaxed something of its puzzled concentration:

"Oh him! I hope you don't think he was any source of grief. Why, he was only a servant; and he had over-stayed his three-score and ten years by something like twenty years. He must have been ninety, if he was a day!"

"Still, as an old servant…!"

Caswall's words were not so cold as their inflection.

"I never interfere with servants. Besides, I never saw or heard of him. He was kept on here merely because he had been so long on the premises, or for some other idiotic reason. I suppose the steward thought it might make him unpopular if he were to be dismissed. All that is nonsense. There is no sentiment in business; if he is a sentimentalist, he has no right to be a steward of another man's property."

Somehow this tone almost appalled her. How on earth was she to proceed on such a task as hers if this was the utmost geniality she could expect? So she at once tried another tack — this time a personal one:

"I am sorry I disturbed you. I took a great liberty in the so doing. I am really not unconventional — and certainly no slave to convention. Still there are limits.… It is bad enough to intrude in this way, and I do not know what you can say or think of the time selected for the intrusion."

After all, Edgar Caswall was a gentleman by custom and habit, so he rose to the occasion:

"I can only say, Lady Arabella, that you are always welcome at any time when you may deign to honour my house with your presence."

She smiled at him sweetly as she said:

"Thank you *so* much. You *do* put one at ease. A breach of convention with you makes me glad rather than sorry. I feel that I can open my heart to you about anything."

Caswall smiled in his turn.

"Such consideration and understanding as yours are always prohibitive of breach of convention."

"Try me. If I stand the test it will be another link between us."

"That, indeed, would be a privilege. Come, I will try you."

Forthwith she proceeded to tell him about Oolanga and his strange suspicions of her honesty. Caswall laughed heartily and made her explain all the details. He laughed genuinely at her reading of Oolanga's designs, which he did not even dignify with the *sobriquet* of insolence. His final comment was enlightening.

"Let me give you a word of advice: If you have the slightest fault to find with that infernal nigger, shoot him on sight. A swelled-headed negro, with a bee in his bonnet is one of the worst difficulties in the world to deal with. So better make a clean job of it, and wipe him out at once!"

"But what about the law, Mr. Caswall?"

"Oh, the law is all right. But even the law doesn't concern itself much about dead negros. A few more or less of them does not matter. To my mind it's rather a relief!"

"I'm afraid of you," was her only comment, made with a sweet smile and in a soft voice.

"All right," he said, "let us leave it at that. Anyhow, we shall be rid of one of them!"

"I don't love negros any more than you do," she said, "and I suppose one mustn't be too particular where that sort of cleaning up is concerned."

Then she changed in voice and manner, and asked genially:

"And now tell me, am I forgiven?"

"You are, dear lady — if there is anything to forgive."

As he spoke, seeing that she had moved to go, he came to the door with her, and in the most natural way accompanied her downstairs. He passed through the hall door with her and down the avenue. As he went back to the house, she smiled to herself and took herself into her own confidence in a whisper:

"Well, that is all right. I don't think the morning has been altogether thrown away."

And she walked slowly back to Diana's Grove.

When Adam Salton separated from Lady Arabella he continued the walk which he had begun. He followed the line of the Brow, and refreshed his memory as to the various localities. He got home to Lesser Hill just as Sir Nathaniel was beginning breakfast. Mr. Salton had gone to Walsall to keep an early appointment; so he was all alone. When breakfast was over, he, seeing in Adam's face that he had something to speak about, followed into the study and shut the door.

When the two men had lighted their pipes, Sir Nathaniel began:

"Since we talked, I have remembered an interesting fact about Diana's Grove that I intended to have mentioned earlier, only that something put it out of my head. It is about the house, not the Grove. There is, I have long understood, some strange mystery about that house. It may be of some interest, or it may be trivial, in such a tangled skein as we are trying to unravel."

"I am listening. Please tell me all — all you know or suspect, and I shall try to form an opinion. To begin, then, of what sort is the mystery — physical, mental, moral, historical, scientific, occult? Any kind of hint will help me."

"Well, my dear boy, the fact is, I don't know!"

"Don't know, sir?"

"That is not so strange as it may appear. It may belong to any or all of these categories. Naturally, you are incredulous of such complete ignorance—"

“Oh, sir, I would not doubt you.”

“No, of course not. But all the same, you may not be able to believe or understand. Of course I understand your reluctance to speak of a doubt. But that applies not to the fact, but to the manner of expressing it. Be quite assured. I fully accept your belief in my *bona fides*. But we have difficulties to encounter, barriers to pass; so we must trust each other to speak the truth even if we do not understand it ourselves.”

Adam was silent for a few moments, and then said, with his face brightening:

“Quite right. I shall try to tell you what I think; but I have not put my thoughts on the subject in sequence, and so you must forgive me if due order is not observed in my narration. I suppose you have seen the house at Diana’s Grove?”

“Only the outside of it; but I have that in my mind’s eye, and I can fit into my memory whatever you may call my attention to.”

“Good! Well, I shall just tell you, to begin with, what I know, and I may happen to know more of it than you do.”

“The house is very old — probably the first house of some sort that stood there was in the time of the Romans. This was probably renewed — perhaps several times at later periods. The house stands, or, rather used to stand as it is when Mercia was a kingdom — I do not suppose that the basement was later than the Norman Conquest. Some years ago, when I was President of the Mercian Archæological Society, I went all over it very carefully. This was before it was purchased by Captain March. The house had then been done up so as to be suitable to bring the bride to. The basement is very strange — almost as strong and as heavy as if it had been intended to be a fortress. There are a whole series of rooms deep underground. One of them in particular struck me. The room itself is of considerable size, but the masonry is more than massive. In the middle of the room is a sunk well, built up to floor level and evidently going deep underground. There is no windlass nor any trace of there ever having been any — no rope — nothing. Now, we know that even the Romans had wells of immense depth from which the water was lifted by the 'old rag rope'; that at Woodhull used to be nearly a thousand feet. Here, then, we have simply an enormously deep well-hole. The door of the room when I saw it was massive, and was fastened with a lock nearly two feet square. It was evidently intended for some kind of protection to something or someone; but no one in those days when I had made the visit had ever heard of anyone having been allowed even to see the room. All this is *à propos* of the suggestion of which I have hinted that the well-hole was a way by which the White Worm (whatever it was) went and came. At that time I would have had a search made, even excavation if necessary, at my own expense, but all suggestions were met with a prompt and explicit negative. So, of course, I took no further step in the matter. Then it died out of recollection — even of mine."

"Do you remember, sir," asked Adam, "what was the appearance of the room where the well-hole was? And was there furniture — in fact, any sort of thing in the room?"

"I do not remember. It was all very dark — so dark that it was impossible to distinguish anything. The only thing I do remember was a sort of green light — very clouded — very dim, which came up from the well. Not a fixed light, but intermittent and irregular. Quite unlike anything I had ever seen."

"Do you remember how you got into that room — the well-room? Was there a separate door from outside, or was there any interior room or passage which opened into it?”

“I think there must have been some room with a way into it. I remember going up some steep steps by which I came into the well-room. They must have been worn smooth by long use or something of the kind, for I could hardly keep my feet as I went up. Once I stumbled and nearly fell into the well-hole. I was more careful after that.”

“Was there anything strange about the place — any queer smell, for instance?”

“Queer smell — yes! Like bilge or a rank swamp. It was distinctly nauseating; I remember that when I came out I felt that I was going to be physically sick. I shall try to think back on my visit and see if I can recall any more of what I saw or felt.”

“Then perhaps, sir, later in the day you will kindly tell me anything you may chance to recollect.”

“I shall be delighted, Adam. If your uncle has not returned by then, I shall join you in the study after dinner, and we shall resume this interesting chat.”

CHAPTER XX

THE MYSTERY OF “THE GROVE”

WHEN ADAM, AFTER leaving Lady Arabella, went on his own road outside Castra Regis, Oolanga followed him in secret. Adam had at first an idea, or rather a suspicion, that he was being followed, and looked around a good many times in the hope of making discovery of his pursuer. Not being successful in any of these attempts, he gradually gave up the idea, and accepted the alternative that he had been mistaken. He wondered what had become of the negro, whom he had certainly seen at first, so kept a sharp look-out for him as he went on his way. As he passed through the little wood outside the gate of Diana’s Grove, he thought he saw the African’s face for an instant. He knew it must be him; otherwise, there must be a devil wandering loose somewhere in the neighborhood. So he went deeper into the undergrowth, and followed along parallel to the avenue to the house. He was, in a way, glad that there was no workman or servant about, for he did not care that any of Lady Arabella’s people should find him wandering about her grounds at such an hour. Taking advantage of the thickness of the trees, he came close to the house and skirted round it. He was repaid for his trouble, for on the far side of the house, close to where the rocky frontage of the cliff fell away, he saw Oolanga crouched behind the irregular trunk of a great oak. The man was so intent on watching someone, or something, that he did not guard against being himself watched. This suited Adam, for he could thus make scrutiny at will. The thick wood, though the trees were mostly of small girth, threw a heavy shadow, in addition to that made by the early sun being in the east, so that the steep declension, in front of which grew the tree behind which the African lurked, was almost in darkness. Adam drew as close as he could, and was amazed to see a patch of light on the ground before him; when he realised what it was, he was determined more than ever to follow on his quest. Oolanga had a dark lantern in his hand, and was throwing the light down the steep incline. The glare showed that the decline, which was in a sort of sunken way, emerged on a series of stone steps, which ended in a low-lying heavy iron door fixed against the side of the house. His mind was in a whirl. All the strange things he had heard from Sir Nathaniel, and all those, little and big, which he had himself noticed, crowded into his mind in a chaotic way, such as mark the intelligence conveyed in a nightmare. Instinctively he took refuge from the possibility of Oolanga seeing him behind a thick oak stem, and set himself down, to watch what might occur.

After a very short time it was apparent that the African was trying to find out what was behind the heavy door. There was no way of looking in, for the door fitted tight into the massive stone slabs. The only opportunity for the entrance of light was through a small hole left in the building between the great stones above the door. This hole was much too high up to look through from the ground level. The negro was so intent on his effort to see beyond this, that Adam found there was a considerable help to him in his task. Oolanga, having tried standing tiptoe on the highest point near, and holding the lantern as high as he could, threw the light round the edges of the door to see if he could find anywhere a hole or a flaw in the metal through which he could obtain a glimpse. Foiled in this, he brought from the shrubbery a plank, which he leant against the top of the door and then climbed up with great dexterity. This did not bring him near enough to the window-hole to look in, or even to throw the light of the lantern through it, so he climbed down and carried the plank back to the place from which he had got it. Then he concealed himself near the iron door and waited, manifestly with the intent of remaining there till someone came near. Presently Lady Arabella, moving noiselessly through the shade, approached the door. When he saw her close enough to touch it, Oolanga stepped forward from his concealment, and said in a whisper, which through the gloom sounded like a hiss:

"I want to see you, missy — soon and secret."

Her lip curled in scorn as she answered:

"You see me now. What do you want? What is it?"

"You know well, missy; I told you already."

She turned on him with her eyes blazing, so that the green tint in them shown like emeralds.

"Come, none of that. If there is anything sensible which you may wish to say to me, you can see me here, just where we are, at seven o'clock."

He made no reply in words, but, putting the backs of his hands together, bent lower and lower still till his forehead touched the earth. She stood stone-still, which seeing, he rose and went slowly away. Adam Salton, from his hiding-place, saw and wondered. In a few minutes he moved from his place and went home to Lesser Hill, fully determined that seven o'clock would find him in some hidden place behind Diana's Grove.

When he got home he placed the box containing the mongoose in the gun-room. Not having any immediate intention of making use of the animal, it passed quite out of his mind.

At a little before seven Adam stole softly out of the house and took the back way to the rear of Diana's Grove. The place seemed silent and deserted, so he took the opportunity of concealing himself near the spot whence he had seen Oolanga trying to investigate whatever was concealed behind the iron door. He was quite content when he found himself safely ensconced in his hiding-place. He waited, perfectly still, and at last saw a gleam of white passing soundlessly through the undergrowth. He was not surprised when he recognised the shape and colour of Lady Arabella's dress. She came close and waited, with her face to the iron door. From some place of concealment near at hand Oolanga appeared, and came close to her. Adam noticed with surprised amusement that over his shoulder was his, Adam's, box with the mongoose. Of course the African did not know that he was seen by anyone, least of all by the man whose property he had in possession. Silent-footed as he was, Lady Arabella heard him coming, and turned to meet him. It was somewhat hard to see in the gloom, for, as usual, he was all in black, only his collar and cuffs showing white. Lady Arabella opened the conversation which ensued between the two:

"I see you are her — what do you want? To rob me, or murder me?"

"No, to lub you!"

This, getting explicit so soon, frightened her a little, and she tried to change the tone:

"Is that a coffin you have with you? If so, you are wasting your time. It would not hold me."

"Dis ain't no coffin for nobody. Quite opposite. Dis box is for you. Somefin you lub. Me give him to you!"

Still anxious to keep off the subject of affection, on which she believed him to have become crazed, she made another effort to keep his mind elsewhere:

"Is this why you want to see me?"

He nodded.

She went on: "Then come round to the other door. But be quiet. I have no particular desire to be seen so close to my own house in conversation with a — a — a nigger like you!"

She had chosen the word of dishonour deliberately. She wished to meet his passion with another kind. Such would, at all events, help to keep him quiet. In the deep gloom she could not see the anger which suffused his face. Rolling eyeballs and grinding teeth are, however, sufficient indices of anger to be decipherable in the dark. She moved round the corner of the house to her right. Oolanga was following her, when she stopped him by raising her hand.

"No, not that door," she said; "that is not for negros. The other door will do well enough for that!"

There was such scorn in her voice — scorn carried to a positive quality with malignity added — that the African writhed. Suddenly he stopped as if turned into stone, and said in a voice, whose very quietude was dangerous:

"Gib me your gun."

Unthinkingly, she pulled out the revolver, which was in her breast, and handed it to him:

"Do you want to kill me?" she said. "Go on. I am not afraid of you; but, remember, you will swing for it. This is not Berlin or Ashantee — this is England!"

He answered in an even voice:

"Don't fear, missee. Gun no kill nobody. Only to protect myself."

He saw the wonder in her face, and explained:

"I heard this morning what master said in his room. You no thought I heard. He say, ‘If you have any fault to find with that infernal nigger’ — he said that— ‘shoot him on sight.’ Now you call me nigger, speak to me like a dog. And you want me to go into your house by door which I not know. Gun safer now with me. Safer for Oolanga if gun wanted to hurt him.”

“What have you in that box?”

“That is treasure for you, missee. I take care of it, and give it to you when we get in.”

Lady Arabella took in her hand a small key which hung at the end of her watch-chain, and moved to a small door, low down, round the corner, and a little downhill from the edge of the Brow. Oolanga, in obedience to her gesture, went back to the iron door. Adam looked carefully at the mongoose box as the African went by, and was glad to see that it was locked. Unconsciously, as he looked, he fingered the key that was in his waistcoat pocket. When Oolanga was out of sight, Lady Arabella, who had waited quite still said to him:

“Mr. Salton, will you oblige me by coming with me for a few minutes? I have to see that — that coloured person — on a matter of business, and I do not care to see him alone. I shall be happier with a witness. Do you mind obliging me, and coming? It will be very kind of you.”

He bowed, and walked with her to the door round the corner.

CHAPTER XXI

EXIT OOLANGA

THE MOMENT THEY got out of sight of the negro, Adam said to Lady Arabella:

"One moment whilst we are alone. You had better not trust him!"

Her answer was crisp and concise:

"I don't."

"Forewarned is forearmed. Tell me if you will — it is for your own protection. Why do you mistrust him?"

"It is an odd story, but I had better tell you, though, in truth, it is somewhat humiliating — disturbing — to my *amour propre*. He is a thief — at least, so I gather from his readiness to commit a felony. Then you saw that he took my pistol practically under threat. Again he wants to blackmail me — oh I have lots of reasons to distrust him."

"*He* blackmail *you*! The scoundrel! But how could he hope to do such a thing?"

"My friend, you have no idea of that man's impudence. Would you believe that he wants me to marry him?"

"No!" said Adam incredulously, amused in spite of himself.

"Yes, and wanted to bribe me to do it by sharing a chest of treasure — at least, he thought it was — stolen from Mr. Caswall. Why do you yourself distrust him, Mr. Salton?"

"I shall give you an instance. Did you notice that box he had slung on his shoulder? That belongs to me. I left it in the gun-room when I went to lunch. He must have crept in and stolen it. Doubtless he thinks that it, too, is full of treasure."

"He does!"

"How on earth do you know?" asked Adam.

"A little while ago he offered to give it to me — another bribe to accept him. Faugh! I am ashamed to tell you such a thing. The beast!"

"You say he has an appointment to see you?" asked Adam.

"Yes, that was his reason for taking my revolver. He thought perhaps, naturally enough, that I should want to shoot him."

"You would be all right for anything of that sort with him — if I were on the jury."

"Oh, he isn't worth it. After all, even a bullet is of *some* little value."

"Don't alarm yourself, Lady Arabella. You shan't have to do any dirty work. I have a gun!" As he spoke, he took from his pistol pocket a revolver carrying an ounce ball. "I mention this now to make and keep your mind at rest. Moreover, I am a good and quick shot."

"Thanks!"

"By the way, in case there should be any need to know later, what revolver do you use?"

"Weiss of Paris, No. 3," she answered. "And you?"

"Smith and Wesson, 'The Ready!'"

"You noticed, I suppose, how deftly he stole it?"

Adam was astonished — with quite a new astonishment. It had been so dark that he himself had only been able to see the general movement as Oolanga had annexed the pistol. And yet, this woman had seen the smallest details. She must have wonderful eyes to see in the dark like that!

Whilst they had been speaking, she had opened the door, a narrow iron one well hung, for it had opened easily and closed tightly without any creaking or sound of any kind. Within all was dark; but she entered as freely and with as little misgiving or restraint as if it had been broad daylight. For Adam, there was just sufficient green light from somewhere to see that there was a broad flight of heavy stone steps leading upward; but Lady Arabella, after shutting the door behind her, when it closed tightly without a clang, tripped up the steps lightly and swiftly. For an instant all was dark again, but there came again the faint green light which enabled him to see the outlines of things. Another iron door, narrow like the first and fairly high, led into another large room, the walls of which were of massive stones so closely joined together as to exhibit only one smooth surface. This too presented the appearance of having at one time been polished. On the far side, also smooth like the walls, was the reverse of a great wide but not high iron door. Here there was a little more light, for the high-up aperture over the door opened to the air. Lady Arabella took from her girdle another small key, which she inserted in a tiny keyhole in the centre of a massive lock, which seemed the counterpart and reverse of the lock of some two feet square which Adam had noted on the outside of the door. The great bolt seemed wonderfully hung, for the moment the small key was turned the bolts of the great lock moved noiselessly and the iron doors swung open. On the stone steps outside stood Oolanga with the mongoose box slung over his shoulder. Lady Arabella stood a little on one side and moved back a few feet, and the African, accepting the movement as an invitation, entered in an obsequious way. The moment, however, that he was inside, he gave a quick look around him, and in an oily voice, which made Adam shudder, said with a sniff:

“Much death here — big death. Many deaths. Good, good!”

He sniffed round as if he was enjoying the scent. The matter and manner of his speech were so revolting that instinctively Adam’s hand wandered to his revolver, and, with his finger on the trigger, rested satisfied that he was ready for any emergency.

Oolanga seemed more “crawly” than ever in his movements. He unslung the box from his shoulder and put it on a stone ledge which ran along the side of the room to the right of the iron door, saying as he looked towards Adam:

“I have brought your box, master, as I thought you would want it. Also the key which I got from your servant.”

He laid this beside the box, and began to sniff again with an excellent pretence of enjoyment, raising his nose as he turned his head round as if to breathe all the fragrance he could.

There was certainly opportunity for such enjoyment, for the open well-hole was almost under his nose, sending up such a stench as almost made Adam sick, though Lady Arabella seemed not to mind it at all. It was like nothing that Adam had ever met with. He compared it with all the noxious experiences he had ever had — the drainage of war hospitals, of slaughterhouses, the refuse of dissecting rooms. None of these was like it, though it had something of them all, with, added, the sourness of chemical waste and the poisonous effluvium of the bilge of a water-logged ship whereon a multitude of rats had been drowned. However, he was content not to go any further in a search for analogy; it was quite bad enough to have to endure even for a moment, without thinking of it. Besides, he was lost in wonder at a physical peculiarity of Lady Arabella. She seemed to be able to see as well in the dark as in the light. In the gloom under the trees, she had followed every movement of Oolanga. In the Cimmerian darkness of the inner room she had not been for a moment at a loss. It was wonderful. He determined to watch for developments of this strange power — when such would arrive. In the meantime, he had plenty of use for his eyesight to notice what was going on around him. The movements of Oolanga alone were enough to keep his eyes employed. Since the African had laid down the box and the key, Adam had only taken his eyes off it to watch anything seemingly more pressing. He had an idea or an intuition that before long that box would be of overwhelming importance. It was by an intuition also that he grasped his revolver and held it tight. He could see that Oolanga was making up his mind to take some step of which he was at present doubtful. All in a moment it explained itself. He pulled out from his breast Lady Arabella's pistol and shot at him, happily missing. Adam was himself usually a quick shot, but this time his mind had been on something else and he was not ready. However, he was quick to carry out an intention, and he was not a coward. In another second both men were in grips. Beside them was the dark well-hole, with that horrid effluvium stealing up from its mysterious depths. Adam and Oolanga both had pistols; Lady Arabella, who had not one, was probably the most ready of them all in the theory of shooting, but that being impossible, she made her effort in another way. Gliding forward with inconceivable rapidity, she tried to seize the African; but he eluded her grasp, just missing, in doing so, falling into the mysterious hole. As he swayed back to firm foothold, he turned his own gun on her and shot. Instinctively Adam leaped at her assailant; clutching at each other, they tottered on the very brink. Lady Arabella's anger, now fully awake, was all for Oolanga. She moved forward towards him with her hands extended, and had just seized him when the catch of the locked box from some movement from within flew open, and the king-cobra killer flew at her with a venomous fury impossible to describe. As it seized her throat she caught hold of it, and, with a fury superior to its own actually tore it in two just as if it had been a sheet of paper. The strength used for such an act must have been terrific. In an instant, it seemed to spout blood and entrails, and was hurled into the well-hole. In another instant she had seized Oolanga, and with a swift rush had drawn him, her white arms encircling him, with her down into the gaping aperture. As the forms flashed by him Adam saw a medley of green and red lights blaze in a whirling circle, and as it sank down into the well a pair of blazing green eyes became fixed, sank lower and lower with frightful rapidity, and disappeared, throwing upward the green light which grew more and more vivid every second. As the light sank into the noisome depths, there came a shriek which chilled Adam's very blood — a prolonged agony of pain and terror which seemed to have no end.

Adam Salton felt that he would never be able to free his mind from the memory of those last dreadful moments. The gloom which surrounded that horrible charnel pit, which seemed to go down to the very bowels of the earth, conveyed from far down the sights and sounds of the nethermost hell. The ghastly fate of the African as he sank down to his terrible doom, his black face growing grey with terror, his white eyeballs, now like veined bloodstone, rolling in the helpless extremity of fear. The mysterious green light was in itself a *milieu* of horror. And through it all the awful cry came up from that fathomless pit, whose entrance was flooded with gouts of fresh blood. Even the death of the fearless little snake-killer — so fierce, so frightful, as if stained with a ferocity which told of no living force above earth, but only of the devils of the pit — was only an incident.

Adam was in a state of intellectual tumult, which had no peer in his existence. He tried to rush away from the horrible place; even the baleful green light thrown up through the gloomy well-shaft was dying away as its source sank deeper into the primeval ooze. The darkness was closing in on him in overwhelming density. Darkness in such a place and with such a memory of it! He made a wild rush forward — slipt on the steps in some sticky, acrid-smelling mass that felt and smelt like blood, and, falling forward, felt his way into the inner room, where the well-shaft was not. A faint green light began to grow around him until it was sufficient to see by. And then he rubbed his eyes in sheer amazement. Up the stone steps from the narrow door by which he had entered, glided the white-clad figure of Lady Arabella, the only colour to be seen on her being blood-marks on her face and hands and throat. Otherwise, she was calm and unruffled, as when earlier she stood aside for him to pass in through the narrow iron door.

CHAPTER XXII

SELF-JUSTIFICATION

ADAM SALTON WENT for a walk before returning to Lesser Hill; he felt that it might be well, not only to steady his nerves, shaken by the horrible scene, but to get his thoughts into some sort of order, so as to be ready to enter on the matter with Sir Nathaniel. He was a little embarrassed as to telling his uncle, for already affairs had so vastly progressed beyond his original view that he felt a little doubtful as to what would be the old gentleman's attitude when he should hear of the strange events for the first time. He might take umbrage that he had not been consulted or, at least, told of the earlier happenings. At first there had only been inferences from circumstances altogether outside his uncle and his household. Now there were examples of half the crimes in the calender, of which there was already indispensible proof, together with dark and bloody mysteries, enough to shake the nerves of the whole country-side. Mr. Salton would certainly not be satisfied at being treated as an outsider with regard to such things, most of which had points of contact with the interior of his own house. It was with an immense sense of relief that Adam heard that he had telegraphed to the housekeeper that he was detained by business at Walsall, where he would remain for the night; and that he would be back in the morning in time for breakfast. When Adam got home after his walk, he found Sir Nathaniel just going to bed. He did not say anything to him then of what had happened, but contented himself with arranging that they would walk together in the early morning, as he had much to say that would require serious attention.

Strangely enough he slept well, and awoke at dawn with his mind clear and his nerves in their usual unshaken condition. The maid brought up, with his early morning cup of tea, a note which had been found in the letter-box. It was from Lady Arabella, and was evidently intended to put him on his guard as to what he should say about the previous evening. He read it over carefully several times, before he was satisfied that he had taken in its full import.

"DEAR MR. SALTON, — I cannot go to bed until I have written to you, so you must forgive me if I disturb you, and at an unseemly time. Indeed, you must also forgive me if, in trying to do what is right, I err in saying too much or too little. The fact is that I am quite upset and unnerved by all that has happened in this terrible night. I find it difficult even to write; my hands shake so that they are not under control, and I am trembling all over with memory of the horrors we saw enacted before our eyes. I am grieved beyond measure that I should be, however partially or remotely, a cause of this shock and horror coming on you. Forgive me if you can, and do not think too hardly of me. This I ask with confidence, for since we shared together the danger — the very pangs — of death, I feel that we should be to one another something more than mere friends, that I may lean on you and trust you, assured that your sympathy and pity are for me. You really must let me thank you for the friendliness, the help, the confidence, the real aid at a time of deadly danger and deadly fear which you showed me. That awful man — I shall see him for ever in my dreams. His black, malignant face will shut out all memory of sunshine and happiness. I shall eternally see his evil eyes as he threw himself into that well-hole in a vain effort to escape from the inevitable consequences of his own misdoing. The more I think of it, the more apparent it seems to me that he had premeditated the whole thing — of course, except his own horrible death. He probably intended to murder you too. If he had known you had a revolver, he would have tried to get that also, I am sure. You know that women do not reason — we know — that he meant to seize that occasion also for stealing my emeralds."

When next Adam saw her he asked:

"How did it all come about?"

She explained simply, sweetly, and seeming to say what she could in the man's favour, but doubly damning him whilst she did so.

"Perhaps you have noticed — of course, I do not blame if you have not; men are not supposed to remember such trivial things — a fur collar I occasionally wear — or rather wore, it is now. It is one of my most valued treasures — an ermine collar studded with emeralds. They are very fine ones, if that is any justification to anything. It is an old collar, with hanging pieces as well as those of the collar proper. I had often seen Oolanga's eyes gleam covetously when he looked at it. Unhappily, I wore it yesterday. That may have been the cause that lured the poor man to his doom. I hope you do not think me altogether hard-hearted. Of course, as a Christian, I ought to forgive my enemies, and this individual was my enemy — he tried to murder me, and did rob me; but it is above my nature to forgive him stealing my emeralds, which were an heirloom, and, though valuable, in themselves of greater value to me from historical association. I mention these things now, for I may not have an opportunity of referring to them again."

The letter went on:

"I saw a look on your face as Oolanga sank into that terrible pit which I — probably wrongly — mistook; but it seemed to me you were surprised at seeing what seemed to be my arms round his neck.

The fact is, on the very brink of the abyss he tore the collar from my neck and threw it over his own shoulder. That was the last thing of him I saw. When he sank into the hole, I was rushing from the iron door, which I pulled behind me. I am glad to say I did, for it shut out from me the awful sight. When I heard that soul sickening yell, which marked his disappearance in the deep, darkling chasm, I was more glad than I can say that my eyes were spared the pain and horror which my ears had to endure. Even with the fear and horror which I had so recently endured, and the last awful moments which, although it was through his own act, he had to suffer, I could not forgive him — I have prayed ever since, and will ever pray, for forgiveness of my unchristian spirit. And it may one day come in God's mercy. I have endured the punishment; the sweetness of forgiveness of such an error may come in time. Won't you pray for me too?

When I tore myself out of the villain's grasp as he sank into the well-hole, I flew upstairs to be safe with you again. But it was not till I was out in the night, and saw the blessed stars gleaming and flashing above me in their myriad beauty, that I could realise what freedom meant. Freedom! Freedom! Not only from that noisome prison-house, which has now such a memory, but from the more noisome embrace of that hideous monster. Whilst I live I shall always thank you for my freedom. You must let me. A woman must sometimes express her gratitude; otherwise it is too great to bear. I am not a sentimental girl, who merely likes to thank a man. I am a woman who knows all, of bad as well as good, that life can give. I have known what it is to love and to lose. But there, you must not let me bring any unhappiness into your life. I must live on — as I have lived — alone, and, in addition, bear with other woes the memory of this latest insult and horror. I hardly know which is greatest or worst. In the meantime, I must get away as quickly as possible from Diana's Grove. In the morning I shall go up to town, where I shall remain for a week — I cannot stay longer, as certain business affairs demand my presence here after that time. I think, however, that a week in the rush of busy London, surrounded with multitudes of busy commonplace people, will help to wear out — I cannot expect total obliteration — the terrible images of the bygone night. When I can sleep easily — which will be, I expect, after a day or two — I shall be fit to return home and take up again the burden which will, I suppose, always be with me.

"I shall be most happy to see you on my return — or earlier, if my good fortune sends you on any errand to London. I shall be in the Great Eastern Hotel. In that busy spot we may forget some of the dangers and horrors we have already shared together. Adieu, and thank you, again and again, for all your kindness and consideration to me."

Adam was naturally somewhat surprised by this effusive epistle, but he determined to say nothing of it to Sir Nathaniel until he should have thought it well over.

CHAPTER XXIII

AN ENEMY IN THE DARK

WHEN ADAM SALTON met Sir Nathaniel de Salis at breakfast, he was glad that he had taken the time to turn things over in his mind. The result had been that not only was he familiar with the facts of everything, but he had already so far differentiated them that he was now able to arrange them in his own mind according to their values. Thus he was in a position to form his own opinions, and to accept any fact or any reading of it if at all credible; whatever was mysterious, or seemed to be mysterious, he frankly accepted as such, and held it apart in his own mind for future investigations and discussion. The utility of this course was apparent to him when he began to talk to Sir Nathaniel, which was so soon as breakfast was over and they had withdrawn to the study. They were alone, for Mr. Salton was not expected home till noon. Breakfast had been a silent function, so it did not interfere in any way with the process of thought.

So soon as the door was closed, Sir Nathaniel began:

"I see, Adam, that much has occurred, and that you have much to tell me and to consult about."

"That is so, sir. I suppose I had better begin by telling you all I know — all that has happened since I left you last evening?"

"Quite right. Tell me *all*. It will be time enough to look for meanings when we know facts — that is, know them as we understand them to be."

Accordingly Adam began, and gave him details of all that had been during the previous evening. He confined himself rigidly to the narration of circumstances, taking care not to colour events, even impliedly, by any comment of his own, or any opinion of the meaning of things which he did not fully understand. At first, Sir Nathaniel seemed disposed to ask some questions, but shortly gave this over when he recognised that the narration was well thought over, concise and self-explanatory. Thenceforth, he contented himself with quick looks and glances, easily interpreted, or by some acquiescent motions of his hands, when such could be convenient, to emphasise his idea of the correctness of any inference. He was so evidently *en rapport* with Adam, that the latter was helped and emboldened when the time came for his statement of beliefs or inferences as to the meanings of things. This suited Adam exactly — and also Sir Nathaniel came to a quicker, more concise, and more thorough understanding than he could otherwise have done. Until Adam ceased speaking, having evidently come to an end of what he had to say with regard to this section of his story, the elder man made absolutely no comment whatever, remaining silent, except on a very few occasions asking an elucidatory question now and then. Even when Adam, having finished the purely narrative part of what he had seen and heard, took from his pocket Lady Arabella's letter, with manifest intention of reading it, he did not make any comment. Finally, when Adam folded up the letter and put it, in its envelope, back in his pocket, as an intimation that he had now quite finished, the old diplomatist carefully made a few notes in his pocket-book. After a careful reconsideration of these, he spoke:

"That, my dear Adam, is altogether admirable. It is a pity that your duty in life does not call for your writing either political or military despatches or judicial reports. For in all of these branches of work you would probably make a name for yourself. I think I may now take it that we are both well versed in the actual facts, and that our further conference had better take the shape of a mutual exchange of ideas. Let us both ask questions as they may arise; and I do not doubt that we shall arrive at some enlightening conclusions."

"Carried *nem. con*. Will you kindly begin, sir? And then we shall have all in order. I do not doubt that with your experience you will be able to dissipate some of the fog which envelops certain of the things which we have to consider."

"I hope so, my dear boy. For a beginning, then, let me say that Lady Arabella's letter makes clear some things which she intended — and also some things which she did not intend. But, before I begin to comment and draw deductions, let me ask you a few, a very few questions. I know that this is not necessary; but as two men of full age, talking of matters of a peculiarly intimate kind and which may bring in considerations of other persons, it will be as well to have a thorough understanding, leaving nothing to chance or accident!"

"Good again, sir! Please ask away what you will. I shall keep nothing back."

"Right, my boy. That is the spirit in which to begin a true conference, if it is to have any result."

The old man pondered a few moments, and then asked a question which had manifestly been troubling him all along, and which he had made up his mind to ask:

"Adam, are you heart-whole, quite heart-whole, in the matter of Lady Arabella?"

He answered at once, each looking the other straight in the eyes during question and answer.

"Lady Arabella, sir, is a very charming woman, and I have hitherto deemed it a privilege to meet her — to talk to her — even —

since I am in the confessional — to flirt a little with her. But if you mean to ask if my affections are in any way engaged, I can emphatically answer ‘No!’ — as indeed you will understand when presently I give you the reason.”

“Could you — would you mind giving me the reason now? It will help us to understand what is before us in the way of difficulty, and what to rely on.”

“Certainly, sir. I can speak at once — should like to. My reason, on which I can fully depend, is that I love another woman!”

“That clinches it. May I offer my good wishes, and, I hope, my congratulations?”

“I am proud of your good wishes, sir, and I thank you for them. But, it is too soon for congratulations — the lady does not even know my hopes yet. Indeed, I hardly knew them myself, as definite, till this moment. Under the circumstances, it may be wiser to wait a little.”

“Quite so. A very wise precaution. There can never be any harm in such delay. It is not a check, remember, but only wise forethought. I take it then, Adam, that at the right time I may be allowed to know who the lady is?”

Adam laughed a low, sweet laugh, such as ripples from a happy heart.

“In the matter there need not be an hour’s, a minute’s delay. I shall be glad to share my little secret with you, sir. We two are, I take it, tiled. So that there comes not wrong or harm to anyone else in the enlargement of the bounds of our confidence!”

“None. As for me, I promise absolute discretion and, unless with your own consent, silence.”

Both men smiled and bowed.

“The lady, sir, whom I am so happy as to love and in whom my dreams of life-long happiness are centred, is Mimi Watford!"

"Then, my dear Adam, I need not wait to offer hopes and congratulations. She is indeed a very charming lady. I do not think I ever saw a girl who united in such perfection the qualities of strength of character and sweetness of disposition. With all my heart, I congratulate you. Then I may take it that my question as to your heart-wholeness is answered in the affirmative?"

"Yes; and now, sir, may I ask in turn why the question?"

"Certainly! I asked because it seems to me that we are coming to a point where my questions might be painful — impossible, no matter how great friends we may be."

Adam smiled.

"You will now understand why I spoke so positively. It is not merely that I love Mimi, but I have reason to look on Lady Arabella as her enemy!"

"Her enemy?"

"Yes. A rank and unscrupulous enemy who is bent on her destruction."

Sir Nathaniel paused.

"Adam, this grows worse and worse. I do not contradict you; do not doubt. I only want to be sure."

He went on with an infinite sadness in his tone. "I wish to God, my dear young friend, that I could disagree with you. I wish also that she or you — if not both — could be kept completely outside this question. But that, I fear, is impossible. Now for a moment let me hark back to your story of last night. It is better that we clear up an important matter right here; we can then get on more easily."

Adam said nothing, but he looked interrogatively.

The other went on: "It is about Lady Arabella's letter in connection with last night. And indeed, I almost fear to approach it — not on her account, but on yours and Mimi's." Adam, when his friend mentioned Mimi so familiarly, felt his heart warm at once from the chill that accompanied the ominous opening of his speech. Sir Nathaniel saw the look and smiled. Then he went over to the door, looked outside it and returned, locking it carefully behind him.

CHAPTER XXIV

METABOLISM

"AM I LOOKING grave?" asked Sir Nathaniel inconsequently when he re-entered the room.

"You certainly are, sir."

"Yes. I ought to be. I feel as if I had on the Black Cap!" Then he went on more calmly: he felt that he should remain calm if he could. Calmness was a necessary condition of what he had to say. "This is in reality a black-cap affair. We little thought the day we met, only a few days ago, that we should be drawn into such a vortex. Already we are mixed up in robbery, manslaughter, and probably murder, but, a thousand times worse than all the crimes in the calendar, in an affair of gloom and mystery which has no bottom and no end — with magic and demonology, and even with forces of the most unnerving kind, which had their origin in an age when the world was different from the world which we know. We are going back to the origin of superstition — to an age when dragons of the prime tore each other in their slime. I shall come back to these things presently. We must fear nothing — no conclusion, however improbable, almost impossible it may be. Life and death is at the present moment hanging on our judgment. Life and death not only for ourselves, but for others whom we love. Therefore we must think accurately, go warily, and act boldly. Remember, I count on you as I hope you count on me."

"I do, with all confidence."

"Then," said Sir Nathaniel, "let us think justly and boldly and fear nothing, however terrifying it may seem. I suppose I am to take as exact in every detail your account of all the strange things which happened whilst you were in Diana's Grove?"

"So far as I know, yes. Of course I may be mistaken in recollection or appreciation, at the time, of some detail or another, but I am certain that in the main what I have said is correct."

"Then you will not be offended if I ask you, if occasion demands it, to reiterate?"

"I am altogether at your service, sir, and proud to serve."

"We have one account of what happened from an eye-witness whom we do believe and trust — that is you. We have also another account written by Lady Arabella under her own hand. These two accounts do not agree. Therefore we must take it that one of the two is lying."

"Apparently, sir."

"And that Lady Arabella is the liar!"

"Apparently — as I am not."

"We must, therefore, try to find a reason for her lying. She has nothing to fear from Oolanga, who is dead. Therefore the only reason which could actuate her would be to convince someone else that she was blameless. This 'someone' could not be you, for you had the evidence of your own eyes. There was no one else present; therefore it must have been an absent person."

"That seems beyond dispute, sir."

"There is only one other person whose good opinion she could wish to keep — that person we know to be Edgar Caswall. He is the only one who fills the bill."

The old man smiled and went on:

"Her lies point to other things besides the death of the African. She evidently wanted it to be accepted that Oolanga had killed the mongoose, but that his falling into the well was his own act. I cannot suppose that she expected to convince you, the eye-witness; but if she wished later on to spread the story, it was wise of her to try to get your acceptance of it."

"That is so!"

Again Sir Nathaniel smiled. He felt that his argument was convincing.

"Then there were other matters of untruth. That, for instance, of the ermine collar embroidered with emeralds. If an understandable reason be required for this, it would be to draw attention away from the green lights which were seen in the room, and especially in the well-hole. Any unprejudiced person would accept the green lights to be the eyes of a great snake such as tradition pointed to living in the well-hole. In fine, therefore, Lady Arabella wanted the general belief to be that there was no snake of the kind in Diana's Grove. Let us consider this. For my own part, I don't believe in a partial liar. This art does not deal in veneer; a liar is a liar right through. Self-interest may prompt falsity of the tongue; but if one prove to be a liar, nothing that he says can ever be believed. This leads us to the conclusion that because she said or inferred that there was no snake, we should look for one — and expect to find it, too.

"Now let me here digress. I live, and have for many years lived, in Derbyshire, a county more celebrated for its caves than any other county in England. I have been through them all, and am familiar with every turn of them; as also with other great caves in Kentucky, in France, in Germany, and a host of other places — with all, in fact, of these very deep caves of narrow aperture which are so valued by intrepid explorers, who descend narrow gullets of abysmal depth and sometimes never return. In many of the caverns in the Peak I am convinced that some of the smaller passages were used in primeval times as the lairs of some of the great serpents of legend and tradition. It may have been that such caverns were formed in the usual geologic way — bubbles or flaws in the earth's crust — which were later used by the monsters of the period of the young world. It may have been, of course, that some of them at least were worn originally by water; but in time they all found a use when suitable for living monsters. Such may be — I only give it as a suggestion for thought.

"This brings us to another point more difficult to accept and understand than any other requiring belief in a base not usually accepted or indeed entered on: whether such abnormal growths, as must have been in the case of the earlier inhabitants, could have ever changed in their nature. Some day the study of metabolism may progress so far as to enable us to accept structural changes proceeding from an intellectual or moral base. If such ever be probable, we may lean towards a belief that great animal strength may be a sound base for changes of all sorts. If this be so, what could be a more fitting subject than primeval monsters whose strength was such as to allow a survival of thousands of years? Mind, I do not assert, but only suggest it as a subject for thought. We do not know yet if brain can increase and develop independently of other parts of the living structure. This again I only suggest as a subject for thought. My reason for doing so will be presently touched on.

"After all, the mediæval belief in the Philosopher's Stone which could transmute metals, has its counterpart in the accepted theory of metabolism which changes living tissue. Why, the theory has been put forward by a great scientist that the existence of radium and its products proves the truth of the theory of transmutation of metal. In an age of investigation like our own, when we are returning to science as the base of wonders — almost of miracles, — we should be slow to refuse to accept facts, however impossible they may seem to be. We are apt to be hide-bound as to theory when we begin to learn. In a more enlightened age, when the base of knowledge has not only been tested but broadened, perhaps we shall come to an understanding of that marvellous definition of ‘faith’ by St. Paul: ‘the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things unseen.’

“Now, my dear Adam, pardon these digressions into matters which are as far from that with which we are concerned as are the Poles from each other; but even these may help us to accept, even if they cannot help to elucidate. We are in a quagmire, my boy, as vast and as deep as that in which the monsters of the geologic age found shelter and perhaps advance.

“Now, I think we have talked enough for the present of many things hard to understand. It will be better, perhaps, if we lay them aside for the present. When you and I resume this chat we shall be more clear-headed to accept evident deductions, more resolute and better satisfied to act on them. Let us adjourn till to-morrow.”

CHAPTER XXV

THE DECREE

WHEN AFTER BREAKFAST the next morning Sir Nathaniel and Adam met, the elder man, after inquiring how his companion had slept, and satisfying him as to his own experiences in the same matter, said:

"I think we may take it that we are both calm of nerve and brain, and that we are fit to resume so momentous a subject as that deferred. Suppose we begin by taking a problematical case of fact based on our conclusions of yesterday. Let us suppose a monster of the early days of the world — a dragon of the prime — of vast age running into thousands of years, to whom had been conveyed in some way — it matters not — a brain of even the most rudimentary kind — some commencement, however small, just sufficient for the beginning of growth. Suppose the monster to be of incalculable size and of a strength quite abnormal — a veritable incarnation of animal strength. Suppose this animal is allowed to remain in one place, thus being removed from accidents of interrupted development; might not, would not this creature in process of time — ages, if necessary — have that rudimentary intelligence developed? There is no impossibility in this. It is only the natural process of evolution; not taken from genii and species, but from individual instances. Atmosphere, which is the condition of life — vegetable and animal, — is an immediate product of size. In the beginning, the instincts of animals are confined to alimentation, self-protection, and the multiplication of their species. As time goes on and the needs of life become more complex, power follows need. Here let me make another digression. We are prepared already for abnormal growth — it is the corollary of normal growth. We have been long accustomed to consider growth as applied almost exclusively to size in its various aspects. But Nature, who has no doctrinaire ideas, may equally apply it to concentration. A developing thing may expand in any given way or form. Now, it is a scientific law that increase implies gain and loss of various kinds; what a thing gains in one direction it may lose in another. In mechanics, direction is a condition of the increase or limitation of speed or force. Why not apply this more widely? May it not be that Mother Nature may deliberately encourage decrease as well as increase — that it may be an axiom that what is gained in concentration is lost in size? Take, for instance, monsters tradition has accepted and localised, such as the Worm of Lambton or that of Spindleston Heugh. If such one were, by its own process of metabolism, to change much of its bulk for a little intellectual growth, we should at once arrive at a new class of creature, more dangerous, perhaps, than the world has ever had any experience of — a force which can think, which has no soul and no morals, and therefore no acceptance of responsibility. A worm or snake would be a good illustration of this, for it is cold-blooded, and therefore removed from the temptations which often weaken or restrict warm-blooded creatures. If, for instance, the Worm of Lambton — if such ever existed — were guided to its own ends by an organised intelligence capable of expansion, what form of creature could we imagine which would equal it in potentialities of evil? Why, such a being would devastate a whole country. Now, all these things require much thought, and we want to apply the knowledge usefully, and we should therefore be exact. Would it not be well to have another ‘easy’, and resume the subject later in the day?”

"I quite agree, sir. I am in a whirl already; and I want to attend carefully to what you say; so that I may try to digest it."

Both men seemed fresher and better for the "easy," and when they met in the afternoon each of them had, out of his thought, something to contribute to the general stock of information. Adam, who was by nature of a more militant disposition than his elderly friend, was glad to see that the conference at once assumed a practical trend. Sir Nathaniel recognised this, and, like an old diplomatist, turned it to present use.

"Tell me now, Adam, what is the outcome, in your own mind, of our conversation?"

"That the whole difficulty already assumes practical shape; but with added dangers that at first I did not dream of."

"What is the practical shape, and what are the added dangers? I am not disputing, but only trying to clear my own ideas by the consideration of yours—"

Sir Nathaniel waited, so he went on:

"Will it bore you, sir, if I put in order of an argument your own ideas as seen by me?"

"Not at all; I should like it if it will help to clear my own mind."

"Then I will begin with your argument — only in general, not in detail. And please bear in mind, sir, that I am trying to state not so much what you said as the ideas conveyed to my mind — possibly erroneously, — but in the honest belief to comprehend thoroughly."

"Go on, my dear boy, do not fear. I shall understand and, if necessary, make allowance."

So Adam went on:

"In the past, in the early days of the world, there were monsters who were so vast that they could exist thousands of years. Some of them must have overlapped the Christian era. They may have progressed intellectually in process of time. If they had in any way so progressed, or even got the most rudimentary form of brain, they would be the most dangerous things that ever were in the world. Tradition says that one of these monsters lived in the Marsh of the East and came up to a cave in Diana's Grove which was also called the Lair of the White Worm. Such creatures may have grown down (small) as well as up (long). They *may* have grown into, or something like, human beings. Lady Arabella March is of snake nature. She has committed crimes to our knowledge. She retains something of the vast strength of her primal being — can see in the dark — has eyes of a snake. She used the Negro, and then dragged him through the snake's hole down to the swamp; she is intent on evil, and hates some one we love. Result…."

"Yes, the result you arrive at?"

"First, that Mimi Watford should be taken away at once — I should suggest West Australia. And then—"

"Yes?"

"The monster must be destroyed."

"Bravo! That is a true and fearless conclusion. At whatever cost, it must be carried out."

"At once?"

"Soon, at all events. That creature's very existence is a danger. Her presence in this neighbourhood makes the danger immediate."

As he spoke, Sir Nathaniel's mouth hardened and his eyebrows came down till they met. There was no doubting his concurrence in the resolution, or his readiness to help in carrying it out. But he was an elderly man with much experience and knowledge of law and diplomacy. It seemed to him to be a stern duty to prevent anything irrevocable taking place till it had been thought out and all was ready. There were all sorts of legal cruxes to be thought out, not only regarding the taking of life, even of a monstrosity in human form, but also of property. Lady Arabella, be she woman or snake or devil, owned the ground she moved in, according to British law, and the law is jealous and swift to avenge wrongs done within its ken. Within three hundred years the law has accepted facts and evidence that would not be received in later years by school children. All such difficulties should be — must be — avoided for Mr. Salton's sake, for Adam's own sake, and, most of all, for Mimi Watford's sake. Before he spoke again, Sir Nathaniel had made up his mind that he must try to postpone decisive action until the circumstances depended on — which, after all, were only problematical — should have been tested satisfactorily, one way or another. When he did speak, Adam at first thought that his friend was wavering in his intention, or "funking" the responsibility. He could have no such thought regarding Adam. That young man's strong, mobile face was now as set as flint. His eyes were full of fire, non-blazing fire, but slumbrous, which is much more indicative of danger. His brows were in a straight line across his face, and his eyes in parallel course. As to purpose, he was fixed; the only question with him was — when! However, his respect for Sir Nathaniel was so great that he would not act or even come to a conclusion on a vital point without his sanction.

He came close and almost whispered in his ear:

"Will you speak with me of this again — say, when my uncle has gone to bed, and we shall be undisturbed?"

Sir Nathaniel nodded. They had both determined to wait.

CHAPTER XXVI

A LIVING BARBETTE

WHEN MR. SALTON had retired for the night, Adam and Sir Nathaniel with one accord moved to the study. Things went with great regularity at Lesser Hill, so they knew that there would be no interruption to their talk.

When their cigars were lighted, Sir Nathaniel said:

"I hope, Adam, that you do not think me either slack or changeable of purpose. I really am not so, and I mean to go through this business to the bitter end — whatever it may be. Be satisfied that my first care is, and shall be, the protection of Mimi Watford. To that I am pledged; my dear boy, we who are interested are all in some form of the same danger. That monster out of the pit hates and means to destroy us all — you and me certainly, and probably your uncle. We are just on the verge of stormy times for us all. I wanted especially to talk with you to-night, for I cannot help thinking that the time is fast coming — if it has not come already — when we must take your uncle into confidence. It was one thing when fancied evils threatened, but now he as well as the rest of us is probably marked for death; and it is only right that he should know all."

"I am with you, sir. Things have changed since we agreed to keep him out of the trouble. Now we dare not; consideration for his feelings might cost him his life. It is a duty we have — and no light or pleasant one, either. I have not a shadow of doubt that he will want to be one with us in this. But remember, we are his guests, in his house; and his name, his honour have to be thought of as well as his safety."

"I am still with you — to the death. Only, if there be any special danger to him, let me bear, or at any rate share it."

"All shall be as you wish, Adam. We need say no more of that. We are at one. And now as to practicability. What we are to do? We cannot manifestly take and murder Lady Arabella off-hand. Therefore we shall have to put things in order for the killing, and in such a way that we may not be taxed with a base crime. That is why I suggested waiting till we have some definite and complete proof."

Adam stood up, and his voice rang as he said heartily:

"You are quite right, sir, as usual. We must be at least as exact as if we were in a law court. I see that."

Sir Nathaniel acquiesced in such a hearty way as to set his young companion's mind at rest.

Adam sat down again and resumed the conversation, using an even, reflective tone which made the deliberation altogether useful:

"It seems to me, sir, that we are in an exceedingly tight place. Our first difficulty is to know where to begin. Our opponent has pretty well all the trumps. I never thought this fighting an antediluvian monster would be such a complicated job. This one is a woman, with all a woman's wisdom and wit, combined with the heartlessness of a *cocotte* and the want of principle of a suffragette. She has the reserved strength and impregnability of a diplodocus. We may be sure that in the fight that is before us there will be no semblance of fair-play. Also that our unscrupulous opponent will not betray herself!"

Sir Nathaniel commented on this:

"That is so. But being of feminine species, she probably will over-reach herself. That is much more likely — more in woman's way. Now, Adam, it strikes me that, as we have to protect ourselves and others against feminine nature, our strong game will be to play our masculine against her feminine. Men can wait better than women.”

He laughed a mirthless laugh that was all from the brain and had no heart at all, and went on:

“You must remember that this female has had thousands of years’ experience in waiting. As she stands, she will beat us at that game.”

For answer Adam began preparing his revolver, which was at half-cock:

“There is always a quick way of settling differences of that kind!” was all he said; but Sir Nathaniel understood and again uttered a warning:

“How are differences to be settled with a creature of that kind? We might as well fight with a barbette; she is invulnerable so far as physical harm at our hands is concerned.”

“Even barbettes get occasionally blown up!” said Adam.

“Ah! Barbettes aren’t alive all over and, so far as we know, self-recuperative. No! we must think out some plan to have ready if all else should fail. We had better sleep on it. She is a thing of the night; and the night may give us some ideas.”

So they both turned in.

Adam knocked at Sir Nathaniel’s door in the grey of the morning, and, on being bidden, came into the room. He had several letters unclosed in his hand. Sir Nathaniel sat up in bed.

“Well!”

“I should like to read you a few letters, but, of course, shall not send them unless you approve. In fact” — this with a smile and a blush— “there are several things which I want to do; but I hold my hand and my tongue till I have your approval.”

“Go on!” said the other kindly. “Tell me all, and count at any rate on my sympathy, and on my approval and help if I can see my way."

Accordingly Adam proceeded:

"When I told you the conclusions I had arrived at, I put in the foreground that Mimi Watford should for the sake of her own safety be removed — to West Australia, I suggested, — and that the monster which had wrought all the harm should be destroyed."

"Yes, I remember."

"To carry this into practice, sir, one preliminary is required — unless harm of another kind is to be faced."

Sir Nathaniel looked as if he had on his reflecting cap. Then he proceeded, taking up the other's argument:

"Before she goes to West Australia, or indeed to anywhere else, Mimi should have some protector which all the world would recognise. The only form of this safety recognised by convention is marriage!"

"Yes, sir. I see you realise!"

Sir Nathaniel smiled in a fatherly way.

"To marry, a husband is required. And that husband should be you."

"Yes, yes."

"And the marriage should be immediate and secret — or, at least, not spoken of outside ourselves.… And now I must ask you a somewhat delicate question! Would the young lady be agreeable to that proceeding?"

"I do not know, sir!"

"You do not know? Then how are we to proceed?"

"I suppose we — or one of us — must ask her. That one must be myself — and I am ready."

"Is this a sudden idea, Adam, a sudden resolution?"

“A sudden resolution, sir, but not a sudden idea. The resolution is sudden because the need is sudden and imperative. If I were to speak in hyperbole, I could say that the idea is as old as Fate, and that the resolution was waiting before the beginning of the world!”

“I am glad to hear it. I hope it will turn out that the coming of the White Worm has been a blessing in disguise. But now, if things have to be hurried on like this, what is to be the sequence of events?”

“First, that Mimi should be asked to marry me. If she agrees, all is well and good. The sequence is obvious.”

“And is to be kept a secret amongst ourselves?”

Adam answered at once:

“I want no secret, sir, except for Mimi’s good. For myself, I should like to go and shout it out on the house-tops! But I see that we must be discreet. Untimely knowledge to our enemy might work incalculable harm.”

“And how would you suggest, Adam, that we could combine the momentous question with secrecy?”

Here Adam grew red and moved uneasily. Then with a sudden rush he spoke:

“Someone must ask her — as soon as possible!”

“And that someone?”

“I have been thinking the matter over, sir, since we have been here. It requires expedition to achieve safety, and we shall all have to do as duty requires.”

“Certainly. And I trust that none of us shall shirk such a duty. But this is a concrete thing. We may consider and propose in the abstract, but the action is concrete — who, again, is to be the ‘someone’? Who is to ask her?”

“I thought that you, sir, would be so good!”

"God bless my soul! This is a new kind of duty to take on one — at my time of life. Adam, I hope you know that you can count on me to help in any way I can!"

"I have counted on you, sir, when I ventured to make such a suggestion. I can only ask, sir," he added, "that you will be more than ever kind to me — to us, and look on the painful duty as a voluntary act of grace prompted by kindness and affection."

Sir Nathaniel said in a meek but not a doubting voice:

"Painful duty!"

"Yes," said Adam boldly. "Painful to you, though to me it would be all joyful."

"Yes, I understand!" said the other kindly.

Then he went on: "It is a strange job for an early morning! Well, we all live and learn. I suppose the sooner I go the better. Remember, I am in your hands and shall do just what you wish, and shall try to do it just as you wish. Now you had better write a line for me to take with me. For, you see, this is to be a somewhat unusual transaction, and it may be embarrassing to the lady, even to myself. So we ought to have some sort of warrant, something to show on after-thought, that we have been all along mindful of her feelings. It will not do to take acquiescence for granted — although we act for her good. You had better write the letter to have ready, and I had better not know what is in it — except the main purpose of the introducing the subject. I shall explain fully as we go along anything that she may wish."

"Sir Nathaniel, you are a true friend; and I am right sure that both Mimi and I shall be grateful to you for all our lives — however long or however short they may be!"

So the two talked it over and agreed as to points to be borne in mind by the ambassador. It was striking six when Sir Nathaniel left the house, Adam seeing him quietly off.

As the young man followed him with wistful eyes — almost jealous of the privilege which his kind deed was about to bring him, he felt that his own heart was in his friend's breast.

CHAPTER XXVII

GREEN LIGHT

THE MEMORY OF that morning was like a dream to all those concerned in it. Sir Nathaniel had a confused recollection of detail and sequence, though the main facts stood out in his memory boldly and clearly. Adam Salton's recollection was of an illimitable time filled with anxiety, hope, and chagrin, all unified and dominated by a sense of the slow passage of time and accompanied by vague nebulous fears. Mimi could not for a long time think at all or recollect anything, except that Adam loved her and was saving her from a terrible danger. In the bitter time itself, whilst she was learning those truths she found her own heart. When she had time to think, later on, she wondered how or when she had any ignorance of the facts that Adam loved her and that she loved him with all her heart. Everything, every recollection however small, every feeling, seemed to fit into those elemental facts as though they had all been moulded together. The main and crowning recollection was her saying goodbye to Sir Nathaniel and entrusting to him loving messages straight from her heart to Adam Salton, and of his bearing when with an impulse which she could not check — and did not want to — she put her lips to his and kissed him. Later, when she was alone and had time to think, it was a passing grief to her that she would have to be silent, for a time, to Lilla on the happy events of that strange early morning mission.

She had, of course, agreed to keep all secret until Adam should give her leave to speak.

The advice and assistance of Sir Nathaniel de Salis was a great help to Adam Salton in carrying out his idea of marrying Mimi Watford without publicity. He went with him to London, and, with his knowledge and influence, the young man got the license of the Archbishop of Canterbury for a private marriage. Sir Nathaniel then took him to live in his own house till the marriage should have been solemnised. All this was duly done, and, the formalities having been fixed, Adam and Mimi were married at Doom.

Adam had tried to arrange that he and his wife should start for Australia at once; but the first ship to suit them did not start for ten days. So he took his bride off to the Isle of Man for the interim. He wished to place a stretch of sea between Mimi and the White Worm, that being the only way to ensure protection for his wife. When the day for departure arrived, they went from Douglas in the *King Orrey* to Liverpool. On arrival at the landing-stage, they drove to Congleton, where Sir Nathaniel met them and drove them at once to Doom, taking care to avoid any one that he knew on the journey. They travelled at a great pace and arrived before dusk at Doom Tower.

Sir Nathaniel had taken care to have the doors and windows shut and locked — all but the door used for their entry. The shutters were up and the blinds down. Moreover, heavy curtains were drawn across the windows. When Adam commented on this, Sir Nathaniel said in a whisper:

“Wait till we are alone, and I shall tell you why this is done; in the meantime not a word or a sign. You will approve when we have had a talk together.”

They said no more on the subject till, when after dinner, they were ensconced alone in Sir Nathaniel’s study, which was on the top story of the tower. Doom Tower was a lofty structure, seated on an eminence high up in the Peak. The top of the tower commanded a wide prospect ranging from the hills above the Ribble to the near side of the Brow, which marked the northern bound of ancient Mercia. It was of the early Norman period, less than a century younger than Castra Regis. The windows of the study were barred and locked, and heavy dark curtains closed them in. When this was done not a gleam of light from the tower was seen from outside.

When they were alone Sir Nathaniel spoke, keeping his voice to just above a whisper:

"It is well to be more than careful. In spite of the fact that your marriage was kept secret, as also your temporary absence, both are known."

"How? To whom?"

"How, I know not; but I am beginning to have an idea. To whom is it the worst? Where it is most dangerous."

"To her?" asked Adam, in momentary consternation.

Sir Nathaniel shivered perceptibly as he answered:

"The White Worm — yes!"

Adam noticed that from thence on he never spoke amongst themselves of Lady Arabella otherwise, except when he wished to divert the suspicion of others or cover up his own. Then, having opened the door, looked outside it and closed it again, he put his lips to Adam's ear and whispered even more softly:

"Not a word, not a sound to disturb your wife. Her ignorance may be yet her protection. You and I know all and shall watch. At all costs, she must have no suspicion!"

Adam hardly dared to breathe, He put his finger to his lips and at last said under his breath:

"I shall do whatever you tell me to, and all the thanks of my heart are to you!"

Sir Nathaniel switched off the electric light, and when the room was pitch dark he came to Adam, took him by the hand, and led him to a seat set in the southern window. Then he softly drew back a piece of the curtain and motioned his companion to look out.

Adam did so, and immediately shrank back as though his eyes had opened on pressing danger. His companion set his mind at rest by saying in a low voice, not a whisper:

"It is all right; you may speak, but speak low. There is no danger here — at present!"

Adam leaned forward, taking care, however, not to press his face against the glass. What he saw would not under ordinary circumstances have caused concern to anybody but to him. With his knowledge, it was simply appalling — though the night was now so dark that in reality there was little to be seen.

On the western side of the tower stood a grove of old trees of forest dimensions. They were not grouped closely, but stood a little apart from each other, producing the effect of a row widely planted. Over the tops of them was seen a green light, something like the danger signal at a railway-crossing. At the height of the tower, the light was not enough to see anything even close to it. It seemed at first quite still; but presently, when Adam's eye became accustomed to it, he could see that it moved a little as if trembling. This at once recalled to Adam's mind all that had been. He seemed to see again the same duplicate light quivering above the well-hole in the darkness of that inner room at Diana's Grove — to hear again Oolanga's prolonged shriek, and to see the hideous black face, now grown grey with terror, disappear into the impenetrable gloom of the mysterious orifice. Instinctively he laid his hand on his revolver, and stood up ready to protect his wife. Then, seeing that nothing happened, and that the light and all outside the tower remained the same, he softly pulled the curtain over the window, and, rising up, came and sat down beside Sir Nathaniel, who looked up for a moment with a sharp glance, and said in an even voice:

“I see you understand. I need say nothing.”

“I understand!” he replied in the same quiet tone.

Sir Nathaniel switched on the light again, and in its comforting glow they began to talk freely.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AT CLOSE QUARTERS

"SHE HAS DIABOLICAL cunning," said Sir Nathaniel. "Ever since you left, she has ranged along the Brow and wherever you were accustomed to frequent. I have not heard whence the knowledge of your movements came to her, nor have I been able to learn any data whereon I have been able to found an opinion. She seems to have heard both of your marriage and your absence; but I gather, by inference, that she does not know where you and your wife are, or of your return. So soon as the dusk falls, she goes out on her rounds, and before dawn covers the whole ground round the Brow, and away up into the heart of the Peak. I presume she doesn't condescend to rest or to eat. This is not to be wondered at in a lady who has been in the habit of sleeping for a thousand years at a time, and of consuming an amount of food at a sitting which would make a moderate-sized elephant kick the beam. However, be all that as it may, her ladyship is now nightly on the prowl, and in her own proper shape that she used before the time of the Romans. It certainly has great facilities for the business on which she is now engaged. She can look into windows of any ordinary kind. Happily, this house is beyond her reach, especially if she wishes — as she manifestly does — to remain unrecognised. But, even at this height, it is wise to show no lights, lest she might learn something of our presence or absence."

Here Adam stood up again and spoke out:

"Would it not be well, sir, if some one of us could see this monster in her real shape at close quarters? I am willing to run the risk — for I take it there would be no slight risk in the doing. I don't suppose anyone of our time has seen her close and lived to tell the tale.”

Sir Nathaniel rose and held up an expostulatory hand as he said:

“Good God, lad! what are you suggesting? Think of your wife, and all that is at stake.”

Adam interrupted:

“It is of my wife that I think, for her sake that I am willing to risk whatever is to be risked. But be assured I shall not drag her into it — or even tell her anything to frighten her. When I go out she shall not know of it.”

“But if you mention the matter at all she will suspect.”

“The fact of the snake being on the look-out must be told to her to warn her, but I will do it in such a way as not to create any undue suspicion regarding herself. Indeed, I have made up my mind as to what to say some time ago, when it was borne in on me to warn her about keeping the place dark. With your permission, I shall go now and tell her of that, and then when I return here you might lend me a key so that I can let myself in.”

“But do you mean to go alone?”

“Certainly. It is surely enough for one person to run the risk.”

“That may be, Adam, but there will be two.”

“How so! You surely don’t mean that Mimi should come with me?”

“Lord, no! But if she knew you were going she would be sure to want to go too; so be careful not to give her a hint.”

“Be sure I shall not. Then who is to be the other?”

“Myself! You do not know the ground; and so would be sure to get into trouble. Now, I know every inch of it, and can guide you how to go safely to any place you want. Adam, this is an exceptional thing — yielding to no law of action that any of us ever heard of. As to danger! What of that to you and me when your wife's safety is concerned! I tell you, no forlorn hope that either of us ever heard of has a hundredth part of the danger we are running into. Yet I do it with all my heart — even as you do."

Adam made a low bow as to one worthy of all honour, but he said no word more on the subject. After he had switched off the light he then peeped out again through the window and saw where the green light still hung trembling above the trees. Before the curtain was drawn and the lights put up again, Sir Nathaniel said:

"So long as her ladyship does not know whereabout we are, we shall have as much safety as remains to us; so, then, bear in mind that we cannot be too careful."

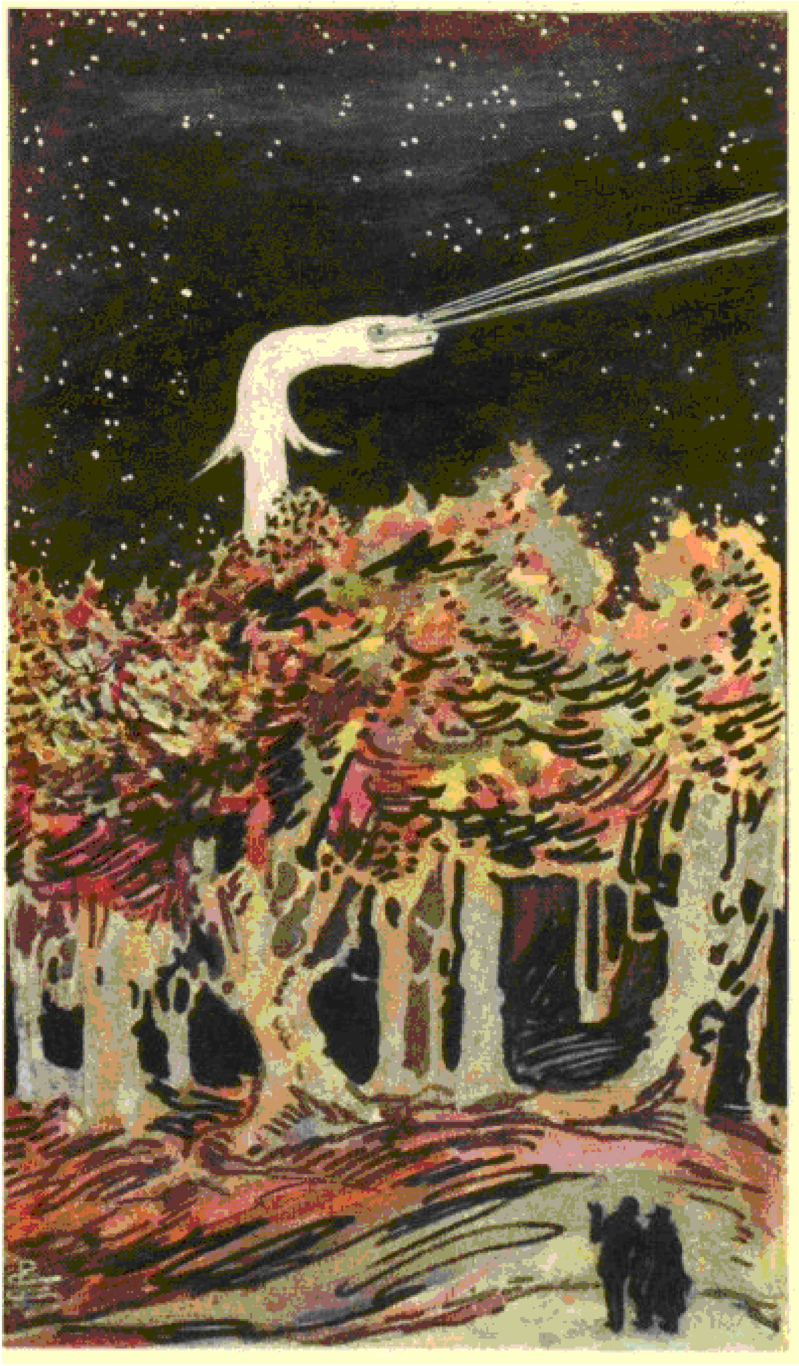
When the two men slipped out by the back door of the house, they walked cautiously along the avenue which trended towards the west. Everything was pitch dark — so dark that at times they had to feel their way by the borders and palings and tree-trunks. They could still see, seemingly far in front of them and high up, the baleful dual light which at the height and distance seemed like a faint line. As they were now on the level of the ground, the light seemed infinitely higher than it had looked from the top of the tower; it actually seemed now, when it trembled, to move amongst the stars. At the sight Adam's heart fell; the whole danger of the desperate enterprise which he had undertaken burst upon him. But shortly this feeling was followed by another which restored him to himself — a fierce hate and loathing, and a desire to kill, such as he had never experienced or even dreamt of.

They went on for some distance on a level road fairly wide, from which the green light was still visible. Here Sir Nathaniel spoke softly again, placing his lips to Adam's ear for safety:

"We must be very silent. We know nothing whatever of this creature's power of either hearing or smelling, though we presume that both are of no great strength. As to seeing, we may presume the opposite, but in any case we must try to keep in the shade or hidden behind the tree-trunks. The slightest error would be fatal to us."

Adam made no answer. He only nodded, in case there should be any chance of the monster seeing the movement.

After a time, that seemed interminable, they emerged from the circling wood. It was like coming out into sunlight by comparison with the misty blackness which had been around them. There was actually some light — enough to see by, though not sufficient to distinguish things at a distance or minutely. Naturally Adam's eyes sought the green light in the sky. It was still in about the same place, but its surroundings were more visible. It now was at the summit of what seemed to be a long white pole, near the top of which were two pendant white masses like rudimentary arms. The green light, strangely enough, did not seem lessened by the surrounding starlight, but had a clearer effect and a deeper green. Whilst they were carefully regarding this — Adam with the aid of a folding opera-glass — their nostrils were assailed by a horrid stench — something like that which rose from the well-hole in Diana's Grove. This put them in mind of the White Worm, and they tried to examine its position as seen against the sky in the faint starlight. By degrees, as their eyes got and held the right focus, they saw an immense towering mass that seemed snowy white. It was tall and wonderfully thin. The lower part was hidden by the trees which lay between, but they could follow the tall white shaft and the duplicate green lights which topped it. As they looked there was a movement: the shaft seemed to bend and the line of green light descended amongst the trees. They could see the green light twinkle as it passed through the obstructing branches. Seeing where the head of the monster was, the two men ventured a little further forward, and, a propitious ray of moonlight helping, saw that the hidden mass at the base of the shaft was composed of vast coils of the great serpent's body, forming a substratum or base from which the upright mass rose. As still they looked, this lower mass moved, the glistening folds catching the moonlight, and they could see the monster's progress was along the ground. It was coming towards them at a swift pace, so instinctively they both turned and ran, taking care as they went to make as little noise as possible, either by their footfalls or by disturbing the undergrowth close to them. They never stopped or paused till they saw before them the high dark tower of Doom. Quickly they entered, locking the door behind them. They did not need to talk, with such a horrid memory behind them and still accompanying them. So in the dark they found their separate rooms and went to bed.



CHAPTER XXIX

IN THE ENEMY’S HOUSE

SIR NATHANIEL WAS in the library next morning after breakfast when Adam came to him carrying a letter. As he entered the room he said:

“Her ladyship doesn’t lose any time. She has begun work already!”

Sir Nathaniel, who was writing at a table near the window, looked up.

“What is it?” said he.

Adam held him the letter he was carrying. It was in a blazoned envelope.

“Ha!” said Sir Nathaniel, “from Lady Arabella! I expected something of the kind.”

“But,” said Adam, “how could she have known we were here? She didn’t know last night.”

“I don’t think we need trouble about that, Adam. There is much we do not and cannot understand. This is only another mystery. Suffice it that she does now know. It is all the better and safer for us.”

“Better and safer?” replied Adam, amazed.

“Certainly. It is better to know the danger before us; and this is a warning, though it was not intended so. Let me see it. Addressed to Mr. Adam Salton! Then she knows everything. All the better.”

“How,” said Adam with a puzzled look. “How is it all the better?”

“General process of reasoning, my boy; and the experience of some years in the diplomatic world. Just that we are all the safer with a creature that follows its own instincts. This creature is a monster without heart or consideration for anything or anyone. She is not nearly so dangerous in the open as when she has the dark to protect her. Besides, we know, by our own experience of her movements, that for some reason she shuns publicity. Perhaps it is that she knows it won't interfere in her designs on Caswall — or rather, on Caswall's estate. In spite of her vast bulk and abnormal strength, she is afraid to attack openly. After all, vast as she is, she is only a snake and with a snake's nature, which is to keep low and squirm and proceed by stealth and cunning. She will never attack when she can run away, although she knows well that running away would probably be fatal to her. What is the letter about?"

Sir Nathaniel's voice was calm and self-possessed. When he was engaged in any struggle of wits he was all diplomatist.

"It is asking Mimi and me to tea this afternoon at Diana's Grove, and hoping that you also will favour her."

Sir Nathaniel smiled as he answered directly:

"Please ask Mrs. Salton to accept for us all."

"Accept? To go there? She means some deadly mischief. Surely — surely it would be wiser not."

"It is an old trick that we learn early in diplomacy, Adam: to fight on ground of your own choice. It is true that she initiated the place on this occasion; but by accepting it we make it ours. Moreover, she will not be able to understand our reason or any reason for our doing so, and her own bad conscience — if she has any bad or good — and her own fears and doubts will play our game for us. No, my dear boy, let us accept, by all means."

"Must we accept for you too, sir? I am loath that you should run such a risk. Surely you are better out of it."

"No! It is better that I should be with you. In the first place, it will be less suspicious — you know you are my guests, and it will be better to preserve convention than to break it. In the next place, and the main reason for my going, there will be two of us to protect your wife in case of necessity. As to fear for me, do not count that. In any case, I am not a timorous man. And in this case I should accept all the danger that could be heaped on me."

Adam said nothing, but he silently held out his hand, which the other shook: no words were necessary.

When it was getting near tea-time, Mimi asked Sir Nathaniel:

"Shall we walk over? It is only a step."

"No, my dear," he answered. "We must make a point of going in state. We want all publicity." She looked at him inquiringly. "Certainly, my dear. In the present circumstances publicity is a part of safety. Do not be surprised if, whilst we are at Diana's Grove, occasional messages come for you — for all or any of us."

"I see!" said Mrs. Salton. "You are taking no chances."

"None, my dear. All I have learned at foreign courts and amongst civilised and uncivilised people is going to be utilised within the next couple of hours."

"I shall gladly learn," she said: "it may help me on other occasions."

"I hope to God it will not!"

Sir Nathaniel's voice was full of seriousness, which made the look grave also. Somehow it brought to her in a convincing way the awful gravity of the occasion. Before they came to the gate, Sir Nathaniel said to her:

"I have arranged with Adam certain signals which may be necessary if certain eventualities occur. These need be nothing to do with you directly. Only bear in mind that if I ask you or Adam to do anything, please do not lose a second in the doing of it. We shall all try to pass off such moments with an appearance of unconcern. In all probability nothing requiring such care will occur. She will not try force, though she has so much of it to spare. Whatever she may attempt to-day of harm to any of us will be in the way of secret plot. Some other time she may try force, but — if I am able to prognosticate such a thing — not to-day. The messengers who may ask for you or any of us will not be witnesses only: they may help to stave off danger." Seeing query in her face he went on. "Of what kind the danger may be I know not, and cannot guess. It will doubtless be some ordinary circumstance of triviality; but none the less dangerous on that account. Here we are at the gate. Now, be self-possessed and careful in all matters, however small. To keep your head is half the battle."

There were quite a lot of servant men in livery in the hall. The doors of the green drawing-room were thrown open, and Lady Arabella came forth and offered them cordial welcome. This having been got over, Lady Arabella went into the other room, where a servant was holding a salver on which was laid a large letter sealed. The instant her back was turned, Sir Nathaniel whispered to Adam:

"Careful! I remember just such a cloud of servants at the Summer Palace in the Kremlin the day the Grand Duke Alexipof was assassinated at the reception given to the Khan of Bokhara."

With a slight motion of his left hand, he put the matter aside, enjoining silence. At that moment a servant in plain clothes came and bowed to Lady Arabella, saying:

"Tea is served, your ladyship, in the atrium."

The doors of a suite of rooms were thrown partially open, the farthest of them showing the lines and colours of a Roman villa. Adam, who was acutely watchful and was suspicious of everything, saw on the far side of this newly disclosed room a panelled iron door of the same colour and configuration as the outer door of the inner room where was the well-hole wherein Oolanga had disappeared. Something in the sight alarmed him, and he quietly went forward and stood near the door. He made no movement even of his eyes, but he could see that Sir Nathaniel was watching him intently and, he fancied, with approval.

They all sat near the table spread for tea, Adam still keeping near the door. Lady Arabella had taken Mimi with her, the two men following, and sat facing the iron door. She fanned herself, impressively complaining of heat, and told one of the footmen to throw all the outer doors open. Tea was in progress when Mimi suddenly started up with a look of fright on her face; at the same moment, the men became cognisant of a thick smoke which began to spread through the room — a smoke which made those who experienced it gasp and choke. The men — even the footmen — began to edge uneasily towards the inner door. Lady Arabella alone was unmoved. She sat still in her seat at the table, with a look of unconcern on her face which disturbed all present, except Sir Nathaniel — and later, Adam, so soon as he caught Sir Nathaniel's eye. Denser and denser grew the smoke, and more acrid its smell. Presently, Mimi, towards whom the draught from the open door wafted the smoke, rose up choking, and ran to the door, which she threw open to its fullest extent, disclosing on the outside of it a curtain of thin silk fixed not to the door but the doorposts. As the door opened more freely the draught from the open door swayed the thin silk towards her, enveloping her in a sort of cloud. In her fright, she tore down the curtain, which enveloped her from head to foot. Then she ran towards the open outer door, unconscious or heedless of the fact that she could not see where she was going. At this moment, Adam, followed by Sir Nathaniel, rushed forward and joined her — Adam catching her by the upper arm and holding her tight. It was well that he did so, for just before her lay the black orifice of the well-hole, which, of course, she could not see with the silk curtain round her head. The floor was extremely slippery; something like thick oil had been spilled where she had to pass; and close to the edge of the hole her feet shot from under her, and she stumbled forward towards the well-hole.

CHAPTER XXX

A RACE FOR LIFE

WHEN ADAM SAW Mimi slip, he sprang forward, still holding her arm, so, as they moved forward at equal rate of speed, there was no unnecessary shock. Instinctively he flung himself backward, still holding her. His weight here told, and, as his grip held her fast; he dragged her up from the hole and they fell together on the floor outside the zone of slipperiness. In a moment he had sprung to his feet and raised her up, so that together they rushed out through the open door into the sunlight, Sir Nathaniel coming close behind them. They were all pale except the old diplomatist, who looked both calm and cool. It sustained and cheered Adam and his wife to see him thus master of himself. Both Mr. and Mrs. Salton managed to follow his example, to the wonderment of the footmen, who saw the three who had just escaped a terrible danger walking together gaily, as under the guiding pressure of Sir Nathaniel's hand they turned to re-enter the house. When they were out of earshot of the servants, Sir Nathaniel whispered softly:

"Hush — not a sound. Do not appear to notice that anything has happened. We are not safe yet — not out of this ordeal."

And so chatting and laughing they re-entered the atrium where Lady Arabella still sat in her place as motionless as a statue of marble. In fact, all those in the room remained so still as to give the newcomers the impression that they were looking at an instantaneous photograph. In a few seconds, however, normal sound and movement were renewed. Lady Arabella, whose face had blanched to a deadly white, now appeared to be in great spirits, and resumed her ministrations at the tea-board as though nothing unusual had happened. The slop-basin was full of half-burned brown paper over which tea had been poured.

Sir Nathaniel, who had been narrowly observing his hostess, took the first opportunity afforded him of whispering to Adam:

“More than ever, be careful. The real attack is to come yet. She is too quiet for reality. When I give my hand to your wife to lead her out — by whatever door, — I don’t know which yet, — come with us — quick, and caution her to hurry. Don’t lose a second, even if you have to make a scene. Hs-s-s-h!”

Then they resumed their places close to the table, and the servants, in obedience to Lady Arabella’s order, brought in fresh tea.

Thence on, that tea-party seemed to Adam, whose faculties were at their utmost intensity, like a terrible dream. As for poor Mimi, she was so over-wrought both with present and future fear, and with horror at the danger she had escaped, that her faculties were numb. However, she was braced up for a trial, and she felt assured that whatever might come she would be able to go through with it. Sir Nathaniel seemed just as usual — suave, dignified, and thoughtful — perfect master of himself and his intention. To her husband it was evident that Mimi was ill at ease. The mere way she kept constantly turning her head to look around her, the quick coming and going of the colour of her face, her hurried breathing, alternating with periods of suspicious calm, were to those who had power to discern subtle evidences of mental perturbation. To her, the attitude of Lady Arabella seemed compounded of social sweetness and personal consideration. It would be hard to imagine any more thoughtful and tender kindness towards an honoured guest. Even Adam seemed touched with it, though he never relaxed his vigilance or took his eyes off the lady's movements. When tea was over and the servants had come to clear away the cups, Lady Arabella, putting her arm round Mimi's waist, strolled with her into an adjoining room, where she collected a number of photographs which were scattered about, and, sitting down beside her guest, began to show them to her. While she was doing this, the servants closed all the doors of the suite of rooms and that which opened from the room outside, — that of the well-hole into the avenue. Presently she came back to the room where Adam and Sir Nathaniel were, and sat on a sofa on which Mimi had already taken her seat. Suddenly, without any seeming cause, the light in the room began to grow dim. The light outside seemed to become obscure. Sir Nathaniel, who was sitting close to Mimi, rose to his feet, and, crying, "Quick!" caught hold of her right hand and began to drag her from the room. Adam caught her other hand, and between them they drew her through the outer door which the servants were beginning to close. It was difficult at first to find the way, the darkness was so great; but to their relief a multitude of the cowled birds rushed through the open door, and then, falling back, formed a lane-way through the air which there was no mistaking. In seemingly frantic haste they rushed through the avenue towards the gate, Adam whistling shrilly. Mr. Salton's double carriage with the four horses and two postillions, which had been waiting quite still in the angle of the avenue, dashed up. Her husband and Sir Nathaniel lifted — almost threw — Mimi into the carriage. The postillion plied whip and spur, and the vehicle, rocking with its speed, swept through the gate and tore up the road. Behind them was a hubbub — servants rushing about, orders being called out, doors shutting, and somewhere, seemingly far back in the house, a strange noise like a lumbering cart moving on thin ice. There was no slackening of pace. Every nerve of the men, and even of the horses, was strained as they dashed recklessly along the road. The two men held Mimi between them, the arms of both of them round her as though protectingly. As they went, there was a sudden rise in the ground; but the horses, breathing heavily as if mad, dashed up it at racing speed, not even slackening their pace when the hill fell away again leaving them to hurry along the downgrade. At the utmost speed of which the horses were capable, they made for Macclesfield. Thence on to Congleton. Having passed the latter place, as they looked back they saw a great shapeless mass behind them, its white showing through the creeping dusk, all form lost in its swift passage. From Congleton they headed for Rancorn, where there were clusters of lights at the bridge and a stream of single lights, or small groups of lights, alone by the ship canal. The horses tore madly on, seemingly in the extremity of terror, and followed in their course by a sickening smell such as had arisen through the well-hole. At Runcorn they headed for Liverpool, joyous, even in the midst of their terror, when they saw the blaze of lights at the landing-stage and extending down the river till they disappeared in the line of the piers and floating buoys. As they drew near they heard with glad ears the hooting of a great steamer, ablaze with many lights from stem to stern.

“We are in time!” said Adam, but made no other remark. At Runcorn they saw a white mass slip down the slope from the roadway to the Mersey, and heard the wash of a great body that slid into the tideway. The postillions, with their goal in sight, redoubled their exertions, and they tore along the streets at reckless pace, careless of the shouted warnings and threats of the police and the many drivers of various vehicles. They tore down the steep movable way to the landing-stage — just in time to see the great vessel move into the river, and to hear the throb of the engines.

The hearts of Adam and his wife grew cold, for their last chance seemed gone. But at the foot of the movable bridge stood Davenport, watch in hand. The moment the carriage drove up he raised his hand in signal to the captain of a great Isle of Man steamer, who was evidently looking out for him. When he saw the hand raised, he worked the engine telegraph, and the great paddle-wheels began to revolve. The *Manx Maid* was the fastest boat sailing from Liverpool; and from the instant the flanges to her paddles struck the water, she began to overhaul the Australian boat. They had not got far down the river when she overtook the latter and ranged alongside without slackening speed. Affairs had already been arranged between the two boats with a time to be reckoned by seconds. Adam and his wife, Sir Nathaniel, and Davenport were transferred to the ocean steamship whilst going at full speed as was allowable at this point of the river, and the latter swept on her way. Davenport went down to his cabin with Adam, telling him on the way what arrangements had been made and how he had received the message from Diana's Grove; and that the voyagers would be able to get off at Queenstown as they might desire.

CHAPTER XXXI

BACK TO DOOM

THERE SEEMED TO be a great and unusual excitement on the river and along both banks as the *Manx Maid* swept on her way. From the tops of the lighthouses and the pleasure towers; from the yards of every big ship going out or coming in, spy-glasses were projected and binoculars in use; there was rushing to and fro on all docks, and many shots were heard. Sir Nathaniel went about the deck trying to find the cause; at least a quarter-master told him that, so far as they could make out from semaphore signals, a great whale had come down the river and was heading out to sea. It had been first noticed at Runcorn, he said, going downstream; but where it had come from no one knew, for it had been unnoticed before that time. For Sir Nathaniel and his friends this was quite sufficient. The danger was not over yet. Adam went straight to the captain and made a request that the search-light with which the ship was equipped should be kept on the alleged whale day and night, as long as it might be within sight. This was attended to at once, and so long as there was anything to be seen there were constant reports. Adam and his friends had many opportunities of seeing the monster, and more than once recognized the contours of its head and the green flash of its eyes. Just before midnight the report came that the whale had been seen to turn, and was now heading towards the Mersey. Then all was darkness, and reports ceased. The pursuit had been given over.

Adam and Mimi and Sir Nathaniel slept sound that night.

Refreshed with sleep, which had for many nights been a stranger to them all, the party rose with renewed courage and the brave intentions which come with it.

When Queenstown was in sight, Adam, leaving his wife in their cabin, took Sir Nathaniel to the saloon, then empty, and astonished him by telling him that he was going off when the ship stopped, and was returning to the Brow at once.

“But what about your wife?” the latter asked. “Does she go on alone?”

“No, sir; she comes back with me,” was the startling reply.

Sir Nathaniel walked back and forwards several times before he spoke:

“I presume, my dear boy, that you have thought well over what you are about to do, and weighed up the possible consequences. I am not given to interfere with my neighbour’s affairs, and such a thing as this is a man’s own responsibility to be decided entirely by himself. Of course when he has a wife her wishes are paramount. What does she say?”

“We are quite agreed, Sir Nathaniel. We both see it as a duty which we owe to other people to be on the spot and do what we can.”

“But,” expostulated Sir Nathaniel, “with the terrible experiences you have had — the recollection of the terrible dangers which you have escaped — is it wise to place such an awful burden as a possible repetition, or even extension of these things, on the shoulders of a young girl just entering — and happily entering — life? Forgive my interference. I shall not press my views unduly on either of you; but to bring the view before your notice is also a duty, a very sacred duty which I must not forgo.”

“I know that, sir, and with all our heart Mimi and I thank you for your kindness. But it is just because of that experience which is already had, and perhaps paid for, that our power to help others has grown — and our responsibility in equal proportion."

Sir Nathaniel said solemnly:

"God forbid that I should come between any man — or woman — and a duty. Remember that I am with you, heart and soul. I shared the trouble and the risk with you at the beginning, and, please God, I shall do so to the end — whatever that may be!"

Sir Nathaniel said no more, but he was helpful in all ways, loyally accepting the wishes of his friends and supporting them. Mimi thanked him in the warmth of her handclasp, for his sharing the risk, and for his devoted friendship. Then they three settled all matters so far as they could foresee.

When the ship arrived in the roads at Queenstown they debarked in the tender and set out in the first train towards Liverpool. There, in obedience to instructions telegraphed to him by Davenport, they were met with the carriage with four horses and the postillions just as when they had left Diana's Grove. The postillions, who were well-plucked men, had volunteered to come though they knew the terrible risk they ran. But the horses had been changed — wisely — for they could not easily get over the fright in the prolonged race against the monster.

Mr. Salton had been advised that they were not returning to Lesser Hill, so did not expect to see them. All was prepared at Doom with locks and bolts and curtains as when they left.

It would be foolish to say that neither Adam nor Mimi had no fears in returning. On the contrary, the road from Liverpool and Congleton was a *via dolorosa*. Of course Mimi felt it more keenly than her husband, whose nerves were harder, and who was more inured to danger. Still she bore up bravely, and as usual the effort was helpful to her. When once she was in the study in the top of the turret, she almost forgot the terrors which lay outside in the dark. She did not attempt even a peep out of the window; but Adam did — and saw nothing. The full moonlight showed all the surrounding country, but nowhere was to be observed that tremulous line of green light or the thin white tower rising up beyond the woods.

The peaceful night had good effect on them all; danger, being unseen, seemed far off. At times it was hard to realise that it had ever been. With courage quite restored, Adam rose early and walked all along the Brow, seeing no change in the signs of life in Castra Regis. What he did see, to his wonder and concern, on his returning homeward, was Lady Arabella in her tight-fitting white dress and ermine collar, but without her emeralds, emerging from the gate of Diana's Grove and walking towards the Castle. Pondering on this and trying to find some meaning in it, occupied his thoughts till he joined Mimi and Sir Nathaniel at breakfast. They were all silent during the meal, simply because none of them had anything to say. What had been had been, and was known to them all. Moreover, it was not a pleasant topic. One experience they had — at least Adam and Mimi had, for Sir Nathaniel had long ago learned all that it could teach — that is, that memory of even the most stirring or exciting or mournful time, soon passes; the humdrum of life is beyond all episodes, and swamps them. A fillip was given to the conversation when Adam told of his seeing Lady Arabella, and her being on her way to Castra Regis. They each had something to say of her, and of what her wishes or intentions were towards Edgar Caswall. Mimi spoke bitterly of her in every aspect. She had not forgotten — and never would — never could — the occasion when to harm Lilla she consorted even with Oolanga. As a social matter, she was disgusted with her over following up of the rich landowner— "throwing herself at his head so shamelessly," was how she expressed it. She was interested to know that the great kite still flew from Caswall's tower. But beyond such matters she did not try to go. Indeed, for such she had no data. She was really surprised — in a quiet way — to hear how fully the old order of things had been already restored. The only comments she made in this connection were of strongly expressed surprise at her ladyship's "cheek" in ignoring her own criminal acts, and her impudence in taking it for granted that others had overlooked them also. Adam had tried unsuccessfully to find any report of the alleged whale in the Mercy, so he remained silent on that subject. Perhaps he had a vague hope that the monster had been unable to sustain her maritime adventures, and had perished. He was well content that this should be so, though he had already made up his mind that he would spare neither time nor effort, or indeed life itself, to root out Diana's Grove and all it contained. He had already expressed his intention to Sir Nathaniel and to Mimi. The former thoroughly approved his intention and pledged himself to support him in his efforts. Mimi agreed with him, but woman-like advised caution.

CHAPTER XXXII

A STARTLING PROPOSITION

THE MORE MIMI thought over the late events, the more puzzled she was. Adam had actually seen Lady Arabella coming from her own house on the Brow, yet he — and she too — had last seen the monster in the guise in which she had occasionally appeared wallowing in the Irish Sea. What did it all mean — what could it mean? except that there was an error of fact somewhere. Could it be possible that some of them — all of them had been mistaken? That there had been no White Worm at all? That the eyes of Adam and Sir Nathaniel had deceived them? She was all at sea! On either side of her was a belief impossible of reception. Not to believe in what seemed apparent was to destroy the very foundations of belief.… And yet…and yet in old days there had been monsters on the earth, and certainly some people had believed in just such mysterious changes of identity.… It was all very strange. Perhaps, indeed, it was that she herself was mad. Yes, that must be it! Something had upset her brain. She was dreaming untruths based on reality. Just fancy how any stranger — say a doctor — would regard her if she were to calmly tell him that she had been to a tea-party with an antediluvian monster, and that they had been waited on by up-to-date men-servants. From this she went into all sorts of wild fancies. What sort of tea did dragons prefer? What was it that essentially tickled their palates? Who did the washing for dragons' servants? Did they use starch? If, in privacy of their houses — homes — lairs, dragons were accustomed to use knives and forks and teaspoons? Yes, that at any rate was true; she had seen them used herself. Here she got into such a state of intellectual confusion that even the upside-down reasoning of the border-land between waking and sleeping would not account for it. She set herself to thinking deeply. Here she was in her own bed in the house of Sir Nathaniel de Salis, Doom Tower — that at any rate was a fact; and to that she would hold on. She would keep quiet and think of nothing — certainly not of any of these strange things — till Adam was with her. He would tell her the truth. She could believe all that he would say. Therefore, till he came she would remain quiet and try not to think at all. This was a wise and dutiful resolution; and it had its reward. Gradually thoughts, true or false, ceased to trouble her. The warmth and peace of her body began to have effect; and after she had left a message for Adam to come up to her when he returned, she sank into a deep sleep.

Adam returned, exhilarated by his walk, and more settled in his mind than he had been for some time. He, too, had been feeling the reaction from the high pressure which he had been experiencing ever since the intentions of Lady Arabella had been manifested. Like Mimi, he had gone through the phase of doubt and inability to believe in the reality of things, though it had not affected him to the same extent. The idea, however, that his wife was suffering ill-effects from her terrible ordeal, braced him up, and when he came into her room and waked her, he was at his intellectual and nervous best. He remained with her till she had quite recovered her nerve, and in this condition had gone again into a peaceful sleep. Then he sought Sir Nathaniel in order to talk over the matter with him. He knew that the calm common sense and self-reliance of the old man, as well as his experience, would be helpful to them all. Sir Nathaniel had by now come to the conclusion that for some reason which he did not understand, or indeed try to, Lady Arabella had entirely changed her plans, and, for the present at all events, was entirely pacific. Later on, when the ideas of the morning were in farther perspective, he was inclined to attribute her changed demeanour to the fact that her influence over Edgar Caswall was so far increased as to justify a more fixed belief in his submission to her charms. She had seen him that morning when she visited Castra Regis, and they had had a long talk together, during which the possibility of their union had been discussed. Caswall, without being enthusiastic on the subject, had been courteous and attentive; as she had walked back to Diana's Grove she almost congratulated herself on her new settlement in life. That the idea was becoming fixed in her mind, and was even beginning to materialise, was shown by a letter which she wrote later in the day to Adam Salton, and sent to him by hand. It ran as follows:

"DEAR MR. SALTON, — I wonder if you would kindly advise, and, if possible, help me in a matter of business. I have no aptitude or experience in such matters, and am inclined to lean on a friend. Briefly, it is this. I have been for some time trying to make up my mind to sell this place (Diana's Grove), but so many difficulties have been suggested about so doing, that I have put off and put off the doing of it till now. The place is entirely my own property, and no one has to be consulted with regard to what I may wish to do about it. It was bought by my late husband, Captain Adolphus Ranger March, who then had a residence, The Crest, Appleby. He acquired all rights of all kinds, including mining and sporting. When he died he left his whole property to me. Now my father wants me to live with him, and I feel it a call of duty to do so. I am his only child, and he is beginning to be an old, a very old man. Moreover, he has certain official duties to perform and dignities to support. He is, as perhaps you know, Lord Lieutenant of the County, and he feels the want of a female relative to take the head of the table. I am, he says, the only one for the post. He is too old to marry again, and, besides help in the duties named, he wants the comfort of a companion. I shall feel the leaving this place, which has become endeared to me by many sacred memories and affections — the recollection of many happy days of my young married life and the more than happy memories of the man I loved and who loved me so much. I should be glad to sell the place for any kind of fair price — so long, of course, as the purchaser was one I liked and of whom I approved. May I say that you yourself would be the ideal person. But I dare not hope for so much. It strikes me, however, that among your Australian friends may be someone who wishes to make a settlement in the Old Country, and would, in such case, care to fix the spot in one of the most historic regions in England, full of romance and legend, and with a never-ending vista of historical interest — an estate which, though small, is in perfect condition and with illimitable possibilities of development, and many doubtful — or unsettled — rights which have existed before the time of the Romans or even Celts, who were the original possessors. In addition, the house is one of the oldest in England, and kept up to the *dernier cri* for the last two thousand years. Of all this, immediate possession is to be had. My lawyers can provide you, or whoever you may suggest, with all business and historical details. A word from you to acceptance or refusal is all that is necessary, and we can leave details to be thrashed out by our agents. Forgive me, won't you, for troubling you in the matter, and believe me, yours very sincerely.

"ARABELLA MARCH"

Adam read this over several times, and then, his mind being made up — though not with inflexible finality, — he went to Mimi and asked if she had any objection. She answered — though after a shudder — that she was in this, as in all things, willing to do whatever he might wish. She added as he was leaving the room:

“Dear, I am willing you should judge what is best for both of us. Be quite free to act as you see your duty, and as your inclination calls. We are in the hands of God, and He has hitherto guided us, and will to His own end.”

CHAPTER XXXIII

WAR À L'OUTRANCE

FROM HIS WIFE'S room Adam Salton went straight to the study in the tower, where he knew Sir Nathaniel would be at that hour. The old man was alone, so, when he had entered in obedience to the "Come in," which answered his query, he closed the door and came and sat down beside him. He began at once:

"Do you think, sir, it would be well for me to buy Diana's Grove?"

"God bless my soul!" said the old man, startled, "what on earth would you want to do that for?"

"Well, sir, I have vowed to destroy that White Worm, and my being able to do whatever I may choose with the Lair would facilitate matters and avoid complications."

Sir Nathaniel hesitated longer than usual before speaking. He was thinking deeply.

"Thank you, Adam, for telling me — though, indeed, I had almost taken so much for granted. But it is well to have accurate knowledge if one is going to advise. I think that, for all reasons, you would do well to buy the property and to have the conveyance settled at once. If you should want more money than is immediately convenient, let me know, so that I may be your banker."

"Thank you, sir, most heartily; but, indeed, I have more money at immediate call than I can want. I am glad you approve."

"More than approve. You are doing a wise thing in a financial way. The property is historic, and as time goes on it will increase in value. Moreover, I may tell you something which indeed is only a surmise, but which, if I am right, will add great value to the place."

Adam listened. He went on:

"Has it ever struck you why the old name, 'The Lair of the White Worm,' was given? Imagine the word 'white' in italics. We know now that there was a snake which in early days was called a worm; but why white?"

"I really don't know, sir; I never thought of it. I simply took it for granted."

"So did I at first — long ago. But later I puzzled my brain for a reason."

"And what was the reason, sir?"

"Simply and solely because the snake or worm *was* white."

"How was that? There must have been a reason. Tradition did not give it a colour without *some* reason."

"Evidently what people saw was white. I puzzled over it till I saw some light on the subject."

"Won't you let me follow your reasoning, sir?"

"Certainly. We are in the county of Stafford, where the great industry of china-burning was originated and grew. Stafford owes much of its wealth to the large deposits of the rare china clay found in it from time to time. These deposits became in time pretty well exhausted; but for centuries Stafford adventurers looked for the special clay as Ohio and Pennsylvania farmers and explorers looked for oil. Anyone owning real estate on which clay can be discovered strikes a sort of gold mine."

"Yes, and then—" The young man looked puzzled.

The old man continued:

"The original 'Worm' so-called, from which the name of the place came, had to find a direct way down to the marshes and the mud-holes. Now, the clay is easily penetrable, and the original hole probably pierced the bed of china clay. When once the way was made it became a sort of highway for the Worm. But as much movement was necessary to ascend such a great and steep height, some of the clay got attached to his rough skin by attrition. The downway must have been easy work, and there was little attrition, but the ascent was different, and when the monster came to view in the upper world, he was fresh from contact with the white clay. Hence the name, which has no cryptic significance but only fact. Now, if that surmise be true — and I do not see why it is not — there must be a deposit of valuable clay of immense depth. And there is no reason why it is not of equally large superficies."

Adam's comment pleased the old gentleman.

"I have it in my bones, sir, that you have struck — or rather reasoned out — a great truth." Sir Nathaniel went on cheerfully, "When the world of commerce and manufacture wakes up to the value of your find, it will be as well that your title to ownership has been perfectly secured. If anyone ever deserved such a gain, it is you."

With his friend's aid, Adam secured the property without loss of time. Then he went to see his uncle, and told him about it. Mr. Salton was delighted to find his young relative already constructively the owner of so fine an estate — and one which gave him an important status in the county.

The next morning, when Adam went in to his host in the smoking-room, the latter asked him how he purposed to proceed with regard to keeping his vow.

"It is a difficult matter which you have undertaken. To destroy such a monster is something like one of the labours of Hercules, in that not only its size and weight and power of using them in little-known ways are against you, but the occult side is alone an unsurpassable difficulty. The Worm is already master of all the elements except fire. And I do not see how fire can be used for the attack. It has only to sink into the earth in its charted way, and you could not overtake it if you had the resources of the biggest coal-mine in existence. But I daresay you have mapped out some plan in your mind," he added courteously.

"I have, sir. But, of course, it is purely theoretical and may not stand the test of practice."

"May I know the idea you formed?"

"Well, sir, this was my argument: This old lady is fairly experienced. I suppose, by the way, that there is no offence in calling her an old lady, considering that she has been disporting herself in her own way for some thousands of years. So there is no use in trying means that were familiar to her at the time of the Flood. I have been turning my brain inside out and upside down to hit on a new scheme. We hear in Ecclesiastes that there is nothing new under the sun, and as she antedated that work, I daresay she is up to everything which has been popularly known ever since. So at last I decided to try a new adaptation of an old scheme. It is about a century old. But what is a century to her? At the time of the Chartist trouble an idea spread amongst financial circles that an attack was going to be made on the Bank of England. Accordingly, the directors of that institution consulted many persons who were supposed to know what steps should be taken, and it was finally decided that the best protection against fire — which is what was feared — was not water but sand. To carry the scheme into practice great store of fine sea-sand — the kind that blows about and is used to fill hour-glasses — was provided throughout the building, especially at the points liable to attack, from which it could be brought into use.

"I propose to follow the example. I shall provide at Diana's Grove, as soon as it comes into my possession, an enormous amount of such sand, and shall take an early occasion of pouring it into the well-hole, which it will in time choke. Thus Lady Arabella, in her guise of the White Worm, will find herself cut off from her refuge. The hole is a narrow one, and is some hundreds of feet deep. The weight of the sand this can contain would not in itself be sufficient to obstruct; but the friction of such a body working up against it would be tremendous."

"One moment. What use, then, would the sand be for destruction?"

"None, directly; but it would hold the struggling body in place till the rest of the scheme came into practice."

"And what is the rest?"

"As the sand is being poured into the well-hole at intervals, large quantities of dynamite can also be thrown in!"

"Good. But how would the dynamite explode — for, of course, that is what you intend. Would not some sort of wire or fuse be required for each parcel of dynamite?"

Adam smiled.

"Not in these days, sir. That was proved in the second and greater explosion at Hell Gate in New York. Before the explosion a hundred thousand pounds of dynamite in sealed canisters was placed about the miles of workings. At the last a charge of gunpowder was fired — a ton or so. And the concussion exploded all the dynamite. It was most successful. Those who were non-experts in high explosives expected that every pane of glass in New York would be shattered.

But, in reality, the explosive did no harm outside the area intended, although sixteen acres of rock had been mined and only the supporting walls and pillars had been left intact. The whole of the rocks which made the whirlpool in East River were simply shattered into the size of matches."

Sir Nathaniel nodded approval.

"That seems a good plan — a very excellent one. But if it has to tear down so many feet of precipice it may wreck the whole neighbourhood."

"And free it for ever from a monster," added Adam, as he left the room to find his wife.

CHAPTER XXXIV

APPREHENSION

LADY ARABELLA HAD instructed her solicitors to hurry on with the conveyance of Diana's Grove, so no time was lost in letting Adam Salton have formal possession of the estate. After his interview with Sir Nathaniel, he had taken steps to begin putting his plan into action. In order to accumulate the necessary amount of fine sea-sand, he had ordered the steward to prepare for an elaborate system of top-dressing all the grounds. A great heap of the sand, which Mr. Salton's carts had brought from bays on the Welsh coast, began to grow at the back of the Grove. No one seemed to suspect that it was there for any purpose other than what had been given out. Lady Arabella, who alone could have guessed, was now so absorbed in her matrimonial pursuit of Edgar Caswall, that she had neither time nor inclination for thought extraneous to this. Adam, as a member of the Australian Committee for Defence and a crack gunner in the West Australian Volunteer Artillery, had, of course, plenty of opportunities for purchasing and storing war material; so he put up a rough corrugated-iron shed behind the Grove, in which he had stored his explosives and also a couple of field pieces which he thought it well to have near him in case of emergency. Even the White Worm would have to yield to the explosive shells which they could carry. All being ready for his great attempt whenever the time should come, he was now content to wait, and, in order to pass the time, was content to interest himself in other things — even in Caswall's great kite, which still flew from the high tower of Castra Regis. Strange to say, he took a real interest, beyond the advantage to his own schemes, in Caswall's childish play with the runners. It may, of course, have been that in such puerile matters, which in reality did not matter how they eventuated, he found a solace, or at any rate a relief, from things which were naturally more trying. At any rate, however intended, the effect was there, and the time passed without any harm being done by its passage. The mount of fine sand grew to proportions so vast as to puzzle the bailiffs and farmers round the Brow. The hour of the intended cataclysm was approaching apace. Adam wished — but in vain — for an opportunity, which would appear to be natural, of visiting Caswall in the turret of Castra Regis. At last he got up early one morning, and when he saw Lady Arabella moving towards the Castle, took his courage *à deux mains* and asked to be allowed to accompany her. She was glad, for her own purposes, to comply with his wishes. So together they entered, unobserved at that early hour, and found their way to the turret-room. Caswall was much surprised to see Adam come to his house in such a way, but lent himself to the task of seeming to be pleased. He played the host so well as to deceive even Adam. They all went out on the turret roof, where he explained to his guests the mechanism for raising and lowering the kite, taking also the opportunity of testing the movements of the multitudes of birds, how they answered almost instantaneously to the lowering or raising of the kite. After a little while, Adam's stock of knowledge of this was so increased that he was glad that he had ventured on the visit.

As Lady Arabella walked home with Adam from Castra Regis, she asked him if she might make a request. Permission having been accorded, she explained that before she finally left Diana's Grove, where she had lived so long, she had a desire to know the depth of the well-hole. Adam was really happy to meet her wishes, not from any sentiment, but because he wished to give some valid and ostensible reason for examining the passage of the Worm, which would obviate any suspicion resulting from his being on the premises. This exactly suited him, and he made full use of his opportunities. He brought from London a Kelvin sounding apparatus with an adequate length of piano-wire for testing any depth, however great. The wire passed over the easily-running wheel, and when this was once fixed over the hole, he was satisfied to wait till the most advantageous time to make his final experiment. He was absolutely satisfied with the way things were going. It seemed to him almost an impossibility that there should be any hitch or disturbance in his carefully arranged plans. It often amazed Adam to see how thoroughly Lady Arabella seemed to enjoy the sounding of the well-hole, despite the sickening stench exhaled by the fissure. Sometimes he would have to go out into the outer air to get free from it for a little while. It really was not merely an evil smell; it rather seemed to partake of some of the qualities of some noxious chemical waste. But she seemed never to tire in the work, but went on as though unconscious that anything disagreeable at all existed. Adam tried to find relief by interesting her in the experiments with the kite. The top of the Castle, at any rate, was free from the foul breath of the pit, and whilst he was engaged there he did not feel as if his actual life was being imperilled by the noxious smell. One thing he longed for, a little artillery practice, though indeed there was a solace to him in the thought that he was the crack shot in the West Australian Artillery.

In the meantime, affairs had been going quietly at Mercy Farm. Lilla, of course, felt lonely at the absence of her cousin, but the even tenor of life went on for her as for others. After the first shock of parting was over, things went back to their accustomed routine. In one respect, however, there was a marked difference. So long as home conditions had remained unchanged, Lilla was content to put ambition far from her and to settle down to the life which had been hers as long as she could remember. But Mimi's marriage set her thinking; naturally, she came to the conclusion that she too might have a mate. There was not for her much choice — there was little movement in the matrimonial direction at the farmhouse. But there was a counter-balancing advantage that one man had already shown his preference for her in an unmistakable way. True, she did not approve of the personality of Edgar Caswall, and his struggle with Mimi had frightened her; but he was unmistakably an excellent *parti*, much better than she could have any right to expect. This weighs much with a woman, and more particularly one of her class. So, on the whole, she was content to let things take their course, and to abide by the issue. As time had gone on, she had reason to secretly believe that things did not point to happiness. But here again was a state of things purely feminine, which was easily got over. The happiness which is, so to speak, "in the bush," is at best vague, and the opposite is more vague still. It is hard for a young person, specially of the female sex, to believe that things may not turn out eventually as well as they had originally promised. She could not shut her eyes to certain disturbing facts, amongst which were the existence of Lady Arabella and her growing intimacy with Edgar Caswall; his own cold and haughty nature, so little in accord with the love which is the foundation of a young maid's dreams of happiness; and, finally, that the companion of her youth — her life — would, by her marriage to Adam, be taken away to the other side of the earth, where she was to make her home. How things would of necessity, alter if she were to marry herself, she was afraid to think. All told, the prospect was not happy for her, and she had a secret longing that *something* might occur to upset the order of things as at present arranged. She had a feeling that she would be happy to accept whatever might happen in consequence of the change. She had also a sort of foreknowledge that the time was coming with startling rapidity when Mr. Caswall would come to pay another visit at the farm — a thing which she was quite unable to contemplate with any mixed pleasure, more especially as Mimi would not be with her to help her in bearing the trial. She dreaded lest there should be another struggle of wills in which she would have to be the shuttlecock. The result of her pondering over the subject was that she saw the beginning of the end of her happy life, and felt as if she was looking into a cold fog in which everything was concealed from her. And so she was filled with many unrelieved apprehensions.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE LAST BATTLE

WHEN LILLA WATFORD got Edgar Caswall's note asking if he might come to tea on the following afternoon, her heart sank within her. If it was only for her father's sake, she must not refuse him or show any disinclination which he might construe into incivility. She missed Mimi more than she could say or even dared to think. Hitherto, she had always looked to her for sympathy, for understanding, for loyal support. Now she and all these things, and a thousand others — gentle, assuring, supporting — were gone. And instead there was a horrible aching void. In matters of affection for both sexes, and overcoming timorousness for woman, want ceases to be a negative and becomes a positive. For the whole afternoon and evening, and for the following forenoon, poor Lilla's loneliness grew to be a positive agony. For the first time she began to realise the sense of her loss as though all the previous suffering had been merely a preparation. Everything she looked at, everything she remembered or thought of, became laden with poignant memory. Then on the top of all was a new sense of dread. The reaction from the sense of security, which had surrounded her all her life, to a never-quieted apprehension was at times almost more than she could bear. It so filled her with fear that she had a haunting feeling that she would as soon die as live. However, whatever might be her own feelings, duty had to be done. And as she had been brought up to consider duty as first, she braced herself to go through, to the very best of her ability, what was before her. Still, the severe and prolonged struggle for self-control told upon her. She looked as she felt, ill and weak. She was really in a nerveless and prostrate condition, with black circles round her eyes, pale even to her lips, and with an instinctive trembling which she was quite unable to repress. It was for her a sad mischance that Mimi was away, for her love would have seen through all obscuring causes, and have brought to light the girl's unhappy condition of health. Lilla was utterly unable to do anything to escape from the ordeal before her; but her cousin, with the experience of her former struggles with Mr. Caswall and of the condition in which these left her, would have taken steps — even peremptory ones, if necessary — to prevent a repetition.

Edgar arrived punctually to the time appointed by herself. When Lilla, through the great window, saw him approaching the house, her condition of nervous upset was pitiable. She braced herself up, however, and managed to meet and go through with the interview in its preliminary stages without any perceptible change in her normal appearance and being. It had been to her an added terror that the black shadow of Oolanga, whom she dreaded, should follow hard on his master. A load was lifted from her mind when he did not make his usual stealthy approach. She had also feared, though in lesser degree, lest Lady Arabella should be present to make trouble for her as before. The absence of her, too, made at least the beginning of the interview less intolerable. With a woman's natural forethought in a difficult position, she had provided the furnishing of the tea-table as a subtle indication of the social difference between her and her guest. She had chosen the implements of service, as well as all the provender set forth, of the humblest kind. Instead of arranging the silver teapot and china cups, she had set out an earthen tea-pot such as was in common use in the farm kitchen. The same idea was carried out in the cups and saucers of thick homely delft, and in the cream-jug of similar kind. The bread was of simple whole-meal, home-baked. The butter was of course good, since she had made it herself and the preserves and honey came from her own garden. Her face beamed with satisfaction when the guest eyed the appointments with a supercilious glance. It was all a shock to the poor girl herself, for she enjoyed offering to a guest the little hospitalities possible to her; but that had to be sacrificed with other pleasures. Caswall's face was more set and iron-clad than ever — his piercing eyes seemed from the very beginning to look her through and through. Her heart quailed when she thought of what would follow — of what would be the end, when this was only the beginning. As some protection, though it could be only of a sentimental kind, she brought from her own room the photographs of Mimi, of her grandfather, and of Adam Salton, whom by now she had grown to look on with reliance, as a brother whom she could trust. She kept the pictures near her heart, to which her hand naturally strayed when her feelings of constraint, distrust, or fear became so poignant as to interfere with the calm which she felt was necessary to help her through her ordeal. At first Edgar Caswall was courteous and polite, even thoughtful; but after a little while, when he found her resistance to his domination grow, he abandoned all forms of self-control and appeared in the same dominance as he had previously shown. She was prepared, however, for this, both by her former experience and the natural fighting instinct within her. By this means, as the minutes went on, both developed the power and preserved the equality in which they had begun.

Without warning or any cogent cause, the psychic battle between the two individualities began afresh. This time both the positive and negative causes were all in favour of the man. The woman was alone and in bad spirits, unsupported; nothing at all was in her favour except the memory of the two victorious contests; whereas the man, though unaided, as before, by either Lady Arabella or Oolanga, was in full strength, well rested, and in flourishing circumstances. It was not, therefore, to be wondered at that his native dominance of character had full opportunity of asserting itself. He began his preliminary stare with a conscious sense of power, and, as it appeared to have immediate effect on the girl, he felt an ever-growing conviction of ultimate victory. After a little Lilla's resolution began to flag. She felt that the contest was unequal — that she was unable to put forth her best efforts. As she was an unselfish, unegotistical person, she could not fight so well in her own battle as in that of someone whom she loved and to whom she was devoted. Edgar saw the relaxing of the muscles of face and brow, and the almost collapse of the heavy eyelids which seemed tumbling downward in sleep. She made gallant efforts to brace her dwindling powers, but for a time unsuccessfully. At length there came an interruption, which seemed like a powerful stimulant. Through the wide window she saw Lady Arabella enter the plain gateway of the farm and advance towards the hall door. She was clad as usual in tight-fitting white, which accentuated her thin, sinuous figure. The sight did for Lilla what no voluntary effort could. Her eyes flashed, and in an instant she felt as though a new life had suddenly developed within her. Lady Arabella's entry, in her usual unconcerned, haughty, supercilious way, heightened the effect, so that when the two stood close to each other battle was joined. Mr. Caswall, too, took new courage from her coming, and all his masterfulness and power came back to him. His looks, intensified, had more obvious effect than had been noticeable that day. Lilla seemed at last overcome by his dominance. Her face became red and pale — violently red and ghastly pale by rapid turns. Her strength seemed gone. Her knees collapsed, and she was actually sinking on the floor, when to her surprise and joy Mimi came into the room, running hurriedly and breathing heavily. Lilla rushed to her, and the two clasped hands. With that, a new sense of power, greater than Lilla had ever seen in her, seemed to quicken her cousin. Her further hand swept the air in front of Edgar Caswall, seeming to drive him backward more and more by each movement, till at last he seemed to be actually hurled through the door which Mimi's entrance had left open, and fell on his back at full length on the gravel path without. Then came the final and complete collapse of Lilla, who, without a sound, sank down pale as death on the floor.

CHAPTER XXXVI

FACE TO FACE

MIMI WAS GREATLY distressed when she saw her cousin lying prone. She had a few times in her life seen Lilla on the verge of fainting, but never senseless; and now she was frightened. She threw herself on her knees beside Lilla, and tried, by rubbing her hands and such measures commonly known, to restore her. But all her efforts were unavailing. Lilla still lay white and senseless. In fact, each moment she looked worse; her breast, that had been heaving with the stress, became still, and the pallor of her face grew like marble. At these succeeding changes Mimi's fright grew, till it altogether mastered her. She succeeded in controlling herself only to the extent that she did not scream. Lady Arabella followed Caswall, when he had recovered sufficiently to get up and walk — though stumblingly — in the direction of Castra Regis. When Mimi was quite alone with Lilla and the need for effort had ceased, she felt weak and trembled. In her own mind, she attributed it to a sudden change in the weather. It was momentarily becoming apparent that a storm was coming on. The sky was covered with flying clouds. The silence was so marked as to become a positive quality. There was in the air that creaking sound that shows that electricity is gathering. For a little while she noticed that though the great kite still flew from the turret, the birds were beginning to gather as they had done when the kite had fallen. But now they began to disappear in some mysterious way: first singly, and then in increasing numbers till the whole world without seemed a widespread desolation. Something struck her when she had become cognizant of this and with wild affright in her face she again stooped over Lilla.

And then came a wild cry of despair. She raised Lilla's white face and laid it on her warm young breast, but all in vain. The cold of the white face thrilled through her, and she utterly collapsed when it was borne in on her that Lilla had passed away.

The dusk gradually deepened and the shades of evening closed in, but she did not seem to notice or to care. She sat still on the floor with her arms round the body of the girl whom she loved. Darker and blacker grew the sky as the coming storm and the closing night joined forces. Still she sat on — alone — tearless — unable to think. Slowly the evening merged in night. Mimi did not know how long she sat there. Though it seemed to her that ages had passed, it could not have been more than a few minutes. She suddenly came to herself, and was surprised to find herself in almost absolute darkness. For a while she lay quiet, thinking of the immediate past. Lilla's hand was still in hers, and to her surprise it was still warm. Somehow this helped her consciousness, and without any special act of will she stood up. She lit a lamp and looked at her cousin. There was no doubt that Lilla was dead; but the death must have been recent. Though her face was of set white, the flesh was still soft to the touch. When the lamplight fell on her eyes, they seemed to look at her with intent — with meaning. She put out the light and sat still in the darkness, feeling as though she were seeing with Lilla's eyes. The blackness which surrounded her allowed of no disturbing influence on her own consciousness: the gloom of the sky, of which there was an occasional glimpse as some flying cloud seemed to carry light with it, was in a way tuned to her own gloomy thoughts. For her all was dark, both within and without. Her hope seemed as dead as her cousin's body. And over and behind all was a sense of unutterable loneliness and sorrow. She felt that nothing in the world could ever come right again. In this state of dark isolation a new resolution came to her, and grew and grew until it became a fixed definite purpose. She would face Caswall and call him to account for his murder of Lilla — that was what she called it to herself. She would also take steps — she knew not what or how — to avenge the part taken by Lady Arabella. In this frame of mind she lit all the lamps in the room, got water and linen from her room, and set about the decent ordering of Lilla's body. This took some time; but when it was finished, she put on her hat and cloak, put out the lights, and, locking the door behind her, set out quietly and at even pace for Castra Regis. As she drew near the Castle, she saw no lights except those in and around the tower room. The lights showed her that Mr. Caswall was there, and so she entered by the hall door, which as usual was open, and felt her way in the darkness up the staircase to the lobby of the room. The door was ajar, and the light from within showed brilliantly through the opening. She saw Edgar Caswall walking restlessly to and fro in the room with his hands clasped behind his back. She opened the door without knocking, and walked right into the room. As she entered, he ceased walking, and stared at her in surprise. She made no remark, no comment, but continued the fixed look which he had seen on her entrance.

For a time silence reigned, and the two stood looking fixedly at each other. Caswall was the first to speak.

"I had the pleasure of seeing your cousin, Miss Watford, to-day."

"Yes," she answered, her head up, looking him straight between the eyes, which made even him flinch. "It was an ill day for her that you did see her."

"Why so?" he asked in a weak way.

“Because it cost her her life. She is dead!”

“Dead! Good God! When did she die? What of?”

“She died this evening just after you left her.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes — and so are you — or you ought to be. You killed her!”

“I killed her! Be careful what you say! Why do you say such a thing?”

“Because, as God sees us, it is true; and you know it. You came to Mercy Farm on purpose to kill her — if you could. And the accomplice of your guilt, Lady Arabella March, came for the same purpose.”

“Be careful, woman,” he said hotly. “Do not use such names in that way, or you shall suffer for it.”

“I am suffering for it — have suffered for it — shall suffer for it. Not for speaking the truth as I have done, but because you two with devilish malignity did my darling to death. It is you and your accomplice who have to dread punishment, not I.”

“Take care!” he said again.

“Oh, I am not afraid of you or your accomplice,” she answered spiritedly. “I am content to stand by every word I have said, every act I have done. Moreover, I believe in God’s justice. I fear not the grinding of His mills. If needed, I shall set the wheels in motion myself. But you don’t care even for God, or believe in Him. Your god is your great kite, which cows the birds of a whole district. But be sure that His hand, when it rises, always falls at the appointed time. His voice speaks in thunder, and not only for the rich who scorn their poorer neighbours. The voices that call on Him come from the furrow and the workshop, from grinding toil and unrelieved stress and strain. Those voices He always hears, however frail and feeble they may be. His thunder is their echo. His lightning the menace that is borne. Be careful! I say even as you have spoken. It may be that your name is being called even at this moment at the Great Assize. Repent while there is still time. Happy you if you may be allowed to enter those mighty halls in the company of the pure-souled angel whose voice has only to whisper one word of justice and you thenceforth disappear for ever into everlasting torment.”

CHAPTER XXXVII

ERITIS SICUT DEUS

FOR THE LAST two days most of those concerned had been especially busy. Adam, leaving his wife free to follow her own desires with regard to Lilla and her grandfather, busied himself with filling the well-hole with the fine sand prepared for the purpose, taking care to have lowered at stated intervals quantities of the store of dynamite so as to be ready for the final explosion. He had under his immediate supervision a corps of workmen, and was assisted in their superintendency by Sir Nathaniel, who had come over for the purpose and was staying at Lesser Hill. Mr. Salton, too, showed much interest in the job, and was eternally coming in and out, nothing escaping his observation. Lady Arabella was staying at her father's place in the Peak. Her visit to Mercy Farm was unknown to any one but herself and Mimi, and she had kept her own counsel with regard to its unhappy conclusion. She had, in fact, been at some pains to keep the knowledge from Edgar. The Kelvin sounding apparatus was in good working order, and it seemed to be a perpetual pleasure to her, despite the horrible effluvium, to measure again and again the depth of the well-hole. This appeared to have some strange fascination for her which no one employed in the work shared. When any of the workmen made complaint of the stench to which they were subjected, she did not hesitate to tell them roundly that she believed it was a "try on" on their part to get an immoderate quantity of strong drink. Naturally, Adam did not hear of Lilla's death. There was no one to tell him except Mimi, who did not wish to give him pain, and who, in addition, was so thoroughly occupied with many affairs, some of which we are aware of, that she lacked the opportunity of broaching the matter — even to her husband.

When Mimi returned to Sir Nathaniel's after her interview with Edgar Caswall, she felt the new freedom as to her movements. Since her marriage to Adam and their coming to stay at Doom Tower, Mimi had been always fettered by fear of the horrible monster at Diana's Grove. But now she dreaded it no longer. She had accepted the fact of its assuming at will the form of Lady Arabella and *vice versa*, and had been perhaps equally afraid whichever form it took. But now she did not concern herself about one or the other. True, she wanted to meet Lady Arabella, but this was for militant purposes. She had still to tax and upbraid her for her part in the unhappiness which had been wrought on Lilla and for her share in causing her death. As for the monster, it had been last seen in the channel, forging a way out to sea, and, so far as she knew or cared, had not been seen since and might never be seen again. Now she could once more wander at will along the breezy heights of the Brow or under the spreading oaks of Diana's Grove unfearful of the hateful presence of either the Lady or her *alter ego*, the Worm. She dared not compare what the place had been to her before the hateful revelation, but she could — and she thanked God for that — enjoy the beauties as they were, what they had been, and might be again were they once free. When she left Castra Regis after her interview with Edgar Caswall, she walked home to Doom, making a long detour along the top of the Brow. She wanted time to get calm and be once more master of herself before she should meet her husband. Her nerves were in a raw condition, and she felt more even than at first the shock of her cousin's death, which still completely overwhelmed her. The walk did her good. In the many changes of scene and the bracing exercise, she felt her nervous strength as well as her spirits restored. She was almost her old self again when she had entered the gates of Doom and saw the lights of her own room shining out into the gloom.

When she entered her own room, her first act was to run to the window and throw an eager look round the whole circle of sight. This was instructive — an unconscious effort to clear her mind of any apprehension that the Worm was still at hand rearing its vast height above the trees. A single glance satisfied her that the White Worm *in propriâ personâ* was not visible. So she sat down for a little in the window-seat and enjoyed the pleasure of a full view from which she had been so long cut off. The maid who waited on her had told her that Mr. Salton had not yet returned home, so that she felt free to enjoy the luxury of peace and quiet.

As she looked out of the window of the high tower, which she had opened, she saw something thin and white move along the avenue far below her. She thought she recognised the figure of Lady Arabella, and instinctively drew back behind the drawn curtain. When she had ascertained by peeping out several times that the lady had not seen her, she watched more carefully, all her instinctive hatred of Lady Arabella flooding back at the sight of her. Lady Arabella was moving swiftly and stealthily, looking back and around her at intervals as if she feared to be followed. This opportunity of seeing her, as she did not wish to be seen, gave Mimi an idea that she was up to no good, and so she determined to seize the occasion for watching her in more detail. Hastily putting on a dark cloak and hat, she ran downstairs and out into the avenue. Lady Arabella had moved, but the sheen of her white dress was still to be seen among the young oaks around the gateway. Keeping herself in shadow, Mimi followed, taking care not to come so close as to awake the other's suspicion. The abnormal blackness of the sky aided her, and, herself unnoticed and unnoticeable, she watched her quarry pass along the road in the direction of Castra Regis.

She followed on steadily through the gloom of the trees, depending on the glint of the white dress to keep her right. The little wood began to thicken, and presently, when the road widened and the trees grew closer to each other though they stood farther back, she lost sight of any indication of her whereabouts. Under the present conditions it was impossible for her to do any more, so, after waiting for a while, still hidden in the shadow to see if she could catch another glimpse of the white frock, she determined to go on slowly towards Castra Regis and trust to the chapter of accidents to pick up the trail again. She went on slowly, taking advantage of every obstacle and shadow to keep herself concealed. At last she entered on the grounds of the Castle at a spot from which the windows of the turret were dimly visible, without having seen again any sign of Lady Arabella. All the time that she, Mimi Salton, had been coming from Doom, following as she thought Lady Arabella March, she was in reality being followed by Lady Arabella, who, having the power of seeing in the darkness, had caught sight of her leaving Doom Tower and had never again lost touch with her. It was a rarely complete case of the hunter being hunted, and, strange to say, in a manner true of both parties to the chase. For a time Mimi's many turnings, with the natural obstacles that were perpetually intervening, kept Mimi disappearing and reappearing; but when she was close to Castra Regis there was no more possibility of concealment, and the strange double following went swiftly on. At this period of the chase, the disposition of those concerned was this: Mimi, still searching in vain for Lady Arabella, was ahead; and close behind her, though herself keeping well concealed, came the other, who saw everything as well as though it were daylight. The natural darkness of the night and the blackness of the storm-laden sky had no difficulties for her. When she saw Mimi come close to the hall door of Castra Regis and ascend the steps, she followed. When Mimi entered the dark hall and felt her way up the still darker staircase, still, as she believed, following Lady Arabella, the latter still kept on her way. When they had reached the lobby of the turret-rooms, neither searched actively for the other, each being content to go on, believing that the object of her search was ahead of her.

Edgar Caswall sat thinking in the gloom of the great room, occasionally stirred to curiosity when the drifting clouds allowed a little light to fall from the storm-swept sky. But nothing really interested him now. Since he had heard of Lilla's death, the gloom of his poignant remorse, emphasised by Mimi's upbraiding, had made more hopeless even the darkness of his cruel, selfish, saturnine nature. He heard no sound. In the first place, his normal faculties seemed benumbed by his inward thought. Then the sounds made by the two women were in themselves difficult to hear. Mimi was light of weight, and in the full tide of her youth and strength her movements were as light and as well measured and without waste as an animal of the forest.

As to Lady Arabella, her movements were at all times as stealthy and as silent as those of her pristine race, the first thousands of whose years was occupied, not in direct going to and fro, but on crawling on their bellies without notice and without noise.

Mimi, when she came to the door, still a little ajar, gave with the instinct of decorum a light tap. So light was it that it did not reach

Caswall’s ears. Then, taking her courage in both hands, she boldly but noiselessly pushed the door and entered. As she did so, her heart sank, for now she was face to face with a difficulty which had not, in her state of mental perturbation, occurred to her.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

ON THE TURRET ROOF

THE STORM WHICH was coming was already making itself manifest, not only in the wide scope of nature, but in the hearts and natures of human beings. Electrical disturbance in the sky and the air is reproduced in animals of all kinds, and particularly in the highest type of them all — the most receptive — the most electrical themselves — the most recuperative of their natural qualities, the widest sweeping with their net of interests. So it was with Edgar Caswall, despite his selfish nature and coldness of blood. So it was with Mimi Salton, despite her unselfish, unchanging devotion for those she loved. So it was even with Lady Arabella, who, under the instincts of a primeval serpent, carried the ever-varying indestructible wishes and customs of womanhood, which is always old — and always new. Edgar, after he had turned his eyes on Mimi, resumed his apathetic position and sullen silence. Mimi quietly took a seat a little way apart from Edgar, whence she could look on the progress of the coming storm and study its appearance throughout the whole visible circle of the neighbourhood. She was in brighter and better spirits than she had been all day — or for many days past. Lady Arabella tried to efface herself behind the now open door. At every movement she appeared as if trying to squeeze herself into each little irregularity in the flooring beside her. Without, the clouds grew thicker and blacker as the storm-centre came closer. As yet the forces, from whose linking the lightning springs, were held apart, and the silence of nature proclaimed the calm before the storm. Caswall felt the effect of the gathering electric force. A sort of wild exultation grew upon him such as he had sometimes felt just before the breaking of a tropical storm. As he became conscious of this he instinctively raised his head and caught the eye of Mimi. He was in the grip of an emotion greater than himself; in the mood in which he was he felt the need upon him of doing some desperate deed. He was now absolutely reckless, and as Mimi was associated with him in the memory which drove him on, he wished that she too should be engaged in this enterprise. Of course, he had no knowledge of the proximity of Lady Arabella. He thought that he was alone, far removed from all he knew and whose interests he shared — alone with the wild elements, which were being lashed to fury, and with the woman who had struggled with him and vanquished him, and on whom he would shower, though in secret, the full measure of his hate.

The fact was that Edgar Caswall was, if not mad, something akin to it. His always eccentric nature, fed by the dominance possible to one in his condition in life, had made him oblivious to the relative proportions of things. That way madness lies. A person who is either unable or unwilling to distinguish true proportions is apt to get further afield intellectually with each new experience. From inability to realise the true proportions of many things, there is but one step to a fatal confusion. Madness in its first stage — monomania — is a lack of proportion. So long as this is general, it is not always noticeable, for the uninspired onlooker is without the necessary base of comparison. The realisation only comes with an occasion, when the person in the seat of judgement has some recognised standard with which to compare the chimerical ideas of the disordered brain. Monomania gives the opportunity. Men do not usually have at hand a number, or even a choice of standards. It is the one thing which is contrary to our experience which sets us thinking; and when once the process of thought is established it becomes applicable to all the ordinary things of life; and then discovery of the truth is only a matter of time. It is because imperfections of the brain are usually of a character or scope which in itself makes difficult a differentiation of irregularities that discovery is not usually made quickly. But in monomania the errant faculty protrudes itself in a way that may not be denied. It puts aside, obscures, or takes the place of something else — just as the head of a pin placed before the centre of the iris will block out the whole scope of vision. The most usual form of monomania has commonly the same beginning as that from which Edgar Caswall suffered — an over-large idea of self-importance. Alienists, who study the matter exactly, probably know more of human vanity and its effects than do ordinary men. Their knowledge of the intellectual weakness of an individual seldom comes quickly. It is in itself an intellectual process, and, if the beginnings can at all be traced, the cure — if cure be possible — has already begun. Caswall's mental disturbance was not hard to identify. Every asylum is full of such cases — men and women, who, naturally selfish and egotistical, so appraise to themselves their own importance that every other circumstance in life becomes subservient to it. The declension is rapid. The disease supplies in itself the material for self-magnification. The same often modest, religious, unselfish individual who has walked perhaps for years in all good ways, passing stainless through temptations which wreck most persons of abilities superior to his own, develops — by a process so gradual that at its first recognition it appears almost to be sudden — into a self-engrossed, lawless, dishonest, cruel, unfaithful person who cannot be trusted any more that he can be restrained. When the same decadence attacks a nature naturally proud and selfish and vain, and lacking both the aptitude and habit of self-restraint, the development of the disease is more swift, and ranges to farther limits. It is such persons who become imbued with the idea that they have the attributes of the Almighty — even that they themselves are the Almighty. Vanity, the beginning, is also the disintegrating process and also the melancholy end. A close investigation shows that there is no new factor in this chaos. It is all exact and logical. It is only a development and not a recreation: the germs were there already; all that has happened is that they have ripened and perhaps fructified. Caswall's was just such a case. He did not become cruel or lawless or dishonest or unfaithful; those qualities were there already, wrapped up in one or other of the many disguises of selfishness.

Character — of whatever kind it be, of whatever measure, either good or bad — is bound in the long run to justify itself according to its lights. The whole measure of drama is in the development of character. Grapes do not grow on thorns nor figs on thistles. This is true of every phase of nature, and, above all, true character which is simply logic in episodical form. The hand that fashioned Edgar Caswall's physiognomy in aquiline form, and the mind that ordained it, did not err. Up to the last he maintained the strength and the weakness of aquiline nature. And in this final hour, when the sands were running low, he, his intentions, and his acts — the whole variations and complexities of his individuality — were in essence the very same as those which marked him in his earliest days. He had ripened; that was all.

Mimi had a suspicion — or rather, perhaps, an intuition — of the true state of things when she heard him speak, and at the same time noticed the abnormal flush on his face, and his rolling eyes. There was a certain want of fixedness of purpose which she had certainly not noticed before — a quick, spasmodic utterance which belongs rather to the insane than to those of intellectual equilibrium. She was a little astonished, not only by his thoughts but by his staccato way of expressing them. The manner remained almost longer in her memory than the words. When, later, thinking the matter over, she took into account certain matters of which at the time she had not borne in mind: the odd hour of her visit — it was now after midnight — close on dawn; the wild storm which was now close at hand: the previous nervous upset, of her own struggle with him, of his hearing the news of Lilla's death, of her own untimely visit so fraught with unpleasant experiences and memories. When in a calmer state she weighed all these things in a balance, the doing so not only made for toleration of errors and excesses, but also for that serener mental condition in which correctness of judgement is alone attainable.

As Caswall rose up and began to move to the door leading to the turret stair by which the roof was reached, he said in a peremptory way, whose tone alone made her feel defiant:

"Come! I want you."

She instinctively drew back — she was not accustomed to such words, more especially to such tone. Her answer was indicative of a new contest:

"Where to? Why should I go? What for?"

He did not at once reply — another indication of his overwhelming egotism. He was now fast approaching the attitude of conscious Final Cause. She repeated her questions. He seemed a little startled; but habit reasserted itself, and he spoke without thinking the words which were in his heart.

"I want you, if you will be so good, to come with me to the turret roof. I know I have no right to ask you, or to expect you to come. It would be a kindness to me. I am much interested in certain experiments with the kite which would be, if not a pleasure, at least a novel experience to you. You would see something not easily seen otherwise. The experience *may* be of use some time, though I cannot guarantee that."

"I will come," she answered simply; Edgar moved in the direction of the stair, she following close behind him.

She did not like to be left alone at such a height, in such a place, in the darkness, with a storm about to break. Of himself she had no fear; all that had been seemed to have passed away with her two victories over him in the struggle of wills. Moreover, the more recent apprehension — that of his madness — had also ceased. In the conversation of the last few minutes he seemed so rational, so clear, so unaggressive, that she no longer saw reason even for doubt. So satisfied was she that even when he put out a hand to guide her to the steep, narrow stairway, she took it without thought in the most conventional way. Lady Arabella, crouching in the lobby behind the door, heard every word that had been said, and formed her own opinion of it. It was evident to her that there had been some *rapprochement* between the two, who had so lately been hostile to each other, and that made her furiously angry. It was not jealousy, but only that Mimi was interfering with her plans. She had by now made certain of her capture of Edgar Caswall, and she could not tolerate even the lightest and most contemptuous fancy on his part which might divert him from the main issue. When she became aware that he wished Mimi to come with him to the roof and that she had acquiesced, her rage got beyond bounds. She became oblivious to any danger there might be in a visit to such an exposed place at such a time, and to all lesser considerations, and made up her mind to forestall them. By now she knew well the turns and difficulties of the turret stair, and could use it in darkness as well as light, — this, independent of her inherited ophidian power of seeing without light. When she had come to the lobby this evening, she had seen that the steel wicket, usually kept locked, that forbade entrance on the stairway, had been left open. So, when she was aware of the visit of the two others to the roof, she stealthily and noiselessly crept through the wicket, and, ascending the stair, stepped out on the roof. It was bitterly cold, for the fierce gusts of the storm which swept round the turret drove in through every unimpeded way, whistling at the sharp corners and singing round the trembling flagstaff. The kite-string and the wire which controlled the runners made a concourse of weird sounds which somehow, perhaps from the violence which surrounded them, acting on their length, resolved themselves into some kind of harmony — a fitting accompaniment to the tragedy which seemed about to begin.

Lady Arabella scorned all such thoughts, putting them behind her as she did fear. Still moving swiftly and stealthily, she glided across the stone roof and concealed herself behind one of the machicolations of the tower. She was already safely ensconced when the heads of Edgar and Mimi, whom he guided, appeared against the distant sky-line as they came up the steep stair. Mimi's heart beat heavily. Just before leaving the turret-chamber she had got a fright which she could not shake off. The lights of the room had momentarily revealed to her, as they passed out, Edgar's face concentrated as it did whenever he intended to use his mesmeric power. Now the black eyebrows made a thick line across his face, under which his eyes shone and glittered ominously. Mimi recognised the danger, and assumed the defiance that had twice already served her so well. She had a fear that the circumstances and the place were against her, and she wanted to be forearmed.

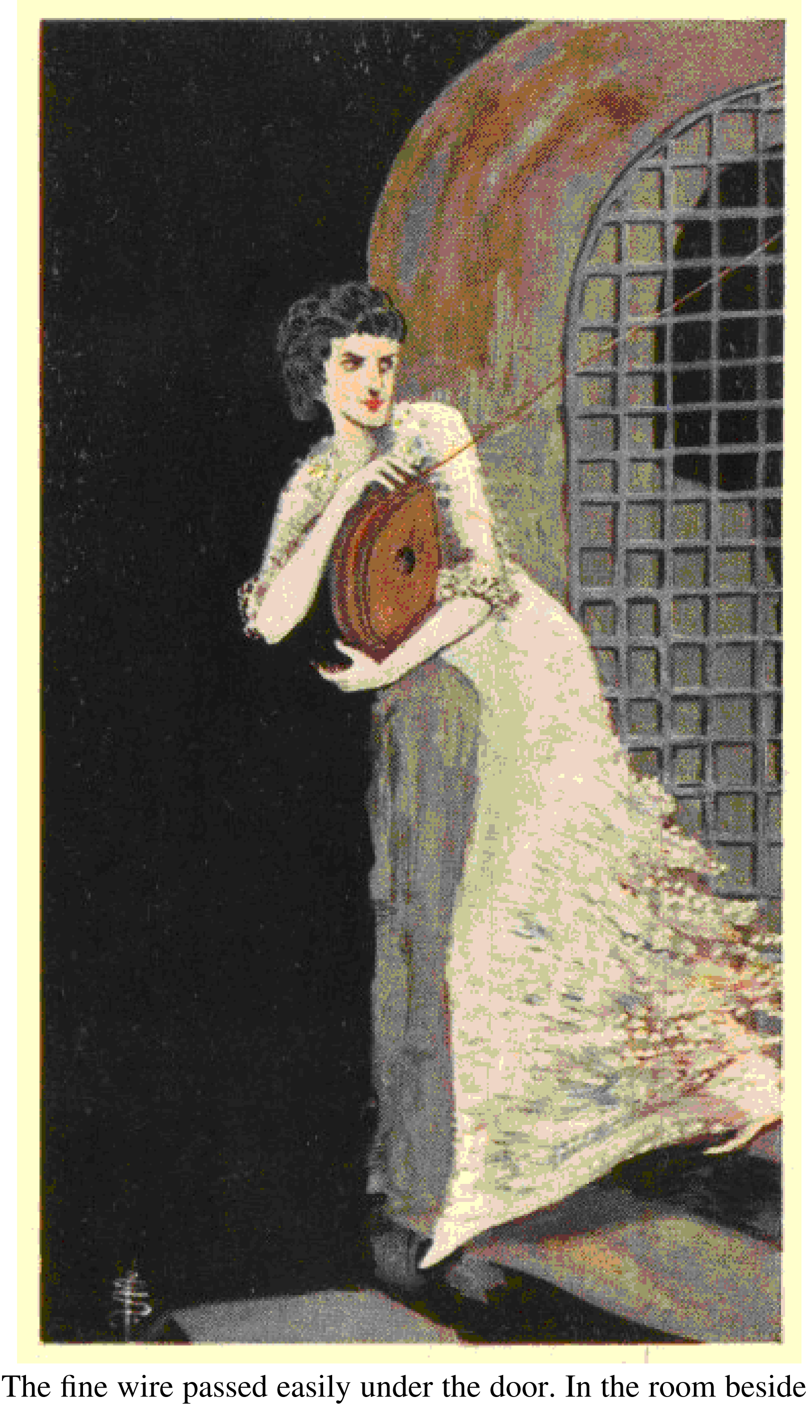
The sky was now somewhat lighter than it had been. Either there was lightning afar off, whose reflections were carried by the rolling clouds, or else the gathered force, though not yet breaking into lightning, had an incipient power of light. It seemed to affect both the man and the woman. Edgar seemed altogether under its influence. His spirits were boisterous, his mind exalted. He was now at his worst; madder even than he had been earlier in the night. Mimi, trying to keep as far from him as possible, moved across the stone floor of the turret roof, and found a niche which concealed her. It was not far from Lady Arabella's place of hiding, but the angle of the machicolation stood between them, separating them. It was fortunate for Mimi that she could not see the other's face. Those burning eyes concentrated in deadly hate would have certainly unnerved her just as she wanted the full of her will power to help her in extremity.

Edgar, left thus alone on the centre of the turret roof, found himself altogether his own master in a way which tended to increase his madness. He knew that Mimi was close at hand, though he had lost sight of her. He spoke loudly, and the sound of his own voice, though it was carried from him on the sweeping wind as fast as the words were spoken, seemed to exalt him still more. Even the raging of the elements round him appeared to add to his exaltation. To him it seemed that these manifestations were obedient to his own will. He had reached the sublime of his madness; he was now in his own mind actually the Almighty, and whatever might happen would be the direct carrying out of his own commands. As he could not see Mimi, nor fix whereabout she was, he shouted loudly:

"Come to me! You shall see now what you are despising, what you are warring against. All that you see is mine — the darkness as well as the light. I tell you that I am greater than any other who is, or was, or shall be. Look you now and learn. When the Master of Evil took Him up on a high place and showed Him all the kingdoms of the earth, he was doing what he thought no other could do. He was wrong. He forgot *Me*. You shall see. I shall send you light to see by. I shall send you light up to the very ramparts of heaven. A light so great that it shall dissipate those black clouds that are rushing up and piling around us. Look! Look! At the very touch of my hand that light springs into being and mounts up — and up — and up!"

He made his way whilst he was speaking to the corner of the turret whence flew the giant kite, and from which the runners ascended. Mimi looked on, appalled and afraid to speak lest she should precipitate some calamity. Within the machicolated niche Lady Arabella, quiet and still as death, cowered in a paroxysm of fear. Edgar took from his pocket a small wooden box, through a hole in which the wire of the runner ran. This evidently set some machinery in motion, for a sound as of whirring came. From one side of the box floated what looked like a piece of stiff ribbon, which snapped and crackled as the wind took it. For a few seconds Mimi saw it as it rushed along the sagging line to the kite. When close to it, there was a loud crack, like a minor explosion, and a sudden light appeared to issue from every chink in the box. Then a quick flame flashed along the snapping ribbon, which glowed with an intense light — a light so great that the whole of the countryside around stood out against the background of black driving clouds. For a few seconds the light remained, then suddenly disappeared in the blackness around. That light had no mystery for either Mimi or Lady

Arabella, both of whom had often seen manifestations of the same thing. It was simply a magnesium light which had been fired by the mechanism within the box carried up to the kite. Edgar was in a state of tumultuous excitement, shouting and yelling at the top of his voice and dancing about like a violent lunatic. But the others were quiet, Mimi nestling in her niche and avoiding observation as well as she could. Once the sagging string, caught in a wind-flurry, was thrown across the back of her hand. Its trembling had an extraordinary effect on her, bracing her up to the full of her emotional power. She felt, on the instant, that the spirit of Lilla was beside her, and that it was Lilla's touch which she had felt. Lady Arabella had evidently made up her mind what to do; the inspiration how to do it came to her with the sight of Mimi's look of power evident to her ophidian sight. On the instant she glided through the darkness to the wheel whereon the string of the kite was wound. With deft fingers she found where the wheel of the Kelvin sounding apparatus was fixed to it, and, unshipping this, took it with her, reeling out the wire as she went, and so keeping, in a way, in touch with the kite. Then she glided swiftly to the wicket, through which she passed, locking the gate behind her as she went. Down the turret stair she ran quickly, letting the wire run from the wheel which she carried carefully, and, passing out of the hall door, ran down the avenue with all her speed. She soon reached her own gate, ran down the avenue, and with her small key opened the iron door leading to the atrium.



The fine wire passed easily under the door. In the room beside the atrium, where was the well-hole, she sat down panting, unknown to all, for in the coming she had escaped observation. She felt that she was excited, and in order to calm herself began a new form of experiment with regard to her observation of the hole. She fastened the lamp which was ready for lowering to the end of the wire, whose end came into the room. Then she began quietly and methodically lowering the two by means of the Kelvin sounding apparatus, intending to fire at the right time the new supply of magnesium ribbon which she had brought from the turret. She felt well satisfied with herself. All her plans were maturing, or had already matured. Castra Regis was within her grasp. The woman whose interference she feared, Lilla Watford, was dead. Diana’s Grove and all its hideous secrets was now in other hands, an accident to whom would cause her no concern. Truly, all was well, and she felt that she might pause a while and rest. She lay down on a sofa close to the well-hole so that she could see it without moving when she had lit the lamp. In a state of blissful content she sank into a gentle sleep.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE BREAKING OF THE STORM

WHEN LADY ARABELLA had gone away in her usual noiseless fashion, the two others remained for a while quite still in their places on the turret roof: Caswall because he had nothing to say and could not think of anything; Mimi because she had much to say and wished to put her thoughts in order. For quite a while — which seemed interminable — silence reigned between them. At last Mimi made a beginning — she had made up her mind how to act.

"Mr. Caswall," she said loudly, so as to make sure of being heard through the blustering of the wind and the perpetual cracking of the electricity.

Caswall said something in reply which she understood to be: "I am listening."

His words were carried away on the storm as they came from his mouth. However, one of her objects was effected: she knew now exactly whereabout on the roof he was. So she moved close to the spot before she spoke again, raising her voice almost to a shout:

"The wicket is shut. Please to open it. I can't get out."

As she spoke she was quietly fingering a revolver which Adam had given to her when she got back to Liverpool, and which now lay in her breast. She felt that she was caged like a rat in a trap, but did not mean to be taken at a disadvantage, whatever happened. By this time Caswall also was making up his mind what his own attitude would be. He, too, felt trapped, and all the brute in him rose to the emergency. He never had been counted — even by himself — as chivalrous; but now, when he was at a loss, even decency of thought had no appeal for him. In a voice which was raucous and brutal — much like that which is heard when a wife is being beaten by her husband in a slum — he hissed out, his syllables cutting through the roaring of the storm:

"I didn't let you in here. You came of your own accord — without permission, or even asking it. Now you stay or go as you choose. But you must manage it for yourself; I'll have nothing to do with it."

She answered, woman-like, with a query:

"It was Lady Arabella who shut and locked it. Was it by your wish?"

"I had no wish one way or the other. I didn't even know that she was here."

Then suddenly he added: "How did you know it?"

"By her white dress and the green gleam of her eyes. Her figure is not hard to distinguish, even in the dark."

He gave some kind of snort of disagreement. Taking additional umbrage at this, she went on in words which she thought would annoy him most:

"When a woman is gifted with a figure like hers, it is easy to tell her even in a rope-walk or a bundle of hop-poles."

He even improved on her affronting speech:

"Every woman in the eastern counties seems to think that she has a right to walk into my house at any hour of the day or night, and into every room in the house whether I am there or not. I suppose I'll have to get watch-dogs and police to keep them out, and spring guns and man-traps to deal with them if they get in." He went on more roughly as if he had been wound up to it.

"Well, why don't you go?"

Her answer was spoken with dangerous suavity:

“I am going. Blame yourself if you do not like the time and manner of it. I daresay Adam — my husband — Mr. Salton, will have a word to say to you about it!”

“Let him say, and be damned to him, and to you too! I’ll show you a light. You shan’t be able to say that you could not see what you were doing.”

As he spoke he was lighting another piece of the magnesium ribbon, which made a blinding glare in which everything was plainly discernible, down to the smallest detail. This exactly suited her. She took accurate note of the wicket and its fastening before the glare had died away. She took her revolver out and had fired into the lock, which was shivered on the instant, the pieces flying round in all directions, but happily without causing hurt to anyone. Then she pushed the wicket open and ran down the narrow stair and so to the hall door. Opening this also, she ran down the avenue, never lessening her speed till she stood outside the door of Doom Tower. The household was all awake, and the door was opened at once on her ringing.

She asked: “Is Mr. Salton in?”

“He has just come in, a few minutes ago. He has gone up to the study.”

She ran upstairs at once and joined him. He seemed relieved when he saw her, but scrutinised her face keenly. He saw that she had been in some concern, so led her over to the sofa in the window and sat down beside her.

“Now, dear, tell me all about it!” he said.

She rushed breathlessly through all the details of her adventure on the turret roof. Adam listened attentively, helping her all he could, both positively and negatively, nor embarrassing her by any questioning or surprise. His thoughtful silence was a great help to her, for it allowed her to collect and organise her thoughts. When she had done he gave her his story without unnecessary delay:

"I kept out of your way so as to leave you unhampered in anything you might wish to attend to. But when the dark came and you were still out, I was a little frightened about you. So I went to where I thought you might be. First to Mercy; but no one there knew where you were. Then to Diana's Grove. There, too, no one could tell me anything. But when the footman who opened the door went to the atrium, looking if you were about, I caught a glimpse of the room where the well-hole is. Beside the hole, and almost over it, was a sofa on which lay Lady Arabella quietly sleeping. So I went on to Castra Regis, but no one there had seen you either. When that magnesium light flared out from close to the kite, I thought I saw you on the turret. I tried to ascend, and actually got to the wicket at the foot of the turret stair. But that was locked, so I turned back and went round the Brow on the chance of meeting or seeing you; then I came on here. I only knew you had come home when Braithwait came up to the study to tell me. I must go and see Caswall to-morrow or next day to hear what he has to say on the subject. You won't mind, will you?"

She answered quickly, a new fear in her heart:

"Oh no, dear, I wouldn't and won't mind anything you think it right to do. But, dear, for my sake, don't have any quarrel with Mr. Caswall. I have had too much trial and pain lately to wish it increased by any anxiety regarding you."

"You shall not, dear — if I can help it — please God," he said solemnly, and he kissed her.

Then, in order to keep her interested so that she might forget the fears and anxieties that had disturbed her, he began to talk over details of her adventure, making shrewd comments which attracted and held her attention. Presently, *inter alia*, he said:

"That's a dangerous game Caswall is up to. It seems to me that that young man — though he doesn't appear to know it — is riding for a fall!"

"How, dear? I don't understand."

"Kite flying on a night like this from a place like the tower of Castra Regis is, to say the least of it, dangerous. It is not merely courting death or other accident from lightning, but it is bringing the lightning into where he lives."

"Oh, do explain to me, Adam. I am very ignorant on such subjects."

"Well, you see, Mimi, the air all around is charged and impregnated with electricity, which is simply undeveloped lightning. Every cloud that is blowing up here — and they all make for the highest point — is bound to develop into a flash of lightning. That kite is up in the air about a mile high and is bound to attract the lightning. Its cord makes a road for it on which to travel to earth. When it does come, it will strike the top of the tower with a weight a hundred times greater than a whole park of artillery. It will knock Castra Regis into matches. Where it will go after that, no one can tell. If there be any metal by which it can travel, such will not only point the road, but be the road itself. If anything of that sort *should* happen, it may — probably will — wreck the whole neighborhood!"

"Would it be dangerous to be out in the open air when such a thing is taking place?" she asked.

"No, little girl. It would be the safest possible place — so long as one was not in the line of the electric current."

"Then, do let us go outside. I don't want to run into any foolish danger — or, far more, to ask you to do so. But surely if the open is safest, that is the place to be. We can easily keep out of electric currents — if we know where they are. By the way, I suppose these are carried and marked by wires, or by something which can attract? If so, we can look for such. I had my electric torch that you gave me recharged the day I was in Wolverhampton with Sir Nathaniel."

"I have my torch too, all fit," interposed Adam.

Without another word, she put on again the cloak she had thrown off, and a small, tight-fitting cap. Adam too put on his cap, and, after looking that his revolver was all right, gave her his hand, and they left the house together. When they had come to the door, which lay quite open, Adam said:

"I think the best thing we can do will be to go round all the places which are mixed up in this affair."

"All right, dear, I am ready. But, if you don't mind, we might go first to Mercy. I am anxious about grandfather, and we might see that — as yet, at all events — nothing has happened there."

"Good idea. Let us go at once, Mimi."

So they went on the high-hung road along the top of the Brow. The wind here was of great force, and made a strange booming noise as it swept high overhead; though not the sound of cracking and tearing as it passed through woods of high slender trees which grew on either side of the road. Mimi could hardly keep her feet. She was not afraid; but the force to which she was opposed gave her a good excuse to hold on to her husband extra tight.

At Mercy there was no one up. At least, all the lights were out. But to Mimi, accustomed to the nightly routine of the house, there were manifest signs that all was well, except in the little room on the first floor, where the blinds were down. Mimi could not bear to look at that, to think of it. Adam understood her pain. He bent over and kissed her, and then took her hand and held it hard. And thus they passed on together, returning to the high road towards Castra Regis. They had now got ready their electric torches, depressing the lens of each towards the ground so that henceforth on their journey two little circles of bright light ran ahead of them, and, moving from side to side as they went, kept the ground in front of them and at either side well disclosed.

At the gate of Castra Regis they were, if possible, extra careful. When drawing near, Adam had asked his wife several questions as to what signs, if any, had been left of Lady Arabella's presence in the tower. So she told him, but with greater detail, of the wire from the Kelvin sounder, which, taking its origin from the spot whence the kite flew, marked the way through the wicket, down the stairs and along the avenue.

Adam drew his breath at this, and said in a low, earnest whisper:

"I don't want to frighten you, Mimi, dear, but wherever that wire is there is danger."

"Danger! How?"

"That is the track where the lightning will go; any moment, even now whilst we are speaking and searching, a fearful force may be loosed upon us. You run on, dear; you know the way down to where the avenue joins the highroad. Keep your torch moving, and if you see any sign of the wire keep away from it, for God's sake. I shall join you at the gateway."

She said in a low voice:

"Are you going to find or to follow that wire alone?"

"Yes, dear. One is sufficient for that work. I shall not lose a moment till I am with you."

"Adam, when I came with you into the open, when we both feared what might happen, my main wish was that we should be together when the end came. You wouldn't deny me that right, would you, dear?"

"No, dear, not that or any right. Thank God that my wife has such a wish. Come; we will go together. We are in the hands of God. If He wishes, we shall be together at the end, whenever or wherever that may be. Kiss me dear — even if it be for the last time. Give me your hand. Now, I am ready."

And so, hand in hand, they went to find the new danger together. They picked up the trail of the wire on the steps of the entrance and followed it down the avenue, taking especial care not to touch it with their feet. It was easy enough to follow, for the wire, if not bright, was self-coloured, and showed at once when the roving lights of the electric torches exposed it. They followed it out of the gateway and into the avenue of Diana's Grove. Here a new gravity clouded over Adam's face, though Mimi saw no cause for fresh concern. This was easily enough explained. Adam knew of the explosive works in progress regarding the well-hole, but the matter had been studiously kept from his wife. As they came near the house, Adam sent back his wife to the road, ostensibly to watch the course of the wire, telling her that there might be a branch wire leading to somewhere else. She was to search the undergrowth which the wire went through, and, if she found it, was to warn him by the Australian native "Coo-ee!" which had been arranged between them as the means of signalling. When Mimi had disappeared in the avenue, Adam examined the wire inch by inch, taking special note of where it disappeared under the iron door at the back of the house. When he was satisfied that he was quite alone, he went round to the front of the house and gently shoved the hall door, thinking that perhaps it was unlocked and unbolted, after the usual custom. It yielded, so he stole into the hall, keeping his torch playing the light all over the floor, both to avoid danger and to try to pick the wire up again. When he came to the iron door he saw the glint of the wire as it passed under it. He traced it into the room with the well-hole, taking care to move as noiselessly as possible. He saw Lady Arabella sleeping on the sofa close to the hole into which the continuation of the wire disappeared. As he did so he heard a whispered "H-ss-h!" at the door, and, looking up, saw Mimi, who signalled him to come out. He joined her, and together they passed into the avenue.

Mimi whispered to him:

"Would it not be possible to give someone here warning? They are in danger."

He put his lips close to her ear and whispered his reply:

"We could, but it would not be safe. Lady Arabella has brought the wire here herself for some purpose of her own. If she were to suspect that we knew or guessed her reason, she would take other steps which might be still more dangerous. It is not our doing, any of it. We had better not interfere."

Mimi, who had spoken from duty, far from any wish or fear of her own, was only too glad to be silent, and to get away, both safe. So her husband, taking her hand, led her away from the wire.

When they were in the wide part of the avenue, he whispered again:

"We must be careful, Mimi, what we do. We are surrounded with unknown dangers on every side, and we may, in trying to do good in some way, do the very thing which we should most avoid."

Under the trees, which cracked as the puff of wind clashed their branches and the slender shafts swayed to and from the upright, he went on:

"We know that if the lightning comes it will take the course of the kite string. We also know that if it strikes Castra Regis it will still follow the wire, which we have just seen running about the avenue. But we don't know to where else that wire may lead the danger. It may be to *Mercy* — or to *Lesser Hill*; in fact, to anywhere in the neighborhood. Moreover, we do not know when the stroke may fall. There will be no warning, be sure of that. It will, or may, come when we least expect it. If we cut off the possibilities of the lightning finding its own course, we may do irreparable harm where we should least wish. In fact, the Doom is probably spoken already. We can only wait in what safety, or possibility of safety, we can achieve till the moment sounds.

Mimi was silent, but she stood very close to him and held his hand tight. After a few moments she spoke:

"Then let the Doom fall when it may. We are ready. At least, we shall die together!"

With the belief that death was hovering over them, as was shown in the resignation which they expressed to each other, it was little wonder that Adam and Mimi were restless and practically unable to remain quiet or even in one place. They spent the dark hours of the night wandering along the top of the Brow, and waiting for — they knew not what. Strange to say, they both enjoyed, or thought they did, the tumult of Nature's forces around them. Had their nervous strain been less, the sense of æstheticism which they shared would have had more scope. Even as it was, the dark beauties of sky and landscape appealed to them; the careering of the inky-black clouds;

the glimpses of the wind-swept sky; the rush and roar of the tempest amongst the trees; the never-ceasing crackle of electricity; the distant booming of the storm as it rushed over the Mercian highlands, and ever mingling its roar with the scream of the waves on the pebble beaches of the eastern sea; the round, big waves breaking on the iron-bound marge of the ocean; the distant lights, which grew bright as the storm swept past, and now and again seemed to melt into the driving mist — all these things claimed their interest and admiration, forming, as it were, a background of fitting grandeur and sublimity to the great tragedy of life which was being enacted in their very midst. When such a thought crossed Mimi's mind, it seemed to restore in an instant her nerve and courage. In the wild elemental warfare, such surface passions as fear and anger and greed seemed equally unworthy to the persons within their scope and to the occasion of their being. In those flying minutes, Adam and Mimi found themselves, and learned — did they not know it already? — to value personal worthiness.

As the dawn grew nearer, the violence of the storm increased. The wind raged even more tumultuously. The flying clouds grew denser and blacker, and occasionally flashes of lightning, though yet far-distant, cut through the oppressive gloom. The tentative growling of thunder changed, at instants, to the rolling majesty of heaven's artillary. Then came a time when not seconds elapsed between the white flash and the thunder-burst, which ended in a prolonged roll which seemed to shake the whole structure of the world.

But still through all the great kite, though assailed by all the forces of air, tugged strenuously but unconquered against its controlling string.

At length, when the sky to the east began to quicken there seemed a lull in the storm. Adam and Mimi had gone the whole length of the Brow, and had come so far on the return towards Castra Regis as to be level with Diana's Grove. The comparative silence of the lull gave Adam and his wife the idea of coming again close to the house. In his secret heart Adam was somewhat impatient of the delay of the kite drawing down the lightning — and he was also not too well pleased at it. He had been so long thinking of the destruction of the Lair of the White Worm that the prolongation seemed undue and excessive — indeed, unfair. Nevertheless, he waited with an outward appearance of patience and even calm; but his heart was all the while raging. He wanted to know and to feel that he had seen the last of the White Worm. With the coming of the day the storm *seemed* less violent, simply because the eyes of the onlookers came to the aid of their ears. The black clouds seemed less black because the rest of the landscape was not swathed in impenetrable gloom. When any of our usual organs of sense are for any cause temporarily useless, we are deprived of the help of perspective in addition to any special deprivation. To both Adam and Mimi the promise of the dawn was of both help and comfort. Not only was the lifting of the pall of blackness — even if light only came through rents in the wind-torn sky — hopeful, but the hope that came along with light brought consolation and renewing of spirit. Together they moved on the road to Diana's Grove. Adam had taken his wife's arm in that familiar way which a woman loves when she loves the man, and, without speaking, guided her down the avenue towards the house.

The top of the hill on which Diana's Grove was seated had, from time immemorial, been kept free from trees or other obstruction which might hide the view. In early days this was not for any æsthetic reason, but simply to guard against the unseen approach of enemies. However, the result was the same; an uninterrupted view all round was obtained or preserved. Now, as the young people stood out in the open they could see most of the places in which for the time they were interested. Higher up on the Brow and crowning it rose Castra Regis, massive and stern — the very moral of a grey, massive frowning Norman fortress. Down the hill, half way to the level of the plain where lay the deep streams and marsh-ringed pools, Mercy Farm nestled among protecting woods. Half hidden among stately forest trees, and so seeming far away, Lesser Hill reared its look-out tower. Adam took Mimi's hand, and instinctively they moved down close to the house of Diana's Grove, noticing, as they went, its inhospitable appearance. Never a window, a door, or chimney seemed to have any living force behind it. It was all cold and massive as a Roman temple, with neither prospect nor promise of welcome or comfort. Adam could not help recalling to his mind the last glimpse he had of its mistress — looking thinner even than usual in her white frock, drawn tight to her as it had been to resist the wind pressure. Calmly sleeping, she lay on the sofa close to the horrible well-hole — so close to it that it seemed as if the slightest shock or even shake would hurl her into the abyss. The idea seemed to get hold of him; he could not shake it off. For a few moments it seemed to him as if the walls had faded away like mist, and that as if, in a vision of second sight, there was a dim adumbration of a phase of the future — a kind of prophecy. Mimi's touch on his arm as if to suggest moving from the spot, recalled him to himself. Together they moved round to the back of the house, and stood where the wind was less fierce in the shelter of the iron door.

Whilst they were standing there, there came a blinding flash of lightning which lit up for several seconds the whole area of earth and sky. It was only the first note of the celestial prelude, for it was followed in quick succession by numerous flashes, whilst the crash and roll of thunder seemed continuous. Adam, appalled, drew his wife to him and held her close. As far as he could estimate by the interval between lightning and thunder-clap, the heart of the storm was still some distance off, and so he felt no present concern for their safety. Still, it was apparent that the course of the storm was moving swiftly in their direction. The lightning flashes came faster and faster and closer together; the thunder-roll was almost continuous, not stopping for a moment — a new crash beginning before the old one had ceased. Adam kept looking up in the direction where the kite strained and struggled at its detaining cord, but, of course, the dawn was not yet sufficiently advanced to permit of his seeing it in a glance.

At length there came a flash so appallingly bright that in its glare nature seemed to be standing still. So long did it last, that there was time to distinguish its configuration. It seemed like a mighty tree inverted, pendent from the sky. The roots overhead were articulated. The whole country around within the angle of vision was lit up till it seemed to glow. Then a broad ribbon of fire seemed to drop on to the tower of Castra Regis just as the thunder crashed. By the glare of the lightning he could see the tower shake and tremble and finally fall to pieces like a house of cards. The passing of the lightning left the sky again dark, but a blue flame fell downward from the tower and, with inconceivable rapidity running along the ground in the direction of Diana’s Grove, reached the dark silent house, which in the instant burst into flame at a hundred different points. At the same moment rose from the house a rending, crashing sound of woodwork, broken or thrown about, mixed with a quick yell so appalling that Adam, stout of heart as he undoubtedly was, felt his blood turned into ice. Instinctively, despite the danger and their consciousness of it, husband and wife took hands and listened, trembling. *Something* was going on close to them, mysterious, terrible, deadly. The shrieks continued, though less sharp in sound, as though muffled. In the midst of them was a terrific explosion, seemingly sounding from deep in the earth. They looked around. The flames from Castra Regis and from Diana's Grove made all around almost as light as day, and now that the lightning had ceased to flash, their eyes, unblinded, were able to judge both perspective and detail. The heat of the burning house caused the iron doors either to warp and collapse or to force the hinges. Seemingly of their own accord, they flew or fell open, and exposed the interior. The Saltons could now look through the atrium and the room beyond where the well-hole yawned, a deep narrow circular chasm. From this the agonised shrieks were rising, growing even more terrible with each second that passed. But it was not only the heart-rending sound that almost paralysed poor Mimi with terror. What she saw was alone sufficient to fill her with evil dreams for the remainder of her life. The whole place looked as if a sea of blood had been beating against it. Each of the explosions from below had thrown out from the well-hole, as if it had been the mouth of a cannon, a mass of fine sand mixed with blood, and a horrible repulsive slime in which were great red masses of rent and torn flesh and fat. As the explosions kept on, more and more this repulsive mass was shot up, the great bulk of it falling back again. The mere amount of this mass was horrible to contemplate. Many of the awful fragments were of something which had lately been alive. They quivered and trembled and writhed as though they were still in torment, a supposition to which the unending scream gave a horrible credence. At moments some mountainous mass of flesh surged up through the narrow orifice as though it were forced by a measureless power through an opening infinitely smaller than itself. Some of these fragments were covered or partially covered with white skin as of a human being, and others — the largest and most numerous — with scaled skin as of a gigantic lizard or serpent. And now and again to these clung masses of long black hair which reminded Adam of a chest full of scalps which he had seen seized from a marauding party of Comanche Indians. Once, in a sort of lull or pause, the seething contents of the hole rose after the manner of a bubbling spring, and Adam saw part of the thin form of Lady Arabella forced up to the top amid a mass of blood and slime and what looked as if it had been the entrails of a monster torn in shreds. Several times some masses of enormous bulk were forced up through the well-hole with inconceivable violence, and, suddenly expanding as they came into larger space, disclosed great sections of the White Worm which Adam and Sir Nathaniel had seen looking over the great trees with its enormous eyes of emerald-green flickering like great lamps in a gale.

At last the explosive power, which was not yet exhausted, evidently reached the main store of dynamite which had been lowered into the worm hole. The result was appalling. The ground for far around quivered and opened in long deep chasms, whose edges shook and fell in, throwing up clouds of sand which fell back and hissed amongst the rising water. The heavily built house shook to its foundations. Great stones were thrown up as from a volcano, some of them, great masses of hard stone squared and grooved with implements wrought by human hands, breaking up and splitting in mid air as though riven by some infernal power. Trees near the house, and therefore presumably in some way above the hole, which sent up clouds of dust and steam and fine sand mingled, and which carried an appalling stench which sickened the spectators, were torn up by the roots and hurled into the air. By now, flames were bursting violently from all over the ruins, so dangerously that Adam caught up his wife in his arms and ran with her from the proximity of the flames.

Then almost as quickly as it had begun, the whole cataclysm ceased. A deep-down rumbling continued intermittently for some time. And then silence brooded over all — silence so complete that it seemed in itself a sentient thing — silence which seemed like incarnate darkness, and conveyed the same idea to all who came within its radius. To the young people who had suffered the long horror of that awful night, it brought relief — relief from the presence or the fear of all that was horrible — relief which seemed perfected when the red rays of sunrise shot up over the far eastern sea, bringing a promise of a new order of things with the coming day.

CHAPTER XL

WRECKAGE

HIS BED SAW little of Adam Salton for the remainder of that night. He and Mimi walked hand in hand in the brightening dawn round by the Brow to Castra Regis and on to Doom Tower. They did so deliberately in an attempt to think as little as possible of the terrible experiences of the night. They both tried loyally to maintain the other's courage, and in helping the other to distract attention from the recollections of horror. The morning was bright and cheerful, as a morning sometimes is after a devastating storm. The clouds, of which there were plenty in evidence, brought no lingering idea of gloom. All nature was bright and joyous, being in striking contrast to the scenes of wreck and devastation, of the effects of obliterating fire and lasting ruin.

The only evidence of the once stately pile of Castra Regis was a shapeless huddle of shattered architecture dimly seen at moments as the sea-breeze swept aside the cloud of thin, bluish, acrid smoke which presently marked the site of the once lordly castle. As for Diana's Grove, they looked in vain for a sign which had a suggestion of permanence. The oak trees of the Grove were still to be seen — some of them — emerging from a haze of smoke, the great trunks solid and erect as ever, but the larger branches broken and twisted and rent, with bark stripped and chipped, and the smaller branches broken and dishevelled looking from the constant stress and threshing of the storm. Of the house as such, there was, even at the little distance from which they looked, no trace. With the resolution to which he had come — to keep from his wife as well as he could all sights which might cause her pain or horror or leave unpleasant memories — Adam resolutely turned his back on the area of the devastation and hurried on to Doom Tower. This, with the strength and cosiness of the place, its sense of welcome and the perfection of its thoughtful ordering, gave Mimi the best sense of security and peace which she had had since, on last evening, she had left its shelter. She was not only upset and shocked in many ways, but she was physically "dog tired" and falling asleep on her feet. Adam took her to her room and made her undress and get into bed, taking care that the room was well lighted both by sunshine and lamps. The only obstruction was from a silk curtain drawn across the window to keep out the glare. When she was feeling sleep steal over her, he sat beside her holding her hand, well knowing that the comfort of his presence was the best restorative for her. He stayed with her in that way till sleep had overmastered her wearied body. Then he went softly away. He found Sir Nathaniel in the study having an early cup of tea, amplified to the dimensions of a possible breakfast. After a little chat, the two agreed to go together to look at the ruins of Diana's Grove and Castra Regis. Adam explained that he had not told his wife that he was going over the horrible places again, lest it would frighten her, whilst the rest and sleep in ignorance would help her and make a gap of peacefulness between the horrors. Sir Nathaniel agreed in the wisdom of the proceeding, and the two went off together.

They visited Diana's Grove first, not only because it was nearer, but that it was the place where most description was required, and Adam felt that he could tell his story best on the spot. The absolute destruction of the place and everything in it seen in the broad daylight was almost inconceivable. To Sir Nathaniel it was as a story of horror full and complete. But to Adam it was, as it were, only on the fringes. He knew what was still to be seen when his friend had got over the knowledge of externals. As yet, Sir Nathaniel had only seen the outside of the house — or rather, where the outside of the house had been. The great horror lay within. However, age — and the experience of age — counts. Sir Nathaniel in his long and eventful life had seen too many terrible and horrible sights to be dismayed at a new one, even of the kind which lay close before him, though just beyond his vision. A strange, almost elemental, change in the aspect had taken place in the time which had elapsed since the dawn. It would almost seem as if Nature herself had tried to obliterate the evil signs of what had occurred, and to restore something of the æsthetic significance of the place. True, the utter ruin and destruction of the house was made even more manifest in the searching daylight; but the more appalling destruction which lay beneath was not visible. The rent, torn, and dislocated stonework looked worse than before; the upheaved foundations, the piled-up fragments of masonry, the fissures in the torn earth — all were at the worst. The Worm's hole was still evident, a round fissure seemingly leading down into the very bowels of the earth. But all the horrid mass of blood and slime, of torn, evil-smelling flesh and the sickening remnants of violent death, were gone. Either some of the later explosions had thrown up from the deep quantities of water which, though foul and corrupt itself, had still some cleansing power left, or else the writhing mass which stirred from far down below had helped to drag down and obliterate the items of horror. A grey dust, partly of fine sand, partly of the waste of the falling ruin, covered everything, and, though ghastly itself, helped to mask in something still worse. After a few minutes of watching, it became apparent to both men that the turmoil far below had not yet quite ceased. At short irregular intervals the hell-broth in the hole seemed as if boiling up. It rose and fell again and turned over, showing in fresh form much of the nauseous detail which had been visible earlier. The worst parts to see were the great masses of the flesh of the monstrous Worm in all its red and sickening aspect. Such fragments had been naturally bad enough before, but now they were infinitely worse. Corruption comes with startling rapidity to beings whose destruction has been due wholly or in part to lightning. Now the whole mass seemed to have become all at once corrupt. But that corruption was not all. It seemed to have attracted every natural organism which was in itself obnoxious. The whole surface of the fragments, once alive, were covered with insects, worms, and vermin of all kinds. The sight was horrible enough, but, with the awful smell added, was simply unbearable. The Worm's hole appeared to breathe forth death in its most repulsive forms. Both Adam and Sir Nathaniel, with one impulse, turned and ran to the top of the Brow, where a fresh breeze from the eastern sea was blowing up.

At the top of the Brow, beneath them as they looked down, they saw a shining mass of white, which looked strangely out of place amongst such wreckage as they had been viewing. It appeared so strange that Adam suggested trying to find a way down so that they might see it closely.

Sir Nathaniel suddenly stopped and said:

"We need not go down; I know what it is. The explosions of last night have blown off the outside of the cliffs. That which we see is the vast bed of china clay through which the Worm originally found its way down to its lair. See, there is the hole going right down through it. We can catch the glint of the water of the deep quags far down below. Well, her ladyship didn't deserve such a funeral, or such a monument. But all's well that ends well. We had better hurry home. Your wife may be walking by now, and is sure to be frightened at first. Come home as soon as you can. I shall see that breakfast is ready. I think we all want it."

THE END

The Lair of the White Worm — 28 Chapter Version, 1925

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To my friend Bertha Nicoll with affectionate esteem.

CHAPTER I — ADAM SALTON ARRIVES

Adam Salton sauntered into the Empire Club, Sydney, and found awaiting him a letter from his grand-uncle. He had first heard from the old gentleman less than a year before, when Richard Salton had claimed kinship, stating that he had been unable to write earlier, as he had found it very difficult to trace his grand-nephew's address. Adam was delighted and replied cordially; he had often heard his father speak of the older branch of the family with whom his people had long lost touch. Some interesting correspondence had ensued. Adam eagerly opened the letter which had only just arrived, and conveyed a cordial invitation to stop with his grand-uncle at Lesser Hill, for as long a time as he could spare.

"Indeed," Richard Salton went on, "I am in hopes that you will make your permanent home here. You see, my dear boy, you and I are all that remain of our race, and it is but fitting that you should succeed me when the time comes. In this year of grace, 1860, I am close on eighty years of age, and though we have been a long-lived race, the span of life cannot be prolonged beyond reasonable bounds. I am prepared to like you, and to make your home with me as happy as you could wish. So do come at once on receipt of this, and find the welcome I am waiting to give you. I send, in case such may make matters easy for you, a banker's draft for £200. Come soon, so that we may both of us enjoy many happy days together. If you are able to give me the pleasure of seeing you, send me as soon as you can a letter telling me when to expect you. Then when you arrive at Plymouth or Southampton or whatever port you are bound for, wait on board, and I will meet you at the earliest hour possible."

* * * * *

Old Mr. Salton was delighted when Adam's reply arrived and sent a groom hot-foot to his crony, Sir Nathaniel de Salis, to inform him that his grand-nephew was due at Southampton on the twelfth of June.

Mr. Salton gave instructions to have ready a carriage early on the important day, to start for Stafford, where he would catch the 11.40 a.m. train. He would stay that night with his grand-nephew, either on the ship, which would be a new experience for him, or, if his guest should prefer it, at a hotel. In either case they would start in the early morning for home. He had given instructions to his bailiff to send the postillion carriage on to Southampton, to be ready for their journey home, and to arrange for relays of his own horses to be sent on at once. He intended that his grand-nephew, who had been all his life in Australia, should see something of rural England on the drive. He had plenty of young horses of his own breeding and breaking, and could depend on a journey memorable to the young man. The luggage would be sent on by rail to Stafford, where one of his carts would meet it. Mr. Salton, during the journey to Southampton, often wondered if his grand-nephew was as much excited as he was at the idea of meeting so near a relation for the first time; and it was with an effort that he controlled himself. The endless railway lines and switches round the Southampton Docks fired his anxiety afresh.

As the train drew up on the dockside, he was getting his hand traps together, when the carriage door was wrenched open and a young man jumped in.

"How are you, uncle? I recognised you from the photo you sent me! I wanted to meet you as soon as I could, but everything is so strange to me that I didn't quite know what to do. However, here I am. I am glad to see you, sir. I have been dreaming of this happiness for thousands of miles; now I find that the reality beats all the dreaming!" As he spoke the old man and the young one were heartily wringing each other's hands.

The meeting so auspiciously begun proceeded well. Adam, seeing that the old man was interested in the novelty of the ship, suggested that he should stay the night on board, and that he would himself be ready to start at any hour and go anywhere that the other suggested. This affectionate willingness to fall in with his own plans quite won the old man's heart. He warmly accepted the invitation, and at once they became not only on terms of affectionate relationship, but almost like old friends. The heart of the old man, which had been empty for so long, found a new delight. The young man found, on landing in the old country, a welcome and a surrounding in full harmony with all his dreams throughout his wanderings and solitude, and the promise of a fresh and adventurous life. It was not long before the old man accepted him to full relationship by calling him by his Christian name. After a long talk on affairs of interest, they retired to the cabin, which the elder was to share. Richard Salton put his hands affectionately on the boy's shoulders — though Adam was in his twenty-seventh year, he was a boy, and always would be, to his grand-uncle.

"I am so glad to find you as you are, my dear boy — just such a young man as I had always hoped for as a son, in the days when I still had such hopes. However, that is all past. But thank God there is a new life to begin for both of us. To you must be the larger part — but there is still time for some of it to be shared in common. I have waited till we should have seen each other to enter upon the subject; for I thought it better not to tie up your young life to my old one till we should have sufficient personal knowledge to justify such a venture. Now I can, so far as I am concerned, enter into it freely, since from the moment my eyes rested on you I saw my son — as he shall be, God willing — if he chooses such a course himself."

"Indeed I do, sir — with all my heart!"

"Thank you, Adam, for that." The old, man's eyes filled and his voice trembled. Then, after a long silence between them, he went on: "When I heard you were coming I made my will. It was well that your interests should be protected from that moment on. Here is the deed — keep it, Adam. All I have shall belong to you; and if love and good wishes, or the memory of them, can make life sweeter, yours shall be a happy one. Now, my dear boy, let us turn in. We start early in the morning and have a long drive before us. I hope you don't mind driving? I was going to have the old travelling carriage in which my grandfather, your great-grand-uncle, went to Court when William IV. was king. It is all right — they built well in those days — and it has been kept in perfect order. But I think I have done better: I have sent the carriage in which I travel myself. The horses are of my own breeding, and relays of them shall take us all the way. I hope you like horses? They have long been one of my greatest interests in life."

"I love them, sir, and I am happy to say I have many of my own. My father gave me a horse farm for myself when I was eighteen. I devoted myself to it, and it has gone on. Before I came away, my steward gave me a memorandum that we have in my own place more than a thousand, nearly all good."

"I am glad, my boy. Another link between us."

"Just fancy what a delight it will be, sir, to see so much of England — and with you!"

“Thank you again, my boy. I will tell you all about your future home and its surroundings as we go. We shall travel in old-fashioned state, I tell you. My grandfather always drove four-in-hand; and so shall we.”

“Oh, thanks, sir, thanks. May I take the ribbons sometimes?”

“Whenever you choose, Adam. The team is your own. Every horse we use to-day is to be your own.”

“You are too generous, uncle!”

“Not at all. Only an old man’s selfish pleasure. It is not every day that an heir to the old home comes back. And — oh, by the way . . . No, we had better turn in now — I shall tell you the rest in the morning.”

CHAPTER II — THE CASWALLS OF CASTRA REGIS

Mr. Salton had all his life been an early riser, and necessarily an early waker. But early as he woke on the next morning — and although there was an excuse for not prolonging sleep in the constant whirr and rattle of the "donkey" engine winches of the great ship — he met the eyes of Adam fixed on him from his berth. His grand-nephew had given him the sofa, occupying the lower berth himself. The old man, despite his great strength and normal activity, was somewhat tired by his long journey of the day before, and the prolonged and exciting interview which followed it. So he was glad to lie still and rest his body, whilst his mind was actively exercised in taking in all he could of his strange surroundings. Adam, too, after the pastoral habit to which he had been bred, woke with the dawn, and was ready to enter on the experiences of the new day whenever it might suit his elder companion. It was little wonder, then, that, so soon as each realised the other's readiness, they simultaneously jumped up and began to dress. The steward had by previous instructions early breakfast prepared, and it was not long before they went down the gangway on shore in search of the carriage.

They found Mr. Salton's bailiff looking out for them on the dock, and he brought them at once to where the carriage was waiting in the street. Richard Salton pointed out with pride to his young companion the suitability of the vehicle for every need of travel. To it were harnessed four useful horses, with a postillion to each pair.

"See," said the old man proudly, "how it has all the luxuries of useful travel — silence and isolation as well as speed. There is nothing to obstruct the view of those travelling and no one to overhear what they may say. I have used that trap for a quarter of a century, and I never saw one more suitable for travel. You shall test it shortly. We are going to drive through the heart of England; and as we go I'll tell you what I was speaking of last night. Our route is to be by Salisbury, Bath, Bristol, Cheltenham, Worcester, Stafford; and so home."

Adam remained silent a few minutes, during which he seemed all eyes, for he perpetually ranged the whole circle of the horizon.

"Has our journey to-day, sir," he asked, "any special relation to what you said last night that you wanted to tell me?"

"Not directly; but indirectly, everything."

"Won't you tell me now — I see we cannot be overheard — and if anything strikes you as we go along, just run it in. I shall understand."

So old Salton spoke:

"To begin at the beginning, Adam. That lecture of yours on 'The Romans in Britain,' a report of which you posted to me, set me thinking — in addition to telling me your tastes. I wrote to you at once and asked you to come home, for it struck me that if you were fond of historical research — as seemed a fact — this was exactly the place for you, in addition to its being the home of your own forbears. If you could learn so much of the British Romans so far away in New South Wales, where there cannot be even a tradition of them, what might you not make of the same amount of study on the very spot. Where we are going is in the real heart of the old kingdom of Mercia, where there are traces of all the various nationalities which made up the conglomerate which became Britain."

"I rather gathered that you had some more definite — more personal reason for my hurrying. After all, history can keep —

except in the making!"

"Quite right, my boy. I had a reason such as you very wisely guessed. I was anxious for you to be here when a rather important phase of our local history occurred."

"What is that, if I may ask, sir?"

"Certainly. The principal landowner of our part of the county is on his way home, and there will be a great home-coming, which you may care to see. The fact is, for more than a century the various owners in the succession here, with the exception of a short time, have lived abroad."

"How is that, sir, if I may ask?"

"The great house and estate in our part of the world is Castra Regis, the family seat of the Caswall family. The last owner who lived here was Edgar Caswall, grandfather of the man who is coming here — and he was the only one who stayed even a short time. This man's grandfather, also named Edgar — they keep the tradition of the family Christian name — quarrelled with his family and went to live abroad, not keeping up any intercourse, good or bad, with his relatives, although this particular Edgar, as I told you, did visit his family estate, yet his son was born and lived and died abroad, while his grandson, the latest inheritor, was also born and lived abroad till he was over thirty — his present age. This was the second line of absentees. The great estate of Castra Regis has had no knowledge of its owner for five generations — covering more than a hundred and twenty years. It has been well administered, however, and no tenant or other connected with it has had anything of which to complain. All the same, there has been much natural anxiety to see the new owner, and we are all excited about the event of his coming. Even I am, though I own my own estate, which, though adjacent, is quite apart from Castra Regis. — Here we are now in new ground for you. That is the spire of Salisbury Cathedral, and when we leave that we shall be getting close to the old Roman county, and you will naturally want your eyes. So we shall shortly have to keep our minds on old Mercia. However, you need not be disappointed. My old friend, Sir Nathaniel de Salis, who, like myself, is a free-holder near Castra Regis — his estate, Doom Tower, is over the border of Derbyshire, on the Peak — is coming to stay with me for the festivities to welcome Edgar Caswall. He is just the sort of man you will like. He is devoted to history, and is President of the Mercian Archaeological Society. He knows more of our own part of the country, with its history and its people, than anyone else. I expect he will have arrived before us, and we three can have a long chat after dinner. He is also our local geologist and natural historian. So you and he will have many interests in common. Amongst other things he has a special knowledge of the Peak and its caverns, and knows all the old legends of prehistoric times."

They spent the night at Cheltenham, and on the following morning resumed their journey to Stafford. Adam's eyes were in constant employment, and it was not till Salton declared that they had now entered on the last stage of their journey, that he referred to Sir Nathaniel's coming.

As the dusk was closing down, they drove on to Lesser Hill, Mr. Salton's house. It was now too dark to see any details of their surroundings. Adam could just see that it was on the top of a hill, not quite so high as that which was covered by the Castle, on whose tower flew the flag, and which was all ablaze with moving lights, manifestly used in the preparations for the festivities on the morrow. So Adam deferred his curiosity till daylight. His grand-uncle was met at the door by a fine old man, who greeted him warmly.

"I came over early as you wished. I suppose this is your grand-nephew — I am glad to meet you, Mr. Adam Salton. I am Nathaniel de Salis, and your uncle is one of my oldest friends."

Adam, from the moment of their eyes meeting, felt as if they were already friends. The meeting was a new note of welcome to those that had already sounded in his ears.

The cordiality with which Sir Nathaniel and Adam met, made the imparting of information easy. Sir Nathaniel was a clever man of the world, who had travelled much, and within a certain area studied deeply. He was a brilliant conversationalist, as was to be expected from a successful diplomatist, even under unstimulating conditions. But he had been touched and to a certain extent fired by the younger man's evident admiration and willingness to learn from him. Accordingly the conversation, which began on the most friendly basis, soon warmed to an interest above proof, as the old man spoke of it next day to Richard Salton. He knew already that his old friend wanted his grand-nephew to learn all he could of the subject in hand, and so had during his journey from the Peak put his thoughts in sequence for narration and explanation. Accordingly, Adam had only to listen and he must learn much that he wanted to know. When dinner was over and the servants had withdrawn, leaving the three men at their wine, Sir Nathaniel began.

"I gather from your uncle — by the way, I suppose we had better speak of you as uncle and nephew, instead of going into exact relationship? In fact, your uncle is so old and dear a friend, that, with your permission, I shall drop formality with you altogether and speak of you and to you as Adam, as though you were his son."

"I should like," answered the young man, "nothing better!"

The answer warmed the hearts of both the old men, but, with the usual avoidance of Englishmen of emotional subjects personal to themselves, they instinctively returned to the previous question. Sir Nathaniel took the lead.

"I understand, Adam, that your uncle has posted you regarding the relationships of the Caswall family?"

"Partly, sir; but I understood that I was to hear minuter details from you — if you would be so good."

"I shall be delighted to tell you anything so far as my knowledge goes. Well, the first Caswall in our immediate record is an Edgar, head of the family and owner of the estate, who came into his kingdom just about the time that George III. did. He had one son of about twenty-four. There was a violent quarrel between the two. No one of this generation has any idea of the cause; but, considering the family characteristics, we may take it for granted that though it was deep and violent, it was on the surface trivial.

"The result of the quarrel was that the son left the house without a reconciliation or without even telling his father where he was going. He never came back again. A few years after, he died, without having in the meantime exchanged a word or a letter with his father. He married abroad and left one son, who seems to have been brought up in ignorance of all belonging to him. The gulf between them appears to have been unbridgable; for in time this son married and in turn had a son, but neither joy nor sorrow brought the sundered together. Under such conditions no *rapprochement* was to be looked for, and an utter indifference, founded at best on ignorance, took the place of family affection — even on community of interests. It was only due to the watchfulness of the lawyers that the birth of this new heir was ever made known. He actually spent a few months in the ancestral home.

“After this the family interest merely rested on heirship of the estate. As no other children have been born to any of the newer generations in the intervening years, all hopes of heritage are now centred in the grandson of this man.

“Now, it will be well for you to bear in mind the prevailing characteristics of this race. These were well preserved and unchanging; one and all they are the same: cold, selfish, dominant, reckless of consequences in pursuit of their own will. It was not that they did not keep faith, though that was a matter which gave them little concern, but that they took care to think beforehand of what they should do in order to gain their own ends. If they should make a mistake, someone else should bear the burthen of it. This was so perpetually recurrent that it seemed to be a part of a fixed policy. It was no wonder that, whatever changes took place, they were always ensured in their own possessions. They were absolutely cold and hard by nature. Not one of them — so far as we have any knowledge — was ever known to be touched by the softer sentiments, to swerve from his purpose, or hold his hand in obedience to the dictates of his heart. The pictures and effigies of them all show their adherence to the early Roman type. Their eyes were full; their hair, of raven blackness, grew thick and close and curly. Their figures were massive and typical of strength.

“The thick black hair, growing low down on the neck, told of vast physical strength and endurance. But the most remarkable characteristic is the eyes. Black, piercing, almost unendurable, they seem to contain in themselves a remarkable will power which there is no gainsaying. It is a power that is partly racial and partly individual: a power impregnated with some mysterious quality, partly hypnotic, partly mesmeric, which seems to take away from eyes that meet them all power of resistance — nay, all power of wishing to resist. With eyes like those, set in that all-commanding face, one would need to be strong indeed to think of resisting the inflexible will that lay behind.

“You may think, Adam, that all this is imagination on my part, especially as I have never seen any of them. So it is, but imagination based on deep study. I have made use of all I know or can surmise logically regarding this strange race. With such strange compelling qualities, is it any wonder that there is abroad an idea that in the race there is some demoniac possession, which tends to a more definite belief that certain individuals have in the past sold themselves to the Devil?

“But I think we had better go to bed now. We have a lot to get through to-morrow, and I want you to have your brain clear, and all your susceptibilities fresh. Moreover, I want you to come with me for an early walk, during which we may notice, whilst the matter is fresh in our minds, the peculiar disposition of this place — not merely your grand-uncle’s estate, but the lie of the country around it. There are many things on which we may seek — and perhaps find — enlightenment. The more we know at the start, the more things which may come into our view will develop themselves.”

CHAPTER III — DIANA’S GROVE

Curiosity took Adam Salton out of bed in the early morning, but when he had dressed and gone downstairs; he found that, early as he was, Sir Nathaniel was ahead of him. The old gentleman was quite prepared for a long walk, and they started at once.

Sir Nathaniel, without speaking, led the way to the east, down the hill. When they had descended and risen again, they found themselves on the eastern brink of a steep hill. It was of lesser height than that on which the Castle was situated; but it was so placed that it commanded the various hills that crowned the ridge. All along the ridge the rock cropped out, bare and bleak, but broken in rough natural castellation. The form of the ridge was a segment of a circle, with the higher points inland to the west. In the centre rose the Castle, on the highest point of all. Between the various rocky excrescences were groups of trees of various sizes and heights, amongst some of which were what, in the early morning light, looked like ruins. These — whatever they were — were of massive grey stone, probably limestone rudely cut — if indeed they were not shaped naturally. The fall of the ground was steep all along the ridge, so steep that here and there both trees and rocks and buildings seemed to overhang the plain far below, through which ran many streams.

Sir Nathaniel stopped and looked around, as though to lose nothing of the effect. The sun had climbed the eastern sky and was making all details clear. He pointed with a sweeping gesture, as though calling Adam’s attention to the extent of the view. Having done so, he covered the ground more slowly, as though inviting attention to detail. Adam was a willing and attentive pupil, and followed his motions exactly, missing — or trying to miss — nothing.

"I have brought you here, Adam, because it seems to me that this is the spot on which to begin our investigations. You have now in front of you almost the whole of the ancient kingdom of Mercia. In fact, we see the whole of it except that furthest part, which is covered by the Welsh Marches and those parts which are hidden from where we stand by the high ground of the immediate west. We can see — theoretically — the whole of the eastern bound of the kingdom, which ran south from the Humber to the Wash. I want you to bear in mind the trend of the ground, for some time, sooner or later, we shall do well to have it in our mind's eye when we are considering the ancient traditions and superstitions, and are trying to find the *rationale* of them. Each legend, each superstition which we receive, will help in the understanding and possible elucidation of the others. And as all such have a local basis, we can come closer to the truth — or the probability — by knowing the local conditions as we go along. It will help us to bring to our aid such geological truth as we may have between us. For instance, the building materials used in various ages can afford their own lessons to understanding eyes. The very heights and shapes and materials of these hills — nay, even of the wide plain that lies between us and the sea — have in themselves the materials of enlightening books."

"For instance, sir?" said Adam, venturing a question.

"Well, look at those hills which surround the main one where the site for the Castle was wisely chosen — on the highest ground. Take the others. There is something ostensible in each of them, and in all probability something unseen and unproved, but to be imagined, also."

"For instance?" continued Adam.

"Let us take them *seriatim*. That to the east, where the trees are, lower down — that was once the location of a Roman temple, possibly founded on a pre-existing Druidical one. Its name implies the former, and the grove of ancient oaks suggests the latter."

"Please explain."

"The old name translated means 'Diana's Grove.' Then the next one higher than it, but just beyond it, is called '*Mercy*' — in all probability a corruption or familiarisation of the word *Mercia*, with a Roman pun included. We learn from early manuscripts that the place was called *Vilula Misericordiae*. It was originally a nunnery, founded by Queen Bertha, but done away with by King Penda, the reactionary to Paganism after St. Augustine. Then comes your uncle's place — Lesser Hill. Though it is so close to the Castle, it is not connected with it. It is a freehold, and, so far as we know, of equal age. It has always belonged to your family."

"Then there only remains the Castle!"

"That is all; but its history contains the histories of all the others — in fact, the whole history of early England." Sir Nathaniel, seeing the expectant look on Adam's face, went on:

"The history of the Castle has no beginning so far as we know. The furthest records or surmises or inferences simply accept it as existing. Some of these — guesses, let us call them — seem to show that there was some sort of structure there when the Romans came, therefore it must have been a place of importance in Druid times — if indeed that was the beginning. Naturally the Romans accepted it, as they did everything of the kind that was, or might be, useful. The change is shown or inferred in the name Castra. It was the highest protected ground, and so naturally became the most important of their camps. A study of the map will show you that it must have been a most important centre. It both protected the advances already made to the north, and helped to dominate the sea coast. It sheltered the western marches, beyond which lay savage Wales — and danger. It provided a means of getting to the Severn, round which lay the great Roman roads then coming into existence, and made possible the great waterway to the heart of England — through the Severn and its tributaries. It brought the east and the west together by the swiftest and easiest ways known to those times. And, finally, it provided means of descent on London and all the expanse of country watered by the Thames.

"With such a centre, already known and organised, we can easily see that each fresh wave of invasion — the Angles, the Saxons, the Danes, and the Normans — found it a desirable possession and so ensured its upholding. In the earlier centuries it was merely a vantage ground. But when the victorious Romans brought with them the heavy solid fortifications impregnable to the weapons of the time, its commanding position alone ensured its adequate building and equipment. Then it was that the fortified camp of the Caesars developed into the castle of the king. As we are as yet ignorant of the names of the first kings of Mercia, no historian has been able to guess which of them made it his ultimate defence; and I suppose we shall never know now. In process of time, as the arts of war developed, it increased in size and strength, and although recorded details are lacking, the history is written not merely in the stone of its building, but is inferred in the changes of structure. Then the sweeping changes which followed the Norman Conquest wiped out all lesser records than its own. To-day we must accept it as one of the earliest castles of the Conquest, probably not later than the time of Henry I. Roman and Norman were both wise in their retention of places of approved strength or utility. So it was that these surrounding heights, already established and to a certain extent proved, were retained. Indeed, such characteristics as already pertained to them were preserved, and to-day afford to us lessons regarding things which have themselves long since passed away.

“So much for the fortified heights; but the hollows too have their own story. But how the time passes! We must hurry home, or your uncle will wonder what has become of us.”

He started with long steps towards Lesser Hill, and Adam was soon furtively running in order to keep up with him.

CHAPTER IV — THE LADY ARABELLA MARCH

"Now, there is no hurry, but so soon as you are both ready we shall start," Mr. Salton said when breakfast had begun. "I want to take you first to see a remarkable relic of Mercia, and then we'll go to Liverpool through what is called 'The Great Vale of Cheshire.' You may be disappointed, but take care not to prepare your mind" — this to Adam— "for anything stupendous or heroic. You would not think the place a vale at all, unless you were told so beforehand, and had confidence in the veracity of the teller. We should get to the Landing Stage in time to meet the *West African*, and catch Mr. Caswall as he comes ashore. We want to do him honour — and, besides, it will be more pleasant to have the introductions over before we go to his *fête* at the Castle."

The carriage was ready, the same as had been used the previous day, but there were different horses — magnificent animals, and keen for work. Breakfast was soon over, and they shortly took their places. The postillions had their orders, and were quickly on their way at an exhilarating pace.

Presently, in obedience to Mr. Salton's signal, the carriage drew up opposite a great heap of stones by the wayside.

"Here, Adam," he said, "is something that you of all men should not pass by unnoticed. That heap of stones brings us at once to the dawn of the Anglian kingdom. It was begun more than a thousand years ago — in the latter part of the seventh century — in memory of a murder. Wulfere, King of Mercia, nephew of Penda, here murdered his two sons for embracing Christianity. As was the custom of the time, each passer-by added a stone to the memorial heap. Penda represented heathen reaction after St. Augustine's mission. Sir Nathaniel can tell you as much as you want about this, and put you, if you wish, on the track of such accurate knowledge as there is."

Whilst they were looking at the heap of stones, they noticed that another carriage had drawn up beside them, and the passenger — there was only one — was regarding them curiously. The carriage was an old heavy travelling one, with arms blazoned on it gorgeously. The men took off their hats, as the occupant, a lady, addressed them.

"How do you do, Sir Nathaniel? How do you do, Mr. Salton? I hope you have not met with any accident. Look at me!"

As she spoke she pointed to where one of the heavy springs was broken across, the broken metal showing bright. Adam spoke up at once:

"Oh, that can soon be put right."

"Soon? There is no one near who can mend a break like that."

"I can."

"You!" She looked incredulously at the dapper young gentleman who spoke. "You — why, it's a workman's job."

"All right, I am a workman — though that is not the only sort of work I do. I am an Australian, and, as we have to move about fast, we are all trained to farriery and such mechanics as come into travel — I am quite at your service."

"I hardly know how to thank you for your kindness, of which I gladly avail myself. I don't know what else I can do, as I wish to meet Mr. Caswall of Castra Regis, who arrives home from Africa to-day. It is a notable home-coming; all the countryside want to do him honour." She looked at the old men and quickly made up her mind as to the identity of the stranger. "You must be Mr. Adam Salton of

Lesser Hill. I am Lady Arabella March of Diana's Grove." As she spoke she turned slightly to Mr. Salton, who took the hint and made a formal introduction.

So soon as this was done, Adam took some tools from his uncle's carriage, and at once began work on the broken spring. He was an expert workman, and the breach was soon made good. Adam was gathering the tools which he had been using — which, after the manner of all workmen, had been scattered about — when he noticed that several black snakes had crawled out from the heap of stones and were gathering round him. This naturally occupied his mind, and he was not thinking of anything else when he noticed Lady Arabella, who had opened the door of the carriage, slip from it with a quick gliding motion. She was already among the snakes when he called out to warn her. But there seemed to be no need of warning. The snakes had turned and were wriggling back to the mound as quickly as they could. He laughed to himself behind his teeth as he whispered, "No need to fear there. They seem much more afraid of her than she of them." All the same he began to beat on the ground with a stick which was lying close to him, with the instinct of one used to such vermin. In an instant he was alone beside the mound with Lady Arabella, who appeared quite unconcerned at the incident. Then he took a long look at her, and her dress alone was sufficient to attract attention. She was clad in some kind of soft white stuff, which clung close to her form, showing to the full every movement of her sinuous figure. She wore a close-fitting cap of some fine fur of dazzling white. Coiled round her white throat was a large necklace of emeralds, whose profusion of colour dazzled when the sun shone on them. Her voice was peculiar, very low and sweet, and so soft that the dominant note was of sibilation. Her hands, too, were peculiar — long, flexible, white, with a strange movement as of waving gently to and fro.

She appeared quite at ease, and, after thanking Adam, said that if any of his uncle's party were going to Liverpool she would be most happy to join forces.

"Whilst you are staying here, Mr. Salton, you must look on the grounds of Diana's Grove as your own, so that you may come and go just as you do in Lesser Hill. There are some fine views, and not a few natural curiosities which are sure to interest you, if you are a student of natural history — specially of an earlier kind, when the world was younger."

The heartiness with which she spoke, and the warmth of her words — not of her manner, which was cold and distant — made him suspicious. In the meantime both his uncle and Sir Nathaniel had thanked her for the invitation — of which, however, they said they were unable to avail themselves. Adam had a suspicion that, though she answered regretfully, she was in reality relieved. When he had got into the carriage with the two old men, and they had driven off, he was not surprised when Sir Nathaniel spoke.

"I could not but feel that she was glad to be rid of us. She can play her game better alone!"

"What is her game?" asked Adam unthinkingly.

"All the county knows it, my boy. Caswall is a very rich man. Her husband was rich when she married him — or seemed to be. When he committed suicide, it was found that he had nothing left, and the estate was mortgaged up to the hilt. Her only hope is in a rich marriage. I suppose I need not draw any conclusion; you can do that as well as I can."

Adam remained silent nearly all the time they were travelling through the alleged Vale of Cheshire. He thought much during that journey and came to several conclusions, though his lips were unmoved. One of these conclusions was that he would be very careful about paying any attention to Lady Arabella. He was himself a rich man, how rich not even his uncle had the least idea, and would have been surprised had he known.

The remainder of the journey was uneventful, and upon arrival at Liverpool they went aboard the *West African*, which had just come to the landing-stage. There his uncle introduced himself to Mr. Caswall, and followed this up by introducing Sir Nathaniel and then Adam. The new-comer received them graciously, and said what a pleasure it was to be coming home after so long an absence of his family from their old seat. Adam was pleased at the warmth of the reception; but he could not avoid a feeling of repugnance at the man's face. He was trying hard to overcome this when a diversion was caused by the arrival of Lady Arabella. The diversion was welcome to all; the two Saltons and Sir Nathaniel were shocked at Caswall's face — so hard, so ruthless, so selfish, so dominant. "God help any," was the common thought, "who is under the domination of such a man!"

Presently his African servant approached him, and at once their thoughts changed to a larger toleration. Caswall looked indeed a savage — but a cultured savage. In him were traces of the softening civilisation of ages — of some of the higher instincts and education of man, no matter how rudimentary these might be. But the face of Oolanga, as his master called him, was unreformed, unsoftened savage, and inherent in it were all the hideous possibilities of a lost, devil-ridden child of the forest and the swamp — the lowest of all created things that could be regarded as in some form ostensibly human. Lady Arabella and Oolanga arrived almost simultaneously, and Adam was surprised to notice what effect their appearance had on each other. The woman seemed as if she would not — could not — condescend to exhibit any concern or interest in such a creature. On the other hand, the negro's bearing was such as in itself to justify her pride. He treated her not merely as a slave treats his master, but as a worshipper would treat a deity. He knelt before her with his hands out-stretched and his forehead in the dust. So long as she remained he did not move; it was only when she went over to Caswall that he relaxed his attitude of devotion and stood by respectfully.

Adam spoke to his own man, Davenport, who was standing by, having arrived with the bailiff of Lesser Hill, who had followed Mr. Salton in a pony trap. As he spoke, he pointed to an attentive ship's steward, and presently the two men were conversing.

"I think we ought to be moving," Mr. Salton said to Adam. "I have some things to do in Liverpool, and I am sure that both Mr. Caswall and Lady Arabella would like to get under weigh for Castra Regis."

"I too, sir, would like to do something," replied Adam. "I want to find out where Ross, the animal merchant, lives — I want to take a small animal home with me, if you don't mind. He is only a little thing, and will be no trouble."

"Of course not, my boy. What kind of animal is it that you want?"

"A mongoose."

"A mongoose! What on earth do you want it for?"

"To kill snakes."

"Good!" The old man remembered the mound of stones. No explanation was needed.

When Ross heard what was wanted, he asked:

"Do you want something special, or will an ordinary mongoose do?"

"Well, of course I want a good one. But I see no need for anything special. It is for ordinary use."

"I can let you have a choice of ordinary ones. I only asked, because I have in stock a very special one which I got lately from Nepaul. He has a record of his own. He killed a king cobra that had been seen in the Rajah's garden. But I don't suppose we have any snakes of the kind in this cold climate — I daresay an ordinary one will do."

When Adam got back to the carriage, carefully carrying the box with the mongoose, Sir Nathaniel said: "Hullo! what have you got there?"

"A mongoose."

"What for?"

"To kill snakes!"

Sir Nathaniel laughed.

"I heard Lady Arabella's invitation to you to come to Diana's Grove."

"Well, what on earth has that got to do with it?"

"Nothing directly that I know of. But we shall see." Adam waited, and the old man went on: "Have you by any chance heard the other name which was given long ago to that place."

"No, sir."

"It was called — Look here, this subject wants a lot of talking over. Suppose we wait till we are alone and have lots of time before us."

"All right, sir." Adam was filled with curiosity, but he thought it better not to hurry matters. All would come in good time. Then the three men returned home, leaving Mr. Caswall to spend the night in Liverpool.

The following day the Lesser Hill party set out for Castra Regis, and for the time Adam thought no more of Diana's Grove or of what mysteries it had contained — or might still contain.

The guests were crowding in, and special places were marked for important people. Adam, seeing so many persons of varied degree, looked round for Lady Arabella, but could not locate her. It was only when he saw the old-fashioned travelling carriage approach and heard the sound of cheering which went with it, that he realised that Edgar Caswall had arrived. Then, on looking more closely, he saw that Lady Arabella, dressed as he had seen her last, was seated beside him. When the carriage drew up at the great flight of steps, the host jumped down and gave her his hand.

It was evident to all that she was the chief guest at the festivities. It was not long before the seats on the daïs were filled, while the tenants and guests of lesser importance had occupied all the coigns of vantage not reserved. The order of the day had been carefully arranged by a committee. There were some speeches, happily neither many nor long; and then festivities were suspended till the time for feasting arrived. In the interval Caswall walked among his guests, speaking to all in a friendly manner and expressing a general welcome. The other guests came down from the daïs and followed his example, so there was unceremonious meeting and greeting between gentle and simple.

Adam Salton naturally followed with his eyes all that went on within their scope, taking note of all who seemed to afford any interest. He was young and a man and a stranger from a far distance; so on all these accounts he naturally took stock rather of the women than of the men, and of these, those who were young and attractive. There were lots of pretty girls among the crowd, and Adam, who was a handsome young man and well set up, got his full share of admiring glances. These did not concern him much, and he remained unmoved until there came along a group of three, by their dress and bearing, of the farmer class. One was a sturdy old man; the other two were good-looking girls, one of a little over twenty, the other not quite so old. So soon as Adam's eyes met those of the younger girl, who stood nearest to him, some sort of electricity flashed — that divine spark which begins by recognition, and ends in obedience. Men call it "Love."

Both his companions noticed how much Adam was taken by the pretty girl, and spoke of her to him in a way which made his heart warm to them.

"Did you notice that party that passed? The old man is Michael Watford, one of the tenants of Mr. Caswall. He occupies Mercy Farm, which Sir Nathaniel pointed out to you to-day. The girls are his grand-daughters, the elder, Lilla, being the only child of his elder son, who died when she was less than a year old. His wife died on the same day. She is a good girl — as good as she is pretty. The other is her first cousin, the daughter of Watford's second son. He went for a soldier when he was just over twenty, and was drafted abroad. He was not a good correspondent, though he was a good enough son. A few letters came, and then his father heard from the colonel of his regiment that he had been killed by dacoits in Burmah. He heard from the same source that his boy had been married to a Burmese, and that there was a daughter only a year old.

Watford had the child brought home, and she grew up beside Lilla. The only thing that they heard of her birth was that her name was Mimi. The two children adored each other, and do to this day. Strange how different they are! Lilla all fair, like the old Saxon stock from which she is sprung; Mimi showing a trace of her mother's race. Lilla is as gentle as a dove, but Mimi's black eyes can glow whenever she is upset. The only thing that upsets her is when anything happens to injure or threaten or annoy Lilla. Then her eyes glow as do the eyes of a bird when her young are menaced."

CHAPTER V — THE WHITE WORM

Mr. Salton introduced Adam to Mr. Watford and his granddaughters, and they all moved on together. Of course neighbours in the position of the Watfords knew all about Adam Salton, his relationship, circumstances, and prospects. So it would have been strange indeed if both girls did not dream of possibilities of the future. In agricultural England, eligible men of any class are rare. This particular man was specially eligible, for he did not belong to a class in which barriers of caste were strong. So when it began to be noticed that he walked beside Mimi Watford and seemed to desire her society, all their friends endeavoured to give the promising affair a helping hand. When the gongs sounded for the banquet, he went with her into the tent where her grandfather had seats. Mr. Salton and Sir Nathaniel noticed that the young man did not come to claim his appointed place at the daïs table; but they understood and made no remark, or indeed did not seem to notice his absence.

Lady Arabella sat as before at Edgar Caswall's right hand. She was certainly a striking and unusual woman, and to all it seemed fitting from her rank and personal qualities that she should be the chosen partner of the heir on his first appearance. Of course nothing was said openly by those of her own class who were present; but words were not necessary when so much could be expressed by nods and smiles. It seemed to be an accepted thing that at last there was to be a mistress of Castra Regis, and that she was present amongst them. There were not lacking some who, whilst admitting all her charm and beauty, placed her in the second rank, Lilla Watford being marked as first. There was sufficient divergence of type, as well as of individual beauty, to allow of fair comment; Lady Arabella represented the aristocratic type, and Lilla that of the commonalty.

When the dusk began to thicken, Mr. Salton and Sir Nathaniel walked home — the trap had been sent away early in the day — leaving Adam to follow in his own time. He came in earlier than was expected, and seemed upset about something. Neither of the elders made any comment. They all lit cigarettes, and, as dinner-time was close at hand, went to their rooms to get ready.

Adam had evidently been thinking in the interval. He joined the others in the drawing-room, looking ruffled and impatient — a condition of things seen for the first time. The others, with the patience — or the experience — of age, trusted to time to unfold and explain things. They had not long to wait. After sitting down and standing up several times, Adam suddenly burst out.

"That fellow seems to think he owns the earth. Can't he let people alone! He seems to think that he has only to throw his handkerchief to any woman, and be her master."

This outburst was in itself enlightening. Only thwarted affection in some guise could produce this feeling in an amiable young man. Sir Nathaniel, as an old diplomatist, had a way of understanding, as if by foreknowledge, the true inwardness of things, and asked suddenly, but in a matter-of-fact, indifferent voice:

"Was he after Lilla?"

"Yes, and the fellow didn't lose any time either. Almost as soon as they met, he began to butter her up, and tell her how beautiful she was. Why, before he left her side, he had asked himself to tea to-morrow at Mercy Farm. Stupid ass! He might see that the girl isn't his sort! I never saw anything like it. It was just like a hawk and a pigeon."

As he spoke, Sir Nathaniel turned and looked at Mr. Salton — a keen look which implied a full understanding.

“Tell us all about it, Adam. There are still a few minutes before dinner, and we shall all have better appetites when we have come to some conclusion on this matter.”

“There is nothing to tell, sir; that is the worst of it. I am bound to say that there was not a word said that a human being could object to. He was very civil, and all that was proper — just what a landlord might be to a tenant’s daughter . . . Yet — yet — well, I don’t know how it was, but it made my blood boil.”

“How did the hawk and the pigeon come in?” Sir Nathaniel’s voice was soft and soothing, nothing of contradiction or overdone curiosity in it — a tone eminently suited to win confidence.

“I can hardly explain. I can only say that he looked like a hawk and she like a dove — and, now that I think of it, that is what they each did look like; and do look like in their normal condition.”

“That is so!” came the soft voice of Sir Nathaniel.

Adam went on:

“Perhaps that early Roman look of his set me off. But I wanted to protect her; she seemed in danger.”

“She seems in danger, in a way, from all you young men. I couldn’t help noticing the way that even you looked — as if you wished to absorb her!”

“I hope both you young men will keep your heads cool,” put in Mr. Salton. “You know, Adam, it won’t do to have any quarrel between you, especially so soon after his home-coming and your arrival here. We must think of the feelings and happiness of our neighbours; mustn’t we?”

“I hope so, sir. I assure you that, whatever may happen, or even threaten, I shall obey your wishes in this as in all things.”

"Hush!" whispered Sir Nathaniel, who heard the servants in the passage bringing dinner.

After dinner, over the walnuts and the wine, Sir Nathaniel returned to the subject of the local legends.

"It will perhaps be a less dangerous topic for us to discuss than more recent ones."

"All right, sir," said Adam heartily. "I think you may depend on me now with regard to any topic. I can even discuss Mr. Caswall. Indeed, I may meet him to-morrow. He is going, as I said, to call at Mercy Farm at three o'clock — but I have an appointment at two."

"I notice," said Mr. Salton, "that you do not lose any time."

The two old men once more looked at each other steadily. Then, lest the mood of his listener should change with delay, Sir Nathaniel began at once:

"I don't propose to tell you all the legends of Mercia, or even to make a selection of them. It will be better, I think, for our purpose if we consider a few facts — recorded or unrecorded — about this neighbourhood. I think we might begin with Diana's Grove. It has roots in the different epochs of our history, and each has its special crop of legend. The Druid and the Roman are too far off for matters of detail; but it seems to me the Saxon and the Angles are near enough to yield material for legendary lore. We find that this particular place had another name besides Diana's Grove. This was manifestly of Roman origin, or of Grecian accepted as Roman. The other is more pregnant of adventure and romance than the Roman name. In Mercian tongue it was 'The Lair of the White Worm.' This needs a word of explanation at the beginning.

"In the dawn of the language, the word 'worm' had a somewhat different meaning from that in use to-day. It was an adaptation of the

Anglo-Saxon ‘wyrm,’ meaning a dragon or snake; or from the Gothic ‘waurms,’ a serpent; or the Icelandic ‘ormur,’ or the German ‘wurm.’ We gather that it conveyed originally an idea of size and power, not as now in the diminutive of both these meanings. Here legendary history helps us. We have the well-known legend of the ‘Worm Well’ of Lambton Castle, and that of the ‘Laidly Worm of Spindleston Heugh’ near Bamborough. In both these legends the ‘worm’ was a monster of vast size and power — a veritable dragon or serpent, such as legend attributes to vast fens or quags where there was illimitable room for expansion. A glance at a geological map will show that whatever truth there may have been of the actuality of such monsters in the early geologic periods, at least there was plenty of possibility. In England there were originally vast plains where the plentiful supply of water could gather. The streams were deep and slow, and there were holes of abysmal depth, where any kind and size of antediluvian monster could find a habitat. In places, which now we can see from our windows, were mud-holes a hundred or more feet deep. Who can tell us when the age of the monsters which flourished in slime came to an end? There must have been places and conditions which made for greater longevity, greater size, greater strength than was usual. Such over-lappings may have come down even to our earlier centuries. Nay, are there not now creatures of a vastness of bulk regarded by the generality of men as impossible? Even in our own day there are seen the traces of animals, if not the animals themselves, of stupendous size — veritable survivals from earlier ages, preserved by some special qualities in their habitats. I remember meeting a distinguished man in India, who had the reputation of being a great shikaree, who told me that the greatest temptation he had ever had in his life was to shoot a giant snake which he had come across in the Terai of Upper India. He was on a tiger-shooting expedition, and as his elephant was crossing a nullah, it squealed. He looked down from his howdah and saw that the elephant had stepped across the body of a snake which was dragging itself through the jungle. ‘So far as I could see,’ he said, ‘it must have been eighty or one hundred feet in length. Fully forty or fifty feet was on each side of the track, and though the weight which it dragged had thinned it, it was as thick round as a man’s body. I suppose you know that when you are after tiger, it is a point of honour not to shoot at anything else, as life may depend on it. I could easily have spined this monster, but I felt that I must not — so, with regret, I had to let it go.’

“Just imagine such a monster anywhere in this country, and at once we could get a sort of idea of the ‘worms,’ which possibly did frequent the great morasses which spread round the mouths of many of the great European rivers.”

“I haven’t the least doubt, sir, that there may have been such monsters as you have spoken of still existing at a much later period than is generally accepted,” replied Adam. “Also, if there were such things, that this was the very place for them. I have tried to think over the matter since you pointed out the configuration of the ground. But it seems to me that there is a hiatus somewhere. Are there not mechanical difficulties?”

“In what way?”

“Well, our antique monster must have been mighty heavy, and the distances he had to travel were long and the ways difficult. From where we are now sitting down to the level of the mud-holes is a distance of several hundred feet — I am leaving out of consideration altogether any lateral distance. Is it possible that there was a way by which a monster could travel up and down, and yet no chance recorder have ever seen him? Of course we have the legends; but is not some more exact evidence necessary in a scientific investigation?"

"My dear Adam, all you say is perfectly right, and, were we starting on such an investigation, we could not do better than follow your reasoning. But, my dear boy, you must remember that all this took place thousands of years ago. You must remember, too, that all records of the kind that would help us are lacking. Also, that the places to be considered were desert, so far as human habitation or population are considered. In the vast desolation of such a place as complied with the necessary conditions, there must have been such profusion of natural growth as would bar the progress of men formed as we are. The lair of such a monster would not have been disturbed for hundreds — or thousands — of years. Moreover, these creatures must have occupied places quite inaccessible to man. A snake who could make himself comfortable in a quagmire, a hundred feet deep, would be protected on the outskirts by such stupendous morasses as now no longer exist, or which, if they exist anywhere at all, can be on very few places on the earth's surface. Far be it from me to say that in more elemental times such things could not have been. The condition belongs to the geologic age — the great birth and growth of the world, when natural forces ran riot, when the struggle for existence was so savage that no vitality which was not founded in a gigantic form could have even a possibility of survival. That such a time existed, we have evidences in geology, but there only; we can never expect proofs such as this age demands. We can only imagine or surmise such things — or such conditions and such forces as overcame them."

CHAPTER VI — HAWK AND PIGEON

At breakfast-time next morning Sir Nathaniel and Mr. Salton were seated when Adam came hurriedly into the room.

“Any news?” asked his uncle mechanically.

“Four.”

“Four what?” asked Sir Nathaniel.

“Snakes,” said Adam, helping himself to a grilled kidney.

“Four snakes. I don’t understand.”

“Mongoose,” said Adam, and then added explanatorily: “I was out with the mongoose just after three.”

“Four snakes in one morning! Why, I didn’t know there were so many on the Brow” — the local name for the western cliff. “I hope that wasn’t the consequence of our talk of last night?”

“It was, sir. But not directly.”

“But, God bless my soul, you didn’t expect to get a snake like the Lambton worm, did you? Why, a mongoose, to tackle a monster like that — if there were one — would have to be bigger than a haystack.”

“These were ordinary snakes, about as big as a walking-stick.”

“Well, it’s pleasant to be rid of them, big or little. That is a good mongoose, I am sure; he’ll clear out all such vermin round here,” said Mr. Salton.

Adam went quietly on with his breakfast. Killing a few snakes in a morning was no new experience to him. He left the room the moment breakfast was finished and went to the study that his uncle had arranged for him. Both Sir Nathaniel and Mr. Salton took it that he wanted to be by himself, so as to avoid any questioning or talk of the visit that he was to make that afternoon. They saw nothing further of him till about half-an-hour before dinner-time. Then he came quietly into the smoking-room, where Mr. Salton and Sir Nathaniel were sitting together, ready dressed.

"I suppose there is no use waiting. We had better get it over at once," remarked Adam.

His uncle, thinking to make things easier for him, said: "Get what over?"

There was a sign of shyness about him at this. He stammered a little at first, but his voice became more even as he went on.

"My visit to Mercy Farm."

Mr. Salton waited eagerly. The old diplomatist simply smiled.

"I suppose you both know that I was much interested yesterday in the Watfords?" There was no denial or fending off the question. Both the old men smiled acquiescence. Adam went on: "I meant you to see it — both of you. You, uncle, because you are my uncle and the nearest of my own kin, and, moreover, you couldn't have been more kind to me or made me more welcome if you had been my own father." Mr. Salton said nothing. He simply held out his hand, and the other took it and held it for a few seconds. "And you, sir, because you have shown me something of the same affection which in my wildest dreams of home I had no right to expect." He stopped for an instant, much moved.

Sir Nathaniel answered softly, laying his hand on the youth's shoulder.

"You are right, my boy; quite right. That is the proper way to look at it. And I may tell you that we old men, who have no children of our own, feel our hearts growing warm when we hear words like those."

Then Adam hurried on, speaking with a rush, as if he wanted to come to the crucial point.

"Mr. Watford had not come in, but Lilla and Mimi were at home, and they made me feel very welcome. They have all a great regard for my uncle. I am glad of that any way, for I like them all — much. We were having tea, when Mr. Caswall came to the door, attended by the negro. Lilla opened the door herself. The window of the living-room at the farm is a large one, and from within you cannot help seeing anyone coming. Mr. Caswall said he had ventured to call, as he wished to make the acquaintance of all his tenants, in a less formal way, and more individually, than had been possible to him on the previous day. The girls made him welcome — they are very sweet girls those, sir; someone will be very happy some day there — with either of them."

"And that man may be you, Adam," said Mr. Salton heartily.

A sad look came over the young man's eyes, and the fire his uncle had seen there died out. Likewise the timbre left his voice, making it sound lonely.

"Such might crown my life. But that happiness, I fear, is not for me — or not without pain and loss and woe."

"Well, it's early days yet!" cried Sir Nathaniel heartily.

The young man turned on him his eyes, which had now grown excessively sad.

"Yesterday — a few hours ago — that remark would have given me new hope — new courage; but since then I have learned too much."

The old man, skilled in the human heart, did not attempt to argue in such a matter.

"Too early to give in, my boy."

"I am not of a giving-in kind," replied the young man earnestly.

"But, after all, it is wise to realise a truth. And when a man, though he is young, feels as I do — as I have felt ever since yesterday, when I first saw Mimi's eyes — his heart jumps. He does not need to learn things. He knows."

There was silence in the room, during which the twilight stole on imperceptibly. It was Adam who again broke the silence.

"Do you know, uncle, if we have any second sight in our family?"

"No, not that I ever heard about. Why?"

"Because," he answered slowly, "I have a conviction which seems to answer all the conditions of second sight."

"And then?" asked the old man, much perturbed.

"And then the usual inevitable. What in the Hebrides and other places, where the Sight is a cult — a belief — is called 'the doom' — the court from which there is no appeal. I have often heard of second sight — we have many western Scots in Australia; but I have realised more of its true inwardness in an instant of this afternoon than I did in the whole of my life previously — a granite wall stretching up to the very heavens, so high and so dark that the eye of God Himself cannot see beyond. Well, if the Doom must come, it must. That is all."

The voice of Sir Nathaniel broke in, smooth and sweet and grave.

"Can there not be a fight for it? There can for most things."

"For most things, yes, but for the Doom, no. What a man can do I shall do. There will be — must be — a fight. When and where and how I know not, but a fight there will be. But, after all, what is a man in such a case?"

"Adam, there are three of us." Salton looked at his old friend as he spoke, and that old friend's eyes blazed.

"Ay, three of us," he said, and his voice rang.

There was again a pause, and Sir Nathaniel endeavoured to get back to less emotional and more neutral ground.

“Tell us of the rest of the meeting. Remember we are all pledged to this. It is a fight *à l’outrance*, and we can afford to throw away or forgo no chance.”

“We shall throw away or lose nothing that we can help. We fight to win, and the stake is a life — perhaps more than one — we shall see.” Then he went on in a conversational tone, such as he had used when he spoke of the coming to the farm of Edgar Caswall: “When Mr. Caswall came in, the negro went a short distance away and there remained. It gave me the idea that he expected to be called, and intended to remain in sight, or within hail. Then Mimi got another cup and made fresh tea, and we all went on together.”

“Was there anything uncommon — were you all quite friendly?” asked Sir Nathaniel quietly.

“Quite friendly. There was nothing that I could notice out of the common — except,” he went on, with a slight hardening of the voice, “except that he kept his eyes fixed on Lilla, in a way which was quite intolerable to any man who might hold her dear.”

“Now, in what way did he look?” asked Sir Nathaniel.

“There was nothing in itself offensive; but no one could help noticing it.”

“You did. Miss Watford herself, who was the victim, and Mr. Caswall, who was the offender, are out of range as witnesses. Was there anyone else who noticed?”

“Mimi did. Her face flamed with anger as she saw the look.”

“What kind of look was it? Over-ardent or too admiring, or what? Was it the look of a lover, or one who fain would be? You understand?”

"Yes, sir, I quite understand. Anything of that sort I should of course notice. It would be part of my preparation for keeping my self-control — to which I am pledged."

"If it were not amatory, was it threatening? Where was the offence?"

Adam smiled kindly at the old man.

"It was not amatory. Even if it was, such was to be expected. I should be the last man in the world to object, since I am myself an offender in that respect. Moreover, not only have I been taught to fight fair, but by nature I believe I am just. I would be as tolerant of and as liberal to a rival as I should expect him to be to me. No, the look I mean was nothing of that kind. And so long as it did not lack proper respect, I should not of my own part condescend to notice it. Did you ever study the eyes of a hound?"

"At rest?"

"No, when he is following his instincts! Or, better still," Adam went on, "the eyes of a bird of prey when he is following his instincts. Not when he is swooping, but merely when he is watching his quarry?"

"No," said Sir Nathaniel, "I don't know that I ever did. Why, may I ask?"

"That was the look. Certainly not amatory or anything of that kind — yet it was, it struck me, more dangerous, if not so deadly as an actual threatening."

Again there was a silence, which Sir Nathaniel broke as he stood up:

"I think it would be well if we all thought over this by ourselves. Then we can renew the subject."

CHAPTER VII — OOLANGA

Mr. Salton had an appointment for six o'clock at Liverpool. When he had driven off, Sir Nathaniel took Adam by the arm.

"May I come with you for a while to your study? I want to speak to you privately without your uncle knowing about it, or even what the subject is. You don't mind, do you? It is not idle curiosity. No, no. It is on the subject to which we are all committed."

"Is it necessary to keep my uncle in the dark about it? He might be offended."

"It is not necessary; but it is advisable. It is for his sake that I asked. My friend is an old man, and it might concern him unduly — even alarm him. I promise you there shall be nothing that could cause him anxiety in our silence, or at which he could take umbrage."

"Go on, sir!" said Adam simply.

"You see, your uncle is now an old man. I know it, for we were boys together. He has led an uneventful and somewhat self-contained life, so that any such condition of things as has now arisen is apt to perplex him from its very strangeness. In fact, any new matter is trying to old people. It has its own disturbances and its own anxieties, and neither of these things are good for lives that should be restful. Your uncle is a strong man, with a very happy and placid nature. Given health and ordinary conditions of life, there is no reason why he should not live to be a hundred. You and I, therefore, who both love him, though in different ways, should make it our business to protect him from all disturbing influences. I am sure you will agree with me that any labour to this end would be well spent. All right, my boy! I see your answer in your eyes; so we need say no more of that. And now," here his voice changed, "tell me all that took place at that interview. There are strange things in front of us — how strange we cannot at present even guess. Doubtless some of the difficult things to understand which lie behind the veil will in time be shown to us to see and to understand. In the meantime, all we can do is to work patiently, fearlessly, and unselfishly, to an end that we think is right. You had got so far as where Lilla opened the door to Mr. Caswall and the negro. You also observed that Mimi was disturbed in her mind at the way Mr. Caswall looked at her cousin."

"Certainly — though 'disturbed' is a poor way of expressing her objection."

"Can you remember well enough to describe Caswall's eyes, and how Lilla looked, and what Mimi said and did? Also Oolanga, Caswall's West African servant."

"I'll do what I can, sir. All the time Mr. Caswall was staring, he kept his eyes fixed and motionless — but not as if he was in a trance. His forehead was wrinkled up, as it is when one is trying to see through or into something. At the best of times his face has not a gentle expression; but when it was screwed up like that it was almost diabolical. It frightened poor Lilla so that she trembled, and after a bit got so pale that I thought she had fainted. However, she held up and tried to stare back, but in a feeble kind of way. Then Mimi came close and held her hand. That braced her up, and — still, never ceasing her return stare — she got colour again and seemed more like herself."

"Did he stare too?"

"More than ever. The weaker Lilla seemed, the stronger he became, just as if he were feeding on her strength. All at once she turned round, threw up her hands, and fell down in a faint. I could not see what else happened just then, for Mimi had thrown herself on her knees beside her and hid her from me. Then there was something like a black shadow between us, and there was the nigger, looking more like a malignant devil than ever. I am not usually a patient man, and the sight of that ugly devil is enough to make one's blood boil. When he saw my face, he seemed to realise danger — immediate danger — and slunk out of the room as noiselessly as if he had been blown out. I learned one thing, however — he is an enemy, if ever a man had one."

"That still leaves us three to two!" put in Sir Nathaniel.

"Then Caswall slunk out, much as the nigger had done. When he had gone, Lilla recovered at once."

"Now," said Sir Nathaniel, anxious to restore peace, "have you found out anything yet regarding the negro? I am anxious to be posted regarding him. I fear there will be, or may be, grave trouble with him."

"Yes, sir, I've heard a good deal about him — of course it is not official; but hearsay must guide us at first. You know my man Davenport — private secretary, confidential man of business, and general factotum. He is devoted to me, and has my full confidence. I asked him to stay on board the *West African* and have a good look round, and find out what he could about Mr. Caswall. Naturally, he was struck with the aboriginal savage. He found one of the ship's stewards, who had been on the regular voyages to South Africa. He knew Oolanga and had made a study of him. He is a man who gets on well with niggers, and they open their hearts to him. It seems that this Oolanga is quite a great person in the nigger world of the African West Coast. He has the two things which men of his own colour respect: he can make them afraid, and he is lavish with money. I don’t know whose money — but that does not matter. They are always ready to trumpet his greatness. Evil greatness it is — but neither does that matter. Briefly, this is his history. He was originally a witch-finder — about as low an occupation as exists amongst aboriginal savages. Then he got up in the world and became an Obi-man, which gives an opportunity to wealth *via* blackmail. Finally, he reached the highest honour in hellish service. He became a user of Voodoo, which seems to be a service of the utmost baseness and cruelty. I was told some of his deeds of cruelty, which are simply sickening. They made me long for an opportunity of helping to drive him back to hell. You might think to look at him that you could measure in some way the extent of his vileness; but it would be a vain hope. Monsters such as he is belong to an earlier and more rudimentary stage of barbarism. He is in his way a clever fellow — for a nigger; but is none the less dangerous or the less hateful for that. The men in the ship told me that he was a collector: some of them had seen his collections. Such collections! All that was potent for evil in bird or beast, or even in fish. Beaks that could break and rend and tear — all the birds represented were of a predatory kind. Even the fishes are those which are born to destroy, to wound, to torture. The collection, I assure you, was an object lesson in human malignity. This being has enough evil in his face to frighten even a strong man. It is little wonder that the sight of it put that poor girl into a dead faint!”

Nothing more could be done at the moment, so they separated.

Adam was up in the early morning and took a smart walk round the Brow. As he was passing Diana’s Grove, he looked in on the short avenue of trees, and noticed the snakes killed on the previous morning by the mongoose. They all lay in a row, straight and rigid, as if they had been placed by hands. Their skins seemed damp and sticky, and they were covered all over with ants and other insects. They looked loathsome, so after a glance, he passed on.

A little later, when his steps took him, naturally enough, past the entrance to Mercy Farm, he was passed by the negro, moving quickly under the trees wherever there was shadow. Laid across one extended arm, looking like dirty towels across a rail, he had the horrid-looking snakes. He did not seem to see Adam. No one was to be seen at Mercy except a few workmen in the farmyard, so, after waiting on the chance of seeing Mimi, Adam began to go slowly home.

Once more he was passed on the way. This time it was by Lady Arabella, walking hurriedly and so furiously angry that she did not recognise him, even to the extent of acknowledging his bow.

When Adam got back to Lesser Hill, he went to the coach-house where the box with the mongoose was kept, and took it with him, intending to finish at the Mound of Stone what he had begun the previous morning with regard to the extermination. He found that the snakes were even more easily attacked than on the previous day; no less than six were killed in the first half-hour. As no more appeared, he took it for granted that the morning's work was over, and went towards home. The mongoose had by this time become accustomed to him, and was willing to let himself be handled freely. Adam lifted him up and put him on his shoulder and walked on. Presently he saw a lady advancing towards him, and recognised Lady Arabella.

Hitherto the mongoose had been quiet, like a playful affectionate kitten; but when the two got close, Adam was horrified to see the mongoose, in a state of the wildest fury, with every hair standing on end, jump from his shoulder and run towards Lady Arabella. It looked so furious and so intent on attack that he called a warning.

"Look out — look out! The animal is furious and means to attack."

Lady Arabella looked more than ever disdainful and was passing on; the mongoose jumped at her in a furious attack. Adam rushed forward with his stick, the only weapon he had. But just as he got within striking distance, the lady drew out a revolver and shot the animal, breaking his backbone. Not satisfied with this, she poured shot after shot into him till the magazine was exhausted. There was no coolness or hauteur about her now; she seemed more furious even than the animal, her face transformed with hate, and as determined to kill as he had appeared to be. Adam, not knowing exactly what to do, lifted his hat in apology and hurried on to Lesser Hill.

CHAPTER VIII — SURVIVALS

At breakfast Sir Nathaniel noticed that Adam was put out about something, but he said nothing. The lesson of silence is better remembered in age than in youth. When they were both in the study, where Sir Nathaniel followed him, Adam at once began to tell his companion of what had happened. Sir Nathaniel looked graver and graver as the narration proceeded, and when Adam had stopped he remained silent for several minutes, before speaking.

"This is very grave. I have not formed any opinion yet; but it seems to me at first impression that this is worse than anything I had expected."

"Why, sir?" said Adam. "Is the killing of a mongoose — no matter by whom — so serious a thing as all that?"

His companion smoked on quietly for quite another few minutes before he spoke.

"When I have properly thought it over I may moderate my opinion, but in the meantime it seems to me that there is something dreadful behind all this — something that may affect all our lives — that may mean the issue of life or death to any of us."

Adam sat up quickly.

"Do tell me, sir, what is in your mind — if, of course, you have no objection, or do not think it better to withhold it."

"I have no objection, Adam — in fact, if I had, I should have to overcome it. I fear there can be no more reserved thoughts between us."

"Indeed, sir, that sounds serious, worse than serious!"

"Adam, I greatly fear that the time has come for us — for you and me, at all events — to speak out plainly to one another. Does not there seem something very mysterious about this?"

"I have thought so, sir, all along. The only difficulty one has is what one is to think and where to begin."

"Let us begin with what you have told me. First take the conduct of the mongoose. He was quiet, even friendly and affectionate with you. He only attacked the snakes, which is, after all, his business in life."

"That is so!"

"Then we must try to find some reason why he attacked Lady Arabella."

"May it not be that a mongoose may have merely the instinct to attack, that nature does not allow or provide him with the fine reasoning powers to discriminate who he is to attack?"

"Of course that may be so. But, on the other hand, should we not satisfy ourselves why he does wish to attack anything? If for centuries, this particular animal is known to attack only one kind of other animal, are we not justified in assuming that when one of them attacks a hitherto unclassed animal, he recognises in that animal some quality which it has in common with the hereditary enemy?"

"That is a good argument, sir," Adam went on, "but a dangerous one. If we followed it out, it would lead us to believe that Lady Arabella is a snake."

"We must be sure, before going to such an end, that there is no point as yet unconsidered which would account for the unknown thing which puzzles us."

"In what way?"

"Well, suppose the instinct works on some physical basis — for instance, smell. If there were anything in recent juxtaposition to the attacked which would carry the scent, surely that would supply the missing cause."

"Of course!" Adam spoke with conviction.

"Now, from what you tell me, the negro had just come from the direction of Diana's Grove, carrying the dead snakes which the mongoose had killed the previous morning. Might not the scent have been carried that way?"

"Of course it might, and probably was. I never thought of that. Is there any possible way of guessing approximately how long a scent will remain? You see, this is a natural scent, and may derive from a place where it has been effective for thousands of years. Then, does a scent of any kind carry with it any form or quality of another kind, either good or evil? I ask you because one ancient name of the house lived in by the lady who was attacked by the mongoose was 'The Lair of the White Worm.' If any of these things be so, our difficulties have multiplied indefinitely. They may even change in kind. We may get into moral entanglements; before we know it, we may be in the midst of a struggle between good and evil."

Sir Nathaniel smiled gravely.

"With regard to the first question — so far as I know, there are no fixed periods for which a scent may be active — I think we may take it that that period does not run into thousands of years. As to whether any moral change accompanies a physical one, I can only say that I have met no proof of the fact. At the same time, we must remember that 'good' and 'evil' are terms so wide as to take in the whole scheme of creation, and all that is implied by them and by their mutual action and reaction. Generally, I would say that in the scheme of a First Cause anything is possible. So long as the inherent forces or tendencies of any one thing are veiled from us we must expect mystery."

"There is one other question on which I should like to ask your opinion. Suppose that there are any permanent forces appertaining to the past, what we may call 'survivals,' do these belong to good as well as to evil? For instance, if the scent of the primaeval monster can so remain in proportion to the original strength, can the same be true of things of good import?"

Sir Nathaniel thought for a while before he answered.

"We must be careful not to confuse the physical and the moral. I can see that already you have switched on the moral entirely, so perhaps we had better follow it up first. On the side of the moral, we have certain justification for belief in the utterances of revealed religion. For instance, 'the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much' is altogether for good. We have nothing of a similar kind on the side of evil. But if we accept this dictum we need have no more fear of 'mysteries': these become thenceforth merely obstacles."

Adam suddenly changed to another phase of the subject.

"And now, sir, may I turn for a few minutes to purely practical things, or rather to matters of historical fact?"

Sir Nathaniel bowed acquiescence.

"We have already spoken of the history, so far as it is known, of some of the places round us— 'Castra Regis,' 'Diana's Grove,' and 'The Lair of the White Worm.' I would like to ask if there is anything not necessarily of evil import about any of the places?"

"Which?" asked Sir Nathaniel shrewdly.

"Well, for instance, this house and Mercy Farm?"

"Here we turn," said Sir Nathaniel, "to the other side, the light side of things. Let us take Mercy Farm first. When Augustine was sent by Pope Gregory to Christianise England, in the time of the

Romans, he was received and protected by Ethelbert, King of Kent, whose wife, daughter of Charibert, King of Paris, was a Christian, and did much for Augustine. She founded a nunnery in memory of Columba, which was named *Sedes misericordioe*, the House of Mercy, and, as the region was Mercian, the two names became involved. As Columba is the Latin for dove, the dove became a sort of signification of the nunnery. She seized on the idea and made the newly-founded nunnery a house of doves. Someone sent her a freshly-discovered dove, a sort of carrier, but which had in the white feathers of its head and neck the form of a religious cowl. The nunnery flourished for more than a century, when, in the time of Penda, who was the reactionary of heathendom, it fell into decay. In the meantime the doves, protected by religious feeling, had increased mightily, and were known in all Catholic communities. When King Offa ruled in Mercia, about a hundred and fifty years later, he restored Christianity, and under its protection the nunnery of St. Columba was restored and its doves flourished again. In process of time this religious house again fell into desuetude; but before it disappeared it had achieved a great name for good works, and in especial for the piety of its members. If deeds and prayers and hopes and earnest thinking leave anywhere any moral effect, Mercy Farm and all around it have almost the right to be considered holy ground."

"Thank you, sir," said Adam earnestly, and was silent. Sir Nathaniel understood.

After lunch that day, Adam casually asked Sir Nathaniel to come for a walk with him. The keen-witted old diplomatist guessed that there must be some motive behind the suggestion, and he at once agreed.

As soon as they were free from observation, Adam began.

"I am afraid, sir, that there is more going on in this neighbourhood than most people imagine. I was out this morning, and on the edge of the small wood, I came upon the body of a child by the roadside. At first, I thought she was dead, and while examining her, I noticed on her neck some marks that looked like those of teeth."

"Some wild dog, perhaps?" put in Sir Nathaniel.

"Possibly, sir, though I think not — but listen to the rest of my news. I glanced around, and to my surprise, I noticed something white moving among the trees. I placed the child down carefully, and followed, but I could not find any further traces. So I returned to the child and resumed my examination, and, to my delight, I discovered that she was still alive. I chafed her hands and gradually she revived, but to my disappointment she remembered nothing — except that something had crept up quietly from behind, and had gripped her round the throat. Then, apparently, she fainted."

"Gripped her round the throat! Then it cannot have been a dog."

"No, sir, that is my difficulty, and explains why I brought you out here, where we cannot possibly be overheard. You have noticed, of course, the peculiar sinuous way in which Lady Arabella moves — well, I feel certain that the white thing that I saw in the wood was the mistress of Diana's Grove!"

"Good God, boy, be careful what you say."

"Yes, sir, I fully realise the gravity of my accusation, but I feel convinced that the marks on the child's throat were human — and made by a woman."

Adam's companion remained silent for some time, deep in thought.

"Adam, my boy," he said at last, "this matter appears to me to be far more serious even than you think. It forces me to break confidence with my old friend, your uncle — but, in order to spare him, I must do so. For some time now, things have been happening in this district that have been worrying him dreadfully — several people have disappeared, without leaving the slightest trace; a dead child was found by the roadside, with no visible or ascertainable cause of death — sheep and other animals have been found in the fields, bleeding from open wounds. There have been other matters — many of them apparently trivial in themselves. Some sinister influence has been at work, and I admit that I have suspected Lady Arabella — that is why I questioned you so closely about the mongoose and its strange attack upon Lady Arabella. You will think it strange that I should suspect the mistress of Diana's Grove, a beautiful woman of aristocratic birth. Let me explain — the family seat is near my own place, Doom Tower, and at one time I knew the family well. When still a young girl, Lady Arabella wandered into a small wood near her home, and did not return. She was found unconscious and in a high fever — the doctor said that she had received a poisonous bite, and the girl being at a delicate and critical age, the result was serious — so much so that she was not expected to recover. A great London physician came down but could do nothing — indeed, he said that the girl would not survive the night. All hope had been abandoned, when, to everyone's surprise, Lady Arabella made a sudden and startling recovery. Within a couple of days she was going about as usual! But to the horror of her people, she developed a terrible craving for cruelty, maiming and injuring birds and small animals — even killing them. This was put down to a nervous disturbance due to her age, and it was hoped that her marriage to Captain March would put this right. However, it was not a happy marriage, and eventually her husband was found shot through the head. I have always suspected suicide, though no pistol was found near the body. He may have discovered something — God knows what! — so possibly Lady Arabella may herself have killed him. Putting together many small matters that have come to my knowledge, I have come to the conclusion that the foul White Worm obtained control of her body, just as her soul was leaving its earthly tenement — that would explain the sudden revival of energy, the strange and inexplicable craving for maiming and killing, as well as many other matters with which I need not trouble you now, Adam. As I said just now, God alone knows what poor Captain March discovered — it must have been something too ghastly for human endurance, if my theory is correct that the once beautiful human body of Lady Arabella is under the control of this ghastly White Worm."

Adam nodded.

"But what can we do, sir — it seems a most difficult problem."

"We can do nothing, my boy — that is the important part of it. It would be impossible to take action — all we can do is to keep careful watch, especially as regards Lady Arabella, and be ready to act, promptly and decisively, if the opportunity occurs."

Adam agreed, and the two men returned to Lesser Hill.

CHAPTER IX — SMELLING DEATH

Adam Salton, though he talked little, did not let the grass grow under his feet in any matter which he had undertaken, or in which he was interested. He had agreed with Sir Nathaniel that they should not do anything with regard to the mystery of Lady Arabella's fear of the mongoose, but he steadily pursued his course in being *prepared* to act whenever the opportunity might come. He was in his own mind perpetually casting about for information or clues which might lead to possible lines of action. Baffled by the killing of the mongoose, he looked around for another line to follow. He was fascinated by the idea of there being a mysterious link between the woman and the animal, but he was already preparing a second string to his bow. His new idea was to use the faculties of Oolanga, so far as he could, in the service of discovery. His first move was to send Davenport to Liverpool to try to find the steward of the *West African*, who had told him about Oolanga, and if possible secure any further information, and then try to induce (by bribery or other means) the nigger to come to the Brow. So soon as he himself could have speech of the Voodoo-man he would be able to learn from him something useful. Davenport was successful in his missions, for he had to get another mongoose, and he was able to tell Adam that he had seen the steward, who told him much that he wanted to know, and had also arranged for Oolanga to come to Lesser Hill the following day. At this point Adam saw his way sufficiently clear to admit Davenport to some extent into his confidence. He had come to the conclusion that it would be better — certainly at first — not himself to appear in the matter, with which Davenport was fully competent to deal. It would be time for himself to take a personal part when matters had advanced a little further.

If what the nigger said was in any wise true, the man had a rare gift which might be useful in the quest they were after. He could, as it were, "smell death." If any one was dead, if any one had died, or if a place had been used in connection with death, he seemed to know the broad fact by intuition. Adam made up his mind that to test this faculty with regard to several places would be his first task. Naturally he was anxious, and the time passed slowly. The only comfort was the arrival the next morning of a strong packing case, locked, from Ross, the key being in the custody of Davenport. In the case were two smaller boxes, both locked. One of them contained a mongoose to replace that killed by Lady Arabella; the other was the special mongoose which had already killed the king-cobra in Nepaul. When both the animals had been safely put under lock and key, he felt that he might breathe more freely. No one was allowed to know the secret of their existence in the house, except himself and Davenport. He arranged that Davenport should take Oolanga round the neighbourhood for a walk, stopping at each of the places which he designated. Having gone all along the Brow, he was to return the same way and induce him to touch on the same subjects in talking with Adam, who was to meet them as if by chance at the farthest part — that beyond Mercy Farm.

The incidents of the day proved much as Adam expected. At Mercy Farm, at Diana's Grove, at Castra Regis, and a few other spots, the negro stopped and, opening his wide nostrils as if to sniff boldly, said that he smelled death. It was not always in the same form. At Mercy Farm he said there were many small deaths. At Diana's Grove his bearing was different. There was a distinct sense of enjoyment about him, especially when he spoke of many great deaths. Here, too, he sniffed in a strange way, like a bloodhound at check, and looked puzzled. He said no word in either praise or disparagement, but in the centre of the Grove, where, hidden amongst ancient oak stumps, was a block of granite slightly hollowed on the top, he bent low and placed his forehead on the ground. This was the only place where he showed distinct reverence. At the Castle, though he spoke of much death, he showed no sign of respect.

There was evidently something about Diana's Grove which both interested and baffled him. Before leaving, he moved all over the place unsatisfied, and in one spot, close to the edge of the Brow, where there was a deep hollow, he appeared to be afraid. After returning several times to this place, he suddenly turned and ran in a panic of fear to the higher ground, crossing as he did so the outcropping rock. Then he seemed to breathe more freely, and recovered some of his jaunty impudence.

All this seemed to satisfy Adam's expectations. He went back to Lesser Hill with a serene and settled calm upon him. Sir Nathaniel followed him into his study.

"By the way, I forgot to ask you details about one thing. When that extraordinary staring episode of Mr. Caswall went on, how did Lilla take it — how did she bear herself?"

"She looked frightened, and trembled just as I have seen a pigeon with a hawk, or a bird with a serpent."

"Thanks. It is just as I expected. There have been circumstances in the Caswall family which lead one to believe that they have had from the earliest times some extraordinary mesmeric or hypnotic faculty. Indeed, a skilled eye could read so much in their physiognomy. That shot of yours, whether by instinct or intention, of the hawk and the pigeon was peculiarly apposite. I think we may settle on that as a fixed trait to be accepted throughout our investigation."

When dusk had fallen, Adam took the new mongoose — not the one from Nepaul — and, carrying the box slung over his shoulder, strolled towards Diana's Grove. Close to the gateway he met Lady Arabella, clad as usual in tightly fitting white, which showed off her slim figure.

To his intense astonishment the mongoose allowed her to pet him, take him up in her arms and fondle him. As she was going in his direction, they walked on together.

Round the roadway between the entrances of Diana's Grove and Lesser Hill were many trees, with not much foliage except at the top. In the dusk this place was shadowy, and the view was hampered by the clustering trunks. In the uncertain, tremulous light which fell through the tree-tops, it was hard to distinguish anything clearly, and at last, somehow, he lost sight of her altogether, and turned back on his track to find her. Presently he came across her close to her own gate. She was leaning over the paling of split oak branches which formed the paling of the avenue. He could not see the mongoose, so he asked her where it had gone.

"He slipt out of my arms while I was petting him," she answered, "and disappeared under the hedges."

They found him at a place where the avenue widened so as to let carriages pass each other. The little creature seemed quite changed. He had been ebulliently active; now he was dull and spiritless — seemed to be dazed. He allowed himself to be lifted by either of the pair; but when he was alone with Lady Arabella he kept looking round him in a strange way, as though trying to escape. When they had come out on the roadway Adam held the mongoose tight to him, and, lifting his hat to his companion, moved quickly towards Lesser Hill; he and Lady Arabella lost sight of each other in the thickening gloom.

When Adam got home, he put the mongoose in his box, and locked the door of the room. The other mongoose — the one from Nepaul — was safely locked in his own box, but he lay quiet and did not stir. When he got to his study Sir Nathaniel came in, shutting the door behind him.

"I have come," he said, "while we have an opportunity of being alone, to tell you something of the Caswall family which I think will interest you. There is, or used to be, a belief in this part of the world that the Caswall family had some strange power of making the wills of other persons subservient to their own. There are many allusions to the subject in memoirs and other unimportant works, but I only know of one where the subject is spoken of definitely. It is *Mercia and its Worthies*, written by Ezra Toms more than a hundred years ago. The author goes into the question of the close association of the then Edgar Caswall with Mesmer in Paris. He speaks of Caswall being a pupil and the fellow worker of Mesmer, and states that though, when the latter left France, he took away with him a vast quantity of philosophical and electric instruments, he was never known to use them again. He once made it known to a friend that he had given them to his old pupil. The term he used was odd, for it was 'bequeathed,' but no such bequest of Mesmer was ever made known. At any rate the instruments were missing, and never turned up."

A servant came into the room to tell Adam that there was some strange noise coming from the locked room into which he had gone when he came in. He hurried off to the place at once, Sir Nathaniel going with him. Having locked the door behind them, Adam opened the packing-case where the boxes of the two mongooses were locked up. There was no sound from one of them, but from the other a queer restless struggling. Having opened both boxes, he found that the noise was from the Nepaul animal, which, however, became quiet at once. In the other box the new mongoose lay dead, with every appearance of having been strangled!

CHAPTER X — THE KITE

On the following day, a little after four o'clock, Adam set out for Mercy.

He was home just as the clocks were striking six. He was pale and upset, but otherwise looked strong and alert. The old man summed up his appearance and manner thus: "Braced up for battle."

"Now!" said Sir Nathaniel, and settled down to listen, looking at Adam steadily and listening attentively that he might miss nothing — even the inflection of a word.

"I found Lilla and Mimi at home. Watford had been detained by business on the farm. Miss Watford received me as kindly as before; Mimi, too, seemed glad to see me. Mr. Caswall came so soon after I arrived, that he, or someone on his behalf, must have been watching for me. He was followed closely by the negro, who was puffing hard as if he had been running — so it was probably he who watched. Mr. Caswall was very cool and collected, but there was a more than usually iron look about his face that I did not like. However, we got on very well. He talked pleasantly on all sorts of questions. The nigger waited a while and then disappeared as on the other occasion. Mr. Caswall's eyes were as usual fixed on Lilla. True, they seemed to be very deep and earnest, but there was no offence in them. Had it not been for the drawing down of the brows and the stern set of the jaws, I should not at first have noticed anything. But the stare, when presently it began, increased in intensity. I could see that Lilla began to suffer from nervousness, as on the first occasion; but she carried herself bravely. However, the more nervous she grew, the harder Mr. Caswall stared. It was evident to me that he had come prepared for some sort of mesmeric or hypnotic battle. After a while he began to throw glances round him and then raised his hand, without letting either Lilla or Mimi see the action. It was evidently intended to give some sign to the negro, for he came, in his usual stealthy way, quietly in by the hall door, which was open. Then Mr. Caswall's efforts at staring became intensified, and poor Lilla's nervousness grew greater. Mimi, seeing that her cousin was distressed, came close to her, as if to comfort or strengthen her with the consciousness of her presence. This evidently made a difficulty for Mr. Caswall, for his efforts, without appearing to get feebler, seemed less effective. This continued for a little while, to the gain of both Lilla and Mimi. Then there was a diversion. Without word or apology the door opened, and Lady Arabella March entered the room. I had seen her coming through the great window. Without a word she crossed the room and stood beside Mr. Caswall. It really was very like a fight of a peculiar kind; and the longer it was sustained the more earnest — the fiercer — it grew. That combination of forces — the over-lord, the white woman, and the black man — would have cost some — probably all of them — their lives in the Southern States of America. To us it was simply horrible. But all that you can understand. This time, to go on in sporting phrase, it was understood by all to be a 'fight to a finish,' and the mixed group did not slacken a moment or relax their efforts. On Lilla the strain began to tell disastrously. She grew pale — a patchy pallor, which meant that her nerves were out of order. She trembled like an aspen, and though she struggled bravely, I noticed that her legs would hardly support her. A dozen times she seemed about to collapse in a faint, but each time, on catching sight of Mimi's eyes, she made a fresh struggle and pulled through.

"By now Mr. Caswall's face had lost its appearance of passivity.

His eyes glowed with a fiery light. He was still the old Roman in inflexibility of purpose; but grafted on to the Roman was a new Berserker fury. His companions in the baleful work seemed to have taken on something of his feeling. Lady Arabella looked like a soulless, pitiless being, not human, unless it revived old legends of transformed human beings who had lost their humanity in some transformation or in the sweep of natural savagery. As for the negro — well, I can only say that it was solely due to the self-restraint which you impressed on me that I did not wipe him out as he stood — without warning, without fair play — without a single one of the graces of life and death. Lilla was silent in the helpless concentration of deadly fear; Mimi was all resolve and self-forgetfulness, so intent on the soul-struggle in which she was engaged that there was no possibility of any other thought. As for myself, the bonds of will which held me inactive seemed like bands of steel which numbed all my faculties, except sight and hearing. We seemed fixed in an *impasse*. Something must happen, though the power of guessing was inactive. As in a dream, I saw Mimi's hand move restlessly, as if groping for something. Mechanically it touched that of Lilla, and in that instant she was transformed. It was as if youth and strength entered afresh into something already dead to sensibility and intention. As if by inspiration, she grasped the other's band with a force which blenched the knuckles. Her face suddenly flamed, as if some divine light shone through it. Her form expanded till it stood out majestically. Lifting her right hand, she stepped forward towards Caswall, and with a bold sweep of her arm seemed to drive some strange force towards him. Again and again was the gesture repeated, the man falling back from her at each movement. Towards the door he retreated, she following. There was a sound as of the cooing sob of doves, which seemed to multiply and intensify with each second. The sound from the unseen source rose and rose as he retreated, till finally it swelled out in a triumphant peal, as she with a fierce sweep of her arm, seemed to hurl something at her foe, and he, moving his hands blindly before his face, appeared to be swept through the doorway and out into the open sunlight.

“All at once my own faculties were fully restored; I could see and hear everything, and be fully conscious of what was going on. Even the figures of the baleful group were there, though dimly seen as through a veil — a shadowy veil. I saw Lilla sink down in a swoon, and Mimi throw up her arms in a gesture of triumph. As I saw her through the great window, the sunshine flooded the landscape, which, however, was momentarily becoming eclipsed by an onrush of a myriad birds.”

By the next morning, daylight showed the actual danger which threatened. From every part of the eastern counties reports were received concerning the enormous immigration of birds. Experts were sending — on their own account, on behalf of learned societies, and through local and imperial governing bodies — reports dealing with the matter, and suggesting remedies.

The reports closer to home were even more disturbing. All day long it would seem that the birds were coming thicker from all quarters. Doubtless many were going as well as coming, but the mass seemed never to get less. Each bird seemed to sound some note of fear or anger or seeking, and the whirring of wings never ceased nor lessened. The air was full of a muttered throb. No window or barrier could shut out the sound, till the ears of any listener became dulled by the ceaseless murmur. So monotonous it was, so cheerless, so disheartening, so melancholy, that all longed, but in vain, for any variety, no matter how terrible it might be.

The second morning the reports from all the districts round were more alarming than ever. Farmers began to dread the coming of winter as they saw the dwindling of the timely fruitfulness of the earth. And as yet it was only a warning of evil, not the evil accomplished; the ground began to look bare whenever some passing sound temporarily frightened the birds.

Edgar Caswall tortured his brain for a long time unavailingly, to think of some means of getting rid of what he, as well as his neighbours, had come to regard as a plague of birds. At last he recalled a circumstance which promised a solution of the difficulty. The experience was of some years ago in China, far up-country, towards the head-waters of the Yang-tze-kiang, where the smaller tributaries spread out in a sort of natural irrigation scheme to supply the wilderness of paddy-fields. It was at the time of the ripening rice, and the myriads of birds which came to feed on the coming crop was a serious menace, not only to the district, but to the country at large. The farmers, who were more or less afflicted with the same trouble every season, knew how to deal with it. They made a vast kite, which they caused to be flown over the centre spot of the incursion. The kite was shaped like a great hawk; and the moment it rose into the air the birds began to cower and seek protection — and then to disappear. So long as that kite was flying overhead the birds lay low and the crop was saved. Accordingly Caswall ordered his men to construct an immense kite, adhering as well as they could to the lines of a hawk. Then he and his men, with a sufficiency of cord, began to fly it high overhead. The experience of China was repeated. The moment the kite rose, the birds hid or sought shelter. The following morning, the kite was still flying high, no bird was to be seen as far as the eye could reach from Castra Regis. But there followed in turn what proved even a worse evil. All the birds were cowed; their sounds stopped. Neither song nor chirp was heard — silence seemed to have taken the place of the normal voices of bird life. But that was not all. The silence spread to all animals.

The fear and restraint which brooded amongst the denizens of the air began to affect all life. Not only did the birds cease song or chirp, but the lowing of the cattle ceased in the fields and the varied sounds of life died away. In place of these things was only a soundless gloom, more dreadful, more disheartening, more soul-killing than any concourse of sounds, no matter how full of fear and dread. Pious individuals put up constant prayers for relief from the intolerable solitude. After a little there were signs of universal depression which those who ran might read. One and all, the faces of men and women seemed bereft of vitality, of interest, of thought, and, most of all, of hope. Men seemed to have lost the power of expression of their thoughts. The soundless air seemed to have the same effect as the universal darkness when men gnawed their tongues with pain.

From this infliction of silence there was no relief. Everything was affected; gloom was the predominant note. Joy appeared to have passed away as a factor of life, and this creative impulse had nothing to take its place. That giant spot in high air was a plague of evil influence. It seemed like a new misanthropic belief which had fallen on human beings, carrying with it the negation of all hope.

After a few days, men began to grow desperate; their very words as well as their senses seemed to be in chains. Edgar Caswall again tortured his brain to find any antidote or palliative of this greater evil than before. He would gladly have destroyed the kite, or caused its flying to cease; but the instant it was pulled down, the birds rose up in even greater numbers; all those who depended in any way on agriculture sent pitiful protests to Castra Regis.

It was strange indeed what influence that weird kite seemed to exercise. Even human beings were affected by it, as if both it and they were realities. As for the people at Mercy Farm, it was like a taste of actual death. Lilla felt it most. If she had been indeed a real dove, with a real kite hanging over her in the air, she could not have been more frightened or more affected by the terror this created.

Of course, some of those already drawn into the vortex noticed the effect on individuals. Those who were interested took care to compare their information. Strangely enough, as it seemed to the others, the person who took the ghastly silence least to heart was the negro. By nature he was not sensitive to, or afflicted by, nerves. This alone would not have produced the seeming indifference, so they set their minds to discover the real cause. Adam came quickly to the conclusion that there was for him some compensation that the others did not share; and he soon believed that that compensation was in one form or another the enjoyment of the sufferings of others. Thus the black had a never-failing source of amusement.

Lady Arabella's cold nature rendered her immune to anything in the way of pain or trouble concerning others. Edgar Caswall was far too haughty a person, and too stern of nature, to concern himself about poor or helpless people, much less the lower order of mere animals. Mr. Watford, Mr. Salton, and Sir Nathaniel were all concerned in the issue, partly from kindness of heart — for none of them could see suffering, even of wild birds, unmoved — and partly on account of their property, which had to be protected, or ruin would stare them in the face before long.

Lilla suffered acutely. As time went on, her face became pinched, and her eyes dull with watching and crying. Mimi suffered too on account of her cousin's suffering. But as she could do nothing, she resolutely made up her mind to self-restraint and patience. Adam's frequent visits comforted her.

CHAPTER XI — MESMER'S CHEST

After a couple of weeks had passed, the kite seemed to give Edgar Caswall a new zest for life. He was never tired of looking at its movements. He had a comfortable armchair put out on the tower, wherein he sat sometimes all day long, watching as though the kite was a new toy and he a child lately come into possession of it. He did not seem to have lost interest in Lilla, for he still paid an occasional visit at Mercy Farm.

Indeed, his feeling towards her, whatever it had been at first, had now so far changed that it had become a distinct affection of a purely animal kind. Indeed, it seemed as though the man's nature had become corrupted, and that all the baser and more selfish and more reckless qualities had become more conspicuous. There was not so much sternness apparent in his nature, because there was less self-restraint. Determination had become indifference.

The visible change in Edgar was that he grew morbid, sad, silent; the neighbours thought he was going mad. He became absorbed in the kite, and watched it not only by day, but often all night long. It became an obsession to him.

Caswall took a personal interest in the keeping of the great kite flying. He had a vast coil of cord efficient for the purpose, which worked on a roller fixed on the parapet of the tower. There was a winch for the pulling in of the slack; the outgoing line being controlled by a racket. There was invariably one man at least, day and night, on the tower to attend to it. At such an elevation there was always a strong wind, and at times the kite rose to an enormous height, as well as travelling for great distances laterally. In fact, the kite became, in a short time, one of the curiosities of Castra Regis and all around it. Edgar began to attribute to it, in his own mind, almost human qualities. It became to him a separate entity, with a mind and a soul of its own. Being idle-handed all day, he began to apply to what he considered the service of the kite some of his spare time, and found a new pleasure — a new object in life — in the old schoolboy game of sending up "runners" to the kite. The way this is done is to get round pieces of paper so cut that there is a hole in the centre, through which the string of the kite passes. The natural action of the wind-pressure takes the paper along the string, and so up to the kite itself, no matter how high or how far it may have gone.

In the early days of this amusement Edgar Caswall spent hours. Hundreds of such messengers flew along the string, until soon he bethought him of writing messages on these papers so that he could make known his ideas to the kite. It may be that his brain gave way under the opportunities given by his illusion of the entity of the toy and its power of separate thought. From sending messages he came to making direct speech to the kite — without, however, ceasing to send the runners. Doubtless, the height of the tower, seated as it was on the hill-top, the rushing of the ceaseless wind, the hypnotic effect of the lofty altitude of the speck in the sky at which he gazed, and the rushing of the paper messengers up the string till sight of them was lost in distance, all helped to further affect his brain, undoubtedly giving way under the strain of beliefs and circumstances which were at once stimulating to the imagination, occupative of his mind, and absorbing.

The next step of intellectual decline was to bring to bear on the main idea of the conscious identity of the kite all sorts of subjects which had imaginative force or tendency of their own. He had, in Castra Regis, a large collection of curious and interesting things formed in the past by his forebears, of similar tastes to his own. There were all sorts of strange anthropological specimens, both old and new, which had been collected through various travels in strange places: ancient Egyptian relics from tombs and mummies; curios from Australia, New Zealand, and the South Seas; idols and images — from Tartar ikons to ancient Egyptian, Persian, and Indian objects of worship; objects of death and torture of American Indians; and, above all, a vast collection of lethal weapons of every kind and from every place — Chinese "high pinders," double knives, Afghan double-edged scimitars made to cut a body in two, heavy knives from all the Eastern countries, ghost daggers from Thibet, the terrible kukri of the Ghourka and other hill tribes of India, assassins' weapons from Italy and Spain, even the knife which was formerly carried by the slave-drivers of the Mississippi region. Death and pain of every kind were fully represented in that gruesome collection.

That it had a fascination for Oolanga goes without saying. He was never tired of visiting the museum in the tower, and spent endless hours in inspecting the exhibits, till he was thoroughly familiar with every detail of all of them. He asked permission to clean and polish and sharpen them — a favour which was readily granted. In addition to the above objects, there were many things of a kind to awaken human fear. Stuffed serpents of the most objectionable and horrid kind; giant insects from the tropics, fearsome in every detail; fishes and crustaceans covered with weird spikes; dried octopuses of great size. Other things, too, there were, not less deadly though seemingly innocuous — dried fungi, traps intended for birds, beasts, fishes, reptiles, and insects; machines which could produce pain of any kind and degree, and the only mercy of which was the power of producing speedy death.

Caswall, who had never before seen any of these things, except those which he had collected himself, found a constant amusement and interest in them. He studied them, their uses, their mechanism — where there was such — and their places of origin, until he had an ample and real knowledge of all concerning them. Many were secret and intricate, but he never rested till he found out all the secrets. When once he had become interested in strange objects, and the way to use them, he began to explore various likely places for similar finds. He began to inquire of his household where strange lumber was kept. Several of the men spoke of old Simon Chester as one who knew everything in and about the house. Accordingly, he sent for the old man, who came at once. He was very old, nearly ninety years of age, and very infirm. He had been born in the Castle, and had served its succession of masters — present or absent — ever since. When Edgar began to question him on the subject regarding which he had sent for him, old Simon exhibited much perturbation. In fact, he became so frightened that his master, fully believing that he was concealing something, ordered him to tell at once what remained unseen, and where it was hidden away. Face to face with discovery of his secret, the old man, in a pitiable state of concern, spoke out even more fully than Mr. Caswall had expected.

"Indeed, indeed, sir, everything is here in the tower that has ever been put away in my time except — except—" here he began to shake and tremble it— "except the chest which Mr. Edgar — he who was Mr. Edgar when I first took service — brought back from France, after he had been with Dr. Mesmer. The trunk has been kept in my room for safety; but I shall send it down here now."

"What is in it?" asked Edgar sharply.

"That I do not know. Moreover, it is a peculiar trunk, without any visible means of opening."

"Is there no lock?"

"I suppose so, sir; but I do not know. There is no keyhole."

"Send it here; and then come to me yourself."

The trunk, a heavy one with steel bands round it, but no lock or keyhole, was carried in by two men. Shortly afterwards old Simon attended his master. When he came into the room, Mr. Caswall himself went and closed the door; then he asked:

"How do you open it?"

"I do not know, sir."

"Do you mean to say that you never opened it?"

"Most certainly I say so, your honour. How could I? It was entrusted to me with the other things by my master. To open it would have been a breach of trust."

Caswall sneered.

"Quite remarkable! Leave it with me. Close the door behind you. Stay — did no one ever tell you about it — say anything regarding it — make any remark?"

Old Simon turned pale, and put his trembling hands together.

"Oh, sir, I entreat you not to touch it. That trunk probably contains secrets which Dr. Mesmer told my master. Told them to his ruin!"

"How do you mean? What ruin?"

"Sir, he it was who, men said, sold his soul to the Evil One; I had thought that that time and the evil of it had all passed away."

"That will do. Go away; but remain in your own room, or within call. I may want you."

The old man bowed deeply and went out trembling, but without speaking a word.

CHAPTER XII — THE CHEST OPENED

Left alone in the turret-room, Edgar Caswall carefully locked the door and hung a handkerchief over the keyhole. Next, he inspected the windows, and saw that they were not overlooked from any angle of the main building. Then he carefully examined the trunk, going over it with a magnifying glass. He found it intact: the steel bands were flawless; the whole trunk was compact. After sitting opposite to it for some time, and the shades of evening beginning to melt into darkness, he gave up the task and went to his bedroom, after locking the door of the turret-room behind him and taking away the key.

He woke in the morning at daylight, and resumed his patient but unavailing study of the metal trunk. This he continued during the whole day with the same result — humiliating disappointment, which overwrought his nerves and made his head ache. The result of the long strain was seen later in the afternoon, when he sat locked within the turret-room before the still baffling trunk, distrait, listless and yet agitated, sunk in a settled gloom. As the dusk was falling he told the steward to send him two men, strong ones. These he ordered to take the trunk to his bedroom. In that room he then sat on into the night, without pausing even to take any food. His mind was in a whirl, a fever of excitement. The result was that when, late in the night, he locked himself in his room his brain was full of odd fancies; he was on the high road to mental disturbance. He lay down on his bed in the dark, still brooding over the mystery of the closed trunk.

Gradually he yielded to the influences of silence and darkness. After lying there quietly for some time, his mind became active again. But this time there were round him no disturbing influences; his brain was active and able to work freely and to deal with memory. A thousand forgotten — or only half-known — incidents, fragments of conversations or theories long ago guessed at and long forgotten, crowded on his mind. He seemed to hear again around him the legions of whirring wings to which he had been so lately accustomed. Even to himself he knew that that was an effort of imagination founded on imperfect memory. But he was content that imagination should work, for out of it might come some solution of the mystery which surrounded him. And in this frame of mind, sleep made another and more successful essay. This time he enjoyed peaceful slumber, restful alike to his wearied body and his overwrought brain.

In his sleep he arose, and, as if in obedience to some influence beyond and greater than himself, lifted the great trunk and set it on a strong table at one side of the room, from which he had previously removed a quantity of books. To do this, he had to use an amount of strength which was, he knew, far beyond him in his normal state. As it was, it seemed easy enough; everything yielded before his touch. Then he became conscious that somehow — how, he never could remember — the chest was open. He unlocked his door, and, taking the chest on his shoulder, carried it up to the turret-room, the door of which also he unlocked. Even at the time he was amazed at his own strength, and wondered whence it had come. His mind, lost in conjecture, was too far off to realise more immediate things. He knew that the chest was enormously heavy. He seemed, in a sort of vision which lit up the absolute blackness around, to see the two sturdy servant men staggering under its great weight. He locked himself again in the turret-room, and laid the opened chest on a table, and in the darkness began to unpack it, laying out the contents, which were mainly of metal and glass — great pieces in strange forms —

on another table. He was conscious of being still asleep, and of acting rather in obedience to some unseen and unknown command than in accordance with any reasonable plan, to be followed by results which he understood. This phase completed, he proceeded to arrange in order the component parts of some large instruments, formed mostly of glass. His fingers seemed to have acquired a new and exquisite subtlety and even a volition of their own. Then weariness of brain came upon him; his head sank down on his breast, and little by little everything became wrapped in gloom.

He awoke in the early morning in his bedroom, and looked around him, now clear-headed, in amazement. In its usual place on the strong table stood the great steel-hooped chest without lock or key. But it was now locked. He arose quietly and stole to the turret-room. There everything was as it had been on the previous evening. He looked out of the window where high in air flew, as usual, the giant kite. He unlocked the wicket gate of the turret stair and went out on the roof. Close to him was the great coil of cord on its reel. It was humming in the morning breeze, and when he touched the string it sent a quick thrill through hand and arm. There was no sign anywhere that there had been any disturbance or displacement of anything during the night.

Utterly bewildered, he sat down in his room to think. Now for the first time he *felt* that he was asleep and dreaming. Presently he fell asleep again, and slept for a long time. He awoke hungry and made a hearty meal. Then towards evening, having locked himself in, he fell asleep again. When he woke he was in darkness, and was quite at sea as to his whereabouts. He began feeling about the dark room, and was recalled to the consequences of his position by the breaking of a large piece of glass. Having obtained a light, he discovered this to be a glass wheel, part of an elaborate piece of mechanism which he must in his sleep have taken from the chest, which was now opened. He had once again opened it whilst asleep, but he had no recollection of the circumstances.

Caswall came to the conclusion that there had been some sort of dual action of his mind, which might lead to some catastrophe or some discovery of his secret plans; so he resolved to forgo for a while the pleasure of making discoveries regarding the chest. To this end, he applied himself to quite another matter — an investigation of the other treasures and rare objects in his collections. He went amongst them in simple, idle curiosity, his main object being to discover some strange item which he might use for experiment with the kite. He had already resolved to try some runners other than those made of paper. He had a vague idea that with such a force as the great kite straining at its leash, this might be used to lift to the altitude of the kite itself heavier articles. His first experiment with articles of little but increasing weight was eminently successful. So he added by degrees more and more weight, until he found out that the lifting power of the kite was considerable. He then determined to take a step further, and send to the kite some of the articles which lay in the steel-hooped chest. The last time he had opened it in sleep, it had not been shut again, and he had inserted a wedge so that he could open it at will. He made examination of the contents, but came to the conclusion that the glass objects were unsuitable. They were too light for testing weight, and they were so frail as to be dangerous to send to such a height.

So he looked around for something more solid with which to experiment. His eye caught sight of an object which at once attracted him. This was a small copy of one of the ancient Egyptian gods —

that of Bes, who represented the destructive power of nature. It was so bizarre and mysterious as to commend itself to his mad humour. In lifting it from the cabinet, he was struck by its great weight in proportion to its size. He made accurate examination of it by the aid of some instruments, and came to the conclusion that it was carved from a lump of lodestone. He remembered that he had read somewhere of an ancient Egyptian god cut from a similar substance, and, thinking it over, he came to the conclusion that he must have read it in Sir Thomas Brown's *Popular Errors*, a book of the seventeenth century. He got the book from the library, and looked out the passage:

"A great example we have from the observation of our learned friend Mr. Graves, in an AEgyptian idol cut out of Loadstone and found among the Mummies; which still retains its attraction, though probably taken out of the mine about two thousand years ago."

The strangeness of the figure, and its being so close akin to his own nature, attracted him. He made from thin wood a large circular runner, and in front of it placed the weighty god, sending it up to the flying kite along the throbbing cord.

CHAPTER XIII — OOLANGA'S HALLUCINATIONS

During the last few days Lady Arabella had been getting exceedingly impatient. Her debts, always pressing, were growing to an embarrassing amount. The only hope she had of comfort in life was a good marriage; but the good marriage on which she had fixed her eye did not seem to move quickly enough — indeed, it did not seem to move at all — in the right direction. Edgar Caswall was not an ardent wooer. From the very first he seemed *difficile*, but he had been keeping to his own room ever since his struggle with Mimi Watford. On that occasion Lady Arabella had shown him in an unmistakable way what her feelings were; indeed, she had made it known to him, in a more overt way than pride should allow, that she wished to help and support him. The moment when she had gone across the room to stand beside him in his mesmeric struggle, had been the very limit of her voluntary action. It was quite bitter enough, she felt, that he did not come to her, but now that she had made that advance, she felt that any withdrawal on his part would, to a woman of her class, be nothing less than a flaming insult. Had she not classed herself with his nigger servant, an unreformed savage? Had she not shown her preference for him at the festival of his home-coming? Had she not . . . Lady Arabella was cold-blooded, and she was prepared to go through all that might be necessary of indifference, and even insult, to become chatelaine of Castra Regis. In the meantime, she would show no hurry — she must wait. She might, in an unostentatious way, come to him again. She knew him now, and could make a keen guess at his desires with regard to Lilla Watford. With that secret in her possession, she could bring pressure to bear on Caswall which would make it no easy matter for him to evade her. The great difficulty was how to get near him. He was shut up within his Castle, and guarded by a defence of convention which she could not pass without danger of ill repute to herself. Over this question she thought and thought for days and nights. At last she decided that the only way would be to go to him openly at Castra Regis. Her rank and position would make such a thing possible, if carefully done. She could explain matters afterwards if necessary. Then when they were alone, she would use her arts and her experience to make him commit himself. After all, he was only a man, with a man's dislike of difficult or awkward situations. She felt quite sufficient confidence in her own womanhood to carry her through any difficulty which might arise.

From Diana's Grove she heard each day the luncheon-gong from Castra Regis sound, and knew the hour when the servants would be in the back of the house. She would enter the house at that hour, and, pretending that she could not make anyone hear her, would seek him in his own rooms. The tower was, she knew, away from all the usual sounds of the house, and moreover she knew that the servants had strict orders not to interrupt him when he was in the turret chamber. She had found out, partly by the aid of an opera-glass and partly by judicious questioning, that several times lately a heavy chest had been carried to and from his room, and that it rested in the room each night. She was, therefore, confident that he had some important work on hand which would keep him busy for long spells.

Meanwhile, another member of the household at Castra Regis had schemes which he thought were working to fruition. A man in the position of a servant has plenty of opportunity of watching his betters and forming opinions regarding them. Oolanga was in his way a clever, unscrupulous rogue, and he felt that with things moving round him in this great household there should be opportunities of self-advancement. Being unscrupulous and stealthy — and a savage — he looked to dishonest means. He saw plainly enough that Lady Arabella was making a dead set at his master, and he was watchful of the slightest sign of anything which might enhance this knowledge. Like the other men in the house, he knew of the carrying to and fro of the great chest, and had got it into his head that the care exercised in its porterage indicated that it was full of treasure. He was for ever lurking around the turret-rooms on the chance of making some useful discovery. But he was as cautious as he was stealthy, and took care that no one else watched him.

It was thus that the negro became aware of Lady Arabella's venture into the house, as she thought, unseen. He took more care than ever, since he was watching another, that the positions were not reversed. More than ever he kept his eyes and ears open and his mouth shut. Seeing Lady Arabella gliding up the stairs towards his master's room, he took it for granted that she was there for no good, and doubled his watching intentness and caution.

Oolanga was disappointed, but he dared not exhibit any feeling lest it should betray that he was hiding. Therefore he slunk downstairs again noiselessly, and waited for a more favourable opportunity of furthering his plans. It must be borne in mind that he thought that the heavy trunk was full of valuables, and that he believed that Lady Arabella had come to try to steal it. His purpose of using for his own advantage the combination of these two ideas was seen later in the day. Oolanga secretly followed her home. He was an expert at this game, and succeeded admirably on this occasion. He watched her enter the private gate of Diana's Grove, and then, taking a roundabout course and keeping out of her sight, he at last overtook her in a thick part of the Grove where no one could see the meeting.

Lady Arabella was much surprised. She had not seen the negro for several days, and had almost forgotten his existence. Oolanga would have been startled had he known and been capable of understanding the real value placed on him, his beauty, his worthiness, by other persons, and compared it with the value in these matters in which he held himself. Doubtless Oolanga had his dreams like other men. In such cases he saw himself as a young sun-god, as beautiful as the eye of dusky or even white womanhood had ever dwelt upon. He would have been filled with all noble and captivating qualities — or those regarded as such in West Africa. Women would have loved him, and would have told him so in the overt and fervid manner usual in affairs of the heart in the shadowy depths of the forest of the Gold Coast.

Oolanga came close behind Lady Arabella, and in a hushed voice, suitable to the importance of his task, and in deference to the respect he had for her and the place, began to unfold the story of his love. Lady Arabella was not usually a humorous person, but no man or woman of the white race could have checked the laughter which rose spontaneously to her lips. The circumstances were too grotesque, the contrast too violent, for subdued mirth. The man a debased specimen of one of the most primitive races of the earth, and of an ugliness which was simply devilish; the woman of high degree, beautiful, accomplished. She thought that her first moment's consideration of the outrage — it was nothing less in her eyes — had given her the full material for thought. But every instant after threw new and varied lights on the affront. Her indignation was too great for passion; only irony or satire would meet the situation. Her cold, cruel nature helped, and she did not shrink to subject this ignorant savage to the merciless fire-lash of her scorn.

Oolanga was dimly conscious that he was being flouted; but his anger was no less keen because of the measure of his ignorance. So he gave way to it, as does a tortured beast. He ground his great teeth together, raved, stamped, and swore in barbarous tongues and with barbarous imagery. Even Lady Arabella felt that it was well she was within reach of help, or he might have offered her brutal violence — even have killed her.

"Am I to understand," she said with cold disdain, so much more effective to wound than hot passion, "that you are offering me your love? Your — love?"

For reply he nodded his head. The scorn of her voice, in a sort of baleful hiss, sounded — and felt — like the lash of a whip.

"And you dared! you — a savage — a slave — the basest thing in the world of vermin! Take care! I don't value your worthless life more than I do that of a rat or a spider. Don't let me ever see your hideous face here again, or I shall rid the earth of you."

As she was speaking, she had taken out her revolver and was pointing it at him. In the immediate presence of death his impudence forsook him, and he made a weak effort to justify himself. His speech was short, consisting of single words. To Lady Arabella it sounded mere gibberish, but it was in his own dialect, and meant love, marriage, wife. From the intonation of the words, she guessed, with her woman's quick intuition, at their meaning; but she quite failed to follow, when, becoming more pressing, he continued to urge his suit in a mixture of the grossest animal passion and ridiculous threats. He warned her that he knew she had tried to steal his master's treasure, and that he had caught her in the act. But if she would be his, he would share the treasure with her, and they could live in luxury in the African forests. But if she refused, he would tell his master, who would flog and torture her and then give her to the police, who would kill her.

CHAPTER XIV — BATTLE RENEWED

The consequences of that meeting in the dusk of Diana’s Grove were acute and far-reaching, and not only to the two engaged in it. From Oolanga, this might have been expected by anyone who knew the character of the tropical African savage. To such, there are two passions that are inexhaustible and insatiable — vanity and that which they are pleased to call love. Oolanga left the Grove with an absorbing hatred in his heart. His lust and greed were afire, while his vanity had been wounded to the core. Lady Arabella’s icy nature was not so deeply stirred, though she was in a seething passion. More than ever she was set upon bringing Edgar Caswall to her feet. The obstacles she had encountered, the insults she had endured, were only as fuel to the purpose of revenge which consumed her.

As she sought her own rooms in Diana’s Grove, she went over the whole subject again and again, always finding in the face of Lilla Watford a key to a problem which puzzled her — the problem of a way to turn Caswall’s powers — his very existence — to aid her purpose.

When in her boudoir, she wrote a note, taking so much trouble over it that she destroyed, and rewrote, till her dainty waste-basket was half-full of torn sheets of notepaper. When quite satisfied, she copied out the last sheet afresh, and then carefully burned all the spoiled fragments. She put the copied note in an emblazoned envelope, and directed it to Edgar Caswall at Castra Regis. This she sent off by one of her grooms. The letter ran:

“DEAR MR. CASWALL,

“I want to have a chat with you on a subject in which I believe you are interested. Will you kindly call for me one day after lunch

— say at three or four o'clock, and we can walk a little way together. Only as far as Mercy Farm, where I want to see Lilla and Mimi Watford. We can take a cup of tea at the Farm. Do not bring your African servant with you, as I am afraid his face frightens the girls. After all, he is not pretty, is he? I have an idea you will be pleased with your visit this time.

"Yours sincerely,

"ARABELLA MARCH."

At half-past three next day, Edgar Caswall called at Diana's Grove. Lady Arabella met him on the roadway outside the gate. She wished to take the servants into her confidence as little as possible. She turned when she saw him coming, and walked beside him towards Mercy Farm, keeping step with him as they walked. When they got near Mercy, she turned and looked around her, expecting to see Oolanga or some sign of him. He was, however, not visible. He had received from his master peremptory orders to keep out of sight — an order for which the African scored a new offence up against her. They found Lilla and Mimi at home and seemingly glad to see them, though both the girls were surprised at the visit coming so soon after the other.

The proceedings were a repetition of the battle of souls of the former visit. On this occasion, however, Edgar Caswall had only the presence of Lady Arabella to support him — Oolanga being absent; but Mimi lacked the support of Adam Salton, which had been of such effective service before. This time the struggle for supremacy of will was longer and more determined. Caswall felt that if he could not achieve supremacy he had better give up the idea, so all his pride was enlisted against Mimi. When they had been waiting for the door to be opened, Lady Arabella, believing in a sudden attack, had said to him in a low voice, which somehow carried conviction:

"This time you should win. Mimi is, after all, only a woman. Show her no mercy. That is weakness. Fight her, beat her, trample on her — kill her if need be. She stands in your way, and I hate her. Never take your eyes off her. Never mind Lilla — she is afraid of you. You are already her master. Mimi will try to make you look at her cousin. There lies defeat. Let nothing take your attention from Mimi, and you will win. If she is overcoming you, take my hand and hold it hard whilst you are looking into her eyes. If she is too strong for you, I shall interfere. I'll make a diversion, and under cover of it you must retire unbeaten, even if not victorious. Hush! they are coming."

The two girls came to the door together. Strange sounds were coming up over the Brow from the west. It was the rustling and crackling of the dry reeds and rushes from the low lands. The season had been an unusually dry one. Also the strong east wind was helping forward enormous flocks of birds, most of them pigeons with white cowls. Not only were their wings whirring, but their cooing was plainly audible. From such a multitude of birds the mass of sound, individually small, assumed the volume of a storm. Surprised at the influx of birds, to which they had been strangers so long, they all looked towards Castra Regis, from whose high tower the great kite had been flying as usual. But even as they looked, the cord broke, and the great kite fell headlong in a series of sweeping dives. Its own weight, and the aerial force opposed to it, which caused it to rise, combined with the strong easterly breeze, had been too much for the great length of cord holding it.

Somehow, the mishap to the kite gave new hope to Mimi. It was as though the side issues had been shorn away, so that the main struggle was thenceforth on simpler lines. She had a feeling in her heart, as though some religious chord had been newly touched. It may, of course, have been that with the renewal of the bird voices a fresh courage, a fresh belief in the good issue of the struggle came too. In the misery of silence, from which they had all suffered for so long, any new train of thought was almost bound to be a boon. As the inrush of birds continued, their wings beating against the crackling rushes, Lady Arabella grew pale, and almost fainted.

"What is that?" she asked suddenly.

To Mimi, born and bred in Siam, the sound was strangely like an exaggeration of the sound produced by a snake-charmer.

Edgar Caswall was the first to recover from the interruption of the falling kite. After a few minutes he seemed to have quite recovered his *sang froid*, and was able to use his brains to the end which he had in view. Mimi too quickly recovered herself, but from a different cause. With her it was a deep religious conviction that the struggle round her was of the powers of Good and Evil, and that Good was triumphing. The very appearance of the snowy birds, with the cowls of Saint Columba, heightened the impression. With this conviction strong upon her, she continued the strange battle with fresh vigour. She seemed to tower over Caswall, and he to give back before her oncoming. Once again her vigorous passes drove him to the door. He was just going out backward when Lady Arabella, who had been gazing at him with fixed eyes, caught his hand and tried to stop his movement. She was, however, unable to do any good, and so, holding hands, they passed out together. As they did so, the strange music which had so alarmed Lady Arabella suddenly stopped. Instinctively they all looked towards the tower of Castra Regis, and saw that the workmen had refixed the kite, which had risen again and was beginning to float out to its former station.

As they were looking, the door opened and Michael Watford came into the room. By that time all had recovered their self-possession, and there was nothing out of the common to attract his attention. As he came in, seeing inquiring looks all around him, he said:

“The new influx of birds is only the annual migration of pigeons from Africa. I am told that it will soon be over.”

The second victory of Mimi Watford made Edgar Caswall more moody than ever. He felt thrown back on himself, and this, added to his absorbing interest in the hope of a victory of his mesmeric powers, became a deep and settled purpose of revenge. The chief object of his animosity was, of course, Mimi, whose will had overcome his, but it was obscured in greater or lesser degree by all who had opposed him. Lilla was next to Mimi in his hate — Lilla, the harmless, tender-hearted, sweet-natured girl, whose heart was so full of love for all things that in it was no room for the passions of ordinary life — whose nature resembled those doves of St. Columba, whose colour she wore, whose appearance she reflected. Adam Salton came next — after a gap; for against him Caswall had no direct animosity. He regarded him as an interference, a difficulty to be got rid of or destroyed. The young Australian had been so discreet that the most he had against him was his knowledge of what had been. Caswall did not understand him, and to such a nature as his, ignorance was a cause of alarm, of dread.

Caswall resumed his habit of watching the great kite straining at its cord, varying his vigils in this way by a further examination of the mysterious treasures of his house, especially Mesmer’s chest. He sat much on the roof of the tower, brooding over his thwarted passion.

The vast extent of his possessions, visible to him at that altitude, might, one would have thought, have restored some of his complacency. But the very extent of his ownership, thus perpetually brought before him, created a fresh sense of grievance. How was it, he thought, that with so much at command that others wished for, he could not achieve the dearest wishes of his heart?

In this state of intellectual and moral depravity, he found a solace in the renewal of his experiments with the mechanical powers of the kite. For a couple of weeks he did not see Lady Arabella, who was always on the watch for a chance of meeting him; neither did he see the Watford girls, who studiously kept out of his way. Adam Salton simply marked time, keeping ready to deal with anything that might affect his friends. He called at the farm and heard from Mimi of the last battle of wills, but it had only one consequence. He got from Ross several more mongooses, including a second king-cobra-killer, which he generally carried with him in its box whenever he walked out.

Mr. Caswall's experiments with the kite went on successfully. Each day he tried the lifting of greater weight, and it seemed almost as if the machine had a sentience of its own, which was increasing with the obstacles placed before it. All this time the kite hung in the sky at an enormous height. The wind was steadily from the north, so the trend of the kite was to the south. All day long, runners of increasing magnitude were sent up. These were only of paper or thin cardboard, or leather, or other flexible materials. The great height at which the kite hung made a great concave curve in the string, so that as the runners went up they made a flapping sound. If one laid a finger on the string, the sound answered to the flapping of the runner in a sort of hollow intermittent murmur. Edgar Caswall, who was now wholly obsessed by the kite and all belonging to it, found a distinct resemblance between that intermittent rumble and the snake-charming music produced by the pigeons flying through the dry reeds.

One day he made a discovery in Mesmer's chest which he thought he would utilise with regard to the runners. This was a great length of wire, "fine as human hair," coiled round a finely made wheel, which ran to a wondrous distance freely, and as lightly. He tried this on runners, and found it work admirably. Whether the runner was alone, or carried something much more weighty than itself, it worked equally well. Also it was strong enough and light enough to draw back the runner without undue strain. He tried this a good many times successfully, but it was now growing dusk and he found some difficulty in keeping the runner in sight. So he looked for something heavy enough to keep it still. He placed the Egyptian image of Bes on the fine wire, which crossed the wooden ledge which protected it. Then, the darkness growing, he went indoors and forgot all about it.

He had a strange feeling of uneasiness that night — not sleeplessness, for he seemed conscious of being asleep. At daylight he rose, and as usual looked out for the kite. He did not see it in its usual position in the sky, so looked round the points of the compass. He was more than astonished when presently he saw the missing kite struggling as usual against the controlling cord. But it had gone to the further side of the tower, and now hung and strained *against the wind* to the north. He thought it so strange that he determined to investigate the phenomenon, and to say nothing about it in the meantime.

In his many travels, Edgar Caswall had been accustomed to use the sextant, and was now an expert in the matter. By the aid of this and other instruments, he was able to fix the position of the kite and the point over which it hung. He was startled to find that exactly under it — so far as he could ascertain — was Diana's Grove. He had an inclination to take Lady Arabella into his confidence in the matter, but he thought better of it and wisely refrained. For some reason which he did not try to explain to himself, he was glad of his silence, when, on the following morning, he found, on looking out, that the point over which the kite then hovered was Mercy Farm. When he had verified this with his instruments, he sat before the window of the tower, looking out and thinking. The new locality was more to his liking than the other; but the why of it puzzled him, all the same. He spent the rest of the day in the turret-room, which he did not leave all day. It seemed to him that he was now drawn by forces which he could not control — of which, indeed, he had no knowledge — in directions which he did not understand, and which were without his own volition. In sheer helpless inability to think the problem out satisfactorily, he called up a servant and told him to tell Oolanga that he wanted to see him at once in the turret-room. The answer came back that the African had not been seen since the previous evening.

Caswall was now so irritable that even this small thing upset him. As he was distrait and wanted to talk to somebody, he sent for Simon Chester, who came at once, breathless with hurrying and upset by the unexpected summons. Caswall bade him sit down, and when the old man was in a less uneasy frame of mind, he again asked him if he had ever seen what was in Mesmer's chest or heard it spoken about.

Chester admitted that he had once, in the time of "the then Mr. Edgar," seen the chest open, which, knowing something of its history and guessing more, so upset him that he had fainted. When he recovered, the chest was closed. From that time the then Mr. Edgar had never spoken about it again.

When Caswall asked him to describe what he had seen when the chest was open, he got very agitated, and, despite all his efforts to remain calm, he suddenly went off into a faint. Caswall summoned servants, who applied the usual remedies. Still the old man did not recover. After the lapse of a considerable time, the doctor who had been summoned made his appearance. A glance was sufficient for him to make up his mind. Still, he knelt down by the old man, and made a careful examination. Then he rose to his feet, and in a hushed voice said:

"I grieve to say, sir, that he has passed away."

CHAPTER XV — ON THE TRACK

Those who had seen Edgar Caswall familiarly since his arrival, and had already estimated his cold-blooded nature at something of its true value, were surprised that he took so to heart the death of old Chester. The fact was that not one of them had guessed correctly at his character. They thought, naturally enough, that the concern which he felt was that of a master for a faithful old servant of his family. They little thought that it was merely the selfish expression of his disappointment, that he had thus lost the only remaining clue to an interesting piece of family history — one which was now and would be for ever wrapped in mystery. Caswall knew enough about the life of his ancestor in Paris to wish to know more fully and more thoroughly all that had been. The period covered by that ancestor's life in Paris was one inviting every form of curiosity.

Lady Arabella, who had her own game to play, saw in the *métier* of sympathetic friend, a series of meetings with the man she wanted to secure. She made the first use of the opportunity the day after old Chester's death; indeed, as soon as the news had filtered in through the back door of Diana's Grove. At that meeting, she played her part so well that even Caswall's cold nature was impressed.

Oolanga was the only one who did not credit her with at least some sense of fine feeling in the matter. In emotional, as in other matters, Oolanga was distinctly a utilitarian, and as he could not understand anyone feeling grief except for his own suffering, pain, or for the loss of money, he could not understand anyone simulating such an emotion except for show intended to deceive. He thought that she had come to Castra Regis again for the opportunity of stealing something, and was determined that on this occasion the chance of pressing his advantage over her should not pass. He felt, therefore, that the occasion was one for extra carefulness in the watching of all that went on. Ever since he had come to the conclusion that Lady Arabella was trying to steal the treasure-chest, he suspected nearly everyone of the same design, and made it a point to watch all suspicious persons and places. As Adam was engaged on his own researches regarding Lady Arabella, it was only natural that there should be some crossing of each other's tracks. This is what did actually happen.

Adam had gone for an early morning survey of the place in which he was interested, taking with him the mongoose in its box. He arrived at the gate of Diana's Grove just as Lady Arabella was preparing to set out for Castra Regis on what she considered her mission of comfort. Seeing Adam from her window going through the shadows of the trees round the gate, she thought that he must be engaged on some purpose similar to her own. So, quickly making her toilet, she quietly left the house, and, taking advantage of every shadow and substance which could hide her, followed him on his walk.

Oolanga, the experienced tracker, followed her, but succeeded in hiding his movements better than she did. He saw that Adam had on his shoulder a mysterious box, which he took to contain something valuable. Seeing that Lady Arabella was secretly following Adam, he was confirmed in this idea. His mind — such as it was — was fixed on her trying to steal, and he credited her at once with making use of this new opportunity.

In his walk, Adam went into the grounds of Castra Regis, and Oolanga saw her follow him with great secrecy. He feared to go closer, as now on both sides of him were enemies who might make discovery. When he realised that Lady Arabella was bound for the Castle, he devoted himself to following her with singleness of purpose. He therefore missed seeing that Adam branched off the track and returned to the high road.

That night Edgar Caswall had slept badly. The tragic occurrence of the day was on his mind, and he kept waking and thinking of it. After an early breakfast, he sat at the open window watching the kite and thinking of many things. From his room he could see all round the neighbourhood, but the two places that interested him most were Mercy Farm and Diana's Grove. At first the movements about those spots were of a humble kind — those that belong to domestic service or agricultural needs — the opening of doors and windows, the sweeping and brushing, and generally the restoration of habitual order.

From his high window — whose height made it a screen from the observation of others — he saw the chain of watchers move into his own grounds, and then presently break up — Adam Salton going one way, and Lady Arabella, followed by the nigger, another. Then Oolanga disappeared amongst the trees; but Caswall could see that he was still watching. Lady Arabella, after looking around her, slipped in by the open door, and he could, of course, see her no longer.

Presently, however, he heard a light tap at his door, then the door opened slowly, and he could see the flash of Lady Arabella's white dress through the opening.

CHAPTER XVI — A VISIT OF SYMPATHY

Caswall was genuinely surprised when he saw Lady Arabella, though he need not have been, after what had already occurred in the same way. The look of surprise on his face was so much greater than Lady Arabella had expected — though she thought she was prepared to meet anything that might occur — that she stood still, in sheer amazement. Cold-blooded as she was and ready for all social emergencies, she was nonplussed how to go on. She was plucky, however, and began to speak at once, although she had not the slightest idea what she was going to say.

"I came to offer you my very warm sympathy with the grief you have so lately experienced."

"My grief? I'm afraid I must be very dull; but I really do not understand."

Already she felt at a disadvantage, and hesitated.

"I mean about the old man who died so suddenly — your old . . . retainer."

Caswall's face relaxed something of its puzzled concentration.

"Oh, he was only a servant; and he had over-stayed his three-score and ten years by something like twenty years. He must have been ninety!"

"Still, as an old servant . . ."

Caswall's words were not so cold as their inflection.

"I never interfere with servants. He was kept on here merely because he had been so long on the premises. I suppose the steward thought it might make him unpopular if the old fellow had been dismissed."

How on earth was she to proceed on such a task as hers if this was the utmost geniality she could expect? So she at once tried another tack — this time a personal one.

"I am sorry I disturbed you. I am really not unconventional — though certainly no slave to convention. Still there are limits . . . it is bad enough to intrude in this way, and I do not know what you can say or think of the time selected, for the intrusion."

After all, Edgar Caswall was a gentleman by custom and habit, so he rose to the occasion.

"I can only say, Lady Arabella, that you are always welcome at any time you may deign to honour my house with your presence."

She smiled at him sweetly.

"Thank you *so* much. You *do* put one at ease. My breach of convention makes me glad rather than sorry. I feel that I can open my heart to you about anything."

Forthwith she proceeded to tell him about Oolanga and his strange suspicions of her honesty. Caswall laughed and made her explain all the details. His final comment was enlightening.

"Let me give you a word of advice: If you have the slightest fault to find with that infernal nigger, shoot him at sight. A swelled-headed nigger, with a bee in his bonnet, is one of the worst difficulties in the world to deal with. So better make a clean job of it, and wipe him out at once!"

"But what about the law, Mr. Caswall?"

"Oh, the law doesn't concern itself much about dead niggers. A few more or less do not matter. To my mind it's rather a relief!"

"I'm afraid of you," was her only comment, made with a sweet smile and in a soft voice.

"All right," he said, "let us leave it at that. Anyhow, we shall be rid of one of them!"

"I don't love niggers any more than you do," she replied, "and I suppose one mustn't be too particular where that sort of cleaning up is concerned." Then she changed in voice and manner, and asked genially: "And now tell me, am I forgiven?"

"You are, dear lady — if there is anything to forgive."

As he spoke, seeing that she had moved to go, he came to the door with her, and in the most natural way accompanied her downstairs. He passed through the hall with her and down the avenue. As he went back to the house, she smiled to herself.

"Well, that is all right. I don't think the morning has been altogether thrown away."

And she walked slowly back to Diana's Grove.

Adam Salton followed the line of the Brow, and refreshed his memory as to the various localities. He got home to Lesser Hill just as Sir Nathaniel was beginning lunch. Mr. Salton had gone to Walsall to keep an early appointment; so he was all alone. When the meal was over — seeing in Adam's face that he had something to speak about — he followed into the study and shut the door.

When the two men had lighted their pipes, Sir Nathaniel began.

"I have remembered an interesting fact about Diana's Grove — there is, I have long understood, some strange mystery about that house. It may be of some interest, or it may be trivial, in such a tangled skein as we are trying to unravel."

"Please tell me all you know' or suspect. To begin, then, of what sort is the mystery — physical, mental, moral, historical, scientific, occult? Any kind of hint will help me."

"Quite right. I shall try to tell you what I think; but I have not put my thoughts on the subject in sequence, so you must forgive me if due order is not observed in my narration. I suppose you have seen the house at Diana's Grove?"

"The outside of it; but I have that in my mind's eye, and I can fit into my memory whatever you may mention."

"The house is very old — probably the first house of some sort that stood there was in the time of the Romans. This was probably renewed — perhaps several times at later periods. The house stands, or, rather, used to stand here when Mercia was a kingdom — I do not suppose that the basement can be later than the Norman Conquest. Some years ago, when I was President of the Mercian Archaeological Society, I went all over it very carefully. This was when it was purchased by Captain March. The house had then been done up, so as to be suitable for the bride. The basement is very strong, — almost as strong and as heavy as if it had been intended as a fortress. There are a whole series of rooms deep underground. One of them in particular struck me. The room itself is of considerable size, but the masonry is more than massive. In the middle of the room is a sunk well, built up to floor level and evidently going deep underground. There is no windlass nor any trace of there ever having been any — no rope — nothing. Now, we know that the Romans had wells of immense depth, from which the water was lifted by the 'old rag rope'; that at Woodhull used to be nearly a thousand feet. Here, then, we have simply an enormously deep well-hole. The door of the room was massive, and was fastened with a lock nearly a foot square. It was evidently intended for some kind of protection to someone or something; but no one in those days had ever heard of anyone having been allowed even to see the room. All this is *à propos* of a suggestion on my part that the well-hole was a way by which the White Worm (whatever it was) went and came. At that time I would have had a search made — even excavation if necessary

— at my own expense, but all suggestions were met with a prompt and explicit negative. So, of course, I took no further step in the matter. Then it died out of recollection — even of mine.”

“Do you remember, sir,” asked Adam, “what was the appearance of the room where the well-hole was? Was there furniture — in fact, any sort of thing in the room?”

“The only thing I remember was a sort of green light — very clouded, very dim — which came up from the well. Not a fixed light, but intermittent and irregular — quite unlike anything I had ever seen.”

“Do you remember how you got into the well-room? Was there a separate door from outside, or was there any interior room or passage which opened into it?”

“I think there must have been some room with a way into it. I remember going up some steep steps; they must have been worn smooth by long use or something of the kind, for I could hardly keep my feet as I went up. Once I stumbled and nearly fell into the well-hole.”

“Was there anything strange about the place — any queer smell, for instance?”

“Queer smell — yes! Like bilge or a rank swamp. It was distinctly nauseating; when I came out I felt as if I had just been going to be sick. I shall try back on my visit and see if I can recall any more of what I saw or felt.”

“Then perhaps, sir, later in the day you will tell me anything you may chance to recollect.”

“I shall be delighted, Adam. If your uncle has not returned by then, I’ll join you in the study after dinner, and we can resume this interesting chat.”

CHAPTER XVII — THE MYSTERY OF “THE GROVE”

That afternoon Adam decided to do a little exploring. As he passed through the wood outside the gate of Diana’s Grove, he thought he saw the African’s face for an instant. So he went deeper into the undergrowth, and followed along parallel to the avenue to the house. He was glad that there was no workman or servant about, for he did not care that any of Lady Arabella’s people should find him wandering about her grounds. Taking advantage of the denseness of the trees, he came close to the house and skirted round it. He was repaid for his trouble, for on the far side of the house, close to where the rocky frontage of the cliff fell away, he saw Oolanga crouched behind the irregular trunk of a great oak. The man was so intent on watching someone, or something, that he did not guard against being himself watched. This suited Adam, for he could thus make scrutiny at will.

The thick wood, though the trees were mostly of small girth, threw a heavy shadow, so that the steep declension, in front of which grew the tree behind which the African lurked, was almost in darkness. Adam drew as close as he could, and was amazed to see a patch of light on the ground before him; when he realised what it was, he was determined, more than ever to follow on his quest. The nigger had a dark lantern in his hand, and was throwing the light down the steep incline. The glare showed a series of stone steps, which ended in a low-lying heavy iron door fixed against the side of the house. All the strange things he had heard from Sir Nathaniel, and all those, little and big, which he had himself noticed, crowded into his mind in a chaotic way. Instinctively he took refuge behind a thick oak stem, and set himself down, to watch what might occur.

After a short time it became apparent that the African was trying to find out what was behind the heavy door. There was no way of looking in, for the door fitted tight into the massive stone slabs. The only opportunity for the entrance of light was through a small hole between the great stones above the door. This hole was too high up to look through from the ground level. Oolanga, having tried standing tiptoe on the highest point near, and holding the lantern as high as he could, threw the light round the edges of the door to see if he could find anywhere a hole or a flaw in the metal through which he could obtain a glimpse. Foiled in this, he brought from the shrubbery a plank, which he leant against the top of the door and then climbed up with great dexterity. This did not bring him near enough to the window-hole to look in, or even to throw the light of the lantern through it, so he climbed down and carried the plank back to the place from which he had got it. Then he concealed himself near the iron door and waited, manifestly with the intent of remaining there till someone came near. Presently Lady Arabella, moving noiselessly through the shade, approached the door. When he saw her close enough to touch it, Oolanga stepped forward from his concealment, and spoke in a whisper, which through the gloom sounded like a hiss.

“I want to see you, missy — soon and secret.”

“What do you want?”

“You know well, missy; I told you already.”

She turned on him with blazing eyes, the green tint in them glowing like emeralds.

“Come, none of that. If there is anything sensible which you wish to say to me, you can see me here, just where we are, at seven o'clock."

He made no reply in words, but, putting the backs of his hands together, bent lower and lower till his forehead touched the earth. Then he rose and went slowly away.

Adam Salton, from his hiding-place, saw and wondered. In a few minutes he moved from his place and went home to Lesser Hill, fully determined that seven o'clock would find him in some hidden place behind Diana's Grove.

At a little before seven Adam stole softly out of the house and took the back-way to the rear of Diana's Grove. The place seemed silent and deserted, so he took the opportunity of concealing himself near the spot whence he had seen Oolanga trying to investigate whatever was concealed behind the iron door. He waited, perfectly still, and at last saw a gleam of white passing soundlessly through the undergrowth. He was not surprised when he recognised the colour of Lady Arabella's dress. She came close and waited, with her face to the iron door. From some place of concealment near at hand Oolanga appeared, and came close to her. Adam noticed, with surprised amusement, that over his shoulder was the box with the mongoose. Of course the African did not know that he was seen by anyone, least of all by the man whose property he had with him.

Silent-footed as he was, Lady Arabella heard him coming, and turned to meet him. It was somewhat hard to see in the gloom, for, as usual, he was all in black, only his collar and cuffs showing white. Lady Arabella opened the conversation which ensued between the two.

"What do you want? To rob me, or murder me?"

"No, to lub you!"

This frightened her a little, and she tried to change the tone.

"Is that a coffin you have with you? If so, you are wasting your time. It would not hold me."

When a nigger suspects he is being laughed at, all the ferocity of his nature comes to the front; and this man was of the lowest kind.

"Dis ain't no coffin for nobody. Dis box is for you. Somefin you lub. Me give him to you!"

Still anxious to keep off the subject of affection, on which she believed him to have become crazed, she made another effort to keep his mind elsewhere.

"Is this why you want to see me?" He nodded. "Then come round to the other door. But be quiet. I have no desire to be seen so close to my own house in conversation with a — a — a nigger like you!"

She had chosen the word deliberately. She wished to meet his passion with another kind. Such would, at all events, help to keep him quiet. In the deep gloom she could not see the anger which suffused his face. Rolling eyeballs and grinding teeth are, however, sufficient signs of anger to be decipherable in the dark. She moved round the corner of the house to her right. Oolanga was following her, when she stopped him by raising her hand.

"No, not that door," she said; "that is not for niggers. The other door will do well enough for you!"

Lady Arabella took in her hand a small key which hung at the end of her watch-chain, and moved to a small door, low down, round the corner, and a little downhill from the edge of the Brow. Oolanga, in obedience to her gesture, went back to the iron door. Adam looked carefully at the mongoose box as the African went by, and was glad to see that it was intact. Unconsciously, as he looked, he fingered the key that was in his waistcoat pocket. When Oolanga was out of sight, Adam hurried after Lady Arabella.

CHAPTER XVIII — EXIT OOLANGA

The woman turned sharply as Adam touched her shoulder.

“One moment whilst we are alone. You had better not trust that nigger!” he whispered.

Her answer was crisp and concise:

“I don’t.”

“Forewarned is forearmed. Tell me if you will — it is for your own protection. Why do you mistrust him?”

“My friend, you have no idea of that man’s impudence. Would you believe that he wants me to marry him?”

“No!” said Adam incredulously, amused in spite of himself.

“Yes, and wanted to bribe me to do it by sharing a chest of treasure — at least, he thought it was — stolen from Mr. Caswall. Why do you distrust him, Mr. Salton?”

“Did you notice that box he had slung on his shoulder? That belongs to me. I left it in the gun-room when I went to lunch. He must have crept in and stolen it. Doubtless he thinks that it, too, is full of treasure.”

“He does!”

“How on earth do you know?” asked Adam.

“A little while ago he offered to give it to me — another bribe to accept him. Faugh! I am ashamed to tell you such a thing. The beast!”

Whilst they had been speaking, she had opened the door, a narrow iron one, well hung, for it opened easily and closed tightly without any creaking or sound of any kind. Within all was dark; but she entered as freely and with as little misgiving or restraint as if it had been broad daylight. For Adam, there was just sufficient green light from somewhere for him to see that there was a broad flight of heavy stone steps leading upward; but Lady Arabella, after shutting the door behind her, when it closed tightly without a clang, tripped up the steps lightly and swiftly. For an instant all was dark, but there came again the faint green light which enabled him to see the outlines of things. Another iron door, narrow like the first and fairly high, led into another large room, the walls of which were of massive stones, so closely joined together as to exhibit only one smooth surface. This presented the appearance of having at one time been polished. On the far side, also smooth like the walls, was the reverse of a wide, but not high, iron door. Here there was a little more light, for the high-up aperture over the door opened to the air.

Lady Arabella took from her girdle another small key, which she inserted in a keyhole in the centre of a massive lock. The great bolt seemed wonderfully hung, for the moment the small key was turned, the bolts of the great lock moved noiselessly and the iron doors swung open. On the stone steps outside stood Oolanga, with the mongoose box slung over his shoulder. Lady Arabella stood a little on one side, and the African, accepting the movement as an invitation, entered in an obsequious way. The moment, however, that he was inside, he gave a quick look around him.

“Much death here — big death. Many deaths. Good, good!”

He sniffed round as if he was enjoying the scent. The matter and manner of his speech were so revolting that instinctively Adam’s hand wandered to his revolver, and, with his finger on the trigger, he rested satisfied that he was ready for any emergency.

There was certainly opportunity for the nigger’s enjoyment, for the open well-hole was almost under his nose, sending up such a stench as almost made Adam sick, though Lady Arabella seemed not to mind it at all. It was like nothing that Adam had ever met with. He compared it with all the noxious experiences he had ever had — the drainage of war hospitals, of slaughter-houses, the refuse of dissecting rooms. None of these was like it, though it had something of them all, with, added, the sourness of chemical waste and the poisonous effluvium of the bilge of a water-logged ship whereon a multitude of rats had been drowned.

Then, quite unexpectedly, the negro noticed the presence of a third person — Adam Salton! He pulled out a pistol and shot at him, happily missing. Adam was himself usually a quick shot, but this time his mind had been on something else and he was not ready. However, he was quick to carry out an intention, and he was not a coward. In another moment both men were in grips. Beside them was the dark well-hole, with that horrid effluvium stealing up from its mysterious depths.

Adam and Oolanga both had pistols; Lady Arabella, who had not one, was probably the most ready of them all in the theory of shooting, but that being impossible, she made her effort in another way. Gliding forward, she tried to seize the African; but he eluded her grasp, just missing, in doing so, falling into the mysterious hole. As he swayed back to firm foothold, he turned his own gun on her and shot. Instinctively Adam leaped at his assailant; clutching at each other, they tottered on the very brink.

Lady Arabella's anger, now fully awake, was all for Oolanga. She moved towards him with her hands extended, and had just seized him when the catch of the locked box — due to some movement from within — flew open, and the king-cobra-killer flew at her with a venomous fury impossible to describe. As it seized her throat, she caught hold of it, and, with a fury superior to its own, tore it in two just as if it had been a sheet of paper. The strength used for such an act must have been terrific. In an instant, it seemed to spout blood and entrails, and was hurled into the well-hole. In another instant she had seized Oolanga, and with a swift rush had drawn him, her white arms encircling him, down with her into the gaping aperture.

Adam saw a medley of green and red lights blaze in a whirling circle, and as it sank down into the well, a pair of blazing green eyes became fixed, sank lower and lower with frightful rapidity, and disappeared, throwing upward the green light which grew more and more vivid every moment. As the light sank into the noisome depths, there came a shriek which chilled Adam's blood — a prolonged agony of pain and terror which seemed to have no end.

Adam Salton felt that he would never be able to free his mind from the memory of those dreadful moments. The gloom which surrounded that horrible charnel pit, which seemed to go down to the very bowels of the earth, conveyed from far down the sights and sounds of the nethermost hell. The ghastly fate of the African as he sank down to his terrible doom, his black face growing grey with terror, his white eyeballs, now like veined bloodstone, rolling in the helpless extremity of fear. The mysterious green light was in itself a milieu of horror. And through it all the awful cry came up from that fathomless pit, whose entrance was flooded with spots of fresh blood. Even the death of the fearless little snake-killer — so fierce, so frightful, as if stained with a ferocity which told of no living force above earth, but only of the devils of the pit — was only an incident. Adam was in a state of intellectual tumult, which had no parallel in his experience. He tried to rush away from the horrible place; even the baleful green light, thrown up through the gloomy well-shaft, was dying away as its source sank deeper into the primeval ooze. The darkness was closing in on him in overwhelming density — darkness in such a place and with such a memory of it!

He made a wild rush forward — slipt on the steps in some sticky, acrid-smelling mass that felt and smelt like blood, and, falling forward, felt his way into the inner room, where the well-shaft was not.

Then he rubbed his eyes in sheer amazement. Up the stone steps from the narrow door by which he had entered, glided the white-clad figure of Lady Arabella, the only colour to be seen on her being blood-marks on her face and hands and throat. Otherwise, she was calm and unruffled, as when earlier she stood aside for him to pass in through the narrow iron door.

CHAPTER XIX — AN ENEMY IN THE DARK

Adam Salton went for a walk before returning to Lesser Hill; he felt that it might be well, not only to steady his nerves, shaken by the horrible scene, but to get his thoughts into some sort of order, so as to be ready to enter on the matter with Sir Nathaniel. He was a little embarrassed as to telling his uncle, for affairs had so vastly progressed beyond his original view that he felt a little doubtful as to what would be the old gentleman's attitude when he should hear of the strange events for the first time. Mr. Salton would certainly not be satisfied at being treated as an outsider with regard to such things, most of which had points of contact with the inmates of his own house. It was with an immense sense of relief that Adam heard that his uncle had telegraphed to the housekeeper that he was detained by business at Walsall, where he would remain for the night; and that he would be back in the morning in time for lunch.

When Adam got home after his walk, he found Sir Nathaniel just going to bed. He did not say anything to him then of what had happened, but contented himself with arranging that they would walk together in the early morning, as he had much to say that would require serious attention.

Strangely enough he slept well, and awoke at dawn with his mind clear and his nerves in their usual unshaken condition. The maid brought up, with his early morning cup of tea, a note which had been found in the letter-box. It was from Lady Arabella, and was evidently intended to put him on his guard as to what he should say about the previous evening.

He read it over carefully several times, before he was satisfied that he had taken in its full import.

“DEAR MR. SALTON,

“I cannot go to bed until I have written to you, so you must forgive me if I disturb you, and at an unseemly time. Indeed, you must also forgive me if, in trying to do what is right, I err in saying too much or too little. The fact is that I am quite upset and unnerved by all that has happened in this terrible night. I find it difficult even to write; my hands shake so that they are not under control, and I am trembling all over with memory of the horrors we saw enacted before our eyes. I am grieved beyond measure that I should be, however remotely, a cause of this horror coming on you. Forgive me if you can, and do not think too hardly of me. This I ask with confidence, for since we shared together the danger — the very pangs — of death, I feel that we should be to one another something more than mere friends, that I may lean on you and trust you, assured that your sympathy and pity are for me. You really must let me thank you for the friendliness, the help, the confidence, the real aid at a time of deadly danger and deadly fear which you showed me. That awful man — I shall see him for ever in my dreams. His black, malignant face will shut out all memory of sunshine and happiness. I shall eternally see his evil eyes as he threw himself into that well-hole in a vain effort to escape from the consequences of his own misdoing. The more I think of it, the more apparent it seems to me that he had premeditated the whole thing — of course, except his own horrible death.

“Perhaps you have noticed a fur collar I occasionally wear. It is one of my most valued treasures — an ermine collar studded with emeralds. I had often seen the nigger’s eyes gleam covetously when he looked at it. Unhappily, I wore it yesterday. That may have been the cause that lured the poor man to his doom. On the very brink of the abyss he tore the collar from my neck — that was the last I saw of him. When he sank into the hole, I was rushing to the iron door, which I pulled behind me. When I heard that soul-sickening yell, which marked his disappearance in the chasm, I was more glad than I can say that my eyes were spared the pain and horror which my ears had to endure.

"When I tore myself out of the negro's grasp as he sank into the well-hole; I realised what freedom meant. Freedom! Freedom! Not only from that noisome prison-house, which has now such a memory, but from the more noisome embrace of that hideous monster. Whilst I live, I shall always thank you for my freedom. A woman must sometimes express her gratitude; otherwise it becomes too great to bear. I am not a sentimental girl, who merely likes to thank a man; I am a woman who knows all, of bad as well as good, that life can give. I have known what it is to love and to lose. But you must not let me bring any unhappiness into your life. I must live on — as I have lived — alone, and, in addition, bear with other woes the memory of this latest insult and horror. In the meantime, I must get away as quickly as possible from Diana's Grove. In the morning I shall go up to town, where I shall remain for a week — I cannot stay longer, as business affairs demand my presence here. I think, however, that a week in the rush of busy London, surrounded with multitudes of commonplace people, will help to soften — I cannot expect total obliteration — the terrible images of the bygone night. When I can sleep easily — which will be, I hope, after a day or two — I shall be fit to return home and take up again the burden which will, I suppose, always be with me.

"I shall be most happy to see you on my return — or earlier, if my good fortune sends you on any errand to London. I shall stay at the

Mayfair Hotel. In that busy spot we may forget some of the dangers and horrors we have shared together. Adieu, and thank you, again and again, for all your kindness and consideration to me.

"ARABELLA MARSH."

Adam was surprised by this effusive epistle, but he determined to say nothing of it to Sir Nathaniel until he should have thought it well over. When Adam met Sir Nathaniel at breakfast, he was glad that he had taken time to turn things over in his mind. The result had been that not only was he familiar with the facts in all their bearings, but he had already so far differentiated them that he was able to arrange them in his own mind according to their values. Breakfast had been a silent function, so it did not interfere in any way with the process of thought.

So soon as the door was closed, Sir Nathaniel began:

"I see, Adam, that something has occurred, and that you have much to tell me."

"That is so, sir. I suppose I had better begin by telling you all I know — all that has happened since I left you yesterday?"

Accordingly Adam gave him details of all that had happened during the previous evening. He confined himself rigidly to the narration of circumstances, taking care not to colour events by any comment of his own, or any opinion of the meaning of things which he did not fully understand. At first, Sir Nathaniel seemed disposed to ask questions, but shortly gave this up when he recognised that the narration was concise and self-explanatory. Thenceforth, he contented himself with quick looks and glances, easily interpreted, or by some acquiescent motions of his hands, when such could be convenient, to emphasise his idea of the correctness of any inference. Until Adam ceased speaking, having evidently come to an end of what he had to say with regard to this section of his story, the elder man made no comment whatever. Even when Adam took from his pocket Lady Arabella's letter, with the manifest intention of reading it, he did not make any comment. Finally, when Adam folded up the letter and put it, in its envelope, back in his pocket, as an intimation that he had now quite finished, the old diplomatist carefully made a few notes in his pocket-book.

"Your narrative, my dear Adam, is altogether admirable. I think I may now take it that we are both well versed in the actual facts, and that our conference had better take the shape of a mutual exchange of ideas. Let us both ask questions as they may arise; and I do not doubt that we shall arrive at some enlightening conclusions."

"Will you kindly begin, sir? I do not doubt that, with your longer experience, you will be able to dissipate some of the fog which envelops certain of the things which we have to consider."

"I hope so, my dear boy. For a beginning, then, let me say that Lady Arabella's letter makes clear some things which she intended — and also some things which she did not intend. But, before I begin to draw deductions, let me ask you a few questions. Adam, are you heart-whole, quite heart-whole, in the matter of Lady Arabella?"

His companion answered at once, each looking the other straight in the eyes during question and answer.

"Lady Arabella, sir, is a charming woman, and I should have deemed it a privilege to meet her — to talk to her — even — since I am in the confessional — to flirt a little with her. But if you mean to ask if my affections are in any way engaged, I can emphatically answer 'No!' — as indeed you will understand when presently I give you the reason. Apart from that, there are the unpleasant details we discussed the other day."

“Could you — would you mind giving me the reason now? It will help us to understand what is before us, in the way of difficulty.”

“Certainly, sir. My reason, on which I can fully depend, is that I love another woman!”

“That clinches it. May I offer my good wishes, and, I hope, my congratulations?”

“I am proud of your good wishes, sir, and I thank you for them. But it is too soon for congratulations — the lady does not even know my hopes yet. Indeed, I hardly knew them myself, as definite, till this moment.”

“I take it then, Adam, that at the right time I may be allowed to know who the lady is?”

Adam laughed a low, sweet laugh, such as ripples from a happy heart.

“There need not be an hour’s, a minute’s delay. I shall be glad to share my secret with you, sir. The lady, sir, whom I am so happy as to love, and in whom my dreams of life-long happiness are centred, is Mimi Watford!”

“Then, my dear Adam, I need not wait to offer congratulations. She is indeed a very charming young lady. I do not think I ever saw a girl who united in such perfection the qualities of strength of character and sweetness of disposition. With all my heart, I congratulate you. Then I may take it that my question as to your heart-wholeness is answered in the affirmative?”

“Yes; and now, sir, may I ask in turn why the question?”

“Certainly! I asked because it seems to me that we are coming to a point where my questions might be painful to you.”

“It is not merely that I love Mimi, but I have reason to look on Lady Arabella as her enemy,” Adam continued.

“Her enemy?”

“Yes. A rank and unscrupulous enemy who is bent on her destruction.”

Sir Nathaniel went to the door, looked outside it and returned, locking it carefully behind him.

CHAPTER XX — METABOLISM

“Am I looking grave?” asked Sir Nathaniel inconsequently when he re-entered the room.

“You certainly are, sir.”

“We little thought when first we met that we should be drawn into such a vortex. Already we are mixed up in robbery, and probably murder, but — a thousand times worse than all the crimes in the calendar — in an affair of ghastly mystery which has no bottom and no end — with forces of the most unnerving kind, which had their origin in an age when the world was different from the world which we know. We are going back to the origin of superstition — to an age when dragons tore each other in their slime. We must fear nothing — no conclusion, however improbable, almost impossible it may be. Life and death is hanging on our judgment, not only for ourselves, but for others whom we love. Remember, I count on you as I hope you count on me.”

“I do, with all confidence.”

“Then,” said Sir Nathaniel, “let us think justly and boldly and fear nothing, however terrifying it may seem. I suppose I am to take as exact in every detail your account of all the strange things which happened whilst you were in Diana’s Grove?”

“So far as I know, yes. Of course I may be mistaken in recollection of some detail or another, but I am certain that in the main what I have said is correct.”

“You feel sure that you saw Lady Arabella seize the negro round the neck, and drag him down with her into the hole?”

“Absolutely certain, sir, otherwise I should have gone to her assistance.”

“We have, then, an account of what happened from an eye-witness whom we trust — that is yourself. We have also another account, written by Lady Arabella under her own hand. These two accounts do not agree. Therefore we must take it that one of the two is lying.”

“Apparently, sir.”

“And that Lady Arabella is the liar!”

“Apparently — as I am not.”

“We must, therefore, try to find a reason for her lying. She has nothing to fear from Oolanga, who is dead. Therefore the only reason which could actuate her would be to convince someone else that she was blameless. This ‘someone’ could not be you, for you had the evidence of your own eyes. There was no one else present; therefore it must have been an absent person.”

“That seems beyond dispute, sir.”

“There is only one other person whose good opinion she could wish to keep — Edgar Caswall. He is the only one who fills the bill. Her lies point to other things besides the death of the African. She evidently wanted it to be accepted that his falling into the well was his own act. I cannot suppose that she expected to convince you, the eye-witness; but if she wished later on to spread the story, it was wise of her to try to get your acceptance of it.”

“That is so!”

“Then there were other matters of untruth. That, for instance, of the ermine collar embroidered with emeralds. If an understandable reason be required for this, it would be to draw attention away from the green lights which were seen in the room, and especially in the well-hole. Any unprejudiced person would accept the green lights to be the eyes of a great snake, such as tradition pointed to living in the well-hole. In fine, therefore, Lady Arabella wanted the general belief to be that there was no snake of the kind in Diana's Grove. For my own part, I don't believe in a partial liar — this art does not deal in veneer; a liar is a liar right through. Self-interest may prompt falsity of the tongue; but if one prove to be a liar, nothing that he says can ever be believed. This leads us to the conclusion that because she said or inferred that there was no snake, we should look for one — and expect to find it, too.

"Now let me digress. I live, and have for many years lived, in Derbyshire, a county more celebrated for its caves than any other county in England. I have been through them all, and am familiar with every turn of them; as also with other great caves in Kentucky, in France, in Germany, and a host of other places — in many of these are tremendously deep caves of narrow aperture, which are valued by intrepid explorers, who descend narrow gullets of abysmal depth — and sometimes never return. In many of the caverns in the Peak I am convinced that some of the smaller passages were used in primeval times as the lairs of some of the great serpents of legend and tradition. It may have been that such caverns were formed in the usual geologic way — bubbles or flaws in the earth's crust — which were later used by the monsters of the period of the young world. It may have been, of course, that some of them were worn originally by water; but in time they all found a use when suitable for living monsters.

"This brings us to another point, more difficult to accept and understand than any other requiring belief in a base not usually accepted, or indeed entered on — whether such abnormal growths could have ever changed in their nature. Some day the study of metabolism may progress so far as to enable us to accept structural changes proceeding from an intellectual or moral base. We may lean towards a belief that great animal strength may be a sound base for changes of all sorts. If this be so, what could be a more fitting subject than primeval monsters whose strength was such as to allow a survival of thousands of years? We do not know yet if brain can increase and develop independently of other parts of the living structure.

"After all, the mediaeval belief in the Philosopher's Stone which could transmute metals, has its counterpart in the accepted theory of metabolism which changes living tissue. In an age of investigation like our own, when we are returning to science as the base of wonders — almost of miracles — we should be slow to refuse to accept facts, however impossible they may seem to be.

"Let us suppose a monster of the early days of the world — a dragon of the prime — of vast age running into thousands of years, to whom had been conveyed in some way — it matters not — a brain just sufficient for the beginning of growth. Suppose the monster to be of incalculable size and of a strength quite abnormal — a veritable incarnation of animal strength. Suppose this animal is allowed to remain in one place, thus being removed from accidents of interrupted development; might not, would not this creature, in process of time — ages, if necessary — have that rudimentary intelligence developed? There is no impossibility in this; it is only the natural process of evolution. In the beginning, the instincts of animals are confined to alimentation, self-protection, and the multiplication of their species. As time goes on and the needs of life become more complex, power follows need. We have been long accustomed to consider growth as applied almost exclusively to size in its various aspects. But Nature, who has no doctrinaire ideas, may equally apply it to concentration. A developing thing may expand in any given way or form. Now, it is a scientific law that increase implies gain and loss of various kinds; what a thing gains in one direction it may lose in another. May it not be that Mother Nature may deliberately encourage decrease as well as increase — that it may be an axiom that what is gained in concentration is lost in size? Take, for instance, monsters that tradition has accepted and localised, such as the Worm of Lambton or that of Spindleston Heugh. If such a creature were, by its own process of metabolism, to change much of its bulk for intellectual growth, we should at once arrive at a new class of creature — more dangerous, perhaps, than the world has ever had any experience of — a force which can think, which has no soul and no morals, and therefore no acceptance of responsibility. A snake would be a good illustration of this, for it is cold-blooded, and therefore removed from the temptations which often weaken or restrict warm-blooded creatures. If, for instance, the Worm of Lambton — if such ever existed — were guided to its own ends by an organised intelligence capable of expansion, what form of creature could we imagine which would equal it in potentialities of evil? Why, such a being would devastate a whole country. Now, all these things require much thought, and we want to apply the knowledge usefully, and we should therefore be exact. Would it not be well to resume the subject later in the day?"

"I quite agree, sir. I am in a whirl already; and want to attend carefully to what you say; so that I may try to digest it."

Both men seemed fresher and better for the "easy," and when they met in the afternoon each of them had something to contribute to the general stock of information. Adam, who was by nature of a more militant disposition than his elderly friend, was glad to see that the conference at once assumed a practical trend. Sir Nathaniel recognised this, and, like an old diplomatist, turned it to present use.

"Tell me now, Adam, what is the outcome, in your own mind, of our conversation?"

"That the whole difficulty already assumes practical shape; but with added dangers, that at first I did not imagine."

"What is the practical shape, and what are the added dangers? I am not disputing, but only trying to clear my own ideas by the consideration of yours—"

So Adam went on:

"In the past, in the early days of the world, there were monsters who were so vast that they could exist for thousands of years. Some of them must have overlapped the Christian era. They may have progressed intellectually in process of time. If they had in any way so progressed, or even got the most rudimentary form of brain, they would be the most dangerous things that ever were in the world. Tradition says that one of these monsters lived in the Marsh of the East, and came up to a cave in Diana's Grove, which was also called the Lair of the White Worm. Such creatures may have grown down as well as up. They *may* have grown into, or something like, human beings. Lady Arabella March is of snake nature. She has committed crimes to our knowledge. She retains something of the vast strength of her primal being — can see in the dark — has the eyes of a snake. She used the nigger, and then dragged him through the snake's hole down to the swamp; she is intent on evil, and hates some one we love. Result . . ."

"Yes, the result?"

"First, that Mimi Watford should be taken away at once — then —"

“Yes?”

“The monster must be destroyed.”

“Bravo! That is a true and fearless conclusion. At whatever cost, it must be carried out.”

“At once?”

“Soon, at all events. That creature’s very existence is a danger. Her presence in this neighbourhood makes the danger immediate.”

As he spoke, Sir Nathaniel’s mouth hardened and his eyebrows came down till they met. There was no doubting his concurrence in the resolution, or his readiness to help in carrying it out. But he was an elderly man with much experience and knowledge of law and diplomacy. It seemed to him to be a stern duty to prevent anything irrevocable taking place till it had been thought out and all was ready. There were all sorts of legal cruxes to be thought out, not only regarding the taking of life, even of a monstrosity in human form, but also of property. Lady Arabella, be she woman or snake or devil, owned the ground she moved in, according to British law, and the law is jealous and swift to avenge wrongs done within its ken. All such difficulties should be — must be — avoided for Mr. Salton’s sake, for Adam’s own sake, and, most of all, for Mimi Watford’s sake.

Before he spoke again, Sir Nathaniel had made up his mind that he must try to postpone decisive action until the circumstances on which they depended — which, after all, were only problematical — should have been tested satisfactorily, one way or another. When he did speak, Adam at first thought that his friend was wavering in his intention, or “funking” the responsibility. However, his respect for Sir Nathaniel was so great that he would not act, or even come to a conclusion on a vital point, without his sanction.

He came close and whispered in his ear:

“We will prepare our plans to combat and destroy this horrible menace, after we have cleared up some of the more baffling points. Meanwhile, we must wait for the night — I hear my uncle’s footsteps echoing down the hall.”

Sir Nathaniel nodded his approval.

CHAPTER XXI — GREEN LIGHT

When old Mr. Salton had retired for the night, Adam and Sir Nathaniel returned to the study. Things went with great regularity at Lesser Hill, so they knew that there would be no interruption to their talk.

When their cigars were lighted, Sir Nathaniel began.

"I hope, Adam, that you do not think me either slack or changeable of purpose. I mean to go through this business to the bitter end — whatever it may be. Be satisfied that my first care is, and shall be, the protection of Mimi Watford. To that I am pledged; my dear boy, we who are interested are all in the same danger. That semi-human monster out of the pit hates and means to destroy us all — you and me certainly, and probably your uncle. I wanted especially to talk with you to-night, for I cannot help thinking that the time is fast coming — if it has not come already — when we must take your uncle into our confidence. It was one thing when fancied evils threatened, but now he is probably marked for death, and it is only right that he should know all."

"I am with you, sir. Things have changed since we agreed to keep him out of the trouble. Now we dare not; consideration for his feelings might cost his life. It is a duty — and no light or pleasant one, either. I have not a shadow of doubt that he will want to be one with us in this. But remember, we are his guests; his name, his honour, have to be thought of as well as his safety."

"All shall be as you wish, Adam. And now as to what we are to do? We cannot murder Lady Arabella off-hand. Therefore we shall have to put things in order for the killing, and in such a way that we cannot be taxed with a crime."

"It seems to me, sir, that we are in an exceedingly tight place. Our first difficulty is to know where to begin. I never thought this fighting an antediluvian monster would be such a complicated job. This one is a woman, with all a woman's wit, combined with the heartlessness of a *cocotte*. She has the strength and impregnability of a diplodocus. We may be sure that in the fight that is before us there will be no semblance of fair-play. Also that our unscrupulous opponent will not betray herself!"

"That is so — but being feminine, she will probably over-reach herself. Now, Adam, it strikes me that, as we have to protect ourselves and others against feminine nature, our strong game will be to play our masculine against her feminine. Perhaps we had better sleep on it. She is a thing of the night; and the night may give us some ideas."

So they both turned in.

Adam knocked at Sir Nathaniel's door in the grey of the morning, and, on being bidden, came into the room. He had several letters in his hand. Sir Nathaniel sat up in bed.

"Well!"

"I should like to read you a few letters, but, of course, I shall not send them unless you approve. In fact" — with a smile and a blush — "there are several things which I want to do; but I hold my hand and my tongue till I have your approval."

"Go on!" said the other kindly. "Tell me all, and count at any rate on my sympathy, and on my approval and help if I can see my way."

Accordingly Adam proceeded:

"When I told you the conclusions at which I had arrived, I put in the foreground that Mimi Watford should, for the sake of her own safety, be removed — and that the monster which had wrought all the harm should be destroyed."

"Yes, that is so."

"To carry this into practice, sir, one preliminary is required — unless harm of another kind is to be faced. Mimi should have some protector whom all the world would recognise. The only form recognised by convention is marriage!"

Sir Nathaniel smiled in a fatherly way.

"To marry, a husband is required. And that husband should be you."

"Yes, yes."

"And the marriage should be immediate and secret — or, at least, not spoken of outside ourselves. Would the young lady be agreeable to that proceeding?"

"I do not know, sir!"

"Then how are we to proceed?"

"I suppose that we — or one of us — must ask her."

"Is this a sudden idea, Adam, a sudden resolution?"

"A sudden resolution, sir, but not a sudden idea. If she agrees, all is well and good. The sequence is obvious."

"And it is to be kept a secret amongst ourselves?"

"I want no secret, sir, except for Mimi's good. For myself, I should like to shout it from the house-tops! But we must be discreet; untimely knowledge to our enemy might work incalculable harm."

"And how would you suggest, Adam, that we could combine the momentous question with secrecy?"

Adam grew red and moved uneasily.

"Someone must ask her — as soon as possible!"

"And that someone?"

"I thought that you, sir, would be so good!"

"God bless my soul! This is a new kind of duty to take on — at my time of life. Adam, I hope you know that you can count on me to help in any way I can!"

"I have already counted on you, sir, when I ventured to make such a suggestion. I can only ask," he added, "that you will be more than ever kind to me — to us — and look on the painful duty as a voluntary act of grace, prompted by kindness and affection."

"Painful duty!"

"Yes," said Adam boldly. "Painful to you, though to me it would be all joyful."

"It is a strange job for an early morning! Well, we all live and learn. I suppose the sooner I go the better. You had better write a line for me to take with me. For, you see, this is to be a somewhat unusual transaction, and it may be embarrassing to the lady, even to myself. So we ought to have some sort of warrant, something to show that we have been mindful of her feelings. It will not do to take acquiescence for granted — although we act for her good."

"Sir Nathaniel, you are a true friend; I am sure that both Mimi and I shall be grateful to you for all our lives — however long they may be!"

So the two talked it over and agreed as to points to be borne in mind by the ambassador. It was striking ten when Sir Nathaniel left the house, Adam seeing him quietly off.

As the young man followed him with wistful eyes — almost jealous of the privilege which his kind deed was about to bring him — he felt that his own heart was in his friend's breast.

The memory of that morning was like a dream to all those concerned in it. Sir Nathaniel had a confused recollection of detail and sequence, though the main facts stood out in his memory boldly and clearly. Adam Salton's recollection was of an illimitable wait, filled with anxiety, hope, and chagrin, all dominated by a sense of the slow passage of time and accompanied by vague fears. Mimi could not for a long time think at all, or recollect anything, except that Adam loved her and was saving her from a terrible danger. When she had time to think, later on, she wondered when she had any ignorance of the fact that Adam loved her, and that she loved him with all her heart. Everything, every recollection however small, every feeling, seemed to fit into those elemental facts as though they had all been moulded together. The main and crowning recollection was her saying goodbye to Sir Nathaniel, and entrusting to him loving messages, straight from her heart, to Adam Salton, and of his bearing when — with an impulse which she could not check — she put her lips to his and kissed him. Later, when she was alone and had time to think, it was a passing grief to her that she would have to be silent, for a time, to Lilla on the happy events of that strange mission.

She had, of course, agreed to keep all secret until Adam should give her leave to speak.

The advice and assistance of Sir Nathaniel was a great help to Adam in carrying out his idea of marrying Mimi Watford without publicity. He went with him to London, and, with his influence, the young man obtained the license of the Archbishop of Canterbury for a private marriage. Sir Nathaniel then persuaded old Mr. Salton to allow his nephew to spend a few weeks with him at Doom Tower, and it was here that Mimi became Adam's wife. But that was only the first step in their plans; before going further, however, Adam took his bride off to the Isle of Man. He wished to place a stretch of sea between Mimi and the White Worm, while things matured. On their return, Sir Nathaniel met them and drove them at once to Doom, taking care to avoid any one that he knew on the journey.

Sir Nathaniel had taken care to have the doors and windows shut and locked — all but the door used for their entry. The shutters were up and the blinds down. Moreover, heavy curtains were drawn across the windows. When Adam commented on this, Sir Nathaniel said in a whisper:

"Wait till we are alone, and I'll tell you why this is done; in the meantime not a word or a sign. You will approve when we have had a talk together."

They said no more on the subject till after dinner, when they were ensconced in Sir Nathaniel's study, which was on the top storey. Doom Tower was a lofty structure, situated on an eminence high up in the Peak. The top commanded a wide prospect, ranging from the hills above the Ribble to the near side of the Brow, which marked the northern bound of ancient Mercia. It was of the early Norman period, less than a century younger than Castra Regis. The windows of the study were barred and locked, and heavy dark curtains closed them in. When this was done not a gleam of light from the tower could be seen from outside.

When they were alone, Sir Nathaniel explained that he had taken his old friend, Mr. Salton, into full confidence, and that in future all would work together.

"It is important for you to be extremely careful. In spite of the fact that our marriage was kept secret, as also your temporary absence, both are known."

"How? To whom?"

"How, I know not; but I am beginning to have an idea."

"To her?" asked Adam, in momentary consternation.

Sir Nathaniel shivered perceptibly.

"The White Worm — yes!"

Adam noticed that from now on, his friend never spoke of Lady Arabella otherwise, except when he wished to divert the suspicion of others.

Sir Nathaniel switched off the electric light, and when the room was pitch dark, he came to Adam, took him by the hand, and led him to a seat set in the southern window. Then he softly drew back a piece of the curtain and motioned his companion to look out.

Adam did so, and immediately shrank back as though his eyes had opened on pressing danger. His companion set his mind at rest by saying in a low voice:

"It is all right; you may speak, but speak low. There is no danger here — at present!"

Adam leaned forward, taking care, however, not to press his face against the glass. What he saw would not under ordinary circumstances have caused concern to anybody. With his special knowledge, it was appalling — though the night was now so dark that in reality there was little to be seen.

On the western side of the tower stood a grove of old trees, of forest dimensions. They were not grouped closely, but stood a little apart from each other, producing the effect of a row widely planted. Over the tops of them was seen a green light, something like the danger signal at a railway-crossing. It seemed at first quite still; but presently, when Adam's eye became accustomed to it, he could see that it moved as if trembling. This at once recalled to Adam's mind the light quivering above the well-hole in the darkness of that inner room at Diana's Grove, Oolanga's awful shriek, and the hideous black face, now grown grey with terror, disappearing into the impenetrable gloom of the mysterious orifice. Instinctively he laid his hand on his revolver, and stood up ready to protect his wife. Then, seeing that nothing happened, and that the light and all outside the tower remained the same, he softly pulled the curtain over the window.

Sir Nathaniel switched on the light again, and in its comforting glow they began to talk freely.

CHAPTER XXII — AT CLOSE QUARTERS

"She has diabolical cunning," said Sir Nathaniel. "Ever since you left, she has ranged along the Brow and wherever you were accustomed to frequent. I have not heard whence the knowledge of your movements came to her, nor have I been able to learn any data whereon to found an opinion. She seems to have heard both of your marriage and your absence; but I gather, by inference, that she does not actually know where you and Mimi are, or of your return. So soon as the dusk fails, she goes out on her rounds, and before dawn covers the whole ground round the Brow, and away up into the heart of the Peak. The White Worm, in her own proper shape, certainly has great facilities for the business on which she is now engaged. She can look into windows of any ordinary kind. Happily, this house is beyond her reach, if she wishes — as she manifestly does — to remain unrecognised. But, even at this height, it is wise to show no lights, lest she might learn something of our presence or absence."

"Would it not be well, sir, if one of us could see this monster in her real shape at close quarters? I am willing to run the risk — for I take it there would be no slight risk in the doing. I don't suppose anyone of our time has seen her close and lived to tell the tale."

Sir Nathaniel held up an expostulatory hand.

"Good God, lad, what are you suggesting? Think of your wife, and all that is at stake."

"It is of Mimi that I think — for her sake that I am willing to risk whatever is to be risked."

Adam's young bride was proud of her man, but she blanched at the thought of the ghastly White Worm. Adam saw this and at once reassured her.

"So long as her ladyship does not know whereabout I am, I shall have as much safety as remains to us; bear in mind, my darling, that we cannot be too careful."

Sir Nathaniel realised that Adam was right; the White Worm had no supernatural powers and could not harm them until she discovered their hiding place. It was agreed, therefore, that the two men should go together.

When the two men slipped out by the back door of the house, they walked cautiously along the avenue which trended towards the west. Everything was pitch dark — so dark that at times they had to feel their way by the palings and tree-trunks. They could still see, seemingly far in front of them and high up, the baleful light which at the height and distance seemed like a faint line. As they were now on the level of the ground, the light seemed infinitely higher than it had from the top of the tower. At the sight Adam's heart fell; the danger of the desperate enterprise which he had undertaken burst upon him. But this feeling was shortly followed by another which restored him to himself — a fierce loathing, and a desire to kill, such as he had never experienced before.

They went on for some distance on a level road, fairly wide, from which the green light was visible. Here Sir Nathaniel spoke softly, placing his lips to Adam's ear for safety.

"We know nothing whatever of this creature's power of hearing or smelling, though I presume that both are of no great strength. As to seeing, we may presume the opposite, but in any case we must try to keep in the shade behind the tree-trunks. The slightest error would be fatal to us."

Adam only nodded, in case there should be any chance of the monster seeing the movement.

After a time that seemed interminable, they emerged from the circling wood. It was like coming out into sunlight by comparison with the misty blackness which had been around them. There was light enough to see by, though not sufficient to distinguish things at a distance. Adam's eyes sought the green light in the sky. It was still in about the same place, but its surroundings were more visible. It was now at the summit of what seemed to be a long white pole, near the top of which were two pendant white masses, like rudimentary arms or fins. The green light, strangely enough, did not seem lessened by the surrounding starlight, but had a clearer effect and a deeper green. Whilst they were carefully regarding this — Adam with the aid of an opera-glass — their nostrils were assailed by a horrid stench, something like that which rose from the well-hole in Diana's Grove.

By degrees, as their eyes got the right focus, they saw an immense towering mass that seemed snowy white. It was tall and thin. The lower part was hidden by the trees which lay between, but they could follow the tall white shaft and the duplicate green lights which topped it. As they looked there was a movement — the shaft seemed to bend, and the line of green light descended amongst the trees. They could see the green light twinkle as it passed between the obstructing branches.

Seeing where the head of the monster was, the two men ventured a little further forward, and saw that the hidden mass at the base of the shaft was composed of vast coils of the great serpent's body, forming a base from which the upright mass rose. As they looked, this lower mass moved, the glistening folds catching the moonlight, and they could see that the monster's progress was along the ground. It was coming towards them at a swift pace, so they turned and ran, taking care to make as little noise as possible, either by their footfalls or by disturbing the undergrowth close to them. They did not stop or pause till they saw before them the high dark tower of Doom.

CHAPTER XXIII — IN THE ENEMY'S HOUSE

Sir Nathaniel was in the library next morning, after breakfast, when Adam came to him carrying a letter.

"Her ladyship doesn't lose any time. She has begun work already!"

Sir Nathaniel, who was writing at a table near the window, looked up.

"What is it?" said he.

Adam held out the letter he was carrying. It was in a blazoned envelope.

"Ha!" said Sir Nathaniel, "from the White Worm! I expected something of the kind."

"But," said Adam, "how could she have known we were here? She didn't know last night."

"I don't think we need trouble about that, Adam. There is so much we do not understand. This is only another mystery. Suffice it that she does know — perhaps it is all the better and safer for us."

"How is that?" asked Adam with a puzzled look.

"General process of reasoning, my boy; and the experience of some years in the diplomatic world. This creature is a monster without heart or consideration for anything or anyone. She is not nearly so dangerous in the open as when she has the dark to protect her. Besides, we know, by our own experience of her movements, that for some reason she shuns publicity. In spite of her vast bulk and abnormal strength, she is afraid to attack openly. After all, she is only a snake and with a snake's nature, which is to keep low and squirm, and proceed by stealth and cunning. She will never attack when she can run away, although she knows well that running away would probably be fatal to her. What is the letter about?"

Sir Nathaniel's voice was calm and self-possessed. When he was engaged in any struggle of wits he was all diplomatist.

"She asks Mimi and me to tea this afternoon at Diana's Grove, and hopes that you also will favour her."

Sir Nathaniel smiled.

"Please ask Mrs. Salton to accept for us all."

"She means some deadly mischief. Surely — surely it would be wiser not."

"It is an old trick that we learn early in diplomacy, Adam — to fight on ground of your own choice. It is true that she suggested the place on this occasion; but by accepting it we make it ours. Moreover, she will not be able to understand our reason for doing so, and her own bad conscience — if she has any, bad or good — and her own fears and doubts will play our game for us. No, my dear boy, let us accept, by all means."

Adam said nothing, but silently held out his hand, which his companion shook: no words were necessary.

When it was getting near tea-time, Mimi asked Sir Nathaniel how they were going.

"We must make a point of going in state. We want all possible publicity." Mimi looked at him inquiringly. "Certainly, my dear, in the present circumstances publicity is a part of safety. Do not be surprised if, whilst we are at Diana's Grove, occasional messages come for you — for all or any of us."

"I see!" said Mrs. Salton. "You are taking no chances."

"None, my dear. All I have learned at foreign courts, and amongst civilised and uncivilised people, is going to be utilised within the next couple of hours."

Sir Nathaniel's voice was full of seriousness, and it brought to Mimi in a convincing way the awful gravity of the occasion.

In due course, they set out in a carriage drawn by a fine pair of horses, who soon devoured the few miles of their journey. Before they came to the gate, Sir Nathaniel turned to Mimi.

"I have arranged with Adam certain signals which may be necessary if certain eventualities occur. These need be nothing to do with you directly. But bear in mind that if I ask you or Adam to do anything, do not lose a second in the doing of it. We must try to pass off such moments with an appearance of unconcern. In all probability, nothing requiring such care will occur. The White Worm will not try force, though she has so much of it to spare. Whatever she may attempt to-day, of harm to any of us, will be in the way of secret plot. Some other time she may try force, but — if I am able to judge such a thing — not to-day. The messengers who may ask for any of us will not be witnesses only, they may help to stave off danger." Seeing query in her face, he went on: "Of what kind the danger may be, I know not, and cannot guess. It will doubtless be some ordinary circumstance; but none the less dangerous on that account. Here we are at the gate. Now, be careful in all matters, however small. To keep your head is half the battle."

There were a number of men in livery in the hall when they arrived. The doors of the drawing-room were thrown open, and Lady Arabella came forth and offered them cordial welcome. This having been got over, Lady Arabella led them into another room where tea was served.

Adam was acutely watchful and suspicious of everything, and saw on the far side of this room a panelled iron door of the same colour and configuration as the outer door of the room where was the well-hole wherein Oolanga had disappeared. Something in the sight alarmed him, and he quietly stood near the door. He made no movement, even of his eyes, but he could see that Sir Nathaniel was watching him intently, and, he fancied, with approval.

They all sat near the table spread for tea, Adam still near the door. Lady Arabella fanned herself, complaining of heat, and told one of the footmen to throw all the outer doors open.

Tea was in progress when Mimi suddenly started up with a look of fright on her face; at the same moment, the men became cognisant of a thick smoke which began to spread through the room — a smoke which made those who experienced it gasp and choke. The footmen began to edge uneasily towards the inner door. Denser and denser grew the smoke, and more acrid its smell. Mimi, towards whom the draught from the open door wafted the smoke, rose up choking, and ran to the inner door, which she threw open to its fullest extent, disclosing on the outside a curtain of thin silk, fixed to the doorposts. The draught from the open door swayed the thin silk towards her, and in her fright, she tore down the curtain, which enveloped her from head to foot. Then she ran through the still open door, heedless of the fact that she could not see where she was going. Adam, followed by Sir Nathaniel, rushed forward and joined her — Adam catching his wife by the arm and holding her tight. It was well that he did so, for just before her lay the black orifice of the well-hole, which, of course, she could not see with the silk curtain round her head. The floor was extremely slippery; something like thick oil had been spilled where she had to pass; and close to the edge of the hole her feet shot from under her, and she stumbled forward towards the well-hole.

When Adam saw Mimi slip, he flung himself backward, still holding her. His weight told, and he dragged her up from the hole and they fell together on the floor outside the zone of slipperiness. In a moment he had raised her up, and together they rushed out through the open door into the sunlight, Sir Nathaniel close behind them. They were all pale except the old diplomatist, who looked both calm and cool. It sustained and cheered Adam and his wife to see him thus master of himself. Both managed to follow his example, to the wonderment of the footmen, who saw the three who had just escaped a terrible danger walking together gaily, as, under the guiding pressure of Sir Nathaniel's hand, they turned to re-enter the house.

Lady Arabella, whose face had blanched to a deadly white, now resumed her ministrations at the tea-board as though nothing unusual had happened. The slop-basin was full of half-burned brown paper, over which tea had been poured.

Sir Nathaniel had been narrowly observing his hostess, and took the first opportunity afforded him of whispering to Adam:

"The real attack is to come — she is too quiet. When I give my hand to your wife to lead her out, come with us — and caution her to hurry. Don't lose a second, even if you have to make a scene. Hs-s-s-h!"

Then they resumed their places close to the table, and the servants, in obedience to Lady Arabella's order, brought in fresh tea.

Thence on, that tea-party seemed to Adam, whose faculties were at their utmost intensity, like a terrible dream. As for poor Mimi, she was so overwrought both with present and future fear, and with horror at the danger she had escaped, that her faculties were numb. However, she was braced up for a trial, and she felt assured that whatever might come she would be able to go through with it. Sir Nathaniel seemed just as usual — suave, dignified, and thoughtful —

perfect master of himself.

To her husband, it was evident that Mimi was ill at ease. The way she kept turning her head to look around her, the quick coming and going of the colour of her face, her hurried breathing, alternating with periods of suspicious calm, were evidences of mental perturbation. To her, the attitude of Lady Arabella seemed compounded of social sweetness and personal consideration. It would be hard to imagine more thoughtful and tender kindness towards an honoured guest.

When tea was over and the servants had come to clear away the cups, Lady Arabella, putting her arm round Mimi's waist, strolled with her into an adjoining room, where she collected a number of photographs which were scattered about, and, sitting down beside her guest, began to show them to her. While she was doing this, the servants closed all the doors of the suite of rooms, as well as that which opened from the room outside — that of the well-hole into the avenue. Suddenly, without any seeming cause, the light in the room began to grow dim. Sir Nathaniel, who was sitting close to Mimi, rose to his feet, and, crying, "Quick!" caught hold of her hand and began to drag her from the room. Adam caught her other hand, and between them they drew her through the outer door which the servants were beginning to close. It was difficult at first to find the way, the darkness was so great; but to their relief when Adam whistled shrilly, the carriage and horses, which had been waiting in the angle of the avenue, dashed up. Her husband and Sir Nathaniel lifted — almost threw — Mimi into the carriage. The postillion plied whip and spur, and the vehicle, rocking with its speed, swept through the gate and tore up the road. Behind them was a hubbub — servants rushing about, orders being shouted out, doors shutting, and somewhere, seemingly far back in the house, a strange noise. Every nerve of the horses was strained as they dashed recklessly along the road. The two men held Mimi between them, the arms of both of them round her as though protectingly. As they went, there was a sudden rise in the ground; but the horses, breathing heavily, dashed up it at racing speed, not slackening their pace when the hill fell away again, leaving them to hurry along the downgrade.

It would be foolish to say that neither Adam nor Mimi had any fear in returning to Doom Tower. Mimi felt it more keenly than her husband, whose nerves were harder, and who was more inured to danger. Still she bore up bravely, and as usual the effort was helpful to her. When once she was in the study in the top of the turret, she almost forgot the terrors which lay outside in the dark. She did not attempt to peep out of the window; but Adam did — and saw nothing. The moonlight showed all the surrounding country, but nowhere was to be observed that tremulous line of green light.

The peaceful night had a good effect on them all; danger, being unseen, seemed far off. At times it was hard to realise that it had ever been. With courage restored, Adam rose early and walked along the Brow, seeing no change in the signs of life in Castra Regis. What he did see, to his wonder and concern, on his returning homeward, was Lady Arabella, in her tight-fitting white dress and ermine collar, but without her emeralds; she was emerging from the gate of Diana's Grove and walking towards the Castle. Pondering on this, and trying to find some meaning in it, occupied his thoughts till he joined Mimi and Sir Nathaniel at breakfast. They began the meal in silence. What had been had been, and was known to them all. Moreover, it was not a pleasant topic.

A fillip was given to the conversation when Adam told of his seeing Lady Arabella, on her way to Castra Regis. They each had something to say of her, and of what her wishes or intentions were towards Edgar Caswall. Mimi spoke bitterly of her in every aspect. She had not forgotten — and never would — never could — the occasion when, to harm Lilla, the woman had consorted even with the nigger. As a social matter, she was disgusted with her for following up the rich landowner— “throwing herself at his head so shamelessly,” was how she expressed it. She was interested to know that the great kite still flew from Caswall’s tower. But beyond such matters she did not try to go. The only comment she made was of strongly expressed surprise at her ladyship’s “cheek” in ignoring her own criminal acts, and her impudence in taking it for granted that others had overlooked them also.

CHAPTER XXIV — A STARTLING PROPOSITION

The more Mimi thought over the late events, the more puzzled she was. What did it all mean — what could it mean, except that there was an error of fact somewhere. Could it be possible that some of them — all of them had been mistaken, that there had been no White Worm at all? On either side of her was a belief impossible of reception. Not to believe in what seemed apparent was to destroy the very foundations of belief . . . yet in old days there had been monsters on the earth, and certainly some people had believed in just such mysterious changes of identity. It was all very strange. Just fancy how any stranger — say a doctor — would regard her, if she were to tell him that she had been to a tea-party with an antediluvian monster, and that they had been waited on by up-to-date men-servants.

Adam had returned, exhilarated by his walk, and more settled in his mind than he had been for some time. Like Mimi, he had gone through the phase of doubt and inability to believe in the reality of things, though it had not affected him to the same extent. The idea, however, that his wife was suffering ill-effects from her terrible ordeal, braced him up. He remained with her for a time, then he sought Sir Nathaniel in order to talk over the matter with him. He knew that the calm common sense and self-reliance of the old man, as well as his experience, would be helpful to them all.

Sir Nathaniel had come to the conclusion that, for some reason which he did not understand, Lady Arabella had changed her plans, and, for the present at all events, was pacific. He was inclined to attribute her changed demeanour to the fact that her influence over Edgar Caswall was so far increased, as to justify a more fixed belief in his submission to her charms.

As a matter of fact, she had seen Caswall that morning when she visited Castra Regis, and they had had a long talk together, during which the possibility of their union had been discussed. Caswall, without being enthusiastic on the subject, had been courteous and attentive; as she had walked back to Diana's Grove, she almost congratulated herself on her new settlement in life. That the idea was becoming fixed in her mind, was shown by a letter which she wrote later in the day to Adam Salton, and sent to him by hand. It ran as follows:

"DEAR MR. SALTON,

"I wonder if you would kindly advise, and, if possible, help me in a matter of business. I have been for some time trying to make up my mind to sell Diana's Grove, I have put off and put off the doing of it till now. The place is my own property, and no one has to be consulted with regard to what I may wish to do about it. It was bought by my late husband, Captain Adolphus Ranger March, who had another residence, The Crest, Appleby. He acquired all rights of all kinds, including mining and sporting. When he died, he left his whole property to me. I shall feel leaving this place, which has become endeared to me by many sacred memories and affections — the recollection of many happy days of my young married life, and the more than happy memories of the man I loved and who loved me so much. I should be willing to sell the place for any fair price — so long, of course, as the purchaser was one I liked and of whom I approved. May I say that you yourself would be the ideal person. But I dare not hope for so much. It strikes me, however, that among your Australian friends may be someone who wishes to make a settlement in the Old Country, and would care to fix the spot in one of the most historic regions in England, full of romance and legend, and with a never-ending vista of historical interest — an estate which, though small, is in perfect condition and with illimitable possibilities of development, and many doubtful — or unsettled — rights which have existed before the time of the Romans or even Celts, who were the original possessors. In addition, the house has been kept up to the *dernier cri*. Immediate possession can be arranged. My lawyers can provide you, or whoever you may suggest, with all business and historical details. A word from you of acceptance or refusal is all that is necessary, and we can leave details to be thrashed out by our agents. Forgive me, won't you, for troubling you in the matter, and believe me, yours very sincerely.

"ARABELLA MARCH."

Adam read this over several times, and then, his mind being made up, he went to Mimi and asked if she had any objection. She answered — after a shudder — that she was, in this, as in all things, willing to do whatever he might wish.

"Dearest, I am willing that you should judge what is best for us. Be quite free to act as you see your duty, and as your inclination calls. We are in the hands of God, and He has hitherto guided us, and will do so to His own end."

From his wife's room Adam Salton went straight to the study in the tower, where he knew Sir Nathaniel would be at that hour. The old man was alone, so, when he had entered in obedience to the "Come in," which answered his query, he closed the door and sat down beside him.

"Do you think, sir, that it would be well for me to buy Diana's Grove?"

"God bless my soul!" said the old man, startled, "why on earth would you want to do that?”

“Well, I have vowed to destroy that White Worm, and my being able to do whatever I may choose with the Lair would facilitate matters and avoid complications.”

Sir Nathaniel hesitated longer than usual before speaking. He was thinking deeply.

“Yes, Adam, there is much common sense in your suggestion, though it startled me at first. I think that, for all reasons, you would do well to buy the property and to have the conveyance settled at once. If you want more money than is immediately convenient, let me know, so that I may be your banker.”

“Thank you, sir, most heartily; but I have more money at immediate call than I shall want. I am glad you approve.”

“The property is historic, and as time goes on it will increase in value. Moreover, I may tell you something, which indeed is only a surmise, but which, if I am right, will add great value to the place.” Adam listened. “Has it ever struck you why the old name, ‘The Lair of the White Worm,’ was given? We know that there was a snake which in early days was called a worm; but why white?”

“I really don’t know, sir; I never thought of it. I simply took it for granted.”

“So did I at first — long ago. But later I puzzled my brain for a reason.”

“And what was the reason, sir?”

“Simply and solely because the snake or worm *was* white. We are near the county of Stafford, where the great industry of china-burning was originated and grew. Stafford owes much of its wealth to the large deposits of the rare china clay found in it from time to time. These deposits become in time pretty well exhausted; but for centuries Stafford adventurers looked for the special clay, as Ohio and Pennsylvania farmers and explorers looked for oil. Anyone owning real estate on which china clay can be discovered strikes a sort of gold mine."

"Yes, and then—" The young man looked puzzled.

"The original 'Worm' so-called, from which the name of the place came, had to find a direct way down to the marshes and the mud-holes. Now, the clay is easily penetrable, and the original hole probably pierced a bed of china clay. When once the way was made it would become a sort of highway for the Worm. But as much movement was necessary to ascend such a great height, some of the clay would become attached to its rough skin by attrition. The downway must have been easy work, but the ascent was different, and when the monster came to view in the upper world, it would be fresh from contact with the white clay. Hence the name, which has no cryptic significance, but only fact. Now, if that surmise be true — and I do not see why not — there must be a deposit of valuable clay — possibly of immense depth."

Adam's comment pleased the old gentleman.

"I have it in my bones, sir, that you have struck — or rather reasoned out — a great truth."

Sir Nathaniel went on cheerfully. "When the world of commerce wakes up to the value of your find, it will be as well that your title to ownership has been perfectly secured. If anyone ever deserved such a gain, it is you."

With his friend's aid, Adam secured the property without loss of time. Then he went to see his uncle, and told him about it. Mr. Salton was delighted to find his young relative already constructively the owner of so fine an estate — one which gave him an important status in the county. He made many anxious enquiries about Mimi, and the doings of the White Worm, but Adam reassured him.

The next morning, when Adam went to his host in the smoking-room, Sir Nathaniel asked him how he purposed to proceed with regard to keeping his vow.

"It is a difficult matter which you have undertaken. To destroy such a monster is something like one of the labours of Hercules, in that not only its size and weight and power of using them in little-known ways are against you, but the occult side is alone an unsurpassable difficulty. The Worm is already master of all the elements except fire — and I do not see how fire can be used for the attack. It has only to sink into the earth in its usual way, and you could not overtake it if you had the resources of the biggest coal-mine in existence. But I daresay you have mapped out some plan in your mind," he added courteously.

"I have, sir. But, of course, it may not stand the test of practice."

"May I know the idea?"

"Well, sir, this was my argument: At the time of the Chartist trouble, an idea spread amongst financial circles that an attack was going to be made on the Bank of England. Accordingly, the directors of that institution consulted many persons who were supposed to know what steps should be taken, and it was finally decided that the best protection against fire — which is what was feared — was not water but sand. To carry the scheme into practice great store of fine sea-sand — the kind that blows about and is used to fill hour-glasses — was provided throughout the building, especially at the points liable to attack, from which it could be brought into use.

"I propose to provide at Diana's Grove, as soon as it comes into my possession, an enormous amount of such sand, and shall take an early occasion of pouring it into the well-hole, which it will in time choke. Thus Lady Arabella, in her guise of the White Worm, will find herself cut off from her refuge. The hole is a narrow one, and is some hundreds of feet deep. The weight of the sand this can contain would not in itself be sufficient to obstruct; but the friction of such a body working up against it would be tremendous."

"One moment. What use would the sand be for destruction?"

"None, directly; but it would hold the struggling body in place till the rest of my scheme came into practice."

"And what is the rest?"

"As the sand is being poured into the well-hole, quantities of dynamite can also be thrown in!"

"Good. But how would the dynamite explode — for, of course, that is what you intend. Would not some sort of wire or fuse he required for each parcel of dynamite?"

Adam smiled.

"Not in these days, sir. That was proved in New York. A thousand pounds of dynamite, in sealed canisters, was placed about some workings. At the last a charge of gunpowder was fired, and the concussion exploded the dynamite. It was most successful. Those who were non-experts in high explosives expected that every pane of glass in New York would be shattered. But, in reality, the explosive did no harm outside the area intended, although sixteen acres of rock had been mined and only the supporting walls and pillars had been left intact. The whole of the rocks were shattered."

Sir Nathaniel nodded approval.

"That seems a good plan — a very excellent one. But if it has to tear down so many feet of precipice, it may wreck the whole neighbourhood."

"And free it for ever from a monster," added Adam, as he left the room to find his wife.

CHAPTER XXV — THE LAST BATTLE

Lady Arabella had instructed her solicitors to hurry on with the conveyance of Diana's Grove, so no time was lost in letting Adam Salton have formal possession of the estate. After his interview with Sir Nathaniel, he had taken steps to begin putting his plan into action. In order to accumulate the necessary amount of fine sea-sand, he ordered the steward to prepare for an elaborate system of top-dressing all the grounds. A great heap of the sand, brought from bays on the Welsh coast, began to grow at the back of the Grove. No one seemed to suspect that it was there for any purpose other than what had been given out.

Lady Arabella, who alone could have guessed, was now so absorbed in her matrimonial pursuit of Edgar Caswall, that she had neither time nor inclination for thought extraneous to this. She had not yet moved from the house, though she had formally handed over the estate.

Adam put up a rough corrugated-iron shed behind the Grove, in which he stored his explosives. All being ready for his great attempt whenever the time should come, he was now content to wait, and, in order to pass the time, interested himself in other things — even in Caswall's great kite, which still flew from the high tower of Castra Regis.

The mound of fine sand grew to proportions so vast as to puzzle the bailiffs and farmers round the Brow. The hour of the intended cataclysm was approaching apace. Adam wished — but in vain — for an opportunity, which would appear to be natural, of visiting Caswall in the turret of Castra Regis. At last, one morning, he met Lady Arabella moving towards the Castle, so he took his courage *à* *deux mains* and asked to be allowed to accompany her. She was glad, for her own purposes, to comply with his wishes. So together they entered, and found their way to the turret-room. Caswall was much surprised to see Adam come to his house, but lent himself to the task of seeming to be pleased. He played the host so well as to deceive even Adam. They all went out on the turret roof, where he explained to his guests the mechanism for raising and lowering the kite, taking also the opportunity of testing the movements of the multitudes of birds, how they answered almost instantaneously to the lowering or raising of the kite.

As Lady Arabella walked home with Adam from Castra Regis, she asked him if she might make a request. Permission having been accorded, she explained that before she finally left Diana's Grove, where she had lived so long, she had a desire to know the depth of the well-hole. Adam was really happy to meet her wishes, not from any sentiment, but because he wished to give some valid and ostensible reason for examining the passage of the Worm, which would obviate any suspicion resulting from his being on the premises. He brought from London a Kelvin sounding apparatus, with a sufficient length of piano-wire for testing any probable depth. The wire passed easily over the running wheel, and when this was once fixed over the hole, he was satisfied to wait till the most advantageous time for his final experiment.

* * * * *

In the meantime, affairs had been going quietly at Mercy Farm. Lilla, of course, felt lonely in the absence of her cousin, but the even tenor of life went on for her as for others. After the first shock of parting was over, things went back to their accustomed routine. In one respect, however, there was a marked difference. So long as home conditions had remained unchanged, Lilla was content to put ambition far from her, and to settle down to the life which had been hers as long as she could remember. But Mimi's marriage set her thinking; naturally, she came to the conclusion that she too might have a mate. There was not for her much choice — there was little movement in the matrimonial direction at the farmhouse. She did not approve of the personality of Edgar Caswall, and his struggle with Mimi had frightened her; but he was unmistakably an excellent *parti*, much better than she could have any right to expect. This weighs much with a woman, and more particularly one of her class. So, on the whole, she was content to let things take their course, and to abide by the issue.

As time went on, she had reason to believe that things did not point to happiness. She could not shut her eyes to certain disturbing facts, amongst which were the existence of Lady Arabella and her growing intimacy with Edgar Caswall; as well as his own cold and haughty nature, so little in accord with the ardour which is the foundation of a young maid's dreams of happiness. How things would, of necessity, alter if she were to marry, she was afraid to think. All told, the prospect was not happy for her, and she had a secret longing that something might occur to upset the order of things as at present arranged.

When Lilla received a note from Edgar Caswall asking if he might come to tea on the following afternoon, her heart sank within her. If it was only for her father's sake, she must not refuse him or show any disinclination which he might construe into incivility. She missed Mimi more than she could say or even dared to think. Hitherto, she had always looked to her cousin for sympathy, for understanding, for loyal support. Now she and all these things, and a thousand others — gentle, assuring, supporting — were gone. And instead there was a horrible aching void.

For the whole afternoon and evening, and for the following forenoon, poor Lilla's loneliness grew to be a positive agony. For the first time she began to realise the sense of her loss, as though all the previous suffering had been merely a preparation. Everything she looked at, everything she remembered or thought of, became laden with poignant memory. Then on the top of all was a new sense of dread. The reaction from the sense of security, which had surrounded her all her life, to a never-quieted apprehension, was at times almost more than she could bear. It so filled her with fear that she had a haunting feeling that she would as soon die as live. However, whatever might be her own feelings, duty had to be done, and as she had been brought up to consider duty first, she braced herself to go through, to the very best of her ability, what was before her.

Still, the severe and prolonged struggle for self-control told upon Lilla. She looked, as she felt, ill and weak. She was really in a nerveless and prostrate condition, with black circles round her eyes, pale even to her lips, and with an instinctive trembling which she was quite unable to repress. It was for her a sad mischance that Mimi was away, for her love would have seen through all obscuring causes, and have brought to light the girl's unhappy condition of health. Lilla was utterly unable to do anything to escape from the ordeal before her; but her cousin, with the experience of her former struggles with Mr. Caswall and of the condition in which these left her, would have taken steps — even peremptory ones, if necessary — to prevent a repetition.

Edgar arrived punctually to the time appointed by herself. When Lilla, through the great window, saw him approaching the house, her condition of nervous upset was pitiable. She braced herself up, however, and managed to get through the interview in its preliminary stages without any perceptible change in her normal appearance and bearing. It had been to her an added terror that the black shadow of Oolanga, whom she dreaded, would follow hard on his master. A load was lifted from her mind when he did not make his usual stealthy approach. She had also feared, though in lesser degree, lest Lady Arabella should be present to make trouble for her as before.

With a woman's natural forethought in a difficult position, she had provided the furnishing of the tea-table as a subtle indication of the social difference between her and her guest. She had chosen the implements of service, as well as all the provender set forth, of the humblest kind. Instead of arranging the silver teapot and china cups, she had set out an earthen teapot, such as was in common use in the farm kitchen. The same idea was carried out in the cups and saucers of thick homely delft, and in the cream-jug of similar kind. The bread was of simple whole-meal, home-baked. The butter was good, since she had made it herself, while the preserves and honey came from her own garden. Her face beamed with satisfaction when the guest eyed the appointments with a supercilious glance. It was a shock to the poor girl herself, for she enjoyed offering to a guest the little hospitalities possible to her; but that had to be sacrificed with other pleasures.

Caswall's face was more set and iron-clad than ever — his piercing eyes seemed from the very beginning to look her through and through. Her heart quailed when she thought of what would follow — of what would be the end, when this was only the beginning. As some protection, though it could be only of a sentimental kind, she brought from her own room the photographs of Mimi, of her grandfather, and of Adam Salton, whom by now she had grown to look on with reliance, as a brother whom she could trust. She kept the pictures near her heart, to which her hand naturally strayed when her feelings of constraint, distrust, or fear became so poignant as to interfere with the calm which she felt was necessary to help her through her ordeal.

At first Edgar Caswall was courteous and polite, even thoughtful; but after a little while, when he found her resistance to his domination grow, he abandoned all forms of self-control and appeared in the same dominance as he had previously shown. She was prepared, however, for this, both by her former experience and the natural fighting instinct within her. By this means, as the minutes went on, both developed the power and preserved the equality in which they had begun.

Without warning, the psychic battle between the two individualities began afresh. This time both the positive and negative causes were all in favour of the man. The woman was alone and in bad spirits, unsupported; nothing at all was in her favour except the memory of the two victorious contests; whereas the man, though unaided, as before, by either Lady Arabella or Oolanga, was in full strength, well rested, and in flourishing circumstances. It was not, therefore, to be wondered at that his native dominance of character had full opportunity of asserting itself. He began his preliminary stare with a conscious sense of power, and, as it appeared to have immediate effect on the girl, he felt an ever-growing conviction of ultimate victory.

After a little Lilla's resolution began to flag. She felt that the contest was unequal — that she was unable to put forth her best efforts. As she was an unselfish person, she could not fight so well in her own battle as in that of someone whom she loved and to whom she was devoted. Edgar saw the relaxing of the muscles of face and brow, and the almost collapse of the heavy eyelids which seemed tumbling downward in sleep. Lilla made gallant efforts to brace her dwindling powers, but for a time unsuccessfully. At length there came an interruption, which seemed like a powerful stimulant. Through the wide window she saw Lady Arabella enter the plain gateway of the farm, and advance towards the hall door. She was clad as usual in tight-fitting white, which accentuated her thin, sinuous figure.

The sight did for Lilla what no voluntary effort could have done. Her eyes flashed, and in an instant she felt as though a new life had suddenly developed within her. Lady Arabella's entry, in her usual unconcerned, haughty, supercilious way, heightened the effect, so that when the two stood close to each other battle was joined. Mr. Caswall, too, took new courage from her coming, and all his masterfulness and power came back to him. His looks, intensified, had more obvious effect than had been noticeable that day. Lilla seemed at last overcome by his dominance. Her face became red and pale — violently red and ghastly pale — by rapid turns. Her strength seemed gone. Her knees collapsed, and she was actually sinking on the floor, when to her surprise and joy Mimi came into the room, running hurriedly and breathing heavily.

Lilla rushed to her, and the two clasped hands. With that, a new sense of power, greater than Lilla had ever seen in her, seemed to quicken her cousin. Her hand swept the air in front of Edgar Caswall, seeming to drive him backward more and more by each movement, till at last he seemed to be actually hurled through the door which Mimi’s entrance had left open, and fell at full length on the gravel path without.

Then came the final and complete collapse of Lilla, who, without a sound, sank down on the floor.

CHAPTER XXVI — FACE TO FACE

Mimi was greatly distressed when she saw her cousin lying prone. She had a few times in her life seen Lilla on the verge of fainting, but never senseless; and now she was frightened. She threw herself on her knees beside Lilla, and tried, by rubbing her hands and other measures commonly known, to restore her. But all her efforts were unavailing. Lilla still lay white and senseless. In fact, each moment she looked worse; her breast, that had been heaving with the stress, became still, and the pallor of her face grew like marble.

At these succeeding changes Mimi's fright grew, till it altogether mastered her. She succeeded in controlling herself only to the extent that she did not scream.

Lady Arabella had followed Caswall, when he had recovered sufficiently to get up and walk — though stumblingly — in the direction of Castra Regis. When Mimi was quite alone with Lilla and the need for effort had ceased, she felt weak and trembled. In her own mind, she attributed it to a sudden change in the weather — it was momentarily becoming apparent that a storm was coming on.

She raised Lilla's head and laid it on her warm young breast, but all in vain. The cold of the white features thrilled through her, and she utterly collapsed when it was borne in on her that Lilla had passed away.

The dusk gradually deepened and the shades of evening closed in, but Mimi did not seem to notice or to care. She sat on the floor with her arms round the body of the girl whom she loved. Darker and blacker grew the sky as the coming storm and the closing night joined forces. Still she sat on — alone — tearless — unable to think. Mimi did not know how long she sat there. Though it seemed to her that ages had passed, it could not have been more than half-an-hour. She suddenly came to herself, and was surprised to find that her grandfather had not returned. For a while she lay quiet, thinking of the immediate past. Lilla's hand was still in hers, and to her surprise it was still warm. Somehow this helped her consciousness, and without any special act of will she stood up. She lit a lamp and looked at her cousin. There was no doubt that Lilla was dead; but when the lamp-light fell on her eyes, they seemed to look at Mimi with intent — with meaning. In this state of dark isolation a new resolution came to her, and grew and grew until it became a fixed definite purpose. She would face Caswall and call him to account for his murder of Lilla — that was what she called it to herself. She would also take steps — she knew not what or how — to avenge the part taken by Lady Arabella.

In this frame of mind she lit all the lamps in the room, got water and linen from her room, and set about the decent ordering of Lilla's body. This took some time; but when it was finished, she put on her hat and cloak, put out the lights, and set out quietly for Castra Regis.

As Mimi drew near the Castle, she saw no lights except those in and around the tower room. The lights showed her that Mr. Caswall was there, so she entered by the hall door, which as usual was open, and felt her way in the darkness up the staircase to the lobby of the room. The door was ajar, and the light from within showed brilliantly through the opening. She saw Edgar Caswall walking restlessly to and fro in the room, with his hands clasped behind his back. She opened the door without knocking, and walked right into the room. As she entered, he ceased walking, and stared at her in surprise. She made no remark, no comment, but continued the fixed look which he had seen on her entrance.

For a time silence reigned, and the two stood looking fixedly at each other. Mimi was the first to speak.

"You murderer! Lilla is dead!"

"Dead! Good God! When did she die?"

"She died this afternoon, just after you left her."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes — and so are you — or you ought to be. You killed her!"

"I killed her! Be careful what you say!"

"As God sees us, it is true; and you know it. You came to Mercy Farm on purpose to break her — if you could. And the accomplice of your guilt, Lady Arabella March, came for the same purpose."

"Be careful, woman," he said hotly. "Do not use such names in that way, or you shall suffer for it."

"I am suffering for it — have suffered for it — shall suffer for it. Not for speaking the truth as I have done, but because you two, with devilish malignity, did my darling to death. It is you and your accomplice who have to dread punishment, not I."

"Take care!" he said again.

"Oh, I am not afraid of you or your accomplice," she answered spiritedly. "I am content to stand by every word I have said, every act I have done. Moreover, I believe in God's justice. I fear not the grinding of His mills; if necessary I shall set the wheels in motion myself. But you don't care for God, or believe in Him. Your god is your great kite, which cows the birds of a whole district. But be sure that His hand, when it rises, always falls at the appointed time. It may be that your name is being called even at this very moment at the Great Assize. Repent while there is still time. Happy you, if you may be allowed to enter those mighty halls in the company of the pure-souled angel whose voice has only to whisper one word of justice, and you disappear for ever into everlasting torment."

The sudden death of Lilla caused consternation among Mimi's friends and well-wishers. Such a tragedy was totally unexpected, as Adam and Sir Nathaniel had been expecting the White Worm's vengeance to fall upon themselves.

Adam, leaving his wife free to follow her own desires with regard to Lilla and her grandfather, busied himself with filling the well-hole with the fine sand prepared for the purpose, taking care to have lowered at stated intervals quantities of the store of dynamite, so as to be ready for the final explosion. He had under his immediate supervision a corps of workmen, and was assisted by Sir Nathaniel, who had come over for the purpose, and all were now staying at Lesser Hill.

Mr. Salton, too, showed much interest in the job, and was constantly coming in and out, nothing escaping his observation.

Since her marriage to Adam and their coming to stay at Doom Tower, Mimi had been fettered by fear of the horrible monster at Diana's Grove. But now she dreaded it no longer. She accepted the fact of its assuming at will the form of Lady Arabella. She had still to tax and upbraid her for her part in the unhappiness which had been wrought on Lilla, and for her share in causing her death.

One evening, when Mimi entered her own room, she went to the window and threw an eager look round the whole circle of sight. A single glance satisfied her that the White Worm in *propriâ personâ* was not visible. So she sat down in the window-seat and enjoyed the pleasure of a full view, from which she had been so long cut off. The maid who waited on her had told her that Mr. Salton had not yet returned home, so she felt free to enjoy the luxury of peace and quiet.

As she looked out of the window, she saw something thin and white move along the avenue. She thought she recognised the figure of Lady Arabella, and instinctively drew back behind the curtain. When she had ascertained, by peeping out several times, that the lady had not seen her, she watched more carefully, all her instinctive hatred flooding back at the sight of her. Lady Arabella was moving swiftly and stealthily, looking back and around her at intervals, as if she feared to be followed. This gave Mimi an idea that she was up to no good, so she determined to seize the occasion for watching her in more detail.

Hastily putting on a dark cloak and hat, she ran downstairs and out into the avenue. Lady Arabella had moved, but the sheen of her white dress was still to be seen among the young oaks around the gateway. Keeping in shadow, Mimi followed, taking care not to come so close as to awake the other's suspicion, and watched her quarry pass along the road in the direction of Castra Regis.

She followed on steadily through the gloom of the trees, depending on the glint of the white dress to keep her right. The wood began to thicken, and presently, when the road widened and the trees grew farther back, she lost sight of any indication of her whereabouts. Under the present conditions it was impossible for her to do any more, so, after waiting for a while, still hidden in the shadow to see if she could catch another glimpse of the white frock, she determined to go on slowly towards Castra Regis, and trust to the chapter of accidents to pick up the trail again. She went on slowly, taking advantage of every obstacle and shadow to keep herself concealed.

At last she entered on the grounds of the Castle, at a spot from which the windows of the turret were dimly visible, without having seen again any sign of Lady Arabella.

Meanwhile, during most of the time that Mimi Salton had been moving warily along in the gloom, she was in reality being followed by Lady Arabella, who had caught sight of her leaving the house and had never again lost touch with her. It was a case of the hunter being hunted. For a time Mimi's many turnings, with the natural obstacles that were perpetually intervening, caused Lady Arabella some trouble; but when she was close to Castra Regis, there was no more possibility of concealment, and the strange double following went swiftly on.

When she saw Mimi close to the hall door of Castra Regis and ascending the steps, she followed. When Mimi entered the dark hall and felt her way up the staircase, still, as she believed, following Lady Arabella, the latter kept on her way. When they reached the lobby of the turret-rooms, Mimi believed that the object of her search was ahead of her.

Edgar Caswall sat in the gloom of the great room, occasionally stirred to curiosity when the drifting clouds allowed a little light to fall from the storm-swept sky. But nothing really interested him now. Since he had heard of Lilla's death, the gloom of his remorse, emphasised by Mimi's upbraiding, had made more hopeless his cruel, selfish, saturnine nature. He heard no sound, for his normal faculties seemed benumbed.

Mimi, when she came to the door, which stood ajar, gave a light tap. So light was it that it did not reach Caswall's ears. Then, taking her courage in both hands, she boldly pushed the door and entered. As she did so, her heart sank, for now she was face to face with a difficulty which had not, in her state of mental perturbation, occurred to her.

CHAPTER XXVII — ON THE TURRET ROOF

The storm which was coming was already making itself manifest, not only in the wide scope of nature, but in the hearts and natures of human beings. Electrical disturbance in the sky and the air is reproduced in animals of all kinds, and particularly in the highest type of them all — the most receptive — the most electrical. So it was with Edgar Caswall, despite his selfish nature and coldness of blood. So it was with Mimi Salton, despite her unselfish, unchanging devotion for those she loved. So it was even with Lady Arabella, who, under the instincts of a primeval serpent, carried the ever-varying wishes and customs of womanhood, which is always old — and always new.

Edgar, after he had turned his eyes on Mimi, resumed his apathetic position and sullen silence. Mimi quietly took a seat a little way apart, whence she could look on the progress of the coming storm and study its appearance throughout the whole visible circle of the neighbourhood. She was in brighter and better spirits than she had been for many days past. Lady Arabella tried to efface herself behind the now open door.

Without, the clouds grew thicker and blacker as the storm-centre came closer. As yet the forces, from whose linking the lightning springs, were held apart, and the silence of nature proclaimed the calm before the storm. Caswall felt the effect of the gathering electric force. A sort of wild exultation grew upon him, such as he had sometimes felt just before the breaking of a tropical storm. As he became conscious of this, he raised his head and caught sight of Mimi. He was in the grip of an emotion greater than himself; in the mood in which he was he felt the need upon him of doing some desperate deed. He was now absolutely reckless, and as Mimi was associated with him in the memory which drove him on, he wished that she too should be engaged in this enterprise. He had no knowledge of the proximity of Lady Arabella, and thought that he was far removed from all he knew and whose interests he shared — alone with the wild elements, which were being lashed to fury, and with the woman who had struggled with him and vanquished him, and on whom he would shower the full measure of his hate.

The fact was that Edgar Caswall was, if not mad, close to the border-line. Madness in its first stage — monomania — is a lack of proportion. So long as this is general, it is not always noticeable, for the uninspired onlooker is without the necessary means of comparison. But in monomania the errant faculty protrudes itself in a way that may not be denied. It puts aside, obscures, or takes the place of something else — just as the head of a pin placed before the centre of the iris will block out the whole scope of vision. The most usual form of monomania has commonly the same beginning as that from which Edgar Caswall suffered — an over-large idea of self-importance. Alienists, who study the matter exactly, probably know more of human vanity and its effects than do ordinary men. Caswall's mental disturbance was not hard to identify. Every asylum is full of such cases — men and women, who, naturally selfish and egotistical, so appraise to themselves their own importance that every other circumstance in life becomes subservient to it. The disease supplies in itself the material for self-magnification. When the decadence attacks a nature naturally proud and selfish and vain, and lacking both the aptitude and habit of self-restraint, the development of the disease is more swift, and ranges to farther limits. It is such persons who become imbued with the idea that they have the attributes of the Almighty — even that they themselves are the Almighty.

Mimi had a suspicion — or rather, perhaps, an intuition — of the true state of things when she heard him speak, and at the same time noticed the abnormal flush on his face, and his rolling eyes. There was a certain want of fixedness of purpose which she had certainly not noticed before — a quick, spasmodic utterance which belongs rather to the insane than to those of intellectual equilibrium. She was a little frightened, not only by his thoughts, but by his staccato way of expressing them.

Caswall moved to the door leading to the turret stair by which the roof was reached, and spoke in a peremptory way, whose tone alone made her feel defiant.

"Come! I want you."

She instinctively drew back — she was not accustomed to such words, more especially to such a tone. Her answer was indicative of a new contest.

"Why should I go? What for?"

He did not at once reply — another indication of his overwhelming egotism. She repeated her questions; habit reasserted itself, and he spoke without thinking the words which were in his heart.

"I want you, if you will be so good, to come with me to the turret roof. I am much interested in certain experiments with the kite, which would be, if not a pleasure, at least a novel experience to you. You would see something not easily seen otherwise."

"I will come," she answered simply; Edgar moved in the direction of the stair, she following close behind him.

She did not like to be left alone at such a height, in such a place, in the darkness, with a storm about to break. Of himself she had no fear; all that had been seemed to have passed away with her two victories over him in the struggle of wills. Moreover, the more recent apprehension — that of his madness — had also ceased. In the conversation of the last few minutes he seemed so rational, so clear, so unaggressive, that she no longer saw reason for doubt. So satisfied was she that even when he put out a hand to guide her to the steep, narrow stairway, she took it without thought in the most conventional way.

Lady Arabella, crouching in the lobby behind the door, heard every word that had been said, and formed her own opinion of it. It seemed evident to her that there had been some rapprochement between the two who had so lately been hostile to each other, and that made her furiously angry. Mimi was interfering with her plans! She had made certain of her capture of Edgar Caswall, and she could not tolerate even the lightest and most contemptuous fancy on his part which might divert him from the main issue. When she became aware that he wished Mimi to come with him to the roof and that she had acquiesced, her rage got beyond bounds. She became oblivious to any danger there might be in a visit to such an exposed place at such a time, and to all lesser considerations, and made up her mind to forestall them. She stealthily and noiselessly crept through the wicket, and, ascending the stair, stepped out on the roof. It was bitterly cold, for the fierce gusts of the storm which swept round the turret drove in through every unimpeded way, whistling at the sharp corners and singing round the trembling flagstaff. The kite-string and the wire which controlled the runners made a concourse of weird sounds which somehow, perhaps from the violence which surrounded them, acting on their length, resolved themselves into some kind of harmony — a fitting accompaniment to the tragedy which seemed about to begin.

Mimi's heart beat heavily. Just before leaving the turret-chamber she had a shock which she could not shake off. The lights of the room had momentarily revealed to her, as they passed out, Edgar's face, concentrated as it was whenever he intended to use his mesmeric power. Now the black eyebrows made a thick line across his face, under which his eyes shone and glittered ominously. Mimi recognised the danger, and assumed the defiant attitude that had twice already served her so well. She had a fear that the circumstances and the place were against her, and she wanted to be forearmed.

The sky was now somewhat lighter than it had been. Either there was lightning afar off, whose reflections were carried by the rolling clouds, or else the gathered force, though not yet breaking into lightning, had an incipient power of light. It seemed to affect both the man and the woman. Edgar seemed altogether under its influence. His spirits were boisterous, his mind exalted. He was now at his worst; madder than he had been earlier in the night.

Mimi, trying to keep as far from him as possible, moved across the stone floor of the turret roof, and found a niche which concealed her. It was not far from Lady Arabella's place of hiding.

Edgar, left thus alone on the centre of the turret roof, found himself altogether his own master in a way which tended to increase his madness. He knew that Mimi was close at hand, though he had lost sight of her. He spoke loudly, and the sound of his own voice, though it was carried from him on the sweeping wind as fast as the words were spoken, seemed to exalt him still more. Even the raging of the elements round him appeared to add to his exaltation. To him it seemed that these manifestations were obedient to his own will. He had reached the sublime of his madness; he was now in his own mind actually the Almighty, and whatever might happen would be the direct carrying out of his own commands. As he could not see Mimi, nor fix whereabout she was, he shouted loudly:

"Come to me! You shall see now what you are despising, what you are warring against. All that you see is mine — the darkness as well as the light. I tell you that I am greater than any other who is, or was, or shall be. When the Master of Evil took Christ up on a high place and showed Him all the kingdoms of the earth, he was doing what he thought no other could do. He was wrong — he forgot *Me*. I shall send you light, up to the very ramparts of heaven. A light so great that it shall dissipate those black clouds that are rushing up and piling around us. Look! Look! At the very touch of my hand that light springs into being and mounts up — and up — and up!"

He made his way whilst he was speaking to the corner of the turret whence flew the giant kite, and from which the runners ascended. Mimi looked on, appalled and afraid to speak lest she should precipitate some calamity. Within the niche Lady Arabella cowered in a paroxysm of fear.

Edgar took up a small wooden box, through a hole in which the wire of the runner ran. This evidently set some machinery in motion, for a sound as of whirring came. From one side of the box floated what looked like a piece of stiff ribbon, which snapped and crackled as the wind took it. For a few seconds Mimi saw it as it rushed along the sagging line to the kite. When close to it, there was a loud crack, and a sudden light appeared to issue from every chink in the box. Then a quick flame flashed along the snapping ribbon, which glowed with an intense light — a light so great that the whole of the countryside around stood out against the background of black driving clouds. For a few seconds the light remained, then suddenly disappeared in the blackness around. It was simply a magnesium light, which had been fired by the mechanism within the box and carried up to the kite. Edgar was in a state of tumultuous excitement, shouting and yelling at the top of his voice and dancing about like a lunatic.

This was more than Lady Arabella's curious dual nature could stand — the ghoulish element in her rose triumphant, and she abandoned all idea of marriage with Edgar Caswall, gloating fiendishly over the thought of revenge.

She must lure him to the White Worm's hole — but how? She glanced around and quickly made up her mind. The man's whole thoughts were absorbed by his wonderful kite, which he was showing off, in order to fascinate her imaginary rival, Mimi.

On the instant she glided through the darkness to the wheel whereon the string of the kite was wound. With deft fingers she unshipped this, took it with her, reeling out the wire as she went, thus keeping, in a way, in touch with the kite. Then she glided swiftly to the wicket, through which she passed, locking the gate behind her as she went.

Down the turret stair she ran quickly, letting the wire run from the wheel which she carried carefully, and, passing out of the hall door, hurried down the avenue with all her speed. She soon reached her own gate, ran down the avenue, and with her key opened the iron door leading to the well-hole.

She felt well satisfied with herself. All her plans were maturing, or had already matured. The Master of Castra Regis was within her grasp. The woman whose interference she had feared, Lilla Watford, was dead. Truly, all was well, and she felt that she might pause a while and rest. She tore off her clothes, with feverish fingers, and in full enjoyment of her natural freedom, stretched her slim figure in animal delight. Then she lay down on the sofa — to await her victim! Edgar Caswall's life blood would more than satisfy her for some time to come.

CHAPTER XXVIII — THE BREAKING OF THE STORM

When Lady Arabella had crept away in her usual noiseless fashion, the two others remained for a while in their places on the turret roof: Caswall because he had nothing to say, Mimi because she had much to say and wished to put her thoughts in order. For quite a while — which seemed interminable — silence reigned between them. At last Mimi made a beginning — she had made up her mind how to act.

"Mr. Caswall," she said loudly, so as to make sure of being heard through the blustering of the wind and the perpetual cracking of the electricity.

Caswall said something in reply, but his words were carried away on the storm. However, one of her objects was effected: she knew now exactly whereabout on the roof he was. So she moved close to the spot before she spoke again, raising her voice almost to a shout.

"The wicket is shut. Please to open it. I can't get out."

As she spoke, she was quietly fingering a revolver which Adam had given to her in case of emergency and which now lay in her breast. She felt that she was caged like a rat in a trap, but did not mean to be taken at a disadvantage, whatever happened. Caswall also felt trapped, and all the brute in him rose to the emergency. In a voice which was raucous and brutal — much like that which is heard when a wife is being beaten by her husband in a slum — he hissed out, his syllables cutting through the roaring of the storm:

"You came of your own accord — without permission, or even asking it. Now you can stay or go as you choose. But you must manage it for yourself; I'll have nothing to do with it."

Her answer was spoken with dangerous suavity

"I am going. Blame yourself if you do not like the time and manner of it. I daresay Adam — my husband — will have a word to say to you about it!"

"Let him say, and be damned to him, and to you too! I'll show you a light. You shan't be able to say that you could not see what you were doing."

As he spoke, he was lighting another piece of the magnesium ribbon, which made a blinding glare in which everything was plainly discernible, down to the smallest detail. This exactly suited Mimi. She took accurate note of the wicket and its fastening before the glare had died away. She took her revolver out and fired into the lock, which was shivered on the instant, the pieces flying round in all directions, but happily without causing hurt to anyone. Then she pushed the wicket open and ran down the narrow stair, and so to the hall door. Opening this also, she ran down the avenue, never lessening her speed till she stood outside the door of Lesser Hill. The door was opened at once on her ringing.

"Is Mr. Adam Salton in?" she asked.

"He has just come in, a few minutes ago. He has gone up to the study," replied a servant.

She ran upstairs at once and joined him. He seemed relieved when he saw her, but scrutinised her face keenly. He saw that she had been in some concern, so led her over to the sofa in the window and sat down beside her.

"Now, dear, tell me all about it!" he said.

She rushed breathlessly through all the details of her adventure on the turret roof. Adam listened attentively, helping her all he could, and not embarrassing her by any questioning. His thoughtful silence was a great help to her, for it allowed her to collect and organise her thoughts.

"I must go and see Caswall to-morrow, to hear what he has to say on the subject."

"But, dear, for my sake, don't have any quarrel with Mr. Caswall. I have had too much trial and pain lately to wish it increased by any anxiety regarding you."

"You shall not, dear — if I can help it — please God," he said solemnly, and he kissed her.

Then, in order to keep her interested so that she might forget the fears and anxieties that had disturbed her, he began to talk over the details of her adventure, making shrewd comments which attracted and held her attention. Presently, *inter alia*, he said:

"That's a dangerous game Caswall is up to. It seems to me that that young man — though he doesn't appear to know it — is riding for a fall!"

"How, dear? I don't understand."

"Kite flying on a night like this from a place like the tower of Castra Regis is, to say the least of it, dangerous. It is not merely courting death or other accident from lightning, but it is bringing the lightning into where he lives. Every cloud that is blowing up here — and they all make for the highest point — is bound to develop into a flash of lightning. That kite is up in the air and is bound to attract the lightning. Its cord makes a road for it on which to travel to earth. When it does come, it will strike the top of the tower with a weight a hundred times greater than a whole park of artillery, and will knock Castra Regis into pieces. Where it will go after that, no one can tell. If there should be any metal by which it can travel, such will not only point the road, but be the road itself."

"Would it be dangerous to be out in the open air when such a thing is taking place?" she asked.

"No, little woman. It would be the safest possible place — so long as one was not in the line of the electric current."

"Then, do let us go outside. I don't want to run into any foolish danger — or, far more, to ask you to do so. But surely if the open is safest, that is the place for us."

Without another word, she put on again the cloak she had thrown off, and a small, tight-fitting cap. Adam too put on his cap, and, after seeing that his revolver was all right, gave her his hand, and they left the house together.

"I think the best thing we can do will be to go round all the places which are mixed up in this affair."

"All right, dear, I am ready. But, if you don't mind, we might go first to Mercy. I am anxious about grandfather, and we might see that — as yet, at all events — nothing has happened there."

So they went on the high-hung road along the top of the Brow. The wind here was of great force, and made a strange booming noise as it swept high overhead; though not the sound of cracking and tearing as it passed through the woods of high slender trees which grew on either side of the road. Mimi could hardly keep her feet. She was not afraid; but the force to which she was opposed gave her a good excuse to hold on to her husband extra tight.

At Mercy there was no one up — at least, all the lights were out. But to Mimi, accustomed to the nightly routine of the house, there were manifest signs that all was well, except in the little room on the first floor, where the blinds were down. Mimi could not bear to look at that, to think of it. Adam understood her pain, for he had been keenly interested in poor Lilla. He bent over and kissed her, and then took her hand and held it hard. Thus they passed on together, returning to the high road towards Castra Regis.

At the gate of Castra Regis they were extra careful. When drawing near, Adam stumbled upon the wire that Lady Arabella had left trailing on the ground.

Adam drew his breath at this, and spoke in a low, earnest whisper:

"I don't want to frighten you, Mimi dear, but wherever that wire is there is danger."

"Danger! How?"

"That is the track where the lightning will go; at any moment, even now whilst we are speaking and searching, a fearful force may be loosed upon us. Run on, dear; you know the way to where the avenue joins the highroad. If you see any sign of the wire, keep away from it, for God's sake. I shall join you at the gateway."

"Are you going to follow that wire alone?"

"Yes, dear. One is sufficient for that work. I shall not lose a moment till I am with you."

"Adam, when I came with you into the open, my main wish was that we should be together if anything serious happened. You wouldn't deny me that right, would you, dear?"

"No, dear, not that or any right. Thank God that my wife has such a wish. Come; we will go together. We are in the hands of God. If He wishes, we shall be together at the end, whenever or wherever that may be."

They picked up the trail of the wire on the steps and followed it down the avenue, taking care not to touch it with their feet. It was easy enough to follow, for the wire, if not bright, was self-coloured, and showed clearly. They followed it out of the gateway and into the avenue of Diana's Grove.

Here a new gravity clouded Adam's face, though Mimi saw no cause for fresh concern. This was easily enough explained. Adam knew of the explosive works in progress regarding the well-hole, but the matter had been kept from his wife. As they stood near the house, Adam asked Mimi to return to the road, ostensibly to watch the course of the wire, telling her that there might be a branch wire leading somewhere else. She was to search the undergrowth, and if she found it, was to warn him by the Australian native "Coo-ee!"

Whilst they were standing together, there came a blinding flash of lightning, which lit up for several seconds the whole area of earth and sky. It was only the first note of the celestial prelude, for it was followed in quick succession by numerous flashes, whilst the crash and roll of thunder seemed continuous.

Adam, appalled, drew his wife to him and held her close. As far as he could estimate by the interval between lightning and thunder-clap, the heart of the storm was still some distance off, so he felt no present concern for their safety. Still, it was apparent that the course of the storm was moving swiftly in their direction. The lightning flashes came faster and faster and closer together; the thunder-roll was almost continuous, not stopping for a moment — a new crash beginning before the old one had ceased. Adam kept looking up in the direction where the kite strained and struggled at its detaining cord, but, of course, the dull evening light prevented any distinct scrutiny.

At length there came a flash so appallingly bright that in its glare Nature seemed to be standing still. So long did it last, that there was time to distinguish its configuration. It seemed like a mighty tree inverted, pendent from the sky. The whole country around within the angle of vision was lit up till it seemed to glow. Then a broad ribbon of fire seemed to drop on to the tower of Castra Regis just as the thunder crashed. By the glare, Adam could see the tower shake and tremble, and finally fall to pieces like a house of cards. The passing of the lightning left the sky again dark, but a blue flame fell downward from the tower, and, with inconceivable rapidity, running along the ground in the direction of Diana's Grove, reached the dark silent house, which in the instant burst into flame at a hundred different points.

At the same moment there rose from the house a rending, crashing sound of woodwork, broken or thrown about, mixed with a quick scream so appalling that Adam, stout of heart as he undoubtedly was, felt his blood turn into ice. Instinctively, despite the danger and their consciousness of it, husband and wife took hands and listened, trembling. Something was going on close to them, mysterious, terrible, deadly! The shrieks continued, though less sharp in sound, as though muffled. In the midst of them was a terrific explosion, seemingly from deep in the earth.

The flames from Castra Regis and from Diana's Grove made all around almost as light as day, and now that the lightning had ceased to flash, their eyes, unblinded, were able to judge both perspective and detail. The heat of the burning house caused the iron doors to warp and collapse. Seemingly of their own accord, they fell open, and exposed the interior. The Saltons could now look through to the room beyond, where the well-hole yawned, a deep narrow circular chasm. From this the agonised shrieks were rising, growing ever more terrible with each second that passed.

But it was not only the heart-rending sound that almost paralysed poor Mimi with terror. What she saw was sufficient to fill her with evil dreams for the remainder of her life. The whole place looked as if a sea of blood had been beating against it. Each of the explosions from below had thrown out from the well-hole, as if it had been the mouth of a cannon, a mass of fine sand mixed with blood, and a horrible repulsive slime in which were great red masses of rent and torn flesh and fat. As the explosions kept on, more and more of this repulsive mass was shot up, the great bulk of it falling back again. Many of the awful fragments were of something which had lately been alive. They quivered and trembled and writhed as though they were still in torment, a supposition to which the unending scream gave a horrible credence. At moments some mountainous mass of flesh surged up through the narrow orifice, as though forced by a measureless power through an opening infinitely smaller than itself. Some of these fragments were partially covered with white skin as of a human being, and others — the largest and most numerous — with scaled skin as of a gigantic lizard or serpent. Once, in a sort of lull or pause, the seething contents of the hole rose, after the manner of a bubbling spring, and Adam saw part of the thin form of Lady Arabella, forced up to the top amid a mass of blood and slime, and what looked as if it had been the entrails of a monster torn into shreds. Several times some masses of enormous bulk were forced up through the well-hole with inconceivable violence, and, suddenly expanding as they came into larger space, disclosed sections of the White Worm which Adam and Sir Nathaniel had seen looking over the trees with its enormous eyes of emerald-green flickering like great lamps in a gale.

At last the explosive power, which was not yet exhausted, evidently reached the main store of dynamite which had been lowered into the worm hole. The result was appalling. The ground for far around quivered and opened in long deep chasms, whose edges shook and fell in, throwing up clouds of sand which fell back and hissed amongst the rising water. The heavily built house shook to its foundations. Great stones were thrown up as from a volcano, some of them, great masses of hard stone, squared and grooved with implements wrought by human hands, breaking up and splitting in mid air as though riven by some infernal power. Trees near the house — and therefore presumably in some way above the hole, which sent up clouds of dust and steam and fine sand mingled, and which carried an appalling stench which sickened the spectators — were torn up by the roots and hurled into the air. By now, flames were bursting violently from all over the ruins, so dangerously that Adam caught up his wife in his arms, and ran with her from the proximity of the flames.

Then almost as quickly as it had begun, the whole cataclysm ceased, though a deep-down rumbling continued intermittently for some time. Then silence brooded over all — silence so complete that it seemed in itself a sentient thing — silence which seemed like incarnate darkness, and conveyed the same idea to all who came within its radius. To the young people who had suffered the long horror of that awful night, it brought relief — relief from the presence or the fear of all that was horrible — relief which seemed perfected when the red rays of sunrise shot up over the far eastern sea, bringing a promise of a new order of things with the coming day.

* * * * *

His bed saw little of Adam Salton for the remainder of that night. He and Mimi walked hand in hand in the brightening dawn round by the Brow to Castra Regis and on to Lesser Hill. They did so deliberately, in an attempt to think as little as possible of the terrible experiences of the night. The morning was bright and cheerful, as a morning sometimes is after a devastating storm. The clouds, of which there were plenty in evidence, brought no lingering idea of gloom. All nature was bright and joyous, being in striking contrast to the scenes of wreck and devastation, the effects of obliterating fire and lasting ruin.

The only evidence of the once stately pile of Castra Regis and its inhabitants was a shapeless huddle of shattered architecture, dimly seen as the keen breeze swept aside the cloud of acrid smoke which marked the site of the once lordly castle. As for Diana's Grove, they looked in vain for a sign which had a suggestion of permanence. The oak trees of the Grove were still to be seen — some of them — emerging from a haze of smoke, the great trunks solid and erect as ever, but the larger branches broken and twisted and rent, with bark stripped and chipped, and the smaller branches broken and dishevelled looking from the constant stress and threshing of the storm.

Of the house as such, there was, even at the short distance from which they looked, no trace. Adam resolutely turned his back on the devastation and hurried on. Mimi was not only upset and shocked in many ways, but she was physically "dog tired," and falling asleep on her feet. Adam took her to her room and made her undress and get into bed, taking care that the room was well lighted both by sunshine and lamps. The only obstruction was from a silk curtain, drawn across the window to keep out the glare. He sat beside her, holding her hand, well knowing that the comfort of his presence was the best restorative for her. He stayed with her till sleep had overmastered her wearied body. Then he went softly away. He found his uncle and Sir Nathaniel in the study, having an early cup of tea, amplified to the dimensions of a possible breakfast. Adam explained that he had not told his wife that he was going over the horrible places again, lest it should frighten her, for the rest and sleep in ignorance would help her and make a gap of peacefulness between the horrors.

Sir Nathaniel agreed.

"We know, my boy," he said, "that the unfortunate Lady Arabella is dead, and that the foul carcase of the Worm has been torn to pieces — pray God that its evil soul will never more escape from the nethermost hell."

They visited Diana's Grove first, not only because it was nearer, but also because it was the place where most description was required, and Adam felt that he could tell his story best on the spot. The absolute destruction of the place and everything in it seen in the broad daylight was almost inconceivable. To Sir Nathaniel, it was as a story of horror full and complete. But to Adam it was, as it were, only on the fringes. He knew what was still to be seen when his friends had got over the knowledge of externals. As yet, they had only seen the outside of the house — or rather, where the outside of the house once had been. The great horror lay within. However, age — and the experience of age — counts.

A strange, almost elemental, change in the aspect had taken place in the time which had elapsed since the dawn. It would almost seem as if Nature herself had tried to obliterate the evil signs of what had occurred. True, the utter ruin of the house was made even more manifest in the searching daylight; but the more appalling destruction which lay beneath was not visible. The rent, torn, and dislocated stonework looked worse than before; the upheaved foundations, the piled-up fragments of masonry, the fissures in the torn earth — all were at the worst. The Worm's hole was still evident, a round fissure seemingly leading down into the very bowels of the earth. But all the horrid mass of blood and slime, of torn, evil-smelling flesh and the sickening remnants of violent death, were gone. Either some of the later explosions had thrown up from the deep quantities of water which, though foul and corrupt itself, had still some cleansing power left, or else the writhing mass which stirred from far below had helped to drag down and obliterate the items of horror. A grey dust, partly of fine sand, partly of the waste of the falling ruin, covered everything, and, though ghastly itself, helped to mask something still worse.

After a few minutes of watching, it became apparent to the three men that the turmoil far below had not yet ceased. At short irregular intervals the hell-broth in the hole seemed as if boiling up. It rose and fell again and turned over, showing in fresh form much of the nauseous detail which had been visible earlier. The worst parts were the great masses of the flesh of the monstrous Worm, in all its red and sickening aspect. Such fragments had been bad enough before, but now they were infinitely worse. Corruption comes with startling rapidity to beings whose destruction has been due wholly or in part to lightning — the whole mass seemed to have become all at once corrupt! The whole surface of the fragments, once alive, was covered with insects, worms, and vermin of all kinds. The sight was horrible enough, but, with the awful smell added, was simply unbearable. The Worm's hole appeared to breathe forth death in its most repulsive forms. The friends, with one impulse, moved to the top of the Brow, where a fresh breeze from the sea was blowing up.

At the top of the Brow, beneath them as they looked down, they saw a shining mass of white, which looked strangely out of place amongst such wreckage as they had been viewing. It appeared so strange that Adam suggested trying to find a way down, so that they might see it more closely.

"We need not go down; I know what it is," Sir Nathaniel said. "The explosions of last night have blown off the outside of the cliffs — that which we see is the vast bed of china clay through which the Worm originally found its way down to its lair. I can catch the glint of the water of the deep quags far down below. Well, her ladyship didn't deserve such a funeral — or such a monument."

* * * * *

The horrors of the last few hours had played such havoc with Mimi's nerves, that a change of scene was imperative — if a permanent breakdown was to be avoided.

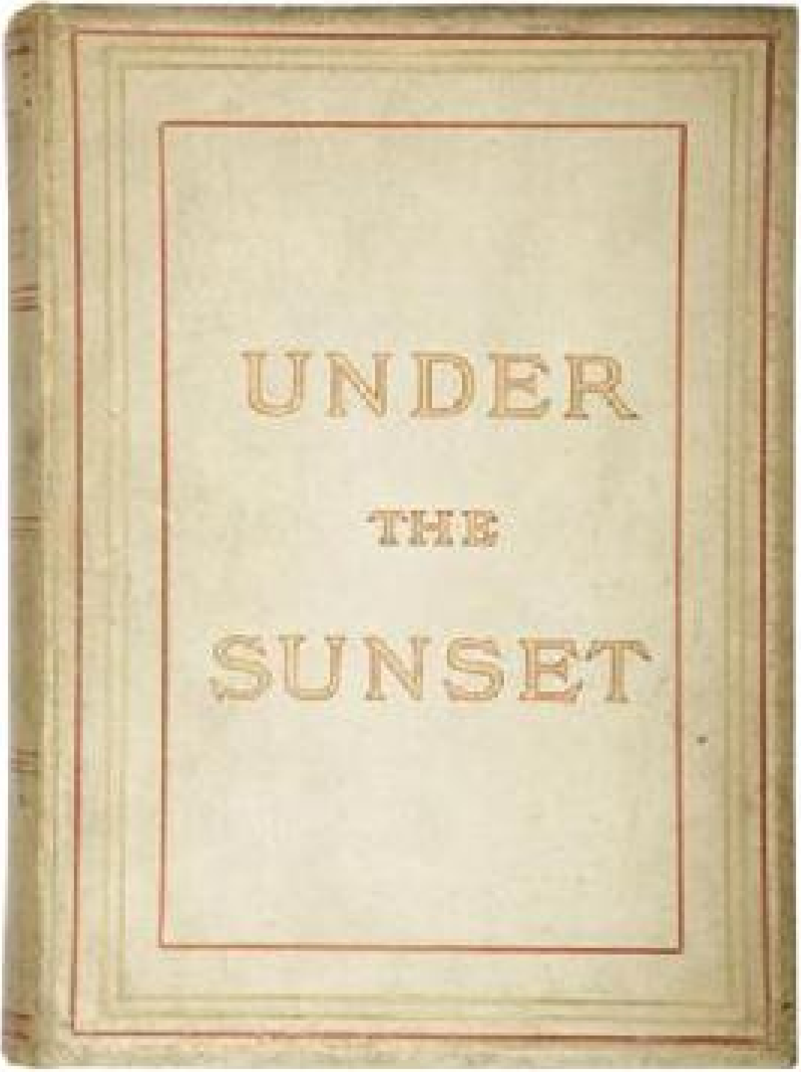
"I think," said old Mr. Salton, "it is quite time you young people departed for that honeymoon of yours!" There was a twinkle in his eye as he spoke.

Mimi's soft shy glance at her stalwart husband, was sufficient answer.

The Short Story Collections

Under the Sunset

This collection of eight short stories was first published in 1881. Critics now recognise the influence these fairy tales have had in the development of fantasy literature.


UNDER
THE
SUNSET

The first edition

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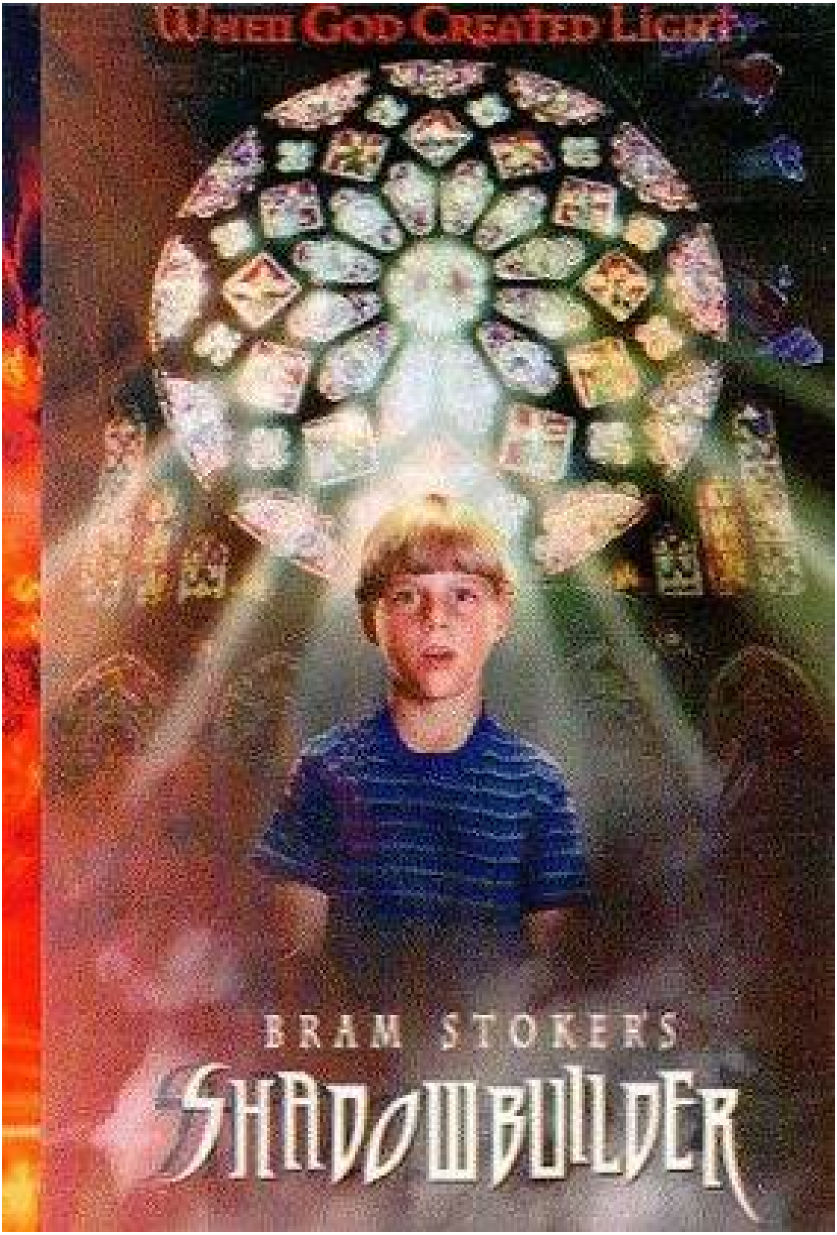
When God Created Light
BRAM STOKER'S
SHADOWBUILDER

The 1998 film adaptation based on one of the stories in this collection

UNDER THE SUNSET

Far, far away, there is a beautiful Country which no human eye has ever seen in waking hours. Under the Sunset it lies, where the distant horizon bounds the day, and where the clouds, splendid with light and colour, give a promise of the glory and beauty which encompass it.

Sometimes it is given to us to see it in dreams.

Now and again come, softly, Angels who fan with their great white wings the aching brows, and place cool hands upon the sleeping eyes. Then soars away the spirit of the sleeper. Up from the dimness and murkiness of the night season it springs. Away through the purple clouds it sails. It hies through the vast expanse of light and air. Through the deep blue of heaven's vault it flies; and sweeping over the far-off horizon, rests in the fair Land Under the Sunset.

This Country is like our own Country in many ways. It has men and women, kings and queens, rich and poor; it has houses, and trees, and fields, and birds, and flowers. There is day there and night also; and heat and cold, and sickness and health. The hearts of men and women, and boys and girls, beat as they do here. There are the same sorrows and the same joys; and the same hopes and the same fears.

If a child from that Country was beside a child here you could not tell the difference between them, save that the clothes alone are different. They talk the same language as we do ourselves. They do not know that they are different from us; and we do not know that we are different from them. When they come to us in their dreams we do not know they are strangers; and when we go to their Country in our dreams we seem to be at home. Perhaps this is because good people's homes are in their hearts; and wheresoever they may be they have peace.

The Country Under the Sunset was for long ages a wondrous and pleasant Land. Nothing there was which was not beautiful and sweet and pleasant. It was only when sin came that things there began to lose their perfect beauty. Even now it is a wondrous and pleasant land.

As the sun is strong there, by the sides of every road are planted great trees which spread out their thick branches. So the travellers have shelter as they pass. The milestones are fountains of sweet cold water, so clear and bright that when the wayfarer comes to one he sits down on the carved stone seat beside it and gives a sigh of relief, for he knows that there is rest.

When it is sunset here, it is the middle of the day there. The clouds gather and shade the Land from the great heat. Then for a little while everything goes to sleep.

This sweet, peaceful hour is called the Rest Time.

When it comes the birds stop their singling, and lie close under the wide eaves of the houses, or in the branches of the trees where they join the stems. The fishes stop darting about in the water, and lie close under the stones, with their fins and tails as still as if they were dead. The sheep and the cattle lie under the trees. The men and women get into hammocks slung between trees or under the verandahs of their houses. Then, when the sun has ceased to glare so fiercely and the clouds have melted away, the living things all wake up.

The only living things that are not asleep in the Rest Time are the dogs. They lie quite quiet, only half asleep, with one eye open and one ear cocked; keeping watch all the time. Then if any stranger comes during the hour of Rest, the dogs rise up and look at him, softly, without barking, lest they should disturb anyone. They know if the new comer is harmless; and if it be so they lie down again, and the stranger lies down too till the Rest Time is over.

But if the dogs think that the stranger is come to do any harm, they bark loudly and growl. The cows begin to low and the sheep to bleat, and the birds to chirp and sing their loudest notes, but without any music in them; and even the fishes begin to dart about and splash the water. The men awake and jump out of their hammocks, and seize their weapons. Then it is an evil time for the intruder. Straightway he is brought into the Court and tried, and if found guilty sentenced, and either put into prison or banished.

Then the men go back to their hammocks, and all living things retire again till the Rest Time is over.

It is the same in the night as in the Rest Time, if an intruder comes to do harm. In the night only the dogs are awake, and the sick people and their nurses.

No one can leave the Country Under the Sunset except in one direction. Those who go there in dreams, or who come in dreams to our world, come and go they know not how; but if an inhabitant tries to leave it, he cannot except by one way. If he tries any other way he goes on and on, turning without knowing it, till he comes to the one place where only he can depart.

This place is called the Portal, and there the Angels keep guard.

Exactly in the middle of the Country is the palace of the King, and the roads stretch away from it on every side. When the King stands on the top of the tower, which rises to a great height from the middle of his palace, he can look along the roads, which are all quite straight.

They seem to become narrower and narrower as they get further, till at last they are lost altogether in the mere distance.

Round the King's palace are gathered the houses of the great nobles, each being close in proportion to the rank of its owner. Outside these again come the houses of the lesser nobles; and then those of all the other people, getting smaller and smaller as they get further.

Every house, big and little, stands in the middle of a garden, which has a fountain and a stream of water in it, and big trees, and beds of beautiful flowers.

Farther off, away towards the Portal, the country gets wilder and wilder. Beyond this there are dense forests and great mountains full of deep caverns, as dark as night. Here wild animals and all cruel things have their home.

Then come bogs and fens and deep shaky morasses, and thick jungles. Then all becomes so wild that the road gets lost altogether.

In the wild places beyond this no man knows what dwells. Some say that the Giants who still exist, live there, and that all poisonous plants there grow. They say that there is a wicked wind there that brings out the seeds of all evil things and scatters them over the earth. Some there are who say that the same wicked wind brings out also the Diseases and Plagues that there exist. Others say that Famine lives there in the marshes, and that he stalks out when men are wicked - so wicked that the Spirits who guard the land are weeping so bitterly that they do not see him pass.

It is whispered that Death has his kingdom in the Solitudes beyond the marshes, and lives in a castle so awful to look at that no one has ever seen it and lived to tell what it is like. Also it is told that all the evil things that live in the marshes are the disobedient Children of Death who have left their home and cannot find their way back again.

But no man knows where the Castle of King Death is. All men and women, boys and girls, and even little wee children should so live that when they have to enter the Castle and see the grim King, they may not fear to behold his face.

For long, Death and his Children stayed without the Portal and all within was joy.

But there came a time when all was changed. The hearts of men grew cold and hard with pride in their prosperity, and they heeded not the lessons which they had been taught. Then when within there was coldness and indifference and disdain, the Angels on guard saw in the terrors that stood without, the means of punishment and the lesson which could do good.

The good lessons came - as good things very often do - after pain and trial, and they taught much. The story of their coming has a lesson for the wise.

At the Portal two Angels for ever kept watch and guard. These angels were so great and so watchful, and were always so steadfast in their guardianship, that there was only one name for them both. Either or both of them would, if spoken to, have been called by the whole name. One of them knew as much as the other did about anything which could have anything known about it. This was not so strange, for they both knew everything. Their name was Fid-Def.

Fid-Def stood on guard at the Portal. Beside them was a Child-Angel, fairer than the light of the sun. The outline of its beautiful form was so soft that it ever seemed to be melting into the air; it seemed a holy living light.

It did not stand as the other Angels did, but floated up and down and all around. Sometimes it was but a tiny speck, and then it would suddenly, without seeming to be making any change, be bigger than the great Guardian Spirits that were the same for ever.

Fid-Def loved the Child-Angel, and as it rose now and again, they spread their great white wings, and it would sometimes stand on them. Its own beautiful soft wings would gently fan their faces as they turned to speak.

But the Child-Angel never went over the threshold. It looked out into the wilderness beyond; but it never put even the tip of its wing over the Portal.

It was asking questions of Fid-Def, and seemed to want to know what was without, and how all there differed from all within.

The questions and the answers of the Angels were not like our questions and answers, for no speech was needed. The moment a thought occurred of wanting to know anything, the question was asked and the answer given. But still the question was given by the Child-Angel and answered by Fid-Def; and if we knew the no-language that the Angels were not-speaking we would have heard thus. Fid-Def was talking to Fid-Def:

"Is not Chiaro beautiful?"

"He is very beautiful. He will be a new power in the Land."

Here Chiaro, who was standing with one foot on the plume of Fid-Def's wing, said:

"Tell me, Fid-Def, what are those dreadful-looking Beings beyond the Portal?"

Fid-Def answered:

"They are Children of King Death. That dreadfullest one of all, enwrapt in gloom, is Skooro, an Evil Spirit."

"How horrible they look!"

"Very horrible, dear Chiaro; and these Children of Death want to pass through the Portal and enter the Land."

Chiaro, at the terrible news, soared up aloft, and got so big that the whole of the Country Under the Sunset was made bright. Soon, however, he grew smaller and smaller till he was only a speck, like the coloured ray seen in a dark room when the sun comes in through a chink. He asked of the Angels of the Portal:

"Tell me, Fid-Def, why do the Children of Death want to get in?"

"Because, dear Child, they are wicked, and wish to corrupt the hearts of the dwellers in the Land."

"But tell me, Fid-Def, can they get in? Surely, if the All-Father says, No! they must stay ever without the Land."

After a pause came the answer of the Angels of the Portal:

"The All-Father is wiser than even the Angels can conceive. He overthroweth the wicked with their own devices, and he trappeth the hunter in his own snare. The Children of Death when they enter - as they are about to do - shall do much good in the Land, which they wish to harm. For lo! the hearts of the people are corrupt. They have forgotten the lessons which they have been taught. They do not know how thankful they should be for their happy lot, for of sorrow they wot not. Some pain or grief or sadness must be to them, that so they may see the error of their ways."

As they spoke, the Angels wept in sorrow for the misdeeds of the people and the pain they must endure.

The Child-Angel answered in awe:

"Then this most horrible Being, too, is to enter the Land. Woe! woe!"

"Dear Child," said the Guardian Spirits, as the Child-Angel crept into their bosoms, "on you devolves a great duty. The Children of Death are about to enter. To you has been entrusted the watching of this dread Being,Skooro. Wheresoever he goeth, there must you be also; and so naught of harm can happen - save only what is intended and allowed.”

The Child-Angel, awed by the greatness of the trust, resolved that his duty should be well done. Fid-Def went on:

“You must know, dear Child, that without darkness is no fear of the unseen; and not even the darkness of night can fright if there be light within the soul. To the good and pure there is no fear either of the evil things of the earth or of the Powers that are unseen. To you is trusted to guard the pure and true. Skooro will encompass them with his gloom; but to you is given to steal into their hearts and by your own glorious light to make the gloom of the Child of Death unseen and unknown.”

“But from evil-doers - from the wicked, and the ungrateful, and the unforgiving, and the impure, and the untrue you will keep afar off; and so when they look for you to comfort them - as they must ever - they will not see you. They will see only the gloom which your far-off light will make seem darker still, for the shadow will be in their very souls.”

“But oh, Child, our Father is kind beyond belief. He orders that should any that are evil repent, you will on the instant fly to them, and comfort them, and help them, and cheer them, and drive the shadow afar off. Should they only pretend to repent, meaning to be again wicked when the danger is past; or should they only act from fear, then will you hide your brightness so that the gloom may grow darker still over them. Now, dear Chiaro, become unseen. The time approaches when the Child of Death is to be allowed to enter the Land. He will try to steal in, and we shall let him, for we must work unseen and unknown, that we may do our duty.”

Then the Child-Angel faded slowly away, so that no eye - not even the eye of Fid-Def - could see him; and the Guardian Spirits stood as ever beside the Portal.

The Rest Time came; and all was quiet in the Land.

When the Children of Death afar off in the marshes saw that nothing was stirring, save that the Angels stood as ever on guard, they determined to make another effort to gain entrance to the Land.

Accordingly they resolved themselves into many parts. Each part took a different form, but all together they moved on towards the Portal. Thus the Children of Death drew a-nigh the threshold of the Land.

On the wings of a passing bird they came; on a cloud that drifted slowly in the sky; in the snakes that crawled on the earth - in the worms, and mice, and moles that crept under it; in the fishes that swam and the insects that flew. By earth and water and air they came.

So without let or hindrance; and in many ways, the Children of Death entered the country Under the Sunset; and from that hour all in that fair Land was changed.

Not all at once did the Children of Death make themselves known. One by one the bolder spirits amongst them, stalking with fell footsteps through the Land, filled all hearts with terror as they came.

However, each and all of them left a lesson for good in the hearts of the dwellers in the Land.

THE ROSE PRINCE

A long, long time ago - so long ago that if one tries to think ever so far back, it is farther than that again - King Mago reigned in the Country Under the Sunset.

He was an old king, and his white beard had grown so long that it almost touched the ground; and all his reign had been passed in trying to make his people happy.

He had one son, of whom he was very fond. This son, Prince Zaphir, was well worthy of all his father's fondness, for he was as good as can be.

He was still only a boy, and he had never seen his beautiful sweet-faced mother, who had died when he was only a baby. It often made him very sad that he had no mother, when he thought other boys had tender mothers, at whose knees they learned to pray, and who came and kissed them in their beds at night. He felt that it was strange that many of the poor people in his father's dominions had mothers, whilst he, the prince, had none. When he thought thus it made him very humble; for he knew that neither power, nor riches, nor youth, nor beauty will save any one from the doom of all mortals, and that the only beautiful thing in the world whose beauty lasts for ever is a pure, fair soul. He always remembered, however, that if he had no mother he had a father who loved him very dearly, and so was comforted and content.

He used to muse much on many things; and often even in the bright rest-time, when all the people slept, he would go out into the wood, close to the palace, and think and think on all that was beautiful and true, whilst his faithful dog Gomus would crouch at his feet and sometimes wag his tail, as much as to say -

“Here I am, prince; I am not asleep either.”

Prince Zaphir was so good and so kind that he never hurt any living thing. If he saw a worm crawling over the road before him he would step over it carefully lest it should be injured. If he saw a fly fallen in the water he would lift it tenderly out and send it forth again, free of wing, into the glorious bright air: so kind was he that all the animals that had once seen him knew him again, and when he went to his favourite seat in the wood there would arise a glad hum from all the living things. Those bright insects, whose colours change hour by hour, would put on their brightest colours, and bask about in the gleams of sunlight that came slanting down between the benches of the trees. The noisy insects put on their mufflers so that they would not disturb him; and the little birds resting on the trees would open their round bright eyes, and come out and blink and wink in the light, and pipe little joyous songs of welcome with all their sweetest notes.

So is it ever with tender, loving people; the living things that have voices as sweet as man’s or woman’s, and who have languages of their own, although we cannot understand them, all talk to them in joyous notes and bid them welcome in their own pretty ways.

King Mago was proud of his brave, good, handsome boy, and liked him to dress beautifully; and all the people loved to see his bright face and his gay clothing. The King made the great merchants search far and near till they got the largest and finest feather that had ever been seen. This feather he had put in the front of a beautiful cap, the colour of a ruby, and fastened with a brooch made of a great diamond. He gave this cap to Zaphir on his birthday.

As Prince Zaphir walked through the streets, the people saw the great white plume nodding from far away. All were glad when they saw it, and ran to their windows and doors and stood bowing and smiling and waving their hands as their beautiful prince went by. Zaphir always bowed and smiled in return; and he loved his people and gloried in the love that they had for him.

In the Court of King Mago was a companion for Zaphir whom he loved very much. This was the Princess Bluebell. She was the daughter of another king who had been wrongfully deprived of his dominion by a cruel and treacherous enemy, and who had come to King Mago to ask for help and had died in his Court after living there for many, many years. But King Mago had taken his little orphan daughter and had her brought up as his own child.

A great vengeance had come upon the wicked usurper. The Giants had come upon his dominions and had slain him and all his family, and had killed all the people in the land, and had even destroyed all the animals, except those wild ones that were like the Giants themselves. Then the houses began to tumble down from age and decay, and the beautiful gardens to become wild and neglected; and so when after many long years the Giants grew tired and went back to their home in the wilderness, the country that Princess Bluebell owned was such a vast desolation that no one going into it would know that people had ever dwelt there.

Princess Bluebell was very young and very, very beautiful. She, like Prince Zaphir, had never known a mother's love, for her mother, too, had died whilst she was young. She loved King Mago very much, but she loved Prince Zaphir more than all the rest of the world. They had always been companions, and there was not a thought of his heart that she did not know almost before it came there. Prince Zaphir loved her too, more dearly than words can tell, and for her sake he would have done anything, no matter how full of danger. He hoped when he was a man and she a woman that she would marry him, and that they would help King Mago to rule his kingdom justly and wisely, and that there would be no pain or want in the whole country, if they could help it.

King Mago had two little thrones made, and when he sat in state on his great throne the two children sat one on each side of him, and learned how to be King and Queen.

Princess Bluebell had a robe of ermine like a Queen's, and a little sceptre and a little crown, and Prince Zaphir had a sword as bright as a flash of lightning, and it hung in a golden scabbard.

Behind the King's throne the courtiers used to gather; and there were many of these who were great and good, and there were others who were only vain and self-seeking.

There was Phlosbos, the Prime Minister, an old, old man with a long beard like white silk, and he carried a white wand with a gold ring on it.

There was Janisar, the Captain of the Guard, with fierce moustachios and a suit of heavy armour.

Then there was Tufto, an old courtier, a silly old man who did nothing but hang about the great nobles and pay them deference, and every one, high and low, despised him much. He was fat, and had no hair on all his face or head, not even eyebrows, and he looked - oh! so funny, with his big bald head quite white and smooth.

There was Sartorius, a foolish young courtier, who thought that dress was the most important thing in the world; and who accordingly dressed in the finest clothes he could possibly get. But people only smiled at him and sometimes laughed, for there is no honour due to fine clothes, but only to what is in the man himself who wears them. Sartorius always tried to push himself into the front place everywhere, in order to show off his fine clothes; and he thought that because the other courtiers did not try to push him aside in the same way, they acknowledged his right to be first. It was not so, however; they only despised him and would not do what he did.

There was also Skarkrou, who was just the opposite to Sartorius, and who thought - or pretended to think - that untidiness was a good thing; and was as proud or prouder of his rags than Sartorius was of his fine clothes. He too was despised, for he was vain, and his vanity made him ridiculous.

Then there was Gabbleander, who did nothing but talk from morning till night; and who would have talked from night till morning if he could have got any one to listen to him. He too was laughed at, for people cannot always talk sense if they talk much. The foolish things are remembered, but the wise ones are forgotten; and so these talkers of too many things come to be considered foolish.

But no one must think that all the Court of the good King Mago were like these people. No! there were many, many good, and great, and noble, and brave men; but such is life in every country, even the Country Under the Sunset, that there are fools as well as wise men, and cowards as well as brave men, and mean men as well as good men.

Children who wish to become good and great men or good and noble women, should try to know well all the people whom they meet. Thus they will find that there is no one who has not much of good; and when they see some great folly, or some meanness, or some cowardice, or some fault or weakness in another person, they should examine themselves carefully. Then they will see that, perhaps, they too have some of the same fault in themselves -

although perhaps it does not come out in the same way - and then they must try to conquer that fault. So they will become more and more good as they grow up; and others will examine them, and when these find they have not the faults, they will love and honour them.

Well, one day King Mago sat on his throne in his robes and his crown, and holding his sceptre in his hand.

At his right hand sat Princess Bluebell, with her robe and crown and sceptre, and with her little dog Smg beside her.

This dog was a great favourite. At first it was called Sumog, because Zaphir's dog was Gomus, and this was the name spelled backwards. But then it was called Smg because this was a name that could not he shouted out, but could only be spoken in a whisper. Bluebell had no need for more than this, for Smg was never far away, but always stayed close to his mistress and watched her.

At the King's left sat Prince Zaphir, on his little throne, with his bright sword and his mighty feather.

Mago was making laws for the good of his people. Round him were gathered all the courtiers, and many people stood in the hall and many more in the street without.

Suddenly there was a loud sound heard - the cracking of a whip and the blowing of a horn - and it came nearer and nearer, and the people in the street began to murmur. Loud cries arose, the King stopped to listen, and the people turned their heads to see who was coming. The crowd opened, and a messenger booted and spurred and covered with dust, rushed into the hall and knelt on one knee before the King, and held out a paper which King Mago took and read eagerly. The people waited in silence to hear the news.

The King was deeply moved, but he knew his people were anxious, so he spoke to them, standing up as he did so: -

"My people, a grievous peril has come upon our Land. We learn from this despatch from the province of Sub-Tegmine, that a terrible Giant has come out of the marshes beyond No-Man's-Land, and is devastating the country. But be not in fear, my people, for to-night many soldiers shall go forth with their arms, and by sunset to-morrow the Giant will have fallen, we trust."

The people bowed their heads with murmured thanks, and all went quietly away to their homes.

That night a body of picked soldiers went out with brave hearts to fight the Giant, and the people cheered them on their way.

All next day and next night the people as well as the King were very anxious; and the second morning they expected news that the Giant was overthrown.

But no news came till nightfall; and then one weary man, covered with dust and blood, and wounded unto death, crawled into the town.

The people made way for him, and he came before the throne and bent low and said -

"Alas! King, I have to tell you that your soldiers have been slain - all save myself. The Giant triumphs and advances towards the city."

Having said so, the pain of his wounds grew so great that he cried out several times and fell down; and when they lifted him up he was dead.

At the sad news which he told a low wail arose from the people. The widows of the slain soldiers cried loudly a little cry, and came and threw themselves before the King's throne, and raised their hands on high and said -

"Oh, King! Oh, King!" and they could say no more with weeping.

Then the King's heart was very, very sore, and he tried to comfort them, but his best comfort was in his tears - for the tears of friends help to make trouble light; and he spoke to the people and said -

"Alas! our soldiers were too few. To-night we will send an army, and perchance the Giant will fall."

That night a gallant army, with many great engines of war and with flags flying and bands playing, went forth against the Giant.

At the head of the army rode Janisar, the captain, with his armour of steel inlaid with gold shining in the glow of the sunset. The scarlet and white trappings of his great black charger looked splendid. At his side, for some distance on his way, rode Prince Zaphir on his white palfrey.

The people all gathered to wish the army success on their departure; and a lot of foolish people who believed in luck threw old shoes after them. One of these shoes struck Sartorius, who was as usual pushing into the front to show himself off, and blackened his eye, and the black of the shoe came off on his new dress and spoiled it. Another shoe - a heavy one with an iron heel - struck Tufto, who was talking to Janisar - on the top of his bald head, and cut it, and then all the people laughed.

Just fancy how a man is despised when people laugh when he is hurt. Old Tufto danced about and got quite angry, and then the people laughed all the more; for nothing is funnier than when a person is so angry that he loses all self-control.

All the people cheered as the army went off. Even the poor widows of the slain soldiers cheered; and the men going away looked at them and resolved that they would conquer or die, like brave soldiers doing their duty.

Princess Bluebell went with King Mago to the top of the tower of the palace, and together they watched the soldiers as they marched away. The king went in soon, but Bluebell stayed on, looking at the helmets glittering and flashing in the sunset till the sun sank down over the horizon.

Just then Prince Zaphir, who had returned, joined her. Then in the twilight on the top of the tower, with many thousand eager, anxious hearts beating in the city below them, and with the beautiful sky overhead, the two children knelt down and prayed for the success of the army on the morrow.

There was no sleep in the city that night.

Next day the people were filled with anxiety; and as the day wore on and there was no news they grew more anxious still.

Towards the evening they heard the sound of a great tumult far away. They knew that a battle was on; and so they waited and waited for news.

They did not go to bed that night at all; but all through the city watch-fires were lighted and everyone stayed awake waiting for the news.

But no news came.

Then the fear became so great that the faces of men and women grew as white as snow, and their hearts as cold. For a long, long time they were silent, for no man dared to speak.

At last one of the widows of the slain soldiers rose up and said -

“I shall arise and go down to the battle-field, and see how fares it there; and shall bring back the news to quiet your poor beating hearts.”

Then many men rose and said -

“No! it must not be. We shall go. It were shame to our City if a woman went where men could not. We shall go.”

But she answered them with a sad smile -

“Alas! I have no fear of death since my brave husband was killed.

I do not wish to live. You must defend the city, I shall go."

Straightway she walked out of the city in the chill grey dawn towards the battle-field. As she moved away and faded in the distance, she seemed to the anxious people like a phantom of Hope passing away from them.

The sun rose and grew bright in the heavens till the rest time came; but men heeded it not, watching and waiting ever.

Presently they saw afar off the figure of a woman running. They ran to meet her and found it was the widow. She came amongst them and cried -

"Woe! woe! Alas! for our army is scattered; our mighty ones are fallen in the pride of their strength. The Giant triumphs, and I fear me all is lost."

There came a great wail from the people; and a hush fell on them, so great was their fear.

Then the King assembled all his Court and people, and took counsel what was best to be done. Many seemed to think that a new army should go forth of all those who were willing to die, if need be, for the good of the Country; but there was much perplexity.

Whilst they were discussing, Prince Zaphir sat silent on his little throne; and his eyes more than once filled with tears at the thought of the sufferings of his beloved people. Now he arose and stood before the throne.

There was silence till he should speak.

As the Prince stood, cap in hand, before the King, there was in his face a look of such high resolve that those who saw it could not help having a new hope. The Prince spoke -

"Oh, King, Father, before you decide further, hear me. It is right that if there be danger in the Land, the first to meet it is the Prince whom the people trust. If there is pain to be felt, who should feel it before him? If death is to come to any, surely it should first strike over his corpse. King, Father, pause but one day. Let me go tomorrow against the Giant. This widow hath told you that now he sleeps after his combat. Tomorrow I shall meet him in fight. If I fall, then will be time to risk the lives of your people; and if it should be that he falls, then all is well."

King Mago knew that the Prince had spoken well; and although it grieved him to see his beloved son running into such danger, he did not try to stop him, but said:

"Oh, son, worthy to be a king, thou hast well spoken! Be it even as thou wilt."

Then the people left the Hall, and King Mago and Bluebell kissed Zaphir. Bluebell said to him:

"Zaphir, you have done right," and she looked at him proudly.

Presently the prince went to bed, that he might sleep, and so be strong for the morrow.

All that night the smiths and armourers and the craftsmen of jewels worked hard and fast. Till daylight the furnaces glowed and the anvils rang; and all hands cunning at artifice plied hard.

In the morning they brought into the Hall, and laid before the throne as a present for Prince Zaphir, a suit of armour such as never before had been seen.

It was wrought of steel and gold, and was all in scales. Each scale was like a different leaf; and it was all burnished and bright as the sun. Between the leaves were jewels, and many more jewels were fastened on them like drops of dew. Thus the armour shone in the light till it dazzled the eyes of whosoever saw it - for the cunning armourers meant that when the Prince fought, his enemy might be half blinded with the glare and so miss his blows.

The helmet was like to a flower, and the Prince's crest was wrought upon it, and the feather and the big diamond in his cap were fastened in front.

When the Prince was equipped, he looked so noble and brave that the people cried out with shouts that he must conquer; and they had new and great hopes.

Then his father, the King, blessed him, and Princess Bluebell kissed him and cried a few tears and gave him a lovely rose, which he fastened on his helmet.

Amid shouting of the people, Prince Zaphir went out to fight the Giant.

His dog, Gomus, wanted to go, but he could not be taken. So Gomus was shut up and howled, for he knew that his dear master was in danger and wanted to be with him.

When Prince Zaphir was gone, Princess Bluebell went to the top of the tower and looked after him till he got so far away that she could no longer see the flashing of his beautiful armour in the sunlight. At first, when she was saying good bye to Zaphir - and she knew that it might be good bye for ever - she did not shed a tear, lest she should pain her beloved Prince, for she knew that he was going into battle, and would need all his bravery and all his firmness. So the last look Zaphir saw on his Bluebell's face was a loving, hopeful, trustful smile. Thus he went into the battle strengthened by the thought that her heart went with him, and that, although her body was far away, her spirit was close to him.

When he was gone, really gone, far away out of sight, and she stood on the top of the tower alone, Bluebell shed many tears; and the great fear of her heart that Zaphir might be killed made her sad unto death. She thought that it might be that he would be killed by the wicked Giant who had already slain two armies, and that then she would never see him again - never see the love in his dear, true eyes - never hear the tones of his tender, sweet voice - never feel the beating of his great, generous heart again.

And so she wept, oh! so bitterly. But as she wept the thought came to her that life does not lie in the power of men, or even of giants; and so she dried her tears, and knelt down and prayed with an humble heart, and rose up comforted, as people always do when they pray earnestly.

Then she went down to the great hall; but King Mago was not there. She looked for him to comfort him, for she knew that his heart must be bleeding for his son in danger.

She found him in his chamber, and he, too, was praying. She knelt beside him, and they put their arms round each other - the old King and the orphan child - and they prayed together; and so they both got comfort.

Together they waited, and waited patiently, for the return of their beloved one. All the city waited too; and neither by day nor night was there sleep in the Country Under the Sunset, for all were waiting for the return of the Prince.

When Zaphir left the city, he went on and on in the direction of the Giant, till the sun grew bright in the heavens, so bright that his golden armour glowed like fire; and then he walked under the shelter of the trees, and he did not pause even in the rest-time, but went ever onward.

Towards evening he heard and saw strange things.

Far off the ground seemed to shake, and a dull rumbling arose of rocks being levelled, and forests being broken down. These were the sounds of the Giant's footsteps, as he came onwards to the city. But Prince Zaphir, although the sounds were very terrible, had no fear, and went bravely onward. Then he began to meet many living things, which swept by him at full speed - for they were the swiftest of their kind, and so had run from the Giant faster than the rest.

On they came, in hundreds and thousands, their numbers getting more and more as the time wore on, and as the Prince and the Giant drew nearer.

There were all the beasts of the field, and all the fowls of the air, and all the insects that fly and crawl. Lions and tigers, and horses and sheep, and mice and cats and rats, and cocks and hens, and foxes and geese and turkeys, all were mixed together, big and little, and all were so frightened at the Giant that they forgot to be afraid of one another. Thus there ran together, cats and mice, wolves and lambs, foxes and geese; and the weak ones did not fear, nor did the strong ones wish to harm.

As they came on, however, all the living things seemed to know that Prince Zaphir was braver than they were, and made room for him to pass. The weakest things, and those most afraid, did not go further in their flight, but tried to get as near the Prince as possible; and many followed him back towards the Giant rather than not be near him.

Further on, in a little while, he met all the old animals that could not come so fast as the rest, and all the poor wounded living things, and all those that were slow of pace. These, too, did not try to go further, for they knew that they were safer near a brave man than in helpless flight.

Then Prince Zaphir saw something, still far off, that looked like a mighty mountain.

It was moving towards him, and his heart beat high, partly with the thought of his coming battle, and partly with hope.

The Giant came closer and closer. His footsteps crushed the rocks, and with his mighty club he swept the forests from his path.

The living things behind Prince Zaphir quailed with fear, and hid their faces in the dust. Some animals, like some foolish people, think that if they do not see anything that they do not want to see, that therefore it ceases to exist.

It is very silly of them.

Then, as the Giant drew near, Prince Zaphir felt that the hour of battle had come.

When he was face to face with a foe more mighty than aught he had ever seen, Zaphir felt as he never felt before. It was not that he was afraid of the Giant, for he felt so brave that, for the good of his people, he could gladly have died then the most painful death. It was that he realised how small a thing he was in the great world.

He saw more clearly than he had ever seen that he was only a speck - a mere atom - in the great living world; and in one moment he knew that if the victory came to him it was not because his arm was strong or his heart brave, but that because it was willed by the One that rules the universe.

Then, in his humility, Prince Zaphir prayed for strength. He doffed his splendid armour, which shone like a sun on earth, he took off the splendid helmet, and he laid by the flashing sword; and they lay in a lifeless heap beside him.

It was a fair sight, that young boy kneeling by the discarded armour. The glittering heap lay all beautiful, glowing in the bright sunset with millions of coloured flashes, till it looked like even unto a living thing. Yet it was sad, and poor, and pitiful beside the boy.

There he knelt paying humbly, with his deep earnest eyes lit by the truth and trust that lay in his clean heart and pure soul.

The glittering armour looked like the work of man's hands - as it was, and the work of the hands of good true men; but the beautiful boy kneeling in trust and faith was the work of the hands of God.

As he prayed, Prince Zaphir saw all his life in the past, from the day he could first remember till even then as he was, face to face with the Giant. There was not an unworthy thought that he had ever had, not a cross word he had ever spoken, not an angry look that had ever given another pain, that did not come back to his mind. It grieved him much that there were so many; for they crowded on so thick and fast that he was amazed at their very number.

It is ever thus that the things which we do wrong - although they may seem little at the time, and though from the hardness of our hearts we pass them lightly by - come back to us with bitterness, when danger makes us think how little we have done to deserve help, and how much to deserve punishment.

Prince Zaphir's heart was purified by repentance for all wrongs done in the past, and by high resolves to be good in the future; and when his humble prayer was finished, he rose up, and he felt in his arms a strength that he wot not of. He knew that it was not his own strength, but that he was the humble instrument of saving his beloved people; and in his heart he was very thankful.

The Giant saw presently the glitter of the golden armour, and knew that another enemy had come anigh him.

He gave a great roar of rage and anger, that sounded like the echo of a thunder-clap. On the distant hills it echoed, and it rolled through the far-off valleys, and sunk into mutterings and low growlings, as of wild beasts, in the caves and the mountain fastnesses.

With such sound the Giant ever began his fighting, that so he might terrify his enemies; but the brave heart of the Prince shook not with fear. He became braver than ever as he heard the sound; for he knew that there was the more need for courage, lest his people, and even the King his father, and Bluebell, should fall into the power of the Giant.

Whilst amongst the rocks and forests the footsteps of the Giant crashed, and whilst there uprose around his feet the dust of the desolation which he made, Prince Zaphir gathered from the brook some round pebbles.

He fitted one in the sling which he carried.

As he lifted his arm to whirl the sling round his head, the Giant saw him, and laughed, and pointed in scorn at him with his great hands, which were more savage than tiger's claws. The laugh which the Giant thundered forth was so terrible - so harsh and grim and dreadful, that the living things that had raised their timid eyes to watch the fray buried their heads in the dust again, and quaked with fear.

But even as he laughed his enemy to scorn, the Giant's doom was spoken.

Round Prince Zaphir's head swung the sling, and the whistling pebble flew. It struck the Giant fair in the temple; and even with the scornful laughter on his lips, and with his outstretched hand pointing in derision, he fell prone.

As he fell he gave a single cry, but a cry so loud that it rolled away over the hills and valleys like a peal of thunder. At the sound the living things cowered again, and sagged with fear.

Afar off the people in the City heard the mighty sound; but they knew not what it meant.

As the Giant's great body fell prone, the earth trembled with the shock for many a mile around; and as his great club dropped from his hand, it laid many tall trees of the forest low.

Then Prince Zaphir fell on his knees and prayed with fervent thankfulness for his victory.

Quickly he arose, and, as he knew of the bitter anxiety of the King and people, he never stopped to gather up his armour, but fled fast to the City to bring the joyful tidings.

The night had now fallen and the way was dark; but Prince Zaphir had trust, and he went onward into the darkness with a brave and hopeful heart.

Soon the living things that were noble came around him in their gratitude; and all they that could followed him closely. Many noble animals there were, - lions and tigers and bears, as well as tamer beasts; and their great fiery eyes seemed like lamps, and helped him on his way.

However, as they drew near to the City the wild animals began to stop, for though they trusted Zaphir they feared other men. They growled a low growl of regret and stopped; and Prince Zaphir went on alone.

All night long the city had been awake. In the court King Mago and Princess Bluebell waited and watched together hand in hand. The people in the streets sat around their watch-fires, and they only dared to talk in whispers.

So the long night wore away.

At last the eastern sky began to pale; and then a streak of red fire shot up over the horizon; and the sun rose in his glory; and it was day. The people, when they saw the light and heard the fresh singing of the birds, had hope; and they looked anxiously for the coming of the Prince.

Neither King Mago nor Princess Bluebell dared to go aloft to the tower, but waited patiently in the hall; and their faces were pale as death.

The watchmen of the city and those who joined them looked down the long roadway, expecting ever and anon to see Prince Zaphir's golden armour shining in the bright morning light, and his great white plume, that they knew so well, nodding in the breeze. They knew that they could see it afar off, and so they only glanced now and again into the distance.

Suddenly there was a shout from all the people - and then a sudden stillness.

They rose to their feet, and with one accord waited for the news.

For oh, joy! there among them - shorn of his bright armour and his nodding plume, but hale - stood their beloved Prince.

VICTORY was in his look.

He smiled on them, raising his hands as if blessing; and pointed to the King's palace, as though to say:

"Our king! his is the right to hear the earliest tidings."

He passed into the hall, all the people following him.

When King Mago and Princess Bluebell heard the shout and felt the stillness that followed, their hearts began to beat, and they waited in great dread.

Princess Bluebell shuddered and cried a little, and drew closer to the King, and leaned her face on his breast.

As she leaned with her face hidden, she felt the King start. She looked up quickly, and there - oh, joy of joys! - was her own beloved Zaphir entering the hall, with all the people following him.

The King stepped down from his throne and took him in his arms, and kissed him; and Bluebell, too, put her arms round him, and kissed him on the mouth.

Prince Zaphir spoke and said:

“Oh King my Father, and oh People! - God has been good to us, and His arm has given us the victory. Lo, the Giant has fallen in the pride of his strength!”

Then such a shout went up from the people that the roof rang again; and the noise went out over the City on the wings of the wind. The glad multitude shouted again and again, till the sound rolled in waves over the whole Dominion, and Under the Sunset that hour there was naught but joy. The King called Zaphir his Brave Son; and Princess Bluebell kissed him again, and called him her Hero.

At that very time, far away in the forest, the Giant lay fallen in the pride of his strength - the foulest thing in all the land - and over his dead body ran the foxes and the stoats. The snakes crawled around his body; and thither, too, crept all the meaner living things that had fled from him when he lived.

From afar off gathered the vultures for their prey.

Close to the slain Giant, shining in the light, lay the golden armour. The great white plume rose from the helmet and even now nodded in the breeze.

When the people came out to see the dead Giant, they found that rank weeds had grown up already where his blood had fallen, but that round the armour that the Prince had doffed had grown a ring of lovely flowers. Fairest of all was a rose tree in bloom, for the rose that Princess Bluebell had given him had taken root, and had blossomed afresh and made a crown of living roses round the helmet and lay against the stem of the plume.

Then the people took reverently home the golden armour; but

Prince Zaphir said that not such armour, but a true heart was the best protection, and that he would not dare to put it on again.

So they hung it up in the Cathedral amongst the grand old flags and the helmets of the old knights, as a memorial of the victory over the Giant.

Prince Zaphir took from the helmet the feather that the King his father had given him of old and he wore it again in his cap. The rose that had blossomed was planted in the centre of the palace garden; and it grew so great that many people could sit under it, and be sheltered from the sun by its wealth of flowers.

When Prince Zaphir's birthday came, the people had made in secret a great preparation.

When he rose in the morning to go to the Cathedral, the whole people had assembled and lined the way on every side. Each person, old and young, held one rose. Those who had many roses brought them for those who had none; and each person had only one that all might be equal in the sight of the Prince whom they loved. They had taken off all the thorns from the stems that the Prince's feet might not be hurt. As he passed they threw their roses in the way, till all the long street was a mass of flowers.

As the Prince went by, they stooped and gathered up the roses that his feet had touched; and they treasured them very dearly.

At each birthday of the Prince they did the same for all their lives long. When Zaphir and Bluebell were married, they strewed their path with roses in the same way, for the people loved them much.

Long and happily lived THE ROSE PRINCE - for so they called him - and his beautiful wife Princess Bluebell.

When in the fulness of time King Mago died - as all men must - they ruled as King and Queen. They ruled well and unselfishly, ever denying themselves and striving to make others good and happy.

They were blessed with peace.

THE INVISIBLE GIANT

Time goes on in the Country Under the Sunset much as it does here. Many years passed away; and they wrought much change. And now we find a time when the people that lived in good King Mago's time would hardly have known their beautiful Land if they had seen it again.

It had sadly changed indeed. No longer was there the same love or the same reverence towards the king-no longer was there perfect peace. People had become more selfish and more greedy, and had tried to grasp all they could for themselves. There were some very rich and there were many poor. Most of the beautiful gardens were laid waste. Houses had grown up close round the palace; and in some of these dwelt many persons who could only afford to pay for part of a house.

All the beautiful Country was sadly changed, and changed was the life of the dwellers in it. The people had almost forgotten Prince Zaphir, who was dead many, many years ago; and no more roses were spread on the pathways. Those who lived now in the Country Under the Sunset laughed at the idea of more Giants, and they did not fear them because they did not see them. Some of them said,

"Tush! what can there be to fear? Even if there over were giants there are none now."

And so the people sang and danced and feasted as before, and thought only of themselves. The Spirits that guarded the Land were very, very sad. Their great white shadowy wings drooped as they stood at their posts at the Portals of the Land. They hid their faces, and their eyes were dim with continuous weeping, so that they heeded not if any evil thing went by them. They tried to make the people think of their evil-doing; but they could not leave their posts, and the people heard their moaning in the night season and said,

“Listen to the sighing of the breeze; how sweet it is!”

So is it ever with us also, that when we hear the wind sighing and moaning and sobbing round our houses in the lonely nights, we do not think our Angels may be sorrowing for our misdeeds, but only that there is a storm coming. The Angels wept evermore, and they felt the sorrow of dumbness-for though they could speak, those they spoke to would not hear.

Whilst the people laughed at the idea of Giants, there was one old man who shook his head, and made answer to them, when he heard them, and said:

“Death has many children, and there are Giants in the marshes still. You may not see them, perhaps-but they are there, and the only bulwark of safety is in a land of patient, faithful hearts.”

The name of this good old man was Knoal, and he lived in a house built of great blocks of stone, in the middle of a wild place far from the city.

In the city there were many great old houses, storey upon storey high; and in these houses lived many poor people. The higher you went up the great steep stairs the poorer were the people that lived there, so that in the garrets were some so poor that when the morning came they did not know whether they should have anything to eat the whole long day. This was very, very sad, and gentle children would have wept if they had seen their pain.

In one of these garrets there lived all alone a little maiden called Zaya. She was an orphan, for her father had died many years before, and her poor mother, who had toiled long and wearily for her dear little daughter-her only child-had died also not long since.

Poor little Zaya had wept so bitterly when she saw her dear mother lying dead, and she had been so sad and sorry for a long time, that she quite forgot that she had no means of living. However, the poor people who lived in the house had given her part of their own food, so that she did not starve.

Then after awhile she had tried to work for herself and earn her own living. Her mother had taught her to make flowers out of paper; so that she made a lot of flowers, and when she had a full basket she took them into the street and sold them. She made flowers of many kinds, roses and lilies, and violets, and snowdrops, and primroses, and mignonette, and many beautiful sweet flowers that only grow in the Country Under the Sunset. Some of them she could make without any pattern, but others she could not, so when she wanted a pattern she took her basket of paper and scissors, and paste, and brushes, and all the things she used, and went into the garden which a kind lady owned, where there grew many beautiful flowers. There she sat down and worked away, looking at the flowers she wanted.

Sometimes she was very sad, and her tears fell thick and fast as she thought of her dear dead mother. Often she seemed to feel that her mother was looking down at her, and to see her tender smile in the sunshine on the water; then her heart was glad, and she sang so sweetly that the birds came around her and stopped their own singing to listen to her.

She and the birds grew great friends, and sometimes when she had sung a song they would all cry out together, as they sat round her in a ring, in a few notes that seemed to say quite plainly:

"Sing to us again. Sing to us again."

So she would sing again. Then she would ask them to sing, and they would sing till there was quite a concert. After a while the birds knew her so well that they would come into her room, and they even built their nests there, and they followed her wherever she went. The people used to say:

"Look at the girl with the birds; she must be half a bird herself, for see how the birds know and love her." From so many people coming to say things like this, some silly people actually believed that she was partly a bird, and they shook their heads when wise people laughed at them, and said:

"Indeed she must be; listen to her singing; her voice is sweeter even than the birds."

So a nickname was applied to her, and naughty boys called it after her in the street, and the nickname was "Big Bird". But Zaya did not mind the name; and although often naughty boys said it to her, meaning to cause her pain, she did not dislike it, but the contrary, for she so gloried in the love and trust of her little sweet-voiced pets that she wished to be thought like them.

Indeed it would be well for some naughty little boys and girls if they were as good and harmless as the little birds that work all day long for their helpless baby birds, building nests and bringing food, and sitting so patiently hatching their little speckled eggs.

One evening Zaya sat alone in her garret very sad and lonely. It was a lovely summer's evening, and she sat in the window looking out over the city. She could see over the many streets towards the great cathedral whose spire towered aloft into the sky higher by far even than the great tower of the king's palace. There was hardly a breath of wind, and the smoke went up straight from the chimneys, getting further and fainter till it was lost altogether.

Zaya was very sad. For the first time for many days her birds were all away from her at once, and she did not know where they had gone. It seemed to her as if they had deserted her, and she was so lonely, poor little maid, that she wept bitter tears. She was thinking of the story which long ago her dead mother had told her, how Prince Zaphir had slain the Giant, and she wondered what the prince was like, and thought how happy the people must have been when Zaphir and Bluebell were king and queen. Then she wondered if there were any hungry children in those good days, and if, indeed, as the people said, there were no more Giants. So she went on with her work before the open window.

Presently she looked up from her work and gazed across the city. There she saw a terrible thing-something so terrible that she gave a low cry of fear and wonder, and leaned out of the window, shading her eyes with her hands to see more clearly.

In the sky beyond the city she saw a vast shadowy Form with its arms raised. It was shrouded in a great misty robe that covered it, fading away into air so that she could only see the face and the grim, spectral hands.

The Form was so mighty that the city below it seemed like a child's toy. It was still far off the city.

The little maid's heart seemed to stand still with fear as she thought to herself, "The Giants, then, are not dead. This is another of them."

Quickly she ran down the high stairs and out into the street. There she saw some people, and cried to them,

"Look! look! the Giant, the Giant!" and pointed towards the Form which she still saw moving onwards to the city.

The people looked up, but they could not see anything, and they laughed and said,

"The child is mad."

Then poor little Zaya was more than ever frightened, and ran down the street crying out still,

"Look, look! the Giant, the Giant!" But no one heeded her, and all said, "The child is mad," and they went on their own ways.

Then the naughty boys came around her and cried out,

"Big Bird has lost her mates. She sees a bigger bird in the sky, and she wants it." And they made rhymes about her, and sang them as they danced round.

Zaya ran away from them; and she hurried right through the city, and out into the country beyond it, for she still saw the great Form before her in the air.

As she went on, and got nearer and nearer to the Giant, it grew a little darker. She could see only the clouds; but still there was visible the form of a Giant hanging dimly in the air.

A cold mist closed around her as the Giant appeared to come onwards towards her. Then she thought of all the poor people in the city, and she hoped that the Giant would spare them, and she knelt down before him and lifted up her hands appealingly, and cried aloud:

"Oh, great Giant! spare them, spare them!"

But the Giant moved onwards still as though he never heard. She cried aloud all the more,

"Oh, great Giant! spare them, spare them!" And she bowed her head and wept, and the Giant still, though very slowly, moved onward towards the city.

There was an old man not far off standing at the door of a small house built of great stones, but the little maid saw him not. His face wore a look of fear and wonder, and when he saw the child kneel and raise her hands, he drew nigh and listened to her voice. When he heard her say, “Oh, great Giant!” he murmured to himself, “It is then even as I feared. There are more Giants, and truly this is another.” He looked upwards, but he saw nothing, and he murmured again,

“I see not, yet this child can see; and yet I feared, for something told me that there was danger. Truly knowledge is blinder than innocence.”

The little maid, still not knowing there was any human being near her, cried out again, with a great cry of anguish:

“Oh, do not, do not, great Giant, do them harm. If someone must suffer, let it be me. Take me, I am willing to die, but spare them. Spare them, great Giant and do with me even as thou wilt.” But the giant heeded not.

And Knoal-for he was the old man-felt his eyes fill with tears, and he said to himself,

“Oh, noble child, how brave she is, she would sacrifice herself!” And coming closer to her, he put his hand upon her head.

Zaya, who was again bowing her head, started and looked round when she felt the touch. However, when she saw that it was Knoal, she was comforted, for she knew how wise and good he was, and felt that if any person could help her, he could. So she clung to him, and hid her face in his breast; and he stroked her hair and comforted her. But still he could see nothing.

The cold mist swept by, and when Zaya looked up, she saw that the Giant had passed by, and was moving onward to the city.

“Come with me, my child,” said the old man; and the two arose, and went into the dwelling built of great stones.

When Zaya entered, she started, for lo! the inside was as a Tomb. The old man felt her shudder, for he still held her close to him, and he said, "Weep not, little one, and fear not. This place reminds me and all who enter it, that to the tomb we must all come at the last. Fear it not, for it has grown to be a cheerful home to me."

Then the little maid was comforted, and began to examine all around her more closely. She saw all sorts of curious instruments, and many strange and many common herbs and simples hung to dry in bunches on the walls. The old man watched her in silence till her fear was gone, and then he said:

"My child, saw you the features of the Giant as he passed?"

She answered, "Yes."

"Can you describe his face and form to me?" he asked again.

Whereupon she began to tell him all that she had seen. How the Giant was so great that all the sky seemed filled. How the great arms were outspread, veiled in his robe, till far away the shroud was lost in air. How the face was as that of a strong man, pitiless, yet without malice; and that the eyes were blind.

The old man shuddered as he heard, for he knew that the Giant was a very terrible one; and his heart wept for the doomed city where so many would perish in the midst of their sin.

They determined to go forth and warn again the doomed people; and making no delay, the old man and the little maid hurried towards the city.

As they left the small house, Zaya saw the Giant before them, moving towards the city. They hurried on; and when they had passed through the cold mist, Zaya looked back and saw the Giant behind them.

Presently they came to the city.

It was a strange sight to see that old man and that little maid flying to tell people of the terrible Plague that was coming upon them. The old man's long white beard and hair and the child's golden locks were swept behind them in the wind, so quick they came. The faces of both were white as death. Behind them, seen only to the eyes of the pure-hearted little maid when she looked back, came ever onward at slow pace the spectral Giant that hung a dark shadow in the evening air.

But those in the city never saw the Giant; and when the old man and the little maid warned them, still they heeded not, but scoffed and jeered at them, and said,

"Tush! there are no Giants now"; and they went on their way, laughing and jeering.

Then the old man came and stood on a raised place amongst them, on the lowest step of the great fountain with the little maid by his side, and he spake thus:

"Oh, people, dwellers in this Land, be warned in time. This pure-hearted child, round whose sweet innocence even the little birds that fear men and women gather in peace, has this night seen in the sky the form of a Giant that advances ever onward menacingly to our city. Believe, oh, believe; and be warned, whilst ye may. To myself even as to you the sky is a blank; and yet see that I believe. For listen to me: all unknowing that another Giant had invaded our land, I sat pensive in my dwelling; and, without cause or motive, there came into my heart a sudden fear for the safety of our city. I arose and looked north and south and east and west, and on high and below, but never a sign of danger could I see. So I said to myself,

'Mine eyes are dim with a hundred years of watching and waiting, and so I cannot see.' And yet, oh people, dwellers in this land, though that century has dimmed mine outer eyes, still it has quickened mine inner eyes-the eyes of my soul. Again I went forth, and lo! this little maid knelt and implored a Giant, unseen by me, to spare the city; but he heard her not, or, if he heard, answered her not, and she fell prone. So hither we come to warn you. Yonder, says the maid, he passes onward to the city. Oh, be warned; be warned in time."

Still the people heeded not; but they scoffed and jeered the more, and said,

"Lo, the maid and the old man both are mad"; and they passed onwards to their homes-to dancing and feasting as before.

Then the naughty boys came and mocked them, and said that Zaya had lost her birds, and gone mad; and they made songs, and sang them as they danced round.

Zaya was so sorely grieved for the poor people that she heeded not the cruel boys. Seeing that she did not heed them, some of them got still more rude and wicked; they went a little way off, and threw things at them, and mocked them all the more.

Then, sad of heart, the old man arose, and took the little maid by the hand, and brought her away into the wilderness; and lodged her with him in the house built with great stones. That night Zaya slept with the sweet smell of the drying herbs all around her; and the old man held her hand that she might have no fear.

In the morning Zaya arose betimes, and awoke the old man, who had fallen asleep in his chair.

She went to the doorway and looked out, and then a thrill of gladness came upon her heart; for outside the door, as though waiting to see her, sat all her little birds, and many, many more. When the birds saw the little maid they sang a few loud joyous notes, and flew about foolishly for very joy-some of them fluttering their wings and looking so funny that she could not help laughing a little.

When Knoal and Zaya had eaten their frugal breakfast and given to their little feathered friends, they set out with sorrowful hearts to visit the city, and to try once more to warn the people. The birds flew around them as they went, and to cheer them sang as joyously as they could, although their little hearts were heavy.

As they walked they saw before them the great shadowy Giant; and he had now advanced to the very confines of the city.

Once again they warned the people, and great crowds came around them, but only mocked them more than ever; and naughty boys threw stones and sticks at the little birds and killed some of them. Poor Zaya wept bitterly, and Knoal's heart was very sad. After a time, when they had moved from the fountain, Zaya looked up and started with joyous surprise, for the great shadowy Giant was nowhere to be seen. She cried out in joy, and the people laughed and said,

"Cunning child! she sees that we will not believe her, and she pretends that the Giant has gone."

They surrounded her, jeering, and some of them said,

"Let us put her under the fountain and duck her, as a lesson to liars who would frighten us." Then they approached her with menaces. She clung close to Knoal, who had looked terribly grave when she had said she did not see the Giant any longer, and who was now as if in a dream, thinking. But at her touch he seemed to wake up; and he spoke sternly to the people, and rebuked them. But they cried out on him also, and said that as he had aided Zaya in her lie he should be ducked also, and they advanced to lay hands on them both.

The hand of one who was a ringleader was already outstretched, when he gave a low cry, and pressed his hand to his side; and, whilst the others turned to look at him in wonder, he cried out in great pain, and screamed horribly. Even whilst the people looked, his face grew blacker and blacker, and he fell down before them, and writhed a while in pain, and then died.

All the people screamed out in terror, and ran away, crying aloud:

“The Giant! the Giant! he is indeed amongst us!” They feared all the more that they could not see him.

But before they could leave the market-place, in the centre of which was the fountain, many fell dead and their corpses lay.

There in the centre knelt the old man and the little maid, praying; and the birds sat perched around the fountain, mute and still, and there was no sound heard save the cries of the people far off. Then their wailing sounded louder and louder, for the Giant-Plague-was amongst and around them, and there was no escaping, for it was now too late to fly.

Alas! in the Country Under the Sunset there was much weeping that day; and when the night came there was little sleep, for there was fear in some hearts and pain in others. None were still except the dead, who lay stark about the city, so still and lifeless that even the cold light of the moon and the shadows of the drifting clouds moving over them could not make them seem as though they lived.

And for many a long day there was pain and grief and death in the Country Under the Sunset.

Knoal and Zaya did all they could to help the poor people, but it was hard indeed to aid them, for the unseen Giant was amongst them, wandering through the city to and fro, so that none could tell where he would lay his ice-cold hand.

Some people fled away out of the city; but it was little use, for go how they would and fly never so fast they were still within the grasp of the unseen Giant. Ever and anon he turned their warm hearts to ice with his breath and his touch, and they fell dead.

Some, like those within the city, were spared, and of these some perished of hunger, and the rest crept sadly back to the city and lived or died amongst their friends. And it was all, oh! so sad, for there was nothing but grief and fear and weeping from morn till night.

Now, see how Zaya's little bird friends helped her in her need.

They seemed to see the coming of the Giant when no one-not even the little maid herself-could see anything, and they managed to tell her when there was danger just as well as though they could talk.

At first Knoal and she went home every evening to the house built of great stones to sleep, and came again to the city in the morning, and stayed with the poor sick people, comforting them and feeding them, and giving them medicine which Knoal, from his great wisdom, knew would do them good. Thus they saved many precious human lives, and those who were rescued were very thankful, and henceforth ever after lived holier and more unselfish lives.

After a few days, however, they found that the poor sick people needed help even more at night than in the day, and so they came and lived in the city altogether, helping the stricken folk day and night.

At the earliest dawn Zaya would go forth to breathe the morning air; and there, just waked from sleep, would be her feathered friends waiting for her. They sang glad songs of joy, and came and perched on her shoulders and her head, and kissed her. Then, if she went to go towards any place where, during the night, the Plague had laid his deadly hand, they would flutter before her, and try to impede her, and scream out in their own tongue,

"Go back! go back!"

They pecked of her bread and drank of her cup before she touched them; and when there was danger-for the cold hand of the Giant was placed everywhere-they would cry,

"No, no!" and she would not touch the food, or let anyone else do so. Often it happened that, even whilst it pecked at the bread or drank of the cup, a poor little bird would fall down and flutter its wings and die; but all they that died, did so with a chirp of joy, looking at their little mistress, for whom they had gladly perished. Whenever the little birds found that the bread and the cup were pure and free from danger, they would look up at Zaya jauntily, and flap their wings and try to crow, and seemed so saucy that the poor sad little maiden would smile.

There was one old bird that always took a second, and often a great many pecks at the bread when it was good, so that he got quite a hearty meal; and sometimes he would go on feeding till Zaya would Shake her finger at him and say,

"Greedy!" and he would hop away as if he had done nothing.

There was one other dear little bird-a robin, with a breast as red as the sunset-that loved Zaya more than one can think. When he tried the food and found that it was safe to eat, he would take a tiny piece in his bill, and fly up and put it in her mouth.

Every little bird that drank from Zaya's cup and found it good raised its head to say grace; and ever since then the little birds do the same, and they never forget to say their grace-as some thankless children do.

Thus Knoal and Zaya lived, although many around them died, and the Giant still remained in the city. So many people died that one began to wonder that so many were left; for it was only when the town began to get thinned that people thought of the vast numbers that had lived in it.

Poor little Zaya had got so pale and thin that she looked a shadow, and Knoal's form was bent more with the sufferings of a few weeks than it had been by his century of age. But although the two were weary and worn, they still kept on their good work of aiding the sick.

Many of the little birds were dead.

One morning the old man was very weak-so weak that he could hardly stand. Zaya got frightened about him, and said,

"Are you ill, father?" for she always called him father now.

He answered her in a voice alas! hoarse and low, but very, very tender:

"My child, I fear the end is coming: take me home, that there I may die."

At his words Zaya gave a low cry and fell on her knees beside him, and buried her head in his bosom and wept bitterly, whilst she hugged him close. But she had little time for weeping, for the old man struggled up to his feet, and, seeing that he wanted aid, she dried her tears and helped him.

The old man took his staff, and with Zaya helping to support him, got as far as the fountain in the midst of the market-place; and there, on the lowest step, he sank down as though exhausted. Zaya felt him grow cold as ice, and she knew that the chilly hand of the Giant had been laid upon him.

Then, without knowing why, she looked up to where she had last seen the Giant as Knoal and she had stood beside the fountain. And lo! as she looked, holding Knoal's hand, she saw the shadowy form of the terrible Giant who had been so long invisible growing more and more clearly out of the clouds.

His face was stern as ever, and his eyes were still blind.

Zaya cried to the Giant, still holding Knoal tightly by the hand:

"Not him, not him! Oh, mighty Giant! not him! not him!" and she bowed her head and wept.

There was such. anguish in her hart that to the blind eyes of the shadowy Giant came tears that fell like dew on the forehead of the old man. Knoal spake to Zaya:

"Grieve not, my child. I am glad that you see the Giant again, for I have hope that he will leave our city free from woe. I am the last victim, and I gladly die."

Then Zaya knelt to the Giant, and said:

"Spare him! oh! spare him and take me! but spare him! spare him!"

The old man raised himself upon his elbow as he lay, and spake to her:

"Grieve not, my little one, and repine not. Sooth I know that you would gladly give your life for mine. But we must give for the good of others that which is dearer to us than our lives. Bless you, my little one, and be good. Farewell! farewell!"

As he spake the last word he grew cold as death, and his spirit passed away.

Zaya knelt down and prayed; and when she looked up she saw the shadowy Giant moving away.

The Giant turned as he passed on, and Zaya saw that his blind eyes looked towards her as though he were trying to see. He raised the great shadowy arms, draped still in his shroud of mist, as though blessing her; and she thought that the wind that came by her moaning bore the echo of the words:

"Innocence and devotion save the land."

Presently she saw far off the great shadowy Giant Plague moving away to the border of the Land, and passing between the Guardian Spirits out through the Portal into the deserts beyond-for ever.

THE SHADOW BUILDER

The lonely Shadow Builder watches ever in his lonely abode.

The walls are of cloud, and round and through them, changing ever as they come, pass the dim shades of all the things that have been.

This endless, shadowy, wheeling, moving circle is called *The Procession Of The Dead Past*. In it everything is just as it has been in the great world. There is no change in any part; for each moment, as it passes, sends its shade into this dim Procession. Here there are moving people and events - cares - thoughts - follies - crimes - joys - sorrows - places - scenes - hopes and fears, and all that make the sum of life with all its lights and shadows. Every picture in nature where shadow dwells - and that is every one - has here its dim phantom. Here are all pictures that are most fair and most sad to see - the passing gloom over a sunny cornfield when with the breeze comes the dark sway of the full ears as they bend and rise; the ripple on the glassy surface of a summer sea; the dark expanse that lies beyond and without the broad track of moonlight on the water; the lacework of glare and gloom that flickers over the road as one passes in autumn when the moonlight is falling through the naked branches of overhanging trees; the cool, restful shade under the thick trees in summer timewhen the sun is flaming down on the haymaker at work; the dark clouds that flit across the moon, hiding her light, which leaps out again hollowly and coldly; the gloom of violet and black that rises on the horizon when rain is near in summer time; the dark recesses and gloomy caverns where the waterfall hurls itself shrieking into the pool below, - all these shadow pictures, and a thousand others that come by night and day, circle in the Procession among the things that have been.

Here, too, every act that any human being does, every thought - good and bad - every wish, every hope - everything that is secret - is pictured, and becomes a lasting record which cannot be blotted out; for at any time the Shadow Builder may summon with his special hand any one - sleeping or waking - to behold what is pictured of the Dead Past, in the dim, mysterious distance which encompasses his lonely abode.

In this ever-moving Procession of the Dead Past there is but one place where the circling phantoms are not, and where the cloudy walls are lost.There is here a great blackness, dense and deep, and full of gloom, and behind which lies the great real world without.

This blackness is called *The Gate Of Dread*.

The Procession afar off takes from it its course, and when passing on its way it circles again towards the darkness, the shadowy phantoms melt again into the mysterious gloom.

Sometimes the Shadow Builder passes through the vapoury walls of his abode and mingles in the ranks of the Procession; and sometimes a figure summoned by the wave of his spectral hand, with silent footfall stalks out of the mist and pauses beside him. Sometimes from a sleeping body the Shadow Builder summons a dreaming soul; then for a time the quick and the dead stand face to face, and men call it a dream of the Past. When this happens, friend meets friend or foe meets foe; and over the soul of the dreamer comes a happy memory long vanished, or the troubled agony of remorse. But no spectre passes through the misty wall, save to the Shadow Builder alone; and no human being - even in a dream - can enter the dimness where the Procession moves along.

So lives the lonely Shadow Builder amid his gloom; and his habitation is peopled by a spectral past.

His only people are of the past; for though he creates shadows they dwell not with him. His children go out at once to their homes in the big world, and he knows them no more till, in the fulness of time, they join the Precession of the Dead Past, and reach, in turn, the misty walls of his home.

For the Shadow Builder there is not night nor day, nor season of the year; but for ever round his lonely dwelling passes the silent Procession of the Dead Past.

Sometimes he sits and muses with eyes fixed and staring, and seeing nothing; and then out at sea there is a cloudless calm or the black gloom of night. Towards the far north or south for long months together he never looks, and then the stillness of the arctic night reigns alone. When the dreamy eyes again become conscious, the hard silence softens into the sounds of life and light.

Sometimes, with set frown on his face and a hard look in the eyes, which flash and gleam dark lightnings, the Shadow Builder sways resolute to his task, and round the world the shadows troop thick and fast. Over the sea sweeps the blackness of the tempest; the dim lights flicker in the cots away upon the lonely moors; and even in the palaces of kings dark shadows pass and fly and glide over all things - yea, through the hearts of the kings themselves - for the Shadow Builder is then dread to look upon.

Now and again, with long whiles between, the Shadow Builder as he completes his task lingers over the work as though he loves it. His heart yearns to the children of his will; and he fain would keep even one shadow to be a companion to him in his loneliness. But the voice of the Great Present is ever ringing in his ears at such times, enjoining him to haste. The giant voice booms out,

“Onwards, onwards.”

Whilst the words ring in the ears of the Shadow Builder the completed shadow fades from beneath his hands, and passing unseen through the Gate of Dread, mingles in the great world without, in which it is to play its part. When, in the fulness of time, this shadow comes into the ranks of the Procession of the Dead Past, the Shadow Builder knows it and remembers it; but in his dead heart there is no gleam of loving remembrance, for he can only love the Present, that slips ever from his grasp.

And oh! it is a lonely life which the Shadow Builder lives; and in the weird, sad, solemn, mysterious, silent gloom which encompasses him, he toils on ever at his lonely task.

But sometimes too the Shadow Builder has his joys. Baby shadows spring up, and sunny pictures, alight with sweetness and love, glide from under his touch, and are gone.

Before the Shadow Builder at his task lies a space wherein is neither light nor darkness, neither joy nor gloom. Whatsoever touches it fades away as sand heaps melt before the incoming tide, or like words writ on water. In it all things lose their being and become part of the great Is-Not; and this terrible line of mystery is called THE THRESHOLD. Whatsoever passes into it disappears; and whatsoever emerges from it is complete as it comes and passes into the great world as a thing to run its course. Before the Threshold the Shadow Builder himself is as naught; and in its absorbing might there is that which he cannot sway or rule.

When at his task he summons; and out of the impalpable nothingness of the Threshold there comes the object of his will. Sometimes the shadow bursts full and freshly and is suddenly lost in the gloom of the Gate of Dread; and sometimes it grows softly and faintly, getting fuller as it comes, and so melts away into the gloom.

The lonely Shadow Builder is working in his lonely abode; around him, beyond the vapoury walls, pressing onward as ever, is the circling Procession of the Dead Past. Storm and calm have each been summoned from the Threshold, and have gone; and now in this calm, wistful moment the Shadow Builder pauses at his task, and wishes and wishes till, to his lonely longing wistfulness, the nothingness of THE THRESHOLD sends an answer.

Forth from it grows the shadow of a Baby's foot, stepping with tottering gait out towards the world; then follows the little round body and the big head, and the Baby shadow moves onwards, swaying and balancing with uncertain step. Swift behind it come the Mother's hands stretched out in loving helpfulness, lest it should fall. One step - two - it totters, and is falling; but the Mother's arms are swift, and the gentle hands bear it firmly up. The Child turns and toddles again into its Mother's arms.

Again it strives to walk; and again the Mother's watchful hands are ready. This time it needs not the help; but when the race is over, the shadow Child turns again lovingly to its Mother's breast.

Once again it strives, and it walks boldly and firmly; but the Mother's hands quiver as they hang by her side, whilst a tear sweeps down the cheek, although that cheek is gladdened by a smile.

The Baby shadow turns, and goes a little way off. Then over the misty Nothing on which the shadows fall, flits the flickering shadow of a tiny hand waving; and onward, with firm tread, the shadow of the little feet moves out into the misty gloom of the Gate of Dread, and passes away.

But the Mother's shadow moves not. The hands are pressed to the heart, the loving face is upturned in prayer, and down the cheeks roll great tears. Then her head bows lower as the little feet pass beyond her ken; and lower and lower bends the weeping Mother till she lies prone. Even as he looks, the Shadow Builder sees the shadows fade away, away, and the terrible nothingness of the Threshold only is there.

Then presently in the Procession of the Dead Past circle round the misty walls the shadows that had been - the Mother and the Child.

Now from out the Threshold steps a Youth with brave and buoyant tread; and as on the misty veil his shadow falls, the dress and bearing proclaim him a sailor lad. Close to this shadow comes another - the Mother’s. Older and thinner she is, as if with watching, but still the same. The old loving hands array prettily the knotted kerchief hanging loosely on the open throat; and the Boy’s hands reach out, take the Mother’s face between them, and draw it forward for a kiss. The Mother’s arms fly round her Son, and in a close embrace they cling.

The Mother kisses her Boy again and again; and together they stand, as though to part were impossible.

Suddenly the Boy turns as though he heard a call. The Mother clings closer. He seems to remonstrate tenderly; but the loving arms hold tighter, till with gentle force he tears himself away. The Mother takes a step forward, and holds out the thin hands trembling in an agony of grief. The Boy stops; to one knee he bends, then, dashing away his tears, he waves his cap, and hurries on, while once again the Mother sinks to her knees, and weeps.

And so, slowly, once again, the shadows of the Mother and the Child grown greater in the fulness of time, pass out through the Gate of Dread, and circle among the phantoms in the Procession of the Dead Past - the Mother following hard upon the speeding footsteps of her Son.

In the long pause that follows, whilst the Shadow Builder watches, all seems changed. Out from the Threshold comes a mist, such as hangs sometimes over the surface of a tropic sea.

By little and little the mist rolls away, and forth advances, black and great, the prow of a mighty vessel. The shadows of the great sails lie faintly in the cool depths of the sea, as the sails flap idly in the breezeless air. Over the bulwark lean listless figures waiting for a wind to come. The mist on the sea melts slowly away; and by the dark shadows of men sheltering from the sunny glare and fanning themselves with their broad sailor hats, it is plain that the heat is terrible.

Now from far off, behind the ship, comes up over the horizon a black cloud no bigger than a man's hand, but sweeping on with terrible speed. Also, from far away, before her course, rises the edge of a coral reef, scarcely seen above the glassy water, but darkling the depths below.

Those on board see neither of these things, for they shelter under their awnings, and sigh for cool breezes.

Quicker and quicker comes the dark cloud, sweeping faster and faster, and growing blacker and blacker and vaster and vaster as it comes.

Then those on board seem to know the danger. Hurried shadows fly along the decks; up the shadows of the ladders hurry shadows of men. The flapping of the great sails ceases as one by one the willing hands draw them in.

But quicker than the hands of men can work sweeps the tempest.

Onwards it rushes, and terrible things come close behind; black darkness - towering waves that break in fury and fly aloft - the spume of the sea swept heavenwards - the great clouds wheeling in fury; -

and in the centre of these flying, whirling, maddening shadows, rocks the shadow of the ship.

As the black darkness of the heavens encompasses all, the rush of shadowy storm sweeps through the Gate of Dread.

As he waits and looks and sees the cyclone whirling amongst the shadows in the Procession of the Dead Past, the Shadow Builder, even in his dead heart, feels a weight of pain for the brave Sailor Boy tossed on the deep, and the anxious Mother sitting lonely at home.

Again from the Threshold passes a shadow, growing deeper as it comes, but very, very faint at first; for here the sun is strong, and there is but little room for shadows on the bare rock which seems to rise from the glare and the glitter of the sea deeps round.

On the lonely rock a Sailor Boy stands; thin and gaunt he is, and his clothing is but a few rags. Sheltering his eyes with his hand, he looks out to sea, where, afar off, the cloudless sky sinks to meet the burning sea; but no speck over the horizon - no distant glitter of a white sail - gives him a ray of hope.

Long, long he peers, till, wearied out, he sits down on the rock and bows his head as if in despair for a time. As the sea falls, he gathers from the rock the shellfish which has come during the tide.

So the day wears on, and the night comes; and in the tropic sky the stars hang like lamps.

In the cool silence of the night the forlorn Sailor Boy rests - sleeps, and dreams. His dreams are of home - of loving arms stretched out to meet him - of banquets spread - of green fields and waving branches, and the sheltering happiness of his mother’s love. For in his sleep the Shadow Builder summons his dreaming soul, and shows him all these blessings passing ceaselessly in the Procession of the Dead Past, and so comforts him lest he should despair and die.

Thus wear on many weary days; and the sailor-boy lingers on the lonely rock.

Afar off he can just see a hill that seems to rise over the Water. One morning when the blackening sky and the sultry air promise a storm, the distant mountain seems nearer; and he thinks that he will try to reach it by swimming.

Whilst he is thus resolving, the storm rushes up over the horizon and sweeps him from the lonely rock. He swims with a bold heart; but just as his strength is done, he is cast by the fury of the storm on a beach of soft sand. The storm passes on its way and the waves leave him high and dry. He goes inland, where, in a cave in the rock, he finds shelter, and sinks to sleep.

The Shadow Builder, as he sees all this happen in the shadows on the clouds, and land, and sea, rejoices in his dead heart that the lonely mother perhaps will not wait in vain.

So time wears on, and many, many weary days pass. The Boy becomes a young Man, living in the lonely island; his beard has grown, and he is clothed in a dress of leaves. All day long, save when he is not working to get food to eat, he watches from the mountain top for a ship to come. As he stands looking out over the sea, the sun casts his shadow down the hillside, so that at evening, as it sinks low in the waters, the shadow of the lonely Sailor grows longer and longer, till at the last it makes a dark streak down the hill side, even to the water's edge.

The lonely Man's heart grows heavier and heavier as he waits and watches, whilst the weary time passes and the countless days and nights come and go.

Time comes when he begins to get feebler and feebler. At last he grows sick to death, and lingers long a-dying.

Then these shadows pass away.

Out from the Threshold grows the shadow of an old woman, thin and worn, sitting in a lonely cottage on a jutting cliff. In the window a lamp burns in the night time to welcome the Lost One should he ever return, and to guide him to his Mother’s home. By the lamp the Mother watches, till, wearied out, she sinks to sleep.

As she sleeps the Shadow Builder summons her sleeping soul with the wave of his spectral hand.

She stands beside him in the lonely abode, whilst round them through the misty walls passes onward the Procession of the Dead Past.

As she looks, the Shadow Builder lifts his spectral hand to point to the vision of her Son.

But the Mother’s eyes are quicker than even the spectral hand that evokes all the shadows of the rushing storm, and ere the hand is raised she sees her Son among the Shadows of the Past. The Mother’s heart is filled with unspeakable joy, as she sees him alive and hale, although a prisoner amongst the tropic seas.

But alas! she knows not that in the dim Procession pass only the things that have been; and that although in the past the lonely Sailor lived, in the present - even at the moment - he may be dying or dead.

The Mother stretches out her arms to her Boy; but even as she does, her sleeping soul loses sight of the dim Procession and vanishes from the Shadow Builder’s lonely abode. For when she knows that her Boy is alive, there follows a great pain that he is lonely and waits and watches for help; and the quick heart of the Mother is overcome with grief, and she wakes with a bitter cry.

Then as she rises and looks past the dying lamp out into the dawn, the Mother feels that she has seen a vision of her son in sleep, and that he lives and waits for help; and her heart glows with a great resolve.

Quickly then from the Threshold float many shadows. -

A lonely Mother speeding with flying feet to a distant city.

Grave men refusing, but not unkindly, a kneeling woman making an appeal with uplifted hands.

Hard men spurning a praying Mother from their doors.

A wild rabble of bad and thoughtless boys and girls hounding through the streets a hurrying woman.

A shadow of pain on a Mother's heart.

The upcoming of a black cloud of despair, but which hangs far off - for it cannot advance into the bright sunlight of the Mother's resolve.

Weary days with their own myriad shadows.

Lonely nights - black want - cold - hunger and pain; and through all these darkening shadows the swift moving shadow of the Mother's flying feet.

A long long line of such pictures come ever anigh in the Procession, till the dead heart of the Shadow Builder grows icy, and his burning eyes look out savagely on all who give pain and trial to the Mother's faithful heart.

And so all these shadows float out into a black mist, and are lost in the gloom of the Gate of Dread.

Another shadow grows out of the mist. -

An Old Man sits in his armchair. The firelight flickering throws his image, quaintly dancing, on the wall of the room. He is old, for the great shoulders are bowed, and the grand strong face is lined with years. There is another shadow in the room; it is the Mother's - she is standing by the table, and is telling her story; her thin hands point away where in the distance she knows her Son is a prisoner in the lonely seas.

The Old Man rises; the enthusiasm of the Mother's heart has touched him, and back to his memory rush the old love and energy and valour of his youth. The great hand rises, closes, and strikes the table with a mighty blow, as though declaring a binding promise. The Mother sinks to her knees, - she seizes the great hand and kisses it, and stands erect.

Other men come in - they receive orders - they hurry out.

Then come many shadows whose movement and swiftness and firm purpose mean life and hope.

At sunset, when the masts make long shadows on the harbour water, a big ship moves out on her journey to the tropic seas. Men's shadows quickly flit up and down the rigging and along the decks.

As the shadows wheel round the capstan bar the anchor rises; and into the sunset passes the great vessel.

In the bow, like a figure of Hope, stands the Mother, gazing with eager eyes on the far-off horizon.

Then this shadow fades.

A great ship sweeps along with white sails swelling to the breeze; at the bow stands the Mother, gazing ever out into the distance before her.

Storms come and the ship flies before the blast; but she swerves not, for the Mother, with outstretched hand, points the way, and the helmsman swaying beside his wheel obeys the hand.

So this shadow also passes.

The shadows of days and nights come on in quick succession; and the Mother seeks ever for her Son.

So the records of the prosperous journey melt into a faint, dim, misty shadow through which one figure alone stands clear - the watching Mother at the vessel's prow.

Now from the Threshold grow the shadows of the mountain island and of the ship drawing nigh. In the prow the Mother kneels, looking out and pointing. A boat is lowered. Men spring on board with eager feet; but before them all is the Mother. The boat nears the island; the water shallows, and on the hot white beach the men spring to land.

But in the boat's prow still the Mother sits. In her long anxious hours of agony she has seen in her dreams her Son standing afar off and watching; she has seen him wave his arms with a great joy as the ship rises over the horizon's edge; she has seen him standing on the beach waiting; she has seen him rushing through the surf so that the first thing that the lonely Sailor Boy should touch would be his Mother's loving hands.

But alas! for her dreams. No figure with joyous waving arms stands on the summit of the mountain - no eager figure stands at the water's edge or dashes to meet her through the surf. Her heart grows cold and chill with fear.

Has she indeed come too late?

The men leave the boat, comforting her as they go with shakings of the hand and kindly touches upon the shoulder. She motions them to haste and remains kneeling.

The time goes on. The men ascend the mountain; they search, but they find not the lost Sailor Boy, and with slow, halting feet they return to the boat.

The Mother hears them coming afar and rises to meet them. They hang their heads. The Mother's arms go up, tossed aloft in the anguish of despair, and she sinks swooning in the boat.

The Shadow Builder in an instant summons her spirit from her senseless clay, and points to a figure passing, without movement, in the Procession of the Dead Past.

Then quicker than light the Mother's soul flies back full of new-found joy.

She rises from the boat - she springs to land. The men follow wondering.

She rushes along the shore with flying feet; the sailors come close behind.

She stops opposite the entrance to a cave obscured with trailing brambles. Here, without turning, she motions to the men to wait. They pause and she passes within.

For a few moments grim darkness pours from the threshold; and then one sad, sad vision grows and passes. -

A dim, dark cave - a worn man lying prone, and a Mother in anguish bending over the cold clay. On the icy breast she lays her hand; but alas! she cannot feel the beat of the heart she loves.

With a wild, heart-stricken gesture, she flings herself upon the body of her Son and holds it close, close - as though the clasp of a Mother were stronger than the grasp of Death.

The dead heart of the Shadow Builder is alive with pain as he turns away from the sad picture, and with anxious eyes looks where from behind the Gate of Dread, the Mother and Child must come to join the ever-swelling ranks of the Procession of the Dead Past.

Slowly, slowly comes the shadow of the clay cold Mariner passing on.

But swifter than light come the Mother's flying feet. The arms so strong with love are stretched out - the thin hands grasp the passing shadow of her Son and tear him back beyond the Gate of Dread - to life - and liberty - and love.

The lonely Shadow Builder knows now that the Mother’s arms are stronger than the grasp of Death.

HOW SEVEN WENT MAD

On the bank of the river that flows through the Land there stands a beautiful palace, where one of the great men dwells.

The bank rises steep from the rushing water; and the great trees growing on the slope rise so high that their branches wave level with the palace turrets. It is a beautiful spot, where the grass is crisp and short and close like velvet, and as green as emerald. There the daisies shine like stars that have fallen, and lie scattered over the sward.

Many children have lived and grown to be men and women in the old palace, and they have had many pets. Amongst their pets have been many birds - for birds of all kinds love the place. In one corner is a spot which is called the Birds' Burying Ground. Here all the pets are laid when they die; and the grass grows greenly here, and many flowers spring up among the monuments.

One of the boys that had here dwelt had once, as a pet, a raven. He found the bird, whose leg had been wounded, and took it home and nursed it till it grew well again; but the poor thing was lame.

Tineboy was the youth's name; and the bird was called Mr. Daw. As you may imagine, the raven loved the boy and never left him. There was a cage for it in his bedroom, and there the bird went every night to roost when the sun went down. Birds go to bed quite regularly of their own accord; and if you wished to punish a bird you would make him get up. Birds are not like boys and girls. Just fancy punishing boys or girls by not letting them go to bed at sunset, or by preventing them getting up very early in the morning.

Well, when morning came this bird would get up and stretch himself, and wink his eyes, and give a good shake all over, and then feel quite awake and ready to begin the day.

A bird has a much easier time of it in getting up than a boy or a girl. Soap cannot get into its eye; or the comb will not stick in knots of hair, and its shoe-laces never get into black knots. This is because it does not use soap, or combs, or shoe-laces; if it did, perhaps it also would suffer.

When Mr. Daw had quite finished his own dressing, he would hop on the bed and try and wake his master and make him get up; but of the two to wake him was the easier task. When the boy went to school the bird would fly along the road beside him, and would sit near on a tree till school was over, and then would follow him home again in the same way.

Tineboy was very fond of Mr. Daw and he used sometimes to try to make him come into the schoolroom during school-hours. But the bird was very wise, and would not.

One day Tineboy was at his sums, and instead of attending to what he was doing, he kept trying to make Mr. Daw come in. The sum was "multiply 117,649 by 7." Tineboy and Mr. Daw kept looking at one another. Tineboy made signals to the bird to come in. Mr. Daw, however, would not stir; he sat outside in the shade, for the day was very hot, and put his head on one side and looked in knowingly.

"Come in, Mr. Daw," said Tineboy, "and help me to do this sum.'' Mr. Daw only croaked.

"Seven times nine are seventy-seven, seven times nine are seventy-nine - no ninety-seven. Oh, I don't know - I wish number 7 had never been invented," said Tineboy.

"Croak;" said Mr. Daw.

The day was very hot and Tineboy was very sleepy. He thought that perhaps he would be able to do the sum better if he rested a little while, just to think; and so he put his head down on the table. He was not quite comfortable, for his forehead was on the 7, at least he thought it was; so he shifted it till it hung right down over the edge of the desk. Then, after a while, somehow, very queer things began to happen.

The Teacher was just going to tell them a story.

The scholars had all settled themselves down to listen; the Raven sat on the sill of the open window, put his head on one side, closed one eye - the eye nearest the school-room - so that they might think him asleep, and listened away harder than any of them.

The pupils were all happy - all except three. One because his leg went to sleep; another because she had her pocket full of curds and wanted to eat them, and couldn't without being found out, and the curds were melting away; and the third, who was awfully sleepy, and awfully anxious to hear the story, and couldn't do either because of the other.

The schoolmaster then began his story.

HOW POOR 7 WENT MAD

"The Alphabet Doctor -"

Here he was interrupted by Tineboy, who said -

"What is an Alphabet Doctor?"

"An Alphabet Doctor," said the schoolmaster, "is the doctor who attends to the sicknesses and diseases of the letters of the Alphabet."

"How have Alphabets diseases and sicknesses?" asked Tineboy.

"Oh, they have plenty. Do you never make a crooked o or a capital A with a lame leg, or a T that is not straight in its back?"

There was a chorus from all the class, "He does. He does often." Ruffin, the biggest boy, said after all the others, "Very often. In fact always."

"Very well, then there must be some one to put them straight again, must there not?"

None of the children could say that there was not. Tineboy alone was heard to mutter to himself, "I don't believe it."

The schoolmaster began again -

"The Alphabet Doctor was sitting down to his tea. He was very tired, for he had been out attending cases all day."

Tineboy again interrupted, "What cases?"

"I can tell you. He had to put in an i which had been omitted, and to alter the leg of an R which had been twisted into a B.

"Well, just as he was beginning his tea a hurried knock came to the door. He went to the door, opened it, and a groom rushed into the room, breathless with running, and said -

"'Oh, Doctor, do come quick; there is a frightful calamity down at our place.'"

"'What is our place?' said the doctor."

"'Oh, you know. The Number Stables.'"

"What are the Number Stables?" said Tineboy, again interrupting.

"The Number Stables," said the Teacher, "are the stables where the numbers are kept."

"Why are they kept in stables?" said Tineboy.

"Because they go so fast."

"How do they go fast?"

"You take a sum and work it and you will see at once. Or look at your multiplication table; it starts with twice one are two, and before you get down the page you are at twelve times twelve. Is that not fast going?"

"Well, they have to keep the numbers in sables, or else they would run away altogether and never be heard of again. At the end of the day they all come home and change their shoes, and get tied up and have their supper."

"The Groom from the Number Stables was very impatient."

"'What is wrong?' said the Doctor."

"'Oh, poor 7, sir.'"

"'What of him?'"

"'He is mortal bad. We don't think he'll ever get through it.'"

"'Through what?' said the Doctor."

"'Come and see,' said the Groom."

"The Doctor hurried away, taking the lantern with him, for the night was dark, and soon got to the Stables."

"As he got close there was a very curious sound heard - a sound of gasping and choking, and yelling and coughing, and laughing, and a wild, unearthly screech all in one."

"'Oh, do come quick!' said the Groom."

"When the Doctor entered the stables there was poor No. 7 with all the neighbours round him, and he was in a very bad way. He was foaming at the mouth and apparently quite mad. The Nurse from the Grammar Village was holding him by the hand, trying to bleed him. All the neighbours were wringing either their hands or their necks, or were helping to hold him. The Footsmith, - the man," explained the teacher, seeing from the look on Tineboy's face that he was going to ask a question, "the man who puts the feet on the letters and numbers to make them able to stand upright without wearing out, - was holding down the poor demented nuummbeer."

"The Nurse, trying to quiet him, said:"

"'There now, there now, deary - don't go and make a noise. Here comes the good Alphabet Doctor, who will make you unmad.'"

"'I won't be made unmad,' said 7, loudly."

"'But, my good sir,' said the Doctor, 'this cannot go on. You surely are not mad enough to insist on being mad?'"

"'Yes, I am,' said 7, loudly."

"'Then,' said the Doctor blandly, 'if you are mad enough to insist on being mad, we must try to cure your madness or being mad, and then you will be unmad enough to wish to be unmad, and we will cure that too.'"

"I don't understand that,' ' said Tineboy.

"Hush!" said the class.

"The Doctor took out his stethoscope, and his telescope, and his microscope, and his horoscope, and began to use them on poor mad 7."

"First he put the stethoscope to the sole of his foot, and began to talk into it."

"'That is not the way to use that,' said the Nurse; 'you ought to put it to his chest and listen to it.'"

"'Not at all, my dear madam,' said the bland Doctor, 'that is the way with sane people; but, of course, when one is insane, the fact of the disease necessitates an opposite method of treatment.' Then he took the telescope and looked at him to see how near he was, and the microscope to look how small; and then he drew his horoscope."

"Why did he draw it?" said Tineboy.

"Because, my dear child," said the Teacher, "do you not see that by right a horoscope is cast; but as the poor man was mad the horoscope had to be drawn."

"What is a horrorscope?" said Tineboy.

"It is not horrorscope, my child; it is horoscope - a very different thing."

"Well, what is horoscope?"

“Look in your dictionary, my dear child,” said the Teacher.

“Well, when the doctor had used all the instruments, he said, ‘I use all these in order to find the scope of the disease. I shall now proceed to find the cause. In the first instance, I shall interrogate the patient.’”

“‘Now, my good sir, why do you insist on being mad?’”

“‘Because I choose.’”

“‘Oh, my dear sir, that is not a polite answer. Why do you choose?’”

“‘I can’t say why,’ said 7 ‘unless I make a speech.’”

“‘Well, make a speech.’”

“‘I can’t speak till I am set free; how can I make a speech with all these people holding me?’”

“‘We are afraid to let you go,’ said the Nurse, ‘you will run away.’”

“‘I will not.’”

“‘You promise that?’ said the doctor.”

“‘I promise,’ said 7.”

“‘Let him go,’ said the Doctor, and accordingly they put a piece of carpet under him, and the Footsmith sat on his head, the way they do when horses fall down in the street. Then they all got clear away, and the Footsmith got away too; and after a long struggle 7 got to his feet.”

“‘Now make the speech,’ said the Doctor.”

“‘I can’t begin,’ said 7, ‘till I get a glass of water on a table. Who ever heard of any one making a speech without a glass of water!’”

“So they brought a glass of water.”

“‘Ladies and Gentlemen - ‘ began 7, and then stopped.”

“‘What are you waiting for?’ said the Doctor.”

"'For the applause, of course,' said 7. 'Who ever heard of a speech without applause?'"

"They all applauded."

"'I am mad,' said 7, 'because I choose to be mad; and I never shall, will, might, could, should, would, or ought to be anything but mad. The treatment that I get is enough to make me mad.'"

"'Dear me, dear me!' said the Doctor. 'What treatment?'"

"'Morning, noon, and night am I treated worse than any slave. There is not in the whole range of learning any one thing that has so much to bear as I have. I work hard all the time. I never grumble. I am often a multiple; often a multiplicand. I am willing to bear my share of being a result, but I cannot stand the treatment I get. I am wrong added, wrong divided, wrong subtracted, and wrong multiplied. Other numbers are not treated as I am; and, besides, they are not orphans like me.'"

"'Orphans?' asked the Doctor; 'what do you mean?'"

"'I mean that the other numbers have lots of relations. But I have neither kith nor kin except old Number l, and he does not count for much; and, besides, I am only his great-great-great-great-grandson.'"

"'How do you mean?' asked the Doctor."

"'Oh, he is an old chap that is there all the time. He has all his children round him, and I only come six generations down.'"

"'Humph!' said the doctor."

"'Number 2,' went on 7, 'never gets into any trouble, and 4, 6, and 8 are his cousins. Number 3 is close to 6 and 9. No. 5 is half a decimal and he never gets into trouble. But as for me, I am miserable, ill-treated, and alone.' Here poor 7 began to cry, and bending down his head sobbed bitterly.' '

When the Teacher got thus far there was an Interruption, for here little Tineboy began to cry too.

"Why are you crying?" said Ruffin, the bully boy.

"I am not crying," said Tineboy, and he cried away faster than ever.

The Teacher went on with the story.

"The Alphabet Doctor tried to cheer poor 7."

"'Hear, hear!' said he."

"7 stopped crying and looked at him. 'No,' said he, 'you should say "speak, speak," it is I that should say "hear, hear."'"

"'Certainly,' said the Doctor, 'you would say that if you were sane; but then, you see, you are not sane, and being mad you say what you should not say.'"

"'That is false,' said 7."

"'I understand,' said the Doctor, 'but do not stop to argue the point. If you were sane you would say "that is true," but you do say "that is false," meaning that you agree with me.'"

"7 looked pleased at being so understood.

"'No,' said he - meaning 'yes.'"

"'Then,' continued the Doctor, 'if you say "speak, speak," when a sane man would say "hear, hear," of course, I should say "hear, hear," when I mean "speak, speak," because I am talking to a madman.'"

"'No, no,' said 7 - meaning, 'yes, yes.'"

"'Go on with your speech,' said the Doctor."

"'No 7 took out his handkerchief and wept."

"'Ladies and Gentlemen,' he went on, 'once more I must plead the cause of the poor ill-used number - that is me - this orphan number - this number without kin - "

Here Tineboy interrupted the Teacher, “How had he no skin?”

“Kin, my child. Kin, not skin,” said the Teacher.

“What is the difference between kin and skin?” asked Tineboy.

“There will be but a small difference,” said the Teacher, “between this cane and your skin if you interrupt.” So Tineboy was quiet.

“Well,” said the teacher, “poor 7 went on - ‘I implore your pity for this forlorn number. Oh, you boys and girls, think of a poor desolate number, who has no home, no friends, no father, mother, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, nephew, niece, son, daughter, or cousin, and is desolate and alone.’”

Tineboy here set up a terrible howl.

“What are you crying for?” said the Teacher.

“I want poor old 7 to be more happy. I will give him some of my lunch and a share of my bed.”

The Teacher turned to the Monitor.

“Tineboy is a good child,” he said, “let him for the next week learn 7 times 0 up, and perhaps that will comfort him.”

The Raven, sitting in the window, winked his eye to himself and hopped about with a suppressed merry croak, shook his wings, and seemed hugging himself and laughing. Then he hopped softly away, and stole up and hid on the top of the book-case.

The Schoolmaster went on with his story.

“Well, children, after a while poor 7 got better and promised that he would get unmad. Before the Doctor went home again all the Alphabet and Number Children came and shook poor Number 7’s hand, and promised that they would be more kind to him in future.”

“Now, children, what do you think of the story?”

They all said that they liked it, that it was beautiful, and that they too would try to be more kind to poor 7 for the future. At last Ruffin the bully boy said:

“I don’t believe it. And if it is true I wish he had died; we would be better without him.”

“Would we?” asked the teacher, “how?”

“Because we would not be troubled with him,” said Ruffin.

As he said it there was a sort of queer croak heard from the Raven, but nobody minded, except Tineboy, who said: -

“Mr. Daw, you and I love poor 7, at all events.”

The Raven hated Ruffin because he always threw stones at him, and he had tried to pull the feathers out of his tail, and when Ruffin spoke, his croak seemed to mean, ‘‘Just you wait.” When no one was looking Mr. Daw stole up and hid in the rafters.

Then presently school broke up, and Tineboy went home; but he was not able to find Mr. Daw. He thought he was lost, and was very miserable, and went to bed crying.

In the meantime, when the school was locked up empty, Mr. Daw came down from the rafters very, very quietly - hobbled over to the door, and putting his head down, listened; then he flew and scrambled up on the handle of the door, and looked out through the keyhole. There was nothing to see and nothing to hear.

Then he got up on the Master’s desk, flapped his wings, and began to crow like a cock, only very softly, for fear he should be heard.

Presently he went over all the room, flying up to the big sheets of multiplication table, and turning over the pages of the books with his claws, and picking up SOMETHING with his sharp beak.

One would hardly believe it, but he was stealing all the Number Sevens in the place; he picked the Seven off the clock, rubbed it off the slates, and brushed it with his wings off the blackboard.

Mr. Daw knew that if once you can get the whole of any number out of a schoolroom no one else can use it without asking your leave.

Whilst he was picking out all the Sevens he was swelling out very much; and when he had got them all he was exactly Seven times his natural size.

He was not able to do this all at once. It took him the whole night, and when he got back to his corner in the rafters it was nearly time for school to open.

He was now so big that he was only just able to squeeze into the corner and no more.

The school time came, but there was no Master, and there were no Scholars. A whole hour passed; and then the Master came, and the Ushers, and all the Boys and Girls.

When they were all in the Master said -

"You are all very late."

"Please, sir, we could not help it," they all answered together.

"Why could you not help it?"

They all answered at once -

"I wasn't called in time."

"What time are you called at every morning?"

They all seemed about to speak, but all were silent.

"Why don't you answer?" asked the Teacher.

They made motions will their mouths like speaking, but no one said anything.

The Raven up in his corner croaked a quiet laugh all to himself.

"Why don't you answer?" asked the Teacher again. "If I have not my question answered at once, I shall keep you all in."

"Please, sir, we can't," said one.

"Why not?"

‘‘Because” -

Here Tineboy interrupted, “Why were you so late Sir?”

“Well, my boy, I am sorry to say I was late; but the fact is, my servant did not knock at my door at the usual hour.”

“What hour, sir?” asked Tineboy.

The Teacher seemed as if he was going to speak, but stopped.

“This is very queer,” he said, after a long pause.

Ruffin said, in a sort of swaggering way, “We are not late at all. You are here and we are here - that is all.”

“No, it is not all,” said the Teacher. “Ten is the hour, and it is now eleven - we have lost an hour.”

“How have we lost it?” asked one of the Scholars.

“Well, that is what puzzles me. We must only wait a little and see.”

Here Tineboy said suddenly, “Perhaps some one stole it!”

“Stole what?” said the scholars.

“I don’t know,” said Tineboy.

They all laughed.

“You need not laugh, something is stolen; look at my lesson!” said Tineboy, and he held up the book. Here is what they saw -

- 1 are - - 2” 14 - 3” 21 - 4” 28 - 5” 35 - 6” 42 - -” 49 - 8” 56 - 9” 63 - 10” -0

All the Scholars crowded round Tineboy to look at the book. Ruffin did not, for he was looking at the school clock.

“The clock has lost something,” said he, and sure enough it did not look all right.

The Teacher looked up - for he was leaning with his head on his desk, groaning.

“What is wrong with it?” he asked.

“Something is missing.”

“There is a number out; there are only eleven figures,” said the Teacher.

“No, no,” said the Scholars.

“Count them out, Ruffin,” said the Master.

“1 2 3 4 5 6 8 9 10 11 12.”

“Quite right,” said the Teacher, “you see there are twelve. No there are not - yes there are - no - yes - no, yes - what is it all about?” and he looked round the room, and then leaned his head on the desk again and groaned.

In the meantime the Raven had crept along the rafters till he had got over the Teacher’s desk; and then he got a good heavy Seven and dropped it right on the little bald spot on the top of the Teacher’s head. It bounded off the head and fell on the desk before him. The instant the Teacher saw it he knew what was wanting all the time. He covered over the Seven with a piece of blotting Paper. He then called up Ruffin.

“Ruffin, you told me that something was missing - are you sure?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Very well. Do you remember that you said yesterday, that you wished a certain Number had died in a madhouse?”

“Yes, I do; and I wish it still.”

“Well, that Number has been stolen by some one during the night.”

“Hurrah!” said Ruffin, and he threw his book up to the ceiling. It hit poor Mr. Daw, who had another Seven in his beak ready to drop it, and knocked the Seven down. It fell into Tineboy’s cap, which he held in his hand. He took it out, and stooped and petted it.

“Poor 7,” said Tineboy.

"Give me the Number," said Ruffin.

"I shan't. It belongs to me."

"Then I'll make you," said Ruffin; and he caught hold of Tineboy - even before the Master's face.

"Let me go. I'll not give you my poor Seven," said Tineboy, and he began to scream and cry.

"Ruffin, stand out," said the Master.

Ruffin did so.

"Seven times seven?" asked the Master.

Ruffin did not answer. He could not, for he had not got a Seven.

"I know," said Tineboy.

"Oh, yes," said Ruffin, with a sneer; "he knows because he has a Number.''

"Forty-nine," said Tineboy.

"Right," said the Master; "go up, Tineboy."

So Tineboy went up to the top of the class, and Ruffin went down.

"Seven times forty-nine?" asked the Master.

They were all silent.

"Come, answer!" said the Master.

"What is it, yourself?" said Tineboy.

"Well, my boy, I am sorry to say I cannot say. Dear me, it is very queer," and the Master put down his head on the desk again, and groaned louder than ever.

Just then Mr. Daw took another seven and dropped it down on the floor before Tineboy.

"Three hundred and forty-three," said Tineboy, quickly; for he could answer as he had another Seven.

The Teacher looked up and laughed loudly.

"Hurrah, hurrah!" said he.

When the third Seven fell the Raven began to swell.

He got seven times as big as he was, so that he began to lift the slates off the roof.

The Scholars all looked up; Ruffin had his mouth open, and Mr. Daw, anxious to get rid of the Sevens, dropped one into it.

"Two thousand three hundred and one," Ruffin spluttered out.

Mr. Daw dropped another Seven into his mouth, and he spluttered out again worse than ever, "Sixteen thousand eight hundred and seven."

The Raven began hurling Sevens at him as fast as he could; and each time he threw one he grew smaller and smaller, till he got to just his natural size.

Ruffin kept spluttering out and gasping numbers as hard as ever he could, till he grew black in the face and fell down in a fit just as he had come to "Seventy-nine thousand seven hundred and ninety-two billion, two hundred and sixty-six thousand two hundred and ninety-seven million six hundred and twelve thousand and one."

Suddenly Tineboy woke up, and found that he had been dreaming with his head down.

LIES AND LILIES

Claribel lived in peace and happiness with her father and mother, from the time she was a little baby till when, at ten years old, she went to school.

Her parents were good, kind people, who loved truth and tried ever to walk in the paths of the just. They taught Claribel all good things, and her mother, Fridolina, used to bring her when every day she went to visit and comfort the sick.

When Claribel went to school, she was even happier, for not only had she her home as it was ever, but there were many new friends also who were of her own age and whom she came to know and love. The school-mistress was very good and very nice and very old, with beautiful white hair and a sweet gentle face that never looked hard or stern, except when some one told a lie. Then the smile would fade from her face; and it was like the change in the sky when the sun has gone down, and she would look grave, and cry silently. If the child who had been wicked came and confessed the fault and promised never never to tell a lie again, the smile would come back like sunshine. But if the child persisted in the lie her face would look stern, and afterwards the stern look would be in the memory of the liar, even when she was not there.

Every day she told all the children of the beauty of Truth and how a lie was so black and terrible a thing. She would also tell them stories from the Great Book; and one that she loved, and that they loved too, was of the Beautiful City where the good people shall live hereafter.

The children never tired of hearing of that City, like a jasper stone clear as crystal, with its twelve gates with names written thereon, and they used to ask the Mistress questions about the Angel who measured the City with a golden reed. Always towards the end of the story, the Mistresse’s voice would become very grave, and a hush would steal over the children and they would draw closer together in awe as she told them that outside that beautiful city were for ever condemned to stand “whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.”

Then the good Mistress would tell them what a terrible thing it would be to stand there without, and lose all the beauty and eternal glory that lay within. And all for a fault which no human being need ever commit - for telling a lie. People are not very much angry even when a fault has been done, when the truth is told at once; but if a fault is made worse by a lie then everyone is justly angry. If men and women, even fathers and mothers who love their little children very tenderly, are angry, how much more will God be angry against whom the sin of a lie is made.

Claribel loved this story and often cried as she thought of the poor people who will have to stand without the Beautiful City for ever, but she never thought that she would tell a lie herself. Indeed, she never did till temptation came. When people think themselves very good they are in danger of sin, for if we are not ever on the watch against evil we surely do some wrong thing; and as Claribel feared no evil, she was easily led into sin.

The children were all at their sums. A few of them knew their arithmetic and got out their answers and proved them; but some could not get out the answer right, and others stuck and could not get out any answer at all. A couple of naughty ones did not even try to get out the answers, but drew pictures on their slates and wrote their names. Claribel tried to do her sum, but she could not remember 9 times 7, and instead of beginning at “twice one are two” and going on up, she grew idle and lazy and gave up the sum and drew the beginnings of pictures and gave them up too. She looked up at the window thinking of something to draw and saw on the lower panes coloured flowers painted there so as to prevent the children looking at the people outside during lesson time. Claribel fixed on one of these flowers, a lily, and began to draw it.

Skooro saw her looking up and began his evil work. In order to help her to do what she ought not to do he took the shape of a lily and lay on the slate very faintly, so that she had only to draw round his edges and then there was a lily drawn. Now it is not a wrong thing to draw a lily, and if Claribel had drawn it well at a proper time she would have got praise; but a good thing may become a bad thing if it is wrongly done - and so it was with Claribel's lily.

Presently the Mistress asked for the slates. When Claribel brought hers up she knew that she had done wrong and was sorry; but she was only sorry because she was afraid of being punished. When the Mistress asked for the answer she hung down her head and said she could not get it.

"Did you try?" asked the Mistress.

"Yes," she answered, feeling that she had tried for a while.

"Did you idle?" she was asked, "Did you do anything but your sum?" Then she knew that she would get into trouble for idling if she told it; and so forgetting all about the Jasper City and those who are doomed to stand without its beautiful gates, she answered that she had done nothing else but sums. The mistress took her word - for she had always been truthful - and said :

"You were puzzled, I suppose, dear child; let me help you," and she kindly showed her how to work the sum.

As she was going back to her seat, Claribel hung her head, for she knew that she had told a lie, and although it need now never he found out, she was sorrowful, and felt as if she were standing outside the shining City. Even then if she had rushed up to the mistress and said:

“I have done wrong; but I will be a better child again,” all would have been well; but she did not, and every minute that passed made such a thing harder to do.

Soon after school was over, and Claribel went sadly home. She did not care to play, for she had told a lie, and her heart was heavy.

When bed-time came she lay down weary, but could not sleep; and she cried very bitterly, for she could not pray. She was sorry that she had told a lie, and she thought it rather hard that her sorrow was not enough to make her happy again; but her conscience said -

“Will you confess to-morrow?” But she thought that it would not be necessary, for the sin was over and she had not done harm to anyone. But all the time she knew that she was wrong. Had the mistress spoken of this, she would have said -

“It is ever thus, dear children. A sin cannot be wiped away till the shame comes first; for without the shame and the acknowledgment of guilt the heart cannot be cleansed from the sin.”

At last Claribel sobbed herself to sleep.

Then when she slept, the Child Angel stole into the room and passed over her eyelids, so that even in her sleep she saw the beautiful light, and she thought of the City like a jasper stone, clear as crystal, with its twelve gates with names written thereon. She dreamed that she saw the Angel with the golden reed measuring the city, and Claribel was so happy that she forgot all about her sin. The Child Angel knew all her thoughts, and he grew less and less till his light all died away; and to Claribel in her dream all seemed to grow dark, and she knew that she was standing without the gate of the

Beautiful City. The Angel, who held the measuring reed of gold, stood on the battlements of the city, and in a terrible voice said -

"Claribel, stand thou without; thou makest and lovest a lie."

"Oh, no," said Claribel, "I do not love it."

"Then why not confess thy fault?"

Claribel was silent; but she would not confess her sin, for her heart was hard, and the Angel lifted the golden reed, and lo! it blossomed a beautiful lily. Then the Angel said -

"The lilies grow only for the pure, who live within the city; thou must stand without among the liars."

Claribel saw the jasper walls before her towering up and up, and she knew that they were an eternal barrier to her, and that she must ever stand without the Beautiful City; and in the anguish and horror she felt how deep was her sin, and longed to confess it.

Skooro saw that she was repenting, for he, too, could see into her thoughts, and with the darkness of his presence he tried to blot out the whole dream of the Beautiful City.

But the Child Angel crept into her heart and made it light, and the seed of repentance grew and blossomed.

Claribel woke early, and rose and went and told her mistress of her sin, and was happy once more.

All her life long she loved the lilies; for she thought of her lie and of her repentance for it, and that the lilies grow within the Jasper City, which is for the pure alone.

THE CASTLE OF THE KING

When they told the poor Poet that the One he loved best was lying sick in the shadow of danger, he was nigh distraught.

For weeks past he had been alone; she, his Wife, having gone afar to her old home to see an aged grandsire ere he died.

The Poet's heart had for some days been oppressed with a strange sorrow. He did not know the cause of it; he only knew with the deep sympathy which is the poet's gift, that the One he loved was sick. Anxiously had he awaited tidings. When the news came, the shock, although he expected a sad message, was too much for him, and he became nigh distraught.

In his sadness and anxiety he went out into the garden which long years he had cultured for Her. There, amongst the bright flowers, where the old statues stood softly white against the hedges of yew, he lay down in the long uncut summer grass, and wept with his head buried low.

He thought of all the past-of how he had won his Wife and how they loved each other; and to him it seemed a sad and cruel thing that she was afar and in danger, and he not near to comfort her or even to share her pain.

Many many thoughts came back to him, telling the story of the weary years whose gloom and solitude he had forgotten in the brightness of his lovely home.-

How in youth they twain had met and in a moment loved. How his poverty and her greatness had kept them apart. How he had struggled and toiled in the steep and rugged road to fame and fortune.

How all through the weary years he had striven with the single idea of winning such a place in the history of his time, that he should be able to come and to her say, “I love you,” and to her proud relations, “I am worthy, for I too have become great.”

How amid all this dreaming of a happy time which might come, he had kept silent as to his love. How he had never seen her or heard her voice, or even known her habitation, lest, knowing, he should fail in the purpose of his life.

How time-as it ever does to those who work with honesty and singleness of purpose-crowned the labours and the patience of his life.

How the world had come to know his name and reverence and love it as of one who had helped the weak and weary by his example; who had purified the thoughts of all who listened to his words; and who had swept away baseness before the grandeur and simpleness of his noble thoughts.

How success had followed in the wake of fame.

How at length even to his heart, timorous with the doubt of love, had been borne the thought that he had at last achieved the greatness which justified him in seeking the hand of her he loved.

How he had come back to his native place, and there found her still free.

How when he had dared to tell her of his love she had whispered to him that she, too, had waited all the years, for that she knew that he would come to claim her at the end.

How she had come with him as his bride into the home which he had been making for her all these years. How, there, they had lived happily; and had dared to look into the long years to come for joy and content without a bar.

How he thought that even then, when though somewhat enfeebled in strength by the ceaseless toil of years and the care of hoping, he might look to the happy time to come.

But, alas! for hope; for who knoweth what a day may bring forth? Only a little while ago his Dear One had left him hale, departing in the cause of duty; and now she lay sick and he not nigh to help her.

All the sunshine of his life seemed passing away. All the long years of waiting and the patient continuance in well-doing which had crowned their years with love, seemed as but a passing dream, and was all in vain-all, all in vain.

Now with the shadow hovering over his Beloved One, the cloud seemed to be above and around them, and to hold in its dim recesses the doom of them both.

“Why, oh why,” asked the poor Poet to the viewless air, “did love come to us? Why came peace and joy and happiness, if the darkening wings of peril shadow the air around her, and leave me to weep alone?”

Thus he moaned, and raved, and wept; and the bitter hours went by him in his solitude.

As he lay in the garden with his face buried in the long grass, they came to him and told him with weeping, that tidings-sad, indeed-had come.

As they spoke he lifted his poor head and gazed at them; and they saw in the great, dark, tender eyes that now he was quite distraught. He smiled at them sadly, as though not quite understanding the import of their words. As tenderly as they could they tried to tell him that the One he loved best was dead.

They said:-

“She has walked in the Valley of the Shadow;” but he seemed to understand them not.

They whispered,

“She has heard the Music of the Spheres,” but still he comprehended not.

Then they spoke to him sorrowfully and said:

“She now abides in the Castle of the King.”

He looked at them eagerly, as if to ask:

“What castle? What king?”

They bowed their heads; and as they turned away weeping they murmured to him softly-

“The Castle of the King of Death.”

He spake no word; so they turned their weeping faces to him again. They found that he had risen and stood with a set purpose on his face. Then he said sweetly:

“I go to find her, that where she abideth, I too may there abide.”

They said to him:

“You cannot go. Beyond the Portal she is, and in the Land of Death.”

Set purpose shone in the Poet’s earnest, loving eyes as he answered them for the last time:

“Where she has gone, there go I too. Through the Valley of the Shadow shall I wend my way. In these ears also shall ring the Music of the Spheres. I shall seek, and I shall find my Beloved in the Halls of the Castle of the King. I shall clasp her close-even before the dread face of the King of Death.”

As they heard these words they bowed their heads again and wept, and said:

“Alas! alas!”

The poet turned and left them; and passed away. They fain would have followed; but he motioned them that they should not stir. So, alone, in his grief he went.

As he passed on he turned and waved his hand to them in farewell. Then for a while with uplifted hand he stood, and turned him slowly all around.

Suddenly his outstretched hand stopped and pointed. His friends looking with him saw, where, away beyond the Portal, the idle wilderness spread. There in the midst of desolation the mist from the marshes hung like a pall of gloom on the far off horizon.

As the Poet pointed there was a gleam of happiness-very very faint it was-in his poor sad eyes, distraught with loss, as if afar he beheld some sign or hope of the Lost One.

Swiftly and sadly the Poet fared on through the burning day.

The Rest Time came; but on he journeyed. He paused not for shade or rest. Never, even for an instant did he stop to cool his parched lips with an icy draught from the crystal springs.

The weary wayfarers resting in the cool shadows beside the fountains raised their tired heads and looked at him with sleepy eyes as he hurried. He heeded them not; but went ever onward with set purpose in his eyes, as though some gleam of hope bursting through the mists of the distant marshes urged him on.

So he fared on through all the burning day, and all the silent night. In the earliest dawn, when the promise of the still unrisen sun quickened the eastern sky into a pale light, he drew anigh the Portal. The horizon stood out blackly in the cold morning light.

There, as ever, stood the Angels who kept watch and ward, and oh, wondrous! although invisible to human eyes, they were seen of him.

As he drew nigh they gazed at him pityingly and swept their great wings out wide, as if to shelter him. He spake; and from his troubled heart the sad words came sweetly through the pale lips:

“Say, Ye who guard the Land, has my Beloved One passed hither on the journey to the Valley of the Shadow, to hear the Music of the Spheres, and to abide in the Castle of the King?”

The Angels at the Portal bowed their heads in token of assent; and they turned and looked outward from the Land to where, far off in the idle wilderness, the dank mists crept from the lifeless bosom of the marsh.

They knew well that the poor lonely Poet was in quest of his Beloved One; so they hindered him not, neither urged they him to stay. They pitied him much for that much he loved.

They parted wide, that through the Portal he might pass without let.

So, the Poet went onwards into the idle desert to look for his Beloved One in the Castle of the King.

For a time he went through gardens whose beauty was riper than the gardens of the Land. The sweetness of all things stole on the senses like the odours from the Isles of the Blest.

The subtlety of the King of Death, who rules in the Realms of Evil, is great. He has ordered that the way beyond the Portal be made full of charm. Thus those straying from the paths ordained for good see around them such beauty that in its joy the gloom and cruelty and guilt of the desert are forgotten.

But as the Poet passed onwards the beauty began to fade away.

The fair gardens looked as gardens do when the hand of care is taken off, and when the weeds in their hideous luxuriance choke, as they spring up, the choicer life of the flowers.

From cool alleys under spreading branches, and from crisp sward which touched as soft as velvet the Wanderer’s aching feet, the way became a rugged stony path, full open to the burning glare. The flowers began to lose their odour, and to dwarf to stunted growth. Tall hemlocks rose on every side, infecting the air with their noisome odour.

Great fungi grew in the dark hollows where the pools of dank water lay. Tall trees, with branches like skeletons, rose-trees which had no leaves, and under whose shadow to pause were to die.

Then huge rocks barred the way. These were only passed by narrow, winding passages, overhung by the ponderous cliffs above, which ever threatened to fall and engulph the Sojourner.

Here the night began to fall; and the dim mist rising from the far-off marshes, took weird shapes of gloom. In the distant fastnesses of the mountains the wild beasts began to roar in their cavern lairs. The air became hideous with the fell sounds of the night season.

But the poor Poet heeded not ill sights or sounds of dread. Onward he went ever-unthinking of the terrors of the night. To him there was no dread of darkness-no fear of death-no consciousness of horror. He sought his Beloved One in the Castle of the King; and in that eager quest all natural terrors were forgot.

So fared he onward through the livelong night. Up the steep defiles he trod. Through the shadows of the huge rocks he passed unscathed. The wild animals came around him roaring fiercely-their great eyes flaming like fiery stars through the blackness of the night.

From the high rocks great pythons crawled and hung to seize their prey. From the crevices of the mountain steeps, and from cavernous rifts in the rocky way poisonous serpents glided and rose to strike.

But close though the noxious things came, they all refrained to attack; for they knew that the lonely Sojourner was bound for the Castle of their King.

Onward still, onward he went-unceasing-pausing not in his course-but pressing ever forward in his quest.

When daylight broke at last, the sun rose on a sorry sight. There toiling on the rocky way, the poor lonely Poet went ever onwards, unheeding of cold or hunger or pain.

His feet were bare, and his footsteps on the rock-strewn way were marked by blood. Around and behind him, and afar off keeping equal pace on the summits of the rocky ridges, came the wild beasts that looked on him as their prey, but that refrained from touching him because he sought the Castle of their King.

In the air wheeled the obscene birds who follow ever on the track of the dying and the lost. Hovered the bare-necked vultures with eager eyes, and hungry beaks. Their great wings flapped lazily in the idle air as they followed in the Wanderer's track. The vulture are a patient folk, and they await the falling of the prey.

From the cavernous recesses in the black mountain gorges crept, with silent speed, the serpents that there lurk. Came the python, with his colossal folds and endless coils, whence looked forth cunningly the small flat head. Came the boa and all his tribe, which seize their prey by force and crush it with the dread strictness of their embrace. Came the hooded snakes and all those which with their venom destroy their prey. Here, too, came those serpents most terrible of all to their quarry-which fascinate with eyes of weird magic and by the slow gracefulness of their approach.

Here came or lay in wait, subtle snakes, which take the colour of herb, or leaf, or dead branch, or slimy pool, amongst which they lurk, and so strike their prey unsuspecting.

Great serpents there were, nimble of body, which hang from rock or branch. These gripping tight to their distant hold, strike downward with the rapidity of light as they hurl their whip-like bodies from afar upon their prey.

Thus came forth all these noxious things to meet the Questing Man, and to assail him. But when they knew he was bound for the dread Castle of their King, and saw how he went onward without fear, they abstained from attack.

The deadly python and the boa towering aloft, with colossal folds, were passive, and for the nonce, became as stone. The hooded serpents drew in again their venomous fangs. The mild, deep earnest eyes of the fascinating snake became lurid with baffled spleen, as he felt his power to charm was without avail. In its deadly descent the hanging snake arrested its course, and hung a limp line from rock or branch.

Many followed the Wanderer onwards into the desert wilds, waiting and hoping for a chance to destroy.

Many other perils also were there for the poor Wanderer in the desert idleness. As he went onward the rocky way got steeper and darker. Lurid fogs and deadly chill mists arose.

Then in this path along the trackless wilderness were strange and terrible things.

Mandrakes-half plant, half man-shrieked at him with despairing cry, as, helpless for evil, they stretched out their ghastly arms in vain.

Giant thorns arose in the path; they pierced his suffering feet and tore his flesh as onward he trod. He felt the pain, but he heeded it not.

In all the long, terrible journey he had but one idea other than his eager search for his Beloved One. He thought that the children of men might learn much from the journey towards the Castle of the King, which began so fair, amidst the odorous gardens and under the cool shadow of the spreading trees. In his heart the Poet spake to the multitude of the children of men; and from his lips the words flowed like music, for he sang of the Golden Gate which the Angels call TRUTH.

"Pass not the Portal of the Sunset Land! Pause where the Angels at their vigil stand. Be warned! and press not though the gates lie wide, But rest securely on the hither side. Though odorous gardens and cool ways invite, Beyond are darkest valleys of the night. Rest! Rest contented.-Pause whilst undefiled, Nor seek the horrors of the desert wild."

Thus treading down all obstacles with his bleeding feet, passed ever onwards, the poor distraught Poet, to seek his Beloved One in the Castle of the King.

Even as onward he went the life that is of the animals seemed to die away behind him. The jackals and the more cowardly savage animals slunk away. The lions and tigers, and bears, and wolves, and all the braver of the fierce beasts of prey which followed on his track even after the others had stopped, now began to halt in their career.

They growled low and then roared loudly with uplifted heads; the bristles of their mouths quivered with passion, and the great white teeth champed angrily together in baffled rage. They went on a little further; and stopped again roaring and growling as before. Then one by one they ceased, and the poor Poet went on alone.

In the air the vultures wheeled and screamed, pausing and halting in their flight, as did the savage beasts. These too ceased at length to follow in air the Wanderer in his onward course.

Longest of all kept up the snakes. With many a writhe and stealthy onward glide, they followed hard upon the footsteps of the Questing Man. In the blood marks of his feet upon the flinty rocks they found a joy and hope, and they followed ever.

But time came when the awful aspect of the places where the Poet passed checked even the serpents in their track-the gloomy defiles whence issue the poisonous winds that sweep with desolation even the dens of the beasts of prey-the sterile fastnesses which march upon the valleys of desolation. Here even the stealthy serpents paused in their course; and they too fell away. They glided back, smiling with deadliest rancour, to their obscene clefts.

Then came places where plants and verdure began to cease. The very weeds became more and more stunted and inane. Farther on they declined into the sterility of lifeless rock. Then the most noxious herbs that grew in ghastly shapes of gloom and terror lost even the power to harm, which outlives their living growth. Dwarfed and stunted even of evil, they were compact of the dead rock. Here even the deadly Upas tree could strike no root into the pestiferous earth.

Then came places where, in the entrance to the Valley of the Shadow, even solid things lost their substance, and melted in the dank and cold mists which swept along.

As he passed, the distraught Poet could feel not solid earth under his bleeding feet. On shadows he walked, and amid them, onward through the Valley of the Shadow to seek his Beloved One in the Castle of the King.

The Valley of the Shadow seemed of endless expanse. Circled by the teeming mist, no eye could pierce to where rose the great mountains between which the Valley lay.

Yet they stood there-Mount Despair on the one hand, and the Hill of Fear upon the other.

Hitherto the poor bewildered brain of the Poet had taken no note of all the dangers, and horrors, and pains which surrounded him-save only for the lesson which they taught. But now, lost as he was in the shrouding vapour of the Valley of the Shadow, he could not but think of the terrors of the way. He was surrounded by grisly phantoms that ever and anon arose silent in the mist, and were lost again before he could catch to the full their dread import.

Then there flashed across his soul a terrible thought-

Could it be possible that hither his Beloved One had travelled? Had there come to her the pains which shook his own form with agony? Was it indeed necessary that she should have been appalled by all these surrounding horrors?

At the thought of her, his Beloved One, suffering such pain and dread, he gave forth one bitter cry that rang through the solitude-that cleft the vapour of the Valley, and echoed in the caverns of the mountains of Despair and Fear.

The wild cry prolonged with the agony of the Poet's soul rang through the Valley, till the shadows that peopled it woke for the moment into life-in-death. They flitted dimly along, now melting away and anon springing again into life-till all the Valley of the Shadow was for once peopled with quickened ghosts.

Oh, in that hour there was agony to the poor distraught Poet's soul.

But presently there came a calm. When the rush of his first agony passed, the Poet knew that to the Dead came not the horrors of the journey that he undertook. To the Quick alone is the horror of the passage to the Castle of the King. With the thought came to him such peace that even there-in the dark Valley of the Shadow-stole soft music that sounded in the desert gloom like the Music of the Spheres.

Then the poor Poet remembered what they had told him; that his Beloved One had walked through the Valley of the Shadow, that she had known the Music of the Spheres, and that she abode in the Castle of the King. So he thought that as he was now in the Valley of the Shadow, and as he heard the Music of the Spheres, that soon he should see the Castle of the King where his Beloved One abode. Thus he went on in hope.

But alas! that very hope was a new pain that ere this he wot not of.

Hitherto he had gone on blindly, recking not of where he went or what came a-nigh him, so long as he pressed onward on his quest; but now the darkness and the peril of the way had new terrors, for he thought of how they might arrest his course. Such thoughts made the way long indeed, for the moments seemed an age with hoping. Eagerly he sought for the end to come, when, beyond the Valley of the Shadow through which he fared, he should see rising the turrets of the Castle of the King.

Despair seemed to grow upon him; and as it grew there rang out, ever louder, the Music of the Spheres.

Onward, ever onward, hurried in mad haste the poor distraught Poet. The dim shadows that peopled the mist shrank back as he passed, extending towards him warning hands with long gloomy fingers of deadly cold. In the bitter silence of the moment, they seemed to say:

“Go back! Go back!”

Louder and louder rang now the Music of the Spheres. Faster and faster in mad, feverish haste rushed the Poet, amid the shrinking Shadows of the gloomy valley. The peopling shadows as they faded away before him, seemed to wail in sorrowful warning:

“Go back! Go back!”

Still in his ears rang ever the swelling tumult of the music.

Faster and faster he rushed onward; till, at last, wearied nature gave way and he fell prone to earth, senseless, bleeding, and alone.

After a time-how long he could not even guess-he awoke from his swoon.

For awhile he could not think where he was; and his scattered senses could not help him.

All was gloom and cold and sadness. A solitude reigned around him, more deadly than aught he had ever dreamt of. No breeze was in the air; no movement of a passing cloud. No voice or stir of living thing in earth, or water, or air. No rustle of leaf or sway of branch-all was silent, dead, and deserted. Amid the eternal hills of gloom around, lay the valley devoid of aught that lived or grew.

The sweeping mists with their multitude of peopling shadows had gone by. The fearsome terrors of the desert even were not there. The Poet, as he gazed around him, in his utter loneliness, longed for the sweep of the storm or the roar of the avalanche to break the dread horror of the silent gloom.

Then the Poet knew that through the Valley of the Shadow had he come; that scared and maddened though he had been, he had heard the Music of the Spheres. He thought that now hard by the desolate Kingdom of Death he trod.

He gazed all around him, fearing lest he should see anywhere the dread Castle of the King, where his Beloved One abode; and he groaned as the fear of his heart found voice:

“Not here! oh not here, amid this awful solitude.”

Then amid the silence around, upon distant hills his words echoed:

“Not here! oh not here,” till with the echoing and re-echoing rock, the idle wilderness was peopled with voices.

Suddenly the echo voices ceased.

From the lurid sky broke the terrible sound of the thunder peal. Along the distant skies it rolled. Far away over the endless ring of the grey horizon it swept-going and returning-pealing-swelling-dying away. It traversed the aether, muttering now in ominous sound as of threats, and anon crashing with the voice of dread command.

In its roar came a sound as of a word:

“Onward.”

To his knees the Poet sank and welcomed with tears of joy the sound of the thunder. It swept away as a Power from Above the silent desolation of the wilderness. It told him that in and above the Valley of the Shadow rolled the mighty tones of Heaven’s command.

Then the Poet rose to his feet, and with new heart went onwards into the wilderness.

As he went the roll of the thunder died away, and again the silence of desolation reigned alone.

So time wore on; but never came rest to the weary feet. Onwards, still onwards he went, with but one memory to cheer him-the echo of the thunder roll in his ears, as it pealed out in the Valley of Desolation:

“Onward! Onward!”

Now the road became less and less rocky, as on his way he passed. The great cliffs sank and dwindled away, and the ooze of the fens crept upward to the mountain’s feet.

At length the hills and hollows of the mountain fastnesses disappeared. The Wanderer took his way amid mere trackless wastes, where was nothing but quaking marsh and slime.

On, on he wandered; stumbling blindly with weary feet on the endless road.

Over his soul crept ever closer the blackness of despair. Whilst amid the mountain gorges he had been wandering, some small cheer came from the hope that at any moment some turn in the path might show him his journey's end. Some entry from a dark defile might expose to him, looming great in the distance-or even anigh him-the dread Castle of the King. But now with the flat desolation of the silent marsh around him, he knew that the Castle could not exist without his seeing it.

He stood for awhile erect, and turned him slowly round, so that the complete circuit of the horizon was swept by his eager eyes. Alas! never a sight did he see. Nought was there but the black line of the horizon, where the sad earth lay against the level sky. All, all was compact of a silent gloom.

Still on he tottered. His breath came fast and laboured. His weary limbs quivered as they bore him feebly up. His strength-his life-was ebbing fast.

On, on, he hurried, ever on, with one idea desperately fixed in his poor distraught mind-that in the Castle of the King he should find his Beloved One.

He stumbled and fell. There was no obstacle to arrest his feet; only from his own weakness he declined.

Quickly he arose and went onward with flying feet. He dreaded that should he fall he might not be able to arise again.

Again he fell. Again he rose and went on his way desperately, with blind purpose.

So for a while went he onwards, stumbling and falling; but arising ever and pausing not on his way. His quest he followed, of his Beloved One abiding in the Castle of the King.

At last so weak he grew that when he sank he was unable to rise again.

Feebler and feebler he grew as he lay prone; and over his eager eyes came the film of death.

But even then came comfort; for he knew that his race was run, and that soon he would meet his Beloved One in the Halls of the Castle of the King.

To the wilderness his thoughts he spoke. His voice came forth with a feeble sound, like the moaning before a storm of the wind as it passes through reeds in the grey autumn:

“A little longer. Soon I shall meet her in the Halls of the King; and we shall part no more. For this it is worth to pass through the Valley of the Shadow and to listen to the Music of the Spheres with their painful hope. What boots it though the Castle be afar? Quickly speed the feet of the dead. To the fleeting spirit all distance is but a span. I fear not now to see the Castle of the King; for there, within its chiefest Hall, soon shall I meet my Beloved-to part no more.”

Even as he spoke he felt that the end was nigh.

Forth from the marsh before him crept a still, spreading mist. It rose silently, higher-higher-enveloping the wilderness for far around. It took deeper and darker shades as it arose. It was as though the Spirit of Gloom were hid within, and grew mightier with the spreading vapour.

To the eyes of the dying Poet the creeping mist was as a shadowy castle. Arose the tall turrets and the frowning keep. The gateway with its cavernous recesses and its beetling towers took shape as a skull. The distant battlements towered aloft into the silent air. From the very ground whereon the stricken Poet lay, grew, dim and dark, a vast causeway leading into the gloom of the Castle gate.

The dying Poet raised his head and looked. His fast failing eyes, quickened by the love and hope of his spirit, pierced through the dark walls of the keep and the gloomy terrors of the gateway.

There, within the great Hall where the grim King of Terrors himself holds his court, he saw her whom he sought. She was standing in the ranks of those who wait in patience for their Beloved to follow them into the Land of Death.

The Poet knew that he had but a little while to wait, and he was patient-stricken though he lay, amongst the Eternal Solitudes.

Afar off, beyond the distant horizon, came a faint light as of the dawn of a coming day.

As it grew brighter the Castle stood out more and more clearly; till in the quickening dawn it stood revealed in all its cold expanse.

The dying Poet knew that the end was at hand. With a last effort he raised himself to his feet, that standing erect and bold, as is the right of manhood, he might so meet face to face the grim King of Death before the eyes of his Beloved One.

The distant sun of the coming day rose over the horizon’s edge.

A ray of light shot upward.

As it struck the summit of the Castle keep the Poet’s Spirit in an instant of time swept along the causeway. Through the ghostly portal of the Castle it swept, and met with joy the kindred Spirit that it loved before the very face of the King of Death.

Quicker then than the lightning’s flash the whole Castle melted into nothingness; and the sun of the coming day shone calmly down upon the Eternal Solitudes.

In the Land within the Portal rose the sun of the coming day. It shone calmly and brightly on a fair garden, where, among the long summer grass lay the Poet, colder than the marble statues around him.

THE WONDROUS CHILD

Far away on the edge of a great creek, that stretched inland from the endless sea, there lay a peaceful village.

Here the husbandmen led a happy, prosperous life. They rose early, so that in the cool grey morn they heard the lark, all invisible in the height of the dawn, singing the morning hymn that he never forgets.

As sunset came stealing on, they returned to their homes, glad of the rest that nightfall brought to them.

In the autumn, when the harvesting was to be done, they worked late, as they were able to do; for at that time the kind Sun and his wife the Moon have a compact that they will help those who work at the harvest. So the sun stays up a little longer, and the moon gets out of her bed in the horizon a little earlier, and thus there is always light to work by.

The red, broad, full-faced moon that looks down on the husbandmen at work is called the Harvest Moon.

The Lord of the Manor of this peaceful village was a very good, kind man, that helped the poor always. At meal-time the door of his mansion stood open; and all who were hungry could enter if they chose, and take seats at the table, and be welcome guests.

This Lord of the Manor had three children, Sibold and May, and one little Baby Boy just come home who had no name as yet.

Sibold had just reached his eighth birthday, and May was within two months of her sixth. They were very fond of each other - as brother and sister should be - and had all their plays together. May thought that Sibold was very big and strong, and whatever he wished to do she always agreed to.

Sibold loved finding things and exploring; and at different times the two children had been over all the domain of their father.

They had certain secret haunts that nobody knew of except themselves. Some of these were very queer, delightful places.

One was in the centre of a hollow Oak tree, where so many squirrels lived that the branches were quite like the streets of a town, with their going to and fro.

Another place was the top of a rock, which was only reached by a narrow path between high bushes of ivy. Here there was a sort of great chair made in the rock, which just held the two; and here they often brought their lunch, and sat half the day looking out over the tree tops to where, far away in the distance, the white edge of the horizon lay on the glittering sea.

Then they would tell each other what they thought about, and what they would like to do, and what they would try to do when they grew up.

There was also another place, which was their favourite of all.

It was under a great Weeping Willow. This was a mighty tree, many hundreds of years old, which towered aloft above the other trees which dotted the sward. The long branches fell downwards so thickly, that even in winter, when the leaves held fallen and the benches were bare, one could hardly see into the hollow that lay within.

When the new spring clothes came home, the whole tree, from its high top even to the mossy ground from which it rose, was a mass of solid green; and it was difficult to get within even if one knew the way.

In one place one of the trailing branches had, a long time ago, been broken in a great storm, winch had laid low many forest trees; but the branches which hung next to this sent forth new green shoots to fill the empty space, and so the opening was covered with thin twigs instead of strong branches.

In summer the leaves covered all with a mass of green; but those who knew the opening could push the twigs aside, and so enter into the bower.

It was a most beautiful bower. No matter how strong the sun glared without, it was within cool and pleasant. From the ground even up to the top, till the very roof where the dark branches meeting made a black mass, all was a delicate green, for the light without came through the leaves softly and gently.

Sibold and May thought that so the sea must look to the Mermaids, who sing and comb their long hair with golden combs down in the cool depths of the ocean.

In the sward around this great tree were many beds of beautiful flowers. Asters, with their wide faces of many colours, staring up straight at the sun without ever winking, and round and over which flitted the gorgeous butterflies, with their wings like rainbows or peacocks or sunsets, or aught that is most beautiful. Sweet Mignonette, where the bees hovered with grateful hum. Pansies, with their delicate big faces trembling on their slender stalks. Tulips, opening their mouths to the sun and the rain; for the Tulip is a greedy flower, that opens his mouth till at last he opens it so wide that his head falls all to pieces and he dies. Hyacinths, with their many bells clustered on one stalk - like a big family party. Great Sunflowers, whose drooping faces shone like children of the parent Sun himself.

There were also great Poppies, with spreading, careless leaves, thick juicy stalks, and grand scarlet flowers, which rise and droop just as they please, and look so free and careless and independent.

Both Sibold and May loved these Poppies, and went every day to look at them. In the beds in the mossy sward, from which the great Willow rose, they grew to an enormous size; so high that when Sibold and May stood hand in hand beside the bed, the great Poppies towered over them till Sibold, standing on tiptoe, could not reach the scarlet flowers.

One day after breakfast, Sibold and May took their lunch with them, and went out to spend the day together wandering about among the woods, for it was a holiday with them. A little tiny Boy brother had arrived in the house, and everybody was busy getting things for him. The children had just seen him for an instant.

Hand in hand Sibold and May went round all their favourite spots. They looked at the cave in the Oak tree, and said "How do you do?" to all the squirrels that lived in the tree, and told them of the new Baby that had come home. Then they went to the rock, and sat together in the seat, and looked away over the sea.

There they sat for a while in the hot sunlight, and talked together of the dear little baby brother that they had seen. They wondered where he came from, and they made up a plan that they would look and look till they found a baby too. Sibold said that he must have come over the sea, and been laid in the parsley-bed by the Angels, so that nurse might find him there and bring him to comfort their poor sick mother. Then they wondered how they would be able to get away over the sea, and they planned that some day Sibold's boat would be made bigger, and they would get into it and sail away over the sea, and search for another little baby all for themselves.

After a while they got tired of sitting in the hot sun; so they left the place, and, hand in hand, wandered on till they came to the level sward where the great Willow tree rose, and where the beds of flowers made the air seem full of colours and perfume.

Hand in hand they walked on, looking at the butterflies, and the bees, and the birds, and the beautiful flowers.

In one bed they found a new flower had come out. Sibold knew it, and told May it was a Tiger-lily; she was afraid to go near it till he told her it could not hurt her, as it was only a flower.

As they went on Sibold picked some flowers from every bed, and gave them to his sister; when they were going away from the Tiger-lily he pulled the flower, and as May was afraid to carry it, he took it himself.

At last they came to the great bed of Poppies. The flowers looked so bright and cool for all their flaming colour, and so careless, that May and Sibold both together thought that they would like to take a lot with them into the Willow Bower; for they were going to eat their lunch there, and they wished the place to be as gay and pretty as possible.

But first they went back to the Oak tree to gather a lot of leaves, for Sibold suggested that they would make the new baby brother the King of the Feast, and that they would make for him a crown of oak. As he would not be there himself, they would put the crown where they could see it well.

When they got to the Oak tree May called out,

"Oh look, Sibold, look, look!"

Sibold looked, and saw that on nearly every branch were a whole lot of squirrels sitting two and two, with their bushy tails over their backs, eating nuts as hard as ever they could.

When the squirrels saw them they were not frightened, for the children had never done them any harm. They gave a sort of queer croak all together, and a funny little skip. Sibold and May began to laugh, but they did not like to disturb them, so they gathered as many oak leaves as they wanted, and went back to the Poppy bed.

"Now, Sibold, dear," said May, "we must get lots of Poppies, for the dear Ba is very very fond of them."

"How do you know?" said Sibold.

"Because he ought to be," she answered. "You and I are, and he is our brother, so of course he is."

So Sibold pulled a lot of the Poppies, and some he took with many of the cool green leaves attached, till they had each an armful of them. Then they gathered up all the other flowers, and entered the Willow Bower to eat their lunch. Sibold went to the spring that rose in the garden, and that ran through it down to the sea. There he filled his cap with water, and brought it back as steadily as he could, so as not to spill much; and returned to the bower. May held open the leafy branches as he came, and when he passed in she let them fall again. As the leafy curtain hung all round them, the two children were alone in the Willow Bower.

Then they set to work to deck their leafy tent with the flowers. They twisted them round the hanging branches, and made a wreath, which they put round the trunk of the tree. Everywhere they put the Poppies as high as they could reach, and then Sibold held up May while she stuck the Tiger-lily in a cleft in the tree-trunk above all the other flowers.

Then the children sat down to their lunch. They were very tired and very hungry, and they enjoyed the rest and the food very much. There was only one thing which they wanted, and that was the new little Baby Brother, so that they might make him the king of the feast.

When lunch was finished, they felt very tired, so they lay down together with their heads on each other's shoulders and their arms twined; and there they went to sleep with the scarlet Poppies nodding all round them.

After a time they were not asleep. It did not seem to be any later in the day, but to be the early morning. Neither of them felt the least sleepy or tired; on the contrary they both wanted to go on a longer expedition than ever.

"Come down to the creek," said Sibold, "and let us get out my boat."

May arose, and they opened the leafy door and went out. They went down to the creek; and there they found Sibold's boat with all its white sails set.

"Let us get in," said Sibold.

"Why?" asked May.

"Because then we can have a sail," he answered.

"But it will not hold us; it is too small," said May, who was rather afraid to go sailing, but did not like to say so.

"Let us try," said her brother. He took hold of the cord that tied the boat to the bank, and drew it in. The line seemed very long, and Sibold appeared to be pulling it in for a great while. However, the boat came in at last. As it drew nearer, it got bigger and bigger, till when it touched the bank, they saw that it was just large enough to hold them both.

"Come, let us get in," said Sibold.

Somehow May did not feel afraid now. She got into the boat and found that in it there were silken cushions of the colour of the Poppy flowers. Then Sibold got in, and pulled away the rope that tied the boat to shore. He sat in the stern, and held the tiller in his hand; May sat on a cushion in the bottom of the boat, and held on to the sides.

The white sails swelled out with a gentle breeze, and they began to move away from the shore; the tiny waves rippled from the bow of the boat. May heard the lap, lap, lap, as they touched the prow, and then fell away.

The sun shone very brightly. The water was as blue as the sky, and so clear that the children could see down into its depths, where the fishes were darting about. There, too, the plants and trees that grow under the water were opening and closing their branches; and the leaves were moving about as those of land trees do when the wind is blowing.

For a little while the boat went straight away from land till they lost sight of the tall Willow tree which rose above the others. Then it seemed to come near to the shore again, and moved on, always so close that the children could see all that was there very plainly.

The shore was very varied; and each moment showed something new and beautiful -

Now it was a jutting rock all covered with trailing plants whose flowers almost touched the water.

Now it was a beach, where the white sand glittered and glistened in the light, and where the waves made a pleasant humming sound as they ran up the shore and down again - as if playing at “touch” with themselves.

Now dark trees with dense foliage overhung the water; but through their gloom shone bright patches far away as the sun streamed down, through some opening, into the glade.

Again there were places where grass as green as emerald sloped right down to the water’s edge, and where the Cowslips and Buttercups that grew on the marge as they leant over almost kissed the little waves that rose to meet them.

Then there were places where great trees of Lilac made the air sweet for far around with the breath of their clusters of pink and white blossom, and where the laburnums seemed to shower endless streams of gold from the wealth of flowers which hung from their twisted green branches.

There were also great Palm-trees with their wide leaves making a cool shadow on the earth beneath. Great Cocoa-nut trees up whose stems troops of monkeys kept running to gather the cocoa-nuts which they pulled and threw down below. Aloes with great stalks laden with flowers of purple and gold - for this was the hundredth year when alone the Aloe blooms.

There were Poppies as large as trees; and Lilies whose flowers were bigger than tents.

The children liked all these places, but presently they come to a spot where there was a patch of emerald grass shaded over with giant trees. Around rose or hung or clustered every flower that grows. Tall Sugar-canes sprang from the edge of a tiny stream which ran over a bed of bright stones like jewels. Palms reared their lofty heads, and plants with great leaves rose and made shadows even in the shade. Close by was a crystal spring which bubbled into the tiny stream whence the Sugar-canes rose.

When they saw this place both the children cried out, “Oh, how beautiful! Let us stop here.”

The boat seemed to understand their wishes, for without the helm even being touched, it turned and drifted in gently to the shore.

Sibold got out and lifted May to land. He intended to moor the boat; but the moment May got out all the sails folded themselves of their own accord, the anchor jumped overboard, and before it was possible to do anything the boat was anchored close to the shore.

Sibold and May took each other’s hands, and they went round the place together, looking at everything.

Presently May said, in a whisper:

“Oh, Sibold, this place is so nice, I wonder if there is any Parsley here.”

“Why do you want Parsley?” he asked.

“Because if there was a nice bed of Parsley we might be able to find a Baby - And oh, Sibold, I do so want a Baby.”

“Very well then, let us look,” said her brother. “There seems to be every kind of plant here; and if there is every kind of plant, you know there must be Parsley.” For Sibold was very logical.

So the two children went all round the grassy dell searching; and presently, sure enough, under the spreading leaves of a Citron they found a great bed of Parsley - bigger Parsley than they had ever seen before.

Sibold was quite pleased with it, and said, “This is something like Parsley. Do you know, May, it always puzzled me how a Baby who is so much bigger than the Parsley can be hidden by it; and it must be hidden in it, for I often go out to look in the bed at home, and I never can find one, although nurse always finds one whenever she looks. But she does not look nearly often enough. I know if I was as lucky as she is, I would be always looking.”

May found the longing to find a baby grow so strong upon her that she said again:

“Oh, Sibold, I do so long for a Baby; I hope we will find one.”

As she spoke there was a queer kind of sound heard - a sort of very, very soft laugh - like a smile set to music.

May was surprised, and, for a moment, did not think of doing anything; she merely pointed, and said:

“Look, look!”

Sibold ran forward, and lifted up the leaf of an enormous Parsley plant; and there - oh, joy of joys! - was lying the dearest little Baby Boy that ever was seen.

May knelt down beside him, and lifted him up, and began to rock him, and sing "Hush a bye, baby," whilst Sibold looked on complacently. However, after a while he got impatient, and said:

"Look here, you know, I found that Baby; he belongs to me."

"Oh, please," said May, "I heard him first. He is mine."

"He is mine," said Sibold; "He is mine," said May; and both began to get a little angry.

Suddenly they heard a low groan - a sort of sound like as if a tune had a toothache. Both children looked down in alarm, and saw that the poor Baby was dead.

They were both horrorstruck, and began to cry; and both asked the other to forgive them, and promised that never, never again they would be angry. When they had done this, the Child opened its eyes, looked at them gravely, and said:

"Now never quarrel or be angry. If you get angry again, either of you, I shall be dead, aye, and buried too, before you can say 'trapsticks.'"

"Indeed, Ba," said May, "I shall never, never be angry again. At least, I shall try not to be."

Said Sibold:

"I assure you, sir, that under no provocation, resulting from whatever concatenation of circumstances, shall I be guilty of the malfaisance of anger."

"How pretty he speaks," said May; and the Baby nodded his head to him familiarly, as much as to say:

"All right, old man, we understand each other."

Then for a while they were all quite quiet. Presently the Baby turned its blue eyes up to May, and said:

"Please, little mother, will you sing to me?"

"What would you like, Ba?" said May.

"Oh, any little trifle; something pathetic," he answered.

"Any particular style?" asked May.

"No, thank you; anything that comes handy. I prefer something simple - some little elementary trifle, as, for instance, any little tune beginning with a chromatic scale in consecutive fifths and octaves, pianissimo - rallentando - excellerando - crescendo - up to an inharmonic change on the dominant of the diminished flat ninth."

"Oh, please, Ba," said May, very humbly, "I do not know anything about that yet. I am only in scales, and, if you please, I do not know what it is all about."

"Look, and you will see," said the Child, and he took a piece of stick and wrote some music on the sand.

"I do not know yet," said May.

Just then a small yellowish-brown animal appeared in the glade chasing a rat. When it came opposite them it suddenly went off like the sound of a pistol.

"Do you know now?" asked the Child.

"No, dear Ba, but it does not matter," she answered.

"Very well, dear," said the Child, kissing her, "anything you please, only let it come straight from your loving little heart;" and he kissed her again.

Then May sang something very sweet and pretty - so sweet and pretty that it made her cry, and Sibold also, and the Baby. She did not know the words, and she did not know the tune, and she had only a vague sort of idea what it was all about; but it was very, very pretty. All the time she was singing she kept nursing the baby, and he put his dear little fat arms round her neck, and loved her very much.

When she was done singing, the Child said:

"Chlap, Chlap, Chlap, M-chlap!"

"What does he mean?" she asked Sibold, in distress, for she saw that the Baby wanted something.

Just then a beautiful Cow put its head over the bushes, and said, "Moo-oo-oo." The Beautiful Child clapped his hands; so did May, who said:

"Oh, I know now. He wants to be fed."

The Cow walked in without being invited; and Sibold said:

"I suppose, May, I had better milk him."

"Please do, dear," said May; and she began cuddling the Baby again, and kissing, and nursing him, and telling him that he would soon be fed now.

Whilst she was thus engaged, she was sitting with her back to Sibold; but the Baby was looking on at the milking operation, with his blue eyes dancing with glee. All at once he began to laugh, so much that May looked round to see what he was laughing at. There was Sibold trying to milk the Cow by pulling its tail.

The Cow did not seem to mind him, but went on grazing.

"Chay, Lady," said Sibold. The Cow began to frisk about.

"Oh, I say," said Sibold, "do hurry up now, and give us some milk; the Ba wants some."

The Cow answered him:

"The dear Ba must not want for aught."

May thought it very strange that the Cow could talk; but as Sibold did not seem to think it strange, she held her tongue.

Sibold began to argue with the Cow: "But really now, Mister

Cow, if he must not want for anything, why do you make him want?"

The Cow answered: "Don't blame me. It is your own fault. Try some other way;" and it began to laugh as hard as it could.

Its laugh was very funny, very loud at first, but gradually getting more and more like the Child's laugh, till May could not tell one from the other. Then the Cow stopped laughing, but the Child went on.

"What are you laughing at, Ba?" May asked, for she did not remember to know anything about milking, any more than Sibold. She thought this very funny, for she knew that she had often seen the cows milked at home.

The Baby spoke, "That is not the way to milk a cow."

Then Sibold began to work the Cow's tail up and down like the handle of a pump; but the Baby laughed more than ever.

All at once, without knowing how it came to pass, she felt herself pouring milk out of a watering-pot all over the Baby, who lay on the ground, with Sibold holding down its head. The Baby was crowing and laughing like mad; and when the watering-pot was all emptied, he said:

"Thank you both so much. I never enjoyed dinner so much in my life."

"This is a very queer dear Ba!" said May, in a whisper.

"Very," said Sibold.

Whilst they were talking there came a dreadful sound among the trees, very very far away at first, but getting nearer and nearer every moment. It was like cats who were trying to imitate thunder. The noise came booming through the trees.

"Meiau-u-boom-r-p-s-s-s. Yarkhow-iau-p-s-s."

May was very much frightened. So also was Sibold, but he would not say so; he felt that he had to protect his little Sister and the Baby, so he got between them and the place the sound came from. May hugged the Child close, and said to him, “Do not fear, dear Ba. We will not let it touch you.” “What is ‘it?’” said the Baby.

“I do not know, Ba,” she answered. “I wish I did. There it comes now;” for just at that moment a great angry Tiger bounded over the tops of the highest trees, and stood glaring at them out of its great green flaming eyes.

May looked on this terrible thing with her eyes distended with terror; but still she clasped the Baby closer and closer. She kept looking at the Tiger, and saw that he was eyeing not her nor Sibold, but the Baby. This made her more frightened than ever, and she clasped him closer. As she looked, however, she saw that the Tiger’s eyes got less and less angry every moment, till at last they were as gentle and tame as those of her own favourite tabby.

Then the Tiger began to purr. The purring was like a cat’s purr, but so loud that it sounded like drums. However, she did not mind it, for although loud it seemed as if it meant to be gentle and caressing. Then the Tiger came close, and crouched before the Wondrous Child, and licked his little fat hands with its great rough red tongue, but very gently. The Baby laughed, and patted the Tiger’s great nose, and pulled the long bristling whiskers, and said:

“Gee, gee.”

The Tiger went on behaving most funnily. It lay down on its back, and rolled over and over, and then stood up and purred louder than ever. Its great tail rose straight into the air, with the top moving about and knocking to and fro a great bunch of grapes that hung down from the tree above. It seemed overwhelmed with joy, and came and crouched again before the Child, and purred round him in the greatest state of happiness. Finally it lay down, smiling and purring, and watching over the Child as if on guard.

Presently there came from the distance another terrible Sound. It was like a great Giant hissing; and was louder than steam, and more multitudinous than a flock of geese. There was also the sound of breaking branches, of the crushing of the undergrowth; and there was a terrible dragging noise like nothing else they had ever heard.

Again Sibold stood out between the sound and May, who once more held the Baby to protect him from harm.

The Tiger rose and arched his back like an angry cat, and got ready to spring on whatsoever should come.

Then there appeared over the tops of the trees the head of an enormous Serpent, with small eyes that shone like sparks of fire, and two great open jaws. These jaws were so big that it really seemed as if the beast's whole head opened in two; and between them appeared a great forked tongue which seemed to spit venom. Behind this monstrous head appeared enormous coils of the Serpent's body moving endlessly. The Tiger growled as if about to spring; but suddenly the Serpent lowered its head submissively. It was gazing at the Wondrous Child; and May looking, also saw that the wee Baby was pointing down as if commanding the Serpent to his feet. Then the Tiger, with a low growl and afterwards a contented purr, went back to its place to watch and guard; the great Serpent came gently and coiled itself in the glade, and it also seemed as if keeping watch and guard over the Wondrous Child.

Again there came another terrible sound. This time it was in the air. Great wings seemed to flap louder than thunder; and from far away the air was darkened by a mighty Bird of Prey that made a shadow over the land with its outspread wings.

As the Bird of Prey swooped down, the Tiger rose again and arched his back as though about to spring to meet it, and the Serpent raised his mighty coils and opened his great jaws as if about to strike.

But when the Bird saw the Child it too became less fierce, and hung in mid air with its head drooped as though making submission. Presently the Serpent coiled itself and lay as before, the Tiger went back to watch and guard, and the Bird of Prey alit in the glade and watched and guarded too.

May and Sibold began to look with wonder on the Beautiful Boy, before whom these monsters made obeisance; but they could not see anything strange.

Again there was another terrible sound - this time out to sea - a rushing and swishing as if some giant thing was lashing the water.

Looking round, the children saw two monsters coming. These were a Shark and a Crocodile. They rose out of the sea and came up on land. The Shark was jumping along, with its tail beating about and its triple rows of great teeth grinding together. The Crocodile was crawling along with its big feet and short bent legs; and its terrible mouth was opening and shutting, snapping its big teeth together.

When these two got near, the Tiger and the Serpent and the Bird of Prey all rose to guard the Child; but when the new comers saw the Baby, they too made submission, and they also kept watch and guard - the Crocodile crawling on the beach, and the Shark moving up and down in the water - just like sentries.

Again May and Sibold looked at the Beautiful Child and wondered.

Once more there was a terrible noise, more awful than had yet been.

The earth seemed to shake, and a deep rumbling sound came from far below. Then, a little way off, a mountain suddenly rose; its top opened, and forth burst, with a sound louder than a storm, fire and smoke. Great volumes of black vapour rose and hung, a dark cloud, overhead. Red-hot stones of enormous size were shot aloft and fell again into the crater, and were lost. Down the sides of the mountain rolled torrents of burning lava, and springs of fiercely-boiling water burst forth on every side.

Sibold and May were more frightened than ever, and May clasped the dear Baby closer to her breast.

The thunder of the burning mountain grew louder and louder, the fiery lava poured thick and fast, and from the crater rose the head of a fiery Dragon, with eyes like burning coals and teeth like tongues of flame.

Then the Tiger and the Serpent and the Bird of Prey, and the Crocodile and the Shark, all prepared to defend the Wondrous Child.

But when the fiery Dragon saw the Boy it, too, was quelled; and it crawled humbly out from the burning crater.

Then the fiery mountain sunk again into the earth, the burning lava disappeared; and the Dragon remained with the others to watch and guard.

Sibold and May were more amazed than ever, and looked at the Baby more curiously still. Suddenly May said to her brother:

“Sibold, I want to whisper you something.”

Sibold bent his head, and she whispered very softly into his ear:

“I think the Ba is an Angel!”

Sibold looked at him in awe as he answered:

“I think so, too, dear. What are we to do?”

“I do not know,” said May; “I hope he will not be angry with us for calling him ‘Ba.’”

"I hope not," said Sibold.

May thought for a moment, and then her face lit up with a glad smile as she said:

"He will not be angry, Sibold. You know we entertained him unawares."

"Quite true," said Sibold.

Whilst they were talking, all sorts of animals and birds and fishes were coming into the glade, walking arm in arm, as well as they could - for none of them had arms. A Lion and a Lamb came first, and these two bowed to the Child, and then went and lay down together. Then came a Fox and a Goose; and then a Hawk and a Pigeon; and then a Wolf and another Lamb; then a Dog and a Cat; and then another Cat and a Mouse; and then another Fox and a Stork; and a Hare and a Tortoise; and a Pike and a Trout; and a Sparrow and a Worm; and many, many others, till all the glade was full of living things all at peace with one another.

They all sat round the glade in pairs, and they all looked at the Wondrous Child.

May whispered again to Sibold:

"I think if he is an Angel we ought to be very respectful to him."

Sibold nodded, slowing that he agreed with her; so she cuddled up the Baby closer and said:

"Please, Mister Ba, do not they all look nice and pretty sitting around like that?"

The Beautiful Child smiled sweetly as he answered:

"Beautiful and sweet they look."

May said again:

"I wish they would always be like that, and never fight nor disagree at all, dear Ba. Oh! I beg your pardon. I mean, Mister Ba."

The Child asked her:

“Why do you beg my pardon?”

“Because I called you Ba, instead of Mister Ba.”

The Boy asked again:

“Why should you call me Mister Ba?”

May did not like to say, “Because you are an Angel,” as she would like to have said, so she cuddled the Child closer and whispered into his little pink ear:

“You know.”

The Child put his little arms round her neck and kissed her, and said, very low and very sweetly, words that all her life long she never forgot:

“I do know. Be always loving and sweet, dear child, and even the Angels will know your thoughts and will listen to your words.”

May felt very happy. She looked at Sibold, who bent over and kissed her, and called her “sweet little sister;” and all the animals in pairs, and all the terrible ones on guard, said all together like a cheer:

“Right!”

Then they stopped and made all together each of the noises in turn that any of them used to show they were happy. First they all purred, and then they all crowed, and then cackled, and squeaked, and flapped their wings and wagged their tails.

“Oh, how pretty!” said May again, “look, dear Ba!” She was just going to say Mister when the Child held up its finger, so she only said “Ba.”

The Child smiled and said:

“Right, you must call me only Ba.”

Again all the animals said together like a shout:

“Right, you must say only Ba,” and then they all went through the same ways of showing their joy as before.

May said to the Child - and somehow her voice seemed very, very loud although she did not mean it, but only to whisper.

"Oh, dear Ba, I do so wish they would always continue happy and at peace like this. Is there no way of doing it?"

The Beautiful Child opened its mouth to speak, and all the living things put up their claws, or their wings, or their fins to their cars, to listen attentively.

He spake, and his words seemed full of sound but very soft, like the echo of distant thunder coming over far waters on the wings of music.

"Know, dear children, and know ye all that list - there shall be peace on earth between all living things when the children of men are for one hour in perfect love and harmony with each other. Strive, oh! strive, each and all of you, that it may be so."

As he spoke there came over all a solemn hush, and they were very still.

Then the Wondrous Child seemed to float out of May's arms and to move down toward the sea. All the living things instantly hurried to make a great double line between which he passed.

May and Sibold followed him hand in hand. He waited for them at the marge of the sea and then kissed them both.

Whilst he was kissing them, the boat came close to shore; the anchor climbed on board; the white sails ran aloft, and a fresh breeze began to blow towards home.

The Wondrous Child moved on to the prow, and there rested. Sibold and May went on board, and took their old place; and after kissing their hands to all the living things - who were by this time dancing all together in the glade - they kept their eyes fixed on the

Beautiful Boy.

As they sat hand in hand, the boat moved along gently, but very swiftly. The shore, with its many beautiful places, seemed gliding into a dim mist as they swept along.

Presently they saw their own creek, and the great Willow towering over all the other trees on shore.

The boat came to land. The Wondrous Child, floating in the air, moved onward towards the Willow Bower.

Sibold and May followed.

He entered the Bower; they came close after.

As the leafy curtain fell behind them, the figure of the Wondrous Child got dimmer and dimmer; till at last, looking at them lovingly, and waving his tiny hands, as if blessing them, he seemed to melt away into the air.

Sibold and May sat for a long time, hand in hand, thinking. Then both feeling sleepy, they put their arms round each other, and lay down to rest.

In this position they again fell asleep, with the Poppies all around them.

Snow Bound: The Record of a Theatrical Touring Party

This collection of fifteen short stories was first published in 1908. Stoker weaves the stories together as a series of tales told by the members of a touring theatre company on a snowbound train.

Collier's Shilling Library

SNOW BOUND

The record of a theatrical touring party

BRAM STOKER

The first edition

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PREFACE

The Truth - or rather Accuracy - of these Stories may be accepted or not as the Reader pleases. They are given as Fiction.

Bram Stoker

THE OCCASION

For a little while the train seemed to stumble along amongst the snowdrifts. Every now and again there would be a sudden access of speed as a drift was cleared, just as in a saw-mill the ‘buzz’ saw rushes round at accelerated speed as the log is cleaved, or as a screw ‘races’ when the wave falls away. Then would follow an ominous slowing down as the next snowdrift was encountered. The Manager, pulling up the blind and peering out on the waste of snow, remarked:

‘Nice cheerful night this; special nice place to be snowed up. So far as I can see, there isn’t a house between the North Sea and the Grampians. There! we’ve done it at last! Stuck for good this time!’ - for the slow movement of the train stopped altogether. The rest of the Company waited in anxious expectancy, and it was with a general sigh of relief that they saw the door on the sheltered side of the saloon open under the vigorous jerk of the Guard: anything was better than the state of uncertainty to which they had been reduced by the slow, spasmodic process of the last two hours. The Guard shook the rough mass of snow from him as he came in and closed the door.

‘Very sorry to tell you, Ladies and Gentlemen, that we’ve come to a stop at last. We’ve been fighting the snow ever since we left Aberdeen, and the driver had hopes we might win on as far as Perth. But these drifts are one too many for us. Here we are till daylight unless we can get some place nigh at hand for ye to shelter.’ The practical mind of the Manager at once grasped a possibility.

‘Why not go back to Aberdeen? We have cleared the road so far, and we should be able to run back over it now.’ The Guard shook his head.

‘That mecht do by ordinar’; but with a wind like this and such a snowfall as I’ve never seen the like of, we wouldn’t be able to run a mile. But, anyhow, the Stoker has gone out to prospect; and we’ll soon know what to expect.’

‘Tell the Driver to come here,’ said the Manager. ‘I should like to know exactly how we stand as to possibilities.’ As the door opened for his passing out, the keen blast of icy air which rushed in sent a shiver through the whole Company. They were all too miserable and too anxious to say anything, so the silence was unbroken till the Guard returned with the Engine-Driver, the latter muffled, his black, oily clothes additionally shiny with the running of the melted snow.

‘Where are we?’ asked the Manager.

‘Just about ten miles from anywhere, so far as I can make out. The snow falls so fast that you cannot see ten feet ahead, and the Stoker has come back, unable to get twenty yards away from the train.’

‘Then I suppose there is no help for us till the storm ceases?’

‘None!’

‘And we have to pass the night on the train without any sort of comfort that you can give us?’

‘That’s so.’ A groan from all followed the words. The Manager went on:

‘Then we must do what we can to keep warm at least. We must make a fire here.’ The Guard struck in sharply:

‘Mak’ a fire in the Company’s carriage, and burn the whole timing up to a cender? Ye’ll no mak’ a fire here!’ He spoke decisively. The Manager answered with equal decision:

‘Who will prevent us?’

‘I will.’

‘Indeed! How will you do it?’

‘By the authority of the Great North line which I represent. So tak' ye formal notice that I forbid any fire in the carriage.' He paused, self-satisfied.

The Manager, taking his writing-pad from his pocket, wrote a few words. Then he said suavely:

'You understand I call on you as the representative of the Company to fulfil the Company's contract and leave us in London.'

'Ye know verra weel that I canna' do it.'

'So you admit that, relying, I presume, on the common law of force majeure to relieve you?'

'Aye!'

'Then read this paper; you see it is a formal notice. Now if you rely on force majeure, so do we; and we have a good deal more force majeure than you have! So here we'll make a fire, and, if need be, we'll fight your crowd in the doing of it. Brooke, you go to the workmen's carriage and tell them to come here.'

The Call Boy departed on his errand, and the Manager, seeing that the Guard had caved in, went on more genially:

'We'll not do any harm, as you shall soon see; but, anyhow, we don't mean to die like rats in a trap. Fire we must have, but we'll so arrange it that there will not be any harm done. All our people will come in here, and your men can come also and share the warmth when we get it.'

'Aye! when ye get it,' murmured the Engine-Driver. The Manager smiled. 'You will see!' he observed. 'I shall stage-manage this. You may look on and get a wrinkle for other snow-uppings.'

At this moment the door was torn open, and in rushed the half-dozen workmen, carpenters and property men, headed by the Master Machinist and the Property Master. The rear was brought up by the Baggage Master. The feet of all were clogged heavily with snow.

The Manager spoke up just in time to prevent blows:

‘Be quiet, men! We are snowed up, and will have to make ourselves comfortable as well as we can. We must make a fire here. Ruggles’ - this to the Property Master - ‘can you get out any of the things from the vans?’

‘Quite easy, sir! We’re not loaded too full, and there is a clear way up the car.’

‘And you, Hempitch?’ - this to the Master Machinist.

‘Same, sir. We’re not full either.’

‘Very well! We must first make a fire in this carriage -’ Here the guard broke in:

‘Ye’ll no mak’ a fire here - except ower ma deid body.’

‘Hush, man!’ said the Manager, holding up his hand. ‘You’ll see it will be all right. Just wait a while, and you will be satisfied; and then we shan’t have to knock you on the head or tie you up. Now, Hempitch, you get out the thunder and lay it here on the floor on the lee side of the car opposite this window; you will see, Guard, that the iron sheet will protect the floor. You, Ruggles, get a good lump of modelling clay from Pygmalion and make a rim all round to keep in the ashes. Then, Hempitch, have half-a-dozen iron braces and lay them on billets or a couple of stage boxes. On this platform put down one of the fireplaces - any one will do. Then, Ruggles, you will put a Louis XI chimney over it, with a fire backing behind, and make an asbestos fire-cloth into a chimney leading out of the window; you can seal it up with clay. The Engine-Driver here will bring us some live coals from his engine, and one of the carpenters can take his saw and cut down a piece of the fence that I saw outside made of old sleepers.’

The railway servants were intelligent men, and recognised the safety and comfort of the plan; so they went to the engine to get the live coals. When the workmen were bringing the coal, the Manager said to the Baggage Master:

‘You had better bring in a couple of baskets of the furs from Michael Strogoff; they will help to make us comfortable. And now, ladies and gentlemen, you had better produce your provisions. I see you have all hampers for the journey to London, and we can have supper. I have myself a big jar of Highland whiskey and we shall have as jolly a time as we can.’

All was bustle, and though for a while the saloon was deathly cold whilst the various things ordered were being brought in, the extemporary fireplace was so quickly organised and the fire burned so well that warmth and comfort were soon realised. The Engine-Driver brought one or two appliances from his own store, notably a flat kettle, which, filled with melted snow, was soon hissing on the fire. The Property Master produced crockery from his professional stores; and supper began amidst the utmost comfort and good humour.

When it was done, punch and tea were made and handed round, and pipes and cigars were lit. The Company, wrapped in furs, gathered as closely as they could get round the fire.

After a while the general buzz of conversation began to subside, and desultory remarks now and then marked the transition to absolute silence. This was after a while broken by the Manager with a sudden eruption of speech which seemed to awake the drowsy faculties of his companions.

A LESSON IN PETS

'Once before, I spent some time with the Company in a saloon which was not altogether ideal.

'Oh, do tell us about it,' said the Leading Lady. 'We have hours at least to spend here, and it will help to pass the time.'

'Hear! hear!' came from the rest of the Company, who at least always seemed to like to hear the Manager speak. The Manager rose and bowed with his hand on his heart as though before the curtain, sat down again, and began:

'It was a good many years ago - about ten, I should think - when I had out the No 1 Company of "Revelations of Society". Some of you will remember the piece. It had a long run both in town and country.'

'I know it well,' said the Heavy Father. 'When I was a Leading Juvenile I played Geoffroi D'Almontiere, the French villain, in the Smalls in old George Bucknill's Company, with Evangeline Destrude as Lady Margaret Skeffington. A ripping good piece it was, too. I often wonder that someone doesn't revive it. It's worth a dozen of these namby-pamby - rot-gut-problem -'

'Hush! hush!' came the universal interruption, and the growing indignation of the speaker calmed down. The Manager went on:

'That time we had an eruption of dogs.'

'Of what's?'

'How?'

'Of dogs?'

'How that time?'

'Oh, do explain!' from the Company. The Manager resumed:

'Of dogs, and other things. But I had better begin at the beginning. On the previous tour I had out "The Lesson of the Cross", and as we were out to rake in all the goody-goodies, I thought it best to have an ostensibly moral tone about the whole outfit. So I picked them out on purpose for family reasons. There were with us none but married folk, and no matter how old and ugly the women were, I knew they'd pass muster with the outside crowd that we were catering for. But I did not quite expect what would happen. Every one of them brought children. I wouldn't have minded so much if they had brought the bigger ones that could have gone on to swell the crowds. I'd have paid their fares for them, too. But they only took babies and little kiddies that needed someone to look after them all the time. The number of young nursemaids and slips of girls from the workhouse and institutions that we had with us you wouldn't credit. When I got down to the station and saw the train that the Inspector pointed out as my special, I could not believe my eyes. There was hardly a window that hadn't a baby being held out of it, and the platform was full of old women and children all crowing, laughing, and crying and snapping their fingers and wiping their eyes and waving pocket-handkerchiefs. Somehow the crowd outside had tumbled to it, and it being Sunday afternoon, they kept pouring in and guying the whole outfit. I could do nothing then but get into my own compartment and pull down the blind, and pray that we might get away on time.

'When we got to Manchester, where we opened, there was the usual Sunday crowd to see the actors. When we came sliding round the curve of the Exchange I looked out, and saw with pleasure the public anxiety to catch the first glimpse of the celebrated "Lesson of the Cross" Company, as they had it well displayed on our bills. But I saw run along all the faces in the line, just as you see a breeze sweep over a cornfield, a look of wonder; and then a white flash as the teeth of every man, woman, and child became open with a grin. I looked back, and there again was that infernal row of babies being dandled in front of the windows. The crowd began to cheer; I waited till they closed round the babies, and then I bolted for my hotel.

'It was the same thing over and over again all through that tour. Every place at which we arrived or from which we went away had the same crowd; and we went and came in howls of laughter. I wouldn't have minded so much if it did us any good; but somehow it only disappointed a lot of people who came to the play to see the crowd of babies, and wanted their money back when they found they weren't on. I spoke to some of the Company quietly as to whether they couldn't manage to send some of the young 'uns home; but they all told me that domestic arrangements were complete, and that they couldn't change them. The only fun I had was with one young couple who I knew were only just married. They had with them a little girl about three years old, whom they had dressed up as a boy. When I remonstrated with them they frankly told me that as all the others had children with them they thought it would look too conspicuous without, and so they had hired the child from a poor relation, and were responsible for it for the tour. This made me laugh, and I could say no more.

'Then there was another drawback from all the children; there wasn't an infant epidemic within a hundred miles of us that some of them didn't get - measles, whooping-cough, chicken-pock, mumps, ringworm - the whole lot of them, till the train not only looked like a creche, but smelt like a baby-farm and a hospital in one. Why, if you will believe me, during the year that I toured that blessed Company - and we had a mighty prosperous time of it, take it for all in all - the entire railway system of England was strewn with feeding-bottles and rusks.'

‘Oh, Mr Benville Nonplusser, how can you?’ remonstrated the First Old Woman. The Manager went on:

‘Just before the end of the tour I got all the Company together, and told them that never again would I allow a baby to be taken on any tour of mine; at all events, in my special trains. And that resolution I’ve kept from that day to this.

‘Well, the next tour we went on was very different. It was, as I said, with the “Revelations of Society”, and, of course, the cast was quite different. We wanted to get a sort of toney, upper-crust effect; so I got a lot of society amateurs to walk on. The big parts were, of course, done by good people, but all the small ones were done by swells. It wasn’t altogether a pleasant time, for there was no end to the jealousies. The society amateurs were, as usual, more theatrical than the theatricals; the airs that some of them gave themselves would make you laugh. This put up the backs of our own crowd - and they got their shirts out, I can tell you. At first I tried to keep the peace, for these swell supers were mighty good and just what we wanted in the play; but after a bit it got to a regular division of camps, and I found that whatever I did must be wrong. Whateverone got or did they all wanted, and nothing was allowed to pass that gave even a momentary advantage or distinction to any of the crowd. By-and-by I began to have to put my foot down, but every time I did so there was a kick somewhere; so I had to be careful lest I should have no one at all to play the piece.

‘I seemed never to be able to get an hour’s rest from some of the jealousies that were constantly springing up. If I could have managed to forestall any of them it would have been easy enough, but the worst of it all was that they were perpetually breaking out in a new place; and it was only when it was too late to do anything to prevent a row that I came to know the cause of the one then on.

'Having forbidden babies on the former tour, I did not think it was necessary to forbid anything else; and the consequence was that I suddenly found that we had broken out in an eruption of Pets. My Leading Lady then, Miss Flora Montressor, who had been with me on seven tours and was an established favourite all over the Provinces, had a little toy wheaten terrier that she had taken with her everywhere since ever she had been with me. Often other members had asked my Acting Manager if they too might bring dogs; but he had always put them off, telling them that the railway people didn't allow it, and that it would be better not to press the matter, as Miss Montressor from her position was a privileged person. This had always been enough with the regular Company, but the new lot had all of them got pets of some kind, and after the first journey, when their attention had been called to the irregularity, they simply produced dog-tickets, and said they would pay for them themselves. That was enough for the other lot, and before the next journey came there wasn't a soul in the whole crowd but had a pet of some kind. Of course, they were mostly dogs - and a queer lot they were, from the tiniest kind of toy up to the biggest sort of mastiff. The railway people weren't ready for them - it would have taken a new kind of van for them all - and I wasn't ready for them either; so I said nothing then. The following Sunday I got them all together, and told them that after that journey I was afraid I could not permit the thing to go on. The station was then like a dog-show, and I could hardly hear myself speak for the barking and yelping and howling. There were mastiffs and St Bernards, and collies and poodles and terriers and bull-dogs and Skyes, and King Charleys and dachshunds and turnspits - every kind of odd illustration of the family of the canine world. One man had got a cat with a silver collar, and led it by a string; another had a tame frog; and several had squirrels, white mice, rabbits, rats, a canary in a cage, and a tame duck. Our Second Low Comedy Merchant had got a young pig, but it got away at the station, and he hadn't time to follow it up. When I spoke to the Company they were silent, and they all held up their dog-tickets - all except Miss Flora Montressor, who said quietly:

'"You gave me leave years ago to bring my little dog."

'Well, I saw that nothing could be done then except with the kind of row that I didn't want. So I went to my own compartment to think the matter over.

'I soon came to the conclusion that an object-lesson of some kind was required; and then a bright idea struck me:

'"I should get a pet myself."

'We were then bound for Liverpool, and early in the week I slipped down to my old friend Ross, the animal importer, to consult with him. In my early days I had had to do with a circus, and I thought that on this occasion I might turn my knowledge to account. He was out, so I asked one of the men if he could recommend me some sort of pet that wouldn't be pleasant for a nervous person to travel with. He wasn't a humorous man, and at once suggested a tiger. "We have a lovely full-grown one," he said, "just in from Bombay. He's as savage as they make 'em. We have to keep him in a place by himself, for when we put him 'in a room with any of the others, he terrifies them so that they are like to quit in a body."

'I thought this cure might be too drastic, and I didn't want to close my tour in a cemetery or a gaol, so I suggested something milder. He tried me with pumas, leopards, crocodiles, wolves, bears, gorillas, and even with a young elephant; but none of them seemed as if it would suit. Just then Ross himself came in, and took me off to see something new.

'"Just come in," he said; "three ton of boa-constrictor from Surinam. The finest lot I've ever come across." When I looked at them, although my early training had somewhat accustomed me tosuch matters, I felt a little uneasy. There they lay in cases like melonbeds, with nothing over them but a glass frame, with not even a hasp to hold it down. A great slimy, many-coloured mass all folded about and coiled up and down and round and round; - except for a head sticking out here and there one would have thought that it was all one big reptile. Ross saw me move a little, so he said, to reassure me:

'"You needn't be skeered. This weather they're half torpid. It's pretty cold now, and even if the heat were to get at them they wouldn't wake up." I didn't like them, all the same, for whenever one of them would give a gulp, swallowing whatever food he was on at the moment - a rat or a rabbit or what not - the whole mass would stir and heave and writhe a little. I thought how nice a lot of them would look amongst my crowd; so there and then I agreed with Ross to hire a lot of them for the next journey. One of his men was to come down with my workmen to Carlisle, whither we were bound, to take them back again.

'I arranged with the railway company to have for that journey one of their large excursion saloons, so that all the members of the Company would have to travel together instead of going into separate compartments grouped in parties. When they gathered at the station none of them were satisfied. There was, however, no overt grumbling. I had casually mentioned, and the word had gone round, that I was coming with them myself, and had prepared a treat for them. That they evidently expected something in the way of a picnic was manifested by the frequent inquiries of some of them from the porters and the Baggage Master as to whether my personal luggage had arrived. I had carefully arranged with Ross's people that my contribution was not to be brought till the last moment, and I had privately tipped the Guard and asked him to be ready for an immediate start after its arrival. The special train had been scheduled for a quick run, and was not to stop between Liverpool and Carlisle.

'As the starting time drew near, the Company took their places as they had secured them in the saloon, the first comers getting to the furthest ends. The carriage became by a sort of natural selection divided into two camps. The dogs belonging to either side were in the centre. When "all aboard" had been called out by my Acting Manager after his usual custom, the last of the Company took their places. Then a heavy truck came quickly along the platform, surrounded by several men. It contained two great boxes with unfastened lids, and as there were many hands available these were quickly lifted into the saloon. One was placed opposite the door on the off-side of the carriage, and the other put just inside the door of entry, which it blocked.

'Then the door was slammed and locked; the Guard's whistle sounded, and we were off.

'I needn't tell you that all this time the dogs were barking and howling for all they were worth, and some of them were only held back by their owners from flying at each other. The cat had taken refuge on a hat-rack, and stood growling, with her tail thickened and lashing about. The frog sat complacently in its box beside its master, and the rats and mice were nowhere to be seen in their cages. When the baskets came in some of the dogs cowered down and shivered, whilst others barked fiercely and could hardly be held back. I got out my Sunday paper and began to read quietly, awaiting developments.

'For a while the angry dogs kept up their clamour, and one of them, the mastiff, became almost unmanageable. His master called out to me:

'"I can't hold him much longer. There must be something in that box that upsets him."

'"Indeed!" I said, and went on reading. Then one or two of the Company began to get alarmed; one of them came over and looked curiously at the box, bent close and sniffed suspiciously, and drew back. This whetted the curiosity of others, and several more came around and bent down and sniffed. Then they began to whisper amongst themselves, and one of them asked me point-blank:

'"Mr Benville Nonplusser, what is in that box?"

'"Only some pets of mine," I answered, without looking up from my paper.

'"Very nasty pets, whatever they are," she answered tartly. "They smell very nasty." To which I replied:

'"We all have our fancies, my dear. You have yours and I have mine; and since all you belonging to this Company have your pets with you, I have determined to establish some of mine. You'll doubtless grow to like them in time. In fact, you'd better begin, for they are likely to be with you every journey henceforth."

'"May we look?" asked one of the young men. I nodded acquiescence, and as he stooped to lift the lid the rest gathered round - all except the man with the mastiff, who had his hands full with that clamorous beast. The young man raised the lid, and as he saw what was within, threw it back as he recoiled, so that it fell over, leaving the whole interior exposed. Then the crowd drew back with a shudder, and some of the women began to scream. I was afraid that they might attract attention, as we were then nearing a station, so I said quietly:

'"You had better be as quiet as you can. Nothing irritates serpents so much as noise. They think it is their opportunity for seeking prey!" This bold statement seemed to be verified by the fact that some of the boa-constrictors sleepily raised their heads with a faint hissing. Whereupon the crowd simply tumbled over each other in their efforts to reach the further corners of the saloon. By this time the man with the mastiff was becoming exhausted by his struggling with the powerful animal. As I wished to push home my lesson, I said:

'"You had better keep those dogs quiet. If you don't, I shall not answer for the consequences. If that mastiff manages to attack the serpents, as he is trying to, they will spring out and fight, and then -" I was silent, for at such a point silence is the true eloquence. The fear of all was manifested by their blanched faces and trembling forms.

'"I'm afraid I can't hold him any longer!" gasped out the man.

'"Then," said I, "some of your companions who have dogs also should try to help you. If not, it will be too late!" So several others came, and by the aid of their rug-straps they managed to tie the brute securely to a leg of the bench. Seeing that they were nearly all half-paralysed with fright, I lifted the lid to the top of the box again; at which they seemed to breathe more freely. When they saw me actually sitting on the box, something like a far-off smile began to glow on the countenances of some of them. I kept urging them to keep the animals quiet; and as this was a never-ceasing work, they had something to occupy them.

'I was a little nervous myself at first, and had any of the boa-constrictors knocked his head against the lid of the box I should have made a jump away. However, as they remained absolutely tranquil, my own courage grew.

‘And so some hours passed, with occasional episodes, such as when some one of the many pets would make a disturbance. The singing of the canary, for instance, was resisted with angry curses. But the vials of the wrath of all were emptied forth at its owner when the hitherto silent duck began its homely song, “Quack, quack!”

‘“Will you keep that blasted brute quiet?” came an angry whisper from the worn-out owner of the mastiff. Upon which a good many of those on whom time had had a quieting effect smiled.

‘When my watch told me that we were within a short distance of Carlisle, I stood upon the box and made a little speech:

‘“Ladies and Gentlemen, I trust that the episode of to-day, unpleasant though it may have been, will not be ultimately without beneficial effect. You have learned that each one of you owes something to the general good, and that the selfish pursuance of your own pleasure in small ways has sooner or later to be accounted for. When I remonstrated with each of you as to this animal business, you chose to take your own way, and even went so far as to reconcile your personal and sectional jealousies in order to unite against me. I therefore thought that I would bring the difficulty home to you in a striking way! Have I done so?”

‘For a while there was silence; and then a smile and a faint affirmative answer here and there, so I went on:

‘“Now I hope you will all take it in as good part as I have taken all that went before. Anyhow, my mind is made up. Pets shall be included with babies in the Index Expurgatorius of our tour. In the meantime, for the remainder of this tour, if anyone else brings pets, so shall I; and I think you know that I know how to choose my own. Anyone objecting to this can cancel the engagement right here. Has anyone got anything to say?” Some shrugged their shoulders, but all were silent; and I knew that my victory was complete. As I was stepping down, however, I caught Miss Montressor’s eye as tearfully she looked at me and then at her little dog, so I added:

‘“This does not apply to Miss Montressor, who years ago had permission to take her dog. I shall certainly not deprive her of that privilege now.”

‘And not a soul objected.’

‘Next!’ said the Acting Manager, Mr Wragge, who, being by the needs of his calling a pushful person, usually took such prominent responsibilities as were unallotted or unattached, and who in the present instance had become by a sort of natural selection, manifested by tacit consent of the Company, Master of the Ceremonies.

There was dead silence, for the seance was as yet so young that no one seemed to wish to be put forward. The keen-eyed MC recognised the situation at a glance, and, turning to the Leading Lady on the Manager’s left, said:

‘You’ll have to go on next, Miss Venables. The turn will travel with the wine - if we had any for it to travel with.’ The hint was not lost on the First Low Comedian, who promptly unscrewed the top of his flask and gallantly pushed it, together with a tumbler and the water-bottle, in front of the blushing girl. ‘Here is the wine,’ he said; ‘vin du pays.’ She made a gentle motion of protest, but the Manager poured a small portion of whiskey in the glass, together with a fair supply of water. She acknowledged the courtesy with a pretty little bow, and then turned an appealing eye round the Company. ‘I will with pleasure do what I can for the public good,' she said, 'but I am really and truly at a loss to know what to tell. My life has not yet been a very adventurous one, and I don't know anything worth telling that has ever happened to myself.'

One of the Young Gentlemen, who secretly admired her from afar, blurted out:

'I know something which would interest us all.'

'What is that?' asked the MC quickly. The Young Man blushed and stammered as he answered, looking apprehensively at the object of his devotion, who gazed at him inquiringly with bent brows:

'It was some joke - something - I don't know what it was - that they had in the "Her Grace the Blanchisseuse" Company just before I joined them. Someone had sworn them all to secrecy, so no one would tell me why it was that they always spoke of Miss Venables as "Coggins's Property."'

The girl laughed merrily. 'Oh, I did that. It was too funny altogether. I didn't mind it myself; but there was another; poor Coggins, who was an excellent fellow, took to heart so much the perpetual chaff of the Company that he sent in his resignation. I knew that he had a wife and family, and would not leave a good situation unless he was really hurt; so I made a personal request to everyone, and they all promised not to tell how the name came to be. But I am not bound, so if you like I will tell you; for the thing is all over long ago, and Coggins is a prosperous builder in the Midlands'

'Hear! hear!' came from all, for their expectations were aroused. So the Leading Lady began:

COGGINS'S PROPERTY

'When I was in "Her Grace the Blanchisseuse", I had just gone on the stage and played a lot of little parts of a line or two. Sometimes I was a body without a voice, and sometimes a voice without a body!'

'Vox et praeterea nihil,' murmured another Young Man, who had been to a public school.

'Amongst the voice parts was one which was supposed to come from a queen who was in bed in a room off the salon which was represented in the scene. The edge of the bed was dimly seen, and I had to put out a hand with a letter and speak two lines. My attendant took the letter, the door was shut - and that was all. Of course, I had not to dress for the part, except that I put on a little silk and lace jacket, and one sleeve as of a nightdress, so I used to come on from the side just before my cue and slip into, or, rather, on to the bed. Then a property man came with a quilt embroidered with the Imperial Arms, which he threw over me, tucking in the edge nearest the audience. The man originally appointed to this work was Coggins, and as he had a great deal of work to do - for it was a "property" play - he only got to me in time to do his work and clear out before the door opened and my attendant came in. Coggins was an excellent fellow, grave, civil, punctual, sober, and as steady and stolid as a rock. The scene was a silent one, and what appeared to be my room was almost in the dark. The effect to the audience was to see through the lighted salon this dim sleeping chamber; to see a white hand with a letter emerge from the bed curtains, and to hear a drowsy voice as of one newly roused from sleep. There was no opportunity of speaking a word, and no need for it. Coggins knew his work thoroughly, and the stage manager and his assistants insisted on the most rigorous silence. After a few nights, when I found Coggins so attentive in his work, I said “goodnight” when I passed him at the stage-door, and gave him a shilling. He seemed somewhat surprised, but doffed his cap with the utmost respect. Henceforward we always saluted each other, each in our own way; and he had an occasional shilling, which he always received with a measure of surprise. In other portions of his nightly work and mine I often came in contact with, or rather in juxtaposition to, Coggins; but he never seemed to show the same delicate nicety which he exhibited towards me in his manipulations of my tucking-up in “Her Grace the Blanchisseuse”. The piece, as you know, had a long run in London, and then the original Company went round the “Greats” for a whole season. Of course, the Manager took with him all the people who worked in London who were necessary, and amongst them came the excellent and stolid Coggins.

‘After months of work done under all possible conditions, we all came to know our cues so well that we were able to cut the time pretty fine; we often turned up at our places only at the moment of our cues. My own part was essentially favourable for this, and I am afraid I began to cut it a little too fine; for I got to arriving at my place just a second or two before Coggins made his appearance with the Imperial quilt.

‘At last one night, in the Grand at Leeds - you know what a huge theatre it is, and how puzzling to get on the right floor - I went just across the line of safety. I was chatting in the dressing-room with Birdie Squeers, when the call-boy came tearing along the passage shouting: “Miss Venables, Miss Venables. You’re late! Hurry up, or there will be a stage wait!” I jumped for the door and tore along the passage, and got to the back of the stage just in time to meet the stolid Coggins with his stolidity for once destroyed. He had the Imperial quilt as usual folded over one arm, but he was gesticulating wildly with the other. "'Ere!" he called in a fierce whisper to a group of the other workmen. "Who the 'ell has took my Property?"

"'Yer property!" said one of the others. "Garn! ye juggins. Hain't ye got it on yer arm?"

"'This! This is all right," he answered. "That ain't what I mean. Wot I want is wot I covers up with this."

"'Well, and ain't the bed there? You keep your hair on, and don't be makin' a hass of yerself." I heard no more, for I slipped by and got on to the bed from the back. Coggins had evidently made up his mind that his particular work should not be neglected. He was not responsible for the figure in the bed, but only for putting on the quilt; and on the quilt should go. His look of blank amazement when he found that the quilt did not lie flat as on his first effort amused me. I heard him murmur to himself:

"'A trick, is it? Puttin' the Property back like that. I'll talk to them when the Act's over." Coggins was a sturdy fellow, and I had heard him spoken of as a bruiser, so I thought I would see for myself the result of his chagrin. I suppose it was a little cruel of me, but I felt a certain sort of chagrin myself. I was a newcomer to the stage, and I had hitherto felt a sort of interest in Coggins. His tender, nightly devotion to his work, of which I was at least the central figure, had to me its own romantic side. He was of the masses, and I had come of the classes, but he was a man and I a woman, and a man's devotion is always sweet - to a woman. I had often taken to heart Claude Melnotte's romantic assumption of Pauline's reply to his suit:

"That which the Queen of Navarre gave to the poor Troubadour: "Show me the oracle that can tell nations I am beautiful."

‘But it had begun to dawn upon me that my friend and humble admirer, Coggins, had no interest in me at all. My part in the play came to an end before the close of the scene, and so when the doors were closed I slipped from my place as usual; I did not, however, go to my dressing-room as was my habit, but waited to see what Coggins would do. In his usual course he came and removed his quilt; and again there was a look of annoyed amazement on his face when he found that it lay flat on the bed. Again he murmured:

‘“So they’ve took the Property away again, have they? We’ll see about it presently.” When he had removed the Imperial quilt two other men came, and as usual lifted away the bed, the Empress’s bedroom being opened no more during the play. As there was no more to be done till the play was over, I went to the stage-door, ostensibly to ask if there were any letters for me, but in reality because the workmen usually assembled there when not wanted on the stage, and it was here that I expected the denouement. Several of the carpenters and property men were smoking outside the stage-door, and to them presently came Coggins, thoroughly militant in manner.

‘“Now, you chaps,” he said, “there’s somethin’ I want to know; an’ I mean to ‘ave it, stryte ‘ere! Which of you’s ‘avin’ a lark with me?”

‘“Wot jer’ mean?” said one of the others with equal truculence. He was a local man, and certainly looked like a fighter. “Wot are ye givin’ us?”

‘Coggins, recognising an antagonist worthy of consideration, replied as calmly as he could:

‘“Wot I want to know is ‘oo’s a plyin’ tricks with my Property?”

‘“What property, Coggins?” asked one of his own pals.

'"Yer know as well as I do; the one wot I covers up on the bed with that quilt." There was a roar of laughter from the men, and a hail of chaff began to rain on him.

'"Oh! if that's your property, Coggins, I wonder what your missis will say when she hears it!"

'"Why, that ain't no property; it's a gal."

'"Well, boys, when the divorce is asked for we can prove that there weren't nothin' 'atween 'em. When old Jeune 'ears that he didn't know the differ between a property and a gal, he'll up and say, "Not guilty. The prisoner leaves the Court without the slightest stain on his character."

'Coggins grew very pale and perplexed-looking, and in a changed voice he asked:

'"Boys, is this all a cod or what?"

'"Not a bit of a cod," said one. "Do ye mean to say that you didn't know that what you tucked up every night was one of the young ladies?"

'"No!" he answered hotly. "'Ow could I know it? I never come on except just in time to put on the quilt and tuck it up. It was nearly dark, and it never said nothin'! An' 'ow the 'ell was I to know the bally thing was alive!" This was said with such an air of sincerity that it broke me all up, and I burst into laughter. Coggins turned angrily round, but, seeing me, took off his cap with his usual salute.

'"That's yer Property, Coggins!" said one of the men; and Coggins was speechless.

'Of course, he was unmercifully chaffed, and so was I. Various members of the Company used to come up to me on all sorts of occasions, and, after gazing into my eyes and touching me, would say in a surprised way:

'"Why, the bally thing's alive!"

'Coggins appeared to have a rough time of it with some of the others. For weeks he never had less than one black eye, and not only were most of our own men in a similar condition, but we left behind us wherever we went quite a crop of contusions. I knew it was no use my saying anything on my own account, for you might as well ask the wind to leave the thrashing-floor alone as for a parcel of friends to drop a good subject of chaff; but after a while I had to take pity on poor Coggins, for he sent in his resignation. I knew he had a wife and family, and that as his situation was a good one he would not leave it unless hard pressed. So I spoke to him about it. I think that his explanation had, if possible, more unconscious humour in it than his mistake. But there was pathos, too, and Coggins showed himself to be, according to his lights, a true gentleman.

'"There's two things, Miss, that I can't get away from. My missis is a good ole sort, and takes care of the kids beautiful. But she believes that there ain't in the world only one Coggins - I'm him; and as I 'ave to be away so much on tour she gets to thinkin' that there's other wimmin as foolish as herself. That makes her a bit jealous; an' if she was to 'ear that I was every night a-tuckin' up a beautiful young lady - savin' your presence - in a bed, she would give me Johnny-up-the-orchard. An' besides, Miss - I hope you'll forgive me, but I want to do the right thing if I can - I've not give up carpenterin' and took to the styge without learnin' somethin' of the ways of the quality. I was in the Dook o' York's Theatre when they had a ply what showed as how in high society if a man gets a girl into any trouble, no matter how innocent, but so as how she's chaffed by her pals, he's got to marry her to put it right. An', ye see, Miss, as how bein' married already I couldn't do the right thing ... so I've resigned, and must look for another shop."

‘‘Ow would a dead byby suit you to hear on?’ asked the Sewing Woman, with an interrogative glance round the company. ‘I know of one that was simply ‘arrowing.’ The ensuing silence was expressive.

No one said a word; all looked at the fire meditatively. The Second Low Comedian sighed. In a half-reflective, half-apologetic way she went on, as if thinking aloud rather than speaking:

‘Not that I know overmuch of bybies, anyhow, never havin’ ‘ad none of my own, though that’s partly due that I was never married. Any’ow, I never ‘ad the chances of some - married or onmarried.’

The Wardrobe Mistress, known in the Company as ‘Ma,’ here felt it incumbent on her, as the ostensible matron of the party, to say something on such a theme:

‘Well, bybies is interesting things, alive or dead. But I don’t know whether they’re the cause of most noise alive or dyin’ or dead. Seems to me that we’ve got to have it out either in screaming or sobbing or mourning, whatever you do. So, my dears, it’s just as well to take things as they come, and make the best of them.’

‘You may bet your immortal on that!’ said the Second Low Comedian. ‘Ma’s head is level!’ With the instinct of the profession, they all applauded the ‘point,’ and Ma beamed round her. Applause given to herself was a rare commodity with her.

‘All right! then we’ll drive on,’ said the bustling MC. ‘You choose your own topic, Mrs Wrigglesworth - or, rather, Miss Wrigglesworth, as I should say after your recent confession of spinsterhood.’ The Sewing Woman coughed, cleared her throat, and made those other preparations usual to the inexperienced speaker. In the pause the Tragedian’s deep voice resounded:

‘Dead babies are always cheerful. I love them on the walls of the

Academy. The Christy Minstrels' deepest bass as he trills his carol, "Cradle's Empty; Baby's Gone", fills me with delight. On such a night as this, surrounded as we are by the profound manifestations of Nature's feller forces, the theme is not uncongenial. Methinks the very snow-wreaths with which the driving tempest smites the windows of our prison-house are the beatings of dead baby fingers as they clamour to lay ice-cold touches on our hearts.' The Company, especially the women, shuddered, and the comments were varied.

'Lor'!' said the Wardrobe Mistress.

'Bones!' - the slang name of the Tragedian - 'never beat that in his nach. He'll be wanting to have a play written round it,' said the Low Comedian. The Tragedian glared and breathed hard, but said nothing. He contented himself with swallowing at a gulp the remainder of his whiskey-punch.

'Refill the Death Goblet!' said the Second Low Comedian in a sepulchral voice. 'Here, Dandy' - this to the Leading Juvenile - 'pass the whiskey.'

The servile desire to please, habitual to her, animated the Sewing Woman to proceed on her task:

'Well, Mr Benville Nonplusser,' she began, 'and Lydies and Gentlemen, which I 'opes you'll not expect too much from me in the litery way. Now, if it was a-sewin' on of buttons - no matter wherever placed! An' many a queer tale I could tell you of them if I could remember 'em, and the lydies wouldn't object - though blushes is becomin' to 'em, the dears! Or if I could do summat with a needle and thread, even in a 'urry in the dark and the styge a-waitin' of -' She was interrupted by the Low Comedian, who said insinuatingly:

'Go on, my dear. This ain't the time nor place for one to object to anything. The ladies' blushes will do them good, and will make us all feel young again. Besides' - here he winked round at the Company - 'the humour, conscious or unconscious,, offf the various situations with which your episodical narrative must be tinged will give an added force to the gruesomeness which is attendant on the defunct homunculus.'

'You are too bad, Mr Parmentire,' whispered the Singing Chambermaid to him. 'If she makes us blush you will be responsible.'

'I accept the responsibility!' he answered gallantly to her, adding sotto voce to the Prompter: 'And I won't need any cut-throat insurance at Lloyd's to protect me against that hazard.' The Sewing Woman went on:

'Well, as to the dead byby, which it makes me cry only to think of it, and its poor young mother growin' colder and colder in spite of 'ot poultices -'

Her voice was beginning to assume that nasal tone which with a woman of her class is at once a prelude to and a cause of tears. So the Manager promptly interrupted:

'We're simply in raptures about that baby; but as an introduction to the story, couldn't you give us some personal reminiscence? The baby, you see, couldn't be your own, and therefore it can only be a matter of hearsay -'

'Lor' bless you're 'eart, sir, but I ain't 'ad anythink to reminisce.'

'Well, anything you've seen or heard in the theatre. Come now, you've been a long time in the business; did you never see anything heroic happen?'

'As 'ow, sir, 'eroes not bein' much in my way?'

'Well, for instance, have you never seen a situation saved by promptness, or resource, or daring, or by the endurance of pain -'

‘Oh, yes, sir. I seen them things all in one, but it wasn’t anythink to do with the dead byby.’

‘Well, just tell us first how it was, and how resource and readiness and the endurance of pain saved the situation.’

As the Manager spoke he glanced around the Company with a meaning look; so she proceeded:

THE SLIM SYRENS

‘The first show what I ever went out with was Mr Sloper’s Company for the Society Gal, what was called “The Syrens.” You see, when the play was first done, society ‘ad long wysts and thin ‘ips and no bust to speak of, and the lydies what plyed in it original was chose according. My! but they was a skinny lot - reg’lar bags o’ bones; if ye’d a biled down the lot for stock you’d no need to ‘ave skimmed it. W’y, the tights they wore! - Speakin’ of legs as yards of pump-water ain’t in it; theirs looked as you might ‘ave rolled ’em up on a spool. And as to their chestys - why, you might ‘ave put ’em through the mangle and none ever the wuss - except the mangle from jerkiness, where it might ‘ave well expected to take it a bit india-rubbery. But the ply ‘ad so long a run that the fashion got changed, and the swells began to like ’em thick. So the gals got changed, too; some of ’em makin’ up with ‘eavy fleshings an’ them shove-up corsets, what’d take a pinch out of your - your stummick an’ swell out your throat with it, till they come into line with the fashion. Lor’, the things I’ve seen the girls do to make theirselves look bulkier than what nature made ‘em! Any’ow, when they ‘ad run the fust companies twice round the Greats, Mr Sloper thought as ‘ow ‘e’d go one better on the fashion. “Ketch the risin’ tide” was ever ‘is mortar! So the company engyged for “The New Edition Society Gal” was corkers! They used to say in the wardrobe as ‘ow there was a twenty-stun standard, and no one would be engyged that couldn’t pass the butcher. Of course, the wardrobe of the theayter or the travelling shows was no use for “The Slim Syrens” - for that’s what they came to be kown as. We ‘ad to ‘ave a lot of tights made a purpose, and when they come ‘ome the young man ‘as brought ’em laughed that much that he cried, and he wanted to stay an' see 'em put on, till I 'unted 'im out. I never see such tights in all my time. They was wove that bias everywhere as I felt my 'eart sink when I thought of 'ow we was to take up ladders in 'em; for fat girls does a deal more in that wy than slim ones - let alone the 'arder pullin' to drag 'em on. But the tights wasn't the wust. You remember, Mrs Solomon, as 'ow there's a scene when Society goes in for to restore Wat-ho, and the 'ole bilin' dresses theirselves as shepherds. Mr Sloper didn't want to spend no more money than he could 'elp; so down he goes to Morris Angel's, tykin' me and Mrs Beilby, that was wardrobe mistress to the Slim Syrens, with 'im. Well, ole Morris Angel trots out all the satin britches as 'e 'ad in stock. Of course, the most of 'em was no use to our little lot, but we managed to pick out a few that was likely for lydies what runs large. These did for some of the crowd, and, of course, the principals got theirs made to order. They wasn't so much fuller than Angel's lot, arter all; for our lydies, though bulky, liked good fits, and sure enough at the dress rehearsal most of them looked as if they had been melted and poured in. Mr Sloper and the styge manager and some of the syndicate gentlemen what came to see the rehearsal had no end of fun, and the things they said, and the jokes they made, and the way that the girls run after 'em and 'ammered of 'em playful, as girls does, 'd made you laugh to have seen it. And talk of blushin'! Well, there! The most particular of the lot, and him what didn't like the laughin' and the jokin', was Mr Santander, that was going to take out the Company as manager - him what they called "Smack" Santander in the green room. There was one girl what was his ladyfriend as he had put into the lead, though the other girls said as 'ow she 'ad no rights to be shoved on that way. But, there! Gals is mostly like that when another gal gets took up and 'elped on. Why, the things what I've 'eard and seen just because a girl was put into the front row! When she was bein' dressed, which it was in the wardrobe, because Mr Santander was that particular that Miss Amontillado should be dressed careful, well do I remember the remark as Mrs Beilby made: "Well, Miss," says she, "there's no denyin' of that you are very fine and large!" Which was gospel truth,and no concealin' of it either in the wardrobe or on the styge, an' most of all in the orchestra, where the gentlemen never left for their whiskey-and-soda, or their beer or cards or what not, or a smoke, till she 'ad gone to 'er dressin'-room, which most of 'em got new glasses - them what didn't use opery-glasses. Well, when dress rehearsal was over, Mr Sloper 'e tried to be very serious, and, says he, "Lydies, you must try and be careful; remember that you carry weight!" - which that hended 'is speech for 'im, for he choked with laughter till the syndicate gentleman come and slapped 'im on the back, and then laughed, too, fit to bust.

'When we was startin' the season Mr Santander sent for me and spoke to me about Miss Amontillado, and told me that it was as much as my plyce was worth if anything went wrong with 'er. I told 'im as 'ow I'd do my best, and I took Miss Amontillado aside, and, ses I, "Miss, it's temptin' providence it is," says I, "for a fine, strapping young lydy as you in britches like them," I says. "You do kick about that free," I says; "and satin is only satin at the best, and though the stryn is usual on it in the right direction up and down, there's the stryn on yours all round. What if I was you I wouldn't take no chances," I says. Well, she laughed, and says she, "Well, you dear old geeser" - for she was a young lydy as was alwys kind and affable to her inferiors - "and what would you do if you was me?" "Well, miss," I says, "if I was as gifted as you is, I'd have them made on webbin' what'd 'old, and wouldn't show if the wust come to the wust." She only laughed, and gave me sixpence, and, says she, "You're a good ole sort, Sniffles" - for that's what some of the young ones called me - "and I'll tell Smack how well you look after me. Then perhaps he'll raise your screw."

'Both Mr Santander and Miss Amontillado was anxious about the first night, and there was bets in the dressin'-room as to how she'd come off in 'er 'igh-kickin' act. You'll remember, Mrs Solomon, 'ow the ply goes, as 'ow to the surprise of all, the young Society gal as didn't do nothin' more nor a skirt-dance, sudden ups and tykes the kyke from all the perfeshionals. When Miss Amontillado was dressed for the act in her shepherd dress, I says to her, "Now miss," I says, "do be keerful"; and Mr Santander 'e says, "'Ear! 'ear!" 'e says. "Oh, I'm all right," she says. "Look 'ere, Smack," and she ups and does a split as made my 'eart jump, it was that sudden, and up on her 'eels agin afore you could say Jack Robinson!

'Well, just then I 'eard the Call-Boy a-comin' down the passidge 'ollerin', "Miss Amontillado! Miss Amontillado!" "'Ere!" she says; and as he came into the room she puts 'er 'ands over 'er 'ead and does a sal-lam that low that 'er back 'air nigh swept the floor. And lo and behold! as she bent I 'ears a 'ideous crack; and there was 'er back up and down in two 'alves as you'd 'ave put a sweepin' brush atween.

'"Now you've done it, Miss," I says; and there was she laughin' and cryin' all in a moment, for it weren't no joke to 'er to 'ave her big scene queered like that the fust time as she done it. And there was Mr Santander a-tearin' at 'is 'air - which there wasn't none too much of it - and 'im a-bullyin' of 'er dreadful, and sayin' as 'ow 'e'd cancel 'er engygement - which 'e weren't no gentleman, that 'e weren’t. And all the time the Call-Boy yellin’ out, “Miss Amontillado, there’ll be a styge wyte!” and ‘im fit to bust laughin’. Impident young monkey! I knew as ‘ow if anything was to be done it must be done quick, so I whips out a big sailmaker’s needle what we sewed canvas with and the tapes on the stair-treads, an’ a lot of waxend twine as I kep’ for fixin’ reefs in the ballet shoes; for it wasn’t no child’s play as to them britches with a fine gal like that, and them so tight. I tried to get a holt of the two sides of the tear to bring ’em together; but, lor’ bless you! the reef was that wide I couldn’t get ’em close any’ow. The dresser that was in with me, she tried to ‘elp; but it weren’t no use. And then Mr Santander ‘e kem and ‘ad a try, but it weren’t no go. Then I tykes the Call-Boy by the ‘air of ‘is ‘ead and mykes ‘im ketch ‘old too, ‘im bein’ a bicyclist and ‘is fingers that ‘ard. Then the gas-man came to ‘elp with two sets of pinchers; but all we could do we couldn’t make them sides of that split meet.

‘We was all in despair and the time goin’ by; we could ‘ear the ‘ootin’ in front at the wayt, and the styge-manager kem tearin’ along, yellin’ and cursin’ and shoutin’ out, “What in ‘ell is wrong? Where is the bally girl? Why don’t she ‘urry up?”

‘At that very moment a hinspiration came to me. It was a hinspiration an’ nothink else, for there was that there poor gal’s success at styke, much less ‘er situation. “‘Ere,” say I, “my dear, just you lie down on the sofy on yer fyce, with yer bust on the cushing and yer toes out with yer ‘eels in the air.” She sor in a flash what I were up to, and chucked ‘erself on the sofy, and the Call-Boy shoved a bolster under ‘er instep. My! but she bent up double that’ard that I ‘eard the webbin’ of the abominable belt as she wore go crack.

‘But, lydies and gents, the situation was saved; the roos was a pernounced success. Them two distant hedges kem together like twins a-kissin', and afore you could say "Boo!" I 'ad my needle and was a-sewin' of 'em up that firm. I was in such a 'urry that some of the stitches took in the skin as well as the satin. But she was a plucky gal, and tho' she 'owled, she didn't wriggle away. There wasn't no time to cut the thread, and as soon as the last stitch was in she jumps up, tearin' the stitches through her skin, and bounds out on the styge with the needle 'anging' be'ind. Mind you, 'er blood was up, and she landed on to the styge like a good 'un.

'The roar that come from the Johnnies when they see 'er was good to 'ear!

'But this is nothin' to do with what I was goin' to tell you about that story of the dead byby -'

'Oh! blow the dead baby,' said the Second Low Comedian. 'Put it in a bottle and keep it on the shelf till called for. After an act of living valour like what you've told us, we don't want anything dead.'

'Next!' said the MC, in the pause that ensued.

The Low Comedian being next in order had been gradually becoming more ill at ease as his own time approached; it was manifest that in the armoury of his craft was no weapon suited to deal with a necessity of extempore narration. Some of those on whom he was accustomed to sharpen his wits knew, either instinctively or by experience, of this weakness, and commenced to redress or avenge whatever they might have suffered at his hands. They began by encouragement, outwardly genuine and hearty, but with an underlying note of irony which could not fail to wound a spirit sensitive on the point of its own importance:

'Buck up, old man.'

'Drive on, Gags.'

‘Have a drink first. You’re always funnier afterwards.’

‘What do you mean by that?’ asked the indignant Low Comedian, fiercely. ‘What do you mean by “afterwards”? Do you mean when I’m drunk, or have had too much, or what?’

‘Only a joke!’ said the Prompter, in a deprecatory way, for his was the unhappy remark. The Heavy Father who was usually one of his butts struck in:

‘He probably meant that you were funnier in your intention after the opportunity of being funny had existed as a fact.’ The Low Comedian did not see his way to a fitting reply, so he replied to the arrow with a stone:

‘Indeed! If I was you, old man, I would try Irish! It’s sometimes hard to understand you through Scotch!’

‘Time!’ cried out the MC, anxious to prevent what looked like the beginning of a quarrel. The bottle, or I should say the Tribune, rests with Mr Parmentire.’ The Low Comedian looked at the fire reflectively for a few seconds; then he passed his hand through his hair, and after glaring all round the Company, began:

‘I suppose you know, Ladies and Gentlemen, that there is a current idea that a Low Comedian must be always humorous.’ He was interrupted by the Tragedian, who, prefacing his remark with a Mephistophelean Ha-ha-ha! said:

‘If there is, it is a mistake; or, at best, an exploded idea. Surely, humour is the last quality to be expected from a Comedian, let alone a Low Comedian. But, of course, I may be prejudiced; I never took much stock of the horse-collar myself’

‘Si-lence! Si-lence!’ said the watchful MC in the manner of a Court crier, whilst the Leading Juvenile whispered to the Prompter:

‘Bones got in at him for the dead baby fingers that time.’ The Low

Comedian went on:

‘Well, if humour in private life is expected, it’s not always to be had, as Bones has very properly implied in his best knock-down-and-drag-out manner, however we may deceive the public by our arts and utterances in public.

A NEW DEPARTURE IN ART

'I remember once being called on to be humorous under circumstances which made me feel that fun was as difficult to catch as a bat with a fishing rod.' With the cultivated instinct of listeners, which all actors must be able to pretend to be, the Company gave simultaneously that movement of eagerness which implies a strained attention. The perfection and simultaneity of the movement was art, but the spirit of truth lay behind it, for all felt whatever was coming was real. The Low Comedian, with the trained instinct of an actor, felt that his audience was with him - en rapport - and allowed himself a thought more breadth in his manner as he proceeded:

'I was playing "Con" in The Shaughraun for want of a better, having been put into the part because I could manage a kind of brogue. We had a wretched Company, and we went to wretched places, places nearly bad enough to do us justice. At last we found ourselves in a little town on the west side of the Bog of Allen. It was hopeless business, for the people were poor; the room we played in was an awful hole, and the shebeen which they called a hotel where we all stayed was a holy terror. The dirt on the floor had caked, and felt like sand under your feet. As to the beds -'

'Oh, don't, Mr Parmentire; it's too dreadful!' said the Leading Lady, shuddering. So he went on:

'Anyhow, the audience - what there was of them - were fine. They weren't used to play-acting, and I think most of them took what they saw as reality - certainly while the curtain was up. We played three nights; the second night when I came out a big-made young man came up to me and said:

'"Kin I have a wurrd wid ye, sorr?"

'"Begob! but ye may," said I, in as near a brogue as I could get to his. "Twinty av ye loike!"

'"Then whisper me," said he, and, taking me by the arm, he led me across the street where we were alone. "What is it?" I asked.

'"I seen ye, sorr, at the wake to-night. Begorra, but it was an illigant toime. Shure the fun iv that would have done good to a rale corpse, much less to his frinds. I wondher now wud ye care to do a neighbourly act?" He said, this with considerable diffidence. There was something genial and winning in his way, as there is generally with Irishmen; so I said as heartily as I could that I hoped I would, and asked him how I could do it. His face brightened as he answered:

'"Well, there's a wake to-night, a rale wake, yer ann'r, at Kenagh beyant and the widdy is in a most dishtressful state intirely. Now, av yer ann'r as is used to the divarshins iv wakes would come, shure it might help to cheer her up. It's only a rough place, surr, an' the byes an' the girrls is all there is; but there's lashins iv whiskey an' tobaccy, an' wan iv the quality like yer ann'r will be mighty welkim."

'That did it! For a man who took me for one of the quality I would have done anything! I tell you, you have to be mucking about for a spell in such places as we had been, and treated with the contempt which used to be the actor's meed in his private life in such places in my young days, to appreciate fully the help such a thing was to one's self-esteem. I told my pals that I was going to a local party, for I didn't want to disturb my new dignity all at once, and went off with my friend. We went on a donkey cart without springs. Such a cart, and such a road! There was a bundle of straw to sit on, so I was comfortable enough; except when the jolting through an unusually deep rut banged me about more than was consistent with physical self-restraint. At last we stopped where a small house stood back some hundred yards from the road. The light was coming through the little windows and the open door, that seemed quite bright through the inky blackness of the night. I separated myself from the straw as well as I could, and got down. A small boy appeared out of the darkness, like an attendant demon, and took away the donkey and cart. It seemed to fade into space, for, as it disappeared through a gap in the hedge, the wheels ceased to sound upon the soft turf. My friend said:

'"Stiddy, surr! the boreen is a bit rough!" He was right; it was! I stumbled towards the house through what seemed the bed of a small watercourse floored with peculiarly uneven boulders. When we got near the house, the light from within told more on the darkness, and as we came close to the projecting porch, the white oblong of the open doorway to the right became darkened as a figure came out to meet us - an elderly woman with grey hair and a white cap and a black dress. She curtsied when she saw my dress, and said with a certain air of distinction that most Irish-women have in their moments of reserve, and which all good women have in their grief:

'"Welkim, yer ann'r. I thank ye kindly for pathernisin' this house iv woe!"

'"God save all here!" said my cicerone as he removed his caubeen.

'I repeated the salutation, feeling a little bit chokey about the throat as I followed the woman into the house.

'The room was a good-sized one, for it was no peasant's hut I was in, but a substantial farmhouse. Seated about it were some thirty or forty people of both sexes, old and young. Nearly all the men were smoking, some short cutty pipes as black as your hat, others long churchwardens, which manifestly came from a batch which lay on a table beside a substantial roll of “Limerick twist.” The tobacco was strong, and so were the lungs of the smokers, so the room was in a sort of thick haze, which swayed about in visible wreaths whenever a passing gust drove in through the open door. There was a huge fire of turf on the hearth, over which hung a great black kettle puffing steam like a locomotive. The air was fragrant with whiskey punch, of which some great jugs were scattered about. The guests drank from all kinds of vessels of glass, crockery, tin, and wood, each of which seemed pro bono publico, for they were attacked at times by those nearest with the utmost impartiality. As there was manifestly not seating room for so many people, a good many of the women, old as well as young, sat on the men’s knees in the most matter-of-fact way and with the utmost decorum.

‘My cicerone, who was on all sides saluted as “Dan,” took a pipe from the table and filled it. One of the girls, shifting from her living stool, took a blazing turf from the fire with the tongs, and held it to him as a light. He then helped himself to punch from the nearest vessel, looking round the room and repeating the salutation: “God save all here!”

‘The widow herself pressed me into an armchair, vacated for the purpose by a powerful-looking young man who had been sitting with a girl on each knee. She then handed me a steaming jorum of punch in one of the few glass tumblers which she had wiped with the corner of her apron before filling it. She also gave me a pipe and tobacco, and brought me herself a sod of turf with which to light it when filled. This was the evident courtesy to a stranger, which, through all her grief, was a duty not to be overlooked.

‘Nearly all those present seemed cheerful; some of them laughed, and I could not but feel that the instinct and purpose of the occasion was to counteract in some way the gloom and grief which were centred round the black coffin which rested on two chairs in the centre of the room. I could not myself but feel moved and solemn as I looked at it. The lid was laid on loosely, slightly drawn down so as to show the dead face which lay, still and waxen, within. A crucifix of black wood with the Figure in white lay on the coffin lid, together with some loose flowers, amongst which a bunch of arum lilies stood out in their white beauty.

'I think I really needed the punch to brace me up, for there was something so touching in the whole affair - the deep-felt grief held back with so stern a purpose, the sympathy of so many friends, all giving what comfort they could with their presence, combating the chill of death with the warmth of living and loving hearts - that it almost broke me up. It was evident that they had had some music, for a flute lay on the table, and a set of bagpipes stood in a corner. I sat quiet and waited, for I feared that, in my ignorance, I might jar on some feeling of those afflicted, either by some sin of commission, or of omission. I felt a little uncomfortable occupying a chair all to myself when every other seat in the place did double or treble duty; and I found myself beginning to speculate whether some of the girls would come and sit on my knee. But they didn't.'

'Showed their good taste!' said the Tragedian with a saturnine smile as he reapplied himself to his toddy.

'That's just it, Bones!' answered the Low Comedian sharply, 'showed their good taste! Remember that these weren't the pothouse rabble that you are accustomed to. They were decent, respectable folk, who could be familiar enough with one another without any ill thought of their neighbours or themselves, but they wouldn't lower themselves by a like familiarity with strangers, especially when they had any mistaken idea that their guest belonged to the quality.'

'Anyhow, they showed their good taste, whether according to Bones's idea or mine, and so I sat in solitary grandeur, and was by degrees fetched up to the level of the acceptance of fact by the whiskey punch. The restraint of the presence of a stranger wore away shortly, and I listened with interest to some of the music, quaint old airs with a lilt in them, and always an underlying note of pathos. This was especially manifest in the bagpipes, for the Irish bagpipes so far differs from the Scotch that it produces a softness of tone impossible to the other. You do not know, perhaps, that the Irish pipes have half-notes, whilst the Scotch have only full ones.'

Here a sort of modified snort was heard in the immediate neighbourhood of the Musical Director, and a remark was made, sotto voce, in which the words 'grandmother' and 'eggs' were distinguishable. The Low Comedian turned a swift glance in the direction, but said nothing, and, after a pause, went on:

'Presently Dan got up and said:

'"Widdy, this gintleman here is the funniest wan that iver I seen. Maybe now ye wouldn't mind av he was to give us a taste iv what he can do?"

'The Widow gravely nodded as she replied: "Shure, an' av his ann'r will pathernise us so far, we'll all be grateful to him. What like kind iv fun, Dan, does his ann'r consave?" I felt my heart sink. You know I'm not bashful.'

'You're not! not by a jugful!' interrupted the Tragedian. The Low Comedian smiled. He understood, from the low 'h-s-s-s-h' that ran through the saloon that the audience were with him, so he reserved his repartee, and went on:

‘Not as a general rule, but there is a time for everything, and here, in the very presence of death, perpetually emphasised to me by the light of the candles which surrounded the coffin, flickering through the smoke, levity seemed out of place. Dan’s chuckle of laughter as he began to speak almost disgusted me:

‘“Oh, byes, but he’s the funny man entirely. I seen him to-night play-actin’, an’ I thought I’d laugh the buttons from aff iv me britches.”

‘“What did he do, Dan?” asked one of the girls.

‘“Begob, but he reprisinted a corpse. ’Twas the most comical thing I iver seen.” He was interrupted by a violent sobbing from the widow, who, throwing her apron over her head, sat down beside the coffin, one hand leaning over till it touched the marble cheek and rocked herself to and fro in floods of tears. All her self-restraint seemed broken down in an instant. Some of the younger women sympathetically burst into tears; and the scene became almost in a moment one of unmitigated grief.

‘But the very purpose for which the wake is ordained is to combat grief and its more potent manifestation. The stronger and more experienced spirits in the room looked at each other, and prompt action was taken. One old man put his arm round the widow, and with a fair use of force, raised her to her feet and led her back to her seat by the chimney corner, where she rocked herself to and fro for a little, but in silence. Each “boy” who had a crying girl on his knee, put his arms round her and began to kiss and pet and comfort her, and the crying soon ceased. The old man who had attended to the widow said, in a half-apologetic way:

‘“Don’t mind her, neighbours! Shure, ’tis the ways iv weemen when their hearts is sore. It’s hard, it is, for the poor souls to bear up all the time, an' yez mustn't be hard on thim when they're bruk down. It's different wid us min!" There was an iron resolution in the man's bearing, and a break in his voice which showed me that he was one of those whose self-control was accomplished with effort. "Who is he?" I asked from the man sitting next me.

'"Shure, an' he's the brother iv the corpse, surr!" came the answer. The apologetic words were received with a series of sympathetic nods and shakings of the head and muttered words of acquiescence:

'"Thrue for ye!"

'"Begob, but that's so!"

'"Weemin is only weemin, afther all!"

'"The poor crathur; God be aisy wid her in her sorra!" In the midst of this, Dan went on just as if nothing had happened. That he was right in his endeavour was shown by the brighter look on the faces of all as he resumed:

'"'Twas the funniest thing I iver seen! He was the corp himself, and him not dead at all. Tear an ages! but that was a quare wake intirely. Wid the corpse drinkin' the keener's punch whiniver she nodded her head." Here the keener, sitting on a low stool on the side of the coffin away from the fire, hearing through her somnolence the implied slight to her function, woke on the instant, and, with a half-angry look at the speaker, said: "Keeners doesn't sleep - not till the words is said over the grave." Then, as if to show that she herself was wide awake, she raised a keene which, beginning low and sad, rose and rose in pitch and volume till the rafters seemed to buzz and ring with the mournful sound. Thenceforth, and throughout the remainder of the night, she keened at intervals, generally choosing such times as the interruption of the current proceedings would bring into prominence the importance of her lugubrious office. No one, however, considered her professional labours as an interruption, but went on just as if nothing were occurring. It was embarrassing at first, but after awhile no more interrupted one than the ticking of a clock or the whistling of the wind, or the rush and clash of waves. Dan proceeded:

'"Thin he tuk the shnuff, an' threw it in the faces iv the polis."

'"An' what did he do that for, wastin' it on the likes iv them?" asked a fierce-looking old woman.

'"To make them incapable, for shure!"

'"Make them incapable! Wid shnuff! Wid shnuff!" she said with fine scorn. "Musha, but that's not the way I'd make the polis incapable - more'n they are already. It's wid a blackthorn on their skulls, an' plenty iv it at that!" There was a slight pause, which was broken by an old woman, who said in a conversational way:

'"Who'd a thought, now, that there was that comicality in a wake? Musha, but I've been attindin' them for half a hundhred years, an' I niver seen a funny wan yet."

'Dan at once championed his own choice.

'"Maybe, acushla, that was because this gintleman wasn't the corpse on the occasion. Av he had a-been like I seen him the night, it's houldin' in yer stummick wid laughin' ye'd be!"

'"Corpses does be ginerally sarious enough!" remarked an old man. "I'm thinkin' it's grateful we'd be to wan what'd give us divarshion iv any kind." Dan didn't seem to like these interruptions. There was something of the spirit of the impresario in him, and he manifestly wished to exploit what he considered his funny-man addition to the entertainment, so he began to explain:

'"Musha! but won't yez undhershtand that this wasn't a real corp, but a man what was only purtendin' to be wan. It was play-actin' and his ann'r is the funniest man I ivver seen."'

'Limited opportunities have very dreadful effects!' murmured the Tragedian; but no one took any notice. The Low Comedian proceeded:

'Dan turned to me and says he: "Wudn't yer ann'r do somethin' funny?"

'"Good God!" I said, "I couldn't be funny in the presence of the dead - it wouldn't be respectful!"

'"Put that out iv yer mind, surr," said the brother of the corpse; "shure, all these frinds an' neighbours is here out iv respect, an yet they does what they can to cheer up the poor widdy woman that has but little to comfort her in her sorra. It's well, so it is, to help her to forgit!" This was so manifestly true that I bowed to the occasion, and said that I would do what I could to amuse them. I would just take a minute to think of something, if they would pardon me. With true Irish delicacy they began to talk to each other, ostensibly letting me alone as I wished. Dan smiled round with the consciousness that his efforts were about to be crowned with success, and remarked for the general good:

'"Begob, there was wan quare thing, at the wake I'm tellin' yez iv - all the girrls on the flure wint wan afther th'other an' kissed the corpse!" There was a murmur of incredulous astonishment from all, and many whisperings and strugglings between the girls and the men who held them on their knees.

'"That wouldn't do you, Katty!" remarked one young man to the girl beside him, but her retort came pat, "It'd be a good custom for you, avick, for the only chance you'd iver get in yer life is whin ye're dead." Then there was a pinch unseen, and a most manifest smack on the man’s face which would have given a less hardy person a headache for a day. It was evident that conversation was being made on my account, for the next remarks kept on the subject of me and my work.

‘“Begob! but play-actin’ is a mighty curious thing intirely!” said a man. “I seen some iv it wanst at a fair in Limerick. Shure, they was bins that was play-actin’,44 an’ cute enough they wor.”

‘“I seen a man wan time at Ballinasloe Heifer Fair turnin’ music out iv a box, an’ him wid a monkey dhressed up like a gineral!”

‘“An’ I seen dogs what would climb up a laddher an’ purtend to be dead, an’ would jump as high as yer head through a hoop. I wonder, surr,” this to me, “if ye would jump a bit through a hoop. Mind ye, it’s a mighty divartin’ thing to luk at, an’ would do the widdy a power iv good.”

‘I really could not stand this; it was too damned humiliating - our Art compared with the antics of a hen, a monkey, and a dog, as if we were all comrades of equality. But it was all meant in so kindly a way that I made up my mind to sing a comic song. I gave them “Are you there, Moriarty!” for all I was worth. Artistically, it was a success, though, the subject being a glorification of police, was, I felt after I had begun, deplorably inappropriate. They were a splendid audience, and after I had begun to entertain them, I felt I could depend on them thoroughly, so played with the thing, and did it as well as I could. But at first it was dreadful to stand up there looking down on the dead man in his coffin, and facing the widow with her swollen eyes, with the crucifix and the flowers and the death-lights right under me to try to be comic. It was the ghastliest thing I ever knew, or that I ever shall know. I felt at first like a fiend and a cad and a villain and a scoffer, all in one. In fact, I may say that in that awful moment I realised what it must be to be a tragedian! It was only when I saw the apron slowly drawn from the face of the widow, and her poor, worn eyes brightening up perceptibly through her tears, that I began to understand how salutary was the purpose of the wake. Finally, I gave them "Shamus O'Brien" as a recitation, and that went like wildfire. So we passed right into the dawn, when the grey came stealing in through the narrow windows and the open door, and making the guttering candles look dissolute; when the men were nodding their heads, and the girls were, many of them, fast asleep in their arms with their heads on the frieze-clad shoulders, and their ruddy lips open in sleep. Well, anyhow, I was mighty tired when I came away to drive into Fenagh in the donkey cart and the straw, but felt the effort was not wasted when the whole band of friends - they were real friends now - came down the boreen to see me off, and the poor widow looked gratefully at me as she waved her hand from the open door with the first red of the coming dawn falling full upon her with a sort of promise of hope.'

When the applause had subsided, the Manager stood up and said:

'Ladies and gentlemen, before we go any further I want to see one thing done - to see two very good friends of mine shake hands. Two very good fellows; two leaders and representatives of the great branches of the art that we all love, and whose exercise is our vocation, Tragedy and Comedy. Not that I know such a thing is necessary, for in the close companionship which our work necessitates we can chaff one another without mercy. But there are some strangers here, these gentlemen' - here he pointed to the railway men - 'who are our guests; and I should not like them to think that the girding at each other with passages of humour and satire which has been going on between the accomplished representatives of the buskin and the sock was other than in perfect good fellowship.’

Both men saw the necessity of the case, and each standing up held out a hand.

‘Gags, old boy, here’s your good health and your family’s, and may they live long and prosper,’ said the Tragedian.

‘Bones, my old pal,’ said the Low Comedian, ‘here’s a nail in your coffin and no hair on your head; and when I regard those hyacinthine locks of yours and see the strength and symmetry of the form of which all your comrades are so proud, I think that is tantamount to the farthest-off manifestation of ill that I can imagine.’ The men, who were really old and tried friends, though they had eternal passages of arms, shook hands cordially. The MC grasped the fact that the situation was complete.

‘Next!’ he said, indicating the Prompter with the hand which did not contain the hot grog. So the Prompter began:

I suppose I must confine myself to some personal experience, and that connected with the theatre. It is a pity I am so limited; as if I were free to speak of the adventures of my youth by flood and field, “I could a tale unfold” that would “freeze your young blood and make each particular hair to stand on end like quills upon the fretful porcupine.”’

‘Talking about floods, what was that about a flood of which you were speaking to Gags the other night? It seemed mighty interesting to both of you.’ This from the Heavy Father.

‘Oh, that,’ answered the Prompter, with a short laugh. ‘That wasn’t half bad; but it wasn’t what you’d call a story; and though I was there, anything that happened was not strictly personal to me. Mr Hupple was there too. He can tell you more about it than I can, for I only knew about going through the flood and what the conductor said; but he heard the confessions.’

‘Never mind about him now,’ said the MC. ‘We shall come to him presently.’

‘Tell us about your part, anyhow.’ This suggestion came from the Manager. So the Prompter took it as a command - or as a stage direction, at any rate. Bending low, he said:

‘Whatever you wish, Mr Benville Nonplusser, must be done.’

MICK THE DEVIL

‘It was when I was with the Windsor Theatre Company in America in the ‘eighties. I was then Second Lead. Things change, alas! Well, we had been North and East and West, and were entering on the last quarter of an eight months’ tour when we got to New Orleans. There had been an unusually dry fall, and the rivers were down to the lowest known for years. The earth was all baked and cracked; the trees were burned up with drought, and the grass and undergrowth were as brown as December bracken. The Mississippi was so low that the levees were visible down below the piles, and the water that went swirling by looked as thick as pea-soup. We were playing a three weeks’ engagement, before, during, and after Mardi Gras; and as we had been doing two months of one-night stands, we were all glad to have the spell of rest in one place. No one can imagine, till they try it, what a wearisome business it is changing camps every day or every few days. Sometimes you get so dazed with it all that when you wake up in the morning you can’t remember where you are - even though you had not been up with the boys the night before.

‘Just before Mardi Gras the weather changed. There came for two days a close, damp heat, which was the most terrible thing I ever experienced. It was impossible to keep dry, and I was in nightly fear that the whole paint would wash away from everyone. It was just a miracle how moustaches stuck on; and as for the flush of youth and beauty on the girls’ cheeks! - well, “there is a Providence that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will.” Then the rain came down. Great Scott! what rain, both as regards quality and quantity! It seemed as if the sky was full of angels emptying buckets. The ground was so hard that at first the rain didn’t sink into it, but ran off into the streams and the river. You know what a place New Orleans is! It has its head just above water, when the level is low; but when the Mississippi rises, the levees fill up and the river rushes on high over the city level. We didn't mind the rain, though it spoiled the show in the streets, for it cooled the air, and that was much.

'I certainly never saw anything uglier than the streets of New Orleans. Theoretically, the place is delightful, and if I were only to give you bare facts I should mislead you altogether. What would you think, for instance, of streets by each side of which run streams of water whose gurgling is always in your ears as you walk? Sounds nice, don't it? But then the whole place is clay, and the water is muddy with it; the streams in the streets are full of dirty water, with refuse of all kinds tumbling lazily along. If you dig a foot deep in any street you find water; that is why the gas-pipes are in the air, and why the dead are buried above ground in stucco-covered vaults like bakers' ovens. Well, the rain kept on, and the Mississippi rose till it was up to the top of the levees, and we in New Orleans began to wonder when the city would be flooded out. One day, when I saw the base of the banks beginning to cave in, I felt glad that we were leaving the neighbourhood that night. We were bound for Memphis, and our train was scheduled to leave at one o'clock in the morning. Before turning in, I met the Sectional Engineer tramping up and down and chewing the end of his cigar in a frightful fashion, and we got into conversation. I saw he was anxious, and asked him the cause. He told me in confidence - "in my clothes," he called it - that there had been a "wash-out" in the Valley section of the line, on which it had been arranged that we should travel; and so we would have to go round another way. As I was going on the journey, I was naturally anxious, too, and began to pump him, pretending that I was not at all afraid. He tumbled to it, and explained the trouble to me:

'"You see, I am afraid of Bayou Pierre. There's a spongy gap a couple of miles wide, with a trestle bridge across it over which you have to pass. At the best of times I am anxious about that trestle, for the ground is so bad that anything might happen at any time. But now, with a fortnight's rain and the Mississippi up the levees and the bottoms flooded all over the country, that blessed place will be like an estuary of the sea. The bridge isn't built for weather like this, and the flood is sure to be well over it. A train running on it will have to take chance whether it is there at all; and if any of it is gone - swept away or caved in - well, God help the train! That's all I can say, for everyone in it will die like a rat in a trap!"

'This was distinctly comforting to one of the travellers! I did not know exactly what to do or say, so I just managed to gasp out a question without giving myself away:

'"How long will it take us to get to Bayou Pierre?"

'"Well, say that you start about three o'clock, you will be there about noon or a little before it!" I said good-night and went into the train, determined to wake up pretty early and be ready to have some business in some local town about ten.

I didn't sleep very well, and the grey dawn was edging its way under the dark blind of my sleeping berth when I dropped off. I had plenty of disturbing dreams. The last I remember was that a great crocodile came out of a raging flood, snapped me up in its mouth, and began whirling me along at an inconceivably rapid rate. For a while I tried to make up my mind what I would do. There was no denying the pace at which we were going; I could distinctly hear the whirring of the wheels.

'Then, with a gasp, I remembered that crocodiles don't use wheels, and I jumped out of my berth faster even than I usually did when the nigger porter put his black hand over my face or pulled my toes. We seemed to be going at a terrific pace. The carriage rocked to and fro, and I had to hold on, or I should have been thrown about as in a cabin at sea in a storm. I looked out of the window and saw palm and cypress and great swathes of hanging Florida moss on the live-oaks as we whirled by. It was evident we were not going to stop soon. I looked at my watch; it was close to eleven o'clock. I ran back and hammered at the door of the drawing-room of the car where our manager made himself comfortable. He called out "Come in"; I evidently astonished him when I burst in in my pyjamas and a violent state of excitement. "Well, Mr Gallimant, what is it?" he asked shortly, as he stood up. "Do you know," I said, "that we are going to cross a flooded creek on a trestle bridge under water, and that it may be washed away?"

'"No," he said, quite coolly, "I don't! Who has been filling you up with fool-talk?"

'"The engineer of the line told me last night," I answered, unthinkingly.

'"Told you last night!" he said sarcastically. "Then why did you not let me know before? Oh, I see; you wanted to get off in time yourself and let the rest of us meet the danger. You needn't deny it; I see it in your face. Then let me tell you that if you had got off and stayed behind, you'd have found your berth full when you caught us up. See?" I saw pretty well that there was no sympathy to be had from him, so I ran through the train looking for the conductor, whom I found in the observation-room on the last car. Several of the Company, seeing my excitement, took it for granted that something was wrong, and followed me. When we burst in on the conductor, who was making an entry in his book, he looked up and said:

'"Well, what's wrong with you all?"

'"Here, you, stop the train!" I cried. "We want to get out before we're drowned!"

'"Oh, indeed!" he said coolly. "And how do you know you're going to be drowned?"

'"Because," I said, in a heat, "we are going to run over Bayou Pierre on the trestle bridge, and it's under water. Who knows that part of it mayn't be washed away or have collapsed?" He actually smiled at me.

'"Now, do you know," he said, "that shows great knowledge, both topographical and problematical, on your part! And so you want to get out? Well, you can't. Tell you why? Mick Devlin was put on to drive this train because he's the daringest driver on the whole fit-out. 'Mick the Devil' they call him. And Mick is letting her go now for all she is worth. Listen to that; she's going seventy, clean. Mick knows his part of the job, and I guess you've all got to keep your hair on and sit tight while Mick has his hand on the throttle."'

'Here's luck to Mick!' said the driver of the engine, in a hearty voice.

'Hush, h-s-s-h!' said the rest, for they were getting interested in the story. The Prompter went on:

'"Why does he want to go so fast?" I said.

'"Now you're beginning to talk!" he answered; "and as you know so much, I'll tell you more. Mick knows what he's about; what he doesn't know about engines and bridges and floods isn't much worth knowin'. See? We've got to go across Bayou Pierre to-day; and belike we'll be the last to cross it before the floods go down. You know some of the dangers, but you don't know as much as Mick.

Someone has been fillin' you up with bogey talk, and you've taken it not only for Gospel, but for all the Gospel there is. The Sectional Engineer is a permanent-way man, and he looks on his work from the standpoint of statical force. But, you see, Mick's special province is dynamics. He knows all the dangers that there Engineer ladled into you; and he takes his chances on them blindfold, for he can do nothing. If there is a wash-out or a collapse anywhere, it's kingdom-come for us all, anyhow. But then there's other dangers that Mick knows, and I know; mayhap the Sectional Engineer knows them, too, though he didn't talk of them, for they don't belong to his trade."

'"What are the other dangers?" I gasped out with what appearance of nonchalance I could muster, for the doorway was crowded with a lot of deadly-white faces. The conductor actually smiled as he replied:

'"I guess I'd better explain" - here he actually laughed - "though I daresay some of ye think it's pretty tiresome listening to a dissertation on coming dangers whilst a mad Irishman is whirling you all to perdition. Well, be it so! Your own boss made a contract. The railway company agreed to it; and Mick and me undertook to carry it out. Our Yard-Master said we was to put you down in Nashville, flood or no flood; and so we shall, the will of God alone objectin'. An' what the will of God is we'll try to find out for sure. You see, this flood has been out nigh on a week. Floods in a big place like Bayou Pierre don't, as a rule, run strong enough to wash clean away like a sea or a big river does. But it can weaken. It eddies everlastingly round the bases of piles, and it softens the mortar between the bricks of the piers. There's a lot of them in this bridge we're coming to, for though you'll hardly believe it when you see it, it's only a flat valley, except in floods, with streams running through it here and there. When pierwork or brickwork is demoralised and weakened that way, though it will stand all right till it gets a shock, it will suddenly go all to bits if it gets jarred. You know what that means. Each pier holds a piece of a bridge; and if it goes, down goes the whole thing. Now, have any of you ever thought of the weight, the deadweight, of a train? Such a one as ours will weigh, engine and tender and brake and goods and passengers and all, more than half a million pounds. Put that suddenly on the top of one of these tottering piles or weakened piers, and what'll happen? Why, the darned thing will slide, or warp, or twist, or crumble away, or grind together; and this, mind you, without a steady force of water to wash away every fragment of mortar as it is disturbed. So as we travel over them we're helping to make the wash-outs and collapses that the Sectional Engineer fears."

'He paused, and through the beating of my own heart and the throbbing of the pulses in my own head I could hear a sort of sobbing groan from the womenkind - they were far too frightened to scream. Without was the whirring rush of the wheels and the panting of the engine taxed to its utmost with our terrific speed. The Conductor looked keenly into the faces of all before he went on:

'"Now, Mick knows all about this, and he also knows the way to minimise the risk. Why, he's doin' it now; that is why he's goin' at our present pace! Mick's workin' this job bald-headed!"

'"Why?" The question was gasped out by one of the ladies, her eyes as round as a bird's with fright. The Conductor nodded approval.

'"Now, that's good! I like to see people that's reasonable and don't quite let their fears master them. Well, ma'am, I'll tell you why. A pier can't fall all in a second; it takes time to break up anything that it has taken time to put together, even if it has to be hoisted with dynamite. Now, our pressure is great, but it doesn't last long. The quicker we go, the shorter it lasts; so that when things are real bad - so near a collapse that it only wants a finishing touch - we can be up and over before the crash comes. I've seen Mick take a train through three feet of water in a flood on one of the Pan Handle branches, and felt the last car pull up the slope of the girders of a bridge as the pier collapsed behind us. Don't you be skeered, any of you! Mick's the right man in the right place; an' if you're goin' to get through to-day he's the man to take you. If not, we're well out of it compared with him! Drownin' is an easy death, they say; but if the engine goes down head first, as she will if there be aught wrong, there's steam enough in the boilers and heat enough to cook him and his mate while they're drownin'!

'"Well, s'long! I'm goin' up to the baggage-car in front to be near Mick. We've worked together too long to be parted at the last, if it should come. There she goes! we're into Bayou Pierre now, and so long as we're on the trestle, all any of you can do is to say your prayers and confess your sins. After that - well, I don't think I'd worry much about it as yet!"

'He passed on his way, leaving behind him a sense of gallant manhood that made me ashamed of being afraid.

'The speed had manifestly diminished, although we still went at a considerable rate; there was a queer sound, a sort of hissing scream as the water was churned by our rushing wheels.

'I stepped out on the rear platform and looked around. In front of me, as I stood, the shore we had left receded farther and farther at every instant. The dwarf palms became a stunted mass, and the clumps of cypress and live-oak seemed to dwindle away into shrubs.

Around us was a waste of water flowing swiftly under our feet; a great frothy yellow tide, with here and there floating masses of debris - logs, hay, dead cattle, and drift of every imaginable kind. On either side it was the same. Leaning out over the rail I could just see the far shore, a dim line on the horizon. We were driving through the flood at a great pace and our engine sent before us, as does the prow of a steamer, a wave whose flanks fell ever back on us as we swept along. Now and again we could feel a sort of shiver or a sudden shock, as though something had loosened or given way under us. But somehow we ran along all right; and as the shore we had passed grew dimmer, and as the far shore grew closer, our spirits rose and the fear fell away from us.

'It was with glad hearts that we felt the solid ground under us and heard the old roar of the wheels again. The squealing of the brakes was like music as we drew up on the track a little later on.

'The engine seemed to pant like an animal which has gone through hard stress; and her master, Mick the Devil, looking gay and easy and debonnair, raised his cap in answering salute as we all tumbled out and raised three cheers for him in true Anglo- Saxon fashion.'

'Now, Mr Hupple,' said the MC, 'as we learned from Gallimant that you were on the train crossing Bayou Pierre, and that you heard the confessions, perhaps you will tell us something of what happened?' There came a chorus of entreaty from all, amongst which the voices of the ladies were the most eager. Confessions - of other people - are always interesting. The Second Low Comedian had a hint of the duty before him, and seemed quite prepared. He began at once:

'Our little lot comprised the major part of the Company. None of them had talked to the Sectional Engineer, and so were not prepared to save their own skins by bolting without ever giving a hint to their pals. I never knew the full measure of our friend's bravery before!'

'Time!' said the MC, warningly. He nodded cheerfully and went on:

'It was only when we were actually in the water that any of them began to concern themselves. Indeed, at first no one seemed to mind, for we had often before made a dash over a flooded stream. But when the speed slackened and the rush of the wheels in the water made a new sort of sound, they all ran to the windows and looked out. Some of the festive spirits thought it a good opportunity to frighten the girls, and put up a joke on the more timid of the men. It didn't seem a difficult job so far as some of them were concerned, for the surprise was rapidly becoming terror. Everything seemed to lend itself to the presiding influence; the yellow water seeming to go two ways at once as it flowed past us and as we crossed its course; the horrible churning of our wheels which seemed to come up from under us through the now opened windows; the snorting and panting of the engine; the looks of fear and horror growing on the blanching faces around; all seemed to culminate towards hysteria. The most larky of the men was young Gatacre, who was understudy for Huntley Vavasseur, then our Leading Juvenile. He pretended to be terribly afraid, and cowered down and hid his face and groaned, all the time winking at some of us. But presently, as the waste of water grew wider and wider, his glances out of the window became more anxious, and I could see his lips grow white. All at once he became ghastly pale, and, throwing up his hands, broke out into a positive wail of terror, and began to pray in a most grovelling manner - there is no other way to describe it. To some of us it was revolting, and we should have liked to kick him; but its effect on the girls was dreadful. All the hysteria of panic which had been coming on broke out at once, and within half a minute the place was like the Stool-of-Repentance corner at a Revival Meeting.

‘I am glad to say that, with these exceptions, they were in the main brave and sensible people, who kept their own heads and tried to make, for very shame’s sake, their friends keep theirs. It seems to me that really good women are never finer than when they are helping a weak sister. I mean really helping when it isn’t altogether pleasant work. I don’t count it help to a woman, lashing out wastefully with other people’s Eau de Cologne, and ostentatiously loosening her stays, and then turning to the menkind who are looking on helplessly, with a “phew!” as if they knew what was wrong with her all the time. We all know how our women help each other, for we are all comrades, and the girls are the best of us. But on this occasion the womenkind were a bit panicky, and even those who kept their heads and tried to shield the others from the effects of their hysterical abandon, were pale and rocky themselves, and kept one eye on the yellow flood running away under us.

‘I certainly never did hear such a giving away as in the confessions of some of them, and I tell you that it wasn’t pleasant to listen to. It made some of us men angry and humiliated to think that we could be so helpless. We took some of the girls and tried to actually shake them back into reason, but, Lord bless you! it wasn’t the least use. The more we shook them, the more we shook out of them things which were better left unsaid. It almost seemed as if confession was a pebbly sort of thing that could be jerked out of one, like corn out of a nose-bag. The whole thing was so infernally sudden that one had no time to think. One moment we were all composed and jolly, and the next there were these poor women babbling out the most distressing and heartrending things, and we quite unable to stop them. The funny thing, as it seemed to me now, was that it never occurred to any of us to shove off and leave them alone! Anyhow, we didn't go, at all events till the fat was in the fire. Fortunately, the poor girls didn't have much to confess that seemed very wrong to most of us. There were one or two nasty and painful things, of course, but we all shut our memories, and from that day to this it never made any difference in any way that I could ever see - except in one case, where a wife told an old story to her husband. I can see the scene now. The terror in her grey eyes, the frown in his pale face, all the whiter by contrast with his hair. "Sun and Shade," we used to call them.'

He broke off suddenly, paused a moment, and then resumed:

'But that was their own business, and though it never seemed to come right, none of us ever said a word about it.'

'Did none of the men confess anything?' asked the Singing Chambermaid. There was in the tone of her voice that underlying note of militant defiance which is always evident when the subject of woman in the abstract is mentioned in mixed company. The Second Low Comedian smiled as he replied:

'Certainly, my dear! I thought you understood that I was speaking of the young ladies of both sexes. You remember that the first, in fact the one to set them off, was an alleged Man.'

'Well, these things, you see, made the painful side of the incident, for it is not pleasant to hear people say things which you know they will grieve for bitterly afterwards. But there was another side, which was both interesting and amusing: the way in which the varieties of character came out in the confessions, and the manner of their coming. If we hadn't known already - I speak for myself - we should have been able to differentiate the weaknesses of the various parties, and to have got a knowledge of the class of things which they fondly hoped they had kept hidden. I suppose it is such times that reveal us to ourselves, or would do so if we had grace to avail ourselves of our opportunities. Anyhow, the dominant note of each personality was struck in so marked a way that the scene became a sort of character-garden with living flowers!'

When the applause which followed his poetic 'tag' had ceased, there was a chorus of indignant disappointment:

'Is that all?'

'Why stop just as it was getting interesting?'

'Just fancy, with material like that, to fade out in vague generalities!'

'Can't you tell us some more of the things they said?'

'What's the use of telling us of confessions when you keep it dark what they were.'

'Was there anything so very compromising, to you or to anybody else, that you should hesitate?'

'That's just it,' said the Second Low Comedian with a grin. 'If there was anything compromising, I would tell it with pleasure, especially, I need not say, if it concerned myself. But of all the confessions that were ever written or spoken, I suppose there never were any as little compromising as on this occasion. With the one exception that I have spoken of, and on which all our lips are sealed, there was nothing which would injure the character of a sergeant in the Archangelic police force. Of course, I except the young man who began the racket. There was not one of those who “confessed” who did not compromise himself or herself. But the subjects were so odd! I didn’t know there were so many sinless wickednesses in the whole range of evil!’

‘What on earth do you mean?’ said the Leading Lady with the wide open eyes of stage amazement. ‘Do give us some examples, so that we may be able to follow you.’

‘Ah! I thought that was what you wanted!’ he answered with a wink. ‘You would like to hear the confessions, good or bad, or, rather, bad or worse, and judge for yourself as to their barometric wickedness. All right! I will tell you all I remember.

‘There was our Leading Lady, I mention no names, who had been on the stage, to my own knowledge, twenty-eight years, and she was in the Second Lead when I met her first at Halifax in Wibster’s Folly, which was a popular stock piece on the Yorkshire Circuit. She confessed to having deceived, not only the public, but her friends, even her dear friends of the Company, and would like to put herself right with them all and have their forgiveness ere she died. Her sin was one of vanity, for she had deceived them as to her age. She had acknowledged to twenty-nine; but now in her last hour, with the death drops on her brow, and the chill of the raging flood already striking into her very soul, she would confess. They knew how hard it was for a woman to be true when dealing with her age; women at least would understand her; she would confess that she was really thirty-three. Then she sank down on her knees, in a picturesque position, which she had often told her friends she made famous in East Lynne, and held up her hands and implored their forgiveness. Do you know that nearly all those present were so touched by her extraordinary self-sacrifice in that trying moment, that they turned away and hid their faces in their hands. I could myself see the shoulders of some of them shake with emotion.

‘Well, her example was infectious; she was hardly on her knees when our Juvenile Lead took up the running. With a heart-breaking bitter sob, such as adorned his performance in Azrael the Prodigal, he held his hands aloft with the fingers interlaced, and, looking up to the gallery - I mean the roof, or the sky, or whatever he saw above him with either his outer or his inner eye - he mourned his malingering in the way of pride. He had been filled with ungodly pride, when during his very first engagement, having been promoted through sheer merit - having swept, if he might say so, upward like a rocket through the minor ranks of the profession, he had emerged in sober splendour amongst the loftier altitudes. Oh, even that fact had not bounded his excesses of pride. That evil quality, which, like jealousy, “mocks the meat it feeds on,” had grown with the enlarging successes which seemed to whirl upon him like giant snowflakes from the Empyrean. When the Mid-Mudland Anti-Baptist Scrutiniser had spoken of him as “the rising histrionic genius who was destined to lift from the shrouded face of Melpomene the seemingly ineradicable shadow which the artistic incompetence of a re-puritanised age had thrown upon it,” he had felt elated with the thought that on his shoulder rested the weight of the banner of art, which it would be his duty, as well as his pride, to carry amongst the Nations, and unfurl even before the eyes of their Kings. Ah! but that was not his worst sin, for with the years that had carried the greatness of his stormy youth into the splendour of his prime young manhood, had grown an ever-increasing pride in what he knew from the adoring looks of women and their passionate expressions of endearment - both written and verbal - was the divine gift of physical beauty in perfection. In which gift was included the voice at once sweet and powerful which evoked that enthusiastic tribute from the Bootle Local Government Questioner, wherein occurred the remarkable passage: “It is rare, if not unique, to find in the tones of a human voice, centred in no matter how perfect a physical entourage, at once the subtlety of the lyre, the great epigrammatic precision of the ophicleide, and the resonant doom-sounding thunder of the clarion and the bassoon.” So, too, was included a bearing of grace and nobility which “recalled” as the Midland humoristic organ, The Pushful Joe, remarked, “the worth of the youthful emperor Gluteus Maximus.” Oh! these things were indeed sources of a pride, which was at best a weakness of poor humanity. Still, it should be held in check, and this in proportion to its natural strength. “Mea culpa! Mea culpa!” he said in the tones with which he used to thrill the house in Don Alzavar the Penitent, or the Monk of Madrid. He went on further, for pride seemed to have no limit, but essayed, when fixed in daring and lofty natures, to scale the very bastions of Olympus. He was proud - oh, so proud that in this dread moment, when he stood hand-in-hand with his fellow-brother, Death, he could see its earthly littleness. It was when depicting the roles in which he had won his greatest fame, he had, with the best and purest intention, he assured us, dared the blue ribbon of histrionic achievement in essaying the part of Hamlet in the Ladbroke Hall. He had found his justification of Metropolitan endeavour in the striking words of the Westbourne Grove and Neighbouring Parishes’ Chronicle of Striking Events: “The triumph of our youngest ‘Hamlet’ is as marked as his many successes in less ambitious walks of histrionic renown!”’

He was interrupted by our First Low Comedy Merchant, who said:

‘Time! old man. There are others who want a chance of public confession whilst Death still stares us in the face.’ He was followed by our Heavy Man, who added:

‘It’s a good idea, as well as a new one, to confess your Notices. Anyhow, it makes a variety from having to pretend to read them every time you strike a man for a drink.’ The Leading Juvenile glared at his interrupters, in the manner which he was used to assume as Geoffrey Plantagenet in The Baffled Usurper. He was about to loose the vials of his wrath upon them when our First Singing Chambermaid, who had been furtively preparing for her effort by letting down her back hair, flung herself upon her knees with a piercing shriek, and, holding up her hands invocatively after the manner of The Maiden’s Prayer, cried out, interrupting herself all the while with muttered sobs of choking anguish:

‘“Oh, ye Powers, to whom is given the priceless guardianship of Maiden life, look down in forgiving pity upon the delinquencies of one who, though without evil purpose, but in the guilelessness of her innocent youth, and with the surpassing cruelty of the young and thoughtless, hath borne hard upon the passionate but honourable love of Dukes and Marquises! Peccavi! Peccavi!! Peccavi!!!” with which final utterance she fell fainting upon her face, and struggled convulsively, till, seeing that no one flew to her assistance, she lay still a moment, and then ignominiously rose to her feet and retired, outwardly sobbing and inwardly scowling, to her section.

‘Hardly, however, had she spoken her tag when two aspirants for confessional honours sought to “catch the speaker’s eye.” One of them was the Understudy of the last confessor, the other the First Old Woman. They were something of an age and appearance, each being on the shady side of something, and stout in proportion. They both had deep voices, and as neither would at first give way, their confessions were decidedly clamorous and tangled, but full of divine possibilities of remorse. They both had flung themselves on their knees, right and left, like the kneeling figures beside an Elizabethan tomb. We all stood by, with admiring sympathy manifested in our choking inspirations and on our broadening smiles. It was a pretty fair struggle. The First Old Woman was fighting for her position, and that is a strong stimulus to effort; the other was endeavouring to win a new height in her Olympian ambition, and that is also a strong aid to endeavour. They both talked so loud and so fast that none of us could follow a word that either of them said. But neither would give way, till our Tragedian, beginning to despair of an opening for his confession, drew a deep breath and let us have it after the manner of his celebrated impersonation of the title-role of Manfred in the Alpine storm, in which you will remember that he has to speak against the thunder, the bassoon, the wind, and the rain - not to mention the avalanches, though he generally makes a break for them to pass. The women held out as long as they could, and finally, feeling worsted by the Tragedian's thunder, they joined against the common enemy, and shrieked hysterically in unison as long as their breath held out. Our Tragedian's confession was immense. I wish I could remember it word for word as he gave it, with long dwelling on his pet words, and crashing out his own particular consonants. We were all silent, for we wanted to remember, for after use, what he said. Being a Tragedian, he began, of course, with Jove:

"'Thou Mighty One who sittest on the cloud-capped heights of Olympus, and regardest the spectral figure of the mighty Hyster seated in his shadowy cart, deign to hear the murmurings of a heart whose mightiest utterances have embodied the noblest language of the chiefest bards. Listen, O son of Saturn! O husband of Juno! O father of Thalia and Melpomene! O brother of Neptune and Pluto! O lover of Leda and Semele and Danae and of all the galaxy of celestial beauties who crowned with love the many-sided proclivities of Thou, most multitudinous-hearted God! Hear the sad wail of one who has devoted himself to the Art of Roscius! Listen to the voice that has been wont to speak in thundrous tones to the ears of a wondering world, now stilled to the plaintive utterance of deepening regret. Hear me mourn the lost opportunities of a not-unsuccessful life! When I think that I have had at my foot the ball of success, and in my sublime indifference spurned it from me as a thing of little worth, well knowing that in all the years genius such as mine must ever command the plaudits of an enraptured world, what can I say or how announce the magnitude, or even the name, of my sin? Hear me then, O mighty Jove ...”

‘Just then the dull threshing and swishing of the submerged wheels changed to the normal roar and resonance, as we left the trestle bridge and swept into the cutting beyond. The first one to speak was the Prompter, who said:

‘“Your attack was a little slow, Mr Montressor. It’s a bit hard that the curtain has to drop before the invocation is properly begun!”

There was a pause, chiefly utilised for the consumption of heeltaps and the replenishment of drinking vessels. It was broken by the voice of one of the Young Men who sat at some distance from the fire and quite away from the Prompter - a Young Man who wore his hair long and had literary ambitions. He spoke of himself sometimes as ‘a Man of Letters as well as a Player.’

‘How small the world is! Do you know that out of that very episode that Mr Hupple has just spoken of came a strange circumstance? If I were next on the list I could give it as a fitting corollary.'

'Corolly or no corolly,' the Sewing Woman was heard to murmur, the punch having had some effect in creating a certain drowsiness which fell on her like a robe. 'Corolly or no corolly, it ain't in it with the Dead Byby I was a-tellin' ye of.'

The MC stopped the threatened reminiscence by shaking her by the shoulder. 'Wake up, dear lady,' he said, 'and learn of the smallness of the world. I think we may take it,' he added, looking round, 'that in such an exceptional case we may break the rule and ask Bloze to go on next.' 'Bloze' was the nickname of Mr Horatio Sparbrook (stage name) given to him for an attempt he had once made to introduce realism into the part of Gaspard in The Lady of Lyons in replying to Claude's entreaty to pardon the blows which he had received in his service: 'Bloze! Melnotte, Bloze! Bloze!' instead of the traditional 'Balows! Melnotte, Balows! Balows!' Without further preface Mr Sparbrook began:

'Mr Hupple mentioned that in that memorable journey across the flooded Bayou Pierre a certain confession was made. May I ask if that was done in your hearing?' Considerable curiosity was manifested, and the faces of all were turned towards the Second Low Comedian, awaiting his reply. After a pause it came with a certain reluctance:

'Yes, more than one of us did hear the confession. No one seemed to mind it at the time; but there was a painful result. There were few words, but they meant much. We didn't ever see them speaking to each other after that, but when that tour ended they both resigned, and I never saw either of them again. Someone told me that they had both given up the stage! I'd like to know how you came to know of it. There was a sort of understanding amongst those of us who saw the scene and heard what was said that we wouldn't ever speak of it. I've never done so from that time to this.'

'Was he a tall, well-featured man, with clustering grey hair?'

'It was black then; as black as Bones's! I beg your pardon, old man' - this to the Tragedian. The Young Man continued:

'And was she handsome and somewhat aquiline? A fine woman with a presence, and thick white hair, and grey eyes like stars?'

'She had beautiful grey eyes as big and bright as lamps, but her hair was golden. They were the handsomest young couple I think I ever saw; and up to that time I believe they simply doted on each other. I tell you it was a grief to us all what happened that journey.' The Young Man said very gravely:

'If we knew everything, as the Almighty knows it, perhaps we should regret some things more than we do, and others less. I only guessed that Bayou Pierre was the scene of that confession; the other end of the story comes from across the world.' There was a shiver of expectation from all. Here was a good story that seemed to have a living interest. A stillness, as marked as that of the falling snow without, reigned in the car.

AT LAST

‘When I was young - I’m not very old yet, but I was very young then, and it all seems long ago - I made an ass of myself. It wasn’t very bad, not criminal; but I was pretty well ashamed of it, for my people were of high rank and held a great position in the county. When I came back I was afraid to tell the girl I was engaged to. She was a clever girl, and she knew by a sort of instinct that there was something, and asked me what it was. I denied that there was anything. That did for me, for I knew she was clean grit, and that she would have the truth or nothing, and as I didn’t want to tell her I was a liar as well as an ass, I shoved for Australia. What I did there doesn’t concern you much, and it was pretty tame, anyhow. I only mention this that you may understand something later. I had been a medical student, and liked the work so well that I have had a sneaking fondness for everything connected with it ever since. On the ship I went out on was a nurse, who was going out as an assistant matron to one of the Melbourne hospitals. She was a young woman, but with white hair; and she used to come down to the steerage - where I was - and try to be of service. I had become a kind of volunteer help to the doctor, who recognised that I had been a gentleman - you are not much of a gentleman in a steerage, I can tell you - and made things a little comfortable for me in several ways. By being about with him I met the nurse, and we became very good friends. She was very sympathetic, and knew pretty well that I was sore-hearted about something; and with the natural sweet helpfulness of a woman - God bless ‘em! - soon got to know my secret. One night - I shall never forget it, a heavy, still night with the moon a blaze of gold over the silent sea - we sat out late, right over the screw, which ground away beneath us but disturbed us no more than the ticking of a clock. The mystery of the place, and the hunger for sympathy which always gnawed at my soul, got the better of me, and I opened my heart as I have never done before or since. When I stopped I saw that her great eyes were gleaming out over the sea, and the tears were rolling down her cheeks. She turned to me and took my hand between both of hers and said:

'"Oh! why didn't you tell her all? She would have forgiven all - everything, and would have loved you better for it all your life long. It is the concealment that hurts! Noble natures feel it most. I know, I know it too well, out of the bitterness of my broken heart!" I saw here a sorrow far greater than my own, and tried to comfort her. It seemed a relief to her, as it had been to me, to speak of her trouble, and I encouraged her confidence. She told me that in her youth she had run away with a man whom she thought she loved; they were married at a registry, but after a while she found out that he was married already. She wanted to leave him then at once, but he terrorised her, threatening to kill her if she tried to leave him. So she had perforce to remain with him till, happily, he met with a fatal accident and she was free. Then her baby was born dead, and she found herself alone.'

Here there was an interruption on the part of the Sewing Woman, who remarked sotto voce:

'He's a-tykin' of my Dead Byby, too!'

'Hush! hush!' said the MC. And the Young Man went on:

'She changed her name, and after trying work of several kinds, found her way on the stage. There she fell in love, in real love, with a man she honoured; and when she found that he loved her too, she was afraid to tell him the dark chapter of her life lest she should lose him. She thought that as it was all past, and as no trace remained, no one need ever know. She was married and was ideally happy, and, after a couple of years, which had brought them a daughter, towards the end of a certain tour was on her way home where she would see her little baby daughter again, when in a time of great peril, when everyone round her was making confession of all they had ever done wrong, she was drawn into the hysterical whirlpool, and told her husband all that had been. He seemed cut to the heart, but said very little - not a word of reproach. Then she, too, felt constrained to silence, and a barrier seemed to grow up between them, so that when they reached England - home was a name only, and not a reality - they did not seem able to speak freely; and it became apparent to both that nothing remained but to separate. He had wished to take the child, and when the subject was mooted, said he wanted to take her far away where she would never know what had been. "Oh, I loved him so," she wailed, "that I felt that all I could give him was my child. The baby when she grew up would never know her mother's shame. It was a bitter atonement for my deceit; but it was all I could do. Perhaps God will account it to me and my child and the husband that I love, and somehow turn it to usefulness in His good time."

'Well, I comforted her as well as I could, though there was not much comfort to her in the world, poor soul, separated from her husband, whom she still loved, and from their child. We became fast friends, and we often wrote to each other; and in all my wanderings I kept her informed of my whereabouts.

'I went up-country herding,' and after a weary, weary time on

'The bitter road the younger son must tread Ere he win to hearth and saddle of his own, Mid the riot of the shearers in the shed In the silence of the herder's hut alone,' I found my way to a lonely place on the edge of a creek. It was a lovely spot, and the man who owned it had evidently given time and care to its beautifying, for all the natural trees and flowers were used to the best advantage, and it was a delight to see growing with the added luxuriance of a new soil all the home flowers as well. My employer, Mr Macrae, was a crank in some ways, but he was a gentleman, and he made my life a very different one from what it had been in my stock-keeping apprenticeship. He, too, soon recognised that I had been a gentleman, and took me into the house instead of letting me camp outside in a rough shed, as is the usual thing with hired hands. Oh! the comfort and luxury of being in a real house with real bedding and real food, after a bunk and damper of your own making. Mr Macrae was very kindly, but stern on certain points. He simply idolised his little daughter, a bright, pretty child with golden hair and big grey eyes that I seemed, when I saw them, to have known all my life. The sun seemed to the father to rise and set in the child; but even to her he could be stern, even cruel, to an extent I never saw equalled. One night after dinner the little thing was nestling up to him and playing with him in her usual coaxing way. He asked her some little question, and she fenced with the answer. This seemed all at once to make him stern, and he asked some more questions with a fierce gravity which frightened the child. She attempted playfulness as a weapon against wrath, as a woman does; but the father would have none of it. He brushed it aside and continued his inquisition. It was quite apparent to me that the child had little or nothing to conceal, but she was frightened, and in her fear yielded to the weakness of the woman within her and lied. It was a harmless little lie at worst, one rather of not telling the truth than of speaking falsely; but it seemed to inflame the father to a white heat.

His eyes glowed with the intensity of his anger. He mastered himself, however, and his cold anger was infinitely worse than his hot. He took the child very tenderly in his arms and said:

'"Little one, you know that I love you?"

'"Yes, daddy!" came the pretty voice, in a flood of tears.

'"And you know I wouldn't hurt you but for your good, darling?"

'"Yes, daddy! But, oh, daddy, daddy, don't hurt me! - don't hurt me!"

'"I must, my little one, I must! You will have to remember all your life what it is to lie; that fire on earth or in hell is the liar's portion. And it is better that you learn it now than suffer it hereafter and make others suffer!" He bent down towards the fire, holding her hand in his; her pitiful little struggles were as nothing in his powerful grasp. Seeing me instinctively draw near, for I thought to protect the child, he motioned me back gravely.

'"Do not interfere. It is necessary that my child learn a little lesson to save her a harder one later on."

'With an iron determination, and with lips set and growing white as snow, he put for a moment the rosy fingers of the child on the hot bar of the grate. Despite her shriek of pain, he held it there quite a second or two, and then drew her back almost fainting. The child loved and trusted him in spite of the cruel act, and clung to him, sobbing as if her little heart would break. He held her close to him, and then disengaged her arm very gently from his neck. He stepped closer to the fire, and saying to her: "See, little one, you have no pain that is not mine!" thrust his own right hand down into the very heart of the glowing fire. He held it there a few seconds without a quiver, whilst fine child shrieked and flew to him and dragged the hand away.

'"Oh, daddy, daddy, daddy!" she wailed, "and I have by my lying made you suffer this!" As I am a living man, I saw a glad light flash into his eyes, though the pain he suffered must have been excruciating. With his other hand he stroked the child's golden locks as he said:

'"It was worth pain, my little one, that you should learn so great a truth."

'I could not but be silent in face of such a splendid heroism, and offered to use such medical knowledge as I possessed on his behalf. He accepted cheerfully, and when I had got oil and lint he made me dress the child's burn before allowing me to attend to his own. It was a bad burn, and I was in real fear that it might have an ill ending. He made light of it, however, and tried to keep up the child's spirits. I tried to help him, and she went to bed less unhappy than I expected. Macrae's strength and constitution stood to him, and, though the hand was badly scarred, he fully recovered its use.

'That night he was so feverish that I insisted on sitting up with him. I was able to give him some ease, and he was grateful for it. He talked with me more freely than he had ever done. He insisted on going several times to see how the child slept. He came back after one of these visits with his eyes wet, and as he lay down on his bed said softly:

'"Poor little mite! God forgive me if I was wrong; but I thought it best!" Then turning to me, he went on:

'"I suppose you thought me not merely brutal, but fiendish. But if you knew how deeply for her own future happiness I value truth, you would perhaps be tolerant with me. It was a lie that ruined her mother's life and my own; and I would guard her against such an evil. Her mother and I loved each other, and there seemed no flaw in our lives; but once when in danger of death as we were rushing through a seething flood, she confessed to me that the innocence which had charmed me at the first was but an acted lie; that she had loved another man before she had seen me, and had lived with him guiltily. But, there! that page of my life is closed for ever." He said no more, and, of course, I never referred to the subject again. It struck me afterwards as strange that two people whom I had met had each suffered from a similar cause - as I myself had suffered - but it never struck me to connect them.

'After that night we became better friends, for we seemed to understand each other. I grew to love the child almost as much as if she had been my own daughter. During all that time I worked hard, and had few distractions; but I promised myself a treat when I should go over to Warrow, the nearest town beyond the Creek, for I had heard from Nurse Dora that she had become matron of the hospital there. The time which I had promised myself for my holiday was at hand, when little Dora fell ill of a fever. The white woman who was with us got it at the same time, and Macrae and I had to do the nursing ourselves. The floods were out, and the Creels was like a sea; the natives, seeing a fever in the house, ran away. It was a quick fever, though a low one, and in a few days the woman died. The child got worse and worse, and her moaning was pitiful to hear. The father used to sit hour after hour with his head in his hands and groan. One evening I heard him say that if we had a woman to nurse her she might be saved; and this gave me an idea. I said nothing except that I was going out for a bit, for my mind was made up that I would try to fetch my friend the matron. I took my mare, Wild Meg, and swam the flooded Creek; and early in the morning, riding for all I was worth, fetched up at Warrow. I went to the hospital and asked for the matron. When she came my heart leaped, and something within me seemed to cry out. It was as though two ends of an electric current were come together. Little Dora's fever-wasted face, as I had seen it the night before on the pillow, was reproduced in the pale lineaments of her who stood before me. I understood it all now. The man with the story; the woman with the story; the child parted from the mother; the mother who lied! Heaven had sent at the moment me, who, coming across the world, held in his hand the two ends of this chain of destiny. I told her of the child who was ill, dying; she wept, but said her duty held her to her post. Then I described the child and the solitary man, and a quick light leaped to her eyes. Hope had dawned in that withered heart! She said not a word, but with a gesture to me to wait, disappeared behind the hospital. In a minute she reappeared, leading by the bridle a magnificent roan horse.

'"Come!" she said, and sprang to the saddle.

'We rode all day without a word. Late in the afternoon we struck the creek, just as a thunderstorm came on, which in a moment lashed the flood into a raging torrent. But nothing daunted her. She rode boldly into the water, I following, and together we battled the watery element. Through danger and toil we won the further shore, though our two gallant steeds fell dead within sight of the house. We hurried in, she leading, I following. When she stood in the doorway Macrae rose to his feet with a wild cry:

"Dora, Dora, my darling, come at last! Now the child must live!" Then he fell fainting on the floor.'

Mr Sparbrook paused and looked round. Some of the womenkind were wiping their eyes, and sniffed, their bosoms heaving. Some office men said 'Hear! hear!' feebly. The only audible remark was the comment of the Wardrobe Mistress:

‘Mr Bloze is a-goin’ of it this evening. He’ll be a-puttin’ of it into a ply. Him in Australiar! W’y, I’ve known ‘im since ‘e was a nipper, which ‘is mother ‘ad a puddin’ shop at Ipswich close along of the theyatre, an’ ‘e never was hout of England in ‘is life!’

‘You’re next on the list,’ said the MC to the Second Heavies, Mr Hemans, who was sipping his hot grog with a preternaturally solemn look and manner.

‘I know it, alas! I pity you all; but duty must be done. I suppose it is not necessary that I wander into the fields of romance?’ - this with a covert look at the last story-teller.

‘You give us fact, old man!’ said the MC. ‘After the heroics, a little sordid realism won’t come amiss. If you could manage to tell us something funny we should all be grateful.’

‘Anything in the shape of a Dead Byby?’ he asked, with his face for one instant illumined by a humorous twinkle in his eye.

‘Lydies and gents, not forgettin’ of you, Mr Benville Nonplusser, sir, whenever ye likes I’m ready to go on with the ‘arrowin’ tyle of the Dead Byby what I eluded to before if - ‘She was cut short by the Second Heavies, who had no intention of being ‘queered’ at the start by this species of realism:

‘No dead babies in mine, thank you; but I was going to tell you of a somewhat humorous episode of a live baby - I may say a very-much-alive baby,’

‘Hear! hear!’ ‘Silence!’ ‘Hus-s-sh!’

‘Next!’ said the MC to the Second Heavies, who was ready to begin:

‘Some of you may perhaps know that I was not always an actor! That I am not one even now,’ he added quickly, seeing the Tragedian take his pipe from his lips preparatory to making a caustic comment.

‘Having had aspirations towards the stage, and in especial towards high tragedy, I naturally became a commercial traveller, for I thought that self-possession and sheer, unadulterated, unmitigated impudence were the qualities which I ought to cultivate most assiduously!’

‘Look here,’ said the Tragedian, half rising from his seat. Seeing, however, no sympathy in the faces of the Company, he sat down again and smoked hard. The Second Heavies went on:

‘From that I graduated into the undertaking business, for I soon saw that lugubriousness was a still more important item of stock-in-trade if my ambition was ever to be materialised. It was strange, however, that in neither branch of tragic art did I succeed. The clients considered me as a “drummer” too solemn, and suspected a levity of manner superimposed upon a lugubriety of appearance. I found the greater centres of civilisation slow to compete for my mature efforts. So, crossing the seas, I gradually drifted towards the Setting Sun, earning for a time a precarious livelihood by drumming in the neighbourhood of the Black Mountains a new “Curative Compound” calculated to obviate equally the ravages of sunstroke or frost-bite.

CHIN MUSIC

‘One night we were journeying in the west of the Rockies over a road bed which threatened to jerk out our teeth with every loosely-laid sleeper on the line.

‘Travelling in that part of the world, certainly in the days I speak of, was pretty hard. The travellers were mostly men, all over-worked, all over-anxious, and intolerant of anything which hindered their work or interfered with the measure of their repose. In night journeys the berths in the sleeping cars were made up early, and as all the night trains were sleeping cars, the only thing to be done was to turn in at once and try and sleep away the time. As most of us were tired out with the day’s work, the arrangement suited everybody.

‘The weather was harsh; sneezing and coughing was the order of the day. This made the people in the sleeper, all men, irritable: all the more that as most of them were contributing to the general chorus of sounds coming muffled through quilts and curtains, it was impossible to single out any special offender for general execration. After a while, however, the change of posture from standing or sitting to lying down began to have some kind of soothing effect, and new sounds of occasional snoring began to vary the monotony of irritation. Presently the train stopped at a way station; then ensued a prolonged spell of shunting backwards and forwards with the uncertainty of jerkiness which is so peculiarly disturbing to imperfect sleep; and then two newcomers entered the sleeper, a man and a baby. The baby was young, quite young enough to be defiantly ignorant and intolerant of all rules and regulations regarding the common good. It played for its own hand alone, and as it was extremely angry and gifted with exceptionally powerful lungs, the fact of its presence and its emotional condition, even though the latter afforded a mystery as to its cause, were immediately apparent. The snoring ceased, and its place was taken by muttered grunts and growls; the coughing seemed to increase with the renewed irritation, and everywhere was the rustling of ill-at-ease and impotent humanity. Curtains were pulled angrily aside, the rings shrieking viciously on the brass rods, and faces with bent brows and gleaming eyes and hardening mouths glared savagely at the intruder on our quiet, for so we now had tardily come to consider by comparison him and it. The newcomer did not seem to take the least notice of anything, but went on in a stolid way trying to quiet the child, shifting it from one arm to the other, dandling it up and down, and rocking it sideways.

‘I took considerable amusement, myself, from the annoyance of my fellow-passengers. I had no cold myself, and so had been worried by their discomforting sounds; besides, I had come to the car from a dinner with clients, where the wine of the country had circulated with quite sufficient freedom. When a man has a large family - I regret to say that at that time my first wife was nursing her seventh - he acquires a certain indifference to infantile querulousness. As a matter of fact, he does not feel sympathy with the child at all, his pity being reserved for other people.

‘All babies are malignant; the natural wickedness of man, as elaborated at the primeval curse, seems to find an unadulterated effect in their expressions of feeling.

‘I confess that the sight of a child crying, and especially crying angrily - unless, of course, it disturbs me in anything I may be doing - affords me a pleasure which is at once philosophical, humorous, contemplative, reminiscent and speculative.’

‘Oh, Mr Hemans, how horrid you are to say such things!’ said the Leading Lady. ‘You know you don’t think anything of the kind. There’s no one who loves little children better than you do, or who is so considerate to them!’ He made no reply, but only held up a hand in protest, smiling sweetly as he resumed:

‘This baby was a peculiarly fine specimen of its class. It seemed to have no compunction whatever, no parental respect, no natural affection, no mitigation in the natural virulence of its rancour. It screamed, it roared, it squalled, it bellowed. The root ideas of profanity, of obscenity, of blasphemy were mingled in its tone. It beat with clenched fist its father’s face, it clawed at his eyes with twitching fingers, it used its head as an engine with which to buffet him. It kicked, it struggled, it wriggled, it writhed, it twisted itself into serpentine convolutions, till every now and then, what with its vocal and muscular exertions, it threatened to get black in the face. All the time the stolid father simply tried to keep it quiet with eternal changes of posture and with whispered words, “There, now, pet!” “Hush! lie still, little one.” “Rest, dear one, rest!” He was a big, lanky, patient-looking, angular man with great rough hands and enormous feet, which he shifted about as he spoke; so that man and child together seemed eternally restless.

‘The thing appeared to have a sort of fascination for most of the men in the car. The curtains of a lot of berths were opened, and a lot of heads appeared, all scowling. I chuckled softly to myself, and tried to conceal my merriment, lest I should spoil the fun. No one said anything for a long time, till at last one wild-eyed, swarthy, long-bearded individual, who somehow looked like a Mormon Elder, said:

‘“Say, mister! What kind of howling-piece is it you have got there? Have none of you boys got a gun?”

‘There came from the bunks a regular chorus of acquiescence: “The durned thing had ought to be killed!”

‘“Beats prairie dogs in full moon!”

‘“When I woke up with it howlin’, thought I had got ’em again.”

‘“Never mind, boys, it may be a blessin’ in disguise. Somethin’ bad is comin’ to us on this trip, an’ arter this ‘twill be easy work to die!”

‘The man spoke up:

‘“I’m sorry, gentlemen, if she incommodes you!” The words were so manifestly inadequate that there was a roar of laughter which seemed to shake the car. West of the Mississippi things are, or at any rate they used to be, a bit rough, and ideas followed suit. Laughter, when it came, was rough and coarse, and on this occasion even the lanky man seemed to feel it. He only tried to hold the child closer to him, as if to shield it from the hail of ironical chaff which followed.

‘“Incommode us! Oh, not at all. It’s the most soothing concourse of sweet sounds I ever heard.”

‘“Bully for baby syrups!”

‘“Pray, don’t let us disturb the concert with our sleeping.”

‘“Jerk us out a little more chin-music!”

‘“There’s no place like home with a baby in it.”

‘Just opposite where the man moved restlessly with the child was the bunk of a young giant whom I had noticed turning in earlier in the evening. He had not seemed to have noticed the disturbance, but now his curtains were thrust aside fiercely and he appeared, lifting himself on one elbow, and he asked in an angry tone:

‘“Say you, where’s its mother, anyhow?” The man replied in a low, weary tone, without looking round:

‘“She’s in the baggage-car, sir - in her coffin!”

‘Well, you could have heard the silence that came over all the men. The baby’s screaming and the rush, and roar, and rattle of the train seemed unnatural breakers of the profound stillness. In an instant the young man, clad only in his under-flannels, was out on the floor and close to the man.

‘“Say, stranger,” he said, “if I’d knowed that, I’d a bit my tongue out afore I’d ‘a spoke! An’ now I look at you, my poor fellow, I see you’re most wore out! Here, give me the child, and you turn into my bunk an’ rest. No! you needn’t be afeered” - for he saw the father shrink away a little and hold the child closer. “I’m one of a big family, an’ I’ve nursed the baby often. Give her over! I’ll take care of her, an’ I’ll talk to the conductor, and we’ll see that you’re called when the time comes.” He put out his great hands and lifted the little one, the father resigning her to his care without a word. He held her in one arm whilst with the other he helped the newcomer into his empty berth.

‘Strange to say, the child made no more struggle. It may have been that the young blood or the young flesh gave something of the warmth and softness of the mother’s breast which it missed, or that the fresh, young nerves soothed where the worn nerves of the sorrowing man had only irritated; but, with a peaceful sigh, the little one leaned over, let its head fall on the young man’s shoulder, and seemingly in an instant was fast asleep.

‘And all night long, up and down, up and down, in his stockinged feet, softly marched the flannel-clad young giant, with the baby asleep on his breast, whilst in his bunk the tired, sorrow- stricken father slept - and forgot.’

There was a long pause, with here and there a sniffle, whilst down the faces of many the tears trickled. The first to speak was the

Leading Lady. Her face was as a masque of tender feeling, and the yearning of her voice went straight to every heart:

‘That mother’s body may have been far distant from where her baby and her husband slept, but somehow I think that her soul was not very far away.’

Again there was a long pause, broken by the Low Comedian:

‘So that’s what you call a funny story! A pretty bally funny story it is, to make us feel like this. Look at me!’ His eyes were all blurred with crying. The next remark was made by the Sewing-Woman, a question asked with much anxiety:

‘Did the Byby die, sir?’

And then everyone else in the saloon burst into a roar of laughter; the pent-up feelings of all had found a vent. The Second Heavies looked around with a complacent smile on his solemn face as he remarked:

‘If it wasn’t funny, what in thunder are you all laughing at?’

‘I think you are next, my dear,’ said the MC to the Singing Chambermaid.

‘Oh, I do wish someone would go on for me,’ she protested with a pretty embarrassment, or what was an excellent assumption of the same. ‘I do feel so bashful!’

‘That being a condition antecedent to soubrette success!’ interrupted the Tragedian. She smiled at him with a helpless little simper, and went on:

‘Couldn’t you give my understudy a chance?’

‘Not me!’ answered the latter quickly, ‘I don’t mind winging a part when there’s an accident; but you had your part in good time, and now, if you’re not letter-perfect, you must do your own fluffing!’

‘Quite right, too!’ said the Prompter, who was not, as a rule, attached to understudies. The Manager nodded approval, so the Singing Chambermaid, with an appealing look round the Company, went on:

A DEPUTY WAITER

'When I began my career, I was ambitious to shine upon the lyric stage - no, sir! not in Shaftesbury Avenue.' The interpolation was in answer to the Tragedian's again removing his pipe from his lips, preparatory to some effort of biting sarcasm. I intended Grand Opera, the whole big thing. I didn't take much stock of Comedy in those days. Indeed, I thought Comedy was vulgar!' Here there was an approving grunt from the Tragedian. Without turning to him she went on:

'As vulgar as tragedy was ridiculous! You needn't laugh, boys and girls - that was when I was young - very young; I know better about both things now.

'Well, they said at the Conservatoire in Paris that I might succeed if a something-or-other happened to my throat, and that in such case I would be a star, for my voice would be abnormally high. However, the something-or-other didn't come off, and I had to look for success in a different way. I didn't know at that time that I had latent those gifts of Comedy and humour which have since then lifted me to my present height in my career. This is all nothing, however; it is only to explain how I came to be an intimate friend of the great cantatrice, Helda, who was a class-fellow of my own. She went up like a rocket, if you like; and the stick never fell till it fell into her grave! In all her success she never forgot me, and whenever she knew I was in the same town, or near it, she always had me to come and stay with her. It was sometimes a nice change for me, too, for things were up-and-down with me. She was a good creature, and was able to take, in a lordly sort of way, all the honours that were showered upon her. But they must have oppressed her now and again; for when I would come to her she would love to pretend that I was the great star, and would make me sit opposite her at dinner, or at supper after the play, when we were alone, all hung over with the magnificent jewels that Kings and Queens had given her. I liked it all at first, but after a few years, when the hollowness of the world had been burned into me, I began to feel it in my inmost heart as a bitter sort of mockery. Of course, I wouldn't have let her know my feeling for the world, for it would have cut her to the quick; so there was never any change, and the old girlish game went on to the end.

'It was when I was with her in Chicago that I had an adventure of an odd kind. Some of you may have heard of it?'

She looked round interrogatively; the silence was broken by the voice of the Tragedian:

'They've forgotten it, my dear, those who haven't become doddery since then!'

'Bones, when you counter, even a woman, you shouldn't hit below the belt!' said one of the young men, who had been at Oxford. The Tragedian glared at him, the appalling impudence of the youngster, who looked angry, and seemed to mean what he said, being unprecedented. A Young Man to put a Tragedian to rights! Of all the -! He felt, however, that he was in the wrong, and remained silent, waiting. The Singing Chambermaid looked saucily round her; but there was a tremble in the curl of her lips, and a furtive dimness as of unshed tears in her eyes. The blow had told. She went on:

'It is long ago; there is no denying that! But it seems to me all as clear as if it were yesterday! There was I, all alone, in Helda's flat. It was in the Annexe, where there are suites of rooms with an outer door on the corridor with a regular latch-key. Helda was singing in Fidelio, and her maids were with her. I had stayed at home, because I was “under the weather,” to use an Americanism, and I wasn’t in The Fatal Legacy, which our company was giving that night at McVicker’s. I was lying back in a comfortable chair, half dozing, when I heard the door open with a latch-key. I didn’t turn round, for there was a special waiter who attended each suite, and I thought he had come to ask if I wished for coffee, as he usually did about that time when we were at home. It seemed as if at the same time the housemaid had gone in to make up the bedrooms. He did not speak to me as usual, so I said sleepily:

‘“Fritz.” There was no answer.

‘“I think, Fritz,” I said, “I would like a cup of tea to-night, instead of coffee.” He still said nothing, so I looked round, and saw that it was a strange waiter. “Oh,” I said, “I thought it was Fritz. Where is he?” The man answered me with perfect politeness:

‘“He has gone out, madam! This is his night off, but I am to take his place.”

‘“Then,” I said, “will you kindly bring my tea as soon as you can. I have a headache, and it may do it good.” I sank back in my chair again. I did not hear him go out, so I looked round and said: “Do pray make haste,” for his waiting irritated me. He had not stirred, but stood there looking at me fixedly. I began to feel a bit frightened, for there was, I thought, a wild look in his eyes as of a man hunted or desperate. In Helda’s room I heard the rustle of the chambermaids at their work. I rose quickly and went towards the door, intending to join them and then get somebody else sent up instead of the new waiter, who was, I had by this time settled in my mind, mad. Just, however, as my hand was on the door-knob, a voice behind me, thin and keen, said in a fierce whisper:

‘“Stop!” I turned round and looked straight into the muzzle of a revolver pointed at my head. For an instant I was too paralysed to scream out, and then I felt that the only way to deal with a madman was to be calm and cool. Let me tell you, however, that being calm and cool under certain conditions is no easy task. I would just then have given my year's salary to have been able to have appeared hot and flustered. The voice came again:

'"Sit there! His hand pointed to the piano stool. I sat down. Again came the voice:

'"I know you; you are a Singing Chambermaid! Sing!"

'In the midst of all my trouble it was some comfort to find my professional abilities recognised, even by a lunatic. When I looked at him to ask what I should sing, I saw his eyes roll horribly. I thought it better not to ask questions, so I started at once my great song, "George's Kiss is not like Daddy's," which I had rendered famous in the Farce-Comedy, From the West. At first he did not seem to like it. Some of you may have heard it - of course, in your extreme youth' - this with a reproachful look at the Tragedian. 'It begins wonderingly, and then works up and up with each verse. It is a song that has to be acted, and in those days I used to finish the refrain with a high note, a sort of suggestion of sudden surprise as one gives at an unexpected pinch. The "Inter-ocean" called it "Miss Pescod's yelp." The boys in the gallery used to take it up, and the latter verses were always chorused by the audience.

'My lunatic friend had evidently not heard the song, though I had been singing it three times a week in Chicago for a whole month, so I guessed that, as he knew me as an actress, he must have seen me in some other town. He entered into the spirit of the thing, however, and when he heard the end of the first verse his face relaxed, and he cried, "Hear! Hear!" Thenceforward he made me sing the refrain of every verse over several times, and joined in the chorus himself. He seemed to be satisfied with my complaisance, for though he held the revolver in his hand, he did not keep it pointed at me.

‘In the middle of one of the verses the door from the bedroom opened very slightly and so softly that, had I not seen it, I should not have known; the maids were evidently listening. This was my chance; I called out imperatively and sharply:

‘“Come in!”

‘The door was instantly shut - so quickly that this time it sounded loudly; at the same instant the muzzle of the revolver rose and covered me.

‘“Silence!” came the fierce whisper. “This treat is for me alone! It is deah to someone if it be shared!” I tried to go on singing, but the sudden terror was too much for me. I put my hands to my forehead to steady myself. At that instant I heard the lintel of the outer door click; the maids had evidently gone.

‘I looked up at the waiter. He was grinning with a savage delight; and as I was now quite powerless, I sank to the floor. He said, with his eyes rolling:

‘“Mine alone! All for me now! All the entrancing delight of music from a Master voice! Then he pointed the revolver at me, saying:

‘“Get up, Singing Chambermaid! Sing! Sing to me! Sing for your life!”

‘It is astonishing what a restorative a revolver, properly used, can be. I don’t know but that when I have a theatre of my own I won’t present one to my Stage Manager. It would be a prompt and admirable help!’

‘Hear! Hear!’ said the Stage Manager enthusiastically. She resumed:

‘Well, I got up quickly and went on with the song just where I had left off. It didn’t do to have any fooling around under the circumstances. I sang for all I was worth, and the lunatic joined in the chorus with a gleeful zest which was bewildering. I would like to have scratched him!

‘When he had encored the whole song twice, I began to get tired. It was no joke to me; and if it hadn’t seemed really a matter of life and death, I couldn’t have gone on. When I made a protest, he scowled at me, and his hand rose with the revolver. After a moment’s thought he said:

‘“You can have five minutes’ rest from singing, but you must go on playing.”

‘I began to play. I thought some merry tune might soothe him, and I started into a Scotch reel. The effect was so far good that he began to snap his fingers and to keep time with his feet. All the time my brain was working, and it flashed across me that if I could move him thus to my will with music, I might be able to devise some means to rid myself of him. There was so much of hope in the thought that it almost overcame me, and I began to laugh. The instant my hands stopped, his moved, and the revolver rose again.

‘“Play up, or you’re lost!” came the peremptory whisper.

‘Nature is nature, and necessity is necessity, and I suppose that hysterics is the result of the struggle between them. Anyhow, I kept playing away at the reel, and all the time rolling on the piano stool with laughing. Presently I was recalled by a peremptory word:

‘“Time!” I looked round; the revolver still covered me. He went on:

‘“The five minutes is up! Singing Chambermaid, do your work! Follow your vocation! Exercise your calling! Practise your art!

Sing!”

‘“What shall I sing?” I asked in desperation. His face wore a sardonic smile as he replied:

‘“Sing the same song again. You will have time to think of something else whilst you are singing it!”

‘I began the song again. I used to think it very funny, and full of a sort of quaint plaintiveness, but now it seemed only a mass of distressing rubbish - false sentiment, indelicate, inane. From that hour I could never sing it without a nauseating sense of humiliation.’

‘Hear! Hear!’ said the Tragedian, but drew back under the fierce ‘Hsh’ of the Company. The Singing Chambermaid looked at him reproachfully, and went on:

‘Presently my lunatic waiter drew close to me, and whispered:

‘“Don’t stop! If you pause a moment you are a dead woman. Here is Fritz; I hear his footsteps.” He must have had wonderful ears, I thought; but that is the way of madness. “When he opens the door, tell him that you are practising some songs, and don’t want to be disturbed. Remember, I am watching you! If you even falter, your life and his are forfeit! I am desperate! The music is mine alone, and alone I will have it!” He withdrew to the bedroom, leaving the door slightly open. He could not be seen from the outer door, but he could see me. And I could see him, with his revolver pointed at my head, and a set, vindictive, threatening scowl upon his evil face. I knew that he would kill me if I did not do as he wished, so when Fritz opened the door, I called to him as complacently as I could - there is some use in stage training:

‘I am practising, Fritz, and do not wish to be disturbed. I shall want nothing till Madame comes in.’

‘“Goot!” said the pleasant Fritz, and he at once withdrew.

‘Then my mad friend came out from the room, and said, showing his teeth with a grim smile:

‘“You showed your nerve and your wisdom, Singing Chambermaid; now sing!”

‘Well, I sang, and sang, and sang all the songs I could think of, till I grew so weary that I could hardly sit erect; and my brain began to reel. The maniac then began to grow more desperate. As I grew fainter he levelled his pistol at me and forced me to go on from very fear of death. His face began to twitch, his eyes to roll horribly, and his mouth to work convulsively as he called, in a fierce whisper:

‘“Go on. Sing! Sing! Faster! Faster! Faster!”

‘He made me go faster and faster still, beating time with the revolver, till my breath began to go. I held on in mortal fear till even sheer terror could no longer uphold me. The last thing I saw as I fell senseless from the stool was his scowling face and the bobbing muzzle of the revolver as he called, “Faster! Faster!”

‘The next thing I remember is hearing Helda’s voice, seemingly coming from a great distance. I recognised the tone before I heard the words, but things grew clearer and clearer, and at last I knew that it was her hands which held my head up. Then I heard distinctly the words she said:

‘“Oh, don’t bother! What does it matter? I would rather see her her dear self than all the jewels in Christendom!” Then came a gruff, strong voice:

‘“But, look here, ma’am. Time is everything now! We can’t begin till we get some kind of clue. Do you just tell us what you know; we’ll do the rest.’ She answered impatiently:

‘“I really know nothing, except what I’ve told you already. I came in after the Opera, and found her here in a dead faint. Perhaps, when she regains her consciousness, she will be able to tell us something." Then came the strong voice again:

'"And you, Fritz Darmstetter, have you no more to say than this: 'I came several times during the evening, and heard her singing, generally the same song over and over again. Something about George and Daddy. When, at last, I opened the door, she told me to go away, as she was practising, and did not want to be disturbed. She would not want anything till Madame came"?'

'"Dat is so!" Here I seemed to become awake. I opened my eyes, and when I saw my dear Helda close to me, I clung to her and implored her to protect me. She promised me that she would. Then, somewhat reassured, I looked round and saw myself surrounded with a crowd. At one side was a row of gigantic policemen, with a still more gigantic inspector standing in front of them; on the other side were a lot of the hotel servants, male and female, and Helda's maids, who were wringing their hands. One of the policemen carried Helda's Russia-leather jewel-case with the lid wrenched off. When the Inspector saw my eyes open he stooped and, with a sweep of his arm, lifted me to my feet.

'"Now," he said in a commanding voice, "now, young lady, tell me what you know!"

'I suppose we women know a man's voice when we hear it, and we, or our mothers before us, have learned to obey, so I spoke out instinctively:

'"The lunatic came in and pointed a revolver at me, and made me sing all the evening till I fell down with fatigue!"

'"What was he like, miss?" asked the giant Inspector in an imperative voice.

'"He was thin," I answered. "He had dark whiskers and a shaven upper lip, and his eyes rolled!” Then I proceeded to tell him all I knew of the lunatic’s strange proceedings.

‘As I spoke, there came a queer sort of grin on the faces of the policemen; the Inspector seemed to voice their sentiments as he said:

‘“Well, ma’am, this case is pretty clever. Guess its Dimeshow Pete this time. The old man has fooled us all. He seems to have been tarnation clever over it! That was a cute scheme of his to make the young woman sing over and over again the same song with the high note, like as she was practising, whilst his confederates got off with the swag. Guess they’re off on the Lake Shore special hours ago, and he’s gone on the Flyer, and has jumped at Lake. Pete’s a peach! He’s been too many for us this time, but I reckon we’ll chalk it up to him agin the time comes!”’

For some little time the eyes of the Company had been gradually focussing the Tragedian, who was next in order. He had himself shown to experienced eyes a certain uneasiness, though he tried with all the wile of his craft to disguise it in a mantle of degage self-possession.

When the last speaker had completely finished - this, his auditory being actors, being when the applause had entirely ceased and the opportunity for encore or recall had come and gone - the MC spoke:

‘Now, Mr Dovercourt, we hope for the honour of hearing from you!’ There was an immediate chorus from all the Company, the Manager being bland - not exactly patronising, but striking an exact mean between condescension and respect - whilst the rest all down the line with an ever-growing serious attention which began with the Low Comedian’s companionable deference and ended with the Sewing Woman’s self-abasement.

The latter, who through effluxion of time which had put her own literary effort in historical perspective, and influxion of the cup that cheers, felt herself in a halo of imaginative glory, added her tearful request:

‘And if I might make so hold, Mr Wragge, seein’ as ‘ow I may now claim to be myself a sister hartis, though in a numble wy, I would wenture to arsk if you could tell us out of tragic lore some instance of anythink which isn’t about a dead byby, which the same belongs to my spear, an” - this said with an air of vicious determination - ‘I means to ‘old to my rights, though I be a numble woman what knows her plyce for all the -’

Her eloquence was cut short by the MC, who said, with a stern determination which reached her intelligence through her somewhat clouded faculties:

‘That will do, Mrs Wrigglesworth! When your turn comes again we’ll call on you, never fear. In the meantime, you must not interrupt anyone else; more especially one whom we all respect and admire so much as we do our Tragedian, the glory of our Company, the pride of our calling, the perfected excellence of our Art. Mr Dovercourt, here is your very good health! Ladies and gentlemen all! in the good old fashion: Hip, Hip, Hurrah!’

The toast was drunk standing, and with a manifest respect on the part of all, which was a really effective tribute to his branch of his Art. Growl as they may, the companions of the Tragedian have always a secret respect, if not for the Man, at least for the Artist.

The Tragedian began:

WORK'US

'As my friend Parmentire said earlier in this symposium, the humour is not always to its - ah! professional exponent, the Comedian. It may somewhat mitigate the gloom in which the enactment of my special roles in the greater passions for which opportunity has been given to me - and others - yes, to others - by the Master, Shakespeare, and the galaxy of dramatic, poetic talent which has carried down to our day the torch of tragic thought, if I, in this hour of social communion when, if I may be allowed the expression, the buskin is unlaced and the sock is - ah! somewhat eased, relate to you a somewhat humorous episode of my "hot youth," when, like our dear Prince Hal, I occasionally made the welkin ring in its darker hours before the dawn.

'Looking back over the vista of time, those hours of revelry seem to have left a less effaceable mark on memory than does the whirlwind of jealous passion, or even the soft dalliance of the hours of love.'

'Oh, Mr Dovercourt!' said the Second Lady, putting up her fingers to screen a modest blush. The Tragedian, pleased, went on:

'It is, perhaps, the contrast between my hours within what I may call my art-workshop and those without its pale - what a great writer has called the "irony of things" - which makes my memory cling to little trivial absurdities of days long gone; whilst the same memory has lost sight of many an hour of paramount triumph, snatched from eager humanity even before the very thrones of the Kings of the Earth. Ah, me! those halcyon days which are gone for aye! But "sit still my soul" and "break my heart, for I must hold my tongue." Well, it was when I was in the stock at Wigan, when Hulliford

Greenlow controlled the theatrical destinies of that home of the black diamond. A few of us choice spirits were used as a habit to assemble nightly when our work at the theatre was over. Our rendezvous was at the hotel, or rather I should say the public-house, known as “The Merry Maiden.” It was in reality but a drinking house; but there were a few bedrooms which were now and again occupied by some overcome reveller. The place, however, had so bad a reputation in the eyes of the police that no one would willingly remain in it after the withdrawal of the extraneous company, unless quite overcome by his libations to Bacchus. Naturally our conversation, if at times pronounced, was bright; and naturally, too, there were at times jokes, both practical and - and - ah - verbal, consonant with the various dispositions of the nightly frequenters of the house. There were a few choice spirits who were outsiders to our habitual galaxy, and efforts were often made by others to penetrate our charmed circle. We were, however, conservative in our tendencies. We cared for none of the guests who were not good company; and the landlord, a genial soul but thoroughly equipped with business instincts, did not care for any company which was devoid of surplus cash. Naturally the more choice spirits amongst us had at times periods of - ah - petrifaction, when, in fact, the ghost had not walked; and at such times we were wont to reap in a practical shape the harvest of which the seed-time had been a certain toleration extended to repetition on the part of some of our eclectic community, and the exercise of some of our histrionic talents in enacting the part of listeners.

‘One night we had a strange experience in the shape of a fresh guest. He was a very young man, a weakling and somewhat deformed. In fact, our genial host called our attention at first to his - ah - eccentricity by the humorous way in which he addressed him as "my lord," it being our custom in those days to designate as a nobleman anyone whom Dame Nature had in a malevolent moment inflicted with a curvature of the spine. The youth was ill at ease, but he was so manifestly ambitious to share our revelry, and he was so eager in his appreciation of our merry quips and cranks - the flashing by-play of our intellectual swords - that we decided tacitly to allow him to remain amongst us. Our humorous but business-like host took care that the new-comer's expenditure on the goods of his trade was commensurate with his enjoyment. On further visits of this young nobleman he so harassed him into needless expenditure - an expenditure manifestly ill according to his means, for his garments were poor and worn - that one or two of our duller spirits interfered, and chid our host into a more decorous observance of the economic proprieties. The youth would join us at irregular periods, but seldom a week passed that he did not make his appearance. After a little his shyness wore away, and now and again he ventured to make a remark, generally of an abstruse kind and necessitating for its full understanding an intimate acquaintance with the classics. By this time, too, we had come to know something of the youth's personal surroundings. He was the son of a man who had been a teacher in a school, but who had been killed at a fire whilst he was helping at a rescue. His widow, being penniless, had, of course, to go to the Union, where the boy was brought up. Being a cripple and unable to play or work with other boys, he had been allowed to take advantage of the school, and had read all the books he could get and had taught himself some of the dead languages. When these facts had come to our knowledge, some of our community were not well pleased that he should have come amongst us. There is, Ladies and Gentlemen, a very natural prejudice against the workhouse taint, and some of the high-spirited members of our little coterie resented it. Ourgenial host was one of the most indignant. He was, though himself a man of humble origin, one of very fine feelings, and he said it hurt him, and it hurt his house, to be tainted with any workhouse scum - such was the humorous way in which he expressed himself. “To think,” said he, “of his damned impudence, comin’ ‘ere to my ‘ouse - my ‘otel - a-spendin’ of money while ‘is hold mother is a-livin’ in the workus, kep’ by rates paid by you an’ me. I’ll let ‘im know what I thinks before I’ve done with ‘im.” The man who had told us the story set the landlord right upon one point; the old lady was not living in the Union, nor had been for some time. So soon as her son had begun to earn money, which he did, it was said, by writing for papers and magazines, he had taken her out, and they lived together in a tiny house some distance outside the town, where rent was cheap.

‘Well, we were discussing the affair, when “lo! and behold you” -’

‘My hown words! ‘E’s a-stealin’ of ’em from me!’ came from the Sewing Woman, with a snort. ‘H-ss-sh!’ went round the company. The Tragedian glared, and went on:

‘When lo! and behold you, who should come in but the very hunchback himself in a new suit of clothes. We all tried to look as if there was nothing strange; but do what we would, the conversation from that moment on kept about nothing else than the workhouse. Our genial host did not say a word, from which I gathered that he had some deep design. At first the young man coloured up and flushed something painful to see; but presently he went over to the bar and gave an order sotto voce. Then he came back amongst us,and, standing up, said something like this:

‘“Gentlemen, I want you all to drink a bowl of punch with me. To-night is a red-letter night with me, and I want you all, good fellows that you are, to let me speak my gratitude to you. For you have done for me more than you perhaps know. You let me come amongst you and share all your fun, and get inspiration from your brilliancy. I feel most keenly all you have just been saying about the workhouse. No one knows better than I know how true it all is. But I owe it something; I owe it much. It sheltered my mother in her trouble, and it sheltered me in my youth. It gave me education, and made thus for me possibilities which I might not otherwise have had. And, indeed, I am grateful to it. But the life there is a barren one at best, and there is little light through its dull, sad shade. I wanted a contrast to this shade of my youth, and I heard someone speak of you fellows and your brighter evenings here. I was earning but little money, but the schooling which my mother and I had gone through made our wants but few, and I was able to save each week the necessary sum to pay my footing here. My dear mother wished it. She used to sit up for me till I returned whenever I came here; and before we went to bed I told her of you all and most of the clever things I had heard. Then out of all your brightness, and with the contrast to what I knew already, I found I could begin the play I had longed to write. You gave me material! You gave me inspiration! You gave me hope! And I wish you could know the depth of gratitude in my heart. My play is to be rehearsed tomorrow at the Crown Theatre in London, and I am to be there to help. I got some little money only yesterday for a story, and you see me in the first good suit of clothes I ever had. I tell you all these things because you have been so good to me that I want you to feel, one and all, how much I owe you. This shirt I wear, my mother made herself and washed and ironed for me; and it touched me when I was coining out to-night when she brought it to me and said: ‘My boy, I can’t be with you, but I want you to feel that I am near you. Every stitch in this is put in with love and hope, and you must feel it, whether you think of it or not.’ It was she who counselled me to come here to-night to thank you all, my good friends; to close worthily the door on the old life, and bring, if I may, into the new life some of the good feeling that you have so freely given me in the old.” He appeared moved, and the tears were in his eyes. We all drank his punch, of course; and as it was his punch we had, of course, to drink his health. Then, if you please, our genial host got up and said that he was going to stand a bowl of punch too, so that we might bid our young friend adieu. So we drank his punch also. Then he came and whispered to me to order another bowl of punch. “I’ll pay for it. See that his Lordship drinks plenty; I mean to be even with Work’us!” So the whisper went round the jovial spirits that our young friend was to have a skinful. And he had. He was not accustomed to such freedom of liquor, and after the first few glasses it wasn’t hard to persuade him to drink more. He was always reminding us that he had to catch the train for London at 8.15, and he kept showing us his ticket.

‘Then we put him to bed in a room of “The Merry Maiden.” We all helped. But before we went away we took the gloss off that new suit of clothes. I daresay we were a bit rougher than was necessary; but it was so excruciatingly funny to think of when he would wake with a headache and find his new clothes torn and burned in holes, and stabbed with a penknife, and blotched with ink and candle-grease. Finally we put the shirt up the chimney and dragged it about the floor a bit till it was a real picture. As we came away our genial host observed with a laugh: “‘Lord Work’us’ will find it like old times when he sees his clothes.”

‘Well, our little joke wasn’t quite complete after all. We had, of course, intended that he should miss his train; but it seems that early in the morning his mother came looking for him, and learned from a servant that he was there. Our genial host was still asleep, so there was no one to prevent her entering. I believe she just got him to the train in time. He hadn’t a coin about him after he had paid for his bowl of punch.

‘I heard from one of the Company at the Crown that he arrived in a terrible state. He was well plucked enough, I will say that for him; and he would have gone on with his work looking like a scarecrow, only that by some evil chance Grandison, the Manager, saw him in time and took him away to his own room and let him wash and rigged him up.

‘Anyhow, he never came back to Wigan. And now look at the justice of things! Here’s this workhouse upstart with a fortune. They say he has over a hundred thousand pounds, his wife and his mother drive about in carriages; whilst men of genius like myself have to pig it in hovels with the riffraff of the stage. Pah!’

He drowned the depth of his indignant emotion in his drink.

For a time no one spoke; the men smoked, the women looked down at nothing on their laps. The first sound heard was from the Engine-Driver:

‘That’s a funny story - a really funny story! I won’t say what I think, because this is Christmas-time, and the gent who told it is an old one with one foot in the grave. I’m from Wigan, I am. So you can fancy how nice it is for me to hear a story like that. I know where “The Merry Maiden” is, and I know, too, the sort of reputation that the “genial host” bears. Bless him! I’ll look in there when I’m next at home, and see if we can’t fix up another joke of some kind!’

Later on he was heard to say in private conversation with the MC:

‘Look here, mister, you’re a man of the world. Tell me, how do the beaks look nowadays on scrappin’ in the Midlands? What do they consider a fair fine where there has been a holy shindy and some hound has been wiped the floor with?’

‘You are next, Murphy,’ said the MC, looking at the Super-Master, and at the same time handing a glass of steaming whisky punch. ‘Don’t be afraid of this. ’Tis John Jamieson.’

‘I’m a timarious man be nature,’ he answered as he began to sip the punch as a preliminary, ‘but whin I’m dhragged into publicity like this I’m tuk be the short hairs, so ye’ll pardon me, I thrust, Ladies and Gents all, av I thransgress in me shortcomin’s.’ Being an Irishman, he was regarded by the Company as a humorist, and felt that he had to keep up that perilous reputation - just as he had to strain himself now and again to achieve a sufficient brogue.

‘I suppose ‘t would be betther for me to shtay on dhry land an’ to give an expayrence iv me own, rather than to be afther gettin’ into difficulties be puttin’ out to say what I don’t know in the way of shtories an’ consates. Illi robur et aes triplex circa pectus erat. Yous’ll remimber!’ He had been brought up at a hedge school, and always advanced the preposterous statement that he had been ‘at College.’

‘All right, Murphy. What you will, but hurry up! This isn’t Monday trunks, but Sunday hand-bags!’ The professional simile was received with laughter and applause by the actors; but Murphy, who was a shrewd fellow, knew too much to waste his opportunity on quips and cranks, so went on at once.

A CORNER IN DWARFS

'I was Super-Master at the Lane Theatre when the "Stage Children's Act" was passed. I had to make it up a bit, for it was part iv me wurrk t' engage the kids as well as the exthras, an' it was a rare job that year, I can tell ye. Ould Gustavus had quarrelled the year before with Madam Laffan, the dancin' misthress, iv Old Street, who used to take all the East-end childher, an' Mrs Purefoy had made her fortune and retired, so there was no one west with a stock of trained kids. The Act, you remimber, was pushed through be the faddists, an' became law before anyone could wink. Then the throuble began. The parents what usually kem beggin' an' prayin' to have their kids took on began to trate even me haughty, an' t' ask for conthracts. They wanted double an' tribble pay. They thought they had a right to sell their childher's services, and that the new law couldn't touch them. So ould Gustavus held off in turn, when, lo and behold! you -'

'He's stealin' my words too!' murmured the Sewing Woman under her breath. She didn't dare to speak out loud for fear of offending him. Murphy was a kindly creature, and often showed her small kindnesses.

'- the beaks shut down on the whole thing, and wouldn't allow any childher at all to be engaged. We was all at our wits' end thin. We had for Pantomime that Christmas Cinderella. It was to be all done be childher, an' the scenery an' props an' costumes was all made. As time wint on I began to get anxious. Childher want a lot of tachin' an' dhrillin', and av ye have to take 'em in the raw 'tis no light job. There ginerally is a lot of such about, and in usual circumstances - unless you have lift it too late - there does be plinty of the wans that have been on before, and have only to be freshened up and taught the business iv the new play. Av coorse, every thayatre has its own lists of thim what comes to be re-engaged - I think it only just to say that I'm not the only first-class Super-Master in the business! So by-an'-by, whin the Governor asked me how many kids I had engaged, I had to say to him:

'"Sorra a wan! Don't you remimber ye towld me not to engage a bally one - an' bally ind to me!" Ould Gustavus was a man what niver got angry or swore or stamped about like some; but he had the nasty tongue on him that was a dale sight worse. So, sez he:

'"Oh, indade! Then, Mr Murphy, let me point out this to ye. If I've no supers an' no extras an' no childher, I don't seem to know that I have any use for a Super-Master - you undhershtand?"

'"I do!" sez I, an' wint out fit to hould. Whin I was shmokin' outside the stage-door, the call-boy kem yellin' out:

'"Ye're wanted be the Guvernor, Murphy, at wanst."

'Whin I kem in he says to me quite gintly - so gintly that I began to suspect he was up to some devilment:

'"Be the way, Murphy, in makin' any engagements, I want ye to put in yer own name as employer. It may be a good thing, ye know, for ye personally, an' 'twill make no differ to me."

'While he was shpakin' I seen at a glance what he was up to - I think that quick. "Oh-ho!" sez I to meself, "that's the game, is it? 'Tis to be me what employs them! An' thin, whin the polis does be comin' along undher the new Act, 'tis the employer that has to be run in!..."

'"May I have some forrms, surr?" I sez.

'"Certainly - as many as ye like. Take this ordher to Miles's an' get them to print ye a set." While he was shpakin', he tore out a forrm from th' ordher book, and handed it to me wid a conthract forrm which he had althered. “Tell them to print it like that - I have althered the name.”

‘“Thin, surr,” I sez, “’tis me as employs them. I suppose I can do what I like in that way?”

‘“Certainly, certainly,” he sez. “You have a free hand in the matter. I shall make a contract with you when I want them.”

‘“An’ their pay, sir?” I sez.

‘“Oh, that is all right. You don’t have to pay thim till work begins, ye know.”

‘“That’s thrue!” sez I, an’ wid that I wint out.

I got me forrms from the printer next day - hundhreds, thousands iv them - an’ set to worrk. I had a game av me own on, an’ I tuk not a sowl in me confidence. I knew ’twas no use gettin’ childher at all, for whin the time’d come, the magisthrates wouldn’t let thim wurrk at all, at all. So I luk’d round an’ picked out all the small young weemen I could find that was nice an’ shlim.

‘My! but wasn’t there a lot iv them. I had no idea that London was so full iv shlim young undher-sized weemen. I suppose I used to like big girrls best, and plazed me eye whin I selected them. But there was I now engagin’ the shmall wans be the score, be the hundhred, an’ just whisperin’ a word to aich iv thim to hould their tongues about their engagement, lest others’d crowd in an’ kape thim out.

‘Thin I laid out some iv me own savin’s in fares to all the big cities where they had pantomimes, an’ I chose in the same way hundhreds iv shlim, short girls ivrywhere.

‘Thin, whin I got back to London, I engaged, in Gustavus’s name this time, a lot of kids for Misther Gustavus - rale childher this time. I had had a “force majeure” clause put in the conthract forrm in ordher to purtect him.

'Ould Gustavus made his conthract wid me, agreein' to pay me for aich iv the childher a shillin' a week more than usual. That was more than what I had agreed with their parents for; so in case there was no objections wid the polis they'd be betther off than usual. So that was all right.

'We began rehearsin' all right. An' wint on at it for two weeks: whin lo an' behold ye -'

'My words again!' murmured the aggrieved Sewing Woman.

'- down came the polis with a summons for ould Gustavus for contravenin' the Act be usin' on the stage the labour iv childher undher sixteen. He wint off to Bow Street quite cocky, takin' me with him. For defince he said, in the first place, he wasn't employin' labour at all, for his theatre wasn't even open. An' in the second he wasn't the employer at all. It was me. But the magistrate shut him up short. He said he'd have him know that that was a quibble, as it was within his knowledge that I was in his employment on his staff, and that as I was his agent the legal maxim facit per alium facit per se came in.

'"He's not me agent!" he says out loud. "An' look here, Murphy, I discharge ye on the shpot!"

'"That's enough," sez the magistrate. "Your dischargin' the man is a proof that he was yer agent up to that moment. Now the way you shtand is this. As this man Murphy was your agent, the childher were engaged be you; an' if y' allow them to appear in public you will go to prison. I accept the statement that they've not as yet been employed, as I understand that rehearsal is rather an unpaid preparation for employment than employment itself. I shall therefore discharge you to-day - or rather I shall postpone the hearing till afther Christmas. And, by the way, since you discharged this man summarily, you are, I take it, liable for a week’s wages. You had betther pay him at once if you are wise! If not, an action will lie against you, and the proof will come from the Coort!”

‘When we were in the street he sez to me:

‘“Well?”

‘“It looks like the end, surr, though it’s only the beginning’.”

‘“Of course, Murphy, I’ll keep you on,” he sez.

‘“Thank ye, surr,” sez I, “but I’m makin’ other arrangements.”

‘“How do ye mane?” sez he.

‘“I mane this, surr,” sez I, “that ye’ve planted me for yer own purposes, an’ now I intind that what grows out iv me plantin’ is me own.”

‘“I don’t undhershtand,” sez he, “yit!”

‘“Ye will by an’ by,” sez I. “Look here, Misther Gustavus, for yer own nefayrious purposes ye tould me t’ engage a lot iv childher for the pantomime, an’ ye tould me t’ ingage them in me own name. That was so that whin the polis’d come at ye ye might say, as ye done just now to the beak, that it wasn’t you at all, but me. Now it was ayther you or me what engaged them be conthract. If ’twas you ye had to shtand the racket, or would have done if the sayson had begun - which it hadn’t; an’ ye’d have th’ advantage, too. But ye said it wasn’t you whin ye thought the polis had got ye, an’ ye wanted to have me run in for it. So that’s off. But if ’twas me what engaged thim, thin ’tis me what’ll git the benefit. See? Moreover, ye discharrged me in the Coort, an’ the beak himself said ye’d have to pay me me salary for a week. So now I’m free av ye, wid the kay iv the shtreet in me hand. But I’ve got the conthracts what I’ve made wid a lot iv people in all kinds iv places. These are me own prawperty, an’ I’m goin’ to use thim in me own way. The only conthracts what is made in your name is wid the childher for yer own pantomime, an’ thim ye has to shtand be. I might have tould his worship that they wor your conthracts, but I thought as ye swore at the beginnin’ that they worn’t I’d hould them over in case ye should git obstreperous later on.

‘“So now ye’re in the soup. Ye won’t be let play the childher what ye engaged. An’ I can tell ye now that ye won’t be allowed any childhers at all, at all. But I’ve got meself in me own employment a number iv likely young weemen iv shmall patthem what’ll be able to play in shpite iv all the polis in the counthry. So av ye’re wishful to git what ye want, Misther Gustavus, it’s me that ye’ll have t’apply to. I hould the whole shtock. There is no use yer kickin’. I can prove me bona fides all along the line. ’Tis you what’ll figure out as the bloated capitalist what deceived the poor honest workin’ man - that’s me - what thrusted him. What made nefayrious conthracts wid poor innocent childhers what’ll have a hungry Christmas. An’ what perjured hisself in a courthouse, which can be proved be the beak hisself an’ some iv yer conthracts ye made wid the childher. Not be me, av coorse, for didn’t ye swear that I was not in yer sarvice. But anyhow ye have got a force majeure clause in. That’ll not look well, will it? As if ’twas I what put it in, whin I haven’t the same clause even for me own purtection in me own conthracts.”

‘“So, Misther Gustavus, ye’d betther be quick in engagin’ some iv me throup iv dancers. I’ll only charge double for sich iv thim what is took from me by me first pathron.”

‘Well, th’ ould man was in a clift shtick, an’ knew it. So he made me come back wid him to his office, an’ then an’ there made an iron-clad conthract wid me for the sarvices iv more’n a hundhred iv me dwarfs. “Mind ye,” I had said to him, “ye can have as many as iver ye want at the price av ye take tham at wanst. But if ye lave it over to take more later in case ye find ye've not enough, ye'll have to come in line wid the rest av the managers. No man can come in on the ground floor a second time!"

'It all kem off well. As soon as the rehearsals began the polis woke up an' got shpry all over the counthry. The managers was all run in. Like ould Gustavus they couldn't be punished bekase they hadn't done nothin' wrong, as yet. But they tuk fright, as was intended, an' gave undhertakins not to employ any childher at all while th' Act run. An' so they all had to come, in the long run, to me what had cornered all the dwarfs. Mind ye, I was careful not to use that word, for if they'd any iv them heard it, they'd have riz up an' flew away like a flock iv pigeons does, all about nothin'.

'Then the fun began. Shmall weemin is more up in themselves than big wans. So the shtage managers an' bally masters what was in the habit of drillin' childher in the pantomime sayson soon found out the differ. Some iv them thried to thrate the little weemin - "beautiful childher" is what I called them, so they thought I was a very nice man, an' we got on well with aich other, an' I had no quarrellin' wid them - as if they was kids, an' ordhered them about somethin' crool. They soon found out the mishtake. Wan iv them - Cuthbert Kinsey it was, of the Royal at Queenhythe - gave wan iv them a slap on th' ear. But she could scrap a bit, so she could; she was a sturdy, plucky little party what could whip her weight in wild cats, as the Yankees say. She just put up her dooks an' wint for him. She gave him wan on the bread-basket an' another on the boko what made him go into the claret business sthraight. So for that sayson he kep his hooks down. My! but there was scrappin' in some theyatres, for the budlets wouldn't shtand no guff. An' whin the bally masters an' shtage managers found they was weemin an' tried to make love to them things was worse. Moreover, they tuk breaches iv promise whiniver the chap had any oof at all. I'm tellin' ye the carnage among bachelors in theyatres that year was frightful. I was a bachelor meself in thim days, so I have cause enough to know it!'

'Was that when and how you met your wife, Mr Roscoe?' asked the Second Old Woman, a big-built woman with a temper of her own.

The rest of the Company smiled, for it was an open secret that Mrs Roscoe, who had once been wardrobe mistress, had been required to leave the Company on account of her success in a face-slapping episode wherein the Second Old Woman had fared badly. The Super Master, who, both as one occupying a post on the managerial staff and also as an Irishman from whom a large measure of courtesy to women was expected, kept strict guard on his temper except when quelling a riot or pleasantry amongst his own crowd, answered sweetly:

'Yes, ma'am. I am proud to say it was. I bless the day.'

'She is not here, I notice,' said the Second Old Woman, with a suavity equal to his own. 'May I ask you why that is?'

'Certainly, ma'am.' he replied heartily. 'She is away on a long tour in America with a first-class Company.'

'Oh! And she is Wardrobe - as an assistant, I suppose?'

'No, ma'am,' he replied sadly. 'I regret to say she has gone down in the world.'

'I see. A Dresser, then?'

'No, ma'am. Lower still; she is First Old Woman. But then I should say that it is a Company so good that the Old Women are played by young and pretty ones. Not by real has-beens or neverwases, as is usually the case!' The ready laugh of the younger members of the Company showed that the shot had told. The Second Old Woman's anger flamed out in her face as she said still - by a great effort - suavely:

'I hope she is now respectable?'

'Keeps, ma'am! - keeps, not "is"! She is and has always been respectable. And is always a quiet, tender-hearted woman. Except, of course, when she has to chastise insolence - as you very well know.'

The Second Old Woman contented herself by glaring, as she realised from the universal titter that the laugh was against her. The Super Master swallowed his consolation - steaming hot though it was.

The MC turned to the next on the line, The Advance Agent, an alert-looking man of middle age.

'I hope you will give us something next, Alphage. It is so seldom that we have the honour of seeing you whilst we are on the road that we should look on it as the lost opportunity of our lives if we do not hear some story or reminiscence of your own life.'

'All right, old man. I'll do what I can. You won't mind, I hope, Ladies and Gentlemen, if it is a bit dull. But the fact is that I've been so much in the habit of inventing lies about my stars that plain fact comes to be prosaic. Anyhow, it may be a change for me; I'm tired of finding out new virtues of my employers or ringing the changes on the old ones.

A CRIMINAL STAR

‘Of course, you all remember Wolseley Gartside -’

‘Rather!’ This was from the Tragedian. ‘I remember when he took that name. Indeed, I was not pleased with him about it; it clashed with the name I had taken myself - or, rather - ahem! - which my sponsors took for me at my christening. I consoled myself with the reflection that Wolseley was a later name historically than Wellesley.’ The Advance Agent went on:

‘Gartside, like many others who have risen from the ranks - the ranks of his profession - was, well, a wee, tiny bit over-sensitive in matters of public esteem. In fact, he did not like to be neglected -’

Here the Second Heavies interrupted with a rapidity and acerbity which left an impression that indignation was founded on aggrievement:

‘“Over-sensitive in matters of public esteem!” I like that. He had got the swelled head bad, if that be what you mean. He wanted the earth, he did! The way he hustled other people off the posters was indecent! And the size of type he clamoured for was an inducement to blindness and an affront to the common sense of an educated community.’ The Advance Agent went on calmly:

‘- did not like to be neglected. This was all bad enough when he was engaged by someone else; but when he was out on his own with nothing to check him except the reports of his treasurer, he became a holy terror. There wasn’t any crowding of names off the bill then; there were simply no names at all. Names of other people, I mean; his name was all right so long as the paper was up to the biggest stands, and the types were the largest to be had in the town. Later on he went even further and had all his printing done in London or New

York from types cut special.' The Second Heavies cut in again:

'No! Mr Wolseley Gartside didn't mean to get neglected so long as there was a public Press to be influenced or a hoarding to be covered.'

'Exactly!' said the Advance Agent drily. He was beginning to fear that his pitch would be queered by the outpouring of the grievances of the Second Heavies. The professional instinct of the audience made for peace. They were all trained to listen. Mr Alphage seized the opportunity, and went on:

'When he was arranging his first American tour he wanted to get someone who, as a persona grata, could command the Press; who understood human nature to the core; who had the instinct of a diplomatist, the experience of a field-marshall, the tact of an Attorney-General; the -'

'All right, old man. We know you took him in tow.'

'Thank you, Bones! I understand. Gartside was a tragedian, too, and of course wanted the whole stage. They're all the same.'

'Well, of all the -' began Dovercourt; but there he stopped. There was a readiness of repartee about the Advance Agent that disturbed his self-serenity.

'So I took him in tow, as Bones calls it. I thought my work was piloting. But Bones knows; he, too, belongs to the hungry, egotist lot who have to be dragged into publicity - like Wolseley Gartside!

'Well, before I started out, which he insisted should be a full week ahead of him, he began to teach me my business. At first I pointed out to him that the whole mechanism of advance publicity wasn't wrong because he hadn't done it. But he took me up short, and expressed his opinions pretty freely, I admit. He gave me quite a dissertation on publicity, telling me that to hit the public you must tell them plenty. They wanted to know all about a man; they didn't care much whether it was good or bad; but on the whole they preferred bad. Then he went on to give me what he called my instructions. That I was to have paragraphs about him every day. "Make me out," he said, "a sort of Don Juan, with a fierce, revengeful nature. A man from whose hate no man is safe; no woman from his love. Never mind moral character. The public don't want it - nor no more do I. Say whatever you please about me so long as you make people talk. Now I don't want argument with you. Do you just carry out my instructions, and all will be well. But if you don't, you'll get the order of the chuck." I didn't want to argue with him. To begin with, a man like that isn't worth argument - especially about instructions. Instructions! Just fancy an Advance Agent who knows his business being instructed by a Star that he has got to boom, and to whose vanity - no, sensitiveness - he has to minister. Why, compared with even a duffer at my work the biggest and brightest star in the theatrical firmament don't know enough to come in out of the rain! I was very angry with him, I admit; but in a flash there came to me out of his own very instructions an idea which put anger out of my mind. The top dog isn't angry - though he may bite! "Very well, Mr Wolseley Gartside," said I to myself, said I, "I'll carry out your instructions with exactness. They're yours, not mine; so if anything comes out wrong you are the responsible party." Before I went to bed I wrote out a mem of my "instructions."

"'The public want to know everything about a man. Tell them plenty - all they want. They don't care whether it's good or bad. On the whole, they prefer bad. Give them paragraphs every day. Make me a Don Juan, fierce, revengeful, passionate. No man safe from my hate; no woman from my love. Don't aim at moral character; the public don't want it; no more do I. Say whatever you please about me so long as you make people talk. Make things lively before I come!"

'I headed this "Instructions to Montague Phase Alphage, Advance Agent to Wolseley Gartside, Esquire." In the morning I brought it to him and asked him to sign and date it, as I wished to carry out his instructions to the full, and to take for myself advantage of his wisdom and his splendid initiative power. He signed it, looking very pleased. The sort of smirk that tragedians use when they're feeling good.

'The next day I started out on my travels. The tour was to begin with a week of one-night stands. Wolseley Gartside had insisted on making out the tour himself, and, of course, he knew better than anybody - everybody else. You know what that means, Wragge. I certainly covered the ground for him that week. I simply lived in trains, and I wore out the stairs of all the offices of what they called newspapers. Do you know, I think there must be a special angelic squad told off to look after advance agents. And if there is, my chap must have had what they call a hellova time. It's a direct mercy that I didn't develop acute DT in letting the penny-a-liners of that group of one-horse towns have the time of their lives. They tumbled to it quick that they would not have to write any themselves, for, of course, I did all that myself. It was best that way, anyhow, for not one of them could have written a decent par to save his soul.

'I filled them all up with Wolseley Gartside; and they filled up as much space as the editorial staff could spare from ads. Generally I paid for the printing, too - though who benefited by it I don't know. I thought Gartside would darken the air when he got my bill; but I did him well - in quantity, at all events. But the quality was good, too;

just what the old man liked. I not only painted him as a man of transcendent genius and as an artist that had no peer in past or present, but gave him such a character as a libertine that the local Don Juans began over their drink to talk of reviving lynching, and the womenkind exhausted the dry goods stores for new frocks and fal-lals of all kinds. Why, they tell me that the demand for toupees and false fronts and extensions was such that the New York wholesale hair houses sent down a whole flock of drummers. The back-numbers were going to have a turn at him as well as the girls and the frisky matrons! I gave him out as having the courage of a lion and the heart of a fiend; the skill at cards of a prestidigitateur; the style and daring in the hunt of Buffalo Bill; the learning of an Erasmus; the voice of a De Reske; the strength of Milo - it was before Sandow's time. I finished it all off with a hypnotic gift which was unique; which from the stage could rule audiences, and in the smoking-room or the boudoir could make man or woman his obedient slave. I got most of the newspapers to take up hypnotism as a theme of controversy, and wrote lots of letters on the subject, under various names, which opened people's eyes as to the power of that mysterious craft - or quality, whichever it is - and the consequent danger attendant on their daily lives. I suppose I needn't say that the whole controversy everywhere circled round Gartside and his wonderful powers. I tell you that by the Sunday afternoon when my Star came along with his crowd in his special, with his private car at the tail of it, and him on the rear platform, the women of Patricia City, where he opened, were in a flutter. They didn't know whether it was hope or fear. Knowing the sex as I do, I am inclined to think it was hope. To tame and subdue a dragon of voluptuous impurity is the dearest wish of a good woman's heart!'

‘Oh, really, Mr Phase Alphage ...’ said the First Old Woman, raising an index finger of remonstrance.

‘True, dear lady, true. It is trite as a record, as well as solemn as a truth.’

‘Aye, it is truth, indeed. Sad truth!’ murmured the Tragedian, in a thunderous bass. ‘The experiences of my own hot youth have proven it to the full. ’Twas not gifts of mind or body, all-compelling though these be, nor the fascinations of our glamorous calling. Rather would I call it the maelstrom of passion which the Apple of Eden begot in the breast of woman.’

‘Rather a mixed metaphor that!’ said the young man from Oxford, who seemed to have taken on himself the task of keeping the Tragedian to order. ‘But we understand what you mean. Drive on, Alphage.’

‘I was fifty miles on my road when the day of opening came; but I ran back - that came out of my own pocket, too! - to see Gartside and hear what he thought of the way I had exploited him. I boarded his train down the line, and came on with him. He was both jubilant and effusive, and said my work in advance was the best he had ever had. “Go on, my boy, go on, and follow it up. You are on the right tack!” were the last words he said to me. I dropped off at the depot, and got on the outward train, for I didn’t want to get pitched into by him when he should find the excitement was less than he expected. I do believe he thought there would be in waiting a murderous crowd, with a rope, intent on a neck-tie party, with a few regiments of State troops to counteract them.

‘When I got into the next town the Press was full of what had been said at Patricia City, and wanted me to go at least one better, or they couldn’t use my stuff at all. That would be checkmate to me as

Advance Agent, so I was in a real difficulty. I couldn't increase the praise of my Star, so the only thing was to go down. I made up my mind to go deeper and deeper into crime. There was no help for it. I knew well that each other town in that group would want its own increase of pressure, and so arranged my plans in the back of my head. I should have to distribute the steps of the downward grade amongst five different towns; so I laid out my work and began to get my copy ready. I never went to bed at all that night, but spent it writing advance matter in shorthand. In the morning I got a smart typewriter and dictated to her from my stenographic script. I sent off that for Tuesday by mail, and got the rest ready to post when the hour should arrive. I had to be careful not to send matter long enough in advance for the comparison of towns, or of different papers in the same town.

'Early on Tuesday morning I got to Hustleville - that was the second town of the tour - and from that moment matters began to hum. All the papers were full, not only of my own matter, but of comments on it. In addition, nearly every one had a leader in which they cut the Tragedian to pieces. The Banner of Freedom wanted to make out his coming to be nothing short of an international outrage.

'"It makes little," it said, "for the comity of nations that an ostensibly friendly country like England should be allowed to dump down on our shores a cargo of criminal decadents like the man Wolseley Gartside and his crowd of hooligans. His being left at large so long as seems to have been the case says little for either the morals or the sanity of the people who have permitted his existence. He is a smirch on the fair face of cosmic law, a living germ of intellectual disease, a cancerous growth even in the parasitic calling which he follows; an outrage to man and morals, to fair living, to development of God’s creatures - nay, even to God Himself! The people of this State have not in the past lacked courage or energy to terminate swiftly, by the exercise of rough justice in the open courts of natural law, the opportunities of offenders against public good. We have heard of a human pendulum swinging on a giant bough of one of our noble forest trees; there are recollections in the minds of those of our pioneers who happily survive of worthless miscreants riding on rails clad in unpretentious costumes of feathers and tar. It is up to the heroic souls who founded Hustleville to break the long silence of their well-won repose, and, for protection of the city they have won from forest depths, and for the defence of their kin, to raise voice and hand for woman’s honour and man’s unshrinking nobility! A hint on such a subject should be sufficient. Verbum sapientice sufficit. We have done.”

‘This reached Gartside after breakfast, and he at once wired me:

‘“Go on; it is well. Banner has struck right note. Shall be ere long living heart of international cyclone!”

‘I went on the same afternoon to Comstock, which was next on our route. I had, of course, sent on plenty of advance matter, and the editors had written me gratefully about it. But when I called at the Whoop - which was, I understood, the popular paper - I was received in a manner which was decidedly chilly. I am not, as a rule, lacking in diffidence ...’

‘Distinctly an understatement, my dear sir,’ said the Tragedian, with challenge to battle in his eye. You really wrong yourself by putting it in that negative way!’ He glared in return, but went on, calmly:

‘... but I admit I was a little nonplussed - no pun intended, Governor’ - this to the Manager. ‘So I asked the editor if I had hurt or affronted him in any way to cause his greeting to be so different from his written words. He hum'd and haw'd, and finally admitted that he was chagrined that the Comstock Whoop had not been treated as well as the Hustleville Banner of Freedom.

'"How?" I asked. "I sent you twenty per cent more advance copy."

'"Aye. The quantity was all right; but there were none of the spicy details which worked up the dormant conscience of even a one-horse town like Hustleville. Now, I suppose you know that we young towns can't live on the past. Has-been isn't a good diet for growing youth. Moreover, we're all living on one another's backs, with the nails dug in. What we want in the Whoop is anti-soothing syrup; and nothing else is any use to us. So get a move on you and let us have it. We want stronger meat than Hustleville."

'"But there's nothing stronger. To say more wouldn't be true."

'The editor seemed as if struck blind. He raised his hands as if expostulating with the powers of the air, as he said:

'"True! Do I live to hear the Advance Agent of a Troupe speak of truth ... Now, look here, Mister. It's no use talking ethics with you. For either I'm drunk - which would be early in the day for me - or else you've got some sort of freshness on you that I don't understand. And I may tell you for your edification that we don't much care for freshness here. Comstock is a town where we perspire quick; and there's plenty of space in the forest for developing our cem-e-tary. When I got your first letter I told my boys to hold back because this was your funeral, and ye was up in the etiquette. But the boys wasn't altogether pleased. They are good boys, and could knock sparks out of Ananias in making a story. See! So you'd better get to work. You know your man and they don't; so your story is apt to seem more lifelike. I'll want the copy here by seven. Then, the quicker ye quit the better."

'There was nothing for it but to carry out Wolseley Gartside's instructions. It was wife-beating this time that swelled his reputation. I didn't mean to be knocked out by the boys of the Whoop, nor to afford an opportunity for exemplifying the sudorific rapidity of Comstock - no, nor to take a part in de-veloping the cem-e-tary either; so the story of WG's experiences as a defendant in the police-court of Abingchester, in the Peak of Derbyshire - that was well out of the way of public prints - was given in full detail, together with a description of the Lord Chancellor who condemned him, and an exciting account of his escape, riddled with bullets, from the county gaol. The editor read it with a beaming face, and said when he had done:

'"That's the biggest scoop we ever had. Here, I'll give you a straight tip which will put money in your pocket if you get out your copy right smart. There is every indication that when the play is over to-morrow night there will be an adjournment of citizens to the forest, and that one of the oaks will bear a new sort of acorn. One with a bloated body; but a rotten heart. See?"

'I did see; and I sent an urgent letter to WG by the driver of the mail train, telling him frankly where his instructions were likely to lead him.

'He was wise for once, and altered his route. This wasn't a case for vanity, but for skin. So there wasn't any new kind of acorn found on the forest round Comstock, though the search party was all ready.

'Now, Mr Hempitch,' said the MC, 'you're next.' So he began at once.

'All right, sir. Mr Alphage's story of a Star reminds me of a Star of another kind which is more in my line of business.

A STAR TRAP

"When I was apprenticed to theatrical carpentering my master was John Haliday, who was Master Machinist - we called men in his post 'Master Carpenter' in those days - of the old Victoria Theatre, Hulme. It wasn't called Hulme; but that name will do. It would only stir up painful memories if I were to give the real name. I daresay some of you - not the Ladies (this with a gallant bow all round) - will remember the case of a Harlequin as was killed in an accident in the pantomime. We needn't mention names; Mortimer will do for a name to call him by - Henry Mortimer. The cause of it was never found out. But I knew it; and I've kept silence for so long that I may speak now without hurting anyone. They're all dead long ago that was interested in the death of Henry Mortimer or the man who wrought that death."

"Any of you who know of the case will remember what a handsome, dapper, well-built man Mortimer was. To my own mind he was the handsomest man I ever saw."

The Tragedian's low, grumbling whisper, "That's a large order," sounded a warning note. Hempitch, however, did not seem to hear it, but went on:

"Of course, I was only a boy then, and I hadn't seen any of you gentlemen - Yer very good health, Mr Wellesley Dovercourt, sir, and cettera. I needn't tell you, Ladies, how well a harlequin's dress sets off a nice slim figure. No wonder that in these days of suffragettes, women wants to be harlequins as well as columbines. Though I hope they won't make the columbine a man's part!"

"Mortimer was the nimblest chap at the traps I ever see. He was so sure of hisself that he would have extra weight put on so that when the counter weights fell he'd shoot up five or six feet higher than anyone else could even try to. Moreover, he had a way of drawing up his legs when in the air - the way a frog does when he is swimming - that made his jump look ever so much higher."

"I think the girls were all in love with him, the way they used to stand in the wings when the time was comin' for his entrance. That wouldn't have mattered much, for girls are always falling in love with some man or other, but it made trouble, as it always does when the married ones take the same start. There were several of these that were always after him, more shame for them, with husbands of their own. That was dangerous enough, and hard to stand for a man who might mean to be decent in any way. But the real trial - and the real trouble, too - was none other than the young wife of my own master, and she was more than flesh and blood could stand. She had come into the panto, the season before, as a high-kicker - and she could! She could kick higher than girls that was more than a foot taller than her; for she was a wee bit of a thing and as pretty as pie; a gold-haired, blue-eyed, slim thing with much the figure of a boy, except for. . . and they saved her from any mistaken idea of that kind. Jack Haliday went crazy over her, and when the notice was up, and there was no young spark with plenty of oof coming along to do the proper thing by her, she married him. It was, when they was joined, what you Ladies call a marriage of convenience; but after a bit they two got on very well, and we all thought she was beginning to like the old man - for Jack was old enough to be her father, with a bit to spare. In the summer, when the house was closed, he took her to the Isle of Man; and when they came back he made no secret of it that he'd had the happiest time of his life. She looked quite happy, too, and treated him affectionate; and we all began to think that that marriage had not been a failure at any rate.”

“Things began to change, however, when the panto, rehearsals began next year. Old Jack began to look unhappy, and didn’t take no interest in his work. Loo - that was Mrs Haliday’s name - didn’t seem over fond of him now, and was generally impatient when he was by. Nobody said anything about this, however, to us men; but the married women smiled and nodded their heads and whispered that perhaps there were reasons. One day on the stage, when the harlequinade rehearsal was beginning, someone mentioned as how perhaps Mrs Haliday wouldn’t be dancing that year, and they smiled as if they was all in the secret. Then Mrs Jack ups and gives them Johnny-up-the-orchard for not minding their own business and telling a pack of lies, and such like as you Ladies like to express in your own ways when you get your back hair down. The rest of us tried to soothe her all we could, and she went off home.”

“It wasn’t long after that that she and Henry Mortimer left together after rehearsal was over, he saying he’d leave her at home. She didn’t make no objections - I told you he was a very handsome man.”

“Well, from that on she never seemed to take her eyes from him during every rehearsal, right up to the night of the last rehearsal, which, of course, was full dress - ‘Everybody and Everything.’”

“Jack Haliday never seemed to notice anything that was going on, like the rest of them did. True, his time was taken up with his own work, for I’m telling you that a Master Machinist hasn’t got no loose time on his hands at the first dress rehearsal of a panto. And, of course, none of the company ever said a word or gave a look that would call his attention to it. Men and women are queer beings. They will be blind and deaf whilst danger is being run; and it’s only after the scandal is beyond repair that they begin to talk - just the very time when most of all they should be silent."

"I saw all that went on, but I didn't understand it. I liked Mortimer myself and admired him - like I did Mrs Haliday, too - and I thought he was a very fine fellow. I was only a boy, you know, and Haliday's apprentice, so naturally I wasn't looking for any trouble I could help, even if I'd seen it coming. It was when I looked back afterwards at the whole thing that I began to comprehend; so you will all understand now, I hope, that what I tell you is the result of much knowledge of what I saw and heard and was told of afterwards - all morticed and clamped up by thinking."

"The panto, had been on about three weeks when one Saturday, between the shows, I heard two of our company talking. Both of them was among the extra girls that both sang and danced and had to make theirselves useful. I don't think either of them was better than she should be; they went out to too many champagne suppers with young men that had money to burn. That part doesn't matter in this affair - except that they was naturally enough jealous of women who was married - which was what they was aiming at - and what lived straighter than they did. Women of that kind like to see a good woman tumble down; it seems to make them all more even. Now real bad girls what have gone under altogether will try to save a decent one from following their road. That is, so long as they're young; for a bad one what is long in the tooth is the limit. They'll help anyone down hill - so long as they get anything out of it."

"Well - no offence, you Ladies, as has growed up! - these two girls was enjoyin' themselves over Mrs Haliday and the mash she had set up on Mortimer. They didn't see that I was sitting on a stage box behind a built-out piece of the Prologue of the panto., which was set ready for night. They were both in love with Mortimer, who wouldn’t look at either of them, so they was miaw’n cruel, like cats on the tiles. Says one:”

“‘The Old Man seems worse than blind; he won’t see.’”

“‘Don’t you be too sure of that,’ says the other. ‘He don’t mean to take no chances. I think you must be blind, too, Kissie.’ That was her name - on the bills anyhow, Kissie Mountpelier. ‘Don’t he make a point of taking her home hisself every night after the play. You should know, for you’re in the hall yourself waiting for your young man till he comes from his club.’”

“‘Wot-ho, you bally geeser,’ says the other - which her language was mostly coarse - ‘don’t you know there’s two ends to everything? The Old Man looks to one end only!’ Then they began to snigger and whisper; and presently the other one says:”

“‘Then he thinks harm can be only done when work is over!’”

“‘Jest so,’ she answers. ‘Her and him knows that the old man has to be down long before the risin’ of the rag; but she doesn’t come in till the Vision of Venus dance after half time; and he not till the harlequinade!’”

“Then I quit. I didn’t want to hear any more of that sort.”

“All that week things went on as usual. Poor old Haliday wasn’t well. He looked worried and had a devil of a temper. I had reason to know that, for what worried him was his work. He was always a hard worker, and the panto. season was a terror with him. He didn’t ever seem to mind anything else outside his work. I thought at the time that that was how those two chattering girls made up their slanderous story; for, after all, a slander, no matter how false it may be, must have some sort of beginning. Something that seems, if there isn’t something that is! But no matter how busy he might be, old Jack always made time to leave the wife at home."

"As the week went on he got more and more pale; and I began to think he was in for some sickness. He generally remained in the theatre between the shows on Saturday; that is, he didn't go home, but took a high tea in the coffee shop close to the theatre, so as to be handy in case there might be a hitch anywhere in the preparation for night. On that Saturday he went out as usual when the first scene was set, and the men were getting ready the packs for the rest of the scenes. By and bye there was some trouble - the usual Saturday kind - and I went off to tell him. When I went into the coffee shop I couldn't see him. I thought it best not to ask or to seem to take any notice, so I came back to the theatre, and heard that the trouble had settled itself as usual, by the men who had been quarrelling going off to have another drink. I hustled up those who remained, and we got things smoothed out in time for them all to have their tea. Then I had my own. I was just then beginning to feel the responsibility of my business, so I wasn't long over my food, but came back to look things over and see that all was right, especially the trap, for that was a thing Jack Haliday was most particular about. He would overlook a fault for anything else; but if it was along of a trap, the man had to go. He always told the men that that wasn't ordinary work; it was life or death."

"I had just got through my inspection when I saw old Jack coming in from the hall. There was no one about at that hour, and the stage was dark. But dark as it was I could see that the old man was ghastly pale. I didn't speak, for I wasn't near enough, and as he was moving very silently behind the scenes I thought that perhaps he wouldn't like anyone to notice that he had been away. I thought the best thing I could do would be to clear out of the way, so I went back and had another cup of tea."

"I came away a little before the men, who had nothing to think of except to be in their places when Haliday's whistle sounded. I went to report myself to my master, who was in his own little glass-partitioned den at the back of the carpenter's shop. He was there bent over his own bench, and was filing away at something so intently that he did not seem to hear me; so I cleared out. I tell you, Ladies and Gents., that from an apprentice point of view it is not wise to be too obtrusive when your master is attending to some private matter of his own!"

"When the 'get-ready' time came and the lights went up, there was Haliday as usual at his post. He looked very white and ill - so ill that the stage manager, when he came in, said to him that if he liked to go home and rest he would see that all his work would be attended to. He thanked him, and said that he thought he would be able to stay. 'I do feel a little weak and ill, sir,' he said. 'I felt just now for a few moments as if I was going to faint. But that's gone by already, and I'm sure I shall be able to get through the work before us all right.'"

"Then the doors was opened, and the Saturday night audience came rushing and tumbling in. The Victoria was a great Saturday night house. No matter what other nights might be, that was sure to be good. They used to say in the perfesh that the Victoria lived on it, and that the management was on holiday for the rest of the week. The actors knew it, and no matter how slack they might be from Monday to Friday they was all taut and trim then. There was no walking through and no fluffing on Saturday nights - or else they'd have had the bird."

"Mortimer was one of the most particular of the lot in this way.

He never was slack at any time - indeed, slackness is not a harlequin’s fault, for if there’s slackness there’s no harlequin, that’s all. But Mortimer always put on an extra bit on the Saturday night. When he jumped up through the star trap he always went then a couple of feet higher. To do this we had always to put on a lot more weight. This he always saw to himself; for, mind you, it’s no joke being driven up through the trap as if you was shot out of a gun. The points of the star had to be kept free, and the hinges at their bases must be well oiled, or else there can be a disaster at any time. Moreover, ’tis the duty of someone appointed for the purpose to see that all is clear upon the stage. I remember hearing that once at New York, many years ago now, a harlequin was killed by a ‘grip’ - as the Yankees call a carpenter - what outsiders here call a scene-shifter - walking over the trap just as the stroke had been given to let go the counter-weights. It wasn’t much satisfaction to the widow to know that the ‘grip’ was killed too.”

“That night Mrs Haliday looked prettier than ever, and kicked even higher than I had ever seen her do. Then, when she got dressed for home, she came as usual and stood in the wings for the beginning of the harlequinade. Old Jack came across the stage and stood beside her; I saw him from the back follow up the sliding ground-row that closed in on the Realms of Delight. I couldn’t help noticing that he still looked ghastly pale. He kept turning his eyes on the star trap. Seeing this, I naturally looked at it too, for I feared lest something might have gone wrong. I had seen that it was in good order, and that the joints were properly oiled when the stage was set for the evening show, and as it wasn’t used all night for anything else I was reassured. Indeed, I thought I could see it shine a bit as the limelight caught the brass hinges. There was a spot light just above it on the bridge, which was intended to make a good show of harlequin and his big jump. The people used to howl with delight as he came rushing up through the trap and when in the air drew up his legs and spread them wide for an instant and then straightened them again as he came down - only bending his knees just as he touched the stage."

"When the signal was given the counter-weight worked properly. I knew, for the sound of it at that part was all right."

"But something was wrong. The trap didn't work smooth, and open at once as the harlequin's head touched it. There was a shock and a tearing sound, and the pieces of the star seemed torn about, and some of them were thrown about the stage. And in the middle of them came the coloured and spangled figure that we knew."

"But somehow it didn't come up in the usual way. It was erect enough, but there was not the usual elasticity. The legs never moved; and when it went up a fair height - though nothing like usual - it seemed to topple over and fall on the stage on its side. The audience shrieked, and the people in the wings - actors and staff all the same - closed in, some of them in their stage clothes, others dressed for going home. But the man in the spangles lay quite still."

"The loudest shriek of all was from Mrs Haliday; and she was the first to reach the spot where he - it - lay. Old Jack was close behind her, and caught her as she fell. I had just time to see that, for I made it my business to look after the pieces of the trap; there was plenty of people to look after the corpse. And the pit was by now crossing the orchestra and climbing up on the stage."

"I managed to get the bits together before the rush came. I noticed that there were deep scratches on some of them, but I didn't have time for more than a glance. I put a stage box over the hole lest anyone should put a foot through it. Such would mean a broken leg at least; and if one fell through, it might mean worse. Amongst other things I found a queer-looking piece of flat steel with some bent points on it. I knew it didn't belong to the trap; but it came from somewhere, so I put it in my pocket."

"By this time there was a crowd where Mortimer's body lay. That he was stone dead nobody could doubt. The very attitude was enough. He was all straggled about in queer positions; one of the legs was doubled under him with the toes sticking out in the wrong way. But let that suffice! It doesn't do to go into details of a dead body...I wish someone would give me a drop of punch."

"There was another crowd round Mrs Haliday, who was lying a little on one side nearer the wings where her husband had carried her and laid her down. She, too, looked like a corpse; for she was as white as one and as still, and looked as cold. Old Jack was kneeling beside her, chafing her hands. He was evidently frightened about her, for he, too, was deathly white. However, he kept his head, and called his men round him. He left his wife in care of Mrs Homcroft, the Wardrobe Mistress, who had by this time hurried down. She was a capable woman, and knew how to act promptly. She got one of the men to lift Mrs Haliday and carry her up to the wardrobe. I heard afterwards that when she got her there she turned out all the rest of them that followed up - the women as well as the men - and looked after her herself."

"I put the pieces of the broken trap on the top of the stage box, and told one of our chaps to mind them, and see that no one touched them, as they might be wanted. By this time the police who had been on duty in front had come round, and as they had at once telephoned to headquarters, more police kept coming in all the time. One of them took charge of the place where the broken trap was; and when he heard who put the box and the broken pieces there, sent for me. More of them took the body away to the property room, which was a large room with benches in it, and which could be locked up. Two of them stood at the door, and wouldn't let anyone go in without permission."

"The man who was in charge of the trap asked me if I had seen the accident. When I said I had, he asked me to describe it. I don't think he had much opinion of my powers of description, for he soon dropped that part of his questioning. Then he asked me to point out where I found the bits of the broken trap. I simply said:"

"'Lord bless you, sir, I couldn't tell. They was scattered all over the place. I had to pick them up between people's feet as they were rushing in from all sides.'"

"'All right, my boy,' he said, in quite a kindly way, for a policeman, 'I don't think they'll want to worry you. There are lots of men and women, I am told, who were standing by and saw the whole thing. They will be all subpoenaed.' I was a small-made lad in those days - I ain't a giant now! - and I suppose he thought it was no use having children for witnesses when they had plenty of grown-ups. Then he said something about me and an idiot asylum that was not kind - no, nor wise either, for I dried up and did not say another word."

"Gradually the public was got rid of. Some strolled off by degrees, going off to have a glass before the pubs closed, and talk it all over. The rest us and the police ballooned out. Then, when the police had taken charge of everything and put in men to stay all night, the coroner's officer came and took off the body to the city mortuary, where the police doctor made a post mortem. I was allowed to go home. I did so - and gladly - when I had seen the place settling down.

Mr Haliday took his wife home in a four-wheeler. It was perhaps just as well, for Mrs Homcroft and some other kindly souls had poured so much whisky and brandy and rum and gin and beer and peppermint into her that I don't believe she could have walked if she had tried."

"When I was undressing myself something scratched my leg as I was taking off my trousers. I found it was the piece of flat steel which I had picked up on the stage. It was in the shape of a star fish, but the spikes of it were short. Some of the points were turned down, the rest were pulled out straight again. I stood with it in my hand wondering where it had come from and what it was for, but I couldn't remember anything in the whole theatre that it could have belonged to. I looked at it closely again, and saw that the edges were all filed and quite bright. But that did not help me, so I put it on the table and thought I would take it with me in the morning; perhaps one of the chaps might know. I turned out the gas and went to bed - and to sleep."

"I must have begun to dream at once, and it was, naturally enough, all about the terrible thing that had occurred. But, like all dreams, it was a bit mixed. They were all mixed. Mortimer with his spangles flying up the trap, it breaking, and the pieces scattering round. Old Jack Haliday looking on at one side of the stage with his wife beside him - he as pale as death, and she looking prettier than ever. And then Mortimer coming down all crooked and falling on the stage, Mrs Haliday shrieking, and her and Jack running forward, and me picking up the pieces of the broken trap from between people's legs, and finding the steel star with the bent points."

"I woke in a cold sweat, saying to myself as I sat up in bed in the dark:"

"'That's it!'"

"And then my head began to reel about so that I lay down again and began to think it all over. And it all seemed clear enough then. It was Mr Haliday who made that star and put it over the star trap where the points joined! That was what Jack Haliday was filing at when I saw him at his bench; and he had done it because Mortimer and his wife had been making love to each other. Those girls were right, after all. Of course, the steel points had prevented the trap opening, and when Mortimer was driven up against it his neck was broken."

"But then came the horrible thought that if Jack did it, it was murder, and he would be hung. And, after all, it was his wife that the harlequin had made love to - and old Jack loved her very much indeed himself and had been good to her - and she was his wife. And that bit of steel would hang him if it should be known. But no one but me - and whoever made it, and put it on the trap - even knew of its existence - and Mr Haliday was my master - and the man was dead - and he was a villain!"

"I was living then at Quarry Place; and in the old quarry was a pond so deep that the boys used to say that far down the water was boiling hot, it was so near Hell."

"I softly opened the window, and, there in the dark, threw the bit of steel as far as I could into the quarry."

"No one ever knew, for I have never spoken a word of it till this very minute. I was not called at the inquest. Everyone was in a hurry; the coroner and the jury and the police. Our governor was in a hurry too, because we wanted to go on as usual at night; and too much talk of the tragedy would hurt business. So nothing was known; and all went on as usual. Except that after that Mrs Haliday didn't stand in the wings during the harlequinade, and she was as loving to her old husband as a woman can be. It was him she used to watch now; and always with a sort of respectful adoration. She knew, though no one else did, except her husband - and me.”

When he finished there was a big spell of silence. The company had all been listening intently, so that there was no change except the cessation of Hempitch’s voice. The eyes of all were now fixed on Mr Wellesley Dovercourt. It was the role of the Tragedian to deal with such an occasion. He was quite alive to the privileges of his status, and spoke at once:

“H’m! Very excellent indeed! You will have to join the ranks of our profession, Mr Master Machinist - the lower ranks, of course. A very thrilling narrative yours, and distinctly true. There may be some errors of detail, such as that Mrs Haliday never flirted again. I . . . I knew John Haliday under, of course, his real name. But I shall preserve the secret you so judiciously suppressed. A very worthy person. He was stage carpenter at the Duke’s Theatre, Bolton, where I first dared histrionic triumphs in the year - ah H’m! I saw quite a good deal of Mrs Haliday at that time. And you are wrong about her. Quite wrong! She was a most attractive little woman - very!”

The Wardrobe Mistress here whispered to the Second Old Woman:

“Well, ma’am, they all seem agoin’ of it tonight. I think they must have ketched the infection from Mr Bloze. There isn’t a bally word of truth in all Hempitch has said. I was there when the accident occurred - for it was an accident when Jim Bungnose, the clown, was killed. For he was a clown, not a ‘arlequin; an’ there wasn’t no lovemakin’ with Mrs ‘Aliday. God ‘elp the woman as would try to make love to Jim; which she was the Strong Woman in a Circus, and could put up her dooks like a man. Moreover, there wasn’t no Mrs ‘Aliday. The carpenter at Grimsby, where it is he means, was Tom

Elrington, as he was my first ‘usband. And as to Mr Dovercourt rememberin’! He’s a cure, he is; an’ the Limit!”

The effect of the Master Machinist’s story was so depressing that the M.C. tried to hurry things on; any change of sentiment would, he thought, be and advantage. So he bustled along:

“Now, Mr Turner Smith, you are the next on the roster. It is a pity we have not an easel and a canvas and paint box here, or even some cartridge pager and charcoal, so that you might give us a touch of your art - what I may call a plastic diversion of the current of narrative genius which has been enlivening the snowy waste around us.” The artistic audience applauded this flight of metaphor - all except the young man from Oxford, who contented himself by saying loudly, “Pip-pip!” He had heard something like it before at the Union. The Scene Painter saw coming danger, for the Tragedian had put down his pipe and was clearing his throat; so he at once began:

'I'm afraid I cannot give any narrative of a humorous or touching nature. My life has been, as is necessary for the art I follow, an unexciting one. Perhaps it has been just as well; for art requires a measure of calmness if not of isolation for its higher manifestations. Perfection was never achieved amid the silent tumult of conflicting thoughts.'

'Pip-pip' came again from the young man from Oxford. The Tragedian started to his feet - in his momentary passion he forgot to be slow.

'I protest against this unseemly interruption. This intrusion into the privacy of our artistic life of hooligans without soul: this importation to the inner heart of refinement, of the coarser vulgarisms of the world of decadent ineptitude. And when, in addition, the perpetrators of this ignoble infamy seem to be ignorant of the very elemental basis of the respect due to recognised personal supremacy in a glorious art and an honoured calling. Bah! Never mind, Turner Smith. I suppose all the fine arts are to be assailed in turns. Your time will come, however. You can, later, turn this painful episode to professional advantage. I understand that you are doing the scenery of the panto at Poole; why not take for the subject of your opening scene, the gloomy one, The Home of the Hooligan. The audience will show at once their detestation of that offensive class. Doubtless the Costumier will rise to the occasion, and show a peculiarly offensive fiend with a marvel of ill manners. The Musical Conductor, too, can enhance the satirical effect by introducing into his score as a motif the Pip-pip whereby the Hooligan proclaims himself.' Then the Tragedian retired into himself with a victorious air. In the constrained silence that followed the Wardrobe Mistress was heard to whisper to the Sewing Woman:

‘Mister Wellesley Dovercourt giv it him in the neck that time. It’ll be a lesson to Cattle what he won’t forget.’ Cattle was the nickname of the young man from Oxford, given to him soon after his joining the company. The occasion had been his writing his name in a landlady’s ‘book’ and putting after it, Oxon. This was looked on by his comrades not as cheek but as bad spelling. The Scene Painter saw his chance to continue, and so resumed his narrative:

‘I was Scenic Artist at one time to old Schoolbred, the impresario. It was a special engagement, and just suited me, for at that time I had undertaken a lot of work of various kinds, and was looking about for a painting room. Schoolbred had then a long lease of the Queen’s Opera House, which had, as some of you may remember, a magnificent atelier. Old Schoolbred paid me a good salary - that is, he promised it, for he never paid any one if he could help it. I daresay he suspected that I mistrusted him, for he also put it in the agreement that I was to have full use of the painting-room for my own purposes from the time of my signing until I should start at his work. It was then that my solicitor did a wise thing. He, too, knew from old experience that there was sure to be some trouble with Schoolbred, and insisted that I should have a lease of the painting rooms. “Otherwise,” he said, “your own property is not safe. If he goes bankrupt the creditors will seize all of yours that is on the premises.” When I objected he said:

‘“Surely it is all the same to you. You will give him each week a quittance for salary, and he will give you one for rent. It is as broad as it is long; and you wouldn’t touch money anyhow.” As he found all materials and paid wages I was on velvet, for I should have no expenses. All I risked was my time; and against that I had the use of the finest frames in London. Schoolbred's work was only touching up the old scenes belonging to the Opera House and painting the new opera by Magnoli, Il Campador. My assistant, whom he paid, could do most of the re-painting, and as I knew that his work did not come on till September I had nearly six months rent free, and my time my own.

'When I had moved in my traps I got to work at once. It took me half a day going over the scenery book with Grimshaw, who was then the Stage Carpenter, and off and on a couple of days more examining the scenes before we could get to work. The scenery was old-fashioned - nearly all flats; hardly a cloth, let alone a cut-cloth, in the lot. Heavy old framed stuff that wouldn't fold; and as much messy old timber about it as would furnish a ship-yard. Old Schoolbred had ordered the scenes to be made workable, so that when the time should come of bringing the operas on the road they should be all ready. There would, I saw, be a fine old job for Grimshaw to cut and hinge that mass of scenes so that they would double up for transport. However, Grimshaw was a good man, and work was no terror to him. He got his coat off, and once he was started with his own men I couldn't overtake him. Schoolbred was in a hurry to have the work done - in such a hurry that he didn't even grumble when I had to get a second assistant and two more labourers. Mind you, that meant a lot to him, for weekly wages means ready money; and out-of-pocket expenses have to be paid every Saturday. There were seventeen operas, so that it was no slouch of a job to get them all into moving trim. But there is, I must say, this about a carpenter's job that when the "production" is simplified it means saving labour afterwards. But the more scenes there are - not built scenes, but flats and cloths, wings and borders - to keep in order for nightly use and travel, and the taking to and from the storage, the more the poor scenic artist gets it in the neck.

'However, when we had once got started and I had explained to my assistants what I wanted and roughed out sketches to guide them I was able to get a bit of my own work in hand. I had a whole batch of such at the time. As you know, it was just when I was starting on my own, and every scene that was done was just so much in my pocket. I tell you I worked hard to get a bit ahead and give myself room, so that I wouldn't have to be always pulling the devil by the tail. We all worked day and night; as old Schoolbred didn't grumble at overtime the men were content to do twenty-four hours in the day. Our work has long waits; and as the labourers have to be on hand whenever they are wanted they did themselves well in the way of sleep. At first they had old sacks and such like to lie on; but presently they got luxurious, and nothing would do them but ticking and fresh hay and army blankets to cover them. I didn't mind. Indeed, I never even let on that I noticed.

After all, the men had to rest some time, and when they slept in the theatre it saved them their lodging. As you know, we scenic artists sometimes have our food cooked for us in the paint room in busy times, so that these men lived pretty well free. Naturally, I charged all expenses, as old Schoolbred was in such a hurry that ordinary rules didn't count. He was glad to get the work done so quickly at any cost.

'I had on the frames then a set of scenes for Manfred, which Wilbur Winston had commissioned. I had knocked off the other work quickly in order to be free for this. For this was a production that would make me. The scene of the Thunderstorm in the Alps would put me at the very top. That I held back, for I was anxious to make a great thing of it. It was my first job for Winston, and I wanted him to be pleased. Moreover, he had a great following, and a fine scene at the British was talked about everywhere. There was a lot of built stuff in it and paperwork, so that by the time it was done it bulked up pretty big. It was still in hand when the opera season began. Winston wasn't ready for it, so he asked me to keep it till he should rehearse. Of course, I had to meet his wishes, but happily there was loads of room at the Queen's, even after we had arranged the operas separately so that we could deal with them as they came along. So there wasn't any trouble about that.

'At first the season seemed to promise well enough; but after a night or two business fell off, and Schoolbred was at his wits' end. He was already over head and ears in debt, and this time he was only given credit in the hope that those he owed to would get a bit back. They certainly treated him very well, I will say that. They gave him every possible chance; but when the creditors saw that so far from things getting better they were going from bad to worse, a meeting was held.

'At the meeting steps were taken, and very soon after Schoolbred was in process of being made a bankrupt. A Receiver was appointed by the Court, and took formal possession. Everyone in the theatre was upset about it - except me. I had my lease, and felt like a cock on his own dunghill.

'I found out, however, after a bit that it wasn't all sunshine even with a lease. As an employe I could get salary, if there was any to get; but the liquidator cut down expenses, and, along with the rest, I was discharged. But as a lessor I was held to my lease and had to pay my rent. Long before this, as I said, old Schoolbred's work was finished, and I was working at my own contracts. I could not grumble much as my rent was small, and though I had had practically no salary in the past I had had the use of the atelier. So I paid up regularly, and was glad to be able to work. There was a little nuisance in one way; as the whole Opera house was in charge of the Receiver, and as my lease was only of a little bit of it I had to get a special permit to take out any of my scenes as they were done. I didn't want to make unnecessary trouble for myself, so I never made a bother, but asked formally whenever I wanted a permit. The Receiver was a good enough fellow, and was very civil to me. We became quite friends. Schoolbred kept on working the show with the sanction of the liquidator. He had good assets, remember, and his engagements of star singers were fine.

'One day I came across him in a violent rage. When I asked him what had upset him he could hardly speak at first. At last when he got calmer he said:

'"It's enough to drive a man mad. Here I've been spending money like water to increase the taste for opera; and now, when I've a company that's simply gorgeous and things ought to hum along this Royal death happens and knocks me right out. And the worst of it is it is all old debts except the landlord, and he's the worst of the bunch. Here have I been and restored this old rat's nest of his that had been so long empty that there's not a foot of timber in it that hasn't got the dry-rot. And now he goes and helps to make me a bankrupt - just as if that'll do him any good!"

'"But," I said, "surely that hasn't made you so violently angry this morning?"

'"Indirectly it has!"

'"How is that?" I asked.

‘I have just got an offer from America - a magnificent offer - one that would make any manager get up and dance for joy. A fortune, sir, a fortune - a gigantic fortune. Every big town in the United States and Canada and Mexico and South America, where they’re all crazy for opera, to follow.”

‘“But surely,” I said, “that is a thing to be glad about, not angry. Why on earth should you stamp about with rage just because unexpectedly fortune has been put within your grasp?”

‘“That is just the flaming aggravation of it all.”

‘“I’m afraid I don’t understand,” I said.

‘“Oh, you don’t understand, don’t you?” he said, with a bitterness of sarcasm in his tones which showed that the wildness of his rage had passed. “Then I had better explain to you. What is the use of putting fortune in my grasp - and then not letting me grasp it?”

‘“It may be very silly of me, Mr Schoolbred,” I said, “but still I don’t understand.”

‘“How can I take the golden opportunity when I can’t get away from here? Haven’t we got bailiffs in the place! Isn’t there an Official Receiver! How am I to get to America when these won’t let a thing leave the Opera House? You can’t play Grand Opera without scenery and properties and costumes, stupid! Here we are with sixteen operas - the best and most popular of them, all ready for the road - and yet we can’t get even started. They are all rehearsed and perfect in every detail. I have every one of the artists on two years’ engagements at English salary, but to play where and when I please. If I could get to America any time within the next two months there is nothing that could stand between me and success. There’s no opposition whatever, and they couldn’t get up one in the time. Moreover, I have all the popular artists - every one of them. Aye, and they would have to help me for a month at the beginning on half salaries or no salaries at all, and pay their own personals in addition. For they're in a cleft stick. They are engaged to me, so they can't play with anyone else; and if I don't play them they can't play at all. And yet here I am - here are we all - hung up for want of the sticks and rags. It's cruel! It's wicked! It's vile! If I could only get away out of this."

'Whilst he was talking a thought had come to me that made me very uneasy. How would all this affect me? Since I had been allowed to take out some of my own work that was urgent, things had got worse. Then disaster had been only threatening; now it had come. How would it be if they were to seize my things as well as old Schoolbred's! Then it flashed across me how wise had been the provision of the lease, for now they couldn't take my goods. Old Schoolbred had been watching my face narrowly; now he said,suddenly:

'"But I can't get away. None of us can get away. They have formal possession of everything in the house - and they'll bally welltake care to hold very tight so that they can seize everything when the time comes."

'"They can't seize my things!" I said. He rubbed his hands in delight.

'"That is so; you have a lease. I am glad of that." He thought awhile, and his face fell. For a moment there was a gleam, but it faded as quickly as it had come, and there was on him a look of hopeless sadness. It was in his voice, too, when he spoke next:

'"That Receiver is a leery fellow - a sly, cold-blooded, heartless villain! There won't be much consideration for either you or me in the long run. I say, Turner Smith, a word of caution in your ear: Don't you trust him, and if you can help it don't ask any favours from him. Later on it may be all right; but at present he has to think of himself."

'"How do you mean?" said I.

'"He has to hold down his own job. He may be willing enough to help you; but his first duty is to the Court that employs him."

'Two or three days afterwards he came up to my room and said he had a commission to give me, and explained that he was going to make a new departure in opera.

'I am going to show them a realistic up-to-date opera; in fact, an old-fashioned Adelphi drama - except that it will be all sung. It is to be called For the Love of an Actress. The scenes will be all theatre interiors except the third act, which is to be the wicked Billionaire's palace in Park Lane. The Soprano is, of course, the heroine, and is the daughter of the Scenic Artist. She loves with mutual affection the Tenor, who is the unacknowledged son of the Billionaire by a secret marriage. The Billionaire (Bass, of course), who is a widower, wants to marry her, but she refuses. Then he gets mad and carries her off. The Tenor breaks into the Park Lane palace, and there is a great trio, which is ended by the King and all his nobles, who are coming to dine, arriving unexpectedly early. Of course, they are all in their robes as they are dining with a Billionaire. The King happens to have in his pocket the marriage certificate of the Billionaire's first wife, and also of the birth of her son. So then and there he holds a meeting of the House of Lords, and they find the Billionaire guilty. The Headsman is called in, and he is going to be executed when the Soprano in a passionate prayer appeals to the King to save him. 'Spare, oh spare, Most Gracious Ruler, the grandsire of my unborn child!' So the Billionaire makes over his money to his son, whom the King creates a Duke, and all ends happily. How does that strike you, my boy? Eh?"

"'Well, as you ask me," I said, "I think it the balliest rot I ever heard in my life!" He slapped me on the shoulder with quite a merry air, as he explained:

"'Right, my boy, right as rain. Rot is no name for it! That's why I'm so hopeful about it. We'll play it with grim seriousness, and there won't be a scene that isn't prickly with the most outrageous breaches of convenance. All London will rush to see it and laugh their very souls out. The music is fine, full of melody - just the thing for empty-headed smart society that wants to be amused. We're going to be on the pig's back, I can tell you, my boy." He then proceeded to make me a very handsome offer for painting the scenes. He said he had worked it out on a generous basis, because he wouldn't be able to pay me till the opera was out. That was reasonable enough, so I agreed. Then he told me that for the first act we couldn't do better than reproduce the painting room exactly as it stood. "It looks business, you know. All the appliances for scene painting ready with the painter at work - a fine bit of realism. That will fetch the public in itself. The Tenor will make up like you - Willie Larkom will arrange all that. And as it will be good to show the public what an expensive thing an opera is, you, or rather he, will have twelve assistants who will all be made up like the best known members of the Royal Academy. Of course, they are chorus, and will sing a song with a queer catch in the refrain - a discord like the creaking of a windlass." At the door he turned and said:

"'By the way - two things: not a word of this to a soul. The surprise will be half the battle, and I want to get it out quick, so you must get the first act done as soon as ever you can. As this is to be a reproduction of your own atelier, and the painting is in your own hands, there is no need for a model. You can start at once. In order to save time, I have had the flats primed and ready - full stage, my boy, and new canvas framed in folding panels for travelling - and not a wrinkle in the lot. And please note, I want that scene - it is where the lovers meet - to be brilliant moonlight. You must have a practical moon - a big one - shining in through the glass roof. I want to show a new moonlight effect."

'I slipped into my work, and three days afterwards I was almost ready. I kept my doors locked, and not a soul was in the secret except old Schoolbred and myself, and, of course, my own people; but I could trust them.

'It was too bad that I had a delay; but I suppose it could not be helped. It turned out that Wilbur Winston had fixed the date for Manfred, and wanted to get in the Thunderstorm Scene at once, so that he could start the lighting rehearsals. He had decided four days before, but had not announced it, except to a few friends, till he was ready to take rehearsals in hand. I arranged with him that the stuff should be brought into the British on the following Saturday night after the play was over. I got the police permit, which was necessary, for there was a devil of a lot of stuff and huge stuff too. Some of the built pieces were over forty feet long. There was one panorama cloth, which was to go round nearly the whole of the three sides of the stage. This would have to travel on two timber carts roped together head and tail. I was to come early on Sunday and see to its being put together on the British stage, and Winston would begin the lighting with a full staff that night. Rehearsals were to follow from Monday.

'Old Schoolbred was most helpful in arranging things. He certainly could hustle when he put his back into it! He undertook to arrange and look after the carting. I told him how many carts I should require, and the kind. He had a carting contract with the London Haulage Company based on men and horses and hours, so I knew he couldn't best me about the price. It was necessary to keep an eye on the old man, for he was the shiftiest old rascal I ever came across. I told my assistant to look after him, and he undertook to see the stuff safely out. I had, of course, arranged with the Receiver that the scenery should be allowed to come out. He was very nice about it, and I had his written permit in due form. He had not been a bit like what old Schoolbred said of him. I know now even better how false the old trickster was.

'Schoolbred had asked me to set the new scene on the stage - well up, so that it should not be in the way of rehearsals on Saturday after the day-men had gone home. We did not play on that night, so it was easy to arrange. I got my own men and a few that the Governor sent in; the regular day-men of the Opera House were away for the afternoon. The Governor had fixed the day for the "outing" of the theatre staff and employees, and they were having a big dinner up in Islington. The old man provided dinner for them "very handsomely," as they said. It was conventional lighting - plain gas, and all overhead, just as we used in the painting room. Old Schoolbred came and saw it set himself. We didn't want any fuss, so there was no one there except those actually at work. He was very complimentary about my work. He said he couldn't have believed that anyone could have made the dull old painting room so luxurious. "If I had thought you could have done that with it I'm blessed if I would have rented it to you at the money!" he said, in a burst of candour unusual to him.

'"But you asked me to specially," I answered. "Don't you remember you said that you wanted it to look like a miracle of artistic luxury. I took some pains, I can tell you, to paint in all that fine old furniture. Dagmar let me take some drawings in his place; he said he'd be blessed if he'd let his things come here -"

'"Oh, I ain't complaining," he answered. "In fact, I intended to furnish the place up a bit myself, so as I thought I would have some practical safes and things I went to his place and got them - paid him for them too; he wouldn't let them come without. When he told me in confidence which pieces you had taken as models, I purchased them. They are in my own room at the present moment. I'll send them down here to-morrow, so as to be ready for rehearsals."

'There was only one disagreeable incident that day, and strangely enough it came from an unexpected quarter. The men in possession got shirty because they had not been asked to the beano. It was an outrageous position for them to take, when their only duty was to be on and not off the premises. But men in their position can give a lot of trouble by simply doing nothing; and everyone who has had the misfortune of having them in the house knows that it is well to keep them in good humour. I was a bit anxious myself, for, after all, they were the servants of the Court, and they might ruin me by wilfully making some mistake about my permit, and I couldn't get it put right till Monday. If Winston didn't get his Thunderstorm Scene on the Saturday night he might get shirty in his turn and repudiate the whole transaction - then where should I be?'

'In the soup, my boy; in the soup!' said the Low Comedian.

'H-s-s-h!' said the Company in chorus; they wanted to hear what happened.

'However, Schoolbred soothed them with the promise of a dinner for themselves. On the Saturday night I saw the men in possession just sitting down to dinner. The old man had certainly done them well. He had a dinner sent in for them from the Old Red Post

Restaurant - soup and fish, and an entree, and joints and sweets and savoury and cheese and dessert and coffee. Moreover, there was champagne up to the masthead, and liqueurs, and brandy and whisky and cigars after. It was all laid out at once, and they looked as if they were enjoying the very sight. Said I to myself: "There won't be any trouble with these fellows about my permit. This banquet of Heliogabalus will make them blind. Moreover, they will be blind in another form before very long. It'll take them till to-morrow afternoon to sleep this off!"

'My assistant, Rooke, was there to see our work off, so I went home to have a good sleep. I knew there would be no time for sleep or rest when Winston began to rehearse his great scene.

'On Sunday, just as I had got my scene set up in the British ready for Winston to see it Rooke came in looking very excited, and took me on one side:

'"Oh, that infernal scoundrel!" he began. He was so excited that I found it difficult to get him to begin. However, he started at last:

'"That old scoundrel Schoolbred! What do you think that he did! It turns out that he made a contract for America - the one he told you was offered him - undertaking to stage sixteen full operas. He had them all ready, as you know; but his trouble was to get them off, for they were in the hands of the Court, with men in possession to watch them. Well, he evidently fixed last night to get off. He had a big Atlantic steamer, the Rockefeller, ready in the docks, and put the whole company, staff and chorus and all, aboard last evening. Then at midnight he had a train of carts ready - there must have been a hundred of them - and on the head of getting out our one scene he carted off the whole lot out of the Opera House. They didn't begin that work, of course, till after our job, for I was there and might have been dangerous. Of course, I left when our own stuff went. In fact, I came on the last cart, and saw it all brought into the British. That yarn about the new opera was all bunkum. The new scene, too, was only a blind to keep our lot quiet and disarm suspicion. The moon was his joke. He had the sofas put in as he said he would, and had the bailiffs carried in and laid on them. They may be there yet for all I know. It would take a whole day to make them conscious. But the job seemed to the police and others continuous - they had the order of the Receiver and the police permit, and there was nothing seemingly out of order. When once the carts got off it was no one's business to enquire where they were going to. So that is how the old rascal shot the moon. He is off on blue water by this time with his whole outfit, and will come back with a fortune. The landlord won't grumble, because Schoolbred must pay his rent, or else they will attach him for stealing their scenery. Nor will the Receiver either, for he is in for a fat job for at least a year to come, nothing to do, and sure of being paid. Even the men in possession whom he diddled will have to be kept here, and they will have an easy time. I daresay they will expect to have every day a blow-out such as they had last night. But they won't get it. They don't know Schoolbred. He is all very generous when he wants anything, but he don't give something for nothing."

'But he did - for once. Before he came back from America he sent me the receipt from the Receiver of my rent for the whole time. He had paid it himself.'

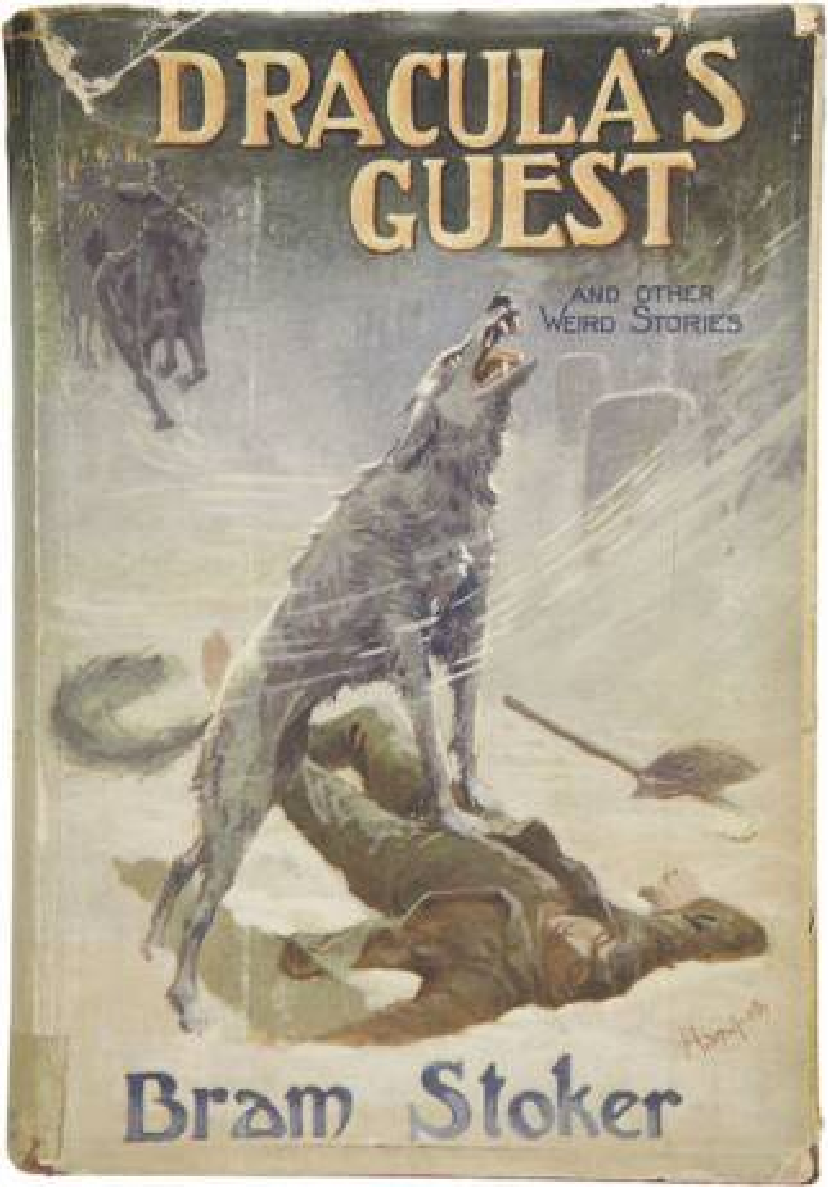
Just then there was a distant noise which came drifting down on the wind. All started to their feet. There was the shrill sound of a whistle. Presently there was a loud knock at the side door of the saloon, and the door was dragged open, to the accompaniment of drifting snow and piercingly cold wind. Two railway men came in, shutting with difficulty the door behind them. One of them shouted out:

‘It’s a’ richt! A snow-ploo wi’ twa engines has been sent on frae Dundee. A rotary that has bored a road through the drifts. We’re firin’ up fast, and ye’ll a’ sleep in yer beds the nicht - somewhere. An’ A’m thinkin’ we could dae wi’ some o’ yer Johnny Walker - hot.’

Dracula's Guest and Other Weird Stories

This collection of short stories was first published in 1914, two years after Stoker's death. Now, it is widely believed that *Dracula's Guest* is actually the deleted first chapter from the original *Dracula* manuscript, which the publisher deemed superfluous to the story, although some scholars disagree with this belief. In the preface of the collection, Stoker's wife Florence explains, "To his original list of stories in this book, I have added an hitherto unpublished episode from Dracula. It was originally excised owing to the length of the book, and may prove of interest to the many readers of what is considered my husband's most remarkable work."

Dracula's Guest follows an Englishman (presumed to be Jonathan Harker, although this is never stated) on a visit to Munich before leaving for Transylvania. It is Walpurgis Night, and in spite of an hotelier's warning to return before dark, the young man later leaves his carriage and wanders in the direction of an abandoned village.


DRACULA'S GUEST
AND OTHER WEIRD STORIES
Bram Stoker

The first edition

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PREFACE

A few months before the lamented death of my husband — I might say even as the shadow of death was over him — he planned three series of short stories for publication, and the present volume is one of them. To his original list of stories in this book, I have added an hitherto unpublished episode from *Dracula*. It was originally excised owing to the length of the book, and may prove of interest to the many readers of what is considered my husband's most remarkable work. The other stories have already been published in English and American periodicals. Had my husband lived longer, he might have seen fit to revise this work, which is mainly from the earlier years of his strenuous life. But, as fate has entrusted to me the issuing of it, I consider it fitting and proper to let it go forth practically as it was left by him.

FLORENCE BRAM STOKER

DRACULA’S GUEST

When we started for our drive the sun was shining brightly on Munich, and the air was full of the joyousness of early summer. Just as we were about to depart, Herr Delbrück (the maître d’hôtel of the Quatre Saisons, where I was staying) came down, bareheaded, to the carriage and, after wishing me a pleasant drive, said to the coachman, still holding his hand on the handle of the carriage door:

‘Remember you are back by nightfall. The sky looks bright but there is a shiver in the north wind that says there may be a sudden storm. But I am sure you will not be late.’ Here he smiled, and added, ‘for you know what night it is.’

Johann answered with an emphatic, ‘Ja, mein Herr,’ and, touching his hat, drove off quickly. When we had cleared the town, I said, after signalling to him to stop:

‘Tell me, Johann, what is tonight?’

He crossed himself, as he answered laconically: ‘Walpurgis nacht.’ Then he took out his watch, a great, old-fashioned German silver thing as big as a turnip, and looked at it, with his eyebrows gathered together and a little impatient shrug of his shoulders. I realised that this was his way of respectfully protesting against the unnecessary delay, and sank back in the carriage, merely motioning him to proceed. He started off rapidly, as if to make up for lost time. Every now and then the horses seemed to throw up their heads and sniffed the air suspiciously. On such occasions I often looked round in alarm. The road was pretty bleak, for we were traversing a sort of high, wind-swept plateau. As we drove, I saw a road that looked but little used, and which seemed to dip through a little, winding valley. It looked so inviting that, even at the risk of offending him, I called

Johann to stop — and when he had pulled up, I told him I would like to drive down that road. He made all sorts of excuses, and frequently crossed himself as he spoke. This somewhat piqued my curiosity, so I asked him various questions. He answered fencingly, and repeatedly looked at his watch in protest. Finally I said:

‘Well, Johann, I want to go down this road. I shall not ask you to come unless you like; but tell me why you do not like to go, that is all I ask.’ For answer he seemed to throw himself off the box, so quickly did he reach the ground. Then he stretched out his hands appealingly to me, and implored me not to go. There was just enough of English mixed with the German for me to understand the drift of his talk. He seemed always just about to tell me something — the very idea of which evidently frightened him; but each time he pulled himself up, saying, as he crossed himself: ‘Walpurgis-Nacht!’

I tried to argue with him, but it was difficult to argue with a man when I did not know his language. The advantage certainly rested with him, for although he began to speak in English, of a very crude and broken kind, he always got excited and broke into his native tongue — and every time he did so, he looked at his watch. Then the horses became restless and sniffed the air. At this he grew very pale, and, looking around in a frightened way, he suddenly jumped forward, took them by the bridles and led them on some twenty feet. I followed, and asked why he had done this. For answer he crossed himself, pointed to the spot we had left and drew his carriage in the direction of the other road, indicating a cross, and said, first in German, then in English: ‘Buried him — him what killed themselves.’

I remembered the old custom of burying suicides at cross-roads: ‘Ah! I see, a suicide. How interesting!’ But for the life of me I could not make out why the horses were frightened.

Whilst we were talking, we heard a sort of sound between a yelp and a bark. It was far away; but the horses got very restless, and it took Johann all his time to quiet them. He was pale, and said, ‘It sounds like a wolf — but yet there are no wolves here now.’

‘No?’ I said, questioning him; ‘isn’t it long since the wolves were so near the city?’

‘Long, long,’ he answered, ‘in the spring and summer; but with the snow the wolves have been here not so long.’

Whilst he was petting the horses and trying to quiet them, dark clouds drifted rapidly across the sky. The sunshine passed away, and a breath of cold wind seemed to drift past us. It was only a breath, however, and more in the nature of a warning than a fact, for the sun came out brightly again. Johann looked under his lifted hand at the horizon and said:

‘The storm of snow, he comes before long time.’ Then he looked at his watch again, and, straightway holding his reins firmly — for the horses were still pawing the ground restlessly and shaking their heads — he climbed to his box as though the time had come for proceeding on our journey.

I felt a little obstinate and did not at once get into the carriage.

‘Tell me,’ I said, ‘about this place where the road leads,’ and I pointed down.

Again he crossed himself and mumbled a prayer, before he answered, ‘It is unholy.’

‘What is unholy?’ I enquired.

‘The village.’

‘Then there is a village?’

‘No, no. No one lives there hundreds of years.’ My curiosity was piqued, ‘But you said there was a village.’

‘There was.’

‘Where is it now?’

Whereupon he burst out into a long story in German and English, so mixed up that I could not quite understand exactly what he said, but roughly I gathered that long ago, hundreds of years, men had died there and been buried in their graves; and sounds were heard under the clay, and when the graves were opened, men and women were found rosy with life, and their mouths red with blood. And so, in haste to save their lives (aye, and their souls! — and here he crossed himself) those who were left fled away to other places, where the living lived, and the dead were dead and not — not something. He was evidently afraid to speak the last words. As he proceeded with his narration, he grew more and more excited. It seemed as if his imagination had got hold of him, and he ended in a perfect paroxysm of fear — white-faced, perspiring, trembling and looking round him, as if expecting that some dreadful presence would manifest itself there in the bright sunshine on the open plain. Finally, in an agony of desperation, he cried:

‘Walpurgis nacht!’ and pointed to the carriage for me to get in. All my English blood rose at this, and, standing back, I said:

‘You are afraid, Johann — you are afraid. Go home; I shall return alone; the walk will do me good.’ The carriage door was open. I took from the seat my oak walking-stick — which I always carry on my holiday excursions — and closed the door, pointing back to Munich, and said, ‘Go home, Johann — Walpurgis-nacht doesn’t concern Englishmen.’

The horses were now more restive than ever, and Johann was trying to hold them in, while excitedly imploring me not to do anything so foolish. I pitied the poor fellow, he was deeply in earnest; but all the same I could not help laughing. His English was quite gone now. In his anxiety he had forgotten that his only means of making me understand was to talk my language, so he jabbered away in his native German. It began to be a little tedious. After giving the direction, ‘Home!’ I turned to go down the cross-road into the valley.

With a despairing gesture, Johann turned his horses towards Munich. I leaned on my stick and looked after him. He went slowly along the road for a while: then there came over the crest of the hill a man tall and thin. I could see so much in the distance. When he drew near the horses, they began to jump and kick about, then to scream with terror. Johann could not hold them in; they bolted down the road, running away madly. I watched them out of sight, then looked for the stranger, but I found that he, too, was gone.

With a light heart I turned down the side road through the deepening valley to which Johann had objected. There was not the slightest reason, that I could see, for his objection; and I daresay I tramped for a couple of hours without thinking of time or distance, and certainly without seeing a person or a house. So far as the place was concerned, it was desolation, itself. But I did not notice this particularly till, on turning a bend in the road, I came upon a scattered fringe of wood; then I recognised that I had been impressed unconsciously by the desolation of the region through which I had passed.

I sat down to rest myself, and began to look around. It struck me that it was considerably colder than it had been at the commencement of my walk — a sort of sighing sound seemed to be around me, with, now and then, high overhead, a sort of muffled roar. Looking upwards I noticed that great thick clouds were drifting rapidly across the sky from North to South at a great height. There were signs of coming storm in some lofty stratum of the air. I was a little chilly, and, thinking that it was the sitting still after the exercise of walking, I resumed my journey.

The ground I passed over was now much more picturesque. There were no striking objects that the eye might single out; but in all there was a charm of beauty. I took little heed of time and it was only when the deepening twilight forced itself upon me that I began to think of how I should find my way home. The brightness of the day had gone. The air was cold, and the drifting of clouds high overhead was more marked. They were accompanied by a sort of far-away rushing sound, through which seemed to come at intervals that mysterious cry which the driver had said came from a wolf. For a while I hesitated. I had said I would see the deserted village, so on I went, and presently came on a wide stretch of open country, shut in by hills all around. Their sides were covered with trees which spread down to the plain, dotting, in clumps, the gentler slopes and hollows which showed here and there. I followed with my eye the winding of the road, and saw that it curved close to one of the densest of these clumps and was lost behind it.

As I looked there came a cold shiver in the air, and the snow began to fall. I thought of the miles and miles of bleak country I had passed, and then hurried on to seek the shelter of the wood in front. Darker and darker grew the sky, and faster and heavier fell the snow, till the earth before and around me was a glistening white carpet the further edge of which was lost in misty vagueness. The road was here but crude, and when on the level its boundaries were not so marked, as when it passed through the cuttings; and in a little while I found that I must have strayed from it, for I missed underfoot the hard surface, and my feet sank deeper in the grass and moss. Then the wind grew stronger and blew with ever increasing force, till I was fain to run before it. The air became icy-cold, and in spite of my exercise I began to suffer. The snow was now falling so thickly and whirling around me in such rapid eddies that I could hardly keep my eyes open. Every now and then the heavens were torn asunder by vivid lightning, and in the flashes I could see ahead of me a great mass of trees, chiefly yew and cypress all heavily coated with snow.

I was soon amongst the shelter of the trees, and there, in comparative silence, I could hear the rush of the wind high overhead. Presently the blackness of the storm had become merged in the darkness of the night By-and-by the storm seemed to be passing away: it now only came in fierce puffs or blasts. At such moments the weird sound of the wolf appeared to be echoed by many similar sounds around me.

Now and again, through the black mass of drifting cloud, came a straggling ray of moonlight, which lit up the expanse, and showed me that I was at the edge of a dense mass of cypress and yew trees. As the snow had ceased to fall, I walked out from the shelter and began to investigate more closely. It appeared to me that, amongst so many old foundations as I had passed, there might be still standing a house in which, though in ruins, I could find some sort of shelter for a while. As I skirted the edge of the copse, I found that a low wall encircled it, and following this I presently found an opening. Here the cypresses formed an alley leading up to a square mass of some kind of building. Just as I caught sight of this, however, the drifting clouds obscured the moon, and I passed up the path in darkness. The wind must have grown colder, for I felt myself shiver as I walked;

but there was hope of shelter, and I groped my way blindly on.

I stopped, for there was a sudden stillness. The storm had passed; and, perhaps in sympathy with nature's silence, my heart seemed to cease to beat. But this was only momentarily; for suddenly the moonlight broke through the clouds, showing me that I was in a graveyard, and that the square object before me was a great massive tomb of marble, as white as the snow that lay on and all around it. With the moonlight there came a fierce sigh of the storm, which appeared to resume its course with a long, low howl, as of many dogs or wolves. I was awed and shocked, and felt the cold perceptibly grow upon me till it seemed to grip me by the heart. Then while the flood of moonlight still fell on the marble tomb, the storm gave further evidence of renewing, as though it was returning on its track. Impelled by some sort of fascination, I approached the sepulchre to see what it was, and why such a thing stood alone in such a place. I walked around it, and read, over the Doric door, in German:

COUNTESS DOLINGEN OF GRATZ
IN STYRIA
SOUGHT AND FOUND DEATH
1801

On the top of the tomb, seemingly driven through the solid marble — for the structure was composed of a few vast blocks of stone — was a great iron spike or stake. On going to the back I saw, graven in great Russian letters:

'The dead travel fast.'

There was something so weird and uncanny about the whole thing that it gave me a turn and made me feel quite faint. I began to wish, for the first time, that I had taken Johann's advice. Here a thought struck me, which came under almost mysterious circumstances and with a terrible shock. This was Walpurgis Night!

Walpurgis Night, when, according to the belief of millions of people, the devil was abroad — when the graves were opened and the dead came forth and walked. When all evil things of earth and air and water held revel. This very place the driver had specially shunned. This was the depopulated village of centuries ago. This was where the suicide lay; and this was the place where I was alone — unmanned, shivering with cold in a shroud of snow with a wild storm gathering again upon me! It took all my philosophy, all the religion I had been taught, all my courage, not to collapse in a paroxysm of fright.

And now a perfect tornado burst upon me. The ground shook as though thousands of horses thundered across it; and this time the storm bore on its icy wings, not snow, but great hailstones which drove with such violence that they might have come from the thongs of Balearic slingers — hailstones that beat down leaf and branch and made the shelter of the cypresses of no more avail than though their stems were standing-corn. At the first I had rushed to the nearest tree; but I was soon fain to leave it and seek the only spot that seemed to afford refuge, the deep Doric doorway of the marble tomb. There, crouching against the massive bronze door, I gained a certain amount of protection from the beating of the hailstones, for now they only drove against me as they ricocheted from the ground and the side of the marble.

As I leaned against the door, it moved slightly and opened inwards. The shelter of even a tomb was welcome in that pitiless tempest, and I was about to enter it when there came a flash of forked-lightning that lit up the whole expanse of the heavens. In the instant, as I am a living man, I saw, as my eyes were turned into the darkness of the tomb, a beautiful woman, with rounded cheeks and red lips, seemingly sleeping on a bier. As the thunder broke overhead, I was grasped as by the hand of a giant and hurled out into the storm. The whole thing was so sudden that, before I could realise the shock, moral as well as physical, I found the hailstones beating me down. At the same time I had a strange, dominating feeling that I was not alone. I looked towards the tomb. Just then there came another blinding flash, which seemed to strike the iron stake that surmounted the tomb and to pour through to the earth, blasting and crumbling the marble, as in a burst of flame. The dead woman rose for a moment of agony, while she was lapped in the flame, and her bitter scream of pain was drowned in the thundercrash. The last thing I heard was this mingling of dreadful sound, as again I was seized in the giant-grasp and dragged away, while the hailstones beat on me, and the air around seemed reverberant with the howling of wolves. The last sight that I remembered was a vague, white, moving mass, as if all the graves around me had sent out the phantoms of their sheeted-dead, and that they were closing in on me through the white cloudiness of the driving hail.

Gradually there came a sort of vague beginning of consciousness; then a sense of weariness that was dreadful. For a time I remembered nothing; but slowly my senses returned. My feet seemed positively racked with pain, yet I could not move them. They seemed to be numbed. There was an icy feeling at the back of my neck and all down my spine, and my ears, like my feet, were dead, yet in torment; but there was in my breast a sense of warmth which was, by comparison, delicious. It was as a nightmare — a physical nightmare, if one may use such an expression; for some heavy weight on my chest made it difficult for me to breathe.

This period of semi-lethargy seemed to remain a long time, and as it faded away I must have slept or swooned. Then came a sort of loathing, like the first stage of sea-sickness, and a wild desire to be free from something — I knew not what. A vast stillness enveloped me, as though all the world were asleep or dead — only broken by the low panting as of some animal close to me. I felt a warm rasping at my throat, then came a consciousness of the awful truth, which chilled me to the heart and sent the blood surging up through my brain. Some great animal was lying on me and now licking my throat. I feared to stir, for some instinct of prudence bade me lie still; but the brute seemed to realise that there was now some change in me, for it raised its head. Through my eyelashes I saw above me the two great flaming eyes of a gigantic wolf. Its sharp white teeth gleamed in the gaping red mouth, and I could feel its hot breath fierce and acrid upon me.

For another spell of time I remembered no more. Then I became conscious of a low growl, followed by a yelp, renewed again and again. Then, seemingly very far away, I heard a ‘Holloa! holloa!’ as of many voices calling in unison. Cautiously I raised my head and looked in the direction whence the sound came; but the cemetery blocked my view. The wolf still continued to yelp in a strange way, and a red glare began to move round the grove of cypresses, as though following the sound. As the voices drew closer, the wolf yelped faster and louder. I feared to make either sound or motion. Nearer came the red glow, over the white pall which stretched into the darkness around me. Then all at once from beyond the trees there came at a trot a troop of horsemen bearing torches. The wolf rose from my breast and made for the cemetery. I saw one of the horsemen (soldiers by their caps and their long military cloaks) raise his carbine and take aim. A companion knocked up his arm, and I heard the ball whizz over my head. He had evidently taken my body for that of the wolf. Another sighted the animal as it slunk away, and a shot followed. Then, at a gallop, the troop rode forward — some towards me, others following the wolf as it disappeared amongst the snow-clad cypresses.

As they drew nearer I tried to move, but was powerless, although I could see and hear all that went on around me. Two or three of the soldiers jumped from their horses and knelt beside me. One of them raised my head, and placed his hand over my heart.

‘Good news, comrades!’ he cried. ‘His heart still beats!’

Then some brandy was poured down my throat; it put vigour into me, and I was able to open my eyes fully and look around. Lights and shadows were moving among the trees, and I heard men call to one another. They drew together, uttering frightened exclamations; and the lights flashed as the others came pouring out of the cemetery pell-mell, like men possessed. When the further ones came close to us, those who were around me asked them eagerly:

‘Well, have you found him?’

The reply rang out hurriedly:

‘No! no! Come away quick — quick! This is no place to stay, and on this of all nights!’

‘What was it?’ was the question, asked in all manner of keys. The answer came variously and all indefinitely as though the men were moved by some common impulse to speak, yet were restrained by some common fear from giving their thoughts.

‘It — it — indeed!’ gibbered one, whose wits had plainly given out for the moment.

‘A wolf — and yet not a wolf!’ another put in shudderingly.

‘No use trying for him without the sacred bullet,’ a third remarked in a more ordinary manner.

‘Serve us right for coming out on this night! Truly we have earned our thousand marks!’ were the ejaculations of a fourth.

‘There was blood on the broken marble,’ another said after a pause— ‘the lightning never brought that there. And for him — is he safe? Look at his throat! See, comrades, the wolf has been lying on him and keeping his blood warm.’

The officer looked at my throat and replied:

‘He is all right; the skin is not pierced. What does it all mean? We should never have found him but for the yelping of the wolf.’

‘What became of it?’ asked the man who was holding up my head, and who seemed the least panic-stricken of the party, for his hands were steady and without tremor. On his sleeve was the chevron of a petty officer.

‘It went to its home,’ answered the man, whose long face was pallid, and who actually shook with terror as he glanced around him fearfully. ‘There are graves enough there in which it may lie. Come, comrades — come quickly! Let us leave this cursed spot.’

The officer raised me to a sitting posture, as he uttered a word of command; then several men placed me upon a horse. He sprang to the saddle behind me, took me in his arms, gave the word to advance; and, turning our faces away from the cypresses, we rode away in swift, military order.

As yet my tongue refused its office, and I was perforce silent. I must have fallen asleep; for the next thing I remembered was finding myself standing up, supported by a soldier on each side of me. It was almost broad daylight, and to the north a red streak of sunlight was reflected, like a path of blood, over the waste of snow. The officer was telling the men to say nothing of what they had seen, except that they found an English stranger, guarded by a large dog.

‘Dog! that was no dog,’ cut in the man who had exhibited such fear. ‘I think I know a wolf when I see one.’

The young officer answered calmly: ‘I said a dog.’

‘Dog!’ reiterated the other ironically. It was evident that his courage was rising with the sun; and, pointing to me, he said, ‘Look at his throat. Is that the work of a dog, master?’

Instinctively I raised my hand to my throat, and as I touched it I cried out in pain. The men crowded round to look, some stooping down from their saddles; and again there came the calm voice of the young officer:

‘A dog, as I said. If aught else were said we should only be laughed at.’

I was then mounted behind a trooper, and we rode on into the suburbs of Munich. Here we came across a stray carriage, into which I was lifted, and it was driven off to the Quatre Saisons — the young officer accompanying me, whilst a trooper followed with his horse, and the others rode off to their barracks.

When we arrived, Herr Delbrück rushed so quickly down the steps to meet me, that it was apparent he had been watching within. Taking me by both hands he solicitously led me in. The officer saluted me and was turning to withdraw, when I recognised his purpose, and insisted that he should come to my rooms. Over a glass of wine I warmly thanked him and his brave comrades for saving me. He replied simply that he was more than glad, and that Herr Delbrück had at the first taken steps to make all the searching party pleased; at which ambiguous utterance the maître d'hôtel smiled, while the officer pleaded duty and withdrew.

'But Herr Delbrück,' I enquired, 'how and why was it that the soldiers searched for me?'

He shrugged his shoulders, as if in depreciation of his own deed, as he replied:

'I was so fortunate as to obtain leave from the commander of the regiment in which I served, to ask for volunteers.'

'But how did you know I was lost?' I asked.

'The driver came hither with the remains of his carriage, which had been upset when the horses ran away.'

'But surely you would not send a search-party of soldiers merely on this account?'

'Oh, no!' he answered; 'but even before the coachman arrived, I had this telegram from the Boyar whose guest you are,' and he took from his pocket a telegram which he handed to me, and I read:

Bistritz.

Be careful of my guest — his safety is most precious to me. Should aught happen to him, or if he be missed, spare nothing to find him and ensure his safety. He is English and therefore adventurous. There are often dangers from snow and wolves and night. Lose not a moment if you suspect harm to him. I answer your zeal with my fortune. — *Dracula.*

As I held the telegram in my hand, the room seemed to whirl around me; and, if the attentive maître d'hôtel had not caught me, I think I should have fallen. There was something so strange in all this, something so weird and impossible to imagine, that there grew on me a sense of my being in some way the sport of opposite forces — the mere vague idea of which seemed in a way to paralyse me. I was certainly under some form of mysterious protection. From a distant country had come, in the very nick of time, a message that took me out of the danger of the snow-sleep and the jaws of the wolf.

THE JUDGE’S HOUSE

When the time for his examination drew near Malcolm Malcolmson made up his mind to go somewhere to read by himself. He feared the attractions of the seaside, and also he feared completely rural isolation, for of old he knew it charms, and so he determined to find some unpretentious little town where there would be nothing to distract him. He refrained from asking suggestions from any of his friends, for he argued that each would recommend some place of which he had knowledge, and where he had already acquaintances. As Malcolmson wished to avoid friends he had no wish to encumber himself with the attention of friends’ friends, and so he determined to look out for a place for himself. He packed a portmanteau with some clothes and all the books he required, and then took ticket for the first name on the local time-table which he did not know.

When at the end of three hours’ journey he alighted at Benchurch, he felt satisfied that he had so far obliterated his tracks as to be sure of having a peaceful opportunity of pursuing his studies. He went straight to the one inn which the sleepy little place contained, and put up for the night. Benchurch was a market town, and once in three weeks was crowded to excess, but for the remainder of the twenty-one days it was as attractive as a desert, Malcolmson looked around the day after his arrival to try to find quarters more isolated than even so quiet an inn as ‘The Good Traveller’ afforded. There was only one place which took his fancy, and it certainly satisfied his wildest ideas regarding quiet; in fact, quiet was not the proper word to apply to it — desolation was the only term conveying any suitable idea of its isolation. It was an old rambling, heavy-built house of the Jacobean style, with heavy gables and windows, unusually small, and set higher than was customary in such houses, and was surrounded with a high brick wall massively built. Indeed, on examination, it looked more like a fortified house than an ordinary dwelling. But all these things pleased Malcolmson. 'Here,' he thought, 'is the very spot I have been looking for, and if I can get opportunity of using it I shall be happy.' His joy was increased when he realised beyond doubt that it was not at present inhabited.

From the post-office he got the name of the agent, who was rarely surprised at the application to rent a part of the old house. Mr. Carnford, the local lawyer and agent, was a genial old gentleman, and frankly confessed his delight at anyone being willing to live in the house.

'To tell you the truth,' said he, 'I should be only too happy, on behalf of the owners, to let anyone have the house rent free for a term of years if only to accustom the people here to see it inhabited. It has been so long empty that some kind of absurd prejudice has grown up about it, and this can be best put down by its occupation — if only,' he added with a sly glance at Malcolmson, 'by a scholar like yourself, who wants its quiet for a time.'

Malcolmson thought it needless to ask the agent about the 'absurd prejudice'; he knew he would get more information, if he should require it, on that subject from other quarters. He paid his three months' rent, got a receipt, and the name of an old woman who would probably undertake to 'do' for him, and came away with the keys in his pocket. He then went to the landlady of the inn, who was a cheerful and most kindly person, and asked her advice as to such stores and provisions as he would be likely to require. She threw up her hands in amazement when he told her where he was going to settle himself.

‘Not in the Judge’s House!’ she said, and grew pale as she spoke. He explained the locality of the house, saying that he did not know its name. When he had finished she answered:

‘Aye, sure enough — sure enough the very place! It is the Judge’s House sure enough.’ He asked her to tell him about the place, why so called, and what there was against it. She told him that it was so called locally because it had been many years before — how long she could not say, as she was herself from another part of the country, but she thought it must have been a hundred years or more — the abode of a judge who was held in great terror on account of his harsh sentences and his hostility to prisoners at Assizes. As to what there was against the house itself she could not tell. She had often asked, but no one could inform her; but there was a general feeling that there was *something*, and for her own part she would not take all the money in Drinkwater’s Bank and stay in the house an hour by herself. Then she apologised to Malcolmson for her disturbing talk.

‘It is too bad of me, sir, and you — and a young gentlemen, too — if you will pardon me saying it, going to live there all alone. If you were my boy — and you’ll excuse me for saying it — you wouldn’t sleep there a night, not if I had to go there myself and pull the big alarm bell that’s on the roof!’ The good creature was so manifestly in earnest, and was so kindly in her intentions, that Malcolmson, although amused, was touched. He told her kindly how much he appreciated her interest in him, and added:

‘But, my dear Mrs. Witham, indeed you need not be concerned about me! A man who is reading for the Mathematical Tripos has too much to think of to be disturbed by any of these mysterious “somethings”, and his work is of too exact and prosaic a kind to allow of his having any corner in his mind for mysteries of any kind. Harmonical Progression, Permutations and Combinations, and Elliptic Functions have sufficient mysteries for me!’ Mrs. Witham kindly undertook to see after his commissions, and he went himself to look for the old woman who had been recommended to him. When he returned to the Judge’s House with her, after an interval of a couple of hours, he found Mrs. Witham herself waiting with several men and boys carrying parcels, and an upholsterer’s man with a bed in a car, for she said, though tables and chairs might be all very well, a bed that hadn’t been aired for mayhap fifty years was not proper for young bones to lie on. She was evidently curious to see the inside of the house; and though manifestly so afraid of the ‘somethings’ that at the slightest sound she clutched on to Malcolmson, whom she never left for a moment, went over the whole place.

After his examination of the house, Malcolmson decided to take up his abode in the great dining-room, which was big enough to serve for all his requirements; and Mrs. Witham, with the aid of the charwoman, Mrs. Dempster, proceeded to arrange matters. When the hampers were brought in and unpacked, Malcolmson saw that with much kind forethought she had sent from her own kitchen sufficient provisions to last for a few days. Before going she expressed all sorts of kind wishes; and at the door turned and said:

‘And perhaps, sir, as the room is big and draughty it might be well to have one of those big screens put round your bed at night — though, truth to tell, I would die myself if I were to be so shut in with all kinds of — of “things”, that put their heads round the sides, or over the top, and look on me!’ The image which she had called up was too much for her nerves, and she fled incontinently.

Mrs. Dempster sniffed in a superior manner as the landlady disappeared, and remarked that for her own part she wasn't afraid of all the bogies in the kingdom.

'I'll tell you what it is, sir,' she said; 'bogies is all kinds and sorts of things — except bogies! Rats and mice, and beetles; and creaky doors, and loose slates, and broken panes, and stiff drawer handles, that stay out when you pull them and then fall down in the middle of the night. Look at the wainscot of the room! It is old — hundreds of years old! Do you think there's no rats and beetles there! And do you imagine, sir, that you won't see none of them? Rats is bogies, I tell you, and bogies is rats; and don't you get to think anything else!'

'Mrs. Dempster,' said Malcolmson gravely, making her a polite bow, 'you know more than a Senior Wrangler! And let me say, that, as a mark of esteem for your indubitable soundness of head and heart, I shall, when I go, give you possession of this house, and let you stay here by yourself for the last two months of my tenancy, for four weeks will serve my purpose.'

'Thank you kindly, sir!' she answered, 'but I couldn't sleep away from home a night. I am in Greenhow's Charity, and if I slept a night away from my rooms I should lose all I have got to live on. The rules is very strict; and there's too many watching for a vacancy for me to run any risks in the matter. Only for that, sir, I'd gladly come here and attend on you altogether during your stay.'

'My good woman,' said Malcolmson hastily, 'I have come here on purpose to obtain solitude; and believe me that I am grateful to the late Greenhow for having so organised his admirable charity — whatever it is — that I am perforce denied the opportunity of suffering from such a form of temptation! Saint Anthony himself could not be more rigid on the point!'

The old woman laughed harshly. 'Ah, you young gentlemen,' she said, ‘you don’t fear for naught; and belike you’ll get all the solitude you want here.’ She set to work with her cleaning; and by nightfall, when Malcolmson returned from his walk — he always had one of his books to study as he walked — he found the room swept and tidied, a fire burning in the old hearth, the lamp lit, and the table spread for supper with Mrs. Witham’s excellent fare. ‘This is comfort, indeed,’ he said, as he rubbed his hands.

When he had finished his supper, and lifted the tray to the other end of the great oak dining-table, he got out his books again, put fresh wood on the fire, trimmed his lamp, and set himself down to a spell of real hard work. He went on without pause till about eleven o’clock, when he knocked off for a bit to fix his fire and lamp, and to make himself a cup of tea. He had always been a tea-drinker, and during his college life had sat late at work and had taken tea late. The rest was a great luxury to him, and he enjoyed it with a sense of delicious, voluptuous ease. The renewed fire leaped and sparkled, and threw quaint shadows through the great old room; and as he sipped his hot tea he revelled in the sense of isolation from his kind. Then it was that he began to notice for the first time what a noise the rats were making.

‘Surely,’ he thought, ‘they cannot have been at it all the time I was reading. Had they been, I must have noticed it!’ Presently, when the noise increased, he satisfied himself that it was really new. It was evident that at first the rats had been frightened at the presence of a stranger, and the light of fire and lamp; but that as the time went on they had grown bolder and were now disporting themselves as was their wont.

How busy they were! and hark to the strange noises! Up and down behind the old wainscot, over the ceiling and under the floor they raced, and gnawed, and scratched! Malcolmson smiled to himself as he recalled to mind the saying of Mrs. Dempster, ‘Bogies is rats, and rats is bogies!’ The tea began to have its effect of intellectual and nervous stimulus, he saw with joy another long spell of work to be done before the night was past, and in the sense of security which it gave him, he allowed himself the luxury of a good look round the room. He took his lamp in one hand, and went all around, wondering that so quaint and beautiful an old house had been so long neglected. The carving of the oak on the panels of the wainscot was fine, and on and round the doors and windows it was beautiful and of rare merit. There were some old pictures on the walls, but they were coated so thick with dust and dirt that he could not distinguish any detail of them, though he held his lamp as high as he could over his head. Here and there as he went round he saw some crack or hole blocked for a moment by the face of a rat with its bright eyes glittering in the light, but in an instant it was gone, and a squeak and a scamper followed. The thing that most struck him, however, was the rope of the great alarm bell on the roof, which hung down in a corner of the room on the right-hand side of the fireplace. He pulled up close to the hearth a great high-backed carved oak chair, and sat down to his last cup of tea. When this was done he made up the fire, and went back to his work, sitting at the corner of the table, having the fire to his left. For a little while the rats disturbed him somewhat with their perpetual scampering, but he got accustomed to the noise as one does to the ticking of a clock or to the roar of moving water; and he became so immersed in his work that everything in the world, except the problem which he was trying to solve, passed away from him.

He suddenly looked up, his problem was still unsolved, and there was in the air that sense of the hour before the dawn, which is so dread to doubtful life. The noise of the rats had ceased. Indeed it seemed to him that it must have ceased but lately and that it was the sudden cessation which had disturbed him. The fire had fallen low, but still it threw out a deep red glow. As he looked he started in spite of his *sang froid*.

There on the great high-backed carved oak chair by the right side of the fireplace sat an enormous rat, steadily glaring at him with baleful eyes. He made a motion to it as though to hunt it away, but it did not stir. Then he made the motion of throwing something. Still it did not stir, but showed its great white teeth angrily, and its cruel eyes shone in the lamplight with an added vindictiveness.

Malcolmson felt amazed, and seizing the poker from the hearth ran at it to kill it. Before, however, he could strike it, the rat, with a squeak that sounded like the concentration of hate, jumped upon the floor, and, running up the rope of the alarm bell, disappeared in the darkness beyond the range of the green-shaded lamp. Instantly, strange to say, the noisy scampering of the rats in the wainscot began again.

By this time Malcolmson's mind was quite off the problem; and as a shrill cock-crow outside told him of the approach of morning, he went to bed and to sleep.

He slept so sound that he was not even waked by Mrs. Dempster coming in to make up his room. It was only when she had tidied up the place and got his breakfast ready and tapped on the screen which closed in his bed that he woke. He was a little tired still after his night's hard work, but a strong cup of tea soon freshened him up and, taking his book, he went out for his morning walk, bringing with him a few sandwiches lest he should not care to return till dinner time. He found a quiet walk between high elms some way outside the town, and here he spent the greater part of the day studying his Laplace. On his return he looked in to see Mrs. Witham and to thank her for her kindness. When she saw him coming through the diamond-paned bay window of her sanctum she came out to meet him and asked him in. She looked at him searchingly and shook her head as she said:

‘You must not overdo it, sir. You are paler this morning than you should be. Too late hours and too hard work on the brain isn’t good for any man! But tell me, sir, how did you pass the night? Well, I hope? But my heart! sir, I was glad when Mrs. Dempster told me this morning that you were all right and sleeping sound when she went in.’

‘Oh, I was all right,’ he answered smiling, ‘the “somethings” didn’t worry me, as yet. Only the rats; and they had a circus, I tell you, all over the place. There was one wicked looking old devil that sat up on my own chair by the fire, and wouldn’t go till I took the poker to him, and then he ran up the rope of the alarm bell and got to somewhere up the wall or the ceiling — I couldn’t see where, it was so dark.’

‘Mercy on us,’ said Mrs. Witham, ‘an old devil, and sitting on a chair by the fireside! Take care, sir! take care! There’s many a true word spoken in jest.’

‘How do you mean? Pon my word I don’t understand.’

‘An old devil! The old devil, perhaps. There! sir, you needn’t laugh,’ for Malcolmson had broken into a hearty peal. ‘You young folks thinks it easy to laugh at things that makes older ones shudder. Never mind, sir! never mind! Please God, you’ll laugh all the time. It’s what I wish you myself!’ and the good lady beamed all over in sympathy with his enjoyment, her fears gone for a moment.

‘Oh, forgive me!’ said Malcolmson presently. ‘Don’t think me rude; but the idea was too much for me — that the old devil himself was on the chair last night!’ And at the thought he laughed again. Then he went home to dinner.

This evening the scampering of the rats began earlier; indeed it had been going on before his arrival, and only ceased whilst his presence by its freshness disturbed them. After dinner he sat by the fire for a while and had a smoke; and then, having cleared his table, began to work as before. Tonight the rats disturbed him more than they had done on the previous night. How they scampered up and down and under and over! How they squeaked, and scratched, and gnawed! How they, getting bolder by degrees, came to the mouths of their holes and to the chinks and cracks and crannies in the wainscoting till their eyes shone like tiny lamps as the firelight rose and fell. But to him, now doubtless accustomed to them, their eyes were not wicked; only their playfulness touched him. Sometimes the boldest of them made sallies out on the floor or along the mouldings of the wainscot. Now and again as they disturbed him Malcolmson made a sound to frighten them, smiting the table with his hand or giving a fierce ‘Hsh, hsh,’ so that they fled straightway to their holes.

And so the early part of the night wore on; and despite the noise Malcolmson got more and more immersed in his work.

All at once he stopped, as on the previous night, being overcome by a sudden sense of silence. There was not the faintest sound of gnaw, or scratch, or squeak. The silence was as of the grave. He remembered the odd occurrence of the previous night, and instinctively he looked at the chair standing close by the fireside. And then a very odd sensation thrilled through him.

There, on the great old high-backed carved oak chair beside the fireplace sat the same enormous rat, steadily glaring at him with baleful eyes.

Instinctively he took the nearest thing to his hand, a book of logarithms, and flung it at it. The book was badly aimed and the rat did not stir, so again the poker performance of the previous night was repeated; and again the rat, being closely pursued, fled up the rope of the alarm bell. Strangely too, the departure of this rat was instantly followed by the renewal of the noise made by the general rat community. On this occasion, as on the previous one, Malcolmson could not see at what part of the room the rat disappeared, for the green shade of his lamp left the upper part of the room in darkness, and the fire had burned low.

On looking at his watch he found it was close on midnight; and, not sorry for the *divertissement*, he made up his fire and made himself his nightly pot of tea. He had got through a good spell of work, and thought himself entitled to a cigarette; and so he sat on the great oak chair before the fire and enjoyed it. Whilst smoking he began to think that he would like to know where the rat disappeared to, for he had certain ideas for the morrow not entirely disconnected with a rat-trap. Accordingly he lit another lamp and placed it so that it would shine well into the right-hand corner of the wall by the fireplace. Then he got all the books he had with him, and placed them handy to throw at the vermin. Finally he lifted the rope of the alarm bell and placed the end of it on the table, fixing the extreme end under the lamp. As he handled it he could not help noticing how pliable it was, especially for so strong a rope, and one not in use. ‘You could hang a man with it,’ he thought to himself. When his preparations were made he looked around, and said complacently:

‘There now, my friend, I think we shall learn something of you this time!' He began his work again, and though as before somewhat disturbed at first by the noise of the rats, soon lost himself in his propositions and problems.

Again he was called to his immediate surroundings suddenly. This time it might not have been the sudden silence only which took his attention; there was a slight movement of the rope, and the lamp moved. Without stirring, he looked to see if his pile of books was within range, and then cast his eye along the rope. As he looked he saw the great rat drop from the rope on the oak arm-chair and sit there glaring at him. He raised a book in his right hand, and taking careful aim, flung it at the rat. The latter, with a quick movement, sprang aside and dodged the missile. He then took another book, and a third, and flung them one after another at the rat, but each time unsuccessfully. At last, as he stood with a book poised in his hand to throw, the rat squeaked and seemed afraid. This made Malcolmson more than ever eager to strike, and the book flew and struck the rat a resounding blow. It gave a terrified squeak, and turning on his pursuer a look of terrible malevolence, ran up the chair-back and made a great jump to the rope of the alarm bell and ran up it like lightning. The lamp rocked under the sudden strain, but it was a heavy one and did not topple over. Malcolmson kept his eyes on the rat, and saw it by the light of the second lamp leap to a moulding of the wainscot and disappear through a hole in one of the great pictures which hung on the wall, obscured and invisible through its coating of dirt and dust.

'I shall look up my friend's habitation in the morning,' said the student, as he went over to collect his books. 'The third picture from the fireplace; I shall not forget.' He picked up the books one by one, commenting on them as he lifted them. '*Conic Sections* he does not mind, nor *Cycloidal Oscillations*, nor the *Principia*, nor *Quaternions*, nor *Thermodynamics*. Now for the book that fetched him!' Malcolmson took it up and looked at it. As he did so he started, and a sudden pallor overspread his face. He looked round uneasily and shivered slightly, as he murmured to himself:

'The Bible my mother gave me! What an odd coincidence.' He sat down to work again, and the rats in the wainscot renewed their gambols. They did not disturb him, however; somehow their presence gave him a sense of companionship. But he could not attend to his work, and after striving to master the subject on which he was engaged gave it up in despair, and went to bed as the first streak of dawn stole in through the eastern window.

He slept heavily but uneasily, and dreamed much; and when Mrs. Dempster woke him late in the morning he seemed ill at ease, and for a few minutes did not seem to realise exactly where he was. His first request rather surprised the servant.

'Mrs. Dempster, when I am out to-day I wish you would get the steps and dust or wash those pictures — specially that one the third from the fireplace — I want to see what they are.'

Late in the afternoon Malcolmson worked at his books in the shaded walk, and the cheerfulness of the previous day came back to him as the day wore on, and he found that his reading was progressing well. He had worked out to a satisfactory conclusion all the problems which had as yet baffled him, and it was in a state of jubilation that he paid a visit to Mrs. Witham at 'The Good Traveller'. He found a stranger in the cosy sitting-room with the landlady, who was introduced to him as Dr. Thornhill. She was not quite at ease, and this, combined with the doctor's plunging at once into a series of questions, made Malcolmson come to the conclusion that his presence was not an accident, so without preliminary he said:

‘Dr. Thornhill, I shall with pleasure answer you any question you may choose to ask me if you will answer me one question first.’

The doctor seemed surprised, but he smiled and answered at once, ‘Done! What is it?’

‘Did Mrs. Witham ask you to come here and see me and advise me?’

Dr. Thornhill for a moment was taken aback, and Mrs. Witham got fiery red and turned away; but the doctor was a frank and ready man, and he answered at once and openly.

‘She did: but she didn’t intend you to know it. I suppose it was my clumsy haste that made you suspect. She told me that she did not like the idea of your being in that house all by yourself, and that she thought you took too much strong tea. In fact, she wants me to advise you if possible to give up the tea and the very late hours. I was a keen student in my time, so I suppose I may take the liberty of a college man, and without offence, advise you not quite as a stranger.’

Malcolmson with a bright smile held out his hand. ‘Shake! as they say in America,’ he said. ‘I must thank you for your kindness and Mrs. Witham too, and your kindness deserves a return on my part. I promise to take no more strong tea — no tea at all till you let me — and I shall go to bed tonight at one o’clock at latest. Will that do?’

‘Capital,’ said the doctor. ‘Now tell us all that you noticed in the old house,’ and so Malcolmson then and there told in minute detail all that had happened in the last two nights. He was interrupted every now and then by some exclamation from Mrs. Witham, till finally when he told of the episode of the Bible the landlady’s pent-up emotions found vent in a shriek; and it was not till a stiff glass of brandy and water had been administered that she grew composed again. Dr. Thornhill listened with a face of growing gravity, and when the narrative was complete and Mrs. Witham had been restored he asked:

'The rat always went up the rope of the alarm bell?'

'Always.'

'I suppose you know,' said the Doctor after a pause, 'what the rope is?'

'No!'

'It is,' said the Doctor slowly, 'the very rope which the hangman used for all the victims of the Judge's judicial rancour!' Here he was interrupted by another scream from Mrs. Witham, and steps had to be taken for her recovery. Malcolmson having looked at his watch, and found that it was close to his dinner hour, had gone home before her complete recovery.

When Mrs. Witham was herself again she almost assailed the Doctor with angry questions as to what he meant by putting such horrible ideas into the poor young man's mind. 'He has quite enough there already to upset him,' she added. Dr. Thornhill replied:

'My dear madam, I had a distinct purpose in it! I wanted to draw his attention to the bell rope, and to fix it there. It may be that he is in a highly overwrought state, and has been studying too much, although I am bound to say that he seems as sound and healthy a young man, mentally and bodily, as ever I saw — but then the rats — and that suggestion of the devil.' The doctor shook his head and went on. 'I would have offered to go and stay the first night with him but that I felt sure it would have been a cause of offence. He may get in the night some strange fright or hallucination; and if he does I want him to pull that rope. All alone as he is it will give us warning, and we may reach him in time to be of service. I shall be sitting up pretty late tonight and shall keep my ears open. Do not be alarmed if Benchurch gets a surprise before morning.'

'Oh, Doctor, what do you mean? What do you mean?'

'I mean this; that possibly — nay, more probably — we shall hear the great alarm bell from the Judge's House tonight,' and the Doctor made about as effective an exit as could be thought of.

When Malcolmson arrived home he found that it was a little after his usual time, and Mrs. Dempster had gone away — the rules of Greenhow's Charity were not to be neglected. He was glad to see that the place was bright and tidy with a cheerful fire and a well-trimmed lamp. The evening was colder than might have been expected in April, and a heavy wind was blowing with such rapidly-increasing strength that there was every promise of a storm during the night. For a few minutes after his entrance the noise of the rats ceased; but so soon as they became accustomed to his presence they began again. He was glad to hear them, for he felt once more the feeling of companionship in their noise, and his mind ran back to the strange fact that they only ceased to manifest themselves when that other — the great rat with the baleful eyes — came upon the scene. The reading-lamp only was lit and its green shade kept the ceiling and the upper part of the room in darkness, so that the cheerful light from the hearth spreading over the floor and shining on the white cloth laid over the end of the table was warm and cheery. Malcolmson sat down to his dinner with a good appetite and a buoyant spirit. After his dinner and a cigarette he sat steadily down to work, determined not to let anything disturb him, for he remembered his promise to the doctor, and made up his mind to make the best of the time at his disposal.

For an hour or so he worked all right, and then his thoughts began to wander from his books. The actual circumstances around him, the calls on his physical attention, and his nervous susceptibility were not to be denied. By this time the wind had become a gale, and the gale a storm. The old house, solid though it was, seemed to shake to its foundations, and the storm roared and raged through its many chimneys and its queer old gables, producing strange, unearthly sounds in the empty rooms and corridors. Even the great alarm bell on the roof must have felt the force of the wind, for the rope rose and fell slightly, as though the bell were moved a little from time to time and the limber rope fell on the oak floor with a hard and hollow sound.

As Malcolmson listened to it he bethought himself of the doctor’s words, ‘It is the rope which the hangman used for the victims of the Judge’s judicial rancour,’ and he went over to the corner of the fireplace and took it in his hand to look at it. There seemed a sort of deadly interest in it, and as he stood there he lost himself for a moment in speculation as to who these victims were, and the grim wish of the Judge to have such a ghastly relic ever under his eyes. As he stood there the swaying of the bell on the roof still lifted the rope now and again; but presently there came a new sensation — a sort of tremor in the rope, as though something was moving along it.

Looking up instinctively Malcolmson saw the great rat coming slowly down towards him, glaring at him steadily. He dropped the rope and started back with a muttered curse, and the rat turning ran up the rope again and disappeared, and at the same instant Malcolmson became conscious that the noise of the rats, which had ceased for a while, began again.

All this set him thinking, and it occurred to him that he had not investigated the lair of the rat or looked at the pictures, as he had intended. He lit the other lamp without the shade, and, holding it up went and stood opposite the third picture from the fireplace on the right-hand side where he had seen the rat disappear on the previous night.

At the first glance he started back so suddenly that he almost dropped the lamp, and a deadly pallor overspread his face. His knees shook, and heavy drops of sweat came on his forehead, and he trembled like an aspen. But he was young and plucky, and pulled himself together, and after the pause of a few seconds stepped forward again, raised the lamp, and examined the picture which had been dusted and washed, and now stood out clearly.

It was of a judge dressed in his robes of scarlet and ermine. His face was strong and merciless, evil, crafty, and vindictive, with a sensual mouth, hooked nose of ruddy colour, and shaped like the beak of a bird of prey. The rest of the face was of a cadaverous colour. The eyes were of peculiar brilliance and with a terribly malignant expression. As he looked at them, Malcolmson grew cold, for he saw there the very counterpart of the eyes of the great rat. The lamp almost fell from his hand, he saw the rat with its baleful eyes peering out through the hole in the corner of the picture, and noted the sudden cessation of the noise of the other rats. However, he pulled himself together, and went on with his examination of the picture.

The Judge was seated in a great high-backed carved oak chair, on the right-hand side of a great stone fireplace where, in the corner, a rope hung down from the ceiling, its end lying coiled on the floor. With a feeling of something like horror, Malcolmson recognised the scene of the room as it stood, and gazed around him in an awestruck manner as though he expected to find some strange presence behind him. Then he looked over to the corner of the fireplace — and with a loud cry he let the lamp fall from his hand.

There, in the Judge's arm-chair, with the rope hanging behind, sat the rat with the Judge's baleful eyes, now intensified and with a fiendish leer. Save for the howling of the storm without there was silence.

The fallen lamp recalled Malcolmson to himself. Fortunately it was of metal, and so the oil was not spilt. However, the practical need of attending to it settled at once his nervous apprehensions. When he had turned it out, he wiped his brow and thought for a moment.

'This will not do,' he said to himself. 'If I go on like this I shall become a crazy fool. This must stop! I promised the doctor I would not take tea. Faith, he was pretty right! My nerves must have been getting into a queer state. Funny I did not notice it. I never felt better in my life. However, it is all right now, and I shall not be such a fool again.'

Then he mixed himself a good stiff glass of brandy and water and resolutely sat down to his work.

It was nearly an hour when he looked up from his book, disturbed by the sudden stillness. Without, the wind howled and roared louder than ever, and the rain drove in sheets against the windows, beating like hail on the glass; but within there was no sound whatever save the echo of the wind as it roared in the great chimney, and now and then a hiss as a few raindrops found their way down the chimney in a lull of the storm. The fire had fallen low and had ceased to flame, though it threw out a red glow. Malcolmson listened attentively, and presently heard a thin, squeaking noise, very faint. It came from the corner of the room where the rope hung down, and he thought it was the creaking of the rope on the floor as the swaying of the bell raised and lowered it. Looking up, however, he saw in the dim light the great rat clinging to the rope and gnawing it. The rope was already nearly gnawed through — he could see the lighter colour where the strands were laid bare. As he looked the job was completed, and the severed end of the rope fell clattering on the oaken floor, whilst for an instant the great rat remained like a knob or tassel at the end of the rope, which now began to sway to and fro. Malcolmson felt for a moment another pang of terror as he thought that now the possibility of calling the outer world to his assistance was cut off, but an intense anger took its place, and seizing the book he was reading he hurled it at the rat. The blow was well aimed, but before the missile could reach him the rat dropped off and struck the floor with a soft thud. Malcolmson instantly rushed over towards him, but it darted away and disappeared in the darkness of the shadows of the room. Malcolmson felt that his work was over for the night, and determined then and there to vary the monotony of the proceedings by a hunt for the rat, and took off the green shade of the lamp so as to insure a wider spreading light. As he did so the gloom of the upper part of the room was relieved, and in the new flood of light, great by comparison with the previous darkness, the pictures on the wall stood out boldly. From where he stood, Malcolmson saw right opposite to him the third picture on the wall from the right of the fireplace. He rubbed his eyes in surprise, and then a great fear began to come upon him.

In the centre of the picture was a great irregular patch of brown canvas, as fresh as when it was stretched on the frame. The background was as before, with chair and chimney-corner and rope, but the figure of the Judge had disappeared.

Malcolmson, almost in a chill of horror, turned slowly round, and then he began to shake and tremble like a man in a palsy. His strength seemed to have left him, and he was incapable of action or movement, hardly even of thought. He could only see and hear.

There, on the great high-backed carved oak chair sat the Judge in his robes of scarlet and ermine, with his baleful eyes glaring vindictively, and a smile of triumph on the resolute, cruel mouth, as he lifted with his hands a *black cap*. Malcolmson felt as if the blood was running from his heart, as one does in moments of prolonged suspense. There was a singing in his ears. Without, he could hear the roar and howl of the tempest, and through it, swept on the storm, came the striking of midnight by the great chimes in the market place. He stood for a space of time that seemed to him endless still as a statue, and with wide-open, horror-struck eyes, breathless. As the clock struck, so the smile of triumph on the Judge's face intensified, and at the last stroke of midnight he placed the black cap on his head.

Slowly and deliberately the Judge rose from his chair and picked up the piece of the rope of the alarm bell which lay on the floor, drew it through his hands as if he enjoyed its touch, and then deliberately began to knot one end of it, fashioning it into a noose. This he tightened and tested with his foot, pulling hard at it till he was satisfied and then making a running noose of it, which he held in his hand. Then he began to move along the table on the opposite side to Malcolmson keeping his eyes on him until he had passed him, when with a quick movement he stood in front of the door. Malcolmson then began to feel that he was trapped, and tried to think of what he should do. There was some fascination in the Judge's eyes, which he never took off him, and he had, perforce, to look. He saw the Judge approach — still keeping between him and the door — and raise the noose and throw it towards him as if to entangle him. With a great effort he made a quick movement to one side, and saw the rope fall beside him, and heard it strike the oaken floor. Again the Judge raised the noose and tried to ensnare him, ever keeping his baleful eyes fixed on him, and each time by a mighty effort the student just managed to evade it. So this went on for many times, the Judge seeming never discouraged nor discomposed at failure, but playing as a cat does with a mouse. At last in despair, which had reached its climax, Malcolmson cast a quick glance round him. The lamp seemed to have blazed up, and there was a fairly good light in the room. At the many rat-holes and in the chinks and crannies of the wainscot he saw the rats' eyes; and this aspect, that was purely physical, gave him a gleam of comfort. He looked around and saw that the rope of the great alarm bell was laden with rats. Every inch of it was covered with them, and more and more were pouring through the small circular hole in the ceiling whence it emerged, so that with their weight the bell was beginning to sway.

Hark! it had swayed till the clapper had touched the bell. The sound was but a tiny one, but the bell was only beginning to sway, and it would increase.

At the sound the Judge, who had been keeping his eyes fixed on Malcolmson, looked up, and a scowl of diabolical anger overspread his face. His eyes fairly glowed like hot coals, and he stamped his foot with a sound that seemed to make the house shake. A dreadful peal of thunder broke overhead as he raised the rope again, whilst the rats kept running up and down the rope as though working against time. This time, instead of throwing it, he drew close to his victim, and held open the noose as he approached. As he came closer there seemed something paralysing in his very presence, and Malcolmson stood rigid as a corpse. He felt the Judge's icy fingers touch his throat as he adjusted the rope. The noose tightened — tightened. Then the Judge, taking the rigid form of the student in his arms, carried him over and placed him standing in the oak chair, and stepping up beside him, put his hand up and caught the end of the swaying rope of the alarm bell. As he raised his hand the rats fled squeaking, and disappeared through the hole in the ceiling. Taking the end of the noose which was round Malcolmson's neck he tied it to the hanging-bell rope, and then descending pulled away the chair.

When the alarm bell of the Judge's House began to sound a crowd soon assembled. Lights and torches of various kinds appeared, and soon a silent crowd was hurrying to the spot. They knocked loudly at the door, but there was no reply. Then they burst in the door, and poured into the great dining-room, the doctor at the head.

There at the end of the rope of the great alarm bell hung the body of the student, and on the face of the Judge in the picture was a malignant smile.

THE SQUAW

Nurnberg at the time was not so much exploited as it has been since then. Irving had not been playing *Faust*, and the very name of the old town was hardly known to the great bulk of the travelling public. My wife and I being in the second week of our honeymoon, naturally wanted someone else to join our party, so that when the cheery stranger, Elias P. Hutcheson, hailing from Isthmian City, Bleeding Gulch, Maple Tree County, Neb. turned up at the station at Frankfort, and casually remarked that he was going on to see the most all-fired old Methuselah of a town in Yurrup, and that he guessed that so much travelling alone was enough to send an intelligent, active citizen into the melancholy ward of a daft house, we took the pretty broad hint and suggested that we should join forces. We found, on comparing notes afterwards, that we had each intended to speak with some diffidence or hesitation so as not to appear too eager, such not being a good compliment to the success of our married life; but the effect was entirely marred by our both beginning to speak at the same instant — stopping simultaneously and then going on together again. Anyhow, no matter how, it was done; and Elias P. Hutcheson became one of our party. Straightway Amelia and I found the pleasant benefit; instead of quarrelling, as we had been doing, we found that the restraining influence of a third party was such that we now took every opportunity of spooning in odd corners. Amelia declares that ever since she has, as the result of that experience, advised all her friends to take a friend on the honeymoon. Well, we 'did' Nurnberg together, and much enjoyed the racy remarks of our Transatlantic friend, who, from his quaint speech and his wonderful stock of adventures, might have stepped out of a novel. We kept for the last object of interest in the city to be visited the Burg, and on the day appointed for the visit strolled round the outer wall of the city by the eastern side.

The Burg is seated on a rock dominating the town and an immensely deep fosse guards it on the northern side. Nurnberg has been happy in that it was never sacked; had it been it would certainly not be so spick and span perfect as it is at present. The ditch has not been used for centuries, and now its base is spread with tea-gardens and orchards, of which some of the trees are of quite respectable growth. As we wandered round the wall, dawdling in the hot July sunshine, we often paused to admire the views spread before us, and in especial the great plain covered with towns and villages and bounded with a blue line of hills, like a landscape of Claude Lorraine. From this we always turned with new delight to the city itself, with its myriad of quaint old gables and acre-wide red roofs dotted with dormer windows, tier upon tier. A little to our right rose the towers of the Burg, and nearer still, standing grim, the Torture Tower, which was, and is, perhaps, the most interesting place in the city. For centuries the tradition of the Iron Virgin of Nurnberg has been handed down as an instance of the horrors of cruelty of which man is capable; we had long looked forward to seeing it; and here at last was its home.

In one of our pauses we leaned over the wall of the moat and looked down. The garden seemed quite fifty or sixty feet below us, and the sun pouring into it with an intense, moveless heat like that of an oven. Beyond rose the grey, grim wall seemingly of endless height, and losing itself right and left in the angles of bastion and counterscarp. Trees and bushes crowned the wall, and above again towered the lofty houses on whose massive beauty Time has only set the hand of approval. The sun was hot and we were lazy; time was our own, and we lingered, leaning on the wall. Just below us was a pretty sight — a great black cat lying stretched in the sun, whilst round her gambolled prettily a tiny black kitten. The mother would wave her tail for the kitten to play with, or would raise her feet and push away the little one as an encouragement to further play. They were just at the foot of the wall, and Elias P. Hutcheson, in order to help the play, stooped and took from the walk a moderate sized pebble.

‘See!’ he said, ‘I will drop it near the kitten, and they will both wonder where it came from.’

‘Oh, be careful,’ said my wife; ‘you might hit the dear little thing!’

‘Not me, ma’am,’ said Elias P. ‘Why, I’m as tender as a Maine cherry-tree. Lor, bless ye. I wouldn’t hurt the poor pooty little critter more’n I’d scalp a baby. An’ you may bet your variegated socks on that! See, I’ll drop it fur away on the outside so’s not to go near her!’ Thus saying, he leaned over and held his arm out at full length and dropped the stone. It may be that there is some attractive force which draws lesser matters to greater; or more probably that the wall was not plump but sloped to its base — we not noticing the inclination from above; but the stone fell with a sickening thud that came up to us through the hot air, right on the kitten’s head, and shattered out its little brains then and there. The black cat cast a swift upward glance, and we saw her eyes like green fire fixed an instant on Elias P. Hutcheson; and then her attention was given to the kitten, which lay still with just a quiver of her tiny limbs, whilst a thin red stream trickled from a gaping wound. With a muffled cry, such as a human being might give, she bent over the kitten licking its wounds and moaning. Suddenly she seemed to realise that it was dead, and again threw her eyes up at us. I shall never forget the sight, for she looked the perfect incarnation of hate. Her green eyes blazed with lurid fire, and the white, sharp teeth seemed to almost shine through the blood which dabbled her mouth and whiskers. She gnashed her teeth, and her claws stood out stark and at full length on every paw. Then she made a wild rush up the wall as if to reach us, but when the momentum ended fell back, and further added to her horrible appearance for she fell on the kitten, and rose with her black fur smeared with its brains and blood. Amelia turned quite faint, and I had to lift her back from the wall. There was a seat close by in shade of a spreading plane-tree, and here I placed her whilst she composed herself. Then I went back to Hutcheson, who stood without moving, looking down on the angry cat below.

As I joined him, he said:

‘Wall, I guess that air the savagest beast I ever see— ‘cept once when an Apache squaw had an edge on a half-breed what they nicknamed “Splinters” ‘cos of the way he fixed up her papoose which he stole on a raid just to show that he appreciated the way they had given his mother the fire torture. She got that kinder look so set on her face that it jest seemed to grow there. She followed Splinters mor’n three year till at last the braves got him and handed him over to her. They did say that no man, white or Injun, had ever been so long a-dying under the tortures of the Apaches. The only time I ever see her smile was when I wiped her out. I kem on the camp just in time to see Splinters pass in his checks, and he wasn’t sorry to go either. He was a hard citizen, and though I never could shake with him after that papoose business — for it was bitter bad, and he should have been a white man, for he looked like one — I see he had got paid out in full. Durn me, but I took a piece of his hide from one of his skinnin' posts an' had it made into a pocket-book. It's here now!' and he slapped the breast pocket of his coat.

Whilst he was speaking the cat was continuing her frantic efforts to get up the wall. She would take a run back and then charge up, sometimes reaching an incredible height. She did not seem to mind the heavy fall which she get each time but started with renewed vigour; and at every tumble her appearance became more horrible. Hutcheson was a kind-hearted man — my wife and I had both noticed little acts of kindness to animals as well as to persons — and he seemed concerned at the state of fury to which the cat had wrought herself.

'Wall, now!' he said, 'I du declare that that poor critter seems quite desperate. There! there! poor thing, it was all an accident — though that won't bring back your little one to you. Say! I wouldn't have had such a thing happen for a thousand! Just shows what a clumsy fool of a man can do when he tries to play! Seems I'm too darned slipperhanded to even play with a cat. Say Colonel!' it was a pleasant way he had to bestow titles freely— 'I hope your wife don't hold no grudge against me on account of this unpleasantness? Why, I wouldn't have had it occur on no account.'

He came over to Amelia and apologised profusely, and she with her usual kindness of heart hastened to assure him that she quite understood that it was an accident. Then we all went again to the wall and looked over.

The cat missing Hutcheson's face had drawn back across the moat, and was sitting on her haunches as though ready to spring. Indeed, the very instant she saw him she did spring, and with a blind unreasoning fury, which would have been grotesque, only that it was so frightfully real. She did not try to run up the wall, but simply launched herself at him as though hate and fury could lend her wings to pass straight through the great distance between them. Amelia, womanlike, got quite concerned, and said to Elias P. in a warning voice:

‘Oh! you must be very careful. That animal would try to kill you if she were here; her eyes look like positive murder.’

He laughed out jovially. ‘Excuse me, ma’am,’ he said, ‘but I can’t help laughin’. Fancy a man that has fought grizzlies an’ Injuns bein’ careful of bein’ murdered by a cat!’

When the cat heard him laugh, her whole demeanour seemed to change. She no longer tried to jump or run up the wall, but went quietly over, and sitting again beside the dead kitten began to lick and fondle it as though it were alive.

‘See!’ said I, ‘the effect of a really strong man. Even that animal in the midst of her fury recognises the voice of a master, and bows to him!’

‘Like a squaw!’ was the only comment of Elias P. Hutcheson, as we moved on our way round the city fosse. Every now and then we looked over the wall and each time saw the cat following us. At first she had kept going back to the dead kitten, and then as the distance grew greater took it in her mouth and so followed. After a while, however, she abandoned this, for we saw her following all alone; she had evidently hidden the body somewhere. Amelia’s alarm grew at the cat’s persistence, and more than once she repeated her warning; but the American always laughed with amusement, till finally, seeing that she was beginning to be worried, he said:

‘I say, ma’am, you needn’t be skeered over that cat. I go heeled, I du!’ Here he slapped his pistol pocket at the back of his lumbar region. ‘Why sooner’n have you worried, I’ll shoot the critter, right here, an’ risk the police interferin’ with a citizen of the United States for carryin’ arms contrairy to reg’lations!’ As he spoke he looked over the wall, but the cat on seeing him, retreated, with a growl, into a bed of tall flowers, and was hidden. He went on: ‘Blest if that ar critter ain’t got more sense of what’s good for her than most Christians. I guess we’ve seen the last of her! You bet, she’ll go back now to that busted kitten and have a private funeral of it, all to herself!’

Amelia did not like to say more, lest he might, in mistaken kindness to her, fulfil his threat of shooting the cat: and so we went on and crossed the little wooden bridge leading to the gateway whence ran the steep paved roadway between the Burg and the pentagonal Torture Tower. As we crossed the bridge we saw the cat again down below us. When she saw us her fury seemed to return, and she made frantic efforts to get up the steep wall. Hutcheson laughed as he looked down at her, and said:

‘Goodbye, old girl. Sorry I injured your feelin’s, but you’ll get over it in time! So long!’ And then we passed through the long, dim archway and came to the gate of the Burg.

When we came out again after our survey of this most beautiful old place which not even the well-intentioned efforts of the Gothic restorers of forty years ago have been able to spoil — though their restoration was then glaring white — we seemed to have quite forgotten the unpleasant episode of the morning. The old lime tree with its great trunk gnarled with the passing of nearly nine centuries, the deep well cut through the heart of the rock by those captives of old, and the lovely view from the city wall whence we heard, spread over almost a full quarter of an hour, the multitudinous chimes of the city, had all helped to wipe out from our minds the incident of the slain kitten.

We were the only visitors who had entered the Torture Tower that morning — so at least said the old custodian — and as we had the place all to ourselves were able to make a minute and more satisfactory survey than would have otherwise been possible. The custodian, looking to us as the sole source of his gains for the day, was willing to meet our wishes in any way. The Torture Tower is truly a grim place, even now when many thousands of visitors have sent a stream of life, and the joy that follows life, into the place; but at the time I mention it wore its grimmest and most gruesome aspect. The dust of ages seemed to have settled on it, and the darkness and the horror of its memories seem to have become sentient in a way that would have satisfied the Pantheistic souls of Philo or Spinoza. The lower chamber where we entered was seemingly, in its normal state, filled with incarnate darkness; even the hot sunlight streaming in through the door seemed to be lost in the vast thickness of the walls, and only showed the masonry rough as when the builder's scaffolding had come down, but coated with dust and marked here and there with patches of dark stain which, if walls could speak, could have given their own dread memories of fear and pain. We were glad to pass up the dusty wooden staircase, the custodian leaving the outer door open to light us somewhat on our way; for to our eyes the one long-wick'd, evil-smelling candle stuck in a sconce on the wall gave an inadequate light. When we came up through the open trap in the corner of the chamber overhead, Amelia held on to me so tightly that I could actually feel her heart beat. I must say for my own part that I was not surprised at her fear, for this room was even more gruesome than that below. Here there was certainly more light, but only just sufficient to realise the horrible surroundings of the place. The builders of the tower had evidently intended that only they who should gain the top should have any of the joys of light and prospect. There, as we had noticed from below, were ranges of windows, albeit of mediaeval smallness, but elsewhere in the tower were only a very few narrow slits such as were habitual in places of mediaeval defence. A few of these only lit the chamber, and these so high up in the wall that from no part could the sky be seen through the thickness of the walls. In racks, and leaning in disorder against the walls, were a number of headsmen's swords, great double-handed weapons with broad blade and keen edge. Hard by were several blocks whereon the necks of the victims had lain, with here and there deep notches where the steel had bitten through the guard of flesh and shored into the wood. Round the chamber, placed in all sorts of irregular ways, were many implements of torture which made one's heart ache to see — chairs full of spikes which gave instant and excruciating pain; chairs and couches with dull knobs whose torture was seemingly less, but which, though slower, were equally efficacious; racks, belts, boots, gloves, collars, all made for compressing at will; steel baskets in which the head could be slowly crushed into a pulp if necessary; watchmen's hooks with long handle and knife that cut at resistance — this a speciality of the old Nurnberg police system; and many, many other devices for man's injury to man. Amelia grew quite pale with the horror of the things, but fortunately did not faint, for being a little overcome she sat down on a torture chair, but jumped up again with a shriek, all tendency to faint gone. We both pretended that it was the injury done to her dress by the dust of the chair, and the rusty spikes which had upset her, and Mr. Hutcheson acquiesced in accepting the explanation with a kind-hearted laugh.

But the central object in the whole of this chamber of horrors was the engine known as the Iron Virgin, which stood near the centre of the room. It was a rudely-shaped figure of a woman, something of the bell order, or, to make a closer comparison, of the figure of Mrs. Noah in the children's Ark, but without that slimness of waist and perfect *rondeur* of hip which marks the aesthetic type of the Noah family. One would hardly have recognised it as intended for a human figure at all had not the founder shaped on the forehead a rude semblance of a woman's face. This machine was coated with rust without, and covered with dust; a rope was fastened to a ring in the front of the figure, about where the waist should have been, and was drawn through a pulley, fastened on the wooden pillar which sustained the flooring above. The custodian pulling this rope showed that a section of the front was hinged like a door at one side; we then saw that the engine was of considerable thickness, leaving just room enough inside for a man to be placed. The door was of equal thickness and of great weight, for it took the custodian all his strength, aided though he was by the contrivance of the pulley, to open it. This weight was partly due to the fact that the door was of manifest purpose hung so as to throw its weight downwards, so that it might shut of its own accord when the strain was released. The inside was honeycombed with rust — nay more, the rust alone that comes through time would hardly have eaten so deep into the iron walls; the rust of the cruel stains was deep indeed! It was only, however, when we came to look at the inside of the door that the diabolical intention was manifest to the full. Here were several long spikes, square and massive, broad at the base and sharp at the points, placed in such a position that when the door should close the upper ones would pierce the eyes of the victim, and the lower ones his heart and vitals. The sight was too much for poor Amelia, and this time she fainted dead off, and I had to carry her down the stairs, and place her on a bench outside till she recovered. That she felt it to the quick was afterwards shown by the fact that my eldest son bears to this day a rude birthmark on his breast, which has, by family consent, been accepted as representing the Nurnberg Virgin.

When we got back to the chamber we found Hutcheson still opposite the Iron Virgin; he had been evidently philosophising, and now gave us the benefit of his thought in the shape of a sort of exordium.

‘Wall, I guess I’ve been learnin’ somethin’ here while madam has been gettin’ over her faint. ‘Pears to me that we’re a long way behind the times on our side of the big drink. We uster think out on the plains that the Injun could give us points in tryin’ to make a man uncomfortable; but I guess your old mediaeval law-and-order party could raise him every time. Splinters was pretty good in his bluff on the squaw, but this here young miss held a straight flush all high on him. The points of them spikes air sharp enough still, though even the edges air eaten out by what uster be on them. It’d be a good thing for our Indian section to get some specimens of this here play-toy to send round to the Reservations jest to knock the stuffin’ out of the bucks, and the squaws too, by showing them as how old civilisation lays over them at their best. Guess but I’ll get in that box a minute jest to see how it feels!’

‘Oh no! no!’ said Amelia. ‘It is too terrible!’

‘Guess, ma’am, nothin’s too terrible to the explorin’ mind. I’ve been in some queer places in my time. Spent a night inside a dead horse while a prairie fire swept over me in Montana Territory — an’ another time slept inside a dead buffler when the Comanches was on the war path an' I didn't keer to leave my kyard on them. I've been two days in a caved-in tunnel in the Billy Broncho gold mine in New Mexico, an' was one of the four shut up for three parts of a day in the caisson what slid over on her side when we was settin' the foundations of the Buffalo Bridge. I've not funked an odd experience yet, an' I don't propose to begin now!'

We saw that he was set on the experiment, so I said: 'Well, hurry up, old man, and get through it quick!'

'All right, General,' said he, 'but I calculate we ain't quite ready yet. The gentlemen, my predecessors, what stood in that thar canister, didn't volunteer for the office — not much! And I guess there was some ornamental tyin' up before the big stroke was made. I want to go into this thing fair and square, so I must get fixed up proper first. I dare say this old galoot can rise some string and tie me up accordin' to sample?'

This was said interrogatively to the old custodian, but the latter, who understood the drift of his speech, though perhaps not appreciating to the full the niceties of dialect and imagery, shook his head. His protest was, however, only formal and made to be overcome. The American thrust a gold piece into his hand, saying: 'Take it, pard! it's your pot; and don't be skeer'd. This ain't no necktie party that you're asked to assist in!' He produced some thin frayed rope and proceeded to bind our companion with sufficient strictness for the purpose. When the upper part of his body was bound, Hutcheson said:

'Hold on a moment, Judge. Guess I'm too heavy for you to tote into the canister. You jest let me walk in, and then you can wash up regardin' my legs!'

Whilst speaking he had backed himself into the opening which was just enough to hold him. It was a close fit and no mistake. Amelia looked on with fear in her eyes, but she evidently did not like to say anything. Then the custodian completed his task by tying the American's feet together so that he was now absolutely helpless and fixed in his voluntary prison. He seemed to really enjoy it, and the incipient smile which was habitual to his face blossomed into actuality as he said:

'Guess this here Eve was made out of the rib of a dwarf! There ain't much room for a full-grown citizen of the United States to hustle. We uster make our coffins more roomier in Idaho territory. Now, Judge, you jest begin to let this door down, slow, on to me. I want to feel the same pleasure as the other jays had when those spikes began to move toward their eyes!'

'Oh no! no! no!' broke in Amelia hysterically. 'It is too terrible! I can't bear to see it! — I can't! I can't!' But the American was obdurate. 'Say, Colonel,' said he, 'why not take Madame for a little promenade? I wouldn't hurt her feelin's for the world; but now that I am here, havin' kem eight thousand miles, wouldn't it be too hard to give up the very experience I've been pinin' an' pantin' fur? A man can't get to feel like canned goods every time! Me and the Judge here'll fix up this thing in no time, an' then you'll come back, an' we'll all laugh together!'

Once more the resolution that is born of curiosity triumphed, and Amelia stayed holding tight to my arm and shivering whilst the custodian began to slacken slowly inch by inch the rope that held back the iron door. Hutcheson's face was positively radiant as his eyes followed the first movement of the spikes.

'Wall!' he said, 'I guess I've not had enjoyment like this since I left Noo York. Bar a scrap with a French sailor at Wapping — an' that warn't much of a picnic neither — I've not had a show fur real pleasure in this dod-rotted Continent, where there ain't no b'ars nor no Injuns, an' wheer nary man goes heeled. Slow there, Judge! Don't you rush this business! I want a show for my money this game — I du!'

The custodian must have had in him some of the blood of his predecessors in that ghastly tower, for he worked the engine with a deliberate and excruciating slowness which after five minutes, in which the outer edge of the door had not moved half as many inches, began to overcome Amelia. I saw her lips whiten, and felt her hold upon my arm relax. I looked around an instant for a place whereon to lay her, and when I looked at her again found that her eye had become fixed on the side of the Virgin. Following its direction I saw the black cat crouching out of sight. Her green eyes shone like danger lamps in the gloom of the place, and their colour was heightened by the blood which still smeared her coat and reddened her mouth. I cried out:

'The cat! look out for the cat!' for even then she sprang out before the engine. At this moment she looked like a triumphant demon. Her eyes blazed with ferocity, her hair bristled out till she seemed twice her normal size, and her tail lashed about as does a tiger's when the quarry is before it. Elias P. Hutcheson when he saw her was amused, and his eyes positively sparkled with fun as he said:

'Darned if the squaw hain't got on all her war paint! Jest give her a shove off if she comes any of her tricks on me, for I'm so fixed everlastingly by the boss, that durn my skin if I can keep my eyes from her if she wants them! Easy there, Judge! don't you slack that ar rope or I'm euchered!'

At this moment Amelia completed her faint, and I had to clutch hold of her round the waist or she would have fallen to the floor. Whilst attending to her I saw the black cat crouching for a spring, and jumped up to turn the creature out.

But at that instant, with a sort of hellish scream, she hurled herself, not as we expected at Hutcheson, but straight at the face of the custodian. Her claws seemed to be tearing wildly as one sees in the Chinese drawings of the dragon rampant, and as I looked I saw one of them light on the poor man's eye, and actually tear through it and down his cheek, leaving a wide band of red where the blood seemed to spurt from every vein.

With a yell of sheer terror which came quicker than even his sense of pain, the man leaped back, dropping as he did so the rope which held back the iron door. I jumped for it, but was too late, for the cord ran like lightning through the pulley-block, and the heavy mass fell forward from its own weight.

As the door closed I caught a glimpse of our poor companion's face. He seemed frozen with terror. His eyes stared with a horrible anguish as if dazed, and no sound came from his lips.

And then the spikes did their work. Happily the end was quick, for when I wrenched open the door they had pierced so deep that they had locked in the bones of the skull through which they had crushed, and actually tore him — it — out of his iron prison till, bound as he was, he fell at full length with a sickly thud upon the floor, the face turning upward as he fell.

I rushed to my wife, lifted her up and carried her out, for I feared for her very reason if she should wake from her faint to such a scene. I laid her on the bench outside and ran back. Leaning against the wooden column was the custodian moaning in pain whilst he held his reddening handkerchief to his eyes. And sitting on the head of the poor American was the cat, purring loudly as she licked the blood which trickled through the gashed socket of his eyes.

I think no one will call me cruel because I seized one of the old executioner's swords and shore her in two as she sat.

THE SECRET OF THE GROWING GOLD

When Margaret Delandre went to live at Brent's Rock the whole neighbourhood awoke to the pleasure of an entirely new scandal. Scandals in connection with either the Delandre family or the Brents of Brent's Rock, were not few; and if the secret history of the county had been written in full both names would have been found well represented. It is true that the status of each was so different that they might have belonged to different continents — or to different worlds for the matter of that — for hitherto their orbits had never crossed. The Brents were accorded by the whole section of the country a unique social dominance, and had ever held themselves as high above the yeoman class to which Margaret Delandre belonged, as a blue-blooded Spanish hidalgo out-tops his peasant tenantry.

The Delandres had an ancient record and were proud of it in their way as the Brents were of theirs. But the family had never risen above yeomanry; and although they had been once well-to-do in the good old times of foreign wars and protection, their fortunes had withered under the scorching of the free trade sun and the 'piping times of peace.' They had, as the elder members used to assert, 'stuck to the land', with the result that they had taken root in it, body and soul. In fact, they, having chosen the life of vegetables, had flourished as vegetation does — blossomed and thrived in the good season and suffered in the bad. Their holding, Dander's Croft, seemed to have been worked out, and to be typical of the family which had inhabited it. The latter had declined generation after generation, sending out now and again some abortive shoot of unsatisfied energy in the shape of a soldier or sailor, who had worked his way to the minor grades of the services and had there stopped, cut short either from unheeding gallantry in action or from that destroying cause to men without breeding or youthful care — the recognition of a position above them which they feel unfitted to fill. So, little by little, the family dropped lower and lower, the men brooding and dissatisfied, and drinking themselves into the grave, the women drudging at home, or marrying beneath them — or worse. In process of time all disappeared, leaving only two in the Croft, Wykham Delandre and his sister Margaret. The man and woman seemed to have inherited in masculine and feminine form respectively the evil tendency of their race, sharing in common the principles, though manifesting them in different ways, of sullen passion, voluptuousness and recklessness.

The history of the Brents had been something similar, but showing the causes of decadence in their aristocratic and not their plebeian forms. They, too, had sent their shoots to the wars; but their positions had been different and they had often attained honour — for without flaw they were gallant, and brave deeds were done by them before the selfish dissipation which marked them had sapped their vigour.

The present head of the family — if family it could now be called when one remained of the direct line — was Geoffrey Brent. He was almost a type of worn out race, manifesting in some ways its most brilliant qualities, and in others its utter degradation. He might be fairly compared with some of those antique Italian nobles whom the painters have preserved to us with their courage, their unscrupulousness, their refinement of lust and cruelty — the voluptuary actual with the fiend potential. He was certainly handsome, with that dark, aquiline, commanding beauty which women so generally recognise as dominant. With men he was distant and cold; but such a bearing never deters womankind. The inscrutable laws of sex have so arranged that even a timid woman is not afraid of a fierce and haughty man. And so it was that there was hardly a woman of any kind or degree, who lived within view of Brent’s Rock, who did not cherish some form of secret admiration for the handsome wastrel. The category was a wide one, for Brent’s Rock rose up steeply from the midst of a level region and for a circuit of a hundred miles it lay on the horizon, with its high old towers and steep roofs cutting the level edge of wood and hamlet, and far-scattered mansions.

So long as Geoffrey Brent confined his dissipations to London and Paris and Vienna — anywhere out of sight and sound of his home — opinion was silent. It is easy to listen to far off echoes unmoved, and we can treat them with disbelief, or scorn, or disdain, or whatever attitude of coldness may suit our purpose. But when the scandal came close home it was another matter; and the feelings of independence and integrity which is in people of every community which is not utterly spoiled, asserted itself and demanded that condemnation should be expressed. Still there was a certain reticence in all, and no more notice was taken of the existing facts than was absolutely necessary. Margaret Delandre bore herself so fearlessly and so openly — she accepted her position as the justified companion of Geoffrey Brent so naturally that people came to believe that she was secretly married to him, and therefore thought it wiser to hold their tongues lest time should justify her and also make her an active enemy.

The one person who, by his interference, could have settled all doubts was debarred by circumstances from interfering in the matter. Wykham Delandre had quarrelled with his sister — or perhaps it was that she had quarrelled with him — and they were on terms not merely of armed neutrality but of bitter hatred. The quarrel had been antecedent to Margaret going to Brent's Rock. She and Wykham had almost come to blows. There had certainly been threats on one side and on the other; and in the end Wykham, overcome with passion, had ordered his sister to leave his house. She had risen straightway, and, without waiting to pack up even her own personal belongings, had walked out of the house. On the threshold she had paused for a moment to hurl a bitter threat at Wykham that he would rue in shame and despair to the last hour of his life his act of that day. Some weeks had since passed; and it was understood in the neighbourhood that Margaret had gone to London, when she suddenly appeared driving out with Geoffrey Brent, and the entire neighbourhood knew before nightfall that she had taken up her abode at the Rock. It was no subject of surprise that Brent had come back unexpectedly, for such was his usual custom. Even his own servants never knew when to expect him, for there was a private door, of which he alone had the key, by which he sometimes entered without anyone in the house being aware of his coming. This was his usual method of appearing after a long absence.

Wykham Delandre was furious at the news. He vowed vengeance — and to keep his mind level with his passion drank deeper than ever. He tried several times to see his sister, but she contemptuously refused to meet him. He tried to have an interview with Brent and was refused by him also. Then he tried to stop him in the road, but without avail, for Geoffrey was not a man to be stopped against his will. Several actual encounters took place between the two men, and many more were threatened and avoided. At last Wykham Delandre settled down to a morose, vengeful acceptance of the situation.

Neither Margaret nor Geoffrey was of a pacific temperament, and it was not long before there began to be quarrels between them. One thing would lead to another, and wine flowed freely at Brent's Rock. Now and again the quarrels would assume a bitter aspect, and threats would be exchanged in uncompromising language that fairly awed the listening servants. But such quarrels generally ended where domestic altercations do, in reconciliation, and in a mutual respect for the fighting qualities proportionate to their manifestation. Fighting for its own sake is found by a certain class of persons, all the world over, to be a matter of absorbing interest, and there is no reason to believe that domestic conditions minimise its potency. Geoffrey and Margaret made occasional absences from Brent's Rock, and on each of these occasions Wykham Delandre also absented himself; but as he generally heard of the absence too late to be of any service, he returned home each time in a more bitter and discontented frame of mind than before.

At last there came a time when the absence from Brent's Rock became longer than before. Only a few days earlier there had been a quarrel, exceeding in bitterness anything which had gone before; but this, too, had been made up, and a trip on the Continent had been mentioned before the servants. After a few days Wykham Delandre also went away, and it was some weeks before he returned. It was noticed that he was full of some new importance — satisfaction, exaltation — they hardly knew how to call it. He went straightway to Brent's Rock, and demanded to see Geoffrey Brent, and on being told that he had not yet returned, said, with a grim decision which the servants noted:

'I shall come again. My news is solid — it can wait!' and turned away. Week after week went by, and month after month; and then there came a rumour, certified later on, that an accident had occurred in the Zermatt valley. Whilst crossing a dangerous pass the carriage containing an English lady and the driver had fallen over a precipice, the gentleman of the party, Mr. Geoffrey Brent, having been fortunately saved as he had been walking up the hill to ease the horses. He gave information, and search was made. The broken rail, the excoriated roadway, the marks where the horses had struggled on the decline before finally pitching over into the torrent — all told the sad tale. It was a wet season, and there had been much snow in the winter, so that the river was swollen beyond its usual volume, and the eddies of the stream were packed with ice. All search was made, and finally the wreck of the carriage and the body of one horse were found in an eddy of the river. Later on the body of the driver was found on the sandy, torrent-swept waste near Täsch; but the body of the lady, like that of the other horse, had quite disappeared, and was — what was left of it by that time — whirling amongst the eddies of the Rhone on its way down to the Lake of Geneva.

Wykham Delandre made all the enquiries possible, but could not find any trace of the missing woman. He found, however, in the books of the various hotels the name of ‘Mr. and Mrs. Geoffrey Brent’. And he had a stone erected at Zermatt to his sister’s memory, under her married name, and a tablet put up in the church at Bretten, the parish in which both Brent’s Rock and Dander’s Croft were situated.

There was a lapse of nearly a year, after the excitement of the matter had worn away, and the whole neighbourhood had gone on its accustomed way. Brent was still absent, and Delandre more drunken, more morose, and more revengeful than before.

Then there was a new excitement. Brent’s Rock was being made ready for a new mistress. It was officially announced by Geoffrey himself in a letter to the Vicar, that he had been married some months before to an Italian lady, and that they were then on their way home. Then a small army of workmen invaded the house; and hammer and plane sounded, and a general air of size and paint pervaded the atmosphere. One wing of the old house, the south, was entirely re-done; and then the great body of the workmen departed, leaving only materials for the doing of the old hall when Geoffrey Brent should have returned, for he had directed that the decoration was only to be done under his own eyes. He had brought with him accurate drawings of a hall in the house of his bride's father, for he wished to reproduce for her the place to which she had been accustomed. As the moulding had all to be re-done, some scaffolding poles and boards were brought in and laid on one side of the great hall, and also a great wooden tank or box for mixing the lime, which was laid in bags beside it.

When the new mistress of Brent's Rock arrived the bells of the church rang out, and there was a general jubilation. She was a beautiful creature, full of the poetry and fire and passion of the South; and the few English words which she had learned were spoken in such a sweet and pretty broken way that she won the hearts of the people almost as much by the music of her voice as by the melting beauty of her dark eyes.

Geoffrey Brent seemed more happy than he had ever before appeared; but there was a dark, anxious look on his face that was new to those who knew him of old, and he started at times as though at some noise that was unheard by others.

And so months passed and the whisper grew that at last Brent's Rock was to have an heir. Geoffrey was very tender to his wife, and the new bond between them seemed to soften him. He took more interest in his tenants and their needs than he had ever done; and works of charity on his part as well as on his sweet young wife's were not lacking. He seemed to have set all his hopes on the child that was coming, and as he looked deeper into the future the dark shadow that had come over his face seemed to die gradually away.

All the time Wykham Delandre nursed his revenge. Deep in his heart had grown up a purpose of vengeance which only waited an opportunity to crystallise and take a definite shape. His vague idea was somehow centred in the wife of Brent, for he knew that he could strike him best through those he loved, and the coming time seemed to hold in its womb the opportunity for which he longed. One night he sat alone in the living-room of his house. It had once been a handsome room in its way, but time and neglect had done their work and it was now little better than a ruin, without dignity or picturesqueness of any kind. He had been drinking heavily for some time and was more than half stupefied. He thought he heard a noise as of someone at the door and looked up. Then he called half savagely to come in; but there was no response. With a muttered blasphemy he renewed his potations. Presently he forgot all around him, sank into a daze, but suddenly awoke to see standing before him someone or something like a battered, ghostly edition of his sister. For a few moments there came upon him a sort of fear. The woman before him, with distorted features and burning eyes seemed hardly human, and the only thing that seemed a reality of his sister, as she had been, was her wealth of golden hair, and this was now streaked with grey. She eyed her brother with a long, cold stare; and he, too, as he looked and began to realise the actuality of her presence, found the hatred of her which he had had, once again surging up in his heart. All the brooding passion of the past year seemed to find a voice at once as he asked her:

‘Why are you here? You’re dead and buried.’

‘I am here, Wykham Delandre, for no love of you, but because I hate another even more than I do you!’ A great passion blazed in her eyes.

‘Him?’ he asked, in so fierce a whisper that even the woman was for an instant startled till she regained her calm.

‘Yes, him!’ she answered. ‘But make no mistake, my revenge is my own; and I merely use you to help me to it.’ Wykham asked suddenly:

‘Did he marry you?’

The woman’s distorted face broadened out in a ghastly attempt at a smile. It was a hideous mockery, for the broken features and seamed scars took strange shapes and strange colours, and queer lines of white showed out as the straining muscles pressed on the old cicatrices.

‘So you would like to know! It would please your pride to feel that your sister was truly married! Well, you shall not know. That was my revenge on you, and I do not mean to change it by a hair’s breadth. I have come here tonight simply to let you know that I am alive, so that if any violence be done me where I am going there may be a witness.’

‘Where are you going?’ demanded her brother.

‘That is my affair! and I have not the least intention of letting you know!’ Wykham stood up, but the drink was on him and he reeled and fell. As he lay on the floor he announced his intention of following his sister; and with an outburst of splenetic humour told her that he would follow her through the darkness by the light of her hair, and of her beauty. At this she turned on him, and said that there were others beside him that would rue her hair and her beauty too. ‘As he will,’ she hissed; ‘for the hair remains though the beauty be gone. When he withdrew the lynch-pin and sent us over the precipice into the torrent, he had little thought of my beauty. Perhaps his beauty would be scarred like mine were he whirled, as I was, among the rocks of the Visp, and frozen on the ice pack in the drift of the river. But let him beware! His time is coming!’ and with a fierce gesture she flung open the door and passed out into the night.

Later on that night, Mrs. Brent, who was but half-asleep, became suddenly awake and spoke to her husband:

‘Geoffrey, was not that the click of a lock somewhere below our window?’

But Geoffrey — though she thought that he, too, had started at the noise — seemed sound asleep, and breathed heavily. Again Mrs. Brent dozed; but this time awoke to the fact that her husband had arisen and was partially dressed. He was deadly pale, and when the light of the lamp which he had in his hand fell on his face, she was frightened at the look in his eyes.

‘What is it, Geoffrey? What dost thou?’ she asked.

‘Hush! little one,’ he answered, in a strange, hoarse voice. ‘Go to sleep. I am restless, and wish to finish some work I left undone.’

‘Bring it here, my husband,’ she said; ‘I am lonely and I fear when thou art away.’

For reply he merely kissed her and went out, closing the door behind him. She lay awake for awhile, and then nature asserted itself, and she slept.

Suddenly she started broad awake with the memory in her ears of a smothered cry from somewhere not far off. She jumped up and ran to the door and listened, but there was no sound. She grew alarmed for her husband, and called out: ‘Geoffrey! Geoffrey!’

After a few moments the door of the great hall opened, and Geoffrey appeared at it, but without his lamp.

‘Hush!’ he said, in a sort of whisper, and his voice was harsh and stern. ‘Hush! Get to bed! I am working, and must not be disturbed. Go to sleep, and do not wake the house!’

With a chill in her heart — for the harshness of her husband’s voice was new to her — she crept back to bed and lay there trembling, too frightened to cry, and listened to every sound. There was a long pause of silence, and then the sound of some iron implement striking muffled blows! Then there came a clang of a heavy stone falling, followed by a muffled curse. Then a dragging sound, and then more noise of stone on stone. She lay all the while in an agony of fear, and her heart beat dreadfully. She heard a curious sort of scraping sound; and then there was silence. Presently the door opened gently, and Geoffrey appeared. His wife pretended to be asleep; but through her eyelashes she saw him wash from his hands something white that looked like lime.

In the morning he made no allusion to the previous night, and she was afraid to ask any question.

From that day there seemed some shadow over Geoffrey Brent. He neither ate nor slept as he had been accustomed, and his former habit of turning suddenly as though someone were speaking from behind him revived. The old hall seemed to have some kind of fascination for him. He used to go there many times in the day, but grew impatient if anyone, even his wife, entered it. When the builder’s foreman came to inquire about continuing his work

Geoffrey was out driving; the man went into the hall, and when Geoffrey returned the servant told him of his arrival and where he was. With a frightful oath he pushed the servant aside and hurried up to the old hall. The workman met him almost at the door; and as Geoffrey burst into the room he ran against him. The man apologised:

‘Beg pardon, sir, but I was just going out to make some enquiries. I directed twelve sacks of lime to be sent here, but I see there are only ten.’

‘Damn the ten sacks and the twelve too!’ was the ungracious and incomprehensible rejoinder.

The workman looked surprised, and tried to turn the conversation.

‘I see, sir, there is a little matter which our people must have done; but the governor will of course see it set right at his own cost.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘That ‘ere ‘arth-stone, sir: Some idiot must have put a scaffold pole on it and cracked it right down the middle, and it’s thick enough you’d think to stand hanythink.’ Geoffrey was silent for quite a minute, and then said in a constrained voice and with much gentler manner:

‘Tell your people that I am not going on with the work in the hall at present. I want to leave it as it is for a while longer.’

‘All right sir. I’ll send up a few of our chaps to take away these poles and lime bags and tidy the place up a bit.’

‘No! No!’ said Geoffrey, ‘leave them where they are. I shall send and tell you when you are to get on with the work.’ So the foreman went away, and his comment to his master was:

‘I’d send in the bill, sir, for the work already done. ‘Pears to me that money’s a little shaky in that quarter.’

Once or twice Delandre tried to stop Brent on the road, and, at last, finding that he could not attain his object rode after the carriage, calling out:

‘What has become of my sister, your wife?’ Geoffrey lashed his horses into a gallop, and the other, seeing from his white face and from his wife’s collapse almost into a faint that his object was attained, rode away with a scowl and a laugh.

That night when Geoffrey went into the hall he passed over to the great fireplace, and all at once started back with a smothered cry. Then with an effort he pulled himself together and went away, returning with a light. He bent down over the broken hearth-stone to see if the moonlight falling through the storied window had in any way deceived him. Then with a groan of anguish he sank to his knees.

There, sure enough, through the crack in the broken stone were protruding a multitude of threads of golden hair just tinged with grey!

He was disturbed by a noise at the door, and looking round, saw his wife standing in the doorway. In the desperation of the moment he took action to prevent discovery, and lighting a match at the lamp, stooped down and burned away the hair that rose through the broken stone. Then rising nonchalantly as he could, he pretended surprise at seeing his wife beside him.

For the next week he lived in an agony; for, whether by accident or design, he could not find himself alone in the hall for any length of time. At each visit the hair had grown afresh through the crack, and he had to watch it carefully lest his terrible secret should be discovered. He tried to find a receptacle for the body of the murdered woman outside the house, but someone always interrupted him; and once, when he was coming out of the private doorway, he was met by his wife, who began to question him about it, and manifested surprise that she should not have before noticed the key which he now reluctantly showed her. Geoffrey dearly and passionately loved his wife, so that any possibility of her discovering his dread secrets, or even of doubting him, filled him with anguish; and after a couple of days had passed, he could not help coming to the conclusion that, at least, she suspected something.

That very evening she came into the hall after her drive and found him there sitting moodily by the deserted fireplace. She spoke to him directly.

‘Geoffrey, I have been spoken to by that fellow Delandre, and he says horrible things. He tells to me that a week ago his sister returned to his house, the wreck and ruin of her former self, with only her golden hair as of old, and announced some fell intention. He asked me where she is — and oh, Geoffrey, she is dead, she is dead! So how can she have returned? Oh! I am in dread, and I know not where to turn!’

For answer, Geoffrey burst into a torrent of blasphemy which made her shudder. He cursed Delandre and his sister and all their kind, and in especial he hurled curse after curse on her golden hair.

‘Oh, hush! hush!’ she said, and was then silent, for she feared her husband when she saw the evil effect of his humour. Geoffrey in the torrent of his anger stood up and moved away from the hearth; but suddenly stopped as he saw a new look of terror in his wife’s eyes. He followed their glance, and then he too, shuddered — for there on the broken hearth-stone lay a golden streak as the point of the hair rose though the crack.

‘Look, look!’ she shrieked. ‘Is it some ghost of the dead! Come away — come away!’ and seizing her husband by the wrist with the frenzy of madness, she pulled him from the room.

That night she was in a raging fever. The doctor of the district attended her at once, and special aid was telegraphed for to London. Geoffrey was in despair, and in his anguish at the danger of his young wife almost forgot his own crime and its consequences. In the evening the doctor had to leave to attend to others; but he left Geoffrey in charge of his wife. His last words were:

‘Remember, you must humour her till I come in the morning, or till some other doctor has her case in hand. What you have to dread is another attack of emotion. See that she is kept warm. Nothing more can be done.’

Late in the evening, when the rest of the household had retired, Geoffrey’s wife got up from her bed and called to her husband.

‘Come!’ she said. ‘Come to the old hall! I know where the gold comes from! I want to see it grow!’

Geoffrey would fain have stopped her, but he feared for her life or reason on the one hand, and lest in a paroxysm she should shriek out her terrible suspicion, and seeing that it was useless to try to prevent her, wrapped a warm rug around her and went with her to the old hall. When they entered, she turned and shut the door and locked it.

‘We want no strangers amongst us three tonight!’ she whispered with a wan smile.

‘We three! nay we are but two,’ said Geoffrey with a shudder; he feared to say more.

‘Sit here,’ said his wife as she put out the light. ‘Sit here by the hearth and watch the gold growing. The silver moonlight is jealous! See, it steals along the floor towards the gold — our gold!’ Geoffrey looked with growing horror, and saw that during the hours that had passed the golden hair had protruded further through the broken hearth-stone. He tried to hide it by placing his feet over the broken place; and his wife, drawing her chair beside him, leant over and laid her head on his shoulder.

‘Now do not stir, dear,’ she said; ‘let us sit still and watch. We shall find the secret of the growing gold!’ He passed his arm round her and sat silent; and as the moonlight stole along the floor she sank to sleep.

He feared to wake her; and so sat silent and miserable as the hours stole away.

Before his horror-struck eyes the golden-hair from the broken stone grew and grew; and as it increased, so his heart got colder and colder, till at last he had not power to stir, and sat with eyes full of terror watching his doom.

In the morning when the London doctor came, neither Geoffrey nor his wife could be found. Search was made in all the rooms, but without avail. As a last resource the great door of the old hall was broken open, and those who entered saw a grim and sorry sight.

There by the deserted hearth Geoffrey Brent and his young wife sat cold and white and dead. Her face was peaceful, and her eyes were closed in sleep; but his face was a sight that made all who saw it shudder, for there was on it a look of unutterable horror. The eyes were open and stared glassily at his feet, which were twined with tresses of golden hair, streaked with grey, which came through the broken hearth-stone.

THE GIPSY PROPHECY

'I really think,' said the Doctor, 'that, at any rate, one of us should go and try whether or not the thing is an imposture.'

'Good!' said Considine. 'After dinner we will take our cigars and stroll over to the camp.'

Accordingly, when the dinner was over, and the *La Tour* finished, Joshua Considine and his friend, Dr Burleigh, went over to the east side of the moor, where the gipsy encampment lay. As they were leaving, Mary Considine, who had walked as far as the end of the garden where it opened into the laneway, called after her husband:

'Mind, Joshua, you are to give them a fair chance, but don't give them any clue to a fortune — and don't you get flirting with any of the gipsy maidens — and take care to keep Gerald out of harm.'

For answer Considine held up his hand, as if taking a stage oath, and whistled the air of the old song, 'The Gipsy Countess.' Gerald joined in the strain, and then, breaking into merry laughter, the two men passed along the laneway to the common, turning now and then to wave their hands to Mary, who leaned over the gate, in the twilight, looking after them.

It was a lovely evening in the summer; the very air was full of rest and quiet happiness, as though an outward type of the peacefulness and joy which made a heaven of the home of the young married folk. Considine's life had not been an eventful one. The only disturbing element which he had ever known was in his wooing of Mary Winston, and the long-continued objection of her ambitious parents, who expected a brilliant match for their only daughter. When Mr. and Mrs. Winston had discovered the attachment of the young barrister, they had tried to keep the young people apart by sending their daughter away for a long round of visits, having made her promise not to correspond with her lover during her absence. Love, however, had stood the test. Neither absence nor neglect seemed to cool the passion of the young man, and jealousy seemed a thing unknown to his sanguine nature; so, after a long period of waiting, the parents had given in, and the young folk were married.

They had been living in the cottage a few months, and were just beginning to feel at home. Gerald Burleigh, Joshua's old college chum, and himself a sometime victim of Mary's beauty, had arrived a week before, to stay with them for as long a time as he could tear himself away from his work in London.

When her husband had quite disappeared Mary went into the house, and, sitting down at the piano, gave an hour to Mendelssohn.

It was but a short walk across the common, and before the cigars required renewing the two men had reached the gipsy camp. The place was as picturesque as gipsy camps — when in villages and when business is good — usually are. There were some few persons round the fire, investing their money in prophecy, and a large number of others, poorer or more parsimonious, who stayed just outside the bounds but near enough to see all that went on.

As the two gentlemen approached, the villagers, who knew Joshua, made way a little, and a pretty, keen-eyed gipsy girl tripped up and asked to tell their fortunes. Joshua held out his hand, but the girl, without seeming to see it, stared at his face in a very odd manner. Gerald nudged him:

'You must cross her hand with silver,' he said. 'It is one of the most important parts of the mystery.' Joshua took from his pocket a half-crown and held it out to her, but, without looking at it, she answered:

‘You have to cross the gipsy’s hand with gold.’

Gerald laughed. ‘You are at a premium as a subject,’ he said. Joshua was of the kind of man — the universal kind — who can tolerate being stared at by a pretty girl; so, with some little deliberation, he answered:

‘All right; here you are, my pretty girl; but you must give me a real good fortune for it,’ and he handed her a half sovereign, which she took, saying:

‘It is not for me to give good fortune or bad, but only to read what the Stars have said.’ She took his right hand and turned it palm upward; but the instant her eyes met it she dropped it as though it had been red hot, and, with a startled look, glided swiftly away. Lifting the curtain of the large tent, which occupied the centre of the camp, she disappeared within.

‘Sold again!’ said the cynical Gerald. Joshua stood a little amazed, and not altogether satisfied. They both watched the large tent. In a few moments there emerged from the opening not the young girl, but a stately looking woman of middle age and commanding presence.

The instant she appeared the whole camp seemed to stand still. The clamour of tongues, the laughter and noise of the work were, for a second or two, arrested, and every man or woman who sat, or crouched, or lay, stood up and faced the imperial looking gipsy.

‘The Queen, of course,’ murmured Gerald. ‘We are in luck tonight.’ The gipsy Queen threw a searching glance around the camp, and then, without hesitating an instant, came straight over and stood before Joshua.

‘Hold out your hand,’ she said in a commanding tone.

Again Gerald spoke, *sotto voce*: ‘I have not been spoken to in that way since I was at school.'

'Your hand must be crossed with gold.'

'A hundred per cent. at this game,' whispered Gerald, as Joshua laid another half sovereign on his upturned palm.

The gipsy looked at the hand with knitted brows; then suddenly looking up into his face, said:

'Have you a strong will — have you a true heart that can be brave for one you love?'

'I hope so; but I am afraid I have not vanity enough to say "yes".'

'Then I will answer for you; for I read resolution in your face — resolution desperate and determined if need be. You have a wife you love?'

'Yes,' emphatically.

'Then leave her at once — never see her face again. Go from her now, while love is fresh and your heart is free from wicked intent. Go quick — go far, and never see her face again!'

Joshua drew away his hand quickly, and said, 'Thank you!' stiffly but sarcastically, as he began to move away.

'I say!' said Gerald, 'you're not going like that, old man; no use in being indignant with the Stars or their prophet — and, moreover, your sovereign — what of it? At least, hear the matter out.'

'Silence, ribald!' commanded the Queen, 'you know not what you do. Let him go — and go ignorant, if he will not be warned.'

Joshua immediately turned back. 'At all events, we will see this thing out,' he said. 'Now, madam, you have given me advice, but I paid for a fortune.'

'Be warned!' said the gipsy. 'The Stars have been silent for long; let the mystery still wrap them round.'

'My dear madam, I do not get within touch of a mystery every day, and I prefer for my money knowledge rather than ignorance. I can get the latter commodity for nothing when I want any of it.'

Gerald echoed the sentiment. 'As for me I have a large and unsaleable stock on hand.'

The gipsy Queen eyed the two men sternly, and then said: 'As you wish. You have chosen for yourself, and have met warning with scorn, and appeal with levity. On your own heads be the doom!'

'Amen!' said Gerald.

With an imperious gesture the Queen took Joshua's hand again, and began to tell his fortune.

'I see here the flowing of blood; it will flow before long; it is running in my sight. It flows through the broken circle of a severed ring.'

'Go on!' said Joshua, smiling. Gerald was silent.

'Must I speak plainer?'

'Certainly; we commonplace mortals want something definite. The Stars are a long way off, and their words get somewhat dulled in the message.'

The gipsy shuddered, and then spoke impressively. 'This is the hand of a murderer — the murderer of his wife!' She dropped the hand and turned away.

Joshua laughed. 'Do you know,' said he, 'I think if I were you I should prophesy some jurisprudence into my system. For instance, you say "this hand is the hand of a murderer." Well, whatever it may be in the future — or potentially — it is at present not one. You ought to give your prophecy in such terms as "the hand which will be a murderer's", or, rather, "the hand of one who will be the murderer of his wife". The Stars are really not good on technical questions.'

The gipsy made no reply of any kind, but, with drooping head and despondent mien, walked slowly to her tent, and, lifting the curtain, disappeared.

Without speaking the two men turned homewards, and walked across the moor. Presently, after some little hesitation, Gerald spoke.

‘Of course, old man, this is all a joke; a ghastly one, but still a joke. But would it not be well to keep it to ourselves?’

‘How do you mean?’

‘Well, not tell your wife. It might alarm her.’

‘Alarm her! My dear Gerald, what are you thinking of? Why, she would not be alarmed or afraid of me if all the gipsies that ever didn’t come from Bohemia agreed that I was to murder her, or even to have a hard thought of her, whilst so long as she was saying “Jack Robinson.”’

Gerald remonstrated. ‘Old fellow, women are superstitious — far more than we men are; and, also they are blessed — or cursed — with a nervous system to which we are strangers. I see too much of it in my work not to realise it. Take my advice and do not let her know, or you will frighten her.’

Joshua’s lips unconsciously hardened as he answered: ‘My dear fellow, I would not have a secret from my wife. Why, it would be the beginning of a new order of things between us. We have no secrets from each other. If we ever have, then you may begin to look out for something odd between us.’

‘Still,’ said Gerald, ‘at the risk of unwelcome interference, I say again be warned in time.’

‘The gipsy’s very words,’ said Joshua. ‘You and she seem quite of one accord. Tell me, old man, is this a put-up thing? You told me of the gipsy camp — did you arrange it all with Her Majesty?’ This was said with an air of bantering earnestness. Gerald assured him that he only heard of the camp that morning; but he made fun of every answer of his friend, and, in the process of this raillery, the time passed, and they entered the cottage.

Mary was sitting at the piano but not playing. The dim twilight had waked some very tender feelings in her breast, and her eyes were full of gentle tears. When the men came in she stole over to her husband's side and kissed him. Joshua struck a tragic attitude.

'Mary,' he said in a deep voice, 'before you approach me, listen to the words of Fate. The Stars have spoken and the doom is sealed.'

'What is it, dear? Tell me the fortune, but do not frighten me.'

'Not at all, my dear; but there is a truth which it is well that you should know. Nay, it is necessary so that all your arrangements can be made beforehand, and everything be decently done and in order.'

'Go on, dear; I am listening.'

'Mary Considine, your effigy may yet be seen at Madame Tussaud's. The juris-imprudent Stars have announced their fell tidings that this hand is red with blood — your blood. Mary! Mary! my God!' He sprang forward, but too late to catch her as she fell fainting on the floor.

'I told you,' said Gerald. 'You don't know them as well as I do.'

After a little while Mary recovered from her swoon, but only to fall into strong hysterics, in which she laughed and wept and raved and cried, 'Keep him from me — from me, Joshua, my husband,' and many other words of entreaty and of fear.

Joshua Considine was in a state of mind bordering on agony, and when at last Mary became calm he knelt by her and kissed her feet and hands and hair and called her all the sweet names and said all the tender things his lips could frame. All that night he sat by her bedside and held her hand. Far through the night and up to the early morning she kept waking from sleep and crying out as if in fear, till she was comforted by the consciousness that her husband was watching beside her.

Breakfast was late the next morning, but during it Joshua received a telegram which required him to drive over to Withering, nearly twenty miles. He was loth to go; but Mary would not hear of his remaining, and so before noon he drove off in his dog-cart alone.

When he was gone Mary retired to her room. She did not appear at lunch, but when afternoon tea was served on the lawn under the great weeping willow, she came to join her guest. She was looking quite recovered from her illness of the evening before. After some casual remarks, she said to Gerald: ‘Of course it was very silly about last night, but I could not help feeling frightened. Indeed I would feel so still if I let myself think of it. But, after all these people may only imagine things, and I have got a test that can hardly fail to show that the prediction is false — if indeed it be false,’ she added sadly.

‘What is your plan?’ asked Gerald.

‘I shall go myself to the gipsy camp, and have my fortune told by the Queen.’

‘Capital. May I go with you?’

‘Oh, no! That would spoil it. She might know you and guess at me, and suit her utterance accordingly. I shall go alone this afternoon.’

When the afternoon was gone Mary Considine took her way to the gipsy encampment. Gerald went with her as far as the near edge of the common, and returned alone.

Half-an-hour had hardly elapsed when Mary entered the drawing-room, where he lay on a sofa reading. She was ghastly pale and was in a state of extreme excitement. Hardly had she passed over the threshold when she collapsed and sank moaning on the carpet. Gerald rushed to aid her, but by a great effort she controlled herself and motioned him to be silent. He waited, and his ready attention to her wish seemed to be her best help, for, in a few minutes, she had somewhat recovered, and was able to tell him what had passed.

'When I got to the camp,' she said, 'there did not seem to be a soul about, I went into the centre and stood there. Suddenly a tall woman stood beside me. "Something told me I was wanted!" she said. I held out my hand and laid a piece of silver on it. She took from her neck a small golden trinket and laid it there also; and then, seizing the two, threw them into the stream that ran by. Then she took my hand in hers and spoke: "Naught but blood in this guilty place," and turned away. I caught hold of her and asked her to tell me more. After some hesitation, she said: "Alas! alas! I see you lying at your husband's feet, and his hands are red with blood".'

Gerald did not feel at all at ease, and tried to laugh it off. 'Surely,' he said, 'this woman has a craze about murder.'

'Do not laugh,' said Mary, 'I cannot bear it,' and then, as if with a sudden impulse, she left the room.

Not long after Joshua returned, bright and cheery, and as hungry as a hunter after his long drive. His presence cheered his wife, who seemed much brighter, but she did not mention the episode of the visit to the gipsy camp, so Gerald did not mention it either. As if by tacit consent the subject was not alluded to during the evening. But there was a strange, settled look on Mary's face, which Gerald could not but observe.

In the morning Joshua came down to breakfast later than usual. Mary had been up and about the house from an early hour; but as the time drew on she seemed to get a little nervous and now and again threw around an anxious look.

Gerald could not help noticing that none of those at breakfast could get on satisfactorily with their food. It was not altogether that the chops were tough, but that the knives were all so blunt. Being a guest, he, of course, made no sign; but presently saw Joshua draw his thumb across the edge of his knife in an unconscious sort of way. At the action Mary turned pale and almost fainted.

After breakfast they all went out on the lawn. Mary was making up a bouquet, and said to her husband, ‘Get me a few of the tea-roses, dear.’

Joshua pulled down a cluster from the front of the house. The stem bent, but was too tough to break. He put his hand in his pocket to get his knife; but in vain. ‘Lend me your knife, Gerald,’ he said. But Gerald had not got one, so he went into the breakfast room and took one from the table. He came out feeling its edge and grumbling. ‘What on earth has happened to all the knives — the edges seem all ground off?’ Mary turned away hurriedly and entered the house.

Joshua tried to sever the stalk with the blunt knife as country cooks sever the necks of fowl — as schoolboys cut twine. With a little effort he finished the task. The cluster of roses grew thick, so he determined to gather a great bunch.

He could not find a single sharp knife in the sideboard where the cutlery was kept, so he called Mary, and when she came, told her the state of things. She looked so agitated and so miserable that he could not help knowing the truth, and, as if astounded and hurt, asked her:

‘Do you mean to say that *you* have done it?’

She broke in, ‘Oh, Joshua, I was so afraid.’

He paused, and a set, white look came over his face. ‘Mary!’ said he, ‘is this all the trust you have in me? I would not have believed it.’

‘Oh, Joshua! Joshua!’ she cried entreatingly, ‘forgive me,’ and wept bitterly.

Joshua thought a moment and then said: ‘I see how it is. We shall better end this or we shall all go mad.’

He ran into the drawing-room.

‘Where are you going?’ almost screamed Mary.

Gerald saw what he meant — that he would not be tied to blunt instruments by the force of a superstition, and was not surprised when he saw him come out through the French window, bearing in his hand a large Ghourka knife, which usually lay on the centre table, and which his brother had sent him from Northern India. It was one of those great hunting-knives which worked such havoc, at close quarters with the enemies of the loyal Ghourkas during the mutiny, of great weight but so evenly balanced in the hand as to seem light, and with an edge like a razor. With one of these knives a Ghourka can cut a sheep in two.

When Mary saw him come out of the room with the weapon in his hand she screamed in an agony of fright, and the hysterics of last night were promptly renewed.

Joshua ran toward her, and, seeing her falling, threw down the knife and tried to catch her.

However, he was just a second too late, and the two men cried out in horror simultaneously as they saw her fall upon the naked blade.

When Gerald rushed over he found that in falling her left hand had struck the blade, which lay partly upwards on the grass. Some of the small veins were cut through, and the blood gushed freely from the wound. As he was tying it up he pointed out to Joshua that the wedding ring was severed by the steel.

They carried her fainting to the house. When, after a while, she came out, with her arm in a sling, she was peaceful in her mind and happy. She said to her husband:

‘The gipsy was wonderfully near the truth; too near for the real thing ever to occur now, dear.’

Joshua bent over and kissed the wounded hand.

THE COMING OF ABEL BEHENNA

The little Cornish port of Pencastle was bright in the early April, when the sun had seemingly come to stay after a long and bitter winter. Boldly and blackly the rock stood out against a background of shaded blue, where the sky fading into mist met the far horizon. The sea was of true Cornish hue — sapphire, save where it became deep emerald green in the fathomless depths under the cliffs, where the seal caves opened their grim jaws. On the slopes the grass was parched and brown. The spikes of furze bushes were ashy grey, but the golden yellow of their flowers streamed along the hillside, dipping out in lines as the rock cropped up, and lessening into patches and dots till finally it died away all together where the sea winds swept round the jutting cliffs and cut short the vegetation as though with an ever-working aerial shears. The whole hillside, with its body of brown and flashes of yellow, was just like a colossal yellow-hammer.

The little harbour opened from the sea between towering cliffs, and behind a lonely rock, pierced with many caves and blow-holes through which the sea in storm time sent its thunderous voice, together with a fountain of drifting spume. Hence, it wound westwards in a serpentine course, guarded at its entrance by two little curving piers to left and right. These were roughly built of dark slates placed endways and held together with great beams bound with iron bands. Thence, it flowed up the rocky bed of the stream whose winter torrents had of old cut out its way amongst the hills. This stream was deep at first, with here and there, where it widened, patches of broken rock exposed at low water, full of holes where crabs and lobsters were to be found at the ebb of the tide. From amongst the rocks rose sturdy posts, used for warping in the little coasting vessels which frequented the port. Higher up, the stream still flowed deeply, for the tide ran far inland, but always calmly for all the force of the wildest storm was broken below. Some quarter mile inland the stream was deep at high water, but at low tide there were at each side patches of the same broken rock as lower down, through the chinks of which the sweet water of the natural stream trickled and murmured after the tide had ebbed away. Here, too, rose mooring posts for the fishermen's boats. At either side of the river was a row of cottages down almost on the level of high tide. They were pretty cottages, strongly and snugly built, with trim narrow gardens in front, full of old-fashioned plants, flowering currants, coloured primroses, wallflower, and stonecrop. Over the fronts of many of them climbed clematis and wisteria. The window sides and door posts of all were as white as snow, and the little pathway to each was paved with light coloured stones. At some of the doors were tiny porches, whilst at others were rustic seats cut from tree trunks or from old barrels; in nearly every case the window ledges were filled with boxes or pots of flowers or foliage plants.

Two men lived in cottages exactly opposite each other across the stream. Two men, both young, both good-looking, both prosperous, and who had been companions and rivals from their boyhood. Abel Behenna was dark with the gypsy darkness which the Phœnician mining wanderers left in their track; Eric Sanson — which the local antiquarian said was a corruption of Sagamanson — was fair, with the ruddy hue which marked the path of the wild Norseman. These two seemed to have singled out each other from the very beginning to work and strive together, to fight for each other and to stand back to back in all endeavours. They had now put the coping-stone on their Temple of Unity by falling in love with the same girl. Sarah Trefusis was certainly the prettiest girl in Pencastle, and there was many a young man who would gladly have tried his fortune with her, but that there were two to contend against, and each of these the strongest and most resolute man in the port — except the other. The average young man thought that this was very hard, and on account of it bore no good will to either of the three principals: whilst the average young woman who had, lest worse should befall, to put up with the grumbling of her sweetheart, and the sense of being only second best which it implied, did not either, be sure, regard Sarah with friendly eye. Thus it came, in the course of a year or so, for rustic courtship is a slow process, that the two men and woman found themselves thrown much together. They were all satisfied, so it did not matter, and Sarah, who was vain and something frivolous, took care to have her revenge on both men and women in a quiet way. When a young woman in her 'walking out' can only boast one not-quite-satisfied young man, it is no particular pleasure to her to see her escort cast sheep's eyes at a better-looking girl supported by two devoted swains.

At length there came a time which Sarah dreaded, and which she had tried to keep distant — the time when she had to make her choice between the two men. She liked them both, and, indeed, either of them might have satisfied the ideas of even a more exacting girl. But her mind was so constituted that she thought more of what she might lose, than of what she might gain; and whenever she thought she had made up her mind she became instantly assailed with doubts as to the wisdom of her choice. Always the man whom she had presumably lost became endowed afresh with a newer and more bountiful crop of advantages than had ever arisen from the possibility of his acceptance. She promised each man that on her birthday she would give him his answer, and that day, the 11th of April, had now arrived. The promises had been given singly and confidentially, but each was given to a man who was not likely to forget. Early in the morning she found both men hovering round her door. Neither had taken the other into his confidence, and each was simply seeking an early opportunity of getting his answer, and advancing his suit if necessary. Damon, as a rule, does not take Pythias with him when making a proposal; and in the heart of each man his own affairs had a claim far above any requirements of friendship. So, throughout the day, they kept seeing each other out. The position was doubtless somewhat embarrassing to Sarah, and though the satisfaction of her vanity that she should be thus adored was very pleasing, yet there were moments when she was annoyed with both men for being so persistent. Her only consolation at such moments was that she saw, through the elaborate smiles of the other girls when in passing they noticed her door thus doubly guarded, the jealousy which filled their hearts. Sarah's mother was a person of commonplace and sordid ideas, and, seeing all along the state of affairs, her one intention, persistently expressed to her daughter in the plainest words, was to so arrange matters that Sarah should get all that was possible out of both men. With this purpose she had cunningly kept herself as far as possible in the background in the matter of her daughter's wooings, and watched in silence. At first Sarah had been indignant with her for her sordid views; but, as usual, her weak nature gave way before persistence, and she had now got to the stage of acceptance. She was not surprised when her mother whispered to her in the little yard behind the house: —

'Go up the hillside for a while; I want to talk to these two. They're both red-hot for ye, and now’s the time to get things fixed!’ Sarah began a feeble remonstrance, but her mother cut her short.

‘I tell ye, girl, that my mind is made up! Both these men want ye, and only one can have ye, but before ye choose it’ll be so arranged that ye’ll have all that both have got! Don’t argy, child! Go up the hillside, and when ye come back I’ll have it fixed — I see a way quite easy!’ So Sarah went up the hillside through the narrow paths between the golden furze, and Mrs. Trefusis joined the two men in the living-room of the little house.

She opened the attack with the desperate courage which is in all mothers when they think for their children, howsoever mean the thoughts may be.

‘Ye two men, ye’re both in love with my Sarah!’

Their bashful silence gave consent to the barefaced proposition. She went on.

‘Neither of ye has much!’ Again they tacitly acquiesced in the soft impeachment.

‘I don’t know that either of ye could keep a wife!’ Though neither said a word their looks and bearing expressed distinct dissent. Mrs. Trefusis went on:

‘But if ye’d put what ye both have together ye’d make a comfortable home for one of ye — and Sarah!’ She eyed the men keenly, with her cunning eyes half shut, as she spoke; then satisfied from her scrutiny that the idea was accepted she went on quickly, as if to prevent argument:

‘The girl likes ye both, and mayhap it’s hard for her to choose. Why don’t ye toss up for her? First put your money together — ye’ve each got a bit put by, I know. Let the lucky man take the lot and trade with it a bit, and then come home and marry her. Neither of ye's afraid, I suppose! And neither of ye'll say that he won't do that much for the girl that ye both say ye love!'

Abel broke the silence:

'It don't seem the square thing to toss for the girl! She wouldn't like it herself, and it doesn't seem — seem respectful like to her—' Eric interrupted. He was conscious that his chance was not so good as Abel's in case Sarah should wish to choose between them:

'Are ye afraid of the hazard?'

'Not me!' said Abel, boldly. Mrs. Trefusis, seeing that her idea was beginning to work, followed up the advantage.

'It is settled that ye put yer money together to make a home for her, whether ye toss for her or leave it for her to choose?'

'Yes,' said Eric quickly, and Abel agreed with equal sturdiness. Mrs. Trefusis' little cunning eyes twinkled. She heard Sarah's step in the yard, and said:

'Well! here she comes, and I leave it to her.' And she went out.

During her brief walk on the hillside Sarah had been trying to make up her mind. She was feeling almost angry with both men for being the cause of her difficulty, and as she came into the room said shortly:

'I want to have a word with you both — come to the Flagstaff Rock, where we can be alone.' She took her hat and went out of the house up the winding path to the steep rock crowned with a high flagstaff, where once the wreckers' fire basket used to burn. This was the rock which formed the northern jaw of the little harbour. There was only room on the path for two abreast, and it marked the state of things pretty well when, by a sort of implied arrangement, Sarah went first, and the two men followed, walking abreast and keeping step. By this time, each man's heart was boiling with jealousy. When they came to the top of the rock, Sarah stood against the flagstaff, and the two young men stood opposite her. She had chosen her position with knowledge and intention, for there was no room for anyone to stand beside her. They were all silent for a while; then Sarah began to laugh and said: —

‘I promised the both of you to give you an answer to-day. I’ve been thinking and thinking and thinking, till I began to get angry with you both for plaguing me so; and even now I don’t seem any nearer than ever I was to making up my mind.’ Eric said suddenly:

‘Let us toss for it, lass!’ Sarah showed no indignation whatever at the proposition; her mother’s eternal suggestion had schooled her to the acceptance of something of the kind, and her weak nature made it easy to her to grasp at any way out of the difficulty. She stood with downcast eyes idly picking at the sleeve of her dress, seeming to have tacitly acquiesced in the proposal. Both men instinctively realising this pulled each a coin from his pocket, spun it in the air, and dropped his other hand over the palm on which it lay. For a few seconds they remained thus, all silent; then Abel, who was the more thoughtful of the men, spoke:

‘Sarah! is this good?’ As he spoke he removed the upper hand from the coin and placed the latter back in his pocket. Sarah was nettled.

‘Good or bad, it’s good enough for me! Take it or leave it as you like,’ she said, to which he replied quickly:

‘Nay lass! Aught that concerns you is good enow for me. I did but think of you lest you might have pain or disappointment hereafter. If you love Eric better nor me, in God’s name say so, and I think I’m man enow to stand aside. Likewise, if I’m the one, don’t make us both miserable for life!’ Face to face with a difficulty, Sarah’s weak nature proclaimed itself; she put her hands before her face and began to cry, saying —

‘It was my mother. She keeps telling me!’ The silence which followed was broken by Eric, who said hotly to Abel:

‘Let the lass alone, can’t you? If she wants to choose this way, let her. It’s good enough for me — and for you, too! She’s said it now, and must abide by it!’ Hereupon Sarah turned upon him in sudden fury, and cried:

‘Hold your tongue! what is it to you, at any rate?’ and she resumed her crying. Eric was so flabbergasted that he had not a word to say, but stood looking particularly foolish, with his mouth open and his hands held out with the coin still between them. All were silent till Sarah, taking her hands from her face laughed hysterically and said:

‘As you two can’t make up your minds, I’m going home!’ and she turned to go.

‘Stop,’ said Abel, in an authoritative voice. ‘Eric, you hold the coin, and I’ll cry. Now, before we settle it, let us clearly understand: the man who wins takes all the money that we both have got, brings it to Bristol and ships on a voyage and trades with it. Then he comes back and marries Sarah, and they two keep all, whatever there may be, as the result of the trading. Is this what we understand?’

‘Yes,’ said Eric.

‘I’ll marry him on my next birthday,’ said Sarah. Having said it the intolerably mercenary spirit of her action seemed to strike her, and impulsively she turned away with a bright blush. Fire seemed to sparkle in the eyes of both men. Said Eric: ‘A year so be! The man that wins is to have one year.’

‘Toss!’ cried Abel, and the coin spun in the air. Eric caught it, and again held it between his outstretched hands.

‘Heads!’ cried Abel, a pallor sweeping over his face as he spoke. As he leaned forward to look Sarah leaned forward too, and their heads almost touched. He could feel her hair blowing on his cheek, and it thrilled through him like fire. Eric lifted his upper hand; the coin lay with its head up. Abel stepped forward and took Sarah in his arms. With a curse Eric hurled the coin far into the sea. Then he leaned against the flagstaff and scowled at the others with his hands thrust deep into his pockets. Abel whispered wild words of passion and delight into Sarah’s ears, and as she listened she began to believe that fortune had rightly interpreted the wishes of her secret heart, and that she loved Abel best.

Presently Abel looked up and caught sight of Eric’s face as the last ray of sunset struck it. The red light intensified the natural ruddiness of his complexion, and he looked as though he were steeped in blood. Abel did not mind his scowl, for now that his own heart was at rest he could feel unalloyed pity for his friend. He stepped over meaning to comfort him, and held out his hand, saying:

‘It was my chance, old lad. Don’t grudge it me. I’ll try to make Sarah a happy woman, and you shall be a brother to us both!’

‘Brother be damned!’ was all the answer Eric made, as he turned away. When he had gone a few steps down the rocky path he turned and came back. Standing before Abel and Sarah, who had their arms round each other, he said:

‘You have a year. Make the most of it! And be sure you’re in time to claim your wife! Be back to have your banns up in time to be married on the 11th April. If you’re not, I tell you I shall have my banns up, and you may get back too late.’

‘What do you mean, Eric? You are mad!’

‘No more mad than you are, Abel Behenna. You go, that’s your chance! I stay, that’s mine! I don’t mean to let the grass grow under my feet. Sarah cared no more for you than for me five minutes ago, and she may come back to that five minutes after you’re gone! You won by a point only — the game may change.’

‘The game won’t change!’ said Abel shortly. ‘Sarah, you’ll be true to me? You won’t marry till I return?’

‘For a year!’ added Eric, quickly, ‘that’s the bargain.’

‘I promise for the year,’ said Sarah. A dark look came over Abel’s face, and he was about to speak, but he mastered himself and smiled.

‘I mustn’t be too hard or get angry tonight! Come, Eric! we played and fought together. I won fairly. I played fairly all the game of our wooing! You know that as well as I do; and now when I am going away, I shall look to my old and true comrade to help me when I am gone!’

‘I’ll help you none,’ said Eric, ‘so help me God!’

‘It was God helped me,’ said Abel simply.

‘Then let Him go on helping you,’ said Eric angrily. ‘The Devil is good enough for me!’ and without another word he rushed down the steep path and disappeared behind the rocks.

When he had gone Abel hoped for some tender passage with Sarah, but the first remark she made chilled him.

‘How lonely it all seems without Eric!’ and this note sounded till he had left her at home — and after.

Early on the next morning Abel heard a noise at his door, and on going out saw Eric walking rapidly away: a small canvas bag full of gold and silver lay on the threshold; on a small slip of paper pinned to it was written:

‘Take the money and go. I stay. God for you! The Devil for me!

Remember the 11th of April. — ERIC SANSON.' That afternoon Abel went off to Bristol, and a week later sailed on the *Star of the Sea* bound for Pahang. His money — including that which had been Eric's — was on board in the shape of a venture of cheap toys. He had been advised by a shrewd old mariner of Bristol whom he knew, and who knew the ways of the Chersonese, who predicted that every penny invested would be returned with a shilling to boot.

As the year wore on Sarah became more and more disturbed in her mind. Eric was always at hand to make love to her in his own persistent, masterful manner, and to this she did not object. Only one letter came from Abel, to say that his venture had proved successful, and that he had sent some two hundred pounds to the bank at Bristol, and was trading with fifty pounds still remaining in goods for China, whither the *Star of the Sea* was bound and whence she would return to Bristol. He suggested that Eric's share of the venture should be returned to him with his share of the profits. This proposition was treated with anger by Eric, and as simply childish by Sarah's mother.

More than six months had since then elapsed, but no other letter had come, and Eric's hopes which had been dashed down by the letter from Pahang, began to rise again. He perpetually assailed Sarah with an 'if!' If Abel did not return, would she then marry him? If the 11th April went by without Abel being in the port, would she give him over? If Abel had taken his fortune, and married another girl on the head of it, would she marry him, Eric, as soon as the truth were known? And so on in an endless variety of possibilities. The power of the strong will and the determined purpose over the woman's weaker nature became in time manifest. Sarah began to lose her faith in Abel and to regard Eric as a possible husband; and a possible husband is in a woman's eye different to all other men. A new affection for him began to arise in her breast, and the daily familiarities of permitted courtship furthered the growing affection. Sarah began to regard Abel as rather a rock in the road of her life, and had it not been for her mother's constantly reminding her of the good fortune already laid by in the Bristol Bank she would have tried to have shut her eyes altogether to the fact of Abel's existence.

The 11th April was Saturday, so that in order to have the marriage on that day it would be necessary that the banns should be called on Sunday, 22nd March. From the beginning of that month Eric kept perpetually on the subject of Abel's absence, and his outspoken opinion that the latter was either dead or married began to become a reality to the woman's mind. As the first half of the month wore on Eric became more jubilant, and after church on the 15th he took Sarah for a walk to the Flagstaff Rock. There he asserted himself strongly:

'I told Abel, and you too, that if he was not here to put up his banns in time for the eleventh, I would put up mine for the twelfth. Now the time has come when I mean to do it. He hasn't kept his word' — here Sarah struck in out of her weakness and indecision:

'He hasn't broken it yet!' Eric ground his teeth with anger.

'If you mean to stick up for him,' he said, as he smote his hands savagely on the flagstaff, which sent forth a shivering murmur, 'well and good. I'll keep my part of the bargain. On Sunday I shall give notice of the banns, and you can deny them in the church if you will. If Abel is in Pencastle on the eleventh, he can have them cancelled, and his own put up; but till then, I take my course, and woe to anyone who stands in my way!' With that he flung himself down the rocky pathway, and Sarah could not but admire his Viking strength and spirit, as, crossing the hill, he strode away along the cliffs towards Bude.

During the week no news was heard of Abel, and on Saturday Eric gave notice of the banns of marriage between himself and Sarah Trefusis. The clergyman would have remonstrated with him, for although nothing formal had been told to the neighbours, it had been understood since Abel's departure that on his return he was to marry Sarah; but Eric would not discuss the question.

'It is a painful subject, sir,' he said with a firmness which the parson, who was a very young man, could not but be swayed by. 'Surely there is nothing against Sarah or me. Why should there be any bones made about the matter?' The parson said no more, and on the next day he read out the banns for the first time amidst an audible buzz from the congregation. Sarah was present, contrary to custom, and though she blushed furiously enjoyed her triumph over the other girls whose banns had not yet come. Before the week was over she began to make her wedding dress. Eric used to come and look at her at work and the sight thrilled through him. He used to say all sorts of pretty things to her at such times, and there were to both delicious moments of love-making.

The banns were read a second time on the 29th, and Eric's hope grew more and more fixed though there were to him moments of acute despair when he realised that the cup of happiness might be dashed from his lips at any moment, right up to the last. At such times he was full of passion — desperate and remorseless — and he ground his teeth and clenched his hands in a wild way as though some taint of the old Berserker fury of his ancestors still lingered in his blood. On the Thursday of that week he looked in on Sarah and found her, amid a flood of sunshine, putting finishing touches to her white wedding gown. His own heart was full of gaiety, and the sight of the woman who was so soon to be his own so occupied, filled him with a joy unspeakable, and he felt faint with languorous ecstasy. Bending over he kissed Sarah on the mouth, and then whispered in her rosy ear —

‘Your wedding dress, Sarah! And for me!’ As he drew back to admire her she looked up saucily, and said to him —

‘Perhaps not for you. There is more than a week yet for Abel!’ and then cried out in dismay, for with a wild gesture and a fierce oath Eric dashed out of the house, banging the door behind him. The incident disturbed Sarah more than she could have thought possible, for it awoke all her fears and doubts and indecision afresh. She cried a little, and put by her dress, and to soothe herself went out to sit for a while on the summit of the Flagstaff Rock. When she arrived she found there a little group anxiously discussing the weather. The sea was calm and the sun bright, but across the sea were strange lines of darkness and light, and close in to shore the rocks were fringed with foam, which spread out in great white curves and circles as the currents drifted. The wind had backed, and came in sharp, cold puffs. The blow-hole, which ran under the Flagstaff Rock, from the rocky bay without to the harbour within, was booming at intervals, and the seagulls were screaming ceaselessly as they wheeled about the entrance of the port.

‘It looks bad,’ she heard an old fisherman say to the coastguard. ‘I seen it just like this once before, when the East Indiaman *Coromandel* went to pieces in Dizzard Bay!’ Sarah did not wait to hear more. She was of a timid nature where danger was concerned, and could not bear to hear of wrecks and disasters. She went home and resumed the completion of her dress, secretly determined to appease Eric when she should meet him with a sweet apology — and to take the earliest opportunity of being even with him after her marriage. The old fisherman's weather prophecy was justified. That night at dusk a wild storm came on. The sea rose and lashed the western coasts from Skye to Scilly and left a tale of disaster everywhere. The sailors and fishermen of Pencastle all turned out on the rocks and cliffs and watched eagerly. Presently, by a flash of lightning, a 'ketch' was seen drifting under only a jib about half-a-mile outside the port. All eyes and all glasses were concentrated on her, waiting for the next flash, and when it came a chorus went up that it was the *Lovely Alice*, trading between Bristol and Penzance, and touching at all the little ports between. 'God help them!' said the harbour-master, 'for nothing in this world can save them when they are between Bude and Tintagel and the wind on shore!' The coastguards exerted themselves, and, aided by brave hearts and willing hands, they brought the rocket apparatus up on the summit of the Flagstaff Rock. Then they burned blue lights so that those on board might see the harbour opening in case they could make any effort to reach it. They worked gallantly enough on board; but no skill or strength of man could avail. Before many minutes were over the *Lovely Alice* rushed to her doom on the great island rock that guarded the mouth of the port. The screams of those on board were faintly borne on the tempest as they flung themselves into the sea in a last chance for life. The blue lights were kept burning, and eager eyes peered into the depths of the waters in case any face could be seen; and ropes were held ready to fling out in aid. But never a face was seen, and the willing arms rested idle. Eric was there amongst his fellows. His old Icelandic origin was never more apparent than in that wild hour. He took a rope, and shouted in the ear of the harbour-master:

‘I shall go down on the rock over the seal cave. The tide is running up, and someone may drift in there!’

‘Keep back, man!’ came the answer. ‘Are you mad? One slip on that rock and you are lost: and no man could keep his feet in the dark on such a place in such a tempest!’

‘Not a bit,’ came the reply. ‘You remember how Abel Behenna saved me there on a night like this when my boat went on the Gull Rock. He dragged me up from the deep water in the seal cave, and now someone may drift in there again as I did,’ and he was gone into the darkness. The projecting rock hid the light on the Flagstaff Rock, but he knew his way too well to miss it. His boldness and sureness of foot standing to him, he shortly stood on the great round-topped rock cut away beneath by the action of the waves over the entrance of the seal cave, where the water was fathomless. There he stood in comparative safety, for the concave shape of the rock beat back the waves with their own force, and though the water below him seemed to boil like a seething cauldron, just beyond the spot there was a space of almost calm. The rock, too, seemed here to shut off the sound of the gale, and he listened as well as watched. As he stood there ready, with his coil of rope poised to throw, he thought he heard below him, just beyond the whirl of the water, a faint, despairing cry. He echoed it with a shout that rang into the night Then he waited for the flash of lightning, and as it passed flung his rope out into the darkness where he had seen a face rising through the swirl of the foam. The rope was caught, for he felt a pull on it, and he shouted again in his mighty voice:

‘Tie it round your waist, and I shall pull you up.’ Then when he felt that it was fast he moved along the rock to the far side of the sea cave, where the deep water was something stiller, and where he could get foothold secure enough to drag the rescued man on the overhanging rock. He began to pull, and shortly he knew from the rope taken in that the man he was now rescuing must soon be close to the top of the rock. He steadied himself for a moment, and drew a long breath, that he might at the next effort complete the rescue. He had just bent his back to the work when a flash of lightning revealed to each other the two men — the rescuer and the rescued.

Eric Sanson and Abel Behenna were face to face — and none knew of the meeting save themselves; and God.

On the instant a wave of passion swept through Eric’s heart. All his hopes were shattered, and with the hatred of Cain his eyes looked out. He saw in the instant of recognition the joy in Abel’s face that his was the hand to succour him, and this intensified his hate. Whilst the passion was on him he started back, and the rope ran out between his hands. His moment of hate was followed by an impulse of his better manhood, but it was too late.

Before he could recover himself, Abel encumbered with the rope that should have aided him, was plunged with a despairing cry back into the darkness of the devouring sea.

Then, feeling all the madness and the doom of Cain upon him, Eric rushed back over the rocks, heedless of the danger and eager only for one thing — to be amongst other people whose living noises would shut out that last cry which seemed to ring still in his ears. When he regained the Flagstaff Rock the men surrounded him, and through the fury of the storm he heard the harbour-master say: —

‘We feared you were lost when we heard a cry! How white you are! Where is your rope? Was there anyone drifted in?’

‘No one,’ he shouted in answer, for he felt that he could never explain that he had let his old comrade slip back into the sea, and at the very place and under the very circumstances in which that comrade had saved his own life. He hoped by one bold lie to set the matter at rest for ever. There was no one to bear witness — and if he should have to carry that still white face in his eyes and that despairing cry in his ears for evermore — at least none should know of it. ‘No one,’ he cried, more loudly still. ‘I slipped on the rock, and the rope fell into the sea!’ So saying he left them, and, rushing down the steep path, gained his own cottage and locked himself within.

The remainder of that night he passed lying on his bed — dressed and motionless — staring upwards, and seeming to see through the darkness a pale face gleaming wet in the lightning, with its glad recognition turning to ghastly despair, and to hear a cry which never ceased to echo in his soul.

In the morning the storm was over and all was smiling again, except that the sea was still boisterous with its unspent fury. Great pieces of wreck drifted into the port, and the sea around the island rock was strewn with others. Two bodies also drifted into the harbour — one the master of the wrecked ketch, the other a strange seaman whom no one knew.

Sarah saw nothing of Eric till the evening, and then he only looked in for a minute. He did not come into the house, but simply put his head in through the open window.

‘Well, Sarah,’ he called out in a loud voice, though to her it did not ring truly, ‘is the wedding dress done? Sunday week, mind! Sunday week!’

Sarah was glad to have the reconciliation so easy; but, womanlike, when she saw the storm was over and her own fears groundless, she at once repeated the cause of offence.

‘Sunday so be it,’ she said without looking up, ‘if Abel isn’t there on Saturday!' Then she looked up saucily, though her heart was full of fear of another outburst on the part of her impetuous lover. But the window was empty; Eric had taken himself off, and with a pout she resumed her work. She saw Eric no more till Sunday afternoon, after the banns had been called the third time, when he came up to her before all the people with an air of proprietorship which half-pleased and half-annoyed her.

'Not yet, mister!' she said, pushing him away, as the other girls giggled. 'Wait till Sunday next, if you please — the day after Saturday!' she added, looking at him saucily. The girls giggled again, and the young men guffawed. They thought it was the snub that touched him so that he became as white as a sheet as he turned away. But Sarah, who knew more than they did, laughed, for she saw triumph through the spasm of pain that overspread his face.

The week passed uneventfully; however, as Saturday drew nigh Sarah had occasional moments of anxiety, and as to Eric he went about at night-time like a man possessed. He restrained himself when others were by, but now and again he went down amongst the rocks and caves and shouted aloud. This seemed to relieve him somewhat, and he was better able to restrain himself for some time after. All Saturday he stayed in his own house and never left it. As he was to be married on the morrow, the neighbours thought it was shyness on his part, and did not trouble or notice him. Only once was he disturbed, and that was when the chief boatman came to him and sat down, and after a pause said:

'Eric, I was over in Bristol yesterday. I was in the ropemaker's getting a coil to replace the one you lost the night of the storm, and there I saw Michael Heavens of this place, who is a salesman there. He told me that Abel Behenna had come home the week ere last on the *Star of the Sea* from Canton, and that he had lodged a sight of money in the Bristol Bank in the name of Sarah Behenna. He told Michael so himself — and that he had taken passage on the *Lovely Alice* to Pencastle. 'Bear up, man,' for Eric had with a groan dropped his head on his knees, with his face between his hands. 'He was your old comrade, I know, but you couldn't help him. He must have gone down with the rest that awful night. I thought I'd better tell you, lest it might come some other way, and you might keep Sarah Trefusis from being frightened. They were good friends once, and women take these things to heart. It would not do to let her be pained with such a thing on her wedding day!' Then he rose and went away, leaving Eric still sitting disconsolately with his head on his knees.

'Poor fellow!' murmured the chief boatman to himself; 'he takes it to heart. Well, well! right enough! They were true comrades once, and Abel saved him!'

The afternoon of that day, when the children had left school, they strayed as usual on half-holidays along' the quay and the paths by the cliffs. Presently some of them came running in a state of great excitement to the harbour, where a few men were unloading a coal ketch, and a great many were superintending the operation. One of the children called out:

'There is a porpoise in the harbour mouth! We saw it come through the blow-hole! It had a long tail, and was deep under the water!'

'It was no porpoise,' said another; 'it was a seal; but it had a long tail! It came out of the seal cave!' The other children bore various testimony, but on two points they were unanimous — it, whatever 'it' was, had come through the blow-hole deep under the water, and had a long, thin tail — a tail so long that they could not see the end of it. There was much unmerciful chaffing of the children by the men on this point, but as it was evident that they had seen something, quite a number of persons, young and old, male and female, went along the high paths on either side of the harbour mouth to catch a glimpse of this new addition to the fauna of the sea, a long-tailed porpoise or seal. The tide was now coming in. There was a slight breeze, and the surface of the water was rippled so that it was only at moments that anyone could see clearly into the deep water. After a spell of watching a woman called out that she saw something moving up the channel, just below where she was standing. There was a stampede to the spot, but by the time the crowd had gathered the breeze had freshened, and it was impossible to see with any distinctness below the surface of the water. On being questioned the woman described what she had seen, but in such an incoherent way that the whole thing was put down as an effect of imagination; had it not been for the children's report she would not have been credited at all. Her semi-hysterical statement that what she saw was 'like a pig with the entrails out' was only thought anything of by an old coastguard, who shook his head but did not make any remark. For the remainder of the daylight this man was seen always on the bank, looking into the water, but always with disappointment manifest on his face.

Eric arose early on the next morning — he had not slept all night, and it was a relief to him to move about in the light. He shaved himself with a hand that did not tremble, and dressed himself in his wedding clothes. There was a haggard look on his face, and he seemed as though he had grown years older in the last few days. Still there was a wild, uneasy light of triumph in his eyes, and he kept murmuring to himself over and over again:

‘This is my wedding-day! Abel cannot claim her now — living or dead! — living or dead! Living or dead!’ He sat in his arm-chair, waiting with an uncanny quietness for the church hour to arrive. When the bell began to ring he arose and passed out of his house, closing the door behind him. He looked at the river and saw the tide had just turned. In the church he sat with Sarah and her mother, holding Sarah’s hand tightly in his all the time, as though he feared to lose her. When the service was over they stood up together, and were married in the presence of the entire congregation; for no one left the church. Both made the responses clearly — Eric’s being even on the defiant side. When the wedding was over Sarah took her husband’s arm, and they walked away together, the boys and younger girls being cuffed by their elders into a decorous behaviour, for they would fain have followed close behind their heels.

The way from the church led down to the back of Eric’s cottage, a narrow passage being between it and that of his next neighbour. When the bridal couple had passed through this the remainder of the congregation, who had followed them at a little distance, were startled by a long, shrill scream from the bride. They rushed through the passage and found her on the bank with wild eyes, pointing to the river bed opposite Eric Sanson’s door.

The falling tide had deposited there the body of Abel Behenna stark upon the broken rocks. The rope trailing from its waist had been twisted by the current round the mooring post, and had held it back whilst the tide had ebbed away from it. The right elbow had fallen in a chink in the rock, leaving the hand outstretched toward Sarah, with the open palm upward as though it were extended to receive hers, the pale drooping fingers open to the clasp.

All that happened afterwards was never quite known to Sarah

Sanson. Whenever she would try to recollect there would become a buzzing in her ears and a dimness in her eyes, and all would pass away. The only thing that she could remember of it all — and this she never forgot — was Eric's breathing heavily, with his face whiter than that of the dead man, as he muttered under his breath:

'Devil's help! Devil's faith! Devil's price!'

THE BURIAL OF THE RATS

Leaving Paris by the Orleans road, cross the Enceinte, and, turning to the right, you find yourself in a somewhat wild and not at all savoury district. Right and left, before and behind, on every side rise great heaps of dust and waste accumulated by the process of time.

Paris has its night as well as its day life, and the sojourner who enters his hotel in the Rue de Rivoli or the Rue St. Honore late at night or leaves it early in the morning, can guess, in coming near Montrouge — if he has not done so already — the purpose of those great waggons that look like boilers on wheels which he finds halting everywhere as he passes.

Every city has its peculiar institutions created out of its own needs; and one of the most notable institutions of Paris is its rag-picking population. In the early morning — and Parisian life commences at an early hour — may be seen in most streets standing on the pathway opposite every court and alley and between every few houses, as still in some American cities, even in parts of New York, large wooden boxes into which the domestics or tenement-holders empty the accumulated dust of the past day. Round these boxes gather and pass on, when the work is done, to fresh fields of labour and pastures new, squalid hungry-looking men and women, the implements of whose craft consist of a coarse bag or basket slung over the shoulder and a little rake with which they turn over and probe and examine in the minutest manner the dustbins. They pick up and deposit in their baskets, by aid of their rakes, whatever they may find, with the same facility as a Chinaman uses his chopsticks.

Paris is a city of centralisation — and centralisation and classification are closely allied. In the early times, when centralisation is becoming a fact, its forerunner is classification. All things which are similar or analogous become grouped together, and from the grouping of groups rises one whole or central point. We see radiating many long arms with innumerable tentaculae, and in the centre rises a gigantic head with a comprehensive brain and keen eyes to look on every side and ears sensitive to hear — and a voracious mouth to swallow.

Other cities resemble all the birds and beasts and fishes whose appetites and digestions are normal. Paris alone is the analogical apotheosis of the octopus. Product of centralisation carried to an *ad absurdum*, it fairly represents the devil fish; and in no respects is the resemblance more curious than in the similarity of the digestive apparatus.

Those intelligent tourists who, having surrendered their individuality into the hands of Messrs. Cook or Gaze, ‘do’ Paris in three days, are often puzzled to know how it is that the dinner which in London would cost about six shillings, can be had for three francs in a café in the Palais Royal. They need have no more wonder if they will but consider the classification which is a theoretic speciality of Parisian life, and adopt all round the fact from which the chiffonier has his genesis.

The Paris of 1850 was not like the Paris of to-day, and those who see the Paris of Napoleon and Baron Hausseman can hardly realise the existence of the state of things forty-five years ago.

Amongst other things, however, which have not changed are those districts where the waste is gathered. Dust is dust all the world over, in every age, and the family likeness of dust-heaps is perfect. The traveller, therefore, who visits the environs of Montrouge can go go back in fancy without difficulty to the year 1850.

In this year I was making a prolonged stay in Paris. I was very much in love with a young lady who, though she returned my passion, so far yielded to the wishes of her parents that she had promised not to see me or to correspond with me for a year. I, too, had been compelled to accede to these conditions under a vague hope of parental approval. During the term of probation I had promised to remain out of the country and not to write to my dear one until the expiration of the year.

Naturally the time went heavily with me. There was not one of my own family or circle who could tell me of Alice, and none of her own folk had, I am sorry to say, sufficient generosity to send me even an occasional word of comfort regarding her health and well-being. I spent six months wandering about Europe, but as I could find no satisfactory distraction in travel, I determined to come to Paris, where, at least, I would be within easy hail of London in case any good fortune should call me thither before the appointed time. That 'hope deferred maketh the heart sick' was never better exemplified than in my case, for in addition to the perpetual longing to see the face I loved there was always with me a harrowing anxiety lest some accident should prevent me showing Alice in due time that I had, throughout the long period of probation, been faithful to her trust and my own love. Thus, every adventure which I undertook had a fierce pleasure of its own, for it was fraught with possible consequences greater than it would have ordinarily borne.

Like all travellers I exhausted the places of most interest in the first month of my stay, and was driven in the second month to look for amusement whithersoever I might. Having made sundry journeys to the better-known suburbs, I began to see that there was a *terra incognita*, in so far as the guide book was concerned, in the social wilderness lying between these attractive points. Accordingly I began to systematise my researches, and each day took up the thread of my exploration at the place where I had on the previous day dropped it.

In the process of time my wanderings led me near Montrouge, and I saw that hereabouts lay the Ultima Thule of social exploration — a country as little known as that round the source of the White Nile. And so I determined to investigate philosophically the chiffonier — his habitat, his life, and his means of life.

The job was an unsavoury one, difficult of accomplishment, and with little hope of adequate reward. However, despite reason, obstinacy prevailed, and I entered into my new investigation with a keener energy than I could have summoned to aid me in any investigation leading to any end, valuable or worthy.

One day, late in a fine afternoon, toward the end of September, I entered the holy of holies of the city of dust. The place was evidently the recognised abode of a number of chiffoniers, for some sort of arrangement was manifested in the formation of the dust heaps near the road. I passed amongst these heaps, which stood like orderly sentries, determined to penetrate further and trace dust to its ultimate location.

As I passed along I saw behind the dust heaps a few forms that flitted to and fro, evidently watching with interest the advent of any stranger to such a place. The district was like a small Switzerland, and as I went forward my tortuous course shut out the path behind me.

Presently I got into what seemed a small city or community of chiffoniers. There were a number of shanties or huts, such as may be met with in the remote parts of the Bog of Allan — rude places with wattled walls, plastered with mud and roofs of rude thatch made from stable refuse — such places as one would not like to enter for any consideration, and which even in water-colour could only look picturesque if judiciously treated. In the midst of these huts was one of the strangest adaptations — I cannot say habitations — I had ever seen. An immense old wardrobe, the colossal remnant of some boudoir of Charles VII, or Henry II, had been converted into a dwelling-house. The double doors lay open, so that the entire ménage was open to public view. In the open half of the wardrobe was a common sitting-room of some four feet by six, in which sat, smoking their pipes round a charcoal brazier, no fewer than six old soldiers of the First Republic, with their uniforms torn and worn threadbare. Evidently they were of the *mauvais sujet* class; their bleary eyes and limp jaws told plainly of a common love of absinthe; and their eyes had that haggard, worn look of slumbering ferocity which follows hard in the wake of drink. The other side stood as of old, with its shelves intact, save that they were cut to half their depth, and in each shelf of which there were six, was a bed made with rags and straw. The half-dozen of worthies who inhabited this structure looked at me curiously as I passed; and when I looked back after going a little way I saw their heads together in a whispered conference. I did not like the look of this at all, for the place was very lonely, and the men looked very, very villainous. However, I did not see any cause for fear, and went on my way, penetrating further and further into the Sahara. The way was tortuous to a degree, and from going round in a series of semi-circles, as one goes in skating with the Dutch roll, I got rather confused with regard to the points of the compass.

When I had penetrated a little way I saw, as I turned the corner of a half-made heap, sitting on a heap of straw an old soldier with threadbare coat.

‘Hallo!’ said I to myself; ‘the First Republic is well represented here in its soldiery.’

As I passed him the old man never even looked up at me, but gazed on the ground with stolid persistency. Again I remarked to myself: ‘See what a life of rude warfare can do! This old man’s curiosity is a thing of the past.’

When I had gone a few steps, however, I looked back suddenly, and saw that curiosity was not dead, for the veteran had raised his head and was regarding me with a very queer expression. He seemed to me to look very like one of the six worthies in the press. When he saw me looking he dropped his head; and without thinking further of him I went on my way, satisfied that there was a strange likeness between these old warriors.

Presently I met another old soldier in a similar manner. He, too, did not notice me whilst I was passing.

By this time it was getting late in the afternoon, and I began to think of retracing my steps. Accordingly I turned to go back, but could see a number of tracks leading between different mounds and could not ascertain which of them I should take. In my perplexity I wanted to see someone of whom to ask the way, but could see no one. I determined to go on a few mounds further and so try to see someone — not a veteran.

I gained my object, for after going a couple of hundred yards I saw before me a single shanty such as I had seen before — with, however, the difference that this was not one for living in, but merely a roof with three walls open in front. From the evidences which the neighbourhood exhibited I took it to be a place for sorting. Within it was an old woman wrinkled and bent with age; I approached her to ask the way.

She rose as I came close and I asked her my way. She immediately commenced a conversation; and it occurred to me that here in the very centre of the Kingdom of Dust was the place to gather details of the history of Parisian rag-picking — particularly as I could do so from the lips of one who looked like the oldest inhabitant.

I began my inquiries, and the old woman gave me most interesting answers — she had been one of the ceteuces who sat daily before the guillotine and had taken an active part among the women who signalised themselves by their violence in the revolution. While we were talking she said suddenly: ‘But m’sieur must be tired standing,’ and dusted a rickety old stool for me to sit down. I hardly liked to do so for many reasons; but the poor old woman was so civil that I did not like to run the risk of hurting her by refusing, and moreover the conversation of one who had been at the taking of the Bastille was so interesting that I sat down and so our conversation went on.

While we were talking an old man — older and more bent and wrinkled even than the woman — appeared from behind the shanty. ‘Here is Pierre,’ said she. ‘M’sieur can hear stories now if he wishes, for Pierre was in everything, from the Bastille to Waterloo.’ The old man took another stool at my request and we plunged into a sea of revolutionary reminiscences. This old man, albeit clothed like a scarecrow, was like any one of the six veterans.

I was now sitting in the centre of the low hut with the woman on my left hand and the man on my right, each of them being somewhat in front of me. The place was full of all sorts of curious objects of lumber, and of many things that I wished far away. In one corner was a heap of rags which seemed to move from the number of vermin it contained, and in the other a heap of bones whose odour was something shocking. Every now and then, glancing at the heaps, I could see the gleaming eyes of some of the rats which infested the place. These loathsome objects were bad enough, but what looked even more dreadful was an old butcher's axe with an iron handle stained with clots of blood leaning up against the wall on the right hand side. Still, these things did not give me much concern. The talk of the two old people was so fascinating that I stayed on and on, till the evening came and the dust heaps threw dark shadows over the vales between them.

After a time I began to grow uneasy. I could not tell how or why, but somehow I did not feel satisfied. Uneasiness is an instinct and means warning. The psychic faculties are often the sentries of the intellect, and when they sound alarm the reason begins to act, although perhaps not consciously.

This was so with me. I began to bethink me where I was and by what surrounded, and to wonder how I should fare in case I should be attacked; and then the thought suddenly burst upon me, although without any overt cause, that I was in danger. Prudence whispered: 'Be still and make no sign,' and so I was still and made no sign, for I knew that four cunning eyes were on me. 'Four eyes — if not more.' My God, what a horrible thought! The whole shanty might be surrounded on three sides with villains! I might be in the midst of a band of such desperadoes as only half a century of periodic revolution can produce.

With a sense of danger my intellect and observation quickened, and I grew more watchful than was my wont. I noticed that the old woman's eyes were constantly wandering towards my hands. I looked at them too, and saw the cause — my rings. On my left little finger I had a large signet and on the right a good diamond.

I thought that if there was any danger my first care was to avert suspicion. Accordingly I began to work the conversation round to rag-picking — to the drains — of the things found there; and so by easy stages to jewels. Then, seizing a favourable opportunity, I asked the old woman if she knew anything of such things. She answered that she did, a little. I held out my right hand, and, showing her the diamond, asked her what she thought of that. She answered that her eyes were bad, and stooped over my hand. I said as nonchalantly as I could: ‘Pardon me! You will see better thus!’ and taking it off handed it to her. An unholy light came into her withered old face, as she touched it. She stole one glance at me swift and keen as a flash of lightning.

She bent over the ring for a moment, her face quite concealed as though examining it. The old man looked straight out of the front of the shanty before him, at the same time fumbling in his pockets and producing a screw of tobacco in a paper and a pipe, which he proceeded to fill. I took advantage of the pause and the momentary rest from the searching eyes on my face to look carefully round the place, now dim and shadowy in the gloaming. There still lay all the heaps of varied reeking foulness; there the terrible blood-stained axe leaning against the wall in the right hand corner, and everywhere, despite the gloom, the baleful glitter of the eyes of the rats. I could see them even through some of the chinks of the boards at the back low down close to the ground. But stay! these latter eyes seemed more than usually large and bright and baleful!

For an instant my heart stood still, and I felt in that whirling condition of mind in which one feels a sort of spiritual drunkenness, and as though the body is only maintained erect in that there is no time for it to fall before recovery. Then, in another second, I was calm — coldly calm, with all my energies in full vigour, with a self-control which I felt to be perfect and with all my feeling and instincts alert.

Now I knew the full extent of my danger: I was watched and surrounded by desperate people! I could not even guess at how many of them were lying there on the ground behind the shanty, waiting for the moment to strike. I knew that I was big and strong, and they knew it, too. They knew also, as I did, that I was an Englishman and would make a fight for it; and so we waited. I had, I felt, gained an advantage in the last few seconds, for I knew my danger and understood the situation. Now, I thought, is the test of my courage — the enduring test: the fighting test may come later!

The old woman raised her head and said to me in a satisfied kind of way:

‘A very fine ring, indeed — a beautiful ring! Oh, me! I once had such rings, plenty of them, and bracelets and earrings! Oh! for in those fine days I led the town a dance! But they’ve forgotten me now! They’ve forgotten me! They? Why they never heard of me! Perhaps their grandfathers remember me, some of them!’ and she laughed a harsh, croaking laugh. And then I am bound to say that she astonished me, for she handed me back the ring with a certain suggestion of old-fashioned grace which was not without its pathos.

The old man eyed her with a sort of sudden ferocity, half rising from his stool, and said to me suddenly and hoarsely:

‘Let me see!’

I was about to hand the ring when the old woman said:

‘No! no, do not give it to Pierre! Pierre is eccentric. He loses things; and such a pretty ring!’

‘Cat!’ said the old man, savagely. Suddenly the old woman said, rather more loudly than was necessary:

‘Wait! I shall tell you something about a ring.’ There was something in the sound of her voice that jarred upon me. Perhaps it was my hyper-sensitiveness, wrought up as I was to such a pitch of nervous excitement, but I seemed to think that she was not addressing me. As I stole a glance round the place I saw the eyes of the rats in the bone heaps, but missed the eyes along the back. But even as I looked I saw them again appear. The old woman’s ‘Wait!’ had given me a respite from attack, and the men had sunk back to their reclining posture.

‘I once lost a ring — a beautiful diamond hoop that had belonged to a queen, and which was given to me by a farmer of the taxes, who afterwards cut his throat because I sent him away. I thought it must have been stolen, and taxed my people; but I could get no trace. The police came and suggested that it had found its way to the drain. We descended — I in my fine clothes, for I would not trust them with my beautiful ring! I know more of the drains since then, and of rats, too! but I shall never forget the horror of that place — alive with blazing eyes, a wall of them just outside the light of our torches. Well, we got beneath my house. We searched the outlet of the drain, and there in the filth found my ring, and we came out.

‘But we found something else also before we came! As we were coming toward the opening a lot of sewer rats — human ones this time — came towards us. They told the police that one of their number had gone into the drain, but had not returned. He had gone in only shortly before we had, and, if lost, could hardly be far off. They asked help to seek him, so we turned back. They tried to prevent me going, but I insisted. It was a new excitement, and had I not recovered my ring? Not far did we go till we came on something. There was but little water, and the bottom of the drain was raised with brick, rubbish, and much matter of the kind. He had made a fight for it, even when his torch had gone out. But they were too many for him! They had not been long about it! The bones were still warm; but they were picked clean. They had even eaten their own dead ones and there were bones of rats as well as of the man. They took it cool enough those other — the human ones — and joked of their comrade when they found him dead, though they would have helped him living. Bah! what matters it — life or death?'

'And had you no fear?' I asked her.

'Fear!' she said with a laugh. 'Me have fear? Ask Pierre! But I was younger then, and, as I came through that horrible drain with its wall of greedy eyes, always moving with the circle of the light from the torches, I did not feel easy. I kept on before the men, though! It is a way I have! I never let the men get it before me. All I want is a chance and a means! And they ate him up — took every trace away except the bones; and no one knew it, nor no sound of him was ever heard!' Here she broke into a chuckling fit of the ghastliest merriment which it was ever my lot to hear and see. A great poetess describes her heroine singing: 'Oh! to see or hear her singing! Scarce I know which is the divinest.'

And I can apply the same idea to the old crone — in all save the divinity, for I scarce could tell which was the most hellish — the harsh, malicious, satisfied, cruel laugh, or the leering grin, and the horrible square opening of the mouth like a tragic mask, and the yellow gleam of the few discoloured teeth in the shapeless gums. In that laugh and with that grin and the chuckling satisfaction I knew as well as if it had been spoken to me in words of thunder that my murder was settled, and the murderers only bided the proper time for its accomplishment. I could read between the lines of her gruesome story the commands to her accomplices. ‘Wait,’ she seemed to say, ‘bide your time. I shall strike the first blow. Find the weapon for me, and I shall make the opportunity! He shall not escape! Keep him quiet, and then no one will be wiser. There will be no outcry, and the rats will do their work!’

It was growing darker and darker; the night was coming. I stole a glance round the shanty, still all the same! The bloody axe in the corner, the heaps of filth, and the eyes on the bone heaps and in the crannies of the floor.

Pierre had been still ostensibly filling his pipe; he now struck a light and began to puff away at it. The old woman said:

‘Dear heart, how dark it is! Pierre, like a good lad, light the lamp!’

Pierre got up and with the lighted match in his hand touched the wick of a lamp which hung at one side of the entrance to the shanty, and which had a reflector that threw the light all over the place. It was evidently that which was used for their sorting at night.

‘Not that, stupid! Not that! the lantern!’ she called out to him.

He immediately blew it out, saying: ‘All right, mother I’ll find it,’ and he hustled about the left corner of the room — the old woman saying through the darkness:

The lantern! the lantern! Oh! That is the light that is most useful to us poor folks. The lantern was the friend of the revolution! It is the friend of the chiffonier! It helps us when all else fails.’

Hardly had she said the word when there was a kind of creaking of the whole place, and something was steadily dragged over the roof.

Again I seemed to read between the lines of her words. I knew the lesson of the lantern.

‘One of you get on the roof with a noose and strangle him as he passes out if we fail within.’

As I looked out of the opening I saw the loop of a rope outlined black against the lurid sky. I was now, indeed, beset!

Pierre was not long in finding the lantern. I kept my eyes fixed through the darkness on the old woman. Pierre struck his light, and by its flash I saw the old woman raise from the ground beside her where it had mysteriously appeared, and then hide in the folds of her gown, a long sharp knife or dagger. It seemed to be like a butcher’s sharpening iron fined to a keen point.

The lantern was lit.

‘Bring it here, Pierre,’ she said. ‘Place it in the doorway where we can see it. See how nice it is! It shuts out the darkness from us; it is just right!’

Just right for her and her purposes! It threw all its light on my face, leaving in gloom the faces of both Pierre and the woman, who sat outside of me on each side.

I felt that the time of action was approaching, but I knew now that the first signal and movement would come from the woman, and so watched her.

I was all unarmed, but I had made up my mind what to do. At the first movement I would seize the butcher’s axe in the right-hand corner and fight my way out. At least, I would die hard. I stole a glance round to fix its exact locality so that I could not fail to seize it at the first effort, for then, if ever, time and accuracy would be precious.

Good God! It was gone! All the horror of the situation burst upon me; but the bitterest thought of all was that if the issue of the terrible position should be against me Alice would infallibly suffer. Either she would believe me false — and any lover, or any one who has ever been one, can imagine the bitterness of the thought — or else she would go on loving long after I had been lost to her and to the world, so that her life would be broken and embittered, shattered with disappointment and despair. The very magnitude of the pain braced me up and nerved me to bear the dread scrutiny of the plotters.

I think I did not betray myself. The old woman was watching me as a cat does a mouse; she had her right hand hidden in the folds of her gown, clutching, I knew, that long, cruel-looking dagger. Had she seen any disappointment in my face she would, I felt, have known that the moment had come, and would have sprung on me like a tigress, certain of taking me unprepared.

I looked out into the night, and there I saw new cause for danger. Before and around the hut were at a little distance some shadowy forms; they were quite still, but I knew that they were all alert and on guard. Small chance for me now in that direction.

Again I stole a glance round the place. In moments of great excitement and of great danger, which is excitement, the mind works very quickly, and the keenness of the faculties which depend on the mind grows in proportion. I now felt this. In an instant I took in the whole situation. I saw that the axe had been taken through a small hole made in one of the rotten boards. How rotten they must be to allow of such a thing being done without a particle of noise.

The hut was a regular murder-trap, and was guarded all around. A garroter lay on the roof ready to entangle me with his noose if I should escape the dagger of the old hag. In front the way was guarded by I know not how many watchers. And at the back was a row of desperate men — I had seen their eyes still through the crack in the boards of the floor, when last I looked — as they lay prone waiting for the signal to start erect. If it was to be ever, now for it!

As nonchalantly as I could I turned slightly on my stool so as to get my right leg well under me. Then with a sudden jump, turning my head, and guarding it with my hands, and with the fighting instinct of the knights of old, I breathed my lady's name, and hurled myself against the back wall of the hut.

Watchful as they were, the suddenness of my movement surprised both Pierre and the old woman. As I crashed through the rotten timbers I saw the old woman rise with a leap like a tiger and heard her low gasp of baffled rage. My feet lit on something that moved, and as I jumped away I knew that I had stepped on the back of one of the row of men lying on their faces outside the hut. I was torn with nails and splinters, but otherwise unhurt. Breathless I rushed up the mound in front of me, hearing as I went the dull crash of the shanty as it collapsed into a mass.

It was a nightmare climb. The mound, though but low, was awfully steep, and with each step I took the mass of dust and cinders tore down with me and gave way under my feet. The dust rose and choked me; it was sickening, fœtid, awful; but my climb was, I felt, for life or death, and I struggled on. The seconds seemed hours; but the few moments I had in starting, combined with my youth and strength, gave me a great advantage, and, though several forms struggled after me in deadly silence which was more dreadful than any sound, I easily reached the top. Since then I have climbed the cone of Vesuvius, and as I struggled up that dreary steep amid the sulphurous fumes the memory of that awful night at Montrouge came back to me so vividly that I almost grew faint.

The mound was one of the tallest in the region of dust, and as I struggled to the top, panting for breath and with my heart beating like a sledge-hammer, I saw away to my left the dull red gleam of the sky, and nearer still the flashing of lights. Thank God! I knew where I was now and where lay the road to Paris!

For two or three seconds I paused and looked back. My pursuers were still well behind me, but struggling up resolutely, and in deadly silence. Beyond, the shanty was a wreck — a mass of timber and moving forms. I could see it well, for flames were already bursting out; the rags and straw had evidently caught fire from the lantern. Still silence there! Not a sound! These old wretches could die game, anyhow.

I had no time for more than a passing glance, for as I cast an eye round the mound preparatory to making my descent I saw several dark forms rushing round on either side to cut me off on my way. It was now a race for life. They were trying to head me on my way to Paris, and with the instinct of the moment I dashed down to the right-hand side. I was just in time, for, though I came as it seemed to me down the steep in a few steps, the wary old men who were watching me turned back, and one, as I rushed by into the opening between the two mounds in front, almost struck me a blow with that terrible butcher's axe. There could surely not be two such weapons about!

Then began a really horrible chase. I easily ran ahead of the old men, and even when some younger ones and a few women joined in the hunt I easily distanced them. But I did not know the way, and I could not even guide myself by the light in the sky, for I was running away from it. I had heard that, unless of conscious purpose, hunted men turn always to the left, and so I found it now; and so, I suppose, knew also my pursuers, who were more animals than men, and with cunning or instinct had found out such secrets for themselves: for on finishing a quick spurt, after which I intended to take a moment's breathing space, I suddenly saw ahead of me two or three forms swiftly passing behind a mound to the right.

I was in the spider's web now indeed! But with the thought of this new danger came the resource of the hunted, and so I darted down the next turning to the right. I continued in this direction for some hundred yards, and then, making a turn to the left again, felt certain that I had, at any rate, avoided the danger of being surrounded.

But not of pursuit, for on came the rabble after me, steady, dogged, relentless, and still in grim silence.

In the greater darkness the mounds seemed now to be somewhat smaller than before, although — for the night was closing — they looked bigger in proportion. I was now well ahead of my pursuers, so I made a dart up the mound in front.

Oh joy of joys! I was close to the edge of this inferno of dustheaps. Away behind me the red light of Paris was in the sky, and towering up behind rose the heights of Montmarte — a dim light, with here and there brilliant points like stars.

Restored to vigour in a moment, I ran over the few remaining mounds of decreasing size, and found myself on the level land beyond. Even then, however, the prospect was not inviting. All before me was dark and dismal, and I had evidently come on one of those dank, low-lying waste places which are found here and there in the neighbourhood of great cities. Places of waste and desolation, where the space is required for the ultimate agglomeration of all that is noxious, and the ground is so poor as to create no desire of occupancy even in the lowest squatter. With eyes accustomed to the gloom of the evening, and away now from the shadows of those dreadful dustheaps, I could see much more easily than I could a little while ago. It might have been, of course, that the glare in the sky of the lights of Paris, though the city was some miles away, was reflected here. Howsoever it was, I saw well enough to take bearings for certainly some little distance around me.

In front was a bleak, flat waste that seemed almost dead level, with here and there the dark shimmering of stagnant pools. Seemingly far off on the right, amid a small cluster of scattered lights, rose a dark mass of Fort Montrouge, and away to the left in the dim distance, pointed with stray gleams from cottage windows, the lights in the sky showed the locality of Bicêtre. A moment's thought decided me to take to the right and try to reach Montrouge. There at least would be some sort of safety, and I might possibly long before come on some of the cross roads which I knew. Somewhere, not far off, must lie the strategic road made to connect the outlying chain of forts circling the city.

Then I looked back. Coming over the mounds, and outlined black against the glare of the Parisian horizon, I saw several moving figures, and still a way to the right several more deploying out between me and my destination. They evidently meant to cut me off in this direction, and so my choice became constricted; it lay now between going straight ahead or turning to the left. Stooping to the ground, so as to get the advantage of the horizon as a line of sight, I looked carefully in this direction, but could detect no sign of my enemies. I argued that as they had not guarded or were not trying to guard that point, there was evidently danger to me there already. So I made up my mind to go straight on before me.

It was not an inviting prospect, and as I went on the reality grew worse. The ground became soft and oozy, and now and again gave way beneath me in a sickening kind of way. I seemed somehow to be going down, for I saw round me places seemingly more elevated than where I was, and this in a place which from a little way back seemed dead level. I looked around, but could see none of my pursuers. This was strange, for all along these birds of the night had followed me through the darkness as well as though it was broad daylight. How I blamed myself for coming out in my light-coloured tourist suit of tweed. The silence, and my not being able to see my enemies, whilst I felt that they were watching me, grew appalling, and in the hope of some one not of this ghastly crew hearing me I raised my voice and shouted several times. There was not the slightest response; not even an echo rewarded my efforts. For a while I stood stock still and kept my eyes in one direction. On one of the rising places around me I saw something dark move along, then another, and another. This was to my left, and seemingly moving to head me off.

I thought that again I might with my skill as a runner elude my enemies at this game, and so with all my speed darted forward.

Splash!

My feet had given way in a mass of slimy rubbish, and I had fallen headlong into a reeking, stagnant pool. The water and the mud in which my arms sank up to the elbows was filthy and nauseous beyond description, and in the suddenness of my fall I had actually swallowed some of the filthy stuff, which nearly choked me, and made me gasp for breath. Never shall I forget the moments during which I stood trying to recover myself almost fainting from the fœtid odour of the filthy pool, whose white mist rose ghostlike around. Worst of all, with the acute despair of the hunted animal when he sees the pursuing pack closing on him, I saw before my eyes whilst I stood helpless the dark forms of my pursuers moving swiftly to surround me.

It is curious how our minds work on odd matters even when the energies of thought are seemingly concentrated on some terrible and pressing need. I was in momentary peril of my life: my safety depended on my action, and my choice of alternatives coming now with almost every step I took, and yet I could not but think of the strange dogged persistency of these old men. Their silent resolution, their steadfast, grim, persistency even in such a cause commanded, as well as fear, even a measure of respect. What must they have been in the vigour of their youth. I could understand now that whirlwind rush on the bridge of Arcola, that scornful exclamation of the Old Guard at Waterloo! Unconscious cerebration has its own pleasures, even at such moments; but fortunately it does not in any way clash with the thought from which action springs.

I realised at a glance that so far I was defeated in my object, my enemies as yet had won. They had succeeded in surrounding me on three sides, and were bent on driving me off to the left-hand, where there was already some danger for me, for they had left no guard. I accepted the alternative — it was a case of Hobson's choice and run. I had to keep the lower ground, for my pursuers were on the higher places. However, though the ooze and broken ground impeded me my youth and training made me able to hold my ground, and by keeping a diagonal line I not only kept them from gaining on me but even began to distance them. This gave me new heart and strength, and by this time habitual training was beginning to tell and my second wind had come. Before me the ground rose slightly. I rushed up the slope and found before me a waste of watery slime, with a low dyke or bank looking black and grim beyond. I felt that if I could but reach that dyke in safety I could there, with solid ground under my feet and some kind of path to guide me, find with comparative ease a way out of my troubles. After a glance right and left and seeing no one near, I kept my eyes for a few minutes to their rightful work of aiding my feet whilst I crossed the swamp. It was rough, hard work, but there was little danger, merely toil; and a short time took me to the dyke. I rushed up the slope exulting; but here again I met a new shock. On either side of me rose a number of crouching figures. From right and left they rushed at me. Each body held a rope.

The cordon was nearly complete. I could pass on neither side, and the end was near.

There was only one chance, and I took it. I hurled myself across the dyke, and escaping out of the very clutches of my foes threw myself into the stream.

At any other time I should have thought that water foul and filthy, but now it was as welcome as the most crystal stream to the parched traveller. It was a highway of safety!

My pursuers rushed after me. Had only one of them held the rope it would have been all up with me, for he could have entangled me before I had time to swim a stroke; but the many hands holding it embarrassed and delayed them, and when the rope struck the water I heard the splash well behind me. A few minutes' hard swimming took me across the stream. Refreshed with the immersion and encouraged by the escape, I climbed the dyke in comparative gaiety of spirits.

From the top I looked back. Through the darkness I saw my assailants scattering up and down along the dyke. The pursuit was evidently not ended, and again I had to choose my course. Beyond the dyke where I stood was a wild, swampy space very similar to that which I had crossed. I determined to shun such a place, and thought for a moment whether I would take up or down the dyke. I thought I heard a sound — the muffled sound of oars, so I listened, and then shouted.

No response; but the sound ceased. My enemies had evidently got a boat of some kind. As they were on the up side of me I took the down path and began to run. As I passed to the left of where I had entered the water I heard several splashes, soft and stealthy, like the sound a rat makes as he plunges into the stream, but vastly greater; and as I looked I saw the dark sheen of the water broken by the ripples of several advancing heads. Some of my enemies were swimming the stream also.

And now behind me, up the stream, the silence was broken by the quick rattle and creak of oars; my enemies were in hot pursuit. I put my best leg foremost and ran on. After a break of a couple of minutes I looked back, and by a gleam of light through the ragged clouds I saw several dark forms climbing the bank behind me. The wind had now begun to rise, and the water beside me was ruffled and beginning to break in tiny waves on the bank. I had to keep my eyes pretty well on the ground before me, lest I should stumble, for I knew that to stumble was death. After a few minutes I looked back behind me. On the dyke were only a few dark figures, but crossing the waste, swampy ground were many more. What new danger this portended I did not know — could only guess. Then as I ran it seemed to me that my track kept ever sloping away to the right. I looked up ahead and saw that the river was much wider than before, and that the dyke on which I stood fell quite away, and beyond it was another stream on whose near bank I saw some of the dark forms now across the marsh. I was on an island of some kind.

My situation was now indeed terrible, for my enemies had hemmed me in on every side. Behind came the quickening roll of the oars, as though my pursuers knew that the end was close. Around me on every side was desolation; there was not a roof or light, as far as I could see. Far off to the right rose some dark mass, but what it was I knew not. For a moment I paused to think what I should do, not for more, for my pursuers were drawing closer. Then my mind was made up. I slipped down the bank and took to the water. I struck out straight ahead so as to gain the current by clearing the backwater of the island, for such I presume it was, when I had passed into the stream. I waited till a cloud came driving across the moon and leaving all in darkness. Then I took off my hat and laid it softly on the water floating with the stream, and a second after dived to the right and struck out under water with all my might. I was, I suppose, half a minute under water, and when I rose came up as softly as I could, and turning, looked back. There went my light brown hat floating merrily away. Close behind it came a rickety old boat, driven furiously by a pair of oars. The moon was still partly obscured by the drifting clouds, but in the partial light I could see a man in the bows holding aloft ready to strike what appeared to me to be that same dreadful pole-axe which I had before escaped. As I looked the boat drew closer, closer, and the man struck savagely. The hat disappeared. The man fell forward, almost out of the boat. His comrades dragged him in but without the axe, and then as I turned with all my energies bent on reaching the further bank, I heard the fierce whirr of the muttered ‘Sacre!’ which marked the anger of my baffled pursuers.

That was the first sound I had heard from human lips during all this dreadful chase, and full as it was of menace and danger to me it was a welcome sound for it broke that awful silence which shrouded and appalled me. It was as though an overt sign that my opponents were men and not ghosts, and that with them I had, at least; the chance of a man, though but one against many.

But now that the spell of silence was broken the sounds came thick and fast. From boat to shore and back from shore to boat came quick question and answer, all in the fiercest whispers. I looked back — a fatal thing to do — for in the instant someone caught sight of my face, which showed white on the dark water, and shouted. Hands pointed to me, and in a moment or two the boat was under weigh, and following hard after me. I had but a little way to go, but quicker and quicker came the boat after me. A few more strokes and I would be on the shore, but I felt the oncoming of the boat, and expected each second to feel the crash of an oar or other weapon on my head. Had I not seen that dreadful axe disappear in the water I do not think that I could have won the shore. I heard the muttered curses of those not rowing and the laboured breath of the rowers. With one supreme effort for life or liberty I touched the bank and sprang up it. There was not a single second to spare, for hard behind me the boat grounded and several dark forms sprang after me. I gained the top of the dyke, and keeping to the left ran on again. The boat put off and followed down the stream. Seeing this I feared danger in this direction, and quickly turning, ran down the dyke on the other side, and after passing a short stretch of marshy ground gained a wild, open flat country and sped on.

Still behind me came on my relentless pursuers. Far away, below me, I saw the same dark mass as before, but now grown closer and greater. My heart gave a great thrill of delight, for I knew that it must be the fortress of Bicêtre, and with new courage I ran on. I had heard that between each and all of the protecting forts of Paris there are strategic ways, deep sunk roads where soldiers marching should be sheltered from an enemy. I knew that if I could gain this road I would be safe, but in the darkness I could not see any sign of it, so, in blind hope of striking it, I ran on.

Presently I came to the edge of a deep cut, and found that down below me ran a road guarded on each side by a ditch of water fenced on either side by a straight, high wall.

Getting fainter and dizzier, I ran on; the ground got more broken — more and more still, till I staggered and fell, and rose again, and ran on in the blind anguish of the hunted. Again the thought of Alice nerved me. I would not be lost and wreck her life: I would fight and struggle for life to the bitter end. With a great effort I caught the top of the wall. As, scrambling like a catamount, I drew myself up, I actually felt a hand touch the sole of my foot. I was now on a sort of causeway, and before me I saw a dim light. Blind and dizzy, I ran on, staggered, and fell, rising, covered with dust and blood.

'Halt la!'

The words sounded like a voice from heaven. A blaze of light seemed to enwrap me, and I shouted with joy.

'Qui va la?' The rattle of musketry, the flash of steel before my eyes. Instinctively I stopped, though close behind me came a rush of my pursuers.

Another word or two, and out from a gateway poured, as it seemed to me, a tide of red and blue, as the guard turned out. All around seemed blazing with light, and the flash of steel, the clink and rattle of arms, and the loud, harsh voices of command. As I fell forward, utterly exhausted, a soldier caught me. I looked back in dreadful expectation, and saw the mass of dark forms disappearing into the night. Then I must have fainted. When I recovered my senses

I was in the guard room. They gave me brandy, and after a while I was able to tell them something of what had passed. Then a commissary of police appeared, apparently out of the empty air, as is the way of the Parisian police officer. He listened attentively, and then had a moment's consultation with the officer in command. Apparently they were agreed, for they asked me if I were ready now to come with them.

'Where to?' I asked, rising to go.

'Back to the dust heaps. We shall, perhaps, catch them yet!'

'I shall try!' said I.

He eyed me for a moment keenly, and said suddenly:

'Would you like to wait a while or till tomorrow, young Englishman?' This touched me to the quick, as, perhaps, he intended, and I jumped to my feet.

'Come now!' I said; 'now! now! An Englishman is always ready for his duty!'

The commissary was a good fellow, as well as a shrewd one; he slapped my shoulder kindly. 'Brave garçon!' he said. 'Forgive me, but I knew what would do you most good. The guard is ready. Come!'

And so, passing right through the guard room, and through a long vaulted passage, we were out into the night. A few of the men in front had powerful lanterns. Through courtyards and down a sloping way we passed out through a low archway to a sunken road, the same that I had seen in my flight. The order was given to get at the double, and with a quick, springing stride, half run, half walk, the soldiers went swiftly along. I felt my strength renewed again — such is the difference between hunter and hunted. A very short distance took us to a low-lying pontoon bridge across the stream, and evidently very little higher up than I had struck it. Some effort had evidently been made to damage it, for the ropes had all been cut, and one of the chains had been broken. I heard the officer say to the commissary:

‘We are just in time! A few more minutes, and they would have destroyed the bridge. Forward, quicker still!’ and on we went. Again we reached a pontoon on the winding stream; as we came up we heard the hollow boom of the metal drums as the efforts to destroy the bridge was again renewed. A word of command was given, and several men raised their rifles.

‘Fire!’ A volley rang out. There was a muffled cry, and the dark forms dispersed. But the evil was done, and we saw the far end of the pontoon swing into the stream. This was a serious delay, and it was nearly an hour before we had renewed ropes and restored the bridge sufficiently to allow us to cross.

We renewed the chase. Quicker, quicker we went towards the dust heaps.

After a time we came to a place that I knew. There were the remains of a fire — a few smouldering wood ashes still cast a red glow, but the bulk of the ashes were cold. I knew the site of the hut and the hill behind it up which I had rushed, and in the flickering glow the eyes of the rats still shone with a sort of phosphorescence. The commissary spoke a word to the officer, and he cried:

‘Halt!’

The soldiers were ordered to spread around and watch, and then we commenced to examine the ruins. The commissary himself began to lift away the charred boards and rubbish. These the soldiers took and piled together. Presently he started back, then bent down and rising beckoned me.

‘See!’ he said.

It was a gruesome sight. There lay a skeleton face downwards, a woman by the lines — an old woman by the coarse fibre of the bone. Between the ribs rose a long spike-like dagger made from a butcher's sharpening knife, its keen point buried in the spine.

'You will observe,' said the commissary to the officer and to me as he took out his note book, 'that the woman must have fallen on her dagger. The rats are many here — see their eyes glistening among that heap of bones — and you will also notice' — I shuddered as he placed his hand on the skeleton— 'that but little time was lost by them, for the bones are scarcely cold!'

There was no other sign of any one near, living or dead; and so deploying again into line the soldiers passed on. Presently we came to the hut made of the old wardrobe. We approached. In five of the six compartments was an old man sleeping — sleeping so soundly that even the glare of the lanterns did not wake them. Old and grim and grizzled they looked, with their gaunt, wrinkled, bronzed faces and their white moustaches.

The officer called out harshly and loudly a word of command, and in an instant each one of them was on his feet before us and standing at 'attention!'

'What do you here?'

'We sleep,' was the answer.

'Where are the other chiffoniers?' asked the commissary.

'Gone to work.'

'And you?'

'We are on guard!'

'Peste!' laughed the officer grimly, as he looked at the old men one after the other in the face and added with cool deliberate cruelty: 'Asleep on duty! Is this the manner of the Old Guard? No wonder, then, a Waterloo!'

By the gleam of the lantern I saw the grim old faces grow deadly pale, and almost shuddered at the look in the eyes of the old men as the laugh of the soldiers echoed the grim pleasantry of the officer.

I felt in that moment that I was in some measure avenged.

For a moment they looked as if they would throw themselves on the taunter, but years of their life had schooled them and they remained still.

'You are but five,' said the commissary; 'where is the sixth?' The answer came with a grim chuckle.

'He is there!' and the speaker pointed to the bottom of the wardrobe. 'He died last night. You won't find much of him. The burial of the rats is quick!'

The commissary stooped and looked in. Then he turned to the officer and said calmly:

'We may as well go back. No trace here now; nothing to prove that man was the one wounded by your soldiers' bullets! Probably they murdered him to cover up the trace. See!' again he stooped and placed his hands on the skeleton. 'The rats work quickly and they are many. These bones are warm!'

I shuddered, and so did many more of those around me.

'Form!' said the officer, and so in marching order, with the lanterns swinging in front and the manacled veterans in the midst, with steady tramp we took ourselves out of the dustheaps and turned backward to the fortress of Bicêtre.

My year of probation has long since ended, and Alice is my wife. But when I look back upon that trying twelvemonth one of the most vivid incidents that memory recalls is that associated with my visit to the City of Dust.

A DREAM OF RED HANDS

The first opinion given to me regarding Jacob Settle was a simple descriptive statement, ‘He’s a down-in-the-mouth chap’: but I found that it embodied the thoughts and ideas of all his fellow-workmen. There was in the phrase a certain easy tolerance, an absence of positive feeling of any kind, rather than any complete opinion, which marked pretty accurately the man’s place in public esteem. Still, there was some dissimilarity between this and his appearance which unconsciously set me thinking, and by degrees, as I saw more of the place and the workmen, I came to have a special interest in him. He was, I found, for ever doing kindnesses, not involving money expenses beyond his humble means, but in the manifold ways of forethought and forbearance and self-repression which are of the truer charities of life. Women and children trusted him implicitly, though, strangely enough, he rather shunned them, except when anyone was sick, and then he made his appearance to help if he could, timidly and awkwardly. He led a very solitary life, keeping house by himself in a tiny cottage, or rather hut, of one room, far on the edge of the moorland. His existence seemed so sad and solitary that I wished to cheer it up, and for the purpose took the occasion when we had both been sitting up with a child, injured by me through accident, to offer to lend him books. He gladly accepted, and as we parted in the grey of the dawn I felt that something of mutual confidence had been established between us.

The books were always most carefully and punctually returned, and in time Jacob Settle and I became quite friends. Once or twice as I crossed the moorland on Sundays I looked in on him; but on such occasions he was shy and ill at ease so that I felt diffident about calling to see him. He would never under any circumstances come into my own lodgings.

One Sunday afternoon, I was coming back from a long walk beyond the moor, and as I passed Settle’s cottage stopped at the door to say ‘How do you do?’ to him. As the door was shut, I thought that he was out, and merely knocked for form’s sake, or through habit, not expecting to get any answer. To my surprise, I heard a feeble voice from within, though what was said I could not hear. I entered at once, and found Jacob lying half-dressed upon his bed. He was as pale as death, and the sweat was simply rolling off his face. His hands were unconsciously gripping the bedclothes as a drowning man holds on to whatever he may grasp. As I came in he half arose, with a wild, hunted look in his eyes, which were wide open and staring, as though something of horror had come before him; but when he recognised me he sank back on the couch with a smothered sob of relief and closed his eyes. I stood by him for a while, quite a minute or two, while he gasped. Then he opened his eyes and looked at me, but with such a despairing, woeful expression that, as I am a living man, I would have rather seen that frozen look of horror. I sat down beside him and asked after his health. For a while he would not answer me except to say that he was not ill; but then, after scrutinising me closely, he half arose on his elbow and said:

‘I thank you kindly, sir, but I’m simply telling you the truth. I am not ill, as men call it, though God knows whether there be not worse sicknesses than doctors know of. I’ll tell you, as you are so kind, but I trust that you won’t even mention such a thing to a living soul, for it might work me more and greater woe. I am suffering from a bad dream.’

‘A bad dream!’ I said, hoping to cheer him; ‘but dreams pass away with the light — even with waking.’ There I stopped, for before he spoke I saw the answer in his desolate look round the little place.

‘No! no! that’s all well for people that live in comfort and with those they love around them. It is a thousand times worse for those who live alone and have to do so. What cheer is there for me, waking here in the silence of the night, with the wide moor around me full of voices and full of faces that make my waking a worse dream than my sleep? Ah, young sir, you have no past that can send its legions to people the darkness and the empty space, and I pray the good God that you may never have!’ As he spoke, there was such an almost irresistible gravity of conviction in his manner that I abandoned my remonstrance about his solitary life. I felt that I was in the presence of some secret influence which I could not fathom. To my relief, for I knew not what to say, he went on:

‘Two nights past have I dreamed it. It was hard enough the first night, but I came through it. Last night the expectation was in itself almost worse than the dream — until the dream came, and then it swept away every remembrance of lesser pain. I stayed awake till just before the dawn, and then it came again, and ever since I have been in such an agony as I am sure the dying feel, and with it all the dread of tonight.’ Before he had got to the end of the sentence my mind was made up, and I felt that I could speak to him more cheerfully.

‘Try and get to sleep early tonight — in fact, before the evening has passed away. The sleep will refresh you, and I promise you there will not be any bad dreams after tonight.’ He shook his head hopelessly, so I sat a little longer and then left him.

When I got home I made my arrangements for the night, for I had made up my mind to share Jacob Settle's lonely vigil in his cottage on the moor. I judged that if he got to sleep before sunset he would wake well before midnight, and so, just as the bells of the city were striking eleven, I stood opposite his door armed with a bag, in which were my supper, an extra large flask, a couple of candles, and a book. The moonlight was bright, and flooded the whole moor, till it was almost as light as day; but ever and anon black clouds drove across the sky, and made a darkness which by comparison seemed almost tangible. I opened the door softly, and entered without waking Jacob, who lay asleep with his white face upward. He was still, and again bathed in sweat. I tried to imagine what visions were passing before those closed eyes which could bring with them the misery and woe which were stamped on the face, but fancy failed me, and I waited for the awakening. It came suddenly, and in a fashion which touched me to the quick, for the hollow groan that broke from the man's white lips as he half arose and sank back was manifestly the realisation or completion of some train of thought which had gone before.

'If this be dreaming,' said I to myself, 'then it must be based on some very terrible reality. What can have been that unhappy fact that he spoke of?'

While I thus spoke, he realised that I was with him. It struck me as strange that he had no period of that doubt as to whether dream or reality surrounded him which commonly marks an expected environment of waking men. With a positive cry of joy, he seized my hand and held it in his two wet, trembling hands, as a frightened child clings on to someone whom it loves. I tried to soothe him:

'There, there! it is all right. I have come to stay with you tonight, and together we will try to fight this evil dream.' He let go my hand suddenly, and sank back on his bed and covered his eyes with his hands.

‘Fight it? — the evil dream! Ah! no, sir, no! No mortal power can fight that dream, for it comes from God — and is burned in here;’ and he beat upon his forehead. Then he went on:

‘It is the same dream, ever the same, and yet it grows in its power to torture me every time it comes.’

‘What is the dream?’ I asked, thinking that the speaking of it might give him some relief, but he shrank away from me, and after a long pause said:

‘No, I had better not tell it. It may not come again.’

There was manifestly something to conceal from me — something that lay behind the dream, so I answered:

‘All right. I hope you have seen the last of it. But if it should come again, you will tell me, will you not? I ask, not out of curiosity, but because I think it may relieve you to speak.’ He answered with what I thought was almost an undue amount of solemnity:

‘If it comes again, I shall tell you all.’

Then I tried to get his mind away from the subject to more mundane things, so I produced supper, and made him share it with me, including the contents of the flask. After a little he braced up, and when I lit my cigar, having given him another, we smoked a full hour, and talked of many things. Little by little the comfort of his body stole over his mind, and I could see sleep laying her gentle hands on his eyelids. He felt it, too, and told me that now he felt all right, and I might safely leave him; but I told him that, right or wrong, I was going to see in the daylight. So I lit my other candle, and began to read as he fell asleep.

By degrees I got interested in my book, so interested that presently I was startled by its dropping out of my hands. I looked and saw that Jacob was still asleep, and I was rejoiced to see that there was on his face a look of unwonted happiness, while his lips seemed to move with unspoken words. Then I turned to my work again, and again woke, but this time to feel chilled to my very marrow by hearing the voice from the bed beside me:

‘Not with those red hands! Never! never!’ On looking at him, I found that he was still asleep. He woke, however, in an instant, and did not seem surprised to see me; there was again that strange apathy as to his surroundings. Then I said:

‘Settle, tell me your dream. You may speak freely, for I shall hold your confidence sacred. While we both live I shall never mention what you may choose to tell me.’

He replied:

‘I said I would; but I had better tell you first what goes before the dream, that you may understand. I was a schoolmaster when I was a very young man; it was only a parish school in a little village in the West Country. No need to mention any names. Better not. I was engaged to be married to a young girl whom I loved and almost reverenced. It was the old story. While we were waiting for the time when we could afford to set up house together, another man came along. He was nearly as young as I was, and handsome, and a gentleman, with all a gentleman’s attractive ways for a woman of our class. He would go fishing, and she would meet him while I was at my work in school. I reasoned with her and implored her to give him up. I offered to get married at once and go away and begin the world in a strange country; but she would not listen to anything I could say, and I could see that she was infatuated with him. Then I took it on myself to meet the man and ask him to deal well with the girl, for I thought he might mean honestly by her, so that there might be no talk or chance of talk on the part of others. I went where I should meet him with none by, and we met!' Here Jacob Settle had to pause, for something seemed to rise in his throat, and he almost gasped for breath. Then he went on:

'Sir, as God is above us, there was no selfish thought in my heart that day, I loved my pretty Mabel too well to be content with a part of her love, and I had thought of my own unhappiness too often not to have come to realise that, whatever might come to her, my hope was gone. He was insolent to me — you, sir, who are a gentleman, cannot know, perhaps, how galling can be the insolence of one who is above you in station — but I bore with that. I implored him to deal well with the girl, for what might be only a pastime of an idle hour with him might be the breaking of her heart. For I never had a thought of her truth, or that the worst of harm could come to her — it was only the unhappiness to her heart I feared. But when I asked him when he intended to marry her his laughter galled me so that I lost my temper and told him that I would not stand by and see her life made unhappy. Then he grew angry too, and in his anger said such cruel things of her that then and there I swore he should not live to do her harm. God knows how it came about, for in such moments of passion it is hard to remember the steps from a word to a blow, but I found myself standing over his dead body, with my hands crimson with the blood that welled from his torn throat. We were alone and he was a stranger, with none of his kin to seek for him and murder does not always out — not all at once. His bones may be whitening still, for all I know, in the pool of the river where I left him. No one suspected his absence, or why it was, except my poor Mabel, and she dared not speak. But it was all in vain, for when I came back again after an absence of months — for I could not live in the place — I learned that her shame had come and that she had died in it. Hitherto I had been borne up by the thought that my ill deed had saved her future, but now, when I learned that I had been too late, and that my poor love was smirched with that man's sin, I fled away with the sense of my useless guilt upon me more heavily than I could bear. Ah! sir, you that have not done such a sin don't know what it is to carry it with you. You may think that custom makes it easy to you, but it is not so. It grows and grows with every hour, till it becomes intolerable, and with it growing, too, the feeling that you must for ever stand outside Heaven. You don't know what that means, and I pray God that you never may. Ordinary men, to whom all things are possible, don't often, if ever, think of Heaven. It is a name, and nothing more, and they are content to wait and let things be, but to those who are doomed to be shut out for ever you cannot think what it means, you cannot guess or measure the terrible endless longing to see the gates opened, and to be able to join the white figures within.

'And this brings me to my dream. It seemed that the portal was before me, with great gates of massive steel with bars of the thickness of a mast, rising to the very clouds, and so close that between them was just a glimpse of a crystal grotto, on whose shining walls were figured many white-clad forms with faces radiant with joy. When I stood before the gate my heart and my soul were so full of rapture and longing that I forgot. And there stood at the gate two mighty angels with sweeping wings, and, oh! so stern of countenance. They held each in one hand a flaming sword, and in the other the latchet, which moved to and fro at their lightest touch. Nearer were figures all draped in black, with heads covered so that only the eyes were seen, and they handed to each who came white garments such as the angels wear. A low murmur came that told that all should put on their own robes, and without soil, or the angels would not pass them in, but would smite them down with the flaming swords. I was eager to don my own garment, and hurriedly threw it over me and stepped swiftly to the gate; but it moved not, and the angels, loosing the latchet, pointed to my dress, I looked down, and was aghast, for the whole robe was smeared with blood. My hands were red; they glittered with the blood that dripped from them as on that day by the river bank. And then the angels raised their flaming swords to smite me down, and the horror was complete — I awoke. Again, and again, and again, that awful dream comes to me. I never learn from the experience, I never remember, but at the beginning the hope is ever there to make the end more appalling; and I know that the dream does not come out of the common darkness where the dreams abide, but that it is sent from God as a punishment! Never, never shall I be able to pass the gate, for the soil on the angel garments must ever come from these bloody hands!'

I listened as in a spell as Jacob Settle spoke. There was something so far away in the tone of his voice — something so dreamy and mystic in the eyes that looked as if through me at some spirit beyond — something so lofty in his very diction and in such marked contrast to his workworn clothes and his poor surroundings that I wondered if the whole thing were not a dream.

We were both silent for a long time. I kept looking at the man before me in growing wonderment. Now that his confession had been made, his soul, which had been crushed to the very earth, seemed to leap back again to uprightness with some resilient force. I suppose I ought to have been horrified with his story, but, strange to say, I was not. It certainly is not pleasant to be made the recipient of the confidence of a murderer, but this poor fellow seemed to have had, not only so much provocation, but so much self-denying purpose in his deed of blood that I did not feel called upon to pass judgment upon him. My purpose was to comfort, so I spoke out with what calmness I could, for my heart was beating fast and heavily:

‘You need not despair, Jacob Settle. God is very good, and His mercy is great. Live on and work on in the hope that some day you may feel that you have atoned for the past.’ Here I paused, for I could see that deep, natural sleep this time, was creeping upon him. ‘Go to sleep,’ I said; ‘I shall watch with you here and we shall have no more evil dreams tonight.’

He made an effort to pull himself together, and answered:

‘I don’t know how to thank you for your goodness to me this night, but I think you had best leave me now. I’ll try and sleep this out; I feel a weight off my mind since I have told you all. If there’s anything of the man left in me, I must try and fight out life alone.’

‘I’ll go tonight, as you wish it,’ I said; ‘but take my advice, and do not live in such a solitary way. Go among men and women; live among them. Share their joys and sorrows, and it will help you to forget. This solitude will make you melancholy mad.’

‘I will!’ he answered, half unconsciously, for sleep was overmastering him.

I turned to go, and he looked after me. When I had touched the latch I dropped it, and, coming back to the bed, held out my hand. He grasped it with both his as he rose to a sitting posture, and I said my goodnight, trying to cheer him:

‘Heart, man, heart! There is work in the world for you to do, Jacob Settle. You can wear those white robes yet and pass through that gate of steel!’

Then I left him.

A week after I found his cottage deserted, and on asking at the works was told that he had ‘gone north’, no one exactly knew whither.

Two years afterwards, I was staying for a few days with my friend Dr. Munro in Glasgow. He was a busy man, and could not spare much time for going about with me, so I spent my days in excursions to the Trossachs and Loch Katrine and down the Clyde. On the second last evening of my stay I came back somewhat later than I had arranged, but found that my host was late too. The maid told me that he had been sent for to the hospital — a case of accident at the gas-works, and the dinner was postponed an hour; so telling her I would stroll down to find her master and walk back with him, I went out. At the hospital I found him washing his hands preparatory to starting for home. Casually, I asked him what his case was.

‘Oh, the usual thing! A rotten rope and men’s lives of no account. Two men were working in a gasometer, when the rope that held their scaffolding broke. It must have occurred just before the dinner hour, for no one noticed their absence till the men had returned. There was about seven feet of water in the gasometer, so they had a hard fight for it, poor fellows. However, one of them was alive, just alive, but we have had a hard job to pull him through. It seems that he owes his life to his mate, for I have never heard of greater heroism. They swam together while their strength lasted, but at the end they were so done up that even the lights above, and the men slung with ropes, coming down to help them, could not keep them up. But one of them stood on the bottom and held up his comrade over his head, and those few breaths made all the difference between life and death. They were a shocking sight when they were taken out, for that water is like a purple dye with the gas and the tar. The man upstairs looked as if he had been washed in blood. Ugh!'

'And the other?'

'Oh, he's worse still. But he must have been a very noble fellow. That struggle under the water must have been fearful; one can see that by the way the blood has been drawn from the extremities. It makes the idea of the *Stigmata* possible to look at him. Resolution like this could, you would think, do anything in the world. Ay! it might almost unbar the gates of Heaven. Look here, old man, it is not a very pleasant sight, especially just before dinner, but you are a writer, and this is an odd case. Here is something you would not like to miss, for in all human probability you will never see anything like it again.' While he was speaking he had brought me into the mortuary of the hospital.

On the bier lay a body covered with a white sheet, which was wrapped close round it.

'Looks like a chrysalis, don't it? I say, Jack, if there be anything in the old myth that a soul is typified by a butterfly, well, then the one that this chrysalis sent forth was a very noble specimen and took all the sunlight on its wings. See here!' He uncovered the face. Horrible, indeed, it looked, as though stained with blood. But I knew him at once, Jacob Settle! My friend pulled the winding sheet further down.

The hands were crossed on the purple breast as they had been reverently placed by some tender-hearted person. As I saw them my heart throbbed with a great exultation, for the memory of his harrowing dream rushed across my mind. There was no stain now on those poor, brave hands, for they were blanched white as snow.

And somehow as I looked I felt that the evil dream was all over.

That noble soul had won a way through the gate at last. The white robe had now no stain from the hands that had put it on.

CROOKEN SANDS

Mr Arthur Fernlee Markam, who took what was known as the Red House above the Mains of Crooken, was a London merchant, and being essentially a cockney, thought it necessary when he went for the summer holidays to Scotland to provide an entire rig-out as a Highland chieftain, as manifested in chromolithographs and on the music-hall stage. He had once seen in the Empire the Great Prince— 'The Bounder King' — bring down the house by appearing as 'The MacSlogan of that Ilk,' and singing the celebrated Scotch song, 'There's naething like haggis to mak a mon dry!' and he had ever since preserved in his mind a faithful image of the picturesque and warlike appearance which he presented. Indeed, if the true inwardness of Mr. Markam's mind on the subject of his selection of Aberdeenshire as a summer resort were known, it would be found that in the foreground of the holiday locality which his fancy painted stalked the many hued figure of the MacSlogan of that Ilk. However, be this as it may, a very kind fortune — certainly so far as external beauty was concerned — led him to the choice of Crooken Bay. It is a lovely spot, between Aberdeen and Peterhead, just under the rock-bound headland whence the long, dangerous reefs known as The Spurs run out into the North Sea. Between this and the 'Mains of Crooken' — a village sheltered by the northern cliffs — lies the deep bay, backed with a multitude of bent-grown dunes where the rabbits are to be found in thousands. Thus at either end of the bay is a rocky promontory, and when the dawn or the sunset falls on the rocks of red syenite the effect is very lovely. The bay itself is floored with level sand and the tide runs far out, leaving a smooth waste of hard sand on which are dotted here and there the stake nets and bag nets of the salmon fishers. At one end of the bay there is a little group or cluster of rocks whose heads are raised something above high water, except when in rough weather the waves come over them green. At low tide they are exposed down to sand level; and here is perhaps the only little bit of dangerous sand on this part of the eastern coast. Between the rocks, which are apart about some fifty feet, is a small quicksand, which, like the Goodwins, is dangerous only with the incoming tide. It extends outwards till it is lost in the sea, and inwards till it fades away in the hard sand of the upper beach. On the slope of the hill which rises beyond the dunes, midway between the Spurs and the Port of Crooken, is the Red House. It rises from the midst of a clump of fir-trees which protect it on three sides, leaving the whole sea front open. A trim old-fashioned garden stretches down to the roadway, on crossing which a grassy path, which can be used for light vehicles, threads a way to the shore, winding amongst the sand hills.

When the Markam family arrived at the Red House after their thirty-six hours of pitching on the Aberdeen steamer *Ban Righ* from Blackwall, with the subsequent train to Yellon and drive of a dozen miles, they all agreed that they had never seen a more delightful spot. The general satisfaction was more marked as at that very time none of the family were, for several reasons, inclined to find favourable anything or any place over the Scottish border. Though the family was a large one, the prosperity of the business allowed them all sorts of personal luxuries, amongst which was a wide latitude in the way of dress. The frequency of the Markam girls' new frocks was a source of envy to their bosom friends and of joy to themselves.

Arthur Fernlee Markam had not taken his family into his confidence regarding his new costume. He was not quite certain that he should be free from ridicule, or at least from sarcasm, and as he was sensitive on the subject, he thought it better to be actually in the suitable environment before he allowed the full splendour to burst upon them. He had taken some pains, to insure the completeness of the Highland costume. For the purpose he had paid many visits to 'The Scotch All-Wool Tartan Clothing Mart' which had been lately established in Copthall-court by the Messrs. MacCallum More and Roderick MacDhu. He had anxious consultations with the head of the firm — MacCallum as he called himself, resenting any such additions as 'Mr.' or 'Esquire.' The known stock of buckles, buttons, straps, brooches and ornaments of all kinds were examined in critical detail; and at last an eagle's feather of sufficiently magnificent proportions was discovered, and the equipment was complete. It was only when he saw the finished costume, with the vivid hues of the tartan seemingly modified into comparative sobriety by the multitude of silver fittings, the cairngorm brooches, the philibeg, dirk and sporran that he was fully and absolutely satisfied with his choice. At first he had thought of the Royal Stuart dress tartan, but abandoned it on the MacCallum pointing out that if he should happen to be in the neighbourhood of Balmoral it might lead to complications. The MacCallum, who, by the way, spoke with a remarkable cockney accent, suggested other plaids in turn; but now that the other question of accuracy had been raised, Mr. Markam foresaw difficulties if he should by chance find himself in the locality of the clan whose colours he had usurped. The MacCallum at last undertook to have, at Markam's expense, a special pattern woven which would not be exactly the same as any existing tartan, though partaking of the characteristics of many. It was based on the Royal Stuart, but contained suggestions as to simplicity of pattern from the Macalister and Ogilvie clans, and as to neutrality of colour from the clans of Buchanan, Macbeth, Chief of Macintosh and Macleod. When the specimen had been shown to Markam he had feared somewhat lest it should strike the eye of his domestic circle as gaudy; but as Roderick MacDhu fell into perfect ecstasies over its beauty he did not make any objection to the completion of the piece. He thought, and wisely, that if a genuine Scotchman like MacDhu liked it, it must be right — especially as the junior partner was a man very much of his own build and appearance. When the MacCallum was receiving his cheque — which, by the way, was a pretty stiff one — he remarked:

'I've taken the liberty of having some more of the stuff woven in case you or any of your friends should want it.' Markam was gratified, and told him that he should be only too happy if the beautiful stuff which they had originated between them should become a favourite, as he had no doubt it would in time. He might make and sell as much as he would.

Markam tried the dress on in his office one evening after the clerks had all gone home. He was pleased, though a little frightened, at the result. The MacCallum had done his work thoroughly, and there was nothing omitted that could add to the martial dignity of the wearer.

'I shall not, of course, take the claymore and the pistols with me on ordinary occasions,' said Markam to himself as he began to undress. He determined that he would wear the dress for the first time on landing in Scotland, and accordingly on the morning when the *Ban Righ* was hanging off the Girdle Ness lighthouse, waiting for the tide to enter the port of Aberdeen, he emerged from his cabin in all the gaudy splendour of his new costume. The first comment he heard was from one of his own sons, who did not recognise him at first.

‘Here’s a guy! Great Scott! It’s the governor!’ And the boy fled forthwith and tried to bury his laughter under a cushion in the saloon. Markam was a good sailor and had not suffered from the pitching of the boat, so that his naturally rubicund face was even more rosy by the conscious blush which suffused his cheeks when he had found himself at once the cynosure of all eyes. He could have wished that he had not been so bold for he knew from the cold that there was a big bare spot under one side of his jauntily worn Glengarry cap. However, he faced the group of strangers boldly. He was not, outwardly, upset even when some of the comments reached his ears.

‘He’s off his bloomin’ chump,’ said a cockney in a suit of exaggerated plaid.

‘There’s flies on him,’ said a tall thin Yankee, pale with sea-sickness, who was on his way to take up his residence for a time as close as he could get to the gates of Balmoral.

‘Happy thought! Let us fill our mulls; now’s the chance!’ said a young Oxford man on his way home to Inverness. But presently Mr. Markam heard the voice of his eldest daughter.

‘Where is he? Where is he?’ and she came tearing along the deck with her hat blowing behind her. Her face showed signs of agitation, for her mother had just been telling her of her father’s condition; but when she saw him she instantly burst into laughter so violent that it ended in a fit of hysterics. Something of the same kind happened to each of the other children. When they had all had their turn Mr. Markam went to his cabin and sent his wife’s maid to tell each member of the family that he wanted to see them at once. They all made their appearance, suppressing their feelings as well as they could. He said to them very quietly:

‘My dears, don’t I provide you all with ample allowances?’

‘Yes, father!’ they all answered gravely, ‘no one could be more generous!’

‘Don’t I let you dress as you please?’

‘Yes, father!’ — this a little sheepishly.

‘Then, my dears, don’t you think it would be nicer and kinder of you not to try and make me feel uncomfortable, even if I do assume a dress which is ridiculous in your eyes, though quite common enough in the country where we are about to sojourn?’ There was no answer except that which appeared in their hanging heads. He was a good father and they all knew it. He was quite satisfied and went on:

‘There, now, run away and enjoy yourselves! We shan’t have another word about it.’ Then he went on deck again and stood bravely the fire of ridicule which he recognised around him, though nothing more was said within his hearing.

The astonishment and the amusement which his get-up occasioned on the *Ban Righ* was, however, nothing to that which it created in Aberdeen. The boys and loafers, and women with babies, who waited at the landing shed, followed *en masse* as the Markam party took their way to the railway station; even the porters with their old-fashioned knots and their new-fashioned barrows, who await the traveller at the foot of the gang-plank, followed in wondering delight. Fortunately the Peterhead train was just about to start, so that the martyrdom was not unnecessarily prolonged. In the carriage the glorious Highland costume was unseen, and as there were but few persons at the station at Yellon, all went well there. When, however, the carriage drew near the Mains of Crooken and the fisher folk had run to their doors to see who it was that was passing, the excitement exceeded all bounds. The children with one impulse waved their bonnets and ran shouting behind the carriage; the men forsook their nets and their baiting and followed; the women clutched their babies, and followed also. The horses were tired after their long journey to Yellon and back, and the hill was steep, so that there was ample time for the crowd to gather and even to pass on ahead.

Mrs. Markam and the elder girls would have liked to make some protest or to do something to relieve their feelings of chagrin at the ridicule which they saw on all faces, but there was a look of fixed determination on the face of the seeming Highlander which awed them a little, and they were silent. It might have been that the eagle's feather, even when arising above the bald head, the cairngorm brooch even on the fat shoulder, and the claymore, dirk and pistols, even when belted round the extensive paunch and protruding from the stocking on the sturdy calf, fulfilled their existence as symbols of martial and terrifying import! When the party arrived at the gate of the Red House there awaited them a crowd of Crooken inhabitants, hatless and respectfully silent; the remainder of the population was painfully toiling up the hill. The silence was broken by only one sound, that of a man with a deep voice.

'Man! but he's forgotten the pipes!'

The servants had arrived some days before, and all things were in readiness. In the glow consequent on a good lunch after a hard journey all the disagreeables of travel and all the chagrin consequent on the adoption of the obnoxious costume were forgotten.

That afternoon Markam, still clad in full array, walked through the Mains of Crooken. He was all alone, for, strange to say, his wife and both daughters had sick headaches, and were, as he was told, lying down to rest after the fatigue of the journey. His eldest son, who claimed to be a young man, had gone out by himself to explore the surroundings of the place, and one of the boys could not be found. The other boy, on being told that his father had sent for him to come for a walk, had managed — by accident, of course — to fall into the water butt, and had to be dried and rigged out afresh. His clothes not having been as yet unpacked this was of course impossible without delay.

Mr. Markam was not quite satisfied with his walk. He could not meet any of his neighbours. It was not that there were not enough people about, for every house and cottage seemed to be full; but the people when in the open were either in their doorways some distance behind him, or on the roadway a long distance in front. As he passed he could see the tops of heads and the whites of eyes in the windows or round the corners of doors. The only interview which he had was anything but a pleasant one. This was with an odd sort of old man who was hardly ever heard to speak except to join in the 'Amens' in the meeting-house. His sole occupation seemed to be to wait at the window of the post-office from eight o'clock in the morning till the arrival of the mail at one, when he carried the letter-bag to a neighbouring baronial castle. The remainder of his day was spent on a seat in a draughty part of the port, where the offal of the fish, the refuse of the bait, and the house rubbish was thrown, and where the ducks were accustomed to hold high revel.

When Saft Tammie beheld him coming he raised his eyes, which were generally fixed on the nothing which lay on the roadway opposite his seat, and, seeming dazzled as if by a burst of sunshine, rubbed them and shaded them with his hand. Then he started up and raised his hand aloft in a denunciatory manner as he spoke: —

'"Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher. All is vanity." Mon, be warned in time! "Behold the lilies of the field, they toil not, neither do they spin, yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” Mon! Mon! Thy vanity is as the quicksand which swallows up all which comes within its spell. Beware vanity! Beware the quicksand, which yawneth for thee, and which will swallow thee up! See thyself! Learn thine own vanity! Meet thyself face to face, and then in that moment thou shalt learn the fatal force of thy vanity. Learn it, know it, and repent ere the quicksand swallow thee!’ Then without another word he went back to his seat and sat there immovable and expressionless as before.

Markam could not but feel a little upset by this tirade. Only that it was spoken by a seeming madman, he would have put it down to some eccentric exhibition of Scottish humour or impudence; but the gravity of the message — for it seemed nothing else — made such a reading impossible. He was, however, determined not to give in to ridicule, and although he had not yet seen anything in Scotland to remind him even of a kilt, he determined to wear his Highland dress. When he returned home, in less than half-an-hour, he found that every member of the family was, despite the headaches, out taking a walk. He took the opportunity afforded by their absence of locking himself in his dressing-room, took off the Highland dress, and, putting on a suit of flannels, lit a cigar and had a snooze. He was awakened by the noise of the family coming in, and at once donning his dress made his appearance in the drawing-room for tea.

He did not go out again that afternoon; but after dinner he put on his dress again — he had, of course dressed for dinner as usual — and went by himself for a walk on the sea-shore. He had by this time come to the conclusion that he would get by degrees accustomed to the Highland dress before making it his ordinary wear. The moon was up and he easily followed the path through the sand-hills, and shortly struck the shore. The tide was out and the beach firm as a rock, so he strolled southwards to nearly the end of the bay. Here he was attracted by two isolated rocks some little way out from the edge of the dunes, so he strolled towards them. When he reached the nearest one he climbed it, and, sitting there elevated some fifteen or twenty feet over the waste of sand, enjoyed the lovely, peaceful prospect. The moon was rising behind the headland of Pennyfold, and its light was just touching the top of the furthermost rock of the Spurs some three-quarters of a mile out; the rest of the rocks were in dark shadow. As the moon rose over the headland, the rocks of the Spurs and then the beach by degrees became flooded with light.

For a good while Mr. Markam sat and looked at the rising moon and the growing area of light which followed its rise. Then he turned and faced eastwards and sat with his chin in his hand looking seawards, and revelling in the peace and beauty and freedom of the scene. The roar of London — the darkness and the strife and weariness of London life — seemed to have passed quite away, and he lived at the moment a freer and higher life. He looked at the glistening water as it stole its way over the flat waste of sand, coming closer and closer insensibly — the tide had turned. Presently he heard a distant shouting along the beach very far off.

‘The fishermen calling to each other,’ he said to himself and looked around. As he did so he got a horrible shock, for though just then a cloud sailed across the moon he saw, in spite of the sudden darkness around him, his own image. For an instant, on the top of the opposite rock he could see the bald back of the head and the Glengarry cap with the immense eagle’s feather. As he staggered back his foot slipped, and he began to slide down towards the sand between the two rocks. He took no concern as to failing, for the sand was really only a few feet below him, and his mind was occupied with the figure or simulacrum of himself, which had already disappeared. As the easiest way of reaching *terra firma* he prepared to jump the remainder of the distance. All this had taken but a second, but the brain works quickly, and even as he gathered himself for the spring he saw the sand below him lying so marbly level shake and shiver in an odd way. A sudden fear overcame him; his knees failed, and instead of jumping he slid miserably down the rock, scratching his bare legs as he went. His feet touched the sand — went through it like water — and he was down below his knees before he realised that he was in a quicksand. Wildly he grasped at the rock to keep himself from sinking further, and fortunately there was a jutting spur or edge which he was able to grasp instinctively. To this he clung in grim desperation. He tried to shout, but his breath would not come, till after a great effort his voice rang out. Again he shouted, and it seemed as if the sound of his own voice gave him new courage, for he was able to hold on to the rock for a longer time than he thought possible — though he held on only in blind desperation. He was, however, beginning to find his grasp weakening, when, joy of joys! his shout was answered by a rough voice from just above him.

'God be thankit, I'm nae too late!' and a fisherman with great thigh-boots came hurriedly climbing over the rock. In an instant he recognised the gravity of the danger, and with a cheering 'Haud fast, mon! I'm comin'!' scrambled down till he found a firm foothold. Then with one strong hand holding the rock above, he leaned down, and catching Markam's wrist, called out to him, 'Haud to me, mon! Haud to me wi' ither hond!'

Then he lent his great strength, and with a steady, sturdy pull, dragged him out of the hungry quicksand and placed him safe upon the rock. Hardly giving him time to draw breath, he pulled and pushed him — never letting him go for an instant — over the rock into the firm sand beyond it, and finally deposited him, still shaking from the magnitude of his danger, high upon the beach. Then he began to speak:

'Mon! but I was just in time. If I had no laucht at yon foolish lads and begun to rin at the first you'd a bin sinkin' doon to the bowels o' the airth be the noo! Wully Beagrie thocht you was a ghaist, and Tom MacPhail swore ye was only like a goblin on a puddick-steel! "Na!" said I. "Yon's but the daft Englishman — the loony that had escapit frae the waxwarks." I was thinkin' that bein' strange and silly — if not a whole-made feel — ye'd no ken the ways o' the quicksan'! I shouted till warn ye, and then ran to drag ye aff, if need be. But God be thankit, be ye fule or only half-daft wi' yer vanity, that I was no that late!' and he reverently lifted his cap as he spoke.

Mr. Markam was deeply touched and thankful for his escape from a horrible death; but the sting of the charge of vanity thus made once more against him came through his humility. He was about to reply angrily, when suddenly a great awe fell upon him as he remembered the warning words of the half-crazy letter-carrier: 'Meet thyself face to face, and repent ere the quicksand shall swallow thee!'

Here, too, he remembered the image of himself that he had seen and the sudden danger from the deadly quicksand that had followed. He was silent a full minute, and then said:

'My good fellow, I owe you my life!'

The answer came with reverence from the hardy fisherman, 'Na! Na! Ye owe that to God; but, as for me, I'm only too glad till be the humble instrument o' His mercy.'

'But you will let me thank you,' said Mr. Markam, taking both the great hands of his deliverer in his and holding them tight. ‘My heart is too full as yet, and my nerves are too much shaken to let me say much; but, believe me, I am very, very grateful!’ It was quite evident that the poor old fellow was deeply touched, for the tears were running down his cheeks.

The fisherman said, with a rough but true courtesy:

‘Ay, sir! thank me and ye will — if it’ll do yer poor heart good. An’ I’m thinking that if it were me I’d be thankful too. But, sir, as for me I need no thanks. I am glad, so I am!’

That Arthur Fernlee Markam was really thankful and grateful was shown practically later on. Within a week’s time there sailed into Port Crooken the finest fishing smack that had ever been seen in the harbour of Peterhead. She was fully found with sails and gear of all kinds, and with nets of the best. Her master and men went away by the coach, after having left with the salmon-fisher’s wife the papers which made her over to him.

As Mr. Markam and the salmon-fisher walked together along the shore the former asked his companion not to mention the fact that he had been in such imminent danger, for that it would only distress his dear wife and children. He said that he would warn them all of the quicksand, and for that purpose he, then and there, asked questions about it till he felt that his information on the subject was complete. Before they parted he asked his companion if he had happened to see a second figure, dressed like himself on the other rock as he had approached to succour him.

‘Na! Na!’ came the answer, ‘there is nae sic another fule in these parts. Nor has there been since the time o’ Jamie Fleeman — him that was fule to the Laird o’ Udny. Why, mon! sic a heathenish dress as ye have on till ye has nae been seen in these pairts within the memory o’ mon. An’ I’m thinkin’ that sic a dress never was for sittin’ on the cauld rock, as ye done beyont. Mon! but do ye no fear the rheumatism or the lumbagy wi’ floppin’ doon on to the cauld stanes wi’ yer bare flesh? I was thinking that it was daft ye waur when I see ye the mornin’ doon be the port, but it’s fule or eediot ye maun be for the like o’ thot!’ Mr. Markam did not care to argue the point, and as they were now close to his own home he asked the salmon-fisher to have a glass of whisky — which he did — and they parted for the night. He took good care to warn all his family of the quicksand, telling them that he had himself been in some danger from it.

All that night he never slept. He heard the hours strike one after the other; but try how he would he could not get to sleep. Over and over again he went through the horrible episode of the quicksand, from the time that Saft Tammie had broken his habitual silence to preach to him of the sin of vanity and to warn him. The question kept ever arising in his mind: ‘Am I then so vain as to be in the ranks of the foolish?’ and the answer ever came in the words of the crazy prophet: ‘“Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” Meet thyself face to face, and repent ere the quicksand shall swallow thee!’ Somehow a feeling of doom began to shape itself in his mind that he would yet perish in that same quicksand, for there he had already met himself face to face.

In the grey of the morning he dozed off, but it was evident that he continued the subject in his dreams, for he was fully awakened by his wife, who said:

‘Do sleep quietly! That blessed Highland suit has got on your brain. Don’t talk in your sleep, if you can help it!’ He was somehow conscious of a glad feeling, as if some terrible weight had been lifted from him, but he did not know any cause of it. He asked his wife what he had said in his sleep, and she answered:

‘You said it often enough, goodness knows, for one to remember it— “Not face to face! I saw the eagle plume over the bald head! There is hope yet! Not face to face!” Go to sleep! Do!’ And then he did go to sleep, for he seemed to realise that the prophecy of the crazy man had not yet been fulfilled. He had not met himself face to face — as yet at all events.

He was awakened early by a maid who came to tell him that there was a fisherman at the door who wanted to see him. He dressed himself as quickly as he could — for he was not yet expert with the Highland dress — and hurried down, not wishing to keep the salmon-fisher waiting. He was surprised and not altogether pleased to find that his visitor was none other than Saft Tammie, who at once opened fire on him:

‘I maun gang awa’ t’ the post; but I thocht that I would waste an hour on ye, and ca’ roond just to see if ye waur still that fou wi’ vanity as on the nicht gane by. An I see that ye’ve no learned the lesson. Well! the time is comin’, sure eneucht! However I have all the time i’ the marnins to my ain sel’, so I’ll aye look roond jist till see how ye gang yer ain gait to the quicksan’, and then to the de’il! I’m aff till ma wark the noo!’ And he went straightway, leaving Mr. Markam considerably vexed, for the maids within earshot were vainly trying to conceal their giggles. He had fairly made up his mind to wear on that day ordinary clothes, but the visit of Saft Tammie reversed his decision. He would show them all that he was not a coward, and he would go on as he had begun — come what might. When he came to breakfast in full martial panoply the children, one and all, held down their heads and the backs of their necks became very red indeed. As, however, none of them laughed — except Titus, the youngest boy, who was seized with a fit of hysterical choking and was promptly banished from the room — he could not reprove them, but began to break his egg with a sternly determined air. It was unfortunate that as his wife was handing him a cup of tea one of the buttons of his sleeve caught in the lace of her morning wrapper, with the result that the hot tea was spilt over his bare knees. Not unnaturally, he made use of a swear word, whereupon his wife, somewhat nettled, spoke out:

'Well, Arthur, if you will make such an idiot of yourself with that ridiculous costume what else can you expect? You are not accustomed to it — and you never will be!' In answer he began an indignant speech with: 'Madam!' but he got no further, for now that the subject was broached, Mrs. Markam intended to have her say out. It was not a pleasant say, and, truth to tell, it was not said in a pleasant manner. A wife's manner seldom is pleasant when she undertakes to tell what she considers 'truths' to her husband. The result was that Arthur Fernlee Markam undertook, then and there, that during his stay in Scotland he would wear no other costume than the one she abused. Woman-like his wife had the last word — given in this case with tears:

'Very well, Arthur! Of course you will do as you choose. Make me as ridiculous as you can, and spoil the poor girls' chances in life. Young men don't seem to care, as a general rule, for an idiot father-in-law! But I must warn you that your vanity will some day get a rude shock — if indeed you are not before then in an asylum or dead!'

It was manifest after a few days that Mr. Markam would have to take the major part of his outdoor exercise by himself. The girls now and again took a walk with him, chiefly in the early morning or late at night, or on a wet day when there would be no one about; they professed to be willing to go out at all times, but somehow something always seemed to occur to prevent it. The boys could never be found at all on such occasions, and as to Mrs. Markam she sternly refused to go out with him on any consideration so long as he should continue to make a fool of himself. On the Sunday he dressed himself in his habitual broadcloth, for he rightly felt that church was not a place for angry feelings; but on Monday morning he resumed his Highland garb. By this time he would have given a good deal if he had never thought of the dress, but his British obstinacy was strong, and he would not give in. Saft Tammie called at his house every morning, and, not being able to see him nor to have any message taken to him, used to call back in the afternoon when the letter-bag had been delivered and watched for his going out. On such occasions he never failed to warn him against his vanity in the same words which he had used at the first. Before many days were over Mr. Markam had come to look upon him as little short of a scourge.

By the time the week was out the enforced partial solitude, the constant chagrin, and the never-ending brooding which was thus engendered, began to make Mr. Markam quite ill. He was too proud to take any of his family into his confidence since they had in his view treated him very badly. Then he did not sleep well at night, and when he did sleep he had constantly bad dreams. Merely to assure himself that his pluck was not failing him he made it a practice to visit the quicksand at least once every day, he hardly ever failed to go there the last thing at night. It was perhaps this habit that wrought the quicksand with its terrible experience so perpetually into his dreams. More and more vivid these became, till on waking at times he could hardly realise that he had not been actually in the flesh to visit the fatal spot. He sometimes thought that he might have been walking in his sleep.

One night his dream was so vivid that when he awoke he could not believe that it had only been a dream. He shut his eyes again and again, but each time the vision, if it was a vision, or the reality, if it was a reality, would rise before him. The moon was shining full and yellow over the quicksand as he approached it; he could see the expanse of light shaken and disturbed and full of black shadows as the liquid sand quivered and trembled and wrinkled and eddied as was its wont between its pauses of marble calm. As he drew close to it another figure came towards it from the opposite side with equal footsteps. He saw that it was his own figure, his very self, and in silent terror, compelled by what force he knew not, he advanced — charmed as the bird is by the snake, mesmerised or hypnotised — to meet this other self. As he felt the yielding sand closing over him he awoke in the agony of death, trembling with fear, and, strange to say, with the silly man's prophecy seeming to sound in his ears: '"Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!" See thyself and repent ere the quicksand swallow thee!'

So convinced was he that this was no dream that he arose, early as it was, and dressing himself without disturbing his wife took his way to the shore. His heart fell when he came across a series of footsteps on the sands, which he at once recognised as his own. There was the same wide heel, the same square toe; he had no doubt now that he had actually been there, and half horrified, and half in a state of dreamy stupor, he followed the footsteps, and found them lost in the edge of the yielding quicksand. This gave him a terrible shock, for there were no return steps marked on the sand, and he felt that there was some dread mystery which he could not penetrate, and the penetration of which would, he feared, undo him.

In this state of affairs he took two wrong courses. Firstly he kept his trouble to himself, and, as none of his family had any clue to it, every innocent word or expression which they used supplied fuel to the consuming fire of his imagination. Secondly he began to read books professing to bear upon the mysteries of dreaming and of mental phenomena generally, with the result that every wild imagination of every crank or half-crazy philosopher became a living germ of unrest in the fertilising soil of his disordered brain. Thus negatively and positively all things began to work to a common end. Not the least of his disturbing causes was Saft Tammie, who had now become at certain times of the day a fixture at his gate. After a while, being interested in the previous state of this individual, he made inquiries regarding his past with the following result.

Saft Tammie was popularly believed to be the son of a laird in one of the counties round the Firth of Forth. He had been partially educated for the ministry, but for some cause which no one ever knew threw up his prospects suddenly, and, going to Peterhead in its days of whaling prosperity, had there taken service on a whaler. Here off and on he had remained for some years, getting gradually more and more silent in his habits, till finally his shipmates protested against so taciturn a mate, and he had found service amongst the fishing smacks of the northern fleet. He had worked for many years at the fishing with always the reputation of being ‘a wee bit daft,’ till at length he had gradually settled down at Crooken, where the laird, doubtless knowing something of his family history, had given him a job which practically made him a pensioner. The minister who gave the information finished thus: —

‘It is a very strange thing, but the man seems to have some odd kind of gift. Whether it be that “second sight” which we Scotch people are so prone to believe in, or some other occult form of knowledge, I know not, but nothing of a disastrous tendency ever occurs in this place but the men with whom he lives are able to quote after the event some saying of his which certainly appears to have foretold it. He gets uneasy or excited — wakes up, in fact — when death is in the air!’

This did not in any way tend to lessen Mr. Markam’s concern, but on the contrary seemed to impress the prophecy more deeply on his mind. Of all the books which he had read on his new subject of study none interested him so much as a German one *Die Döppleganger*, by Dr. Heinrich von Aschenberg, formerly of Bonn. Here he learned for the first time of cases where men had led a double existence — each nature being quite apart from the other — the body being always a reality with one spirit, and a simulacrum with the other. Needless to say that Mr. Markam realised this theory as exactly suiting his own case. The glimpse which he had of his own back the night of his escape from the quicksand — his own footmarks disappearing into the quicksand with no return steps visible — the prophecy of Saft Tammie about his meeting himself and perishing in the quicksand — all lent aid to the conviction that he was in his own person an instance of the döppleganger. Being then conscious of a double life he took steps to prove its existence to his own satisfaction. To this end on one night before going to bed he wrote his name in chalk on the soles of his shoes. That night he dreamed of the quicksand, and of his visiting it — dreamed so vividly that on walking in the grey of the dawn he could not believe that he had not been there. Arising, without disturbing his wife, he sought his shoes.

The chalk signatures were undisturbed! He dressed himself and stole out softly. This time the tide was in, so he crossed the dunes and struck the shore on the further side of the quicksand. There, oh, horror of horrors! he saw his own footprints dying into the abyss!

He went home a desperately sad man. It seemed incredible that he, an elderly commercial man, who had passed a long and uneventful life in the pursuit of business in the midst of roaring, practical London, should thus find himself enmeshed in mystery and horror, and that he should discover that he had two existences. He could not speak of his trouble even to his own wife, for well he knew that she would at once require the fullest particulars of that other life — the one which she did not know; and that she would at the start not only imagine but charge him with all manner of infidelities on the head of it. And so his brooding grew deeper and deeper still. One evening — the tide then going out and the moon being at the full — he was sitting waiting for dinner when the maid announced that Saft Tammie was making a disturbance outside because he would not be let in to see him. He was very indignant, but did not like the maid to think that he had any fear on the subject, and so told her to bring him in. Tammie entered, walking more briskly than ever with his head up and a look of vigorous decision in the eyes that were so generally cast down. As soon as he entered he said:

'I have come to see ye once again — once again; and there ye sit, still just like a cockatoo on a pairch. Weel, mon, I forgie ye! Mind ye that, I forgie ye!' And without a word more he turned and walked out of the house, leaving the master in speechless indignation.

After dinner he determined to pay another visit to the quicksand — he would not allow even to himself that he was afraid to go. And so, about nine o'clock, in full array, he marched to the beach, and passing over the sands sat on the skirt of the nearer rock. The full moon was behind him and its light lit up the bay so that its fringe of foam, the dark outline of the headland, and the stakes of the salmon-nets were all emphasised. In the brilliant yellow glow the lights in the windows of Port Crooken and in those of the distant castle of the laird trembled like stars through the sky. For a long time he sat and drank in the beauty of the scene, and his soul seemed to feel a peace that it had not known for many days. All the pettiness and annoyance and silly fears of the past weeks seemed blotted out, and a new holy calm took the vacant place. In this sweet and solemn mood he reviewed his late action calmly, and felt ashamed of himself for his vanity and for the obstinacy which had followed it. And then and there he made up his mind that the present would be the last time he would wear the costume which had estranged him from those whom he loved, and which had caused him so many hours and days of chagrin, vexation, and pain.

But almost as soon as he arrived at this conclusion another voice seemed to speak within him and mockingly to ask him if he should ever get the chance to wear the suit again — that it was too late — he had chosen his course and must now abide the issue.

‘It is not too late,’ came the quick answer of his better self; and full of the thought, he rose up to go home and divest himself of the now hateful costume right away. He paused for one look at the beautiful scene. The light lay pale and mellow, softening every outline of rock and tree and house-top, and deepening the shadows into velvety-black, and lighting, as with a pale flame, the incoming tide, that now crept fringe-like across the flat waste of sand. Then he left the rock and stepped out for the shore.

But as he did so a frightful spasm of horror shook him, and for an instant the blood rushing to his head shut out all the light of the full moon. Once more he saw that fatal image of himself moving beyond the quicksand from the opposite rock to the shore. The shock was all the greater for the contrast with the spell of peace which he had just enjoyed; and, almost paralysed in every sense, he stood and watched the fatal vision and the wrinkly, crawling quicksand that seemed to writhe and yearn for something that lay between. There could be no mistake this time, for though the moon behind threw the face into shadow he could see there the same shaven cheeks as his own, and the small stubby moustache of a few weeks' growth. The light shone on the brilliant tartan, and on the eagle's plume. Even the bald space at one side of the Glengarry cap glistened, as did the cairngorm brooch on the shoulder and the tops of the silver buttons. As he looked he felt his feet slightly sinking, for he was still near the edge of the belt of quicksand, and he stepped back. As he did so the other figure stepped forward, so that the space between them was preserved.

So the two stood facing each other, as though in some weird fascination; and in the rushing of the blood through his brain Markam seemed to hear the words of the prophecy: 'See thyself face to face, and repent ere the quicksand swallow thee.' He did stand face to face with himself, he had repented — and now he was sinking in the quicksand! The warning and prophecy were coming true.

Above him the seagulls screamed, circling round the fringe of the incoming tide, and the sound being entirely mortal recalled him to himself. On the instant he stepped back a few quick steps, for as yet only his feet were merged in the soft sand. As he did so the other figure stepped forward, and coming within the deadly grip of the quicksand began to sink. It seemed to Markam that he was looking at himself going down to his doom, and on the instant the anguish of his soul found vent in a terrible cry. There was at the same instant a terrible cry from the other figure, and as Markam threw up his hands the figure did the same. With horror-struck eyes he saw him sink deeper into the quicksand; and then, impelled by what power he knew not, he advanced again towards the sand to meet his fate. But as his more forward foot began to sink he heard again the cries of the seagulls which seemed to restore his benumbed faculties. With a mighty effort he drew his foot out of the sand which seemed to clutch it, leaving his shoe behind, and then in sheer terror he turned and ran from the place, never stopping till his breath and strength failed him, and he sank half swooning on the grassy path through the sandhills.

Arthur Markam made up his mind not to tell his family of his terrible adventure — until at least such time as he should be complete master of himself. Now that the fatal double — his other self — had been engulfed in the quicksand he felt something like his old peace of mind.

That night he slept soundly and did not dream at all; and in the morning was quite his old self. It really seemed as though his newer and worser self had disappeared for ever; and strangely enough Saft Tammie was absent from his post that morning and never appeared there again, but sat in his old place watching nothing, as of old, with lack-lustre eye. In accordance with his resolution he did not wear his Highland suit again, but one evening tied it up in a bundle, claymore, dirk and philibeg and all, and bringing it secretly with him threw it into the quicksand. With a feeling of intense pleasure he saw it sucked below the sand, which closed above it into marble smoothness. Then he went home and announced cheerily to his family assembled for evening prayers:

‘Well! my dears, you will be glad to hear that I have abandoned my idea of wearing the Highland dress. I see now what a vain old fool I was and how ridiculous I made myself! You shall never see it again!’

‘Where is it, father?’ asked one of the girls, wishing to say something so that such a self-sacrificing announcement as her father’s should not be passed in absolute silence. His answer was so sweetly given that the girl rose from her seat and came and kissed him. It was:

‘In the quicksand, my dear! and I hope that my worser self is buried there along with it — for ever.’

The remainder of the summer was passed at Crooken with delight by all the family, and on his return to town Mr. Markam had almost forgotten the whole of the incident of the quicksand, and all touching on it, when one day he got a letter from the MacCallum More which caused him much thought, though he said nothing of it to his family, and left it, for certain reasons, unanswered. It ran as follows: —

‘The MacCallum More and Roderick MacDhu.
‘The Scotch All-Wool Tartan Clothing Mart.
Copthall Court, E.C.,
30th September, 1892.

‘Dear Sir, — I trust you will pardon the liberty which I take in writing to you, but I am desirous of making an inquiry, and I am informed that you have been sojourning during the summer in Aberdeenshire (Scotland, N.B.). My partner, Mr. Roderick MacDhu — as he appears for business reasons on our bill-heads and in our advertisements, his real name being Emmanuel Moses Marks of

London — went early last month to Scotland (N.B.) for a tour, but as I have only once heard from him, shortly after his departure, I am anxious lest any misfortune may have befallen him. As I have been unable to obtain any news of him on making all inquiries in my power, I venture to appeal to you. His letter was written in deep dejection of spirit, and mentioned that he feared a judgment had come upon him for wishing to appear as a Scotchman on Scottish soil, as he had one moonlight night shortly after his arrival seen his ‘wraith’. He evidently alluded to the fact that before his departure he had procured for himself a Highland costume similar to that which we had the honour to supply to you, with which, as perhaps you will remember, he was much struck. He may, however, never have worn it, as he was, to my own knowledge, diffident about putting it on, and even went so far as to tell me that he would at first only venture to wear it late at night or very early in the morning, and then only in remote places, until such time as he should get accustomed to it. Unfortunately he did not advise me of his route so that I am in complete ignorance of his whereabouts; and I venture to ask if you may have seen or heard of a Highland costume similar to your own having been seen anywhere in the neighbourhood in which I am told you have recently purchased the estate which you temporarily occupied. I shall not expect an answer to this letter unless you can give me some information regarding my friend and partner, so pray do not trouble to reply unless there be cause. I am encouraged to think that he may have been in your neighbourhood as, though his letter is not dated, the envelope is marked with the postmark of “Yellon” which I find is in Aberdeenshire, and not far from the Mains of Crooken.

‘I have the honour to be, dear sir,

‘Yours very respectfully,
‘Joshua Sheeny Cohen Benjamin
‘(The MacCallum More.)’

Uncollected Short Stories

This collection offers the stories that were not printed in a collection before Stoker's death. Of particular interest is *The Bridal of Death*, which is an alternative (and original) ending to Stoker's Mummy novel *The Jewel of Seven Stars*.

Stoker, 1906

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THE BRIDAL OF DEATH

If any evidence had been wanted of how absolutely one and all of us had come to believe in the spiritual existence of the Egyptian Queen, it would have been found in the change which n a few minutes had been effected in us by the statement of voluntary negation made, we all believed, through Margaret. Despite the coming of the fearful ordeal, the sense of which it was impossible to forget, we looked and acted as though a great relief had come to us. We had indeed lived in such a state of terrorism during the days when Mr. Trelawny was lying in a trance that the feeling had bitten deeply into us. No one knows till he has experienced it, what it is to be in constant dreadof some unknown danger which may come at any time and in any form.

The change was manifested in different ways, according to each nature. Margaret was sad. Doctor Winchester was in high spirits, and keenly observant; the process of thought which had served as an antidote to fear, being now relieved from this duty, added to his intellectual enthusiasm. Mr. Corbeck seemed to be in a retrospective rather than a speculative mood. I was myself rather inclined to be gay; the relief from certain anxiety regarding Margaret was sufficient for me for the time.

As to Mr. Trelawny he seemed less changed than any. Perhaps this was only natural, as he had had in his mind the intention for so many years of doing that in which we were tonight engaged, that any event connected with it could only seem to him as an episode, a step to the end. His was that commanding nature which looks so to the end of an undertaking that all else is of secondary importance. Even now, though his terrible sternness relaxed under the relief from the strain, he never flagged nor faltered for a moment in his purpose. He asked us men to come with him; and going to the hall we presently managed to lower into the cave an oak table, fairly long and not too wide, which stood against the wall in the hall. This we placed under the strong cluster of electric lights in the middle of the cave. Margaret looked on for a while; then all at once her face blanched, and in an agitated voice she said:

"What are you going to do, Father?"

"To unroll the mummy of the cat! Queen Tera will not need her Familiar tonight. If she should want him, it might be dangerous to us; so we shall make him safe. You are not alarmed, dear?"

"Oh no!" she answered quickly. "But I was thinking of my Silvio, and how I should feel if he had been the mummy that was to be unswathed!"

Mr. Trelawny got knives and scissors ready, and placed the cat on the table. It was a grim beginning to our work; and it made my heart sink when I thought of what might happen in that lonely house in the mid-gloom of the night. The sense of loneliness and isolation from the world was increased by the moaning of the wind which had now risen ominously, and by the beating of waves on the rocks below. But we had too grave a task before us to be swayed by external manifestations: the unrolling of the mummy began.

There was an incredible number of bandages; and the tearing sound — they being stuck fast to each other by bitumen and gums and spices — and the little cloud of red pungent dust that arose, pressed on the senses of all of us. As the last wrappings came away, we saw the animal seated before us. He was all hunkered up; his hair and teeth and claws were complete. The eyes were closed, but the eyelids had not the fierce look which I expected. The whiskers had been pressed down on the side of the face by the bandaging; but when the pressure ws taken away they stood out, just as they would have done in life. He was a magnificent creature, a tiger-cat of great size. But as we looked at him, our first glance of admiration changed to one of fear, and a shudder ran through each one of us; for here was a confirmation of the fears which we had endured.

His mouth and his claws were smeared with the dry, red stains of recent blood!

Doctor Winchester was the first to recover; blood in itself had small disturbing quality for him. He had taken out his magnifying-glass and was examining the stains on the cat's mouth. Mr. Trelawny breathed loudly, as though a strain had been taken from him.

"It is as I expected," he said. "This promises well for what is to follow."

By this time Doctor Winchester was looking at the red stained paws. "As I expected!" he said. "He has seven claws, too!" Opening his pocket-book, he took out the piece of blotting-paper marked by Silvio's claws, on which was also marked in pencil a diagram of the cuts made on Mr. Trelawny's wrist. He placed the paper under the mummy cat's paw. The marks fitted exactly.

When we had carefully examined the cat, finding, however, nothing strange about it but its wonderful preservation, Mr. Trelawny lifted it from the table. Margaret started forward, crying out:

"Take care, Father! Take care! He may injure you!"

"Not now, my dear!" he answered as he moved towards the stairway. Her face fell. "Where are you going?" she asked in a faint voice.

"To the kitchen," he answered. "Fire will take away all danger for the future; even an astral body cannot materialise from ashes!"

He signed to us to follow him. Margaret turned away with a sob. I went to her; but she motioned me back and whispered:

"No, no! Go with the others. Father may want you. Oh! it seems like murder! The poor Queen's pet . . . !" The tears were dropping from under the fingers that covered her eyes.

In the kitchen was a fire of wood ready laid. To this Mr. Trelawny applied a match; in a few seconds the kindling had caught and the flames leaped. When the fire was solidly ablaze, he threw the body of the cat into it. For a few seconds it lay a dark mass amidst the flames, and the room was rank with the smell of burning hair. Then the dry body caught fire too. The inflammable substances used in embalming became new fuel, and the flames roared. A few minutes of fierce conflagration; and then we breathed freely. Queen Tera's Familiar was no more!

When we went back to the cave we found Margaret sitting in the dark. She had switched off the electric light, and only a faint glow of the evening light came through the narrow openings. Her father went quickly over to her and put his arms round her in a loving protective way. She laid her head on his shoulder for a minute and seemed comforted. Presently she called to me:

"Malcolm, turn up the light!" I carried out her orders, and could see that, though she had been crying, her eyes were now dry. Her father saw it too and looked glad. He said to us in a grave tone:

"Now we had better prepare for our great work. It will not do to leave anything to the last!" Margaret must have had a suspicion of what was coming, for it was with a sinking voice that she asked:

"What are you going to do now?" Mr. Trelawny too must have had a suspicion of her feelings, for he answered in a low tone:

"To unroll the mummy of Queen Tera!" She came close to him and said pleadingly in a whisper:

"Father, you are not going to unswathe her! All you men . . . ! And in the glare of light!"

"But why not, my dear?"

"Just think, Father, a woman! All alone! In such a way! In such a place! Oh! it's cruel, cruel!" She was manifestly much overcome. Her cheeks were flaming red, and her eyes were full of indignant tears. Her father saw her distress; and, sympathising with it, began to comfort her. I was moving off; but he signed to me to stay. I took it that after the usual manner of men he wanted help on such an occasion, and man-like wished to throw on someone else the task of dealing with a woman in indignant distress. However, he began to appeal first to her reason:

"Not a woman, dear; a mummy! She has been dead nearly five thousand years!"

"What does that matter? Sex is not a matter of years! A woman is a woman, if she had been dead five thousand centuries! And you expect her to arise out of that long sleep! It could not be real death, if she is to rise out of it! You have led me to believe that she will come alive when the Coffer is opened!"

"I did, my dear; and I believe it! But if it isn't death that has been the matter with her all these years, it is something uncommonly like it. Then again, just think; it was men who embalmed her. They didn't have women's rights or lady doctors in ancient Egypt, my dear! And besides," he went on more freely, seeing that she was accepting his argument, if not yielding to it, "we men are accustomed to such things. Corbeck and I have unrolled a hundred mummies; and there were as many women as men amongst them. Doctor Winchester in his work has had to deal with women as well of men, till custome has made him think nothing of sex. Even Ross has in his work as a barrister . . ." He stopped suddenly.

"You were going to help too!" she said to me, with an indignant look.

I said nothing; I thought silence was best. Mr. Trelawny went on hurriedly; I could see that he was glad of interruption, for the part of his argument concerning a barrister's work was becoming decidedly weak:

"My child, you will be with us yourself. Would we do anything which would hurt or offend you? Come now! be reasonable! We are not at a pleasure party. We are all grave men, entering gravely on an experiment which may unfold the wisdom of old times, and enlarge human knowledge indefinitely; which may put the minds of men on new tracks of thought and research. An experiment," as he went on his voice deepened, "which may be fraught with death to any one of us — to us all! We know from what has been, that there are, or may be, vast and unknown dangers ahead of us, of which none in the house today may ever see the end. Take it, my child, that we are not acting lightly; but with all the gravity of deeply earnest men! Besides, my dear, whatever feelings you or any of us may have on the subject, it is necessary for the success of the experiment to unswathe her. I think that under any circumstances it would be necessary to remove the wrappings before she became again a live human being instead of a spiritualised corpse with an astral body. Were her original intention carried out, and did she come to new life within her mummy wrappings, it might be to exchange a coffin for a grave! She would die the death of the buried alive! But now, when she has voluntarily abandoned for the time her astral power, there can be no doubt on the subject."

Margaret's face cleared. "All right, Father!" she said as she kissed him. "But oh! it seems a horrible indignity to a Queen, and a woman."

I was moving away to the staircase when she called me:

"Where are you going?" I came back and took her hand and stroked it as I answered:

"I shall come back when the unrolling is over!" She looked at me long, and a faint suggestion of a smile came over her face as she said:

"Perhaps you had better stay, too! It may be useful to you in your work as a barrister!" She smiled out as she met my eyes: but in an instant she changed. Her face grew grave, and deadly white. In a far away voice she said:

"Father is right! It is a terrible occasion; we need all to be serious over it. But all the same — nay, for that very reason you had better stay, Malcolm! You may be glad, later on, that you were present tonight!"

My heart sank down, down, at her words; but I thought it better to say nothing. Fear was stalking openly enough amongst us already!

By this time Mr. Trelawny, assisted by Mr. Corbeck and Doctor Winchester, had raised the lid of the ironstone sarcophagus which contained the mummy of the Queen. It was a large one; but it was none too big. The mummy was both long and broad and high; and was of such weight that it was no easy task, even for the four of us, to lift it out. Under Mr. Trelawny's direction we laid it out on the table prepared for it.

Then, and then only, did the full horror of the whole thing burst upon me! There, in the full glare of the light, the whole material and sordid side of death seemed staringly real. The outer wrappings, torn and loosened by rude touch, and with the colour either darkened by dust or worn light by friction, seemed creased as by rough treatment; the jagged edges of the wrapping-cloths looked fringed; the painting was patchy, and the varnish chipped. The coverings were evidently many, for the bulk was great. But through all, showed that unhidable human figure, which seems to look more horrible when partially concealed than at any other time. What was before us was Death, and nothing else. All the romance and sentiment of fancy had disappeared. The two elder men, enthusiasts who had often done such work, were not disconcerted; and Doctor Winchester seemed to hold himself in a business-like attitude, as if before the operating-table. But I felt low-spirited, and miserable, and ashamed; and besides I was pained and alarmed by Margaret's ghastly pallor.

Then the work began. The unrolling of the mummy cat had prepared me somewhat for it; but this was so much larger, and so infinitely more elaborate, that it seemed a different thing. Moreover, in addition to the ever present sense of death and humanity, there was a feeling of something finer in all this. The cat had been embalmed with coarser materials; here, all, when once the outer coverings were removed, was more delicately done. It seemed as if only the finest gums and spices had been used in this embalming. But there were the same surroundings, the same attendant red dust and pungent presence of bitumen; there was the same sound of rending which marked the tearing away of the bandages. There were an enormous number of these, and their bulk when opened was great. As the men unrolled them, I grew more and more excited. I did not take a part in it myself; Margaret had looked at me gratefully as I drew back. We clasped hands, and held each other hard. As the unrolling went on, the wrappings became finer, and the smell less laden with bitumen, but more pungent. We all, I think, began to feel it as though it caught or touched us in some special way. This, however, did not interfere with the work; it went on uninterruptedly. Some of the inner wrappings bore symbols or pictures. These were done sometimes wholly in pale green colour, sometimes in many colours; but always with a prevalence of green. Now and again Mr. Trelawny or Mr. Corbeck would point out some special drawing before laying the bandage on the pile behind them, which kept growing to a monstrous height.

At last we knew that the wrappings were coming to an end. Already the proportions were reduced to those of a normal figure of the manifest height of the Queen, who was more than average height. And as the end drew nearer, so Margaret's pallor grew; and her heart beat more and more wildly, till her breast heaved in a way that frightened me.

Just as her father was taking away the last of the bandages, he happened to look up and caught the pained and anxious look of her pale face. He paused, and taking her concern to be as to the outrage on modesty, said in a comforting way:

"Do not be uneasy, dear! See! there is nothing to harm you. The Queen has on a robe. — Ay, and a royal robe, too!"

The wrapping was a wide piece the whole length of the body. It being removed, a profusely full robe of white linen had appeared, covering the body from the throat to the feet.

And such linen! We all bent over to look at it.

Margaret lost her concern, in her woman's interest in fine stuff. Then the rest of us looked with admiration; for surely such linen was never seen by the eyes of our age. It was as fine as the finest silk. But never was spun or woven silk which lay in such gracious folds, constrict though they were by the close wrappings of the mummy cloth, and fixed into hardness by the passing of thousands of years.

Round the neck it was delicately embroidered in pure gold with tiny sprays of sycamore; and round the feet, similarly worked, was an endless line of lotus plants of unequal height, and with all the graceful abandon of natural growth.

Across the body, but manifestly not surrounding it, was a girdle of jewels. A wondrous girdle, which shone and glowed with all the forms and phases and colours of the sky!

The buckle was a great yellow stone, round of outline, deep and curved, as if a yielding globe had been pressed down. It shone and glowed, as though a veritable sun lay within; the rays of its light seemed to strike out and illumine all round. Flanking it were two great moonstones of lesser size, whose glowing, beside the glory of the sunstone, was like the silvery sheen of moonlight.

And then on either side, linked by golden clasps of exquisite shape, was a line of flaming jewels, of which the colours seemed to glow. Each of these stones seemed to hold a living star, which twinkled in every phase of changing light.

Margaret raised her hands in ecstasy. She bent over to examine more closely; but suddenly drew back and stood fully erect at her grand height. She seemed to speak with the conviction of absolute knowledge as she said:

"That is no cerement! It was no meant for the clothing of death! It is a marriage robe!"

Mr. Trelawny leaned over and touched the linen robe. He lifted a fold at the neck, and I knew from the quick intake of his breath that something had surprised him. He lifted yet a little more; and then he, too, stood back and pointed, saying:

"Margaret is right! That dress is not intended to be worn by the dead! See! her figure is not robed in it. It is but laid upon her." He lifted the zone of jewels and handed it to Margaret. Then with both hands he raised the ample robe, and laid it across the arms which she extended in a natural impulse. Things of such beauty were too precious to be handled with any but the greatest care.

We all stood awed at the beauty of the figure which, save for the face cloth, now lay completely nude before us. Mr. Trelawny bent over, and with hands that trembled slightly, raised this linen cloth which was of the same fineness as the robe. As he stood back and the whole glorious beauty of the Queen was revealed, I felt a rush of shame sweep over me. It was not right that we should be there, gazing with irreverent eyes on such unclad beauty: it was indecent; it was almost sacrilegious! And yet the white wonder of that beautiful form was something to dream of. It was not like death at all; it was like a statue carven in ivory by the hand of a Praxiteles. There was nothing of that horrible shrinkage which death seems to effect in a moment. There was none of the wrinkled toughness which seems to be a leading characteristic of most mummies. There was not the shrunken attenuation of a body dried in the sand, as I had seen before in museums. All the pores of the body seemed to have been preserved in some wonderful way. The flesh was full and round, as in a living person; and the skin was as smooth as satin. The colour seemed extraordinary. It was like ivory, new ivory; except where the right arm, with shattered, bloodstained wrist and missing hand had lain bare to exposure in the sarcophagus for so many tens of centuries.

With a womanly impulse; with a mouth that drooped with pity, with eyes that flashed with anger, and cheeks that flamed, Margaret threw over the body the beautiful robe which lay across her arm.

Only the face was then to be seen. This was more startling even than the body, for it seemed not dead, but alive. The eyelids were closed; but the long, black, curling lashes lay over on the cheeks. The nostrils, set in grave pride, seemed to have the repose which, when it is seen in life, is greater than the repose of death. The full, red lips, though the mouth was not open, showed the tiniest white line of pearly teeth within. Her hair, glorious in quantity and glossy black as the raven's wing, was piled in great masses over the white forehead, on which a few curling tresses strayed like tendrils. I was amazed at the likeness to Margaret, though I had had my mind prepared for this by Mr. Corbeck's quotation of her father's statement. This woman — I could not think of her as a mummy or a corpse — was the image of Margaret as my eyes had first lit on her. The likeness was increased by the jewelled ornament which she wore in her hair, the "Disk and Plumes", such as Margaret, too, had worn. It, too, was a glorious jewel; one noble pearl of moonlight lustre, flanked by carven pieces of moonstone.

Mr. Trelawny was overcome as he looked. He quite broke down; and when Margaret flew to him and held him close in her arms and comforted him, I heard him murmur brokenly:

"It looks as if you were dead, my child!"

There was a long silence. I could hear without the roar of the wind, which was now risen to a tempest, and the furius dashing of the waves far below. Mr. Trelawny's voice broke the spell:

"Later on we must try and find out the process of embalming. It is not like any that I know. There does not seem to have been any opening cut for the withdrawing of the viscera and organs, which apparently remain intact within the body. Then, again, there is no moisture in the flesh; but its place is supplied with something else, as though wax or stearine had been conveyed into the veins by some subtle process. I wonder could it be possible that at that time they could have used paraffin. It might have been, by some process that we know not, pumped into the veins, where it hardened!"

Margaret, having thrown a white sheet over the Queen's body, asked us to bring it to her own room, where we laid it on her bed. Then she sent us away, saying:

"Leave her alone with me. There are still many hours to pass, and I do not like to leave her lying there, all stark in the glare of light. This may be the Bridal she prepared for — the Bridal of Death; and at least she shall wear her pretty robes."

When presently she brought me back to her room, the dead Queen was dressed in the robe of fine linen with the embroidery of gold; and all her beautiful jewels were in place. Candles were lit around her, and white flowers lay upon her breast.

Hand in hand we stood looking at her for a while. Then with a sigh, Margaret covered her with one of her own snowy sheets. She turned away; and after softly closing the door of the room, went back with me to the others who had now come into the dining room. Here we all began to talk over the things that had been, and that were to be.

Now and again I could feel that one or other of us was forcing conversation, as if we were not sure of ourselves. The long wait was beginning to tell on our nerves. It was apparent to me that Mr. Trelawny had suffered in that strange trance more than we suspected, or than he cared to show. True, his will and his determination were as strong as ever; but the purely physical side of him had been weakened somewhat. It was indeed only natural that it should be. No man can go through a period of four days of absolute negation of life without being weakened by it somehow.

As the hours crept by, the time passed more and more slowly. The other men seemed to get unconsciously a little drowsy. I wondered if in the case of Mr. Trelawny and Mr. Corbeck, who had already been under the hypnotic influence of the Queen, the same dormance was manifesting itself. Doctor Winchester had periods of distraction which grew longer and more frequent as the time wore on.

As to Margaret, the suspense told on her exceedingly, as might have been expected in the case of a woman. She grew paler and paler still; till at last about midnight, I began to be seriously alarmed about her. I got her to come into the library with me, and tried to make her lie down on a sofa for a little while. As Mr. Trelawny had decided that the experiment was to be made exactly at the seventh hour after sunset, it would be as nearly as possible three o'clock in the morning when the great trial should be made. Even allowing a whole hour for the final preparations, we had still two hours of waiting to go through, and I promised faithfully to watch her and to awake her at any time she might name. She would not hear of it, however. She thanked me sweetly and smiled at me as she did so; but she assured me that she was not sleepy, and that she was quite able to bear up. That it was only the suspense and excitement of waiting that made her pale. I agreed perforce; but I kept her talking of many things in the library for more than an hour; so that at last, when she insisted on going back to her father's room I felt that I had at least done something to help her pass the time.

We found the three men sitting patiently in silence. With manlike fortitude they were content to be still when they felt they had done all in their power.

And so we waited.

The striking of two o'clock seemed to freshen us all up. Whatever shadows had been settling over us during the long hours preceding seemed to lift at once, and we all went about our separate duties alert and with alacrity. We looked first to the windows to see that they were closed; for now the storm raged so fiercely that we feared it might upset our plans which, after all, were based on perfect stillness. Then we got ready our respirators to put them on when the time should be close at hand. We had from the first arranged to use them, for we did not know whether some noxious fume might not come from the Magic Coffer when it should be opened. Somehow it never seemed to occur to any of us that there was any doubt as to its opening.

Then, under Margaret's guidance, we carried the body of Queen Tera, still clad in her Bridal robes, from her room into the cavern.

It was a strange sight, and a strange experience. The group of grave silent men carrying away from the lighted candles and the white flowers the white still figure, which looked like an ivory statue when through our moving the robe fell back.

We laid her in the sarcophagus, and placed the severed hand in its true position on her breast. Under it was laid the Jewel of Seven Stars, which Mr Trelawny had taken from the safe. It seemed to flash and blaze as he put it in its place. The glare of the electric lights shone cold on the great sarcophagus fixed ready for the final experiment — the Great Experiment, consequent on the researches during a lifetime of these two travelled scholars. Again, the startling likeness between Margaret and the mummy, intensified by her own extraordinary pallor, heightened the strangeness of it all.

When all was finally fixed, three-quarters of an hour had gone; for we were deliberate in all our doings. Margaret beckoned me, and I went with her to her room. There she did a thing which moved me strangely, and brought home to me keenly the desperate nature of the enterprise on which we were embarked. One by one, she blew out the candles carefully, and placed them back in their usual places. When she had finished she said to me:

"They are done with! Whatever comes — Life or Death — there will be no purpose in their using now!"

We returned to the cavern with a strange thrill as of finality. There was to be no going back now!

We put on our respirators, and took our places as had been arranged. I was to stand by the taps of the electric lights, ready to turn them off or on as Mr Trelawny should direct. His last caution to me to carry out his instructions exactly was almost like a menace; for he warned me that death to any or all of us might come from any error or neglect on my part. Margaret and Doctor Winchester were to stand between the sarcophagus and the wall, so that they would not be between the mummy and the Magic Coffer. They were to note accurately all that should happen with regard to the Queen.

Mr Trelawny and Mr Corbeck were to see the lamps lighted: and then to take their places, the former at the foot, the latter at the head, of the sarcophagus.

When the hands of the clock were close to the hour, they stood ready with their lit tapers, like gunners in old days with their linstocks.

For the few minutes that followed, the passing of time was a slow horror. Mr Trelawny stood with his watch in his hand, ready to give the signal.

The time approached with inconceivable slowness; but at last came the whirring of wheels which warns that the hour is at hand. The striking of the silver bell of the clock seemed to smite on our hearts like the knell of doom. One! Two! Three!

The wicks of the lamps caught, and I turned out the electric light. In the dimness of the struggling lamps, and after the bright glow of the electric light, the room and all within it took weird shape, and everything seemed in an instant to change. We waited, with our hearts beating. I know mine did; and I fancied I could hear the pulsation of the others. Without, the storm raged; the shutters of the narrow windows shook and strained and rattled, as though something was striving for entrance.

The seconds seemed to pass with leaden wings; it was as though all the world were standing still. The figures of the others stood out dimly, Margaret's white dress alone showing clearly in the gloom. The thick respirators, which we all wore, added to the strange appearance. The thin light of the lamps, as the two men bent over the Coffer, showed Mr Trelawny's square jaw and strong mouth, and the brown, wrinkled face of Mr Corbeck. Their eyes seemed to glare in the light. Across the room Doctor Winchester's eyes twinkled like stars, and Margaret's blazed like black suns.

Would the lamps never burn up!

It was only a few seconds in all till they did blaze up. A slow, steady light, growing more and more bright; and changing in colour from blue to crystal white. So they stayed for a couple of minutes, without any change in the Coffer being noticeable. At last there began to appear all over it a delicate glow. This grew and grew, till it became like a blazing jewel; and then like a living thing, whose essence was light. Mr Trelawny and Mr Corbeck moved silently to their places beside the sarcophagus.

We waited and waited, our hearts seeming to stand still.

All at once there was a sound like a tiny muffled explosion, and the cover of the Coffer lifted right up on a level plane a few inches; there was no mistaking anything now, for the whole cavern was full of light. Then the cover, staying fast at one side, rose slowly up on the other, as though yielding to some pressure of balance. I could not see what was within, for the risen cover stood between. The Coffer still continued to glow; from it began to steal a faint greenish vapour which floated in the direction of the sarcophagus as though impelled or drawn towards it. I could not smell it fully on account of the respirator; but, even through that, I was conscious of a strange, pungent odour. The vapour got somewhat denser after a few seconds, and began to pass directly into the open sarcophagus. It was evident now that the mummied body had some attraction for it; and also that it had some effect on the body, for the sarcophagus slowly became illumined as though the body had begun to glow. I could not see within from where I stood, but I gathered from the faces of all the four watchers that something strange was happening.

I longed to run over and take a look for myself; but I remembered Mr Trelawny's solemn warning, and remained at my post.

The storm still thundered round the house, and I could feel the rock on which it was built tremble under the furious onslaught of the waves. The shutters strained as though the screaming wind without would in very anger have forced an entrance. In that dread hour of expectancy, when the forces of Life and Death were struggling for the mastery, imagination was awake. I almost fancied that the storm was a living thing, and animated with the wrath of the quick!

All at once the eager faces round the sarcophagus were bent forward. The look of speechless wonder in the eyes, lit by that supernatural glow from within the sarcophagus, had a more than mortal brilliance.

My own eyes were nearly blinded by the awful, paralysing light, so that I could hardly trust them. I saw something white rising up from the open sarcophagus. Something which appeared to my tortured eyes to be filmy, like a white mist. In the heart of this mist, which was cloudy and opaque like an opal, was something like a hand holding a fiery jewel flaming with many lights. As the fierce glow of the Coffer met this new living light, the green vapour floating between them seemed like a cascade of brilliant points — a miracle of light!

But at that very moment there came a change. The fierce storm, battling with the shutters of the narrow openings, won victory. With the sound of a pistol shot, one of the heavy shutters broke its fastening and was hurled on its hinges back against the wall. In rushed a fierce blast which blew the flames of the lamps to and fro, and drifted the green vapour from its course.

On the very instant came a change in the outcome from the Coffer. There was a moment's quick flame and a muffled explosion; and black smoke began to pour out. This got thicker and thicker with frightful rapidity, in volumes of ever-increasing density; till the whole cavern began to get obscure, and its outlines were lost. The screaming wind tore in and whirled it about. At a sign from Mr Trelawny Mr Corbeck went and closed the shutter and jammed it fast with a wedge.

I should have liked to help; but I had to wait directions from Mr Trelawny, who inflexibly held his post at the head of the sarcophagus. I signed to him with my hand, but he motioned me back. Gradually the figures of all close to the sarcophagus became indistinct in the smoke which rolled round them in thick billowy clouds. Finally, I lost sight of them altogether. I had a terrible desire to rush over so as to be near Margaret; but again I restrained myself. If the Stygian gloom continued, light would be a necessity of safety; and I was the guardian of the light! My anguish of anxiety as I stood to my post was almost unendurable.

The Coffer was now but a dull colour; and the lamps were growing dim, as though they were being overpowered by the thick smoke. Absolute darkness would soon be upon us.

I waited and waited, expecting every instant to hear the command to turn up the light; but none came. I waited still, and looked with harrowing intensity at the rolling billows of smoke still pouring out of the casket whose glow was fading. The lamps sank down, and went out; one by one.

Finally, there was but one lamp alight, and that was dimly blue and flickering. I kept my eyes fixed towards Margaret, in the hope that I might see her in some lifting of the gloom; it was for her now that all my anxiety was claimed. I could just see her white frock beyond the dim outline of the sarcophagus.

Deeper and deeper grew the black mist, and its pungency began to assail my nostrils as well as my eyes. Now the volume of smoke coming from the Coffer seemed to lessen, and the smoke itself to be less dense. Across the room I saw a movement of something white where the sarcophagus was. There were several such movements. I could just catch the quick glint of white through the dense smoke in the fading light; for now even the last lamp began to flicker with the quick leaps before extinction.

Then the last glow disappeared. I felt that the time had come to speak; so I pulled off my respirator and called out:

“Shall I turn on the light?” There was no answer. Before the thick smoke choked me, I called again, but more loudly:

“Mr Trelawny, shall I turn on the light? Answer me! If you do not forbid me, I shall turn it on!”

As there was no reply, I turned the tap. To my horror there was no response; something had gone wrong with the electric light! I moved, intending to run up the staircase to seek the cause, but I could now see nothing, all was pitch dark.

I groped my way across the room to where I thought Margaret was. As I went I stumbled across a body. I could feel by her dress that it was a woman. My heart sank; Margaret was unconscious, or perhaps dead. I lifted the body in my arms, and went straight forward till I touched a wall. Following it round I came to the stairway, and hurried up the steps with what haste I could make, hampered as I was with my dear burden. It may have been that hope lightened my task; but as I went the weight that I bore seemed to grow less as I ascended from the cavern.

I laid the body in the hall, and groped my way to Margaret’s room, where I knew there were matches, and the candies which she had placed beside the Queen. I struck a match; and oh! it was good to see the light. I lit two candies, and taking one in each hand, hurried back to the hall where I had left, as I had supposed, Margaret.

Her body was not there. But on the spot where I had laid her was Queen Tera’s Bridal robe, and surrounding it the girdle of wondrous gems. Where the heart had been, lay the Jewel of Seven Stars.

Sick at heart, and with a terror which has no name, I went down into the cavern. My two candles were like mere points of light in the black, impenetrable smoke. I put up again to my mouth the respirator which hung round my neck, and went to look for my companions.

I found them all where they had stood. They had sunk down on the floor, and were gazing upward with fixed eyes of unspeakable terror. Margaret had put her hands before her face, but the glassy stare of her eyes through her fingers was more terrible than an open glare.

I pulled back the shutters of all the windows to let in what air I could. The storm was dying away as quickly as it had risen, and now it only came in desultory puffs. It might well be quiescent; its work was done!

I did what I could for my companions; but there was nothing that could avail. There, in that lonely house, far away from aid of man, naught could avail.

It was merciful that I was spared the pain of hoping.

BURIED TREASURES

CHAPTER I - THE OLD WRECK

Mr. Stedman spoke.

"I do not wish to be too hard on you; but I will not, I cannot consent to Ellen's marrying you till you have sufficient means to keep her in comfort. I know too well what poverty is. I saw her poor mother droop and pine away till she died, and all from poverty. No, no, Ellen must be spared that sorrow at all events."

"But, sir, we are young. You say you have always earned your living. I can do the same and I thought" - this with a flush - "I thought that if I might be so happy as to win Ellen's love that you might help us."

"And so I would, my dear boy; but what help could I give? I find it hard to keep the pot boiling as it is, and there is only Ellen and myself to feed. No, no, I must have some certainty for Ellen before I let her leave me. Just suppose anything should happen to me" -

"Then, sir, what could be better than to have some one to look after Ellen - some one with a heart to love her as she should be loved, and a pair of hands to be worked to the bone for her sake."

"True, boy; true. But still it cannot be. I must be certain of Ellen's future before I trust her out of my own care. Come now, let me see you with a hundred pounds of your own, and I shall not refuse to let you speak to her. But mind, I shall trust to your honour not to forestall that time."

"It is cruel, sir, although you mean it in kindness. I could as easily learn to fly as raise a hundred pounds with my present opportunities. Just think of my circumstances, sir. If my poor father had lived all would have been different; but you know that sad story."

"No, I do not. Tell it to me."

"He left the Gold Coast after spending half his life there toiling for my poor mother and me. We knew from his letter that he was about to start for home, and that he was coming in a small sailing vessel, taking all his savings with him. But from that time to this he has never been heard of."

"Did you make inquiries?"

"We tried every means, or rather poor mother did, for I was too young, and we could find out nothing."

"Poor boy. From my heart I pity you; still I cannot change my opinion. I have always hoped that Ellen would marry happily. I have worked for her, early and late, since she was born, and it would be mistaken kindness to let her marry without sufficient provisions for her welfare."

Robert Hamilton left Mr. Stedman's cottage in great dejection. He had entered it with much misgiving, but with a hope so strong that it brightened the prospect of success. He went slowly along the streets till he got to his office, and when once there he had so much work to do that little time was left him for reflection until his work for the day was over. That night he lay awake, trying with all the intentness of his nature to conceive some plan by which he might make the necessary sum to entitle him to seek the hand of Ellen Stedman: but all in vain. Scheme after scheme rose up before him, but each one, though born of hope, quickly perished in succession. Gradually his imagination grew in force as the real world seemed to fade away; he built bright castles in the air and installed Ellen as their queen. He thought of all the vast sums of money made each year by chances, of old treasures found after centuries, new treasures dug from mines, and turned from mills and commerce. But all these required capital - except the old treasures - and this source of wealth being a possibility, to it his thoughts clung as a man lost in mid-ocean clings to a spar - clung as he often conceived that his poor father had clung when lost with all his treasure far at sea.

"Vigo Bay, the Schelde, already giving up their long-buried spoil," so thought he. "All round our coasts lie millions lost, hidden but for a time. Other men have benefited by them - why should not I have a chance also?" And then, as he sunk to sleep the possibility seemed to become reality, and as he slept he found treasure after treasure, and all was real to him, for he knew not that he dreamt.

He had many dreams. Most of them connected with the finding of treasures, and in all of them Ellen took a prominent place. He seemed in his dreams to renew his first acquaintance with the girl he loved, and when he thought of the accident that brought them together, it might be expected that the seashore was the scene of many of his dreams. The meeting was in this wise: One holiday, some three years before, he had been walking on the flat shore of the 'Bull,' when he noticed at some distance off a very beautiful young girl, and set to longing for some means of making her acquaintance. The means came even as he wished. The wind was blowing freely, and the girl's hat blew off and hurried seawards over the flat shore. He ran after it and brought it back: and from that hour the two had, after their casual acquaintance had been sanctioned by her father, became fast friends.

Most of his dreams of the night had faded against morning, but one he remembered.

He seemed to be in a wide stretch of sand near the hulk of a great vessel. Beside him lay a large iron-bound box of great weight, which he tried in vain to lift. He had by a lever just forced it through a hole in the side of the ship, and it had fallen on the sand and was sinking. Despite all he could do, it still continued to go down into the sand, but by slow degrees. The mist was getting round him, shutting out the moonlight, and from far he could hear a dull echoing roar muffled by the fog, and the air seemed laden with the clang of distant bells. Then the air became instinct with the forms of life, and amid them floated the form of Ellen, and with her presence the gloom and fog and darkness were dispelled, and the sun rose brightly on the instant, and all was fair and happy.

Next day was Sunday, and so after prayers he went for a walk with his friend, Tom Harrison.

They directed their steps towards Dollymount, and passing across the bridge, over Crab Lake, found themselves on the North Bull. The tide was “black” out, and when they crossed the line of low bent-covered sand-hills, or dunnes, as they are called in Holland, a wide stretch of sand intersected with shallow tidal streams lay before them, out towards the mouth of the bay. As they looked, Robert’s dream of the night before flashed into his memory, and he expected to see before him the hulk of the old ship.

Presently Tom remarked:

“I do not think I ever saw the tide so far out before. What an immense stretch of sand there is. It is a wonder there is no rock or anything of the kind all along this shore.”

“There is one,” said Robert, pointing to where, on the very edge of the water, rose a little mound, seemingly a couple of feet at most, over the level of the sand.

“Let us go out to it,” said Tom, and accordingly they both took off their boots and stockings, and walked over the wet sand, and forded the shallow streams till they got within a hundred yards of the mound. Suddenly Tom called out: “It is not a rock at all; it is a ship, bottom upwards, with the end towards us, and sunk in the sand.”

Robert’s heart stood still for an instant.

What if this should be a treasure-ship, and his dream prove prophetic? In an instant more he shook aside the fancy and hurried on.

They found that Tom had not been mistaken. There lay the hulk of an old ship, with just its bottom over the sand. Close round it the ebb and flow of the tide had worn a hole like the moat round an old castle; and in this pool small fishes darted about, and lazy crabs sidled into the sand.

Tom jumped the narrow moat, and stood balanced on the keel, and a hard task he had to keep his footing on the slippery seaweed. He tapped the timbers with his stick, and they gave back a hollow sound. “The inside is not yet choked up,” he remarked.

Robert joined him, and walked all over the bottom of the ship, noticing how some of the planks, half rotten with long exposure, were sinking inwards.

After a few minutes Tom spoke -

“I say, Bob, suppose that this old ship was full of money, and that you and I could get it out.”

“I have just been thinking the same.”

“Suppose we try,” said Tom, and he commenced to endeavour to prize up the end of a broken timber with his stick. Robert watched him for some minutes, and when he had given up the attempt in despair, spoke -

“Suppose we do try, Tom. I have a very strange idea. I had a curious dream last night, and this old ship reminds me of it.”

Tom asked Robert to tell the dream. He did so, and when he had finished, and had also confided his difficulty about the hundred pounds, Tom remarked -

"We'll try the hulk, at any rate. Let us come some night and cut a hole in her and look. It might be worth our while; it will be a lark at any rate."

He seemed so interested in the matter that Robert asked him the reason.

"Well, I will tell you," he said. "You know Tomlinson. Well, he told me the other day that he was going to ask Miss Stedman to marry him. He is well off - comparatively, and unless you get your chance soon you may be too late. Don't be offended at me for telling you. I wanted to get an opportunity."

"Thanks, old boy," was Robert's answer, as he squeezed his hand. No more was spoken for a time. Both men examined the hulk carefully, and then came away, and sat again on a sand hill.

Presently a coastguard came along, with his telescope under his arm. Tom entered into conversation with him about the wreck.

"Well, sir," he said, "that was afore my time here. I've been here only about a year, and that's there a matter o' fifteen year or thereabouts. She came ashore here in the great storm when the 'Mallard' was lost in the Scillies. I've heerd tell" -

Robert interrupted him to ask -

"Did anyone ever try what was in her?"

"Well, sir, there I'm out. By rights there should, but I've bin told that about then there was a lawsuit on as to who the shore belonged to. The ship lay in the line between the Ballast Board ground and the Manor ground, or whatever it is, and so nothin' could be done till the suit was ended, and when it was there weren't much use lookin' for anything, for she was settled nigh as low as she is now, and if there ever was anything worth havin' in her the salt water had ruined it long ago."

"Then she was never examined?" said Tom.

"Most like not, sir; they don't never examine little ships like her - if she was a big one we might," and the coastguard departed.

When he was gone Tom said, "By Jove, he forgot to say on whose ground she is," and he ran after him to ask the question. When he came back he said, "It's all right; it belongs to Sir Arthur Forres."

After watching for some time in silence Robert said, "Tom, I have very strange thoughts about this. Let us get leave from Sir Arthur - he is, I believe, a very generous man - and regularly explore."

"Done," said Tom, and, it being now late, they returned to town.

CHAPTER II - WIND AND TIDE

Robert and Tom next day wrote a letter to Sir Arthur Forres asking him to let them explore the ship, and by return of post got a kind answer, not only granting the required permission, but making over the whole ship to them to do what they pleased with. Accordingly they held a consultation as to the best means of proceeding, and agreed to commence operations as soon as possible, as it was now well on in December, and every advance of winter would throw new obstacles in their way. Next day they bought some tools, and brought them home in great glee. It often occurred to both of them that they were setting out on the wildest of wild-goose chases, but the novelty and excitement of the whole affair always overcame their scruples. The first moonlight night that came they took their tools, and sallied out to Dollymount to make the first effort on their treasure ship. So intent were they on their object that their immediate surroundings did not excite their attention. It was not, therefore, till they arrived at the summit of the sand hill, from which they had first seen the hulk, that they discovered that the tide was coming in, and had advanced about half way. The knowledge was like a cold bath to each of them, for here were all their hopes dashed to the ground, for an indefinite time at least. It might be far into the winter time - perhaps months - before they could get a union of tide, moonlight, and fair weather, such as alone could make their scheme practicable. They had already tried to get leave from office, but so great was the press of business that their employer told them that unless they had special business, which they could name, he could not dispense with their services. To name their object would be to excite ridicule, and as the whole affair was but based on a chimera they were of course silent.

They went home sadder than they had left it, and next day, by a careful study of the almanac, made out a list of the nights which might suit their purpose - if moon and weather proved favourable. From the fact of their living in their employer's house their time was further curtailed, for it was an inflexible rule that by twelve o'clock everyone should be home. Therefore, the only nights which could suit were those from the 11th to the 15th December, on which there would be low water between the hours of seven and eleven. This would give them on each night about one hour in which to work, for that length of time only was the wreck exposed between the ebbing and flowing tides.

They waited in anxiety for the 11th December, the weather continued beautifully fine, and nearly every night the two friends walked to view the scene of their future operations. Robert was debarred from visiting Ellen by her father's direction, and so was glad to have some object of interest to occupy his thoughts whilst away from her.

As the time wore on, the weather began to change, and Robert and Tom grew anxious. The wind began to blow in short sharp gusts, which whirled the sodden dead leaves angrily about exposed corners, and on the seaboard sent the waves shorewards topped with angry crests. Misty clouds came drifting hurriedly over the sea, and at times the fog became so thick that it was hardly possible to see more than a few yards ahead, still the young men continued to visit their treasure every night. At first, the coastguards had a watchful eye on them, noticing which they unfolded their purpose and showed Sir Arthur's letter making the ship over to their hands.

The sailors treated the whole affair as a good joke, but still promised to do what they could to help them, in the good-humoured way which is their special charm. A certain fear had for some time haunted the two friends - a fear which neither of them had ever spoken out. From brooding so much as they did on their adventure, they came to think, or rather to feel, that the ship which for fifteen years had been unnoticed and untouched in the sand, had suddenly acquired as great an interest in the eyes of all the world as of themselves. Accordingly, they thought that some evil-designing person might try to cut them out of their adventure by forestalling them in searching the wreck. Their fear was dispelled by the kindly promise of the coastguards not to let anyone meddle with the vessel without their permission. As the weather continued to get more and more broken, the very disappointment of their hopes, which the break threatened served to enlarge those hopes, and when on the night of the tenth they heard a wild storm howling round the chimneys, as they lay in bed, each was assured in his secret heart that the old wreck contained such a treasure as the world had seldom seen.

Seven o'clock next night saw them on the shore of the Bull looking out into the pitchy darkness. The wind was blowing so strongly inshore that the waves were driven high beyond their accustomed line at the same state of the tide, and the channels were running like mill-dams. As each wave came down over the flat shore it was broke up into a mass of foam and spray, and the wind swept away the spume until on shore it fell like rain. Far along the sandy shore was heard the roaring of the waves, hoarsely bellowing, so that hearing the sound we could well imagine how the district got its quaint name.

On such a night it would have been impossible to have worked at the wreck, even could the treasure-seekers have reached it, or could they have even found it in the pitchy darkness. They waited some time, but seeing that it was in vain, they sadly departed homeward, hoping fondly that the next evening would prove more propitious.

Vain were their hopes. The storm continued for two whole days, for not one moment of which, except between the pauses of the rushing or receding waves, was the wreck exposed. Seven o'clock each night saw the two young men looking over the sand-hills, waiting in the vain hope of a chance of visiting the vessel, hoping against hope that a sudden calm would give the opportunity they wished. When the storm began to abate their hopes were proportionally raised, and on the morning of the 14th when they awoke and could not hear the wind whistling through the chimneys next their attic, they grew again sanguine of success. That night they went to the Bull in hope, and came home filled with despair. Although the storm had ceased, the sea was still rough. Great, heavy, sullen waves, sprayless, but crested ominously, from ridges of foam, came rolling into the bay, swelling onward with great speed and resistless force, and bursting over the shallow waste of sand so violently that even any attempt to reach the wreck was out of the question. As Robert and Tom hurried homeward - they had waited to the latest moment on the Bull, and feared being late - they felt spiritless and dejected. But one more evening remained on which they might possibly visit the wreck, and they feared that even should wind and tide be suitable one hour would not do to explore it. However, youth is never without hope, and next morning they both had that sanguine feeling which is the outcome of despair - the feeling that the tide of fortune must sometime turn, and that the loser as well as the winner has his time. As they neared the Bull that night their hearts beat so loud that they could almost hear them. They felt that there was ground for hope. All the way from town they could see the great flats opposite Clontarf lying black in the moonlight, and they thought that over the sands the same calm must surely rest. But, alas, they did not allow for the fact that two great breakwaters protect the harbour, but that the sands of the Bull are open to all the storms that blow - that the great Atlantic billows, broken up on the northern and southern coasts, yet still strong enough to be feared, sweep up and down the Channel, and beat with every tide into the harbours and bays along the coast. Accordingly, on reaching the sand-hills, they saw what dashed their hopes at once.

The moon rose straight before them beyond the Bailey Lighthouse, and the broad belt of light which stretched from it passed over the treasure-ship. The waves, now black, save where the light caught the sloping sides, lay blank, but ever and anon as they passed on far over their usual range, the black hull rose among the gleams of light. There was not a chance that the wreck could be attempted, and so they went sadly home - remembering the fact that the night of the 24th December was the earliest time at which they could again renew their effort.

CHAPTER III - THE IRON CHEST

The days that intervened were long to both men.

To Robert they were endless; even the nepenthe of continued hard work could not quiet his mind. Distracted on one side by his forbidden love for Ellen, and on the other by the expected fortune by which he might win her, he could hardly sleep at night. When he did sleep he always dreamed, and in his dreams Ellen and the wreck were always associated. At one time his dream would be of unqualified good fortune - a vast treasure found and shared with his love; at another, all would be gloom, and in the search for the treasure he would endanger his life, or, what was far greater pain, forfeit her love.

However, it is one consolation, that, whatever else may happen in the world, time wears on without ceasing, and the day longest expected comes at last.

On the evening of the 24th December, Tom and Robert took their way to Dollymount in breathless excitement.

As they passed through town, and saw the vast concourse of people all intent on one common object - the preparation for the greatest of all Christian festivals - the greatest festival, which is kept all over the world, wherever the True Light has fallen, they could not but feel a certain regret that they, too, could not join in the throng. Robert's temper was somewhat ruffled by seeing Ellen leaning on the arm of Tomlinson, looking into a brilliantly-lighted shop window, so intently, that she did not notice him passing. When they had left the town, and the crowds, and the overflowing stalls, and brilliant holly-decked shops, they did not so much mind, but hurried on.

So long as they were within city bounds, and even whilst there were brightly-lit shop windows, all seemed light enough. When, however, they were so far from town as to lose the glamour of the lamplight in the sky overhead, they began to fear that the night would indeed be too dark for work.

They were prepared for such an emergency, and when they stood on the slope of sand, below the dunnes, they lit a dark lantern and prepared to cross the sands. After a few moments they found that the lantern was a mistake. They saw the ground immediately before them so far as the sharp triangle of light, whose apex was the bulls-eye, extended, but beyond this the darkness rose like a solid black wall. They closed the lantern, but this was even worse, for after leaving the light, small though it was, their eyes were useless in the complete darkness. It took them nearly an hour to reach the wreck.

At last they got to work, and with hammer and chisel and saw commenced to open the treasure ship.

The want of light told sorely against them, and their work progressed slowly despite their exertions. All things have an end, however, and in time they had removed several planks so as to form a hole some four feet wide, by six long - one of the timbers crossed this; but as it was not in the middle, and left a hole large enough to descend by, it did not matter.

It was with beating hearts that the two young men slanted the lantern so as to turn the light in through the aperture. All within was black, and not four feet below them was a calm glassy pool of water that seemed like ink. Even as they looked this began slowly to rise, and they saw that the tide had turned, and that but a few minutes more remained. They reached down as far as they could, plunging their arms up to their shoulders in the water, but could find nothing. Robert stood up and began to undress.

"What are you going to do?" said Tom.

"Going to dive - it is the only chance we have."

Tom did not hinder him, but got the piece of rope they had brought with them and fastened it under Robert's shoulders and grasped the other end firmly. Robert arranged the lamp so as to throw the light as much downwards as possible, and then, with a silent prayer, let himself down through the aperture and hung on by the beam. The water was deadly cold - so cold, that, despite the fever heat to which he was brought through excitement, he felt chilled. Nevertheless he did not hesitate, but, letting go the beam, dropped into the black water.

"For Ellen," he said, as he disappeared.

In a quarter of a minute he appeared again, gasping, and with a convulsive effort climbed the short rope, and stood beside his friend.

"Well?" asked Tom, excitedly.

"Oh-h-h-h! good heavens, I am chilled to the heart. I went down about six feet, and then touched a hard substance. I felt round it, and so far as I can tell it is a barrel. Next to it was a square corner of a box, and further still something square made of iron."

"How do you know it is iron?"

"By the rust. Hold the rope again, there is no time to lose; the tide is rising every minute, and we will soon have to go."

Again he went into the black water and this time stayed longer. Tom began to be frightened at the delay, and shook the rope for him to ascend. The instant after he appeared with face almost black with suffused blood. Tom hauled at the rope, and once more he stood on the bottom of the vessel. This time he did not complain of the cold. He seemed quivering with a great excitement that overcame the cold. When he had recovered his breath he almost shouted out -

"There's something there. I know it - I feel it."

"Anything strange?" asked Tom, in fierce excitement.

"Yes, the iron box is heavy - so heavy that I could not stir it. I could easily lift the end of the cask, and two or three other boxes, but I could not stir it."

Whilst he was speaking, both heard a queer kind of hissing noise, and looking down in alarm saw the water running into the pool around the vessel. A few minutes more and they would be cut off from shore by some of the tidal streams. Tom cried out:

"Quick, quick! or we shall be late. We must put down the beams before the tide rises or it will wash the hold full of sand."

Without waiting even to dress, Robert assisted him and they placed the planks on their original position and secured them with a few strong nails. Then they rushed away for shore. When they had reached the sand-hill, Robert, despite his exertions, was so chilled that he was unable to put on his clothes.

To bathe and stay naked for half an hour on a December night is no joke.

Tom drew his clothes on him as well as he could, and after adding his overcoat and giving him a pull from the flask, he was something better. They hurried away, and what with exercise, excitement, and hope were glowing when they reached home.

Before going to bed they held a consultation as to what was best to be done. Both wished to renew their attempt as they could begin at half-past seven o'clock; for although the morrow was Christmas Day, they knew that any attempt to rescue goods from the wreck should be made at once. There were now two dangers to be avoided - rough weather and the drifting of the sand - and so they decided that not a moment was to be lost.

At the daybreak they were up, and the first moment that saw the wreck approachable found them wading out towards it. This time they were prepared for wet and cold. They had left their clothes on the beach and put on old ones, which, even if wet, would still keep off the wind, for a strong, fitful breeze was now blowing in eddies, and the waves were beginning to rise ominously. With beating hearts they examined the closed-up gap; and, as they looked, their hopes fell. One of the timbers had been lifted off by the tide, and from the deposit of sand in the crevices, they feared that much must have found its way in. They had brought several strong pieces of rope with them, for their effort to-day was to be to lift out the iron chest, which both fancied contained a treasure.

Robert prepared himself to descend again. He tied one rope round his waist, as before, and took the other in his hands. Tom waited breathlessly till he returned. He was a long time coming up, and rose with his teeth chattering, but had the rope no longer with him. He told Tom that he had succeeded in putting it under the chest. Then he went down again with the other rope, and when he rose the second time, said that he had put it under also, but crossing the first. He was so chilled that he was unable to go down a third time. Indeed, he was hardly able to stand so cold did he seem; and it was with much shrinking of spirit that his friend prepared to descend to make the ropes fast, for he knew that should anything happen to him Robert could not help him up. This did not lighten his task or serve to cheer his spirits as he went down for the first time into the black water. He took two pieces of rope; his intention being to tie Robert's ropes round the chest, and then bring the spare ends up. When he rose he told Robert that he had tied one of the ropes round the box, but had not time to tie the others. He was so chilled that he could not venture to go down again, and so both men hurriedly closed the gap as well as they could, and went on shore to change their clothes. When they had dressed, and got tolerably warm, the tide had begun to turn, and so they went home, longing for the evening to come, when they might make the final effort.

CHAPTER IV - LOST AND FOUND

Tom was to dine with some relatives where he was living. When he was leaving Robert he said to him, "Well, Bob, seven o'clock, sharp."

"Tom, do not forget or be late. Mind, I trust you."

"Never fear, old boy. Nothing short of death shall keep me away; but if I should happen not to turn up do not wait for me. I will be with you in spirit if I cannot be in the flesh."

"Tom, don't talk that way. I don't know what I should do if you didn't come. It may be all a phantom we're after, but I do not like to think so. It seems so much to me."

"All right, old man," said Tom, cheerily, "I shan't fail - seven o'clock," and he was gone.

Robert was in a fever all day. He went to the church where he knew he would see Ellen, and get a smile from her in passing. He did get a smile, and a glance from her lovely dark eyes which said as plainly as if she had spoken the words with her sweet lips, “How long you have been away; you never come to see me now.” This set Robert’s heart bounding, but it increased his fever. “How would it be,” he thought, “if the wreck turned out a failure, and the iron box a deception? If I cannot get £100 those dark eyes will have to look sweet things to some other man; that beautiful mouth to whisper in the ears of some one who would not - could not - love her half so well as I do.”

He could not bear to meet her, so when service was over he hurried away. When she came out her eyes were beaming, for she expected to see Robert waiting for her. She looked anxiously, but could only see Mr. Tomlinson, who did not rise in her favour for appearing just then.

Robert had to force himself to eat his dinner. Every morsel almost choked him, but he knew that strength was necessary for his undertaking, and so compelled himself to eat. As the hour of seven approached he began to get fidgety. He went often to the window, but could see no sign of Tom. Seven o’clock struck, but no Tom came. He began to be alarmed. Tom’s words seemed to ring in his ears, “nothing short of death shall keep me away.” He waited a little while in terrible anxiety, but then bethought him of his companion’s other words, “if I should not happen to turn up do not wait for me,” and knowing that whether he waited or no the tide would still come in all the same, and his chance of getting out the box would pass away, determined to set out alone. His determination was strengthened by the fact that the gusty wind of the morning had much increased, and sometimes swept along laden with heavy clinging mist that bespoke a great fog bank somewhere behind the wind.

Till he had reached the very shore of the “Bull” he did not give up hopes of Tom, for he thought it just possible that he might have been delayed, and instead of increasing the delay by going home, had come on straight to the scene of operation.

There was, however, no help for it; as Tom had not come he should work alone. With misgivings he prepared himself. He left his clothes on the top of a sand-hill, put on the old ones he had brought with him, took his tools, ropes, and lantern, and set out. There was cause for alarm. The wind was rising, and it whistled in his ears as the gusts swept past. Far away in the darkness the sea was beginning to roar on the edge of the flats, and the mist came driving inland in sheets like the spume from a cataract. The water in the tidal streams as he waded across them beat against his legs and seemed cold as ice. Although now experienced in the road, he had some difficulty in finding the wreck, but at length reached it and commenced operations.

He had taken the precaution of bringing with him a second suit of old clothes and an oilskin coat. His first care was to fix the lamp where the wind could not harm it; his second, to raise the planks, and expose the interior of the wreck. Then he prepared his ropes, and, having undressed once again, went beneath the water to fasten the second rope. This he accomplished safely, and let the knot of it be on the opposite side to where the first rope was tied. He then ascended and dressed himself in all his clothes to keep him warm. He then cut off a portion in another plank, so as to expose a second one of the ship's timbers. Round this he tied one of the ropes, keeping it as taut as he could. He took a turn of the other rope round the other beam and commenced to pull. Little by little he raised the great chest from its position, and when he had raised it all he could he made that rope fast and went to the other.

By attacking the ropes alternately he raised the chest, so that he could feel from its situation that it hung suspended in the water. Then he began to shake the ropes till the chest swung like a pendulum. He held firmly both ropes, having a turn of each round its beam, and each time the weight swung he gained a little rope. So he worked on little by little, till at last, to his infinite joy, he saw the top of the box rise above the water. His excitement then changed to frenzy. His strength redoubled, and, as faster and faster the box swung, he gained more and more rope, and raised it higher and higher, till at last it ceased to rise, and he found he had reached the maximum height attainable by this means. As, however, it was now nearly up he detached a long timber, and using it as a lever, slowly, after repeated failures, prized up the chest through the gap till it reached the bottom of the ship, and then, toppling over, fell with a dull thud upon the sand.

With a cry of joy Robert jumped down after it, but in jumping lit on the edge of it and wrenched his ankle so severely that when he rose up and attempted to stand on it it gave way under him, and he fell again. He managed, however, to crawl out of the hulk, and reached his lantern. The wind by this time was blowing louder and louder, and the mist was gathering in white masses, and sweeping by, mingled with sleet. In endeavouring to guard the lantern from the wind he slipped once more on the wet timbers, and fell down, striking his leg against the sharp edge of the chest. So severe was the pain that for a few moments he became almost insensible, and when he recovered his senses found he was quite unable to stir.

The lantern had fallen in a pool of water, and had of course gone out. It was a terrible situation, and Robert's heart sank within him, as well it might, as he thought of what was to come. The wind was rapidly rising to a storm, and swept by him, laden with the deadly mist in fierce gusts. The roaring of the tide grew nearer and nearer, and louder and louder. Overhead was a pall of darkness, save when in the leaden winter sky some white pillar of mist swept onward like an embodied spirit of the storm. All the past began to crowd Robert's memory, and more especially the recent past. He thought of his friend's words - "Nothing short of death shall keep me away," and so full of dismal shadows, and forms of horror was all the air, that he could well fancy that Tom was dead, and that his spirit was circling round him, wailing through the night. Then again, arose the memory of his dream, and his very heart stood still, as he thought of how awfully it had been fulfilled. There he now lay; not in a dream, but in reality, beside a ship on a waste of desert sand. Beside him lay a chest such as he had seen in his dreams, and, as before, death seemed flapping his giant wings over his head. Strange horrors seemed to gather round him, borne on the wings of the blast. His father, whom he had never seen, he felt to be now beside him. All the dead that he had ever known circled round him in a weird dance. As the stormy gusts swept by, he heard amid their screams the lugubrious tolling of bells; bells seemed to be all around him; whichever way he turned he heard his knell. All forms were gathered there, as in his dreams - all save Ellen. But hark! even as the thought flashed across his brain; his ears seemed to hear her voice as one hears in a dream. He tried to cry out, but was so overcome by cold, that he could barely hear his own voice. He tried to rise, but in vain, and then, overcome by pain and excitement, and disappointed hope, he became insensible.

Was his treasure-hunting to end thus?

As Mr. Stedman and Ellen was sitting down to tea that evening, Arthur Tomlinson being the only other guest, a hurried knock came to the cottage door. The little servant came into the room a moment after, looking quite scared, and holding a letter in her hand. She came over to Ellen and faltered out, “Oh, please, miss, there’s a man from the hospital, and he says as how you’re to open the letter and to come at once; it’s a matter of life and death.”

Ellen grew white as a sheet, and stood up quickly, trembling as she opened the letter. Mr. Stedman rose up, too. Arthur Tomlinson sat still, and glared at the young servant till, thinking she had done something wrong, she began to cry. The letter was from the doctor of the hospital, written for Tom, and praying her to come at once, as the latter had something to tell her of the greatest import to one for whom he was sure she would do much. She immediately ran and put on her cloak, and asked her father to come with her.

“Surely you won’t go?” said Tomlinson.

“What else should I do?” she asked, scornfully; “I must apologise for leaving you, unless you will come with us.”

“No, thank you; I am not a philanthropist.”

In half an hour they had reached the hospital, and had heard Tom’s story. Poor fellow, when hurrying home to Robert, he had been knocked down by a car and had his leg broken. As soon as he could he had sent word to Ellen, for he feared for Robert being out alone at the wreck, knowing how chilled he had been on the previous night, and he thought that if any one would send him aid Ellen would.

No sooner had the story been told, and Ellen had understood the danger Robert was in, than with her father she hurried off to the “Bull.”

They got a car with some difficulty, and drove as fast as the horse could go, and arriving at the “Bull,” called to the coastguard-station.

None of the coastguards had seen Robert that evening, but on learning of his possible danger all that were in the station at once turned out. They wrapped Ellen and her father in oilskins, and, taking lanterns and ropes, set out for the wreck. They all knew its position, and went as straight for it as they could, and, as they crossed the sandhills, found Robert's clothes. At this they grew very grave. They wanted to leave Ellen on the shore, but she refused point blank. By this time the storm was blowing wildly, and the roaring of the sea being borne on the storm was frightful to hear. The tidal streams were running deeper than usual, and there was some difficulty in crossing to the wreck.

In the mist the men lost their way a little, and could not tell exactly how far to go. They shouted as loudly as they could, but there was no reply. Ellen's terror grew into despair. She too, shouted, although fearing that to shout in the teeth of such a wind her woman's voice would be of no avail. However, her clear soprano rang out louder than the hoarse shouts of the sturdy sailors, and cleft the storm like a wedge. Twice or thrice she cried, “Robert, Robert, Robert,” but still there was no reply. Suddenly she stopped, and, bending her head, cried joyfully, “He is there, he is there; I hear his voice,” and commenced running as fast as she could through the darkness towards the raging sea. The coastguards called out to her to mind where she was going, and followed her with the lanterns as fast as they could run.

When they came up with her they found her sitting on an iron chest close to the wreck, with Robert resting on her knees, and his head pillowed on her breast. He had opened his eyes, and was faintly whispering, “Ellen, my love, my love. It was to win you I risked my life.”

She bent and kissed him, even there among rough sailors, and then, amid the storm, she whispered softly, “It was not risked in vain.”

THE CHAIN OF DESTINY

CHAPTER I. A WARNING

It was so late in the evening when I arrived at Scarp that I had but little opportunity of observing the external appearance of the house; but, as far as I could judge in the dim twilight, it was a very stately edifice of seemingly great age, built of white stone. When I passed the porch, however, I could observe its internal beauties much more closely, for a large wood fire burned in the hall and all the rooms and passages were lighted. The hall was almost baronial in its size, and opened on to a staircase of dark oak so wide and so generous in its slope that a carriage might almost have been driven up it. The rooms were large and lofty, with their walls, like those of the staircase, panelled with oak black from age. This sombre material would have made the house intensely gloomy but for the enormous width and height of both rooms and passages. As it was, the effect was a homely combination of size and warmth. The windows were set in deep embrasures, and, on the ground story, reached from quite level with the floor to almost the ceiling. The fireplaces were quite in the old style, large and surrounded with massive oak carvings, representing on each some scene from Biblical history, and at the side of each fireplace rose a pair of massive carved iron fire-dogs. It was altogether just such a house as would have delighted the heart of Washington Irving or Nathaniel Hawthorne.

The house had been lately restored; but in effecting the restoration comfort had not been forgotten, and any modern improvement which tended to increase the homelike appearance of the rooms had been added. The old diamond-paned casements, which had remained probably from the Elizabethan age, had given place to more useful plate glass; and, in like manner, many other changes had taken place. But so judiciously had every change been effected that nothing of the new clashed with the old, but the harmony of all the parts seemed complete.

I thought it no wonder that Mrs. Trevor had fallen in love with Scarp the first time she had seen it. Mrs. Trevor's liking the place was tantamount to her husband's buying it, for he was so wealthy that he could get almost anything money could purchase. He was himself a man of good taste, but still he felt his inferiority to his wife in this respect so much that he never dreamt of differing in opinion from her on any matter of choice or judgment. Mrs. Trevor had, without exception, the best taste of any one whom I ever knew, and, strange to say, her taste was not confined to any branch of art. She did not write, or paint, or sing; but still her judgment in writing, painting, or music, was unquestioned by her friends. It seemed as if nature had denied to her the power of execution in any separate branch of art, in order to make her perfect in her appreciation of what was beautiful and true in all. She was perfect in the art of harmonising-the art of every-day life. Her husband used to say, with a far-fetched joke, that her star must have been in the House of Libra, because everything which she said and did showed such a nicety of balance.

Mr. and Mrs. Trevor were the most model couple I ever knew-they really seemed not twain, but one. They appeared to have adopted something of the French idea of man and wife-that they should not be the less like friends because they were linked together by indissoluble bonds-that they should share their pleasures as well as their sorrows. The former outbalanced the latter, for both husband

and wife were of that happy temperament which can take pleasure from everything, and find consolation even in the chastening rod of affliction.

Still, through their web of peaceful happiness ran a thread of care. One that cropped up in strange places, and disappeared again, but which left a quiet tone over the whole fabric-they had no child.

“They had their share of sorrow, for when time was ripe The still affection of the heart became an outward breathing type, That into stillness passed again, But left a want unknown before.”

There was something simple and holy in their patient endurance of their lonely life-for lonely a house must ever be without children to those who love truly. Theirs was not the eager, disappointed longing of those whose union had proved fruitless. It was the simple, patient, hopeless resignation of those who find that a common sorrow draws them more closely together than many common joys. I myself could note the warmth of their hearts and their strong philoprogenitive feeling in their manner towards me.

From the time when I lay sick in college when Mrs. Trevor appeared to my fever-dimmed eyes like an angel of mercy, I felt myself growing in their hearts. Who can imagine my gratitude to the lady who, merely because she heard of my sickness and desolation from a college friend, came and nursed me night and day till the fever left me. When I was sufficiently strong to be moved she had me brought away to the country, where good air, care, and attention soon made me stronger than ever. From that time I became a constant visitor at the Trevors’ house; and as month after month rolled by I felt that I was growing in their affections. For four summers I spent my long vacation in their house, and each year I could feel Mr. Trevor’s shake of the hand grow heartier, and his wife’s kiss on my forehead-for so she always saluted me-grow more tender and motherly.

Their liking for me had now grown so much that in their heart of hearts-and it was a sanctum common to them both-they secretly loved me as a son. Their love was returned manifold by the lonely boy, whose devotion to the kindest friends of his youth and his trouble had increased with his growth into manhood. Even in my own heart I was ashamed to confess how I loved them both-how I worshipped Mrs. Trevor as I adored the mother whom I had lost so young, and whose eyes shone sometimes even then upon me, like stars, in my sleep.

It is strange how timorous we are when our affections are concerned. Merely because I had never told her how I loved her as a mother, because she had never told me how she loved me as a son, I used sometimes to think of her with a sort of lurking suspicion that I was trusting too much to my imagination. Sometimes even I would try to avoid thinking of her altogether, till my yearning would grow too strong to be repelled, and then I would think of her long and silently, and would love her more and more. My life was so lonely that I clung to her as the only thing I had to love. Of course I loved her husband, too, but I never thought about him in the same way; for men are less demonstrative about their affections to each other, and even acknowledge them to themselves less.

Mrs. Trevor was an excellent hostess. She always let her guests see that they were welcome, and, unless in the case of casual visitors, that they were expected. She was, as may be imagined, very popular with all classes; but what is more rare, she was equally popular with both sexes. To be popular with her own sex is the touchstone of a woman’s worth. To the houses of the peasantry she came, they said, like an angel, and brought comfort wherever she came. She knew the proper way to deal with the poor; she always helped them materially, but never offended their feelings in so doing. Young people all adored her.

My curiosity had been aroused as to the sort of place Scarp was; for, in order to give me a surprise, they would not tell me anything about it, but said that I must wait and judge it for myself. I had looked forward to my visit with both expectation and curiosity.

When I entered the hall, Mrs. Trevor came out to welcome me and kissed me on the forehead, after her usual manner. Several of the old servants came near, smiling and bowing, and wishing welcome to “Master Frank.” I shook hands with several of them, whilst their mistress looked on with a pleased smile.

As we went into a snug parlour, where a table was laid out with the materials for a comfortable supper, Mrs. Trevor said to me:

“I am glad you came so soon, Frank. We have no one here at present, so you will be quite alone with us for a few days; and you will be quite alone with me this evening, for Charley is gone to a dinner-party at Westholm.”

I told her that I was glad that there was no one else at Scarp, for that I would rather be with her and her husband than any one else in the world. She smiled as she said:

“Frank, if any one else said that, I would put it down as a mere compliment; but I know you always speak the truth. It is all very well to be alone with an old couple like Charley and me for two or three days; but just you wait till Thursday, and you will look on the intervening days as quite wasted.”

“Why?” I inquired.

“Because, Frank, there is a girl coming to stay with me then, with whom I intend you to fall in love."

I answered jocosely:

"Oh, thank you, Mrs. Trevor, very much for your kind intentions-but suppose for a moment that they should be impracticable. 'One man may lead a horse to the pond's brink.' 'The best laid schemes o' mice an' men.' Eh?"

"Frank, don't be silly. I do not want to make you fall in love against your inclination; but I hope and I believe that you will."

"Well, I'm sure I hope you won't be disappointed; but I never yet heard a person praised that I did not experience a disappointment when I came to know him or her."

"Frank, did I praise any one?"

"Well, I am vain enough to think that your saying that you knew I would fall in love with her was a sort of indirect praise."

"Dear, me, Frank, how modest you have grown. 'A sort of indirect praise!' Your humility is quite touching."

"May I ask who the lady is, as I am supposed to be an interested party?"

"I do not know that I ought to tell you on account of your having expressed any doubt as to her merits. Besides, I might weaken the effect of the introduction. If I stimulate your curiosity it will be a point in my favour."

"Oh, very well; I suppose I must only wait?"

"Ah, well, Frank, I will tell you. It is not fair to keep you waiting. She is a Miss Fothering."

"Fothering? Fothering? I think I know that name. I remember hearing it somewhere, a long time ago, if I do not mistake. Where does she come from?"

"Her father is a clergyman in Norfolk, but he belongs to the

Warwickshire family. I met her at Winthrop, Sir Harry Blount's place, a few months ago, and took a great liking for her, which she returned, and so we became fast friends. I made her promise to pay me a visit this summer, so she and her sister are coming here on Thursday to stay for some time."

"And, may I be bold enough to inquire what she is like?"

"You may inquire if you like, Frank; but you won't get an answer. I shall not try to describe her. You must wait and judge for yourself."

"Wait," said I, "three whole days? How can I do that? Do, tell me."

She remained firm to her determination. I tried several times in the course of the evening to find out something more about Miss Fothering, for my curiosity was roused; but all the answer I could get on the subject was-"Wait, Frank; wait, and judge for yourself."

When I was bidding her good night, Mrs. Trevor said to me-

"By-the-bye, Frank, you will have to give up the room which you will sleep in to-night, after to-morrow. I will have such a full house that I cannot let you have a doubled-bedded room all to yourself; so I will give that room to the Miss Fotherings, and move you up to the second floor. I just want you to see the room, as it has a romantic look about it, and has all the old furniture that was in it when we came here. There are several pictures in it worth looking at."

My bedroom was a large chamber-immense for a bedroom-with two windows opening level with the floor, like those of the parlours and drawingrooms. The furniture was old-fashioned, but not old enough to be curious, and on the walls hung many pictures-portraits-the house was full of portraits-and landscapes. I just glanced at these, intending to examine them in the morning, and went to bed. There was a fire in the room, and I lay awake for some time looking dreamily at the shadows of the furniture flitting over the walls and ceiling as the flames of the wood fire leaped and fell, and the red embers dropped whitening on the hearth. I tried to give the rein to my thoughts, but they kept constantly to the one subject-the mysterious Miss Fothering, with whom I was to fall in love. I was sure that I had heard her name somewhere, and I had at times lazy recollections of a child's face. At such times I would start awake from my growing drowsiness, but before I could collect my scattered thoughts the idea had eluded me. I could remember neither when nor where I had heard the name, nor could I recall even the expression of the child's face. It must have been long, long ago, when I was young. When I was young my mother was alive. My mother-mother-mother. I found myself half awakening, and repeating the word over and over again. At last I fell asleep.

I thought that I awoke suddenly to that peculiar feeling which we sometimes have on starting from sleep, as if some one had been speaking in the room, and the voice is still echoing through it. All was quite silent, and the fire had gone out. I looked out of the window that lay straight opposite the foot of the bed, and observed a light outside, which gradually grew brighter till the room was almost as light as by day. The window looked like a picture in the framework formed by the cornice over the foot of the bed, and the massive pillars shrouded in curtains which supported it.

With the new accession of light I looked round the room, but nothing was changed. All was as before, except that some of the objects of furniture and ornament were shown in stronger relief than hitherto. Amongst these, those most in relief were the other bed, which was placed across the room, and an old picture that hung on the wall at its foot. As the bed was merely the counterpart of the one in which I lay, my attention became fixed on the picture. I observed it closely and with great interest. It seemed old, and was the portrait of a young girl, whose face, though kindly and merry, bore signs of thought and a capacity for deep feeling-almost for passion. At some moments, as I looked at it, it called up before my mind a vision of Shakespeare's Beatrice, and once I thought of Beatrice Cenci. But this was probably caused by the association of ideas suggested by the similarity of names.

The light in the room continued to grow even brighter, so I looked again out of the window to seek its source, and saw there a lovely sight. It seemed as if there were grouped without the window three lovely children, who seemed to float in mid-air. The light seemed to spring from a point far behind them, and by their side was something dark and shadowy, which served to set off their radiance.

The children seemed to be smiling in upon something in the room, and, following their glances, I saw that their eyes rested upon the other bed. There, strange to say, the head which I had lately seen in the picture rested upon the pillow. I looked at the wall, but the frame was empty, the picture was gone. Then I looked at the bed again, and saw the young girl asleep, with the expression of her face constantly changing, as though she were dreaming.

As I was observing her, a sudden look of terror spread over her face, and she sat up like a sleep-walker, with her eyes wide open, staring out of the window.

Again turning to the window, my gaze became fixed, for a great and weird change had taken place. The figures were still there, but their features and expressions had become woefully different. Instead of the happy innocent look of childhood was one of malignity. With the change the children had grown old, and now three hags, decrepit and deformed, like typical witches, were before me.

But a thousand times worse than this transformation was the change in the dark mass that was near them. From a cloud, misty and undefined, it became a sort of shadow with a form. This gradually, as I looked, grew darker and fuller, till at length it made me shudder. There stood before me the phantom of the Fiend.

There was a long period of dead silence, in which I could hear the beating of my heart; but at length the phantom spoke to the others. His words seemed to issue from his lips mechanically, and without expression-"To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow. The fairest and the best." He looked so awful that the question arose in my mind-"Would I dare to face him without the window-would any one dare to go amongst those fiends?" A harsh, strident, diabolical laugh from without seemed to answer my unasked question in the negative.

But as well as the laugh I heard another sound-the tones of a sweet sad voice in despair coming across the room.

“Oh, alone, alone! is there no human thing near me? No hope-no hope. I shall go mad-or die.”

The last words were spoken with a gasp.

I tried to jump out of bed, but could not stir, my limbs were bound in sleep. The young girl’s head fell suddenly back upon the pillow, and the limp-hanging jaw and wide-open, purposeless mouth spoke but too plainly of what had happened.

Again I heard from without the fierce, diabolical laughter, which swelled louder and louder, till at last it grew so strong that in very horror I shook aside my sleep and sat up in bed. listened and heard a knocking at the door, but in another moment I became more awake, and knew that the sound came from the hall. It was, no doubt, Mr. Trevor returning from his party.

The hall-door was opened and shut, and then came a subdued sound of tramping and voices, but this soon died away, and there was silence throughout the house.

I lay awake for long thinking, and looking across the room at the picture and at the empty bed; for the moon now shone brightly, and the night was rendered still brighter by occasional flashes of summer lightning. At times the silence was broken by an owl screeching outside.

As I lay awake, pondering, I was very much troubled by what I had seen; but at length, putting several things together, I came to the conclusion that I had had a dream of a kind that might have been expected. The lightning, the knocking at the hall-door, the screeching of the owl, the empty bed, and the face in the picture, when grouped together, supplied materials for the main facts of the vision. The rest was, of course, the offspring of pure fancy, and the natural consequence of the component elements mentioned acting with each other in the mind.

I got up and looked out of the window, but saw nothing but the broad belt of moonlight glittering on the bosom of the lake, which extended miles and miles away, till its farther shore was lost in the night haze, and the green sward, dotted with shrubs and tall grasses, which lay between the lake and the house.

The vision had utterly faded. However, the dream-for so, I suppose, I should call it-was very powerful, and I slept no more till the sunlight was streaming broadly in at the window, and then I fell into a doze.

CHAPTER II. MORE LINKS

Late in the morning I was awakened by Parks, Mr. Trevor's man, who always used to attend on me when I visited my friends. He brought me hot water and the local news; and, chatting with him, I forgot for a time my alarm of the night.

Parks was staid and elderly, and a type of a class now rapidly disappearing-the class of old family servants who are as proud of their hereditary loyalty to their masters, as those masters are of name and rank. Like all old servants he had a great loving for all sorts of traditions. He believed them, and feared them, and had the most profound reverence for anything which had a story.

I asked him if he knew anything of the legendary history of Scarp. He answered with an air of doubt and hesitation, as of one carefully delivering an opinion which was still incomplete.

"Well, you see, Master Frank, that Scarp is so old that it must have any number of legends; but it is so long since it was inhabited that no one in the village remembers them. The place seems to have become in a kind of way forgotten, and died out of people's thoughts, and so I am very much afraid, sir, that all the genuine history is lost."

"What do you mean by the genuine history?" I inquired.

"Well, sir, I mean the true tradition, and not the inventions of the village folk. I heard the sexton tell some stories, but I am quite sure that they were not true, for I could see, Master Frank, that he did not believe them himself, but was only trying to frighten us."

"And could you not hear of any story that appeared to you to be true?"

"No, sir, and I tried very hard. You see, Master Frank, that there is a sort of club held every week in the tavern down in the village, composed of very respectable men, sir-very respectable men, indeed-

and they asked me to be their chairman. I spoke to the master about it, and he gave me leave to accept their proposal. I accepted it as they made a point of it; and from my position I have of course a fine opportunity of making inquiries. It was at the club, sir, that I was, last night, so that I was not here to attend on you, which I hope that you will excuse."

Parks's air of mingled pride and condescension, as he made the announcement of the club, was very fine, and the effect was heightened by the confiding frankness with which he spoke. I asked him if he could find no clue to any of the legends which must have existed about such an old place. He answered with a very slight reluctance-

"Well, sir, there was one woman in the village who was awfully old and doting, and she evidently knew something about Scarp, for when she heard the name she mumbled out something about 'awful stories,' and 'times of horror,' and such like things, but I couldn't make her understand what it was I wanted to know, or keep her up to the point."

"And have you tried often, Parks? Why do you not try again?"

"She is dead, sir!"

I had felt inclined to laugh at Parks when he was telling me of the old woman. The way in which he gloated over the words "awful stories," and "times of horror," was beyond the power of description; it should have been heard and seen to have been properly appreciated. His voice became deep and mysterious, and he almost smacked his lips at the thought of so much pabulum for nightmares. But when he calmly told me that the woman was dead, a sense of blankness, mingled with awe, came upon me. Here, the last link between myself and the mysterious past was broken, never to be mended. All the rich stores of legend and tradition that had arisen from strange conjunctures of circumstances, and from the belief and imagination of long lines of villagers, loyal to their suzerain lord, were lost forever. I felt quite sad and disappointed; and no attempt was made either by Parks or myself to continue the conversation. Mr. Trevor came presently into my room, and having greeted each other warmly we went together to breakfast.

At breakfast Mrs. Trevor asked me what I thought of the girl's portrait in my bedroom. We had often had discussions as to characters in faces for we were both physiognomists, and she asked the question as if she were really curious to hear my opinion. I told her that I had only seen it for a short time, and so would rather not attempt to give a final opinion without a more careful study; but from what I had seen of it I had been favourably impressed.

"Well, Frank, after breakfast go and look at it again carefully, and then tell me exactly what you think about it."

After breakfast I did as directed and returned to the breakfast room, where Mrs. Trevor was still sitting.

"Well, Frank, what is your opinion-mind, correctly. I want it for a particular reason."

I told her what I thought of the girl's character; which, if there be any truth in physiognomy, must have been a very fine one.

"Then you like the face?"

I answered-

"It is a great pity that we have none such now-a-days. They seem to have died out with Sir Joshua and Greuze. If I could meet such a girl as I believe the prototype of that portrait to have been I would never be happy till I had made her my wife."

To my intense astonishment my hostess jumped up and clapped her hands. I asked her why she did it, and she laughed as she replied in a mocking tone imitating my own voice-

"But suppose for a moment that your kind intentions should be frustrated. 'One man may lead a horse to the pond's brink.' 'The best laid schemes o' mice an' men.' Eh?"

"Well," said I, "there may be some point in the observation. I suppose there must be since you have made it. But for my part I don't see it."

"Oh, I forgot to tell you, Frank, that that portrait might have been painted for Diana Fothering."

I felt a blush stealing over my face. She observed it and took my hand between hers as we sat down on the sofa, and said to me tenderly-

"Frank, my dear boy, I intend to jest with you no more on the subject. I have a conviction that you will like Diana, which has been strengthened by your admiration for her portrait, and from what I know of human nature I am sure that she will like you. Charley and I both wish to see you married, and we would not think of a wife for you who was not in every way eligible. I have never in my life met a girl like Di; and if you and she fancy each other it will be Charley's pleasure and my own to enable you to marry-as far as means are concerned. Now, don't speak. You must know perfectly well how much we both love you. We have always regarded you as our son, and we intend to treat you as our only child when it pleases God to separate us. There now, think the matter over, after you have seen Diana. But, mind me, unless you love each other well and truly, we would far rather not see you married. At all events, whatever may happen you have our best wishes and prayers for your happiness. God bless you, Frank, my dear, dear boy."

There were tears in her eyes as she spoke. When she had finished she leaned over, drew down my head and kissed my forehead very, very tenderly, and then got up softly and left the room. I felt inclined to cry myself. Her words to me were tender, and sensible, and womanly, but I cannot attempt to describe the infinite tenderness and gentleness of her voice and manner. I prayed for every blessing on her in my secret heart, and the swelling of my throat did not prevent my prayers finding voice. There may have been women in the world like Mrs. Trevor, but if there had been I had never met any of them, except herself.

As may be imagined, I was most anxious to see Miss Fothering, and or the remainder of the day she was constantly in my thoughts. That evening a letter came from the younger Miss Fothering apologising for her not being able to keep her promise with reference to her visit, on account of the unexpected arrival of her aunt, with whom she was obliged to go to Paris for some months. That night I slept in my new room, and had neither dream nor vision. I awoke in the morning half ashamed of having ever paid any attention to such a silly circumstance as a strange dream in my first night in an old house.

After breakfast next morning, as I was going along the corridor, I saw the door of my old bedroom open, and went in to have another look at the portrait. Whilst I was looking at it I began to wonder how it could be that it was so like Miss Fothering as Mrs. Trevor said it was. The more I thought of this the more it puzzled me, till suddenly the dream came back-the face in the picture, and the figure in the bed, the phantoms out in the night, and the ominous words-"The fairest and the best." As I thought of these things all the possibilities of the lost legends of the old house thronged so quickly into my mind that I began to feel a buzzing in my ears and my head began to swim, so that I was obliged to sit down.

“Could it be possible,” I asked myself, “that some old curse hangs over the race that once dwelt within these walls, and can she be of that race? Such things have been before now!”

The idea was a terrible one for me, for it made to me a reality that which I had come to look upon as merely the dream of a distempered imagination. If the thought had come to me in the darkness and stillness of the night it would have been awful. How happy I was that it had come by daylight, when the sun was shining brightly, and the air was cheerful with the trilling of the song birds, and the lively, strident cawing from the old rookery.

I stayed in the room for some little time longer, thinking over the scene, and, as is natural, when I had got over the remnants of my fear, my reason began to question the genuineness-vraisemblance of the dream. I began to look for the internal evidence of the untruth to facts; but, after thinking earnestly for some time the only fact that seemed to me of any importance was the confirmatory one of the younger Miss Fothering’s apology. In the dream the frightened girl had been alone, and the mere fact of two girls coming on a visit had seemed a sort of disproof of its truth. But, just as if things were conspiring to force on the truth of the dream, one of the sisters was not to come, and the other was she who resembled the portrait whose prototype I had seen sleeping in a vision. I could hardly imagine that I had only dreamt.

I determined to ask Mrs. Trevor if she could explain in any way Miss Fothering’s resemblance to the portrait, and so went at once to seek her.

I found her in the large drawingroom alone, and, after a few casual remarks, I broached the subject on which I had come to seek for information. She had not said anything further to me about marrying since our conversation on the previous day, but when I mentioned Miss Fothering's name I could see a glad look on her face which gave me great pleasure. She made none of those vulgar commonplace remarks which many women find it necessary to make when talking to a man about a girl for whom he is supposed to have an affection, but by her manner she put me entirely at my ease, as I sat fidgeting on the sofa, pulling purposelessly the woolly tufts of an antimacassar, painfully conscious that my cheeks were red, and my voice slightly forced and unnatural.

She merely said, "Of course, Frank, I am ready if you want to talk about Miss Fothering, or any other subject." She then put a marker in her book and laid it aside, and, folding her arms, looked at me with a grave, kind, expectant smile.

I asked her if she knew anything about the family history of Miss Fothering. She answered-

"Not further than I have already told you. Her father's is a fine old family, although reduced in circumstances."

"Has it ever been connected with any family in this county? With the former owners of Scarp, for instance?"

"Not that I know of. Why do you ask?"

"I want to find out how she comes to be so like that portrait."

"I never thought of that. It may be that there was some remote connection between her family and the Kirks who formerly owned Scarp. I will ask her when she comes. Or stay. Let us go and look if there is any old book or tree in the library that will throw a light upon the subject. We have rather a good library now, Frank, for we have all our own books, and all those which belonged to the Scarp library also. They are in great disorder, for we have been waiting till you came to arrange them, for we knew that you delighted in such work."

"There is nothing I should enjoy more than arranging all these splendid books. What a magnificent library. It is almost a pity to keep it in a private house."

We proceeded to look for some of those old books of family history which are occasionally to be found in old county houses. The library of Scarp, I saw, was very valuable, and as we prosecuted our search I came across many splendid and rare volumes which I determined to examine at my leisure, for I had come to Scarp for a long visit.

We searched first in the old folio shelves, and, after some few disappointments, found at length a large volume, magnificently printed and bound, which contained views and plans of the house, illuminations of the armorial bearings of the family of Kirk, and all the families with whom it was connected, and having the history of all these families carefully set forth. It was called on the title-page "The Book of Kirk," and was full of anecdotes and legends, and contained a large stock of family tradition. As this was exactly the book which we required, we searched no further, but, having carefully dusted the volume, bore it to Mrs. Trevor's boudoir where we could look over it quite undisturbed.

On looking in the index, we found the name of Fothering mentioned, and on turning to the page specified, found the arms of Kirk quartered on those of Fothering. From the text we learned that one of the daughters of Kirk had, in the year 1573, married the brother of Fothering against the united wills of her father and brother, and that after a bitter feud of some ten or twelve years, the latter, then master of Scarp, had met the brother of Fothering in a duel and had killed him. Upon receiving the news Fothering had sworn a great oath to revenge his brother, invoking the most fearful curses upon himself and his race if he should fail to cut off the hand that had slain his brother, and to nail it over the gate of Fothering. The feud then became so bitter that Kirk seems to have gone quite mad on the subject. When he heard of Fothering's oath he knew that he had but little chance of escape, since his enemy was his master at every weapon; so he determined upon a mode of revenge which, although costing him his own life, he fondly hoped would accomplish the eternal destruction of his brother-in-law through his violated oath. He sent Fothering a letter cursing him and his race, and praying for the consummation of his own curse invoked in case of failure. He concluded his missive by a prayer for the complete destruction, soul, mind, and body, of the first Fothering who should enter the gate of Scarp, who he hoped would be the fairest and best of the race. Having despatched this letter he cut off his right hand and threw it into the centre of a roaring fire, which he had made for the purpose. When it was entirely consumed he threw himself upon his sword, and so died.

A cold shiver went through me when I read the words "fairest and best." All my dream came back in a moment, and I seemed to hear in my ears again the echo of the fiendish laughter. I looked up at Mrs. Trevor, and saw that she had become very grave.Her face had a half-frightened look, as if some wild thought had struck her. I was more frightened than ever, for nothing increases our alarms so much as the sympathy of others with regard to them; however, I tried to conceal my fear. We sat silent for some minutes, and then Mrs. Trevor rose up saying:

"Come with me, and let us look at the portrait."

I remember her saying the and not that portrait, as if some concealed thought of it had been occupying her mind. The same dread had assailed her from a coincidence as had grown in me from a vision. Surely-surely I had good grounds for fear!

We went to the bedroom and stood before the picture, which seemed to gaze upon us with an expression which reflected our own fears. My companion said to me in slightly excited tones: “Frank, lift down the picture till we see its back.” I did so, and we found written in strange old writing on the grimy canvas a name and a date, which, after a great deal of trouble, we made out to be “Margaret Kirk, 1572.” It was the name of the lady in the book.

Mrs. Trevor turned round and faced me slowly, with a look of horror on her face.

“Frank, I don’t like this at all. There is something very strange here.”

I had it on my tongue to tell her my dream, but was ashamed to do so. Besides, I feared that it might frighten her too much, as she was already alarmed.

I continued to look at the picture as a relief from my embarrassment, and was struck with the excessive griminess of the back in comparison to the freshness of the front. I mentioned my difficulty to my companion, who thought for a moment, and then suddenly said-

“I see how it is. It has been turned with its face to the wall.”

I said no word but hung up the picture again; and we went back to the boudoir.

On the way I began to think that my fears were too wildly improbable to bear to be spoken about. It was so hard to believe in the horrors of darkness when the sunlight was falling brightly around me. The same idea seemed to have struck Mrs. Trevor, for she said, when we entered the room:

"Frank, it strikes me that we are both rather silly to let our imaginations carry us away so. The story is merely a tradition, and we know how report distorts even the most innocent facts. It is true that the Fothering family was formerly connected with the Kirks, and that the picture is that of the Miss Kirk who married against her father's will; it is likely that he quarrelled with her for so doing, and had her picture turned to the wall-a common trick of angry fathers at all times-but that is all. There can be nothing beyond that. Let us not think any more upon the subject, as it is one likely to lead us into absurdities. However, the picture is a really beautiful one-independent of its being such a likeness of Diana, and I will have it placed in the dining-room."

The change was effected that afternoon, but she did not again allude to the subject. She appeared, when talking to me, to be a little constrained in manner-a very unusual thing with her, and seemed to fear that I would renew the forbidden topic. I think that she did not wish to let her imagination lead her astray, and was distrustful of herself. However, the feeling of constraint wore off before night-but she did not renew the subject.

I slept well that night, without dreams of any kind; and next morning-the third to-morrow promised in the dream-when I came down to breakfast, I was told that I would see Miss Fothering before that evening.

I could not help blushing, and stammered out some commonplace remark, and then glancing up, feeling very sheepish, I saw my hostess looking at me with her kindly smile intensified. She said:

"Do you know, Frank, I felt quite frightened yesterday when we were looking at the picture; but I have been thinking the matter over since, and have come to the conclusion that my folly was perfectly unfounded. I am sure you agree with me. In fact, I look now upon our fright as a good joke, and will tell it to Diana when she arrives."

Once again I was about to tell my dream; but again was restrained by shame. I knew, of course, that Mrs. Trevor would not laugh at me or even think little of me for my fears, for she was too well-bred, and kind-hearted, and sympathetic to do anything of the kind, and, besides, the fear was one which we had shared in common.

But how could I confess my fright at what might appear to others to be a ridiculous dream, when she had conquered the fear that had been common to us both, and which had arisen from a really strange conjuncture of facts. She appeared to look on the matter so lightly that I could not do otherwise. And I did it honestly for the time.

CHAPTER III. THE THIRD TO-MORROW

In the afternoon I was out in the garden lying in the shadow of an immense beech, when I saw Mrs. Trevor approaching. I had been reading Shelley's "Stanzas Written in Dejection," and my heart was full of melancholy and a vague yearning after human sympathy. I had thought of Mrs. Trevor's love for me, but even that did not seem sufficient. I wanted the love of some one more nearly of my own level, some equal spirit, for I looked on her, of course, as I would have regarded my mother. Somehow my thoughts kept returning to Miss Fothering till I could almost see her before me in my memory of the portrait. I had begun to ask myself the question: "Are you in love?" when I heard the voice of my hostess as she drew near.

"Ha! Frank, I thought I would find you here. I want you to come to my boudoir."

"What for?" I inquired, as I rose from the grass and picked up my volume of Shelley.

"Di has come ever so long ago; and I want to introduce you and have a chat before dinner," said she, as we went towards the house.

"But won't you let me change my dress? I am not in correct costume for the afternoon."

I felt somewhat afraid of the unknown beauty when the introduction was imminent. Perhaps it was because I had come to believe too firmly in Mrs. Trevor's prediction.

"Nonsense, Frank, just as if any woman worth thinking about cares how a man is dressed."

We entered the boudoir and found a young lady seated by a window that overlooked the croquet-ground. She turned round as we came in, so Mrs. Trevor introduced us, and we were soon engaged in a lively conversation. I observed her, as may be supposed, with more than curiosity, and shortly found that she was worth looking at. She was very beautiful, and her beauty lay not only in her features but in her expression. At first her appearance did not seem to me so perfect as it afterwards did, on account of her wonderful resemblance to the portrait with whose beauty I was already acquainted. But it was not long before I came to experience the difference between the portrait and the reality. No matter how well it may be painted a picture falls far short of its prototype. There is something in a real face which cannot exist on canvas-some difference far greater than that contained in the contrast between the one expression, however beautiful of the picture, and the moving features and varying expression of the reality. There is something living and lovable in a real face that no art can represent.

When we had been talking for a while in the usual conventional style, Mrs. Trevor said, "Di, my love, I want to tell you of a discovery Frank and I have made. You must know that I always call Mr. Stanford, Frank-he is more like my own son than my friend, and that I am very fond of him."

She then put her arms round Miss Fothering's waist, as they sat on the sofa together, and kissed her, and then, turning towards me, said, "I don't approve of kissing girls in the presence of gentlemen, but you know that Frank is not supposed to be here. This is my sanctum, and who invades it must take the consequences. But I must tell you about the discovery."

She then proceeded to tell the legend, and about her finding the name of Margaret Kirk on the back of the picture.

Miss Fothering laughed gleefully as she heard the story, and then said, suddenly,

"Oh, I had forgotten to tell you, dear Mrs. Trevor, that I had such a fright the other day. I thought I was going to be prevented coming here. Aunt Deborah came to us last week for a few days, and when she heard that I was about to go on a visit to Scarp she seemed quite frightened, and went straight off to papa and asked him to forbid me to go. Papa asked her why she made the request, so she told a long family legend about any of us coming to Scarp-just the same story that you have been telling me. She said she was sure that some misfortune would happen if I came; so you see that the tradition exists in our branch of the family too. Oh, you can't fancy the scene there was between papa and Aunt Deborah. I must laugh whenever I think of it, although I did not laugh then, for I was greatly afraid that aunty would prevent me coming. Papa got very grave, and aunty thought she had carried her point when he said, in his dear, old, pompous manner,

"'Deborah, Diana has promised to pay Mrs. Trevor, of Scarp, a visit, and, of course, must keep her engagement. And if it were for no other reason than the one you have just alleged, I would strain a point of convenience to have her go to Scarp. I have always educated my children in such a manner that they ought not to be influenced by such vain superstitions; and with my will their practice shall never be at variance with the precepts which I have instilled into them.'

"Poor aunty was quite overcome. She seemed almost speechless for a time at the thought that her wishes had been neglected, for you know that Aunt Deborah's wishes are commands to all our family."

Mrs. Trevor said-

"I hope Mrs. Howard was not offended?"

"Oh, no. Papa talked to her seriously, and at length-with a great deal of difficulty I must say-succeeded in convincing her that her fears were groundless-at least, he forced her to confess that such things as she was afraid of could not be."

I thought of the couplet-

"A man convinced against his will Is of the same opinion still," but said nothing.

Miss Fothering finished her story by saying-

"Aunty ended by hoping that I might enjoy myself, which I am sure, my dear Mrs. Trevor, that I will do."

"I hope you will, my love."

I had been struck during the above conversation by the mention of Mrs. Howard. I was trying to think of where I had heard the name, Deborah Howard, when suddenly it all came back to me. Mrs. Howard had been Miss Fothering, and was an old friend of my mother's. It was thus that I had been accustomed to her name when I was a child. I remembered now that once she had brought a nice little girl, almost a baby, with her to visit. The child was her niece, and it was thus that I now accounted for my half-recollection of the name and the circumstance on the first night of my arrival at Scarp. The thought of my dream here recalled me to Mrs. Trevor's object in bringing Miss Fothering to her boudoir, so I said to the latter-

"Do you believe these legends?"

"Indeed I do not, Mr. Stanford; I do not believe in anything half so silly."

"Then you do not believe in ghosts or visions?"

"Most certainly not."

How could I tell my dream to a girl who had such profound disbelief? And yet I felt something whispering to me that I ought to tell it to her. It was, no doubt, foolish of me to have this fear of a dream, but I could not help it. I was just going to risk being laughed at, and unburden my mind, when Mrs. Trevor started up, after looking at her watch, saying-

"Dear me, I never thought it was so late. I must go and see if any others have come. It will not do for me to neglect my guests."

We all left the boudoir, and as we did so the gong sounded for dressing for dinner, and so we each sought our rooms.

When I came down to the drawingroom I found assembled a number of persons who had arrived during the course of the afternoon. I was introduced to them all, and chatted with them till dinner was announced. I was given Miss Fothering to take into dinner, and when it was over I found that we had improved our acquaintance very much. She was a delightful girl, and as I looked at her I thought with a glow of pleasure of Mrs. Trevor's prediction.

Occasionally I saw our hostess observing us, and as she saw us chatting pleasantly together as though we enjoyed it a more than happy look came into her face. It was one of her most fascinating points that in the midst of gaiety, while she never neglected anyone, she specially remembered her particular friends. No matter what position she might be placed in she would still remember that there were some persons who would treasure up her recognition at such moments.

After dinner, as I did not feel inclined to enter the drawingroom with the other gentlemen, I strolled out into the garden by myself, and thought over things in general, and Miss Fothering in particular. The subject was such a pleasant one that I quite lost myself in it, and strayed off farther than I had intended. Suddenly I remembered myself and looked around. I was far away from the house, and in the midst of a dark, gloomy walk between old yew trees. I could not see through them on either side on account of their thickness, and as the walk was curved I could see but a short distance either before or behind me. I looked up and saw a yellowish, luminous sky with heavy clouds passing sluggishly across it. The moon had not yet risen, and the general gloom reminded me forcibly of some of the weird pictures which William Blake so loved to paint. There was a sort of vague melancholy and ghostliness in the place that made me shiver, and I hurried on.

At length the walk opened and I came out on a large sloping lawn, dotted here and there with yew trees and tufts of pampass grass of immense height, whose stalks were crowned with large flowers. To the right lay the house, grim and gigantic in the gloom, and to the left the lake which stretched away so far that it was lost in the evening shadow. The lawn sloped from the terrace round the house down to the water's edge, and was only broken by the walk which continued to run on round the house in a wide sweep.

As I came near the house a light appeared in one of the windows which lay before me, and as I looked into the room I saw that it was the chamber of my dream.

Unconsciously I approached nearer and ascended the terrace from the top of which I could see across the deep trench which surrounded the house, and looked earnestly into the room. I shivered as I looked. My spirits had been damped by the gloom and desolation of the yew walk, and now the dream and all the subsequent revelations came before my mind with such vividness that the horror of the thing again seized me, but more forcibly than before. I looked at the sleeping arrangements, and groaned as I saw that the bed where the dying woman had seemed to lie was alone prepared, while the other bed, that in which I had slept, had its curtains drawn all round. This was but another link in the chain of doom. Whilst I stood looking, the servant who was in the room came and pulled down one of the blinds, but, as she was about to do the same with the other, Miss Fothering entered the room, and, seeing what she was about, evidently gave her contrary directions, for she let go the window string, and then went and pulled up again the blind which she had let down. Having done so she followed her mistress out of the room. So wrapped up was I in all that took place with reference to that chamber, that it never even struck me that I was guilty of any impropriety in watching what took place.

I stayed there for some little time longer purposeless and terrified. The horror grew so great to me as I thought of the events of the last few days, that I determined to tell Miss Fothering of my dream, in order that she might not be frightened in case she should see anything like it, or at least that she might be prepared for anything that might happen. As soon as I had come to this determination the inevitable question "when?" presented itself. The means of making the communication was a subject most disagreeable to contemplate, but as I had made up my mind to do it, I thought that there was no time like the present. Accordingly I was determined to seek the drawingroom, where I knew I should find Miss Fothering and Mrs. Trevor, for, of course, I had determined to take the latter into our confidence. As I was really afraid to go through the awful yew walk again, I completed the half circle of the house and entered the backdoor, from which I easily found my way to the drawingroom.

When I entered Mrs. Trevor, who was sitting near the door, said to me, "Good gracious, Frank, where have you been to make you look so pale? One would think you had seen a ghost!"

I answered that I had been strolling in the garden, but made no other remark, as I did not wish to say anything about my dream before the persons to whom she was talking, as they were strangers to me. I waited for some time for an opportunity of speaking to her alone, but her duties, as hostess, kept her so constantly occupied that I waited in vain. Accordingly I determined to tell Miss Fothering at all events, at once, and then to tell Mrs. Trevor as soon as an opportunity for doing so presented itself.

With a good deal of difficulty-for I did not wish to do anything marked-I succeeded in getting Miss Fothering away from the persons by whom she was surrounded, and took her to one of the embrasures, under the pretence of looking out at the night view. Here we were quite removed from observation, as the heavy window curtains completely covered the recess, and almost isolated us from the rest of the company as perfectly as if we were in a separate chamber. I proceeded at once to broach the subject for which I had sought the interview; for I feared lest contact with the lively company of the drawingroom would do away with my present fears, and so breakdown the only barrier that stood between her and Fate.

“Miss Fothering, do you ever dream?”

“Oh, yes, often. But I generally find that my dreams are most ridiculous.”

“How so?”

“Well, you see, that no matter whether they are good or bad they appear real and coherent whilst I am dreaming them; but when I wake I find them unreal and incoherent, when I remember them at all. They are, in fact, mere disconnected nonsense.”

“Are you fond of dreams?”

“Of course I am. I delight in them, for whether they are sense or gibberish when you wake, they are real whilst you are asleep.”

“Do you believe in dreams?”

“Indeed, Mr. Stanford, I do not.”

“Do you like hearing them told?”

“I do, very much, when they are worth telling. Have you been dreaming anything? If you have, do tell it to me.”

“I will be glad to do so. It is about a dream which I had that concerns you, that I came here to tell you.”

“About me. Oh, how nice. Do, go on.”

I told her all my dream, after calling her attention to our conversation in the boudoir as a means of introducing the subject. I did not attempt to heighten the effect in any way or to draw any inferences. I tried to suppress my own emotion and merely to let the facts speak for themselves. She listened with great eagerness, but, as far as I could see, without a particle of either fear or belief in the dream as a warning. When I had finished she laughed a quiet, soft laugh, and said-

“That is delicious. And was I really the girl that you saw afraid of ghosts? If papa heard of such a thing as that even in a dream what a lecture he would give me! I wish I could dream anything like that.”

“Take care,” said I, “you might find it too awful. It might indeed prove the fulfilling of the ban which we saw in the legend in the old book, and which you heard from your aunt.”

She laughed musically again, and shook her head at me wisely and warningly.

“Oh, pray do not talk nonsense and try to frighten me-for I warn you that you will not succeed.”

“I assure you on my honour, Miss Fothering, that I was never more in earnest in my whole life.”

“Do you not think that we had better go into the room?” said she, after a few moment’s pause.

“Stay just a moment, I entreat you,” said I. “What I say is true. I am really in earnest.”

“Oh, pray forgive me if what I said led you to believe that I doubted your word. It was merely your inference which I disagreed with. I thought you had been jesting to try and frighten me.”

“Miss Fothering, I would not presume to take such a liberty. But I am glad that you trust me. May I venture to ask you a favour? Will you promise me one thing?”

Her answer was characteristic-

“No. What is it?”

“That you will not be frightened at anything which may take place to-night?”

She laughed softly again.

"I do not intend to be. But is that all?"

"Yes, Miss Fothering, that is all; but I want to be assured that you will not be alarmed-that you will be prepared for anything which may happen. I have a horrid foreboding of evil-some evil that I dread to think of-and it will be a great comfort to me if you will do one thing."

"Oh, nonsense. Oh, well, if you really wish it I will tell you if I will do it when I hear what it is."

Her levity was all gone when she saw how terribly in earnest I was. She looked at me boldly and fearlessly, but with a tender, half-pitying glance as if conscious of the possession of strength superior to mine. Her fearlessness was in her free, independent attitude, but her pity was in her eyes. I went on-

"Miss Fothering, the worst part of my dream was seeing the look of agony on the face of the girl when she looked round and found herself alone. Will you take some token and keep it with you till morning to remind you, in case anything should happen, that you are not alone-that there is one thinking of you, and one human intelligence awake for you, though all the rest of the world should be asleep or dead?"

In my excitement I spoke with fervour, for the possibility of her enduring the horror which had assailed me seemed to be growing more and more each instant. At times since that awful night I had disbelieved the existence of the warning, but when I thought of it by night I could not but believe, for the very air in the darkness seemed to be peopled by phantoms to my fevered imagination. My belief had been perfected to-night by the horror of the yew walk, and all the sombre, ghostly thoughts that had arisen amid its gloom.

There was a short pause. Miss Fothering leaned on the edge of the window, looking out at the dark, moonless sky. At length she turned and said to me, with some hesitation, “But really, Mr. Stanford, I do not like doing anything from fear of supernatural things, or from a belief in them. What you want me to do is so simple a thing in itself that I would not hesitate a moment to do it, but that papa has always taught me to believe that such occurrences as you seem to dread are quite impossible, and I know that he would be very much displeased if any act of mine showed a belief in them.”

“Miss Fothering, I honestly think that there is not a man living who would wish less than I would to see you or anyone else disobeying a father either in word or spirit, and more particularly when that father is a clergyman; but I entreat you to gratify me on this one point. It cannot do you any harm; and I assure you that if you do not I will be inexpressibly miserable. I have endured the greatest tortures of suspense for the last three days, and to-night I feel a nervous horror of which words can give you no conception. I know that I have not the smallest right to make the request, and no reason for doing it except that I was fortunate, or unfortunate, enough to get the warning. I apologise most sincerely for the great liberty which I have taken, but believe me that I act with the best intentions.”

My excitement was so great that my knees were trembling, and the large drops of perspiration rolling down my face.

There was a long pause, and I had almost made up my mind for a refusal of my request when my companion spoke again.

“Mr. Stanford, on that plea alone I will grant your request. I can see that for some reason which I cannot quite comprehend you are deeply moved; and that I may be the means of saving pain to any one, I will do what you ask. Just please to state what you wish me to do.”

I thought from her manner that she was offended with me; however I explained my purpose:

"I want you to keep about you, when you go to bed, some token which will remind you in an instant of what has passed between us, so that you may not feel lonely or frightened-no matter what may happen."

"I will do it. What shall I take?"

She had her handkerchief in her hand as she spoke. So I put my hand upon it and blessed it in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. I did this to fix its existence in her memory by awing her slightly about it. "This," said I, "shall be a token that you are not alone." My object in blessing the handkerchief was fully achieved, for she did seem somewhat awed, but still she thanked me with a sweet smile. "I feel that you act from your heart," said she, "and my heart thanks you." She gave me her hand as she spoke, in an honest, straightforward manner, with more the independence of a man than the timorousness of a woman. As I grasped it I felt the blood rushing to my face, but before I let it go an impulse seized me and I bent down and touched it with my lips. She drew it quickly away, and said more coldly than she had yet spoken: "I did not mean you to do that."

"Believe me I did not mean to take a liberty-it was merely the natural expression of my gratitude. I feel as if you had done me some great personal service. You do not know how much lighter my heart is now than it was an hour ago, or you would forgive me for having so offended."

As I made my apologetic excuse, I looked at her wistfully. She returned my glance fearlessly, but with a bright, forgiving smile. She then shook her head slightly, as if to banish the subject.

There was a short pause, and then she said:

“I am glad to be of any service to you; but if there be any possibility of what you fear happening it is I who will be benefited. But mind, I will depend upon you not to say a word of this to anybody. I am afraid that we are both very foolish.”

“No, no, Miss Fothering. I may be foolish, but you are acting nobly in doing what seems to you to be foolish in order that you may save me from pain. But may I not even tell Mrs. Trevor?”

“No, not even her. I should be ashamed of myself if I thought that anyone except ourselves knew about it.”

“You may depend upon me. I will keep it secret if you wish.”

“Do so, until morning at all events. Mind, if I laugh at you then I will expect you to join in my laugh.”

“I will,” said I. “I will be only too glad to be able to laugh at it.” And we joined the rest of the company.

When I retired to my bedroom that night I was too much excited to sleep-even had my promise not forbidden me to do so. I paced up and down the room for some time, thinking and doubting. I could not believe completely in what I expected to happen, and yet my heart was filled with a vague dread. I thought over the events of the evening-particularly my stroll after dinner through that awful yew walk and my looking into the bedroom where I had dreamed. From these my thoughts wandered to the deep embrasure of the window where I had given Miss Fothering the token. I could hardly realise that whole interview as a fact. I knew that it had taken place, but that was all. It was so strange to recall a scene that, now that it was enacted, seemed half comedy and half tragedy, and to remember that it was played in this practical nineteenth century, in secret, within earshot of a room full of people, and only hidden from them by a curtain, I felt myself blushing, half from excitement, half from shame, when I thought of it. But then my thoughts turned to the way in which Miss Fothering had acceded to my request, strange as it was; and as I thought of her my blundering shame changed to a deeper glow of hope. I remembered Mrs. Trevor's prediction-"from what I know of human nature I think that she will like you"-and as I did so I felt how dear to me Miss Fothering was already becoming. But my joy was turned to anger on thinking what she might be called on to endure; and the thought of her suffering pain or fright caused me greater distress than any suffered myself. Again my thoughts flew back to the time of my own fright and my dream, with all the subsequent revelations concerning it, rushed across my mind. I felt again the feeling of extreme terror-as if something was about to happen-as if the tragedy was approaching its climax. Naturally I thought of the time of night and so I looked at my watch. It was within a few minutes of one o'clock. I remembered that the clock had struck twelve after Mr. Trevor had come home on the night of my dream. There was a large clock at Scarp which tolled the hours so loudly that for a long way round the estate the country people all regulated their affairs by it. The next few minutes passed so slowly that each moment seemed an age.

I was standing, with my watch in my hand, counting the moments when suddenly a light came into the room that made the candle on the table appear quite dim, and my shadow was reflected on the wall by some brilliant light which streamed in through the window. My heart for an instant ceased to beat, and then the blood rushed so violently to my temples that my eyes grew dim and my brain began to reel. However, I shortly became more composed, and then went to the window expecting to see my dream again repeated.

The light was there as formerly, but there were no figures of children, or witches, or fiends. The moon had just risen, and I could see its reflection upon the far end of the lake. I turned my head in trembling expectation to the ground below where I had seen the children and the hags, but saw merely the dark yew trees and tall crested pampass tufts gently moving in the night wind. The light caught the edges of the flowers of the grass, and made them most conspicuous.

As I looked a sudden thought flashed like a flame of fire through my brain. I saw in one second of time all the folly of my wild fancies. The moonlight and its reflection on the water shining into the room was the light of my dream, or phantasm as I now understood it to be. Those three tufts of pampass grass clumped together were in turn the fair young children and the withered leaves and the dark foliage of the yew beside them gave substance to the semblance of the fiend. For the rest, the empty bed and the face of the picture, my half recollection of the name of Fothering, and the long-forgotten legend of the curse. Oh, fool! fool that I had been! How I had been the victim of circumstances, and of my own wild imagination! Then came the bitter reflection of the agony of mind which Miss Fothering might be compelled to suffer. Might not the recital of my dream, and my strange request regarding the token, combined with the natural causes of night and scene, produce the very effect which I so dreaded? It was only at that bitter, bitter moment that I realised how foolish I had been. But what was my anguish of mind to hers? For an instant I conceived the idea of rousing Mrs. Trevor and telling her all the facts of the case so that she might go to Miss Fothering and tell her not to be alarmed. But I had no time to act upon my thought. As I was hastening to the door the clock struck one and a moment later I heard from the room below me a sharp scream-a cry of surprise rather than fear. Miss Fothering had no doubt been awakened by the striking of the clock, and had seen outside the window the very figures which I had described to her.

I rushed madly down the stairs and arrived at the door of her bedroom, which was directly under the one which I now occupied. As I was about to rush in I was instinctively restrained from so doing by the thoughts of propriety; and so for a few moments I stood silent, trembling, with my hand upon the door-handle.

Within I heard a voice-her voice-exclaiming, in tones of stupefied surprise-

“Has it come then? Am I alone?” She then continued joyously, “No, I am not alone. His token! Oh, thank God for that. Thank God for that.”

Through my heart at her words came a rush of wild delight. I felt my bosom swell and the tears of gladness spring to my eyes. In that moment I knew that I had strength and courage to face the world, alone, for her sake. But before my hopes had well time to manifest themselves they were destroyed, for again the voice came wailing from the room of blank despair that made me cold from head to foot.

“Ah-h-h! still there? Oh! God, preserve my reason. Oh! for some human thing near me.” Then her voice changed slightly to a tone of entreaty: “You will not leave me alone? Your token. Remember your token. Help me. Help me now.” Then her voice became more wild, and rose to an inarticulate, wailing scream of horror.

As I heard that agonised cry, I realised the idea that it was madness to delay-that I had hesitated too long already-I must cast aside the shackles of conventionality if I wished to repair my fatal error. Nothing could save her from some serious injury-perhaps madness-perhaps death; save a shock which would break the spell which was over her from fear and her excited imagination. I flung open the door and rushed in, shouting loudly:

“Courage, courage. You are not alone. I am here. Remember the token.”

She grasped the handkerchief instinctively, but she hardly comprehended my words, and did not seem to heed my presence. She was sitting up in bed, her face being distorted with terror, and was gazing out upon the scene. I heard from without the hooting of an owl as it flew across the border of the lake. She heard it also, and screamed-

“The laugh, too! Oh, there is no hope. Even he will not dare to go amongst them.”

Then she gave vent to a scream, so wild, so appalling that, as I heard it, I trembled, and the hair on the back of my head bristled up. Throughout the house I could hear screams of affright, and the ringing of bells, and the banging of doors, and the rush of hurried feet; but the poor sufferer comprehended not these sounds; she still continued gazing out of the window awaiting the consummation of the dream.

I saw that the time for action and self-sacrifice was come. There was but one way now to repair my fatal error. To burst through the window and try by the shock to wake her from her trance of fear.

I said no word but rushed across the room and hurled myself, back foremost, against the massive plate glass. As I turned I saw Mrs. Trevor rushing into the room, her face wild with excitement. She was calling out-

“Diana, Diana, what is it?”

The glass crashed and shivered into a thousand pieces, and I could feel its sharp edges cutting me like so many knives. But I heeded not the pain, for above the rushing of feet and crashing of glass and the shouting both within and without the room I heard her voice ring forth in a joyous, fervent cry, “Saved. He has dared,” as she sank down in the arms of Mrs. Trevor, who had thrown herself upon the bed.

Then I felt a mighty shock, and all the universe seemed filled with sparks of fire that whirled around me with lightning speed, till I seemed to be in the centre of a world of flame, and then came in my ears the rushing of a mighty wind, swelling ever louder, and then came a blackness over all things and a deadness of sound as if all the earth had passed away, and I remembered no more.

CHAPTER IV. AFTERWARDS

When I next became conscious I was lying in bed in a dark room. I wondered what this was for, and tried to look around me, but could hardly stir my head. I attempted to speak, but my voice was without power-it was like a whisper from another world. The effort to speak made me feel faint, and again I felt a darkness gathering round me.

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I became gradually conscious of something cool on my forehead. I wondered what it was. All sorts of things I conjectured, but could not fix my mind on any of them. I lay thus for some time, and at length opened my eyes and saw my mother bending over me-it was her hand which was so deliciously cool on my brow. I felt amazed somehow. I expected to see her; and yet I was surprised, for I had not seen her for a long time-a long, long time. I knew that she was dead-could I be dead, too? I looked at her again more carefully, and as I looked, the old features died away, but the expression remained the same. And then the dear, well-known face of Mrs. Trevor grew slowly before me. She smiled as she saw the look of recognition in my eyes, and, bending down, kissed me very tenderly. As she drew back her head something warm fell on my face. I wondered what this could be, and after thinking for a long time, to do which I closed my eyes, I came to the conclusion that it was a tear. After some more thinking I opened my eyes to see why she was crying; but she was gone, and I could see that although the window-blinds were pulled up the room was almost dark. I felt much more awake and much stronger than I had been before, and tried to call Mrs. Trevor. A woman got up from a chair behind the bed-curtains and went to the door, said something, and came back and settled my pillows.

"Where is Mrs. Trevor?" I asked, feebly. "She was here just now."

The woman smiled at me cheerfully, and answered:

"She will be here in a moment. Dear heart! but she will be glad to see you so strong and sensible."

After a few minutes she came into the room, and, bending over me, asked me how I felt. I said that I was all right-and then a thought struck me, so I asked,

"What was the matter with me?"

I was told that I had been ill, very ill, but that I was now much better. Something, I know not what, suddenly recalled to my memory all the scene of the bedroom, and the fright which my folly had caused, and I grew quite dizzy with the rush of blood to my head. But Mrs. Trevor's arm supported me, and after a time the faintness passed away, and my memory was completely restored. I started violently from the arm that held me up, and called out:

"Is she all right? I heard her say, 'saved.' Is she all right?"

"Hush, dear boy, hush-she is all right. Do not excite yourself."

"Are you deceiving me?" I inquired. "Tell me all-I can bear it. Is she well or no?"

"She has been very ill, but she is now getting strong and well, thank God."

I began to cry, half from weakness and half from joy, and Mrs. Trevor seeing this, and knowing with the sweet instinct of womanhood that I would rather be alone, quickly left the room, after making a sign to the nurse, who sank again to her old place behind the bed-curtain.

I thought for long; and all the time from my first coming to Scarp to the moment of unconsciousness after I sprung through the window came back to me as in a dream. Gradually the room became darker and darker, and my thoughts began to give semblance to the objects around me, till at length the visible world passed away from my wearied eyes, and in my dreams I continued to think of all that had been. I have a hazy recollection of taking some food and then relapsing into sleep; but remember no more distinctly until I woke fully in the morning and found Mrs. Trevor again in the room. She came over to my bedside, and sitting down said gaily-

"Ah, Frank, you look bright and strong this morning, dear boy. You will soon be well now I trust."

Her cool deft fingers settled my pillow and brushed back the hair from my forehead. I took her hand and kissed it, and the doing so made me very happy. By-and-by I asked her how was Miss Fothering.

“Better, much better this morning. She has been asking after you ever since she has been able; and to-day when I told her how much better you were she brightened up at once.”

I felt a flush painfully strong rushing over my face as she spoke, but she went on-

“She has asked me to let her see you as soon as both of you are able. She wants to thank you for your conduct on that awful night. But there, I won’t tell any more tales-let her tell you what she likes herself.”

“To thank me-me-for what? For having brought her to the verge of madness or perhaps death through my silly fears and imagination. Oh, Mrs. Trevor, I know that you never mock anyone-but to me that sounds like mockery.”

She leaned over me as she sat on my bedside and said, oh, so sweetly, yet so firmly that a sense of the truth of her words came at once upon me-

“If I had a son I would wish him to think as you have thought, and to act as you have acted. I would pray for it night and day and if he suffered as you have done, I would lean over him as I lean over you now and feel glad, as I feel now, that he had thought and acted as a true-hearted man should think and act. I would rejoice that God had given me such a son; and if he should die-as I feared at first that you should-I would be a prouder and happier woman kneeling by his dead body than I would in clasping a different son, living, in my arms.

Oh, how my weak fluttering heart did beat as she spoke. With pity for her blighted maternal instincts, with gladness that a true-hearted woman had approved of my conduct toward a woman whom I loved, and with joy for the deep love for myself. There was no mistaking the honesty of her words-her face was perfectly radiant as she spoke them.

I put up my arms-it took all my strength to do it-round her neck, and whispered softly in her ear one word, “mother.”

She did not expect it, for it seemed to startle her; but her arms tightened around me convulsively. I could feel a perfect rain of tears falling on my upturned face as I looked into her eyes, full of love and long-sought joy. As I looked I felt stronger and better; my sympathy for her joy did much to restore my strength.

For some little time she was silent, and then she spoke as if to herself-”God has given me a son at last. I thank thee, O Father; forgive me if I have at any time repined. The son I prayed for might have been different from what I would wish. Thou doest best in all things.”

For some time after this she stayed quite silent, still supporting me in her arms. I felt inexpressibly happy. There was an atmosphere of love around me, for which I had longed all my life. The love of a mother, for which I had pined since my orphan childhood, I had got at last, and the love of a woman to become far dearer to me than a mother I felt was close at hand.

At length I began to feel tired, and Mrs. Trevor laid me back on my pillow. It pleased me inexpressibly to observe her kind motherly manner with me now. The ice between us had at last been broken, we had declared our mutual love, and the white-haired woman was as happy in the declaration as the young man.

The next day I felt a shade stronger, and a similar improvement was manifested on the next. Mrs. Trevor always attended me herself, and her good reports of Miss Fothering’s progress helped to cheer me not a little. And so the days wore on, and many passed away before I was allowed to rise from bed.

One day Mrs. Trevor came into the room in a state of suppressed delight. By this time I had been allowed to sit up a little while each day, and was beginning to get strong, or rather less weak, for I was still very helpless.

"Frank, the doctor says that you may be moved into another room to-morrow for a change, and that you may see Di."

As may be supposed I was anxious to see Miss Fothering. Whilst I had been able to think during my illness, I had thought about her all day long, and sometimes all night long. I had been in love with her even before that fatal night. My heart told me that secret whilst I was waiting to hear the clock strike, and saw all my folly about the dream; but now I not only loved the woman but I almost worshipped my own bright ideal which was merged in her. The constant series of kind messages that passed between us tended not a little to increase my attachment, and now I eagerly looked forward to a meeting with her face to face.

I awoke earlier than usual next morning, and grew rather feverish as the time for our interview approached. However, I soon cooled down upon a vague threat being held out, that if I did not become more composed I must defer my visit.

The expected time at length arrived, and I was wheeled in my chair into Mrs. Trevor's boudoir. As I entered the door I looked eagerly round and saw, seated in another chair near one of the windows, a girl, who, turning her head round languidly, disclosed the features of Miss Fothering. She was very pale and ethereal looking, and seemed extremely delicate; but in my opinion this only heightened her natural beauty. As she caught sight of me a beautiful blush rushed over her poor, pale face, and even tinged her alabaster forehead. This passed quickly, and she became calm again, and paler than before. My chair was wheeled over to her, and Mrs. Trevor said, as she bent over and kissed her, after soothing the pillow in her chair-

"Di, my love, I have brought Frank to see you. You may talk together for a little while; but, mind, the doctor's orders are very strict, and if either of you excite yourselves about anything I must forbid you to meet again until you are both much stronger."

She said the last words as she was leaving the room.

I felt red and pale, hot and cold by turns. I looked at Miss Fothering and faltered. However, in a moment or two I summoned up courage to address her.

"Miss Fothering, I hope you forgive me for the pain and danger I caused you by that foolish fear of mine. I assure you that nothing I ever did"-

Here she interrupted me.

"Mr. Stanford, I beg you will not talk like that. I must thank you for the care you thought me worthy of. I will not say how proud I feel of it, and for the generous courage and wisdom you displayed in rescuing me from the terror of that awful scene."

She grew pale, even paler than she had been before, as she spoke the last words, and trembled all over. I feared for her, and said as cheerfully as I could:

"Don't be alarmed. Do calm yourself. That is all over now and past. Don't let its horror disturb you ever again."

My speaking, although it calmed her somewhat, was not sufficient to banish her fear, and, seeing that she was really excited, I called to Mrs. Trevor, who came in from the next room and talked to us for a little while. She gradually did away with Miss Fothering's fear by her pleasant cheery conversation. She, poor girl, had received a sad shock, and the thought that I had been the cause of it gave me great anguish. After a little quiet chat, however, I grew more cheerful, but presently feeling faintish, was wheeled back to my own room and put to bed.

For many long days I continued very weak, and hardly made any advance. I saw Miss Fothering every day, and each day I loved her more and more. She got stronger as the days advanced, and after a few weeks was comparatively in good health, but still I continued weak. Her illness had been merely the result of the fright she had sustained on that unhappy night; but mine was the nervous prostration consequent on the long period of anxiety between the dream and its seeming fulfilment, united with the physical weakness resulting from my wounds caused by jumping through the window. During all this time of weakness Mrs. Trevor was, indeed, a mother to me. She watched me day and night, and as far as a woman could, made my life a dream of happiness. But the crowning glory of that time was the thought that sometimes forced itself upon me-that Diana cared for me. She continued to remain at Scarp by Mrs. Trevor's request, as her father had gone to the Continent for the winter, and with my adopted mother she shared the attendance on me. Day after day her care for my every want grew greater, till I came to fancy her like a guardian angel keeping watch over me. With the peculiar delicate sense that accompanies extreme physical prostration I could see that the growth of her pity kept pace with the growth of her strength. My love kept pace with both. I often wondered if it could be sympathy and not pity that so forestalled my wants and wishes; or if it could be love that answered in her heart when mine beat for her. She only showed pity and tenderness in her acts and words, but still I hoped and longed for something more.

Those days of my long-continued weakness were to me sweet, sweet days. I used to watch her for hours as she sat opposite to me reading or working, and my eyes would fill with tears as I thought how hard it would be to die and leave her behind me. So strong was the flame of my love that I believed, in spite of my religious teaching, that, should I die, I would leave the better part of my being behind me. I used to think in a vague imaginative way, that was no less powerful because it was undefined, of what speeches I would make to her-if I were well. How I would talk to her in nobler language than that in which I would now allow my thoughts to mould themselves. How, as I talked, my passion, and honesty, and purity would make me so eloquent that she would love to hear me speak. How I would wander with her through the sunny-gladed woods that stretched away before me through the open window, and sit by her feet on a mossy bank beside some purling brook that rippled gaily over the stones, gazing into the depths of her eyes, where my future life was pictured in one long sheen of light. How I would whisper in her ear sweet words that would make me tremble to speak them, and her tremble to hear. How she would bend to me and show me her love by letting me tell her mine without reproof. And then would come, like the shadow of a sudden rain-cloud over an April landscape, the bitter, bitter thought that all this longing was but a dream, and that when the time had come when such things might have been, I would, most likely, be sleeping under the green turf. And she might, perhaps, be weeping in the silence of her chamber sad, sad tears for her blighted love and for me. Then my thoughts would become less selfish, and I would try to imagine the bitter blow of my death-if she loved me-for I knew that a woman loves not by the value of what she loves, but by the strength of her affection and admiration for her own ideal, which she thinks she sees bodied forth in some man. But these thoughts had always the proviso that the dreams of happiness were prophetic. Alas! I had altogether lost faith in dreams. Still, I could not but feel that even if I had never frightened Miss Fothering by telling my vision, she might, nevertheless, have been terrified by the effect of the moonlight upon the flowers of the pampass tufts, and that, under Providence, I was the instrument of saving her from a shock even greater than that which she did experience, for help might not have come to her so soon. This thought always gave me hope. Whenever I thought of her sorrow for my death, I would find my eyes filled with a sudden rush of tears which would shut out from my waking vision the object of my thoughts and fears. Then she would come over to me and place her cool hand on my forehead, and whisper sweet words of comfort and hope in my ears. As I would feel her warm breath upon my cheek and wafting my hair from my brow, I would lose all sense of pain and sorrow and care, and live only in the brightness of the present. At such times I would cry silently from very happiness, for I was sadly weak, and even trifling things touched me deeply. Many a stray memory of some tender word heard or some gentle deed done, or of some sorrow or distress, would set me thinking for hours and stir all the tender feelings of my nature.

Slowly-very slowly-I began to get stronger, but for many days more I was almost completely helpless. With returning strength came the strengthening of my passion-for passion my love for Diana had become. She had been so woven into my thoughts that my love for her was a part of my being, and I felt that away from her my future life would be but a bare existence and no more. But strange to say, with increasing strength and passion came increasing diffidence. I felt in her presence so bashful and timorous that I hardly dared to look at her, and could not speak save to answer an occasional question. I had ceased to dream entirely, for such day-dreams as I used to have seemed now wild and almost sacrilegious to my surexcited imagination. But when she was not looking at me I would be happy in merely seeing her or hearing her speak. I could tell the moment she left the house or entered it, and her footfall was the music sweetest to my ears-except her voice. Sometimes she would catch sight of my bashful looks at her, and then, at my conscious blushing, a bright smile would flit over her face. It was sweet and womanly, but sometimes I would think that it was no more than her pity finding expression. She was always in my thoughts and these doubts and fears constantly assailed me, so that I could feel that the brooding over the subject-a matter which I was powerless to prevent-was doing me an injury; perhaps seriously retarding my recovery.

One day I felt very sad. There had a bitter sense of loneliness come over me which was unusual. It was a good sign of returning health, for it was like the waking from a dream to a world of fact, with all its troubles and cares. There was a sense of coldness and loneliness in the world, and I felt that I had lost something without gaining anything in return-I had, in fact, lost somewhat of my sense of dependence, which is a consequence of prostration, but had not yet regained my strength. I sat opposite a window itself in shade, but looking over a garden that in the summer had been bright with flowers, and sweet with their odours, but which, now, was lit up only in patches by the quiet mellow gleams of the autumn sun, and brightened by a few stray flowers that had survived the first frosts.

As I sat I could not help thinking of what my future would be. I felt that I was getting strong, and the possibilities of my life seemed very real to me. How I longed for courage to ask Diana to be my wife! Any certainty would be better than the suspense I now constantly endured. I had but little hope that she would accept me, for she seemed to care less for me now than in the early days of my illness. As I grew stronger she seemed to hold somewhat aloof from me; and as my fears and doubts grew more and more, I could hardly bear to think of my joy should she accept me, or of my despair should she refuse. Either emotion seemed too great to be borne.

To-day when she entered the room my fears were vastly increased. She seemed much stronger than usual, for a glow, as of health, ruddied her cheeks, and she seemed so lovely that I could not conceive that such a woman would ever condescend to be my wife. There was an unusual constraint in her manner as she came and spoke to me, and flitted round me, doing in her own graceful way all the thousand little offices that only a woman's hand can do for an invalid. She turned to me two or three times, as if she was about to speak; but turned away again, each time silent, and with a blush. I could see that her heart was beating violently. At length she spoke.

"Frank."

Oh! what a wild throb went through me as I heard my name from her lips for the first time. The blood rushed to my head, so that for a moment I was quite faint. Her cool hand on my forehead revived me.

"Frank, will you let me speak to you for a few minutes as honestly as I would wish to speak, and as freely?"

"Go on."

"You will promise me not to think me unwomanly or forward, for indeed I act from the best motives-promise me?"

This was said slowly with much hesitation, and a convulsive heaving of the chest.

"I promise."

"We can see that you are not getting as strong as you ought, and the doctor says that there is some idea too much in your mind-that you brood over it, and that it is retarding your recovery. Mrs. Trevor and I have been talking about it. We have been comparing notes, and I think we have found out what your idea is. Now, Frank, you must not pale and red like that, or I will have to leave off."

"I will be calm-indeed, I will. Go on."

"We both thought that it might do you good to talk to you freely, and we want to know if our idea is correct. Mrs. Trevor thought it better that I should speak to you than she should."

"What is the idea?"

Hitherto, although she had manifested considerable emotion, her voice had been full and clear, but she answered this last question very faintly, and with much hesitation.

"You are attached to me, and you are afraid I-I don't love you."

Here her voice was checked by a rush of tears, and she turned her head away.

"Diana," said I, "dear Diana," and I held out my arms with what strength I had.

The colour rushed over her face and neck, and then she turned, and with a convulsive sigh laid her head upon my shoulder. One weak arm fell round her waist, and my other hand rested on her head. I said nothing. I could not speak, but I felt the beating of her heart against mine, and thought that if I died then I must be happy for ever, if there be memory in the other world.

For a long, long, blissful time she kept her place, and gradually our hearts ceased to beat so violently, and we became calm.

Such was the confession of our love. No plighted faith, no passionate vows, but the silence and the thrill of sympathy through our hearts were sweeter than words could be.

Diana raised her head and looked fearlessly but appealingly into my eyes as she asked me-

“Oh, Frank, did I do right to speak? Could it have been better if I had waited?”

She saw my wishes in my eyes, and bent down her head to me. I kissed her on the forehead and fervently prayed, “Thank God that all was as it has been. May He bless my own darling wife for ever and ever.”

“Amen,” said a sweet, tender voice.

We both looked up without shame, for we knew the tones of my second mother. Her face, streaming with tears of joy, was lit up by a sudden ray of sunlight through the casement.

THE CRYSTAL CUP

Published in 1872, this short story is in fact Stoker's first ever printed piece of fiction.

CHAPTER I. THE DREAM-BIRTH

The blue waters touch the walls of the palace; I can hear their soft, lapping wash against the marble whenever I listen. Far out at sea I can see the waves glancing in the sunlight, ever-smiling, ever-glancing, ever-sunny. Happy waves!-happy in your gladness, thrice happy that ye are free!

I rise from my work and spring up the wall till I reach the embrasure. I grasp the corner of the stonework and draw myself up till I crouch in the wide window. Sea, sea, out away as far as my vision extends. There I gaze till my eyes grow dim; and in the dimness of my eyes my spirit finds its sight. My soul flies on the wings of memory away beyond the blue, smiling sea-away beyond the glancing waves and the gleaming sails, to the land I call my home. As the minutes roll by, my actual eyesight seems to be restored, and I look round me in my old birth-house. The rude simplicity of the dwelling comes back to me as something new. There I see my old books and manuscripts and pictures, and there, away on their old shelves, high up above the door, I see my first rude efforts in art.

How poor they seem to me now! And yet, were I free, I would not give the smallest of them for all I now possess. Possess? How I dream.

The dream calls me back to waking life. I spring down from my window-seat and work away frantically, for every line I draw on paper, every new form that springs on the plaster, brings me nearer freedom. I will make a vase whose beauty will put to shame the glorious works of Greece in her golden prime! Surely a love like mine and a hope like mine must in time make some form of beauty spring to life! When He beholds it he will exclaim with rapture, and will order my instant freedom. I can forget my hate, and the deep debt of revenge which I owe him when I think of liberty-even from his hands. Ah! then on the wings of the morning shall I fly beyond the sea to my home-her home-and clasp her to my arms, never more to be separated!

But, oh Spirit of Day! if she should be-No, no, I cannot think of it, or I shall go mad. Oh Time, Time! maker and destroyer of men's fortunes, why hasten so fast for others whilst thou laggest so slowly for me? Even now my home may have become desolate, and she-my bride of an hour-may sleep calmly in the cold earth. Oh this suspense will drive me mad! Work, work! Freedom is before me; Aurora is the reward of my labour!

So I rush to my work; but to my brain and hand, heated alike, no fire or no strength descends. Half mad with despair, I beat myself against the walls of my prison, and then climb into the embrasure, and once more gaze upon the ocean, but find there no hope. And so I stay till night, casting its pall of blackness over nature, puts the possibility of effort away from me for yet another day.

So my days go on, and grow to weeks and months. So will they grow to years, should life so long remain an unwelcome guest within me; for what is man without hope? and is not hope nigh dead within this weary breast?

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Last night, in my dreams, there came, like an inspiration from the Day-Spirit, a design for my vase.

All day my yearning for freedom-for Aurora, or news of her-had increased tenfold, and my heart and brain were on fire. Madly I beat myself, like a caged bird, against my prison-bars. Madly I leaped to my window-seat, and gazed with bursting eyeballs out on the free, open sea. And there I sat till my passion had worn itself out; and then I slept, and dreamed of thee, Aurora-of thee and freedom. In my ears I heard again the old song we used to sing together, when as children we wandered on the beach; when, as lovers, we saw the sun sink in the ocean, and I would see its glory doubled as it shone in thine eyes, and was mellowed against thy cheek; and when, as my bride, you clung to me as my arms went round you on that desert tongue of land whence rushed that band of sea-robbers that tore me away. Oh! how my heart curses those men-not men, but fiends! But one solitary gleam of joy remains from that dread encounter,-that my struggle stayed those hell-hounds, and that, ere I was stricken down, this right hand sent one of them to his home. My spirit rises as I think of that blow that saved thee from a life worse than death. With the thought I feel my cheeks burning, and my forehead swelling with mighty veins. My eyes burn, and I rush wildly round my prison-house, ‘0h! for one of my enemies, that I might dash out his brains against these marble walls, and trample his heart out as he lay before me!’ These walls would spare him not. They are pitiless, alas! I know too well. ‘0h, cruel mockery of kindness, to make a palace a prison, and to taunt a captive’s aching heart with forms of beauty and sculptured marble!’ Wondrous, indeed, are these sculptured walls! Men call them passing fair; but oh, Aurora! with thy beauty ever before my eyes, what form that men call lovely can be fair to me? Like him who gazes sun-wards, and then sees no light on earth, from the glory that dyes his iris, so thy beauty or its memory has turned the fairest things of earth to blackness and deformity.

In my dream last night, when in my ears came softly, like music stealing across the waters from afar, the old song we used to sing together, then to my brain, like a ray of light, came an idea whose grandeur for a moment struck me dumb. Before my eyes grew a vase of such beauty that I knew my hope was born to life, and that the Great Spirit had placed my foot on the ladder that leads from this my palace-dungeon to freedom and to thee. Today I have got a block of crystal-for only in such pellucid substance can I body forth my dream-and have commenced my work.

I found at first that my hand had lost its cunning, and I was beginning to despair, when, like the memory of a dream, there came back in my ears the strains of the old song. I sang it softly to myself, and as I did so I grew calmer; but oh! how differently the song sounded to me when thy voice, Aurora, rose not in unison with my own! But what avails pining? To work! To work! Every touch of my chisel will bring me nearer thee.

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My vase is daily growing nearer to completion. I sing as I work, and my constant song is the one I love so well. I can hear the echo of my voice in the vase; and as I end, the wailing song note is prolonged in sweet, sad music in the crystal cup. I listen, ear down, and sometimes I weep as I listen, so sadly comes the echo to my song. Imperfect though it be, my voice makes sweet music, and its echo in the cup guides my hand towards perfection as I work. Would that thy voice rose and fell with mine, Aurora, and then the world would behold a vase of such beauty as never before woke up the slumbering fires of mans love for what is fair; for if I do such work in sadness, imperfect as I am in my solitude and sorrow, what would I do in joy, perfect when with thee? I know that my work is good as an artist, and I feel that it is as a man; and the cup itself, as it daily grows in beauty, gives back a clearer echo. Oh! if I worked in joy how gladly would it give back our voices! Then would we hear an echo and music such as mortals seldom hear; but now the echo, like my song, seems imperfect. I grow daily weaker; but still I work on-work with my whole soul-for am I not working for freedom and for thee?

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My work is nearly done. Day by day, hour by hour, the vase grows more finished. Ever clearer comes the echo whilst I sing; ever softer, ever more sad and heart-rending comes the echo of the wail at the end of the song. Day by day I grow weaker and weaker; still I work on with all my soul. At night the thought comes to me, whilst I think of thee, that I will never see thee more-that I breathe out my life into the crystal cup, and that it will last there when I am gone.

So beautiful has it become, so much do I love it, that I could gladly die to be maker of such a work, were it not for thee-for my love for thee, and my hope of thee, and my fear for thee, and my anguish for thy grief when thou knowest I am gone.

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My work requires but few more touches. My life is slowly ebbing away, and I feel that with my last touch my life will pass out for ever into the cup. Till that touch is given I must not die-I will not die. My hate has passed away. So great are my wrongs that revenge of mine would be too small a compensation for my woe. I leave revenge to a juster and a mightier than I. Thee, oh Aurora, I will await in the land of flowers, where thou and I will wander, never more to part, never more! Ah, never more! Farewell, Aurora-Aurora-Aurora!

CHAPTER II. THE FEAST OF BEAUTY

The Feast of Beauty approaches rapidly, yet hardly so fast as my royal master wishes. He seems to have no other thought than to have this feast greater and better than any ever held before. Five summers ago his Feast of Beauty was nobler than all held in his sires reign together; yet scarcely was it over, and the rewards given to the victors, when he conceived the giant project whose success is to be tested when the moon reaches her full. It was boldly chosen and boldly done; chosen and done as boldly as the project of a monarch should be. But still I cannot think that it will end well. This yearning after completeness must be unsatisfied in the end-this desire that makes a monarch fling his kingly justice to the winds, and strive to reach his Mecca over a desert of blighted hopes and lost lives. But hush! I must not dare to think ill of my master or his deeds; and besides, walls have ears. I must leave alone these dangerous topics, and confine my thoughts within proper bounds.

The moon is waxing quickly, and with its fulness comes the Feast of Beauty, whose success as a whole rests almost solely on my watchfulness and care; for if the ruler of the feast should fail in his duty, who could fill the void? Let me see what arts are represented, and what works compete. All the arts will have trophies: poetry in its various forms, and prose-writing; sculpture with carving in various metals, and glass, and wood, and ivory, and engraving gems, and setting jewels; painting on canvas, and glass, and wood, and stone and metal; music, vocal and instrumental; and dancing. If that woman will but sing, we will have a real triumph of music; but she appears sickly too. All our best artists either get ill or die, although we promise them freedom or rewards or both if they succeed.

Surely never yet was a Feast of Beauty so fair or so richly dowered as this which the full moon shall behold and hear; but ah! the crowning glory of the feast will be the crystal cup. Never yet have these eyes beheld such a form of beauty, such a wondrous mingling of substance and light. Surely some magic power must have helped to draw such loveliness from a cold block of crystal. I must be careful that no harm happens the vase. To-day when I touched it, it gave forth such a ringing sound that my heart jumped with fear lest it should sustain any injury. Henceforth, till I deliver it up to my master, no hand but my own shall touch it lest any harm should happen to it.

Strange story has that cup. Born to life in the cell of a captive torn from his artist home beyond the sea, to enhance the splendour of a feast by his labour-seen at work by spies, and traced and followed till a chance-cruel chance for him-gave him into the hands of the emissaries of my master. He too, poor moth, fluttered about the flame: the name of freedom spurred him on to exertion till he wore away his life. The beauty of that cup was dearly bought for him. Many a man would forget his captivity whilst he worked at such a piece of loveliness; but he appeared to have some sorrow at his heart, some sorrow so great that it quenched his pride.

How he used to rave at first! How he used to rush about his chamber, and then climb into the embrasure of his window, and gaze out away over the sea! Poor captive! perhaps over the sea some one waited for his coming who was dearer to him than many cups, even many cups as beautiful as this, if such could be on earth. . . . Well, well, we must all die soon or late, and who dies first escapes the more sorrow, perhaps, who knows? How, when he had commenced the cup, he used to sing all day long, from the moment the sun shot its first fiery arrow into the retreating hosts of night-clouds, till the shades of evening advancing drove the lingering sunbeams into the west-and always the same song!

How he used to sing, all alone! Yet sometimes I could almost imagine I heard not one voice from his chamber, but two. . . . No more will it echo again from the wall of a dungeon, or from a hillside in free air. No more will his eyes behold the beauty of his crystal cup.

It was well he lived to finish it. Often and often have I trembled to think of his death, as I saw him day by day grow weaker as he worked at the unfinished vase. Must his eyes never more behold the beauty that was born of his soul? Oh, never more! Oh Death, grim King of Terrors, how mighty is thy sceptre! All-powerful is the wave of thy hand that summons us in turn to thy kingdom away beyond the poles!

Would that thou, poor captive, hadst lived to behold thy triumph, for victory will be thine at the Feast of Beauty such as man never before achieved. Then thou mightst have heard the shout that hails the victor in the contest, and the plaudits that greet him as he passes out, a free man, through the palace gates. But now thy cup will come to light amid the smiles of beauty and rank and power, whilst thou liest there in thy lonely chamber, cold as the marble of its walls.

And, after all, the feast will be imperfect, since the victors cannot all be crowned. I must ask my master's direction as to how a blank place of a competitor, should he prove a victor, is to be filled up. So late? I must see him ere the noontide hour of rest be past.

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Great Spirit! how I trembled as my master answered my question!

I found him in his chamber, as usual in the noontide. He was lying on his couch disrobed, half-sleeping; and the drowsy zephyr, scented with rich odours from the garden, wafted through the windows at either side by the fans, lulled him to complete repose. The darkened chamber was cool and silent. From the vestibule came the murmuring of many fountains, and the pleasant splash of falling waters. 'Oh, happy,' said I, in my heart, 'oh, happy great King, that has such pleasures to enjoy!' The breeze from the fans swept over the strings of the AEolian harps, and a sweet, confused, happy melody arose like the murmuring of children's voices singing afar off in the valleys, and floating on the wind.

As I entered the chamber softly, with muffled foot-fall and pent-in breath, I felt a kind of awe stealing over me. To me who was born and have dwelt all my life within the precincts of the court-to me who talk daily with my royal master, and take his minutest directions as to the coming feast-to me who had all my life looked up to my king as to a spirit, and had venerated him as more than mortal-came a feeling of almost horror; for my master looked then, in his quiet chamber, half-sleeping amid the drowsy music of the harps and fountains, more like a common man than a God. As the thought came to me I shuddered in affright, for it seemed to me that I had been guilty of sacrilege. So much had my veneration for my royal master become a part of my nature, that but to think of him as another man seemed like the anarchy of my own soul.

I came beside the couch, and watched him in silence. He seemed to be half-listening to the fitful music; and as the melody swelled and died away his chest rose and fell as he breathed in unison with the sound.

After a moment or two he appeared to become conscious of the presence of some one in the room, although by no motion of his face could I see that he heard any sound, and his eyes were shut. He opened his eyes, and, seeing me, asked, ‘Was all right about the Feast of Beauty?’ for that is the subject ever nearest to his thoughts. I answered that all was well, but that I had come to ask his royal pleasure as to how a vacant place amongst the competitors was to be filled up. He asked, ‘How vacant?’ and on my telling him, ‘from death,’ he asked again, quickly, ‘Was the work finished?’ When I told him that it was, he lay back again on his couch with a sigh of relief, for he had half arisen in his anxiety as he asked the question. Then he said, after a minute, ‘All the competitors must be present at the feast.’ ‘All?’ said I. ‘All,’ he answered again, ‘alive or dead; for the old custom must be preserved, and the victors crowned.’ He stayed still for a minute more, and then said, slowly, ‘Victors or martyrs.’ And I could see that the kingly spirit was coming back to him.

Again he went on. ‘This will be my last Feast of Beauty; and all the captives shall be set free. Too much sorrow has sprung already from my ambition. Too much injustice has soiled the name of king.’

He said no more, but lay still and closed his eyes. I could see by the working of his hands and the heaving of his chest that some violent emotion troubled him, and the thought arose, ‘He is a man, but he is yet a king; and, though a king as he is, still happiness is not for him. Great Spirit of Justice! thou metest out his pleasures and his woes to man, to king and slave alike! Thou lovest best to whom thou givest peace!’

Gradually my master grew more calm, and at length sunk into a gentle slumber; but even in his sleep he breathed in unison with the swelling murmur of the harps.

‘To each is given,’ said I gently, ‘something in common with the world of actual things. Thy life, oh King, is bound by chains of sympathy to the voice of Truth, which is Music! Tremble, lest in the presence of a master-strain thou shouldst feel thy littleness, and die!’ and I softly left the room.

CHAPTER III. THE STORY OF THE MOONBEAM

Slowly I creep along the bosom of the waters.

Sometimes I look back as I rise upon a billow, and see behind me many of my kin sitting each upon a wave-summit as upon a throne. So I go on for long, a power that I wist not forcing me onward, without will or purpose of mine.

At length, as I rise upon a mimic wave, I see afar a hazy light that springs from a vast palace, through whose countless windows flame lamps and torches. But at the first view, as if my coming had been the signal, the lights disappear in an instant.

Impatiently I await what may happen; and as I rise with each heart-beat of the sea, I look forward to where the torches had gleamed. Can it be a deed of darkness that shuns the light?

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The time has come when I can behold the palace without waiting to mount upon the waves. It is built of white marble, and rises steep from the brine. Its sea-front is glorious with columns and statues; and from the portals the marble steps sweep down, broad and wide to the waters, and below them, down as deep as I can see.

No sound is heard, no light is seen. A solemn silence abounds, a perfect calm.

Slowly I climb the palace walls, my brethren following as soldiers up a breach. I slide along the roofs, and as I look behind me walls and roofs are glistening as with silver. At length I meet with something smooth and hard and translucent; but through it I pass and enter a vast hall, where for an instant I hang in mid-air and wonder.

My coming has been the signal for such a burst of harmony as brings back to my memory the music of the spheres as they rush through space; and in the full-swelling anthem of welcome I feel that I am indeed a sun-spirit, a child of light, and that this is homage to my master.

I look upon the face of a great monarch, who sits at the head of a banquet-table. He has turned his head upwards and backwards, and looks as if he had been awaiting my approach. He rises and fronts me with the ringing out of the welcome-song, and all the others in the great hall turn towards me as well. I can see their eyes gleaming. Down along the immense table, laden with plate and glass and flowers, they stand holding each a cup of ruby wine, with which they pledge the monarch when the song is ended, as they drink success to him and to the ‘Feast of Beauty.’

I survey the hall. An immense chamber, with marble walls covered with bas-reliefs and frescoes and sculptured figures, and panelled by great columns that rise along the surface and support a dome-ceiling painted wondrously; in its centre the glass lantern by which I entered.

On the walls are hung pictures of various forms and sizes, and down the centre of the table stretches a raised platform on which are placed works of art of various kinds.

At one side of the hall is a dais on which sit persons of both sexes with noble faces and lordly brows, but all wearing the same expression-care tempered by hope. All these hold scrolls in their hands.

At the other side of the hall is a similar dais, on which sit others fairer to earthly view, less spiritual and more marked by surface-passion. They hold music-scores. All these look more joyous than those on the other platform, all save one, a woman, who sits with downcast face and dejected mien, as of one without hope. As my light falls at her feet she looks up, and I feel happy. The sympathy between us has called a faint gleam of hope to cheer that poor pale face.

Many are the forms of art that rise above the banquet-table, and all are lovely to behold. I look on all with pleasure one by one, till I see the last of them at the end of the table away from the monarch, and then all the others seem as nothing to me. What is this that makes other forms of beauty seem as nought when compared with it, when brought within the radius of its lustre? A crystal cup, wrought with such wondrous skill that light seems to lose its individual glory as it shines upon it and is merged in its beauty. ‘0h Universal Mother, let me enter there. Let my life be merged in its beauty, and no more will I regret my sun-strength hidden deep in the chasms of my moon-mother. Let me live there and perish there, and I will be joyous whilst it lasts, and content to pass into the great vortex of nothingness to be born again when the glory of the cup has fled.'

Can it be that my wish is granted, that I have entered the cup and become a part of its beauty? 'Great Mother, I thank thee.'

Has the cup life? or is it merely its wondrous perfectness that makes it tremble, like a beating heart, in unison with the ebb and flow, the great wave-pulse of nature? To me it feels as if it had life.

I look through the crystal walls and see at the end of the table, isolated from all others, the figure of a man seated. Are those cords that bind his limbs? How suits that crown of laurel those wide, dim eyes, and that pallid hue? It is passing strange. This Feast of Beauty holds some dread secrets, and sees some wondrous sights.

I hear a voice of strange, rich sweetness, yet wavering-the voice of one almost a king by nature. He is standing up; I see him through my palace-wall. He calls a name and sits down again.

Again I hear a voice from the platform of scrolls, the Throne of Brows; and again I look and behold a man who stands trembling yet flushed, as though the morning light shone bright upon his soul. He reads in cadenced measure a song in praise of my moon-mother, the Feast of Beauty, and the king. As he speaks, he trembles no more, but seems inspired, and his voice rises to a tone of power and grandeur, and rings back from walls and dome. I hear his words distinctly, though saddened in tone, in the echo from my crystal home. He concludes and sits down, half-fainting, amid a whirlwind of applause, every note, every beat of which is echoed as the words had been.

Again the monarch rises and calls 'Aurora,' that she may sing for freedom. The name echoes in the cup with a sweet, sad sound. So sad, so despairing seems the echo, that the hall seems to darken and the scene to grow dim.

‘Can a sun-spirit mourn, or a crystal vessel weep?’

She, the dejected one, rises from her seat on the Throne of Sound, and all eyes turn upon her save those of the pale one, laurel-crowned. Thrice she essays to begin, and thrice nought comes from her lips but a dry, husky sigh, till an old man who has been moving round the hall settling all things, cries out, in fear lest she should fail, ‘Freedom!’

The word is re-echoed from the cup. She hears the sound, turns towards it and begins.

Oh, the melody of that voice! And yet it is not perfect alone; for after the first note comes an echo from the cup that swells in unison with the voice, and the two sounds together, seem as if one strain came ringing sweet from the lips of the All-Father himself. So sweet it is, that all throughout the hall sit spell-bound, and scarcely dare to breathe.

In the pause after the first verses of the song, I hear the voice of the old man speaking to a comrade, but his words are unheard by any other, ‘Look at the king. His spirit seems lost in a trance of melody. Ah! I fear me some evil: the nearer the music approaches to perfection the more rapt he becomes. I dread lest a perfect note shall prove his death-call.’ His voice dies away as the singer commences the last verse.

Sad and plaintive is the song; full of feeling and tender love, but love overshadowed by grief and despair. As it goes on the voice of the singer grows sweeter and more thrilling, more real; and the cup, my crystal time-home, vibrates more and more as it gives back the echo. The monarch looks like one entranced, and no movement is within the hall. . . . The song dies away in a wild wail that seems to tear the heart of the singer in twain; and the cup vibrates still more as it gives back the echo. As the note, long-swelling, reaches its highest, the cup, the Crystal Cup, my wondrous home, the gift of the All-Father, shivers into millions of atoms, and passes away.

Ere I am lost in the great vortex I see the singer throw up her arms and fall, freed at last, and the King sitting, glory-faced, but pallid with the hue of Death.

THE DUALITISTS

CHAPTER I. BIS DAT QUI NON CITO DAT.

There was joy in the house of Bubb.

For ten long years had Ephraim and Sophonisba Bubb mourned in vain the loneliness of their life. Unavailingly had they gazed into the emporia of baby-linen, and fixed their searching glances on the basket-makers' warehouses where the cradles hung in tempting rows. In vain had they prayed, and sighed, and groaned, and wished, and waited, and wept, but never had even a ray of hope been held out by the family physician.

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But now at last the wished-for moment had arrived. Month after month had flown by on leaden wings, and the destined days had slowly measured their course. The months had become weeks; the weeks had dwindled down to days; the days had been attenuated to hours; the hours had lapsed into minutes, the minutes had slowly died away, and but seconds remained.

Ephraim Bubb sat cowering on the stairs, and tried with high-strung ears to catch the strain of blissful music from the lips of his first-born. There was silence in the house-silence as of the deadly calm before the cyclone. Ah! Ephra Bubb, little thinkest thou that another moment may for ever destroy the peaceful, happy course of thy life, and open to thy too craving eyes the portals of that wondrous land where Childhood reigns supreme, and where the tyrant infant with the wave of his tiny hand and the imperious treble of his tiny voice sentences his parent to the deadly vault beneath the castle moat. As the thought strikes thee thou becomest pale. How thou tremblest as thou findest thyself upon the brink of the abyss! Wouldst that thou could recall the past!

But hark! the die is cast for good or ill. The long years of praying and hoping have found an end at last. From the chamber within comes a sharp cry, which shortly after is repeated. Ah! Ephraim, that cry is the feeble effort of childish lips as yet unused to the rough, worldly form of speech to frame the word Father. In the glow of thy transport all doubts are forgotten; and when the doctor cometh forth as the harbinger of joy he findeth thee radiant with new found delight.

“My dear sir, allow me to congratulate you-to offer twofold felicitations. Mr. Bubb, sir, you are the father of Twins!”

CHAPTER II. HALCYON DAYS.

The twins were the finest children that ever were seen-so at least said the cognoscenti, and the parents were not slow to believe. The nurse’s opinion was in itself a proof.

It was not, ma’am, that they was fine for twins, but they was fine for singles, and she had ought to know, for she had nussed a many in her time, both twins and singles. All they wanted was to have their dear little legs cut off and little wings on their dear little shoulders, for to be put one on each side of a white marble tombstone, cut beautiful, sacred to the relic of Ephraim Bubb, that they might, sir, if so be that missus was to survive the father of two such lovely twins-although she would make bold to say, and no offence intended, that a handsome gentleman, though a trifle or two older than his good lady, though for the matter of that she heerd that gentlemen was never too old at all, and for her own part she liked them the better for it: not like bits of boys that didn't know their own minds-that a gentleman what was the father of two such 'eavenly twins (God bless them!) couldn't be called anything but a boy; though for the matter of that she never knowed in her experience-which it was much-of a boy as had such twins, or any twins at all so much for the matter of that.

The twins were the idols of their parents, and at the same time their pleasure and their pain. Did Zerubbabel cough, Ephraim would start from his balmy slumbers with an agonised cry of consternation, for visions of innumerable twins black in the face from croup haunted his nightly pillow. Did Zacariah rail at aethereal expansion, Sophonisba with pallid hue and dishevelled locks would fly to the cradle of her offspring. Did pins torture or strings afflict, or flannel or flies tickle, or light dazzle, or darkness affright, or hunger or thirst assail the synchronous productions, the household of Bubb would be roused from quiet slumbers or the current of its manifold workings changed.

The twins grew apace; were weaned; teethed; and at length arrived at the stage of three years!

"They grew in beauty side by side,   They filled one home," etc.

CHAPTER III. RUMOURS OF WARS.

Harry Merford and Tommy Santon lived in the same range of villas as Ephraim Bubb. Harry's parents had taken up their abode in No. 25, No. 27 was happy in the perpetual sunshine of Tommy's smiles, and between these two residences Ephraim Bubb reared his blossoms, the number of his mansion being 26. Harry and Tommy had been accustomed from the earliest times to meet each other daily. Their primal method of communication had been by the housetops, till their respective sires had been obliged to pay compensation to Bubb for damages to his roof and dormer windows; and from that time they had been forbidden by the home authorities to meet, whilst their mutual neighbour had taken the precaution of having his garden walls pebble-dashed and topped with broken glass to prevent their incursions. Harry and Tommy, however, being gifted with daring souls, lofty ambitions, impetuous natures, and strong seats to their trousers, defied the rugged walls of Bubb and continued to meet in secret.

Compared with these two youths, Castor and Pollux, Damon and Pythias, Eloisa and Abelard are but tame examples of duality or constancy and friendship. All the poets from Hyginus to Schiller might sing of noble deeds done and desperate dangers held as naught for friendship's sake, but they would have been mute had they but known of the mutual affection of Harry and Tommy. Day by day, and often night by night, would these two brave the perils of nurse, and father, and mother, of whip and imprisonment, and hunger and thirst, and solitude and darkness to meet together. What they discussed in secret none other knew. What deeds of darkness were perpetrated in their symposia none could tell. Alone they met, alone they remained, and alone they departed to their several abodes. There was in the garden of Bubb a summer house overgrown with trailing plants, and surrounded by young poplars which the fond father had planted on his children's natal day, and whose rapid growth he had proudly watched. These trees quite obscured the summerhouse, and here Harry and Tommy, knowing after a careful observation that none ever entered the place, held their conclaves. Time after time they met in full security and followed their customary pursuit of pleasure. Let us raise the mysterious veil and see what was the great Unknown at whose shrine they bent the knee.

Harry and Tommy had each been given as a Christmas box a new knife; and for a long time-nearly a year-these knives, similar in size and pattern, were their chief delights. With them they cut and hacked in their respective homes all things which would not be likely to be noticed; for the young gentlemen were wary and had no wish that their moments of pleasure should be atoned for by moments of pain. The insides of drawers, and desks, and boxes, and underparts of tables and chairs, the backs of picture frames, even the floors, where corners of the carpets could surreptitiously be turned up, all bore marks of their craftsmanship; and to compare notes on these artistic triumphs was a source of joy. At length, however, a critical time came, some new field of action should be opened up, for the old appetites were sated, and the old joys had begun to pall. It was absolutely necessary that the existing schemes of destruction should be enlarged; and yet this could hardly be done without a terrible risk of discovery, for the limits of safety had long since been reached and passed. But, be the risk great or small, some new ground should be broken-some new joy found, for the old earth was barren, and the craving for pleasure was growing fiercer with each successive day.

The crisis had come: who could tell the issue?

Chapter IV. The Tucket Sounds.

They met in the arbour, determined to discuss this grave question. The heart of each was big with revolution, the head of each was full of scheme and strategy, and the pocket of each was full of sweet-stuff, the sweeter for being stolen. After having despatched the sweets, the conspirators proceeded to explain their respective views with regard to the enlargement of their artistic operations. Tommy unfolded with much pride a scheme which he had in contemplation of cutting a series of holes in the sounding board of the piano, so as to destroy its musical properties. Harry was in no wise behindhand in his ideas of reform. He had conceived the project of cutting the canvas at the back of his great grandfather's portrait, which his father held in high regard among his lares and penates, so that in time when the picture should be moved the skin of paint would be broken, the head fall bodily out from the frame.

At this point of the council a brilliant thought occurred to Tommy. "Why should not the enjoyment be doubled, and the musical instruments and family pictures of both establishments be sacrificed on the altar of pleasure?" This was agreed to nem. con.; and then the meeting adjourned for dinner. When they next met it was evident that there was a screw loose somewhere-that there was "something rotten in the state of Denmark." After a little fencing on both sides, it came out that all the schemes of domestic reform had been foiled by maternal vigilance, and that so sharp had been the reprimand consequent on a partial discovery of the schemes that they would have to be abandoned-till such time, at least, as increased physical strength would allow the reformers to laugh to scorn parental threats and injunctions.

Sadly the two forlorn youths took out their knives and regarded them; sadly, sadly they thought, as erst did Othello, of all the fair chances of honour and triumph and glory gone for ever. They compared knives with almost the fondness of doting parents. There they were-so equal in size and strength and beauty-dimmed by no corrosive rust, tarnished by no stain, and with unbroken edges of the keenness of Saladin's sword.

So like were the knives that but for the initials scratched in the handles neither boy could have been sure which was his own. After a little while they began mutually to brag of the superior excellence of their respective weapons. Tommy insisted that his was the sharper, Harry asserted that his was the stronger of the two. Hotter and hotter grew the war of words. The tempers of Harry and Tommy got inflamed, and their boyish bosoms glowed with manly thoughts of daring and of hate. But there was abroad in that hour a spirit of a bygone age-one that penetrated even to that dim arbour in the grove of Bubb. The world-old scheme of ordeal was whispered by the spirit in the ear of each, and suddenly the tumult was allayed. With one impulse the boys suggested that they should test the quality of their knives by the ordeal of the Hack.

No sooner said than done. Harry held out his knife edge uppermost; and Tommy, grasping his firmly by the handle, brought down the edge of the blade crosswise on Harry's. The process was then reversed, and Harry became in turn the aggressor. Then they paused and eagerly looked for the result. It was not hard to see; in each knife were two great dents of equal depth; and so it was necessary to renew the contest, and seek a further proof.

What needs it to relate seriatim the details of that direful strife? The sun had long since gone down, and the moon with fair, smiling face had long risen over the roof of Bubb, when, wearied and jaded, Harry and Tommy sought their respective homes. Alas! the splendour of the knives was gone for ever. Ichabod!-Ichabod! the glory had departed and naught remained but two useless wrecks, with keen edges destroyed, and now like unto nothing save the serried hills of Spain.

But though they mourned for their fondly cherished weapons, the hearts of the boys were glad; for the bygone day had opened to their gaze a prospect of pleasure as boundless as the limits of the world.

CHAPTER V. THE FIRST CRUSADE.

From that day a new era dawned in the lives of Harry and Tommy. So long as the resources of the parental establishments could hold out so long would their new amusement continue. Subtly they obtained surreptitious possession of articles of family cutlery not in general use, and brought them one by one to their rendezvous. These came fair and spotless from the sanctity of the butlers' pantry. Alas! they returned not as they came.

But in course of time the stock of available cutlery became exhausted, and again the inventive faculties of the youths were called into requisition. They reasoned thus: "The knife game, it is true, is played out, but the excitement of the Hack is not to be dispensed with. Let us carry, then, this Great Idea into new worlds; let us still live in the sunshine of pleasure; let us continue to hack, but with objects other than knives."

It was done. Not knives now engaged the attention of the ambitious youths. Spoons and forks were daily flattened and beaten out of shape; pepper castor met pepper castor in combat, and both were borne dying from the field; candlesticks met in fray to part no more on this side of the grave; even epergnes were used as weapons in the crusade of Hack.

At last all the resources of the butler's pantry became exhausted, and then began a system of miscellaneous destruction that proved in a little time ruinous to the furniture of the respective homes of Harry and Tommy. Mrs. Santon and Mrs. Merford began to notice that the wear and tear in their households became excessive. Day after day some new domestic calamity seemed to have occurred. To-day a valuable edition of some book whose luxurious binding made it an object for public display would appear to have suffered some dire misfortune, for the edges were frayed and broken and the back loose if not altogether displaced; to-morrow the same awful fate would seem to have followed some miniature frame; the day following the legs of some chair or spider-table would show signs of extraordinary hardship. Even in the nursery the sounds of lamentation were heard. It was a thing of daily occurrence for the little girls to state that when going to bed at night they had laid their dear dollies in their beds with tender care, but that when again seeking them in the period of recess they had found them with all their beauty gone, with legs and arms amputated and faces beaten from all semblance of human form.

Then articles of crockery began to be missed. The thief could in no case be discovered, and the wages of the servants, from constant stoppages, began to be nominal rather than real. Mrs. Merford and Mrs. Santon mourned their losses, but Harry and Tommy gloated day after day over their spoils, which lay in an ever-increasing heap in the hidden grove of Bubb. To such an extent had the fondness of the Hack now grown that with both youths it was an infatuation-a madness-a frenzy.

At length one awful day arrived. The butlers of the houses of Merford and Santon, harassed by constant losses and complaints, and finding that their breakage account was in excess of their wages, determined to seek some sphere of occupation where, if they did not meet with a suitable reward or recognition of their services, they would, at least, not lose whatever fortune and reputation they had already acquired. Accordingly, before rendering up their keys and the goods entrusted to their charge, they proceeded to take a preliminary stock of their own accounts, to make sure of their accredited accuracy. Dire indeed was their distress when they knew to the full the havoc which had been wrought; terrible their anguish of the present, bitter their thoughts of the future. Their hearts, bowed down with weight of woe, failed them quite; reeled the strong brains that had erst overcome foes of deadlier spirit than grief; and fell their stalwart forms prone on the floors of their respective sancta sanctorum.

Late in the day when their services were required they were sought for in bower and hall, and at length discovered where they lay.

But alas for justice! They were accused of being drunk and for having, whilst in that degraded condition, deliberately injured all the property on which they could lay hands. Were not the evidences of their guilt patent to all in the hecatombs of the destroyed? Then they were charged with all the evils wrought in the houses, and on their indignant denial Harry and Tommy, each in his own home, according to their concerted scheme of action, stepped forward and relieved their minds of the deadly weight that had for long in secret borne them down. The story of each ran that time after time he had seen the butler, when he thought that nobody was looking, knocking knives together in the pantry, chairs and books and pictures in the drawing-room and study, dolls in the nursery, and plates in the kitchen. Then, indeed, was the master of each household stern and uncompromising in his demands for justice. Each butler was committed to the charge of myrmidons of the law under the double charge of drunkenness and wilful destruction of property.

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Softly and sweetly slept Harry and Tommy in their little beds that night. Angels seemed to whisper to them, for they smiled as though lost in pleasant dreams. The rewards given by proud and grateful parents lay in their pockets, and in their hearts the happy consciousness of having done their duty.

Truly sweet should be the slumbers of the just.

CHAPTER VI. "LET THE DEAD PAST BURY ITS DEAD."

It might be supposed that now the operations of Harry and Tommy would be obliged to be abandoned.

Not so, however. The minds of these youths were of no common order, nor were their souls of such weak nature as to yield at the first summons of necessity. Like Nelson, they knew not fear; like Napoleon, they held "impossible" to be the adjective of fools; and they revelled in the glorious truth that in the lexicon of youth is no such word as "fail." Therefore on the day following the eclaircissement of the butlers' misdeeds, they met in the arbour to plan a new campaign.

In the hour when all seemed blackest to them, and when the narrowing walls of possibility hedged them in on every side, thus ran the deliberations of these dauntless youths:-

"We have played out the meaner things that are inanimate and inert; why not then trench on the domains of life? The dead have lapsed into the regions of the forgotten past-let the living look to themselves."

That night they met when all households had retired to balmy sleep, and naught but the amorous wailings of nocturnal cats told of the existence of life and sentience. Each bore into the arbour in his arms a pet rabbit and a piece of sticking-plaster. Then, in the peaceful, quiet moonlight, commenced a work of mystery, blood, and gloom. The proceedings began by the fixing of a piece of sticking-plaster over the mouth of each rabbit to prevent it making a noise, if so inclined. Then Tommy held up his rabbit by its scutty tail, and it hung wriggling, a white mass in the moonlight. Slowly Harry raised his rabbit holding it in the same manner, and when level with his head brought it down on Tommy's client.

But the chances had been miscalculated. The boys held firmly to the tails, but the chief portions of the rabbits fell to earth. Ere the doomed beasts could escape, however, the operators had pounced upon them, and this time holding them by the hind legs renewed the trial.

Deep into the night the game was kept up, and the Eastern sky began to show signs of approaching day as each boy bore triumphantly the dead corse of his favourite bunny and placed it within its sometime hutch.

Next night the same game was renewed with a new rabbit on each side, and for more than a week-so long as the hutches supplied the wherewithal-the battle was sustained. True that there were sad hearts and red eyes in the juveniles of Santon and Merford as one by one the beloved pets were found dead, but Harry and Tommy, with the hearts of heroes steeled to suffering and deaf to the pitiful cries of childhood, still fought the good fight on to the bitter end.

When the supply of rabbits was exhausted, other munition was not wanting, and for some days the war was continued with white mice, dormice, hedgehogs, guinea pigs, pigeons, lambs, canaries, parroqueets, linnets, squirrels, parrots, marmots, poodles, ravens, tortoises, terriers, and cats. Of these, as might be expected, the most difficult to manipulate were the terriers and the cats, and of these two classes the proportion of the difficulties in the way of terrier-hacking was, when compared with those of cat-hacking, about that which the simple Lac of the British Pharmacopoeia bears to water in the compound which dairymen palm off upon a too confiding public as milk. More than once when engaged in the rapturous delights of cat-hacking had Harry and Tommy wished that the silent tomb could open its ponderous and massy jaws and engulf them, for the feline victims were not patient in their death agonies, and often broke the bonds in which the security of the artists rested, and turned fiercely on their executioners.

At last, however, all the animals available were sacrificed; but the passion for hacking still remained. How was it all to end?

CHAPTER VII. A CLOUD WITH GOLDEN LINING.

Tommy and Harry sat in the arbour dejected and disconsolate. They wept like two Alexanders because there were no more worlds to conquer. At last the conviction had been forced upon them that the resources available for hacking were exhausted. That very morning they had had a desperate battle, and their attire showed the ravages of direful war. Their hats were battered into shapeless masses, their shoes were soleless and heelless and had the uppers broken, the ends of their braces, their sleeves, and their trousers were frayed, and had they indulged in the manly luxury of coat tails these too would have gone.

Truly, hacking had become an absorbing passion with them. Long and fiercely had they been swept onward on the wings of the demon of strife, and powerless at the best of times had been the promptings of good; but now, heated with combat, maddened by the equal success of arms, and with the lust for victory still unsated, they longed more fiercely than ever for some new pleasure: like tigers that have tasted blood they thirsted for a larger and more potent libation.

As they sat, with their souls in a tumult of desire and despair, some evil genius guided into the garden the twin blossoms of the tree of Bubb. Hand in hand Zacariah and Zerubbabel advanced from the back door; they had escaped from their nurses, and with the exploring instinct of humanity, advanced boldly into the great world-the terra incognita, the Ultima Thule of the paternal domain.

In the course of time they approached the hedge of poplars, from behind which the anxious eyes of Harry and Tommy looked for their approach, for the boys knew that where the twins were the nurses were accustomed to be gathered together, and they feared discovery if their retreat should be cut off.

It was a touching sight, these lovely babes, alike in form, feature, size, expression, and dress; in fact, so like each other that one "might not have told either from which." When the startling similarity was recognised by Harry and Tommy, each suddenly turned, and, grasping the other by the shoulder, spoke in a keen whisper:

"Hack! They are exactly equal! This is the very apotheosis of our art!"

With excited faces and trembling hands they laid their plans to lure the unsuspecting babes within the precincts of their charnel house, and they were so successful in their efforts that in a little time the twins had toddled behind the hedge and were lost to the sight of the parental mansion.

Harry and Tommy were not famed for gentleness within the immediate precincts of their respective homes, but it would have delighted the heart of any philanthropist to see the kindly manner in which they arranged for the pleasures of the helpless babes. With smiling faces and playful words and gentle wiles they led them within the arbour, and then, under pretence of giving them some of those sudden jumps in which infants rejoice, they raised them from the ground. Tommy held Zacariah across his arm with his baby moon-face smiling up at the cobwebs on the arbour roof, and Harry, with a mighty effort, raised the cherubic Zerubbabel aloft.

Each nerved himself for a great endeavour, Harry to give, Tommy to endure a shock, and then the form of Zerubbabel was seen whirling through the air round Harry's glowing and determined face. There was a sickening crash and the arm of Tommy yielded visibly.

The pasty face of Zerubbabel had fallen fair on that of Zacariah, for Tommy and Harry were by this time artists of too great experience to miss so simple a mark. The putty-like noses collapsed, the putty-like cheeks became for a moment flattened, and when in an instant more they parted, the faces of both were dabbled in gore. Immediately the firmament was rent with a series of such yells as might have awakened the dead. Forthwith from the house of Bubb came the echoes in parental cries and footsteps. As the sounds of scurrying feet rang through the mansion, Harry cried to Tommy:

"They will be on us soon. Let us cut to the roof of the stable and draw up the ladder."

Tommy answered by a nod, and the two boys, regardless of consequences, and bearing each a twin, ascended to the roof of the stable by means of a ladder which usually stood against the wall, and which they pulled up after them.

As Ephraim Bubb issued from his house in pursuit of his lost darlings, the sight which met his gaze froze his very soul. There, on the coping of the stable roof, stood Harry and Tommy renewing their game. They seemed like two young demons forging some diabolical implement, for each in turn the twins were lifted high in air and let fall with stunning force on the supine form of its fellow. How Ephraim felt none but a tender and imaginative father can conceive. It would be enough to wring the heart of even a callous parent to see his children, the darlings of his old age-his own beloved twins-being sacrificed to the brutal pleasure of unregenerate youths, without being made unconsciously and helplessly guilty of the crime of fratricide.

Loudly did Ephraim and also Sophonisba, who, with dishevelled locks, had now appeared upon the scene, bewail their unhappy lot and shriek in vain for aid; but by rare illchance no eyes save their own saw the work of butchery or heard the shrieks of anguish and despair. Wildly did Ephraim, mounting on the shoulders of his spouse, strive, but in vain, to scale the stable wall.

Baffled in every effort, he rushed into the house and appeared in a moment bearing in his hands a double-barrelled gun, into which he poured the contents of a shot pouch as he ran. He came anigh the stable and hailed the murderous youths:

“Drop them twins and come down here or I’ll shoot you like a brace of dogs.”

“Never!” exclaimed the heroic two with one impulse, and continued their awful pastime with a zest tenfold as they knew that the agonised eyes of parents wept at the cause of their joy.

“Then die!” shrieked Ephraim, as he fired both barrels, right-left, at the hackers.

But, alas! love for his darlings shook the hand that never shook before. As the smoke cleared off and Ephraim recovered from the kick of his gun, he heard a loud twofold laugh of triumph and saw Harry and Tommy, all unhurt, waving in the air the trunks of the twins-the fond father had blown the heads completely off his own offspring.

Tommy and Harry shrieked aloud in glee, and after playing catch with the bodies for some time, seen only by the agonised eyes of the infanticide and his wife, flung them high in the air. Ephraim leaped forward to catch what had once been Zacariah, and Sophonisba grabbed wildly for the loved remains of her Zerubbabel.

But the weight of the bodies and the height from which they fell were not reckoned by either parent, and from being ignorant of a simple dynamical formula each tried to effect an object which calm, common sense, united with scientific knowledge, would have told them was impossible. The masses fell, and Ephraim and Sophonisba were stricken dead by the falling twins, who were thus posthumously guilty of the crime of parricide.

An intelligent coroner's jury found the parents guilty of the crimes of infanticide and suicide, on the evidence of Harry and Tommy, who swore, reluctantly, that the inhuman monsters, maddened by drink, had killed their offspring by shooting them into the air out of a cannon-since stolen-whence like curses they had fallen on their own heads; and that then they had slain themselves suis manibus with their own hands.

Accordingly Ephraim and Sophonisba were denied the solace of Christian burial, and were committed to the earth with "maimed rites," and had stakes driven through their middles to pin them down in their unhallowed graves till the Crack of Doom.

Harry and Tommy were each rewarded with National honours and were knighted, even at their tender years.

Fortune seemed to smile upon them all the long after years, and they lived to a ripe old age, hale of body, and respected and beloved of all.

Often in the golden summer eves, when all nature seemed at rest, when the oldest cask was opened and the largest lamp was lit, when the chestnuts glowed in the embers and the kid turned on the spit, when their great-grandchildren pretended to mend fictional armour and to trim an imaginary helmet's plume, when the shuttles of the good wives of their grandchildren went flashing each through its proper loom, with shouting and with laughter they were accustomed to tell the tale of THE DUALITISTS; OR, THE DEATH-DOOM OF THE DOUBLE-BORN.

THE 'EROES OF THE THAMES

When Peter Jimpson, the professional swimmer, had won all the prizes to be had in the towns of Southern England, he thought that the time had come when he should attempt the possibilities of London. He was the more encouraged in the idea because his young son, whom he had brought up to his own calling, had developed quite a genius for his work. Not only could he swim so fast and stay so well that his father looked upon him as a future champion, but he had manifested a decided ability as an aquatic actor.

His tricks were always amusing, and, whether in the humours of a duck chase or exhibiting possibilities of the disasters which may happen to the imperfect swimmer, he showed undoubted power. Peter, therefore, determined to turn young Peter's gift to advantage. He had long known that to win the attention of magnificent, rich, indifferent London, some sort of coup is necessary; there are so many workers of all kinds in the vast metropolis that merely to work is only to be one of many.

So all the early summer the two Peters rehearsed a little aquatic scene-that of a drowning boy rescued by a brave passing stranger. Many a time and oft, and always in secret-for the elder Peter impressed on his son the absolute necessity for silence-they went through every detail, till at last Peter junior could simulate the entire dangers and possibilities of an immersion.

He would fall into the water in the most natural way in the world; would struggle violently with his hands above water and his mouth open, after the manner of the ignorant; he would sink and rise again with strange portions of his anatomy appearing first above water, as though forced up by an irresistible current; he would gasp and choke and go down again; rise again with only his hands above water, and clutch at the empty air with writhing fingers in a manner which was positively heartrending to witness. Then the proud father knew that in his son were all the elements of success.

Wherefore they took their way to London. Having surveyed the various bridges they fixed on London Bridge as the scene of their exploit, and the hour when the afternoon throng was greatest as the time. They had several consultations, for it was necessary to be circumspect; the bridge was always well-furnished with police, and on two occasions they had noticed that different men had eyed them curiously, as though they were suspicious characters.

However, they fixed on every detail of their plan, leaving nothing to chance. As the construction of London Bridge does not allow of a small boy who is simply passing along to fall off by accident, and as to climb the parapet is at least a suspicious act, they arranged that Peter, having ascertained that neither passing barge nor steamer made a special source of danger, was to throw his son right over the parapet, and immediately jump after him.

They felt that in the excitement of the rescue-which they knew so well how to play-the crowd would instantly line the parapet, and would lose sight of the seemingly lethal act. They anticipated a rich harvest of praise, and possibly of a more tangible kind of reward; in any case, their fame as swimmers would be noised abroad.

Next day at the appointed time, when London Bridge was almost a solid mass of vehicles, horsemen, and pedestrians, they made their enterprise. Having seen that no barge or steamer was close, they moved to the pathway over the very centre arch of the bridge on the down-river side as the current was running up.

There Peter, suddenly seizing the boy, hurled him with a mighty effort over the parapet into the water, and the instant after began to climb after him. But just as he was gaining a footing a man rushed forward and caught him by the ankles, and dragged him back upon the pavement. Peter turned on him furiously, and saw that his captor was one of the very men whom he had seen watching him on a previous occasion.

“Let me go!” he cried, “let me go! I must save my boy!” and he struggled frantically.

“A new way to save him, to throw him over the bridge!” said the man, who held him in a grip of iron.

“My boy! my boy! I must save my boy!” cried Peter appealingly to the crowd.

“Your boy will be saved if the bravest fellow in England can do it. Look there!” came the answer, and the crowd began to cheer; for just at the moment another man leapt upon the parapet, and, throwing off his coat, dived into the river. Some of the crowd helped to hold Peter, who struggled wildly, none the less that he had recognised in the man who jumped from the bridge another of the men whom he had seen watching him.

The tide was running so strongly up stream that young Peter was in a second or two after his immersion carried under the shadow of the arch, and close behind him his rescuer also disappeared from view. There was an instant rush across the bridge, and in a moment the up-river parapet was black with people, all looking eagerly for their coming through the arch.

The seconds seemed ages; but at length those exactly over it saw the body of the little boy drifting along just under the water, and turning round as it came. As soon as the bridge was cleared, and the sunlight reached the water above him, there was a violent struggle, a kicking about of the little chap's arms and legs in seemingly a death-struggle. And then the horrified spectators saw two little hands rise above the water, clutch violently at the air, and sink again. Then the angle of refraction became too great, and even those on the centre arch could see no more.

There was a deep groan from the crowd; which, however, turned to a cheer as a man swimming overhand with a powerful stroke swept through the arch in the wake of the missing boy. A thousand hands pointed to where the child had gone down, and a thousand voices roared a thousand different directions. But the swimmer seemed to know instinctively the right spot, and making for it, turned head foremost and went down into the deep water to search for him.

There must have been some strange currents running round the piers of London Bridge that tide, for suddenly the crowd seemed to realise all at once that the boy's body had risen out of the water not directly in the track of the stream, but at a spot some dozen or more yards on the Surrey side. In the moments that had elapsed the little chap had had time to draw his breath, and in the stillness around-for the roar of the traffic had ceased for the moment-the crowd hearth his faint cry:

"Oh, father! father!"

There was an instant shiver through the crowd, such as is seen when a sudden breeze sweeps over a cornfield, for instinctively everyone had turned his head backward to look at the guilty father. The fierce howl that swept from the mass of people showed that it was just as well that a strong force of police now surrounded the prisoner, or his life might have been in danger.

In the meantime, the man had risen from his dive and the boy had again sunk; again the crowd roared and pointed, and the man had with a few powerful strokes gained the place. This time, however, he did not dive, for he knew that he must be ready to seize the body when it rose again, for it would be the last chance.

The crowd and the man alike waited in fearful suspense. The swimmer was a keen-eyed, powerful fellow; he raised his head well above the water, and kept looking all around him. It was well that he did so, for by another effort of those strange currents round the piers the boy's body rose down the river this time, having travelled against the current, and being still close to London Bridge, where the great crowd could plainly see.

The swimmer seemed to jump forward in the water, and with half-a-dozen mighty overhand strokes came close and seized the boy by the back of the neck, and raised his head out of the water. The boy could not see him from the position in which he was held, but he again shouted, "Father! father!" but this time in ringing, joyous tones, which reached the crowd from Surrey to Middlesex.

By this time boats were coming up and down the river to the rescue, and it appeared to be well that they were at hand, for it seemed to be no easy task to rescue a child. The man who had appeared to swim so powerfully when alone seemed, now that he was hampered with the boy, to be hardly able to support himself.

Boy and man struggled together in a little maelstrom of their own creation, and more than once went under water, leaving only a mass of froth to show where they went down. Once, though, after such a disappearance, the boy rose first, and appeared to be making frantic efforts to get away; but the instant after appeared the man, who, with seemingly renewed vigour, followed him up and again caught him by the nape of the neck, and then never let him go-over water or under it-till the two were taken into the police boat, the man gasping, and the child seemingly senseless.

Then a mighty roar arose from the watching crowd. Handkerchiefs and hats were waved, and the rescuer looked proud as he waved his hand in recognition, sitting in the stern of the boat, and holding on his knees the little chap, who had now opened his eyes, and only struggled faintly as though by instinct. Then the boat took its way to the river police-station, and the crowd went about its business, all except two sections, one of which followed the boy and his gallant rescuer, and the other the father, under arrest for attempted murder.

At the police-court the magistrate was sitting and when Peter Jimpson was brought into the station he was told with policeman pleasantry how nice it would be that he would not have long to wait for his committal. Somehow, he did not seem to see the joke-it is wonderful what a difference in point of view there is between the inside and the outside of the dock-especially in matters of humour.

However, he began to think, with the result that when he was brought before the magistrate he found himself prepared to make a clean breast of his ill-starred effort to achieve notoriety. A policeman who had been on duty on London Bridge had from a little distance seen him throw the boy into the water, and the man who had first laid hands on him, John Polter, testified to the same; the charge was therefore simple enough, and no time was lost.

When in the court the charge was entered upon, Peter Jimpson made his explanation, saying that all that had been done was with his son’s consent and connivance, simply in order to bring their names as swimmers before the public. To which the magistrate drily replied that such a course was apt to be attended with misapprehension, and was not devoid even of serious risk, as doubtless the grand jury would let him know later on.

Whilst the proceedings were at this stage a great cheering was heard outside, and very soon the rescued boy and his rescuer entered the court. Young Peter, with every appearance of regret, corroborated his father's statement as to his having been a consenting party to his immersion; whereupon the rescuer indignantly said:

"And do you mean to say, you little wretch, that you tried to deceive the public by a base pretence of danger? Oh, boy! boy! I feel a certain love for you since your life is due to my own valour; but I trust that such an acted lie shall never again be due to you-even in part!"

The boy covered his eyes with his hands, and his voice was broken as he answered:

"Oh, your worship, I ain't agoin' on such a racket never no more. This brave, kind gentleman has taught me a lesson which I'll never forget!" And he took the man's big hand in his two small ones, and bent over it and kissed it, whilst there was scarcely a dry eye in the court, even the magistrate being visibly affected. Peter Jimpson was about to say something angrily, but the clerk of the court motioned him to be silent. Then the rescuer, who gave his name as Tom Bolter, spoke:

"May I ask your worship to dismiss the case. I wouldn't go for to take the liberty of speaking only as how it was me what saved the boy at the risk of my life; and mayhap on that account you'll let me say what I feels. These here two professionals has been trying to rig up a bit of biz, but the chance was against them, and they got queerer. No doubt but it'll be a lesson to them not to play tricks again with the feelins of the public! It's a harrowin' up tenderness; that's what it is, and I am sure that if your worship will let them off this time they will never go for to do it again. Isn't that so, mateys?"

Both the Peters pronounced eager acquiescence; so after some deliberation the genial, bald-headed magistrate said:

"Peter Jimpson, and you, too, Peter Jimpson junior, I trust that the severe lesson which you have this day learnt may not be thrown away upon you. You must always remember that any form of fraud is obnoxious to the law; and this was distinctly a fraud on your part. Perhaps- indeed, I am satisfied, that you thought it an innocent proceeding enough; but let me tell you that there was manifest throughout the mens rea, which the law holds to be a necessary part of ill-doing-the intent to deceive. I am convinced that you, Peter Jimpson, fully intended to follow your son into the water, or otherwise I should have by this time committed you for trial on the serious charge of attempted murder, and for this reason I shall dismiss the charge; but I trust that as you lay your head on your pillow to-night you will breathe a warm and earnest prayer for that most gallant fellow, Thomas Bolter-that most excellent swimmer and master of the art of life-saving, to whom you owe so much!"

There was great applause in court, and a voice in the back of the crowd said, "Good old Bolter!" but the crier instantly called, "Silence in the court."

Then Tom Bolter stood forward, and pulling his forelock respectfully, said:

"Your worship, what I done I done for the dear child's good; but I thank your worship all the same for the kind and useful-and I hope I may say true-words which you have spoke of me. I'm only a unknown man in London as yet; but I am sure that before long you'll hear of me in connection with saving life from drowning. When that time comes I 'ope as you, your worship, and all these 'ere ladies and gents as has done me so proud to-day concernin' my gallant act'll remember the name of Tom Bolter, and come and see me, even if you have to plank down your moneyfor it. My service to you, your worship, and you ladies and gents all!" and Tom Bolter retired from the court amid a murmur of applause, the court emptying after him in a stream.

Outside there was soon a buzz and hum of many persons speaking, for each of the chief actors in the river episode was surrounded by a group of sympathisers or admirers.

One little group of sporting-looking young men stood apart listening to a betting man, whose calling was writ large on every square inch of his face and clothing.

"Well, blow me tight!" they heard him say, "if that ain't the very cheekiest thing I ever see done; and, mind you, I've seen a few."

"How do you mean, Sam?" came the chorus of questions.

" 'Ow do I mean? Why, this, that the bally court and the 'ole bloomin' lot of yer is took in! They've been playin' yer for suckers, the 'ole bloomin' lot of yer."

"Who has, Sam?"

"Why, them two Northern chaps, Polter and Bolter, the champion swimmers of the Tyne. They've come to London to give an exhibition of life savin' at the Hippodrome, an' I've seen their printin' lyin' ready till their chance come. 'Polter and Bolter, the 'Eroes of the Thames,' is wot they're down as, and I've seen them the 'ole of last week prowlin' round the bridge lookin' out for a chanst. My stars! but they done it fine; but the kiddy is the daisy of them all!"

In the meantime, in the group round the two Peters, the boy's voice was heard above the babel:

“I tell you he’s the bravest chap and the finest swimmer in all the world! I ought to know since he took me out of the jaws of death! God bless him!”

Here Peter the elder whispered to him fiercely:

“Stow all that and keep yer ‘ead shut! Don’t crack him up; keep that for ourselves!” to which the dutiful boy answered aloud;

“No, father, I cannot hold my tongue! I must speak up for the brave and true!” Then he added in a whisper:

“Keep it up, dad! I’ve settled with them as we came up to the court. They’re goin’ to open in the Hippodrome and they’re to give you and me twenty quid a week to play up to them! You go on swimmin’, father, and be quicker in your jumps; but leave the business of the firm to me!”

LORD CASTLETON EXPLAINS

Taken From

THE FATE OF FENELLA

The serial novel *The Fate of Fenella* was published in 1892 in *Cassell's Magazine* and featured a different author writing each of the twenty-four chapters. Stoker was commissioned to write the tenth chapter, which is available below.

CHAPTER 10

Lord Francis Onslow lifted his cap. The action was an instinctive one, for he was face to face with a lady; but he was half dazed with the unexpected meeting, and could not collect his thoughts. He only remembered that when he had last seen his wife she was opening the door of her chamber to De Murger. For weeks he had been schooling himself for such a meeting, for he knew that on his return such might at any time occur; but now, when the moment had come, and unexpectedly, the old pain of his shame overwhelmed him anew. His face grew white-white till it seemed to Fenella that it was of the pallor of death. She knew that she had been so far guilty of what had happened that the murder had been the outcome of her previous acts. She knew also that her husband was ignorant of his part in the deed-and her horror of the man, blood-guilty in such a way, was fined down by the sense of her own partial guilt. The trial, with all its consequent pain to a proud and sensitive woman, had softened her, and she grasped at any hope. The sight of Frank, his gaunt cheeks, which told their tale of suffering, and now the deadly pallor, awoke all the protective feeling which is a part of a woman's love. It was with her whole soul in her voice that she said again:

"Frank!" His voice was stern as well as sad as he answered her:

"What is it?" Her heart went cold, but she persevered.

"Frank, I must have a word with you-I must. For God's sake, for Ronny's sake, do not deny me." She did not know that as yet Frank Onslow was in ignorance of De Murger's death; and when his answer came it seemed more hard than even he intended:

"Do you wish to speak of that night?" In a faint voice she answered:

"I do." Then looking in his eyes and seeing the hard look becoming harder still-for a man is seldom generous with a woman where his honour is concerned, she added:

"O Heaven! Frank! You do not think me guilty! No, no, not you! not you! That would be too cruel!"

Frank Onslow paused and said:

"Fenella, God help me! but I do," and he turned away his head. His wife, of course, thought that he alluded to the murder, and not to her sin against him as he saw it, and with a low moan she turned away and hid her face in her hands. Then with an effort she drew herself up, and without a word or a single movement to show that she even recognised his presence, she passed on up the street.

Frank Onslow stood for a few moments watching her retreating figure, and then went across the street and turned the next corner on his way to the post-office, for which he had been inquiring when he met his wife. At the door he was stopped by a cheery voice and an outstretched hand:

"Onslow!"

"Castleton! The two men shook hands warmly.

"I see you did not get my telegram," said Lord Castleton. "It is waiting for you at the post-office."

"What telegram?"

"To tell you that I was on my way here from London. I went in your interest, old fellow. I thought you would like full particulars-the newspapers are so vague."

"What papers? My interest? Tell me all. I am ignorant of all that has passed for the last six weeks." A vague, shadowy fear began to creep over his spirits. Castleton's voice was full of sympathy as he answered:

"Then you have not heard of-but stay. It is a long story. Come back to the yacht. I was just going to join you there. We shall be all alone, and I can tell you all. I have the newspapers here for you." He motioned to a roll under his arm.

The two went down to the harbour, and finding the sailor waiting with the boat at the steps, were rowed to the yacht and got on board. Here the two men were all alone. Then, with a preliminary clearing of his voice, Castleton began his story:

"Frank Onslow-better get the worst over at once-just after you went away from Harrogate your wife was tried for murder and acquitted."

"My God! Fenella tried for murder? Whose murder?"

"That scoundrel De Murger. It seems he went into her room in the night and attempted violence, so she stabbed him-"

Castleton stopped in amazement, for a look of radiance came over Frank Onslow's face, as he murmured "Thank God!" Recalled to himself by Castleton's silence, for he was too amazed to go on, Frank said. “I have a reason, old fellow; I shall tell it to you later, but go on. Tell me all the facts, or let me read the papers. Remember I am as yet quite ignorant of it all and I am full of anxiety!”

Without a word Castleton handed him the papers, and, lighting a fresh cigar, sat down with his back to him, and presently yielded to the sun and fresh air and fell into a doze.

Frank Onslow took the papers, and read carefully from end to end the account of the trial of his wife for the murder of De Murger. When he had finished he sat with the folded paper in his hand, and his eyes had the same far-away look in them which they had had on that fatal night. The hypnotic trance was on him again.

Presently he rose, and with stealthy steps approached his sleeping friend. Murmuring “Why did I not kill him?” he struck with the folded paper, as though with a dagger, the form before him. Castleton, who had sunk into a pleasant sleep and whose fat face was wreathed with a smile, was annoyed at the rude awakening. “What the devil!” he began angrily, and then stopped as his eyes met the face of his friend and he realised that he was in some sort of trance. He grew very pale as he saw Frank Onslow stab, and stab, and stab again. There was a certain grotesqueness in the affair-the man in such terrible earnest, in his mind committing murder, while his real weapon was but a folded paper. As he stabbed he hissed, “Why did I not kill him? Why did I not kill him?” Then he went through a series of movements as though he were softly pulling an imaginary door shut behind him, and so back to his own chair, where he sat down hiding his face in his hands.

Castleton sat looking at him in amazement, and then murmured to himself:

“They thought it was someone stronger than Fenella whose grasp made those marks on the dead man's throat." He suddenly looked round to see that no one but himself had observed what had happened, and then, being satisfied on this point, murmured again:

"A noble woman, by Jove! A noble woman!" He called out:

"Frank-Frank Onslow! Wake up, man." Onslow raised his head as a man does when suddenly awakened, and smiled as he said:

"What is it, old man? Have I been asleep?" It was quite evident that he had no recollection of what had just passed. Castleton came and sat down beside him, and his kindly face was grave as he asked:

"You have read the papers?"

"I have."

"Now tell me-you offered to do so-why you said 'Thank God!' when I told you that your wife had killed De Murger?"

Frank Onslow paused. Although the memory of what he had thought to be his shame had been with him daily and nightly until he had become familiarized with it, it was another thing to speak of it, even to such a friend as Castleton. Even now, when it was apparent from the issue of the trial that his wife had avenged so dreadfully the attempt upon her honour, he felt it hard to speak on the subject. Castleton saw the doubt and struggle in his mind which was reflected in his face, and said earnestly, as he laid his hand upon his shoulder:

"Do not hesitate to tell me, Frank. I do not ask out of mere curiosity. I am perhaps a better friend than you think in helping to clear up a certain doubt which I see before me. I think you know I am a friend."

"One of the best a man ever had!" said Frank impulsively, as he took the other's hand. Then turning away his head, he said slowly:

"You were surprised because I was glad Fenella killed that scoundrel. I can tell you, Castleton, but I would not tell anyone else.

It was because I saw him enter her room, and, God forgive me! I thought at the time that it was by her wish. That is why I came away from Harrogate that night. That is what kept me away. How could I go back and face my friends with such a shame fresh upon me? It was your lending me your yacht, old man, that made life possible. When I was by myself through the wildness of the Bay of Biscay and among the great billows of the Atlantic I began to be able to bear. I had steeled myself, I thought, and when I heard that so far from my wife being guilty of such a shame, she actually killed the man that attempted her honour, is it any wonder that I felt joyful?"

After a pause Castleton asked:

"How did you come to see-to see it. Why did you take no step to prevent it? Forgive me, old fellow, but I want to understand."

Frank Onslow went to the rail, and leaned over. When he came back Castleton saw that his eyes were wet. With what cheerfulness he could assume, he answered:

"On that very night I had made up my mind to try to win back my wife's love. I wrote a letter to her, a letter in which I poured out my whole soul, and I left my room to put it under her door, so that she would get it in the morning. But"-here he paused, and then said, slowly, "but when in the corridor, I saw her door open, and at the same moment De Murger appeared."

"Did she seem surprised?"

"Not at first. But a moment after a look of amazement crossed her face, and she stepped back into the room, he following her." As he said this he put his head between his hands and groaned.

"And then?" added his friend.

"And then I hardly know what happened. My mind seems full of a dim memory of a blank existence, and then a series of wild whirling thoughts, something like that last moment after death in Wiertz's picture. I think I must have slept, for it was two o'clock when I saw Fenella, and the clock was striking five when I crossed the bridge after I had left the hotel.

"And the letter? What became of it?"

Frank started. "The letter? I never thought of it. Stay! I must have left it on the table in my room. I remember seeing it there a little while before I came away."

"How was it addressed? Do not think me inquisitive, but I cannot help thinking that that letter may yet be of some great importance."

Frank smiled, a sad smile enough, as he answered: "By the pet name I had for Fenella-Mrs Right. I used to chaff her because she always defended her position when we argued, and so, when I wanted to tease her, I called her Mrs Right."

"Was it written on hotel paper?"

"No. I was going to write on some, but I thought it would be better to use the sort we had when-when we were first married. There were a few sheets in my writing case, so I took one."

"That was headed somewhere in Surrey, was it not?"

"Yes; Chiddingford, near Haslemere. It was a pretty place, too, called The Grange. Fenella fell in love with it, and made me buy it right away."

"Is anyone living there now?"

"It is let to someone. I don't think that I heard the name. The agent knows. When the trouble came I told him to do what he could with it, and not to bother me with it any more. After a while he wrote and asked if I would mind it being let to a foreigner? I told him he might let it to a devil so long as he did not worry me."

Lord Castleton paused awhile, and asked the next question in a hesitating way. He felt embarrassed, and showed it:

"Tell me one thing more, old fellow-if-if you don't mind."

"My dear Castleton, I'll tell you anything you like."

"How did you sign the letter?" Onslow's face looked sad as he answered:

"I signed it by another old pet name we both understood. We had pet names-people always have when they are first married," he added with embarrassment.

"Of course," murmured the sympathetic Castleton.

"One such name lasted a long time. An old friend of my father's came to see us, and in a playful moment he said I was a 'sad dog'. Fenella took it up and used to call me 'Doggie,' and I often signed myself 'Frank Doggie'-as men usually do."

"Of course," again murmured Castleton, as if such a signature was a customary thing. Then he added, "And on this occasion?"

"On this occasion I used the name that seemed full of happiest memories. 'Frank Doggie' may seem idiotic to an outsider, but to Fenella and myself it might mean much."

The two men sat silent awhile, and then Castleton asked softly:

"I suppose it may be taken for granted that Lady Francis never got the letter?"

"I take it, it is so; but it is no matter now, I refused to speak with her just before I met you. I did not know then what I know now-and she will never speak to me again." He sighed as he spoke, and turned away. Then he went to the rail of the yacht and leaned over with his head down, looking into the still blue water beneath him.

"Poor old Frank!" said Castleton to himself. "I can't but think that this matter may come right yet. I must find out what became of that letter, in case Lady Francis never got it. It would prove to her that

Frank-"

His train of thought suddenly stopped. A new idea seemed to strike him so forcibly that it quite upset him. Onslow, who had come over from the rail, noticed it. "I say, Castleton, what is wrong with you? You have got quite white about the gills."

"Nothing-nothing," he answered hastily, "I am subject to it. They call it heart. Pardon me for a bit, I'll go to my bunk and lie down," and he went below.

In truth, he was overwhelmed by the thought which had just struck him. If his surmise were true, that Onslow, in a hypnotic trance, as he had almost proved by its recurrence, had killed De Murger, where, then, was Fenella's heroism after all? True that she had taken the blame on herself; but might it not have been that she was morally guilty all the same? Why, then, had she taken the blame? Was it not because she feared that her husband might have refused to screen her shame; or because she feared that if any less heroic aspect of the tragedy was presented to the public, her own fair fame might suffer in greater degree? Could it indeed be that Fenella Onslow was not a heroine, but only a calculating woman of exceeding smartness? Then, again, if Frank Onslow believed that his wife had avenged her honour, was it wise to disturb such belief? He might think, if once the suggestion were made to him, that his honour was preserved only by his own unconscious act.

Was it then wise to disturb existing relations between the husband and wife, sad though they were? Did they come together again, they might in mutual confidence arrive at a real knowledge of the facts, and then-and then, what would be the result? And besides, might there not be some danger in any suggestion made as to his suspicion of who struck the blow? It was true that Lady Francis had been acquitted of the crime, although she confessed to the killing; but her husband might still be tried-and if tried? What then would be the result of the discovery of the missing letter on which he had been building such hopes?

The problem was too much for Lord Castleton. His life had been too sunny and easy-going to allow of familiarity with great emotions, and such a problem as this was to him overwhelming. The issue was too big for him; and revolving in his own mind all that belonged to it, he glided into sleep.

THE GOMBEEN MAN

"God save all here," said the man as he entered.

Room was made for him at the fire. He no sooner came near it and tasted the heat than a cloud of steam arose from him.

"Man! but ye're wet," said Mrs. Kelligan. "One'd think ye'd been in the lake beyant!"

"So I have," he answered, "worse luck! I rid all the way from Galway this blessed day to be here in time, but the mare slipped coming down Curragh Hill and threw me over the bank into the lake. I wor in the wather nigh three hours before I could get out, for I was foreninst the Curragh Rock an' only got a foothold in a chink, an' had to hold on wid me one arm for I fear the other is broke."

"Dear! dear! dear!" interrupted the woman. "Sthrip yer coat off, acushla, an' let us see if we can do anythin'."

He shook his head, as he answered:-

"Not now, there's not a minute to spare. I must get up the Hill at once. I should have been there be six o'clock. But I mayn't be too late yit. The mare has broke down entirely. Can any one here lend me a horse?"

There was no answer till Andy spoke:-

"Me mare is in the shtable, but this gintleman has me an' her for the day, an' I have to lave him at Carnaclif to-night."

Here I struck in:-

"Never mind me, Andy! If you can help this gentleman, do so: I'm better off here than driving through the storm. He wouldn't want to go on, with a broken arm, if he hadn't good reason!"

The man looked at me with grateful eagerness:-

"Thank yer honour, kindly. It's a rale gintleman ye are! An' I hope ye'll never be sorry for helpin' a poor fellow in sore throuble."

"What's wrong, Phelim?" asked the priest. "Is there anything troubling you that any one here can get rid of?"

"Nothin', Father Pether, thank ye kindly. The throuble is me own intirely, an' no wan here could help me. But I must see Murdock to-night."

There was a general sigh of commiseration; all understood the situation.

"Musha!" said old Dan Moriarty, sotto voce. "An' is that the way of it! An' is he too in the clutches iv that wolf? Him that we all thought was so warrum. Glory be to God! but it's a quare wurrld it is; an' it's few there is in it that is what they seems. Me poor frind! is there any way I can help ye? I have a bit iv money by me that yer welkim to the lend iv av ye want it."

The other shook his head gratefully:-

"Thank ye kindly, Dan, but I have the money all right; it's only the time I'm in trouble about!"

"Only the time! me poor chap! It's be time that the divil helps Black Murdock an' the likes iv him, the most iv all! God be good to ye if he has got his clutch on yer back, an' has time on his side, for ye'll want it!"

"Well! anyhow, I must be goin' now. Thank ye kindly, neighbours all. When a man's in throuble, sure the goodwill of his frinds is the greatest comfort he can have."

"All but one, remember that! all but one!" said the priest.

"Thank ye kindly, Father, I shan't forget. Thank ye Andy: an' you, too, young sir, I'm much beholden to ye. I hope, some day, I may have it to do a good turn for ye in return. Thank ye kindly again, and good night." He shook my hand warmly, and was going to the door, when old Dan said:-

"An' as for that black-jawed ruffian, Murdock - " He paused, for the door suddenly opened, and a harsh voice said:-

"Murtagh Murdock is here to answer for himself!" - It was my man at the window.

There was a, sort of paralyzed silence in the room, through which came the whisper of one of the old women:-

"Musha! talk iv the divil!"

Joyce's face grew very white; one hand instinctively grasped his riding switch, the other hung uselessly by his side. Murdock spoke:-

"I kem here expectin' to meet Phelim Joyce. I thought I'd save him the throuble of comin' wid the money." Joyce said in a husky voice:-

"What do ye mane? I have the money right enough here. I'm sorry I'm a bit late, but I had a bad accident - bruk me arrum, an' was nigh dhrownded in the Curragh Lake. But I was goin' up to ye at once, bad as I am, to pay ye yer money, Murdock." The Gombeen Man interrupted him:-

"But it isn't to me ye'd have to come, me good man. Sure, it's the sheriff, himself, that was waitin' for ye', an' whin ye didn't come" - here Joyce winced; the speaker smiled - "he done his work."

"What wurrk, acushla?" asked one of the women. Murdock answered slowly:-

He sould the lease iv the farrum known as the Shleenanaher in open sale, in accordance wid the terrums of his notice, duly posted, and wid warnin' given to the houldher iv the lease."

There was a long pause. Joyce was the first to speak:-

"Ye're jokin', Murdock. For God's sake say ye're jokin'! Ye tould me yerself that I might have time to git the money. An' ye tould me that the puttin' me farrum up for sale was only a matther iv forrum to let me pay ye back in me own way. Nay! more, ye asked me not to te tell any iv the neighbours, for fear some iv them might want to buy some iv me land. An' it's niver so, that whin ye got me aff to Galway to rise the money, ye went on wid the sale, behind me back - wid not a soul by to spake for me or mine - an' sould up all I have! No! Murtagh Murdock, ye're a hard man I know, but ye wouldn't do that! Ye wouldn't do that!"

Murdock made no direct reply to him, but said seemingly to the company generally:-

"I ixpected to see Phelim Joyce at the sale to-day, but as I had some business in which he was consarned, I kem here where I knew there'd be neighbours - an' sure so there is."

He took out his pocket-book and wrote names, "Father Pether Ryan, Daniel Moriarty, Bartholomew Moynahan, Andhrew McGlown, Mrs. Katty Kelligan - that's enough! I want ye all to see what I done. There's nothin' undherhand about me! Phelim Joyce, I give ye formial notice that yer land was sould an' bought be me, for ye broke yer word to repay me the money lint ye before the time fixed. Here's the Sheriff's assignmint, an' I tell ye before all these witnesses that I'll proceed with ejectment on title at wanst."

All in the room were as still as statues. Joyce was fearfully still and pale, but when Murdock spoke the word "ejectment" he seemed to wake in a moment to frenzied life. The blood flushed up in his face and he seemed about to do something rash; but with a great effort he controlled himself and said:-

"Mr. Murdock, ye won't be too hard. I got the money to-day - it's here - but I had an accident that delayed me. I was thrown into the Curragh Lake and nigh drownded an' me arrum is bruk. Don't be so close as an hour or two - ye'll never be sorry for it. I'll pay ye all, and more, and thank ye into the bargain all me life; ye'll take back the paper, won't ye, for me childhren's sake - for Norah's sake?

"He faltered; the other answered with an evil smile:-

"Phelim Joyce, I've waited years for this moment - don't ye know me betther nor to think I would go back on meself whin I have shtarted on a road? I wouldn't take yer money, not if ivery pound note was spread into an acre and cut up in tin-pound notes. I want yer land - I have waited for it, an' I mane to have it! - Now don't beg me any more, for I won't go back - an' tho' its many a grudge I owe ye, I square them all before the neighbours be refusin' yer prayer. The land is mine, bought be open sale; an' all the judges an' coorts in Ireland can't take it from me! An' what do ye say to that now, Phelim Joyce?

"The tortured man had been clutching the ash sapling which he had used as a riding whip, and from the nervous twitching of his fingers I knew that something was coming. And it came; for, without a word, he struck the evil face before him - struck as quick as a flash of lightning - such a blow that the blood seemed to leap out round the stick, and a vivid welt rose in an instant. With a wild, savage cry the Gombeen Man jumped at him; but there were others in the room as quick, and before another blow could be struck on either side both men were grasped by strong hands and held back.

Murdock's rage was tragic. He yelled, like a wild beast, to be let get at his opponent. He cursed and blasphemed so outrageously that all were silent, and only the stern voice of the priest was heard:-

"Be silent Murtagh Murdock! Aren't you afraid that the God overhead will strike you dead? With such a storm as is raging as a sign of His power, you are a foolish man to tempt Him."

The man stopped suddenly, and a stern dogged sullenness took the place of his passion. The priest went on:-

"As for you, Phelim Joyce, you ought to be ashamed of yourself; ye're not one of my people, but I speak as your own clergyman would if he were here. Only this day has the Lord seen fit to spare you from a terrible death; and yet you dare to go back of His mercy with your angry passion. You had cause for anger - or temptation to it, I know - but you must learn to kiss the chastening rod, not spurn it. The Lord knows what He is doing for you as for others, and it may be that you will look back on this day in gratitude for His doing, and in shame for your own anger. Men, hold off your hand's - let those two men go; they'll quarrel no more - before me at any rate, I hope."

The men drew back. Joyce held his head down, and a more despairing figure or a sadder one I never saw. He turned slowly away, and leaning against the wall put his face between his hands and sobbed. Murdock scowled, and the scowl gave place to an evil smile as looking all around he said:-

"Well, now that me work is done, I must be gettin' home."

"An' get some wan to iron that mark out iv yer face," said Dan. Murdock turned again and glared around him savagely as he hissed out:-

"There'll be iron for some one before I'm done. Mark me well! I've never gone back or wakened yit whin I promised to have me own turn. There's thim here what'll rue this day yit! If I am the shnake on the hill - thin beware the shnake. An' for him what shtruck me, he'll be in bitther sorra for it yit - him an' his!" He turned his back and went to the door.

"Stop!" said the priest. "Murtagh Murdock, I have a word to say to you - a solemn word of warning. Ye have to-day acted the part of

Ahab towards Naboth the Jezreelite; beware of his fate! You have coveted your neighbour's goods - you have used your power without mercy; you have made the law an engine of oppression. Mark me! It was said of old that what measure men meted should be meted out to them again. God is very just. 'Be not deceived, God is not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap.' Ye have sowed the wind this day - beware lest you reap the whirlwind! Even as God visited his sin upon Ahab the Samarian, and as He has visited similar sins on others in His own way - so shall He visit yours on you. You are worse than the land-grabber - worse than the man who only covets. Saintough is a virtue compared with your act! Remember the story of Naboth's vineyard, and the dreadful end of it. Don't answer me! Go and repent if you can, and leave sorrow and misery to be comforted by others - unless you wish to undo your wrong yourself. If you don't - then remember the curse that may come upon you yet!"

Without a word Murdock opened the door and went out, and a little later we heard the clattering of his horse's feet on the rocky road to Shleenanaher.

When it was apparent to all that he was really gone a torrent of commiseration, sympathy and pity broke over Joyce. The Irish nature is essentially emotional, and a more genuine and stronger feeling I never saw. Not a few had tears in their eyes, and one and all were manifestly deeply touched. The least moved was, to all appearance, poor Joyce himself. He seemed to have pulled himself together, and his sterling manhood and courage and pride stood by him. He seemed, however, to yield to the kindly wishes of his friends; and when we suggested that his hurt should be looked to, he acquiesced:-

"Yes, if you will. Betther not go home to poor Norah and distress her with it. Poor child! she'll have enough to bear without that."

His coat was taken off, and between us we managed to bandage the wound. The priest, who had some surgical knowledge, came to the conclusion that there was only a simple fracture. He splinted and bandaged the arm, and we all agreed that it would be better for Joyce to wait until the storm was over before starting for home. Andy said he could take him on the car, as he knew the road well, and that, as it was partly on the road to Carnaclif, we should only have to make a short detour and would pass the house of the doctor, by whom the arm could be properly attended to.

So we sat around the fire again, whilst, without, the storm howled and the fierce gusts which swept the valley seemed at times as if they would break in the door, lift of the roof, or in some way annihilate the time-worn cabin which gave us shelter.

There could, of course, be only one subject of conversation now, and old Dan simply interpreted the public wish, when he said:-

"Tell us, Phelim, sure we're all friends here! how Black Murdock got ye in his clutches? Sure any wan of us would get you out of thim if he could."

There was a general acquiescence. Joyce yielded himself, and said:-

"Let me thank ye, neighbours all, for yer kindness to me and mine this sorraful night. Well! I'll say no more about that; but I'll tell ye how it was that Murdock got me into his power. Ye know that boy of mine, Eugene?"

"Oh! and he's the fine lad, God bless him! an' the good lad too!" - this from the women.

"Well! ye know too that he got on so well whin I sint him to school that Dr. Walsh recommended me to make an ingineer of him.

He said he had such promise that it was a pity not to see him get the right start in life, and he gave me, himself, a letther to Sir George Henshaw, the great ingineer. I wint and seen him, and he said he would take the boy. He tould me that there was a big fee to be paid, but I was not to throuble about that - at any rate, that he himself didn't want any fee, and he would ask his partner if he would give up his share too. But the latther was hard up for money. He said he couldn't give up all fee, but that he would take half the fee, provided it was paid down in dhry money. Well! the regular fee to the firm was five hundhred pounds, and as Sir George had giv up half an' only half th' other half was to be paid, that was possible. I hadn't got more'n a few pounds by me - for what wid dhrainin' and plantin' and fencin' and the payin' the boy's schoolin', and the girl's at the Nuns' in Galway, it had put me to the pin iv me collar to find the money up to now. But I didn't like to let the boy lose his chance in life for want of an effort, an' I put me pride in me pocket an' kem an' asked Murdock for the money. He was very smooth an' nice wid me - know why now - an' promised he would give it at wanst if I would give him security on me land. Sure he joked an' laughed wid me, an' was that cheerful that I didn't misthrust him. He tould me it was only forrums I was signin' that'd never be used" - Here Dan Moriarty interrupted him:-

"What did ye sign, Phelim?"

"There wor two papers. Wan was a writin' iv some kind, that in considheration iv the money lent an' his own land - which I was to take over if the money wasn't paid at the time appointed - he was to get me lease from me: an' the other was a power of attorney to Enther Judgment for the amount if the money wasn't paid at the right time. I thought I was all safe as I could repay him in the time named, an’ if the worst kem to the worst I might borry the money from some wan else - for the lease is worth the sum tin times over - an’ repay him. Well! what’s the use of lookin’ back, anyhow! I signed the papers - that was a year ago, an’ one week. An’ a week ago the time was up!” He gulped down a sob, and went on:-

“Well! ye all know the year gone has been a terrible bad wan, an’ as for me it was all I could do to hould on - to make up the money was impossible. Thrue the lad cost me next to nothin’, for he arned his keep be exthra work, an’ the girl, Norah, kem home from school and laboured wid me, an’ we saved every penny we could. But it was all no use! - we couldn’t get the money together anyhow. Thin we had the misfortin wid the cattle that ye all know of; an’ three horses, that I sould in Dublin, up an’ died before the time I guaranteed them free from sickness” Here Andy struck in:-

“Thrue for ye! Sure there was some dhreadful disordher in Dublin among the horse cattle, intirely; an’ even Misther Docther Perfesshinal Ferguson himself couldn’t git undher it!” Joyce went on:-

“An’ as the time grew nigh I began to fear, but Murdock came down to see me whin I was alone, an’ tould me not to throuble about the money an’ not to mind about the sheriff, for he had to give him notice. ‘An’,’ says he, ‘I wouldn’t, if I was you, tell Norah anythin’ about it, for it might frighten the girl - for weemin is apt to take to heart things like that that’s only small things to min like us.’ An’ so, God forgive me, I believed him; an’ I niver tould me child anything about it - even whin I got the notice from the sheriff. An’ whin the Notice tellin’ of the sale was posted up on me land, I tuk it down meself so that the poor child wouldn’t be frightened - God help me!” He broke down for a bit, but then went on:-

“But somehow I wasn’t asy in me mind, an’ whin the time iv the sale dhrew nigh I couldn’t keep it to myself any longer, an’ I tould Norah. That was only yisterday, and look at me to-day! Norah agreed wid me that we shouldn’t trust the Gombeen, an’ she sent me off to the Galway Bank to borry the money. She said I was an honest man an’ farmed me own land, and that the bank might lind the money on it. An’ sure enough whin I wint there this mornin’ be appointment, wid the Coadjuthor himself to inthroduce me, though he didn’t know why I wanted the money - that was Norah’s idea, and the Mother Superior settled it for her - the manager, who is a nice gintleman, tould me at wanst that I might have the money on me own note iv hand. I only gave him a formal writin’, an’ I took away the money. Here it is in me pocket in good notes; they’re wet wid the lake but I’m thankful to say all safe. But it’s too late, God help me!” Here he broke down for a minute, but recovered himself with an effort:-

“Anyhow the bank that thrusted me musn’t be wronged. Back the money goes to Galway as soon as iver I can get it there. If I am a ruined man I need’nt be a dishonest wan! But poor Norah! God help her! it will break her poor heart.”

There was a spell of silence only broken by sympathetic moans. The first to speak was the priest.

“Phelim Joyce, I told you a while ago, in the midst of your passion, that God knows what He is doin’, and works in His own way. You’re an honest man, Phelim, and God knows it, and, mark me, He won’t let you nor yours suffer. ‘I have been young,’ said the Psalmist, ‘and now am old; and I have not seen the just forsaken, nor his seed seeking bread.’ Think of that, Phelim! - may it comfort you and poor Norah. God bless her! but she’s the good girl. You have much to be thankful for, with a daughter like her to comfort you at home and take the place of her poor mother, who was the best of women; and with such a boy as Eugene, winnin' name and credit, and perhaps fame to come, even in England itself. Thank God for His many mercies, Phelim, and trust Him."

There was a dead slience in the room. The stern man rose, and coming over took the priest's hand.

"God bless ye, Father!" he said, "it's the true comforter ye are."

The scene was a most touching one; I shall never forget it. The worst of the poor man's trouble seemed now past. He had faced the darkest hour; he had told his trouble, and was now prepared to make the best of everything - for the time at least - for I could not reconcile to my mind the idea that that proud, stern man, would not take the blow to heart for many a long day, that it might even embitter his life.

Old Dan tried comfort in a practical way by thinking of what was to be done. Said he:-

"Iv course, Phelim, it's a mighty throuble to give up yer own foine land an' take Murdock's bleak shpot instead, but I daresay ye will be able to work it well enough. Tell me, have ye signed away all the land, or only the lower farm? I mane, is the Cliff Fields yours or his?"

Here was a gleam of comfort evidently to the poor man. His face lightened as he replied:-

"Only the lower farm, thank God! Indeed, I couldn't part wid the Cliff Fields, for they don't belong to me - they are Norah's, that her poor mother left her - they wor settled on her, whin we married, be her father, and whin he died we got them. But, indeed, I fear they're but small use be themselves; shure there's no wather in them at all, savin' what runs off me ould land; an' if we have to carry wather all the way down the hill from - from me new land" - this was said with a smile, which was a sturdy effort at cheerfulness - "it will be but poor work to raise anythin' there - ayther shtock or craps. No doubt but Murdock will take away the sthrame iv wather that runs there now. He'll want to get the cliff lands, too, I suppose."

I ventured to ask a question:-

"How do your lands lie compared with Mr. Murdock's?"

There was bitterness in' his tone as he answered, in true Irish fashion:

"Do you mane me ould land, or me new?"

"The lands that were - that ought still to be yours," I answered.

He was pleased at the reply, and his face softened as he replied:-

"Well, the way of it is this. We two owns the West side of the hill between us. Murdock's land - I'm spakin' iv them as they are, till he gets possession iv mine - lies at the top iv the hill; mine lies below. My land is the best bit on the mountain, while the Gombeen's is poor soil, with only a few good patches here and there. Moreover, there is another thing. There is a bog which is high up the hill, mostly on his houldin', but my land is free from bog, except one end of the big bog, an' a stretch of dry turf, the best in the counthry, an' wid' enough turf to last for a hundhred years, it's that deep."

Old Dan joined in:-

"Thrue enough! that bog of the Gombeen's isn't much use anyhow. It's rank and rotten wid wather. Whin it made up its mind to sthay, it might have done betther!"

"The bog? Made up its mind to stay! What on earth do you mean?" I asked. I was fairly puzzled.

"Didn't ye hear talk already," said Dan, "of the shiftin' bog on the mountain?"

"I did."

"Well, that's it! It moved an' moved an' moved longer than anywan can remimber. Me grandfather wanst tould me that whin he was a gossoon it wasn't nigh so big as it was when he tould me. It hasn't shifted in my time, and I make bould to say that it has made up its mind to settle down where it is. Ye must only make the best of it, Phelim. I daresay ye will turn it to some account."

"I'll try what I can do, anyhow. I don't mane to fould me arms an' sit down op-pawsit me property an' ate it!" was the brave answer.

For myself, the whole idea was most interesting. I had never before even heard of a shifting bog, and I determined to visit it before I left this part of the country.

By this time the storm was beginning to abate. The rain had ceased, and Andy said we might proceed on our journey. So after a while we were on our way; the wounded man and I sitting on one side of the car, and Andy on the other. The whole company came out to wish us God-speed, and with such comfort as good counsel and good wishes could give we ventured into the inky darkness of the night.

Andy was certainly a born car-driver. Not even the darkness, the comparative strangeness of the road, or the amount of whisky-punch which he had on board could disturb his driving in the least; he went steadily on. The car rocked and swayed and bumped, for the road was a bye one, and in but poor condition - but Andy and the mare went on alike unmoved. Once or twice only, in a journey of some three miles of winding bye-lanes, crossed and crossed again by lanes or water-courses, did he ask the way. I could not tell which was road-way and which water-way, for they were all water-courses at present, and the darkness was profound. Still, both Andy and Joyce seemed to have a sense lacking in myself, for now and again they spoke of things which I could not see at all. As, for instance, when Andy asked:-

"Do we go up or down where the road branches beyant?" Or again: "I disremimber, but is that Micky Dolan's ould apple three, or didn't he cut it down? an' is it Tim's fornent us on the lift?"

Presently we turned to the right, and drove up a short avenue towards a house. I knew it to be a house by the light in the windows, for shape it had none. Andy jumped down and knocked, and after a short colloquy, Joyce got down and went into the Doctor's house. I was asked to go too, but thought it better not to, as it would only have disturbed the Doctor in his work; and so Andy and I possessed our souls in patience until Joyce came out again, with his arm in a proper splint. And then we resumed our journey through the inky darkness.

However, after a while either there came more light into the sky, or my eyes became accustomed to the darkness, for I thought that now and again I beheld "men as trees walking."

Presently something dark and massive seemed outlined in the sky before us - a blackness projected on a darkness - and, said Andy, turning to me:-

"That's Knockcalltecrore; we're nigh the foot iv it now, and pretty shortly we'll be at the enthrance iv the boreen, where Misther Joyce'll git aff."

We plodded on for a while, and the hill before us seemed to overshadow whatever glimmer of light there was, for the darkness grew more profound than ever; then Andy turned to my companion:-

"Sure, isn't that Miss Norah I see sittin' on the sthyle beyant?" I looked eagerly in the direction in which he evidently pointed, but for the life of me I could see nothing.

"No! I hope not," said the father, hastily. "She's never come out in the shtorm. Yes! It is her, she sees us."

Just then there came a sweet sound down the lane:-

"Is that you, father?"

"Yes! my child; but I hope you've not been out in the shtorm."

"Only a bit, father; I was anxious about you. Is it all right, father; did you get what you wanted?" She had jumped off the stile and had drawn nearer to us, and she evidently saw me, and went on in a changed and shyer voice:-

"Oh! I beg your pardon, I did not see you had a stranger with you."

This was all bewildering to me; I could hear it all - and a sweeter voice I never heard - but yet I felt like a blind man, for not a thing could I see, whilst each of the three others was seemingly as much at ease as in the daylight.

"This gentleman has been very kind to me, Norah. He has given me a seat on his car, and indeed he's come out of his way to lave me here."

"I am sure we're all grateful to you, sir; but, father where is your horse? Why are you on a car at all? Father, I hope you haven't met with any accident - I have been so fearful for you all the day." This was spoken in a fainter voice; had my eyes been of service, I was sure I would have seen her grow pale.

"Yes, my darlin', I got a fall on the Curragh Hill, but I'm all right. Norah dear! Quick, quick! catch her, she's faintin'! - my God! I can't stir!"

I jumped off the car in the direction of the voice, but my arms sought the empty air. However, I heard Andy's voice beside me:-

"All right! I have her. Hould up, Miss Norah; yer dada's all right, don't ye see him there, sittin' on me car. All right, sir, she's a brave girrul! she hasn't fainted."

"I am all right," she murmured faintly; "but, father, I hope you are not hurt?"

"Only a little, my darlin', just enough for ye to nurse me a while; I daresay a few days will make me all right again. Thank ye, Andy; steady now, till I get down; I'm feelin' a wee bit stiff." Andy evidently helped him to the ground.

"Good night, Andy, and good night you too, sir, and thank you kindly for your goodness to me all this night. I hope I'll see you again." He took my hand in his uninjured one, and shook it warmly.

"Good night," I said, and "good-bye: I am sure I hope we shall meet again."

Another hand took mine as he relinquished it - a warm, strong one - and a sweet voice said, shyly:-

"Good night, sir, and thank you for your kindness to father."

I faltered "Good night," as I raised my hat; the aggravation of the darkness at such a moment was more than I could equably bear. We heard them pass up the boreen, and I climbed on the car again.

The night seemed darker than ever as we turned our steps towards Carnaclif, and the journey was the dreariest one I had ever taken. I had only one thought which gave me any pleasure, but that was a pretty constant one through the long miles of damp, sodden road - the warm hand and the sweet voice coming out of the darkness, and all in the shadow of that mysterious mountain, which seemed to have become a part of my life. The words of the old story-teller came back to me again and again:-

"The Hill can hould tight enough! A man has raysons - sometimes wan thing and sometimes another - but the Hill houlds him all the same!"

And a vague wonder grew upon me as to whether it could ever hold me, and how!

GREATER LOVE

We was just standin' here at about eleven in the evenin', an' the moon was beginnin' to rise. We could see the little patch of light growin' bigger an' bigger, just as it is now, an' we knew that before many moments the light would be up over the sea. My back was to the sea, an' Bill was leanin' agin' the handrail, just like you now.

It ain't much, sir, after all; leastwise to you; but it was, aye, an' it is, a deal to me, for it has all my life in it, such as it is. There's a deal of poetry an' story-tellin' in books; but, Lor' bless ye, if ye could see the heart right through of even such men as me, you'd have no need o' books when you wanted poetry and romance. I often think that them chaps in them don't feel a bit more nor we do when things is happenin'; it's only when they're written down that they become heroes an' martyrs, an' suchlike. Why, Bill was as big a hero as any of them. I often wished as how I could write, that I might tell all about him.

Howsumdever, if I can't write, I can talk, an' if you're not in a hurry, an'll wait till I tell you all, I'll be proud. It does me good to talk about Bill.

Well, when I turned round an' faced Bill I see his eyes with the light in 'em, an' they was glistenin'. Bill gives a big gulp, an' says to me:

"Joe, the world's a big place, big enough for you an' me to live in without quarrelin'. An', mayhap, the same God as made one woman would make another, an' we might both live an' be happy. You an' me has been comrades for long, an' God knows that, next to Mary, I'd be sad to see you die, so whatever comes, we won't quarrel or think hard of one another, sure we won't, Joe."

He put out his hand, an' I took it sudden. We held hands for a long time. I thought he was in low spirits, and I wished to cheer him, so I says:

"Why, Bill, who talks o' dyin' that's as hearty as we?"

He shook his head sadly, an' says he:

"Joe, I don't vally my life at a pin's head, an' I ain't afraid to die. For her sake or for yours - aye, even for her pleasure - I'd - No matter. Just see if I turn coward if I ever get the chance to do her a service."

Well, we stood there for a long time. Neither of us said a word, for I didn't like to speak, although I would several times have liked to ask him a question. An' then I gave up wishin' to speak, an' began to think, like him.

I thought of all the time Bill an' me had been friends an' comrades, an' how fond we were both of Mary, an' she of us. Ye see, when we was all children, the little thing took such a fancy for both of us that we couldn't help likin' her for it, and so we became, in course of time, like big brothers to her. She would come down on the shore with Bill an' me an' sit quiet all the day an' never say a word or do anything to annoy us or put us out. Sometimes we'd go out sailin', an' then she would come an' sit beside whoever was steerin' till he'd ask her to come up an' sit on his knee. Then she'd put up her little arms round his neck an' kiss him, an' would stay as quiet as a mouse till she'd have to change her place. That was the way, sir, that we both came to be so fond of her.

An', sure enough, when she began to grow up, Bill an' me wanted none other but her. An' the more she grew, the prouder we were of her, till at last we found out that we were both of us in love with her. But we never told her so, or let her see it; an' she had grown up so amongst us that she never suspected it. She said so long after.

Then Bill an’ me held a kind of council about what was to be done, an’ so we came to be talkin’ on the bridge that night. Mary was growin’ into a young woman, an’ we feared that some other chap might take her fancy, if one of us didn’t get her at once. Bill was very serious, far more serious than me, for I had somehow got the idea into my head as how Mary cared for me, an’ as long as I felt that I couldn’t feel either unhappy or downhearted.

All at once Bill’s face grew brighter, an’ there was a soft look in his eyes.

“Joe,” he says, “whatever happens, Mary must never hang her head. The lass is tender-hearted, and she likes both of us, we know; an’ as she can only love one of us, it might pain her to think that when she was marryin’ one man she was leavin’ a hole in the life of his comrade. So she must never know as how we both love her, if we can prevent it.”

When we got that far, I began to grow uneasy. I began to distrust Bill - God forgive me for it - an’ to think that maybe he was fixin’ some plan for to cut me out. I must have been jealous, that was it. But I was punished for my distrust when he went on:

“Joe, old lad, we both love her an’ we love each other; an’ God knows I’d go away, an’ wiMin’, an’ leave her to you, but who knows that mayhap she’d like me better of the two. Women is queer creatures in lettin’ a fellow see their hearts till they see his first.”

Then he stayed quiet, an’ so I says to him:

“How are we to manage to do that, Bill? If we tell her, won’t she know that we both love her? An’ you said you wouldn’t like her to do that.”

“That’s just what I was thinkin’ of,” he says. “An’ I see how we may do it. One of us must go to her an' find out if she loves him, an' if she does, the other will say nothin'."

I felt feared, so I asked him:

"Who is to go, Bill?"

He came over an' took me by the shoulder, an' says he:

"Joe, so far as I can see, the lass cares for you the most; you must go first an' find out."

I tried not to appear joyful, an' I says:

"Bill, that isn't fair; whoever goes first has the best chance. Why won't you go, or why not draw lots?" I've had a many hard tussles in my time, both with men an' things, but I never had such a struggle as I had to say them words.

"Joe," says Bill, "you must do all you can to win her yourself, an' don't let any thoughts of me hinder you. I'll be best pleased by seein' heran' you happy, if so be she loves you." Then he stood up from leaning on the rail, an' says he:

"Joe, give me your hand before we go, an' mind, I charge you on your honor as a man, never while I'm livin', to let Mary know as how I loved her, in case she chooses you." So I promised. I felt Bill's hand grip like a vice, an' then we turned an' walked away home an' never spoke another word that night, either of us.

I didn't sleep much that night, and when it began to get to mornin' I got up an' went down to the sea an' had a swim, an' that freshened me up somewhat. I wasn't much of a swimmer myself, but I could manage to keep myself up pretty well. That was the point where I envied Bill most of all. He was the finest swimmer I ever see. He did a many things well, an' no lad in this county could come near him in anything he chose to do; but in swimmin' none could come anigh him at all. An' man^s the time it stood to others as well as himself.

Well, when I had had my bathe, I went up toward Mary's home, an' found myself goin' in to ask her straight off to marry me. Then I began to think it was too early for Mary to be up; so I stole away on tiptoe, an' walked round the house. Then I thought I'd go an' look up Bill, an' came anigh his house. But when I came to the door, as I didn't like to knock, I thought I'd speer in, an' see if he was asleep. So I stole to the window an' looked in.

I never shall forget to my dyin' day what I saw then. I wasn't a bad fellow, thank God, at any time, but I couldn't be a bad fellow or do anything I thought very wrong after that. There was Bill, just as I had left him the night before. He had never changed his clothes, an' the candle was flickerin' down in the socket, unheeded. He was kneelin' down by the bed, with his arms stretched out before him, an' his face down on the quilt. That was thirty-seven year ago, but it seems like yesterday. I thought at first he was sleepin', but I saw from a movement he made that he was awake. So I stole away, guiltylike, an' went down an' stood beside the sea. I took off my hat, an' let the wind blow about my forehead, for somehow it felt burnin', an' I looked out over the sea for long. Somehow my heart beat like as if it was lead, an' I felt half choked. I dunno how long I would have stayed there only for Bill. He came behind me, and put his hand on my shoulder and said, sudden:

"Why, Joe, what are you doin' here?"

I turned, startled, an' saw that he was smilin'. I was so thunderstruck at seein' the change, that for a moment I said nothin'. He says to me again:

"Joe, I thought you'd have more to do than think of eatin' this mornin', an' it's bad to court on an empty stomach! So come up to my place; I've got breakfast for the both of us."

I couldn't realise that this hearty chap was the man I saw prayin' after the long night. I looked at him keenly, but could see no sign of his actin' a part in his face. He was gayer an' livelier than ever, an' in such good spirits that he made me gay, too. I couldn't forget how I'd seen him a short while since; but I laid the thought by, an' didn't let it trouble me. I went up to his place. It was clean an' tidy as ever, an' the breakfast was ready. He made me eat some, an' when I was done, he brushed me up an' tidied me, an' says he:

"Go in an' win, old lad. God bless ye!" I went away toward Mary's house; but before I lost sight of Bill, I turned, an' he waved his hand to me with a kind smile an' went in an' shut the door.

I went on toward Mary's; but the farther I went the slower I got. An' when I got to the garden gate I stopped altogether. I stayed moonin' about there for a while, till at last Mary sees me an' comes out. I don't know how to tell you what took place then. I ain't more bashfuller than a man of my years ought to be, but somehow it comes rough on a man to tell this kind of ting. Oh, no; it ain't that I don't remember it all; for I do, well. But, ye see - ye won't laugh at me? I know'd ye wouldn't; I ax yer pardon. Well, to prove it to ye, I'll say what I never said yet to mortal, except Mary - an' that only once.

Mary comes out to me, runnin' like a little girl, with her face all dimplin' overwith pleasure, an' she says:

"Why, Joe, what brings you here at this hour? Come in, Joe! Mother, here's Joe! Have you had your breakfast, Joe? Come in!"

I felt that I would never have courage to speak out before her mother if I went into the cottage, so I stayed beside the gate an' let her talk on. As I looked at her then, I could hardly believe what I was come for; it seemed like doin' something wrong to try to change her from what she was. She looked so lovely an' so bright that it seemed a pity ever to wish her to be aught else - even my own wife. An', beside, the thought came an' hit me hard, that mayhap she wouldn't have me, after all. I tried to think on that; but, Lor' bless ye, I couldn't. It seemed somethin' so terrible that I couldn't think it. However, I stood still, sayin' nothin', till she began to notice. I wasn't used to be sheepish before Mary or any one else; so when she had done her talkin' she looked at me sudden, an' then her eyes fell, an', after a moment, she blushed up to the roots of her hair an' says:

"Joe, what's the matter with you? You don't look as usual."

I blurted out all in a moment:

"No, Mary; nor I ain't the same as usual, for I'm in trouble."

She came close to me before I could say any more - she wasn't lookin' down or blushin' then - an' she says:

"Oh, Joe, I'm sorry for that." An' she put her arm on my shoulder. Then she went on, in a kind o' tender voice:

"Did you tell Bill?"

"Yes," I says.

"And what did he say?"

"He told me to come to you!"

"To me, Joe?" she says, an' looked puzzled.

"Yes," I says, in despair like. "I'm in trouble, Mary, for I want you to marry me."

"Oh, Joe!" she says, an' drew away a little. Then she says to me, with a queer look on her face:

"Joe, run an' tell Bill I want to see him - to come as soon as he can."

Well, them words went through me like so many knives, an' if ever I could have hated Bill, it would have been then. What could she want Bill for, I thinks to myself, but to find out if he loves her, too -

an’ to have him? I thinks how mad a woman would be to have me when she could get a man like Bill. I was afraid to say anything, so I set off smart for him, for I feared I wouldn’t be able to tell him if I didn’t go at once. I tried not to think while I was goin’ down the road; but I couldn’t get her words out of my head. They seemed to keep time with my feet, an’ I heard them over an’ over again:

“Tell - Bill -1 - want - to - see - him! Tell - Bill -1 - want - to - see - him!”

At last I got to the house, an’ found Bill inside, mendin’ a net that hung agin’ the wall. He turned round quickly when I came in, an’ his heart began to beat so hard that I could see it thumpin’ inside his guernsey. He saw I wasn’t lookin’ pleased, so he came near an’ put his two hands on my shoulders an’ looked me in the face.

“What cheer, Joe?” he says, an’ I could see that he was tryin’ to control himself. When I told him the message, he began tremblin’ all over, an’ got as white as a sheet. Then he says to me in a thick kind o’ voice:

“Joe, how did she look when she said it?”

I tried to tell him, an’ asked him to hurry on.

“In a minute,” says he, an’ went into the other room.

When he came back I turned round, expectin’ to see him got up a bit; but there he was just as he went in, in his old workin’ clothes. But he was quiet lookin’, an’ had a smile on his face.

“Bill, old lad,” I says, “aren’t ye goin’ to tidy up a bit? Mayhap Maryd like to see ye neat.”

“No,” he says; “I’ll go as I am. If it be as it may be, she won’t like me none the worse for comin’ quick; an’ if it don’t be - Come on, Joe, an’ don’t keep her waitin’.”

Well, we walked up the road without sayin’ a word. When we came in sight of Mary's cottage it seemed darker to me than it had been.

Mary came out of the gate to meet us, an' when she spoke to Bill I dropped behind. They two went into the arbor that we had built for her. They sat talkin' for a few minutes -1 could see them through the hedge - an' at last I saw Bill bend down his head an' kiss her. She put her arms round his neck an' kissed him. An' at that the whole of the light seemed to go out of the sky, an' I wished I was dead.

I would have gone away, but I could hardly stir. I leaned up against the hedge, an' didn't mind any more till I heard Bill's voice callin' me. I came in at the gate, puttin' on as good a face as I could, an' came into the arbor.

Bill an' Mary was standin' up, an' Bill's face looked beamin', while Mary's was red as a rose.

Bill beckoned me over, an' when I came near, he says:

"Well, Mary, shall I tell him now?"

"Yes, Bill," she says, in a kind of a whisper; so he says to me:

"Joe, I give her to you! She wouldn't let none do it but me; for she says she loves me like as a brother. Take her, Joe, an' love her well, an' God bless ye both!"

He put her in my arms, an' she clung to me.

I was bewildered, an' could hardly see; but when I came to look about there was Mary in my arms, with her face buried in my breast, an' her arms round my neck.

Bill was makin' down the road, upright an' steady as ever. Even then, for a moment, I couldn't think of Mary, for my thoughts went back to when I saw Bill kneelin' beside his bed, with his arms stretched out, an' I felt - if you'll believe me - more sorrow than joy. I know now that Bill had wrestled with the devil that night, an' threw him, if ever a man did. Poor Bill! Poor Bill!

I suppose I needn’t tell you what Mary an’ me said? It wouldn’t sound much, at any rate, altho’ it pleased us. When I felt that she loved me I forgot even Bill, an’ we was happier than tongue could tell.

Well, the time went on for a month or two, an’ we was thinkin’ of gettin’ married soon. I was gettin’ my cottage ready an’ spendin’ some of the money I had saved to make it bright for Mary. Bill worked with me early an’ late, but it wasn’t only his time that he gave to me. He would often go into the town to buy the things I wanted, an’ I’m sure he never got them for what he told me. I said nothin’, for I knew that it would only hurt him, an’ it was little enough that I could do for Bill to let him help if he chose. I used to watch him to see if he wasn’t unhappy, but I never seed a sign of sorrow on him. He always looked happy an’ bright, an’ he worked harder than ever, an’ was kinder to all around him. I knew he didn’t forget - for how could he forget Mary? - an’ I feared at times lest he might fret in secret. But I never seed him grieve. I could hardly imagine, when I would think on it, how Mary came to take me or love me when Bill was nigh her.

Well, the time wasn’t long goin’ by, for we was happy, an’ had all our lives before us, an’, at length, the day came round before we was to be married. It was Easter Sunday we was to be married on, an’ all the people as knew Mary an’ me - an’ that was all the village - was goin’ to have a grand holiday. We was to go an’ have a feast out on the island, an’ we was gettin’ the boats cleaned an’ nice an’ smart for the occasion. In coorse, everybody had to bring their own dinners; but we was to join them all together an’ make a grand feast. We had got a cask o’ beer, an’ we was to have great doin’s an’ a dance on the grass. There’s the finest sod for dancin’ in the countryside out yonder on the island, an’ we’d got Mike Wheeler to bring his fiddle, with an extra set of strings. We weren’t to come home till evenin’ when the tide turned, an’ then we would have a race home.

Well, Bill an’ me, we both took tea at Mary’s house that evenin’, an’ when we came home Bill asked me to go into his house for awhile an’ have a quiet talk. We lit our pipes, drew up our chairs, an’ sat down by the fire an’ puffed away, without sayin’ a word for some time, an’ then Bill says to me:

“Well, Joe, there won’t be a man in the church tomorrow that won’t envy you - except myself.”

I thought of him kneelin’ down by the bedside that mornin’ when he says that, so I thought to tell him. I put down my pipe an’ came an’ put my arms on his shoulder, as I used to do when we was boys together, an’ told him all I knew. He just shook hands with me, an’ says he:

“Joe, it was a hard fight, but, thank God, I won. I’ve crushed out all the old love now. Why, lad, to-morrow she’ll be your wife, an’ I’ll care for her no more than any other woman - as a sweetheart, I mean, for I’m a brother to her now as long as we live - an’ to you, Joe. It ain’t that I think less of her, for I’d walk into the fire for her this minute, but -1 can’t explain it, Joe. You know what I mean.”

“Bill,” I says, “you’ve been a true friend to me an’ Mary, an’ I hope we’ll always be able to show how much we both love you. May God judge me hard when I die if ever I have a hard thought of you as long as I live!”

We said no more after that. I went out, but came back in a minute to tell Bill to be sure to come an’ wake me if he was up first; but when I was passin’ the window I see him hangin’ a coat up over it. It wasn’t that he thought I’d spy on him again that he did that. I saw that in his face; but he feared I might see him again somehow, and that it might pain me.

Well, I woke in the mornin’ as soon as it was daylight, an’ went down an’ had a swim, an’ then came home an’ brushed my new clothes an’ laid out the shirt that Mary had worked for me herself, an’ washed as white as snow. Then Bill came down to me. He was to take his breakfast with me that mornin’, an’ he came all dressed for the weddin’ in a new suit of clothes. He was a real handsome, fine fellow at any time, but he looked like a gentleman that mornin’. Then I thought that Mary must have done right to choose a laborin’ man like me rather than a chap like Bill, that was above all of us, except in his heart.

We went off to the church an’ waited till Mary an’ her mother came. All the people was there outside the porch, an’ some of the gentlefolks was inside. The squire’s family was in their pew, for, ye see, Mary was a favourite with them all, an’ they came early to church to see her married. I felt very solemn then, but I could hardly feel as how Mary was goin’ to marry me. There she was, as lovely as an angel, an’ blushin’ like a rose. I said my “I will” in a low voice, for it seemed awkward to me to say it loud; but Mary said hers out in a clear, sweet voice, an’ then the parson blessed us, an’ spoke to us so solemn that we both cried, an’ Mary nestled up close to me. When it came to kiss the bride, Bill was first, an’ claimed the kiss, so the other lads had to give up. Bill bent down an’ took her pretty face between his two hands an’ kissed heron the forehead.

Agin the weddin’ was over, it was time for service, so we all went to our seats - an’ I never felt solemner in my life than I did then; nor did Mary, either.

When the service was over we all came out; an’ the people stood by on both sides to let Mary an’ me walk down the churchyard together an’ go first out of the gate.

We all went down to the beach, where the boats was ready on the shore. Some of them was freshly painted, an’ a couple had bright ribbons tied about them. Bill’s boat was the one that Mary an’ me was to go in, an’ Bill himself was to pull stroke oar in her. He had got for a crew three of the young fellows we knew best, an’ who was the cracks at rowin’, an’ we was determined to race all the other boats to the island. The lads had all run on before us, an’ when we came down to the beach the boats was all ready, an’ the baskets with the dinner put in them, so we all got on board, an’ off we started.

Mary an’ me, we held the rudder together, an’ Bill an’ his lads bent to their oars, an’ away we flew, an’ in a quarter of an hour came to the island, leading the others by a hundred yards. We all got out, an’ the lads carried up the baskets to the slope up yonder, where you see the moonlight shine on the island, where there was a fine, level place on the edge of the cliff.

The grass there was short an’ as smooth as a table; an’ when you stood on the edge of the cliff the water was straight below you, for the rock went sheer some forty feet. Mary an’ me stood there on the edge while the lads an’ the girls got ready the feast, for they wouldn’t let us put hand to anything; an’ we looked at the water hurryin’ by under us. The tide had turned, an’ the water was runnin’ like a mill race down away past the island, an’ runnin’ straight away for the head off there as far as you can see. The currents is very contrary here, so you’d better not get caught in them when you’re sailin’ orswimmin’.

We all sat down, an’ if we didn’t enjoy our dinner, all of us, it was a queer thing; an’ after dinner was over the girls insisted on havin’ a dance. We got the things all cleared off an’ danced away for some time, an’ then some one proposed blind man’s buff. One young fellow was blinded, an’ we all stood round; an’ then the fun began. The young chap - Mark Somers by name - used to make wild rushes to try an’ get some one, an’ then the girls yelled out, an’ they all scurried away as quick as they could, an’ the fun grew greater an’ greater. At last he made a dive over to the place where Mary was standin’ near the brink of the cliff. We all yelled to her to take care where she was goin’; but I suppose she thought it was merely our fun, for she laughed an’ screamed out like the others - an’ stepped backward. Before any one could stop her, she went over the edge of the cliff an’ disappeared. I was sittin’ up on a rock, an’ when I saw her fall over the edge I gave a cry that you might have heard a mile away an’ jumped down an’ ran across the grass.

But a better man than me was there before me. Bill had pulled off his jacket an’ kicked off his shoes, an’ was at the edge before me. Before he jumped, he cried out:

“Joe, run for the boats, quick! I’ll keep her up till you come. I can swim stronger nor you.”

I didn’t wait a second, but ran down to where the boats was drawn up on the beach. Some of the chaps came with me as hard as they could run, an’ we shoved down the nearest boat. But in spite of all our efforts - an’ we was so mad with excitement that not one of us but had the strength of ten - it took us a couple of minutes to get out fair on the water.

Well, when we was fair started I pulled so hard that I broke my oar, an’ we had to stop to get another; an’ then we had to row all the way round the spur of the rocks out there before we could even see whereabout Mary an' Bill should be. The men an' women on the rocks screamed out to us an' pointed in their direction, an' the boat flew along at every stroke. But the current was mortal strong, an' they had been for nigh five minutes in the water before we caught sight of them. An' it seemed to me to be years before we came anigh them at all. Mary was weighed down with her clothes, an' Bill with his; an', in spite of what a swimmer I knew Bill was, I feared lest we should come too late.

At last we began to close on them. I could see over my shoulder as we rowed. I could only see Mary's face, but that was beacon enough for me. I called to one of the men to slip into my place an' row, an' he did, an' I got out into the bows. There was Mary with her face all white an' her eyes closed, as if she was dead; her hair was all draggin' in the water, an' as the current rolled her along, her dress moved as if it was some strange fish under the water. I could see nothin' of Bill; but I hadn't need to think, for I knew that where Mary was there was Bill somewhere anigh to her. When we came nearer I saw where Bill was.

Look here, he was down under the water, an' with his last breath he was keepin' her afloat till we came. I saw his two hands rise up out of the water, holdin' her up by the hair; but that was all. Many's the time since then that, in spite of all I loved Mary, I was tempted to be cross with her - for we laborin' men is only rough folk, after all, an' we have a deal o' hardship to bear at times. But whenever I was tempted to say a hard word, or even to think hard of her, them two hands of Bill's seemed to rise up between me an' her, and I could no more think or say a hard word than I could stand quiet an' see another man strike her. An' I wouldn't be like for to do that!

Well, we took them into the boat an' came home. Mary recovered, for she had only had the shock of her fall; but when we took in Bill, it was only-

He kept his word that he spoke to me that night; he gave up his life for hers! You'll see that on his tomb in the churchyard that we all put up to him:

"Greater Love Hath No Man Than This:

That a Man Shall Give Up His Life For His Friend."

There's no more left like Bill. An' Mary thinks it, too, as well as me.

IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

The rubber-tyred wheels jolt unevenly over the granite setts. Dimly I recognise the familiar grey streets and garden-centred squares.

We stop, and through the little crowd on the pavement I am carried indoors and up to the high-ceiling ward. Gently they lift me off the stretcher and put me in bed, and I say:

“What queer curtains you have! They have faces worked on the border. Are they those of your friends?”

The matron smiles, and I think what a quaint idea it is. Then suddenly it strikes me that I have said something foolish, but still the faces are there right enough. (Even when I got well I could sometimes see them in certain lights.)

One of the faces is familiar, and I am just going to ask how they know So-and-so, when I am left alone.

For hours and hours (it seems) no one comes near me. At first I am patient, but gradually a fierce anger seizes me. Did I submit to be brought here merely to die in solitude and in suffocating darkness? I will not stay in this place; far better to go back and die at home!

Suddenly I am borne in a winged machine up, up into the cool air. Far below and infinitesimally small lies the “New Town,” half-hid beneath the fluffy smoke; yonder, clear and blue and glittering, is the Firth of Forth; and beyond the sunlit hills of Fife are the advance-guards of the Grampians. A moment only of sheer palpitating ecstasy, then a soul-shattering fall into the black abyss of oblivion. (I hold Mr H. G. Wells partially responsible for this little excursion.)

It is light again, but what is that which prevents my seeing the window? A screen? What does that betoken?

A blackness of despair grips me. It is all over, then! No more mountaineering, no more pleasant holidays. This is the end of all my little ambitions. This is, in truth, the bitterness of death.

Presently a nurse comes with a cooling drink, and, making a tremendous effort to look unconcerned, I ask for the screen to be removed. She laughs and folds it up, when I see another screen opposite partially concealing a bed. So I have company. (This was a comparatively lucid interval.)

What a queer place to have texts! Right round the cornice of the room. And they are constantly changing too. “The Lord is my Shepherd-” “I will arise-” Really this is most irritating. I cannot finish any of them. If the letters would only stay still for a single moment!

But what is that below? It is a wide sandy beach with the blue sea beyond. On the top of a pole in the foreground is a-what is it?-yes, a man’s head, of course. (It was really a hanging electric light which by some curious means I must have seen in an inverted position.)

“Sister, I am sure that could be worked up into a splendid story. Please give me some paper and my fountain pen. If I don’t write it down now I shall forget it, just as has happened before when I have thought of things during the night.” (As a matter of fact, when, I was convalescent I did want to write not only this particular tale, but a complete account of my visions. Of course, I was not permitted, and now, alas! it has gone to join that great company of magnificent-seeming but elusive ideas one has in dreams.)

“Honestly, Sister, I must go out for a few moments. The man is in great danger, and I alone can save him. There is a desperate plot against his life. He lives quite close by in one of the two houses on each side of this.”

Sister promises to see about this, and I lie back only half-satisfied.

Presently my bed begins noiselessly to move. It goes through the wall into the next house. Room after room is visited, but my doomed friend is not there. The other houses are then inspected in turn, with no result. I have a feeling that he is being spirited away just in front of me so as to be always in the next house. Sister is at the bottom of this trick, I am sure. (Here began that absurd hatred and suspicion of her which only left me with the delirium.)

"Oh, doctor, I am glad to see you! Really in a free country it is intolerable that a simple request like this cannot be granted me, and to save a man's life, too. You can see for yourself that I am quite sensible and very much in earnest. Try me."

The doctor asks what day of the week it is. I answer, Scots fashion:

"Oh, that's easy! If I am the man who came here on Monday, then it is Wednesday, but if I came on Thursday, then it's Saturday. If you will tell me which man I am, I will tell you what day it is."

Overcome by this logic, the doctor gives in, but suggests a compromise, to which I agree. It is that the four neighbouring houses be brought in and placed before my bed, so that I can make sure of seeing and warning my friend in distress.

"No, I will not drink whisky. Surely you know perfectly well that I am a Mussulman and forbidden to drink spirits? You cannot wish me to violate the principles of my religion?"

Sister assures me that the draught is not whisky, and puts the glass to my lips.

In horror I dash it to the floor.

"Devil in human form, you tempt me to my destruction. Begone and let me die in the true faith." (Of course it was not whisky, but something of quite an opposite nature. Weeks later, on recounting this incident, I was reminded of having one day casually read a page or two of a novel in which a Mohammedan is tempted to drink wine. It made no impression whatever at the time, but it must have been stored up somewhere.)

Presently Sister returns with three other nurses and a fresh supply of the accursed stuff. All means are tried, from argument, in which they are signally worsted, to persuasion and gentle force.

Suddenly I resolve on flight, and actually reach the door of the room before being overpowered and brought back to bed. Then I am asked to put my finger in the dose and prove to myself that it is not whisky. In this suggestion I see Sister's malicious cunning, so I smell the wet finger, and triumphantly assert that it is whisky.

When they say it is twelve o'clock, and that I am keeping them all out of bed, I answer that they need not stay for me, and, anyway, what is that to the loss of my soul?

At length I am forced down, and the glass put to my clenched teeth. I pray inwardly for help in this dire extremity. Lo! a brilliant idea. I will pretend to be dead. I stiffen myself and hold my breath. (I can remember no further effort, but I was told afterwards the imitation was wonderful. Even the nurses grew alarmed, and the doctor was sent for. I have a dim recollection of his coming, and before I knew where I was he had injected something, which I thought was the whisky, into my arm.)

I sit up in bed, and glare at them all with concentrated hatred, then I fall back, heartbroken at my forced abjuration, sobbing, sobbing.

I am suffering for my sin. Sister is stabbing me in the Shoulder-blade with a red-hot dagger. (It was a fly-blister, and my skin is very sensitive.) I am aching all over.

Suddenly I am alone on a flat desert plain. I am sitting with my back against one of the stone pillars of a huge closed gateway reaching to the sky. In front of me is proceeding a cinematographic entertainment on a stupendous scale. (I cannot now remember much about it, but the series was long and of an appalling character. Below each picture was a placard stating the subject of the next one. I had the feeling that they were not pictures at all, but real events in the process of happening; further that by answering a question put to me by a mysterious voice I could bring the series to an end, but, though I knew the answer, it was quite beyond my power to give it. Immediately following my failure to reply, from somewhere behind me a full organ pealed forth and a choir of voices broke into a mocking ditty, which embodied the proper answer, and also words of scorn directed against myself. Till recently this ditty haunted me occasionally, but I have now, I am glad to say, forgotten both air and words. All I know is that it was like a quick chant, and quite unfamiliar to me. When the horrid song was over I fell into a state of self-condemnation mixed with helpless expectancy, which was so poignant as to move me still when I think of it.)

This picture is one of wars and earthquakes and burning mountains. Underneath it are the words “End of the World.” I have a vision of the countless myriads of mankind kneeling in agony on the other side of the gate. A multitudinous murmur swells into an awful shriek for pity.

“Who am I, O God, that this burden is laid on me? Am I the keeper of that countless host? I cannot answer.”

Even as I speak a shudder cleaves the air, a cataclysmal mirage comes into view, the organ booms and the impish choir begins its torturing refrain.

Underneath this picture there is no placard.

The dreadful music ceases, and the horrid scene before me works on in silence. It passes, and then there is neither light nor darkness. The desert disappears, the gateway is no more, the infinite host has gone like the dew of the morning, and I am left in presence of nothing.

The realisation is frightful; my brain is whirling; relief must come; human nature cannot bear it. Ah, thank God, I am going mad-when from somewhere, but whence I know not, comes a light scornful laugh, a Satanic voice says, "Sold again!" the organ swells, the invisible choir sings anew, and the whole series of pictures begins again from the beginning. For a moment the tension is relaxed, "God's in His heaven" after all, when, like the clang of steel, the Voice utters the unanswerable question. Oh, God, I must-I shall speak. The answer, the answer is-

"What time is it, Russell?" (Russell was the male night-nurse, the necessity for whose presence the reader will by this time fully understand!)

"Half-past four, sir."

"Well, I must get up to catch the first train to Glasgow. It is a matter of life and death. Please give me my clothes."

Russell endeavours to soothe me with promises of going tomorrow, and so forth, all of which I see through with merciless clearness. In the end, as I threaten to alarm the whole household, I am wrapped up in blankets, carried to an easy-chair before the fire, and a screen put behind me.

"You can't get a train, sir, before half-past six."

"Excuse me, there is a train at 5.55, and I am going to get it. By the way, are you sure Sister is not about? I thought I saw her round the corner of the screen. No? Then give me some soda and milk, and have you a cigarette anywhere?”

Russell naturally denied having cigarettes, whereupon, as he afterwards told me, I proceeded to curse him, his family, antecedents, and descendants together, with such copiousness and minuteness of diction that I spoke without stopping for an hour and a half! I fancy Mr Kipling is responsible for at least the Indian meticulosity of my comminations. Anyhow, the effort having exhausted me, on Russell saying that I had now missed the train, and had better go back to bed to wait for the next, I sensibly agreed.

That was the climax, and on awaking some hours later from a peaceful sleep I found that the crisis was past, and that I was as sane again as usual. The first book I asked for was the Pilgrim’s Progress, and as soon as I was permitted to read I turned to the account of Christian’s passage through the Valley of the Shadow. I had felt before that Bunyan’s demons were stage demons, his quagmires and pits merely simulacra, the accessories generally such as Drury Lane would laugh to scorn. Now I am sure of it. The real difficulty, of course, is to do it better.

THE MAN FROM SHORROX

‘Throth, yer ‘ann’rs, I’ll tell ye wid pleasure; though, trooth to tell, it’s only poor wurrk telling the same shtory over an’ over agin. But I niver object to tell it to rale gintlemin, like yer ‘ann’rs, what don’t forget that a poor man has a mouth on to him as much as Creeshus himself has.

The place was a market town in Kilkenny — or maybe King’s County or Queen’s County. At all evints, it was wan of them counties what Cromwell — bad cess to him! — gev his name to. An’ the house was called after him that was the Lord Liftinint an’ invinted the polis — God forgive him! It was kep’ be a man iv the name iv Misther Mickey Byrne an’ his good lady — at laste it was till wan dark night whin the bhoys mistuk him for another gindeman, an unknown man, what had bought a contagious property — mind ye the impidence iv him. Mickey was comin’ back from the Curragh Races wid his skin that tight wid the full of the whiskey inside of him that he couldn’t open his eyes to see what was goin’ on, or his mouth to set the bhoys right afther he had got the first tap on the head wid wan of the blackthorns what they done such jobs wid. The poor bhoys was that full of sorra for their mishap whin they brung him home to his widdy that the crather hadn’t the hearrt to be too sevare on thim. At the first iv course she was wroth, bein’ only a woman afther all, an’ weemun not bein’ gave to rayson like nun is. Millia murdher! but for a bit she was like a madwoman, and was nigh to have cut the heads from affav thim wid the mate chopper, till, seein’ thim so white and quite, she all at wance flung down the chopper an’ knelt down be the corp.

‘Lave me to me dead,’ she sez. ‘Oh mm! it’s no use more people nor is needful bein' made unhappy over this night's terrible wurrk. Mick Byrne would have no man worse for him whin he was living, and he'll have harm to none for his death! Now go; an', oh bhoys, be dacent and quite, an' don't thry a poor widdied sowl too hard!'

Well, afther that she made no change in things ginerally, but kep' on the hotel jist the same; an' whin some iv her friends wanted her to get help, she only sez: 'Mick an' me run this house well enough; an' whin I'm thinkin' of takun' help I'll tell yez. I'll go on be meself, as I mane to, till Mick an' me comes together agun.'

An', sure enough, the ould place wint on jist the same, though, more betoken, there wasn't Mick wid his shillelagh to kape the pace whin things got pretty hot on fair nights, an' in the gran' ould election times, when heads was bruk like eggs — glory be to God!

My! but she was the fine woman, was the Widdy Byrne! A gran' crathur intirely: a fine upshtandin' woman, nigh as tall as a modheratesized man, wid a forrm on her that'd warrm yer hearrt to look at, it sthood out that way in the right places. She had shkin like satin, wid a warrm flush in it, like the sun shinun' on a crock iv yestherday's crame; an' her cheeks an' her neck was that firrm that ye couldn't take a pinch iv thim — though sorra wan iver dar'd to thry, the worse luck! But her hair! Begor, that was the finishing touch that set all the min crazy. It was jist wan mass iv red, like the heart iv a burnun' furze-bush whin the smoke goes from aff iv it. Musha! but it'd make the blood come up in yer eyes to see the glint iv that hair wid the light shunun' on it. There was niver a man, what was a man at all at all, iver kem in be the door that he didn't want to put his two arrms round the widdy an' giv' her a hug immadiate. They was fine min too, some iv thim — and warrm men — big graziers from Kildare, and the like, that counted their cattle be scores, an' used to come ridin' in to market on huntin' horses what they'd refuse hundlireds iv pounds for from officers in the Curragh an' the quality. Begor, but some iv thim an' the dhrovers was rare miii in a fight. More nor wance I seen them, forty, maybe half a hundred, strong, clear the market-place at Banagher or Athy. Well do I remimber the way the big, red, hairy wrists iv thim'd go up in the air, an' down'd come the springy ground-ash saplins what they carried for switches. The whole lot iv thim wanted to come coortun' the widdy; but sorra wan iv her'd look at thim. She'd flirt an' be coy an' taze thim and make thim mad for love iv her, as weemin likes to do. Thank God for the same! for mayhap we min wouldn't love thim as we do only for their thricky ways; an' thin what'd become iv the counthry wid nothin' in it at all except single min an' ould maids jist dyin', and growin' crabbed for want iv chuidher to kiss an' tache an' shpank an' make love to? Shure, yer 'ann'rs, 'tis childher as makes the hearrt iv man green, jist as it is fresh wather that makes the grass grow. Divil a shtep nearer would the widdy iver let mortial man come. 'No,' she'd say; 'whin I see a man fit to fill Mick's place, I'll let yez know iv it; thank ye kindly'; an' wid that she'd shake her head till the beautiful red hair iv it'd be like shparks iv fire — an' the mm more mad for her nor iver.

But, mind ye, she wasn't no shpoil-shport; Mick's wife knew more nor that, an' his widdy didn't forgit the thrick iv it. She'd lade the laugh herself if 'twas anything a dacent woman could shmile at; an' if it wasn't, she'd send the girrls aff to their beds, an' tell the min they might go on talkin' that way, for there was only herself to be insulted; an' that'd shut thim up pretty quick I'm tellin' yez. But av any iv thim'd thry to git affectionate, as min do whin they've had all they can carry, well, thin she had a playful way iv dalin' wid thim what'd always turn the laugh agin' thim. She used to say that she lamed the beginnun' iv it at the school an' the rest iv it from Mick. She always kep by her on the counther iv the bar wan iv thim rattan canes wid the curly ends, what the soldiers carries whin they can't barry a whip, an' are goin' out wid their cap on three hairs, an' thim new oiled, to scorch the girrls. An' thin whin any iv the shuitors'd get too affectionate she'd lift the cane an' swish them wid it, her laughin' out iv her like mad all the time. At first wan or two iv the min'd say that a kiss at the widdy was worth a clip iv a cane; an' wan iv thim, a warrm horse-fanner from Poul-a-Phoka, said he'd complate the job av she was to cut him into ribbons. But she was a handy woman wid the cane — which was shtrange enough, for she had no childer to be practisin' on — an' whin she threw what was left iv him back over the bar, wid his face like a gridiron, the other min what was laughin' along wid her tuk the lesson to hearrt. Whiniver afther that she laid her hand on the cane, no matther how quietly, there'd be no more talk iv thryin' for kissin' in that quarther.

Well, at the time I'm comm' to there was great divarshuns intirely goin' on in the town. The fair was on the morra, an' there was a power iv people in the town; an' cattle, an' geese, an' turkeys, an' butther, an' pigs, an' vegetables, an' all kinds iv divilment, includin' a berryin' — the same bein' an ould attorney-man, savin' yer prisince; a lone man widout friends, lyin' out there in the gran' room iv the hotel what they call the 'Queen's Room'. Well, I needn't tell yer 'ann'rs that the place was pretty full that night. Musha, but it's the fleas thimselves what had the bad time iv it, wid thim crowded out on the outside, an' shakin', an' thrimblin' wid the cowld. The widdy, av coorse, was in the bar passin' the time iv the day wid all that kem in, an' keepin' her eyes afore an' ahint her to hould the girrls up to their wurrk an’ not to be thriflin’ wid the mm. My! but there was a power iv min at the bar that night; warrm farmers from four counties, an’ graziers wid their ground-ash plants an’ big frieze coats, an’ plinty iv commercials, too. In the middle iv it all, up the shtreet at a hand gallop comes an Athy carriage wid two horses, an’ pulls up at the door wid the horses shmokin’. An’ begor’, the man in it was smokin’ too, a big cygar nigh ~s long as yer arrm. He jumps out an’ walks up as bould as brass to the bar, jist as if there was niver a livin’ sowl but himself in the place. He chucks the widdy undher the chin at wanst, an’, taking aff his hat, sez: ‘I want the best room in the house. I travel for Shorrox’, the greatest long-cotton firrm in the whole worrld, an’ I want to open up a new line here! The best is what I want, an’ that’s not good enough for me!’

Well, gintlemun, ivery wan in the place was spacheless at his impidence; an’, begor! that was the only time in her life I’m tould whin the widdy was tuk back. But, glory be, it didn’t take long for her to recover herself, an’ sez she quitely: ‘I don’t doubt ye, sur! The best can’t be too good for a gintleman what makes himself so aisy at home!’ an’ she shmiled at him till her teeth shone like jools.

God knows, gintlemin, what does be in weemin’s minds whin they’re dalin’ wid a man! Maybe it was that Widdy Byrne only wanted to kape the pace wid all thim min crowdin’ roun’ her, an’ thim clutchin’ on tight to their shticks an’ aiger for a fight wid any man on her account. Or maybe it was that she forgive him his impidence; for well I know that it’s not the most modest man, nor him what kapes his distance, that the girrls, much less the widdies, like the best. But anyhow she spake out iv her to the man from Manchesther: ‘I’m sorry, sur, that I can’t give ye the best room — what we call the best — for it is engaged already.’

‘Then turn him out!’ sez he.

‘I can’t,’ she says— ‘at laste not till tomorra; an’ ye can have the room thin iv ye like.’

There was a kind iv a sort iv a shnicker among some iv the min, thim knowin’ iv the corp, an’ the Manchesther man tuk it that they was laughin’ at him; so he sez: ‘I’ll shleep in that room tonight; the other gintleman can put up wid me iv I can wid him. Unless,’ sez he, oglin’ the widdy, ‘I can have the place iv the masther iv the house, if there’s a priest or a parson handy in this town — an’ sober,’ sez he.

Well, tho’ the widdy got as red as a Claddagh cloak, she jist laughed an’ turned aside, sayin’: ‘Throth, sur, but it’s poor Mick’s place ye might have, an’ welkim, this night.’

‘An’ where might that be now, ma’am?’ sez he, lanin’ over the bar; an’ him would have chucked her under the chin agun, only that she moved her head away that quick.

‘In the churchyard!’ she sez. ‘Ye might take Mick’s place there, av ye like, an’ I’ll not be wan to say ye no.’

At that the min round all laughed, an’ the man from Manchesther got mad, an’ shpoke out, rough enough too it seemed: ‘Oh, he’s all right where he is. I daresay he’s quiter times where he is than whin he had my luk out. Him an’ the Devil can toss for choice in bein’ lonely or bein’ quite.’

Wid that the widdy blazes up all iv a suddunt, like a live sod shtuck in the thatch, an’ sez she: ‘Who are ye that dares to shpake ill iv the dead, an’ to couple his name wid the Divil, an’ to his widdy’s very face? It’s aisy seen that poor Mick is gone!’ an’ wid that she threw her apron over her head an’ sot down an’ rocked herself to and fro, as widdies do whin the fit is on thim iv missin’ the dead.

There was more nor wan man there what’d like to have shtud opposite the Manchesther man wid a bit iv a blackthorn in his hand; but they knew the widdy too well to dar to intherfere till they were let. At length wan iv thim — Mr Hogan, from nigh Portarlington, a warrm man, that'd put down a thousand pounds iv dhry money any day in the week — kem over to the bar an' tuk aff his hat, an' sez he: 'Mrs Byrne, ma'am, as a friend of poor dear ould Mick, I'd be glad to take his quarrel on meself on his account, an' more than proud to take it on his widdy's, if, ma'am, ye'll only honour me be saying the wurrd.'

Wid that she tuk down the apron from aff iv her head an' wiped away the tears in her jools iv eyes wid the corner iv it.

'Thank ye kindly,' sez she; 'but, guntlemin, Mick an' me run this hotel long together, an' I've run it alone since thin, an' I mane to go on running' it be meself, even if new min from Manchesther itself does be bringin' us new ways. As to you, sur, 'sez she, turnin' to him, 'it's powerful afraid I am that there isn't accommodation here for a guntlemin what's so requireful. An' so I think I'll be askin' ye to find convanience in some other hotel in the town.'

Wid that he turned on her an' sez, 'I'm here now, an' I offer to pay me charges. Be the law ye can't refuse to resave me or refuse me lodgmint, especially whin I'm on the primises.'

So the Widdy Byrne drewed herself up, an' sez she, 'Sur, ye ask yer legal rights; ye shall have them. Tell me what it is ye require.'

Sez he sthraight out: 'I want the best room.'

'I've tould you already,' sez she, 'there's a gintleman in it.'

'Well,' sez he, 'what other room have ye vacant?'

'Sorra wan at all,' sez she. 'Every room in the house is tuk. Perhaps, sur, ye don't think or remimber that there's a fair on tomorra.'

She shpoke so polite that ivery man in the place knew there was somethin' comin' — later on. The Manchesther man felt that the laugh was on him; but he didn't want for impidence, so he up, an' sez he: 'Thin, if I have to share wid another, I'll share wid the best! It's the Queen's Room I'll be shleepin' in this night.'

Well, the min shtandin' by wasn't too well plazed wid what was going on; for the man from Manchesther he was plumin' himself for all the world like a cock on a dunghill. He laned agin over the bar an' began makin' love to the widdy hot an' fast. He was a fine, shtout-made man, wid a bull neck on to him an' short hair, like wan iv thim 'two-to-wan-bar-wans' what I've seen at Punchestown an' Fairy House an' the Galway races. But he seemed to have no manners at all in his coortin', but done it as quick an' business-like as takun' his commercial ordhers. It was like this: 'I want to make love; you want to be made love to, bein' a woman. Hould up yer head!'

We all could see the widdy was boilin' mad; but, to do him fair, the man from Manchesther didn't seem to care what any wan thought. But we all seen what he didn't see at first, that the widdy began widout thinkin' to handle the rattan cane on the bar. Well, prisintly he began agun to ask about his room, an' what kind iv a man it was that was to share it wid him.

So sez the widdy, 'A man wid less wickedness in him nor you have, an' less impidence.'

'I hope he's a quite man,' sez he.

So the widdy began to laugh, an' sez she: 'I'll warrant he's quite enough.'

'Does he shnore? I hate a man — or a woman ayther — what shnores.'

'Throth,' sez she, 'there's no shnore in him'; an' she laughed agin.

Some iv the min round what knew iv the ould attorney-man — saving yer prisince — began to laugh too; and this made the Manchesther man suspicious. When the likes iv him gets suspicious he gets rale nasty; so he sez, wid a shneer: ‘You seem to be pretty well up in his habits, ma’am!’

The widdy looked round at the graziers, what was clutchin’ their ash plants hard, an’ there was a laughin’ divil in her eye that kep’ thim quite; an’ thin she turned round to the man, and sez she: ‘Oh, I know that much, anyhow, wid wan thing an’ another, begor!’ But she looked more enticin’ nor iver at that moment. For sure the man from Manchesther thought so, for he laned nigh his whole body over the counther, an’ whispered somethin’ at her, puttin’ out his hand as he did so, an’ layin’ it on her neck to dhraw her to him. The widdy seemed to know what was comm’, an’ had her hand on the rattan; so whin he was draggin’ her to him an’ puttin’ out his lips to kiss her — an’ her first as red as a turkey-cock an’ thin as pale as a sheet — she ups wid the cane and gev him wan skelp across the face wid it, shpringin’ back as she done so. Oh jool! but that was a skelp! A big wale iv blood riz up as quick as the blow was shtruck, jist as I’ve seen on the pigs’ backs whin they do be prayin’ aloud not to be tuk where they’re wanted.

‘Hands off, Misther Impidence!’ sez she. The man from Manchesther was that mad that he ups wid the tumbler formnst him an’ was goin’ to throw it at her, whin there kem an odd sound from the graziers — a sort of ‘Ach!’ as whin a man is workin’ a sledge, an’ I seen the ground-ash plants an’ the big fists what held thim, and the big hairy wrists go up in the air. Begor, but polis thimselves wid bayonets wouldn’t care to face thim like that! In the half of two twos the man from Manchesther would have been cut in ribbons, but there came a cry from the widdy what made the glasses ring: 'Shtop! I'm not goin' to have any fightin' here; an' besides, there's bounds to the bad manners iv even a man from Shorrox'. He wouldn't dar to shtrike me — though I have no head! Maybe I hit a thought too hard; but I had rayson to remimber that somethin' was due on Mick's account too. I'm sorry, sur,' sez she to the man, quite polite, 'that I had to defind meself; but whin a gintleman claims the law to come into a house, an' thin assaults th' owner iv it, though she has no head, it's more restrainful he should be intirely!'

'Hear, hear!' cried some iv the mm, an' wan iv thim sez 'Amen', sez he, an' they all begin to laugh. The Manchesther man he didn't know what to do; for begor he didn't like the look of thim ash plants up in the air, an' yit he was not wan to like the laugh agin' him or to take it aisy. So he turns to the widdy an' he lifts his hat an' sez he wid mock politeness: 'I must complimint ye, ma'am, upon the shtrength iv yer arrm, as upon the mildness iv yer disposition. Throth, an' I'm thinkin' that it's misther Mick that has the best iv it, wid his body lyin' paceful in the churchyard, anyhow; though the poor sowi doesn't seem to have much good in changin' wan devil for another!' An' he looked at her rale spiteful.

Well, for a minit her eyes blazed, but thin she shmiled at him, an' made a low curtsey, an' sez she — oh! mind ye, she was a gran' woman at givin' back as good as she got— 'Thank ye kindly, sur, for yer polite remarks about me arrm. Sure me poor dear Mick often said the same; only he said more an' wid shuparior knowledge! "Molly", sez he— "I'd mislike the shtrength iv yer arrm whin ye shtrike, only that I forgive ye for it whin it comes to the huggin'!" But as to poor Mick's prisint condition I'm not goin' to argue wid ye, though I can't say that I forgive ye for the way you've shpoke iv him that's gone. Bedad, it's fond iv the dead y'are, for ye seem onable to kape thim out iv yer mouth. Maybe ye'll be more respectful to thim before ye die!'

'I don't want no sarmons!' sez he, wery savage. 'Am I to have me room tonight, or am I not?'

'Did I undherstand ye to say,' sez she, 'that ye wanted a share iv the Queen's Room?'

'I did! an' I demand it.'

'Very well, sur,' sez she very quitely, 'ye shall have it!' Jist thin the supper war ready, and most iv the mm at the bar thronged into the coffee-room, an' among thim the man from Manchesther, what wint bang up to the top iv the table an sot down as though he owned the place, an' him niver in the house before.

A few iv the bhoys shtayed a minit to say another word to the widdy, an' as soon as they was alone Misther Hogan up, an' sez he: 'Oh, darlint! but it's a jool iv a woman y' are! Do ye raly mane to put him in the room wid the corp?'

'He said he insisted on being in that room!' she says, quite sarious; an' thin givin' a look undher her lashes at the bhoys as made thim lep, sez she: 'Oh! min, an ye love me give him his shkin that full that he'll tumble into his bed this night wid his sinses obscurifled. Dhrink toasts till he misremimbers where he is! Whist! Go, quick, so that he won't suspect nothin'!'

That was a warrm night, I'm telling ye! The man from Shorrox' had wine galore wid his mate; an' afther, whin the plates an' dishes was tuk away an' the nuts was brought in, Hogan got up an' proposed his health, an' wished him prosperity in his new line. Iv coorse he had to dhrink that; an' thin others got up, an' there was more toasts dhrunk than there was min in the room, till the man, him not bein' used to whiskey-punch, began to git onsartin in his shpache. So they gev him more toasts— 'Ireland as a nation', an' 'Home Rule', an' 'The ruimory iv Dan O'Connell', an' 'Bad luck to Boney', an' 'God save the Queen', an' 'More power to Manchesther', an' other things what they thought would plaze him, him bein' English. Long hours before it was time for the house to shut, he was as dhrunk as a whole row of fiddlers, an' kep shakin' hands wid ivery man an' promisin' thim to open a new line in Home Rule, an' sich nonsinse. So they tuk him up to the door iv the Queen's Room an' left him there.

He managed to undhress himself all except his hat, and got into bed wid the corp iv th' ould attorney-man, an' thin an' there fell asleep widout noticin' him.

Well, prisintly he woke wid a cowid feelin' all over him. He had lit no candle, an' there was only the light from the passage comm' in through the glass over the door. He felt himself nigh fallin' out iv the bed wid him almost on the edge, an' the cowld shtrange gindeman lyin' shlap on the broad iv his back in the middle. He had enough iv the dhrink in him to be quarrelsome.

'I'll throuble ye,' sez he, 'to kape over yer own side iv the bed — or I'll soon let ye know the rayson why.' An' wid that he give him a shove. But iv coorse the ould attorney-man tuk no notice whatsumiver.

'Y'are not that warrm that one'd like to lie contagious to ye,' sez he. 'Move over, I say, to yer own side!' But divil a shtir iv the corp.

Well, thin he began to get fightin' angry, an' to kick an' shove the corp; but not gittin' any answer at all, he turned round an' hit him a clip on the side iv the head.

‘Gitup,’ he sez, ‘iv ye’re a man at all, an’ put up yer dooks.’

Then he got more madder shrill, for the dhrink was shtirrin’ in him, an’ he kicked an’ shoved an’ grabbed him be the leg an’ the arrm to move him.

‘Begor!’ sez he, ‘but ye’re the cowldest chap I iver kem anigh iv. Musha! but yer hairs is like icicles.’

Thin he tuk him be the head, an’ shuk him an’ brung him to the bedside, an’ kicked him clane out on to the flure on the far side iv the bed.

‘Lie there,’ he sez, ‘ye ould blast furnace! Ye can warrm yerself up on the flure till tomorra.’

Be this time the power iv the dhrink he had tuk got ahoult iv him agin, an’ he fell back in the middle iv the bed, wid his head on the pilla an’ his toes up, an’ wint aff ashleep, like a cat in the frost.

By-an’-by, whin the house was about shuttin’ up, the watcher from th’ undhertaker’s kem to sit be the corp till the mornin’, an’ th’ attorney him bein’ a Protestan’ there was no candles. Whin the house was quite, wan iv the girris, what was coortin’ wid the watcher, shtole into the room.

‘Are ye there, Michael?’ sez she.

‘Yis, me darlint!’ he sez, comm’ to her; an’ there they shtood be the door, wid the lamp in the passage shinin’ on the red heads iv the two iv thim.

‘I’ve come,’ sez Katty, ‘to kape ye company for a bit, Michael; for it’s crool lonesome worrk sittin’ there alone all night. But I mustn’t shtay long, for they’re all goin’ to bed soon, when the dishes is washed up.’

‘Give us a kiss,’ sez Michael.

‘Oh, Michael!’ sez she: ‘kissin’ in the prisince iv a corp! It’s ashamed iv ye I am.'

'Sorra cause, Katty. Sure, it's more respectful than any other way. Isn't it next to kissin' in the chapel? — an' ye do that whin ye're bein' married. If ye kiss me now, begor but I don't know as it's mortial nigh a weddin' it is! Anyhow, give us a kiss, an' we'll talk iv the rights an' wrongs iv it aftherwards.'

Well, somehow, yer 'ann'rs, that kiss was bern' gave — an' a kiss in the prisince iv a corp is a sarious thing an' takes a long time. Thim two was payin' such attintion to what was going on betune thim that they didn't heed nothin', whin suddint Katty stops, and sez: 'Whist! what is that?'

Michael felt creepy too, for there was a quare sound comm' from the bed. So they grabbed one another as they shtud in the doorway an looked at the bed almost afraid to breathe till the hair on both iv thim began to shtand up in horror; for the corp rose up in the bed, an' they seen it pointin' at thim, an' heard a hoarse voice say, 'It's in hell I am — Divils around me! Don't I see thim burnin' wid their heads like flames? an' it's burnin' lam too — burnin', burnin', burnin'! Me throat is on fire, an' me face is burnin'! Wather! wather! Give me wather, if only a dhrop on me tongue's tip!'

Well, thin Katty let one screetch out iv her, like to wake the dead, an' tore down the passage till she kem to the shtairs, and tuk a flyin' lep down an' fell in a dead faint on the mat below; and Michael yelled 'murdher' wid all his might.

It wasn't long till there was a crowd in that room, I tell ye; an' a mighty shtrange thing it was that sorra wan iv the graziers had even tuk his coat from aff iv him to go to bed, or laid by his shtick. An' the widdy too, she was as nate an' tidy as iver, though seemin' surprised out iv a sound shleep, an' her clothes onto her, all savin' a white bedgown, an’ a candle in her hand. There was some others what had been in bed, min an’ wimin wid their bare feet an’ slippers on to some iv thim, wid their bracers down their backs, an’ their petticoats flung on anyhow. An’ some iv thim in big nightcaps, an’ some wid their hair all screwed up in knots wid little wisps iv paper, like farden screws iv Limerick twist or Lundy Foot snuff. Musha! but it was the ould weemin what was afraid iv things what didn’t alarrm the young wans at all. Divil resave me! but the sole thing they seemed to dhread was the min — dead or alive it was all wan to thim — an’ ’twas ghosts an’ corpses an’ mayhap divils that the rest was afeard iv.

Well, whin the Manchesther man seen thim all come tumblin’ into the room he began to git his wits about him; for the dhrink was wearin’ aff, an’ he was thryin’ to remimber where he was. So whin he seen the widdy he put his hand up to his face where the red welt was, an’ at wance seemed to undhershtand, for he got mad agin an’ roared out: ‘What does this mane? Why this invasion iv me chamber? Clear out the whole kit, or I’ll let yez know!’

Wid that he was goin’ to jump out of bed, but the moment they seen his toes the ould weemin let a screech out iv thim, an’ clung to the mm an’ implored thim to save thim from murdher — an’ worse. An’ there was the Widdy Byrne laughin’ like mad; an’ Misther Hogan shtepped out, an’ sez he: ‘Do jump out, Misther Shorrox! The boys has their switches, an’ it’s a mighty handy costume ye’re in for a leatherin’!’

So wid that he jumped back into bed an’ covered the clothes over him.

‘In the name of God,’ sez he, ‘what does it all mane?’

‘It manes this,’ sez Hogan, goin’ round the bed an’ draggin’ up the corp an’ layin’ it on the bed beside him. ‘Begorra! but it’s cantankerous kind iv a scut y'are. First nothin' will do ye but sharin' a room wid a corp; an' thin ye want the whole place to yerself.'

'Take it away! Take it away,' he yells out.

'Begorra,' sez Mister Hogan, 'I'll do no such thing. The gintleman ordhered the room first, an' it's he has the right to ordher you to be brung out!'

'Did he shnore much, sur?' says the widdy; an' wid that she burst out laughin' an' cryin' all at wanst. 'That'll tache ye to shpake ill iv the dead agin!' An' she flung her petticoat over her head an' run out iv the room.

Well, we turned the min all back to their own rooms; for the most part iv thim had plenty iv dhrink on board, an' we feared for a row. Now that the fun was over, we didn't want any unplisintness to follow. So two iv the graziers wint into wan bed, an' we put the man from Manchesther in th' other room, an' gev him a screechin' tumbler iv punch to put the hearrt in him agin.

I thought the widdy had gone to her bed; but whin I wint to put out the lights I seen one in the little room behind the bar, an' I shtepped quite, not to dishturb her, and peeped in. There she was on a low shtool rockin' herself to an' fro, an' goin' on wid her laughin' an' cryin' both together, while she tapped wid her fut on the flume. She was talkin' to herselfin a kind iv a whisper, an' I heerd her say: 'Oh, but it's the crool woman I am to have such a thing done in me house — an' that poor sowl, wid none to weep for him, knocked about that a way for shport iv dhrunken min while me poor dear darlin' himself is in the cowid clay! — But oh! Mick, Mick, if ye were only here! Wouldn't it be you — you wid the fun iv ye an' yer merry hearrt — that'd be plazed wid the doin's iv this night!'

OUR NEW HOUSE

We spoke of it as our New House simply because we thought of it as such and not from any claim to the title, for it was just about as old and as ricketty as a house supposed to be habitable could well be. It was only new to us. Indeed with the exception of the house there was nothing new about us. Neither my wife nor myself was, in any sense of the word, old, and we were still, comparatively speaking, new to each other.

It had been my habit, for the few years I had been in Somerset House, to take my holidays at Littlehampton, partly because I liked the place, and partly - and chiefly, because it was cheap. I used to have lodgings in the house of a widow, Mrs. Compton, in a quiet street off the sea frontage. I had this year, on my summer holiday, met there my fate in the person of Mrs. Compton's daughter Mary, just home from school. I returned to London engaged. There was no reason why we should wait, for I had few friends and no near relatives living, and Mary had the consent of her mother. I was told that her father, who was a merchant captain, had gone to sea shortly after her birth, but had never been heard of since, and had consequently been long ago reckoned as "with the majority." I never met any of my new relatives; indeed, there was not the family opportunity afforded by marriage under conventional social conditions. We were married in the early morning at the church at Littlehampton, and, without any formal wedding breakfast, came straight away in the train. As I had to attend to my duties at Somerset House, the preliminaries were all arranged by Mrs. Compton at Littlehampton, and Mary gave the required notice of residency. We were all in a hurry to be off, as we feared missing the train; indeed, whilst Mary was signing the registry I was settling the fees and tipping the verger.

When we began to look about for a house, we settled on one which was vacant in a small street near Sloane Square. There was absolutely nothing to recommend the place except the smallness of the rent - but this was everything to us. The landlord, Mr. Gradder, was the very hardest man I ever came across. He did not even go through the form of civility in his dealing.

“There is the house,” he said, “and you can either take it or leave it. I have painted the outside, and you must paint the inside. Or, if you like it as it is, you can have it so; only you must paint and paper it before you give it up to me again - be it in one year or more.”

I was pretty much of a handy man, and felt equal to doing the work myself; so, having looked over the place carefully, we determined to take it. It was, however, in such a terribly neglected condition that I could not help asking my ironclad lessor as to who had been the former tenant, and what kind of person he had been to have been content with such a dwelling.

His answer was vague. “Who he was I don’t know. I never knew more than his name. He was a regular oddity. Had this house and another of mine near here, and used to live in them both, and all by himself. Think he was afraid of being murdered or robbed. Never knew which he was in. Dead lately. Had to bury him - worse luck. Expenses swallowed up value of all he’d got.”

We signed an agreement to take out a lease, and when, in a few days, I had put in order two rooms and a kitchen, my wife and I moved in. I worked hard every morning before I went to my office, and every evening after I got home, so I got the place in a couple of weeks in a state of comparative order. We had, in fact, arrived so far on our way to perfection that we had seriously begun to consider dispensing with the services of our charwoman and getting a regular servant.

One evening my landlord called on me. It was about nine o'clock, and, as our temporary servant had gone home, I opened the door myself. I was somewhat astonished at recognising my visitor, and not a little alarmed, for he was so brutally simple in dealing with me that I rather dreaded any kind of interview. To my astonishment he began to speak in what he evidently meant for a hearty manner.

"Well, how are you getting on with your touching up?"

"Pretty well," I answered, "but 'touching up' is rather a queer name for it. Why, the place was like an old ash heap. The very walls seemed pulled about."

"Indeed !" he said quickly.

I went on, "It is getting into something like order, however. There is only one more room to do, and then we shall be all right."

"Do you know," he said, "that I have been thinking it is hardly fair that you should have to do all this yourself."

I must say that I was astonished as well as pleased, and found myself forming a resolution not to condemn ever again anyone for hardness until I had come to know something about his real nature. I felt somewhat guilty as I answered, "You are very kind, Mr. Gradder. I shall let you know what it all costs me, and then you can repay me a part as you think fair."

"Oh, I don't mean that at all." This was said very quickly.

"Then what do you mean," I asked.

"That I should do some of it in my own way, at my own cost."

I did not feel at all inclined to have either Mr. Gradder or strange workmen in the house. Moreover, my pride rebelled at the thought that I should be seen by real workmen doing labourers' work - I suppose there is something of the spirit of snobbery in all of us. So I told him I could not think of such a thing; that all was going on very well; and more to the same effect. He seemed more irritated than the occasion warranted. Indeed, it struck me as odd that a man should be annoyed at his generous impulse being thwarted. He tried, with a struggle for calmness, to persuade me, but I did not like the controversy, and stood to my refusal of assistance. He went away in a positive fury of suppressed rage.

The next evening he called in to see me. Mary had, after he had gone, asked me not to allow him to assist, as she did not like him; so when he came in I refused again with what urbanity I could. Mary kept nudging me to be firm, and he could not help noticing it. He said: "Of course, if your wife objects" - and stopped. He spoke the words very rudely, and Mary spoke out:

"She does object, Mr. Gradder. We are all right, thank you, and do not want help from any one."

For reply Mr. Gradder put on his hat, knocked it down on his head firmly and viciously, and walked out, banging the door behind him.

"There is a nice specimen of a philanthropist," said Mary, and we both laughed.

The next day, while I was in my office, Mr. Gradder called to see me. He was in a very amiable mood, and commenced by apologising for what he called "his unruly exit." "I am afraid you must have thought me rude," he said.

As the nearest approach to mendacity I could allow myself, was the suppressio veri, I was silent.

"You see," he went on, "your wife dislikes me, and that annoys me; so I just called to see you alone, and try if we could arrange this matter - we men alone."

"What matter?" I asked.

"You know - about the doing up those rooms."

I began to get annoyed myself, for there was evidently some underlying motive of advantage to himself in his persistence. Any shadowy belief I had ever entertained as to a benevolent idea had long ago vanished and left not a wrack behind. I told him promptly and briefly that I would not do as he desired, and that I did not care to enter any further upon the matter. He again made an "unruly exit." This time he nearly swept away in his violence a young man who was entering through the swing door, to get some papers stamped. The youth remonstrated with that satirical force which is characteristic of the lawyer's clerk. Mr. Gradder was too enraged to stop to listen, and the young man entered the room grumbling and looking back at him.

"Old brute!" he said. "I know him. Next time I see him I'll advise him to buy some manners with his new fortune."

"His new fortune?" I asked, naturally interested about him. "Howdo you mean, Wigley?"

"Lucky old brute! I wish I had a share of it. I heard all about it at Doctors Commons yesterday."

"Why, is it anything strange?"

"Strange! Why, it's no name for it. What do you think of an old flint like that having a miser for a tenant who goes and dies and leaves him all he's got - £40,000 or £50,000 - in a will, providing a child of his own doesn't turn up to claim it.

"He died recently, then?"

"About three or four weeks ago. Old Gradder only found the will a few days since. He had been finding pots of gold and bundles of notes all over the house, and it was like drawing a tooth from him to make an inventory, as he had to do under a clause of the will. The old thief would have pocketed all the coin without a word, only for the will, and he was afraid he'd risk everything if he did not do it legally.

"You know all about it," I remarked, wishing to hear more.

"I should think I did. I asked Cripps, of Bogg and Snagleys, about it this morning. They're working for him, and Cripps says that if they had not threatened him with the Public Prosecutor, he would not have given even a list of the money he found."

I began now to understand the motive of Mr. Gradder's anxiety to aid in working at my house. I said to Wigley:

"This is very interesting. Do you know that he is my landlord?"

"Your landlord! Well, I wish you joy of him. I must be off now. I have to go down to Doctors Commons before one o'clock. Would you mind getting these stamped for me, and keeping them till I come back?"

"With pleasure," I said, "and look here! Would you mind looking out that will of Gradder's, and make a mem. of it for me, if it isn't too long? I'll go a shilling on it." And I handed him the coin.

Later in the day he came hack and handed me a paper.

"It isn't long," he said. "We might put up the shutters if men made wills like that. That is an exact copy. It is duly witnessed, and all regular."

I took the paper and put it in my pocket, for I was very busy at the time.

After supper that evening I got a note from Gradder, saying that he had got an offer from another person who had been in treaty with him before I had taken the, house, wanting to have it, and offering to pay a premium. "He is an old friend," wrote Gradder, "and I would like to oblige him; so if you choose I will take back the lease and hand you over what he offers to pay." This was £25, altered from £20.

I then told Mary of his having called on me at the office, and of the subsequent revelation of the will. She was much impressed.

"Oh, Bob," she said, "it is a real romance."

With a woman's quickness of perception, she guessed at once our landlord's reason for wishing to help us.

"Why, he thinks the old miser has hidden money here, and wants to look for it. Bob," this excitedly, "this house may be full of money; the walls round us may hold a fortune. Let us begin to look at once!"

I was as much excited as she was, but I felt that someone must keep cool, so I said:

"Mary, dear, there maybe nothing; but even if there is, it does not belong to us."

"Why not?" she asked.

"Because it is all arranged in the will," I answered; "and, by the bye, I have a mem. of it here," and I took from my pocket the paper which Wigley had given me.

With intense interest we read it together, Mary holding me tightly by the arm. It certainly was short. It ran as follows:

"7, Little Butler Street, S.W., London. - I hereby leave to my child or children, if I have any living, all I own, and in default of such everything is to go to John Gradder, my landlord, who is to make an inventory of all he can find in the two houses occupied by me, this house and 2, Lampeter Street, S.W. London, and to lodge all money and securities in Coutts's Bank. If my children or any of them do not claim in writing by an application before a Justice of the Peace within one calendar month from my decease, they are to forfeit all rights. Ignorance of my death or their relationship to be no reason for noncompliance. Lest there be any doubt of my intentions, I hereby declare that I wish in such default of my natural heirs John Gradder aforesaid to have my property, because he is the hardesthearted man I ever knew, and will not fool it away in charities or otherwise, but keep it together. If any fooling is to be done, it will be by my own.

(Signed) Giles Armer, Master Mariner, Formerly of Whitby."

When I came near the end, Mary, who had been looking down the paper in advance of my reading, cried out; "Giles Armer! Why, that was my father!"

"Good God!" I cried out, as I jumped to my feet.

"Yes," she said, excitedly; "didn't you see me sign Mary Armer at the registry? We never spoke of the name because he had a quarrel with mother and deserted her, and after seven years she married my step-father, and I was always called by his name."

"And was he from Whitby?" I asked. I was nearly wild with excitement.

"Yes," said Mary. "Mother was married there, and I was born there."

I was reading over the will again. My hands were trembling so that I could hardly read. An awful thought struck me. What day did he die? Perhaps it was too late - it was now the thirtieth of October. However, we were determined to be on the safe side, and then and there Mary and I put on our hats and wraps and went to the nearest police-station.

There we learned the address of a magistrate, after we had explained to the inspector the urgency of the case.

We went to the address given, and after some delay were admitted to an interview.

The Magistrate was at first somewhat crusty at being disturbed at such an hour, for by this time it was pretty late in the evening. However, when we had explained matters to him he was greatly interested, and we went through the necessary formalities. When it was done he ordered in cake and wine, and wished us both luck. “But remember,” he said to Mary, “that as yet your possible fortune is a long way off. There may be more Giles Armers than one, and moreover there may be some difficulty in proving legally that the dead man was the same person as your father. Then you will also have to prove, in a formal way, your mother’s marriage and your own birth. This will probably involve heavy expenses, for lawyers fight hard when they are well paid. However, I do not wish to discourage you, but only to prevent false hopes; at any rate, you have done well in making your Declaration at once. So far you are on the high road to success.” So he sent us away filled with hopes as well as fears.

When we got home we set to work to look for hidden treasures in the unfinished room. I knew too well that there was nothing hidden in the rooms which were finished, for I had done the work myself, and had even stripped the walls and uncovered the floors.

It took us a couple of hours to make an accurate search, but there was absolutely no result. The late Master Mariner had made his treasury in the other house.

Next morning I went to find out from the parish registry the date of the death of Giles Armer, and to my intense relief and joy learned that it had occurred on the 30th of September, so that by our prompt action in going at once to the magistrate’s, we had, if not secured a fortune, at least, not forfeited our rights or allowed them to lapse.

The incident was a sort of good omen, and cheered us up; and we needed a little cheering, for, despite the possible good fortune, we feared we might have to contest a lawsuit, a luxury which we could not afford.

We determined to keep our own counsel for a little, and did not mention the matter to a soul.

That evening Mr. Gradder called again, and renewed his offer of taking the house off my hands. I still refused, for I did not wish him to see any difference in my demeanour. He evidently came determined to effect a surrender of the lease, and kept bidding higher and higher, till at last I thought it best to let him have his way; and so we agreed for no less a sum than a hundred pounds that I should give him immediate possession and cancel the agreement. I told him we would clear out within one hour after the money was handed to me.

Next morning at half-past nine o’clock he came with the money. I had all our effects - they were not many - packed up and taken to a new lodging, and before ten o’clock Mr. Gradder was in possession of the premises.

Whilst he was tearing down my new wall papers, and pulling out the grates, and sticking his head up the chimneys and down the water tanks in the search for more treasures, Mary and I were consulting the eminent solicitor, Mr. George, as to our method of procedure. He said he would not lose an hour, but go by the first train to Littlehampton himself to examine Mrs. Compton as to dates and places.

Mary and I went with him. In the course of the next twenty-four hours he had, by various documents and the recollections of my mother-in-law, made out a clear case, the details of which only wanted formal verification.

We all came back to London jubilant, and were engaged on a high tea when there came a loud knocking at the door. There was a noise and scuffle in the passage, and into the room rushed Mr. Gradder, covered with soot and lime dust, with hair dishevelled and eyes wild with anger, and haggard with want of sleep. He burst out at me in a torrent of invective.

“Give me back my money, you thief! You ransacked the house yourself, and have taken it all away! My money, do you hear? my money!” He grew positively speechless with rage, and almost foamed at the mouth.

I took Mary by the hand and led her up to him.

“Mr. Gradder,” I said, “let us both thank you. Only for your hurry and persistency we might have let the time lapse, and have omitted the declaration which, on the evening before last, we, or rather, she, made.

He started as though struck.

“What declaration? What do you mean?”

“The declaration made by my wife, only daughter of Giles Armer, Master Mariner, late of Whitby.”

THE RED STOCKADE

We was on the southern part of the China station, when the "George Ranger" was ordered to the Straits of Malacca, to put down the pirates that had been showing themselves of late. It was in the forties, when ships was ships, not iron-kettles full of wheels, and other devilments, and there was a chance of hand-to-hand fighting - not being blown up in an iron cellar by you don't know who. Ships was ships in them days!

There had been a lot of throat-cutting and scuttling, for them devils stopped at nothing. Some of us had been through the straits before, when we was in the "Polly Phemus," seventy-four, going to the China station, and although we had never come to quarters with the Malays, we had seen some of their work, and knew what kind they was. So, when we had left Singapore in the "George Ranger," for that was our saucy, little thirty-eight-gun frigate, - the place wasn't in them days what it is now, - many and many 's the yarn was told in the fo'c'sle, and on the watches, of what the yellow devils could do, and had done. Some of us took it one way, and some another, but all, save a few, wanted to get into hand-grips with the pirates, for all their kreeses, and their stinkpots, and the devil's engines what they used. There was some that didn't mind cold steel of an ordinary kind, and would have faced cutlasses and boarding-pikes, any day, for a holiday, but that didn't like the idea of those knives like crooked flames, and that sliced a man in two, and hacked through the bowels of him. Naturally, we didn't take much stock of this kind; and many's the joke we had on them, and some of them cruel enough jokes, too.

You may be sure there was good stories, with plenty of cutting, and blood, and tortures in them, told in their watches, and nigh the whole ship's crew was busy, day and night, remembering and inventing things that'd make them gasp and grow white. I think that, somehow, the captain and the officers must have known what was goin' on, for there came tales from the ward-room that was worse nor any of ours. The midshipmen used to delight in them, like the ship's boys did, and one of them, that had a kreese, used to bring it out when he could, and show how the pirates used it when they cut the hearts out of men and women, and ripped them up to the chins. It was a bit cruel, at times, on them poor, white-livered chaps, - a man can't help his liver, I suppose, - but, anyhow, there's no place for them in a warship, for they're apt to do more harm by living where there's men of all sorts, than they can do by dying. So there wasn't any mercy for them, and the captain was worse on them than any. Captain Wynyard was him that commanded the corvette "Sentinel" on the China station, and was promoted to the "George Ranger" for cutting up a fleet of junks that was hammering at the "Rajah," from Canton, racing for Southampton with the first of the season's tea. He was a man, if you like, a bulldog full of hellfire, when he was on for fighting; he wouldn't have a white liver at any price. "God hates a coward," he said once, "and under Her Britannic Majesty I'm here to carry out God's will. Trice him up, and give him a dozen!" At least, that's the story they tell of him when he was round Shanghai, and one of his men had held back when the time came for boarding a fire-junk that was coming down the tide. And with that he went in, and steered her off with his own hands.

Well, the captain knew what work there was before us, and that it weren't no time for kid gloves and hair-oil, much less a bokey in your buttonhole and a top-hat, and he didn't mean that there should be any funk on his ship. So you take your davy that it wasn't his fault if things was made too pleasant aboard for men what feared fallin' into the clutches of the Malays.

Now and then he went out of his way to be nasty over such folk, and, boy or man, he never checked his tongue on a hard word when any one's face was pale before him. There was one old chap on board that we called "Old Land's End," for he came from that part, and that had a boy of his on the "Billy Ruffian," when he sailed on her, and after got lost, one night, in cutting out a Greek sloop at Navarino, in 1827. We used to chaff him when there was trouble with any of the boys, for he used to say that his boy might have been in that trouble, too. And now, when the chaff was on about bein' afeered of the Malay's, we used to rub it into the old man; but he would flame up, and answer us that his boy died in his duty, and that he couldn't be afeered of nought.

One night there was a row on among the midshipmen, for they said that one of them, Tempest by name, owned up to being afraid of being kreesed. He was a rare bright little chap of about thirteen, that was always in fun and trouble of some kind; but he was soft-hearted, and sometimes the other lads would tease him. He would own up truthfully to anything he thought, or felt, and now they had drawn him to own something that none of them would - no matter how true it might be. Well, they had a rare fight, for the boy was never backward with his fists, and by accident it came to the notice of the captain. He insisted on being told what it was all about, and when young Tempest spoke out, and told him, he stamped on the deck, and called out:

"I'll have no cowards in this ship," and was going on, when the boy cut in:

“I’m no coward, sir; I’m a gentleman!”

“Did you say you were afraid? Answer me - yes, or no?”

“Yes, sir, I did, and it was true! I said I feared the Malay kreeses; but I did not mean to shirk them, for all that. Henry of Navarre was afraid, but, all the same, he -”

“Henry of Navarre be damned,” shouted the captain, “and you, too! You said you were afraid, and that, let me tell you, is what we call a coward in the Queen’s navy. And if you are one, you can, at least, have the grace to keep it to yourself! No answer to me! To the masthead for the remainder of the day! I want my crew to know what to avoid, and to know it when they see it!” and he walked away, while the lad, without a word, ran up the maintop.

Some way, the men didn’t say much about this. The only one that said anything to the point was Old Land’s End, and says he:

“That may be a coward, but I’d chance it that he was a boy of mine.”

As we went up the straits and got the sun on us, and the damp heat of that kettle of a place, - Lor’ bless ye! ye steam there, all day and all night like a copper at the galley, - we began to look around for the pirates, and there wasn’t a man that got drowsy on the watch. We coasted along as we went up north, and took a look into the creeks and rivers as we went. It was up these that the Malays hid themselves; for the fevers and such that swept off their betters like flies, didn’t seem to have any effect on them. There was pretty bad bits, I tell you, up some of them rivers through the mango groves, where the marshes spread away, mile after mile, as far as you could see, and where every thing that is noxious, both beast, and bird, and fish, and crawling thing, and insect, and tree, and bush, and flower, and creeper, is most at home.

But the pirate ships kept ahead of us; or, if they came south again, passed us by in the night, and so we ran up till about the middle of the peninsula, where the worst of the piracies had happened. There we got up as well as we could to look like a ship in distress; and, sure enough, we deceived the beggars, for two of them came out one early dawn and began to attack us. They was ugly looking craft, too - long, low hull and lateen - sails, and a double crew twice told in every one of them.

But if the crafts was ugly the men was worse, for uglier devils I never saw. Swarthy, yellow chaps, some of them, and some with shaven crowns and white eyeballs, and others as black as your shoe, with one or two white men, more shame, among them, but all carrying kreeses as long as your arm, and pistols in their belts.

They didn't get much change from us, I tell you. We let them get close, and then gave them a broadside that swept their decks like a hail-storm; but we was unlucky that we didn't grapple them, for they managed to shift off and ran for it. Our boats was out quick, but we daren't follow them where they ran into a wide creek, with mango swamps on each side as far as the eye could reach. The boat came back after a bit and reported that they had run up the river which was deep enough but with a winding channel between great mud-banks, where alligators lay in hundreds. There seemed some sort of fort where the river narrowed, and the pirates ran in behind it and disappeared up the bend of the river.

Then the preparations began. We knew that we had got two craft, at any rate, caged in the river, and there was every chance that we had found their lair. Our captain wasn't one that let things go asleep, and by daylight the next morning we was ready for an attack. The pinnace and four other boats started out under the first lieutenant to prospect, and the rest that was left on board waited, as well as they could, till we came back.

That was an awful day. I was in the second boat, and we all kept well together when we began to get into the narrows of the mouth of the river. When we started, we went in a couple of hours after the flood-tide, and so all we saw when the light came seemed fresh and watery. But as the tide ran out, and the big black mud-banks began to show their heads above everywhere, it wasn't nice, I can tell you. It was hardly possible for us to tell the channels, for everywhere the tide raced quick, and it was only when the boat began to touch the black slime that you knew that you was on a bank. Twice our boat was almost caught this way, but by good luck we pulled and pushed off in time into the ebbing tide; and hardly a boat but touched somewhere. One that was a bit out from the rest of us got stuck at last in a nasty cut between two mud-banks, and as the water ran away the boat turned over on the slope, despite all hercrew could do, and we saw the poor fellows thrown out into the slime. More than one of them began to swim toward us, but behind each came a rush of something dark, and though we shouted and made what noise we could, and fired many shots, the alligators was too close, and with shriek after shriek they went down to the bottom of the filth and slime. Oh, man! it was a dreadful sight, and none the better that it was new to nigh all of us. How it would have taken us if we had time to think about it, I hardly know, but I doubt that more than a few would have grown cold over it; but just then there flew amongst us a hail of small shot from a fleet of boats that had stolen down on us. They drove out from behind a big mud-bank that rose steeper than the others and that seemed solider, too, for the gravel of it showed, as the scour of the tide washed the mud away. We was not sorry, I tell you, to have men to fight with, instead of alligators and mud-banks, in an ebbing tide, in a strange tropical river.

We gave chase at once, and the pinnace fired the twelve-pounder which she carried in the bows, in among the huddle of the boats, and the yells arose as the rush of the alligators turned to where the Malay heads bobbed up and down in the drift of the tide. Then the pirates turned and ran, and we after them as hard as we could pull, till round a sharp bend of the river we came to a narrow place, where one side was steep for a bit and then tailed away to a wilderness of marsh, worse than we had seen. The other side was crowned by a sort of fort, built on the top of a high bank, but guarded by a stockade and a mud-bank which lay at its base. From this there came a rain of bullets, and we saw some guns turned toward us. We was hardly strong enough to attack such a position without reconnoitring, and so we drew away; but not quite quick enough, for before we could get out of range of their guns a round shot carried away the whole of the starboard oars of one of our boats.

It was a dreary pull to the ship, and the tide was agin us, for we all got thinking of what we had to tell, - one boat and crew lost entirely, and a set of oars shot away, - and no work done.

The captain was furious; and, in the ward-room, and in the fo'c'sle that night, there was nothing that wasn't flavored with anger and curses. Even the boys, of all sorts, from the cabin-boys to the midshipmen, was wanting to get at the Malays. However, sharp was the order; and by daylight three boats was up at the stockaded fort, making an accurate survey. I was again in one of the boats; and, in spite of what the captain had said to make us all so angry, - and he had a tongue like vitriol, I tell you, - we all felt pretty down and cold when we got again amongst those terrible mud-banks and saw the slime that shone on them bubble up, when the gray of the morning let us see anything We found that the fort was one that we would have to take if we wanted to follow the pirates up the river, for it barred the way without a chance. There was a gut of the river between the two great ridges of gravel, and this was the only channel where there was a chance of passing. But it had been staked on both sides, so that only the center was left free. Why, from the fort they could have stoned any one in the boats passing there, only that there wasn't any stone, that we could see, in their whole blasted country!

When we got back, with two cases of sunstroke among us, and reported, the captain ordered preparations for an attack on the fort, and the next morning the ball began. It was ugly work. We got close up to the fort, but, as the tide ran out, we had to sheer away somewhat so as not to get stranded. The whole place swarmed with those grinning devils. They evidently had some way of getting to and from their boats behind the stockade. They did not fire a shot at us, - not at first, - and that was the most aggravating thing that you can imagine. They seemed to know something that we did not, and they only just waited. As the tide sank lower and lower, and the mud-banks grew steeper, and the sun on them began to fizzle, a steam arose that nigh turned our stomachs. Why, the sight of them alone would make your heart sink!

The slime shimmered in all kinds of colours, like the water when there's tarring work on hand, and the whole place seemed alive with all that was horrible. The alligators kept off the boats and the banks close to us, but the thick water was full of eels and water-snakes, and the mud was alive with water-worms and leeches, and horrible, gaudy-colored crabs. The very air was filled with pests, - flies of all kinds, and a sort of big-striped insect that they call the "tiger mosquito," which comes out in the daytime and bites you like red-hot pincers. It was bad enough, I tell you, for us men with hair on our faces, but some of the boys got very white and pale, and they was all pretty silent for a while. All at once the crowd of Malays behind the stockade began to roll their eyes and wave their kreeses and to shout. We knew that there was some cause for it, but couldn't make it out, and this exasperated us more than ever. Then the captain sings out to us to attack the stockade; so out we all jumped into the mud. We knew it couldn't be very deep just there, on account of the gravel beneath. We was knee-deep in a moment, but we struggled, and slipped, and fell over each other; and, when we got to the top of that bank, we was the queerest, filthiest-looking crowd you ever see. But the mud hadn't took the heart out of us, and the Malays, with their necks craned over the stockade, and with the nearest thing to a laugh or a smile that the devil lets them have, drew back and fell, one on another, when they heard our cheer.

Between them and us there was a bit of a dip where the water had been running in the ebb-tide, but which seemed now as dry as the rest, and the foremost of our men charged down the slope, and then we knew why they had kept silent and waited! We was in a regular trap. The first ranks disappeared at once in the mud and ooze in the hollow, and those next were up to their armpits before they could stop. Then those Malay devils opened on us, and while we tried to pull our chaps out, they mowed us down with every kind of small arm they had - and they had a queer assortment, I tell you.

It was all we could do to get back over the slope and to the boats again, - what was left of us, - and, as we hadn't hands enough left even to row with full strength, we had to make for the ship as fast as we could, for their boats began to pass out in a cloud through the narrow by the stockade. But before we went we saw them dragging the live and dead out of the mud with hooks on the end of long bamboos; and there was terrible shrieks from some poor fellows when the kreeses gashed through them. We daren't wait; but we saw enough to make us swear revenge. When we saw them devils stick the bleeding heads of our comrades on the spikes of the stockade, there was nigh a mutiny because the captain wouldn't let us go back and have another try for it. He was cool enough now; and those of us that knew him and understood what was in his mind, when the smile on him showed the white teeth in the corners of his mouth, felt that it was no good day's work that the pirates had done for themselves.

When we got back to the ship and told our tale, it wasn't long till the men was all on fire; and nigh every man took a turn with the grindstone at his cutlass, till they was all like razors. The captain mustered every one on board, and detailed every man to his work in the boats, ready for the next time; and we knew that, by daylight, we were to have another slap at the pirates. We got six-pounders and twelve-pounders in most of the boats, for we was to give them a dose of big shot before we came to close quarters.

When we got up near the stockade, the tide had turned, and we thought it better to wait till dawn, for it was bad work among the mud-banks at the ebb in the dark. So we hung on a while, and then when the sky began to lighten, we made for the fort. When we got nigh enough to see it, there wasn't a man of us who didn't want to have some bloody revenge, for there, on the spikes of the stockade, were the heads of all the poor fellows that we had lost the day before, with a cloud of mosquitoes and flies already beginning to buzz around them in the dawn. But beyond that again, they had painted the outside of the stockade with blood, so that the whole place was a crimson mass. You could smell it as the sun came up!

Well, that day was a hard one. We opened fire with our guns, and the Malays returned it, with all they had got. A fleet of boats came out from beyond the fort, and for a while we had to turn our attention to these. The small guns served us well, and we made a rare havoc among the boats, for our shot went crashing through them, and quite a half of them were sunk. The water was full of bobbing heads; but the tide carried them away from us, and their cries and shrieks came from beyond the fort and then died away. The other boats recognised their danger, and turned and ran in through the narrow, and let us alone for hours after. Then we went at the fort again. We turned our guns at the piles of the stockade, and, of course, every shot told, - but their fire was at too close quarters, and with their rifles and matchlocks, and the rest, they picked us off too fast, and we had to sheer off where our heavy metal could tell without our being within their range. Before we sheered off, we could see that the hole we had knocked in the stockade was only in the outer work, and that the real fort was within. We had to go down the river, as we couldn't go far enough across without danger from the banks, and this only gave us a side view, and, do what we would, we couldn't make an impression, - at least any that we could see.

That was a long and awful day! The sun was blazing on us like a furnace, and we was nigh mad with heat, and flies, and drouth, and anger. It was that hot that if you touched metal it fairly burned you. When the tide was near the flood, the captain ordered up the boats in the wide water now opposite the fort; and there, for a while, we got a fair chance, till, when the ebb began, we should have to sheer off again. By this time our shot was nearly run out, and we thought that we should have to give over; but all at once came order to prepare for attack, and in a few minutes we was working for dear life across the river, straight for the stockade. The men set up a cheer, and the pirates showed over the top of the stockade and waved their kreeses, and more than one of them sliced off pieces of the heads on the spikes, and jeered at us, as much as to say that they would do the same for us in our turn! When we got close up, every one of them had disappeared, and there was a silence of the grave. We knew that there was something up, but what the move was we could not tell, till from behind the fort came rushing again a fleet of boats. We turned on them, and, like we did before, we made mincemeat of them. This time the tide made for us, and the bobbing heads went by us in dozens. Now and then there was a wild yell, as an alligator pulled some one down into the mud. This went on for a little, and we had beaten them off enough to be able to get our grappling - irons ready for climbing the stockade, when the second lieutenant, who was in the outer boat, called out:

"Back with the boats! Back, quick, the tide is falling!" and with one impulse we began to shove off. Then, in an instant, the place became alive again with the Malays, and they began firing on us so quickly that before we could get out into the whirl of tide there was many a dead man in our boats.

There was no use trying to do any more that day, and after we had done what could be done for the wounded, and patched up our boats, for there was plenty of shot-holes to plug, we pulled back to the ship. The alligators had had a good day, and as we went along, and the mud-banks grew higher and higher with the falling of the tide, we could see them lie out lazily, as if they had been gorged. Aye! And there was enough left for the ground-sharks out in the offing; for the men on board told us that every while on the ebb something would go along, bobbing up and down in the swell, till presently there would be a swift ripple of a fin, and then there was no more pirate.

Well! when we got aboard, the rest was mighty anxious to know what had been done; and when we began, with the heads on spikes of the red stockade, the men ground their teeth, and Old Land's End up, and says he:

"The Red Stockade! We'll not forget the name! It'll be our turn next, and then we'll paint it inside this time." And so it was that we came to know the place by that name. That night the captain was like a man that would do murder. His face was like steel, and his eyes was as red as flames. He didn't seem to have a thought for any one; and everything he did was as hard as though his heart were brass. He ordered all that was needful to be done for the wounded, but he added to the doctor: "And, mind you, get them well as soon as you can. We're too shorthanded already!"

Up to now, we all had known him treat men as men, but now he only thought of us as machines for fighting! True enough, he thought the same of himself. Twice that very night he cut up rough in a new way. Of course, the men was talking of the attack, and there was lots of brag and chaff, for all they was so grim earnest, and some of the old fooling went on about blood and tortures. The captain came on deck, and as he walked along, he saw one of the men that didn't like the kreeses, and he didn't evidently like the looks of him, for he turned on his heel and said savagely:

"Send the doctor here!" So the doctor came, and the captain he says to him, cold as ice, and as polite as you please:

"Dr. Fairbrother, there is a sick man here! look at his pale face. Something wrong with his liver, I suppose. It's the only thing that makes a seaman's face white when there's fighting ahead. Take him down to sick bay, and do something for him. I'd like to cut the accursed white liver out of him altogether!" and with that he went down to his cabin.

Well if we was hot for fighting before, we was boiling after that, and we all came to know that the next attack on the Red Stockade would be the last, one way or the other! We had to wait two more days before that could come off, for the boats and tackle had to be made ready, and there wasn't going to be any mistakes made this time.

It was just after midnight when we began to get ready. Every man was to his post. The moon was up, and it was lighter nor a London day, and the captain stood by and saw every man to his place, and nothing escaped him. By and by, as No. 6 boat was filling, and before the officer in charge of it got in, came the midshipman, young Tempest, and when the captain saw him he called him up and hissed out before all the crew:

"Why are you so white? What's wrong with you, anyway? Is your liver out of order, too?"

True enough, the boy was white, but at the flaming insult the blood rushed to his face and we could see it red in the starlight. Then in another moment it passed away and left him paler than ever, and he said with a gentle voice, though standing as straight as a ramrod:

"I can't help the blood in my face, sir. If I'm a coward because I'm pale, perhaps you are right. But I shall do my duty all the same!" and with that he pulled himself up, touched his cap, and went down into the boat.

Old Land's End was behind me in the boat with him, number five to my six, and he whispered to me through his shut teeth:

"Too rough that! He might have thought a bit that he's only a child. And he came all the same, even if he was afeer'd!"

We stole away with muffled oars, and dropped silently into the river on the floodtide. If any man had had any doubts as to whether we was in earnest at other times, he had none then, anyhow. It was a pretty grim time, I tell you, for the most of us felt that whether we won or not this time, there would be many empty hammocks that night in the "George Ranger;" but we meant to win even if we went into the maws of the sharks and crocodiles for it. When we came up close on the flood we lost no time but went slap at the fort. At first, of course, we had crawled up the river in silence, and I think that we took the beggars by surprise, for we was there before the time they expected us. Howsomever, they turned out quick enough and there was soon music on both sides of the stockade. We didn't want to take any chance on the mud-banks this time, so we ran in close under the stockade at once and hooked on. We found that they had repaired the breach we had made the last time. They fought like devils, for they knew that we could beat them hand to hand, if we could once get in, and they sent round the boats to take us on the flank, as they had done each time before. But this time we wasn't to be drawn away from our attack, and we let our boats outside tackle them, while we minded our own business closer home.

It was a long fight and a bloody one. They was sheltered inside, and they knew that time was with them, for when the tide should have fallen, if we hadn't got in we should have our old trouble with the mud-banks all over again. But we knew it, too, and we didn't lose no time. Still, men is only men, after all, and we couldn't fly up over a stockade out of a boat, and them as did get up was sliced about dreadful, - they are handy workmen with their kreeses, and no doubt! We was so hot on the job we had on hand that we never took no note of time at all, and all at once we found the boat fixed tight under us.

The tide had fallen and left us on the bank under the Red Stockade, and the best half of the boats was cut off from us. We had some thirty men left, and we knew we had to fight whether we liked it or not. It didn't much matter, anyhow, for we was game to go through with it. The captain, when he seen the state of things, gave his orders to take the boats out into mid-stream, and shell and shot the fort, whilst we was to do what we could to get in. It was no use trying to bridge over the slobs, for the masts of an old seventy-four wouldn't have done it. We was in a tight place, then, I can tell you, between two fires, for the guns in the boats couldn't fire high enough to clear us every time, without going over the fort altogether, and more than one of our own shots did some of us a harm. The cutter came into the game, and began sending the war-rockets from the tubes. The pirates didn't like that, I tell you, and more betoken, no more did we, for we got as much of them as they did, till the captain saw the harm to us, and bade them cease. But he knew his business, and he kept all the fire of the guns on the one side of the stockade, till he knocked a hole that we could get in by. When this was done, the Malays left the outer wall and went within the fort proper. This gave us some protection, since they couldn't fire right down on us, and our guns kept the boats away that would have taken us from the riverside. But it was hot work, and we began dropping away with stray shots, and with the stinkpots and hand-grenades that they kept hurling over the stockade on to us.

So the time came when we found that we must make a dash for the fort, or get picked out, one by one, where we stood. By this time some of our boats was making for the opening, and there seemed less life behind the stockade; some of them was up to some move, and was sheering off to make up some other devilment. Still, they had their guns in the fort, and there was danger to our boats if they tried to cross the opening between the piles. One did, and went down with a hole in her within a minute. So we made a burst inside the stockade, and found ourselves in a narrow place between the two walls of piles. Anyhow, the place was drier, and we felt a relief in getting out of up to our knees in steaming mud. There was no time to lose, and the second lieutenant, Webster by name, told us to try to scale the stockade in front.

It wasn't high, but it was slimy below and greasy above, and do what we would, we couldn't get no nigher. A shot from a pistol wiped out the lieutenant, and for a moment we thought we was without a leader. Young Tempest was with us, silent all the time, with his face as white as a ghost, though he done his best, like the rest of us. Suddenly he called out:

"Here, lads! take and throw me in. I'm light enough to do it, and I know that when I'm in you'll all follow."

Ne'er a man stirred. Then the lad stamped his foot and called again, and I remember his young, high voice now:

"Seamen to your duty! I command here!"

At the word we all stood at attention, just as if we was at quarters. Then Jack Pring, that we called the Giant, for he was six feet four and as strong as a bullock, spoke out:

"It's no duty, sir, to fling an officer into hell!" The lad looked at him and nodded.

"Volunteers for dangerous duty!" he called, and every man of the crowd stepped out.

"All right, boys!" says he. "Now take me up and throw me in. We'll get down that flag, anyhow," and he pointed to the black flag that the pirates flew on the flagstaff in the fort. Then he took the small flag of the float and put it on his breast, and says he: “This’ll suit better.”

“Won’t I do, sir?” said Jack, and the lad laughed a laugh that rang again.

“Oh, my eye!” says he, has any one got a crane to hoist in the Giant?” The lad told us to catch hold of him, and when Jack hesitated, says he:

“We’ve always been friends, Jack, and I want you to be one of the last to touch me!” So Jack laid hold of him by one side, and Old Land’s End stepped out and took him by the other. The rest of us was, by this time, kicking off our shoes and pulling off our shirts, and getting our knives open in our teeth. The two men gave a great heave together and they sent the boy clean over the top of the stockade. We heard across the river a cheer from our boats, as we began to scramble. There was a pause within the fort for a few seconds, and then we saw the lad swarm up the bamboo flagstaff that swayed under him, and tear down the black flag. He pulled our own flag from his breast and hung it over the top of the post. And he waved his hand and cheered, and the cheer was echoed in thunder across the river. And then a shot fetched him down, and with a wild yell they all went for him, while the cheering from the boats came like a storm.

We never knew quite how we got over that stockade. To this day I can’t even imagine how we done it! But when we leaped down, we saw something lying at the foot of the flagstaff all red, - and the kreeses was red, too! The devils had done their work! But it was their last, for we came at them with our cutlasses, - there was never a sound from the lips of any of us, - and we drove them like a hail-storm beats down standing corn! We didn’t leave a living thing within the Red Stockade that day, and we wouldn't if there had been a million there!

It was a while before we heard the shouting again, for the boats was coming up the river, now that the fort was ours, and the men had other work for their breath than cheering.

Between us, we made a rare clearance of the pirates' nest that day. We destroyed every boat on the river, and the two ships that we was looking for, and one other that was careened. We tore down and burned every house, and jetty, and stockade in the place, and there was no quarter for them we caught. Some of them got away by a path they knew through the swamp where we couldn't follow them. The sun was getting low when we pulled back to the ship. It would have been a merry enough home-coming, despite our losses, - all but for one thing, and that was covered up with a Union Jack in the captain's own boat. Poor lad! when they lifted him on deck, and the men came round to look at him, his face was pale enough now, and, one and all, we felt that it was to make amends, as the captain stooped over and kissed him on the forehead.

"We'll bury him to-morrow," he said, "but in blue water, as becomes a gallant seaman."

At the dawn, next day, he lay on a grating, sewn in his hammock, with the shot at his feet, and the whole crew was mustered, and the chaplain read the service for the dead. Then he spoke a bit about him, - how he had done his duty, and was an example to all, - and he said how all loved and honored him. Then the men told off for the duty stood ready to slip the grating and let the gallant boy go plunging down to join the other heroes under the sea; but Old Land's End stepped out and touched his cap to the captain, and asked if he might say a word.

“Say on, my man!” said the captain, and he stood, with his cocked hat in his hand, whilst Old Land’s End spoke:

“Mates! ye’ve heerd what the chaplain said. The boy done his duty, and died like the brave gentleman he was! And we wish he was here now. But, for all that, we can’t be sorry for him, or for what he done, though it cost him his life. I had a lad once of my own, and I hoped for him what I never wanted for myself, - that he would win fame and honor, and become an admiral of the fleet, as others have done before. But, so help me God! I’d rather see him lying under the flag as we see that brave boy lie now, and know why he was there, than I’d see him in his epaulettes on the quarter-deck of the flagship! He died for his Queen and country, and for the honor of the flag! And what more would you have him do!”

THE SEER

I had just arrived at Cruden Bay on my annual visit, and after a late breakfast was sitting on the low wall which was a continuation of the escarpment of the bridge over the Water of Cruden. Opposite to me, across the road and standing under the only little clump of trees in the place was a tall, gaunt old woman, who kept looking at me intently. As I sat, a little group, consisting of a man and two women, went by. I found my eyes follow them, for it seemed to me after they had passed me that the two women walked together and the man alone in front carrying on his shoulder a little black box-a coffin. I shuddered as I thought, but a moment later I saw all three abreast as they had been. The old woman was now looking at me with eyes that blazed. She came across the road and said to me without preface:

"What saw ye then, that yer e'en looked so awed?" I did not like to tell her so I did not answer. Her great eyes were fixed keenly upon me, seeming to look me through and through. I felt that I grew quite red, whereupon she said, apparently to herself: "I thocht so! Even I did not see that which he saw."

"How do you mean?" I queried. She answered ambiguously:

"Wait! Ye shall perhaps know before this hour to-morrow!"

Her answer interested me and I tried to get her to say more; but she would not. She moved away with a grand stately movement that seemed to become her great gaunt form.

After dinner whilst I was sitting in front of the hotel, there was a great commotion in the village; much running to and fro of men and women with sad mien. On questioning them I found that a child had been drowned in the little harbour below. Just then a woman and a man, the same that had passed the bridge earlier in the day, ran by with wild looks. One of the bystanders looked after them pityingly as he said:

"Puir souls. It's a sad home-comin' for them the nicht."

"Who are they?" I asked. The man took off his cap reverently as he answered:

"The father and mother of the child that was drowned!" As he spoke I looked round as though someone had called me.

There stood the gaunt woman with a look of triumph on her face.

The curved shore of Cruden Bay, Aberdeenshire, is backed by a waste of sandhills in whose hollows seagrass and moss and wild violets, together with the pretty "grass of Parnassus" form a green carpet. The surface of the hills is held together by bent-grass and is eternally shifting as the wind takes the fine sand and drifts it to and fro. All behind is green, from the meadows that mark the southern edge of the bay to the swelling uplands that stretch away and away far in the distance, till the blue mist of the mountains at Braemar sets a kind of barrier. In the centre of the bay the highest point of the land that runs downward to the sea looks like a miniature hill known as the Hawklaw; from this point onward to the extreme south the land runs high with a gentle trend downwards.

Cruden sands are wide and firm and the sea runs out a considerable distance. When there is a storm with the wind on shore the whole bay is a mass of leaping waves and broken water that threatens every instant to annihilate the stake-nets which stretch out here and there along the shore. More than a few vessels have been lost on these wide stretching sands, and it was perhaps the roaring of the shallow seas and the terror which they inspired which sent the crews to the spirit room and the bodies of those of them which came to shore later on, to the churchyard on the hill.

If Cruden Bay is to be taken figuratively as a mouth, with the sand hills for soft palate, and the green Hawklaw as the tongue, the rocks which mark the extremities are its teeth. To the north the rocks of red granite rise jagged and broken. To the south, a mile and a half away as the crow flies, Nature seems to have manifested its wildest forces. It is here, where the little promontory called Whinnyfold juts out, that the two great geological features of the Aberdeen coast meet. The red sienite of the north joins the black gneiss of the south. That union must have been originally a wild one; there are evidences of an upheaval which must have shaken the earth to its centre. Here and there are great masses of either species of rock hurled upwards in every conceivable variety of form, sometimes fused or pressed together so that it is impossible to say exactly where gneiss ends or sienite begins; but broadly speaking here is an irregular line of separation. This line runs seawards to the east and its strength is shown in its outcrop. For half a mile or more the rocks rise through the sea singly or in broken masses ending in a dangerous cluster known as “The Skares” and which has had for centuries its full toll of wreck and disaster. Did the sea hold its dead where they fell, its floor around the Skares would be whitened with their bones, and new islands could build themselves with the piling wreckage. At times one may see here the ocean in her fiercest mood; for it is when the tempest drives from the south-east that the sea is fretted amongst the rugged rocks and sends its spume landwards. The rocks that at calmer times rise dark from the briny deep are lost to sight for moments in the grand onrush of the waves. The seagulls which usually whiten them, now flutter around screaming, and the sound of their shrieks comes in on the gale almost in a continuous note, for the single cries are merged in the multitudinous roar of sea and air.

The village, squatted beside the embouchער of the Water of Cruden at the northern side of the bay is simple enough; a few rows of fishermen's cottages, two or three great red-tiled drying-sheds nestled in the sand-heap behind the fishers' houses. For the rest of the place as it was when first I saw it, a little lockout beside a tall flagstaff on the northern cliff, a few scattered farms over the inland prospect, one little hotel down on the western bank of the Water of Cruden with a fringe of willows protecting its sunk garden which was always full of fruits and flowers.

From the most southern part of the beach of Cruden Bay to Whinnyfold village the distance is but a few hundred yards; first a steep pull up the face of the rock; and then an even way, beside part of which runs a tiny stream. To the left of this path, going towards Whinnyfold, the ground rises in a bold slope and then falls again all round, forming a sort of wide miniature hill of some eighteen or twenty acres. Of this the southern side is sheer, the black rock dipping into the waters of the little bay of Whinnyfold, in the centre of which is a picturesque island of rock shelving steeply from the water on the northern side, as is the tendency of all the gneiss and granite in this part. But to east and north there are irregular bays or openings, so that the furthest points of the promotory stretch out like fingers. At the tips of these are reefs of sunken rock falling down to deep water and whose existence can only be suspected in bad weather when the rush of the current beneath sends up swirling eddies or curling masses of foam. These little bays are mostly curved and are green where falling earth or drifting sand have hidden the outmost side of the rocks and given a foothold to the seagrass and clover. Here have been at some time or other great caves, now either fallen in or silted up with sand, or obliterated with the earth brought down in the rush of surface-water in times of long rain. In one of these bays, Broad Haven, facing right out to the Skares, stands an isolated pillar of rock called locally the “Puir mon” through whose base, time and weather have worn a hole through which one may walk dryshod.

Through the masses of rocks that run down to the sea from the sides and shores of all these bays are here and there natural channels with straight edges as though cut on purpose for the taking in of the cobbles belonging to the fisher folk of Whinnyfold.

When first I saw the place I fell in love with it. Had it been possible I should have spent my summer there, in a house of my own, but the want of any place in which to live forbade such an opportunity. So I stayed in the little hotel, the Kilmarnock Arms.

The next year I came again, and the next, and the next. And then I arranged to take a feu at Whinnyfold and to build a house overlooking the Skares for myself. The details of this kept me constantly going to Whinnyfold, and my house to be was always in my thoughts.

Hitherto my life had been an uneventful one. At school I was, though secretly ambitious, dull as to results. At College I was better off, for my big body and athletic powers gave me a certain position in which I had to overcome my natural shyness. When I was about eight and twenty I found myself nominally a barrister, with no knowledge whatever of the practice of law and but little less of the theory, and with a commission in the Devil’s Own-the irrelevant name given to the Inns of Court Volunteers. I had few relatives, but a comfortable, though not great, fortune; and I had been round the world, dilettante fashion.

All that night I thought of the dead child and of the peculiar vision which had come to me. Sleeping or waking it was all the same; my mind could not leave the parents in procession as seen in imagination, or their distracted mien in reality. Mingled with them was the great-eyed, aquiline-featured, gaunt old woman who had taken such an interest in the affair; and in my part of it. I asked the landlord if he knew her, since from his position as postmaster he knew almost everyone for miles around. He told me that she was a stranger to the place. Then he added:

“I can’t imagine what brings her here. She has come over from Peterhead two or three times lately; but she doesn’t seem to have anything at all to do. She has nothing to sell and she buys nothing. She’s not a tripper, and she’s not a beggar, and she’s not a thief, and she’s not a worker of any sort. She’s a queer-looking lot anyhow. I fancy from her speech that she’s from the west; probably from some of the far-out islands. I can tell that she has the Gaelic from the way she speaks.”

Later on in the day, when I was walking on the shore near the Hawklaw, she came up to speak to me. The shore was quite lonely, for in those days it was rare to see anyone on the beach except when the salmon fishers drew their nets at the ebbing tide. I was walking towards Whinnyfold when she came upon me silently from behind. She must have been hidden among the bent-grass of the sandhills for had she been anywhere in view I must have seen her on that desolate shore. She was evidently a most imperious person; she at once addressed me in a tone and manner which made me feel as though I were in some way an inferior, and in somehow to blame:

“What for did ye no tell me what ye saw yesterday?” Instinctively I answered:

“I don’t know why. Perhaps because it seemed so ridiculous.” Her stern features hardened into scorn as she replied:

“Are Death and the Doom then so redeekulous that they pleasure ye intil silence?” I somehow felt that this was a little too much and was about to make a sharp answer, when suddenly it struck me as a remarkable thing that she knew already. Filled with surprise I straightway asked her:

“Why, how on earth do you know? I told no one.” I stopped for I felt all at sea; there was some mystery here which I could not fathom. She seemed to read my mind like an open book, for she went on looking at me as she spoke, searchingly and with an odd smile.

“Eh! laddie, do ye no ken that ye hae een that can see? Do ye no understand that ye hae een that can speak? Is it that one with the Gift o’ Second Sight has no an understandin’ o’ it. Why, yer face when ye saw the mark o’ the Doom, was like a printed book to een like mine.”

“Do you mean to tell me,” I asked, “that you could tell what I saw, simply by looking at my face?”

“Na! na! laddie. Not all that, though a Seer am I; but I knew that you had seen the Doom! It’s no that varied that there need be any mistake. After all Death is only one, in whatever way we may speak!” After a pause of thought I asked her:

If you have the power of Second Sight why did you not see the vision, or whatever it was, yourself?”

“Eh! laddie,” she answered, shaking her head, “’Tis little ye ken o’ the wark o’ the Fates! Learn ye then that the Voice speaks only as it listeth into chosen ears, and the Vision comes to chosen een. None can will to hear or to see, to pleasure theirsels.”

“Then,” I said, and I felt that there was a measure of triumph in my tone, “if to none but the chosen is given to know, how comes it that you, who seem not to have been chosen on this occasion at all events, know all the same?” She answered with a touch of impatience:

“Do ye ken, young sir, that even mortal een have power to see much, if there be behind them the thocht, an’ the knowledge and the experience to guide them aright. How, think ye, is it that some can see much, and learn much as they gang; while others go blind as the mowdiwart, at the end o’ the journey as before it?”

“Then perhaps you will tell me how much you saw, and how you saw it?”

“Ah! to them that have seen the Doom there needs but sma’ guidance to their thochts. Too lang, an’ too often hae I mysen seen the death-sark an’ the watch-candle an’ the dead-hole, not to know when they are seen tae ither een. Na, na! laddie, what I kent o’ yer seein’ was no by the Gift but only by the use o’ my proper een. I kent not the muckle o’ what ye saw. Not whether it was ane or ither o’ the garnishins o’ the dead; but weel I kent that it was o’ death.”

“Then,” I said interrogatively, “Second Sight is altogether a matter of chance?”

“Chance! chance!” she repeated with scorn. “Na! young sir; when the Voice has spoken there is no more chance than that the nicht will follow the day.”

“You mistake me,” I said, feeling somewhat superior now that I had caught her in an error, “I did not for a moment mean that the Doom-whatever it is-is not a true forerunner. What I meant was that it seems to be a matter of chance in whose ear the Voice-whatever it is-speaks; when once it has been ordained that it is to sound in the ear of some one.” Again she answered with scorn:

“Na, na! there is no chance o’ ocht about the Doom. Them that send forth the Voice and the Seein’ know well to whom it is sent and why. Can ye no comprehend that it is for no bairn-play that such goes forth. When the Voice speaks, it is mainly followed by tears an' woe an' lamentation! Nae! nor is it only one bit manifestation that stands by its lanes, remote and isolate from all ither. Truly 'tis but a pairt o' the great scheme o' things; an' be sure that who so is chosen to see or to hear is chosen weel, an' must hae their pairt in what is to be, on to the verra end."

"Am I to take it," I asked, "that Second Sight is but a little bit of some great purpose which has to be wrought out by means of many kinds; and that who so sees the Vision or hears the Voice is but the blind unconscious instrument of Fate?"

"Aye! laddie. Weel eneuch the Fates know their wishes an' their wark, no to need the help or the thocht of any human-blind or seein', sane or silly, conscious or unconscious."

All through her speaking I had been struck by the old woman's use of the word "Fate," and more especially when she used it in the plural. It was evident that, Christian though she might be-and in the West they are generally devout observants of the duties of their creed-her belief in this respect came from some of the old pagan mythologies. I should have liked to question her on this point; but I feared to shut her lips against me. Instead I asked her:

"Tell me, will you, if you don't mind, of some case you have known yourself of Second Sight?"

"Tis no for them to brag or boast to whom has been given to see the wark o' the hand o' Fate. But sine ye are yerself a Seer an' would learn, then I may speak. I hae seen the sea ruffle wi'oot cause in the verra spot where later a boat was to gang doon, I hae heard on a lone moor the hammerin' o' the coffin-wright when one passed me who was soon to dee. I hae seen the death-sarli fold round the speerit o' a drowned one, in baith ma sleepin' an' ma wakin' dreams. I hae heard the settin' doom o' the spaiks, an' I hae seen the weepers on a' the crood that walked. Aye, an' in money anither way hae I seen an' heard the Coming o' the Doom."

"But did all the seeings and hearings come true?" I asked. "Did it ever happen that you heard queer sounds or saw strange sights and that yet nothing came of them? I gather that you do not always know to whom something is going to happen; but only that death is coming to some one!" She was not displeased at my questioning but replied at once:

"Na doot! but there are times when what is seen or heard has no manifest following. But think ye, young sir, how mony a corp, still waited for, lies in the depths o' the sea; how mony lie oot on the hillsides, or are fallen in deep places where their bones whiten unkent. Nay! more, to how many has Death come in a way that men think the wark o' nature when his hastening has come frae the hand of man, untold." This was a difficult matter to answer so I changed or rather varied the subject.

"How long must elapse before the warning comes true?"

"Ye know yersel', for but yestreen ye hae seen, how the Death can follow hard upon the Doom; but there be times, nay mostly are they so, when days or weeks pass away ere the Doom is fulfilled."

"Is this so?" I asked, "when you know the person regarding whom the Doom is spoken." She answered with an air of certainty which somehow carried conviction, secretly, with it.

"Even so! I know one who walks the airth now in all the pride o' his strength. But the Doom has been spoken of him. I saw him with these verra een lie prone on rocks, wi' the water runnin' down from his hair. An' again I heard the minute bells as he went by me on a road where is no bell for a score o' miles. Aye, an' yet again I saw him in the kirk itsel' wi' corbies flyin' round him, an' mair gatherin' from afar!"

Here was indeed a case where Second Sight might be tested; so I asked her at once, though to do so I had to overcome a strange sort of repugnance:

"Could this be proved? Would it not be a splendid case to make known; so that if the death happened it would prove beyond all doubt the existence of such a thing as Second Sight. "My suggestion was not well received. She answered with slow scorn:

"Beyon' all doot! Doot! Wha is there that doots the bein' o' the Doom? Learn ye too, young sir, that the Doom an' all thereby is no for traffickin' wi' them that only cares for curiosity and publeecity. The Voice and the Vision o' the Seer is no for fine madams and idle gentles to while away their time in play-toy make-believe!" I climbed down at once.

"Pardon me!" I said, "I spoke without thinking. I should not have said so-to you at any rate." She accepted my apology with a sort of regal inclination; but the moment after she showed by her words she was after all but a woman!

"I will tell ye; that so in the full time ye may hae no doot yersel'. For ye are a Seer and as Them that has the power hae gien ye the Gift it is no for the like o' me to cumber the road o' their doin'. Know ye then, and remember weel, how it was told ye by Gormala MacNiel that Lauchlane Macleod o' the Outer Isles hae been Called; tho' as yet the Voice has no sounded in his ears but only in mine. But ye will see the time-"

She stopped suddenly as though some thought had struck her, and then went on impressively:

"When I saw him lie prone on the rocks there was ane that bent ower him that I kent not in the nicht wha it was, though the licht o' the moon was around him. We shall see! We shall see!"

Without a word more she turned and left me. She would not listen to my calling after her; but with long strides passed up the beach and was lost among the sandhills.

THE WAY OF PEACE

I knew both Michael Hennessey and his wife Katty, though under the local pronunciation of the surname- Hinnessey. I had often gone into the little farmhouse to smoke a pipe with the old man, and to have, before I came away, a glass of milk from the old woman's clean, cool dairy. I had always understood that they were looked upon as a model couple; and it was within my knowledge that a little more than a year ago they had celebrated their golden wedding. But when old Lord Killendell - "The Lard" as they called him locally - suggested that I should ask old Michael how it was that they had lived such a happy life, there was something in his tone and the quiet laugh which followed it, which made me take the advice to heart. More especially when Lady Killendell, who had always been most kind to me, added with an approving smile -

"Do! You are a young man and a bachelor; you will learn something which may be of some service to you later on in your life."

The next time I was near Hennessey's farm the advice occurred to me, and I went in. The two old folk were alone in the house. Their work for the day - the strenuous work - was done, and they were beginning the long evening of rest, which is the farmer's reward for patient toil. We three sat round the hearth enjoying the glowing fire, and the aromatic smell of the burning turf, which is the only fuel used in that part of Ireland.

I gradually led conversation round to the point of happy marriages by way of the Golden Wedding, which was not yet so far off as to have lost interest to the old folk.

"They tell me," I said presently, "that you two are the happiest couple in the Country. I hope that is so? You look it anyway; and every time I have seen you the idea has been with me."

"That's true, God be thanked!" said Michael, after a pause.

"Amin!" joined in Katty, as she crossed herself.

"I wish you'd tell me how you do it?" I asked. Michael smiled this time, and his wife laughed.

"Why do ye want to know, acushla?" she said in reply. This put me in a little personal difficulty. As a matter of fact, I was engaged to be married, but I had been enjoined not to say anything about it - as yet. So I had to put my request on general grounds, which is never so appealing as when such information is asked for personal reasons.

"Well, you see, Mrs. Hennessey," I said, stumbling along as well as I could, "a man would always like to know a secret like that. It is one which might - at some time in his life - be - be useful to him. He -"

"Begob it might, yer 'ann'r," broke in Michael. "Divil recave me if a young man beginnin' life wid a knowledge like that mightn't have all the young women iv a township follyin' round afther him like a flock iv geese afther a ghander." He was interrupted in turn by Katty -

"Ay, or th' ould wans too!" Then she turned to me -

"An' so ye're goin' to be married, yer 'ann'r. More power to ye; an' as many childher as there's days in the month."

"Hold hard there, ma'am!" I retorted. "That would be anembarras de richesse." She winced at the foreign phrase, so I translated it - "too much of a good thing - as the French say. But why do you think I'm going to be married?"

"Ah, go on out iv that wid ye! For what would a young man like yer 'ann'r want to know how marrid people does get on wid wan another, unless he's ceasin' to be a bhoy himself!" (In Ireland a man is a "bhoy" so long as he remains a bachelor. I have myself known a "bhoy" over ninety.) Her inductive ratiocination was too much for me; I remained silent.

"Begob, surr, Katty was wan too many for ye there!" chuckled the old man.

"Quite right, Michael, so she was!" I said. "But now that she has found me out, mayn't I have the price of the discovery? Won't you tell me how you have lived together so happilyforso many years?"

"Ay, surr, there hasn't been a harrd wurrd betune us since the day aftherwe was married."

"The day after you were married?" I commented. "I wonder you didn't begin on the wedding-day itself!"

"Now that's all right, surr, an' mayhap so we would if we was beginnin' life out iv a book. Mayhap it was that we found out the way for ourselves, bekase we wasn't lookin' for it on any particular road. I'm thinkin' that that's the usual way for threasures bein' found 'Tisn't always - aye or mostly - the people that goes about shtickin' rods into places or knockin' chunks wid hammers from off iv other people's property that finds hidden money. Sure 'tis thim that goes about mindin' their own business that comes across it whin they're laste expectin' it." This was a long speech for Michael; and Katty, with her instinctive wish to please, expressed herself in subtle flattery given in an overt aside -

"Mind ye, the wisdom iv him. It does come bubblin' up, like a spring out iva big book full ivwritin' what no man can undhershtand!" Then Ijoined in myself -

"That is a good idea, Michael. The knowledge that can make two people happy is indeed a treasure. Won't you tell me how to find it?

The finding, of course, a man must do for himself. But where there is a road, it is wise to know something about it before you start on a journey."

"Thrue for ye, surr. But I'm misdoubtin' meself if there's a road at all - a high-road iv coorse, I mane. But mind ye, 'tisn't on the high-roads that happiness walks. 'Tis the boreens in a man's own houldin' - nigh to his own home - an' his own heart!" This time Kattys comment was made directly to her husband -

"Begob, Mike, but it's a pote ye're becomin' in yer ould age. Boreens in yer heart! indade! An' here have I been thrampin' for half a century up an' down our own boreen; an' sorra wance have I seen happiness walkin' there more than on the mail-road itself."

This new philosophy was taking us away from the subject, so I led them back to it—"

"Well, even if there isn't a high-road - a road for all - won't you tell me what road you and Katty took? Then I may be able - some day - to find a road like it." The old man winked at me and chuckled; taking the pipe from his lips he jerked the mouth-piece backward over his shoulder.

"Ask her, surr. 'Tis she that can tell you - av she plases."

"Won't you tell me, Katty?" I asked.

"Wid all the plisure in life, yer 'ann'r. 'Tis not much to tell for sure - an' mayhap not worth the tellin'; but av ye wish ye shall hear.

"As that ould man there says, it began the mornin' afther he was married on to me. Mind ye, at the beginnin' -1 don't want ye to decave yerself about that bekase that's part iv the shtory - we was mighty fond of aich other. My! but he was the fine bhoy! Tall an' big an' shtrong an' mastherful; an' 'tis the proud girrl I was whin he ixprissed himself to me. I was that proud that I kem home leppin' so that me mother noticed it an' said: 'Katty, has that impident villin Mike Hinnessey been tellin' ye that ye're a good-lookin' girleen?' - for mind ye I wasn't thin grown up but only a shtep afther a skeuneuch. 'H'm'!' sez I.' 'Tis more than that; he has asked me no less than to be married on to me.' That fetched her up, I can tell ye. 'Glory be,' sez she. 'What is the childher comin' to at all at all? You to be marrid that has no more to yer feet nor yer back than a flapper duck on the bog; an' him that can't bring a thing to the fair that he can't carry. Him that has but only yistherday left his father's cabin an' got one for himself; widout a shtick in it but the thruckle he lies on, an' the creel he ates aff.'"

Instinctively I looked round the fine farm-kitchen in which we sat, with its good, solid, oak furniture, its plentitude of glass and crockeryall daintily clean and bright. Michael noticed my look and said, gravely nodding his head as he spoke -

"That's all herdoin', surr. That's Katty's!"

"Don't mind him, surr! 'Tis the kind good heart iv him that says it. But it's not mydoin'. That's Michael's own work. Surely I only was careful wid the money that he arn'd!" Here I harked back to the main subject with a hint -

"And you said to your mother - ?"

"Well, yer 'ann'r, I shtood right up to her - wasn't Michael worth it? - an' sez I: 'Michael is the bist man nor iver I see; an' I'm for him an' for no one else. He's poor I know, an' so am I. But plaze God he'll not be poor always; an' I'll wait for him if 'tis all me life!' Well, me mother was a good woman, an' she seen the tears in me eyes an' knew I was in arnest. She kem an' put her arms round me an' sez she: 'That's right, me child. That's the way to love; an' it's worth all the rist iv the wurrld. He's a good bhoy is Michael; an' 'tis right sure I am that he loves ye. An' whin the both iv ye think the time has come 'tis not me nor yer poor dead father that'll shtand betune ye.' I knew - faix only too well - what a harrd time me poor mother had, for the times was bad. That was the year of the potato-rot, an' throughout the counthry min an' weemin - an' worse still, the poor childhers - was dyin' be shcores. An' Michael knew too; an' ere long he sez to me: 'Katty, come wid me soon. Sure, acushla, if 'tis nothin' else 'twill be wan mouth less for yer poor mother to feed.' When Michael shpoke like that I wasn't the wan to say him nay."

Both were silent and I waited a while, till, seeing that they considered the tale as told, I ventured to recall them once again -

"But you haven't told me about the road yet."

"Oh, that, surr," said Katty with a laugh - "that was simple enough - may I tell him, Michael?"

"Go an, woman! Go an!" he answered with a growl.

"As Michael tould ye, surr, it began the day afther our weddin'. Ye know, surr, people like us didn't go off on honeymoons in thim days - not like they do now, poor or rich. Whin a woman kem into her husband's home she took life as 'twas to be foreninst her. I cooked Michael's supper an' me own on our weddin' night, just as I've done iver since. I knew that the fair at Killen was on the nixt day an' that Michael was lookin' to goin' to it; an' I made up me mind that he'd not go that day. So in the mornin' whin I done me hair - for a coorse I got up first to get the breakfast - I hid the rack...."

"The rack? Pardon my interrupting, but I don't understand." She was not offended but proceeded to explain -

"The rack-comb, surr. The thing ye brush yer hair wid. Wid poor folk it's all the brush-an'-comb they have. It was not thin like it is now whin ivery wan in a house has their own. Why, me son from

Ameriky when he kem to shtay wid us had what he called a 'dressin'-bag' wid brushes an' combs enough to clane the heads iv all the parish. But in thim times if the house had wan that was all that was needed. When I looked back Michael was up an' was shavin' himself.

" 'Gettin' ready for the fair?' sez I to him.

" 'Yiz!' sez he, not sayin' much for the lip iv him was that twitched up to get smooth for the razor.

" 'Ye're not!' sez I.

" 'I am!'sez he.

" 'Ye're not!' sez I again.

"I don't suppose ye undhershtand, surr, the feelin' iv a young wife when she knows that her man is her own. I had only been marrid on the yistherday, an' whin I knew how Michael loved me I thought I was him as well as meself too. When a woman is marrid she thinks - an' never more than the day afther - that what she wishes is fixed an' done. She manes so well be her man - an' for all her life, mind ye - that she has no thought that everything isn't right. She has to larn! She has to larn; an' the sooner that she larns the betther for herself an' ivery wan else! Whin Michael had wiped his razor he put his hand on the windy-sill to take up the rack where it always lay. Notfindin' it, he sez to me -

" 'Katty, Where's the rack?'

" 'I won't tell ye,' sez 1.1 was up in meself afther me wan day iva wife.

" 'I want the rack, Katty,' he sez quite quiet.

" 'Ye'll not get it,' sez I 'Ye're not goin' to the fair today!'

" 'I'm goin' to the fair to-day, an' iveryday I like!' he sez quieter nor iver, 'an' I want the rack.'

“ ‘Ye’ll not get it,’ sez I. Wid that he took me face in his hands an’ kissed me on the mouth. An’ thin whin I let him go afther I had giv it back, he fetched me a shlap on the side iv me head that made me think that the house was full iv bells all clattherin’ away at wanst, as sez he -

“ ‘Katty, bring me the rack!’

She stopped and sat down, resuming her knitting as though she had said all she intended.

“And then?” I ventured to hint. She looked up at me and then over at Michael and said -

“Well, I wint acoorse an’ brung him the rack. An’ from that day to this we niver had a harrd wurrd wan for th’other.” Michael chuckled.

“That’s the road, surr. Some wan must be masther iv th’ house. That time it had got to be me. An’ I was - an’ I am!” Here he stood up and bent over and kissed the old lady heartily. “An’, surr, take it to mind that there’s been no happier woman in Ireland - no, nor out of it - nor Katty.”

It didn’t seem quite a sufficient charting of the Road, so I ventured to appeal to Mrs. Hennessey again: -

“Did he go to the fair?” She had evidently been thinking, for she began almost at my first word. Since then, in trying to find a motive for her interruption, I have concluded that she thought her words might put Michael in a bad light; as one who was more or less of a bully.

“He combed his hair an’ his moustache, an’ he put on his coat wid the tails, an’ shtuck his pipe in the front iv his caubeen, an’ tuk his blackthorn. Thin he kissed me an’ wint out. I looked out iv the door afther him, an’ saw him turn the comer; an’ then I kem in an’ began to tidy up the house.

“Thin the door darkened, an’ in kem Michael. He flung his caubeen an’ his blackthorn in the corner, an’ tuk me in his arrms, an’ sez he -

“ ‘Katty, alana-ma-chree, I’m not goin’ to the fair this day. Bekase ye don’t wish it, me darlin’, not bekase ye merely want to kape me from it. Shure I love you alone, an’ I wouldn’t do nothin’ to hurt ye. But always remimber that I’m a man an’ used to man’s ways; an’ a man doesn’t like bein’ ordhered about be any wan - even be a wife that he loves an’ that loves him.’” Her eyes were soft and shiny, and she looked affectionately at the sturdy old man. Then she turned to me and went on -

“An’ that’s the sort iv man that I’ve kep the peace wid for all these years. An’ isn’t he worth it? An’ doesn’t he desarve it - a man like that? I tell ye, surr, that’s the way to thrate a woman; an’ that’s the way that a woman ought to be thrated. Sure, afther all, they’re but childher iva bigger kind. An’ what’s the way to thrate childher? ’Tisn’t all done be shmiles an’ pettin’, an’ be bread an’ sugar. They want to get the hard hand now and again, an’ they does the same whin they’re grown into min and weemin. ’Tis the hand iv the mother that’s the most tindher. Thin, whin that’s not enough, the father has to give thim a clip on the ear if it’s a girrl, or a cut wid a switch if it’s a bhoy.

“An’, mind ye, that’s the aisiest punishment they iver gits. Whin they don’t larn things from them ’tis harder they git it whin they come to larn from the warld!”

A YELLOW DUSTER

When my old friend Stanhope came unexpectedly, late in life, into a huge fortune he went traveling round the world for a whole year with his wife before settling down. We had been friends in college days, but I had seen little of him during his busy professional life. Now, however, in our declining years, chance threw us together again, and our old intimacy became renewed. I often stayed with him, both at Stanhope Towers and in his beautiful house in St. James's-square; and I noticed that wherever he was, certain of his curios went with him. He had always been a collector in a small way, and I have no doubt that in his hard-working time, though he had not the means to gratify his exquisite taste, the little he could do served as a relief to the worry and tedium of daily toil. His great-uncle, from whom he inherited, had a wonderful collection of interesting things; and Stanhope kept them much in the same way as he had found them - not grouped or classified in any way, but placed in juxtaposition as taste or pleasure prompted. There was one glass-covered table which stood always in the small drawing room, or rather sitting room, which Mr. and Mrs. Stanhope held as their own particular sanctum. In it was a small but very wonderful collection of precious and beautiful things; an enormous gold scarib with graven pictures on its natural panels, such a scarib as is not to be found even amongst the wonderful collection at Leyden; a carved star ruby from Persia, a New Zealand chieftain's head wrought in greenstone, a jade amulet from Central India, an enamelled watch with an exquisitely-painted miniature of Madame du Barri, a perfect Queen Anne farthing laid in a contemporary pounce-box of gold and enamel, a Borgia ring, a coiled serpent with emerald eyes, a miniature of Peg Woffington by

Gainsborough, in a quaint frame of aqua marines, a tiny Elzivir Bible in cover of lapis lazuli mounted in red gold, a chain of wrought iron as delicate as hair, and many other such things, which were not only rare and costly as well as beautiful, but each of which seemed to have some personal association.

And yet in the very middle of the case was placed a common cotton duster, carefully folded. It was not only coarse and common in its texture, but it was of such crude and vulgar colours that it looked startlingly out of place in such a congeries of beautiful treasures. It was so manifestly a personal relic that for a long time I felt some diffidence in alluding to it; though I always looked at that particular table, for as Mrs. Stanhope was good enough to share her husband's liking for me, I was always treated as one of themselves and admitted to their special sitting-room.

One day when Stanhope and I were bending over the case, I remarked: -

"I see one treasure there which must be supreme, for it has not the same intrinsic claim as the others!" He smiled as he said: -

"Oh, that! You are right; that is one of the best treasures I have got. Only for it all the rest might be of no avail!"

This piqued my curiosity, so I said: -

"May an old friend hear the story? Of course, it is evident by its being there that it is not a subject to be shunned."

"Right again!" he answered, and opening the case he took out the duster and held it in his hand lovingly. I could see that it was not even clean; it was one that had manifestly done service.

"You ask the missis," he said: "and if she doesn't mind I'll tell you with pleasure."

At tea that afternoon, when we were alone, I asked Mrs.

Stanhope if I might hear the story. Her reply was quick and hearty: -

"Indeed you may! Moreover, I hope I may hear it, too!"

"Do you mean to tell me," I said, "that you don't know why it is there?" She smiled as she replied: -

"I have often wondered; but Frank never told me, and I never asked. It is a long, long time since he kept it. It used to be in the safe of his study till he came into Stanhope Towers; and then he put it where it is now. He keeps the key of the table himself, and no one touches the things in it but him. You noticed, I suppose, that every thing in it is fastened down for traveling?"

When I told Stanhope that his wife permitted him to tell me the story, I added her own hope that she, too, might hear it. He said:

"Very well! To-night after dinner - we are alone this evening - we will come in here and I shall tell you."

When we were alone in the room and the coffee cups had been removed he began:

"Of all the possessions I have, which come under the designation of real or personal estate, that old, dirty, flaring, common duster is the most precious. It is, and has been, a secret pleasure to me for all these years to surround it with the most pretty and costly of my treasures; for so it has a symbolical effect to me. I was once near a grave misunderstanding with my wife - indeed it had begun. This was not long into the second year of our marriage, when the bloom of young wedlock had worn off, and we had begun to settle down to the grim realities of working life. You know my wife is a good many years younger than I am, and when we married I had just about come to that time of life when a man begins to distrust himself as important in the eyes of a beautiful young woman. Lily was always so sweet to me, however, that out of her very sweetness I began to distrust her somewhat. It seemed almost unreasonable that she should be always willing to yield her wishes to mine. At first this distrust was on a very shadowy and unreal basis; but as we grew into the realities of life on small means, it was not always possible for her to forego her wishes in the same way. I had my work to do; and she had her own life to lead, and her own plans to make. I daresay I was pretty unreasonable at times. A man gets worried about his work, and if he tries to keep the worry to himself he sometimes overlooks the fact that his wife, not knowing the facts, cannot understand the almost vital importance of small arrangements which he has to make. So she unconsciously thwarts him."

Here Mrs. Stanhope came over and sat on a stool beside him, and put her hand in his. He stroked it gently and went on: -

"I was especially anxious not to worry her about this time, for there was a hope that our wishes for a child were to be realised, and in my very anxiety to save her from trouble I created the very thing I dreaded. Some little question arose between us; a matter in itself of so small importance that I have quite forgotten it, though the issues then bearing on it were big enough to be remembered. For the purpose of my work things had to be settled in my way, but I could not explain to her without letting her share the worry, and, in addition, I feared that as we were at two, my having held back anything from her might be construed into a want of confidence. Thus it was that her opposition to me became far graver than the occasion itself warranted; and in my blind helplessness, with no one to confide in, I began to fancy that the reason of her opposition was that she did not love me. Let me tell you, old friend - you cannot know, since you were never married - that when once you raise this spirit it is hard to exorcise it. It grows, and grows, and grows, like the genius in the ‘Arabian Nights,’ until it fills the universe. With this fatal suspicion in my mind every little act of petulance or self-will, everything done or undone, said or unsaid, became ‘proof as strong as Holy Writ’ that she did not love me; until I grew morbid on the subject. Like the people of old, I wanted a sign.

“One day the strain of silence became too great for me to bear. I broke my resolution of reticence, and taxed her that she did not love me. At first she laughed; for she felt, as she told me afterwards, that the idea was ridiculous. Anyhow, I did not wait to understand, or to weigh her feeling. Her laughter maddened me, and I spoke out some bitter things. ‘Oh, yes, my dear, I did!’ [This in response to a pressure from the hand that held his, and a warning finger of the other raised.] She tried to bear with me bravely for a while; but at length her feelings mastered her, and the tears rose in her eyes and trickled down her cheeks. But even then I was obdurate. The suspicion of weeks, and all the bitterness of it which had kept me awake so many nights, could not be allayed in a moment. I began to doubt even her very tears. They might, I thought, have come from annoyance at having to explain, from chagrin, from vexation, from anything except the real cause, true womanly and wifely feeling. Again I wanted a sign. And I got it.”

His wife’s hand closed harder on his; I could see the answering pressure of his hand as he went on:

“She had been dusting the little knick-knacks in the drawing-room, using for the purpose a duster of a peculiarly aggressive pattern. It was one of a set put aside for this special purpose, and therefore chosen of a colour not to be confused with the rest of the domestic appliances. She still held this in her hand; and whilst I stood looking at her with something like rage in my heart, and with my brain a seething mass of doubt as to her half-hysterical sobbing, she raised the duster unconsciously to her face and began to wipe her tears away with it.

“That settled me! Here was a sign that not even a jealous idiot could mistake! Had the thing been less gaudily hideous, had it even been clean, I might still have wallowed in my doubt; but now the conviction of the genuineness of her grief swept me like a great burst of sunshine through fog, and cleared it away for ever. I took her in my arms and tried to comfort her; and from that hour to this there has never been - I thank God for it with all my heart - a doubt between us. Nothing but love and trust and affection! I noticed where she placed the duster, and in the night I came and took it and put it safely away. Do you wonder now, old friend, why I value that rag; why it has a sacred value in my eyes?”

By this time Mrs. Stanhope was shading her face, and I could see the tears roll down her cheeks. “Frank, dear,” she said, “let me have your key a moment?” He handed the bunch to her without a word. She selected the key, opened the table top, and took out the duster, which she kissed. Then turning to her husband, as she dried her eyes, she said, “Frank, dear, this is the second time you have made me cry in my long, happy life; but, ho, how different!” Stanhope spoke: “Lily, dear, the first time you used that duster I noticed the glaring contrast of its colour to your black hair, and now it holds its own against the coming grey,” and he took her in his arms and kissed her. She turned to me and said: “I think the story was worth the telling - and the hearing - don’t you? I have allowed this poor, dear old rag to remain in its place of honour all these years because my husband wished it so; but now it shall hold its place in my heart as well as his. God does not always speak in thunder; there are softer notes in the expression of His love and tenderness. Oh, Frank!”

What more she said I know not; for by this time I had stolen quietly away, leaving them alone together.

The Short Stories

the hospital group

Kildare Street, Dublin – Stoker’s home for many years

List of Short Stories in Chronological Order

UNDER THE SUNSET
THE ROSE PRINCE
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COGGINS’S PROPERTY
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A NEW DEPARTURE IN ART
MICK THE DEVIL
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A DEPUTY WAITER
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A CORNER IN DWARFS
A CRIMINAL STAR
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DRACULA’S GUEST
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THE SECRET OF THE GROWING GOLD
THE GIPSY PROPHECY
THE COMING OF ABEL BEHENNA
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THE BRIDAL OF DEATH
BURIED TREASURES
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LORD CASTLETON EXPLAINS
THE FATE OF FENELLA
THE GOMBEEN MAN
GREATER LOVE
IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW
THE MAN FROM SHORROX
OUR NEW HOUSE
THE RED STOCKADE
THE SEER
THE WAY OF PEACE
A YELLOW DUSTER

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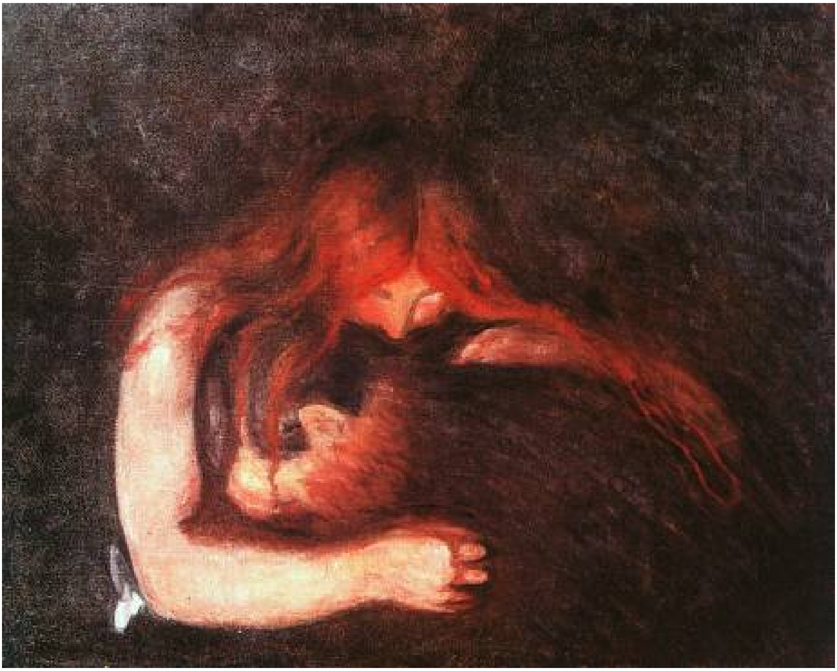
The Vampire Sources



‘The Vampire’ by Edvard Munch

Der Vampir by Heinrich Ossenfelder

This poem was written by German poet Heinrich Ossenfelder in 1748 and it is the first recorded piece of litereature to feature a vampire.

DER VAMPIR

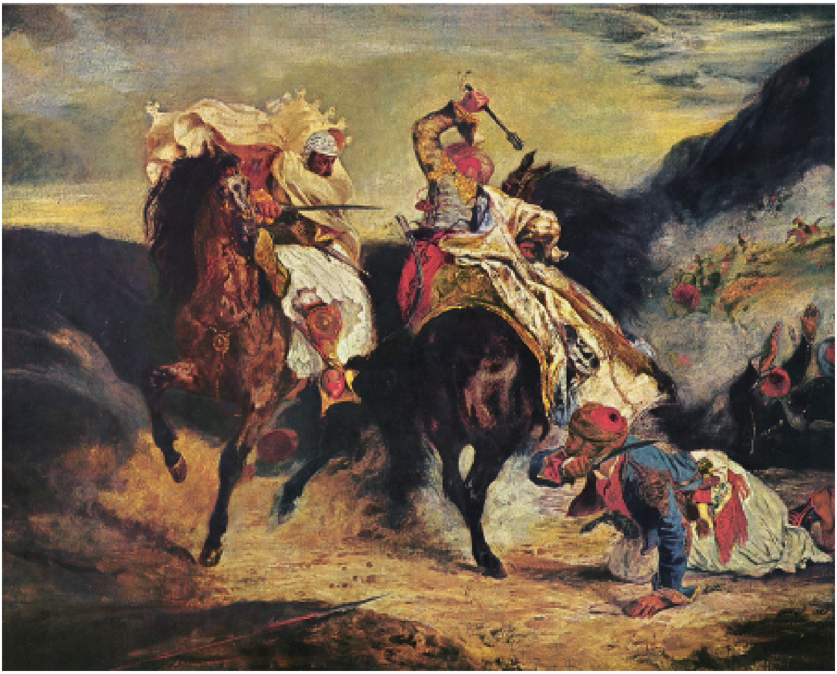
My dear young maiden clingeth
Unbending, fast and firm
To all the long-held teaching
Of a mother ever true;
As in vampires unmortal
Folk on the Theyse’s portal
Heyduck-like do believe.
But my Christine thou dost dally,
And wilt my loving parry
Till I myself avenging
To a vampire’s health a-drinking
Him toast in pale tockay.

And as softly thou art sleeping
To thee shall I come creeping
And thy life’s blood drain away.
And so shalt thou be trembling
For thus shall I be kissing

And death’s threshold thou’ it be crossing
With fear, in my cold arms.
And last shall I thee question
Compared to such instruction
What are a mother’s charms?

The Giaour by Lord Byron

First published in 1813, this poem is one of the earliest works in English to feature a vampire. It proved to be a great success when published, helping to consolidate Byron’s reputation critically and commercially. The origin of the story came during Byron’s Grand Tour during 1809 and 1810, which he undertook with his friend John Cam Hobhouse. While in Athens, he became aware of the Turkish custom of throwing a woman found guilty of adultery in the sea wrapped in a sack.



‘*Combat of the Giaour and the Hassan’* by Eugène Delacroix (1826)

THE GIAOUR

A FRAGMENT OF A TURKISH TALE

BY

LORD BYRON

1813

ADVERTISEMENT

The tale which these disjointed fragments present is founded upon circumstances now less common in the East than formerly; either because the ladies are more circumspect than in the “olden time,” or because the Christians have better fortune, or less enterprise.

The story, when entire, contained the adventures of a female slave, who was thrown, in the Mussulman manner, into the sea for infidelity, and avenged by a young Venetian, her lover, at the time the Seven Islands were possessed by the Republic of Venice, and soon after the Arnauts were beaten back from the Morea, which they had ravaged for some time subsequent to the Russian invasion. The desertion of the Mainotes, on being refused the plunder of Misitra, led to the abandonment of that enterprise, and to the desolation of the Morea; during which the cruelty exercised on all sides was unparalleled even in the annals of the faithful.

THE GIAOUR

No breath of air to break the wave
That rolls below the Athenian's grave,
That tomb which, gleaming o'er the cliff
First greets the homeward-veering skiff
High o'er the land he saved in vain;
When shall such Hero live again?

Fair clime! where every season smiles
Benignant o'er those blesséd isles,
Which, seen from far Colonna's height,
Make glad the heart that hails the sight,
And lend to lonliness delight.
There mildly dimpling, Ocean's cheek
Reflects the tints of many a peak
Caught by the laughing tides that lave
These Edens of the Eastern wave:
And if at times a transient breeze
Break the blue crystal of the seas,
Or sweep one blossom from the trees,
How welcome is each gentle air
That waves and wafts the odours there!
For there the Rose, o'er crag or vale,
Sultana of the Nightingale,

The maid for whom his melody,
His thousand songs are heard on high,

Blooms blushing to her lover’s tale:
His queen, the garden queen, his Rose,
Unbent by winds, unchilled by snows,
Far from winters of the west,
By every breeze and season blest,
Returns the sweets by Nature given
In soft incense back to Heaven;
And gratefu yields that smiling sky
Her fairest hue and fragrant sigh.
And many a summer flower is there,
And many a shade that Love might share,
And many a grotto, meant by rest,
That holds the pirate for a guest;
Whose bark in sheltering cove below
Lurks for the pasiing peaceful prow,
Till the gay mariner’s guitar
Is heard, and seen the Evening Star;
Then stealing with the muffled oar,
Far shaded by the rocky shore,
Rush the night-prowlers on the prey,
And turns to groan his roudelay.
Strande — that where Nature loved to trace,
As if for Gods, a dwelling place,
And every charm and grace hath mixed
Within the Paradise she fixed,
There man, enarmoured of distress,
Shoul mar it into wilderness,
And trample, brute-like, o’er each flower
That tasks not one labourious hour;

Nor claims the culture of his hand
To blood along the fairy land,
But springs as to preclude his care,
And sweetly woos him — but to spare!
Strange — that where all is Peace beside,
There Passion riots in her pride,
And Lust and Rapine wildly reign
To darken o’er the fair domain.
It is as though the Fiends prevailed
Against the Seraphs they assailed,
And, fixed on heavenly thrones, should dwell
The freed inheritors of Hell;
So soft the scene, so formed for joy,
So curst the tyrants that destroy!

He who hath bent him o’er the dead
Ere the first day of Death is fled,
The first dark day of Nothingness,
The last of Danger and Distress,
(Before Decay’s effacing fingers
Have swept the lines where Beauty lingers,)
And marked the mild angelic air,
The rapture of Repose that’s there,
The fixed yet tender thraits that streak
The languor of the placid cheek,
And — but for that sad shrouded eye,
That fires not, wins not, weeps not, now,
And but for that chill, changeless brow,

Where cold Obstruction’s apathy
Appals the gazing mourner’s heart,
As if to him it could impart
The doom he dreads, yet dwells upon;
Yes, but for these and these alone,
Some moments, aye, one treacherous hour,
He still might doubt the Tyrant’s power;
So fair, so calm, so softly sealed,
The first, last look by Death revealed!
Such is the aspect of his shore;
‘T is Greece, but living Greece no more!
So coldly sweet, so deadly fair,
We start, for Soul is wanting there.
Hers is the loveliness in death,
That parts not quite with parting breath;
But beauty with that fearful bloom,
That hue which haunts it to the tomb,
Expression’s last receding ray,
A gilded Halo hovering round decay,
The farewell beam of Feeling past away!
Spark of that flame, perchance of heavenly birth,
Which gleams, but warms no more its cherished earth!

Clime of the unforgotten brave!
Whose land from plain to mountain-cave
Was Freedom;s home or Glory’s grave!
Shrine of the mighty! can it be,
That this is all remains of thee?
Approach, thou craven crouching slave:

Say, is this not Thermopylæ?
These waters blue that round you lave, —
Of servile offspring of the free —
Pronounce what sea, what shore is this?
The gulf, the rock of Salamis!
These scenes, their story yet unknown;
Arise, and make again your own;
Snatch from the ashes of your Sires
The embers of their former fires;
And he who in the strife expires
Will add to theirs a name of fear
That Tyranny shall quake to hear,
And leave his sons a hope, a fame,
They too will rather die than shame:
For Freedom's battle once begun,
Bequeathed by bleeding Sire to Son,
Though baffled oft is ever won.
Bear witness, Greece, thy living page!
Attest it many a deathless age!
While Kings, in dusty darkness hid,
Have left a namesless pyramid,
Thy Heroes, though the general doom
Hath swept the column from their tomb,
A mightier monument command,
The mountains of thy native land!
There points thy Muse to stranger's eye
The graves of those that cannot die!
'T were long to tell, and sad to trace,
Each step from Spledour to Disgrace;

Enough — no foreign foe could quell
Thy soul, till from itself it fell;
Yet! Self-abasement paved the way
To villain-bonds and despot sway.

What can he tell who tread thy shore?
No legend of thine olden time,
No theme on which the Muse might soar
High as thine own days of yore,
When man was worthy of thy clime.
The hearts within thy valleys bred,
The fiery souls that might have led
Thy sons to deeds sublime,
Now crawl from cradle to the Grave,
Slaves — nay, the bondsmen of a Slave,
And callous, save to crime.
Stained with each evil that pollutes
Mankind, where least above the brutes;
Without even savage virtue blest,
Without one free or valiant breast,
Still to the neighbouring ports tey waft
Proverbial wiles, and ancient craft;
In this subtle Greek is found,
For this, and this alown, renowned.
In vain might Liberty invoke
The spirit to its bondage broke
Or raise the neck that courts the yoke:
No more her sorrows I bewail,
Yet this will be a mournful tale,

And they who listen may believe,
Who heard it first had cause to grieve.

Far, dark, along the blue sea glancing,
The shadows of the rocks advancing
Start on the fisher’s eye like boat
Of island-pirate or Mainote;
And fearful for his light caïque,
He shuns the near but doubtful creek:
Though worn and weary with his toil,
And cumbered with his scaly spoil,
Slowly, yet strongly, plies the oar,
Till Port Leone’s safer shore
Receives him by the lovely light
That best becomes an Eastern night.

... Who thundering comes on blackest steed,
With slackened bit and hoof of speed?
Beneath the clattering iron’s sound
The caverned echoes wake around
In lash for lash, and bound for bound;
The foam that streaks the courser’s side
Seems gathered from the ocean-tide:
Though weary waves are sunk to rest,
There’s none within his rider’s breast;
And though tomorrow’s tempest lower,
’Tis calmer than thy heart, young Giaour!
I know thee not, I loathe thy race,

But in thy lineaments I trace
What time shall strengthen, not efface:
Though young and pale, that sallow front
Is scathed by fiery passion's brunt;
Though bent on earth thine evil eye,
As meteor-like thou glidest by,
Right well I view thee and deem thee one
Whom Othman's sons should slay or shun.

On - on he hastened, and he drew
My gaze of wonder as he flew:
Though like a demon of the night
He passed, and vanished from my sight,
His aspect and his air impressed
A troubled memory on my breast,
And long upon my startled ear
Rung his dark courser's hoofs of fear.
He spurs his steed; he nears the steep,
That, jutting, shadows o'er the deep;
He winds around; he hurries by;
The rock relieves him from mine eye;
For, well I ween, unwelcome he
Whose glance is fixed on those that flee;
And not a start that shines too bright
On him who takes such timeless flight.
He wound along; but ere he passed
One glance he snatched, as if his last,
A moment checked his wheeling steed,

A moment breathed him from his speed,
A moment on his stirrup stood -
Why looks he o’er the olive wood?
The crescent glimmers on the hill,
The mosque’s high lamps are quivering still
Though too remote for sound to wake
In echoes of far tophaike,
The flashes of each joyous peal
Are seen to prove the Moslem’s zeal,
Tonight, set Rhamazani’s sun;
Tonight the Bairam feast’s begun;
Tonight - but who and what art thou
Of foreign garb and fearful brow?
That thou should’st either pause or flee?

He stood - some dread was on his face,
Soon hatred settled in its place:
It rose not with the reddening flush
Of transient anger’s hasty blush,
But pale as marble o’er the tomb,
Whose ghastly whiteness aids its gloom.
His brow was bent, his eye was glazed;
He raised his arm, and fiercely raised,
And sternly shook his hand on high,
As doubting to return or fly;
Impatient of his flight delayed,
Here loud his raven charger neighed -
Down glanced that hand and, and grasped his blade;

That sound had burst his waking dream,
As slumber starts at owlet’s scream.
The spur hath lanced his courser’s sides;
Away, away, for life he rides:
Swift as the hurled on high jerreed
Springs to the touch his startled steed;
The rock is doubled, and the shore
Shakes with the clattering tramp no more;
The crag is won, no more is seen
His Christian crest and haughty mien.
’Twas but an instant he restrained
That fiery barb so sternly reined;
’Twas but a moment that he stood,
Then sped as if by death pursued;
But in that instant 0’er his soul
Winters of memory seemed to roll,
And gather in that drop of time
A life of pain, an age of crime.
O’er him who loves, or hates, or fears,
Such moment pours the grief of years:
What felt he then, at once opprest
By all that most distracts the breast?
That pause, which pondered o’er his fate,
Oh, who its dreary length shall date!
Though in time’s record nearly nought,
It was eternity to thought!
For infinite as boundless space
The thought that conscience must embrace,
Which in itself can comprehend

Woe without name, or hope, or end.

The hour is past, the Giaour is gone;
And did he fly or fall alone?
Woe to that hour he came or went!
The curse for Hassan's sin was sent
To turn a palace to a tomb:
He came, he went, like the Simoom,
That harbinger of fate and gloom,
Beneath whose widely - wasting breath
The very cypress droops to death -
Dark tree, still sad when others' grief is fled,
The only constant mourner o'er the dead!

The steed is vanished from the stall;
No serf is seen in Hassan's hall;
The lonely spider's thin grey pall
Waves slowly widening o'er the wall;
The bat builds in his harem bower,
And in the fortress of his power
The owl usurps the beacon-tower;
The wild-dog howls o'er the fountain's brim,
With baffled thirst and famine, grim;
For the stream has shrunk from its marble bed,
Where the weeds and the desolate dust are spread.
'Twas sweet of yore to see it play
And chase the sultriness of day,

As springing high the silver dew
In whirls fantastically flew,
And flung luxurious coolness round
The air, and verdure o’er the ground.
’Twas sweet, when cloudless stars were bright,
To view the wave of watery light,
And hear its melody by night.
And oft had Hassan’s childhood played
Around the verge of that cascade;
And oft upon his mother’s breast
That sound had harmonized his rest;
And oft had Hassan’s youth along
Its bank been soothed by beauty’s song;
And softer seem’d each melting tone
Of music mingled with its own.
But ne’er shall Hassan’s age repose
Along the brink at twilight’s close:
The stream that filled that font is fled -
The blood that warmed his heart is shed!
And here no more shall human voice
Be heard to rage, regret, rejoice.
The last sad note that swelled the gale
Was woman’s wildest funeral wall:
That quenched in silence all is still,
But the lattice that flaps when the wind is shrill:
Though raves the gust, and floods the rain,
No hand shall clasp its clasp again.
On desert sands ‘twere joy to scan
The rudest steps of fellow man,

So here the very voice of grief
Might wake an echo like relief -
At least ’twould say, ‘All are not gone;
There lingers life, though but in one’ -
For many a gilded chamber’s there,
Which solitude might well forbear;
Within that dome as yet decay
Hath slowly worked her cankering way -
But gloom is gathered o’er the gate,
Nor there the fakir’s self will wait;
Nor there will wandering dervise stay,
For bounty cheers not his delay;
Nor there will weary stranger halt
To bless the sacred ‘bread and salt’.
Alike must wealth and poverty
Pass heedless and unheeded by,
For courtesy and pity died
With Hassan on the mountain side.
His roof, that refuge unto men,
Is desolation’s hungry den.
The guest flies the hall, and the vassal from labour,
Since his turban was cleft by the infidel’s sabre!

I hear the sound of coming feet,
But not a voice mine ear to greet;
More near - each turban I can scan,
And silver-sheathed ataghan;
The foremost of the band is seen

An emir by his garb of green:
‘Ho! Who art thou?’ - ‘This low salam
Replies of Moslem faith I am.’
‘The burden ye so gently bear,
Seems one that claims your utmost care,
And, doubtless, holds some precious freight,
My humble bark would gladly wait.’

‘Thou speakest sooth; they skiff unmoor,
And waft us from the silent shore;
Nay, leave the sail still furled, and ply
The nearest oar that’s scattered by,
And midway to those rocks where sleep
The channeled waters dark and deep.
Rest from your task - so - bravely done,
Of course had been right swiftly run;
Yet ’tis the longest voyage, I trow,
That one of -

Sullen it plunged, and slowly sank,
The calm wave rippled to the bank;
I watched it as it sank, methought
Some motion from the current caught
Bestirred it more, - ’twas but the beam
That checkered o’er the living stream:
I gazed, till vanishing from view,
Like lessening pebble it withdrew;

Still less and less, a speck of white
That gemmed the tide, then mocked the sight;
And all its hidden secrets sleep,
Known but to Genii of the deep,
Which, trembling in their coral caves,
They dare not whisper to the waves.

As rising on its purple wing
The insect-queen of eastern spring,
O’er emerald meadows of Kashmeer
Invites the young pursuer near,
And leads him on from flower to flower
A weary chase and wasted hour,
Then leaves him, as it soars on high,
With panting heart and tearful eye:
So beauty lures the full-grown child,
With hue as bright, and wing as wild:
A chase of idle hopes and fears,
Begun in folly, closed in tears.
If won, to equal ills betrayed,
Woe waits the insect and the maid;
A life of pain, the loss of peace,
From infant’s play and man’s caprice:
The lovely toy so fiercely sought
Hath lost its charm by being caught,
For every touch that wooed its stay
Hath brushed its brightest hues away,
Till charm, and hue, and beauty gone,

’Tis left to fly or fall alone.
With wounded wing, or bleeding breast,
Ah! Where shall either victim rest?
Can this with faded pinion soar
From rose to tulip as before?
Or beauty, blighted in an hour,
Find joy within her broken bower?
No: gayer insects fluttering by
Ne’er droop the wing o’er those that die,
And lovelier things have mercy shown
To every failing but their own,
And every woe a tear can claim
Except an erring sister’s shame.

The mind that broods o’er guilty woes,
Is like the scorpion girt by fire;
In circle narrowing as it glows,
The flames around their captive close,
Till inly searched by thousand throes,
And maddening in her ire,
One sad and sole relief she knows,
The sting she nourished for her foes,
Whose venom never yet was vain,
Gives but one pang, and cures all pain,
So do the dark in soul expire,
Or live like scorpion girt by fire;
So writhes the mind remorse hath riven,
Unfit for earth, undoomed for heaven,

Darkness above, despair beneath,
Around it flame, within it death!

Black Hassan from the harem flies,
Nor bends on woman's form his eyes;
The unwonted chase each hour employs,
Yet shares he not the hunter's joys.
Not thus was Hassan wont to fly
When Leila dwelt in his Serai.
Doth Leila there no longer dwell?
That tale can only Hassan tell:
Strange rumours in our city say
Upon that eve she fled away
When Rhamazan's last sun was set,
And flashing from each minaret
Millions of lamps proclaimed the feast
Of Bairam through the boundless East.
'Twas then she went as to the bath,
Which Hassan vainly searched in wrath;
For she was flown her master's rage
In likeness of a Georgian page,
And far beyond the Moslem's power
Had wronged him with the faithless Giaour.
Somewhat of this had Hassan deemed;
But still so fond, so fair she seemed,
Too well he trusted to the slave
Whose treachery deserved a grave:
And on that eve had gone to mosque,

And thence to feast in his kiosk.
Such is the tale his Nubians tell,
Who did not watch their charge too well;
But others say, that on that night,
By pale Phingari’s trembling light,
The Giaour upon his jet-black steed
Was seen, but seen alone to speed
With bloody spur along the shore,
Nor maid nor page behind him bore.

Her eye’s dark charm ‘twere vain to tell,
But gaze on that of the gazelle,
It will assist thy fancy well;
As large, as languishingly dark,
But soul beamed forth in every spark
That darted from beneath the lid,
Bright as the jewel of Giamschild.
Yea, Soul, and should our prophet say
That form was nought but breathing clay,
By Allah! I would answer nay;
Though on Al-Sirat’s arch I stood,
Which totters o’er the fiery flood,
With Paradise within my view,
And all his Houris beckoning through.
Oh! Who young Leila’s glance could read
And keep that portion of his creed,
Which saith that woman is but dust,
A soulless toy for tyrant’s lust?

On her might Muftis might gaze, and own
That through her eye the Immortal shone;
On her fair cheek's unfading hue
The young pomegranate's blossoms strew
Their bloom in blushes ever new;
Her hair in hyacinthine flow,
When left to roll its folds below,
As midst her handmaids in the hall
She stood superior to them all,
Hath swept the marble where her feet
Gleamed whiter than the mountain sleet
Ere from the cloud that gave it birth
It fell, and caught one stain of earth.
The cygnet nobly walks the water;
So moved on earth Circassia's daughter,
The loveliest bird of Franguestan!
As rears her crest the ruffled swan,
And spurns the wave with wings of pride,
When pass the steps of stranger man
Along the banks that bound her tide;
Thus rose fair Leila's whiter neck:-
Thus armed with beauty would she check
Intrusion's glance, till folly's gaze
Shrunk from the charms it meant to praise:
Thus high and graceful as her gait;
Her heart as tender to her mate;
Her mate - stern Hassan, who was he?
Alas! That name was not for thee!

Stern Hassan hath a journey ta'en
With twenty vassals in his train,
Each armed, as best becomes a man,
With arquebuss and ataghan;
The chief before, as decked for war,
Bears in his belt the scimitar
Stain'd with the best of Amaut blood
When in the pass the rebels stood,
And few returned to tell the tale
Of what befell in Parne's vale.
The pistols which his girdle bore
Were those that once a pasha wore,
Which still, though gemmed and bossed with gold,
Even robbers tremble to behold.
'Tis said he goes to woo a bride
More true than her who left his side;
The faithless slave that broke her bower,
And - worse than faithless - for a Giaour!

The sun's last rays are on the hill,
And sparkle in the fountain rill,
Whose welcome waters, cool and clear,
Draw blessings from the mountaineer:
Here may the loitering merchant Greek
Find that repose 'twere vain to seek
In cities lodged too near his lord,
And trembling for his secret hoard -

Here may he rest where none can see,
In crowds a slave, in deserts free;
And with forbidden wine may stain
The bowl a Moslem must not drain.

The foremost Tartar’s in the gap,
Conspicuous by his yellow cap;
The rest in lengthening line the while
Wind slowly through the long defile:
Above, the mountain rears a peak,
Where vultures whet the thirsty beak,
And theirs may be a feast tonight,
Shall tempt them down ere morrow’s light;
Beneath, a river’s wintry stream
Has shrunk before the summer beam,
And left a channel bleak and bare,
Save shrubs that spring to perish there:
Each side the midway path there lay
Small broken crags of granite grey
By time, or mountain lightning, riven
From summits clad in mists of heaven;
For where is he that hath beheld
The peak of Liakura unveiled?

They reach the grove of pine at last:
‘Bismillah! now the peril’s past;
For yonder view the opening plain,

And there we’ll prick our steeds amain.’
The Chiaus spake, and as he said,
A bullet whistled o’er his head;
The foremost Tartar bites the ground!
Scarce had they time to check the rein,
Swift from their steeds the riders bound;
But three shall never mount again:
Unseen the foes that gave the wound,
The dying ask revenge in vain.
With steel unsheathed, and carbine bent,
Some o’er their courser’s harness leant,
Half sheltered by the steed;
Some fly behind the nearest rock,
And there await the coming shock,
Nor tamely stand to bleed
Beneath the shaft of foes unseen,
Who dare not quit their craggy screen.
Stern Hassan only from his horse
Disdains to light, and keeps his course,
Till fiery flashes in the van
Proclaim too sure the robber-clan
Have well secured the only way
Could now avail the promised prey;
Then curled his very beard with ire,
And glared his eye with fiercer fire:
‘Though far and near the bullets hiss,
I’ve ‘scaped a bloodier hour than this.’
And now the foe their covert quit,
And call his vassals to submit;

But Hassan’s frown and furious word
Are dreaded more than hostile sword,
Nor of his little band a man
Resigned carbine or ataghan,
Nor raised the craven cry, Amaun!
In fuller sight, more near and near,
The lately ambushed foes appear,
And, issuing from the grove, advance
Some who on battle-charger prance.
Who leads them on with foreign brand,
Far flashing in his red right hand?
“Tis he! ’tis he! I know him now;
I know him by his pallid brow;
I know him by the evil eye
That aids his envious treachery;
I know him by his jet-black barb:
Though now arrayed in Arnaut garb
Apostate from his own vile faith,
It shall not save him from the death:
’Tis he! well met in any hour,
Lost Leila’s love, accursed Giaour!

As rolls the river into ocean,
In sable torrent wildly streaming;
As the sea-tide’s opposing motion,
In azure column Proudly gleaming
Beats back the current many a rood,
In curling foam and mingling flood,

While eddying whirl, and breaking wave,
Roused by the blast of winter, rave;
Through sparkling spray, in thundering clash,
The lightnings of the waters flash
In awful whiteness o'er the shore,
That shines and shakes beneath the roar;
Thus - as the stream, and Ocean greet,
With waves that madden as they meet -
Thus join the bands, whom mutual wrong,
And fate, and fury, drive along.
The bickering sabres' shivering jar;
And pealing wide or ringing near
Its echoes on the throbbing ear,
The deathshot hissing from afar;
The shock, the shout, the groan of war,
Reverberate along that vale
More suited to the shepherds tale:
Though few the numbers - theirs the strife
That neither spares nor speaks for life!
Ah! fondly youthful hearts can press,
To seize and share the dear caress;
But love itself could never pant
For all that beauty sighs to grant
With half the fervour hate bestows
Upon the last embrace of foes,
When grappling in the fight they fold
Those arms that ne'er shall lose their hold:
Friends meet to part; love laughs at faith;
True foes, once met, are joined till death!

With sabre shivered to the hilt,
Yet dripping with the blood he spilt;
Yet strained within the severed hand
Which quivers round that faithless brand;
His turban far behind him rolled,
And cleft in twain its firmest fold;
His flowing robe by falchion torn,
And crimson as those clouds of morn
That, streaked with dusky red, portend
The day shall have a stormy end;
A stain on every bush that bore
A fragment of his palampore
His breast with wounds unnumbered riven,
His back to earth, his face to heaven,
Fallen Hassan lies - his unclosed eye
Yet lowering on his enemy,
As if the hour that sealed his fate
Surviving left his quenchless hate;
And o’er him bends that foe with brow
As dark as his that bled below.

‘Yes, Leila sleeps beneath the wave,
But his shall be a redder grave;
Her spirit pointed well the steel
Which taught that felon heart to feel.
He called the Prophet, but his power

Was vain against the vengeful Giaour:
He called on Allah - but the word.
Arose unheeded or unheard.
Thou Paynim fool! could Leila’s prayer
Be passed, and thine accorded there?
I watched my time, I leagued with these,
The traitor in his turn to seize;
My wrath is wreaked, the deed is done,
And now I go - but go alone.’

The browsing camels’ bells are tinkling:
His mother looked from her lattice high -
She saw the dews of eve besprinkling
The pasture green beneath her eye,
She saw the planets faintly twinkling:
‘’Tis twilight - sure his train is nigh.’
She could not rest in the garden-bower,
But gazed through the grate of his steepest tower:
‘Why comes he not? his steeds are fleet,
Nor shrink they from the summer heat;
Why sends not the bridegroom his promised gift?
Is his heart more cold, or his barb less swift?
Oh, false reproach! yon Tartar now
Has gained our nearest mountain’s brow,
And warily the steep descends,
And now within the valley bends;
And he bears the gift at his saddle bow
How could I deem his courser slow?

Right well my largess shall repay
His welcome speed, and weary way.’
The Tartar lighted at the gate,
But scarce upheld his fainting weight!
His swarthy visage spake distress,
But this might be from weariness;
His garb with sanguine spots was dyed,
But these might be from his courser’s side;
He drew the token from his vest -
Angel of Death! ’tis Hassan’s cloven crest!
His calpac rent - his caftan red -
‘Lady, a fearful bride thy son hath wed:
Me, not from mercy, did they spare,
But this empurpled pledge to bear.
Peace to the brave! whose blood is spilt:
Woe to the Giaour! for his the guilt.’

A turban carved in coarsest stone,
A pillar with rank weeds o’ergrown,
Whereon can now be scarcely read
The Koran verse that mourns the dead,
Point out the spot where Hassan fell
A victim in that lonely dell.
There sleeps as true an Osmanlie
As e’er at Mecca bent the knee;
As ever scorned forbidden wine,
Or prayed with face towards the shrine,
In orisons resumed anew

At solemn sound of ‘Allah Hu!’
Yet died he by a stranger’s hand,
And stranger in his native land;
Yet died he as in arms he stood,
And unavenged, at least in blood.
But him the maids of Paradise
Impatient to their halls invite,
And the dark Heaven of Houris’ eyes
On him shall glance for ever bright;
They come - their kerchiefs green they wave,
And welcome with a kiss the brave!
Who falls in battle ‘gainst a Giaour
Is worthiest an immortal bower.

But thou, false Infidel! shalt writhe
Beneath avenging Monkir’s scythe;
And from its torment ‘scape alone
To wander round lost Eblis’ throne;
And fire unquenched, unquenchable,
Around, within, thy heart shall dwell;
Nor ear can hear nor tongue can tell
The tortures of that inward hell!
But first, on earth as vampire sent,
Thy corse shall from its tomb be rent:
Then ghastly haunt thy native place,
And suck the blood of all thy race;
There from thy daughter, sister, wife,
At midnight drain the stream of life;

Yet loathe the banquet which perforce
Must feed thy livid living corse:
Thy victims ere they yet expire
Shall know the demon for their sire,
As cursing thee, thou cursing them,
Thy flowers are withered on the stem.
But one that for thy crime must fall,
The youngest, most beloved of all,
Shall bless thee with a father's name -
That word shall wrap thy heart in flame!
Yet must thou end thy task, and mark
Her cheek's last tinge, her eye's last spark,
And the last glassy glance must view
Which freezes o'er its lifeless blue;
Then with unhallowed hand shalt tear
The tresses of her yellow hair,
Of which in life a lock when shorn
Affection's fondest pledge was worn,
But now is borne away by thee,
Memorial of thine agony!
Wet with thine own best blood shall drip
Thy gnashing tooth and haggard lip;
Then stalking to thy sullen grave,
Go - and with Gouls and Afrits rave;
Till these in horror shrink away
From spectre more accursed than they!

'How name ye yon lone Caloyer?

His features I have scanned before
In mine own land: ’tis many a year,
Since, dashing by the lonely shore,
I saw him urge as fleet a steed
As ever served a horseman’s need.
But once I saw that face, yet then
It was so marked with inward pain,
I could not pass it by again;
It breathes the same dark spirit now,
As death were stamped upon his brow.

‘’Tis twice three years at summer tide
Since first among our freres he came;
And here it soothes him to abide
For some dark deed he will not name.
But never at our vesper prayer,
Nor e’er before confession chair
Kneels he, nor recks he when arise
Incense or anthem to the skies,
But broods within his cell alone,
His faith and race alike unknown.
The sea from Paynim land he crost,
And here ascended from the coast;
Yet seems he not of Othman race,
But only Christian in his face:
I’d judge him some stray renegade,
Repentant of the change he made,
Save that he shuns our holy shrine,

Nor tastes the sacred bread and wine.
Great largess to these walls he brought,
And thus our abbot’s favour bought;
But were I prior, not a day
Should brook such stranger’s further stay,
Or pent within our penance cell
Should doom him there for aye to dwell.
Much in his visions mutters he
Of maiden whelmed beneath the sea;
Of sabres clashing, foemen flying,
Wrongs avenged, and Moslem dying.
On cliff he hath been known to stand,
And rave as to some bloody hand
Fresh severed from its parent limb,
Invisible to all but him,
Which beckons onward to his grave,
And lures to leap into the wave.’

Dark and unearthly is the scowl
That glares beneath his dusky cowl:
The flash of that dilating eye
Reveals too much of times gone by;
Though varying, indistinct its hue,
Oft will his glance the gazer rue,
For in it lurks that nameless spell,
Which speaks, itself unspeakable,
A spirit yet unquelled and high,
That claims and keeps ascendency;

And like the bird whose pinions quake,
But cannot fly the gazing snake,
Will others quail beneath his look,
Nor ‘scape the glance they scarce can brook.
From him the half-affrighted friar
When met alone would fain retire,
As if that eye and bitter smile
Transferred to others fear and guile:
Not oft to smile descendeth he,
And when he doth ’tis sad to see
That he but mocks at misery.
How that pale lip will curl and quiver!
Then fix once more as if for ever;
As if his sorrow or disdain
Forbade him e’er to smile again.
Well were it so - such ghastly mirth
From joyaunce ne’er derived its birth.
But sadder still it were to trace
What once were feelings in that face:
Time hath not yet the features fixed,
But brighter traits with evil mixed;
And there are hues not always faded,
Which speak a mind not all degraded
Even by the crimes through which it waded:
The common crowd but see the gloom
Of wayward deeds, and fitting doom;
The close observer can espy
A noble soul, and lineage high:
Alas! though both bestowed in vain,

Which grief could change, and guilt could stain,
It was no vulgar tenement
To which such lofty gifts were lent,
And still with little less than dread
On such the sight is riveted.
The roofless cot, decayed and rent,
Will scarce delay the passer-by;
The tower by war or tempest bent,
While yet may frown one battlement,
Demands and daunts the stranger's eye;
Each ivied arch, and pillar lone,
Pleads haughtily for glories gone!

'His floating robe around him folding,
Slow sweeps he through the columned aisle;
With dread beheld, with gloom beholding
The rites that sanctify the pile.
But when the anthem shakes the choir,
And kneel the monks, his steps retire;
By yonder lone and wavering torch
His aspect glares within the porch;
There will he pause till all is done -
And hear the prayer, but utter none.
See - by the half-illumined wall
His hood fly back, his dark hair fall,
That pale brow wildly wreathing round,
As if the Gorgon there had bound
The sablest of the serpent-braid

That o’er her fearful forehead strayed:
For he declines the convent oath
And leaves those locks unhallowed growth,
But wears our garb in all beside;
And, not from piety but pride,
Gives wealth to walls that never heard
Of his one holy vow nor word.
Lo! - mark ye, as the harmony
Peals louder praises to the sky,
That livid cheek, that stony air
Of mixed defiance and despair!
Saint Francis, keep him from the shrine!
Else may we dread the wrath divine
Made manifest by awful sign.
If ever evil angel bore
The form of mortal, such he wore:
By all my hope of sins forgiven,
Such looks are not of earth nor heaven!’

To love the softest hearts are prone,
But such can ne’er be all his own;
Too timid in his woes to share,
Too meek to meet, or brave despair;
And sterner hearts alone may feel
The wound that time can never heal.
The rugged metal of the mine,
Must burn before its surface shine,
But plunged within the furnace-flame,

It bends and melts - though still the same;
Then tempered to thy want, or will,
‘Twill serve thee to defend or kill;
A breast-plate for thine hour of need,
Or blade to bid thy foeman bleed;
But if a dagger’s form it bear,
Let those who shape its edge, beware!
Thus passion’s fire, and woman’s art,
Can turn and tame the sterner heart;
From these its form and tone are ta’en,
And what they make it, must remain,
But break - before it bend again.

If solitude succeed to grief,
Release from pain is slight relief;
The vacant bosom’s wilderness
Might thank the pang that made it less.
We loathe what none are left to share:
Even bliss - ‘twere woe alone to bear;
The heart once left thus desolate
Must fly at last for ease - to hate.
It is as if the dead could feel
The icy worm around them steal,
And shudder, as the reptiles creep
To revel o’er their rotting sleep,
Without the power to scare away
The cold consumers of their clay I
It is as if the desert-bird,

Whose beak unlocks her bosom's stream
To still her famished nestlings' scream,
Nor mourns a life to them transferred,
Should rend her rash devoted breast,
And find them flown her empty nest.
The keenest pangs the wretched find
Are rapture to the dreary void,
The leafless desert of the mind,
The waste of feelings unemployed.
Who would be doomed to gaze upon
A sky without a cloud or sun?
Less hideous far the tempest's roar
Than ne'er to brave the billows more -
Thrown, when the war of winds is o'er,
A lonely wreck on fortune's shore,
'Mid sullen calm, and silent bay,
Unseen to drop by dull decay; -
Better to sink beneath the shock
Than moulder piecemeal on the rock!

'Father! thy days have passed in peace,
'Mid counted beads, and countless prayer;
To bid the sins of others cease
Thyself without a crime or care,
Save transient ills that all must bear,
Has been thy lot from youth to age;
And thou wilt bless thee from the rage
Of passions fierce and uncontrolled,

Such as thy penitents unfold,
Whose secret sins and sorrows rest
Within thy pure and pitying breast.

My days, though few, have passed below
In much of joy, but more of woe;
Yet still in hours of love or strife,
I’ve ‘scaped the weariness of life:
Now leagued with friends, now girt by foes,
I loathed the languor of repose.
Now nothing left to love or hate,
No more with hope or pride elate,
I’d rather be the thing that crawls
Most noxious o’er a dungeon’s walls,
Than pass my dull, unvarying days,
Condemned to meditate and gaze.
Yet, lurks a wish within my breast
For rest - but not to feel ’tis rest
Soon shall my fate that wish fulfil;
And I shall sleep without the dream
Of what I was, and would be still,
Dark as to thee my deeds may seem:
My memory now is but the tomb
Of joys long dead; my hope, their doom:
Though better to have died with those
Than bear a life of lingering woes.
My spirit shrunk not to sustain
The searching throes of ceaseless pain;
Nor sought the self-accorded grave

Of ancient fool and modern knave:
Yet death I have not feared to meet;
And the field it had been sweet,
Had danger wooed me on to move
The slave of glory, not of love.
I've braved it - not for honour's boast;
I smile at laurels won or lost;
To such let others carve their way,
For high renown, or hireling pay:
But place again before my eyes
Aught that I deem a worthy prize
The maid I love, the man I hate,
And I will hunt the steps of fate,
To save or slay, as these require,
Through rending steel, and rolling fire:
Nor needest thou doubt this speech from one
Who would but do ~ what he hath done.
Death is but what the haughty brave,
The weak must bear, the wretch must crave;
Then let life go to him who gave:
I have not quailed to danger's brow
When high and happy - need I now?

'I loved her, Friar! nay, adored -
But these are words that all can use -
I proved it more in deed than word;
There's blood upon that dinted sword,
A stain its steel can never lose:

’Twas shed for her, who died for me,
It warmed the heart of one abhorred:
Nay, start not - no - nor bend thy knee,
Nor midst my sins such act record;
Thou wilt absolve me from the deed,
For he was hostile to thy creed!
The very name of Nazarene
Was wormwood to his Paynim spleen.
Ungrateful fool! since but for brands
Well wielded in some hardy hands,
And wounds by Galileans given -
The surest pass to Turkish heaven
For him his Houris still might wait
Impatient at the Prophet’s gate.
I loved her - love will find its way
Through paths where wolves would fear to prey;
And if it dares enough, ‘twere hard
If passion met not some reward -
No matter how, or where, or why,
I did not vainly seek, nor sigh:
Yet sometimes, with remorse, in vain
I wish she had not loved again.
She died - I dare not tell thee how;
But look - ’tis written on my brow!
There read of Cain the curse and crime,
In characters unworn by time:
Still, ere thou dost condemn me, pause;
Not mine the act, though I the cause.
Yet did he but what I had done

Had she been false to more than one.
Faithless to him, he gave the blow;
But true to me, I laid him low:
Howe’er deserved her doom might be,
Her treachery was truth to me;
To me she gave her heart, that all
Which tyranny can ne’er enthral;
And I, alas! too late to save!
Yet all I then could give, I gave,
’Twas some relief, our foe a grave.
His death sits lightly; but her fate
Has made me - what thou well mayest hate.
His doom was sealed - he knew it well
Warned by the voice of stern Taheer,
Deep in whose darkly boding ear
The deathshot pealed of murder near,
As filed the troop to where they fell!
He died too in the battle broil,
A time that heeds nor pain nor toil;
One cry to Mahomet for aid,
One prayer to Allah all he made:
He knew and crossed me in the fray -
I gazed upon him where he lay,
And watched his spirit ebb away:
Though pierced like pard by hunters’ steel,
He felt not half that now I feel.
I searched, but vainly searched, to find
The workings of a wounded mind;
Each feature of that sullen corse

Betrayed his rage, but no remorse.
Oh, what had vengeance given to trace
Despair upon his dying face I
The late repentance of that hour,
When penitence hath lost her power
To tear one terror from the grave,
And will not soothe, and cannot save.

‘The cold in clime are cold in blood,
Their love can scarce deserve the name;
But mine was like a lava flood
That boils in Etna’s breast of flame.
I cannot prate in puling strain
Of ladye-love, and beauty’s chain:
If changing cheek, and searching vein,
Lips taught to writhe, but not complain,
If bursting heart, and maddening brain,
And daring deed, and vengeful steel,
And all that I have felt, and feel,
Betoken love - that love was mine,
And shown by many a bitter sign.
’Tis true, I could not whine nor sigh,
I knew but to obtain or die.
I die - but first I have possessed,
And come what may, I have been blessed.
Shall I the doom I sought upbraid?
No - reft of all, yet undismayed
But for the thought of Leila slain,

Give me the pleasure with the pain,
So would I live and love again.
I grieve, but not, my holy guide!
For him who dies, but her who died:
She sleeps beneath the wandering wave
Ah! had she but an earthly grave,
This breaking heart and throbbing head
Should seek and share her narrow bed.
She was a form of life and light,
That, seen, became a part of sight;
And rose, where'er I turned mine eye,
The morning-star of memory!

'Yes, love indeed is light from heaven..
A spark of that immortal fire
With angels shared, by Allah given,
To lift from earth our low desire.
Devotion wafts the mind above,
But Heaven itself descends in love;
A feeling from the Godhead caught,
To wean from self each sordid thought;
A ray of him who formed the whole;
A glory circling round the soul !
I grant my love imperfect, all
That mortals by the name miscall;
Then deem it evil, what thou wilt;
But say, oh say, hers was not guilt !
She was my life's unerring light:

That quenched, what beam shall break my night?
Oh! would it shone to lead me still,
Although to death or deadliest ill!
Why marvel ye, if they who lose
This present joy, this future hope,
No more with sorrow meekly cope;
In phrensy then their fate accuse;
In madness do those fearful deeds
That seem to add but guilt to woe?
Alas! the breast that inly bleeds
Hath nought to dread from outward blow;
Who falls from all he knows of bliss,
Cares little into what abyss.
Fierce as the gloomy vulture's now
To thee, old man, my deeds appear:
I read abhorrence on thy brow,
And this too was I born to bear!
'Tis true, that, like that bird of prey,
With havock have I marked my way:
But this was taught me by the dove,
To die - and know no second love.
This lesson yet hath man to learn,
Taught by the thing he dares to spurn:
The bird that sings within the brake,
The swan that swims upon the lake,
One mate, and one alone, will take.
And let the fool still prone to range,
And sneer on all who cannot change,
Partake his jest with boasting boys;

I envy not his varied joys,
But deem such feeble, heartless man,
Less than yon solitary swan;
Far, far beneath the shallow maid
He left believing and betrayed.
Such shame at least was never mine -
Leila! each thought was only thine!
My good, my guilt, my weal, my woe,
My hope on high - my all below.
Earth holds no other like to thee,
Or, if it doth, in vain for me:
For worlds I dare not view the dame
Resembling thee, yet not the same.
The very crimes that mar my youth,
This bed of death - attest my truth!
’Tis all too late - thou wert, thou art
The cherished madness of my heart!

‘And she was lost - and yet I breathed,
But not the breath of human life:
A serpent round my heart was wreathed,
And stung my every thought to strife.
Alike all time, abhorred all place,
Shuddering I shrunk from Nature’s face,
Where every hue that charmed before
The blackness of my bosom wore.
The rest thou dost already know,
And all my sins, and half my woe.

But talk no more of penitence;
Thou see'st I soon shall part from hence:
And if thy holy tale were true,
The deed that's done canst thou undo?
Think me not thankless - but this grief
Looks not to priesthood for relief.
My soul's estate in secret guess:
But wouldst thou pity more, say less.
When thou canst bid my Leila live,
Then will I sue thee to forgive;
Then plead my cause in that high place
Where purchased masses proffer grace.
Go, when the hunter's hand hath wrung
From forest-cave her shrieking young,
And calm the lonely lioness:
But soothe not - mock not my distress!

'In earlier days, and calmer hours,
When heart with heart delights to blend,
Where bloom my native valley's bowers
I had - Ah! have I now? - a friend!
To him this pledge I charge thee send,
Memorial of a youthful vow;
I would remind him of my end:
Though souls absorbed like mine allow
Brief thought to distant friendship's claim,
Yet dear to him my blighted name.
'Tis strange - he prophesied my doom,

And I have smiled - I then could smile -
When prudence would his voice assume,
And warn - I recked not what - the while:
But now remembrance whispers o’er
Those accents scarcely marked before.
Say - that his bodings came to pass,
And he will start to hear their truth,
And wish his words had not been sooth:
Tell him, unheeding as I was,
Through many a busy bitter scene
Of all our golden youth had been,
In pain, my faltering tongue had tried
To bless his memory ere I died;
But Heaven in wrath would turn away,
If guilt should for the guiltless pray.
I do not ask him not to blame,
Too gentle he to wound my name;
And what have I to do with fame?
I do not ask him not to mourn,
Such cold request might sound like scorn;
And what than friendship’s manly tear
May better grace a brother’s bier?
But bear this ring, his own of old,
And tell him - what thou dost behold!
The withered frame, the ruined mind,
The wrack by passion left behind,
A shrivelled scroll, a scattered leaf,
Seared by the autumn blast of grief!

‘Tell me no more of fancy’s gleam,
No, father, no, ’twas not a dream;
Alas! the dreamer first must sleep.
I only watched, and wished to weep;
But could not, for my burning brow
Throbbed to the very brain as now:
I wished but for a single tear,
As something welcome, new, and dear-;
I wished it then, I wish it still;
Despair is stronger than my will.
Waste not thine orison, despair
Is mightier than thy pious prayer:
I would not if I might, be blest;
I want no paradise, but rest.
’Twas then, I tell thee, father! then
I saw her; yes, she lived again;
And shining in her white symar,
As through yon pale grey cloud the star
Which now I gaze on, as on her,
Who looked and looks far lovelier;
Dimly I view its trembling spark;
Tomorrow’s night shall be more dark;
And I, before its rays appear,
That lifeless thing the living fear.
I wander, father! for my soul
Is fleeting towards the final goal.
I saw her, friar! and I rose
Forgetful of our former woes;
And rushing from my couch, I dart,

And clasp her to my desperate heart;
I clasp - what is it that I clasp?
No breathing form within my grasp,
No heart that beats reply to mine,
Yet, Leila! yet the form is thine!
And art thou, dearest, changed so much,
As meet my eye, yet mock my touch?
Ah! were thy beauties e’er so cold,
I care not; so my arms enfold
The all they ever wished to hold.
Alas! around a shadow prest,
They shrink upon my lonely breast;
Yet still ’tis there! In silence stands,
And beckons with beseeching hands!
With braided hair, and bright black eye -
I knew ’twas false - she could not die!
But he is dead! within the dell
I saw him buried where he fell;
He comes not, for he cannot break
From earth; why then art thou awake?
They told me wild waves rolled above
The face I view, the form I love;
They told me - ’twas a hideous tale I
I’d tell it, but my tongue would fail:
If true, and from thine ocean-cave
Thou com’st to claim a calmer grave;
Oh! pass thy dewy fingers o’er
This brow that then will burn no more;
Or place them on my hopeless heart:

But, shape or shade! whate’er thou art,
In mercy ne’er again depart!
Or farther with thee bear my soul
Than winds can waft or waters roll!

‘Such is my name, and such my tale.
Confessor ! to thy secret ear
I breathe the sorrows I bewail,
And thank thee for the generous tear
This glazing eye could never shed.
Then lay me with the humblest dead,
And, save the cross above my head,
Be neither name nor emblem spread,
By prying stranger to be read,
Or stay the passing pilgrims tread.’

He passed - nor of his name and race
Hath left a token or a trace,
Save what the father must not say
Who shrived him on his dying day:
This broken tale was all we knew
Of her he loved, or him he slew.

The Vampyre by Henry Colburn

This 1819 short story was first published by Henry Colburn in the *New Monthly Magazine* with the false attribution “A Tale by Lord Byron”. The story was an immediate success, partly because of the Byron attribution and partly because it exploited gothic horror themes that were so popular at the time. *The Vampyre* is now believed to be the first work to depict what would become the gothic prototype of a vampire.

THE VAMPYRE

A Tale

INTRODUCTION.

THE superstition upon which this tale is founded is very general in the East. Among the Arabians it appears to be common: it did not, however, extend itself to the Greeks until after the establishment of Christianity; and it has only assumed its present form since the division of the Latin and Greek churches; at which time, the idea becoming prevalent, that a Latin body could not corrupt if buried in their territory, it gradually increased, and formed the subject of many wonderful stories, still extant, of the dead rising from their graves, and feeding upon the blood of the young and beautiful. In the West it spread, with some slight variation, all over Hungary, Poland, Austria, and Lorraine, where the belief existed, that vampyres nightly imbibed a certain portion of the blood of their victims, who became emaciated, lost their strength, and speedily died of consumptions; whilst these human blood-suckers fattened — and their veins became distended to such a state of repletion, as to cause the blood to flow from all the passages of their bodies, and even from the very pores of their skins.

In the London Journal, of March, 1732, is a curious, and, of course, credible account of a particular case of vampyrism, which is stated to have occurred at Madreyga, in Hungary. It appears, that upon an examination of the commander-in-chief and magistrates of the place, they positively and unanimously affirmed, that, about five years before, a certain Heyduke, named Arnold Paul, had been heard to say, that, at Cassovia, on the frontiers of the Turkish Servia, he had been tormented by a vampyre, but had found a way to rid himself of the evil, by eating some of the earth out of the vampyre's grave, and rubbing himself with his blood. This precaution, however, did not prevent him from becoming a vampyre himself; for, about twenty or thirty days after his death and burial, many persons complained of having been tormented by him, and a deposition was made, that four persons had been deprived of life by his attacks. To prevent further mischief, the inhabitants having consulted their Hadagni, took up tho body, and found it (as is supposed to be usual in cases of vampyrism) fresh, and entirely free from corruption, and emitting at the mouth, nose, and ears, pure and florid blood. Proof having been thus obtained, they resorted to the accustomed remedy. A stake was driven entirely through the heart and body of Arnold Paul, at which he is reported to have cried out as dreadfully as if he had been alive. This done, they cut off his head, burned his body, and threw the ashes into his grave. The same measures were adopted with the corses of those persons who had previously died from vampyrism, lest they should, in their turn, become agents upon others who survived them.

This monstrous rodomontade is here related, because it seems better adapted to illustrate the subject of the present observations than any other instance which could be adduced. In many parts of Greece it is considered as a sort of punishment after death, for some heinous crime committed whilst in existence, that the deceased is not only doomed to vampyrise, but compelled to confine his infernal visitations solely to those beings he loved most while upon earth — those to whom he was bound by ties of kindred and affection. — A supposition alluded to in the "Giaour."

But first on earth, as Vampyre sent,
Thy corse shall from its tomb be rent;
Then ghastly haunt the native place,
And suck the blood of all thy race;
There from thy daughter, sister, wife,
At midnight drain the stream of life;
Yet loathe the banquet which perforce
Must feed thy livid living corse,
Thy victims, ere they yet expire,
Shall know the demon for their sire;
As cursing thee, thou cursing them,
Thy flowers are withered on the stem.
But one that for thy crime must fall,
The youngest, best beloved of all,
Shall bless thee with a father’s name —
That word shall wrap thy heart in flame!
Yet thou must end thy task and mark
Her cheek’s last tinge — her eye’s last spark,
And the last glassy glance must view
Which freezes o’er its lifeless blue;
Then with unhallowed hand shall tear
The tresses of her yellow hair,
Of which, in life a lock when shorn
Affection’s fondest pledge was worn —
But now is borne away by thee
Memorial of thine agony!
Yet with thine own best blood shall drip;
Thy gnashing tooth, and haggard lip;
Then stalking to thy sullen grave,

Go — and with Gouls and Afrits rave,
Till these in horror shrink away
From spectre more accursed than they.

Mr. Southey has also introduced in his wild but beautiful poem of "Thalaba," the vampyre corse of the Arabian maid Oneiza, who is represented as having returned from the grave for the purpose of tormenting him she best loved whilst in existence. But this cannot be supposed to have resulted from the sinfulness of her life, she being pourtrayed throughout the whole of the tale as a complete type of purity and innocence. The veracious Tournefort gives a long account in his travels of several astonishing cases of vampyrism, to which he pretends to have been an eyewitness; and Calmet, in his great work upon this subject, besides a variety of anecdotes, and traditionary narratives illustrative of its effects, has put forth some learned dissertations, tending to prove it to be a classical, as well as barbarian error.

Many curious and interesting notices on this singularly horrible superstition might be added; though the present may suffice for the limits of a note, necessarily devoted to explanation, and which may now be concluded by merely remarking, that though the term Vampyre is the one in most general acceptation, there are several others synonimous with it, made use of in various parts of the world: as Vroucolocha, Vardoulacha, Goul, Broucoloka, &c.

THE VAMPYRE.

IT happened that in the midst of the dissipations attendant upon a London winter, there appeared at the various parties of the leaders of the ton a nobleman, more remarkable for his singularities, than his rank. He gazed upon the mirth around him, as if he could not participate therein. Apparently, the light laughter of the fair only attracted his attention, that he might by a look quell it, and throw fear into those breasts where thoughtlessness reigned. Those who felt this sensation of awe, could not explain whence it arose: some attributed it to the dead grey eye, which, fixing upon the object's face, did not seem to penetrate, and at one glance to pierce through to the inward workings of the heart; but fell upon the cheek with a leaden ray that weighed upon the skin it could not pass. His peculiarities caused him to be invited to every house; all wished to see him, and those who had been accustomed to violent excitement, and now felt the weight of ennui, were pleased at having something in their presence capable of engaging their attention. In spite of the deadly hue of his face, which never gained a warmer tint, either from the blush of modesty, or from the strong emotion of passion, though its form and outline were beautiful, many of the female hunters after notoriety attempted to win his attentions, and gain, at least, some marks of what they might term affection: Lady Mercer, who had been the mockery of every monster shewn in drawing-rooms since her marriage, threw herself in his way, and did all but put on the dress of a mountebank, to attract his notice: — though in vain: — when she stood before him, though his eyes were apparently fixed upon her's, still it seemed as if they were unperceived; — even her unappalled impudence was baffled, and she left, the field. But though the common adultress could not influence even the guidance of his eyes, it was not that the female sex was indifferent to him: yet such was the apparent caution with which he spoke to the virtuous wife and innocent daughter, that few knew he ever addressed himself to females. He had, however, the reputation of a winning tongue; and whether it was that it even overcame the dread of his singular character, or that they were moved by his apparent hatred of vice, he was as often among those females who form the boast of their sex from their domestic virtues, as among those who sully it by their vices.

About the same time, there came to London a young gentleman of the name of Aubrey: he was an orphan left with an only sister in the possession of great wealth, by parents who died while he was yet in childhood. Left also to himself by guardians, who thought it their duty merely to take care of his fortune, while they relinquished the more important charge of his mind to the care of mercenary subalterns, he cultivated more his imagination than his judgment. He had, hence, that high romantic feeling of honour and candour, which daily ruins so many milliners' apprentices. He believed all to sympathise with virtue, and thought that vice was thrown in by Providence merely for the picturesque effect of the scene, as we see in romances: he thought that the misery of a cottage merely consisted in the vesting of clothes, which were as warm, but which were better adapted to the painter's eye by their irregular folds and various coloured patches. He thought, in fine, that the dreams of poets were the realities of life. He was handsome, frank, and rich: for these reasons, upon his entering into the gay circles, many mothers surrounded him, striving which should describe with least truth their languishing or romping favourites: the daughters at the same time, by their brightening countenances when he approached, and by their sparkling eyes, when he opened his lips, soon led him into false notions of his talents and his merit. Attached as lie was to the romance of his solitary hours, he was startled at finding, that, except in the tallow and wax candles that flickered, not from the presence of a ghost, but from want of snuffing, there was no foundation in real life for any of that congeries of pleasing pictures and descriptions contained in those volumes, from which he had formed his study. Finding, however, some compensation in his gratified vanity, he was about to relinquish his dreams, when the extraordinary being we have above described, crossed him in his career.

He watched him; and the very impossibility of forming an idea of the character of a man entirely absorbed in himself, who gave few other signs of his observation of external objects, than the tacit assent to their existence, implied by the avoidance of their contact: allowing his imagination to picture every thing that flattered its propensity to extravagant ideas, he soon formed this object into the hero of a romance, and determined to observe the offspring of his fancy, rather than the person before him. He became acquainted with him, paid him attentions, and so far advanced upon his notice, that his presence was always recognised. He gradually learnt that Lord Ruthven's affairs were embarrassed, and soon found, from the notes of preparation in —— Street, that he was about to travel. Desirous of gaining some information respecting this singular character, who, till now, had only whetted his curiosity, he hinted to his guardians, that it was time for him to perform the tour, which for many generations has been thought necessary to enable the young to take some rapid steps in the career of vice towards putting themselves upon an equality with the aged, and not allowing them to appear as if fallen from the skies, whenever scandalous intrigues are mentioned as the subjects of pleasantry or of praise, according to the degree of skill shewn in carrying them on. They consented: and Aubrey immediately mentioning his intentions to Lord Ruthven, was surprised to receive from him a proposal to join him. Flattered by such a mark of esteem from him, who, apparently, had nothing in common with other men, he gladly accepted it, and in a few days they had passed the circling waters.

Hitherto, Aubrey had had no opportunity of studying Lord Ruthven's character, and now he found, that, though many more of his actions were exposed to his view, the results offered different conclusions from the apparent motives to his conduct. His companion was profuse in his liberality; — the idle, the vagabond, and the beggar, received from his hand more than enough to relieve their immediate wants. But Aubrey could not avoid remarking, that it was not upon the virtuous, reduced to indigence by the misfortunes attendant even upon virtue, that he bestowed his alms; — these were sent from the door with hardly suppressed sneers; but when the profligate came to ask something, not to relieve his wants, but to allow him to wallow in his lust, or to sink him still deeper in his iniquity, he was sent away with rich charity. This was, however, attributed by him to the greater importunity of the vicious, which generally prevails over the retiring bashfulness of the virtuous indigent. There was one circumstance about the charity of his Lordship, which was still more impressed upon his mind: all those upon whom it was bestowed, inevitably found that there was a curse upon it, for they were all either led to the scaffold, or sunk to the lowest and the most abject misery. At Brussels and other towns through which they passed, Aubrey was surprized at the apparent eagerness with which his companion sought for the centres of all fashionable vice; there he entered into all the spirit of the faro table: he betted, and always gambled with success, except where the known sharper was his antagonist, and then he lost even more than he gained; but it was always with the same unchanging face, with which he generally watched the society around: it was not, however, so when he encountered the rash youthful novice, or the luckless father of a numerous family; then his very wish seemed fortune's law — this apparent abstractedness of mind was laid aside, and his eyes sparkled with more fire than that of the cat whilst dallying with the half-dead mouse. In every town, he left the formerly affluent youth, torn from the circle he adorned, cursing, in the solitude of a dungeon, the fate that had drawn him within the reach of this fiend; whilst many a father sat frantic, amidst the speaking looks of mute hungry children, without a single farthing of his late immense wealth, wherewith to buy even sufficient to satisfy their present craving. Yet he took no money from the gambling table; but immediately lost, to the ruiner of many, the last gilder he had just snatched from the convulsive grasp of the innocent: this might but be the result of a certain degree of knowledge, which was not, however, capable of combating the cunning of the more experienced. Aubrey often wished to represent this to his friend, and beg him to resign that charity and pleasure which proved the ruin of all, and did not tend to his own profit; — but he delayed it — for each day he hoped his friend would give him some opportunity of speaking frankly and openly to him; however, this never occurred. Lord Ruthven in his carriage, and amidst the various wild and rich scenes of nature, was always the same: his eye spoke less than his lip; and though Aubrey was near the object of his curiosity, he obtained no greater gratification from it than the constant excitement of vainly wishing to break that mystery, which to his exalted imagination began to assume the appearance of something supernatural.

They soon arrived at Rome, and Aubrey for a time lost sight of his companion; he left him in daily attendance upon the morning circle of an Italian countess, whilst he went in search of the memorials of another almost deserted city. Whilst he was thus engaged, letters arrived from England, which he opened with eager impatience; the first was from his sister, breathing nothing but affection; the others were from his guardians, the latter astonished him; if it had before entered into his imagination that there was an evil power resident in his companion, these seemed to give him sufficient reason for the belief. His guardians insisted upon his immediately leaving his friend, and urged, that his character was dreadfully vicious, for that the possession of irresistible powers of seduction, rendered his licentious habits more dangerous to society. It had been discovered, that his contempt for the adultress had not originated in hatred of her character; but that he had required, to enhance his gratification, that his victim, the partner of his guilt, should be hurled from the pinnacle of unsullied virtue, down to the lowest abyss of infamy and degradation: in fine, that all those females whom he had sought, apparently on account of their virtue, had, since his departure, thrown even the mask aside, and had not scrupled to expose the whole deformity of their vices to the public gaze.

Aubrey determined upon leaving one, whose character had not yet shown a single bright point on which to rest the eye. He resolved to invent some plausible pretext for abandoning him altogether, purposing, in the mean while, to watch him more closely, and to let no slight circumstances pass by unnoticed. He entered into the same circle, and soon perceived, that his Lordship was endeavouring to work upon the inexperience of the daughter of the lady whose house he chiefly frequented. In Italy, it is seldom that an unmarried female is met with in society; he was therefore obliged to carry on his plans in secret; but Aubrey's eye followed him in all his windings, and soon discovered that an assignation had been appointed, which would most likely end in the ruin of an innocent, though thoughtless girl. Losing no time, he entered the apartment of Lord Ruthven, and abruptly asked him his intentions with respect to the lady, informing him at the same time that he was aware of his being about to meet her that very night. Lord Ruthven answered, that his intentions were such as he supposed all would have upon such an occasion; and upon being pressed whether he intended to marry her, merely laughed. Aubrey retired; and, immediately writing a note, to say, that from that moment he must decline accompanying his Lordship in the remainder of their proposed tour, ho ordered his servant to seek other apartments, and calling upon tho mother of the lady, informed her of all he knew, not only with regard to her daughter, but also concerning the character of his Lordship. The assignation was prevented. Lord Ruthven next day merely sent his servant to notify his complete assent to a separation; but did not hint any suspicion of his plans having been foiled by Aubrey's interposition.

Having left Rome, Aubrey directed his steps towards Greece, and crossing the Peninsula, soon found himself at Athens. He then fixed his residence in the house of a Greek; and soon occupied himself in tracing the faded records of ancient glory upon monuments that apparently, ashamed of chronicling the deeds of freemen only before slaves, had hidden themselves beneath the sheltering soil or many coloured lichen. Under the same roof as himself, existed a being, so beautiful and delicate, that she might have formed the model for a painter, wishing; to pourtray on canvass the promised hope of the faithful in Mahomet's paradise, save that her eyes spoke too much mind for any one to think she could belong to those who had no souls. As she danced upon the plain, or tripped along the mountain's side, one would have thought the gazelle a poor type of her beauties; for who would have exchanged her eye, apparently the eye of animated nature, for that sleepy luxurious look of the animal suited but to the taste of an epicure. The light step of Ianthe often accompanied Aubrey in his search after antiquities, and often would the unconscious girl, engaged in the pursuit of a Kashmere butterfly, show the whole beauty of her form, floating as it were upon the wind, to the eager gaze of him, who forgot the letters he had just decyphered upon an almost effaced tablet, in the contemplation of her sylph-like figure. Often would her tresses falling, as she flitted around, exhibit in the sun's ray such delicately brilliant and swiftly fading hues, its might well excuse the forgetfulness of the antiquary, who let escape from his mind the very object he had before thought of vital importance to the proper interpretation of a passage in Pausanias. But why attempt to describe charms which all feel, but none can appreciate? — It was innocence, youth, and beauty, unaffected by crowded drawing-rooms and stifling balls. Whilst he drew those remains of which lie wished to preserve a memorial for his future hours, she would stand by, and watch the magic effects of his pencil, in tracing the scenes of her native place; she would then describe to him the circling dance upon the open plain, would paint, to him in all the glowing colours of youthful memory, the marriage pomp she remembered viewing in her infancy; and then, turning to subjects that had evidently made a greater impression upon her mind, would tell him all the supernatural tales of her nurse. Her earnestness and apparent belief of what she narrated, excited the interest even of Aubrey; and often as she told him the tale of the living vampyre, who had passed years amidst his friends, and dearest ties, forced every year, by feeding upon the life of a lovely female to prolong his existence for the ensuing months, his blood would run cold, whilst he attempted to laugh her out of such idle and horrible fantasies; but Ianthe cited to him the names of old men, who had at last detected one living among themselves, after several of their near relatives and children had been found marked with the stamp of the fiend's appetite; and when she found him so incredulous, she begged of him to believe her, for it had been, remarked, that those who had dared to question their existence, always had some proof given, which obliged them, with grief and heartbreaking, to confess it was true. She detailed to him the traditional appearance of these monsters, and his horror was increased, by hearing a pretty accurate description of Lord Ruthven; he, however, still persisted in persuading her, that there could be no truth in her fears, though at the same time he wondered at the many coincidences which had all tended to excite a belief in the supernatural power of Lord Ruthven.

Aubrey began to attach himself more and more to Ianthe; her innocence, so contrasted with all the affected virtues of the women among whom he had sought for his vision of romance, won his heart; and while he ridiculed the idea of a young man of English habits, marrying an uneducated Greek girl, still he found himself more and more attached to the almost fairy form before him. He would tear himself at times from her, and, forming a plan for some antiquarian research, he would depart, determined not to return until his object was attained; but he always found it impossible to fix his attention upon the ruins around him, whilst in his mind he retained an image that seemed alone the rightful possessor of his thoughts. Ianthe was unconscious of his love, and was ever the same frank infantile being he had first known. She always seemed to part from him with reluctance; but it was because she had no longer any one with whom she could visit her favourite haunts, whilst her guardian was occupied in sketching or uncovering some fragment which had yet escaped the destructive hand of time. She had appealed to her parents on the subject of Vampyres, and they both, with several present, affirmed their existence, pale with horror at the very name. Soon after, Aubrey determined to proceed upon one of his excursions, which was to detain him for a few hours; when they heard the name of the place, they all at once begged of him not to return at night, as he must necessarily pass through a wood, where no Greek would ever remain, after the day had closed, upon any consideration. They described it as the resort of the vampyres in their nocturnal orgies, and denounced the most heavy evils as impending upon him who dared to cross their path. Aubrey made light of their representations, and tried to laugh them out of the idea; but when he saw them shudder at his daring thus to mock a superior, infernal power, the very name of which apparently made their blood freeze, he was silent.

Next morning Aubrey set off upon his excursion unattended; he was surprised to observe the melancholy face of his host, and was concerned to find that his words, mocking the belief of those horrible fiends, had inspired them with such terror. When he was about to depart, Ianthe came to the side of his horse, and earnestly begged of him to return, ere night allowed the power of these beings to be put in action; — he promised. He was, however, so occupied in his research, that he did not perceive that day-light would soon end, and that in the horizon there was one of those specks which, in the warmer climates, so rapidly gather into a tremendous mass, and pour all their rage upon the devoted country. — He at last, however, mounted his horse, determined to make up by speed for his delay: but it was too late. Twilight, in these southern climates, is almost unknown; immediately the sun sets, night begins: and ere he had advanced far, the power of the storm was above — its echoing thunders had scarcely an interval of rest — its thick heavy rain forced its way through the canopying foliage, whilst the blue forked lightning seemed to fall and radiate at his very feet. Suddenly his horse took fright, and he was carried with dreadful rapidity through the entangled forest. The animal at last, through fatigue, stopped, and he found, by the glare of lightning, that he was in the neighbourhood of a hovel that hardly lifted itself up from the masses of dead leaves and brushwood which surrounded it. Dismounting, he approached, hoping to find some one to guide him to the town, or at least trusting to obtain shelter from the pelting of the storm. As he approached, the thunders, for a moment silent, allowed him to hear the dreadful shrieks of a woman mingling with the stifled, exultant mockery of a laugh, continued in one almost unbroken sound; — he was startled: but, roused by the thunder which again rolled over his head, he, with a sudden effort, forced open the door of the hut. He found himself in utter darkness: the sound, however, guided him. He was apparently unperceived; for, though he called, still the sounds continued, and no notice was taken of him. He found himself in contact with some one, whom he immediately seized; when a voice cried, “Again baffled!” to which a loud laugh succeeded; and he felt himself grappled by one whose strength seemed superhuman: determined to sell his life as dearly as he could, he struggled; but it was in vain: he was lifted from his feet and hurled with enormous force against the ground: — his enemy threw himself upon him, and kneeling upon his breast, had placed his hands upon his throat — when the glare of many torches penetrating through the hole that gave light in the day, disturbed him; — he instantly rose, and, leaving his prey, rushed through the door, and in a moment the crashing of the brandies, as he broke through the wood, was no longer heard. The storm was now still; and Aubrey, incapable of moving, was soon heard by those without. They entered; the light of their torches fell upon the mud walls, and the thatch loaded on every individual straw with heavy flakes of soot. At the desire of Aubrey they searched for her who had attracted him by her cries; he was again left in darkness; but what was his horror, when the light of the torches once more burst upon him, to perceive the airy form of his fair conductress brought in a lifeless corse. He shut his eyes, hoping that it was but a vision arising from his disturbed imagination; but he again saw the same form, when he unclosed them, stretched by his side. There was no colour upon her cheek, not even upon her lip; yet there was a stillness about her face that seemed almost as attaching as the life that once dwelt there: — upon her neck and breast was blood, and upon her throat were the marks of teeth having opened the vein: — to this the men pointed, crying, simultaneously struck with horror, “A Vampyre! a Vampyre!” A litter was quickly formed, and Aubrey was laid by the side of her who had lately been to him the object of so many bright and fairy visions, now fallen with the flower of life that had died within her. He knew not what his thoughts were — his mind was benumbed and seemed to shun reflection, and take refuge in vacancy — he held almost unconsciously in his hand a naked dagger of a particular construction, which had been found in the hut. They were soon met by different parties who had been engaged in the search of her whom a mother had missed. Their lamentable cries, as they approached the city, forewarned the parents of some dreadful catastrophe. — To describe their grief would be impossible; but when they ascertained the cause of their child's death, they looked at Aubrey, and pointed to the corse. They were inconsolable; both died broken-hearted.

Aubrey being put to bed was seized with a most violent fever, and was often delirious; in these intervals he would call upon Lord Ruthven and upon Ianthe — by some unaccountable combination he seemed to beg of his former companion to spare the being he loved. At other times he would imprecate maledictions upon his head, and curse him as her destroyer. Lord Ruthven, chanced at this time to arrive at Athens, and, from whatever motive, upon hearing of the state of Aubrey, immediately placed himself in the same house, and became his constant attendant. When the latter recovered from his delirium, he was horrified and startled at the sight of him whose image he had now combined with that of a Vampyre; but Lord Ruthven, by his kind words, implying almost repentance for the fault that had caused their separation, and still more by the attention, anxiety, and care which he showed, soon reconciled him to his presence. His lordship seemed quite changed; he no longer appeared that apathetic being who had so astonished Aubrey; but as soon as his convalescence began to be rapid, he again gradually retired into the same state of mind, and Aubrey perceived no difference from the former man, except that at times he was surprised to meet his gaze fixed intently upon him, with a smile of malicious exultation playing upon his lips: he knew not why, but this smile haunted him. During the last stage of the invalid's recovery, Lord Ruthven was apparently engaged in watching the tideless waves raised by the cooling breeze, or in marking the progress of those orbs, circling, like our world, the moveless sun; — indeed, he appeared to wish to avoid the eyes of all.

Aubrey's mind, by this shock, was much weakened, and that elasticity of spirit which had once so distinguished him now seemed to have fled for ever. He was now as much a lover of solitude and silence as Lord Ruthven; but much as he wished for solitude, his mind could not find it in the neighbourhood of Athens; if he sought it amidst the ruins he had formerly frequented, Ianthe's form stood by his side — if he sought it in the woods, her light step would appear wandering amidst the underwood, in quest of the modest violet; then suddenly turning round, would show, to his wild imagination, her pale face and wounded throat, with a meek smile upon her lips. He determined to fly scenes, every feature of which created such bitter associations in his mind. He proposed to Lord Ruthven, to whom he held himself bound by the tender care he had taken of him during his illness, that they should visit those parts of Greece neither had yet seen. They travelled in every direction, and sought every spot to which a recollection could be attached: but though they thus hastened from place to place, yet they seemed not to heed what they gazed upon. They heard much of robbers, but they gradually began to slight these reports, which they imagined were only the invention of individuals, whose interest it was to excite the generosity of those whom they defended from pretended dangers. In consequence of thus neglecting the advice of the inhabitants, on one occasion they travelled with only a few guards, more to serve as guides than as a defence. Upon entering, however, a narrow defile, at the bottom of which was the bed of a torrent, with large masses of rock brought down from the neighbouring precipices, they had reason to repent their negligence; for scarcely were the whole of the party engaged in the narrow pass, when they were startled by the whistling of bullets close to their heads, and by the echoed report of several guns. In an instant their guards had left them, and, placing themselves behind rocks, had begun to fire in the direction whence the report came. Lord Ruthven and Aubrey, imitating their example, retired for a moment behind the sheltering turn of the defile: but ashamed of being thus detained by a foe, who with insulting shouts bade them advance, and being exposed to unresisting slaughter, if any of the robbers should climb above and take them in the rear, they determined at once to rush forward in search of the enemy. Hardly had they lost the shelter of the rock, when Lord Ruthven received a shot in the shoulder, which brought him to the ground. Aubrey hastened to his assistance; and, no longer heeding the contest or his own peril, was soon surprised by seeing the robbers' faces around him — his guards having, upon Lord Ruthven's being wounded, immediately thrown up their arms and surrendered.

By promises of great reward, Aubrey soon induced them to convey his wounded friend to a neighbouring cabin; and having agreed upon a ransom, he was no more disturbed by their presence — they being content merely to guard the entrance till their comrade should return with the promised sum, for which he had an order. Lord Ruthven's strength rapidly decreased; in two days mortification ensued, and death seemed advancing with hasty steps. His conduct and appearance had not changed; he seemed as unconscious of pain as he had been of the objects about him: but towards the close of the last evening, his mind became apparently uneasy, and his eye often fixed upon Aubrey, who was induced to offer his assistance with more than usual earnestness— “Assist me! you may save me — you may do more than that — I mean not my life, I heed the death of my existence as little as that of the passing day; but you may save my honour, your friend’s honour.”— “How? tell me how? I would do any thing,” replied Aubrey.— “I need but little — my life ebbs apace — I cannot explain the whole — but if you would conceal all you know of me, my honour were free from stain in the world’s mouth — and if my death were unknown for some time in England — I — I — but life.”— “It shall not be known.”— “Swear!” cried the dying man, raising himself with exultant violence, “Swear by all your soul reveres, by all your nature fears, swear that, for a year and a day you will not impart your knowledge of my crimes or death to any living being in any way, whatever may happen, or whatever you may see. “ — His eyes seemed bursting from their sockets: “I swear!” said Aubrey; he sunk laughing upon his pillow, and breathed no more.

Aubrey retired to rest, but did not sleep; the many circumstances attending his acquaintance with this man rose upon his mind, and he knew not why; when he remembered his oath a cold shivering came over him, as if from the presentiment of something horrible awaiting him. Rising early in the morning, he was about to enter the hovel in which he had left the corpse, when a robber met him, and informed him that it was no longer there, having been conveyed by himself and comrades, upon his retiring, to the pinnacle of a neighbouring mount, according to a promise they had given his lordship, that it should be exposed to the first cold ray of the moon that rose after his death. Aubrey astonished, and taking several of the men, determined to go and bury it upon the spot where it lay. But, when he had mounted to the summit he found no trace of either the corpse or the clothes, though the robbers swore they pointed out the identical rock:

on which they had laid the body. For a time his mind was bewildered in conjectures, but he at last returned, convinced that they had buried the corpse for the sake of the clothes.

Weary of a country in which he had met with such terrible misfortunes, and in which all apparently conspired to heighten that superstitious melancholy that had seized upon his mind, he resolved to leave it, and soon arrived at Smyrna. While waiting for a vessel to convey him to Otranto, or to Naples, he occupied himself in arranging those effects he had with him belonging to Lord Ruthven. Amongst other things there was a case containing several weapons of offence, more or less adapted to ensure the death of the victim. There were several daggers and ataghans. Whilst turning them over, and examining their curious forms, what was his surprise at finding a sheath apparently ornamented in the same style as the dagger discovered in the fatal hut — he shuddered — hastening to gain further proof, he found the weapon, and his horror may be imagined when he discovered that it fitted, though peculiarly shaped, the sheath he held in his hand. His eyes seemed to need no further certainty — they seemed gazing to be bound to the dagger; yet still he wished to disbelieve; but the particular form, the same varying tints upon the haft and sheath were alike in splendour on both, and left no room for doubt; there were also drops of blood on each.

He left Smyrna, and on his way home, at Rome, his first inquiries were concerning the lady he had attempted to snatch from Lord Ruthven's seductive arts. Her parents were in distress, their fortune ruined, and she had not been heard of since the departure of his lordship. Aubrey's mind became almost broken under so many repeated horrors; he was afraid that this lady had fallen a victim to the destroyer of Ianthe. He became morose and silent; and his only occupation consisted in urging the speed of the postilions, as if he were going to save the life of some one he held dear. He arrived at Calais; a breeze, which seemed obedient to his will, soon wafted him to the English shores; and he hastened to the mansion of his fathers, and there, for a moment, appeared to lose, in the embraces and caresses of his sister, all memory of the past. If she before, by her infantine caresses, had gained his affection, now that the woman began to appear, she was still more attaching as a companion.

Miss Aubrey had not that winning grace which gains the gaze and applause of the drawing-room assemblies. There was none of that light brilliancy which only exists in the heated atmosphere of a crowded apartment. Her blue eye was never lit up by the levity of the mind beneath. There was a melancholy charm about it which did not seem to arise from misfortune, but from some feeling within, that appeared to indicate a soul conscious of a brighter realm. Her step was not that light footing, which strays where'er a butterfly or a colour may attract — it was sedate and pensive. When alone, her face was never brightened by the smile of joy; but when her brother breathed to her his affection, and would in her presence forget those griefs she knew destroyed his rest, who would have exchanged her smile for that of the voluptuary? It seemed as if those eyes, — that face were then playing in the light of their own native sphere. She was yet only eighteen, and had not been presented to the world, it having been thought by her guardians more fit that her presentation should be delayed until her brother's return from the continent, when he might be her protector. It was now, therefore, resolved that the next drawing-room, which was fast approaching, should be the epoch of her entry into the "busy scene." Aubrey would rather have remained in the mansion of his fathers, and fed upon the melancholy which overpowered him. He could not fed interest about the frivolities of fashionable strangers, when his mind had been so torn by the events he had witnessed; but he determined to sacrifice his own comfort to the protection of his sister. They soon arrived in town, and prepared for the next day, which had been announced as a drawing-room.

The crowd was excessive — a drawing-room had not been held for a long time, and all who were anxious to bask in the smile of royalty, hastened thither. Aubrey was there with his sister. While he was standing in a corner by himself, heedless of all around him, engaged in the remembrance that the first time he had seen Lord Ruthven was in that very place — he felt himself suddenly seized by the arm, and a voice he recognised too well, sounded in his ear— “Remember your oath.” He had hardly courage to turn, fearful of seeing a spectre that would blast him, when he perceived, at a little distance, the same figure which had attracted his notice on this spot upon his first entry into society. He gazed till his limbs almost refusing to bear their weight, he was obliged to take the arm of a friend, and forcing a passage through the crowd, he threw himself into his carriage, and was driven home. He paced the room with hurried steps, and fixed his hands upon his head, as if he were afraid his thoughts were bursting from his brain. Lord Ruthven again before him — circumstances started up in dreadful array — the dagger — his oath. — He roused himself, he could not believe it possible — the dead rise again! — He thought his imagination had conjured up the image, his mind was resting upon. It was impossible that it could be real — he determined, therefore, to go again into society; for though he attempted to ask concerning Lord Ruthven, the name hung upon his lips, and he could not succeed in gaining information. He went a few nights after with lib sister to the assembly of a near relation. Leaving her under the protection of a matron, ho retired into a recess, and there gave himself up to his own devouring thoughts. Perceiving, at last, that many were leaving, he roused himself, and entering another room, found his sister surrounded by several, apparently in earnest conversation; he attempted to pass and get near her, when one, whom he requested to move, turned round, and revealed to him those features he most abhorred. He sprang forward, seized his sister's arm, and, with hurried step, forced her towards the street: at the door he found himself impeded by the crowd of servants who were waiting for their lords; and while he was engaged in passing them, he again heard that voice whisper close to him—"Remember your oath!" — He did not dare to turn, but, hurrying his sister, soon reached home.

Aubrey became almost distracted. If before his mind had been absorbed by one subject, how much more completely was it engrossed, now that the certainty of the monster's living again pressed upon his thoughts. His sister's attentions were now unheeded, and it was in vain that she intreated him to explain to her what had caused his abrupt conduct. He only uttered a few words, and those terrified her. The more he thought, the more he was bewildered. His oath startled him; — was he then to allow this monster to roam, bearing ruin upon his breath, amidst all he held dear, and not avert its progress? His very sister might have been touched by him. But even if he were to break his oath, and disclose his suspicions, who would believe him? He thought of employing his own hand to free the world from such a wretch; but death, he remembered, had been already mocked. For days he remained in this state; shut up in his room, he saw no one, and eat only when his sister came, who, with eyes streaming with tears, besought him, for her sake, to support nature. At last, no longer capable of bearing stillness and solitude, he left his house, roamed from street to street, anxious to fly that image which haunted him. His dress became neglected, and he wandered, as often exposed to the noon-day sun as to the midnight damps. He was no longer to be recognised; at first he returned with the evening to the house; but at last he laid him down to rest wherever fatigue overtook him. His sister, anxious for his safety, employed people to follow him; but they were soon distanced by him who fled from a pursuer swifter than any — from thought. His conduct, however, suddenly changed. Struck with the idea that he left by his absence the whole of his friends, with a fiend amongst them, of whose presence they were unconscious, he determined to enter again into society, and watch him closely, anxious to forewarn, in spite of his oath, all whom Lord Ruthven approached with intimacy. But when he entered into a room, his haggard and suspicious looks were so striking, his inward shudderings so visible, that his sister was at last obliged to beg of him to abstain from seeking, for her sake, a society which affected him so strongly. When, however, remonstrance proved unavailing, the guardians thought proper to interpose, and, fearing that his mind was becoming alienated, they thought it high time to resume again that trust which had been before imposed upon them by Aubrey’s parents.

Desirous of saving him from the injuries and sufferings he had daily encountered in his wanderings, and of preventing him from exposing to the general eye those marks of what they considered folly, they engaged a physician to reside in the house, and take constant care of him. He hardly appeared to notice it, so completely was his mind absorbed by one terrible subject. His incoherence became at last so great, that he was confined to his chamber. There he would often lie for days, incapable of being roused. He had become emaciated, his eyes had attained a glassy lustre; — the only sign of affection and recollection remaining displayed itself upon the entry of his sister; then he would sometimes start, and, seizing her hands, with looks that severely afflicted her, he would desire her not to touch him. “Oh, do not touch him — if your love for me is aught, do not go near him!” When, however, she inquired to whom he referred, his only answer was, “True! true!” and again he sank into a state, whence not even she could rouse him. This lasted many months: gradually, however, as the year was passing, his incoherences became less frequent, and his mind threw off a portion of its gloom, whilst his guardians observed, that several times in the day he would count upon his fingers a definite number, and then smile.

The time had nearly elapsed, when, upon the last day of the year, one of his guardians entering his room, began to converse with his physician upon the melancholy circumstance of Aubrey’s being in so awful a situation, when his sister was going next day to be married. Instantly Aubrey’s attention was attracted; he asked anxiously to whom. Glad of this mark of returning intellect, of which they feared he had been deprived, they mentioned the name of the Earl of Marsden. Thinking this was a young Earl whom he had met with in society, Aubrey seemed pleased, and astonished them still more by his expressing his intention to be present at the nuptials, and desiring to see his sister. They answered not, but in a few minutes his sister was with him. He was apparently again capable of being affected by the influence of her lovely smile; for he pressed her to his breast, and kissed her check, wet with tears, flowing at the thought of her brother's being once more alive to the feelings of affection. He began to speak with all his wonted warmth, and to congratulate her upon her marriage with a person so distinguished for rank and every accomplishment; when he suddenly perceived a locket upon her breast; opening it, what was his surprise at beholding the features of the monster who had so long influenced his life. He seized the portrait in a paroxysm of rage, and trampled it under foot. Upon her asking him why he thus destroyed the resemblance of her future husband, he looked as if he did not understand her — then seizing her hands, and gazing on her with a frantic expression of countenance, he bade her swear that she would never wed this monster, for he —— But he could not advance — it seemed as if that voice again bade him remember his oath — he turned suddenly round, thinking Lord Ruthven was near him but saw no one. In the meantime the guardians and physician, who had heard the whole, and thought this was but a return of his disorder, entered, and forcing him from Miss Aubrey, desired her to leave him. He fell upon his knees to them, he implored, he begged of them to delay but for one day. They, attributing this to the insanity they imagined had taken possession of his mind, endeavoured to pacify him, and retired.

Lord Ruthven had called the morning after the drawing-room, and had been refused with every one else. When he heard of Aubrey's ill health, he readily understood himself to be the cause of it; but when he learned that he was deemed insane, his exultation and pleasure could hardly be concealed from those among whom he had gained this information. He hastened to the house of his former companion, and, by constant attendance, and the pretence of great affection for the brother and interest in his fate, he gradually won the ear of Miss Aubrey. Who could resist his power? His tongue had dangers and toils to recount — could speak of himself as of an individual having no sympathy with any being on the crowded earth, save with her to whom he addressed himself; — could tell how, since he knew her, his existence, had begun to seem worthy of preservation, if it were merely that he might listen to her soothing accents; — in fine, he knew so well how to use the serpent's art, or such was the will of fate, that he gained her affections. The title of the elder branch falling at length to him, lie obtained an important embassy, which served as an excuse for hastening the marriage, (in spite of her brother's deranged state,) which was to take place the very day before his departure for the continent.

Aubrey, when he was left by the physician and his guardians, attempted to bribe the servants, but in vain. He asked for pen and paper; it was given him; he wrote a letter to his sister, conjuring her, as she valued her own happiness, her own honour, and the honour of those now in the grave, who once held her in their arms as their hope and the hope of their house, to delay but for a few hours that marriage, on which he denounced the most heavy curses. The servants promised they would deliver it; but giving it to the physician, he thought it better not to harass any more the mind of Miss Aubrey by, what he considered, the ravings of a maniac. Night passed on without rest to the busy inmates of the house; and Aubrey heard, with a horror that may more easily be conceived than described, the notes of busy preparation. Morning came, and the sound of carriages broke upon his ear. Aubrey grew almost frantic. The curiosity of the servants at last overcame their vigilance, they gradually stole away, leaving him in the custody of an helpless old woman. He seized the opportunity, with one bound was out of the room, and in a moment found himself in the apartment where all were nearly assembled. Lord Ruthven was the first to perceive him: lie immediately approached, and, taking his arm by force, hurried him from the room, speechless with rage. When on the staircase, Lord Ruthven whispered in his ear— “Remember your oath, and know, if not my bride to day, your sister is dishonoured. Women are frail!” So saying, he pushed him towards his attendants, who, roused by the old woman, had come in search of him. Aubrey could no longer support himself; his rage not finding vent, had broken a blood-vessel, and he was conveyed to bed. This was not mentioned to his sister, who was not present when he entered, as the physician was afraid of agitating her. The marriage was solemnized, and the bride and bridegroom left London.

Aubrey’s weakness increased; the effusion of blood produced symptoms of the near approach of death. He desired his sister’s guardians might be called, and when the midnight hour had struck, he related composedly what the reader has perused — he died immediately after.

The guardians hastened to protect Miss Aubrey; but when they arrived, it was too late. Lord Ruthven had disappeared, and Aubrey’s sister had glutted the thirst of a VAMPYRE!

THE END

Varney the Vampire by James Malcolm Rymer

This Victorian gothic novel was serialised in 1845–47 as a string of cheap pamphlets known as ‘penny dreadfuls’. The work is of epic length, containing nearly 667,000 words. *Varney the Vampire* introduced many vampire features that later inspired Stoker’s *Dracula* and are well-known to modern readers now. The story has a confused setting, claiming to be set in the early eighteenth century, while making references to the Napoleonic Wars and other events of the nineteenth century.

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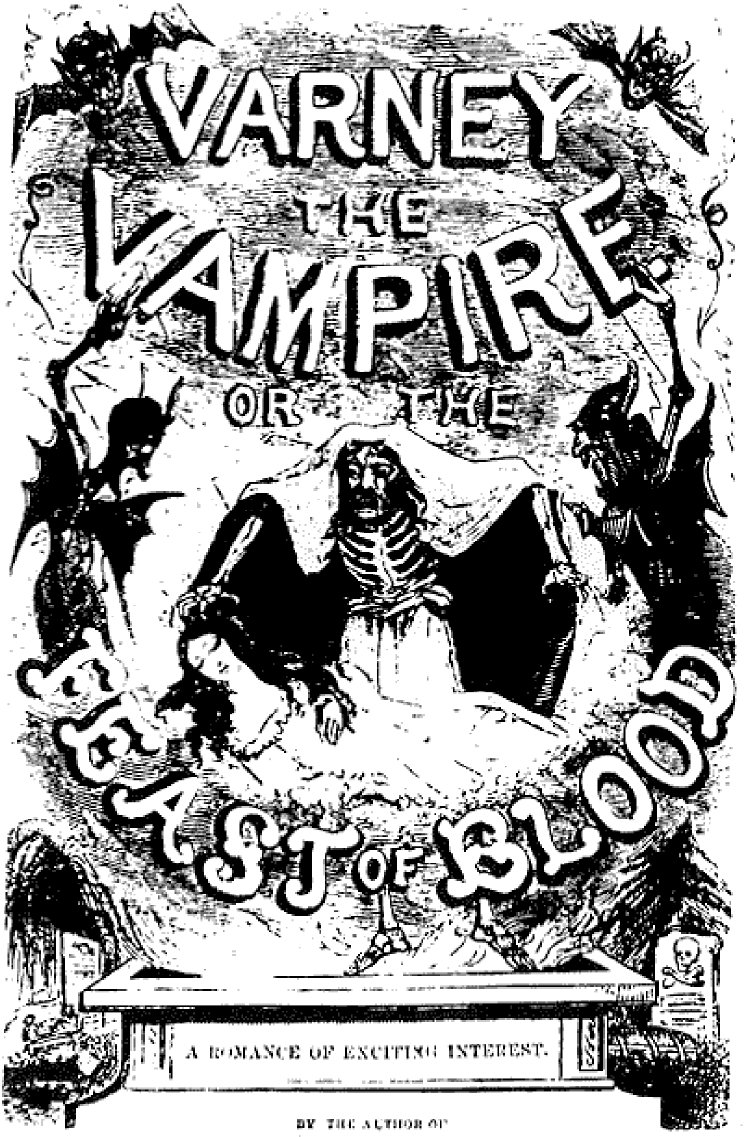
VARNEY
THE
VAMPIRE
OR THE
FEAST OF BLOOD
A ROMANCE OF EXCITING INTEREST.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"GRACE RIVERS; OR, THE MERCHANT'S DAUGHTER."

LONDON: E. LLOYD, SALISBURY-SQUARE, AND ALL BOOKSELLERS.

The cover of the first Penny Dreadful instalment

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PREFACE

The unprecedented success of the romance of "Varney the Vampyre," leaves the Author but little to say further, than that he accepts that success and its results as gratefully as it is possible for any one to do popular favours.

A belief in the existence of Vampyres first took its rise in Norway and Sweden, from whence it rapidly spread to more southern regions, taking a firm hold of the imaginations of the more credulous portion of mankind.

The following romance is collected from seemingly the most authentic sources, and the Author must leave the question of credibility entirely to his readers, not even thinking that he his peculiarly called upon to express his own opinion upon the subject.

Nothing has been omitted in the life of the unhappy Varney, which could tend to throw a light upon his most extraordinary career, and the fact of his death just as it is here related, made a great noise at the time through Europe and is to be found in the public prints for the year 1713.

With these few observations, the Author and Publisher, are well content to leave the work in the hands of a public, which has stamped it with an approbation far exceeding their most sanguine expectations, and which is calculated to act as the strongest possible incentive to the production of other works, which in a like, or perchance a still further degree may be deserving of public patronage and support.

To the whole of the Metropolitan Press for their laudatory notices, the Author is peculiarly obliged.

London Sep. 1847

CHAPTER I.

— — "How graves give up their dead.
And how the night air hideous grows
With shrieks!"

MIDNIGHT. — THE HAIL-STORM. — THE DREADFUL VISITOR. — THE VAMPYRE.

The solemn tones of an old cathedral clock have announced midnight — the air is thick and heavy — a strange, death like stillness pervades all nature. Like the ominous calm which precedes some more than usually terrific outbreak of the elements, they seem to have paused even in their ordinary fluctuations, to gather a terrific strength for the great effort. A faint peal of thunder now comes from far off. Like a signal gun for the battle of the winds to begin, it appeared to awaken them from their lethargy, and one awful, warring hurricane swept over a whole city, producing more devastation in the four or five minutes it lasted, than would a half century of ordinary phenomena.

It was as if some giant had blown upon some toy town, and scattered many of the buildings before the hot blast of his terrific breath; for as suddenly as that blast of wind had come did it cease, and all was as still and calm as before.

Sleepers awakened, and thought that what they had heard must be the confused chimera of a dream. They trembled and turned to sleep again.

All is still — still as the very grave. Not a sound breaks the magic of repose. What is that — a strange, pattering noise, as of a million of fairy feet? It is hail — yes, a hail-storm has burst over the city.

Leaves are dashed from the trees, mingled with small boughs; windows that lie most opposed to the direct fury of the pelting particles of ice are broken, and the rapt repose that before was so remarkable in its intensity, is exchanged for a noise which, in its accumulation, drowns every cry of surprise or consternation which here and there arose from persons who found their houses invaded by the storm.

Now and then, too, there would come a sudden gust of wind that in its strength, as it blew laterally, would, for a moment, hold millions of the hailstones suspended in mid air, but it was only to dash them with redoubled force in some new direction, where more mischief was to be done.

Oh, how the storm raged! Hail — rain — wind. It was, in very truth, an awful night.

There is an antique chamber in an ancient house. Curious and quaint carvings adorn the walls, and the large chimney-piece is a curiosity of itself. The ceiling is low, and a large bay window, from roof to floor, looks to the west. The window is latticed, and filled with curiously painted glass and rich stained pieces, which send in a strange, yet beautiful light, when sun or moon shines into the apartment. There is but one portrait in that room, although the walls seem panelled for the express purpose of containing a series of pictures. That portrait is of a young man, with a pale face, a stately brow, and a strange expression about the eyes, which no one cared to look on twice.

There is a stately bed in that chamber, of carved walnut-wood is it made, rich in design and elaborate in execution; one of those works of art which owe their existence to the Elizabethan era. It is hung with heavy silken and damask furnishing; nodding feathers are at its corners — covered with dust are they, and they lend a funereal aspect to the room. The floor is of polished oak.

God! how the hail dashes on the old bay window! Like an occasional discharge of mimic musketry, it comes clashing, beating, and cracking upon the small panes; but they resist it — their small size saves them; the wind, the hail, the rain, expend their fury in vain.

The bed in that old chamber is occupied. A creature formed in all fashions of loveliness lies in a half sleep upon that ancient couch — a girl young and beautiful as a spring morning. Her long hair has escaped from its confinement and streams over the blackened coverings of the bedstead; she has been restless in her sleep, for the clothing of the bed is in much confusion. One arm is over her head, the other hangs nearly off the side of the bed near to which she lies. A neck and bosom that would have formed a study for the rarest sculptor that ever Providence gave genius to, were half disclosed. She moaned slightly in her sleep, and once or twice the lips moved as if in prayer — at least one might judge so, for the name of Him who suffered for all came once faintly from them.

She has endured much fatigue, and the storm does not awaken her; but it can disturb the slumbers it does not possess the power to destroy entirely. The turmoil of the elements wakes the senses, although it cannot entirely break the repose they have lapsed into.

Oh, what a world of witchery was in that mouth, slightly parted, and exhibiting within the pearly teeth that glistened even in the faint light that came from that bay window. How sweetly the long silken eyelashes lay upon the cheek. Now she moves, and one shoulder is entirely visible — whiter, fairer than the spotless clothing of the bed on which she lies, is the smooth skin of that fair creature, just budding into womanhood, and in that transition state which presents to us all the charms of the girl — almost of the child, with the more matured beauty and gentleness of advancing years.

Was that lightning? Yes — an awful, vivid, terrifying flash — then a roaring peal of thunder, as if a thousand mountains were rolling one over the other in the blue vault of Heaven! Who sleeps now in that ancient city? Not one living soul. The dread trumpet of eternity could not more effectually have awakened any one.

The hail continues. The wind continues. The uproar of the elements seems at its height. Now she awakens — that beautiful girl on the antique bed; she opens those eyes of celestial blue, and a faint cry of alarm bursts from her lips. At least it is a cry which, amid the noise and turmoil without, sounds but faint and weak. She sits upon the bed and presses her hands upon her eyes. Heavens! what a wild torrent of wind, and rain, and hail! The thunder likewise seems intent upon awakening sufficient echoes to last until the next flash of forked lightning should again produce the wild concussion of the air. She murmurs a prayer — a prayer for those she loves best; the names of those dear to her gentle heart come from her lips; she weeps and prays; she thinks then of what devastation the storm must surely produce, and to the great God of Heaven she prays for all living things. Another flash — a wild, blue, bewildering flash of lightning streams across that bay window, for an instant bringing out every colour in it with terrible distinctness. A shriek bursts from the lips of the young girl, and then, with eyes fixed upon that window, which, in another moment, is all darkness, and with such an expression of terror upon her face as it had never before known, she trembled, and the perspiration of intense fear stood upon her brow.

“What — what was it?” she gasped; “real, or a delusion? Oh, God, what was it? A figure tall and gaunt, endeavouring from the outside to unclasp the window. I saw it. That flash of lightning revealed it to me. It stood the whole length of the window.”

There was a lull of the wind. The hail was not falling so thickly — moreover, it now fell, what there was of it, straight, and yet a strange clattering sound came upon the glass of that long window. It could not be a delusion — she is awake, and she hears it. What can produce it? Another flash of lightning — another shriek — there could be now no delusion.

A tall figure is standing on the ledge immediately outside the long window. It is its finger-nails upon the glass that produces the sound so like the hail, now that the hail has ceased. Intense fear paralysed the limbs of that beautiful girl. That one shriek is all she can utter — with hands clasped, a face of marble, a heart beating so wildly in her bosom, that each moment it seems as if it would break its confines, eyes distended and fixed upon the window, she waits, froze with horror. The pattering and clattering of the nails continue. No word is spoken, and now she fancies she can trace the darker form of that figure against the window, and she can see the long arms moving to and fro, feeling for some mode of entrance. What strange light is that which now gradually creeps up into the air? red and terrible — brighter and brighter it grows. The lightning has set fire to a mill, and the reflection of the rapidly consuming building falls upon that long window. There can be no mistake. The figure is there, still feeling for an entrance, and clattering against the glass with its long nails, that appear as if the growth of many years had been untouched. She tries to scream again but a choking sensation comes over her, and she cannot. It is too dreadful — she tries to move — each limb seems weighed down by tons of lead — she can but in a hoarse faint whisper cry, —

“Help — help — help — help!”

And that one word she repeats like a person in a dream. The red glare of the fire continues. It throws up the tall gaunt figure in hideous relief against the long window. It shows, too, upon the one portrait that is in the chamber, and that portrait appears to fix its eyes upon the attempting intruder, while the flickering light from the fire makes it look fearfully lifelike. A small pane of glass is broken, and the form from without introduces a long gaunt hand, which seems utterly destitute of flesh. The fastening is removed, and one-half of the window, which opens like folding doors, is swung wide open upon its hinges.

And yet now she could not scream — she could not move. “Help! — help! — help!” was all she could say. But, oh, that look of terror that sat upon her face, it was dreadful — a look to haunt the memory for a lifetime — a look to obtrude itself upon the happiest moments, and turn them to bitterness.

The figure turns half round, and the light falls upon the face. It is perfectly white — perfectly bloodless. The eyes look like polished tin; the lips are drawn back, and the principal feature next to those dreadful eyes is the teeth — the fearful looking teeth — projecting like those of some wild animal, hideously, glaringly white, and fang-like. It approaches the bed with a strange, gliding movement. It clashes together the long nails that literally appear to hang from the finger ends. No sound comes from its lips. Is she going mad — that young and beautiful girl exposed to so much terror? she has drawn up all her limbs; she cannot even now say help. The power of articulation is gone, but the power of movement has returned to her;

she can draw herself slowly along to the other side of the bed from that towards which the hideous appearance is coming.

But her eyes are fascinated. The glance of a serpent could not have produced a greater effect upon her than did the fixed gaze of those awful, metallic-looking eyes that were bent on her face. Crouching down so that the gigantic height was lost, and the horrible, protruding, white face was the most prominent object, came on the figure. What was it? — what did it want there? — what made it look so hideous — so unlike an inhabitant of the earth, and yet to be on it?

Now she has got to the verge of the bed, and the figure pauses. It seemed as if when it paused she lost the power to proceed. The clothing of the bed was now clutched in her hands with unconscious power. She drew her breath short and thick. Her bosom heaves, and her limbs tremble, yet she cannot withdraw her eyes from that marble-looking face. He holds her with his glittering eye.

The storm has ceased — all is still. The winds are hushed; the church clock proclaims the hour of one: a hissing sound comes from the throat of the hideous being, and he raises his long, gaunt arms — the lips move. He advances. The girl places one small foot from the bed on to the floor. She is unconsciously dragging the clothing with her. The door of the room is in that direction — can she reach it? Has she power to walk? — can she withdraw her eyes from the face of the intruder, and so break the hideous charm? God of Heaven! is it real, or some dream so like reality as to nearly overturn the judgment for ever?

The figure has paused again, and half on the bed and half out of it that young girl lies trembling. Her long hair streams across the entire width of the bed. As she has slowly moved along she has left it streaming across the pillows. The pause lasted about a minute — oh, what an age of agony. That minute was, indeed, enough for madness to do its full work in.

With a sudden rush that could not be foreseen — with a strange howling cry that was enough to awaken terror in every breast, the figure seized the long tresses of her hair, and twining them round his bony hands he held her to the bed. Then she screamed — Heaven granted her then power to scream. Shriek followed shriek in rapid succession. The bed-clothes fell in a heap by the side of the bed — she was dragged by her long silken hair completely on to it again. Her beautifully rounded limbs quivered with the agony of her soul. The glassy, horrible eyes of the figure ran over that angelic form with a hideous satisfaction — horrible profanation. He drags her head to the bed's edge. He forces it back by the long hair still entwined in his grasp. With a plunge he seizes her neck in his fang-like teeth — a gush of blood, and a hideous sucking noise follows. *The girl has swooned, and the vampyre is at his hideous repast!*

CHAPTER II.

THE ALARM. — THE PISTOL SHOT. — THE PURSUIT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

Lights flashed about the building, and various room doors opened; voices called one to the other. There was an universal stir and commotion among the inhabitants.

“Did you hear a scream, Harry?” asked a young man, half-dressed, as he walked into the chamber of another about his own age.

“I did — where was it?”

“God knows. I dressed myself directly.”

“All is still now.”

“Yes; but unless I was dreaming there was a scream.”

“We could not both dream there was. Where did you think it came from?”

“It burst so suddenly upon my ears that I cannot say.”

There was a tap now at the door of the room where these young men were, and a female voice said, —

“For God’s sake, get up!”

“We are up,” said both the young men, appearing.

“Did you hear anything?”

“Yes, a scream.”

“Oh, search the house — search the house; where did it come from — can you tell?”

“Indeed we cannot, mother.”

Another person now joined the party. He was a man of middle age, and, as he came up to them, he said, —

“Good God! what is the matter?”

Scarcely had the words passed his lips, than such a rapid succession of shrieks came upon their ears, that they felt absolutely stunned by them. The elderly lady, whom one of the young men had called mother, fainted, and would have fallen to the floor of the corridor in which they all stood, had she not been promptly supported by the last comer, who himself staggered, as those piercing cries came upon the night air. He, however, was the first to recover, for the young men seemed paralysed.

"Henry," he cried, "for God's sake support your mother. Can you doubt that these cries come from Flora's room?"

The young man mechanically supported his mother, and then the man who had just spoken darted back to his own bed-room, from whence he returned in a moment with a pair of pistols, and shouting,—

"Follow me, who can!" he bounded across the corridor in the direction of the antique apartment, from whence the cries proceeded, but which were now hushed.

That house was built for strength, and the doors were all of oak, and of considerable thickness. Unhappily, they had fastenings within, so that when the man reached the chamber of her who so much required help, he was helpless, for the door was fast.

"Flora! Flora!" he cried; "Flora, speak!"

All was still.

"Good God!" he added; "we must force the door."

"I hear a strange noise within," said the young man, who trembled violently.

"And so do I. What does it sound like?"

"I scarcely know; but it nearest resembles some animal eating, or sucking some liquid."

"What on earth can it be? Have you no weapon that will force the door? I shall go mad if I am kept here."

"I have," said the young man. "Wait here a moment."

He ran down the staircase, and presently returned with a small, but powerful, iron crow-bar.

"This will do," he said.

"It will, it will. — Give it to me."

"Has she not spoken?"

"Not a word. My mind misgives me that something very dreadful must have happened to her."

"And that odd noise!"

"Still goes on. Somehow, it curdles the very blood in my veins to hear it."

The man took the crow-bar, and with some difficulty succeeded in introducing it between the door and the side of the wall — still it required great strength to move it, but it did move, with a harsh, crackling sound.

"Push it!" cried he who was using the bar, "push the door at the same time."

The younger man did so. For a few moments the massive door resisted. Then, suddenly, something gave way with a loud snap — it was a part of the lock, — and the door at once swung wide open.

How true it is that we measure time by the events which happen within a given space of it, rather than by its actual duration.

To those who were engaged in forcing open the door of the antique chamber, where slept the young girl whom they named Flora, each moment was swelled into an hour of agony; but, in reality, from the first moment of the alarm to that when the loud cracking noise heralded the destruction of the fastenings of the door, there had elapsed but very few minutes indeed.

“It opens — it opens,” cried the young man.

“Another moment,” said the stranger, as he still plied the crowbar — “another moment, and we shall have free ingress to the chamber. Be patient.”

This stranger’s name was Marchdale; and even as he spoke, he succeeded in throwing the massive door wide open, and clearing the passage to the chamber.

To rush in with a light in his hand was the work of a moment to the young man named Henry; but the very rapid progress he made into the apartment prevented him from observing accurately what it contained, for the wind that came in from the open window caught the flame of the candle, and although it did not actually extinguish it, it blew it so much on one side, that it was comparatively useless as a light.

“Flora — Flora!” he cried.

Then with a sudden bound something dashed from off the bed. The concussion against him was so sudden and so utterly unexpected, as well as so tremendously violent, that he was thrown down, and, in his fall, the light was fairly extinguished.

All was darkness, save a dull, reddish kind of light that now and then, from the nearly consumed mill in the immediate vicinity, came into the room. But by that light, dim, uncertain, and flickering as it was, some one was seen to make for the window.

Henry, although nearly stunned by his fall, saw a figure, gigantic in height, which nearly reached from the floor to the ceiling. The other young man, George, saw it, and Mr. Marchdale likewise saw it, as did the lady who had spoken to the two young men in the corridor when first the screams of the young girl awakened alarm in the breasts of all the inhabitants of that house.

The figure was about to pass out at the window which led to a kind of balcony, from whence there was an easy descent to a garden.

Before it passed out they each and all caught a glance of the side-face, and they saw that the lower part of it and the lips were dabbled in blood. They saw, too, one of those fearful-looking, shining, metallic eyes which presented so terrible an appearance of unearthly ferocity.

No wonder that for a moment a panic seized them all, which paralysed any exertions they might otherwise have made to detain that hideous form.

But Mr. Marchdale was a man of mature years; he had seen much of life, both in this and in foreign lands; and he, although astonished to the extent of being frightened, was much more likely to recover sooner than his younger companions, which, indeed, he did, and acted promptly enough.

“Don’t rise, Henry,” he cried. “Lie still.”

Almost at the moment he uttered these words, he fired at the figure, which then occupied the window, as if it were a gigantic figure set in a frame.

The report was tremendous in that chamber, for the pistol was no toy weapon, but one made for actual service, and of sufficient length and bore of barrel to carry destruction along with the bullets that came from it.

“If that has missed its aim,” said Mr. Marchdale, “I’ll never pull a trigger again.”

As he spoke he dashed forward, and made a clutch at the figure he felt convinced he had shot.

The tall form turned upon him, and when he got a full view of the face, which he did at that moment, from the opportune circumstance of the lady returning at the instant with a light she had been to her own chamber to procure, even he, Marchdale, with all his courage, and that was great, and all his nervous energy, recoiled a step or two, and uttered the exclamation of, "Great God!"

That face was one never to be forgotten. It was hideously flushed with colour — the colour of fresh blood; the eyes had a savage and remarkable lustre; whereas, before, they had looked like polished tin — they now wore a ten times brighter aspect, and flashes of light seemed to dart from them. The mouth was open, as if, from the natural formation of the countenance, the lips receded much from the large canine looking teeth.

A strange howling noise came from the throat of this monstrous figure, and it seemed upon the point of rushing upon Mr. Marchdale. Suddenly, then, as if some impulse had seized upon it, it uttered a wild and terrible shrieking kind of laugh; and then turning, dashed through the window, and in one instant disappeared from before the eyes of those who felt nearly annihilated by its fearful presence.

"God help us!" ejaculated Henry.

Mr. Marchdale drew a long breath, and then, giving a stamp on the floor, as if to recover himself from the state of agitation into which even he was thrown, he cried, —

"Be it what or who it may, I'll follow it"

"No — no — do not," cried the lady.

"I must, I will. Let who will come with me — I follow that dreadful form."

As he spoke, he took the road it took, and dashed through the window into the balcony.

"And we, too, George," exclaimed Henry; "we will follow Mr.

Marchdale. This dreadful affair concerns us more nearly than it does him."

The lady who was the mother of these young men, and of the beautiful girl who had been so awfully visited, screamed aloud, and implored of them to stay. But the voice of Mr. Marchdale was heard exclaiming aloud, —

"I see it — I see it; it makes for the wall."

They hesitated no longer, but at once rushed into the balcony, and from thence dropped into the garden.

The mother approached the bed-side of the insensible, perhaps the murdered girl; she saw her, to all appearance, weltering in blood, and, overcome by her emotions, she fainted on the floor of the room.

When the two young men reached the garden, they found it much lighter than might have been fairly expected; for not only was the morning rapidly approaching, but the mill was still burning, and those mingled lights made almost every object plainly visible, except when deep shadows were thrown from some gigantic trees that had stood for centuries in that sweetly wooded spot. They heard the voice of Mr. Marchdale, as he cried, —

"There — there — towards the wall. There — there — God! how it bounds along."

The young men hastily dashed through a thicket in the direction from whence his voice sounded, and then they found him looking wild and terrified, and with something in his hand which looked like a portion of clothing.

"Which way, which way?" they both cried in a breath.

He leant heavily on the arm of George, as he pointed along a vista of trees, and said in a low voice, —

"God help us all. It is not human. Look there — look there — do you not see it?”

They looked in the direction he indicated. At the end of this vista was the wall of the garden. At that point it was full twelve feet in height, and as they looked, they saw the hideous, monstrous form they had traced from the chamber of their sister, making frantic efforts to clear the obstacle.

Then they saw it bound from the ground to the top of the wall, which it very nearly reached, and then each time it fell back again into the garden with such a dull, heavy sound, that the earth seemed to shake again with the concussion. They trembled — well indeed they might, and for some minutes they watched the figure making its fruitless efforts to leave the place.

“What — what is it?” whispered Henry, in hoarse accents. “God, what can it possibly be?”

“I know not,” replied Mr. Marchdale. “I did seize it. It was cold and clammy like a corpse. It cannot be human.”

“Not human?”

“Look at it now. It will surely escape now.”

“No, no — we will not be terrified thus — there is Heaven above us. Come on, and, for dear Flora’s sake, let us make an effort yet to seize this bold intruder.”

“Take this pistol,” said Marchdale. “It is the fellow of the one I fired. Try its efficacy.”

“He will be gone,” exclaimed Henry, as at this moment, after many repeated attempts and fearful falls, the figure reached the top of the wall, and then hung by its long arms a moment or two, previous to dragging itself completely up.

The idea of the appearance, be it what it might, entirely escaping, seemed to nerve again Mr. Marchdale, and he, as well as the two young men, ran forward towards the wall. They got so close to the figure before it sprang down on the outer side of the wall, that to miss killing it with the bullet from the pistol was a matter of utter impossibility, unless wilfully.

Henry had the weapon, and he pointed it full at the tall form with a steady aim. He pulled the trigger — the explosion followed, and that the bullet did its office there could be no manner of doubt, for the figure gave a howling shriek, and fell headlong from the wall on the outside.

"I have shot him," cried Henry, "I have shot him."

CHAPTER III.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE BODY. — FLORA'S RECOVERY AND MADNESS. — THE OFFER OF ASSISTANCE FROM SIR FRANCIS VARNEY.

"He is human!" cried Henry; "I have surely killed him."

"It would seem so," said Mr. Marchdale. "Let us now hurry round to the outside of the wall, and see where he lies."

This was at once agreed to, and the whole three of them made what expedition they could towards a gate which led into a paddock, across which they hurried, and soon found themselves clear of the garden wall, so that they could make way towards where they fully expected to find the body of him who had worn so unearthly an aspect, but who it would be an excessive relief to find was human.

So hurried was the progress they made, that it was scarcely possible to exchange many words as they went; a kind of breathless anxiety was upon them, and in the speed they disregarded every obstacle, which would, at any other time, have probably prevented them from taking the direct road they sought.

It was difficult on the outside of the wall to say exactly which was the precise spot which it might be supposed the body had fallen on; but, by following the wall in its entire length, surely they would come upon it.

They did so; but, to their surprise, they got from its commencement to its further extremity without finding any dead body, or even any symptoms of one having lain there.

At some parts close to the wall there grew a kind of heath, and, consequently, the traces of blood would be lost among it, if it so happened that at the precise spot at which the strange being had seemed to topple over, such vegetation had existed. This was to be ascertained; but now, after traversing the whole length of the wall twice, they came to a halt, and looked wonderingly in each other's faces.

"There is nothing here," said Harry.

"Nothing," added his brother.

"It could not have been a delusion," at length said Mr. Marchdale, with a shudder.

"A delusion?" exclaimed the brother! "That is not possible; we all saw it."

"Then what terrible explanation can we give?"

"By heavens! I know not," exclaimed Henry. "This adventure surpasses all belief, and but for the great interest we have in it, I should regard it with a world of curiosity."

"It is too dreadful," said George; "for God's sake, Henry, let us return to ascertain if poor Flora is killed."

"My senses," said Henry, "were all so much absorbed in gazing at that horrible form, that I never once looked towards her further than to see that she was, to appearance, dead. God help her! poor — poor, beautiful Flora. This is, indeed, a sad, sad fate for you to come to. Flora — Flora—"

"Do not weep, Henry," said George. "Rather let us now hasten home, where we may find that tears are premature. She may yet be living and restored to us."

"And," said Mr. Marchdale, "she may be able to give us some account of this dreadful visitation."

"True — true," exclaimed Henry; "we will hasten home."

They now turned their steps homeward, and as they went they much blamed themselves for all leaving home together, and with terror pictured what might occur in their absence to those who were now totally unprotected.

"It was a rash impulse of us all to come in pursuit of this dreadful figure," remarked Mr. Marchdale; "but do not torment yourself, Henry. There may be no reason for your fears."

At the pace they went, they very soon reached the ancient house, and when they came in sight of it, they saw lights flashing from the windows, and the shadows of faces moving to and fro, indicating that the whole household was up, and in a state of alarm.

Henry, after some trouble, got the hall door opened by a terrified servant, who was trembling so much that she could scarcely hold the light she had with her.

"Speak at once, Martha," said Henry. "Is Flora living?"

"Yes; but—"

"Enough — enough! Thank God she lives; where is she now?"

"In her own room, Master Henry. Oh, dear — oh, dear, what will become of us all?"

Henry rushed up the staircase, followed by George and Mr. Marchdale, nor paused he once until he reached the room of his sister.

"Mother," he said, before he crossed the threshold, "are you here?"

"I am, my dear — I am. Come in, pray come in, and speak to poor Flora."

"Come in, Mr. Marchdale," said Henry— "come in; we make no stranger of you."

They all then entered the room.

Several lights had been now brought into that antique chamber, and, in addition to the mother of the beautiful girl who had been so fearfully visited, there were two female domestics, who appeared to be in the greatest possible fright, for they could render no assistance whatever to anybody.

The tears were streaming down the mother's face, and the moment she saw Mr. Marchdale, she clung to his arm, evidently unconscious of what she was about, and exclaimed, —

"Oh, what is this that has happened — what is this? Tell me, Marchdale! Robert Marchdale, you whom I have known even from my childhood, you will not deceive me. Tell me the meaning of all this?"

"I cannot," he said, in a tone of much emotion. "As God is my judge, I am as much puzzled and amazed at the scene that has taken place here to-night as you can be."

The mother wrung her hands and wept.

"It was the storm that first awakened me," added Marchdale; "and then I heard a scream."

The brothers tremblingly approached the bed. Flora was placed in a sitting, half-reclining posture, propped up by pillows. She was quite insensible, and her face was fearfully pale; while that she breathed at all could be but very faintly seen. On some of her clothing, about the neck, were spots of blood, and she looked more like one who had suffered some long and grievous illness, than a young girl in the prime of life and in the most robust health, as she had been on the day previous to the strange scene we have recorded.

"Does she sleep?" said Henry, as a tear fell from his eyes upon her pallid cheek.

"No," replied Mr. Marchdale. "This is a swoon, from which we must recover her."

Active measures were now adopted to restore the languid circulation, and, after persevering in them for some time, they had the satisfaction of seeing her open her eyes.

Her first act upon consciousness returning, however, was to utter a loud shriek, and it was not until Henry implored her to look around her, and see that she was surrounded by none but friendly faces, that she would venture again to open her eyes, and look timidly from one to the other. Then she shuddered, and burst into tears as she said, —

"Oh, Heaven, have mercy upon me — Heaven, have mercy upon me, and save me from that dreadful form."

"There is no one here, Flora," said Mr. Marchdale, "but those who love you, and who, in defence of you, if needs were would lay down their lives."

"Oh, God! Oh, God!"

"You have been terrified. But tell us distinctly what has happened? You are quite safe now."

She trembled so violently that Mr. Marchdale recommended that some stimulant should be given to her, and she was persuaded, although not without considerable difficulty, to swallow a small portion of some wine from a cup. There could be no doubt but that the stimulating effect of the wine was beneficial, for a slight accession of colour visited her cheeks, and she spoke in a firmer tone as she said, —

"Do not leave me. Oh, do not leave me, any of you. I shall die if left alone now. Oh, save me — save me. That horrible form! That fearful face!"

"Tell us how it happened, dear Flora?" said Henry.

"Or would you rather endeavour to get some sleep first?" suggested Mr. Marchdale.

"No — no — no," she said, "I do not think I shall ever sleep again."

"Say not so; you will be more composed in a few hours, and then you can tell us what has occurred."

"I will tell you now. I will tell you now."

She placed her hands over her face for a moment, as if to collect her scattered, thoughts, and then she added, —

"I was awakened by the storm, and I saw that terrible apparition at the window. I think I screamed, but I could not fly. Oh, God! I could not fly. It came — it seized me by the hair. I know no more. I know no more."

She passed her hand across her neck several times, and Mr. Marchdale said, in an anxious voice, —

"You seem, Flora, to have hurt your neck — there is a wound."

"A wound!" said the mother, and she brought a light close to the bed, where all saw on the side of Flora's neck a small punctured wound; or, rather two, for there was one a little distance from the other.

It was from these wounds the blood had come which was observable upon her night clothing.

"How came these wounds?" said Henry.

"I do not know," she replied. "I feel very faint and weak, as if I had almost bled to death."

"You cannot have done so, dear Flora, for there are not above half-a-dozen spots of blood to be seen at all."

Mr. Marchdale leaned against the carved head of the bed for support, and he uttered a deep groan. All eyes were turned upon him, and Henry said, in a voice of the most anxious inquiry, —

"You have something to say, Mr. Marchdale, which will throw some light upon this affair."

"No, no, no, nothing!" cried Mr. Marchdale, rousing himself at once from the appearance of depression that had come over him. "I have nothing to say, but that I think Flora had better get some sleep if she can."

"No sleep-no sleep for me," again screamed Flora. "Dare I be alone to sleep?"

"But you shall not be alone, dear Flora," said Henry. "I will sit by your bedside and watch you."

She took his hand in both hers, and while the tears chased each other down her cheeks, she said, —

"Promise me, Henry, by all your hopes of Heaven, you will not leave me."

"I promise!"

She gently laid herself down, with a deep sigh, and closed her eyes.

"She is weak, and will sleep long," said Mr. Marchdale.

"You sigh," said Henry. "Some fearful thoughts, I feel certain, oppress your heart."

"Hush-hush!" said Mr. Marchdale, as he pointed to Flora. "Hush! not here — not here."

"I understand," said Henry.

"Let her sleep."

There was a silence of some few minutes duration. Flora had dropped into a deep slumber. That silence was first broken by George, who said, —

"Mr. Marchdale, look at that portrait."

He pointed to the portrait in the frame to which we have alluded, and the moment Marchdale looked at it he sunk into a chair as he exclaimed, —

“Gracious Heaven, how like!”

“It is — it is,” said Henry. “Those eyes—”

“And see the contour of the countenance, and the strange shape of the mouth.”

“Exact — exact.”

“That picture shall be moved from here. The sight of it is at once sufficient to awaken all her former terrors in poor Flora’s brain if she should chance to awaken and cast her eyes suddenly upon it.”

“And is it so like him who came here?” said the mother.

“It is the very man himself,” said Mr. Marchdale. “I have not been in this house long enough to ask any of you whose portrait that may be?”

“It is,” said Henry, “the portrait of Sir Runnagate Bannerworth, an ancestor of ours, who first, by his vices, gave the great blow to the family prosperity.”

“Indeed. How long ago?”

“About ninety years.”

“Ninety years. ’Tis a long while — ninety years.”

“You muse upon it.”

“No, no. I do wish, and yet I dread—”

“What?”

“To say something to you all. But not here — not here. We will hold a consultation on this matter to-morrow. Not now — not now.”

“The daylight is coming quickly on,” said Henry; “I shall keep my sacred promise of not moving from this room until Flora awakens; but there can be no occasion for the detention of any of you. One is sufficient here. Go all of you, and endeavour to procure what rest you can.”

"I will fetch you my powder-flask and bullets," said Mr. Marchdale; "and you can, if you please, reload the pistols. In about two hours more it will be broad daylight."

This arrangement was adopted. Henry did reload the pistols, and placed them on a table by the side of the bed, ready for immediate action, and then, as Flora was sleeping soundly, all left the room but himself.

Mrs. Bannerworth was the last to do so. She would have remained, but for the earnest solicitation of Henry, that she would endeavour to get some sleep to make up for her broken night's repose, and she was indeed so broken down by her alarm on Flora's account, that she had not power to resist, but with tears flowing from her eyes, she sought her own chamber.

And now the calmness of the night resumed its sway in that evil-fated mansion; and although no one really slept but Flora, all were still. Busy thought kept every one else wakeful. It was a mockery to lie down at all, and Henry, full of strange and painful feelings as he was, preferred his present position to the anxiety and apprehension on Flora's account which he knew he should feel if she were not within the sphere of his own observation, and she slept as soundly as some gentle infant tired of its playmates and its sports.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MORNING. — THE CONSULTATION. — THE FEARFUL SUGGESTION.

What wonderfully different impressions and feelings, with regard to the same circumstances, come across the mind in the broad, clear, and beautiful light of day to what haunt the imagination, and often render the judgment almost incapable of action, when the heavy shadow of night is upon all things.

There must be a downright physical reason for this effect — it is so remarkable and so universal. It seems that the sun's rays so completely alter and modify the constitution of the atmosphere, that it produces, as we inhale it, a wonderfully different effect upon the nerves of the human subject.

We can account for this phenomenon in no other way. Perhaps never in his life had he, Henry Bannerworth, felt so strongly this transition of feeling as he now felt it, when the beautiful daylight gradually dawned upon him, as he kept his lonely watch by the bedside of his slumbering sister.

That watch had been a perfectly undisturbed one. Not the least sight or sound of any intrusion had reached his senses. All had been as still as the very grave.

And yet while the night lasted, and he was more indebted to the rays of the candle, which he had placed upon a shelf, for the power to distinguish objects than to the light of the morning, a thousand uneasy and strange sensations had found a home in his agitated bosom.

He looked so many times at the portrait which was in the panel that at length he felt an undefined sensation of terror creep over him whenever he took his eyes off it.

He tried to keep himself from looking at it, but he found it vain, so he adopted what, perhaps, was certainly the wisest, best plan, namely, to look at it continually.

He shifted his chair so that he could gaze upon it without any effort, and he placed the candle so that a faint light was thrown upon it, and there he sat, a prey to many conflicting and uncomfortable feelings, until the daylight began to make the candle flame look dull and sickly.

Solution for the events of the night he could find none. He racked his imagination in vain to find some means, however vague, of endeavouring to account for what occurred, and still he was at fault. All was to him wrapped in the gloom of the most profound mystery.

And how strangely, too, the eyes of that portrait appeared to look upon him — as if instinct with life, and as if the head to which they belonged was busy in endeavouring to find out the secret communings of his soul. It was wonderfully well executed that portrait; so life-like, that the very features seemed to move as you gazed upon them.

“It shall be removed,” said Henry. “I would remove it now, but that it seems absolutely painted on the panel, and I should awake Flora in any attempt to do so.”

He arose and ascertained that such was the case, and that it would require a workman, with proper tools adapted to the job, to remove the portrait.

“True,” he said, “I might now destroy it, but it is a pity to obscure a work of such rare art as this is; I should blame myself if I were. It shall be removed to some other room of the house, however.”

Then, all of a sudden, it struck Henry how foolish it would be to remove the portrait from the wall of a room which, in all likelihood, after that night, would be uninhabited; for it was not probable that Flora would choose again to inhabit a chamber in which she had gone through so much terror.

"It can be left where it is," he said, "and we can fasten up, if we please, even the very door of this room, so that no one need trouble themselves any further about it."

The morning was now coming fast, and just as Henry thought he would partially draw a blind across the window, in order to shield from the direct rays of the sun the eyes of Flora, she awoke.

"Help — help!" she cried, and Henry was by her side in a moment.

"You are safe, Flora — you are safe," he said.

"Where is it now?" she said.

"What — what, dear Flora?"

"The dreadful apparition. Oh, what have I done to be made thus perpetually miserable?"

"Think no more of it, Flora."

"I must think. My brain is on fire! A million of strange eyes seem gazing on me."

"Great Heaven! she raves," said Henry.

"Hark — hark — hark! He comes on the wings of the storm. Oh, it is most horrible — horrible!"

Henry rang the bell, but not sufficiently loudly to create any alarm. The sound reached the waking ear of the mother, who in a few moments was in the room.

"She has awakened," said Henry, "and has spoken, but she seems to me to wander in her discourse. For God's sake, soothe her, and try to bring her mind round to its usual state."

"I will, Henry — I will."

"And I think, mother, if you were to get her out of this room, and into some other chamber as far removed from this one as possible, it would tend to withdraw her mind from what has occurred."

"Yes; it shall be done. Oh, Henry, what was it — what do you think it was?"

"I am lost in a sea of wild conjecture. I can form no conclusion; where is Mr. Marchdale?"

"I believe in his chamber."

"Then I will go and consult with him."

Henry proceeded at once to the chamber, which was, as he knew, occupied by Mr. Marchdale; and as he crossed the corridor, he could not but pause a moment to glance from a window at the face of nature.

As is often the case, the terrific storm of the preceding evening had cleared the air, and rendered it deliciously invigorating and lifelike. The weather had been dull, and there had been for some days a certain heaviness in the atmosphere, which was now entirely removed.

The morning sun was shining with uncommon brilliancy, birds were singing in every tree and on every bush; so pleasant, so spirit-stirring, health-giving a morning, seldom had he seen. And the effect upon his spirits was great, although not altogether what it might have been, had all gone on as it usually was in the habit of doing at that house. The ordinary little casualties of evil fortune had certainly from time to time, in the shape of illness, and one thing or another, attacked the family of the Bannerworths in common with every other family, but here suddenly had arisen a something at once terrible and inexplicable.

He found Mr. Marchdale up and dressed, and apparently in deep and anxious thought. The moment he saw Henry, he said, —

“Flora is awake, I presume.”

“Yes, but her mind appears to be much disturbed.”

“From bodily weakness, I dare say.”

“But why should she be bodily weak? she was strong and well, ay, as well as she could ever be in all her life. The glow of youth and health was on her cheeks. Is it possible that, in the course of one night, she should become bodily weak to such an extent?”

“Henry,” said Mr. Marchdale, sadly, “sit down. I am not, as you know, a superstitious man.”

“You certainly are not.”

“And yet, I never in all my life was so absolutely staggered as I have been by the occurrences of to-night.”

“Say on.”

“There is a frightful, a hideous solution of them; one which every consideration will tend to add strength to, one which I tremble to name now, although, yesterday, at this hour, I should have laughed it to scorn.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes, it is so. Tell no one that which I am about to say to you. Let the dreadful suggestion remain with ourselves alone, Henry Bannerworth.”

“I — I am lost in wonder.”

“You promise me?”

“What — what?”

“That you will not repeat my opinion to any one.”

“I do.”

"On your honour."

"On my honour, I promise."

Mr. Marchdale rose, and proceeding to the door, he looked out to see that there were no listeners near. Having ascertained then that they were quite alone, he returned, and drawing a chair close to that on which Henry sat, he said, —

"Henry, have you never heard of a strange and dreadful superstition which, in some countries, is extremely rife, by which it is supposed that there are beings who never die."

"Never die!"

"Never. In a word, Henry, have you never heard of — of — I dread to pronounce the word."

"Speak it. God of Heaven! let me hear it."

"A *vampyre*!"

Henry sprung to his feet. His whole frame quivered with emotion; the drops of perspiration stood upon his brow, as, in, a strange, hoarse voice, he repeated the words, —

"A vampyre!"

"Even so; one who has to renew a dreadful existence by human blood — one who lives on for ever, and must keep up such a fearful existence upon human gore — one who eats not and drinks not as other men — a vampyre."

Henry dropped into his scat, and uttered a deep groan of the most exquisite anguish.

"I could echo that groan," said Marchdale, "but that I am so thoroughly bewildered I know not what to think."

"Good God — good God!"

"Do not too readily yield belief in so dreadful a supposition, I pray you."

"Yield belief!" exclaimed Henry, as he rose, and lifted up one of his hands above his head. "No; by Heaven, and the great God of all, who there rules, I will not easily believe aught so awful and so monstrous."

"I applaud your sentiment, Henry; not willingly would I deliver up myself to so frightful a belief — it is too horrible. I merely have told you of that which you saw was on my mind. You have surely before heard of such things."

"I have — I have."

"I much marvel, then, that the supposition did not occur to you, Henry."

"It did not — it did not, Marchdale. It — it was too dreadful, I suppose, to find a home in my heart. Oh! Flora, Flora, if this horrible idea should once occur to you, reason cannot, I am quite sure, uphold you against it."

"Let no one presume to insinuate it to her, Henry. I would not have it mentioned to her for worlds."

"Nor I — nor I. Good God! I shudder at the very thought — the mere possibility; but there is no possibility, there can be none. I will not believe it."

"Nor I."

"No; by Heaven's justice, goodness, grace, and mercy, I will not believe it."

"Tis well sworn, Henry; and now, discarding the supposition that Flora has been visited by a vampyre, let us seriously set about endeavouring, if we can, to account for what has happened in this house."

"I — I cannot now."

"Nay, let us examine the matter; if we can find any natural explanation, let us cling to it, Henry, as the sheet-anchor of our very souls."

"Do you think. You are fertile in expedients. Do you think, Marchdale; and, for Heaven's sake, and for the sake of our own peace, find out some other way of accounting for what has happened, than the hideous one you have suggested."

"And yet my pistol bullets hurt him not; he has left the tokens of his presence on the neck of Flora."

"Peace, oh! peace. Do not, I pray you, accumulate reasons why I should receive such a dismal, awful superstition. Oh, do not, Marchdale, as you love me!"

"You know that my attachment to you," said Marchdale, "is sincere; and yet, Heaven help us!"

His voice was broken by grief as he spoke, and he turned aside his head to hide the bursting tears that would, despite all his efforts, show themselves in his eyes.

"Marchdale," added Henry, after a pause of some moments' duration, "I will sit up to-night with my sister."

"Do — do!"

"Think you there is a chance it may come again?"

"I cannot — I dare not speculate upon the coming of so dreadful a visitor, Henry; but I will hold watch with you most willingly."

"You will, Marchdale?"

"My hand upon it. Come what dangers may, I will share them with you, Henry."

"A thousand thanks. Say nothing, then, to George of what we have been talking about. He is of a highly susceptible nature, and the very idea of such a thing would kill him."

"I will; be mute. Remove your sister to some other chamber, let me beg of you, Henry; the one she now inhabits will always be suggestive of horrible thoughts.”

“I will; and that dreadful-looking portrait, with its perfect likeness to him who came last night.”

“Perfect indeed. Do you intend to remove it?”

“I do not. I thought of doing so; but it is actually on the panel in the wall, and I would not willingly destroy it, and it may as well remain where it is in that chamber, which I can readily now believe will become henceforward a deserted one in this house.”

“It may well become such.”

“Who comes here? I hear a step.”

There was a tip at the door at this moment, and George made his appearance in answer to the summons to come in. He looked pale and ill; his face betrayed how much he had mentally suffered during that night, and almost directly he got into the bed-chamber he said, —

I shall, I am sure, be censured by you both for what I am going to say; but I cannot help saying it, nevertheless, for to keep it to myself would destroy me.”

“Good God, George! what is it?” said Mr. Marchdale.

“Speak it out!” said Henry.

“I have been thinking of what has occurred here, and the result of that thought has been one of the wildest suppositions that ever I thought I should have to entertain. Have you never heard of a vampyre?”

Henry sighed deeply, and Marchdale was silent.

“I say a vampyre,” added George, with much excitement in his manner. “It is a fearful, a horrible supposition; but our poor, dear Flora has been visited by a vampyre, and I shall go completely mad!”

He sat down, and covering his face with his hands, he wept bitterly and abundantly.

"George," said Henry, when he saw that the frantic grief had in some measure abated— "be calm, George, and endeavour to listen to me."

"I hear, Henry."

"Well, then, do not suppose that you are the only one in this house to whom so dreadful a superstition has occurred."

"Not the only one?"

"No; it has occurred to Mr. Marchdale also."

"Gracious Heaven!"

"He mentioned it to me; but we have both agreed to repudiate it with horror."

"To — repudiate — it?"

"Yes, George."

"And yet — and yet—"

"Hush, hush! I know what you would say. You would tell us that our repudiation of it cannot affect the fact. Of that we are aware; but yet will we disbelieve that which a belief in would be enough to drive us mad."

"What do you intend to do?"

"To keep this supposition to ourselves, in the first place; to guard it most zealously from the ears of Flora."

"Do you think she has ever heard of vampyres?"

"I never heard her mention that in all her reading she had gathered even a hint of such a fearful superstition. If she has, we must be guided by circumstances, and do the best we can."

"Pray Heaven she may not!"

"Amen to that prayer, George," said Henry. "Mr. Marchdale and I intend to keep watch over Flora to-night."

"May not I join you?"

"Your health, dear George, will not permit you to engage in such matters. Do you seek your natural repose, and leave it to us to do the best we can in this most fearful and terrible emergency."

"As you please, brother, and as you please, Mr. Marchdale. I know I am a frail reed, and my belief is that this affair will kill me quite. The truth is, I am horrified — utterly and frightfully horrified. Like my poor, dear sister, I do not believe I shall ever sleep again."

"Do not fancy that, George," said Marchdale. "You very much add to the uneasiness which must be your poor mother's portion, by allowing this circumstance to so much affect you. You well know her affection for you all, and let me therefore, as a very old friend of hers, entreat you to wear as cheerful an aspect as you can in her presence."

"For once in my life," said George, sadly, "I will; to my dear mother, endeavour to play the hypocrite."

"Do so," said Henry. "The motive will sanction any such deceit as that, George, be assured."

The day wore on, and Poor Flora remained in a very precarious situation. It was not until mid-day that Henry made up his mind he would call in a medical gentleman to her, and then he rode to the neighbouring market-town, where he knew an extremely intelligent practitioner resided. This gentleman Henry resolved upon, under a promise of secrecy, makings confidant of; but, long before he reached him, he found he might well dispense with the promise of secrecy.

He had never thought, so engaged had he been with other matters, that the servants were cognizant of the whole affair, and that from them he had no expectation of being able to keep the whole story in all its details. Of course such an opportunity for tale-bearing and gossiping was not likely to be lost; and while Henry was thinking over how he had better act in the matter, the news that Flora Bannerworth had been visited in the night by a vampyre — for the servants named the visitation such at once — was spreading all over the county.

As he rode along, Henry met a gentleman on horseback who belonged to the county, and who, reining in his steed, said to him,

"Good morning, Mr. Bannerworth."

"Good morning," responded Henry, and he would have ridden on, but the gentleman added, —

"Excuse me for interrupting you, sir; but what is the strange story that is in everybody's mouth about a vampyre?"

Henry nearly fell off his horse, he was so much astonished, and, wheeling the animal around, he said, —

"In everybody's mouth!"

"Yes; I have heard it from at least a dozen persons."

"You surprise me."

"It is untrue? Of course I am not so absurd as really to believe about the vampyre; but is there no foundation at all for it? We generally find that at the bottom of these common reports there is a something around which, as a nucleus, the whole has formed."

"My sister is unwell."

"Ah, and that's all. It really is too bad, now."

"We had a visitor last night."

"A thief, I suppose?"

"Yes, yes — I believe a thief. I do believe it was a thief, and she was terrified."

"Of course, and upon such a thing is grafted a story of a vampyre, and the marks of his teeth being in her neck, and all the circumstantial particulars."

"Yes, yes."

"Good morning, Mr. Bannerworth."

Henry bade the gentleman good morning, and much vexed at the publicity which the affair had already obtained, he set spurs to his horse, determined that he would speak to no one else upon so uncomfortable a theme. Several attempts were made to stop him, but he only waved his hand and trotted on, nor did he pause in his speed till he reached the door of Mr. Chillingworth, the medical man whom he intended to consult.

Henry knew that at such a time he would be at home, which was the case, and he was soon closeted with the man of drugs. Henry begged his patient hearing, which being accorded, he related to him at full length what had happened, not omitting, to the best of his remembrance, any one particular. When he had concluded his narration, the doctor shifted his position several times, and then said, —

"That's all?"

"Yes — and enough too."

"More than enough, I should say, my young friend. You astonish me."

"Can you form any supposition, sir, on the subject?"

"Not just now. What is your own idea?"

"I cannot be said to have one about it. It is too absurd to tell you that my brother George is impressed with a belief a vampyre has visited the house."

"I never in all my life heard a more circumstantial narrative in favour of so hideous a superstition."

"Well, but you cannot believe—"

"Believe what?"

"That the dead can come to life again, and by such a process keep up vitality."

"Do you take me for a fool?"

"Certainly not."

"Then why do you ask me such questions?"

"But the glaring facts of the case."

"I don't care if they were ten times more glaring, I won't believe it. I would rather believe you were all mad, the whole family of you — that at the full of the moon you all were a little cracked."

"And so would I."

"You go home now, and I will call and see your sister in the course of two hours. Something may turn up yet, to throw some new light upon this strange subject."

With this understanding Henry went home, and he took care to ride as fast as before, in order to avoid questions, so that he got back to his old ancestral home without going through the disagreeable ordeal of having to explain to any one what had disturbed the peace of it.

When Henry reached his home, he found that the evening was rapidly coming on, and before he could permit himself to think upon any other subject, he inquired how his terrified sister had passed the hours during his absence.

He found that but little improvement had taken place in her, and that she had occasionally slept, but to awaken and speak incoherently, as if the shock she had received had had some serious affect upon her nerves. He repaired at once to her room, and, finding that she was awake, he leaned over her, and spoke tenderly to her.

"Flora," he said, "dear Flora, you are better now?"

"Harry, is that you?"

"Yes, dear."

"Oh, tell me what has happened?"

"Have you not a recollection, Flora?"

"Yes, yes, Henry; but what was it? They none of them will tell me what it was, Henry."

"Be calm, dear. No doubt some attempt to rob the house."

"Think you so?"

"Yes; the bay window was peculiarly adapted for such a purpose; but now that you are removed here to this room, you will be able to rest in peace."

"I shall die of terror, Henry. Even now those eyes are glaring on me so hidiously. Oh, it is fearful — it is very fearful, Henry. Do you not pity me, and no one will promise to remain with me at night."

"Indeed, Flora, you are mistaken, for I intend to sit by your bedside armed, and so preserve you from all harm."

She clutched his hand eagerly, as she said, —

"You will, Henry. You will, and not think it too much trouble, dear Henry."

"It can be no trouble, Flora."

"Then I shall rest in peace, for I know that the dreadful vampyre cannot come to me when you are by-"

"The what, Flora!"

"The vampyre, Henry. It was a vampyre."

"Good God, who told you so?"

"No one. I have read of them in the book of travels in Norway, which Mr. Marchdale lent us all."

“Alas, alas!” groaned Henry. “Discard, I pray you, such a thought from your mind.”

“Can we discard thoughts. What power have we but from that mind, which is ourselves?”

“True, true.”

“Hark, what noise is that? I thought I heard a noise. Henry, when you go, ring for some one first. Was there not a noise?”

“The accidental shutting of some door, dear.”

“Was it that?”

“It was.”

“Then I am relieved. Henry, I sometimes fancy I am in the tomb, and that some one is feasting on my flesh. They do say, too, that those who in life have been bled by a vampyre, become themselves vampyres, and have the same horrible taste for blood as those before them. Is it not horrible?”

“You only vex yourself by such thoughts, Flora. Mr. Chillingworth is coming to see you.”

“Can he minister to a mind diseased?”

“But yours is not, Flora. Your mind is healthful, and so, although his power extends not so far, we will thank Heaven, dear Flora, that you need it not.”

She sighed deeply, as she said, —

“Heaven help me! I know not, Henry. The dreadful being held on by my hair. I must have it all taken off. I tried to get away, but it dragged me back — a brutal thing it was. Oh, then at that moment, Henry, I felt as if something strange took place in my brain, and that I was going mad! I saw those glazed eyes close to, mine — I felt a hot, pestiferous breath upon my face — help — help!”

“Hush! my Flora, hush! Look at me.”

"I am calm again. It fixed its teeth in my throat. Did I faint away?"

"You did, dear; but let me pray you to refer all this to imagination; or at least the greater part of it."

"But you saw it."

"Yes—"

"All saw it."

"We all saw some man — a housebreaker — It must have been some housebreaker. What more easy, you know, dear Flora, than to assume some such disguise?"

"Was anything stolen?"

"Not that I know of; but there was an alarm, you know."

Flora shook her head, as she said, in a low voice, —

"That which came here was more than mortal. Oh, Henry, if it had but killed me, now I had been happy; but I cannot live — I hear it breathing now."

"Talk of something else, dear Flora," said the much distressed Henry; "you will make yourself much worse, if you indulge yourself in these strange fancies."

"Oh, that they were but fancies!"

"They are, believe me."

"There is a strange confusion in my brain, and sleep comes over me suddenly, when I least expect it. Henry, Henry, what I was, I shall never, never be again."

"Say not so. All this will pass away like a dream, and leave so faint a trace upon your memory, that the time will come when you will wonder it ever made so deep an impression on your mind."

"You utter these words, Henry," she said, "but they do not come from your heart. Ah, no, no, no! Who comes?"

The door was opened by Mrs. Bannerworth, who said, —

"It is only me, my dear. Henry, here is Dr. Chillingworth in the dining-room."

Henry turned to Flora, saying, —

"You will see him, dear Flora? You know Mr. Chillingworth well."

"Yes, Henry, yes, I will see him, or whoever you please."

"Shew Mr. Chillingworth up," said Henry to the servant.

In a few moments the medical man was in the room, and he at once approached the bedside to speak to Flora, upon whose pale countenance he looked with evident interest, while at the same time it seemed mingled with a painful feeling — at least so his own face indicated.

"Well, Miss Bannerworth," he said, "what is all this I hear about an ugly dream you have had?"

"A dream?" said Flora, as she fixed her beautiful eyes on his face.

"Yes, as I understand."

She shuddered, and was silent.

"Was it not a dream, then?" added Mr. Chillingworth.

She wrung her hands, and in a voice of extreme anguish and pathos, said, —

"Would it were a dream — would it were a dream! Oh, if any one could but convince me it was a dream!"

"Well, will you tell me what it was?"

"Yes, sir, it was a vampyre."

Mr. Chillingworth glanced at Henry, as he said, in reply to Flora's words, —

"I suppose that is, after all, another name, Flora, for the nightmare?"

"No — no — no!"

"Do you really, then, persist in believing anything so absurd, Miss Bannerworth?"

"What can I say to the evidence of my own senses?" she replied. "I saw it, Henry saw it, George saw, Mr. Marchdale, my mother — all saw it. We could not all be at the same time the victims of the same delusion."

"How faintly you speak."

"I am very faint and ill."

"Indeed. What wound is that on your neck?"

A wild expression came over the face of Flora; a spasmodic action of the muscles, accompanied with a shuddering, as if a sudden chill had come over the whole mass of blood took place, and she said, —

"It is the mark left by the teeth of the vampyre."

The smile was a forced one upon the face of Mr. Chillingworth.

"Draw up the blind of the window, Mr. Henry," he said, "and let me examine this puncture to which your sister attaches so extraordinary a meaning."

The blind was drawn up, and a strong light was thrown into the room. For full two minutes Mr. Chillingworth attentively examined the two small wounds in the neck of Flora. He took a powerful magnifying glass from his pocket, and looked at them through it, and after his examination was concluded, he said, —

"They are very trifling wounds, indeed."

"But how inflicted?" said Henry.

"By some insect, I should say, which probably — it being the season for many insects — has flown in at the window"

"I know the motive," said Flora "which prompts all these suggestions it is a kind one, and I ought to be the last to quarrel with it; but what I have seen, nothing can make me believe I saw not, unless I am, as once or twice I have thought myself, really mad."

"How do you now feel in general health?"

"Far from well; and a strange drowsiness at times creeps over me. Even now I feel it."

She sunk back on the pillows as she spoke and closed her eyes with a deep sigh.

Mr. Chillingworth beckoned Henry to come with him from the room, but the latter had promised that he would remain with Flora; and as Mrs. Bannerworth had left the chamber because she was unable to control her feelings, he rang the bell, and requested that his mother would come.

She did so, and then Henry went down stairs along with the medical man, whose opinion he was certainly eager to be now made acquainted with.

As soon as they were alone in an old-fashioned room which was called the oak closet, Henry turned to Mr. Chillingworth, and said, —

"What, now, is your candid opinion, sir? You have seen my sister, and those strange indubitable evidences of something wrong."

"I have; and to tell you candidly the truth, Mr. Henry, I am sorely perplexed."

"I thought you would be."

"It is not often that a medical man likes to say so much, nor is it, indeed, often prudent that he should do so, but in this case I own I am much puzzled. It is contrary to all my notions upon all such subjects."

"Those wounds, what do you think of them?"

"I know not what to think. I am completely puzzled as regards them."

"But, but do they not really bear the appearance of being bites?"

"They really do."

"And so far, then, they are actually in favour of the dreadful supposition which poor Flora entertains."

"So far they certainly are. I have no doubt in the world of their being bites; but we not must jump to a conclusion that the teeth which inflicted them were human. It is a strange case, and one which I feel assured must give you all much uneasiness, as, indeed, it gave me; but, as I said before, I will not let my judgment give in to the fearful and degrading superstition which all the circumstances connected with this strange story would seem to justify."

"It is a degrading superstition."

"To my mind your sister seems to be labouring under the effect of some narcotic."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; unless she really has lost a quantity of blood, which loss has decreased the heart's action sufficiently to produce the languor under which she now evidently labours."

"Oh, that I could believe the former supposition, but I am confident she has taken no narcotic; she could not even do so by mistake, for there is no drug of the sort in the house. Besides, she is not heedless by any means. I am quite convinced she has not done so."

"Then I am fairly puzzled, my young friend, and I can only say that I would freely have given half of what I am worth to see that figure you saw last night."

"What would you have done?"

"I would not have lost sight of it for the world's wealth."

"You would have felt your blood freeze with horror. The face was terrible."

"And yet let it lead me where it liked I would have followed it."

"I wish you had been here."

"I wish to Heaven I had. If I though there was the least chance of another visit I would come and wait with patience every night for a month."

"I cannot say," replied Henry. "I am going to sit up to-night with my sister, and I believe, our friend Mr. Marchdale will share my watch with me."

Mr. Chillingworth appeared to be for a few moments lost in thought, and then suddenly rousing himself, as if he found it either impossible to come to any rational conclusion upon the subject, or had arrived at one which he chose to keep to himself, he said, —

"Well, well, we must leave the matter at present as it stands. Time may accomplish something towards its development, but at present so palpable a mystery I never came across, or a matter in which human calculation was so completely foiled."

"Nor I — nor I."

"I will send you some medicines, such as I think will be of service to Flora, and depend upon seeing me by ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

"You have, of course, heard something," said Henry to the doctor, as he was pulling on his gloves, "about vampyres."

"I certainly have, and I understand that in some countries, particularly Norway and Sweden, the superstition is a very common one."

"And in the Levant."

"Yes. The ghouls of the Mahometans are of the same description of beings. All that I have heard of the European vampyre has made it a being which can be killed, but is restored to life again by the rays of a full moon falling on the body."

"Yes, yes, I have heard as much."

"And that the hideous repast of blood has to be taken very frequently, and that if the vampyre gets it not he wastes away, presenting the appearance of one in the last stage of a consumption, and visibly, so to speak, dying."

"That is what I have understood."

"To-night, do you know, Mr. Bannerworth, is the full of the moon."

Henry started.

"If now you had succeeded in killing — . Pshaw, what am I saying. I believe I am getting foolish, and that the horrible superstition is beginning to fasten itself upon me as well as upon all of you. How strangely the fancy will wage war with the judgment in such a way as this."

"The full of the moon," repeated Henry, as he glanced towards the window, "and the night is near at hand."

"Banish these thoughts from your mind," said the doctor, "or else, my young friend, you will make yourself decidedly ill. Good evening to you, for it is evening. I shall see you to-morrow morning."

Mr. Chillingworth appeared now to be anxious to go, and Henry no longer opposed his departure; but when he was gone a sense of great loneliness came over him.

"To-night," he repeated, "is the full of the moon. How strange that this dreadful adventure should have taken place just the night before. 'Tis very strange. Let me see — let me see."

He took from the shelves of a book case the work which Flora had mentioned, entitled, “Travels in Norway,” in which work he found some account of the popular belief in vampyres.

He opened the work at random, and then some of the leaves turned over of themselves to a particular place, as the leaves of a book will frequently do when it has been kept open a length of time at that part, and the binding stretched there more than anywhere else. There was a note at the bottom of one of the pages at this part of the book, and Henry read as follows: —

“With regard to these vampyres, it is believed by those who are inclined to give credence to so dreadful a superstition, that they always endeavour to make their feast of blood, for the revival of their bodily powers, on some evening immediately preceding a full moon, because if any accident befal them, such as being shot, or otherwise killed or wounded, they can recover by lying down somewhere where the full moon’s rays will fall upon them.”

Henry let the book drop from his hands with a groan and a shudder.

CHAPTER V.

THE NIGHT WATCH. — THE PROPOSAL. — THE MOONLIGHT. — THE FEARFUL ADVENTURE.

A kind of stupefaction came over Henry Bannerworth, and he sat for about a quarter of an hour scarcely conscious of where he was, and almost incapable of anything in the shape of rational thought. It was his brother, George, who roused him by saying, as he laid his hand upon his shoulder, —

"Henry, are you asleep?"

Henry had not been aware of his presence, and he started up as if he had been shot.

"Oh, George, is it you?" he said.

"Yes, Henry, are you unwell?"

"No, no; I was in a deep reverie."

"Alas! I need not ask upon what subject," said George, sadly. "I sought you to bring you this letter."

"A letter to me?"

"Yes, you see it is addressed to you, and the seal looks as if it came from someone of consequence."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, Henry. Read it, and see from whence it comes."

There was just sufficient light by going to the window to enable Henry to read the letter, which he did aloud.

It ran thus: —

"Sir Francis Varney presents his compliments to Mr. Beaumont, and is much concerned to hear that some domestic affliction has fallen upon him. Sir Francis hopes that the genuine and loving sympathy of a neighbour will not be regarded as an intrusion, and begs to proffer any assistance or counsel that may be within the compass of his means.

"Ratford Abbey."

"Sir Francis Varney!" said Henry, "who is he?"

"Do you not remember, Henry," said George, "we were told a few days ago, that a gentleman of that name had become the purchaser of the estate of Ratford Abbey."

"Oh, yes, yes. Have you seen him?"

"I have not."

"I do not wish to make any new acquaintance, George. We are very poor — much poorer indeed than the general appearance of this place, which, I fear, we shall soon have to part with, would warrant any one believing. I must, of course, return a civil answer to this gentleman, but it must be such as one as shall repress familiarity."

"That will be difficult to do while we remain here, when we come to consider the very close proximity of the two properties, Henry."

"Oh, no, not at all. He will easily perceive that we do not want to make acquaintance with him, and then, as a gentleman, which doubtless he is, he will give up the attempt."

"Let it be so, Henry. Heaven knows I have no desire to form any new acquaintance with any one, and more particularly under our present circumstances of depression. And now, Henry, you must permit me, as I have had some repose, to share with you your night watch in Flora's room."

"I would advise you not, George; your health, you know, is very far from good."

"Nay, allow me. If not, then the anxiety I shall suffer will do me more harm than the watchfulness I shall keep up in her chamber."

This was an argument which Henry felt himself the force of too strongly not to admit it in the case of George, and he therefore made no further opposition to his wish to make one in the night watch.

"There will be an advantage," said George, "you see, in three of us being engaged in this matter, because, should anything occur, two can act together, and yet Flora may not be left alone."

"True, true, that is a great advantage."

Now a soft gentle silvery light began to spread itself over the heavens. The moon was rising, and as the beneficial effects of the storm of the preceding evening were still felt in the clearness of the air, the rays appeared to be more lustrous and full of beauty than they commonly were.

Each moment the night grew lighter, and by the time the brothers were ready to take their places in the chamber of Flora, the moon had risen considerably.

Although neither Henry nor George had any objection to the company of Mr. Marchdale, yet they gave him the option, and rather in fact urged him not to destroy his night's repose by sitting up with them; but he said, —

"Allow me to do so; I am older, and have calmer judgment than you can have. Should anything again appear, I am quite resolved that it shall not escape me."

"What would you do?"

"With the name of God upon my lips," said Mr. Marchdale, solemnly, "I would grapple with it."

"You laid hands upon it last night."

"I did, and have forgotten to show you what I tore from it. Look here, — what should you say this was?"

He produced a piece of cloth, on which was an old-fashioned piece of lace, and two buttons. Upon a close inspection, this appeared to be a portion of the lapel of a coat of ancient times, and suddenly, Henry, with a look of intense anxiety, said, —

"This reminds me of the fashion of garments very many years ago, Mr. Marchdale."

"It came away in my grasp as if rotten and incapable of standing any rough usage."

"What a strange unearthly smell it has!"

"Now you mention it yourself," added Mr. Marchdale, "I must confess it smells to me as if it had really come from the very grave."

"It does — it does. Say nothing of this relic of last night's work to any one."

"Be assured I shall not. I am far from wishing to keep up in any one's mind proofs of that which I would fain, very fain refute."

Mr. Marchdale replaced the portion of the coat which the figure had worn in his pocket, and then the whole three proceeded to the chamber of Flora.

It was within a very few minutes of midnight, the moon had climbed high in the heavens, and a night of such brightness and beauty had seldom shown itself for a long period of time.

Flora slept, and in her chamber sat the two brothers and Mr. Marchdale, silently, for she had shown symptoms of restlessness, and they much feared to break the light slumber into which she had fallen.

Occasionally they had conversed in whispers, which could not have the effect of rousing her, for the room, although smaller than the one she had before occupied, was still sufficiently spacious to enable them to get some distance from the bed.

Until the hour of midnight now actually struck, they were silent, and when the last echo of the sounds had died away, a feeling of uneasiness came over them, which prompted some conversation to get rid of it.

"How bright the moon is now," said Henry, in a low tone.

"I never saw it brighter," replied Marchdale. "I feel as if I were assured that we shall not to-night be interrupted."

"It was later than this," said Henry.

"It was — it was."

"Do not then yet congratulate us upon no visit."

"How still the house is!" remarked George; "it seems to me as if I had never found it so intensely quiet before."

"It is very still."

"Hush! she moves."

Flora moaned in her sleep, and made a slight movement. The curtains were all drawn closely round the bed to shield her eyes from the bright moonlight which streamed into the room so brilliantly. They might have closed the shutters of the window, but this they did not like to do, as it would render their watch there of no avail at all, inasmuch as they would not be able to see if any attempt was made by any one to obtain admittance.

A quarter of an hour longer might have thus passed when Mr. Marchdale said in a whisper, —

"A thought has just struck me that the piece of coat I have, which I dragged from the figure last night, wonderfully resembles in colour and appearance the style of dress of the portrait in the room which Flora lately slept in."

"I thought of that," said Henry, "when first I saw it; but, to tell the honest truth, I dreaded to suggest any new proof connected with last night's visitation."

"Then I ought not to have drawn your attention to it," said Mr. Marchdale, "and regret I have done so."

"Nay, do not blame yourself on such an account," said Henry. "You are quite right, and it is I who am too foolishly sensitive. Now, however, since you have mentioned it, I must own I have a great desire to test the accuracy of the observation by a comparison with the portrait."

"That may easily be done."

"I will remain here," said George, "in case Flora awakens, while you two go if you like. It is but across the corridor."

Henry immediately rose, saying —

"Come, Mr. Marchdale, come. Let us satisfy ourselves at all events upon this point at once. As George says it is only across the corridor, and we can return directly."

"I am willing," said Mr. Marchdale, with a tone of sadness.

There was no light needed, for the moon stood suspended in a cloudless sky, so that from the house being a detached one, and containing numerous windows, it was as light as day.

Although the distance from one chamber to the other was only across the corridor, it was a greater space than these words might occupy, for the corridor was wide, neither was it directly across, but considerably slanting. However, it was certainly sufficiently close at hand for any sound of alarm from one chamber to reach another without any difficulty.

A few moments sufficed to place Henry and Mr. Marchdale in that antique room, where, from the effect of the moonlight which was streaming over it, the portrait on the panel looked exceedingly life like.

And this effect was probably the greater because the rest of the room was not illuminated by the moon's rays, which came through a window in the corridor, and then at the open door of that chamber upon the portrait.

Mr. Marchdale held the piece of cloth he had close to the dress of the portrait, and one glance was sufficient to show the wonderful likeness between the two.

"Good God!" said Henry, "it is the same."

Mr. Marchdale dropped the piece of cloth and trembled.

"This fact shakes even your scepticism," said Henry.

"I know not what to make of it."

"I can tell you something which bears upon it. I do not know if you are sufficiently aware of my family history to know that this one of my ancestors, I wish I could say worthy ancestors, committed suicide, and was buried in his clothes."

"You — you are sure of that?"

"Quite sure."

"I am more and more bewildered as each moment some strange corroborative fact of that dreadful supposition we so much shrink from seems to come to light and to force itself upon our attention."

There was a silence of a few moments duration, and Henry had turned towards Mr. Marchdale to say something, when the cautious tread of a footstep was heard in the garden, immediately beneath that balcony.

A sickening sensation came over Henry, and he was compelled to lean against the wall for support, as in scarcely articulate accents he said —

"The vampyre — the vampyre! God of heaven, it has come once again!"

"Now, Heaven inspire us with more than mortal courage," cried Mr. Marchdale, and he dashed open the window at once, and sprang into the balcony.

Henry in a moment recovered himself sufficiently to follow him, and when he reached his side in the balcony, Marchdale said, as he pointed below, —

"There is some one concealed there."

"Where — where?"

"Among the laurels. I will fire a random shot, and we may do some execution."

"Hold!" said a voice from below; "don't do any such thing, I beg of you."

"Why, that is Mr. Chillingworth's voice," cried Henry.

"Yes, and it's Mr. Chillingworth's person, too," said the doctor, as he emerged from among some laurel bushes.

"How is this?" said Marchdale.

"Simply that I made up my mind to keep watch and ward to-night outside here, in the hope of catching the vampyre. I got into here by climbing the gate."

"But why did you not let me know?" said Henry.

"Because I did not know myself, my young friend, till an hour and a half ago."

"Have you seen anything?"

"Nothing. But I fancied I heard something in the park outside the wall."

"Indeed!"

"What say you, Henry," said Mr. Marchdale, "to descending and taking a hasty examination of the garden and grounds?"

"I am willing; but first allow me to speak to George, who otherwise might be surprised at our long absence."

Henry walked rapidly to the bed chamber of Flora, and be said to George, —

"Have you any objection to being left alone here for about half an hour, George, while we make an examination of the garden?"

"Let me have some weapon and I care not. Remain here while I fetch a sword from my own room."

Henry did so, and when George returned with a sword, which he always kept in his bed-room, he said, —

"Now go, Henry. I prefer a weapon of this description to pistols much. Do not be longer gone than necessary."

"I will not, George, be assured."

George was then left alone, and Henry returned to the balcony, where Mr. Marchdale was waiting for him. It was a quicker mode of descending to the garden to do so by clambering over the balcony than any other, and the height was not considerable enough to make it very objectionable, so Henry and Mr. Marchdale chose that way of joining Mr. Chillingworth.

"You are, no doubt, much surprised at finding me here," said the doctor; "but the fact is, I half made up my mind to come while I was here; but I had not thoroughly done so, therefore I said nothing to you about it."

"We are much indebted to you," said Henry, "for making the attempt."

"I am prompted to it by a feeling of the strongest curiosity."

"Are you armed, sir?" said Marchdale.

"In this stick," said the doctor, "is a sword, the exquisite temper of which I know I can depend upon, and I fully intended to run through any one whom I saw that looked in the least of the vampyre order."

“You would have done quite right,” replied Mr. Marchdale. “I have a brace of pistols here, loaded with ball; will you take one, Henry, if you please, and then we shall be all armed.”

Thus, then, prepared for any exigency, they made the whole round of the house; but found all the fastenings secure, and everything as quiet as possible.

“Suppose, now, we take a survey of the park outside the garden wall,” said Mr. Marchdale.

This was agreed to; but before they had proceeded far, Mr. Marchdale said, —

“There is a ladder lying on the wall; would it not be a good plan to place it against the very spot the supposed vampyre jumped over last night, and so, from a more elevated position, take a view of the open meadows. We could easily drop down on the outer side, if we saw anything suspicious.”

“Not a bad plan,” said the doctor. “Shall we do it?”

“Certainly,” said Henry; and they accordingly carried the ladder, which had been used for pruning the trees, towards the spot at the end of the long walk, at which the vampyre had made good, after so many fruitless efforts, his escape from the premises.

They made haste down the long vista of trees until they reached the exact spot, and then they placed the ladder as near as possible, exactly where Henry, in his bewilderment on the evening before, had seen the apparition from the grave spring to.

“We can ascend singly,” said Marchdale; “but there is ample space for us all there to sit on the top of the wall and make our observations.”

This was seen to be the case, and in about a couple of minutes they had taken up their positions on the wall, and, although the height was but trifling, they found that they had a much more extensive view than they could have obtained by any other means.

"To contemplate the beauty of such a night as this," said Mr. Chillingworth, "is amply sufficient compensation for coming the distance I have."

"And who knows," remarked Marchdale, "we may yet see something which may throw a light upon our present perplexities God knows that I would give all I can call mine in the world to relieve you and your sister, Henry Bannerworth, from the fearful effect which last night's proceedings cannot fail to have upon you."

"Of that I am well assured, Mr. Marchdale," said Henry. "If the happiness of myself and family depended upon you, we should be happy indeed."

"You are silent, Mr. Chillingworth," remarked Marchdale, after a slight pause.

"Hush!" said Mr. Chillingworth— "hush — hush!"

"Good God, what do you hear?" cried Henry.

The doctor laid his hand upon Henry's arm as he said, —

"There is a young lime tree yonder to the right."

"Yes — yes."

"Carry your eye from it in a horizontal line, as near as you can, towards the wood."

Henry did so, and then he uttered a sudden exclamation of surprise, and pointed to a rising spot of ground, which was yet, in consequence of the number of tall trees in its vicinity, partially enveloped in shadow.

"What is that?" he said.

"I see something," said Marchdale. "By Heaven! it is a human form lying stretched there."

"It is — as if in death."

"What can it be?" said Chillingworth.

"I dread to say," replied Marchdale; "but to my eyes, even at this distance, it seems like the form of him we chased last night."

"The vampyre?"

"Yes — yes. Look, the moonbeams touch him. Now the shadows of the trees gradually recede. God of Heaven! the figure moves."

Henry's eyes were riveted to that fearful object, and now a scene presented itself which filled them all with wonder and astonishment, mingled with sensations of the greatest awe and alarm.

As the moonbeams, in consequence of the luminary rising higher and higher in the heavens, came to touch this figure that lay extended on the rising ground, a perceptible movement took place in it. The limbs appeared to tremble, and although it did not rise up, the whole body gave signs of vitality.

"The vampyre — the vampyre!" said Mr. Marchdale. "I cannot doubt it now. We must have hit him last night with the pistol bullets, and the moonbeams are now restoring him to a new life."

Henry shuddered, and even Mr. Chillingworth turned pale. But he was the first to recover himself sufficiently to propose some course of action, and he said, —

"Let us descend and go up to this figure. It is a duty we owe to ourselves as much as to society."

"Hold a moment," said Mr. Marchdale, as he produced a pistol. "I am an unerring shot, as you well know, Henry. Before we move from this position we now occupy, allow me to try what virtue may be in a bullet to lay that figure low again."

"He is rising!" exclaimed Henry.

Mr. Marchdale levelled the pistol — he took a sure and deliberate aim, and then, just as the figure seemed to be struggling to its feet, he fired, and, with a sudden bound, it fell again.

"You have hit it," said Henry.

"You have indeed," exclaimed the doctor. "I think we can go now."

"Hush!" said Marchdale— "Hush! Does it not seem to you that, hit it as often as you will, the moonbeams will recover it?"

"Yes — yes," said Henry, "they will — they will."

"I can endure this no longer," said Mr. Chillingworth, as he sprung from the wall. "Follow me or not, as you please, I will seek the spot where this being lies."

"Oh, be not rash," cried Marchdale. "See, it rises again, and its form looks gigantic."

"I trust in Heaven and a righteous cause," said the doctor, as he drew the sword he had spoken of from the stick, and threw away the scabbard. "Come with me if you like, or I go alone."

Henry at once jumped down from the wall, and then Marchdale followed him, saying, —

"Come on; I will not shrink."

They ran towards the piece of rising ground; but before they got to it, the form rose and made rapidly towards a little wood which was in the immediate neighbourhood of the hillock.

"It is conscious of being pursued," cried the doctor. "See how it glances back, and then increases its speed."

"Fire upon it, Henry," said Marchdale.

He did so; but either his shot did not take effect, or it was quite unheeded if it did, by the vampyre, which gained the wood before they could have a hope of getting sufficiently near it to effect, or endeavour to effect, a capture.

"I cannot follow it there," said Marchdale. "In open country I would have pursued it closely; but I cannot follow it into the intricacies of a wood."

"Pursuit is useless there," said Henry. "It is enveloped in the deepest gloom."

"I am not so unreasonable," remarked Mr. Chillingworth, "as to wish you to follow into such a place as that. I am confounded utterly by this affair."

"And I," said Marchdale. "What on earth is to be done?"

"Nothing — nothing!" exclaimed Henry, vehemently; "and yet I have, beneath the canopy of Heaven, declared that I will, so help me God! spare neither time nor trouble in the unravelling of this most fearful piece of business. Did either of you remark the clothing which this spectral appearance wore?"

"They were antique clothes," said Mr. Chillingworth, "such as might have been fashionable a hundred years ago, but not now."

"Such was my impression," added Marchdale.

"And such my own," said Henry, excitedly. "Is it at all within the compass of the wildest belief that what we have seen is a vampyre, and no other than my ancestor who, a hundred years ago, committed suicide?"

There was so much intense excitement, and evidence of mental suffering, that Mr. Chillingworth took him by the arm, saying, —

"Come home — come home; no more of this at present; you will but make yourself seriously unwell."

"No — no — no."

"Come home now, I pray you; you are by far too much excited about this matter to pursue it with the calmness which should be brought to bear upon it."

"Take advice, Henry," said Marchdale, "take advice, and come home at once."

"I will yield to you; I feel that I cannot control my own feelings — I will yield to you, who, as you say, are cooler on this subject than I can be. Oh, Flora, Flora, I have no comfort to bring to you now."

Poor Henry Bannerworth appeared to be in a complete state of mental prostration, on account of the distressing circumstances that had occurred so rapidly and so suddenly in his family, which had had quite enough to contend with without having superadded to every other evil the horror of believing that some preternatural agency was at work to destroy every hope of future happiness in this world, under any circumstances.

He suffered himself to be led home by Mr. Chillingworth and Marchdale; he no longer attempted to dispute the dreadful fact concerning the supposed vampyre; he could not contend now against all the corroborating circumstances that seemed to collect together for the purpose of proving that which, even when proved, was contrary to all his notions of Heaven, and at variance with all that was recorded and established is part and parcel of the system of nature.

"I cannot deny," he said, when they had reached home, "that such things are possible; but the probability will not bear a moment's investigation."

"There are more things," said Marchdale, solemnly, "in Heaven, and on earth, than are dreamed of in our philosophy."

"There are indeed, it appears," said Mr. Chillingworth.

"And are you a convert?" said Henry, turning to him.

"A convert to what?"

"To a belief in — in — these vampyres?"

"I? No, indeed; if you were to shut me up in a room full of vampyres, I would tell them all to their teeth that I defied them."

"But after what we have seen to-night?"

"What have we seen?"

"You are yourself a witness."

"True; I saw a man lying down, and then I saw a man get up; he seemed then to be shot, but whether he was or not he only knows; and then I saw him walk off in a desperate hurry. Beyond that, I saw nothing."

"Yes; but, taking such circumstances into combination with others, have you not a terrible fear of the truth of the dreadful appearance?"

"No — no; on my soul, no. I will die in my disbelief of such an outrage upon Heaven as one of these creatures would most assuredly be."

"Oh! that I could think like you; but the circumstance strikes too nearly to my heart."

"Be of better cheer, Henry — be of better cheer," said Marchdale; "there is one circumstance which we ought to consider, it is that, from all we have seen, there seems to be some things which would favour an opinion, Henry, that your ancestor, whose portrait hangs in the chamber which was occupied by Flora, is the vampyre."

"The dress was the same," said Henry.

"I noted it was."

"And I."

"Do you not, then, think it possible that something might be done to set that part of the question at rest?"

"What — what?"

"Where is your ancestor buried?"

"Ah! I understand you now."

"And I," said Mr. Chillingworth; "you would propose a visit to his mansion?"

"I would," added Marchdale; "anything that may in any way tend to assist in making this affair clearer, and divesting it of its mysterious circumstances, will be most desirable."

Henry appeared to rouse for some moments and then he said, —

"He, in common with many other members of the family, no doubt occupies place in the vault under the old church in the village."

"Would it be possible," asked Marchdale, "to get into that vault without exciting general attention?"

"It would," said Henry; "the entrance to the vault is in the flooring of the pew which belongs to the family in the old church."

"Then it could be done?" asked Mr. Chillingworth.

"Most undoubtedly."

"Will you under take such an adventure?" said Mr. Chillingworth. "It may ease your mind."

"He was buried in the vault, and in his clothes," said Henry, musingly; "I will think of it. About such a proposition I would not decide hastily. Give me leave to think of it until to-morrow."

"Most certainly."

They now made their way to the chamber of Flora, and they heard from George that nothing of an alarming character had occurred to disturb him on his lonely watch. The morning was now again dawning, and Henry earnestly entreated Mr. Marchdale to go to bed, which he did, leaving the two brothers to continue as sentinels by Flora's bed side, until the morning light should banish all uneasy thoughts.

Henry related to George what had taken place outside the house, and the two brothers held a long and interesting conversation for some hours upon that subject, as well as upon others of great importance to their welfare. It was not until the sun’s early rays came glaring in at the casement that they both rose, and thought of awakening Flora, who had now slept soundly for so many hours.

CHAPTER VI.

A GLANCE AT THE BANNERWORTH FAMILY. — THE PROBABLE CONSEQUENCES OF THE MYSTERIOUS APPARITION'S APPEARANCE.

Having thus far, we hope, interested our readers in the fortunes of a family which had become subject to so dreadful a visitation, we trust that a few words concerning them, and the peculiar circumstances in which they are now placed, will not prove altogether out of place, or unacceptable. The Bannerworth family then were well known in the part of the country where they resided. Perhaps, if we were to say they were better known by name than they were liked, on account of that name, we should be near the truth, for it had unfortunately happened that for a very considerable time past the head of the family had been the very worst specimen of it that could be procured. While the junior branches were frequently amiable and most intelligent, and such in mind and manner as were calculated to inspire goodwill in all who knew them, he who held the family property, and who resided in the house now occupied by Flora and her brothers, was a very so — so sort of character.

This state of things, by some strange fatality, had gone on for nearly a hundred years, and the consequence was what might have been fairly expected, namely — that, what with their vices and what with their extravagances, the successive heads of the Bannerworth family had succeeded in so far diminishing the family property that, when it came into the hands of Henry Bannerworth, it was of little value, on account of the numerous encumbrances with which it was saddled.

The father of Henry had not been a very brilliant exception to the general rule, as regarded the head of the family. If he were not quite so bad as many of his ancestors, that gratifying circumstance was to be accounted for by the supposition that he was not quite so bold, and that the change in habits, manners, and laws, which had taken place in a hundred years, made it not so easy for even a landed proprietor to play the petty tyrant.

He had, to get rid of those animal spirits which had prompted many of his predecessors to downright crimes, had recourse to the gaming-table, and, after raising whatever sums he could upon the property which remained, he naturally, and as might have been fully expected, lost them all.

He was found lying dead in the garden of the house one day, and by his side was his pocket-book, on one leaf of which, it was the impression of the family, he had endeavoured to write something previous to his decease, for he held a pencil firmly in his grasp.

The probability was that he had felt himself getting ill, and, being desirous of making some communication to his family which pressed heavily upon his mind, he had attempted to do so, but was stopped by the too rapid approach of the hand of death.

For some days previous to his decease, his conduct had been extremely mysterious. He had announced an intention of leaving England for ever — of selling the house and grounds for whatever they would fetch over and above the sums for which they were mortgaged, and so clearing himself of all encumbrances.

He had, but a few hours before he was found lying dead, made the following singular speech to Henry, —

“Do not regret, Henry, that the old house which has been in our family so long is about to be parted with. Be assured that, if it is but for the first time in my life, I have good and substantial reasons now for what I am about to do. We shall be able to go some other country, and there live like princes of the land."

Where the means were to come from to live like a prince, unless Mr. Bannerworth had some of the German princes in his eye, no one knew but himself, and his sudden death buried with him that most important secret.

There were some words written on the leaf of his pocket-book, but they were of by far too indistinct and ambiguous a nature to lead to anything. They were these: —

"The money is —— —— —"

And then there was a long scrawl of the pencil, which seemed to have been occasioned by his sudden decease.

Of course nothing could be made of these words, except in the way of a contradiction as the family lawyer said, rather more facetiously than a man of law usually speaks, for if he had written "The money is not," he would have been somewhere remarkably near the truth.

However, with all his vices he was regretted by his children, who chose rather to remember him in his best aspect than to dwell upon his faults.

For the first time then, within the memory of man, the head of the family of the Bannerworths was a gentleman, in every sense of the word. Brave, generous, highly educated, and full of many excellent and noble qualities — for such was Henry, whom we have introduced to our readers under such distressing circumstances.

And now, people said, that the family property having been all dissipated and lost, there would take place a change, and that the Bannerworths would have to take to some course of honourable industry for a livelihood, and that then they would be as much respected as they had before been detested and disliked.

Indeed, the position which Henry held was now a most precarious one — for one of the amazingly clever acts of his father had been to encumber the property with overwhelming claims, so that when Henry administered to the estate, it was doubted almost by his attorney if it were at all desirable to do so.

An attachment, however, to the old house of his family, had induced the young man to hold possession of it as long as he could, despite any adverse circumstance which might eventually be connected with it.

Some weeks, however, only after the decease of his father, and when he fairly held possession, a sudden and a most unexpected offer came to him from a solicitor in London, of whom he knew nothing, to purchase the house and grounds, for a client of his, who had instructed him so to do, but whom he did not mention.

The offer made was a liberal one, and beyond the value of the place. The lawyer who had conducted Henry’s affairs for him since his father’s decease, advised him by all means to take it; but after a consultation with his mother and sister, and George, they all resolved to hold by their own house as long as they could, and, consequently, he refused the offer.

He was then asked to let the place, and to name his own price for the occupation of it; but that he would not do: so the negotiation went off altogether, leaving only, in the minds of the family, much surprise at the exceeding eagerness of some one, whom they knew not, to get possession of the place on any terms.

There was another circumstance perhaps which materially aided in producing a strong feeling on the minds of the Bannerworths, with regard to remaining where they were.

That circumstance occurred thus: a relation of the family, who was now dead, and with whom had died all his means, had been in the habit, for the last half dozen years of his life, of sending a hundred pounds to Henry, for the express purpose of enabling him and his brother George and his sifter Flora to take a little continental or home tour, in the autumn of the year.

A more acceptable present, or for a more delightful purpose, to young people, could not be found; and, with the quiet, prudent habits of all three of them, they contrived to go far and to see much for the sum which was thus handsomely placed at their disposal.

In one of those excursions, when among the mountains of Italy, an adventure occurred which placed the life of Flora in imminent hazard.

They were riding along a narrow mountain path, and, her horse slipping, she fell over the ledge of a precipice.

In an instant, a young man, a stranger to the whole party, who was travelling in the vicinity, rushed to the spot, and by his knowledge and exertions, they felt convinced her preservation was effected.

He told her to lie quiet; he encouraged her to hope for immediate succour; and then, with much personal exertion, and at immense risk to himself, he reached the ledge of rock on which she lay, and then he supported her until the brothers had gone to a neighbouring house, which, bye-the-bye, was two good English miles off, and got assistance.

There came on, while they were gone, a terrific storm, and Flora felt that but for him who was with her she must have been hurled from the rock, and perished in an abyss below, which was almost too deep for observation.

Suffice it to say that she was rescued; and he who had, by his intrepidity, done so much towards saving her, was loaded with the most sincere and heartfelt acknowledgments by the brothers as well as by herself.

He frankly told them that his name was Holland; that he was travelling for amusement and instruction, and was by profession an artist.

He travelled with them for some time; and it was not at all to be wondered at, under the circumstances, that an attachment of the tenderest nature should spring up between him and the beautiful girl, who felt that she owed to him her life.

Mutual glances of affection were exchanged between them, and it was arranged that when he returned to England, he should come at once as an honoured guest to the house of the family of the Bannerworths.

All this was settled satisfactorily with the full knowledge and acquiescence of the two brothers, who had taken a strange attachment to the young Charles Holland, who was indeed in every way likely to propitiate the good opinion of all who knew him.

Henry explained to him exactly how they were situated, and told him that when he came he would find a welcome from all, except possibly his father, whose wayward temper he could not answer for.

Young Holland stated that he was compelled to be away for a term of two years, from certain family arrangements he had entered into, and that then he would return and hope to meet Flora unchanged as he should be.

It happened that this was the last of the continental excursions of the Bannerworths, for, before another year rolled round, the generous relative who had supplied them with the means of making such delightful trips was no more; and, likewise, the death of the father had occurred in the manner we have related, so that there was no chance as had been anticipated and hoped for by Flora, of meeting Charles Holland on the continent again, before his two years of absence from England should be expired.

Such, however, being the state of things, Flora felt reluctant to give up the house, where he would be sure to come to look for her, and her happiness was too dear to Henry to induce him to make any sacrifice of it to expediency.

Therefore was it that Bannerworth Hall, as it was sometimes called, was retained, and fully intended to be retained at all events until after Charles Holland had made his appearance, and his advice (for he was, by the young people, considered as one of the family) taken, with regard to what was advisable to be done.

With one exception this was the state of affairs at the hall, and that exception relates to Mr. Marchdale.

He was a distant relation of Mrs. Bannerworth, and, in early life, had been sincerely and tenderly attached to her. She, however, with the want of steady reflection of a young girl, as she then was, had, as is generally the case among several admirers, chosen the very worst: that is, the man who treated her with the most indifference, and who paid her the least attention, was of course, thought the most of, and she gave her hand to him.

That man was Mr. Bannerworth. But future experience had made her thoroughly awake to her former error; and, but for the love she bore her children, who were certainly all that a mother's heart could wish, she would often have deeply regretted the infatuation which had induced her to bestow her hand in the quarter she had done so.

About a month after the decease of Mr. Bannerworth, there came one to the hall, who desired to see the widow. That one was Mr. Marchdale.

It might have been some slight tenderness towards him which had never left her, or it might be the pleasure merely of seeing one whom she had known intimately in early life, but, be that as it may, she certainly gave him a kindly welcome; and he, after consenting to remain for some time as a visitor at the hall, won the esteem of the whole family by his frank demeanour and cultivated intellect.

He had travelled much and seen much, and he had turned to good account all he had seen, so that not only was Mr. Marchdale a man of sterling sound sense, but he was a most entertaining companion.

His intimate knowledge of many things concerning which they knew little or nothing; his accurate modes of thought, and a quiet, gentlemanly demeanour, such as is rarely to be met with, combined to make him esteemed by the Bannerworths. He had a small independence of his own, and being completely alone in the world, for he had neither wife nor child, Marchdale owned that he felt a pleasure in residing with the Bannerworths.

Of course he could not, in decent terms, so far offend them as to offer to pay for his subsistence, but he took good care that they should really be no losers by having him as an inmate, a matter which he could easily arrange by little presents of one kind and another, all of which he managed should be such as were not only ornamental, but actually spared his kind entertainers some positive expense which otherwise they must have gone to.

Whether or not this amiable piece of manoeuvring was seen through by the Bannerworths it is not our purpose to inquire. If it was seen through, it could not lower him in their esteem, for it was probably just what they themselves would have felt a pleasure in doing under similar circumstances, and if they did not observe it, Mr. Marchdale would, probably, be all the better pleased.

Such then may be considered by our readers as a brief outline of the state of affairs among the Bannerworths — a state which was pregnant with changes, and which changes were now likely to be rapid and conclusive.

How far the feelings of the family towards the ancient house of their race would be altered by the appearance at it of so fearful a visitor as a vampyre, we will not stop to inquire, inasmuch as such feelings will develop themselves as we proceed.

That the visitation had produced a serious effect upon all the household was sufficiently evident, as well among the educated as among the ignorant. On the second morning, Henry received notice to quit his service from the three servants he with difficulty had contrived to keep at the hall. The reason why he received such notice he knew well enough, and therefore he did not trouble himself to argue about a superstition to which he felt now himself almost, compelled to give way; for how could he say there was no such thing as a vampyre, when he had, with his own eyes, had the most abundant evidence of the terrible fact?

He calmly paid the servants, and allowed them to leave him at once without at all entering into the matter, and, for the time being, some men were procured, who, however, came evidently with fear and trembling, and probably only took the place, on account of not being able, to procure any other. The comfort of the household was likely to be completely put an end to, and reasons now for leaving the hall appeared to be most rapidly accumulating.

CHAPTER VII.

THE VISIT TO THE VAULT OF THE BANNERWORTHS, AND ITS UNPLEASANT RESULT. — THE MYSTERY.

Henry and his brother roused Flora, and after agreeing together that it would be highly imprudent to say anything to her of the proceedings of the night, they commenced a conversation with her in encouraging and kindly accents.

"Well, Flora," said Henry, "you see you have been quite undisturbed to-night."

"I have slept long, dear Henry."

"You have, and pleasantly too, I hope."

"I have not had any dreams, and I feel much refreshed, now, and quite well again."

"Thank Heaven!" said George.

"If you will tell dear mother that I am awake, I will get up with her assistance."

The brothers left the room, and they spoke to each other of it as a favourable sign, that Flora did not object to being left alone now, as she had done on the preceding morning.

"She is fast recovering, now, George," said Henry. "If we could now but persuade ourselves that all this alarm would pass away, and that we should hear no more of it, we might return to our old and comparatively happy condition."

"Let us believe, Henry, that we shall."

"And yet, George, I shall not be satisfied in my mind, until I have paid a visit."

"A visit? Where?"

"To the family vault."

"Indeed, Henry! I thought you had abandoned that idea."

"I had. I have several times abandoned it; but it comes across my mind again and again."

"I much regret it."

"Look you, George; as yet, everything that has happened has tended to confirm a belief in this most horrible of all superstitions concerning vampyres."

"It has."

"Now, my great object, George, is to endeavour to disturb such a state of things, by getting something, however slight, or of a negative character, for the mind to rest upon on the other side of the question."

"I comprehend you, Henry."

"You know that at present we are not only led to believe, almost irresistibly that we have been visited here by a vampyre but that that vampyre is our ancestor, whose portrait is on the panel of the wall of the chamber into which he contrived to make his way."

"True, most true."

"Then let us, by an examination of the family vault, George, put an end to one of the evidences. If we find, as most surely we shall, the coffin of the ancestor of ours, who seems, in dress and appearance, so horribly mixed up in this affair, we shall be at rest on that head."

"But consider how many years have elapsed."

"Yes, a great number."

"What then, do you suppose, could remain of any corpse placed in a vault so long ago?"

"Decomposition must of course have done its work, but still there must be a something to show that a corpse has so undergone the process common to all nature. Double the lapse of time surely could not obliterate all traces of that which had been."

"There is reason in that, Henry."

"Besides, the coffins are all of lead, and some of stone, so that they cannot have all gone."

"True, most true."

"If in the one which, from the inscription and the date, we discover to be that of our ancestor whom we seek, we find the evident remains of a corpse, we shall be satisfied that he has rested in his tomb in peace."

"Brother, you seem bent on this adventure," said George; "if you go, I will accompany you."

"I will not engage rashly in it, George. Before I finally decide, I will again consult with Mr. Marchdale. His opinion will weigh much with me."

"And in good time, here he comes across the garden," said George, as he looked from the window of the room in which they sat.

It was Mr. Marchdale, and the brothers warmly welcomed him as he entered the apartment.

"You have been early afoot," said Henry.

"I have," he said. "The fact is, that although at your solicitation I went to bed, I could not sleep, and I went out once more to search about the spot where we had seen the — the I don't know what to call it, for I have a great dislike to naming it a vampyre."

"There is not much in a name," said George.

"In this instance there is," said Marchdale. "It is a name suggestive of horror."

"Made you any discovery?" said Henry.

"None whatever."

"You saw no trace of any one?"

"Not the least."

"Well, Mr. Marchdale, George and I were talking over this projected visit to the family vault."

"Yes."

"And we agreed to suspend our judgments until we saw you, and learned your opinion."

"Which I will tell you frankly," said Mr. Marchdale, "because I know you desire it freely."

"Do so."

"It is, that you make the visit."

"Indeed."

"Yes, and for this reason. You have now, as you cannot help having, a disagreeable feeling, that you may find that one coffin is untenanted. Now, if you do find it so, you scarcely make matters worse, by an additional confirmation of what already amounts to a strong supposition, and one which is likely to grow stronger by time."

"True, most true."

"On the contrary, if you find indubitable proofs that your ancestor has slept soundly in the tomb, and gone the way of all flesh, you will find yourselves much calmer, and that an attack is made upon the train of events which at present all run one way."

"That is precisely the argument I was using to George," said Henry, "a few moments since."

"Then let us go," said George, "by all means."

"It is so decided then," said Henry.

"Let it be done with caution," replied Mr. Marchdale.

"If any one can manage it, of course we can."

"Why should it not be done secretly and at night? Of course we lose nothing by making a night visit to a vault into which daylight, I presume, cannot penetrate."

"Certainly not."

"Then let it be at night."

"But we shall surely require the concurrence of some of the church authorities."

"Nay, I do not see that," interposed Mr. Marchdale. "It is the vault actually vested in and belonging to yourself you wish to visit, and, therefore, you have right to visit it in any manner or at any time that may be most suitable to yourself."

"But detection in a clandestine visit might produce unpleasant consequences."

"The church is old," said George, "and we could easily find means of getting into it. There is only one objection that I see, just now, and that is, that we leave Flora unprotected."

"We do, indeed," said Henry. "I did not think of that."

"It must be put to herself, as a matter for her own consideration," said Mr. Marchdale, "if she will consider herself sufficiently safe with the company and protection of your mother only."

"It would be a pity were we not all three present at the examination of the coffin," remarked Henry.

"It would, indeed. There is ample evidence," said Mr. Marchdale, "but we must not give Flora a night of sleeplessness and uneasiness on that account, and the more particularly as we cannot well explain to her where we are going, or upon what errand."

"Certainly not."

"Let us talk to her, then, about it," said Henry. "I confess I am much bent upon the plan, and fain would not forego it; neither should

I like other than that we three should go together."

"If you determine, then, upon it," said Marchdale, "we will go to-night; and, from your acquaintance with the place, doubtless you will be able to decide what tools are necessary."

"There is a trap-door at the bottom of the pew," said Henry; "it is not only secured down, but it is locked likewise, and I have the key in my possession."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; immediately beneath is a short flight of stone steps, which conduct at once into the vault."

"Is it large?"

"No; about the size of a moderate chamber, and with no intricacies about it."

"There can be no difficulties, then."

"None whatever, unless we meet with actual personal interruption, which I am inclined to think is very far from likely. All we shall require will be a screwdriver, with which to remove the screws, and then something with which to wrench open the coffin."

"Those we can easily provide, along with lights," remarked Mr. Marchdale.

"I hope to Heaven that this visit to the tomb will have the effect of easing your minds, and enabling you to make a successful stand against the streaming torrent of evidence that has poured in upon us regarding this most fearful of apparitions."

"I do, indeed, hope so," added Henry; "and now I will go at once to Flora, and endeavour to convince her she is safe without us to-night."

"By-the-bye, I think," said Marchdale, "that if we can induce Mr. Chillingworth to come with us, it will be a great point gained in the investigation."

"He would," said Henry, "be able to come to an accurate decision with respect to the remains — if any — in the coffin, which we could not."

"Then have him, by all means," said George. "He did not seem averse last night to go on such an adventure."

"I will ask him when he makes his visit this morning upon Flora; and should he not feel disposed to join us, I am quite sure he will keep the secret of our visit."

All this being arranged, Henry proceeded to Flora, and told her that he and George, and Mr. Marchdale wished to go out for about a couple of hours in the evening after dark, if she felt sufficiently well to feel a sense of security without them.

Flora changed colour, and slightly trembled, and then, as if ashamed of her fears, she said, —

"Go, go; I will not detain you. Surely no harm can come to me in presence of my mother."

"We shall not be gone longer than the time I mention to you," said Henry.

"Oh, I shall be quite content. Besides, am I to be kept thus in fear all my life? Surely, surely not. I ought, too, to learn to defend myself."

Henry caught at the idea, as he said, —

"If fire-arms were left you, do you think you would have courage to use them?"

"I do, Henry."

"Then you shall have them; and let me beg of you to shoot any one without the least hesitation who shall come into your chamber."

"I will, Henry. If ever human being was justified in the use of deadly weapons, I am now. Heaven protect me from a repetition of the visit to which I have now been once subjected. Rather, oh, much rather would I die a hundred deaths than suffer what I have suffered."

"Do not allow it, dear Flora, to press too heavily upon your mind in dwelling upon it in conversation. I still entertain a sanguine expectation that something may arise to afford a far less dreadful explanation of what has occurred than what you have put upon it. Be of good cheer, Flora, we shall go one hour after sunset, and return in about two hours from the time at which we leave here, you may be assured."

Notwithstanding this ready and courageous acquiescence of Flora in the arrangement, Henry was not without his apprehension that when the night should come again, her fears would return with it; but he spoke to Mr. Chillingworth upon the subject, and got that gentleman's ready consent to accompany them.

He promised to meet them at the church porch exactly at nine o'clock, and matters were all arranged, and Henry waited with much eagerness and anxiety now for the coming night, which he hoped would dissipate one of the fearful deductions which his imagination had drawn from recent circumstances.

He gave to Flora a pair of pistols of his own, upon which he knew he could depend, and he took good care to load them well, so that there could be no likelihood whatever of their missing fire at a critical moment.

"Now, Flora," he said, "I have seen you use fire-arms when you were much younger than you are now, and therefore I need give you no instructions. If any intruder does come, and you do fire, be sure you take a good aim, and shoot low."

"I will, Henry, I will; and you will be back in two hours?"

"Most assuredly I will."

The day wore on, evening came, and then deepened into night. It turned out to be a cloudy night, and therefore the moon's brilliance was nothing near equal to what it had been on the preceding night Still, however, it had sufficient power over the vapours that frequently covered it for many minutes together, to produce a considerable light effect upon the face of nature, and the night was consequently very far, indeed, from what might be called a dark one.

George, Henry, and Marchdale, met in one of the lower rooms of the house, previous to starting upon their expedition; and after satisfying themselves that they had with them all the tools that were necessary, inclusive of the same small, but well-tempered iron crow-bar with which Marchdale had, on the night of the visit of the vampyre, forced open the door of Flora's chamber, they left the hall, and proceeded at a rapid pace towards the church.

"And Flora does not seem much alarmed," said Marchdale, "at being left alone?"

"No," replied Henry, "she has made up her mind with a strong natural courage which I knew was in her disposition to resist as much as possible the depressing effects of the awful visitation she has endured."

"It would have driven some really mad."

"It would, indeed; and her own reason tottered on its throne, but, thank Heaven, she has recovered."

"And I fervently hope that, through her life," added Marchdale, "she may never have such another trial."

"We will not for a moment believe that such a thing can occur twice."

"She is one among a thousand. Most young girls would never at all have recovered the fearful shock to the nerves."

"Not only has she recovered," said Henry, "but a spirit, which I am rejoiced to see, because it is one which will uphold her, of resistance now possesses her."

"Yes, she actually — I forgot to tell you before — but she actually asked me for arms to resist any second visitation."

"You much surprise me."

"Yes, I was surprised, as well as pleased, myself."

"I would have left her one of my pistols had I been aware of her having made such a request. Do you know if she can use fire-arms?"

"Oh, yes; well."

"What a pity. I have them both with me."

"Oh, she is provided."

"Provided?"

"Yes; I found some pistols which I used to take with me on the continent, and she has them both well loaded, so that if the vampyre makes his appearance, he is likely to meet with rather a warm reception."

"Good God! was it not dangerous?"

"Not at all, I think."

"Well, you know best, certainly, of course. I hope the vampyre may come, and that we may have the pleasure, when we return, of finding him dead. By-the-bye, I — I — . Bless me, I have forgot to get the materials for lights, which I pledged myself to do."

"How unfortunate."

"Walk on slowly, while I run back and get them."

"Oh, we are too far—"

"Hilloa!" cried a man at this moment, some distance in front of them.

“It is Mr. Chillingworth,” said Henry.

“Hilloa,” cried the worthy doctor again. “Is that you, my friend, Henry Bannerworth?”

“It is,” cried Henry.

Mr. Chillingworth now came up to them and said, —

“I was before my time, so rather than wait at the church porch, which would have exposed me to observation perhaps, I thought it better to walk on, and chance meeting with you.”

“You guessed we should come this way?’

“Yes, and so it turns out, really. It is unquestionably your most direct route to the church.”

“I think I will go back,” said Mr Marchdale.

“Back!” exclaimed the doctor; “what for?”

“I forgot the means of getting lights. We have candles, but no means of lighting them.”

“Make yourselves easy on that score,” said Mr. Chillingworth. “I am never without some chemical matches of my own manufacture, so that as you have the candles, that can be no bar to our going on a once.”

“That is fortunate,” said Henry.

“Very,” added Marchdale; “for it seems a mile’s hard walking for me, or at least half a mile from the hall. Let us now push on.”

They did push on, all four walking at a brisk pace. The church, although it belonged to the village, was not in it. On the contrary, it was situated at the end of a long lane, which was a mile nearly from the village, in the direction of the hall, therefore, in going to it from the hall, that amount of distance was saved, although it was always called and considered the village church.

It stood alone, with the exception of a glebe house and two cottages, that were occupied by persons who held situations about the sacred edifice, and who were supposed, being on the spot, to keep watch and ward over it.

It was an ancient building of the early English style of architecture, or rather Norman, with one of those antique, square, short towers, built of flint stones firmly embedded in cement, which, from time, had acquired almost the consistency of stone itself. There were numerous arched windows, partaking something of the more florid gothic style, although scarcely ornamental enough to be called such. The edifice stood in the centre of a grave-yard, which extended over a space of about half an acre, and altogether it was one of the prettiest and most rural old churches within many miles of the spot.

Many a lover of the antique and of the picturesque, for it was both, went out of his way while travelling in the neighbourhood to look at it, and it had an extensive and well-deserved reputation as a fine specimen of its class and style of building.

In Kent, to the present day, are some fine specimens of the old Roman style of church, building; and, although they are as rapidly pulled down as the abuse of modern architects, and the cupidity of speculators, and the vanity of clergymen can possibly encourage, in older to erect flimsy, Italianised structures in their stead, yet sufficient of them remain dotted over England to interest the traveller. At Walesden there is a church of this description which will well repay a visit. This, then, was the kind of building into which it was the intention of our four friends to penetrate, not on an unholy, or an unjustifiable errand, but on one which, proceeding from good and proper motives, it was highly desirable to conduct in as secret a manner as possible.

The moon was more densely covered by clouds than it had yet been that evening, when they reached the little wicket-gate which led into the churchyard, through which was a regularly used thoroughfare.

"We have a favourable night," remarked Henry, "for we are not so likely to be disturbed."

"And now, the question is, how are we to get in?" said Mr. Chillingworth, as he paused, and glanced up at the ancient building.

"The doors," said George, "would effectually resist us."

"How can it be done, then?"

"The only way I can think of," said Henry, "is to get out one of the small diamond-shaped panes of glass from one of the low windows, and then we can one of us put in our hands, and undo the fastening, which is very simple, when the window opens like a door, and it is but a step into the church."

"A good way," said Marchdale. "We will lose no time."

They walked round the church till they came to a very low window indeed, near to an angle of the wall, where a huge abutment struck far out into the burial-ground.

"Will you do it, Henry?" said George.

"Yes. I have often noticed the fastenings. Just give me a slight hoist up, and all will be right."

George did so, and Henry with his knife easily bent back some of the leadwork which held in one of the panes of glass, and then got it out whole. He handed it down to George, saying, —

"Take this, George. We can easily replace it when we leave, so that there can be no signs left of any one having been here at all."

George took the piece of thick, dim-coloured glass, and in another moment Henry had succeeded in opening the window, and the mode of ingress to the old church was fair and easy before them all, had there been ever so many.

"I wonder," said Marchdale, "that a place so inefficiently protected has never been robbed."

"No wonder at all," remarked Mr. Chillingworth. "There is nothing to take that I am aware of that would repay anybody the trouble of taking."

"Indeed!"

"Not an article. The pulpit, to be sure, is covered with faded velvet; but beyond that, and an old box, in which I believe nothing is left but some books, I think there is no temptation."

"And that, Heaven knows, is little enough, then."

"Come on," said Henry. "Be careful; there is nothing beneath the window, and the depth is about two feet."

Thus guided, they all got fairly into the sacred edifice, and then Henry closed the window, and fastened it on the inside as he said, —

"We have nothing to do now but to set to work opening a way into the vault, and I trust that Heaven will pardon me for thus desecrating the tomb of my ancestors, from a consideration of the object I have in view by so doing."

"It does seem wrong thus to tamper with the secrets of the tomb," remarked Mr. Marchdale.

"The secrets of a fiddlestick!" said the doctor. "What secrets has the tomb I wonder?"

"Well, but, my dear sir—"

"Nay, my dear sir, it is high time that death, which is, then, the inevitable fate of us all, should be regarded with more philosophic eyes than it is. There are no secrets in the tomb but such as may well be endeavoured to be kept secret."

"What do you mean?"

"There is one which very probably we shall find unpleasantly revealed."

"Which is that?"

"The not over pleasant odour of decomposed animal remains — beyond that I know of nothing of a secret nature that the tomb can show us."

"Ah, your profession hardens you to such matters."

"And a very good thing that it does, or else, if all men were to look upon a dead body as something almost too dreadful to look upon, and by far too horrible to touch, surgery would lose its value, and crime, in many instances of the most obnoxious character, would go unpunished."

"If we have a light here," said Henry, "we shall run the greatest chance in the world of being seen, for the church has many windows."

"Do not have one, then, by any means," said Mr. Chillingworth. "A match held low down in the pew may enable us to open the vault."

"That will be the only plan."

Henry led them to the pew which belonged to his family, and in the floor of which was the trap door.

"When was it last opened?" inquired Marchdale.

"When my father died," said Henry; "some ten months ago now, I should think."

"The screws, then, have had ample time to fix themselves with fresh rust."

"Here is one of my chemical matches," said Mr. Chillingworth, as he suddenly irradiated the pew with a clear and beautiful flame, that lasted about a minute.

The heads of the screws were easily discernible, and the short time that the light lasted had enabled Henry to turn the key he had brought with him in the lock.

"I think that without a light now," he said, "I can turn the screws well."

"Can you?"

"Yes; there are but four."

"Try it, then."

Henry did so, and from the screws having very large heads, and being made purposely, for the convenience of removal when required, with deep indentations to receive the screw-driver, he found no difficulty in feeling for the proper places, and extracting the screws without any more light than was afforded to him from the general whitish aspect of the heavens.

"Now, Mr. Chillingworth," he said "another of your matches, if you please. I have all the screws so loose that I can pick them up with my fingers."

"Here," said the doctor.

In another moment the pew was as light as day, and Henry succeeded in taking out the few screws, which he placed in his pocket for their greater security, since, of course, the intention was to replace everything exactly as it was found, in order that not the least surmise should arise in the mind of any person that the vault had been opened, and visited for any purpose whatever, secretly or otherwise."

"Let us descend," said Henry. "There is no further obstacle, my friends. Let us descend."

"If any one," remarked George, in a whisper, as they slowly descended the stairs which conducted into the vault— "if any one had told me that I should be descending into a vault for the purpose of ascertaining if a dead body, which had been nearly a century there, was removed or not, and had become a vampyre, I should have denounced the idea as one of the most absurd that ever entered the brain of a human being."

"We are the very slaves of circumstances," said Marchdale, "and we never know what we may do, or what we may not. What appears to us so improbable as to border even upon the impossible at one time, is at another the only course of action which appears feasibly open to us to attempt to pursue."

They had now reached the vault, the floor of which was composed of flat red tiles, laid in tolerable order the one beside the other. As Henry had stated, the vault was by no means of large extent. Indeed, several of the apartments for the living, at the hall, were much larger than was that one destined for the dead.

The atmosphere was dump and noisome, but not by any means so bad as might have been expected, considering the number of months which had elapsed since last the vault was opened to receive one of its ghastly and still visitants.

"Now for one of your lights. Mr. Chillingworth. You say you have the candles, I think, Marchdale, although you forgot the matches."

"I have. They are here."

Marchdale took from his pocket a parcel which contained several wax candles, and when it was opened, a smaller packet fell to the ground.

"Why, these are instantaneous matches," said Mr. Chillingworth, as he lifted the small packet up.

"They are; and what a fruitless journey I should have had back to the hall," said Mr. Marchdale, "if you had not been so well provided as you are with the means of getting a light. These matches, which I thought I had not with me, have been, in the hurry of departure, enclosed, you see, with the candles. Truly, I should have hunted for them at home in vain."

Mr. Chillingworth lit the wax candle which was now handed to him by Marchdale, and in another moment the vault from one end of it to the other was quite clearly discernible.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE COFFIN. — THE ABSENCE OF THE DEAD. — THE MYSTERIOUS CIRCUMSTANCE, AND THE CONSTERNATION OF GEORGE.

They were all silent for a few moments as they looked around them with natural feelings of curiosity. Two of that party had of course never been in that vault at all, and the brothers, although they had descended into it upon the occasion, nearly a year before, of their father being placed in it, still looked upon it with almost as curious eyes as they who now had their first sight of it.

If a man be at all of a thoughtful or imaginative cast of mind, some curious sensations are sure to come over him, upon standing in such a place, where he knows around him lie, in the calmness of death, those in whose veins have flowed kindred blood to him — who bore the same name, and who preceded him in the brief drama of his existence, influencing his destiny and his position in life probably largely by their actions compounded of their virtues and their vices.

Henry Bannerworth and his brother George were just the kind of persons to feel strongly such sensations. Both were reflective, imaginative, educated young men, and, as the light from the wax candle flashed upon their faces, it was evident how deeply they felt the situation in which they were placed.

Mr. Chillingworth and Marchdale were silent. They both knew what was passing in the minds of the brothers, and they had too much delicacy to interrupt a train of thought which, although from having no affinity with the dead who lay around, they could not share in, yet they respected. Henry at length, with a sudden start, seemed to recover himself from his reverie.

"This is a time for action, George," he said, "and not for romantic thought. Let us proceed."

"Yes, yes," said George, and he advanced a step towards the centre of the vault.

"Can you find out among all these coffins, for there seem to be nearly twenty," said Mr. Chillingworth, "which is the one we seek?"

"I think we may," replied Henry. "Some of the earlier coffins of our race, I know, were made of marble, and others of metal, both of which materials, I expect, would withstand the encroaches of time for a hundred years, at least."

"Let us examine," said George.

There were shelves or niches built into the walls all round, on which the coffins were placed, so that there could not be much difficulty in a minute examination of them all, the one after the other.

When, however, they came to look, they found that "decay's offensive fingers" had been more busy than they could have imagined, and that whatever they touched of the earlier coffins crumbled into dust before their very fingers.

In some cases the inscriptions were quite illegible, and, in others, the plates that had borne them had fallen on to the floor of the vault, so that it was impossible to say to which coffin they belonged.

Of course, the more recent and fresh-looking coffins they did not examine, because they could not have anything to do with the object of that melancholy visit.

"We shall arrive at no conclusion," said George. "All seems to have rotted away among those coffins where we might expect to find the one belonging to Marmaduke Bannerworth, our ancestor."

"Here is a coffin plate," said Marchdale, taking one from the floor.

He handed it to Mr. Chillingworth, who, upon an inspection of it, close to the light, exclaimed, —

"It must have belonged to the coffin you seek."

"What says it?"

"Ye mortale remains of Marmaduke Bannerworth, Yeoman. God reste his soule. A.D. 1540."

"It is the plate belonging to his coffin," said Henry, "and now our search is fruitless."

"It is so, indeed," exclaimed George, "for how can we tell to which of the coffins that have lost the plates this one really belongs?"

"I should not be so hopeless," said Marchdale. "I have, from time to time, in the pursuit of antiquarian lore, which I was once fond of, entered many vaults, and I have always observed that an inner coffin of metal was sound and good, while the outer one of wood had rotted away, and yielded at once to the touch of the first hand that was laid upon it."

"But, admitting that to be the case," said Henry, "how does that assist us in the identification of a coffin?"

"I have always, in my experience, found the name and rank of the deceased engraved upon the lid of the inner coffin, as well as being set forth in a much more perishable manner on the plate which was secured to the outer one."

"He is right," said Mr. Chillingworth. "I wonder we never thought of that. If your ancestor was buried in a leaden coffin, there will be no difficulty in finding which it is."

Henry seized the light, and proceeding to one of the coffins, which seemed to be a mass of decay, he pulled away some of the rotted wood work, and then suddenly exclaimed, —

"You are quite right. Here is a firm strong leaden coffin within, which, although quite black, does not otherwise appear to have suffered."

"What is the inscription on that?" said George.

With difficulty the name on the lid was deciphered, but it was found not to be the coffin of him whom they sought.

"We can make short work of this," said Marchdale, "by only examining those leaden coffins which have lost the plates from off their outer cases. There do not appear to be many in such a state."

He then, with another light, which he lighted from the one that Henry now carried, commenced actively assisting in the search, which was carried on silently for more than ten minutes.

Suddenly Mr. Marchdale cried, in a tone of excitement, —

"I have found it. It is here."

They all immediately surrounded the spot where he was, and then he pointed to the lid of a coffin, which he had been rubbing with his handkerchief, in order to make the inscription more legible, and said, —

"See. It is here."

By the combined light of the candles they saw the words, —

"Marmaduke Bannerworth, Yeoman, 1640."

"Yes, there can be no mistake here," said Henry. "This is the coffin, and it shall be opened."

"I have the iron crowbar here," said Marchdale. "It is an old friend of mine, and I am accustomed to the use of it. Shall I open the coffin?"

"Do so — do so," said Henry.

They stood around in silence, while Mr. Marchdale, with much care, proceeded to open the coffin, which seemed of great thickness, and was of solid lead.

It was probably the partial rotting of the metal, in consequence of the damps of that place, that made it easier to open the coffin than it otherwise would have been, but certain it was that the top came away remarkably easily. Indeed, so easily did it come off, that another supposition might have been hazarded, namely, that it had never at all been effectually fastened.

The few moments that elapsed were ones of very great suspense to every one there present; and it would, indeed, be quite sure to assert, that all the world was for the time forgotten in the absorbing interest which appertained to the affair which was in progress.

The candles were now both held by Mr. Chillingworth, and they were so held as to cast a full and clear light upon the coffin. Now the lid slid off, and Henry eagerly gazed into the interior.

There lay something certainly there, and an audible “Thank God!” escaped his lips.

“The body is there!” exclaimed George.

“All right,” said Marchdale, “here it is. There is something, and what else can it be?”

“Hold the lights,” said Mr. Chillingworth; “hold the lights, some of you; let us be quite certain.”

George took the lights, and Mr. Chillingworth, without any hesitation, dipped his hands at once into the coffin, and took up some fragments of rags which were there. They were so rotten, that they fell to pieces in his grasp, like so many pieces of tinder.

There was a death-like pause for some few moments, and then Mr. Chillingworth said, in a low voice, —

“There is not the least vestige of a dead body here.”

Henry gave a deep groan, as he said, —

"Mr. Chillingworth, can you take upon yourself to say that no corpse has undergone the process of decomposition in this coffin?"

"To answer your question exactly, as probably in your hurry you have worded it," said Mr. Chillingworth, "I cannot take upon myself to say any such thing; but this I can say, namely, that in this coffin there are no animal remains, and that it is quite impossible that any corpse enclosed here could, in any lapse of time, have so utterly and entirely disappeared."

"I am answered," said Henry.

"Good God!" exclaimed George, "and has this but added another damning proof, to those we have already on our minds, of one of the must dreadful superstitions that ever the mind of man conceived?"

"It would seem so," said Marchdale, sadly.

"Oh, that I were dead! This is terrible. God of heaven, why are these things? Oh, if I were but dead, and so spared the torture of supposing such things possible."

"Think again, Mr. Chillingworth; I pray you think again," cried Marchdale.

"If I were to think for the remainder of my existence," he replied, "I could come to no other conclusion. It is not a matter of opinion; it is a matter of fact."

"You are positive, then," said Henry, "that the dead body of Marmaduke Bannerworth is not rested here?"

"I am positive. Look for yourselves. The lead is but slightly discoloured; it looks tolerably clean and fresh; there is not a vestige of putrefaction — no bones, no dust even."

They did all look for themselves, and the most casual glance was sufficient to satisfy the most sceptical.

"All is over," said Henry; "let us now leave this place; and all I can now ask of you, my friends, is to lock this dreadful secret deep in your own hearts."

"It shall never pass my lips," said Marchdale.

"Nor mine, you may depend," said the doctor. "I was much in hopes that this night's work would have had the effect of dissipating, instead of adding to, the gloomy fancies that now possess you."

"Good heavens!" cried George, "can you call them fancies, Mr. Chillingworth?"

"I do, indeed."

"Have you yet a doubt?"

"My young friend, I told you from the first, that I would not believe in your vampyre; and I tell you now, that if one was to come and lay hold of me by the throat, as long as I could at all gasp for breath I would tell him he was a d —— d impostor."

"This is carrying incredulity to the verge of obstinacy."

"Far beyond it, if you please."

"You will not be convinced?" said Marchdale.

"I most decidedly, on this point, will not."

"Then you are one who would doubt a miracle, if you saw it with your own eyes."

"I would, because I do not believe in miracles. I should endeavour to find some rational and some scientific means of accounting for the phenomenon, and that's the very reason why we have no miracles now-a-days, between you and I, and no prophets and saints, and all that sort of thing."

"I would rather avoid such observations in such a place as this," said Marchdale.

"Nay, do not be the moral coward," cried Mr. Chillingworth, "to make your opinions, or the expression of them, dependent upon any certain locality."

"I know not what to think," said Henry; "I am bewildered quite. Let us now come away."

Mr. Marchdale replaced the lid of the coffin, and then the little party moved towards the staircase. Henry turned before he ascended, and glanced back into the vault.

"Oh," he said, "if I could but think there had been some mistake, some error of judgment, on which the mind could rest for hope."

"I deeply regret," said Marchdale, "that I so strenuously advised this expedition. I did hope that from it would have resulted much good."

"And you had every reason so to hope," said Chillingworth. "I advised it likewise, and I tell you that its result perfectly astonishes me, although I will not allow myself to embrace at once all the conclusions to which it would seem to lead me."

"I am satisfied," said Henry; "I know you both advised me for the best. The curse of Heaven seems now to have fallen upon me and my house."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Chillingworth. "What for?"

"Alas! I know not."

"Then you may depend that Heaven would never act so oddly. In the first place, Heaven don't curse anybody; and, in the second, it is too just to inflict pain where pain is not amply deserved."

They ascended the gloomy staircase of the vault. The countenances of both George and Henry were very much saddened, and it was quite evident that their thoughts were by far too busy to enable them to enter into any conversation. They did not, and particularly George, seem to hear all that was said to them. Their intellects seemed almost stunned by the unexpected circumstance of the disappearance of the body of their ancestor.

All along they had, although almost unknown to themselves, felt a sort of conviction that they must find some remains of Marmaduke Bannerworth, which would render the supposition, even in the most superstitious minds, that he was the vampyre, a thing totally and physically impossible.

But now the whole question assumed a far more bewildering shape. The body was not in its coffin — it had not there quietly slept the long sleep of death common to humanity. Where was it then? What had become of it? Where, how, and under what circumstances had it been removed? Had it itself burst the bands that held it, and hideously stalked forth into the world again to make one of its seeming inhabitants, and kept up for a hundred years a dreadful existence by such adventures as it had consummated at the hall, where, in the course of ordinary human life, it had once lived?

All these were questions which irresistibly pressed themselves upon the consideration of Henry and his brother. They were awful questions.

And yet, take any sober, sane, thinking, educated man, and show him all that they had seen, subject him to all to which they had been subjected, and say if human reason, and all the arguments that the subtlest brain could back it with, would be able to hold out against such a vast accumulation of horrible evidences, and say— "I don't believe it."

Mr. Chillingworth's was the only plan. He would not argue the question. He said at once, —

"I will not believe this thing — upon this point I will yield to no evidence whatever."

That was the only way of disposing of such a question; but there are not many who could so dispose of it, and not one so much interested in it as were the brothers Bannerworth, who could at all hope to get into such a state of mind.

The boards were laid carefully down again, and the screws replaced. Henry found himself unequal to the task, so it was done by Marchdale, who took pains to replace everything in the same state in which they had found it, even to the laying even the matting at the bottom of the pew.

Then they extinguished the light, and, with heavy hearts, they all walked towards the window, to leave the sacred edifice by the same means they had entered it.

"Shall we replace the pane of glass?" said Marchdale.

"Oh, it matters not — it matters not," said Henry, listlessly; "nothing matters now. I care not what becomes of me — I am getting weary of a life which now must be one of misery and dread."

"You must not allow yourself to fall into such a state of mind as this," said the doctor, "or you will become a patient of mine very quickly."

"I cannot help it."

"Well, but be a man. If there are serious evils affecting you, fight out against them the best way you can."

"I cannot."

"Come, now, listen to me. We need not, I think, trouble ourselves about the pane of glass, so come along."

He took the arm of Henry and walked on with him a little in advance of the others.

"Henry," he said, "the best way, you may depend, of meeting evils, be they great or small, is to get up an obstinate feeling of defiance against them. Now, when anything occurs which is uncomfortable to me, I endeavour to convince myself, and I have no great difficulty in doing so, that I am a decidedly injured man."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; I get very angry, and that gets up a kind of obstinacy, which makes me not feel half so much mental misery as would be my portion, if I were to succumb to the evil, and commence whining over it, as many people do, under the pretence of being resigned."

"But this family affliction of mine transcends anything that anybody else ever endured."

"I don't know that; but it is a view of the subject which, if I were you, would only make me more obstinate."

"What can I do?"

"In the first place, I would say to myself, 'There may or there may not be supernatural beings, who, from some physical derangement of the ordinary nature of things, make themselves obnoxious to living people; if there are, d — n them! There may be vampyres; and if there are, I defy them.' Let the imagination paint its very worst terrors; let fear do what it will and what it can in peopling the mind with horrors. Shrink from nothing, and even then I would defy them all."

"Is not that like defying Heaven?"

"Most certainly not; for in all we say and in all we do we act from the impulses of that mind which is given to us by Heaven itself. If Heaven creates an intellect and a mind of a certain order, Heaven will not quarrel that it does the work which it was adapted to do."

"I know these are your opinions. I have heard you mention them before."

"They are the opinions of every rational person. Henry Bannerworth, because they will stand the test of reason; and what I urge upon you is, not to allow yourself to be mentally prostrated, even if a vampyre has paid a visit to your house. Defy him, say I — fight him. Self-preservation is a great law of nature, implanted in all our hearts; do you summon it to your aid."

"I will endeavour to think as you would have me. I thought more than once of summoning religion to my aid."

"Well, that is religion."

"Indeed!"

"I consider so, and the most rational religion of all. All that we read about religion that does not seem expressly to agree with it, you may consider as an allegory."

"But, Mr. Chillingworth, I cannot and will not renounce the sublime truths of Scripture. They may be incomprehensible; they may be inconsistent; and some of them may look ridiculous; but still they are sacred and sublime, and I will not renounce them although my reason may not accord with them, because they are the laws of Heaven."

No wonder this powerful argument silenced Mr. Chillingworth, who was one of those characters in society who hold most dreadful opinions, and who would destroy religious beliefs, and all the different sects in the world, if they could, and endeavour to introduce instead some horrible system of human reason and profound philosophy.

But how soon the religious man silences his opponent; and let it not be supposed that, because his opponent says no more upon the subject, he does so because he is disgusted with the stupidity of the other; no, it is because he is completely beaten, and has nothing more to say.

The distance now between the church and the hall was nearly traversed, and Mr. Chillingworth, who was a very good man, notwithstanding his disbelief in certain things of course paved the way for him to hell, took a kind leave of Mr. Marchdale and the brothers, promising to call on the following morning and see Flora.

Henry and George then, in earnest conversation with Marchdale, proceeded homewards. It was evident that the scene in the vault had made a deep and saddening impression upon them, and one which was not likely easily to be eradicated.

CHAPTER IX.

THE OCCURRENCES OF THE NIGHT AT THE HALL. — THE SECOND APPEARANCE OF THE VAMPYRE, AND THE PISTOL-SHOT.

Despite the full and free consent which Flora had given to her brothers to entrust her solely to the care of her mother and her own courage at the hall, she felt greater fear creep over her after they were gone than she chose to acknowledge.

A sort of presentiment appeared to come over her that some evil was about to occur, and more than once she caught herself almost in the act of saying, —

"I wish they had not gone."

Mrs. Bannerworth, too, could not be supposed to be entirely destitute of uncomfortable feelings, when she came to consider how poor a guard she was over her beautiful child, and how much terror might even deprive of the little power she had, should the dreadful visitor again make his appearance.

"But it is but for two hours," thought Flora, "and two hours will soon pass away."

There was, too, another feeling which gave her some degree of confidence, although it arose from a bad source, inasmuch as it was one which showed powerfully how much her mind was dwelling on the particulars of the horrible belief in the class of supernatural beings, one of whom she believed had visited her.

That consideration was this. The two hours of absence from the hall of its male inhabitants, would be from nine o'clock until eleven, and those were not the two hours during which she felt that she would be most timid on account of the vampyre.

"It was after midnight before," she thought, "when it came, and perhaps it may not be able to come earlier. It may not have the power, until that time, to make its hideous visits, and, therefore, I will believe myself safe."

She had made up her mind not to go to bed until the return of her brothers, and she and her mother sat in a small room that was used as a breakfast-room, and which had a latticed window that opened on to the lawn.

This window had in the inside strong oaken shutters, which had been fastened as securely as their construction would admit of some time before the departure of the brothers and Mr. Marchdale on that melancholy expedition, the object of which, if it had been known to her, would have added so much to the terrors of poor Flora.

It was not even guessed at, however remotely, so that she had not the additional affliction of thinking, that while she was sitting there, a prey to all sorts of imaginative terrors, they were perhaps gathering fresh evidence, as, indeed, they were, of the dreadful reality of the appearance which, but for the collateral circumstances attendant upon its coming and its going, she would fain have persuaded herself was but the vision of a dream.

It was before nine that the brothers started, but in her own mind Flora gave them to eleven, and when she heard ten o'clock sound from a clock which stood in the hall, she felt pleased to think that in another hour they would surely be at home.

"My dear," said her mother, "you look more like yourself, now."

"Do, I, mother?"

"Yes, you are well again."

"Ah, if I could forget—"

"Time, my dear Flora, will enable you to do so, and all the fear of what made you so unwell will pass away. You will soon forget it all."

"I will hope to do so."

"Be assured that, some day or another, something will occur, as Henry says, to explain all that has happened, in some way consistent with reason and the ordinary nature of things, my dear Flora."

"Oh, I will cling to such a belief; I will get Henry, upon whose judgment I know I can rely, to tell me so, and each time that I hear such words from his lips, I will contrive to dismiss some portion of the terror which now, I cannot but confess, clings to my heart."

Flora laid her hand upon her mother's arm, and in a low, anxious tone of voice, said,— "Listen, mother."

Mrs. Bannerworth turned pale, as she said,— "Listen to what, dear?"

"Within these last ten minutes," said Flora, "I have thought three or four times that I heard a slight noise without. Nay, mother, do not tremble — it may be only fancy."

Flora herself trembled, and was of a death-like paleness; once or twice she passed her hand across her brow, and altogether she presented a picture of much mental suffering.

They now conversed in anxious whispers, and almost all they said consisted in anxious wishes for the return of the brothers and Mr. Marchdale.

"You will be happier and more assured, my dear, with some company," said Mrs. Bannerworth. "Shall I ring for the servants, and let them remain in the room with us, until they who are our best safeguards next to Heaven return?"

"Hush — hush — hush, mother!"

"What do you hear?"

"I thought — I heard a faint sound."

"I heard nothing, dear."

"Listen again, mother. Surely I could not be deceived so often. I have now, at least, six times heard a sound as if some one was outside by the windows."

"No, no, my darling, do not think; your imagination is active and in a state of excitement."

"It is, and yet—"

"Believe me, it deceives you."

"I hope to Heaven it does!"

There was a pause of some minutes' duration, and then Mrs. Bannerworth again urged slightly the calling of some of the servants, for she thought that their presence might have the effect of giving a different direction to her child's thoughts; but Flora saw her place her hand upon the bell, and she said, —

"No, mother, no — not yet, not yet. Perhaps I am deceived."

Mrs. Bannerworth upon this sat down, but no sooner had she done so than she heartily regretted she had not rung the bell, for, before, another word could be spoken, there came too perceptibly upon their ears for there to be any mistake at all about it, a strange scratching noise upon the window outside.

A faint cry came from Flora's lips, as she exclaimed, in a voice of great agony, —

"Oh, God! — oh, God! It has come again!"

Mrs. Bannerworth became faint, and unable to move or speak at all; she could only sit like one paralysed, and unable to do more than listen to and see what was going on.

The scratching noise continued for a few seconds, and then altogether ceased. Perhaps, under ordinary circumstances, such a sound outside the window would have scarcely afforded food for comment at all, or, if it had, it would have been attributed to some natural effect, or to the exertions of some bird or animal to obtain admittance to the house.

But there had occurred now enough in that family to make any little sound of wonderful importance, and these things which before would have passed completely unheeded, at all events without creating much alarm, were now invested with a fearful interest.

When the scratching noise ceased, Flora spoke in a low, anxious whisper, as she said, —

"Mother, you heard it then?"

Mrs. Bannerworth tried to speak, but she could not; and then suddenly, with a loud clash, the bar, which on the inside appeared to fasten the shutters strongly, fell as if by some invisible agency, and the shutters now, but for the intervention of the window, could be easily pushed open from without.

Mrs. Bannerworth covered her face with her hands, and, after rocking to and fro for a moment, she fell off her chair, having fainted with the excess of terror that came over her.

For about the space of time in which a fast speaker could count twelve, Flora thought her reason was leaving her, but it did not. She found herself recovering; and there she sat, with her eyes fixed upon the window, looking more like some exquisitely-chiselled statue of despair than a being of flesh and blood, expecting each moment to have its eyes blasted by some horrible appearance, such as might be supposed to drive her to madness.

And now again came the strange knocking or scratching against the glass of the window.

This continued for some minutes, during which it appeared likewise to Flora that some confusion was going on at another part of the house, for she fancied she heard voices and the banging of doors.

It seemed to her as if she must have sat looking at the shutters of that window a long time before she saw them shake, and then one wide hinged portion of them slowly opened.

Once again horror appeared to be on the point of producing madness in her brain, and then, as before, a feeling of calmness rapidly ensued.

She was able to see plainly that something was by the window, but what it was she could not plainly discern, in consequence of the lights she had in the room. A few moments, however, sufficed to settle that mystery, for the window was opened and a figure stood before her.

One glance, one terrified glance, in which her whole soul was concentrated, sufficed to shew her who and what the figure was. There was the tall, gaunt form — there was the faded ancient apparel — the lustrous metallic-looking eyes — its half-opened month, exhibiting the tusk-like teeth! It was — yes, it was — *the vampyre!*

It stood for a moment gazing at her, and then in the hideous way it had attempted before to speak, it apparently endeavoured to utter some words which it could not make articulate to human ears. The pistols lay before Flora. Mechanically she raised one, and pointed it at the figure. It advanced a step, and then she pulled the trigger.

A stunning report followed. There was a loud cry of pain, and the vampyre fled. The smoke and the confusion that was incidental to the spot prevented her from seeing if the figure walked or ran away. She thought she heard a crashing sound among the plants outside the window, as if it had fallen, but she did not feel quite sure.

It was no effort of any reflection, but a purely mechanical movement, that made her raise the other pistol, and discharge that likewise in the direction the vampyre had taken. Then casting the weapon away, she rose, and made a frantic rush from the room. She opened the door, and was dashing out, when she found herself caught in the circling arms of some one who either had been there waiting, or who had just at that moment got there.

The thought that it was the vampyre, who by some mysterious means, had got there, and was about to make her his prey, now overcame her completely, and she sunk into a state of utter insensibility on the moment.

CHAPTER X.

THE RETURN FROM THE VAULT. — THE ALARM, AND THE SEARCH AROUND THE HALL.

It so happened that George and Henry Bannerworth, along with Mr. Marchdale, had just reached the gate which conducted into the garden of the mansion when they all were alarmed by the report of a pistol. Amid the stillness of the night, it came upon them with so sudden a shock, that they involuntarily paused, and there came from the lips of each an expression of alarm.

"Good heavens!" cried George, "can that be Flora firing at any intruder?"

"It must be," cried Henry; "she has in her possession the only weapons in the house."

Mr. Marchdale turned very pale, and trembled slightly, but he did not speak.

"On, on," cried Henry; "for God's sake, let us hasten on."

As he spoke, he cleared the gate at a bound, and at a terrific pace he made towards the house, passing over beds, and plantations, and flowers heedlessly, so that he went the most direct way to it.

Before, however, it was possible for any human speed to accomplish even half of the distance, the report of the other shot came upon his ears, and he even fancied he heard the bullet whistle past his head in tolerably close proximity. This supposition gave him a clue to the direction at all events from whence the shots proceeded, otherwise he knew not from which window they were fired, because it had not occurred to him, previous to leaving home, to inquire in which room Flora and his mother were likely to be seated waiting his return.

He was right as regarded the bullet. It was that winged messenger of death which had passed his head in such very dangerous proximity, and consequently he made with tolerable accuracy towards the open window from whence the shots had been fired.

The night was not near so dark as it had been, although even yet it was very far from being a light one, and he was soon enabled to see that there was a room, the window of which was wide open, and lights burning on the table within. He made towards it in a moment, and entered it. To his astonishment, the first objects he beheld were Flora and a stranger, who was now supporting her in his arms. To grapple him by the throat was the work of a moment, but the stranger cried aloud in a voice which sounded familiar to Harry, —

"Good God, are you all mad?"

Henry relaxed his hold, and looked in his face.

"Gracious heavens, it is Mr. Holland!" he said.

"Yes; did you not know me?"

Henry was bewildered. He staggered to a seat, and, in doing so, he saw his mother, stretched apparently lifeless upon the floor. To raise her was the work of a moment, and then Marchdale and George, who had followed him as fast as they could, appeared at the open window.

Such a strange scene as that small room now exhibited had never been equalled in Bannerworth Hall. There was young Mr. Holland, of whom mention has already been made, as the affianced lover of Flora, supporting her fainting form. There was Henry doing equal service to his mother; and on the floor lay the two pistols, and one of the candles which had been upset in the confusion; while the terrified attitudes of George and Mr. Marchdale at the window completed the strange-looking picture.

"What is this — oh! what has happened?" cried George.

"I know not — I know not," said Henry. "Some one summon the servants; I am nearly mad."

Mr. Marchdale at once rung the bell, for George looked so faint and ill as to be incapable of doing so; and he rung it so loudly and so effectually, that the two servants who had been employed suddenly upon the others leaving came with much speed to know what was the matter.

"See to your mistress," said Henry. "She is dead, or has fainted. For God's sake, let who can give me some account of what has caused all this confusion here."

"Are you aware, Henry," said Marchdale, "that a stranger is present in the room?"

He pointed to Mr. Holland as he spoke, who, before Henry could reply, said, —

"Sir, I may be a stranger to you, as you are to me, and yet no stranger to those whose home this is."

"No, no," said Henry, "you are no stronger to us, Mr. Holland, but are thrice welcome — none can be more welcome. Mr. Marchdale, this is Mr Holland, of whom you have heard me speak."

"I am proud to know you, sir," said Marchdale.

"Sir, I thank you," replied Holland, coldly.

It will so happen; but, at first sight, it appeared as if those two persons had some sort of antagonistic feeling towards each other, which threatened to prevent effectually their ever becoming intimate friends.

The appeal of Henry to the servants to know if they could tell him what had occurred was answered in the negative. All they knew was that they had heard two shots fired, and that, since then, they had remained where they were, in a great fright, until the bell was rung violently. This was no news at all and, therefore, the only chance was, to wait patiently for the recovery of the mother, or of Flora, from one or the other of whom surely some information could be at once then procured.

Mrs. Bannerworth was removed to her own room, and so would Flora have been; but Mr. Holland, who was supporting her in his arms, said, —

"I think the air from the open window is recovering her, and it is likely to do so. Oh, do not now take her from me, after so long an absence. Flora, Flora, look up; do you not know me? You have not yet given me one look of acknowledgment. Flora, dear Flora!"

The sound of his voice seemed to act as the most potent of charms in restoring her to consciousness; it broke through the death-like trance in which she lay, and, opening her beautiful eyes, she fixed them upon his face, saying, —

"Yes, yes; it is Charles — it is Charles."

She burst into a hysterical flood of tears, and clung to him like some terrified child to its only friend in the whole wide world.

"Oh, my dear friends," cried Charles Holland, "do not deceive me; has Flora been ill?"

"We have all been ill," said George.

"All ill?"

"Ay, and nearly mad," exclaimed Harry.

Holland looked from one to the other in surprise, as well he might, nor was that surprise at all lessened when Flora made an effort to extricate herself from his embrace, as she exclaimed, —

"You must leave me — you must leave me, Charles, for ever! Oh! never, never look upon my face again!"

"I — I am bewildered," said Charles.

"Leave me, now," continued Flora; "think me unworthy; think what you will, Charles, but I cannot, I dare not, now be yours."

"Is this a dream?"

"Oh, would it were. Charles, if we had never met, you would be happier — I could not be more wretched."

"Flora, Flora, do you say these words of so great cruelty to try my love?"

"No, as Heaven is my judge, I do not."

"Gracious Heaven, then, what do they mean?"

Flora shuddered, and Henry, coming up to her, took her hand in his tenderly, as he said, —

"Has it been again?"

"It has."

"You shot it?"

"I fired full upon it, Henry, but it fled."

"It did — fly?"

"It did, Henry, but it will come again — it will be sure to come again."

"You — you hit it with the bullet?" interposed Mr. Marchdale. "Perhaps you killed it?"

"I think I must have hit it, unless I am mad."

Charles Holland looked from one to the other with such a look of intense surprise, that George remarked it, and said at once to him, —

"Mr. Holland, a full explanation is due to you, and you shall have it."

"You seem the only rational person here," said Charles. "Pray what is it that everybody calls '*it*?'"

"Hush — hush!" said Henry; "you shall hear soon, but not at present."

"Hear me, Charles," said Flora. "From this moment mind, I do release you from every vow, from every promise made to me of constancy and love; and if you are wise, Charles, and will be advised, you will now this moment leave this house never to return to it."

"No," said Charles— "no; by Heaven I love you, Flora! I have come to say again all that in another clime I said with joy to you. When I forget you, let what trouble may oppress you, may God forget me, and my own right hand forget to do me honest service."

"Oh! no more — no more!" sobbed Flora.

"Yes, much more, if you will tell me of words which shall be stronger than others in which to paint my love, my faith, and my constancy."

"Be prudent," said Henry. "Say no more."

"Nay, upon such a theme I could speak for ever. You may cast me off, Flora; but until you tell me you love another, I am yours till the death, and then with a sanguine hope at my heart that we shall meet again, never, dearest, to part."

Flora sobbed bitterly.

"Oh!" she said, "this is the unkindest blow of all — this is worse than all."

"Unkind!" echoed Holland.

"Heed her not," said Henry; "she means not you."

"Oh, no — no!" she cried. "Farewell, Charles — dear Charles."

"Oh, say that word again!" he exclaimed, with animation. "It is the first time such music has met my ears."

"It must be the last."

"No, no — oh, no."

"For your own sake I shall be able now, Charles, to show you that

I really loved you."

"Not by casting me from you?"

"Yes, even so. That will be the way to show you that I love you."

She held up her hands wildly, as she added, in an excited voice, —

"The curse of destiny is upon me! I am singled out as one lost and accursed. Oh, horror — horror! would that I were dead!"

Charles staggered back a pace or two until he came to the table, at which he clutched for support. He turned very pale as he said, in a faint voice, —

"Is — is she mad, or am I?"

"Tell him I am mad, Henry," cried Flora. "Do not, oh, do not make his lonely thoughts terrible with more than that. Tell him I am mad."

"Come with me," whispered Henry to Holland. "I pray you come with me at once, and you shall know all."

"I — will."

"George, stay with Flora for a time. Come, come, Mr. Holland, you ought, and you shall know all; then you can come to a judgment for yourself. This way, sir. You cannot, in the wildest freak of your imagination, guess that which I have now to tell you."

Never was mortal man so utterly bewildered by the events of the last hour of his existence as was now Charles Holland, and truly he might well be so. He had arrived in England, and made what speed he could to the house of a family whom he admired for their intelligence, their high culture, and in one member of which his whole thoughts of domestic happiness in this world were centered, and he found nothing but confusion, incoherence, mystery, and the wildest dismay.

Well might he doubt if he were sleeping or waking — well might he ask if he or they were mad.

And now, as, after a long, lingering look of affection upon the pale, suffering face of Flora, he followed Henry from the room, his thoughts were busy in fancying a thousand vague and wild imaginations with respect to the communication which was promised to be made to him.

But, as Henry had truly said to him, not in the wildest freak of his imagination could he conceive of any thing near the terrible strangeness and horror of that which he had to tell him, and consequently he found himself closeted with Henry in a small private room, removed from the domestic part of the hall, to the full in as bewildered a state as he had been from the first.

CHAPTER XI.

THE COMMUNICATIONS TO THE LOVER. — THE HEART’S DESPAIR.

Consternation is sympathetic, and any one who had looked upon the features of Charles Holland, now that he was seated with Henry Bannerworth, in expectation of a communication which his fears told him was to blast all his dearest and most fondly cherished hopes for ever, would scarce have recognised in him the same young man who, one short hour before, had knocked so loudly, and so full of joyful hope and expectation, at the door of the hall.

But so it was. He knew Henry Bannerworth too well to suppose that any unreal cause could blanch his cheek. He knew Flora too well to imagine for one moment that caprice had dictated the, to him, fearful words of dismissal she had uttered to him.

Happier would it at that time have been for Charles Holland had she acted capriciously towards him, and convinced him that his true heart’s devotion had been cast at the feet of one unworthy of so really noble a gift. Pride would then have enabled him, no doubt, successfully to resist the blow. A feeling of honest and proper indignation at having his feelings trifled with, would, no doubt, have sustained him, but, alas! the case seemed widely different.

True, she implored him to think of her no more — no longer to cherish in his breast the fond dream of affection which had been its guest so long; but the manner in which she did so brought along with it an irresistible conviction, that she was making a noble sacrifice of her own feelings for him, from some cause which was involved in the profoundest mystery.

But now he was to hear all. Henry had promised to tell him, and as he looked into his pale, but handsomely intellectual face, he half dreaded the disclosure he yet panted to hear.

“Tell me all, Henry — tell me all,” he said. “Upon the words that come from your lips I know I can rely.”

“I will have no reservations with you,” said Henry, sadly. “You ought to know all, and you shall. Prepare yourself for the strangest revelation you ever heard.”

“Indeed!”

“Ay. One which in hearing you may well doubt; and one which, I hope, you will never find an opportunity of verifying.”

“You speak in riddles.”

“And yet speak truly, Charles. You heard with what a frantic vehemence Flora desired you to think no more of her?”

“I did — I did.”

“She was right. She is a noble-hearted girl for uttering those words. A dreadful incident in our family has occurred, which might well induce you to pause before uniting your fate with that of any member of it.”

“Impossible. Nothing can possibly subdue the feelings of affection I entertain for Flora. She is worthy of any one, and, as such, amid all changes — all mutations of fortune, she shall be mine.”

“Do not suppose that any change of fortune has produced the scene you were witness to.”

“Then, what else?”

“I will tell you, Holland. In all your travels, and in all your reading, did you ever come across anything about vampyres?”

“About what?” cried Charles, drawing his chair forward a little. “About what?”

"You may well doubt the evidence of your own ears, Charles Holland, and wish me to repeat what I said. I say, do you know anything about vampyres?"

Charles Holland looked curiously in Henry's face, and the latter immediately added, —

"I can guess what is passing in your mind at present, and I do not wonder at it. You think I must be mad."

"Well, really, Henry, your extraordinary question—"

"I knew it. Were I you, I should hesitate to believe the tale; but the fact is, we have every reason to believe that one member of our own family is one of those horrible preternatural beings called vampyres."

"Good God, Henry, can you allow your judgment for a moment to stoop to such a supposition?"

"That is what I have asked myself a hundred times; but, Charles Holland, the judgment, the feelings, and all the prejudices, natural and acquired, must succumb to actual ocular demonstration. Listen to me, and do not interrupt me. You shall know all, and you shall know it circumstantially."

Henry then related to the astonished Charles Holland all that had occurred, from the first alarm of Flora, up to that period when he, Holland, caught her in his arms as she was about to leave the room.

"And now," he said, in conclusion, "I cannot tell what opinion you may come to as regards these most singular events. You will recollect that here is the unbiassed evidence of four or five people to the facts, and, beyond that, the servants, who have seen something of the horrible visitor."

"You bewilder me, utterly," said Charles Holland.

"As we are all bewildered."

"But — but, gracious Heaven! it cannot be."

"It is."

"No — no. There is — there must be yet some dreadful mistake."

"Can you start any supposition by which we can otherwise explain any of the phenomena I have described to you? If you can, for Heaven's sake do so, and you will find no one who will cling to it with more tenacity than I."

"Any other species or kind of supernatural appearance might admit of argument; but this, to my perception, is too wildly improbable — too much at variance with all we see and know of the operations of nature."

"It is so. All that we have told ourselves repeatedly, and yet is all human reason at once struck down by the few brief words of— 'We have seen it.'"

"I would doubt my eyesight."

"One might; but many cannot be labouring under the same delusion."

"My friend, I pray you, do not make me shudder at the supposition that such a dreadful thing as this is at all possible."

"*I* am, believe me, Charles, most unwilling to oppress anyone with the knowledge of these evils; but you are so situated with us, that you ought to know, and you will clearly understand that you may, with perfect honour, now consider yourself free from all engagements you have entered into with Flora."

"No, no! By Heaven, no!"

"Yes, Charles. Reflect upon the consequences now of a union with such a family."

"Oh, Henry Bannerworth, can you suppose me so dead to all good feeling, so utterly lost to honourable impulses, as to eject from my heart her who has possession of it entirely, on such a ground as this?"

"You would be justified."

"Coldly justified in prudence I might be. There are a thousand circumstances in which a man may be justified in a particular course of action, and that course yet may be neither honourable nor just. I love Flora; and were she tormented by the whole of the supernatural world, I should still love her. Nay, it becomes, then, a higher and a nobler duty on my part to stand between her and those evils, if possible."

"Charles — Charles," said Henry, "I cannot of course refuse to you my meed of praise and admiration for your generosity of feeling; but, remember, if we are compelled, despite all our feelings and all our predilections to the contrary, to give in to a belief in the existence of vampyres, why may we not at once receive as the truth all that is recorded of them?"

"To what do you allude?"

"To this. That one who has been visited by a vampyre, and whose blood has formed a horrible repast for such a being, becomes, after death, one of the dreadful race, and visits others in the same way."

"Now this must be insanity," cried Charles.

"It bears the aspect of it, indeed," said Henry; "oh, that you could by some means satisfy yourself that I am mad."

"There may be insanity in this family," thought Charles, with such an exquisite pang of misery, that he groaned aloud.

"Already," added Henry, mournfully, "already the blighting influence of the dreadful tale is upon you, Charles. Oh, let me add my advice to Flora's entreaties. She loves you, and we all esteem you; fly, then, from us, and leave us to encounter our miseries alone. Fly from us, Charles Holland, and take with you our best wishes for happiness which you cannot know here."

"Never," cried Charles; "I devote my existence to Flora. I will not play the coward, and fly from one whom I love, on such grounds. I devote my life to her."

Henry could not speak for emotion for several minutes, and when at length, in a faltering voice, he could utter some words, he said, —

"God of heaven, what happiness is marred by these horrible events? What have we all done to be the victims of such a dreadful act of vengeance?"

"Henry, do not talk in that way," cried Charles. "Rather let us bend all our energies to overcoming the evil, than spend any time in useless lamentations. I cannot even yet give in to a belief in the existence of such a being as you say visited Flora."

"But the evidences."

"Look you here, Henry: until I am convinced that some things have happened which it is totally impossible could happen by any human means whatever, I will not ascribe them to supernatural influence."

"But what human means, Charles, could produce what I have now narrated to you?"

"I do not know, just at present, but I will give the subject the most attentive consideration. Will you accommodate me here for a time?"

"You know you are as welcome here as if the house were your own, and all that it contains."

"I believe so, most truly. You have no objection, I presume, to my conversing with Flora upon this strange subject?"

"Certainly not. Of course you will be careful to say nothing which can add to her fears."

"I shall be most guarded, believe me. You say that your brother

George, Mr. Chillingworth, yourself, and this Mr. Marchdale, have all been cognisant of the circumstances."

"Yes — yes."

"Then with the whole of them you permit me to hold free communication upon the subject?"

"Most certainly."

"I will do so then. Keep up good heart, Henry, and this affair, which looks so full of terror at first sight, may yet be divested of some of its hideous aspect."

"I am rejoiced, if anything can rejoice me now," said Henry, "to see you view the subject with so much philosophy."

"Why," said Charles, "you made a remark of your own, which enabled me, viewing the matter in its very worst and most hideous aspect, to gather hope."

"What was that?"

"You said, properly and naturally enough, that if ever we felt that there was such a weight of evidence in favour of a belief in the existence of vampyres that we are compelled to succumb to it, we might as well receive all the popular feelings and superstitions concerning them likewise."

"I did. Where is the mind to pause, when once we open it to the reception of such things?"

"Well, then, if that be the case, we will watch this vampyre and catch it."

"Catch it?"

"Yes; surely it can be caught; as I understand, this species of being is not like an apparition, that may be composed of thin air, and utterly impalpable to the human touch, but it consists of a revivified corpse."

"Yes, yes."

"Then it is tangible and destructible. By Heaven! if ever I catch a glimpse of any such thing, it shall drag me to its home, be that where it may, or I will make it prisoner."

"Oh, Charles! you know not the feeling of horror that will come across you when you do. You have no idea of how the warm blood will seem to curdle in your veins, and how you will be paralysed in every limb."

"Did you feel so?"

"I did."

"I will endeavour to make head against such feelings. The love of Flora shall enable me to vanquish them. Think you it will come again to-morrow?"

"I can have no thought the one way or the other."

"It may. We must arrange among us all, Henry, some plan of watching which, without completely prostrating our health and strength, will always provide that one shall be up all night and on the alert."

"It must be done."

"Flora ought to sleep with the consciousness now that she has ever at hand some intrepid and well-armed protector, who is not only himself prepared to defend her, but who can in a moment give an alarm to us all, in case of necessity requiring it."

"It would be a dreadful capture to make to seize a vampyre," said Henry.

"Not at all; it would be a very desirable one. Being a corpse revivified, it is capable of complete destruction, so as to render it no longer a scourge to any one."

"Charles, Charles, are you jesting with me, or do you really give any credence to the story?"

"My dear friend, I always make it a rule to take things at their worst, and then I cannot be disappointed. I am content to reason upon this matter as if the fact of the existence of a vampyre were thoroughly established, and then to think upon what is best to be done about it."

"You are right."

"If it should turn out then that there is an error in the fact, well and good — we are all the better off; but if otherwise, we are prepared, and armed at all points."

"Let it be so, then. It strikes me, Charles, that you will be the coolest and the calmest among us all on this emergency; but the hour now waxes late, I will get them to prepare a chamber for you, and at least to-night, after what has occurred already, I should think we can be under no apprehension."

"Probably not. But, Henry, if you would allow me to sleep in that room where the portrait hangs of him whom you suppose to be the vampyre, I should prefer it."

"Prefer it!"

"Yes; I am not one who courts danger for danger's sake, but I would rather occupy that room, to see if the vampyre, who perhaps has a partiality for it, will pay me a visit."

"As you please, Charles. You can have the apartment. It is in the same state as when occupied by Flora. Nothing has been, I believe, removed from it."

"You will let me, then, while I remain here, call it my room?"

"Assuredly."

This arrangement was accordingly made to the surprise of all the household, not one of whom would, indeed, have slept, or attempted to sleep there for any amount of reward. But Charles Holland had his own reasons for preferring that chamber, and he was conducted to it in the course of half an hour by Henry, who looked around it with a shudder, as he bade his young friend good night.

CHAPTER XII.

CHARLES HOLLAND'S SAD FEELINGS. — THE PORTRAIT. — THE OCCURRENCE OF THE NIGHT AT THE HALL.

Charles Holland wished to be alone, if ever any human being had wished fervently to be so. His thoughts were most fearfully oppressive.

The communication that had been made to him by Henry Bannerworth, had about it too many strange, confirmatory circumstances to enable him to treat it, in his own mind, with the disrespect that some mere freak of a distracted and weak imagination would, most probably, have received from him.

He had found Flora in a state of excitement which could arise only from some such terrible cause as had been mentioned by her brother, and then he was, from an occurrence which certainly never could have entered into his calculations, asked to forego the bright dream of happiness which he had held so long and so rapturously to his heart.

How truly he found that the course of true love ran not smooth; and yet how little would any one have suspected that from such a cause as that which now oppressed his mind, any obstruction would arise.

Flora might have been fickle and false; he might have seen some other fairer face, which might have enchained his fancy, and woven for him a new heart's chain; death might have stepped between him and the realization of his fondest hopes; loss of fortune might have made the love cruel which would have yoked to its distresses a young and beautiful girl, reared in the lap of luxury, and who was not, even by those who loved her, suffered to feel, even in later years, any of the pinching necessities of the family.

All these things were possible — some of them were probable; and yet none of them had occurred. She loved him still; and he, although he had looked on many a fair face, and basked in the sunny smiles of beauty, had never for a moment forgotten her faith, or lost his devotion to his own dear English girl.

Fortune he had enough for both; death had not even threatened to rob him of the prize of such a noble and faithful heart which he had won. But a horrible superstition had arisen, which seemed to place at once an impassable abyss between them, and to say to him, in a voice of thundering denunciation, —

"Charles Holland, will you have a vampyre for your bride?"

The thought was terrific. He paced the gloomy chamber to and fro with rapid strides, until the idea came across his mind that by so doing he might not only be proclaiming to his kind entertainers how much he was mentally distracted, but he likewise might be seriously distracting them.

The moment this occurred to him he sat down, and was profoundly still for some time. He then glanced at the light which had been given to him, and he found himself almost unconsciously engaged in a mental calculation as to how long it would last him in the night.

Half ashamed, then, of such terrors, as such a consideration would seem to indicate, he was on the point of hastily extinguishing it, when he happened to cast his eyes on the now mysterious and highly interesting portrait in the panel.

The picture, as a picture, was well done, whether it was a correct likeness or not of the party whom it represented. It was one of those kind of portraits that seem so life-like, that, as you look at them, they seem to return your gaze fully, and even to follow you with their eyes from place to place.

By candle-light such an effect is more likely to become striking and remarkable than by daylight; and now, as Charles Holland shaded his own eyes from the light, so as to cast its full radiance upon the portrait, he felt wonderfully interested in its life-like appearance.

“Here is true skill,” he said; “such as I have not before seen. How strangely this likeness of a man whom I never saw seems to gaze upon me.”

Unconsciously, too, he aided the effect, which he justly enough called life-like, by a slight movement of the candle, such as any one not blessed with nerves of iron would be sure to make, and such a movement made the face look as if it was inspired with vitality.

Charles remained looking at the portrait for a considerable period of time. He found a kind of fascination in it which prevented him from drawing his eyes away from it. It was not fear which induced him to continue gazing on it, but the circumstance that it was a likeness of the man who, after death, was supposed to have borrowed so new and so hideous an existence, combined with its artistic merits, chained him to the spot.

“I shall now,” he said, “know that face again, let me see it where I may, or under what circumstances I may. Each feature is now indelibly fixed upon my memory — I never can mistake it.”

He turned aside as he uttered these words, and as he did so his eyes fell upon a part of the ornamental frame which composed the edge of the panel, and which seemed to him to be of a different colour from the surrounding portion.

Curiosity and increased interest prompted him at once to make a closer inquiry into the matter; and, by a careful and diligent scrutiny, he was almost induced to come to the positive opinion, that it no very distant period in time past, the portrait had been removed from the place it occupied.

When once this idea, even vague and indistinct as it was, in consequence of the slight grounds he formed it on, had got possession of his mind, he felt most anxious to prove its verification or its fallacy.

He held the candle in a variety of situations, so that its light fell in different ways on the picture; and the more he examined it, the more he felt convinced that it must have been moved lately.

It would appear as if, in its removal, a piece of the old oaken carved framework of the panel had been accidentally broken off, which caused the new look of the fracture, and that this accident, from the nature of the broken bit of framing, could have occurred in any other way than from an actual or attempted removal of the picture, he felt was extremely unlikely.

He set down the candle on a chair near at hand, and tried if the panel was fast in its place. Upon the very first touch, he felt convinced it was not so, and that it easily moved. How to get it out, though, presented a difficulty, and to get it out was tempting.

“Who knows,” he said to himself, “what may be behind it? This is an old baronial sort of hall, and the greater portion of it was, no doubt, built at a time when the construction of such places as hidden chambers and intricate staircases were, in all buildings of importance, considered a disiderata.”

That he should make some discovery behind the portrait, now became an idea that possessed him strongly, although he certainly had no definite grounds for really supposing that he should do so.

Perhaps the wish was more father to the thought than he, in the partial state of excitement he was in, really imagined; but so it was. He felt convinced that he should not be satisfied until he had removed that panel from the wall, and seen what was immediately behind it.

After the panel containing the picture had been placed where it was, it appeared that pieces of moulding had been inserted all around, which had had the effect of keeping it in its place, and it was a fracture of one of these pieces which had first called Charles Holland's attention to the probability of the picture having been removed. That he should have to get two, at least, of the pieces of moulding away, before he could hope to remove the picture, was to him quite apparent, and he was considering how he should accomplish such a result, when he was suddenly startled by a knock at his chamber door.

Until that sudden demand for admission at his door came, he scarcely knew to what a nervous state he had worked himself up. It was an odd sort of tap — one only — a single tap, as if some one demanded admittance, and wished to awaken his attention with the least possible chance of disturbing any one else.

"Come in," said Charles, for he knew he had not fastened his door; "come in."

There was no reply, but after a moment's pause, the same sort of low tap came again.

Again he cried "come in," but, whoever it was, seemed determined that the door should be opened for him, and no movement was made from the outside. A third time the tap came, and Charles was very close to the door when he heard it, for with a noiseless step he had approached it intending to open it. The instant this third mysterious demand for admission came, he did open it wide. There was no one there! In an instant he crossed the threshold into the corridor, which ran right and left. A window at one end of it now sent in the moon's rays, so that it was tolerably light, but he could see no one. Indeed, to look for any one, he felt sure was needless, for he had opened his chamber-door almost simultaneously with the last knock for admission.

"It is strange," he said, as he lingered on the threshold of his room door for some moments; "my imagination could not so completely deceive me. There was most certainly a demand for admission."

Slowly, then, he returned to his room again, and closed the door behind him.

"One thing is evident," he said, "that if I am in this apartment to be subjected to these annoyances, I shall get no rest, which will soon exhaust me."

This thought was a very provoking one, and the more he thought that he should ultimately find a necessity for giving up that chamber he had himself asked as a special favour to be allowed to occupy, the more vexed he became to think what construction might be put upon his conduct for so doing.

"They will all fancy me a coward," he thought, "and that I dare not sleep here. They may not, of course, say so, but they will think that my appearing so bold was one of those acts of bravado which I have not courage to carry fairly out."

Taking this view of the matter was just the way to enlist a young man's pride in staying, under all circumstances, where he was, and, with a slight accession of colour, which, even although he was alone, would visit his cheeks, Charles Holland said aloud, —

"I will remain the occupant of this room come what may, happen what may. No terrors, real or unsubstantial, shall drive me from it: I will brave them all, and remain here to brave them."

Tap came the knock at the door again, and now, with more an air of vexation than fear, Charles turned again towards it, and listened. Tap in another minute again succeeded, and much annoyed, he walked close to the door, and laid his hand upon the lock, ready to open it at the precise moment of another demand for admission being made.

He had not to wait long. In about half a minute it came again, and, simultaneously with the sound, the door flew open. There was no one to be seen; but, as he opened the door, he heard a strange sound in the corridor — a sound which scarcely could be called a groan, and scarcely a sigh, but seemed a compound of both, having the agony of the one combined with the sadness of the other. From what direction it came he could not at the moment decide, but he called out, —

"Who's there? who's there?"

The echo of his own voice alone answered him for a few moments, and then he heard a door open, and a voice, which he knew to be Henry's, cried, —

"What is it? who speaks?"

"Henry," said Charles.

"Yes — yes — yes."

"I fear I have disturbed you."

"You have been disturbed yourself, or you would not have done so. I shall be with you in a moment."

Henry closed his door before Charles Holland could tell him not to come to him, as he intended to do, for he felt ashamed to have, in a manner of speaking, summoned assistance for so trifling a cause of alarm as that to which he had been subjected. However, he could not go to Henry's chamber to forbid him from coming to his, and, more vexed than before, he retired to his room again to await his coming.

He left the door open now, so that Henry Bannerworth, when he had got on some articles of dress, walked in at once, saying, —

"What has happened, Charles?"

"A mere trifle, Henry, concerning which I am ashamed you should have been at all disturbed."

"Never mind that, I was wakeful."

"I heard a door open, which kept me listening, but I could not decide which door it was till I heard your voice in the corridor."

"Well, it was this door; and I opened it twice in consequence of the repeated taps for admission that came to it; some one has been knocking at it, and, when I go to it, lo! I can see nobody."

"Indeed!"

"Such is the case."

"You surprise me."

"I am very sorry to have disturbed you, because, upon such a ground, I do not feel that I ought to have done so; and, when I called out in the corridor, I assure you it was with no such intention."

"Do not regret it for a moment," said Henry; "you were quite justified in making an alarm on such an occasion."

"It's strange enough, but still it may arise from some accidental cause; admitting, if we did but know it, of some ready enough explanation."

"It may, certainly, but, after what has happened already, we may well suppose a mysterious connexion between any unusual sight or sound, and the fearful ones we have already seen."

"Certainly we may."

"How earnestly that strange portrait seems to look upon us, Charles."

"It does, and I have been examining it carefully. It seems to have been removed lately."

"Removed!"

"Yes, I think, as far as I can judge, that it has been taken from its frame; I mean, that the panel on which it is painted has been taken out."

"Indeed!"

"If you touch it you will find it loose, and, upon a close examination, you will perceive that a piece of the moulding which holds it in its place has been chipped off, which is done in such a place that I think it could only have arisen during the removal of the picture."

"You must be mistaken."

"I cannot, of course, take upon myself, Henry, to say precisely such is the case," said Charles.

"But there is no one here to do so."

"That I cannot say. Will you permit me and assist me to remove it? I have a great curiosity to know what is behind it."

"If you have, I certainly will do so. We thought of taking it away altogether, but when Flora left this room the idea was given up as useless. Remain here a few moments, and I will endeavour to find something which shall assist us in its removal."

Henry left the mysterious chamber in order to search in his own for some means of removing the frame-work of the picture, so that the panel would slip easily out, and while he was gone, Charles Holland continued gazing upon it with greater interest, if possible, than before.

In a few minutes Henry returned, and although what he had succeeded in finding were very inefficient implements for the purpose, yet with this aid the two young men set about the task.

It is said, and said truly enough, that "where there is a will there is a way," and although the young men had no tools at all adapted for the purpose, they did succeed in removing the moulding from the sides of the panel, and then by a little tapping at one end of it, and using a knife at a lever at the other end of the panel, they got it fairly out.

Disappointment was all they got for their pains. On the other side there was nothing but a rough wooden wall, against which the finer and more nicely finished oak panelling of the chamber rested.

"There is no mystery here," said Henry.

"None whatever," said Charles, as he tapped the wall with his knuckles, and found it all hard and sound. "We are foiled."

"We are indeed."

"I had a strange presentiment, now," added Charles, "that we should make some discovery that would repay us for our trouble. It appears, however, that such is not to be the case; for you see nothing presents itself to us but the most ordinary appearances."

"I perceive as much; and the panel itself, although of more than ordinary thickness, is, after all, but a bit of planed oak, and apparently fashioned for no other object than to paint the portrait on."

"True. Shall we replace it?"

Charles reluctantly assented, and the picture was replaced in its original position. We say Charles reluctantly assented, because, although he had now had ocular demonstration that there was really nothing behind the panel but the ordinary woodwork which might have been expected from the construction of the old house, yet he could not, even with such a fact staring him in the face, get rid entirely of the feeling that had come across him, to the effect that the picture had some mystery or another.

"You are not yet satisfied," said Henry, as he observed the doubtful look of Charles Holland's face.

"My dear friend," said Charles, "I will not deceive you. I am much disappointed that we have made no discovery behind that picture."

"Heaven knows we have mysteries enough in our family," said Henry.

Even as he spoke they were both startled by a strange clattering noise at the window, which was accompanied by a shrill, odd kind of shriek, which sounded fearful and preternatural on the night air.

"What is that?" said Charles.

"God only knows," said Henry.

The two young men naturally turned their earnest gaze in the direction of the window, which we have before remarked was one unprovided with shutters, and there, to their intense surprise, they saw, slowly rising up from the lower part of it, what appeared to be a human form. Henry would have dashed forward, but Charles restrained him, and drawing quickly from its case a large holster pistol, he levelled it carefully at the figure, saying in a whisper, —

"Henry, if I don't hit it, I will consent to forfeit my head."

He pulled the trigger — a loud report followed — the room was filled with smoke, and then all was still. A circumstance, however, had occurred, as a consequence of the concussion of air produced by the discharge of the pistol, which neither of the young men had for the moment calculated upon, and that was the putting out of the only light they there had.

In spite of this circumstance, Charles, the moment he had discharged the pistol, dropped it and sprung forward to the window. But here he was perplexed, for he could not find the old fashioned, intricate fastening which held it shut, and he had to call to Henry, —

“Henry! For God’s sake open the window for me, Henry! The fastening of the window is known to you, but not to me. Open it for me.”

Thus called upon, Henry sprung forward, and by this time the report of the pistol had effectually alarmed the whole household. The flashing of lights from the corridor came into the room, and in another minute, just as Henry succeeded in getting the window wide open, and Charles Holland had made his way on to the balcony, both George Bannerworth and Mr. Marchdale entered the chamber, eager to know what had occurred. To their eager questions Henry replied, —

“Ask me not now;” and then calling to Charles, he said,— “Remain where you are, Charles, while I run down to the garden immediately beneath the balcony.”

“Yes — yes,” said Charles.

Henry made prodigious haste, and was in the garden immediately below the bay window in a wonderfully short space of time. He spoke to Charles, saying, —

“Will you now descend? I can see nothing here; but we will both make a search.”

George and Mr. Marchdale were both now in the balcony, and they would have descended likewise, but Henry said, —

“Do not all leave the house. God only knows, now, situated as we are, what might happen."

"I will remain, then," said George. "I have been sitting up to-night as the guard, and, therefore, may as well continue to do so."

Marchdale and Charles Holland clambered over the balcony, and easily, from its insignificant height, dropped into the garden. The night was beautiful, and profoundly still. There was not a breath of air sufficient to stir a leaf on a tree, and the very flame of the candle which Charles had left burning in the balcony burnt clearly and steadily, being perfectly unruffled by any wind.

It cast a sufficient light close to the window to make everything very plainly visible, and it was evident at a glance that no object was there, although had that figure, which Charles shot at, and no doubt hit, been flesh and blood, it must have dropped immediately below.

As they looked up for a moment after a cursory examination of the ground, Charles exclaimed, —

"Look at the window! As the light is now situated, you can see the hole made in one of the panes of glass by the passage of the bullet from my pistol."

They did look, and there the clear, round hole, without any starring, which a bullet discharged close to a pane of glass will make in it, was clearly and plainly discernible.

"You must have hit him," said Henry.

"One would think so," said Charles; "for that was the exact place where the figure was."

"And there is nothing here," added Marchdale. "What can we think of these events — what resource has the mind against the most dreadful suppositions concerning them?"

Charles and Henry were both silent; in truth, they knew not what to think, and the words uttered by Marchdale were too strikingly true to dispute for a moment. They were lost in wonder.

“Human means against such an appearance as we saw to-night,” said Charles, “are evidently useless.”

“My dear young friend,” said Marchdale, with much emotion, as he grasped Henry Bannerworth’s hand, and the tears stood in his eyes as he did so,— “my dear young friend, these constant alarms will kill you. They will drive you, and all whose happiness you hold dear, distracted. You must control these dreadful feelings, and there is but one chance that I can see of getting now the better of these.”

“What is that?”

“By leaving this place for ever.”

“Alas! am I to be driven from the home of my ancestors from such a cause as this? And whither am I to fly? Where are we to find a refuge? To leave here will be at once to break up the establishment which is now held together, certainly upon the sufferance of creditors, but still to their advantage, inasmuch as I am doing what no one else would do, namely, paying away to within the scantiest pittance the whole proceeds of the estate that spreads around me.”

“Heed nothing but an escape from such horrors as seem to be accumulating now around you.”

“If I were sure that such a removal would bring with it such a corresponding advantage, I might, indeed, be induced to risk all to accomplish it.”

“As regards poor dear Flora,” said Mr. Marchdale, “I know not what to say, or what to think; she has been attacked by a vampyre, and after this mortal life shall have ended, it is dreadful to think there may be a possibility that she, with all her beauty, all her excellence and purity of mind, and all those virtues and qualities which should make her the beloved of all, and which do, indeed, attach all hearts towards her, should become one of that dreadful tribe of beings who cling to existence by feeding, in the most dreadful manner, upon the life blood of others — oh, it is too dreadful to contemplate! Too horrible — too horrible!"

"Then wherefore speak of it?" said Charles, with some asperity. "Now, by the great God of Heaven, who sees all our hearts, I will not give in to such a horrible doctrine! I will not believe it; and were death itself my portion for my want of faith, I would this moment die in my disbelief of anything so truly fearful!"

"Oh, my young friend," added Marchdale, "if anything could add to the pangs which all who love, and admire, and respect Flora Bannerworth must feel at the unhappy condition in which she is placed, it would be the noble nature of you, who, under happier auspices, would have been her guide through life, and the happy partner of her destiny."

"As I will be still."

"May Heaven forbid it! We are now among ourselves, and can talk freely upon such a subject. Mr. Charles Holland, if you wed, you would look forward to being blessed with children — those sweet ties which bind the sternest hearts to life with so exquisite a bondage. Oh, fancy, then, for a moment, the mother of your babes coming at the still hour of midnight to drain from their veins the very life blood she gave to them. To drive you and them mad with the expected horror of such visitations — to make your nights hideous — your days but so many hours of melancholy retrospection. Oh, you know not the world of terror, on the awful brink of which you stand, when you talk of making Flora Bannerworth a wife."

"Peace! oh, peace!" said Henry.

"Nay, I know my words are unwelcome," continued Mr.

Marchdale. “It happens, unfortunately for human nature, that truth and some of our best and holiest feelings are too often at variance, and hold a sad contest—”

“I will hear no more of this,” cried Charles Holland.— “I will hear no more.”

“I have done,” said Mr. Marchdale.

“And ‘twere well you had not begun.”

“Nay, say not so. I have but done what I considered was a solemn duty.”

“Under that assumption of doing duty — a solemn duty — heedless of the feelings and the opinions of others,” said Charles, sarcastically, “more mischief is produced — more heart-burnings and anxieties caused, than by any other two causes of such mischievous results combined. I wish to hear no more of this.”

“Do not be angered with Mr. Marchdale, Charles,” said Henry. “He can have no motive but our welfare in what he says. We should not condemn a speaker because his words may not sound pleasant to our ears.”

“By Heaven!” said Charles, with animation, “I meant not to be illiberal; but I will not because I cannot see a man’s motives for active interference in the affairs of others, always be ready, merely on account of such ignorance, to jump to a conclusion that they must be estimable.”

“To-morrow, I leave this house,” said Marchdale.

“Leave us?” exclaimed Henry.

“Ay, for ever.”

“Nay, now, Mr. Marchdale, is this generous?”

“Am I treated generously by one who is your own guest, and towards whom I was willing to hold out the honest right hand of friendship?”

Henry turned to Charles Holland, saying, —

“Charles, I know your generous nature. Say you meant no offence to my mother’s old friend.”

“If to say I meant no offence,” said Charles, “is to say I meant no insult, I say it freely.”

“Enough,” cried Marchdale; “I am satisfied.”

“But do not,” added Charles, “draw me any more such pictures as the one you have already presented to my imagination, I beg of you. From the storehouse of my own fancy I can find quite enough to make me wretched, if I choose to be so; but again and again do I say I will not allow this monstrous superstition to tread me down, like the tread of a giant on a broken reed. I will contend against it while I have life to do so.”

“Bravely spoken.”

“And when I desert Flora Bannerworth, may Heaven, from that moment, desert me!”

“Charles!” cried Henry, with emotion, “dear Charles, my more than friend — brother of my heart — noble Charles!”

“Nay, Henry, I am not entitled to your praises. I were base indeed to be other than that which I purpose to be. Come weal or woe — come what may, I am the affianced husband of your sister, and she, and she only, can break asunder the tie that binds me to her.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE OFFER FOR THE HALL. — THE VISIT TO SIR FRANCIS VARNEY. — THE STRANGE RESEMBLANCE. — A DREADFUL SUGGESTION.

The party made a strict search through every nook and corner of the garden, but it proved to be a fruitless one: not the least trace of any one could be found. There was only one circumstance, which was pondered over deeply by them all, and that was that, beneath the window of the room in which Flora and her mother sat while the brothers were on their visit to the vault of their ancestors, were visible marks of blood to a considerable extent.

It will be remembered that Flora had fired a pistol at the spectral appearance, and that immediately upon that it had disappeared, after uttering a sound which might well be construed into a cry of pain from a wound.

That a wound then had been inflicted upon some one, the blood beneath the window now abundantly testified; and when it was discovered, Henry and Charles made a very close examination indeed of the garden, to discover what direction the wounded figure, be it man or vampyre, had taken.

But the closest scrutiny did not reveal to them a single spot of blood, beyond the space immediately beneath the window; — there the apparition seemed to have received its wound, and then, by some mysterious means, to have disappeared.

At length, wearied with the continued excitement, combined with want of sleep, to which they had been subjected, they returned to the hall.

Flora, with the exception of the alarm she experienced from the firing of the pistol, had met with no disturbance, and that, in order to spare her painful reflections, they told her was merely done as a precautionary measure, to proclaim to any one who might be lurking in the garden that the inmates of the house were ready to defend themselves against any aggression.

Whether or not she believed this kind deceit they knew not. She only sighed deeply, and wept. The probability is, that she more than suspected the vampyre had made another visit, but they forbore to press the point; and, leaving her with her mother, Henry and George went from her chamber again — the former to endeavour to seek some repose, as it would be his turn to watch on the succeeding night, and the latter to resume his station in a small room close to Flora's chamber, where it had been agreed watch and ward should be kept by turns while the alarm lasted.

At length, the morning again dawned upon that unhappy family, and to none were its beams more welcome.

The birds sang their pleasant carols beneath the window. The sweet, deep-coloured autumnal sun shone upon all objects with a golden luster; and to look abroad, upon the beaming face of nature, no one could for a moment suppose, except from sad experience, that there were such things as gloom, misery, and crime, upon the earth.

"And must I," said Henry, as he gazed from a window of the hall upon the undulating park, the majestic trees, the flowers, the shrubs, and the many natural beauties with which the place was full,— "must I be chased from this spot, the home of my self and of my kindred, by a phantom — must I indeed seek refuge elsewhere, because my own home has become hideous?"

It was indeed a cruel and a painful thought! It was one he yet would not, could not be convinced was absolutely necessary. But now the sun was shining: it was morning; and the feelings, which found a home in his breast amid the darkness, the stillness, and the uncertainty of night, were chased away by those glorious beams of sunlight, that fell upon hill, valley, and stream, and the thousand sweet sounds of life and animation that filled that sunny air!

Such a revulsion of feeling was natural enough. Many of the distresses and mental anxieties of night vanish with the night, and those which oppressed the heart of Henry Bannerworth were considerably modified.

He was engaged in these reflections when he heard the sound of the lodge bell, and as a visitor was now somewhat rare at this establishment, he waited with some anxiety to see to whom he was indebted for so early a call.

In the course of a few minutes, one of the servants came to him with a letter in her hand.

It bore a large handsome seal, and, from its appearance, would seem to have come from some personage of consequence. A second glance at it shewed him the name of "Varney" in the corner, and, with some degree of vexation, he muttered to himself,

"Another condoling epistle from the troublesome neighbour whom I have not yet seen."

"If you please, sir," said the servant who had brought him the letter, "as I'm here, and you are here, perhaps you'll have no objection to give me what I'm to have for the day and two nights as I've been here, cos I can't stay in a family as is so familiar with all sorts o' ghostesses: I ain't used to such company."

"What do you mean?" said Henry.

The question was a superfluous one — : too well he knew what the woman meant, and the conviction came across his mind strongly that no domestic would consent to live long in a house which was subject to such dreadful visitations.

"What does I mean!" said the woman,— "why, sir, if it's all the same to you, I don't myself come of a wampyre family, and I don't choose to remain in a house where there is sich things encouraged. That's what I means, sir."

"What wages are owing to you?" said Henry.

"Why, as to wages, I only comed here by the day."

"Go, then, and settle with my mother. The sooner you leave this house, the better."

"Oh, indeed. I'm sure I don't want to stay."

This woman was one of those who were always armed at all points for a row, and she had no notion of concluding any engagement, of any character whatever, without some disturbance; therefore, to see Henry take what she said with such provoking calmness was aggravating in the extreme; but there was no help for such a source of vexation. She could find no other ground of quarrel than what was connected with the vampyre, and, as Henry would not quarrel with her on such a score, she was compelled to give it up in despair.

When Henry found himself alone, and free from the annoyance of this woman, he turned his attention to the letter he held in his hand, and which, from the autograph in the corner, he knew came from his new neighbour, Sir Francis Varney, whom, by some chance or another, he had never yet seen.

To his great surprise, he found that the letter contained the following words: —

Dear Sir,— "As a neighbour, by purchase of an estate contiguous to your own, I am quite sure you have excused, and taken in good part, the cordial offer I made to you of friendship and service some short time since; but now, in addressing to you a distinct proposition, I trust I shall meet with an indulgent consideration, whether such proposition be accordant with your views or not.

"What I have heard from common report induces me to believe that Bannerworth Hall cannot be a desirable residence for yourself, or your amiable sister. If I am right in that conjecture, and you have any serious thought of leaving the place, I would earnestly recommend you, as one having some experience in such descriptions of property, to sell it at once.

"Now, the proposition with which I conclude this letter is, I know, of a character to make you doubt the disinterestedness of such advice; but that it is disinterested, nevertheless, is a fact of which I can assure my own heart, and of which I beg to assure you. I propose, then, should you, upon consideration, decide upon such a course of proceeding, to purchase of you the Hall. I do not ask for a bargain on account of any extraneous circumstances which may at the present time depreciate the value of the property, but I am willing to give a fair price for it. Under these circumstances, I trust, sir, that you will give a kindly consideration to my offer, and even if you reject it, I hope that, as neighbours, we may live long in peace and amity, and in the interchange of those good offices which should subsist between us. Awaiting your reply,

"Believe me to be, dear sir,

"Your very obedient servant,

"FRANCIS VARNEY.

"To Henry Bannerworth, Esq."

Henry, after having read this most unobjectionable letter through, folded it up again, and placed it in his pocket. Clasping his hands, then, behind his back, a favourite attitude of his when he was in deep contemplation, he paced to and fro in the garden for some time in deep thought.

"How strange," he muttered. "It seems that every circumstance combines to induce me to leave my old ancestral home. It appears as if everything now that happened had that direct tendency. What can be the meaning of all this? 'Tis very strange — amazingly strange. Here arise circumstances which are enough to induce any man to leave a particular place. Then a friend, in whose single-mindedness and judgment I know I can rely, advises the step, and immediately upon the back of that comes a fair and candid offer."

There was an apparent connexion between all these circumstances which much puzzled Henry. He walked to and fro for nearly an hour, until he heard a hasty footstep approaching him, and upon looking in the direction from whence it came, he saw Mr. Marchdale.

"I will seek Marchdale's advice," he said, "upon this matter. I will hear what he says concerning it."

"Henry," said Marchdale, when he came sufficiently near to him for conversation, "why do you remain here alone?"

"I have received a communication from our neighbour, Sir Francis Varney," said Henry.

"Indeed!"

"It is here. Peruse it for yourself, and then tell me, Marchdale, candidly what you think of it."

"I suppose," said Marchdale, as he opened the letter, "it is another friendly note of condolence on the state of your domestic affairs, which, I grieve to say, from the prattling of domestics, whose tongues it is quite impossible to silence, have become food for gossip all over the neighbouring villages and estates."

"If anything could add another pang to those I have already been made to suffer," said Henry, "it would certainly arise from being made the food of vulgar gossip. But read the letter, Marchdale. You will find its contents of a more important character than you anticipate."

"Indeed!" said Marchdale, as he ran his eyes eagerly over the note.

When he had finished it he glanced at Henry, who then said, —

"Well, what is your opinion?"

"I know not what to say, Henry. You know that my own advice to you has been to get rid of this place."

"It has."

"With the hope that the disagreeable affair connected with it now may remain connected with it as a house, and not with you and yours as a family."

"It may be so."

"There appears to me every likelihood of it."

"I do not know," said Henry, with a shudder. "I must confess, Marchdale, that to my own perceptions it seems more probable that the infliction we have experienced from the strange visitor, who seems now resolved to pester us with visits, will rather attach to a family than to a house. The vampyre may follow us."

"If so, of course the parting with the Hall would be a great pity, and no gain."

"None in the least."

"Henry, a thought has struck me."

"Let's hear it, Marchdale."

"It is this: — Suppose you were to try the experiment of leaving the Hall without selling it. Suppose for one year you were to let it to some one, Henry."

"It might be done."

"Ay, and it might, with very great promise and candour, be proposed to this very gentleman, Sir Francis Varney, to take it for one year, to see how he liked it before becoming the possessor of it. Then if he found himself tormented by the vampyre, he need not complete the purchase, or if you found that the apparition followed you from hence, you might yourself return, feeling that perhaps here, in the spots familiar to your youth, you might be most happy, even under such circumstances as at present oppress you."

"Most happy!" ejaculated Henry.

"Perhaps I should not have used that word."

"I am sure you should not," said Henry, "when you speak of me."

"Well — well; let us hope that the time may not be very far distant when I may use the term happy, as applied to you, in the most conclusive and the strongest manner it can be used."

"Oh," said Henry, "I will hope; but do not mock me with it now, Marchdale, I pray you."

"Heaven forbid that I should mock you!"

"Well — well; I do not believe you are the man to do so to any one. But about this affair of the house."

"Distinctly, then, if I were you, I would call upon Sir Francis Varney, and make him an offer to become a tenant of the Hall for twelve months, during which time you could go where you please, and test the fact of absence ridding you or not ridding you of the dreadful visitant who makes the night here truly hideous."

"I will speak to my mother, to George, and to my sister of the matter. They shall decide."

Mr. Marchdale now strove in every possible manner to raise the spirits of Henry Bannerworth, by painting to him the future in far more radiant colours than the present, and endeavouring to induce a belief in his mind that a short period of time might after all replace in his mind, and in the minds of those who were naturally so dear to him, all their wonted serenity.

Henry, although he felt not much comfort from these kindly efforts, yet could feel gratitude to him who made them; and after expressing such a feeling to Marchdale, in strong terms, he repaired to the house, in order to hold a solemn consultation with those whom he felt ought to be consulted as well as himself as to what steps should be taken with regard to the Hall.

The proposition, or rather the suggestion, which had been made by Marchdale upon the proposition of Sir Francis Varney, was in every respect so reasonable and just, that it met, as was to be expected, with the concurrence of every member of the family.

Flora's cheeks almost resumed some of their wonted colour at the mere thought now of leaving that home to which she had been at one time so much attached.

"Yes, dear Henry," she said, "let us leave here if you are agreeable so to do, and in leaving this house, we will believe that we leave behind us a world of terror."

"Flora," remarked Henry, in a tone of slight reproach, "if you were so anxious to leave Bannerworth Hall, why did you not say so before this proposition came from other mouths? You know your feelings upon such a subject would have been laws to me."

"I knew you were attached to the old house," said Flora; "and, besides, events have come upon us all with such fearful rapidity, there has scarcely been time to think."

"True — true."

"And you will leave, Henry?"

"I will call upon Sir Francis Varney myself, and speak to him upon the subject."

A new impetus to existence appeared now to come over the whole family, at the idea of leaving a place which always would be now associated in their minds with so much terror. Each member of the family felt happier, and breathed more freely than before, so that the change which had come over them seemed almost magical. And Charles Holland, too, was much better pleased, and he whispered to Flora, —

"Dear Flora, you will now surely no longer talk of driving from you the honest heart that loves you?"

"Hush, Charles, hush!" she said; "meet me an hour hence in the garden, and we will talk of this."

"That hour will seem an age," he said.

Henry, now, having made a determination to see Sir Francis Varney, lost no time in putting it into execution. At Mr. Marchdale's own request, he took him with him, as it was desirable to have a third person present in the sort of business negotiation which was going on. The estate which had been so recently entered upon by the person calling himself Sir Francis Varney, and which common report said he had purchased, was a small, but complete property, and situated so close to the grounds connected with Bannerworth Hall, that a short walk soon placed Henry and Mr. Marchdale before the residence of this gentleman, who had shown so kindly a feeling towards the Bannerworth family.

"Have you seen Sir Francis Varney?" asked Henry of Mr. Marchdale, as he rung the gate-bell.

"I have not. Have you?"

"No; I never saw him. It is rather awkward our both being absolute strangers to his person."

"We can but send in our names, however; and, from the great vein of courtesy that runs through his letter, I have no doubt but we shall receive the most gentlemanly reception from him."

A servant in handsome livery appeared at the iron-gates, which opened upon a lawn in the front of Sir Francis Varney's house, and to this domestic Henry Bannerworth handed his card, on which he had written, in pencil, likewise the name of Mr. Marchdale.

"If your master," he said, "is within, we shall be glad to see him."

"Sir Francis is at home, sir," was the reply, "although not very well. If you will be pleased to walk in, I will announce you to him."

Henry and Marchdale followed the man into a handsome enough reception-room, where they were desired to wait while their names were announced.

"Do you know if this gentleman be a baronet," said Henry, "or a knight merely?"

"I really do not; I never saw him in my life, or heard of him before he came into this neighbourhood."

"And I have been too much occupied with the painful occurrences of this hall to know anything of our neighbours. I dare say Mr. Chillingworth, if we had thought to ask him, would have known something concerning him."

"No doubt."

This brief colloquy was put an end to by the servant, who said, —

"My master, gentlemen, is not very well; but he begs me to present his best compliments, and to say he is much gratified with your visit, and will be happy to see you in his study."

Henry and Marchdale followed the man up a flight of stone stairs, and then they were conducted through a large apartment into a smaller one. There was very little light in this small room; but at the moment of their entrance a tall man, who was seated, rose, and, touching the spring of a blind that was to the window, it was up in a moment, admitting a broad glare of light. A cry of surprise, mingled with terror, came from Henry Bannerworth's lip. *The original of the portrait on the panel stood before him!* There was the lofty stature, the long, sallow face, the slightly projecting teeth, the dark, lustrous, although somewhat sombre eyes; the expression of the features — all were alike.

"Are you unwell, sir?" said Sir Francis Varney, in soft, mellow accents, as he handed a chair to the bewildered Henry.

"God of Heaven!" said Henry; "how like!"

"You seem surprised, sir. Have you ever seen me before?"

Sir Francis drew himself up to his full height, and cast a strange glance upon Henry, whose eyes were rivetted upon his face, as if with a species of fascination which he could not resist.

"Marchdale," Henry gasped; "Marchdale, my friend, Marchdale. I — I am surely mad."

"Hush! be calm," whispered Marchdale.

"Calm — calm — can you not see? Marchdale, is this a dream? Look — look — oh! look."

"For God's sake, Henry, compose yourself."

"Is your friend often thus?" said Sir Francis Varney, with the same mellifluous tone which seemed habitual to him.

"No, sir, he is not; but recent circumstances have shattered his nerves; and, to tell the truth, you bear so strong a resemblance to an old portrait, in his house, that I do not wonder so much as I otherwise should at his agitation."

"Indeed."

"A resemblance!" said Henry; "a resemblance! God of Heaven! it is the face itself."

"You much surprise me," said Sir Francis.

Henry sunk into the chair which was near him, and he trembled violently. The rush of painful thoughts and conjectures that came through his mind was enough to make any one tremble. "Is this the vampyre?" was the horrible question that seemed impressed upon his very brain, in letters of flame. "Is this the vampyre?"

"Are you better, sir?" said Sir Francis Varney, in his bland, musical voice. "Shall I order any refreshment for you?"

"No — no," gasped Henry; "for the love of truth tell me! Is — is your name really Varney!"

"Sir?"

"Have you no other name to which, perhaps, a better title you could urge?"

"Mr. Bannerworth, I can assure you that I am too proud of the name of the family to which I belong to exchange it for any other, be it what it may."

"How wonderfully like!"

"I grieve to see you so much distressed. Mr. Bannerworth. I presume ill health has thus shattered your nerves?"

"No; ill health has not done the work. I know not what to say, Sir Francis Varney, to you; but recent events in my family have made the sight of you full of horrible conjectures."

"What mean you, sir?"

"You know, from common report, that we have had a fearful visitor at our house."

"A vampyre, I have heard," said Sir Francis Varney, with a bland, and almost beautiful smile, which displayed his white glistening teeth to perfection.

"Yes; a vampyre, and — and—"

"I pray you go on, sir; you surely are far above the vulgar superstition of believing in such matters?"

"My judgment is assailed in too many ways and shapes for it to hold out probably as it ought to do against so hideous a belief, but never was it so much bewildered as now."

"Why so?"

"Because—"

"Nay, Henry," whispered Mr. Marchdale, "it is scarcely civil to tell Sir Francis to his face, that he resembles a vampyre."

"I must, I must."

"Pray, sir," interrupted Varney to Marchdale, "permit Mr. Bannerworth to speak here freely. There is nothing in the whole world I so much admire as candour."

"Then you so much resemble the vampyre," added Henry, "that — that I know not what to think."

"Is it possible?" said Varney.

"It is a damning fact."

"Well, it's unfortunate for me, I presume? Ah!"

Varney gave a twinge of pain, as if some sudden bodily ailment had attacked him severely.

"You are unwell, sir?" said Marchdale.

"No, no — no," he said; "I — hurt my arm, and happened accidentally to touch the arm of this chair with it."

"A hurt?" said Henry.

"Yes, Mr. Bannerworth."

"A — a wound?"

"Yes, a wound, but not much more than skin deep. In fact, little beyond an abrasion of the skin."

"May I inquire how you came by it?"

"Oh, yes. A slight fall."

"Indeed."

"Remarkable, is it not? Very remarkable. We never know a moment when, from same most trifling cause, we may receive really some serious bodily harm. How true it is, Mr. Bannerworth, that in the midst of life we are in death."

"And equally true, perhaps," said Henry, "that in the midst of death there may be found a horrible life."

"Well, I should not wonder. There are really so many strange things in this world, that I have left off wondering at anything now."

"There are strange things," said Henry. "You wish to purchase of me the Hall, sir?"

"If you wish to sell."

"You — you are perhaps attached to the place? Perhaps you recollected it, sir, long ago?"

"Not very long," smiled Sir Francis Varney. "It seems a nice comfortable old house; and the grounds, too, appear to be amazingly well wooded, which, to one of rather a romantic temperament like myself, is always an additional charm to a place. I was extremely pleased with it the first time I beheld it, and a desire to call myself the owner of it took possession of my mind. The scenery is remarkable for its beauty, and, from what I have seen of it, it is rarely to be excelled. No doubt you are greatly attached to it."

"It has been my home from infancy," returned Henry, "and being also the residence of my ancestors for centuries, it is natural that I should be so.”

“True — true.”

“The house, no doubt, has suffered much,” said Henry, “within the last hundred years.”

“No doubt it has. A hundred years is a tolerable long space of time, you know.”

“It is, indeed. Oh, how any human life which is spun out to such an extent, must lose its charms, by losing all its fondest and dearest associations.”

“Ah, how true,” said Sir Francis Varney. He had some minutes previously touched a bell, and at this moment a servant brought in on a tray some wine and refreshments.

CHAPTER XIV.

HENRY'S AGREEMENT WITH SIR FRANCIS VARNEY. — THE SUDDEN ARRIVAL AT THE HALL. — FLORA'S ALARM.

On the tray which the servant brought into the room, were refreshments of different kinds, including wine, and after waving his hand for the domestic to retire, Sir Francis Varney said, —

"You will be better, Mr. Bannerworth, for a glass of wine after your walk, and you too, sir. I am ashamed to say, I have quite forgotten your name."

"Marchdale."

"Mr. Marchdale. Ay, Marchdale. Pray, sir, help yourself."

"You take nothing yourself?" said Henry.

"I am under a strict regimen," replied Varney. "The simplest diet alone does for me, and I have accustomed myself to long abstinence."

"He will not eat or drink," muttered Henry, abstractedly.

"Will you sell me the Hall?" said Sir Francis Varney.

Henry looked in his face again, from which he had only momentarily withdrawn his eyes, and he was then more struck than ever with the resemblance between him and the portrait on the panel of what had been Flora's chamber. What made that resemblance, too, one about which there could scarcely be two opinions, was the mark or cicatrix of a wound in the forehead, which the painter had slightly indented in the portrait, but which was much more plainly visible on the forehead of Sir Francis Varney. Now that Henry observed this distinctive mark, which he had not done before, he could feel no doubt, and a sickening sensation came over him at the thought that he was actually now in the presence of one of those terrible creatures, vampyres.

"You do not drink," said Varney. "Most young men are not so modest with a decanter of unimpeachable wine before them. I pray you help yourself."

"I cannot."

Henry rose as he spoke, and turning to Marchdale, he said, in addition, —

"Will you come away?"

"If you please," said Marchdale, rising.

"But you have not, my dear sir," said Varney, "given me yet any answer about the Hall?"

"I cannot yet," answered Henry, "I will think. My present impression is, to let you have it on whatever terms you may yourself propose, always provided you consent to one of mine."

"Name it."

"That you never show yourself in my family."

"How very unkind. I understand you have a charming sister, young, beautiful, and accomplished. Shall I confess, now, that I had hopes of making myself agreeable to her?"

"You make yourself agreeable to her? The sight of you would blast her for ever, and drive her to madness."

"Am I so hideous?"

"No, but — you are—"

"What am I?"

"Hush, Henry, hush," cried Marchdale. "Remember you are in this gentleman's house."

"True, true. Why does he tempt me to say these dreadful things? I do not want to say them."

"Come away, then — come away at once. Sir Francis Varney, my friend, Mr. Bannerworth, will think over your offer, and let you know. I think you may consider that your wish to become the purchaser of the Hall will be complied with."

"I wish to have it," said Varney, "and I can only say, that if I am master of it, I shall be very happy to see any of the family on a visit at any time."

"A visit!" said Henry, with a shudder. "A visit to the tomb were far more desirable. Farewell, sir."

"Adieu," said Sir Francis Varney, and he made one of the most elegant bows in the world, while there came over his face a peculiarity of expression that was strange, if not painful, to contemplate. In another minute Henry and Marchdale were clear of the house, and with feelings of bewilderment and horror, which beggar all description, poor Henry allowed himself to be led by the arm by Marchdale to some distance, without uttering a word. When he did speak, he said, —

"Marchdale, it would be charity of some one to kill me."

"To kill you!"

"Yes, for I am certain otherwise that I must go mad."

"Nay, nay; rouse yourself."

"This man, Varney, is a vampyre."

"Hush! hush!"

"I tell you, Marchdale," cried Henry, in a wild, excited manner, "he is a vampyre. He is the dreadful being who visited Flora at the still hour of midnight, and drained the life-blood from her veins. He is a vampyre. There are such things. I cannot doubt now. Oh, God, I wish now that your lightnings would blast me, as here I stand, for over into annihilation, for I am going mad to be compelled to feel that such horrors can really have existence."

"Henry — Henry."

"Nay, talk not to me. What can I do? Shall I kill him? Is it not a sacred duty to destroy such a thing? Oh, horror — horror. He must be killed — destroyed — burnt, and the very dust to which he is consumed must be scattered to the winds of Heaven. It would be a deed well done, Marchdale."

"Hush! hush! These words are dangerous."

"I care not."

"What if they were overheard now by unfriendly ears? What might not be the uncomfortable results? I pray you be more cautious what you say of this strange man."

"I must destroy him."

"And wherefore?"

"Can you ask? Is he not a vampyre?"

"Yes; but reflect, Henry, for a moment upon the length to which you might carry out so dangerous an argument. It is said that vampyres are made by vampyres sucking the blood of those who, but for that circumstance, would have died and gone to decay in the tomb along with ordinary mortals; but that being so attacked during life by a vampyre, they themselves, after death, become such."

"Well — well, what is that to me?"

"Have you forgotten Flora?"

A cry of despair came from poor Henry's lips, and in a moment he seemed completely, mentally and physically, prostrated.

"God of Heaven!" he moaned, "I had forgotten her!"

"I thought you had."

"Oh, if the sacrifice of my own life would suffice to put an end to all this accumulating horror, how gladly would I lay it down. Ay, in any way — in any way. No mode of death should appal me. No amount of pain make me shrink. I could smile then upon the destroyer, and say, 'welcome — welcome — most welcome.'"

"Rather, Henry, seek to live for those whom you love than die for them. Your death would leave them desolate. In life you may ward off many a blow of fate from them."

"I may endeavour so to do."

"Consider that Flora may be wholly dependent upon such kindness as you may be able to bestow upon her."

"Charles clings to her."

"Humph!"

"You do not doubt him?"

"My dear friend, Henry Bannerworth, although I am not an old man, yet I am so much older than you that I have seen a great deal of the world, and am, perhaps, far better able to come to accurate judgments with regard to individuals."

"No doubt — no doubt; but yet—"

"Nay, hear me out. Such judgments, founded upon experience, when uttered have all the character of prophecy about them. I, therefore, now prophecy to you that Charles Holland will yet be so stung with horror at the circumstance of a vampyre visiting Flora, that he will never make her his wife."

"Marchdale, I differ from you most completely," said Henry. "I know that Charles Holland is the very soul of honour."

"I cannot argue the matter with you. It has not become a thing of fact. I have only sincerely to hope that I am wrong."

"You are, you may depend, entirely wrong. I cannot be deceived in Charles. From you such words produce no effect but one of regret that you should so much err in your estimate of any one. From any one but yourself they would have produced in me a feeling of anger I might have found it difficult to smother."

"It has often been my misfortune through life," said Mr. Marchdale, sadly, "to give the greatest offence where I feel the truest friendship, because it is in such quarters that I am always tempted to speak too freely."

"Nay, no offence," said Henry. "I am distracted, and scarcely know what I say. Marchdale, I know you are my sincere friend — but, as I tell you, I am nearly mad."

"My dear Henry, be calmer. Consider upon what is to be said concerning this interview at home."

"Ay; that is a consideration."

"I should not think it advisable to mention the disagreeable fact, that in your neighbour you think you have found out the nocturnal disturber of your family."

"No — no."

"I would say nothing of it. It is not at all probable that, after what you have said to him this Sir Francis Varney, or whatever his real name may be will obtrude himself upon you."

"If he should he die."

"He will, perhaps, consider that such a step would be dangerous to him."

"It would be fatal, so help me. However, and then would I take especial care that no power of resuscitation should ever enable that man again to walk the earth."

"They say that only way of destroying a vampyre is to fix him to the earth with a stake, so that he cannot move, and then, of course, decomposition will take its course, as in ordinary cases."

"Fire would consume him, and be a quicker process," said Henry. "But these are fearful reflections, and, for the present, we will not pursue them. Now to play the hypocrite, and endeavour to look composed and serene to my mother, and to Flora while my heart is breaking."

The two friends had by this time reached the hall, and leaving his friend Marchdale, Henry Bannerworth, with feelings of the most unenviable description, slowly made his way to the apartment occupied by his mother and sister.

CHAPTER XV.

THE OLD ADMIRAL AND HIS SERVANT. — THE COMMUNICATION FROM THE LANDLORD OF THE NELSON'S ARMS.

While those matters of most grave and serious import were going on at the Hall, while each day, and almost each hour in each day, was producing more and more conclusive evidence upon a matter which at first had seemed too monstrous to be at all credited, it may well be supposed what a wonderful sensation was produced among the gossip-mongers of the neighbourhood by the exaggerated reports that had reached them.

The servants, who had left the Hall on no other account, as they declared, but sheer fright at the awful visits of the vampyre, spread the news far and wide, so that in the adjoining villages and market-towns the vampyre of Bannerworth Hall became quite a staple article of conversation.

Such a positive godsend for the lovers of the marvellous had not appeared in the country side within the memory of that sapient individual — the oldest inhabitant.

And, moreover, there was one thing which staggered some people of better education and maturer judgments, and that was, that the more they took pains to inquire into the matter, in order, if possible, to put an end to what they considered a gross lie from the commencement, the more evidence they found to stagger their own senses upon the subject.

Everywhere then, in every house, public as well as private, something was being continually said of the vampyre. Nursery maids began to think a vampyre vastly superior to “old scratch and old bogie” as a means of terrifying their infant charges into quietness, if not to sleep, until they themselves became too much afraid upon the subject to mention it.

But nowhere was gossiping carried on upon the subject with more systematic fervour than at an inn called the Nelson’s Arms, which was in the high street of the nearest market town to the Hall.

There, it seemed as if the lovers of the horrible made a point of holding their head quarters, and so thirsty did the numerous discussions make the guests, that the landlord was heard to declare that he, from his heart, really considered a vampyre as very nearly equal to a contested election.

It was towards evening of the same day that Marchdale and Henry made their visit to Sir Francis Varney, that a postchaise drew up to the inn we have mentioned. In the vehicle were two persons of exceedingly dissimilar appearance and general aspect.

One of these people was a man who seemed fast verging upon seventy years of age, although, from his still ruddy and embrowned complexion and stentorian voice, it was quite evident he intended yet to keep time at arm’s-length for many years to come.

He was attired in ample and expensive clothing, but every article had a naval animus about it, it we may be allowed such an expression with regard to clothing. On his buttons was an anchor, and the general assortment and colour of the clothing as nearly assimilated as possible to the undress naval uniform of an officer of high rank some fifty or sixty years ago.

His companion was a younger man, and about his appearance there was no secret at all. He was a genuine sailor, and he wore the shore costume of one. He was hearty-looking, and well dressed, and evidently well fed.

As the chaise drove up to the door of the inn, this man made an observation to the other to the following effect, —

“A-hoy!”

“Well, you lubber, what now?” cried the other.

“They call this the Nelson’s Arms; and you know, shiver me, that for the best half of his life he had but one.”

“D — n you!” was the only rejoinder he got for this observation; but, with that, he seemed very well satisfied.

“Heave to!” he then shouted to the postilion, who was about to drive the chaise into the yard. “Heave to, you lubberly son of a gun! we don’t want to go into dock.”

“Ah!” said the old man, “let’s get out, Jack. This is the port; and, do you hear, and be cursed to you, let’s have no swearing, d — n you, nor bad language, you lazy swab.”

“Aye, aye,” cried Jack; “I’ve not been ashore now a matter o’ ten years, and not larnt a little shore-going politeness, admiral, I ain’t been your *walley de sham* without larning a little about land reckonings. Nobody would take me for a sailor now, I’m thinking, admiral.”

“Hold your noise!”

“Aye, aye, sir.”

Jack, as he was called, bundled out of the chaise when the door was opened, with a movement so closely resembling what would have ensued had he been dragged out by the collar, that one was tempted almost to believe that such a feat must have been accomplished all at once by some invisible agency.

He then assisted the old gentleman to alight, and the landlord of the inn commenced the usual profusion of bows with which a passenger by a postchaise is usually welcomed in preference to one by a stage coach.

"Be quiet, will you!" shouted the admiral, for such indeed he was. "Be quiet."

"Best accommodation, sir — good wine — well-aired beds — good attendance — fine air—"

"Belay there," said Jack; and he gave the landlord what no doubt he considered a gentle admonition, but which consisted of such a dig in the ribs, that he made as many evolutions as the clown in a pantomime when he vociferates hot codlings.

"Now, Jack, where's the sailing instructions?" said his master.

"Here, sir, in the locker," said Jack, a he took from his pocket a letter, which he handed to the admiral.

"Won't you step in, sir?" said the landlord, who had begun now to recover a little from the dig in the ribs.

"What's the use of coming into port and paying harbour dues, and all that sort of thing, till we know if it's the right, you lubber, eh?"

"No; oh, dear me, sir, of course — God bless me, what can the old gentleman mean?"

The admiral opened the letter, and read: —

"If you stop at the Nelson's Aims at Uxotter, you will hear of me, and I can be sent for, when I will tell you more.

"Yours, very obediently and humbly,

"JOSIAH CRINKLES."

"Who the deuce is he?"

"This is Uxotter, sir," said the landlord; "and here you are, sir, at the Nelson's Arms. Good beds — good wine — good—"

"Silence!"

"Yes, sir — oh, of course"

“Who the devil is Josiah Crinkles?”

“Ha! ha! ha! ha! Makes me laugh, sir. Who the devil indeed! They do say the devil and lawyers, sir, know something of each other — makes me smile.”

“I’ll make you smile on the other side of that d —— d great hatchway of a mouth of yours in a minute. Who is Crinkles?”

“Oh, Mr. Crinkles, sir, everybody knows, most respectable attorney, sir, indeed, highly respectable man, sir.”

“A lawyer?”

“Yes, sir, a lawyer.”

“Well, I’m d —— d!”

Jack gave a long whistle, and both master and man looked at each other aghast.

“Now, hang me!” cried the admiral, “if ever I was so taken in in all my life.”

“Ay, ay, sir,” said Jack.

“To come a hundred and seventy miles see a d —— d swab of a rascally lawyer.”

“Ay, ay, sir.”

“I’ll smash him — Jack!”

“Yer honour?”

“Get into the chaise again.”

“Well, but where’s Master Charles? Lawyers, in course, sir, is all blessed rogues; but, howsomdever, he may have for once in his life this here one of ’em have told us of the right channel, and if so be as he has, don’t be the Yankee to leave him among the pirates. I’m ashamed on you.”

“You infernal scoundrel; how dare you preach to me in such a way, you lubberly rascal?”

“Cos you desarves it.”

“Mutiny — mutiny — by Jove! Jack, I’ll have you put in irons — you’re a scoundrel, and no seaman.”

“No seaman! — no seaman!”

“Not a bit of one.”

“Very good. It’s time, then, as I was off the purser’s books. Good bye to you; I only hopes as you may get a better seaman to stick to you and be your *walley de sham* nor Jack Pringle, that’s all the harm I wish you. You didn’t call me no seaman in the Bay of Corfu, when the bullets were scuttling our nobs.”

“Jack, you rascal, give us your fin. Come here, you d —— d villain. You’ll leave me, will you?”

“Not if I know it.”

“Come in, then”

“Don’t tell me I’m no seaman. Call me a wagabone if you like, but don’t hurt my feelings. There I’m as tender as a baby, I am. — Don’t do it.”

“Confound you, who is doing it?”

“The devil.”

“Who is?”

“Don’t, then.”

Thus wrangling, they entered the inn, to the great amusement of several bystanders, who had collected to hear the altercation between them.

“Would you like a private room, sir?” said the landlord.

“What’s that to you?” said Jack.

“Hold your noise, will you?” cried his master. “Yes, I should like a private room, and some grog.”

“Strong as the devil!” put in Jack.

"Yes, sir-yes, sir. Good wines — good beds — good—"

"You said all that before, you know," remarked Jack, as he bestowed upon the landlord another terrific dig in the ribs.

"Hilloa!" cried the admiral, "you can send for that infernal lawyer, Mister Landlord."

"Mr. Crinkles, sir?"

"Yes, yes."

"Who may I have the honour to say, sir, wants to see him?"

"Admiral Bell."

"Certainly, admiral, certainly. You'll find him a very conversible, nice, gentlemanly little man, sir."

"And tell him as Jack Pringle is here, too," cried the seaman.

"Oh, yes, yes — of course," said the landlord, who was in such a state of confusion from the digs in the ribs he had received and the noise his guests had already made in his house, that, had he been suddenly put upon his oath, he would scarcely have liked to say which was the master and which was the man.

"The idea now, Jack," said the admiral, "of coming all this way to see a lawyer."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"If he'd said he was a lawyer, we would have known what to do. But it's a take in, Jack."

"So I think. Howsomdever, we'll serve him out when we catch him, you know."

"Good — so we will."

"And, then, again, he may know something about Master Charles, sir, you know. Lord love him, don't you remember when he came aboard to see you once at Portsmouth?"

"Ah! I do, indeed."

"And how he said he hated the French, and quite a baby, too. What perseverance and sense. 'Uncle,' says he to you, 'when I'm a big man, I'll go in a ship, and fight all the French in a heap,' says he. 'And beat 'em, my boy, too,' says you; cos you thought he'd forgot that; and then he says, 'what's the use of saying that, stupid? — don't we always beat 'em?'"

The admiral laughed and rubbed his hands, as he cried aloud, —

"I remember, Jack — I remember him. I was stupid to make such a remark."

"I know you was — a d —— d old fool I thought you."

"Come, come. Hilloa, there!"

"Well, then, what do you call me no seaman for?"

"Why, Jack, you bear malice like a marine."

"There you go again. Goodbye. Do you remember when we were yard arm to yard arm with those two Yankee frigates, and took 'em both! You didn't call me a marine then, when the scuppers were running with blood. Was I a seaman then?"

"You were, Jack — you were; and you saved my life."

"I didn't."

"You did."

"I say I didn't — it was a marlin-spike."

"But I say you did, you rascally scoundrel. — I say you did, and I won't be contradicted in my own ship."

"Call this your ship?"

"No, d — n it — I—"

"Mr. Crinkles," said the landlord, flinging the door wide open, and so at once putting an end to the discussion which always apparently had a tendency to wax exceedingly warm.

"The shark, by G — d!" said Jack.

A little, neatly dressed man made his appearance, and advanced rather timidly into the room. Perhaps he had heard from the landlord that the parties who had sent for him were of rather a violent sort.

"So you are Crinkles, are you?" cried the admiral. "Sit down, though you are a lawyer."

"Thank you, sir. I am an attorney, certainly, and my name as certainly is Crinkles."

"Look at that."

The admiral placed the letter in the little lawyer's hands, who said, —

"Am I to read it?"

"Yes, to be sure."

"Aloud?"

"Read it to the devil, if you like, in a pig's whisper, or a West India hurricane."

"Oh, very good, sir. I — I am willing to be agreeable, so I'll read it aloud, if it's all the same to you."

He then opened the letter, and read as follows: —

"To Admiral Bell.

"Admiral, — Being, from various circumstances, aware that you take a warm and a praiseworthy interest in your nephew, Charles Holland, I venture to write to you concerning a matter in which your immediate and active co-operation with others may rescue him from a condition which will prove, if allowed to continue, very much to his detriment, and ultimate unhappiness.

"You are, then, hereby informed, that he, Charles Holland, has, much earlier than he ought to have done, returned to England, and that the object of his return is to contract a marriage into a family in every way objectionable, and with a girl who is highly objectionable.

“You, admiral, are his nearest and almost his only relative in the world; you are the guardian of his property, and, therefore, it becomes a duty on your part to interfere to save him from the ruinous consequences of a marriage, which is sure to bring ruin and distress upon himself and all who take an interest in his welfare.

“The family he wishes to marry into is named Bannerworth, and the young lady’s name is Flora Bannerworth. When, however, I inform you that a vampyre is in that family, and that if he marries into it, he marries a vampyre, and will have vampyres for children, I trust I have said enough to warn you upon the subject, and to induce you to lose no time in repairing to the spot.

“If you stop at the Nelson’s Arms at Uxotter, you will hear of me. I can be sent for, when I will tell you more.

“Yours, very obediently and humbly,

“JOSIAH CRINKLES.”

“P.S. I enclose you Dr. Johnson’s definition of a vampyre, which is as follows:

“VAMPYRE (a German blood-sucker) — by which you perceive how many vampyres, from time immemorial, must have been well entertained at the expense of John Bull, at the court of St. James, where no thing hardly is to be met with but German blood-suckers.”

The lawyer ceased to read, and the amazed look with which he glanced at the face of Admiral Bell would, under any other circumstances, have much amused him. His mind, however, was by far too much engrossed with a consideration of the danger of Charles Holland, his nephew, to be amused at anything; so, when he found that the little lawyer said nothing, he bellowed out, —

“Well, sir?”

“We — we — well,” said the attorney.

“I’ve sent for you, and here you are, and here I am, and here’s Jack Pringle. What have you got to say?”

“Just this much,” said Mr. Crinkles, recovering himself a little, “just this much, sir, that I never saw that letter before in all my life.”

“You — never — saw — it?”

“Never.”

“Didn’t you write it?”

“On my solemn word of honour, sir, I did not.”

Jack Pringle whistled, and the admiral looked puzzled. Like the admiral in the song, too, he “grew paler,” and then Mr. Crinkles added, —

“Who has forged my name to a letter such as this, I cannot imagine. As for writing to you, sir, I never heard of your existence, except publicly, as one of those gallant officers who have spent a long life in nobly fighting their country’s battles, and who are entitled to the admiration and the applause of every Englishman.”

Jack and the admiral looked at each other in amazement, and then the latter exclaimed, —

“What! This from a lawyer?”

“A lawyer, sir,” said Crinkles, “may know how to appreciate the deeds of gallant men, although he may not be able to imitate them. That letter, sir, is a forgery, and I now leave you, only much gratified at the incident which has procured me the honour of an interview with a gentleman, whose name will live in the history of his country. Good day, sir! Good day!”

“No! I’m d —— d if you go like that,” said Jack, as he sprang to the door, and put his back against it. “You shall take a glass with me in honour of the wooden walls of Old England, d —— e, if you was twenty lawyers."

"That's right, Jack," said the admiral. "Come, Mr. Crinkles, I'll think, for your sake, there may be two decent lawyers in the world, and you one of them. We must have a bottle of the best wine the ship — I mean the house — can afford together."

"If it is your command, admiral, I obey with pleasure," said the attorney; "and although I assure you, on my honour, I did not write that letter, yet some of the matters mentioned in it are so generally notorious here, that I can afford you information concerning them."

"Can you?"

"I regret to say I can, for I respect the parties."

"Sit down, then — sit down. Jack, run to the steward's room and get the wine. We will go into it now starboard and larboard. Who the deuce could have written that letter?"

"I have not the least idea, sir."

"Well — well, never mind; it has brought me here, that's something, so I won't grumble much at it. I didn't know my nephew was in England, and I dare say he didn't know I was; but here we both are, and I won't rest till I've seen him, and ascertained how the what's-its-name—"

"The vampyre."

"Ah! the vampyre."

"Shiver my timbers!" said Jack Pringle, who now brought in some wine much against the remonstrances of the waiters of the establishment, who considered that he was treading upon their vested interests by so doing.— "Shiver my timbers, if I knows what a *wamphigher* is, unless he's some distant relation to Davy Jones!"

"Hold your ignorant tongue," said the admiral; "nobody wants you to make a remark, you great lubber!"

"Very good," said Jack, and he sat down the wine on the table, and then retired to the other end of the room, remarking to himself that he was not called a great lubber on a certain occasion, when bullets were scuttling their nobs, and they were yard arm and yard arm with God knows who.

"Now, mister lawyer," said Admiral Bell, who had about him a large share of the habits of a rough sailor. "Now, mister lawyer, here is a glass first to our better acquaintance, for d —— e, if I don't like you!"

"You are very good, sir."

"Not at all. There was a time, when I'd just as soon have thought of asking a young shark to supper with me in my own cabin as a lawyer, but I begin to see that there may be such a thing as a decent, good sort of a fellow seen in the law; so here's good luck to you, and you shall never want a friend or a bottle while Admiral Bell has a shot in the locker."

"Gammon," said Jack.

"D — n you, what do you mean by that?" roared the admiral, in a furious tone.

"I wasn't speaking to you," shouted Jack, about two octaves higher. "It's two boys in the street as is pretending they're a going to fight, and I know d —— d well they won't."

"Hold your noise."

"I'm going. I wasn't told to hold my noise, when our nobs were being scuttled off Beyrout."

"Never mind him, mister lawyer," added the admiral. "He don't know what he's talking about. Never mind him. You go on and tell me all you know about the — the—"

"The vampyre!"

"Ah! I always forget the names of strange fish. I suppose, after all, it's something of the mermaid order?"

"That I cannot say, sir; but certainly the story, in all its painful particulars, has made a great sensation all over the country."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir. You shall hear how it occurred. It appears that one night Miss Flora Bannersworth, a young lady of great beauty, and respected and admired by all who knew her was visited by a strange being who came in at the window."

"My eye," said Jack, "it waren't me, I wish it had a been."

"So petrified by fear was she, that she had only time to creep half out of the bed, and to utter one cry of alarm, when the strange visitor seized her in his grasp."

"D — n my pig tail," said Jack, "what a squall there must have been, to be sure."

"Do you see this bottle?" roared the admiral.

"To be sure, I does; I think as it's time I seed another."

"You scoundrel, I'll make you feel it against that d —— d stupid head of yours, if you interrupt this gentleman again."

"Don't be violent."

"Well, as I was saying," continued the attorney, "she did, by great good fortune, manage to scream, which had the effect of alarming the whole house. The door of her chamber, which was fast, was broken open."

"Yes, yes—"

"Ah," cried Jack.

"You may imagine the horror and the consternation of those who entered the room to find her in the grasp of a fiend-like figure, whose teeth were fastened on her neck, and who was actually draining her veins of blood."

"The devil!"

"Before any one could lay hands sufficiently upon the figure to detain it, it had fled precipitately from its dreadful repast. Shots were fired after it in vain."

"And they let it go?"

"They followed it, I understand, as well as they were able, and saw it scale the garden wall of the premises; there it escaped, leaving, as you may well imagine, on all their minds, a sensation of horror difficult to describe."

"Well, I never did hear anything the equal of that. Jack, what do you think of it?"

"I haven't begun to think, yet," said Jack.

"But what about my nephew, Charles?" added the admiral.

"Of him I know nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Not a word, admiral. I was not aware you had a nephew, or that any gentleman bearing that, or any other relationship to you, had any sort of connexion with these mysterious and most unaccountable circumstances. I tell you all I have gathered from common report about this vampyre business. Further I know not, I assure you."

"Well, a man can't tell what he don't know. It puzzles me to think who could possibly have written me this letter."

"That I am completely at a loss to imagine," said Crinkles. "I assure you, my gallant sir, that I am much hurt at the circumstance of any one using my name in such a way. But, nevertheless, as you are here, permit me to say, that it will be my pride, my pleasure, and the boast of the remainder of my existence, to be of some service to so gallant a defender of my country, and one whose name, along with the memory of his deeds, is engraved upon the heart of every Briton."

"Quite ekal to a book, he talks," said Jack. "I never could read one myself, on account o' not knowing how, but I've heard 'em read, and that's just the sort o' incomprehensible gammon."

"We don't want any of your ignorant remarks," said the admiral, "so you be quiet."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Now, Mister Lawyer, you are an honest fellow, and an honest fellow is generally a sensible fellow."

"Sir, I thank you."

"If so be as what this letter says is true, my nephew Charles has got a liking for this girl, who has had her neck bitten by a vampyre, you see."

"I perceive, sir."

"Now what would you do?"

"One of the most difficult, as well, perhaps, as one of the most ungracious of tasks," said the attorney, "is to interfere with family affairs. The cold and steady eye of reason generally sees things in such very different lights to what they appear to those whose feelings and whose affections are much compromised in their results."

"Very true. Go on."

"Taking, my dear sir, what in my humble judgment appears to be a reasonable view of this subject, I should say it would be a dreadful thing for your nephew to marry into a family any member of which was liable to the visitations of a vampyre."

"It wouldn't be pleasant."

"The young lady might have children."

"Oh, lots," cried Jack.

“Hold your noise, Jack.”

“Ay, ay, sir.”

“And she might herself actually, when after death she became a vampyre, come and feed on her own children.”

“Become a vampyre! What, is she going to be a vampyre too?”

“My dear sir, don’t you know that it is a remarkable fact, as regards the physiology of vampyres, that whoever is bitten by one of those dreadful beings, becomes a vampyre?”

“The devil!”

“It is a fact, sir.”

“Whew!” whistled Jack; “she might bite us all, and we should be a whole ship’s crew o’ *wamphighers*. There would be a confounded go!”

“It’s not pleasant,” said the admiral, as he rose from his chair, and paced to and fro in the room, “it’s not pleasant. Hang me up at my own yard-arm if it is.”

“Who said it was?” cried Jack.

“Who asked you, you brute?”

“Well, sir,” added Mr. Crinkles, “I have given you all the information I can; and I can only repeat what I before had the honour of saying more at large, namely, that I am your humble servant to command, and that I shall be happy to attend upon you at any time.”

“Thank ye — thank ye, Mr. — a — a—”

“Crinkles.”

“Ah, Crinkles. You shall hear from me again, sir, shortly. Now that I am down here, I will see to the very bottom of this affair, were it deeper than fathom ever sounded. Charles Holland was my poor sister’s son; he’s the only relative I have in the wide world, and his happiness is dearer to my heart than my own.”

Crinkles turned aside, and, by the twinkle of his eyes, one might premise that the honest little lawyer was much affected.

"God bless you, sir," he said; "farewell."

"Good day to you."

"Good-bye, lawyer," cried Jack. "Mind how you go. D — n me, if you don't seem a decent sort of fellow, and, after all, you may give the devil a clear berth, and get into heaven's straits with a flowing sheet, provided as you don't, towards the end of the voyage, make any lubberly blunders."

The old admiral threw himself into a chair with a deep sigh.

"Jack," said he.

"Aye, aye, sir."

"What's to be done now?"

Jack opened the window to discharge the superfluous moisture from an enormous quid he had indulged himself with while the lawyer was telling about the vampyre, and then again turning his face towards his master, he said, —

"Do! What shall we do? Why, go at once and find out Charles, our *nevy*, and ask him all about it, and see the young lady, too, and lay hold o' the *wamphigher* if we can, as well, and go at the whole affair broadside to broadside, till we make a prize of all the particulars, after which we can turn it over in our minds agin, and see what's to be done."

"Jack, you are right. Come along."

"I knows I am. Do you know now which way to steer?"

"Of course not. I never was in this latitude before, and the channel looks intricate. We will hail a pilot, Jack, and then we shall be all right, and if we strike it will be his fault."

"Which is a mighty great consolation," said Jack. "Come along."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MEETING OF THE LOVERS IN THE GARDEN. — AN AFFECTING SCENE. — THE SUDDEN APPEARANCE OF SIR FRANCIS VARNEY.

Our readers will recollect that Flora Bannerworth had made an appointment with Charles Holland in the garden of the hall. This meeting was looked forward to by the young man with a variety of conflicting feelings, and he passed the intermediate time in a most painful state of doubt as to what would be its result.

The thought that he should be much urged by Flora to give up all thoughts of making her his, was a most bitter one to him, who loved her with so much truth and constancy, and that she would say all she could to induce such a resolution in his mind he felt certain. But to him the idea of now abandoning her presented itself in the worst of aspects.

"Shall I," he said, "sink so low in my own estimation, as well as in hers, and in that of all honourable-minded persons, as to desert her now in the hour of affliction? Dare I be so base as actually or virtually to say to her, 'Flora, when your beauty was undimmed by sorrow — when all around you seemed life and joy, I loved you selfishly for the increased happiness which you might bestow upon me; but now the hand of misfortune presses heavily upon you — you are not what you were, and I desert you? Never — never — never!"

Charles Holland, it will be seen by some of our more philosophic neighbours, felt more acutely than he reasoned; but let his errors of argumentation be what they may, can we do other than admire the nobility of soul which dictated such a self denying generous course as that he was pursuing?

As for Flora, Heaven only knows if at that precise time her intellect had completely stood the test of the trying events which had nearly overwhelmed it.

The two grand feelings that seemed to possess her mind were fear of the renewed visit of the vampyre, and an earnest desire to release Charles Holland from his repeated vows of constancy towards her.

Feeling, generosity, and judgment, all revolted holding a young man to such a destiny as hers. To link him to her fate, would be to make him to a real extent a sharer in it, and the more she heard fall from his lips in the way of generous feelings of continued attachment to her, the more severely did she feel that he would suffer most acutely if united to her.

And she was right. The very generosity of feeling which would have now prompted Charles Holland to lead Flora Bannerworth to the altar, even with the marks of the vampyre's teeth upon her throat, gave an assurance of a depth of feeling which would have made him an ample haven in all her miseries, in all her distresses and afflictions.

What was familiarly in the family at the Hall called the garden, was a semicircular piece of ground shaded in several directions by trees, and which was exclusively devoted to the growth of flowers. The piece of ground was nearly hidden from the view of the house, and in its centre was a summer-house, which at the usual season of the year was covered with all kinds of creeping plants of exquisite perfumes, and rare beauty. All around, too, bloomed the fairest and sweetest of flowers, which a rich soil and a sheltered situation could produce.

Alas! though, of late many weeds had straggled up among their more estimable floral culture, for the decayed fortunes of the family had prevented them from keeping the necessary servants, to place the Hall and its grounds in a state of neatness, such as it had once been the pride of the inhabitants of the place to see them. It was then in this flower-garden that Charles and Flora used to meet.

As may be supposed, he was on the spot before the appointed hour, anxiously expecting the appearance of her who was so really and truly dear to him. What to him were the sweet flowers that there grew in such happy luxuriance and heedless beauty? Alas, the flower that to his mind was fairer than them all, was blighted, and in the wan cheek of her whom he loved, he sighed to see the lily usurping the place of the radiant rose.

"Dear, dear Flora," he ejaculated, "you must indeed be taken from this place, which is so full of the most painful remembrance; now, I cannot think that Mr. Marchdale somehow is a friend to me, but that conviction, or rather impression, does not paralyze my judgment sufficiently to induce me not to acknowledge that his advice is good. He might have couched it in pleasanter words — words that would not, like daggers, each have brought a deadly pang home to my heart, but still I do think that in his conclusion he was right."

A light sound, as of some fairy footstep among the flowers, came upon his ears, and turning instantly to the direction from whence the sound proceeded, he saw what his heart had previously assured him of, namely, that it was his Flora who was coming.

Yes, it was she; but, ah, how pale, how wan — how languid and full of the evidences of much mental suffering was she. Where now was the elasticity of that youthful step? Where now was that lustrous beaming beauty of mirthfulness, which was wont to dawn in those eyes?

Alas, all was changed. The exquisite beauty of form was there, but the light of joy which had lent its most transcendent charms to that heavenly face, was gone. Charles was by her side in a moment. He had her hand clasped in his, while his disengaged one was wound tenderly around her taper waist.

“Flora, dear, dear Flora,” he said, “you are better. Tell me that you feel the gentle air revives you?”

She could not speak. Her heart was too full of woe.

“Oh; Flora, my own, my beautiful,” he added, in those tones which come so direct from the heart, and which are so different from any assumption of tenderness. “Speak to me, dear, dear Flora — speak to me if it be but a word.”

“Charles,” was all she could say, and then she burst into a flood of tears, and leant so heavily upon his arm, that it was evident but for that support she must have fallen.

Charles Holland welcomed those, although, they grieved him so much that he could have accompanied them with his own, but then he knew that she would be soon now more composed, and that they would relieve the heart whose sorrows called them into existence.

He forbore to speak to her until he found this sudden gush of feeling was subsiding into sobs, and then in low, soft accents, he again endeavoured to breathe comfort to her afflicted and terrified spirit.

“My Flora,” he said, “remember that there are warm hearts that love you. Remember that neither time nor circumstance can change such endearing affection as mine. Ah, Flora, what evil is there in the whole world that love may not conquer, and in the height of its noble feelings laugh to scorn.”

“Oh, hush, hush, Charles, hush.”

"Wherefore, Flora, would you still the voice of pure affection? I love you surely, as few have ever loved. Ah, why would you forbid me to give such utterance as I may to those feelings which fill up my whole heart?"

"No — no — no."

"Flora, Flora, wherefore do you say no?"

"Do not, Charles, now speak to me of affection or love. Do not tell me you love me now."

"Not tell you I love you! Ah, Flora, if my tongue, with its poor eloquence to give utterance to such a sentiment, were to do its office, each feature of my face would tell the tale. Each action would show to all the world how much I loved you."

"I must not now hear this. Great God of Heaven give me strength to carry out the purpose of my soul."

"What purpose is it, Flora, that you have to pray thus fervently for strength to execute? Oh, if it savour aught of treason against love's majesty, forget it. Love is a gift from Heaven. The greatest and the most glorious gift it ever bestowed upon its creatures. Heaven will not aid you in repudiating that which is the one grand redeeming feature that rescues human nature from a world of reproach."

Flora wrung her hands despairingly as she said, —

"Charles, I know I cannot reason with you. I know I have not power of language, aptitude of illustration, nor depth of thought to hold a mental contention with you."

"Flora, for what do I contend?"

"You, you speak of love."

"And I have, ere this, spoken to you of love unchecked."

"Yes, yes. Before this."

"And now, wherefore not now? Do not tell me you are changed."

"I am changed, Charles. Fearfully changed. The curse of God has fallen upon me, I know not why. I know not that in word or in thought I have done evil, except perchance unwittingly, and yet — the vampyre."

"Let not that affright you."

"Affright me! It has killed me."

"Nay, Flora, — you think too much of what I still hope to be susceptible of far more rational explanation."

"By your own words, then, Charles, I must convict you. I cannot, I dare not be yours, while such a dreadful circumstance is hanging over me, Charles; if a more rational explanation than the hideous one which my own fancy gives to the form that visits me can be found, find it, and rescue me from despair and from madness."

They had now reached the summer-house, and as Flora uttered these words she threw herself on to a seat, and covering her beautiful face with her hands, she sobbed convulsively.

"You have spoken," said Charles, dejectedly. "I have heard that which you wished to say to me."

"No, no. Not all, Charles."

"I will be patient, then, although what more you may have to add should tear my very heart-strings."

"I — I have to add, Charles," she said, in a tremulous voice, "that justice, religion, mercy — every human attribute which bears the name of virtue, calls loudly upon me no longer to hold you to vows made under different auspices."

"Go on, Flora."

"I then implore you, Charles, finding me what I am, to leave me to the fate which it has pleased Heaven to cast upon me. I do not ask you, Charles, not to love me."

"'Tis well. Go on, Flora."

"Because I should like to think that, although I might never see you more, you loved me still. But you must think seldom of me, and you must endeavour to be happy with some other—"

"You cannot, Flora, pursue the picture you yourself would draw. These words come not from your heart."

"Yes — yes — yes."

"Did you ever love me?"

"Charles, Charles, why will you add another pang to those you know must already rend my heart?"

"No, Flora, I would tear my own heart from my bosom ere I would add one pang to yours. Well I know that gentle maiden modesty would seal your lips to the soft confession that you loved me. I could not hope the joy of hearing you utter these words. The tender devoted lover is content to see the truthful passion in the speaking eyes of beauty. Content is he to translate it from a thousand acts, which, to eyes that look not so acutely as a lover's, bear no signification; but when you tell me to seek happiness with another, well may the anxious question burst from my throbbing heart of, 'Did you ever love me, Flora?'"

Her senses hung entranced upon his words. Oh, what a witchery is in the tongue of love. Some even of the former colour of her cheek returned as forgetting all for the moment but that she was listening to the voice of him, the thoughts of whom had made up the day dream of her happiness, she gazed upon his face.

His voice ceased. To her it seemed as if some music had suddenly left off in its most exquisite passage. She clung to his arm — she looked imploringly up to him. Her head sunk upon his breast as she cried, "Charles, Charles, I did love you. I do love you now."

"Then let sorrow and misfortune shake their grisly locks in vain," he cried. "Heart to heart — hand to hand with me, defy them."

He lifted up his arms towards Heaven as he spoke, and at the moment came such a rattling peal of thunder, that the very earth seemed to shake upon its axis.

A half scream of terror burst from the lips of Flora, as she cried, —

"What was that?"

"Only thunder," said Charles, calmly.

"'Twas an awful sound."

"A natural one."

"But at such a moment, when you were defying Fate to injure us. Oh! Charles, is it ominous?"

"Flora, can you really give way to such idle fancies?"

"The sun is obscured."

"Ay, but it will shine all the brighter for its temporary eclipse. The thunder-storm will clear the air of many noxious vapours; the forked lightning has its uses as well as its powers of mischief. Hark! there again!"

Another peal, of almost equal intensity to the other, shook the firmament. Flora trembled.

"Charles," she said, "this is the voice of Heaven. We must part — we must part for ever. I cannot be yours."

"Flora, this is madness. Think again, dear Flora. Misfortunes for a time will hover over the best and most fortunate of us; but, like the clouds that now obscure the sweet sunshine, will pass away, and leave no trace behind them. The sunshine of joy will shine on you again."

There was a small break in the clouds, like a window looking into Heaven. From it streamed one beam of sunlight, so bright, so dazzling, and so beautiful, that it was a sight of wonder to look upon. It fell upon the face of Flora; it warmed her cheek; it lent lustre to her pale lips and tearful eyes; it illumined that little summer-house as if it had been the shrine of some saint.

"Behold!" cried Charles, "where is your omen now?"

"God of Heaven!'" cried Flora; and she stretched out her arms.

"The clouds that hover over your spirit now," said Charles, "shall pass away. Accept this beam of sunlight as a promise from God."

"I will — I will. It is going."

"It has done its office."

The clouds closed over the small orifice, and all was gloom again as before.

"Flora," said Charles, "you will not ask me now to leave you?"

She allowed him to clasp her to his heart. It was beating for her, and for her only.

"You will let me, Flora, love you still?"

Her voice, as she answered him, was like the murmur of some distant melody the ears can scarcely translate to the heart.

"Charles we will live, love, and die together."

And now there was a wrapt stillness in that summer-house for many minutes — a trance of joy. They did not speak, but now and then she would look into his face with an old familiar smile, and the joy of his heart was near to bursting in tears from his eyes.

A shriek burst from Flora's lips — a shriek so wild and shrill that it awakened echoes far and near. Charles staggered back a step, as if shot, and then in such agonised accents as he was long indeed in banishing the remembrance of, she cried, —

“The vampyre! the vampyre!”

CHAPTER XVII.

THE EXPLANATION. — THE ARRIVAL OF THE ADMIRAL AT THE HOUSE. — A SCENE OF CONFUSION, AND SOME OF ITS RESULTS.

So sudden and so utterly unexpected a cry of alarm from Flora, at such a time might well have the effect of astounding the nerves of any one, and no wonder that Charles was for a few seconds absolutely petrified and almost unable to think.

Mechanically, then, he turned his eyes towards the door of the summer-house, and there he saw a tall, thin man, rather elegantly dressed, whose countenance certainly, in its wonderful resemblance to the portrait on the panel, might well appal any one.

The stranger stood in the irresolute attitude on the threshold of the summer-house of one who did not wish to intrude, but who found it as awkward, if not more so now, to retreat than to advance.

Before Charles Holland could summon any words to his aid, or think of freeing himself from the clinging grasp of Flora, which was wound around him, the stranger made a very low and courtly bow, after which he said, in winning accents, —

"I very much fear that I am an intruder here. Allow me to offer my warmest apologies, and to assure you, sir, and you, madam, that I had no idea any one was in the arbour. You perceive the rain is falling smartly, and I made towards here, seeing it was likely to shelter me from the shower."

These words were spoken in such a plausible and courtly tone of voice, that they might well have become any drawing-room in the kingdom.

Flora kept her eyes fixed upon him during the utterance of these words; and as she convulsively clutched the arm of Charles, she kept on whispering, —

"The vampyre! the vampyre!"

"I much fear," added the stranger, in the same bland tones, "that I have been the cause of some alarm to the young lady!"

"Release me," whispered Charles to Flora. "Release me; I will follow him at once."

"No, no — do not leave me — do not leave me. The vampyre — the dreadful vampyre!"

"But, Flora—"

"Hush — hush — hush! It speaks again."

"Perhaps I ought to account for my appearance in the garden at all," added the insinuating stranger. "The fact is, I came on a visit—"

Flora shuddered.

"To Mr. Henry Bannerworth," continued the stranger; "and finding the garden-gate open, I came in without troubling the servants, which I much regret, as I can perceive I have alarmed and annoyed the lady. Madam, pray accept of my apologies."

"In the name of God, who are you?" said Charles.

"My name is Varney."

"Oh, yes. You are the Sir Francis Varney, residing close by, who bears so fearful a resemblance to—"

"Pray go on, sir. I am all attention."

"To a portrait here."

"Indeed! Now I reflect a moment, Mr. Henry Bannerworth did incidentally mention something of the sort. It's a most singular coincidence."

The sound of approaching footsteps was now plainly heard, and in a few moments Henry and George, along with Mr. Marchdale, reached the spot. Their appearance showed that they had made haste, and Henry at once exclaimed, —

“We heard, or fancied we heard, a cry of alarm.”

“You did hear it,” said Charles Holland. “Do you know this gentleman?”

“It is Sir Francis Varney.”

“Indeed!”

Varney bowed to the new comers, and was altogether as much at his ease as everybody else seemed quite the contrary. Even Charles Holland found the difficulty of going up to such a well-bred, gentlemanly man, and saying, “Sir, we believe you to be a vampyre” — to be almost, if not insurmountable.

“I cannot do it,” he thought, “but I will watch him.”

“Take me away,” whispered Flora. “’Tis he— ’tis he. Oh, take me away, Charles.”

“Hush, Flora, hush. You are in some error; the accidental resemblance should not make us be rude to this gentleman.”

“The vampyre! — it is the vampyre!”

“Are you sure, Flora?”

“Do I know your features — my own — my brother’s? Do not ask me to doubt — I cannot. I am quite sure. Take me from his hideous presence, Charles.”

“The young lady, I fear, is very much indisposed,” remarked Sir Francis Varney, in a sympathetic tone of voice. “If she will accept of my arm, I shall esteem it a great honour.”

“No — no — no! — God! no,” cried Flora.

“Madam, I will not press you.”

He bowed, and Charles led Flora from the summer-house towards the hall.

"Flora," he said, "I am bewildered — I know not what to think. That man most certainly has been fashioned after the portrait which is on the panel in the room you formerly occupied; or it has been painted from him."

"He is my midnight visitor!" exclaimed Flora. "He is the vampyre; — this Sir Francis Varney is the vampyre."

"Good God! What can be done?"

"I know not. I am nearly distracted."

"Be calm, Flora. If this man be really what you name him, we now know from what quarter the mischief comes, which is, at all events, a point gained. Be assured we shall place a watch upon him."

"Oh, it is terrible to meet him here."

"And he is so wonderfully anxious, too, to possess the Hall."

"He is — he is."

"It looks strange, the whole affair. But, Flora, be assured of one thing, and that is, of your own safety."

"Can I be assured of that?"

"Most certainly. Go to your mother now. Here we are, you see, fairly within doors. Go to your mother, dear Flora, and keep yourself quiet. I will return to this mysterious man now with a cooler judgment than I left him."

"You will watch him, Charles?"

"I will, indeed."

"And you will not let him approach the house here alone?"

"I will not."

"Oh, that the Almighty should allow such beings to haunt the earth!"

"Hush, Flora, hush! we cannot judge of his allwise purpose."

"'Tis hard that the innocent should be inflicted with its presence."

Charles bowed his head in mournful assent.

"Is it not very, very dreadful?"

"Hush — hush! Calm yourself, dearest, calm yourself. Recollect that all we have to go upon in this matter is a resemblance, which, after all, may be accidental. But leave it all to me, and be assured that now I have some clue to this affair, I will not lose sight of it, or of Sir Francis Varney."

So saying, Charles surrendered Flora to the care of her mother, and then was hastening back to the summer-house, when he met the whole party coming towards the Hall, for the rain was each moment increasing in intensity.

"We are returning," remarked Sir Francis Varney, with a half bow and a smile, to Charles.

"Allow me," said Henry, "to introduce you, Mr. Holland, to our neighbour, Sir Francis Varney."

Charles felt himself compelled to behave with courtesy, although his mind was so full of conflicting feelings as regarded Varney; but there was no avoiding, without such brutal rudeness as was inconsistent with all his pursuits and habits, replying in something like the same strain to the extreme courtly politeness of the supposed vampyre.

"I will watch him closely," thought Charles. "I can do no more than watch him closely."

Sir Francis Varney seemed to be a man of the most general and discursive information. He talked fluently and pleasantly upon all sorts of topics, and notwithstanding he could not but have heard what Flora had said of him, he asked no questions whatever upon that subject.

This silence as regarded a matter which would at once have induced some sort of inquiry from any other man, Charles felt told much against him, and he trembled to believe for a moment that, after all, it really might be true.

“Is he a vampyre?” he asked himself. “Are there vampyres, and is this man of fashion — this courtly, talented, educated gentleman one?” It was a perfectly hideous question.

“You are charmingly situated here,” remarked Varney, as, after ascending the few steps that led to the hall door, he turned and looked at the view from that slight altitude.

“The place has been much esteemed,” said Henry, “for its picturesque beauties of scenery.”

“And well it may be. I trust, Mr. Holland, the young lady is much better?”

“She is, sir,” said Charles.

“I was not honoured by an introduction.”

“It was my fault,” said Henry, who spoke to his extraordinary guest with an air of forced hilarity. “It was my fault for not introducing you to my sister.”

“And that was your sister?”

“It was, sir.”

“Report has not belied her — she is beautiful. But she looks rather pale, I thought. Has she bad health?”

“The best of health.”

“Indeed! Perhaps the little disagreeable circumstance, which is made so much food for gossip in the neighbourhood, has affected her spirits?”

“It has.”

“You allude to the supposed visit here of a vampyre?” said

Charles, as he fixed his eyes upon Varney's face.

"Yes, I allude to the supposed appearance of a supposed vampyre in this family," said Sir Francis Varney, as he returned the earnest gaze of Charles, with such unshrinking assurance, that the young man was compelled, after about a minute, nearly to withdraw his own eyes.

"He will not be cowed," thought Charles. "Use has made him familiar to such cross-questioning."

It appeared now suddenly to occur to Henry that he had said something at Varney's own house which should have prevented him from coming to the Hall, and he now remarked, —

"We scarcely expected the pleasure of your company here, Sir Francis Varney."

"Oh, my dear sir, I am aware of that; but you roused my curiosity. You mentioned to me that there was a portrait here amazingly like me."

"Did I?"

"Indeed you did, or how could I know it? I wanted to see if the resemblance was so perfect."

"Did you hear, sir," added Henry, "that my sister was alarmed at your likeness to that portrait?"

"No, really."

"I pray you walk in, and we will talk more at large upon that matter."

"With great pleasure. One leads a monotonous life in the country, when compared with the brilliancy of a court existence. Just now I have no particular engagement. As we are near neighbours I see no reason why we should not be good friends, and often interchange such civilities as make up the amenities of existence, and which, in the country, more particularly, are valuable."

Henry could not be hypocrite enough to assent to this; but still, under the present aspect of affairs, it was impossible to return any but a civil reply; so he said, —

"Oh, yes, of course — certainly. My time is very much occupied, and my sister and mother see no company."

"Oh, now, how wrong."

"Wrong, sir?"

"Yes, surely. If anything more than another tends to harmonize individuals, it is the society of that fairer half of the creation which we love for their very foibles. I am much attached to the softer sex — to young persons full of health. I like to see the rosy checks, where the warm blood mantles in the superficial veins, and all is loveliness and life."

Charles shrank back, and the word "Demon" unconsciously escaped his lips.

Sir Francis took no manner of notice of the expression, but went on talking, as if he had been on the very happiest terms with every one present.

"Will you follow me, at once, to the chamber where the portrait hangs," said Henry, "or will you partake of some refreshment first?"

"No refreshment for me," said Varney. "My dear friend, if you will permit me to call you such, this is a time of the day at which I never do take any refreshment."

"Nor at any other," thought Henry.

They all went to the chamber where Charles had passed one very disagreeable night, and when they arrived, Henry pointed to the portrait on the panel, saying —

"There, Sir Francis Varney, is your likeness."

He looked, and, having walked up to it, in an under tone, rather as if he were conversing with himself than making a remark for any one else to hear, he said —

“It is wonderfully like.”

“It is, indeed,” said Charles.

“If I stand beside it, thus,” said Varney, placing himself in a favourable attitude for comparing the two faces, “I dare say you will be more struck with the likeness than before.”

So accurate was it now, that the same light fell upon his face as that under which the painter had executed the portrait, that all started back a step or two.

“Some artists,” remarked Varney, “have the sense to ask where a portrait is to be hung before they paint it, and then they adapt their lights and shadows to those which would fall upon the original, were it similarly situated.”

“I cannot stand this,” said Charles to Henry; “I must question him farther.”

“As you please, but do not insult him.”

“I will not.”

“He is beneath my roof now, and, after all, it is but a hideous suspicion we have of him.”

“Rely upon me.”

Charles stepped forward, and once again confronting Varney, with an earnest gaze, he said —

“Do you know, sir, that Miss Bannerworth declares the vampyre she fancies to have visited this chamber to be, in features, the exact counterpart of this portrait?”

“Does she indeed?”

“She does, indeed.”

"And perhaps, then, that accounts for her thinking that I am the vampyre, because I bear a strong resemblance to the portrait."

"I should not be surprised," said Charles.

"How very odd."

"Very."

"And yet entertaining. I am rather amused than otherwise. The idea of being a vampyre. Ha! ha! If ever I go to a masquerade again, I shall certainly assume the character of a vampyre."

"You would do it well."

"I dare say, now, I should make quite a sensation."

"I am certain you would. Do you not think, gentlemen, that Sir Francis Varney would enact the character to the very life? By Heavens, he would do it so well that one might, without much difficulty, really imagine him a vampyre."

"Bravo — bravo," said Varney, as he gently folded his hands together, with that genteel applause that may even be indulged in in a box at the opera itself. "Bravo. I like to see young persons enthusiastic; it looks as if they had some of the real fire of genius in their composition. Bravo — bravo."

This was, Charles thought, the very height and acme of impudence, and yet what could he do? What could he say? He was foiled by the downright coolness of Varney.

As for Henry, George, and Mr. Marchdale, they had listened to what was passing between Sir Francis and Charles in silence. They feared to diminish the effect of anything Charles might say, by adding a word of their own; and, likewise, they did not wish to lose one observation that might come from the lips of Varney.

But now Charles appeared to have said all he had to say, he turned to the window and looked out. He seemed like a man who had made up his mind, for a time, to give up some contest in which he had been engaged.

And, perhaps, not so much did he give it up from any feeling or consciousness of being beaten, as from a conviction that it could be the more effectually, at some other and far more eligible opportunity, renewed.

Varney now addressed Henry, saying, —

“I presume the subject of our conference, when you did me the honour of a call, is no secret to any one here?”

“None whatever,” said Henry.

“Then, perhaps, I am too early in asking you if you have made up your mind?”

“I have scarcely, certainly, had time to think.”

“My dear sir, do not let me hurry you; I much regret, indeed, the intrusion.”

“You seem anxious to possess the Hall,” remarked Mr. Marchdale, to Varney.

“I am.”

“Is it new to you?”

“Not quite. I have some boyish recollections connected with this neighbourhood, among which Bannerworth Hall stands sufficiently prominent.”

“May I ask how long ago that was?” said Charles Howard, rather abruptly.

“I do not recollect, my enthusiastic young friend,” said Varney. “How old are you?”

“Just about twenty-one.”

“You are, then, for your age, quite a model of discretion.”

It would have been difficult for the most accurate observer of human nature to have decided whether this was said truthfully or ironically, so Charles made no reply to it whatever.

"I trust," said Henry, "we shall induce you, as this is your first visit, Sir Francis Varney, to the Hall, to partake of some thing."

"Well, well, a cup of wine—"

"Is at your service."

Henry now led the way to a small parlour, which, although by no means one of the showiest rooms of the house, was, from the care and exquisite carving with which it abounded, much more to the taste of any who possessed an accurate judgment in such works of art.

Then wine was ordered, and Charles took an opportunity of whispering to Henry, —

"Notice well if he drinks."

"I will."

"Do you see that beneath his coat there is a raised place, as if his arm was bound up?"

"I do."

"There, then, was where the bullet from the pistol fired by Flora, when we were at the church, hit him."

"Hush! for God's sake, hush! you are getting into a dreadful state of excitement, Charles; hush! hush!"

"And can you blame—"

"No, no; but what can we do?"

"You are right. Nothing can we do at present. We have a clue now, and be it our mutual inclination, as well as duty, to follow it. Oh, you shall see how calm I will be!"

"For Heaven's sake, be so. I have noted that his eyes flash upon yours with no friendly feeling."

"His friendship were a curse."

"Hush! he drinks!"

"Watch him."

"I will."

"Gentlemen all," said Sir Francis Varney, in such soft, dulcet tones, that it was quite a fascination to hear him speak; "gentlemen all, being as I am, much delighted with your company, do not accuse me of presumption, if I drink now, poor drinker as I am, to our future merry meetings."

He raised the wine to his lips, and seemed to drink, after which he replaced the glass upon the table.

Charles glanced at it, it was still full.

"You have not drank, Sir Francis Varney," he said.

"Pardon me, enthusiastic young sir," said Varney, "perhaps you will have the liberality to allow me to take my wine how I please and when I please."

"Your glass is full."

"Well, sir?"

"Will you drink it?"

"Not at any man's bidding, most certainly. If the fair Flora Bannerworth would grace the board with her sweet presence, methinks I could then drink on, on, on."

"Hark you, sir," cried Charles, "I can bear no more of this. We have had in this house most horrible and damning evidence that there are such things as vampyres."

"Have you really? I suppose you eat raw pork at supper, and so had the nightmare?"

"A jest is welcome in its place, but pray hear me out, sir, if it suit your lofty courtesy to do so."

"Oh, certainly."

"Then I say we believe, as far as human judgment has a right to go, that a vampyre has been here."

"Go on, it's interesting. I always was a lover of the wild and the wonderful."

"We have, too," continued Charles, "some reason to believe that you are the man."

Varney tapped his forehead as he glanced at Henry, and said, —

"Oh, dear, I did not know. You should have told me he was a little wrong about the brain; I might have quarreled with the lad. Dear me, how lamentable for his poor mother."

"This will not do, Sir Francis Varney *alias* Bannerworth."

"Oh — oh! Be calm — be calm."

"I defy you to your teeth, sir! No, God, no! Your teeth!"

"Poor lad! Poor lad!"

"You are a cowardly demon, and here I swear to devote myself to your destruction."

Sir Francis Varney drew himself up to his full height, and that was immense, as he said to Henry, —

"I pray you, Mr. Bannerworth, since I am thus grievously insulted beneath your roof, to tell me if your friend here be mad or sane?"

"He's not mad."

"Then—"

"Hold, sir! The quarrel shall be mine. In the name of my persecuted sister — in the name of Heaven. Sir Francis Varney, I defy you."

Sir Francis, in spite of his impenetrable calmness, appeared somewhat moved, as he said, —

"I have already endured insult sufficient — I will endure no more. If there are weapons at hand—"

"My young friend," interrupted Mr. Marchdale, stepping between the excited men, "is carried away by his feelings, and knows not what he says. You will look upon it in that light, Sir Francis."

"We need no interference," exclaimed Varney, his hitherto bland voice changing to one of fury. "The hot blooded fool wishes to fight, and he shall — to the death — to the death."

"And I say he shall not," exclaimed Mr. Marchdale, taking Henry by the arm. "George," he added, turning to the young man, "assist me in persuading your brother to leave the room. Conceive the agony of your sister and mother if anything should happen to him."

Varney smiled with a devilish sneer, as he listened to these words, and then he said, —

"As you will — as you will. There will be plenty of time, and perhaps better opportunity, gentlemen. I bid you good day."

And with provoking coolness, he then moved towards the door, and quitted the room.

"Remain here," said Marchdale; "I will follow him, and see that he quits the premises."

He did so, and the young men, from the window, beheld Sir Francis walking slowly across the garden, and then saw Mr. Marchdale follow on his track.

While they were thus occupied, a tremendous ringing came at the gate, but their attention was so rivetted to what was passing in the garden, that they paid not the least attention to it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ADMIRAL'S ADVICE. — THE CHALLENGE TO THE VAMPYRE. — THE NEW SERVANT AT THE HALL.

The violent ringing of the bell continued uninterruptedly until at length George volunteered to answer it. The fact was, that now there was no servant at all in the place for, after the one who had recently demanded of Henry her dismissal had left, the other was terrified to remain alone, and had precipitately gone from the house, without even going through the ceremony of announcing her intention to. To be sure, she sent a boy for her money afterwards, which may be considered a great act of condescension.

Suspecting, then, this state of things, George himself hastened to the gate, and, being not over well pleased at the continuous and unnecessary ringing which was kept up at it, he opened it quickly, and cried, with more impatience, by a vast amount, than was usual with him.

"Who is so impatient that he cannot wait a seasonable time for the door to be opened?"

"And who the d —— l are you?" cried one who was immediately outside.

"Who do you want?" cried George.

"Shiver my timbers!" cried Admiral Bell, for it was no other than that personage. "What's that to you?"

"Ay, ay," added Jack, "answer that if you can, you shore-going-looking swab."

"Two madmen, I suppose," ejaculated George, and he would have closed the gate upon them; but Jack introduced between it and the post the end of a thick stick, saying, —

"Avast there! None of that; we have had trouble enough to get in. If you are the family lawyer, or the chaplain, perhaps you'll tell us where Mister Charley is."

"Once more I demand of you who you want?" said George, who was now perhaps a little amused at the conduct of the impatient visitors.

"We want the admiral's *nevey*" said Jack.

"But how do I know who is the admiral's *nevey* as you call him."

"Why, Charles Holland, to be sure. Have you got him aboard or not?"

"Mr. Charles Holland is certainly here; and, if you had said at once, and explicitly, that you wished to see him, I could have given you a direct answer."

"He is here?" cried the admiral.

"Most certainly."

"Come along, then; yet, stop a bit. I say, young fellow, just before we go any further, tell us if he has maimed the vampyre?"

"The what?

"The *wamphigher*," said Jack, by way of being, as he considered, a little more explanatory than the admiral.

"I do not know what you mean," said George; "if you wish to see Mr. Charles Holland walk in and see him. He is in this house; but, for myself, as you are strangers to me, I decline answering any questions, let their import be what they may."

"Hilloa! who are they?" suddenly cried Jack, as he pointed to two figures some distance off in the meadows, who appeared to be angrily conversing.

George glanced in the direction towards which Jack pointed, and there he saw Sir Francis Varney and Mr. Marchdale standing within a few paces of each other, and apparently engaged in some angry discussion.

His first impulse was to go immediately towards them; but, before he could execute even that suggestion of his mind, he saw Varney strike Marchdale, and the latter fell to the ground.

"Allow me to pass," cried George, as he endeavoured to get by the rather unwieldy form of the admiral. But, before he could accomplish this, for the gate was narrow, he saw Varney, with great swiftness, make off, and Marchdale, rising to his feet, came towards the Hall.

When Marchdale got near enough to the garden-gate to see George, he motioned to him to remain where he was, and then, quickening his pace, he soon came up to the spot.

"Marchdale," cried George, "you have had an encounter with Sir Francis Varney."

"I have," said Marchdale, in an excited manner. "I threatened to follow him, but he struck me to the earth as easily as I could a child. His strength is superhuman."

"I saw you fall."

"I believe, but that he was observed, he would have murdered me."

"Indeed!"

"What, do you mean to say that lankey, horse-marine looking fellow is as bad as that!" said the admiral.

Marchdale now turned his attention to the two new comers, upon whom he looked with some surprise, and then, turning to George, he said, —

"Is this gentleman a visitor?"

"To Mr. Holland, I believe he is," said George; "but I have not the pleasure of knowing his name."

"Oh, you may know my name as soon as you like," cried the admiral. "The enemies of old England know it, and I don't care if all the world knows it. I'm old Admiral Bell, something of a hulk now, but still able to head a quarter-deck if there was any need to do so."

"Ay, ay," cried Jack, and taking from his pocket a boatswain's whistle, he blew a blast so long, and loud, and shrill, that George was fain to cover his ears with his hands to shut out the brain-piercing, and, to him unusual sound.

"And are you, then, a relative," said Marchdale, "of Mr. Holland's, sir, may I ask?"

"I'm his uncle, and be d —— d to him, if you must know, and some one has told me that the young scamp thinks of marrying a mermaid, or a ghost, or a vampyre, or some such thing, so, for the sake of the memory of his poor mother, I've come to say no to the bargain, and d — n me, who cares."

"Come in, sir," said George, "I will conduct you to Mr. Holland. I presume this is your servant?"

"Why, not exactly. That's Jack Pringle, he was my boatswain, you see, and now he's a kind o' something betwixt and between. Not exactly a servant."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Jack. "Have it all your own way, though we is paid off."

"Hold your tongue, you audacious scoundrel, will you."

"Oh, I forgot, you don't like anything said about paying off, cos it puts you In mind of—"

"Now, d — n you, I'll have you strung up to the yard-arm, you dog, if you don't belay there."

"I'm done. All's right."

By this time the party, including the admiral, Jack, George Bannerworth, and Marchdale, had got more than half-way across the garden, and were observed by Charles Holland and Henry, who had come to the steps of the hall to see what was going on. The moment Charles saw the admiral a change of colour came over his face, and he exclaimed, —

"By all that's surprising, there is my uncle!"

"Your uncle!" said Henry.

"Yes, as good a hearted a man as ever drew breath, and yet, withal, as full of prejudices, and as ignorant of life, as a child."

Without waiting for any reply from Henry, Charles Holland rushed forward, and seizing his uncle by the hand, he cried, in tones of genuine affection, —

"Uncle, dear uncle, how came you to find me out?"

"Charley, my boy," cried the old man, "bless you; I mean, confound your d —— d impudence; you rascal, I'm glad to see you; no, I ain't, you young mutineer. What do you mean by it, you ugly, ill-looking, d —— d fine fellow — my dear boy. Oh, you infernal scoundrel."

All this was accompanied by a shaking of the hand, which was enough to dislocate anybody's shoulder, and which Charles was compelled to bear as well as he could.

It quite prevented him from speaking, however, for a few moments, for it nearly shook the breath out of him. When, then, he could get in a word, he said, —

"Uncle, I dare say you are surprised."

"Surprised! D — n me, I am surprised."

"Well, I shall be able to explain all to your satisfaction, I am sure.

Allow me now to introduce you to my friends."

Turning then to Henry, Charles said, —

"This is Mr. Henry Bannerworth, uncle; and this Mr. George Bannerworth, both good friends of mine; and this is Mr. Marchdale, a friend of theirs, uncle."

"Oh, indeed!"

"And here you see Admiral Bell, my most worthy, but rather eccentric uncle."

"Confound your impudence."

"What brought him here I cannot tell; but he is a brave officer, and a gentleman."

"None of your nonsense," said the admiral.

"And here you sees Jack Pringle," said that individual, introducing himself, since no one appeared inclined to do that office for him, "a tar for all weathers. One as hates the French, and is never so happy as when he's alongside o' some o' those lubberly craft blazing away."

"That's uncommonly true," remarked the admiral.

"Will you walk in, sir?" said Henry, courteously. "Any friend of Charles Holland's is most welcome here. You will have much to excuse us for, because we are deficient in servants at present, in consequence of come occurrences in our family, which your nephew has our full permission to explain to you in full"

"Oh, very good, I tell you what it is, all of you, what I've seen of you, d —— e, I like, so here goes. Come along, Jack."

The admiral walked into the house, and as he went, Charles Holland said to him, —

"How came you to know I was here, uncle?"

"Some fellow wrote me a despatch."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, saying at you was a going to marry some odd sort of fish as it wasn't at all the thing to introduce into the family."

"Was — was a vampyre mentioned?"

"That's the very thing."

"Hush, uncle — hush."

"What for?"

"Do not, I implore, hint at such a thing before these kind friends of mine. I will take an opportunity within the next hour of explaining all to you, and you shall form your own kind and generous judgement upon circumstances in which my honour and my happiness are so nearly concerned."

"Gammon," said the admiral.

"What, uncle?"

"Oh, I know you want to palaver me into saying it's all right. I suppose if my judgment and generosity don't like it, I shall be an old fool, and a cursed goose?"

"Now, uncle."

"Now, *nevey*."

"Well, well — no more at present. We will talk over this at leisure. You promise me to say nothing about it until you have heard my explanation, uncle?"

"Very good. Make it as soon as you can, and as short as you can, that's all I ask of you."

"I will, I will."

Charles was to the full as anxious as his uncle could be to enter upon the subject, some remote information of which, he felt convinced, had brought the old man down to the Hall. Who it could have been that so far intermeddled with his affairs as to write to him, he could not possibly conceive.

A very few words will suffice to explain the precise position in which Charles Holland was. A considerable sum of money had been left to him, but it was saddled with the condition that he should not come into possession of it until he was one year beyond the age which is usually denominated that of discretion, namely, twenty-one. His uncle, the admiral, was the trustee of his fortune, and he, with rare discretion, had got the active and zealous assistance of a professional gentleman of great honour and eminence to conduct the business for him.

This gentleman had advised that for the two years between the ages of twenty and twenty-two, Charles Holland should travel, inasmuch as in English society he would find himself in an awkward position, being for one whole year of age, and yet waiting for his property.

Under such circumstances, reasoned the lawyer, a young man, unless he is possessed of very rare discretion indeed, is almost sure to get fearfully involved with money-lenders. Being of age, his notes, and bills, and bonds would all be good, and he would be in a ten times worse situation than a wealthy minor.

All this was duly explained to Charles, who, rather eagerly than otherwise, caught at the idea of a two years wander on the continent, where he could visit so many places, which to a well read young man like himself, and one of a lively imagination, were full of the most delightful associations.

But the acquaintance with Flora Bannerworth effected a great revolution in his feelings. The dearest, sweetest spot on earth became that which she inhabited. When the Bannerworths left him abroad, he knew not what to do with himself. Everything, and every pursuit in which he had before taken a delight, became most distasteful to him. He was, in fact, in a short time, completely "used up," and then he determined upon returning to England, and finding out the dear object of his attachment at once. This resolution was no sooner taken, than his health and spirits returned to him, and with what rapidity he could, he now made his way to his native shores.

The two years were so nearly expired, that he made up his mind he would not communicate either with his uncle, the admiral, or the professional gentleman upon whose judgment he set so high and so just a value. And at the Hall he considered he was in perfect security from any interruption, and so he would have been, but for that letter which was written to Admiral Bell, and signed Josiah Crinkles, but which Josiah Crinkles so emphatically denied all knowledge of. Who wrote it, remains at present one of those mysteries which time, in the progress of our narrative, will clear up.

The opportune, or rather the painful juncture at which Charles Holland had arrived at Bannerworth Hall, we are well cognisant of. Where he expected to find smiles he found tears, and the family with whom he had fondly hoped he should pass a time of uninterrupted happiness, he found plunged in the gloom incidental to an occurrence of the most painful character.

Our readers will perceive, too, that coming as he did with an utter disbelief in the vampyre, Charles had been compelled, in some measure, to yield to the overwhelming weight of evidence which had been brought to bear upon the subject, and although he could not exactly be said to believe in the existence and the appearance of the vampyre at Bannerworth Hall, he was upon the subject in a most painful state of doubt and indecision.

Charles now took an opportunity to speak to Henry privately, and inform him exactly how he stood with his uncle, adding —

"Now, my dear friend, if you forbid me, I will not tell my uncle of this sad affair, but I must own I would rather do so fully and freely, and trust to his own judgment upon it."

"I implore you to do so," said Henry. "Conceal nothing. Let him know the precise situation and circumstances of the family by all means. There is nothing so mischievous as secrecy: I have the greatest dislike to it. I beg you tell him all."

"I will; and with it, Henry, I will tell him that my heart is irrevocably Flora's."

"Your generous clinging to one whom your heart saw and loved, under very different auspices," said Henry, "believe me, Charles, sinks deep into my heart. She has related to me something of a meeting she had with you."

"Oh, Henry, she may tell you what I said; but there are no words which can express the depth of my tenderness. 'Tis only time which can prove how much I love her."

"Go to your uncle," said Henry, in a voice of emotion. "God bless you, Charles. It is true you would have been fully justified in leaving my sister; but the nobler and the more generous path you have chosen has endeared you to us all."

"Where is Flora now?" said Charles.

"She is in her own room. I have persuaded her, by some occupation, to withdraw her mind from a too close and consequently painful contemplation of the distressing circumstances in which she feels herself placed."

"You are right. What occupation best pleases her?"

"The pages of romance once had a charm for her gentle spirit."

"Then come with me, and, from among the few articles I brought with me here, I can find some papers which may help her to pass some merry hours."

Charles took Henry to his room, and, unstrapping a small valise, he took from it some manuscript papers, one of which he handed to Henry, saying —

"Give that to her: it contains an account of a wild adventure, and shows that human nature may suffer much more — and that wrongfully too — than came ever under our present mysterious affliction."

"I will," said Henry; "and, coming from you, I am sure it will have a more than ordinary value in her eyes."

"I will now," said Charles, "seek my uncle. I will tell him how I love her; and at the end of my narration, if he should not object, I would fain introduce her to him, that he might himself see that, let what beauty may have met his gaze, her peer he never yet met with, and may in vain hope to do so."

"You are partial, Charles."

"Not so. 'Tis true I look upon her with a lover's eyes, but I look still with those of truthful observation."

"Well, I will speak to her about seeing your uncle, and let you know. No doubt, he will not be at all averse to an interview with any one who stands high in your esteem."

The young men now separated — Henry, to seek his beautiful sister; and Charles, to communicate to his uncle the strange particulars connected with Varney, the Vampyre.

CHAPTER XIX.

FLORA IN HER CHAMBER. — HER FEARS. — THE MANUSCRIPT. — AN ADVENTURE.

Henry found Flora in her chamber. She was in deep thought when he tapped at the door of the room, and such was the state of nervous excitement in which she was that even the demand for admission made by him to the room was sufficient to produce from her a sudden cry of alarm.

"Who — who is there?" she then said, in accents full of terror.

"'Tis I, dear Flora," said Henry.

She opened the door in an instant, and, with a feeling of grateful relief, exclaimed —

"Oh, Henry, is it only you?"

"Who did you suppose it was, Flora?"

She shuddered.

"I — I — do not know; but I am so foolish now, and so weak-spirited, that the slightest noise is enough to alarm me."

"You must, dear Flora, fight up, as I had hoped you were doing, against this nervousness."

"I will endeavour. Did not some strangers come a short time since, brother?"

"Strangers to us, Flora, but not to Charles Holland. A relative of his — an uncle whom he much respects, has found him out here, and has now come to see him."

"And to advise him," said Flora, as she sunk into a chair, and wept bitterly; "to advise him, of course, to desert, as he would a pestilence, a vampyre bride."

"Hush, hush! for the sake of Heaven, never make use of such a phrase, Flora. You know not what a pang it brings to my heart to hear you."

"Oh, forgive me, brother."

"Say no more of it, Flora. Heed it not. It may be possible — in fact, it may well be supposed as more than probable — that the relative of Charles Holland may shrink from sanctioning the alliance, but do you rest securely in the possession of the heart which I feel convinced is wholly yours, and which, I am sure, would break ere it surrendered you."

A smile of joy came across Flora's pale but beautiful face, as she cried, —

"And you, dear brother — you think so much of Charles's faith?"

"As Heaven is my judge, I do."

"Then I will bear up with what strength God may give me against all things that seek to depress me; I will not be conquered."

"You are right, Flora; I rejoice to find in you such a disposition. Here is some manuscript which Charles thinks will amuse you, and he bade me ask you if you would be introduced to his uncle."

"Yes, yes — willingly."

"I will tell him so; I know he wishes it, and I will tell him so. Be patient, dear Flora, and all may yet be well."

"But, brother, on your sacred word, tell me do you not think this Sir Francis Varney is the vampyre?"

"I know not what to think, and do not press me for a judgment now. He shall be watched."

Henry left his sister, and she sat for some moments in silence with the papers before her that Charles had sent her.

"Yes," she then said, gently, "he loves me — Charles loves me; I ought to be very, very happy. He loves me. In those words are concentrated a whole world of joy — Charles loves me — he will not forsake me. Oh, was there ever such dear love — such fond devotion? — never, never. Dear Charles. He loves me — he loves me!"

The very repetition of these words had a charm for Flora — a charm which was sufficient to banish much sorrow; even the much-dreaded vampyre was forgotten while the light of love was beaming upon her, and she told herself, —

"He is mine! — he is mine! He loves me truly."

After a time, she turned to the manuscript which her brother had brought her, and, with a far greater concentration of mind than she had thought it possible she could bring to it, considering the many painful subjects of contemplation that she might have occupied herself with, she read the pages with very great pleasure and interest.

The tale was one which chained her attention both by its incidents and the manner of its recital. It commenced as follows, and was entitled, "Hugo de Verole; or, the Double Plot."

In a very mountainous part of Hungary lived a nobleman whose paternal estates covered many a mile of rock and mountain land, as well as some fertile valleys, in which reposed a hardy and contented peasantry. The old Count de Hugo de Verole had quitted life early, and had left his only son, the then Count Hugo de Verole, a boy of scarcely ten years, under the guardianship of his mother, an arbitrary and unscrupulous woman.

The count, her husband, had been one of those quiet, even-tempered men, who have no desire to step beyond the sphere in which they are placed; he had no cares, save those included in the management of his estate, the prosperity of his serfs, and the happiness of those, around him.

His death caused much lamentation throughout his domains, it was so sudden and unexpected, being in the enjoyment of his health and strength until a few hours previous, and then his energies became prostrated by pain and disease. There was a splendid funeral ceremony, which, according to the usages of his house, took place by torch-light.

So great and rapid were the ravages of disease, that the count’s body quickly became a mass of corruption. All were amazed at the phenomena, and were heartily glad when the body was disposed of in the place prepared for its reception in the vaults of his own castle. The guests who came to witness the funeral, and attend the count’s obsequies, and to condole with the widow on the loss she had sustained, were entertained sumptuously for many days.

The widow sustained her part well. She was inconsolable for the loss of her husband, and mourned his death bitterly. Her grief appeared profound, but she, with difficulty, subdued it to within decent bounds, that she might not offend any of her numerous guests.

However, they left her with the assurances of their profound regard, and then when they were gone, when the last guest had departed, and were no longer visible to the eye of the countess, as she gazed from the battlements, then her behaviour changed totally.

She descended from the battlements, and then with an imperious gesture she gave her orders that all the gates of the castle should be closed, and a watch set. All signs of mourning she ordered to be laid on one side save her own, which she wore, and then she retired to her own apartment, where she remained unseen.

Here the countess remained in profound meditation for nearly two days, during which time the attendants believed she was praying for the welfare of the soul of their deceased master, and they feared she would starve herself to death if she remained any longer.

Just as they had assembled together for the purpose of either recalling her from her vigils or breaking open the door, they were amazed to see the countess open the room-door, and stand in the midst of them.

“What do you here?” she demanded, in a stern voice.

The servants were amazed and terrified at her contracted brow, and forgot to answer the question she put to them.

“What do you do here?”

“We came, my lady, to see — see — if — if you were well.”

“And why?”

“Because we hadn’t seen your ladyship these two days, and we thought that your grief was so excessive that we feared some harm might befall you.”

The countess’s brows contracted for a few seconds, and she was about to make a hasty reply, but she conquered the desire to do so, and merely said, —

“I am not well, I am faint; but, had I been dying, I should not have thanked you for interfering to prevent me; however, you acted for the best, but do so no more. Now prepare me some food.”

The servants, thus dismissed, repaired to their stations, but with such a degree of alacrity, that they sufficiently showed how much they feared their mistress.

The young count, who was only in his sixth year, knew little about the loss he had sustained; but after a day or two’s grief, there was an end of his sorrow for the time.

That night there came to the castle-gate a man dressed in a black cloak, attended by a servant. They were both mounted on good horses, and they demanded to be admitted to the presence of the Countess de Hugo de Verole.

The message was carried to the countess, who started, but said, —

“Admit the stranger.”

Accordingly the stranger was admitted, and shown into the apartment where the countess was sitting.

At a signal the servants retired, leaving the countess and the stranger alone. It was some moments ere they spoke, and then the countess said in a low tone, —

“You are come?”

“I am come.”

“You cannot now, you see, perform your threat. My husband, the count, caught a putrid disease, and he is no more.”

“I cannot indeed do what I intended, inform your husband of your amours; but I can do something as good, and which will give you as much annoyance.”

“Indeed.”

“Aye, more, it will cause you to be hated. I can spread reports.”

“You can.”

“And these may ruin you.”

“They may.”

“What do you intend to do? Do you intend that I shall be an enemy or a friend? I can be either, according to my will.”

“What, do you desire to be either?” inquired the countess, with a careless tone.

“If you refuse my terms, you can make me an implacable enemy, and if you grant them, you can make me a useful friend and auxiliary,” said the stranger.

“What would you do if you were my enemy?” inquired the countess.

"It is hardly my place," said the stranger, "to furnish you with a knowledge of my intentions, but I will say this much, that the bankrupt Count of Morven is your lover."

"Well?"

"And in the second place, that you were the cause of the death of your husband,"

"How dare you, sir—"

"I dare say so much, and I dare say, also, that the Count of Morven bought the drug of me, and that he gave it to you, and that you gave it to the count your husband."

"And what could you do if you were my friend?" inquired the countess, in the same tone, and without emotion.

"I should abstain from doing all this; should be able to put any one else out of your way for you, when you get rid of this Count of Morven, as you assuredly will; for I know him too well not to be sure of that."

"Get rid of him!"

"Exactly, in the same manner you got rid of the old count."

"Then I accept your terms."

"It is agreed, then?"

"Yes, quite."

"Well, then, you must order me some rooms in a tower, where I can pursue my studies in quiet."

"You will be seen — and noticed — all will be discovered."

"No, indeed, I will take care of that, I can so far disguise myself that he will not recognise me, and you can give out I am a philosopher or necromancer, or what you will; no one will come to me — they will be terrified."

“Very well.”

“And the gold?”

“Shall be forthcoming as soon as I can get it. The count has placed all his gold in safe keeping, and all I can seize are the rents as they become due.”

“Very well; but let me have them. In the meantime you must provide for me, as I have come here with the full intention of staying here, or in some neighbouring town.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes; and my servant must be discharged, as I want none here.”

The countess called to an attendant and gave the necessary orders, and afterwards remained some time with the stranger, who had thus so unceremoniously thrust himself upon her, and insisted upon staying under such strange and awful circumstances.

The Count of Morven came a few weeks after, and remained some days with the countess. They were ceremonious and polite until they had a moment to retire from before people, when the countess changed her cold disdain to a cordial and familiar address.

“And now, my dear Morven,” she exclaimed, as soon as they were unobserved— “and now, my dear Morven, that we are not seen, tell me, what have you been doing with yourself?”

“Why, I have been in some trouble. I never had gold that would stay by me. You know my hand was always open.”

“The old complaint again.”

“No; but having come to the end of my store, I began to grow serious.”

“Ah, Morven!’ said the countess, reproachfully.

“Well, never mind; when my purse is low my spirits sink, as the mercury does with the cold. You used to say my spirits were mercurial — I think they were."

"Well, what did you do?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Was that what you were about to tell me?" inquired the countess.

"Oh, dear, no. You recollect the Italian quack of whom I bought the drug you gave to the count, and which put an end to his days — he wanted more money. Well, as I had no more to spare, I could spare no more to him, and he turned vicious, and threatened. I threatened, too, and he knew I was fully able and willing to perform any promise I might make to him on that score. I endeavoured to catch him, as he had already began to set people off on the suspicious and marvellous concerning me, and if I could have come across him, I would have laid him very low indeed."

"And you could not find him?"

"No, I could not."

"Well, then, I will tell you where he is at this present moment."

"You?"

"Yes, I."

"I can scarcely credit my senses at what you say," said Count Morven. "My worthy doctor, you are little better than a candidate for divine honours. But where is he?"

"Will you promise to be guided by me?" said the countess.

"If you make it a condition upon which you grant the information, I must."

"Well, then, I take that as a promise."

"You may. Where — oh, where is he?"

"Remember your promise. Your doctor is at this moment in this castle."

“This castle?”

“Yes, this castle.”

“Surely there must be some mistake; it is too much fortune at once.”

“He came here for the same purpose he went to you.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes, to get more money by extortion, and a promise to poison anybody I liked.”

“D — n! it is the offer he made to me, and he named you.”

“He named you to me, and said I should be soon tired of you.”

“You have caged him?”

“Oh, dear, no; he has a suite of apartments in the eastern tower, where he passes for a philosopher, or a wizard, as people like best.”

“How?”

“I have given him leave there.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes; and what is more amazing is, that he is to aid me in poisoning you when I have become tired of you.”

“This is a riddle I cannot unravel; tell me the solution.”

“Well, dear, listen, — he came to me and told me of something I already knew, and demanded money and a residence for his convenience, and I have granted him the asylum.”

“You have?”

“I have.”

“I see; I will give him an inch or two of my Andrea Ferrara.”

“No — no.”

“Do you countenance him?”

“For a time. Listen — we want men in the mines; my late husband sent very few to them of late years, and therefore they are getting short of men there."

"Aye, aye."

"The thing will be for you to feign ignorance of the man, and then you will be able to get him seized, and placed in the mines, for such men as he are dangerous, and carry poisoned weapons."

"Would he not be better out of the world at once; there would be no escape, and no future contingencies?"

"No — no. I will have no more lives taken; and he will be made useful; and, moreover, he will have time to reflect upon the mistake he had made in threatening me."

"He was paid for the job, and he had no future claim. But what about the child?"

"Oh, he may remain for some time longer here with us."

"It will be dangerous to do so," said the count; "he is now ten years old, and there is no knowing what may be done for him by his relatives."

"They dare not enter the gates of this castle Morven."

"Well, well; but you know he might have travelled the same road as his father, and all would be settled."

"No more lives, as I told you; but we can easily secure him some other way, and we shall be equally as free from him and them."

"That is enough — there are dungeons, I know, in this castle, and he can be kept there safe enough."

"He can; but that is not what I propose. We can put him into the mines and confine him as a lunatic."

"Excellent!"

"You see, we must make those mines more productive somehow or other; they would be so, but the count would not hear of it; he said it was so inhuman, they were so destructive of life."

"Paha! what were the mines intended for if not for use?"

"Exactly — I often said so, but he always put a negative to it."

"We'll make use of an affirmative, my dear countess, and see what will be the result in a change of policy. By the way, when will our marriage be celebrated?"

"Not for some months."

"How, so long? I am impatient."

"You must restrain your impatience — but we must have the boy settled first, and the count will have been dead a longer time then, and we shall not give so much scandal to the weak-minded fools that were his friends, for it will be dangerous to have so many events happen about the same period."

"You shall act as you think proper — but the first thing to be done will be, to get this cunning doctor quietly out of the way."

"Yes."

"I must contrive to have him seized, and carried to the mines."

"Beneath the tower in which he lives is a trap-door and a vault, from which, by means of another trap and vault, is a long subterranean passage that leads to a door that opens into one end of the mines; near this end live several men whom you must give some reward to, and they will, by concert, seize him, and set him to work."

"And if he will not work?"

"Why, they will scourge him in such a manner, that he would be afraid even of a threat of a repetition of the same treatment."

"That will do. But I think the worthy doctor will split himself with rage and malice, he will be like a caged tiger."

"But he will be denuded of his teeth and claws," replied the countess, smiling "therefore he will have leisure to repent of having threatened his employers."

Some weeks passed over, and the Count of Morven contrived to become acquainted with the doctor. They appeared to be utter strangers to each other, though each knew the other; the doctor having disguised himself, he believed the disguise impenetrable and therefore sat at ease.

"Worthy doctor," said the count to him, one day; "you have, no doubt, in your studies, become acquainted with many of the secrets of science."

"I have, my lord count; I may say there are few that are not known to Father Aldrovani. I have spent many years in research."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; the midnight lamp has burned till the glorious sun has reached the horizon, and brings back the day, and yet have I been found beside my books."

"'Tis well; men like you should well know the value of the purest and most valuable metals the earth produces?"

"I know of but one — that is gold!"

"'Tis what I mean."

"But 'tis hard to procure from the bowels of the earth — from the heart of these mountains by which we are surrounded."

"Yes, that is true. But know you not the owners of this castle and territory possess these mines and work them?"

"I believe they do; but I thought they had discontinued working them some years."

"Oh, no! that was given out to deceive the government, who claimed so much out of its products."

"Oh! ah! aye, I see now."

"And ever since they have been working it privately, and storing bars of gold up in the vaults of this—"

"Here, in this castle?"

"Yes; beneath this very tower — it being the least frequented — the strongest, and perfectly inaccessible from all sides, save the castle — it was placed there for the safest deposit."

"I see; and there is much gold deposited in the vaults?"

"I believe there is an immense quantity in the vaults."

"And what is your motive for telling me of this hoard of the precious metal?"

"Why, doctor, I thought that you or I could use a few bars; and that, if we acted in concert, we might be able to take away, at various times, and secrete, in some place or other, enough to make us rich men for all our lives."

"I should like to see this gold before I said anything about it," replied the doctor, thoughtfully.

"As you please; do you find a lamp that will not go out by the sudden draughts of air, or have the means of relighting it, and I will accompany you."

"When?"

"This very night, good doctor, when you shall see such a golden harvest you never yet hoped for, or even believed in."

"To-night be it, then," replied the doctor. "I will have a lamp that will answer our purpose, and some other matters."

"Do, good doctor," and the count left the philosopher's cell.

"The plan takes," said the count to the countess, "give me the keys, and the worthy man will be in safety before daylight."

"Is he not suspicious?"

"Not at all."

That night, about an hour before midnight, — the Count Morven stole towards the philosopher's room. He tapped at the door.

"Enter," said the philosopher.

The count entered, and saw the philosopher seated, and by him a lamp of peculiar construction, and incased in gauze wire, and a cloak.

"Are you ready?" inquired the count.

"Quite," he replied.

"Is that your lamp?"

"It is."

"Follow me, then, and hold the lamp tolerably high, as the way is strange, and the steps steep."

"Lead on."

"You have made up your mind, I dare say, as to what share of the undertaking you will accept of with me."

"And what if I will not?" said the philosopher, coolly.

"It falls to the ground, and I return the keys to their place."

"I dare say I shall not refuse, if you have not deceived me as to the quantity and purity of the metal they have stored up."

"I am no judge of these metals, doctor. I am no assayest; but I believe you will find what I have to show you will far exceed your expectations on that head."

"'Tis well: proceed."

They had now got to the first vault, in which stood the first door, and, with some difficulty, they opened the vault door.

"It has not been opened for some time," said the philosopher.

"I dare say not, they seldom used to go here, from what I can learn, though it is kept a great secret."

“And we can keep it so, likewise.”

“True.”

They now entered the vault, and came to the second door, which opened into a kind of flight of steps, cut out of the solid rock, and then along a passage cut out of the mountain, of some kind of stone, but not so hard as the rock itself.

“You see,” said the count, “what care has been taken to isolate the place, and detach it from the castle, so that it should not be dependent upon the possessor of the castle. This is the last door but one, and now prepare yourself for a surprise, doctor, this will be an extraordinary one.”

So saying, the count opened the door, and stepped on one side, when the doctor approached the place, and was immediately thrust forward by the count and he rolled down some steps into the mine, and was immediately seized by some of the miners, who had been stationed there for that purpose, and carried to a distant part of the mine, there to work for the remainder of his life.

The count, seeing all secure, refastened the doors, and returned to the castle. A few weeks after this the body of a youth, mangled and disfigured, was brought to the castle, which the countess said was her son’s body.

The count had immediately secured the real heir, and thrust him into the mines, there to pass a life of labour and hopeless misery.

There was a high feast held. The castle gates were thrown open, and everybody who came were entertained without question.

This was on the occasion of the count’s and countess’s marriage. It seemed many months after the death of her son, whom she affected to mourn for a long time.

However, the marriage took place, and in all magnificence and splendour. The countess again appeared arrayed in splendour and beauty: she was proud and haughty, and the count was imperious.

In the mean time, the young Count de Hugo de Verole was confined in the mines, and the doctor with him.

By a strange coincidence, the doctor and the young count became companions, and the former, meditating projects of revenge, educated the young count as well as he was able for several years in the mines, and cherished in the young man a spirit of revenge. They finally escaped together, and proceeded to Leyden, where the doctor had friends, and where he placed his pupil at the university, and thus made him a most efficient means of revenge, because the education of the count gave him a means of appreciating the splendour and rank he had been deprived of. He, therefore, determined to remain at Leyden until he was of age, and then apply to his father's friends, and then to his sovereign, to dispossess and punish them both for their double crime.

The count and countess lived on in a state of regal splendour. The immense revenue of his territory, and the treasure the late count had amassed, as well as the revenue that the mines brought in, would have supported a much larger expenditure than even their tastes disposed them to enjoy.

They had heard nothing of the escape of the doctor and the young count. Indeed, those who knew of it held their peace and said nothing about it, for they feared the consequences of their negligence. The first intimation they received was at the hands of a state messenger, summoning them to deliver up the castle revenues and treasure of the late count.

This was astounding to them, and they refused to do so, but were soon after seized upon by a regiment of cuirassiers sent to take them, and they were accused of the crime of murder at the instance of the doctor.

They were arraigned and found guilty, and, as they were of the patrician order, their execution was delayed, and they were committed to exile. This was done out of favour to the young count, who did not wish to have his family name tainted by a public execution, or their being confined like convicts.

The count and countess quitted Hungary, and settled in Italy, where they lived upon the remains of the Count of Morven's property, shorn of all their splendour but enough to keep them from being compelled to do any menial office.

The young count took possession of his patrimony and his treasure at last, such as was left by his mother and her paramour.

The doctor continued to hide his crime from the young count, and the perpetrators denying all knowledge of it, he escaped; but he returned to his native place, Leyden, with a reward for his services from the young count.

Flora rose from her perusal of the manuscript, which here ended, and even as she did so, she heard a footstep approaching her chamber door.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DREADFUL MISTAKE. — THE TERRIFIC INTERVIEW IN THE CHAMBER. — THE ATTACK OF THE VAMPYRE.

The footstep which Flora, upon the close of the tale she had been reading, heard approaching her apartment, came rapidly along the corridor.

"It is Henry, returned to conduct me to an interview with Charles's uncle," she said. "I wonder, now, what manner of man he is. He should in some respects resemble Charles; and if he do so, I shall bestow upon him some affection for that alone."

Tap — tap came upon the chamber door. Flora was not at all alarmed now, as she had been when Henry brought her the manuscript. From some strange action of the nervous system, she felt quite confident, and resolved to brave everything. But then she felt quite sure that it was Henry, and before the knocking had taken her by surprise.

"Come in," she said, in a cheerful voice. "Come in."

The door opened with wonderful swiftness — a figure stepped into the room, and then closed it as rapidly, and stood against it. Flora tried to scream, but her tongue refused its office; a confused whirl of sensations passed through her brain — she trembled, and an icy coldness came over her. It was Sir Francis Varney, the vampyre!

He had drawn up his tall, gaunt frame to its full height, and crossed his arms upon his breast; there was a hideous smile upon his sallow countenance, and his voice was deep and sepulchral, as he said, —

“Flora Bannerworth, hear that which I have to say, and hear it calmly. You need have nothing to fear. Make an alarm — scream, or shout for help, and, by the hell beneath us, you are lost!”

There was a death-like, cold, passionless manner about the utterance of these words, as if they were spoken mechanically, and came from no human lips.

Flora heard them, and yet scarcely comprehended them; she stepped slowly back till she reached a chair, and there she held for support. The only part of the address of Varney that thoroughly reached her ears, was that if she gave any alarm some dreadful consequences were to ensue. But it was not on account of these words that she really gave no alarm; it was because she was utterly unable to do so.

“Answer me,” said Varney. “Promise that you will hear that which I have to say. In so promising you commit yourself to no evil, and you shall hear that which shall give you much peace.”

It was in vain she tried to speak; her lips moved, but she uttered no sound.

“You are terrified,” said Varney, “and yet I know not why. I do not come to do you harm, although harm have you done me. Girl, I come to rescue you from a thraldom of the soul under which you now labour.”

There was a pause of some moments’ duration, and then, faintly, Flora managed to say, —

“Help! help! Oh, help me, Heaven!”

Varney made a gesture of impatience, as he said, —

“Heaven works no special matters now. Flora Bannerworth, if you have as much intellect as your nobility and beauty would warrant the world in supposing, you will listen to me.”

"I — I hear," said Flora, as she still, dragging the chair with her, increased the distance between them.

"'Tis well. You are now more composed."

She fixed her eyes upon the face of Varney with a shudder. There could be no mistake. It was the same which, with the strange, glassy looking eyes, had glared upon her on that awful night of the storm when she was visited by the vampyre. And Varney returned that gaze unflinchingly There was a hideous and strange contortion of his face now as he said, —

"You are beautiful. The most cunning statuary might well model some rare work of art from those rounded limbs, that were surely made to bewitch the gazer. Your skin rivals the driven snow — what a face of loveliness, and what a form of enchantment."

She did not speak, but a thought came across her mind, which at once crimsoned her cheek — she knew she had fainted on the first visit of the vampyre, and now he, with a hideous reverence, praised beauties which he might have cast his demoniac eyes over at such a time.

"You understand me," he said. "Well, let that pass. I am something allied to humanity yet."

"Speak your errand," gasped Flora, "or come what may, I scream for help to those who will not be slow to render it."

"I know it."

"You know I will scream?"

"No; you will hear me. I know they would not be slow to tender help to you, but you will not call for it; I will present to you no necessity."

"Say on — say on."

"You perceive I do not attempt to approach you; my errand is one of peace.”

“Peace from you! Horrible being, if you be really what even now my appalled imagination shrinks from naming you, would not even to you absolute annihilation be a blessing?”

“Peace, peace. I came not here to talk on such a subject. I must be brief, Flora Bannerworth, for time presses. I do not hate you. Wherefore should I? You are young, and you are beautiful, and you bear a name which should command, and does command, some portion of my best regard.”

“There is a portrait,” said Flora, “in this house.”

“No more — no more. I know what you would say.”

“It is yours.”

“The house, and all within, I covet,” he said, uneasily. “Let that suffice. I have quarrelled with your brother — I have quarrelled with one who just now fancies he loves you.”

“Charles Holland loves me truly.”

“It does not suit me now to dispute that point with you. I have the means of knowing more of the secrets of the human heart than common men. I tell you, Flora Bannerworth, that he who talks to you of love, loves you not but with the fleeting fancy of a boy; and there is one who hides deep in his heart a world of passion, one who has never spoken to you of love, and yet who loves you with a love as far surpassing the evanescent fancy of this boy Holland, as does the mighty ocean the most placid lake that ever basked in idleness beneath a summer’s sun.”

There was a wonderful fascination in the manner now of Varney. His voice sounded like music itself. His words flowed from his tongue, each gently and properly accented, with all the charm of eloquence.

Despite her trembling horror of that man — despite her fearful opinion, which might be said to amount to a conviction of what he really was, Flora felt an irresistible wish to hear him speak on. Ay, despite too, the ungrateful theme to her heart which he had now chosen as the subject of his discourse, she felt her fear of him gradually dissipating, and now when he made a pause, she said, —

"You are much mistaken. On the constancy and truth of Charles Holland, I would stake my life."

"No doubt, no doubt."

"Have you spoken now that which you had to say?"

"No, no. I tell you I covet this place, I would purchase it, but having with your bad-tempered brothers quarrelled, they will hold no further converse with me."

"And well they may refuse."

"Be, that as it may, sweet lady, I come to you to be my mediator. In the shadow of the future I can see many events which are to come."

"Indeed."

"It is so. Borrowing some wisdom from the past, and some from resources I would not detail to you, I know that if I have inflicted much misery upon you, I can spare you much more. Your brother or your lover will challenge me."

"Oh, no, no."

"I say such will happen, and I can kill either. My skill as well as my strength is superhuman."

"Mercy! mercy!" gasped Flora. "I will spare either or both on a condition."

"What fearful condition?"

"It is not a fearful one. Your terrors go far before the fact. All I wish, maiden, of you is to induce these imperious brothers of yours to sell or let the Hall to me."

"Is that all?"

"It is. I ask no more, and, in return, I promise you not only that I will not fight with them, but that you shall never see me again. Rest securely, maiden, you will be undisturbed by me."

"Oh, God! that were indeed an assurance worth the striving for," said Flora.

"It is one you may have. But—"

"Oh, I knew — my heart told me there was yet some fearful condition to come."

"You are wrong again. I only ask of you that you keep this meeting a secret."

"No, no, no — I cannot."

"Nay, what so easy?"

"I will not; I have no secrets from those I love."

"Indeed, you will find soon the expediency of a few at least; but if you will not, I cannot urge it longer. Do as your wayward woman's nature prompts you."

There was a slight, but a very slight, tone of aggravation in these words, and the manner in which they were uttered.

As he spoke, he moved from the door towards the window, which opened into a kitchen garden. Flora shrunk as far from him as possible, and for a few moments they regarded each other in silence.

"Young blood," said Varney, "mantles in your veins."

She shuddered with terror.

"Be mindful of the condition I have proposed to you. I covet Bannerworth Hall."

"I — I hear."

"And I must have it. I will have it, although my path to it be through a sea of blood. You understand me, maiden? Repeat what has passed between us or not, as you please. I say, beware of me, if you keep not the condition I have proposed."

"Heaven knows that this place is becoming daily more hateful to us all," said Flora.

"Indeed!"

"You well might know so much. It is no sacrifice to urge it now. I will urge my brother."

"Thanks — a thousand thanks. You may not live to regret even having made a friend of Varney—"

"The vampyre!" said Flora.

He advanced towards her a step, and she involuntarily uttered a scream of terror.

In an instant his hand clasped her waist with the power of an iron vice; she felt hit hot breath flushing on her cheek. Her senses reeled, and she found herself sinking. She gathered all her breath and all her energies into one piercing shriek, and then she fell to the floor. There was a sudden crash of broken glass, and then all was still.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CONFERENCE BETWEEN THE UNCLE AND NEPHEW, AND THE ALARM.

Meanwhile Charles Holland had taken his uncle by the arm, and led him into a private room.

"Dear uncle," he said, "be seated, and I will explain everything without reserve."

"Seated! — nonsense! I'll walk about," said the admiral. "D — n me! I've no patience to be seated, and very seldom had or have. Go on now, you young scamp."

"Well — well; you abuse me, but I am quite sure, had you been in my situation, you would have acted precisely as I have done."

"No, I shouldn't."

"Well, but, uncle—"

"Don't think to come over me by calling me uncle. Hark you, Charles — from this moment I won't be your uncle any more."

"Very well, sir."

"It ain't very well. And how dare you, you buccaneer, call me sir, eh? I say, how dare you?"

"I will call you anything you like."

"But I won't be called anything I like. You might as well call me at once Morgan, the Pirate, for he was called anything he liked. Hilloa, sir! how dare you laugh, eh? I'll teach you to laugh at me. I wish I had you on board ship — that's all, you young rascal. I'd soon teach you to laugh at your superior officer, I would."

"Oh, uncle, I did not laugh at you."

"What did you laugh at, then?"

"At the joke."

"Joke. D — n me, there was no joke at all!"

"Oh, very good."

"And it ain't very good."

Charles knew very well that, this sort of humour, in which was the old admiral, would soon pass away, and then that he would listen to him comfortably enough; so he would not allow the least exhibition of petulance or mere impatience to escape himself, but contented himself by waiting until the ebullition of feeling fairly worked itself out.

"Well, well," at length said the old man, "you have dragged me here, into a very small and a very dull room, under pretence of having something to tell me, and I have heard nothing yet."

"Then I will now tell you," said Charles. "I fell in love—"

"Bah!"

"With Flora Bannerworth, abroad; she is not only the most beautiful of created beings—"

"Bah!"

"But her mind is of the highest order of intelligence, honour, candour, and all amiable feelings—"

"Bah!"

"Really, uncle, if you say 'Bah!' to everything, I cannot go on."

"And what the deuce difference, sir, does it make to you, whether I say 'Bah!' or not?"

"Well, I love her. She came to England, and, as I could not exist, but was getting ill, and should, no doubt, have died if I had not done so, I came to England."

"But d —— e, I want to know about the mermaid."

"The vampyre, you mean, sir?"

“Well, well, the vampyre.”

“Then, uncle, all I can tell you is, that it is supposed a vampyre came one night and inflicted a wound upon Flora’s neck with his teeth, and that he is still endeavouring to renew his horrible existence from the young, pure blood that flows through her veins.”

“The devil he is!”

“Yes. I am bewildered, I must confess, by the mass of circumstances that have combined to give the affair a horrible truthfulness. Poor Flora is much injured in health and spirits; and when I came home, she, at once, implored me to give her up, and think of her no more, for she could not think of allowing me to unite my fate with hers, under such circumstances.”

“She did?”

“Such were her words, uncle. She implored me — she used that word, ‘implore’ — to fly from her, to leave her to her fate, to endeavour to find happiness with some one else.”

“Well?”

“But I saw her heart was breaking.”

“What o’ that?”

“Much of that, uncle. I told her that when I deserted her in the hour of misfortune that I hoped Heaven would desert me. I told her that if her happiness was wrecked, to cling yet to me, and that with what power and what strength God had given me, I would stand between her and all ill.”

“And what then?”

“She — she fell upon my breast and wept and blessed me. Could I desert her — could I say to her, ‘My dear girl, when you were full of health and beauty, I loved you, but now that sadness is at your heart I leave you?’ Could I tell her that, uncle, and yet call myself a man?”

"No!" roared the old admiral, in a voice that made the room echo again; "and I tell you what, if you had done so, d — n you, you puppy, I'd have braced you, and — and married the girl myself. I would, d —— e, but I would."

"Dear uncle!"

"Don't dear me, sir. Talk of deserting a girl when the signal of distress, in the shape of a tear, is in her eye!"

"But I—"

"You are a wretch — a confounded lubberly boy — a swab — a d —— d bad grampus."

"You mistake, uncle."

"No, I don't. God bless you, Charles, you shall have her — if a whole ship's crew of vampyres said no, you shall have her. Let me see her — just let me see her."

The admiral gave his lips a vigorous wipe with his sleeve, and Charles said hastily, —

"My dear uncle, you will recollect that Miss Bannerworth is quite a young lady."

"I suppose she is."

"Well, then, for God's sake, don't attempt to kiss her."

"Not kiss her! d —— e, they like it. Not kiss her, because she's a young lady! D —— e, do you think I'd kiss a corporal of marines?"

"No, uncle; but you know young ladies are very delicate."

"And ain't I delicate — shiver my timbers, ain't I delicate? Where is she? that's what I want to know."

"Then you approve of what I have done?"

"You are a young scamp, but you have got some of the old admiral's family blood in you, so don't take any credit for acting like an honest man — you couldn't help it."

"But if I had not so acted," said Charles, with a smile, "what would have become of the family blood, then?"

"What's that to you? I would have disowned you, because that very thing would have convinced me you were an impostor, and did not belong to the family at all."

"Well, that would have been one way of getting over the difficulty."

"No difficulty at all. The man who deserts the good ship that carries him through the waves, or the girl that trusts her heart to him, ought to be chopped up into meat for wild monkeys."

"Well, I think so to."

"Of course you do."

"Why, of course?"

"Because it's so d —— d reasonable that, being a nephew of mine, you can't possibly help it."

"Bravo, uncle! I had no idea you were so argumentative."

"Hadn't you, spooney; you'd be an ornament to the gun-room, you would; but where's the 'young lady' who is so infernal delicate — where is she, I say?"

"I will fetch her, uncle."

"Ah, do; I'll be bound, now, she's one of the right build — a good figure-head, and don't make too much stern-way."

"Well, well, whatever you do, now don't pay her any compliments, for your efforts in that line are of such a very doubtful order, that I shall dread to hear you."

"You be off, and mind your own business; I haven't been at sea forty years without picking up some out-and-out delicate compliments to say to a young lady."

"But do you really imagine, now, that the deck of a man-of-war is a nice place to pick up courtly compliments in?”

“Of course I do. There you hear the best of language, d —— e! You don’t know what you are talking about, you fellows that have stuck on shore all your lives; it’s we seamen who learn life.”

“Well, well — hark!”

“What’s that?”

“A cry — did you not hear a cry?”

“A signal of distress, by G — d!”

In their efforts to leave the room, the uncle and nephew for about a minute actually blocked up the door-way, but the superior bulk of the admiral prevailed, and after nearly squeezing poor Charles flat, he got out first.

But this did not avail him, for he knew not where to go. Now, the second scream which Flora had uttered when the vampyre had clasped her waist came upon their ears, and, as they were outside the room, it acted well as a guide in which direction to come.

Charles fancied correctly enough at once that it proceeded from the room which was called “Flora’s own room,” and thitherward accordingly he dashed at tremendous speed.

Henry, however, happened to be nearer at hand, and, moreover, he did not hesitate a moment, because he knew that Flora was in her own room; so he reached it first, and Charles saw him rush in a few moments before he could reach the room.

The difference of time, however, was very slight, and Henry had only just raised Flora from the floor as Charles appeared.

“God of Heaven!” cried the latter, “what has happened?”

“I know not,” said Henry; “as God is my judge, I know not. Flora, Flora, speak to us! Flora! Flora!”

“She has fainted!” cried Charles. “Some water may restore her.

Oh, Henry, Henry, is not this horrible?"

"Courage! courage!" said Henry although his voice betrayed what a terrible state of anxiety he was himself in; "you will find water in that decanter, Charles. Here is my mother, too! Another visit! God help us!"

Mrs. Bannerworth sat down on the edge of the sofa which was in the room, and could only wring her hands and weep.

"Avast!" cried the admiral, making his appearance. "Where's the enemy, lads?"

"Uncle," said Charles, "uncle, uncle, the vampyre has been here again — the dreadful vampyre!"

"D — n me, and he's gone, too, and carried half the window with him. Look there!"

It was literally true; the window, which was a long latticed one, was smashed through.

"Help! oh, help!" said Flora, as the water that was dashed in her face began to recover her.

"You are safe!" cried Henry, "you are safe!"

"Flora," said Charles; "you know my voice, dear Flora? Look up, and you will see there are none here but those who love you."

Flora opened her eyes timidly as the said, —

"Has it gone?"

"Yes, yes, dear," said Charles. "Look around you; here are none but true friends."

"And tried friends, my dear," said Admiral Bell, "excepting me; and whenever you like to try me, afloat or ashore, d — n me, shew me Old Nick himself, and I won't shrink — yard arm and yard arm — grapnel to grapnel — pitch pots and grenades!"

"This is my uncle, Flora," said Charles.

"I thank you, sir," said Flora, faintly.

"All right!" whispered the admiral to Charles; "what a figure-head, to be sure! Poll at Swansea would have made just about four of her, but she wasn't so delicate, d — n me!"

"I should think not."

"You are right for once in a way, Charley."

"What was it that alarmed you?" said Charles, tenderly, as he now took one of Flora's hands in his.

"Varney — Varney, the vampyre."

"Varney!" exclaimed Henry; "Varney here!"

"Yes, he came in at that door: and when I screamed, I suppose — for I hardly was conscious — he darted out through the window."

"This," said Henry, "is beyond all human patience. By Heaven! I cannot and will not endure it."

"It shall be my quarrel," said Charles; "I shall go at once and defy him. He shall meet me."

"Oh, no, no, no," said Flora, as she clung convulsively to Charles. "No, no; there is a better way."

"What way?"

"The place has become full of terrors. Let us leave it. Let him, as he wishes, have it."

"Let *him* have it?"

"Yes, yes. God knows, if it purchase an immunity from these visits, we may well be overjoyed. Remember that we have ample reason to believe him more than human. Why should you allow yourselves to risk a personal encounter with such a man, who might be glad to kill you that he might have an opportunity of replenishing his own hideous existence from your best heart's blood?"

The young men looked aghast.

"Besides," added Flora, "you cannot tell what dreadful powers of mischief he may have, against which human courage might be of no avail."

"There is truth and reason," said Mr. Marchdale, stepping forward, "in what Flora says."

"Only let me come across him, that's all," said Admiral Bell, "and I'll soon find out what he is. I suppose he's some long slab of a lubber after all, ain't he, with no strength."

"His strength is immense," said Marchdale. "I tried to seize him, and I fell beneath his arm as if I had been struck by the hammer of a Cyclops."

"A what?" cried the admiral.

"A Cyclops."

"D — n me, I served aboard the Cyclops eleven years, and never saw a very big hammer aboard of her."

"What on earth is to be done?" said Henry."

"Oh," chimed in the admiral, "there's always a bother about what's to be done on earth. Now, at sea, I could soon tell you what was to be done."

"We must hold a solemn consultation over this matter," said Henry. "You are safe now, Flora."

"Oh, be ruled by me. Give up the Hall."

"You tremble."

"I do tremble, brother, for what may yet ensue. I implore you to give up the Hall. It is but a terror to us now — give it up. Have no more to do with it. Let us make terms with Sir Francis Varney. Remember, we dare not kill him."

"He ought to be smothered," said the admiral.

"It is true," remarked Henry, "we dare not, even holding all the terrible suspicions we do, take his life.”

“By foul means certainly not,” said Charles, “were he ten times a vampyre. I cannot, however, believe that he is so invulnerable as he is represented.”

“No one represents him here,” said Marchdale. “I speak, sir, because I saw you glance at me. I only know that, having made two unsuccessful attempts to seize him, he eluded me, once by leaving in my grasp a piece of his coat, and the next time he struck me down, and I feel yet the effects of the terrific blow.”

“You hear?” said Flora.

“Yes, I hear,” said Charles.

“For some reason,” added Marchdale, in a tone of emotion, “what I say seems to fall always badly upon Mr. Holland’s ear. I know not why; but if it will give him any satisfaction, I will leave Bannerworth Hall to-night.”

“No, no, no,” said Henry; “for the love of Heaven, do not let us quarrel.”

“Hear, hear,” cried the admiral. “We can never fight the enemy well if the ship’s crew are on bad terms. Come now, you Charles, this appears to be an honest, gentlemanly fellow — give him your hand.”

“If Mr. Charles Holland,” said Marchdale, “knows aught to my prejudice in any way, however slight, I here beg of him to declare it at once, and openly.”

“I cannot assert that I do,” said Charles.

“Then what the deuce do you make yourself so disagreeable for, eh?” cried the admiral.

“One cannot help one’s impression and feelings,” said Charles; “but I am willing to take Mr. Marchdale’s hand.”

“And I yours, young sir,” said Marchdale, “in all sincerity of spirit, and with good will towards you.”

They shook hands; but it required no conjuror to perceive that it was not done willingly or cordially. It was a handshaking of that character which seemed to imply on each side, “I don’t like you, but I don’t know positively any harm of you.”

“There now,” said the admiral, “that’s better.”

“Now, let us hold counsel about this Varney,” said Henry. “Come to the parlour all of you, and we will endeavour to come to some decided arrangement.”

“Do not weep, mother,” said Flora. “All may yet be well. We will leave this place.”

“We will consider that question, Flora,” said Henry; “and believe me your wishes will go a long way with all of us, as you may well suppose they always would.”

They left Mrs. Bannerworth with Flora, and proceeded to the small oaken parlour, in which were the elaborate and beautiful carvings which have been before mentioned.

Henry’s countenance, perhaps, wore the most determined expression of all. He appeared now as if he had thoroughly made up his mind to do something which should have a decided tendency to put a stop to the terrible scenes which were now day by day taking place beneath that roof.

Charles Holland looked serious and thoughtful, as if he were revolving some course of action in his mind concerning which he was not quite clear.

Mr. Marchdale was more sad and depressed, to all appearance, than any of them.

At for the admiral, he was evidently in a state of amazement, and knew not what to think. He was anxious to do something, and yet what that was to be he had not the most remote idea, any more than as if he was not at all cognisant of any of those circumstances, every one of which was so completely out of the line of his former life and experience.

George had gone to call on Mr. Chillingworth, so he was not present at the first part of this serious council of war.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CONSULTATION. — THE DETERMINATION TO LEAVE THE HALL.

This was certainly the most seriously reasonable meeting which had been held at Bannerworth Hall on the subject of the much dreaded vampyre. The absolute necessity for doing something of a decisive character was abundantly apparent, and when Henry promised Flora that her earnest wish to leave the house should not be forgotten as an element in the discussion which was about to ensue, it was with a rapidly growing feeling on his own part, to the effect that that house, associated even as it was with many endearing recollections, was no home for him.

Hence he was the more inclined to propose a departure from the Hall if it could possibly be arranged satisfactorily in a pecuniary point of view. The pecuniary point of view, however, in which Henry was compelled to look at the subject, was an important and a troublesome one.

We have already hinted at the very peculiar state of the finances of the family; and, in fact, although the income derivable from various sources ought to have been amply sufficient to provide Henry, and those who were dependent upon him, with a respectable livelihood, yet it was nearly all swallowed up by the payment of regular instalments upon family debts incurred by his father. And the creditors took great credit to themselves that they allowed of such an arrangement, instead of sweeping off all before them, and leaving the family to starve.

The question, therefore, or, at all events, one of the questions, now was, how far would a departure from the Hall of him, Henry, and the other branches of the family, act upon that arrangement?

During a very few minutes' consideration, Henry, with the frank and candid disposition which was so strong a characteristic of his character, made up his mind to explain all this fully to Charles Holland and his uncle.

When once he formed such a determination he was not likely to be slow in carrying it into effect, and no sooner, then, were the whole of them seated in the small oaken parlour than he made an explicit statement of his circumstances.

"But," said Mr. Marchdale, when he had done, "I cannot see what right your creditors have to complain of where you live, so long as you perform your contract to them."

"True; but they always expected me, I knew, to remain at the Hall, and if they chose, why, of course, at any time, they could sell off the whole property for what it would fetch, and pay themselves as far as the proceeds would go. At all events, I am quite certain there could be nothing at all left for me."

"I cannot imagine," added Mr. Marchdale, "that any men could be so unreasonable."

"It is scarcely to be borne," remarked Charles Holland, with more impatience than he usually displayed, "that a whole family are to be put to the necessity of leaving their home for no other reason than the being pestered by such a neighbour as Sir Francis Varney. It makes one impatient and angry to reflect upon such a state of things."

"And yet they are lamentably true," said Henry. "What can we do?"

"Surely there must be some sort of remedy."

"There is but one that I can imagine, and that is one we all alike revolt from. We might kill him."

"That is out of the question."

"Of course my impression is that he bears the same name really as myself, and that he is my ancestor, from whom was painted the portrait on the panel."

"Have circumstances really so far pressed upon you," said Charles Holland, "as at length to convince you that this man is really the horrible creature we surmise he may be?"

"Dare we longer doubt it?" cried Henry, in a tone of excitement. "He is the vampyre."

"I'll be hanged if I believe it," said Admiral Bell! "Stuff and nonsense! Vampyre, indeed! Bother the vampyre."

"Sir," said Henry, "you have not had brought before you, painfully, as we have, all the circumstances upon which we, in a manner, feel compelled to found this horrible belief. At first incredulity was a natural thing. We had no idea that ever we could be brought to believe in such a thing."

"That is the case," added Marchdale. "But, step by step, we have been driven from utter disbelief in this phenomenon to a trembling conviction that it must be true."

"Unless we admit that, simultaneously, the senses of a number of persons have been deceived."

"That is scarcely possible."

"Then do you mean really to say there are such fish?" said the admiral.

"We think so."

"Well, I'm d —— d! I have heard all sorts of yarns about what fellows have seen in one ocean and another; but this does beat them all to nothing."

“It is monstrous,” exclaimed Charles.

There was a pause of some few moments’ duration, and then Mr. Marchdale said, in a low voice, —

“Perhaps I ought not to propose any course of action until you, Henry, have yourself done so; but even at the risk of being presumptuous, I will say that I am firmly of opinion you ought to leave the Hall.”

“I am inclined to think so, too,” said Henry.

“But the creditors?” interposed Charles.

“I think they might be consulted on the matter beforehand,” added Marchdale, “when no doubt they would acquiesce in an arrangement which could do them no harm.”

“Certainly, no harm,” said Henry, “for I cannot take the estate with me, as they well know.”

“Precisely. If you do not like to sell it, you can let it.”

“To whom?”

“Why, under the existing circumstances, it is not likely you would get any tenant for it than the one who has offered himself.”

“Sir Francis Varney?”

“Yes. It seems to be a great object with him to live here, and it appears to me, that notwithstanding all that has occurred, it is most decidedly the best policy to let him.”

Nobody could really deny the reasonableness of this advice, although it seemed strange, and was repugnant to the feelings of them all, as they heard it. There was a pause of some seconds’ duration, and then Henry said, —

“It does, indeed, seem singular, to surrender one’s house to such a being.”

“Especially,” said Charles, “after what has occurred.”

"True."

"Well," said Mr. Marchdale, "if any better plan of proceeding, taking the whole case into consideration, can be devised, I shall be most happy."

"Will you consent to put off all proceedings for three days?" said Charles Holland, suddenly.

"Have you any plan, my dear sir?" said Mr. Marchdale.

"I have, but it is one which I would rather say nothing about for the present."

"I have no objection," said Henry, "I do not know that three days can make any difference in the state of affairs. Let it be so, if you wish, Charles."

"Then I am satisfied," said Charles. "I cannot but feel that, situated as I am regarding Flora, this is almost more my affair than even yours, Henry."

"I cannot see that," said Henry. "Why should you take upon yourself more of the responsibility of these affairs than I, Charles? You induce in my mind a suspicion that you have some desperate project in your imagination, which by such a proposition you would seek to reconcile me to."

Charles was silent, and Henry then added, —

"Now, Charles, I am quite convinced that what I have hinted at is the fact. You have conceived some scheme which you fancy would be much opposed by us?"

"I will not deny that I have," said Charles. "It is one, however, which you must allow me for the present to keep locked in my own breast."

"Why will you not trust us?"

"For two reasons."

“Indeed!”

“The one is, that I have not yet thoroughly determined upon the course I project; and the other is, that it is one in which I am not justified in involving any one else.”

“Charles, Charles,” said Henry, despondingly; “only consider for a moment into what new misery you may plunge poor Flora, who is, Heaven knows, already sufficiently afflicted, by attempting an enterprise which even we, who are your friends, may unwittingly cross you in the performance of.”

“This is one in which I fear no such result. It cannot so happen. Do not urge me.”

“Can’t you say at once what you think of doing?” said the old admiral. “What do you mean by turning your sails in all sorts of directions so oddly? You sneak, why don’t you be what do you call it — explicit?”

“I cannot, uncle.”

“What, are you tongue-tied?”

“All here know well,” said Charles, “that if I do not unfold my mind fully, it is not that I fear to trust any one present, but from some other most special reason.”

“Charles, I forbear to urge you further,” said Henry, “and only implore you to be careful.”

At this moment the room door opened, and George Bannerworth, accompanied by Mr. Chillingworth, came in.

“Do not let me intrude,” said the surgeon; “I fear, as I see you seated, gentlemen, that my presence must be a rudeness and a disturbance to some family consultation among yourselves?”

“Not at all, Mr. Chillingworth,” said Henry. “Pray be seated; we are very glad indeed to see you. Admiral Bell, this is a friend on whom we can rely — Mr. Chillingworth."

"And one of the right sort, I can see," said the admiral, as he shook Mr. Chillingworth by the hand.

"Sir, you do me much honour," said the doctor.

"None at all, none at all; I suppose you know all about this infernal odd vampyre business?"

"I believe I do, sir."

"And what do you think of it?"

"I think time will develop the circumstances sufficiently to convince us all that such things cannot be."

"D — n me, you are the most sensible fellow, then, that I have yet met with since I have been in this neighbourhood; for everybody else is so convinced about the vampyre, that they are ready to swear by him."

"It would take much more to convince me. I was coming over here when I met Mr. George Bannerworth coming to my house."

"Yes," said George, "and Mr. Chillingworth has something to tell us of a nature confirmatory of our own suspicions."

"It is strange," said Henry; "but any piece of news, come it from what quarter it may, seems to be confirmatory, in some degree or another, of that dreadful belief in vampyres."

"Why," said the doctor, "when Mr. George says that my news is of such a character, I think he goes a little too far. What I have to tell you, I do not conceive has anything whatever to do with the fact, or one fact of there being vampyres."

"Let us hear it," said Henry.

"It is simply this, that I was sent for by Sir Francis Varney myself."

"You sent for?"

"Yes; he sent for me by a special messenger to come to him, and when I went, which, under the circumstances, you may well guess, I did with all the celerity possible, I found it was to consult me about a flesh wound in his arm, which was showing some angry symptoms."

"Indeed."

"Yes, it was so. When I was introduced to him I found him lying on a couch, and looking pale and unwell. In the most respectful manner, he asked me to be seated, and when I had taken a chair, he added, —

"'Mr. Chillingworth, I have sent for you in consequence of a slight accident which has happened to my arm. I was incautiously loading some fire-arms, and discharged a pistol so close to me that the bullet inflicted a wound on my arm.'

"'If you will allow me," said I, 'to see the wound, I will give you my opinion.'

"He then showed me a jagged wound, which had evidently been caused by the passage of a bullet, which, had it gone a little deeper, must have inflicted serious injury. As it was, the wound was but trifling.

"He had evidently been attempting to dress it himself, but finding some considerable inflammation, he very likely got a little alarmed."

"You dressed the wound?"

"I did."

"And what do you think of Sir Francis Varney, now that you have had so capital an opportunity," said Henry, "of a close examination of him?"

"Why, there is certainly something odd about him which I cannot well define, but, take him altogether, he can be a very gentlemanly man indeed."

"So he can."

"His manners are easy and polished; he has evidently mixed in good society, and I never, in all my life, heard such a sweet, soft, winning voice."

"That is strictly him. You noticed, I presume, his great likeness to the portrait on the panel?"

"I did. At some moments, and viewing his face in some particular lights, it showed much more strongly than at others. My impression was that he could, when he liked, look much more like the portrait on the panel than when he allowed his face to assume its ordinary appearance."

"Probably such an impression would be produced upon your mind," said Charles, "by some accidental expression of the countenance which even he was not aware of, and which often occurs in families."

"It may be so."

"Of course you did not hint, sir, at what has passed here with regard to him?" said Henry.

"I did not. Being, you see, called in professionally, I had no right to take advantage of that circumstance to make any remarks to him about his private affairs."

"Certainly not."

"It was all one to me whether he was a vampyre or not, professionally, and however deeply I might feel, personally, interested in the matter, I said nothing to him about it, because, you see, if I had, he would have had a fair opportunity of saying at once, 'Pray, sir, what is that to you?' and I should have been at a loss what to reply."

"Can we doubt," said Henry, "but that this very wound has been inflicted upon Sir Francis Varney, by the pistol-bullet which was discharged at him by Flora?"

"Everything leads to such an assumption certainly," said Charles Holland.

"And yet you cannot even deduce from that the absolute fact of Sir Francis Varney being a vampyre?"

"I do not think, Mr. Chillingworth," said Marchdale, "anything would convince you but a visit from him, and an actual attempt to fasten upon some of your own veins."

"That would not convince me," said Chillingworth.

"Then you will not be convinced?"

"I certainly will not. I mean to hold out to the last. I said at the first, and I say so still, that I never will give way to this most outrageous superstition."

"I wish I could think with you," said Marchdale, with a shudder; "but there may be something in the very atmosphere of this house which has been rendered hideous by the awful visits that have been made to it, which forbids me to disbelieve in those things which others more happily situated can hold at arm's length, and utterly repudiate."

"There may be," said Henry; "but as to that, I think, after the very strongly expressed wish of Flora, I will decide upon leaving the house."

"Will you sell it or let it?"

"The latter I should much prefer," was the reply.

"But who will take it now, except Sir Francis Varney? Why not at once let him have it? I am well aware that this does sound odd advice, but remember, we are all the creatures of circumstances, and that, in some cases where we least like it, we must swim with the stream."

"That you will not decide upon, however, at present," said Charles Holland, as he rose.

"Certainly not; a few days can make no difference."

"None for the worse, certainly, and possibly much for the better."

"Be it so; we will wait."

"Uncle," said Charles, "will you spare me half an hour of your company?"

"An hour, my boy, if you want it," said the admiral, rising from his chair.

"Then this consultation is over," said Henry, "and we quite understand that to leave the Hall is a matter determined on, and that in a few days a decision shall be come to as to whether Varney the Vampyre shall be its tenant or not."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ADMIRAL'S ADVICE TO CHARLES HOLLAND. — THE CHALLENGE TO THE VAMPYRE.

When Charles Holland got his uncle into a room by themselves, he said, —

"Uncle, you are a seaman, and accustomed to decide upon matters of honour. I look upon myself as having been most grievously insulted by this Sir Francis Varney. All accounts agree in representing him as a gentleman. He goes openly by a title, which, if it were not his, could easily be contradicted; therefore, on the score of position in life, there is no fault to find with him. What would you do if you were insulted by a gentleman?"

The old admiral's eyes sparkled, and he looked comically in the face of Charles, as he said, —

"I know now where you are steering."

"What would you do, uncle?"

"Fight him!"

"I knew you would say so, and that's just what I want to do as regards Sir Francis Varney."

"Well, my boy, I don't know that you can do better. He must be a thundering rascal, whether he is a vampyre or not; so if you feel that he has insulted you, fight him by all means, Charles."

"I am much pleased, uncle, to find that you take my view of the subject," said Charles. "I knew that if I mentioned such a thing to the Bannerworths, they would endeavour all in their power to pursuade me against it."

"Yes, no doubt; because they are all impressed with a strange fear of this fellow's vampyre powers. Besides, if a man is going to fight, the fewer people he mentions it to most decidedly the better, Charles."

"I believe that is the fact, uncle. Should I overcome Varney, there will most likely be at once an end to the numerous and uncomfortable perplexities of the Bannerworths as regards him; and if he overcome me, why, then, at all events, I shall have made an effort to rescue Flora from the dread of this man."

"And then he shall fight me," added the admiral, "so he shall have two chances, at all events, Charles."

"Nay, uncle, that would, you know, scarcely be fair. Besides, if I should fall, I solemnly bequeath Flora Bannerworth to your good offices. I much fear that the pecuniary affairs of poor Henry, — from no fault of his, Heaven knows, — are in a very bad state, and that Flora may yet live to want some kind and able friend."

"Never fear, Charles. The young creature shall never want while the old admiral has got a shot in the locker."

"Thank you, uncle, thank you. I have ample cause to know, and to be able to rely upon your kind and generous nature. And now about the challenge?"

"You write it, boy, and I'll take it."

"Will you second me, uncle?"

"To be sure I will. I wouldn't trust anybody else to do so on any account. You leave all the arrangements with me, and I'll second you as you ought to be seconded."

"Then I will write it at once, for I have received injuries at the hands of that man, or devil, be he what he may, that I cannot put up with. His visit to the chamber of her whom I love would alone constitute ample ground of action."

"I should say it rather would, my boy."

"And after this corroborative story of the wound, I cannot for a moment doubt that Sir Francis Varney is the vampyre, or the personifier of the vampyre."

"That's clear enough, Charles. Come, just you write your challenge, my boy, at once, and let me have it."

"I will, uncle."

Charles was a little astonished, although pleased, at his uncle's ready acquiescence in his fighting a vampyre, but that circumstance he ascribed to the old man's habits of life, which made him so familiar with strife and personal contentions of all sorts, that he did not ascribe to it that amount of importance which more peaceable people did. Had he, while he was writing the note to Sir Francis Varney, seen the old admiral's face, and the exceedingly cunning look it wore, he might have suspected that the acquiescence in the duel was but a seeming acquiescence. This, however, escaped him, and in a few moments he read to his uncle the following note: —

"To SIR FRANCIS VARNEY.

"Sir, — The expressions made use of towards me by you, as well as general circumstances, which I need not further allude to here, induce me to demand of you that satisfaction due from one gentleman to another. My uncle, Admiral Bell, is the bearer of this note, and will arrange preliminaries with any friend you may choose to appoint to act in your behalf. I am, sir, yours, &c.

"CHARLES HOLLAND."

"Will that do?" said Charles.

"Capital!" said the admiral.

"I am glad you like it."

"Oh, I could not help liking it. The least said and the most to the purpose, always pleases me best; and this explains nothing, and demands all you want — which is a fight; so it's all right, you see, and nothing can be possibly better."

Charles did glance in his uncle's face, for he suspected, from the manner in which these words were uttered, that the old man was amusing himself a little at his expense. The admiral, however, looked so supernaturally serious that Charles was foiled.

"I repeat, it's a capital letter," he said.

"Yes, you said so."

"Well, what are you staring at?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Do you doubt my word?"

"Not at all, uncle; only I thought there was a degree of irony in the manner in which you spoke."

"None at all, my boy. I never was more serious in all my life."

"Very good. Then you will remember that I leave my honour in this affair completely in your hands."

"Depend upon me, my boy."

"I will, and do."

"I'll be off and see the fellow at once."

The admiral bustled out of the room, and in a few moments Charles heard him calling loudly, —

"Jack — Jack Pringle, you lubber, where are you? — Jack Pringle, I say."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Jack, emerging from the kitchen, where he had been making himself generally useful in assisting Mrs. Bannerworth, there being no servant in the house, to cook some dinner for the family.

"Come on, you rascal, we are going for a walk."

“The rations will be served out soon,” growled Jack.

“We shall be back in time, you cormorant, never fear. You are always thinking of eating and drinking, you are, Jack; and I’ll be hanged if I think you ever think of anything else. Come on, will you; I’m going on rather a particular cruise just now, so mind what you are about.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” said the tar, and these two originals, who so perfectly understood each other, walked away, conversing as they went, and their different voices coming upon the ear of Charles, until distance obliterated all impression of the sound.

Charles paced to and fro in the room where he had held this brief and conclusive conversation with his uncle. He was thoughtful, as any one might well be who knew not but that the next four-and-twenty hours would be the limit of his sojourn in this world.

“Oh, Flora — Flora!” he at length said, “how happy we might to have been together — how happy we might have been! but all is past now, and there seems nothing left us but to endure. There it but one chance, and that is in my killing this fearful man who is invested with so dreadful an existence. And if I do kill him in fair and in open fight, I will take care that his mortal frame has no power again to revisit the glimpses of the moon.”

It was strange to imagine that such was the force of many concurrent circumstances, that a young man like Charles Holland, of first-rate abilities and education, should find it necessary to give in so far to a belief which was repugnant to all his best feelings and habits of thought, as to be reasoning with himself upon the best means of preventing the resuscitation of the corpse of a vampyre. But so it was. His imagination had yielded to a succession of events which very few persons indeed could have held out against.

"I have heard and read," he said, as he continued his agitated and uneasy walk, "of how these dreadful beings are to be in their graves. I have heard of stakes being driven through the body so as to pin it to the earth until the gradual progress of decay has rendered its revivification a thing of utter and total impossibility. Then, again," he added, after a slight pause, "I have heard of their being burned, and the ashes gathered to the winds of Heaven to prevent them from ever again uniting or assuming human form."

These were disagreeable and strange fancies, and he shuddered while he indulged in them. He felt a kind of trembling horror come over him even at the thought of engaging in conflict with a being, who perhaps, had lived more than a hundred years.

"That portrait," he thought, "on the panel, is the portrait of a man in the prime of life. If it be the portrait of Sir Francis Varney, by the date which the family ascribe to it he must be nearly one hundred and fifty years of age now."

This was a supposition which carried the imagination to a vast amount of strange conjectures.

"What changes he must have witnessed about him in that time," thought Charles. "How he must have seen kingdoms totter and fall, and how many changes of habits, of manners, and of customs must he have become a spectator of. Renewing too, ever and anon, his fearful existence by such fearful means."

This was a wide field of conjecture for a fertile imagination, and now that he was on the eve of engaging with such a being in mortal combat, on behalf of her he loved, the thoughts it gave rise to came more strongly and thickly upon him than ever they had done before.

"But I will fight him," he suddenly said, "for Flora's sake, were he a hundred times more hideous a being than so many evidences tend to prove him. I will fight with him, and it may be my fate to rid the world of such a monster in human form."

Charles worked himself up to a kind of enthusiasm by which he almost succeeded in convincing himself that, in attempting the destruction of Sir Francis Varney, he was the champion of human nature.

It would be aside from the object of these pages, which is to record facts as they occurred, to enter into the metaphysical course of reasoning which came across Charles's mind; suffice it to say that he felt nothing shaken as regarded his resolve to meet Varney the Vampyre, and that he made up his mind the conflict should be one of life or death.

"It must be so," he said. "It must be so. Either he or I must fall in the fight which shall surely be."

He now sought Flora, for how soon might he now be torn from her for ever by the irresistible hand of death. He felt that, during the few brief hours which now would only elapse previous to his meeting with Sir Francis Varney, he could not enjoy too much of the society of her who reigned supreme in his heart, and held in her own keeping his best affections.

But while Charles is thus employed, let us follow his uncle and Jack Pringle to the residence of Varney, which, as the reader is aware, was so near at hand that it required not many minutes' sharp walking to reach it.

The admiral knew well he could trust Jack with any secret, for long habits of discipline and deference to the orders of superiors takes off the propensity to blabbing which, among civilians who are not accustomed to discipline, is so very prevalent. The old man therefore explained to Jack what he meant to do, and it received

Jack's full approval; but as in the enforced detail of other matters it must come out, we will not here prematurely enter into the admiral's plans.

When they reached the residence of Sir Francis Varney, they were received courteously enough, and the admiral desired Jack to wait for him in the handsome hall of the house, while he was shewn up stairs to the private room of the vampyre.

"Confound the fellow!" muttered the old admiral, "he is well lodged at all events. I should say he was not one of those sort of vampyres who have nowhere to go to but their own coffins when the evening comes."

The room into which the admiral was shewn had green blinds to it, and they were all drawn down. It is true that the sun was shining brightly outside, although transiently, but still a strange green tinge was thrown over everything in the room, and more particularly did it appear to fall upon the face of Varney, converting his usually sallow countenance into a still more hideous and strange colour. He was sitting upon a couch, and, when the admiral came in, he rose, and said, in a deep-toned voice, extremely different to that he usually spoke in, —

"My humble home is much honoured, sir, by your presence in it."

"Good morning," said the admiral. "I have come to speak to you, sir, rather seriously."

"However abrupt this announcement may sound to me," said Varney, "I am quite sure I shall always hear, with the most profound respect, whatever Admiral Bell may have to say."

"There is no respect required," said the admiral, "but only a little attention."

Sir Francis bowed in a stately manner, saying, —

"I shall be quite unhappy if you will not be seated, Admiral Bell."

"Oh, never mind that, Sir Francis Varney, if you be Sir Francis Varney; for you may be the devil himself, for all I know. My nephew, Charles Holland, considers that, one way and another, he has a very tolerable quarrel with you."

"I much grieve to hear it."

"Do you?"

"Believe me, I do. I am most scrupulous in what I say; and an assertion that I am grieved, you may thoroughly and entirely depend upon."

"Well, well, never mind that; Charles Holland is a young man just entering into life. He loves a girl who is, I think, every way worthy of him."

"Oh, what a felicitous prospect!"

"Just hear me out, if you please."

"With pleasure, sir — with pleasure."

"Well, then, when a young, hot-headed fellow thinks he has a good ground of quarrel with anybody, you will not be surprised at his wanting to fight it out."

"Not at all."

"Well, then, to come to the point, my nephew, Charles Holland, has a fancy for fighting with you."

"Ah!"

"You take it d —— d easy."

"My dear sir, why should I be uneasy? He is not my nephew, you know. I shall have no particular cause, beyond those feelings of common compassion which I hope inhabit my breast as well as every one else's."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, he is a young man just, as you say, entering into life, and I cannot help thinking it would be a pity to cut him off like a flower in the bud, so very soon."

"Oh, you make quite sure, then, of settling him, do you?"

"My dear sir, only consider; he might be very troublesome, indeed; you know young men are hot-headed and troublesome. Even if I were only to maim him, he might be a continual and never-ceasing annoyance to me. I think I should be absolutely, in a manner of speaking, compelled to cut him off."

"The devil you do!"

"As you say, sir."

"D — n your assurance, Mr. Vampyre, or whatever odd fish you may be."

"Admiral Bell, I never called upon you and received a courteous reception, and then insulted you."

"Then why do you talk of cutting off a better man than yourself? D — n it, what would you say to him cutting you off?"

"Oh, as for me, my good sir, that's quite another thing. Cutting me off is very doubtful."

Sir Francis Varney gave a strange smile as he spoke, and shook his head, as if some most extraordinary and extravagant proposition had been mooted, which it was scarcely worth the while of anybody possessed of common sense to set about expecting.

Admiral Bell felt strongly inclined to get into a rage, but he repressed the idea as much as he could, although, but for the curious faint green light that came through the blinds, his heightened colour would have sufficiently proclaimed what state of mind he was in.

"Mr. Varney," he said, "all this is quite beside the question; but, at all events, if it have any weight at all, it ought to have a considerable influence in deciding you to accept of what terms I propose."

"What are they, sir?"

"Why, that you permit me to espouse my nephew Charles's quarrel, and meet you instead of him."

"You meet me?"

"Yes; I've met a better man more than once before. It can make no difference to you."

"I don't know that, Admiral Bell. One generally likes, in a duel, to face him with whom one has had the misunderstanding, be it on what grounds it may."

"There's some reason, I know, in what you say; but, surely, if I am willing, you need not object."

"And is your nephew willing thus to shift the danger and the job of resenting his own quarrels on to your shoulders?"

"No; he knows nothing about it. He has written you a challenge, of which I am the bearer, but I voluntarily, and of my own accord, wish to meet you instead."

"This is a strange mode of proceeding."

"If you will not accede to it, and fight him first, and any harm comes to him, you shall fight me afterwards."

"Indeed."

"Yes, indeed you shall, however surprised you may look."

"As this appears to be quite a family affair, then," said Sir Francis Varney, "it certainly does appear immaterial which of you I fight with first."

"Quite so; now you take a sensible view of the question. Will you meet me?"

"I have no particular objection. Have you settled all your affairs, and made your will?"

"What's that to you?"

"Oh, I only asked, because there is generally so much food for litigation if a man dies intestate, and is worth any money."

"You make devilish sure," said the admiral, "of being the victor. Have you made your will?"

"Oh, my will," smiled Sir Francis; "that, my good sir, is quite an indifferent affair."

"Well, make it or not, as you like. I am old, I know, but I can pull a trigger as well as any one."

"Do what?"

"Pull a trigger."

"Why, you don't suppose I resort to any such barbarous modes of fighting?"

"Barbarous! Why, how do you fight then?"

"As a gentleman, with my sword."

"Swords! Oh, nonsense! nobody fights with swords now-a-days. That's all exploded."

"I cling to the customs and the fashions of my youth," said Varney. "I have been, years ago, accustomed always to wear a sword, and to be without one now vexes me."

"Pray, how many years ago?"

"I am older than I look, but that is not the question. I am willing to meet you with swords if you like. You are no doubt aware that, as the challenged party, I am entitled to the choice of weapons."

"I am."

"Then you cannot object to my availing myself of the one in the use of which I am perfectly unequalled."

"Indeed."

"Yes, I am, I think, the first swordsman in Europe; I have had immense practice."

"Well, sir, you have certainly made a most unexpected choice of weapons. I can use a sword still, but am by no means a master of fencing. However, it shall not be said that I went back from my word, and let the chances be as desperate as they may, I will meet you."

"Very good."

"With swords?"

"Ay, with swords; but I must have everything properly arranged, so that no blame can rest on me, you know. As you will be killed, you are safe from all consequences, but I shall be in a very different position; so, if you please, I must have this meeting got up in such a manner as shall enable me to prove, to whoever may question me on the subject, that you had fair play."

"Oh, never fear that."

"But I do fear it. The world, my good sir, is censorious, and you cannot stop people from saying extremely ill-natured things."

"What do you require, then?"

"I require you to send me a friend with a formal challenge."

"Well?"

"Then I shall refer him to a friend of mine, and they two must settle everything between them."

"Is that all?"

"Not quite. I will have a surgeon on the ground, in case, when I pink you, there should be a chance of saving your life. It always looks humane."

"When you pink me?"

"Precisely."

"Upon my word, you take these affairs easy. I suppose you have had a few of them?"

"Oh, a good number. People like yourself worry me into them, I don't like the trouble, I assure you; it is no amusement to me. I would rather, by a great deal, make some concession than fight, because I will fight with swords, and the result is then so certain that there is no danger in the matter to me."

"Hark you, Sir Francis Varney. You are either a very clever actor, or a man, as you say, of such skill with your sword, that you can make sure of the result of a duel. You know, therefore, that it is not fair play on your part to fight a duel with that weapon."

"Oh, I beg your pardon there. I never challenge anybody, and when foolish people will call me out, contrary to my inclination, I think I am bound to take what care of myself I can."

"D — n me, there's some reason in that, too," said the admiral; "but why do you insult people?"

"People insult me first."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"How should you like to be called a vampyre, and stared at as if you were some hideous natural phenomenon?"

"Well, but—"

"I say, Admiral Bell, how should you like it? I am a harmless country gentleman, and because, in the heated imaginations of some member of a crack-brained family, some housebreaker has been converted into a vampyre, I am to be pitched upon as the man, and insulted and persecuted accordingly."

"But you forget the proofs."

"What proofs?"

"The portrait, for one."

"What! Because there is an accidental likeness between me and an old picture, am I to be set down as a vampyre? Why, when I was in Austria last, I saw an old portrait of a celebrated court fool, and you so strongly resemble it, that I was quite struck when I first saw you with the likeness; but I was not so unpolite as to tell you that I considered you were the court fool turned vampyre."

"D — n your assurance!"

"And d — n yours, if you come to that."

The admiral was fairly beaten. Sir Francis Varney was by far too long-headed and witty for him. After now in vain endeavouring to find something to say, the old man buttoned up his coat in a great passion, and looking fiercely at Varney, he said,— "I don't pretend to a gift of the gab. D — n me, it ain't one of my peculiarities; but though you may talk me down, you sha'n't keep me down."

"Very good, sir."

"It is not very good. You shall hear from me."

"I am willing."

"I don't care whether you are willing or not. You shall find that when once I begin to tackle an enemy, I don't so easily leave him. One or both of us, sir, is sure to sink."

"Agreed."

"So say I. You shall find that I'm a tar for all weathers, and if you were a hundred and fifty vampires all rolled into one, I'd tackle you somehow."

The admiral walked to the door in high dudgeon; when he was near to it, Varney said, in some of his most winning and gentle accents, —

"Will you not take some refreshment, sir before you go from my humble house?"

"No!" roared the admiral.

"Something cooling?"

"No!"

"Very good, sir. A hospitable host can do no more than offer to entertain his guests."

Admiral Bell turned at the door, and said, with some degree of intense bitterness,

"You look rather poorly. I suppose, to-night, you will go and suck somebody's blood, you shark — you confounded vampyre! You ought to be made to swallow a red-hot brick, and then let dance about till it digests."

Varney smiled as he rang the bell, and said to a servant, —

"Show my very excellent friend Admiral Bell out. He will not take any refreshments."

The servant bowed, and preceded the admiral down the staircase; but, to his great surprise, instead of a compliment in the shape of a shilling or half-a-crown for his pains, he received a tremendous kick behind, with a request to go and take it to his master, with his compliments.

The fume that the old admiral was in beggars all description. He walked to Bannerworth Hall at such a rapid pace, that Jack Pringle had the greatest difficulty in the world to keep up with him, so as to be at all within speaking distance.

"Hilloa, Jack," cried the old man, when they were close to the Hall. "Did you see me kick that fellow?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Well, that's some consolation, at any rate, if somebody saw it. It ought to have been his master, that's all I can say to it, and I wish it had."

"How have you settled it, sir?"

"Settled what?"

"The fight, sir."

"D — n me, Jack, I haven't settled it at all."

"That's bad, sir."

"I know it is; but it shall be settled for all that, I can tell him, let him vapour as much as he may about pinking me, and one thing and another."

"Pinking you, sir?"

"Yes. He wants to fight with cutlasses, or toasting-forks, d — n me, I don't know exactly which, and then he must have a surgeon on the ground, for fear when he pinks me I shouldn't slip my cable in a regular way, and he should be blamed."

Jack gave a long whistle, as he replied, —

"Going to do it, sir?"

"I don't know now what I'm going to do. Mind, Jack, mum is the word."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"I'll turn the matter over in my mind, and then decide upon what had best be done. If he pinks me, I'll take d —— d good care he don't pink Charles."

"No, sir, don't let him do that. A *wamphigher*, sir, ain't no good opponent to anybody. I never seed one afore, but it strikes me as the best way to settle him, would be to shut him up in some little bit of a cabin, and then smoke him with brimstone, sir."

"Well, well, I'll consider, Jack, I'll consider. Something must be done, and that quickly too. Zounds, here's Charles — what the deuce shall I say to him, by way of an excuse, I wonder, for not arranging his affair with Varney? Hang me, if I ain't taken aback now, and don't know where to place a hand."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE LETTER TO CHARLES. — THE QUARREL. — THE ADMIRAL'S NARRATIVE. — THE MIDNIGHT MEETING.

It was Charles Holland who now advanced hurriedly to meet the admiral. The young man's manner was anxious. He was evidently most intent upon knowing what answer could be sent by Sir Francis Varney to his challenge.

"Uncle," he said, "tell me at once, will he meet me? You can talk of particulars afterwards, but now tell me at once if he will meet me?"

"Why, as to that," said the admiral, with a great deal of fidgetty hesitation, "you see, I can't exactly say."

"Not say!"

"No. He's a very odd fish. Don't you think he's a very odd fish, Jack Pringle'?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"There, you hear, Charles, that Jack is of my opinion that your opponent is an odd fish."

"But, uncle, why trifle with my impatience thus? Have you seen Sir Francis Varney?"

"Seen him. Oh, yes."

"And what did he say?"

"Why, to tell the truth, my lad, I advise you not to fight with him at all."

"Uncle, is this like you? This advice from you, to compromise my honour, after sending a man a challenge?"

"D — n it all, Jack, I don't know how to get out of it," said the admiral. “I tell you what it is, Charles, he wants to fight with swords; and what on earth is the use of your engaging with a fellow who has been practising at his weapon for more than a hundred years?”

“Well, uncle, if any one had told me that you would be terrified by this Sir Francis Varney into advising me not to fight, I should have had no hesitation whatever in saying such a thing was impossible.”

“I terrified?”

“Why, you advise me not to meet this man, even after I have challenged him.”

“Jack,” said the admiral, “I can’t carry it on, you see. I never could go on with anything that was not as plain as an anchor, and quite straightforward. I must just tell all that has occurred.”

“Ay, ay, sir. The best way.”

“You think so, Jack?”

“I know it is, sir, always axing pardon for having a opinion at all, excepting when it happens to be the same as yourn, sir.”

“Hold your tongue, you libellous villain! Now, listen to me, Charles. I got up a scheme of my own.”

Charles gave a groan, for he had a very tolerable appreciation of his uncle’s amount of skill in getting up a scheme of any kind or description.

“Now here am I,” continued the admiral, “an old hulk, and not fit for use anymore. What’s the use of me, I should like to know? Well, that’s settled. But you are young and hearty, and have a long life before you. Why should you throw away your life upon a lubberly vampyre?”

“I begin to perceive now, uncle,” said Charles, reproachfully, “why you, with such apparent readiness, agreed to this duel taking place.”

"Well, I intended to fight the fellow myself, that's the long and short of it, boy."

"How could you treat me so?"

"No nonsense, Charles. I tell you it was all in the family. I intended to fight him myself. What was the odds whether I slipped my cable with his assistance, or in the regular course a little after this? That's the way to argufy the subject; so, as I tell you, I made up my mind to fight him myself."

Charles looked despairingly, but said, —

"What was the result?"

"Oh, the result! D — n me, I suppose that's to come. The vagabond won't fight like a Christian. He says he's quite willing to fight anybody that calls him out, provided it's all regular."

"Well — well."

"And he, being the party challenged — for he says he never himself challenges anybody, as he is quite tired of it — must have his choice of weapons."

"He is entitled to that; but it is generally understood now-a-days that pistols are the weapons in use among gentlemen for such purposes."

"Ah, but he won't understand any such thing, I tell you. He will fight with swords."

"I suppose he is, then, an adept at the use of the sword?"

"He says he is."

"No doubt — no doubt. I cannot blame a man for choosing, when he has the liberty of choice, that weapon in the use of which he most particularly, from practice, excels."

"Yes; but if he be one half the swordsman he has had time enough, according to all accounts, to be, what sort of chance have you with him?"

"Do I hear you reasoning thus?"

"Yes, to be sure you do. I have turned wonderfully prudent, you see: so I mean to fight him myself, and mind, now, you have nothing whatever to do with it."

"An effort of prudence that, certainly."

"Well, didn't I say so?"

"Come — come, uncle, this won't do. I have challenged Sir Francis Varney, and I must meet him with any weapon he may, as the challenged party, choose to select. Besides, you are not, I dare say, aware that I am a very good fencer, and probably stand as fair a chance as Varney in a contest with swords."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, uncle. I could not be so long on the continent as I have been without picking up a good knowledge of the sword, which is so popular all over Germany."

"Humph! but only consider, this d —— d fellow is no less than a hundred and fifty years old."

"I care not."

"Yes, but I do."

"Uncle, uncle, I tell you I will fight with him; and if you do not arrange matters for me so that I can have the meeting with this man, which I have myself sought, and cannot, even if I wished, now recede from with honour, I must seek some other less scrupulous friend to do so."

"Give me an hour or two to think of it, Charles," said the admiral. "Don't speak to any one else, but give me a little time. You shall have no cause of complaint. Your honour cannot suffer in my hands."

"I will wait your leisure, uncle; but remember that such affairs as these, when once broached, had always better be concluded with all convenient dispatch."

"I know that, boy — I know that."

The admiral walked away, and Charles, who really felt much fretted at the delay which had taken place, returned to the house.

He had not been there long, when a lad, who had been temporarily hired during the morning by Henry to answer the gate, brought him a note, saying, —

"A servant, sir, left this for you just now."

"For me?" said Charles, as he glanced at the direction. "This is strange, for I have no acquaintance about here. Does any one wait?"

"No, sir."

The note was properly directed to him, therefore Charles Holland at once opened it. A glance at the bottom of the page told him that it came from his enemy, Sir Francis Varney, and then he read it with much eagerness. It ran thus: —

"SIR, — Your uncle, as he stated himself to be, Admiral Bell, was the bearer to me, as I understood him this day, of a challenge from you. Owing to some unaccountable hallucination of intellect, he seemed to imagine that I intended to set myself up as a sort of animated target, for any one to shoot at who might have a fancy so to do.

"According to this eccentric view of the case, the admiral had the kindness to offer to fight me first, when, should he not have the good fortune to put me out of the world, you were to try your skill, doubtless.

"I need scarcely say that I object to these family arrangements. You have challenged me, and, fancying the offence sufficient, you defy me to mortal combat. If, therefore, I fight with any one at all, it must be with you.

"You will clearly understand me, sir, that I do not accuse you of being at all party to this freak of intellect of your uncle's. He, no doubt, alone conceived it, with a laudable desire on his part of serving you. If, however, to meet me, do so to-night, in the middle of the park surrounding your own friends estate.

"There is a pollard oak growing close to a small pool; you, no doubt, have noticed the spot often. Meet me there, if you please, and any satisfaction you like I will give you, at twelve o'clock this night.

"Come alone, or you will not see me. It shall be at your own option entirely, to convert the meeting into a hostile one or not. You need send me no answer to this. If you are at the place I mention at the time I have named, well and good. If you an not, I can only, if I please, imagine that you shrink from a meeting with

"FRANCIS VARNEY."

Charles Holland read this letter twice over carefully, and then folding it up, and placing it in his pocket, he said, —

"Yes, I will meet him; he may be assured that I will meet him. He shall find that I do not shrink from Francis Varney In the name of honour, love, virtue, and Heaven, I will meet this man, and it shall go hard with me but I will this night wring from him the secret of what he really is. For the sake of her who is so dear to me — for her sake, I will meet this man, or monster, be he what he may."

It would have been far more prudent had Charles informed Henry Bannerworth or George of his determination to meet the vampyre that evening, but he did not do so. Somehow he fancied it would be some reproach against his courage if he did not go, and go alone, too, for he could not help suspecting that, from the conduct of his uncle, Sir Francis Varney might have got up an opinion inimical to his courage.

With all the eager excitement of youth, there was nothing that arrayed itself to his mind in such melancholy and uncomfortable colours as an imputation upon his courage.

"I will show this vampyre, if he be such," he said, "that I am not afraid to meet him, and alone, too, at his own hour — at midnight, even when, if his preternatural powers be of more avail to him than at any other time, be can attempt, if he dare, to use them."

Charles resolved upon going armed, and with the greatest care he loaded his pistols, and placed them aside ready for action, when the time should come to set out to meet the vampyre at the spot in the park which had been particularly alluded to in his letter.

This spot was perfectly well known to Charles; indeed, no one could be a single day at Bannerworth Hall without noticing it, so prominent an object was that pollard oak, standing, as it did, alone, with the beautiful green sward all around it. Near to it was the pool which hid been mentioned, which was, in reality, a fish-pond, and some little distance off commenced the thick plantation, among the intricacies of which Sir Francis Varney, or the vampyre, had been supposed to disappear, after the revivification of his body at the full of the moon.

This spot was in view of several of the windows of the house, so that if the night should happen to be a very light one, and any of the inhabitants of the Hall should happen to have the curiosity to look from those particular windows, no doubt the meeting between Charles Holland and the vampyre would be seen.

This, however, was a contingency which was nothing to Charles, whatever it might be to Sir Francis Varney, and he scarcely at all considered it as worth consideration. He felt more happy and comfortable now that everything seemed to be definitively arranged by which he could come to some sort of explanation with that mysterious being who had so effectually, as yet, succeeded in destroying his peace of mind and his prospects of happiness.

"I will this night force him to declare himself," thought Charles. "He shall tell me who and what he really is, and by some means I will endeavour to put an end to those frightful persecutions which Flora has suffered."

This was a thought which considerably raised Charles's spirits, and when he sought Flora again, which he now did, she was surprised to see him so much more easy and composed in his mind, which was sufficiently shown by his manner, than he had been but so short a time before.

"Charles," she said, "what has happened to give such an impetus to your spirits?"

"Nothing, dear Flora, nothing; but I have been endeavouring to throw from my mind all gloomy thoughts, and to convince myself that in the future you and I, dearest, may yet be very happy."

"Oh, Charles, if I could but think so."

"Endeavour, Flora, to think so. Remember how much our happiness is always in our own power, Flora, and that, let fate do her worst, so long as we are true to each other, we have a recompense for every ill."

"Oh, indeed, Charles, that is a dear recompense."

"And it is well that no force of circumstances short of death itself can divide us."

"True, Charles, true, and I am more than ever now bound to look upon you with a loving heart; for have you not clung to me generously under circumstances which, if any at all could have justified you in rending asunder every tie which bound us together, surely would have done so most fully."

"It is misfortune and distress that tries love," said Charles. "It is thus that the touchstone is applied to see if it be current gold indeed, or some base metal, which by a superficial glitter imitates it."

"And your love is indeed true gold."

"I am unworthy of one glance from those dear eyes if it were not."

"Oh, if we could but go from here I think then we might be happy. A strong impression is upon my mind, and has been so for some time, that these persecutions to which I have been subjected are peculiar to this house."

"Think you so?"

"I do, indeed!"

"It may be so, Flora. You are aware that your brother has made up his mind that he will leave the Hall."

"Yes, yes."

"And that only in deference to an expressed wish of mine he put off the carrying such a resolve into effect for a few days."

"He said so much."

"Do not, however, imagine, dearest Flora, that those few days will be idly spent."

"Nay, Charles, I could not imagine so."

"Believe me, I have some hopes that in that short space of time I shall be able to accomplish yet something which shall have a material effect upon the present posture of affairs."

"Do not run into danger, Charles."

"I will not. Believe me, Flora, I have too much appreciation of the value of an existence which is blessed by your love, to encounter any needless risks."

"You say needless. Why do you not confide in me, and tell me if the object you have in view to accomplish in the few days delay is a dangerous one at all."

"Will you forgive me, Flora, if for once I keep a secret from you?"

"Then, Charles, along with the forgiveness I must conjure up a host of apprehensions."

"Nay, why so?"

"You would tell me if there were no circumstances that you feared would fill me with alarm."

"Now, Flora, your fears and not your judgment condemn me. Surely you cannot think me so utterly heedless as to court danger for danger's sake."

"No, not so—"

"You pause."

"And yet you have a sense of what you call honour, which, I fear, would lead you into much risk."

"I have a sense of honour; but not that foolish one which hangs far more upon the opinions of others than my own. If I thought a course of honour lay before me, and all the world, in a mistaken judgment, were to condemn it as wrong, I would follow it."

"You are right, Charles; you are right. Let me pray of you to be careful, and, at all events, to interpose no more delay to our leaving this house than you shall feel convinced is absolutely necessary for some object of real and permanent importance."

Charles promised Flora Bannerworth that for her sake, as well as his own, he would be most specially careful of his safety; and then in such endearing conversation as may be well supposed to be dictated by such hearts as theirs another happy hour was passed away.

They pictured to themselves the scene where first they met, and with a world of interest hanging on every word they uttered, they told each other of the first delightful dawnings of that affection which had sprung up between them, and which they fondly believed neither time nor circumstance would have the power to change or subvert.

In the meantime the old admiral was surprised that Charles was so patient, and had not been to him to demand the result of his deliberation.

But he knew not on what rapid pinions time flies, when in the presence of those whom we love. What was an actual hour, was but a fleeting minute to Charles Holland, as he sat with Flora's hand clasped in his, and looking at her sweet face.

At length a clock striking reminded him of his engagement with his uncle, and he reluctantly rose.

"Dear Flora," he said, "I am going to sit up to watch to-night, so be under no sort of apprehension."

"I will feel doubly safe," she said.

"I have now something to talk to my uncle about, and must leave you."

Flora smiled, and held out her hand to him. He pressed it to his heart. He knew not what impulse came over him then, but for the first time he kissed the cheek of the beautiful girl.

With a heightened colour she gently repulsed him. He took a long lingering look at her as he passed out of the room, and when the door was closed between them, the sensation he experienced was as if some sudden cloud had swept across the face of the sun, dimming to a vast extent its precious lustre.

A strange heaviness came across his spirits, which before had been so unaccountably raised. He felt as if the shadow of some coming evil was resting on his soul — as if some momentous calamity was preparing for him, which would almost be enough to drive him to madness, and irredeemable despair.

“What can this be,” he exclaimed, “that thus oppresses me? What feeling is this that seems to tell me, I shall never again see Flora Bannerworth?”

Unconsciously he uttered these words, which betrayed the nature of his worst forebodings.

“Oh, this is weakness,” he then added. “I must fight out against this; it is mere nervousness. I must not endure it, I will not suffer myself thus to become the sport of imagination. Courage, courage, Charles Holland. There are real evils enough, without your adding to them by those of a disordered fancy. Courage, courage, courage.”

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ADMIRAL’S OPINION. — THE REQUEST OF CHARLES.

Charles then sought the admiral, whom he found with his hands behind him, pacing to and fro in one of the long walks of the garden, evidently in a very unsettled state of mind. When Charles appeared, he quickened his pace, and looked in such a state of unusual perplexity that it was quite ridiculous to observe him.

“I suppose, uncle, you have made up your mind thoroughly by this time?”

“Well, I don’t know that.”

“Why, you have had long enough surely to think over it. I have not troubled you soon.”

“Well, I cannot exactly say you have, but, somehow or another, I don’t think very fast, and I have an unfortunate propensity after a time of coming exactly round to where I began.”

“Then, to tell the truth, uncle, you can come to no sort of conclusion.”

“Only one.”

“And what may that be?”

“Why, that you are right in one thing, Charles, which is, that having sent a challenge to this fellow of a vampyre, you must fight him.”

“I suspect that that is a conclusion you had from the first, uncle?”

“Why so?”

“Because it is an obvious and a natural one. All your doubts, and trouble, and perplexities, have been to try and find some excuse for not entertaining that opinion, and now that you really find it in vain to make it, I trust that you will accede as you first promised to do, and not seek by any means to thwart me."

"I will not thwart you, my boy, although in my opinion you ought not to fight with a vampyre."

"Never mind that. We cannot urge that as a valid excuse, so long as he chooses to deny being one. And after all, if he be really wrongfully suspected, you must admit that he is a very injured man."

"Injured! — nonsense. If he is not a vampyre, he's some other out-of-the-way sort of fish, you may depend. He's the oddest-looking fellow ever I came across in all my born days, ashore or afloat."

"Is he?"

"Yes, he is: and yet, when I come to look at the thing again in my mind, some droll sights that I have seen come across my memory. The sea is the place for wonders and for mysteries. Why, we see more in a day and a night there, than you landsmen could contrive to make a whole twelvemonth's wonder of."

"But you never saw a vampyre, uncle?"

"Well, I don't know that. I didn't know anything about vampyres till I came here; but that was my ignorance, you know. There might have been lots of vampyres where I've been, for all I know."

"Oh, certainly; but as regards this duel, will you wait now until to-morrow morning, before you take any further steps in the matter?"

"Till to-morrow morning?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Why, only a little while ago, you were all eagerness to have something done off-hand."

"Just so; but now I have a particular reason for waiting until to-morrow morning."

"Have you? Well, as you please, boy — as you please. Have everything your own way."

"You are very kind, uncle; and now I have another favour to ask of you."

"What is it?"

"Why, you know that Henry Bannerworth receives but a very small sum out of the whole proceeds of the estate here, which ought, but for his father's extravagance, to be wholly at his disposal."

"So I have heard."

"I am certain he is at present distressed for money, and I have not much. Will you lend me fifty pounds, uncle, until my own affairs are sufficiently arranged to enable you to pay yourself again?"

"Will I! of course I will."

"I wish to offer that sum as an accommodation to Henry. From me, I dare say he will receive it freely, because he must be convinced how freely it is offered; and, besides, they look upon me now almost as a member of the family in consequence of my engagement with Flora."

"Certainly, and quite correct too: there's a fifty-pound note, my boy; take it, and do what you like with it, and when you want any more, come to me for it."

"I knew I could trespass thus far on your kindness, uncle."

"Trespass! It's no trespass at all."

"Well, we will not fall out about the terms in which I cannot help expressing my gratitude to you for many favours. To-morrow, you will arrange the duel for me."

"As you please. I don't altogether like going to that fellow's house again."

"Well, then, we can manage, I dare say, by note."

"Very good. Do so. He puts me in mind altogether of a circumstance that happened a good while ago, when I was at sea, and not so old a man as I am now."

"Puts you in mind of a circumstance, uncle?"

"Yes; he's something like a fellow that figured in an affair that I know a good deal about; only I do think as my chap was more mysterious by a d —— d sight than this one."

"Indeed!"

"Oh, dear, yes. When anything happens in an odd way at sea, it is as odd again as anything that occurs on land, my boy, you may depend."

"Oh, you only fancy that, uncle, because you have spent so long a time at sea."

"No, I don't imagine it, you rascal. What can you have on shore equal to what we have at sea? Why, the sights that come before us would make you landsmen's hairs stand up on end, and never come down again."

"In the ocean, do you mean, that you see those sights, uncle?"

"To be sure. I was once in the southern ocean, in a small frigate, looking out for a seventy-four we were to join company with, when a man at the mast-head sung out that he saw her on the larboard bow. Well, we thought it was all right enough, and made away that quarter, when what do you think it turned out to be?"

"I really cannot say."

"The head of a fish."

"A fish!"

"Yes! a d —— d deal bigger than the hull of a vessel. He was swimming along with his head just what I dare say he considered a shaving or so out of the water."

“But where were the sails, uncle?”

“The sails?”

“Yes; your man at the mast-head must have been a poor seaman not to have missed the sails.”

“All, that’s one of your shore-going ideas, now. You know nothing whatever about it. I’ll tell you where the sails were, master Charley.”

“Well, I should like to know.”

“The spray, then, that he dashed up with a pair of fins that were close to his head, was in such a quantity, and so white, that they looked just like sails.”

“Oh!”

“Ah! you may say ‘oh!’ but we all saw him — the whole ship’s crew; and we sailed alongside of him for some time, till he got tired of us, and suddenly dived down, making such a vortex in the water, that the ship shook again, and seemed for about a minute as if she was inclined to follow him to the bottom of the sea.”

“And what do you suppose it was, uncle?”

“How should I know?”

“Did you ever see it again?”

“Never; though others have caught a glimpse of him now and then in the same ocean, but never came so near him as we did, that ever I heard of, at all events. They may have done so.”

“It is singular!”

“Singular or not, it’s a fool to what I can tell you. Why, I’ve seen things that, if I were to set about describing them to you, you would say I was making up a romance.”

“Oh, no; it’s quite impossible, uncle, any one could ever suspect you of such a thing.”

"You'd believe me, would you?"

"Of course I would."

"Then here goes. I'll just tell you now of a circumstance that I haven't liked to mention to anybody yet."

"Indeed! why so?"

"Because I didn't want to be continually fighting people for not believing it; but here you have it:—"

We were outward bound; a good ship, a good captain, and good messmates, you know, go far towards making a prosperous voyage a pleasant and happy one, and on this occasion we had every reasonable prospect of all.

Our hands were all tried men — they had been sailors from infancy; none of your French craft, that serve an apprenticeship and then become land lubbers again. Oh, no, they were stanch and true, and loved the ocean as the sluggard loves his bed, or the lover his mistress.

Ay, and for the matter of that, the love was a more enduring and a more healthy love, for it increased with years, and made men love one another, and they would stand by each other while they had a limb to lift — while they were able to chew a quid or wink an eye, leave alone wag a pigtail.

We were outward bound for Ceylon, with cargo, and were to bring spices and other matters home from the Indian market. The ship was new and good — a pretty craft; she sat like a duck upon the water, and a stiff breeze carried her along the surface of the waves without your rocking, and pitching, and tossing, like an old wash-tub at a mill-tail, as I have had the misfortune to sail in more than once afore.

No, no, we were well laden, and well pleased, and weighed anchor with light hearts and a hearty cheer.

Away we went down the river, and soon rounded the North Foreland, and stood out in the Channel. The breeze was a steady and stiff one, and carried us through the water as though it had been made for us.

"Jack," said I to a messmate of mine, as he stood looking at the skies, then at the sails, and finally at the water, with a graver air than I thought was at all consistent with the occasion or circumstances.

"Well," he replied.

"What ails you? You seem as melancholy as if we were about to cast lots who should be eaten first. Are you well enough?"

"I am hearty enough, thank Heaven," he said, "but I don't like this breeze."

"Don't like the breeze!" said I; "why, mate, it is as good and kind a breeze as ever filled a sail. What would you have, a gale?"

"No, no; I fear that."

"With such a ship, and such a set of hearty able seamen, I think we could manage to weather out the stiffest gale that ever whistled through a yard."

"That may be; I hope it is, and I really believe and think so."

"Then what makes you so infernally mopish and melancholy?"

"I don't know, but can't help it. It seems to me as though there was something hanging over us, and I can't tell what."

"Yes, there are the colours, Jack, at the masthead; they are flying over us with a hearty breeze."

"Ah! ah!" said Jack, looking up at the colours, and then went away without saying anything more, for he had some piece of duty to perform.

I thought my messmate had something on his mind that caused him to feel sad and uncomfortable, and I took no more notice of it; indeed, in the course of a day or two he was as merry as any of the rest, and had no more melancholy that I could perceive, but was as comfortable as anybody.

We had a gale off the coast of Biscay, and rode it out without the loss of a spar or a yard; indeed, without the slightest accident or rent of any kind.

“Now, Jack, what do you think of our vessel?” said I.

“She’s like a duck upon water, rises and falls with the waves, and doesn’t tumble up and down like a hoop over stones.”

“No, no; she goes smoothly and sweetly; she is a gallant craft, and this is her first voyage, and I predict a prosperous one.”

“I hope so,” he said.

Well, we went on prosperously enough for about three weeks; the ocean was as calm and as smooth as a meadow, the breeze light but good, and we stemmed along majestically over the deep blue waters, and passed coast after coast, though all around was nothing but the apparently pathless main in sight.

“A better sailer I never stepped into,” said the captain one day; “it would be a pleasure to live and die in such a vessel.”

Well, as I said, we had been three weeks or thereabouts, when one morning, after the sun was up and the decks washed, we saw a strange man sitting on one of the water-casks that were on deck, for, being full, we were compelled to stow some of them on deck.

You may guess those on deck did a little more than stare at this strange and unexpected apparition. By jingo, I never saw men open their eyes wider in all my life, nor was I any exception to the rule. I stared, as well I might; but we said nothing for some minutes, and the stranger looked calmly on us, and then cocked his eye with a nautical air up at the sky, as if he expected to receive a twopenny-post letter from St. Michael, or a *billet doux* from the Virgin Mary.

"Where has he come from?" said one of the men in a low tone to his companion, who was standing by him at that moment.

"How can I tell?" replied his companion. "He may have dropped from the clouds; he seems to be examining the road; perhaps he is going back."

The stranger sat all this time with the most extreme and provoking coolness and unconcern; he deigned us but a passing notice, but it was very slight.

He was a tall, spare man — what is termed long and lathy — but he was evidently a powerful man. He had a broad chest, and long, sinewy arms, a hooked nose, and a black, eagle eye. His hair was curly, but frosted by age; it seemed as though it had been tinged with white at the extremities, but he was hale and active otherwise, to judge from appearances.

Notwithstanding all this, there was a singular repulsiveness about him that I could not imagine the cause, or describe; at the same time there was an air of determination in his wild and singular-looking eyes, and over their whole there was decidedly an air and an appearance so sinister as to be positively disagreeable.

"Well," said I, after we had stood some minutes, "where did you come from, shipmate?"

He looked at me and then up at the sky, in a knowing manner.

"Come, come, that won't do; you have none of Peter Wilkins's wings, and couldn't come on the aerial dodge; it won't do; how did you get here?"

He gave me an awful wink, and made a sort of involuntary movement, which jumped him up a few inches, and he bumped down again on the water-cask.

"That's as much as to say," thought I, "that he's sat himself on it."

"I'll go and inform the captain," said I, "of this affair; he'll hardly believe me when I tell him, I am sure."

So saying, I left the deck and went to the cabin, where the captain was at breakfast, and related to him what I had seen respecting the stranger. The captain looked at me with an air of disbelief, and said, —

"What? — do you mean to say there's a man on board we haven't seen before?"

"Yes, I do, captain. I never saw him afore, and he's sitting beating his heels on the water-cask on deck."

"The devil!"

"He is, I assure you, sir; and he won't answer any questions."

"I'll see to that. I'll see if I can't make the lubber say something, providing his tongue's not cut out. But how came he on board? Confound it, he can't be the devil, and dropped from the moon."

"Don't know, captain," said I. "He is evil-looking enough, to my mind, to be the father of evil, but it's ill bespeaking attentions from that quarter at any time."

"Go on, lad; I'll come up after you."

I left the cabin, and I heard the captain coming after me. When I got on deck, I saw he had not moved from the place where I left him. There was a general commotion among the crew when they beard of the occurrence, and all crowded round him, save the man at the wheel, who had to remain at his post.

The captain now came forward, and the men fell a little back as he approached. For a moment the captain stood silent, attentively examining the stranger, who was excessively cool, and stood the scrutiny with the same unconcern that he would had the captain been looking at his watch.

"Well, my man," said the captain, "how did you come here?"

"I'm part of the cargo," he said, with an indescribable leer.

"Part of the cargo be d —— d!" said the captain, in sudden rage, for he thought the stranger was coming his jokes too strong. "I know you are not in the bills of lading."

"I'm contraband," replied the stranger; "and my uncle's the great chain of Tartary."

The captain stared, as well he might, and did not speak for some minutes; all the while the stranger kept kicking his heels against the water-casks and squinting up at the skies; it made us feel very queer.

"Well, I must confess you are not in the regular way of trading."

"Oh, no," said the stranger; "I am contraband — entirely contraband."

"And how did you come on board?"

At this question the stranger again looked curiously up at the skies, and continued to do so for more than a minute; he then turned his gaze upon the captain.

"No, no," said the captain; "eloquent dumb show won't do with me; you didn't come, like Mother Shipton, upon a birch broom. How did you come on board my vessel?"

"I walked on board," said the stranger.

"You walked on board; and where did you conceal yourself?"

"Below."

"Very good; and why didn't you stay below altogether?"

"Because I wanted fresh air. I'm in a delicate state of health, you see; it doesn't do to stay in a confined place too long."

"Confound the binnacle!" said the captain; it was his usual oath when anything bothered him, and he could not make it out. “Confound the binnacle! — what a delicate-looking animal you are. I wish you had stayed where you were; your delicacy would have been all the same to me. Delicate, indeed!”

“Yes, very,” said the stranger, coolly.

There was something so comic in the assertion of his delicateness of health, that we should all have laughed; but we were somewhat scared, and had not the inclination.

“How have you lived since you came on board?” inquired the captain.

“Very indifferently.”

“But how? What have you eaten? and what have you drank?”

“Nothing, I assure you. All I did while was below was—”

“What?”

“Why, I sucked my thumbs like a polar bear in its winter quarters.”

And as he spoke the stranger put his two thumbs into his mouth, and extraordinary thumbs they were, too, for each would have filled an ordinary man’s mouth.

“These,” said the stranger, pulling them out, and gazing at them wistfully, and with a deep sigh he continued, —

“These were thumbs at one time; but they are nothing now to what they were.”

“Confound the binnacle!” muttered the captain to himself, and then he added, aloud, —

“It’s cheap living, however; but where are you going to, and why did you come aboard?”

“I wanted a cheap cruise, and I am going there and back.”

“Why, that’s where we are going,” said the captain.

"Then we are brothers," exclaimed the stranger, hopping off the water-cask like a kangaroo, and bounding towards the captain, holding out his hand as though he would have shaken hands with him.

"No, no," said the captain; "I can't do it."

"Can't do it!" exclaimed the stranger, angrily. "What do you mean?"

"That I can't have anything to do with contraband articles; I am a fair trader, and do all above board. I haven't a chaplain on board, or he should offer up prayers for your preservation, and the recovery of your health, which seems so delicate."

"That be—"

The stranger didn't finish the sentence; he merely screwed his mouth up into an incomprehensible shape, and puffed out a lot of breath, with some force, and which sounded very much like a whistle: but, oh, what thick breath he had, it was as much like smoke as anything I ever saw, and so my shipmate said.

"I say, captain," said the stranger, as he saw him pacing the deck.

"Well."

"Just send me up some beef and biscuit, and some coffee royal — be sure it's royal, do you hear, because I'm partial to brandy, it's the only good thing there is on earth."

I shall not easily forget the captain's look as he turned towards the stranger, and gave his huge shoulders a shrug, as much as to say, —

"Well, I can't help it now; he's here, and I can't throw him overboard."

The coffee, beef, and biscuit were sent him, and the stranger seemed to eat them with great *gout*, and drank the coffee with much relish, and returned the things, saying, "Your captain is an excellent cook; give him my compliments."

I thought the captain would think that was but a left-handed compliment, and look more angry than pleased, but no notice was taken of it.

It was strange, but this man had impressed upon all in the vessel some singular notion of his being more than he should be — more than a mere mortal, and not one endeavoured to interfere with him; the captain was a stout and dare-devil a fellow as you would well met with, yet he seemed tacitly to acknowledge more than he would say, for he never after took any further notice of the stranger nor he of him.

They had barely any conversation, simply a civil word when they first met, and so forth; but there was little or no conversation of any kind between them.

The stranger slept upon deck, and lived upon deck entirely; he never once went below after we saw him, and his own account of being below so long.

This was very well, but the night-watch did not enjoy his society, and would have willingly dispensed with it at that hour so particularly lonely and dejected upon the broad ocean, and perhaps a thousand miles away from the nearest point of land.

At this dread and lonely hour, when no sound reaches the ear and disturbs the wrapt stillness of the night, save the whistling of the wind through the cordage, or an occasional dash of water against the vessel's side, the thoughts of the sailor are fixed on far distant objects — his own native land and the friends and loved ones he has left behind him.

He then thinks of the wilderness before, behind, and around him; of the immense body of water, almost in places bottomless; gazing upon such a scene, and with thoughts as strange and indefinite as the very boundless expanse before him, it is no wonder if he should become superstitious; the time and place would, indeed unbidden, conjure up thoughts and feelings of a fearful character and intensity.

The stranger at such times would occupy his favourite seat on the water cask, and looking up at the sky and then on the ocean, and between whiles he would whistle a strange, wild, unknown melody.

The flesh of the sailors used to creep up in knots and bumps when they heard it; the wind used to whistle as an accompaniment and pronounce fearful sounds to their ears.

The wind had been highly favourable from the first, and since the stranger had been discovered it had blown fresh, and we went along at a rapid rate, stemming the water, and dashing the spray off from the bows, and cutting the water like a shark.

This was very singular to us, we couldn’t understand it, neither could the captain, and we looked very suspiciously at the stranger, and wished him at the bottom, for the freshness of the wind now became a gale, and yet the ship came through the water steadily, and away we went before the wind, as if the devil drove us; and mind I don’t mean to say he didn’t.

The gale increased to a hurricane, and though we had not a stitch of canvass out, yet we drove before the gale as if we had been shot out of the mouth of a gun.

The stranger still sat on the water casks, and all night long he kept up his infernal whistle. Now, sailors don’t like to hear any one whistle when there’s such a gale blowing over their heads — it’s like asking for more; but he would persist, and the louder and stronger the wind blew, the louder he whistled.

At length there came a storm of rain, lightning, and wind. We were tossed mountains high, and the foam rose over the vessel, and often entirely over our heads, and the men were lashed to their posts to prevent being washed away.

But the stranger still lay on the water casks, kicking his heels and whistling his infernal tune, always the same. He wasn't washed away nor moved by the action of the water; indeed, we heartily hoped and expected to see both him and the water cask floated overboard at every minute; but, as the captain said, —

"Confound the binnacle! the old water tub seems as if it were screwed on to the deck, and won't move off and he on the top of it."

There was a strong inclination to throw him overboard, and the men conversed in low whispers, and came round the captain, saying, —

"We have come, captain, to ask you what you think of this strange man who has come so mysteriously on board?"

"I can't tell what to think, lads; he's past thinking about — he's something above my comprehension altogether, I promise you."

"Well, then, we are thinking much of the same thing, captain."

"What do you mean?"

"That he ain't exactly one of our sort."

"No, he's no sailor, certainly; and yet, for a land lubber, he's about as rum a customer as ever I met with."

"So he is, sir."

"He stands salt water well; and I must say that I couldn't lay a top of those water casks in that style very well."

"Nor nobody amongst us, sir."

"Well, then, he's in nobody's way, it he? — nobody wants to take his berth, I suppose?"

The men looked at each other somewhat blank; they didn't understand the meaning at all — far from it; and the idea of any one's wanting to take the stranger's place on the water casks was so outrageously ludicrous, that at any other time they would have considered it a devilish good joke and have never ceased laughing at it.

He paused some minutes, and then one of them said, —

"It isn't that we envy him his berth, captain, 'cause nobody else could live there for a moment. Any one amongst us that had been there would have been washed overboard a thousand times over."

"So they would," said the captain.

"Well, sir, he's more than us."

"Very likely; but how can I help that?"

"We think he's the main cause of all this racket in the heavens — the storm and hurricane; and that, in short, if he remains much longer we shall all sink."

"I am sorry for it. I don't think we are in any danger, and had the strange being any power to prevent it, he would assuredly do so, lest he got drowned."

"But we think if he were thrown overboard all would be well."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, captain, you may depend upon it he's the cause of all the mischief. Throw him overboard and that's all we want."

"I shall not throw him overboard, even if I could do such a thing; and I am by no means sure of anything of the kind."

"We do not ask it, sir."

"What do you desire?"

"Leave to throw him overboard — it is to save our own lives."

"I can't let you do any such thing; he's in nobody's way."

"But he's always a whistling. Only hark now, and in such a hurricane as this, it is dreadful to think of it. What else can we do, sir? — he's not human."

At this moment, the stranger's whistling came clear upon their ears; there was the same wild, unearthly notes as before, but the cadences were stronger, and there was a supernatural clearness in all the tones.

"There now," said another, "he's kicking the water cask with his heels."

"Confound the binnacle!" said the captain; "it sounds like short peals of thunder. Go and talk to him, lads."

"And if that won't do, sir, may we—"

"Don't ask me any questions. I don't think a score of the best men that were ever born could move him."

"I don't mind trying," said one.

Upon this the whole of the men moved to the spot where the water casks were standing and the stranger lay.

There was he, whistling like fury, and, at the same time, beating his heels to the tune against the empty casks. We came up to him, and he took no notice of us at all, but kept on in the same way.

"Hilloa!" shouted one.

"Hilloa!" shouted another.

No notice, however, was taken of us, and one of our number, a big, herculean fellow, an Irishman, seized him by the leg, either to make him get up, or, as we thought, to give him a lift over our heads into the sea.

However, he had scarcely got his fingers round the calf of the leg, when the stranger pinched his leg so tight against the water cask, that he could not move, and was as effectually pinned as if he had been nailed there. The stranger, after he had finished a bar of the music, rose gradually to a sitting posture, and without the aid of his hands, and looking the unlucky fellow in the face, he said, —

“Well, what do you want?”

“My hand,” said the fellow.

“Take it then,” he said.

He did take it, and we saw that there was blood on it.

The stranger stretched out his left hand, and taking him by the breech, he lifted him, without any effort, upon the water-cask beside him.

We all stared at this, and couldn’t help it; and we were quite convinced we could not throw him overboard, but he would probably have no difficulty in throwing us overboard.

“Well, what do you want?” he again exclaimed to us all.

We looked at one another, and had scarce courage to speak; at length I said, —

“We wish you to leave off whistling.”

“Leave off whistling!” he said. “And why should I do anything of the kind?”

“Because it brings the wind.”

“Ha! ha! why, that’s the very reason I am whistling, to bring the wind.”

“But we don’t want so much.”

“Pho! pho! you don’t know what’s good for you — it’s a beautiful breeze, and not a bit too stiff.”

“It’s a hurricane.”

“Nonsense.”

“But it is.”

“Now you see how I’ll prove you are wrong in a minute. You see my hair, don’t you?” he said, after he took off his cap. “Very well, look now.”

He got up on the water-cask, and stood bolt upright; and running his fingers through his hair, made it all stand straight on end.

“Confound the binnacle!” said the captain, “if ever I saw the like.”

“There,” said the stranger, triumphantly, “don’t tell me there’s any wind to signify; don’t you see, it doesn’t even move one of my grey hairs; and if it blew as hard as you say, I am certain it would move a hair.”

“Confound the binnacle!” muttered the captain as he walked away. “D — n the cabouse, if he ain’t older than I am — he’s too many for me and everybody else.”

“Are you satisfied?”

What could we say? — we turned away and left the place, and stood at our quarters — there was no help for it — we were impelled to grin and abide by it.

As soon as we had left the place he put his cap on again and sat down on the water-casks, and then took leave of his prisoner, whom he set free, and there lay at full length on his back, with his legs hanging down. Once more he began to whistle most furiously, and beat time with his feet.

For full three weeks did he continue at this game night and day, without any interruption, save such as he required to consume enough coffee royal, junk, and biscuit, as would have served three hearty men.

Well, about that time, one night the whistling ceased and he began to sing — oh! it was singing — such a voice! Gog and Magog in Guildhall, London, when they spoke were nothing to him — it was awful; but the wind calmed down to a fresh and stiff breeze. He continued at this game for three whole days and nights, and on the fourth it ceased, and when we went to take his coffee royal to him he was gone.

We hunted about everywhere, but he was entirely gone, and in three weeks after we safely cast anchor, having performed our voyage in a good month under the usual time; and had it been an old vessel she would have leaked and stinted like a tub from the straining; however, we were glad enough to get in, and were curiously inquisitive as to what was put in our vessel to come back with, for as the captain said, —

“Confound the binnacle! I’ll have no more contraband articles if I can help it.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MEETING BY MOONLIGHT IN THE PARK. — THE TURRET WINDOW IN THE HALL. — THE LETTERS.

The old admiral showed such a strong disposition to take offence at Charles if he should presume, for a moment, to doubt the truth of the narrative that was thus communicated to him, that the latter would not anger him by so doing, but confined his observations upon it to saying that he considered it was very wonderful, and very extraordinary, and so on, which very well satisfied the old man.

The day was now, however, getting far advanced, and Charles Holland began to think of his engagement with the vampyre. He read and read the letter over and over again, but he could not come to a correct conclusion as to whether it intended to imply that he, Sir Francis Varney, would wish to fight him at the hour and place mentioned, or merely give him a meeting as a preliminary step.

He was rather, on the whole, inclined to think that some explanation would be offered by Varney, but at all events he persevered in his determination of going well armed, lest anything in the shape of treachery should be intended.

As nothing of any importance occurred now in the interval of time till nearly midnight, we will at once step to that time, and our readers will suppose it to be a quarter to twelve o'clock at night, and young Charles Holland on the point of leaving the house, to keep his appointment by the pollard oak, with the mysterious Sir Francis Varney.

He placed his loaded pistols conveniently in his pocket, so that at a moment's notice he could lay hands on them, and then wrapping himself up in a travelling cloak he had brought with him to Bannerworth Hall, he prepared to leave his chamber.

The moon still shone, although now somewhat on the wane, and although there were certainly many clouds in the sky they were but of a light fleecy character, and very little interrupted the rays of light that came from the nearly full disc of the moon.

From his window he could not perceive the spot in the park where he was to meet Varney, because the room in which he was occupied not a sufficiently high place in the house to enable him to look over a belt of trees that stopped the view. From almost any of the upper windows the pollard oak could be seen.

It so happened now that the admiral had been placed in a room immediately above the one occupied by his nephew, and, as his mind was full of how he should manage with regard to arranging the preliminaries of the duel between Charles and Varney on the morrow, he found it difficult to sleep; and after remaining in bed about twenty minutes, and finding that each moment he was only getting more and more restless, he adopted a course which he always did under such circumstances.

He rose and dressed himself again, intending to sit up for an hour and then turn into bed and try a second time to get to sleep. But he had no means of getting a light, so he drew the heavy curtain from before the window, and let in as much of the moonlight as he could.

This window commanded a most beautiful and extensive view, for from it the eye could carry completely over the tops of the tallest trees, so that there was no interruption whatever to the prospect, which was as extensive as it was delightful.

Even the admiral, who never would confess to seeing much beauty in scenery where water formed not a large portion of it, could not resist opening his window and looking out, with a considerable degree of admiration, upon wood and dale, as they were illuminated by the moon's rays, softened, and rendered, if anything, more beautiful by the light vapours, through which they had to struggle to make their way.

Charles Holland, in order to avoid the likelihood of meeting with any one who would question him as to where he was going, determined upon leaving his room by the balcony, which, as we are aware, presented ample facilities for his so doing.

He cast a glance at the portrait in the panel before he left the apartment, and then saying, —

"For you, dear Flora, for you I essay this meeting with the fearful original of that portrait," he immediately opened his window, and stepped out on to the balcony.

Young and active as was Charles Holland, to descend from that balcony presented to him no difficulty whatever, and he was, in a very few moments, safe in the garden of Bannerworth Hall.

He never thought, for a moment, to look up, or he would, in an instant, have seen the white head of his old uncle, as it was projected over the sill of the window of his chamber.

The drop of Charles from the balcony of his window, just made sufficient noise to attract the admiral's attention, and, then, before he could think of making any alarm, he saw Charles walking hastily across a grass plot, which was sufficiently in the light of the moon to enable the admiral at once to recognise him, and leave no sort of doubt as to his positive identity.

Of course, upon discovering that it was Charles, the necessity for making an alarm no longer existed, and, indeed, not knowing what it was that had induced him to leave his chamber, a moment's reflection suggested to him the propriety of not even calling to Charles, lest he should defeat some discovery which he might be about to make.

"He has heard something, or seen something," thought the admiral, "and is gone to find out what it is. I only wish I was with him; but up here I can do nothing at all, that's quite clear."

Charles, he saw, walked very rapidly, and like a man who has some fixed destination which he wishes to reach as quickly as possible.

When he dived among the trees which skirted one side of the flower gardens, the admiral was more puzzled than ever, and he said —

"Now where on earth is he off to? He is fully dressed, and has his cloak about him."

After a few moments' reflection he decided that, having seen something suspicious, Charles must have got up, and dressed himself, to fathom it.

The moment this idea became fairly impressed upon his mind, he left his bedroom, and descended to where one of the brothers he knew was sitting up, keeping watch during the night. It was Henry who was so on guard; and when the admiral came into the room, he uttered an expression of surprise to find him up, for it was now some time past twelve o'clock.

"I have come to tell you that Charles has left the house," said the admiral.

"Left the house?"

"Yes; I saw him just now go across the garden."

"And you are sure it was he?"

"Quite sure. I saw him by the moonlight cross the green plot."

“Then you may depend he has seen or heard something, and gone alone to find out what it is rather than give any alarm.”

“That is just what I think.”

“It must be so. I will follow him, if you can show me exactly which way he went.”

“That I can easily. And in case I should have made any mistake, which it is not at all likely, we can go to his room first and see if it is empty.”

“A good thought, certainly; that will at once put an end to all doubt upon the question.”

They both immediately proceeded to Charles’s room, and then the admiral’s accuracy of identification of his nephew was immediately proved by finding that Charles was not there, and that the window was wide open.

“You see I am right,” said the admiral.

“You are,” cried Henry; “but what have we here?”

“Where?”

“Here on the dressing-table. Here are no less than three letters, all laid as it on purpose to catch the eye of the first one who might enter the room.”

“Indeed!”

“You perceive them?”

Henry held them to the light, and after a moment’s inspection of them, he said, in a voice of much surprise, —

“Good God! what is the meaning of this?”

“The meaning of what?”

“The letters are addressed to parties in the house here. Do you not see?”

“To whom?”

"One to Admiral Bell—"

"The deuce!"

"Another to me, and the third to my sister Flora. There is some new mystery here."

The admiral looked at the superscription of one of the letters which was handed to him in silent amazement. Then he cried, —

"Set down the light, and let us read them."

Henry did so, and then they simultaneously opened the epistles which were severally addressed to them. There was a silence, as of the very grave, for some moments, and then the old admiral staggered to a seat, as he exclaimed, —

"Am I dreaming — am I dreaming?"

"Is this possible?" said Henry, in a voice of deep emotion, as he allowed the note addressed to him to drop on to the floor.

"D — n it, what does yours say?" cried the old admiral, in a louder tone.

"Read it — what says yours?"

"Read it — I'm amazed."

The letters were exchanged, and read by each with the same breathless attention they had bestowed upon their own; after which, they both looked at each other in silence, pictures of amazement, and the most absolute state of bewilderment.

Not to keep our readers in suspense, we at once transcribe each of these letters.

The one to the admiral contained these words, —

"MY DEAR UNCLE,

"Of course you will perceive the prudence of keeping this letter to yourself, but the fact is, I have now made up my mind to leave Bannerworth Hall.

“Flora Bannerworth is not now the person she was when first I knew her and loved her. Such being the case, and she having altered, not I, she cannot accuse me of fickleness.

“I still love the Flora Bannerworth I first knew, but I cannot make my wife one who is subject to the visitations of a vampyre.

“I have remained here long enough now to satisfy myself that this vampyre business is no delusion. I am quite convinced that it is a positive fact, and that, after death, Flora will herself become one of the horrible existences known by that name.

“I will communicate to you from the first large city on the continent whither I am going, at which I make any stay, and in the meantime, make what excuses you like at Bannerworth Hall, which I advise you to leave as quickly as you can, and believe me to be, my dear uncle, yours truly,

“CHARLES HOLLAND.”

Henry’s letter was this: —

“MY DEAR SIR,

“If you calmly and dispassionately consider the painful and distressing circumstances in which your family are placed, I am sure that, far from blaming me for the step which this note will announce to you I have taken, you will be the first to give me credit for acting with an amount of prudence and foresight which was highly necessary under the circumstances.

“If the supposed visits of a vampyre to your sister Flora had turned out, as first I hoped they would, a delusion and been in any satisfactory manner explained away I should certainly have felt pride and pleasure in fulfilling my engagement to that young lady.

“You must, however, yourself feel that the amount of evidence in favour of a belief that an actual vampyre has visited Flora, enforces a conviction of its truth.

"I cannot, therefore, make her my wife under such very singular circumstances.

"Perhaps you may blame me for not taking at once advantage of the permission given me to forego my engagement when first I came to your house; but the fact is, I did not then in the least believe in the existence of the vampyre, but since a positive conviction of that most painful fact has now forced itself upon me, I beg to decline the honour of an alliance which I had at one time looked forward to with the most considerable satisfaction.

"I shall be on the continent as fast as conveyances can take me, therefore, should you entertain any romantic notions of calling me to an account for a course of proceeding I think perfectly and fully justifiable, you will not find me.

"Accept the assurances of my respect for yourself and pity for your sister, and believe me to be, my dear sir, your sincere friend,

"CHARLES HOLLAND."

These two letters might well make the admiral stare at Henry Bannerworth, and Henry stare at him.

An occurrence so utterly and entirely unexpected by both of them, was enough to make them doubt the evidence of their own senses. But there were the letters, as a damning evidence of the outrageous fact, and Charles Holland was gone.

It was the admiral who first recovered from the stunning effect of the epistles, and he, with a gesture of perfect fury, exclaimed, —

"The scoundrel — the cold-blooded villain! I renounce him for ever! he is no nephew of mine; he is some d —— d imposter! Nobody with a dash of my family blood in his veins would have acted so to save himself from a thousand deaths."

"Who shall we trust now," said Henry, "when those whom we take to our inmost hearts deceive us thus? This is the greatest shock I have yet received. If there be a pang greater than another, surely it is to be found in the faithlessness and heartlessness of one we loved and trusted."

"He is a scoundrel!" roared the admiral. "D — n him, he'll die on a dunghill, and that's too good a place for him. I cast him off — I'll find him out, and old as I am, I'll fight him — I'll wring his neck, the rascal; and, as for poor dear Miss Flora, God bless her! I'll — I'll marry her myself, and make her an admiral. — I'll marry her myself. Oh, that I should be uncle to such a rascal!"

"Calm yourself," said Henry, "no one can blame you."

"Yes, you can; I had no right to be his uncle, and I was an old fool to love him."

The old man sat down, and his voice became broken with emotion as he said, —

"Sir, I tell you I would have died willingly rather than this should have happened. This will kill me now, — I shall die now of shame and grief."

Tears gushed from the admiral's eyes and the sight of the noble old man's emotion did much to calm the anger of Henry which, although he said but little, was boiling at his heart like a volcano.

"Admiral Bell," he said, "you have nothing to do with this business; we can not blame you for the heartlessness of another. I have but one favour to ask of you."

"What — what can I do?"

"Say no more about him at all."

"I can't help saying something about him. You ought to turn me out of the house."

"Heaven forbid! What for?"

"Because I'm his uncle — his d —— d old fool of an uncle, that always thought so much of him."

"Nay, my good sir, that was a fault on the right side, and cannot discredit you. I thought him the most perfect of human beings."

"Oh, if I could but have guessed this."

"It was impossible. Such duplicity never was equalled in this world — it was impossible to foresee it."

"Hold — hold! did he give you fifty pounds?"

"What?"

"Did he give you fifty pounds?"

"Give me fifty pounds! Most decidedly not; what made you think of such a thing?"

"Because to-day he borrowed fifty pounds of me, he said, to lend to you."

"I never heard of the transaction until this moment."

"The villain!"

"No, doubt, sir, he wanted that amount to expedite his progress abroad."

"Well, now, damme, if an angel had come to me and said 'Hilloa! Admiral Bell, your nephew, Charles Holland, is a thundering rogue,' I should have said 'You're a liar!'"

"This is fighting against facts, my dear sir. He is gone — mention him no more; forget him, as I shall endeavour myself to do, and persuade my poor sister to do."

"Poor girl! what can we say to her?"

"Nothing, but give her all the letters, and let her be at once satisfied of the worthlessness of him she loved."

"The best way. Her woman's pride will then come to her help."

"I hope it will. She is of an honourable race, and I am sure she will not condescend to shed a tear for such a man as Charles Holland has proved himself to be."

"D — n him, I'll find him out, and make him fight you. He shall give you satisfaction."

"No, no."

"No? But he shall."

"I cannot fight with him."

"You cannot?"

"Certainly not. He is too far beneath me now. I cannot fight on honourable terms with one whom I despise as too dishonourable to contend with. I have nothing now but silence and contempt."

"I have though, for I'll break his neck when I see him, or he shall break mine. The villain! I'm ashamed to stay here, my young friend."

"How mistaken a view you take of this matter, my dear sir. As Admiral Bell, a gentleman, a brave officer, and a man of the purest and most unblemished honour, you confer a distinction upon us by your presence here."

The admiral wrung Henry by the hand, as he said, —

"To-morrow — wait till to-morrow; we will talk over this matter to morrow — I cannot to-night, I have not patience; but to-morrow, my dear boy, we will have it all out. God bless you. Good night."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE NOBLE CONFIDENCE OF FLORA BANNERWORTH IN HER LOVER. — HER OPINION OF THE THREE LETTERS. — THE ADMIRAL'S ADMIRATION.

To describe the feelings of Henry Bannerworth on the occasion of this apparent defalcation from the path of rectitude and honour by his friend, as he had fondly imagined Charles Holland to be, would be next to impossible.

If, as we have taken occasion to say, it be a positive fact, that a noble and a generous mind feels more acutely any heartlessness of this description from one on whom it has placed implicit confidence, than the most deliberate and wicked of injuries from absolute strangers, we can easily conceive that Henry Bannerworth was precisely the person to feel most acutely the conduct which all circumstances appeared to fix upon Charles Holland, upon whose faith, truth, and honour, he would have staked his very existence but a few short hours before.

With such a bewildered sensation that he scarcely knew where he walked or whither to betake himself, did he repair to his own chamber, and there he strove, with what energy he was able to bring to the task, to find out some excuses, if he could, for Charles's conduct. But he could find none. View it in what light he would, it presented but a picture of the most heartless selfishness it had ever been his lot to encounter.

The tone of the letters, too, which Charles had written, materially aggravated the moral delinquency of which he had been guilty; belief, far better, had he not attempted an excuse at all than have attempted such excuses as were there put down in those epistles.

A more cold blooded, dishonourable proceeding could not possibly be conceived.

It would appear, that while he entertained a doubt with regard to the reality of the visitation of the vampyre to Flora Bannerworth, he had been willing to take to himself abundance of credit for the most honourable feelings, and to induce a belief in the minds of all that an exalted feeling of honour, as well as a true affection that would know no change, kept him at the feet of her whom he loved.

Like some braggart, who, when there is no danger, is a very hero, but who, the moment he feels convinced he will be actually and truly called upon for an exhibition of his much-vaunted prowess, had Charles Holland deserted the beautiful girl who, if anything, had now certainly, in her misfortunes, a far higher claim upon his kindly feeling than before.

Henry could not sleep, although, at the request of George, who offered to keep watch for him the remainder of the night he attempted to do so.

He in vain said to himself, “I will banish from my mind this most unworthy subject. I have told Admiral Bell that contempt is the only feeling I can now have for his nephew, and yet I now find myself dwelling upon him, and upon his conduct, with a perseverance which is a foe to my repose.”

At length came the welcome and beautiful light of day, and Henry rose fevered and unrefreshed.

His first impulse now was to hold a consultation with his brother George, as to what was to be done, and George advised that Mr. Marchdale, who as yet knew nothing of the matter, should be immediately informed of it, and consulted, as being probably better qualified than either of them to come to a just, a cool, and a reasonable opinion upon the painful circumstance, which it could not be expected that either of them would be able to view calmly.

"Let it be so, then," said Henry; "Mr. Marchdale shall decide for us."

They at once sought this friend of the family, who was in his own bed-room, and when Henry knocked at the door, Marchdale opened it hurriedly, eagerly inquiring what was the matter.

"There is no alarm," said Henry. "We have only come to tell you of a circumstance which has occurred during the night, and which will somewhat surprise you."

"Nothing calamitous, I hope?"

"Vexatious; and yet, I think it is a matter upon which we ought almost to congratulate ourselves. Read those two letters, and give us your candid opinion upon them."

Henry placed in Mr. Marchdale's hands the letter addressed to himself, as well as that to the admiral.

Marchdale read them both with marked attention, but he did not exhibit in his countenance so much surprise as regret.

When he had finished, Henry said to him, —

"Well, Marchdale, what think you of this new and extraordinary episode in our affairs?"

"My dear young friends," said Marchdale, in a voice of great emotion, "I know not what to say to you. I have no doubt but that you are both of you much astonished at the receipt of these letters, and equally so at the sudden absence of Charles Holland."

"And are not you?"

"Not so much as you, doubtless, are. The fact is, I never did entertain a favourable opinion of the young man, and he knew it. I have been accustomed to the study of human nature under a variety of aspects; I have made it a matter of deep, and I may add, sorrowful, contemplation, to study and remark those minor shades of character which commonly escape observation wholly. And, I repeat, I always had a bad opinion of Charles Holland, which he guessed, and hence he conceived a hatred to me, which more than once, as you cannot but remember, showed itself in little acts of opposition and hostility."

"You much surprise me."

"I expected to do so. But you cannot help remembering that at one time I was on the point of leaving here solely on his account."

"You were so."

"Indeed I should have done so, but that I reasoned with myself upon the subject, and subdued the impulse of the anger which some years ago, when I had not seen so much of the world, would have guided me."

"But why did you not impart to us your suspicions? We should at least, then, have been prepared for such a contingency as has occurred."

"Place yourself in my position, and then yourself what you would have done. Suspicion is one of those hideous things which all men should be most specially careful not only how they entertain at all, but how they give expression to. Besides, whatever may be the amount of one's own internal conviction with regard to the character of any one, there is just a possibility that one may be wrong."

"True, true."

"That possibility ought to keep any one silent who has nothing but suspicion to go upon, however cautious it may make him, as regards his dealings with the individual. I only suspected from little minute shades of character, that would peep out in spite of him, that Charles

Holland was not the honourable man he would fain have had everybody believe him to be."

"And had you from the first such a feeling?"

"I had."

"It is very strange."

"Yes; and what is more strange still, is that he from the first seemed to know it; and despite a caution which I could see he always kept uppermost in his thoughts, he could not help speaking tartly to me at times."

"I have noticed that," said George.

"You may depend it is a fact," added Marchdale, "that nothing so much excites the deadly and desperate hatred of a man who is acting a hypocritical part, as the suspicion, well grounded or not, that another sees and understands the secret impulses of his dishonourable heart."

"I cannot blame you, or any one else, Mr. Marchdale," said Henry, "that you did not give utterance to your secret thoughts, but I do wish that you had done so."

"Nay, dear Henry," replied Mr. Marchdale, "believe me, I have made this matter a subject of deep thought, and have abundance of reasons why I ought not to have spoken to you upon the subject."

"Indeed!"

"Indeed I have, and not among the least important is the one, that if I had acquainted you with my suspicions, you would have found yourself in the painful position of acting a hypocritical part yourself towards this Charles Holland, for you must either have kept the secret that he was suspected, or you must have shewn it to him by your behaviour."

"Well, well. I dare say, Marchdale, you acted for the best. What shall we do now?”

“Can you doubt?”

“I was thinking of letting Flora at once know the absolute and complete worthlessness of her lover, so that she could have no difficulty in at once tearing herself from him by the assistance of the natural pride which would surely come to her aid, upon finding herself so much deceived.”

“The test may be possible.”

“You think so?”

“I do, indeed.”

“Here is a letter, which of course remains unopened, addressed to Flora by Charles Holland. The admiral rather thought it would hurt her feelings to deliver her such an epistle, but I must confess I am of a contrary opinion upon that point, and think now the more evidence she has of the utter worthlessness of him who professed to love her with so much disinterested affection, the better it will be for her.”

“You could not, possibly, Henry, have taken a more sensible view of the subject.”

“I am glad you agree with me.”

“No reasonable man could do otherwise, and from what I have seen of Admiral Bell, I am sure, upon reflection, he will be of the same opinion.”

“Then it shall be so. The first shock to poor Flora may be severe, but we shall then have the consolation of knowing that it is the only one, and that in knowing the very worst, she has no more on that score to apprehend. Alas, alas! the hand of misfortune now appears to have pressed heavily upon us indeed. What in the name of all that is unlucky and disastrous, will happen next, I wonder?”

“What can happen?” said Marchdale; “I think you have now got rid of the greatest evil of all — a false friend."

"We have, indeed."

"Go, then, to Flora; assure her that in the affection of others who know no falsehood, she will find a solace from every ill. Assure her that there are hearts that will place themselves between her and every misfortune."

Mr. Marchdale was much affected as he spoke. Probably he felt deeper than he chose to express the misfortunes of that family for whom he entertained so much friendship. He turned aside his head to hide the traces of emotion which, despite even his great powers of self-command, would shew themselves upon his handsome and intelligent countenance. Then it appeared as if his noble indignation had got, for a few brief moments, the better of all prudence, and he exclaimed, —

"The villain! the worse than villain! who would, with a thousand artifices, make himself beloved by a young, unsuspecting, and beautiful girl, but then to leave her to the bitterness of regret, that she had ever given such a man a place in her esteem. The heartless ruffian!"

"Be calm, Mr. Marchdale, I pray you be calm," said George; "I never saw you so much moved."

"Excuse me," he said, "excuse me; I am much moved, and I am human. I cannot always, let me strive my utmost, place a curb upon my feelings."

"They are feelings which do you honour."

"Nay, nay, I am foolish to have suffered myself to be led away into such a hasty expression of them. I am accustomed to feel acutely and to feel deeply, but it is seldom I am so much overcome as this."

"Will you accompany us to the breakfast room at once, Mr.

Marchdale, where we will make this communication to Flora; you will then be able to judge by her manner of receiving it, what it will be best to say to her."

"Come, then, and pray be calm. The least that is said upon this painful and harassing subject, after this morning, will be the best."

"You are right — you are right."

Mr. Marchdale hastily put on his coat. He was dressed, with the exception of that one article of apparel, when the brothers came to his chamber, and then he came to the breakfast-parlour where the painful communication was to be made to Flora of her lover's faithlessness.

Flora was already seated in that apartment. Indeed, she had been accustomed to meet Charles Holland there before others of the family made their appearance, but, alas! this morning the kind and tender lover was not there.

The expression that sat upon the countenances of her brothers, and of Mr. Marchdale, was quite sufficient to convince her that something more serious than usual had occurred, and she at the moment turned very pale. Marchdale observed this change of change of countenance in her, and he advanced towards her, saying, —

"Calm yourself, Flora, we have something to communicate to you, but it is a something which should excite indignation, and no other feeling, in your breast."

"Brother, what is the meaning of this?" said Flora, turning aside from Marchdale, and withdrawing the hand which he would have taken.

"I would rather have Admiral Bell here before I say anything," said Henry, "regarding a matter in which he cannot but feel much interested personally."

"Here he is," said the admiral, who at that moment had opened the door of the breakfast room. "Here he is, so now fire away, and don't spare the enemy."

"And Charles?" said Flora, "where is Charles?"

"D — n Charles!" cried the admiral, who had not been much accustomed to control his feelings.

"Hush! hush!" said Henry; "my dear sir, bush! do not indulge now in any invectives. Flora, here are three letters; you will see that the one which is unopened is addressed to yourself. However, we wish you to read the whole three of them, and then to form your own free and unbiased opinion."

Flora looked as pale as a marble statue, when she took the letters into her hands. She let the two that were open fall on the table before her, while she eagerly broke the seal of that which was addressed to herself.

Henry, with an instinctive delicacy, beckoned every one present to the window, so that Flora had not the pain of feeling that any eyes were fixed upon her but those of her mother, who had just come into the room, while she was perusing those documents which told such a tale of heartless dissimulation.

"My dear child," said Mrs. Bannerworth, "you are ill."

"Hush! mother — hush!" said Flora, "let me know all."

She read the whole of the letters through, and then, as the last one dropped from her grasp, she exclaimed, —

"Oh, God! oh, God! what is all that has occurred compared to this? Charles — Charles — Charles!"

"Flora!" exclaimed Henry, suddenly turning from the window. "Flora, is this worthy of you?"

"Heaven now support me!"

“Is this worthy of the name you bear Flora? I should have thought, and I did hope, that woman’s pride would have supported you.”

“Let me implore you,” added Marchdale, “to summon indignation to your aid, Miss Bannerworth.”

“Charles — Charles — Charles!” she again exclaimed, as she wrung her hands despairingly.

“Flora, if anything could add a sting to my already irritated feelings,” said Henry, “this conduct of yours would.”

“Henry — brother, what mean you? Are you mad?”

“Are you, Flora?”

“God, I wish now that I was.”

“You have read those letters, and yet you call upon the name of him who wrote them with frantic tenderness.”

“Yes, yes,” she cried; “frantic tenderness is the word. It is with frantic tenderness I call upon his name, and ever will. — Charles! Charles! — dear Charles!”

“This surpasses all belief,” said Marchdale.

“It is the frenzy of grief,” added George; “but I did not expect it of her. Flora — Flora, think again.”

“Think — think — the rush of thought distracts. Whence came these letters? — where did you find these most disgraceful forgeries?”

“Forgeries!” exclaimed Henry; and he staggered back, as if some one bad struck him a blow.

“Yes, forgeries!” screamed Flora. “What has become of Charles Holland? Has he been murdered by some secret enemy, and then these most vile fabrications made up in his name? Oh, Charles, Charles, are you lost to me for ever?”

“Good God!” said Henry; “I did not think of that”

"Madness! — madness!" cried Marchdale.

"Hold!" shouted the admiral. "Let me speak to her."

He pushed every one aside, and advanced to Flora. He seized both her hands in his own, and in a tone of voice that was struggling with feeling, he cried, —

"Look at me, my dear; I'm an old man old enough to be your grandfather, so you needn't mind looking me steadily in the face. Look at me, I want to ask you a question."

Flora raised her beautiful eyes, and looked the old weather-beaten admiral full in the face.

Oh! what a striking contrast did those two persons present to each other. That young and beautiful girl, with her small, delicate, childlike hands clasped, and completely hidden in the huge ones of the old sailor, the white, smooth skin contrasting wonderfully with his wrinkled, hardened features.

"My dear," he cried, "you have read those — those d —— d letters, my dear?"

"I have, sir."

"And what do you think of them?"

"They were not written by Charles Holland, your nephew."

A choking sensation seemed to come over the old man, and he tried to speak, but in vain. He shook the hands of the young girl violently, until he saw that he was hurting her, and then, before she could be aware of what he was about, he gave her a kiss on the cheek, as he cried, —

"God bless you — God bless you! You are the sweetest, dearest little creature that ever was, or that ever will be, and I'm a d —— d old fool, that's what I am. These letters were not written by my nephew, Charles. He is incapable of writing them, and, d — n me, I shall take shame to myself as long as I live for ever thinking so."

"Dear sir," said Flora, who somehow or another did not seem at all offended at the kiss which the old man had given her; "dear sir, how could you believe, for one moment, that they came from him? There has been some desperate villany on foot. Where is he? — oh, find him, if he be yet alive. If they who have thus striven to steal from him that honour, which is the jewel of his heart, have murdered him, seek them out, sir, in the sacred name of justice, I implore you."

"I will — I will. I don't renounce him; he is my nephew still — Charles Holland — my own dear sister's son; and you are the best girl, God bless you, that ever breathed. He loved you — he loves you still; and if he's above ground, poor fellow, he shall yet tell you himself he never saw those infamous letters."

"You — you will seek for him?" sobbed Flora, and the tears gushed from her eyes. "Upon you, sir, who, as I do, feel assured of his innocence, I alone rely. If all the world say he is guilty, we will not think so."

"I'm d —— d if we do."

Henry had sat down by the table, and, with his hands clasped together, seemed in an agony of thought.

He was now roused by a thump on the back by the admiral, who cried, —

"What do you think, now, old fellow? D — n it, things look a little different now."

"As God is my judge," said Henry, holding up his hands, "I know not what to think, but my heart and feelings all go with you and with Flora, in your opinion of the innocence of Charles Holland."

"I knew you would say that, because you could not possibly help it, my dear boy. Now we are all right again, and all we have got to do is to find out which way the enemy has gone, and then give chase to him."

"Mr. Marchdale, what do you think of this new suggestion," said George to that gentleman.

"Pray, excuse me," was his reply; "I would much rather not be called upon to give an opinion."

"Why, what do you mean by that?" said the admiral.

"Precisely what I say, sir."

"D — n me, we had a fellow once in the combined fleets, who never had an opinion till after something had happened, and then he always said that was just what he thought."

"I was never in the combined, or any other fleet, sir," said Marchdale, coldly.

"Who the devil said you were?" roared the admiral.

Marchdale merely hawed.

"However," added the admiral, "I don't care, and never did, for anybody's opinion, when I know I am right. I'd back this dear girl here for opinions, and good feelings, and courage to express them, against all the world, I would, any day. If I was not the old hulk I am, I would take a cruise in any latitude under the sun, if it was only for the chance of meeting with just such another."

"Oh, lose no time!" said Flora. "If Charles is not to be found in the house, lose no time in searching for him, I pray you; seek him, wherever there is the remotest probability he may chance to be. Do not let him think he is deserted."

"Not a bit of it," cried the admiral. "You make your mind easy, my dear. If he's above ground, we shall find him out, you may depend upon it. Come along master Henry, you and I will consider what had best be done in this uncommonly ugly matter."

Henry and George followed the admiral from the breakfast-room, leaving Marchdale there, who looked serious and full of melancholy thought.

It was quite clear that he considered Flora had spoken from the generous warmth of her affection as regarded Charles Holland, and not from the convictions which reason would have enforced her to feel.

When he was now alone with her and Mrs. Bannerworth, he spoke in a feeling and affectionate tone regarding the painful and inexplicable events which had transpired.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MR. MARCHDALE'S EXCULPATION OF HIMSELF. — THE SEARCH THROUGH THE GARDENS. — THE SPOT OF THE DEADLY STRUGGLE. — THE MYSTERIOUS PAPER.

It was, perhaps, very natural that, with her feelings towards Charles Holland, Flora should shrink from every one who seemed to be of a directly contrary impression, and when Mr. Marchdale now spoke, she showed but little inclination to hear what he had to say in explanation.

The genuine and unaffected manner, however, in which he spoke, could not but have its effect upon her, and she found herself compelled to listen, as well as, to a great extent, approve of the sentiments that fell from his lips.

"Flora," he said, "I beg that you will here, in the presence of your mother, give me a patient hearing. You fancy that, because I cannot join so glibly as the admiral in believing that these letters are forgeries, I must be your enemy."

"Those letters," said Flora, "were not written by Charles Holland."

"That is your opinion."

"It is more than an opinion. He could not write them."

"Well, then, of course, if I felt inclined, which Heaven alone knows I do not, I could not hope successfully to argue against such a conviction. But I do not wish to do so. All I want to impress upon you is, that I am not to be blamed for doubting his innocence; and, at the same time, I wish to assure you that no one in this house would feel more exquisite satisfaction than I in seeing it established."

"I thank you for so much," said Flora; "but as, to my mind, his innocence has never been doubted, it needs to me no establishing."

"Very good. You believe these letters forgeries?"

"I do."

"And that the disappearance of Charles Holland is enforced, and not of his own free will?"

"I do."

"Then you may rely upon my unremitting exertions night and day to find him and any suggestion you can make, which is likely to aid in the search, shall, I pledge myself, be fully carried out."

"I thank you, Mr. Marchdale."

"My dear," said the mother, "rely on Mr. Marchdale."

"I will rely on any one who believe Charles Holland innocent of writing those odious letters, mother — I rely upon the admiral. He will aid me heart and hand."

"And so will Mr. Marchdale."

"I am glad to hear it."

"And yet doubt it, Flora," said Marchdale, dejectedly. "I am very sorry that such should be the case; I will not, however, trouble you any further, nor, give me leave to assure you, will I relax in my honest endeavours to clear up this mystery."

So saying, Mr. Marchdale bowed, and left the room, apparently more vexed than he cared to express at the misconstruction which had been put upon his conduct and motives. He at once sought Henry and the admiral, to whom he expressed his most earnest desire to aid in attempting to unravel the mysterious circumstances which had occurred.

"This strongly-expressed opinion of Flora," he remarked, "is of course amply sufficient to induce us to pause before we say one word more that shall in any way sound like a condemnation of Mr. Holland. Heaven forbid that I should.”

“No,” said the admiral; “don’t.”

“I do not intend.”

“I would not advise anybody.”

“Sir, if you use that as a threat—”

“A threat?”

“Yes; I must say, it sounded marvellously like one.”

“Oh, dear, no — quite a mistake. I consider that every man has a fair right to the enjoyment of his opinion. All I have to remark is, that I shall, after what has occurred, feel myself called upon to fight anybody who says those letters were written by my nephew.”

“Indeed, sir!”

“Ah, indeed.”

“You will permit me to say such is a strange mode of allowing every one the free enjoyment of his opinion.”

“Not at all.”

“Whatever pains and penalties may be the result, Admiral Bell, of differing with so infallible authority as yourself, I shall do so whenever my judgment induces me.”

“You will?”

“Indeed I will.”

“Very good. You know the consequences.”

“As to fighting you, I should refuse to do so.”

“Refuse?”

“Yes; most certainly.”

“Upon what ground?”

“Upon the ground that you were a madman.”

“Come,” now interposed Henry, “let me hope that, for my sake as well as for Flora's, this dispute will proceed no further."

"I have not courted it," said Marchdale. "I have much temper, but I am not a stick or a stone."

"D —— e, if I don't think," said the admiral, "you are a bit of both."

"Mr. Henry Bannerworth," said Marchdale, "I am your guest, and but for the duty I feel in assisting in the search for Mr. Charles Holland, I should at once leave your house."

"You need not trouble yourself on my account," said the admiral; "if I find no clue to him in the neighbourhood for two or three days, I shall be off myself."

"I am going," said Henry, rising, "to search the garden and adjoining meadows; if you two gentlemen choose to come with me, I shall of course be happy of your company; if, however, you prefer remaining here to wrangle, you can do so."

This had the effect, at all events, of putting a stop to the dispute for the present, and both the admiral and Mr. Marchdale accompanied Henry on his search. That search was commenced immediately under the balcony of Charles Holland's window, from which the admiral had seen him emerge.

There was nothing particular found there, or in the garden. Admiral Bell pointed out accurately the route he had seen Charles take across the grass plot just before he himself left his chamber to seek Henry.

Accordingly, this route was now taken, and it led to a low part of the garden wall, which any one of ordinary vigour could easily have surmounted.

"My impression is," said the admiral, "that he got over here."

"The ivy appears to be disturbed," remarked Henry.

"Suppose we mark the spot, and then go round to it on the outer side?" suggested George.

This was agreed to; for, although the young man might have chosen rather to clamber over the wall than go round, it was doubtful if the old admiral could accomplish such a feat.

The distance round, however, was not great, and as they had cast over the wall a handful of flowers from the garden to mark the precise spot, it was easily discoverable.

The moment they reached it, they were panic-stricken by the appearances which it presented. The grass was for some yards round about completely trodden up, and converted into mud. There were deep indentations of feet-marks in all directions, and such abundance of evidence that some most desperate struggle had recently taken place there, that the most sceptical person in the world could not have entertained any doubt upon the subject.

Henry was the first to break the silence with which they each regarded the broken ground.

"This is conclusive to my mind," he said, with a deep sigh. "Here has poor Charles been attacked."

"God keep him!" exclaimed Marchdale, "and pardon me my doubts — I am now convinced."

The old admiral gazed about him like one distracted. Suddenly he cried —

"They have murdered him. Some fiends in the shape of men have murdered him, and Heaven only knows for what."

"It seems but too probable," said Henry. "Let us endeavour to trace the footsteps. Oh! Flora, Flora, what terrible news this will be to you."

"A horrible supposition comes across my mind," said George.

"What if he met the vampyre?"

"It may have been so," said Marchdale, with a shudder. "It is a point which we should endeavour to ascertain, and I think we may do so."

"How!"

"By some inquiry as to whether Sir Francis Varney was from home at midnight last night."

"True; that might be done."

"The question, suddenly put to one of his servants, would, most probably, be answered as a thing of course."

"It would."

"Then that shall be decided upon. And now, my friends, since you have some of you thought me luke-warm in this business, I pledge myself that, should it be ascertained that Varney was from home at midnight last evening, I will defy him personally, and meet him hand to hand."

"Nay, nay," said Henry, "leave that course to younger hands."

"Why so?"

"It more befits me to be his challenger."

"No, Henry. You are differently situated to what I am."

"How so?"

"Remember, that I am in the world a lone man; without ties or connexions. If I lose my life, I compromise no one by my death; but you have a mother and a bereaved sister to look to who will deserve your care."

"Hilloa," cried the admiral, "what's this?"

"What?" cried each, eagerly, and they pressed forward to where the admiral was stooping to the ground to pick up something which was nearly completely trodden into the grass.

He with some difficulty raised it. It was a small slip of paper, on which was some writing, but it was so much covered with mud as not to be legible.

"If this be washed," said Henry, "I think we shall be able to read it clearly."

"We can soon try that experiment," said George. "And as the footsteps, by some mysterious means, show themselves nowhere else but in this one particular spot, any further pursuit of inquiry about here appears useless."

"Then we will return to the house," said Henry, "and wash the mud from this paper."

"There is one important point," remarked Marchdale, "which it appears to me we have all overlooked."

"Indeed!"

"Yes."

"What may that be?"

"It is this. Is any one here sufficiently acquainted with the handwriting of Mr. Charles Holland to come to an opinion upon the letters?"

"I have some letters from him," said Henry, "which we received while on the continent, and I dare say Flora has likewise."

"Then they should be compared with the alleged forgeries."

"I know his handwriting well," said the admiral. "The letters bear so strong a resemblance to it that they would deceive anybody."

"Then you may depend," remarked Henry, "some most deep-laid and desperate plot is going on."

"I begin," added Marchdale, "to dread that such must be the case. What say you to claiming the assistance of the authorities, as well as offering a large reward for any information regarding Mr. Charles

Holland?"

"No plan shall be left untried, you may depend."

They had now reached the house, and Henry having procured some clean water, carefully washed the paper which had been found among the trodden grass. When freed from the mixture of clay and mud which had obscured it, they made out the following words, —

" — it be so well. At the next full moon seek a convenient spot, and it can be done. The signature is, to my apprehension, perfect. The money which I hold, in my opinion, is much more in amount than you imagine, must be ours; and as for—"

Here the paper was torn across, and no further words were visible upon it.

Mystery seemed now to be accumulating upon mystery; each one, as it showed itself darkly, seeming to bear some remote relation to what preceded it; and yet only confusing it the more.

That this apparent scrap of a letter had dropped from some one's pocket during the fearful struggle, of which there were such ample evidences, was extremely probable; but what it related to, by whom it was written, or by whom dropped, were unfathomable mysteries.

In fact, no one could give an opinion upon these matters at all; and after a further series of conjectures, it could only be decided, that unimportant as the scrap of paper appeared now to be, it should be preserved, in case it should, as there was a dim possibility that it might become a connecting link in some chain of evidence at another time.

"And here we are," said Henry, "completely at fault, and knowing not what to do."

"Well, it is a hard case," said the admiral, "that, with all the will in the world to be up and doing something, we are lying here like a fleet of ships in a calm, as idle as possible."

"You perceive we have no evidence to connect Sir Francis Varney with this affair, either nearly or remotely," said Marchdale.

"Certainly not," replied Henry.

"But yet, I hope you will not lose sight of the suggestion I proposed, to the effect of ascertaining if he were from home last night."

"But how is that to be carried out?"

"Boldly."

"How boldly?"

"By going at once, I should advise, to his house, and asking the first one of his domestics you may happen to see."

"I will go over," cried George; "on such occasions as these one cannot act upon ceremony."

He seized his hat, and without waiting for a word from any one approving or condemning his going, off he went.

"If," said Henry, "we find that Varney has nothing to do with the matter, we are completely at fault."

"Completely," echoed Marchdale.

"In that case, admiral, I think we ought to defer to your feelings upon the subject, and do whatever you suggest should be done."

"I shall offer a hundred pounds reward to any one who can and will bring any news of Charles."

"A hundred pounds is too much," said Marchdale.

"Not at all; and while I am about it, since the amount is made a subject of discussion, I shall make it two hundred, and that may benefit some rascal who is not so well paid for keeping the secret as I will pay him for disclosing it."

"Perhaps you are right," said Marchdale.

"I know I am, as I always am."

Marchdale could not forbear a smile at the opinionated old man, who thought no one's opinion upon any subject at all equal to his own; but he made no remark, and only waited, as did Henry, with evident anxiety for the return of George.

The distance was not great, and George certainly performed his errand quickly, for he was back in less time than they had thought he could return in. The moment he came into the room, he said, without waiting for any inquiry to be made of him, —

"We are at fault again. I am assured that Sir Francis Varney never stirred from home after eight o'clock last evening."

"D — n it, then," said the admiral, "let us give the devil his due. He could not have had any hand in this business."

"Certainly not."

"From whom, George, did you get your information?" asked Henry, in a desponding tone.

"From, first of all, one of his servants, whom I met away from the house, and then from one whom I saw at the house."

"There can be no mistake, then?"

"Certainly none. The servants answered me at once, and so frankly that I cannot doubt it."

The door of the room was slowly opened, and Flora came in. She looked almost the shadow of what she had been but a few weeks before. She was beautiful, but she almost realised the poet's description of one who had suffered much, and was sinking into an early grave, the victim of a broken heart: —

"She was more beautiful than death,
And yet as sad to look upon."

Her face was of a marble paleness, and as she clasped her hands, and glanced from face to face, to see if she could gather hope and consolation from the expression of any one, she might have been taken for some exquisite statue of despair.

“Have you found him?” she said. Have you found Charles?”

“Flora, Flora,” said Henry, as he approached her.

“Nay, answer me; have you found him? You went to seek him. Dead or alive, have you found him?”

“We have not, Flora.”

“Then I must seek him myself. None will search for him as I will search; I must myself seek him. ’Tis true affection that can alone be successful in such a search.”

“Believe me, dear Flora, that all has been done which the shortness of the time that has elapsed would permit. Further measures will now immediately be taken. Rest assured, dear sister, that all will be done that the utmost zeal can suggest.”

“They have killed him! they have killed him!” she said, mournfully. “Oh, God, they have killed him! I am not now mad, but the time will come when I must surely be maddened. The vampyre has killed Charles Holland — the dreadful vampyre!”

“Nay, now, Flora, this is frenzy.”

“Because he loved me has he been destroyed. I know it, I know it. The vampyre has doomed me to destruction. I am lost, and all who loved me will be involved in one common ruin on my account. Leave me all of you to perish. If, for iniquities done in our family, some one must suffer to appease the divine vengeance, let that one be me, and only me.”

“Hush, sister, hush!” cried Henry. “I expected not this from you. The expressions you use are not your expressions. I know you better. There is abundance of divine mercy, but no divine vengeance. Be calm, I pray you."

"Calm! calm!"

"Yes. Make an exertion of that intellect we all know you to possess. It is too common a thing with human nature, when misfortune overtakes it, to imagine that such a state of things is specially arranged. We quarrel with Providence because it does not interfere with some special miracle in our favour; forgetting that, being denizens of this earth, and members of a great social system; We must be subject occasionally to the accidents which will disturb its efficient working."

"Oh, brother, brother!" she exclaimed, as she dropped into a seat, "you have never loved."

"Indeed!"

"No; you have never felt what it was to hold your being upon the breath of another. You can reason calmly, because you cannot know the extent of feeling you are vainly endeavouring to combat."

"Flora, you do me less than justice. All I wish to impress upon your mind is, that you are not in any way picked out by Providence to be specially unhappy — that there is no perversion of nature on your account."

"Call you that hideous vampyre form that haunts me no perversion of ordinary nature?"

"What is is natural," said Marchdale.

"Cold reasoning to one who suffers as I suffer. I cannot argue with you; I can only know that I am most unhappy — most miserable."

"But that will pass away, sister, and the sun of your happiness may smile again."

"Oh, if I could but hope!"

"And wherefore should you deprive yourself of that poorest privilege of the most unhappy?"

"Because my heart tells me to despair."

"Tell it you won't, then," cried Admiral Bell. "If you had been at sea as long as I have, Miss Bannerworth, you would never despair of anything at all."

"Providence guarded you," said Marchdale.

"Yes, that's true enough, I dare say, I was in a storm once off Cape Ushant, and it was only through Providence, and cutting away the mainmast myself, that we succeeded in getting into port."

"You have one hope," said Marchdale to Flora, as he looked in her wan face.

"One hope?"

"Yes. Recollect you have one hope."

"What is that?"

"You think that, by removing from this place, you may find that peace which is here denied you."

"No, no, no."

"Indeed. I thought that such was your firm conviction."

"It was; but circumstances have altered."

"How?"

"Charles Holland has disappeared here, and here must I remain to seek for him."

"True he may have disappeared here," remarked Marchdale; "and yet that may be no argument for supposing him still here."

"Where, then, is he?"

"God knows how rejoiced I should be if I were able to answer your question. I must seek him, dead or alive! I must see him yet before I bid adieu to this world, which has now lost all its charms for me."

“Do not despair,” said Henry; “I will go to the town now at once, to make known our suspicions that he has met with some foul play. I will set every means in operation that I possibly can to discover him. Mr. Chillingworth will aid me, too; and I hope that not many days will elapse, Flora, before some intelligence of a most satisfactory nature shall be brought to you on Charles Holland’s account.”

“Go, go, brother; go at once.”

“I go now at once.”

“Shall I accompany you?” said Marchdale.

“No. Remain here to keep watch over Flora’s safety while I am gone; I can alone do all that can be done.”

“And don’t forget to offer the two hundred pounds reward,” said the admiral, “to any one who can bring us news of Charles, on which we can rely.”

“I will not.”

“Surely — surely something must result from that,” said Flora, as she looked in the admiral’s face, as if to gather encouragement in her dawning hopes from its expression.

“Of course it will, my dear,” he said. “Don’t you be downhearted; you and I are of one mind in this affair, and of one mind we will keep. We won’t give up our opinions for anybody.”

“Our opinions,” she said, “of the honour and honesty of Charles Holland. That is what we will adhere to.”

“Of course we will.”

“Ah, sir, it joys me, even in the midst of this, my affliction, to find one at least who is determined to do him full justice. We cannot find such contradictions in nature as that a mind, full of noble impulses, should stoop to such a sudden act of selfishness as those letters would attribute to Charles Holland. It cannot — cannot be.”

“You are right, my dear. And now, Master Henry, you be off, will you, if you please.”

“I am off now. Farewell, Flora, for a brief space.”

“Farewell, brother; and Heaven speed you on your errand.”

“Amen to that,” cried the admiral; “and now, my dear, if you have got half an hour to spare, just tuck your arm under mine, and take a walk with me in the garden, for I want to say something to you.”

“Most willingly,” said Flora.

“I would not advise you to stray far from the house, Miss Bannerworth,” said Marchdale.

“Nobody asked you for advice,” said the admiral. “D —— e, do you want to make out that I ain’t capable of taking care of her?”

“No, no; but—”

“Oh, nonsense! Come along, my dear; and if all the vampyres and odd fish that were ever created were to come across our path, we would settle them somehow or another. Come along, and don’t listen to anybody’s croaking.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

A PEEP THROUGH AN IRON GRATING. — THE LONELY PRISONER IN HIS DUNGEON. — THE MYSTERY.

Without forestalling the interest of our story, or recording a fact in its wrong place, we now call our readers' attention to a circumstance which may, at all events, afford some food for conjecture.

Some distance from the Hall, which, from time immemorial, had been the home and the property of the Bannerworth family, was an ancient ruin known by the name of the Monks' Hall.

It was conjectured that this ruin was the remains of some one of those half monastic, half military buildings which, during the middle ages, were so common in almost every commanding situation in every county of England.

At a period of history when the church arrogated to itself an amount of political power which the intelligence of the spirit of the age now denies to it, and when its members were quite ready to assert at any time the truth of their doctrines by the strong arm of power, such buildings as the one, the old grey ruins of which were situated near to Bannerworth Hall, were erected.

Ostensibly for religious purposes, but really as a stronghold for defence, as well as for aggression, this Monks' Hall, as it was called, partook quite as much of the character of a fortress, as of an ecclesiastical building.

The ruins covered a considerable extent, of ground, but the only part which seemed successfully to have resisted the encroaches of time, at least to a considerable extent, was a long, hall in which the jolly monks no doubt feasted and caroused.

Adjoining to this hall, were the walls of other parts of the building, and at several places there were small, low, mysterious-looking doors that led, heaven knows where, into some intricacies and labyrinths beneath the building, which no one had, within the memory of man, been content to run the risk of losing himself in.

It was related that among these subterranean passages and arches there were pitfalls and pools of water; and whether such a statement was true or not, it certainly acted as a considerable damper upon the vigour of curiosity.

This ruin was so well known in the neighbourhood, and had become from earliest childhood so familiar to the inhabitants of Bannerworth Hall, that one would as soon expect an old inhabitant of Ludgate-hill to make some remark about St. Paul's, as any of them to allude to the ruins of Monks' Hall.

They never now thought of going near to it, for in infancy they had spoiled among its ruins, and it had become one of those familiar objects which, almost, from that very familiarity, cease to hold a place in the memories of those who know it so well.

It is, however, to this ruin we would now conduct our readers, premising that what we have to say concerning it now, is not precisely in the form of a connected portion of our narrative.

It is evening — the evening of that first day of heart loneliness to poor Flora Bannerworth. The lingering rays of the setting sun are gilding the old ruins with a wondrous beauty. The edges of the decayed stones seem now to be tipped with gold, and as the rich golden refulgence of light gleams upon the painted glass which still adorned a large window of the hall, a flood of many-coloured beautiful light was cast within, making the old flag-stones, with which the interior was paved, look more like some rich tapestry, laid down to do honour to a monarch.

So picturesque and so beautiful an aspect did the ancient ruin wear, that to one with a soul to appreciate the romantic and the beautiful, it would have amply repaid the fatigue of a long journey now to see it.

And as the sun sank to rest, the gorgeous colours that it cast upon the mouldering wall, deepened from an appearance of burnished gold to a crimson hue, and from that again the colour changed to a shifting purple, mingling with the shadows of the evening, and so gradually fading away into absolute darkness.

The place is as silent as the tomb — a silence far more solemn than could have existed, had there been no remains of a human habitation; because even these time-worn walls were suggestive of what once had been; and the wrapt stillness which now pervaded them brought with them a melancholy feeling for the past.

There was not even the low hum of insect life to break the stillness of these ancient ruins.

And now the last rays of the sun are gradually fading away. In a short time all will be darkness. A low gentle wind is getting up, and beginning slightly to stir the tall blades of grass that have shot up between some of the old stones. The silence is broken, awfully broken, by a sudden cry of despair; such a cry as might come from some imprisoned spirit, doomed to waste an age of horror in a tomb.

And yet it was scarcely to be called a scream, and not all a groan. It might have come from some one on the moment of some dreadful sacrifice, when the judgment had not sufficient time to call courage to its aid, but involuntarily had induced that sound which might not be repeated.

A few startled birds flew from odd holes and corners about the ruins, to seek some other place of rest. The owl hooted from a corner of what had once been a belfry, and a dreamy-looking bat flew out from a cranny and struck itself headlong against a projection.

Then all was still again. Silence resumed its reign, and if there had been a mortal ear to drink in that sudden sound, the mind might well have doubted if fancy had not more to do with the matter than reality.

From out a portion of the ruins that was enveloped in the deepest gloom, there now glides a figure. It is of gigantic height, and it moves along with a slow and measured tread. An ample mantle envelopes the form, which might well have been taken for the spirit of one of the monks who, centuries since, had made that place their home.

It walked the whole length of the ample hall we have alluded to, and then, at the window from which had streamed the long flood of many coloured light, it paused.

For more than ten minutes this mysterious looking figure there stood.

At length there passed something on the outside of the window, that looked like the shadow of a human form.

Then the tall, mysterious, apparition-looking man turned, and sought a side entrance to the hall.

Then he paused, and, in about a minute, he was joined by another who must have been he who had so recently passed the stained glass window on the outer side.

There was a friendly salutation between these two beings, and they walked to the centre of the hall, where they remained for some time in animated conversation.

From the gestures they used, it was evident that the subject of their discourse was one of deep and absorbing interest to both. It was one, too, upon which, after a time, they seemed a little to differ, and more than once they each assumed attitudes of mutual defiance.

This continued until the sun had so completely sunk, that twilight was beginning sensibly to wane, and then gradually the two men appeared to have come to a better understanding, and whatever might be the subject of their discourse, there was some positive result evidently arrived at now.

They spoke in lower tones. They used less animated gestures than before; and, after a time, they both walked slowly down the hull towards the dark spot from whence the first tall figure had so mysteriously emerged.

There it a dungeon — damp and full of the most unwholesome exhalations — deep under ground it seems, and, in its excavations, it would appear as if some small land springs had been liberated, for the earthen floor was one continued extent of moisture.

From the roof, too, came perpetually the dripping of water, which fell with sullen, startling splashes in the pool below.

At one end, and near to the roof, — so near that to reach it, without the most efficient means from the inside, was a matter of positive impossibility — is a small iron grating, and not much larger than might be entirely obscured by any human face that might be close to it from the outside of the dungeon.

That dreadful abode is tenanted. In one corner, on a heap of straw, which appears freshly to have been cast into the place, lies a hopeless prisoner.

It is no great stretch of fancy to suppose, that it is from his lips came the sound of terror and of woe that had disturbed the repose of that lonely spot.

The prisoner is lying on his back; a rude bandage round his head, on which were numerous spots of blood, would seem to indicate that he had suffered personal injury in some recent struggle. His eyes were open. They were fixed desparingly, perhaps unconsciously, upon that small grating which looked into the upper world.

That grating slants upwards, and looks to the west, so that any one confined in that dreary dungeon might be tantalized, on a sweet summer's day, by seeing the sweet blue sky, and occasionally the white clouds flitting by in that freedom which he cannot hope for.

The carol of a bird, too, might reach him there. Alas! sad remembrance of life, and joy, and liberty.

But now all is deepening gloom. The prisoner sees nothing — hears nothing; and the sky is not quite dark. That small grating looks like a strange light-patch in the dungeon wall.

Hark! some footstep sounds upon his ear. The creaking of a door follows — a gleam of light shines into the dungeon, and the tall mysterious-looking figure in the cloak stands before the occupant of that wretched place.

Then comes in the other man, and he carries in his hand writing materials. He stoops to the stone couch on which the prisoner lies, and offers him a pen, as he raises him partially from the miserable damp pallet.

But there is no speculation in the eyes of that oppressed man. In vain the pen is repeatedly placed in his grasp, and a document of some length, written on parchment, spread out before him to sign. In vain is he held up now by both the men, who have thus mysteriously sought him in his dungeon; he has not power to do as they would wish him. The pen falls from his nerveless grasp, and, with a deep sigh, when they cease to hold him up, he falls heavily back upon the stone couch.

Then the two men looked at each other for about a minute silently; after which he who was the shorter of the two raised one hand, and, in a voice of such concentrated hatred and passion as was horrible to hear, he said, —

“D — n!”

The reply of the other was a laugh; and then he took the light from the floor, and motioned the one who seemed so little able to control his feelings of bitterness and disappointment to leave the place with him.

With a haste and vehemence, then, which showed how much angered he was, the shorter man of the two now rolled up the parchment, and placed it in a breast-pocket of his coat.

He cast a withering look of intense hatred on the form of the nearly-unconscious prisoner, and then prepared to follow the other.

But when they reached the door of the dungeon, the taller man of the two paused, and appeared for a moment or two to be in deep thought; after which he handed the lamp he carried to his companion, and approached the pallet of the prisoner.

He took from his pocket a small bottle, and, raising the head of the feeble and wounded man, he poured some portion of the contents into his mouth, and watched him swallow it.

The other looked on in silence, and then they both slowly left the dreary dungeon.

The wind rose, and the night had deepened into the utmost darkness. The blackness of a night, unillumined by the moon, which would not now rise for some hours, was upon the ancient ruins. All was calm and still, and no one would have supposed that aught human was within those ancient, dreary looking walls.

Time will show who it was who lay in that unwholesome dungeon, as well as who were they who visited him so mysteriously, and retired again with feelings of such evident disappointment with the document it seemed of such importance, at least to one of them, to get that unconscious man to sign.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE VISIT OF FLORA TO THE VAMPYRE. — THE OFFER. — THE SOLEMN ASSEVERATION.

Admiral Bell had, of course, nothing particular to communicate to Flora in the walk he induced her to take with him in the gardens of Bannerworth Hall, but he could talk to her upon a subject which was sure to be a welcome one, namely, of Charles Holland.

And not only could he talk to her of Charles, but he was willing to talk of him in the style of enthusiastic commendation which assimilated best with her own feelings. No one but the honest old admiral, who was as violent in his likes and his dislikes as any one could possibly be, could just then have conversed with Flora Bannerworth to her satisfaction of Charles Holland.

He expressed no doubts whatever concerning Charles's faith, and to his mind, now that he had got that opinion firmly fixed in his mind, everybody that held a contrary one he at once denounced as a fool or a rogue.

"Never you mind, Miss Flora," he said; "you will find, I dare say, that all will come right eventually. D — n me! the only thing that provokes me in the whole business is, that I should have been such an old fool as for a moment to doubt Charles."

"You should have known him better, sir."

"I should, my dear, but I was taken by surprise, you see, and that was wrong, too, for a man who has held a responsible command."

"But the circumstances, dear sir, were of a nature to take every one by surprise."

"They were, they were. But now, candidly speaking, and I know I can speak candidly to you; do you really think this Varney is the vampyre?"

"I do."

"You do? Well, then, somebody must tackle him, that's quite clear; we can't put up with his fancies always."

"What can be done?"

"Ah, that I don't know, but something must be done, you know. He wants this place; Heaven only knows why or wherefore he has taken such a fancy to it; but he has done so, that is quite clear. If it had a good sea view, I should not be so much surprised; but there's nothing of the sort, so it's no way at all better than any other shore-going stupid sort of house, that you can see nothing but land from."

"Oh, if my brother would but make some compromise with him to restore Charles to us and take the house, we might yet be happy."

"D — n it! then you still think that he has a hand in spiriting away Charles?"

"Who else could do so?"

"I'll be hanged if I know. I do feel tolerably sure, and I have good deal of reliance upon your opinion, my dear; I say, I do feel tolerably sure: but, if I was d —— d sure, now, I'd soon have it out of him."

"For my sake, Admiral Bell, I wish now to extract one promise from you."

"Say your say, my dear, and I'll promise you."

"You will not then expose yourself to the danger of any personal conflict with that most dreadful man, whose powers of mischief we do not know, and therefore cannot well meet or appreciate."

"Whew! is that what you mean?"

"Yes; you will, I am sure, promise me so much."

"Why, my dear, you see the case is this. In affairs of fighting, the less ladies interfere the better."

"Nay, why so?"

"Because — because, you see, a lady has no reputation for courage to keep up. Indeed, it's rather the other way, for we dislike a bold woman as much as we hold in contempt a cowardly man."

"But if you grant to us females that in consequence of our affections, we are not courageous, you must likewise grant how much we are doomed to suffer from the dangers of those whom we esteem."

"You would be the last person in the world to esteem a coward."

"Certainly. But there is more true courage often in not fighting than in entering into a contest."

"You are right enough there, my dear."

"Under ordinary circumstances, I should not oppose your carrying out the dictates of your honour, but now, let me entreat you not to meet this dreadful man, if man he can be called, when you know not how unfair the contest may be."

"Unfair?"

"Yes. May he not have some means of preventing you from injuring him, and of overcoming you, which no mortal possesses?"

"He may."

"Then the supposition of such a case ought to be sufficient ground for at once inducing you to abandon all idea of meeting with him."

"My dear, I'll consider of this matter."

"Do so."

"There is another thing, however, which now you will permit me to ask of you as a favour."

"It is granted ere it is spoken."

"Very good. Now you must not be offended with what I am going to say, because, however it may touch that very proper pride which you, and such as you, are always sure to possess, you are fortunately at all times able to call sufficient judgment to your aid to enable you to see what is really offensive and what is not."

"You alarm me by such a preface."

"Do I? then here goes at once. Your brother Henry, poor fellow, has enough to do, has he not, to make all ends meet."

A flush of excitement came over Flora's cheek as the old admiral thus bluntly broached a subject of which she already knew the bitterness to such a spirit as her brother's.

"You are silent," continued the old man; "by that I guess I am not wrong in my I supposition; indeed it is hardly a supposition at all, for Master Charles told me as much, and no doubt he had it from a correct quarter."

"I cannot deny it, sir."

"Then don't. It ain't worth denying, my dear. Poverty is no crime, but, like being born a Frenchman, it's a d —— d misfortune."

Flora could scarcely refuse a smile, as the nationality of the old admiral peeped out even in the midst of his most liberal and best feelings.

"Well," he continued, "I don't intend that he shall have so much trouble as he has had. The enemies of his king and his country shall free him from his embarrassments."

"The enemies?"

"Yes; who else?"

"You speak in riddles, sir."

"Do I? Then I'll soon make the riddles plain. When I went to sea I was worth nothing — as poor as a ship's cat after the crew had been paid off for a month. Well, I began fighting away as hard and fast as I could, and the more I fought, and the more hard knocks I gave and took, the more money I got."

"Indeed."

"Yes; prize after prize we hauled into port, and at last the French vessels wouldn't come out of their harbours."

"What did you do then?"

"What did we do then? Why what was the most natural thing in the whole world for us to do, we did."

"I cannot guess."

"Well, I am surprised at that. Try again."

"Oh, yes; I can guess now. How could I have been so dull? You went and took them out."

"To be sure we did — to be sure we did, my dear; that's how we managed them. And, do you see, at the end of the war I found myself with lots of prize money, all wrung from old England's enemies, and I intend that some of it shall find it's way to your brother's pocket; and you see that will bear out just what I said, that the enemies of his king and his country shall free him from his difficulties — don't you see?"

"I see your noble generosity, admiral."

"Noble fiddlestick! Now I have mentioned this matter to you, my dear, and I don't so much mind talking to you about such matters as I should to your brother, I want you to do me the favour of managing it all for me."

"How, sir?"

"Why, just this way. You must find out how much money will free your brother just now from a parcel of botherations that beset him, and then I will give it to you, and you can hand it to him, you see, so I need not say anything about it; and if he speaks to me on the subject at all, I can put him down at once by saying, ‘avast there, it’s no business of mine.’”

“And can you, dear admiral, imagine that I could conceal the generous source from where so much assistance came?”

“Of course; it will come from you. I take a fancy to make you a present of a sum of money; you do with it what you please — it’s yours, and I have no right and no inclination to ask you what use you put it to.”

Tears gushed from the eyes of Flora as she tried to utter some word, but could not. The admiral swore rather fearfully, and pretended to wonder much what on earth she could be crying for. At length, after the first gush of feeling was over, she said, —

“I cannot accept of so much generosity, sir — I dare not”

“Dare not!”

“No; I should think meanly of myself were I to take advantage of the boundless munificence of your nature.”

“Take advantage! I should like to see anybody take advantage of me, that’s all.”

“I ought not to take the money of you. I will speak to my brother, and well I know how much he will appreciate the noble, generous offer, my dear sir.”

“Well, settle it your own way, only remember I have a right to do what I like with my own money.”

“Undoubtedly.”

“Very good. Then as that is undoubted, whatever I lend to him, mind I give to you, so it’s as broad as it’s long, as the Dutchman said, when he looked at the new ship that was built for him, and you may as well take it yourself you see, and make no more fuss about it.”

"I will consider," said Flora, with much emotion— "between this time and the same hour to-morrow I will consider, sir, and if you can find any words more expressive of heartfelt gratitude than others, pray imagine that I have used them with reference to my own feelings towards you for such an unexampled offer of friendship."

"Oh, bother — stuff."

The admiral now at once changed the subject, and began to talk of Charles — a most grateful theme to Flora, as may well be supposed. He related to her many little particulars connected with him which all tended to place his character in a most amiable light, and as her ears drank in the words of commendation of him she loved, what sweeter music could there be to her than the voice of that old weather-beaten rough-spoken man.

"The idea," he added, to a warm eulogium he had uttered concerning Charles— "the idea that he could write those letters my dear, is quite absurd."

"It is, indeed. Oh, that we could know what had become of him!"

"We shall know. I don't think but what he's alive. Something seems to assure me that we shall some of these days look upon his face again."

"I am rejoiced to hear you say so."

"We will stir heaven and earth to find him. If he were killed, do you see, there would have been some traces of him now at hand; besides, he would have been left lying where the rascals attacked him."

Flora shuddered.

"But don't you fret yourself. You may depend that the sweet little cherub that sits up aloft has looked after him."

"I will hope so."

“And now, my dear, Master Henry will soon be home, I am thinking, and as he has quite enough disagreeables on his own mind to be able to spare a few of them, you will take the earliest opportunity, I am sure, of acquainting him with the little matter we have been talking about, and let me know what he says.”

“I will — I will.”

“That’s right. Now, go in doors, for there’s a cold air blowing here, and you are a delicate plant rather just now — go in and make yourself comfortable and easy. The worst storm must blow over at last.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

SIR FRANCIS VARNEY AND HIS MYSTERIOUS VISITOR. — THE STRANGE CONFERENCE.

Sir Francis Varney is in what he calls his own apartment. It is night, and a dim and uncertain light from a candle which has been long neglected, only serves to render obscurity more perplexing. The room is a costly one. One replete with all the appliances of refinement and luxury which the spirit and the genius of the age could possibly supply him with, but there is upon his brow the marks of corroding care, and little does that most mysterious being seem to care for all the rich furnishing of that apartment in which he sits.

His cadaverous-looking face is even paler and more death-like-looking than usual; and, if it can be conceived possible that such an one can feel largely interested in human affairs, to look at him, we could well suppose that some interest of no common magnitude was at stake.

Occasionally, too, he muttered some unconnected words, no doubt mentally filling up the gaps, which rendered the sentences incomplete, and being unconscious, perhaps, that he was giving audible utterance to any of his dark and secret meditations.

At length he rose, and with an anxious expression of countenance, he went to the window, and looked out into the darkness of the night. All was still, and not an object was visible. It was that pitchy darkness without, which, for some hours, when the moon is late in lending her reflected beams, comes over the earth's surface.

"It is near the hour," he muttered. "It is now very near the hour; surely he will come, and yet I know not why I should fear him, although I seem to tremble at the thought of his approach. He will surely come. Once a year — only once does he visit me, and then ’tis but to take the price which he has compelled me to pay for that existence, which but for him had been long since terminated. Sometimes I devoutly wish it were.”

With a shudder he returned to the seat he had so recently left, and there for some time he appeared to meditate in silence.

Suddenly now, a clock, which was in the hall of that mansion he had purchased, sounded the hour loudly.

“The time has come,” said Sir Francis. “The time has come. He will surely soon be here. Hark! hark!”

Slowly and distinctly he counted the strokes of the clock, and, when they had ceased, he exclaimed, with sudden surprise —

“Eleven! But eleven! How have I been deceived. I thought the hour of midnight was at hand.”

He hastily consulted the watch he wore, and then he indeed found, that whatever he had been looking forward to with dread for some time past, as certain to ensue, at or about twelve o clock, had yet another hour in which to prey upon his imagination.

“How could I have made so grievous an error?” he exclaimed. “Another hour of suspense and wonder as to whether that man be among the living or the dead. I have thought of raising my hand against his life, but some strange mysterious feeling has always staid me; and I have let him come and go freely, while an opportunity might well have served me to put such a design into execution. He is old, too — very old, and yet he keeps death at a distance. He looked pale, but far from unwell or failing, when last I saw him. Alas! a whole hour yet to wait. I would that this interview were over.”

That extremely well known and popular disease called the fidgets, now began, indeed, to torment Sir Francis Varney. He could not sit — he could not walk, and, somehow or another, he never once seemed to imagine that from the wine cup he should experience any relief, although, upon a side table, there stood refreshments of that character. And thus some more time passed away, and he strove to cheat it of its weariness by thinking of a variety of subjects; but as the fates would have it, there seemed not one agreeable reminiscence in the mind of that most inexplicable man, and the more he plunged into the recesses of memory the more uneasy, not to say almost terrified, he looked and became. A shuddering nervousness came across him, and, for a few moments, be sat as if he were upon the point of fainting. By a vigorous effort, however, he shook this off, and then placing before him the watch, which now indicated about the quarter past eleven, he strove with a calmer aspect to wait the coming of him whose presence, when he did come, would really be a great terror, since the very thought beforehand produced so much hesitation and apparent dismay.

In order too, if possible, then to further withdraw himself from a too painful consideration of those terrors, which in due time the reader will be acquainted with the cause of, he took up a book, and plunging at random into its contents, he amused his mind for a time with the following brief narrative: —

The wind howled round the gable ends of Bridport House in sudden and furious gusts, while the inmates sat by the fire-side, gazing in silence upon the blazing embers of the huge fire that shed a red and bright light all over the immense apartment in which they all sat.

It was an ancient looking place, very large, end capable of containing a number of guests. Several were present.

An aged couple were seated in tall high straight-backed chairs. They were the owners of that lordly mansion, and near them sat two young maidens of surpassing beauty; they were dissimilar, and yet there was a slight likeness, but of totally different complexions.

The one had tresses of raven black; eyebrows, eyelashes, and eyes were all of the same hue; she was a beautiful and proud-looking girl, her complexion clear, with the hue of health upon her cheeks, while a smile played around her lips. The glance of the eye was sufficient to thrill through the whole soul.

The other maiden was altogether different; her complexion altogether fairer — her hair of sunny chestnut, and her beautiful hazel eyes were shaded by long brown eyelashes, while a playful smile also lit up her countenance. She was the younger of the two.

The attention of the two young maidens had been directed to the words of the aged owner of the house, for he had been speaking a few moments before.

There were several other persons present, and at some little distance were many of the domestics who were not denied the privilege of warmth and rest in the presence of their master.

These were not the times, when, if servants sat down, they were deemed idle; but the daily task done, then the evening hour was spent by the fire-side.

“The wind howls and moans,” said an aged domestic, “in an awful manner. I never heard the like.”

“It seems as though same imprisoned spirit was waiting for the repose that had been denied on earth,” said the old lady as she shifted her seat and gazed steadily on the fire.

“Ay,” said her aged companion, “it is a windy night, and there will be a storm before long, or I’m mistaken.”

"It was just such a night as that my son Henry left his home," said Mrs. Bradley, "just such another — only it had the addition of sleet and rain."

The old man sighed at the mention of his son's name, a tear stood in the eyes of the maidens, while one looked silently at the other, and seemed to exchange glances.

"I would that I might again see him before my body seeks its final home in the cold remorseless grave."

"Mother," said the fairest of the two maidens, "do not talk thus, let us hope that we yet may have many years of happiness together."

"Many, Emma?"

"Yes, mamma, many."

"Do you know that I am very old, Emma, very old indeed, considering what I have suffered, such a life of sorrow and ill health is at least equal to thirty years added to my life."

"You may have deceived yourself, aunt," said the other maiden; "at all events, you cannot count upon life as certain, for the strongest often go first, while those who seem much more likely to fall, by care, as often live in peace and happiness."

"But I lead no life of peace and happiness, while Henry Bradley is not here; besides, my life might be passed without me seeing him again."

"It is now two years since he was here last," said the old man,

"This night two years was the night on which he left."

"This night two years?"

"Yes."

"It was this night two years," said one of the servant men, "because old Dame Poutlet had twins on that night."

"A memorable circumstance."

"And one died at a twelvemonth old," said the man; "and she had a dream which foretold the event."

"Ay, ay."

"Yes, and moreover she's had the same dream again last Wednesday was a week," said the man.

"And lost the other twin?"

"Yes sir, this morning."

"Omens multiply," said the aged man; "I would that it would seem to indicate the return of Henry to his home."

"I wonder where he can have gone to, or what he could have done all this time; probably he may not be in the land of the living."

"Poor Henry," said Emma.

"Alas, poor boy! We may never see him again — it was a mistaken act of his, and yet he knew not otherwise how to act or escape his father's displeasure."

"Say no more — say no more upon that subject; I dare not listen to it. God knows I know quite enough," said Mr. Bradley; "I knew not he would have taken my words so to heart as he did."

"Why," said the old woman, "he thought you meant what you said."

There was a long pause, during which all gazed at the blazing fire, seemingly wrapt in their own meditation.

Henry Bradley, the son of the apparently aged couple, had left that day two years, and wherefore had he left the home of his childhood? wherefore had he, the heir to large estates, done this?

He had dared to love without his father's leave, and had refused the offer his father made him of marrying a young lady whom he had chosen for him, but whom he could not love.

It was as much a matter of surprise to the father that the son should refuse, as it was to the son that his father should contemplate such a match.

"Henry," said the father, "you have been thought of by me, I have made proposals for marrying you to the daughter of our neighbour, Sir Arthur Onslow."

"Indeed, father!"

"Yes; I wish you to go there with me to see the young lady."

"In the character of a suitor?"

"Yes," replied the father, "certainly; it's high time you were settled."

"Indeed, I would rather not go, father; I have no intention of marrying just yet. I do not desire to do so."

This was an opposition that Mr. Bradley had not expected from his son, and which his imperious temper could ill brook, and with a darkened brow he said, —

"It is not much, Henry, that I trespass upon your obedience; but when I do so, I expect that you will obey me."

"But, father, this matter affects me for my whole life."

"That is why I have deliberated so long and carefully over it."

"But it is not unreasonable that I should have a voice in the affair, father, since it may render me miserable."

"You shall have a voice."

"Then I say no to the whole regulation," said Henry, decisively.

"If you do so you forfeit my protection, much more favour; but you had better consider over what you have said. Forget it, and come with me."

"I cannot."

"You will not?"

"No, father; I cannot do as you wish me; my mind is fully made up upon that matter."

"And so is mine. You either do as I would have you, or you leave the house, and seek your own living, and you are a beggar."

"I should prefer being such," said Henry, "than to marry any young lady, and be unable to love her."

"That is not required."

"No! I am astonished! Not necessary to love the woman you marry!"

"Not at all; if you act justly towards her she ought to be grateful; and it is all that is requisite in the marriage state. Gratitude will beget love, and love in one begets love in the other."

"I will not argue with you, father, upon the matter. You are a better judge than I; you have had more experience."

"I have."

"And it would be useless to speak upon the subject; but of this I can speak — my own resolve — that I will not marry the lady in question."

The son had all the stern resolve of the father, but he had also very good reasons for what he did. He loved, and was beloved in return; and hence he would not break his faith with her whom he loved.

To have explained this to his father would have been to gain nothing except an accession of anger, and he would have made a new demand upon his (the son's) obedience, by ordering him to discard from his bosom the image that was there indelibly engraven.

"You will not marry her whom I have chosen for your bride?"

"I cannot."

"Do not talk to me of can and can't, when I speak of will and wont. It Is useless to disguise the fact. You have your free will in the matter. I shall take no answer but yes or no."

“Then, no, father.”

“Good, sir; and now we are strangers.”

With that Mr. Bradley turned abruptly from his son, and left him to himself.

It was the first time they had any words or difference together, and it was sudden and soon terminated.

Henry Bradley was indignant at what had happened; he did not think his father would have acted as he had done in this instance; but he was too much interested in the fate of another to hesitate for a moment. Then came the consideration as to what he should do, now that he had arrived at such a climax.

His first thoughts turned to his mother and sister. He could not leave the house without bidding them good-bye. He determined to see his mother, for his father had left the Hall upon a visit.

Mrs. Bradley and Emma were alone when he entered their apartment, and to them he related all that had passed between himself and father.

They besought him to stay, to remain there, or at least in the neighbourhood; but he was resolved to quit the place altogether for a time, as he could do nothing there, and he might chance to do something elsewhere.

Upon this, they got together all the money and such jewels as they could spare, which in all amounted to a considerable sum; then taking an affectionate leave of his mother and sister, Henry left the Hall — not before he had taken a long and affectionate farewell of one other who lived within those walls.

This was no other than the raven-eyed maiden who sat by the fire side, and listened attentively to the conversation that was going on. She was his love — she, a poor cousin. For her sake he had braved all his father's anger, and attempted to seek his fortune abroad.

This done, he quietly left the Hall, without giving any one any intimation of where he was going.

Old Mr. Bradley, when he had said so much to his son, was highly incensed at what he deemed his obstinacy; and he thought the threat hanging over him would have had a good effect; but he was amazed when he discovered that Henry had indeed left the Hall, and he knew not whither.

For some time he comforted himself with the assurance that he would, he must return, but, alas! he came not, and this was the second anniversary of that melancholy day, which no one more repented of and grieved for, than did poor Mr. Bradley.

"Surely, surely he will return, or let us know where he is," he said; "he cannot be in need, else he would have written to us for aid."

"No, no," said Mrs. Bradley; "it is, I fear, because he has not written, that he is in want; he would never write if he was in poverty, lest he should cause us unhappiness at his fate. Were he doing well, we should hear of it, for he would be proud of the result of his own unaided exertions."

"Well, well," said Mr. Bradley, "I can say no more; if I was hasty, so was he; but it is passed. I would forgive all the past, if I could but see him once again — once again!"

"How the wind howls," added the aged man; "and it's getting worse and worse."

"Yes, and the snow is coming down now in style," said one of the servants, who brought in some fresh logs which were piled up on the fire, and he shook the white flakes off his clothes.

"It will be a heavy fall before morning," said one of the men.

"Yes, it has been gathering for some days; it will be much warmer than it has been when it is all down."

"So it will — so it will."

At that moment there was a knocking at the gate, and the dogs burst into a dreadful uproar from their kennels.

"Go, Robert," said Mr. Bradley, "and see who it is that knocks such a night as this; it is not fit or safe that a dog should be out in it."

The man went out, and shortly returned, saying, —

"So please you, sir, there is a traveller that has missed his way, and desires to know if he can obtain shelter here, or if any one can be found to guide him to the nearest inn."

"Bid him come in; we shall lose no warmth because there is one more before the fire."

The stranger entered, and said,— "I have missed my way, and the snow comes down so thick and fast, and is whirled in such eddies, that I fear, by myself, I should fall into some drift, and perish before morning."

"Do not speak of it, sir," said Mr. Bradley; "such a night as this is a sufficient apology for the request you make, and an inducement to me to grant it most willingly."

"Thanks," replied the stranger; "the welcome is most seasonable."

"Be seated, sir; take your seat by the ingle; it is warm."

The stranger seated himself, and seemed lost in reflection, as he gazed intently on the blazing logs. He was a robust man, with great whiskers and beard, and, to judge from his outward habiliments, he was a stout man.

"Have you travelled far?"

"I have, sir."

"You appear to belong to the army, if I mistake not?"

"I do, sir."

There was a pause; the stranger seemed not inclined to speak of himself much; but Mr. Bradley continued, —

"Have you come from foreign service, sir? I presume you have."

"Yes; I have not been in this country more than six days."

"Indeed; shall we have peace think you?"

"I do so, and I hope it may be so, for the sake of many who desire to return to their native land, and to those they love best."

Mr. Bradley heaved a deep sigh, which was echoed softly by all present, and the stranger looked from one to another, with a hasty glance, and then turned his gaze upon the fire.

"May I ask, sir, if you have any person whom you regard in the army — any relative?"

"Alas! I have — perhaps, I ought to say I had a son. I know not, however, where he is gone."

"Oh! a runaway; I see."

"Oh, no; he left because there were some family differences, and now, I would, that he were once more here."

"Oh!" said the stranger, softly, "differences and mistakes will happen now and then, when least desired."

At this moment, an old hound who had lain beside Ellen Mowbray, she who wore the coal-black tresses, lifted his head at the difference in sound that was noticed in the stranger's voice. He got up and slowly walked up to him, and began to smell around him, and, in another moment, he rushed at him with a cry of joy, and began to lick and caress him in the most extravagant manner. This was followed by a cry of joy in all present.

"It is Henry!" exclaimed Ellen Mowbray, rising and rushing into his arms.

It was Henry, and he threw off the several coats he had on, as well as the large beard he wore to disguise himself.

The meeting was a happy one; there was not a more joyful house than that within many miles around. Henry was restored to the arms of those who loved him, and, in a month, a wedding was celebrated between him and his cousin Ellen.

Sir Francis Varney glanced at his watch. It indicated but five minutes to twelve o'clock, and he sprang to his feet. Even as he did so, a loud knocking at the principal entrance to his house awakened every echo within its walls.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE THOUSAND POUNDS. — THE STRANGER'S PRECAUTIONS.

Varney moved not now, nor did he speak, but, like a statue, he stood, with his unearthly looking eyes rivetted upon the door of the apartment.

In a few moments one of his servants came, and said —

"Sir, a person is here, who says he wants to see you. He desired me to say, that he had ridden far, and that moments were precious when the tide of life was ebbing fast."

"Yes! yes!" gasped Varney; "admit him, I know him! Bring him here? It is — an — old friend — of mine."

He sank into a chair, and still he kept his eyes fixed upon that door through which his visitor must come. Surely some secret of dreadful moment must be connected with him whom Sir Francisexpected — dreaded — and yet dared not refuse to see. And now a footstep approaches — a slow and a solemn footstep — it pauses a moment at the door of the apartment, and then the servant flings it open, and a tall man enters. He is enveloped in the folds of a horseman's cloak, and there is the clank of spurs upon his heels as he walks into the room.

Varney rose again, but he said not a word and for a few moments they stood opposite each other in silence. The domestic has left the room, and the door is closed, so that there was nothing to prevent them from conversing; and, yet, silent they continued for some minutes. It seemed as if each was most anxious that the other should commence the conversation, first.

And yet there was nothing so very remarkable in the appearance of that stranger which should entirely justify Sir Francis Varney, in feeling so much alarm at his presence. He certainly was a man past the prime of life; and he looked like one who had battled much with misfortune, and as if time had not passed so lightly over his brow, but that it had left deep traces of its progress. The only thing positively bad about his countenance, was to be found in his eyes. There there was a most ungracious and sinister expression, a kind of lurking and suspicions look, as if he were always resolving in his mind some deep laid scheme, which might be sufficient to circumvent the whole of mankind.

Finding, probably, that Varney would not speak first, he let his cloak fall more loosely about him, and in a low, deep tone, he said,

“I presume I was expected?”

“You were,” said Varney. “It is the day, and it is the hour.”

“You are right. I like to see you so mindful. You don’t improve in looks since—”

“Hush — hush! no more of that; can we not meet without a dreadful allusion to the past! There needs nothing to remind me of it; and your presence here now shows that you are not forgetful. Speak not of that fearful episode. Let no words combine to place it in a tangible shape to human understanding. I cannot, dare not, hear you speak of that.”

“It is well,” said the stranger; “as you please. Let our interview be brief. You know my errand?”

“I do. So fearful a drag upon limited means, is not likely to be readily forgotten.”

“Oh, you are too ingenious — too full of well laid schemes, and to apt and ready in their execution, to feel, as any fearful drag, the conditions of our bargain. Why do you look at me so earnestly?"

"Because," said Varney — and he trembled as he spoke— "because each lineament of your countenance brings me back to the recollection of the only scene in life that made me shudder, and which I cannot think of, even with the indifference of contempt. I see it all before my mind's eye, coming in frightful panoramic array, those incidents, which even to dream of, are sufficient to drive the soul to madness; the dread of this annual visit, hangs upon me like a dark cloud upon my very heart; it sits like some foul incubus, destroying its vitality and dragging me, from day to day, nearer to that tomb, from whence not as before, I can emerge."

"You have been among the dead?" said the stranger.

"I have."

"And yet are mortal."

"Yes," repeated Varney, "yes, and yet am mortal."

"It was I that plucked you back to that world, which, to judge from your appearance, has had since that eventful period but few charms for you. By my faith you look like—"

"Like what I am," interrupted Varney.

"This is a subject that once a year gets frightfully renewed between us. For weeks before your visit I am haunted by frightful recollections, and it takes me many weeks after you are gone, before I can restore myself to serenity. Look at me; am I not an altered man?"

"In faith you are," said the stranger "I have no wish to press upon you painful recollections. And yet 'tis strange to me that upon such a man as you, the event to which you allude should produce so terrible an impression."

"I have passed through the agony of death," said Varney, "and have again endured the torture — for it is such — of the re-union of the body and the soul; not having endured so much, not the faintest echo of such feelings can enter into your imagination."

"There may be truth in that, and yet, like a fluttering moth round a flame, it seems to me, that when I do see you, you take a terrific kind of satisfaction in talking of the past."

"That is strictly true," said Varney; "the images with which my mind is filled are frightful. Pent up do they remain for twelve long months. I can speak to you, and you only, without disguise, and thus does it seem to me that I get rid of the uneasy load of horrible imaginings. When you are gone, and have been gone a sufficient lapse of time, my slumbers are not haunted with frightful images — I regain a comparative peace, until the time slowly comes around again, when we are doomed to meet."

"I understand you. You seem well lodged here?"

"I have ever kept my word, and sent to you, telling you where I am."

"You have, truly. I have no shadow of complaint to make against you. No one, could have more faithfully performed his bond than you have. I give you ample credit for all that, and long may you live still to perform your conditions."

"I dare not deceive you, although to keep such faith I may be compelled to deceive a hundred others."

"Of that I cannot judge. Fortune seems to smile upon you; you have not as yet disappointed me."

"And will not now," said Varney. "The gigantic and frightful penalty of disappointing you, stares me in the face. I dare not do so."

He took from his pocket, as he spoke, a clasped book, from which he produced several bank notes, which he placed before the stranger.

"A thousand pounds," he said; "that is the agreement."

"It is to the very letter. I do not return to you a thousand thanks — we understand each other better than to waste time with idle compliment. Indeed I will go quite as far as to say, truthfully, that did not my necessities require this amount from you, you should have the boon, for which you pay that price at a much cheaper rate."

"Enough! enough!" said Varney. "It is strange, that your face should have been the last I saw, when the world closed upon me, and the first that met my eyes when I was again snatched back to life! Do you pursue still your dreadful trade?"

"Yes," said the stranger, "for another year, and then, with such a moderate competence as fortune has assigned me, I retire, to make way for younger and abler spirits."

"And then," said Varney, "shall you still require of me such an amount as this?"

"No; this is my last visit but one. I shall be just and liberal towards you. You are not old; and I have no wish to become the clog of your existence. As I have before told you, it is my necessity, and not my inclination, that sets the value upon the service I rendered you."

"I understand you, and ought to thank you. And in reply to so much courtesy, be assured, that when I shudder at your presence, it is not that I regard you with horror, as an individual, but it is because the sight of you awakens mournfully the remembrance of the past."

"It is clear to me," said the stranger; "and now I think we part with each other in a better spirit than we ever did before; and when we meet again, the remembrance that it is the last time, will clear away the gloom that I now find hanging over you."

"It may! it may! With what an earnest gaze you still regard me!"

"I do. It does appear to me most strange, that time should not have obliterated the effects which I thought would have ceased with their cause. You are no more the man that in my recollection you once were, than I am like a sporting child."

"And I never shall be," said Varney; "never — never again! This self-same look which the hand of death had placed upon me, I shall ever wear. I shudder at myself, and as I oft perceive the eye of idle curiosity fixed steadfastly upon me, I wonder in my inmost heart, if even the wildest guesser hits upon the cause why I am not like unto other men?"

"No. Of that you may depend there is no suspicion; but I will leave you now; we part such friends, as men situated as we are can be. Once again shall we meet, and then farewell for ever."

"Do you leave England, then?"

"I do. You know my situation in life. It is not one which offers me inducements to remain. In some other land, I shall win the respect and attention I may not hope for here. There my wealth will win many golden opinions; and casting, as best I may, the veil of forgetfulness over my former life, my declining years may yet be happy. This money, that I have had of you from time to time, has been more pleasantly earned than all beside. Wrung, as it has been, from your fears, still have I taken it with less reproach. And now, farewell!"

Varney rang for a servant to show the stranger from the house, and without another word they parted.

Then, when he was alone, that mysterious owner of that costly home drew a long breath of apparently exquisite relief.

"That is over! — that is over!" he said. "He shall have the other thousand pounds, perchance, sooner than he thinks. With all expedition I will send it to him. And then on that subject I shall be at peace. I shall have paid a large sum; but that which I purchased was to me priceless. It was my life! — it was my life itself! That possession which the world's wealth cannot restore! And shall I grudge these thousands, which have found their way into this man's hands? No! 'Tis true, that existence, for me, has lost some of its most resplendent charms. 'Tis true, that I have no earthly affections, and that shunning companionship with all, I am alike shunned by all; and yet, while the life-blood still will circulate within my shrunken veins, I cling to vitality."

He passed into an inner room, and taking from a hook, on which it hung, a long, dark-coloured cloak, he enveloped his tall, unearthly figure within its folds.

Then, with his hat in his hand, he passed out of his house, and appeared to be taking his way towards Bannerworth House.

Surely it must be guilt of no common die that could oppress a man so destitute of human sympathies as Sir Francis Varney. The dreadful suspicions that hovered round him with respect to what he was, appeared to gather confirmation from every act of his existence.

Whether or not this man, to whom he felt bound to pay annually so large a sum, was in the secret, and knew him to be something more than earthly, we cannot at present declare; but it would seem from the tenor of their conversation as if such were the fact.

Perchance he had saved him from the corruption of the tomb, by placing out, on some sylvan spot, where the cold moonbeams fell, the apparently lifeless form, and now claimed so large a reward for such a service, and the necessary secrecy contingent upon it.

We say this may be so, and yet again some more natural and rational explanation may unexpectedly present itself; and there may be yet a dark page in Sir Francis Varney's life's volume, which will place him in a light of superadded terrors to our readers.

Time, and the now rapidly accumulating incidents of our tale, will soon tear aside the veil of mystery that now envelopes some of our *dramatis personae*.

And let us hope that in the development of those incidents we shall be enabled to rescue the beautiful Flora Bannerworth from the despairing gloom that is around her. Let us hope and even anticipate that we shall see her smile again; that the roseate hue of health will again revisit her cheeks, the light buoyancy of her step return, and that as before she may be the joy of all around her, dispensing and receiving happiness.

And, he too, that gallant fearless lover, he whom no chance of time or tide could sever from the object of his fond affections, he who listened to nothing but the dictates of his heart's best feelings, let us indulge a hope that he will have a bright reward, and that the sunshine of a permanent felicity will only seem the brighter for the shadows that for a time have obscured its glory.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE STRANGE INTERVIEW. — THE CHASE THROUGH THE HALL.

It was with the most melancholy aspect that anything human could well bear, that Sir Francis Varney took his lonely walk, although perhaps in saying so much, probably we are instituting a comparison which circumstances scarcely empower us to do; for who shall say that that singular man, around whom a very atmosphere of mystery seemed to be perpetually increasing, was human?

Averse as we are to believe in the supernatural, or even to invest humanity with any preternatural powers, the more than singular facts and circumstances surrounding the existence and the acts of that man bring to the mind a kind of shuddering conviction, that if he be indeed really mortal he still must possess some powers beyond ordinary mortality, and be walking the earth for some unhallowed purposes, such as ordinary men with the ordinary attributes of human nature can scarcely guess at.

Silently and alone he took his way through that beautiful tract of country, comprehending such picturesque charms of hill and dale which lay between his home and Bannerworth Hall. He was evidently intent upon reaching the latter place by the shortest possible route, and in the darkness of that night, for the moon had not yet risen, he showed no slight acquaintance with the intricacies of that locality, that he was at all enabled to pursue so undeviatingly a tract as that which he took.

He muttered frequently to himself low, indistinct words as he went, and chiefly did they seem to have reference to that strange interview he had so recently had with one who, from some combination of circumstances scarcely to be guessed at, evidently exercised a powerful control over him, and was enabled to make a demand upon his pecuniary resources of rather startling magnitude.

And yet, from a stray word or two, which were pronounced more distinctly, he did not seem to be thinking in anger over that interview; but it would appear that it rather had recalled to his remembrance circumstances of a painful and a degrading nature, which time had not been able entirely to obliterate from his recollection.

"Yes, yes," he said, as he paused upon the margin of the wood, to the confines of which he, or what seemed to be he, had once been chased by Marchdale and the Bannerworths— "yes, the very sight of that man recalls all the frightful pageantry of a horrible tragedy, which I can never — never forget. Never can it escape my memory, as a horrible, a terrific fact; but it is the sight of this man alone that can recall all its fearful minutiae to my mind, and paint to my imagination, in the most vivid colours, every, the least particular connected with that time of agony. These periodical visits much affect me. For months I dread them, and for months I am but slowly recovering from the shocks they give me. 'But once more,' he says— 'but once more,' and then we shall not meet again. Well, well; perchance before that time arrives, I may be able to possess myself of those resources which will enable me to forestall his visit, and so at least free myself from the pang of expecting him."

He paused at the margin of the wood, and glanced in the direction of Bannerworth Hall. By the dim light which yet showed from out the light sky, he could discern the ancient gable ends, and turret-like windows; he could see the well laid out gardens, and the grove of stately firs that shaded it from the northern blasts, and, as he gazed, a strong emotion seemed to come over him, such as no one could have supposed would for one moment have possessed the frame of one so apparently unconnected with all human sympathies.

"I know this spot well," he said, "and my appearance here on that eventful occasion, when the dread of my approach induced a crime only second to murder itself, was on such a night as this, when all was so still and calm around, and when he who, at the merest shadow of my presence, rather chose to rush on death than be assured it was myself. Curses on the circumstances that so foiled me! I should have been most wealthy. I should have possessed the means of commanding the adulation of those who now hold me but cheaply; but still the time may come. I have a hope yet, and that greatness which I have ever panted for, that magician-like power over my kind, which the possession of ample means alone can give, may yet be mine."

Wrapping his cloak more closely around him, he strode forward with that long, noiseless step which was peculiar to him. Mechanically he appeared to avoid those obstacles of hedge and ditch which impeded his pathway. Surely be had come that road often, or he would not so easily have pursued his way. And now he stood by the edge of a plantation which in some measure protected from trespassers the more private gardens of the Hall, and there he paused, as if a feeling of irresolution had come over him, or it might be, as indeed it seemed from his subsequent conduct, that he had come without any fixed intention, or if with a fixed intention, without any regular plan of carrying it into effect.

Did he again dream of intruding into any of the chambers of that mansion, with the ghastly aspect of that terrible creation with which, in the minds of its inhabitants, he seemed to be but too closely identified? He was pale, attenuated, and trembled. Could it be that so soon it had become necessary to renew the life-blood in his veins in the awful manner which it is supposed the vampyre brood are compelled to protract their miserable existence?

It might be so, and that he was even now reflecting upon how once more he could kindle the fire of madness in the brain of that beautiful girl, who he had already made so irretrievably wretched.

He leant against an aged tree, and his strange, lustrous-looking eyes seemed to collect every wandering scintillation of light that was around, and to shine with preternatural intensity.

"I must, I will," he said, "be master of Bannerworth Hall. It must come to that. I have set an existence upon its possession, and I will have it; and then, if with my own hands I displace it brick by brick and stone by stone, I will discover that hidden secret which no one but myself now dreams of. It shall be done by force or fraud, by love or by despair, I care not which; the end shall sanctify all means. Ay, even if I wade through blood to my desire, I say it shall be done."

There was a holy and a still calmness about the night much at variance with the storm of angry passion that appeared to be momentarily gathering power in the breast of that fearful man. Not the least sound came from Bannerworth Hall, and it was only occasionally that from afar off on the night air there came the bark of some watchdog, or the low of distant cattle. All else was mute save when the deep sepulchral tones of that man, if man he was, gave an impulse to the soft air around him.

With a strolling movement as if he were careless if he proceeded in that direction or not, he still went onward toward the house, and now he stood by that little summer-house once so sweet and so dear a retreat, in which the heart-stricken Flora had held her interview with him whom she loved with a devotion unknown to meaner minds.

This spot scarcely commanded any view of the house, for so enclosed was it among evergreens and blooming flowers, that it seemed like a very wilderness of nature, upon which, with liberal hand, she had showered down in wild luxuriance her wildest floral beauties.

In and around that spot the night air was loaded with sweets. The mingled perfume of many flowers made that place seem a very paradise. But oh, how sadly at variance with that beauty and contentedness of nature was he who stood amidst such beauty! All incapable as he was of appreciating its tenderness, or of gathering the faintest moral from its glory.

“Why am I here?” he said. “Here, without fixed design or stability of purpose, like some miser who has hidden his own hoards so deeply within the bowels of the earth he cannot hope that he shall ever again be able to bring them to the light of day. I hover around this spot which I feel — which I know — contains my treasure, though I cannot lay my hands upon it, or exult in its glistening beauty.”

Even as he spoke he cowered down like some guilty thing, for he heard a faint footstep upon the garden path. So light, so fragile was the step, that, in the light of day, the very hum of summer insects would have drowned the noise; but he heard it, that man of crime — of unholy and awful impulses. He heard it, and he shrunk down among the shrubs and flowers till he was hidden completely from observation amid a world of fragrant essences.

Was it some one stealthily in that place even as he was, unwelcome or unknown? or was it one who had observed him intrude upon the privacy of those now unhappy precincts, and who was coming to deal upon him that death which, vampyre though he might be, he was yet susceptible of from mortal hands?

The footstep advanced, and lower down he shrunk until his coward-heart beat against the very earth itself. He knew that he was unarmed, a circumstance rare with him, and only to be accounted for by the disturbance of his mind consequent upon the visit of that strange man to his house, whose presence had awakened so many conflicting emotions.

Nearer and nearer still came that light footstep, and his deep-seated fears would not let him perceive that it was not the step of caution or of treachery, but owed its lightness to the natural grace and freedom of movement of its owner.

The moon must have arisen, although obscured by clouds, through which it cast but a dim radiance, for the night had certainly grown lighter; so that although there were no strong shadows cast, a more diffused brightness was about all things, and their outlines looked not so dancing, and confused the one with the other.

He strained his eyes in the direction whence the sounds proceeded, and then his fears for his personal safety vanished, for he saw it was a female form that was slowly advancing towards him.

His first impulse was to rise, for with the transient glimpse he got of it, he knew that it must be Flora Bannerworth; but a second thought, probably one of intense curiosity to know what could possibly have brought her to such a spot at such a time, restrained him, and he was quiet. But if the surprise of Sir Francis Varney was great to see Flora Bannerworth at such a time in such a place, we have no doubt, that with the knowledge which our readers have of her, their astonishment would more than fully equal his; and when we come to consider, that since that eventful period when the sanctity of her chamber had been so violated by that fearful midnight visitant, it must appear somewhat strange that she could gather courage sufficient to wander forth alone at such an hour.

Had she no dread of meeting that unearthly being? Did the possibility that she might fall into his ruthless grasp, not come across her mind with a shuddering consciousness of its probability? Had she no reflection that each step she took, was taking her further and further from those who would aid her in all extremities? It would seem not, for she walked onward, unheeding, and apparently unthinking of the presence, possible or probable, of that bane of her existence.

But let us look at her again. How strange and spectral-like she moves along; there seems no speculation in her countenance, but with a strange and gliding step, she walks like some dim shadow of the past in that ancient garden. She is very pale, and on her brow there is the stamp of suffering; her dress is a morning robe, she holds it lightly round her, and thus she moves forward towards that summer-house which probably to her was sanctified by having witnessed those vows of pure affection, which came from the lips of Charles Holland, about whose fate there now hung so great a mystery.

Has madness really seized upon the brain of that beautiful girl? Has the strong intellect really sunk beneath the oppressions to which it has been subjected? Does she now walk forth with a disordered intellect, the queen of some fantastic realm, viewing the material world with eyes that are not of earth; shunning perhaps that which she should have sought, and, perchance, in her frenzy, seeking that which in a happier frame of mind she would have shunned.

Such might have been the impression of any one who had looked upon her for a moment, and who knew the disastrous scenes through which she had so recently passed; but we can spare our readers the pangs of such a supposition. We have bespoken their love for Flora Bannerworth, and we are certain that she has it; therefore would we spare them, even for a few brief moments, from imagining that cruel destiny had done its worst, and that the fine and beautiful spirit we have so much commended had lost its power of rational reflection. No; thank Heaven, such is not the case. Flora Bannerworth is not mad, but under the strong influence of some eccentric dream, which has pictured to her mind images which have no home but in the airy realms of imagination. She has wandered forth from her chamber to that sacred spot where she had met him she loved, and heard the noblest declaration of truth and constancy that ever flowed from human lips.

Yes, she is sleeping; but, with a precision such as the somnambulist so strangely exerts, she trod the well-known paths slowly, but surely, toward that summer's bower, where her dreams had not told her lay crouching that most hideous spectre of her imagination, Sir Francis Varney. He who stood between her and her heart's best joy; he who had destroyed all hope of happiness, and who had converted her dearest affections into only so many causes of greater disquietude than the blessings they should have been to her.

Oh! could she have imagined but for one moment that he was there, with what an eagerness of terror would she have flown back again to the shelter of those walls, where at least was to be found some protection from the fearful vampyre's embrace, and where she would be within hail of friendly hearts, who would stand boldly between her and every thought of harm.

But she knew it not, and onwards she went until the very hem of her garment touched the face of Sir Francis Varney.

And he was terrified — he dared not move — he dared not speak! The idea that she had died, and that this was her spirit, come to wreak some terrible vengeance upon him, for a time possessed him, and so paralysed with fear was he, that he could neither move nor speak.

It had been well if, during that trance of indecision in which his coward heart placed him, Flora had left the place, and again sought her home; but unhappily such an impulse came not over her; she sat upon that rustic seat, where she had reposed when Charles had clasped her to his heart, and through her very dream the remembrance of that pure affection came across her, and in the tenderest and most melodious accents, she said, —

"Charles! Charles! and do you love me still? No — no; you have not forsaken me. Save me, save me from the vampyre!"

She shuddered, and Sir Francis Varney heard her weeping.

"Fool that I am," he muttered, "to be so terrified. She sleeps. This is one of the phases which a disordered imagination oft puts on. She sleeps, and perchance this may be an opportunity of further increasing the dread of my visitation, which shall make Bannerworth Hall far too terrible a dwelling-place for her; and well I know, if she goes, they will all go. It will become a deserted house, and that is what I want. A house, too, with such an evil reputation, that none but myself, who have created that reputation, will venture within its walls: — a house, which superstition will point out as the abode of evil spirits; — a house, as it were, by general opinion, ceded to the vampyre. Yes, it shall be my own; fit dwelling-place for a while for me. I have sworn it shall be mine, and I will keep my oath, little such as I have to do with vows."

He rose, and moved slowly to the narrow entrance of the summer-house; a movement he could make, without at all disturbing Flora, for the rustic seat, on which she sat, was at its further extremity. And there he stood, the upper part of his gaunt and hideous form clearly defined upon the now much lighter sky, so that if Flora Bannerworth had not been in that trance of sleep in which she really was, one glance upward would let her see the hideous companion she had, in that once much-loved spot — a spot hitherto sacred to the best and noblest feelings, but now doomed for ever to be associated with that terrific spectre of despair.

But she was in no state to see so terrible a sight. Her hands were over her face, and she was weeping still.

"Surely, he loves me," she whispered; "he has said he loved me, and he does not speak in vain. He loves me still, and I shall again look upon his face, a Heaven to me! Charles! Charles! you will come again? Surely, they sin against the divinity of love, who would tell me that you love me not!"

"Ha!" muttered Varney, "this passion is her first, and takes a strong hold on her young heart — she loves him — but what are human affections to me? I have no right to count myself in the great muster-roll of humanity. I look not like an inhabitant of the earth, and yet am on it. I love no one, expect no love from any one, but I will make humanity a slave to me; and the lip-service of them who hate me in their hearts, shall be as pleasant jingling music to my ear, as if it were quite sincere! I will speak to this girl; she is not mad — perchance she may be."

There was a diabolical look of concentrated hatred upon Varney's face, as he now advanced two paces towards the beautiful Flora.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE THREAT. — ITS CONSEQUENCES. — THE RESCUE, AND SIR FRANCIS VARNEY'S DANGER.

Sir Francis Varney now paused again, and he seemed for a few moments to gloat over the helpless condition of her whom he had so determined to make his victim; there was no look of pity in his face, no one touch of human kindness could be found in the whole expression of those diabolical features; and if he delayed making the attempt to strike terror into the heart of that unhappy, but beautiful being, it could not be from any relenting feeling, but simply, that he wished for a few moments to indulge his imagination with the idea of perfecting his villany more effectually.

Alas! and they who would have flown to her rescue, — they, who for her would have chanced all accidents, ay, even life itself, were sleeping, and knew not of the loved one's danger. She was alone, and far enough from the house, to be driven to that tottering verge where sanity ends, and the dream of madness, with all its terrors, commences.

But still she slept — if that half-waking sleep could indeed be considered as any thing akin to ordinary slumber — still she slept, and called mournfully upon her lover's name; and in tender, beseeching accents, that should have melted even the stubbornest hearts, did she express her soul's conviction that he loved her still.

The very repetition of the name of Charles Holland seemed to be galling to Sir Francis Varney. He made a gesture of impatience, as she again uttered it, and then, stepping forward, he stood within a pace of where she sat, and in a fearfully distinct voice he said, —

"Flora Bannerworth, awake! awake! and look upon me, although the sight blast and drive you to despair. Awake! awake!"

It was not the sound of the voice which aroused her from that strange slumber. It is said that those who sleep in that eccentric manner, are insensible to sounds, but that the lightest touch will arouse them in an instant; and so it was in this case, for Sir Francis Varney, as he spoke, laid upon the hand of Flora two of his cold, corpse-like looking fingers. A shriek burst from her lips, and although the confusion of her memory and conceptions was immense, yet she was awake, and the somnambulistic trance had left her.

"Help, help!" she cried. "Gracious Heavens! Where am I?"

Varney spoke not, but he spread out his long, thin arms in such a manner that he seemed almost to encircle her, while he touched her not, so that escape became a matter of impossibility, and to attempt to do so, must have been to have thrown herself into his hideous embrace.

She could obtain but a single view of the face and figure of him who opposed her progress, but, slight as that view was, it more than sufficed. The very extremity of fear came across her, and she sat like one paralysed; the only evidence of existence she gave consisting in the words, —

"The vampyre — the vampyre!"

"Yes," said Varney, "the vampyre. You know me, Flora Bannerworth — Varney, the vampyre; your midnight guest at that feast of blood. I am the vampyre. Look upon me well; shrink not from my gaze. You will do well not to shun me, but to speak to me in such a shape that I may learn to love you."

Flora shook as in a convulsion, and she looked as white as any marble statue.

"This is horrible!" she said. "Why does not Heaven grant me the death I pray for?"

"Hold!" said Varney. "Dress not up in the false colours of the imagination that which in itself is sufficiently terrific to need none of the allurements of romance. Flora Bannerworth, you are persecuted — persecuted by me, the vampyre. It is my fate to persecute you; for there are laws to the invisible as well as the visible creation that force even such a being as I am to play my part in the great drama of existence. I am a vampyre; the sustenance that supports this frame must be drawn from the life-blood of others."

"Oh, horror — horror!"

"But most I do affect the young and beautiful. It is from the veins of such as thou art, Flora Bannerworth, that I would seek the sustenance I'm compelled to obtain for my own exhausted energies. But never yet, in all my long career — a career extending over centuries of time — never yet have I felt the soft sensation of human pity till I looked on thee, exquisite piece of excellence. Even at the moment when the reviving fluid from the gushing fountain of your veins was warming at my heart, I pitied and I loved you. Oh, Flora! even I can now feel the pang of being what I am!"

There was a something in the tone, a touch of sadness in the manner, and a deep sincerity in these words, that in some measure disabused Flora of her fears. She sobbed hysterically, and a gush of tears came to her relief, as, in almost inarticulate accents, she said, —

"May the great God forgive even you!"

"I have need of such a prayer," exclaimed Varney— "Heaven knows I have need of such a prayer. May it ascend on the wings of the night air to the throne of Heaven. May it be softly whispered by ministering angels to the ear of Divinity. God knows I have need of such a prayer!"

"To hear you speak in such a strain," said Flora, "calms the excited fancy, and strips even your horrible presence of some of its maddening influence."

"Hush," said the vampire, "you must hear more — you must know more ere you speak of the matters that have of late exercised an influence of terror over you."

"But how came I here?" said Flora, "tell me that. By what more than earthly power have you brought me to this spot? If I am to listen to you, why should it not be at some more likely time and place?"

"I have powers," said Varney, assuming from Flora's words, that she would believe such arrogance— "I have powers which suffice to bend many purposes to my will — powers incidental to my position, and therefore is it I have brought you here to listen to that which should make you happier than you are."

"I will attend," said Flora. "I do not shudder now; there's an icy coldness through my veins, but it is the night air — speak, I will attend you."

"I will. Flora Bannerworth, I am one who has witnessed time's mutations on man and on his works, and I have pitied neither; I have seen the fall of empires, and sighed not that high reaching ambition was toppled to the dust. I have seen the grave close over the young and the beautiful — those whom I have doomed by my insatiable thirst for human blood to death, long ere the usual span of life was past, but I never loved till now."

"Can such a being as you," said Flora "be susceptible of such an earthly passion?"

"And wherefore not?"

"Love is either too much of heaven, or too much of earth to find a home with thee."

"No, Flora, no! it may be that the feeling is born of pity. I will save you — I will save you from a continuance of the horrors that are assailing you."

"Oh! then may Heaven have mercy in your hour of need!"

"Amen!"

"May you even yet know peace and joy above."

"It is a faint and straggling hope — but if achieved, it will be through the interposition of such a spirit as thine, Flora, which has already exercised so benign an influence upon my tortured soul, as to produce the wish within my heart, to do a least one unselfish action."

"That wish," said Flora, "shall be father to the deed. Heaven has boundless mercy yet."

"For thy sweet sake, I will believe so much, Flora Bannerworth; it is a condition with my hateful race, that if we can find one human heart to love us, we are free. If, in the face of Heaven, you will consent to be mine, you will snatch me from a continuance of my frightful doom, and for your pure sake, and on your merits, shall I yet know heavenly happiness. Will you be mine?"

A cloud swept from off the face of the moon, and a slant ray fell upon the hideous features of the vampire. He looked as if just rescued from some charnel-house, and endowed for a space with vitality to destroy all beauty and harmony in nature, and drive some benighted soul to madness.

"No, no, no!" shrieked Flora, "never!"

"Enough," said Varney, "I am answered. It was a bad proposal. I am a vampyre still."

"Spare me! spare me!"

“Blood!”

Flora sank upon her knees, and uplifted her hands to heaven. “Mercy, mercy!” she said.

“Blood!” said Varney, and she saw his hideous, fang-like teeth. “Blood! Flora Bannerworth, the vampyre’s motto. I have asked you to love me, and you will not — the penalty be yours.”

“No, no!” said Flora. “Can it be possible that even you, who have already spoken with judgment and precision, can be so unjust? you must feel that, in all respects, I have been a victim, most gratuitously — a sufferer, while there existed no just cause that I should suffer; one who has been tortured, not from personal fault, selfishness, lapse of integrity, or honourable feelings, but because you have found it necessary, for the prolongation of your terrific existence, to attack me as you have done. By what plea of honour, honesty, or justice, can I be blamed for not embracing an alternative which is beyond all human control? — I cannot love you.”

“Then be content to suffer. Flora Bannerworth, will you not, even for a time, to save yourself and to save me, become mine?”

“Horrible proposition!”

“Then am I doomed yet, perhaps, for many a cycle of years, to spread misery and desolation around me; and yet I love you with a feeling which has in it more of gratefulness and unselfishness than ever yet found a home within my breast. I would fain have you, although you cannot save me; there may yet be a chance, which shall enable you to escape from the persecution of my presence.”

“Oh! glorious chance!” said Flora. “Which way can it come? tell me how I may embrace it, and such grateful feelings as a heart-stricken mourner can offer to him who has rescued her from her deep affliction, shall yet be yours.”

"Hear me, then, Flora Bannerworth, while I state to you some particulars of mysterious existence, of such beings as myself, which never yet have been breathed to mortal ears."

Flora looked intently at him, and listened, while, with a serious earnestness of manner, he detailed to her something of the physiology of the singular class of beings which the concurrence of all circumstances tended to make him appear.

"Flora," he said, "it is not that I am so enamoured of an existence to be prolonged only by such frightful means, which induces me to become a terror to you or to others. Believe me, that if my victims, those whom my insatiable thirst for blood make wretched, suffer much, I, the vampyre, am not without my moments of unutterable agony. But it is a mysterious law of our nature, that as the period approaches when the exhausted energies of life require a new support from the warm, gushing fountain of another's veins, the strong desire to live grows upon us, until, in a paroxysm of wild insanity, which will recognise no obstacles, human or divine, we seek a victim."

"A fearful state!" said Flora.

"It is so; and, when the dreadful repast is over, then again the pulse beats healthfully, and the wasted energies of a strange kind of vitality are restored to us, we become calm again, but with that calmness comes all the horror, all the agony of reflection, and we suffer far more than tongue can tell."

"You have my pity," said Flora; "even you have my pity."

"I might well demand it, if such a feeling held a place within your breast. I might well demand your pity, Flora Bannerworth, for never crawled an abject wretch upon the earth's rotundity, so pitiable as I."

"Go on, go on."

"I will, and with such brief conclusions as I may. Having once attacked any human being, we feel a strange, but terribly impulsive desire again to seek that person for more blood. But I love you, Flora; the small amount of sensibility that still lingers about my preternatural existence, acknowledges in you a pure and better spirit. I would fain save you."

"Oh! tell me how I may escape the terrible infliction."

"That can only be done by flight. Leave this place, I implore you! leave it as quickly as the movement may be made. Linger not — cast not one regretful look behind you on your ancient home. I shall remain in this locality for years. Let me lose sight of you, I will not pursue you; but, by force of circumstances, I am myself compelled to linger here. Flight is the only means by which you may avoid a doom as terrific as that which I endure."

"But tell me," said Flora, after a moment's pause, during which she appeared to be endeavouring to gather courage to ask some fearful question; "tell me if it be true that those who have once endured the terrific attack of a vampyre, become themselves, after death, one of that dread race?"

"It is by such means," said Varney, "that the frightful brood increases; but time and circumstances must aid the development of the new and horrible existence. You, however, are safe."

"Safe! Oh! say that word again."

"Yes, safe; not once or twice will the vampyre's attack have sufficient influence on your mortal frame, as to induce a susceptibility on your part to become coexistent with such as he. The attacks must be often repeated, and the termination of mortal existence must be a consequence essential, and direct from those attacks, before such a result may be anticipated."

"Yes, yes; I understand."

"If you were to continue my victim from year to year, the energies of life would slowly waste away, and, till like some faint taper's gleam, consuming more sustenance than it received, the veriest accident would extinguish your existence, and then, Flora Bannerworth, you might become a vampyre."

"Oh! horrible! most horrible!"

"If by chance, or by design, the least glimpse of the cold moonbeams rested on your apparently lifeless remains, you would rise again and be one of us — a terror to yourself and a desolation to all around."

"Oh! I will fly from here," said Flora. "The hope of escape from so terrific and dreadful a doom shall urge me onward; if flight can save me — flight from Bannerworth Hall, I will pause not until continents and oceans divide us."

"It is well. I'm able now thus calmly to reason with you. A few short months more and I shall feel the languor of death creeping over me, and then will come that mad excitement of the brain, which, were you hidden behind triple doors of steel, would tempt me again to seek your chamber — again to seize you in my full embrace — again to draw from your veins the means of prolonged life — again to convulse your very soul with terror."

"I need no incentives," said Flora, with a shudder, "in the shape of descriptions of the past, to urge me on."

"You will fly from Bannerworth Hall?"

"Yes, yes!" said Flora, "it shall be so; its very chambers now are hideous with the recollection of scenes enacted in them. I will urge my brothers, my mother, all to leave, and in some distant clime we will find security and shelter. There even we will learn to think of you with more of sorrow than of anger — more pity than reproach —

more curiosity than loathing."

"Be it so," said the vampyre; and he clasped his hands, as if with a thankfulness that he had done so much towards restoring peace at least to one, who, in consequence of his acts, had felt such exquisite despair. "Be it so; and even I will hope that the feelings which have induced so desolated and so isolated a being as myself to endeavour to bring peace to one human heart, will plead for me, trumpet-tongued, to Heaven!"

"It will — it will," said Flora.

"Do you think so?"

"I do; and I will pray that the thought may turn to certainty in such a cause."

The vampyre appeared to be much affected; and then he added, —

"Flora, you know that this spot has been the scene of a catastrophe fearful to look back upon, in the annals of your family?"

"It has," said Flora. "I know to what you allude; 'tis a matter of common knowledge to all — a sad theme to me, and one I would not court."

"Nor would I oppress you with it. Your father, here, on this very spot, committed that desperate act which brought him uncalled for to the judgment seat of God. I have a strange, wild curiosity upon such subjects. Will you, in return for the good that I have tried to do you, gratify it?"

"I know not what you mean," said Flora.

"To be more explicit, then, do you remember the day on which your father breathed his last?"

"Too well — too well."

"Did you see him or converse with him shortly before that desperate act was committed?"

"No; he shut himself up for some time in a solitary chamber."

"Ha! what chamber?"

"The one in which I slept myself on the night—"

"Yes, yes; the one with the portrait — that speaking portrait — the eyes of which seem to challenge an intruder as he enters the apartment."

"The same."

"For hours shut up there!" added Varney, musingly; "and from thence he wandered to the garden, where, in this summer-house, he breathed his last?"

"It was so."

"Then, Flora, ere I bid you adieu—"

These words were scarcely uttered, when there was a quick, hasty footstep, and Henry Bannerworth appeared behind Varney, in the very entrance of the summer-house.

"Now," he cried, "for revenge! Now, foul being, blot upon the earth's surface, horrible imitation of humanity, if mortal arm can do aught against you, you shall die!"

A shriek came from the lips of Flora, and flinging herself past Varney, who stepped aside, she clung to her brother, who made an unavailing pass with his sword at the vampyre. It was a critical moment; and had the presence of mind of Varney deserted him in the least, unarmed as he was, he must have fallen beneath the weapon of Henry. To spring, however, up the seat which Flora had vacated, and to dash out some of the flimsy and rotten wood-work at the back of the summer-house by the propulsive power of his whole frame, was the work of a moment; and before Henry could free himself from the clinging embrace of Flora, Varney, the vampyre was gone, and there was no greater chance of his capture than on a former occasion, when he was pursued in vain from the Hall to the wood, in the intricacies of which he was so entirely lost.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE EXPLANATION. — MARCHDALE’S ADVICE. — THE PROJECTED REMOVAL, AND THE ADMIRAL’S ANGER.

This extremely sudden movement on the part of Varney was certainly as unexpected as it was decisive. Henry had imagined, that by taking possession of the only entrance to the summer-house, he must come into personal conflict with the being who had worked so much evil for him and his; and that he should so suddenly have created for himself another mode of exit, certainly never occurred to him.

“For Heaven’s sake, Flora,” he said, “unhand me; this is a time for action.”

“But, Henry, Henry, hear me.”

“Presently, presently, dear Flora; I will yet make another effort to arrest the headlong flight of Varney.”

He shook her off, perhaps with not more roughness than was necessary to induce her to forego her grasp of him, but in a manner that fully showed he intended to be free; and then he sprang through the same aperture whence Varney had disappeared, just as George and Mr. Marchdale arrived at the door of the summer-house.

It was nearly morning, so that the fields were brightening up with the faint radiance of the coming day; and when Henry reached a point which he knew commanded an extensive view, he paused, and ran his eye eagerly along the landscape, with a hope of discovering some trace of the fugitive.

Such, however, was not the case; he saw nothing, heard nothing of Sir Francis Varney; and then he turned, and called loudly to

George to join him, and was immediately replied to by his brother's presence, accompanied by Marchdale.

Before, however, they could exchange a word, a rattling discharge of fire-arms took place from one of the windows, and they heard the admiral, in a loud voice, shouting, —

"Broadside to broadside! Give it them again, Jack! Hit them between wind and water!"

Then there was another rattling discharge, and Henry exclaimed, —

"What is the meaning of that firing?"

"It comes from the admiral's room," said Marchdale. "On my life, I think the old man must be mad. He has some six or eight pistols ranged in a row along the window-sill, and all loaded, so that by the aid of a match they can be pretty well discharged as a volley, which he considers the only proper means of firing upon the vampyre."

"It is so," replied George; "and, no doubt, hearing an alarm, he has commenced operations by firing into the enemy."

"Well, well," said Henry; "he must have his way. I have pursued Varney thus far, and that he has again retreated to the wood, I cannot doubt. Between this and the full light of day, let us at least make an effort to discover his place of retreat. We know the locality as well as he can possibly, and I propose now that we commence an active search."

"Come on, then," said Marchdale. "We are all armed; and I, for one, shall feel no hesitation in taking the life, if it be possible to do so, of that strange being."

"Of that possibility you doubt?" said George, as they hurried on across the meadows.

"Indeed I do, and with reason too. I'm certain that when I fired at him before I hit him; and besides, Flora must have shot him upon the occasion when we were absent, and she used your pistols Henry, to defend herself and her mother."

"It would seem so," said Henry; "and disregarding all present circumstances, if I do meet him, I will put to the proof whether he be mortal or not."

The distance was not great, and they soon reached the margin of the wood; they then separated agreeing to meet within it, at a well-spring, familiar to them all: previous to which each was to make his best endeavour to discover if any one was hidden among the bush-wood or in the hollows of the ancient trees they should encounter on their line of march.

The fact was, that Henry finding that he was likely to pass an exceedingly disturbed, restless night, through agitation of spirits, had, after tossing to and fro on his couch for many hours, wisely at length risen, and determined to walk abroad in the gardens belonging to the mansion, in preference to continuing in such a state of fever and anxiety, as he was in, in his own chamber.

Since the vampyre's dreadful visit, it had been the custom of both the brothers, occasionally, to tap at the chamber door of Flora, who, at her own request, now that she had changed her room, and dispensed with any one sitting up with her, wished occasionally to be communicated with by some member of the family.

Henry, then, after rapidly dressing, as he passed the door of her bedroom, was about to tap at it, when to his surprise he found it open, and upon hastily entering it he observed that the bed was empty, and a hasty glance round the apartment convinced him that Flora was not there.

Alarm took possession of him, and hastily arming himself, he roused Marchdale and George, but without waiting for them to be ready to accompany him, he sought the garden, to search it thoroughly in case she should be anywhere there concealed.

Thus it was he had come upon the conference so strangely and so unexpectedly held between Varney and Flora in the summer-house. With what occurred upon that discovery the readers are acquainted.

Flora had promised George that she would return immediately to the house, but when, in compliance with the call of Henry, George and Marchdale had left her alone, she felt so agitated and faint that she began to cling to the trellis work of the little building for a few moments before she could gather strength to reach the mansion.

Two or three minutes might thus have elapsed, and Flora was in such a state of mental bewilderment with all that had occurred, that she could scarce believe it real, when suddenly a slight sound attracted her attention, and through the gap which had been made in the wall of the summer-house, with an appearance of perfect composure, again appeared Sir Francis Varney.

"Flora," he said, quietly resuming the discourse which had been broken off, "I am quite convinced now that you will be much the happier for the interview."

"Gracious Heaven!" said Flora, "whence have you come from?"

"I have never left," said Varney.

"But I saw you fly from this spot."

"You did; but it was only to another immediately outside the summer house. I had no idea of breaking off our conference so abruptly."

"Have you anything to add to what you have already stated?"

"Absolutely nothing, unless you have a question to propose to me — I should have thought you had, Flora. Is there no other circumstance weighing heavily upon your mind, as well as the dreadful visitation I have subjected you to?"

"Yes," said Flora. "What has become of Charles Holland?"

"Listen. Do not discard all hope; when you are far from here you will meet with him again."

"But he has left me."

"And yet he will be able, when you again encounter him, so far to extenuate his seeming perfidy, that you shall hold him as untouched in honour as when first he whispered to you that he loved you."

"Oh, joy! joy!" said Flora; "by that assurance you have robbed misfortune of its sting, and richly compensated me for all that I have suffered."

"Adieu!" said the vampyre. "I shall now proceed to my own home by a different route to that taken by those who would kill me."

"But after this," said Flora, "there shall be no danger; you shall be held harmless, and our departure from Bannerworth Hall shall be so quick, that you will soon be released from all apprehension of vengeance from my brother, and I shall taste again of that happiness which I thought had fled from me for ever."

"Farewell," said the vampire; and folding his cloak closely around him, he strode from the summer-house, soon disappearing from her sight behind the shrubs and ample vegetation with which that garden abounded.

Flora sunk upon her knees, and uttered a brief, but heartfelt thanksgiving to Heaven for this happy change in her destiny. The hue of health faintly again visited her cheeks, and as she now, with a feeling of more energy and strength than she had been capable of exerting for many days, walked towards the house, she felt all that delightful sensation which the mind experiences when it is shaking off the trammels of some serious evil which it delights now to find that the imagination has attired in far worse colours than the facts deserved.

It is scarcely necessary, after this, to say that the search in the wood for Sir Francis Varney was an unproductive one, and that the morning dawned upon the labours of the brother and of Mr. Marchdale, without their having discovered the least indication of the presence of Varney. Again puzzled and confounded, they stood on the margin of the wood, and looked sadly towards the brightening windows of Bannerworth Hall, which were now reflecting with a golden radiance the slant rays of the morning sun.

"Foiled again," remarked Henry, with a gesture of impatience; "foiled again, and as completely as before. I declare that I will fight this man, let our friend the admiral say what he will against such a measure I will meet him in mortal combat; he shall consummate his triumph over our whole family by my death, or I will rid the world and ourselves of so frightful a character."

"Let us hope," said Marchdale, "that some other course may be adopted, which shall put an end to these proceedings."

"That," exclaimed Henry, "is to hope against all probability; what other course can be pursued? Be this Varney man or devil, he has evidently marked us for his prey."

"Indeed, it would seem so," remarked George; "but yet he shall find that we will not fall so easily; he shall discover that if poor Flora's gentle spirit has been crushed by these frightful circumstances, we are of a sterner mould."

"He shall," said Henry; "I for one will dedicate my life to this matter. I will know no more rest than is necessary to recruit my frame, until I have succeeded in overcoming this monster; I will seek no pleasure here, and will banish from my mind, all else that may interfere with that one fixed pursuit. He or I must fall."

"Well spoken," said Marchdale; "and yet I hope that circumstances may occur to prevent such a necessity of action, and that probably you will yet see that it will be wise and prudent to adopt a milder and a safer course."

"No, Marchdale, you cannot feel as we feel. You look on more as a spectator, sympathising with the afflictions of either, than feeling the full sting of those afflictions yourself."

"Do I not feel acutely for you? I'm a lonely man in the world, and I have taught myself now to centre my affections in your family; my recollections of early years assist me in so doing. Believe me, both of you, that I am no idle spectator of your griefs, but that I share them fully. If I advise you to be peaceful, and to endeavour by the gentlest means possible to accomplish your aims, it is not that I would counsel you cowardice; but having seen so much more of the world than either of you have had time or opportunity of seeing, I do not look so enthusiastically upon matters, but, with a cooler, calmer judgment, I do not say a better, I proffer to you my counsel."

"We thank you," said Henry; "but this is a matter in which action seems specially called for. It is not to be borne that a whole family is to be oppressed by such a fiend in human shape as that Varney."

"Let me," said Marchdale, "counsel you to submit to Flora's decision in this business; let her wishes constitute the rules of action. She is the greatest sufferer, and the one most deeply interested in the termination of this fearful business. Moreover she has judgment and decision of character — she will advise you rightly, be assured."

"That she would advise us honourably," said Henry, "and that we should feel every disposition in the world to defer to her wishes our proposition, is not to be doubted; but little shall be done without her counsel and sanction. Let us now proceed homeward, for I am most anxious to ascertain how it came about that she and Sir Francis Varney were together in that summer-house at so strange an hour."

They all three walked together towards the house, conversing in a similar strain as they went.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE CONSULTATION. — THE DUEL AND ITS RESULTS.

Independent of this interview which Flora had had with the much dreaded Sir Francis Varney, the circumstances in which she and all who were dear to her, happened at that moment to be placed, certainly required an amount of consideration, which could not be too soon bestowed.

By a combination of disagreeables, everything that could possibly occur to disturb the peace of the family seemed to have taken place at once; like Macbeth's, their troubles had truly come in battalions, and now that the serenity of their domestic position was destroyed, minor evils and annoyances which that very serenity had enabled them to hold at arm's-length became gigantic, and added much to their distress.

The small income, which, when all was happiness, health and peace, was made to constitute a comfortable household, was now totally inadequate to do so — the power to economise and to make the most of a little, had flown along with that contentedness of spirit which the harmony of circumstances alone could produce.

It was not to be supposed that poor Mrs. Bannerworth could now, as she had formerly done, when her mind was free from anxiety, attend to those domestic matters which make up the comforts of a family — distracted at the situation of her daughter, and bewildered by the rapid succession of troublesome events which so short a period of time had given birth to, she fell into an inert state of mind as different as anything could possibly be, from her former active existence.

It has likewise been seen how the very domestics fled from Bannerworth Hall in dismay, rather than remain beneath the same roof with a family believed to be subject to the visitations of so awful a being as a vampyre.

Among the class who occupy positions of servitude, certainly there might have been found some, who, with feelings and understandings above such considerations, would have clung sympathetically to that family in distress, which they had known under a happier aspect; but it had not been the good fortune of the Bannerworths to have such as these about them; hence selfishness had its way, and they were deserted. It was not likely, then, that strangers would willingly accept service in a family so situated, without some powerful impulse in the shape of a higher pecuniary consideration, as was completely out of the power of the Bannerworths to offer.

Thus was it, then, that most cruelly, at the very time that they had most need of assistance and of sympathy, this unfortunate family almost became isolated from their kind; and, apart from every other consideration, it would have been almost impossible for them to continue inhabitants of the Hall, with anything like comfort, or advantage.

And then, although the disappearance of Charles Holland no longer awakened those feelings of indignation at his supposed perfidy which were first produced by that event; still, view it in which way they might, it was a severe blow of fate, and after it, they one and all found themselves still less able to contend against the sea of troubles that surrounded them.

The reader, too, will not have failed to remark that there was about the whole of the family that pride of independence which induced them to shrink from living upon extraneous aid; and hence, although they felt and felt truly, that when Admiral Bell, in his frank manner, offered them pecuniary assistance, that it was no idle compliment, yet with a sensitiveness such as they might well be expected to feel, they held back, and asked each other what prospect there was of emerging from such a state of things, and if it were justifiable to commence a life of dependence, the end of which was not evident or tangible.

Notwithstanding, too, the noble confidence of Flora in her lover, and notwithstanding that confidence had been echoed by her brothers, there would at times obtrude into the minds of the latter, a feeling of the possibility, that after all they might be mistaken; and Charles Holland might, from some sudden impulse, fancying his future happiness was all at stake, have withdrawn himself from the Hall, and really written the letters attributed to him.

We say this only obtruded itself occasionally, for all their real feelings and aspirations were the other way, although Mr. Marchdale, they could perceive, had his doubts, and they could not but confess that he was more likely to view the matter calmly and dispassionately than they.

In fact, the very hesitation with which he spoke upon the subject, convinced them of his doubt; for they attributed that hesitation to a fear of giving them pain, or of wounding the prejudices of Admiral Bell, with whom he had already had words so nearly approaching to a quarrel.

Henry's visit to Mr. Chillingworth was not likely to be productive of any results beyond those of a conjectural character. All that that gentleman could do was to express a willingness to be directed by them in any way, rather than suggest any course of conduct himself upon circumstances which he could not be expected to judge of as they who were on the spot, and had witnessed their actual occurrence.

And now we will suppose that the reader is enabled with us to look into one of the principal rooms of Bannerworth Hall. It is evening, and some candles are shedding a sickly light on the ample proportions of the once handsome apartment. At solemn consultation the whole of the family are assembled. As well as the admiral, Mr. Chillingworth, and Marchdale, Jack Pringle, too, walked in, by the sufferance of his master, as if he considered he had a perfect right to do so.

The occasion of the meeting had been a communication which Flora had made concerning her most singular and deeply interesting interview with the vampyre. The details of this interview had produced a deep effect upon the whole of the family. Flora was there, and she looked better, calmer, and more collected than she had done for some days past.

No doubt the interview she had had with Varney in the summer-house in the garden had dispelled a host of imaginary terrors with which she had surrounded him, although it had confirmed her fully that he and he only was the dreadful being who had caused her so much misery.

That interview had tended to show her that about him there was yet something human, and that there was not a danger of her being hunted down from place to place by so horrible an existence.

Such a feeling as this was, of course, a source of deep consolation; and with a firmer voice, and more of her old spirit of cheerfulness about her than she had lately exhibited, she again detailed the particulars of the interview to all who had assembled, concluding by saying, —

“And this has given me hope of happier days. If it be a delusion, it is a happy one; and now that but a frightful veil of mystery still hangs over the fate of Charles Holland, I how gladly would I bid adieu to this place, and all that has made it terrible. I could almost pity Sir Francis Varney, rather than condemn him.”

“That may be true,” said Henry, “to a certain extent, sister; but we never can forget the amount of misery he has brought upon us. It is no slight thing to be forced from our old and much-loved home, even if such proceeding does succeed in freeing us from his persecutions.”

“But, my young friend,” said Marchdale, “you must recollect, that through life it is continually the lot of humanity to be endeavouring to fly from great evils to those which do not present themselves to the mind in so bad an aspect. It is something, surely, to alleviate affliction, if we cannot entirely remove it.”

“That is true,” said Mr. Chillingworth, “to a considerable extent, but then it takes too much for granted to please me.”

“How so, sir?”

“Why, certainly, to remove from Bannerworth Hall is a much less evil than to remain at Bannerworth Hall, and be haunted by a vampyre; but then that proposition takes for granted that vampyre business, which I will never grant. I repeat, again and again, it is contrary to all experience, to philosophy, and to all the laws of ordinary nature.”

“Facts are stubborn things,” said Marchdale.

“Apparently,” remarked Mr. Chillingworth.

“Well, sir; and here we have the fact of a vampyre.”

“The presumed fact. One swallow don’t make a summer, Mr. Marchdale.”

"This is waste of time," said Henry— "of course, the amount of evidence that will suffice to bring conviction to one man's mind will fail in doing so to another. The question is, what are we to do?"

All eyes were turned upon Flora, as if this question was more particularly addressed to her, and it behoved her, above all others, to answer it. She did so; and in a firm, clear voice, she said, —

"I will discover the fate of Charles Holland, and then leave the Hall."

"The fate of Charles Holland!" said Marchdale. "Why, really, unless that young gentleman chooses to be communicative himself upon so interesting a subject, we may be a long while discovering his fate. I know that it is not a romantic view to take of the question, to suppose simply that he wrote the three letters found upon his dressing-table, and then decamped; but to my mind, it savours most wonderfully of matter-of-fact. I now speak more freely than I have otherwise done, for I am now upon the eve of my departure. I have no wish to remain here, and breed dissension in any family, or to run a tilt against anybody's prejudices." Here he looked at Admiral Bell. "I leave this house to-night."

"You're a d —— d lubberly thief," said the admiral; "the sooner you leave it the better. Why, you bad-looking son of a gun, what do you mean? I thought we'd had enough of that."

"I fully expected this abuse," said Marchdale.

"Did you expect that?" said the admiral, as he snatched up an inkstand, and threw at Marchdale, hitting him a hard knock on the chin, and bespattering its contents on his breast. "Now I'll give you satisfaction, you lubber. D — me, if you ain't a second Jones, and enough to sink the ship. Shiver my timbers if I sha'n't say something strong presently."

"I really," said Henry, "must protest, Admiral Bell, against this conduct."

"Protest and be d —— d."

"Mr. Marchdale may be right, sir, or he may be wrong, it's a matter of opinion."

"Oh, never mind," said Marchdale; "I look upon this old nautical ruffian as something between a fool and a madman. If he were a younger man I should chastise him upon the spot; but as it is I live in hopes yet of getting him into some comfortable lunatic asylum."

"Me into an asylum!" shouted the admiral. "Jack, did you hear that?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Farewell all of you," said Marchdale; "my best wishes be with this family. I cannot remain under this roof to be so insulted."

"A good riddance," cried the admiral. "I'd rather sail round the world with a shipload of vampyres than with such a humbugging son of a gun as you are. D —— e, you're worse than a lawyer."

"Nay, nay," cried they, "Mr. Marchdale, stay."

"Stay, stay," cried George, and Mrs. Bannerworth, likewise, said stay; but at the moment Flora stepped forward, and in a clear voice she said, —

"No, let him go, he doubts Charles Holland; let all go who doubt Charles Holland. Mr. Marchdale, Heaven forgive you this injustice you are doing. We may never meet again. Farewell, sir!"

These words were spoken in so decided a tone, that no one contradicted them. Marchdale cast a strange kind of look round upon the family circle, and in another instant he was gone.

"Huzza!" shouted Jack Pringle; "that's one good job."

Henry looked rather resentful, which the admiral could not but observe, and so, less with the devil-may-care manner in which he usually spoke, the old man addressed him.

"Hark ye, Mr. Henry Bannerworth, you ain't best pleased with me, and in that case I don't know that I shall stay to trouble you any longer, as for your friend who has left you, sooner or later you'll find him out — I tell you there's no good in that fellow. Do you think I've been cruising about for a matter of sixty years, and don't know an honest man when I see him. But never mind, I'm going on a voyage of discovery for my nephew, and you can do as you like."

"Heaven only knows, Admiral Bell," said Henry, "who is right and who is wrong. I do much regret that you have quarrelled with Mr. Marchdale; but what is done can't be undone."

"Do not leave us," said Flora; "let me beg of you, Admiral Bell, not to leave us; for my sake remain here, for to you I can speak freely and with confidence, of Charles, when probably I can do so to no one else. You knew him well and have a confidence in him, which no one else can aspire to. I pray you, therefore, to stay with us."

"Only on one condition," said the admiral.

"Name it — name it!

"You think of letting the Hall?"

"Yes, yes."

"Let me have it, then, and let me pay a few years in advance. If you don't, I'm d —— d if I stay another night in the place. You must give me immediate possession, too, and stay here as my guests until you suit yourselves elsewhere. Those are my terms and conditions. Say yes, and all's right; say no, and I'm off like a round shot from a carronade. D —— me, that's the thing, Jack, isn't it?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

There was a silence of some few moments after this extraordinary offer had been made, and then they spoke, saying, —

“Admiral Bell, your generous offer, and the feelings which dictated it, are by far too transparent for us to affect not to understand them. Your actions, Admiral—”

“Oh, bother my actions! what are they to you? Come, now, I consider myself master of the house, d — n you! I invite you all to dinner, or supper, or to whatever meal comes next. Mrs. Bannerworth, will you oblige me, as I’m an old fool in family affairs, by buying what’s wanted for me and my guests? There’s the money, ma’am. Come along, Jack, we’ll take a look over our new house. What do you think of it?”

“Wants some sheathing, sir, here and there.”

“Very like; but, however, it will do well enough for us; we’re in port, you know. Come along.”

“Ay, ay, sir.”

And off went the admiral and Jack, after leaving a twenty pound note in Mrs. Bannerworth’s lap.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SIR FRANCIS VARNEY'S SEPARATE OPPONENTS. — THE INTERPOSITION OF FLORA.

The old admiral so completely overcame the family of the Bannerworths by his generosity and evident single-mindedness of his behaviour, that although not one, except Flora, approved of his conduct towards Mr. Marchdale, yet they could not help liking him; and had they been placed in a position to choose which of the two they would have had remain with them, the admiral or Marchdale, there can be no question they would have made choice of the former.

Still, however, it was not pleasant to find a man like Marchdale virtually driven from the house, because he presumed to differ in opinion upon a very doubtful matter with another of its inmates. But as it was the nature of the Bannerworth family always to incline to the most generous view of subjects, the frank, hearty confidence of the old admiral in Charles Holland pleased them better than the calm and serious doubting of Marchdale.

His ruse of hiring the house of them, and paying the rent in advance, for the purpose of placing ample funds in their hands for any contingency, was not the less amiable because it was so easily seen through; and they could not make up their minds to hurt the feelings of the old man by the rejection of his generous offer.

When he had left, this subject was canvassed among them, and it was agreed that he should have his own way in the matter for the present, although they hoped to hear something from Marchdale, which should make his departure appear less abrupt and uncomfortable to the whole of the family.

During the course of this conversation, it was made known to Flora with more distinctness than under any other circumstances it would have been, that George Holland had been on the eve of fighting a duel with Sir Francis Varney, previous to his mysterious disappearance.

When she became fully aware of this fact, to her mind it seemed materially to add to the suspicions previously to then entertained, that foul means had been used in order to put Charles out of the way.

"Who knows," she said, "that this Varney may not shrink with the greatest terror from a conflict with any human being, and feeling one was inevitable with Charles Holland, unless interrupted by some vigorous act of his own, he or some myrmidons of his may have taken Charles's life!"

"I do not think, Flora," said Henry, "that he would have ventured upon so desperate an act; I cannot well believe such a thing possible. But fear not; he will find, it he have really committed any such atrocity, that it will not save him."

These words of Henry, though it made no impression at the time upon Flora, beyond what they carried upon their surface, they really, however, as concerned Henry himself, implied a settled resolution, which he immediately set about reducing to practice.

When the conference broke up, night, as it still was, he, without saying anything to any one, took his hat and cloak, and left the Hall, proceeding by the nearest practicable route to the residence of Sir Francis Varney, where he arrived without any interruption of any character.

Varney was at first denied to him, but before he could leave the house, a servant came down the great staircase, to say it was a mistake; and that Sir Francis was at home, and would be happy to see him.

He was ushered into the same apartment where Sir Frances Varney had before received his visitors; and there sat the now declared vampyre, looking pale and ghastly by the dim light which burned in the apartment, and, indeed, more like some spectre of the tomb, than one of the great family of man.

"Be seated, sir," said Varney; "although my eyes have seldom the pleasure of beholding you within these walls, be assured you are a honoured guest."

"Sir Francis Varney," said Henry, "I came not here to bandy compliments with you; I have none to pay to you, nor do I wish to hear any of them from your lips."

"An excellent sentiment, young man," said Varney, "and well delivered. May I presume, then, without infringing too far upon your extreme courtesy, to inquire, to what circumstances I am indebted for your visit?"

"To one, Sir Francis, that I believe you are better acquainted with than you will have the candour to admit."

"Indeed, sir," said Varney, coldly; "you measure my candour, probably, by a standard of your own; in which case I fear, I may be no gainer; and yet that may be of itself a circumstance that should afford little food for surprise, but proceed, sir — since we have so few compliments to stand between us and our purpose, we shall in all due time arrive at it."

"Yes, in due time, Sir Francis Varney, and that due time has arrived. Know you anything of my friend, Mr. Charles Holland?" said Henry, in marked accents; and he gazed on Sir Francis Varney with earnestness, that seemed to say not even a look should escape his observation.

Varney, however, returned the gaze as steadily, but coldly, as he replied in his measured accents, —

"I have heard of the young gentleman."

"And seen him?"

"And seen him too, as you, Mr. Bannerworth, must be well aware. Surely you have not come all this way, merely to make such an inquiry; but, sir, you are welcome to the answer."

Henry had something of a struggle to keep down the rising anger, at these cool taunts of Varney; but he succeeded — and then he said, —

"I suspect Charles Holland, Sir Francis Varney, has met with unfair treatment, and that he has been unfairly dealt with, for an unworthy purpose."

"Undoubtedly," said Varney, "if the gentleman you allude to, has been unfairly dealt with, it was for a foul purpose; for no good or generous object, my young sir, could be so obtained — you acknowledge so much, I doubt not?"

"I do, Sir Francis Varney; and hence the purpose of my visit here — for this reason I apply to you—"

"A singular object, supported by a singular reason. I cannot see the connection, young sir; pray proceed to enlighten me upon this matter, and when you have done that, may I presume upon your consideration, to inquire in what way I can be of any service to you?"

"Sir Francis," said Henry, his anger raising his tones— "this will not serve you — I have come to exact an account of how you have disposed of my friend; and I will have it."

"Gently, my good sir; you are aware I know nothing of your friend; his motions are his own; and as to what I have done with him; my only answer is, that he would permit me to do nothing with him, had I been so inclined to have taken the liberty."

"You are suspected, Sir Francis Varney, of having made an attempt upon the life or liberty of Charles Holland; you, in fact, are suspected of being his murderer — and, so help me Heaven! if I have not justice, I will have vengeance!"

"Young sir, your words are of grave import, and ought to be coolly considered before they are uttered. With regard to justice and vengeance, Mr. Bannerworth, you may have both; but I tell you, of Charles Holland, or what has become of him, I know nothing. But wherefore do you come to so unlikely a quarter to learn something of an individual of whom I know nothing?"

"Because Charles Holland was to have fought a duel with you: but before that had time to take place, he has suddenly become missing. I suspect that you are the author of his disappearance, because you fear an encounter with a mortal man."

"Mr. Bannerworth, permit me to say, in my own defence, that I do not fear any man, however foolish he may be; and wisdom is not an attribute I find, from experience in all men, of your friend. However, you must be dreaming, sir — a kind of vivid insanity has taken possession of your mind, which distorts—"

"Sir Francis Varney!" exclaimed Henry, now perfectly uncontrollable.

"Sir," said Varney, as he filled up the pause, "proceed; I am all attention. You do me honour."

"If," resumed Henry, "such was your object in putting Mr. Holland aside, by becoming personally or by proxy an assassin, you are mistaken in supposing you have accomplished your object."

"Go on, sir," said Sir Francis Varney, in a bland and sweet tone; "I am all attention; pray proceed."

"You have failed; for I now here, on this spot, defy you to mortal combat. Coward, assassin as you are, I challenge you to fight."

"You don't mean on the carpet here?" said Varney, deliberately.

"No, sir; but beneath the canopy of heaven, in the light of the day. And then, Sir Francis, we shall see who will shrink from the conflict."

"It is remarkably good, Mr. Bannerworth, and, begging your pardon, for I do not wish to give any offence, my honoured sir, it would rehearse before an audience; in short, sir, it is highly dramatic."

"You shrink from the combat, do you? Now, indeed, I know you."

"Young man — young man," said Sir Francis, calmly, and shaking his head very deliberately, and the shadows passed across his pale face, "you know me not, if you think Sir Francis Varney shrinks from any man, much less one like yourself."

"You are a coward, and worse, if you refuse my challenge."

"I do not refuse it; I accept it," said Varney, calmly, and in a dignified manner; and then, with a sneer, he added,— "You are well acquainted with the mode in which gentlemen generally manage these matters, Mr. Bannerworth, and perhaps I am somewhat confined in my knowledge in the ways of the world, because you are your own principal and second. In all my experience, I never met with a similar case."

"The circumstances under which it is given are as unexampled, and will excuse the mode of the challenge," said Henry, with much warmth.

"Singular coincidence — the challenge and mode of it is most singular! They are well matched in that respect. Singular, did I say? The more I think of it, Mr. Bannerworth, the more I am inclined to think this positively odd.”

“Early to-morrow, Sir Francis, you shall hear from me.”

“In that case, you will not arrange preliminaries now? Well, well; it is very unusual for the principals themselves to do so; and yet, excuse my freedom, I presumed, as you had so far deserted the beaten track, that I had no idea how far you might be disposed to lead the same route.”

“I have said all I intended to say, Sir Francis Varney; we shall see each other again.”

“I may not detain you, I presume, to taste aught in the way of refreshment?”

Henry made no reply, but turned towards the door, without even making an attempt to return the grave and formal bow that Sir Francis Varney made as be saw him about to quit the apartment; for Henry saw that his pale features were lighted up with a sarcastic smile, most disagreeable to look upon as well as irritating to Henry Bannerworth.

He now quitted Sir Francis Varney’s abode, being let out by a servant who had been rung for for that purpose by his master.

Henry walked homeward, satisfied that he had now done all that he could under the circumstances.

“I will send Chillingworth to him in the morning, and then I shall see what all this will end in. He must meet me, and then Charles Holland, if not discovered, shall be, at least, revenged.”

There was another person in Bannerworth Hall who had formed a similar resolution. That person was a very different sort of person to Henry Bannerworth, though quite as estimable in his way.

This was no other than the old admiral. It was singular that two such very different persons should deem the same steps necessary, and both keep the secret from each other; but so it was, and, after some internal swearing, he determined upon challenging Varney in person.

"I'd send Jack Pringle, but the swab would settle the matter as shortly as if a youngster was making an entry in a log, and heard the boatswain's whistle summoning the hands to a mess, and feared he would lose his grog.

"D — n my quarters! but Sir Francis Varney, as he styles himself, sha'n't make any way against old Admiral Bell. He's as tough as a hawser, and just the sort of blade for a vampyre to come athwart. I'll pitch him end-long, and make a plank of him afore long. Cus my windpipe! what a long, lanky swab he is, with teeth fit to unpick a splice; but let me alone, I'll see if I can't make a hull of his carcass, vampyre or no vampyre.

"My nevy, Charles Holland, can't be allowed to cut away without nobody's leave or licence. No, no; I'll not stand that anyhow. 'Never desert a messmate in the time of need,' is the first maxim of a seaman, and I ain't the one as 'll do so."

Thus self-communing, the old admiral marched along until he came to Sir Francis Varney's house, at the gate of which he gave the bell what he called a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull altogether, that set it ringing with a fury, the like of which had never certainly been heard by the household.

A minute or two scarcely elapsed before the domestics hurried to answer so urgent a summons; and when the gate was opened, the servant who answered it inquired his business.

"What's that to you, snob? Is your master, Sir Francis Varney, in? because, if he be, let him know old Admiral Bell wants to speak to him. D'ye hear?"

“Yes, sir,” replied the servant, who had paused a few moments to examine the individual who gave this odd kind of address.

In another minute word was brought to him that Sir Francis Varney would be very happy to see Admiral Bell.

“Ay, ay,” he muttered; “just as the devil likes to meet with holy water, or as I like any water save salt water.”

He was speedily introduced to Sir Francis Varney, who was seated in the same posture as he had been left by Henry Bannerworth not many minutes before.

“Admiral Bell,” said Sir Francis, rising, and bowing to that individual in the most polite, calm, and dignified manner imaginable, “permit me to express the honour I feel at this unexpected visit.”

“None of your gammon.”

“Will you be seated. Allow me to offer you such refreshments as this poor house affords.”

“D — n all this! You know, Sir Francis, I don’t want none o’ this palaver. It’s for all the world like a Frenchman, when you are going to give him a broadside; he makes grimaces, throws dust in your eyes, and tries to stab you in the back. Oh, no! none of that for me.”

“I should say not, Admiral Bell. I should not like it myself, and I dare say you are a man of too much experience not to perceive when you are or are not imposed upon.”

“Well, what is that to you? D — n me, I didn’t come here to talk to you about myself.”

“Then may I presume upon your courtesy so far as to beg that you will enlighten me upon the object of your visit!”

“Yes; in pretty quick time. Just tell me where you have stowed away my nephew, Charles Holland?”

“Really, I—”

“Hold your slack, will you, and hear me out; if he’s living, let him out, and I’ll say no more about it; that’s liberal, you know; it ain’t terms everybody would offer you.”

“I must, in truth, admit they are not; and, moreover, they quite surprise even me, and I have learned not to be surprised at almost anything.”

“Well, will you give him up alive? but, hark ye, you mustn’t have made very queer fish of him, do ye see?”

“I hear you,” said Sir Francis, with a bland smile, passing one hand gently over the other, and showing his front teeth in a peculiar manner; “but I really cannot comprehend all this; but I may say, generally, that Mr. Holland is no acquaintance of mine, and I have no sort of knowledge where he may be.”

“That won’t do for me,” said the admiral, positively, shaking his head.

“I am particularly sorry, Admiral Bell, that it will not, seeing that I have nothing else to say.”

“I see how it is; you’ve put him out of the way, and I’m d —— d if you shan’t bring him to life, whole and sound, or I’ll know the reason why.”

“With that I have already furnished you, Admiral Bell,” quietly rejoined Varney; “anything more on that head is out of my power, though my willingness to oblige a person of such consideration as yourself, is very great; but, permit me to add, this is a very strange and odd communication from one gentleman to another. You have lost a relative, who has, very probably, taken some offence, or some notion into his head, of which nobody but himself knows anything, and you come to one yet more unlikely to know anything of him, than even yourself.

“Gammon again, now, Sir Francis Varney, or Blarney.”

“Varney, if you please, Admiral Bell; I was christened Varney.”

“Christened, eh?”

“Yes, christened — were you not christened? If not, I dare say you understand the ceremony well enough.”

“I should think I did; but, as for christening, a—”

“Go on, sir.”

“A vampyre! why I should as soon think of reading the burial service of a pig.”

“Very possible; but what has all this to do with your visit to me?”

“This much, you lubber. Now, d — n my carcass from head to stern, if I don’t call you out.”

“Well, Admiral Bell,” slid Varney, mildly, “in that case, I suppose I must come out; but why do you insist that I have any knowledge of your nephew, Mr. Charles Holland?”

“You were to have fought a duel with him, and now he’s gone.”

“I am here,” said Varney.

“Ay,” said the admiral, “that’s as plain as a purser’s shirt upon a handspike; but that’s the very reason why my nevey ain’t here, and that’s all about it.”

“And that’s marvellous little, so far as the sense is concerned,” said Varney, without the movement of a muscle.

“It is said that people of your class don’t like fighting mortal men; now you have disposed of him, lest he should dispose of you.”

“That is explicit, but it is to no purpose, since the gentleman in question hasn’t placed himself at my disposal.”

“Then, d —— e, I will; fish, flesh, or fowl, I don’t care; all’s one to Admiral Bell. Come fair or fowl, I’m a tar for all men; a seaman ever ready to face a foe, so here goes, you lubberly moon manufactured calf."

"I hear, admiral, but it is scarcely civil, to say the least of it; however, as you are somewhat eccentric, and do not, I dare say, mean all your words imply, I am quite willing to make every allowance."

"I don't want any allowance; d — n you and your allowance, too; nothing but allowance of grog, and a pretty good allowance, too, will do for me, and tell you, Sir Francis Varney," said the admiral, with much wrath, "that you are a d —— d lubberly hound, and I'll fight you; yes, I'm ready to hammer away, or with anything from a pop-gun to a ship's gun; you don't come over me with your gammon, I tell you. You've murdered Charles Holland because you couldn't face him — that's the truth of it."

"With the other part of your speech, Admiral Bell, allow me to say, you have mixed up a serious accusation — one I cannot permit to pass lightly."

"Will you or not fight?"

"Oh, yes; I shall be happy to serve you any way that I can. I hope this will be an answer to your accusation, also."

"That's settled, then."

"Why, I am not captious, Admiral Bell, but it is not generally usual for the principals to settle the preliminaries themselves; doubtless you, in your career of fame and glory, know something of the manner in which gentlemen demean themselves on these occasions."

"Oh, d — n you! Yes, I'll send some one to do all this. Yes, yes, Jack Pringle will be the man, though Jack ain't a holiday, shore-going, smooth-spoken swab, but as good a seaman as ever trod deck or handled a boarding-pike."

"Any friend of yours," said Varney, blandly, "will be received and treated as such upon an errand of such consequence; and now our conference has, I presume, concluded."

"Yes, yes, I've done — d —— e, no — yes — no. I will keel-haul you but I'll know something of my neavy, Charles Holland."

"Good day, Admiral Bell." As Varney spoke, he placed his hand upon the bell which he had near him, to summon an attendant to conduct the admiral out. The latter, who had said a vast deal more than he ever intended, left the room in a great rage, protesting to himself that he would amply avenge his nephew, Charles Holland.

He proceeded homeward, considerably vexed and annoyed that he had been treated with so much calmness, and all knowledge of his nephew denied.

When he got back, he quarrelled heartily with Jack Pringle — made it up — drank grog — quarrelled — made it up, and finished with grog again — until he went to bed swearing he should like to fire a broadside at the whole of the French army, and annihilate it at once.

With this wish, he fell asleep.

Early next morning, Henry Bannerworth sought Mr. Chillingworth, and having found him, he said in a serious tone, —

"Mr. Chillingworth, I have rather a serious favour to ask you, and one which you may hesitate in granting."

"It must be very serious indeed," said Mr. Chillingworth, "that I should hesitate to grant it to you; but pray inform me what it is that you deem so serious?"

"Sir Francis Varney and I must have a meeting," said Henry.

"Have you really determined upon such a course?" said Mr. Chillingworth; "you know the character of your adversary?"

"That is all settled, — I have given a challenge, and he has accepted it; so all other considerations verge themselves into one — and that is the when, where, and how."

"I see," said Mr. Chillingworth. "Well, since it cannot be helped on your part, I will do what is requisite for you — do you wish anything to be done or insisted on in particular in this affair."

"Nothing with regard to Sir Francis Varney that I may not leave to your discretion. I feel convinced that he is the assassin of Charles Holland, whom he feared to fight in duel."

"Then there remains but little else to do, but to arrange preliminaries, I believe. Are you prepared on every other point?"

"I am — you will see that I am the challenger, and that he must now fight. What accident may turn up to save him, I fear not, but sure I am, that he will endeavour to take every advantage that may arise, and so escape the encounter."

"And what do you imagine he will do now he has accepted your challenge?" said Mr. Chillingworth; "one would imagine he could not very well escape."

"No — but he accepted the challenge which Charles Holland sent him — a duel was inevitable, and it seems to me to be a necessary consequence that he disappeared from amongst us, for Mr. Holland would never have shrunk from the encounter."

"There can be no sort of suspicion about that," remarked Chillingworth; "but allow me to advise you that you take care of yourself, and keep a watchful eye upon every one — do not be seen out alone."

"I fear not."

"Nay, the gentleman who has disappeared was, I am sure, fearless enough; but yet that has not saved him. I would not advise you to be fearful, only watchful; you have now an event awaiting upon you, which it is well you should go through with, unless circumstances should so turn out, that it is needless; therefore I say, when you have the suspicions you do entertain of this man's conduct, beware, be cautious, and vigilant."

"I will do so — in the mean time, I trust myself confidently in your hands — you know all that is necessary."

"This affair is quite a secret from all of the family?"

"Most certainly so, and will remain so — I shall be at the Hall."

"And there I will see you — but be careful not to be drawn into any adventure of any kind — it is best to be on the safe side under all circumstances."

"I will be especially careful, be assured, but farewell; see Sir Francis Varney as early as you can, and let the meeting be as early as you can, and thus diminish the chance of accident."

"That I will attend to. Farewell for the present."

Mr. Chillingworth immediately set about the conducting of the affair thus confided to him; and that no time might be lost, he determined to set out at once for Sir Francis Varney's residence.

"Things with regard to this family seem to have gone on wild of late," thought Mr. Chillingworth; "this may bring affairs to a conclusion, though I had much rather they had come to some other. My life for it, there is a juggle or a mystery somewhere; I will do this, and then we shall see what will come of it; if this Sir Francis Varney meets him — and at this moment I can see no reason why he should not do so — it will tend much to deprive him of the mystery about him; but if, on the other hand, he refuse — but then that's all improbable, because he has agreed to do so. I fear, however, that such a man as Varney is a dreadful enemy to encounter — he is cool and unruffled — and that gives him all the advantage in such affairs; but Henry's nerves are not bad, though shaken by these untowards events; but time will show — I would it were all over."

With these thoughts and feelings strangely intermixed, Mr. Chillingworth set forward for Sir Francis Varney's house.

Admiral Bell slept soundly enough though, towards morning, he fell into a strange dream, and thought he was yard arm and yard arm with a strange fish — something of the mermaid species.

"Well," exclaimed the admiral, after a customary benediction of his eyes and limbs, "what's to come next? may I be spliced to a shark if I understand what this is all about. I had some grog last night, but then grog, d'y'see, is — is — a seaman's native element, as the newspapers say, though I never read 'em now, it's such a plague."

He lay quiet for a short time, considering in his own mind what was best to he done, and what was the proper course to pursue, and why he should dream.

"Hilloa, hilloa, hil — loa! Jack a-hoy! a-hoy!" shouted the admiral, as a sudden recollection of his challenge came across his memory; "Jack Pringle a-hoy? d — n you, where are you? — you're never at hand when you are wanted. Oh, you lubber, — a-hoy!"

"A-hoy!" shouted a voice, as the door opened, and Jack thrust his head in; "what cheer, messmate? what ship is this?"

"Oh, you lubberly—"

The door was shut in a minute, and Jack Pringle disappeared.

"Hilloa, Jack Pringle, you don't mean to say you'll desert your colours, do you, you dumb dog?"

"Who says I'll desert the ship as she's sea-worthy!"

"Then why do you go away?"

"Because I won't be called lubberly. I'm as good a man as ever swabbed a deck, and don't care who says to the contrary. I'll stick to the ship as long as she's seaworthy," said Jack.

"Well, come here, and just listen to the log, and be d —— d to you."

"What's the orders now, admiral?" said Jack, "though, as we are paid off—"

"There, take that, will you?" said Admiral Bell, as he flung a pillow at Jack, being the only thing in the shape of a missile within reach.

Jack ducked, and the pillow produced a clatter in the washhand-stand among the crockery, as Jack said, —

"There's a mutiny in the ship, and hark how the cargo clatters; will you have it back again?"

"Come, will you? I've been dreaming, Jack."

"Dreaming! what's that?"

"Thinking of something when you are asleep, you swab."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Jack; "never did such a thing in my life — ha, ha, ha! what's the matter now?"

"I'll tell you what's the matter. Jack Pringle, you are becoming mutinous, and I won't have it; if you don't hold your jaw and draw in your slacks, I'll have another second."

"Another second! what's in the wind, now?" said Jack. "Is this the dream?"

"If ever I dream when I'm alongside a strange craft, then it is a dream; but old Admiral Bell ain't the man to sleep when there's any work to be done."

"That's uncommon true," said Jack, turning a quid.

"Well, then, I'm going to fight."

"Fight!" exclaimed Jack. "Avast, there, I don't see where's the enemy — none o' that gammon; Jack Pringle can fight, too, and will lay alongside his admiral, but he don't see the enemy anywhere."

"You don't understand these things, so I'll tell you. I have had a bit of talk with Sir Francis Varney, and I am going to fight him."

"What the *wamphigher*?" remarked Jack, parenthetically.

"Yes."

"Well, then," resumed Jack, "then we shall see another blaze, at least afore we die; but he's an odd fish — one of Davy Jones's sort."

"I don't care about that; he may be anything he likes; but Admiral Bell ain't a-going to have his nephew burned and eaten, and sucked like I don't know what, by a vampyre, or by any other confounded land-shark."

"In course," said Jack, "we ain't a-going to put up with nothing of that sort, and if so be as how he has put him out of the way, why it's our duty to send him after him, and square the board."

"That's the thing, Jack; now you know you must go to Sir Francis Varney and tell him you come from me."

"I don't care if I goes on my own account," said Jack.

"That won't do; I've challenged him and I must fight him."

"In course you will," returned Jack, "and, if he blows you away, why I'll take your place, and have a blaze myself."

The admiral gave a look at Jack of great admiration, and then said, —

"You are a d —— d good seaman, Jack, but he's a knight, and might say no to that, but do you go to him, and tell him that you come from me to settle the when and the where this duel is to be fought."

"Single fight?" said Jack.

"Yes; consent to any thing that is fair," said the admiral, "but let it be as soon as you can. Now, do you understand what I have said?"

"Yes, to be sure; I ain't lived all these years without knowing your lingo."

"Then go at once; and don't let the honour of Admiral Bell and old England suffer, Jack. I'm his man, you know, at any price."

"Never fear," said Jack; "you shall fight him, at any rate. I'll go and see he don't back out, the warmint."

"Then go along, Jack; and mind don't you go blazing away like a fire ship, and letting everybody know what's going on, or it'll be stopped."

"I'll not spoil sport," said Jack, as he left the room, to go at once to Sir Francis Varney, charged with the conducting of the important cartel of the admiral. Jack made the best of his way with becoming gravity and expedition until he reached the gate of the admiral's enemy.

Jack rang loudly at the gate; there seemed, if one might judge by his countenance, a something on his mind, that Jack was almost another man. The gate was opened by the servant, who inquired what he wanted there.

"The wamphigher."

"Who?"

"The wamphigher."

The servant frowned, and was about to say something uncivil to Jack, who winked at him very hard, and then said, —

"Oh, may be you don't know him, or won't know him by that name: I wants to see Sir Francis Varney."

"He's at home," said the servant; "who are you?"

"Show me up, then. I'm Jack Pringle, and I'm come from Admiral

Bell; I’m the Admiral’s friend, you see, so none of your black looks.”

The servant seemed amazed, as well as rather daunted, at Jack’s address; he showed him, however, into the hall, where Mr. Chillingworth had just that moment arrived, and was waiting for an interview with Varney.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MARCHDALE'S OFFER. — THE CONSULTATION AT BANNERWORTH HALL. — THE MORNING OF THE DUEL.

Mr. Chillingworth was much annoyed to see Jack Pringle in the hall, and Jack was somewhat surprised at seeing Mr. Chillingworth there at that time in the rooming; they had but little time to indulge in their mutual astonishment, for a servant came to announce that Sir Francis Varney would see them both.

Without saying anything to the servant or each other, they ascended the staircase, and were shown into the apartment where Sir Francis Varney received them.

"Gentlemen," said Sir Francis, in his usual bland tone, "you are welcome."

"Sir Francis," said Mr. Chillingworth, "I have come upon matters of some importance; may I crave a separate audience?"

"And I too," said Jack Pringle; "I come as the friend of Admiral Bell, I want a private audience; but, stay, I don't care a rope's end who knows who I am, or what I come about; say you are ready to name time and place, and I'm as dumb as a figure-head; that is saying something, at all events; and now I'm done."

"Why, gentlemen," said Sir Francis, with a quiet smile, "as you have both come upon the same errand, and as there may arise a controversy upon the point of precedence, you had better be both present, as I must arrange this matter myself upon due inquiry."

"I do not exactly understand this," said Mr. Chillingworth; "do you, Mr. Pringle? perhaps you can enlighten me?"

"It," said Jack, "as how you came here upon the same errand as I, and I as you, why we both come about fighting Sir Francis Varney."

"Yes," said Sir Francis; "what Mr. Pringle says, is, I believe correct to a letter. I have a challenge from both your principals, and am ready to give you both the satisfaction you desire, provided the first encounter will permit me the honour of joining in the second. You, Mr. Pringle, are aware of the chances of war?"

"I should say so," said Jack, with a wink and a nod of a familiar character. "I've seen a few of them."

"Will you proceed to make the necessary agreement between you both, gentlemen? My affection for the one equals fully the good will I bear the other, and I cannot give a preference in so delicate a matter; proceed gentlemen."

Mr. Chillingworth looked at Jack, and Jack Pringle looked at Mr. Chillingworth, and then the former said, —

"Well, the admiral means fighting, and I am come to settle the necessaries; pray let me know what are your terms, Mr. What-d'ye-call'em."

"I am agreeable to anything that is at all reasonable — pistols, I presume?"

"Sir Francis Varney," said Mr. Chillingworth, "I cannot consent to carry on this office, unless you can appoint a friend who will settle these matters with us — myself, at least."

"And I too," said Jack Pringle; "we don't want to bear down an enemy. Admiral Bell ain't the man to do that, and if he were, I'm not the man to back him in doing what isn't fair or right; but he won't do it."

"But, gentlemen, this must not be; Mr. Henry Bannerworth must not be disappointed, and Admiral Bell must not be disappointed. Moreover, I have accepted the two cartels, and I am ready and willing to fight; — one at a time, I presume?"

"Sir Francis, after what you have said, I must take upon myself, on the part of Mr. Henry Bannerworth, to decline meeting you, if you cannot name a friend with whom I can arrange this affair."

"Ah!" said Jack Pringle, "that's right enough. I recollect very well when Jack Mizeu fought Tom Foremast, they had their seconds. Admiral Bell can't do anything in the dark. No, no, d —— e! all must be above board."

"Gentlemen," said Sir Francis Varney, "you see the dilemma I am in. Your principals have both challenged me. I am ready to fight any one, or both of them, as the case may be. Distinctly understand that; because it is a notion of theirs that I will not do so, or that I shrink from them; but I am a stranger in this neighbourhood, and have no one whom I could call upon to relinquish so much, as they run the risk of doing by attending me to the field."

"Then your acquaintances are no friends, d —— e!" said Jack Pringle, spitting through his teeth into the bars of a beautifully polished grate. "I'd stick to anybody — the devil himself, leave alone a vampyre — if so be as how I had been his friends and drunk grog from the same can. They are a set of lubbers."

"I have not been here long enough to form any such friendships, Mr. Chillingworth; but can confidently rely upon your honour and that of your principal, and will freely and fairly meet him."

"But, Sir Francis, you forget the fact, in transacting, myself for Mr. Bannerworth, and this person or Admiral Bell, we do match, and have our own characters at stake; nay more, our lives and fortunes. These may be small; but they are everything to us. Allow me to say, on my own behalf, that I will not permit my principal to meet you unless you can name a second, as is usual with gentlemen on such occasions.”

“I regret, while I declare to you my entire willingness to meet you, that I cannot comply through utter inability to do so, with your request. Let this go forth to the world as I have stated it, and let it be an answer to any aspersions that may be uttered as to my unwillingness to fight.”

There was a pause of some moments. Mr. Chillingworth was resolved that, come of it what would, he would not permit Henry to fight, unless Sir Francis Varney himself should appoint a friend, and then they could meet upon equal terms.

Jack Pringle whistled, and spit, and chewed and turned his quid — hitched up his trousers, and looked wistfully from one to the other, as he said, —

“So then it’s likely to be no fight at all, Sir Francis what’s-o’-name?”

“It seems like it, Mr. Pringle,” replied Varney, with a meaning smile; “unless you can be more complaisant towards myself, and kind towards the admiral.”

“Why, not exactly that,” said Jack; “it’s a pity to stop a good play in the beginning, just because some little thing is wrong in the tackling.”

“Perhaps your skill and genius may enable us to find some medium course that we may pursue with pleasure and profit. What say you, Mr. Pringle?”

“All I know about genius, as you call it is the Flying Dutchman, or some such odd out of the way fish. But, as I said, I am not one to spoil sport, nor more is the admiral. Oh, no, we is all true men and good.”

“I believe it,” said Varney, bowing politely.

"You needn't keep your figure-head on the move; I can see you just as well. Howsoever, as I was saying, I don't like to spoil sport, and sooner than both parties should be disappointed, my principal shall become your second, Sir Francis."

"What, Admiral Bell?" exclaimed Varney, lifting his eyebrows with surprise.

"What, Charles Holland's uncle!" exclaimed Mr. Chillingworth, in accents of amazement.

"And why not?" said Jack, with great gravity. "I will pledge my word — Jack Pringle's word — that Admiral Bell shall be second to Sir Francis Varney, during his scrimmage with Mr. Henry Bannerworth. That will let the matter go on; there can be no back-out then, eh?" continued Jack Pringle, with a knowing nod at Chillingworth as he spoke.

"That will, I hope, remove your scruples, Mr. Chillingworth," said Varney, with a courteous smile.

"But will Admiral Bell do this?"

"His second says so, and has, I daresay, influence enough with him to induce that person to act in conformity with his promise."

"In course he will. Do you think he would be the man to hang back? Oh, no; he would be the last to leave Jack Pringle in the lurch — no. Depend upon it, Sir Francis, he'll be as sure to do what I say, as I have said it."

"After that assurance, I cannot doubt it," said Sir Francis Varney; "this act of kindness will, indeed, lay me under a deep and lasting obligation to Admiral Bell, which I fear I shall never be able to pay."

"You need not trouble yourself about that," said Jack Pringle; "the admiral will credit all, and you can pay off old scores when his turn comes in the field."

“I will not forget,” said Varney; “he deserves every consideration; but now, Mr. Chillingworth, I presume that we may come to some understanding respecting this meeting, which you were so kind as to do me the honour of seeking.”

“I cannot object to its taking place. I shall be most happy to meet your second in the field, and will arrange with him.”

“I imagine that, under the circumstances, that it will be barely necessary to go to that length of ceremony. Future interviews can be arranged later; name the time and place, and after that we can settle all the rest on the ground.”

“Yes,” said Jack; “it will be time enough, surely, to see the admiral when we are upon the ground. I’ll warrant the old buffer is a true brick as ever was: there’s no flinching about him.”

“I am satisfied,” said Varney.

“And I also,” said Chillingworth; “but, understand, Sir Francis, any default for seconds makes the meeting a blank.”

“I will not doubt Mr. Pringle’s honour so much as to believe it possible.”

“I’m d —— d,” said Jack, “if you ain’t a trump-card, and no mistake; it’s a great pity as you is a wamphigher.”

“The time, Mr. Chillingworth?”

“To-morrow, at seven o’clock,” replied that gentleman.

“The place, sir?”

“The best place that I can think of is a level meadow half-way between here and Bannerworth Hall; but that is your privilege, Sir Francis Varney.”

“I waive it, and am much obliged to you for the choice of the spot; it seems of the best character imaginable. I will be punctual.”

“I think we have nothing further to arrange now,” said Mr.

Chillingworth. "You will meet with Admiral Bell."

"Certainly. I believe there is nothing more to be done; this affair is very satisfactorily arranged, and much better than I anticipated."

"Good morning, Sir Francis," said Mr. Chillingworth. "Good morning."

"Adieu," said Sir Francis, with a courteous salutation. "Good day, Mr. Pringle, and commend me to the admiral, whose services will be of infinite value to me."

"Don't mention it," said Jack; "the admiral's the man as'd lend any body a helping hand in case of distress like the present; and I'll pledge my word — Jack Pringle's too, as that he'll do what's right, and give up his turn to Mr. Henry Bannerworth; cause you see he can have his turn arterwards, you know — it's only waiting awhile."

"That's all," said Sir Francis.

Jack Pringle made a sea bow and took his leave, as he followed Mr. Chillingworth, and they both left the house together, to return to Bannerworth Hall.

"Well," said Mr. Chillingworth, "I am glad that Sir Francis Varney has got over the difficulty of having no seconds; for it would not be proper or safe to meet a man without a friend for him."

"It ain't the right thing," said Jack hitching up his trousers; "but I was afeard as how he would back out, and that would be just the wrong thing for the admiral; he'd go raving mad."

They had got but very few paces from Sir Francis Varney's house, when they were joined by Marchdale.

"Ah," he said, as he came up, "I see you have been to Sir Francis Varney's, if I may judge from the direction whence you're coming, and your proximity."

"Yes, we have," said Mr. Chillingworth. "I thought you had left these parts?"

"I had intended to do so," replied Marchdale; "but second thoughts are sometimes best, you know."

"Certainly."

"I have so much friendship for the family at the hall, that notwithstanding I am compelled to be absent from the mansion itself, yet I cannot quit the neighbourhood while there are circumstances of such a character hanging about them. I will remain, and see if there be not something arising, in which I may be useful to them in some matter."

"It is very disinterested of you; you will remain here for some time, I suppose?"

"Yes, undoubtedly; unless, as I do not anticipate, I should see any occasion to quit my present quarters."

"I tell you what it is," said Jack Pringle; "if you had been here half-an-hour earlier you could have seconded the wamphigher."

"Seconded!"

"Yes, we're here to challenge."

"A double challenge?"

"Yes; but in confiding this matter to you, Mr. Marchdale, you will make no use of it to the exploding of this affair. By so doing you will seriously damage the honour of Mr. Henry Bannerworth."

"I will not, you may rely upon it; but Mr. Chillingworth, do I not see you in the character of a second?"

"You do, sir."

"To Mr. Henry?"

"The same, sir."

"Have you reflected upon the probable consequences of such an act, should any serious mischief occur?"

"What I have undertaken, Mr. Marchdale, I will go through with; the consequences I have duly considered, and yet you see me in the character of Mr. Henry Bannerworth's friend."

"I am happy to see you as such, and I do not think Henry could find a better. But this is beside the question. What induced me to make the remark was this, — had I been at the hall, you will admit that Henry Bannerworth would have chosen myself, without any disparagement to you, Mr. Chillingworth."

"Well sir, what then?"

"Why I am a single man, I can live, reside and go any where; one country will suit me as well as another. I shall suffer no loss, but as for you, you will be ruined in every particular; for if you go in the character of a second, you will not be excused; for all the penalties incurred your profession of a surgeon will not excuse you."

"I see all that, sir."

"What I propose is, that you should accompany the parties to the field, but in your own proper character of surgeon, and permit me to take that of second to Mr. Bannerworth."

"This cannot be done, unless by Mr. Henry Bannerworth's consent," said Mr. Chillingworth.

"Then I will accompany you to Bannerworth Hall, and see Mr. Henry, whom I will request to permit me to do what I have mentioned to you."

Mr. Chillingworth could not but admit the reasonableness of this proposal, and it was agreed they should return to Bannerworth Hall in company.

Here they arrived in a very short time after, and entered together.

"And now," said Mr. Chillingworth, "I will go and bring our two principals, who will be as much astonished to find themselves engaged in the same quarrel, as I was to find myself sent on a similar errand to Sir Francis with our friend Mr. John Pringle."

"Oh, not John — Jack Pringle, you mean," said that individual.

Chillingworth now went in search of Henry, and sent him to the apartment where Mr. Marchdale was with Jack Pringle, and then he found the admiral waiting the return of Jack with impatience.

"Admiral!" he said, "I perceive you are unwell this morning."

"Unwell be d —— d," said the admiral, starting up with surprise. "Who ever heard that old admiral Bell looked ill just afore he was going into action? I say it's a scandalous lie."

"Admiral, admiral, I didn't say you were ill; only you looked ill — a — a little nervous, or so. Rather pale, eh? Is it not so?"

"Confound you, do you think I want to be physicked? I tell you, I have not a little but a great inclination to give you a good keelhauling. I don't want a doctor just yet."

"But it may not be so long, you know, admiral; but there is Jack Pringle a-waiting you below. Will you go to him? There is a particular reason; he has something to communicate from Sir Francis Varney, I believe."

The admiral gave a look of some amazement at Mr. Chillingworth, and then he said, muttering to himself, —

"If Jack Pringle should have betrayed me — but, no; he could not do that, he is too true. I'm sure of Jack; and how did that son of a gallipot hint about the odd fish I sent Jack to?"

Filled with a dubious kind of belief which he had about something he had heard of Jack Pringle, he entered the room, where he met Marchdale, Jack Pringle, and Henry Bannerworth. Immediately afterwards, Mr. Chillingworth entered the apartment.

"I have," said he, "been to Sir Francis Varney, and there had an interview with him, and with Mr. Pringle; when I found we were both intent upon the same object, namely, an encounter with the knight by our principals."

"Eh?" said the admiral.

"What!" exclaimed Henry; "had he challenged you, admiral?"

"Challenged me!" exclaimed Admiral Bell, with a round oath. "I — however — since it comes to this, I must admit I challenged him."

"That's what I did," said Henry Bannerworth, after a moment's thought; "and I perceive we have both fallen into the same line of conduct."

"That is the fact," said Mr. Chillingworth. "Both Mr. Pringle and I went there to settle the preliminaries, and we found an insurmountable bar to any meeting taking place at all."

"He wouldn't fight, then?" exclaimed Henry. "I see it all now."

"Not fight!" said Admiral Bell, with a sort of melancholy disappointment. "D — n the cowardly rascal! Tell me, Jack Pringle, what did the long horse-marine-looking slab say to it? He told me he would fight. Why he ought to be made to stand sentry over the wind."

"You challenged him in person, too, I suppose?" said Henry.

"Yes, confound him! I went there last night."

"And I too."

"It seems to me," said Marchdale, "that this affair has been not indiscretely conducted; but somewhat unusually and strangely, to say the least of it."

"You see," said Chillingworth, "Sir Francis was willing to fight both Henry and the admiral, as he told us."

"Yes," said Jack; "he told us he would fight us both, if so be as his light was not doused in the first brush."

"That was all that was wanted," said the admiral.

"We could expect no more."

"But then he desired to meet you without any second; but, of course, I would not accede to this proposal. The responsibility was too great and too unequally borne by the parties engaged in the rencontre."

"Decidedly," said Henry; "but it is unfortunate — very unfortunate."

"Very," said the admiral— "very. What a rascally thing it is there ain't another rogue in the country to keep him in countenance."

"I thought it was a pity to spoil sport," said Jack Pringle. "It was a pity a good intention should be spoiled, and I promised the wamphigher that if as how he would fight, you should second him, and you'd meet him to do so."

"Eh! who? I!" exclaimed the admiral in some perplexity.

"Yes; that is the truth," said Mr. Chillingworth. "Mr Pringle said you would do so, and he then and there pledged his word that you should meet him on the ground and second him."

"Yes," said Jack "You must do it. I knew you would not spoil sport, and that there had better be a fight than no fight. I believe you'd sooner see a scrimmage than none, and so it's all arranged."

"Very well," said the admiral, "I only wish Mr. Henry Bannerworth had been his second; I think I was entitled to the first meeting."

"No," said Jack, "you warn't, for Mr. Chillingworth was there first; first come first served, you know."

"Well, well, I mustn't grumble at another man's luck; mine'll come in turn; but it had better be so than a disappointment altogether; I'll be second to this Sir Francis Varney; he shall have fair play, as

I’m an admiral; but, d —— e he shall fight — yes, yes, he shall fight.”

“And to this conclusion I would come,” said Henry, “I wish him to fight; now I will take care that he shall not have any opportunity of putting me on one side quietly.”

“There is one thing,” observed Marchdale, “that I wished to propose. After what has passed, I should not have returned, had I not some presentiment that something was going forward in which I could be useful to my friend.”

“Oh!” said the admiral, with a huge twist of his countenance.

“What I was about to say was this, — Mr. Chillingworth has much to lose as he is situated, and I nothing as I am placed. I am chained down to no spot of earth. I am above following a profession — my means, I mean, place me above the necessity. Now, Henry, allow me to be your second in this affair; allow Mr. Chillingworth to attend in his professional capacity; he may be of service — of great service to one of the principals; whereas, if he go in any other capacity, he will inevitably have his own safety to consult.”

“That is most unquestionably true,” said Henry, “and, to my mind, the best plan that can be proposed. What say you, Admiral Bell, will you act with Mr. Marchdale in this affair?”

“Oh, I! — Yes — certainly — I don’t care. Mr. Marchdale is Mr. Marchdale, I believe, and that’s all I care about. If we quarrel to-day, and have anything to do to-morrow, in course, to-morrow I can put off my quarrel for next day; it will keep, — that’s all I have to say at present.”

“Then this is a final arrangement?” said Mr. Chillingworth.

“It is.”

“But, Mr. Bannerworth, in resigning my character of second to

Mr. Marchdale, I only do so because it appears and seems to be the opinion of all present that I can be much better employed in another capacity."

"Certainly, Mr. Chillingworth; and I cannot but feel that I am under the same obligations to you for the readiness and zeal with which you have acted."

"I have done what I have done," said Chillingworth, "because I believed it was my duty to do so."

"Mr. Chillingworth has undoubtedly acted most friendly and efficiently in this affair," said Marchdale; "and he does not relinquish the part for the purpose of escaping a friendly deed, but to perform one in which he may act in a capacity that no one else can."

"That is true," said the admiral.

"And now," said Chillingworth, "you are to meet to-morrow morning in the meadow at the bottom of the valley, half way between here and Sir Francis Varney's house, at seven o'clock in the morning."

More conversation passed among them, and it was agreed that they should meet early the next morning, and that, of course, the affair should be kept a secret.

Marchdale for that night should remain in the house, and the admiral should appear as if little or nothing was the matter; and he and Jack Pringle retired, to talk over in private all the arrangements.

Henry Bannerworth and Marchdale also retired, and Mr. Chillingworth, after a time, retired, promising to be with them in time for the meeting next morning.

Much of that day was spent by Henry Bannerworth in his own apartment, in writing documents and letters of one kind and another; but at night he had not finished, for he had been compelled to be about, and in Flora’s presence, to prevent anything from being suspected.

Marchdale was much with him, and in secret examined the arms, ammunition, and bullets, and saw all was right for the next morning; and when he had done, he said, —

“Now, Henry, you must permit me to insist that you take some hours’ repose, else you will scarcely be as you ought to be.”

“Very good,” said Henry. “I have just finished, and can take your advice.”

After many thoughts and reflections, Henry Bannerworth fell into a deep sleep, and slept several hours in calmness and quietude, and at an early hour he awoke, and saw Marchdale sitting by him.

“Is it time, Marchdale? I have not overslept myself, have I?”

“No; time enough — time enough,” said Marchdale. “I should have let you sleep longer, but I should have awakened you in good time.”

It was now the grey light of morning, and Henry arose and began to prepare for the encounter. Marchdale stole to Admiral Bell’s chamber, but he and Jack Pringle were ready.

Few words were spoken, and those few were in a whisper, and the whole party left the Hall in as noiseless a manner as possible. It was a mild morning, and yet it was cold at that time of the morning, just as day is beginning to dawn in the east. There was, however, ample time to reach the rendezvous.

It was a curious party that which was now proceeding towards the spot appointed for the duel, the result of which might have so important an effect on the interests of those who were to be engaged in it.

It would be difficult for us to analyse the different and conflicting emotions that filled the breasts of the various individuals composing that party — the hopes and fears — the doubts and surmises that were given utterance to; though we are compelled to acknowledge that though to Henry, the character of the man he was going to meet in mortal fight was of a most ambiguous and undefined nature, and though no one could imagine the means he might be endowed with for protection against the arms of man — Henry, as we said, strode firmly forward with unflinching resolution. His heart was set on recovering the happiness of his sister, and he would not falter.

So far, then, we may consider that at length proceedings of a hostile character were so far clearly and fairly arranged between Henry Bannerworth and that most mysterious being who certainly, from some cause or another, had betrayed no inclination to meet an opponent in that manner which is sanctioned, bad as it is, by the usages of society.

But whether his motive was one of cowardice or mercy, remained yet to be seen. It might be that he feared himself receiving some mortal injury, which would at once put a stop to that preternatural career of existence which he affected to shudder at, and yet evidently took considerable pains to prolong.

Upon the other hand, it is just possible that some consciousness of invulnerability on his own part, or of great power to injure his antagonist, might be the cause why he had held back so long from fighting the duel, and placed so many obstacles in the way of the usual necessary arrangements incidental to such occasions.

Now, however, there would seem to be no possible means of escape. Sir Francis Varney must fight or fly, for he was surrounded by too many opponents.

To be sure he might have appealed to the civil authorities to protect him, and to sanction him in his refusal to commit what undoubtedly is a legal offence; but then there cannot be a question that the whole of the circumstances would come out, and meet the public eye — the result of which would be, his acquisition of a reputation as unenviable as it would be universal.

It had so happened, that the peculiar position of the Bannerworth family kept their acquaintance within extremely narrow limits, and greatly indisposed them to set themselves up as marks for peculiar observation.

Once holding, as they had, a proud position in the county, and being looked upon quite as magnates of the land, they did not now court the prying eye of curiosity to look upon their poverty; but rather with a gloomy melancholy they lived apart, and repelled the advances of society by a cold reserve, which few could break through.

Had this family suffered in any noble cause, or had the misfortunes which had come over them, and robbed their ancestral house of its lustre, been an unavoidable dispensation of providence, they would have borne the hard position with a different aspect; but it must be remembered, that to the faults, the vices, and the criminality of some of their race, was to be attributed their present depressed state.

It has been seen during the progress of our tale, that its action has been tolerably confined to Bannerworth Hall, its adjacent meadows, and the seat of Sir Francis Varney; the only person at any distance, knowing anything of the circumstances, or feeling any interest in them, being Mr. Chillingworth, the surgeon, who, from personal feeling, as well as from professional habit, was not likely to make a family's affairs a subject of gossip.

A change, however, was at hand — a change of a most startling and alarming character to Varney — one which he might expect, yet not be well prepared for.

This period of serenity was to pass away, and he was to become most alarmingly popular. We will not, however, anticipate, but proceed at once to detail as briefly as may be the hostile meeting.

It would appear that Varney, now that he had once consented to the definitive arrangements of a duel, shrunk not in any way from carrying them out, nor in the slightest attempted to retard arrangements which might be fatal to himself.

The early morning was one of those cloudy ones so frequently occurring in our fickle climate, when the cleverest weather prophet would find it difficult to predict what the next hour might produce.

There was a kind of dim gloominess over all objects; and as there were no bright lights, there were no deep shadows — the consequence of which was a sureness of effect over the landscape, that robbed it of many of its usual beauties.

Such was the state of things when Marchdale accompanied Henry and Admiral Bell from Bannerworth Hall across the garden in the direction of the hilly wood, close to which was the spot intended for the scene of encounter.

Jack Pringle came on at a lazy pace behind with his hands in his pockets, and looking as unconcerned as if he had just come out for a morning’s stroll, and scarcely knew whether he saw what was going on or not.

The curious contort on into which he twisted his countenance, and the different odd-looking lumps that appeared in it from time to time, may be accounted for by a quid of unusual size, which he seemed to be masticating with a relish quite horrifying to one unused to so barbarous a luxury.

The admiral had strictly enjoined him not to interfere on pain of being considered a lubber and no seaman for the remainder of his existence — threatened penalties which, of course, had their own weight with Jack, and accordingly he came just, to see the row in as quiet a way as possible, perhaps not without a hope, that something might turn up in the shape of a *causus belli*, that might justify him in adopting a threatening attitude towards somebody.

"Now, Master Henry," said the admiral, "none of your palaver to me as we go along, recollect I don't belong to your party, you know. I've stood friend to two or three fellows in my time; but if anybody had said to me, 'Admiral Bell, the next time you go out on a quiet little shooting party, it will be as second to a vampyre,' I'd have said 'you're a liar' Howsomever, d — me, here you goes, and what I mean to say is this, Mr Henry, that I'd second even a Frenchman rather than he shouldn't fight when he's asked"

"That's liberal of you," said Henry, "at all event"

"I believe you it is," said the admiral, "so mind if you don't hit him, I'm not a-going to tell you how — all you've got to do, is to fire low; but that's no business of mine. Shiver my timbers, I oughtn't to tell you, but d — n you, hit him if you can."

"Admiral," said Henry, "I can hardly think you are even preserving a neutrality in the matter, putting aside my own partisanship as regards your own man."

"Oh, hang him. I'm not going to let him creep out of the thing on such a shabby pretence. I can tell you. I think I ought to have gone to his house this morning; only, as I said I never would cross his threshold again, I won't."

"I wonder if he'll come," said Mr Marchdale to Henry. "After all, you know he may take to flight, and shun an encounter which, it is evident, he has entered into but tardily."

"I hope not," said Henry, "and yet I must own that your supposition has several times crossed my mind. If, however, he do not meet me, he never can appear at all in the country, and we should, at least, be rid of him, and all his troublesome importunities concerning the Hall. I would not allow that man, on any account, to cross the threshold of my house, as its tenant or its owner."

"Why, it ain't usual," said the admiral, "to let ones house to two people at once, unless you seem quite to forget that I've taken yours. I may as well remind you of it"

"Hurra" said Jack Pringle, at this moment.

"What's the matter with you? Who told you to hurra?"

"Enemy in the offing," said Jack, "three or four pints to the sou-west."

"So he is, by Jove! dodging about among the trees. Come, now, this vampyre's a decenter fellow than I thought him. He means, after all, to let us have a pop at him"

They had now reached so close to the spot, that Sir Francis Varney, who, to all appearance, had been waiting, emerged from among the trees, rolled up in his dismal-looking cloak, and, if possible, looking longer and thinner than ever he had looked before.

His face wore a singular cadaverous looking aspect. His very lips were white and there was a curious, pinkish-looking circle round each of his eyes, that imparted to his whole countenance a most uninviting appearance. He turned his eyes from one to the other of those who were advancing towards him, until he saw the admiral, upon which he gave such a grim and horrible smile, that the old man exclaimed, —

"I say, Jack, you lubber, there's a face for a figure head."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Did you ever see such a d —— d grin as that in your life, in any latitude?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"You did you swab."

"I should think so."

"It's a lie, and you know it."

"Very good," said Jack, "don't you recollect when that ere iron bullet walked over your head, leaving a nice little nick, all the way off Bergen-ap-Zoom, that was the time — blessed if you didn't give just such a grin as that."

"I didn't, you rascal."

"And I say you did."

"Mutiny, by God!"

"Go to blazes!"

How far this contention might nave gone, having now reached its culminating point, had the admiral and Jack been alone, it is hard to say; but as it was, Henry and Marchdale interfered, and so the quarrel was patched up for the moment, in order to give place to more important affairs.

Varney seemed to think, that after the smiling welcome he had given to his second, he had done quite enough; for there he stood, tall, and gaunt, and motionless, if we may except an occasional singular movement of the mouth, and a clap together of his teeth, at times, which was enough to make anybody jump to hear.

"For Heaven's sake," said Marchdale, "do not let us trifle at such a moment as this. Mr. Pringle, you really had no business here."

"Mr. who?" said Jack.

“Pringle, I believe, is your name?” returned Marchdale.

“It were; but blowed if ever I was called mister before.”

The admiral walked up to Sir Francis Varney, and gave him a nod that looked much more like one of defiance than of salutation, to which the vampyre replied by a low, courtly bow.

“Oh, bother!” muttered the old admiral. “If I was to double up my backbone like that, I should never get it down straight again. Well, all’s right; you’ve come; that’s all you could do, I suppose.”

“I am here,” said Varney, “and therefore it becomes a work of supererogation to remark that I’ve come.”

“Oh! does it? I never bolted a dictionary, and, therefore, I don’t know exactly what you mean.”

“Step aside with me a moment, Admiral Bell, and I will tell you what you are to do with me after I am shot, if such should be my fate.”

“Do with you! D —— d if I’ll do anything with you.”

“I don’t expect you will regret me; you will eat.”

“Eat!”

“Yes, and drink as usual, no doubt, notwithstanding being witness to the decease of a fellow-creature.”

“Belay there; don’t call yourself a fellow-creature of mine; I ain’t a vampyre.”

“But there’s no knowing what you may be; and now listen to my instructions; for as you’re my second, you cannot very well refuse to me a few friendly offices. Rain is falling. Step beneath this ancient tree, and I will talk to you.”

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE STORM AND THE FIGHT.-THE ADMIRAL'S REPUDIATION OF HIS PRINCIPAL.

"Well," said the admiral, when they were fairly under the tree, upon the leaves of which the pattering rain might be heard falling: "well — what is it?"

"If your young friend, Mr. Bannerworth, should chance to send a pistol-bullet through any portion of my anatomy, prejudicial to the prolongation of my existence, you will be so good as not to interfere with anything I may have about me, or to make any disturbance whatever."

"You may depend I sha'n't."

"Just take the matter perfectly easy — as a thing of course."

"Oh! I mean d —— d easy."

"Ha! what a delightful thing is friendship! There is a little knoll or mound of earth midway between here and the Hall. Do you happen to know it? There is one solitary tree glowing near its summit — an oriental looking tree, of the fir tribe, which, fan-like, spreads its deep green leaves; across the azure sky."

"Oh! bother it; it's a d —— d old tree, growing upon a little bit of a hill, I suppose you mean?"

"Precisely; only much more poetically expressed. The moon rises at a quarter past four to-night, or rather to-morrow, morning."

"Does it?"

"Yes; and if I should happen to be killed, you will have me removed gently to this mound of earth, and there laid beneath this tree, with my face upwards; and take care that it is done before the moon rises. You can watch that no one interferes."

"A likely job. What the deuce do you take me for? I tell you what it is, Mr. Vampyre, or Varney, or whatever's your name, if you should chance to be hit, where-ever you chance to fall, there you'll lie."

"How very unkind."

"Uncommon, ain't it?"

"Well, well, since that is your determination, I must take care of myself in another way. I can do so, and I will."

"Take care of yourself how you like, for all I care; I've come here to second you, and to see that, on the honour of a seaman, if you are put out of the world, it's done in a proper manner, that's all I have to do with you — now you know."

Sir Francis Varney looked after him with a strange kind of smile, as he walked away to make the necessary preparation with Marchdale for the immediate commencement of the contest.

These were simple and brief. It was agreed that twelve paces should be measured out, six each way, from a fixed point; one six to be paced by the admiral, and the other by Marchdale; then they were to draw lots, to see at which end of this imaginary line Varney was to be placed; after this the signal for firing was to be one, two, three — fire!

A few minutes sufficed to complete these arrangements; the ground was measured in the manner we have stated, and the combatants placed in their respective positions, Sir Francis Varney occupying the same spot where he had at first stood, namely, that nearest to the little wood, and to his own residence.

It is impossible that under such circumstances the bravest and the calmest of mankind could fail to feel some slight degree of tremour or uneasiness; and, although we can fairly claim for Henry Bannerworth that he was as truly courageous as any right feeling Christian man could wish to be, yet when it was possible that he stood within, as it were, a hair's breadth of eternity, a strange world of sensation and emotions found a home in his heart, and he could not look altogether undaunted on that future which might, for all he knew to the contrary, be so close at hand, as far as he was concerned.

It was not that he feared death, but that he looked with a decent gravity upon so grave a change as that from this world to the next, and hence was it that his face was pale, and that he looked all the emotion which he really felt.

This was the aspect and the bearing of a brave but not a reckless man; while Sir Francis Varney, on the other hand, seemed, now that he had fairly engaged in the duel, to look upon it and its attendant circumstances with a kind of smirking satisfaction, as if he were far more amused than personally interested.

This was certainly the more extraordinary after the manner in which he had tried to evade the fight, and, at all events, was quite a sufficient proof that cowardice had not been his actuating motive in so doing.

The admiral, who stood on a level with him, could not see the sort of expression he wore, or, probably, he would have been far from well pleased; but the others did, and they found something inexpressibly disagreeable in the smirking kind of satisfaction with which the vampyre seemed to regard now the proceedings.

"Confound him," whispered Marchdale to Henry, "one would think he was quite delighted, instead, as we had imagined him, not well pleased, at these proceedings; look how he grins."

"It is no matter," said Henry; "let him wear what aspect he may, if is the same to me; and, as Heaven is my judge, I here declare, if I did not think myself justified in so doing, I would not raise my hand against this man."

"There can be no shadow of a doubt regarding your justification. Have at him, and Heaven protect you."

"Amen!"

The admiral was to give the word to fire, and now he and Marshal having stepped sufficiently on one side to be out of all possible danger from any stray shot, he commenced repeating the signal, —

"Are you ready, gentlemen? — once."

They looked sternly at each other, and each grasped his pistol.

"Twice!"

Sir Francis Varney smiled and looked around him, as if the affair were one of the most common-place description.

"Thrice!"

Varney seemed to be studying the sky rather than attending to the duel.

"Fire!" said the admiral, and one report only struck upon the ear. It was that from Henry's pistol.

All eyes were turned upon Sir Francis Varney, who had evidently reserved his fire, for what purpose could not be devised, except a murderous one, the taking of a more steady aim at Henry.

Sir Francis, however, seemed in no hurry, but smiled significantly, and gradually raised the point of his weapon.

"Did you hear the word, Sir Francis? I gave it loud enough, I am sure. I never spoke plainer in my life; did I ever, Jack?"

"Yes, often," said Jack Pringle; "what's the use of your asking such yarns as them? you know you have done so often enough when you wanted grog."

"You d —— d rascal, I'll — I'll have your back scored, I will."

"So you will, when you are afloat again, which you never will be — you're paid off, that's certain."

"You lubberly lout, you ain't a seaman; a seaman would never mutiny against his admiral; howsomever, do you hear, Sir Francis, I'll give the matter up, if you don't pay some attention to me."

Henry looked steadily at Varney, expecting every moment to feel his bullet. Mr. Marchdale hastily exclaimed that this was not according to usage.

Sir Francis Varney took no notice, but went on elevating his weapon; when it was perpendicular to the earth he fired in the air.

"I had not anticipated this," said Marchdale, as he walked to Henry. "I thought he was taking a more deadly aim."

"And I," said Henry.

"Ay, you have escaped, Henry; let me congratulate you."

"Not so fast; we may fire again."

"I can afford to do that," he said, with a smile.

"You should have fired, sir, according to custom," said the admiral; "this is not the proper thing."

"What, fire at your friend?"

"Oh, that's all very well! You are my friend for a time, vampyre as you are, and I intend you shall fire."

"If Mr. Henry Bannerworth demands another fire, I have no objection to it, and will fire at him; but as it is I shall not do so, indeed, it would be quite useless for him to do so — to point mortal weapons at me is mere child's play, they will not hurt me."

"The devil they won't," said the admiral.

"Why, look you here," said Sir Francis Varney, stepping forward and placing his hand to his neckerchief; "look you here; if Mr. Henry

Bannerworth should demand another fire, he may do so with the same bullet."

"The same bullet!" said Marchdale, stepping forward— "the same bullet! How is this?"

"My eyes," said Jack; "who'd a thought it; there's a go! Wouldn't he do for a dummy — to lead a forlorn hope, or to put among the boarders?"

"Here," said Sir Francis, handing a bullet to Henry Bannerworth — "here is the bullet you shot at me."

Henry looked at it — it was blackened by powder; and then Marchdale seized it and tried it in the pistol, but found the bullet fitted Henry's weapon.

"By heavens, it is so!" he exclaimed, stepping back and looking at Varney from top to toe in horror and amazement.

"D —— e," said the admiral, "if I understand this. Why Jack Pringle, you dog, here's a strange fish."

"On, no! there's plenty on 'um in some countries."

"Will you insist upon another fire, or may I consider you satisfied?"

"I shall object," said Marchdale. "Henry, this affair must go no further; it would be madness — worse than madness, to fight upon such terms."

"So say I," said the admiral. "I will not have anything to do with you, Sir Francis. I'll not be your second any longer. I didn't bargain for such a game as this. You might as well fight with the man in brass armour, at the Lord Mayor's show, or the champion at a coronation."

"Oh!" said Jack Pringle; "a man may as well fire at the back of a halligator as a wamphigher."

"This must be considered as having been concluded," said Mr. Marchdale.

"No!" said Henry.

"And wherefore not?"

"Because I have not received his fire."

"Heaven forbid you should."

"I may not with honour quit the ground without another fire."

"Under ordinary circumstances there might be some shadow of an excuse for your demand; but as it is there is none. You have neither honour nor credit to gain by such an encounter, and, certainly, you can gain no object."

"How are we to decide this affair? Am I considered absolved from the accusation under which I lay, of cowardice?" inquired Sir Francis Varney, with a cold smile.

"Why, as for that," said the admiral, "I should as soon expect credit for fighting behind a wall, as with a man that I couldn't hit any more than the moon."

"Henry; let me implore you to quit this scene; it can do no good."

At this moment, a noise, as of human voices, was heard at a distance; this caused a momentary pause, and, the whole party stood still and listened.

The murmurs and shouts that now arose in the distance were indistinct and confused.

"What can all this mean?" said Marchdale; "there is something very strange about it. I cannot imagine a cause for so unusual an occurrence."

"Nor I," said Sir Francis Varney, looking suspiciously at Henry Bannerworth.

"Upon my honour I know neither what is the cause nor the nature of the sounds themselves."

"Then we can easily see what is the matter from yonder hillock," said the admiral; "and there's Jack Pringle, he's up there already. What's he telegraphing about in that manner, I wonder?"

The fact was, Jack Pringle, hearing the riot, had thought that if he got to the neighbouring eminence he might possibly ascertain what it was that was the cause of what he termed the "row," and had succeeded in some degree.

There were a number of people of all kinds coming out from the village, apparently armed, and shouting. Jack Pringle hitched up his trousers and swore, then took off his hat and began to shout to the admiral, as he said, —

"D —— e, they are too late to spoil the sport. Hilloa! hurrah!"

"What's all that about, Jack?" inquired the admiral, as he came puffing along. "What's the squall about?"

"Only a few horse-marines and bumboat-women, that have been startled like a company of penguins."

"Oh! my eyes! wouldn't a whole broadside set 'em flying, Jack?"

"Ay; just as them Frenchmen that you murdered on board the Big Thunderer, as you called it."

"I murder them, you rascal?"

"Yes; there was about five hundred of them killed."

"They were only shot."

"They were killed, only your conscience tells you it's uncomfortable."

"You rascal — you villain! You ought to be keel-hauled and well payed."

"Ay; you're payed, and paid off as an old hulk."

"D —— e — you — you — oh! I wish I had you on board ship, I'd make your lubberly carcass like a union jack, full of red and blue stripes."

"Oh! it's all very well; but if you don't take to your heels, you'll have all the old women in the village a whacking on you, that's all I have to say about it. You'd better port your helm and about ship, or you'll be keel-hauled."

"D — n your—"

"What's the matter?" inquired Marchdale, as he arrived.

"What's the cause of all the noise we have heard?" said Sir Francis; "has some village festival spontaneously burst forth among the rustics of this place?"

"I cannot tell the cause of it," said Henry Bannerworth; "but they seem to me to be coming towards this place."

"Indeed!"

"I think so too," said Marchdale.

"With what object?" inquired Sir Francis Varney.

"No peaceable one," observed Henry; "for, as far I can observe, they struck across the country, as though they would enclose something, or intercept somebody."

"Indeed! but why come here?"

"If I knew that I could have at once told the cause."

"And they appear armed with a variety of odd weapons," observed Sir Francis; "they mean an attack upon some one! Who is that man with them? he seems to be deprecating their coming."

"That appears to be Mr. Chillingworth," said Henry; "I think that is he."

"Yes," observed the admiral; "I think I know the build of that craft; he's been in our society before. I always know a ship as soon as I see it."

“Does you, though?” said Jack.

“Yea; what do you mean, eh? let me hear what you’ve got to say against your captain and your admiral, you mutinous dog; you tell me, I say.”

“So I will; you thought you were fighting a big ship in a fog, and fired a dozen broadsides or so, and it was only the Flying Dutchman, or the devil.”

“You infernal dog—”

“Well, you know it was; it might a been our own shadow for all I can tell. Indeed, I think it was.”

“You think!”

“Yes.”

“That’s mutiny; I’ll have no more to do with you, Jack Pringle; you’re no seaman, and have no respect for your officer. Now sheer off, or I’ll cut your yards.”

“Why, as for my yards, I’ll square ’em presently if I like, you old swab; but as for leaving you, very well; you have said so, and you shall be accommodated, d —— e; however, it was not so when your nob was nearly rove through with a boarding pike; it wasn’t ‘I’ll have no more to do with Jack Pringle’ then, it was more t’other.”

“Well, then, why be so mutinous?”

“Because you aggrawates me.”

The cries of the mob became more distinct as they drew nearer to the party, who began to evince some uneasiness as to their object.

“Surely,” said Marchdale, “Mr. Chillingworth has not named anything respecting the duel that has taken place.”

“No, no.”

“But he was to have been here this morning,” said the admiral. “I understood he was to be here in his own character of a surgeon, and yet I have not seen him; have any of you?"

"No," said Henry.

"Then here he comes in the character of conservator of the public peace," said Varney, coldly; "however, I believe that his errand will be useless since the affair is, I presume, concluded."

"Down with the vampyre!"

"Eh!" said the admiral, "eh, what's that, eh? What did they say?"

"If you'll listen they'll tell you soon enough, I'll warrant."

"May be they will, and yet I'd like to know now."

Sir Francis Varney looked significantly at Marchdale, and then waited with downcast eyes for the repetition of the words.

"Down with the vampyre!" resounded on all sides from the people who came rapidly towards them, and converging towards a centre. "Burn, destroy, and kill the vampyre! No vampyre; burn him out; down with him; kill him!"

Then came Mr. Chillingworth's voice, who, with much earnestness, endeavoured to exhort them to moderation, and to refrain from violence.

Sir Francis Varney became very pale agitated; he immediately turned, and taking the least notice, he made for the wood, which lay between him and his own house, leaving the people in the greatest agitation.

Mr. Marchdale was not unmoved at this occurrence, but stood his ground with Henry Bannerworth, the admiral, and Jack Pringle, until the mob came very near to them, shouting, and uttering cries of vengeance, and death of all imaginable kinds that it was possible to conceive, against the unpopular vampyre.

Pending the arrival of these infuriated persons, we will, in a few words, state how it was that so suddenly a set of circumstances arose productive of an amount of personal danger to Varney, such as, up to that time, had seemed not at all likely to occur.

We have before stated there was but one person out of the family of the Bannerworths who was able to say anything of a positive character concerning the singular and inexplicable proceedings at the Hall; and that that person was Mr. Chillingworth, an individual not at all likely to become garrulous upon the subject.

But, alas! the best of men have their weaknesses, and we much regret to say that Mr. Chillingworth so far in this instance forgot that admirable discretion which commonly belonged to him, as to be the cause of the popular tumult which had now readied such a height.

In a moment of thoughtlessness and confidence, he told his wife. Yes, this really clever man, from whom one would not have expected such a piece of horrible indiscretion, actually told his wife all about the vampyre. But such is human nature; combined with an amount of firmness and reasoning power, that one would have thought to be invulnerable safeguards, we find some weakness which astonishes all calculation.

Such was this of Mr. Chillingworth's. It is true, he cautioned the lady to be secret, and pointed to her the danger of making Varney the vampyre a theme for gossip; but he might as well have whispered to a hurricane to be so good as not to go on blowing so, as request Mrs. Chillingworth to keep a secret.

Of course she burst into the usual fervent declarations of "Who was she to tell? Was she a person who went about telling things? When did she see anybody? Not she, once in a blue moon;" and then, when Mr. Chillingworth went out, like the King of Otaheite, she invited the neighbours round about to come to take some tea.

Under solemn promises of secrecy, sixteen ladies that evening were made acquainted with the full and interesting particulars of the attack of the vampyre on Flora Bannerworth, and all the evidence inculpating Sir Francis Varney as the blood-thirsty individual.

When the mind comes to consider that these sixteen ladies multiplied their information by about four-and-twenty each, we become quite lost in a sea of arithmetic, and feel compelled to sum up the whole by a candid assumption that in four-and-twenty hours not an individual in the whole town was ignorant of the circumstances.

On the morning before the projected duel, there was an unusual commotion in the streets. People were conversing together in little knots, and using rather violent gesticulations. Poor Mr. Chillingworth! he alone was ignorant of the causes of the popular commotion, and so he went to bed wondering that an unusual bustle pervaded the little market town, but not at all guessing its origin.

Somehow or another, however, the populace, who had determined to make a demonstration on the following morning against the vampyre, thought it highly necessary first to pay some sort of compliment to Mr. Chillingworth, and, accordingly, at an early hour, a great mob assembled outside his house, and gave three terrific applauding shouts, which roused him most unpleasantly from his sleep; and induced the greatest astonishment at the cause of such a tumult.

Oh, that artful Mrs. Chillingworth! too well she knew what was the matter; yet she pretended to be so oblivious upon the subject.

“Good God!” cried Mr. Chillingworth, as he started up in bed, “what’s all that?”

“All what?” said his wife.

“All what! Do you mean to say you heard nothing?”

"Well, I think I did hear a little sort of something."

"A little sort of something? It shook the house."

"Well, well; never mind. Go to sleep again; it's no business of ours."

"Yes; but it may be, though. It's all very well to say 'go to sleep.' That happens to be a thing I can't do. There's something amiss."

"Well, what's that to you?"

"Perhaps nothing; but, perhaps, everything."

Mr. Chillingworth sprang from his bed, and began dressing, a process which he executed with considerable rapidity, and in which he was much accelerated by two or three supplementary shouts from the people below.

Then, in a temporary lull, a loud voice shouted, —

"Down with the vampyre — down with the vampyre!"

The truth in an instant burst over the mind of Mr. Chillingworth; and, turning to his wife, he exclaimed, —

"I understand it now. You've been gossipping about Sir Francis Varney, and have caused all this tumult."

"I gossip! Well, I never! Lay it on me; it's sure to be my fault. I might have known that beforehand. I always am."

"But you must have spoken of it."

"Who have I got to speak to about it?"

"Did you, or did you not?"

"Who should I tell?"

Mr. Chillingworth was dressed, and he hastened down and entered the street with great desperation. He had a hope that he might be enabled to disperse the crowd, and yet be in time to keep his appointment at the duel.

His appearance was hailed with another shout, for it was considered, of course, that he had come to join in the attack upon Sir Francis Varney. He found assembled a much more considerable mob than he had imagined, and to his alarm he found many armed with all sorts of weapons of offence.

"Hurrah!" cried a great lumpy-looking fellow, who seemed half mad with the prospect of a disturbance. "Hurrah! here's the doctor, he'll tell us all about it as we go along. Come on."

"For Heaven's sake," said Mr. Chillingworth, "stop; What are you about to do all of you?"

"Burn the vampyre — burn the vampyre!"

"Hold — hold! this is folly. Let me implore you all to return to your homes, or you will get into serious trouble on this subject."

This was a piece of advice not at all likely to be adopted; and when the mob found that Mr. Chillingworth was not disposed to encourage and countenance it in its violence, it gave another loud shout of defiance, and moved off through the long straggling streets of the town in a direction towards Sir Francis Varney's house.

It is true that what were called the authorities of the town had become alarmed, and were stirring, but they found themselves in such a frightful minority, that it became out of the question for them to interfere with any effect to stop the lawless proceedings of the rioters, so that the infuriated populace had it all their own way, and in a straggling, disorderly-looking kind of procession they moved off, vowing vengeance as they went against Varney the vampyre.

Hopeless as Mr. Chillingworth thought it was to interfere with any degree of effect in the proceedings of the mob, he still could not reconcile it to himself to be absent from a scene which he now felt certain had been produced by his own imprudence, so he went on with the crowd, endeavouring, as he did so, by every argument that could be suggested to him to induce them to abstain from the acts of violence they contemplated. He had a hope, too, that when they reached Sir Francis Varney's, finding him not within, as probably would be the case, as by that time he would have started to meet Henry Bannerworth on the ground, to fight the duel, he might induce the mob to return and forego their meditated violence.

And thus was it that, urged on by a multitude of persons, the unhappy surgeon was expiating, both in mind and person, the serious mistakes he had committed in trusting a secret to his wife.

Let it not be supposed that we for one moment wish to lay down a general principle as regards the confiding secrets to ladies, because from the beginning of the world it has become notorious how well they keep them, and with what admirable discretion, tact, and forethought this fairest portion of humanity conduct themselves.

We know how few Mrs. Chillingworths there are in the world, and have but to regret that our friend the doctor should, in his matrimonial adventure, have met with such a specimen.

CHAPTER XL.

THE POPULAR RIOT. — SIR FRANCIS VARNEY'S DANGER. — THE SUGGESTION AND ITS RESULTS.

Such, then, were the circumstances which at once altered the whole aspect of the affairs, and, from private and domestic causes of very deep annoyance, led to public results of a character which seemed likely to involve the whole country-side in the greatest possible confusion.

But while we blame Mr. Chillingworth for being so indiscreet as to communicate the secret of such a person as Varney the vampyre to his wife, we trust in a short time to be enabled to show that he made as much reparation as it was possible to make for the mischief he had unintentionally committed. And now as he struggled onward — apparently onward — first and foremost among the rioters, he was really doing all in his power to quell that tumult which superstition and dread had raised.

Human nature truly delights in the marvellous, and in proportion as a knowledge of the natural phenomena of nature is restricted, and unbridled imagination allowed to give the rein to fathomless conjecture, we shall find an eagerness likewise to believe the marvellous to be the truth.

That dim and uncertain condition concerning vampyres, originating probably as it had done in Germany, had spread itself slowly, but insidiously, throughout the whole of the civilized world.

In no country and in no clime is there not something which bears a kind of family relationship to the veritable vampyre of which Sir Francis Varney appeared to be so choice a specimen.

The *ghoul* of eastern nations is but the same being, altered to suit habits and localities; and the *sema* of the Scandinavians is but the vampyre of a more primitive race, and a personification of that morbid imagination which has once fancied the probability of the dead walking again among the living, with all the frightful insignia of corruption and the grave about them.

Although not popular in England, still there had been tales told of such midnight visitants, so that Mrs. Chillingworth, when she had imparted the information which she had obtained, had already some rough material to work upon in the minds of her auditors, and therefore there was no great difficulty in very soon establishing the fact.

Under such circumstances, ignorant people always do what they have heard has been done by some one else before them and in an incredibly short space of time the propriety of catching Sir Francis Varney, depriving him of his vampyre-like existence, and driving a stake through his body, became not at all a questionable proposition.

Alas, poor Mr. Chillingworth! as well might he have attempted King Canute's task of stemming the waves of the ocean as that of attempting to stop the crowd from proceeding to Sir Francis Varney's house.

His very presence was a sort of confirmation of the whole affair. In vain he gesticulated, in vain he begged and prayed that they would go back, and in vain he declared that full and ample justice should be done upon the vampyre, provided popular clamour spared him, and he was left to more deliberate judgment.

Those who were foremost in the throng paid no attention to these remonstrances while those who were more distant heard them not, and, for all they knew, he might be urging the crowd on to violence, instead of deprecating it.

Thus, then, this disorderly rabble soon reached the house of Sir Francis Varney and loudly demanded of his terrified servant where he was to be found.

The knocking at the Hall door was prodigious, and, with a laudable desire, doubtless, of saving time, the moment one was done amusing himself with the ponderous knocker, another seized it; so that until the door was flung open by some of the bewildered and terrified men, there was no cessation whatever of the furious demands for admittance.

"Varney the vampyre — Varney the vampyre!" cried a hundred voices. "Death to the vampyre! Where is he? Bring him out. Varney the vampyre!"

The servants were too terrified to speak for some moments, as they saw such a tumultuous assemblage seeking their master, while so singular a name was applied to him. At length, one more bold than the rest contrived to stammer out, —

"My good people, Sir Francis Varney is not at home. He took an early breakfast, and has been out nearly an hour."

The mob paused a moment in indecision, and then one of the foremost cried, —

"Who'd suppose they'd own he was at home? He's hiding somewhere of course; let's pull him out."

"Ah, pull him out — pull him out!" cried many voices. A rush was made into the hall and in a very few minutes its chambers were ransacked, and all its hidden places carefully searched, with the hope of discovering the hidden form of Sir Francis Varney.

The servants felt that, with their inefficient strength, to oppose the proceedings of an assemblage which seemed to be unchecked by all sort of law or reason, would be madness; they therefore only looked on, with wonder and dismay, satisfied certainly in their own minds that Sir Francis would not be found, and indulging in much conjecture as to what would be the result of such violent and unexpected proceedings.

Mr. Chillingworth hoped that time was being gained, and that some sort of indication of what was going on would reach the unhappy object of popular detestation sufficiently early to enable him to provide for his own safety.

He knew he was breaking his own engagement to be present at the duel between Henry Bannerworth and Sir Francis Varney, and, as that thought recurred to him, he dreaded that his professional services might be required on one side or the other; for he knew, or fancied he knew, that mutual hatred dictated the contest; and he thought that if ever a duel had taken place which was likely to be attended with some disastrous result, that was surely the one.

But how could he leave, watched and surrounded as he was by an infuriated multitude — how could he hope but that his footsteps would be dogged, or that the slightest attempt of his to convey a warning to Sir Francis Varney, would not be the means of bringing down upon his head the very danger he sought to shield him from.

In this state of uncertainty, then, did our medical man remain, a prey to the bitterest reflections, and full of the direst apprehensions, without having the slightest power of himself to alter so disastrous a train of circumstances.

Dissatisfied with their non-success, the crowd twice searched the house of Sir Francis Varney, from the attics to the basement; and then, and not till then, did they begin reluctantly to believe that the servants must have spoken the truth.

"He's in the town somewhere," cried one. "Let's go back to the town."

It is strange how suddenly any mob will obey any impulse, and this perfectly groundless supposition was sufficient to turn their steps back again in the direction whence they came, and they had actually, in a straggling sort of column, reached halfway towards the town, when they encountered a boy, whose professional pursuit consisted in tending sheep very early of a morning, and who at once informed them that he had seen Sir Francis Varney in the wood, half way between Bannerworth Hall and his own home.

This event at once turned the whole tide again, and with renewed clamours, carrying Mr. Chillingworth along with them, they now rapidly neared the real spot, where, probably, had they turned a little earlier, they would have viewed the object of their suspicion and hatred.

But, as we have already recorded, the advancing throng was seen by the parties on the ground, where the duel could scarcely have been said to have been fought; and then had Sir Francis Varney dashed into the wood, which was so opportunely at hand to afford him a shelter from his enemies, and from the intricacies of which — well acquainted with them as he doubtless was, — he had every chance of eluding their pursuit.

The whole affair was a great surprise to Henry and his friends, when they saw such a string of people advancing, with such shouts and imprecations; they could not, for the life of them, imagine what could have excited such a turn out among the ordinarily industrious and quiet inhabitants of a town, remarkable rather for the quietude and steadiness of its population, than for any violent outbreaks of popular feeling.

"What can Mr. Chillingworth be about," said Henry, "to bring such a mob here? has he taken leave of his senses?"

"Nay," said Marchdale; "look again; he seems to be trying to keep them back, although ineffectually, for they will not be stayed."

"D —— e," said the admiral, "here's a gang of pirates; we shall be boarded and carried before we know where we are, Jack."

"Ay ay, sir," said Jack.

"And is that all you've got to say, you lubber, when you see your admiral in danger? You'd better go and make terms with the enemy at once."

"Really, this is serious," said Henry; "they shout for Varney. Can Mr. Chillingworth have been so mad as to adopt this means of stopping the duel?"

"Impossible," said Marchdale; "if that had been his intention, he could have done so quietly, through the medium of the civil authorities."

"Hang me!" exclaimed the admiral, "if there are any civil authorities; they talk of smashing somebody. What do they say, Jack? I don't hear quite so well as I used."

"You always was a little deaf," said Jack.

"What?"

"A little deaf, I say."

"Why, you lubberly lying swab, how dare you say so?"

"Because you was."

"You slave-going scoundrel!"

"For Heaven's sake, do not quarrel at such a time as this!" said Henry; "we shall be surrounded in a moment. Come, Mr. Marchdale, let you and I visit these people, and ascertain what it is that has so much excited their indignation."

"Agreed," said Marchdale; and they both stepped forward at a rapid pace, to meet the advancing throng.

The crowd which had now approached to within a short distance of the expectant little party, was of a most motley description, and its appearance, under many circumstances, would cause considerable risibility. Men and women were mixed indiscriminately together, and in the shouting, the latter, if such a thing were possible, exceeded the former, both in discordance and energy.

Every individual composing that mob carried some weapon calculated for defence, such as flails, scythes, sickles, bludgeons, &c., and this mode of arming caused them to wear a most formidable appearance; while the passion that superstition had called up was strongly depicted in their inflamed features. Their fury, too, had been excited by their disappointment, and it was with concentrated rage that they now pressed onward.

The calm and steady advance of Henry and Mr. Marchdale to meet the advancing throng, seemed to have the effect of retarding their progress a little, and they came to a parley at a hedge, which separated them from the meadow in which the duel had been fought.

"You seem to be advancing towards us," said Henry. "Do you seek me or any of my friends; and if so, upon what errand? Mr. Chillingworth, for Heaven's sake, explain what is the cause of all this assault. You seem to be at the head of it."

"Seem to be," said Mr. Chillingworth, "without being so. You are not sought, nor any of your friends?"

"Who, then?"

"Sir Francis Varney," was the immediate reply.

"Indeed! and what has he done to excite popular indignation? of private wrong I can accuse him; but I desire no crowd to take up my cause, or to avenge my quarrels."

"Mr. Bannerworth, it has become known, through my indiscretion, that Sir Frances Varney is suspected of being a vampyre."

"Is this so?"

"Hurrah!" shouted the mob. "Down with the vampyre! hurrah! where is he? Down with him!"

"Drive a stake through him," said a woman; "it's the only way, and the humanest. You've only to take a hedge stake and sharpen it a bit at one end, and char it a little in the fire so as there mayt'n't be no splinters to hurt, and then poke it through his stomach."

The mob gave a great shout at this humane piece of advice, and it was some time before Henry could make himself heard at all, even to those who were nearest to him.

When he did succeed in so doing, he cried, with a loud voice, —

"Hear me, all of you. It is quite needless for me to inquire how you became possessed of the information that a dreadful suspicion hangs over the person of Sir Francis Varney; but if, in consequence of hearing such news, you fancy this public demonstration will be agreeable to me, or likely to relieve those who are nearest or dearest to me from the state of misery and apprehension into which they have fallen, you are much mistaken."

"Hear him, hear him!" cried Mr. Marchdale; "he speaks both wisdom and truth."

"If anything," pursued Henry, "could add to the annoyance of vexation and misery we have suffered, it would assuredly be the being made subjects of every-day gossip, and every-day clamour."

"You hear him?" said Mr. Marchdale.

"Yes, we does," said a man; "but we comes out to catch a vampyre, for all that."

"Oh, to be sure," said the humane woman; "nobody's feelings is nothing to us. Are we to be woke up in the night with vampyres sucking our bloods while we've got a stake in the country?"

"Hurrah!" shouted everybody. "Down with the vampyre! where is he?"

"You are wrong. I assure you, you are all wrong," said Mr. Chillingworth, imploringly; "there is no vampyre here, you see. Sir Francis Varney has not only escaped, but he will take the law of all of you."

This was an argument which appeared to stagger a few, but the bolder spirits pushed them on, and a suggestion to search the wood having been made by some one who was more cunning than his neighbours, that measure was at once proceeded with, and executed in a systematic manner, which made those who knew it to be the hiding-place of Sir Francis Varney tremble for his safety.

It was with a strange mixture of feeling that Henry Bannerworth waited the result of the search for the man who but a few minutes before had been opposed to him in a contest of life or death.

The destruction of Sir Francis Varney would certainly have been an effectual means of preventing him from continuing to be the incubus he then was upon the Bannerworth family; and yet the generous nature of Henry shrank with horror from seeing even such a creature as Varney sacrificed at the shrine of popular resentment, and murdered by an infuriated populace.

He felt as great an interest in the escape of the vampyre as if some great advantage to himself bad been contingent upon such an event; and, although he spoke not a word, while the echoes of the little wood were all awakened by the clamorous manner in which the mob searched for their victim, his feelings could be well read upon his countenance.

The admiral, too, without possessing probably the fine feelings of Henry Bannerworth, took an unusually sympathetic interest in the fate of the vampyre; and, after placing himself in various attitudes of intense excitement, he exclaimed, —

"D — n it, Jack, I do hope, after all, the vampyre will get the better of them. It's like a whole flotilla attacking one vessel — a lubberly proceeding at the best, and I'll be hanged if I like it. I should like to pour in a broadside into those fellows, just to let them see it wasn't a proper English mode of fighting. Shouldn't you, Jack?"

"Ay, ay, sir, I should."

"Shiver me, if I see an opportunity, if I don't let some of those rascals know what's what."

Scarcely had these words escaped the lips of the old admiral than there arose a loud shout from the interior of the wood. It was a shout of success, and seemed at the very least to herald the capture of the unfortunate Varney.

"By Heaven!" exclaimed Henry, "they have him."

"God forbid!" said Mr. Marchdale; "this grows too serious."

"Bear a hand, Jack," said the admiral: "we'll have a fight for it yet; they sha'n't murder even a vampyre in cold blood. Load the pistols and send a flying shot or two among the rascals, the moment they appear."

"No, no," said Henry; "no more violence, at least there has been enough — there has been enough."

Even as he spoke there came rushing from among the trees, at the corner of the wood, the figure of a man. There needed but one glance to assure them who it was. Sir Francis Varney had been seen, and was flying before those implacable foes who had sought his life.

He had divested himself of his huge cloak, as well as of his low slouched hat, and, with a speed which nothing but the most absolute desperation could have enabled him to exert, he rushed onward, beating down before him every obstacle, and bounding over the meadows at a rate that, if he could have continued it for any length of time, would have set pursuit at defiance.

"Bravo!" shouted the admiral, "a stern chase is a long chase, and I wish them joy of it — d —— e, Jack, did you ever see anybody get along like that?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"You never did, you scoundrel."

"Yes, I did."

"When and where?"

"When you ran away off the sound."

The admiral turned nearly blue with anger, but Jack looked perfectly imperturbable, as he added, —

"You know you ran away after the French frigates who wouldn't stay to fight you."

"Ah! that indeed. There he goes, putting on every stitch of canvass, I'll be bound."

"And there they come," said Jack, as he pointed to the corner of the wood, and some of the more active of the vampyre's pursuers showed themselves.

It would appear as if the vampyre had been started from some hiding-place in the interior of the wood, and had then thought it expedient altogether to leave that retreat, and make his way to some more secure one across the open country, where there would be more obstacles to his discovery than perseverance could overcome.

Probably, then, among the brushwood and trees, for a few moments he had been again lost sight of, until those who were closest upon his track had emerged from among the dense foliage, and saw him scouring across the country at such headlong speed. These were but few, and in their extreme anxiety themselves to capture Varney, whose precipate and terrified flight brought a firm conviction to their minds of his being a vampyre, they did not stop to get much of a reinforcement, but plunged on like greyhounds in his track.

"Jack," said the admiral, "this won't do. Look at that great lubberly fellow with the queer smock-frock."

"Never saw such a figure-head in my life," said Jack.

"Stop him."

"Ay, ay, sir."

The man was coming on at a prodigious rate, and Jack, with all the deliberation in the world, advanced to meet him; and when they got sufficiently close together, that in a few moments they must encounter each other, Jack made himself into as small a bundle as possible, and presented his shoulder to the advancing countryman in such a way, that he flew off it at a tangent, as if he had run against a brick wall, and after rolling head over heels for some distance, safely deposited himself in a ditch, where he disappeared completely for a few moments from all human observation.

"Don't say I hit you," said Jack. "Curse yer, what did yer run against me for? Sarves you right. Lubbers as don't know how to steer, in course runs agin things."

"Bravo," said the admiral; "there's another of them."

The pursuers of Varney the vampyre, however, now came too thick and fast to be so easily disposed of, and as soon as his figure could be seen coursing over the meadows, and springing over road and ditch with an agility almost frightful to look upon, the whole rabble rout was in pursuit of him.

By this time, the man who had fallen into the ditch had succeeded in making his appearance in the visible world again, and as he crawled up the bank, looking a thing of mire and mud, Jack walked up to him with all the carelessness in the world, and said to him, —

"Any luck, old chap?"

"Oh, murder!" said the man, "what do you mean? who are you? where am I? what's the matter? Old Muster Fowler, the fat crowner, will set upon me now."

"Have you caught anything?" said Jack.

"Caught anything?"

"Yes; you've been in for eels, haven't you?"

"D — n!"

"Well, it is odd to me, as some people can't go a fishing without getting out of temper. Have it your own way; I won't interfere with you;" and away Jack walked.

The man cleared the mud out of his eyes, as well as he could, and looked after him with a powerful suspicion that in Jack he saw the very cause of his mortal mishap: but, somehow or other, his immersion in the not over limpid stream had wonderfully cooled his courage, and casting one despairing look upon his begrimed apparel, and another at the last of the stragglers who were pursuing Sir Francis Varney across the fields, he thought it prudent to get home as fast he could, and get rid of the disagreeable results of an adventure which had turned out for him anything but auspicious or pleasant.

Mr. Chillingworth, as though by a sort of impulse to be present in case Sir Francis Varney should really be run down and with a hope of saving him from personal violence, had followed the foremost of the rioters in the wood, found it now quite impossible for him to carry on such a chase as that which was being undertaken across the fields after Sir Francis Varney.

His person was unfortunately but ill qualified for the continuance of such a pursuit, and, although with the greatest reluctance, he at last felt himself compelled to give it up.

In making his way through the intricacies of the wood, he had been seriously incommoded by the thick undergrowth, and he had accidentally encountered several miry pools, with which he had involuntarily made a closer acquaintance than was at all conducive either to his personal appearance or comfort. The doctor's temper, though, generally speaking, one of the most even, was at last affected by his mishaps, and he could not restrain from an execration upon his want of prudence in letting his wife have a knowledge of a secret that was not his own, and the producing an unlooked for circumstance, the termination of which might be of a most disastrous nature.

Tired, therefore, and nearly exhausted by the exertions he had already taken, he emerged now alone from the wood, and near the spot where stood Henry Bannerworth and his friends in consultation.

The jaded look of the surgeon was quite sufficient indication of the trouble and turmoil he had gone through, and some expressions of sympathy for his condition were dropped by Henry, to whom he replied, —

"Nay, my young friend, I deserve it all. I have nothing but my own indiscretion to thank for all the turmoil and tumult that has arisen this morning."

"But to what possible cause can we attribute such an outrage?"

"Reproach me as much as you will, I deserve it. A man may prate of his own secrets if he like, but he should be careful of those of other people. I trusted yours to another, and am properly punished."

"Enough," said Henry; "we'll say no more of that, Mr. Chillingworth. What is done cannot be undone, and we had better spend our time in reflection of how to make the best of what is, than in useless lamentation over its causes. What is to be done?"

"Nay, I know not. Have you fought the duel?"

"Yes; and, as you perceive, harmlessly."

"Thank Heaven for that."

"Nay, I had my fire, which Sir Francis Varney refused to return; so the affair had just ended, when the sound of approaching tumult came upon our ears."

"What a strange mixture," exclaimed Marchdale, "of feelings and passions this Varney appears to be. At one moment acting with the apparent greatest malignity; and another, seeming to have awakened in his mind a romantic generosity which knows no bounds. I cannot understand him."

"Nor I, indeed," said Henry; "but yet I somehow tremble for his fate, and I seem to feel that something ought to be done to save him from the fearful consequences of popular feeling. Let us hasten to the town, and procure what assistance we may: but a few persons, well organised and properly armed, will achieve wonders against a desultory and ill-appointed multitude. There may be a chance of saving him, yet, from the imminent danger which surrounds him."

"That's proper," cried the admiral. "I don't like to see anybody run down. A fair fight's another thing. Yard arm and yard arm — stink pots and pipkins — broadside to broadside — and throw in your bodies, if you like, on the lee quarter; but don't do anything shabby. What do you think of it, Jack?"

"Why, I means to say as how if Varney only keeps on sail as he's been doing, that the devil himself wouldn't catch him in a gale."

"And yet," said Henry, "it is our duty to do the best we can. Let us at once to the town, and summons all the assistance in our power. Come on — come on!"

His friends needed no further urging, but, at a brisk pace, they all proceeded by the nearest footpaths towards the town.

It puzzled his pursuers to think in what possible direction Sir Francis Varney expected to find sustenance or succour, when they saw how curiously he took his flight across the meadows. Instead of endeavouring, by any circuitous path, to seek the shelter of his own house, or to throw himself upon the care of the authorities of the town, who must, to the extent of their power, have protected him, he struck across the fields, apparently without aim or purpose, seemingly intent upon nothing but to distance his pursuers in a long chase, which might possibly tire them, or it might not, according to their or his powers of endurance.

We say this seemed to be the case, but it was not so in reality. Sir Francis Varney had a deeper purpose, and it was scarcely to be supposed that a man of his subtle genius, and, apparently, far-seeing and reflecting intellect, could have so far overlooked the many dangers of his position as not to be fully prepared for some such contingency as that which had just now occurred.

Holding, as he did, so strange a place in society — living among men, and yet possessing so few attributes in common with humanity — he must all along have felt the possibility of drawing upon himself popular violence.

He could not wholly rely upon the secrecy of the Bannerworth family, much as they might well be supposed to shrink from giving publicity to circumstances of so fearfully strange and perilous a nature as those which had occurred amongst them. The merest accident might, at any moment, make him the town's talk. The overhearing of a few chance words by some gossiping domestic — some ebullition of anger or annoyance by some member of the family — or a communication from some friend who had been treated with confidence — might, at any time, awaken around him some such a storm as that which now raged at his heels.

Varney the vampire must have calculated this. He must have felt the possibility of such a state of things; and, as a matter of course, politicly provided himself with some place of refuge.

After about twenty minutes of hard chasing across the fields, there could be no doubt of his intentions. He had such a place of refuge; and, strange a one as it might appear, he sped towards it in as direct a line as ever a well-sped arrow flew towards its mark.

That place of refuge, to the surprise of every one, appeared to be the ancient ruin, of which we have before spoken, and which was so well known to every inhabitant of the county.

Truly, it seemed like some act of mere desperation for Sir Francis Varney to hope there to hide himself. There remained within, of what had once been a stately pile, but a few grey crumbling walls, which the hunted have would have passed unheeded, knowing that not for one instant could he have baffled his pursuers by seeking so inefficient a refuge.

And those who followed hard and fast upon the track of Sir Francis Varney felt so sure of their game, when they saw whither he was speeding, that they relaxed in their haste considerably, calling loudly to each other that the vampire was caught at last, for he could be easily surrounded among the old ruins, and dragged from amongst its moss-grown walls.

In another moment, with a wild dash and a cry of exultation, he sprang out of sight, behind an angle, formed by what had been at one time one of the principal supports of the ancient structure.

Then, as if there was still something so dangerous about him, that only by a great number of hands could he be hoped to be secured, the infuriated peasantry gathered in a dense circle around what they considered his temporary place of refuge, and as the sun, which had now climbed above the tree tops, and dispersed, in a great measure, many of the heavy clouds of morning, shone down upon the excited group, they might have been supposed there assembled to perform some superstitious rite, which time had hallowed as an association of the crumbling ruin around which they stood.

By the time the whole of the stragglers, who had persisted in the chase, had come up, there might have been about fifty or sixty resolute men, each intent upon securing the person of one whom they felt, while in existence, would continue to be a terror to all the weaker and dearer portions of their domestic circles.

There was a pause of several minutes. Those who had come the fleetest were gathering breath, and those who had come up last were looking to their more forward companions for some information as to what had occurred before their arrival.

All was profoundly still within the ruin, and then suddenly, as if by common consent, there arose from every throat a loud shout of "Down with the vampyre! down with the vampyre!"

The echoes of that shout died away, and then all was still as before, while a superstitious feeling crept over even the boldest. It would almost seem as if they had expected some kind of response from Sir Francis Varney to the shout of defiance with which they had just greeted him; but the very calmness, repose, and absolute quiet of the ruin, and all about it, alarmed them, and they looked the one at the other as if the adventure after all were not one of the pleasantest description, and might not fall out so happily as they had expected.

Yet what danger could there be? there were they, more than half a hundred stout, strong men, to cope with one; they felt convinced that he was completely in their power; they knew the ruins could not hide him, and that five minutes time given to the task, would suffice to explore every nook and corner of them.

And yet they hesitated, while an unknown terror shook their nerves, and seemingly from the very fact that they had run down their game successfully, they dreaded to secure the trophy of the chase.

One bold spirit was wanting; and, if it was not a bold one that spoke at length, he might be complimented as being comparatively such. It was one who had not been foremost in the chase, perchance from want of physical power, who now stood forward, and exclaimed, —

"What are you waiting for, now? You can have him when you like. If you want your wives and children to sleep quietly in their beds, you will secure the vampyre. Come on — we all know he's here — why do you hesitate? Do you expect me to go alone and drag him out by the ears?"

Any voice would have sufficed to break the spell which bound them. This did so; and, with one accord, and yells of imprecation, they rushed forward and plunged among the old walls of the ruin.

Less time than we have before remarked would have enabled any one to explore the tottering fabric sufficient to bring a conviction to their minds that, after all, there might have been some mistake about the matter, and Sir Francis Varney was not quite caught yet.

It was astonishing how the fact of not finding him in a moment, again roused all their angry feelings against him, and dispelled every feeling of superstitious awe with which he had been surrounded; rage gave place to the sort of shuddering horror with which they had before contemplated his immediate destruction, when they had believed him to be virtually within their very grasp.

Over and over again the ruins were searched — hastily and impatiently by some, carefully and deliberately by others, until there could be no doubt upon the mind of every one individual, that somehow or somewhere within the shadow of those walls, Sir Francis Varney had disappeared most mysteriously.

Then it would have been a strange sight for any indifferent spectator to have seen how they shrunk, one by one, out of the shadow of those ruins; each seeming to be afraid that the vampyre, in some mysterious manner, would catch him if he happened to be the last within their sombre influence; and, when they had all collected in the bright, open space, some little distance beyond, they looked at each other and at the ruins, with dubious expressions of countenance, each, no doubt, wishing that each would suggest something of a consolatory or practicable character.

"What's to be done, now?" said one.

"Ah! that's it," said another, sententiously. "I'll be hanged if I know."

"He's given us the slip," remarked a third.

"But he can't have given us the slip," said one man, who was particularly famous for a dogmatical spirit of argumentation; "how is it possible? he must be here, and I say he is here."

"Find him, then," cried several at once.

"Oh! that's nothing to do with the argument; he's here, whether we find him or not."

One very cunning fellow laid his finger on his nose, and beckoned to a comrade to retire some paces, where he delivered himself of the following very oracular sentiment: —

"My good friend, you must know Sir Francis Varney is here or he isn't."

"Agreed, agreed."

"Well, if he isn't here it's no use troubling our heads any more about him; but, otherwise, it's quite another thing, and, upon the whole, I must say, that I rather think he is."

All looked at him, for it was evident he was big with some suggestion. After a pause, he resumed, —

"Now, my good friends, I propose that we all appear to give it up, and to go away; but that some one of us shall remain and hide among the ruins for some time, to watch, in case the vampyre makes his appearance from some hole or corner that we haven't found out."

"Oh, capital!" said everybody.

"Then you all agree to that?"

"Yes, yes."

"Very good; that's the only way to nick him. Now, we'll pretend to give it up; let's all of us talk loud about going home."

They did all talk loud about going home; they swore that it was not worth the trouble of catching him, that they gave it up as a bad job; that he might go to the deuce in any way he liked, for all they cared; and then they all walked off in a body, when, the man who had made the suggestion, suddenly cried, —

"Hilloa! hilloa! — stop! stop! you know one of us is to wait?"

"Oh, ay; yes, yes, yes!" said everybody, and still they moved on.

"But really, you know, what's the use of this? who's to wait?"

That was, indeed, a knotty question, which induced a serious consultation, ending in their all, with one accord, pitching upon the author of the suggestion, as by far the best person to hide in the ruins and catch the vampyre.

They then all set off at full speed; but the cunning fellow, who certainly had not the slightest idea of so practically carrying out his own suggestion, scampered off after them with a speed that soon brought him in the midst of the throng again, and so, with fear in their looks, and all the evidences of fatigue about them, they reached the town to spread fresh and more exaggerated accounts of the mysterious conduct of Varney the vampyre.

CHAPTER XLIV.

VARNEY'S DANGER, AND HIS RESCUE. — THE PRISONER AGAIN, AND THE SUBTERRANEAN VAULT.

We have before slightly mentioned to the reader, and not unadvisedly, the existence of a certain prisoner, confined in a gloomy dungeon, into whose sad and blackened recesses but few and faint glimmering rays of light ever penetrated; for, by a diabolical ingenuity, the narrow loophole which served for a window to that subterraneous abode was so constructed, that, let the sun be at what point it might, during its diurnal course, but a few reflected beams of light could ever find their way into that abode of sorrow.

The prisoner — the same prisoner of whom we before spoke — is there. Despair is in his looks, and his temples are still bound with those cloths, which seemed now for many days to have been sopped in blood, which has become encrusted in their folds.

He still lives, apparently incapable of movement. How he has lived so long seems to be a mystery, for one would think him scarcely in a state, even were nourishment placed to his lips, to enable him to swallow it.

It may be, however, that the mind has as much to do with that apparent absolute prostration of all sort of physical energy as those bodily wounds which he has received at the hands of the enemies who have reduced him to his present painful and hopeless situation.

Occasionally a low groan burst from his lips; it seems to come from the very bottom of his heart, and it sounds as if it would carry with it every remnant of vitality that was yet remaining to him.

Then he moves restlessly, and repeats in hurried accents the names of some who are dear to him, and far away — some who may, perchance, be mourning him, but who know not, guess not, aught of his present sufferings.

As he thus moves, the rustle of a chain among the straw on which he lies gives an indication, that even in that dungeon it has not been considered prudent to leave him master of his own actions, lest, by too vigorous an effort, he might escape from the thraldom in which he is held.

The sound reaches his own ears, and for a few moments, in the deep impatience of his wounded spirit, he heaps malediction on the heads of those who have reduced him to his present state.

But soon a better nature seems to come over him, and gentler words fall from his lips. He preaches patience to himself — he talks not of revenge, but of justice, and in accents of more hopefulness than he had before spoken, he calls upon Heaven to succour him in his deep distress.

Then all is still, and the prisoner appears to have resigned himself once more to the calmness of expectation or of despair; but hark! his sense of hearing, rendered doubly acute by lying so long alone in nearly darkness, and in positive silence, detects sounds which, to ordinary mortal powers of perception, would have been by far too indistinct to produce any tangible effect upon the senses.

It is the sound of feet — on, on they come; far overhead he hears them; they beat the green earth — that sweet, verdant sod, which he may never see again — with an impatient tread. Nearer and nearer still; and now they pause; he listens with all the intensity of one who listens for existence; some one comes; there is a lumbering noise — a hasty footstep; he hears some one labouring for breath — panting like a hunted hare; his dungeon door is opened, and there totters in a man, tall and gaunt; he reels like one intoxicated; fatigue has done more than the work of inebriation; he cannot save himself, and he sinks exhausted by the side of that lonely prisoner.

The captive raises himself as far as his chains will allow him; he clutches the throat of his enervated visitor.

"Villain, monster, vampyre!" he shrieks, "I have thee now;" and locked in a deadly embrace, they roll upon the damp earth, struggling for life together.

It is mid-day at Bannerworth Hall, and Flora is looking from the casement anxiously expecting the arrival of her brothers. She had seen, from some of the topmost windows of the Hall, that the whole neighbourhood had been in a state of commotion, but little did she guess the cause of so much tumult, or that it in any way concerned her.

She had seen the peasantry forsaking their work in the fields and the gardens, and apparently intent upon some object of absorbing interest; but she feared to leave the house, for she had promised Henry that she would not do so, lest the former pacific conduct of the vampyre should have been but a new snare, for the purpose of drawing her so far from her home as to lead her into some danger when she should be far from assistance.

And yet more than once was she tempted to forget her promise, and to seek the open country, for fear that those she loved should be encountering some danger for her sake, which she would willingly either share with them or spare them.

The solicitation, however, of her brother kept her comparatively quiet; and, moreover, since her last interview with Varney, in which, at all events, he had shown some feeling for the melancholy situation to which, he had reduced her, she had been more able to reason calmly, and to meet the suggestions of passion and of impulse with a sober judgment.

About midday, then, she saw the domestic party returning — that party, which now consisted of her two brothers, the admiral, Jack Pringle, and Mr. Chillingworth. As for Mr. Marchdale, he had given them a polite adieu on the confines of the grounds of Bannerworth Hall, stating, that although he had felt it to be his duty to come forward and second Henry Bannerworth in the duel with the vampyre, yet that circumstance by no means obliterated from his memory the insults he had received from Admiral Bell, and, therefore, he declined going to Bannerworth Hall, and bade them a very good morning.

To all this, Admiral Bell replied that he might go and be d —— d, if he liked, and that he considered him a swab and a humbug, and appealed to Jack Pringle whether he, Jack, ever saw such a sanctified looking prig in his life.

“Ay, ay,” says Jack.

This answer, of course, produced the usual contention, which lasted them until they got fairly in the house, where they swore at each other to an extent that was enough to make any one’s hair stand on end, until Henry and Mr. Chillingworth interfered, and really begged that they would postpone the discussion until some more fitting opportunity.

The whole of the circumstances were then related to Flora; who, while she blamed her brother much for fighting the duel with the vampyre, found in the conduct of that mysterious individual, as regarded the encounter, yet another reason for believing him to be strictly sincere in his desire to save her from the consequences of his future visits.

Her desire to leave Bannerworth Hall consequently became more and more intense, and as the admiral really now considered himself the master of the house, they offered no amount of opposition to the subject, but merely said, —

"My dear Flora, Admiral Bell shall decide in all these matters, now. We know that he is our sincere friend; and that whatever he says we ought to do, will be dictated by the best possible feelings towards us."

"Then I appeal to you, sir," said Flora, turning to the admiral.

"Very good," replied the old man; "then I say—"

"Nay, admiral," interrupted Mr. Chillingworth; "you promised me, but a short time since, that you would come to no decision whatever upon this question, until you had heard some particulars which I have to relate to you, which, in my humble opinion, will sway your judgment."

"And so I did," cried the admiral; "but I had forgotten all about it. Flora, my dear, I'll be with you in an hour or two. My friend, the doctor, here, has got some sow by the ear, and fancies it's the right one; however, I'll hear what he has got to say, first, before we come to a conclusion. So, come along, Mr. Chillingworth, and let's have it out at once."

"Flora," said Henry, when the admiral had left the room, "I can see that you wish to leave the Hall."

"I do, brother; but not to go far — I wish rather to hide from Varney than to make myself inaccessible by distance."

"You still cling to this neighbourhood?"

"I do, I do; and you know with what hope I cling to it."

"Perfectly; you still think it possible that Charles Holland may be united to you."

"I do, I do."

"You believe his faith."

"Oh, yes; as I believe in Heaven's mercy."

"And I, Flora; I would not doubt him now for worlds; something even now seems to whisper to me that a brighter sun of happiness will yet dawn upon us, and that, when the mists which at present enshroud ourselves and our fortunes pass away, they will disclose a landscape full of beauty, the future of which shall know no pangs."

"Yes, brother," exclaimed Flora, enthusiastically; "this, after all, may be but some trial, grievous while it lasts, but yet tending eventually only to make the future look more bright and beautiful. Heaven may yet have in store for us all some great happiness, which shall spring clearly and decidedly from out these misfortunes."

"Be it so, and may we ever thus banish despair by such hopeful propositions. Lean on my arm, Flora; you are safe with me. Come, dearest, and taste the sweetness of the morning air."

There was, indeed now, a hopefulness about the manner in which Henry Bannerworth spoke, such as Flora had not for some weary months had the pleasure of listening to, and she eagerly rose to accompany him into the garden, which was glowing with all the beauty of sunshine, for the day had turned out to be much finer than the early morning had at all promised it would be.

"Flora," he said, when they had taken some turns to and fro in the garden, "notwithstanding all that has happened, there is no convincing Mr. Chillingworth that Sir Francis Varney is really what to us he appears."

"Indeed!"

"It is so. In the face of all evidence, he neither will believe in vampyres at all, nor that Varney is anything but some mortal man, like ourselves, in his thoughts, talents, feelings, and modes of life; and with no more power to do any one an injury than we have."

"Oh, would that I could think so!"

"And I; but, unhappily, we have by far too many, and too conclusive evidences to the contrary."

"We have, indeed, brother."

"And though, while we respect that strength of mind in our friend which will not allow him, even almost at the last extremity, to yield to what appear to be stern facts, we may not ourselves be so obdurate, but may feel that we know enough to be convinced."

"You have no doubt, brother?"

"Most reluctantly, I must confess, that I feel compelled to consider Varney as something more than mortal."

"He must be so."

"And now, sister, before we leave the place which has been a home to us from earliest life, let us for a few moments consider if there be any possible excuse for the notion of Mr. Chillingworth, to the effect that Sir Francis Varney wants possession of the house for some purpose still more inimical to our peace and prosperity than any he has yet attempted."

"Has he such an opinion?"

"He has."

"'Tis very strange."

"Yes, Flora; he seems to gather from all the circumstances, nothing but an overwhelming desire on the part of Sir Francis Varney to become the tenant of Bannerworth Hall."

"He certainly wishes to possess it."

"Yes; but can you, sister, in the exercise of any possible amount of fancy, imagine any motive for such an anxiety beyond what he alleges?"

"Which is merely that he is fond of old houses."

"Precisely so. That is the reason, and the only one, that can be got from him. Heaven only knows if it be the true one."

"It may be, brother."

"As you say, it may; but there's a doubt, nevertheless, Flora. I much rejoice that you have had an interview with this mysterious being, for you have certainty, since that time, been happier and more composed than I ever hoped to see you again."

"I have indeed."

"It is sufficiently perceivable."

"Somehow, brother, since that interview, I have not had the same sort of dread of Sir Francis Varney which before made the very sound of his name a note of terror to me. His words, and all he said to me during that interview which took place so strangely between us, indeed how I know not, tended altogether rather to make him, to a certain extent, an object of my sympathies rather than my abhorrence."

"That is very strange."

"I own that it is strange, Henry; but when we come for but a brief moment to reflect upon the circumstances which have occurred, we shall, I think, be able to find some cause even to pity Varney the vampyre."

"How?"

"Thus, brother. It is said — and well may I who have been subject to an attack of such a nature, tremble to repeat the saying — that those who have been once subject to the visitations of a vampyre, are themselves in a way to become one of the dreadful and maddening fraternity."

"I have heard so much, sister," replied Henry.

"Yes; and therefore who knows but that Sir Francis Varney may, at one time, have been as innocent as we are ourselves of the terrible and fiendish propensity which now makes him a terror and a reproach to all who know him, or are in any way obnoxious to his attacks."

"That is true."

"There may have been a time — who shall say there was not? — when he, like me, would have shrunk, with a dread as great as any one could have experienced, from the contamination of the touch even of a vampyre."

"I cannot, sister, deny the soundness of your reasoning," said Henry, with a sigh; "but I still no not see anything, even from a full conviction that Varney is unfortunate, which should induce us to tolerate him."

"Nay, brother, I said not tolerate. What I mean is, that even with the horror and dread we must naturally feel at such a being, we may afford to mingle some amount of pity, which shall make us rather seek to shun him, than to cross his path with a resolution of doing him an injury."

"I perceive well, sister, what you mean. Rather than remain here, and make an attempt to defy Sir Francis Varney, you would fly from him, and leave him undisputed master of the field."

"I would — I would."

"Heaven forbid that I or any one should thwart you. You know well, Flora, how dear you are to me; you know well that your happiness has ever been to us all a matter which has assumed the most important of shapes, as regarded our general domestic policy. It is not, therefore, likely now, dear sister, that we should thwart you in your wish to remove from here."

"I know, Henry, all you would say," remarked Flora, as a tear started to her eyes. "I know well all you think, and, in your love for me, I likewise know well I rely for ever. You are attached to this place, as, indeed, we all are, by a thousand happy and pleasant associations; but listen to me further, Henry, I do not wish to wander far."

"Not far, Flora?"

"No. Do I not still cling to a hope that Charles may yet appear? and if he do so, it will assuredly be in this neighbourhood, which he knows is native and most dear to us all."

"True."

"Then do I wish to make some sort of parade, in the way of publicity, of our leaving the Hall."

"Yes, yes."

"And yet not go far. In the neighbouring town, for example, surely we might find some means of living entirely free from remark or observation as to who or what we were."

"That, sister, I doubt. If you seek for that species of solitude which you contemplate, it is only to be found in a desert."

"A desert?"

"Yes; or in a large city."

"Indeed!"

"Ay, Flora; you may well believe me, that it is so. In a small community you can have no possible chance of evading an amount of scrutiny which would very soon pierce through any disguise you could by any possibility assume."

"Then there is no resource. We must go far."

"Nay, I will consider for you, Flora; and although, as a general principle, what I have said I know to be true, yet some more special circumstance may arise that may point a course that, while it enables us, for Charles Holland's sake, to remain in this immediate neighbourhood, yet will procure to us all the secrecy we may desire."

"Dear — dear brother," said Flora, as she flung herself upon Henry's neck, "you speak cheeringly to me, and, what is more, you believe in Charles's faithfulness and truth."

"As Heaven is my judge, I do."

"A thousand, thousand thanks for such an assurance. I know him too well to doubt, for one moment, his faith. Oh, brother! could he — could Charles Holland, the soul of honour, the abode of every noble impulse that can adorn humanity — could he have written those letters? No, no! perish the thought!"

"It has perished."

"Thank God!"

"I only, upon reflection, wonder how, misled for the moment by the concurrence of a number of circumstances, I could ever have suspected him."

"It is like your generous nature, brother to say so; but you know as well as I, that there has been one here who has, far from feeling any sort of anxiety to think as well as possible of poor Charles Holland, has done all that in him lay to take the worst view of his mysterious disappearance, and induce us to do the like."

"You allude to Mr. Marchdale?"

"I do."

"Well, Flora, at the same time that I must admit you have cause for speaking of Mr. Marchdale as you do, yet when we come to consider all things, there may be found for him excuses."

“May there?”

“Yes, Flora; he is a man, as he himself says, past the meridian of life, and the world is a sad as well as a bad teacher, for it soon — too soon, alas! deprives us of our trusting confidence in human nature.”

“It may be so; but yet, he, knowing as he did so very little of Charles Holland, judged him hastily and harshly.”

“You rather ought to say, Flora, that he did not judge him generously.”

“Well, be it so.”

“And you must recollect, when you say so, that Marchdale did not love Charles Holland.”

“Nay, now,” said Flora, while there flashed across her cheek, for a moment, a heightened colour, “you are commencing to jest with me, and, therefore, we will say no more. You know, dear Henry, all my hopes, my wishes, and my feelings, and I shall therefore leave my future destiny in your hands, to dispose of as you please. Look yonder!”

“Where?”

“There. Do you not see the admiral and Mr. Chillingworth walking among the trees?”

“Yes, yes; I do now.”

“How very serious and intent they are upon the subject of their discourse. They seem quite lost to all surrounding objects. I could not have imagined any subject that would so completely have absorbed the attention of Admiral Bell.”

“Mr. Chillingworth had something to relate to him or to propose, of a nature which, perchance, has had the effect of enchaining all his attention — he called him from the room.”

“Yes; I saw that he did. But see, they come towards us, and now we shall, probably, hear what is the subject-matter of their discourse and consultation."

"We shall."

Admiral Bell had evidently seen Henry and his sister, for now, suddenly, as if not from having for the first moment observed them, and, in consequence, broken off their private discourse, but as if they arrived at some point in it which enabled them to come to a conclusion to be communicative, the admiral came towards the brother and sister,

"Well," said the bluff old admiral, when they were sufficiently near to exchange words, "well, Miss Flora, you are looking a thousand times better than you were."

"I thank you, admiral, I am much better."

"Oh, to be sure you are; and you will be much better still, and no sort of mistake. Now, here's the doctor and I have both been agreeing upon what is best for you."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, to be sure. Have we not, doctor?"

"We have, admiral."

"Good; and what, now, Miss Flora, do you suppose it is?"

"I really cannot say."

"Why, it's change of air, to be sure. You must get away from here as quickly as you can, or there will be no peace for you."

"Yes," added Mr. Chillingworth, advancing; "I am quite convinced that change of scene and change of place, and habits, and people, will tend more to your complete recovery than any other circumstances. In the most ordinary cases of indisposition we always find that the invalid recovers much sooner away from the scene of his indisposition, than by remaining in it, even though its general salubrity be much greater than the place to which he may be removed."

"Good," said the admiral.

"Then we are to understand," said Henry, with a smile, "that we are no longer to be your guests, Admiral Bell?"

"Belay there!" cried the admiral; "who told you to understand any such thing, I should like to know?"

"Well, but we shall look upon this house as yours, now; and, that being the case, if we remove from it, of course we cease to be your guests any longer."

"That's all you know about it. Now, hark ye. You don't command the fleet, so don't pretend to know what the admiral is going to do. I have made money by knocking about some of the enemies of old England, and that's the most gratifying manner in the world of making money, so far as I am concerned."

"It is an honourable mode."

"Of course it is. Well, I am going to — what the deuce do you call it?"

"What?"

"That's just what I want to know. Oh, I have it now. I am going to what the lawyers call invest it."

"A prudent step, admiral, and one which it is to be hoped, before now, has occurred to you."

"Perhaps it has and perhaps it hasn't; however, that's my business, and no one's else's. I am going to invest my spare cash in taking houses; so, as I don't care a straw where the houses may be situated, you can look out for one somewhere that will suit you, and I'll take it; so, after all, you will be my guests there just the same as you are here."

"Admiral," said Henry, "it would be imposing upon a generosity as rare as it is noble, were we to allow you to do so much for us as you contemplate."

"Very good."

"We cannot — we dare not."

"But I say you shall. So you have had your say, and I've had mine, after which, if you please, Master Henry Bannerworth, I shall take upon myself to consider the affair as altogether settled. You can commence operations as soon as you like. I know that Miss Flora, here — bless her sweet eyes — don't want to stay at Bannerworth Hall any longer than she can help it."

"Indeed I was urging upon Henry to remove," said Flora; "but yet I cannot help feeling with him, admiral, that we are imposing upon your goodness."

"Go on imposing, then."

"But—"

"Psha! Can't a man be imposed upon if he likes? D — n it, that's a poor privilege for an Englishman to be forced to make a row about. I tell you I like it. I will be imposed upon, so there's an end of that; and now let's come in and see what Mrs. Bannerworth has got ready for luncheon."

It can hardly be supposed that such a popular ferment as had been created in the country town, by the singular reports concerning Varney the Vampyre, should readily, and without abundant satisfaction, subside.

An idea like that which had lent so powerful an impulse to the popular mind, was one far easier to set going than to deprecate or extinguish. The very circumstances which had occurred to foil the excited mob in their pursuit of Sir Francis Varney, were of a nature to increase the popular superstition concerning him, and to make him and his acts appear in still more dreadful colours.

Mobs do not reason very closely and clearly; but the very fact of the frantic flight of Sir Francis Varney from the projected attack of the infuriated multitude, was seized hold of as proof positive of the reality of his vampyre-like existence.

Then, again, had he not disappeared in the most mysterious manner? Had he not sought refuge where no human being would think of seeking refuge, namely, in that old, dilapidated ruin, where, when his pursuers were so close upon his track, he had succeeded in eluding their grasp with a facility which looked as if he had vanished into thin air, or as if the very earth had opened to receive him bodily within its cold embraces?

It is not to be wondered at, that the few who fled so precipitately from the ruin, lost nothing of the wonderful story they had to tell, in the carrying it from that place to the town. When they reached their neighbours, they not only told what had really occurred, but they added to it all their own surmises, and the fanciful creation of all their own fears, so that before mid-day, and about the time when Henry Bannerworth was conversing so quietly in the gardens of the Hall with his beautiful sister, there was an amount of popular ferment in the town, of which they had no conception.

All business was suspended, and many persons, now that once the idea had been started concerning the possibility that a vampyre might have been visiting some of the houses in the place, told how, in the dead of the night, they had heard strange noises. How children had shrieked from no apparent cause — doors opened and shut without human agency; and windows rattled that never had been known to rattle before.

Some, too, went so far as to declare that they had been awakened out of their sleep by noises incidental to an effort made to enter their chambers; and others had seen dusky forms of gigantic proportions outside their windows, tampering with their fastenings, and only disappearing when the light of day mocked all attempts at concealment.

These tales flew from mouth to mouth, and all listened to them with such an eager interest, that none thought it worth while to challenge their inconsistencies, or to express a doubt of their truth, because they had not been mentioned before.

The only individual, and he was a remarkably clever man, who made the slightest remark upon the subject of a practical character, hazarded a suggestion that made confusion worse confounded.

He knew something of vampyres. He had travelled abroad, and had heard of them in Germany, as well as in the east, and, to a crowd of wondering and aghast listeners, he said, —

"You may depend upon it, my friends, this has been going on for some time; there have been several mysterious and sudden deaths in the town lately; people have wasted away and died nobody knew how or wherefore."

"Yes — yes," said everybody.

"There was Miles, the butcher; you know how fat he was, and then how fat he wasn't."

A general assent was given to the proposition; and then, elevating one arm in an oratorical manner, the clever fellow continued, —

"I have not a doubt that Miles, the butcher, and every one else who has died suddenly lately, have been victims of the vampyre; and what's more, they'll all be vampyres, and come and suck other people's blood, till at last the whole town will be a town of vampyres."

"But what's to be done?" cried one, who trembled so excessively that he could scarcely stand under his apprehension.

"There is but one plan — Sir Francis Varney must be found, and put out of the world in such a manner that he can't come back to it again; and all those who are dead that we have any suspicion of, should be taken up out of their graves and looked at, to see if they're rotting or not; if they are it's all right; but, if they look fresh and much, as usual, you may depend they're vampyres, and no mistake."

This was a terrific suggestion thrown amongst a mob. To have caught Sir Francis Varney and immolated him at the shrine of popular fury, they would not have shrunk from; but a desecration of the graves of those whom they had known in life was a matter which, however much it had to recommend it, even the boldest stood aghast at, and felt some qualms of irresolution.

There are many ideas, however, which, like the first plunge into a cold bath, are rather uncomfortable for the moment; but which, in a little time, we become so familiarized with, that they become stripped of their disagreeable concomitants, and appear quite pleasing and natural.

So it was with this notion of exhuming the dead bodies of those townspeople who had recently died from what was called a decay of nature, and such other failures of vitality as bore not the tangible name of any understood disease.

From mouth to mouth the awful suggestion spread like wildfire, until at last it grew into such a shape that it almost seemed to become a duty, at all events, to have up Miles the butcher, and see how he looked.

There is, too, about human nature a natural craving curiosity concerning everything connected with the dead. There is not a man of education or of intellectual endowment who would not travel many miles to look upon the exhumation of the remains of some one famous in his time, whether for his vices, his virtues, his knowledge, his talents, or his heroism; and, if this feeling exist in the minds of the educated and refined in a sublimated shape, which lends to it grace and dignity, we may look for it among the vulgar and the ignorant, taking only a grosser and meaner form, in accordance with their habits of thought. The rude materials, of which the highest and noblest feelings of educated minds are formed, will be found amongst the most grovelling and base; and so this vulgar curiosity, which, combined with other feelings, prompted an ignorant and illiterate mob to exhume Miles, the once fat butcher, in a different form tempted the philosophic Hamlet to moralise upon the skull of Yorick.

And it was wonderful to see how, when these people had made up their minds to carry out the singularly interesting, but, at the same, fearful, suggestion, they assumed to themselves a great virtue in so doing — told each other what an absolute necessity there was, for the public good, that it should be done; and then, with loud shouts and cries concerning the vampyre, they proceeded in a body to the village churchyard, where had been lain, with a hope of reposing in peace, the bones of their ancestors.

A species of savage ferocity now appeared to have seized upon the crowd, and the people, in making up their minds to do something which was strikingly at variance with all their preconceived notions of right and wrong, appeared to feel that it was necessary, in order that they might be consistent, to cast off many of the decencies of life, and to become riotous and reckless.

As they proceeded towards the graveyard, they amused themselves by breaking the windows of the tax-gatherers, and doing what passing mischief they could to the habitations of all who held any official situation or authority.

This was something like a proclamation of war against those who might think it their duty to interfere with the lawless proceedings of an ignorant multitude. A public-house or two, likewise, *en route*, was sacked of some of its inebriating contents, so that, what with the madness of intoxication, and the general excitement consequent upon the very nature of the business which took them to the churchyard, a more wild and infuriated multitude than that which paused at two iron gates which led into the sanctuary of that church could not be imagined.

Those who have never seen a mob placed in such a situation as to have cast off all moral restraint whatever, at the same time that it feels there is no physical power to cope with it, can form no notion of the mass of terrible passions which lie slumbering under what, in ordinary cases, have appeared harmless bosoms, but which now run riot, and overcame every principle of restraint. It is a melancholy fact, but, nevertheless, a fact, despite its melancholy, that, even in a civilised country like this, with a generally well-educated population, nothing but a well-organised physical force keeps down, from the commission of the most outrageous offences, hundreds and thousands of persons.

We have said that the mob paused at the iron gates of the churchyard, but it was more a pause of surprise than one of vacillation, because they saw that those iron gates were closed, which had not been the case within the memory of the oldest among them.

At the first building of the church, and the enclosure of its graveyard, two pairs of these massive gates had been presented by some munificent patron; but, after a time, they hung idly upon their hinges, ornamental certainly, but useless, while a couple of turnstiles, to keep cattle from straying within the sacred precincts, did duty instead, and established, without trouble, the regular thoroughfare, which long habit had dictated as necessary, through the place of sepulture.

But now those gates were closed, and for once were doing duty. Heaven only knows how they had been moved upon their rusty and time-worn hinges. The mob, however, was checked for the moment, and it was clear that the ecclesiastical authorities were resolved to attempt something to prevent the desecration of the tombs.

Those gates were sufficiently strong to resist the first vigorous shake which was given to them by some of the foremost among the crowd, and then one fellow started the idea that they might be opened from the inside, and volunteered to clamber over the wall to do so.

Hoisted up upon the shoulders of several, he grasped the top of the wall, and raised his head above its level, and then something of a mysterious nature rose up from the inside, and dealt him such a whack between the eyes, that down he went sprawling among his coadjutors.

Now, nobody had seen how this injury had been inflicted, and the policy of those in the garrison should have been certainly to keep up the mystery, and leave the invaders in ignorance of what sort of person it was that had so foiled them. Man, however, is prone to indulge in vain glorification, and the secret was exploded by the triumphant waving of the long staff of the beadle, with the gilt knob at the end of it, just over the parapet of the wall, in token of victory.

"It's Waggles! it's Waggles!" cried everybody "it's Waggles, the beadle!"

"Yes," said a voice from within, "it's Waggles, the beadle; and he thinks as he had yer there rather; try it again. The church isn't in danger; oh, no. What do you think of this?"

The staff was flourished more vigorously than ever, and in the secure position that Waggles occupied it seemed not only impossible to attack him, but that he possessed wonderful powers of resistance, for the staff was long and the knob was heavy.

It was a boy who hit upon the ingenious expedient of throwing up a great stone, so that it just fell inside the wall, and hit Waggles a great blow on the head.

The staff was flourished more vigorously than ever, and the mob, in the ecstasy at the fun which was going on, almost forgot the errand which had brought them.

Perhaps after all the affair might have passed off jestingly, had not there been some really mischievous persons among the throng who were determined that such should not be the case, and they incited the multitude to commence an attack upon the gates, which in a few moments must have produced their entire demolition.

Suddenly, however, the boldest drew back, and there was a pause, as the well-known form of the clergyman appeared advancing from the church door, attired in full canonicals.

"There's Mr. Leigh," said several; "how unlucky he should be here."

"What is this?" said the clergyman, approaching the gates. "Can I believe my eyes when I see before me those who compose the worshippers at this church armed, and attempting to enter for the purpose of violence to this sacred place! Oh! let me beseech you, lose not a moment, but return to your homes, and repent of that which you have already done. It is not yet too late; listen, I pray you, to the voice of one with whom you have so often joined in prayer to the throne of the Almighty, who is now looking upon your actions."

This appeal was heard respectfully, but it was evidently very far from suiting the feelings and the wishes of those to whom it was addressed; the presence of the clergyman was evidently an unexpected circumstance, and the more especially too as he appeared in that costume which they had been accustomed to regard with a reverence almost amounting to veneration. He saw the favourable effect he had produced, and anxious to follow it up, he added, —

"Let this little ebullition of feeling pass away, my friends; and, believe me, when I assure you upon my sacred word, that whatever ground there may be for complaint or subject for inquiry, shall be fully and fairly met; and that the greatest exertions shall be made to restore peace and tranquillity to all of you."

"It's all about the vampyre!" cried one fellow— "Mr. Leigh, how should you like a vampyre in the pulpit?"

"Hush, hush! can it be possible that you know so little of the works of that great Being whom you all pretend to adore, as to believe that he would create any class of beings of a nature such as those you ascribe to that terrific word! Oh, let me pray of you to get rid of these superstitions — alike disgraceful to yourselves and afflicting to me."

The clergyman had the satisfaction of seeing the crowd rapidly thinning from before the gates, and he believed his exhortations were having all the effect he wished. It was not until he heard a loud shout behind him, and, upon hastily turning, saw that the churchyard had been scaled at another place by some fifty or sixty persons, that his heart sunk within him, and he began to feel that what he had dreaded would surely come to pass.

Even then he might have done something in the way of pacific exertion, but for the interference of Waggles, the beadle, who spoilt everything.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE OPEN GRAVES. — THE DEAD BODIES. — A SCENE OF TERROR.

We have said Waggles spoilt everything, and so he did, for before Mr. Leigh could utter a word more, or advance two steps towards the rioters, Waggles charged them staff in hand, and there soon ensued a riot of a most formidable description.

A kind of desperation seemed to have seized the beadle, and certainly, by his sudden and unexpected attack, he achieved wonders. When, however, a dozen hands got hold of the staff, and it was wrenched from him, and he was knocked down, and half-a-dozen people rolled over him, Waggles was not near the man he had been, and he would have been very well content to have lain quiet where he was; this, however, he was not permitted to do, for two or three, who had felt what a weighty instrument of warfare the parochial staff was, lifted him bodily from the ground, and canted him over the wall, without much regard to whether he fell on a hard or a soft place on the other side.

This feat accomplished, no further attention was paid to Mr. Leigh, who, finding that his exhortations were quite unheeded, retired into the church with an appearance of deep affliction about him, and locked himself in the vestry.

The crowd now had entire possession — without even the sort of control that an exhortation assumed over them — of the burying-ground, and soon in a dense mass were these desperate and excited people collected round the well-known spot where lay the mortal remains of Miles, the butcher.

“Silence!” cried a loud voice, and every one obeyed the mandate, looking towards the speaker, who was a tall, gaunt-looking man, attired in a suit of faded black, and who now pressed forward to the front of the throng.

“Oh!” cried one, “it’s Fletcher, the ranter. What does he do here?”

“Hear him! hear him!” cried others; “he won’t stop us.”

“Yes, hear him,” cried the tall man, waving his arms about like the sails of a windmill. “Yes, hear him. Sons of darkness, you’re all vampyres, and are continually sucking the life-blood from each other. No wonder that the evil one has power over you all. You’re as men who walk in the darkness when the sunlight invites you, and you listen to the words of humanity when those of a diviner origin are offered to your acceptance. But there shall be miracles in the land, and even in this place, set apart with a pretended piety that is in itself most damnable, you shall find an evidence of the true light; and the proof that those who will follow me the true path to glory shall be found here within this grave. Dig up Miles, the butcher!”

“Hear, hear, hear, hurra!” said every body. “Mr. Fletcher’s not such a fool, after all. He means well.”

“Yes, you sinners,” said the ranter, “and if you find Miles, the butcher, decaying — even as men are expected to decay whose mortal tabernacles are placed within the bowels of the earth — you shall gather from that a great omen, and a sign that if you follow me you seek the Lord; but I you find him looking fresh and healthy, as if the warm blood was still within his veins, you shall take that likewise as a signification that what I say to you shall be as the Gospel, and that by coming to the chapel of the Little Boozlehum, ye shall achieve a great salvation.”

“Very good,” said a brawny fellow, advancing with a spade in his hand; “you get out of the way, and I’ll soon have him up. Here goes, like blue blazes!”

The first shovelful of earth he took up, he cast over his head into the air, so that it fell in a shower among the mob, which of course raised a shout of indignation; and, as he continued so to dispose of the superfluous earth, a general row seemed likely to ensue. Mr. Fletcher opened his mouth to make a remark, and, as that feature of his face was rather a capacious one, a descending lump of mould, of a clayey consistency, fell into it, and got so wedged among his teeth, that in the process of extracting it he nearly brought some of those essential portions of his anatomy with it.

This was a state of things that could not last long, and he who had been so liberal with his spadesful of mould was speedily disarmed, and yet he was a popular favourite, and had done the thing so good-humouredly, that nobody touched him. Six or eight others, who had brought spades and pickaxes, now pushed forward to the work, and in an incredibly short space of time the grave of Miles, the butcher, seemed to be very nearly excavated.

Work of any kind or nature whatever, is speedily executed when done with a wish to get through it; and never, perhaps, within the memory of man, was a grave opened in that churchyard with such a wonderful celerity. The excitement of the crowd grew intense — every available spot from which a view of the grave could be got, was occupied; for the last few minutes scarcely a remark had been uttered, and when, at last, the spade of one of those who were digging struck upon something that sounded like wood, you might have heard a pin drop, and each one there present drew his breath more shortly than before.

“There he is,” said the man, whose spade struck upon the coffin.

Those few words broke the spell, and there was a general murmur, while every individual present seemed to shift his position in his anxiety to obtain a better view of what was about to ensue.

The coffin now having been once found, there seemed to be an increased impetus given to the work; the earth was thrown out with a rapidity that seemed almost the quick result of the working of some machine; and those closest to the grave's brink crouched down, and, intent as they were upon the progress of events, heeded not the damp earth that fell upon them, nor the frail brittle and humid remains of humanity that occasionally rolled to their feet.

It was, indeed, a scene of intense excitement — a scene which only wanted a few prominent features in its foreground of a more intellectual and higher cast than composed the mob, to make it a fit theme for a painter of the highest talent.

And now the last few shovelfuls of earth that hid the top of the coffin were cast from the grave, and that narrow house which contained the mortal remains of him who was so well known, while in life, to almost every one then present, was brought to the gaze of eyes which never had seemed likely to have looked upon him again.

The cry was now for ropes, with which to raise the cumbrous mass; but these were not to be had, no one thought of providing himself with such appliances, so that by main strength, only, could the coffin be raised to the brink.

The difficulty of doing this was immense, for there was nothing tangible to stand upon; and even when the mould from the sides was sufficiently cleared away, that the handles of the coffin could be laid hold of, they came away immediately in the grasp of those who did so.

But the more trouble that presented itself to the accomplishment of the designs of the mob, the more intent that body seemed upon carrying out to the full extent their original designs.

Finding it quite impossible by bodily strength to raise the coffin of the butcher from the position in which it had got imbedded by excessive rains, a boy was hastily despatched to the village for ropes, and never did boy run with such speed before, for all his own curiosity was excited in the issue of an adventure, that to his young imagination was appallingly interesting.

As impatient as mobs usually are, they had not time, in this case, for the exercise of that quality of mind before the boy came back with the necessary means of exerting quite a different species of power against the butcher's coffin.

Strong ropes were slid under the inert mass, and twenty hands at once plied the task of raising that receptacle of the dead from what had been presumed to be its last resting-place. The ropes strained and creaked, and many thought that they would burst asunder sooner than raise the heavy coffin of the defunct butcher.

It is singular what reasons people find for backing their opinion.

"You may depend he's a vampyre," said one, "or it wouldn't be so difficult to get him out of the grave."

"Oh, there can be no mistake about that," said one; "when did a natural Christian's coffin stick in the mud in that way?"

"Ah, to be sure," said another; "I knew no good would come of his goings on; he never was a decent sort of man like his neighbours, and many queer things have been said of him that I have no doubt are true enough, if we did but know the rights of them."

"Ah, but," said a young lad, thrusting his head between the two who were talking, "if he is a vampyre, how does he get out of his coffin of a night with all that weight of mould a top of him?"

One of the men considered for a moment, and then finding no rational answer occur to him, he gave the boy a box on the ear, saying, —

"I should like to know what business that is of yours? Boys, now-a-days, ain't like the boys in my time; they think nothing now of putting their spokes in grown-up people's wheels, just as if their opinions were of any consequence."

Now, by a vigorous effort, those who were tugging at the ropes succeeded in moving the coffin a little, and that first step was all the difficulty, for it was loosened from the adhesive soil in which it lay, and now came up with considerable facility.

There was a half shout of satisfaction at this result, while some of the congregation turned pale, and trembled at the prospect of the sight which was about to present itself; the coffin was dragged from the grave's brink fairly among the long rank grass that flourished in the churchyard, and then they all looked at it for a time, and the men who had been most earnest in raising it wiped the perspiration from their brows, and seemed to shrink from the task of opening that receptacle of the dead now that it was fairly in their power so to do.

Each man looked anxiously in his neighbour's face, and several audibly wondered why somebody else didn't open the coffin.

"There's no harm in it," said one; "if he's a vampyre, we ought to know it; and, if he ain't, we can't do any hurt to a dead man."

"Oughtn't we to have the service for the dead?" said one.

"Yes," said the impertinent boy who had before received the knock on the head, "I think we ought to have that read backwards."

This ingenious idea was recompensed by a great many kicks and cuffs, which ought to have been sufficient to have warned him of the great danger of being a little before his age in wit.

"Where's the use of shirking the job?" cried he who had been so active in shoveling the mud upon the multitude; "why, you cowardly sneaking set of humbugs, you're half afraid, now."

"Afraid — afraid!" cried everybody: "who's afraid."

"Ah, who's afraid?" said a little man, advancing, and assuming an heroic attitude; "I always notice, if anybody's afraid, it's some big fellow, with more bones than brains."

At this moment, the man to whom this reproach was more particularly levelled, raised a horrible shout of terror, and cried out, in frantic accents, —

"He's a-coming — he's a-coming!"

The little man fell at once into the grave, while the mob, with one accord, turned tail, and fled in all directions, leaving him alone with the coffin. Such a fighting, and kicking, and scrambling ensued to get over the wall of the grave-yard, that this great fellow, who had caused all the mischief, burst into such peals of laughter that the majority of the people became aware that it was a joke, and came creeping back, looking as sheepish as possible.

Some got up very faint sorts of laugh, and said "very good," and swore they saw what big Dick meant from the first, and only ran to make the others run.

"Very good," said Dick, "I'm glad you enjoyed it, that's all. My eye, what a scampering there was among you. Where's my little friend, who was so infernally cunning about bones and brains?"

With some difficulty the little man was extricated from the grave, and then, oh, for the consistency of a mob! they all laughed at him; those very people who, heedless of all the amenities of existence, had been trampling upon each other, and roaring with terror, actually had the impudence to laugh at him, and call him a cowardly little rascal, and say it served him right.

But such is popularity!

“Well, if nobody won’t open the coffin,” said big Dick, “I will, so here goes. I knowed the old fellow when he was alive, and many a time he’s d —— d me and I’ve d —— d him, so I ain’t a-going to be afraid of him now he’s dead. We was very intimate, you see, ‘cos we was the two heaviest men in the parish; there’s a reason for everything.”

“Ah, Dick’s the fellow to do it,” cried a number of persons; “there’s nobody like Dick for opening a coffin; he’s the man as don’t care for nothing.”

“Ah, you snivelling curs,” said Dick, “I hate you. If it warn’t for my own satisfaction, and all for to prove that my old friend, the butcher, as weighed seventeen stone, and stood six feet two and-a-half on his own sole, I’d see you all jolly well—”

“D —— d first,” said the boy; “open the lid, Dick, let’s have a look.”

“Ah, you’re a rum un,” said Dick, “arter my own heart. I sometimes thinks as you must be a nevy, or some sort of relation of mine. Howsomdever, here goes. Who’d a thought that I should ever had a look at old fat and thunder again? — that’s what I used to call him; and then he used to request me to go down below, where I needn’t turn round to light my blessed pipe.”

“Hell — we know,” said the boy; “why don’t you open the lid, Dick?”

“I’m a going,” said Dick; “kim up.”

He introduced the corner of a shovel between the lid and the coffin, and giving it a sudden wrench, he loosened it all down one side.

A shudder pervaded the multitude, and, popularly speaking, you might have heard a pin drop in that crowded churchyard at that eventful moment.

Dick then proceeded to the other side, and executed the same manoeuvre.

"Now for it," he said; "we shall see him in a moment, and we'll think we seed him still."

"What a lark!" said the boy.

"You hold yer jaw, will yer? Who axed you for a remark, blow yer? What do you mean by squatting down there, like a cock-sparrow, with a pain in his tail, hanging yer head, too, right over the coffin? Did you never hear of what they call a fluvifium coming from the dead, yer ignorant beast, as is enough to send nobody to blazes in a minute? Get out of the way of the cold meat, will yer?"

"A what, do you say, Dick?"

"Request information from the extreme point of my elbow."

Dick threw down the spade, and laying hold of the coffin-lid with both hands, he lifted it off, and flung it on one side.

There was a visible movement and an exclamation among the multitude. Some were pushed down, in the eager desire of those behind to obtain a sight of the ghastly remains of the butcher; those at a distance were frantic, and the excitement was momentarily increasing.

They might all have spared themselves the trouble, for the coffin was empty — here was no dead butcher, nor any evidence of one ever having been there, not even the grave-clothes; the only thing at all in the receptacle of the dead was a brick.

Dick's astonishment was so intense that his eyes and mouth kept opening together to such an extent, that it seemed doubtful when they would reach their extreme point of elongation. He then took up the brick and looked at it curiously, and turned it over and over, examined the ends and the sides with a critical eye, and at length he said, —

"Well, I'm blowed, here's a transmogrification; he's consolidified himself into a blessed brick — my eye, here's a curiosity."

"But you don't mean to say that's the butcher, Dick?" said the boy.

Dick reached over, and gave him a tap on the head with the brick.

"There!" he said, "that's what I calls occular demonstration. Do you believe it now, you blessed infidel? What's more natural? He was an out-and-out brick while he was alive; and he's turned to a brick now he's dead."

"Give it to me, Dick," said the boy; "I should like to have that brick, just for the fun of the thing."

"I'll see you turned into a pantile first. I sha'n't part with this here, it looks so blessed sensible; it's a gaining on me every minute as a most remarkable likeness, d —— d if it ain't."

By this time the bewilderment of the mob had subsided; now that there was no dead butcher to look upon, they fancied themselves most grievously injured; and, somehow or other, Dick, notwithstanding all his exertions in their service, was looked upon in the light of a showman, who had promised some startling exhibition and then had disappointed his auditors.

The first intimation he had of popular vengeance was a stone thrown at him, but Dick's eye happened to be upon the fellow who threw it, and collaring him in a moment, he dealt him a cuff on the side of the head, which confused his faculties for a week.

"Hark ye," he then cried, with a loud voice, "don't interfere with me; you know it won't go down. There's something wrong here; and, as one of yourselves, I'm as much interested in finding out what it is as any of you can possibly be. There seems to be some truth in this vampyre business; our old friend, the butcher, you see, is not in his grave; where is he then?"

The mob looked at each other, and none attempted to answer the question.

"Why, of course, he's a vampyre," said Dick, "and you may all of you expect to see him, in turn, come into your bed-room windows with a burst, and lay hold of you like a million and a half of leeches rolled into one."

There was a general expression of horror, and then Dick continued, —

"You'd better all of you go home; I shall have no hand in pulling up any more of the coffins — this is a dose for me. Of course you can do what you like."

"Pull them all up!" cried a voice; "pull them all up! Let's see how many vampyres there are in the churchyard."

"Well, it's no business of mine," said Dick; "but I wouldn't, if I was you."

"You may depend," said one, "that Dick knows something about it, or he wouldn't take it so easy."

"Ah! down with him," said the man who had received the box on the ears; "he's perhaps a vampyre himself."

The mob made a demonstration towards him, but Dick stood his ground, and they paused again.

"Now, you're a cowardly set," he said; "cause you're disappointed, you want to come upon me. Now, I'll just show what a little thing will frighten you all again, and I warn beforehand it will, so you sha'n't say you didn't know it, and were taken by surprise."

The mob looked at him, wondering what he was going to do.

"Once! twice! thrice!" he said, and then he flung the brick up into the air an immense height, and shouted "heads," in a loud tone.

A general dispersion of the crowd ensued, and the brick fell in the centre of a very large circle indeed.

"There you are again," said Dick; "why, what a nice act you are!"

"What fun!" said the boy. "It's a famous coffin, this, Dick," and he laid himself down in the butcher's last resting-place. "I never was in a coffin before — it's snug enough."

"Ah, you're a rum 'un," said Dick; "you're such a inquiring genius, you is; you'll get your head into some hole one day, and not be able to get it out again, and then I shall see you a kicking. Hush! lay still — don't say anything."

"Good again," said the boy; "what shall I do?"

"Give a sort of a howl and a squeak, when they've all come back again."

"Won't I!" said the boy; "pop on the lid."

"There you are," said Dick; "d —— d if I don't adopt you, and bring you up to the science of nothing."

"Now, listen to me, good people all," added Dick; "I have really got something to say to you."

At this intimation the people slowly gathered again round the grave.

"Listen," said Dick, solemnly; "it strikes me there's some tremendous do going on."

"Yes, there is," said several who were foremost.

"It won't be long before you'll all of you be most d — nably astonished; but let me beg of all you not to accuse me of having anything to do with it, provided I tell you all I know."

"No, Dick; we won't — we won't — we won't."

"Good; then, listen. I don't know anything, but I'll tell you what I think, and that's as good; I don't think that this brick is the butcher; but I think, that when you least expect it — hush! come a little closer."

"Yes, yes; we are closer."

"Well, then, I say, when you all least expect it, and when you ain't dreaming of such a thing, you'll hear something of my fat friend as is dead and gone, that will astonish you all."

Dick paused, and he gave the coffin a slight kick, as intimation to the boy that he might as well be doing his part in the drama, upon which that ingenious young gentleman set up such a howl, that even Dick jumped, so unearthly did it sound within the confines of that receptacle of the dead.

But if the effect upon him was great, what must it have been upon those whom it took completely unawares? For a moment or two they seemed completely paralysed, and then they frightened the boy, for the shout of terror that rose from so many throats at once was positively alarming.

This jest of Dick's was final, for, before three minutes had elapsed, the churchyard was clear of all human occupants save himself and the boy, who had played his part so well in the coffin.

"Get out," said Dick, "it's all right — we've done 'em at last; and now you may depend upon it they won't be in a hurry to come here again. You keep your own counsel, or else somebody will serve you out for this. I don't think you're altogether averse to a bit of fun, and if you keep yourself quiet, you'll have the satisfaction of hearing what's said about this affair in every pot-house in the village, and no mistake.”

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE PREPARATIONS FOR LEAVING BANNERWORTH HALL, AND THE MYSTERIOUS CONDUCT OF THE ADMIRAL AND MR. CHILLINGWORTH.

It seemed now, that, by the concurrence of all parties, Bannerworth Hall was to be abandoned; and, notwithstanding Henry was loth — as he had, indeed, from the first shown himself — to leave the ancient abode of his race, yet, as not only Flora, but the admiral and his friend Mr. Chillingworth seemed to be of opinion that it would be a prudent course to adopt, he felt that it would not become him to oppose the measure.

He, however, now made his consent to depend wholly upon the full and free acquiescence of every member of the family.

"If," he said, "there be any among us who will say to me 'Continue to keep open the house in which we have passed so many happy hours, and let the ancient home of our race still afford a shelter to us,' I shall feel myself bound to do so; but if both my mother and my brother agree to a departure from it, and that its hearth shall be left cold and desolate, be it so. I will not stand in the way of any unanimous wish or arrangement."

"We may consider that, then, as settled," said the admiral, "for I have spoken to your brother, and he is of our opinion. Therefore, my boy, we may all be off as soon as we can conveniently get under weigh."

"But my mother?

"Oh, there, I don't know. You must speak to her yourself. I never, if I can help it, interfere with the women folks."

"If she consent, then I am willing."

"Will you ask her?"

"I will not ask her to leave, because I know, then, what answer she would at once give; but she shall hear the proposition, and I will leave her to decide upon it, unbiased in her judgment by any stated opinion of mine upon the matter."

"Good. That'll do; and the proper way to put it, too. There's no mistake about that, I can tell you."

Henry, although he went through the ceremony of consulting his mother, had no sort of doubt before he did so that she was sufficiently aware of the feelings and wishes of Flora to be prepared to yield a ready assent to the proposition of leaving the Hall.

Moreover, Mr. Marchdale had, from the first, been an advocate of such a course of proceeding, and Henry well knew how strong an influence he had over Mrs. Bannerworth's mind, in consequence of the respect in which she held him as an old and valued friend.

He was, therefore, prepared for what his mother said, which was, —

"My dear Henry, you know that the wishes of my children, since they have been grown up and capable of coming to a judgment for themselves, have ever been laws to me. If you, among you all, agree to leave this place, do so."

"But will you leave it freely, mother?"

"Most freely I go with you all; what is it that has made this house and all its appurtenances pleasant in my eyes, but the presence in it of those who are so dear to me? If you all leave it, you take with you the only charms it ever possessed; so it becomes in itself as nothing. I am quite ready to accompany you all anywhere, so that we do but keep together."

"Then, mother, we may consider that as settled."

"As you please."

"'It's scarcely as I please. I must confess that I would fain have clung with a kind of superstitious reverence to this ancient abiding-place of my race, but it may not be so. Those, perchance, who are more practically able to come to correct conclusions, in consequence of their feelings not being sufficiently interested to lead them astray, have decided otherwise; and, therefore, I am content to leave."

"Do not grieve at it, Henry. There has hung a cloud of misfortune over us all since the garden of this house became the scene of an event which we can none of us remember but with terror and shuddering."

"Two generations of our family must live and die before the remembrance of that circumstance can be obliterated. But we will think of it no more."

There can no doubt but that the dreadful circumstance to which both Mrs. Bannerworth and Henry alluded, was the suicide of the father of the family in the gardens which before has been hinted at in the course of this narration, as being a circumstance which had created a great sensation at the time, and cast a great gloom for many months over the family.

The reader will, doubtless, too, recollect that, at his last moments, this unhappy individual was said to have uttered some incoherent words about some hidden money, and that the rapid hand of death alone seemed to prevent him from being explicit upon that subject, and left it merely a matter of conjecture.

As years had rolled on, this affair, even as a subject of speculation, had ceased to occupy the minds of any of the Bannerworth family, and several of their friends, among whom was

Mr. Marchdale, were decidedly of opinion that the apparently pointed and mysterious words uttered, were but the disordered wanderings of an intellect already hovering on the confines of eternity.

Indeed, far from any money, of any amount, being a disturbance to the last moments of the dissolute man, whose vices and extravagances had brought his family, to such ruin, it was pretty generally believed that he had committed suicide simply from a conviction of the impossibility of raising any more supplies of cash, to enable him to carry on the career which he had pursued for so long.

But to resume.

Henry at once communicated to the admiral what his mother had said, and then the whole question regarding the removal being settled in the affirmative, nothing remained to be done but to set about it as quickly as possible.

The Bannerworths lived sufficiently distant from the town to be out of earshot of the disturbances which were then taking place; and so completely isolated were they from all sort of society, that they had no notion of the popular disturbance which Varney the vampyre had given rise to.

It was not until the following morning that Mr. Chillingworth, who had been home in the meantime, brought word of what had taken place, and that great commotion was still in the town, and that the civil authorities, finding themselves by far too weak to contend against the popular will, had sent for assistance to a garrison town, some twenty miles distant.

It was a great grief to the Bannerworth family to hear these tidings, not that they were in any way, except as victims, accessory to creating the disturbance about the vampyre, but it seemed to promise a kind of notoriety which they might well shrink from, and which they were just the people to view with dislike.

View the matter how we like, however, it is not to be considered as at all probable that the Bannerworth family would remain long in ignorance of what a great sensation they had created unwittingly in the neighbourhood.

The very reasons which had induced their servants to leave their establishment, and prefer throwing themselves completely out of place, rather than remain in so ill-omened a house, were sure to be bruited abroad far and wide.

And that, perhaps, when they came to consider of it, would suffice to form another good and substantial reason for leaving the Hall, and seeking a refuge in obscurity from the extremely troublesome sort of popularity incidental to their peculiar situation.

Mr. Chillingworth felt uncommonly chary of telling them all that had taken place; although he was well aware that the proceedings of the riotous mob had not terminated with the little disappointment at the old ruin, to which they had so effectually chased Varney the vampyre, but to lose him so singularly when he got there.

No doubt he possessed the admiral with the uproar that was going on in the town, for the latter did hint a little of it to Henry Bannerworth.

"Hilloa!" he said to Henry, as he saw him walking in the garden; "it strikes me if you and your ship's crew continue in these latitudes, you'll get as notorious as the Flying Dutchman in the southern ocean."

"How do you mean?" said Henry.

"Why, it's a sure going proverb to say, that a nod's as good as a wink; but, the fact is, it's getting rather too well known to be pleasant, that a vampyre has struck up rather a close acquaintance with your family. I understand there's a precious row in the town."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; bother the particulars, for I don't know them; but, hark ye, by to-morrow I'll have found a place for you to go to, so pack up the sticks, get all your stores ready to clear out, and make yourself scarce from this place."

"I understand you," said Henry; "We have become the subject of popular rumour; I've only to beg of you, admiral, that you'll say nothing of this to Flora; she has already suffered enough, Heaven knows; do not let her have the additional infliction of thinking that her name is made familiar in every pothouse in the town."

"Leave me alone for that," said the admiral. "Do you think I'm an ass?"

"Ay, ay," said Jack Pringle, who came in at that moment, and thought the question was addressed to him.

"Who spoke to you, you bad-looking horse-marine?"

"Me a horse-marine! didn't you ask a plain question of a fellow, and get a plain answer?"

"Why, you son of a bad looking gun, what do you mean by that? I tell you what it is, Jack; I've let you come sneaking too often on the quarter-deck, and now you come poking your fun at your officers, you rascal!"

"I poking fun!" said Jack; "couldn't think of such a thing. I should just as soon think of you making a joke as me."

"Now, I tell you what it is, I shall just strike you off the ship's books, and you shall just go and cruise by yourself; I've done with you."

"Go and tell that to the marines, if you like," said Jack. "I ain't done with you yet, for a jolly long watch. Why, what do you suppose would become of you, you great babby, without me? Ain't I always a conveying you from place to place, and steering you through all sorts of difficulties?"

"D — -n your impudence!"

"Well, then, d — -n yours."

"Shiver my timbers!"

"Ay, you may do what you like with your own timbers."

"And you won't leave me?"

"Sartingly not."

"Come here, then?"

Jack might have expected a gratuity, for he advanced with alacrity.

"There," said the admiral, as he laid his stick across his shoulders; "that's your last month's wages; don't spend it all at once."

"Well, I'm d —— d!" said Jack; "who'd have thought of that? — he's a turning rumgumtious, and no mistake. Howsomdever, I must turn it over in my mind, and be even with him, somehow — I owes him one for that. I say, admiral."

"What now, you lubber?"

"Nothing; turn that over in your mind;" and away Jack walked, not quite satisfied, but feeling, at least, that he had made a demonstration of attack.

As for the admiral, he considered that the thump he had given Jack with the stick, and it was no gentle one, was a decided balancing of accounts up to that period, and as he remained likewise master of the field, he was upon the whole very well satisfied.

These last few words which had been spoken to Henry by

Admiral Bell, more than any others, induced him to hasten his departure from Bannerworth Hall; he had walked away when the altercation between Jack Pringle and the admiral began, for he had seen sufficient of those wordy conflicts between those originals to be quite satisfied that neither of them meant what he said of a discouraging character towards the other, and that far from there being any unfriendly feeling contingent upon those little affairs, they were only a species of friendly sparring, which both parties enjoyed extremely.

He went direct to Flora, and he said to her, —

"Since we are all agreed upon the necessity, or, at all events, upon the expediency of a departure from the Hall, I think, sister, the sooner we carry out that determination the better and the pleasanter for us all it will be. Do you think you could remove so hastily as to-morrow?"

"To-morrow! That is soon indeed."

"I grant you that it is so; but Admiral Bell assures me that he will have everything in readiness, and a place provided for us to go to by then."

"Would it be possible to remove from a house like this so very quickly?"

"Yes, sister. If you look around you, you will see that a great portion of the comforts you enjoy in this mansion belong to it as a part of its very structure, and are not removable at pleasure; what we really have to take away is very little. The urgent want of money during our father's lifetime induced him, as you may recollect even, at various times to part with much that was ornamental, as well as useful, which was in the Hall. You will recollect that we seldom returned from those little continental tours which to us were so delightful, without finding some old familiar objects gone, which, upon inquiry, we found had been turned into money, to meet some more than usually pressing demand."

"That is true, brother; I recollect well."

"So that, upon the whole, sister, there is little to remove."

"Well, well, be it so. I will prepare our mother for this sudden step. Believe me, my heart goes with it; and as a force of vengeful circumstances have induced us to remove from this home, which was once so full of pleasant recollections, it is certainly better, as you say, that the act should be at once consummated, than left hanging in terror over our minds."

"Then I'll consider that as settled," said Henry.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE REMOVAL FROM THE HALL. — THE NIGHT WATCH, AND THE ALARM.

Mrs. Bannerworth's consent having been already given to the removal, she said at once, when appealed to, that she was quite ready to go at any time her children thought expedient.

Upon this, Henry sought the admiral, and told him as much, at the same time adding, —

"My sister feared that we should have considerable trouble in the removal, but I have convinced her that such will not be the case, as we are by no means overburdened with cumbrous property."

"Cumbrous property," said the admiral, "why, what do you mean? I beg leave to say, that when I took the house, I took the table and chairs with it. D — n it, what good do you suppose an empty house is to me?"

"The tables and chairs!"

"Yes. I took the house just as it stands. Don't try and bamboozle me out of it. I tell you, you've nothing to move but yourselves and immediate personal effects."

"I was not aware, admiral, that that was your plan."

"Well, then, now you are, listen to me. I've circumvented the enemy too often not to know how to get up a plot. Jack and I have managed it all. To-morrow evening, after dark, and before the moon's got high enough to throw any light, you and your brother, and Miss Flora and your mother, will come out of the house, and Jack and I will lead you where you're to go to. There's plenty of furniture where you're a-going, and so you will get off free, without anybody knowing anything about it."

"Well, admiral, I've said it before, and it is the unanimous opinion of us all, that everything should be left to you. You have proved yourself too good a friend to us for us to hesitate at all in obeying your commands. Arrange everything, I pray you, according to your wishes and feelings, and you will find there shall be no cavilling on our parts."

"That's right; there's nothing like giving a command to some one person. There's no good done without. Now I'll manage it all. Mind you, seven o'clock to-morrow evening everything is to be ready, and you will all be prepared to leave the Hall."

"It shall be so."

"Who's that giving such a thundering ring at the gate?"

"Nay, I know not. We have few visitors and no servants, so I must e'en be my own gate porter."

Henry walked to the gate, and having opened it, a servant in a handsome livery stepped a pace or two into the garden.

"Well," said Henry.

"Is Mr. Henry Bannerworth within, or Admiral Bell?"

"Both," cried the admiral. "I'm Admiral Bell, and this is Mr. Henry Bannerworth. What do you want with us, you d —— d gingerbread-looking flunkey?"

"Sir, my master desires his compliments — his very best compliments — and he wants to know how you are after your flurry."

"What?"

"After your — a — a — flurry and excitement."

"Who is your master?" said Henry.

"Sir Francis Varney."

"The devil!" said the admiral; "if that don't beat all the impudence I ever came near. Our flurry! Ah! I like that fellow. Just go and tell him—"

"No, no," said Henry, interposing, "send back no message. Say to your master, fellow, that Mr. Henry Bannerworth feels that not only has he no claim to Sir Francis Varney's courtesy, but that he would rather be without it."

"Oh, ha!" said the footman, adjusting his collar; "very good. This seems a d —— d, old-fashioned, outlandish place of yours. Any ale?"

"Now, shiver my hulks!" said the admiral.

"Hush! hush!" said Henry; "who knows but there may be a design in this? We have no ale."

"Oh, ah! dem! — dry as dust, by God! What does the old commodore say? Any message, my ancient Greek?"

"No, thank you," said the admiral; "bless you, nothing. What did you give for that waistcoat, d — n you? Ha! ha! you're a clever fellow."

"Ah! the old gentleman's ill. However, I'll take back his compliments, and that he's much obliged at Sir Francis's condescension. At the same time, I suppose may place in my eye what I may get out of either of you, without hindering me seeing my way back. Ha! ha! Adieu — adieu."

"Bravo!" said the admiral; "that's it — go it — now for it. D — n it, it is a *do*!"

The admiral's calmness during the latter part of the dialogue arose from the fact that over the flunkey's shoulder, and at some little distance off, he saw Jack Pringle taking off his jacket, and rolling up his sleeves in that deliberate sort of way that seemed to imply a determination of setting about some species of work that combined the pleasant with the useful.

Jack executed many nods to and winks at the livery-servant, and jerked his thumb likewise in the direction of a pump near at hand, in a manner that spoke as plainly as possible, that John was to be pumped upon.

And now the conference was ended, and Sir Francis's messenger turned to go; but Jack Pringle bothered him completely, for he danced round him in such a singular manner, that, turn which way he would, there stood Jack Pringle, in some grotesque attitude, intercepting him; and so he edged him on, till he got him to the pump.

"Jack," said the admiral.

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Don't pump on that fellow now."

"Ay, ay, sir; give us a hand."

Jack laid hold of him by the two ears, and holding him under the pump, kicked his shins until he completely gathered himself beneath the spout. It was in vain that he shouted "Murder! help! fire! thieves!" Jack was inexorable, and the admiral pumped.

Jack turned the fellow's head about in a very scientific manner, so as to give him a fair dose of hydropathic treatment, and in a few minutes, never was human being more thoroughly saturated with moisture than was Sir Francis Varney's servant. He had left off hallooing for aid, for he found that whenever he did so, Jack held his mouth under the spout, which was decidedly unpleasant; so, with a patience that looked like heroic fortitude, he was compelled to wait until the admiral was tired of pumping.

"Very good," at length he said. "Now, Jack, for fear this fellow catcher cold, be so good as to get a horsewhip, and see him off the premises with it."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Jack. "And I say, old fellow, you can take back all our blessed compliments now, and say you've been flurried a little yourself; and if so be as you came here as dry as dust, d —— e, you go back as wet as a mop. Won't it do to kick him out, sir?"

"Very well — as you please, Jack."

"Then here goes;" and Jack proceeded to kick the shivering animal from the garden with a vehemence that soon convinced him of the necessity of getting out of it as quickly as possible.

How it was that Sir Francis Varney, after the fearful race he had had, got home again across the fields, free from all danger, and back to his own house, from whence he sent so cool and insolent a message, they could not conceive.

But such must certainly be the fact; somehow or another, he had escaped all danger, and, with a calm insolence peculiar to the man, he had no doubt adopted the present mode of signifying as much to the Bannerworths.

The insolence of his servant was, no doubt, a matter of pre-arrangement with that individual, however he might have set about it con amore. As for the termination of the adventure, that, of course, had not been at all calculated upon; but, like most tools of other people's insolence or ambition, the insolence of the underling had received both his own punishment and his master's.

We know quite enough of Sir Francis Varney to feel assured that he would rather consider it as a good jest than otherwise of his footman, so that with the suffering he endured at the Bannerworths', and the want of sympathy he was likely to find at home, that individual had certainly nothing to congratulate himself upon but the melancholy reminiscence of his own cleverness.

But were the mob satisfied with what had occurred in the churchyard? They were not, and that night was to witness the perpetration of a melancholy outrage, such as the history of the time presents no parallel to.

The finding of a brick in the coffin of the butcher, instead of the body of that individual, soon spread as a piece of startling intelligence all over the place; and the obvious deduction that was drawn from the circumstance, seemed to be that the deceased butcher was unquestionably a vampyre, and out upon some expedition at the time when his coffin was searched.

How he had originally got out of that receptacle for the dead was certainly a mystery; but the story was none the worse for that. Indeed, an ingenious individual found a solution for that part of the business, for, as he said, nothing was more natural, when anybody died who was capable of becoming a vampyre, than for other vampyres who knew it to dig him up, and lay him out in the cold beams of the moonlight, until he acquired the same sort of vitality they themselves possessed, and joined their horrible fraternity.

In lieu of a better explanation — and, after all, it was no bad one — this theory was generally received, and, with a shuddering horror, people asked themselves, if the whole of the churchyard were excavated, how many coffins would be found tenantless by the dead which had been supposed, by simple-minded people, to inhabit them.

The presence, however, of a body of dragoons, towards evening, effectually prevented any renewed attack upon the sacred precincts of the churchyard, and it was a strange and startling thing to see that country town under military surveillance, and sentinels posted at its principal buildings.

This measure smothered the vengeance of the crowd, and insured, for a time, the safety of Sir Francis Varney; for no considerable body of persons could assemble for the purpose of attacking his house again, without being followed; so such a step was not attempted.

It had so happened, however, that on that very day, the funeral of a young man was to have taken place, who had put up for a time at that same inn where Admiral Bell was first introduced to the reader. He had become seriously ill, and, after a few days of indisposition, which had puzzled the country practitioners, breathed his last.

He was to have been buried in the village churchyard on the very day of the riot and confusion incidental to the exhumation of the coffin of the butcher, and probably from that circumstance we may deduce the presence of the clergyman in canonicals at the period of the riot.

When it was found that so disorderly a mob possessed the churchyard, the idea of burying the stranger on that day was abandoned; but still all would have gone on quietly as regarded him, had it not been for the folly of one of the chamber-maids at the tavern.

This woman, with all the love of gossip incidental to her class, had, from the first, entered so fully into all the particulars concerning vampyres, that she fairly might be considered to be a little deranged on that head. Her imagination had been so worked upon, that she was in an unfit state to think of anything else, and if ever upon anybody a stern and revolting superstition was calculated to produce direful effects, it was upon this woman.

The town was tolerably quiet; the presence of the soldiery had frightened some and amused others, and no doubt the night would have passed off serenely, had she not suddenly rushed into the street, and, with bewildered accents and frantic gestures shouted, —

“A vampyre — a vampyre — a vampyre!”

These words soon collected a crowd around her, and then, with screaming accents, which would have been quite enough to convince any reflecting person that she had actually gone distracted upon that point, she cried, —

“Come into the house — come into the house! Look upon the dead body, that should have been in its grave; it’s fresher now than it was the day on which it died, and there’s a colour in its cheeks! A vampyre — a vampyre — a vampyre! Heaven save us from a vampyre!”

The strange, infuriated, maniacal manner in which these words were uttered, produced an astonishingly exciting effect among the mob. Several women screamed, and some few fainted. The torch was laid again to the altar of popular feeling, and the fierce flame of superstition burnt brightly and fiercely.

Some twenty or thirty persons, with shouts and exclamations, rushed into the inn, while the woman who had created the disturbance still continued to rave, tearing her hair, and shrieking at intervals, until she fell exhausted upon the pavement.

Soon, from a hundred throats, rose the dreadful cry of “A vampyre — a vampyre!” The alarm was given throughout the whole town; the bugles of the military sounded; there was a clash of arms — the shrieks of women; altogether, the premonitory symptoms of such a riot as was not likely to be quelled without bloodshed and considerable disaster.

It is truly astonishing the effect which one weak or vicious-minded person can produce upon a multitude.

Here was a woman whose opinion would have been accounted valueless upon the most common-place subject, and whose word would not have passed for twopence, setting a whole town by the ears by force of nothing but her sheer brutal ignorance.

It is a notorious physiological fact, that after four or five days, or even a week, the bodies of many persons assume an appearance of freshness, such as might have been looked for in vain immediately after death.

It is one of the most insidious processes of that decay which appears to regret with its

“ —— —— — offensive fingers, To mar the lines where beauty lingers.”

But what did the chamber-maid know of physiology? Probably, she would have asked if it was anything good to eat; and so, of course, having her head full of vampyres, she must needs produce so lamentable a scene of confusion, the results of which we almost sicken at detailing.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE STAKE AND THE DEAD BODY.

The mob seemed from the first to have an impression that, as regarded the military force, no very serious results would arise from that quarter, for it was not to be supposed that, on an occasion which could not possibly arouse any ill blood on the part of the soldiery, or on which they could have the least personal feeling, they would like to get a bad name, which would stick to them for years to come.

It was no political riot, on which men might be supposed, in consequence of differing in opinion, to have their passions inflamed; so that, although the call of the civil authorities for military aid had been acceded to, yet it was hoped, and, indeed, almost understood by the officers, that their operations would lie confined more to a demonstration of power, than anything else.

Besides, some of the men had got talking to the townspeople, and had heard all about the vampyre story, and not being of the most refined or educated class themselves, they felt rather interested than otherwise in the affair.

Under these circumstances, then, we are inclined to think, that the disorderly mob of that inn had not so wholesome a fear as it was most certainly intended they should have of the redcoats. Then, again, they were not attacking the churchyard, which, in the first case, was the main point in dispute, and about which the authorities had felt so very sore, inasmuch as they felt that, if once the common people found out that the sanctity of such places could be outraged with impunity, they would lose their reverence for the church; that is to say, for the host of persons who live well and get fat in this country by the trade of religion.

Consequently, this churchyard was the main point of defence, and it was zealously looked to when it need not have been done so, while the public-house where there really reigned mischief was half unguarded.

There are always in all communities, whether large or small, a number of persons who really have, or fancy they have, something to gain by disturbance. These people, of course, care not for what pretext the public peace is violated; so long as there is a row, and something like an excuse for running into other people's houses, they are satisfied.

To get into a public-house under such circumstances is an unexpected treat; and thus, when the mob rushed into the inn with such symptoms of fury and excitement, there went with the leaders of the disturbance a number of persons who never thought of getting further than the bar, where they attacked the spirit-taps with an alacrity which showed how great was their love for ardent compounds.

Leaving these persons behind, however, we will follow those who, with a real superstition, and a furious interest in the affair of the vampyre, made their way towards the upper chamber, determining to satisfy themselves if there were truth in the statement so alarmingly made by the woman who had created such an emotion.

It is astonishing what people will do in crowds, in comparison with the acts that they would be able to commit individually. There is usually a calmness, a sanctity, a sublimity about death, which irresistibly induces a respect for its presence, alike from the educated or from the illiterate; and let the object of the fell-destroyer's presence be whom it may, the very consciousness that death has claimed it for its own, invests it with a halo of respect, that, in life, the individual could never aspire to probably.

Let us precede these furious rioters for a few moments, and look upon the chamber of the dead — that chamber, which for a whole week, had been looked upon with a kind of shuddering terror — that chamber which had been darkened by having its sources of light closed, as if it were a kind of disrespect to the dead to allow the pleasant sunshine to fall upon the faded form.

And every inhabitant of that house, upon ascending and descending its intricate and ancient staircases, had walked with a quiet and subdued step past that one particular door.

Even the tones of voice in which they spoke to each other, while they knew that that sad remnant of mortality was in the house, was quiet and subdued, as if the repose of death was but a mortal sleep, and could be broken by rude sounds.

Ay, even some of these very persons, who now with loud and boisterous clamour, had rushed into the place, had visited the house and talked in whispers; but then they were alone, and men will do in throngs acts which, individually, they would shrink from with compunction or cowardice, call it which we will.

The chamber of death is upon the second story of the house. It is a back room, the windows of which command a view of that half garden, half farm-yard, which we find generally belonging to country inns.

But now the shutters were closed, with the exception of one small opening, that, in daylight, would have admitted a straggling ray of light to fall upon the corpse. Now, however, that the sombre shades of evening had wrapped everything in gloom, the room appeared in total darkness, so that the most of those adventurers who had ventured into the place shrunk back until lights were procured from the lower part of the house, with which to enter the room.

A dim oil lamp in a niche sufficiently lighted the staircase, and, by the friendly aid of its glimmering beams, they had found their way up to the landing tolerably well, and had not thought of the necessity of having lights with which to enter the apartments, until they found them in utter darkness.

These requisites, however, were speedily procured from the kitchen of the inn. Indeed, anything that was wanted was laid hold of without the least word of remark to the people of the place, as if might, from that evening forthwith, was understood to constitute right, in that town.

Up to this point no one had taken a very prominent part in the attack upon the inn if attack it could be called; but now the man whom chance, or his own nimbleness, made the first of the throng, assumed to himself a sort of control over his companions and, turning to them, he said, —

"Hark ye, my friends; we'll do everything quietly and properly; so I think we'd better three or four of us go in at once, arm-in-arm."

"Psha!" cried one who had just arrived with a light; "it's your cowardice that speaks. I'll go in first; let those follow me who like, and those who are afraid may remain where they are."

He at once dashed into the room, and this immediately broke the spell of fear which was beginning to creep over the others in consequence of the timid suggestion of the man who, up to that moment, had been first and foremost in the enterprise.

In an instant the chamber was half filled with persons, four or five of whom carried lights; so that, as it was not of very large dimensions, it was sufficiently illuminated for every object in it to be clearly visible.

There was the bed, smooth and unruffled, as if waiting for some expected guest; while close by its side a coffin, supported upon tressles, over which a sheet was partially thrown, contained the sad remains of him who little expected in life that, after death, he should be stigmatised as an example of one of the ghastliest superstitions that ever found a home in the human imagination.

It was evident that some one had been in the room; and that this was the woman whose excited fancy had led her to look upon the face of the corpse there could be no doubt, for the sheet was drawn aside just sufficiently to discover the countenance.

The fact was that the stranger was unknown at the inn, or probably ere this the coffin lid would have been screwed on; but it was hoped, up to the last moment, as advertisements had been put into the county papers, that some one would come forward to identify and claim him.

Such, however, had not been the case, and so his funeral had been determined upon.

The presence of so many persons at once effectually prevented any individual from exhibiting, even if he felt any superstitious fears about approaching the coffin; and so, with one accord, they surrounded it, and looked upon the face of the dead.

There was nothing repulsive in that countenance. The fact was that decomposition had sufficiently advanced to induce a relaxation of the muscles, and a softening of the fibres, so that an appearance of calmness and repose had crept over the face which it did not wear immediately after death.

It happened, too, that the face was full of flesh — for the death had been sudden, and there had not been that wasting away of the muscles and integuments which makes the skin cling, as it were, to the bone, when the ravages of long disease have exhausted the physical frame.

There was, unquestionably, a plumpness, a freshness, and a sort of vitality about the countenance that was remarkable.

For a few moments there was a death-like stillness in the apartment, and then one voice broke the silence by exclaiming, —

"He's a vampyre, and has come here to die. Well he knows he'd be taken up by Sir Francis Varney, and become one of the crew."

"Yes, yes," cried several voices at once; "a vampyre! a vampyre!"

"Hold a moment," cried one; "let us find somebody in the house who has seen him some days ago, and then we can ascertain if there's any difference in his looks."

This suggestion was agreed to, and a couple of stout men ran down stairs, and returned in a few moments with a trembling waiter, whom they had caught in the passage, and forced to accompany them.

This man seemed to think that he was to be made a dreadful example of in some sort of way; and, as he was dragged into the room, he trembled, and looked as pale as death.

"What have I done, gentlemen?" he said; "I ain't a vampyre. Don't be driving a stake through me. I assure you, gentlemen, I'm only a waiter, and have been for a matter of five-and-twenty years."

"You'll be done no harm to," said one of his captors; "you've only got to answer a question that will be put to you."

"Oh, well, certainly, gentlemen; anything you please. Coming — coming, as I always say; give your orders, the waiter's in the room."

"Look upon the fare of that corpse."

"Certainly, certainly — directly."

“Have you ever seen it before?”

“Seen it before! Lord bless you! yes, a dozen of times. I seed him afore he died, and I seed him arter; and when the undertaker’s men came, I came up with them and I seed ’em put him in his coffin. You see I kept an eye on ‘em, gentlemen, ‘cos knows well enough what they is. A cousin of mine was in the trade, and he assures me as one of ’em always brings a tooth-drawing concern in his pocket, and looks in the mouth of the blessed corpse to see if there’s a blessed tooth worth pulling out.”

“Hold your tongue,” said one; “we want none of your nonsense. Do you see any difference now in the face of the corpse to what it was some days since?”

“Well, I don’t know; somehow, it don’t look so rum.”

“Does it look fresher?”

“Well, somehow or another, now you mention it, it’s very odd, but it does.”

“Enough,” cried the man who had questioned him, with considerable excitement of manner. “Neighbours, are we to have our wives and our children scared to death by vampyres?”

“No — no!” cried everybody.

“Is not this, then, one of that dreadful order of beings?”

“Yes — yes; what’s to be done?”

“Drive a stake through the body, and so prevent the possibility of anything in the shape of a restoration.”

This was a terrific proposition; and even those who felt most strongly upon the subject, and had their fears most awakened, shrank from carrying it into effect. Others, again, applauded it, although they determined, in their own minds, to keep far enough off from the execution of the job, which they hoped would devolve upon others, so that they might have all the security of feeling that such a process had been gone through with the supposed vampyre, without being in any way committed by the dreadful act.

Nothing was easier than to procure a stake from the garden in the rear of the premises; but it was one thing to have the means at hand of carrying into effect so dreadful a proposition, and another actually to do it.

For the credit of human nature, we regret that even then, when civilisation and popular education had by no means made such rapid strides as in our times they have, such a proposition should be entertained for a moment: but so it was; and just as an alarm was given that a party of the soldiers had reached the inn and had taken possession of the doorway with a determination to arrest the rioters, a strong hedge-stake had been procured, and everything was in readiness for the perpetration of the horrible deed.

Even then those in the room, for they were tolerably sober, would have revolted, probably, from the execution of so fearful an act; but the entrance of a party of the military into the lower portion of the tavern, induced those who had been making free with the strong liquors below, to make a rush up-stairs to their companions with the hope of escaping detection of the petty larceny, if they got into trouble on account of the riot.

These persons, infuriated by drink, were capable of anything, and to them, accordingly, the more sober parties gladly surrendered the disagreeable job of rendering the supposed vampyre perfectly innoxious, by driving a hedge-stake through his body — a proceeding which, it was currently believed, inflicted so much physical injury to the frame, as to render his resuscitation out of the question.

The cries of alarm from below, joined now to the shouts of those mad rioters, produced a scene of dreadful confusion.

We cannot, for we revolt at the office, describe particularly the dreadful outrage which was committed upon the corpse; suffice it that two or three, maddened by drink, and incited by the others, plunged the hedge-stake through the body, and there left it, a sickening and horrible spectacle to any one who might cast his eyes upon it.

With such violence had the frightful and inhuman deed been committed, that the bottom of the coffin was perforated by the stake so that the corpse was actually nailed to its last earthly tenement.

Some asserted, that at that moment an audible groan came from the dead man, and that this arose from the extinguishment of that remnant of life which remained in him, on account of his being a vampyre, and which would have been brought into full existence, if the body had been placed in the rays of the moon, when at its full, according to the popular superstition upon that subject.

Others, again, were quite ready to swear that at the moment the stake was used there was a visible convulsion of all the limbs, and that the countenance, before so placid and so calm, became immediately distorted, as if with agony.

But we have done with these horrible surmises; the dreadful deed has been committed, and wild, ungovernable superstition has had, for a time, its sway over the ignorant and debased.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE MOB'S ARRIVAL AT SIR FRANCIS VARNEY'S. — THE ATTEMPT TO GAIN ADMISSION.

The soldiery had been sent for from their principal station near the churchyard, and had advanced with some degree of reluctance to quell what they considered as nothing better nor worse than a drunken brawl at a public-house, which they really considered they ought not to be called to interfere with.

When, however, the party reached the spot, and heard what a confusion there was, and saw in what numbers the rioters were assembling, it became evident to them that the case was of a more serious complexion than they had at first imagined, and consequently they felt that their professional dignity was not so much compromised with their interference with the lawless proceedings.

Some of the constabulary of the town were there, and to them the soldiers promised they would hand what prisoners they took, at the same time that they made a distinct condition that they were not to be troubled with their custody, nor in any way further annoyed in the business beyond taking care that they did not absolutely escape, after being once secured.

This was all that the civil authorities of the town required, and, in fact, they hoped that, after making prisoners of a few of the ringleaders of the riotous proceedings, the rest would disperse, and prevent the necessity of capturing them.

Be it known, however, that both military and civil authorities were completely ignorant of the dreadful outrage against all common decency, which had been committed within the public-house.

The door was well guarded, and the question now was how the rioters were to be made to come down stairs, and be captured; and this was likely to remain a question, so long as no means were adopted to make them descend. So that, after a time, it was agreed that a couple of troopers should march up stairs with a constable, to enable him to secure any one who seemed a principal in the riot.

But this only had the effect of driving those who were in the second-floor, and saw the approach of the two soldiers, whom they thought were backed by the whole of their comrades, up a narrow staircase, to a third-floor, rather consisting of lofts than of actual rooms; but still, for the time, it was a refuge; and owing to the extreme narrowness of the approach to it, which consisted of nearly a perpendicular staircase, with any degree of tact or method, it might have been admirably defended.

In the hurry and scramble, all the lights were left behind; and when the two soldiers and constables entered the room where the corpse had lain, they became, for the first time, aware of what a horrible purpose had been carried out by the infuriated mob.

The sight was one of perfect horror, and hardened to scenes which might strike other people as being somewhat of the terrific as these soldiers might be supposed to be by their very profession, they actually sickened at the sight which the mutilated corpse presented, and turned aside with horror.

These feelings soon gave way to anger and animosity against the crowd who could be guilty of such an atrocious outrage; and, for the first time, a strong and interested vengeance against the mob pervaded the breasts of those who were brought to act against it.

One of the soldiers ran down stairs to the door, and reported the scene which was to be seen above. A determination was instantly come to, to capture as many as possible of those who had been concerned in so diabolical an outrage, and leaving a guard of five men at the door, the remainder of the party ascended the staircase, determined upon storming the last refuge of the rioters, and dragging them to justice.

The report, however, of these proceedings that were taking place at the inn, spread quickly over the whole town; and soon as large a mob of the disorderly and the idle as the place could at all afford was assembled outside the inn.

This mob appeared, for a time, inertly to watch the proceedings. It seemed rather a hazardous thing to interfere with the soldiers, whose carbines look formidable and troublesome weapons.

With true mob courage, therefore, they left the minority of their comrades, who were within the house, to their fate; and after a whispered conference from one to the other, they suddenly turned in a body, and began to make for the outskirts of the town.

They then separated, as if by common consent, and straggled out into the open country by twos and threes, consolidating again into a mass when they had got some distance off, and clear of any exertions that could be made by the soldiery to stay them.

The cry then rose of “Down with Sir Francis Varney — slay him — burn his house — death to all vampyres!” and, at a rapid pace, they proceeded in the direction of his mansion.

We will leave this mob, however, for the present, and turn our attention to those who are at the inn, and are certainly in a position of some jeopardy. Their numbers were not great, and they were unarmed; certainly, their best chance would have been to have surrendered at discretion; but that was a measure which, if the sober ones had felt inclined to, those who were infuriated and half maddened with drink would not have acceded to on any account.

A furious resistance was, therefore, fairly to be expected; and what means the soldiery were likely to use for the purpose of storming this last retreat was a matter of rather anxious conjecture.

In the case of a regular enemy, there would not, perhaps, have been much difficulty; but here the capture of certain persons, and not their destruction, was the object; and how that was to be accomplished by fair means, certainly was a question which nobody felt very competent to solve.

Determination, however, will do wonders; and although the rioters numbered over forty, notwithstanding all their desertions, and not above seventeen or eighteen soldiers marched into the inn, we shall perceive that they succeeded in accomplishing their object without any manoeuvring at all.

The space in which the rioters were confined was low, narrow, and inconvenient, as well as dark, for the lights on the staircase cast up that height but very insufficient rays.

Weapons of defence they found but very few, and yet there were some which, to do them but common credit, they used as effectually as possible.

These attics, or lofts, were used as lumber-rooms, and had been so for years, so that there was a collection of old boxes, broken pieces of furniture, and other matters, which will, in defiance of everything and everybody, collect in a house.

These were formidable means of defence, if not of offence, down a very narrow staircase, had they been used with judgment.

Some of the rioters, who were only just drunk enough to be foolhardy, collected a few of these articles at the top of the staircase, and swore they would smash anybody who should attempt to come up to them, a threat easier uttered than executed.

And besides, after all, if their position had been ever so impregnable, they must come down eventually, or be starved out.

But the soldiers were not at liberty to adopt so slow a process of overcoming their enemy, and up the second-floor staircase they went, with a determination of making short work of the business.

They paused a moment, by word of command, on the landing, and then, after this slight pause, the word was given to advance.

Now when men will advance, in spite of anything and everything, it is no easy matter to stop them, and he who was foremost among the military would as soon thought of hesitating to ascend the narrow staircase before him, when ordered so to do, as paying the national debt. On he went, and down came a great chest, which, falling against his feet, knocked him down as he attempted to scramble over it.

“Fire,” said the officer; and it appeared that he had made some arrangements as to how the order was to be obeyed, for the second man fired his carbine, and then scrambled over his prostrate comrade; after which he stooped, and the third fired his carbine likewise, and then hurried forward in the same manner.

At the first sound of the fire arms the rioters were taken completely by surprise; they had not had the least notion of affairs getting to such a length. The smell of the powder, the loud report, and the sensation of positive danger that accompanied these phenomena, alarmed them most terrifically; so that, in point of fact, with the exception of the empty chest that was thrown down in the way of the first soldier, no further idea of defence seemed in any way to find a place in the hearts of the besieged.

They scrambled one over the other in their eagerness to get as far as possible from immediate danger, which, of course, they conceived existed in the most imminent degree the nearest to the door.

Such was the state of terror into which they were thrown, that each one at the moment believed himself shot, and the soldiers had overcome all the real difficulties in getting possession of what might thus be called the citadel of the inn, before those men who had been so valorous a short time since recovered from the tremendous fright into which they had been thrown.

We need hardly say that the carbines were loaded, but with blank cartridges, for there was neither a disposition nor a necessity for taking the lives of these misguided people.

If was the suddenness and the steadiness of the attack that had done all the mischief to their cause; and now, ere they recovered from the surprise of having their position so completely taken by storm, they were handed down stairs, one by one, from soldier to soldier, and into the custody of the civil authorities.

In order to secure the safe keeping of large a body of prisoners, the constables, who were in a great minority, placed handcuffs upon some of the most capable of resistance; so what with those who were thus secured, and those who were terrified into submission, there was not a man of all the lot who had taken refuge in the attics of the public-house but was a prisoner.

At the sound of fire-arms, the women who were outside the inn had, of course, raised a most prodigious clamour.

They believed directly that every bullet must have done some most serious mischief to the townspeople, and it was only upon one of the soldiers, a non-commissioned officer, who was below, assuring them of the innoxious nature of the proceeding which restored anything like equanimity.

"Silence!" he cried: "what are you howling about? Do you fancy that we've nothing better to do than to shoot a parcel of fellows that are not worth the bullets that would be lodged in their confounded carcases?"

"But we heard the gun," said a woman.

"Of course you did; it's the powder that makes the noise, not the bullet. You'll see them all brought out safe wind and limb."

This assurance satisfied the women to a certain extent, and such had been their fear that they should have had to look upon the spectacle of death, or of grievous wounds, that they were comparatively quite satisfied when they saw husbands, fathers, and brothers, only in the custody of the town officers.

And very sheepish some of the fellows looked, when they were handed down and handcuffed, and the more especially when they had been routed only by a few blank cartridges — that sixpenny worth of powder had defeated them.

They were marched off to the town gaol, guarded by the military, who now probably fancied that their night's work was over, and that the most turbulent and troublesome spirits in the town had been secured.

Such, however, was not the case, for no sooner had comparative order been restored, than common observation pointed to a dull red glare in the southern sky.

In a few more minutes there came in stragglers from the open country, shouting "Fire! fire!" with all their might.

CHAPTER L.

THE MOB'S ARRIVAL AT SIR FRANCIS VARNEY'S. — THE ATTEMPT TO GAIN ADMISSION.

All eyes were directed towards that southern sky which each moment was becoming more and more illuminated by the lurid appearance bespeaking a conflagration, which if it was not extensive, at all events was raging fiercely.

There came, too upon the wind, which set from that direction, strange sounds, resembling shouts of triumph, combined occasionally with sharper cries, indicative of alarm.

With so much system and so quietly had this attack been made upon the house of Sir Francis Varney — for the consequences of it now exhibited themselves most unequivocally — that no one who had not actually accompanied the expedition was in the least aware that it had been at all undertaken, or that anything of the kind was on the tapis.

Now, however, it could be no longer kept a secret, and as the infuriated mob, who had sought this flagrant means of giving vent to their anger, saw the flames from the blazing house rising high in the heavens, they felt convinced that further secrecy was out of the question.

Accordingly, in such cries and shouts as — but for caution's sake — they would have indulged in from the very first, they now gave utterance to their feelings as regarded the man whose destruction was aimed at.

"Death to the vampyre! — death to the vampyre!" was the principal shout, and it was uttered in tones which sounded like those of rage and disappointment.

But it is necessary, now that we have disposed of the smaller number of rioters who committed so serious an outrage at the inn, that we should, with some degree of method, follow the proceedings of the larger number, who went from the town towards Sir Francis Varney's.

These persons either had information of a very positive nature, or a very strong suspicion that, notwithstanding the mysterious and most unaccountable disappearance of the vampyre in the old ruin, he would now be found, as usual, at his own residence.

Perhaps one of his own servants may have thus played the traitor to him; but however it was, there certainly was an air of confidence about some of the leaders of the tumultuous assemblage that induced a general belief that this time, at least, the vampyre would not escape popular vengeance for being what he was.

We have before noticed that these people went out of the town at different points, and did not assemble into one mass until they were at a sufficient distance off to be free from all fear of observation.

Then some of the less observant and cautious of them began to indulge in shouts of rage and defiance; but those who placed themselves foremost succeeded in procuring a halt, and one said, —

"Good friends all, if we make any noise, it can only have one effect, and that is, to warn Sir Francis Varney, and enable him to escape. If, therefore, we cannot go on quietly, I propose that we return to our homes, for we shall accomplish nothing."

This advice was sufficiently and evidently reasonable to meet with no dissension; a death-like stillness ensued, only broken by some two or three voices saying, in subdued tones, —

"That's right — that's right. Nobody speak."

"Come on, then," said he who had given such judicious counsel; and the dark mass of men moved towards Sir Francis Varney's house, as quietly as it was possible for such an assemblage to proceed.

Indeed, saving the sound of the footsteps, nothing could be heard of them at all; and that regular tramp, tramp, would have puzzled any one listening to it from any distance to know in which direction it was proceeding.

In this way they went on until Sir Francis Varney's house was reached, and then a whispered word to halt was given, and all eyes were bent upon the building.

From but one window out of the numerous ones with which the front of the mansion was studded did there shine the least light, and from that there came rather an uncommonly bright reflection, probably arising from a reading lamp placed close to the window.

A general impression, they knew not why exactly, seemed to pervade everybody, that in the room from whence streamed that bright light was Sir Francis Varney.

"The vampyre's room!" said several. "The vampyre's room! That is it!"

"Yes," said he who had a kind of moral control over his comrades; "I have no doubt but he is there."

"What's to be done?" asked several.

"Make no noise whatever, but stand aside, so as not to be seen from the door when it is opened."

"Yes, yes."

"I will knock for admittance, and, the moment it is answered, I will place this stick in such a manner within, that the door cannot be closed again. Upon my saying 'Advance,' you will make a rush forward, and we shall have possession immediately of the house."

All this was agreed to. The mob slunk close to the walls of the house, and out of immediate observation from the hall door, or from any of the windows, and then the leader advanced, and knocked loudly for admission.

The silence was now of the most complete character that could be imagined. Those who came there so bent upon vengeance were thoroughly convinced of the necessity of extreme caution, to save themselves even yet from being completely foiled.

They had abundant faith, from experience, of the resources in the way of escape of Sir Francis Varney, and not one among them was there who considered that there was any chance of capturing him, except by surprise, and when once they got hold of him, they determined he should not easily slip through their fingers.

The knock for admission produced no effect; and, after waiting three or four minutes, it was very provoking to find such a wonderful amount of caution and cunning completely thrown away.

"Try again," whispered one.

"Well, have patience; I am going to try again."

The man had the ponderous old-fashioned knocker in his hand, and was about to make another appeal to Sir Francis Varney's door, when a strange voice said, —

"Perhaps you may as well say at once what you want, instead of knocking there to no purpose."

He gave a start, for the voice seemed to come from the very door itself.

Yet it sounded decidedly human; and, upon a closer inspection, it was seen that a little wicket-gate, not larger than a man's face, had been opened from within.

This was terribly provoking. Here was an extent of caution on the part of the garrison quite unexpected. What was to be done?

"Well?" said the man who appeared at the little opening.

"Oh," said he who had knocked; "I—"

"Well?"

"I — that is to say — ahem! Is Sir Francis Varney within?"

"Well?"

"I say, is Sir Francis Varney within?"

"Well; you have said it!"

"Ah, but you have not answered it."

"No."

"Well, is he at home?"

"I decline saying; so you had better, all of you, go back to the town again, for we are well provided with all material to resist any attack you may be fools enough to make."

As he spoke, the servant shut the little square door with a bang that made his questioner jump again. Here was a dilemma!

CHAPTER LI.

THE ATTACK UPON THE VAMPYRE'S HOUSE. — THE STORY OF THE ATTACK. — THE FORCING OF THE DOORS, AND THE STRUGGLE.

A council of war was now called among the belligerents, who were somewhat taken aback by the steady refusal of the servant to admit them, and their apparent determination to resist all endeavours on the part of the mob to get into and obtain possession of the house. It argued that they were prepared to resist all attempts, and it would cost some few lives to get into the vampyre's house. This passed through the minds of many as they retired behind the angle of the wall where the council was to be held.

Here they looked in each others' face, as if to gather from that the general tone of the feelings of their companions; but here they saw nothing that intimated the least idea of going back as they came.

"It's all very well, mates, to take care of ourselves, you know," began one tall, brawny fellow; "but, if we bean't to be sucked to death by a vampyre, why we must have the life out of him."

"Ay, so we must."

"Jack Hodge is right; we must kill him, and there's no sin in it, for he has no right to it; he's robbed some poor fellow of his life to prolong his own."

"Ay, ay, that's the way he does; bring him out, I say, then see what we will do with him."

"Yes, catch him first," said one, "and then we can dispose of him afterwards, I say, neighbours, don't you think it would be as well to catch him first?"

"Haven't we come on purpose?"

"Yes, but do it."

"Ain't we trying it?"

"You will presently, when we come to get into the house."

"Well, what's to be done?" said one; "here we are in a fix, I think, and I can't see our way out very clearly."

"I wish we could get in."

"But how is a question I don't very well see," said a large specimen of humanity.

"The best thing that can be done will be to go round and look over the whole house, and then we may come upon some part where it is far easier to get in at than by the front door."

"But it won't do for us all to go round that way," said one; "a small party only should go, else they will have all their people stationed at one point, and if we can divide them, we shall beat them because they have not enough to defend more than one point at a time; now we are numerous enough to make several attacks."

"Oh! that's the way to bother them all round; they'll give in, and then the place is our own."

"No, no," said the big countryman, "I like to make a good rush and drive all afore us; you know what ye have to do then, and you do it, ye know."

"If you can."

"Ay, to be sure, if we can, as you say; but can't we? that's what I want to know."

"To be sure we can."

"Then we'll do it, mate — that's my mind; we'll do it. Come on, and let's have another look at the street-door."

The big countryman left the main body, and resolutely walked up to the main avenue, and approached the door, accompanied by about a dozen or less of the mob. When they came to the door, they commenced knocking and kicking most violently, and assailing it with all kinds of things they could lay their hands upon.

They continued at this violent exercise for some time — perhaps for five minutes, when the little square hole in the door was again opened, and a voice was heard to say, —

"You had better cease that kind of annoyance."

"We want to get in."

"It will cost you more lives to do so than you can afford to spare. We are well armed, and are prepared to resist any effort you can make."

"Oh! it's all very well; but, an you won't open, why we'll make you; that's all about it."

This was said as the big countryman and his companions were leaving the avenue towards the rest of the body.

"Then, take this, as an earnest of what is to follow," said the man, and he discharged the contents of a blunderbuss through the small opening, and its report sounded to the rest of the mob like the report of a field-piece.

Fortunately for the party retiring the man couldn't take any aim, else it is questionable how many of the party would have got off unwounded. As it was, several of them found stray slugs were lodged in various parts of their persons, and accelerated their retreat from the house of the vampyre.

"What luck?" inquired one of the mob to the others, as they came back; "I'm afraid you had all the honour."

"Ay, ay, we have, and all the lead too," replied a man, as he placed his hand upon a sore part of his person, which bled in consequence of a wound.

"Well, what's to be done?"

"Danged if I know," said one.

"Give it up," said another.

"No, no; have him out. I'll never give in while I can use a stick. They are in earnest, and so are we. Don't let us be frightened because they have a gun or two — they can't have many; and besides, if they have, we are too many for them. Besides, we shall all die in our beds."

"Hurrah! down with the vampyre!"

"So say I, lads. I don't want to be sucked to death when I'm a-bed. Better die like a man than such a dog's death as that, and you have no revenge then."

"No, no; he has the better of us then. We'll have him out — we'll burn him — that's the way we'll do it."

"Ay, so we will; only let us get in."

At that moment a chosen party returned who had been round the house to make a reconnaissance.

"Well, well," inquired the mob, "what can be done now — where can we get in?"

"In several places."

"All right; come along then; the place is our own."

"Stop a minute; they are armed at all points, and we must make an attack on all points, else we may fail. A party must go round to the front-door, and attempt to beat it in; there are plenty of poles and things that could be used for such a purpose."

"There is, besides, a garden-door, that opens into the house — a kind of parlour; a kitchen-door; a window in the flower-garden, and an entrance into a store-room; this place appears strong, and is therefore unguarded."

"The very point to make an attack."

"Not quite."

"Why not?"

"Because it can easily be defended, and rendered useless to us. We must make an attack upon all places but that, and, while they are being at those points, we can then enter at that place, and then you will find them desert the other places when they see us inside."

"Hurrah! down with the vampyre!" said the mob, as they listened to this advice, and appreciated the plan.

"Down with the vampyre!"

"Now, then, lads, divide, and make the attack; never mind their guns, they have but very few, and if you rush in upon them, you will soon have the guns yourselves."

"Hurrah! hurrah!" shouted the mob.

The mob now moved away in different bodies, each strong enough to carry the house. They seized upon a variety of poles and stones, and then made for the various doors and windows that were pointed out by those who had made the discovery. Each one of those who had formed the party of observation, formed a leader to the others, and at once proceeded to the post assigned him.

The attack was so sudden and so simultaneous that the servants were unprepared; and though they ran to the doors, and fired away, still they did but little good, for the doors were soon forced open by the enraged rioters, who proceeded in a much more systematic operation, using long heavy pieces of timber which were carried on the shoulders of several men, and driven with the force of battering-rams — which, in fact, they were — against the door.

Bang went the battering-ram, crash went the door, and the whole party rushed headlong in, carried forward by their own momentum and fell prostrate, engine and all, into the passage.

"Now, then, we have them," exclaimed the servants, who began to belabour the whole party with blows, with every weapon they could secure.

Loudly did the fallen men shout for assistance, and but for their fellows who came rushing in behind, they would have had but a sorry time of it.

"Hurrah!" shouted the mob; "the house is our own."

"Not yet," shouted the servants.

"We'll try," said the mob; and they rushed forward to drive the servants back, but they met with a stout resistance, and as some of them had choppers and swords, there were a few wounds given, and presently bang went the blunderbuss.

Two or three of the mob reeled and fell.

This produced a momentary panic, and the servants then had the whole of the victory to themselves, and were about to charge, and clear the passage of their enemies, when a shout behind attracted their attention.

That shout was caused by an entrance being gained in another quarter, whence the servants were flying, and all was disorder.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" shouted the mob.

The servants retreated to the stairs, and here united, they made a stand, and resolved to resist the whole force of the rioters, and they succeeded in doing so, too, for some minutes. Blows were given and taken of a desperate character.

Somehow, there were no deadly blows received by the servants; they were being forced and beaten, but they lost no life; this may be accounted for by the fact that the mob used no more deadly weapons than sticks.

The servants of Sir Francis Varney, on the contrary, were mostly armed with deadly weapons, which, however, they did not use unnecessarily. They stood upon the hall steps — the grand staircase, with long poles or sticks, about the size of quarter-staves, and with these they belaboured those below most unmercifully.

Certainly, the mob were by no means cowards, for the struggle to close with their enemies was as great as ever, and as firm as could well be. Indeed, they rushed on with a desperation truly characteristic of John Bull, and defied the heaviest blows; for as fast as one was stricken down another occupied his place, and they insensibly pressed their close and compact front upon the servants, who were becoming fatigued and harassed.

“Fire, again,” exclaimed a voice from among the servants.

The mob made no retrogade movement, but still continued to press onwards, and in another moment a loud report rang through the house, and a smoke hung over the heads of the mob.

A long groan or two escaped some of the men who had been wounded, and a still louder from those who had not been wounded, and a cry arose of, —

“Down with the vampyre — pull down — destroy and burn the whole place — down with them all.”

A rush succeeded, and a few more discharges took place, when a shout above attracted the attention of both parties engaged in this fierce struggle. They paused by mutual consent, to look and see what was the cause of that shout.

CHAPTER LII.

THE INTERVIEW BETWEEN THE MOB AND SIR FRANCIS VARNEY. — THE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE. — THE WINE CELLARS.

The shout that had so discomposed the parties who were thus engaged in a terrific struggle came from a party above.

“Hurrah! hurrah!” they shouted a number of times, in a wild strain of delight. “Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!”

The fact was, a party of the mob had clambered up a verandah, and entered some of the rooms upstairs, whence they emerged just above the landing near the spot where the servants were resisting in a mass the efforts of the mob.

“Hurrah!” shouted the mob below.

“Hurrah!” shouted the mob above.

There was a momentary pause, and the servants divided themselves into two bodies, and one turned to face those above, and the other those who were below.

A simultaneous shout was given by both parties of the mob, and a sudden rush was made by both bodies, and the servants of Sir Francis Varney were broken in an instant. They were instantly separated, and knocked about a good bit, but they were left to shift for themselves, the mob had a more important object in view.

“Down with the vampyre!” they shouted.

“Down with the vampyre!” shouted they, and they rushed helter skelter through the rooms, until they came to one where the door was partially open, and they could see some person very leisurely seated.

“Here he is,” they cried.

“Who? who?”

“The vampire.”

“Down with him! kill him! burn him!”

“Hurrah! down with the vampire!”

These sounds were shouted out by a score of voices, and they rushed headlong into the room.

But here their violence and headlong precipitancy were suddenly restrained by the imposing and quiet appearance of the individual who was there seated.

The mob entered the room, and there was a sight, that if it did not astonish them, at least, it caused them to pause before the individual who was seated there.

The room was well filled with furniture, and there was a curtain drawn across the room, and about the middle of it there was a table, behind which sat Sir Francis Varney himself, looking all smiles and courtesy.

“Well, dang my smock-frock!” said one, “who’d ha’ thought of this? He don’t seem to care much about it.”

“Well, I’m d —— d!” said another; “he seems pretty easy, at all events. What is he going to do?”

“Gentlemen,” said Sir Francis Varney, rising, with the blandest smiles, “pray, gentlemen, permit me to inquire the cause of this condescension on your part. The visit is kind.”

The mob looked at Sir Francis, and then at each other, and then at Sir Francis again; but nobody spoke. They were awed by this gentlemanly and collected behaviour.

“If you honour me with this visit from pure affection and neighbourly good-will, I thank you.”

“Down with the vampyre!” said one, who was concealed behind the rest, and not so much overawed, as he had not seen Sir Francis.

Sir Francis Varney rose to his full height; a light gleamed across his features; they were strongly defined then. His long front teeth, too, showed most strongly when he smiled, as he did now, and said, in a bland voice, —

"Gentlemen, I am at your service. Permit me to say you are welcome to all I can do for you. I fear the interview will be somewhat inconvenient and unpleasant to you. As for myself, I am entirely at your service."

As Sir Francis spoke, he bowed, and folded his hands together, and stepped forwards; but, instead of coming onwards to them, he walked behind the curtain, and was immediately hid from their view.

"Down with the vampyre!" shouted one.

"Down with the vampyre!" rang through the apartment; and the mob now, not awed by the coolness and courtesy of Sir Francis, rushed forward, and, overturning the table, tore down the curtain to the floor; but, to their amazement, there was no Sir Francis Varney present.

"Where is he?"

"Where is the vampyre?"

"Where has he gone?"

These were cries that escaped every one's lips; and yet no one could give an answer to them.

There Sir Francis Varney was not. They were completely thunderstricken. They could not find out where he had gone to. There was no possible means of escape, that they could perceive. There was not an odd corner, or even anything that could, by any possibility, give even a suspicion that even a temporary concealment could take place.

They looked over every inch of flooring and of wainscoting; not the remotest trace could be discovered.

“Where is he?”

“I don’t know,” said one— “I can’t see where he could have gone. There ain’t a hole as big as a keyhole.”

“My eye!” said one; “I shouldn’t be at all surprised, if he were to blow up the whole house.”

“You don’t say go!”

“I never heard as how vampyres could do so much as that. They ain’t the sort of people,” said another.

“But if they can do one thing, they can do another.”

“That’s very true.”

“And what’s more, I never heard as how a vampyre could make himself into nothing before; yet he has done so.”

“He may be in this room now.”

“He may.”

“My eyes! what precious long teeth he had!”

“Yes; and had he fixed one on ’em in to your arm, he would have drawn every drop of blood out of your body; you may depend upon that,” said an old man.

“He was very tall.”

“Yes; too tall to be any good.”

“I shouldn’t like him to have laid hold of me, though, tall as he is; and then he would have lifted me up high enough to break my neck, when he let me fall.”

The mob routed about the room, tore everything out of its place, and as the object of their search seemed to be far enough beyond their reach, their courage rose in proportion, and they shouted and screamed with a proportionate increase of noise and bustle; and at length they ran about mad with rage and vexation, doing all the mischief that was in their power to inflict.

Then they became mischievous, and tore he furniture from its place, and broke it in pieces, and then amused themselves with breaking it up, throwing pieces at the pier-glasses, in which they made dreadful holes; and when that was gone, they broke up the frames.

Every hole and corner of the house was searched, but there was no Sir Francis Varney to be found.

"The cellars, the cellars!" shouted a voice.

"The cellars, the cellars!" re-echoed nearly every pair of lips in the whole place; in another moment, there was crushing an crowding to get down into the cellars.

"Hurray!" said one, as he knocked off the neck of the bottle that first came to hand.

"Here's luck to vampyre-hunting! Success to our chase!"

"So say I, neighbour; but is that your manners to drink before your betters?"

So saying, the speaker knocked the other's elbow, while he was in the act of lifting the wine to his mouth; and thus he upset it over his face and eyes.

"D — n it!" cried the man; "how it makes my eyes smart! Dang thee! if I could see, I'd ring thy neck!"

"Success to vampyre-hunting!" said one.

"May we be lucky yet!" said another.

"I wouldn't be luckier than this," said another, as he, too, emptied a bottle. "We couldn't desire better entertainment, where the reckoning is all paid."

"Excellent!"

"Very good!"

"Capital wine this!"

"I say, Huggins!"

"Well," said Huggins.

"What are you drinking?"

"Wine."

"What wine?"

"Danged if I know," was the reply. "It's wine, I suppose; for I know it ain't beer nor spirits; so it must be wine."

"Are you sure it ain't bottled men's blood?"

"Eh?"

"Bottled blood, man! Who knows what a vampyre drinks? It may be his wine. He may feast upon that before he goes to bed of a night, drink anybody's health, and make himself cheerful on bottled blood!"

"Oh, danged! I'm so sick; I wish I hadn't taken the stuff. It may be as you say, neighbour, and then we be cannibals."

"Or vampyres."

"There's a pretty thing to think of."

By this time some were drunk, some were partially so, and the remainder were crowding into the cellars to get their share of the wine.

The servants had now slunk away; they were no longer noticed by the rioters, who, having nobody to oppose them, no longer thought of anything, save the searching after the vampyre, and the destruction of the property. Several hours had been spent in this manner, and yet they could not find the object of their search.

There was not a room, or cupboard, or a cellar, that was capable of containing a cat, that they did not search, besides a part of the rioters keeping a very strict watch on the outside of the house and all about the grounds, to prevent the possibility of the escape of the vampyre.

There was a general cessation of active hostilities at that moment; a reaction after the violent excitement and exertion they had made to get in. Then the escape of their victim, and the mysterious manner in which he got away, was also a cause of the reaction, and the rioters looked in each others’ countenances inquiringly.

Above all, the discovery of the wine-cellar tended to withdraw them from violent measures; but this could not last long, there must be an end to such a scene, for there never was a large body of men assembled for an evil purpose, who ever were, for any length of time, peaceable.

To prevent the more alarming effects of drunkenness, some few of the rioters, after having taken some small portion of the wine, became, from the peculiar flavour it possessed, imbued with the idea that it was really blood, and forthwith commenced an instant attack upon the wine and liquors, and they were soon mingling in one stream throughout the cellars.

This destruction was loudly declaimed against by a large portion of the rioters, who were drinking; but before they could make any efforts to save the liquor, the work of destruction had not only been begun, but was ended, and the consequence was, the cellars were very soon evacuated by the mob.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE DESTRUCTION OF SIR FRANCIS VARNEY'S HOUSE BY FIRE. — THE ARRIVAL OF THE MILITARY, AND A SECOND MOB.

Thus many moments had not elapsed ere the feelings of the rioters became directed into a different channel from that in which it had so lately flowed. When urged about the house and grounds for the vampyre, they became impatient and angry at not finding him. Many believed that he was yet about the house, while many were of opinion that he had flown away by some mysterious means only possessed by vampyres and such like people.

"Fire the house, and burn him out," said one.

"Fire the house!"

"Burn the den!" now arose in shouts from all present, and then the mob were again animated by the love of mischief that seemed to be the strongest feelings that animated them.

"Burn him out — burn him out!" were the only words that could be heard from any of the mob. The words ran through the house like wildfire, nobody thought of anything else, and all were seen running about in confusion.

There was no want of good will on the part of the mob to the undertaking; far from it, and they proceeded in the work *con amore*. They worked together with right good will, and the result was soon seen by the heaps of combustible materials that were collected in a short time from all parts of the house.

All the old dry wood furniture that could be found was piled up in a heap, and to these were added a number of faggots, and also some shavings that were found in the cellar.

"All right!" exclaimed one man, in exultation.

"Yes," replied a second; "all right — all right! Set light to it, and he will be smoked out if not burned."

"Let us be sure that all are out of the house," suggested one of the bystanders.

"Ay, ay," shouted several; "give them all a chance. Search through the house and give them a warning."

"Very well; give me the light, and then when I come back I will set light to the fire at once, and then I shall know all is empty, and so will you too."

This was at once agreed to by all, with acclamations, and the light being handed to the man, he ascended the stairs, crying out in a loud voice, —

"Come out — come out! the house is on fire!"

"Fire! fire! fire!" shouted the mob as a chorus, every now and then at intervals.

In about ten minutes more, there came a cry of "all right; the house is empty," from up the stairs, and the man descended in haste to the hall.

"Make haste, lads, and fire away, for I see the red coats are leaving the town."

"Hurra! hurra!" shouted the infuriated mob. "Fire — fire — fire the house! Burn out the vampyre! Burn down the house — burn him out, and see if he can stand fire."

Amidst all this tumult there came a sudden blaze upon all around, for the pile had been fired.

"Hurra!" shouted the mob— "hurra!" and they danced like maniacs round the fire; looking, in fact, like so many wild Indians, dancing round their roasting victims, or some demons at an infernal feast.

The torch had been put to twenty different places, and the flames united into one, and suddenly shot up with a velocity, and roared with a sound that caused many who were present to make a precipitate retreat from the hall.

This soon became a necessary measure of self-preservation, and it required no urging to induce them to quit a place that was burning rapidly and even furiously.

"Get the poles and firewood — get faggots," shouted some of the mob, and, lo, it was done almost by magic. They brought the faggots and wood piled up for winter use, and laid them near all the doors, and especially the main entrance. Nay, every gate or door belonging to the outhouses was brought forward and placed upon the fire, which now began to reach the upper stories.

"Hurra — fire! Hurra — fire!"

And a loud shout of triumph came from the mob as they viewed the progress of the flames, as they came roaring and tearing through the house doors and the windows.

Each new victory of the element was a signal to the mob for a cheer; and a hearty cheer, too, came from them.

"Where is the vampyre now?" exclaimed one.

"Ha! where is he?" said another.

"If he be there," said the man, pointing to the flames, "I reckon he's got a warm berth of it, and, at the same time, very little water to boil in his kettle."

"Ha, ha! what a funny old man is Bob Mason; he's always poking fun; he'd joke if his wife were dying."

"There is many a true word spoken in jest," suggested another;

"and, to my mind, Bob Mason wouldn't be very much grieved if his wife were to die."

"Die?" said Bob; "she and I have lived and quarrelled daily a matter of five-and-thirty years, and, if that ain't enough to make a man sick of being married, and of his wife, hand me, that's all. I say I am tired."

This was said with much apparent sincerity, and several laughed at the old man's heartiness.

"It's all very well," said the old man; "it's all very well to laugh about matters you don't understand, but I know it isn't a joke — not a bit on it. I tells you what it is, neighbour, I never made but one grand mistake in all my life."

"And what was that?"

"To tie myself to a woman."

"Why, you'd get married to-morrow if your wife were to die to-day," said one.

"If I did, I hope I may marry a vampyre. I should have something then to think about. I should know what's o'clock. But, as for my old woman, lord, lord, I wish Sir Francis Varney had had her for life. I'll warrant when the next natural term of his existence came round again, he wouldn't be in no hurry to renew it; if he did, I should say that vampyres had the happy lot of managing women, which I haven't got."

"No, nor anybody else."

A loud shout now attracted their attention, and, upon looking in the quarter whence it came, they descried a large body of people coming towards them; from one end of the mob could be seen along string of red coats.

"The red coats!" shouted one.

"The military!" shouted another.

It was plain the military who had been placed in the town to quell disturbances, had been made acquainted with the proceedings at Sir Francis Varney's house, and were now marching to relieve the place, and to save the property.

They were, as we have stated, accompanied by a vast concourse of people, who came out to see what they were going to see, and seeing the flames at Sir Francis Varney's house, they determined to come all the way, and be present.

The military, seeing the disturbance in the distance, and the flames issuing from the windows, made the best of their way towards the scene of tumult with what speed they could make.

"Here they come," said one.

"Yes, just in time to see what is done."

"Yes, they can go back and say we have burned the vampyre's house down — hurra!"

"Hurra!" shouted the mob, in prolonged accents, and it reached the ears of the military.

The officer urged the men onwards, and they responded to his words, by exerting themselves to step out a little faster.

"Oh, they should have been here before this; it's no use, now, they are too late."

"Yes, they are too late."

"I wonder if the vampyre can breathe through the smoke, and live in fire," said one.

"I should think he must be able to do so, if he can stand shooting, as we know he can — you can't kill a vampyre; but yet he must be consumed, if the fire actually touches him, but not unless he can bear almost anything."

"So he can."

"Hurra!" shouted the mob, as a tall flame shot through the top windows of the house.

The fire had got the ascendant now, and no hopes could be entertained, however extravagant, of saving the smallest article that had been left in the mansion.

"Hurra!" shouted the mob with the military, who came up with them.

"Hurra!" shouted the others in reply.

"Quick march!" said the officer; and then, in a loud, commanding tone, he shouted, "Clear the way, there! clear the way."

"Ay, there's room enough for you," said old Mason; "what are you making so much noise about?"

There was a general laugh at the officer, who took no notice of the words, but ordered his men up before the burning pile, which was now an immense mass of flame.

The mob who had accompanied the military now mingled with the mob that had set the house of Sir Francis Varney on fire ere the military had come up with them.

"Halt!" cried out the officer; and the men, obedient to the word of command, halted, and drew up in a double line before the house.

There were then some words of command issued, and some more given to some of the subalterns, and a party of men, under the command of a sergeant, was sent off from the main body, to make a circuit of the house and grounds.

The officer gazed for some moments upon the burning pile without speaking; and then, turning to the next in command, he said in low tones, as he looked upon the mob, —

"We have come too late."

“Yes, much.”

“The house is now nearly gutted.”

“It is.”

“And those who came crowding along with us are inextricably mingled with the others who have been the cause of all this mischief: there’s no distinguishing them one from another.”

“And if you did, you could not say who had done it, and who had not; you could prove nothing.”

“Exactly.”

“I shall not attempt to take prisoners, unless any act is perpetrated beyond what has been done.”

“It is a singular affair.”

“Very.”

“This Sir Francis Varney is represented to be a courteous, gentlemanly man,” said the officer.

“No doubt about it, but he’s beset by a parcel of people who do not mind cutting a throat if they can get an opportunity of doing so.”

“And I expect they will.”

“Yes, when there is a popular excitement against any man, he had better leave this part at once and altogether. It is dangerous to tamper with popular prejudices; no man who has any value for his life ought to do so. It is a sheer act of suicide.”

CHAPTER LIV.

THE BURNING OF VARNEY'S HOUSE. — A NIGHT SCENE. — POPULAR SUPERSTITION.

The officer ceased to speak, and then the party whom he had sent round the house and grounds returned, and gained the main body orderly enough, and the sergeant went forward to make his report to his superior officer.

After the usual salutation, he waited for the inquiry to be put to him as to what he had seen.

"Well, Scott, what have you done?"

"I went round the premises, sir, according to your instructions, but saw no one either in the vicinity of the house, or in the grounds around it."

"No strangers, eh?"

"No, sir, none."

"You saw nothing at all likely to lead to any knowledge as to who it was that has caused this catastrophe?"

"No, sir."

"Have you learnt anything among the people who are the perpetrators of this fire?"

"No, sir."

"Well, then, that will do, unless there is anything else that you can think of."

"Nothing further, sir, unless it is that I heard some of them say that Sir Francis Varney has perished in the flames."

"Good heavens!"

"So I heard, sir."

"That must be impossible, and yet why should it be so? Go back, Scott, and bring me some person who can give me some information upon this point."

The sergeant departed toward the people, who looked at him without any distrust, for he came single-handed, though they thought he came with the intention of learning what they knew of each other, and so stroll about with the intention of getting up accusations against them. But this was not the case, the officer didn't like the work well enough; he'd rather have been elsewhere.

At length the sergeant came to one man, whom he accosted, and said to him, —

"Do you know anything of yonder fire?"

"Yes: I do know it is a fire."

"Yes, and so do I."

"My friend," said the sergeant, "when a soldier asks a question he does not expect an uncivil answer."

"But a soldier may ask a question that may have an uncivil end to it."

"He may; but it is easy to say so."

"I do say so, then, now."

"Then I'll not trouble you any more."

The sergeant moved on a pace or two more, and then, turning to the mob, he said, —

"Is there any one among you who can tell me anything concerning the fate of Sir Francis Varney?"

"Burnt!"

"Did you see him burnt?"

"No; but I saw him."

"In the flames?"

"No; before the house was on fire."

"In the house?"

"Yes; and he has not been seen to leave it since, and we conclude he must have been burned."

"Will you come and say as much to my commanding officer? It is all I want."

"Shall I be detained?"

"No."

"Then I will go," said the man, and he hobbled out of the crowd towards the sergeant. "I will go and see the officer, and tell him what I know, and that is very little, and can prejudice no one."

"Hurrah!" said the crowd, when they heard this latter assertion; for, at first, they began to be in some alarm lest there should be something wrong about this, and some of them get identified as being active in the fray.

The sergeant led the man back to the spot, where the officer stood a little way in advance of his men.

"Well, Scott," he said, "what have we here?"

"A man who has volunteered a statement, sir."

"Oh! Well, my man, can you say anything concerning all this disturbance that we have here?"

"No, sir."

"Then what did you come here for?"

"I understood the sergeant to want some one who could speak of Sir Francis Varney."

"Well?"

"I saw him."

"Where?"

"In the house."

“Exactly; but have you not seen him out of it?”

“Not since; nor any one else, I believe.”

“Where was he?”

“Upstairs, where he suddenly disappeared, and nobody can tell where he may have gone to. But he has not been seen out of the house since, and they say he could not have gone bodily out if they had not seen him.”

“He must have been burnt,” said the officer, musingly; “he could not escape, one would imagine, without being seen by some one out of such a mob.”

“Oh, dear no, for I am told they placed a watch at every hole, window, or door however high, and they saw nothing of him — not even fly out!”

“Fly out! I’m speaking of a man!”

“And I of a vampire!” said the man carelessly.

“A vampyre! Pooh, pooh!”

“Oh no! Sir Francis Varney is a vampyre! There can be no sort of doubt about it. You have only to look at him, and you will soon be satisfied of that. See his great sharp teeth in front, and ask yourself what they are for, and you will soon find the answer. They are to make holes with in the bodies of his victims, through which he can suck their blood!”

The officer looked at the man in astonishment for a few moments, as if he doubted his own ears, and then he said, —

“Are you serious?”

“I am ready to swear to it.”

“Well, I have heard a great deal about popular superstition, and thought I had seen something of it; but this is decidedly the worst case that ever I saw or heard of. You had better go home, my man, than, by your presence, countenance such a gross absurdity."

"For all that," said the man, "Sir Francis Varney is a vampyre — a blood-sucker — a human blood-sucker!"

"Get away with you," said the officer, "and do not repeat such folly before any one."

The man almost jumped when he heard the tone in which this was spoken, for the officer was both angry and contemptuous, when he heard the words of the man.

"These people," he added, turning to the sergeant, "are ignorant in the extreme. One would think we had got into the country of vampires, instead of a civilised community."

The day was going down now; the last rays of the setting sun glimmered upwards, and still shone upon the tree-tops. The darkness of night was still fast closing around them. The mob stood a motley mass of human beings, wedged together, dark and sombre, gazing upon the mischief that had been done — the work of their hands. The military stood at ease before the burning pile, and by their order and regularity, presented a contrast to the mob, as strongly by their bright gleaming arms, as by their dress and order.

The flames now enveloped the whole mansion. There was not a window or a door from which the fiery element did not burst forth in clouds, and forked flames came rushing forth with a velocity truly wonderful.

The red glare of the flames fell upon all objects around for some distance — the more especially so, as the sun had sunk, and a bank of clouds rose from beneath the horizon and excluded all his rays; there was no twilight, and there was, as yet, no moon.

The country side was enveloped in darkness, and the burning house could be seen for miles around, and formed a rallying-point to all men’s eyes.

The engines that were within reach came tearing across the country, and came to the fire; but they were of no avail. There was no supply of water, save from the ornamental ponds. These they could only get at by means that were tedious and unsatisfactory, considering the emergency of the case.

The house was a lone one, and it was being entirely consumed before they arrived, and therefore there was not the remotest chance of saving the least article. Had they ever such a supply of water, nothing could have been effected by it.

Thus the men stood idly by, passing their remarks upon the fire and the mob.

Those who stood around, and within the influence of the red glare of the flames, looked like so many demons in the infernal regions, watching the progress of lighting the fire, which we are told by good Christians is the doom of the unfortunate in spirit, and the woefully unlucky in circumstances.

It was a strange sight that; and there were many persons who would, without doubt, have rather been snug by their own fire-side than they would have remained there but it happened that no one felt inclined to express his inclination to his neighbour, and, consequently, no one said anything on the subject.

None would venture to go alone across the fields, where the spirit of the vampyre might, for all they knew to the contrary, be waiting to pounce upon them, and worry them.

No, no; no man would have quitted that mob to go back alone to the village; they would sooner have stood there all night through. That was an alternative that none of the number would very willingly accept.

The hours passed away, and the house that had been that morning a noble and well-furnished mansion, was now a smouldering heap of ruins. The flames had become somewhat subdued, and there was now more smoke than flames.

The fire had exhausted itself. There was now no more material that could serve it for fuel, and the flames began to become gradually enough subdued.

Suddenly there was a rush, and then a bright flame shot upward for an instant, so bright and so strong, that it threw a flash of light over the country for miles; but it was only momentary, and it subsided.

The roof, which had been built strong enough to resist almost anything, after being burning for a considerable time, suddenly gave way, and came in with a tremendous crash, and then all was for a moment darkness.

After this the fire might be said to be subdued, it having burned itself out; and the flames that could now be seen were but the result of so much charred wood, that would probably smoulder away for a day or two, if left to itself to do so. A dense mass of smoke arose from the ruins, and blackened the atmosphere around, and told the spectators the work was done.

CHAPTER LV.

THE RETURN OF THE MOB AND MILITARY TO THE TOWN. — THE MADNESS OF THE MOB. — THE GROCER'S REVENGE.

On the termination of the conflagration, or, rather, the fall of the roof, with the loss of grandeur in the spectacle, men's minds began to be free from the excitement that chained them to the spot, watching the progress of that element which has been truly described as a very good servant, but a very bad master; and of the truth of this every one must be well satisfied.

There was now remaining little more than the livid glare of the hot and burning embers; and this did not extend far, for the walls were too strongly built to fall in from their own weight; they were strong and stout, and intercepted the little light the ashes would have given out.

The mob now began to feel fatigued and chilly. It had been standing and walking about many hours, and the approach of exhaustion could not be put off much longer, especially as there was no longer any great excitement to carry it off.

The officer, seeing that nothing was to be done, collected his men together, and they were soon seen in motion. He had been ordered to stop any tumult that he might have seen, and to save any property. But there was nothing to do now; all the property that could have been saved was now destroyed, and the mob were beginning to disperse, and creep towards their own houses.

The order was then given for the men to take close order, and keep together, and the word to march was given, which the men obeyed with alacrity, for they had no good-will in stopping there the whole of the night.

The return to the village of both the mob and the military was not without its vicissitudes; accidents of all kinds were rife amongst them; the military, however, taking the open paths, soon diminished the distance, and that, too, with little or no accidents, save such as might have been expected from the state of the fields, after they had been so much trodden down of late.

Not so the townspeople or the peasantry; for, by way of keeping up their spirits, and amusing themselves on their way home, they commenced larking, as they called it, which often meant the execution of practical jokes, and these sometimes were of a serious nature.

The night was dark at that hour, especially so when there was a number of persons traversing about, so that little or nothing could be seen.

The mistakes and blunders that were made were numerous. In one place there were a number of people penetrating a path that led only to a hedge and deep ditch; indeed it was a brook very deep and muddy.

Here they came to a stop and endeavoured to ascertain its width, but the little reflected light they had was deceptive, and it did not appear so broad as it was.

"Oh, I can jump it," exclaimed one.

"And so can I," said another. "I have done so before, and why should I not do so now."

This was unanswerable, and as there were many present, at least a dozen were eager to jump.

"If thee can do it, I know I can," said a brawny countryman; "so

I’ll do it at once.

“The sooner the better,” shouted some one behind, “or you’ll have no room for a run, here’s a lot of ’em coming up; push over as quickly as you can.”

Thus urged, the jumpers at once made a rush to the edge of the ditch, and many jumped, and many more, from the prevailing darkness, did not see exactly where the ditch was, and taking one or two steps too many, found themselves up above the waist in muddy water.

Nor were those who jumped much better off, for nearly all jumped short or fell backwards into the stream, and were dragged out in a terrible state.

“Oh, lord! oh, lord!” exclaimed one poor fellow, dripping wet and shivering with cold, “I shall die! oh, the rheumatiz, there’ll be a pretty winter for me: I’m half dead.”

“Hold your noise,” said another, “and help me to get the mud out of my eye; I can’t see.”

“Never mind,” added a third, “considering how you jump, I don’t think you want to see.”

“This comes a hunting vampyres.”

“Oh, it’s all a judgment; who knows but he may be in the air: it is nothing to laugh at as I shouldn’t be surprised if he were: only think how precious pleasant.”

“However pleasant it may be to you,” remarked one, “it’s profitable to a good many.”

“How so?”

“Why, see the numbers, of things that will be spoiled, coats torn, hats crushed, heads broken, and shoes burst. Oh, it’s an ill-wind that blows nobody any good.”

"So it is, but you may benefit anybody you like, so you don't do it at my expence."

In one part of a field where there were some stiles and gates, a big countryman caught a fat shopkeeper with the arms of the stile a terrible poke in the stomach; while the breath was knocked out of the poor man's stomach, and he was gasping with agony, the fellow set to laughing, and said to his companions, who were of the same class —

"I say, Jim, look at the grocer, he hasn't got any wind to spare, I'd run him for a wager, see how he gapes like a fish out of water."

The poor shopkeeper felt indeed like a fish out of water, and as he afterwards declared he felt just as if he had had a red hot clock weight thrust into the midst of his stomach and there left to cool.

However, the grocer would be revenged upon his tormentor, who had now lost sight of him, but the fat man, after a time, recovering his wind, and the pain in his stomach becoming less intense, he gathered himself up.

"My name ain't Jones," he muttered, "if I don't be one to his one for that; I'll do something that shall make him remember what it is to insult a respectable tradesman. I'll never forgive such an insult. It is dark, and that's why it is he has dared to do this."

Filled with dire thoughts and a spirit of revenge, he looked from side to side to see with what he could effect his object, but could espy nothing.

"It's shameful," he muttered; "what would I give for a little retort. I'd plaster his ugly countenance."

As he spoke, he placed his hands on some pales to rest himself, when he found that they stuck to them, the pales had that day been newly pitched.

A bright idea now struck him.

"If I could only get a handful of this stuff," he thought, "I should be able to serve him out for serving me out. I will, cost what it may; I'm resolved upon that. I'll not have my wind knocked out, and my inside set on fire for nothing. No, no; I'll be revenged on him."

With this view he felt over the pales, and found that he could scrape off a little only, but not with his hands; indeed, it only plastered them; he, therefore, marched about for something to scrape it off with.

"Ah; I have a knife, a large pocket knife, that will do, that is the sort of thing I want."

He immediately commenced feeling for it, but had scarcely got his hand into his pocket when he found there would be a great difficulty in either pushing it in further or withdrawing it altogether, for the pitch made it difficult to do either, and his pocket stuck to his hands like a glove.

"D — n it," said the grocer, "who would have thought of that? here's a pretty go, curse that fellow, he is the cause of all this; I'll be revenged upon him, if it's a year hence."

The enraged grocer drew his hand out, but was unable to effect his object in withdrawing the knife also; but he saw something shining, he stooped to pick it up, exclaiming as he did so, in a gratified tone of voice,

"Ah, here's something that will do better."

As he made a grasp at it, he found he had inserted his hand into something soft.

"God bless me! what now?"

He pulled his hand hastily away, and found that it stuck slightly, and then he saw what it was.

"Ay, ay, the very thing. Surely it must have been placed here on purpose by the people."

The fact was, he had placed his hand into a pot of pitch that had been left by the people who had been at work at pitching the pales, but had been attracted by the fire at Sir Francis Varney's, and to see which they had left their work, and the pitch was left on a smouldering peat fire, so that when Mr. Jones, the grocer, accidentally put his hand into it he found it just warm.

When he made this discovery he dabbed his hand again into the pitch-pot, exclaiming, —

"In for a penny, in for a pound."

And he endeavoured to secure as large a handful of the slippery and sticky stuff as he could, and this done he set off to come up with the big countryman who had done him so much indignity and made his stomach uncomfortable.

He soon came up with him, for the man had stopped rather behind, and was larking, as it is called, with some men, to whom he was a companion.

He had slipped down a bank, and was partially sitting down on the soft mud. In his bustle, the little grocer came down with a slide, close to the big countryman.

"Ah — ah! my little grocer," said the countryman, holding out his hand to catch him, and drawing him towards himself. "You will come and sit down by the side of your old friend."

As he spoke, he endeavoured to pull Mr. Jones down, too; but that individual only replied by fetching the countryman a swinging smack across the face with the handful of pitch.

"There, take that; and now we are quits; we shall be old friends after this, eh? Are you satisfied? You'll remember me, I'll warrant."

As the grocer spoke, he rubbed his hands over the face of the fallen man, and then rushed from the spot with all the haste he could make.

The countryman sat a moment or two confounded, cursing, and swearing, and spluttering, vowing vengeance, believing that it was mud only that had been plastered over his face; but when he put his hands up, and found out what it was, he roared and bellowed like a town-bull.

He cried out to his companions that his eyes were pitched: but they only laughed at him, thinking he was having some foolish lark with them.

It was next day before he got home, for he wandered about all night: and it took him a week to wash the pitch off by means of grease; and ever afterwards he recollected the pitching of his face; nor did he ever forget the grocer.

Thus it was the whole party returned a long while after dark across the fields, with all the various accidents that were likely to befal such an assemblage of people.

The vampyre hunting cost many of them dear, for clothes were injured on all sides: hats lost, and shoes missing in a manner that put some of the rioters to much inconvenience. Soon afterwards, the military retired to their quarters; and the townspeople at length became tranquil and nothing more was heard or done that night.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE DEPARTURE OF THE BANNERWORTHS FROM THE HALL. — THE NEW ABODE. — JACK PRINGLE, PILOT.

During that very evening, on which the house of Sir Francis Varney was fired by the mob, another scene, and one of different character, was enacted at Bannerworth Hall, where the owners of that ancient place were departing from it.

It was towards the latter part of the day, that Flora Bannerworth, Mrs. Bannerworth, and Henry Bannerworth, were preparing themselves to depart from the house of their ancestors. The intended proprietor was, as we have already been made acquainted with, the old admiral, who had taken the place somewhat mysteriously, considering the way in which he usually did business.

The admiral was walking up and down the lawn before the house, and looking up at the windows every now and then; and turning to Jack Pringle, he said, —

"Jack, you dog."

"Ay — ay, sir."

"Mind you convoy these women into the right port; do you hear? and no mistaking the bearings; do you hear?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"These crafts want care; and you are pilot, commander, and all; so mind and keep your weather eye open."

"Ay, ay, sir. I knows the craft well enough, and I knows the roads, too; there'll be no end of foundering against the breakers to find where they lie."

"No, no, Jack; you needn't do that; but mind your bearings. Jack, mind your bearings."

"Never fear; I know 'em, well enough; my eyes ain't laid up in ordinary yet."

"Eh? What do you mean by that, you dog, eh?"

"Nothing; only I can see without helps to read, or glasses either; so I know one place from another."

There was now some one moving within; and the admiral, followed by Jack Pringle, entered the Hall. Henry Bannerworth was there. They were all ready to go when the coach came for them, which the admiral had ordered for them.

"Jack, you lubber; where are you?"

"Ay, ay, sir, here am I."

"Go, and station yourself up in some place where you can keep a good look-out for the coach, and come and report when you see it."

"Ay — ay, sir," said Jack, and away he went from the room, and stationed himself up in one of the trees, that commanded a good view of the main road for some distance.

"Admiral Bell," said Henry, "here we are, trusting implicitly to you; and in doing so, I am sure I am doing right."

"You will see that," said the admiral. "All's fair and honest as yet; and what is to come, will speak for itself."

"I hope you won't suffer from any of these nocturnal visits," said Henry.

"I don't much care about them; but old Admiral Bell don't strike his colours to an enemy, however ugly he may look. No, no; it must be a better craft than his own that'll take him; and one who won't run away, but that will grapple yard-arm and yard-arm, you know."

"Why, admiral, you must have seen many dangers in your time, and be used to all kinds of disturbances and conflicts. You have had a life of experience."

"Yes; and experience has come pretty thick sometimes, I can tell you, when it comes in the shape of Frenchmen's broadsides."

"I dare say, then, it must be rather awkward."

"Death by the law," said the admiral, "to stop one of them with your head, I assure you. I dare not make the attempt myself, though I have often seen it done."

"I dare say; but here are Flora and my mother."

As he spoke, Flora and her mother entered the apartment.

"Well, admiral, we are all ready; and, though I may feel somewhat sorry at leaving the old Hall, yet it arises from attachment to the place, and not any disinclination to be beyond the reach of these dreadful alarms."

"And I, too, shall be by no means sorry," said Flora; "I am sure it is some gratification to know we leave a friend here, rather than some others, who would have had the place, if they could have got it, by any means."

"Ah, that's true enough, Miss Flora," said the admiral; "but we'll run the enemy down yet, depend upon it. But once away, you will be free from these terrors; and now, as you have promised, do not let yourselves be seen any where at all."

"You have our promises, admiral; and they shall be religiously kept, I can assure you."

"Boat, ahoy — ahoy!" shouted Jack.

"What boat?" said the admiral, surprised; and then he muttered, "Confound you for a lubber! Didn't I tell you to mind your bearings, you dog-fish you?"

"Ay, ay, sir — and so I did."

"You did."

"Yes, here they are. Squint over the larboard bulk-heads, as they call walls, and then atween the two trees on the starboard side of the course, then straight ahead for a few hundred fathoms, when you come to a funnel as is smoking like the crater of Mount Vesuvius, and then in a line with that on the top of the hill, comes our boat."

"Well," said the admiral, "that'll do. Now go open the gates, and keep a bright look out, and if you see anybody near your watch, why douse their glim."

"Ay — ay, sir," said Jack, and he disappeared.

"Rather a lucid description," said Henry, as he thought of Jack's report to the admiral.

"Oh, it's a seaman's report. I know what he means; it's quicker and plainer than the land lingo, to my ears, and Jack can't talk any other, you see."

By this time the coach came into the yard, and the whole party descended into the court-yard, where they came to take leave of the old place.

"Farewell, admiral."

"Good bye," said the admiral. "I hope the place you are going to will be such as please you — I hope it will."

"I am sure we shall endeavour to be pleased with it, and I am pretty sure we shall."

"Good bye."

"Farewell, Admiral Bell," said Henry.

"You remember your promises?"

"I do. Good bye, Mr. Chillingworth."

"Good bye," said Mr. Chillingworth, who came up to bid them farewell; "a pleasant journey, and may you all be the happier for it."

"You do not come with us?"

“No; I have some business of importance to attend to, else I should have the greatest pleasure in doing so. But good bye; we shall not be long apart, I dare say.”

“I hope not,” said Henry.

The door of the carriage was shut by the admiral, who looked round, saying, —

“Jack — Jack Pringle, where are you, you dog?”

“Here am I,” said Jack.

“Where have you been to?”

“Only been for pigtail,” said Jack. “I forgot it, and couldn’t set sail without it.”

“You dog you; didn’t I tell you to mind your bearings?”

“So I will,” said Jack, “fore and aft — fore and aft, admiral.”

“You had better,” said the admiral, who, however, relaxed into a broad grin, which he concealed from Jack Pringle.

Jack mounted the coach-box, and away it went, just as it was getting dark. The old admiral had locked up all the rooms in the presence of Henry Bannerworth; and when the coach had gone out of sight, Mr. Chillingworth came back to the Hall, where he joined the admiral.

“Well,” he said, “they are gone, Admiral Bell, and we are alone; we have a clear stage and no favour.”

“The two things of all others I most desire. Now, they will be strangers where they are going to, and that will be something gained. I will endeavour to do some thing if I get yard-arm and yard-arm with these pirates. I’ll make ’em feel the weight of true metal; I’ll board ’em — d —— e, I’ll do everything.”

“Everything that can be done.”

“Ay — ay.”

The coach in which the family of the Bannerworths were carried away continued its course without any let or hindrance, and they met no one on their road during the whole drive. The fact was, nearly everybody was at the conflagration at Sir Francis Varney's house.

Flora knew not which way they were going, and, after a time, all trace of the road was lost. Darkness set in, and they all sat in silence in the coach.

At length, after some time had been spent thus, Flora Bannerworth turned to Jack Pringle, and said, —

"Are we near, or have we much further to go?"

"Not very much, ma'am," said Jack. "All's right, however — ship in the direct course, and no breakers ahead — no lookout necessary; however there's a land-lubber aloft to keep a look out."

As this was not very intelligible, and Jack seemed to have his own reasons for silence, they asked him no further questions; but in about three-quarters of an hour, during which time the coach had been driving through the trees, they came to a standstill by a sudden pull of the check-string from Jack, who said, —

"Hilloa! — take in sails, and drop anchor."

"Is this the place?"

"Yes, here we are," said Jack; "we're in port now, at all events;" and he began to sing, —

"The trials and the dangers of the voyage is past," when the coach door opened, and they all got out and looked about them where they were.

"Up the garden if you please, ma'am — as quick as you can; the night air is very cold."

Flora and her mother and brother took the hint, which was meant by Jack to mean that they were not to be seen outside. They at once entered a pretty garden, and then they came to a very neat and picturesque cottage. They had no time to look up at it, as the door was immediately opened by an elderly female, who was intended to wait upon them.

Soon after, Jack Pringle and the coachman entered the passage with the small amount of luggage which they had brought with them. This was deposited in the passage, and then Jack went out again, and, after a few minutes, there was the sound of wheels, which intimated that the coach had driven off.

Jack, however, returned in a few minutes afterwards, having secured the wicket-gate at the end of the garden, and then entered the house, shutting the door carefully after him.

Flora and her mother looked over the apartments in which they were shown with some surprise. It was, in everything, such as they could wish; indeed, though it could not be termed handsomely or extravagantly furnished, or that the things were new, yet, there was all that convenience and comfort could require, and some little of the luxuries.

“Well,” said Flora, “this is very thoughtful of the admiral. The place will really be charming, and the garden, too, delightful.”

“Mustn’t be made use of just now,” said Jack, “if you please, ma’am; them’s the orders at present.”

“Very well,” said Flora, smiling. “I suppose, Mr. Pringle, we must obey them.”

“Jack Pringle, if you please,” said Jack. “My commands only temporary. I ain’t got a commission.”

CHAPTER LVII.

THE LONELY WATCH, AND THE ADVENTURE IN THE DESERTED HOUSE.

It is now quite night, and so peculiar and solemn a stillness reigns in and about Bannerworth Hall and its surrounding grounds, that one might have supposed it a place of the dead, deserted completely after sunset by all who would still hold kindred with the living. There was not a breath of air stirring, and this circumstance added greatly to the impression of profound repose which the whole scene exhibited.

The wind during the day had been rather of a squally character, but towards nightfall, as is often usual after a day of such a character, it had completely lulled, and the serenity of the scene was unbroken even by the faintest sigh from a wandering zephyr.

The moon rose late at that period, and as is always the case at that interval between sunset and the rising of that luminary which makes the night so beautiful, the darkness was of the most profound character.

It was one of those nights to produce melancholy reflections — a night on which a man would be apt to review his past life, and to look into the hidden recesses of his soul to see if conscience could make a coward of him in the loneliness and stillness that breathed around.

It was one of those nights in which wanderers in the solitude of nature feel that the eye of Heaven is upon them, and on which there seems to be a more visible connection between the world and its great Creator than upon ordinary occasions.

The solemn and melancholy appear places once instinct with life, when deserted by those familiar forms and faces that have long inhabited them. There is no desert, no uninhabited isle in the far ocean, no wild, barren, pathless tract of unmitigated sterility, which could for one moment compare in point of loneliness and desolation to a deserted city.

Strip London, mighty and majestic as it is, of the busy swarm of humanity that throng its streets, its suburbs, its temples, its public edifices, and its private dwellings, and how awful would be the walk of one solitary man throughout its noiseless thoroughfares.

If madness seized not upon him ere he had been long the sole survivor of a race, it would need be cast in no common mould.

And to descend from great things to smaller — from the huge leviathan city to one mansion far removed from the noise and bustle of conventional life, we way imagine the sort of desolation that reigned through Bannerworth Hall, when, for the first time, after nearly a hundred and fifty years of occupation, it was deserted by the representatives of that family, so many members of which had lived and died beneath its roof. The house, and everything within, without, and around it, seemed actually to sympathize with its own desolation and desertion.

It seemed as if twenty years of continued occupation could not have produced such an effect upon the ancient edifice as had those few hours of neglect and desertion.

And yet it was not as if it had been stripped of those time-worn and ancient relics of ornament and furnishing that so long had appertained to it. No, nothing but the absence of those forms which had been accustomed quietly to move from room to room, and to be met here upon a staircase, there upon a corridor, and even in some of the ancient panelled apartments, which give it an air of dreary repose and listlessness.

The shutters, too, were all closed, and that circumstance contributed largely to the production of that gloomy effect which otherwise could not have ensued.

In fact, what could be done without attracting very special observation was done to prove to any casual observer that the house was untenanted.

But such was not really the case. In that very room where the much dreaded Varney the vampyre had made one of his dreaded appearances to Flora Bannerworth and her mother, sat two men.

It was from that apartment that Flora had discharged the pistol, which had been left to her by her brother, and the shot from which it was believed by the whole family had most certainly taken effect upon the person of the vampyre.

It was a room peculiarly accessible from the gardens, for it had long French windows opening to the very ground, and but a stone step intervened between the flooring of the apartment and a broad gravel walk which wound round that entire portion of the house.

It was in this room, then, that two men sat in silence, and nearly in darkness.

Before them, and on a table, were several articles of refreshment, as well of defence and offence, according as their intentions might be.

There were a bottle and three glasses, and lying near the elbow of one of the men was a large pair of pistols, such as might have adorned the belt of some desperate character, who wished to instil an opinion of his prowess into his foes by the magnitude of his weapons.

Close at hand, by the same party, lay some more modern fire arms, as well as a long dirk, with a silver mounted handle.

The light they had consisted of a large lantern, so constructed with a slide, that it could be completely obscured at a moment's notice; but now as it was placed, the rays that were allowed to come from it were directed as much from the window of the apartment, as possible, and fell upon the faces of the two men, revealing them to be Admiral Bell and Dr. Chillingworth.

It might have been the effect of the particular light in which he sat, but the doctor looked extremely pale, and did not appear at all at his ease.

The admiral, on the contrary, appeared in as placable a state of mind as possible and had his arms folded across his breast, and his head shrunk down between his shoulders as if he had made up his mind to something that was to last a long time, and, therefore he was making the best of it.

"I do hope," said Mr. Chillingworth, after a long pause, "that our efforts will be crowned with success — you know, my dear sir, that I have always been of your opinion, that there was a great deal more in this matter than met the eye."

"To be sure," said the admiral, "and as to our efforts being crowned with success, why, I'll give you a toast, doctor, 'may the morning's reflection provide for the evening's amusement.'"

"Ha! ha!" said Chillingworth, faintly; "I'd rather not drink any more, and you seem, admiral, to have transposed the toast in some way. I believe it runs, 'may the evening's amusement bear the morning's reflection.'"

"Transpose the devil!" said the admiral; "what do I care how it runs? I gave you my toast, and as to that you mention, it's another one altogether, and a sneaking, shore-going one too: but why don't you drink?”

“Why, my dear sir, medically speaking, I am strongly of opinion that, when the human stomach is made to contain a large quantity of alcohol, it produces bad effects upon the system. Now, I’ve certainly taken one glass of this infernally strong Hollands, and it is now lying in my stomach like the red-hot heater of a tea-urn.”

“Is it? put it out with another, then.”

“Ay, I’m afraid that would not answer, but do you really think, admiral, that we shall effect anything by waiting here, and keeping watch and ward, not under the most comfortable circumstances, this first night of the Hall being empty.”

“Well, I don’t know that we shall,” said the admiral; “but when you really want to steal a march upon the enemy, there is nothing like beginning betimes. We are both of opinion that Varney’s great object throughout has been, by some means or another, to get possession of the house.”

“Yes; true, true.”

“We know that he has been unceasing in his endeavours to get the Bannerworth family out of it; that he has offered them their own price to become its tenant, and that the whole gist of his quiet and placid interview with Flora in the garden, was to supply her with a new set of reasons for urging her mother and brother to leave Bannerworth Hall, because the old ones were certainly not found sufficient.”

“True, true, most true,” said Mr. Chillingworth, emphatically. “You know, sir, that from the first time you broached that view of the subject to me, how entirely I coincided with you.”

“Of course you did, for you are a honest fellow, and a right-thinking fellow, though you are a doctor, and I don’t know that I like doctors much better than I like lawyers — they're only humbugs in a different sort of way. But I wish to be liberal; there is such a thing as an honest lawyer, and, d —— e, you're an honest doctor!"

"Of course I'm much obliged, admiral, for your good opinion. I only wish it had struck me to bring something of a solid nature in the shape of food, to sustain the waste of the animal economy during the hours we shall have to wait here."

"Don't trouble yourself about that," said the admiral. "Do you think I'm a donkey, and would set out on a cruise without victualling my ship? I should think not. Jack Pringle will be here soon, and he has my orders to bring in something to eat."

"Well," said the doctor, "that's very provident of you, admiral, and I feel personally obliged; but tell me, how do you intend to conduct the watch?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I mean, if we sit here with the window fastened so as to prevent our light from being seen, and the door closed, how are we by any possibility to know if the house is attacked or not?"

"Hark'ee, my friend," said the admiral; "I've left a weak point for the enemy."

"A what, admiral?"

"A weak point. I've taken good care to secure everything but one of the windows on the ground floor, and that I've left open, or so nearly open, that it will look like the most natural place in the world to get in at. Now, just inside that window, I've placed a lot of the family crockery. I'll warrant, if anybody so much as puts his foot in, you'll hear the smash; — and, d —— e, there it is!"

There was a loud crash at this moment, followed by a succession of similar sounds, but of a lesser degree; and both the admiral and

Mr. Chillingworth sprung to their feet.

"Come on," cried the former; "here'll be a precious row — take the lantern."

Mr. Chillingworth did so, but he did not seem possessed of a great deal of presence of mind; for, before they got out of the room, he twice accidentally put on the dark slide, and produced a total darkness.

"D — n!" said the admiral; "don't make it wink and wink in that way; hold it up, and run after me as hard as you can."

"I'm coming, I'm coming," said Mr. Chillingworth.

It was one of the windows of a long room, containing five, fronting the garden, which the admiral had left purposely unguarded; and it was not far from the apartment in which they had been sitting, so that, probably, not half a minute's time elapsed between the moment of the first alarm, and their reaching the spot from whence it was presumed to arise.

The admiral had armed himself with one of the huge pistols, and he dashed forward, with all the vehemence of his character, towards the window, where he knew he had placed the family crockery, and where he fully expected to meet the reward of his exertion by discovering some one lying amid its fragments.

In this, however, he was disappointed; for, although there was evidently a great smash amongst the plates and dishes, the window remained closed, and there was no indication whatever of the presence of any one.

"Well, that's odd," said the admiral; "I balanced them up amazingly careful, and two of 'em edgeways — d — e, a fly would have knocked them down."

"Mew," said a great cat, emerging from under a chair.

“Curse you, there you are,” said the admiral. “Put out the light, put out the light; here we’re illuminating the whole house for nothing.”

With, a click went the darkening slide over the lantern, and all was obscurity.

At that instant a shrill, clear whistle came from the garden.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE ARRIVAL OF JACK PRINGLE. — MIDNIGHT AND THE VAMPYRE. — THE MYSTERIOUS HAT.

“Bless me! what is that?” said Mr. Chillingworth; “what a very singular sound.”

“Hold your noise,” said the admiral; “did you never hear that before?”

“No; how should I?”

“Lor, bless the ignorance of some people, that’s a boatswain’s call.”

“Oh, it is,” said Mr. Chillingworth; “is he going to call again?”

“D —— e, I tell ye it’s a boatswain’s call.”

“Well, then, d —— e, if it comes to that,” said Mr. Chillingworth, “what does he call here for?”

The admiral disdained an answer; but demanding the lantern, he opened it, so that there was a sufficient glimmering of light to guide him, and then walked from the room towards the front door of the Hall.

He asked no questions before he opened it, because, no doubt, the signal was preconcerted; and Jack Pringle, for it was he indeed who had arrived, at once walked in, and the admiral barred the door with the same precision with which it was before secured.

“Well, Jack,” he said, “did you see anybody?”

“Ay, ay, sir,” said Jack.

“Why, ye don’t mean that — where?”

“Where I bought the grub; a woman—”

“D —— e, you’re a fool, Jack.”

"You're another."

"Hilloa, ye scoundrel, what d'ye mean by talking to me in that way? is this your respect for your superiors?"

"Ship's been paid off long ago," said Jack, "and I ain't got no superiors. I ain't a marine or a Frenchman."

"Why, you're drunk."

"I know it; put that in your eye."

"There's a scoundrel. Why, you know-nothing-lubber, didn't I tell you to be careful, and that everything depended upon secrecy and caution? and didn't I tell you, above all this, to avoid drink?"

"To be sure you did."

"And yet you come here like a rum cask."

"Yes; now you've had your say, what then?"

"You'd better leave him alone," said Mr. Chillingworth; "it's no use arguing with a drunken man."

"Harkye, admiral," said Jack, steadying himself as well as he could. "I've put up with you a precious long while, but I won't no longer; you're so drunk, now, that you keeping bobbing up and down like the mizen gaff in a storm — that's my opinion — tol de rol."

"Let him alone, let him alone," urged Mr. Chillingworth.

"The villain," said the admiral; "he's enough to ruin everything; now, who would have thought that? but it's always been the way with him for a matter of twenty years — he never had any judgment in his drink. When it was all smooth sailing, and nothing to do, and the fellow might have got an extra drop on board, which nobody would have cared for, he's as sober as a judge; but, whenever there's anything to do, that wants a little cleverness, confound him, he ships rum enough to float a seventy-four."

"Are you going to stand anything to drink," said Jack, "my old buffer? Do you recollect where you got your knob scuttled off Beyrout — how you fell on your latter end and tried to recollect your church cateckis, you old brute? — I's ashamed of you. Do you recollect the brown girl you bought for thirteen bob and a tanner, at the blessed Society Islands, and sold her again for a dollar, to a nigger seven feet two, in his natural pumps? you're a nice article, you is, to talk of marines and swabs, and shore-going lubbers, blow yer. Do you recollect the little Frenchman that told ye he'd pull your blessed nose, and I advised you to soap it? do you recollect Sall at Spithead, as you got in at a port hole of the state cabin, all but her behind?"

"Death and the devil!" said the admiral, breaking from the grasp of Mr. Chillingworth.

"Ay," said Jack, "you'll come to 'em both one of these days, old cock, and no mistake."

"I'll have his life, I'll have his life," roared the admiral.

"Nay, nay, sir," said Mr. Chillingworth, catching the admiral round the waist. "My dear sir, recollect, now, if I may venture to advise you, Admiral Bell, there's a lot of that fiery hollands you know, in the next room; set firm down to that, and finish him off. I'll warrant him, he'll be quiet enough."

"What's that you say?" cried Jack— "hollands! — who's got any? — next to rum and Elizabeth Baker, if I has an affection, it's hollands."

"Jack!" said the admiral.

"Ay, ay, sir!" said Jack, instinctively.

"Come this way."

Jack staggered after him, and they all reached the room where the admiral and Mr. Chillingworth had been sitting before the alarm.

“There!” said the admiral, putting the light upon the table, and pointing to the bottle; “what do you think of that?”

“I never thinks under such circumstances,” said Jack. “Here’s to the wooden walls of old England!”

He seized the bottle, and, putting its neck into his mouth, for a few moments nothing was heard but a gurgling sound of the liquor passing down his throat; his head went further and further back, until, at last, over he went, chair and bottle and all, and lay in a helpless state of intoxication on the floor.

“So far, so good,” said the admiral. “He’s out of the way, at all events.”

“I’ll just loosen his neckcloth,” said Mr. Chillingworth, “and then we’ll go and sit somewhere else; and I should recommend that, if anywhere, we take up our station in that chamber, once Flora’s, where the mysterious panelled portrait hangs, that bears so strong a resemblance to Varney, the vampyre.”

“Hush!” said the admiral. “What’s that?”

They listened for a moment intently; and then, distinctly, upon the gravel path outside the window, they heard a footstep, as if some person were walking along, not altogether heedlessly, but yet without any very great amount of caution or attention to the noise he might make.

“Hist!” said the doctor. “Not a word. They come.”

“What do you say they for?” said the admiral.

“Because something seems to whisper me that Mr. Marchdale knows more of Varney, the vampyre, than ever he has chosen to reveal. Put out the light.”

“Yes, yes — that’ll do. The moon has risen; see how it streams through the chinks of the shutters.”

"No, no — it's not in that direction, or our light would have betrayed us. Do you not see the beams come from that half glass-door leading to the greenhouse?"

"Yes; and there's the footstep again, or another."

Tramp, tramp came a footfall again upon the gravel path, and, as before, died away upon their listening ears.

"What do you say now," said Mr. Chillingworth— "are there not two?"

"If they were a dozen," said the admiral, "although we have lost one of our force, I would tackle them. Let's creep on through the rooms in the direction the footsteps went."

"My life on it," said Mr. Chillingworth as they left the apartment, "if this be Varney, he makes for that apartment where Flora slept, and which he knows how to get admission to. I've studied the house well, admiral, and to get to that window any one from here outside must take a considerable round. Come on — we shall be beforehand."

"A good idea — a good idea. Be it so."

Just allowing themselves sufficient light to guide them on the way from the lantern, they hurried on with as much precipitation as the intricacies of the passage would allow, nor halted till they had reached the chamber were hung the portrait which bore so striking and remarkable a likeness to Varney, the vampyre.

They left the lamp outside the door, so that not even a straggling beam from it could betray that there were persons on the watch; and then, as quietly as foot could fall, they took up their station among the hangings of the antique bedstead, which has been before alluded to in this work as a remarkable piece of furniture appertaining to that apartment.

"Do you think," said the admiral, "we've distanced them?"

"Certainly we have. It's unlucky that the blind of the window is down."

"Is it? By Heaven, there's a d —— d strange-looking shadow creeping over it."

Mr. Chillingworth looked almost with suspended breath. Even he could not altogether get rid of a tremulous feeling, as he saw that the shadow of a human form, apparently of very large dimensions, was on the outside, with the arms spread out, as if feeling for some means of opening the window.

It would have been easy now to have fired one of the pistols direct upon the figure; but, somehow or another, both the admiral and Mr. Chillingworth shrank from that course, and they felt much rather inclined to capture whoever might make his appearance, only using their pistols as a last resource, than gratuitously and at once to resort to violence.

"Who should you say that was?" whispered the admiral.

"Varney, the vampyre."

"D —— e, he's ill-looking and big enough for anything — there's a noise!"

There was a strange cracking sound at the window, as if a pane of glass was being very stealthily and quietly broken; and then the blind was agitated slightly, confusing much the shadow that was cast upon it, as if the hand of some person was introduced for the purpose of effecting a complete entrance into the apartment.

"He's coming in," whispered the admiral.

"Hush, for Heaven's sake!" said Mr. Chillingworth; "you will alarm him, and we shall lose the fruit of all the labour we have already bestowed upon the matter; but did you not say something, admiral, about lying under the window and catching him by the leg?"

"Why, yes; I did."

"Go and do it, then; for, as sure as you are a living man, his leg will be in in a minute."

"Here goes," said the admiral; "I never suggest anything which I'm unwilling to do myself."

Whoever it was that now was making such strenuous exertions to get into the apartment seemed to find some difficulty as regarded the fastenings of the window, and as this difficulty increased, the patience of the party, as well as his caution deserted him, and the casement was rattled with violence.

With a far greater amount of caution than any one from a knowledge of his character would have given him credit for, the admiral crept forward and laid himself exactly under the window.

The depth of wood-work from the floor to the lowest part of the window-frame did not exceed above two feet; to that any one could conveniently step in from the balcony outride on to the floor of the apartment, which was just what he who was attempting to effect an entrance was desirous of doing.

It was quite clear that, be he who he might, mortal or vampyre, he had some acquaintance with the fastening of the window; for now he succeeded in moving it, and the sash was thrown open.

The blind was still an obstacle; but a vigorous pull from the intruder brought that down on the prostrate admiral; and then Mr. Chillingworth saw, by the moonlight, a tall, gaunt figure standing in the balcony, as if just hesitating for a moment whether to get head first or feet first into the apartment.

Had he chosen the former alternative he would need, indeed, to have been endowed with more than mortal powers of defence and offence to escape capture, but his lucky star was in the ascendancy, and he put his foot in first.

He turned his side to the apartment and, as he did so, the blight moonlight fell upon his face, enabling Mr. Chillingworth to see, without the shadow of a doubt, that it was, indeed, Varney, the vampyre, who was thus stealthily making his entrance into Bannerworth Hall, according to the calculation which had been made by the admiral upon that subject. The doctor scarcely knew whether to be pleased or not at this discovery; it was almost a terrifying one, sceptical as he was upon the subject of vampyres, and he waited breathless for the issue of the singular and perilous adventure.

No doubt Admiral Bell deeply congratulated himself upon the success which was about to crown his stratagem for the capture of the intruder, be he who he might, and he writhed with impatience for the foot to come sufficiently near him to enable him to grasp it.

His patience was not severely tried, for in another moment it rested upon his chest.

"Boarders a hoy!" shouted the admiral, and at once he laid hold of the trespasser. "Yard-arm to yard-arm, I think I've got you now. Here's a prize, doctor! he shall go away without his leg if he goes away now. Eh! what! the light — d —— e, he has — Doctor, the light! the light! Why what's this? — Hilloa, there!"

Dr. Chillingworth sprang into the passage, and procured the light — in another moment he was at the side of the admiral, and the lantern slide being thrown back, he saw at once the dilemma into which his friend had fallen.

There he lay upon his back, grasping, with the vehemence of an embrace that had in it much of the ludicrous, a long boot, from which the intruder had cleverly slipped his leg, leaving it as a poor trophy in the hands of his enemies.

"Why you've only pulled his boot off," said the doctor; "and now he's gone for good, for he knows what we're about, and has slipped through your fingers."

Admiral Bell sat up and looked at the boot with a rueful countenance.

"Done again!" he said.

"Yes, you are done," said the doctor; "why didn't you lay hold of the leg while you were about it, instead of the boot? Admiral, are these your tactics?"

"Don't be a fool," said the admiral; "put out the light and give me the pistols, or blaze away yourself into the garden; a chance shot may do something. It's no use running after him; a stern chase is a long chase; but fire away."

As if some parties below had heard him give the word, two loud reports from the garden immediately ensued, and a crash of glass testified to the fact that some deadly missile had entered the room.

"Murder!" said the doctor, and he fell flat upon his back. "I don't like this at all; it's all in your line, admiral, but not in mine."

"All's right, my lad," said the admiral; "now for it."

He saw lying in the moonlight the pistols which he and the doctor had brought into the room, and in another moment he, to use his own words, returned the broadside of the enemy.

"D — n it!" he said, "this puts me in mind of old times. Blaze away, you thieves, while I load; broadside to broadside. It's your turn now; I scorn to take an advantage. What the devil's that?"

Something very large and very heavy came bang against the window, sending it all into the room, and nearly smothering the admiral with the fragments. Another shot was then fired, and in came something else, which hit the wall on the opposite side of the room, rebounding from thence on to the doctor, who gave a yell of despair.

After that all was still; the enemy seemed to be satisfied that they had silenced the garrison. And it took the admiral a great deal of kicking and plunging to rescue himself from some superincumbent mass that was upon him, which seemed to him to be a considerable sized tree.

"Call this fair fighting," he shouted— "getting a man's legs and arms tangled up like a piece of Indian matting in the branches of a tree? Doctor, I say! hilloa! where are you?"

"I don't know," said the doctor; "but there's somebody getting into the balcony — now we shall be murdered in cold blood!"

"Where's the pistols?"

"Fired off, of course; you did it yourself."

Bang came something else into the room, which, from the sound it made, closely resembled a brick, and after that somebody jumped clean into the centre of the floor, and then, after rolling and writhing about in a most singular manner, slowly got up, and with various preliminary hiccups, said, —

"Come on, you lubbers, many of you as like. I'm the tar for all weathers."

"Why, d —— e," said the admiral, "it's Jack Pringle."

"Yes, it is," said Jack, who was not sufficiently sober to recognise the admiral's voice. "I sees as how you've heard of me. Come on, all of you."

"Why, Jack, you scoundrel," roared the admiral, "how came you here? Don't you know me? I'm your admiral, you horse-marine."

"Eh?" said Jack. "Ay — ay, sir, how came you here?"

"How came you, you villain?"

“Boarded the enemy.”

“The enemy who you boarded was us; and hang me if I don’t think you haven’t been pouring broadsides into us, while the enemy were scudding before the wind in another direction.”

“Lor!” said Jack.

“Explain, you scoundrel, directly — explain.”

“Well, that’s only reasonable,” said Jack; and giving a heavier lurch than usual, he sat down with a great bounce upon the floor. “You see it’s just this here, — when I was a coming of course I heard, just as I was a going, that ere as made me come all in consequence of somebody a going, or for to come, you see, admiral.”

“Doctor,” cried the admiral, in a great rage, “just help me out of this entanglement of branches, and I’ll rid the world from an encumbrance by smashing that fellow.”

“Smash yourself!” said Jack. “You know you’re drunk.”

“My dear admiral,” said Mr. Chillingworth, laying hold of one of his legs, and pulling it very hard, which brought his face into a lot of brambles, “we’re making a mess of this business.”

“Murder!” shouted the admiral; “you are indeed. Is that what you call pulling me out of it? You’ve stuck me fast.”

“I’ll manage it,” said Jack. “I’ve seed him in many a scrape, and I’ve seed him out. You pull me, doctor, and I’ll pull him. Yo hoy!”

Jack laid hold of the admiral by the scuff of the neck, and the doctor laid hold of Jack round the waist, the consequence of which was that he was dragged out from the branches of the tree, which seemed to have been thrown into the room, and down fell both Jack and the doctor.

At this instant there was a strange hissing sound heard below the window; then there was a sudden, loud report, as if a hand-grenade had gone off. A spectral sort of light gleamed into the room, and a tall, gaunt-looking figure rose slowly up in the balcony.

"Beware of the dead!" said a voice. "Let the living contend with the living, the dead with the dead. Beware!"

The figure disappeared, as did also the strange, spectral-looking light. A death-like silence ensued, and the cold moonbeams streamed in upon the floor of the apartment, as if nothing had occurred to disturb the wrapped repose and serenity of the scene.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE WARNING. — THE NEW PLAN OF OPERATION. — THE INSULTING MESSAGE FROM VARNEY.

So much of the night had been consumed in these operations, that by the time they were over, and the three personages who lay upon the floor of what might be called the haunted chamber of Bannerworth Hall, even had they now been disposed to seek repose, would have had a short time to do so before the daylight would have streamed in upon them, and roused them to the bustle of waking existence.

It may be well believed what a vast amount of surprise came over the three persons in that chamber at the last little circumstance that had occurred in connection with the night's proceedings.

There was nothing which had preceded that, that did not resemble a genuine attack upon the premises; but about that last mysterious appearance, with its curious light, there was quite enough to bother the admiral and Jack Pringle to a considerable effect, whatever might be the effect upon Mr. Chillingworth, whose profession better enabled him to comprehend, chemically, what would produce effects that, no doubt, astonished them amazingly.

What with his intoxication and the violent exercise he had taken, Jack was again thoroughly prostrate; while the admiral could not have looked more astonished had the evil one himself appeared in *propria persona* and given him notice to quit the premises.

He was, however, the first to speak, and the words he spoke were addressed to Jack, to whom he said, —

"Jack, you lubber, what do you think of all that?"

Jack, however, was too far gone even to say "Ay, ay, sir;" and Mr.

Chillingworth, slowly getting himself up to his feet, approached the admiral.

"It's hard to say so much, Admiral Bell," he said, "but it strikes me that whatever object this Sir Francis Varney, or Varney, the vampyre, has in coming into Bannerworth Hall, it is, at all events, of sufficient importance to induce him to go any length, and not to let even a life to stand in the way of its accomplishment."

"Well, it seems so," said the admiral; "for I'll be hanged if I can make head or tail of the fellow."

"If we value our personal safety, we shall hesitate to continue a perilous adventure which I think can end only in defeat, if not in death."

"But we don't value our personal safety," said the admiral. "We've got into the adventure, and I don't see why we shouldn't carry it out. It may be growing a little serious; but what of that? For the sake of that young girl, Flora Bannerworth, as well as for the sake of my nephew, Charles Holland, I will see the end of this affair, let it be what it may; but mind you, Mr. Chillingworth, if one man chooses to go upon a desperate service, that's no reason why he should ask another to do so."

"I understand you," said Mr. Chillingworth; "but, having commenced the adventure with you, I am not the man to desert you in it. We have committed a great mistake."

"A mistake! how?"

"Why, we ought to have watched outside the house, instead of within it. There can be no doubt that if we had lain in wait in the garden, we should have been in a better position to have accomplished our object."

"Well, I don't know, doctor, but it seems to me that if Jack

Pringle hadn't made such a fool of himself, we should have managed very well: and I don't know now how he came to behave in the manner he did."

"Nor I," said Mr. Chillingworth. "But, at all events, so far as the result goes, it is quite clear that any further watching, in this house, for the appearance of Sir Francis Varney, will now be in vain. He has nothing to do now but to keep quiet until we are tired out — a fact, concerning which he can easily obtain information — and then he immediately, without trouble, walks into the premises, to his own satisfaction."

"But what the deuce can he want upon the premises?"

"That question, admiral, induces me to think that we have made another mistake. We ought not to have attempted to surprise Sir Francis Varney in coming into Bannerworth Hall, but to catch him as he came out."

"Well, there's something in that," said the admiral. "This is a pretty night's business, to be sure. However, it can't be helped, it's done, and there's an end on't. And now, as the morning is near at hand, I certainly must confess I should like to get some breakfast, although I don't like that we should all leave the house together"

"Why," said Mr. Chillingworth, "as we have now no secret to keep with regard to our being here, because the principal person we wished to keep it from is aware of it, I think we cannot do better than send at once for Henry Bannerworth, tell him of the non-success of the effort we have made in his behalf, and admit him at once into our consultation of what is next to be done."

"Agreed, agreed, I think that, without troubling him, we might have captured this Varney; but that's over now, and, as soon as Jack Pringle chooses to wake up again, I'll send him to the Bannerworths with a message.”

“Ay, ay, sir,” said Jack, suddenly; “all’s right.”

“Why, you vagabond,” said the admiral, “I do believe you’ve been shamming!”

“Shamming what?”

“Being drunk, to be sure.”

“Lor! couldn’t do it,” said Jack; “I’ll just tell you how it was. I wakened up and found myself shut in somewhere; and, as I couldn’t get out of the door, I thought I’d try the window, and there I did get out. Well, perhaps I wasn’t quite the thing, but I sees two people in the garden a looking up at this ere room; and, to be sure, I thought it was you and the doctor. Well, it warn’t no business of mine to interfere, so I seed one of you climb up the balcony, as I thought, and then, after which, come down head over heels with such a run, that I thought you must have broken your neck. Well, after that you fired a couple of shots in, and then, after that, I made sure it was you, admiral.”

“And what made you make sure of that?”

“Why, because you scuttled away like an empty tar-barrel in full tide.”

“Confound you, you scoundrel!”

“Well, then, confound you, if it comes to that. I thought I was doing you good sarvice, and that the enemy was here, when all the while it turned out as you was and the enemy wasn’t, and the enemy was outside and you wasn’t.”

“But who threw such a confounded lot of things into the room?”

“Why, I did, of course; I had but one pistol, and, when I fired that off, I was forced to make up a broadside with what I could.”

“Was there ever such a stupid!” said the admiral; “doctor, doctor, you talked of us making two mistakes; but you forgot a third and worse one still, and that was the bringing such a lubberly son of a sea-cook into the place as this fellow."

"You're another," said Jack; "and you knows it."

"Well, well," said Mr. Chillingworth, "it's no use continuing it, admiral; Jack, in his way, did, I dare say, what he considered for the best."

"I wish he'd do, then, what he considers for the worst, next time."

"Perhaps I may," said Jack, "and then you will be served out above a bit. What 'ud become of you, I wonder, if it wasn't for me? I'm as good as a mother to you, you knows that, you old babby."

"Come, come, admiral," said Mr. Chillingworth: "come down to the garden-gate; it is now just upon daybreak, and the probability is that we shall not be long there before we see some of the country people, who will get us anything we require in the shape of refreshment; and as for Jack, he seems quite sufficiently recovered now to go to the Bannerworths'."

"Oh! I can go," said Jack; "as for that, the only thing as puts me out of the way is the want of something to drink. My constitution won't stand what they call temperance living, or nothing with the chill off."

"Go at once," said the admiral, "and tel! Mr. Henry Bannerworth that we are here; but do not tell him before his sister or his mother. If you meet anybody on the road, send them here with a cargo of victuals. It strikes me that a good, comfortable breakfast wouldn't be at all amiss, doctor."

"How rapidly the day dawns," remarked Mr. Chillingworth, as he walked into the balcony from whence Varney, the vampire, had attempted to make good his entrance to the Hall.

Just as he spoke, and before Jack Pringle could get half way over to the garden gate, there came a tremendous ring at the bell which was suspended over it.

A view of that gate could not be commanded from the window of the haunted apartment, so that they could not see who it was that demanded admission.

As Jack Pringle was going down at any rate, they saw no necessity for personal interference; and he proved that there was not, by presently returning with a note which he said had been thrown over the gate by a lad, who then scampered off with all the speed he could make.

The note, exteriorly, was well got up, and had all the appearance of great care having been bestowed upon its folding and sealing.

It was duly addressed to "Admiral Bell, Bannerworth Hall," and the word "immediate" was written at one corner.

The admiral, after looking at it for some time with very great wonder, came at last to the conclusion that probably to open it would be the shortest way of arriving at a knowledge of who had sent it, and he accordingly did so.

The note was as follows: —

"My dear sir, — Feeling assured that you cannot be surrounded with those means and appliances for comfort in the Hall, in its now deserted condition, which you have a right to expect, and so eminently deserve, I flatter myself that I shall receive an answer in the affirmative, when I request the favour of your company to breakfast, as well as that of your learned friend. Mr. Chillingworth.

"In consequence of a little accident which occurred last evening to my own residence, I am, *ad interim*, until the county build it up for me again, staying at a house called Walmesley Lodge, where I shall expect you with all the impatience of one soliciting an honour, and hoping that it will be conferred upon him.

"I trust that any little difference of opinion on other subjects will not interfere to prevent the harmony of our morning's meal together.

"Believe me to be, my dear sir, with the greatest possible consideration, your very obedient, humble servant,

"FRANCIS VARNEY."

The admiral gasped again, and looked at Mr. Chillingworth, and then at the note, and then at Mr. Chillingworth again, as if he was perfectly bewildered.

"That's about the coolest piece of business," said Mr. Chillingworth, "that ever I heard of."

"Hang me," said the admiral, "if I sha'n't like the fellow at last. It is cool, and I like it because it is cool. Where's my hat? where's my stick!"

"What are you going to do?"

"Accept his invitation, to be sure, and breakfast with him; and, my learned friend, as he calls you, I hope you'll come likewise. I'll take the fellow at his word. By fair means, or by foul, I'll know what he wants here; and why he persecutes this family, for whom I have an attachment; and what hand he has in the disappearance of my nephew, Charles Holland; for, as sure as there's a Heaven above us, he's at the bottom of that affair. Where is this Walmesley Lodge?"

"Just in the neighbourhood; but—"

"Come on, then; come on."

"But, really, admiral, you don't mean to say you'll breakfast with — with—"

"A vampyre? Yes, I would, and will, and mean to do so. Here, Jack, you needn't go to Mr. Bannerworth's yet. Come, my learned friend, let’s take Time by the forelock.”

CHAPTER LX.

THE INTERRUPTED BREAKFAST AT SIR FRANCIS VARNEY'S.

Notwithstanding all Mr. Chillingworth could say to the contrary, the admiral really meant to breakfast with Sir Francis Varney.

The worthy doctor could not for some time believe but that the admiral must be joking, when he talked in such a strain; but he was very soon convinced to the contrary, by the latter actually walking out and once more asking him, Mr. Chillingworth, if he meant to go with him, or not.

This was conclusive, so the doctor said, —

"Well, admiral, this appears to me rather a mad sort of freak; but, as I have begun the adventure with you, I will conclude it with you."

"That's right," said the admiral; "I'm not deceived in you, doctor; so come along. Hang these vampyres, I don't know how to tackle them, myself. I think, after all, Sir Francis Varney is more in your line than line is in mine."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, couldn't you persuade him he's ill, and wants some physic? That would soon settle him, you know."

"Settle him!" said Mr. Chillingworth; "I beg to say that if I did give him any physic, the dose would be much to his advantage; but, however, my opinion is, that this invitation to breakfast is, after all, a mere piece of irony; and that, when we get to Walmesley Lodge, we shall not see anything of him; on the contrary, we shall probably find it's a hoax."

"I certainly shouldn't like that, but still it's worth the trying. The fellow has really behaved himself in such an extraordinary manner, that, if I can make terms with him I will; and there’s one thing, you know, doctor, that I think we may say we have discovered.”

“And what may that be? Is it, not to make too sure of a vampyre, even when you have him by the leg?”

“No, that ain’t it, though that’s a very good thing in its way: but it is just this, that Sir Francis Varney, whoever he is and whatever he is, is after Bannerworth Hall, and not the Bannerworth family. If you recollect, Mr. Chillingworth, in our conversation, I have always insisted upon that fact.”

“You have; and it seems to me to be completely verified by the proceedings of the night. There, then, admiral, is the great mystery — what can he want at Bannerworth Hall that makes him take such a world of trouble, and run so many fearful risks in trying to get at it?”

“That is, indeed, the mystery; and if he really means this invitation to breakfast, I shall ask him plumply, and tell him, at the same time, that possibly his very best way to secure his object will be to be candid, vampyre as he is.”

“But really, admiral, you do not still cling to that foolish superstition of believing that Sir Francis Varney is in reality a vampyre?”

“I don’t know, and I can’t say; if anybody was to give me a description of a strange sort of fish that I had never seen, I wouldn’t take upon myself to say there wasn’t such a thing; nor would you, doctor, if you had really seen the many odd ones that I have encountered at various times.”

“Well, well, admiral, I’m certainly not belonging to that school of philosophy which declares the impossible to be what it don’t understand; there may be vampyres, and there may be apparitions, for all I know to the contrary; I only doubt these things, because I think, if they were true, that, as a phenomena of nature, they would have been by this time established by repeated instances without the possibility of doubt or cavil."

"Well, there's something in that; but how far have we got to go now?"

"No further than to yon enclosure where you see those park-like looking gates, and that cedar-tree stretching its dark-green foliage so far into the road; that is Walmesley Lodge, whither you have been invited."

"And you, my learned friend, recollect that you were invited too; so that you are no intruder upon the hospitality of Varney the vampyre."

"I say, admiral," said Mr. Chillingworth, when they reached the gates, "you know it is not quite the thing to call a man a vampyre at his own breakfast-table, so just oblige me by promising not to make any such remark to Sir Francis."

"A likely thing!" said the admiral; "he knows I know what he is, and he knows I'm a plain man and a blunt speaker; however, I'll be civil to him, and more than that I can't promise. I must wring out of him, if I can, what has become of Charles Holland, and what the deuce he really wants himself."

"Well, well; come to no collision with him, while we're his guests."

"Not if I can help it."

The doctor rang at the gate bell of Walmesley Lodge, and was in a few moments answered by a woman, who demanded their business.

"Is Sir Francis Varney here?" said the doctor.

"Oh, ah! yes," she replied; "you see his house was burnt down, for something or other — I'm sure I don't know what — by some people — I'm sure I don't know who; so, as the lodge was to let, we have took him in till he can suit himself."

"Ah! that's it, is it?" said the admiral— "tell him that Admiral Bell and Dr. Chillingworth are here."

"Very well," said the woman; "you may walk in."

"Thank ye; you're vastly obliging, ma'am. Is there anything going on in the breakfast line?"

"Well, yes; I am getting him some breakfast, but he didn't say as he expected company."

The woman opened the garden gate, and they walked up a trimly laid out garden to the lodge, which was a cottage-like structure in external appearance, although within it boasted of all the comforts of a tolerably extensive house.

She left them in a small room, leading from the hall, and was absent about five minutes; then she returned, and, merely saying that Sir Francis Varney presented his compliments, and desired them to walk up stairs, she preceded them up a handsome flight which led to the first floor of the lodge.

Up to this moment, Mr. Chillingworth had expected some excuse, for, notwithstanding all he had heard and seen of Sir Francis Varney, he could not believe that any amount of impudence would suffice to enable him to receive people as his guests, with whom he must feel that he was at such positive war.

It was a singular circumstance; and, perhaps, the only thing that matched the cool impertinence of the invitation, was the acceptance of it under the circumstances by the admiral.

Sir Francis Varney might have intended it as a jest; but if he did so, in the first instance, it was evident he would not allow himself to be beaten with his own weapons.

The room into which they were shown was a longish narrow one; a very wide door gave them admission to it, at the end, nearest the staircase, and at its other extremity there was a similar door opening into some other apartments of the house.

Sir Francis Varney sat with his back towards this second door, and a table, with some chairs and other articles of furniture, were so arranged before him, that while they seemed but to be carelessly placed in the position they occupied, they really formed a pretty good barrier between him and his visitors.

The admiral, however, was too intent upon getting a sight of Varney, to notice any preparation of this sort, and he advanced quickly into the room.

And there, indeed, was the much dreaded, troublesome, persevering, and singular looking being who had caused such a world of annoyance to the family of the Bannerworths, as well as disturbing the peace of the whole district, which had the misfortune to have him as an inhabitant.

If anything, he looked thinner, taller, and paler than usual, and there seemed to be a slight nervousness of manner about him, as he slowly inclined his head towards the admiral, which was not quite intelligible.

“Well,” said Admiral Bell, “you invited me to breakfast, and my learned friend; here we are.”

“No two human beings,” said Varney, “could be more welcome to my hospitality than yourself and Dr. Chillingworth. I pray you to be seated. What a pleasant thing it is, after the toils and struggles of this life, occasionally to sit down in the sweet companionship of such dear friends.”

He made a hideous face as he spoke, and the admiral looked as if he were half inclined to quarrel at that early stage of the proceedings.

"Dear friends!" he said; "well, well — it's no use squabbling about a word or two; but I tell you what it is, Mr. Varney, or Sir Francis Varney, or whatever your d —— d name is—"

"Hold, my dear sir," said Varney— "after breakfast, if you please — after breakfast."

He rang a hand-bell as he spoke, and the woman who had charge of the house brought in a tray tolerably covered with the materials for a substantial morning's meal. She placed it upon the table, and certainly the various articles that smoked upon it did great credit to her culinary powers.

"Deborah," said Sir Varney, in a mild sort of tone, "keep on continually bringing things to eat until this old brutal sea ruffian has satiated his disgusting appetite."

The admiral opened his eyes an enormous width, and, looking at Sir Francis Varney, he placed his two fists upon the table, and drew a long breath.

"Did you address those observations to me," he said, at length, "you blood-sucking vagabond?"

"Eh?" said Sir Francis Varney, looking over the admiral's head, as if he saw something interesting on the wall beyond.

"My dear admiral," said Mr. Chillingworth, "come away."

"I'll see you d —— d first!" said the admiral. "Now, Mr. Vampyre, no shuffling; did you address those observations to me?"

"Deborah," said Sir Francis Varney, in silvery tones, "you can remove this tray and bring on the next."

"Not if I know it," said the admiral "I came to breakfast, and I'll have it; after breakfast I'll pull your nose — ay, if you were fifty vampyres, I'd do it."

"Dr. Chillingworth," said Varney, without paying the least attention to what the admiral said, "you don't eat, my dear sir; you must be fatigued with your night's exertions. A man of your age, you know, cannot be supposed to roll and tumble about like a fool in a pantomime with impunity. Only think what a calamity it would be if you were laid up. Your patients would all get well, you know."

"Sir Francis Varney," said Mr. Chillingworth, "we're your guests; we come here at your invitation to partake of a meal. You have wantonly attacked both of us. I need not say that by so doing you cast a far greater slur upon your own taste and judgment than you can upon us."

"Admirably spoken," said Sir Francis Varney, giving his bands a clap together that made the admiral jump again. "Now, old Bell, I'll fight you, if you think yourself aggrieved, while the doctor sees fair play."

"Old who?" shouted the admiral.

"Bell, Bell — is not your name Bell? — a family cognomen, I presume, on account of the infernal clack, clack, without any sense in it, that is the characteristic of your race."

"You'll fight me?" said the admiral, jumping up.

"Yes; if you challenge me."

"By Jove I do; of course"

"Then I accept it; and the challenged party, you know well, or ought to know, can make his own terms in the encounter."

"Make what terms you please; I care not what they are. Only say you will fight, and that's sufficient."

"It is well," said Sir Francis Varney, in a solemn tone.

"Nay, nay," interrupted Mr. Chillingworth; "this is boyish folly."

"Hold your row," said the admiral, "and let's hear what he's got to say."

"In this mansion," said Sir Francis Varney— "for a mansion it is, although under the unpretending name of a lodge — in this mansion there is a large apartment which was originally fitted up by a scientific proprietor of the place, for the purpose of microscopic and other experiments, which required a darkness total and complete, such a darkness as seems as if it could be felt — palpable, thick, and obscure as the darkness of the tomb, and I know what that is."

"The devil you do!" said this admiral "It's damp, too, ain't it?"

"The room?"

"No; the grave."

"Oh! uncommonly, after autumnal rains. But to resume — this room is large, lofty, and perfectly empty."

"Well?"

"I propose that we procure two scythes."

"Two what?"

"Scythes, with their long handles, and their convenient holding places."

"Well, I'll be hanged! What next do you propose?"

"You may be hanged. The next is, that with these scythes we be both of us placed in the darkened room, and the door closed, and doubly locked upon us for one hour, and that then and there we do our best each to cut the other in two. If you succeed in dismembering me, you will have won the day; but I hope, from my superior agility" — here Sir Francis jumped upon his chair, and sat upon the back of it — "to get the better or you. How do you like the plan I have proposed? Does it meet your wishes?"

"Curse your impudence!" said the admiral, placing his elbows upon the table and resting his chin in astonishment upon his two hands.

“Nay,” interrupted Sir Francis, “you challenged me; and, besides, you’ll have an equal chance, you know that. If you succeed in striking me first, down I go; whereas it I succeed in striking you first, down you go.”

As he spoke, Sir Francis Varney stretched out his foot, and closed a small bracket which held out the flap of the table on which the admiral was leaning, and, accordingly, down the admiral went, tea-tray and all.

Mr. Chillingworth ran to help him up, and, when they both recovered their feet, they found they were alone.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER. — THE PARTICULARS OF THE SUICIDE AT BANNERWORTH HALL.

"Hilloa where the deuce is he?" said the admiral. "Was there ever such a confounded take-in?"

"Well, I really don't know," said Mr. Chillingworth; "but it seems to me that he must have gone out of that door that was behind him: I begin, do you know, admiral, to wish—"

"What?"

"That we had never come here at all; and I think the sooner we get out of it the better."

"Yes; but I am not going to be hoaxed and humbugged in this way. I will have satisfaction, but not with those confounded scythes and things he talks about in the dark room. Give me broad daylight and no favour; yardarm and yardarm; broadside and broadside; hand-grenades and marling-spikes."

"Well, but that's what he won't do. Now, admiral, listen to me."

"Well, go on; what next?"

"Come away at once."

"Oh, you said that before."

"Yes; but I'm going to say something else. Look round you. Don't you think this a large, scientific-looking room?"

"What of that?"

"Why, what if suppose it was to become as dark as the grave, and Varney was to enter with his scythe, that he talks of, and begin mowing about our legs."

"The devil! Come along!"

The door at which they entered was at this moment opened, and the old woman made her appearance.

"Please, sir," she said, "here's a Mr. Mortimer," in a loud voice. "Oh, Sir Francis ain't here! Where's he gone, gentlemen?"

"To the devil!" said the admiral. "Who may Mr. Mortimer be?"

There walked past the woman a stout, portly-looking man, well dressed, but with a very odd look upon his face, in consequence of an obliquity of vision, which prevented the possibility of knowing which way he was looking.

"I must see him," he said; "I must see him."

Mr. Chillingworth started back as if in amazement.

"Good God!" he cried, "you here!

"Confusion!" said Mortimer; "are you Dr. —— Dr. — —"

"Chillingworth."

"The same. Hush! there is no occasion to betray — that is, to state my secret."

"And mine, too," said Chillingworth. "But what brings you here?"

"I cannot and dare not tell you. Farewell!"

He turned abruptly, and was leaving the room; but he ran against some one at the entrance, and in another moment Henry Bannerworth, heated and almost breathless by evident haste, made his appearance.

"Hilloa! bravo!" cried the admiral; "the more the merrier! Here's a combined squadron! Why, how came you here, Mr. Henry Bannerworth?"

"Bannerworth!" said Mortimer; "is that young man's name Bannerworth?"

"Yes," said Henry. "Do you know me, sir?"

"No, no; only I — I — must be off. Does anybody know anything of Sir Francis Varney?"

"We did know something of him," said the admiral, "a little while ago; but he's taken himself off. Don't you do so likewise. If you've got anything to say, stop and say it, like an Englishman."

"Stuff! stuff!" said Mortimer, impatiently. "What do you all want here?"

"Why, Sir Francis Varney," said Henry,— "and I care not if the whole world heard it — is the persecutor of my family."

"How? in what way?"

"He has the reputation of a vampyre; he has hunted me and mine from house and home."

"Indeed!"

"Yes," cried Dr. Chillingworth; "and, by some means or another, he seems determined to get possession of Bannerworth Hall."

"Well, gentlemen," said Mortimer, "I promise you that I will inquire into this. Mr. Chillingworth, I did not expect to meet you. Perhaps the least we say to each other is, after all, the better."

"Let me ask but one question," said Dr. Chillingworth, imploringly.

"Ask it."

"Did he live after—"

"Hush! he did."

"You always told me to the contrary."

"Yes; I had an object; the game is up. Farewell; and, gentlemen, as I am making my exit, let me do so with a sentiment: — Society at large is divided into two great classes."

"And what may they be?" said the admiral.

"Those who have been hanged, and those who have not. Adieu!"

He turned and left the room; and Mr. Chillingworth sunk into a chair, and said, in a low voice, —

“It’s uncommonly true; and I’ve found out an acquaintance among the former.”

“-D — n it! you seem all mad,” said the admiral. “I can’t make out what you are about. How came you here, Mr. Henry Bannerworth?”

“By mere accident I heard,” said Henry, “that you were keeping watch and ward in the Hall. Admiral, it was cruel, and not well done of you, to attempt such an enterprise without acquainting me with it. Did you suppose for a moment that I, who had the greatest interest in this affair, would have shrunk from danger, if danger there be; or lacked perseverance, if that quality were necessary in carrying out any plan by which the safety and honour of my family might be preserved?”

“Nay, now, my young friend,” said Mr. Chillingworth.

“Nay, sir; but I take it ill that I should have been kept out of this affair; and it should have been sedulously, as it were, kept a secret from me.”

“Let him go on as he likes,” said the admiral; “boys will be boys. After all, you know, doctor, it’s my affair, and not yours. Let him say what he likes; where’s the odds? It’s of no consequence.”

“I do not expect. Admiral Bell,” said Henry, “that it is to you; but it is to me.”

“Psha!”

“Respecting you, sir, as I do—”

“Gammon!”

“I must confess that I did expect—”

“What you didn’t get; therefore, there’s an end of that. Now, I tell you what, Henry, Sir Francis Varney is within this house; at least, I have reason to suppose so."

"Then," exclaimed Henry, impetuously, "I will wring from him answers to various questions which concern my peace and happiness."

"Please, gentlemen," said the woman Deborah, making her appearance, "Sir Francis Varney has gone out, and he says I'm to show you all the door, as soon as it is convenient for you all to walk out of it."

"I feel convinced," said Mr. Chillingworth, "that it will be a useless search now to attempt to find Sir Francis Varney here. Let me beg of you all to come away; and believe me that I do not speak lightly, or with a view to get you from here, when I say, that after I have heard something from you, Henry, which I shall ask you to relate to me, painful though it may be, I shall be able to suggest some explanation of many things which appear at present obscure, and to put you in a course of freeing you from the difficulties which surround you, which, Heaven knows, I little expected I should have it in my power to propose to any of you."

"I will follow your advice, Mr. Chillingworth," said Henry; "for I have always found that it has been dictated by good feeling as well as correct judgment. Admiral Bell, you will oblige me much by coming away with me now and at once."

"Well," remarked the admiral, "if the doctor has really something to say, it alters the appearance of things, and, of course, I have no objection."

Upon this, the whole three of them immediately left the place, and it was evident that Mr. Chillingworth had something of an uncomfortable character upon his mind. He was unusually silent and reserved, and, when he did speak, he seemed rather inclined to turn the conversation upon indifferent topics, than to add anything more to what he had said upon the deeply interesting one which held so foremost a place in all their minds.

"How is Flora, now," he asked of Henry, "since her removal?"

"Anxious still," said Henry; "but, I think, better."

"That is well. I perceive that, naturally, we are all three walking towards Bannerworth Hall, and, perhaps, it is as well that on that spot I should ask of you, Henry, to indulge me with a confidence such as, under ordinary circumstances, I should not at all feel myself justified in requiring of you."

"To what does it relate?" said Henry. "You may be assured, Mr. Chillingworth, that I am not likely to refuse my confidence to you, whom I have so much reason to respect as an attached friend of myself and my family."

"You will not object, likewise, I hope," added Mr. Chillingworth, "to extend that confidence to Admiral Bell; for, as you well know, a truer and more warm-hearted man than he does not exist."

"What do you expect for that, doctor?" said the admiral.

"There is nothing," said Henry, "that I could relate at all, that I should shrink from relating to Admiral Bell."

"Well, my boy," said the admiral, "and all I can reply to that is, you are quite right; for there can be nothing that you need shrink from telling me, so far as regards the fact of trusting me with it goes."

"I am assured of that."

"A British officer, once pledging his word, prefers death to breaking it. Whatever you wish kept secret in the communication you make to me, say so, and it will never pass my lips."

"Why, sir, the fact is," said Henry, "that what I am about to relate to you consists not so much of secrets as of matters which would be painful to my feelings to talk of more than may be absolutely required."

"I understand you."

"Let me, for a moment," said Mr Chillingworth, "put myself right. I do not suspect, Mr. Henry Bannerworth, that you fancy I ask you to make a recital of circumstances which must be painful to you from any idle motive. But let me declare that I have now a stronger impulse, which induces me to wish to hear from your own lips those matters which popular rumour may have greatly exaggerated or vitiated."

"It is scarcely possible," remarked Henry, sadly, "that popular rumour should exaggerate the facts."

"Indeed!"

"No. They are, unhappily, of themselves, in their bare truthfulness, so full of all that can be grievous to those who are in any way connected with them, that there needs no exaggeration to invest them with more terror, or with more of that sadness which must ever belong to a recollection of them in my mind."

In suchlike discourse as this, the time was passed, until Henry Bannerworth and his friends once more reached the Hall, from which he, with his family, had so recently removed, in consequence of the fearful persecution to which they had been subjected.

They passed again into the garden which they all knew so well, and then Henry paused and looked around him with a deep sigh.

In answer to an inquiring glance from Mr. Chillingworth, he said, —

"Is it not strange, now, that I should have only been away from here a space of time which may be counted by hours, and yet all seems changed. I could almost fancy that years had elapsed since I had looked at it."

"Oh," remarked the doctor, "time is always by the imagination measured by the number of events which are crowded into a given space of it, and not by its actual duration. Come into the house; there you will find all just as you left it, Henry, and you can tell us your story at leisure."

"The air," said Henry, "about here is fresh and pleasant. Let us sit down in the summer-house yonder, and there I will tell you all. It has a local interest, too, connected with the tale."

This was agreed to, and, in a few moments, the admiral, Mr. Chillingworth, and Henry were seated in the same summer-house which had witnessed the strange interview between Sir Francis Varney and Flora Bannerworth, in which he had induced her to believe that he felt for the distress he had occasioned her, and was strongly impressed with the injustice of her sufferings.

Henry was silent for some few moments, and then he said, with a deep sigh, as he looked mournfully around him, —

"It was on this spot that my father breathed his last, and hence have I said that it has a local interest in the tale I have to tell, which makes it the most fitting place in which to tell it."

"Oh," said the admiral, "he died here, did he?"

"Yes, where you are now sitting."

"Very good, I have seen many a brave man die in my time, and I hope to see a few more, although, I grant you, the death in the heat of conflict, and fighting for our country, is a vastly different thing to some shore-going mode of leaving the world."

"Yes," said Henry, as if pursuing his own meditations, rather than listening to the admiral. "Yes, it was from this precise spot that my father took his last look at the ancient house of his race. What we can now see of it, he saw of it with his dying eyes and many a time I have sat here and fancied the world of terrible thoughts that must at such a moment have come across his brain."

"You might well do so," said the doctor.

"You see," added Henry, "that from here the fullest view you have of any of the windows of the house is of that of Flora's room, as we have always called it, because for years she had had it as her chamber; and, when all the vegetation of summer is in its prime, and the vine which you perceive crawls over this summer-house is full of leaf and fruit, the view is so much hindered that it is difficult, without making an artificial gap in the clustering foliage, to see anything but the window."

"So I should imagine," replied Mr. Chillingworth.

"You, doctor," added Henry, "who know much of my family, need not be told what sort of man my father was."

"No, indeed."

"But you, Admiral Bell, who do not know, must be told, and, however grievous it may be to me to have to say so, I must inform you that he was not a man who would have merited your esteem."

"Well," said the admiral, "you know, my boy, that can make no difference as regards you in anybody's mind, who has got the brains of an owl. Every man's credit, character, and honour, to my thinking, is in his own most special keeping, and let your father be what he might, or who he might, I do not see that any conduct of his ought to raise upon your cheek the flush of shame, or cost you more uneasiness than ordinary good feeling dictates to the errors and feelings of a fellow creature."

"If all the world," said Henry, "would take such liberal and comprehensive views as you do, admiral, it would be much happier than it is; but such is not the case, and people are but too apt to blame one person for the evil that another has done."

"Ah, but," said Mr. Chillingworth, "it so happens that those are the people whose opinions are of the very least consequence."

"There is some truth in that," said Henry, sadly; "but, however, let me proceed; since I have to tell the tale, I could wish it over. My father, then, Admiral Bell, although a man not tainted in early life with vices, became, by the force of bad associates, and a sort of want of congeniality and sentiment that sprang up between him and my mother, plunged into all the excesses of his age."

"These excesses were all of that character which the most readily lay hold strongly of an unreflecting mind, because they all presented themselves in the garb of sociality.

"The wine cup is drained in the name of good fellowship; money which is wanted for legitimate purposes is squandered under the mask of a noble and free generosity, and all that the small imaginations of a number of persons of perverted intellects could enable them to do, has been done from time to time, to impart a kind of lustre to intemperance and all its dreadful and criminal consequences.

"My father, having once got into the company of what he considered wits and men of spirit, soon became thoroughly vitiated. He was almost the only one of the set among whom he passed what he considered his highly convivial existence, who was really worth anything, pecuniarily speaking. There were some among them who might have been respectable men, and perchance carved their way to fortune, as well as some others who had started in life with good patrimonies; but he, my father, at the time he became associated with them, was the only one, as I say, who, to use a phrase I have heard myself from his lips concerning them, had got a feather to fly with.

"The consequence of this was, that his society, merely for the sake of the animal gratification of drinking at his expense was courted, and he was much flattered, all of which he laid to the score of his own merits, which had been found out, and duly appreciated by these *bon vivants*, while he considered that the grave admonitions of his real friends proceeded from nothing in the world but downright envy and malice.

"Such a state of things as this could not last very long. The associates of my father wanted money as well as wine, so they introduced him to the gaming-table, and he became fascinated with the fearful vice to an extent which predicted his own destruction and the ruin of every one who was in any way dependent upon him.

"He could not absolutely sell Bannerworth Hall, unless I had given my consent, which I refused; but he accumulated debt upon debt, and from time to time stripped the mansion of all its most costly contents.

"With various mutations of fortune, he continued this horrible and baneful career for a long time, until, at last, he found himself utterly and irretrievably ruined, and he came home in an agony of despair, being so weak, and utterly ruined in constitution, that he kept his bed for many days.

"It appeared, however, that something occurred at this juncture which gave him actually, or all events awakened a hope that he should possess some money, and be again in a position to try his fortune at the gaming-table.

"He rose, and, fortifying himself once more with the strong stimulant of wine and spirits, he left his home, and was absent for about two months.

“What occurred to him during that time we none of us ever knew, but late one night he came home, apparently much flurried in manner, and seeming as if something had happened to drive him half mad.

“He would not speak to any one, but he shut himself up the whole of the night in the chamber where hangs the portrait that bears so strong a resemblance to Sir Francis Varney, and there he remained till the morning, when he emerged, and said briefly that he intended to leave the country.

“He was in a most fearful state of nervousness, and my mother tells me that he shook like one in an ague, and started at every little sound that occurred in the house, and glared about him so wildly that it was horrible to see him, or to sit in the same apartment with him.

“She says that the whole morning passed on in this way till a letter came to him, the contents of which appeared to throw him into a perfect convulsion of terror, and he retired again to the room with the portrait, where he remained some hours, and then he emerged, looking like a ghost, so dreadfully pale and haggard was he.

“He walked into the garden here, and was seen to sit down in this summer-house, and fix his eyes upon the window of that apartment.”

Henry paused for a few moments, and then he added, —

“You will excuse me from entering upon any details of what next ensued in the melancholy history. My father here committed suicide. He was found dying, and all I he words he spoke were, ‘The money is hidden!’ Death claimed his victim, and, with a convulsive spasm, he resigned his spirit, leaving what he had intended to say hidden in the oblivion of the grave.”

“That was an odd affair,” said the admiral.

"It was, indeed. We have all pondered deeply, and the result was, that, upon the whole, we were inclined to come to an opinion that the words he so uttered were but the result of the mental disturbance that at such a moment might well be supposed to be ensuing in the mind, and that they related really to no foregone fact any more than some incoherent words uttered by a man in a dream might be supposed to do."

"It may be so."

"I do not mean," remarked Mr. Chillingworth, "for one moment to attempt to dispute, Henry, the rationality of such an opinion as you have just given utterance to; but you forget that another circumstance occurred, which gave a colour to the words used by your father."

"Yes; I know to what you allude."

"Be so good as to state it to the admiral."

"I will. On the evening of that same day there came a man here, who, in seeming ignorance of what had occurred, although by that time it was well known to all the neighbourhood, asked to see my father.

"Upon being told that he was dead, he started back, either with well acted or with real surprise, and seemed to be immensely chagrined. He then demanded to know if he had left any disposition of his property; but he got no information, and departed muttering the most diabolical oaths and curses that can be imagined. He mounted his horse, for he had ridden to the Hall and his last words were, as I am told —

"'Where, in the name of all that's damnable, can he have put the money!'"

"And did you never find out who this man was?" asked the admiral.

"Never."

"It is an odd affair."

"It is," said Mr. Chillingworth, "and full of mystery. The public mind was much taken up at the time with some other matters, or it would have made the death of Mr. Bannerworth the subject of more prolific comment than it did. As it was, however, a great deal was said upon the subject, and the whole comity was in a state of commotion for weeks afterwards."

"Yes," said Henry; "it so happened that about that very time a murder was committed in the neighbourhood of London, which baffled all the exertions of the authorities to discover the perpetrators of. It was the murder of Lord Lorne."

"Oh! I remember," said the admiral; "the newspapers were full of it for a long time."

"They were; and so, as Mr. Chillingworth says, the more exciting interest which that affair created drew off public attention, in a great measure, from my father's suicide, and we did not suffer so much from public remark and from impertinent curiosity as might have been expected."

"And, in addition," said Mr. Chillingworth, and he changed colour a little as he spoke, "there was an execution shortly afterwards."

"Yes," said Henry, "there was."

"The execution of a man named Angerstein," added Mr. Chillingworth, "for a highway robbery, attended with the most brutal violence."

"True; all the affairs of that period of time are strongly impressed upon my mind," said Henry; "but you do not seem well, Mr. Chillingworth."

"Oh, yes; I am quite well — you are mistaken."

Both the admiral and Henry looked scrutinisingly at the doctor, who certainly appeared to them to be labouring under some great mental excitement, which he found it almost beyond his power to repress.

"I tell you what it is, doctor," said the admiral; "I don't pretend, and never did, to see further through a tar-barrel than my neighbours; but I can see far enough to feel convinced that you have got something on your mind, and that it somehow concerns this affair."

"Is it so?" said Henry.

"I cannot if I would," said Mr. Chillingworth; "and I may with truth add, that I would not, if I could, hide from you that I have something on my mind connected with this affair; but let me assure you it would be premature of me to tell you of it."

"Premature be d —— d!" said the admiral; "out with it."

"Nay, nay, dear sir; I am not now in a position to say what is passing through my mind."

"Alter your position, then, and be blowed!" cried Jack Pringle, suddenly stepping forward, and giving the doctor such a push, that he nearly went through one of the sides of the summer-house.

"Why, you scoundrel!" cried the admiral, "how came you here?"

"On my legs," said Jack. "Do you think nobody wants to know nothing but yourself? I'm as fond of a yarn as anybody."

"But if you are," said Mr. Chillingworth, "you had no occasion to come against me as if you wanted to move a house."

"You said as you wasn't in a position to say something as I wanted to hear, so I thought I'd alter it for you."

"Is this fellow," said the doctor, shaking his head, as he accosted the admiral, "the most artful or stupid?"

"A little of both," said Admiral Bell— "a little of both, doctor.

He’s a great fool and a great scamp.”

“The same to you,” said Jack; “you’re another. I shall hate you presently, if you go on making yourself so ridiculous. Now, mind, I’ll only give you a trial of another week or so, and if you don’t be more purlite in your d — n language, I’ll leave you.”

Away strolled Jack, with his hands in his pockets, towards the house, while the admiral was half choked with rage, and could only glare after him, without the ability to say a word.

Under any other circumstances than the present one of trouble, and difficulty; and deep anxiety, Henry Bannerworth must have laughed at these singular little episodes between Jack and the admiral; but his mind was now by far too much harassed to permit him to do so.

“Let him go, let him go, my dear sir,” said Mr. Chillingworth to the admiral, who showed some signs of an intention to pursue Jack; “he no doubt has been drinking again.”

“I’ll turn him off the first moment I catch him sober enough to understand me,” said the admiral.

“Well, well; do as you please; but now let me ask a favour of both of you.”

“What is it?”

“That you will leave Bannerworth Hall to me for a week.”

“What for?”

“I hope to make some discoveries connected with it which shall well reward you for the trouble.”

“It’s no trouble,” said Henry; “and for myself, I have amply sufficient faith, both in your judgment and in your friendship, doctor, to accede to any request which you may make to me.”

“And I,” said the admiral. “Be it so — be it so. For one week, you say?”

“Yes — for one week. I hope, by the end of that time, to have achieved something worth the telling you of; and I promise you that, if I am at all disappointed in my expectation, that I will frankly and freely communicate to you all I know and all I suspect.”

“Then that’s a bargain.”

“It is.”

“And what’s to be done at once?”

“Why, nothing, but to take the greatest possible care that Bannerworth Hall is not left another hour without some one in it; and in order that such should be the case, I have to request that you two will remain here until I go to the town, and make preparations for taking quiet possession of it myself, which I will do in the course of two hours, at most.”

“Don’t be longer,” said the admiral, for I am so desperately hungry, that I shall certainly begin to eat somebody, if you are.”

“Depend upon me.”

“Very well,” said Henry; “you may depend we will wait here until you come back.”

The doctor at once hurried from the garden, leaving Henry and the admiral to amuse themselves as best they might, with conjectures as to what he was really about, until his return.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE MYSTERIOUS MEETING IN THE RUIN AGAIN. — THE VAMPYRE'S ATTACK UPON THE CONSTABLE.

It is now necessary that we return once more to that mysterious ruin, in the intricacies of which Varney, when pursued by the mob, had succeeded in finding a refuge which defied all the exertions which were made for his discovery. Our readers must be well aware, that, connected with that ruin, are some secrets of great importance to our story; and we will now, at the solemn hour of midnight, take another glance at what is doing within its recesses.

At that solemn hour it is not probable that any one would seek that gloomy place from choice. Some lover of the picturesque certainly might visit it; but such was not the inciting cause of the pilgrimage with those who were soon to stand within its gloomy precincts.

Other motives dictated their presence in that spot — motives of rapine; peradventure of murder itself.

As the neighbouring clocks sounded the hour of twelve, and the faint strokes were borne gently on the wind to that isolated ruin, there might have been seen a tall man standing by the porch of what had once been a large doorway to some portion of the ruin.

His form was enveloped in a large cloak, which was of such ample material that he seemed well able to wrap it several times around him, and then leave a considerable portion of it floating idly in the gentle wind.

He stood as still, as calm, and as motionless as a statue, for a considerable time, before any degree of impatience began to show itself.

Then he took from his pocket a large antique watch, the white face of which just enabled him to see what the time was, and, in a voice which had in it some amount of petulance and anger, he said, —

"Not come yet, and nearly half an hour beyond the time! What can have detained him? This is, indeed, trifling with the most important moments of a man's existence."

Even as he spoke, he heard, from some distance off, the sound of a short, quick footstep. He bent forwards to listen, and then, in a tone of satisfaction, he said, —

"He comes — he comes!"

But he who thus waited for some confederate among these dim and old grey ruins, advanced not a step to meet him. On the contrary, such seemed the amount of cold-blooded caution which he possessed, that the nearer the man — who was evidently advancing — got to the place, the further back did he who had preceded him shrink into the shadow of the dim and crumbling walls, which had, for some years now past, seemed to bend to the passing blast, and to be on the point of yielding to the destroying hand of time.

And yet, surely he needed not have been so cautious. Who was likely, at such an hour as that, to come to the ruins, but one who sought it by appointment?

And, moreover, the manner of the advancing man should have been quite sufficient to convince him who waited, that so much caution was unnecessary; but it was a part and parcel of his nature.

About three minutes more sufficed to bring the second man to the ruin, and he, at once, and fearlessly, plunged into its recesses.

"Who comes?" said the first man, in a deep, hollow voice.

"He whom you expect," was the reply.

"Good," he said, and at once he now emerged from his hiding-place, and they stood together in the nearly total darkness with which the place was enshrouded; for the night was a cloudy one, and there appeared not a star in the heavens, to shed its faint light upon the scene below.

For a few moments they were both silent, for he who had last arrived had evidently made great exertions to reach the spot, and was breathing laboriously, while he who was there first appeared, from some natural taciturnity of character, to decline opening the conversation.

At length the second comer spoke, saying, —

"I have made some exertion to get here to my time, and yet I am beyond it, as you are no doubt aware."

"Yes, yes."

"Well, such would not have been the case; but yet, I stayed to bring you some news of importance."

"Indeed!"

"It is so. This place, which we have, now for some time had as a quiet and perfectly eligible one of meeting, is about to be invaded by one of those restless, troublesome spirits, who are never happy but when they are contriving something to the annoyance of others who do not interfere with them."

"Explain yourself more fully."

"I will. At a tavern in the town, there has happened some strange scenes of violence, in consequence of the general excitement into which the common people have been thrown upon the dreadful subject of vampyres."

"Well."

"The consequence is, that numerous arrests have taken place, and the places of confinement for offenders against the laws are now full of those whose heated and angry imaginations have induced them to take violent steps to discover the reality or the falsehood of rumours which so much affected them, their wives, and their families, that they feared to lie down to their night's repose."

The other laughed a short, hollow, restless sort of laugh, which had not one particle of real mirth in it.

"Go on — go on," he said. "What did they do?"

"Immense excesses have been committed; but what made me, first of all, stay beyond my time, was that I overheard a man declare his intentions this night, from twelve till the morning, and for some nights to come, to hold watch and ward for the vampyre."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. He did but stay, at the earnest solicitation of his comrades, to take yet another glass, ere he came upon his expedition."

"He must be met. The idiot! what business is it of his?"

"There are always people who will make everything their business, whether it be so or not."

"There are. Let us retire further into the recesses of the ruin, and there consider as well what is to be done regarding more important affairs, as with this rash intruder here."

They both walked for some twenty paces, or so, right into the ruin, and then he who had been there first, said, suddenly, to his companion, —

"I am annoyed, although the feeling reaches no further than annoyance, for I have a natural love of mischief, to think that my reputation has spread so widely, and made so much noise."

"Your reputation as a vampyre, Sir Francis Varney, you mean?"

"Yes; but there is no occasion for you to utter my name aloud, even here where we are alone together."

"It came out unawares."

"Unawares! Can it be possible that you have so little command over yourself as to allow a name to come from your lips unawares?"

"Sometimes."

"I am surprised."

"Well, it cannot be helped. What do you now propose to do?"

"Nay, you are my privy councillor. Have you no deep-laid, artful project in hand? Can you not plan and arrange something which may yet have the effect of accomplishing what at first seemed so very simple, but which has, from one unfortunate circumstance and another, become full of difficulty and pregnant with all sorts of dangers?"

"I must confess I have no plan."

"I listen with astonishment."

"Nay, now, you are jesting."

"When did you ever hear of me jesting?"

"Not often, I admit. But you have a fertile genius, and I have always, myself, found it easier to be the executive than to plan an elaborate course of action for others."

"Then you throw it all on me?"

"I throw a weight, naturally enough, upon the shoulders which I think the best adapted to sustain it."

"Be it so, then — be it so."

"You are, I presume, from what you say, provided with a scheme of action which shall present better hopes of success, at less risk, I hope. Look what great danger we have already passed through."

"Yes, we have."

"I pray you avoid that in the next campaign."

"It is not the danger that annoys and troubles me, but it is that, notwithstanding it, the object is as far off as ever from being attained."

"And not only so, but, as is invariably the case under such circumstances, we have made it more difficult of execution because we have put those upon their guard thoroughly who are the most likely to oppose us."

"We have — we have."

"And placed the probability of success afar off indeed."

"And yet I have set my life upon the cast, and I will stand the hazard. I tell you I will accomplish this object, or I will perish in the attempt."

"You are too enthusiastic."

"Not at all. Nothing has been ever done, the execution of which was difficult, without enthusiasm. I will do what I intend, or Bannerworth Hall shall become a heap of ruins, where fire shall do its worst work of devastation, and I will myself find a grave in the midst."

"Well, I quarrel with no man for chalking out the course he intends to pursue; but what do you mean to do with the prisoner below here?"

"Kill him."

"What?"

"I say kill him. Do you not understand me?"

"I do, indeed."

"When everything else is secured, and when the whole of that which I so much court, and which I will have, is in my possession, I will take his life, or you shall. Ay, you are just the man for such a deed. A smooth-faced, specious sort of roan are you, and you like not danger. There will be none in taking the life of a man who is chained to the floor of a dungeon."

"I know not why," said the other, "you take a pleasure on this particular night, of all others, in saying all you can which you think will be offensive to me."

"Now, how you wrong me. This is the reward of confidence."

"I don't want such confidence."

"Why, you surely don't want me to flatter you."

"No; but—"

"Psha! Hark you. That admiral is the great stumbling-block in my way. I should ere this have had undisturbed possession of Bannerworth Hall but for him. He must be got out of the way somehow."

"A short time will tire him out of watching. He is one of those men of impulse who soon become wearied of inaction."

"Ay, and then the Bannerworths return to the Hall."

"It may be so."

"I am certain of it. We have been out-generalled in this matter, although I grant we did all that men could do to give us success."

"In what way would you get rid of this troublesome admiral?"

"I scarcely know. A letter from his nephew might, if well put together, get him to London."

"I doubt it. I hate him mortally. He has offended me more than once most grievously."

"I know it. He saw through you."

"I do not give him so much credit. He is a suspicious man, and a vain and a jealous one."

"And yet he saw through you. Now, listen to me. You are completely at fault, and have no plan of operations whatever in your mind. What I want you to do is, to disappear from the neighbourhood for a time, and so will I. As for our prisoner here below, I cannot see what else can be done with him than — than—"

"Than what? Do you hesitate?"

"I do."

"Then what is it you were about to say?"

"I cannot but feel that all we have done hitherto, as regards this young prisoner of ours, has failed. He has, with a determined obstinacy, set at naught, as well you know, all threats."

"He has."

"He has refused to do one act which could in any way aid me in my objects. In fact, from the first to the last, he has been nothing but an expense and an encumbrance to us both."

"All that is strictly true."

"And yet, although you, as well as I, know of a marvellously ready way of getting rid of such encumbrances, I must own, that I shrink with more than a feeling of reluctance from the murder of the youth."

"You contemplated it then?" asked the other.

"No; I cannot be said to have contemplated it. That is not the proper sort of expression to use."

"What is then?"

"To contemplate a deed seems to me to have some close connexion to the wish to do it."

"And you have no such wish?"

"I have no such wish, and what is more I will not do it."

"Then that is sufficient; and the only question that remains for you to confide, is, what you will do. It is far easier in all enterprises to decide upon what we will not do, than upon what we will. For my own part I must say that I can perceive no mode of extricating ourselves from this involvement with anything like safety."

"Then it must be done with something like danger."

"As you please."

"You say so, and your words bear a clear enough signification; but from your tone I can guess how much you are dissatisfied with the aspect of affairs."

"Dissatisfied!"

"Yes; I say, dissatisfied. Be frank, and own that which it is in vain to conceal from me. I know you too well; arch hypocrite as you are, and fully capable of easily deceiving many, you cannot deceive me."

"I really cannot understand you."

"Then I will take care that you shall."

"How?"

"Listen. I will not have the life of Charles Holland taken."

"Who wishes to take it?"

"You."

"There, indeed, you wrong me. Unless you yourself thought that such an act was imperatively called for by the state of affairs, do you think that I would needlessly bring down upon my head the odium as well as the danger of such a deed? No, no. Let him live, if you are willing; he may live a thousand years for all I care."

"'Tis well. I am, mark me, not only willing, but I am determined that he shall live so far as we are concerned. I can respect the courage that, even when he considered that his life was at stake, enabled him to say no to a proposal which was cowardly and dishonourable, although it went far to the defeat of my own plans and has involved me in much trouble."

"Hush! hush!"

"What is it?"

"I fancy I hear a footstep."

"Indeed; that were a novelty in such a place as this."

"And yet not more than I expected. Have you forgotten what I told you when I reached here to-night after the appointed hour?"

"Truly; I had for the moment. Do you think then that the footstep which now meets our ears, is that of the adventurer who boasted that he could keep watch for the vampyre?"

"In faith do I. What is to be done with such a meddling fool?"

"He ought certainly to be taught not to be so fond of interfering with other people's affairs."

"Certainly."

"Perchance the lesson will not be wholly thrown away upon others. It may be worth while to take some trouble with this poor valiant fellow, and let him spread his news so as to stop any one else from being equally venturous and troublesome."

"A good thought."

"Shall it be done?"

"Yes; if you will arrange that which shall accomplish such a result."

"Be it so. The moon rises soon."

"It does."

"Ah, already I fancy I see a brightening of the air as if the mellow radiance of the queen of night were already quietly diffusing itself throughout the realms of space. Come further within the ruins."

They both walked further among the crumbling walls and fragments of columns with which the place abounded. As they did so they paused now and then to listen, and more than once they both heard plainly the sound of certain footsteps immediately outside the once handsome and spacious building.

Varney, the vampyre, who had been holding this conversation with no other than Marchdale, smiled as he, in a whispered voice, told the latter what to do in order to frighten away from the place the foolhardy man who thought that, by himself, he should be able to accomplish anything against the vampyre.

It was, indeed, a hair-brained expedition, for whether Sir Francis Varney was really so awful and preternatural a being as so many concurrent circumstances would seem to proclaim, or not, he was not a likely being to allow himself to be conquered by anyone individual, let his powers or his courage be what they might.

What induced this man to become so ventursome we shall now proceed to relate, as well as what kind of reception he got in the old ruins, which, since the mysterious disappearance of Sir Francis Varney within their recesses, had possessed so increased a share of interest and attracted so much popular attention and speculation.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE GUESTS AT THE INN, AND THE STORY OF THE DEAD UNCLE.

As had been truly stated by Mr. Marchdale, who now stands out in his true colours to the reader as the confidant and abettor of Sir Francis Varney, there had assembled on that evening a curious and a gossipping party at the inn where such dreadful and such riotous proceedings had taken place, which, in their proper place, we have already duly and at length recorded.

It was not very likely that, on that evening, or for many and many an evening to come, the conversation in the parlour of the inn would be upon any other subject than that of the vampyre.

Indeed, the strange, mysterious, and horrible circumstances which had occurred, bade fair to be gossipping stock in trade for many a year.

Never before had a subject presenting so many curious features arisen. Never, within the memory of that personage who is supposed to know everything, had there occurred any circumstance in the county, or set of circumstances, which afforded such abundant scope for conjecture and speculation.

Everybody might have his individual opinion, and be just as likely to be right as his neighbours; and the beauty of the affair was, that such was the interest of the subject itself, that there was sure to be a kind of reflected interest with every surmise that at all bore upon it.

On this particular night, when Marchdale was prowling about, gathering what news he could, in order that he might carry it to the vampyre, a more than usually strong muster of the gossips of the town took place.

Indeed, all of any note in the talking way were there, with the exception of one, and he was in the county gaol, being one of the prisoners apprehended by the military when they made the successful attack upon the lumber-room of the inn, after the dreadful desecration of the dead which had taken place.

The landlord of the inn was likely to make a good thing of it, for talking makes people thirsty; and he began to consider that a vampyre about once a-year would be no bad thing for the Blue Lion.

“It’s shocking,” said one of the guests; “it’s shocking to think of. Only last night, I am quite sure I had such a fright that it added at least ten years to my age.”

“A fright!” said several.

“I believe I speak English — I said a fright.”

“Well, but had it anything to do with the vampyre?”

“Everything.”

“Oh! do tell us; do tell us all about it. How was it? Did he come to you? Go on. Well, well.”

The first speaker became immediately a very important personage in the room; and, when he saw that, he became at once a very important personage in his own eyes likewise; and, before he would speak another word, he filled a fresh pipe, and ordered another mug of ale.

“It’s no use trying to hurry him,” said one.

“No,” he said, “it isn’t. I’ll tell you in good time what a dreadful circumstance has made me sixty-three to-day, when I was only fifty-three yesterday.”

“Was it very dreadful?”

“Rather. You wouldn’t have survived it at all.”

“Indeed!”

“No. Now listen. I went to bed at a quarter after eleven, as usual. I didn’t notice anything particular in the room.”

“Did you peep under the bed?”

“No, I didn’t. Well, as I was a-saying, to bed I went, and I didn’t fasten the door; because, being a very sound sleeper, in case there was a fire, I shouldn’t hear a word of it if I did.”

“No,” said another. “I recollect once—”

“Be so good as allow me to finish what I know, before you begin to recollect anything, if you please. As I was saying, I didn’t lock the door, but I went to bed. Somehow or another, I did not feel at all comfortable, and I tossed about, first on one side, and then on the other; but it was all in vain; I only got, every moment, more and more fidgetty.”

“And did you think of the vampyre?” said one of the listeners.

“I thought of nothing else till I heard my clock, which is on the landing of the stairs above my bed-room, begin to strike twelve.”

“Ah! I like to hear a clock sound in the night,” said one; “it puts one in mind of the rest of the world, and lets one know one isn’t all alone.”

“Very good. The striking of the clock I should not at all have objected to; but it was what followed that did the business.”

“What, what?”

“Fair and softly; fair and softly. Just hand me a light, Mr. Sprigs, if you please. I’ll tell you all, gentlemen, in a moment or two.”

With the most provoking deliberation, the speaker re-lit his pipe, which had gone out while he was talking, and then, after a few whiffs, to assure himself that its contents had thoroughly ignited, he resumed, —

"No sooner had the last sound of it died away, than I heard something on the stairs."

"Yes, yes."

"It was as if some man had given his foot a hard blow against one of the stairs; and he would have needed to have had a heavy boot on to do it. I started up in bed and listened, as you may well suppose, not in the most tranquil state of mind, and then I heard an odd, gnawing sort of noise, and then another dab upon one of the stairs."

"How dreadful!"

"It was. What to do I knew not, or what to think, except that the vampyre had, by some means, got in at the attic window, and was coming down stairs to my room. That seemed the most likely. Then there was another groan, and then another heavy step; and, as they were evidently coming towards my door, I felt accordingly, and got out of bed, not knowing hardly whether I was on my head or my heels, to try and lock my door."

"Ah, to be sure."

"Yes; that was all very well, if I could have done it; but a man in such a state of mind as I was in is not a very sharp hand at doing anything. I shook from head to foot. The room was very dark, and I couldn't, for a moment or two, collect my senses sufficient really to know which way the door lay."

"What a situation!"

"It was. Dab, dab, dab, came these horrid footsteps, and there was I groping about the room in an agony. I heard them coming nearer and nearer to my door. Another moment, and they must have reached it, when my hand struck against the lock."

"What an escape!"

"No, it was not."

"No?"

"No, indeed. The key was on the outside, and you may well guess I was not over and above disposed to open the door to get at it."

"No, no."

"I felt regularly bewildered, I can tell you; it seemed to me as if the very devil himself was coming down stairs hopping all the way upon one leg."

"How terrific!"

"I felt my senses almost leaving me; but I did what I could to hold the door shut just as I heard the strange step come from the last stair on to the landing. Then there was a horrid sound, and some one began trying the lock of my door."

"What a moment!"

"Yes, I can tell you it was a moment. Such a moment as I don't wish to go through again. I held the door as close as I could, and did not speak. I tried to cry out help and murder, but I could not; my tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth, and my strength was fast failing me."

"Horrid, horrid!"

"Take a drop of ale."

"Thank you. Well, I don't think this went on above two or three minutes, and all the while some one tried might and main to push open the door. My strength left me all at once; I had only time to stagger back a step or two, and then, as the door opened, I fainted away."

"Well, well!"

"Ah, you wouldn't have said well, if you had been there, I can tell you."

"No; but what become of you. What happened next? How did it end? What was it?"

"Why, what exactly happened next after I fainted I cannot tell you; but the first thing I saw when I recovered was a candle."

"Yes, yes."

"And then a crowd of people."

"Ah, ah!"

"And then Dr. Web."

"Gracious!"

"And. Mrs. Bulk, my housekeeper. I was in my own bed, and when I opened my eyes I heard Dr. Webb say, —

"'He will be better soon. Can no one form any idea of what it is all about. Some sudden fright surely could alone have produced such an effect.'"

"'The Lord have mercy upon me!' said I.

"Upon this everybody who had been called in got round the bed, and wanted to know what had happened; but I said not a word of it; but turning to Mrs. Bulk, I asked her how it was she found out I had fainted.

"'Why, sir,' says she, 'I was coming up to bed as softly as I could, because I knew you had gone to rest some time before. The clock was striking twelve, and as I went past it some of my clothes, I suppose, caught the large weight, but it was knocked off, and down the stairs it rolled, going with such a lump from one to the other, and I couldn't catch it because it rolled so fast, that I made sure you would be awakened; so I came down to tell you what it was, and it was some time before I could get your room door open, and when I did I found you out of bed and insensible.'"

There was a general look of disappointment when this explanation was given, and one said, —

"Then it was not the vampire?"

"Certainly not."

"And, after all, only a clock weight."

"That's about it."

"Why didn't you tell us that at first?"

"Because that would have spoilt the story."

There was a general murmur of discontent, and, after a few moments one man said, with some vivacity, —

"Well, although our friend's vampyre has turned out, after all, to be nothing but a confounded clock-weight, there's no disputing the fact about Sir Francis Varney being a vampyre, and not a clock-weight."

"Very true — very true."

"And what's to be done to rid the town of such a man?"

"Oh, don't call him a man."

"Well, a monster."

"Ah, that's more like. I tell you what, sir, if you had got a light, when you first heard the noise in your room, and gone out to see what it was, you would have spared yourself much fright."

"Ah, no doubt; it's always easy afterwards to say, if you had done this, and if you had done the other, so and so would have been the effect; but there is something about the hour of midnight that makes men tremble."

"Well," said one, who had not yet spoken, "I don't see why twelve at night should be a whit more disagreeable than twelve at day."

"Don't you?"

"Not I."

"Now, for instance, many a party of pleasure goes to that old ruin where Sir Francis Varney so unaccountably disappeared in broad daylight. But is there any one here who would go to it alone, and at midnight?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"I would."

"What! and after what has happened as regards the vampyre in connection with it?"

"Yes, I would."

"I'll bet you twenty shilling you won't."

"And I — and I," cried several.

"Well, gentlemen," said the man, who certainly shewed no signs of fear, "I will go, and not only will I go and take all your bets, but, if I do meet the vampyre, then I'll do my best to take him prisoner."

"And when will you go?"

"To-night," he cried, and he sprang to his feet; "hark ye all, I don't believe one word about vampyres. I'll go at once; it's getting late, and let any one of you, in order that you may be convinced I have been to the place, give me any article, which I will hide among the ruins; and tell you where to find it to-morrow in broad daylight."

"Well," said one, "that's fair, Tom Eccles. Here's a handkerchief of mine; I should know it again among a hundred others."

"Agreed; I'll leave it in the ruins."

The wagers were fairly agreed upon; several handkerchiefs were handed to Tom Eccles; and at eleven o'clock he fairly started, through the murky darkness of the night, to the old ruin where Sir Francis Varney and Marchdale were holding their most unholy conference.

It is one thing to talk and to accept wagers in the snug parlour of an inn, and another to go alone across a tract of country wrapped in the profound stillness of night to an ancient ruin which, in addition to the natural gloom which might well be supposed to surround it, has superadded associations which are anything but of a pleasant character.

Tom Eccles, as he was named, was one of those individuals who act greatly from impulse. He was certainly not a coward, and, perhaps, really as free from superstition as most persons, but he was human, and consequently he had nerves, and he had likewise an imagination.

He went to his house first before he started on his errand to the ruins. It was to get a horse-pistol which he had, and which he duly loaded and placed in his pocket. Then he wrapped himself up in a great-coat, and with the air of a man quite determined upon something desperate he left the town.

The guests at the inn looked after him as he walked from the door of that friendly establishment, and some of them, as they saw his resolved aspect, began to quake for the amount of the wagers they had laid upon his non-success.

However, it was resolved among them, that they would stay until half-past twelve, in the expectation of his return, before they separated.

To while away the time, he who had been so facetious about his story of the clock-weight, volunteered to tell what happened to a friend of his who went to take possession of some family property which he became possessed of as heir-at-law to an uncle who had died without a will, having an illegitimate family unprovided for in every shape.

“Ah! nobody cares for other people’s illegitimate children, and, if their parents don't provide for them, why, the workhouse is open for them, just as if they were something different from other people."

"So they are; if their parents don't take care of them, and provide for them, nobody else will, as you say, neighbour, except when they have a Fitz put to their name, which tells you they are royal bastards, and of course unlike anybody else's."

"But go on — let's know all about it; we sha'n't hear what he has got to say at all, at this rate."

"Well, as I was saying, or about to say, the nephew, as soon as he heard his uncle was dead, comes and claps his seal upon everything in the house."

"But, could he do so?" inquired one of the guests.

"I don't see what was to hinder him," replied a third. "He could do so, certainly."

"But there was a son, and, as I take it, a son's nearer than a nephew any day."

"But the son is illegitimate."

"Legitimate, or illegitimate, a son's a son; don't bother me about distinction of that sort; why, now, there was old Weatherbit—"

"Order, order."

"Let's hear the tale."

"Very good, gentlemen, I'll go on, if I ain't to be interrupted; but I'll say this, that an illegitimate son is no son, in the eyes of the law; or at most he's an accident quite, and ain't what he is, and so can't inherit."

"Well, that's what I call making matters plain," said one of the guests, who took his pipe from his mouth to make room for the remark; "now that is what I likes."

"Well, as I have proved then," resumed the speaker, "the nephew was the heir, and into the house he would come. A fine affair it was too — the illegitimates looking the colour of sloes; but he knew the law, and would have it put in force."

"Law's law, you know."

"Uncommonly true that; and the nephew stuck to it like a cobbler to his last — he said they should go out, and they did go out; and, say what they would about their natural claims, he would not listen to them, but bundled them out and out in a pretty short space of time."

"It was trying to them, mind you, to leave the house they had been born in with very different expectations to those which now appeared to be their fate. Poor things, they looked ruefully enough, and well they might, for there was a wide world for them, and no prospect of a warm corner.

"Well, as I was saying, he had them all out and the house clear to himself.

"Now," said he, "I have an open field and no favour. I don't care for no — Eh! what?"

"There was a sudden knocking, he thought, the door, and went and opened it, but nothing was to be seen.

"Oh! I see — somebody next door; and if it wasn't, it don't matter. There's nobody here. I'm alone, and there's plenty of valuables in the house. That is what I call very good company. I wouldn't wish for better."

He turned about, looked over room after room, and satisfied himself that he was alone — that the house was empty.

At every room he entered he paused to think over the value — what it was worth, and that he was a very fortunate man in having dropped into such a good thing."

"Ah! there's the old boy's secretary, too — his bureau — there'll be something in that that will amuse me mightily; but I don’t think I shall sit up late. He was a rum old man, to say the least of it — a very odd sort of man.”

With that he gave himself a shrug, as if some very uncomfortable feeling had come over him.

“I’ll go to bed early, and get some sleep, and then in daylight I can look after these papers. They won’t be less interesting in the morning than they are now.”

There had been some rum stories about the old man, and now the nephew seemed to think he might have let the family sleep on the premises for that night; yes, at that moment he could have found it in his heart to have paid for all the expense of their keep, had it been possible to have had them back to remain the night.

But that wasn’t possible, for they would not have done it, but sooner have remained in the streets all night than stay there all night, like so many house-dogs, employed by one who stepped in between them and their father’s goods, which were their inheritance, but for one trifling circumstance — a mere ceremony.

The night came on, and he had lights. True it was he had not been down stairs, only just to have a look. He could not tell what sort of a place it was; there were a good many odd sort of passages, that seemed to end nowhere, and others that did.

There were large doors; but they were all locked, and he had the keys; so he didn’t mind, but secured all places that were not fastened.

He then went up stairs again, and sat down in the room where the bureau was placed.

“I’ll be bound,” said one of the guests, “he was in a bit of a stew, notwithstanding all his brag.”

“Oh! I don’t believe,” said another, “that anything done that is dangerous, or supposed to be dangerous, by the bravest man, is any way wholly without some uncomfortable feelings. They may not be strong enough to prevent the thing proposed to be done from being done, but they give a disagreeable sensation to the skin."

"You have felt it, then?"

"Ha! ha! ha!"

"Why, at that time I slept in the churchyard for a wager, I must say I felt cold all over, as if my skin was walking about me in an uncomfortable manner."

"But you won your wager?"

"I did."

"And of course you slept there?"

"To be sure I did."

"And met with nothing?"

"Nothing, save a few bumps against the gravestones."

"Those were hard knocks, I should say."

"They were, I assure you; but I lay there, and slept there, and won my wager."

"Would you do it again?"

"No."

"And why not?"

"Because of the rheumatism."

"You caught that?"

"I did; I would give ten times my wager to get rid of them. I have them very badly."

"Come, order, order — the tale; let's hear the end of that, since it has begun."

"With all my heart. Come, neighbour."

"Well, as I said, he was fidgetty; but yet he was not a man to be very easily frightened or overcome, for he was stout and bold.

"When he shut himself up in the room, he took out a bottle of some good wine, and helped himself to drink; it was good old wine, and he soon felt himself warmed and, comforted. He could have faced the enemy.

"If one bottle produces such an effect," he muttered, "what will two do?"

This was a question that could only be solved by trying it, and this he proceeded to do.

But first he drew a brace of long barrelled pistols from his coat pocket, and taking a powder-flask and bullets from his pocket also, he loaded them very carefully.

"There," said he, "are my bull-dogs; and rare watch-dogs they are. They never bark but they bite. Now, if anybody does come, it will be all up with them. Tricks upon travellers ain't a safe game when I have these; and now for the other bottle."

He drew the other bottle, and thought, if anything, it was better than the first. He drank it rather quick, to be sure, and then he began to feel sleepy and tired.

"I think I shall go to bed," he said; "that is, if I can find my way there, for it does seem to me as if the door was travelling. Never mind, it will make a call here again presently, and then I'll get through."

So saying he arose. Taking the candle in his hand, he walked with a better step than might have been expected under the circumstance. True it was the candle wagged to and fro, and his shadow danced upon the wall; but still, when he got to the bed, he secured his door, put the light in a safe place, threw himself down, and was fast asleep in a few moments, or rather he fell into a doze instantaneously.

How long he remained in this state he knew not, but he was suddenly awakened by a loud bang, as though something heavy and flat had fallen upon the floor — such, for instance, as a door, or anything of that sort. He jumped up, rubbed his eyes, and could even then hear the reverberations through the house.

“What is that?” he muttered; “what is that?”

He listened, and thought he could hear something moving down stairs, and for a moment he was seized with an ague fit; but recollecting, I suppose, that there were some valuables down stairs that were worth fighting for, he carefully extinguished the light that still burned, and softly crept down stairs.

When he got down stairs he thought he could hear some one scramble up the kitchen stairs, and then into the room where the bureau was. Listening for a moment to ascertain if there were more than one, and then feeling convinced there was not, he followed into the parlour, when he heard the cabinet open by a key.

This was a new miracle, and one he could not understand; and then he hoard the papers begin to rattle and rustle; so, drawing out one of the pistols, he cocked it, and walked in.

The figure instantly began to jump about; it was dressed in white — in grave-clothes. He was terribly nervous, and shook, so he feared to fire the pistol; but at length he did, and the report was followed by a fall and a loud groan.

This was very dreadful — very dreadful; but all was quiet, and he lit the candle again, and approached the body to examine it, and ascertain if he knew who it was. A groan came from it. The bureau was open, and the figure clutched firmly a will in his hand.

The figure was dressed in grave-clothes, and he started up when he saw the form and features of his own uncle, the man who was dead, who somehow or other had escaped his confinement, and found his way up, here. He held his will firmly; and the nephew was so horrified and stunned, that he threw down the light, and rushed out of the room with a shout of terror, and never returned again.

The narrator concluded, and one of the guests said, —

“And do you really believe it?”— “No, no — to be sure not.”

“You don’t?”— “Why should I? My friend was, out of all hand, one of the greatest liars I ever came near; and why, therefore, should I believe him? I don’t, on my conscience, believe one word of it.”

It was now half-past twelve, and, as Tom Eccles came not back, and the landlord did not feel disposed to draw any more liquor, they left the inn, and retired to their separate houses in a great state of anxiety to know the fate of their respective wagers.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE VAMPIRE IN THE MOONLIGHT. — THE FALSE FRIEND.

Part of the distance being accomplished towards the old ruins, Tom Eccles began to feel that what he had undertaken was not altogether such child’s-play as he had at first imagined it to be. Somehow or another, with a singular and uncomfortable sort of distinctness, there came across his mind every story that he had remembered of the wild and the wonderful. All the long-since forgotten tales of superstition that in early childhood he had learned, came now back upon him, suggesting to his mind a thousand uncomfortable fancies of the strangest description.

It was not likely that when once a man, under such circumstances, got into such a frame of mind, he would readily get out of it again, while he continued surrounded by such scenes as had first called them into existence.

No doubt, had he turned about, and faced the inn again instead of the old ruins he would soon have shaken off these “thick coming fancies;” but such a result was no to be expected, so long as he kept on towards the dismal place he had pledged himself to reach.

As he traversed meadow after meadow he began to ask himself some questions which he found that he could not answer exactly in a consolatory manner, under the present state of things.

Among these question was the very pertinent one of,— “It’s no argument against vampyres, because I don’t see the use of ’em — is it?” This he was compelled to answer as he had put it; and when, in addition, he began to recollect that, without the shadow of a doubt, Sir Francis Varney the supposed vampyre, had been chased across the fields to that very ruin whither he was bound, and had then and there disappeared, he certainly found himself in decidedly uncomfortable and most unpromising situation.

"No," he said, "no. Hang it, I won't go back now, to be made the laughing-stock of the whole town, which I should be. Come what may of it, I will go on as I have commenced; so I shall put on as stout a heart as I can."

Then, having come to this resolve, he strove might and main to banish from his mind those disagreeable reminiscences that had been oppressing him, to turn his attention to subjects of a different complexion.

During the progress of making this endeavour, which was rather futile, he came within sight of the ruins. Then he slackened his pace a little, telling himself, with a pardonable self-deceit, that it was common, ordinary caution only, which induced him to do so, and nothing at all in the shape of fear.

"Time enough," he remarked, "to be afraid, when I see anything to be afraid of, which I don't see as yet. So, as all's right, I may as well put a good face upon the matter."

He tried to whistle a tune, but it turned out only a melancholy failure; so he gave that up in despair, and walked on until he got within a hundred yards, or thereabouts, of the old ruins.

He thus proceeded, and bending his ear close to the ground, he listened attentively for several minutes. Somehow, he fancied that a strange, murmuring sound came to his ears; but he was not quite sure that it proceeded from the ruins, because it was just that sort of sound that might come from a long way off, being mellowed by distance, although, perhaps, loud enough at its source.

"Well, well," he whispered to himself, "it don't matter much, after all. Go I must, and hide the handkerchiefs somewhere, or else be laughed at, besides losing my wages. The former I don't like, and the latter I cannot afford."

Thus clinching the matter by such knock-down arguments, he walked on until he was almost within the very shadow of the ruins, and, probably, it was at this juncture that his footsteps may have been heard by Marchdale and Sir Francis Varney.

Then he paused again; but all was profoundly still, and he began to think that the strange sort of murmuring noise which he had heard must have come from far off and not at all from any person or persons within the ruins.

"Let me see," he said to himself; "I have five handkerchiefs to hide among the old ruins somewhere, and the sooner I do so the better, because then I will get away; for, as regards staying here to watch, Heaven knows how long, for Sir Francis Varney, I don't intend to do it, upon second thoughts and second thoughts, they say, are generally best."

With the most careful footsteps now, as if he were treading upon some fragile substance, which he feared to injure, he advanced until he was fairly within the precincts of the ancient place, which now bore so ill a reputation.

He then made to himself much the same remark that Sir Francis Varney had made to Marchdale, with respect to the brightening up of the sky, in consequence of its being near the time for the moon to rise from the horizon, and he saw more clearly around him, although he could not find any good place to hide the handkerchiefs in.

"I must and will," he said, "hide them securely; for it would, indeed, be remarkably unpleasant, after coming here and winning my wages, to have the proofs that I had done so taken away by some chance visitor to the place."

He at length saw a tolerably large stone, which stood, in a slant position, up against one of the walls. Its size attracted him. He thought, if his strength was sufficient to move it, that it would be a good thing to do so, and to place the handkerchiefs beneath it; for, at all events, it was so heavy that it could not be kicked aside, and no one, without some sort of motive to do so, beyond the mere love of labour, would set about moving it from its position.

"I may go further and fare worse," he said to himself; "so here shall all the handkerchiefs lie, to afford a proof that I have been here."

He packed them into a small compass, and then stooped to roll aside the heavy stone, when, at the moment, before he could apply his strength to that purpose, he heard some one, in his immediate neighbourhood, say,— "Hist!"

This was so sudden, and so utterly unexpected, that he not only ceased his exertions to move the stone, but he nearly fell down in his surprise.

"Hist — hist!" said the voice again.

"What — what," gasped Tom Eccles— "what are you?"— "Hush — hush — hush!"

The perspiration broke out upon his brow, and he leaned against the wall for support, as he managed to say, faintly, —

"Well, hush — what then?"— "Hist!"

"Well, I hear you. Where are you?"

"Here at hand. Who are you?"

"Tom Eccles. Who are you?"— "A friend. Have you seen anything?"

"No; I wish I could. I should like to see you if I could."— "I'm coming."

There was a slow and cautious footstep, and Marchdale advanced to where Tom Eccles was standing.

"Come, now," said the latter, when he saw the dusky-looking form stalking towards him; "till I know you better, I'll be obliged to you to keep off. I am well armed. Keep your distance, be you friend or foe."

"Armed!" exclaimed Marchdale, and he at once paused.— "Yes, I am."

"But I am a friend. I have no sort of objection frankly to telly you my errand. I am a friend of the Bannerworth family, and have kept watch here now for two nights, in the hopes of meeting with Varney, the vampyre."

"The deuce you have: and pray what may your name be?"— "Marchdale."

"If you be Mr. Marchdale, I know you by sight: for I have seen you with Mr. Henry Bannerworth several times. Come out from among the shadows, and let us have a look at you; but, till you do, don't come within arm's length of me. I am not naturally suspicious; but we cannot be too careful."

"Oh! certainly — certainly. The silver edge of the moon is now just peeping up from the east, and you will be able to see me well, if you step from the shadow of the wall by which you now are."

This was a reasonable enough proposition, and Tom Eccles at once acceded to it, by stepping out boldly into the partial moonlight, which now began to fall upon the open meadows, tinting the grass with a silvery refulgence, and rendering even minute objects visible. The moment he saw Marchdale he knew him, and, advancing frankly to him, he said, —

"I know you, sir, well."

"And what brings you here?"— "A wager for one thing, and a wish to see the vampyre for another."

"Indeed!"— "Yes; I must own I have such a wish, along with a still stronger one, to capture him, if possible; and, as there are now two of us, why may we not do it?"

"As for capturing him," said Marchdale, "I should prefer shooting him."— "You would?"

"I would, indeed. I have seen him once shot down, and he is now, I have no doubt, as well as ever. What were you doing with that huge stone I saw you bending over?"— "I have some handkerchiefs to hide here, as a proof that I have to-night really been to this place."

"Oh, I will show you a better spot, where there is a crevice in which you can place them with perfect safety. Will you walk with me into the ruins?"— "Willingly."

"It's odd enough," remarked Marchdale, after he had shown Tom Eccles where to hide the handkerchiefs, "that you and I should both be here upon so similar an errand."— "I'm very glad of it. It robs the place of its gloom, and makes it ten times more endurable than it otherwise would be. What do you propose to do if you see the vampyre?"

"I shall try a pistol bullet on him. You say you are armed?"— "Yes."

"With pistols?"— "One. Here it is."

"A huge weapon; loaded well, of course?"— "Oh, yes, I can depend upon it; but I did not intend to use it, unless assailed."

"'Tis well. What is that?"— "What — what?"

"Don't you see anything there? Come farther back. Look — look.

At the corner of that wall there I am certain there is the flutter of a human garment."— "There is — there is."

"Hush! Keep close. It must be the vampyre."— "Give me my pistol. What are you doing with it?"

"Only ramming down the charge more firmly for you. Take it. If that be Varney the vampyre, I shall challenge him to surrender the moment he appears; and if he does not, I will fire upon him, and do you do so likewise."— "Well, I — I don't know."

"You have scruples?"— "I certainly have."

"Well, well — don't you fire, then, but leave it to me. There; look — look. Now have you any doubt? There he goes; in his cloak. It is — it is — —"— "Varney, by Heavens!" cried Tom Eccles.

"Surrender!" shouted Marchdale.

At the instant Sir Francis Varney sprang forward, and made off at a rapid pace across the meadows.

"Fire after him — fire!" cried Marchdale, "or he will escape. My pistol has missed fire. He will be off."

On the impulse of the moment, and thus urged by the voice and the gesture of his companion, Tom Eccles took aim as well as he could, and fired after the retreating form of Sir Francis Varney. His conscience smote him as he heard the report and saw the flash of the large pistol amid the half sort of darkness that was still around.

The effect of the shot was then to him painfully apparent. He saw Varney stop instantly; then make a vain attempt to stagger forward a little, and finally fall heavily to the earth, with all the appearance of one killed upon the spot.

"You have hit him," said Marchdale— "you have hit him. Bravo!"— "I have — hit him."

"Yes, a capital shot, by Jove!"— "I am very sorry."

“Sorry! sorry for ridding the world of such a being! What was in your pistol?”— “A couple of slugs.”

“Well, they have made a lodgment in him, that’s quite clear. Let’s go up and finish him at once.”— “He seems finished.”

“I beg your pardon there. When the moonbeams fall upon him he’ll get up and walk away as if nothing was the matter.”— “Will he?” cried Tom, with animation— “will he?”

“Certainly he will.”— “Thank God for that. Now, hark you, Mr. Marchdale: I should not have fired if you had not at the moment urged me to do so. Now, I shall stay and see if the effect which you talk of will ensue; and although it may convince me that he is a vampyre, and that there are such things, he may go off, scot free, for me.”

“Go off?”— “Yes; I don’t want to have even a vampyre’s blood upon my hands.”

“You are exceedingly delicate.”— “Perhaps I am; it’s my way, though. I have shot him — not you, mind; so, in a manner of speaking, he belongs to me. Now, mark, me: I won’t have him touched any more to-night, unless you think there’s a chance of making a prisoner of him without violence.”

“There he lies; you can go and make a prisoner of him at once, dead as he is; and if you take him out of the moonlight—”

“I understand; he won’t recover.”— “Certainly not.”

“But, as I want him to recover, that don’t suit me.”— “Well, I cannot but honour your scruples, although I do not actually share in them; but I promise you that, since such is your wish, I will take no steps against the vampyre; but let us come up to him and see if he be really dead, or only badly wounded.”

Tom Eccles hang back a little from this proposal; but, upon being urged again by Marchdale, and told that he need not go closer than he chose, he consented, and the two of them approached the prostrate form of Sir Francis Varney, which lay upon its face in the faint moonlight, which each moment was gathering strength and power.

"He lies upon his face," said Marchdale. "Will you go and turn him over?"— "Who — I? God forbid I should touch him."

"Well — well, I will. Come on."

They halted within a couple of yards of the body. Tom Eccles would not go a step farther; so Marchdale advanced alone, and pretended to be, with great repugnance, examining for the wound.

"He is quite dead," he said; "but I cannot see the hurt."— "I think he turned his head as I fired."

"Did he? Let us see."

Marchdale lifted up the head, and disclosed such a mass of clotted-looking blood, that Tom Eccles at once took to his heels, nor stopped until he was nearly as far off as the ruins. Marchdale followed him more slowly, and when he came up to him, he said, —

"The slugs have taken effect on his face."— "I know it — I know it. Don't tell me."

"He looks horrible."— "And I am a murderer."

"Psha! You look upon this matter too seriously. Think of who and what he was, and then you will soon acquit yourself of being open to any such charge."— "I am bewildered, Mr. Marchdale, and cannot now know whether he be a vampyre or not. If he be not, I have murdered, most unjustifiably, a fellow-creature."

"Well, but if he be?"— "Why, even then I do not know but that I ought to consider myself as guilty. He is one of God's creatures if he were ten times a vampyre."

"Well, you really do take a serious view of the affair."— "Not more serious than it deserves."

"And what do you mean to do?"— "I shall remain here to await the result of what you tell me will ensue, if he be a real vampire. Even now the moonbeams are full upon him, and each moment increasing in intensity. Think you he will recover?"

"I do indeed."— "Then here will I wait."

"Since that is you resolve, I will keep you company. We shall easily find some old stone in the ruins which will serve us for a seat, and there at leisure we can keep our eyes upon the dead body, and be able to observe if it make the least movement."

This plan was adopted, and they sat down just within the ruins, but in such a place that they had a full view of the dead body, as it appeared to be, of Sir Francis Varney, upon which the sweet moonbeams shone full and clear.

Tom Eccles related how he was incited to come upon his expedition, but he might have spared himself that trouble, as Marchdale had been in a retired corner of the inn parlour before he came to his appointment with Varney, and heard the business for the most part proposed.

Half-an-hour, certainly not more, might have elapsed; when suddenly Tom Eccles uttered an exclamation, partly of surprise and partly of terror, —

"He moves; he moves!" he cried. "Look at the vampyre's body."

Marchdale affected to look with an all-absorbing interest, and there was Sir Francis Varney, raising slowly one arm with the hand outstretched towards the moon, as if invoking that luminary to shed more of its beams upon him. Then the body moved slowly, like some one writhing in pain, and yet unable to move from the spot on which it lay. From the head to the foot, the whole frame seemed to be convulsed, and now and then as the ghastly object seemed to be gathering more strength, the limbs were thrown out with a rapid and a frightful looking violence.

It was truly to one, who might look upon it as a reality and no juggle, a frightful sight to see, and although Marchdale, of course, tolerably well preserved his equanimity, only now and then, for appearance sake, affecting to be wonderfully shocked, poor Tom Eccles was in such a state of horror and fright that he could not, if he would, have flown from the spot, so fascinated was he by the horrible spectacle.

This was a state of things which continued for many minutes, and then the body showed evident symptoms of so much returning animation, that it was about to rise from his gory bed and mingle once again with the living.

“Behold!” said Marchdale— “behold!”— “Heaven have mercy upon us!”

“It is as I said; the beams of the moon have revived the vampyre. You perceive now that there can be no doubt.”— “Yes, yes, I see him; I see him.”

Sir Francis Varney now, as if with a great struggle, rose to his feet, and looked up at the bright moon for some moments with such an air and manner that it would not have required any very great amount of imagination to conceive that he was returning to it some sort of thanksgiving for the good that it had done to him.

He then seemed for some moments in a state of considerable indecision as to which way he should proceed. He turned round several times. Then he advanced a step or two towards the house, but apparently his resolution changed again, and casting his eyes upon the ruins, he at once made towards them.

This was too much for the philosophy as well as for the courage of Tom Eccles. It was all very well to look on at some distance, and observe the wonderful and inexplicable proceedings of the vampyre; but when he showed symptoms of making a nearer acquaintance, it was not to be borne.

"Why, he's coming here," said Tom.— "He seems so indeed," remarked Marchdale.

"Do you mean to stay?"— "I think I shall."

"You do, do you?"— "Yes, I should much like to question him, and as we are two to one I think we really can have nothing to fear."

"Do you? I'm altogether of a different opinion. A man who has more lives than a cat don't much mind at what odds he fights. You may stay if you like."— "You do not mean to say that you will desert me?"

"I don't see a bit how you call it deserting you; if we had come out together on this adventure, I would have stayed it out with you; but as we came separate and independent, we may as well go back so."— "Well, but—"

"Good morning?" cried Tom, and he at once took to his heels towards the town, without staying to pay any attention to the remonstrances of Marchdale, who called after him in vain.

Sir Francis Varney, probably, had Tom Eccles not gone off so rapidly, would have yet taken another thought, and gone in another direction than that which led him to the ruins, and Tom, if he had had his senses fully about him, as well as all his powers of perception, would have seen that the progress of the vampyre was very slow, while he continued to converse with Marchdale, and that it was only when he went off at good speed that Sir Francis Varney likewise thought it prudent to do so.

"Is he much terrified?" said Varney, as he came up to Marchdale. — "Yes, most completely."

"This then, will make a good story in the town."— "It will, indeed, and not a little enhance your reputation."

"Well, well; it don't much matter now; but if by terrifying people I can purchase for myself anything like immunity for the past, I shall be satisfied."— "I think you may now safely reckon that you have done so. This man who has fled with so much precipitation, had courage."

"Unquestionably."— "Or else he would have shrunk from coming here at all."

"True, but his courage and presence arose from his strong doubts as to the existence of such beings as vampyres."— "Yes, and now that he is convinced, his bravery has evaporated along with his doubts; and such a tale as he has now to tell, will be found sufficient to convert even the most sceptical in the town."

"I hope so."— "And yet it cannot much avail you."

"Not personally, but I must confess that I am not dead to all human opinions, and I feel some desire of revenge against those dastards who by hundreds have hunted me, burnt down my mansion, and sought my destruction."— "That I do not wonder at."

"I would fain leave among them a legacy of fear. Such fear as shall haunt them and their children for years to come. I would wish that the name of Varney, the vampire, should be a sound of terror for generations."— "It will be so."

"It shall."— "And now, then, for a consideration of what is to be done with our prisoner. What is your resolve upon that point?"

"I have considered it while I was lying upon yon green sward waiting for the friendly moonbeams to fall upon my face, and it seems to me that there is no sort of resource but to — —"— "Kill him?"

"No, no."— "What then?"

"To set him free."— "Nay, have you considered the immense hazard of doing so? Think again; I pray you think again. I am decidedly of opinion that he more than suspects who are his enemies; and, in that case, you know what consequences would ensue; besides, have we not enough already to encounter? Why should we add another young, bold, determined spirit to the band which is already arrayed against us?"

"You talk in vain, Marchdale; I know to what it all tends; you have a strong desire for the death of this young man."— "No; there you wrong me. I have no desire for his death, for its own sake; but, where great interests are at stake, there must be sacrifices made."

"So there must; therefore, I will make a sacrifice, and let this young prisoner free from his dungeon."— "If such be your determination, I know well it is useless to combat with it. When do you purpose giving him his freedom?"

"I will not act so heedlessly as that your principles of caution shall blame me. I will attempt to get from him some promise that he will not make himself an active instrument against me. Perchance, too, as Bannerworth Hall, which he is sure to visit, wears such an air of desertion, I may be able to persuade him that the Bannerworth family, as well as his uncle, have left this part of the country altogether; so that, without making any inquiry for them about the neighbourhood, he may be induced to leave at once."— "That would be well."

"Good; your prudence approves of the plan, and therefore it shall be done."— "I am rather inclined to think," said Marchdale, with a slight tone of sarcasm, “that if my prudence did not approve of the plan, it would still be done.”

“Most probably,” said Varney, calmly.— “Will you release him to-night?”

“It is morning, now, and soon the soft grey light of day will tint the east. I do not think I will release him till sunset again now. Has he provision to last him until then?”— “He has.”

“Well, then, two hours after sunset I will come here and release him from his weary bondage, and now I must go to find some place in which to hide my proscribed head. As for Bannerworth Hall, I will yet have it in my power; I have sworn to do so, I will keep my oath.”— “The accomplishment of our purpose, I regret to say, seems as far off as ever.”

“Not so — not so. As I before remarked, we must disappear, for a time, so as to lull suspicion. There will then arise a period when Bannerworth Hall will neither be watched, as it is now, nor will it be inhabited, — a period before the Bannerworth family has made up its mind to go back to it, and when long watching without a result has become too tiresome to be continued at all; then we can at once pursue our object.”— “Be it so.”

“And now, Marchdale, I want more money.”— “More money!”

“Yes; you know well that I have had large demands of late.”— “But I certainly had an impression that you were possessed, by the death of some one, with very ample means.”

“Yes, but there is a means by which all is taken from me. I have no real resources but what are rapidly used up, so I must come upon you again.”— “I have already completely crippled myself as regards money matters in this enterprise, and I do certainly hope that the fruits will not be far distant. If they be much longer delayed, I shall really not know what to do. However, come to the lodge where you have been staying, and then I will give you, to the extent of my ability, whatever sum you think your present exigencies require."

"Come on, then, at once. I would certainly, of course, rather leave this place now, before daybreak. Come on, I say, come on."

Sir Francis Varney and Marchdale walked for some time in silence across the meadows. It was evident that there was not between these associates the very best of feelings. Marchdale was always smarting under an assumption of authority over him, on the part of Sir Francis Varney, while the latter scarcely cared to conceal any portion of the contempt with which he regarded his hypocritical companion.

Some very strong band of union, indeed, must surely bind these two strange persons together! It must be something of a more than common nature which induces Marchdale not only to obey the behests of his mysterious companion, but to supply him so readily with money as we perceive he promises to do.

And, as regards Varney, the vampyre, be, too, must have some great object in view to induce him to run such a world of risk, and take so much trouble as he was doing with the Bannerworth family.

What his object is, and what is the object of Marchdale, will, now that we have progressed so far in our story, soon appear, and then much that is perfectly inexplicable, will become clear and distinct, and we shall find that some strong human motives are at the bottom of it all.

CHAPTER LXV.

VARNEY'S VISIT TO THE DUNGEON OF THE LONELY PRISONER IN THE RUINS.

Evident it was that Marchdale was not near so scrupulous as Sir Francis Varney, in what he chose to do. He would, without hesitation, have sacrificed the life of that prisoner in the lonely dungeon, whom it would be an insult to the understanding of our readers, not to presume that they had, long ere this, established in their minds to be Charles Holland.

His own safety seemed to be the paramount consideration with Marchdale, and it was evident that he cared for nothing in comparison with that object.

It says much, however, for Sir Francis Varney, that he did not give in to such a blood-thirsty feeling, but rather chose to set the prisoner free, and run all the chances of the danger to which he might expose himself by such a course of conduct, than to insure safety, comparatively, by his destruction.

Sir Francis Varney is evidently a character of strangely mixed feelings. It is quite evident that he has some great object in view, which he wishes to accomplish almost at any risk; but it is equally evident, at the same time, that he wishes to do so with the least possible injury to others, or else he would never have behaved as he had done in his interview with the beautiful and persecuted Flora Bannerworth, or now suggested the idea of setting Charles Holland free from the dreary dungeon in which he had been so long confined.

We are always anxious and willing to give every one credit for the good that is in them; and, hence, we are pleased to find that Sir

Francis Varney, despite his singular, and apparently preternatural capabilities, has something sufficiently human about his mind and feelings, to induce him to do as little injury as possible to others in the pursuit of his own objects.

Of the two, vampyre as he is, we prefer him much to the despicable and hypocritical, Marchdale, who, under the pretence of being the friend of the Bannerworth family, would freely have inflicted upon them the most deadly injuries.

It was quite clear that he was most dreadfully disappointed that Sir Francis Varney, would not permit him to take the life of Charles Holland, and it was with a gloomy and dissatisfied air that he left the ruins to proceed towards the town, after what we may almost term the altercation he had had with Varney the vampyre upon that subject.

It must not be supposed that Sir Francis Varney, however, was blind to the danger which must inevitably accrue from permitting Charles Holland once more to obtain his liberty.

What the latter would be able to state would be more than sufficient to convince the Bannerworths, and all interested in their fortunes, that something was going on of a character, which, however, supernatural it might seem to be, still seemed to have some human and ordinary objects for its ends.

Sir Francis Varney thought over all this before he proceeded, according to his promise, to the dungeon of the prisoner; but it would seem as if there was considerable difficulty, even to an individual of his long practice in all kinds of chicanery and deceit, in arriving at any satisfactory conclusion, as to a means of making Charles Holland's release a matter of less danger to himself, than it would be likely to be, if, unfettered by obligation, he was at once set free.

At the solemn hour of midnight, while all was still, that is, to say, on the night succeeding the one, on which he had had the interview with Marchdale, we have recorded, Sir Francis Varney alone sought the silent ruins. He was attired, as usual, in his huge cloak, and, indeed, the chilly air of the evening warranted such protection against its numerous discomforts.

Had any one seen him, however, that evening, they would have observed an air of great doubt, and irresolution upon his brow, as if he were struggling with some impulses which he found it extremely difficult to restrain.

"I know well," he muttered, as he walked among the shadow of the ruins, "that Marchdale's reasoning is coldly and horribly correct, when he says that there is danger in setting this youth free; but, I am about to leave this place, and not to show myself for some time, and I cannot reconcile myself to inflicting upon him the horror of a death by starvation, which must ensue."

It was a night of more than usual dullness, and, as Sir Francis Varney removed the massy stone, which hid the narrow and tortuous entrance to the dungeons, a chilly feeling crept over him, and he could not help supposing, that even then Marchdale might have played him false, and neglected to supply the prisoner food, according to his promise.

Hastily he descended to the dungeons, and with a step, which had in it far less of caution, than had usually characterised his proceedings, he proceeded onwards until he reached that particular dungeon, in which our young friend, to whom we wished so well, had been so long confined from the beautiful and cheering light of day, and from all that his heart's best affections most cling to.

"Speak," said Sir Francis Varney, as he entered the dungeon— "If the occupant of this dreary place live, let him answer one who is as much his friend as he has been his enemy."

"I have no friend," said Charles Holland, faintly; "unless it be one who would come and restore me to liberty."

"And how know you that I am not he?"

"Your voice sounds like that of one of my persecutors. Why do you not place the climax to your injuries by at once taking away life. I should be better pleased that you would do so, than that I should wear out the useless struggle of existence in so dreary and wretched an abode as this."

"Young man," said Sir Francis Varney, "I have come to you on a greater errand of mercy than, probably, you will ever give me credit for. There is one who would too readily have granted your present request, and who would at once have taken that life of which you profess to be so wearied; but which may yet present to you some of its sunniest and most beautiful aspects."

"Your tones are friendly," said Charles; "but yet I dread some new deception. That you are one of those who consigned me by stratagem, and by brute force, to this place of durance, I am perfectly well assured, and, therefore, any good that may be promised by you, presents itself to me in a very doubtful character."

"I cannot be surprised," said Sir Francis Varney, "at such sentiments arising from your lips; but, nevertheless, I am inclined to save you. You have been detained here because it was supposed by being so, a particular object would be best obtained by your absence. That object, however has failed, notwithstanding, and I do not feel further inclined to protract your sufferings. Have you any guess as to the parties who have thus confined you?"— "I am unaccustomed to dissemble, and, therefore I will say at once that I have a guess."

"In which way does it tend?" —

"Against Sir Francis Varney, called the vampyre."

"Does it not strike you that this may be a dangerous candour?"— "It may, or it may not be; I cannot help it. I know I am at the mercy of my foes, and I do not believe that anything I can say or do will make my situation worse or better."

"You are much mistaken there. In other hands than mine, it might make it much worse; but it happens to be one of my weaknesses, that I am charged with candour, and that I admire boldness of disposition."— "Indeed! and yet can behave in the manner you have done towards me."

"Yes. There are more things in heaven and on earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy. I am the more encouraged to set you free, because, if I procure from you a promise, which I intend to attempt, I am inclined to believe that you will keep it."— "I shall assuredly keep whatever promise I may make. Propound your conditions, and if they be such as honour and honesty will permit me to accede to, I will do so willingly and at once. Heaven knows I am weary enough of this miserable imprisonment."

"Will you promise me then, if I set you free, not to mention your suspicions that it is to Sir Francis Varney you owe this ill turn, and not to attempt any act of vengeance against him as a retaliation for it."— "I cannot promise so much as that. Freedom, indeed, would be a poor boon, if I were not permitted freely to converse of some of the circumstances connected with my captivity."

"You object?"— "I do to the former of your propositions, but not to the latter. I will promise not to go at all out of my way to execute any vengeance upon you; but I will not promise that I will not communicate the circumstances of my forced absence from them, to those friends whose opinion I so much value, and to return to whom is almost as dear to me as liberty itself."

Sir Francis Varney was silent for a few moments, and then he said, in a tone of deep solemnity, —

"There are ninety-nine persons out of a hundred who would take your life for the independence of your tongue; but I am as the hundredth one, who looks with a benevolent eye at your proceedings. Will you promise me, if I remove the fetters which now bind your limbs, that you will make no personal attack upon me; for I am weary of personal contention, and I have no disposition to endure it. Will you make me this promise?"— "I promise?"— "I will."

Without another word, but trusting implicitly to the promise which had been given to him, Sir Francis Varney produced a small key from his pocket, and unlocked with it a padlock which confined the chains about the prisoner.

With ease, Charles Holland was then enabled to shake them off, and then, for the first time, for some weeks, he rose to his feet, and felt all the exquisite relief of being comparatively free from bondage.

"This is delightful, indeed," he said.

"It is," said Sir Francis Varney— "it is but a foretaste of the happiness you will enjoy when you are entirely free. You see that I have trusted you."

"You have trusted me as you might trust me, and you perceive that I have kept my word."

"You have; and since you decline to make me the promise which I would fain have from you, to the effect that you would not mention me as one of the authors of your calamity, I must trust to your honour not to attempt revenge for what you have suffered."

"That I will promise. There can be but little difficulty to any generous mind in giving up such a feeling. In consequence of your sparing me what you might still further have inflicted, I will let the past rest, and as if it had never happened really to me; and speak of it to others, but as a circumstance which I wish not to revert to, but prefer should be buried in oblivion."

"It is well; and now I have a request to make of you, which, perhaps, you will consider the hardest of all."

"Name it. I feel myself bound to a considerable extent to comply with whatever you may demand of me, that is not contrary to honourable principle."

"Then it is this, that, comparatively free as you are, and in a condition, as you are, to assert your own freedom, you will not do so hastily, or for a considerable period; in fact, I wish and expect that you should wait yet awhile, until it shall suit me to say that it is my pleasure that you shall be free."

"That is, indeed, a hard condition to man who feels, as you yourself remark, that he can assert his freedom. It is one which I have still a hope you will not persevere in.

"Nay, young man, I think that I have treated you with generosity, to make you feel that I am not the worst of foes you could have had. All I require of you is, that you should wait here for about an hour. It is now nearly one o'clock; will you wait until you hear it strike two before you actually make a movement to leave this place?"

Charles Holland hesitated for some moments, and then he said, —

"Do not fancy that I am not one who appreciates the singular trust you have reposed in me; and, however repugnant to me it may be to remain here, a voluntary prisoner, I am inclined to do so, if it be but to convince you that the trust you have reposed in me is not in vain, and that I can behave with equal generosity to you as you can to me."

“Be it so,” said Sir Francis Varney; “I shall leave you with a full reliance that you will keep your word; and now, farewell. When you think of me, fancy me rather one unfortunate than criminal, and tell yourself that even Varney the vampyre had some traits in his character, which, although they might not raise your esteem, at all events did not loudly call for your reprobation.”

“I shall do so. Oh! Flora, Flora, I shall look upon you once again, after believing and thinking that I had bidden you a long and last adieu. My own beautiful Flora, it is joy indeed to think that I shall look upon that face again, which, to my perception, is full of all the majesty of loveliness.”

Sir Francis Varney looked coldly on while Charles uttered this enthusiastic speech.

“Remember,” he said, “till two o’clock;” and he walked towards the door of the dungeon. “You will have no difficulty in finding your way out from this place. Doubtless you already perceive the entrance by which I gained admission.”

“Had I been free,” said Charles, “and had the use of my limbs, I should, long ere this, have worked my way to life and liberty.”

“’Tis well. Goodnight.”

Varney walked from the place, and just closed the door behind him. With a slow and stately step he left the ruins, and Charles Holland found himself once more alone, but in a much more enviable condition than for many weeks he could have called his.

CHAPTER LXVI.

FLORA BANNERWORTH'S APPARENT INCONSISTENCY. — THE ADMIRAL'S CIRCUMSTANCES AND ADVICE. — MR. CHILLINGWORTH'S MYSTERIOUS ABSENCE.

For a brief space let us return to Flora Bannerworth, who had suffered so much on account of her affections, as well as on account of the mysterious attack that had been made upon her by the reputed vampyre.

After leaving Bannerworth Hall for a short time, she seemed to recover her spirits; but this was a state of things which did not last, and only showed how fallacious it was to expect that, after the grievous things that had happened, she would rapidly recover her equanimity.

It is said, by learned physiologists, that two bodily pains cannot endure at the same space of time in the system; and, whether it be so or not, is a question concerning which it would be foreign to the nature of our work, to enter into anything like an elaborate disquisition.

Certainly, however, so far as Flora Bannerworth was concerned, she seemed inclined to show that, mentally, the observation was a true one, for that, now she became released from a continued dread of the visits of the vampyre, her mind would, with more painful interest than ever, recur to the melancholy condition, probably, of Charles Holland, if he were alive, and to soul-harrowing reflections concerning him, if he were dead.

She could not, and she did not, believe, for one moment, that his desertion of her had been of a voluntary character. She knew, or fancied she knew, him by far too well for that; and she more than once expressed her opinion, to the effect that she was perfectly convinced his disappearance was a part and parcel of all that train of circumstances which had so recently occurred, and produced such a world of unhappiness to her, as well as to the whole of the Bannerworth family.

"If he had never loved me," she said to her brother Henry, "he would have been alive and well; but he has fallen a victim to the truth of a passion, and to the constancy of an affection which, to my dying day, I will believe in."

Now that Mr. Marchdale had left the place there was no one to dispute this proposition with Flora, for all, as well as she, were fully inclined to think well of Charles Holland.

It was on the very morning which preceded that evening when Sir Francis Varney called upon Charles Holland in the manner we have related, with the gratifying news that, upon certain conditions, he might be released, that Flora Bannerworth, when the admiral came to see them, spoke to him of Charles Holland, saying, —

"Now, sir, that I am away from Bannerworth Hall, I do not, and cannot feel satisfied; for the thought that Charles may eventually come back, and seek us there, still haunts me. Fancy him, sir, doing so, and seeing the place completely deserted."

"Well, there's something in that," said the admiral; "but, however, he's hardly such a goose, if it were so to happen, to give up the chase — he'd find us out somehow."

"You think he would, sir? or, do you not think that despair would seize upon him, and that, fancying we had all left the spot for ever, he might likewise do so; so that we should lose him more effectually than we have done at present?"

"No; hardly," said the admiral; "he couldn't be such a goose as that. Why, when I was of his age, if I had secured the affections of a young girl like you, I'd have gone over all the world, but I'd have found out where she was; and what I mean to say is, if he's half such a goose as you think him, he deserves to lose you."

"Did you not tell me something, sir, of Mr. Chillingworth talking of taking possession of the Hall for a brief space of time?"

"Why, yes, I did; and I expect he is there now; in fact, I'm sure he's there, for he said he would be."

"No, he ain't," said Jack Pringle, at that moment entering the room; "you're wrong again, as you always are, somehow or other."

"What, you vagabond, are you here, you mutinous rascal?"— "Ay, ay, sir; go on; don't mind me. I wonder what you'd do, sir, if you hadn't somebody like me to go on talking about"

"Why, you infernal rascal, I wonder what you'd do if you had not an indulgent commander, who puts up even with real mutiny, and says nothing about it. But where have you been? Did you go as I directed you, and take some provisions to Bannerworth Hall?"

"Yes, I did; but I brought them back again; there's nobody there, and don't seem likely to be, except a dead body."

"A dead body! Whose body can that be!"— "Tom somebody; for I'm d —— d if it ain't a great he cat."

"You scoundrel, how dare you alarm me in such a way? But do you mean to tell me that you did not see Dr. Chillingworth at the Hall?"— "How could I see him, if he wasn't there?"

"But he was there; he said he would be there."— "Then he's gone again, for there's nobody there that I know of in the shape of a doctor. I went through every part of the ship — I mean the house — and the deuce a soul could I find; so as it was rather lonely and uncomfortable, I came away again. 'Who knows,' thought I, 'but some blessed vampyre or another may come across me.'"

"This won't do," said the old admiral, buttoning up his coat to the chin; "Bannerworth Hall must not be deserted in this way. It is quite clear that Sir Francis Varney and his associates have some particular object in view in getting possession of the place. Here, you Jack."— "Ay, ay, sir."

"Just go back again, and stay at the Hall till somebody comes to you. Even such a stupid hound as you will be something to scare away unwelcome visitors. Go back to the Hall, I say. What are you staring at?"— "Back to Bannerworth Hall!" said Jack. "What! just where I've come from; all that way off, and nothing to eat, and, what's worse, nothing to drink. I'll see you d —— d first."

The admiral caught up a table-fork, and made a rush at Jack; but Henry Bannerworth interfered.

"No, no," he said, "admiral; no, no — not that. You must recollect that you yourself have given this, no doubt, faithful fellow of your's liberty to do and say a great many things which don't look like good service; but I have no doubt, from what I have seen of his disposition, that he would risk his life rather than, that you should come to any harm."

"Ay, ay," said Jack; "he quite forgets when the bullets were scuttling our nobs off Cape Ushant, when that big Frenchman had hold of him by the *skirf* of his neck, and began pummelling his head, and the lee scuppers were running with blood, and a bit of Joe Wiggins's brains had come slap in my eye, while some of Jack Marling's guts was hanging round my neck like a nosegay, all in consequence of grape-shot — then he didn't say as I was a swab, when I came up, and bored a hole in the Frenchman's back with a pike. Ay, it's all very well now, when there's peace, and no danger, to call Jack Pringle a lubberly rascal, and mutinous. I'm blessed if it ain't enough to make an old pair of shoes faint away."

"Why, you infernal scoundrel," said the admiral, "nothing of the sort ever happened, and you know it. Jack, you're no seaman."— "Werry good," said Jack; "then, if I ain't no seaman, you are what shore-going people calls a jolly fat old humbug."

"Jack, hold your tongue," said Henry Bannerworth; "you carry these things too far. You know very well that your master esteems you, and you should not presume too much upon that fact."— "My master!" said Jack; "don't call him my master. I never had a master, and don't intend. He's my admiral, if you like; but an English sailor don't like a master."

"I tell you what it is, Jack," said the admiral; "you've got your good qualities, I admit."— "Ay, ay, sir — that's enough; you may as well leave off well while you can."

"But I'll just tell you what you resemble more than anything else."— "Chew me up! what may that be, sir?"

"A French marine."— "A what! A French marine! Good-bye. I wouldn't say another word to you, if you was to pay me a dollar a piece. Of all the blessed insults rolled into one, this here's the worstest. You might have called me a marine, or you might have called me a Frenchman, but to make out that I'm both a marine and a Frenchman, d — me, if it isn't enough to make human nature stand on an end! Now, I've done with you."

"And a good job, too," said the admiral. "I wish I'd thought of it before. You're worse than a third day's ague, or a hot and a cold fever in the tropics."— "Very good," said Jack; "I only hope Providence will have mercy upon you, and keep an eye upon you when I'm gone, otherwise, I wonder what will become of you? It wasn't so when young Belinda, who you took off the island of Antiggy, in the Ingies, jumped overboard, and I went after her in a heavy swell. Howsomdever, never mind, you shook hands with me then; and while a bushel of the briny was weeping out of the corner of each of your blinkers, you says, says you,—"

"Hold!" cried the admiral, "hold! I know what I said, Jack. It's cut a fathom deep in my memory. Give us your fist, Jack, and — and —"— "Hold yourself," said Jack; "I know what you're going to say, and I won't hear you say it — so there's an end of it. Lor bless you! I knows you. I ain't a going to leave you. Don't be afraid; I only works you up, and works you down again, just to see if there's any of that old spirit in you when we was aboard the Victory. Don't you recollect, admiral?"

"Yes — yes; enough, Jack."— "Why, let me see — that was a matter of forty years ago, nearly, when I was a youngster."

"There — there, Jack — that'll do. You bring the events of other years fresh upon my memory. Peace — peace. I have not forgotten; but still, to hear what you know of them, if recited, would give the old man a pang."— "A pang," said Jack; "I suppose that's some dictionary word for a punch in the eye. That would be mutiny with a vengeance; so I'm off."

"Go, go."— "I'm a going; and just to please you, I'll go to the Hall, so you sha'n't say that you told me to do anything that I didn't."

Away went Jack, whistling an air, that might have been popular when he and the admiral were young, and Henry Bannerworth could not but remark that an appearance of great sadness came over the old man, when Jack was gone.

“I fear, sir,” he said, “that heedless sailor has touched upon some episode in your existence, the wounds of which are still fresh enough to give you pain.”— “It is so,” said the old admiral; “just look at me, now. Do I look like the here of a romantic love story?”

“Not exactly, I admit.”— “Well, notwithstanding that, Jack Pringle has touched a chord that vibrates in my heart yet,” replied the admiral.

“Have you any objection to tell me of it?”— “None, whatever; and perhaps, by the time I have done, the doctor may have found his way back again, or Jack may bring us some news of him. So here goes for a short, but a true yarn.”

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE ADMIRAL'S STORY OF THE BEAUTIFUL BELINDA.

Just at this moment Flora Bannerworth stole into the room from whence she had departed a short time since; but when she saw that old Admiral Bell was looking so exceedingly serious, and apparently about to address Henry upon some very important subject, she would have retired, but he turned towards her, and said, —

"My story, my dear, I've no objection to your hearing, and, like all women folks, a love story never comes amiss to you; so you may as well stay and hear it."— "A love story," said Flora; "you tell a love story, sir?"

"Yes, my dear, and not only tell it, but be the hero of it, likewise; ain't you astonished?"— "I am, indeed."

"Well, you'll be more astonished then before I've done; so just listen. As Jack Pringle says, it was the matter of about somewhere forty years ago, that I was in command of the Victory frigate, which was placed upon the West Indian station, during a war then raging, for the protection of our ports and harbours in that vicinity. We'd not a strong force in that quarter, therefore, I had to cut about from place to place, and do the best I could. After a time, though, I rather think that we frightened off the enemy, during which time I chiefly anchored off the island of Antigua, and was hospitably received at the house of a planter, of the name of Marchant, who, in fact, made his house my home, and introduced me to all the *elite* of the society of the island. Ah! Miss Flora, you've no idea, to look at me now, what I was then; I held a captain's commission, and was nearly the youngest man in the service, with such a rank. I was as slender, ay, as a dancing master. These withered and bleached locks were black as the raven's plume. Ay, ay, but no matter: the planter had a daughter."

"And you loved her?" said Flora— "Loved her," said the old man, and the flush of youthful animation come to his countenance; "loved her, do you say! I adored her; I worshipped her; she was to me — but what a d —— d old fool, I am; we'll skip that if you please."

"Nay, nay," said Flora; "that is what I want to hear."— "I haven't the least doubt of that, in the world; but that's just what you won't hear; none of your nonsense, Miss Flora; the old man may be a fool, but he isn't quite an idiot."

"He's neither," said Flora; "true feelings can never disgrace any one."— "Perhaps not; but, however, to make a long story short, somehow or other, one day, Belinda was sitting alone, and I rudely pounced upon her; I rather think then I must have said something that I oughtn't to have said, for it took her so aback; I was forced, somehow or other, to hold her up, and then I — I — yes; I'm sure I kissed her; and so, I told her I loved her; and then, what do you think she said?"

"Why," said Flora, "that she reciprocated the passion."— "D — n my rags," said Jack, who at the moment came into the room, "I suppose that's the name of some shell or other."

"You here, you villain!" said the admiral; "I thought you were gone."— "So I was," said Jack, "but I came back for my hat, you see."

Away he went again, and the admiral resumed his story.

"Well, Miss Flora," he said, "you haven't made a good guess, as she didn't say anything at all, she only clung to me like some wild bird to its mother's breast, and cried as if her heart would break."—

"Indeed!"

"Yes; I didn't know the cause of her emotion, but at last I got it out of her."— "What was it?"

"Oh, a mere trifle; she was already married to somebody else, that's all; some d —— d fellow, who had gone trading about the islands, a fellow she didn't care a straw about, that was old enough to be her father."

"And you left her?"— "No, I didn't. Guess again. I was a mad-headed youngster. I only felt — I didn't think. I persuaded her to come away with me. I took her aboard my ship, and set sail with her. A few weeks flew like hours; but one day we were hailed by a vessel, and when we neared her, she manned a boat and brought a letter on board, addressed to Belinda. It was from her father, written in his last moments. It began with a curse and ended with a blessing. There was a postscript in another hand, to say the old man died of grief. She read it by my side on the quarter-deck. It dropped from her grasp, and she plunged into the sea. Jack Pringle went after her; but I never saw her again."

"Gracious Heavens! what a tragedy!"— "Yes, tolerable," said the old man.

He arose and took his hat and placed it on his head. He gave the crown of it a blow that sent it nearly over his eyes. He thrust his hands deep into his breeches pockets, clenched his teeth, and muttered something inaudible as he strode from the apartment.

"Who would have thought, Henry," said Flora, "that such a man as Admiral Bell had been the hero of such an adventure?"— "Ay, who indeed; but it shows that we never can judge from appearances, Flora; and that those who seem to us the most heart-whole may have experienced the wildest vicissitudes of passion."

"And we must remember, likewise, that this was forty years ago, Henry, which makes a material difference in the state of the case as regards Admiral Bell."

"It does indeed — more than half a lifetime; and yet how evident it was that his old feelings clung to him. I can well imagine the many hours of bitter regret which the memory of this his lost love must have given him."

"True — true. I can feel something for him; for have I not lost one who loved me — a worse loss, too, than that which Admiral Bell relates; for am I not a prey to all the horrors of uncertainty? Whereas he knew the worst, and that, at all events, death had claimed its victim, leaving nothing to conjecture in the shape of suffering, so that the mind had nothing to do but to recover slowly, but surely, as it would from the shock which it had received."

"That is worse than you, Flora; but rather would I have you cherish hope of soon beholding Charles Holland, probably alive and well, than fancy any great disaster has come over him."

"I will endeavour to do so," replied Flora.

"I long to hear what has become of Dr. Chillingworth. His disappearance is most singular; for I fully suspected that he had some particular object in view in getting possession for a short time of Bannerworth Hall; but now, from Jack Pringle's account, he appears not to be in it, and, in fact, to have disappeared completely from the sight of all who knew him."

"Yes," said Flora; "but he may have done that, brother, still in furtherance of his object."

"It may be so, and I will hope that it is so. Keep yourself close, sister, and see no one, while I proceed to his house to inquire if they have heard anything of him. I will return soon, be assured; and, in the meantime, should you see my brother, tell him I shall be at home in an hour or so, and not to leave the cottage; for it is more than likely that the admiral has gone to Bannerworth Hall, so that you may not see anything of him for some time.”

CHAPTER LXVIII.

MARCHDALE'S ATTEMPTED VILLANY, AND THE RESULT.

Varney the vampyre left the dungeon of Charles Holland amid the grey ruins, with a perfect confidence the young man would keep his word, and not attempt to escape from that place until the time had elapsed which he had dictated to him.

And well might he have that confidence, for having once given his word that he would remain until he heard the clock strike two from a neighbouring church, Charles Holland never dreamt for a moment of breaking it.

To be sure it was a weary time to wait when liberty appeared before him; but he was the soul of honour, and the least likely man in all the world to infringe in the slightest upon the condition which he had, of his own free will, acceded to.

Sir Francis Varney walked rapidly until he came nearly to the outskirts of the town, and then he slackened his pace, proceeding more cautiously, and looking carefully about him, as if he feared to meet any one who might recognise him.

He had not proceeded far in this manner, when be became conscious of the cautious figure of a man gliding along in the opposite direction to that which he was taking.

A suspicion struck him, from the general appearance, that it was Marchdale, and if so he wondered to see him abroad at such a time. Still he would not be quite certain; but he hurried forward, so as to meet the advancing figure, and then his suspicions were confirmed; and Marchdale, with some confusion in his looks and manners, accosted him.

“Ah, Sir Francis Varney,” he said, “you are out late.” —

“Why, you know I should be out late,” said Varney, “and you likewise know the errand upon which I was to be out.”

“Oh, I recollect; you were to release your prisoner.” —

“Yes, I was.”

“And have you done so?” —

“Oh, no.”

“Oh, indeed. I — I am glad you have taken better thoughts of it. Good night — good night; we shall meet to-morrow.” —

“Adieu,” said Sir Francis Varney; and he watched the retreating figure of Marchdale, and then he added, in a low tone to himself, —

“I know his object well. His craven spirit shrinks at the notion, a probable enough one, I will admit, that Charles Holland has recognised him, and that, if once free, he would denounce him to the Bannerworths, holding him up to scorn in his true colours, and bringing down upon his head, perhaps, something more than detestation and contempt. The villain! he is going now to take the life of the man whom he considers chained to the ground. Well, well, they must fight it out together. Charles Holland is sufficiently free to take his own part, although Marchdale little thinks that such is the case.”

Marchdale walked on for some little distance, and then he turned and looked after Sir Francis Varney.

“Indeed!” he said; “so you have not released him to-night, but I know well will do so soon. I do not, for my part, admire this romantic generosity which sets a fox free at the moment that he’s the most dangerous. It’s all very well to be generous, but it is better to be just first, and that I consider means looking after one’s self first. I have a poniard here which will soon put an end to the troubles of the prisoner in his dungeon — its edge is keen and sharp, and will readily find a way to his heart."

He walked on quite exultingly and carelessly now, for he had got into the open country, and it was extremely unlikely that he would meet anybody on his road to the ruins.

It did not take many minutes, sharp walking now to bring him close to the spot which he intended should become such a scene of treacherous slaughter, and just then he heard from afar off something like the muttering of thunder, as if Heaven itself was proclaiming its vengeance against the man who had come out to slay one of its best and noblest creatures.

"What is that'" said Marchdale, shrinking back a moment; "what is that — an approaching storm? It must be so, for, now I recollect me, the sun set behind a bank of clouds of a fiery redness, and as the evening drew in there was every appearance in the heavens of some ensuing strife of the elements."

He listened for a few moments, and fixed his eyes intently in the direction of the horizon from where the muttering sounds had proceeded.

He had not long to wait before he saw a bright flash of blue lightning, which for one instant illumined the sky; then by the time he could have counted twelve there came the thunder which the flash preceded, and he felt terribly anxious to complete his enterprize, so that he might get back to the town and be safely housed before the storm, which was evidently approaching, should burst upon him.

"It is sweeping on apace," he said; "why did I not come earlier?"

Even as he spoke he plunged among the recesses of the ruins, and searching about for the old stone which covered the entrance to the dungeon, he was surprised to find it rolled from its place, and the aperture open.

"What is the meaning of this?" he said; "how negligent of Sir Francis Varney; or perhaps, after all, he was only jesting with me, and let the prisoner go. If that should be the case, I am foiled indeed; but surely he could not be so full of indiscretion."

Again came a dazzling flash of lightning, which now, surrounded by the ruins as he was, made him shrink back and cover his eyes for a moment; and then followed a peal of thunder with not half the duration of time between it and the flash which had characterized the previous electric phenomenon.

"The storm approaches fast," said Marchdale; "I must get my work done quickly, if indeed my victim be here, which I begin seriously to doubt."

He descended the intricate winding passage to the vault below, which served the purpose of a dungeon, and when he got very nearly into the depth of its recesses, he called aloud, saying, —

"Ho! what ho! is there any one here?"— "Yes," said Charles Holland, who fancied it might be his former visitor returned. "Have you come to repent of your purpose?"

"Ah!" said Marchdale to himself, "Sir Francis, after all, has told me the truth — the prisoner is still here."

The light from without was not near sufficient to send the least ray into the depths of that dungeon; so that Marchdale, when he entered the place, could see nothing but an absolute blackness.

It was not so, however, with Charles Holland, whose eyes had been now so long accustomed to the place that he could see in it as if a dim twilight irradiated it, and he at once, in his visitor, saw his worst foe, and not the man who had comparatively set him free.

He saw, too, that the hand of his visitor grasped a weapon, which Marchdale thought that, favoured by the darkness, he might carry openly in perfect security.

"Where are you?" said Marchdale; "I cannot see you."— "Here!" said Charles, "you may feel my grip;" and he sprung upon him in an instant.

The attack was so sudden and so utterly unexpected, that Marchdale was thrown backwards, and the dagger wrested from his grasp, during the first impulse which Charles Holland had thrown into his attack.

Moreover, his head struck with such violence against the earthern floor, that it produced a temporary confusion of his faculties, so that, had Charles Holland been so inclined, he might, with Marchdale's own weapon, have easily taken his life.

The young man did, on the impulse of the moment, raise it in his hand, but, on the impulse of another thought, he cast it from him, exclaiming —

"No, no! not that; I should be as bad as he, or nearly so. This villain has come to murder me, but yet I will not take his life for the deed. What shall I do with him? Ha! a lucky thought — chains!"

He dragged Marchdale to the identical spot of earth on which he had lain so long; and, as Sir Francis Varney had left the key of the padlock which bound the chains together in it, he, in a few moments, had succeeded in placing the villain Marchdale in the same durance from which he had himself shortly since escaped.

"Remain there," he said, "until some one comes to rescue you. I will not let you starve to death, but I will give you a long fast; and, when I come again, it shall be along with some of the Bannerworth family, to show them what a viper they have fostered in their hearts."

Marchdale was just sufficiently conscious now to feel all the realities of his situation. In vain he attempted to rise from his prostrate position. The chains did their duty, keeping down a villain with the same means that they had held in ignominious confinement a true man.

He was in a perfect agony, inasmuch as he considered that he would be allowed to remain there to starve to death, thus achieving for himself a more horrible death than any he had ever thought of inflicting.

"Villain!" exclaimed Charles Holland, "you shall there remain; and, let you have what mental sufferings you may, you richly deserve them."

He heeded not the cries of Marchdale — he heeded not his imprecations any more than he did his prayers; and the arch hypocrite used both in abundance. Charles was but too happy once more to look upon the open sky, although it was then in darkness, to heed anything that Marchdale, in the agony to which he was now reduced, might feel inclined to say; and, after glancing around him for some few moments, when he was free of the ruins, and inhaling with exquisite delight the free air of the surrounding meadows, he saw, by the twinkling of the lights, in which direction the town lay, and knowing that by taking a line in that path, and then after a time diverging a little to the right, he should come to Bannerworth Hall, he walked on, never in his whole life probably feeling such an enjoyment of the mere fact of existence as at such a moment as that of exquisite liberty.

Our readers may with us imagine what it is to taste the free, fresh air of heaven, after being long pent up, as he, Charles Holland, had been, in a damp, noisome dungeon, teeming with unwholesome exhalations. They may well suppose with what an amount of rapture he now found himself unrestrained in his movements by those galling fetters which had hung for so long a period upon his youthful limbs, and which, not unfrequently in the despair of his heart, he had thought he should surely die in.

And last, although not least in his dear esteem, did the rapturous thought of once more looking in the sweet face of her he loved come cross him with a gush of delight.

"Yes!" he exclaimed, as he quickened his pace; "yes! I shall be able to tell Flora Bannerworth how well and how truly I love her. I shall be able to tell her that, in my weary and hideous imprisonment, the thought alone of her has supported me."

As he neared the Hall, he quickened his pace to such an extent, that soon he was forced to pause altogether, as the exertion he had undertaken pretty plainly told him that the imprisonment, scanty diet, and want of exercise, which had been his portion for some time past, had most materially decreased his strength.

His limbs trembled, and a profuse perspiration bedewed his brow, although the night was rather cold than otherwise.

"I am very weak," he said; "and much I wonder now that I succeeded in overcoming that villain Marchdale; who, if I had not done so, would most assuredly have murdered me."

And it was a wonder; for Marchdale was not an old man, although he might be considered certainly as past the prime of life, and he was of a strong and athletic build. But it was the suddenness of his attack upon him which had given Charles Holland the great advantage, and had caused the defeat of the ruffian who came bent on one of the most cowardly and dastardly murders that could be committed — namely, upon an unoffending man, whom he supposed to be loaded with chains, and incapable of making the least efficient resistance.

Charles soon again recovered sufficient breath and strength to proceed towards the Hall, and now warned, by the exhaustion which had come over him that he had not really anything like strength enough to allow him to proceed rapidly, he walked with slow and deliberate steps.

This mode of proceeding was more favourable to reflection than the wild, rapid one which he had at first adopted, and in all the glowing colours of youthful and ingenious fancy did he depict to himself the surprise and the pleasure that would beam in the countenance of his beloved Flora when she should find him once again by her side.

Of course, he, Charles, could know nothing of the contrivances which had been resorted to, and which the reader may lay wholly to the charge of Marchdale, to blacken his character, and to make him appear faithless to the love he had professed.

Had he known this, it is probable that indignation would have added wings to his progress, and he would not have been able to proceed at the leisurely pace he felt that his state of physical weakness dictated to him.

And now he saw the topmost portion at Bannerworth Hall pushing out from amongst the trees with which the ancient pile was so much surrounded, and the sight of the home of his beloved revived him, and quickened the circulation of the warm blood in his veins.

“I shall behold her now,” he said— “I shall behold her how! A few minutes more, and I shall hold her to my heart — that heart which has been ever hers, and which carried her image enshrined in its deepest recesses, even into the gloom of a dungeon!”

But let us, while Charles Holland is indulging in these delightful anticipations — anticipations which, we regret, in consequence of the departure of the Bannerworths from the Hall, will not be realised so soon as he supposes — look back upon the discomfited hypocrite and villain, Marchdale, who occupies his place in the dungeon of the old ruins.

Until Charles Holland actually had left the strange, horrible, and cell-like place, he could scarcely make up his mind that the young man entertained a serious intention of leaving him there.

Perhaps he did not think any one could be so cruel and so wicked as he himself; for the reader will no doubt recollect that his, Marchdale's, counsel to Varney, was to leave Charles Holland to his fate, chained down as he was in the dungeon, and that fate would have been the horrible one of being starved to death in the course of a few days.

When now, however, he felt confident that he was deserted — when he heard the sound of Charles Holland's retreating footsteps slowly dying away in the distance, until not the faintest echo of them reached his ears, he despaired indeed; and the horror he experienced during the succeeding ten minutes, might be considered an ample atonement for some of his crimes. His brain was in a complete whirl; nothing of a tangible nature, but that he was there, chained down, and left to starve to death, came across his intellect. Then a kind of madness, for a moment or two, took possession of him; he made a tremendous effort to burst asunder the bands that held him.

But it was in vain. The chains — which had been placed upon Charles Holland during the first few days of his confinement, when he had a little recovered from the effects of the violence which had been committed upon him at the time when he was captured — effectually resisted Marchdale.

They even cut into his flesh, inflicting upon him some grievous wounds; but that was all he achieved by his great efforts to free himself, so that, after a few moments, bleeding and in great pain, he, with a deep groan, desisted from the fruitless efforts he had better not have commenced.

Then he remained silent for a time, but it was not the silence of reflection; it was that of exhaustion, and, as such, was not likely to last long; nor did it, for, in the course of another five minutes, he called out loudly.

Perhaps he thought there might be a remote chance that some one traversing the meadows would hear him; and yet, if he had duly considered the matter, which he was not in a fitting frame of mind to do, he would have recollected that, in choosing a dungeon among the underground vaults of these ruins, he had, by experiment, made certain that no cry, however loud, from where he lay, could reach the upper air. And thus had this villain, by the very precautions which he had himself taken to ensure the safe custody of another, been his own greatest enemy.

"Help! help! help!" he cried frantically "Varney! Charles Holland! have mercy upon me, and do not leave me here to starve! Help, oh, Heaven! Curses on all your heads — curses! Oh, mercy — mercy — mercy!"

In suchlike incoherent expressions did he pass some hours, until, what with exhaustion and a raging thirst that came over him, he could not utter another word, but lay the very picture of despair and discomfited malice and wickedness.

CHAPTER LXIX.

FLORA BANNERWORTH AND HER MOTHER. — THE EPISODE OF CHIVALRY.

Gladly we turn from such a man as Marchdale to a consideration of the beautiful and accomplished Flora Bannerworth, to whom we may, without destroying in any way the interest of our plot, predict a much happier destiny than, probably, at that time, she considers as at all likely to be hers.

She certainly enjoyed, upon her first removal from Bannerworth Hall, greater serenity of mind than she had done there; but, as we have already remarked of her, the more her mind was withdrawn, by change of scene, from the horrible considerations which the attack of the vampyre had forced upon her, the more she reverted to the fate of Charles Holland, which was still shrouded in so much gloom.

She would sit and converse with her mother upon that subject until she worked up her feelings to a most uncomfortable pitch of excitement, and then Mrs. Bannerworth would get her younger brother to join them, who would occasionally read to her some compositions of his own, or of some favourite writer whom he thought would amuse her.

It was on the very evening when Sir Francis Varney had made up his mind to release Charles Holland, that young Bannerworth read to his sister and his mother the following little chivalric incident, which he told them he had himself collated from authentic sources: —

"The knight with the green shield," exclaimed one of a party of men-at-arms, who were drinking together at an ancient hostel, not far from Shrewsbury— "the knight with the green shield is as good a knight as ever buckled on a sword, or wore spurs."— "Then how comes it he is not one of the victors in the day's tournament?" exclaimed another.— "By the bones of Alfred!" said a third, "a man must be judged of by his deserts, and not by the partiality of his friends. That's my opinion, friends."— "And mine, too," said another.

"That is all very true, and my opinion would go with yours, too; but not in this instance. Though you may accuse me of partiality, yet I am not so; for I have seen some of the victors of to-day by no means forward in the press of battle-men who, I will not say feared danger, but who liked it not so well but they avoided it as much as possible."

"Ay, marry, and so have I. The reason is, 'tis much easier to face a blunted lance, than one with a spear-head; and a man may practise the one and thrive in it, but not the other; for the best lance in the tournament is not always the best arm in the battle."

"And that is the reason of my saying the knight with the green shield was a good knight. I have seen him in the midst of the melee, when men and horses have been hurled to the ground by the shock; there he has behaved himself like a brave knight, and has more than once been noticed for it."

"But how canne he to be so easily overthrown to-day? That speaks something."— "His horse is an old one."

"So much the better," said another; "he's used to his work, and as cunning as an old man."— "But he has been wounded more than once, and is weakened very much: besides, I saw him lose his footing, else he had overthrown his opponent.

"He did not seem distressed about his accident, at all events, but sat contented in the tent."— "He knows well that those who know him will never attribute his misadventure either to want of courage or conduct; moreover, he seems to be one of those who care but little for the opinion of men who care nothing for him."

"And he's right. Well, dear comrades, the health of Green Knight, or the Knight with a Green Shield, for that's his name, or the designation he chooses to go by."— "A health to the Knight with the Green Shield!" shouted the men-at-arms, as they lifted their cups on high.

"Who is he?" inquired one of the men-at-arms, of him who had spoken favourably of the stranger.— "I don't know."

"And yet you spoke favourably of him a few seconds back, and said what a brave knight he was!"— "And so I uphold him to be; but, I tell you what, friend, I would do as much for the greatest stranger I ever met. I have seen him fight where men and horses have bit the dust in hundreds; and that, in my opinion, speaks out for the man and warrior; he who cannot, then, fight like a soldier, had better tilt at home in the castle-yard, and there win ladies' smiles, but not the commendation of the leader of the battle."

"That's true: I myself recollect very well Sir Hugh de Colbert, a very accomplished knight in the castle-yard; but his men were as fine a set of fellows as ever crossed a horse, to look at, but they proved deficient at the moment of trial; they were broken, and fled in a moment, and scarce one of them received a scratch."

"Then they hadn't stood the shock of the foeman?"— "No; that's certain."

"But still I should like to know the knight, — to know his name very well."— "I know it not; he has some reason for keeping it secret, I suppose; but his deeds will not shame it, be it what it may. I can bear witness to more than one foeman falling beneath his battle-axe."

"Indeed!"— "Yes; and he took a banner from the enemy in the last battle that was fought."

"Ah, well! he deserves a better fortune to-morrow. Who is to be the bridegroom of the beautiful Bertha, daughter of Lord de Cauci?"— "That will have to be decided: but it is presumed that Sir Guthrie de Beaumont is the intended."

"Ah! but should he not prove the victor?"— "It's understood; because it's known he is intended by the parents of the lady, and none would be ungallant enough to prevail against him, — save on such conditions as would not endanger the fruits of victory."

"No?"— "Certainly not; they would lay the trophies at the foot of the beauty worshipped by the knights at the tournament."

"So, triumphant or not, he's to be the bridegroom; bearing off the prize of valour whether or no, — in fact, deserve her or not, — that's the fact."— "So it is, so it is."

"And a shame, too, friends; but so it is now; but yet, if the knight's horse recovers from the strain, and is fit for work to-morrow, it strikes me that the Green Shield will give some work to the holiday knight."

There had been a grand tournament held near Shrewsbury Castle, in honour of the intended nuptials of the beautiful Lady Bertha de Cauci. She was the only daughter of the Earl de Cauci, a nobleman of some note; he was one of an ancient and unblemished name, and of great riches.

The lady was beautiful, but, at the same time, she was an unwilling bride, — every one could see that; but the bridegroom cared not for that. There was a sealed sorrow on her brow, — a sorrow that seemed sincere and lasting; but she spoke not of it to any one, — her lips were seldom parted. She loved another. Yes; she loved one who was far away, fighting in the wars of his country, — one who was not so rich in lands as her present bridegroom.

When he left her, she remembered his promise; it was, to fight on till he earned a fortune, or name that should give him some right to claim her hand, even from her imperious father. But alas! he came not; and what could she do against the commands of one who would be obeyed? Her mother, too, was a proud, haughty woman, one whose sole anxiety was to increase the grandeur and power of her house by such connections.

Thus it was pressed on by circumstances, she could no longer hold out, more especially as she heard nothing of her knight. She knew not where he was, or indeed if he were living or dead. She knew not he was never named. This last circumstance, indeed, gave her pain; for it assured her that he whom she loved had been unable to signalize himself from among other men. That, in fact, he was unknown in the annals of fame, as well as the probability that he had been slain in some of the earlier skirmishes of the war. This, if it had happened, caused her some pain to think upon; not but such events were looked upon with almost indifference by females, save in such cases where their affections were engaged, as on this occasion. But the event was softened by the fact that men were continually falling by the hand of man in such encounters, but at the same time it was considered an honourable and praiseworthy death for a soldier. He was wounded, but not with the anguish we now hear of; for the friends were consoled by the reflection that the deceased warrior died covered with glory.

Bertha, however, was young, and as yet she knew not the cause of her absent knight's silence, or why he had not been heard of among the most forward in the battle.

"Heaven's will be done," she exclaimed; "what can I do? I must submit to my father's behests; but my future life will be one of misery and sorrow."

She wept to think of the past, and to dream of the future; both alike were sorrowful to think upon — no comfort in the past and no joy in the future.

Thus she wept and sorrowed on the night of the first tournament; there was to be a second, and that was to be the grand one, where her intended bridegroom was to show himself off in her eyes, and take his part in the sport.

Bertha sat late — she sat sorrowing by the light of the lamps and the flickering flame of the fire, as it rose and fell on the hearth and threw dancing shadows on the walls.

"Oh, why, Arthur Home, should you thus be absent? Absent, too, at such a time when you are more needed than ever. Alas, alas! you may no longer be in the land of the living. Your family is great and your name known — your own has been spoken with commendation from the lips of your friend; what more of fame do you need? but I am speaking without purpose. Heaven have mercy on me."

As she spoke she looked up and saw one of her women in waiting standing by.

"Well, what would you?"— "My lady, there is one who would speak with you," said the hand-maiden.

"With me?"— "Yes, my lady; he named you the Lady Bertha de Cauci."

"Who and what is he?" she inquired, with something like trepidation, of the maiden.— “I know not, my lady.”

“But gave he not some token by which I might know who I admit to my chamber?”— “None,” replied the maiden.

“And what does he bear by way of distinguishing himself? What crest or device doth he bear?”— “Merely a green shield.”

“The unsuccessful knight in the tournament to-day. Heaven’s! what can he desire with me; he is not — no, no, it cannot be — it cannot be.”— “Will you admit him, lady?”

“Indeed, I know not what to do; but yet he may have some intelligence to give me. Yes, yes, admit him; but first throw some logs on the fire.”

The attendant did as she was desired, and then quitted the room for the purpose of admitting the stranger knight with the green shield. In a few moments she could hear the stride of the knight as he entered the apartment, and she thought the step was familiar to her ear — she thought it was the step of Sir Arthur Home, her lover. She waited anxiously to see the door open, and then the stranger entered. His form and bearing was that of her lover, but his visor was down, and she was unable to distinguish the features of the stranger.

His armour was such as had seen many a day’s hard wear, and there were plenty of marks of the battle about him. His travel-worn accoutrements were altogether such as bespoke service in the field.

“Sir, you desired to see me; say wherefore you do so, and if it is news you bring.” The knight answered not, but pointed to the female attendant, as if he desired she would withdraw. “You may retire,” said Bertha; “be within call, and let me know if I am threatened with interruption.”

The attendant retired, and then the knight and lady were left alone. The former seemed at a loss how to break silence for some moments, and then he said, —

"Lady — —"— "Oh, Heavens! 'tis he!" exclaimed Bertha, as she sprang to her feet; "it is Sir Arthur Home!"

"It is," exclaimed the knight, pulling up his visor, and dropping on one knee he encircled his arm round the waist of the lady, and at the same moment he pressed her lips to his own.

The first emotion of joy and surprise over, Bertha checked her transports, and chid the knight for his boldness.

"Nay, chide me not, dear Bertha; lam what I was when I left you, and hope to find you the same."

"Am I not?" said Bertha.— "Truly I know not, for you seem more beautiful than you were then; I hope that is the only change."

"If there be a change, it is only such as you see. Sorrow and regret form the principal causes."— "I understand you."

"My intended nuptials — —"— "Yes, I have heard all. I came here but late in the morning; and my horse was jaded and tired, and my impatience to attend the tournament caused me a disaster which it is well it came not on the second day."

"It is, dear Arthur. How is it I never heard your name mentioned, or that I received no news from any one about you during the wars that have ended?"— "I had more than one personal enemy, Bertha; men who would have been glad to see me fall, and who, in default of that, would not have minded bribing an assassin to secure my death for them at any risk whatever."

"Heavens! and how did you escape such a death from such people, Arthur?"— "By adopting such a device as that I wear. The Knight of the Green Shield I'm called."

"I saw you to-day in the tournament."— "And there my tired and jaded horse gave way; but to-morrow I shall have, I hope, a different fortune."

"I hope so too."— "I will try; my arm has been good in battle, and I see not why it should be deficient in peaceful jousts."

"Certainly not. What fortune have you met with since you left England?"— "I was of course known but to a few; among those few were the general under whom I served and my more immediate officers, who I knew would not divulge my secret."

"And they did not?"— "No; kept it nobly, and kept their eyes upon me in battle; and I have reaped a rich harvest in force, honour, and riches, I assure you."

"Thank Heaven!" said Bertha.— "Bertha, if I be conqueror, may I claim you in the court-yard before all the spectators?"

"You may," said Bertha, and she hung her head.— "Moreover," said Sir Arthur, "you will not make a half promise, but when I demand you, you will at once come down to me and accept me as your husband; if I be the victor then he cannot object to the match."

"But he will have many friends, and his intended bride will have many more, so that you may run some danger among so many enemies."— "Never fear for me, Bertha, because I shall have many friends of distinction there too — many old friends who are tried men in battle, and whose deeds are a glory and honour to them; besides, I shall have my commander and several gentlemen who would at once interfere in case any unfair advantage was attempted to be taken of my supposed weakness."

"Have you a fresh horse?" inquired Bertha.— "I have, or shall have by the morning; but promise me you will do what I ask you, and then my arm will be nerved to its utmost, and I am sure to be victorious."

"I do promise," said Bertha; "I hope you may be as successful as you hope to be, Arthur; but suppose fortune should declare against you; suppose an accident of any kind were to happen, what could be done then?"— "I must be content to hide myself for ever afterwards, as a defeated knight; how can I appear before your friends as the claimant of your hand?"

"I will never have any other."— "But you will be forced to accept this Guthrie de Beaumont, your father's chosen son-in-law."

"I will seek refuge in a cloister."— "Will you fly with me, Bertha, to some sequestered spot, where we can live in each others society?"

"Yes," said Bertha, "anything, save marriage with Guthrie de Beaumont."— "Then await the tournament of to-morrow," said Sir Arthur, "and then this may be avoided; in the meantime, keep up a good heart and remember I am at hand."

These two lovers parted for the present, after a protracted interview, Bertha to her chamber, and the Knight of the Green Shield to his tent.

The following morning was one of great preparation; the lists had been enlarged, and the seats made more commodious, for the influx of visitors appeared to be much greater than had been anticipated.

Moreover, there were many old warriors of distinction to be present, which made the bridegroom look pale and feel uncomfortable as to the results of the tournament. The tilting was to begin at an early hour, and then the feasting and revelry would begin early in the evening, after the tilting had all passed off.

In that day's work there were many thrown from their saddles, and many broke their lances. The bridegroom tilted with several knights, and came off victorious, or without disadvantage to either.

The green knight, on the contrary, tilted with but few, and always victorious, and such matches were with men who had been men of some name in the wars, or at least in the tilt yard.

The sports drew to a close, and when the bridegroom became the challenger, the Knight of the Green Shield at once rode out quietly to meet him. The encounter could not well be avoided, and the bridegroom would willingly have declined the joust with a knight who had disposed of his enemies so easily, and so unceremoniously as he had.

The first encounter was enough; the bridegroom was thrown to a great distance, and lay insensible on the ground, and was carried out of the field. There was an immediate sensation among the friends of the bridegroom, several of whom rode out to challenge the stranger knight for his presumption.

In this, however, they had misreckoned the chances, for the challenged accepted their challenges with alacrity and disposed of them one by one with credit to himself until the day was concluded. The stranger was then asked to declare who he was, upon which he lifted his visor, and said,

"I am Sir Arthur Home, and claim the Lady Bertha as my bride, by the laws of arms, and by those of love."

Again the tent was felled, and again the hostelry was tenanted by the soldier, who declared for one side and then for the other, as the cups clanged and jingled together.

"Said I not," exclaimed one of the troopers, "that the knight with a green shield was a good knight?"— "You did," replied the other.

"And you knew who he was?" said another of the troopers.— "Not I, comrades; I had seen him fight in battle, and, therefore, partly guessed how it would be if he had any chance with the bridegroom.

I’m glad he has won the lady.”

It was true, the Lady Bertha was won, and Sir Arthur Home claimed his bride, and then they attempted to defeat his claim; yet Bertha at once expressed herself in his favour, to strongly that they were, however reluctantly compelled, to consent at last.

At this moment, a loud shout as from a multitude of persons came upon their ears and Flora started from her seat in alarm. The cause of the alarm we shall proceed to detail.

CHAPTER LXX.

THE FUNERAL OF THE STRANGER OF THE INN. — THE POPULAR COMMOTION, AND MRS. CHILLINGWORTH'S APPEAL TO THE MOB. — THE NEW RIOT. — THE HALL IN DANGER.

As yet the town was quiet; and, though there was no appearance of riot or disturbance, yet the magistracy had taken every precaution they deemed needful, or their position and necessities warranted, to secure the peace of the town from the like disturbance to that which had been, of late, a disgrace and terror of peaceably-disposed persons.

The populace were well advertised of the fact, that the body of the stranger was to be buried that morning in their churchyard; and that, to protect the body, should there be any necessity for so doing, a large body of constables would be employed.

There was no disposition to riot; at least, none was visible. It looked as if there was some event about to take place that was highly interesting to all parties, who were peaceably assembling to witness the interment of nobody knew who.

The early hour at which persons were assembling, at different points, clearly indicated that there was a spirit of curiosity about the town, so uncommon that none would have noticed it but for the fact of the crowd of people who hung about the streets, and there remained, listless and impatient.

The inn, too, was crowded with visitors, and there were many who, not being blessed with the strength of purse that some were, were hanging about in the distance, waiting and watching the motions of those who were better provided.

"Ah!" said one of the visitors, "this is a disagreeable job in your house, landlord."— "Yes, sir; I'd sooner it had happened elsewhere, I assure you. I know it has done me no good."

"No; no man could expect any, and yet it is none the less unfortunate for that."— "I would sooner anything else happen than that, whatever it might be. I think it must be something very bad, at all events; but I dare say I shall never see the like again."

"So much the better for the town," said another; "for, what with vampyres and riots, there has been but little else stirring than mischief and disturbances of one kind and another."

"Yes; and, what between Varneys and Bannerworths, we have had but little peace here."

"Precisely. Do you know it's my opinion that the least thing would upset the whole town. Any one unlucky word would do it, I am sure," said a tall thin man.

"I have no doubt of it," said another; "but I hope the military would do their duty under such circumstances, for people's lives and property are not safe in such a state of things."— "Oh, dear no."

"I wonder what has become of Varney, or where he can have gone to."— "Some thought he must have been burned when they burned his house," replied the landlord.

"But I believe it generally understood he's escaped, has he not? No traces of his body were found in the ruins."— "None. Oh! he's escaped, there can be no doubt of that. I wish I had some fortune depending upon the fact; it would be mine, I am sure."

"Well, the lord keep us from vampyres and suchlike cattle," said an old woman. "I shall never sleep again in my bed with any safety. It frightens one out of one's life to think of it. What a shame the men didn't catch him and stake him!"

The old woman left the inn as soon as she had spoke this Christian speech.

"Humane!" said a gentleman, with a sporting coat on. "The old woman is no advocate for half measures!"

"You are right, sir," said the landlord; "and a very good look-out she keeps upon the pot, to see it's full, and carefully blows the froth off!"— "Ah! I thought as much."

"How soon will the funeral take place, landlord?" inquired a person, who had at that moment entered the inn.— "In about an hour's time, sir."

"Oh! the town seems pretty full, though it is very quiet. I suppose it is more as a matter of curiosity people congregate to see the funeral of this stranger?"

"I hope so, sir."

"The time is wearing on, and if they don't make a dust, why then the military will not be troubled."

"I do not expect anything more, sir," said the landlord; "for you see they must have had their swing out, as the saying is, and be fully satisfied. They cannot have much more to do in the way of exhibiting their anger or dislike to vampyres — they all have done enough."

"So they have — so they have."

"Granted," said an old man with a troublesome cough; "but when did you ever know a mob to be satisfied? If they wanted the moon and got it, they'd find out it would be necessary to have the stars also."

"That's uncommonly true," said the landlord. "I shouldn't be surprised if they didn't do something worse than ever."— "Nothing more likely," said the little old man. "I can believe anything of a mob

— anything — no matter what.”

The inn was crowded with visitors, and several extra hands were employed to wait upon the customers, and a scene of bustle and activity was displayed that was never before seen. It would glad the heart of a landlord, though he were made of stone, and landlords are usually of much more malleable materials than that.

However, the landlord had hardly time to congratulate himself, for the bearers were come now, and the undertaker and his troop of death-following officials.

There was a stir among the people, who began now to awaken from the lethargy that seemed to have come over them while they were waiting for the moment when it should arrive, that was to place the body under the green sod, against which so much of their anger had been raised. There was a decent silence that pervaded the mob of individuals who had assembled.

Death, with all its ghastly insignia, had an effect even upon the unthinking multitude, who were ever ready to inflict death or any violent injury upon any object that came in their way — they never hesitated; but even these, now the object of their hatred was no more, felt appalled.

’Tis strange what a change comes over masses of men as they gaze upon a dead body. It may be that they all know that to that complexion they must come at last. This may be the secret of the respect offered to the dead.

The undertakers are men, however, who are used to the presence of death — it is their element; they gain a living by attending upon the last obsequies of the dead; they are used to dead bodies, and care not for them. Some of them are humane men, that is, in their way; and even among them are men who wouldn’t be deprived of the joke as they screwed down the last screw. They could not forbear, even on this occasion, to hold their converse when left alone.

“Jacobs,” said one who was turning a long screw, “Jacobs, my boy, do you take the chair to-night?”— “Yes,” said Jacobs who was a long lugubrious-looking man, “I do take the chair, if I live over this blessed event.”

“You are not croaking, Jacobs, are you? Well, you are a lively customer, you are.”— “Lively — do you expect people to be lively when they are full dressed for a funeral? You are a nice article for your profession. You don’t feel like an undertaker, you don’t.”

“Don’t, Jacobs, my boy. As long as I look like one when occasion demands; when I have done my job I puts my comfort in my pocket, and thinks how much more pleasanter it is to be going to other people’s funerals than to our own, and then only see the difference as regards the money.”

“True,” said Jacobs with a groan; “but death’s a melancholy article, at all events.”— “So it is.”

“And then when you come to consider the number of people we have buried — how many have gone to their last homes — and how many more will go the same way.”— “Yes, yes; that’s all very well, Jacob. You are precious surly this morning. I’ll come to-night. You’re brewing a sentimental tale as sure as eggs is eggs.”

“Well, that is pretty certain; but as I was saying how many more are there—”

“Ah, don’t bother yourself with calculations that have neither beginning nor end, and which haven’t one point to go. Come, Jacob, have you finished yet?”— “Quite,” said Jacob.

They now arranged the pall, and placed all in readiness, and returned to a place down stairs where they could enjoy themselves for an odd half hour, and pass that time away until the moment should arrive when his reverence would be ready to bury the deceased, upon consideration of the fees to be paid upon the occasion.

The tap-room was crowded, and there was no room for the men, and they were taken into the kitchen, where they were seated, and earnestly at work, preparing for the ceremony that had so shortly to be performed.

"Any better, Jacobs?"— "What do you mean?" inquired Jacobs, with a groan. "It's news to me if I have been ill."

"Oh, yes, you were doleful up stairs, you know."— "I've a proper regard for my profession — that's the difference between you and I, you know."

"I'll wager you what you like, now, that I'll handle a corpse and drive a screw in a coffin as well as you, now, although you are so solid and miserable."— "So you may — so you may."

"Then what do you mean by saying I haven't a proper regard for my profession?"— "I say you haven't, and there's the thing that shall prove it — you don't look it, and that's the truth."

"I don't look like an undertaker! indeed I dare say I don't if I ain't dressed like one."— "Nor when you are," reiterated Jacob.

"Why not, pray?"— "Because you have always a grin on your face as broad as a gridiron — that's why."

This ended the dispute, for the employer of the men suddenly put his head in, saying, —

"Come, now, time's up; you are wanted up stairs, all of you. Be quick; we shall have his reverence waiting for us, and then we shall lose his recommendation."

"Ready sir," said the round man, taking up his pint and finishing it off at a draught, at the same moment he thrust the remains of some bread and cheese into his pocket.

Jacob, too, took his pot, and, having finished it, with great gravity followed the example of his more jocose companion, and they all left the kitchen for the room above, where the corpse was lying ready for interment.

There was an unusual bustle; everybody was on the tip-top of expectation, and awaiting the result in a quiet hurry, and hoped to have the first glimpse of the coffin, though why they should do so it was difficult to define. But in this fit of mysterious hope and expectation they certainly stood.

"Will they be long?" inquired a man at the door of one inside,— "will they be long before they come?"— "They are coming now," said the man. "Do you all keep quiet; they are knocking their heads against the top of the landing. Hark! There, I told you so."

The man departed, hearing something, and being satisfied that he had got some information.

"Now, then," said the landlord, "move out of the way, and allow the corpse to pass out. Let me have no indecent conduct; let everything be as it should be."

The people soon removed from the passage and vicinity of the doorway, and then the mournful procession — as the newspapers have it — moved forward. They were heard coming down stairs, and thence along the passage, until they came to the street, and then the whole number of attendants was plainly discernible.

How different was the funeral of one who had friends. He was alone; none followed, save the undertaker and his attendants, all of whom looked solemn from habit and professional motives. Even the jocose man was as supernaturally solemn as could be well imagined;

indeed, nobody knew he was the same man.

"Well," said the landlord, as he watched them down the street, as they slowly paced their way with funereal, not sorrowful, solemnity — "well, I am very glad that it is all over."

"It has been a sad plague to you," said one.

"It has, indeed; it must be to any one who has had another such a job as this. I don't say it out of any disrespect to the poor man who is dead and gone — quite the reverse; but I would not have such another affair on my hands for pounds."

"I can easily believe you, especially when we come to consider the disagreeables of a mob."

"You may say that. There's no knowing what they will or won't do, confound them! If they'd act like men, and pay for what they have, why, then I shouldn't care much about them; but it don't do to have other people in the bar."

"I should think not, indeed; that would alter the scale of your profits, I reckon."

"It would make all the difference to me. Business," added the landlord, "conducted on that scale, would become a loss; and a man might as well walk into a well at once."

"So I should say. Have many such occurrences as these been usual in this part of the country?" inquired the stranger.

"Not usual at all," said the landlord; "but the fact is, the whole neighbourhood has run distracted about some superhuman being they call a vampyre."

"Indeed!"— "Yes; and they suspected the unfortunate man who has been lying up-stairs, a corpse, for some days."

"Oh, the man they have just taken in the coffin to bury?" said the stranger.

“Yes, sir, the same.”

“Well, I thought perhaps somebody of great consequence had suddenly become defunct.”— “Oh, dear no; it would not have caused half the sensation; people have been really mad.”

“It was a strange occurrence, altogether, I believe, was it?” inquired the stranger.— “Indeed it was, sir. I hardly know the particulars, there have been so many tales afloat; though they all concur in one point, and that is, it has destroyed the peace of one family.”

“Who has done so?”— “The vampyre.”

“Indeed! I never heard of such an animal, save as a fable, before; it seems to me extraordinary.”

“So it would do to any one, sir, as was not on the spot, to see it; I’m sure I wouldn’t.”

In the meantime, the procession, short as it was of itself, moved along in slow time through a throng of people who ran out of their houses on either side of the way, and lined the whole length of the town.

Many of these closed in behind, and followed the mourners until they were near the church, and then they made a rush to get into the churchyard.

As yet all had been conducted with tolerable propriety, the funeral met with no impediment. The presence of death among so many of them seemed some check upon the licence of the mob, who bowed in silence to the majesty of death.

Who could bear ill-will against him who was now no more? Man, while he is man, is always the subject of hatred, fear, or love. Some one of these passions, in a modified state, exists in all men, and with such feelings they will regard each other; and it is barely possible that any one should not be the object of some of these, and hence the stranger's corpse was treated with respect.

In silence the body proceeded along the highway until it came to the churchyard, and followed by an immense multitude of people of all grades.

The authorities trembled; they knew not what all this portended. They thought it might pass off; but it might become a storm first; they hoped and feared by turns, till some of them fell sick with apprehension.

There was a deep silence observed by all those in the immediate vicinity of the coffin, but those farther in the rear found full expression for their feelings.

"Do you think," said an old man to another, "that he will come to life again, eh?"— "Oh, yes, vampyres always do, and lay in the moonlight, and then they come to life again. Moonlight recovers a vampyre to life again."

"And yet the moonlight is cold."— "Ah, but who's to tell what may happen to a vampyre, or what's hot or what's cold?"

"Certainly not; oh, dear, no."— "And then they have permission to suck the blood of other people, to live themselves, and to make other people vampyres, too."

"The lord have mercy upon us!"— "Ay, but they have driven a stake through this one, and he can't get in moonlight or daylight; it's all over — he's certainly done for; we may congratulate ourselves on this point."

"So we may — so we may."

They now neared the grave, the clergyman officiating as usual on such occasions. There was a large mob of persons on all sides, with serious faces, watching the progress of the ceremony, and who listened in quietness.

There was no sign of any disturbance amongst the people, and the authorities were well pleased; they congratulated themselves upon the quietness and orderliness of the assemblage.

The service was ended and the coffin lowered, and the earth was thrown on the coffin-lid with a hollow sound. Nobody could hear that sound unmoved. But in a short while the sound ceased as the grave became filled; it was then trodden carefully down.

There were no relatives there to feel affected at the last scene of all. They were far away, and, according to popular belief upon the subject, they must have been dead some ages.

The mob watched the last shovel-full of earth thrown upon the coffin, and witnessed the ramming down of the soil, and the heaping of it over at top to make the usual monument; for all this was done speedily and carefully, lest there should be any tendency to exhume the body of the deceased.

The people were now somewhat relieved, as to their state of solemnity and silence. They would all of them converse freely on the matter that had so long occupied their thoughts.

They seemed now let loose, and everybody found himself at liberty to say or do something, no matter if it were not very reasonable; that is not always required of human beings who have souls, or, at least it is unexpected; and were it expected, the expectation would never be realised.

The day was likely to wear away without a riot, nay, even without a fight; a most extraordinary occurrence for such a place under the existing circumstances; for of late the populace, or, perhaps, the townspeople, were extremely pugnacious, and many were the disputes that were settled by the very satisfactory application of the knuckles to the head of the party holding a contrary opinion.

Thus it was they were ready to take fire, and a hubbub would be the result of the slightest provocation. But, on the present occasion, there was a remarkable dearth of, all subjects of the nature described.

Who was to lead Israel out to battle? Alas! no one on the present occasion.

Such a one, however, appeared, at least, one who furnished a ready excuse for a disturbance.

Suddenly, Mrs Chillingworth appeared in the midst of a large concourse of people. She had just left her house, which was close at hand, her eyes red with weeping, and her children around her on this occasion.

The crowd made way for her, and gathered round her to see what was going to happen.

"Friends and neighbours," she said "can any of you relieve the tears of a distressed wife and mother, have any of you seen anything of my husband, Mr. Chillingworth?"

"What the doctor?" exclaimed one.— "Yes; Mr. Chillingworth, the surgeon. He has not been home two days and a night. I'm distracted! — what can have become of him I don't know, unless—"

Here Mrs Chillingworth paused, and some person said, —

"Unless what, Mrs Chillingworth? there are none but friends here, who wish the doctor well, and would do anything to serve him — unless what? speak out."

"Unless he's been destroyed by the vampyre. Heaven knows what we may all come to! Here am I and my children deprived of our protector by some means which we cannot imagine. He never, in all his life, did the same before."

"He must have been spirited away by some of the vampyres. I'll tell you what, friend," said one to another, "that something must be done; nobody's safe in their bed."

"No; they are not, indeed. I think that all vampyres ought to be burned and a stake run through them, and then we should be safe."

"Ay; but you must destroy all those who are even suspected of being vampyres, or else one may do all the mischief."— "So he might."

"Hurrah!" shouted the mob. "Chillingworth for ever! We'll find the doctor somewhere, if we pull down the whole town."

There was an immense commotion among the populace, who began to start throwing stones, and do all sorts of things without any particular object, and some, as they said, to find the doctor, or to show how willing they were to do so if they knew how.

Mrs. Chillingworth, however, kept on talking to the mob, who continued shouting; and the authorities anticipated an immediate outbreak of popular opinion, which is generally accompanied by some forcible demonstration, and on this occasion some one suggested the propriety of burning down Bannerworth Hall; because they had burned down the vampyre's home, and they might as well burn down that of the injured party, which was carried by acclamation; and with loud shouts they started on their errand.

This was a mob's proceeding all over, and we regret very much to say, that it is very much the characteristic of English mobs. What an uncommonly strange thing it is that people in multitudes seem completely to get rid of all reason — all honour — all common ordinary honesty; while, if you were to take the same people singly, you would find that they were reasonable enough, and would shrink with a feeling quite approaching to horror from anything in the shape of very flagrant injustice.

This can only be accounted for by a piece of cowardice in the human race, which induces them when alone, and acting with the full responsibility of their actions, to shrink from what it is quite evident they have a full inclination to do, and will do when, having partially lost their individuality in a crowd, they fancy, that to a certain extent they can do so with impunity.

The burning of Sir Francis Varney's house, although it was one of those proceedings which would not bear the test of patient examination, was yet, when we take all the circumstances into consideration, an act really justifiable and natural in comparison with the one which was now meditated.

Bannerworth Hall had never been the residence even of anyone who had done the people any injury or given them any offence, so that to let it become a prey to the flames was but a gratuitous act of mischief.

It was, however, or seemed to be, doomed, for all who have had any experience in mobs, must know how extremely difficult it is to withdraw them from any impulse once given, especially when that impulse, as in the present instance, is of a violent character.

"Down with Bannerworth Hall!" was the cry. "Burn it — burn it," and augmented by fresh numbers each minute, the ignorant, and, in many respects, ruffianly assemblage, soon arrived within sight of what had been for so many years the bane of the Bannerworths, and whatever may have been the fault of some of that race, those faults had been of a domestic character, and not at all such as would interfere with the public weal.

The astonished, and almost worn-out authorities, hastily, now, after having disposed of their prisoners, collected together what troops they could, and by the time the misguided, or rather the not guided at all populace, had got halfway to Bannerworth Hall, they were being outflanked by some of the dragoons, who, by taking a more direct route, hoped to reach Bannerworth Hall first, and so perhaps, by letting the mob see that it was defended, induce them to give up the idea of its destruction on account of the danger attendant upon the proceeding by far exceeding any of the anticipated delight of the disturbance.

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE STRANGE MEETING AT THE HALL BETWEEN MR. CHILLINGWORTH AND THE MYSTERIOUS FRIEND OF VARNEY.

When we praise our friend Mr. Chillingworth for not telling his wife where he was going, in pursuance of a caution and a discrimination so highly creditable to him, we are quite certain that he has no such excuse as regards the reader. Therefore we say at once that he had his own reasons now for taking up his abode at Bannerworth Hall for a time. These reasons seemed to be all dependant upon the fact of having met the mysterious man at Sir Francis Varney's; and although we perhaps would have hoped that the doctor might have communicated to Henry Bannerworth all that he knew and all that he surmised, yet have we no doubt that what he keeps to himself he has good reasons for so keeping, and that his actions as regards it are founded upon some very just conclusions.

He has then made a determination to take possession of, and remain in, Bannerworth Hall according to the full and free leave which the admiral had given him so to do. What results he anticipated from so lonely and so secret a watch we cannot say, but probably they will soon exhibit themselves. It needed no sort of extraordinary discrimination for any one to feel it once that not the least good, in the way of an ambuscade, was likely to be effected by such persons as Admiral Bell or Jack Pringle. They were all very well when fighting should actually ensue, but they both were certainly remarkably and completely deficient in diplomatic skill, or in that sort of patience which should enable them at all to compete with the cunning, the skill, and the nice discrimination of such a man as Sir Francis Varney.

If anything were to be done in that way it was unquestionably to be done by some one alone, who, like the doctor, would, and could, remain profoundly quiet and await the issue of events, be they what they might, and probably remain a spy and attempt no overt act which should be of a hostile character. This unquestionably was the mode, and perhaps we should not be going too far when we say it was the only mode which could be with anything like safety relied upon as one likely to lead really to a discovery of Sir Francis Varney's motives in making such determined exertions to get possession of Bannerworth Hall.

That night was doomed to be a very eventful one, indeed; for on it had Charles Holland been, by a sort of wild impulsive generosity of Sir Francis Varney, rescued from the miserable dungeon in which he had been confined, and on that night, too, he, whom we cannot otherwise describe than as the villain Marchdale, had been, in consequence of the evil that he himself meditated, and the crime with which he was quite willing to stain his soul, been condemned to occupy Charles's position.

On that night, too, had the infuriated mob determined upon the destruction of Bannerworth Hall, and on that night was Mr. Chillingworth waiting with what patience he could exert, at the Hall, for whatever in the chapter of accidents might turn up of an advantageous character to that family in whose welfare and fortunes he felt so friendly and so deep an interest.

Let us look, then, at the worthy doctor as he keeps his solitary watch.

He did not, as had been the case when the admiral shared the place with him in the hope of catching Varney on that memorable occasion when he caught only his boot, sit in a room with a light and the means and appliances for making the night pass pleasantly away; but, on the contrary, he abandoned the house altogether, and took up a station in that summer-house which has been before mentioned as the scene of a remarkable interview between Flora Bannerworth and Varney the vampyre.

Alone and in the dark, so that he could not be probably seen, he watched that one window of the chamber where the first appearance of the hideous vampyre had taken place, and which seemed ever since to be the special object of his attack.

By remaining from twilight, and getting accustomed to the gradually increasing darkness of the place, no doubt the doctor was able to see well enough without the aid of any artificial light whether any one was in the place besides himself.

"Night after night," he said, "will I watch here until I have succeeded in unravelling this mystery; for that there is some fearful and undreamt of mystery at the bottom of all these proceedings I am well convinced."

When he made such a determination as this, Dr. Chillingworth was not at all a likely man to break it, so there, looking like a modern statue in the arbour, he sat with his eyes fixed upon the balcony and the window of what used to be called Flora's room for some hours.

The doctor was a contemplative man, and therefore he did not so acutely feel the loneliness of his position as many persons would have done; moreover, he was decidedly not of a superstitious turn of mind, although certainly we cannot deny an imagination to him. However, if he really had harboured some strange fears and terrors they would have been excusable, when we consider how many circumstances had combined to make it almost a matter of demonstration that Sir Francis Varney was something more than mortal.

What quantities of subjects the doctor thought over during his vigil in that garden it is hard to say, but never in his whole life, probably, had he such a glorious opportunity for the most undisturbed contemplation of subjects requiring deep thought to analyze, than as he had then. At least he felt that since his marriage he had never been so thoroughly quiet, and left so completely to himself.

It is to be hoped that he succeeded in settling any medical points of a knotty character that might be hovering in his brain, and certain it is that he had become quite absorbed in an abstruse matter connected with physiology, when his ears were startled, and he was at once aroused to a full consciousness of where he was, and why he had come there, by the distant sound of a man's footstep.

It was a footstep which seemed to be that of a person who scarcely thought it at all necessary to use any caution, and the doctor's heart leaped within him as in the lowest possible whisper he said to himself, —

"I am successful — I am successful. It is believed now that the Hall is deserted, and no doubt that is Sir Francis Varney come with confidence, to carry out his object in so sedulously attacking it, be that object what it may."

Elated with this idea, the doctor listened intently to the advancing footstep, which each moment sounded more clearly upon his ears.

It was evidently approaching from the garden entrance towards the house, and he thought, by the occasional deadened sound of the person's feet, be he whom he might, that he could not see his way very well, and, consequently, frequently strayed from the path, on to some of the numerous flower-beds which were in the way.

"Yes," said the doctor, exultingly, "it must be Varney; and now I have but to watch him, and not to resist him; for what good on earth is it to stop him in what he wishes to do, and, by such means, never wrest his secret from him. The only way is to let him go on, and that will I do, most certainly."

Now he heard the indistinct muttering of the voice of some one, so low that he could not catch what words were uttered; but he fancied that, in the deep tones, he recognised, without any doubt, the voice of Sir Francis Varney.

"It must be he," he said, "it surely must be he. Who else would come here to disturb the solitude of an empty house? He comes! he comes!"

Now the doctor could see a figure emerge from behind some thick beeches, which had before obstructed his vision, and he looked scrutinisingly about, while some doubts stole slowly over his mind now as to whether it was the vampyre or not. The height was in favour of the supposition that it was none other than Varney; but the figure looked so much stouter, that Mr. Chillingworth felt a little staggered upon the subject, and unable wholly to make up his mind upon it.

The pausing of this visitor, too, opposite that window where Sir Francis Varney had made his attempts, was another strong reason why the doctor was inclined to believe it must be him, and yet he could not quite make up his mind upon the subject, so as to speak with certainty.

A very short time, however, indeed, must have sufficed to set such a question as that at rest; and patience seemed the only quality of mind necessary under those circumstances for Mr. Chillingworth to exert.

The visitor continued gazing either at that window, or at the whole front of the house, for several minutes, and then he turned away from a contemplation of it, and walked slowly along, parallel with the windows of that dining-room, one of which had been broken so completely on the occasion of the admiral's attempt to take the vampyre prisoner.

The moment the stranger altered his position, from looking at the window, and commenced walking away from it, Mr. Chillingworth's mind was made up. It was not Varney — of that he felt now most positively assured, and could have no doubt whatever upon the subject.

The gait, the general air, the walk, all were different; and then arose the anxious question of who could it be that had intruded upon that lonely place, and what could be the object of any one else but Varney the vampyre to do so.

The stranger looked a powerful man, and walked with a firm tread, and, altogether he was an opponent that, had the doctor been ever so belligerently inclined, it would have been the height of indiscretion for him to attempt to cope with.

It was a very vexatious thing, too, for any one to come there at such a juncture, perhaps only from motives of curiosity, or possibly just to endeavour to commit some petty depredations upon the deserted building, if possible; and most heartily did the doctor wish that, in some way, he could scare away the intruder.

The man walked along very slowly, indeed, and seemed to be quite taking his time in making his observations of the building; and this was the more provoking, as it was getting late, and if having projected a visit at all, it would surely soon be made, and then, when he found any one there, of course, he would go.

Amazed beyond expression, the doctor felt about on the ground at his feet, until he found a tolerably large stone, which he threw at the stranger with so good an aim, that it hit him a smart blow on the back, which must have been anything but a pleasant surprise.

That it was a surprise, and that, too, a most complete one, was evident from the start which the man gave, and then he uttered a furious oath, and rubbed his back, as he glanced about him to endeavour to ascertain from whence the missile had come.

"I'll try him again with that," thought the doctor; "it may succeed in scaring him away;" and he stooped to watch for another stone.

It was well that he did so at that precise moment; for, before he rose again, he heard the sharp report of a pistol, and a crashing sound among some of the old wood work of which the summer-house was composed, told him that a shot had there taken effect. Affairs were now getting much too serious; and, accordingly, Dr. Chillingworth thought that, rather than stay there to be made a target of, he would face the intruder.

"Hold — hold!" he cried. "Who are you, and what do you mean by that?"— "Oh! somebody is there," cried the man, as he advanced. "My friend, whoever you are, you were very foolish to throw a stone at me."

"And, my friend, whoever you are," responded the doctor, "you were very spiteful to fire a pistol bullet at me in consequence." —

"Not at all."

"But I say yes; for, probably, I can prove a right to be here, which you cannot."— "Ah!" said the stranger, "that voice — why — you are Dr. Chillingworth?"

"I am; but I don't know you," said the doctor, as he emerged now from the summer-house, and confronted the stranger who was within a few paces of the entrance to it. Then he started, as he added, —

"Yes, I do know you, though. How, in the name of Heaven, came you here, and what purpose have you in so coming?"

"What purpose have you? Since we met at Varney's, I have been making some inquiries about this neighbourhood, and learn strange things."— "That you may very easily do here; and, what is more extraordinary, the strange things are, for the most part, I can assure you, quite true."

The reader will, from what has been said, now readily recognise this man as Sir Francis Varney's mysterious visitor, to whom he gave, from some hidden cause or another, so large a sum of money, and between whom and Dr. Chillingworth a mutual recognition had taken place, on the occasion when Sir Francis Varney had, with such cool assurance, invited the admiral to breakfast with him at his new abode.

"You, however," said the man, "I have no doubt, are fully qualified to tell me of more than I have been able to learn from other people; and, first of all, let me ask you why you are here?"— "Before I answer you that question, or any other," said the doctor, "let me beg of you to tell me truly, is Sir Francis Varney—"

The doctor whispered in the ear of the stranger some name, as if he feared, even there, in the silence of that garden, where everything conspired to convince him that he could not be overheard, to pronounce it in an audible tone.

"He is," said the other.— "You have no manner of doubt of it?"

"Doubt? — certainly not. What doubt can I have? I know it for a positive certainty, and he knows, of course, that I do know it, and has purchased my silence pretty handsomely, although I must confess that nothing but my positive necessities would have induced me to make the large demands upon him that I have, and I hope soon to be able to release him altogether from them.”

The doctor shook his head repeatedly, as he said, —

“I suspected it; I suspected it, do you know, from the first moment that I saw you there in his house. His face haunted me ever since — awfully haunted me; and yet, although I felt certain that I had once seen it under strange circumstances, I could not identify it with — but no matter, no matter. I am waiting here for him.”

“Indeed!”— “Ay, that I am; and I flung a stone at you, not knowing you, with hope that you would be, by such means, perhaps, scared away, and so leave the coast clear for him.”

“Then you have an appointment with him?”— “By no means; but he has made such repeated and determined attacks upon this house that the family who inhabited it were compelled to leave it, and I am here to watch him, and ascertain what can possibly be his object.”

“It is as I suspected, then,” muttered this man. “Confound him! Now can I read, as if in a book, most clearly, the game that he is playing!”

“Can you?” cried the doctor, energetically— “can you? What is it? Tell me, for that is the very thing I want to discover.”— “You don’t say so?”

“It is, indeed; and I assure you that it concerns the peace of a whole family to know it. You say you have made inquiries about this neighbourhood, and, if you have done so, you have discovered how the family of the Bannerworths have been persecuted by Varney, and how, in particular, Flora Bannerworth, a beautiful and intelligent girl, has been most cruelly made to suffer.”

"I have heard all that, and I dare say with many exaggerations."— "It would be difficult for any one really to exaggerate the horrors that have taken place in this house, so that any information which you can give respecting the motives of Varney will tend, probably, to restore peace to those who have been so cruelly persecuted, and be an act of kindness which I think not altogether inconsistent with your nature."

"You think so, and yet know who I am."— "I do, indeed."

"And what I am. Why, if I were to go into the market-place of yon town, and proclaim myself, would not all shun me — ay, even the very lowest and vilest; and yet you talk of an act of kindness not being altogether inconsistent with my nature!"— "I do, because I know something more of you than many."

There was a silence of some moments' duration, and then the stranger spoke in a tone of voice which looked as it he were struggling with some emotion.

"Sir, you do know more of me than many. You know what I have been, and you know how I left an occupation which would have made me loathed. But you — even you — do not know what made me take to so terrible a trade."— "I do not."

"Would it suit you for me now to tell you?"— "Will you first promise me that you will do all you can for this persecuted family of the Bannerworths, in whom I take so strange an interest?"

"I will. I promise you that freely. Of my own knowledge, of course, I can say but little concerning them, but, upon that warranting, I well believe they deserve abundant sympathy, and from me they shall have it."

"A thousand thanks! With your assistance, I have little doubt of being able to extricate them from the tangled web of dreadful incidents which has turned them from their home; and now, whatever you may choose to tell me of the cause which drove you to be what you became, I shall listen to with abundant interest. Only let me beseech you to come into this summer-house, and to talk low."

"I will, and you can pursue your watch at the same time, while I beguile its weariness."— "Be it so."

"You knew me years ago, when I had all the chances in the world of becoming respectable and respected. I did, indeed; and you may, therefore, judge of my surprise when, some years since, being in the metropolis, I met you, and you shunned my company."— "Yes; but, at last, you found out why it was that I shunned your company."

"I did. You yourself told me once that I met you, and would not leave you, but insisted upon your dining with me. Then you told me, when you found that I would take no other course whatever, that you were no other than the — the — —" —

"Out with it! I can bear to hear it now better than I could then! I told you that I was the common hangman of London!"

"You did, I must confess, to my most intense surprise."

"Yes, and yet you kept to me; and, but that I respected you too much to allow you to do so, you would, from old associations, have countenanced me; but I could not, and I would not, let you do so. I told you then that, although I held the terrible office, that I had not been yet called upon to perform its loathsome functions. Soon — soon — come the first effort — it was the last!"

"Indeed! You left the dreadful trade?"

"I did — I did. But what I want to tell you, for I could not then, was why I went ever to it. The wounds my heart had received were then too fresh to allow me to speak of them, but I will tell you now. The story is a brief one, Mr. Chillingworth. I pray you be seated."

CHAPTER LXXII.

THE STRANGE STORY. — THE ARRIVAL OF THE MOB AT THE HALL, AND THEIR DISPERSION.

“You will find that the time which elapsed since I last saw you in London, to have been spent in an eventful, varied manner.”— “You were in good circumstances then,” said Mr. Chillingworth.— “I was, but many events happened after that which altered the prospect; made it even more gloomy than you can well imagine: but I will tell you all candidly, and you can keep watch upon Bannerworth Hall at the same time. You are well aware that I was well to do, and had ample funds, and inclination to spend them.”— “I recollect: but you were married then, surely?”— “I was,” said the stranger, sadly, “I was married then.”— “And now?”— “I am a widower.” The stranger seemed much moved, but, after a moment or so, he resumed— “I am a widower now; but how that event came about is partly my purpose to tell you. I had not married long — that is very long — for I have but one child, and she is not old, or of an age to know much more than what she may be taught; she is still in the course of education. I was early addicted to gamble; the dice had its charms, as all those who have ever engaged in play but too well know; it is perfectly fascinating.”— “So I have heard,” said Mr. Chillingworth; “though, for myself, I found a wife and professional pursuits quite incompatible with any pleasure that took either time or resources.” —

“It is so. I would I had never entered one of those houses where men are deprived of their money and their own free will, for at the gambling-table you have no liberty, save that in gliding down the stream in company with others. How few have ever escaped destruction — none, I believe — men are perfectly fascinated; it is ruin alone that enables a man to see how he has been hurried onwards without thought or reflection; and how fallacious were all the hopes he ever entertained! Yes, ruin, and ruin alone, can do this; but, alas! ’tis then too late — the evil is done. Soon after my marriage I fell in with a Chevalier St. John. He was a man of the world in every sense of the word, and one that was well versed in all the ways of society. I never met with any man who was so perfectly master of himself, and of perfect ease and self-confidence as he was. He was never at a loss, and, come what would, never betrayed surprise or vexation — two qualities, he thought, never ought to be shown by any man who moved in society.” —

“Indeed!”— “He was a strange man — a very strange man.” —

“Did he gamble?” —

“It is difficult to give you a correct and direct answer. I should say he did, and yet he never lost or won much; but I have often thought he was more connected with those who did than was believed.” —

“Was that a fact?” inquired Mr. Chillingworth. —

“You shall see as we go on, and be able to judge for yourself. I have thought he was. Well, he first took me to a handsome saloon, where gambling was carried on. We had been to the opera. As we came out, he recommended that we should sup at a house where he was well known, and where he was in the habit of spending his evenings after the opera, and before he retired. I agreed to this. I saw no reason why I should not. We went there, and bitterly have I repented of so doing for years since, and do to this day.” —

“Your repentance has been sincere and lasting,” said Mr. Chillingworth; “the one proves the other.”— “It does; but I thought not so then. The place was glittering, and the wine good. It was a kind of earthly paradise; and when we had taken some wine, the chevalier said to me, —

"'I am desirous of seeing a friend backwards; he is at the hazard-table. Will you go with me?' — I hesitated. I feared to see the place where a vice was carried on. I knew myself inclined to prudential motives. I said to him,— 'No, St. John, I'll wait here for you; it may be as well — the wine is good, and it will content me?'

"'Do so,' he said, smiling; 'but remember I seldom or never play myself, nor is there any reason why you should.'— 'I'll go, but I will not play.'— 'Certainly not; you are free alike to look on, play, or quit the place at any moment you please, and not be noticed, probably, by a single soul.'

"I arose, and we walked backwards, having called one of the men who were waiting about, but who were watchers and door-keepers of the 'hell.' We were led along the passage, and passed through the pair of doors, which were well secured and rendered the possibility of a surprise almost impossible. After these dark places, we were suddenly let into a place where we were dazzled by the light and brilliancy of the saloon. It was not so large as the one we left, but it was superior to it in all its appointments.

"At first I could not well see who was, or who was not, in the room where we were. As soon, however, as I found the use of my eyes, I noticed many well-dressed men, who were busily engaged in play, and who took no notice of any one who entered. We walked about for some minutes without speaking to any one, but merely looking on. I saw men engaged in play; some with earnestness, others again with great nonchalance, and money changed hands without the least remark. There were but few who spoke, and only those in play. There was a hum of conversation; but you could not distinguish what was said, unless you paid some attention to, and was in close vicinity with, the individual who spoke.

"'Well,' said St. John, 'what do you think of this place?'— 'Why,' I replied, 'I had no notion of seeing a place fitted up as this is.'

"'No; isn't it superb?'— 'It is beautifully done. They have many visitors,' said I, 'many more than I could have believed.'

"'Yes, they are all *bona fide* players; men of stamp and rank — none of your seedy legs who have only what they can cheat you out of.'— 'Ah!'— 'And besides,' he added, 'you may often form friendships here that lead to fortune hereafter. I do not mean in play, because there is no necessity for your doing so, or, if you do so, in going above a stake which you know won't hurt you.'— 'Exactly.'

"'Many men can never approach a table like this, and sit down to an hour's play, but, if they do, they must stake not only more than they can afford, but all their property, leaving themselves beggars.' 'They do?" said I.

"'But men who know themselves, their resources, and choose to indulge for a time, may often come and lay the foundation to a very pretty fortune.'

"'Do you see your friend?' I inquired.— 'No, I do not; but I will inquire if he has been here — if not, we will go.'

"He left me for a moment or two to make some inquiry, and I stood looking at the table, where there were four players, and who seemed to be engaged at a friendly game; and when one party won they looked grave, and when the other party lost they smiled and looked happy. I walked away, as the chevalier did not return immediately to me; and then I saw a gentleman rise up from a table.

He had evidently lost. I was standing by the seat, unconsciously holding the back in my hand. I sat down without thinking or without speaking, and found myself at the hazard table.

"'Do you play, sir?'— 'Yes,' I said. I had hardly uttered the words when I was sorry for them; but I could not recall them. I sat down, and play at once commenced.

"In about ten or fifteen minutes, often losing and then winning, I found myself about a hundred and twenty pounds in pocket, clear gain by the play.

"'Ah!' said the chevalier, who came up at that moment, 'I thought you wouldn't play.'— 'I really don't know how it happened,' said I, 'but I suddenly found myself here without any previous intention.'

"'You are not a loser, I hope?'— 'Indeed I am not,' I replied; 'but not much a gainer.'

"'Nor need you desire to be. Do you desire to give your adversary his revenge now, or take another opportunity.'— 'At another time,' I replied.

"'You will find me here the day after to-morrow, when I shall be at your service;' then bowing, he turned away.

"'He is a very rich man whom you have been playing with,' said the chevalier.—"

"Indeed!"

"'Yes, and I have known him to lose for three days together; but you may take his word for any amount; he is a perfect gentleman and man of honour.'—''Tis well to play with such,' I replied; 'but I suppose you are about to leave.'

"'Yes, it grows late, and I have some business to transact to-morrow, so I must leave.'— 'I will accompany you part of the way home,' said I, 'and then I shall have finished the night.'

"I did leave with him, and accompanied him home, and then walked to my own home."

"This was my first visit, and I thought a propitious beginning, but it was the more dangerous. Perhaps a loss might have effectually deterred me, but it is doubtful to tell how certain events might have been altered. It is just possible that I might have been urged on by my desire to retrieve any loss I might have incurred, and so made myself at once the miserable being it took months to accomplish in bringing me to.

"I went the day but one after this, to meet the same individual at the gambling-table, and played some time with varied success, until I left off with a trifling loss upon the night's play, which was nothing of any consequence.

"Thus matters went on; I sometimes won and sometimes lost, until I won a few hundreds, and this determined me to play for higher stakes than any I had yet played for.

"It was no use going on in the peddling style I had been going on; I had won two hundred and fifty pounds in three months, and had I been less fearful I might have had twenty-five thousand pounds. Ah! I'll try my fortune at a higher game.

"Having once made this resolution, I was anxious to begin my new plan, which I hoped would have the effect of placing me far above my then present position in society, which was good, and with a little attention it would have made me an independent man; but then it required patience, and nothing more. However, the other method was so superior since it might all be done with good luck in a few months. Ah! good luck; how uncertain is good luck; how changeful is fortune; how soon is the best prospect blighted by the frosts of adversity. In less than a month I had lost more than I could pay, and then I gambled on for a living.

"My wife had but one child; her first and only one; an infant at her breast; but there was a change came over her; for one had come over me — a fearful one it was too — one not only in manner but in fortune too. She would beg me to come home early; to attend to other matters, and leave the dreadful life I was then leading.

"'Lizzy,' said I, 'we are ruined.'— 'Ruined!' she exclaimed, and staggered back, until she fell into a seat. 'Ruined!'

"'Ay, ruined. It is a short word, but expressive.'— 'No, no, we are not ruined. I know what you mean, you would say, we cannot live as we have lived; we must retrench, and so we will, right willingly.'

"'You must retrench most wonderfully,' I said, with desperate calmness, 'for the murder must out.'— 'And so we will; but you will be with us; you will not go out night after night, ruining your health, our happiness, and destroying both peace and prospects.'

"'No, no, Lizzy, we have no chance of recovering ourselves; house and home — all gone — all, all.'— 'My God!' she exclaimed.

"'Ay, rail on,' said I; 'you have cause enough; but, no matter — we have lost all.'— 'How — how?'

"'It is useless to ask how; I have done, and there is an end of the matter; you shall know more another day; we must leave this house for a lodging.'— 'It matters little,' she said; 'all may be won again, if you will but say you will quit the society of those who have ruined you.'

"'No one,' said I, 'has ruined me; I did it; it was no fault of any one else's; I have not that excuse.'— 'I am sure you can recover.'

"'I may; some day fortune will shower her favours upon me, and I live on in that expectation.'— 'You cannot mean that you will chance the gaming-table? for I am sure you must have lost all there?'

"'I have.'— 'God help me,' she said; 'you have done your child a wrong, but you may repair it yet.'

"'Never!'—''Tis a long day! let me implore you, on my knees, to leave this place, and adopt some other mode of life; we can be careful; a little will do, and we shall, in time, be equal to, and better than what we have been.'

"'We never can, save by chance.'— 'And by chance we never shall,' she replied; 'if you will exert yourself, we may yet retrieve ourselves.'

"'And exert myself I will.'— 'And quit the gaming-table?'

"'Ask me to make no promises,' said I; 'I may not be able to keep them; therefore, ask me to make none.'— 'I do ask you, beg of, entreat of you to promise, and solemnly promise me that you will leave that fearful place, where men not only lose all their goods, but the feelings of nature also.'

"'Say no more, Lizzy; if I can get a living elsewhere I will, but if not, I must get it there.'

"She seemed to be cast down at this, and she shed tears. I left the room, and again went to the gambling-house, and there that night, I won a few pounds, which enabled me to take my wife and child away from the house they had so long lived in, and took them afterwards to a miserable place, — one room, where, indeed, there were a few articles of furniture that I had saved from the general wreck of my own property.

"She took things much less to heart than I could have anticipated; she seemed cheerful and happy, — she endeavoured to make my home as comfortable as she could.

"Her whole endeavour was to make me as much as possible, forget the past. She wanted, as much as possible, to wean me away from my gambling pursuits, but that was impossible. I had no hope, no other prospect.

"Thus she strove, but I could see each day she was getting paler, and more pale; her figure, before round, was more thin, and betrayed signs of emaciation. This preyed upon me; and, when fortune denied me the means of carrying home that which she so much wanted, I could never return for two days at a time. Then I would find her shedding tears, and sighing; what could I say? If I had anything to take her, then I used to endeavour to make her forget that I had been away.

"'Ah!' she would exclaim, 'you will find me dead one of these days; what you do now for one or two days, you will do by-and-bye for many days, perhaps weeks.'— 'Do not anticipate evil.'

"'I cannot do otherwise; were you in any other kind of employment but that of gambling,' she said, 'I should have some hope of you; but, as it is, there is none.'— 'Speak not of it; my chances may turn out favourable yet, and you may be again as you were.'

"'Never.'— 'But fortune is inconstant, and may change in my favour as much as she has done in others.'

"'Fortune is indeed constant, but misfortune is as inconstant.'— 'You are prophetic of evil."

"'Ah! I would to Heaven I could predict good; but who ever yet heard of a ruined gambler being able to retrieve himself by the same means that he was ruined?'

"Thus we used to converse, but our conversation was usually of but little comfort to either of us, for we could give neither any comfort to the other; and as that was usually the case, our interviews became less frequent, and of less duration. My answer was always the same.

"'I have no other chance; my prospects are limited to that one place; deprive me of that, and I never more should be able to bring you a mouthful of bread.'

"Day after day, — day after day, the same result followed, and I was as far from success as ever I was, and ever should be; I was yet a beggar.

"The time flew by; my little girl was nearly four years old, but she knew not the misery her father and mother had to endure. The poor little thing sometimes went without more than a meal a day; and while I was living thus upon the town, upon the chances of the gaming-table, many a pang did she cause me, and so did her mother. My constant consolation was this, —

"'It is bad luck now,' I would say; 'but will be better by-and-bye; things cannot always continue thus. It is all for them — all for them.'

"I thought that by continuing constantly in one course, I must be at land at the ebb of the tide. 'It cannot always flow one way,' I thought. I had often heard people say that if you could but have the resolution to play on, you must in the end seize the turn of fortune.

"'If I could but once do that, I would never enter a hell again as long as I drew breath.'

"This was a resolve I could not only make but keep, because I had suffered so much that I would never run through the same misery again that I had already gone through. However, fortune never seemed inclined to take the turn I had hoped for; fortune was as far off as ever, and had in no case given me any opportunity of recovering myself.

"A few pounds were the utmost I could at any time muster, and I had to keep up something of an appearance, and seem as if I had a thousand a year; when, God knows, I could not have mustered a thousandth part of that sum, were all done and paid for.

"Day after day passed on, and yet no change. I had almost given myself up to despair, when one night when I went home I saw my wife was more than usually melancholy and sad, and perhaps ill; I didn't look at her — I seldom did, because her looks were always a reproach to me; I could not help feeling them so.

"'Well,' said I, 'I have come home to you because I have something to bring you; not what I ought — but what I can — you must be satisfied!'— 'I am,' she said.

"'I know also you want it; how is the child, is she quite well?'— 'Yes, quite.'

"'Where is she?' inquired I, looking round the room, but I didn't see her; she used to be up.— 'She has gone to bed,' she said.

"'It is very early.'— 'Yes, but she cried so for food that I was obliged to get her to sleep to forget her hunger: poor thing, she has wanted bread very badly.'

"'Poor thing!' I said, 'let her be awakened and partake of what I have brought home.'

"With that my wife waked her up, and the moment she opened her eyes she again began to cry for food, which I immediately gave her and saw her devour with the utmost haste and hunger. The sight smote my heart, and my wife sat by watching, and endeavouring to prevent her from eating so fast.

"'This is bad,' I said.— 'Yes, but I hope it may be the worst,' she replied, in a deep and hollow voice.

"'Lizzy,' I exclaimed, 'what is the matter — are you ill?'— 'Yes, very ill.'

"'What is the matter with you? For God's sake tell me,' I said, for I was alarmed.— 'I am very ill,' she said, 'very ill indeed; I feel my strength decreasing every day. I must drink.'

"You, too, want food?'— 'I have and perhaps do, though the desire to eat seems almost to have left me.'

"'For Heaven's sake eat,' said I; 'I will bring you home something more by to-morrow; eat and drink Lizzy. I have suffered; but for you and your child's sake, I will do my best.'— 'Your best,' she said, 'will kill us both; but, alas, there is no other aid at hand. You may one day, however, come here too late to find us living.'

"'Say no more, Lizzy, you know not my feelings when you speak thus; alas, I have no hope — no aid — no friend.'— 'No,' she replied, 'your love of gaming drove them from you, because they would not aid a gambler.'

"'Say no more, Lizzy,' I said; 'if there be not an end to this life soon, there will be an end to me. In two days more I shall return to you. Good bye; God bless you. Keep up your heart and the child.'— 'Good bye,' she said, sorrowfully. She shed tears, and wrung her hands bitterly. I hastened away — my heart was ready to burst, and I could not speak.

"I walked about to recover my serenity, but could not do so sufficiently well to secure anything like an appearance that would render me fit to go to the gaming-house. That night I remained away, but I could not avoid falling into a debauch to drown my misfortunes, and shift the scene of misery that was continually before my eyes."

"The next night I was at the gaming-house. I went there in better than usual spirits. I saw, I thought, a change in fortune, and hailed that as the propitious moment of my life, when I was to rise above my present misfortunes.

"I played and won — played and lost — played and won, and then lost again; thus I went on, fluctuating more and more, until I found I was getting money in my pocket. I had, at one moment more than three hundred pounds in my pocket, and I felt that then was my happy moment — then the tide of fortune was going in my favour. I ought to have left off with that — to have been satisfied with such an amount of money; but the demon of avarice seemed to have possessed me, and I went on and on with fluctuating fortune, until I lost the whole of it.

"I was mad — desperate, and could have destroyed myself; but I thought of the state my wife and child were in; I thought that that night they would want food; but they could not hurt for one day — they must have some, or would procure some.

"I was too far gone to be able to go to them, even if I were possessed of means; but I had none, and daylight saw me in a deep sleep, from which I awoke not until the next evening let in, and then I once more determined that I would make a desperate attempt to get a little money. I had always paid, and thought my word would be taken for once; and, if I won, all well and good; if not, then I was no worse off than before.

"This was easy to plan, but not to execute. I went there, but there were none present in whom I had sufficient interest to dare make the attempt. I walked about, and felt in a most uncomfortable state. I feared I should not succeed at all, then what was to become of me — of my wife and child? This rendered me almost mad. I could not understand what I was to do, what to attempt, or where to go. One or two persons came up, and asked me if I were ill. My answers were, that I was well enough. Good God! how far from the truth was that; but I found I must place more control on my feelings, else I should cause much conversation, and then I should lose all hope of recovering myself, and all prospect of living, even.

"At length some one did come in, and I remarked I had been there all the evening and had not played. I had an invitation to play with him, which ended, by a little sleight of hand, in my favour; and on that I had calculated as much as on any good fortune I might meet. The person I played with observed it not, and, when we left off playing, I had some six or seven pounds in pocket. This, to me, was a very great sum; and, the moment I could decently withdraw myself, I ran off home.

"I was fearful of the scene that awaited me. I expected something; worse than I had yet seen. Possibly Lizzy might be angry, and scold as well as complain. I therefore tapped at the door gently, but heard no one answer; but of this I took no notice, as I believed that they might be, and were, most probably, fast asleep. I had provided myself with a light, and I therefore opened the door, which was not fastened.

"'Lizzy!' said I, 'Lizzy!' There was no answer given, and I paused. Everything was as still as death. I looked on the bed — there lay my wife with her clothes on.

"'Lizzy! Lizzy!' said I. But still she did not answer me.

"'Well,' said I, 'she sleeps sound;' and I walked towards the bed, and placed my hand upon her shoulder, and began to shake her, saying, as I did so, —

"'Lizzy! Lizzy! I'm come home.' But still no answer, or signs of awaking.

"I went on the other side of the bed to look at her face, and some misgivings overtook me. I trembled much. She lay on the bed, with her back towards the spot where I stood.

"I came towards her face. My hand shook violently as I endeavoured to look at her. She had her eyes wide open, as if staring at me.

"'Lizzy,' said I. No answer was returned. I then placed my hand upon her cheek. It was enough, and I started back in great horror. She was dead!

"This was horror itself. I staggered back and fell into a chair. The light I placed down, Heaven knows how or why; but there I sat staring at the corpse of my unfortunate wife. I can hardly tell you the tremendous effect this had upon me. I could not move. I was fascinated to the spot. I could not move and could not turn."

"It was morning, and the rays of the sun illumined the apartment; but there sat I, still gazing upon the face of my unfortunate wife, I saw, I knew she was dead; but yet I had not spoken, but sat looking at her.

"I believe my heart was as cold as she was; but extreme horror and dread had dried up all the warm blood in my body, and I hardly think there was a pulsation left. The thoughts of my child never once seemed to cross my mind. I had, however, sat there long — some hours before I was discovered, and this was by the landlady.

"I had left the door open behind me, and she, in passing down, had the curiosity to peep, and saw me sitting in what she thought to be a very strange attitude, and could hear no sounds.

"After some time she discovered my wife was dead, and, for some time, she thought me so, too. However, she was convinced to the contrary, and then began to call for assistance. This awoke the child, which was nearly famished. The landlady, to become useful, and to awaken me from my lethargy, placed the child in my hands, telling me I was the best person now to take care of it.

"And so I was; there was no doubt of the truth of that, and I was compelled to acknowledge it. I felt much pride and pleasure in my daughter, and determined she should, if I starved, have the benefit of all I could do for her in the way of care, &c."

"The funeral over, I took my child and carried it to a school, where I left her, and paid in advance, promising to do so as often as the quarter came round. My wife I had seen buried by the hands of man, and I swore I would do the best for my child, and to keep this oath was a work of pleasure.

"I determined also I would never more enter a gaming-house, be the extremity what it might; I would suffer even death before I would permit myself to enter the house in which it took place.

"'I will,' I thought, 'obtain some employment of some kind or other. I could surely obtain that. I have only to ask and I have it, surely — something, however menial, that would keep me and my child. Yes, yes — she ought, she must have her charges paid at once."

"The effect of my wife's death was a very great shock to me, and such a one I could not forget — one I shall ever remember, and one that at least made a lasting impression upon me."

"Strange, but true, I never entered a gambling-house; it was my horror and my aversion. And yet I could obtain no employment. I took my daughter and placed her at a boarding-school, and tried hard to obtain bread by labour; but, do what would, none could be had; if my soul depended upon it, I could find none. I cared not what it was — anything that was honest.

“I was reduced low — very low; gaunt starvation showed itself in my cheeks; but I wandered about to find employment; none could be found, and the world seemed to have conspired together to throw me back to the gaming-table.

“But this I would not. At last employment was offered; but what was it? The situation of common hangman was offered me. The employment was disgusting and horrible; but, at the same time, it was all I could get, and that was a sufficient inducement for me to accept of it. I was, therefore, the common executioner; and in that employment for some time earned a living. It was terrible; but necessity compelled me to accept the only thing I could obtain. You now know the reason why I became what I have told you.”

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE VISIT OF THE VAMPIRE. — THE GENERAL MEETING.

The mysterious friend of Mr. Chillingworth finished his narrative, and then the doctor said to him, —

"And that, then, is the real cause why you, a man evidently far above the position of life which is usually that of those who occupy the dreadful post of executioner, came to accept of it."— "The real reason, sir. I considered, too, that in holding such a humiliating situation that I was justly served for the barbarity of which I had been guilty; for what can be a greater act of cruelty than to squander, as I did, in the pursuit of mad excitement, those means which should have rendered my home happy, and conduced to the welfare of those who were dependant upon me?"

"I do not mean to say that your self-reproaches are unjust altogether, but — What noise is that? do you hear anything?" —

"Yes — yes."

"What do you take it to be?"— "It seemed like the footsteps of a number of persons, and it evidently approaches nearer and nearer. I know not what to think."

"Shall I tell you?" said a deep-toned voice, and some one, through the orifice in the back of the summer-house, which, it will be recollected, sustained some damage at the time that Varney escaped from it, laid a hand upon Mr. Chillingworth's shoulder. "God bless me!" exclaimed the doctor; "who's that?" and he sprang from his seat with the greatest perturbation in the world.

"Varney, the vampyre!" added the voice, and then both the doctor and his companion recognised it, and saw the strange, haggard features, that now they knew so well, confronting them. There was a pause of surprise, for a moment or two, on the part of the doctor, and then he said, “Sir Francis Varney, what brings you here? I conjure you to tell me, in the name of common justice and common feeling, what brings you to this house so frequently? You have dispossessed the family, whose property it is, of it, and you have caused great confusion and dismay over a whole county. I implore you now, not in the language of menace or as an enemy, but as the advocate of the oppressed, and one who desires to see justice done to all, to tell me what it is you require.”

“There is no time now for explanation,” said Varney, “if explanations were my full and free intent. You wished to know what noise was that you heard?”

“I did; can you inform me?”— “I can. The wild and lawless mob which you and your friends first induced to interfere in affairs far beyond their or your control, are now flushed with the desire of riot and of plunder. The noise you hear is that of their advancing footsteps; they come to destroy Bannerworth Hall.”

“Can that be possible? The Bannerworth family are the sufferers from all that has happened, and not the inflictors of suffering.”— “Ay, be it so; but he who once raises a mob has raised an evil spirit, which, in the majority of cases, it requires a far more potent spell than he is master of to quell again.”

“It is so. That is a melancholy truth; but you address me, Sir Francis Varney, as if I led on the mob, when in reality I have done all that lay in my power, from the very first moment of their rising on account of this affair, which, in the first instance, was your work, to prevent them from proceeding to acts of violence.”— “It may be so;

but if you have now any regard for your own safety you will quit this place. It will too soon become the scene of a bloody contention. A large party of dragoons are even now by another route coming towards it, and it will be their duty to resist the aggressions of the mob; then should the rioters persevere, you can guess the result."— "I can, indeed."

"Retire then while you may, and against the bad deeds of Sir Francis Varney at all events place some of his good ones, that he may not seem wholly without one redeeming trait."— "I am not accustomed," said the doctor, "to paint the devil blacker than he really is; but yet the cruel persecutions that the Bannerworth family have endured call aloud for justice. You still, with a perseverance which shows you regardless of what others suffer so that you compass your own ends, hover round a spot which you have rendered desolate."

"Hark, sir; do you not hear the tramp of horses' feet?"— "I do."

The noise made by the feet of the insurgents was now almost drowned in the louder and more rapid tramp of the horses' feet of the advancing dragoons, and, in a few moments more, Sir Francis Varney waved his arm, exclaiming, —

"They are here. Will you not consult your safety by flight?"— "No," said Mr. Chillingworth's companion; "we prefer remaining here at the risk even of whatever danger may accrue to us."

"Fools, would you die in a chance *melee* between an infuriated populace and soldiery?"— "Do not leave," whispered the ex-hangman to Mr. Chillingworth; "do not leave, I pray you. He only wants to have the Hall to himself."

There could be no doubt now of the immediate appearance of the cavalry, and, before Sir Francis Varney could utter another word, a couple of the foremost of the soldiers cleared the garden fence at a part where it was low, and alighted not many feet from the summer-house in which this short colloquy was taking place. Sir Francis Varney uttered a bitter oath, and immediately disappeared in the gloom.

"What shall we do?" said the hangman.— "You can do what you like, but I shall avow my presence to the military, and claim to be on their side in the approaching contest, if it should come to one, which I sincerely hope it will not."

The military detachment consisted of about twenty-five dragoons, who now were all in the gardens. An order was given by the officer in command for them to dismount, which was at once obeyed, and the horses were fastened by their bridles to the various trees with which the place abounded.

"They are going to oppose the mob on foot, with their carbines," said the hangman; "there will be sad work here I am afraid."— "Well, at all events," said Mr. Chillingworth, "I shall decline acting the part of a spy here any longer; so here goes."

"Hilloa! a friend, — a friend here, in the summer-house!"

"Make it two friends," cried the hangman, "if you please, while you are about it."

A couple of the dragoons immediately appeared, and the doctor, with his companion, were marched, as prisoners, before the officer in command.

"What do you do here?" he said; "I was informed that the Hall was deserted. Here, orderly, where is Mr. Adamson, the magistrate, who came with me?"— "Close at hand sir, and he says he's not well."

"Well, or ill, he must come here, and do something with these people."

A magistrate of the district who had accompanied the troops, and been accommodated with a seat behind one of the dragoons, which seemed very much to have disagreed with him, for he was as pale as death, now stepped forward.

"You know me, Mr. Adamson?" said the doctor; "I am Mr. Chillingworth."— "Oh! yes; Lord bless you! how came you here?"

"Never mind that just now; you can vouch for my having no connection with the rioters."— "Oh! dear, yes; certainly. This is a respectable gentleman, Captain Richardson, and a personal friend of mine."

"Oh! very good."— "And I," said the doctor's companion, "am likewise a respectable and useful member of society, and a great friend of Mr. Chillingworth."

"Well, gentlemen," said the captain in command, "you may remain here, if you like, and take the chances, or you may leave."

They intimated that they preferred remaining, and, almost at the moment that they did so, a loud shout from many throats announced the near approach of the mob.— "Now, Mr. Magistrate, if you please," said the officer; "you will be so good as to tell the mob that I am here with my troop, under your orders, and strongly advise them to be off while they can, with whole skins, for if they persevere in attacking the place, we must persevere in defending it; and, if they have half a grain of sense among them, they can surely guess what the result of that will be."

"I will do the best I can, as Heaven is, my judge," said the magistrate, "to produce a peaceable recall, — more no man can do."

"Hurrah! hurrah!'" shouted the mob, "down with the Vampyre! down with the Hall!" and then one, more candid than his fellows, shouted,— “Down with everything and everybody!”

“Ah!” remarked the officer; “that fellow now knows what he came about.”

A great number of torches and links were lighted by the mob, but the moment the glare of light fell upon the helmets and accoutrements of the military, there was a pause of consternation on the part of the multitude, and Mr. Adamson, urged on by the officer, who, it was evident, by no means liked the service he was on, took advantage of the opportunity, and, stepping forward, he said, —

“My good people, and fellow townsmen, let me implore you to listen to reason, and go to your homes in peace. If you do not, but, on the contrary, in defiance of law and good order, persist in attacking this house, it will become my painful duty to read the riot act, and then the military and you will have to fight it out together, which I beg you will avoid, for you know that some of you will be killed, and a lot more of you receive painful wounds. Now disperse, let me beg of you, at once.”

There seemed for a moment a disposition among the mob to give up the contest, but there were others among them who were infuriated with drink, and so regardless of all consequences. Those set up a shout of “Down with the red coats; we are Englishmen, and will do what we like.” Some one then threw a heavy stone, which struck one of the soldiers, and brought blood from his cheek. The officer saw it, but he said at once, —

“Stand firm, now, stand firm. No anger — steady.”

“Twenty pounds for the man who threw that stone,” said the magistrate.— “Twenty pound ten for old Adamson, the magistrate,” cried a voice in the crowd, which, no doubt came from him who had cast the missile.

Then, at least fifty stones were thrown, some of which hit the magistrate, and the remainder came rattling upon the helmets of the dragoons, like a hail shower.

"I warn you, and beg of you to go," said Mr. Adamson; "for the sake of your wives and families, I beg of you not to pursue this desperate game."

Loud cries now arose of "Down with the soldiers; down with the vampyre. He's in Bannerworth Hall. Smoke him out." And then one or two links were hurled among the dismounted dragoons. All this was put up with patiently; and then again the mob were implored to leave, which being answered by fresh taunts, the magistrate proceeded to read the riot act, not one word of which was audible amid the tumult that prevailed.

"Put out all the lights," cried a voice among the mob. The order was obeyed, and the same voice added; "they dare not fire on us. Come on:" and a rush was made at the garden wall.

"Make ready — present," cried the officer. And then he added, in an under tone, "above their heads, now — fire."

There was a blaze of light for a moment, a stunning noise, a shout of dismay from the mob, and in another moment all was still.

"There," said Dr. Chillingworth, "that this is, at all events, a bloodless victory."

"You may depend upon that," said his companion; "but is not there some one yet remaining? Look there, do you not see a figure clambering over the fence?"

"Yes, I do, indeed. Ah, they have him a prisoner, at all events. Those two dragoons have him, fast enough; we shall now, perhaps, hear from this fellow who is the actual ringleader in such an affair, which, but for the pusillanimity of the mob, might have turned out to be really most disastrous."

It was strange how one man should think it expedient to attack the military post after the mob had been so completely routed at the first discharge of fire-arms, but so it was. One man did make an attempt to enter the garden, and it was so rapid and so desperate an one, that he rather seemed to throw himself bodily at the fence, which separated it from the meadows without, than to clamber over it, as any one under ordinary circumstances, who might wish to effect an entrance by that means, would have done.

He was no sooner, however, perceived, than a couple of the dismounted soldiers stepped forward and made a prisoner of him.

"Good God!" exclaimed Mr. Chillingworth, as they approached nearer with him. "Good God! what is the meaning of that? Do my eyes deceive me, or are they, indeed, so blessed?"

"Blessed by what?" exclaimed the hangman.

"By a sight of the long lost, deeply regretted Charles Holland. Charles — Charles, is that indeed you, or some unsubstantial form in your likeness?"

Charles Holland, for it was, indeed, himself, heard the friendly voice of the doctor, and he called out to him.

"Speak to me of Flora. Oh, speak to me of Flora, if you would not have me die at once of suspense, and all the torture of apprehension."

"She lives and is well."

"Thank Heaven. Do with me what you please."

Dr. Chillingworth sprang forward, and addressing the magistrate, he said, —

"Sir, I know this gentleman. He is no one of the rioters, but a dear friend of the family of the Bannerworths. Charles Holland, what in the name of Heaven had become of you so long, and what brought you here at such a juncture as this?"

"I am faint," said Charles; "I — I only arrived as the crowd did. I had not strength to fight my way through them, and was compelled to pause until they had dispersed Can — can you give me water?"

"Here's something better," said one of the soldiers, as he handed a flask to Charles, who partook of some of the contents, which greatly revived him, indeed.

"I am better now," he said. "Thank you kindly. Take me into the house. Good God! why is it made a point of attack? Where are Flora and Henry? Are they all well? And my uncle? Oh! what must you all have thought of my absence! But you cannot have endured a hundredth part of what I have suffered. Let me look once again upon the face of Flora. Take me into the house."

"Release him," said the officer, as he pointed to his head, and looked significantly, as much as to say, "Some mad patient of yours, I suppose."

"You are much mistaken, sir," said Dr. Chillingworth; "this gentleman has been cruelly used, I have no doubt. He has, I am inclined to believe, been made the victim, for a time, of the intrigues of that very Sir Francis Varney, whose conduct has been the real cause of all the serious disturbances that have taken place in the country."

"Confound Sir Francis Varney," muttered the officer; "he is enough to set a whole nation by the ears. However, Mr. Magistrate, if you are satisfied that this young man is not one of the rioters, I have, of course, no wish to hold him a prisoner."

"I can take Mr. Chillingworth's word for more than that," said the magistrate.

Charles Holland was accordingly released, and then the doctor, in hurried accents, told him the principal outlines of what had occurred.

"Oh! take me to Flora," he said; "let me not delay another moment in seeking her, and convincing her that I could not have been guilty of the baseness of deserting her."

"Hark you, Mr. Holland, I have quite made up my mind that I will not leave Bannerworth Hall yet; but you can go alone, and easily find them by the directions which I will give you; only let me beg of you not to go abruptly into the presence of Flora. She is in an extremely delicate state of health, and although I do not take upon myself to say that a shock of a pleasurable nature would prove of any paramount bad consequence to her, yet it is as well not to risk it."

"I will be most careful, you may depend."

At this moment there was a loud ringing at the garden bell, and, when it was answered by one of the dragoons, who was ordered to do so by his officer, he came back, escorting no other than Jack Pringle, who had been sent by the admiral to the Hall, but who had solaced himself so much on the road with divers potations, that he did not reach it till now, which was a full hour after the reasonable time in which he ought to have gone the distance.

Jack was not to say dumb, but he had had enough to give him a very jolly sort of feeling of independence, and so he came along quarrelling with the soldier all the way, the latter only laughing and keeping his temper admirably well, under a great deal of provocation.

"Why, you land lubbers," cried Jack, "what do you do here, all of you, I wonder! You are all wamphighers, I'll be bound, every one of you. You mind me of marines, you do, and that's quite enough to turn a proper seaman's stomach, any day in the week."

The soldier only laughed, and brought Jack up to the little group of persons consisting of Dr. Chillingworth, the hangman, Charles Holland, and the officer.

"Why, Jack Pringle," said Dr. Chillingworth, stepping before Charles, so that Jack should not see him,— "why, Jack Pringle, what brings you here?"

"A slight squall, sir, to the nor'west. Brought you something to eat."

Jack produced a bottle.

"To drink, you mean?"

"Well, it's all one; only in this here shape, you see, it goes down better, I'm thinking, which does make a little difference somehow."

"How is the admiral?"

"Oh, he's as stupid as ever; Lord bless you, he'd be like a ship without a rudder without me, and would go swaying about at the mercy of winds and waves, poor old man. He's bad enough as it is, but if so be I wasn't to give the eye to him as I does, bless my heart if I thinks as he'd be above hatches long. Here's to you all."

Jack took the cork from the bottle he had with him, and there came from it a strong odour of rum. Then he placed it to his lips, and was enjoying the pleasant gurgle of the liquor down his throat, when Charles stepped up to him, and laying hold of the lower end of the bottle, he dragged it from his mouth, saying, —

"How dare you talk in the way you have of my uncle, you drunken, mutinous rascal, and behind his back too!"

The voice of Charles Holland was as well known to Jack Pringle as that of the admiral, and his intense astonishment at hearing himself so suddenly addressed by one, of whose proximity he had not the least idea, made some of the rum go, what is popularly termed, the wrong way, and nearly choked him.

He reeled back, till he fell over some obstruction, and then down he sat on a flower bed, while his eyes seemed ready to come out of his head.

"Avast heavings," he cried, "Who's that?"

"Come, come," said Charles Holland, "don't pretend you don't know me; I will not have my uncle spoken of in a disrespectful manner by you."

"Well, shiver my timbers, if that ain't our nevey. Why, Charley, my boy, how are you? Here we are in port at last. Won't the old commodore pipe his eye, now. Whew! here's a go. I've found our nevey, after all."

"You found him," said Dr. Chillingworth; "now, that is as great a piece of impudence as ever I heard in all my life. You mean that he has found you, and found you out, too, you drunken fellow. Jack, you get worse and worse every day."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"What, you admit it?"

"Ay, ay, sir. Now, Master Charley, I tell you what it is, I shall take you off to your old uncle, you shore going sneak and you'll have to report what cruise you've been upon all this while, leaving the ship to look after itself. Lord love you all, if it hadn't been for me I don't know what anybody would have done."

"I only know of the result," said Dr Chillingworth, "that would ensue, if it were not for you, and that would consist in a great injury to the revenue, in consequence of the much less consumption of rum and other strong liquors."

"I'll be hanged up at the yard if I understands what you mean," said Jack; "as if I ever drunk anything — I, of all people in the world. I am ashamed of you. You are drunk."

Several of the dragoons had to turn aside to keep themselves from laughing, and the officer himself could not forbear from a smile as be said to the doctor, —

"Sir, you seem to have many acquaintances, and by some means or another they all have an inclination to come here to-night. If, however, you consider that you are bound to remain here from a feeling that the Hall is threatened with any danger, you may dismiss that fear, for I shall leave a picquet here all night."

"No, sir," replied Dr. Chillingworth, "it is not that I fear now, after the manner in which they have been repulsed, any danger to the Hall from the mob; but I have reasons for wishing to be in it or near it for some time to come."

"As you please."

"Charles, do not wait for or accept the guidance of that drunken fellow, but go yourself with a direction which I will write down for you in a leaf of my pocket-book."

"Drunken fellow," exclaimed Jack, who had now scrambled to his feet, "who do you call a drunken fellow?"

"Why you, unquestionably."

"Well, now, that is hard. Come along, nevey; I'll shew you where they all are. I could walk a plank on any deck with any man in the service, I could. Come along, my boy, come along."

"You can accept of him as a guide if you like, of course," said the doctor; "he may be sober enough to conduct you."

"I think he can," said Charles. "Lead on, Jack; but mark me, I shall inform my uncle of this intemperance, as well as of the manner in which you let your tongue wag about him behind his back, unless you promise to reform."

"He is long past all reformation," remarked Dr. Chillingworth; "it is out of the question."

"And I am afraid my uncle will not have courage to attempt such an ungrateful task, when there is so little chance of success," replied Charles Holland, shaking the worthy doctor by the hand. "Farewell, for the present, sir; the next time I see you, I hope we shall both be more pleasantly situated."

"Come along, nevey," interrupted Jack Pringle; "now you've found your way back, the first thing you ought to do, is to report yourself as having come aboard. Follow me, and I'll soon show yer the port where the old hulk's laid hisself up."

Jack walked on first, tolerably steady, if one may take into account his divers deep potations, and Charles Holland, anticipating with delight again looking upon the face of his much loved Flora, followed closely behind him.

We can well imagine the world of delightful thoughts that came crowding upon him when Jack, after rather a long walk, announced that they were now very near the residence of the object of his soul's adoration.

We trust that there is not one of our readers who, for one moment, will suppose that Charles Holland was the sort of man to leave even such a villain and double-faced hypocrite as Marchdale, to starve amid the gloomy ruins where he was immured.

Far from Charles's intentions was any such thing; but he did think that a night passed there, with no other company than his own reflections, would do him a world of good, and was, at all events, no very great modicum of punishment for the rascality with which he had behaved.

Besides, even during that night there were refreshments in the shape of bread and water, such as had been presented to Charles himself, within Marchdale's reach as they had been within his.

That individual now, Charles thought, would have a good opportunity of testing the quality of that kind of food, and of finding out what an extremely light diet it was for a strong man to live upon.

But in the morning it was Charles's intention to take Henry Bannerworth and the admiral with him to the ruins, and then and there release the wretch from his confinement, on condition that he made a full confession of his villanies before those persons.

Oh, how gladly would Marchdale have exchanged the fate which actually befell him for any amount of personal humiliation, always provided that it brought with it a commensurate amount of personal safety.

But that fate was one altogether undreamt of by Charles Holland, and wholly without his control.

It was a fate which would have been his, but for the murderous purpose which had brought Marchdale to the dungeon, and those happy accidents which had enabled Charles to change places with him, and breathe the free, cool, fresh air; while he left his enemy loaded with the same chains that had encumbered his limbs so cruelly, and lying on that same damp dungeon floor, which he thought would be his grave.

We mentioned that as Charles left the ruins, the storm, which had been giving various indications of its coming, seemed to be rapidly approaching.

It was one of these extremely local tempests which expend all their principal fury over a small space of country; and, in this instance, the space seemed to include little more than the river, and the few meadows which immediately surrounded it, and lent it so much of its beauty.

Marchdale soon found that his cries were drowned by the louder voices of the elements. The wailing of the wind among the ancient ruins was much more full of sound than his cries; and, now and then, the full-mouthed thunder filled the air with such a volume of roaring, and awakened so many echoes among the ruins, that, had he possessed the voices of fifty men, he could not have hoped to wage war with it.

And then, although we know that Charles Holland would have encountered death himself, rather than he would have willingly left anything human to expire of hunger in that dungeon, yet Marchdale, judging of others by himself, felt by no means sure of any such thing, and, in his horror of apprehension, fancied that that was just the sort of easy, and pleasant, and complete revenge that it was in Charles Holland's power to take, and just the one which would suggest itself, under the circumstances, to his mind.

Could anything be possibly more full of horror than such a thought? Death, let it come in any shape it may, is yet a most repulsive and unwelcome guest; but, when it comes, so united with all that can add to its terrors, it is enough to drive reason from its throne, and fill the mind with images of absolute horror.

Tired of shrieking, for his parched lips and clogged tongue would scarcely now permit him to utter a sound higher than a whisper. Marchdale lay, listening to the furious storm without, in the last abandonment of despair.

"Oh! what a death is this," he groaned. "Here, alone — all alone — and starvation to creep on me by degrees, sapping life's energies one by one. Already do I feel the dreadful sickening weakness growing on me. Help, oh! help me Heav — no, no! Dare I call on Heaven to help me? Is there no fiend of darkness who now will bid me a price for a human soul? Is there not one who will do so — not one who will rescue me from the horror that surrounds me, for Heaven will not? I dare not ask mercy there.”

The storm continued louder and louder. The wind, it is true, was nearly hushed, but the roar and the rattle of the echo-awakening thunder fully made up for its cessation, while, now and then, even there, in that underground abode, some sudden reflection of the vivid lightning’s light would find its way, lending, for a fleeting moment, sufficient light to Marchdale, wherewith he could see the gloomy place in which he was.

At times he wept, and at times he raved, while ever and anon he made such frantic efforts to free himself from the chains that were around him, that, had they not been strong, he must have succeeded; but, as it was, he only made deep indentations into his flesh, and gave himself much pain.

“Charles Holland!” he shouted; “oh! release me! Varney! Varney! why do you not come to save me? I have toiled for you most unrequitedly — I have not had my reward. Let it all consist in my release from this dreadful bondage. Help! help! oh, help!”

There was no one to hear him. The storm continued, and now, suddenly, a sudden and a sharper sound than any awakened by the thunder’s roar came upon his startled ear, and, in increased agony, he shouted, —

“What is that? oh! what is that? God of heaven, do my fears translate that sound aright? Can it be, oh! can it be, that the ruins which have stood for so many a year are now crumbling down before the storm of to-night?”

The sound came again, and he felt the walls of the dungeon in which he was shake. Now there could be no doubt but that the lightning had struck some part of the building, and so endangered the safety of all that was above ground. For a moment there came across his brain such a rush of agony, that he neither spoke nor moved. Had that dreadful feeling continued much longer, he must have lapsed into insanity; but that amount of mercy — for mercy it would have been — was not shown to him. He still felt all the accumulating horrors of his situation, and then, with such shrieks as nothing but a full appreciation of such horrors could have given him strength to utter, he called upon earth, upon heaven and upon all that was infernal, to save him from his impending doom.

All was in vain. It was an impending doom which nothing but the direct interposition of Heaven could have at all averted; and it was not likely that any such perversion of the regular laws of nature would take place to save such a man as Marchdale.

Again came the crashing sound of falling stones, and he was certain that the old ruins, which had stood for so many hundred years the storm, and the utmost wrath of the elements, was at length yielding, and crumbling down.

What else could he expect but to be engulphed among the fragments — fragments still weighty and destructive, although in decay. How fearfully now did his horrified imagination take in at one glance, as it were, a panoramic view of all his past life, and how absolutely contemptible, at that moment, appeared all that he had been striving for.

But the walls shake again, and this time the vibration is more fearful than before. There is a tremendous uproar above him — the roof yields to some superincumbent pressure — there is one shriek, and Marchdale lies crushed beneath a mass of masonry that it would take men and machinery days to remove from off him.

All is over now. That bold, bad man — that accomplished hypocrite — that mendacious, would-be murderer was no more. He lies but a mangled, crushed, and festering corpse.

May his soul find mercy with his God!

The storm, from this moment, seemed to relax in its violence, as if it had accomplished a great purpose, and, consequently, now, need no longer "vex the air with its boisterous presence." Gradually the thunder died away in the distance. The wind no longer blew in blustrous gusts, but, with a gentle murmuring, swept around the ancient pile, as if singing the requiem of the dead that lay beneath — that dead which mortal eyes were never to look upon.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

THE MEETING OF CHARLES AND FLORA.

Charles Holland followed Jack Pringle for some time in silence from Bannerworth Hall; his mind was too full of thought concerning the past to allow him to indulge in much of that kind of conversation in which Jack Pringle might be fully considered to be a proficient.

As for Jack, somehow or another, he had felt his dignity offended in the garden of Bannerworth Hall, and he had made up his mind, as he afterwards stated in his own phraseology, not to speak to nobody till somebody spoke to him.

A growing anxiety, however, to ascertain from one who had seen her lately, how Flora had borne his absence, at length induced Charles Holland to break his self-imposed silence.

"Jack," he said, "you have had the happiness of seeing her lately, tell me, does Flora Bannerworth look as she was wont to look, or have all the roses faded from her cheeks?"

"Why, as for the roses," said Jack, "I'm blowed if I can tell, and seeing as how she don't look at me much, I doesn't know nothing about her; I can tell you something, though, about the old admiral that will make you open your eyes."

"Indeed, Jack, and what may that be?"

"Why, he's took to drink, and gets groggy about every day of his life, and the most singular thing is, that when that's the case with the old man, he says it's me."

"Indeed, Jack! taken to drinking has my poor old uncle, from grief, I suppose, Jack, at my disappearance."

"No, I don't think it's grief," said Jack; "it strikes me it's rum-

and-water."

"Alas, alas, I never could have imagined he could have fallen into that habit of yours; he always seemed so far from anything of this kind."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Jack, "I know'd you'd be astonished. It will be the death of him, that's my opinion; and the idea, you know, Master Charles, of accusing me when he gets drunk himself."

"I believe that is a common delusion of intemperate persons," said Charles.

"Is it, sir; well, it's a very awkward I thing, because you know, sir, as well as most people, that I'm not the fellow to take a drop too much."

"I cannot say, Jack, that I know so much, for I have certainly heard my uncle accuse you of intoxication."

"Lor', sir, that was all just on account of his trying it hisself; he was a thinking on it then, and wanted to see how I'd take it."

"But tell me of Flora; are you quite certain that she has had no more alarms from Varney?"

"What, that ere vampyre fellow? not a bit of it, your honour. Lor' bless you, he must have found out by some means or another that I was on the look out, and that did the business. He'll never come near Miss Flora again, I'll be bound, though to be sure we moved away from the Hall on account of him; but not that I saw the good of cruising out of one's own latitude, but somehow or another you see the doctor and the admiral got it into their heads to establish a sort of blockade, and the idea of the thing was to sail away in the night quite quiet, and after that take up a position that would come across the enemy on the larboard tack, if so be as he made his appearance."

"Oh, you allude to watching the Hall, I presume?"

"Ay, ay, sir, just so; but would you believe it, Master Charlie, the admiral and the doctor got so blessed drunk that I could do nothing with 'em."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, they did indeed, and made all kinds of queer mistakes, so that the end of all that was, that the vampyre did come; but he got away again."

"He did come then; Sir Francis Varney came again after the house was presumed to be deserted?"

"He did, sir."

"That is very strange; what on earth could have been his object? This affair is most inexplicably mysterious. I hope the distance, Jack, is not far that you're taking me, for I'm incapable of enduring much fatigue."

"Not a great way, your honour; keep two points to the westward, and sail straight on; we'll soon come to port. My eye, won't there be a squall when you get in. I expect as Miss Flora will drop down as dead as a herring, for she doesn't think you're above the hatches."

"A good thought, Jack; my sudden appearance may produce alarm. When we reach the place of abode of the Bannerworths, you shall precede me, and prepare them in some measure for my reception."

"Very good, sir; do you see that there little white cottage a-head, there in the offing?"

"Yes, yes; is that the place?"

"Yes, your honour, that's the port to which we are bound."

"Well, then, Jack, you hasten a-head, and see Miss Flora, and be sure you prepare her gently and by degrees, you know, Jack, for my appearance, so that she shall not be alarmed."

"Ay, ay, sir, I understand; you wait here, and I'll go and do it; there would be a squall if you were to make your appearance, sir, all at once. She looks upon you as safely lodged in Davy's locker; she minds me, all the world, of a girl I knew at Portsmouth, called Bet Bumplush. She was one of your delicate little creatures as don't live long in this here world; no, blow me; when I came home from a eighteen months' cruise, once I seed her drinking rum out of a quart pot, so I says, 'Hilloa, what cheer?' And only to think now of the wonderful effect that there had upon her; with that very pot she gives the fellow as was standing treat a knobber on the head as lasted him three weeks. She was too good for this here world, she was, and too rummantic. 'Go to blazes,' she says to him, 'here's Jack Pringle come home.'"

"Very romantic indeed," said Charles.

"Yes, I believe you, sir; and that puts me in mind of Miss Flora and you."

"An extremely flattering comparison. Of course I feel much obliged."

"Oh, don't name it, sir. The British tar as can't oblige a feller-cretor is unworthy to tread the quarter-deck, or to bear a hand to the distress of a woman."

"Very well," said Charles. "Now, as we are here, precede me, if you please, and let me beg of you to be especially cautious in your manner of announcing me."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Jack: and away he walked towards the cottage, leaving Charles some distance behind.

Flora and the admiral were sitting together conversing. The old man, who loved her as if she had been a child of his own, was endeavouring, to the extent of his ability, to assuage the anguish of her thoughts, which at that moment chanced to be bent upon Charles Holland.

"Nevermind, my dear," he said; "he'll turn up some of these days, and when he does, I sha'n't forget to tell him that it was you who stood out for his honesty and truth, when every one else was against him, including myself, an old wretch that I was."

"Oh, sir, how could you for one moment believe that those letters could have been written by your nephew Charles? They carried, sir, upon the face of them their own refutation; and I'm only surprised that for one instant you, or any one who knew him, could have believed him capable of writing them."

"Avast, there," said the admiral; "that'll do. I own you got the better of the old sailor there. I think you and Jack Pringle were the only two persons who stood out from the first."

"Then I honour Jack for doing so."

"And here he is," said the admiral, "and you'd better tell him. The mutinous rascal! he wants all the honour he can get, as a set-off against his drunkenness and other bad habits."

Jack walked into the room, looked about him in silence for a moment, thrust his hands in his breeches pockets, and gave a long whistle.

"What's the matter now?" said the admiral.

"D — me, if Charles Holland ain't outside, and I've come to prepare you for the blessed shock," said Jack. "Don't faint either of you, because I'm only going to let you know it by degrees, you know."

A shriek burst from Flora's lips, and she sprung to the door of the apartment.

"What!" cried the admiral, "my nephew — my nephew Charles!

Jack, you rascal, if you're joking, it's the last joke you shall make in this world; and if it's true, I — I — I'm an old fool, that's all."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Jack; "didn't you know that afore?"

"Charles — Charles!" cried Flora. He heard the voice. Her name escaped his lips, and rang with a pleasant echo through the house.

In another moment he was in the room, and had clasped her to his breast.

"My own — my beautiful — my true!"

"Charles, dear Charles!"

"Oh, Flora, what have I not endured since last we met; but this repays me — more than repays me for all."

"What is the past now," cried Flora— "what are all its miseries placed against this happy, happy moment?"

"D — me, nobody thinks of me," said the admiral.

"My dear uncle," said Charles, looking over Flora's shoulder, as he still held her in his arms, "is that you?"

"Yes, yes, swab, it is me, and you know it; but give us your five, you mutinous vagabond; and I tell you what, I'll do you the greatest favour I've had an opportunity of doing you some time — I'll leave you alone, you dog. Come along, Jack."

"Ay, ay, sir," said Jack; and away they went out of the apartment.

And now those two loving hearts were alone — they who had been so long separated by malignant destiny, once again were heart to heart, looking into each other's faces with all the beaming tenderness of an affection of the truest, holiest character.

The admiral had done a favour to them both to leave them alone, although we much doubt whether his presence, or the presence of the whole world, would have had the effect of controlling one generous sentiment of noble feeling.

They would have forgotten everything but that they were together, and that once again each looked into the other's eyes with all the tenderness of a love purer and higher than ordinarily belongs to mortal affections.

Language was weak to give utterance to the full gust of happy feelings that now were theirs. It was ecstasy enough to feel, to know that the evil fortune which had so long separated them, depriving each existence of its sunniest aspect, was over. It was enough for Charles Holland to feel that she loved him still. It was enough for Flora Bannerworth to know, as she looked into his beaming countenance, that that love was not misplaced, but was met by feelings such as she herself would have dictated to be the inhabitants of the heart of him whom she would have chosen from the mass of mankind as her own.

"Flora — dear Flora," said Charles, "and you have never doubted me?"

"I've never doubted, Charles, Heaven or you. To doubt one would have been, to doubt both."

"Generous and best of girls, what must you have thought of my enforced absence! Oh! Flora, I was unjust enough to your truth to make my greatest pang the thought that you might doubt me, and cast me from your heart for ever."

"Ah! Charles, you ought to have known me better. I stood amid sore temptation to do so much. There were those who would have urged me on to think that you had cast me from your heart for ever. There were those ready and willing to place the worst construction upon your conduct, and with a devilish ingenuity to strive to make me participate in such a feeling; but, no, Charles, no — I loved you, and I trusted you, and I could not so far belie my own judgment as to tell you other than what you always seemed to my young fancy."

"And you are right, my Flora, right; and is it not a glorious triumph to see that love — that sentiment of passion — has enabled you to have so enduring and so noble a confidence in aught human?"

"Ay, Charles, it is the sentiment of passion, for our love has been more a sentiment than a passion. I would fain think that we had loved each other with an affection not usually known, appreciated, or understood, and so, in the vanity of my best affections, I would strive to think them something exclusive, and beyond the common feelings of humanity."

"And you are right, my Flora; such love as yours is the exception; there may be preferences, there may be passions, and there may be sentiments, but never, never, surely, was there a heart like yours."

"Nay, Charles, now you speak from a too poetical fancy; but is it possible that I have had you here so long, with your hand clasped in mine, and asked you not the causes of your absence?"

"Oh, Flora, I have suffered much — much physically, but more mentally. It was the thought of you that was at once the bane and the antidote of my existence."

"Indeed, Charles! Did I present myself in such contradictory colours to you?"

"Yes, dearest, as thus. When I thought of you, sometimes, in the deep seclusion of a dungeon, that thought almost goaded me to madness, because it brought with it the conviction — a conviction peculiar to a lover — that none could so effectually stand between you and all evil as myself."

"Yes, yes, Charles; most true."

"It seemed to me as if all the world in arms could not have protected you so well as this one heart, clad in the triple steel of its affections, could have shielded you from evil.”

“Ay, Charles; and then I was the bane of your existence, because I filled you with apprehension?”

“For a time, dearest; and then came the antidote; for when exhausted alike in mind and body — when lying helpless, with chains upon my limbs — when expecting death at every visit of those who had dragged me from light and from liberty, and from love; it was but the thought of thy beauty and thy affection that nerved me, and gave me a hope even amidst the cruellest disaster.”

“And then — and then, Charles?”

“You were my blessing, as you have ever been — as you are, and as you will ever be — my own Flora, my beautiful — my true!”

We won’t go so far as to say it is the fact; but, from a series of singular sounds which reached even to the passage of the cottage, we have our own private opinion to the effect, that Charles began kissing Flora at the top of her forehead, and never stopped, somehow or another, till he got down to her chin — no, not her chin — her sweet lips — he could not get past them. Perhaps it was wrong; but we can’t help it — we are faithful chroniclers. Reader, if you be of the sterner sex, what would you have done? — if of the gentler, what would you have permitted?

CHAPTER LXXV.

MUTUAL EXPLANATIONS, AND THE VISIT TO THE RUINS.

During the next hour, Charles informed Flora of the whole particulars of his forcible abduction; and to his surprise he heard, of course, for the first time, of those letters, purporting to be written by him, which endeavoured to give so bad an aspect to the fact of his sudden disappearance from Bannerworth Hall.

Flora would insist upon the admiral, Henry, and the rest of the family, hearing all that Charles had to relate concerning Mr. Marchdale; for well she knew that her mother, from early associations, was so far impressed in the favour of that hypocritical personage, that nothing but damning facts, much to his prejudice, would suffice to convince her of the character he really was.

But she was open to conviction, and when she really found what a villain she had cherished and given her confidence to, she shed abundance of tears, and blamed herself exceedingly as the cause of some of the misfortunes which had fallen upon her children.

“Very good,” said the admiral; “I ain’t surprised a bit. I knew he was a vagabond from the first time I clapped eyes upon him. There was a down look about the fellow’s figure-head that I didn’t like, and be hanged to him, but I never thought he would have gone the length he has done. And so you say you’ve got him safe in the ruins, Charles?”

“I have, indeed, uncle.”

“And then there let him remain, and a good place, too, for him.”

“No, uncle, no. I’m sure you speak without thought. I intend to release him in a few hours, when I have rested from my fatigues. He could not come to any harm if he were to go without food entirely for the time that I leave him; but even that he will not do, for there is bread and water in the dungeon."

"Bread and water! that's too good for him. But, however, Charles, when you go to let him out, I'll go with you, just to tell him what I think of him, the vagabond."

"He must suffer amazingly, for no doubt knowing well, as he does, his own infamous intentions, he will consider that if I were to leave him to starve to death, I should be but retailing upon him the injuries he would have inflicted upon me."

"The worst of it is," said the admiral, "I can't think what to do with him."

"Do nothing, uncle, but just let him go; it will be a sufficient punishment for such a man to feel that, instead of succeeding in his designs, he has only brought upon himself the bitterest contempt of those whom he would fain have injured. I can have no desire for revenge on such a man as Marchdale."

"You are right, Charles," said Flora; "let him go, and let him go with a feeling that he has acquired the contempt of those whose best opinions might have been his for a far less amount of trouble than he has taken to acquire their worst."

Excitement had kept up Charles to this point, but now, when he arose and expressed his intention of going to the ruins, for the purpose of releasing Marchdale, he exhibited such unequivocal symptoms of exhaustion and fatigue that neither his uncle nor Flora would permit him to go, so, in deference to them, he gave up the point, and commissioned the admiral and Jack, with Henry, to proceed to the place, and give the villain his freedom; little suspecting what had occurred since he had himself left the neighbourhood of those ruins.

Of course Charles Holland couldn't be at all accountable for the work of the elements, and it was not for him to imagine that when he left Marchdale in the dungeon that so awful a catastrophe as that we have recorded to the reader was to ensue.

The distance to the ruins was not so great from this cottage even as it was from Bannerworth Hall, provided those who went knew the most direct and best road to take; so that the admiral was not gone above a couple of hours, and when he returned he sat down and looked at Charles with such a peculiar expression, that the latter could not for the life of him tell what to make of it.

"Something has happened, uncle," he said, "I am certain; tell me at once what it is."

"Oh! nothing, nothing," said the admiral, "of any importance."

"Is that what you call your feelings?" said Jack Pringle. "Can't you tell him as there came on a squall last night, and the ruins have come in with a dab upon old Marchdale, crushing his guts, so that we smelt him as soon as we got nigh at band?"

"Good God!" said Charles, "has such a catastrophe occurred?"

"Yes, Charles, that's just about the catastrophe that has occurred. He's dead; and rum enough it is that it should happen on the very night that you escaped."

"Rum!" said Jack, suddenly; "my eye, who mentions rum? What a singular sort of liquor rum must be. I heard of a chap as used to be fond of it once on board a ship; I wonder if there's any in the house."

"No!" said the admiral; "but there's a fine pump of spring water outside if you feel a little thirsty, Jack; and I'll engage it shall do you more good than all the rum in the world."

"Uncle," said Charles, "I'm glad to hear you make that observation."

"What for?"

"Why, to deal candidly with you, uncle, Jack informed me that you had lately taken quite a predilection for drinking."

"Me!" cried the admiral; "why the infernal rascal, I've had to threaten him with his discharge a dozen times, at least, on that very ground, and no other."

"There's somebody calling me," said Jack. "I'm a coming! I'm a coming!" and, so he bolted out of the room, just in time to escape an inkstand, which the admiral caught up and flung after him.

"I'll strike that rascal off the ship's books this very day," muttered Admiral Bell. "The drunken vagabond, to pretend that I take anything, when all the while it's himself!"

"Well, well, I ought certainly to have suspected the quarter from whence the intelligence came; but he told it to me so circumstantially, and with such an apparent feeling of regret for the weakness into which he said you had fallen, that I really thought there might be some truth in it."

"The rascal! I've done with him from this moment; I have put up with too much from him for years past."

"I think now that you have given him a great deal of liberty, and that, with a great deal more he has taken, makes up an amount which you find it difficult to endure."

"And I won't endure it."

"Let me talk to him, and I dare say I shall be able to convince him that he goes too far, and when he finds that such is the case he will mend."

"Speak to him, if you like, but I have done with such a mutinous rascal, I have. You can take him into your service, if you like, till you get tired of him; and that won't be very long."

"Well, well, we shall see. Jack will apologise to you I have no doubt; and then I shall intercede for him, and advise you to give him another trial."

"If you get him into the apology, then there's no doubt about me giving him another trial. But I know him too well for that; he's as obstinate as a mule, he is, and you won't get a civil word out of him; but never mind that, now. I tell you what, Master Charley, it will take a good lot of roast beef to get up your good looks again."

"It will, indeed, uncle; and I require, now, rest, for I am thoroughly exhausted. The great privations I have undergone, and the amount of mental excitement which I have experienced, in consequence of the sudden and unexpected release from a fearful confinement, have greatly weakened all my energies. A few hours' sleep will make quite a different being of me."

"Well, my boy, you know best," returned the admiral; "and I'll take care, if you sleep till to-morrow, that you sha'n't be disturbed. So now be off to bed at once."

The young man shook his uncle's hand in a cordial manner, and then repaired to the apartment which had been provided for him.

Charles Holland did, indeed, stand in need of repose; and for the first time now for many days he laid down with serenity at his heart, and slept for many hours. And was there not now a great and a happy change in Flora Bannerworth! As if by magic, in a few short hours, much of the bloom of her before-fading beauty returned to her. Her step again recovered its springy lightness; again she smiled upon her mother, and suffered herself to talk of a happy future; for the dread even of the vampyre's visitations had faded into comparative insignificance against the heart's deep dejection which had come over her at the thought that Charles Holland must surely be murdered, or he would have contrived to come to her.

And what a glorious recompense she had now for the trusting confidence with which she had clung to a conviction of his truth! Was it not great, now, to feel that when he was condemned by others, and when strong and unimpeachable evidence seemed to be against him, she had clung to him and declared her faith in his honour, and wept for him instead of condemning?

Yes, Flora; you were of that order of noble minds that, where once confidence is given, give it fully and completely, and will not harbour a suspicion of the faith of the loved one, a happy disposition when verified, as in this instance, by an answering truthfulness.

But when such a heart trusts not with judgment — when that pure, exalted, and noble confidence is given to an object unworthy of it — then comes, indeed, the most fearful of all mental struggles; and if the fond heart, that has hugged to its inmost core so worthless a treasure, do not break in the effort to discard it, we may well be surprised at the amount of fortitude that has endured so much.

Although the admiral had said but little concerning the fearful end Marchdale had come to, it really did make some impression upon him; and, much as he held in abhorrence the villany of Marchdale's conduct, he would gladly in his heart have averted the fate from him that he had brought upon himself.

On the road to the ruins, he calculated upon taking a different kind of vengeance.

When they had got some distance from the cottage, Admiral Bell made a proposal to Henry to be his second while he fought Marchdale, but Henry would not hear of it for a moment.

"My dear sir," he said, "could I, do you think, stand by and see a valuable, revered, and a respected life like yours exposed to any hazard merely upon the chance of punishing a villain? No, no; Marchdale is too base now to be met in honourable encounter. If he is dealt with in any way let it be by the laws."

This was reasonable enough, and after some argument the admiral coincided in it, and then they began to wonder how, without Charles, they should be able to get an entrance to the dungeons, for it had been his intention originally, had he not felt so fatigued, to go with them.

As soon, however, as they got tolerably near to the ruins, they saw what had happened. Neither spoke, but they quickened their pace, and soon stood close to the mass of stone-work which now had assumed so different a shape to what it had a few short hours before.

It needed little examination to let them feel certain that whoever might have been in any of the underground dungeons must have been crushed to death.

"Heaven have mercy upon his soul!" said Henry.

"Amen!" said the admiral.

They both turned away, and for some time they neither of them spoke, for their thoughts were full of reflection upon the horrible death which Marchdale must have endured. At length the admiral said —

"Shall we tell this or not?"

"Tell it at once," said Henry; "let us have no secrets."

"Good. Then I will not make one you may depend. I only wish that while he was about it, Charley could have popped that rascal Varney as well in the dungeon, and then there would have been an end and a good riddance of them both."

CHAPTER LXXVI.

THE SECOND NIGHT-WATCH OF MR. CHILLINGWORTH AT THE HALL.

The military party in the morning left Bannerworth Hall, and the old place resumed its wonted quiet. But Dr. Chillingworth found it difficult to get rid of his old friend, the hangman, who seemed quite disposed to share his watch with him.

The doctor, without being at all accused of being a prejudiced man, might well object to the continued companionship of one, who, according to his own account, was decidedly no better than he should be, if he were half so good.

Moreover, it materially interfered with the proceedings of our medical friend, whose object was to watch the vampyre with all imaginable quietness and secrecy, in the event of his again visiting Bannerworth Hall.

"Sir," he said, to the hangman, "now that you have so obligingly related to me your melancholy history, I will not detain you."

"Oh, you are not detaining me."

"Yes, but I shall probably remain here for a considerable time."

"I have nothing to do; and one place is about the same as another to me."

"Well, then, if I must speak plainly, allow me to say, that as I came here upon a very important and special errand, I desire most particularly to be left alone. Do you understand me now?"

"Oh! ah! — I understand; you want me to go?"

"Just so."

"Well, then, Dr. Chillingworth, allow me to tell you, I have come here on a very special errand likewise."

"You have?"

"I have. I have been putting one circumstance to another, and drawing a variety of conclusions from a variety of facts, so that I have come to what I consider an important resolve, namely, to have a good look at Bannerworth Hall, and if I continue to like it as well as I do now, I should like to make the Bannerworth family an offer for the purchase of it."

"The devil you would! Why all the world seems mad upon the project of buying this old building, which really is getting into such a state of dilapidation, that it cannot last many years longer."

"It is my fancy."

"No, no; there is something more in this than meets the eye. The same reason, be it what may, that has induced Varney the vampyre to become so desirous of possessing the Hall, actuates you."

"Possibly."

"And what is that reason? You may as well be candid with me."

"Yes, I will, and am. I like the picturesque aspect of the place."

"No, you know that that is a disingenuous answer, that you know well. It is not the aspect of the old Hall that has charms for you. But I feel, only from your conduct, more than ever convinced, that some plot is going on, having the accomplishment of some great object as its climax, a something of which you have guessed."

"How much you are mistaken!"

"No, I am certain I am right; and I shall immediately advise the Bannerworth family to return, and to take up their abode again here, in order to put an end to the hopes which you, or Varney, or any one else may have, of getting possession of the place."

"If you were a man," said the hangman, "who cared a little more for yourself, and a little less for others, I would make a confidant of you."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I mean, candidly, that you are not selfish enough to be entitled to my confidence."

"That is a strange reason for withholding confidence from any man."

"It is a strange reason; but, in this case, a most abundantly true one. I cannot tell you what I would tell you, because I cannot make the agreement with you that I would fain make."

"You talk in riddles."

"To explain which, then, would be to tell my secret."

Dr. Chillingworth was, evidently, much annoyed, and yet he was in an extremely helpless condition; for as to forcing the hangman to leave the Hall, if he did not feel disposed to do so, that was completely out of the question, and could not be done. In the first place, he was a much more powerful man than the doctor, and in the second, it was quite contrary to all Mr. Chillingworth's habits, to engage in anything like personal warfare.

He could only, therefore, look his vexation, and say, —

"If you are determined upon remaining, I cannot help it; but, when some one, as there assuredly will, comes from the Bannerworths, here, to me, or I shall be under the necessity of stating candidly that you are intruding."

"Very good. As the morning air is keen, and as we now are not likely to be as good company to each other as we were, I shall go inside the house."

This was a proposition which the doctor did not like, but he was compelled to submit to it; and he saw, with feelings of uneasiness, the hangman make his way into the Hall by one of the windows.

Then Dr. Chillingworth sat down to think. Much he wondered what could be the secret of the great desire which Varney, Marchdale, and even this man had, all of them to be possessors of the old Hall.

That there was some powerful incentive he felt convinced, and he longed for some conversation with the Bannerworths, or with Admiral Bell, in order that he might state what had now taken place. That some one would soon come to him, in order to bring fresh provisions for the day, he was certain, and all he could do, in the interim, was, to listen to what the hangman was about in the Hall.

Not a sound, for a considerable time, disturbed the intense stillness of the place; but, now, suddenly, Mr. Chillingworth thought he heard a hammering, as if some one was at work in one of the rooms of the Hall.

"What can be the meaning of that?" he said, and he was about to proceed at once to the interior of the building, through the same window which had enabled the hangman to gain admittance, when he heard his own name pronounced by some one at the back of the garden fence, and upon casting his eyes in that direction, he, to his great relief, saw the admiral and Henry Bannerworth.

"Come round to the gate," said the doctor. "I am more glad to see you than I can tell you just now. Do not make more noise than you can help; but, come round to the gate at once."

They obeyed the injunction with alacrity, and when the doctor had admitted them, the admiral said, eagerly, —

"You don't mean to tell us that he is here?"

"No, no, not Varney; but he is not the only one who has taken a great affection for Bannerworth Hall; you may have another tenant for it, and I believe at any price you like to name."

"Indeed!"

"Hush! creep along close to the house, and then you will not be seen. There! do you hear that noise in the hall?"

"Why it sounds," said the admiral, "like the ship's carpenter at work."

"It does, indeed, sound like a carpenter; it's only the new tenant making, I dare say, some repairs."

"D — n his impudence!"

"Why, it certainly does look like a very cool proceeding, I must admit."

"Who, and what is he?"

"Who he is now, I cannot tell you, but he was once the hangman of London, at a time when I was practising in the metropolis, and so I became acquainted with him. He knows Sir Francis Varney, and, if I mistake not, has found out the cause of that mysterious personage's great attachment to Bannerworth Hall, and has found the reasons so cogent, that he has got up an affection for it himself."

"To me," said Henry, "all this is as incomprehensible as anything can possibly be. What on earth does it all mean?"

"My dear Henry," said the doctor, "will you be ruled by me?"

"I will be ruled by any one whom I know I can trust; for I am like a man groping his way in the dark."

"Then allow this gentleman who is carpentering away so pleasantly within the house, to do so to his heart's content, but don't let him leave it. Show yourselves now in the garden, he has sufficient prudence to know that three constitute rather fearful odds against one, and so he will be careful, and remain where he is. If he should come out, we need not let him go until we thoroughly ascertain what he has been about."

"You shall command the squadron, doctor," said the admiral, "and have it all your own way, you know, so here goes! Come along, Henry, and let's show ourselves; we are both armed too!"

They walked out into the centre of the garden, and they were soon convinced that the hangman saw them, for a face appeared at the window, and was as quickly withdrawn again.

"There," said the doctor, "now he knows he is a prisoner, and we may as well place ourselves in some position which commands a good view of the house, as well as of the garden gate, and so see if we cannot starve him out, though we may be starved out ourselves."

"Not at all!" said Admiral Bell, producing from his ample pockets various parcels,— "we came to bring you ample supplies."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; we have been as far as the ruins."

"Oh, to release Marchdale. Charles told me how the villain had fallen into the trap he had laid for him."

"He has, indeed, fallen into the trap, and it's one he won't easily get out of again. He's dead."

"Dead! — dead!"

"Yes; in the storm of last night the ruins have fallen, and he is by this time as flat as a pancake."

"Good God! and yet it is but a just retribution upon him. He would have assassinated poor Charles Holland in the cruelest and most cold-blooded manner, and, however we may shudder at the manner of his death, we cannot regret it."

"Except that he has escaped your friend the hangman," said the admiral.

"Don't call him my friend, if you please," said Dr. Chillingworth, "but, hark how he is working away, as if he really intended to carry the house away piece by piece, as opportunity may serve, if you will not let it to him altogether, just as it stands."

"Confound him! he is evidently working on his own account," said the admiral, "or he would not be half so industrious."

There was, indeed, a tremendous amount of hammering and noise, of one sort and another, from the house, and it was quite clear that the hangman was too heart and soul in his work, whatever may have been the object of it, to care who was listening to him, or to what conjecture he gave rise.

He thought probably that he could but be stopped in what he was about, and, until he was so, that he might as well go on.

And on he went, with a vengeance, vexing the admiral terribly, who proposed so repeatedly to go into the house and insist upon knowing what he was about, that his, wishes were upon the point of being conceded to by Henry, although they were combatted by the doctor, when, from the window at which he had entered, out stepped the hangman.

"Good morning, gentlemen! good morning," he said, and he moved towards the garden gate. "I will not trouble you any longer. Good morning!"

"Not so fast," said the admiral, "or we may bring you up with a round turn, and I never miss my mark when I can see it, and I shall not let it get out of sight, you may depend."

He drew a pistol from his pocket, as he spoke, and pointed it at the hangman, who, thereupon paused and said: —

"What! am I not to be permitted to go in peace? Why it was but a short time since the doctor was quarrelling with me because I did not go, and now it seems that I am to be shot if I do."

“Yes,” said the admiral, “that’s it.”

“Well! but,—”

“You dare,” said he, “stir another inch towards the gate, and you are a dead man!”

The hangman hesitated a moment, and looked at Admiral Bell; apparently the result of the scrutiny was, that he would keep his word, for he suddenly turned and dived in at the window again without saying another word.

“Well; you have certainly stopped him from leaving,” said Henry; “but what’s to be done now?”

“Let him be, let him be,” said the doctor; “he must come out again, for there are no provisions in the place, and he will be starved out.”

“Hush! what is that?” said Henry.

There was a very gentle ring at the bell which hung over the garden gate.

“That’s an experiment, now, I’ll be bound,” said the doctor, “to ascertain if any one is here; let us hide ourselves, and take no notice.”

The ring in a few moments was repeated, and the three confederates hid themselves effectually behind some thick laurel bushes and awaited with expectation what might next ensue.

Not long had they occupied their place of concealment, before they heard a heavy fall upon the gravelled pathway, immediately within the gate, as if some one had clambered to the top from the outside, and then jumped down.

That this was the case the sound of footsteps soon convinced them, and to their surprise as well as satisfaction, they saw through the interstices of the laurel bush behind which they were concealed, no less a personage that Sir Francis Varney himself.

"It is Varney," said Henry.

"Yes, yes," whispered the doctor. "Let him be, do not move for any consideration, for the first time let him do just what he likes."

"D — n the fellow!" said the admiral; "there are some points about him that like, after all, and he's quite an angel compared to that rascal Marchdale."

"He is, — he saved Charles."

"He did, and not if I know it shall any harm come to him, unless he were terribly to provoke it by becoming himself the assailant."

"How sad he looks!"

"Hush! he comes nearer; it is not safe to talk. Look at him."

CHAPTER LXXVII.

VARNEY IN THE GARDEN. — THE COMMUNICATION OF DR. CHILLINGWORTH TO THE ADMIRAL AND HENRY.

Kind reader, it was indeed Varney who had clambered over the garden wall, and thus made his way into the garden of Bannerworth Hall; and what filled those who looked at him with the most surprise was, that he did not seem in any particular way to make a secret of his presence, but walked on with an air of boldness which either arose from a feeling of absolute impunity, from his thinking there was no one there, or from an audacity which none but he could have compassed.

As for the little party that was there assembled, and who looked upon him, they seemed thunderstricken by his presence; and Henry, probably, as well as the admiral, would have burst out into some sudden exclamation, had they not been restrained by Dr. Chillingworth, who, suspecting that they might in some way give an alarm, hastened to speak first, saying in a whisper, —

"For Heaven's sake, be still, fortune, you see, favours us most strangely. Leave Varney alone. You have no other mode whatever of discovering what he really wants at Bannerworth Hall."

"I am glad you have spoken," said Henry, as he drew a long breath. "If you had not, I feel convinced that in another moment I should have rushed forward and confronted this man who has been the very bane of my life."

"And so should I," said the admiral; "although I protest against any harm being done to him, on account of some sort of good feeling that he has displayed, after all, in releasing Charles from that dungeon in which Marchdale has perished."

"At the moment," said Henry, "I had forgotten that; but I will own that his conduct has been tinctured by a strange and wild kind of generosity at times, which would seem to bespeak, at the bottom of his heart, some good feelings, the impulses of which were only quenched by circumstances."

"That is my firm impression of him, I can assure you," said Dr. Chillingworth.

They watched Varney now from the leafy covert in which they were situated, and, indeed, had they been less effectually concealed, it did not seem likely that the much dreaded vampyre would have perceived them; for not only did he make no effort at concealment himself, but he took no pains to see if any one was watching him in his progress to the house.

His footsteps were more rapid than they usually were, and there was altogether an air and manner about him, as if he were moved to some purpose which of itself was sufficiently important to submerge in its consequences all ordinary risks and all ordinary cautions.

He tried several windows of the house along that terrace of which we have more than once had occasion to speak, before he found one that opened; but at length he did succeed, and stepped at once into the Hall, leaving those, who now for some moments in silence had regarded his movements, to lose themselves in a fearful sea of conjecture as to what could possibly be his object.

"At all events," said the admiral, "I'm glad we are here. If the vampyre should have a fight with that other fellow, that we heard doing such a lot of carpentering work in the house, we ought, I think, to see fair play."

"I, for one," said the doctor, "would not like to stand by and see the vampyre murdered; but I am inclined to think he is a good match for any mortal opponent."

"You may depend he is," said Henry.

"But how long, doctor, do you purpose that we should wait here in such a state of suspense as to what is going on within the house?"

"I hope not long; but that something will occur to make us have food for action. Hark! what is that?"

There was a loud crash within the building, as of broken glass. It sounded as if some window had been completely dashed in; but although they looked carefully over the front of the building, they could see no evidences of such a thing having happened, and were compelled, consequently, to come to the opinion that Varney and the other man must have met in one of the back rooms, and that the crash of glass had arisen from some personal conflict in which they had engaged.

"I cannot stand this," said Henry.

"Nay, nay," said the doctor; "be still, and I will tell you something, than which there can be no more fitting time than this to reveal it."

"Refers it to the vampyre?"

"It does — it does."

"Be brief, then; I am in an agony of impatience."

"It is a circumstance concerning which I can be brief; for, horrible as it is, I have no wish to dress it in any adventitious colours. Sir Francis Varney, although under another name, is an old acquaintance of mine."

"Acquaintance!" said Henry.

"Why, you don't mean to say you are a vampyre?" said the admiral; "or that he has ever visited you?"

"No; but I knew him. From the first moment that I looked upon him in this neighbourhood, I thought I knew him; but the circumstance which induced me to think so was of so terrific a character, that I made some efforts to chase it from my mind. It has, however, grown upon me day by day, and, lately, I have had proof sufficient to convince me of his identity with one whom I first saw under most singular circumstances of romance."

"Say on, — you are agitated."

"I am, indeed. This revelation has several times, within the last few days, trembled on my lips, but now you shall have it; because you ought to know all that it is possible for me to tell you of him who has caused you so serious an amount of disturbance."

"You awaken, doctor," said Henry, "all my interest."

"And mine, too," remarked the admiral. "What can it be all about? and where, doctor, did you first see this Varney the vampyre?"

"In his coffin."

Both the admiral and Henry gave starts of surprise as, with one accord, they exclaimed, —

"Did you say coffin?"

"Yes: I tell you, on my word of honour, that the first time in my life I saw ever Sir Francis Varney, was in his coffin."

"Then he is a vampyre, and there can be no mistake," said the admiral.

"Go on, I pray you, doctor, go on," said Henry, anxiously.

"I will. The reason why he became the inhabitant of a coffin was simply this: — he had been hanged, — executed at the Old Bailey, in London, before ever I set eyes upon that strange countenance of his. You know that I was practising surgery at the London schools some years ago, and that, consequently, as I commenced the profession rather late in life, I was extremely anxious to do the most I could in a very short space of time."

"Yes — yes."

"Arrived, then, with plenty of resources, which I did not, as the young men who affected to be studying in the same classes as myself, spend in the pursuit of what they considered life in London, I was indefatigable in my professional labours, and there was nothing connected with them which I did not try to accomplish.

"At that period, the difficulty of getting a subject for anatomization was very great, and all sorts of schemes had to be put into requisition to accomplish so desirable, and, indeed, absolutely necessary a purpose.

"I became acquainted with the man who, I have told you, is in the Hall, at present, and who then filled the unenviable post of public executioner. It so happened, too, that I had read a learned treatise, by a Frenchman, who had made a vast number of experiments with galvanic and other apparatus, upon persons who had come to death in different ways, and, in one case, he asserted that he had actually recovered a man who had been hanged, and he had lived five weeks afterwards.

"Young as I then was, in comparison to what I am now, in my profession, this inflamed my imagination, and nothing seemed to me so desirable as getting hold of some one who had only recently been put to death, for the purpose of trying what I could do in the way of attempting a resuscitation of the subject. It was precisely for this reason that I sought out the public executioner, and made his acquaintance, whom every one else shunned, because I thought he might assist me by handing over to me the body of some condemned and executed man, upon whom I could try my skill.

"I broached the subject to him, and found him not averse. He said, that if I would come forward and claim, as next of kin and allow the body to be removed to his house, the body of the criminal who was to be executed the first time, from that period, that he could give me a hint that I should have no real next of kin opponents, he would throw every facility in my way.

"This was just what I wanted; and, I believe, I waited with impatience for some poor wretch to be hurried to his last account by the hands of my friend, the public executioner.

"At length a circumstance occurred which favoured my designs most effectually, — A man was apprehended for a highway robbery of a most aggravated character. He was tried, and the evidence against him was so conclusive, that the defence which was attempted by his counsel, became a mere matter of form.

"He was convicted, and sentenced. The judge told him not to flatter himself with the least notion that mercy would be extended to him. The crime of which he had been found guilty was on the increase it was highly necessary to make some great public example, to show evil doers that they could not, with impunity, thus trample upon the liberty of the subject, and had suddenly, just as it were, in the very nick of time, committed the very crime, attended with all the aggravated circumstances which made it easy and desirable to hang him out of hand.

"He heard his sentence, they tell me unmoved. I did not see him, but he was represented to me as a man of a strong, and well-knit frame, with rather a strange, but what some would have considered a handsome expression of countenance, inasmuch as that there was an expression of much haughty resolution depicted on it.

"I flew to my friend the executioner.

"'Can you,' I said, 'get me that man's body, who is to be hanged for the highway robbery, on Monday?'

"'Yes,' he said; 'I see nothing to prevent it. Not one soul has offered to claim even common companionship with him, — far less kindred. I think if you put in your claim as a cousin, who will bear the expense of his decent burial, you will have every chance of getting possession of the body.'

"I did not hesitate, but, on the morning before the execution, I called upon one of the sheriffs.

"I told him that the condemned man, I regretted to say, was related to me; but as I knew nothing could be done to save him on the trial, I had abstained from coming forward; but that as I did not like the idea of his being rudely interred by the authorities, I had come forward to ask for the body, after the execution should have taken place, in order that I might, at all events, bestow upon it, in some sequestered spot, a decent burial, with all the rites of the church.

"The sheriff was a man not overburthened with penetration. He applauded my pious feelings, and actually gave me, without any inquiry, a written order to receive the body from the hands of the hangman, after it had hung the hour prescribed by the law.

"I did not, as you may well suppose, wish to appear more in the business than was absolutely necessary; but I gave the executioner the sheriff's order for the body, and he promised that he would get a shell ready to place it in, and four stout men to carry it at once to his house, when he should cut it down.

"'Good!' I said; 'and now as I am not a little anxious for the success of my experiment, do you not think that you can manage so that the fall of the criminal shall not be so sudden as to break his neck?'

"'I have thought of that,' he said, 'and I believe that I can manage to let him down gently, so that he shall die of suffocation, instead of having his neck put out of joint. I will do my best."

"'If you can but succeed in that,' said I, for I was quite in a state of mania upon the subject, 'I shall be much indebted to you, and will double the amount of money which I have already promised.'

"This was, as I believed it would be, a powerful stimulus to him to do all in his power to meet my wishes, and he took, no doubt, active measures to accomplish all that I desired.

"You can imagine with what intense impatience I waited the result. He resided in an old ruinous looking house, a short distance on the Surrey side of the river, and there I had arranged all my apparatus for making experiments upon the dead man, in an apartment the windows of which commanded a view of the entrance."

"I was completely ready by half-past eight, although a moment's consideration of course told me that at least another hour must elapse before there could be the least chance of my seeing him arrive, for whom I so anxiously longed.

"I can safely say so infatuated was I upon the subject, that no fond lover ever looked with more nervous anxiety for the arrival of the chosen object of his heart, than I did for that dead body, upon which I proposed to exert all the influences of professional skill, to recall back the soul to its earthly dwelling-place.

"At length I heard the sound of wheels. I found that my friend the hangman had procured a cart, in which he brought the coffin, that being a much quicker mode of conveyance than by bearers so that about a quarter past nine o'clock the vehicle, with its ghastly content, stopped at the door of his house.

"In my impatience I ran down stairs to meet that which ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have gone some distance to avoid the sight of, namely, a corpse, livid and fresh from the gallows. I, however, heralded it as a great gift, and already, in imagination I saw myself imitating the learned Frenchman, who had published such an elaborate treatise on the mode of restoring life under all sorts of circumstances, to those who were already pronounced by unscientific persons to be dead.

"To be sure, a sort of feeling had come over me at times, knowing as I did that the French are a nation that do not scruple at all to sacrifice truth on the altar of vanity, that it might be after all a mere rhodomontade; but, however, I could only ascertain so much by actually trying, so the suspicion that such might, by a possibility, be the end of the adventure, did not deter me.

"I officiously assisted in having the coffin brought into the room where I had prepared everything that was necessary in the conduction of my grand experiment; and then, when no one was there with me but my friend the executioner, I, with his help, the one of us taking the head and the other the feet, took the body from the coffin and laid it upon a table.

"Hastily I placed my hand upon the region of the heart, and to my great delight I found it still warm. I drew off the cap that covered the face, and then, for the first time, my eyes rested upon the countenance of him who now calls himself — Heaven only knows why — Sir Francis Varney."

"Good God!" said Henry, "are you certain?"

"Quite."

"It may have been some other rascal like him," said the admiral.

"No, I am quite sure now; I have, as I have before mentioned to you, tried to get out of my own conviction upon the subject, but I have been actually assured that he is the man by the very hangman himself."

"Go on, go on! Your tale certainly is a strange one, and I do not say it either to compliment you or to cast a doubt upon you, but, except from the lips of an old, and valued friend, such as you yourself are, I should not believe it.'

"I am not surprised to hear you say that," replied the doctor; "nor should I be offended even now if you were to entertain a belief that I might, after all, be mistaken."

"No, no; you would not be so positive upon the subject, I well know, if there was the slightest possibility of an error."

"Indeed I should not."

"Let us have the sequel, then."

"It is this. I was most anxious to effect an immediate resuscitation, if it were possible, of the hanged man. A little manipulation soon convinced me that the neck was not broken, which left me at once every thing to hope for. The hangman was more prudent than I was, and before I commenced my experiments, he said, —

"'Doctor, have you duly considered what you mean to do with this fellow, in case you should be successful in restoring him to life?'

"'Not I,' said I.

"'Well,' he said, 'you can do as you like; but I consider that it is really worth thinking of.'

"I was headstrong on the matter, and could think of nothing but the success or the non-success, in a physiological point of view, of my plan for restoring the dead to life; so I set about my experiments without any delay, and with a completeness and a vigour that promised the most completely successful results, if success could at all be an ingredient in what sober judgment would doubtless have denominated a mad-headed and wild scheme.

"For more than half an hour I tried in vain, by the assistance of the hangman, who acted under my directions. Not the least symptom of vitality presented itself; and he had a smile upon his countenance, as he said in a bantering tone, —

"'I am afraid, sir, it is much easier to kill than to restore their patients with doctors.'

"Before I could make him any reply, for I felt that his observation had a good amount of truth in it, joined to its sarcasm the hanged man uttered a loud scream, and opened his eyes.

"I must own I was myself rather startled; but I for some moments longer continued the same means which had produced such an effect, when suddenly he sprang up and laid hold of me, at the same time exclaiming, —

"'Death, death, where is the treasure?'

"I had fully succeeded — too fully; and while the executioner looked on with horror depicted in his countenance, I fled from the room and the house, taking my way home as fast as I possibly could.

"A dread came over me, that the restored man would follow me if he should find out, to whom it was he was indebted for the rather questionable boon of a new life. I packed up what articles I set the greatest store by, bade adieu to London, and never have I since set foot within that city."

"And you never met the man you had so resuscitated?"

"Not till I saw Varney, the vampyre; and, as I tell you, I am now certain that he is the man."

"That is the strangest yarn that ever I heard," said the admiral.

“A most singular circumstance,” said Henry.

“You may have noticed about his countenance,” said Dr. Chillingworth, “a strange distorted look?”

“Yes, yes.”

“Well, that has arisen from a spasmodic contraction of the muscles, in consequence of his having been hanged. He will never lose it, and it has not a little contributed to give him the horrible look he has, and to invest him with some of the seeming outward attributes of the vampyre.”

“And that man who is now in the hall with him, doctor,” said Henry, “is the very hangman who executed him?”

“The same. He tells me that after I left, he paid attention to the restored man, and completed what I had nearly done. He kept him in his house for a time, and then made a bargain with him, for a large sum of money per annum, all of which he has regularly been paid, although he tells me he has no more idea where Varney gets it, than the man in the moon.”

“It is very strange; but, hark! do you not hear the sound of voices in angry altercation?”

“Yes, yes, they have met. Let us approach the windows now. We may chance to hear something of what they say to each other.”

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

THE ALTERCATION BETWEEN VARNEY AND THE EXECUTIONER IN THE HALL. — THE MUTUAL AGREEMENT.

There was certainly a loud wrangling in the Hall, just as the doctor finished his most remarkable revelation concerning Sir Francis Varney, a revelation which by no means attacked the fact of his being a vampyre or not; but rather on the contrary, had a tendency to confirm any opinion that might arise from the circumstance of his being restored to life after his execution, favourable to that belief.

They all three now carefully approached the windows of the Hall, to listen to what was going on, and after a few moments they distinctly heard the voice of the hangman, saying in loud and rather angry accents, —

"I do not deny but that you have kept your word with me — our bargain has been, as you say, a profitable one: but, still I cannot see why that circumstance should give you any sort of control over my actions."

"But what do you here?" said Varney, impatiently.

"What do you?" cried the other.

"Nay, to ask another question, is not to answer mine. I tell you that I have special and most important business in this house; you can have no motive but curiosity."

"Can I not, indeed? What, too, if I have serious and important business here?"

"Impossible."

"Well, I may as easily use such a term as regards what you call important business, but here I shall remain."

"Here you shall not remain."

"And will you make the somewhat hazardous attempt to force me to leave?"

"Yes, much as I dislike lifting my hand against you, I must do so; I tell you that I must be alone in this house. I have most special reasons — reasons which concern my continued existence.

"Your continued existence you talk of. — Tell me, now, how is it that you have acquired so frightful a reputation in this neighbourhood? Go where I will, the theme of conversation is Varney, the vampyre! and it is implicitly believed that you are one of those dreadful characters that feed upon the life-blood of others, only now and then revisiting the tomb to which you ought long since to have gone in peace."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; what, in the name of all that's inexplicable, has induced you to enact such a character?"

"Enact it! you say. Can you, then, from all you have heard of me, and from all you know of me, not conceive it possible that I am not enacting any such character? Why may it not be real? Look at me. Do I look like one of the inhabitants of the earth?"

"In sooth, you do not."

"And yet I am, as you see, upon it. Do not, with an affected philosophy, doubt all that may happen to be in any degree repugnant to your usual experiences."

"I am not one disposed to do so; nor am I prepared to deny that such dreadful beings may exist as vampyres. However, whether or not you belong to so frightful a class of creatures, I do not intend to leave here; but, I will make an agreement with you."

Varney was silent; and after a few moments' pause, the other exclaimed, —

"There are people, even now, watching the place, and no doubt you have been seen coming into it."

"No, no, I was satisfied no one was here but you."

"Then you are wrong. A Doctor Chillingworth, of whom you know something, is here; and him, you have said, you would do no harm to, even to save your life."

"I do know him. You told me that it was to him that I was mainly indebted for my mere existence; and although I do not consider human life to be a great boon, I cannot bring myself to raise my hand against the man who, whatever might have been the motives for the deed, at all events, did snatch me from the grave."

"Upon my word," whispered the admiral, "there is something about that fellow that I like, after all."

"Hush!" said Henry, "listen to them. This would all have been unintelligible to us, if you had not related to us what you have."

"I have just told you in time," said Chillingworth, "it seems."

"Will you, then," said the hangman, "listen to proposals?"

"Yes," said Varney.

"Come along, then, and I will show you what I have been about; and I rather think you have already a shrewd guess as to my motive. This way — this way."

They moved off to some other part of the mansion, and the sound of their voices gradually died away, so that after all, the friends had not got the least idea of what that motive was, which still induced the vampyre and the hangman, rather than leave the other on the premises, to make an agreement to stay with each other.

"What's to be done now?" said Henry.

“Wait,” said Dr. Chillingworth, “wait, and watch still. I see nothing else that can be done with any degree of safety.”

“But what are we to wait for?” said the admiral.

“By waiting, we shall, perhaps, find out,” was the doctor’s reply; “but you may depend that we never shall by interfering.”

“Well, well, be it so. It seems that we have no other resource. And when either or both of those fellows make their appearance, and seem about to leave, what is to be done with them?”

“They must be seized then, and in order that that may be done without any bloodshed, we ought to have plenty of force here. Henry, could you get your brother, and Charles, if he be sufficiently recovered, to come?”

“Certainly, and Jack Pringle.”

“No,” said the admiral, “no Jack Pringle for me; I have done with him completely, and I have made up my mind to strike him off the ship’s books, and have nothing more to do with him.”

“Well, well,” added the doctor, “we will not have him, then; and it is just as well, for, in all likelihood, he would come drunk, and we shall be — let me see — five strong without him, which ought to be enough to take prisoners two men.”

“Yes,” said Henry, “although one of them may be a vampyre.”

“That makes no difference,” said the admiral. “I’d as soon take a ship manned with vampyres as with Frenchmen.”

Henry started off upon his errand, certainly leaving the admiral and the doctor in rather a critical situation while he was gone; for had Varney the vampyre and the hangman chosen, they could certainly easily have overcome so inefficient a force.

The admiral would, of course, have fought, and so might the doctor, as far as his hands would permit him; but if the others had really been intent upon mischief, they could, from their downright superior physical power, have taken the lives of the two that were opposed to them.

But somehow the doctor appeared to have a great confidence in the affair. Whether that confidence arose from what the vampyre had said with regard to him, or from any hidden conviction of his own that they would not yet emerge from the Hall, we cannot say; but certain it is, he waited the course of events with great coolness.

No noise for some time came from the house; but then the sounds, as if workmen were busy within it, were suddenly resumed, and with more vigour than before.

It was nearly two hours before Henry made the private signal which had been agreed upon as that which should proclaim his return; and then he and his brother, with Charles, who, when he heard of the matter, would, notwithstanding the persuasions of Flora to the contrary, come, got quietly over the fence at a part of the garden which was quite hidden from the house by abundant vegetation, and the whole three of them took up a position that tolerably well commanded a view of the house, while they were themselves extremely well hidden behind a dense mass of evergreens.

"Did you see that rascal, Jack Pringle?" said the admiral.

"Yes," said Henry; "he is drunk."

"Ah, to be sure."

"And we had no little difficulty in shaking him off. He suspected where we were going; but I think, by being peremptory, we got fairly rid of him."

"The vagabond! if he comes here, I'll brain him, I will, the swab. Why, lately he's done nothing but drink. That's the way with him.

He'll go on sometimes for a year and more, and not take more than enough to do him good, and then all at once, for about six or eight weeks, he does nothing but drink."

"Well, well, we can do without him," said Henry.

"Without him! I should think so. Do you hear those fellows in the Hall at work? D — n me, if I haven't all of a sudden thought what the reason of it all is."

"What — what?" said the doctor, anxiously.

"Why, that rascal Varney, you know, had his house burnt down."

"Yes; well?"

"Yes, well. I dare say he didn't think it well. But, however, he no doubt wants another; so, you see, my idea is, that he's stealing the material from Bannerworth Hall."

"Oh, is that your notion?"

"Yes, and a very natural one, I think, too, Master Doctor, whatever you may think of it. Come, now, have you a better?"

"Oh, dear, no, certainly not; but I have a notion that something to eat would comfort the inward man much."

"And so would something to drink, blow me if it wouldn't," said Jack Pringle, suddenly making his appearance.

The admiral made a rush upon him; but he was restrained by the others, and Jack, with a look of triumph, said, —

"Why, what's amiss with you now? I ain't drunk now. Come, come, you have something dangerous in the wind, I know, so I've made up my mind to be in it, so don't put yourself out of the way. If you think I don't know all about it, you are mistaken, for I do. The vampyre is in the house yonder, and I'm the fellow to tackle him, I believe you, my boys."

"Good God!" said the doctor, "what shall we do?"

"Nothing," said Jack, as he took a bottle from his pocket and applied the neck of it to his lips— "nothing — nothing at all."

"There's something to begin with," said the admiral, as with his stick he gave the bottle a sudden blow that broke it and spilt all its contents, leaving Jack petrified, with the bit of the neck of it still in his mouth.

"My eye, admiral," he said, "was that done like a British seaman? My eye — was that the trick of a lubber, or of a thorough-going first-rater? first-rater? My eye—"

"Hold your noise, will you; you are not drunk yet, and I was determined that you should not get so, which you soon would with that rum-bottle, if I had not come with a broadside across it. Now you may stay; but, mark me, you are on active service now, and must do nothing without orders."

"Ay, ay, your honour," said Jack, as he dropped the neck of the bottle, and looked ruefully upon the ground, from whence arose the aroma of rum— "ay, ay; but it's a hard case, take it how you will, to have your grog stopped; but, d — n it, I never had it stopped yet when it was in my mouth."

Henry and Charles could not forbear a smile at Jack's discomfiture, which, however, they were very glad of, for they knew full well his failing, and that in the course of another half hour he would have been drunk, and incapable of being controlled, except, as on some former occasions, by the exercise of brute force.

But Jack was evidently displeased, and considered himself to be grievously insulted, which, after all, was the better, inasmuch as, while he was brooding over his wrongs, he was quiet; when, otherwise, it might have been a very difficult matter to make him so.

They partook of some refreshments, and, as the day advanced, the brothers Bannerworth, as well as Charles Holland, began to get very anxious upon the subject of the proceedings of Sir Francis Varney in the Hall.

They conversed in low tones, exhausting every, as they considered, possible conjecture to endeavour to account for his mysterious predilection for that abode, but nothing occurred to them of a sufficiently probable motive to induce them to adopt it as a conclusion.

They more than suspected Dr. Chillingworth, because he was so silent, and hazarded no conjecture at all of knowing something, or of having formed to himself some highly probable hypothesis upon the subject; but they could not get him to agree that such was the case.

When they challenged him upon the subject, all he would say was, —

"My good friends, you perceive that, there is a great mystery somewhere, and I do hope that to-night it will be cleared up satisfactorily."

With this they were compelled to be satisfied; and now the soft and sombre shades of evening began to creep over the scene, enveloping all objects in the dimness and repose of early night.

The noise from the house had ceased, and all was profoundly still. But more than once Henry fancied he heard footsteps outside the garden.

He mentioned his suspicions to Charles Holland, who immediately said, —

"The same thing has come to my ears."

"Indeed! Then it must be so; we cannot both of us have merely imagined such a thing. You may depend that this place is beleaguered in some way, and that to-night will be productive of events which will throw a great light upon the affairs connected with this vampyre that have hitherto baffled conjecture."

"Hush!" said Charles; "there, again; I am quite confident I heard a sound as of a broken twig outside the garden-wall. The doctor and the admiral are in deep discussion about something, — shall we tell them?"

"No; let us listen, as yet."

They bent all their attention to listening, inclining their ears towards the ground, and, after a few moments, they felt confident that more than one footstep was creeping along, as cautiously as possible, under the garden wall. After a few moments' consultation, Henry made up his mind — he being the best acquainted with the localities of the place — to go and reconnoitre, so he, without saying anything to the doctor or the admiral, glided from where he was, in the direction of a part of the fence which he knew he could easily scale.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

THE VAMPYRE'S DANGER. — THE LAST REFUGE. — THE RUSE OF HENRY BANNERWORTH.

Yet knowing to what deeds of violence the passions of a lawless mob will sometimes lead them, and having the experience of what had been attempted by the alarmed and infuriated populace on a former occasion, against the Hall, Henry Bannerworth was, reasonably enough, not without his fears that something might occur of a nature yet highly dangerous to the stability of his ancient house.

He did not actually surmount the fence, but he crept so close to it, that he could get over in a moment, if he wished; and, if any one should move or speak on the other side, he should be quite certain to hear them.

For a few moments all was still, and then suddenly he heard some one say, in a low voice,

"Hist! hist! did you hear nothing?"

"I thought I did," said another; "but I now am doubtful."

"Listen again."

"What," thought Henry, "can be the motives of these men lying secreted here? It is most extraordinary what they can possibly want, unless they are brewing danger for the Hall."

Most cautiously now he raised himself, so that his eyes could just look over the fence, and then, indeed, he was astonished.

He had expected to see two or three persons, at the utmost; what was his surprise! to find a compact mass of men crouching down under the garden wall, as far as his eye could reach.

For a few moments, he was so surprised, that he continued to gaze on, heedless of the danger there might be from a discovery that he was playing the part of a spy upon them.

When, however, his first sensations of surprise were over, he cautiously removed to his former position, and, just as he did, so, he heard those who had before spoken, again, in low tones, breaking the stillness of the night.

“I am resolved upon it,” said one; “I am quite determined. I will, please God, rid the country of that dreadful man.”

“Don’t call him a man,” said the oilier.

“Well, well; it is a wrong name to apply to a vampyre.”

“It is Varney, after all, then,” said Henry. Bannerworth, to himself;— “it is his life that they seek. What can be done to save him? — for saved he shall be if I can compass such an object. I feel that there is yet a something in his character which is entitled to consideration, and he shall not be savagely murdered while I have an arm to raise in his defence. But if anything is now to be done, it must be done by stratagem, for the enemy are, by far, in too great force to be personally combatted with.”

Henry resolved to take the advice of his friends, and with that view he went silently and quietly back to where they were, and communicated to them the news that he had so unexpectedly discovered.

They were all much surprised, and then the doctor said,

“You may depend, that since the disappointment of the mob in the destruction of this place, they have had their eye upon Varney. He has been dogged here by some one, and then by degrees that assemblage has sought the spot.”

“He’s a doomed man, then,” remarked the admiral; “for what can save him from a determined number of persons, who, by main force, will overcome us, let us make what stand we may in his defence."

"Is there no hiding-place in the house," said Charles, "where you might, after warring him of his danger, conceal him?"

"There are plenty, but of what avail would that be, if they burn down the Hall, which in all probability they will!"

"None, certainly."

"There is but one chance," said Henry, "and that is to throw them off the scent, and induce them to think that he whom they seek is not here; I think that may possibly be done by boldness."

"But how!"

"I will go among them and make the effort."

He at once left the friends, for he felt that there might be no time to lose, and hastening to the same part of the wall, ever which he had looked so short a time before, he clambered over it, and cried, in a loud voice,

"Stop the vampyre! stop the vampyre!"

"Where, where?" shouted a number of persons at once, turning their eyes eagerly towards the spot where Henry stood.

"There, across the fields," cried Henry. "I have lain in wait for him long; but he has eluded me, and is making his way again towards the old ruins, where I am sure he has some hiding-place that he thinks will elude all search. There, I see his dusky form speeding onwards."

"Come on," cried several; "to the ruins! to the ruins! We'll smoke him out if he will not come by fair means: we must have him, dead or alive."

"Yes, to the ruins!" shouted the throng of persons, who up to this time had preserved so cautious a silence, and, in a few moments more, Henry Bannerworth had the satisfaction of finding that his ruse had been perfectly successful, for Bannerworth Hall and its vicinity were completely deserted, and the mob, in a straggling mass, went over hedge and ditch towards those ruins in which there was nothing to reward the exertions they might choose to make in the way of an exploration of them, but the dead body of the villain Marchdale, who had come there to so dreadful, but so deserved a death.

CHAPTER LXXX.

THE DISCOVERY OF THE BODY OF MARCHDALE IN THE RUINS BY THE MOB. — THE BURNING OF THE CORPSE. — THE MURDER OF THE HANGMAN.

The mob reached the ruins of Bannerworth Hall, and crowded round it on all sides, with the view of ascertaining if a human creature, dead or alive, were there; various surmises were afloat, and some were for considering that everybody but themselves, or their friends, must be nothing less than vampyres. Indeed, a strange man, suddenly appearing among them, would have caused a sensation, and a ring would no doubt have been formed round him, and then a hasty council held, or, what was more probable, some shout, or word uttered by some one behind, who could not understand what was going on in front, would have determined them to commit some desperate outrage, and the sacrifice of life would have been the inevitable result of such an unfortunate concurrence of circumstances.

There was a pause before anyone ventured among the ruins; the walls were carefully looked to, and in more than one instance, but they were found dangerous, what were remaining; some parts had been so completely destroyed, that there were nothing but heaps of rubbish.

However, curiosity was exerted to such an extraordinary pitch that it overcame the fear of danger, in search of the horrible; for they believed that if there were any one in the ruins he must be a vampyre, of course, and they were somewhat cautious in going near such a creature, lest in so doing they should meet with some accident, and become vampyres too.

This was a dreadful reflection, and one that every now and then impressed itself upon the individuals composing the mob; but at the same time any new impulse, or a shout, and they immediately became insensible to all fear; the mere impulse is the dominant one, and then all is forgotten.

The scene was an impressive one; the beautiful house and grounds looked desolate and drear; many of the trees were stripped and broken down, and many scorched and burned, while the gardens and flower beds, the delight of the Bannerworth family, were rudely trodden under foot by the rabble, and all those little beauties so much admired and tended by the inhabitants, were now utterly destroyed, and in such a state that their site could not even be detected by the former owners.

It was a sad sight to see such a sacrilege committed, — such violence done to private feelings, as to have all these places thrown open to the scrutiny of the brutal and vulgar, who are incapable of appreciating or understanding the pleasures of a refined taste.

The ruins presented a remarkable contrast to what the place had been but a very short time before; and now the scene of desolation was complete, there was no one spot in which the most wretched could find shelter.

To be sure, under the lee of some broken and crumbling wall, that tottered, rather than stood, a huddled wretch might have found shelter from the wind, but it would have been at the risk of his life, and not there complete.

The mob became quiet for some moments, but was not so long; indeed, a mob of people, — which is, in fact, always composed of the most disorderly characters to be found in a place, is not exactly the assembly that is most calculated for quietness; somebody gave a shout, and then somebody else shouted, and the one wide throat of the whole concourse was opened, and sent forth a mighty yell.

After this exhibition of power, they began to run about like mad, — traverse the grounds from one end to the other, and then the ruins were in progress of being explored.

This was a tender affair, and had to be done with some care and caution by those who were so engaged; and they walked over crumbling and decayed masses.

In one or two places, they saw what appeared to be large holes, into which the building materials had been sunk, by their own weight, through the flooring, that seemed as roofs to some cellars or dungeons.

Seeing this, they knew not how soon some other part might sink in, and carry their precious bodies down with the mass of rubbish; this gave an interest to the scene, — a little danger is a sort of salt to an adventure, and enables those who have taken part in it to talk of their exploits, and of their dangers, which is pleasant to do, and to hear in the ale-house, and by the inglenook in the winter.

However, when a few had gone some distance, others followed, when they saw them enter the place in safety: and at length the whole ruins were covered with living men, and not a few women, who seemed necessary to make up the elements of mischief in this case.

There were some shouting and hallooing from one to the other as they hurried about the ruins.

At length they had explored the ruins nearly all over, when one man, who had stood a few minutes upon a spot, gazing intently upon something, suddenly exclaimed, —

“Hilloa! hurrah! here we are, altogether, — come on, — I’ve found him, — I've found — recollect it's me, and nobody else has found, — hurrah!"

Then, with a wild kind of frenzy, he threw his hat up into the air, as if to attract attention, and call others round him, to see what it was he had found.

"What's the matter, Bill?" exclaimed one who came up to him, and who had been close at hand.

"The matter? why, I've found him; that's the matter, old man," replied the first.

"What, a whale?

"No, a wampyre; the blessed wampyre! there he is, — don't you see him under them ere bricks?"

"Oh, that's not him; he got away."

"I don't care," replied the other, "who got away, or who didn't; I know this much, that he's a wampyre, — he wouldn't be there if he warn't."

This was an unanswerable argument, and nobody could deny it; consequently, there was a cessation of talk, and the people then came up, as the two first were looking at the body.

"Whose is it?" inquired a dozen voices.

"Not Sir Francis Varney's!" said the second speaker; the clothes are not his—"

"No, no; not Sir Francis's"

"But I tell you what, mates," said the first speaker; "that if it isn't Sir Francis Varney's, it is somebody else's as bad. I dare say, now, he's a wictim."

"A what!"

"A wictim to the wampyre; and, if he sees the blessed moonlight, he will be a wampyre hisself, and so shall we be, too, if he puts his teeth into us."

"So we shall, — so we shall," said the mob, and their flesh begin to run cold, and there was a feeling of horror creeping over the whole body of persons within hearing.

"I tell you what it is; our only plan will be to get him out of the ruins, then, remarked another.

"What!" said one; "who's going to handle such cattle? if you've a sore about you, and his blood touches you, who's to say you won't be a vampyre, too!"

"No, no you won't," said an old woman.

"I won't try," was the happy rejoinder; "I ain't a-going to carry a wampyre on my two legs home to my wife and small family of seven children, and another a-coming."

There was a pause for a few moments, and then one man more adventurous than the rest, exclaimed, —

"Well, vampyre, or no vampyre, his dead body can harm no one; so here goes to get it out, help me who will; once have it out, and then we can prevent any evil, by burning it, and thus destroying the whole body.

"Hurrah!" shouted three or four more, as they jumped down into the hole formed by the falling in of the materials which had crushed Marchdale to death, for it was his body they had discovered.

They immediately set to work to displace such of the materials as lay on the body, and then, having cleared it of all superincumbent rubbish, they proceeded to lift it up, but found that it had got entangled, as they called it, with some chains: with some trouble they got them off, and the body was lifted out to a higher spot.

"Now, what's to be done?" inquired one.

"Burn it," said another.

“Hurrah!” shouted a female voice; “we’ve got the wampyre! run a stake through his body, and then place him upon some dry wood, — there’s plenty to be had about here, I am sure, — and then burn him to a cinder.”

“That’s right, old woman, — that’s right,” said a man; “nothing better: the devil must be in him if he come to life after that, I should say.”

There might be something in that, and the mob shouted its approbation, as it was sure to do as anything stupid or senseless, and the proposal might be said to have been carried by acclamation, and it required only the execution.

This was soon done. There were plenty of laths and rafters, and the adjoining wood furnished an abundant supply of dry sticks, so there was no want of fuel.

There was a loud shout as each accession of sticks took place, and, as each individual threw his bundle into the heap, each man felt all the self-devotion to the task as the Scottish chieftain who sacrificed himself and seven sons in the battle for his superior; and, when one son was cut down, the man filled up his place with the exclamation,— “Another for Hector,” until he himself fell as the last of his race.

Soon now the heap became prodigious, and it required an effort to get the mangled corpse upon this funeral bier; but it was then a shout from the mob that rent the air announced, both the fact and their satisfaction.

The next thing to be done was to light the pile — this was no easy task; but like all others, it was accomplished, and the dead body of the vampyre’s victim was thrown on to prevent that becoming a vampyre too, in its turn.

“There, boys,” said one, “he’ll not see the moonlight, that’s certain, and the sooner we put a light to this the better; for it may be, the soldiers will be down upon us before we know anything of it; so now, who’s got a light?”

This was a question that required a deal of searching; but, at length one was found by one of the mob coming forward, and after drawing his pipe vigorously for some moments, he collected some scraps of paper upon which he emptied the contents of the pipe, with the hope they would take fire.

In this, however, he was doomed to disappointment; for it produced nothing but a deal of smoke, and the paper burned without producing any flame.

This act of disinterestedness, however was not without its due consequences, for there were several who had pipes, and, fired with the hope of emulating the first projector of the scheme for raising the flame, they joined together, and potting the contents of their pipes together on some paper, straw, and chips, they produced, after some little trouble, a flame.

Then there was a shout, and the burning mass was then placed in a favourable position nearer the pile of materials collected for burning, and then, in a few moments, it began to take light; one piece communicated the fire to another, until the whole was in a blaze.

When the first flame fairly reached the top, a loud and tremendous shout arose from the mob, and the very welkin re-echoed with its fulness.

Then the forked flames rushed through the wood, and hissed and crackled as they flew, throwing up huge masses of black smoke, and casting a peculiar reflection around. Not a sound was heard save the hissing and roaring of the flames, which seemed like the approaching of a furious whirlwind.

At length there was nothing to be seen but the blackened mass; it was enveloped in one huge flame, that threw out a great heat, so much so, that those nearest to it felt induced to retire from before it.

"I reckon," said one, "that he's pretty well done by this time — he's had a warm berth of it up there."

"Yes," said another, "farmer Walkings's sheep he roasted whole at last harvest-home hadn't such a fire as this, I'll warrant; there's no such fire in the county — why, it would prevent a frost, I do believe it would."

"So it would, neighbour," answered another.

"Yes," replied a third, "but you'd want such a one corner of each field though."

There was much talk and joking going on among the men who stood around, in the midst of which, however, they were disturbed by a loud shout, and upon looking in the quarter whence it came, they saw stealing from among the ruins, the form of a man.

He was a strange, odd looking man, and at the time it was very doubtful among the mob as to whom it was — nobody could tell, and more than one looked at the burning pile, and then at the man who seemed to be so mysteriously present, as if they almost imagined that the body had got away.

"Who is it?" exclaimed one.

"Danged if I knows," said another, looking very hard, and very white at the same time;— "I hope it ain't the chap what we've burned here jist now."

"No," said the female, "that you may be sure of, for he's had a stake through his body, and as you said, he can never get over that, for as the stake is consumed, so are his vitals, and that’s a sure sign he’s done for.”

“Yes, yes, she’s right — a vampyre may live upon blood, but cannot do without his inside.”

This was so obvious to them all, that it was at once conceded, and a general impression pervaded the mob that it might be Sir Francis Varney: a shout ensued.

“Hurrah! — After him — there’s a vampyre — there he goes! — after him — catch him — burn him!”

And a variety of other exclamations were uttered, at the same time; the victim of popular wrath seemed to be aware that he was now discovered, and made off with all possible expedition, towards some wood.

Away went the mob in pursuit, hooting and hallooing like demons, and denouncing the unfortunate being with all the terrors that could be imagined, and which naturally added greater speed to the unfortunate man.

However, some among the mob, seeing that there was every probability of the stranger’s escaping at a mere match of speed, brought a little cunning to bear upon matter, and took a circuit round, and thus intercepted him.

This was not accomplished without a desperate effort, and by the best runners, who thus reached the spot he made for, before he could get there.

When the stranger saw himself thus intercepted, he endeavoured to fly in a different direction; but was soon secured by the mob, who made somewhat free with his person, and commenced knocking him about.

“Have mercy on me,” said the stranger. “What do you want? I am not rich; but take all I have."

"What do you do here?" inquired twenty voices. "Come, tell us that — what do you do here, and who are you?"

"A stranger, quite a stranger to these parts."

"Oh, yes! he's a stranger; but that's all the worse for him — he's a vampyre — there's no doubt about that."

"Good God," said the man, "I am a living and breathing man like yourselves. I have done no wrong, and injured no man — be merciful unto me; I intend no harm."

"Of course not; send him to the fire — take him back to the ruins — to the fire."

"Ay, and run a stake through his body, and then he's safe for life. I am sure he has something to do with the vampyre; and who knows, if he ain't a vampyre, how soon he may become one?"

"Ah! that's very true; bring him back to the fire, and we'll try the effects of the fire upon his constitution."

"I tell you what, neighbour, it's my opinion, that as one fool makes many, so one vampyre makes many."

"So it does, so it does; there's much truth and reason in that neighbour; I am decidedly of that opinion, too."

"Come along then," cried the mob, cuffing and pulling the unfortunate stranger with them.

"Mercy, mercy!"

But it was useless to call for mercy to men whose superstitious feelings urged them on; far when the demon of superstition is active, no matter what form it may take, it always results in cruelty and wickedness to all.

Various were the shouts and menaces of the mob, and the stranger saw no hope of life unless he could escape from the hands of the people who surrounded him.

They had now nearly reached the ruins, and the stranger, who was certainly a somewhat odd and remarkable looking man, and who appeared in their eyes the very impersonation of their notions of a vampyre, was thrust from one to the other, kicked by one, and then cuffed by the other, as if he was doomed to run the gauntlet.

“Down with the vampyre!” said the mob.

“I am no vampyre,” said the stranger; “I am new to these parts, and I pray you have mercy upon me. I have done you no wrong. Hear me, — I know nothing of these people of whom you speak.”

“That won’t do; you’ve come here to see what you can do, I dare say; and, though you may have been hurt by the vampyre, and may be only your misfortune, and not your fault, yet the mischief is as great as ever it was or can be, you become, in spite of yourself, a vampyre, and do the same injury to others that has been done to you — there’s no help for you.”

“No help, — we can’t help it,” shouted the mob; “he must die, — throw him on the pile.”

“Put a stake through him first, though,” exclaimed the humane female; “put a stake through him, and then he’s safe.”

This horrible advice had an electric effect on the stranger, who jumped up, and eluded the grasp of several hands that were stretched forth to seize him.

“Throw him upon the burning wood!” shouted one.

“And a stake through his body,” suggested the humane female again, who seemed to have this one idea in her heart, and no other, and, upon every available opportunity, she seemed to be anxious to give utterance to the comfortable notion.

“Seize him!” exclaimed one.

“Never let him go,” said another; “we’ve gone too far to hang back now; and, if he escape, he will visit us in our sleep, were it only out of spite.”

The stranger made a dash among the ruins, and, for a moment, out-stripped his pursuers; but a few, more adventurous than the rest, succeeded in driving him into an angle formed by two walls, and the consequence was, he was compelled to come to a stand.

“Seize him — seize him!” exclaimed all those at a distance.

The stranger, seeing he was now nearly surrounded, and had no chance of escape, save by some great effort, seized a long piece of wood, and struck two of his assailants down at once, and then dashed through the opening.

He immediately made for another part of the ruins, and succeeded in making his escape for some short distance, but was unable to keep up the speed that was required, for his great exertion before had nearly exhausted him, and the fear of a cruel death before his eyes was not enough to give him strength, or lend speed to his flight. He had suffered too much from violence, and, though he ran with great speed, yet those who followed were uninjured, and fresher, — he had no chance.

They came very close upon him at the corner of a field, which he endeavoured to cross, and had succeeded in doing, and he made a desperate attempt to scramble up the bank that divided the field from the next, but he slipped back, almost exhausted, into the ditch, and the whole mob came up.

However, he got on the bank, and leaped into the next field, and then he was immediately surrounded by those who pursued him, and he was struck down.

“Down with the vampyre! — kill him, — he’s one of ‘em, — run a stake through him!" were a few of the cries of the infuriated mob of people, who were only infuriated because he attempted to escape their murderous intentions.

It was strange to see how they collected in a ring as the unfortunate man lay on the ground, panting for breath, and hardly able to speak — their infuriated countenances plainly showing the mischief they were intent upon.

"Have mercy upon me!" he exclaimed, as he lay on the earth; "I have no power to help myself."

The mob returned no answer, but stood collecting their numbers as they came up.

"Have mercy on me! it cannot be any pleasure to you to spill my blood. I am unable to resist — I am one man among many, — you surely cannot wish to beat me to death?"

"We want to hurt no one, except in our own defence, and we won't be made vampyres of because you don't like to die."

"No, no; we won't be vampyres," exclaimed the mob, and there arose a great shout from the mob.

"Are you men — fathers? — have you families? if so, I have the same ties as you have; spare me for their sakes, — do not murder me, — you will leave one an orphan if you do; besides, what have I done? I have injured no one."

"I tell you what, friends, if we listen to him we shall all be vampyres, and all our children will all be vampyres and orphans."

"So we shall, so we shall; down with him!"

The man attempted to get up, but, in doing so, he received a heavy blow from a hedge-stake, wielded by the herculean arm of a peasant. The sound of the blow was heard by those immediately around, and the man fell dead. There was a pause, and those nearest, apparently fearful of the consequences, and hardly expecting the catastrophe, began to disperse, and the remainder did so very soon afterwards.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

THE VAMPYRE'S FLIGHT. — HIS DANGER, AND THE LAST PLACE OF REFUGE.

Leaving the disorderly and vicious mob, who were thus sacrificing human life to their excited passions, we return to the brothers Bannerworth and the doctor, who together with Admiral Bell, still held watch over the hall.

No indication of the coming forth of Varney presented itself for some time longer, and then, at least they thought, they heard a window open; and, turning their eyes in the direction whence the sound proceeded, they could see the form of a man slowly and cautiously emerging from it.

As far as they could judge, from the distance at which they were, that form partook much of the appearance and the general aspect of Sir Francis Varney, and the more they looked and noticed its movements, the more they felt convinced that such was the fact.

"There comes your patient, doctor," said the admiral.

"Don't call him my patient," said the doctor, "if you please."

"Why you know he is; and you are, in a manner of speaking, bound to look after him. Well, what is to be done?"

"He must not, on any account," said Dr. Chillingworth, "be allowed to leave the place. Believe me, I have the very strongest reasons for saying so."

"He shall not leave it then," said Henry.

Even as he spoke, Henry Bannerworth darted forward, and Sir Francis Varney dropped from the window, out of which he had clambered, close to his feet.

"Hold!" cried Henry, "you are my prisoner."

With the most imperturbable coolness in the world, Sir Francis Varney turned upon him, and replied, —

"And pray, Henry Bannerworth, what have I done to provoke your wrath?"

"What have you done? — have you not, like a thief, broken into my house? Can you ask what you have done?"

"Ay," said the vampyre, "like a thief, perchance, and yet no thief. May I ask you, what there is to steal, in the house?"

By the time this short dialogue had been uttered, the rest of the party had come up, and Varney was, so far as regarded numbers, a prisoner.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, with that strange contortion of countenance which, now they all understood, arose from the fact of his having been hanged, and restored to life again. "Well, gentlemen, now that you have beleaguered me in such a way, may I ask you what it is about?"

"If you will step aside with me, Sir Francis Varney, for a moment," said Dr. Chillingworth, "I will make to you a communication which will enable you to know what it is all about."

"Oh, with pleasure," said the vampyre. "I am not ill at present; but still, sir, I have no objection to hear what you have to say."

He stepped a few paces on one side with the doctor, while the others waited, not without some amount of impatience for the result of the communication. All that they could hear was, that Varney said, suddenly —

"You are quite mistaken."

And then the doctor appeared to be insisting upon something, which the vampyre listened to patiently; and, at the end, burst out with, —

“Why, doctor, you must be dreaming.”

At this, Dr. Chillingworth at once left him, and advancing to his friends, he said, —

“Sir Francis Varney denies in toto all that I have related to you concerning him; therefore, I can say no more than that I earnestly recommend you, before you let him go, to see that he takes nothing of value with him.”

“Why, what can you mean?” said Varney.

“Search him,” said the doctor; “I will tell you why, very shortly.”

“Indeed — indeed!” said Sir Francis Varney. “Now, gentlemen, I will give you a chance of behaving justly and quietly, so saving yourself the danger of acting otherwise. I have made repeated offers to take this house, either as a tenant or as a purchaser, all of which offers have been declined, upon, I dare say, a common enough principle, namely, one which induces people to enhance the value of anything they have for disposal, if it be unique, by making it difficult to come at. Seeing that you had deserted the place, I could make no doubt but that it was to be had, so I came here to make a thorough examination of its interior, to see if it would suit me. I find that it will not; therefore, I have only to apologise for the intrusion, and to wish you a remarkably good evening.”

“That won’t do,” said the doctor.

“What won’t do, sir?”

“This excuse will not do, Sir Francis Varney. You are, although you deny it, the man who was hanged in London some years ago for a highway robbery.”

Varney laughed, and held up his hands, exclaiming, —

“Alas! alas! our good friend, the doctor, has studied too hard; his wits, probably, at the best of times, none of the clearest, have become hopelessly entangled."

"Do you deny," said Henry, "then, that you are that man?"

"Most unequivocally."

"I assert it," said the doctor, "and now, I will tell you all, for I perceive you hesitate about searching, Sir Francis Varney, I tell you all why it is that he has such an affection for Bannerworth Hall."

"Before you do," said Varney, "there is a pill for you, which you may find more nauseous and harder of digestion, than any your shop can furnish."

As Varney uttered these words, he suddenly drew from his pocket a pistol, and, levelling it at the unfortunate doctor, he fired it full at him.

The act was so sudden, so utterly unexpected, and so stunning, that it was done before any one could move hand or foot to prevent it. Henry Bannerworth and his brother were the furthest off from the vampyre; and, unhappily, in the rush which they, as soon us possible, made towards him, they knocked down the admiral, who impeded them much; and, before they could spring over, or past him, Sir Francis Varney was gone.

So sudden, too, had been his departure, that they had not the least idea in which direction he had gone; so that to follow him would have been a work of the greatest possible difficulty.

Notwithstanding, however, both the difficulty and the danger, for no doubt the vampyre was well enough armed, Henry and his brother both rushed after the murderer, as they now believed him to be, in the route which they thought it was most probable he would take, namely, that which led towards the garden gate.

They reached that spot in a few moments, but all was profoundly still. Not the least trace of any one could be seen, high or low, and they were compelled, after a cursory examination, to admit that Sir Francis Varney had again made his escape, despite the great odds that were against him in point of numbers.

"He has gone," said Henry. "Let us go back, and see into the state of poor Dr. Chillingworth, who, I fear, is a dead man."

They hurried back to the spot, and there they found the admiral looking as composed as possible, and solacing himself with a pinch of snuff, as he gazed upon the apparently lifeless form at his feet.

"Is he dead?" said Henry.

"I should say he was," replied the admiral; "such a shot as that was don't want to be repeated. Well, I liked the doctor with all his faults. He only had one foolish way with him, and that was, that he shirked his grog."

"This is an awful catastrophe," said Henry, as he knelt down by the side of the body. "Assist me, some of you. Where is Charles?"

"I'll be hanged," said the admiral, "if I know. He disappeared somewhere."

"This is a night of mystery as well as terror. Alas! poor Dr. Chillingworth! I little thought that you would have fallen a victim to the man whom you preserved from death. How strange it is that you should have snatched from the tomb the very individual who was, eventually, to take your own life."

The brothers gently raised the body of the doctor, and carried it on to the glass plot, which was close at hand.

"Farewell, kind and honest-hearted Chillingworth," said Henry; "I shall, many and many a time, feel your loss; and now I will rest not until I have delivered up to justice your murderer. All consideration, or feeling, for what seemed to be latent virtues in that strange and inexplicable man, Varney, shall vanish, and he shall reap the consequences of the crime he has now committed."

"It was a cold blooded, cowardly murder," said his brother.

"It was; but you may depend the doctor was about to reveal something to us, which Varney so much dreaded, that he took his life as the only effectual way, at the moment, of stopping him."

"It must be so," said Henry.

"And now," said the admiral, "it's too late, and we shall not know it at all. That's the way. A fellow saves up what he has got to tell till it is too late to tell it, and down he goes to Davy Jones's locker with all his secrets aboard."

"Not always," said Dr. Chillingworth, suddenly sitting bolt upright— "not always."

Henry and his brother started back in amazement, and the admiral was so taken by surprise, that had not the resuscitated doctor suddenly stretched out his hand and laid hold of him by the ankle, he would have made a precipitate retreat.

"Hilloa! murder!" he cried. "Let me go! How do I know but you may be a vampyre by now, as you were shot by one."

Henry soonest recovered from the surprise of the moment, and with the most unfeigned satisfaction, he cried, —

"Thank God you are unhurt, Dr. Chillingworth! Why he must have missed you by a miracle."

"Not at all," said the doctor. "Help me up — thank you — all right. I'm only a little singed about the whiskers. He hit me safe enough."

"Then how have you escaped?"

"Why from the want of a bullet in the pistol, to be sure. I can understand it all well enough. He wanted to create sufficient confusion to cover a desperate attempt to escape, and he thought that would be best done by seeming so shoot me. The suddenness of the shock, and the full belief, at the moment, that he had sent a bullet into my brains, made me fall, and produced a temporary confusion of ideas, amounting to insensibility."

"From which you are happily recovered. Thank Heaven that, after all, he is not such a villain as this act would have made him."

"Ah!" said the admiral, "it takes people who have lived a little in these affairs to know the difference in sound between a firearm with a bullet in it, and one without. I knew it was all right."

"Then why did you not say so, admiral?"

"What was the use? I thought the doctor might be amused to know what you should say of him, so you see I didn't interfere; and, as I am not a good hand at galloping after anybody, I didn't try that part of the business, but just remained where I was."

"Alas! alas!" cried the doctor, "I much fear that, by his going, I have lost all that I expected to be able to do for you, Henry. It's of not the least use now telling you or troubling you about it. You may now sell or let Bannerworth Hall to whomever you please, for I am afraid it is really worthless."

"What on earth do you mean?" said Henry. "Why, doctor, will you keep up this mystery among us? If you have anything to say, why not say it at once?"

"Because, I tell you it's of no use now. The game is up, Sir Francis Varney has escaped; but still I don't know that I need exactly hesitate."

"There can be no reason for your hesitating about making a communication to us," said Henry. "It is unfriendly not to do so."

"My dear boy, you will excuse me for saying that you don't know what you are talking about."

"Can you give any reason?"

"Yes; respect for the living. I should have to relate something of the dead which would be hurtful to their feelings."

Henry was silent for a few moments, and then he said, —

"What dead? And who are the living?"

"Another time," whispered the doctor to him; "another time, Henry. Do not press me now. But you shall know all another time."

"I must be content. But now let us remember that another man yet lingers in Bannerworth Hall. I will endure suspense on his account no longer. He is an intruder there; so I go at once to dislodge him."

No one made any opposition to this move, not even the doctor; so Henry preceded them all to the house. They passed through the open window into the long hall, and from thence into every apartment of the mansion, without finding the object of their search. But from one of the windows up to which there grew great masses of ivy, there hung a rope, by which any one might easily have let himself down; and no doubt, therefore, existed in all their minds that the hangman had sufficiently profited by the confusion incidental to the supposed shooting of the doctor, to make good his escape from the place.

"And so, after all," said Henry, "we are completely foiled?"

"We may be," said Dr. Chillingworth; "but it is, perhaps, going too far to say that we actually are. One thing, however, is quite clear; and that is, no good can be done here."

"Then let us go home," said the admiral. "I did not think from the first that any good would be done here."

They all left the garden together now; so that almost for the first time, Bannerworth Hall was left to itself, unguarded and unwatched by any one whatever. It was with an evident and a marked melancholy that the doctor proceeded with the party to the cottage-house of the Bannerworths; but, as after what he had said, Henry forbore to question him further upon those subjects which he admitted he was keeping secret; and as none of the party were much in a cue for general conversation, the whole of them walked on with more silence than usually characterised them.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

CHARLES HOLLAND'S PURSUIT OF THE VAMPYRE. — THE DANGEROUS INTERVIEW.

It will be recollected that the admiral had made a remark about Charles Holland having suddenly disappeared; and it is for us now to account for that disappearance and to follow him to the pathway he had chosen.

The fact was, that he, when Varney fired the shot at the doctor, or what was the supposed shot, was the farthest from the vampyre; and he, on that very account, had the clearest and best opportunity of marking which route he took when he had discharged the pistol.

He was not confused by the smoke, as the others were; nor was he stunned by the noise of the discharge; but he distinctly saw Varney dart across one of the garden beds, and make for the summer-house, instead of for the garden gate, as Henry had supposed was the most probable path he had chosen.

Now, Charles Holland either had an inclination, for some reasons of his own, to follow the vampyre alone; or, on the spur of the moment, he had not time to give an alarm to the others; but certain it is that he did, unaided, rush after him. He saw him enter the summer-house, and pass out of it again at the back portion of it, as he had once before done, when surprised in his interview with Flora.

But the vampyre did not now, as he had done on the former occasion, hide immediately behind the summer-house. He seemed to be well aware that that expedient would not answer twice; so he at once sped onwards, clearing the garden fence, and taking to the meadows.

It formed evidently no part of the intentions of Charles Holland to come up with him. He was resolved upon dogging his footsteps, to know where he should go; so that he might have a knowledge of his hiding-place, if he had one.

"I must and will," said Charles to himself, "penetrate the mystery that hangs about this most strange and inexplicable being. I will have an interview with him, not in hostility, for I forgive him the evil he has done me, but with a kindly spirit; and I will ask him to confide in me."

Charles, therefore, did not keep so close upon the heels of the vampyre as to excite any suspicions of his intention to follow him; but he waited by the garden paling long enough not only for Varney to get some distance off, but long enough likewise to know that the pistol which had been fired at the doctor had produced no real bad effects, except singing some curious tufts of hair upon the sides of his face, which the doctor was pleased to call whiskers.

"I thought as much," was Charles's exclamation when he heard the doctor's voice. "It would have been strikingly at variance with all Varney's other conduct, if he had committed such a deliberate and heartless murder."

Then, as the form of the vampyre could be but dimly seen, Charles ran on for some distance in the direction he had taken, and then paused again; so that if Varney heard the sound of footsteps, and paused to listen they had ceased again probably, and nothing was discernible.

In this manner he followed the mysterious individual, if we may really call him such, for above a mile; and then Varney made a rapid detour, and took his way towards the town.

He went onwards with wonderful precision now in a right line, not stopping at any obstruction, in the way of fences, hedges, or ditches, so that it took Charles some exertion, to which, just then, he was scarcely equal, to keep up with him.

At length the outskirts of the town were gained, and then Varney paused, and looked around him, scarcely allowing Charles, who was now closer to him than he had been, time to hide himself from observation, which, however, he did accomplish, by casting himself suddenly upon the ground, so that he could not be detected against the sky, which then formed a back ground to the spot where he was.

Apparently satisfied that he had completely now eluded the pursuit, if any had been attempted, of those whom he had led in such a state of confusion, the vampyre walked hastily towards a house that was to let, and which was only to be reached by going up an avenue of trees, and then unlocking a gate in a wall which bounded the premises next to the avenue. But the vampyre appeared to be possessed of every facility for effecting an entrance to the place and, producing from his pocket a key, he at once opened the gate, and disappeared within the precincts of those premises.

He, no doubt, felt that he was hunted by the mob of the town, and hence his frequent change of residence, since his own had been burnt down, and, indeed, situated as he was, there can be no manner of doubt that he would have been sacrificed to the superstitious fury of the populace, if they could but have got hold of him.

He had, from his knowledge, which was no doubt accurate and complete, of what had been done, a good idea of what his own fate would be, were he to fall into the hands of that ferocious multitude, each individual composing which, felt a conviction that there would be no peace, nor hope of prosperity or happiness, on the place, until he, the arch vampyre of all the supposed vampyres, was destroyed.

Charles did pause for a few moments, after having thus become roused, to consider whether he should then attempt to have the interview he had resolved upon having by some means or another, or defer it, now that he knew where Varney was to be found, until another time.

But when he came to consider how extremely likely it was that, even in the course of a few hours, Varney might shift his abode for some good and substantial reasons, he at once determined upon attempting to see him.

But how to accomplish such a purpose was not the easiest question in the world to answer. If he rung the bell that presented itself above the garden gate, was it at all likely that Varney, who had come there for concealment, would pay any attention to the summons?

After some consideration, he did, however, think of a plan by which, at all events, he could ensure effecting an entrance into the premises, and then he would take his chance of finding the mysterious being whom he sought, and who probably might have no particular objection to meeting with him, Charles Holland, because their last interview in the ruins could not be said to be otherwise than of a peaceable and calm enough character.

He saw by the board, which was nailed in the front of the house, that all applications to see it were to be made to a Mr. Nash, residing close at hand; and, as Charles had the appearance of a respectable person, he thought he might possibly have the key entrusted to him, ostensibly to look at the house, preparatory possibly to taking it, and so he should, at all events, obtain admission.

He, accordingly, went at once to this Mr. Nash, and asked about the house; of course he had to affect an interest in its rental and accommodations, which he did not feel, in order to lull any suspicion, and, finally, he said, —

"I should like to look over it if you will lend me the key, which I will shortly bring back to you."

There was an evident hesitation about the agent when this proposal was communicated by Charles Holland, and he said, —

"I dare say, sir, you wonder that I don't say yes, at once; but the fact is there came a gentleman here one day when I was out, and got a key, for we have two to open the house, from my wife, and he never came back again."

That this was the means by which Varney, the vampyre, had obtained the key, by the aid of which Charles had seen him effect so immediate an entrance to the house, there could be no doubt.

"How long ago were you served that trick?" he said.

"About two days ago, sir."

"Well, it only shows how, when one person acts wrongly, another is at once suspected of a capability to do so likewise. There is my name and my address; I should like rather to go alone to see the house, because I always fancy I can judge better by myself of the accommodation, and I can stay as long as I like, and ascertain the sizes of all the rooms without the disagreeable feeling upon my mind, which no amount of complaisance on your part, could ever get me over, that I was most unaccountably detaining somebody from more important business of their own."

"Oh, I assure you, sir," said Mr. Nash, "that I should not be at all impatient. But if you would rather go alone—"

"Indeed I would."

"Oh, then, sir, there is the key. A gentleman who leaves his name and address, of course, we can have no objection to. I only told you of what happened, sir, in the mere way of conversation, and I hope you won't imagine for a moment that I meant to insinuate that you were going to keep the key."

"Oh, certainly not — certainly not," said Charles, who was only too glad to get the key upon any terms. "You are quite right, and I beg you will say no more about it; I quite understand."

He then walked off to the empty house again, and, proceeding to the avenue, he fitted the key to the lock, and had the satisfaction of finding the gate instantly yield to him.

When he passed through it, and closed the door after him, which he did carefully, he found himself in a handsomely laid-out garden, and saw the house a short distance in front of him, standing upon a well got-up lawn.

He cared not if Varney should see him before he reached the house, because the fact was sufficiently evident to himself that after all he could not actually enforce an interview with the vampyre. He only hoped that as he had found him out it would be conceded to him.

He, therefore, walked up the lawn without making the least attempt at concealment, and when he reached the house he allowed his footsteps to make what noise they would upon the stone steps which led up to it. But no one appeared; nor was there, either by sight or by sound, any indication of the presence of any living being in the place besides himself.

Insensibly, as he contemplated the deserted place around him, the solemn sort of stillness began to have its effect upon his imagination, and, without being aware that he did so, he had, with softness and caution, glided onwards, as if he were bent on some errand requiring the utmost amount of caution and discrimination in the conduction of it.

And so he entered the hall of the house, where he stood some time, and listened with the greatest attention, without, however, being able to hear the least sound throughout the whole of the house.

"And yet he must be here," thought Charles to himself; "I was not gone many minutes, and it is extremely unlikely that in so short a space of time he has left, after taking so much trouble, by making such a detour around the meadows to get here, without being observed. I will examine every room in the place, but I will find him."

Charles immediately commenced going from room to room of that house in his search for the vampyre. There were but four apartments upon the ground floor, and these, of course, he quickly ran through. Nothing whatever at all indicative of any one having been there met his gaze, and with a feeling of disappointment creeping over him, he commenced the ascent of the staircase.

The day had now fairly commenced, so that there was abundance of light, although, even for the country, it was an early hour, and probably Mr. Nash had been not a little surprised to have a call from one whose appearance bespoke no necessity for rising with the lark at such an hour.

All these considerations, however, sank into insignificance in Charles's mind, compared with the object he had in view, namely, the unravelling the many mysteries that hung around that man. He ascended to the landing of the first story, and then, as he could have no choice, he opened the first door that his eyes fell upon, and entered a tolerably large apartment. It was quite destitute of furniture, and at the moment Charles was about to pronounce it empty; but then his eyes fell upon a large black-looking bundle of something, that seemed to be lying jammed up under the window on the floor — that being the place of all others in the room which was enveloped in the most shadow.

He started back involuntarily at the moment, for the appearance was one so shapeless, that there was no such thing as defining, from even that distance, what it really was.

Then he slowly and cautiously approached it, as we always approach that of the character of which we are ignorant, and concerning the powers of which to do injury we can consequently have no defined idea.

That it was a human form there, was the first tangible opinion he had about it; and from its profound stillness, and the manner in which it seemed to be laid close under the window, he thought that he was surely upon the point of finding out that some deed of blood had been committed, the unfortunate victim of which was now lying before him.

Upon a nearer examination, he found that the whole body, including the greater part of the head and face, was wrapped in a large cloak; and there, as he gazed, he soon found cause to correct his first opinion at to the form belonging to the dead, for he could distinctly hear the regular breathing, as of some one in a sound and dreamless sleep.

Closer he went, and closer still. Then, as he clasped his hands, he said, in a voice scarcely above a whisper, —

“It is — it is the vampyre.”

Yes, there could be no doubt of the fact. It was Sir Francis Varney who lay there, enveloped in the huge horseman’s cloak, in which, on two or three occasions during the progress of this narrative, he had figured. There he lay, at the mercy completely of any arm that might be raised against him, apparently so overcome by fatigue that no ordinary noise would have awakened him.

Well might Charles Holland gaze at him with mingled feelings. There lay the being who had done almost enough to drive the beautiful Flora Bannerworth distracted — the being who had compelled the Bannerworth family to leave their ancient house, to which they had been bound by every description of association. The same mysterious existence, too, who, the better to carry on his plots and plans, had, by dint of violence, immured him, Charles, in a dungeon, and loaded him with chains. There he lay sleeping, and at his mercy.

"Shall I awaken him," said Charles, "or let him sleep off the fatigue, which, no doubt, is weighing down his limbs, and setting heavily on his eyelids. No, my business with him is too urgent."

He then raised his voice, and cried, —

"Varney, Varney, awake!"

The sound disturbed, without altogether breaking up, the deep slumber of the vampyre, and he uttered a low moan, and moved one hand restlessly. Then, as if that disturbance of the calm and deep repose which had sat upon him, had given at once the reins to fancy, he begin to mutter strange words in his sleep, some of which could be heard by Charles distinctly, while others were too incoherently uttered to be clearly understood.

"Where is it?" he said; "where — where hidden? — Pull the house down! — Murder! No, no, no! no murder! — I will not, I dare not. Blood enough is upon my hands. — The money! — the money! Down, villains! down! down! down!"

What these incoherent words alluded to specifically, Charles, of course, could not have the least idea, but he listened attentively, with a hope that something might fall from his lips that would afford a key to some of the mysterious circumstances with which he was so intimately connected.

Now, however, there was a longer silence than before, only broken occasionally by low moans; but suddenly, as Charles was thinking of again speaking, he uttered some more disjointed sentences.

“No harm,” he said, “no harm, — Marchdale is a villain! — Not a hair of his head injured — no, no. Set him free — yes, I will set him free. Beware! beware, Marchdale! and you Mortimer. The scaffold! ay, the scaffold! but where is the bright gold? The memory of the deed of blood will not cling to it. Where is it hidden? The gold! the gold! the gold! It is not in the grave — it cannot be there — no, no, no! — not there, not there! Load the pistols. There, there! Down, villain, down! — down, down!”

Despairing, now, of obtaining anything like tangible information from these ravings, which, even if they did, by accident, so connect themselves together as to seem to mean something, Charles again cried aloud, —

“Varney, awake, awake!”

But, as before, the sleeping man was sufficiently deaf to the cry to remain, with his eyes closed, still in a disturbed slumber, but yet a slumber which might last for a considerable time.

“I have heard,” said Charles, “that there are many persons whom no noise will awaken, while the slightest touch rouses them in an instant. I will try that upon this slumbering being.”

As he spoke, he advanced close to Sir Francis Varney, and touched him slightly with the toe of his boot.

The effect was as startling as it was instantaneous. The vampyre sprang to his feet, as he had been suddenly impelled up by some powerful machinery; and, casting his cloak away from his arms, so as to have them at liberty, he sprang upon Charles Holland, and hurled him to the ground, where he held him with a giant's gripe, as he cried, —

"Rash fool! be you whom you may. Why have you troubled me to rid the world of your intrusive existence?"

The attack was so sudden and so terrific, that resistance to it, even if Charles had had the power, was out of the question. All he could say, was, —

"Varney, Varney! do you not know me? I am Charles Holland. Will you now, in your mad rage, take the life you might more easily have taken when I lay in the dungeon from which you released me?"

The sound of his voice at once convinced Sir Francis Varney of his identity; and it was with a voice that had some tones of regret in it, that he replied, —

"And wherefore have you thought proper, when you were once free and unscathed, to cast yourself into such a position of danger as to follow me to my haunt?"

"I contemplated no danger," said Charles, "because I contemplated no evil. I do not know why you should kill me."

"You came here, and yet you say you do not know why I should kill you. Young man, have you a dozen lives that you can afford to tamper with them thus? I have, at much chance of imminence to myself, already once saved you, when another, with a sterner feeling, would have gladly taken your life; but now, as if you were determined to goad me to an act which I have shunned committing, you will not let me close my eyes in peace."

"Take your hand from off my throat, Varney, and I will then tell you what brought me here."

Sir Francis Varney did so.

"Rise," he said— "rise; I have seen blood enough to be sickened at the prospect of more; but you should not have come here and tempted me."

"Nay, believe me, I came here for good and not for evil. Sir Francis Varney, hear me out, and then judge for yourself whether you can blame the perseverance which enabled me to find out this secret place of refuge; but let me first say that now it is as good a place of concealment to you as before it was, for I shall not betray you."

"Go on, go on. What is it you desire?"

"During the long and weary hours of my captivity, I thought deeply, and painfully too, as may be well imagined, of all the circumstances connected with your appearance at Bannerworth Hall, and your subsequent conduct. Then I felt convinced that there was something far more than met the eye, in the whole affair, and, from what I have been informed of since, I am the more convinced that some secret, some mystery, which it is in your power only perhaps to explain, lurks at the bottom of all your conduct."

"Well, proceed," said Varney.

"Have I not said enough now to enable you to divine the object of my visit? It is that you should shake off the trammels of mystery in which you have shrouded yourself, and declare what it is you want, what it is you desire, that has induced you to set yourself up as such a determined foe of the Bannerworth family."

"And that, you say, is the modest request that brings you here?"

"You speak as it you thought it was idle curiosity that prompts me, but you know it is not. Your language and manner are those of a man of too much sagacity not to see that I have higher notions."

"Name them."

"You have yourself, in more than one instance, behaved with a strange sort of romantic generosity, as if, but for some great object which you felt impelled to seek by any means, and at any sacrifice, you would be a something in character and conduct very different from what you are. One of my objects, then, is to awaken that better nature which is slumbering within you, only now and then rousing itself to do some deed which should be the character of all your actions — for your own sake I have come."

"But not wholly?"

"Not wholly, as you say. There is another than whom, the whole world is not so dear to me. That other one was serene as she was beautiful. Happiness danced in her eyes, and she ought — for not more lovely is the mind that she possesses than the glorious form that enshrines it — to be happy. Her life should have passed like one long summer's day of beauty, sunshine, and pure heavenly enjoyment. You have poisoned the cup of joy that the great God of nature had permitted her to place to her lips and taste of mistrustingly. Why have you done this? I ask you — why have you done this?"

"Have you said all that you came to say?"

"I have spoken the substance of my message. Much could I elaborate upon such a theme; but it is not one, Varney, which is congenial to my heart; for your sake, however, and for the sakes of those whom I hold most dear, let me implore you to act in this matter with a kindly consideration. Proclaim your motives; you cannot say that they are not such as we may aid you in."

Varney was silent for several moments; he seemed perceptibly moved by the manner of the young man, as well as by the matter of his discourse. In fact, one would suppose that Charles Holland had succeeded in investing what he said with some sort of charm that won much upon the fancy of Sir Francis Varney, for when he ceased to speak, the latter said in a low voice, —

“Go on, go on; you have surely much more to say.”

“No, Varney; I have said enough, and not thus much would I have said had I not been aware, most certainly and truly aware, without the shadow of a doubt, by your manner, that you were most accessible to human feeling.”

“I accessible to human feeling! know you to whom you speak? Am I not he before whom all men shudder, whose name has been a terror and a desolation; and yet you can talk of my human feelings. Nay, if I had had any, be sure they would have been extinguished by the persecutions I have endured from those who, you know, with savage ferocity have sought my life.”

“No, Varney; I give you credit for being a subtler reasoner than thus to argue; you know well that you were the aggressor to those parties who sought your life; you know well that with the greatest imaginable pains you held yourself up to them as a thing of great terror.”

“I did — I did.”

“You cannot, then, turn round upon ignorant persons, and blame them because your exertions to make yourself seem what you wish were but too successful.”

“You use the word *seem*,” said Varney, with a bitterness of aspect, “as if you would imply a doubt that I am that which thousands, by their fears, would testify me to be.”

“Thousands might,” said Charles Holland; “but not among them am I, Varney; I will not be made the victim of superstition. Were you to enact before my very eyes some of those feats which, to the senses of others, would stamp you as the preternatural being you assume to be, I would doubt the evidence of my own senses ere I permitted such a bugbear to oppress my brain."

"Go," said Sir Francis Varney, "go: I have no more words for you; I have nothing to relate to you."

"Nay, you have already listened sufficiently to me to give me a hope that I had awakened some of the humanity that was in your nature. Do not, Sir Francis Varney, crush that hope, even as it was budding forth; not for my own sake do I ask you for revelations; that may, perhaps — must be painful for you; but for the sake of Flora Bannerworth, to whom you owe abundance of reparation."

"No, no."

"In the name of all that is great, and good, and just, I call upon you for justice."

"What have I to do with such an invocation? Utter such a sentiment to men who, like yourself, are invested with the reality as well as the outward show of human nature."

"Nay, Sir Francis Varney, now you belie yourself. You have passed through a long, and, perchance, a stormy life. Can you look back upon your career, and find no reminiscences of the past that shall convince you that you are of the great family of man, and have had abundance of human feelings and of human affections?"

"Peace, peace!"

"Nay, Sir Francis Varney, I will take your word, and if you will lay your hand upon your heart, and tell me truly that you never felt what it was to love — to have all feeling, all taste, and all hope of future joy, concentrated in one individual, I will despair, and leave you. If you will tell me that never, in your whole life, you have felt for any fair and glorious creature, as I now feel for Flora Bannerworth, a being for whom you could have sacrificed not only existence, but all the hopes of a glorious future that bloom around it — if you will tell me, with the calm, dispassionate aspect of truth, that you have held yourself aloof from such human feelings, I will no longer press you to a disclosure which I shall bring no argument to urge."

The agitation of Sir Francis Varney's countenance was perceptible, and Charles Holland was about to speak again, when, striking him upon the breast with his clinched hand, the vampyre checked him, saying —

"Do you wish to drive me mad, that you thus, from memory's hidden cells, conjure up images of the past?"

"Then there are such images to conjure up — there are such shadows only sleeping, but which require only, as you did even now, but a touch to awaken them to life and energy. Oh, Sir Francis Varney, do not tell me that you are not human."

The vampyre made a furious gesture, as if he would have attacked Charles Holland; but then he sank nearly to the floor, as if soul-stricken by some recollection that unnerved his arm; he shook with unwonted emotion, and, from the frightful livid aspect of his countenance, Charles dreaded some serious accession of indisposition, which might, if nothing else did, prevent him from making the revelation he so much sought to hear from his lips.

"Varney," he cried, "Varney, be calm! you will be listened to by one who will draw no harsh — no hasty conclusions; by one, who, with that charity, I grieve to say, is rare, will place upon the words you utter the most favourable construction. Tell me all, I pray you, tell me all."

“This is strange,” said the vampyre. “I never thought that aught human could thus have moved me. Young man, you have touched the chords of memory; they vibrate throughout my heart, producing cadences and sounds of years long past. Bear with me awhile.”

“And you will speak to me?”

“I will.”

“Having your promise, then, I am content, Varney.”

“But you must be secret; not even in the wildest waste of nature, where you can well presume that naught but Heaven can listen to your whisperings, must you utter one word of that which I shall tell to you.”

“Alas!” said Charles, “I dare not take such a confidence; I have said that it is not for myself; I seek such knowledge of what you are, and what you have been, but it is for another so dear to me, that all the charms of life that make up other men’s delights, equal not the witchery of one glance from her, speaking as it does of the glorious light from that Heaven which is eternal, from whence she sprung.”

“And you reject my communication,” said Varney, “because I will not give you leave to expose it to Flora Bannerworth?”

“It must be so.”

“And you are most anxious to hear that which I have to relate?”

“Most anxious, indeed — indeed, most anxious.”

“Then have I found in that scruple which besets your mind, a better argument for trusting you, than had ye been loud in protestation. Had your promises of secrecy been but those which come from the lip, and not from the heart, my confidence would not have been rejected on such grounds. I think that I dare trust you.”

“With leave to tell to Flora that which you shall communicate.”

“You may whisper it to her, but to no one else, without my special leave and licence."

"I agree to those terms, and will religiously preserve them."

"I do not doubt you for one moment; and now I will tell to you what never yet has passed my lips to mortal man. Now will I connect together some matters which you may have heard piecemeal from others."

"What others are they?"

"Dr. Chillingworth, and he who once officiated as a London hangman."

"I have heard something from those quarters."

"Listen then to me, and you shall better understand that which you have heard. Some years ago, it matters not the number, on a stormy night, towards the autumn of the year, two men sat alone in poverty, and that species of distress which beset the haughty, profligate, daring man, who has been accustomed all his life to its most enticing enjoyments, but never to that industry which alone ought to produce them, and render them great and magnificent."

"Two men; and who were they?"

"I was one. Look upon me! I was of those men; and strong and evil passions were battling in my heart."

"And the other!"

"Was Marmaduke Bannerworth."

"Gracious Heaven! the father of her whom I adore; the suicide."

"Yes, the same; that man stained with a thousand vices — blasted by a thousand crimes — the father of her who partakes nothing of his nature, who borrows nothing from his memory but his name — was the man who there sat with me, plotting and contriving how, by fraud or violence, we were to lead our usual life of revelry and wild audacious debauch."

"Go on, go on; believe me, I am deeply interested."

"I can see as much. We were not nice in the various schemes which our prolific fancies engendered. If trickery, and the false dice at the gaming-table, sufficed not to fill our purses, we were bold enough for violence. If simple robbery would not succeed, we could take a life."

"Murder?"

"Ay, call it by its proper name, a murder. We sat till the midnight hour had passed, without arriving at a definite conclusion; we saw no plan of practicable operation, and so we wandered onwards to one of those deep dens of iniquity, a gaming-house, wherein we had won and lost thousands.

"We had no money, but we staked largely, in the shape of a wager, upon the success of one of the players; we knew not, or cared not, for the consequence, if we had lost; but, as it happened, we were largely successful, and beggars as we had walked into that place, we might have left it independent men.

"But when does the gambler know when to pause in his career? If defeat awakens all the raging passions of humanity within his bosom, success but feeds the great vice that has been there engendered. To the dawn of morn we played; the bright sun shone in, and yet we played — the midday came, and went — the stimulant of wine supported us, and still we played; then came the shadows of evening, stealing on in all their beauty. But what were they to us, amid those mutations of fortune, which, at one moment, made us princes, and placed palaces at our control, and, at another, debased us below the veriest beggar, that craves the stinted alms of charity from door to door.

"And there was one man who, from the first to the last, stayed by us like a very fiend; more than man, I thought he was not human. We won of all, but of him. People came and brought their bright red gold, and laid it down before us, but for us to take it up, and then, by a cruel stroke of fortune, he took it from us.

"The night came on; we won, and he won of us; the clock struck twelve — we were beggars. God knows what was he.

"We saw him place his winnings about his person — we saw the smile that curved the corners of his lips; he was calm, and we were maddened. The blood flowed temperately through his veins, but in ours it was burning lava, scorching as it went through every petty artery, and drying up all human thought — all human feeling.

"The winner left, and we tracked his footsteps. When he reached the open air, although he had taken much less than we of the intoxicating beverages that are supplied gratis to those who frequent those haunts of infamy, it was evident that some sort of inebriation attacked him; his steps were disordered and unsteady, and, as we followed him, we could perceive, by the devious track that he took, that he was somewhat uncertain of his route.

"We had no fixed motive in so pursuing this man. It was but an impulsive proceeding at the best; but as he still went on and cleared the streets, getting into the wild and open country, and among the hedge-rows, we began to whisper together, and to think that what we did not owe to fortune, we might to our own energy and courage at such a moment.

"I need not hesitate to say so, since, to hide the most important feature of my revelation from you, would be but to mock you; we resolved upon robbing him.

"And was that all?"

"It was all that our resolution went to. We were not anxious to spill blood; but still we were resolved that we would accomplish our purpose, even if it required murder for its consummation. Have you heard enough?”

“I have not heard enough, although I guess the rest.”

“You may well guess it, from its preface. He turned down a lonely pathway, which, had we chosen it ourselves, could not have been more suitable for the attack we meditated.

“There were tall trees on either side, and a hedge-row stretching high up between them. We knew that that lane led to a suburban village, which, without a doubt, was the object of his destination.

“Then Marmaduke Bannerworth spoke, saying, —

“‘What we have to do, must be done now or never. There needs not two in this adventure. Shall you or I require him to refund what he has won from us?’

“‘I care not,’ I said; ‘but if we are to accomplish our purpose without arousing even a shadow of resistance, it is better to show him its futility by both appearing, and take a share in the adventure.’

“This was agreed upon, and we hastened forward. He heard footsteps pursuing him and quickened his pace. I was the fleetest runner, and overtook him. I passed him a pace or two, and then turning, I faced him, and impeded his progress.

“The lane was narrow, and a glance behind him showed him Marmaduke Bannerworth; so that he was hemmed in between two enemies, and could move neither to the right nor to the left, on account of the thick brushwood that intervened between the trees.

“Then, with an assumed courage, that sat but ill upon him, he demanded of us what we wanted, and proclaimed his right to pass despite the obstruction we placed in his way.

“The dialogue was brief. I, being foremost, spoke to him.

"'Your money,' I said; 'your winnings at the gaming-table. We cannot, and we will not lose it.'

"So suddenly, that he had nearly taken my life, he drew a pistol from his pocket, and levelling it at my head, he fired upon me.

"Perhaps, had I moved, it might have been my death; but, as it was, the bullet furrowed my cheek, leaving a scar, the path of which is yet visible in a white cicatrix.

"I felt a stunning sensation, and thought myself a dead man. I cried aloud to Marmaduke Bannerworth, and he rushed forward. I knew not that he was armed, and that he had the power about him to do the deed which he then accomplished; but there was a groan, a slight struggle, and the successful gamester fell upon the green sward, bathed in his blood."

"And this is the father of her whom I adore?"

"It is. Are you shocked to think of such a neat relationship between so much beauty and intelligence and a midnight murderer? Is your philosophy so poor, that the daughter's beauty suffers from the commission of a father's crime?"

"No, no, It is not so. Do not fancy that, for one moment, I can entertain such unworthy opinions. The thought that crossed me was that I should have to tell one of such a gentle nature that her father had done such a deed."

"On that head you can use your own discretion. The deed was done; there was sufficient light for us to look upon the features of the dying man. Ghastly and terrific they glared upon us; while the glazed eyes, as they were upturned to the bright sky, seemed appealing to Heaven for vengeance against us, for having done the deed.

"Many a day and many an hour since at all times and all seasons, I have seen those eyes, with the glaze of death upon them, following me, and gloating over the misery they had the power to make. I think I see them now."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; look — look — see how they glare upon me — with what a fixed and frightful stare the bloodshot pupils keep their place — there, there! oh! save me from such a visitation again. It is too horrible. I dare not — I cannot endure it; and yet why do you gaze at me with such an aspect, dread visitant? You know that it was not my hand that did the deed — who laid you low. You know that not to me are you able to lay the heavy charge of your death!"

"Varney, you look upon vacancy," said Charles Holland.

"No, no; vacancy it may be to you, but to me 'tis full of horrible shapes."

"Compose yourself; you have taken me far into your confidence already; I pray you now to tell me all. I have in my brain no room for horrible conjectures such as those which might else torment me."

Varney was silent for a few minutes, and then he wiped from his brow the heavy drops of perspiration that had there gathered, and heaved a deep sigh.

"Speak to me," added Charles; "nothing will so much relieve you from the terrors of this remembrance as making a confidence which reflection will approve of, and which you will know that you have no reason to repent."

"Charles Holland," said Varney, "I have already gone too far to retract — much too far, I know, and can well understand all the danger of half confidence. You already know so much, that it is fit you should know more."

"Go on then, Varney, I will listen to you."

"I know not if, at this juncture, I can command myself to say more. I feel that what next has to be told will be most horrible for me to tell — most sad for you to hear told."

"I can well believe, Varney, from your manner of speech, and from the words you use, that you have some secret to relate beyond this simple fact of the murder of this gamester by Marmaduke Bannerworth."

"You are right — such is the fact; the death of that man could not have moved me as you now see me moved. There is a secret connected with his fate which I may well hesitate to utter — a secret even to whisper to the winds of heaven — I — although I did not do the deed, no, no — I — I did not strike the blow — not I — not I!"

"Varney, it is astonishing to me the pains you take to assure yourself of your innocence of this deed; no one accuses you, but still, were it not that I am impressed with a strong conviction that you're speaking to me nothing but the truth, the very fact of your extreme anxiety to acquit yourself, would engender suspicion."

"I can understand that feeling, Charles Holland; I can fully understand it. I do not blame you for it — it is a most natural one; but when you know all, you will feel with me how necessary it must have been to my peace to seize upon every trivial circumstance that can help me to a belief in my own innocence."

"It may be so; as yet, you well know, I speak in ignorance. But what could there have been in the character of that gambler, that has made you so sympathetic concerning his decease?"

"Nothing — nothing whatever in his character. He was a bad man; not one of those free, open spirits which are seduced into crime by thoughtlessness — not one of those whom we pity, perchance, more than we condemn; but a man without a redeeming trait in his disposition — a man so heaped up with vices and iniquities, that society gained much by his decease, and not an individual could say that he had lost a friend."

"And yet the mere thought of the circumstances connected with his death seems almost to drive you to the verge of despair."

"You are right; the mere thought has that effect."

"You have aroused all my curiosity to know the causes of such a feeling."

Varney paced the apartment in silence for many minutes. He seemed to be enduring a great mental struggle, and at length, when he turned to Charles Holland and spoke, there were upon his countenance traces of deep emotion.

"I have said, young man, that I will take you into my confidence. I have said that I will clear up many seeming mysteries, and that I will enable you to understand what was obscure in the narrative of Dr. Chillingworth, and of that man who filled the office of public executioner, and who has haunted me so long."

"It is true, then, as the doctor states, that you were executed in London?"

"I was."

"And resuscitated by the galvanic process, put into operation by Dr. Chillingworth?"

"As he supposed; but there are truths connected with natural philosophy which he dreamed not of. I bear a charmed life, and it was but accident which produced a similar effect upon the latent springs of my existence in the house to which the executioner conducted me, to what would have been produced had I been sufficed, in the free and open air, to wait until the cool moonbeams fell upon me."

"Varney, Varney," said Charles Holland, "you will not succeed in convincing me of your supernatural powers. I hold such feelings and sensations at arm's length. I will not — I cannot assume you to be what you affect."

"I ask for no man's belief. I know that which I know, and, gathering experience from the coincidences of different phenomena, I am compelled to arrive at certain conclusions. Believe what you please, doubt what you please; but I say again that I am not as other men."

"I am in no condition to depute your proposition; I wish not to dispute it; but you are wandering, Varney, from the point. I wait anxiously for a continuation of your narrative."

"I know that I am wandering from it — I know well that I am wandering from it, and that the reason I do so is that I dread that continuation."

"That dread will nor be the less for its postponement."

"You are right; but tell me, Charles Holland, although you are young you have been about in the great world sufficiently to form correct opinions, and to understand that which is related to you, drawing proper deductions from certain facts, and arriving possibly at more correct conclusions than some of maturer years with less wisdom."

"I will freely answer, Varney, any question you may put to me."

"I know it; tell me then what measure of guilt you attach to me in the transaction I have noticed to you."

"It seems then to me that, not contemplating the man's murder, you cannot be accused of the act, although a set of fortuitous circumstances made you appear an accomplice to its commission."

"You think I may be acquitted?"

"You can acquit yourself, knowing that you did not contemplate the murder.”

“I did not contemplate it. I know not what desperate deed I should have stopped short at then, in the height of my distress, but I neither contemplated taking that man’s life, nor did I strike the blow which sent him from existence.”

“There is even some excuse as regards the higher crime for Marmaduke Bannerworth.”

“Think you so?”

“Yes; he thought that you were killed, and impulsively he might have struck the blow that made him a murderer.”

“Be it so. I am willing, extremely willing that anything should occur that should remove the odium of guilt from any man, Be it so, I say, with all my heart; but now, Charles Holland, I feel that we must meet again ere I can tell you all; but in the meantime let Flora Bannerworth rest in peace — she need dread nothing from me. Avarice and revenge, the two passions which found a home in my heart, are now stifled for ever.”

“Revenge! did you say revenge?”

“I did; whence the marvel, am I not sufficiently human for that?”

“But you coupled it with the name of Flora Bannerworth.”

“I did, and that is part of my mystery.”

“A mystery, indeed, to imagine that such a being as Flora could awaken any such feeling in your heart — a most abundant mystery.”

“It is so. I do not affect to deny it: but yet it is true, although so greatly mysterious, but tell her that although at one time I looked upon her as one whom I cared not if I injured, her beauty and distress changed the current of my thoughts, and won upon me greatly, From the moment I found I had the power to become the bane of her existence, I ceased to wish to be so, and never again shall she experience a pang of alarm from Varney, the vampyre."

"Your message shall be faithfully delivered, and doubt not that it will be received with grateful feelings. Nevertheless I should have much wished to have been in a position to inform her of more particulars."

"Come to me here at midnight to-morrow, and you shall know all. I will have no reservation with you, no concealments; you shall know whom I have had to battle against, and how it is that a world of evil passions took possession of my heart and made me what I am."

"Are you firm in this determination, Varney — will you indeed tell me no more to-night?"

"No more, I have said it. Leave me now. I have need of more repose, for of late sleep has seldom closed my eyelids."

Charles Holland was convinced, from the positive manner in which he spoke, that nothing more in the shape of information, at that time, was to be expected from Varney; and being fearful that if he urged this strange being too far, at a time when he did not wish it, he might refuse all further communication, he thought it prudent to leave him, so he said to him, —

"Be assured, Varney, I shall keep the appointment you have made, with an expectation when we do meet of being rewarded by a recital of some full particulars."

"You shall not he disappointed; farewell, farewell!"

Charles Holland bade him adieu, and left the place.

Although he had now acquired all the information he hoped to take away with him when Varney first began to be communicative, yet, when he came to consider how strange and unaccountable a being he had been in communication with, Charles could not but congratulate himself that he had heard so much, for, from the manner of Varney, he could well suppose that that was, indeed, the first time he had been so communicative upon subjects which evidently held so conspicuous a place in his heart.

And he had abundance of hope, likewise, from what had been said by Varney, that he would keep his word, and communicate to him fully all else that he required to know; and when he recollected those words which Varney had used, signifying that he knew the danger of half confidences, that hope grew into a certainty, and Charles began to have no doubt but that on the next evening all that was mysterious in the various affairs connected with the vampyre would become clear and open to the light of day.

He strolled down the lane in which the lone house was situated, revolving these matters in his mind, and when he arrived at its entrance, he was rather surprised to see a throng of persons hastily moving onward, with come appearance of dismay about them, and anxiety depicted upon their countenances.

He stopped a lad, and inquired of him the cause of the seeming tumult.

"Why, sir, the fact is," said the boy, "a crowd from the town's been burning down Bannerworth Hall, and they've killed a man"

"Bannerworth Hall! you must be mistaken."

"Well, sir, I ought not to call it Bannerworth Hall, because I mean the old ruins in the neighbourhood that are supposed to have been originally Bannerworth Hall before the house now called such was built; and, moreover, as the Bannerworths have always had a garden there, and two or three old sheds, the people in the town called it Bannerworth Hall in common with the other building."

"I understand. And do you say that all have been destroyed?"

"Yes, sir. All that was capable of being burnt has been burnt, and, what is more, a man has been killed among the ruins. We don’t know who he is, but the folks said he was a vampyre, and they left him for dead,”

“When will these terrible outrages cease? Oh! Varney, Varney, you have much to answer for; even if in your conscience you succeed in acquitting yourself of the murder, some of the particulars concerning which you have informed me of.”

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS ARRIVAL AT THE INN. — THE HUNGARIAN NOBLEMAN. — THE LETTER TO VARNEY.

While these affairs are proceeding, and when there seems every appearance of Sir Francis Varney himself quickly putting an end to some of the vexatious circumstances connected with himself and the Bannerworth family, it is necessary that we should notice an occurrence which took place at the same inn which the admiral had made such a scene of confusion upon the occasion of his first arrival in the town.

Not since the admiral had arrived with Jack Pringle, and so disturbed the whole economy of the household, was there so much curiosity excited as on the morning following the interview which Charles Holland had had with Varney, the vampyre.

The inn was scarcely opened, when a stranger arrived, mounted on a coal-black horse, and, alighting, he surrendered the bridle into the hands of a boy who happened to be at the inn-door, and stalked slowly and solemnly into the building.

He was tall, and of a cadaverous aspect; in attire he was plainly apparelled, but there was no appearance of poverty about him; on the contrary, what he really had on was of a rich and costly character, although destitute of ornament.

He sat down in the first room that presented itself, and awaited the appearance of the landlord, who, upon being informed that a guest of apparently ample means, and of some consequence, had entered the place, hastily went to him to receive his commands.

With a profusion of bows, our old friend, who had been so obsequious to Admiral Bell, entered the room, and begged to know what orders the gentleman had for him.

"I presume," said the stranger, in a deep, solemn voice, "I presume that you have no objection, for a few days that I shall remain in this town, to board and lodge me for a certain price which you can name to me at once?"

"Certainly, sir," said the landlord; "any way you please; without wine, sir, I presume?"

"As you please; make your own arrangements."

"Well, sir, as we can't tell, of course, what wine a gentleman may drink, but when we come to consider breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper, and a bed, and all that sort of thing, and a private sitting-room, I suppose, sir?"

"Certainly."

"You would not, then, think, sir, a matter of four guineas a week will be too much, perhaps."

"I told you to name your own charge. Let it be four guineas; if you had said eight I should have paid it."

"Good God!" said the publican, "here's a damned fool that I am. I beg your pardon, sir, I didn't mean you. Now I could punch my own head — will you have breakfast at once, sir, and then we shall begin regular, you know, sir?"

"Have what?"

"Breakfast, breakfast, you know, sir; tea, coffee, cocoa, or chocolate; ham, eggs, or a bit of grilled fowl, cold sirloin of roast beef, or a red herring — anything you like, sir."

"I never take breakfast, so you may spare yourself the trouble of providing anything for me."

"Not take breakfast, sir! not take breakfast! Would you like to take anything to drink then, sir? People say it's an odd time, at eight o'clock in the morning, to drink; but, for my part, I always have thought that you couldn't begin a good thing too soon."

"I live upon drink," said the stranger; "but you have none in the cellar that will suit me."

"Indeed, sir."

"No, no, I am certain."

"Why, we've got some claret now, sir," said the landlord.

"Which may look like blood, and yet not be it."

"Like what, sir? — damn my rags!"

"Begone, begone."

The stranger uttered these words so peremptorily that the landlord hastily left the room, and going into his own bar, he gave himself so small a tap on the side of the head, that it would not have hurt a fly, as he said, —

"I could punch myself into bits, I could tear my hair out by the roots;" and then he pulled a little bit of his hair, so gently and tenderly that it showed what a man of discretion he was, even in the worst of all his agony of passion.

"The idea," he added, "of a fellow coming here, paying four guineas a week for board and lodging, telling me he would not have minded eight, and then not wanting any breakfast; it's enough to aggravate half a dozen saints; but what an odd fish he looks."

At this moment the ostler came in, and, standing at the bar, he wiped his mouth with his sleeve, as he said, —

"I suppose you'll stand a quart for that, master?"

"A quart for what, you vagabond? A quart because I've done myself up in heaps; a quart because I'm fit to pull myself into fiddlestrings?"

"No," said the ostler; "because I've just put up the gentleman's horse."

"What gentleman's horse?"

"Why, the big-looking fellow with the white face, now in the parlour."

"What, did he come on a horse, Sam? What sort of a looking creature is it? you may judge of a man from the sort of horse-company he keeps."

"Well, then, sir, I hardly know. It's coal black, and looks as knowing as possible; it's tried twice to get a kick at me, but I was down upon him, and put the bucket in his way. Howsomdever, I don't think it's a bad animal, as a animal, mind you, sir, though a little bit wicious or so."

"Well," said the publican, as he drew the ostler half a pint instead of a quart, "you're always drinking; take that."

"Blow me," said the ostler, "half a pint, master!"

"Plague take you, I can't stand parleying with you, there's the parlour bell; perhaps, after all, he will have some breakfast."

While the landlord was away the ostler helped himself to a quart of the strongest ale, which, by a singular faculty that he had acquired, he poured down his throat without any effort at swallowing, holding his head back, and the jug at a little distance from his mouth.

Having accomplished this feat, he reversed the jug, giving it a knowing tap with his knuckles as though he would have signified to all the world that it was empty, and that he had accomplished what he desired.

In the meantime, the landlord had made his way to his strange guest, who said to him, when he came into the room,

"Is there not one Sir Francis Varney residing in this town?"

"The devil!" thought the landlord; "this is another of them, I'll bet a guinea. Sir Francis Varney, sir, did you say? Why, sir, there was a Sir Francis Varney, but folks seem to think as how he's no better than he should be — a sort of vampyre, sir, if you know what that is."

"I have, certainly, heard of such things; but can you not tell me Varney's address? I wish to see him."

"Well, then, sir, I cannot tell it to you, for there's really been such a commotion and such a riot about him that he's taken himself off, I think, altogether, and we can hear nothing of him. Lord bless you, sir, they burnt down his house, and hunted him about so, that I don't think that he'll ever show his face here again."

"And cannot you tell me where he was seen last?"

"That I cannot, sir; but, if anybody knows anything about him, it's Mr. Henry Bannerworth, or perhaps Dr. Chillingworth, for they have had more to do with him than anybody else."

"Indeed; and can you tell me the address of the former individual?"

"That I can't, sir, for the Bannerworths have left the Hall. As for the doctor, sir, you'll see his house in the High-street, with a large brass plate on the door, so that you cannot mistake it. It's No. 9, on the other side of the way."

"I thank you for so much information," said the stranger, and rising, he walked to the door. Before, however, he left, he turned, and added,— "You can say, if you should by chance meet Mr. Bannerworth, that a Hungarian nobleman wishes to speak to him concerning Sir Francis Varney, the vampyre?"

"A what, sir?"

"A nobleman from Hungary," was the reply.

"The deuce!" said the landlord, as he looked after him. "He don't seem at all hungry here, not thirsty neither. What does he mean by a nobleman from Hungary? The idea of a man talking about hungry, and not taking any breakfast. He's queering me. I'll be hanged if I'll stand it. Here I clearly lose four guineas a week, and then get made game of besides. A nobleman, indeed! I think I see him. Why, he isn't quite so big as old Slaney, the butcher. It's a do. I'll have at him when he comes back."

Meanwhile, the unconscious object of this soliloquy passed down the High-street, until he came to Dr. Chillingworth's, at whose door he knocked.

Now Mrs. Chillingworth had been waiting the whole night for the return of the doctor, who had not yet made his appearance, and, consequently, that lady's temper had become acidulated to an uncommon extent and when she heard a knock at the door, something possessed her that it could be no other than her spouse, and she prepared to give him that warm reception which she considered he had a right, as a married man, to expect after such conduct.

She hurriedly filled a tolerably sized hand-basin with not the cleanest water in the world, and then, opening the door hurriedly with one hand, she slouced the contents into the face of the intruder, exclaiming, —

"Now you've caught it!"

"D — n!" said the Hungarian nobleman, and then Mrs. Chillingworth uttered a scream, for she feared she had made a mistake.

"Oh, sir! I'm very sorry: but I thought it was my husband."

"But if you did," said the stranger, "there was no occasion to drown him with a basin of soap-suds. It is your husband I want, madam, if he be Dr. Chillingworth."

"Then, indeed, you must go on wanting him, sir, for he's not been to his own home for a day and a night. He takes up all his time in hunting after that beastly vampyre."

"Ah! Sir Francis Varney, you mean."

"I do; and I'd Varney him if I caught hold of him."

"Can you give me the least idea of where he can be found?"

"Of course I can."

"Indeed! where?" said the stranger, eagerly.

"In some churchyard, to be sure, gobbling up the dead bodies."

With this Mrs. Chillingworth shut the door with a bang that nearly flattened the Hungarian's nose with his face, and he was fain to walk away, quite convinced that there was no information to be had in that quarter.

He returned to the inn, and having told the landlord that he would give a handsome reward to any one who would discover to him the retreat of Sir Francis Varney, he shut himself up in an apartment alone, and was busy for a time in writing letters.

Although the sum which the stranger offered was an indefinite one, the landlord mentioned the matter across the bar to several persons; but all of them shook their heads, believing it to be a very perilous adventure indeed to have anything to do with so troublesome a subject as Sir Francis Varney. As the day advanced, however, a young lad presented himself, and asked to see the gentleman who had been inquiring for Varney.

The landlord severely questioned and cross-questioned him, with the hope of discovering if he had any information: but the boy was quite obdurate, and would speak to no one but the person who had offered the reward, so that mine host was compelled to introduce him to the Hungarian nobleman, who, as yet, had neither eaten nor drunk in the house.

The boy wore upon his countenance the very expression of juvenile cunning, and when the stranger asked him if he really was in possession of any information concerning the retreat of Sir Francis Varney, he said, —

"I can tell you where he is, but what are you going to give?"

"What sum do you require?" said the stranger.

"A whole half-crown."

"It is your's; and, if your information prove correct, come to-morrow, and I'll add another to it, always provided, likewise, you keep the secret from any one else."

"Trust me for that," said the boy. "I live with my grandmother; she's precious old, and has got a cottage. We sell milk and cakes, sticky stuff, and pennywinkles."

"A goodly collection. Go on."

"Well, sir, this morning, there comes a man in with a bottle, and he buys a bottle full of milk and a loaf. I saw him, and I knew it was Varney, the vampyre."

"You followed him?"

"Of course I did, sir; and he's staying at the house that's to let down the lane, round the corner, by Mr. Biggs's, and past Lee's garden, leaving old Slaney's stacks on your right hand, and so cutting on till you come to Grants's meadow, when you'll see old Madhunter a brick-field staring of you in the face; and, arter that—"

"Peace — peace! — you shall yourself conduct me. Come to this place at sunset; be secret, and, probably, ten times the reward you have already received may be yours," said the stranger.

“What, ten half-crowns?”

“Yes, I will keep my word with you.”

“What a go! I know what I’ll do. I’ll set up as a show man, and what a glorious treat it will be, to peep through one of the holes all day myself, and get somebody to pull the strings up and down, and when I’m tired of that, I can blaze away upon the trumpet like one o’clock. I think I see me. Here you sees the Duke of Marlborough a whopping of everybody, and here you see the Frenchmen flying about like parched peas in a sifter.”

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

THE EXCITED POPULACE. — VARNEY HUNTED. — THE PLACE OF REFUGE.

There seemed, now a complete lull in the proceedings as connected with Varney, the vampyre. We have reason to believe that the executioner who had been as solicitous as Varney to obtain undisputed possession of Bannerworth Hall, has fallen a victim to the indiscriminating rage of the mob. Varney himself is a fugitive, and bound by the most solemn ties to Charles Holland, not only to communicate to him such particulars of the past, as will bring satisfaction to his mind, but to abstain from any act which, for the future, shall exercise a disastrous influence upon the happiness of Flora.

The doctor and the admiral, with Henry, had betaken themselves from the Hall as we had recorded, and, in due time, reached the cottage where Flora and her mother had found a temporary refuge.

Mrs. Bannerworth was up; but Flora was sleeping, and, although the tidings they had to tell were of a curious and mixed nature, they would not have her disturbed to listen to them.

And, likewise, they were rather pleased than otherwise, since they knew not exactly what had become of Charles Holland, to think that they would probably be spared the necessity of saying they could not account for his absence.

That he had gone upon some expedition, probably dangerous, and so one which he did not wish to communicate the particulars of to his friends, lest they should make a strong attempt to dissuade him from it, they were induced to believe.

But yet they had that confidence in his courage and active intellectual resources, to believe that he would come through it unscathed, and, probably, shortly show himself at the cottage.

In this hope they were not disappointed, for in about two hours Charles made his appearance; but, until he began to be questioned concerning his absence by the admiral, he scarcely considered the kind of dilemma he had put himself into by the promise of secrecy he had given to Varney, and was a little puzzled to think now much he might tell, and how much he was bound in honour to conceal.

"Avast there!" cried the admiral; "what's become of your tongue, Charles? You've been on some cruize, I'll be bound. Haul over the ship's books, and tell us what's happened."

"I have been upon an adventure," said Charles, "which I hope will be productive of beneficial results to us all; but, the fact is, I have made a promise, perhaps incautiously, that I will not communicate what I know."

"Whew!" said the admiral, "that's awkward; but, however, if a man said under sealed instructions, there's an end of it. I remember when I was off Candia once — -"

"Ha!" interposed Jack, "that was the time you tumbled over the blessed binnacle, all in consequence of taking too much Madeira. I remember it, too — it's an out and out good story, that 'ere. You took a rope's end, you know, and laid into the bowsprit; and, says you, 'Get up, you lubber,' says you, all the while a thinking, I supposes, as it was long Jack Ingram, the carpenter's mate, laying asleep. What a lark!"

"This scoundrel will be the death of me," said the admiral; "there isn't one word of truth in what he says. I never got drunk in all my life, as everybody knows. Jack, affairs are getting serious between you and I — we must part, and for good. It's a good many times that I've told you you've forgot the difference between the quarter-deck and the caboose. Now, I'm serious — you're off the ship's books, and there's an end of you."

"Very good," said Jack; "I'm willing I'll leave you. Do you think I want to keep you any longer? Good bye, old bloak — I'll leave you to repent, and when old grim death comes yard-arm and yard-arm with you, and you can't shake off his boarding-tackle, you'll say, 'Where's Jack Pringle?' says you; and then what's his mane — oh ah! echo you call it — echo'll say, it's d —— d if it knows."

Jack turned upon his heel, and, before the admiral could make any reply he left the place.

"What's the rascal up to now?" said the admiral. "I really didn't think he'd have taken me at my word."

"Oh, then, after all, you didn't mean it, uncle?" said Charles.

"What's that to you, you lubber, whether I mean it, or not, you shore-going squab? Of course I expect everybody to desert an old hulk, rats and all — and now Jack Pringle's gone; the vagabond, couldn't he stay, and get drunk as long as he liked! Didn't he say what he pleased, and do what he pleased, the mutinous thief? Didn't he say I run away from a Frenchman off Cape Ushant, and didn't I put up with that?"

"But, my dear uncle, you sent him away yourself."

"I didn't, and you know I didn't; but I see how it is, you've disgusted Jack among you. A better seaman never trod the deck of a man-of-war."

"But his drunkenness, uncle?"

"It's a lie. I don't believe he ever got drunk. I believe you all invented it, and Jack's so good-natured, he tumbled about just to keep you in countenance.”

“But his insolence, uncle; his gross insolence towards you — his inventions, his exaggerations of the truth?”

“Avast, there — avast, there — none of that, Master Charlie; Jack couldn’t do anything of the sort; and I means to say this, that if Jack was here now, I’d stick up for him, and say he was a good seaman.

“Tip us your fin, then,” said Jack, darting into the room; “do you think I’d leave you, you d —— d old fool? What would become of you, I wonder, if I wasn’t to take you in to dry nurse? Why, you blessed old babby, what do you mean by it?”

“Jack, you villain!”

“Ah! go on and call me a villain as much as you like. Don’t you remember when the bullets were scuttling our nobs?”

“I do, I do, Jack; tip us your fin, old fellow. You’ve saved my life more than once.”

“It’s a lie.”

“It ain’t. You did, I say.”

“You bed —— d!”

And thus was the most serious misunderstanding that these two worthies ever had together made up. The real fact is, that the admiral could as little do without Jack, as he could have done without food; and as for Pringle, he no more thought of leaving the old commodore, than of — what shall we say? forswearing him. Jack himself could not have taken a stronger oath.

But the old admiral had suffered so much from the idea that Jack had actually left him, that although he abused him as usual often enough, he never again talked of taking him off the ship’s books; and, to the credit of Jack be it spoken, he took no advantage of the circumstance, and only got drunk just as usual, and called his master an old fool whenever it suited him.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

THE HUNGARIAN NOBLEMAN GETS INTO DANGER. — HE IS FIRED AT, AND SHOWS SOME OF HIS QUALITY.

Considerably delighted was the Hungarian, not only at the news he had received from the boy, but as well for the cheapness of it. Probably he did not conceive it possible that the secret of the retreat of such a man as Varney could have been attained so easily.

He waited with great impatience for the evening, and stirred not from the inn for several hours; neither did he take any refreshment, notwithstanding he had made so liberal an arrangement with the landlord to be supplied.

All this was a matter of great excitement and speculation in the inn, so much so, indeed, that the landlord sent for some of the oldest customers of his house, regular topers, who sat there every evening, indulging in strong drinks, and pipes and tobacco, to ask their serious advice as to what he should do, as if it were necessary he should do anything at all.

But, somehow or another, these wiseacres who assembled at the landlord's bidding, and sat down, with something strong before them, in the bar parlour, never once seemed to think that a man might, if he choosed, come to an inn, and agree to pay four guineas a week for board and lodging, and yet take nothing at all.

No; they could not understand it, and therefore they would not have it. It was quite monstrous that anybody should attempt to do anything so completely out of the ordinary course of proceeding. It was not to be borne; and as in this country it happens, free and enlightened as we are, that no man can commit a greater social offence than doing something that his neighbours never thought of doing themselves, the Hungarian nobleman was voted a most dangerous character, and, in fact, not to be put up with.

"I shouldn't have thought so much of it" said the landlord; "but only look at the aggravation of the thing. After I have asked him four guineas a week, and expected to be beaten down to two, to be then told that he would not have cared if it had been eight. It is enough to aggravate a saint."

"Well, I agree with you there," said another; "that's just what it is, and I only wonder that a man of your sagacity has not quite understood it before."

"Understood what?"

"Why, that he is a vampyre. He has heard of Sir Francis Varney, that's the fact, and he's come to see him. Birds of a feather, you know, flock together, and now we shall have two vampyres in the town instead of one."

The party looked rather blank at this suggestion, which, indeed, seemed rather uncomfortable probably. The landlord had just opened his mouth to make some remark, when he was stopped by the violent ringing of what he now called the vampyre's bell, since it proceeded from the room where the Hungarian nobleman was.

"Have you an almanack in the house?" was the question of the mysterious guest.

"An almanack, sir? well, I really don't know. Let me see, an almanack."

"But, perhaps, you can tell me. I was to know the moon's age."

"The devil!" thought the landlord; "he's a vampyre, and no mistake. Why, sir, as to the moon's age, it was a full moon last night, very bright and beautiful, only you could not see it for the clouds."

"A full moon last night," said the mysterious guest, thoughtfully; "it may shine, then, brightly, to-night, and if so, all will be well. I thank you, — leave the room."

"Do you mean to say, sir, you don't want anything to eat now?"

"What I want I'll order."

"But you have ordered nothing."

"Then presume that I want nothing."

The discomfited landlord was obliged to leave the room, for there was no such a thing as making any answer to this, and so, still further confirmed in his opinion that the stranger was a vampyre that came to see Sir Francis Varney from a sympathetic feeling towards him, he again reached the bar-parlour.

"You may depend," he said, "as sure as eggs is eggs, that he is a vampyre. Hilloa! he's going off, — after him — after him; he thinks we suspect him. There he goes — down the High-street."

The landlord ran out, and so did those who were with him, one of whom carried his brandy and water in his hand, which, being too hot for him to swallow all at once, he still could not think of leaving behind.

It was now gelling rapidly dark, and the mysterious stranger was actually proceeding towards the lane to keep his appointment with the boy who had promised to conduct him to the hiding-place of Sir Francis Varney.

He had not proceeded far, however, before he began to suspect that he was followed, as it was evident on the instant that he altered his course; for, instead of walking down the lane, where the boy was waiting for him, he went right on, and seemed desirous of making his way into the open country between the town and Bannerworth Hall.

His pursuers — for they assumed that character — when they saw this became anxious to intercept him; and thinking that the greater force they had the better, they called out aloud as they passed a smithy, where a man was shoeing a horse, —

"Jack Burdon, here is another vampyre!"

"The deuce there is!" said the person who was addressed. "I'll soon settle him. Here's my wife gets no sleep of a night as it is, all owing to that Varney, who has been plaguing us so long. I won't put up with another."

So saying, he snatched from a hook on which it hung, an old fowling-piece, and joined the pursuit, which now required to be conducted with some celerity, for the stranger had struck into the open country, and was getting on at good speed.

The last remnants of the twilight were fading away, and although the moon had actually risen, its rays were obscured by a number of light, fleecy clouds, which, although they did not promise to be of long continuance, as yet certainly impeded the light.

"Where is he going?" said the blacksmith. "He seems to be making his way towards the mill-stream."

"No," said another; "don't you see he is striking higher up towards the old ford, where the stepping-stones are!"

"He is — he is," cried the blacksmith. "Run on — run on; don't you see he is crossing it now? Tell me, all of you, are you quite sure he is a vampyre, and no mistake? He ain't the exciseman, landlord, now, is he?"

"The exciseman, the devil! Do you think I want to shoot the exciseman?"

"Very good — then here goes," exclaimed the Smith.

He stooped, and just as the brisk night air blew aside the clouds from before the face of the moon, and as the stranger was crossing the slippery stones, he fired at him.

How silently and sweetly the moon's rays fall upon the water, upon the meadows, and upon the woods. The scenery appeared the work of enchantment, some fairy land, waiting the appearance of its inhabitants. No sound met the ear; the very wind was hushed; nothing was there to distract the sense of sight, save the power of reflection.

This, indeed, would aid the effect of such a scene. A cloudless sky, the stars all radiant with beauty, while the moon, rising higher and higher in the heavens, increasing in the strength and refulgence of her light, and dimming the very stars, which seemed to grow gradually invisible as the majesty of the queen of night became more and more manifest.

The dark woods and the open meadows contrasted more and more strongly; like light and shade, the earth and sky were not more distinct and apart; and the ripling stream, that rushed along with all the impetuosity of uneven ground.

The banks are clothed with verdure; the tall sedges, here and there, lined the sides; beds of bulrushes raised their heads high above all else, and threw out their round clumps of blossoms like tufts, and looked strange in the light of the moon.

Here and there, too, the willows bent gracefully over the stream, and their long leaves were wafted and borne up and down by the gentler force of the stream.

Below, the stream widened, and ran foaming over a hard, stony bottom, and near the middle is a heap of stones — of large stones, that form the bed of the river, from which the water has washed away all earthy particles, and left them by themselves.

These stones in winter could not be seen, they were all under water, and the stream washed over in a turbulent and tumultuous manner. But now, when the water was clear and low, they are many of them positively out of the water, the stream running around and through their interstices; the water-weeds here and there lying at the top of the stream, and blossoming beautifully.

The daisy-like blossoms danced and waved gently on the moving flood, at the same time they shone in the moonlight, like fairy faces rising from the depths of the river, to receive the principle of life from the moon's rays.

'Tis sweet to wander in the moonlight at such an hour, and it is sweet to look upon such a scene with an unruffled mind, and to give way to the feelings that are engendered by a walk by the river side.

See, the moon is rising higher and higher, the shadows grow shorter and shorter; the river, which in places was altogether hidden by the tall willow trees, now gradually becomes less and less hidden, and the water becomes more and more lit up.

The moonbeams play gracefully on the rippling surface, here and there appearing like liquid silver, that each instant changed its position and surface exposed to the light.

Such a moment — such a scene, were by far too well calculated to cause the most solemn and serious emotions of the mind, and he must have been but at best insensible, who could wander over meadow and through grove, and yet remain untouched by the scene of poetry and romance in which he breathed and moved.

At such a time, and in such a place, the world is alive with all the finer essences of mysterious life. 'Tis at such an hour that the spirits quit their secret abodes, and visit the earth, and whirl round the enchanted trees.

’Tis now the spirits of earth and air dance their giddy flight from flower to flower. ’Tis now they collect and exchange their greetings; the wood is filled with them, the meadows teem with them, the hedges at the river side have them hidden among the deep green leaves and blades.

But what is that yonder, on the stones, partially out of the water — what can it be? The more it is looked at, the more it resembles the human form — and yet it is still and motionless on the hard stones — and yet it is a human form. The legs are lying in the water, the arms appear to be partially in and partially out, they seem moved by the stream now and then, but very gently — so slightly, indeed, that it might well be questioned if it moved at all.

The moon’s rays had not yet reached it; the bank on the opposite side of the stream was high, and some tall trees rose up and obscured the moon. But she was rising higher and higher each moment, and, finally, when it has reached the tops of those trees, then the rays will reach the middle of the river, and then, by degrees, it will reach the stones in the river, and, finally, the body that lies there so still and so mysteriously.

How it came there it would be difficult to say. It appeared as though, when the waters were high, the body had floated down, and, at the subsidence of the waters, it had been left upon the stones, and now it was exposed to view.

It was strange and mysterious, and those who might look upon such a sight would feel their blood chill, and their body creep, to contemplate the remains of humanity in such a place, and in such a condition as that must be in.

A human life had been taken! How? Who could tell? Perhaps accident alone was the cause of it; perhaps some one had taken a life by violent means, and thrown the body in the waters to conceal the fact and the crime.

The waters had brought it down, and deposited it there in the middle of the river, without any human creature being acquainted with the fact.

But the moon rises — the beams come trembling through the tree tops and straggling branches, and fall upon the opposite bank, and there lies the body, mid stream, and in comparative darkness.

By the time the river is lit up by the moon’s rays, then the object on the stones will be visible, then it can be ascertained what appears now only probable, namely, is the dark object a human form or not?

In the absence of light it appears to be so, but when the flood of silver light falls upon it, it would be placed then beyond a doubt.

The time is approaching — the moon each moment approaches her meridian, and each moment do the rays increase in number and in strength, while the shadows shorten.

The opposite bank each moment becomes more and more distinct, and the side of the stream, the green rushes and sedges, all by degrees come full into view.

Now and then a fish leaps out of the stream, and just exhibits itself, as much as to say, “There are things living in the stream, and I am one of them.”

The moment is one of awe — the presence of that mysterious and dreadful-looking object, even while its identity remains doubt, chills the heart — it contracts the expanding thoughts to that one object — all interest in the scene lies centered in that one point.

What could it be? What else but a human body? What else could assume such a form? But see, nearly half the stream is lit by the moonbeams struggling through the tree tops, and now rising above them. The light increases, and the shadows shorten.

The edge of the bed of stones now becomes lit up by the moonlight; the rippling stream, the bubbles, and the tiny spray that was caused by the rush of water against the stones, seemed like sparkling flashes of silver fire.

Then came the moonbeams upon the body, for it was raised above the level of the water, and shewed conspicuously; for the moonbeams reached the body before they fell on the surrounding water; for that reason then it was the body presented a strange and ghastly object against a deep, dark background, by which it was surrounded.

But this did not last long — the water in another minute was lit up by the moon's pale beams, and then indeed could be plainly enough seen the body of a man lying on the heap of stones motionless and ghastly.

The colourless hue of the moonlight gave the object a most horrific and terrible appearance! The face of the dead man was turned towards the moon's rays, and the body seemed to receive all the light that could fall upon it.

It was a terrible object to look upon, and one that added a new and singular interest to the scene! The world seemed then to be composed almost exclusively of still life, and the body was no impediment to the stillness of the scene.

It was, all else considered, a calm, beautiful scene, lovely the night, gorgeous the silvery rays that lit up the face of nature; the hill and dale, meadow, and wood, and river, all afforded contrasts strong, striking, and strange.

But strange, and more strange than any contrast in nature, was that afforded to the calm beauty of the night and place by the deep stillness and quietude imposed upon the mind by that motionless human body.

The moon's rays now fell upon its full length; the feet were lying in the water, the head lay back, with its features turned towards the quarter of the heavens where the moon shone from; the hair floated on the shallow water, while the face and body were exposed to all influences, from its raised and prominent position.

The moonbeams had scarcely settled upon it — scarce a few minutes — when the body moved. Was it the water that moved it? it could not be, surely, that the moonbeams had the power of recalling life into that inanimate mass, that lay there for some time still and motionless as the very stones on which it lay.

It was endued with life; the dead man gradually rose up, and leaned himself upon his elbow; he paused a moment like one newly recalled to life; he seemed to become assured he did live. He passed one hand through his hair, which was wet, and then rose higher into a sitting posture, and then he leaned on one hand, inclining himself towards the moon.

His breast heaved with life, and a kind of deep inspiration, or groan, came from him, as he first awoke to life, and then he seemed to pause for a few moments. He turned gradually over, till his head inclined down the stream.

Just below, the water deepened, and ran swiftly and silently on amid meads and groves of trees. The vampyre was revived; he awoke again to a ghastly life; he turned from the heap of stones, he gradually allowed himself to sink into deep water, and then, with a loud plunge, he swam to the centre of the river.

Slowly and surely did he swim into the centre of the river, and down the stream he went. He took long, but easy strokes, for he was going down the stream, and that aided him.

For some distance might he be heard and seen through the openings in the trees, but he became gradually more and more indistinct, till sound and sight both ceased, and the vampyre had disappeared.

During the continuance of this singular scene, not one word had passed between the landlord and his companions. When the blacksmith fired the fowling-piece, and saw the stranger fall, apparently lifeless, upon the stepping-stones that crossed the river, he became terrified it what he had done, and gazed upon the seeming lifeless form with a face on which the utmost horror was depicted.

They all seemed transfixed to the spot, and although each would have given worlds to move away, a kind of nightmare seemed to possess them, which stunned all their faculties, and brought over them a torpidity from which they found it impossible to arouse themselves.

But, when the apparently dead man moved again, and when, finally, the body, which appeared so destitute of life, rolled into the stream, and floated away with the tide, their fright might be considered to have reached its climax. The absence of the body, however, had seemingly, at all events, the effect of releasing them from the mental and physical thraldom in which they were, and they were enabled to move from the spot, which they did immediately, making their way towards the town with great speed.

As they got near, they held a sort of council of war as to what they should do under the circumstances, the result of which was, that they came to a conclusion to keep all that they had done and seen to themselves; for, if they did not, they might be called upon for some very troublesome explanations concerning the fate of the supposed Hungarian nobleman whom they had taken upon themselves to believe was a vampyre, and to shoot accordingly, without taking the trouble to inquire into the legality of such an act.

How such a secret was likely to be kept, when it was shared amongst seven people, it is hard to say; but, if it were so kept, it could only be under the pressure of a strong feeling of self-preservation.

They were forced individually, of course, to account for their absence during the night at their respective homes, and how they managed to do that is best known to themselves.

As to the landlord, he felt compelled to state that, having his suspicions of his guest aroused, he followed him on a walk that he pretended to take, and he had gone so far, that at length he had given up the chase, and lost his own way in returning.

Thus was it, then, that this affair still preserved all its mystery, with a large superadded amount of fear attendant upon it; for, if the mysterious guest were really anything supernatural, might he not come again in a much more fearful shape, and avenge the treatment he had received?

The only person who fell any disappointment in the affair, or whose expectations were not realised, was the boy who had made the appointment with the supposed vampyre at the end of the lane, and who was to have received what he considered so large a reward for pointing out the retreat of Sir Francis Varney.

He waited in vain for the arrival of the Hungarian nobleman, and, at last, indignation got the better of him, and he walked away. Feeling that he had been jilted, he resolved to proceed to the public-house and demand the half-crowns which had been so liberally promised him; but when he reached there he found that the party whom he sought was not within, nor the landlord either, for that was the precise time when that worthy individual was pursuing his guest over meadow and bill, through brake and through briar, towards the stepping stones on the river.

What the boy further did on the following day, when he found that he was to reap no more benefit for the adventure, we shall soon perceive.

As for the landlord, he did endeavour to catch a few hours' brief repose; but as he dreamed that the Hungarian nobleman came in the likeness of a great toad, and sat upon his chest, feeling like the weight of a mountain, while he, the landlord, tried to scream and cry for help, but found that he could neither do one thing nor the other, we may guess that his repose did not at all invigorate him.

As he himself expressed it, he got up all of a shake, with a strong impression that he was a very ill-used individual, indeed, to have had the nightmare in the day time.

And now we will return to the cottage where the Bannerworth family were at all events, making themselves quite as happy as they did at their ancient mansion, in order to see what is there passing, and how Dr. Chillingworth made an effort to get up some evidence of something that the Bannerworth family knew nothing of, therefore could not very well be expected to render him much assistance. That he did, however, make what he considered an important discovery, we shall perceive in the course of the ensuing chapter, in which it will be seen that the best hidden things will, by the merest accident, sometimes come to light, and that, too, when least expected by any one at all connected with the result.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

THE DISCOVERY OF THE POCKET BOOK OF MARMADUKE BANNERWORTH. — ITS MYSTERIOUS CONTENTS.

The little episode had just taken place which we have recorded between the old admiral and Jack Pringle, when Henry Bannerworth and Charles Holland stepped aside to converse.

“Charles,” said Henry, “it has become absolutely necessary that I should put an end to this state of dependence in which we all live upon your uncle. It is too bad to think, that because, through fighting the battles of his country, he has amassed some money, we are to eat it up.”

“My dear friend,” said Charles, “does it not strike you, that it would be a great deal worse than too bad, if my uncle could not do what he liked with his own?”

“Yes; but, Charles, that is not the question.”

“I think it is, though I know not what other question you can make of it.”

“We have all talked it over, my mother, my brother, and Flora; and my brother and I have determined, if this state of things should last much longer, to find out some means of honourable exertion by which we may, at all events, maintain ourselves without being burdensome to any.”

“Well, well, we will talk of that another time.”

“Nay, but hear me; we were thinking that if we went into some branch of the public service, your uncle would have the pleasure, such we are quite sure it would be to him, of assisting us greatly by his name and influence."

"Well, well, Henry, that's all very well; but for a little time do not throw up the old man and make him unhappy. I believe I am his only relative in the world, and, as he has often said, he intended leaving me heir to all he possesses, you see there is no harm done by you receiving a small portion of it beforehand."

"And," said Henry, "by that line of argument, we are to find an excuse for robbing your uncle; in the fact, that we are robbing you likewise."

"No, no; indeed, you do not view the matter rightly."

"Well, all I can say is, Charles, that while I feel, and while we all feel, the deepest debt of gratitude towards your uncle, it is our duty to do something. In a box which we have brought with us from the Hall, and which has not been opened since our father's death, I have stumbled over some articles of ancient jewellery and plate, which, at all events, will produce something."

"But which you must not part with."

"Nay, but, Charles, these are things I knew not we possessed, and most ill-suited do they happen to be to our fallen fortunes. It is money we want, not the gewgaws of a former state, to which we can have now no sort of pretension."

"Nay, I know you have all the argument; but still is there something sad and uncomfortable to one's feelings in parting with such things as those which have been in families for many years."

"But we knew not that we had them; remember that, Charles. Come and look at them. Those relics of a bygone age may amuse you, and, as regards myself, there are no circumstances whatever associated with them that give them any extrinsic value; so laugh at them or admire them, as you please, I shall most likely be able to join with you in either feeling."

"Well, be it so — I will come and look at them; but you must think better of what you say concerning my uncle, for I happen to know — which you ought likewise by this time — how seriously the old man would feel any rejection on your part of the good he fancies he is doing you. I tell you, Henry, it is completely his hobby, and let him have earned his money with ten times the danger he has, he could not spend it with anything like the satisfaction that he does, unless he were allowed to dispose of it in this way."

"Well, well; be it so for a time."

"The fact is, his attachment to Flora is so great — which is a most fortunate circumstance for me — that I should not be at all surprised that she cuts me out of one half my estate, when the old man dies. But come, we will look at your ancient bijouterie."

Henry led Charles into an apartment of the cottage where some of the few things had been placed that were brought from Bannerworth Hall, which were not likely to be in constant and daily use.

Among these things happened to be the box which Henry had mentioned, and from which he had taken a miscellaneous assortment of things of an antique and singular character.

There were old dresses of a season and of a taste long gone by; ancient articles of defence; some curiously wrought daggers; and a few ornaments, pretty, but valueless, along with others of more sterling pretensions, which Henry pointed out to Charles.

"I am almost inclined to think," said the latter, "that some of these things are really of considerable value; but I do not I profess to be an accurate judge, and, perhaps, I am more taken with the beauty of an article, than the intrinsic worth. What is that which you have just taken from the box?"

"It seems a half-mask," said Henry, "made of silk; and here are initial letters within it — M. B."

"To what do they apply?"

"Marmaduke Bannerworth, my father."

"I regret I asked you."

"Nay, Charles, you need not. Years have now elapsed since that misguided man put a period to his own existence, in the gardens of Bannerworth Hall. Of course, the shock was a great one to us all, although I must confess that we none of us knew much of a father's affections. But time reconciles one to these dispensations, and to a friend, like yourself, I can talk upon these subjects without a pang."

He laid down the mask, and proceeded further in his search in the old box.

Towards the bottom of it there were some books, and, crushed in by the side of them, there was an ancient-looking pocket-book, which Charles pointed out, saying, —

"There, Henry, who knows but you may find a fortune when you least expect it?"

"Those who expect nothing," said Henry, "will not be disappointed. At all events, as regards this pocket-book, you see it is empty."

"Not quite. A card has fallen from it."

Charles took up the card, and read upon it the name of Count Barrare.

"That name," he said, "seems familiar to me. Ah! now I recollect, I have read of such a man. He flourished some twenty, or five-and-twenty years ago, and was considered a *roue* of the first water — a finished gamester; and, in a sort of brief memoir I read once of him, it said that he disappeared suddenly one day, and was never again heard of."

"Indeed! I'm not puzzled to think how his card came into my father's pocket-book. They met at some gaming-house; and, if some old pocket-book of the Count Barrare's were shaken, there might fall from it a card, with the name of Mr. Marmaduke Bannerworth upon it."

"Is there nothing further in the pocket-book — no memoranda?"

"I will look. Stay! here is something upon one of the leaves — let me see— 'Mem., twenty-five thousand pounds! He who robs the robber, steals little; it was not meant to kill him: but it will be unsafe to use the money for a time — my brain seems on fire — the remotest hiding-place in the house is behind the picture."

"What do you think of that?" said Charles.

"I know not what to think. There is one thing though, that I do know."

"And what is that?"

"It is my father's handwriting. I have many scraps of his, and his peculiar hand is familiar to me."

"It's very strange, then, what it can refer to."

"Charles — Charles! there is a mystery connected with our fortunes, that I never could unravel; and once or twice it seemed as if we were upon the point of discovering all; but something has ever interfered to prevent us, and we have been thrown back into the realms of conjecture. My father's last words were, 'The money is hidden;' and then he tried to add something; but death stopped his utterance. Now, does it not almost seem that this memorandum alluded to the circumstance?"

"It does, indeed."

"And then, scarcely had my father breathed his last, when a man comes and asks for him at the garden-gate, and, upon hearing that he is dead, utters some imprecations, and walks away."

"Well, Henry, you must trust to time and circumstances to unravel these mysteries. For myself, I own that I cannot do so; I see no earthly way out of the difficulty whatever. But still it does appear to me as if Dr. Chillingworth knew something or had heard something, with which he really ought to make you acquainted."

"Do not blame the worthy doctor; he may have made an error of judgment, but never one of feeling; and you may depend, if he is keeping anything from me, that he is doing so from some excellent motive: most probably because he thinks it will give me pain, and so will not let me endure any unhappiness from it, unless he is quite certain as regards the facts. When he is so, you may depend he will be communicative, and I shall know all that he has to relate. But, Charles, it is evident to me that you, too, are keeping something."

"I!"

"Yes; you acknowledge to having had an interview, and a friendly one, with Varney; and you likewise acknowledge that he had told you things which he has compelled you to keep secret."

"I have promised to keep them secret, and I deeply regret the promise that I have made. There cannot be anything to my mind more essentially disagreeable than to have one's tongue tied in one's interview with friends. I hate to hear anything that I may not repeat to those whom I take into my own confidence."

"I can understand the feeling; but here comes the worthy doctor."

"Show him the memorandum."

"I will."

As Dr. Chillingworth entered the apartments Henry handed him the memorandum that had been found in the old pocket-book, saying as he did so, —

"Look at that, doctor, and give us your candid opinion upon it."

Dr. Chillingworth fitted on his spectacles, and read the paper carefully. At its conclusion, he screwed up his mouth into an extremely small compass, and doubling up the paper, he put it into his capacious waistcoat pocket, saying as he did so, —

"Oh! oh! oh! oh! hum!"

"Well, doctor," said Henry; "we are waiting for your opinion."

"My opinion! Well, then, my dear boy, I must say, my opinion, to the best of my belief is, that I really don't know anything about it."

"Then, perhaps, you'll surrender us the memorandum," said Charles; "because, if you don't know anything, we may as well make a little inquiry."

"Ha!" said the worthy doctor; "we can't put old heads upon young shoulders, that's quite clear. Now, my good young men, be patient and quiet; recollect, that what you know you're acquainted with, and that that which is hidden from you, you cannot very well come to any very correct conclusion upon. There's a right side and a wrong one you may depend, to every question; and he who walks heedlessly in the dark, is very apt to run his head against a post. Good evening, my boys — good evening."

Away bustled the doctor.

"Well," said Charles, "what do you think of that, Mr. Henry?"

"I think he knows what he's about."

"That may be; but I'll be hanged if anybody else does. The doctor is by no means favourable to the march of popular information; and I really think he might have given us some food for reflection, instead of leaving us so utterly and entirely at fault as he has; and you know he's taken away your memorandum even."

"Let him have it, Charles — let him have it; it is safe with him. The old man may be, and I believe is, a little whimsical and crotchety; but he means abundantly well, and he's just one of those sort of persons, and always was, who will do good his own way, or not at all; so we must take the good with the bad in those cases, and let Dr. Chillingworth do as he pleases."

"I cannot say it is nothing to me, although those words were rising to my lips, because you know, Henry, that everything which concerns you or yours is something to me; and therefore it is that I feel extremely anxious for the solution of all this mystery. Before I hear the sequel of that which Varney, the vampyre, has so strongly made me a confidant of, I will, at all events, make an effort to procure his permission to communicate it to all those who are in any way beneficially interested in the circumstances. Should he refuse me that permission, I am almost inclined myself to beg him to withhold his confidence."

"Nay, do not do so, Charles — do not do that, I implore you. Recollect, although you cannot make us joint recipients with you in your knowledge, you can make use of it, probably, to our advantage, in saving us, perchance, from the different consequences, so that you can make what you know in some way beneficial to us, although not in every way."

"There is reason in that, and I give in at once. Be it so, Henry. I will wait on him, and if I cannot induce him to change his determination, and allow me to tell some other as well as Flora, I must give in, and take the thing as a secret, although I shall not abandon a hope, even after he has told me all he has to tell, that I may induce him to permit me to make a general confidence, instead of the partial one he has empowered me to do."

"It may be so; and, at all events, we must not reject a proffered good because it is not quite so complete as it might be."

"You are right; I will keep my appointment with him, entertaining the most sanguine hope that our troubles and disasters — I say our, because I consider myself quite associated in thought, interest, and feelings with your family — may soon be over."

"Heaven grant it may be so, for your's and Flora's sake; but I feel that Bannerworth Hall will never again be the place it was to us. I should prefer that we sought for new associations, which I have no doubt we may find, and that among us we get up some other home that would be happier, because not associated with so many sad scenes in our history."

"Be it so; and I am sure that the admiral would gladly give way to such an arrangement. He has often intimated that he thought Bannerworth Hall a dull place; consequently, although he pretends to have purchased it of you, I think he will be very glad to leave it."

"Be it so, then. If it should really happen that we are upon the eve of any circumstances that will really tend to relieve us from our misery and embarrassments, we will seek for some pleasanter abode than the Hall, which you may well imagine, since it became the scene of that dreadful tragedy that left us fatherless, has borne but a distasteful appearance to all our eyes."

"I don't wonder at that, and am only surprised that, after such a thing had happened any of you liked to inhabit the place."

"We did not like, but our poverty forced us. You have no notion of the difficulties through which we have struggled; and the fact that we had a home rent free was one of so much importance to us, that had it been surrounded by a thousand more disagreeables than it was, we must have put up with it; but now that we owe so much to the generosity of your uncle, I suppose we can afford to talk of what we like and of what we don't like."

"You can, Henry, and it shall not be my fault if you do not always afford to do so; and now, as the time is drawing on, I think I will proceed at once to Varney, for it is better to be soon than late, and get from him the remainder of his story."

There were active influences at work, to prevent Sir Francis Varney from so quickly as he had arranged to do, carrying out his intention of making Charles Holland acquainted with the history of the eventful period of his life, which had been associated with Marmaduke Bannerworth.

One would have scarcely thought it possible that anything now would have prevented Varney from concluding his strange narrative; but that he was prevented, will appear.

The boy who had been promised such liberal payment by the Hungarian nobleman, for betraying the place of Varney's concealment, we have already stated, felt bitterly the disappointment of not being met, according to promise, at the corner of the lane, by that individual.

It not only deprived him of the half-crowns, which already in imagination he had laid out, but it was a great blow to his own importance, for after his discovery of the residence of the vampyre, he looked upon himself as quite a public character, and expected great applause for his cleverness.

But when the Hungarian nobleman came not, all these dreams began to vanish into thin air, and, like the unsubstantial fabric of a vision, to leave no trace behind them.

He got dreadfully aggravated, and his first thought was to go to

Varney, and see what he could get from him, by betraying the fact that some one was actively in search of him.

That seemed, however, a doubtful good, and perhaps there was some personal dread of the vampyre mixed up with the rejection of this proposition. But reject it he did, and then he walked moodily into the own without any fixed resolution of what he should do.

All that he thought of was a general idea that he should like to create some mischief, if possible — what it was he cared not, so long as it made a disturbance.

Now, he knew well that the most troublesome and fidgetty man in the town was Tobias Philpots, a saddler, who was always full of everybody's business but his own, and ever ready to hear any scandal of his neighbours.

"I have a good mind," said the boy, "to go to old Philpots, and tell him all about it, that I have."

The good mind soon strengthened itself into a fixed resolution, and full of disdain and indignation at the supposed want of faith of the Hungarian nobleman, he paused opposite the saddler's door.

Could he but for a moment have suspected the real reason why the appointment had not been kept with him, all his curiosity would have been doubly aroused, and he would have followed the landlord of the inn and his associate upon the track of the second vampyre that had visited the town.

But of this he knew nothing, for that proceeding had been conducted with amazing quietness; and the fact of the Hungarian nobleman, when he found that he was followed, taking a contrary course to that in which Varney was concealed, prevented the boy from knowing anything of his movements.

Hence the thing looked to him like a piece of sheer neglect and contemptuous indifference, which he felt bound to resent.

He did not pause long at the door of the saddler's, but, after a few moments, he walked boldly in, and said, —

"Master Philpots, I have got something extraordinary to tell you, and you may give me what you like for telling you."

"Go on, then," said the saddler, "that's just the price I always likes to pay for everything."

"Will you keep it secret?" said the boy.

"Of course I will. When did you ever hear of me telling anything to a single individual?"

"Never to a single individual, but I have heard you tell things to the whole town."

"Confound your impudence. Get out of my shop directly."

"Oh! very good. I can go and tell old Mitchell, the pork-butcher."

"No, I say — stop; don't tell him. If anybody is to know, let it be me, and I'll promise you I'll keep it secret."

"Very good," said the boy, returning, "you shall know it; and, mind, you have promised me to keep it secret, so that if it gets known, you know it cannot be any fault of mine."

The fact was, the boy was anxious it should be known, only that in case some consequences might arise, he thought he would quiet his own conscience, by getting a promise of secrecy from Tobias Philpots, which he well knew that individual would not think of keeping.

He then related to him the interview he had had with the Hungarian nobleman at the inn, how he had promised a number of half-crowns, but a very small instalment of which he had received.

All this Master Philpots cared very little for, but the information that the dreaded Varney, the vampyre, was concealed so close to the town was a matter of great and abounding interest, and at that part of the story he suddenly pricked up his ears amazingly.

"Why, you don't mean to say that?" he exclaimed. "Are you sure it was he?"

"Yes, I am quite certain. I have seen I him more than once. It was Sir Francis Varney, without any mistake."

"Why, then you may depend he's only waiting until it's very dark, and then he will walk into somebody, and suck his blood. Here's a horrid discovery! I thought we had had enough of Master Varney, and that he would hardly show himself here again, and now you tell me he is not ten minutes' walk off."

"It's a fact," said the boy. "I saw him go in, and he looks thinner and more horrid than ever. I am sure he wants a dollop of blood from somebody."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Now there is Mrs. Philpots, you know, sir; she's rather big, and seems most ready to burst always; I shouldn't wonder if the vampyre came to her to-night."

"Wouldn't you?" said Mrs. Philpots, who had walked into the shop, and overheard the whole conversation; "wouldn't you, really? I'll vampyre you, and teach you to make these remarks about respectable married women. You young wretch, take that, will you!"

She gave the boy such a box on the ears, that the place seemed to spin round with him. As soon as he recovered sufficiently to be enabled to walk, he made his way from the shop with abundance of precipitation, much regretting that he had troubled himself to make a confidant of Master Philpots.

But, however, he could not but tell himself that if his object was to make a general disturbance through the whole place, he had certainly succeeded in doing so.

He slunk home perhaps with a feeling that he might be called upon to take part in something that might ensue, and at all events be compelled to become a guide to the place of Sir Francis Varney's retreat, in which case, for all he knew, the vampyre might, by some more than mortal means, discover what a hand he had had in the matter, and punish him accordingly.

The moment he hid left the saddler's Mrs. Philpots, after using some bitter reproaches to her husband for not at once sacrificing the boy upon the spot for the disrespectful manner in which he had spoken of her, hastily put on her bonnet and shawl, and the saddler, although it was a full hour before the usual time, began putting up the shutters of his shop.

"Why, my dear," he said to Mrs. Philpots, when she came down stairs equipped for the streets, "why, my dear, where are you going?"

"And pray, sir, what are you shutting up the shop for at this time of the evening!"

"Oh! why, the fact is, I thought I'd just go to the Rose and Crown, and mention that the vampyre was so near at hand."

"Well, Mr. Philpots, and in that case there can be no harm in my calling upon some of my acquaintance and mentioning it likewise."

"Why, I don't suppose there would be much harm; only remember, Mrs. Philpots, remember if you please — -"

"Remember what?"

"To tell everybody to keep it secret."

"Oh, of course I will; and mind you do it likewise."

"Most decidedly."

The shop was closed, Mr. Philpots ran off to the Rose and Crown, and Mrs, Philpots, with as much expedition as she could, purposed making the grand tour of all her female acquaintance in the town, just to tell them, as a great secret, that the vampyre, Sir Francis Varney, as he called himself, had taken refuge at the house that was to let down the lane leading to Higgs's farm.

"But by no means," she said, "let it go no further, because it is a very wrong thing to make any disturbance, and you will understand that it's quite a secret."

She was listened to with breathless attention, as may well be supposed, and it was a singular circumstance that at every house she left some other lady put on her bonnet and shawl, and ran out to make the circle of her acquaintance, with precisely the same story, and precisely the same injunctions to secrecy.

And, as Mr. Philpots pursued an extremely similar course, we are not surprised that in the short space of one hour the news should have spread through all the town, and that there was scarcely a child old enough to understand what was being talked about, who was ignorant of the fact, that Sir Francis Varney was to be found at the empty house down the lane.

It was an unlucky time, too, for the night was creeping on, a period at which people's apprehension of the supernatural becomes each moment stronger and more vivid — a period at which a number of idlers are let loose for different employments, and when anything in the shape of a row or a riot presents itself in pleasant colours to those who have nothing to lose and who expect, under the cover of darkness, to be able to commit outrages they would be afraid to think of in the daytime, when recognition would be more easy.

Thus was it that Sir Francis Varney's position, although he knew it not, became momentarily one of extreme peril, and the danger he was about to run, was certainly greater than any he had as yet experienced. Had Charles Holland but known what was going on, he would undoubtedly have done something to preserve the supposed vampyre from the mischief that threatened him, but the time had not arrived when he had promised to pay him a second visit, so he had no idea of anything serious having occurred.

Perhaps, too, Mr. and Mrs. Philpots scarcely anticipated creating so much confusion, but when they found that the whole place was in an uproar, and that a tumultuous assemblage of persons called aloud for vengeance upon Varney, the vampyre, they made their way home again in no small fright.

And, now, what was the result of all these proceedings will be best known by our introducing the reader to the interior of the house in which Varney had found a temporary refuge, and following in detail his proceedings as he waited for the arrival of Charles Holland.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

THE HUNT FOR VARNEY. — THE HOUSE-TOPS. — THE MIRACULOUS ESCAPE. — THE LAST PLACE OF REFUGE. — THE COTTAGE.

On the tree tops the moon shines brightly, and the long shadows are shooting its rays down upon the waters, and the green fields appear clothed in a flood of silver light; the little town was quiet and tranquil — nature seemed at rest.

The old mansion in which Sir Francis Varney had taken refuge, stood empty and solitary; it seemed as though it were not associated with the others by which it was surrounded. It was gloomy, and in the moonlight it reminded one of things long gone by, existences that had once been, but now no longer of this present time — a mere memento of the past.

Sir Francis Varney reclined upon the house-top; he gazed upon the sky, and upon the earth; he saw the calm tranquillity that reigned around, and could not but admire what he saw; he sighed, he seemed to sigh, from a pleasure he felt in the fact of his security; he could repose there without fear, and breathe the balmy air that fanned his cheek.

"Certainly," he muttered, "things might have been worse, but not much worse; however, they might have been much better; the ignorant are away — the most to be feared, because they have no guide and no control, save what can be exerted over them by their fears and their passions."

He paused to look again over the scene, and, as far as the eye could reach, and that, moonlight as it was, was many miles, the country was diversified with hill and dale, meadow and ploughed land; the open fields, and the darker woods, and the silvery stream that ran at no great distance, all presented a scene that was well calculated to warm the imagination, and to give the mind that charm which a cultivated understanding is capable of receiving.

There was but one thing wanted to make such a scene one of pure happiness, and that was all absence of care of fears for the future and the wants of life.

Suddenly there was a slight sound that came from the town. It was very slight, but the ears of Sir Francis Varney were painfully acute of late; the least sound that came across him was heard in a moment, and his whole visage was changed to one of listening interest.

The sound was hushed; but his attention was not lulled, for he had been placed in circumstances that made all his vigilance necessary for his own preservation. Hence it was, what another would have passed over, or not heard at all, he both heard and noticed. He was not sure of the nature of the sound, it was so slight and so indistinct.

There it was again! Some persons were moving about in the town. The sounds that came upon the night air seemed to say that there was an unusual bustle in the town, which was, to Sir Francis Varney, ominous in the extreme.

What could people in such a quiet, retired place require out at such an hour at night? It must be something very unusual — something that must excite them to a great degree; and Sir Francis began to feel very uneasy.

"They surely," he muttered to himself— "they surely cannot have found out my hiding place, and intend to hunt me from it, the blood-thirsty hounds! they are never satisfied. The mischief they are permitted to do on one occasion is but the precursor to another. The taste has caused the appetite for more, and nothing short of his blood can satisfy it."

The sounds increased, and the noise came nearer and nearer, and it appeared as though a number of men had collected together and were coming towards him. Yes, they were coming down the lane towards the deserted mansion where he was.

For once in his life, Sir Francis Varney trembled; he felt sick at heart, though no man was less likely to give up hope and to despair than he; yet this sign of unrelenting hatred and persecution was too unequivocal and too stern not to produce its effect upon even his mind; for he had no doubt but that they were coming with the express purpose of seeking him.

How they could have found him out was a matter he could not imagine. The Bannerworths could not have betrayed him — he was sure of that; and yet who could have seen him, so cautious and so careful as he had been, and so very sparing had he lived, because he would not give the slightest cause for all that was about to follow. He hoped to have hidden himself; but now he could hear the tramp of men distinctly, and their voices came now on the night air, though it was in a subdued tone, as if they were desirous of approaching unheard and unseen by their victim.

Sir Francis Varney stirred not from his position. He remained silent and motionless. He appeared not to heed what was going on; perhaps he hoped to see them go by — to be upon some false scent; or, if they saw no signs of life, they might leave the place, and go elsewhere.

Hark! they stop at the house — they go not by; they seem to pause, and then a thundering knock came at the door, which echoed and re-echoed through the empty and deserted house, on the top of which sat, in silent expectation, the almost motionless Sir Francis Varney, the redoubted vampyre.

The knock which came so loud and so hard upon the door caused Sir

Francis to start visibly, for it seemed his own knell. Then, as if the mob were satisfied with their knowledge of his presence, and of their victory, and of his inability to escape them, they sent up a loud shout that filled the whole neighbourhood with its sound.

It seemed to come from below and around the house; it rose from all sides, and that told Sir Francis Varney that the house was surrounded and all escape was cut off; there was no chance of his being able to rush through such a multitude of men as that which now encircled him.

With the calmest despair, Sir Francis Varney lay still and motionless on the house-top, and listened to the sounds that proceeded from below. Shout after shout arose on the still, calm air of the night; knock after knock came upon the stout old door, which awakened responsive echoes throughout the house that had for many years lain dormant, and which now seemed disturbed, and resounded in hollow murmurs to the voices from without.

Then a loud voice shouted from below, as if to be heard by any one who might be within, —

“Sir Francis Varney, the vampyre, come out and give yourself up at discretion! If we have to search for you, you may depend it will be to punish you; you will suffer by burning. Come out and give yourself up.”

There was a pause, and then a loud shout.

Sir Francis Varney paid no attention to this summons, but sat, motionless, on the house-top, where he could hear all that passed below in the crowd.

"He will not come out," said one.

"Ah! he's much too cunning to be caught in such a trap. Why, he knows what you would do with him; he knows you would stake him, and make a bonfire about him."

"So he has no taste for roasting," remarked another; "but still, it's no use hiding; we have too many hands, and know the house too well to be easily baffled."

"That may be; and, although he don't like burning, yet we will unearth the old fox, somehow or other; we have discovered his haunt at last, and certainly we'll have him out."

"How shall we get in?"

"Knock in the door — break open the door! the front door — that is the best, because it leads to all parts of the house, and we can secure any one who attempts to move from one to the other, as they come down."

"Hurrah!" shouted several men in the crowd.

"Hurrah!" echoed the mob, with one accord, and the shout rent the air, and disturbed the quietude and serenity that scarce five minutes before reigned through the place.

Then, as if actuated by one spirit, they all set to work to force the door in. It was strong, and capable of great defence, and employed them, with some labour, for fifteen or twenty minutes, and then, with a loud crash, the door fell in.

"Hurrah!" again shouted the crowd.

These shouts announced the fall of the door, and then, and not until then, did Sir Francis Varney stir.

"They have broken in the door," he muttered, "well, if die I must, I will sell my life dearly. However, all is not yet lost, and, in the struggle for life, the loss is not so much felt."

He got up, and crept towards the trap that led into the house, or out of it, as the occasion might require.

"The vampyre! the vampyre!" shouted a man who stood on a garden wall, holding on by the arm of an apple-tree.

"Varney, the vampyre!" shouted a second.

"Hurrah! boys, we are on the right scent; now for a hunt; hurrah! we shall have him now."

They rushed in a tumultuous riot up the stone steps, and into the hall. It was a large, spacious place, with a grand staircase that led up to the upper floor, but it had two ends, and then terminated in a gallery.

It could not be defended by one man, save at the top, where it could not long be held, because the assailants could unite, and throw their whole weight against the entrance, and thus storm it. This actually happened.

They looked up, and, seeing nobody, they rushed up, some by one stair, and some by the other; but it was dark; there were but few of the moon's rays that pierced the gloom of that place, and those who first reached the place which we have named, were seized with astonishment, staggered, and fell.

Sir Francis Varney had met them; he stood there with a staff — something he had found about the house — not quite so long as a broom-handle, but somewhat thicker and heavier, being made of stout ash.

This formidable weapon, Sir Francis Varney wielded with strength and resolution; he was a tall man, and one of no mean activity and personal strength, and such a weapon, in his hands, was one of a most fearful character, and, for the occasion, much better than his sword.

Man after man fell beneath the fearful brace of these blows, for though they could not see Sir Francis, yet he could see them, or the hall-lights were behind them at the time, while he stood in the dark, and took advantage of this to deal murderous blows upon his assailants.

This continued for some minutes, till they gave way before such a vigorous defence, and paused.

"On, neighbours, on," cried one; "will you be beaten off by one man? Rush in at once and you must force him from his position — push him hard, and he must give way."

"Ay," said one fellow who sat upon the ground rubbing his head; "it's all very well to say push him hard, but if you felt the weight of that d —— d pole on your head, you wouldn't be in such a blessed hurry."

However true that might be, there was but little attention paid to it, and a determined rush was made at the entrance to the gallery, and they found that it was unoccupied; and that was explained by the slamming of a door, and its being immediately locked upon them; and when the mob came to the door, they found they had to break their way through another door.

This did not take long in effecting; and in less than five minutes they had broken through that door which led into another room; but the first man who entered it fell from a crashing blow on the head from the ashen staff of Sir Francis Varney, who hurried and fled, closely pursued, until he came to another door, through which he dashed.

Here he endeavoured to make a stand and close it, but was immediately struck and grappled with; but he threw his assailant, and turned and fled again.

His object had been to defend each inch of the ground as long as he was able; but he found they came too close upon his steps, and prevented his turning in time to try the strength of his staff upon the foremost.

He dashed up the first staircase with surprising rapidity, leaving his pursuers behind; and when he had gained the first landing, he turned upon those who pursued him, who could hardly follow him two abreast.

“Down with the vampyre!” shouted the first, who rushed up heedless of the staff.

“Down with a fool!” thundered Varney, as he struck the fellow a terrific blow, which covered his face with blood, and he fell back into the arms of his companions.

A bitter groan and execration arose from them below, and again they shouted, and rushed up headlong.

“Down with the vampyre!” was again shouted, and met by a corresponding, but deep guttural sound of —

“Down with a fool!”

And sure enough the first again came to the earth without any preparation, save the application of an ashen stick to his skull, which, by-the-bye, no means aided the operation of thinking.

Several more shared a similar fate; but they pressed hard, and Sir Francis was compelled to give ground to keep them at the necessary length from him, as they rushed on regardless of his blows, and if he had not he would soon have been engaged in a personal struggle, for they were getting too close for him to use the staff.

“Down with the vampyre!” was the renewed cry, as they drove him from spot to spot until he reached the roof of the house, and then he ran up the steps to the loft, which he had just reached when they came up to the bottom.

Varney attempted to draw the ladder up but four or five stout men held that down; then by a sudden turn, as they were getting up, he turned it over, threw those on it down, and the ladder too, upon the heads of those who were below.

"Down with the vampyre!" shouted the mob, as they, with the most untiring energy, set the ladder, or steps, against the loft, and as many as could held it, while others rushed up to attack Varney with all the ferocity and courage of so many bull dogs.

It was strange, but the more they were baffled the more enraged and determined they rushed on to a new attack, with greater resolution than ever.

On this occasion, however, they were met with a new kind of missile, for Sir Francis had either collected and placed there for the occasion, or they had been left there for years, a number of old bricks, which lay close at hand. These he took, one by one, and deliberately took aim at them, and flung them with great force, striking down every one they hit.

This caused them to recoil; the bricks caused fearful gashes in their heads, and the wounds were serious, the flesh being, in many places, torn completely off. They however, only paused, for one man said, —

"Be of good heart, comrades, we can do as he does; he has furnished us with weapons, and we can thus attack him in two ways, and he must give way in the end."

"Hurrah! down with the vampyre!" sounded from all sides, and the shout was answered by a corresponding rush.

It was true; Sir Francis had furnished them with weapons to attack himself, for they could throw them back at him, which they did, and struck him a severe blow on the head, and it covered his face with blood in a moment.

"Hurrah!" shouted the assailants; "another such a blow, and all will be over with the vampyre."

"He's got—"

"Press him sharp, now," cried another man, as he aimed another blow with a brick, which struck Varney on the arm, causing him to drop the brick he held in his hand. He staggered back, apparently in great pain.

"Up! up! we have him now; he cannot get away; he's hurt; we have him — we have him."

And up they went with all the rapidity they could scramble up the steps; but this had given Varney time to recover himself; and though his right arm was almost useless, yet he contrived, with his left, to pitch the bricks so as to knock over the first three or four, when, seeing that he could not maintain his position to advantage, he rushed to the outside of the house, the last place he had capable of defence.

There was a great shout by those outside, when they saw him come out and stand with his staff, and those who came first got first served, for the blows resounded, while he struck them, and sent them over below.

Then came a great shout from within and without, and then a desperate rush was made at the door, and, in the next instant, Varney was seen flying, followed by his pursuers, one after the other, some tumbling over the tiles, to the imminent hazard of their necks.

Sir Francis Varney rushed along with a speed that appeared by far too great to admit of being safely followed, and yet those who followed appeared infected by his example, and appeared heedless of all consequences by which their pursuit might be attended to themselves.

"Hurrah!" shouted the mob below.

"Hurrah!" answered the mob on the tiles.

Then, over several housetops might be seen the flying figure of Sir Francis Varney, pursued by different men at a pace almost equal to his own.

They, however, could keep up the same speed, and not improve upon it, while he kept the advantage he first obtained in the start.

Then suddenly he disappeared.

It seemed to the spectators below that he had dropped through a house, and they immediately surrounded the house, as well as they could, and then set up another shout.

This took place several times, and as often was the miserable man hunted from his place of refuge only to seek another, from which he was in like manner hunted by those who thirsted for his blood.

On one occasion, they drove him into a house which was surrounded, save at one point, which had a long room, or building in it, that ran some distance out, and about twenty feet high.

At the entrance to the roof of this place, or leads, he stood and defended himself for some moments with success; but having received a blow himself, he was compelled to retire, while the mob behind forced those in front forward faster than he could by any exertion wield the staff that had so much befriended him on this occasion.

He was, therefore, on the point of being overwhelmed by numbers, when he fled; but, alas! there was no escape; a bare coping stone and rails ran round the top of that.

There was not much time for hesitation, but he jumped over the rails and looked below. It was a great height, but if he fell and hurt himself, he knew he was at the mercy of the bloodhounds behind him, who would do anything but show him any mercy, or spare him a single pang.

He looked round and beheld his pursuers close upon him, and one was so close to him that he seized upon his arm, saying, as he shouted to his companions, —

"Hurrah, boys! I have him."

With an execration, Sir Francis wielded his staff with such force, that he struck the fellow on the head, crushing in his hat as if it had been only so much paper. The man fell, but a blow followed from some one else which caused Varney to relax his hold, and finding himself falling, he, to save himself, sprang away.

The rails, at that moment, were crowded with men who leaned over to ascertain the effect of the leap.

"He'll be killed," said one.

"He's sure to be smashed," said another.

"I'll lay any wager he'll break a limb!" said a third.

Varney came to the earth — for a moment he lay stunned, and not able to move hand or foot.

"Hurrah!" shouted the mob.

Their triumph was short, for just as they shouted Varney arose, and after a moment or two's stagger he set off at full speed, which produced another shout from the mob; and just at that moment, a body of his pursuers were seen scaling the walls after him.

There was now a hunt through all the adjoining fields — from cover after cover they pursued him until he found no rest from the hungry wolves that beset him with cries, resembling beasts of prey rather than any human multitude.

Sir Francis heard them, at the same time, with the despair of a man who is struggling for life, and yet knows he is struggling in vain; he knew his strength was decaying — his immense exertions and the blows he had received, all weakened him, while the number and strength of his foes seemed rather to increase than to diminish.

Once more he sought the houses, and for a moment he believed himself safe, but that was only a momentary deception, for they had traced him.

He arrived at a garden wall, over which he bounded, and then he rushed into the house, the door of which stood open, for the noise and disturbance had awakened most of the inhabitants, who were out in all directions.

He took refuge in a small closet on the stairs, but was seen to do so by a girl, who screamed out with fear and fright,

"Murder! murder! — the wampyre! — the wampyre!" with all her strength, and in the way of screaming that was no little, and then she went off into a fit.

This was signal enough, and the house was at once entered, and beset on all sides by the mob, who came impatient of obtaining their victim who had so often baffled them.

"There he is — there he is," said the girl, who came to as soon as other people came up.

"Where? — where?"

"In that closet," she said, pointing to it with her finger. "I see'd him go in the way above."

Sir Francis, finding himself betrayed, immediately came out of the closet, just as two or three were advancing to open it, and dealt so hard a blow on the head of the first that came near him that he fell without a groan, and a second shared the same fate; and then Sir

Francis found himself grappled with, but with a violent effort he relieved himself and rushed up stairs.

"Oh! murder — the wampyre! what shall I do — fire — fire!"

These exclamations were uttered in consequence of Varney in his haste to get up stairs, having inadvertently stepped into the girl's lap with one foot, while he kicked her in the chin with the other, besides scratching her nose till it bled.

"After him — stick to him," shouted the mob, but the girl kicked and sprawled so much they were impeded, till, regardless of her cries, they ran over her and pursued Varney, who was much distressed with the exertions he had made.

After about a minute's race he turned upon the head of the stair, not so much with the hope of defending it as of taking some breathing time: but seeing his enemies so close, he drew his sword, and stood panting, but prepared.

"Never mind his toasting-fork," said one bulky fellow, and, as he spoke, he rushed on, but the point of the weapon entered his heart and he fell dead.

There was a dreadful execration uttered by those who came up after him, and there was a momentary pause, for none liked to rush on to the bloody sword of Sir Francis Varney, who stood so willing and so capable of using it with the most deadly effect. They paused, as well they might, and this pause was the most welcome thing next to life to the unfortunate fugitive, for he was dreadfully distressed and bleeding.

"On to him boys! He can hardly stand. See how he pants. On to him, I say — push him hard."

"He pushes hard, I tell you," said another. "I felt the point of his sword, as it came through Giles's back.".

"I'll try my luck, then," said another, and he rushed up; but he was met by the sword of Sir Francis, who pierced it through his side, and he fell back with a groan.

Sir Francis, fearful of stopping any longer to defend that point, appeared desirous of making good his retreat with some little advantage, and he rushed up stairs before they had recovered from the momentary consternation into which they had been thrown by the sudden disaster they had received.

But they were quickly after him, and before he, wearied as he was, could gain the roof, they were up the ladder after him.

The first man who came through the trap was again set upon by Varney, who made a desperate thrust at him, and it took effect; but the sword snapped by the handle.

With an execration, Sir Francis threw the hilt at the head of the next man he saw; then rushing, with headlong speed, he distanced his pursuers for some house tops.

But the row of houses ended at the one he was then at, and he could go no further. What was to be done? The height was by far too great to be jumped; death was certain. A hideous heap of crushed and mangled bones would be the extent of what would remain of him, and then, perhaps, life not extinct for some hours afterwards.

He turned round; he saw them coming hallooing over the house tops, like a pack of hounds. Sir Francis struck his hands together, and groaned. He looked round, and perceived some ivy peeping over the coping-stone. A thought struck him, and he instantly ran to the spot and leaned over.

"Saved — saved!" he exclaimed.

Then, placing his hand over, he felt for the ivy; then he got over, and hung by the coping-stone, in a perilous position, till he found a spot on which he could rest his foot, and then he grasped the ivy as low down as he could, and thus he lowered himself a short way, till he came to where the ivy was stronger and more secure to the wall, as the upper part was very dangerous with his weight attached to it.

The mob came on, very sure of having Sir Francis Varney in their power, and they did not hurry on so violently, as their position was dangerous at that hour of the night.

“Easy, boys, easy,” was the cry. “The bird is our own; he can’t get away, that’s very certain.”

They, however, came on, and took no time about it hardly; but what was their amazement and rage at finding he had disappeared.

“Where is he?” was the universal inquiry, and “I don’t know,” an almost universal answer.

There was a long pause, while they searched around; but they saw no vestige of the object of their search.

“There’s no trap door open,” remarked one; “and I don’t think he could have got in at any one.”

“Perhaps, finding he could not get away, he has taken the desperate expedient of jumping over, and committing suicide, and so escape the doom he ought to be subjected to.”

“Probably he has; but then we can run a stake through him and burn him all the same.”

They now approached the extreme verge of the houses, and looked over the sides, but they could see nothing. The moon was up, and there was light enough to have seen him if he had fallen to the earth, and they were quite sure that he could not have got up after such a fall as he must have received.

“We are beaten after all, neighbours.”

“I am not so sure of that,” was the reply. “He may now be hidden about, for he was too far spent to be able to go far; he could not do that, I am sure."

"I think not either."

"Might he not have escaped by means of that ivy, yonder?" said one of the men, pointing to the plant, as it climbed over the coping-stones of the wall.

"Yes; it may be possible," said one; "and yet it is very dangerous, if not certain destruction to get over."

"Oh, yes; there is no possibility of escape that way. Why, it wouldn't bear a cat, for there are no nails driven into the wall at this height."

"Never mind," said another, "we may as well leave no stone unturned, as the saying is, but at once set about looking out for him."

The individual who spoke now leant over the coping stone, for some moments, in silence. He could see nothing, but yet he continued to gaze for some moments.

"Do you see him?" inquired one.

"No," was the answer.

"Ay, ay, I thought as much," was the reply. "He might as well have got hold of a corner of the moon, which, I believe, is more likely — a great deal more likely."

"Hold still a moment," said the man, who was looking over the edge of the house.

"What's the matter now? A gnat flew into your eye?"

"No; but I see him — by Jove, I see him!"

"See who — see who?"

"Varney, the vampyre!" shouted the man. "I see him about half-way down clinging, like a fly, to the wall. Odd zounds! I never saw the like afore!"

“Hurrah! after him then, boys!”

“Not the same way, if you please. Go yourself, and welcome; but I won’t go that way.”

“Just as you please,” said the man; “but what’s good for the goose is good for the gander is an old saying, and so is Jack as good as his master.”

“So it may be; but cuss me if you ain’t a fool if you attempt that!”

The man made no reply, but did as Varney had done before, got over the coping stone, and then laid hold of the ivy; but, whether his weight was heavier than Varney’s, or whether it was that the latter had loosened the hold of the ivy or not, but he had no sooner left go of the coping stone than the ivy gave way, and he was precipitated from the height of about fifty feet to the earth — a dreadful fall!

There was a pause — no one spoke. The man lay motionless and dead — he had dislocated his neck!

The fall had not, however, been without its effect upon Varney, for the man’s heels struck him so forcibly on his head as he fell, that he was stunned, and let go his hold, and he, too, fell to the earth, but not many feet.

He soon recovered himself, and was staggering away, when he was assailed by those above with groans, and curses of all kinds, and then by stones, and tiles, and whatever the mob could lay their hands upon.

Some of these struck him, and he was cut about in various places, so that he could hardly stand.

The hoots and shouts of the mob above had now attracted those below to the spot where Sir Francis Varney was trying to escape, but he had not gone far before the loud yells of those behind him told him that he was again pursued.

Half dead, and almost wholly spent, unarmed, and defenceless, he scarce knew what to do; whether to fly, or to turn round and die as a refuge from the greater evil of endeavouring to prolong a struggle which seemed hopeless. Instinct, however, urged him on, at all risks, and though he could not go very far, or fast, yet on he went, with the crowd after him.

"Down with the vampyre! — seize him — hold him — burn him! he must be down presently, he can't stand!"

This gave them new hopes, and rendered Varney's fate almost certain. They renewed their exertions to overtake him, while he exerted himself anew, and with surprising agility, considering how he had been employed for more than two hours.

There were some trees and hedges now that opposed the progress of both parties. The height of Sir Francis Varney gave him a great advantage, and, had he been fresh, he might have shown it to advantage in vaulting over the hedges and ditches, which he jumped when obliged, and walked through when he could.

Every now and then, the party in pursuit, who had been behind him some distance, now they gained on him; however, they kept, every now and then, losing sight of him among the trees and shrubs, and he made direct for a small wood, hoping that when there, he should to be able to conceal himself for some time, so as to throw his pursuers off the track.

They were well aware of this, for they increased their speed, and one or two swifter of foot than the others, got a-head of them and cried out aloud as they ran, —

"Keep up! keep up! he's making for the wood."

"He can't stop there long; there are too many of us to beat that cover without finding our game. Push, lads, he's our own now, as sure as we know he’s on a-head.”

They did push on, and came in full sight as they saw Sir Francis enter the wood, with what speed he could make; but he was almost spent. This was a cheering sight to them, and they were pretty certain he would not leave the wood in the state he was then — he must seek concealment.

However, they were mistaken, for Sir Francis Varney, as soon as he got into the wood, plunged into the thickest of it, and then paused to gain breath.

“So far safe,” he muttered; “but I have had a narrow escape; they are not yet done, though, and it will not be safe here long. I must away, and seek shelter and safety elsewhere, if I can; — curses on the hounds that run yelping over the fields!”

He heard the shouts of his pursuers, and prepared to quit the wood when he thought the first had entered it.

“They will remain here some time in beating about,” he muttered; “that is the only chance I have had since the pursuit; curse them! I say again. I may now get free; this delay must save my life, but nothing else will.”

He moved away, and, at a slow and lazy pace, left the wood, and then made his way across some fields, towards some cottages, that lay on the left.

The moon yet shone on the fields; he could hear the shouts of the mob, as various parties went through the wood from one covert to another, and yet unable to find him.

Then came a great shout upon his ears, as though they had found out he had left the wood. This caused him to redouble his speed, and, fearful lest he should be seen in the moonlight, he leaped over the first fence that he came to, with almost the last effort he could make, and then staggered in at an open door — through a passage — into a front parlour, and there fell, faint, and utterly spent and speechless, at the feet of Flora Bannerworth.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

THE RECEPTION OF THE VAMPYRE BY FLORA. — VARNEY SUBDUED.

We must say that the irruption into the house of the Bannerworths by Sir Francis Varney, was certainly unpremeditated by him, for he knew not into whose house he had thus suddenly rushed for refuge from the numerous foes who were pursuing him with such vengeful ire. It was a strange and singular incident, and one well calculated to cause the mind to pause before it passed it by, and consider the means to an end which are sometimes as wide of the mark, as it is in nature possible to be.

But truth is stronger than fiction by far, and the end of it was, that, pressed on all sides by danger, bleeding, faint, and exhausted, he rushed into the first house he came to, and thus placed himself in the very house of those whom he had brought to such a state of misfortune.

Flora Bannerworth was seated at some embroidery, to pass away an hour or so, and thus get over the tedium of time; she was not thinking, either, upon the unhappy past; some trifling object or other engaged her attention. But what was her anguish when she saw a man staggering into the room bleeding, and bearing the marks of a bloody contest, and sinking at her feet.

Her astonishment was far greater yet, when she recognised that man to be Sir Francis Varney.

"Save me! — save me! Miss Bannerworth, save me! — only you can save me from the ruthless multitude which follows, crying aloud for my blood."

As he spoke, he sank down speechless. Flora was so much amazed, not to say terrified, that she knew not what to do. She saw Sir Francis a suppliant at her feet, a fugitive from his enemies, who would show him no mercy — she saw all this at a moment's glance; and yet she had not recovered her speech and presence of mind enough to enable her to make any reply to him.

"Save me! Miss Flora Bannerworth, save me!" he again said, raising himself on his hands. "I am beset, hunted like a wild beast — they seek my life — they have pursued me from one spot to another, and I have unwittingly intruded upon you. You will save me: I am sure your kindness and goodness of heart will never permit me to be turned out among such a crew of blood-thirsty butchers as those who pursue me are."

"Rise, Sir Francis Varney," said Flora, after a moment's hesitation; "in such an extremity as that which you are in, it would be inhuman indeed to thrust you out among your enemies."

"Oh! it would," said Varney. "I had thought, until now, I could have faced such a mob, until I was in this extremity; and then, disarmed and thrown down, bruised, beaten, and incapable of stemming such a torrent, I fled from one place to another, till hunted from each, and then instinct alone urged me to greater exertion than before, and here I am — this is now my last and only hope."

"Rise, Sir Francis."

"You will not let me be torn out and slaughtered like an ox. I am sure you will not."

"Sir Francis, we are incapable of such conduct; you have sought refuge here, and shall find it as far as we are able to afford it to you."

"And your brother — and—"

"Yes — yes — all who are here will do the same; but here they come to speak for themselves."

As she spoke, Mrs. Bannerworth entered, also Charles Holland, who both started on seeing the vampyre present, Sir Francis Varney, who was too weak to rise without assistance.

"Sir Francis Varney," said Flora, speaking to them as they entered, "has sought refuge here; his life is in peril, and he has no other hope left; you will, I am sure, do what can be done for him."

"Mr. Holland," said Sir Francis, "I am, as you may see by my condition, a fugitive, and have been beaten almost to death; instinct alone urged me on to save my life, and I, unknowingly, came in here."

"Rise, Sir Francis," said Charles Holland; "I am not one who would feel any pleasure in seeing you become the victim of any brutal mob. I am sure there are none amongst us who would willingly do so. You have trusted to those who will not betray you."

"Thank you," said Sir Francis, faintly. "I thank you; your conduct is noble, and Miss Bannerworth's especially so."

"Are you much hurt, Sir Francis?" inquired Charles.

"I am much hurt, but not seriously or dangerously; but I am weak and exhausted."

"Let me assist you to rise," said Charles Holland.

"Thank you," said Sir Francis, as he accepted of the assistance, and when he stood up, he found how incapable he really was, for a child might have grappled with him.

"I have been sore beset, Mrs. Bannerworth," he said, endeavouring to bow to that lady; "and I have suffered much ill-usage. I am not in such a plight as I could wish to be seen in by ladies; but my reasons for coming will be an excuse for my appearance in such disorder."

“We will not say anything about that,” said Charles Holland; “under the circumstances, it could not be otherwise.”

“It could not,” said Sir Francis, as he took the chair Miss Flora Bannerworth placed for him.

“I will not ask you for any explanation as to how this came about; but you need some restorative and rest.”

“I think I suffer more from exhaustion than anything else. The bruises I have, of course, are not dangerous.”

“Can you step aside a few moments?” said Mrs. Bannerworth. “I will show you where you can remove some of those stains, and make yourself more comfortable.”

“Thank you, madam — thank you. It will be most welcome to me, I assure you.”

Sir Francis rose up, and, with the aid of Charles Holland, he walked to the next room, where he washed himself, and arranged his dress as well at it would admit of its being done.

“Mr. Holland,” he said, “I cannot tell you how grateful I feel for this. I have been hunted from the house where you saw me. From what source they learned my abode — my place of concealment — I know not; but they found me out.”

“I need hardly say, Sir Francis, that it could not have occurred through me,” said Charles Holland.

“My young friend,” said Sir Francis, “I am quite sure you were not; and, moreover, I never, for one moment, suspected you. No, no; some accidental circumstance alone has been the cause. I have been very cautious — I may say extremely so — but at the same time, living, as I have, surrounded by enemies on all sides, it is not to be wondered at that I should be seen by some one, and thus traced to my lair, whither they followed me at their leisure.”

"They have been but too troublesome in this matter. When they become a little reasonable, it will be a great miracle; for, when their passions and fears are excited, there is no end to the extremes they will perpetrate."

"It is so," said Varney, "as the history of these last few days amply testifies to me. I could never have credited the extent to which popular excitement could be carried, and the results it was likely to produce."

"It is an engine of very difficult control," pursued Charles Holland; "but what will raise it will not allay it, but add fuel to the fire that burns so fiercely already."

"True enough," said Sir Francis.

"If you have done, will you again step this way?"

Sir Francis Varney followed Charles Holland into the sitting-room, and sat down with them, and before him was spread a light supper, with some good wine.

"Eat, Sir Francis," said Mrs. Bannerworth. "Such a state as that in which you are, must, of necessity, produce great exhaustion, and you must require food and drink."

Sir Francis bowed as well as he was able, and even then, sore and bruised as he was, fugitive as he had been, he could not forget his courtesy; but it was not without an effort. His equanimity was, however, much disturbed, by finding himself in the midst of the Bannerworths.

"I owe you a relation," he said, "of what occurred to drive me from my place of concealment."

"We should like to hear it, if you are not too far fatigued to relate it," said Charles.

"I will. I was sitting at the top of that house in which I sought to hide myself, when I heard sounds come that were of a very suspicious nature; but did not believe that it could happen that they had discovered my lurking-place; far from it; though, of late, I had been habitually cautious and suspicious, yet I thought I was safe, till I heard the noise of a multitude coming towards me. I could not be mistaken in it, for the sounds are so peculiar that they are like nothing else. I heard them coming.

"I moved not; and when they surrounded the house as far as was practicable, they gave an immense shout, and made the welkin ring with the sound."

"I heard a confused noise at a distance," remarked Flora; "but I had no idea that anything serious was contemplated. I imagined it was some festival among some trade, or portion of the townspeople, who were shouting from joy."

"Oh, dear no," said Sir Francis; "but I am not surprised at the mistake, because there are such occurrences occasionally; but whenever the mob gained any advantage upon me they shouted, and when I was able to oppose them with effect, they groaned at me most horribly."

"The deuce," said Charles; "the sound, suppose, serves to express their feelings, and to encourage each other."

"Something of the sort, I dare say," said Varney: "but at length, after defending the house with all the desperation that despair imparted to me, I was compelled to fly from floor to floor, until I had reached the roof; there they followed me, and I was compelled again to fly. House after house they followed me to, until I could go no farther," said Varney.

"How did you escape?"

"Fortunately I saw some ivy growing and creeping over the coping-stones, and by grasping that I got over the side, and so let myself down by degrees, as well as I was able."

"Good heavens! what a dreadful situation," exclaimed Flora; "it is really horrible!"

"I could not do it again, under, I think, any circumstances."

"Not the same?" said Mrs. Bannerworth.

"I really doubt if I could," said Varney. "The truth is, the excitement of the moment was great, and I at that moment thought of nothing but getting away.

"The same circumstances, the same fear of death, could hardly be produced in me again, and I am unable to account for the phenomenon on this occasion."

"Your escape was very narrow indeed," said Flora; "it makes me shudder to think of the dangers you have gone through; it is really terrible to think of it."

"You," said Sir Francis, "are young and susceptible, and generous in your disposition, You can feel for me, and do; but how little I could have expected it, it is impossible to say; but your sympathy sinks into my mind and causes such emotions as never can be erased from my soul.

"But to proceed. You may guess how dreadful was my position, by the fact that the first man who attempted to get over tore the ivy away and fell, striking me in his fall; he was killed, and I thrown down and stunned. I then made for the wood, closely pursued and got into it; then I baffled them: they searched the wood, and I went through it. I then ran across the country to these houses here; I got over the fence, and in at the back door."

"Did they see you come?" inquired Charles Holland.

"I cannot say, but I think that they did not; I heard them give a loud shout more than once when on this side of the wood."

"You did? How far from here were you when you heard the shouts?" inquired Mrs. Bannerworth.

"I was close here; and, as I jumped over the fence, I heard them shout again; but I think they cannot see so far; the night was moonlight, to be sure, but that is all; the shadow of the hedge, and the distance together, would make it, if not impossible, at least very improbable."

"That is very likely," said Mrs. Bannerworth.

"In that case," said Charles Holland, "you are safe here; for none will suspect your being concealed here."

"It is the last place I should myself have thought of," said Varney; "and I may say the last place I would knowingly have come to; but had I before known enough of you, I should have been well assured of your generosity, and have freely come to claim your aid and shelter, which accident has so strangely brought me to be a candidate for, and which you have so kindly awarded me."

"The night is wearing away," said Flora, "and Sir Francis is doubtless fatigued to an excess; sleep, I dare say, will be most welcome to him."

"It will indeed, Miss Bannerworth," said Varney; "but I can do that under any circumstances; do not let me put you to any inconvenience; a chair, and at any hour, will serve me for sleep."

"We cannot do for you what we would wish," said Flora, looking at her mother; "but something better than that, at all events, we can and will provide for you."

"I know not how to thank you," said Sir Francis Varney; "I assure you, of late I have not been luxuriously lodged, and the less trouble I give you the greater I shall esteem the favour."

The hour was late, and Sir Francis Varney, before another half hour had elapsed, was consigned to his own reflections, in a small but neat room, there to repose his bruised and battered carcass, and court the refreshing influence of sleep.

His reflections were, for nearly an hour, of the most contradictory character; some one passion was trying to overcome the other; but he seemed quite subdued.

"I could not have expected this," he muttered; "Flora Bannerworth has the soul of a heroine. I deserved not such a reception from them; and yet, in my hour of utmost need, they have received me like a favoured friend; and yet all their misfortunes have taken their origin from me; I am the cause of all."

Filled with these thoughts, he fell asleep; he slept till morning broke. He was not disturbed; it seemed as though the influence of sleep was sweeter far there, in the cottage of the Bannerworths, than ever he had before received.

It was late on that morning before Sir Francis rose, and then only through hearing the family about, and, having performed his toilet, so far as circumstances permitted, he descended, and entered the front-parlour, the room he had been in the night before.

Flora Bannerworth was already there; indeed, breakfast was waiting the appearance of Sir Francis Varney.

"Good morning, Miss Bannerworth," said Sir Francis, bowing with his usual dignified manner, but in the kindest and sincerest way he was able to assume.

"Good morning, Sir Francis," said Flora, rising to receive him; and she could not avoid looking at him as he entered the room. "I hope you have had a pleasant night?"

"It has been the best night's rest I have had for some time, Miss

Bannerworth. I assure you I have to express my gratitude to you for so much kindness. I have slept well, and soundly."

"I am glad to hear it."

"I think yet I shall escape the search of these people who have hunted me from so many places."

"I hope you may, indeed, Sir Francis."

"You, Miss Bannerworth! and do you hope I may escape the vengeance of these people — the populace?"

"I do, Sir Francis, most sincerely hope so. Why should I wish evil to you, especially at their hands?"

Sir Francis did not speak for a minute or two, and then he said, turning full upon Flora —

"I don't know why, Miss Bannerworth, that I should think so, but perhaps it is because there are peculiar circumstances connected with myself, that have made me feel conscious that I have not deserved so much goodness at your hands."

"You have not deserved any evil. Sir Francis, we could not do that if it were in our power; we would do you a service at any time."

"You have done so, Miss Bannerworth — the greatest that can be performed. You have saved my life."

At that moment Charles Holland entered, and Sir Francis bowed, as he said, —

"I hope you, Mr. Holland, have slept as well, and passed as good a night as I have passed?"

"I am glad you, at least, have passed a quiet one," said Charles Holland; "you, I dare say, feel all the better for it? How do you feel yourself? Are you much hurt?"

"Not at all, not at all," said Sir Francis Varney. "Only a few bruises, and so forth, some of which, as you may perceive, do not add to one's personal appearance. A week or two's quiet would rid me of them. At all events, I would it may do the same with my enemies."

"I wish they were as easily gotten rid of myself," said Charles; "but as that cannot be, we must endeavour to baffle them in the best way we may."

"I owe a debt to you I shall never be able to repay; but where there is a will, they say there is a way; and if the old saying be good for anything, I need not despair, though the way is by no means apparent at present."

"Time is the magician," said Flora, "whose wand changes all things — the young to the aged, and the aged to nothing."

"Certainly, that is true," said Varney, "and many such changes have I seen. My mind is stored with such events; but this is sadness, and I have cause to rejoice."

* * * *

The breakfast was passed off in pleasing conversation, and Varney found himself much at home with the Bannerworths, whose calm and even tenour was quite new to him.

He could not but admit the charms of such a life as that led by the Bannerworths; but what it must have been when they were supplied by ample means, with nothing to prey upon their minds, and no fearful mystery to hang on and weigh down their spirits, he could scarcely imagine.

Thy were amiable, accomplished; they were in the same mind at all times, and nothing seemed to ruffle them; and when night came, he could not but acknowledge to himself that he had never formed half the opinion of them they were deserving of.

Of course during that day he was compelled to lie close, so as not to be seen by any one, save the family. He sat in a small room, which was overlooked by no other in the neighbourhood, and he remained quiet, sometimes conversing, and sometimes reading, but at the same time ever attentive to the least sound that appeared at all of a character to indicate the approach of persons for any purpose whatever.

At supper time he spoke to Flora and to Charles Holland, saying, —

"There are certain matters connected with myself — I may say with you now — sure all that has happened will make it so — of which you would be glad to hear some thing."

"You mean upon the same subject upon which I had some conversation with you a day or two back?"

"Yes, the same. Allow me one week, and you shall know all. I will then relate to you that which you so much desire to know — one week, and all shall be told."

"Well," said Charles Holland, "this has not been exacted from you as the price of your safety, but you can choose your own time, of course; what you promise is most desired, for it will render those happy who now are much worse than they were before these occurrences took place."

"I am aware of all that; grant me but one week, and then you shall be made acquainted with all."

"I am satisfied, Sir Francis," said Flora; "but while here under our roof, we should never have asked you a question."

"Of this, Miss Bannerworth, the little I have seen of you assures me you would not do so; however, I am the more inclined to make it — I am under so deep an obligation to you all, that I can never repay it."

Sir Francis Varney retired to rest that night — his promise to the Bannerworths filled his mind with many reflections — the insecurity of his own position, and the frail tenure which he even held in the hands of those whom he had most injured.

This produced a series of reflections of a grave and melancholy nature, and he sat by his window, watching the progress of the clouds, as they appeared to chase each other over the face of the scene — now casting a shade over the earth, and then banishing the shadows, and throwing a gentle light over the earth's surface, which was again chased away, and shadows again fell upon the scene below.

How long he had sat there in melancholy musing he knew not; but suddenly he was aroused from his dreams by a voice that shook the skies, and caused him to start to his feet.

"Hurrah! — hurrah! — hurrah!" shouted the mob, which had silently collected around the cottage of the Bannerworths.

"Curses!" muttered Sir Francis, as he again sank in his chair, and struck his head with his hand. "I am hunted to death — they will not leave me until my body has graced a cross-road."

"Hurrah! — down with the vampyre — pull him out!"

Then came an instant knocking at the doors, and the people on the outside made so great a din, that it seemed as though they contemplated knocking the house down at once, without warning the inmates that they waited there.

There was a cessation for about a minute, when one of the family hastened to the door, and inquired what was wanted.

"Varney, the vampyre," was the reply.

"You must seek him elsewhere."

"We will search this place before we go further," replied a man.

"But he is not here."

"We have reason to believe otherwise. Open the door, and let us in — no one shall be hurt, or one single object in the house; but we must come in, and search for the vampyre."

"Come to-morrow, then."

"That will not do," said the voice; "open, or we force our way in without more notice."

At the same a tremendous blow was bestowed upon the door, and then much force was used to thrust it in. A consultation was suddenly held among the inmates, as to what was to be done, but no one could advise, and each was well aware of the utter impossibility of keeping the mob out.

"I do not see what is to become of me," said Sir Francis Varney, suddenly appearing before them. "You must let them in; there is no chance of keeping them off, neither can you conceal me. You will have no place, save one, that will be sacred from their profanation."

"And which is that?"

"Flora's own room."

All started at the thought that Flora's chamber could in any way be profaned by any such presence as Sir Francis Varney's.

However, the doors below were suddenly burst open, amid loud cries from the populace, who rushed in in great numbers, and began to search the lower rooms, immediately.

"All is lost!" said Sir Francis Varney, as he dashed away and rushed to the chamber of Flora, who, alarmed at the sounds that were now filling the house, stood listening to them.

"Miss Bannerworth—" began Varney.

"Sir Francis!"

"Yes, it is indeed I, Miss Bannerworth; hear me, for one moment."

"What is the matter?"

"I am again in peril — in more imminent peril than before; my life is not worth a minute's purchase, unless you save me. You, and you alone, can now save me. Oh! Miss Bannerworth, if ever pity touched your heart, save me from those only whom I now fear. I could meet death in any shape but that in which they will inflict it upon me. Hear their execrations below!"

"Death to the vampyre! death to Varney! burn him! run a stake through his body!"

"What can I do, Sir Francis?"

"Admit me to your chamber."

"Sir Francis, are you aware of what you are saying?"

"I am well. It is a request which you would justly scorn to reply to, but now my life — recollect you have saved me once — my life, — do not now throw away the boon you have so kindly bestowed. Save me, Miss Bannerworth."

"It is not possible. I—"

"Nay, Miss Bannerworth, do you imagine this is a time for ceremony, or the observances of polished life! On my honour, you run no risk of censure."

"Where is Varney? Where is the vampyre? He ain't far off."

"Hear — hear them, Miss Bannerworth. They are now at the foot of the stairs. Not a moment to lose. One minute more, and I am in the hands of a crew that has no mercy."

"Hurrah! upstairs! He's not below. Upstairs, neighbours, we shall have him yet!"

These words sounded on the stairs: half-a-dozen more steps, and

Varney would be seen. It was a miracle he was not heard begging for his life.

Varney cast a look of despair at the stairhead and felt for his sword, but it was not there, he had lost it. He struck his head with his clenched hand, and was about to rush upon his foes, when he heard the lock turn; he looked, and saw the door opened gently, and Flora stood there; he passed in, and sank cowering into a chair, at the other end of the room, behind some curtains.

The door was scarcely shut ere some tried to force it, and then a loud knocking came at the door.

“Open! open! we want Varney, the vampyre. Open! or we will burst it open.”

Flora did open it, but stood resolutely in the opening, and held up her hand to impose silence.

“Are you men, that you can come thus to force yourselves upon the privacy of a female? Is there nothing in the town or house, that you must intrude in numbers into a private apartment? Is no place sacred from you?”

“But, ma’am — miss — we only want Varney, the vampyre.”

“And can you find him nowhere but in a female’s bedroom? Shame on you! shame on you! Have you no sisters, wives, or mothers, that you act thus?”

“He’s not there, you may be sure of that, Jack,” said a gruff voice. “Let the lady be in quiet; she’s had quite enough trouble with him to sicken her of a vampyre. You may be sure that’s the last place to find him in.”

With this they all turned away, and Flora shut the door and locked it upon them, and Varney was safe.

“You have saved me,” said Varney.

“Hush!” said Flora. “Speak not; there maybe some one listening.”

Sir Francis Varney stood in the attitude of one listening most anxiously to catch some sounds; the moon fell across his face, and gave it a ghastly hue, that, added to his natural paleness and wounds, gave him an almost unearthly aspect.

The sounds grew more and more distant; the shouts and noise of men traversing the apartments subsided, and gradually the place became restored to its original silence. The mob, after having searched every other part of the house, and not finding the object of their search, they concluded that he was not there, but must have made his escape before.

This most desperate peril of Sir Francis Varney seemed to have more effect upon him than anything that had occurred during his most strange and most eventful career.

When he was assured that the riotous mob that had been so intent upon his destruction was gone, and that he might emerge from his place of concealment, he did so with an appearance of such utter exhaustion that the Bannerworth family could not but look upon him as a being who was near his end.

At any time his countenance, as we long have had occasion to remark, was a strange and unearthly looking one; but when we come to superadd to the strangeness of his ordinary appearance the traces of deep mental emotion, we may well say that Varney’s appearance was positively of the most alarming character.

When he was seated in the ordinary sitting apartment of the Bannerworths, he drew a long sighing breath, and placing his hand upon his heart, he said, in a faint tone of voice, —

“It beats now laboriously, but it will soon cease its pulsations for ever."

These words sounded absolutely prophetic, there was about them such a solemn aspect, and he looked at the same time that he uttered them so much like one whose mortal race was run, and who was now a candidate for the grave.

"Do not speak so despairingly," said Charles Holland; "remember, that if your life has been one of errors hitherto, how short a space of time may suffice to redeem some of them at least, and the communication to me which you have not yet completed may to some extent have such an effect."

"No, no. It may contribute to an act of justice, but it can do no good to me. And yet do not suppose that because such is my impression that I mean to hesitate in finishing to you that communication."

"I rejoice to hear you say so, and if you would, now that you must be aware of what good feelings towards you we are all animated with, remove the bar of secrecy from the communication, I should esteem it a great favour."

Varney appeared to be considering for a few moments, and then he said, —

"Well, well. Let the secrecy no longer exist. Have it removed at once. I will no longer seek to maintain it. Tell all, Charles Holland — tell all."

Thus empowered by the mysterious being, Charles Holland related briefly what Varney had already told him, and then concluded by saying, —

"That is all that I have myself as yet been made aware of, and I now call upon Sir Francis Varney to finish his narration."

"I am weak," said Varney, "and scarcely equal to the task; but yet

I will not shrink from the promise that I have made. You have been the preservers of my life, and more particularly to you, Flora Bannerworth, am I indebted for an existence, which otherwise must have been sacrificed upon the altar of superstition."

"But you will recollect, Master Varney," said the admiral, who had sat looking on for some time in silent wonder, "you must recollect, Master Varney, that the people are, after all, not so much to blame for their superstition, because, whether you are a vampyre or not, and I don't pretend to come to a positive opinion now, you took good care to persuade them you were."

"I did," said Varney, with a shudder; "but why did I?"

"Well, you know best."

"It was, then, because I did believe, and do believe, that there is something more than natural about my strangely protracted existence; but we will waive that point, and, before my failing strength, for it appears to me to be failing, completely prevents me from doing so, let me relate to you the continued particulars of the circumstances that made me what I am."

Flora Bannerworth, although she had heard before from the lips of Charles Holland the to her dreadful fact, that her father, in addition to having laid violent hands upon his own life, was a murderer, now that that fearful circumstance was related more publicly, felt a greater pang than she had done when it was whispered to her in the accents of pure affection, and softened down by a gentleness of tone, which Charles Holland's natural delicacy would not allow him to use even to her whom he loved so well in the presence of others.

She let her beautiful face be hidden by her hands, and she wept as she listened to the sad detail.

Varney looked inquiringly in the countenance of Charles Holland, because, having given him leave to make Flora acquainted with the circumstance, he was rather surprised at the amount of emotion which it produced in her.

Charles Holland answered the appealing look by saying, —

“Flora is already aware of the facts, but it naturally affects her much to hear them now repeated in the presence of others, and those too, towards whom she cannot feel—”

What Charles Holland was going to say was abruptly stopped short by the admiral, who interposed, exclaiming, —

“Why, what do you mean, you son of a sea cook? The presence of who do you mean? Do you mean to say that I don’t feel for Miss Flora, bless her heart! quite as much as a white-faced looking swab like you? Why, I shall begin to think you are only fit for a marine.”

“Nay, uncle, now do not put yourself out of temper. You must be well aware that I could not mean anything disrespectful to you. You should not suppose such a state of things possible; and although, perhaps, I did not express myself so felicitously as I might, yet what I intended to say, was—”

“Oh, bother what you intended to say. You go on, Mr. Vampyre, with your story. I want to know what became of it all; just you get on as quick as you can, and let us know what you did after the man was murdered.”

“When the dreadful deed was committed,” said Varney, “and our victim lay weltering in his blood, and had breathed his last, we stood like men who for the first time were awakened to the frightful consequences of what they had done.

“I saw by the dim light that hovered round us a great change come over the countenance of Marmaduke Bannerworth, and he shook in every limb.

“This soon passed away, however, and the powerful and urgent necessity which arose of avoiding the consequences of the deed that we had done, restored us to ourselves. We stooped and took from the body the ill-gotten gains of the gambler. They amounted to an immense sum, and I said to Marmaduke Bannerworth, —

“‘Take you the whole of this money and proceed to your own home with it, where you will be least suspected. Hide it in some place of great secrecy, and to-morrow I will call upon you, when we will divide it, and will consider of some means of safely exchanging the notes for gold.’

“He agreed to this, and placed the money in his pocket, after which it became necessary that we should dispose of the body, which, if we did not quickly remove, must in a few hours be discovered, and so, perchance, accompanied by other criminating circumstances, become a frightful evidence against us, and entail upon us all those consequences of the deed which we were so truly anxious to escape from.

“It is ever the worst part of the murderer’s task, that after he has struck the blow that has deprived his victim of existence, it becomes his frightful duty to secrete the corpse, which, with its dead eyes, ever seems to be glaring upon him such a world of reproach.

“That it is which should make people pause ere they dipped their hands in the blood of others, and that it is which becomes the first retribution that the murderer has to endure for the deep crime that he has committed.

“We tore two stakes from a hedge, and with their assistance we contrived to dig a very superficial hole, such a hole as was only sufficient, by placing a thin coating of earth over it, to conceal the body of the murdered man.

"And then came the loathsome task of dragging him into it — a task full of horror, and from which we shrunk aghast; but it had to be done, and, therefore, we stooped, and grasping the clothes as best we might, we dragged the body into the chasm we had prepared for its reception. Glad were we then to be enabled to throw the earth upon it and to stamp upon it with such vehemence as might well be supposed to actuate men deeply anxious to put out of sight some dangerous and loathsome object.

"When we had completed this, and likewise gathered handsfull of dust from the road, and dry leaves, and such other matter, to sprinkle upon the grave, so as to give the earth an appearance of not having been disturbed, we looked at each other and breathed from our toil.

"Then, and not till then, was it that we remembered that among other things which the gambler had won of Marmaduke were the deeds belonging to the Dearbrook property."

"The Dearbrook property!" exclaimed Henry Bannerworth; "I know that there was a small estate going by that name, which belonged to our family, but I always understood that long ago my father had parted with it."

"Yes; it was mortgaged for a small sum — a sum not a fourth part of its value — and it had been redeemed by Marmaduke Bannerworth, not for the purpose of keeping it, but in order that he might sell it outright, and so partially remedy his exhausted finances."

"I was not aware of that," returned Henry.

"Doubtless you were not, for of late — I mean for the twelve months or so preceding your father's death — you know he was much estranged from all the family, so that you none of you knew much of what he was doing, except that he was carrying on a very wild and reckless career, such as was sure to end in dishonour and poverty; but I tell you he had the title deeds of the Dearbrook property, and that they were only got from him, along with everything else of value that he possessed, at the gaming-table, by the man who paid such a fearful penalty for his success.

"It was not until after the body was completely buried, and we had completed all our precautions for more effectually hiding it from observation, that we recollected the fact of those important papers being in his possession. It was Marmaduke Bannerworth who first remembered it, and he exclaimed, —

"'By Heaven, we have buried the title deeds of the property, and we shall have again to exhume the corpse for the purpose of procuring them.'

"Now those deeds were nothing to me, and repugnant as I had felt from the first to having anything whatever to do with the dead body, it was not likely that I would again drag it from the earth for such an object.

"'Marmaduke Bannerworth,' I said, 'you can do what you please, and take the consequences of what you do, but I will not again, if I can help it, look upon the face of that corpse. It is too fearful a sight to contemplate again. You have a large sum of money, and what need you care now for the title deeds of a property comparatively insignificant?'

"'Well, well,' he said, 'I will not, at the present time, disturb the remains; I will wait to see if anything should arise from the fact of the murder; if it should turn out that no suspicion of any kind is excited, but that all is still and quiet, I can then take measures to exhume the corpse, and recover those papers, which certainly are important.'

"By this time the morning was creeping on apace, and we thought it prudent to leave the spot. We stood at the end of the lane for a few moments conversing, and those moments were the last in which I ever saw Marmaduke Bannerworth."

"Answer me a question," said Henry.

"I will; ask me what you please, I will answer it."

"Was it you that called at Bannerworth Hall, after my father's melancholy death, and inquired for him?"

"I did; and when I heard of the deed that he had done, I at once left, in order to hold counsel with myself as to what I should do to obtain at least a portion of the property, one-half of which, it was understood, was to have been mine. I heard what had been the last words used by Marmaduke Bannerworth on the occasion of his death, and they were amply sufficient to let me know what had been done with the money — at all events, so far as regards the bestowal of it in some secret place; and from that moment the idea of, by some means or another, getting the exclusive possession of it, never forsook my mind.

"I thought over the matter by day and, by night; and with the exception of having a knowledge of the actual hiding-place of the money, I could see, in the clearest possible manner, how the whole affair had been transacted. There can be no doubt but that Marmaduke Bannerworth had reached home safely with the large sum of which he had become possessed, and that he had hidden it securely, which was but an ordinary measure of precaution, when we come to consider how the property had been obtained.

"Then I suspect that, being alone, and left to the gloom of his own miserable thoughts, they reverted so painfully to the past that he was compelled to drink deeply for the purpose of drowning reflection.

"The natural consequence of this, in his state, was, that partial insanity supervened, and at a moment when frenzy rose far above reflection, he must have committed the dreadful act which hurried him instantaneously to eternity."

"Yes," said Henry; "it must have been so; you have guessed truly. He did on that occasion drink an immense quantity of wine; but instead of stilling the pangs of remorse it must have increased them, and placed him in such a frenzied condition of intellect, that he found it impossible to withstand the impulse of it, unless by the terrific act which ended his existence."

"Yes, and which at once crushed all my expectations of the large fortune which was to have been mine; for even the one-half of the sum which had been taken from the gamester's pocket would have been sufficient to have enabled me to live for the future in affluence.

"I became perfectly maddened at the idea that so large a sum had passed out of my hands. I constantly hovered about Bannerworth Hall, hoping and expecting that something might arise which would enable me to get admittance to it, and make an active search through its recesses for the hidden treasure.

"All my exertions were in vain. I could hit upon no scheme whatever; and at length, wearied and exhausted, I was compelled to proceed to London for the sake of a subsistence. It is only in that great metropolis that such persons as myself, destitute of real resources, but infinitely reckless as regards the means by which they acquire a subsistence, can hope to do so. Once again, therefore, I plunged into the vortex of London life, and proceeded, heedless of the criminality of what I was about, to cater for myself by robbery, or, indeed, in any manner which presented a prospect of success. It was during this career of mine, that I became associated with some of the most desperate characters of the time; and the offences we committed were of that daring character that it could not be wondered at eventually so formidable a gang of desperadoes must be by force broken up.

“It so occurred, but unknown to us, that the police resolved upon making one of the most vigorous efforts to put an end to the affair, and in consequence a watch was set upon every one of our movements.

“The result of this was, as might have been expected, our complete dispersion, and the arrest of some our members, and among them myself.

“I knew my fate almost from the first. Our depredations had created such a sensation, that the legislature, even, had made it a matter of importance that we should be suppressed, and it was an understood thing among the judges, that the severest penalties of the law should be inflicted upon any one of the gang who might be apprehended and convicted.

“My trial scarcely occupied an hour, and then I was convicted and sentenced to execution, with an intimation from the judge that it would be perfectly absurd of me to dream, for one moment, of a remission of that sentence.

“In this state of affairs, and seeing nothing but death before me, I gave myself up to despair, and narrowly missed cheating the hangman of his victim.

“More dead than alive, I was, however, dragged out to be judicially murdered, and I shall never forget the crowd of frightful sensations that came across my mind upon that terrific occasion.

“It seemed as if my fate had then reached its climax, and I have really but a dim recollection of the terrible scene.

“I remember something of the confused murmur arising from an immense throng of persons. I remember looking about me, and seeing nothing but what appeared to me an immense sea of human heads, and then suddenly I heard a loud roar of execration burst from the multitude.

“I shrunk back terrified, and it did, indeed, seem to me a brutal thing thus to roar and shout at a man who was brought out to die. I soon, however, found that the mob who came to see such a spectacle was not so debased as I imagined, but that it was at the hangman, who had suddenly made his appearance on the scaffold, at whom they raised that fearful yell.

“Some one — I think it was one of the sheriffs — must have noticed that I was labouring under the impression that the cry from the mob was levelled at me, for he spoke, saying, —

“‘It is at the hangman they shout,’ and he indicated with his finger that public functionary. In my mind’s eye I think I see him now, and I am certain that I shall never forget the expression of his face. It was perfectly fearful; and afterwards, when I learned who and what he was, I was not surprised that he should feel so acutely the painfully degrading office which he had to perform.

“The fatal rope was in a few minutes adjusted to my neck. I felt its pressure, and I heard the confused sounds of the monotonous voice of the clergyman, as he muttered some prayers, that I must confess sounded to me at the time like a mockery of human suffering.

“Then suddenly there was a loud shout — I felt the platform give way beneath my feet — I tried to utter a yell of agony, but could not — it seemed to me as if I was encompassed by fire, and then sensation left me, and I knew no more.

“The next feelings of existence that came over me consisted in a frightful tingling sensation throughout my veins, and I felt myself making vain efforts to scream. All the sensations of a person suffering from a severe attack of nightmare came across me, and I was in such an agony, that I inwardly prayed for death to release me from such a cruel state of suffering. Then suddenly the power to utter a sound came to me, and I made use of it well, for the piercing shriek I uttered, must have struck terror into the hearts of all who heard it, since it appalled even myself.

“Then I suppose I must have fainted, but when I recovered consciousness again, I found myself upon a couch, and a man presenting some stimulus to me in a cup. I could not distinguish objects distinctly, but I heard him say, ‘Drink, and you will be better.’

“I did drink, for a raging thirst consumed me, and then I fell into a sound sleep, which, I was afterwards told, lasted nearly twenty-four hours, and when I recovered from that, I heard again the same voice that had before spoken to me, asking me how I was.

“I turned in the direction of the sound, and, as my vision was now clearer, I could see that it was the hangman, whose face had made upon the scaffold such an impression upon me — an impression which I then considered my last in this world, but which turned out not to be such by many a mingled one of pain and pleasure since.

“It was some time before I could speak, and when I did, it was only in a few muttered words, to ask what had happened, and where I was.

“‘Do you not remember,’ he said, ‘that you were hanged?’

“‘I do — I do,’ was my reply. ‘Is this the region of damned souls?’

"'No; you are still in this world, however strange you may think it. Listen to me, and I will briefly tell you how it is that you have come back again, as it were, from the very grave, to live and walk about among the living."

"I listened to him with a strange and rapt attention, and then he told how a young and enthusiastic medical man had been anxious to try some experiments with regard to the restoration of persons apparently dead, and he proceeded to relate how it was that he had given ear to the solicitations of the man, and had consented to bring my body after it was hung for him to experiment upon. He related how the doctor had been successful, but how he was so terrified at his own success, that he hastily fled, and had left London, no one knowing whither he had gone.

"I listened to this with the most profound attention, and then he concluded, by saying to me, —

"'There can be no doubt but my duty requires of me to give you up again to the offended laws of your country. I will not, however, do that, if you will consent to an arrangement that I shall propose to you.'

"I asked him what the arrangement was, and he said that if I would solemnly bind myself to pay to him a certain sum per annum, he would keep my secret, and forsaking his calling as hangman, endeavour to do something that should bring with it pleasanter results. I did so solemnly promise him, and I have kept my word. By one means or another I have succeeded in procuring the required amount, and now he is no more."

"I believe," cried Henry, "that he has fallen a victim to the blind fury of the populace."

"You are right, he has so, and accordingly I am relieved from the burden of those payments; but it matters little, for now I am so near the tomb myself, that, together with all my obligations, I shall soon be beyond the reach of mortal cavilling."

"You need not think so, Varney; you must remember that you are at present suffering from circumstances, the pressure of which will soon pass away, and then you will resume your wonted habits."

"What did you do next?" said the admiral.— "Let's know all while you are about it."

"I remained at the hangman's house for some time, until all fear of discovery was over, and then he removed me to a place of greater security, providing me from his own resources with the means of existence, until I had fully recovered my health, and then he told me to shift for myself.

"During my confinement though, I had not been idle mentally, for I concocted a plan, by which I should be enabled not only to live well myself, but to pay to the hangman, whose name was Mortimore, the annual sum I had agreed upon. I need not go into the details of this plan. Of course it was neither an honest nor respectable one, but it succeeded, and I soon found myself in a position to enable me thereby to keep my engagement, as well as to supply me with means of plotting and planning for my future fortunes.

"I had never for a moment forgotten that so large a sum of money was somewhere concealed about Bannerworth Hall, and I still looked forward to obtaining it by some means or another.

"It was in this juncture of affairs, that one night I was riding on horseback through a desolate part of England. The moon was shining sweetly, as I came to a broad stream of water, across which, about a mile further on, I saw that there was a bridge, but being unwilling to waste time by riding up to it, and fancying, by the lazy ripple of the waters, that the river was not shallow, I plunged my horse boldly into the stream.

"When we reached its centre, some sudden indisposition must have seized the horse, for instead of swimming on well and gallantly as it had done before, it paused for a moment, and then plunged headlong into the torrent.

"I could not swim, and so, for a second time, death, with all its terrors, appeared to be taking possession of me. The waters rolled over my head, gurgling and hissing in my ears, and then all was past. I know no more, until I found myself lying upon a bright green meadow, and the full beams of the moon shining upon me.

"I was giddy and sick, but I rose, and walked slowly away, each moment gathering fresh strength, and from that time to this, I never discovered how I came to be rescued from the water, and lying upon that green bank. It has ever been a mystery to me, and I expect it ever will.

"Then from that moment the idea that I had a sort of charmed life came across me, and I walked about with an impression that such was the case, until I came across a man who said that he was a Hungarian, and who was full of strange stories of vampyres. Among other things, he told me that a vampyre could not be drowned, for that the waters would cast him upon its banks, and, if the moonbeams fell upon him, he would be restored to life.

"This was precisely my story, and from that moment I believed myself to be one of those horrible, but charmed beings, doomed to such a protracted existence. The notion grew upon me day by day, and hour by hour, until it became quite a fixed and strong belief, and I was deceiving no one when I played the horrible part that has been attributed to me."

"But you don't mean to say that you believe you are a vampyre now?" said the admiral.

"I say nothing, and know not what to think. I am a desperate man, and what there is at all human in me, strange to say, all of you whom I sought to injure, have awakened."

"Heed not that," said Henry, "but continue your narrative. We have forgiven everything, and that ought to suffice to quiet your mind upon such a subject."

"I will continue; and, believe me, I will conceal nothing from you. I look upon the words I am now uttering as a full, candid, and free confession; and, therefore, it shall be complete.

"The idea struck me that if, by taking advantage of my supposed preternatural gifts, I could drive you from Bannerworth Hall, I should have it to myself to hunt through at my leisure, and possibly find the treasure. I had heard from Marmaduke Bannerworth some slight allusion to concealing the money behind a picture that was in a bed-room called the panelled chamber. By inquiry, I ascertained that in that bed-room slept Flora Bannerworth.

"I had resolved, however, at first to try pacific measures, and accordingly, as you are well aware, I made various proposals to you to purchase or to rent Bannerworth Hall, the whole of which you rejected; so that I found myself compelled to adopt the original means that had suggested themselves to me, and endeavour to terrify you from the house.

"By prowling about, I made myself familiar with the grounds, and with all the plan of the residence, and then one night made my appearance in Flora's chamber by the window."

"But how do you account," said Charles Holland, "for your extraordinary likeness to the portrait?"

"It is partly natural, for I belong to a collateral branch of the family; and it was previously arranged. I had seen the portrait in Marmaduke Bannerworth's time, and I knew some of its peculiarities and dress sufficiently well to imitate them. I calculated upon producing a much greater effect by such an imitation; and it appears that I was not wrong, for I did produce it to the full."

"You did, indeed," said Henry; "and if you did not bring conviction to our minds that you were what you represented yourself to be, you at least staggered our judgments upon the occasion, and left us in a position of great doubt and difficulty."

"I did; I did all that, I know I did; and, by pursuing that line of conduct, I, at last, I presume, entirely forced you from the house."

"That you did."

"Flora fainted when I entered her chamber; and the moment I looked upon her sweet countenance my heart smote me for what I was about; but I solemnly aver, that my lips never touched her, and that, beyond the fright, she suffered nothing from Varney, the vampyre."

"And have you succeeded," said Henry, "in your object now?"

"No; the treasure has yet to be found. Mortimore, the hangman, followed me into the house, guessing my intention, and indulging a hope that he would succeed in sharing with me its proceeds. But he, as well as myself, was foiled, and nothing came of the toilsome and anxious search but disappointment and bitterness."

"Then it is supposed that the money is still concealed?"

"I hope so; I hope, as well, that it will be discovered by you and yours; for surely none can have a better right to it than you, who have suffered so much on its account."

"And yet," remarked Henry, "I cannot help thinking it is too securely hidden from us. The picture has been repeatedly removed from its place, and produced no results; so that I fear we have little to expect from any further or more protracted research."

"I think," said Varney, "that you have everything to expect. The words of the dying Marmaduke Bannerworth, you may depend, were not spoken in vain; and I have every reason to believe that, sooner or later, you must, without question, become the possessors of that sum."

"But ought we rightly to hold it?"

"Who ought more rightly to hold it?" said Varney; "answer me that."

"That's a sensible enough idea of your's," said the admiral; "and if you were twice over a vampyre, I would tell you so. It's a very sensible idea; I should like to know who has more right to it than those who have had such a world of trouble about it."

"Well, well," said Henry, "we must not dispute, as yet, about a sum of money that may really never come to hand. For my own part, I have little to hope for in the matter; but, certainly, nothing shall be spared, on my part, to effect such a thorough search of the Hall as shall certainly bring it to light, if it be in existence."

"I presume, Sir Francis Varney," said Charles Holland, "that you have now completed your narrative?"

"I have. After events are well known to you. And, now, I have but to lie down and die, with the hope of finding that rest and consolation in the tomb which has been denied me hitherto in this world. My life has been a stormy one, and full of the results of angry passions. I do hope now, that, for the short time I have to live, I shall know something like serenity, and die in peace."

"You may depend, Varney, that, as long as you have an asylum with us," said the admiral— "and that you may have as long as you like, — you may be at peace. I consider that you have surrendered at discretion, and, under such circumstances, an enemy always deserves honourable treatment, and always gets it on board such a ship as this."

"There you go again," said Jack, "calling the house a ship."

"What's that to you, if I were to call it a bowsprit? Ain't I your captain, you lubber, and so, sure to be right, while you are wrong, in the natural order of things? But you go and lay down, Master Varney, and rest yourself, for you seem completely done up."

Varney did look fearfully exhausted; and, with the assistance of Henry and Charles, he went into another apartment, and laid down upon a couch, showing great symptoms of debility and want of power.

And now it was a calm; Varney's stay at the cottage of the Bannerworths was productive of a different mood of mind than ever he had possessed before. He looked upon them in a very different manner to what he had been used to. He had, moreover, considerably altered prospects; there could not be the same hopes and expectations that he once had. He was an altered man. He saw in the Bannerworths those who had saved his life, and who, without doubt, had possessed an opinion, not merely obnoxious to him, but must have had some fearful misgivings concerning his character, and that, too, of a nature that usually shuts out all hope of being received into any family.

But, in the hour of his need, when his life was in danger, no one else would have done what they had done for him, especially when so relatively placed.

Moreover, he had been concealed, when to do so was both dangerous and difficult; and then it was done by Flora Bannerworth herself.

Time flew by. The mode of passing time at the cottage was calm and serene. Varney had seldom witnessed anything like it; but, at the same time, he felt more at ease than ever he had; he was charmed with the society of Flora — in fact, with the whole of the little knot of individuals who there collected together; from what he saw he was gratified in their society; and it seemed to alleviate his mental disquiet, and the sense he must feel of his own peculiar position. But Varney became ill. The state of mind and body he had been in for some time past might be the cause of it. He had been much harassed, and hunted from place to place. There was not a moment in which his life was not in danger, and he had, moreover, more than one case, received some bodily injuries, bruises, and contusions of a desperate character; and yet he would take no notice of them, but allow them to get well again, as best they could.

His escapes and injuries had made a deep impression upon his mind, and had no doubt a corresponding effect upon his body, and Varney became very ill.

Flora Bannerworth did all that could be done for one in his painful position, and this greatly added to the depths of thought that occasionally beset him, and he could scarcely draw one limb after the other.

He walked from room to room in the twilight, at which time he had more liberty permitted him than at any other, because there was not the same danger in his doing so; for, if once seen, there could be no manner of doubt but he would have been pursued until he was destroyed, when no other means of escape were at hand; and Varney himself felt that there could be no chance of his again escaping from them, for his physical powers were fast decaying; he was not, in fact, the same man.

He came out into the parlour from the room in which he had been seated during the day. Flora and her mother were there, while Charles Holland and Henry Bannerworth had both at that moment entered the apartment.

“Good evening, Miss Bannerworth,” said Sir Francis, bowing to her, and then to her mother, Mrs. Bannerworth; “and you, Mr. Holland, I see, have been out enjoying the free breeze that plays over the hot fields. It must be refreshing.”

“It is so, sir,” said Charles. “I wish we could make you a partaker in our walks.”

“I wish you could with all my heart,” said Varney.

“Sir Francis,” said Flora, “must be a prisoner for some short time longer yet.”

“I ought not to consider it in any such light. It is not imprisonment. I have taken sanctuary. It is the well spring of life to me,” said Varney.

“I hope it may prove so; but how do you find yourself this evening, Sir Francis Varney?”

“Really, it is difficult to say — I fluctuate. At times, I feel as though I should drop insensible on the earth, and then I feel better than I have done for some time previously.”

“Doctor Chillingworth will be here bye and bye, no doubt; and he must see what he can do for you to relieve you of these symptoms,” said Flora.

“I am much beholden to you — much beholden to you; but I hope to be able to do without the good doctor’s aid in this instance, though I must admit I may appear ungrateful.”

"Not at all — not at all."

"Have you heard any news abroad to-day?" inquired Varney.

"None, Sir Francis — none; there is nothing apparently stirring; and now, go out when you would, you would find nothing but what was old, quiet, and familiar."

"We cannot wish to look upon anything with mere charms for a mind at ease, than we can see under such circumstances; but I fear there are some few old and familiar features that I should find sad havoc in."

"You would, certainly, for the burnings and razings to the ground of some places, have made some dismal appearances; but time may efface that, and then the evil may die away, and the future will become the present, should we be able to allay popular feeling."

"Yes," said Sir Francis; "but popular prejudices, or justice, or feeling, are things not easily assuaged. The people when once aroused go on to commit all kinds of excess, and there is no one point at which they will step short of the complete extirpation of some one object or other that they have taken a fancy to hunt."

"The hubbub and excitement must subside."

"The greater the ignorance the more persevering and the more brutal they are," said Sir Francis; "but I must not complain of what is the necessary consequence of their state."

"It might be otherwise."

"So it might, and no mischief arise either; but as we cannot divert the stream, we may as well bend to the force of a current too strong to resist."

"The moon is up," said Flora, who wished to turn the conversation from that to another topic. "I see if yonder through the trees; it rises red and large — it is very beautiful — and yet there is not a cloud about to give it the colour and appearance it now wears."

"Exactly so," said Sir Francis Varney; "but the reason is the air is filled with a light, invisible vapour, that has the effect you perceive. There has been much evaporation going on, and now it shows itself in giving the moon that peculiar large appearance and deep colour."

"Ay, I see; it peeps through the trees, the branches of which cut it up into various portions. It is singular, and yet beautiful, and yet the earth below seems dark."

"It is dark; you would be surprised to find it so if you walked about. It will soon be lighter than it is at this present moment."

"What sounds are those?" inquired Sir Francis Varney, as he listened attentively.

"Sounds! What sounds?" returned Henry.

"The sounds of wheels and horses' feet," said Varney.

"I cannot even hear them, much less can I tell what they are," said Henry.

"Then listen. Now they come along the road. Cannot you hear them now?" said Varney.

"Yes, I can," said Charles Holland; "but I really don't know what they are, or what it can matter to us; we don't expect any visitors."

"Certainly, certainly," said Varney. "I am somewhat apprehensive of the approach of strange sounds."

"You are not likely to be disturbed here," said Charles.

"Indeed; I thought so when I had succeeded in getting into the house near the town, and so far from believing it was likely I should be discovered, that I sat on the house-top while the mob surrounded it."

"Did you not hear them coming?"

"I did."

"And yet you did not attempt to escape from them?"

"No, I could not persuade them I was not there save by my utter silence. I allowed them to come too close to leave myself time to escape — besides, I could hardly persuade myself there could be any necessity for so doing."

"It was fortunate it was as it happened afterwards, that you were able to reach the wood, and get out of it unperceived by the mob."

"I should have been in an unfortunate condition had I been in their hands long. A man made of iron would not be able to resist the brutality of those people."

As they were speaking, a gig, with two men, drove up, followed by one on horseback. They stopped at the garden-gate, and then tarried to consult with each other, as they looked at the house.

"What can they want, I wonder?" inquired Henry; "I never saw them before."

"Nor I," said Charles Holland.

"Do you not know them at all?" inquired Varney.

"No," replied Flora; "I never saw them, neither can I imagine what is their object in coming here."

"Did you ever see them before?" inquired Henry of his mother, who held up her hand to look more carefully at the strangers; then, shaking her head, she declared she had never seen such persons as those.

"I dare say not," said Charles Holland. "They certainly are not gentlemen; but here they come; there is some mistake, I daresay — they don't want to come here."

As they spoke, the two strangers got down; after picking up a topcoat they had let fall, they turned round, and deliberately put it into the chaise again; they walked up the path to the door, at which they knocked.

The door was opened by the old woman, when the two men entered.

"Does Francis Beauchamp live here?"

"Eh?" said the old woman, who was a little deaf, and she put her hand behind her ear to catch the sounds more distinctly— "eh? — who did you say?"

Sir Francis Varney started as the sounds came upon his ear, but he sat still an attentive listener.

"Are there any strangers in the house?" inquired the other officer, impatiently. "Who is here?"

"Strangers!" said the old woman; "you are the only strangers that I have seen here."

"Come," said the officer to his companion, "come this way; there are people in this parlour. Our business must be an apology for any rudeness we may commit."

As he spoke he stepped by the old woman, and laying his hand upon the handle of the door, entered the apartment, at the same time looking carefully around the room as if he expected some one.

"Ladies," said the stranger, with an off-hand politeness that had something repulsive in it, though it was meant to convey a notion that civility was intended; "ladies, I beg pardon for intruding, but I am looking for a gentleman."

"You shall hear from me again soon," said Sir Francis, in an almost imperceptible whisper.

"What is the object of this intrusion?" demanded Henry Bannerworth, rising and confronting the stranger. "This is a strange introduction."

"Yes, but not an unusual one," said the stranger, "in these cases

— being unavoidable, at the least."

"Sir," said Charles Holland, "if you cannot explain quickly your business here, we will proceed to take those measures which will at least rid ourselves of your company."

"Softly, sir. I mean no offence — not the least; but I tell you I do not come for any purpose that is at all consonant to my wishes. I am a Bow-street officer in the execution of my duty — excuse me, therefore."

"Whom do you want?"

"Francis Beauchamp; and, from the peculiarity of the appearance of this individual here, I think I may safely request the pleasure of his company."

Varney now rose, and the officer made a rush at him, when he saw him do so, saying, —

"Surrender in the king's name."

Varney, however, paid no attention to that, but rushed past, throwing his chair down to impede the officer, who could not stay himself, but fell over it, while Varney made a rush towards the window, which he cleared at one bound, and crossing the road, was lost to sight in a few seconds, in the trees and hedges on the other side.

"Accidents will happen," said the officer, as he rose to his feet; "I did not think the fellow would have taken the window in that manner; but we have him in view, and that will be enough."

"In heaven's name," said Henry, "explain all about this; we cannot understand one word of it — I am at a loss to understand one word of it."

"We will return and do so presently," said the officer as he dashed out of the house after the fugitive at a rapid and reckless speed, followed by his companion.

The man who had been left with the chaise, however, was the first in the chase; seeing an escape from the window, he immediately guessed that he was the man wanted, and, but for an accident, he would have met Varney at the gate, for, as he was getting out in a hurry, his foot became entangled with the reins, and he fell to the ground, and Varney at the same moment stepped over him.

“Curse his infernal impudence, and d — n these reins!” muttered the man in a fury at the accident, and the aggravating circumstance of the fugitive walking over him in such a manner, and so coolly too — it was vexing.

The man, however, quickly released himself, and rushed after Varney across the road, and kept on his track for some time. The moon was still rising, and shed but a gloomy light around. Everything was almost invisible until you came close to it. This was the reason why Varney and his pursuer met with several severe accidents — fumbles and hard knocks against impediments which the light and the rapid flight they were taking did not admit of their avoiding very well.

They went on for some time, but it was evident Varney knew the place best, and could avoid what the man could not, and that was the trees and the natural impediments of the ground, which Varney was acquainted with.

For instance, at full speed across a meadow, a hollow would suddenly present itself, and to an accustomed eye the moonlight might enable it to be distinguished at a glance what it was, while to one wholly unaccustomed to it, the hollow would often look like a hillock by such a light. This Varney would clear at a bound, which a less agile and heavier person would step into, lifting up his leg to meet an impediment, when he would find it come down suddenly some six or eight inches lower than he anticipated, almost dislocating his leg and neck, and producing a corresponding loss of breath, which was not regained by the muttered curse upon such a country where the places were so uneven.

Having come to one of these places, which was a little more perceptible than the others, he made a desperate jump, but he jumped into the middle of the hole with such force that he sprained his ankle, besides sinking into a small pond that was almost dry, being overgrown with rushes and aquatic plants.

"Well?" said the other officer coming up— "well?"

"Well, indeed!" said the one who came first; "it's anything but well. D — n all country excursions say I."

"Why, Bob, you don't mean to say as how you are caught in a rat-trap?"

"Oh, you be d —— d! I am, ain't I?"

"Yes; but are you going to stop there, or coming out, eh? You'll catch cold."

"I have sprained my ankle."

"Well?"

"It ain't well, I tell you; here have I a sprained foot, and my wind broken for a month at least. Why were you not quicker? If you had been sharper we should have had the gentleman, I'll swear!"

"I tumbled down over the chair, and he got out of the window, and I come out of the door."

"Well, I got entangled in the reins; but I got off after him, only his long legs carried him over everything. I tell you what, Wilkinson, if I were to be born again, and intended to be a runner, I would bespeak a pair of long legs."

"Why?"

"Because I should be able to get along better. You have no idea of how he skimmed along the ground; it was quite beautiful, only it wasn't good to follow it."

"A regular sky scraper!"

"Yes, or something of that sort; he looked like a patent flying shadow."

"Well, get up and lead the way; we'll follow you."

"I dare say you will — when I lead the way back there; for as to going out yonder, it is quite out of the question. I want supper to-night and breakfast to-morrow morning."

"Well, what has that to do with it?"

"Just this much: if you follow any farther, you'll get into the woods, and there you'll be, going round and round, like a squirrel in a cage, without being able to get out, and you will there get none of the good things included under the head of those meals."

"I think so too," said the third.

"Well, then, let's go back; we needn't run, though it might be as well to do so."

"It would be anything but well. I don't gallop back, depend upon it."

The three men now slowly returned from their useless chase, and re-trod the way they had passed once in such a hurry that they could hardly recognise it.

"What a dreadful bump I came against that pole standing there," said one.

"Yes, and I came against a hedge-stake, that was placed so as the moon didn't show any light on it. It came into the pit of my stomach. I never recollect such a pain in my life; for all the world like a hot coal being suddenly and forcibly intruded into your stomach."

"Well, here's the road. I must go up to the house where I started him from. I promised them some explanation. I may as well go and give it to them at once."

"Do as you will. I will wait with the horse, else, perhaps, that Beauchamp will again return and steal him."

The officer who had first entered the house now returned to the Bannerworths, saying,

"I promised you I would give you some explanation as to what you have witnessed."

"Yes," said Henry; "we have been awaiting your return with some anxiety and curiosity. What is the meaning of all this? I am, as we are all, in perfect ignorance of the meaning of what took place."

"I will tell you. The person whom you have had here, and goes by the name of Varney, is named Francis Beauchamp."

"Indeed! Are you assured of this?"

"Yes, perfectly assured of it; I have it in my warrant to apprehend him by either name."

"What crime had he been guilty of?"

"I will tell you: he has been *hanged*."

"Hanged!" exclaimed all present.

"What do you mean by that?" added Henry; "I am at a loss to understand what you can mean by saying he was hanged."

"What I say is literally true."

"Pray tell us all about it. We are much interested in the fact; go on, sir."

"Well, sir, then I believe it was for murder that Francis Beauchamp was hanged — yes, hanged; a common execution, before a multitude of people, collected to witness such an exhibition."

"Good God!" exclaimed Henry Bannerworth. "And was — but that is impossible. A dead man come to life again! You must be amusing yourself at our expense."

"Not I," replied the officer. "Here is my warrant; they don't make these out in a joke."

And, as he spoke, he produced the warrant, when it was evident the officer spoke the truth.

"How was this?"

"I will tell you, sir. You see that this Varney was a regular scamp, gamester, rogue, and murderer. He was hanged, and hung about the usual time; he was cut down and the body was given to some one for dissection, when a surgeon, with the hangman, one Montgomery, succeeded in restoring the criminal to life."

"But I always thought they broke the neck when they were hanged; the weight of the body would alone do that."

"Oh, dear, no, sir," said the officer; "that is one of the common every day mistakes; they don't break the neck once in twenty times."

"Indeed!"

"No; they die of suffocation only; this man, Beauchamp, was hanged thus, but they contrived to restore him, and then he assumed a new name, and left London."

"But how came you to know all this?"

"Oh! it came to us, as many things usually do, in a very extraordinary manner, and in a manner that appears most singular and out of the way; but such it was.

"The executioner who was the means of his being restored, or one of them, wished to turn him to account, and used to draw a yearly sum of money from him, as hush money, to induce them to keep the secret; else, the fact of his having escaped punishment would subject him to a repetition of the same punishment; when, of course, a little more care would be taken that he did not escape a second time."

"I dare say not."

"Well, you see, Varney, or rather Beauchamp, was to pay a heavy sum to this man to keep him quiet, and to permit him to enjoy the life he had so strangely become possessed of."

"I see," said Holland.

"Well, this man, Montgomery, had always some kind of suspicion that Varney would murder him."

"Murder him! and he the means of saving his life; surely he could not be so bad as that."

"Why, you see, sir, this hangman drew a heavy sum yearly from him; thus making him only a mine of wealth to himself; this, no doubt, would rankle in the other's heart, to think he should be so beset, and hold life upon such terms."

"I see, now."

"Yes; and then came the consideration that he did not do it from any good motive, merely a selfish one, and he was consequently under no obligation to him for what he had done; besides, self-preservation might urge him on, and tell him to do the deed.

"However that may be, Montgomery dreaded it, and was resolved to punish the deed if he could not prevent it. He, therefore, left general orders with his wife, whenever he went on a journey to Varney, if he should be gone beyond a certain time, she was to open a certain drawer, and take out a sealed packet to the magistrate at the chief office, who would attend to it.

"He has been missing, and his wife did as she was desired, and now we have found what he there mentioned to be true; but, now, sir, I have satisfied you and explained to you why we intruded upon you, we must now leave and seek for him elsewhere.”

“It is most extraordinary, and that is the reason why his complexion is so singular.”

“Very likely.”

They poured out some wine, which was handed to the officers, who drank and then quitted the house, leaving the inmates in a state of stupefaction, from surprise and amazement at what they had heard from the officers.

There was a strange feeling came over them when they recollected the many occurrences they had witnessed, and even the explanation of the officers; it seemed as if some mist had enveloped objects and rendered them indistinct, but which was fast rising, and they were becoming plainer and more distinct every moment in which they were regarded.

There was a long pause, and Flora was about to speak, when suddenly there came the sound of a footstep across the garden. It was slow but unsteady, and paused between whiles until it came close beneath the windows. They remained silent, and then some one was heard to climb up the rails of the veranda, and then the curtains were thrust aside, but not till after the person outside had paused to ascertain who was there.

Then the curtains were opened, and the visage of Sir Francis Varney appeared, much altered; in fact, completely worn and exhausted.

It was useless to deny it, but he looked ghastly — terrific; his singular visage was as pallid as death; his eyes almost protruding, his mouth opened, and his breathing short, and laboured in the extreme.

He climbed over with much difficulty, and staggered into the room, and would have spoken, but he could not; befell senseless upon the floor, utterly exhausted and motionless.

There was a long pause, and each one present looked at each other, and then they gazed upon the inanimate body of Sir Francis Varney, which lay supine and senseless in the middle of the floor.

The importance of the document, said to be on the dead body, was such that it would admit of no delay before it was obtained, and the party determined that it should be commenced instanter. Lost time would be an object to them; too much haste could hardly be made; and now came the question of, "should it be to-night, or not?"

"Certainly," said Henry Bannerworth; "the sooner we can get it, the sooner all doubt and distress will be at an end; and, considering the turn of events, that will be desirable for all our sakes; besides, we know not what unlucky accident may happen to deprive us of what is so necessary."

"There can be none," said Mr. Chillingworth; "but there is this to be said, this has been such an eventful history, that I cannot say what might or what might not happen."

"We may as well go this very night," said Charles Holland. "I give my vote for an immediate exhumation of the body. The night is somewhat stormy, but nothing more; the moon is up, and there will be plenty of light."

"And rain," said the doctor.

"Little or none," said Charles Holland. "A few gusts of wind now and then drive a few heavy plashes of rain against the windows, and that gives a fearful sound, which is, in fret, nothing, when you have to encounter it; but you will go, doctor?"

"Yes, most certainly. We must have some tools."

"Those may be had from the garden," said Henry. "Tools for the exhumation, you mean?”

“Yes; pickaxe, mattocks, and a crowbar; a lantern, and so forth,” said the doctor. “You see I am at home in this; the fact is, I have had more than one affair of this kind on my hands before now, and whilst a student I have had more than one adventure of a strange character.”

“I dare say, doctor,” said Charles Holland, “you have some sad pranks to answer for; you don’t think of it then, only when you find them accumulated in a heap, so that you shall not be able to escape them; because they come over your senses when you sleep at night.”

“No, no,” said Chillingworth; “you are mistaken in that. I have long since settled all my accounts of that nature; besides, I never took a dead body out of a grave but in the name of science, and never far my own profit, seeing I never sold one in my life, or got anything by it.”

“That is not the fact,” said Henry; “you know, doctor, you improved your own talents and knowledge.”

“Yes, yes; I did.”

“Well, but you profited by such improvements?”

“Well, granted, I did. How much more did the public not benefit then,” said the doctor, with a smile.

“Ah, well, we won’t argue the question,” said Charles; “only it strikes me that the doctor could never have been a doctor if he had not determined upon following a profession.”

“There may be a little truth in that,” said Chillingworth; “but now we had better quit the house, and make the best of our way to the spot where the unfortunate man lies buried in his unhallowed grave.”

“Come with me into the garden,” said Henry Bannerworth; “we shall there be able to suit ourselves to what is required. I have a couple of lanterns.”

"One is enough," said Chillingworth; "we had better not burden ourselves more than we are obliged to do; and we shall find enough to do with the tools."

"Yes, they are not light; and the distance is by far too great to make walking agreeable and easy; the wind blows strong, and the rain appears to be coming up afresh, and, by the time we have done, we shall find the ground will become slippy, and bad for walking."

"Can we have a conveyance?"

"No, no," said the doctor; "we could, but we must trouble the turnpike man; besides, there is a shorter way across some fields, which will be better and safer."

"Well, well," said Charles Holland; "I do not mind which way it is, as long as you are satisfied yourselves. The horse and cart would have settled it all better, and done it quicker, besides carrying the tools."

"Very true, very true," said the doctor; "all that is not without its weight, and you shall choose which way you would have it done; for my part, I am persuaded the expedition on foot is to be preferred for two reasons."

"And what are they?"

"The first is, we cannot obtain a horse and cart without giving some detail as to what you want it for, which is awkward, on account of the hour. Moreover, you could not get one at this moment in time."

"That ought to settle the argument," said Henry Bannerworth; "an impossibility, under the circumstances, at once is a clincher, and one that may be allowed to have some weight."

"You may say that," said Charles.

"Besides which, you must go a greater distance, and that, too, along the main road, which is objectionable."

"Then we are agreed," said Charles Holland, "and the sooner we are off the better; the night grows more and more gloomy every hour, and more inclement."

"It will serve our purpose the better," said Chillingworth. "What we do, we may as well do now."

"Come with me to the garden," said Henry, "and we will take the tools. We can go out the back way; that will preclude any observation being made."

They all now left the apartment, wrapped up in great overcoats, to secure themselves against the weather, and also for the purpose of concealing themselves from any chance passenger.

In the garden they found the tools they required, and having chosen them, they took a lantern, with the mean of getting a light when they got to their journey's end, which they would do in less than an hour.

After having duly inspected the state of their efficiency, they started away on their expedition.

The night had turned gloomy and windy; heavy driving masses of clouds obscured the moon, which only now and then was to be seen, when the clouds permitted her to peep out. At the same time, there were many drifting showers, which lasted but a few minutes, and then the clouds were carried forwards by some sudden gust of wind so that, altogether, it was a most uncomfortable night as well could be imagined.

However, there was no time to lose, and, under all circumstances, they could not have chosen a better night for their purpose than the one they had; indeed, they could not desire another night to be out on such a purpose.

They spoke not while they were within sight of the houses, though at the distance of many yards, and, at the same time, there was a noise through the trees that would have carried their voices past every object, however close; but they would make assurance doubly sure.

“I think we are fairly away now,” said Henry, “from all fear of being recognised.”

“To be sure you are. Who would recognise us now, if we were met?”

“No one.”

“I should think not; and, moreover, there would be but small chance of any evil coming from it, even if it were to happen that we were to be seen and known. Nobody knows what we are going to do, and, if they did, there is no illegality in the question.”

“Certainly not; but we wish the matter to be quite secret, therefore, we don’t wish to be seen by any one while upon this adventure.”

“Exactly,” said Chillingworth; “and, if you’ll follow my guidance, you shall meet nobody.”

“We will trust you, most worthy doctor. What have you to say for our confidence?”

“That you will find it is not misplaced.”

Just as the doctor had uttered the last sound, there came a hearty laugh upon the air, which, indeed, sounded but a few paces in advance of them. The wind blew towards them, and would, therefore, cause the sounds to come to them, but not to go away in the direction they were going.

The whole party came to a sudden stand still; there was something so strange in hearing a laugh at that moment, especially as

Chillingworth was, at that moment, boasting of his knowledge of the ground and the certainty of their meeting no one.

"What is that?" inquired Henry.

"Some one laughing, I think," said Chillingworth.

"Of that there can be little or no doubt," said Charles Holland; "and, as people do not usually laugh by themselves so heartily, it may be presumed there are, at least, two."

"No doubt of it."

"And, moreover, their purpose cannot be a very good one, at this hour of the night, and of such a night, too. I think we had better be cautious."

"Hush! Follow me silently," said Henry.

As he spoke, he moved cautiously from the spot where he stood, and, at the same time, he was followed by the whole party, until they came to the hedge which skirted a lane, in which were seated three men.

They had a sort of tent erected, and that was hung upon a part of the hedge which was to windward of them, so that it sheltered them from wind and rain.

Henry and Chillingworth both peeped over the bank, and saw them seated beneath this kind of canopy. They were shabby, gipsy-looking men, who might be something else — sheep-stealers, or horse-stealers, in fact, anything, even to beggars.

"I say, Jack," said one; "it's no bottle to-night."

"No; there's nobody about these parts to-night. We are safe, and so are they."

"Exactly."

"Besides, you see, those who do happen to be out are not worth talking to."

"No cash."

"None, not enough to pay turnpike for a walking-slick, at the most."

"Besides, it does us no good to take a few shillings from a poor wretch, who has more in family than he has shillings in pocket."

"Ay, you are right, quite right. I don't like it myself, I don't; besides that, there's fresh risk in every man you stop, and these poor fellows will fight hard for a few shillings, and there is no knowing what an unlucky blow may do for a man."

"That is very true. Has anything been done to-night?"

"Nothing," said one.

"Only three half crowns," said the other; "that is the extent of the common purse to-night."

"And I," said the third, "I have got a bottle of bad gin from the Cat and Cabbage-stump."

"How did you manage it?"

"Why, this way. I went in, and had some beer, and you know I can give a long yarn when I want; but it wants only a little care to deceive these knowing countrymen, so I talked and talked, until they got quite chatty, and then I put the gin in my pocket."

"Good."

"Well, then, the loaf and beef I took out of the safe as I came by, and I dare say they know they have lost it by this time."

"Yes, and so do we. I expect the gin will help to digest the beef, so we mustn't complain of the goods."

"No; give us another glass, Jim."

Jim held the glass towards him, when the doctor, animated by the spirit of mischief, took a good sized pebble, and threw it into the glass, smashing it, and spilling the contents.

In a moment there was a change of scene; the men were all terrified, and started to their feet, while a sudden gust of wind caused their light to go out; at the same time their tent-cloth was thrown down by the wind, and fell across their heads.

“Come along,” said the doctor.

There was no need of saying so, for in a moment the three were as if animated by one spirit, and away they scudded across the fields, with the speed of a race horse.

In a few minutes they were better than half a mile away from the spot.

“In absence of all authentic information,” said the doctor, speaking as well as he could, and blowing prodigiously between each word, as though he were fetching breath all the way from his heels, “I think I we may conclude we are safe from them. We ought to thank our stars we came across them in the way we did.”

“But, doctor, what in the name of Heaven induced you to make such a noise, to frighten them, in fact, and to tell them some one was about?”

“They were too much terrified to tell whether it was one, or fifty. By this time they are out of the county; they knew what they were talking about.”

“And perhaps we may meet them on the road where we are going, thinking it a rare lonely spot where they can hide, and no chance of their being found out.”

“No,” said the doctor; “they will not go to such a place; it has by far too bad a name for even such men as those to go near, much less stop in.”

“I can hardly think that,” said Charles Holland, “for these fellows are too terrified for their personal safety, to think of the superstitious fears with which a place may be regarded; and these men, in such a place as the one you speak of, they will be at home."

"Well, well, rather than be done, we must fight for it; and when you come to consider we have one pick and two shovels, we shall be in full force."

"Well said, doctor; how far have we to go?"

"Not more than a quarter of a mile."

They pursued their way through the fields, and under the hedgerows, until they came to a gate, where they stopped awhile, and began to consult and to listen.

"A few yards up here, on the left," said the doctor; "I know the spot; besides, there is a particular mark. Now, then, are you all ready?"

"Yes, all."

"Here," said the doctor, pointing out the marks by which the spot might be recognised; "here is the spot, and I think we shall not be half a foot out of our reckoning."

"Then let us begin instanter," said Henry, as he seized hold of the pickaxe, and began to loosen the earth by means of the sharp end.

"That will do for the present," said Chillingworth; "now let me and Charles take a turn with our shovels, and you will get on again presently. Throw the earth up on the bank in one heap, so that we can put it on again without attracting any attention to the spot by its being left in clods and uneven."

"Exactly," said Henry, "else the body will be discovered."

They began to shovel away, and continued to do so, after it had been picked up, working alternately, until at length Charles stuck his pick-axe into something soft, and upon pulling it up, he found it was the body.

A dreadful odour now arose from the spot, and they were at no loss to tell where the body lay. The pick-axe had stuck into the deceased's ribs and clothing, and thus lifted it out of its place.

"Here it is," said the doctor; "but I needn't tell you that; the charnel-house smell is enough to convince you of the fact of where it is."

"I think so; just show a light upon the subject, doctor, and then we can see what we are about — do you mind, doctor — you have the management of the lantern, you know?"

"Yes, yes," said Chillingworth; "I see you have it — don't be in a hurry, but do things deliberately and coolly whatever you do — you will not be so liable to make mistakes, or to leave anything undone."

"There will be nothing of any use to you here, doctor, in the way of dissection, for the flesh is one mass of decay. What a horrible sight, to be sure!"

"It is; but hasten the search."

"Well, I must; though, to confess the truth, I'd sooner handle anything than this."

"It is not the most pleasant thing in the world, for there is no knowing what may be the result — what creeping thing has made a home of it."

"Don't mention anything about it."

Henry and Charles Holland now began to search the pockets of the clothes of the dead body, in one of which was something hard, that felt like a parcel.

"What have you got there?" said Chillingworth, as he held his lantern up so that the light fell upon the ghastly object that they were handling.

"I think it is the prize," said Charles Holland; "but we have not got it out yet, though I dare say it won't be long first, if this wind will but hold good for about five minutes, and keep the stench down."

They now tore open the packet and pulled out the papers, which appeared to have been secreted upon his person.

"Be sure there are none on any other part of the body," said Chillingworth, "because what you do now, you had better do well, and leave nothing to after thought, because it is frequently impracticable."

"The advice is good," said Henry, who made a second search, but found nothing.

"We had better re-bury him," said the doctor; "it had better be done cleanly. Well, it is a sad hole for a last resting-place, and yet I do not know that it matters — it is all a matter of taste — the fashion of the class, or the particular custom of the country."

There was but little to be said against such an argument, though the custom of the age had caused them to look upon it more as a matter of feeling than in such a philosophical sense as that in which the doctor had put it.

"Well, there he is now — shovel the earth in, Charles," said Henry Bannerworth, as he himself set the example, which was speedily and vigorously followed by Charles Holland, when they were not long before the earth was thrown in and covered up with care, and trodden down so that it should not appear to be moved.

"This will do, I think," said Henry.

"Yes; it is not quite the same, but I dare say no one will try to make any discoveries in this place; besides, if the rain continues to come down very heavy, why, it will wash much of it away, and it will make it look all alike."

There was little inducement to hover about the spot, but Henry could not forbear holding up the papers to the light of the lantern to ascertain what they were.

“Are they all right?” inquired the doctor.

“Yes,” replied Henry, “yes. The Dearbrook estate. Oh! yes; they are the papers I am in want of.”

“It is singularly fortunate, at least, to be successful in securing them. I am very glad a living person has possession of them, else it would have been very difficult to have obtained it from them.”

“So it would; but now homeward is the word, doctor; and on my word there is reason to be glad, for the rain is coming on very fast now, and there is no moon at all — we had better step out.”

They did, for the three walked as fast as the nature of the soil would permit them, and the darkness of the night.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

TELLS WHAT BECAME OF THE SECOND VAMPYRE WHO SOUGHT VARNEY.

We left the Hungarian nobleman swimming down the stream; he swam slowly, and used but little exertion in doing so. He appeared to use his hands only as a means of assistance.

The stream carried him onwards, and he aided himself so far that he kept the middle of the stream, and floated along.

Where the stream was broad and shallow, it sometimes left him a moment or two, without being strong enough to carry him onwards; then he would pause, as if gaining strength, and finally he would, when he had rested, and the water came a little faster, and lifted him, make a desperate plunge, and swim forward, until he again came in deep water, and then he went slowly along with the stream, as he supported himself.

It was strange thus to see a man going down slowly, and without any effort whatever, passing through shade and through moonlight — now lost in the shadow of the tall trees, and now emerging into that part of the stream which ran through meadows and cornfields, until the stream widened, and then, at length, a ferry-house was to be seen in the distance.

Then came the ferryman out of his hut, to look upon the beautiful moonlight scene. It was cold, but pure, and brilliantly light. The chaste moon was sailing through the heavens, and the stars diminished in their lustre by the power of the luminous goddess of night.

There was a small cottage — true, it was somewhat larger than was generally supposed by any casual observer who might look at it. The place was rambling, and built chiefly of wood; but in it lived the ferryman, his wife, and family; among these was a young girl about seventeen years of age, but, at the same time, very beautiful.

They had been preparing their supper, and the ferryman himself walked out to look at the river and the shadows of the tall trees that stood on the hill opposite.

While thus employed, he heard a plashing in the water, and on turning towards the quarter whence the sound proceeded for a few yards, he came to the spot where he saw the stranger struggling in the stream.

"Good God!" he muttered to himself, as he saw the struggle continued; "good God! he will sink and drown."

As he spoke, he jumped into his boat and pushed it off, for the purpose of stopping the descent of the body down the stream, and in a moment or two it came near to him. He muttered, —

"Come, come — he tries to swim; life is not gone yet — he will do now, if I can catch hold of him. Swimming with one's face under the stream doesn't say much for his skill, though it may account for the fact that he don't cry out."

As the drowning man neared, the ferryman held on by the boat-hook, and stooping down, he seized the drowning man by the hair of the head, and then paused.

After a time, he lifted him up, and placed him across the edge of the boat, and then, with some struggling of his own, he was rolled over into the boat.

"You are safe now," muttered the ferryman.

The stranger spoke not, but sat or leaned against the boat's head, sobbing and catching at his breath, and spitting off his stomach the water it might be presumed he had swallowed.

The ferryman put back to the shore, when he paused, and secured his boat, and then pulled the stranger out, saying, —

"Do you feel any better now?"

"Yes," said the stranger; "I feel I am living — thanks to you, my good friend; I owe you my life."

"You are welcome to that," replied the ferryman; "it costs me nothing; and, as for my little trouble, I should be sorry to think of that, when a fellow-being's life was in danger."

"You have behaved very well — very well, and I can do little more now than thank you, for I have been robbed of all I possessed about me at the moment."

"Oh! you have been robbed?"

"Aye, truly, I have, and have been thrown into the water, and thus I have been nearly murdered."

"It is lucky you escaped from them without further injury," said the ferryman; "but come in doors, you must be mad to stand here in the cold."

"Thank you; your hospitality is great, and, at this moment, of the greatest importance to me."

"Such as we have," said the honest ferryman, "you shall be welcome to. Come in — come in."

He turned round and led the way to the house, which he entered, saying — as he opened the small door that led into the main apartment, where all the family were assembled, waiting for the almost only meal they had had that day, for the ferryman had not the means, before the sun had set, of sending for food, and then it was a long way before it could be found, and then it was late before they could get it, —

“Wife, we have a stranger to sleep with us to-night, and for whom we must prepare a bed.”

“A stranger!” echoed the wife— “a stranger, and we so poor!”

“Yes; one whose life I have saved, and who was nearly drowned. We cannot refuse hospitality upon such an occasion as that, you know, wife.”

The wife looked at the stranger as he entered the room, and sat down by the fire.

“I am sorry,” he said, “to intrude upon you; but I will make you amends for the interruption and inconvenience I may cause you; but it is too late to apply elsewhere, and yet I am doubtful, if there were, whether I could go any further.”

“No, no,” said the ferryman; “I am sure a man who has been beaten and robbed, and thrown into a rapid and, in some parts, deep stream, is not fit to travel at this time of night.”

“You are lonely about here,” said the stranger, as he shivered by the fire.

“Yes, rather; but we are used to it.”

“You have a family, too; that must help to lighten the hours away, and help you over the long evenings.”

“So you may think, stranger, and, at times, so it is; but when food runs short, it is a long while to daylight, before any more money can be had. To be sure, we have fish in the river, and we have what we can grow in the garden; but these are not all the wants that we feel, and those others are sometimes pinching. However, we are thankful for what we have, and complain but little when we can get no more; but sometimes we do repine — though I cannot say we ought — but I am merely relating the fact, whether it be right or wrong.”

“Exactly. How old is your daughter?”

"She is seventeen come Allhallow's eve."

"That is not far hence," said the stranger. "I hope I may be in this part of the country — and I think I shall — I will on that eve pay you a visit; not one on which I shall be a burden to you, but one more useful to you, and more consonant to my character."

"The future will tell us all about that," said the ferryman; "at present we will see what we can do, without complaining, or taxing anybody."

The stranger and the ferryman sat conversing for some time before the fire, and then the latter pointed out to him which was his bed — one made up near the fire, for the sake of its warmth; and then the ferryman retired to the next room, a place which was merely divided by an imperfect partition.

However, they all fell soundly asleep. The hours on that day had been longer than usual; there was not that buoyancy of spirit; when they retired, they fell off into a heavy, deep slumber.

From this they were suddenly aroused by loud cries and piercing screams from one of the family.

So loud and shrill were the cries, that they all started up, terrified and bewildered beyond measure, unable to apply their faculties to any one object.

"Help — help, father! — help!" shrieked the voice of the young girl whom we have before noticed.

The ferryman jumped up, and rushed to the spot where his daughter lay.

"Fanny," he said— "Fanny, what ails thee — what ails thee? Tell me, my dear child."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, almost choked— "oh, father! are we all alone? I am terrified."

"What ails thee — what ails thee? Tell me what caused you to scream out in such a manner?"

"I — I — that is I, father, thought — but no, I am sure it was reality. Where is the stranger?"

"A light — a light!" shouted the fisherman.

In another moment a light was brought him, and he discovered the stranger reclining in his bed, but awake, and looking around him, as if in the utmost amazement.

"What has happened?" he said— "what has happened?"

"That is more than I know as yet," the man replied. "Come, Fanny," he added, "tell me what it is you fear. What caused you to scream out in that dreadful manner?"

"Oh, father — the vampyre!"

"Great God! what do you mean, Fanny, by that?"

"I hardly know, father. I was fast asleep, when I thought I felt something at my threat; but being very sound asleep, I did not immediately awake. Presently I felt the sharp pang of teeth being driven into the flesh of my neck — I awoke, and found the vampyre at his repast. Oh, God! oh, God! what shall I do?"

"Stay, my child, let us examine the wound," said the fisherman, and he held the candle to the spot where the vampyre's teeth had been applied. There, sure enough, were teeth marks, such as a human being's would make were they applied, but no blood had been drawn therefrom.

"Come, come, Fanny; so far, by divine Providence, you are not injured; another moment, and the mischief would have been done entire and complete, and you would have been his victim."

Then turning to the stranger, he said, —

"You have had some hand in this. No human being but you could come into this place. The cottage door is secured. You must be the vampyre."

"I!"

"Yes; who else could?"

"I! — As Heaven's my judge — but there, it's useless to speak of it; I have not been out of my bed. In this place, dark as it is, and less used to darkness than you, I could not even find my way about. — It is impossible."

"Get out of your bed, and let me feel," said the ferryman, peremptorily— "get out, and I will soon tell."

The stranger arose, and began to dress himself, and the ferryman immediately felt the bed on which he had been lying; but it was ice cold — so cold that he started upon his legs in an instant, exclaiming with vehemence, —

"It is you, vile wretch! that has attempted to steal into the cottage of the poor man, and then to rob him of his only child, and that child of her heart's blood, base ingrate!"

"My friend, you are wrong, entirely wrong. I am not the creature you believe me. I have slept, and slept soundly, and awoke not until your daughter screamed."

"Scoundrel! — liar! — base wretch! you shall not remain alive to injure those who have but one life to lose."

As he spoke, the ferryman made a desperate rush at the vampyre, and seized him by the throat, and a violent struggle ensued, in which the superior strength of the ferryman prevailed, and he brought his antagonist to the earth, at the same time bestowing upon him some desperate blows.

"Thou shall go to the same element from which I took thee," said the ferryman, "and there swim or sink as thou wilt until some one shall drag thee ashore, and when they do, may they have a better return than I.”

As he spoke, he dragged along the stranger by main force until they came to the bank of the river, and then pausing, to observe the deepest part, he said, —

“Here, then, you shall go.”

The vampyre struggled, and endeavoured to speak, but he could not; the grasp at his throat prevented all attempts at speech; and then, with a sudden exertion of his strength, the ferryman lifted the stranger up, and heaved him some distance into the river.

Then in deep water sank the body.

The ferryman watched for some moments, and farther down the stream he saw the body again rise upon the current and struggling slightly, as for life — now whirled around and around, and then carried forward with the utmost velocity.

This continued as far as the moonlight enabled the ferryman to see, and then, with a slow step and clouded brow, he returned to his cottage, which he entered, and closed the door.

CHAPTER XC.

DR. CHILLINGWORTH AT THE HALL. — THE ENCOUNTER OF MYSTERY. — THE CONFLICT. — THE RESCUE, AND THE PICTURE.

There have been many events that have passed rapidly in this our narrative; but more have yet to come before we can arrive at that point which will clear up much that appears to be most mysterious and unaccountable.

Doctor Chillingworth, but ill satisfied with the events that had yet taken place, determined once more upon visiting the Hall, and there to attempt a discovery of something respecting the mysterious apartment in which so much has already taken place.

He communicated his design to no one; he resolved to prosecute the inquiry alone. He determined to go there and await whatever might turn up in the shape of events. He would not for once take any companion; such adventures were often best prosecuted alone — they were most easily brought to something like an explanatory position, one person can often consider matters more coolly than more. At all events, there is more secrecy than under any other circumstances.

Perhaps this often is of greater consequence than many others; and, moreover, when there is more than one, something is usually overdone. Where one adventurous individual will rather draw back in a pursuit, more than one would induce them to urge each other on.

In fact, one in such a case could act the part of a spy — a secret observer; and in that case can catch people at times when they could not under any other circumstances be caught or observed at all.

“I will go,” he muttered; “and should I be compelled to run away again, why, nobody knows anything about it and nobody will laugh at me.”

This was all very well; but Mr. Chillingworth was not the man to run away without sufficient cause. But there was so much mystery in all this that he felt much interested in the issue of the affair. But this issue he could not command; at the same time he was determined to sit and watch, and thus become certain that either something or nothing was to take place.

Even the knowledge of that much — that some inexplicable action was still going on — was far preferable to the uncertainty of not knowing whether what had once been going on was still so or not, because, if it had ceased, it was probable that nothing more would ever be known concerning it, and the mystery would still be a mystery to the end of time.

“It shall be fathomed if there be any possibility of its being discovered,” muttered Chillingworth. “Who would have thought that so quiet and orderly a spot as this, our quiet village, would have suffered so much commotion and disturbance? Far from every cause of noise and strife, it is quite as great a matter of mystery as the vampyre business itself.

“I have been so mixed up in this business that I must go through with it. By the way, of the mysteries, the greatest that I have met with is the fact of the vampyre having anything to do with so quiet a family as the Bannerworths.”

Mr. Chillingworth pondered over the thought; but yet he could make nothing of it. It in no way tended to elucidate anything connected with the affair, and it was much too strange and singular in all its parts to be submitted to any process of thought, with any hope of coming to anything like a conclusion upon the subject — that must remain until some facts were ascertained, and to obtain them Mr. Chillingworth now determined to try.

This was precisely what was most desirable in the present state of affairs; while things remained in the present state of uncertainty, there would be much more of mystery than could ever be brought to light.

One or two circumstances cleared up, the minor ones would follow in the same train, and they would be explained by the others; and if ever that happy state of things were to come about, why, then there would be a perfect calm in the town.

As Mr. Chillingworth was going along, he thought he observed two men sitting inside a hedge, close to a hay-rick, and thinking neither of them had any business there, he determined to listen to their conversation, and ascertain if it had any evil tendency, or whether it concerned the late event.

Having approached near the gate, and they being on the other side, he got over without any noise, and, unperceived by either of them, crept close up to them.

"So you haven't long come from sea?"

"No; I have just landed."

"How is it you have thrown aside your seaman's clothes and taken to these?"

"Just to escape being found out."

"Found out! what do you mean by that? Have you been up to anything?"

"Yes, I have, Jack. I have been up to something, worse luck to me; but I'm not to be blamed either."

"What is it all about?" inquired his companion. "I always thought you were such a steady-going old file that there was no going out of the even path with you."

"Nor would there have been, but for one simple circumstance."

"What was that?"

"I will tell you, Jack — I will tell you; you will never betray me, I am sure."

"Never, by heavens!"

"Well, then, listen — it was this. I had been some time aboard our vessel. I had sailed before, but the captain never showed any signs of being a bad man, and I was willing enough to sail with him again.

"He knew I was engaged to a young woman in this country, and that I was willing to work hard to save money to make up a comfortable home for us both, and that I would not sail again, but that I intended to remain ashore, and make up my mind to a shore life."

"Well, you would have a house then?"

"Exactly; and that's what I wished to do. Well, I made a small venture in the cargo, and thought, by so doing, that I should have a chance of realising a sum of money that would put us both in a comfortable line of business.

"Well, we went on very smoothly until we were coming back. We had disposed of the cargo, and I had received some money, and this seemed to cause our captain to hate me, because I had been successful; but I thought there was something else in it than that, but I could not tell what it was that made him so intolerably cross and tyrannous.

"Well, I found out, at length, he knew my intended wife. He knew her very well, and at the same time he made every effort he could to induce me to commit some act of disobedience and insubordination;

but I would not, for it seemed to me he was trying all he could to prevent my doing my duty with anything like comfort.

"However, I learned the cause of all this afterwards. It was told me by one of the crew.

"'Bill,' said my mate, 'look out for yourself.'

"'What's in the wind?' said I.

"'Only the captain has made a dead set at you, and you'll be a lucky man if you escape.'

"'What's it all about?' said I. 'I cannot understand what he means. I have done nothing wrong. I don't see why I should suddenly be treated in this way.'

"'It's all about your girl, Bill.'

"'Indeed!' said I. 'What can that have to do with the captain? he knows nothing of her.'

"'Oh, yes, he does,' he said. 'If it were not for you he would have the girl himself.'

"'I see now,' said I.

"'Ay, and so can a blind man if you open his eyes; but he wants to make you do wrong — to goad you on to do something that will give him the power of disgracing you, and, perhaps, of punishing you.'

"'He won't do that,' said I.

"'I am glad to hear you say so, Bill; for, to my mind, he has made up his mind to go the whole length against you. I can't make it out, unless he wishes you were dead.'

"'I dare say he does,' said I; 'but I will take care I will live to exact a reckoning when he comes ashore.'

"'That is the best; and when we are paid off, Bill, if you will take it out of him, and pay him off, why, I don't care if I lend you a hand.'

"'We'll say more about that, Dick,' said I, 'when we get ashore and are paid off. If we are overheard now, it will be said that we are conspiring, or committing mutiny, or something of that sort.'

"'You are right, Bill,' he said— 'you are right. We'll say no more about this now, but you may reckon upon me when we are no longer under his orders.'

"'Then there's no danger, you know.'

"Well, we said nothing about this, but I thought of it, and I had cause enough, too, to think of it; for each day the captain grew more and more tyrannous and brutal. I knew not what to do, but kept my resolution of doing my duty in spite of all he could do, though I don't mind admitting I had more than one mind to kill him and myself afterwards.

"However, I contrived to hold out for another week or two, and then we came into port, and were released from his tyranny. I got paid off, and then I met my messmate, and we had some talk about the matter.

"'The worst of it is,' said I, 'we shall have some difficulty to catch him; and, if we can, I'll be sworn we shall give him enough to last him for at least a voyage or two.'

"'He ought to have it smart,' said my messmate; 'and I know where he is to be found.'

"'Do you? — at what hour?'

"'Late at night, when he may be met with as he comes from a house where he spends his evenings."

"'That will be the best time in the world, when we shall have less interference than at any other time in the day. But we'll have a turn to-night if you will be with me, as he will be able to make too good a defence to one. It will be a fight, and not a chastisement.'

"'It will. I will be with you; you know where to meet me. I shall be at the old spot at the usual time, and then we will go.'

"We parted; and, in the evening, we both went together, and sought the place where we should find him out, and set upon him to advantage.

"He was nearly two hours before he came; but when he did come, we saluted him with a rap on the head, that made him hold his tongue; and then we set to, and gave him such a tremendous drubbing, that we left him insensible; but he was soon taken away by some watchmen, and we heard that he was doing well; but he was dreadfully beaten; indeed, it would take him some weeks before he could be about in his duties.

"He was fearfully enraged, and offered fifty pounds reward to any one who could give him information as to who it was that assaulted him.

"I believe he had a pretty good notion of who it was; but he could not swear to me; but still, seeing he was busying himself too much about me, I at once walked away, and went on my way to another part of the country."

"To get married?"

"Ay, and to get into business."

"Then, things are not quite so bad as I thought for at first."

"No — no, not so bad but what they might have been worse a great deal; only I cannot go to sea any more, that's quite certain."

"You needn't regret that."

"I don't know."

"Why not know? Are you not going to be married? — ain't that much better?"

"I can't say," replied the sailor; "there's no knowing how my bargain may turn out; if she does well, why, then the cruising is over;

but nothing short of that will satisfy me; for if my wife is at all not what I wish her to be, why, I shall be off to sea."

"I don't blame you, either; I would do so too, if it were possible; but you see, we can't do so well on land as you do at sea; we can be followed about from pillar to post, and no bounds set to our persecution."

"That's true enough," said the other; "we can cut and run when we have had enough of it. However, I must get to the village, as I shall sleep there to-night, if I find my quarters comfortable enough."

"Come on, then, at once," said his companion; "it's getting dark now; and you have no time to lose."

These two now got up, and walked away towards the village; and Chillingworth arose also, and pursued his way towards the Hall, while he remarked to himself, —

"Well — well, they have nothing to do with that affair at all events. By-the-bye, I wonder what amount of females are deserted in the navy; they certainly have an advantage over landsmen, in the respect of being tied to tiresome partners; they can, at least, for a season, get a release from their troubles, and be free at sea."

However, Mr. Chillingworth got to the Hall, and unobserved, for he had been especially careful not to be seen; he had watched on all sides, and no signs of a solitary human being had he seen, that could in any way make the slightest observation upon him.

Indeed, he had sheltered himself from observation at every point of his road, especially so when near Bannerworth Hall, where there were plenty of corners to enable him to do so; and when he arrived there, he entered at the usual spot, and then sat down a few moments in the bower.

"I will not sit here," he muttered. "I will go and have a watch at that mysterious picture; there is the centre of attraction, be it what it may."

As he spoke, he arose and walked into the house, and entered the same apartment which has been so often mentioned to the reader.

Here he took a chair, and sat down full before the picture, and began to contemplate it.

"Well, for a good likeness, I cannot say I ever saw anything more unprepossessing. I am sure such a countenance as that could never have won a female heart. Surely, it is more calculated to terrify the imagination, than to soothe the affections of the timid and shrinking female.

"However, I will have an inspection of the picture, and see if I can make anything of it."

As he spoke, he put his hand upon the picture with the intention of removing it, when it suddenly was thrust open, and a man stepped down.

The doctor was for a moment completely staggered, it was so utterly unexpected, and he stepped back a pace or two in the first emotion of his surprise; but this soon passed by, and he prepared to close with his antagonist, which he did without speaking a word.

There was a fair struggle for more than two or three minutes, during which the doctor struggled and fought most manfully; but it was evident that Mr. Chillingworth had met with a man who was his superior in point of strength, for he not only withstood the utmost force that Chillingworth could bring against him, but maintained himself, and turned his strength against the doctor.

Chillingworth panted with exertion, and found himself gradually losing ground, and was upon the point of being thrown down at the mercy of his adversary, who appeared to be inclined to take all advantages of him, when an occurrence happened that altered the state of affairs altogether.

While they were struggling, the doctor borne partially to the earth — but yet struggling, suddenly his antagonist released his hold, and staggered back a few paces.

"There, you swab — take that; I am yard-arm and yard-arm with you, you piratical-looking craft — you lubberly, buccaneering son of a fish-fag."

Before, however, Jack Pringle, for it was he who came so opportunely to the rescue of Doctor Chillingworth, could find time to finish the sentence, he found himself assailed by the very man who, but a minute before, he had, as he thought, placed *hors de combat*.

A desperate fight ensued, and the stranger made the greatest efforts to escape with the picture, but found he could not get off without a desperate struggle. He was, at length, compelled to relinquish the hope of carrying that off, for both Mr. Chillingworth and Jack Pringle were engaged hand to hand; but the stranger struck Jack so heavy a blow on the head, that made him reel a few yards, and then he escaped through the window, leaving Jack and Mr. Chillingworth masters of the field, but by no means unscathed by the conflict in which they had been engaged.

CHAPTER XCI.

THE GRAND CONSULTATION BROKEN UP BY MRS. CHILLINGWORTH, AND THE DISAPPEARANCE OF VARNEY.

Remarkable was the change that had taken place in the circumstances of the Bannerworth family. From a state of great despondency, and, indeed, absolute poverty, they had suddenly risen to comfort and independence.

It seemed as if the clouds that had obscured their destiny, had now, with one accord, dissipated, and that a brighter day was dawning. Not only had the circumstances of mental terror which had surrounded them given way in a great measure to the light of truth and reflection, but those pecuniary distresses which had pressed upon them for a time, were likewise passing away, and it seemed probable that they would be in a prosperous condition.

The acquisition of the title deeds of the estate, which they thought had passed away from the family for ever, became to them, in their present circumstances, an immense acquisition, and brought to their minds a feeling of great contentment.

Many persons in their situation would have been extremely satisfied at having secured so strong an interest in the mind of the old admiral, who was very wealthy, and who, from what he had already said and done, no doubt fully intended to provide handsomely for the Bannerworth family.

And not only had they this to look forward to, if they had chosen to regard it as an advantage, but they knew that by the marriage of Flora with Charles Holland she would have a fortune at her disposal, while he (Charles) would be the last man in the world to demur at any reasonable amount of it being lavished upon her mother and her brothers.

But all this did not suit the high and independent spirit of Henry Bannerworth. He was one who would rather have eaten the dust that he procured for himself by some meritorious exertion, than have feasted on the most delicate viands placed before him from the resources of another.

But now that he knew this small estate, the title deeds of which had been so singularly obtained, had once really belonged to the family, but had been risked and lost at the gaming-table, he had no earthly scruple in calling such property again his own.

As to the large sum of money which Sir Francis Varney in his confessions had declared to have found its way into the possession of Marmaduke Bannerworth, Henry did not expect, and scarcely wished to become possessed of wealth through so tainted a source.

"No," he said to himself frequently; "no — I care not if that wealth be never forthcoming, which was so badly got possession of. Let it sink into the earth, if, indeed, it be buried there; or let it rot in some unknown corner of the old mansion. I care not for it."

In this view of the case he was not alone, for a family more unselfish, or who cared so little for money, could scarcely have been found; but Admiral Bell and Charles Holland argued now that they had a right to the amount of money which Marmaduke Bannerworth had hidden somewhere, and the old admiral reasoned upon it rather ingeniously, for he said, —

"I suppose you don't mean to dispute that the money belongs to somebody, and in that case I should like to know who else it belonged to, if not to you? How do you get over that, master Henry?"

"I don't attempt to get over it at all," said Henry; "all I say is, that I do dislike the whole circumstances connected with it, and the manner in which it was come by; and, now that we have a small independence, I hope it will not be found. But, admiral, we are going to hold a family consultation as to what we shall do, and what is to become of Varney. He has convinced me of his relationship to our family, and, although his conduct has certainly been extremely equivocal, he has made all the amends in his power; and now, as he is getting old, I do not like to throw him upon the wide world for a subsistence."

"You don't contemplate," said the admiral, "letting him remain with you, do you?"

"No; that would be objectionable for a variety of reasons; and I could not think of it for a moment."

"I should think not. The idea of sitting down to breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper with a vampyre, and taking your grog with a fellow that sucks other people's blood!"

"Really, admiral, you do not really still cling to the idea that Sir Francis Varney is a vampyre."

"I really don't know; he clings to it himself, that's all I can say; and I think, under those circumstances, I might as well give him the benefit of his own proposition, and suppose that he is a vampyre."

"Really, uncle," said Charles Holland, "I did think that you had discarded the notion."

"Did you? I have been thinking of it, and it ain't so desirable to be a vampyre, I am sure, that any one should pretend to it who is not; therefore, I take the fellow upon his own showing. He is a vampyre in his own opinion, and so I don't see, for the life of me, why he should not be so in ours."

"Well," said Henry, "waving all that, what are we to do with him? Circumstances seem to have thrown him completely at our mercy. What are we to do with him, and what is to become of him for the future?"

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said the admiral. "If he were ten times a vampyre, there is some good in the fellow; and I will give him enough to live upon if he will go to America and spend it. They will take good care there that he sucks no blood out of them; for, although an American would always rather lose a drop of blood than a dollar, they keep a pretty sharp look out upon both."

"The proposal can be made to him," said Henry, "at all events. It is one which I don't dislike, and probably one that he would embrace at once; because he seems, to me, to have completely done with ambition, and to have abandoned those projects concerning which, at one time, he took such a world of trouble."

"Don't you trust to that," said the admiral. "What's bred in the bone don't so easily get out of the flesh; and once or twice, when Master Varney has been talking, I have seen those odd looking eyes of his flash up for a moment, as if he were quite ready to begin his old capers again, and alarm the whole country side."

"I must confess," said Charles Holland, that I myself have had the impression once or twice that Varney was only subdued for a time, and that, with a proper amount of provocation, he would become again a very serious fellow, and to the full as troublesome as he has been."

"Do you doubt his sincerity?" said Henry.

"No, I do not do that, Henry: I think Varney fully means what he says; but I think, at the same time, that he has for so long lead a strange, wild, and reckless life, that he will find it very far from easy, if indeed possible, to shake off his old habits and settle down quietly, if not to say comfortably."

"I regret," said Henry, "that you have such an impression; but, while I do so, I cannot help admitting that it is, to a considerable extent, no more than a reasonable one; and perhaps, after all, my expectation that Varney will give us no more trouble, only amounts to a hope that he will not do so, and nothing more. But let us consider; there seems to be some slight difference of opinion among us, as to whether we should take up our residence at this new house of ours, which we did not know we owned, at Dearbrook, or proceed to London, and there establish ourselves, or again return to Bannerworth Hall, and, by a judicious expenditure of some money, make that a more habitable place than it has been for the last twenty years."

"Now, I'll tell you what," said the admiral, "I would do. It's quite out of the question for any body to live long unless they see a ship; don't you think so, Miss Flora?"

"Why, how can you ask Flora such a question, uncle," said Charles Holland, "when you know she don't care a straw about ships, and only looks upon admirals as natural curiosities?"

"Excepting one," said Flora, "and he is an admiral who is natural but no curiosity, unless it he that you, can call him such because he is so just and generous, and, as for ships, who can help admiring them; and if Admiral Bell proposes that we live in some pleasant, marine villa by the sea-coast, he shall have my vote and interest for the proceeding."

"Bravo! Huzza!" cried the admiral. "I tell you what it is, Master Charley — you horse marine, — I have a great mind to cut you out, and have Miss Flora myself."

"Don't, uncle," said Charles; "that would be so very cruel, after she has promised me so faithfully. How do you suppose I should like it; come now, be merciful."

At this moment, and before any one could make another remark, there came rather a sharp ring at the garden-gate bell, and Henry exclaimed, —

"That's Mr. Chillingworth, and I am glad he has come in time to join our conference. His advice is always valuable; and, moreover, I rather think he will bring us some news worth the hearing."

The one servant who they had to wait upon them looked into the room, and said,— "If you please, here is Mrs. Chillingworth."

"Mistress? you mean Mr."

"No; it is Mrs. Chillingworth and her baby."

"The devil!" said the admiral; "what can she want?"

"I'll come and let you know," said Mrs. Chillingworth, "what I want;" and she darted into the room past the servant. "I'll soon let you know, you great sea crab. I want my husband; and what with your vampyre, and one thing and another, I haven't had him at home an hour for the past three weeks. What am I to do? There is all his patients getting well as fast as they can without him; and, when they find that out, do you think they will take any more filthy physic? No, to be sure not; people ain't such fools as to do anything of the sort."

"I'll tell you what we will do, ma'am," said the admiral; "we'll all get ill at once, on purpose to oblige ye; and I'll begin by having the measles."

"You are an old porpoise, and I believe it all owing to you that my husband neglects his wife and family. What's vampyres to him, I should like to know, that he should go troubling about them? I never heard of vampyres taking draughts and pills."

"No, nor any body else that had the sense of a goose," said the admiral; "but if it's your husband you want, ma'am, it's no use your looking for him here, for here he is not."

"Then where is he? He is running after some of your beastly vampyres somewhere, I'll be bound, and you know where to send for him."

"Then you are mistaken; for, indeed, we don't. We want him ourselves, ma'am, and can't find him — that's the fact."

"It's all very well talking, sir, but if you were a married woman, with a family about you, and the last at the breast, you'd feel very different from what you do now."

"I'm d —— d if I don't suppose I should," said the admiral; "but as for the last, ma'am, I'd soon settle that. I'd wring its neck, and shove it overboard."

"You would, you brute? It's quite clear to me you never had a child of your own."

"Mrs. Chillingworth," said Henry, "I think you have no right to complain to us of your domestic affairs. Where your husband goes, and what he does, is at his own will and pleasure, and, really, I don't see that we are to be made answerable as to whether he is at home or abroad; to say nothing of the bad taste — and bad taste it most certainly is, of talking of your private affairs to other people."

"Oh, dear!" said Mrs. Chillingworth; "that's your idea, is it, you no-whiskered puppy?"

"Really, madam, I cannot see what my being destitute of whiskers has to do with the affair; and I am inclined to think my opinion is quite as good without them as with them."

"I will speak," said Flora, "to the doctor, when I see him."

"Will you, Miss Doll's-eyes? Oh, dear me! you'll speak to the doctor, will you?"

"What on earth do you want?" said Henry. "For your husband's sake, whom we all respect, we wish to treat you with every imaginable civility; but we tell you, candidly, that he is not here, and, therefore, we cannot conceive what more you can require of us."

"Oh, it's a row," said the admiral; "that's what she wants — woman like. D —— d a bit do they care what it's about as long as there's a disturbance. And now, ma'am, will you sit down and have a glass of grog?"

"No, I will not sit down; and all I can say is, that I look upon this place as a den full of snakes and reptiles. That's my opinion; so I'll not stay any longer; but, wishing that great judgments may some day come home to you all, and that you may know what it is to be a mother, with five babies, and one at the breast, I despise you all and leave you."

So saying, Mrs. Chillingworth walked from the place, feeling herself highly hurt and offended at what had ensued; and they were compelled to let her go just as she was, without giving her any information, for they had a vivid recollection of the serious disturbance she had created on a former occasion, when she had actually headed a mob, for the purpose of hunting out Varney, the vampyre, from Bannerworth Hall, and putting an end consequently, as she considered, to that set of circumstances which kept the doctor so much from his house, to the great detriment of a not very extensive practice.

"After all," said Flora, "Mrs. Chillingworth, although she is not the most refined person in the world, is to be pitied."

"What!" cried the admiral; "Miss Doll's-eyes, are you taking her part?"

"Oh, that's nothing. She may call me what she likes."

"I believe she is a good wife to the doctor," said Henry, "notwithstanding his little eccentricities; but suppose we now at once make the proposal we were thinking of to Sir Francis Varney, and so get him to leave England as quickly as possible and put an end to the possibility of his being any more trouble to anybody."

"Agreed — agreed. It's the best thing that can be done, and it will be something gained to get his consent at once."

"I'll run up stairs to him," said Charles, "and call him down at once. I scarcely doubt for a moment his acquiescence in the proposal."

Charles Holland rose, and ran up the little staircase of the cottage to the room which, by the kindness of the Bannerworth family, had been devoted to the use of Varney. He had not been gone above two minutes, when he returned, hastily, with a small scrap of paper in his hand, which he laid before Henry, saying, —

"There, what think you of that?"

Henry, upon taking up the paper, saw written upon it the words, —

"*The Farewell of Varney the Vampyre*."

"He is gone," said Charles Holland. "The room is vacant. I saw at a glance that he had removed his hat, and cloak, and all that belonged to him. He's off, and at so short a warning, and in so abrupt a manner, that I fear the worst."

"What can you fear?"

"I scarcely know what; but we have a right to fear everything and anything from his most inexplicable being, whose whole conduct has been of that mysterious nature, as to put him past all calculation as regards his motives, his objects, or his actions. I must confess that I would have hailed his departure from England with feelings of satisfaction; but what he means now, by this strange manoeuvre, Heaven, and his own singular intellect, can alone divine."

"I must confess," said Flora, "I should not at all have thought this of Varney. It seems to me as if something new must have occurred to him. Altogether, I do not feel any alarm concerning his actions as regards us. I am convinced of his sincerity, and, therefore, do not view with sensations of uneasiness this new circumstance, which appears at present so inexplicable, but for which we may yet get some explanation that will be satisfactory to us all."

"I cannot conceive," said Henry, "what new circumstances could have occurred to produce this effect upon Varney. Things remain just as they were; and, after all, situated as he is, if any change had taken place in matters out of doors, I do not see how he could become acquainted with them, so that his leaving must have been a matter of mere calculation, or of impulse at the moment — Heaven knows which — but can have nothing to do with actual information, because it is quite evident he could not get it."

"It is rather strange," said Charles Holland, "that just as we were speculating upon the probability of his doing something of this sort, he should suddenly do it, and in this singular manner too."

"Oh," said the old admiral, "I told you I saw his eye, that was enough for me. I knew he would do something, as well as I know a mainmast from a chain cable. He can't help it; it's in the nature of the beast, and that's all you can say about it."

CHAPTER XCII.

THE MISADVENTURE OF THE DOCTOR WITH THE PICTURE.

The situation of Dr. Chillingworth and Jack Pringle was not of that character that permitted much conversation or even congratulation. They were victors it was true, and yet they had but little to boast of besides the victory.

Victory is a great thing; it is like a gilded coat, it bewilders and dazzles. Nobody can say much when you are victorious. What a sound! and yet how much misery is there not hidden beneath it.

This victory of the worthy doctor and his aid amounted to this, they were as they were before, without being any better, but much the worse, seeing they were so much buffetted that they could hardly speak, but sat for some moments opposite to each other, gasping for breath, and staring each other in the face without speaking.

The moonlight came in through the window and fell upon the floor, and there were no sounds that came to disturb the stillness of the scene, nor any object that moved to cast a shadow upon the floor. All was still and motionless, save the two victors, who were much distressed and bruised.

"Well!" said Jack Pringle, with a hearty execration, as he wiped his face with the back of his hand; "saving your presence, doctor, we are masters of the field, doctor; but it's plaguey like capturing an empty bandbox after a hard fight."

"But we have got the picture, Jack — we have got the picture, you see, and that is something. I am sure we saved that."

"Well, that may be; and a pretty d —— d looking picture it is after all. Why, it's enough to frighten a lady into the sulks. I think it would be a very good thing if it were burned."

"Well," said the doctor, "I would sooner see it burned than in the hands of that—"

"What?" exclaimed Jack.

"I don't know," said Mr. Chillingworth; "but thief I should say, for it was somewhat thief-like to break into another man's house and carry off the furniture."

"A pirate — a regular land shark."

"Something that is not the same as an honest man, Jack; but, at all events, we have beaten him back this time."

"Yes," said Jack, "the ship's cleared; no company is better than bad company, doctor."

"So it is, and yet it don't seem clear in terms. But, Jack, it you hadn't come in time, I should have been but scurvily treated. He was too powerful for me; I was as nigh being killed as ever I have been; but you were just in time to save me."

"Well, he was a large, ugly fellow, sure enough, and looked like an old tree."

"Did you see him?"

"Yes, to be sure I did."

"Well, I could not catch a glimpse of his features. In fact, I was too much employed to see anything, and it was much too dark to notice anything particular, even if I had had leisure."

"Why, you had as much to do as you could well manage, I must say that, at all events. I didn't see much of him myself; only he was a tall, out-of-the-way sort of chap — a long-legged shark. He gave me such a dig or two as I haven't had for a long while, nor don't want to get again; though I don't care if I face the devil himself. A man can't do more than do his best, doctor."

"No, Jack; but there are very few who do do their best, and that's the truth. You have, and have done it to some purpose too. But I have had enough for one day; he was almost strong enough to contend against us both."

"Yes, so he was."

"And, besides that, he almost carried away the picture — that was a great hindrance to him. Don't you think we could have held him if we had not been fighting over the picture?"

"Yes, to be sure we could; we could have gone at him bodily, and held him. He would not have been able to use his hands. We could have hung on him, and I am sure if I came to grapple yard-arm and yard-arm, he would have told a different tale; however, that is neither here nor there. How long had you been here?"

"Not very long," replied the doctor, whose head was a little confused by the blows which he had received. "I can't now tell how long, but only a short time, I think."

"Where did he come from?" inquired Jack.

"Come from, Jack?"

"Yes, doctor, where did he came from? — the window, I suppose — the same way he went out, I dare say — it's most likely."

"Oh, no, no; he come down from behind the picture. There's some mystery in that picture, I'll swear to it; it's very strange he should make such a desperate attempt to carry it away."

"Yes; one would think," said Jack, there was more in it than we can see — that it is worth more than we can believe; perhaps somebody sets particular store by it."

"I don't know," said Mr. Chillingworth, shaking his head, "I don't know how that may be; but certain it is, the picture was the object of his visit here — that is very certain."

"It was; he was endeavouring to carry it off," said Jack; "it would be a very good ornament to the black hole at Calcutta."

"The utility of putting it where it cannot be seen," remarked Mr. Chillingworth, "I cannot very well see; though I dare say it might be all very well."

"Yes — its ugly features would be no longer seen; so far, it would be a good job. But are you going to remain here all night, and so make a long watch of it, doctor?"

"Why, Jack," said the doctor, "I did intend watching here; but now the game is disturbed, it is of no use remaining here. We have secured the picture, and now there will be no need of remaining in the house; in fact, there is no fear of robbery now."

"Not so long as we are here," said Jack Pringle; "the smugglers won't show a head while the revenue cutter is on the look out."

"Certainly not, Jack," said Mr. Chillingworth; "I think we have scared them away — the picture is safe."

"Yes — so long as we are here."

"And longer, too, I hope."

Jack shook his head, as much as to intimate that he had many doubts upon such a point, and couldn't be hurried into any concession of opinion of the safety of such a picture as that — much as he disliked it, and as poor an opinion as he had of it.

"Don't you think it will be safe?"

"No," said Jack.

"And why not?" said Mr. Chillingworth, willing to hear what Jack could advance against the opinion he had expressed, especially as he had disturbed the marauder in the very act of robbery.

"Why, you'll be watched by this very man; and when you are gone, he will return in safety, and take this plaguey picture away with him."

"Well, he might do so," said Mr. Chillingworth, after some thought; "he even endangered his own escape for the purpose of carrying it off."

"He wants it," said Jack.

"What, the picture?"

"Aye, to be sure; do you think anybody would have tried so hard to get away with it? He wants it; and the long and the short of it is, he will have it, despite all that can be done to prevent it; that's my opinion."

"Well, there is much truth in that; but what to do I don't know."

"Take it to the cottage," suggested Jack. "The picture must be more than we think for; suppose we carry it along."

"That is no bad plan of yours, Jack," said Mr. Chillingworth; "and, though a little awkward, yet it is not the worst I have heard; but — but — what will they say, when they see this frightful face in that quiet, yet contented house?"

"Why, they'll say you brought it," said Jack; "I don't see what else they can say, but that you have done well; besides, when you come to explain, you will make the matter all right to 'em."

"Yes, yes," said Chillingworth; "and, as the picture now seems to be the incomprehensible object of attack, I will secure that, at all events."

"I'll help you."

"Thank you, Jack; your aid will be welcome; at least, it was so just now."

"All right, doctor," said Jack. "I may be under your hands some day."

"I'll physic you for nothing," said Mr. Chillingworth. "You saved my life. One good turn deserves another; I'll not forget."

"Thank you," said Jack, as he made a wry face. "I hope you won't have occasion. I'd sooner have a can of grog than any bottle of medicine you can give me; I ain't ungrateful, neither."

"You needn't name it; I am getting my breath again. I suppose we had better leave this place, as soon as we conveniently can."

"Exactly. The sooner the better; we can take it the more leisurely as we go."

The moon was up; there were no clouds now, but there was not a very strong light, because the moon was on the wane. It was one of those nights during which an imperceptible vapour arises, and renders the moon somewhat obscure, or, at least, it robs the earth of her rays; and then there were shadows cast by the moon, yet they grew fainter, and those cast upon the floor of the apartment were less distinct than at first.

There seemed scarce a breath of air stirring; everything was quiet and still; no motion — no sound, save that of the breathing of the two who sat in that mysterious apartment, who gazed alternately round the place, and then in each other's countenances. Suddenly, the silence of the night was disturbed by a very slight, but distinct noise, which struck upon them with peculiar distinctness; it was a gentle tap, tap, at the window, as if some one was doing it with their fingernail.

They gazed on each other, for some moments, in amazement, and then at the window, but they saw nothing; and yet, had there been anything, they must have seen it, but there was not even a shadow.

"Well," said Mr. Chillingworth, after he had listened to the tap, tap, several times, without being able to find out or imagine what it could arise from, “what on earth can it be?”

“Don’t know,” said Jack, very composedly, squinting up at the window. “Can’t see anything.”

“Well, but it must be something,” persisted Mr. Chillingworth; “it must be something.”

“I dare say it is; but I don’t see anything. I can’t think what it can be, unless—”

“Unless what? Speak out,” said the doctor, impatiently.

“Why, unless it is Davy Jones himself, tapping with his long finger-nails, a-telling us as how we’ve been too long already here.”

“Then, I presume, we may as well go; and yet I am more disposed to deem it some device of the enemy to dislodge us from this place, for the purpose of enabling them to effect some nefarious scheme or other they have afloat.”

“It may be, and is, I dare say, a do of some sort or other,” said Jack; “but what’ can it be?”

“There it is again,” said the doctor; “don’t you hear it? I can, as plain as I can hear myself.”

“Yes,” said Jack; “I can hear it plain enough, and can see it, too; and that is more. Yes, yes, I can tell all about it plain enough.”

“You can? Well, then, shew me,” said the doctor, as he strode up to the window, before which Jack was standing gazing upon one particular spot of the shattered window with much earnestness.

“Where is it?”

“Look there,” said Jack, pointing with his finger to a particular spot, to which the doctor directed his attention, expecting to see a long, skinny hand tapping against the glass; but he saw nothing.

“Where is it?”

“Do you see that twig of ivy, or something of the sort?” inquired

Jack.

"Yes, I do."

"Very well, watch that; and when the wind catches it — and there is but very little — it lifts it up, and then, falling down again, it taps the glass."

Just as he spoke, there came a slight gust of wind; and it gave a practical illustration to his words; for the tapping was heard as often as the plant was moved by the wind.

"Well," said Mr. Chillingworth, "however simple and unimportant the matter may be, yet I cannot but say I am always well pleased to find a practical explanation of it, so that there will be no part left in doubt."

"There is none about that," said Jack.

"None. Well, we are not beset, then. We may as well consider of the manner of our getting clear of this place. What sort of burthen this picture may be I know not; but I will make the attempt to carry it."

"Avast, there," said Jack; "I will carry it: at all events, I'll take the first spell, and, if I can't go on, we'll turn and turn about."

"We can divide the weight from the first, and then neither of us will be tired at all."

"Just as you please, sir," said Jack Pringle. "I am willing to obey orders; and, if we are to get in to-night before they are all a-bed, we had better go at once; and then we shall not disturb them."

"Good, Jack," said Mr. Chillingworth; "very good: let us begin to beat our retreat at once."

"Very good," said Jack.

They both rose and approached the picture, which stood up in one corner, half reclining against the wall; the light, at least so much as there was, fell upon it, and gave it a ghastly and deathly hue, which made Mr. Chillingworth feel an emotion he could not at all understand; but, as soon as he could, he withdrew his eyes from off the picture, and they proceeded to secure it with some cord, so that they might carry it between them the easier — with less trouble and more safety.

These preparations did not take long in making, and, when completed, they gave another inquiring look round the chamber, and Mr. Chillingworth again approached the window, and gazed out upon the garden below, but saw nothing to attract his attention.

Turning away, he came to the picture, with which Jack Pringle had been standing. They proceeded towards the stairs, adopting every precaution they could take to prevent any surprise and any attempt upon the object of their solicitude.

Then they came to the great hall, and, having opened the door, they carried it out; then shutting the door, they both stood outside of Bannerworth Hall; and, before taking the picture up in their hands, they once more looked suspiciously around them.

There was nothing to be seen, and so, shouldering the ominous portrait, they proceeded along the garden till they conveyed it into the roadway.

"Now," said Jack, "we are off; we can scud along under press of sail, you know."

"I would rather not," said the doctor, "for two reasons; one of which is, I can't do it myself, and the other is, we should run the risk of injuring the picture; besides this, there is no reason for so doing."

"Very well," said Jack, "make it agreeable to yourself, doctor. See you, Jack's alive, and I am willing to do all I can to help you."

"I am very glad of your aid," said Mr. Chillingworth; "so we will proceed slowly. I shall be glad when we are there; for there are few things more awkward than this picture to carry."

"It is not heavy," said Jack, giving it a hitch up, that first pulled the doctor back, and then pushed him forward again.

"No; but stop, don't do that often, Jack, or else I shall be obliged to let go, to save myself from falling," said the doctor.

"Very sorry," said Jack; "hope it didn't inconvenience you; but I could carry this by myself."

"And so could I," returned Mr. Chillingworth; "but the probability is there would be some mischief done to it, and then we should be doing more harm than good."

"So we should," said Jack.

They proceeded along with much care and caution. It was growing late now, and no one was about — at least, they met none. People did not roam about much after dark, especially since the reports of the vampyre became current, for, notwithstanding all their bravery and violence while in a body, yet to meet and contend with him singly, and unseen, was not at all a popular notion among them; indeed, they would sooner go a mile out of their way, or remain in doors, which they usually did.

The evening was not precisely dark, there was moonlight enough to save it from that, but there was a mist hanging about, that rendered objects, at a short distance, very indistinct.

Their walk was uninterrupted by any one, and they had got through half the distance without any disturbance or interruption whatever.

When they arrived at the precincts of the village, Jack Pringle said to Dr. Chillingworth, "Do you intend going through the village, doctor?"

"Why not? there will be nobody about, and if there should be, we shall be safe enough from any molestation, seeing there are none here who would dare to harm us; it is the shortest way, too."

"Very good," said Jack; "I am agreeable, and as for any one harming me, they know better; but, at all events, there's company, and there's less danger, you know, doctor; though I'm always company to myself, but haven't any objection to a messmate, now and then."

They pursued their way in silence, for some distance, the doctor not caring about continuing the talk of Jack, which amounted to nothing; besides, he had too much to do, for, notwithstanding the lightness of the picture, which Jack had endeavoured to persuade the doctor of, he found it was heavy and ungainly; indeed, had he been by himself he would have had some trouble to have got it away.

"We are nearly there," said Jack, putting down his end of the picture, which brought Doctor Chillingworth to a standstill.

"Yes, we are; but what made you stop?"

"Why, you see," said Jack, giving his trowsers a hitch, "as I said before, we are nearly there."

"Well, what of that? we intended to go there, did we not?" inquired Chillingworth.

"Yes, exactly; that is, you intended to do so, I know, but I didn't."

"What do you mean by that?" inquired Chillingworth; "you are a complete riddle to-night, Jack; what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing; only, you see, I don't want to go into the cottage, 'cause, you see, the admiral and I have had what you may call a bit of a growl, and I am in disgrace there a little, though I don't know why, or wherefore; I always did my duty by him, as I did by my country. The ould man, however, takes fits into his head; at the same time I shall take some too; Jack's as good as his master, ashore, at all events."

"Well, then, you object to go in?" said Chillingworth.

"That is the state of the case; not that I'm afraid, or have any cause to be ashamed of myself; but I don't want to make anybody else uncomfortable, by causing black looks."

"Very well, Jack," said the doctor. "I am much obliged to you, and, if you don't like to come, I won't press you against your inclination."

"I understand, doctor. I will leave you here, if you can manage the rest of the way by yourself; there are not two hundred yards now to go, so you are all safe; so good bye."

"Good bye, Jack," said Doctor Chillingworth, who stood wiping his forehead, whilst the picture was standing up against the poles.

"Do you want a hand up first?"

"No, thank you; I can get it up very well without any trouble — it's not so heavy."

"Good bye, then," said Jack; and, in a few moments more, Jack Pringle was out of sight, and the doctor was alone with the ominous picture. He had not far to go, and was within hail of the cottage; but it was late, and yet he believed he should find them up, for the quietude and calmness of the evening hour was that which most chimed with their feelings. At such a time they could look out upon the face of nature, and the freedom of thought appeared the greater, because there was no human being to clash with the silence and stillness of the scene.

"Well," muttered Chillingworth, "I'll go at once to the cottage with my burthen. How they will look at me, and wonder what could induce me to bring this away. I can hardly help smiling at the thought of how they will look at the apparition I shall make."

Thus filled with notions that appeared to please him, the doctor shouldered the picture, and walked slowly along until he reached the dead wall that ran up to the entrance, or nearly so, of the gardens.

There was a plantation of young trees that overhung the path, and cast a deep shadow below — a pleasant spot in hot weather.

The doctor had been carrying the picture, resting the side of it on the small of his arm, and against his shoulder; but this was an inconvenient posture, because the weight of the picture cut his arm so much, that he was compelled to pause, and shift it more on his shoulder.

"There," he muttered, "that will do for the present, and last until I reach the cottage garden."

He was proceeding along at a slow and steady pace, bestowing all his care and attention to the manner of holding the picture, when he was suddenly paralysed by the sound of a great shout of such a peculiar character, that he involuntarily stopped, and the next moment, something heavy came against him with great force, just as if a man had jumped from the wall on to him.

This was the truth, for, in another moment, and before he could recover himself, he found that there was an attempt to deprive him of the picture.

This at once aroused him, and he made an instant and a vigorous defence; but he was compelled to let go his hold of the picture, and turn to resist the infuriated attack that was now commenced upon himself.

For some moments it was doubtful who would be the victor; but the wind and strength of the doctor were not enough to resist the powerful adversary against whom he had to contend, and the heavy blows that were showered down upon him.

At first he was enabled to bear up against this attack; and then he returned many of the blows with interest; but the stunning effect of the blows he received himself, was such that he could not help himself, and felt his senses gradually failing, his strength becoming less and less.

In a short time, he received such a blow, that he was laid senseless on the earth in an instant.

How long he remained thus he could not say; but it could not have been long, for all around him seemed just as it was before he was attacked.

The moon had scarcely moved, and the shadows, such as they were, were falling in the same direction as before.

“I have not been long here,” he muttered, after a few moments’ reflection; “but — but—”

He stopped short; for, on looking around him, he saw the object of his solicitude was gone. The picture was nowhere to be seen. It had been carried off the instant he had been vanquished.

“Gone!” he said, in a low, disconsolate tone; “and after all I have done!”

He wiped his hand across his brow, and finding it cut, he looked at the back of his hand, and saw by the deep colour that it was blood, indeed, he could now feel it trickle down his face.

What to do he hardly knew; he could stand, and after having got upon his feet, he staggered hack against the wall, against which he leaned for support, and afterwards he crept along with the aid of its support, until he came to the door.

He was observed from the window, where Henry and Charles Holland, seeing him come up with such an unsteady gait, rushed to the door to ascertain what was the matter.

"What, doctor!" exclaimed Henry Bannerworth; "what is the matter?"

"I am almost dead, I think," said Chillingworth. "Lend me your arm, Henry."

Henry and Charles Holland immediately stepped out, and took him between them into the parlour, and placed him upon a couch.

"What on earth has happened, doctor? — have you got into disgrace with the populace?"

"No, no; give me some drink — some water, I am very faint — very faint."

"Give him some wine, or, what's better, some grog," said the admiral. "Why, he's been yard-arm with some pirate or other, and he's damaged about the figure-head. You ain't hurt in your lower works, are you, doctor?" said the admiral.

But the doctor took no notice of the inquiry; but eagerly sipped the contents of a glass that Charles Holland had poured out of a bottle containing some strong Hollands, and which appeared to nerve him much.

"There!" said the admiral, "that will do you good. How did all this damage to your upper works come about, eh?"

"Let him wash his face and hands first; he will be better able to talk afterwards."

"Oh, thank you," said Chillingworth. "I am much better; but I have had some hard bruises."

"How did it happen?"

"I went by myself to watch in the room where the picture was in Bannerworth Hall."

"Where the picture was!" said Henry; "where it is, you mean, do you not, doctor?"

"No; where it was, and where it is not now."

"Gone!"

"Yes, gone away; I'll tell you all about it. I went there to watch, but found nobody or nothing there; but suddenly a man stepped out from behind the picture, and we had a fight over it; after which, just as I was getting the worst of it, Jack Pringle came in."

"The dog!" muttered the admiral.

"Yes, he came in just in time, I believe, to save my life; for the man, whoever he was, would not have hesitated about it."

"Well, Jack is a good man," said the admiral; "there may be worse, at least."

"Well, we had a desperate encounter for some minutes, during which this fellow wanted to carry off the picture."

"Carry off the picture?"

"Yes; we had a struggle for that; but we could not capture him; he was so violent that he broke away and got clear off."

"With the picture?"

"No, he left the picture behind. Well, we were very tired and bruised, and we sat down to recover ourselves from our fatigue, and to consider what was best to be done; but we were some time before we could leave, and then we determined that we would take the picture away with us, as it seemed to be coveted by the robber, for what object we cannot tell."

"Well, well — where is the picture?"

"You shall hear all about it in a minute, if you'll let me take my time. I am tired and sore. Well, we brought the picture out, and Jack helped me carry it till he came within a couple of hundred yards of the cottage, and there left me."

"The lubber!" said the admiral, interjectionally.

"Well, I rested awhile, and then taking the picture on my shoulders, I proceeded along with it until I came to the wall, when suddenly I heard a great shout, and then down came something heavy upon me, just as if a man had jumped down upon me."

"And — and—"

"Yes," said the doctor, "it was—"

"Was what?" inquired the admiral.

"Just what you all seemed to anticipate; you are all before me, but that was it."

"A man?"

"Yes; I had a struggle with him, and got nearly killed, for I am not equal to him in strength. I was sadly knocked about, and finally all the senses were knocked out of me, and I was, I suppose, left for dead."

"And what became of the picture?"

"I don't know; but I suppose it was taken away, as, when I came to myself, it was gone; indeed, I have some faint recollection of seeing him seize the portrait as I was falling."

There was a pause of some moments, during which all the party appeared to be employed with their own thoughts, and the whole were silent.

"Do you think it was the same man who attacked you in the house that obtained the picture?" at last inquired Henry Bannerworth.

"I cannot say, but I think it most probable that it was the same; indeed, the general appearance, as near as I could tell in the dark, was the same; but what I look upon as much stronger is, the object appears to be the same in both cases."

"That is very true," said Henry Bannerworth— "very true; and I think it more than probable myself. But come, doctor, you will require rest and nursing after your dangers.”

CHAPTER XCIII.

THE ALARM AT ANDERBURY. — THE SUSPICIONS OF THE BANNERWORTH FAMILY, AND THE MYSTERIOUS COMMUNICATION.

About twenty miles to the southward of Bannerworth Hall was a good-sized market-town, called Anderbury. It was an extensive and flourishing place, and from the beauty of its situation, and its contiguity to the southern coast of England, it was much admired; and, in consequence, numerous mansions and villas of great pretension had sprang up in its immediate neighbourhood.

Betides, there were some estates of great value, and one of these, called Anderbury-on-the-Mount, in consequence of the mansion itself, which was of an immense extent, being built upon an eminence, was to be let, or sold.

This town of Anderbury was remarkable not only for the beauty of its aspect, but likewise for the quiet serenity of its inhabitants, who were a prosperous, thriving race, and depended very much upon their own resources.

There were some peculiar circumstances why Anderbury-on-the-Mount was to let. It had been for a great number of years in possession of a family of the name of Milltown, who had resided there in great comfort and respectability, until an epidemic disorder broke out, first among the servants, and then spreading to the junior branches of the family, and from them to their seniors, produced such devastation, that in the course of three weeks there was but one young man left of the whole family, and he, by native vigour of constitution, had baffled the disorder, and found himself alone in his ancestral halls, the last of his race.

Soon a settled melancholy took possession of him, and all that had formerly delighted him now gave him pain, inasmuch as it brought to his mind a host of recollections of the most agonising character.

In vain was it that the surrounding gentry paid him every possible attention, and endeavoured to do all that was in their power to alleviate the unhappy circumstances in which he was placed. If he smiled, it was in a sad sort, and that was very seldom; and at length he announced his intention of leaving the neighbourhood, and seeking abroad, and in change of scene, for that solace which he could not expect to find in his ancestral home, after what had occurred within its ancient walls.

There was not a chamber but which reminded him of the past — there was not a tree or a plant of any kind or description but which spoke to him plainly of those who were now no more, and whose merry laughter had within his own memory made that ancient place echo with glee, filling the sunny air with the most gladsome shouts, such as come from the lips of happy youth long before the world has robbed it of any of its romance or its beauty.

There was a general feeling of regret when this young man announced the fact of his departure to a foreign land; for he was much respected, and the known calamities which he had suffered, and the grief under which he laboured, invested his character with a great and painful interest.

An entertainment was given to him upon the eve of his departure, and on the next day he was many miles from the place, and the estate of Anderbury-on-the-Mount was understood to be sold or let.

The old mansion had remained, then, for a year or two vacant, for it was a place of too much magnitude, and required by far too expensive an establishment to keep it going, to enable any person whose means were not very large to think of having anything to do with it.

So, therefore, it remained unlet, and wearing that gloomy aspect which a large house, untenanted, so very quickly assumes.

It was quite a melancholy thing to look upon it, and to think what it must have once been, and what it might be still, compared to what it actually was; and the inhabitants of the neighbourhood had made up their minds that Anderbury-on-the-Mount would remain untenanted for many a year to come, and, perhaps, ultimately fall into ruin and decay.

But in this they were doomed to be disappointed, for, on the evening of a dull and gloomy day, about one week after the events we have recorded as taking place at Bannerworth Hall and its immediate neighbourhood, a travelling carriage, with four horses and an out-rider, came dashing into the place, and drew up at the principal inn in the town, which was called the Anderbury Arms.

The appearance of such an equipage, although not the most unusual thing in the world, in consequence of the many aristocratic families who resided in the neighbourhood, caused, at all events, some sensation, and, perhaps, the more so because it drove up to the inn instead of to any of the mansions of the neighbourhood, thereby showing that the stranger, whoever he was, came not as a visitor, but either merely baited in the town, being on his road somewhere else, or had some special business in it which would soon be learned.

The out-rider, who was in handsome livery, had gallopped on in advance of the carriage a short distance, for the purpose of ordering the best apartments in the inn to be immediately prepared for the reception of his master.

"Who is he?" asked the landlord.

"It's the Baron Stolmuyer Saltsburgh."

"Bless my heart, I never heard of him before; where did he come from — somewhere abroad I suppose?"

"I can't tell you anything of him further than that he is immensely rich, and is looking for a house. He has heard that there is one to let in this immediate neighbourhood, and that's what has brought him from London, I suppose."

"Yes, there is one; and it is called Anderbury-on-the-Mount."

"Well, he will very likely speak to you about it himself, for here he comes."

By this time the carriage had halted at the door of the hotel, and, the door being opened, and the steps lowered, there alighted from it a tall man attired in a kind of pelisse, or cloak, trimmed with rich fur, the body of it being composed of velvet. Upon his head he wore a travelling cap, and his fingers, as he grasped the cloak around him, were seen to be covered with rings of great value.

Such a personage, coming in such style, was, of course, likely to be honoured in every possible way by the landlord of the inn, and accordingly he was shown most obsequiously to the handsomest apartment in the house, and the whole establishment was put upon the alert to attend to any orders he might choose to give.

He had not been long in the place when he sent for the landlord, who, hastily scrambling on his best coat, and getting his wife to arrange the tie of his neckcloth, proceeded to obey the orders of his illustrious guest, whatever they might chance to be.

He found the Baron Stolmuyer reclining upon a sofa, and having thrown aside his velvet cloak, trimmed with rich fur, he showed that underneath it he wore a costume of great richness and beauty, although, certainly, the form it covered was not calculated to set it off to any great advantage, for the baron was merely skin and bone, and looked like a man who had just emerged from a long illness, for his face was ghastly pale, and the landlord could not help observing that there was a strange peculiarity about his eyes, the reason of which he could not make out.

"You are the landlord of this inn, I presume," said the baron, "and, consequently, no doubt well acquainted with the neighbourhood?"

"I have the honour to be all that, sir. I have been here about sixteen years, and in that time I certainly ought to know something of the neighbourhood."

"'Tis well; some one told me there was a little cottage sort of place to let here, and as I am simple and retired in my habits I thought that it might possibly suit me."

"A little cottage, sir! There are certainly little cottages to let, but not such as would suit you; and if I might have presumed, sir, to think, I should have considered Anderbury-on-the-Mount, which is now to let, would have been the place for you. It is a large place, sir, and belonged to a good family, although they are now all dead and gone, except one, and it's he who wants to let the old place."

"Anderbury-on-the-Mount," said the baron, "was the name of the place mentioned to me; but I understood it was a little place."

"Oh! sir, that is quite a mistake; who told you so? It's the largest place about here; there are a matter of twenty-seven rooms in it, and it stands altogether upon three hundred acres of ground."

"And have you the assurance," said the baron, "to call that anything but a cottage, when the castle of the Stolmuyers, at Saltzburgh, has one suite of reception rooms thirty in number, opening into each other, and the total number of apartments in the and whole building is two hundred and sixty, it is surrounded by eight miles of territory."

"The devil!" said the landlord. "I beg your pardon, sir, but when I am astonished, I generally say the devil. They want eight hundred pounds a year for Anderbury-on-the-Mount."

"A mere trifle. I will sleep here to-night, and in the morning I will go and look at the place. It is near the sea?"

"Half a mile, sir, exactly, from the beach; and one of the most curious circumstances of all connected with it is, that there is a subterranean passage from the grounds leading right away down to the sea-coast. A most curious place, sir, partly cut out of the cliff, with cellars in it for wine, and other matters, that in the height of summer are kept as cool as in the deep winter time. It's more for curiosity than use, such a place; and the old couple, that now take care of the house, make a pretty penny, I'll be bound, though they won't own it, by showing that part of the place."

"It may suit me, but I shall be able to give a decisive answer when I see it on the morrow. You will let my attendants have what they require, and see that my horses be well looked to."

"Certainly, oh! certainly, sir, of course; you might go far, indeed, sir, before you found an inn where everything would be done as things are done here. Is there anything in particular, sir, you would like for dinner?"

"How can I tell that, idiot, until the dinner time arrives?"

"Well, but, sir, in that case, you know, we scarcely know what to do, because you see, sir, you understand—"

"It is very strange to me that you can neither see nor understand your duty. I am accustomed to having the dinner tables spread with all that money can procure; then I choose, but not before, what it suits me to partake of."

"Wil, sir, that is a very good way, and perhaps we ain't quite so used to that sort of thing as we ought to be in these parts; but another time, sir, we shall know better what we are about, without a doubt, and I only hope, sir, that we shall have you in the neighbourhood for a long time; and so, sir, putting one thing to another, and then drawing a conclusion from both of them, you see, sir, you will be able to understand."

"Peace! begone! what is the use of all this bellowing to me — I want it not — I care not for it."

The baron spoke these words so furiously, that the landlord was rather terrified than otherwise, and left the room hastily, muttering to himself that he had never come across such a tiger, and wondering where the baron could have possibly come from, and what amount of wealth he could be possessed of, that would enable him to live in such a princely style as he mentioned.

If the Baron Stolmuyer of Saltzburgh had wished ever so much to impress upon the minds of all persons in the neighbourhood the fact of his wealth and importance, he could not have adopted a better plan to accomplish that object than by first of all impressing such facts upon the mind of the landlord of the Anderbury Arms, for in the course of another hour it was tolerably well spread all over the town, that never had there been such a guest at the Anderbury Arms; and that he called Anderbury-on-the-Mount, with all its rooms — all its outbuildings, and its three hundred acres of ground, a cottage.

This news spread like wildfire, awaking no end of speculation, and giving rise to the most exaggerated rumours, so that a number of persons came to the inn on purpose to endeavour to get a look at the baron; but he did not stir from his apartments, so that these wondermongers were disappointed, and even forced to go away as wise as they came; but in the majority of cases they made up their minds that in the morning they should surely be able to obtain a glimpse of him, which was considered a great treat, for a man with an immense income is looked upon in England as a natural curiosity.

The landlord took his guest at his word as regards the dinner, and provided such a repast as seldom, indeed, graced the board at the Anderbury Arms — a repast sufficient for twenty people, and certainly which was a monstrous thing to set before one individual.

The baron, however, made no remark, but selected a portion from some of the dishes, and those dishes that he did select from, were of the simplest kind, and not such as the landlord expected him to take, so that he really paid about one hundred times the amount he ought to have done for what actually passed his lips.

And then what a fidget the landlord was in about his wines, for he doubted not but such a guest would be extremely critical and hard to please; but, to his great relief, the baron declined taking any wine, merely washing down his repast with a tumbler of cool water; and then, although the hour was very early, he retired at once to rest.

The landlord was not disposed to disregard the injunction which the baron had given him to attend carefully on his servants and horses, and after giving orders that nothing should be stinted as regarded the latter, he himself looked to the creature-comforts of the former, and he did this with a double motive, for not only was he anxious to make the most he could out of the baron in the way of charges, but he was positively panting with curiosity to know more about so singular a personage, and he thought that surely the servants must be able to furnish him with some particulars regarding their eccentric master.

In this, however, he was mistaken, for although they told him all they knew, that amounted to so little as really not to be worth the learning.

They informed him that they had been engaged all in the last week, and that they knew nothing of the baron whatever, or where he came from, or what he was, excepting that he paid them most liberal wages, and was not very exacting in the service he required of them.

This was very unsatisfactory, and when the landlord started on a mission, which he considered himself bound to perform, to a Mr. Leek, in the town, who had the letting of Anderbury-on-the-Mount, he was quite vexed to think what a small amount of information he was able to carry to him.

"I can tell him," he said to himself as he went quickly towards the agent's residence; "I can tell him the baron's name, and that in the morning he wants to look at Anderbury-on-the-Mount; but that's all I know of him, except that he is a most extraordinary man — indeed, the most extraordinary that I ever came near."

Mr. Leek, the house agent, notwithstanding the deficiency of the facts contained in the landlord's statement, was well enough satisfied to hear that any one of apparent wealth was inquiring after the large premises to let, for, as he said truly to the landlord, —

"The commission on letting and receiving the rentals of such a property is no joke to me."

"Precisely," said the landlord. "I thought it was better to come and tell you at once, for there can be no doubt that he is enormously rich."

"If that be satisfactorily proved, it's of no consequence what he is, or who he is, and you may depend I shall be round to the inn early in the morning to attend upon him; and in that case, perhaps, if you have any conversation with him, you will be so good as to mention that I will show him over the premises at his own hour, and you shall not be forgotten, you may depend, if any arrangement is actually come to. It will be just as well for you to tell him what a nice property it is, and that it is to be let for eight hundred a year, or sold outright for eight thousand pounds."

"I will, you may depend, Mr. Leek. A most extraordinary man you will find him; not the handsomest in the world, I can tell you, but handsome is as handsome does, say I; and, if he takes Anderbury-on-the-Mount, I have no doubt but he will spend a lot of money in the neighbourhood, and we shall all be the better of that, of course, as you well know, sir."

This then was thoroughly agreed upon between these high contracting powers, and the landlord returned home very well satisfied, indeed, with the position in which he had put the affair, and resolved upon urging on the baron, as far as it lay within his power so to do, to establish himself in the neighbourhood, and to allow him to be purveyor-in-general to his household, which, if the baron continued in his liberal humour, would be unquestionably a very pleasant post to occupy.

CHAPTER XCIV.

THE VISITOR, AND THE DEATH IN THE SUBTERRANEAN PASSAGE.

About an hour and a half after the baron had retired to rest, and while the landlord was still creeping about enjoining silence on the part of the establishment, so that the slumbers of a wealthy and, no doubt, illustrious personage should not be disturbed, there arrived a horseman at the Anderbury Arms.

He was rather a singular-looking man, with a shifting, uneasy-looking glance, as if he were afraid of being suddenly pounced upon and surprised by some one; and although his apparel was plain, yet it was good in quality, and his whole appearance was such as to induce respectful attention.

The only singular circumstance was, that such a traveller, so well mounted, should be alone; but that might have been his own fancy, so that the absence of an attendant went for nothing. Doubtless, if the whole inn had not been in such a commotion about the illustrious and wealthy baron, this stranger would have received more consideration and attention than he did.

Upon alighting, he walked at once into what is called the coffee-room of the hotel, and after ordering some refreshments, of which he partook but sparingly, he said, in a mild but solemn sort of tone, to the waiter who attended upon him, —

“Tell the Baron Stolmuyer, of Saltzburgh, that there is one here who wants to see him.”

“I beg your pardon, sir,” said the waiter, “but the baron is gone to bed.”

"It matters not to me. If you nor no one else in this establishment will deliver the message I charge you with, I must do so myself."

"I'll speak to my master, sir; but the baron is a very great gentleman indeed, and I don't think my master would like to have him disturbed."

The stranger hesitated for a time, and then he said, —

"Show me the baron's apartment. Perhaps I ought not to ask any one person connected with this establishment to disturb him, when I am quite willing to do so myself. Show me the way."

"Well, but, sir, the baron may get in a rage, and say, very naturally, that we had no business to let anybody walk up to his room and disturb him, because we wouldn't do so ourselves. So that you see, sir, when you come to consider, it hardly seems the right sort of thing."

"Since," said the stranger, rising, "I cannot procure even the common courtesy of being shown to the apartment of the person whom I seek, I must find him myself."

As he spoke he walked out of the room, and began ascending the staircase, despite the remonstrances of the waiter, who called after him repeatedly, but could not induce him to stop; and when he found that such was the case, he made his way to the landlord, to give the alarm that, for all he knew to the contrary, some one had gone up stairs to murder the baron.

This information threw the landlord into such a fix, that he knew not what to be at. At one moment he was for rushing up stairs and endeavouring to interfere, and at another he thought the best plan would be to pretend that he knew nothing about it.

While he was in this state of uncertainty, the stranger succeeded in making his way up stairs to the floor from which proceeded the bedrooms, and, apparently, having no fear whatever of the Baron Stolmuyer's indignation before his eyes, he opened door after door, until he came to one which led him into the apartment occupied by that illustrious individual.

The baron, half undressed only, lay in an uneasy slumber upon the bed, and the stranger stood opposite to him for some minutes, as if considering what he should do.

"It would be easy," he said, "to kill him; but it will pay me better to spare him. I may be wrong in supposing that he has the means which I hope he has; but that I shall soon discover by his conversation."

Stretching out, his hand, he tapped the baron lightly on the shoulder, who thereupon opened his eyes and sprang to his feet instantly, glancing with fixed earnestness at the intruder, upon whose face shone the light of a lamp which was burning in the apartment.

Then the baron shrunk back, and the stranger, folding his arms, said, —

"You know me. Let our interview be as brief as possible. There needs no explanations between us, for we both know all that could be said. By some accident you have become rich, while I continue quite otherwise. It matters not how this has occurred, the fact is everything. I don't know the amount of your possessions; but, from your style of living, they must be great, and therefore it is that I make no hesitation in asking of you, as a price for not exposing who and what you are, a moderate sum."

"I thought that you were dead."

"I know you did; but you behold me here, and, consequently, that delusion vanishes."

"What sum do you require, and what assurance can I have that, when you get if, the demand will not be repeated on the first opportunity?"

"I can give you no such assurance, perhaps, that would satisfy you entirely; but, for more reasons than I choose to enter into, I am extremely anxious to leave England at once and forever. Give me the power to do so that I require, and you will never hear of me again."

The baron hesitated for some few seconds, during which he looked scrutinisingly at his companion, and then he said, in a tone of voice that seemed as if he were making the remark to himself rather than to the other, —

"You look no older than you did when last we parted, and that was years ago."

"Why should I look older? You know as well as I that I need not. But, to be brief, I do not wish to interfere with any plans or projects you may have on hand. I do not wish to be a hindrance to you. Let me have five thousand pounds, and I am off at once and forever, I tell you."

"Five thousand! the man raves — five thousand pounds! Say one thousand, and it is yours."

"No; I have fixed my price; and if you do not consent, I now tell you that I will blazon forth, even in this house, who and what you are; and, let your schemes of ambition or of cupidity be what they may, you may be assured that I will blast them all."

"This is no place in which to argue such a point; come out into the open air; 'walls have ears;' but come out, and I will give you such special reasons why you should not now press your claim at all, that you shall feel much beholden to me for them, and not regret your visit."

"If that we come to terms, I no more desire than you can do that any one should overhear our conversation. I prefer the open air for any conference, be it whatever it may — much prefer it; and therefore most willingly embrace your proposition. Come out.”

The baron put on his travelling cap, and the rich velvet cloak, edged with fur, that he possessed, and leaving his chamber a few paces in advance of his strange visitor, he descended the staircase, followed by him. In the hall of the hotel they found the landlord and almost the whole of the establishment assembled, in deep consultation as to whether or not any one was to go up stairs and ascertain if the stranger who had sought the baron’s chamber was really a friend or an enemy.

But when they saw the two men coming down, at all events apparently amicably, it was a great relief, and the landlord rushed forward and opened the door, for which piece of service he got a very stately bow from the baron, and a slight inclination of the head from his visitor, and then they both passed out.

“I have ascertained,” said the man who came on horseback, “that for the last week in London you have lived in a style of the most princely magnificence, and that you came down here, attended as if you were one of the first nobles of the land.”

“These things amuse the vulgar,” said the baron. “I do not mind admitting to you that I contemplate residing on this spot, and perhaps contracting a marriage.”

“Another marriage?”

“And why not? If wives will die suddenly, and no one knows why, who is to help it. I do not pretend to control the fates.”

“This, between us, is idle talk indeed — most idle; for we know there are certain circumstances which account for the strangest phenomena; but what roaring sound is that which comes so regularly and steadily upon the ear."

"It is the sea washing upon the coast. The tide is no doubt advancing, and, as the eddying surges roll in upon the pebbly shore, they make what, to my mind, is this pleasant music."

"I did not think we were so near the ocean. The moon is rising; let us walk upon the beach, and as that sound is such pleasant music, you shall hear it while I convince you what unpleasant consequences will arise from a refusal of the modest and moderate terms I offer you."

"We shall see, we shall see; but I must confess it does seem to me most extraordinary that you ask of me a positive fortune, for fear you should deprive me of a portion of one; but you cannot mean what you say."

While they were talking they reached a long strip of sand which was by the seashore, at the base of some cliffs, through which was excavated the passage from the coast into the grounds of Anderbury House, and which had been so expatiated upon by the landlord of the inn, in his description of the advantages attendant upon that property.

There were some rude steps, leading to a narrow arched doorway, which constituted an entrance to this subterraneous region; and as the moonlight streamed over the wide waste of waters, and fell upon this little door-way in the face of the cliff, he became convinced that it was the entrance to that excavation, and he eyed it curiously.

"What place is that?" said his companion.

"It is a private entrance to the grounds of a mansion in this neighbourhood."

"Private enough, I should presume; for if there be any other means of reaching the house, surely no one would go through such a dismal hole as that towards it; but come, make up your mind at once.

There need be no quarrelling upon the subject of our conference, but let it be a plain matter of yes or no. Is it worth your while to be left alone in peace, or is it not?"

"It is worth my while, but not at such a price as that you mentioned; and I cannot help thinking that some cheaper mode of accomplishing the same object will surely present itself very shortly."

"I do not understand you; you talk ambiguously."

"But my acts," said the baron, "shall be clear and plain enough, as you shall see. Could you believe it possible that I was the sort of person to submit tamely to any amount of extortion you chose to practise upon me. There was a time when I thought you possessed great sense and judgment when I thought that you were a man who weighed well the chances of what you were about; but now I know to the contrary; and I think for less than a thousand pounds I may succeed in ridding myself of you."

"I do not understand you; you had better beware how you tamper with me, for I am not one who will be calmly disposed to put up with much. The sense, tact, and worldly knowledge which you say you have before, from time to time, given me credit for, belongs to me still, and I am not likely easily to commit myself."

"Indeed; do you think you bear such a charmed life that nothing can shake it?"

"I think nothing of the sort; but I know what I can do — I am armed."

"And I; and since it comes to this, take the reward of your villany; for it was you who made me what I am, and would now seek to destroy my every hope of satisfaction."

As the baron spoke he drew from his breast a small pistol, which, with the quickness of thought, he held full in the face of his companion, and pulled the trigger.

There can be no doubt on earth that his intention was to commit the murder, but the pistol missed fire, and he was defeated in his intention at that moment. Then the stranger laughed scornfully, and drawing a pistol from his pocket, he presented it at the baron's head, saying, —

"Do I not bear a charmed life? If I had not, should I have escaped death from you now? No, I could not; but you perceive that even a weapon that might not fail you upon another occasion is harmless against me; and can you expect that I will hesitate now to take full and ample revenge upon you for this dastardly attempt?"

These words were spoken with great volubility, so much so, indeed, that they only occupied a few very brief seconds in delivering; and then, perhaps, the baron's career might have ended, for it seemed to be fully the intention of the other to conclude what he said by firing the pistol in his face; but the wily aspect of the baron's countenance was, after all, but a fair index of the mind, and, just as the last words passed the lips of his irritated companion, he suddenly dropped in a crouching position to the ground, and, seizing his legs, threw him over his head in an instant.

The pistol was discharged, at the same moment, and then, with a shout of rage and satisfaction, the baron sprang upon his foe, and, kneeling upon his breast, he held aloft in his hand a glittering dagger, the highly-polished blade of which caught the moonbeams, and reflected them into the dazzled eyes of the conquered man, whose fate now appeared to be certain.

"Fool!" said the baron, "you must needs, then, try conclusions with me, and, not content with the safety of insignificance, you must be absurd enough to think it possible you could extort from me whatever sums your fancy dictated, or with any effect threaten me, if I complied not with your desires."

"Have mercy upon me. I meant not to take your life; and, therefore, why should you take mine?"

"You would have taken it, and, therefore, you shall die. Know, too, at this is your last moment, that, vampyre as you are, and as I, of all men, best know you to be, I will take especial care that you shall be placed in some position after death where the revivifying moonbeams may not touch you, so that this shall truly be your end, and you shall rot away, leaving no trace behind of your existence, sufficient to contain the vital principle."

"No — no! you cannot — will not. You will have mercy."

"Ask the famished tiger for mercy, when you intrude upon his den."

As he spoke the baron ground his tenth together with rage, and, in an instant, buried the poniard in the throat of his victim. The blade went through to the yellow sand beneath, and the murderer still knelt upon the man's chest, while he who had thus received so fatal a blow tossed his arms about with agony, and tried in vain to shriek.

The nature of the wound, however, prevented him from uttering anything but a low gurgling sound, for he was nearly choked with his own blood, and soon his eyes became fixed and of a glassy appearance; he stretched out his two arms, and dug his fingers deep into the sand.

The baron drew forth the poniard, and a gush of blood immediately followed it, and then one deep groan testified to the fact, that the spirit, if there be a spirit, had left its mortal habitation, and winged its flight to other realms, if there be other realms for it to wing its flight to.

“He is dead,” said the baron, and, at the same moment, a roll of the advancing tide swept over the body, drenching the living, as well as the dead, with the brine of the ocean.

The baron stooped and rinsed the dagger in the advancing tide from the clotted blood which had clung to it, and then, wiping it carefully, he returned it to its sheath, which was hidden within the folds of his dress; and, rising from his kneeling posture upon the body, he stood by its side, with folded arms, gazing upon it, for some minutes, in silence, heedless of the still advancing water, which was already considerably above his feet.

Then he spoke in his ordinary accents, and evidently caring nothing for the fact that he had done such a deed.

“I must dispose of this carcase,” he said, “which now seems so lifeless, for the moon is up, and if its beams fall upon it, I know, from former experience, what will happen; it will rise again, and walk the earth, seeking for vengeance upon me, and the thirst for that vengeance will become such a part of its very nature, that it will surely accomplish something, if not all that it desires.”

After a few moments’ consideration, he stooped, and, with more strength than one would have thought it possible a man reduced almost, as he was, to a skeleton could have exerted, he lifted the body, and carried it rapidly up the beach towards the cliffs. He threw it down upon the stone steps that led to the small door of the excavation in the cliff, and it fell upon them with a sickening sound, as if some of the bones were surely broken by the fall.

The object, then, of the baron seemed to be to get this door open, if he possibly could; but that was an object easier to be desired than carried into effect, for, although he exerted his utmost power, he did not succeed in moving it an inch, and he began evidently to think that it would be impossible to do so.

But yet he did not give up the attempt at once, but looking about upon the beach, until he found a large heavy stone, he raised it in his arms, and, approaching the door, he flung it against it with such tremendous force, that it flew open instantly, disclosing within a dark and narrow passage.

Apparently rejoiced that he had accomplished this much, he stopped cautiously within the entrance, and then, taking from a concealed pocket that was in the velvet cloak which he wore a little box, he produced from it some wax-lights and some chemical matches, which, by the slightest effort, he succeeded in igniting, and then, with one of the lights in his hand to guide him on his way, he went on exploring the passage, and treading with extreme caution as he went, for fear of falling into any of the ice-wells which were reported to be in that place.

After proceeding about twenty yards, and finding that there was no danger, he became less cautious; but, in consequence of such less caution, he very nearly sacrificed his life, for he came upon an ice-well which seemed a considerable depth, and into which he had nearly plunged headlong.

He started hack with some degree of horror; but that soon left him, and then, after a moment's thought, he sought for some little nook in the wall, in which he might place the candle, and soon finding one that answered the purpose well, he there left it, having all the appearance of a little shrine, while he proceeded again to the mouth of that singular and cavernous-looking place. He had, evidently, quite made up his mind what to do, for, without a moment's hesitation, he lifted the body again, and carried it within the entrance, walking boldly and firmly, now that he knew there was no danger between him and the light, which shed a gleam through the darkness of the place of a very faint and flickering character.

He reached it rapidly, and when he got to the side of the well, he, without a moment's hesitation, flung it headlong down, and, listening attentively, he heard it fall with a slight plash, as if there was some water at the bottom of the pit.

It was an annoyance, however, for him to find that the distance was not so deep as he had anticipated, and when he took the light from the niche where he had placed it, and looked earnestly down, he could see the livid, ghastly-looking face of the dead man, for the body had accidentally fallen upon its back, which was a circumstance he had not counted upon, and one which increased the chances greatly of its being seen, should any one be exploring, from curiosity, that not very inviting place.

This was annoyance, but how could it be prevented, unless, indeed, he chose to descend, and make an alteration in the disposition of the corpse? But this was evidently what he did not choose to do; so, after muttering to himself a few words expressive of his intention to leave it where it was, he replaced the candle, after extinguishing it, in the box from whence he had taken it, and carefully walked out of the dismal place.

The moonbeams were shining very brightly and beautifully upon the face of the cliffs, when he emerged from the subterranean passage, so that he could see the door, the steps, and every object quite distinctly; and, to his gratification, he found that he had not destroyed any fastening that was to the door, but that when it was slammed shut, it struck so hard and fast, that the strength of one man could not possibly move it, even the smallest fraction of an inch.

“I shall be shown all this to-morrow,” he said; “and if I take this house I must have an alteration made in this door, so that it may open with a lock, instead of by main violence, as at present; but if, in the morning, when I view Anderbury House, I can avoid an entrance into this region, I will do so, and at my leisure, if I become the possessor of the estate, I can explore every nook and cranny of it.”

He then folded his cloak about him, after pulling the door as closely as he could. He walked slowly and thoughtfully back to the inn. It was quite evident that the idea of the murder he had committed did not annoy him in the least, and that in his speculations upon the subject he congratulated himself much upon having so far succeeded in getting rid of certainly a most troublesome acquaintance.

“’Tis well, indeed,” he said, “that just at this juncture he should throw himself in my way, and enable me so easy to feel certain that I shall never more be troubled with him. Truly, I ran some risk, and when my pistol missed fire, it seemed as if my evil star was in its ascendant, and that I was doomed myself to become the victim of him whom I have laid in so cold a grave. But I have been victorious, and I am willing to accept the circumstance as an omen of the past — that my fortunes are on the change. I think I shall be successful now, and with the ample means which I now possess, surely, in this country, where gold is loved so well, I shall be able to overcome all difficulties, and to unite myself to some one, who — but no matter, her fate is an after consideration.”

CHAPTER XCV.

THE MARRIAGE IN THE BANNERWORTH FAMILY ARRANGED.

After the adventure of the doctor with regard to the picture about which such an air of mystery and interest has been thrown, the Bannerworth family began to give up all hopes of ever finding a clue to those circumstances concerning which they would certainly have liked to have known the truth, but of which it was not likely they would ever hear anything more.

Dr. Chillingworth now had no reserve, and when he had recovered sufficiently to feel that he could converse without an effort, he took an opportunity, while the whole of the family were present, to speak of what had been his hopes and his expectations.

"You are all aware," he said, "now, of the story of Marmaduke Bannerworth, and what an excessively troublesome person he was, with all deference, to you, Henry; first of all, as to spending all his money at the gaming-table, and leaving his family destitute; and then, when he did get a lump of money which might have done some good to those he left behind him — hiding it somewhere where it could not be found at all, and so leaving you all in great difficulty and distress, when you might have been independent."

"That's true enough, doctor," said Henry; "but you know the old proverb, — that ill-gotten wealth never thrives; so that I don't regret not finding this money, for I am sure we should have been none the happier with it, and perhaps not so happy."

"Oh, bother the old proverb; thirty or forty thousand pounds is no trifle to be talked lightly of, or the loss of which to be quietly put up with, on account of a musty proverb. It's a large sum, and I should like to have placed it in your hands."

"But as you cannot, doctor, there can be no good possibly done by regretting it."

"No, certainly; I don't mean that; utter regret is always a very foolish thing; but it's questionable whether something might not be done in the matter, after all, for you, as it appears, by all the evidence we can collect, that it must have been Varney, after all, who jumped down upon me from the garden-wall in so sudden a manner: and, if I the picture be valuable to him, it must be valuable to us."

"But how are we to get it, and if we could, I do not see that it would be of much good to anybody, for, after all, it is but a painting."

"There you go again," said the doctor, "depreciating what you know nothing about; now, listen to me, Master Henry, and I will tell you. That picture evidently had some sort of lining at the back, over the original canvas; and do you think I would have taken such pains to bring it away with me if that lining had not made me suspect that between it and the original picture the money, in bank notes, was deposited?"

"Had you any special reason for supposing such was the case?"

"Yes; most unquestionably I had; for when I got the picture fairly down, I found various inequalities in the surface of the back, which led me to believe that rolls of notes were deposited, and that the great mistake we had all along made was in looking behind the picture, instead of at the picture itself. I meant immediately to have cut it to pieces when I reached here with it; but now it has got into the hands of somebody else, who knows, I suspect, as much I do."

"It is rather provoking."

"Rather provoking! is that the way to talk of the loss of Heaven knows how many thousands of pounds! I am quite aggravated myself at the idea of the thing, and it puts me in a perfect fever to think of it, I can assure you."

"But what can we do?"

"Oh! I propose an immediate crusade against Varney, the vampyre, for who but he could have made such an attack upon me, and force me to deliver up such a valuable treasure?"

"Never heed it, doctor," said Flora; "let it go; we have never had or enjoyed that money, so it cannot matter, and it is not to be considered as the loss of an actual possession, because we never did actually possess it."

"Yes," chimed in the admiral; "bother the money! what do we care about it; and, besides, Charley Holland is going to be very busy."

"Busy!" said the doctor, "how do you mean?"

"Why, isn't he going to be married directly to Flora, here, and am not I going to settle the whole of my property upon him on condition that he takes the name of Bell instead of Holland? for, you see, his mother was my sister, and of course her name was Bell. As for his father Holland, it can't matter to him now what Charley is called; and if he don't take the name of Bell I shall be the last in the family, for I am not likely to marry, and have any little Bells about me."

"No," said the doctor; "I should say not; and that's the reason why you want to ring the changes upon Charles Holland's name. Do you see the joke, admiral?"

"I can't say I do — where is it? It's all very well to talk of jokes, but if I was like Charles, going to be married, I shouldn't be in any joking humour, I can tell you, but quite the reverse; and as for you and your picture, if you want it, doctor, just run after Varney yourself for it; or, stay — I have a better idea than that — get your wife to go and ask him for it, and if she makes half such a clamour about his ears that she did about ours, he will give it her in a minute, to get rid of her."

"My wife! — you don't mean to say she has been here?"

"Yes, but she has though. And now, doctor, I can tell you I have seen a good deal of service in all parts of the world, and, of course, picked up a little experience; and, if I were you, some of these days, when Mrs. Chillingworth ain't very well, I'd give her a composing draught that would make her quiet enough."

"Ah! that's not my style of practice, admiral; but I am sorry to hear that Mrs. Chillingworth has annoyed you so much."

"Pho, pho, man! — pho, pho! do you think she could annoy me? Why, I have encountered storms and squalls in all latitudes, and it isn't a woman's tongue now that can do anything of an annoying character, I can tell you; far from it — very far from it; so don't distress yourself upon that head. But come, doctor, we are going to have the wedding the day after to-morrow."

"No, no," said Flora; "the week after next, you mean,"

"Is it the week after next? I'll be hanged if I didn't think it was the day after to-morrow; but of course you know best, as you have settled it all among you. I have nothing to do with it."

"Of course, I shall, with great pleasure," returned the doctor, "be present on the interesting occasion; but do you intend taking possession of Bannerworth Hall again?"

"No, certainly not," said Henry; "we propose going to the Dearbrook estate, and there remaining for a time to see how we all like it. We may, perchance, enjoy it very much, for I have heard it spoken of as an attractive little property enough, and one that any one might fancy, after being resident a short time upon it."

"Well," said the admiral; "that is, I believe, settled among us, but I am sure we sha'n't like it, on account of the want of the sea. Why, I tell you, I have not seen a ship myself for this eighteen months; there's a state of things, you see, that won't do to last, because one would get dry-mouldy: it's a shocking thing to see nothing but land, land, wherever you go."

From the preceding conversation may be gathered what were the designs of the Bannerworth family, and what progress had been made in carrying them out. From the moment they had discovered the title-deeds of the Dearbrook property, they had ceased to care about the large sum of money which Marmaduke Bannerworth had been supposed to have hidden in some portion of Bannerworth Hall.

They had already passed through quite enough of the busy turmoils of existence to be grateful for anything that promised ease and competence, and that serenity of mind which is the dearest possession which any one can compass.

Consequently was it, that, with one accord, they got rid of all yearning after the large sum which the doctor was so anxious to procure for them, and looked forward to a life of great happiness and contentment. On the whole, too, when they came to talk the matter over quietly among themselves, they were not sorry that Varney had taken himself off in the way he had, for really it was a great release; and, as he had couched his farewell in words which signified it was a final one, they were inclined to think that he must have left England, and that it was not likely they should ever again encounter him, under any circumstances whatever.

It was to be considered quite as a whim of the old admiral's, the changing of Charles Holland's name to Bell; but, as Charles himself said when the subject was broached to him,— "I am so well content to be called whatever those to whom I feel affection think proper, that I give up my name of Holland without a pang, willingly adopting in its stead one that has always been hallowed in my remembrance with the best and kindest recollections."

And thus this affair was settled, much to the satisfaction of Flora, who was quite as well content to be called Mrs. Bell as to be called Mrs. Holland, since the object of her attachment remained the same. The wedding was really fixed for the week after that which followed the conversation we have recorded; but the admiral was not at all disposed to allow Flora and his nephew Charles to get through such an important period of their lives without some greater demonstration and show than could be made from the little cottage where they dwelt; and consequently he wished that they should leave that and proceed at once to a larger mansion, which he had his eye upon a few miles off, and which was to be had furnished for a time, at the pleasure of any one.

"And we won't shut ourselves up," said the admiral; "but we will find out all the Christian-like people in the neighbourhood, and invite them to the wedding, and we will have a jolly good breakfast together, and lots of music, and a famous lunch; and, after that, a dinner, and then a dance, and all that sort of thing; so that there shall be no want of fun."

As may be well supposed, both Charles and Flora shrunk from so public an affair; but, as the old man had evidently set his heart upon it, they did not like to say they positively would not; so, after a vain attempt to dissuade him from removing at all from the cottage until they removed for good, they gave up the point to him, and he had it all his own way.

He took the house, for one month, which had so taken his fancy, and certainly a pretty enough place it was, although they found out afterwards, that why it was he was so charmed with it consisted in the fact that it bore the name of a vessel which he had once commanded; but this they did not know until a long time afterwards, when it slipped out by mere accident.

They stipulated with the admiral that there should not be more than twenty guests at the breakfast which was to succeed the marriage ceremony; and to that he acceded; but Henry whispered to Charles Holland, —

"I know this public wedding to be distasteful to you, and most particularly do I know it is distasteful to Flora; so, if you do not mind playing a trick upon the old man, I can very easily put you in the way of cheating him entirely."

"Indeed; I should like to hear, and, what is more, I should like to practise, if you think it will not so entirely offend him as to make him implacable."

"Not at all, not at all; he will laugh himself, when he comes to know it, as much as any of us; the present difficulty will be to procure Flora's connivance; but that we must do the best way we can by persuasion."

What this scheme was will ultimately appear; but, certain it is, that the old admiral had no suspicion of what was going on, and proceeded to make all his arrangements accordingly.

From his first arrival in the market town — in the neighbourhood of which was Bannerworth Hall — it will be recollected that he had taken a great fancy to the lawyer, in whose name a forged letter had been sent him, informing him of the fact that his nephew, Charles

Holland, intended marrying into a family of vampyres.

It was this letter, as the reader is aware, which brought the old admiral and Jack Pringle into the neighbourhood of the Hall; and, although it was a manoeuvre to get rid of Charles Holland, which failed most signally, there can be no doubt but that such a letter was the production of Sir Francis Varney, and that he wrote it for the express purpose of getting rid of Charles from the Hall, who had begun materially to interfere with his plans and projects there.

After some conversation with himself, the admiral thought that this lawyer would be just the man to recommend the proper sort of people to be invited to the wedding of Charles and Flora; so he wrote to him, inviting himself to dinner, and received back a very gracious reply from the lawyer, who declared that the honour of entertaining a gentleman whom he so much respected as Admiral Bell, was greater than he had a right to expect by a great deal, and that he should feel most grateful for his company, and await his coming with the greatest impatience.

"A devilish civil fellow, that attorney," said the admiral, as he put the letter in his pocket, "and almost enough to put one in conceit of lawyers."

"Yes," said Jack Pringle, who had overheard the admiral read the letter.

"Yes, we will honour him; and I only hope he will have plenty of grog; because, you see, if he don't — D — n it! what's that? Can't you keep things to yourself?"

This latter exclamation arose from the fact that the admiral was so indignant at Jack for listening to what he had been saying, as to throw a leaden inkstand, that happened to be upon the table, at his head.

“You mutinous swab!” he said, “cannot a gentleman ask me to dinner, or cannot I ask myself, without you putting your spoke in the windlass, you vagabond?”

“Oh! well,” said Jack, “if you are out of temper about it, I had better send my mark to the lawyer, and tell him that we won’t come, as it has made some family differences.”

“Family, you thief!” said the admiral. “What do you mean? What family do you think would own you? D — n me, if I don’t think you came over in some strange ship. But, I tell you what it is, if you interfere in this matter, I’ll be hanged if I don’t blow your brains out.”

“And you’ll be hanged if you do,” said Jack, as he walked out of the room; “so it’s all one either way, old fizgig.”

“What!” roared the admiral, as he sprang up and ran after Jack. “Have I lived all these years to be called names in my own ship — I mean my own house? What does the infernal rascal mean by it?”

The admiral, no doubt, would have pursued Jack very closely, had not Flora intercepted him, and, by gentle violence, got him back to the room. No one else could have ventured to have stopped him, but the affection he had for her was so great that she could really accomplish almost anything with him; and, by listening quietly to his complaints of Jack Pringle — which, however, involved a disclosure of the fact which he had intended to keep to himself, that he had sought the lawyer’s advice — she succeeded in soothing him completely, so that he forgot his anger in a very short time.

But the old man’s anger, although easily aroused, never lasted very long; and, upon the whole, it was really astonishing what he put up with from Jack Pringle, in the way of taunts and sneers, of all sorts and descriptions, and now and then not a little real abuse.

And, probably, he thought likewise that Jack Pringle did not mean what he said, on the same principle that he (the admiral), when he called Jack a mutinous swab and a marine, certainly did not mean that Jack was those things, but merely used them as expletives to express a great amount of indignation at the moment, because, as may be well supposed, nothing in the world could be worse, in Admiral Bell's estimation, that to be a mutinous swab or a marine.

It was rather a wonder, though, that, in his anger some day, he did not do Jack some mischief; for, as we have had occasion to notice in one or two cases, the admiral was not extremely particular as to what sorts of missiles he used when he considered it necessary to throw something at Jack's head.

It would not have been a surprising thing if Jack had really made some communication to the lawyer; but he did stop short at that amount of pleasantry, and, as he himself expressed it, for once in a way he let the old man please himself.

The admiral soon forgot this little dispute, and then pleased himself with the idea that he should pass a pleasant day with the attorney.

"Ah! well," he said; "who would have thought that ever I should have gone and taken dinner with a lawyer — and not only done that, but invited myself too! It shows us all that there may be some good in all sorts of men, lawyers included; and I am sure, after this, I ought to begin to think what I never thought before, and that is, that a marine may actually be a useful person. It shows that, as one gets older, one gets wiser."

It was an immense piece of liberality for a man brought up, as Admiral Bell had been, in decidedly one of the most prejudiced branches of the public service, to make any such admissions as these.

A very great thing it was, and showed a liberality of mind such as, even at the present time, is not readily found.

It is astonishing, as well as amusing, to find how the mind assimilates itself to the circumstances in which it is placed, and how society, being cut up into small sections, imagines different things merely as a consequence of their peculiar application. We shall find that even people, living at different ends of a city, will look with a sort of pity and contempt upon each other; and it is much to be regretted that public writers are found who use what little ability they may possess in pandering to their feelings.

It was as contemptible and silly as it was reprehensible for a late celebrated novelist to pretend that he believed there was at place called Bloomsbury-square, but he really did not know; because that was merely done for the purpose of raising a silly laugh among persons who were neither respectable on account of their abilities or their conduct.

But to return from this digression. The admiral, attired in his best suit, which always consisted of a blue coat, the exact colour of the navy uniform, an immense pale primrose coloured waistcoat, and white kerseymere continuations, went to the lawyer's as had been arranged.

If anything at all could flatter the old man's vanity successfully, it certainly would be the manner in which he was received at the lawyer's house, where everything was done that could give him satisfaction.

A very handsome repast was laid before him, and, when the cloth was removed, the admiral broached the subject upon which he wished to ask the advice of his professional friend. After telling him of the wedding that was to come off, he said, —

"Now, I have bargained to invite twenty people; and, of course, as that is exclusive of any of the family, and as I don't know any people about this neighbourhood except yourself, I want you and your family to come to start with, and then I want you to find me out some more decent people to make up the party."

"I feel highly flattered," said the attorney, "that, in such a case as this, you should have come to me, and my only great fear is, that I should not be able to give you satisfaction."

"Oh! you needn't be afraid of that; there is no fear on that head; so I shall leave it all to you to invite the folks that you think proper."

"I will endeavour, certainly, admiral, to do my best. Of course, living in the town, as I have for many years, I know some very nice people as well as some very queer ones."

"Oh! we don't want any of the queer ones; but let those who are invited be frank, hearty, good-tempered people, such as one will be glad to meet over and over again without any ceremony — none of your simpering people, who are afraid to laugh for fear of opening their mouths too wide, but who are so mighty genteel that they are afraid to enjoy anything for fear it should be vulgar."

"I understand you, admiral, perfectly, and shall endeavour to obey your instructions to the very letter; but, if I should unfortunately invite anybody you don't like, you must excuse me for making such a mistake."

"Oh, of course — of course. Never mind that; and, if any disagreeable fellow comes, we will smother him in some way."

"It would serve him right, for no one ought to make himself disagreeable, after being honoured with an invitation from you; but I will be most especially careful, and I hope that such a circumstance will not occur."

"Never mind. If it should, I'll tell you what I'll do; I'll set Jack Pringle upon him, and if he don't worry his life out it will be a strange thing to me."

"Oh," said the lawyer, "I am glad you have mentioned him, for it gives me an opportunity of saying that I have done all in my power to make him comfortable."

"All in your power to make him comfortable! What do you mean?"

"I mean that I have placed such a dinner before him as will please him; I told him to ask for just whatever he likes."

The admiral looked at the lawyer with amazement, for a few moments, in silence, and then he said,

"D — n it! why, you don't mean to tell me, that that rascal is here."

"Oh, yes; he came about ten minutes I before you arrived, and said you were coming, and he has been down stairs feasting all the while since."

"Stop a bit. Do you happen to have any loaded fire arms in the house?"

"We have got an old bunderbuss; but what for, admiral?"

"To shoot that scoundrel, Pringle. I'll blow his brains out, as sure as fate. The impudence of his coming here, directly against my orders, too."

"My dear sir, calm yourself, and think nothing of it; it's of no consequence whatever."

"No consequence; where is that blunderbuss of yours? Do you mean to tell me that mutiny is of no consequence? Give me the blunderbuss."

"But, my clear sir, we only keep it *in terrorem*, and have no bullets."

"Never mind that, we can cram in a handful of nails, or brass buttons, or hammer up a few halfpence — anything of that sort will do to settle his business with."

"How do you get on, old Tarbarrel?" said Jack, putting his head in at the door. "Are you making yourself comfortable? I'll be hanged if I don't think you have a drop too much already, you look so precious red about the gills. I have been getting on famous, and I thought I'd just hop up for a minute to make your mind easy about me, and tell you so."

It was quite evident that Jack had done justice to the good cheer of the lawyer, for he was rather unsteady, and had to hold by the door-post to support himself, while there was such a look of contentment upon his countenance as contrasted with the indignation that was manifest upon the admiral's face that, as the saying is, it would have made a cat laugh to see them.

"Be off with ye, Jack," said the lawyer; "be off with ye. Go down stairs again and enjoy yourself. Don't you see that the admiral is angry with you."

"Oh, he be bothered," said Jack; "I'll soon settle him if he comes any of his nonsense; and mind, Mr. Lawyer, whatever you do, don't you give him too much to drink."

The lawyer ran to the door, and pushed Jack out, for he rightly enough suspected that the quietness of the admiral was only that calm which precedes a storm of more than usual amount and magnitude, so he was anxious to part them at once.

He then set about appeasing, as well as he could, the admiral's anger, by attributing the perseverance of Jack, in following him wherever he went, to his great affection for him, which, combined with his ignorance, might make him often troublesome when he had really no intention of being so.

This was certainly the best way of appeasing the old man; and, indeed, the only way in which it could be done successfully, and the proof that it was so, consisted in the fact, that the admiral did consent, at the suggestion of the attorney, to forgive Jack once more for the offence he had committed.

CHAPTER XCVI.

THE BARON TAKES ANDERBURY HOUSE, AND DECIDES UPON GIVING A GRAND ENTERTAINMENT.

It was not considered anything extraordinary that, although the Baron Stolmuyer of Saltzburgh went out with the mysterious stranger who had arrived at the Anderbury Arms to see him, he should return without him for certainly he was not bound to bring him back, by any means whatever.

Moreover, he entered the inn so quietly, and with such an appearance of perfect composure, that no one could have suspected for a moment that he had been guilty really of the terrific crime which had been laid to his charge — a crime which few men could have committed in so entirely unmoved and passionless a manner as he had done it.

But he seemed to consider the taking of a human life as a thing not of the remotest consequence, and not to be considered at all as a matter which was to put any one out of the way, but as a thing to be done when necessity required, with all the ease in the world, without arousing or awaking any of those feelings of remorse which one would suppose ought to find a place in the heart of a man who had been guilty of such monstrous behaviour.

He walked up to his own apartment again, and retired to rest with the same feeling, apparently, of calmness, and the same ability to taste of the sweets of repose as had before characterized him.

The stranger's horse, which was a valuable and beautiful animal, remained in the stable of the inn, and as, of course, that was considered a guarantee for his return, the landlord, when he himself retired to rest, left one of his establishment sitting up to let in the man who now lay so motionless and so frightful in appearance in one of the ice-wells of the mysterious passage leading from the base of the cliff, to the grounds of Anderbury House.

But the night wore on, and the man who had been left to let the stranger in, after making many efforts to keep himself awake, dropped into sound repose, which he might just as well have done in the first instance, inasmuch as, although he knew it not, he was engaged in the vain task of waiting for the dead.

The morning was fresh and beautiful, and, at a far earlier hour than a person of his quality was expected to make his appearance, the baron descended from his chamber; for, somehow or other, by common consent, it seems to be agreed that great personages must be late in rising, and equally late in going to bed.

But the baron was evidently not so disposed to turn night into day, and the landlord congratulated himself not a little upon the fact that he was ready for his illustrious guest when he descended so unexpectedly from his chamber as he did.

An ample breakfast was disposed of; that is to say, it was placed upon the table, and charged to the baron, who selected from it what he pleased; and when the meal was over the landlord ventured to enter the apartment, and said to him, with all due humility, —

"If you please, sir, Mr. Leek, who has the letting of Anderbury-on-the-Mount, that is, Anderbury House, as it is usually called, is here, sir, and would be happy to take your orders as to when you would be pleased to look at those premises?"

"I shall be ready to go in half a hour," said the baron; "and, as the distance is not great, I will walk from here to the mansion."

This message was duly communicated to Mr. Leek, who thereupon determined upon waiting until the baron should announce his readiness to depart upon the expedition; and he was as good as his word, for, in about half-an-hour afterwards, he descended to the hall, and then Mr. Leek was summoned, who came out of the bar with such a grand rush, that he fell over a mat that was before him, and saluted the baron by digging his head into his stomach, and then falling sprawling at his feet, and laying hold of his ankle.

This little incident was duly apologised for, and explained; after which Mr. Leek walked on through the town, towards Anderbury-on-the-Mount, followed by the illustrious personage whom he sincerely hoped he should be able to induce to take it.

It was a curious thing to see how they traversed the streets together; for while the baron walked right on, and with a solemn and measured step, Mr. Leek managed to get along a few paces in front of him, sideways, so that he could keep up a sort of conversation upon the merits of Anderbury House, and the neighbourhood in general, without much effort; to which remarks the baron made such suitable and dignified replies as a baron would be supposed to make.

"You will find, sir," said Mr. Leek, "that everything about Anderbury is extremely select, and amazingly correct; and I am sure a more delightful place to live in could not be found."

"Ah!" said the baron; "very likely."

"It's lively, too," continued Mr. Leek; "very lively; and there are two chapels of ease, besides the church."

"That's a drawback," said the baron.

"A drawback, sir! well, I am sorry I mentioned it; but perhaps you are a Roman Catholic, sir, and, in that case, the chapels of ease have no interest for you."

"Not the slightest; but do not, sir, run away with any assumption concerning my religious opinions, for I am not a Roman Catholic."

"No, sir, no, sir; nor more am I; and, as far as I think, and my opinion goes, I say, why shouldn't a gentleman with a large fortune be what he likes, or nothing, if he likes that better? but here we are, sir, close to one of the entrances of Anderbury House. There are three principal entrances, you understand, sir, on three sides of the estate, and the fourth side faces the sea, where there is that mysterious passage that leads down from the grounds to the beach, which, perhaps, you have heard of, sir."

"The landlord of the inn mentioned it."

"We consider it a great curiosity, sir, I can assure you, in these parts — a very great curiosity; and it's an immense advantage to the house, because, you see, sir, in extremely hot weather, all sorts of provisions can be taken down there, and kept at such a very low temperature as to be quite delightful."

"That is an advantage."

Mr. Leek rang the bell that hung over one of the entrances, and his summons for admission was speedily answered by the old couple who had charge of the premises, and then, with a view of impressing them with a notion of the importance of the personage whom he had brought to look at the place, he said, aloud, —

"The Baron Stoltmayor, of Saltsomething, has come to look at the premises."

This announcement was received with all due deference and respect, and the task of showing the baron the premises at once fairly commenced.

"Here you have," said Mr. Leek, assuming an oratorical attitude— "here you have the umbrageous trees stooping down to dip their leaves in the purling waters; here you have the sweet foliage lending a delicious perfume to the balmy air; here you have the murmuring waterfalls playing music of the spheres to the listening birds, who sit responsive upon the dancing boughs; here you have all the fragrance of the briny ocean, mingling with the scent of a bank of violets, and wrapping the senses in Elysium; here you may never tire of an existence that presents never-ending charms, and that, in the full enjoyment of which, you may live far beyond the allotted span of man."

"Enough — enough," said the baron.

"Here you have the choicest exotics taking kindly to a soil gifted by nature with the most extraordinary powers of production; and all that can pamper the appetite or yield delight to the senses, is scattered around by nature with a liberal hand. It is quite impossible that royalty should come near the favoured spot without visiting it as a thing of course; and I forgot to mention that a revenue is derived from some cottages, which, although small, is yet sufficient to pay the tithe on the whole estate."

"There, there — that will do."

"Here you have purling rills and cascades, and fish-ponds so redundant with the finny tribe, that you have but to wish for sport, and it is yours; here you have in the mansion, chambers that vie with the accommodation of a palace — ample dormitories and halls of ancient grandeur; here you have—"

"Stop," said the baron, "stop; I cannot be pestered in this way with your description. I have no patience to listen to such mere words — show me the house at once, and let me judge for myself."

"Certainly, sir; oh! certainly; only I thought it right to give you a slight description of the place as it really was: and now, sir, that we have reached the house, I may remark that here we have—"

"Silence!" said the baron; "if you begin with here we have, I know not when you will leave off. All I require of you is to show me the place, and to answer any question which I may put to you concerning it. I will draw my own conclusions, and nothing you can say, one way or another, will affect my imagination."

"Certainly, sir, certainly; I shall only be too happy to answer any questions that may be put to me by a person of your lordship's great intelligence; and all I can remark is, that when you reach the drawing-room floor, any person may truly say, here you have — I really beg your pardon, sir — I had not the slightest intention of saying here you have, I assure you; but the words came out quite unawares, I assure you."

"Peace — peace!" cried again the baron; "you disturb me by this incessant clatter."

Thus admonished, Mr. Leek was now quiet, and allowed the baron in his own way to make what investigation he pleased concerning Anderbury House.

The investigation was not one that could be gone over in ten minutes; for the house was extremely extensive, and the estate altogether presented so many features of beauty and interest, that it was impossible not to linger over it for a considerable period of time.

The grounds were most extensive, and planted with such a regard to order and regularity, everything being in its proper place, that it was a pleasure to see an estate so well kept. And although the baron was not a man who said much, it was quite evident, by what little he did utter, that he was very well pleased with Anderbury-on-the-Mount.

"And now," said Mr. Leek, "I will do myself the pleasure, sir, of showing your grace the subterranean passage."

At this moment a loud ring at one of the entrance gates was heard, and upon the man who had charge of the house answering the summons for admission, he found that it was a gentleman, who gave a card on which was the name of Sir John Westlake, and who desired to see the premises.

"Sir John Westlake," said Mr. Leek; "oh! I recollect he did call at my office, and say that he thought of taking Anderbury-on-the-Mount. A gentleman of great and taste is Sir John, but I must tell him, baron, that you have the preference if you choose to embrace it."

At this moment the stranger advanced, and when he saw the baron, he bowed courteously, upon which Mr. Leek said, —

"I regret, Sir John, that if you should take a fancy to the place, I am compelled first of all to give this gentleman the refusal of it."

"Certainly," said Sir John Westlake; "do not let me interfere with any one. I have nearly made up my mind, and came to look over the property again; but of course, if this gentleman is beforehand with me, I must be content. I wish particularly to go down to the subterranean passage to the beach, if it is not too much trouble."

"Trouble! certainly not, sir. Here, Davis, get some links, and we can go at once; and as this gentleman likewise has seen everything but that strange excavation, he will probably descend with us."

"Certainly," said the baron; "I shall have great pleasure;" and he said it with so free and unembarrassed an air, that no one could have believed for a moment in the possibility that such a subject of fearful interest to him was there to be found.

The entrance from the grounds into this deep cavernous place was in a small but neat building, that looked like a summer-house; and now, torches being procured, and one lit, a door was opened, which conducted at once into the commencement of the excavation; and

Mr. Leek heading the way, the distinguished party, as that gentleman loved afterwards to call it in his accounts of the transaction, proceeded into the very bowels of the earth, as it were, and quickly lost all traces of the daylight.

The place did not descend by steps, but by a gentle slope, which it required tome caution to traverse, because, being cut in the chalk, which in some places was worn very smooth, it was extremely slippery; but this was a difficulty that a little practice soon overcame, and as they went on the place became more interesting every minute.

Even the baron allowed Mr. Leek to make a speech upon the occasion, and that gentleman said, —

"You will perceive that this excavation must have been made, at a great expense, out of the solid cliff, and in making it some of the most curious specimens of petrifaction and fossil remains were found. You see that the roof is vaulted, and that it is only now and then a lump of chalk has fallen in, or a great piece of flint; and now we come to one of the ice-wells."

They came to a deep excavation, down which they looked, and when the man held the torch beneath its surface, they could dimly see the bottom of it, where there was a number of large pieces of flint stone, and, apparently, likewise, the remains of broken bottles.

"There used to be a windlass at the top of this," said Mr. Leek, "and the things were let down in a basket. They do say that ice will keep for two years in one of these places."

"And are there more of these excavations?" said the baron.

"Oh, dear, yes, sir; there are five or six of them for different purposes; for when the family that used to live in Anderbury House had grand entertainments, which they sometimes had in the summer season, they always had a lot of men down here, cooling wines, and passing them up from hand to hand to the house."

From the gradual slope of this passage down to the cliffs, and the zigzag character of it, it may be well supposed that it was of considerable extent. Indeed, Mr. Leek asserted that it was half a mile in actual measured length.

The baron was not at all anxious to run any risk of a discovery of the dead body which he had cast into that ice-well which was nearest to the opening on to the beach, so, as he went on, he negatived the different proposals that were made to look down into the excavations, and succeeded in putting a stop to that species of inquiry in the majority of instances, but he could not wholly do so.

Perhaps it would have been better for his purpose if he had encouraged a look into every one of the ice-wells; for, in that case, their similarity of appearance might have tired out Sir John Westlake before they got to the last one; but as it was, when they reached the one down which the body had been precipitated, he had the mortification to hear Mr. Leek say, —

"And now, Sir John, and you, my lord baron, as we have looked at the first of these ice wells and at none of the others, suppose we look at the last."

The baron was afraid to say anything; because, if the body were discovered, and identified as that of the visitor at the inn, and who had been seen last with him, any reluctance on his part to have that ice-well examined, might easily afterwards be construed into a very powerful piece of circumstantial evidence against him.

He therefore merely bowed his assent, thinking that the examination would be but a superficial one, and that, in consequence, he should escape easily from any disagreeable consequences.

But this the fates ordained otherwise; and there seemed no hope of that ice-well in particular escaping such an investigation as was sure to induce some uncomfortable results.

"Davis," said Mr. Leek, "these places are not deep, you see, and I was thinking that if you went down one of them, it would be as well; for then you would be able to tell the gentlemen what the bottom was fairly composed of, you understand."

"Oh, I don't mind, sir," said Davis. "I have been down one of them before to-day, I can tell you, sir."

"I do not see the necessity," said Sir John Westlake, "exactly, of such a thing; but still if you please, and this gentleman wishes—"

"I have no wish upon the occasion," said the baron; "and, like yourself, cannot see the necessity."

"Oh, there is no trouble," said Mr. Leek; "and it's better, now you are here, that you see and understand all about it. How can you get down, Davis?"

"Why, sir, it ain't above fourteen feet altogether; so I sha'n't have any difficulty, for I can hang by my hands about half the distance, and drop the remainder."

As he spoke he took off his coat, and then stuck the link he carried into a cleft of the rock, that was beside the brink of the excavation.

The baron now saw that there would be no such thing as avoiding a discovery of the fact of the dead body being in that place, and his only hope was, that in its descent it might have become so injured as to defy identification.

But this was a faint hope, because he recollected that he had himself seen the face, which was turned upwards, and the period after death was by far too short for him to have any hope that decomposition could have taken place even to the most limited extent.

The light, which was stuck in a niche, shed but a few inefficient rays down into the pit, and, as the baron stood, with folded arms, looking calmly on, he expected each moment a scene of surprise and terror would ensue.

Nor was he wrong; for scarcely had the man plunged down into that deep place, than he uttered a cry of alarm and terror, and shouted, —

"Murder! murder! Lift me out. There is a dead man down here, and I have jumped upon him."

"A dead man!" cried Mr. Leek and Sir John Westlake in a breath.

"How very strange!" said the baron.

"Lend me a hand," cried Davis; "lend me a hand out; I cannot stand this, you know. Lend me a hand out, I say, at once."

This was easier to speak of than to do, and Mr. Davis began to discover that it was easier by far to get into a deep pit, than to get out of one, notwithstanding that his assertion of having been down into those places was perfectly true; but then he had met with nothing alarming, and had been able perfectly at his leisure to scramble out the best way he could.

Now, however, his frantic efforts to release himself from a much more uncomfortable situation than he had imagined it possible for him to get into, were of so frantic a nature, that he only half buried himself in pieces of chalk, which he kept pulling down with vehemence from the sides of the pit, and succeeded in accomplishing nothing towards his rescue.

"Oh! the fellow is only joking," said the baron, "and amusing himself at our expense."

But the manner in which the man cried for help, and the marked terror which was in every tone, was quite sufficient to prove that he was not acting; for if he were, a more accomplished mimic could not have been found on the stage than he was.

"This is serious," said Sir John Westlake, "and cannot be allowed. Have you any ropes here by which we can assist him from the pit? Don't be alarmed, my man, for if there be a dead body in the pit, it can't harm you. Take your time quietly and easily, and you will assuredly get out."

"Aye," said the baron, "the more haste, the worst speed, is an English proverb, and in this case it will be fully exemplified. This man would easily leave the pit, if he would have the patience, with care and quietness, to clamber up its sides."

It would appear that Davis felt the truth of these exhortations, for although he trembled excessively, he did begin to make some progress in his ascent, and get so high, that Mr. Leek was enabled to get hold of his hand, and give him a little assistance, so that, in another minute or so, he was rescued from his situation, which was not one of peril, although it was certainly one of fright.

He trembled so excessively, and stuttered and stammered, that for some minutes no one could understand very well what he said; but at length, upon making himself intelligible, he exclaimed, —

"There has been a murder! there has been a murder committed, and the body thrown into the ice pit. I felt that I jumped down upon something soft, and when I put down my hand to feel what it was, it came across a dead man's face, and then, of course, I called out."

"You certainly did call out."

"Yes, and so would anybody, I think, under such circumstances. I suppose I shall be hung now, because I had charge of the house?"

"That did not strike me until this moment," said the baron; "but if there be a dead body in that pit, it certainly places this man in a very awkward position."

"What the deuce do you mean?" said Davis; "I don't know no more about it than the child unborn. There is a dead man in the ice-well, and that is all I know about it; but whether he has been there a long time, or a short time, I don't know any more than the moon, so it's no use bothering me about it."

"My good man," said the baron, "it would be very wrong indeed to impute to you any amount of criminality in this business, since you may be entirely innocent; and I, for one, believe that you are so, for I cannot think that any guilty man would venture into the place where he had put the body of his victim, in the way that you ventured into that pit. I say I cannot believe it possible, and therefore I think you innocent, and will take care to see that no injustice is done you; but at the same time I cannot help adding, that I think, of course, you will find yourself suspected in some way."

"I am very much obliged to you, sir," said Davis; "but as I happen to be quite innocent, I am very easy about it, and don't care one straw what people say. I have not been in this excavation for Heaven knows how long."

"But what's to be done?" said Mr. Leek. "I suppose it's our duty to do something, under such circumstances."

"Unquestionably," said the baron; "and the first thing to be done, is to inform the police of what has happened, so that the body may be got up; and as I have now seen enough of the estate to satisfy me as regards its capabilities, I decide at once upon taking it, it I can agree upon the conditions of the tenancy, and I will purchase it, if the price be such as I think suitable."

"Well," said Mr. Leek, "if anything could reconcile me to the extraordinary circumstance that has just occurred, it certainly is, baron, the having so desirable a tenant for Anderbury-on-the-Mount as yourself. But we need not traverse all this passage again, for it is much nearer now to get out upon the sea-coast at once, as we are so close to the other opening upon the beach. It seems to me that we ought to proceed at once to the town, and give information to the authorities of the discovery which we have made."

"It is absolutely necessary," said the baron, "so to do; so come along at once. I shall proceed to my inn, and as, of course, I have seen nothing more than yourselves, and consequently could only repeat your evidence, I do not see that my presence is called for. Nevertheless, of course, if the justices think it absolutely necessary that I should appear, I can have no possible objection to so do."

This was as straightforward as anything that could be desired, and, moreover, it was rather artfully put together, for it seemed to imply that he, Mr. Leek, would be slighted, if his evidence was not considered sufficient.

"Of course," said Mr. Leek; "I don't see at all why, as you, sir, have only the same thing to say as myself, I should not be sufficient."

"Don't call upon me on any account," said Sir John Westlake.

"Oh! no, no," cried Mr. Leek; "there is no occasion. I won't, you may depend, if it can be helped."

Sir John, in rather a nervous and excited manner, bade them good day, before they got quite into the town, and hurried off; while the baron, with a dignified bow, when he reached the door of his hotel, said to Mr. Leek, —

"Of course I do not like the trouble of judicial investigations more than anybody else, and therefore, unless it is imperatively necessary that I should appear, I shall take it as a favour to be released from such a trouble."

"My lord baron," said Mr. Leek, "you may depend that I shall mention that to the magistrates and the coroner, and all those sort of people;" and then Mr. Leek walked away, but he muttered to himself, as he did so, "They will have him, as sure as fate, just because he is a baron; and his name will look well in the 'County Chronicle.'"

Mr. Leek then repaired immediately to the house of one of the principal magistrates, and related what had occurred, to the great surprise of that gentleman, who suggested immediately the propriety of making the fact known to the coroner of the district, as it was more his business, than a magistrate's, in the first instance, since nobody was accused of the offence.

This suggestion was immediately followed, and that functionary directed that the body should be removed from where it was to the nearest public-house, and immediately issued his precept for an inquiry into the case.

By this time the matter had begun to get bruited about in the town, and of course it went from mouth to mouth with many exaggerations; and although it by no means did follow that a murder had been committed because a dead body had been found, yet, such was the universal impression; and the matter began to be talked about as the murder in the subterranean passage leading to Anderbury House, with all the gusto which the full particulars of some deed of blood was calculated to inspire. And how it spread about was thus: —

The fact was, that Mr. Leek was so anxious to let Anderbury-on-the-Mount to the rich Baron Stolmuyer, of Saltzburgh, that he got a friend of his to come and personate Sir John Westlake, while he, the baron, was looking at the premises, in order to drive him at once to a conclusion upon the matter; so that what made Sir John so very anxious that he should not be called forward in the matter, consisted in the simple fact that he was nothing else than plain Mr. Brown, who kept a hatter's shop in the town; but he could not keep his own counsel, and, instead of holding his tongue, as he ought to have done, about the matter, he told it to every one he met, so that in a short time it was generally known that something serious and startling had occurred in the subterranean passage to Anderbury House, and a great mob of persons thronged the beach in anxious expectation of getting more information on the matter.

The men, likewise, who had been ordered by the coroner to remove the body, soon reached the spot, and they gave an increased impetus to the proceedings, by opening the door of the subterranean passage, and then looking earnestly along the beach as if in expectation of something or somebody of importance.

When eagerly questioned by the mob, for the throng of persons now assembled quite amounted to a mob, to know what they waited for, one of them said, —

"A coffin was to have been brought down to take the body in."

This announcement at once removed anything doubtful that might be in the minds of any of them upon the subject, and at once proclaimed the fact not only that there was a dead body, but that if they looked out they would see it forthwith.

The throng thickened, and by the time two men were observed approaching with a coffin on their shoulders, there was scarcely anybody left in the town, except a few rare persons, indeed, who were not so curious as their neighbours.

It was not an agreeable job, even to those men who were not the most particular in the world, to be removing so loathsome a spectacle as that which they were pretty sure to encounter in the ice-well; but they did not shrink from it, and, by setting about it as a duty, they got through it tolerably well.

They took with them several large torches, and then, one having descended into the pit, fastened a rope under the arms of the dead man, and so he was hauled out, and placed in the shell that was ready to receive him.

They were all surprised at the fresh and almost healthful appearance of the countenance, and it was quite evident to everybody that if any one had known him in life, they could not have the least possible difficulty in recognising him now that he was no more.

And the only appearance of injury which he exhibited was in that dreadful wound which had certainly proved his death, and which was observable in his throat the moment they looked upon him.

The crush to obtain a sight of the body was tremendous at the moment it was brought out, and a vast concourse of persons followed it in procession to the town, where the greatest excitement prevailed. It was easily discovered that no known person was missing, and some who had caught a sight of the body, went so far as to assert that it must have been in the ice-well for years, and that the extreme cold had preserved it in all its original freshness.

The news, of course, came round, although not through the baron, for he did not condescend to say one word about it at the inn, and it was the landlord who first started the suggestion of— “What suppose it is the gentleman who left his horse here?”

This idea had no sooner got possession of his brain, than it each moment seemed to him to assume a more reasonable and tangible form, and without saying any more to any one else about it, he at once started off to where the body lay awaiting an inquest, to see if his suspicions were correct.

When he arrived at the public-house and asked to see the body, he was at once permitted to do so; for the landlord knew him, and was as curious as he could be upon the subject by any possibility. One glance, of course, was sufficient, and the landlord at once said, —

“Yes, I have seen him before, though I don’t know his name. He came to my house last night, and left his horse there; and, although I only saw him for a moment as he passed through the hall, I am certain I am not mistaken. I dare say all my waiters will recognise him, as well as the Baron Stolmuyer of Saltzburgh, who is staying with me, and who no doubt knows very well who he is, for he went out with him late and came home alone, and I ordered one of my men to wait up all night in order to let in this very person who is now lying dead before us.”

“The deuce you did! But you don’t suppose the baron murdered him, do you?”

“It’s a mystery to me altogether — quite a profound mystery. It’s very unlikely, certainly; and what’s the most extraordinary part of the whole affair is, how the deuce could he come into one of the ice-wells belonging to Anderbury House. That’s what puzzles me altogether.”

“Well, it will all come out, I hope, at the inquest, which is to be held at four o’clock to day. There must have been foul play somewhere, but the mystery is where, and that Heaven only knows, perhaps.”

“I shall attend,” said the landlord, “of course, to identify him; and I suppose, unless anybody claims the horse, I may as well keep possession of it.”

“Don’t you flatter yourself that you will get the horse out of the transaction. Don’t you know quite well that the government takes possession of everything as don’t belong to nobody?”

“Yes; but I have got him, and possession, you know, is nine points of the law.”

“It may be so; but their tenth point will get the better of you for all that. You take my word for it, the horse will be claimed of you; but I don’t mind, as an old acquaintance, putting you up to a dodge.”

“In what way?”

“Why, I’ll tell you what happened with a friend of mine; but don’t think it was me for if it was I would tell you at once, so don’t think it. He kept a country public-house; and, one day, an elderly gentleman came in, and appeared to be unwell. He just uttered a word or two, and then dropped down dead. He happened to have in his fob a gold repeater, that was worth, at least a hundred guineas, and my friend, before anybody came, took it out, and popped in, in its stead, an old watch that he had, which was not worth a couple of pounds.”

“It was running a risk.”

“It was; but it turned out very well, because the old gentleman happened to be a very eccentric person, and was living alone, so that his friends really did not know what he had, or what he had not, but took it for granted that any watch produced belonged to him. So, if I were you in this case, when the gentleman’s horse is claimed. I’d get the d — dest old screw I could, and let them have that.”

“You would?”

“Indeed would I, and glory in it, too, as the very best thing that could be done. Now, a horse is of use to you?”

“I believe ye, it is.”

“Exactly; but what’s the use of it to government? and, what’s more, if it went to the government, there might be some excuse; but the government will know no more about it, and make not so much as I shall. Some Jack-in-office will lay hold of it as a thing of course and a perquisite, when you might just as well, and a great deal better, too, keep it yourself, for it would do you some good, as you say, and none to them."

"I'll do it; it is a good and a happy thought. There is no reason on earth why I shouldn't do it, and I will. I have made up my mind to it now."

"Well, I am glad you have. What do you think now the dead man's horse is worth?"

"Oh! fifty or sixty guineas value."

"Then very good. Then, when the affair is all settled, I will trouble you for twenty pounds.

"You?"

"Yes, to be sure. Who else do you suppose is going to interfere with you? One is enough, ain't it, at a time; and I think, after giving you such advice as I have, that I am entitled, at all events, to something."

"I tell you what," said the landlord of the hotel, "taking all things into consideration, I have altered my mind rather, and won't do it."

"Very good. You need not; only mind, if you do, I am down upon you like a shot."

The excitement contingent upon the inquest was very great; indeed, the large room in the public-house, where it was held, was crowded to suffocation with persons who were anxious to be present at the proceedings. When the landlord reached home, of course he told his guest, the baron, of the discovery he had made, that the murdered man was the strange visitor of the previous night; for now, from the frightful wound he had received in his throat, the belief that he was murdered became too rational a one to admit of any doubts, and was that which was universally adopted in preference to any other suggestion upon the occasion; although, no doubt, people would be found who would not scruple to aver that he had cut his own throat, after making his way into the well belonging to Anderbury House.

The landlord had his own misgivings concerning his guest, the baron, now that something had occurred of such an awful and mysterious a nature to one who was evidently known to him. It did not seem to be a pleasant thing to have such an intimate friend of a man who had been murdered in one's house, especially when it came to be considered that he was the last person seen in his company, and that, consequently, he was peculiarly called upon to give an explanation of how, and under what circumstances, he had parted with him.

The baron was sitting smoking in the most unconcerned manner in the world, when the landlord came to bring him this intelligence, and, when he had heard him to an end, the remark he made was, —

"Really, you very much surprise me; but, perhaps, as you are better acquainted with the town than I am, you can tell me who he was?"

"Why, sir, that is what we hoped you would be able to tell us."

"How should I tell you? He introduced himself to me as a Mr. Mitchell, a surveyor, and he said that, hearing I talked of purchasing or renting Anderbury-on-the-Mount, he came to tell me that the principal side wall, that you could see from the beach, was off the perpendicular."

"Indeed, sir!"

"Yes; and as this was a very interesting circumstance to me, considering that I really did contemplate such a purchase or renting, and do so still, as it was a moonlight night, and he said he could show me in a minute what he meant if I would accompany him, I did so; but when we got there, and on the road, I heard quite enough of him to convince me that he was a little out of his senses, and, consequently, I paid no more attention to what he said, but walked home and left him on the beach."

"It's a most extraordinary circumstance, sir; there is no such person, I assure you, as Mitchell, a surveyor, in the town; so I can't make it out in the least."

"But, I tell you, I consider the man out of his senses, and perhaps that may account for the whole affair."

"Oh, yes, sir, that would, certainly; but still, it's a very odd thing, because we don't know of such a person at all, and it does seem so extraordinary that he should have made his appearance, all of a sudden, in this sort of way. I suppose, sir, that you will attend the inquest, now, that's to be held upon him?"

"Oh, yes; I have no objection whatever to that; indeed, I feel myself bound to do so, because I suppose mine is the latest evidence that can be at all produced concerning him."

"Unquestionably, sir; our coroner is a very clever man, and you will be glad to know him — very glad to know him, sir, and he will be glad to know you, so I am sure it will be a mutual gratification. It's at four o'clock the inquest is to be, and I dare say, sir, if you are there by half-past, it will be time enough."

"No doubt of that; but I will be punctual."

We have already said the room in which the inquest was to be held was crowded almost to suffocation, and not only was that the case, but the lower part of the house was crammed with people likewise; and there can be very little doubt but the baron would have shrunk from such an investigation from a number of curious eyes, if he could have done so; while the landlord of the house would have had no objection, as far as his profit was concerned in the sale of a great quantity of beer and spirits, to have had such an occurrence every day in the week, if possible.

The body lay still in the shell where it had been originally placed. After it had been viewed by the jury, and almost every one had remarked upon the extraordinary fresh appearance it wore, they proceeded at once to the inquiry, and the first witness who appeared was Mr. Leek, who deposed to have been in company with some gentlemen viewing Anderbury House, and to have found the body in one of the ice-wells of that establishment.

This evidence was corroborated by that of Davis, who had so unexpectedly jumped into the well, without being aware that it contained already so disagreeable a visitor as it did in the person of the murdered man, regarding the cause of whose death the present inquiry was instituted.

Then the landlord identified the body as that of a gentleman who had come to his house on horseback, and who had afterwards walked out with Baron Stolmuyer of Saltzburgh, who was one of his guests.

"Is that gentleman in attendance?" said the coroner.

"Yes, sir, he is; I told him about it, and he has kindly come forward to give all the evidence in his power concerning it."

There was a general expression of interest and curiosity when the baron stepped forward, attired in his magnificent coat, trimmed with fur, and tendered his evidence to the coroner, which, of course, was precisely the same as the statement he had made to the landlord of the house; for, as he had made up such a well connected story, he was not likely to prevaricate or to depart from it in the smallest particular.

He was listened to with breathless attention, and, when he had concluded, the coroner, with a preparatory hem! said to him,

“And you have reason to suppose, sir, that this person was out of his senses?”

“It seemed to me so; he talked wildly and incoherently, and in such a manner as to fully induce such a belief.”

“You left him on the beach?”

“I did. I found when I got there that it was only a very small portion, indeed, of Anderbury House that was visible; and, although the moon shone brightly, I must confess I did not see, myself, any signs of deviation from the perpendicular; and, such being the case, I left the spot at once, because I could have no further motive in staying; and, moreover, it was not pleasant to be out at night with a man whom I thought was deranged. I regretted, after making this discovery, that I had come from home on such a fool’s errand; but as, when one is going to invest a considerable sum of money in any enterprise, one is naturally anxious to know all about it, I went, little suspecting that the man was insane.”

“Did you see him after that?”

“Certainly not, until to-day, when I recognised in the body that has been exhibited to me the same individual.”

“Gentlemen,” said the coroner to the jury, “it appears to me that this is a most mysterious affair; the deceased person has a wound in his throat, which, I have no doubt, you will hear from a medical witness has been the cause of death; and the most singular part of the affair is, how, if he inflicted it upon himself, he has managed to dispose of the weapon with which he did the deed.”

“The last person seen in his company,” said one of the jury, “was the baron, and I think he is bound to give some better explanation of the affair."

"I am yet to discover," said the baron, "that the last person who acknowledges to having been in the company of a man afterwards murdered, must, of necessity, be the murderer?"

"Yes; but how do you account, sir, for there being no weapon found by which the man could have done the deed himself?"

"I don't account for it at all — how do you?"

"This is irregular," said the coroner; "call the next witness."

This was a medical man, who briefly stated that he had seen the deceased, and that the wound in his throat was amply sufficient to account for his death; that it was inflicted with a sharp instrument having an edge on each side.

This, then, seemed to conclude the case, and the coroner remarked, —

"Gentlemen of the jury, — I think this is one of those peculiar cases in which an open verdict is necessary, or else an adjournment without date, so that the matter can be resumed at any time, if fresh evidence can be procured concerning it. There is no one accused of the offence, although it appears to me impossible that the unhappy man could have committed the act himself. We have no reason to throw the least shade of suspicion or doubt upon the evidence of the Baron Stolmuyer of Saltzburgh; for as far as we know anything of the matter, the murdered man may have been in the company of a dozen people after the baron left him."

A desultory conversation ensued, which ended in an adjournment of the inquest, without any future day being mentioned for its re-assembling, and so the Baron Stolmuyer entirely escaped from what might have been a very serious affair to him.

It did not, however, appear to shake him in his resolution of taking Anderbury-on-the-Mount, although Mr. Leek very much feared it would; but he announced to that gentleman his intention fully of doing so, and told him to get the necessary papers drawn up forthwith.

“I hope,” he said, “within a few weeks’ time to be fairly installed in that mansion, and then I will trouble you, Mr. Leek, to give me a list of the names of all the best families in the neighbourhood; for I intend giving an entertainment on a grand scale in the mansion and grounds.”

“Sir,” said Mr. Leek, “I shall, with the greatest pleasure, attend upon you in every possible way in this affair. This is a very excellent neighbourhood, and you will have no difficulty, I assure you, sir, in getting together an extremely capital and creditable assemblage of persons. There could not be a better plan devised for at once introducing all the people who are worth knowing, to you.”

“I thank you,” said the baron; “I think the place will suit me well; and, as the Baroness Stolmuyer of Saltzburgh is dead, I have some idea of marrying again; and therefore it becomes necessary and desirable that I should be well acquainted with the surrounding families of distinction in this neighbourhood.”

This was a hint not at all likely to be thrown away upon Mr. Leek, who was the grand gossip-monger of the place, and he treasured it up in order to see if he could not make something of it which would be advantageous to himself.

He knew quite enough of the select and fashionable families in that neighbourhood, to be fully aware that neither the baron’s age nor his ugliness would be any bar to his forming a matrimonial alliance.

“There is not one of them,” he said to himself, “who would not marry the very devil himself and be called the Countess Lucifer, or any name of the kind, always provided there was plenty of money: and that the baron has without doubt, so it is equally without doubt he may pick and choose where he pleases."

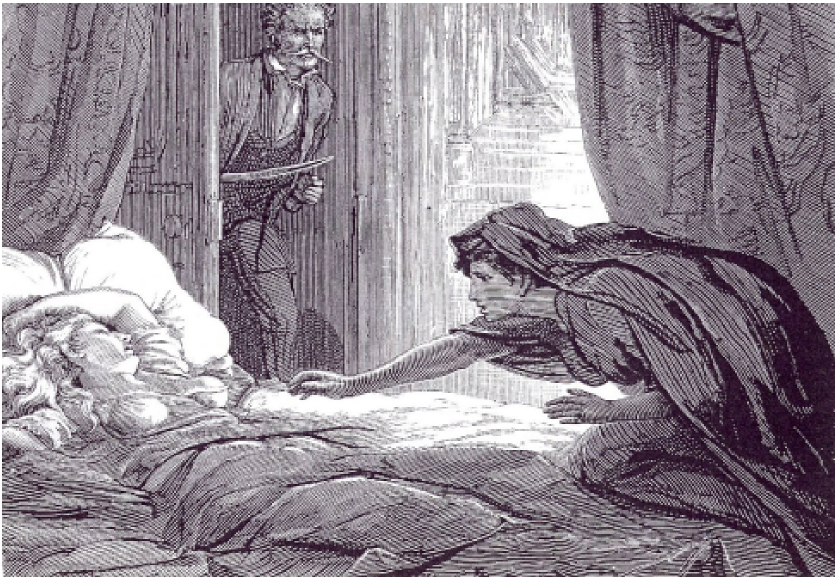
This was quite correct of Mr. Leek, and showed his great knowledge of human nature; and we entertain with him a candid opinion, that if the Baron Stolmuyer of Saltzburgh had been ten times as ugly as he was, and Heaven knows that was needless, he might pick and choose a wife almost when he pleased.

This is a general rule; and as, of course, to all general rules there are exceptions, this one cannot be supposed to be free from them. Under all circumstances, and in all classes of society, there are single-minded beings who consult the pure dictates of their own hearts, and who, disdaining those things which make up the amount of the ambition of meaner spirits, stand aloof as bright and memorable examples to the rest of human nature.

Such a being was Flora Bannerworth. She would never have been found to sacrifice herself to the fancied advantages of wealth and station, but would have given her heart and hand to the true object of her affection, although a sovereign prince had made the endeavour to wean her from it.

Carmilla by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

This gothic novella was first published in the magazine *The Dark Blue* in 1872 and tells the story of a young woman's vulnerability to a female vampire. The story is presented by Le Fanu as part of the casebook of Dr Hesselius, whose departures from medical orthodoxy render him the first occult doctor in literature. The story is narrated by Laura, and is notable for its controversial handling of lesbian themes. Published twenty-five years before *Dracula*, the novella is noticeable for its many influences in Stoker's more famous work.



One of the original illustrations

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PROLOGUE

Upon a paper attached to the Narrative which follows, Doctor Hesselius has written a rather elaborate note, which he accompanies with a reference to his Essay on the strange subject which the MS. illuminates.

This mysterious subject he treats, in that Essay, with his usual learning and acumen, and with remarkable directness and condensation. It will form but one volume of the series of that extraordinary man's collected papers.

As I publish the case, in this volume, simply to interest the "laity," I shall forestall the intelligent lady, who relates it, in nothing; and after due consideration, I have determined, therefore, to abstain from presenting any précis of the learned Doctor's reasoning, or extract from his statement on a subject which he describes as "involving, not improbably, some of the profoundest arcana of our dual existence, and its intermediates."

I was anxious on discovering this paper, to reopen the correspondence commenced by Doctor Hesselius, so many years before, with a person so clever and careful as his informant seems to have been. Much to my regret, however, I found that she had died in the interval.

She, probably, could have added little to the Narrative which she communicates in the following pages, with, so far as I can pronounce, such conscientious particularity.

I

An Early Fright

In Styria, we, though by no means magnificent people, inhabit a castle, or schloss. A small income, in that part of the world, goes a great way. Eight or nine hundred a year does wonders. Scantily enough ours would have answered among wealthy people at home. My father is English, and I bear an English name, although I never saw England. But here, in this lonely and primitive place, where everything is so marvelously cheap, I really don’t see how ever so much more money would at all materially add to our comforts, or even luxuries.

My father was in the Austrian service, and retired upon a pension and his patrimony, and purchased this feudal residence, and the small estate on which it stands, a bargain.

Nothing can be more picturesque or solitary. It stands on a slight eminence in a forest. The road, very old and narrow, passes in front of its drawbridge, never raised in my time, and its moat, stocked with perch, and sailed over by many swans, and floating on its surface white fleets of water lilies.

Over all this the schloss shows its many-windowed front; its towers, and its Gothic chapel.

The forest opens in an irregular and very picturesque glade before its gate, and at the right a steep Gothic bridge carries the road over a stream that winds in deep shadow through the wood. I have said that this is a very lonely place. Judge whether I say truth. Looking from the hall door towards the road, the forest in which our castle stands extends fifteen miles to the right, and twelve to the left. The nearest inhabited village is about seven of your English miles to the left. The nearest inhabited schloss of any historic associations, is that of old General Spielsdorf, nearly twenty miles away to the right.

I have said "the nearest *inhabited* village," because there is, only three miles westward, that is to say in the direction of General Spielsdorf's schloss, a ruined village, with its quaint little church, now roofless, in the aisle of which are the moldering tombs of the proud family of Karnstein, now extinct, who once owned the equally desolate chateau which, in the thick of the forest, overlooks the silent ruins of the town.

Respecting the cause of the desertion of this striking and melancholy spot, there is a legend which I shall relate to you another time.

I must tell you now, how very small is the party who constitute the inhabitants of our castle. I don't include servants, or those dependents who occupy rooms in the buildings attached to the schloss. Listen, and wonder! My father, who is the kindest man on earth, but growing old; and I, at the date of my story, only nineteen. Eight years have passed since then.

I and my father constituted the family at the schloss. My mother, a Styrian lady, died in my infancy, but I had a good-natured governess, who had been with me from, I might almost say, my infancy. I could not remember the time when her fat, benignant face was not a familiar picture in my memory.

This was Madame Perrodon, a native of Berne, whose care and good nature now in part supplied to me the loss of my mother, whom I do not even remember, so early I lost her. She made a third at our little dinner party. There was a fourth, Mademoiselle De Lafontaine, a lady such as you term, I believe, a "finishing governess." She spoke

French and German, Madame Perrodon French and broken English, to which my father and I added English, which, partly to prevent its becoming a lost language among us, and partly from patriotic motives, we spoke every day. The consequence was a Babel, at which strangers used to laugh, and which I shall make no attempt to reproduce in this narrative. And there were two or three young lady friends besides, pretty nearly of my own age, who were occasional visitors, for longer or shorter terms; and these visits I sometimes returned.

These were our regular social resources; but of course there were chance visits from “neighbors” of only five or six leagues distance. My life was, notwithstanding, rather a solitary one, I can assure you.

My gouvernantes had just so much control over me as you might conjecture such sage persons would have in the case of a rather spoiled girl, whose only parent allowed her pretty nearly her own way in everything.

The first occurrence in my existence, which produced a terrible impression upon my mind, which, in fact, never has been effaced, was one of the very earliest incidents of my life which I can recollect. Some people will think it so trifling that it should not be recorded here. You will see, however, by-and-by, why I mention it. The nursery, as it was called, though I had it all to myself, was a large room in the upper story of the castle, with a steep oak roof. I can’t have been more than six years old, when one night I awoke, and looking round the room from my bed, failed to see the nursery maid. Neither was my nurse there; and I thought myself alone. I was not frightened, for I was one of those happy children who are studiously kept in ignorance of ghost stories, of fairy tales, and of all such lore as makes us cover up our heads when the door cracks suddenly, or the flicker of an expiring candle makes the shadow of a bedpost dance upon the wall, nearer to our faces. I was vexed and insulted at finding myself, as I conceived, neglected, and I began to whimper, preparatory to a hearty bout of roaring; when to my surprise, I saw a solemn, but very pretty face looking at me from the side of the bed. It was that of a young lady who was kneeling, with her hands under the coverlet. I looked at her with a kind of pleased wonder, and ceased whimpering. She caressed me with her hands, and lay down beside me on the bed, and drew me towards her, smiling; I felt immediately delightfully soothed, and fell asleep again. I was wakened by a sensation as if two needles ran into my breast very deep at the same moment, and I cried loudly. The lady started back, with her eyes fixed on me, and then slipped down upon the floor, and, as I thought, hid herself under the bed.

I was now for the first time frightened, and I yelled with all my might and main. Nurse, nursery maid, housekeeper, all came running in, and hearing my story, they made light of it, soothing me all they could meanwhile. But, child as I was, I could perceive that their faces were pale with an unwonted look of anxiety, and I saw them look under the bed, and about the room, and peep under tables and pluck open cupboards; and the housekeeper whispered to the nurse: “Lay your hand along that hollow in the bed; someone *did* lie there, so sure as you did not; the place is still warm.”

I remember the nursery maid petting me, and all three examining my chest, where I told them I felt the puncture, and pronouncing that there was no sign visible that any such thing had happened to me.

The housekeeper and the two other servants who were in charge of the nursery, remained sitting up all night; and from that time a servant always sat up in the nursery until I was about fourteen.

I was very nervous for a long time after this. A doctor was called in, he was pallid and elderly. How well I remember his long saturnine face, slightly pitted with smallpox, and his chestnut wig. For a good while, every second day, he came and gave me medicine, which of course I hated.

The morning after I saw this apparition I was in a state of terror, and could not bear to be left alone, daylight though it was, for a moment.

I remember my father coming up and standing at the bedside, and talking cheerfully, and asking the nurse a number of questions, and laughing very heartily at one of the answers; and patting me on the shoulder, and kissing me, and telling me not to be frightened, that it was nothing but a dream and could not hurt me.

But I was not comforted, for I knew the visit of the strange woman was *not* a dream; and I was *awfully* frightened.

I was a little consoled by the nursery maid's assuring me that it was she who had come and looked at me, and lain down beside me in the bed, and that I must have been half-dreaming not to have known her face. But this, though supported by the nurse, did not quite satisfy me.

I remembered, in the course of that day, a venerable old man, in a black cassock, coming into the room with the nurse and housekeeper, and talking a little to them, and very kindly to me; his face was very sweet and gentle, and he told me they were going to pray, and joined my hands together, and desired me to say, softly, while they were praying, "Lord hear all good prayers for us, for Jesus' sake." I think these were the very words, for I often repeated them to myself, and my nurse used for years to make me say them in my prayers.

I remembered so well the thoughtful sweet face of that white-haired old man, in his black cassock, as he stood in that rude, lofty, brown room, with the clumsy furniture of a fashion three hundred years old about him, and the scanty light entering its shadowy atmosphere through the small lattice. He kneeled, and the three women with him, and he prayed aloud with an earnest quavering voice for, what appeared to me, a long time. I forget all my life preceding that event, and for some time after it is all obscure also, but the scenes I have just described stand out vivid as the isolated pictures of the phantasmagoria surrounded by darkness.

II

A Guest

I am now going to tell you something so strange that it will require all your faith in my veracity to believe my story. It is not only true, nevertheless, but truth of which I have been an eyewitness.

It was a sweet summer evening, and my father asked me, as he sometimes did, to take a little ramble with him along that beautiful forest vista which I have mentioned as lying in front of the schloss.

“General Spielsdorf cannot come to us so soon as I had hoped,” said my father, as we pursued our walk.

He was to have paid us a visit of some weeks, and we had expected his arrival next day. He was to have brought with him a young lady, his niece and ward, Mademoiselle Rheinfeldt, whom I had never seen, but whom I had heard described as a very charming girl, and in whose society I had promised myself many happy days. I was more disappointed than a young lady living in a town, or a bustling neighborhood can possibly imagine. This visit, and the new acquaintance it promised, had furnished my day dream for many weeks.

“And how soon does he come?” I asked.

“Not till autumn. Not for two months, I dare say,” he answered. “And I am very glad now, dear, that you never knew Mademoiselle Rheinfeldt.”

“And why?” I asked, both mortified and curious.

“Because the poor young lady is dead,” he replied. “I quite forgot I had not told you, but you were not in the room when I received the General’s letter this evening.”

I was very much shocked. General Spielsdorf had mentioned in his first letter, six or seven weeks before, that she was not so well as he would wish her, but there was nothing to suggest the remotest suspicion of danger.

"Here is the General's letter," he said, handing it to me. "I am afraid he is in great affliction; the letter appears to me to have been written very nearly in distraction."

We sat down on a rude bench, under a group of magnificent lime trees. The sun was setting with all its melancholy splendor behind the sylvan horizon, and the stream that flows beside our home, and passes under the steep old bridge I have mentioned, wound through many a group of noble trees, almost at our feet, reflecting in its current the fading crimson of the sky. General Spielsdorf's letter was so extraordinary, so vehement, and in some places so self-contradictory, that I read it twice over — the second time aloud to my father — and was still unable to account for it, except by supposing that grief had unsettled his mind.

It said "I have lost my darling daughter, for as such I loved her. During the last days of dear Bertha's illness I was not able to write to you.

Before then I had no idea of her danger. I have lost her, and now learn *all*, too late. She died in the peace of innocence, and in the glorious hope of a blessed futurity. The fiend who betrayed our infatuated hospitality has done it all. I thought I was receiving into my house innocence, gaiety, a charming companion for my lost Bertha. Heavens! what a fool have I been!

I thank God my child died without a suspicion of the cause of her sufferings. She is gone without so much as conjecturing the nature of her illness, and the accursed passion of the agent of all this misery. I devote my remaining days to tracking and extinguishing a monster. I am told I may hope to accomplish my righteous and merciful purpose. At present there is scarcely a gleam of light to guide me. I curse my conceited incredulity, my despicable affectation of superiority, my blindness, my obstinacy — all — too late. I cannot write or talk collectedly now. I am distracted. So soon as I shall have a little recovered, I mean to devote myself for a time to enquiry, which may possibly lead me as far as Vienna. Some time in the autumn, two months hence, or earlier if I live, I will see you — that is, if you permit me; I will then tell you all that I scarce dare put upon paper now. Farewell. Pray for me, dear friend."

In these terms ended this strange letter. Though I had never seen Bertha Rheinfeldt my eyes filled with tears at the sudden intelligence; I was startled, as well as profoundly disappointed.

The sun had now set, and it was twilight by the time I had returned the General's letter to my father.

It was a soft clear evening, and we loitered, speculating upon the possible meanings of the violent and incoherent sentences which I had just been reading. We had nearly a mile to walk before reaching the road that passes the schloss in front, and by that time the moon was shining brilliantly. At the drawbridge we met Madame Perrodon and Mademoiselle De Lafontaine, who had come out, without their bonnets, to enjoy the exquisite moonlight.

We heard their voices gabbling in animated dialogue as we approached. We joined them at the drawbridge, and turned about to admire with them the beautiful scene.

The glade through which we had just walked lay before us. At our left the narrow road wound away under clumps of lordly trees, and was lost to sight amid the thickening forest. At the right the same road crosses the steep and picturesque bridge, near which stands a ruined tower which once guarded that pass; and beyond the bridge an abrupt eminence rises, covered with trees, and showing in the shadows some grey ivy-clustered rocks.

Over the sward and low grounds a thin film of mist was stealing like smoke, marking the distances with a transparent veil; and here and there we could see the river faintly flashing in the moonlight.

No softer, sweeter scene could be imagined. The news I had just heard made it melancholy; but nothing could disturb its character of profound serenity, and the enchanted glory and vagueness of the prospect.

My father, who enjoyed the picturesque, and I, stood looking in silence over the expanse beneath us. The two good governesses, standing a little way behind us, discoursed upon the scene, and were eloquent upon the moon.

Madame Perrodon was fat, middle-aged, and romantic, and talked and sighed poetically. Mademoiselle De Lafontaine — in right of her father who was a German, assumed to be psychological, metaphysical, and something of a mystic — now declared that when the moon shone with a light so intense it was well known that it indicated a special spiritual activity. The effect of the full moon in such a state of brilliancy was manifold. It acted on dreams, it acted on lunacy, it acted on nervous people, it had marvelous physical influences connected with life. Mademoiselle related that her cousin, who was mate of a merchant ship, having taken a nap on deck on such a night, lying on his back, with his face full in the light on the moon, had wakened, after a dream of an old woman clawing him by the cheek, with his features horribly drawn to one side; and his countenance had never quite recovered its equilibrium.

“The moon, this night,” she said, “is full of idyllic and magnetic influence — and see, when you look behind you at the front of the schloss how all its windows flash and twinkle with that silvery splendor, as if unseen hands had lighted up the rooms to receive fairy guests.”

There are indolent styles of the spirits in which, indisposed to talk ourselves, the talk of others is pleasant to our listless ears; and I gazed on, pleased with the tinkle of the ladies’ conversation.

“I have got into one of my moping moods tonight,” said my father, after a silence, and quoting Shakespeare, whom, by way of keeping up our English, he used to read aloud, he said:

“‘In truth I know not why I am so sad.
It wearies me: you say it wearies you;
But how I got it — came by it.’

“I forget the rest. But I feel as if some great misfortune were hanging over us. I suppose the poor General’s afflicted letter has had something to do with it.”

At this moment the unwonted sound of carriage wheels and many hoofs upon the road, arrested our attention.

They seemed to be approaching from the high ground overlooking the bridge, and very soon the equipage emerged from that point. Two horsemen first crossed the bridge, then came a carriage drawn by four horses, and two men rode behind.

It seemed to be the traveling carriage of a person of rank; and we were all immediately absorbed in watching that very unusual spectacle. It became, in a few moments, greatly more interesting, for just as the carriage had passed the summit of the steep bridge, one of the leaders, taking fright, communicated his panic to the rest, and after a plunge or two, the whole team broke into a wild gallop together, and dashing between the horsemen who rode in front, came thundering along the road towards us with the speed of a hurricane.

The excitement of the scene was made more painful by the clear, long-drawn screams of a female voice from the carriage window.

We all advanced in curiosity and horror; me rather in silence, the rest with various ejaculations of terror.

Our suspense did not last long. Just before you reach the castle drawbridge, on the route they were coming, there stands by the roadside a magnificent lime tree, on the other stands an ancient stone cross, at sight of which the horses, now going at a pace that was perfectly frightful, swerved so as to bring the wheel over the projecting roots of the tree.

I knew what was coming. I covered my eyes, unable to see it out, and turned my head away; at the same moment I heard a cry from my lady friends, who had gone on a little.

Curiosity opened my eyes, and I saw a scene of utter confusion. Two of the horses were on the ground, the carriage lay upon its side with two wheels in the air; the men were busy removing the traces, and a lady with a commanding air and figure had got out, and stood with clasped hands, raising the handkerchief that was in them every now and then to her eyes.

Through the carriage door was now lifted a young lady, who appeared to be lifeless. My dear old father was already beside the elder lady, with his hat in his hand, evidently tendering his aid and the resources of his schloss. The lady did not appear to hear him, or to have eyes for anything but the slender girl who was being placed against the slope of the bank.

I approached; the young lady was apparently stunned, but she was certainly not dead. My father, who piqued himself on being something of a physician, had just had his fingers on her wrist and assured the lady, who declared herself her mother, that her pulse, though faint and irregular, was undoubtedly still distinguishable. The lady clasped her hands and looked upward, as if in a momentary transport of gratitude; but immediately she broke out again in that theatrical way which is, I believe, natural to some people.

She was what is called a fine looking woman for her time of life, and must have been handsome; she was tall, but not thin, and dressed in black velvet, and looked rather pale, but with a proud and commanding countenance, though now agitated strangely.

“Who was ever being so born to calamity?” I heard her say, with clasped hands, as I came up. “Here am I, on a journey of life and death, in prosecuting which to lose an hour is possibly to lose all. My child will not have recovered sufficiently to resume her route for who can say how long. I must leave her: I cannot, dare not, delay. How far on, sir, can you tell, is the nearest village? I must leave her there; and shall not see my darling, or even hear of her till my return, three months hence.”

I plucked my father by the coat, and whispered earnestly in his ear: “Oh! papa, pray ask her to let her stay with us — it would be so delightful. Do, pray.”

“If Madame will entrust her child to the care of my daughter, and of her good gouvernante, Madame Perrodon, and permit her to remain as our guest, under my charge, until her return, it will confer a distinction and an obligation upon us, and we shall treat her with all the care and devotion which so sacred a trust deserves.”

“I cannot do that, sir, it would be to task your kindness and chivalry too cruelly,” said the lady, distractedly.

“It would, on the contrary, be to confer on us a very great kindness at the moment when we most need it. My daughter has just been disappointed by a cruel misfortune, in a visit from which she had long anticipated a great deal of happiness. If you confide this young lady to our care it will be her best consolation. The nearest village on your route is distant, and affords no such inn as you could think of placing your daughter at; you cannot allow her to continue her journey for any considerable distance without danger. If, as you say, you cannot suspend your journey, you must part with her tonight, and nowhere could you do so with more honest assurances of care and tenderness than here."

There was something in this lady's air and appearance so distinguished and even imposing, and in her manner so engaging, as to impress one, quite apart from the dignity of her equipage, with a conviction that she was a person of consequence.

By this time the carriage was replaced in its upright position, and the horses, quite tractable, in the traces again.

The lady threw on her daughter a glance which I fancied was not quite so affectionate as one might have anticipated from the beginning of the scene; then she beckoned slightly to my father, and withdrew two or three steps with him out of hearing; and talked to him with a fixed and stern countenance, not at all like that with which she had hitherto spoken.

I was filled with wonder that my father did not seem to perceive the change, and also unspeakably curious to learn what it could be that she was speaking, almost in his ear, with so much earnestness and rapidity.

Two or three minutes at most I think she remained thus employed, then she turned, and a few steps brought her to where her daughter lay, supported by Madame Perrodon. She kneeled beside her for a moment and whispered, as Madame supposed, a little benediction in her ear; then hastily kissing her she stepped into her carriage, the door was closed, the footmen in stately liveries jumped up behind, the outriders spurred on, the postilions cracked their whips, the horses plunged and broke suddenly into a furious canter that threatened soon again to become a gallop, and the carriage whirled away, followed at the same rapid pace by the two horsemen in the rear.

III

We Compare Notes

We followed the *cortege* with our eyes until it was swiftly lost to sight in the misty wood; and the very sound of the hoofs and the wheels died away in the silent night air.

Nothing remained to assure us that the adventure had not been an illusion of a moment but the young lady, who just at that moment opened her eyes. I could not see, for her face was turned from me, but she raised her head, evidently looking about her, and I heard a very sweet voice ask complainingly, “Where is mamma?”

Our good Madame Perrodon answered tenderly, and added some comfortable assurances.

I then heard her ask:

“Where am I? What is this place?” and after that she said, “I don’t see the carriage; and Matska, where is she?”

Madame answered all her questions in so far as she understood them; and gradually the young lady remembered how the misadventure came about, and was glad to hear that no one in, or in attendance on, the carriage was hurt; and on learning that her mamma had left her here, till her return in about three months, she wept.

I was going to add my consolations to those of Madame Perrodon when Mademoiselle De Lafontaine placed her hand upon my arm, saying:

“Don’t approach, one at a time is as much as she can at present converse with; a very little excitement would possibly overpower her now.”

As soon as she is comfortably in bed, I thought, I will run up to her room and see her.

My father in the meantime had sent a servant on horseback for the physician, who lived about two leagues away; and a bedroom was being prepared for the young lady's reception.

The stranger now rose, and leaning on Madame's arm, walked slowly over the drawbridge and into the castle gate.

In the hall, servants waited to receive her, and she was conducted forthwith to her room. The room we usually sat in as our drawing room is long, having four windows, that looked over the moat and drawbridge, upon the forest scene I have just described.

It is furnished in old carved oak, with large carved cabinets, and the chairs are cushioned with crimson Utrecht velvet. The walls are covered with tapestry, and surrounded with great gold frames, the figures being as large as life, in ancient and very curious costume, and the subjects represented are hunting, hawking, and generally festive. It is not too stately to be extremely comfortable; and here we had our tea, for with his usual patriotic leanings he insisted that the national beverage should make its appearance regularly with our coffee and chocolate.

We sat here this night, and with candles lighted, were talking over the adventure of the evening.

Madame Perrodon and Mademoiselle De Lafontaine were both of our party. The young stranger had hardly lain down in her bed when she sank into a deep sleep; and those ladies had left her in the care of a servant.

"How do you like our guest?" I asked, as soon as Madame entered. "Tell me all about her?"

"I like her extremely," answered Madame, "she is, I almost think, the prettiest creature I ever saw; about your age, and so gentle and nice."

"She is absolutely beautiful," threw in Mademoiselle, who had peeped for a moment into the stranger's room.

"And such a sweet voice!" added Madame Perrodon.

"Did you remark a woman in the carriage, after it was set up again, who did not get out," inquired Mademoiselle, "but only looked from the window?"

"No, we had not seen her."

Then she described a hideous black woman, with a sort of coloured turban on her head, and who was gazing all the time from the carriage window, nodding and grinning derisively towards the ladies, with gleaming eyes and large white eyeballs, and her teeth set as if in fury.

"Did you remark what an ill-looking pack of men the servants were?" asked Madame.

"Yes," said my father, who had just come in, "ugly, hang-dog looking fellows as ever I beheld in my life. I hope they mayn't rob the poor lady in the forest. They are clever rogues, however; they got everything to rights in a minute."

"I dare say they are worn out with too long traveling," said Madame.

"Besides looking wicked, their faces were so strangely lean, and dark, and sullen. I am very curious, I own; but I dare say the young lady will tell you all about it tomorrow, if she is sufficiently recovered."

"I don't think she will," said my father, with a mysterious smile, and a little nod of his head, as if he knew more about it than he cared to tell us.

This made us all the more inquisitive as to what had passed between him and the lady in the black velvet, in the brief but earnest interview that had immediately preceded her departure.

We were scarcely alone, when I entreated him to tell me. He did not need much pressing.

“There is no particular reason why I should not tell you. She expressed a reluctance to trouble us with the care of her daughter, saying she was in delicate health, and nervous, but not subject to any kind of seizure — she volunteered that — nor to any illusion; being, in fact, perfectly sane.”

“How very odd to say all that!” I interpolated. “It was so unnecessary.”

“At all events it *was* said,” he laughed, “and as you wish to know all that passed, which was indeed very little, I tell you. She then said, ‘I am making a long journey of *vital* importance — she emphasised the word — rapid and secret; I shall return for my child in three months; in the meantime, she will be silent as to who we are, whence we come, and whither we are traveling.’ That is all she said. She spoke very pure French. When she said the word ‘secret,’ she paused for a few seconds, looking sternly, her eyes fixed on mine. I fancy she makes a great point of that. You saw how quickly she was gone. I hope I have not done a very foolish thing, in taking charge of the young lady.”

For my part, I was delighted. I was longing to see and talk to her; and only waiting till the doctor should give me leave. You, who live in towns, can have no idea how great an event the introduction of a new friend is, in such a solitude as surrounded us.

The doctor did not arrive till nearly one o’clock; but I could no more have gone to my bed and slept, than I could have overtaken, on foot, the carriage in which the princess in black velvet had driven away.

When the physician came down to the drawing room, it was to report very favorably upon his patient. She was now sitting up, her pulse quite regular, apparently perfectly well. She had sustained no injury, and the little shock to her nerves had passed away quite harmlessly. There could be no harm certainly in my seeing her, if we both wished it; and, with this permission I sent, forthwith, to know whether she would allow me to visit her for a few minutes in her room.

The servant returned immediately to say that she desired nothing more.

You may be sure I was not long in availing myself of this permission.

Our visitor lay in one of the handsomest rooms in the schloss. It was, perhaps, a little stately. There was a somber piece of tapestry opposite the foot of the bed, representing Cleopatra with the asps to her bosom; and other solemn classic scenes were displayed, a little faded, upon the other walls. But there was gold carving, and rich and varied colour enough in the other decorations of the room, to more than redeem the gloom of the old tapestry.

There were candles at the bedside. She was sitting up; her slender pretty figure enveloped in the soft silk dressing gown, embroidered with flowers, and lined with thick quilted silk, which her mother had thrown over her feet as she lay upon the ground.

What was it that, as I reached the bedside and had just begun my little greeting, struck me dumb in a moment, and made me recoil a step or two from before her? I will tell you.

I saw the very face which had visited me in my childhood at night, which remained so fixed in my memory, and on which I had for so many years so often ruminated with horror, when no one suspected of what I was thinking.

It was pretty, even beautiful; and when I first beheld it, wore the same melancholy expression.

But this almost instantly lighted into a strange fixed smile of recognition.

There was a silence of fully a minute, and then at length she spoke; I could not.

"How wonderful!" she exclaimed. "Twelve years ago, I saw your face in a dream, and it has haunted me ever since."

"Wonderful indeed!" I repeated, overcoming with an effort the horror that had for a time suspended my utterances. "Twelve years ago, in vision or reality, I certainly saw you. I could not forget your face. It has remained before my eyes ever since."

Her smile had softened. Whatever I had fancied strange in it, was gone, and it and her dimpling cheeks were now delightfully pretty and intelligent.

I felt reassured, and continued more in the vein which hospitality indicated, to bid her welcome, and to tell her how much pleasure her accidental arrival had given us all, and especially what a happiness it was to me.

I took her hand as I spoke. I was a little shy, as lonely people are, but the situation made me eloquent, and even bold. She pressed my hand, she laid hers upon it, and her eyes glowed, as, looking hastily into mine, she smiled again, and blushed.

She answered my welcome very prettily. I sat down beside her, still wondering; and she said:

"I must tell you my vision about you; it is so very strange that you and I should have had, each of the other so vivid a dream, that each should have seen, I you and you me, looking as we do now, when of course we both were mere children. I was a child, about six years old, and I awoke from a confused and troubled dream, and found myself in a room, unlike my nursery, wainscoted clumsily in some dark wood, and with cupboards and bedsteads, and chairs, and benches placed about it. The beds were, I thought, all empty, and the room itself without anyone but myself in it; and I, after looking about me for some time, and admiring especially an iron candlestick with two branches, which I should certainly know again, crept under one of the beds to reach the window; but as I got from under the bed, I heard someone crying; and looking up, while I was still upon my knees, I saw you — most assuredly you — as I see you now; a beautiful young lady, with golden hair and large blue eyes, and lips — your lips — you as you are here.

"Your looks won me; I climbed on the bed and put my arms about you, and I think we both fell asleep. I was aroused by a scream; you were sitting up screaming. I was frightened, and slipped down upon the ground, and, it seemed to me, lost consciousness for a moment; and when I came to myself, I was again in my nursery at home. Your face I have never forgotten since. I could not be misled by mere resemblance. *You are* the lady whom I saw then."

It was now my turn to relate my corresponding vision, which I did, to the undisguised wonder of my new acquaintance.

"I don't know which should be most afraid of the other," she said, again smiling— "If you were less pretty I think I should be very much afraid of you, but being as you are, and you and I both so young, I feel only that I have made your acquaintance twelve years ago, and have already a right to your intimacy; at all events it does seem as if we were destined, from our earliest childhood, to be friends. I wonder whether you feel as strangely drawn towards me as I do to you; I have never had a friend — shall I find one now?” She sighed, and her fine dark eyes gazed passionately on me.

Now the truth is, I felt rather unaccountably towards the beautiful stranger. I did feel, as she said, “drawn towards her,” but there was also something of repulsion. In this ambiguous feeling, however, the sense of attraction immensely prevailed. She interested and won me; she was so beautiful and so indescribably engaging.

I perceived now something of languor and exhaustion stealing over her, and hastened to bid her good night.

“The doctor thinks,” I added, “that you ought to have a maid to sit up with you tonight; one of ours is waiting, and you will find her a very useful and quiet creature.”

“How kind of you, but I could not sleep, I never could with an attendant in the room. I shan’t require any assistance — and, shall I confess my weakness, I am haunted with a terror of robbers. Our house was robbed once, and two servants murdered, so I always lock my door. It has become a habit — and you look so kind I know you will forgive me. I see there is a key in the lock.”

She held me close in her pretty arms for a moment and whispered in my ear, “Good night, darling, it is very hard to part with you, but good night; tomorrow, but not early, I shall see you again.”

She sank back on the pillow with a sigh, and her fine eyes followed me with a fond and melancholy gaze, and she murmured again “Good night, dear friend.”

Young people like, and even love, on impulse. I was flattered by the evident, though as yet undeserved, fondness she showed me. I liked the confidence with which she at once received me. She was determined that we should be very near friends.

Next day came and we met again. I was delighted with my companion; that is to say, in many respects.

Her looks lost nothing in daylight — she was certainly the most beautiful creature I had ever seen, and the unpleasant remembrance of the face presented in my early dream, had lost the effect of the first unexpected recognition.

She confessed that she had experienced a similar shock on seeing me, and precisely the same faint antipathy that had mingled with my admiration of her. We now laughed together over our momentary horrors.

IV

Her Habits — A Saunter

I told you that I was charmed with her in most particulars.

There were some that did not please me so well.

She was above the middle height of women. I shall begin by describing her.

She was slender, and wonderfully graceful. Except that her movements were languid — very languid — indeed, there was nothing in her appearance to indicate an invalid. Her complexion was rich and brilliant; her features were small and beautifully formed; her eyes large, dark, and lustrous; her hair was quite wonderful, I never saw hair so magnificently thick and long when it was down about her shoulders; I have often placed my hands under it, and laughed with wonder at its weight. It was exquisitely fine and soft, and in colour a rich very dark brown, with something of gold. I loved to let it down, tumbling with its own weight, as, in her room, she lay back in her chair talking in her sweet low voice, I used to fold and braid it, and spread it out and play with it. Heavens! If I had but known all!

I said there were particulars which did not please me. I have told you that her confidence won me the first night I saw her; but I found that she exercised with respect to herself, her mother, her history, everything in fact connected with her life, plans, and people, an ever wakeful reserve. I dare say I was unreasonable, perhaps I was wrong; I dare say I ought to have respected the solemn injunction laid upon my father by the stately lady in black velvet. But curiosity is a restless and unscrupulous passion, and no one girl can endure, with patience, that hers should be baffled by another. What harm could it do anyone to tell me what I so ardently desired to know? Had she no trust in my good sense or honor? Why would she not believe me when I assured her, so solemnly, that I would not divulge one syllable of what she told me to any mortal breathing.

There was a coldness, it seemed to me, beyond her years, in her smiling melancholy persistent refusal to afford me the least ray of light.

I cannot say we quarreled upon this point, for she would not quarrel upon any. It was, of course, very unfair of me to press her, very ill-bred, but I really could not help it; and I might just as well have let it alone.

What she did tell me amounted, in my unconscionable estimation — to nothing.

It was all summed up in three very vague disclosures:

First — Her name was Carmilla.

Second — Her family was very ancient and noble.

Third — Her home lay in the direction of the west.

She would not tell me the name of her family, nor their armorial bearings, nor the name of their estate, nor even that of the country they lived in.

You are not to suppose that I worried her incessantly on these subjects. I watched opportunity, and rather insinuated than urged my inquiries. Once or twice, indeed, I did attack her more directly. But no matter what my tactics, utter failure was invariably the result. Reproaches and caresses were all lost upon her. But I must add this, that her evasion was conducted with so pretty a melancholy and deprecation, with so many, and even passionate declarations of her liking for me, and trust in my honor, and with so many promises that I should at last know all, that I could not find it in my heart long to be offended with her.

She used to place her pretty arms about my neck, draw me to her, and laying her cheek to mine, murmur with her lips near my ear, “Dearest, your little heart is wounded; think me not cruel because I obey the irresistible law of my strength and weakness; if your dear heart is wounded, my wild heart bleeds with yours. In the rapture of my enormous humiliation I live in your warm life, and you shall die — die, sweetly die — into mine. I cannot help it; as I draw near to you, you, in your turn, will draw near to others, and learn the rapture of that cruelty, which yet is love; so, for a while, seek to know no more of me and mine, but trust me with all your loving spirit.”

And when she had spoken such a rhapsody, she would press me more closely in her trembling embrace, and her lips in soft kisses gently glow upon my cheek.

Her agitations and her language were unintelligible to me.

From these foolish embraces, which were not of very frequent occurrence, I must allow, I used to wish to extricate myself; but my energies seemed to fail me. Her murmured words sounded like a lullaby in my ear, and soothed my resistance into a trance, from which I only seemed to recover myself when she withdrew her arms.

In these mysterious moods I did not like her. I experienced a strange tumultuous excitement that was pleasurable, ever and anon, mingled with a vague sense of fear and disgust. I had no distinct thoughts about her while such scenes lasted, but I was conscious of a love growing into adoration, and also of abhorrence. This I know is paradox, but I can make no other attempt to explain the feeling.

I now write, after an interval of more than ten years, with a trembling hand, with a confused and horrible recollection of certain occurrences and situations, in the ordeal through which I was unconsciously passing; though with a vivid and very sharp remembrance of the main current of my story.

But, I suspect, in all lives there are certain emotional scenes, those in which our passions have been most wildly and terribly roused, that are of all others the most vaguely and dimly remembered.

Sometimes after an hour of apathy, my strange and beautiful companion would take my hand and hold it with a fond pressure, renewed again and again; blushing softly, gazing in my face with languid and burning eyes, and breathing so fast that her dress rose and fell with the tumultuous respiration. It was like the ardor of a lover; it embarrassed me; it was hateful and yet over-powering; and with gloating eyes she drew me to her, and her hot lips traveled along my cheek in kisses; and she would whisper, almost in sobs, “You are mine, you *shall* be mine, you and I are one for ever.” Then she had thrown herself back in her chair, with her small hands over her eyes, leaving me trembling.

“Are we related,” I used to ask; “what can you mean by all this? I remind you perhaps of someone whom you love; but you must not, I hate it; I don’t know you — I don’t know myself when you look so and talk so.”

She used to sigh at my vehemence, then turn away and drop my hand.

Respecting these very extraordinary manifestations I strove in vain to form any satisfactory theory — I could not refer them to affectation or trick. It was unmistakably the momentary breaking out of suppressed instinct and emotion. Was she, notwithstanding her mother’s volunteered denial, subject to brief visitations of insanity; or was there here a disguise and a romance? I had read in old storybooks of such things. What if a boyish lover had found his way into the house, and sought to prosecute his suit in masquerade, with the assistance of a clever old adventuress. But there were many things against this hypothesis, highly interesting as it was to my vanity.

I could boast of no little attentions such as masculine gallantry delights to offer. Between these passionate moments there were long intervals of commonplace, of gaiety, of brooding melancholy, during which, except that I detected her eyes so full of melancholy fire, following me, at times I might have been as nothing to her. Except in these brief periods of mysterious excitement her ways were girlish; and there was always a languor about her, quite incompatible with a masculine system in a state of health.

In some respects her habits were odd. Perhaps not so singular in the opinion of a town lady like you, as they appeared to us rustic people. She used to come down very late, generally not till one o'clock, she would then take a cup of chocolate, but eat nothing; we then went out for a walk, which was a mere saunter, and she seemed, almost immediately, exhausted, and either returned to the schloss or sat on one of the benches that were placed, here and there, among the trees. This was a bodily languor in which her mind did not sympathize. She was always an animated talker, and very intelligent.

She sometimes alluded for a moment to her own home, or mentioned an adventure or situation, or an early recollection, which indicated a people of strange manners, and described customs of which we knew nothing. I gathered from these chance hints that her native country was much more remote than I had at first fancied.

As we sat thus one afternoon under the trees a funeral passed us by. It was that of a pretty young girl, whom I had often seen, the daughter of one of the rangers of the forest. The poor man was walking behind the coffin of his darling; she was his only child, and he looked quite heartbroken.

Peasants walking two-and-two came behind, they were singing a funeral hymn.

I rose to mark my respect as they passed, and joined in the hymn they were very sweetly singing.

My companion shook me a little roughly, and I turned surprised.

She said brusquely, “Don’t you perceive how discordant that is?”

“I think it very sweet, on the contrary,” I answered, vexed at the interruption, and very uncomfortable, lest the people who composed the little procession should observe and resent what was passing.

I resumed, therefore, instantly, and was again interrupted. “You pierce my ears,” said Carmilla, almost angrily, and stopping her ears with her tiny fingers. “Besides, how can you tell that your religion and mine are the same; your forms wound me, and I hate funerals. What a fuss! Why you must die — *everyone* must die; and all are happier when they do. Come home.”

“My father has gone on with the clergyman to the churchyard. I thought you knew she was to be buried today.”

“She? I don’t trouble my head about peasants. I don’t know who she is,” answered Carmilla, with a flash from her fine eyes.

“She is the poor girl who fancied she saw a ghost a fortnight ago, and has been dying ever since, till yesterday, when she expired.”

“Tell me nothing about ghosts. I shan’t sleep tonight if you do.”

“I hope there is no plague or fever coming; all this looks very like it,” I continued. “The swineherd’s young wife died only a week ago, and she thought something seized her by the throat as she lay in her bed, and nearly strangled her. Papa says such horrible fancies do accompany some forms of fever. She was quite well the day before.

She sank afterwards, and died before a week."

"Well, *her* funeral is over, I hope, and *her* hymn sung; and our ears shan't be tortured with that discord and jargon. It has made me nervous. Sit down here, beside me; sit close; hold my hand; press it hard-hard-harder."

We had moved a little back, and had come to another seat.

She sat down. Her face underwent a change that alarmed and even terrified me for a moment. It darkened, and became horribly livid; her teeth and hands were clenched, and she frowned and compressed her lips, while she stared down upon the ground at her feet, and trembled all over with a continued shudder as irrepressible as ague. All her energies seemed strained to suppress a fit, with which she was then breathlessly tugging; and at length a low convulsive cry of suffering broke from her, and gradually the hysteria subsided. "There! That comes of strangling people with hymns!" she said at last. "Hold me, hold me still. It is passing away."

And so gradually it did; and perhaps to dissipate the somber impression which the spectacle had left upon me, she became unusually animated and chatty; and so we got home.

This was the first time I had seen her exhibit any definable symptoms of that delicacy of health which her mother had spoken of. It was the first time, also, I had seen her exhibit anything like temper.

Both passed away like a summer cloud; and never but once afterwards did I witness on her part a momentary sign of anger. I will tell you how it happened.

She and I were looking out of one of the long drawing room windows, when there entered the courtyard, over the drawbridge, a figure of a wanderer whom I knew very well. He used to visit the schloss generally twice a year.

It was the figure of a hunchback, with the sharp lean features that generally accompany deformity. He wore a pointed black beard, and he was smiling from ear to ear, showing his white fangs. He was dressed in buff, black, and scarlet, and crossed with more straps and belts than I could count, from which hung all manner of things. Behind, he carried a magic lantern, and two boxes, which I well knew, in one of which was a salamander, and in the other a mandrake. These monsters used to make my father laugh. They were compounded of parts of monkeys, parrots, squirrels, fish, and hedgehogs, dried and stitched together with great neatness and startling effect. He had a fiddle, a box of conjuring apparatus, a pair of foils and masks attached to his belt, several other mysterious cases dangling about him, and a black staff with copper ferrules in his hand. His companion was a rough spare dog, that followed at his heels, but stopped short, suspiciously at the drawbridge, and in a little while began to howl dismally.

In the meantime, the mountebank, standing in the midst of the courtyard, raised his grotesque hat, and made us a very ceremonious bow, paying his compliments very volubly in execrable French, and German not much better.

Then, disengaging his fiddle, he began to scrape a lively air to which he sang with a merry discord, dancing with ludicrous airs and activity, that made me laugh, in spite of the dog's howling.

Then he advanced to the window with many smiles and salutations, and his hat in his left hand, his fiddle under his arm, and with a fluency that never took breath, he gabbled a long advertisement of all his accomplishments, and the resources of the various arts which he placed at our service, and the curiosities and entertainments which it was in his power, at our bidding, to display.

"Will your ladyships be pleased to buy an amulet against the oupire, which is going like the wolf, I hear, through these woods," he said dropping his hat on the pavement. "They are dying of it right and left and here is a charm that never fails; only pinned to the pillow, and you may laugh in his face."

These charms consisted of oblong slips of vellum, with cabalistic ciphers and diagrams upon them.

Carmilla instantly purchased one, and so did I.

He was looking up, and we were smiling down upon him, amused; at least, I can answer for myself. His piercing black eye, as he looked up in our faces, seemed to detect something that fixed for a moment his curiosity,

In an instant he unrolled a leather case, full of all manner of odd little steel instruments.

"See here, my lady," he said, displaying it, and addressing me, "I profess, among other things less useful, the art of dentistry. Plague take the dog!" he interpolated. "Silence, beast! He howls so that your ladyships can scarcely hear a word. Your noble friend, the young lady at your right, has the sharpest tooth, — long, thin, pointed, like an awl, like a needle; ha, ha! With my sharp and long sight, as I look up, I have seen it distinctly; now if it happens to hurt the young lady, and I think it must, here am I, here are my file, my punch, my nippers; I will make it round and blunt, if her ladyship pleases; no longer the tooth of a fish, but of a beautiful young lady as she is. Hey? Is the young lady displeased? Have I been too bold? Have I offended her?"

The young lady, indeed, looked very angry as she drew back from the window.

"How dares that mountebank insult us so? Where is your father? I shall demand redress from him. My father would have had the wretch tied up to the pump, and flogged with a cart whip, and burnt to the bones with the cattle brand!"

She retired from the window a step or two, and sat down, and had hardly lost sight of the offender, when her wrath subsided as suddenly as it had risen, and she gradually recovered her usual tone, and seemed to forget the little hunchback and his follies.

My father was out of spirits that evening. On coming in he told us that there had been another case very similar to the two fatal ones which had lately occurred. The sister of a young peasant on his estate, only a mile away, was very ill, had been, as she described it, attacked very nearly in the same way, and was now slowly but steadily sinking.

"All this," said my father, "is strictly referable to natural causes. These poor people infect one another with their superstitions, and so repeat in imagination the images of terror that have infested their neighbors."

"But that very circumstance frightens one horribly," said Carmilla.

"How so?" inquired my father.

"I am so afraid of fancying I see such things; I think it would be as bad as reality."

"We are in God's hands: nothing can happen without his permission, and all will end well for those who love him. He is our faithful creator; He has made us all, and will take care of us."

"Creator! *Nature!*" said the young lady in answer to my gentle father. "And this disease that invades the country is natural. Nature. All things proceed from Nature — don't they? All things in the heaven, in the earth, and under the earth, act and live as Nature ordains? I think so."

"The doctor said he would come here today," said my father, after a silence. "I want to know what he thinks about it, and what he thinks we had better do."

"Doctors never did me any good," said Carmilla.

"Then you have been ill?" I asked.

"More ill than ever you were," she answered.

"Long ago?"

"Yes, a long time. I suffered from this very illness; but I forget all but my pain and weakness, and they were not so bad as are suffered in other diseases."

"You were very young then?"

"I dare say, let us talk no more of it. You would not wound a friend?"

She looked languidly in my eyes, and passed her arm round my waist lovingly, and led me out of the room. My father was busy over some papers near the window.

"Why does your papa like to frighten us?" said the pretty girl with a sigh and a little shudder.

"He doesn't, dear Carmilla, it is the very furthest thing from his mind."

"Are you afraid, dearest?"

"I should be very much if I fancied there was any real danger of my being attacked as those poor people were."

"You are afraid to die?"

"Yes, every one is."

"But to die as lovers may — to die together, so that they may live together.

Girls are caterpillars while they live in the world, to be finally butterflies when the summer comes; but in the meantime there are grubs and larvae, don't you see — each with their peculiar propensities, necessities and structure. So says Monsieur Buffon, in his big book, in the next room."

Later in the day the doctor came, and was closeted with papa for some time.

He was a skilful man, of sixty and upwards, he wore powder, and shaved his pale face as smooth as a pumpkin. He and papa emerged from the room together, and I heard papa laugh, and say as they came out:

"Well, I do wonder at a wise man like you. What do you say to hippogriffs and dragons?"

The doctor was smiling, and made answer, shaking his head —

"Nevertheless life and death are mysterious states, and we know little of the resources of either."

And so they walked on, and I heard no more. I did not then know what the doctor had been broaching, but I think I guess it now.

V

A Wonderful Likeness

This evening there arrived from Gratz the grave, dark-faced son of the picture cleaner, with a horse and cart laden with two large packing cases, having many pictures in each. It was a journey of ten leagues, and whenever a messenger arrived at the schloss from our little capital of Gratz, we used to crowd about him in the hall, to hear the news.

This arrival created in our secluded quarters quite a sensation. The cases remained in the hall, and the messenger was taken charge of by the servants till he had eaten his supper. Then with assistants, and armed with hammer, ripping chisel, and turnscrew, he met us in the hall, where we had assembled to witness the unpacking of the cases.

Carmilla sat looking listlessly on, while one after the other the old pictures, nearly all portraits, which had undergone the process of renovation, were brought to light. My mother was of an old Hungarian family, and most of these pictures, which were about to be restored to their places, had come to us through her.

My father had a list in his hand, from which he read, as the artist rummaged out the corresponding numbers. I don’t know that the pictures were very good, but they were, undoubtedly, very old, and some of them very curious also. They had, for the most part, the merit of being now seen by me, I may say, for the first time; for the smoke and dust of time had all but obliterated them.

“There is a picture that I have not seen yet,” said my father. “In one corner, at the top of it, is the name, as well as I could read, ‘Marcia Karnstein,’ and the date ‘1698’; and I am curious to see how it has turned out."

I remembered it; it was a small picture, about a foot and a half high, and nearly square, without a frame; but it was so blackened by age that I could not make it out.

The artist now produced it, with evident pride. It was quite beautiful; it was startling; it seemed to live. It was the effigy of Carmilla!

"Carmilla, dear, here is an absolute miracle. Here you are, living, smiling, ready to speak, in this picture. Isn't it beautiful, Papa? And see, even the little mole on her throat."

My father laughed, and said "Certainly it is a wonderful likeness," but he looked away, and to my surprise seemed but little struck by it, and went on talking to the picture cleaner, who was also something of an artist, and discoursed with intelligence about the portraits or other works, which his art had just brought into light and colour, while I was more and more lost in wonder the more I looked at the picture.

"Will you let me hang this picture in my room, papa?" I asked.

"Certainly, dear," said he, smiling, "I'm very glad you think it so like.

It must be prettier even than I thought it, if it is."

The young lady did not acknowledge this pretty speech, did not seem to hear it. She was leaning back in her seat, her fine eyes under their long lashes gazing on me in contemplation, and she smiled in a kind of rapture.

"And now you can read quite plainly the name that is written in the corner.

It is not Marcia; it looks as if it was done in gold. The name is Mircalla, Countess Karnstein, and this is a little coronet over and underneath A.D.

1698. I am descended from the Karnsteins; that is, mamma was."

"Ah!" said the lady, languidly, "so am I, I think, a very long descent, very ancient. Are there any Karnsteins living now?"

"None who bear the name, I believe. The family were ruined, I believe, in some civil wars, long ago, but the ruins of the castle are only about three miles away."

"How interesting!" she said, languidly. "But see what beautiful moonlight!" She glanced through the hall door, which stood a little open. "Suppose you take a little ramble round the court, and look down at the road and river."

"It is so like the night you came to us," I said.

She sighed; smiling.

She rose, and each with her arm about the other's waist, we walked out upon the pavement.

In silence, slowly we walked down to the drawbridge, where the beautiful landscape opened before us.

"And so you were thinking of the night I came here?" she almost whispered.

"Are you glad I came?"

"Delighted, dear Carmilla," I answered.

"And you asked for the picture you think like me, to hang in your room," she murmured with a sigh, as she drew her arm closer about my waist, and let her pretty head sink upon my shoulder. "How romantic you are, Carmilla," I said. "Whenever you tell me your story, it will be made up chiefly of some one great romance."

She kissed me silently.

"I am sure, Carmilla, you have been in love; that there is, at this moment, an affair of the heart going on."

"I have been in love with no one, and never shall," she whispered, "unless it should be with you."

How beautiful she looked in the moonlight!

Shy and strange was the look with which she quickly hid her face in my neck and hair, with tumultuous sighs, that seemed almost to sob, and pressed in mine a hand that trembled.

Her soft cheek was glowing against mine. "Darling, darling," she murmured, "I live in you; and you would die for me, I love you so."

I started from her.

She was gazing on me with eyes from which all fire, all meaning had flown, and a face colourless and apathetic.

"Is there a chill in the air, dear?" she said drowsily. "I almost shiver; have I been dreaming? Let us come in. Come; come; come in."

"You look ill, Carmilla; a little faint. You certainly must take some wine," I said.

"Yes. I will. I'm better now. I shall be quite well in a few minutes. Yes, do give me a little wine," answered Carmilla, as we approached the door.

"Let us look again for a moment; it is the last time, perhaps, I shall see the moonlight with you."

"How do you feel now, dear Carmilla? Are you really better?" I asked.

I was beginning to take alarm, lest she should have been stricken with the strange epidemic that they said had invaded the country about us.

"Papa would be grieved beyond measure," I added, "if he thought you were ever so little ill, without immediately letting us know. We have a very skilful doctor near us, the physician who was with papa today.”

“I’m sure he is. I know how kind you all are; but, dear child, I am quite well again. There is nothing ever wrong with me, but a little weakness.

People say I am languid; I am incapable of exertion; I can scarcely walk as far as a child of three years old: and every now and then the little strength I have falters, and I become as you have just seen me. But after all I am very easily set up again; in a moment I am perfectly myself. See how I have recovered.”

So, indeed, she had; and she and I talked a great deal, and very animated she was; and the remainder of that evening passed without any recurrence of what I called her infatuations. I mean her crazy talk and looks, which embarrassed, and even frightened me.

But there occurred that night an event which gave my thoughts quite a new turn, and seemed to startle even Carmilla’s languid nature into momentary energy.

VI

A Very Strange Agony

When we got into the drawing room, and had sat down to our coffee and chocolate, although Carmilla did not take any, she seemed quite herself again, and Madame, and Mademoiselle De Lafontaine, joined us, and made a little card party, in the course of which papa came in for what he called his "dish of tea."

When the game was over he sat down beside Carmilla on the sofa, and asked her, a little anxiously, whether she had heard from her mother since her arrival.

She answered "No."

He then asked whether she knew where a letter would reach her at present.

"I cannot tell," she answered ambiguously, "but I have been thinking of leaving you; you have been already too hospitable and too kind to me. I have given you an infinity of trouble, and I should wish to take a carriage tomorrow, and post in pursuit of her; I know where I shall ultimately find her, although I dare not yet tell you."

"But you must not dream of any such thing," exclaimed my father, to my great relief. "We can't afford to lose you so, and I won't consent to your leaving us, except under the care of your mother, who was so good as to consent to your remaining with us till she should herself return. I should be quite happy if I knew that you heard from her: but this evening the accounts of the progress of the mysterious disease that has invaded our neighborhood, grow even more alarming; and my beautiful guest, I do feel the responsibility, unaided by advice from your mother, very much. But I shall do my best; and one thing is certain, that you must not think of leaving us without her distinct direction to that effect. We should suffer too much in parting from you to consent to it easily."

"Thank you, sir, a thousand times for your hospitality," she answered, smiling bashfully. "You have all been too kind to me; I have seldom been so happy in all my life before, as in your beautiful chateau, under your care, and in the society of your dear daughter."

So he gallantly, in his old-fashioned way, kissed her hand, smiling and pleased at her little speech.

I accompanied Carmilla as usual to her room, and sat and chatted with her while she was preparing for bed.

"Do you think," I said at length, "that you will ever confide fully in me?"

She turned round smiling, but made no answer, only continued to smile on me.

"You won't answer that?" I said. "You can't answer pleasantly; I ought not to have asked you."

"You were quite right to ask me that, or anything. You do not know how dear you are to me, or you could not think any confidence too great to look for.

But I am under vows, no nun half so awfully, and I dare not tell my story yet, even to you. The time is very near when you shall know everything. You will think me cruel, very selfish, but love is always selfish; the more ardent the more selfish. How jealous I am you cannot know. You must come with me, loving me, to death; or else hate me and still come with me. and *hating* me through death and after. There is no such word as indifference in my apathetic nature."

"Now, Carmilla, you are going to talk your wild nonsense again," I said hastily.

"Not I, silly little fool as I am, and full of whims and fancies; for your sake I'll talk like a sage. Were you ever at a ball?"

"No; how you do run on. What is it like? How charming it must be."

"I almost forget, it is years ago."

I laughed.

"You are not so old. Your first ball can hardly be forgotten yet."

"I remember everything about it — with an effort. I see it all, as divers see what is going on above them, through a medium, dense, rippling, but transparent. There occurred that night what has confused the picture, and made its colours faint. I was all but assassinated in my bed, wounded here," she touched her breast, "and never was the same since."

"Were you near dying?"

"Yes, very — a cruel love — strange love, that would have taken my life. Love will have its sacrifices. No sacrifice without blood. Let us go to sleep now; I feel so lazy. How can I get up just now and lock my door?"

She was lying with her tiny hands buried in her rich wavy hair, under her cheek, her little head upon the pillow, and her glittering eyes followed me wherever I moved, with a kind of shy smile that I could not decipher.

I bid her good night, and crept from the room with an uncomfortable sensation.

I often wondered whether our pretty guest ever said her prayers. I certainly had never seen her upon her knees. In the morning she never came down until long after our family prayers were over, and at night she never left the drawing room to attend our brief evening prayers in the hall.

If it had not been that it had casually come out in one of our careless talks that she had been baptised, I should have doubted her being a Christian. Religion was a subject on which I had never heard her speak a word. If I had known the world better, this particular neglect or antipathy would not have so much surprised me.

The precautions of nervous people are infectious, and persons of a like temperament are pretty sure, after a time, to imitate them. I had adopted Carmilla's habit of locking her bedroom door, having taken into my head all her whimsical alarms about midnight invaders and prowling assassins. I had also adopted her precaution of making a brief search through her room, to satisfy herself that no lurking assassin or robber was "ensconced."

These wise measures taken, I got into my bed and fell asleep. A light was burning in my room. This was an old habit, of very early date, and which nothing could have tempted me to dispense with.

Thus fortifed I might take my rest in peace. But dreams come through stone walls, light up dark rooms, or darken light ones, and their persons make their exits and their entrances as they please, and laugh at locksmiths.

I had a dream that night that was the beginning of a very strange agony.

I cannot call it a nightmare, for I was quite conscious of being asleep.

But I was equally conscious of being in my room, and lying in bed, precisely as I actually was. I saw, or fancied I saw, the room and its furniture just as I had seen it last, except that it was very dark, and I saw something moving round the foot of the bed, which at first I could not accurately distinguish. But I soon saw that it was a sootyblack animal that resembled a monstrous cat. It appeared to me about four or five feet long for it measured fully the length of the hearthrug as it passed over it; and it continued to-ing and fro-ing with the lithe, sinister restlessness of a beast in a cage. I could not cry out, although as you may suppose, I was terrified. Its pace was growing faster, and the room rapidly darker and darker, and at length so dark that I could no longer see anything of it but its eyes. I felt it spring lightly on the bed. The two broad eyes approached my face, and suddenly I felt a stinging pain as if two large needles darted, an inch or two apart, deep into my breast. I waked with a scream. The room was lighted by the candle that burnt there all through the night, and I saw a female figure standing at the foot of the bed, a little at the right side. It was in a dark loose dress, and its hair was down and covered its shoulders. A block of stone could not have been more still. There was not the slightest stir of respiration. As I stared at it, the figure appeared to have changed its place, and was now nearer the door; then, close to it, the door opened, and it passed out.

I was now relieved, and able to breathe and move. My first thought was that Carmilla had been playing me a trick, and that I had forgotten to secure my door. I hastened to it, and found it locked as usual on the inside. I was afraid to open it — I was horrified. I sprang into my bed and covered my head up in the bedclothes, and lay there more dead than alive till morning.

VII

Descending

It would be vain my attempting to tell you the horror with which, even now, I recall the occurrence of that night. It was no such transitory terror as a dream leaves behind it. It seemed to deepen by time, and communicated itself to the room and the very furniture that had encompassed the apparition.

I could not bear next day to be alone for a moment. I should have told papa, but for two opposite reasons. At one time I thought he would laugh at my story, and I could not bear its being treated as a jest; and at another I thought he might fancy that I had been attacked by the mysterious complaint which had invaded our neighborhood. I had myself no misgiving of the kind, and as he had been rather an invalid for some time, I was afraid of alarming him.

I was comfortable enough with my good-natured companions, Madame Perrodon, and the vivacious Mademoiselle Lafontaine. They both perceived that I was out of spirits and nervous, and at length I told them what lay so heavy at my heart.

Mademoiselle laughed, but I fancied that Madame Perrodon looked anxious.

“By-the-by,” said Mademoiselle, laughing, “the long lime tree walk, behind Carmilla’s bedroom window, is haunted!”

“Nonsense!” exclaimed Madame, who probably thought the theme rather inopportune, “and who tells that story, my dear?”

“Martin says that he came up twice, when the old yard gate was being repaired, before sunrise, and twice saw the same female figure walking down the lime tree avenue.”

"So he well might, as long as there are cows to milk in the river fields," said Madame.

"I daresay; but Martin chooses to be frightened, and never did I see fool more frightened."

"You must not say a word about it to Carmilla, because she can see down that walk from her room window," I interposed, "and she is, if possible, a greater coward than I."

Carmilla came down rather later than usual that day.

"I was so frightened last night," she said, so soon as were together, "and I am sure I should have seen something dreadful if it had not been for that charm I bought from the poor little hunchback whom I called such hard names. I had a dream of something black coming round my bed, and I awoke in a perfect horror, and I really thought, for some seconds, I saw a dark figure near the chimneypiece, but I felt under my pillow for my charm, and the moment my fingers touched it, the figure disappeared, and I felt quite certain, only that I had it by me, that something frightful would have made its appearance, and, perhaps, throttled me, as it did those poor people we heard of.

"Well, listen to me," I began, and recounted my adventure, at the recital of which she appeared horrified.

"And had you the charm near you?" she asked, earnestly.

"No, I had dropped it into a china vase in the drawing room, but I shall certainly take it with me tonight, as you have so much faith in it."

At this distance of time I cannot tell you, or even understand, how I overcame my horror so effectually as to lie alone in my room that night. I remember distinctly that I pinned the charm to my pillow. I fell asleep almost immediately, and slept even more soundly than usual all night.

Next night I passed as well. My sleep was delightfully deep and dreamless.

But I wakened with a sense of lassitude and melancholy, which, however, did not exceed a degree that was almost luxurious.

"Well, I told you so," said Carmilla, when I described my quiet sleep, "I had such delightful sleep myself last night; I pinned the charm to the breast of my nightdress. It was too far away the night before. I am quite sure it was all fancy, except the dreams. I used to think that evil spirits made dreams, but our doctor told me it is no such thing. Only a fever passing by, or some other malady, as they often do, he said, knocks at the door, and not being able to get in, passes on, with that alarm."

"And what do you think the charm is?" said I.

"It has been fumigated or immersed in some drug, and is an antidote against the malaria," she answered.

"Then it acts only on the body?"

"Certainly; you don't suppose that evil spirits are frightened by bits of ribbon, or the perfumes of a druggist's shop? No, these complaints, wandering in the air, begin by trying the nerves, and so infect the brain, but before they can seize upon you, the antidote repels them. That I am sure is what the charm has done for us. It is nothing magical, it is simply natural.

I should have been happier if I could have quite agreed with Carmilla, but I did my best, and the impression was a little losing its force.

For some nights I slept profoundly; but still every morning I felt the same lassitude, and a languor weighed upon me all day. I felt myself a changed girl. A strange melancholy was stealing over me, a melancholy that I would not have interrupted. Dim thoughts of death began to open, and an idea that I was slowly sinking took gentle, and, somehow, not unwelcome, possession of me. If it was sad, the tone of mind which this induced was also sweet.

Whatever it might be, my soul acquiesced in it.

I would not admit that I was ill, I would not consent to tell my papa, or to have the doctor sent for.

Carmilla became more devoted to me than ever, and her strange paroxysms of languid adoration more frequent. She used to gloat on me with increasing ardor the more my strength and spirits waned. This always shocked me like a momentary glare of insanity.

Without knowing it, I was now in a pretty advanced stage of the strangest illness under which mortal ever suffered. There was an unaccountable fascination in its earlier symptoms that more than reconciled me to the incapacitating effect of that stage of the malady. This fascination increased for a time, until it reached a certain point, when gradually a sense of the horrible mingled itself with it, deepening, as you shall hear, until it discolored and perverted the whole state of my life.

The first change I experienced was rather agreeable. It was very near the turning point from which began the descent of Avernus.

Certain vague and strange sensations visited me in my sleep. The prevailing one was of that pleasant, peculiar cold thrill which we feel in bathing, when we move against the current of a river. This was soon accompanied by dreams that seemed interminable, and were so vague that I could never recollect their scenery and persons, or any one connected portion of their action. But they left an awful impression, and a sense of exhaustion, as if I had passed through a long period of great mental exertion and danger.

After all these dreams there remained on waking a remembrance of having been in a place very nearly dark, and of having spoken to people whom I could not see; and especially of one clear voice, of a female's, very deep, that spoke as if at a distance, slowly, and producing always the same sensation of indescribable solemnity and fear. Sometimes there came a sensation as if a hand was drawn softly along my cheek and neck. Sometimes it was as if warm lips kissed me, and longer and longer and more lovingly as they reached my throat, but there the caress fixed itself. My heart beat faster, my breathing rose and fell rapidly and full drawn; a sobbing, that rose into a sense of strangulation, supervened, and turned into a dreadful convulsion, in which my senses left me and I became unconscious.

It was now three weeks since the commencement of this unaccountable state.

My sufferings had, during the last week, told upon my appearance. I had grown pale, my eyes were dilated and darkened underneath, and the languor which I had long felt began to display itself in my countenance.

My father asked me often whether I was ill; but, with an obstinacy which now seems to me unaccountable, I persisted in assuring him that I was quite well.

In a sense this was true. I had no pain, I could complain of no bodily derangement. My complaint seemed to be one of the imagination, or the nerves, and, horrible as my sufferings were, I kept them, with a morbid reserve, very nearly to myself.

It could not be that terrible complaint which the peasants called the oupire, for I had now been suffering for three weeks, and they were seldom ill for much more than three days, when death put an end to their miseries.

Carmilla complained of dreams and feverish sensations, but by no means of so alarming a kind as mine. I say that mine were extremely alarming. Had I been capable of comprehending my condition, I would have invoked aid and advice on my knees. The narcotic of an unsuspected influence was acting upon me, and my perceptions were benumbed.

I am going to tell you now of a dream that led immediately to an odd discovery.

One night, instead of the voice I was accustomed to hear in the dark, I heard one, sweet and tender, and at the same time terrible, which said,

"Your mother warns you to beware of the assassin." At the same time a light unexpectedly sprang up, and I saw Carmilla, standing, near the foot of my bed, in her white nightdress, bathed, from her chin to her feet, in one great stain of blood.

I wakened with a shriek, possessed with the one idea that Carmilla was being murdered. I remember springing from my bed, and my next recollection is that of standing on the lobby, crying for help.

Madame and Mademoiselle came scurrying out of their rooms in alarm; a lamp burned always on the lobby, and seeing me, they soon learned the cause of my terror.

I insisted on our knocking at Carmilla's door. Our knocking was unanswered.

It soon became a pounding and an uproar. We shrieked her name, but all was vain.

We all grew frightened, for the door was locked. We hurried back, in panic, to my room. There we rang the bell long and furiously. If my father's room had been at that side of the house, we would have called him up at once to our aid. But, alas! he was quite out of hearing, and to reach him involved an excursion for which we none of us had courage.

Servants, however, soon came running up the stairs; I had got on my dressing gown and slippers meanwhile, and my companions were already similarly furnished. Recognising the voices of the servants on the lobby, we sallied out together; and having renewed, as fruitlessly, our summons at Carmilla’s door, I ordered the men to force the lock. They did so, and we stood, holding our lights aloft, in the doorway, and so stared into the room.

We called her by name; but there was still no reply. We looked round the room. Everything was undisturbed. It was exactly in the state in which I had left it on bidding her good night. But Carmilla was gone.

VIII

Search

At sight of the room, perfectly undisturbed except for our violent entrance, we began to cool a little, and soon recovered our senses sufficiently to dismiss the men. It had struck Mademoiselle that possibly Carmilla had been wakened by the uproar at her door, and in her first panic had jumped from her bed, and hid herself in a press, or behind a curtain, from which she could not, of course, emerge until the majordomo and his myrmidons had withdrawn. We now recommenced our search, and began to call her name again.

It was all to no purpose. Our perplexity and agitation increased. We examined the windows, but they were secured. I implored of Carmilla, if she had concealed herself, to play this cruel trick no longer — to come out and to end our anxieties. It was all useless. I was by this time convinced that she was not in the room, nor in the dressing room, the door of which was still locked on this side. She could not have passed it. I was utterly puzzled. Had Carmilla discovered one of those secret passages which the old housekeeper said were known to exist in the schloss, although the tradition of their exact situation had been lost? A little time would, no doubt, explain all — utterly perplexed as, for the present, we were.

It was past four o'clock, and I preferred passing the remaining hours of darkness in Madame's room. Daylight brought no solution of the difficulty.

The whole household, with my father at its head, was in a state of agitation next morning. Every part of the chateau was searched. The grounds were explored. No trace of the missing lady could be discovered. The stream was about to be dragged; my father was in distraction; what a tale to have to tell the poor girl's mother on her return. I, too, was almost beside myself, though my grief was quite of a different kind.

The morning was passed in alarm and excitement. It was now one o'clock, and still no tidings. I ran up to Carmilla's room, and found her standing at her dressing table. I was astounded. I could not believe my eyes. She beckoned me to her with her pretty finger, in silence. Her face expressed extreme fear.

I ran to her in an ecstasy of joy; I kissed and embraced her again and again. I ran to the bell and rang it vehemently, to bring others to the spot who might at once relieve my father's anxiety.

"Dear Carmilla, what has become of you all this time? We have been in agonies of anxiety about you," I exclaimed. "Where have you been? How did you come back?"

"Last night has been a night of wonders," she said.

"For mercy's sake, explain all you can."

"It was past two last night," she said, "when I went to sleep as usual in my bed, with my doors locked, that of the dressing room, and that opening upon the gallery. My sleep was uninterrupted, and, so far as I know, dreamless; but I woke just now on the sofa in the dressing room there, and I found the door between the rooms open, and the other door forced. How could all this have happened without my being wakened? It must have been accompanied with a great deal of noise, and I am particularly easily wakened; and how could I have been carried out of my bed without my sleep having been interrupted, I whom the slightest stir startles?"

By this time, Madame, Mademoiselle, my father, and a number of the servants were in the room. Carmilla was, of course, overwhelmed with inquiries, congratulations, and welcomes. She had but one story to tell, and seemed the least able of all the party to suggest any way of accounting for what had happened.

My father took a turn up and down the room, thinking. I saw Carmilla's eye follow him for a moment with a sly, dark glance.

When my father had sent the servants away, Mademoiselle having gone in search of a little bottle of valerian and salvolatile, and there being no one now in the room with Carmilla, except my father, Madame, and myself, he came to her thoughtfully, took her hand very kindly, led her to the sofa, and sat down beside her.

"Will you forgive me, my dear, if I risk a conjecture, and ask a question?"

"Who can have a better right?" she said. "Ask what you please, and I will tell you everything. But my story is simply one of bewilderment and darkness. I know absolutely nothing. Put any question you please, but you know, of course, the limitations mamma has placed me under."

"Perfectly, my dear child. I need not approach the topics on which she desires our silence. Now, the marvel of last night consists in your having been removed from your bed and your room, without being wakened, and this removal having occurred apparently while the windows were still secured, and the two doors locked upon the inside. I will tell you my theory and ask you a question."

Carmilla was leaning on her hand dejectedly; Madame and I were listening breathlessly.

"Now, my question is this. Have you ever been suspected of walking in your sleep?"

"Never, since I was very young indeed."

"But you did walk in your sleep when you were young?"

"Yes; I know I did. I have been told so often by my old nurse."

My father smiled and nodded.

"Well, what has happened is this. You got up in your sleep, unlocked the door, not leaving the key, as usual, in the lock, but taking it out and locking it on the outside; you again took the key out, and carried it away with you to some one of the five-and-twenty rooms on this floor, or perhaps upstairs or downstairs. There are so many rooms and closets, so much heavy furniture, and such accumulations of lumber, that it would require a week to search this old house thoroughly. Do you see, now, what I mean?"

"I do, but not all," she answered.

"And how, papa, do you account for her finding herself on the sofa in the dressing room, which we had searched so carefully?"

"She came there after you had searched it, still in her sleep, and at last awoke spontaneously, and was as much surprised to find herself where she was as any one else. I wish all mysteries were as easily and innocently explained as yours, Carmilla," he said, laughing. "And so we may congratulate ourselves on the certainty that the most natural explanation of the occurrence is one that involves no drugging, no tampering with locks, no burglars, or poisoners, or witches — nothing that need alarm Carmilla, or anyone else, for our safety."

Carmilla was looking charmingly. Nothing could be more beautiful than her tints. Her beauty was, I think, enhanced by that graceful languor that was peculiar to her. I think my father was silently contrasting her looks with mine, for he said:

"I wish my poor Laura was looking more like herself"; and he sighed.

So our alarms were happily ended, and Carmilla restored to her friends.

IX

The Doctor

As Carmilla would not hear of an attendant sleeping in her room, my father arranged that a servant should sleep outside her door, so that she would not attempt to make another such excursion without being arrested at her own door.

That night passed quietly; and next morning early, the doctor, whom my father had sent for without telling me a word about it, arrived to see me.

Madame accompanied me to the library; and there the grave little doctor, with white hair and spectacles, whom I mentioned before, was waiting to receive me.

I told him my story, and as I proceeded he grew graver and graver.

We were standing, he and I, in the recess of one of the windows, facing one another. When my statement was over, he leaned with his shoulders against the wall, and with his eyes fixed on me earnestly, with an interest in which was a dash of horror.

After a minute's reflection, he asked Madame if he could see my father.

He was sent for accordingly, and as he entered, smiling, he said:

"I dare say, doctor, you are going to tell me that I am an old fool for having brought you here; I hope I am."

But his smile faded into shadow as the doctor, with a very grave face, beckoned him to him.

He and the doctor talked for some time in the same recess where I had just conferred with the physician. It seemed an earnest and argumentative conversation. The room is very large, and I and Madame stood together, burning with curiosity, at the farther end. Not a word could we hear, however, for they spoke in a very low tone, and the deep recess of the window quite concealed the doctor from view, and very nearly my father, whose foot, arm, and shoulder only could we see; and the voices were, I suppose, all the less audible for the sort of closet which the thick wall and window formed.

After a time my father's face looked into the room; it was pale, thoughtful, and, I fancied, agitated.

"Laura, dear, come here for a moment. Madame, we shan't trouble you, the doctor says, at present."

Accordingly I approached, for the first time a little alarmed; for, although I felt very weak, I did not feel ill; and strength, one always fancies, is a thing that may be picked up when we please.

My father held out his hand to me, as I drew near, but he was looking at the doctor, and he said:

"It certainly is very odd; I don't understand it quite. Laura, come here, dear; now attend to Doctor Spielsberg, and recollect yourself."

"You mentioned a sensation like that of two needles piercing the skin, somewhere about your neck, on the night when you experienced your first horrible dream. Is there still any soreness?"

"None at all," I answered.

"Can you indicate with your finger about the point at which you think this occurred?"

"Very little below my throat — here," I answered.

I wore a morning dress, which covered the place I pointed to.

"Now you can satisfy yourself," said the doctor. "You won't mind your papa's lowering your dress a very little. It is necessary, to detect a symptom of the complaint under which you have been suffering."

I acquiesced. It was only an inch or two below the edge of my collar.

“God bless me! — so it is,” exclaimed my father, growing pale.

“You see it now with your own eyes,” said the doctor, with a gloomy triumph.

“What is it?” I exclaimed, beginning to be frightened.

“Nothing, my dear young lady, but a small blue spot, about the size of the tip of your little finger; and now,” he continued, turning to papa, “the question is what is best to be done?”

Is there any danger?”I urged, in great trepidation.

“I trust not, my dear,” answered the doctor. “I don’t see why you should not recover. I don’t see why you should not begin immediately to get better. That is the point at which the sense of strangulation begins?”

“Yes,” I answered.

“And — recollect as well as you can — the same point was a kind of center of that thrill which you described just now, like the current of a cold stream running against you?”

“It may have been; I think it was.”

“Ay, you see?” he added, turning to my father. “Shall I say a word to Madame?”

“Certainly,” said my father.

He called Madame to him, and said:

“I find my young friend here far from well. It won’t be of any great consequence, I hope; but it will be necessary that some steps be taken, which I will explain by-and-by; but in the meantime, Madame, you will be so good as not to let Miss Laura be alone for one moment. That is the only direction I need give for the present. It is indispensable.”

“We may rely upon your kindness, Madame, I know,” added my father.

Madame satisfied him eagerly.

“And you, dear Laura, I know you will observe the doctor’s direction.”

“I shall have to ask your opinion upon another patient, whose symptoms slightly resemble those of my daughter, that have just been detailed to you — very much milder in degree, but I believe quite of the same sort. She is a young lady — our guest; but as you say you will be passing this way again this evening, you can’t do better than take your supper here, and you can then see her. She does not come down till the afternoon.”

“I thank you,” said the doctor. “I shall be with you, then, at about seven this evening.”

And then they repeated their directions to me and to Madame, and with this parting charge my father left us, and walked out with the doctor; and I saw them pacing together up and down between the road and the moat, on the grassy platform in front of the castle, evidently absorbed in earnest conversation.

The doctor did not return. I saw him mount his horse there, take his leave, and ride away eastward through the forest.

Nearly at the same time I saw the man arrive from Dranfield with the letters, and dismount and hand the bag to my father.

In the meantime, Madame and I were both busy, lost in conjecture as to the reasons of the singular and earnest direction which the doctor and my father had concurred in imposing. Madame, as she afterwards told me, was afraid the doctor apprehended a sudden seizure, and that, without prompt assistance, I might either lose my life in a fit, or at least be seriously hurt.

The interpretation did not strike me; and I fancied, perhaps luckily for my nerves, that the arrangement was prescribed simply to secure a companion, who would prevent my taking too much exercise, or eating unripe fruit, or doing any of the fifty foolish things to which young people are supposed to be prone.

About half an hour after my father came in — he had a letter in his hand — and said:

“This letter had been delayed; it is from General Spielsdorf. He might have been here yesterday, he may not come till tomorrow or he may be here today.”

He put the open letter into my hand; but he did not look pleased, as he used when a guest, especially one so much loved as the General, was coming.

On the contrary, he looked as if he wished him at the bottom of the Red Sea. There was plainly something on his mind which he did not choose to divulge.

“Papa, darling, will you tell me this?” said I, suddenly laying my hand on his arm, and looking, I am sure, imploringly in his face.

“Perhaps,” he answered, smoothing my hair caressingly over my eyes.

“Does the doctor think me very ill?”

“No, dear; he thinks, if right steps are taken, you will be quite well again, at least, on the high road to a complete recovery, in a day or two,” he answered, a little dryly. “I wish our good friend, the General, had chosen any other time; that is, I wish you had been perfectly well to receive him.”

“But do tell me, papa,” I insisted, “what does he think is the matter with me?”

“Nothing; you must not plague me with questions,” he answered, with more irritation than I ever remember him to have displayed before; and seeing that I looked wounded, I suppose, he kissed me, and added, “You shall know all about it in a day or two; that is, all that I know. In the meantime you are not to trouble your head about it.”

He turned and left the room, but came back before I had done wondering and puzzling over the oddity of all this; it was merely to say that he was going to Karnstein, and had ordered the carriage to be ready at twelve, and that I and Madame should accompany him; he was going to see the priest who lived near those picturesque grounds, upon business, and as Carmilla had never seen them, she could follow, when she came down, with Mademoiselle, who would bring materials for what you call a picnic, which might be laid for us in the ruined castle.

At twelve o’clock, accordingly, I was ready, and not long after, my father, Madame and I set out upon our projected drive.

Passing the drawbridge we turn to the right, and follow the road over the steep Gothic bridge, westward, to reach the deserted village and ruined castle of Karnstein.

No sylvan drive can be fancied prettier. The ground breaks into gentle hills and hollows, all clothed with beautiful wood, totally destitute of the comparative formality which artificial planting and early culture and pruning impart.

The irregularities of the ground often lead the road out of its course, and cause it to wind beautifully round the sides of broken hollows and the steeper sides of the hills, among varieties of ground almost inexhaustible.

Turning one of these points, we suddenly encountered our old friend, the General, riding towards us, attended by a mounted servant. His portmanteaus were following in a hired wagon, such as we term a cart.

The General dismounted as we pulled up, and, after the usual greetings, was easily persuaded to accept the vacant seat in the carriage and send his horse on with his servant to the schloss.

X

Bereaved

It was about ten months since we had last seen him: but that time had sufficed to make an alteration of years in his appearance. He had grown thinner; something of gloom and anxiety had taken the place of that cordial serenity which used to characterize his features. His dark blue eyes, always penetrating, now gleamed with a sterner light from under his shaggy grey eyebrows. It was not such a change as grief alone usually induces, and angrier passions seemed to have had their share in bringing it about.

We had not long resumed our drive, when the General began to talk, with his usual soldierly directness, of the bereavement, as he termed it, which he had sustained in the death of his beloved niece and ward; and he then broke out in a tone of intense bitterness and fury, inveighing against the "hellish arts" to which she had fallen a victim, and expressing, with more exasperation than piety, his wonder that Heaven should tolerate so monstrous an indulgence of the lusts and malignity of hell.

My father, who saw at once that something very extraordinary had befallen, asked him, if not too painful to him, to detail the circumstances which he thought justified the strong terms in which he expressed himself.

"I should tell you all with pleasure," said the General, "but you would not believe me."

"Why should I not?" he asked.

"Because," he answered testily, "you believe in nothing but what consists with your own prejudices and illusions. I remember when I was like you, but I have learned better."

"Try me," said my father; "I am not such a dogmatist as you suppose.

Besides which, I very well know that you generally require proof for what you believe, and am, therefore, very strongly predisposed to respect your conclusions."

"You are right in supposing that I have not been led lightly into a belief in the marvelous — for what I have experienced is marvelous — and I have been forced by extraordinary evidence to credit that which ran counter, diametrically, to all my theories. I have been made the dupe of a preternatural conspiracy."

Notwithstanding his professions of confidence in the General's penetration, I saw my father, at this point, glance at the General, with, as I thought, a marked suspicion of his sanity.

The General did not see it, luckily. He was looking gloomily and curiously into the glades and vistas of the woods that were opening before us.

"You are going to the Ruins of Karnstein?" he said. "Yes, it is a lucky coincidence; do you know I was going to ask you to bring me there to inspect them. I have a special object in exploring. There is a ruined chapel, ain't there, with a great many tombs of that extinct family?"

"So there are — highly interesting," said my father. "I hope you are thinking of claiming the title and estates?"

My father said this gaily, but the General did not recollect the laugh, or even the smile, which courtesy exacts for a friend's joke; on the contrary, he looked grave and even fierce, ruminating on a matter that stirred his anger and horror.

"Something very different," he said, gruffly. "I mean to unearth some of those fine people. I hope, by God's blessing, to accomplish a pious sacrilege here, which will relieve our earth of certain monsters, and enable honest people to sleep in their beds without being assailed by murderers. I have strange things to tell you, my dear friend, such as I myself would have scouted as incredible a few months since."

My father looked at him again, but this time not with a glance of suspicion — with an eye, rather, of keen intelligence and alarm.

"The house of Karnstein," he said, "has been long extinct: a hundred years at least. My dear wife was maternally descended from the Karnsteins. But the name and title have long ceased to exist. The castle is a ruin; the very village is deserted; it is fifty years since the smoke of a chimney was seen there; not a roof left."

"Quite true. I have heard a great deal about that since I last saw you; a great deal that will astonish you. But I had better relate everything in the order in which it occurred," said the General. "You saw my dear ward — my child, I may call her. No creature could have been more beautiful, and only three months ago none more blooming."

"Yes, poor thing! when I saw her last she certainly was quite lovely," said my father. "I was grieved and shocked more than I can tell you, my dear friend; I knew what a blow it was to you."

He took the General's hand, and they exchanged a kind pressure. Tears gathered in the old soldier's eyes. He did not seek to conceal them. He said:

"We have been very old friends; I knew you would feel for me, childless as I am. She had become an object of very near interest to me, and repaid my care by an affection that cheered my home and made my life happy. That is all gone. The years that remain to me on earth may not be very long; but by God's mercy I hope to accomplish a service to mankind before I die, and to subserve the vengeance of Heaven upon the fiends who have murdered my poor child in the spring of her hopes and beauty!”

“You said, just now, that you intended relating everything as it occurred,” said my father. “Pray do; I assure you that it is not mere curiosity that prompts me.”

By this time we had reached the point at which the Drunstall road, by which the General had come, diverges from the road which we were traveling to Karnstein.

“How far is it to the ruins?” inquired the General, looking anxiously forward.

“About half a league,” answered my father. “Pray let us hear the story you were so good as to promise.”

XI

The Story

With all my heart," said the General, with an effort; and after a short pause in which to arrange his subject, he commenced one of the strangest narratives I ever heard.

"My dear child was looking forward with great pleasure to the visit you had been so good as to arrange for her to your charming daughter." Here he made me a gallant but melancholy bow. "In the meantime we had an invitation to my old friend the Count Carlsfeld, whose schloss is about six leagues to the other side of Karnstein. It was to attend the series of fetes which, you remember, were given by him in honor of his illustrious visitor, the Grand Duke Charles."

"Yes; and very splendid, I believe, they were," said my father.

"Princely! But then his hospitalities are quite regal. He has Aladdin's lamp. The night from which my sorrow dates was devoted to a magnificent masquerade. The grounds were thrown open, the trees hung with coloured lamps. There was such a display of fireworks as Paris itself had never witnessed. And such music — music, you know, is my weakness — such ravishing music! The finest instrumental band, perhaps, in the world, and the finest singers who could be collected from all the great operas in Europe. As you wandered through these fantastically illuminated grounds, the moon-lighted chateau throwing a rosy light from its long rows of windows, you would suddenly hear these ravishing voices stealing from the silence of some grove, or rising from boats upon the lake. I felt myself, as I looked and listened, carried back into the romance and poetry of my early youth.

“When the fireworks were ended, and the ball beginning, we returned to the noble suite of rooms that were thrown open to the dancers. A masked ball, you know, is a beautiful sight; but so brilliant a spectacle of the kind I never saw before.

“It was a very aristocratic assembly. I was myself almost the only ‘nobody’ present.

“My dear child was looking quite beautiful. She wore no mask. Her excitement and delight added an unspeakable charm to her features, always lovely. I remarked a young lady, dressed magnificently, but wearing a mask, who appeared to me to be observing my ward with extraordinary interest. I had seen her, earlier in the evening, in the great hall, and again, for a few minutes, walking near us, on the terrace under the castle windows, similarly employed. A lady, also masked, richly and gravely dressed, and with a stately air, like a person of rank, accompanied her as a chaperon.

Had the young lady not worn a mask, I could, of course, have been much more certain upon the question whether she was really watching my poor darling.

I am now well assured that she was.

“We were now in one of the salons. My poor dear child had been dancing, and was resting a little in one of the chairs near the door; I was standing near. The two ladies I have mentioned had approached and the younger took the chair next my ward; while her companion stood beside me, and for a little time addressed herself, in a low tone, to her charge.

“Availing herself of the privilege of her mask, she turned to me, and in the tone of an old friend, and calling me by my name, opened a conversation with me, which piqued my curiosity a good deal. She referred to many scenes where she had met me — at Court, and at distinguished houses. She alluded to little incidents which I had long ceased to think of, but which, I found, had only lain in abeyance in my memory, for they instantly started into life at her touch.

"I became more and more curious to ascertain who she was, every moment. She parried my attempts to discover very adroitly and pleasantly. The knowledge she showed of many passages in my life seemed to me all but unaccountable; and she appeared to take a not unnatural pleasure in foiling my curiosity, and in seeing me flounder in my eager perplexity, from one conjecture to another.

"In the meantime the young lady, whom her mother called by the odd name of Millarca, when she once or twice addressed her, had, with the same ease and grace, got into conversation with my ward.

"She introduced herself by saying that her mother was a very old acquaintance of mine. She spoke of the agreeable audacity which a mask rendered practicable; she talked like a friend; she admired her dress, and insinuated very prettily her admiration of her beauty. She amused her with laughing criticisms upon the people who crowded the ballroom, and laughed at my poor child's fun. She was very witty and lively when she pleased, and after a time they had grown very good friends, and the young stranger lowered her mask, displaying a remarkably beautiful face. I had never seen it before, neither had my dear child. But though it was new to us, the features were so engaging, as well as lovely, that it was impossible not to feel the attraction powerfully. My poor girl did so. I never saw anyone more taken with another at first sight, unless, indeed, it was the stranger herself, who seemed quite to have lost her heart to her.

"In the meantime, availing myself of the license of a masquerade, I put not a few questions to the elder lady.

"'You have puzzled me utterly,' I said, laughing. 'Is that not enough?

Won’t you, now, consent to stand on equal terms, and do me the kindness to remove your mask?’

“‘Can any request be more unreasonable?’ she replied. ‘Ask a lady to yield an advantage! Beside, how do you know you should recognise me? Years make changes.’

“‘As you see,’ I said, with a bow, and, I suppose, a rather melancholy little laugh.

“‘As philosophers tell us,’ she said; ‘and how do you know that a sight of my face would help you?’

“‘I should take chance for that,’ I answered. ‘It is vain trying to make yourself out an old woman; your figure betrays you.’

“‘Years, nevertheless, have passed since I saw you, rather since you saw me, for that is what I am considering. Millarca, there, is my daughter; I cannot then be young, even in the opinion of people whom time has taught to be indulgent, and I may not like to be compared with what you remember me.

You have no mask to remove. You can offer me nothing in exchange.’

“‘My petition is to your pity, to remove it.’

“‘And mine to yours, to let it stay where it is,’ she replied.

“‘Well, then, at least you will tell me whether you are French or German; you speak both languages so perfectly.’

“‘I don’t think I shall tell you that, General; you intend a surprise, and are meditating the particular point of attack.’

“‘At all events, you won’t deny this,’ I said, ‘that being honored by your permission to converse, I ought to know how to address you. Shall I say Madame la Comtesse?’

“She laughed, and she would, no doubt, have met me with another evasion — if, indeed, I can treat any occurrence in an interview every circumstance of which was prearranged, as I now believe, with the profoundest cunning, as liable to be modified by accident.

"'As to that,' she began; but she was interrupted, almost as she opened her lips, by a gentleman, dressed in black, who looked particularly elegant and distinguished, with this drawback, that his face was the most deadly pale I ever saw, except in death. He was in no masquerade — in the plain evening dress of a gentleman; and he said, without a smile, but with a courtly and unusually low bow: —

"'Will Madame la Comtesse permit me to say a very few words which may interest her?'

"The lady turned quickly to him, and touched her lip in token of silence; she then said to me, 'Keep my place for me, General; I shall return when I have said a few words.'

"And with this injunction, playfully given, she walked a little aside with the gentleman in black, and talked for some minutes, apparently very earnestly. They then walked away slowly together in the crowd, and I lost them for some minutes.

"I spent the interval in cudgeling my brains for a conjecture as to the identity of the lady who seemed to remember me so kindly, and I was thinking of turning about and joining in the conversation between my pretty ward and the Countess's daughter, and trying whether, by the time she returned, I might not have a surprise in store for her, by having her name, title, chateau, and estates at my fingers' ends. But at this moment she returned, accompanied by the pale man in black, who said:

"'I shall return and inform Madame la Comtesse when her carriage is at the door.'

"He withdrew with a bow."

XII

A Petition

"'Then we are to lose Madame la Comtesse, but I hope only for a few hours,' I said, with a low bow.

"'It may be that only, or it may be a few weeks. It was very unlucky his speaking to me just now as he did. Do you now know me?'

"I assured her I did not.

"'You shall know me,' she said, 'but not at present. We are older and better friends than, perhaps, you suspect. I cannot yet declare myself. I shall in three weeks pass your beautiful schloss, about which I have been making enquiries. I shall then look in upon you for an hour or two, and renew a friendship which I never think of without a thousand pleasant recollections. This moment a piece of news has reached me like a thunderbolt. I must set out now, and travel by a devious route, nearly a hundred miles, with all the dispatch I can possibly make. My perplexities multiply. I am only deterred by the compulsory reserve I practice as to my name from making a very singular request of you. My poor child has not quite recovered her strength. Her horse fell with her, at a hunt which she had ridden out to witness, her nerves have not yet recovered the shock, and our physician says that she must on no account exert herself for some time to come. We came here, in consequence, by very easy stages — hardly six leagues a day. I must now travel day and night, on a mission of life and death — a mission the critical and momentous nature of which I shall be able to explain to you when we meet, as I hope we shall, in a few weeks, without the necessity of any concealment.’

“She went on to make her petition, and it was in the tone of a person from whom such a request amounted to conferring, rather than seeking a favor.

This was only in manner, and, as it seemed, quite unconsciously. Than the terms in which it was expressed, nothing could be more deprecatory. It was simply that I would consent to take charge of her daughter during her absence.

“This was, all things considered, a strange, not to say, an audacious request. She in some sort disarmed me, by stating and admitting everything that could be urged against it, and throwing herself entirely upon my chivalry. At the same moment, by a fatality that seems to have predetermined all that happened, my poor child came to my side, and, in an undertone, besought me to invite her new friend, Millarca, to pay us a visit. She had just been sounding her, and thought, if her mamma would allow her, she would like it extremely.

“At another time I should have told her to wait a little, until, at least, we knew who they were. But I had not a moment to think in. The two ladies assailed me together, and I must confess the refined and beautiful face of the young lady, about which there was something extremely engaging, as well as the elegance and fire of high birth, determined me; and, quite overpowered, I submitted, and undertook, too easily, the care of the young lady, whom her mother called Millarca.

“The Countess beckoned to her daughter, who listened with grave attention while she told her, in general terms, how suddenly and peremptorily she had been summoned, and also of the arrangement she had made for her under my care, adding that I was one of her earliest and most valued friends.

“I made, of course, such speeches as the case seemed to call for, and found myself, on reflection, in a position which I did not half like.

“The gentleman in black returned, and very ceremoniously conducted the lady from the room.

“The demeanor of this gentleman was such as to impress me with the conviction that the Countess was a lady of very much more importance than her modest title alone might have led me to assume.

“Her last charge to me was that no attempt was to be made to learn more about her than I might have already guessed, until her return. Our distinguished host, whose guest she was, knew her reasons.

“‘But here,’ she said, ‘neither I nor my daughter could safely remain for more than a day. I removed my mask imprudently for a moment, about an hour ago, and, too late, I fancied you saw me. So I resolved to seek an opportunity of talking a little to you. Had I found that you had seen me, I would have thrown myself on your high sense of honor to keep my secret some weeks. As it is, I am satisfied that you did not see me; but if you now suspect, or, on reflection, should suspect, who I am, I commit myself, in like manner, entirely to your honor. My daughter will observe the same secrecy, and I well know that you will, from time to time, remind her, lest she should thoughtlessly disclose it.’

“She whispered a few words to her daughter, kissed her hurriedly twice, and went away, accompanied by the pale gentleman in black, and disappeared in the crowd.

“‘In the next room,’ said Millarca, ‘there is a window that looks upon the hall door. I should like to see the last of mamma, and to kiss my hand to her.’

“We assented, of course, and accompanied her to the window. We looked out, and saw a handsome old-fashioned carriage, with a troop of couriers and footmen. We saw the slim figure of the pale gentleman in black, as he held a thick velvet cloak, and placed it about her shoulders and threw the hood over her head. She nodded to him, and just touched his hand with hers. He bowed low repeatedly as the door closed, and the carriage began to move.

“‘She is gone,’ said Millarca, with a sigh.

“‘She is gone,’ I repeated to myself, for the first time — in the hurried moments that had elapsed since my consent — reflecting upon the folly of my act.

“‘She did not look up,’ said the young lady, plaintively.

“‘The Countess had taken off her mask, perhaps, and did not care to show her face,’ I said; ‘and she could not know that you were in the window.’

“She sighed, and looked in my face. She was so beautiful that I relented. I was sorry I had for a moment repented of my hospitality, and I determined to make her amends for the unavowed churlishness of my reception.

“The young lady, replacing her mask, joined my ward in persuading me to return to the grounds, where the concert was soon to be renewed. We did so, and walked up and down the terrace that lies under the castle windows.

Millarca became very intimate with us, and amused us with lively descriptions and stories of most of the great people whom we saw upon the terrace. I liked her more and more every minute. Her gossip without being ill-natured, was extremely diverting to me, who had been so long out of the great world. I thought what life she would give to our sometimes lonely evenings at home.

"This ball was not over until the morning sun had almost reached the horizon. It pleased the Grand Duke to dance till then, so loyal people could not go away, or think of bed.

"We had just got through a crowded saloon, when my ward asked me what had become of Millarca. I thought she had been by her side, and she fancied she was by mine. The fact was, we had lost her.

"All my efforts to find her were vain. I feared that she had mistaken, in the confusion of a momentary separation from us, other people for her new friends, and had, possibly, pursued and lost them in the extensive grounds which were thrown open to us.

"Now, in its full force, I recognised a new folly in my having undertaken the charge of a young lady without so much as knowing her name; and fettered as I was by promises, of the reasons for imposing which I knew nothing, I could not even point my inquiries by saying that the missing young lady was the daughter of the Countess who had taken her departure a few hours before.

"Morning broke. It was clear daylight before I gave up my search. It was not till near two o'clock next day that we heard anything of my missing charge.

"At about that time a servant knocked at my niece's door, to say that he had been earnestly requested by a young lady, who appeared to be in great distress, to make out where she could find the General Baron Spielsdorf and the young lady his daughter, in whose charge she had been left by her mother.

"There could be no doubt, notwithstanding the slight inaccuracy, that our young friend had turned up; and so she had. Would to heaven we had lost her!

"She told my poor child a story to account for her having failed to recover us for so long. Very late, she said, she had got to the housekeeper's bedroom in despair of finding us, and had then fallen into a deep sleep which, long as it was, had hardly sufficed to recruit her strength after the fatigues of the ball.

"That day Millarca came home with us. I was only too happy, after all, to have secured so charming a companion for my dear girl."

XIII

The Woodman

“There soon, however, appeared some drawbacks. In the first place, Millarca complained of extreme languor — the weakness that remained after her late illness — and she never emerged from her room till the afternoon was pretty far advanced. In the next place, it was accidentally discovered, although she always locked her door on the inside, and never disturbed the key from its place till she admitted the maid to assist at her toilet, that she was undoubtedly sometimes absent from her room in the very early morning, and at various times later in the day, before she wished it to be understood that she was stirring. She was repeatedly seen from the windows of the schloss, in the first faint grey of the morning, walking through the trees, in an easterly direction, and looking like a person in a trance. This convinced me that she walked in her sleep. But this hypothesis did not solve the puzzle. How did she pass out from her room, leaving the door locked on the inside? How did she escape from the house without unbarring door or window?

“In the midst of my perplexities, an anxiety of a far more urgent kind presented itself.

“My dear child began to lose her looks and health, and that in a manner so mysterious, and even horrible, that I became thoroughly frightened.

“She was at first visited by appalling dreams; then, as she fancied, by a specter, sometimes resembling Millarca, sometimes in the shape of a beast, indistinctly seen, walking round the foot of her bed, from side to side.

Lastly came sensations. One, not unpleasant, but very peculiar, she said, resembled the flow of an icy stream against her breast. At a later time, she felt something like a pair of large needles pierce her, a little below the throat, with a very sharp pain. A few nights after, followed a gradual and convulsive sense of strangulation; then came unconsciousness."

I could hear distinctly every word the kind old General was saying, because by this time we were driving upon the short grass that spreads on either side of the road as you approach the roofless village which had not shown the smoke of a chimney for more than half a century.

You may guess how strangely I felt as I heard my own symptoms so exactly described in those which had been experienced by the poor girl who, but for the catastrophe which followed, would have been at that moment a visitor at my father's chateau. You may suppose, also, how I felt as I heard him detail habits and mysterious peculiarities which were, in fact, those of our beautiful guest, Carmilla!

A vista opened in the forest; we were on a sudden under the chimneys and gables of the ruined village, and the towers and battlements of the dismantled castle, round which gigantic trees are grouped, overhung us from a slight eminence.

In a frightened dream I got down from the carriage, and in silence, for we had each abundant matter for thinking; we soon mounted the ascent, and were among the spacious chambers, winding stairs, and dark corridors of the castle.

"And this was once the palatial residence of the Karnsteins!" said the old General at length, as from a great window he looked out across the village, and saw the wide, undulating expanse of forest. "It was a bad family, and here its bloodstained annals were written," he continued. "It is hard that they should, after death, continue to plague the human race with their atrocious lusts. That is the chapel of the Karnsteins, down there."

He pointed down to the grey walls of the Gothic building partly visible through the foliage, a little way down the steep. "And I hear the axe of a woodman," he added, "busy among the trees that surround it; he possibly may give us the information of which I am in search, and point out the grave of Mircalla, Countess of Karnstein. These rustics preserve the local traditions of great families, whose stories die out among the rich and titled so soon as the families themselves become extinct."

"We have a portrait, at home, of Mircalla, the Countess Karnstein; should you like to see it?" asked my father.

"Time enough, dear friend," replied the General. "I believe that I have seen the original; and one motive which has led me to you earlier than I at first intended, was to explore the chapel which we are now approaching."

"What! see the Countess Mircalla," exclaimed my father; "why, she has been dead more than a century!"

"Not so dead as you fancy, I am told," answered the General.

"I confess, General, you puzzle me utterly," replied my father, looking at him, I fancied, for a moment with a return of the suspicion I detected before. But although there was anger and detestation, at times, in the old General's manner, there was nothing flighty.

"There remains to me," he said, as we passed under the heavy arch of the Gothic church — for its dimensions would have justified its being so styled— "but one object which can interest me during the few years that remain to me on earth, and that is to wreak on her the vengeance which, I thank God, may still be accomplished by a mortal arm."

"What vengeance can you mean?" asked my father, in increasing amazement.

"I mean, to decapitate the monster," he answered, with a fierce flush, and a stamp that echoed mournfully through the hollow ruin, and his clenched hand was at the same moment raised, as if it grasped the handle of an axe, while he shook it ferociously in the air.

"What?" exclaimed my father, more than ever bewildered.

"To strike her head off."

"Cut her head off!"

"Aye, with a hatchet, with a spade, or with anything that can cleave through her murderous throat. You shall hear," he answered, trembling with rage. And hurrying forward he said:

"That beam will answer for a seat; your dear child is fatigued; let her be seated, and I will, in a few sentences, close my dreadful story."

The squared block of wood, which lay on the grass-grown pavement of the chapel, formed a bench on which I was very glad to seat myself, and in the meantime the General called to the woodman, who had been removing some boughs which leaned upon the old walls; and, axe in hand, the hardy old fellow stood before us.

He could not tell us anything of these monuments; but there was an old man, he said, a ranger of this forest, at present sojourning in the house of the priest, about two miles away, who could point out every monument of the old Karnstein family; and, for a trifle, he undertook to bring him back with him, if we would lend him one of our horses, in little more than half an hour.

"Have you been long employed about this forest?" asked my father of the old man.

“I have been a woodman here,” he answered in his patois, “under the forester, all my days; so has my father before me, and so on, as many generations as I can count up. I could show you the very house in the village here, in which my ancestors lived.”

“How came the village to be deserted?” asked the General.

“It was troubled by revenants, sir; several were tracked to their graves, there detected by the usual tests, and extinguished in the usual way, by decapitation, by the stake, and by burning; but not until many of the villagers were killed.

“But after all these proceedings according to law,” he continued—“so many graves opened, and so many vampires deprived of their horrible animation — the village was not relieved. But a Moravian nobleman, who happened to be traveling this way, heard how matters were, and being skilled — as many people are in his country — in such affairs, he offered to deliver the village from its tormentor. He did so thus: There being a bright moon that night, he ascended, shortly after sunset, the towers of the chapel here, from whence he could distinctly see the churchyard beneath him; you can see it from that window. From this point he watched until he saw the vampire come out of his grave, and place near it the linen clothes in which he had been folded, and then glide away towards the village to plague its inhabitants.

“The stranger, having seen all this, came down from the steeple, took the linen wrappings of the vampire, and carried them up to the top of the tower, which he again mounted. When the vampire returned from his prowlings and missed his clothes, he cried furiously to the Moravian, whom he saw at the summit of the tower, and who, in reply, beckoned him to ascend and take them.

Whereupon the vampire, accepting his invitation, began to climb the steeple, and so soon as he had reached the battlements, the Moravian, with a stroke of his sword, clove his skull in twain, hurling him down to the churchyard, whither, descending by the winding stairs, the stranger followed and cut his head off, and next day delivered it and the body to the villagers, who duly impaled and burnt them.

"This Moravian nobleman had authority from the then head of the family to remove the tomb of Mircalla, Countess Karnstein, which he did effectually, so that in a little while its site was quite forgotten."

"Can you point out where it stood?" asked the General, eagerly.

The forester shook his head, and smiled.

"Not a soul living could tell you that now," he said; "besides, they say her body was removed; but no one is sure of that either."

Having thus spoken, as time pressed, he dropped his axe and departed, leaving us to hear the remainder of the General's strange story.

XIV

The Meeting

“My beloved child,” he resumed, “was now growing rapidly worse. The physician who attended her had failed to produce the slightest impression on her disease, for such I then supposed it to be. He saw my alarm, and suggested a consultation. I called in an abler physician, from Gratz.

Several days elapsed before he arrived. He was a good and pious, as well as a learned man. Having seen my poor ward together, they withdrew to my library to confer and discuss. I, from the adjoining room, where I awaited their summons, heard these two gentlemen’s voices raised in something sharper than a strictly philosophical discussion. I knocked at the door and entered. I found the old physician from Gratz maintaining his theory. His rival was combating it with undisguised ridicule, accompanied with bursts of laughter. This unseemly manifestation subsided and the altercation ended on my entrance.

“‘Sir,’ said my first physician,’my learned brother seems to think that you want a conjuror, and not a doctor.’

“‘Pardon me,’ said the old physician from Gratz, looking displeased, ‘I shall state my own view of the case in my own way another time. I grieve, Monsieur le General, that by my skill and science I can be of no use.

Before I go I shall do myself the honor to suggest something to you.’

“He seemed thoughtful, and sat down at a table and began to write.

Profoundly disappointed, I made my bow, and as I turned to go, the other doctor pointed over his shoulder to his companion who was writing, and then, with a shrug, significantly touched his forehead.

"This consultation, then, left me precisely where I was. I walked out into the grounds, all but distracted. The doctor from Gratz, in ten or fifteen minutes, overtook me. He apologized for having followed me, but said that he could not conscientiously take his leave without a few words more. He told me that he could not be mistaken; no natural disease exhibited the same symptoms; and that death was already very near. There remained, however, a day, or possibly two, of life. If the fatal seizure were at once arrested, with great care and skill her strength might possibly return. But all hung now upon the confines of the irrevocable. One more assault might extinguish the last spark of vitality which is, every moment, ready to die.

"'And what is the nature of the seizure you speak of?' I entreated.

"'I have stated all fully in this note, which I place in your hands upon the distinct condition that you send for the nearest clergyman, and open my letter in his presence, and on no account read it till he is with you; you would despise it else, and it is a matter of life and death. Should the priest fail you, then, indeed, you may read it.'

"He asked me, before taking his leave finally, whether I would wish to see a man curiously learned upon the very subject, which, after I had read his letter, would probably interest me above all others, and he urged me earnestly to invite him to visit him there; and so took his leave.

"The ecclesiastic was absent, and I read the letter by myself. At another time, or in another case, it might have excited my ridicule. But into what quackeries will not people rush for a last chance, where all accustomed means have failed, and the life of a beloved object is at stake?

“Nothing, you will say, could be more absurd than the learned man’s letter.

It was monstrous enough to have consigned him to a madhouse. He said that the patient was suffering from the visits of a vampire! The punctures which she described as having occurred near the throat, were, he insisted, the insertion of those two long, thin, and sharp teeth which, it is well known, are peculiar to vampires; and there could be no doubt, he added, as to the well-defined presence of the small livid mark which all concurred in describing as that induced by the demon’s lips, and every symptom described by the sufferer was in exact conformity with those recorded in every case of a similar visitation.

“Being myself wholly skeptical as to the existence of any such portent as the vampire, the supernatural theory of the good doctor furnished, in my opinion, but another instance of learning and intelligence oddly associated with some one hallucination. I was so miserable, however, that, rather than try nothing, I acted upon the instructions of the letter.

“I concealed myself in the dark dressing room, that opened upon the poor patient’s room, in which a candle was burning, and watched there till she was fast asleep. I stood at the door, peeping through the small crevice, my sword laid on the table beside me, as my directions prescribed, until, a little after one, I saw a large black object, very ill-defined, crawl, as it seemed to me, over the foot of the bed, and swiftly spread itself up to the poor girl’s throat, where it swelled, in a moment, into a great, palpitating mass.

“For a few moments I had stood petrified. I now sprang forward, with my sword in my hand. The black creature suddenly contracted towards the foot of the bed, glided over it, and, standing on the floor about a yard below the foot of the bed, with a glare of skulking ferocity and horror fixed on me, I saw Millarca. Speculating I know not what, I struck at her instantly with my sword; but I saw her standing near the door, unscathed. Horrified, I pursued, and struck again. She was gone; and my sword flew to shivers against the door.

"I can't describe to you all that passed on that horrible night. The whole house was up and stirring. The specter Millarca was gone. But her victim was sinking fast, and before the morning dawned, she died."

The old General was agitated. We did not speak to him. My father walked to some little distance, and began reading the inscriptions on the tombstones; and thus occupied, he strolled into the door of a side chapel to prosecute his researches. The General leaned against the wall, dried his eyes, and sighed heavily. I was relieved on hearing the voices of Carmilla and Madame, who were at that moment approaching. The voices died away.

In this solitude, having just listened to so strange a story, connected, as it was, with the great and titled dead, whose monuments were moldering among the dust and ivy round us, and every incident of which bore so awfully upon my own mysterious case — in this haunted spot, darkened by the towering foliage that rose on every side, dense and high above its noiseless walls — a horror began to steal over me, and my heart sank as I thought that my friends were, after all, not about to enter and disturb this triste and ominous scene.

The old General's eyes were fixed on the ground, as he leaned with his hand upon the basement of a shattered monument.

Under a narrow, arched doorway, surmounted by one of those demoniacal grotesques in which the cynical and ghastly fancy of old Gothic carving delights, I saw very gladly the beautiful face and figure of Carmilla enter the shadowy chapel.

I was just about to rise and speak, and nodded smiling, in answer to her peculiarly engaging smile; when with a cry, the old man by my side caught up the woodman's hatchet, and started forward. On seeing him a brutalized change came over her features. It was an instantaneous and horrible transformation, as she made a crouching step backwards. Before I could utter a scream, he struck at her with all his force, but she dived under his blow, and unscathed, caught him in her tiny grasp by the wrist. He struggled for a moment to release his arm, but his hand opened, the axe fell to the ground, and the girl was gone.

He staggered against the wall. His grey hair stood upon his head, and a moisture shone over his face, as if he were at the point of death.

The frightful scene had passed in a moment. The first thing I recollect after, is Madame standing before me, and impatiently repeating again and again, the question, "Where is Mademoiselle Carmilla?"

I answered at length, "I don't know — I can't tell — she went there," and I pointed to the door through which Madame had just entered; "only a minute or two since."

"But I have been standing there, in the passage, ever since Mademoiselle Carmilla entered; and she did not return."

She then began to call "Carmilla," through every door and passage and from the windows, but no answer came.

"She called herself Carmilla?" asked the General, still agitated.

"Carmilla, yes," I answered.

“Aye,” he said; “that is Millarca. That is the same person who long ago was called Mircalla, Countess Karnstein. Depart from this accursed ground, my poor child, as quickly as you can. Drive to the clergyman’s house, and stay there till we come. Begone! May you never behold Carmilla more; you will not find her here.”

XV

Ordeal and Execution

As he spoke one of the strangest looking men I ever beheld entered the chapel at the door through which Carmilla had made her entrance and her exit. He was tall, narrow-chested, stooping, with high shoulders, and dressed in black. His face was brown and dried in with deep furrows; he wore an oddly-shaped hat with a broad leaf. His hair, long and grizzled, hung on his shoulders. He wore a pair of gold spectacles, and walked slowly, with an odd shambling gait, with his face sometimes turned up to the sky, and sometimes bowed down towards the ground, seemed to wear a perpetual smile; his long thin arms were swinging, and his lank hands, in old black gloves ever so much too wide for them, waving and gesticulating in utter abstraction.

"The very man!" exclaimed the General, advancing with manifest delight. "My dear Baron, how happy I am to see you, I had no hope of meeting you so soon." He signed to my father, who had by this time returned, and leading the fantastic old gentleman, whom he called the Baron to meet him. He introduced him formally, and they at once entered into earnest conversation. The stranger took a roll of paper from his pocket, and spread it on the worn surface of a tomb that stood by. He had a pencil case in his fingers, with which he traced imaginary lines from point to point on the paper, which from their often glancing from it, together, at certain points of the building, I concluded to be a plan of the chapel. He accompanied, what I may term, his lecture, with occasional readings from a dirty little book, whose yellow leaves were closely written over.

They sauntered together down the side aisle, opposite to the spot where I was standing, conversing as they went; then they began measuring distances by paces, and finally they all stood together, facing a piece of the sidewall, which they began to examine with great minuteness; pulling off the ivy that clung over it, and rapping the plaster with the ends of their sticks, scraping here, and knocking there. At length they ascertained the existence of a broad marble tablet, with letters carved in relief upon it.

With the assistance of the woodman, who soon returned, a monumental inscription, and carved escutcheon, were disclosed. They proved to be those of the long lost monument of Mircalla, Countess Karnstein.

The old General, though not I fear given to the praying mood, raised his hands and eyes to heaven, in mute thanksgiving for some moments.

"Tomorrow," I heard him say; "the commissioner will be here, and the Inquisition will be held according to law."

Then turning to the old man with the gold spectacles, whom I have described, he shook him warmly by both hands and said:

"Baron, how can I thank you? How can we all thank you? You will have delivered this region from a plague that has scourged its inhabitants for more than a century. The horrible enemy, thank God, is at last tracked."

My father led the stranger aside, and the General followed. I know that he had led them out of hearing, that he might relate my case, and I saw them glance often quickly at me, as the discussion proceeded.

My father came to me, kissed me again and again, and leading me from the chapel, said:

"It is time to return, but before we go home, we must add to our party the good priest, who lives but a little way from this; and persuade him to accompany us to the schloss."

In this quest we were successful: and I was glad, being unspeakably fatigued when we reached home. But my satisfaction was changed to dismay, on discovering that there were no tidings of Carmilla. Of the scene that had occurred in the ruined chapel, no explanation was offered to me, and it was clear that it was a secret which my father for the present determined to keep from me.

The sinister absence of Carmilla made the remembrance of the scene more horrible to me. The arrangements for the night were singular. Two servants, and Madame were to sit up in my room that night; and the ecclesiastic with my father kept watch in the adjoining dressing room.

The priest had performed certain solemn rites that night, the purport of which I did not understand any more than I comprehended the reason of this extraordinary precaution taken for my safety during sleep.

I saw all clearly a few days later.

The disappearance of Carmilla was followed by the discontinuance of my nightly sufferings.

You have heard, no doubt, of the appalling superstition that prevails in Upper and Lower Styria, in Moravia, Silesia, in Turkish Serbia, in Poland, even in Russia; the superstition, so we must call it, of the Vampire.

If human testimony, taken with every care and solemnity, judicially, before commissions innumerable, each consisting of many members, all chosen for integrity and intelligence, and constituting reports more voluminous perhaps than exist upon any one other class of cases, is worth anything, it is difficult to deny, or even to doubt the existence of such a phenomenon as the Vampire.

For my part I have heard no theory by which to explain what I myself have witnessed and experienced, other than that supplied by the ancient and well-attested belief of the country.

The next day the formal proceedings took place in the Chapel of Karnstein.

The grave of the Countess Mircalla was opened; and the General and my father recognised each his perfidious and beautiful guest, in the face now disclosed to view. The features, though a hundred and fifty years had passed since her funeral, were tinted with the warmth of life. Her eyes were open; no cadaverous smell exhaled from the coffin. The two medical men, one officially present, the other on the part of the promoter of the inquiry, attested the marvelous fact that there was a faint but appreciable respiration, and a corresponding action of the heart. The limbs were perfectly flexible, the flesh elastic; and the leaden coffin floated with blood, in which to a depth of seven inches, the body lay immersed.

Here then, were all the admitted signs and proofs of vampirism. The body, therefore, in accordance with the ancient practice, was raised, and a sharp stake driven through the heart of the vampire, who uttered a piercing shriek at the moment, in all respects such as might escape from a living person in the last agony. Then the head was struck off, and a torrent of blood flowed from the severed neck. The body and head was next placed on a pile of wood, and reduced to ashes, which were thrown upon the river and borne away, and that territory has never since been plagued by the visits of a vampire.

My father has a copy of the report of the Imperial Commission, with the signatures of all who were present at these proceedings, attached in verification of the statement. It is from this official paper that I have summarized my account of this last shocking scene.

XVI

Conclusion

I write all this you suppose with composure. But far from it; I cannot think of it without agitation. Nothing but your earnest desire so repeatedly expressed, could have induced me to sit down to a task that has unstrung my nerves for months to come, and reinduced a shadow of the unspeakable horror which years after my deliverance continued to make my days and nights dreadful, and solitude insupportably terrific.

Let me add a word or two about that quaint Baron Vordenburg, to whose curious lore we were indebted for the discovery of the Countess Mircalla's grave.

He had taken up his abode in Gratz, where, living upon a mere pittance, which was all that remained to him of the once princely estates of his family, in Upper Styria, he devoted himself to the minute and laborious investigation of the marvelously authenticated tradition of Vampirism. He had at his fingers' ends all the great and little works upon the subject.

"Magia Posthuma," "Phlegon de Mirabilibus," "Augustinus de cura pro Mortuis," "Philosophicae et Christianae Cogitationes de Vampiris," by John Christofer Herenberg; and a thousand others, among which I remember only a few of those which he lent to my father. He had a voluminous digest of all the judicial cases, from which he had extracted a system of principles that appear to govern — some always, and others occasionally only — the condition of the vampire. I may mention, in passing, that the deadly pallor attributed to that sort of revenants, is a mere melodramatic fiction. They present, in the grave, and when they show themselves in human society, the appearance of healthy life. When disclosed to light in their coffins, they exhibit all the symptoms that are enumerated as those which proved the vampire-life of the long-dead Countess Karnstein.

How they escape from their graves and return to them for certain hours every day, without displacing the clay or leaving any trace of disturbance in the state of the coffin or the cerements, has always been admitted to be utterly inexplicable. The amphibious existence of the vampire is sustained by daily renewed slumber in the grave. Its horrible lust for living blood supplies the vigor of its waking existence. The vampire is prone to be fascinated with an engrossing vehemence, resembling the passion of love, by particular persons. In pursuit of these it will exercise inexhaustible patience and stratagem, for access to a particular object may be obstructed in a hundred ways. It will never desist until it has satiated its passion, and drained the very life of its coveted victim. But it will, in these cases, husband and protract its murderous enjoyment with the refinement of an epicure, and heighten it by the gradual approaches of an artful courtship. In these cases it seems to yearn for something like sympathy and consent. In ordinary ones it goes direct to its object, overpowers with violence, and strangles and exhausts often at a single feast.

The vampire is, apparently, subject, in certain situations, to special conditions. In the particular instance of which I have given you a relation, Mircalla seemed to be limited to a name which, if not her real one, should at least reproduce, without the omission or addition of a single letter, those, as we say, anagrammatically, which compose it.

Carmilla did this; so did Millarca.

My father related to the Baron Vordenburg, who remained with us for two or three weeks after the expulsion of Carmilla, the story about the Moravian nobleman and the vampire at Karnstein churchyard, and then he asked the Baron how he had discovered the exact position of the long-concealed tomb of the Countess Mircalla? The Baron's grotesque features puckered up into a mysterious smile; he looked down, still smiling on his worn spectacle case and fumbled with it. Then looking up, he said:

"I have many journals, and other papers, written by that remarkable man; the most curious among them is one treating of the visit of which you speak, to Karnstein. The tradition, of course, discolors and distorts a little. He might have been termed a Moravian nobleman, for he had changed his abode to that territory, and was, beside, a noble. But he was, in truth, a native of Upper Styria. It is enough to say that in very early youth he had been a passionate and favored lover of the beautiful Mircalla, Countess Karnstein. Her early death plunged him into inconsolable grief. It is the nature of vampires to increase and multiply, but according to an ascertained and ghostly law.

"Assume, at starting, a territory perfectly free from that pest. How does it begin, and how does it multiply itself? I will tell you. A person, more or less wicked, puts an end to himself. A suicide, under certain circumstances, becomes a vampire. That specter visits living people in their slumbers; they die, and almost invariably, in the grave, develop into vampires. This happened in the case of the beautiful Mircalla, who was haunted by one of those demons. My ancestor, Vordenburg, whose title I still bear, soon discovered this, and in the course of the studies to which he devoted himself, learned a great deal more.

"Among other things, he concluded that suspicion of vampirism would probably fall, sooner or later, upon the dead Countess, who in life had been his idol. He conceived a horror, be she what she might, of her remains being profaned by the outrage of a posthumous execution. He has left a curious paper to prove that the vampire, on its expulsion from its amphibious existence, is projected into a far more horrible life; and he resolved to save his once beloved Mircalla from this.

"He adopted the stratagem of a journey here, a pretended removal of her remains, and a real obliteration of her monument. When age had stolen upon him, and from the vale of years, he looked back on the scenes he was leaving, he considered, in a different spirit, what he had done, and a horror took possession of him. He made the tracings and notes which have guided me to the very spot, and drew up a confession of the deception that he had practiced. If he had intended any further action in this matter, death prevented him; and the hand of a remote descendant has, too late for many, directed the pursuit to the lair of the beast."

We talked a little more, and among other things he said was this:

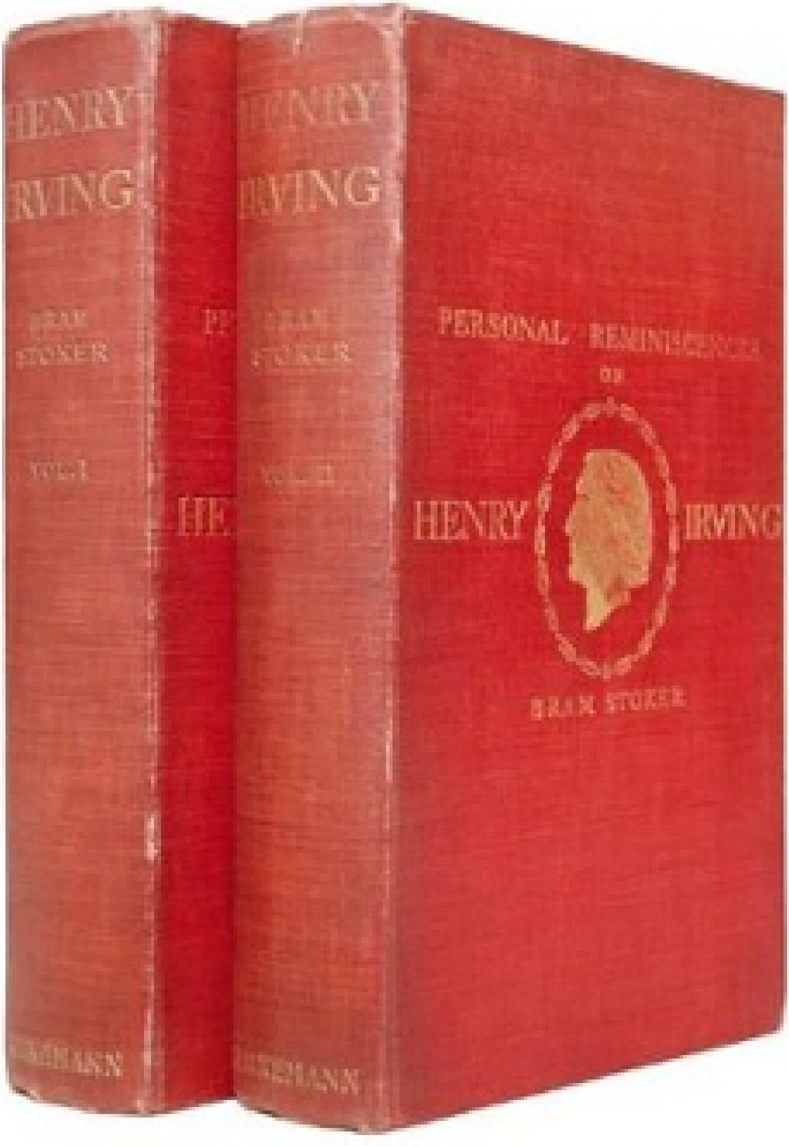
"One sign of the vampire is the power of the hand. The slender hand of Mircalla closed like a vice of steel on the General's wrist when he raised the hatchet to strike. But its power is not confined to its grasp; it leaves a numbness in the limb it seizes, which is slowly, if ever, recovered from."

The following Spring my father took me a tour through Italy. We remained away for more than a year. It was long before the terror of recent events subsided; and to this hour the image of Carmilla returns to memory with ambiguous alternations — sometimes the playful, languid, beautiful girl; sometimes the writhing fiend I saw in the ruined church; and often from a reverie I have started, fancying I heard the light step of Carmilla at the drawing room door.

The Biography

Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving

Stoker published this two-volume biography about his friend the English actor Sir Henry Irving in 1906. As the manager of the Lyceum theatre and the personal assistant of Irving, Stoker's memoir presents not only an invaluable insight of the Victorian theatre, but also many interesting details about the author's own life.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VOLUME I

Sir Henry Irving, as Hamlet in 1893

PREFACE

WERE my book a "life" of Henry Irving instead of a grouping of such matters as came into my own purview, I should probably feel some embarrassment in the commencement of a preface. Logically speaking, even the life of an actor has no preface. He begins, and that is all. And such beginning is usually obscure; but faintly remembered at the best. Art is a completion; not merely a history of endeavour. It is only when completeness has been obtained that the beginnings of endeavour gain importance, and that the steps by which it has been won assume any shape of permanent interest. After all, the struggle for supremacy is so universal that the matters of hope and difficulty of one person are hardly of general interest. When the individual has won out from the huddle of strife, the means and steps of his succeeding become of interest, either historically or in the educational aspect — but not before. From every life there may be a lesson to some one; but in the teeming millions of humanity such lessons can but seldom have any general or exhaustive force. The mere din of strife is too incessant for any individual sound to carry far. Fame, who rides in higher atmosphere, can alone make her purpose heard. Well did the framers of picturesque idea understand their work when in her hand they put a symbolic trumpet.

The fame of an actor is won in minutes and seconds, not in years. The latter are only helpful in the recurrence of opportunities; in the possibilities of repetition. It is not feasible, therefore, adequately to record the progress of his work. Indeed that work in its perfection cannot be recorded; words are, and can be, but faint suggestions of awakened emotion. The student of history can, after all, but accept in matters evanescent the judgment of contemporary experience. Of such, the weight of evidence can at best incline in one direction; and that tendency is not susceptible of further proof. So much, then, for the work of art that is not plastic and permanent. There remains therefore but the artist. Of him the other arts can make record in so far as external appearance goes. Nay, more, the genius of sculptor or painter can suggest — with an understanding as subtle as that of the sun-rays which on sensitive media can depict what cannot be seen by the eye — the existence of these inner forces and qualities whence accomplished works of any kind proceed. It is to such art that we look for the teaching of our eyes. Modern science can record something of the actualities of voice and tone. Writers of force and skill and judgment can convey abstract ideas of controlling forces and purposes; of thwarting passions; of embarrassing weaknesses; of all the bundle of inconsistencies which make up an item of concrete humanity. From all these may be derived some consistent idea of individuality. This individuality is at once the ideal and the objective of portraiture.

For my own part the work which I have undertaken in this book is to show future minds something of Henry Irving as he was to me. I have chosen the form of the book for this purpose. As I cannot give the myriad of details and impressions which went to the making up of my own convictions, I have tried to select such instances as were self-sufficient to the purpose. If here and there I have been able to lift for a single instant the veil which covers the mystery of individual nature, I shall have made something known which must help the lasting memory of my dear dead friend. In the doing of my work, I am painfully conscious that I have obtruded my own personality, but I trust that for this I may be forgiven, since it is only by this means that I can convey at all the ideas which I wish to impress.

As I cannot adequately convey the sense of Irving's worthiness myself, I try to do it by other means. By showing him amongst his friends, and explaining who those friends were; by giving incidents with explanatory matter of intention; by telling of the pressure of circumstance and his bearing under it; by affording such glimpses of his inner life and mind as one man may of another. I have earnestly tried to avoid giving pain to the living, to respect the sanctity of the dead; and finally to keep from any breach of trust — either that specifically confided in me, or implied by the accepted intimacy of our relations. Well I know how easy it is to err in this respect; to overlook the evil force of irresponsible chatter. But I have always tried to bear in mind the grim warning of Tennyson's biting words:

"Proclaim the faults he would not show; Break lock and seal; betray the trust; Keep nothing sacred; 'tis but just The many-headed beast should know."

For nearly thirty years I was an intimate friend of Irving; in certain ways the most intimate friend of his life. I knew him as well as it is given to any man to know another. And this knowledge is fully in my mind, when I say that, so far as I know, there is not in this book a word of his inner life or his outer circumstances that he would wish unsaid; no omission that he would have liked filled.

Let any one who will read the book through say whether I have tried to do him honour — and to do it by worthy means: the honour and respect which I feel; which in days gone I held for him; which now I hold for his memory.

BRAM STOKER.

4 DURHAM PLACE, CHELSEA, LONDON.

CHAPTER I. EARLIEST RECOLLECTIONS OF HENRY IRVING

Earliest Recollection, Dublin,1867 — Captain Absolute — Impersonation — Distinction — Local Criticism—" Two Roses," Dublin, 1871 — The Archetype of Digby Grant — Chevalier Wikog

I

THE first time I ever saw Henry Irving was at the Theatre Royal, Dublin, on the evening of 'Wednesday, August 28, 1867. Miss Herbert had brought the St. James's Company on tour, playing some of the Old Comedies and Miss Braddon's new drama founded on her successful novel, LadyAudley's Secret. The piece chosen for this particular night was The Rivals in which Irving played Captain Absolute.

Forty years ago provincial playgoers did not have much opportunity of seeing great acting, except in the star parts. It was the day of the Stock Companies, when the chief theatres everywhere had good actors who played for the whole season, each in his or her established class; but notable excellence was not to be expected at the salaries then possible to even the most enterprising management. The " business " — the term still applied to the minor incidents of acting, as well as to the disposition of the various characters and the entrances and exits — was, of necessity, of a formal and traditional kind. There was no time for the exhaustive rehearsal of minor details to which actors are in these days accustomed. When the bill was changed five or six times a week it was only possible, even at the longest rehearsal, to get through the standard outline of action, and the perfection of the cues — in fact those conditions of the interdependence of the actors and mechanics on which the structural excellence of the play depends. Moreover, the system by which great actors appeared as “ stars “ supported by only one or two players of their own bringing, made it necessary that there should be in the higher order of theatres some kind of standard way of regulating the action of the plays in vogue. It was a matter of considerable interest to me to see, when some fourteen years later Edwin Booth came to play at the Lyceum, that he sent his “ dresser “ to represent him at the earlier rehearsals so as to point out to the stage management the disposition of the characters and general arrangement of matured action to which he was accustomed. I only mention this here to illustrate the conditions of stage work at an earlier period.

This adherence to standard “ business “ was so strict, though unwritten, a rule that no one actor could venture to break it. To do so without preparation would have been to at least endanger the success of the play; and “ preparation “ was the prerogative of the management, not of the individual player. Even Henry Irving, though he had been, as well as a player, the Stage Manager of the St. James’s Company and could so carry out his ideas partially, could not have altered the broad lines of the play established by nearly a century of usage.

As a matter of fact The Rivals had not been one of Miss Herbert’s productions at the St. James’s, and so it did not come within the scope of his stage management at all.

Irving had played the part of Captain Absolute in the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, during the three years of his engagement there, 1856-59, where he had learned the traditional usage. Thus the only possibility open to him, as to any actor with regard to an established Comedy, was to improve on the traditional method of acting it within the established lines of movement; in fact, to impersonate the character to better advantage.

On this particular occasion the play as an entity had an advantage not always enjoyed in provincial theatres. It was performed by a Company of Comedians, several of whom had acted together for a considerable time. The lines of the play being absolutely conventional did not leave any special impress on the mind; one can only recall the actors and the acting.

To this day I can remember the playing of Henry Irving as Captain Absolute, which was different from any performance of the same part which I had seen. What I saw, to my amazement and delight, was a patrician figure as real as the persons of one's dreams, and endowed with the same poetic grace. A young soldier, handsome, distinguished, self-dependent; compact of grace and slumbrous energy. A man of quality who stood out from his surroundings on the stage as a being of another social world. A figure full of dash and fine irony, and whose ridicule seemed to bite; buoyant with the joy of life; self-conscious; an inoffensive egoist even in his love-making; of supreme and unsurpassable insolence, veiled and shrouded in his fine quality of manner. Such a figure as could only be possible in an age when the answer to insolence was a sword-thrust; when only those dare be insolent who could depend to the last on the heart and brain and arm behind the blade. The scenes which stand out most vividly are the following: His interview with Mrs. Malaprop in which she sets him to read his own intercepted letter to Lydia wherein he speaks of the old lady herself as " the old weather-beaten she-dragon." The manner with which he went back again and again, with excuses exemplified by action rather than speech, to the offensive words — losing his place in the letter and going back to find it — seeming to try to recover the sequence of thought — innocently trying to fit the words to the subject — was simply a triumph of well-bred, easy insolence. Again when Captain Absolute makes repentant obedience to his father's will his negative air of content as to the excellences or otherwise of his suggested wife was inimitable. And the shocked appearance, manner and speech of his hypocritical submission; " Not to please your father, sir? " was as enlightening to the audience as it was convincing to Sir Anthony. Again the scene in the Fourth Act when in the presence of his father and Mrs. Malaprop he has to make love to Lydia in his own person, was on the actor's part a masterpiece of emotion — the sort of thing to make an author grateful. There was no mistaking the emotions which came so fast, treading on each other's heels: his mental perturbation; his sense of the ludicrous situation in which he found himself; his hurried, feeble, ill-concealed efforts to find a way out of the difficulty. And through them all the sincerity of his real affection for Lydia which actually shone, coming straight and convincingly to the hearts of the audience.

But these scenes were all of acting a part. The reality of his character was in the scene of Sir Lucius O'Trigger's quarrel with him. Here he was real. Man to man the grace and truth of his character and bearing were based on no purpose or afterthought. Before a man his manhood was sincere; before a gallant gentleman his gallantry was without flaw, and, as the dramatist intended, outshone even the chivalry of that perfect gentleman Sir Lucius O'Trigger.

The acting of Henry Irving is, after nearly forty years, so vivid in my memory that I can recall his movements, his expressions, the tones of his voice.

And yet the manner in which his acting in the new and perfect method was received in the local press may afford an object-lesson of what the pioneer of high art has, like any other pioneer, to endure.

During the two weeks' visit to Dublin the repertoire comprised, as well as The Rivals, The School for Scandal, The Belle's Stratagem, The Road to Ruin, She Stoops to Conquer, and Lady Audley's Secret.

Of these other plays I can say nothing, for I did not see them. Lately, however, on looking over the newspapers I found hardly a word of even judicious comment; praise there was not. According to the local journalistic record his Joseph Surface was " lachrymose, coarse, pointless and ineffective. Nothing could be more ludicrously deficient of dramatic power than his acting in the passage with Lady Teazle in the screen scene. The want of harmony between the actual words and gesture, emphasis and expression, was painfully palpable."

And yet to those who can read between the lines and gather truth where truth — though not perhaps the same truth — is meant, this very criticism shows how well he played the hypocrite who meant one thing whilst conveying the idea of another. Were Joseph's acts and tones and words all in perfect harmony he would seem to an audience not a hypocrite but a reality.

Another critic considered him " stiff and constrained, and occasionally left the audience under the impression that they were witnessing the playing of an amateur."

The only mention of his Young Marlow was in one paper that it was " carefully represented by Mr. Irving"; and in another that it was "insipid and pointless."

Of young Dornton in The Road to Ruin there was one passing word of praise as an " able impersonation." But of The Rivals I could find no criticism whatever in any of the Dublin papers when more than thirty-eight years after seeing the play I searched them hoping to find some con- formation of my vivid recollection of Henry Irving's brilliant acting. The following only, in small type, I found in the Irish Times more than a week after the play had been given; "Of those who support Miss Herbert, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Matthews are, undoubtedly, the best. Mr. Stoyle is full of broad comedy, but now and then he is not true to nature. Mr. Irving and Mr. Gaston Murray are painstaking and respectable artists."

It is good to think that the great player who, as the representative actor of his nation — of the world — for over a quarter of a century was laid to rest in Westminster Abbey to the grief of at least two Continents, had after eleven years of arduous and self-sacrificing work during which he had played over five hundred different characters and had even then begun quite a new school of acting, been considered by at least one writer for the press " a painstaking and respectable artist."

II

I did not see Henry Irving again till May 1871, when with the Vaudeville Company he played for a fortnight at the Theatre Royal Albery's Comedy, Two Roses. Looking back to that time the best testimony I can bear to the fact that the performance interested me is that I went to see it three times. The company was certainly an excellent one. In addition to Henry Irving it contained H. J. Montague, George Honey, Louise Claire, and Amy Fawsitt.

Well do I remember the delight of that performance of Digby Grant and how well it foiled the other characters of the play.

Amongst them all it stood out star-like. An inimitable character which Irving impersonated in a manner so complete that to this day I have been unable to get it out of my mind as a reality. Indeed it was a reality though at that time I did not know it. Years afterwards I met the original at the house of the late Mr. James McHenry — a villa in a little park off Addison Road.

This archetype was the late Chevalier Wikoff, of whom in the course of a friendship of years I had heard much from McHenry, who well remembered him in his early days in Philadelphia, in which city Wikoff was born. In his youth he had been a very big, handsome man; in the days when men wore cloaks used to pass down Chestnut Street or Locust Street with a sublime swagger. He was a great friend of Edwin Forrest the actor, and a great " ladies' man." He had been a friend and lover of the celebrated dancer Fanny Elsler, who was so big and yet so agile that, as my father described to me, when she bounded in on the stage seeming to light from the wings to the footlights in a single leap, the house seemed to shake. Wikoff was a pretty hard man, and as cunning as men are made. When I knew him he was an old man, but he fortified the deficiencies of age with artfulness. He was then a little hard of hearing; but he simulated complete deafness, and there was little said within a reasonable distance that he did not hear. For many years he had lived in Europe chiefly in London and Paris. There was one trait in his character which even his intimate friends did not suspect. Every year right up to the end of his long life he disappeared from London at a certain date. He was making his pilgrimage to Paris where on a given day he laid some flowers on a little grave long after the child's mother, the dancer, had died. Wikoff was a trusted agent of the Bonaparte's and he held strange secrets of that adventurous family. He it was, so

McHenry told me, who had brought in secret from France to England the last treasures of the Imperial house after the debacle following Sedan.

This was the person whom Irving had selected as the archetype of Digby Grant. Long before, he had met him at McHenry’s; with that “ seeing eye “ of his had marked his personality down for use; and with that marvellous memory which, in my long experience of him never failed him, was able to reproduce with the exactness of a “ Chinese copy “ every jot and tittle appertaining to the man, without and within. His tall gaunt, slightly stooping figure; his scanty hair artfully arranged to cover the ravages of time; the cunning, inquisitive eyes; the mechanical turning of the head which becomes the habit of the deaf. The veiled voice which can do everything but express truth — even under stress of sudden emotion. Years after Two Roses had had its run at the Vaudeville and elsewhere I went to see Wikoff when he was ill in a humble lodging. In answer to my knuckle-tap he opened the door himself. For an instant I was startled out of my self-possession, for in front of me stood the veritable Digby Grant. I had met him already a good many times, but always in the recognised costume of morning or evening. Now I saw him as Irving had represented him; but I do not think he had ever seen him as I saw him at that moment. I believe that the costume in which he appeared in that play was the result of the actor’s inductive ratiocination. He had studied the individuality so thoroughly, and was so familiar with not only his apparent characteristics but with those secret manifestations which are in their very secrecy subtle indicators of individuality grafted on type, that he had re-created him — just as Cuvier or Owen could from a single bone reconstruct giant reptiles of the Palozoic age. There was the bizarre dressing-jacket, frayed at edge and cuff; with ragged frogs and stray buttons. There the three days' beard, white at root and raven black at point. There the flamboyant smoking-cap with yellow tassel which marks that epoch in the history of ridiculous dress out of which in sheer revulsion of artistic feeling came the Pre-Raphaelite movement.

Irving had asked me to bring with me to Wikoff some grapes and other creature comforts for which the poor old man was, I believe, genuinely grateful; but in the course of our chat he told me that Irving had " taken him off " for " that fellow in the Two Roses." It was strange how the name of that play was so often given wrong; most people spoke of it and wrote of it as The Two Roses; I have known even Irving himself to make the mistake! Wikoff did not seem displeased at the duplication of his identity. To me he conveyed the idea of being in some degree proud of it.

This wonderful creation in the play " took the town," as the phrase is, and for some time the sayings of the characters in it were heard everywhere. It was truly a " creation "; not merely in the actor's sense where the first player of a character in London is deemed its " creator " but in the usual meaning of the word. For it is not enough in acting to know what to do; it must be done! All possible knowledge of Wikoff, from his psychical identity to his smoking-cap, could not produce a strong effect unless the actor through - the resources of his art could transform reality to the appearance of reality — a very different and much more difficult thing.

When Irving played in Two Roses in Dublin in 1872 there was not a word in any of the papers of the acting of any of the accomplished players who took part in it; not even the mention of their names.

What other cities may have said of him in these early days I know not; but I take it that the standard of criticism is generally of the same average of excellence, or its opposite, according to the assay of the time. In the provinces the zone of demarcation between bad and good varies less, in that mediocrity qualifies more easily, and super-excellence finds a wider field for work. Of one thing we may be sure: that success has its own dangers. Self-interest and jealousy and a host of the lesser and meaner vices of the intellectual world find their opportunity.

When the floodgates of Comment are opened there comes with the rush of clean water all the scum and rubbish which has accumulated behind them drawn into position by the trickling stream.

CHAPTER II. THE OLD SCHOOL AND THE NEW

Irving's Early Experience in Dublin — A Month of Hisses — The Old School of Acting and the New — Historical Comparison — From Edmund Kean to Irving — Irving's Work — The Thoughtful School

I

MORE than five years elapsed before I saw Henry Irving again. We were both busy men, each in his own way, and the Fates did not allow our orbits to cross. He did not come to Dublin; my work did not allow my going to London except at times when he was not playing there. Those five years were to him a triumphant progress in his art and fame. He rose; and rose; and rose. The Bells in 1871 was followed in 1872 by Charles I., in 1873 by Eugene Aram and Richelieu, in 1874 by Philip and Hamlet, in 1875 by Macbeth, and in 1876 by Othello and Queen Mary.

For my own part, being then in the Civil Service, I could only get away in the " prime of summer time " as my seniors preferred to take their holiday in the early summer or the late autumn. I had, when we next met, been for five years a dramatic critic. In 1871 my growing discontent with the attention accorded to the stage in the local newspapers had culminated with the neglect of Two Roses. I asked the proprietor of one of the Dublin newspapers whom I happened to know, Dr. Maunsell, an old contemporary and friend of Charles Lever, to allow me to write on the subject in the Mail. He told me frankly that the paper could not afford to pay for such special work, as it was in accordance with the local custom of the time done by the regular staff who wrote on all subjects as required. I replied that I would gladly do it without fee or reward. This he allowed me to carry out.

From my beginning the work in November 1871 I had an absolutely free hand. I was thus able to direct public attention, so far as my paper could effect it, where in my mind such was required. In those five years I think I learned a good deal. As Bacon says, " Writing maketh an exact man," and as I have always held that in matters critical the critic's personal honour is involved in every word he writes I could always feel that the duty I had undertaken was a grave one. I did not shirk work in any way; indeed, I helped largely to effect a needed reform as to the time when criticism should appear. In those days of single printings from slow presses " copy " had to be handed in very early. The paper went to press not long after midnight, and there were few men who could see a play and write the criticism in time for the morning's issue. It thus happened that the critical article was usually a full day behind its time. Monday night's performance was not generally reviewed till Wednesday at earliest; the instances which I have already given afford the proof. This was very hard upon the actors and companies making short vists. The public en bloc is a slow-moving force; and when possibility of result is cut short by effluxion of time it is a sad handicap to enterprise and to exceptional work.

I do not wish to be egotistical and I trust that no reader may take it that I am so, in that I have spoken of my first experiences of Henry Irving and how, mainly because of his influence on me, I undertook critical work with regard to his own art. My purpose in doing so is not selfish. I merely wish that those who honour me by reading what I have written should understand something which went before our personal meeting; and why it was that when we did meet we came together with a loving and understanding friendship which lasted unbroken till my dear friend passed away.

Looking back now after an interval of nearly forty years, during which time I was mainly too busy to look back at all, I can understand something of those root-forces which had so strange an influence on both Irving's life and my own, though at the first I was absolutely unconscious of even their existence. Neither when I first saw Irving in 1867, nor when I met him in 1876 nor for many years after I had been his close friend and fellow worker did I know that his early experiences of Dublin had been painful to the last degree. I thought from the way in which the press had ignored him and his work that they must have been bad enough in 1867 and 1871. But later on, when in the prolonged sweetness of years of success the bitterness of that early chagrin had passed away, he told me the story to this effect:

Quite early in his life as an actor — when he was only twenty-one — in an off season when the " resting " actor grasps at any chance of work, he received from Mr. Harry Webb, then Manager of the Queen's Theatre, Dublin, with whom he had played at the Edinburgh Theatre, an offer of an engagement for some weeks. This he joyfully accepted and turned up in due course. He did not know then, though he learned it with startling rapidity, that he was wanted to fill the place of a local. favourite who had been, for some cause, summarily dismissed. The public visited their displeasure on the new-comer, and in no uncertain way. From the moment of his coming on the stage on the first night of his engagement until almost its end he was not allowed to say one word without interruption. Hisses and stamping, catcalls and the thumping of sticks were the universal accompaniments of his speech.

Now to an actor nothing is so deadly as to be hissed. Not only does it bar his artistic effort but it hurts his self-esteem. Its manifestation is a negation of himself, his power, his art. It is present death to him qud artist, with the added sting of shame. Well did the actors who crowded the court at Bow Street when the vanity-mad fool who murdered poor William Terriss know it. The murderer was an alleged actor, and they wanted to punish him. When he was placed in the dock, with one impulse they hissed him In Irving's case at the Queen's the audience with some shameful remnant of fair play treated him well the last two nights of his performance and cheered him. It was manifestly intended as a proof that it was not against the man that their protest was aimed — though he was the sufferer by it; but against any one who might have taken the place of their favourite whom they considered had been injured. It could not have been the actor on whom they lavished either hisses or cheers for they had never even heard the sound of his voice, except in the pauses of their own tumult. But to him the effect was the same.

That early visit to Dublin has so many interesting points that it may be worth while to go into it in detail.

The actor who had been dismissed was Mr. Vincent. He had played on the Saturday night, March 3, up to which time Irving had been giving Readings. On the sudden summons he came quickly, and on the first night of his engagement, Monday, March 5, played to the Othello of Mr. T. C. King the part of Cassio with which he was already familiar.

On the 8th was given Gerold Griffin's play Gisippus; or, The Forgotten Friend, in which Irving took the part of Titus Quintus Fulvius lately vacated by Mr. Vincent.

The engagement was for four weeks terminating on Saturday, March 31; and during the remainder of that time he played the following parts: Laertes in Hamlet — the only play of which any press notice was taken of his performance, the Freeman ‘s Journal speaking of it as “ a clever and judicious performance “; Florizel in A Winter’s Tale; Frank Fairplay in Boots at the Swan — another of Mr. Vincent’s parts; Colonel Davenport in The British Legion (called at other times, The Volunteers); Lucien de Nerval in Pauline; or, A Night of Terror; Didier in The Courier of Lyons; and Dangle in The Critic. From which it will be seen that there were varied opportunities ofjudging of an actor’s talents.

Of this engagement Irving spoke to an interviewer in 18gi apropos of an outrage, unique to him, inflicted on Toole shortly before at Coatbridge — a place of which the saying is: “ There is only a sheet of paper between Hell and Coatbridge.”

“Did you ever have any similar experience in your own career, Mr. Irving?”

“... I did have rather a nasty time once, and suffered much as Mr. Toole has done from the misplaced emotions of the house. It was in this way — when I was a young man — away back about 1859 “ (should be 186o) “ I should say it was — I was once sent for to fulfil an engagement of six weeks at the Queen’s Theatre, a minor theatre in the Irish capital. It was soon after I had left here, Edinburgh. I got over all right, and was ready with my part, but to my amazement, the moment I appeared on the stage I was greeted with a howl of execration from the pit and gallery. There was I standing aghast, ignorant of having given any cause of offence, and in front of me a raging Irish audience, shouting, gesticulating, swearing probably, and in various forms indicating their disapproval of my appearance. I was simply thunderstruck at the warmth of my reception.... I simply went through my part amid a continual uproar — groans, hoots, hisses, catcalls, and all the appliances of concerted opposition. It was a roughish experience that!”

. “ But surely it did not last long?”

“That depends,” replied the player grimly, “ on what you call long. It lasted six weeks.... I was as innocent as yourself of all offence, and could not for the life of me make out what was wrong. I had hurt nobody; had said nothing insulting; I had played my parts not badly for me. Yet for the whole of that time I had every night to fight through my piece in the teeth of a house whose entire energies seemed to be concentrated in a personal antipathy to myself.”

It was little wonder that the actor who had thus suffered undeservedly remembered the details though the time had so long gone by that he made error as to the year. No wonder that the time the Purgatorial suffering seemed 5o per cent. longer than its actual duration. Other things of more moment had long ago passed out of his mind — he had supped full of success and praise; but the bitter flavour of that month of pain hung all the same in his cup of memory.

An actor never forgets a hiss! Collot d’Herbois was once hissed at Lyons. Did he forget? Read history for the effect it had on him — and on others — in the massacre of Brumaire in the Year II. of the Republic (November 1793). The historical episode was typical, though happily on that occasion the effect was out of the usual proportion to the cause.

How his own painful episode hung in Irving’s mind can hardly be expressed in words. For years he did not speak of it even to me when telling me of how on March 12, 186o, he played Laertes to the Hamlet of T. C. King. It was not till after more than a quarter of a century of unbroken success that he could bear even to speak of it. Not even the consciousness of his own innocence in the whole affair could quell the mental disturbance which it caused him whenever it came back to his thoughts.

II

When, then, Henry Irving came to Dublin in 1876, though it was after a series of triumphs in London running into a term of years, he must have had some strong misgivings as to what his reception might be. It is true that the early obloquy had lessened into neglect; but no artist whose stock-in-trade is mainly his own personality could be expected to reason with the same calmness as that Parliamentary candidate who thus expressed the grounds of his own belief in his growing popularity:

"I am growing popular!"

"Popular! " said his friend. " Why last night I saw them pelt you with rotten eggs!"

"Yes! " he replied with gratification, " that is right! But they used to throw bricks!"

In London the bricks had been thrown, and in plenty. There are some persons of such a temperament that they are jealous of any new idea — of any thing or idea which is outside their own experience or beyond their own reasoning. The new ideas of thoughtful acting which Irving introduced won their way, in the main, splendidly. But it was a hard fight, for there were some violent and malignant writers of the time who did not hesitate to stoop to any meanness of attack. It is extraordinary how the sibilation of a single hiss will win through a tempest of cheers! The battle, however, was being won; when Irving came to Dublin he brought with him a reputation consolidated by the victorious conclusions of five years of strife. The new method was already winning its way.

It so happens that I was myself able through a “ fortuitous concourse “ of facts to have some means of comparison between the new and the old.

My father, who was born in 1798 and had been a theatre-goer all his life, had seen Edmund Kean in all his Dublin performances. He had an immense admiration for that actor, with whom none of the men within thirty years of his death were, he said, to be compared. When the late Barry Sullivan came on tour and played a range of the great plays he had enormous success. My father; then well over seventy, did not go to the play as often as he had been used to in earlier days; but I was so much struck with the force of Barry Sullivan’s acting that I persuaded to come with me to see him play Sir Giles Overreach in A New Way to Pay Old Debts — one of his greatest successes, as it had been one of Kean’s. At first he refused to come, saying that it was no use his going as he had seen the greatest of all actors in the part and did not care to see a lesser one. However, he let me have my way, and went; and we sat together in the third row of the pit which had been his chosen locality in his youth. He had been all his life in the Civil Service serving under four Monarchs — George III., George IV., William IV. and Victoria — and retiring after fifty years of service. In those days, as now, the home Civil Service was not a very money-making business, and it was just as well that he preferred the pit. I believed then that I preferred it also; for I too was then in the Civil Service.

He sat the play out with intense eagerness; and as the curtain fell on the frenzied usurer driven mad by thwarted ambition and the loss of his treasure, feebly spitting at the foes he could not master as he sank feebly into supporting arms, he turned to me and said:

“He is as good as the best of them!”

Barry Sullivan was a purely traditional actor of the old school. All his movements and gestures, readings, phrasings, and times were in exact accordance with the accepted style. It was possible, therefore, for my father to judge fairly, though longo intervallo. I saw Barry Sullivan in many plays: Hamlet, Richelieu, Macbeth, King Lear, The Gamester, The Wife’s Secret, The Stranger, RichardIII., The Wonder, Othello, The School for Scandal, as well as playing Sir Giles Overreach, and some more than once; I had a fair opportunity of comparing his acting over a wide range with the particular play by which my father judged. Ab uno disce omnes is hardly a working rule in general, but one example is a world better than none. I can fairly say that the actor’s general excellence was fairly represented by his characterisation and acting of Sir Giles. I had also seen Charles Kean, G. V. Brook, T. C. King, Charles Dillon and Vandenhoff. I had therefore in my own mind some kind of a standard by which to judge of the worth of the old school, tracing it back to its last great exemplar.

When, therefore, I came to contrast it with the new school of Irving I was building my opinion not on sand but upon solid ground. Let me say how the change from the old to the new affected me; it is allowable, I suppose, in matters of reminiscence to take personal example. Hitherto I had only seen Irving in two characters, Captain Absolute and Digby Grant. The former of these was a part in which for at least ten years — for I was a playgoer very early in life — I had seen other actors all playing the part in a conventional manner. As I have explained, I had only in Irving’s case been struck by his rendering of his own part within the conventional lines. The latter part was of quite a new style — new to the world in its essence as its method, and we of that time and place had no standard with regard to it, no means or opportunity of comparison. It was, therefore, with very great interest that we regarded the playing of this actor who was accepted in the main as a new giant. To me as a critic, with the experience of five years of the work, the occasion was of great moment; and I am free to confess that I was a little jealous lest the new-comer — even though I admired so much his work as I had seen — should overthrow my friend and countryman. For at this time Barry Sullivan was more than an acquaintance; we had spent a good many hours together talking over acting and stage history generally. Indeed I began my critical article thus:

“When an actor has arrived at the distinction which Mr. Henry Irving has undoubtedly achieved, he must not be judged by the same rules of praise and blame as hold good in the judgment of less distinguished performers. Mr. Irving holds in the minds of all who have seen him a high place as an artist, and by some he is regarded as the Garrick of his age; and so we shall judge him by the highest standard which we know.”

At the first glance, after the lapse of time, this seems if not unfair at least hard upon the actor; but the second thought shows a subtle, though unintentional compliment: Henry Irving had already raised in his critic, partly by the dignity of his own fame and partly through the favourable experience of the critic, the standard of criticism. He was to be himself the standard of excellence! His present boon to us was that he had taught us to Mink. Let me give an illustration.

Barry Sullivan was according to accepted ideas a great Macbeth. I, for one, thought so. He had great strength, great voice, great physique of all sorts; a well-knit figure with fine limbs, broad shoulders and the perfect back of a prize-fighter. He was master of himself and absolutely well versed in the parts which he played. His fighting power was immense and in the last act of the play good to see. The last scene of all, when the “ flats “ of the penultimate scene were drawn away in response to the usual carpenter’s whistle of the time, was disclosed as a bare stage with wings of wild rock and heather. At the back was Macbeth’s Castle of Dunsinane seen in perspective. It was supposed to be vast, and occupied the whole back of the scene. In the centre was the gate, double doors in a Gothic archway of massive proportions. In reality it was quite eight feet high, though of course looking bigger in the perspective. The stage was empty, but from all round it rose the blare of trumpets and the roll of drums. Suddenly the Castle gates were dashed back and through the archway came Macbeth, sword in hand and buckler on arm. Dashing with really superb vigour down to the footlights he thundered out his speech:

“They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly.”

Now this was to us all very fine, and was vastly exciting. None of us ever questioned its accuracy to nature. That Castle with the massive gates thrown back on their hinges by the rush of a single man came back to me vividly when I saw the play as Irving did it in 1888; though at the time we never gave it a thought. Indeed we gave thought to few such things; we took them with simplicity and as they were. Just as we accepted the conventional scenes of the then theatre, the Palace Arches, the Oak Chamber, the Forest Glade with its added wood wings and all the machinery of tradition. With Irving all was different. That “ easy “ progress of Macbeth’s soldiers returning tired after victorious battle, seen’ against the low dropping sun across the vast heather studded with patches of light glinting on water; the endless procession of soldiers straggling, singly, and by twos and threes, filling the stage to the conclusion of an endless array, conveyed an idea of force and power which impressed the spectator with an invaluable sincerity. In fact Irving always helped his audience to think.

CHAPTER III. FRIENDSHIP

Criticism — My Meeting with Irving — A Blaze of Genius — The Friendship ofa Life

I

THAT Irving was, in my estimation, worthy of the test I had lain down is shown by my article on the opening performance, Hamlet, and in the second article written after I had seen him play the part for the third time running. That he was pleased with the review of his work was proved by the fact that he asked on reading my criticism on Tuesday morning that we should be introduced. This was effected by my friend Mr. John Harris, Manager of the Theatre Royal.

Irving and I met as friends, and it was a great gratification to me when he praised my work.

He asked me to come round to his room again when the play was over. I went back with him to his hotel and with three of his friends supped with him.

We met again on the following Sunday when he had a few friends to dinner. It was a pleasant evening and a memorable one for me; for then began the close friendship between us which only terminated with his life — if indeed friendship, like any other form of love, can ever terminate. In the meantime I had written the second notice of his Hamlet. This had appeared on Saturday, and when we met he was full of it. Praise was no new thing to him in those days. Two years before, though I knew nothing of them at that time, two criticisms of his Hamlet had been published in Liverpool. One admirable pamphlet was by Sir (then Mr.) Edward Russell, then, as now, the finest critic in England; the other by Hall Caine — a remarkable review to have been written by a young man under twenty. Some of the finest and most lofty minds had been brought to bear on his work. It is, however, a peculiarity of an actor's work that it never grows stale; no matter how often the same thing be repeated it requires a fresh effort each time. Thus it is that criticism can never be stale either; it has always power either to soothe or to hurt. To a great actor the growth of character never stops and any new point is a new interest; a new lease of intellectual life.

II

Before dinner Irving chatted with me about this second article. In it I had said:

"There is another view of Hamlet, too, which Mr. Irving seems to realise by a kind of instinct, but which requires' to be more fully and intentionally worked out... The great, deep, underlying idea of Hamlet is that of a mystic.... In the high-strung nerves of the man; in the natural impulse of spiritual susceptibility; in his concentrated action spasmodic though it sometimes be, and in the divine delirium of his perfected passion, there is the instinct of the mystic which he has but to render a little plainer, in order that the less susceptible senses of his audience may see and understand."

He was also pleased with another comment of mine. Speaking of the love shown in his parting with Ophelia I had said:

"To give strong grounds for belief, where the instinct can judge more truly than the intellect, is the perfection of suggestive acting; and certainly with regard to this view of Hamlet Mr. Irving deserves not only the highest praise that can be accorded, but the loving gratitude of all to whom his art is dear."

There were plenty of things in my two criticisms which could hardly have been pleasurable to the actor, so that my review of his work could not be considered mere adulation. But I never knew in all the years of our friendship and business relations Irving to take offence or be hurt by true criticism — that criticism which is philosophical and gives a reason for every opinion adverse to that on which judgment is held. When any one coud let Irving believe that he had either studied the subject or felt the result of his own showing he was prepared to argue to the last any point suggested, on equal terms. I remember at this time Edward Dowden the great Shakespearean critic, then, as now, Professor of English literature in Dublin University, saying to me in discussing Irving's acting:

"After all an actor's commentary is his acting! " — a remark of embodied wisdom. Irving had so thoroughly studied every phase and application and the relative importance of every word of his part that he was well able to defend his accepted position. Seldom indeed was any one able to refute him; but when such occurred no one was more ready to accept the true view — and to act upon it.

Thus it was that on this particular night my host's heart was from the beginning something toward me, as mine had been toward him. He had learned that I could appreciate high effort; and with the instinct of his craft liked, I suppose, to prove himself again to his new, sympathetic and understanding friend. And so after dinner he said he would like to recite for me Thomas Hood's poem The Dream ofEugene Aram.

That experience I shall never — can never — forget. The recitation was different, both in kind and degree, from anything I had ever heard; and in those days there were some noble experiences of moving speech. It had been my good fortune to be in Court when Whiteside made his noble appeal to the jury in the Yelverton Case; a speech which won for him the unique honour, when next he walked into his place in the House of Commons, of the whole House standing up and cheering him.

I had heard Lord Brougham speak amid a tempest of cheers in the great Round Room of the Dublin Mansion House.

I had heard John Bright make his great oration on Ireland in the Dublin Mechanics' Institute, and had thrilled to the roar within and the echoing roar from the crowded street without which followed his splendid utterance. Like all the others I was touched with deep emotion. To this day I can remember the tones of his organ voice as he swept us all — heart and brain and memory and hope — with his mighty period; moving all who remembered how in the Famine time America took the guns from her battleships to load them fuller with grain for the starving Irish peasants.

These experiences and many others had shown me something of the power of words. In all these and in most of the others there were natural aids to the words spoken. The occasion had always been great, the theme far above one's daily life. The place had always been one of dignity; and above all, had been the greatest of all aids to effective speech, that which I heard Dean (then Canon) Farrar call in his great sermon on Garibaldi " the mysterious sympathy of numbers." But here in a hotel drawing-room, amid a dozen friends, a man in evening dress stood up to recite a poem with which we had all been familiar from our schooldays, which most if not all of us had ourselves recited at some time.

But such was Irving's commanding force, so great was the magnetism of his genius, so profound was the sense of his dominance that I sat spellbound. Outwardly I was as of stone; nought quick in me but receptivity and imagination. That I knew the story and was even familiar with its unalterable words was nothing. The whole thing was new, re-created by a force of passion which was like a new power. Across the footlights amid picturesque scenery and suitable dress, with one's fellows beside and all around one, though the effect of passion can convince and sway it cannot move one personally beyond a certain point. But here was incarnate power, incarnate passion, so close to one that one could meet it eye to eye, within touch of one's outstretched hand. The surroundings became non-existent; the dress ceased to be noticeable; recurring thoughts of self-existence were not at all. Here was indeed Eugene Aram as he was face to face with his Lord; his very soul aflame in the light of his abiding horror. Looking back now I can realise the perfection of art with which the mind was led and swept and swayed, hither and thither as the actor wished. How a change of tone or time denoted the personality of the "Blood-avenging Sprite " — and how the nervous, eloquent hands slowly moving, outspread fanlike, round the fixed face — set as doom, with eyes as inflexible as Fate — emphasised it till one instinctively quivered with pity. Then the awful horror on the murderer's face as the ghost in his brain seemed to take external shape before his eyes, and enforced on him that from his sin there was no refuge. After the climax of horror the Actor was able by art and habit to control himself to the narrative mood whilst he spoke the few concluding lines of the poem.

Then he collapsed half fainting.

III

There are great moments even to the great.. That night Irving was inspired. Many times since then I saw and heard him — for such an effort eyes as well as ears are required — recite that poem and hold audiences, big or little, spellbound till the moment came for the thunderous outlet of their pent-up feelings; but that particular vein I never met again. Art can do much; but in all things even in art there is a summit somewhere. That night for a brief time in which the rest of the world seemed to sit still, Irving's genius floated in blazing triumph above the summit of art. There is something in the soul which lifts it above all that has its base in material things. If once only in a lifetime the soul of a man can take wings and sweep for an instant into mortal gaze, then that " once " for Irving was on that, to me, ever memorable night.

As to its effect I had no adequate words. I can only say that after a few seconds of stony silence following his collapse I burst out into something like a violent fit of hysterics.

Let me say, not in my own vindication, but to bring new tribute to Irving's splendid power, that I was no hysterical subject. I was no green youth; no weak individual, yielding to a superior emotional force. I was as men go a strong man, strong in many ways. If autobigraphy is allowable in a work of reminiscence let me say here what I was:

I was a very strong man. It is true that I had known weakness. In my babyhood I used, I understand to be, often at the point of death. Certainly till I was about seven years old I never knew what it was to stand upright. I was naturally thoughtful and the leisure of long illness gave opportunity for many thoughts which were fruitful according to their kind in later years.

This early weakness, however, passed away in time and I grew into a strong boy and in time enlarged to the biggest member of my family. When I was in my twentieth year I was Athletic Champion of

Dublin University. When I met Irving first I was in my thirtieth year. I had been for ten years in the Civil Service and was then engaged on a dry-as-dust book on The Duties of Clerks of Petty Sessions. I had edited a newspaper, and had exercised my spare time in many ways — as a journalist; as a writer of short and serial stories; as a teacher. In my College days I had been Auditor of the Historical Society — a post which corresponds to the Presidency of the Union in Oxford or Cambridge — and had got medals, or certificates, for History, Composition and Oratory. I had been President of the Philosophical Society; had got Honours in pure Mathematics. I had won numerous silver cups for races of various kinds. I had played for years in the University football team, where I had received the honour of a " cap! " I was physically immensely strong. In fact I feel justified in saying I represented in my own person something of that aim of university education mens sang in corpore sano. When, therefore, after his recitation I became hysterical, it was distinctly a surprise to my friends; for myself surprise had no part in my then state of mind. Irving seemed much moved by the occurrence.

On piecing together the causes of his pleasure at finding an understanding friend, and his further pleasure in realising that that friend's capacity for receptive emotion was something akin in forcefulness to his power of creating it, I can now have some glimpse of his compelling motive when he. went into his room and after a couple of minutes brought me out his photograph with an inscription on it, the ink still wet:

"My dear friend Stoker. God bless you! God bless you!! Henry Irving. Dublin, December 3, 1876."

In those moments of our mutual emotion he too had found a friend and knew it. Soul had looked into soul! From that hour began a friendship as profound, as close, as lasting as can be between two men.

He has gone his road. Now he lies amongst the great dead; his battle won; the desire of his heart for the advancement of his chosen and beloved art accomplished; his ambition satisfied; his fame part of the history and the glory of the nation.

And the sight of his picture before me, with those loving words, the record of a time of deep emotion and full understanding of us both, each for the other, unmans me once again as I write.

I have ventured to write fully, if not diffusely, about not only my first meeting with Irving but about matters which preceded it and in some measure lead to an understanding of its results.

When a man with his full share of ambition is willing to yield it up to work with a friend whom he loves and honours, it is perhaps as well that in due season he may set out his reasons for so doing. Such is but just; and I now place it on record for the sake of Irving as well as of myself, and for the friends of us both.

For twenty-seven years I worked with Henry Irving, helping him in all honest ways in which one man may aid another — and there were no ways with Irving other than honourable.

Looking back I cannot honestly find any moment in my life when I failed him, or when I put myself forward in any way when the most scrupulous good taste could have enjoined or even suggested a larger measure of reticence.

By my dealing with him I am quite content to be judged, now and hereafter. In my own speaking to the dead man I can find an analogue in the words of heartbreaking sincerity:

“Stand up on the jasper sea, And be witness I have given All the gifts required of me!”

CHAPTER IV. HONOURS FROM DUBLIN UNIVERSITY

Public Address — University Night —— Carriage Dragged by Students

DURING that visit to Dublin, 1876, Irving received at the hands of the University two honours, one of them unique. Both were accorded by all grades of the College — for Dublin University is the University of the College.

Both honours were unofficial and yet both entirely representative. Both were originated by a few of us the morning after his first performance of Hamlet —— before I had the honour of knowing him personally. The first was an Address to be presented in the Dining Hall by the Graduates and Undergraduates of the University. The movement came from a few enthusiasts of whom the late G. F. Shaw and Professor R. Y. Tyrrell, both Fellows of the University, were included. As I had originated the idea I was asked by the Committee to write the draft address.

One of the paragraphs, when completed, ran as follows:

"For the delight and instruction that we (in common with our fellow citizens) have derived from all your impersonations, we tender you our sincere thanks.

But it is something more than gratitude for personal pleasure or personal improvement that moves us to offer this public homage to your genius. Acting such as yours ennobles and elevates the stage, and serves to restore it to its true function as a potent instrument for intellectual and moral culture.

"Throughout your too brief engagement our stage has been a school of true art, a purifier of the passions, and a nurse of heroic sentiments; you have even succeeded in commending it to the favour of a portion of society, large and justly influential, who usually hold aloof from the theatre.”

The Address was signed with the names necessary to show its scope and wide significance.

To this Irving replied suitably. I give some passages of his speech; for the occasion was a memorable one, with far-reaching consequences to himself and his art and calling:

“I believe that this is one of the very rare occasions on which public acknowledgment has been given by an Academic body to the efforts of a player, and this belief impresses me with the magnitude of the honour which you have conferred.... I feel not merely the personal pride of individual success which you thus avow, but that the far nobler work which I aim at is in truth begun. When I think that you, the upholders of the classic in every age, have thus flung aside the traditions of three centuries, and have acknowledged the true union of poet and actor, my heart swells with a great pride that I should be the recipient of such acknowledgment. I trust with all my soul that the reform which you suggest may ere long be carried out, and that that body to whom is justly entrusted our higher moral education may recognise in the Stage a medium for the accomplishment of such ends. What you have done to-day is a mighty stride in this direction. In my profession it will be hailed with joy and gladness — it must elevate, not only the aims of individual actors, but our calling in the eyes of the world. Such honour as you have now bestowed enters not into the actor’s dreams of success. Our hopes, it is true, are dazzling. We seek our reward in the approval of audiences, and in the tribute of their tears and smiles; but the calm honour of academic distinction is and must be to us, as actors, the

Unattainable, and therefore the more dear when given unsought....

"It is only natural in the presence of gentlemen whose Alma Mater holds such state among institutes of learning that I should feel embarrassed in the choice of words with which to thank you; but I beg you to believe this. For my Profession, I tender you gratitude; for my Art I honour you; for myself, I would that I could speak all that is in my soul. But I cannot; and so falteringly tender you my most grateful thanks."

The second honour given on the same day — December II, 1876 — was a " University Night." Trinity had taken all the seats in the theatre and these had been allotted in a sort of rough precedence, University dignitaries coming first, and public men of light and leading — alumni of the University — next and so on to the undergraduates who occupied pit and gallery. An announcement had been made by the Management of the theatre that only those seats not required by the University would be available on the evening for the public. What follows is from the account of the affair written by myself for the Dublin Mail.

"The grand reception given to Mr. Irving in Trinity College during the day had increased the interest of the public, and vast crowds had assembled to await the opening of the doors. A little before seven the sound of horns was heard in the College, and from the gate in Brunswick Street swept a body of five hundred students, who took the seats reserved for them in the pit of the theatre. Then gradually the boxes began to fill, and as each Fellow and Professor and well-known University character made his appearance, he was cheered according to the measure of his popularity.... All University men, past and present, wore rosettes. Long before the time appointed for beginning the play the whole house was crammed from floor to ceiling; the pit and galleries were seas of heads, and the box lobbies were filled with those who were content to get an occasional glimpse of the stage through the door. When Mr. Irving made his appearance the pit rose at him, and he was received with a cheer which somewhat resembled a May shower, for it was sudden, fierce, and short, as the burst of welcome was not allowed to interrupt the play. The Duke of Connaught arrived during the second act, and received a hearty and prolonged cheer, but not till the scene was ended. Mr. Irving's performance was magnificent. It seemed as though he were put on his mettle by the University distinction of the day to do justice to the stateliness of his mighty theme, and, at the same time, was fired to the utmost enthusiasm — as it was, indeed, no wonder — at the warmth of his reception. In the philosophic passage ' To be or not to be,' and the advice to the players, there was a quiet, self-possessed dignity of thought which no man could maintain if he did not know that he had an appreciative audience, and that he was not talking over their heads. In the scene with Ophelia he acted as though inspired, for there was a depth of passionate emotion evident which even a great actor can but seldom feel; and in the play scene he stirred the house to such a state of feeling that there was a roar of applause. During the performance he was called before the drop-scene several times; but it was not till the green curtain fell that the pent-up enthusiasm burst forth. There was tremendous applause, and when the actor came forward the whole house rose simultaneously to their feet, and there was a shout that made the walls ring again. Hats and handkerchiefs were waved, and cheer upon cheer swelled louder and louder as the player stood proudly before his audience, with a light upon his face such as never shone from the floats. It was a pleasant sight to behold — the sea of upturned faces in the pit, clear, strong young faces, with broad foreheads and bright eyes — the glimpse of colour as the crimson rosettes which the students wore flashed with their every movement — the gleaming jewels of the ladies in the boxes — the moving mass of hats and handkerchiefs, and above all the unanimity with which everything was done. It was evident that in the theatre this night was a body moved by a strong esprit de corps, for without any fugleman every movement was simultaneous. They took their cue from the situation, moved by one impulse to do the same thing. It was, indeed, a tribute of which any human being might be proud. For many minutes the tempest continued, and then, as one man, the house sat down, as Mr. Henry Irving stepped forward to make his speech, which was as follows:

"' Ladies and Gentlemen, — Honest steadfast work in'any path of life is almost sure to bring rewards and honours; but they are rewards and honours so unexpected and so unprecedented that they may well give the happy recipient a new zest for existence. Such honours you have heaped upon me. For the welcome you have given me upon these classic boards — for the proud distinction your grand old University has bestowed upon me — a distinction which will be remembered as long as the annals of our stage will last — for these honours accept the truest, warmest, and most earnest thanks that an overflowing heart tries to utter, and you cannot think it strange that every fibre of my soul throbs and my eyes are dim with emotion as I look upon your faces and know that I must say " Goodbye." Your brilliant attendance on this, my parting performance, sheds a lustre upon my life. I only hope that I have your " God's blessing," as you have mine.'

"At the close of his speech Mr. Irving seemed much affected, as, indeed, it was no wonder, for the memory of Saturday night is one which he will carry to his grave. Not Mr. Irving alone, but the whole of the profession should be proud of such a tribute to histrionic genius, for the address in the University and the assemblage at the theatre not only adds another sprig to the actor's well-won crown of laurel, but it marks an era in the history of the stage."

When the performance was over a vast crowd of young men, nearly all students, waited outside the stage door to escort the actor to his hotel, the Shelbourne, in St. Stephen's Green. This they did in noble style. They had come prepared with a long, strong rope, and taking the horses from the carriage harnessed themselves to it. There were over a thousand of them, and as no more than a couple of hundred of them could get a hand on the rope the rest surrounded us — for I accompanied my friend on that exciting progress — on either side a shouting body. The street was a solid moving mass and the wild uproar was incessant. To us the street was a sea of faces, for more than half the body were turning perpetually to have another look at the hero of the hour. Up Grafton Street we swept, the ordinary passengers in the street falling of necessity back into doorways and side streets; round into St. Stephen's Green, where the shouting crowd stopped before the hotel. Then the cheering became more organised. The desultory sounds grew into more exact and recurring volume till the cheers rang out across the great square and seemed to roll away towards the mountains in the far distance. Irving was greatly moved, almost overcome; and in the exuberance of his heart asked me seriously if it would not be possible to ask all his friends into the hotel to join him at supper. This being manifestly impossible, as he saw when he turned to lift his hat and say good-night and his eyes ranged over that seething roaring crowd, he asked could he not ask them all to drink a health with him. To this the hotel manager and the array of giant constables — then a feature of the Dublin administration of law and order, who had by this time arrived, fearing a possibility of disorder from so large a concourse of students — answered with smiling headshake a no possumus. And so amid endless cheering and relentless hand-shaking we forced a way into the hotel.

That the occasion was marked by rare orderliness — for in those days town and gown fights were pretty common — was shown by the official Notice fixed on the College gate on Monday morning:

“At Roll-call to-night the Junior Dean will express his grateful sense of the admirable conduct of the Students on Saturday last, at Mr. Irving’s Reception in Trinity College, and subsequently at the performance in the Theatre Royal.”

After that glorious night Henry Irving with brave heart and high hopes, now justified by a new form of success, left Ireland for his own country, where fresh triumphs awaited him.

CHAPTER V. CONVERGING STREAMS

A Reading in Trinity College — James Knowles — Hamlet the Mystic — Richard III. — The Plantagenet Look" Only a Commercial" — True Sportsmen — Coming Events

I

IN June 1877 Henry Irving paid a flying visit to Dublin in order to redeem his promise of giving a Reading in Trinity College. It must have been for him an arduous spell of work. Leaving London by the night mail on Sunday he arrived at half-past six in the morning of Monday; June 18, at Kingstown, where I met him. He had with him a couple of friends: Frank A. Marshall, who afterwards edited Shakespeare with him; and Harry J. Loveday, then and afterwards his stage manager. The Reading was in the Examination Hall; on the wall of which is the portrait of Queen Elizabeth, Founder of the College, and in the gallery of which is a fine old organ said to have been taken from one of the galleons of the Armada wrecked on the Irish coast. The hall was crowded in every corner and there was much enthusiasm. He read part of Richard III, part of Othello, Calverley's Gemini et Virgo, and Dickens' Copperfield and the Waiter, and recited The Dream of Eugene Aram.

He was wildly cheered in the Hall; and in the Quadrangle when he came out, he was " chaired " on men's shoulders all round the place. Knowing that particular game is best played by the recipent of the honour and surmising what the action of the crowd would be, I was able to help him. I had already coached him when we had breakfasted together at the hotel as to how to protect himself; and in the rush I managed to keep close to him to see that the wisdom of my experience was put in force. Being chaired is sometimes dangerous from the fact that some of the young enthusiasts who do it are not experts in the game. Often they do not know or realise the necessity of holding to one another as well as to their victim, and so in the whirl they get pulled in different ways and lose their feet. Now the way to secure safety in such cases — in all cases of chairing — is for the one chaired to at once twist the fingers of each hand in the hair of the bearers closest to him, right and left. If all goes well there is no harm done, and even the hair-pulling is not painful. But if there be an accident the danger is averted, for it is not possible that the victim can fall head down; feet down does not matter. The instant the pull comes on the hair of the bearers they resist it; bad for them, but safety for the one in danger. Years afterwards, in 1894; I saw Irving saved by this means from possibly a very nasty accident when, at his being chaired in the Quadrangle of the Victoria University of Manchester, the bearers got pulled in different ways and he was falling head down; his legs being safe held tight in the clutches of two strong young men.

That night he dined in Hall with the Fellows at the High Table and was afterwards in the Cornmination Room where I too was a guest, and where we remained till it was time for him to leave for London by the night mail. Edward Lefroy, brother of the present Dean of Norwich — a brilliant and most promising young journalist, who unhappily died a few years afterwards — and I saw him off from Kingstown.

His reading that day of Richard III. gave me a wonderful glimpse of his dealing with that great character. There was something about it so fine — at once so subtle and so masterly — that it made me long to see the complete work.

II

ThirteenTdays afterwards, I was in London and saw him at the Lyceum in The Lyons Mail, I sat in his dressing-room between the acts. My visit to London was my holiday for that year and took in the Handel Festival. I saw a good deal of Irving; meeting him on most days.

I may here give an instance of his thoughtful kindness. Since our first meeting the year before, he had known of my wish to get to London where as a writer I should have a larger scope and better chance of success than at home. One morning, July 12, I got a letter from him asking me to call at 17 Albert Mansions, Victoria Street, at half-past one and see Mr. Knowles. I did so, and on arriving found that it was the office of the Nineteenth Century. There I saw the Editor and owner, Sir (then Mr.) James Knowles, who received me most kindly and asked me all sorts of questions as to work and prospects. Presently whilst he was speaking he interrupted himself to say:

“What are you smiling at? “ I answered: “ Are you not dissuading me from venturing to come to London as a writer?”

After a moment’s hesitation he said with a smile:

“Yes! I believe I am.”

“I was smiling to think,” I said, “ that if I had not known the accuracy and wisdom of all you have said I should have been here long ago!”

That seemed to interest him; he was far too clever a man to waste time on a fool. Presently he said:

“Now, why do you think it better to be in London? Could you not write, to me for instance, from Dublin?

“Oh! yes I could write well enough, but I have known that game for some time. I know the joy of the waste-paper basket and the manuscript returned — unread. Now Mr. Knowles,” I went on, “ may I ask you something? “ “ Certainly!”

“You are, if I mistake not, a Scotchman? “ He nodded acquiescence, keeping his eyes on me and smiling as I went on:

“And yet you came to London. You have not done badly either, I understand! Why did you come?”

“Oh! “ he answered quickly, “ far be it from me to make little of life in London or the advantages of it. Now look here, I know exactly what you feel. Will you send me anything which you may have written, or which you may write for the purpose, which you think suitable for the Nineteenth Century? I promise you that I shall read it myself; and if I can I will find a place for it in the magazine!”

I thanked him warmly for his quick understanding and sympathy, and for his kindly promise. I said at the conclusion:

“And I give you my word that I shall never send you anything which I do not think worthy of the Nineteenth Century!

From that hour Sir James and I became close friends. I and mine have received from him and his innumerable kindnesses; and there is for him a very warm corner in my heart.

Strange to say that the next time we spoke of my writing in the Nineteenth Century was when in 1881 he asked me to write an article for him on a matter then of much importance in the world of the theatre. I asked him if it was to be over my signature. When he said that was the intention I said:

“I am sorry I cannot do it. Irving and I have been for now some years so closely associated that anything I should write on a theatrical subj ect might be taken for a reflex of his opinion or desire.

Since we have been associated in business I have never written anything regarding the stage unless we shared the same view. And whilst we are so associated I want to keep to that rule. Otherwise it would not be fair to him, for he might get odium in some form for an opinion which he did not hold! As a matter of fact we join issue on this particular subject!”

The first time I had the pleasure of writing for him was when in 1890 I wrote an article on “ Actor-Managers “ which appeared in the June number. Regarding this, Irving’s opinion and my own were at one and I could attack the matter with a good heart. I certainly took pains enough for I spent many, many hours in the Library of my Inn, the Inner Temple, reading all the “ Sumptuary “ laws in the entire collection of British Statutes. Irving himself followed my own article with a short one on the subject of the controversy on which we were then engaged.

III

In the Autumn of that year, 1877, Irving again visited Dublin, opening in Hamlet on Monday, November 19. The year’s work had smoothed and rounded his impersonation, and to my mind, improved even upon its excellence. I shall venture to quote again some sentences from my own criticism upon it. Not that I mean to set myself up as an infallible authority, but it is as well to place on record here the evidence of an independent and sincere opinion. What one wrote at the time has in its own way its historical value. I should say that in the year not only the public had learned something — much; but that he too had learned also, even of his own instinctive ideas — up to then not wholly conscious. We all had learned, acting and reacting on each other. We had followed him. He, in turn, encouraged and aided by the thought as well as the sympathy of others and feeling justified in further advance, had let his own ideas grow, widening to all the points of the intellectual compass and growing higher and deeper than had been possible to his unaided efforts. For original thought must, after. all, be in part experimental or tentative. It is in the consensus of many varying ideas, guesses and experiences — reachings out of groping intelligences into the presently dark unknown — that the throbbing heart of true wisdom is to be found. In my criticism I said:

"Mr. Irving has not slackened in his study of Hamlet, and the consequence is an advance. All the little fleeting subtleties of thought and expression which arise from time to time under slightly different circumstances have been fixed and repeated till they have formed an additional net of completeness round the whole character. To the actor, art is as necessary as genius, for it is only when the flashes of genius evoked by occasion have been studied as facts to be repeated, that a worthy reproduction of effect is possible.... Hamlet, as Mr. Irving now acts it, is the wild, fitful, irresolute, mystic, melancholy prince that we know in the play; but given with a sad, picturesque gracefulness which is the actor's special gift.... In his most passionate moments with Ophelia, even in the violence of his rage, he never loses that sense of distance — of a gulf fixed — of that acknowledgment of the unseen which is his unconscious testimony to her unspotted purity...."

The lesson conveyed to me by his acting of which the above is the expression was put by him into words in his Preface to the edition of Diderot's Paradox of Acting translated by Walter Pollock. and published in 1883 — six years after he had been practising the art by which he taught and illuminated the minds of others.

During this engagement Irving played Richard III., and his wonderful acting satisfied all the hopes aroused by sample given in his Reading at the University. For myself I can say truly that I sat all the evening in a positive quiver of intellectual delight. His conception and impersonation of the part were so " subtle, complete and masterly " — these were the terms I used in my criticism written that night — that it seemed to me the power of acting could go no further; that it had reached the limit of human power. Most certainly it raised him still higher in public esteem. Its memory being still with me, I could fully appreciate the power and fineness of Tennyson's criticism which I heard long afterwards. When the poet had seen the piece he said to Irving:

"Where did you get that Plantagenet look?"

IV

In those days a small party of us, of whom Irving and I were always two, very often had supper in those restaurants which were a famous feature of men's social life in Dublin. There were not so many clubs as there are now, and certain houses made a speciality of suppers — Jude's, Burton Bindon's, Corless's. The latter was famous for " hot lobster " and certain other toothsome delicacies and had an excellent grill, and so we often went there. By that time Irving had a great vogue in Dublin, and since the Address in College and the University night in 1876 his name was in the public mind associated with the University. All College men were naturally privileged persons with him, so that any one who chose to pass himself off as a student could easily make his acquaintance. The waiters in the restaurant, who held him in great respect, were inclined to resent this, and one night at Corless's when a common fellow came up and introduced himself as a Scholar of Trinity College — he called it " Thrinity " — Irving, not suspecting, was friendly to him. I looked on quietly and enjoyed the situation, hoping that it might end in some fun. The outsider having made good his purpose wished to show off before his friends, men of his own style who were grinning at another table. When he went over towards them, our waiter who had been hovering round us waiting for his chance — his napkin taking as many expressive flickers as the tail of Whistler's butterfly in The Gentle Art of Making Enemies — stooped over to Irving and said in a hurried whisper:

"He said he was a College man, sur! He's a liar! He's only a Commercial!"

V

During his fortnight in Dublin I drove one Sunday with Irving in the Phoenix Park, the great park near Dublin which measures some seven miles in circumference. Whilst driving through that section known as the " Nine Acres " we happened on a scene which took his fancy hugely. In those days wrestling was an amusement much in vogue in Ireland, chiefly if not wholly amongst the labouring class. Bouts used to be held on each Sunday afternoon in various places, and naturally the best of the wrestlers wished to prove themselves in the Capital. Each Sunday some young man who had won victory in Navan, or Cork, or Galway, or wherever exceptional excellence had been manifested, would come up to town to try conclusion in the " Phaynix " generally by aid of a subscription from his fellows or his club, for they were all poor men to whom a long railway journey was a grave expense. There was no prize, no betting; it was Sport, pure and simple; and sport conducted under fairer lines I have never seen or thought of. We saw the gathering crowd and joined them. They did not know either of us, but they saw we were gentlemen, strangers to themselves, and with the universal courtesy of their race put us in the front when the ring had been formed. This forming of the ring was a unique experience. There were no police present, there were no stakes or ropes; not even a whitened mark on the grass. Two or three men of authority amongst the sportsmen made the ring. It was done after this fashion: One man, a fine, big, powerful fellow, was given a drayman's heavy whip. Then one of those with him took off his cap and put it before the face of the armed man. Another guided him from behind in the required direction. Warning was called out lustily, and any one not getting at once out of the way had to take the consequence of that fiercely falling whip. It was wonderful how soon and how excellently that ring was formed. The manner of its doing, though violent exceedingly, was so conspicuously and unquestionably fair that not even the most captious or quarrelsome could object.

Then the contestants stepped into the ring and made their little preparations for strife. Two splendid young men they were — Rafferty of Dublin and Finlay of Drogheda — as hard as nails and full of pluck. The style of wrestling was the old-fashioned " collar and elbow " with the usual test of defeat; both shoulders on the ground at once. It was certainly a noble game. A single bout sometimes lasted for over a quarter of an hour; and any one who knows what the fierce and unrelenting and pauseless struggle can be, and must be in any kind of equality, can understand the strain. What was most noticeable by us however was the extraordinary fairness of the crowd. Not a word was allowed; not a hint of method of defence or attack; not an encouraging word or sign. The local men could have cheered their own man to the echo; but the stranger must of necessity be alone or with only a small backing at best. And so, as encouragement could not be equal for the combatants, there should be none at all!

It was a lesson in fair play which might have shone out conspicuously in any part of the civilised world — or the uncivilised either if we do not " count the grey barbarian lower than the Christian child."

Irving was immensely delighted with it and asked to be allowed to give a prize to be divided equally between the combatants; a division which showed the influence on his mind of the extra- ordinary fairness of the conditions of the competition. In this spirit was the gift received. Several of the men came round me whom they had by this time recognised as an old athlete of " the College" — now a " back number " of some ten years' standing. When I told them who was the donor they raised a mighty cheer.

The only difficulty we left behind us was that of " breaking " the bank-note which had been given. We saw them as we moved off producing what money they had so as to make up his half for the stranger to take with him to Drogheda.

VI

One evening in that week Irving came up to supper with me in my rooms after The Bells. We were quite alone and talked with the freedom of understanding friends. He spoke of the future and of what he would try to do when he should have a theatre all to himself where he would be sole master. He was then in a sort of informal partnership with Mrs. Bateman and had of course the feeling of limitation of expansive ideas which must ever be when there is a sharing of interests and responsibilities. He was quite frank as to the present difficulties, although he put them in the most kindly way possible. I had a sort of dim idea that events were moving in a direction which within a year became declared. He had spoken of a matter at which he had hinted shortly after our first meeting: the possibility of my giving up the post I then occupied in the Public Service and sharing his fortunes in case he should have a theatre quite his own. The hope grew in me that a time might yet come when he and I might work together to one end that we both believed in and held precious in the secret chamber of our hearts. In my diary that night, November 22, 1877, I wrote: " London in view!"

CHAPTER VI. JOINING FORCES

“Vanderdecken” — Visit to Belfast — An Irish Bull — I join Irving — Preparations at the Lyceum — The Property Master”getting even”

I

HENRY IRVING produced Wills’s play Vanderdecken at the Lyceum on June 8, 1878. I had arrived in London the day before and was able to be present on the occasion. The play was a new version of the legend of the “ Flying Dutchman “ and was treated in a very poetical way. Irving was fine in it, and gave one a wonderful impression of a dead man fictitiously alive. I think his first appearance was the most striking and startling thing I ever saw on the stage. The scene was of the landing-place on the edge of the fiord. Sea and sky were blue with the cold steely blue of the North. The sun was bright and across the water the rugged mountain-line stood out boldly. Deep under the shelving beach, which led down to the water, was a Norwegian fishing-boat whose small brown foresail swung in the wind. There was no appearance anywhere of a man or anything else alive. But suddenly there stood a mariner in old-time dress of picturesque cut and faded colour of brown and peacock blue with a touch of red. On his head was a sable cap. He stood there, silent, still and fixed, more like a vision made solid than a living man, realising well the description of the phantom sailor of whom Thekla had told in the ballad spoken in the first act

“And the Captain there In the dismal glare Stands paler than tongue can tell With clenched hand As in mute command And eyes like a soul’s in Hell!”

It was marvellous that any living man should show such eyes. They really seemed to shine like cinders of glowing red from out the marble face. The effect was instantaneous and boded well for the success of the play. In my criticism I wrote:

“In his face is the ghastly pallor of the phantom Captain and in his eyes shines the wild glamour of the lost — in his every tone and action there is the stamp of death. Herein lies the terror — we can call it by no other name — of the play. The chief actor is not quick but dead. Twice only does he sound the keynote to the full. In the third act, when before fighting with Olaf he curses him for trifling with my eternal happiness,’ and again in the last act when he answers to Thekla’s question: Where are we? ‘: “ Between the living and the dead! ‘“

But the play itself wanted something. The last act, in which Thekla sails away with the phantom lover whose soul had been released by her unselfish love, was impossible of realisation by the resources of stage art of the time. Nowadays, with calcium lights and coloured “ mediums “ and electricity, and all the aids to illusion which Irving had himself created or brought into use, much could be done.

For such acting the play ought to have been a great one; but it fell short of excellence. It was a great pity; for Irving’s appearance and acting in it were of memorable perfection.

On the next day, Sunday, I spent hours with Irving in his rooms in Grafton Street helping him to cut and alter the play. We did a good deal of work on it and altered it considerably for the better I thought.

The next morning I breakfasted with him in his rooms; and, after another long spell of work on the play, I went with him to the Lyceum to attend rehearsal of the altered business.

That evening I attended the Lyceum again and thought the play had been improved. So had Irving too, so far as was possible to a performance already so complete. I supped with him at the Devonshire Club, where we talked over the play and continued the conversation at his own rooms till after five o'clock in the morning.

The next day I went to Paris, but on my return saw V anderdecken again and thought that by practice it had improved. It played " closer " and the actors were more at ease — a most important thing in an eerie play!

II

In August of the same year, 1878, Henry Irving paid another visit to Ireland. He had promised to give a Reading in the Ulster Hall for the benefit of the Belfast Samaritan Hospital, and this was in the fulfilment of it. By previous arrangement the expedition was enlarged into a holiday. As the Reading was to be on the 16th he travelled from London on the night mail of the 12th. I met him on his arrival at Kingstown in the early morning. He was to stay with my eldest brother, Sir Thornley Stoker (he was in great spirits — something like a schoolboy off on a long-expected holiday). Here he spent three very enjoyable days, a large part of which were occupied in driving-excursions to Lough Bray and leixlip. On the 15th Irving and Loveday and I went to Belfast. After having a look at the Ulster Hall, a huge hall about as big as the Manchester Free Trade Hall, we supped with a somewhat eccentric local philanthropist, David Cunningham. Mr. Cunningham was a large man, tall and broad and heavy and with great bald head which rose dome-shaped above a massive frontal sinus. He was the best of good fellows, the mainstay of the Samaritan Hospital, and a generous helper of all local charities.

The Reading was an immense success. Over three thousand persons were present, and at the close was a scene of wild enthusiasm. We supped again with David Cunningham — he was one of the “ Christian name “ men whose surname is seldom heard and never alone. A good many of his friends were present and we had an informal and joyous time. There were of course lots of speeches. Belfast is the very home of fiery and flamboyant oratory and all our local friends were red-hot Orangemen.

On this occasion, however, we were spared any contentious matter, though the harmless periods of the oratory of the “ Northern Acropolis,” as some of them called their native city, were pressed into service. One speaker made as pretty an “ Irish Bull “ as could be found — though the “ bull “ is generally supposed to belong to other provinces than the hard-headed Ulster. In descanting on the many virtues of the guest of the evening he mentioned the excellence of his moral nature and rectitude of his private life in these terms:

“Mr. Irving, sir, is a gentleman what leads a life of unbroken blemish!”

Years afterwards when at a large and fashionable luncheon-party at Chicago, given in honour of Washington’s birthday, I, as one of the strangers, was asked to speak of Washington, I got out of my difficulties by relating, after saying that I would apply to the Father of his Country the words used to the actor, the incident of that notable speech. The fun of it was instantaneously received; I was able to sit down amidst a burst of laughter and applause.

We sometimes kept late hours in the seventies. That night we left our host's house at three o'clock A.M. On our return to the hotel Irving and I sat up talking over the events of the day. The sun was beginning to herald his arrival when we began, but in spite of that we sat talking till the clock struck seven.

I well understood even then, though I understand it better now, that after a hard and exciting day or night — or both — the person most concerned does not want to go to bed. He feels that sleep is at arm's-length till it is summoned. Irving knew that the next day he would have to start at three o'clock on a continuous journey to London, which would occupy some fifteen hours; but I did not like to thwart him when he felt that a friendly chat of no matter how exaggerated dimensions would rest him better than some sleepless hours in bed.

III

Irving's visit to Dublin as an actor began in that year, 1878, on September 23, and lasted a fortnight. During this time I was a great deal with him, not only in the theatre during rehearsals as well as at the performances, but we drove almost every day and dined and supped at the house of my brother and sister-in-law, with whom he was great friends; at my own lodgings or his hotel; at restaurants or in the houses of other friends. It was a sort of gala time to us all, and through every phase of it — and through the working time as well — our friendship grew and grew.

We had now been close friends for over two years. We understood each other's nature, needs and ambitions, and had a mutual confidence, each towards the other in his own way, rare amongst men. It did not, I think, surprise any of us when six weeks after his departure I received a telegram from him from Glasgow, where he was then playing, asking me if I could go to see him at once on important business.

I was with him the next evening. He told me that he had arranged to take the management of the Lyceum into his own hands. He asked me if I would give up the Civil Service and join him; I to take charge of his business as Acting Manager.

I accepted at once. I had then had some thirteen years in the public service, a term entitling me to pension in case of retirement from ill-health (as distinguished from " gratuity " which is the rule for shorter period of service); but I was content to throw in my lot with his. In the morning I sent in my resignation and made by telegram certain domestic and other arrangements of supreme importance to me at that time — and ever since. We had decided that I was to join him on December 14 as I should require a few weeks to arrange matters at home. I knew that as he was to open the Lyceum on December 31 time was precious, and accordingly did all required with what expedition I could.

I left Glasgow on November 25, and took up my work with Irving at Birmingham on December 9, having in the meantime altered my whole business life, arranged for the completion of my book on The Duties ofPetty Sessions Clerks, and last, not least, having got married — an event which had already been arranged for a year later.

Irving was staying at the Plough and Harrow, that delightful little hotel at Edgbaston, and he was mightily surprised when he found that I had a wife — the wife — with me.

IV

We finished at Birmingham on Saturday December 14, and on Sunday he went on with the company to Bristol whilst we came on to London. The week at Birmingham had been a heavy time. I had taken over all the correspondence and the letters were endless. It was the beginning of a vast experience of correspondence, for from that on till the day of his death I seldom wrote, in working times, less than fifty letters a day. Fortunately — for both myself and the readers, for I write an extremely bad hand — the bulk of them were short. Anyhow I think I shall be very well within the mark when I say that during my time of working with Henry Irving I have written in his name nearer half a million than a quarter of a million letters!

But the week in Birmingham was child's play compared with the next two weeks in London. The correspondence alone was greater; but in addition the theatre which was to be opened was in a state of chaos. The builders who were making certain structural alterations had not got through their work; plasterers, paper-hangers, painters, upholsterers were tumbling over each other. The outside of the building was covered with men and scaffolding. The whole of the auditorium was a mass of poles and platforms. On the stage and in the paint-room and the property-rooms, the gas-rooms and carpenter's shop and wardrobe-room, the new production of Hamlet was being hurried on under high pressure.

On the financial side of things too, there were matters of gravity. Irving had to begin his management without capital — at least without more than that produced by his tour and by such accommodation as he could get from his bankers on the security of his property.

These were matters of much work and anxiety, for before the curtain went up on the first night of his management he had already paid away nearly ten thousand pounds, and had incurred liability for at least half as much more on the structure and what the lawyers call " beautifyings " of the Lyceum.

He had taken over the theatre as from the end of August 1878, so that there was a good deal of extra expense even whilst the theatre was lying idle; though such is usual in some form in the " running " of a theatre.

In another place I shall deal with Finance. I only mention it here because at the very start of his personal enterprise he had to encounter a very great difficulty.

Nearly all the work was new to me, and I was not sorry when on the 19th my colleague, Mr. H. J. Loveday, the stage manager, arrived and took in hand the whole of the stage matters. When Irving and the company arrived four days after, things both on the stage and throughout the house were beginning to look more presentable. When the heads of departments came back to work, preparations began to hum.

V

One of these men, Arnott, the Property Master and a fine workman, had had an odd experience during the Bristol week. Something had gone wrong with the travelling " property " horse used in the vision scene of The Bells, and he had come up to town to bring the real one from the storage. In touring it was usual to bring a " profile " representation of the gallant steed. " Profile " has in theatrical parlance a special meaning other than its dictionary meaning of an " outline." It is thin wood covered on both sides with rough canvas carefully glued down. It is very strong and can be cut in safety to any shape. The profile horse was of course an outline, but the art of the scene-painter had rounded it out to seemingly natural dimensions. Now the " real " horse, though a lifeless " property," had in fact been originally alive. It was formed of the skin of a moderately sized pony; and being embellished with picturesque attachments in the shape of mane and tail was a really creditable object. But it was expensive to carry as it took up much space. Arnott and two of his men ran up to fetch this down as there was not time to make a new profile horse. When they got to Paddington he found that the authorities refused to carry the goods by weight on account of its bulk, and asked him something like4 for the journey. He expressed his feelings freely, as men occasionally do under irritating circumstances, and said he would go somewhere else. The clerk in the office smiled and Arnott went away; he was a clever man who did not like to be beaten, and railways were his natural enemies. He thought the matter over. Having looked over the timetable and found that the cost of a horse-box to Bristol was only Li 13s., he went to the department in charge of such matters and ordered one, paying for it at once and arranging that it should go on the next fast train. By some manoeuvring he so managed that he and his men took Koveski's horse into the box and closed the doors.

When the train arrived at Bristol there had to be some shunting to and fro so as to place the horsebox in the siding arranged for such matters. Tim officials in charge threw open the door for the horse to walk out. But he would yield to no blandishment, nor even to the violence of chastisement usual at such times. A little time passed and the officials got anxious, for the siding was required for other purposes. The station at Bristol is not roomy and more than one line has to use it. The official in charge told him to take out his damned horse!

"Not me! " said he, for he was now seeing his way to " get back " at the railway company, " I've paid for the carriage of the horse and I want him delivered out of your premises. The rate I paid includes the services of the necessary officials."

The porters tried again, but the horse would not stir. Now it is a dangerous matter to go into a horse-box in case the horse should prove restive. One after another the porters declined, till at last one plucky lad volunteered to go in by the little window close to the horse's head. Those on the platform waited in apprehension, till he suddenly ran out from the box laughing and crying out:

"Why you blamed fools. He ain't a 'orse at all. He's a stuffed 'un!"

VI

As I have said, Arnott always got even in some way with those who tried to best him. I remember once when a group of short lines, now amalgamated into the Irish Great Northern Railway and worked in quite a different way, did what we all considered rather too sharp a thing. We had to have a special train to go from Dublin to Belfast on Sunday. For this they charged us full fare for every person and a rate for the train as well. Then when we were starting they took, at the ordinary rate, other passengers in our train for which we had paid extra. This, however, was not that which awoke Arnott's ire. The causa teterrima belli was that whilst they gave us only open trucks for goods they charged us extra for the use of tarpaulins, which are necessary in railway travelling where goods are inflammable and sparks many. Having made the arrangement I had gone back to London on other business, and did not go to Belfast so I did not know what had happened later till after the tour had closed. When I was checking the accounts in my office at the Lyceum, I found that though the railway company had charged us what we thought was an exorbitant price, still the cost of the total journey compared favourably with that of other journeys of equal length. I could not understand it until I went over the accounts, comparing item by item with the other journeys. • Thus I " focussed " the difference in the matter of " goods." Then I found that whereas the other railways had charged us on somewhere about nineteen tons weight this particular line had only assessed us at seven. I sent for Arnott and asked him how could the difference be, as on the first journey I had verified the weight as I usually did, such saving much trouble throughout a tour as it made the check easier. He shook his head and said that he did not know. I pressed him, pointing out that either this railway had underweighed us or that others had overweighed.

"Oh, the others were all right, sir," he said. " I saw them weighed at Euston myself!"

"Then how on earth can there be such a difference? " I asked. f Can't you throw any light on it? " He shook his head slowly as though pondering deeply and then said with a puzzled look on his face:

"I haven't an idea. It must have been all right for the lot of them was there, and the lot of us, too. There couldn't have been any mistake with them all looking on. No, sir, I can't account for it; not for the life of me! " Then seeing that I turned to my work again he moved away. When he was half way to the door he turned round, his face brightening as though a new light had suddenly dawned upon him. He spoke out quite genially as though proud of his intellectual effort:

"Unless it was, sir, that there was some mistake about the weighin'. You see, while the weighin' was gain' on we was all pretty angry about things. We because they was bestin' of us, and they because we was tellin''em so, and rabbin' in what we thought of 'em in a general way. Most of us thought that there might have been a fight and we was all ready — the lot of us — on both sides. We was standin' close together for we wouldn't stir and they had to come to us.... An' — it might have been that me and the boys was standin', before they came to join us on the platform with the weights! I dare say we wasn't so quarrelsome when we moved a bit away for there was more of them than of us; an' they stood where we had been. They didn't want to follow us. An' — an' — the weighin' was done by them!"

VII

One more anecdote of the Property Master.

We were playing in Glasgow at the Theatre Royal, which had just been bought by Howard and Wyndham. J. B. Howard was a man of stern countenance and masterful manner. He was a kindly man, but Nature had framed him in a somewhat fierce mould. His new theatre was a sacred thing, and he liked to be master in his own house. We were playing an engagement of two weeks; and on the first Saturday night it was found that a certain property — a tree trunk required for use in Hamlet, which was to be played on Tuesday night — was not forthcoming. So Arnott was told to make another at once and have it ready, for it required time to dry. Accordingly he went down to the theatre on Sunday morning with a couple of his men. There was no one in the theatre; in accordance with the strict Sabbath-keeping then in vogue at Glasgow, local people were all away — even the hall-keeper. Such a small matter as that would never deter Arnott. He had his work to do, and get in he must. So he took out a pane of glass, opened a window, and went in. In the property shop he found all he required; wood, glue, canvas, nails, paint; so the little band of expert workmen set to work, and having finished their task, came away. They had restored the window pane, and came out by the door. On Monday morning there was a hub-bub. Some one had broken into the theatre and taken store of wood and canvas, glue, nails and paint and there in the shop lay a fine property log already " set" and drying fast. Inquiry showed that none of the local people were to blame. So suspicion naturally fell on our men, and we did not deny the soft impeachment. Howard was fuming; he sent for the man to have it out with him. Arnott was a fine, big, well-featured north-countryman, with large limbs and massive shoulders — such a man as commanded some measure of respect even from an angry manager.

"I hear that you broke into my theatre yesterday and used up a lot of my stores?"

"Yes sir! The theatre was shut up and there was no time."

"Time has nothing to do with it, sir. Why did you do it?"

"Well, Mr. Howard, the governor ordered it and Mr. Loveday told me not to lose any time in getting it ready as we had to rehearse to-day.' This accounted to Mr. Howard, the man, for the breach of decorum; but as the manager he was not satisfied. He was not willing to relinquish his grievance all at once; so he said, and he said it in the emphatic manner customary to him:

"But sir, if Mr. Loveday was to tell you to take down the flys of my theatre would you do that, too?”

The answer came in a quiet, grave voice:

“Certainly, sir!”

Howard looked at him fixedly for a moment and then raising both hands in front of him said, as he shrugged his shoulders:

“In that case I have nothing more to say! I only wish to God that my men would work like that! “ And so the quasi-burglar went unreproved..

CHAPTER VII. THE LYCEUM PRODUCTIONS

DURING Henry Irving's personal management of the Lyceum he produced over forty plays, of which eleven were Shakespeare's; Hamlet, The Merchant of Venice, Othello, Romeo and Juliet, Much Ado About Nothing, Twelfth Night, Macbeth, Henry VIII, King Lear, Cymbeline, and Richard III. Coriolanus was produced during his agreement with the Lyceum Company. He also reproduced six plays which he had before presented during his engagement by and partnership with the Batemans: Eugene Aram, Richelieu, Louis XI, The Lyons Mail, Charles I., The Bells. He also produced the following old plays, in most of which he had already appeared at some time: The Lady of Lyons, The Iron Chest, The Corsican Brothers, The Belle's Stratagem, Two Roses, Olivia, The Dead Heart, Robert Macaire, and a good many " curtain-raisers " whose excellences were old and tried.

The new plays were in some instances old stories told afresh, and in the remainder historic subjects treated in a new way or else quite new themes or translations. In the first category were Faust, Werner, Ravenswood, Iolanthe (one act). In the second were: The Cup, The Amber Heart, Beckett, King Arthur, Madame Sans-Gene, Peter the Great, The Medicine Man, Robespierre and the following one-act plays: Waterloo, Nance Oldfield, and Don Quixote. Dante was produced after the Lyceum Company had been unable to carry out their contract with him.

This gives an average of two plays, " by and large " as the sailors say, for each year from 1878 to 1898, after which time he sold his rights to the Lyceum Theatre Company, Limited. Regarding some of these plays are certain matters of interest either in the preparation or the working. I shall simply try, now and again, to raise a little the veil which hangs between the great actor and the generations who may be interested in him and his work.

CHAPTER VIII. IRVING BEGINS MANAGEMENT

The "Lyceum Audience"— "Hamlet" — A Lesson in Production — The Chinese Ambassador — Catastrophe averted — The Responsibility ofa Manager — Not 1ll for Seven Years

I

THE first half-year of Irving's management was, in accordance with old usage, broken into two seasons, the first ending on May 31 and the second beginning on June i. This was the last time except in the spring of 1881 that such an unnatural division of natural periods took place. After that during the entire of his management the " season " lasted until the theatre closed. And as the coming of the hot weather was the time when, for the reason that the theatre-going public left London, the theatre had to be closed, about the end of July became practically the time for recess. It had become an unwritten law that Goodwood closed the London theatre season, just as in Society circles the banquet of the Royal Academy, on the first Saturday in May, marked the formal opening of the London " season." This made things very comfortable for the actors who by experience came to count on from forty-six to forty-eight weeks salary in a year. This was certainly so in the Lyceum, and in some other theatres of recognised position.

II

The first season made great interest for the public. It was all fairly new to me, for except when I had been present at the first night of Wills's Medea played by Mrs. Crowe (Miss Kate Bateman) in July 1872 and had seen Irving in The Lyons Mail in 1877 and had been at the performance and rehearsal of Vanderdecken in 1878, I had not been into the theatre till I came officially. As yet I knew nothing at all of the audiences, from the management point of view. I soon found an element which had only anything like a parallel in the enthusiasm of the University in Dublin. Here was an audience that believed in the actor whom they had come to see; who took his success as much to heart as though it had been their own; whose cheers and applause — whose very presence, was a stimulant and a help to artistic effort.

This was the audience that he had won — had made; and I myself, as a neophyte, was in full sympathy with them. With such an audience an artist can go far, and in such circumstances there seems nothing that is not possible on the hither side of life and health. The physicists tell us that it is a law of nature that there must be two forces to make impact; that the anvil has to do its work as well as the hammer. And it is a distinguishing difference between scientific and other laws that the former has no exceptions.

So it is in the world of the theatre. Without an audience in sympathy no actor can do his best. Nay more, he should have the assurance of approval, or else sustained effort at high pitch becomes impossible. Some people often think, and sometimes say, that an actor's love of applause is due to a craving vanity. This may be in part true; and may even be wholly true in many cases; but those who know the stage and its needs and difficulties, its helps and thwarting checks, learn to dread a too prolonged stillness. The want of echoing sympathy embarrasses the player. For my own part, having lived largely amongst actors for a quarter of a century; having learned to understand their motives, to sympathise with their aims, and to recognise their difficulties, I can understand the basic wisdom of

George Frederick Cook when on the Liverpool stage he stopped in the middle of a tragic part and coming down to the footlights said to the audience:

"Ladies and gentlemen, if you don't applaud I can't act!"

It was from Irving I heard the story; and he certainly understood and felt with that actor of the old days. If the members of any audience understood how much better value they would get for their money — to put the matter on its lowest basis — when they show appreciation of the actor's efforts, they would certainly now and again signify the fullest recognition of his endeavour.

This " Lyceum audience," whose qualities endeared them to me from that first night, December 3o, 1878, became a quantity to be counted on for twenty-four years of my own experience. Nay more, for when the Lyceum came as a theatre to an end, the audience followed Irving to Drury Lane. They or their successors in title were present on that last night of his season, June 10, 1905, that memorable night when he said farewell, not knowing that it would be the last time he should ever appear in London as a player.

III

The production with which the season of 1878-9 opened was almost entirely new. When Irving took over the Lyceum the agreement between him and Mrs. Bateman entitled him to the use of certain plays and materiel necessary for their representation. But he never contented himself with the scenery, properties or dresses originally used. The taste of the public had so improved and their education so progressed, chiefly under his own influence, that the perfection of the seventies would not do for later days. For Hamlet new scenery had been painted by Hawes Craven, and of all the dresses and properties used few if any had been seen before. What we had seen in the provinces was the old production. I remember being much struck by the care in doing things, especially with reference to the action. It was the first time that I had had the privilege of seeing a play " produced." I had already seen rehearsals, but these except of pantomime had generally been to keep the actors, supers and working staff up to the mark of excellence already arrived at. But now I began to understand why everything was as it was. With regard to stagecraft it was a liberal education. Often and often in the years since then, when I have noticed the thoughtless or careless way in which things were often done on other stages, I have wondered how it was that the younger generation of men had not taken example and reasoned out at least the requirements of those matters incidental to their own playing. Let me give an example:

"In the last act, the cup from which Gertrude drinks the poison is an important item inasmuch as it might have a disturbing influence. In one of the final rehearsals, when grasped by Hamlet in a phrenzy of anxiety lest Horatio should drink: ' Give me the cup; let go; by heaven, I'll have it! ' the cup, flung down desperately rolled away for some distance and then following the shape of the stage rolled down to the footlights. There is a sort of fascination in the uncertain movement of an inanimate object and such an occurrence during the play would infallibly distract the attention of the audience. Irving at once ordered that the massive metal goblet used should have some bosses fixed below the rim so that it could not roll. At a previous rehearsal he had ordered that as the wine from the cup splashed the stage, coloured sawdust should be used — which it did to exactly the same artistic effect.

In another matter of this scene his natural kindness made a sweet little episode which he never afterwards omitted. When he said to the pretty little cup-bearer who offered him the poisoned goblet: “ Set it by awhile! “ he smiled at the child and passed his hand caressingly over the golden hair.

Certain other parts of his Hamlet were unforget- table. His whirlwind of passion at the close of the play scene which, night after night, stirred the whole audience to frenzied cheers. The extraordinary way in which by speech and tone, action and time, he conveyed to his auditory the sense of complex and entangled thought and motive in his wild scene with Ophelia. His wonderment at the announcement of Horatio:

“I think I saw him yester-night.” Hamlet. “ Saw who?”

Horatio. “My Lord, the King your Father.” Hamlet. “The King — my father? “ And the wonderful way in which he conveyed his sense of difference of the subjective origin of the ghost at its second appearance at which Shakespeare hinted, following out Belleforest’s remark on the novel: “ in those days, the northe parts of the worlde, living as then under Sathans lawes, were full of inchanters, so that there was not any young gentleman whatsoever that knew not something therein sufficient to serve his turne, if need required.... Hamlet, while his father lived, had been instructed in that devilish art, whereby the wicked spirite abuseth mankind, and advertiseth him (as he can) of things past.”

Of things past! Hamlet could know of things that had been though he could not read the future. This it was which was the essence of his patient acquiescence in the ways of time — half pagan fatalism, half Christian belief, as shown in that pearl amongst philosophic phrases:

“If it be now, ’tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now;

if it be not now, yet it will come; the readiness is all.”

IV

Hamlet was played ninety-eight nights on that first season. Four of them hang in my mind for very different reasons. The first was that wonderful opening night when the great audience all aflame with generous welcome and exalted by ready sympathy lifted us to unwonted heights.

The second was on January 18, the eighteenth night of Hamlet. The Chinese Ambassador, the Marquis Tseng, came to see the play and with him came Sir Halliday Macartney.

After the third act the Ambassador and Sir Haliday Macartney came to see Irving in his dressing-room, where they stayed some time talk’rig. It was interesting to note — Sir Halliday translated his remarks verbally — how accurately the Ambassador followed the play, which he had not read nor heard of. Where he failed was only on some small points of racial or theological difference. He seemed to be absolutely correct on the human side.

Presently we all went down on the stage whilst Ellen Terry as Ophelia was in the midst of her mad scene. Irving and Sir Halliday and I were talking and, in the interest of the conversation, we all temporarily overlooked the Ambassador. Presently I looked round instinctively and was horrified to see that he had moved in on the stage and was then close to the edge of the arch at the back of the scene where Ophelia had made her entrance and would make her exit. He was in magnificent robes of Mandarin yellow and wore such adornments as are possible to a great official who holds the high grade and honour of the Peacock’s Feather. I jumped for him and just succeeded in catching him before he had passed into the blaze of the limelight. I could fancy the sudden amazement of the audience and the wild roar of laughter that would follow when in the midst of this most sad and pathetic of scenes would enter unheralded this gorgeous anachronism. Under ordinary circumstances I think I should have allowed the contretemps to occur. Its unique grotesqueness would have ensured a widespread publicity not to be acquired by ordinary forms of advertisement. But there was greater force to the contrary. The play was not yet three weeks old in its run; it was a tragedy and the holy of holies to my actor-chief to whom full measure of loyalty was due; and beyond all it was Ellen Terry who would suffer.

V

The third was a very sad occasion, but one which showed that the manager of a theatre must have "nerve " to do the work entailed by his high responsibility. He remained in the wings 0.P. (" Opposite Prompt " in stage parlance) after scene ii of Act 1. The following scene (iii), is a front scene ready for the change to the "front scene " where Polonius gives good advice to his children Laertes and Ophelia. After the few words between the brother and sister on the cue of Laertes: " here my father comes," Polonius enters speaking quickly as one in surprise: " Yet here Laertes Aboard, aboard, for shame!"

Irving instinctively turned on hearing the intonation of the voice, and after one lightning glance signed to the prompter to drop the act-drop, which was done instantly. I was standing beside him at the time talking to him and was struck by the marvellous rapidity of thought and action; of the decision which seemed almost automatic. Then the curtain having been drawn back sufficiently to let him pass he stepped to the footlights and said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I regret to have to tell you that something has happened which I should not like to tell you; and will ask you to bear in patience a minute. We shall, with your permission, go on from the beginning with the third scene of Act 1." He stepped back amid instantaneous and sympathetic applause. Perhaps some knew; some few must have seen for themselves what had occurred, and many undoubtedly guessed. But all recognised the mastery and decision which had saved a very painful and difficult situation. The curtain straightened behind him as he passed in on the stage.

In an incredibly short time all was ready, for stage workmen as well as actors are adepts at their trade. Within seven or eight minutes the curtain went up afresh and the play began anew — with a different Polonius.

That night a call went up for the whole company and employees —" Everybody concerned on the stage " at noon the next day.

It was a grave and solemn gathering; and all were there except one who had received a kindly intimation that he need not attend. Irving came on the stage from the office on the stroke of the hour. Loveday and I were with him. He stood in front of the footlights with his back to the auditorium. He spoke for a few minutes only; but that speech must have sunk deeply into the hearts of every listener. He reminded them of the loyalty which is due from craftsmen to one another. Of the loyalty which is due to a manager who has to think for all. And finally of the loyalty which is due — and was on the unhappy occasion to which he referred — due to their own comrade. " By that want of loyalty," he said, " in any of the forms, you have helped to ruin your comrade. Some of you must have noticed; at least those who dressed in the room with him or saw him in the Green Room. Had I been told — had the stage manager had a single hint from any one, we could, and would, have saved him. The lesson would perhaps have been to him a bitter one, but it would have saved him from worse disaster. As it is, no other course was open to me to save him from public shame. As it is, the disaster of last night may injure him for life. And it is you who have done this. Now, my dear friends and comrades, let this be a lesson to us all. We must be loyal to each other. That is to be helpful, and it is to the honour of our art and our calling!"

There he stopped and turned away. No one said a word. For a short space they stood still and then melted slowly away in silence like the multitude of a dream.

VI

The fourth occasion was on the night of March 27 when Irving, having been taken with a serious cold, was unable to play — the first time he had been out of the bill for seven years! The note in my diary runs:

"Stage very dismal. Ellen Terry met me in the passage and began to cry! I felt very like joining her!"

I instance this as a fair illustration of how Irving was loved by all with whom he came in personal contact.

CHAPTER IX. SHAKESPEARE PLAYS — I

"The Merchant ofVenice" — Preparation — The Red Handkerchief — Booth and Irving—" Othello" — A Dinner at Hampton Court —— The Hat

I

IRVING did not think of playing The Merchant of Venice until he had been to the Levant. The season of 1879-8o had been arranged before the end of the previous season. We were to commence with The Iron Chest; Irving had considerable faith in Colman's play and intended to give it a run. It was to be followed in due course, as announced in his farewell speech at the end of the second season, by The Gamester, The Stranger, Coriolanus, and Robert Emmett, a new play by Frank Marshall. It was rather a surprise, therefore, when on October 8 before the piece had run two weeks, he broached the subject of a new production. It had been apparent to us since his return from a yachting-trip in the Mediterranean that he was not so much in love with the play as he usually was with anything which he had immediately in hand. Even if a play did not seem to fill him, I never saw him show the slightest sign of indifference to it in any other case.

On that particular evening he asked Loireday and me if we could stay and have a chop in the Beefsteak Room. He was evidently full of something of importance; it seemed a relief to him when supper was finished and the servant who waited had gone. When we had lit our cigars he said quietly:

"I am going to do The Merchant ofVenice." We both waited, for there was nothing to say until we should know a little more. He went on:

"I never contemplated doing the piece which did not ever appeal very much to me until when we were down in Morocco and the Levant. You know the W alrus" (that was the fine steamer which the Baroness Burdett Coutts had chartered for her yachting party) " put into all sorts of places. When I saw the Jew in what seemed his own land and in his own dress, Shylock became a different creature. I began to understand him; and now I want to play the part — as soon as I can. I think I shall do it on on the first of November! Can it be done?"

Loveday answered it would depend on what had to be done.

"That is all right," said Irving. " I have it in my mind. I have been thinking it over and I see my way to it. Here is what I shall have in the Casket ' scene." He took a sheet of note-paper and made a rough drawing of the scene, tearing out an arch in the back and propping another piece of paper in it with a rough suggestion of a Venetian scene. " I will have an Eastern lamp with red glass — I know where is the exact thing. It is, or used to be two or three years ago, in that furniture shop in Oxford Street, near Tottenham Court Road."

Then he went on to expound his idea of the whole play; and did it in such a way that he set both Loveday and myself afire with the idea. We talked it out till early morning. Indeed the Eastern sun was outlining the beauty of St. Mary's-le-Strand as the time-roughened stone stood out like delicate tracery against the blush of the sunrise. Then and often since have I thought that Sir Christopher Wren must have got his inspiration regarding St. Mary's on returning late — or early in the morning from a supper in Westminster. The church is ugly enough at other times, but against sunrise it is a picturesque delight.

As we parted Irving smiled, as he said:

“Craven had better get out that red handkerchief, I think.”

Therein lay a little joke amongst us. Hawes Craven who was — as happily he still is — a great scene-painter and could work like a demon when time pressed. Ordinarily he wore when at work in those days a long coat once of a dark colour, and an old brown bowler hat, both splashed out of all recognition with paint. Scene-painting is essentially a splashy, business, the drops of paint from the great brushes, of necessity vigorously used to cover the acres of canvas, “ come not in single spies but in battalions.” But when matters got desperate, when the pressure of the time-gauge registered not in hours but in minutes, the head-gear was changed for a red handkerchief which twisted round the head made a sort of turban. This became in time a sort of oriflamme. We knew that there was to be no sleep, and precious little pause even for food, till the work was all done.

Of course no mortal man could do the whole of the scenery in the three weeks available. Scenes had to be talked over, entrances and exits fixed and models made. Four scene-painters bent their shoulders to the task. Craven did three scenes, Telbin three, Hann three and Cuthbert one. The whole theatre became alive with work. Each night had its own tally of work with the running play; but from the time the curtain went down at night till when the doors were opened the following night work at full pressure never ceased. Properties and dresses and “ appointments “ came in completed every day. Rehearsals went on all day. On Saturday night, November 1, just over three weeks after he had broached the idea, and less than three from the time the work was actually begun — the curtain went up on The Merchant ofVenice.

It had an unbroken run of two hundred and fifty nights; the longest run of the play ever known.

It is a noteworthy fact that one of the actors, Mr. Frank Tyars, who played the Prince of Morocco, after being perfect for two hundred and forty-nine nights forgot some of his words on the two hundred and fiftieth.

For twenty-six years that play remained in the working repertoire of Henry Irving. He played Shylock over a thousand times.

II

The occasion of Irving's producing Othello during his own management was due to his love and remembrance of Edwin Booth. In 1860, at the Theatre Royal, Manchester, Irving began a long engagement. In the bill his name is announced: " His first appearance." In November of the following year Booth appeared as a star, playing Othello, Irving being the Cassio; Hamlet, Irving being the Laertes; A New Way to Pay Old Debts, he of course taking Sir Giles Overreach, and Irving Wellborn. For his benefit he gave on Friday night Romeo and Juliet, in which Irving played Benvolio to his Romeo. Often, when we talked of Booth some twenty years afterwards, he told me of the extraordinary alertness of the American actor; of his fierce concentration and tempestuous passion; of the blazing of his remarkable eyes. It will be seen from the comparison of their respective parts in the plays set out that the difference between them in the way of status as players was marked. The theatre has its own etiquette, and stars were supposed to have a stand-off manner of their own. These things have changed a good deal in the interval, but in the early sixties it was a real though an impalpable barrier, as hard to break through as though it were compact of hardier material than shadowy self-belief. Naturally the men did not have much opportunity for intimacy, but Irving never forgot the bright young actor who had won his heart as well as his esteem. Twenty years afterwards, when the younger man had won his place in the world, and when his theatre was becoming celebrated as a national asset, Booth again visited England. Whoever had arranged his business did not choose the best theatre for him. For in those days the Princess's in Oxford Street did not have a high dramatic cachet. He got a good reception of course; but the engagement was not a satisfactory one, and Booth was much chagrined. I was there myself on the night of his opening, November 6, 188o, on which he played Hamlet. I was much disappointed with the ensemble; for though Booth was fine neither the production nor the support was worthy of his genius and powers. The management was a new one and the manager a man who had been used to a different class of theatre. Also there were certain things which jarred on the senses of any one accustomed to a finer order. This was none of Booth's doing; he was the sufferer by it. Booth and Irving had met at once after the former had come to London, and had renewed their old acquaintance but on a more intimate basis. In those days there was a certain class of busybodies who tried always to make mischief between Americans and English; twenty-five years ago the entente cordiale was not so marked as became noticeable after the breaking out of the war between America and Spain. There were even some who did not hesitate to say that Booth had not been fairly received in London. Irving jumped to the difficulty, went at once to Booth and said to him:

"Why don't you come and play with me at the Lyceum? I'll put on anything you wish; or if there is any play in which we can play together, let us do that.”

Booth was greatly delighted, and took the overture in the same good spirit in which it was meant. He at once told Irving that he would like to appear in Othello. Irving said:

“All right! You decide on the time; and I’ll get the play ready, if you will tell me how you would like it arranged.”

Booth said he would like to leave all that to his host, as he had not himself taken a part in the production of plays for years and did not even attend rehearsals. So Irving took all the task on himself. When he asked Booth whether he would like to play Othello or Iago — for he played both — he said he would like to begin with Othello and that it would, he thought, be well if they changed week about; and so it was arranged. The performance began on May 2, 188i.

By Booth’s wish Othello was only to be played three times a week, as he was averse from the strain of such a heavy part every night. The running bill — The Cup and The Belle’s Stratagem — kept its place on the other three. For the special performances some of the prices were altered, stalls nominally ten shillings becoming a guinea, the dress-circle seats being ten shillings instead of six. The prices for the off night remained as usual.

The success of Othello was instantaneous and immense. During the seven weeks the arrangement lasted the houses were packed. And strange to say the takings of the off nights were not affected in any way.

III

The two months thus occupied made a happy time for Booth. He came down to rehearsal early in the week before the production and was so pleased that he never missed a rehearsal during the remainder of the time. He said more than once that it had given him a new interest in his work. In social ways too the time went pleasantly. Several of his distinguished countrymen were then staying in London, and no matter how strenuous work might be, time was found for enjoyment though the days had to be stretched out in the manner suggested in Tommy Moore's ballad:

> "For the best of all ways to lengthen our days
> Is to steal a few hours from the night, my dear!"

On Sunday, June 12, John McCullough gave a party at Hampton Court, where we dined at the Greyhound. We drove down in four-in-hand drags and spent the late afternoon walking through the beautiful gardens of Hampton Court. June in that favoured spot is always delightful.

There was an amusing episode on our dilatory journeying among the flowers. One of the gardeners, a bright-faced old fellow for whom Nature had been unkind enough to use the mould wrought for the shaping of Richard III., on being asked some trivial question gave so smart an answer that we all laughed. Then began a hail of questions; the old man, smiling gleefully, answered them as quick as lightning. One by one nearly all the party joined in; but to one and all a cunnning answer was given without slack of speed, till the whole crowd was worsted. One of the party asked the gardener if he would lend him his hat for a minute. The old man handed it, remarking in a manifestly intended stage aside:

"It'll be no use to him. The brains don't go with it! " The man who had borrowed it, " Billy " Florence, put it on the grass, open side up, and said:

“Now boys!”

Instantly a rain of money, more of it gold than silver and some folded notes fell into the hat. Then with a handshake all round the clever old fellow toddled off. The names of that party will show most people of the great world, even twenty years afterwards, that there was no lack of “ brains “ in that crowd, even enough possibly to answer effectually to the sallies of one old man. Most of them may be seen on the obverse of the dinner menu which they signed:

John McCullough C. A. Whittier Henry Irving F. C. Burnand Arthur Cecil W. J. Florence J. L. Toole W. W. Tucker Ernest Bendall Bram Stoker Edmund Yates George Augustus Sala Lewis Wingfield Whitelaw Reid (now the Charles Dickens (the United States Ambassador younger) to England)

John Clayton Lord Mandeville (afterwards Edwin Booth Duke of Manchester)

One night at supper in the Beefsteak Room, Irving told me an amusing occurrence which took place at Manchester when Booth played there. He said it was “ about 1863,” so it may have been that of which I have written, of 1861. Richard III. was put up, Charles Calvert, the manager, playing Richmond, and Booth Gloster. Calvert determined to make a brave show of his array against the usurper, and being manager was able to dress his own following to some measure of his wishes. Accordingly he drained the armoury of the theatre and had the armour furbished up to look smart. Richard’s army came on in the usual style. They were not much to look at though they were fairly comfortable for their work of fighting. But Richmond’s army enthralled the senses of the spectators, till those who knew the play began to wonder how such an army could be beaten by the starvelings opposed to them. They were not used to fight, or even to move in armour, however; and the moment they began to make an effort they one and all fell down and wriggled all over the stage in every phase of humiliating but unsuccessful effort to get up; and the curtain had to be lowered amidst the wild laughter of the audience.

CHAPTER X. SHAKESPEARE PLAYS — II

Romeo and Juliet" — Preparation — Music — The Way to carry a corpse — Variants of the Bridal Chamber" Much Ado About Nothing" John Penberthy — Hypercriticism — Respect for feelings

I

Romeo and Juliet was the first great Shakespearean production which Irving made under his own management. Hamlet had been done on very simple lines; the age in which it is set not allowing of splendour. The Merchant ofVenice had been entirely produced and rehearsed within three weeks. But the story of " Juliet and her Romeo," perhaps the greatest and most romantic love-story that ever was written, is one which not only lends itself to, but demands, picturesque setting. For its tragic basis the audience must understand the power and antiquity of the surroundings of each of these unhappy lovers. Under conditions of humbler life the tragedy would not have been possible; in still loftier station, though there might have been tragedy, it would have been wrought by armed force on one of the rival Houses or the other. It is necessary to give something of the luxury, the hereditary feud of two dominant factions represented by their chiefs, of the ingrained bloodthirstiness of the age of the Italian petty States. Irving knew this well, and with his superlative stage instinct grasped the picturesque possibilities The Capulets and the Montagues must be made not only living forces, but typal.

What Irving's intention was may be seen in the opening words which he wrote himself in the short preface to the published Acting Version of the play:

"In producing this tragedy, I have availed myself of every resource at my command to illustrate without intrusion the Italian warmth, life, and romance of this enthralling love-story.”

It was produced on May 8, 1882, and ran for one hundred and sixty-one nights, the summer vacation intervening.

Extraordinary care was taken in the preparation of the play. In the beginning Irving had asked Mr. Alfred Thompson, known as a popular designer of dresses for many plays, to design the costumes. This he did; but as they were not exactly what was wanted, not a single one of them was used in the piece. Irving himself selected the costumes from old pictures and prints, and costume books. He chose and arranged the colours and stuff to be used. Nevertheless, with his characteristic generosity, he put in the playbill and advertisements Mr. Thompson’s name as designer. For the scenery also he made initial suggestions, all in reference to exactness of detail and the needs of the play in the way of sentiment as well as of action. The scenery was really most beautiful and poetic and won much Kaos for the painters, Hawes Craven, William Telbin and Walter Hann.

In another way too a new departure was made. Hitherto it had been a custom in theatres that the musical director should compose or select whatever incidental music was necessary. In every great theatre might be found a really good musician in charge of the orchestra; and on him the management wholly relied for musical help and setting. But with regard to Romeo and Juliet Irving thought that the theme was a tempting one for a composer of note to take in hand. If this could be arranged not only would the play as a whole benefit enormously, but even its business aspect would be greatly enhanced by the addition of the new strength. He wished that Sir Julius Benedict should compose special music for the new production. We were then on a provincial tour; but I ran up to London and saw Sir Julius, who was delighted to undertake the task. In due time charming music was completed.

So long before as June 188o, on two different nights, 14th and i6th, Irving and I supped alone in the Beefsteak Room and on each occasion talked of Romeo and Juliet. For a long time the play had been in Irving’s mind as one to be produced when the proper opportunity should come. In his early days in the “ fifties “ he had played both Paris and Tybalt; and we may be sure that in his ambitious soul and restless eager brain the tragic part of Romeo was shaping itself for future use. More than twenty years afterwards, when the dreams of power to do as he wished on the stage had grown first to possibilities and then to realities, he certainly convinced me that his convictions of the phases of character were quite mature. He had followed Romeo through all his phases, both of character and emotion. He seemed to have not only the theory of action and pose and inflection of voice proper for every moment of his appearance, but the habit of doing it, which is the very stronghold of an actor’s art. To me his conception was enlightening with a new light.

‘The words: “ Thou canst not teach me to forget “ he took to strike a key-note of the play. He rehearsed them over and over again, not only on the stage but on several occasions when we were alone, or when Loveday was also with us. I well remember one night when we three were alone and had supped after the running play, Two Roses, when he was simply bubbling over with the new play. Over and over again he practised the action of leaning on Benvolio, and the tone and manner of the speech. In it there was a distinct duality of thought — of existence. He managed to convey that though his mind was to a measure set on love with a definite object, there was still a sterner possibility of a deeper passion. It seemed to show the heart of a young man yearning for all-compelling love, even at the time when the pale phantom of such a love claimed his errant fancy.

Once he was started on this theme he went on with fiery zeal to other passages in the play, till at last the pathos of the end touched him to his heart's core. I find an entry in my diary:

"H. much touched at tragedy of last act, and in speaking the words wept."

That night too, we practised carrying the body of Paris into the tomb. In the first instance he asked me, as one who had been an athlete, to show him how I would do it. Accordingly Loveday lay on the floor on his back whilst I lifted him, Irving keenly watching all the time. Standing astride over the body I took it by the hinches — as the wrestlers call the upper part of the hips — and bending my legs whilst at the same moment raising with my hands, keeping my elbows down, and swaying backwards I easily flung it over my shoulder. Irving thought it was capital, and asked me to lift him so that he could understand the motion. I did so several times. Then I lay down and he lifted me, easily enough, in the same way. It must have required a fair effort of strength on his part; for he was a thin, spare man whilst I was over twelve stone. He said that that method would do very well and looked all right, but that it might prove too much of a strain in the stress of acting. So we put off other experiments till another evening.

Some ten days after, my brother George, who had been all through the Russo-Turkish war as a surgeon in the Turkish service, was in the theatre. He had been Chief of Ambulance of the Red Crescent and had been in the last convoy into Plevna and had brought to Philippopolis all the Turkish wounded from the battle at the Schipka Pass, and had had about as much experience in the handling of dead bodies as any man wants. Irving thought it might be well to draw on his expert knowledge, and after supper asked him what was the easiest way of carrying a dead body, emphasising the “easiest “; accordingly I, who was to enact the part of “ body,” lay down again. George drew my legs apart, and stooping very low with his back to me, lifted the legs in turn so that the inside of my knees rested on his shoulders. Then, catching one of my ankles in each hand, he drew my body up till the portion of my anatomy where the back and legs unite was pressed against the back of his neck. He then straightened his arms and rose up, my body, face outward, trailing down his back and my arms hanging limp. It was just after the manner of a butcher carrying the carcase of a sheep. It was most certainly the “ easiest “ way to carry a body — there was no possible doubt about that; but its picturesque suitability for stage purpose was another matter. Irving laughed consumedly, and when next we discussed the matter he had come to the conclusion that the best way was to drag the body into the entrance of the monument. He would then appear in the next scene dragging the body down the stone stair to the crypt. To this end a body was prepared, adjusted to the weight and size of Paris so that in every way vraisemblance was secured.

That production was certainly wonderfully perfect. Some of the scenes were of really entrancing beauty, breathing the Italian atmosphere. Even the supers took fire with the reality of all around them. No matter how carefully rehearsed, they would persist in throwing into their work a martial vigour of their own. The rubric of the scene, as printed from the original, does not give the slightest indication of the wonderful stress of the first scene:

“Enter Several Persons of both Houses, who join in the Fray: then enter Citizens and Peace Officers, with their Clubs and Partisans.”

The scene was of the market-place of Verona with side streets and at back a narrow stone bridge over a walled-in stream. The “ Several Persons,” mostly apprentices of the Capulet faction, entered, at first slowly, but coming quicker and quicker till quite a mass had gathered on the hither side of the bridge. The strangers were being easily worsted. Then over the bridge came a rush of the Montagues armed like their foes with sticks or swords according to their degree. They used to pour in on the scene down the slope of the bridge like a released torrent, and for a few minutes such a scene of fighting was enacted as I have never elsewhere seen on the stage. The result of the mighty fight was that during the whole time of the run of the play there was never a day when there was not at least one of the young men in hospital. We tried to make them keep to the business set down for them, for on the stage even a fight between supers is so carefully arranged that no harm can come if they keep to their instructions. But one side or the other would grow so ardent that a nightly trouble of some kind had to be counted upon.

When I look back upon other presentations of. Romeo and Juliet I can see the exceeding value of all the picturesque realism of Irving’s production. I have in my mind’s eye two others in London, one of which I saw and the other of which I heard, for we were then in America, where tragedy was lost in the mirth of the audience.

The former was held in the old Gaiety Theatre then under the management of the late John Hollingshead. It was at a matinee given by a lady who was ambitious of beginning her theatrical career as Juliet. Of course on such an occasion one has to be contented with the local scenery; either such as is used in the running play or can be easily taken from and to the storage. The play went fairly well until the third act; William Terriss was the Romeo, and his performance, if not subtle, was full of life and go. But when the scene went up on

Juliet’s chamber there was a sudden and wild burst of laughter from every part of the house. The stage-management had used a picturesque scene without any idea of suitability. Juliet’s bed was set right in the open, on a wide marble terrace with steps leading to the garden!

The other occasion was when the Property Master, with a better idea of customary utility than of picturesque accuracy, had set out for Juliet’s bed one of double width — a matrimonial couch with two pillows!

II

Much Ado About Nothing followed close after Romeo and Juliet, the theatre being closed for three nights to allow of full-dress rehearsals. It began on October II, 1882, and had an unbroken run of two hundred and twelve nights, being only taken off because the other plays of the repertoire for the coming American tour had to be made ready and rehearsed by playing them. This was not only the longest run the play had ever had, but probably the only real run it had ever had at all. It was always one of those plays known as “ ventilators “ which are put up occasionally with hope on the part of the management that they may do something this time, and a moral conviction that they can’t in any case do worse than the plays that have already been tried.

But Irving had faith in it, and in his own mind saw a way of doing it which would help it immensely. It was beautifully produced and carefully rehearsed. The first act was all brightness and beauty. The cathedral was such as was never before seen on the stage. Even the cathedral servants were new, their brown dresses giving picturesque sombre richness to the scene. Irving had seen such dresses in the cathedral of Seville or Burgos — I forget which — and had noted and remembered. Ellen Terry was born for the part of Beatrice. It was almost as though Shakespeare had a premonition of her coming.

Don Pedro. “ Out of question, you were born in a merry hour.”

Beatrice. “ No, sure, my lord, my mother cried; but then there was a star danced, and under that was I born.”

Surely never such a buoyant, winsome, merry, enchanting personality was ever seen on the stage — or off it. She was literally compact of merriment till when her anger with Claudio blazed forth in a brief tragic moment half passion and whole pathos that carried everything before it. And as for tragic strength, none who have ever seen or may ever see it can forget her futile helpless anger, the surging, choking passion in her voice, as striding to and fro with long paces, her whirling words won Benedick to her as in answer to his query: “ Is Claudio thine enemy,” she broke out:

“Is he not approved in the height a villain, that hath slandered, scorned, dishonoured my kinswoman? — O, that I were a man! — what? bear her in hand until they come to take hands; and then with public accusation, uncovered slander, unmitigated rancour-0 God, that I were a man! I’d — I’d — I’d eat his heart in the market-place!”

And then after some combative words with her lover:

“I cannot be a man with wishing, therefore I will die a woman with grieving.”

It was that last feminine touch that won Benedick to her purpose of revenge. All the audience felt that he could do no less.

By the way, a curious evidence of the truth of its emotional effect came one night, not very long after the play began its long career. I was in my office just after the curtain had gone up on the fourth act, when I was sent for to the front of the house to see some one. In the vestibule I found a tall, powerful, handsome man. He had masterful eyes, a resonant voice and a mouth that shut like steel. A most interesting personality I thought. I introduced myself, and as I had been told he had expressed a wish to see Irving I asked him if he could wait a little as the curtain had gone up. He was very cheery and friendly and he said at once:

"Of course I'll wait. I've just come to London and I came at once to see my cousin Johnny. I haven't seen him since we were boys." I had been trying to place him. This gave me the clue I wanted.

"Are you John Penberthy? " I asked. This delighted him and he shook my hand again as I said that I had often heard of him. From the moment of our meeting we became friends.

John Penberthy was one of the sons of Sarah Behenna, sister of Irving's mother, who had married Captain Isaac Penberthy, a famous mining captain of his time in Cornwall. Whilst a very young man John had gone to South America and had soon become, by his courage and forceful character as well as by his gifts and skill as a miner himself, a great mining captain. He was mostly in the silver mines; he it was who had developed and worked the great Huanchaca mine in Bolivia. For some twenty or more years he had lived in a place and under conditions where a quick eye and a ready hand were the surest guarantees of long life — especially to a man who had to control the fierce spirits of a Spanish mine.

I took him round on the stage, thinking what a surprise as well as a pleasure it would be to Irving to find him there when he came off after the scene. He at once got deeply interested in the scene going on, and now and again as I stood beside him I could see his strong hands closed and hear him grind his teeth. When the scene was over and Irving and Ellen Terry were bowing in the glare of the footlights amid a storm of applause, Captain Penberthy turned to me, his face blazing with generous anger, and said in his native Cornwall accent which he had never lost:

"It was a damned good job 63r that cur Claudio that I hadn't my shootin' irons on me. If I had I'd soon have blasted hell out of him 1"

IV

An instance of the interest of the public in a Lyceum production was shown by a letter received by Irving a few nights after the play had been produced. For one of the front scenes the scene-painter, Hawes Craven, had been given a free hand. He chose for the subject a walk curving away through giant cedars, brown trunks and twisted branches — a noble spot in which to muse. Irving's correspondent pointed out, as well as I remember, that whereas the period is set in the third quarter of the fifteenth century, the cedar was not introduced into Messina until the middle of that century and could not possibly have attained the stature shown in the scene.

Perhaps I may here mention that Irving had some other experiences of the same kind:

When he reproduced Charles I. in June 1879, some critical observer called attention to the fact that the trees in the Hampton Court scene, having been planted in the time of Charles, could not possibly have grown within his reign to the size represented.

Again, whilst in Philadelphia in 1894, where we had played

Becket, the secretary of a Natural History Society wrote a letter — a really charming letter it was too — pointing out that Tennyson had made a mistake in that passage of the last act of the play where Becket speaks of finding a duck frozen on her nest of eggs. Such might certainly occur in the case of certain other wild birds; but not in the case of a duck whose habits made such a tragedy impossible. Irving replied in an equally courteous letter, saying, after thanking him for the interest displayed in the play and for his kindness in calling attention to the alleged error, that there must have been some misreading of the poet's words as he did not mention a duck at all!

"..we came upon A wild-fowl sitting on her nest..."

V

It may be well to mention here the way in which Irving cared always and in every way for the feelings of the public. In religious matters he was scrupulous against offence. When the church scene of Much Ado About Nothing was set for the marriage of Claudio and Hero, he got a Catholic priest to supervise it. He listened carefully whilst the other explained the emblematic value of the points of ritual. The then Property Master was a Catholic and had taken some pains to be correct as to details. When the reverend critic pointed out that the white cloth spread in front of the Tabernacle on the High Altar meant that the Host was within, Irving at once ordered that a piece of cloth of gold should be spread in its place. Again, when he was told that the cross on the ends of the stole of the marrying priest was emblematical of the Sacrament he ordered a fleur-de-lis to be embroidered instead. In the same way, on knowing that the red lamp, hung over the altar-rail by his direction for purely scenic effect, was a sacramental sign he had it altered and others placed to destroy the significance. But not so when as Becket he put on even the pall to go into the cathedral where the murderous huddle of knights awaited him. There he wore the real pall. There were no feelings to be offended then, though the occasion was in itself a sacrament — the greatest of all sacraments — martyrdom. All sensitiveness regarding ritual was merged in pity and the grandeur of the noble readiness:

“I go to meet my King.”

CHAPTER XI. SHAKESPEARE PLAYS — III

"Macbeth" — An Amateur Scene-Painter — Sir Arthur Sullivan — A Lesson in Collaboration—" Henry VIII." — Lessons in Illusion — Stage Effects — Reality v. Scenery — A Real Baby and its Consequences

I

OF all the plays of which Irving talked to me in the days of our friendship when there was an eager wish for freedom of effort, or in later times when a new production was a possibility rather than an intention, I think Macbeth interested me most. When I met him in 1876 he had already played it at the Lyceum; but somehow it was borne in on me that what had been done was not up to his fullest sense of truth. His instinctive idea of treatment — that which is the actor's sixth sense regarding character — was correct. So much I could tell, for the conviction which was in him came out from him to others. But I do not think that at that time his knowledge of the part was complete. In the consideration of such a play it has to be considered what was Shakespeare's knowledge of its origin; for it is by this means that we can get a guiding light on his intention. That he had studied Wintown and Holinshed is manifest to any one who has read the " Cronykil " of the former or the Chronicle of the latter. Now Irving had got hold of the correct idea of Macbeth's character, and from his own inner consciousness of its working out, combined with the enlightenment of the text, knew that Macbeth had thought of and intended the murder of Duncan long before the opening of the play, and that he and his wife had talked it over. But I think that not at first, nor till after he had re-studied the play, was he aware of the personal relationship between Macbeth and Duncan: that after the King and his sons Macbeth was the next successor to the crown of

Scotland. This is according to history, and Shakespeare knew it from Holinshed. But even Shakespeare is somewhat wanting in his way of setting it forth in the play. I know that I myself had from my earliest recollection been always puzzled by the passage in Act I, scene iv, where Macbeth in an aside says:

> “The Prince of Cumberland! that is a step On which I must fall down, or else o’erleap, For in my way it lies.”

Nothing that has gone before in the play can afford to any unlearned member of an audience any possible clue as to how Macbeth could have been injured or thwarted by an honour shown to his own son by the King who had already showered honours and thanks upon his victorious general. In his Address at Owens College, Manchester, six years after his second production of the play, Henry Irving set forth this and many other critical points with admirable lucidity.

To me Irving’s intellectual position with regard to the character from the first was irrefragable. He added scholarship as the time went on; but every addition was an added help to understanding. Between the time when I had first heard him talk over the play and the character in 1876 and when I saw him play it twelve years elapsed. In all that time it was a favourite subject to talk between us, and I think It was one evening in February 1887, on which after he and I having supped alone in the Beefsteak Room talked over the play till the windows began to show their edges brightening in the coming day, that he made up his mind to the reproduction.

We were then deep in the run of Faust, which had passed its three hundredth representation at the Lyceum; but in the running of a

London theatre it is necessary to look a long way ahead; a year at least. In this case there was need of a longer preview, for our plans had already been made for a considerable time. We were to run Faust through the season with some weeks at the end to prepare other plays which together with Faust we were to take to America in the tour already arranged for 1887-8. As we should not be back till the spring of the later year the production of a new play, together with the music and selection of the company, had all to be thought of in time. Irving had — and justifiably — great hopes of the play, and spared on it neither pains nor expense. With regard to the scenery he thought that he would get Keeley Halswelle, A.R.S.A., to make the designs. He was very fond of his work and considered that it would be exactly suitable for his purpose. The painter consented and made some lovely sketches.

He expressed a wish to paint the scenes himself, and when the sketches and then the models in turn had been approved of, we engaged the great paint-rooms of the Covent Garden Opera House, then available, for his use. The canvas-cloths, framed pieces, borders and wings were got ready by our own carpenters and " primed " for the painting.

After a while we began to get anxious about the scenery. We kept asking, and asking and asking as to time of completion; but without result. Finally I paid a visit of inspection to Covent Garden and to my surprise and horror found the acres of white untouched even to the extent of a charcoal outline.

The superb painter of pictures, untutored in stage art and perspective, had found himself powerless before those vast solitudes. He had been unable even to begin his:task!

The work was then undertaken by Hawes Craven, J. Harker, T.

W. Hall, W. Hann, and Perkins and Carey, with magnificent result.

Macbeth is a play that really requires the aid of artistic completeness. Its diction is so lordly, so poetical, so searching in its introspective power that it lifts the mind to an altitude which requires and expects some corresponding elevation of the senses.

Here, by the way, a certain incident comes back to my memory. In the Queen's Theatre, Dublin, some forty years ago the tragedy was being given and when the actor who played Lennox came to the lines:

"The night has been unruly: where we lay, Our chimney was blown down..." he spoke them, in the very worst of Dublin accents, as follows:

"The night hath been rumbunctious where we slep, Our chimbleys was blew down."

For the music incidental to the play Sir Arthur Sullivan undertook the composition. He wrote overture, preludes, incidental music and choruses one and all suitable as well as fine. Throughout there is a barbaric ring which seems to take us back and place us amongst a warlike and undeveloped age. Wherever required he altered it during the progress of rehearsals.

It was a lesson in collaboration to see the way in which these two men, each great in his own craft, worked together. Arthur Sullivan knew that with Irving lay the responsibility of the ensemble, and was quite willing to subordinate himself to the end which the other had in view. Small-minded men are unwilling, or perhaps unable, to accept this position. If their susceptibilities are in any way wounded by even a non-recognition of the superiority of their work they are apt to sulk;

and when an artist sulks those who have to work with him are apt to encounter a paralysing dead-weight. In any form vis inertia is cramping to artistic effort. But these men were both too big for chagrin or jealousy. As example of the harmony of their working and of the absolute necessity in such matters for absolute candour let me instance one scene. Here the music had all been written and rehearsed and Sir Arthur sat in the conductor's chair. In a pause of the rehearsal of action on the stage he said:

"We are ready now, Irving, if you can listen."

"All right, old man; go ahead " When the numbers of that particular piece of incidental music had been gone through the composer asked:

"Do you like that? Will it do? " Irving replied at once with kindly seriousness:

"Oh, as music it's very fine; but for our purpose it is no good at all. Not in the least like it!"

Sullivan was not offended by the frankness. He was only anxious to get some idea of what the other wanted. He asked him if he could give any hint or clue as to what idea he had. Irving, even whilst saying in words that he did not know himself exactly what he wanted, managed by sway of body and movement of arms and hands, by changing times and undulating tones, and by vowel sounds without words to convey his inchoate thought, instinctive rather than of reason. Sullivan grasped the idea and the anxious puzzlement of his face changed to gladness.

"All right! " he said heartily, " I think I understand. If you will go on with the rehearsal I shall have something ready by-and-by." Sitting where he was, he began scoring, the band waiting. When some of the scenes had been rehearsed there was some movement in the orchestra — the crowding of heads together, little chirpy sounds from some of the instruments and then in a pause of the rehearsal:

"Now, Mr. Ball! " — John Meredith Ball was the Musical Director of the Lyceum. " If you are ready now, Irving, we can give you an idea. It is only the theme. If you think it will do I will work it out to-night."

The band struck up the music and Irving's face kindled as he heard.

"Splendid! " he said. " Splendid! That is all I could wish for. It is fine!"

I could not help feeling that such recognition and praise from a fellow artist was one of the rewards which has real value to the creator of good work.

II

It was necessary that Henry VIII. should be very carefully done; for its period is well recorded in architecture, stone-carving, goldsmith work, tapestry, stuffs, embroideries, costumes and paintings. Indeed many historical lessons may be taken from this play. Shakespeare, if he did not actually know or intend this, had an intuition of it. Henry VIII. marks one of the most important epochs in history, and as it was by the very luxury and extravagance of the nobles of the time that the power of the old feudalism was lowered, such naturally becomes a pivotal point of the play. It was a part of the subtle policy of Cardinal Wolsey to bring the great nobles to London, instead of holding local courts of their own, and surrounding themselves with vast retinues of armed retainers. Combination amongst a few such might shake even the throne. When round the Court of the King they were encouraged and incited to vie with each other in the splendour of their dress and equipment; and soon their capacity for revolt was curbed by the quick wasting of their estates. The wonderful pageant of the Field of the Cloth of Gold had its political use and bearing which the student of the future will do well to investigate. In his play Shakespeare bore all this in mind and took care to lay down in exact detail the order of his processions and rituals. It can be therefore seen that in this renaissance of art with a political meaning — and therefore a structural part of a historical play — it was advisable, if not necessary, to be exact in the decor of the play. To this end the greatest care was taken, with of course the added managerial intention of making the piece as attractive as possible. Seymour Lucas (then A.R.A. now R.A.), who undertook to superintend the production, went to and fro examining the buildings and pictures and art work of the period wherever to be found. For months he had assistants working in the South Kensington Museum making coloured drawings of the many stuffs used at that time; reproducing for the guidance of the weavers who were to make up their part of the work in turn, both texture and pattern and colour. Further months were occupied with the looms before the antique stuffs thus reproduced were ready for the costumier.

Irving’s own dress — his robe as Cardival — was, after months of experiment, exactly reproduced from a genuine robe of the period kindly lent to him by Rudolph Lehmann, the painter.

Many lessons in stage values and effects were to be learned from this magnificent production. Let me give a couple of instances. As the period was that of the Field of the Cloth of Gold naturally there was a good deal of cloth of gold used in the English Court; and such, or the effect of it, had to be set forth in the play. A day was fixed when Seymour Lucas was to choose the texture, make and colour of the various patterns of gold cloth submitted. For this purpose the curtain was taken up and the foot- lights were turned on. A row of chairs; back out, were placed along the front of the stage, and on each was hung a sample of cloth of gold. Lucas and Irving, with Loveday and myself, sat in the stalls; and with us the various artists and workpeople employed in the production of the play — property master, wardrobe mistress, costumiers, &c. Something like the following took place as the painter's eye ranged along the glittering line of fabrics:

"That first one — well, fair. Let it remain! The next, take it away. No use at all! Third and fourth — put them on one side — We may want them for variety. Fifth — Oh! that is perfect! Just what we want!"

When the examination was finished we all went on the stage to look at the specimens accepted and discarded. There we found the second so peremptorily rejected was real cloth of gold at ten guineas a foot; whilst the fifth whose excellence for the purpose we had so enthusiastically accepted was Bolton sheeting stencilled in our own property-room, and costing as it stood about eighteen pence a yard.

Again, very fine jewellery — stage jewellery — had been prepared to go with the various dresses. In especial in the procession at the beginning of the fourth act the collars of the Knights of the Garter were of great magnificence. One of the actors, however, was anxious to have everything as real as possible, and not being content with the splendour of the diamond collars provided, borrowed a real one from one of the Dukes, whose Collar of the Garter was of a magnificence rare even amongst such jewels. He expected it to stand out amongst the other jewelled collars seen in the procession. But strange to say, amongst them all it was the only one that did not look well. It did not even look real. Stage jewels are large and are backed with foil which throws back the fierce light of the “ floats “ and the “ standards “ and the “ ground rows” and all those aids to illusion which have been perfected by workmen competent to their purpose.

III

The play ends with the christening of the Infant Princess Elizabeth, in which of course a dummy baby was used. This gave a chance to the voices clamant for realism on the stage. When the play had run some forty nights Irving got a letter from which I quote:

“The complete success of Henry VIII. was marred when the King kissed the china doll. The whole house tittered.... Herewith I offer the hire of our real baby for the purpose of personating the offspring....” To this I replied:

“Mr. Irving fears that there might be some difficulty in making the changes which you suggest with regard to the infant Princess Elizabeth in the play. If reality is to be achieved it should of necessity be real reality and not seeming reality; the latter we have already on the stage. A series of difficulties then arises, any of which you and your family might find insuperable: If your real baby were provided it might be difficult, or even impossible, for the actor who impersonates King Henry VIII: to feel the real feelings of a father towards it. This would necessitate your playing the part of the King; and further would require that your wife should play the part of Queen Anne Boleyn: This might not suit either of you — especially as in reality Henry VIII. had afterwards his wife’s head cut off. To this your wife might naturally object; but even if she were willing to accept this form of reality and you were willing to accept the responsibility on your own part, Mr. Irving would, for his own sake, have to object. By law, if you had your wife decapitated you would be tried for murder; but as Mr. Irving would also be tried as an accessory before the fact, he too would stand in danger of his life. To this he distinctly objects, as he considers that the end aimed at is not worth the risk involved.

"Again, as the play will probably run for a considerable time, your baby would grow. It might, therefore, be necessary to provide another baby. To this you and your wife might object — at short notice.

"There are other reasons — many of them — militating against your proposal; but you will probably deem those given as sufficient."

Henry VIII. was produced on the night of Tuesday, January 5, 1892, and ran at the Lyceum for two hundred and three performances, ending on November 5. Its receipts were over sixty-six thousand pounds.

CHAPTER XII. SHAKESPEARE PLAYS — IV

"King Lear " — Illness of Irving — A Performance at sight — —" Richard III." — A splendid First Night —— A sudden check

I

IN the Edinburgh theatre during his three years' engagement there, 1856-9, Irving had played the part of Curan in King Lear. This was, I think, the only part which he had ever played in the great tragedy; and it is certainly not one commending itself to an ambitious young actor. It is not what actors call a " fat " part; it is only ten lines in all, and none of those of the slightest importance. But the ambitious young actor had his eye on the play very early, and had thought out the doing of it in his own way. The play was not produced till the end of 1892, but nearly ten years before he had talked it over with me. I find this note rough in my diary for January 5, 1883:

"Theatre 7 till 2. H. and I supper alone. He told me of intention to play Lear on return from America. Gave rough idea of play — domestic-gives away kingdom round a wood fire, &c."

On the night of the 9th he spoke again of it under similar circumstances. And on April io he returned to the subject."

King Lear, in the production of which Ford Madox Brown advised, was produced on November 1o, 1892, and ran in all seventy-six nights. My diary of November 10 says:

"First night; King Lear. Great enthusiasm between acts. Whilst scenes on, stillness like the grave. An ideal audience. Thunders of applause and cheers at end."

II

On the morning of January 19, after King Lear had run for sixty nights, I received a hurried note, written with pencil, from Irving, asking me to call and see him as soon as possible. I hurried to his rooms and found him ill and speechless with “ grippe.” This was one of the early epidemics of influenza and its manifestations were very sudden. He could not raise his head from his pillow. He wrote on a slip of paper:

“Can’t play to-night. Better close the theatre.”

“No! “ I said, “ I’ll not close unless you order me to. I’ll never close! “ He smiled feebly and then wrote:

“What will you do?”

“I don’t know,” I said; “ I’ll go down to the theatre at once. Fortunately this is a rehearsal day and everybody will be there.” He wrote again:

“Try Vezin.”

“All right,” I said. Just then Ellen Terry, to whom he had sent word, came in. When she knew how bad he was she said to me:

“Of course you’ll close, Bram “ (we use Christian names a good deal on the stage).

“No! “ said I again.

“Then what will you do?”

“I don’t know. But we’ll play — unless of course you won’t play!”

“Don’t you know that I’ll do anything!”

“Of course I do! It will be all right.” This was a wild presumption, for at the time Loveday the Stage Manager, was away ill.

All the time Irving was hearing every word, and smiled a little through his pain and illness. He never liked to hear of any one giving up, and I think it cheered him a little to know that things were going on. I went to Mr. Vezin’s rooms at once but he was out of town. When I got to the theatre all the company were there. I asked Terriss if he could play Lear. He said no, that he had not studied the part at all — adding in regret: “ I only wish to goodness that I had. It will be a lesson to me in the future.” I then asked the company in general if any of them had ever played Lear — or could play it; but there was no affirmative reply.

In the company was Mr. W. J. Holloway, who played the part of Kent. He was an old actor — that is, the actor was old though the man was in active middle age. He had, I knew, played in what is called “ leading business “ with his own company in Australia, where he had made much success. I asked him if he could read the part that night. If so, I should before the play ask the favour of the audience in the emergency; and that he would then play it “ without the book “ on the next night. He answered that he would rather wait till the next night, by which time he would be ready to play. To this I replied that if we closed for the night we should not re-open until Mr. Irving was able to resume work. After thinking a moment he said:

“Of course any one can read a part.” “ Then,” said I, “ will you read it to-night and play to-morrow?”

He answered that he would. So I said to him: “ Now, Mr. Holloway, consider that from this moment till the curtain goes up you own the theatre. If there is anything you want for help or convenience, order it; you have carte blanche. Mr. Irving’s dresser will make you up, and the Wardrobe Mistress will alter any dress to suit you. We will have a rehearsal if you wish, now or in the evening before the play; or all day, if you like.”

“I think,” he said after a pause, “ I had better get home and try to get hold of the words. I know the business pretty well as I have been at all the rehearsals. I am usually a quick study and it will be so much better if I can do without the book — for part of the time at any rate.”

In this he was quite wise; his experience as an old actor stood to him here. Kent is all through the play close to Lear, either in his own person or in disguise. The actor, therefore, who played the part, which in stage parlance is a “ feeder,” had been at all the rehearsals of Lear’s scenes when the “ business “ of the play is being fixed and when endless repetitions of speech and movement make all familiar with both text and action. Also for sixty nights he had gone through the play till every part of it was burned into his brain. Still, knowledge of a thing is not doing it; and it was a very considerable responsibility to undertake to play such a tremendous part as Lear at short notice.

When he came down at night he seemed easier in his mind than I expected; his wife, who was present though without his knowing it lest it might upset him, told me privately that he was letter perfect — in at least the two first acts. “ I have been going over it with him all day,” she said, “ so I am confident he will be all right.”

And he was all right. From first to last he never needed a word of prompting. Of course we had prepared for all emergencies. Not only had the prompter and the call-boy each a prompt book ready at every wing, but all his fellow actors were primed and ready to help.

I shall never forget that performance; it really stirred me to look at it as I did all through from the wings in something of the same state of mind as a hen who sees her foster ducklings toddling into the ditch. I had known that good actors were fine workmen of their craft, but I think I never saw it realised as then. It was like looking at a game of Rugby football when one is running with the ball for a touch-down behind goal with all the on-side men of his team close behind him. He could not fall or fail if he wanted to. They backed him up in every possible way. The cues came quick and sharp and there was not time to falter or forget. If any of the younger folk, upset by the gravity of the occasion, forgot or delayed in their speeches some one else spoke them for them. The play went with a rush right through; the only difference from the sixty previous performances being that though the entr'actes were of the usual length the play was shorter by some twenty minutes. When the call came at the end the audience showed their approval of Mr. Holloway's plucky effort by hearty applause. When the curtain had finally fallen the actor received that most dear reward of all. His comrades of all ranks closed round him and gave him a hearty cheer. Then the audience beyond the curtain, recognising the rare honour, joined in the cheer till from wall to wall the whole theatre rang.

It was a moving occasion to us all and I am right sure that it bore two lessons to all the actors present, young and old alike: to be ready for chances that may come; and to accept the responsibility of greatness in their work when such may present itself.

Of acting in especial, of all crafts the motto might be:

"The readiness is all!"

III

One other incident of the run of King Lear is, I think, worthy of record, inasmuch as it bears on the character and feeling of that great Englishman, Mr. Gladstone. In the second week of the run he came to see the play, occupying his usual seat on the stage on the O.P. corner. He seemed most interested in all that went on, but not entirely happy. At the end, after many compliments to Mr. Irving and Miss Terry, he commented on the unpatriotic conduct of taking aid from the French — from any foreigners — under any circumstance of domestic stress.

IV

Saturday, December 19, 1896, was an eventful day in Irving's life. That evening, in the full tide of his artistic success and with a personal position such as no actor had ever won, he placed on the stage Richard III, his acting in which just twenty years before had added so much and so justly to the great reputation which he had even then achieved.

His early fight had long been won. The public, and in especial the growing generation whose minds were free from the prejudice of ancient custom, had received his philosophic acting without cavil; the " Irving school " of acting had become a part of the nation's glory.

From the early morning of that day crowds were waiting to gain admission. Many of those in the passage to the pit door, leading in from the Strand, had camp-stools. One man had brought a regular chair so that he might sit all day with as little discomfort as possible. At four o'clock, when a great crowd had assembled, Irving had them all supplied with tea and bread-and-butter at his own expense. This was a custom which had grown up under his care and which made for a feeling of great personal kindness between the actor and his unknown friends. Most of those who waited at the pit door on first nights were young ladies and gentlemen and of course quite able to provide for themselves. But nothing would induce them to have a cup of tea till it was sent out to them by the management. That came to be a part of their cherished remembrance of such occasions, and was not to be foregone.

Many and many a time since then have I met in society persons, both ladies and gentlemen, who introduced themselves as old friends since the days when I had spoken to them, whilst waiting, through the iron rail which kept them from lateral pressure by new-corners and preserved the queue.

That day they were in great force, and even then, long before the house was, or could be, opened, there was no denying the hope-laden thrill of expectation with which they regarded the coming of the night's endeavour.

They were well justified, for nothing, so far as the Richard was concerned, could have gone with more marked success. The audience was simply wild with enthusiasm. That alone helps to make success in a theatre; the whole place seems charged with some kind of electric force and every one is lifted or even exalted beyond the common — the actors to do, the others to be receptive. At the close of the performance there were endless calls and cheering which made the walls ring.

In his very early youth Irving had found a certain attractiveness in Richard III., though doubtless he did not then know or realise what a play was. His cousin, John Penberthy, told me in 1890 how when they were both boys " Johnny " had a book opening out into long series of scenes of plays and that he used to be fond of saying dramatically: " My horse! my horse! A kingdom for my horse " Whether the error lay with the child's knowledge or the man's memory I know not.

Some of the scenes — not merely the painted or built pictures, but that which took in the persons as well as the setting of the stage — were of great beauty. In especial was the first scene when the funeral procession of King Henry VI. came on. Irving had tried to realise some of the effect of the great picture by Edwin A. Abbey, R.A. Here the tide of mourners seems to sweep along in resistless mass, with an extraordinary effect of the spear-poles of royal scarlet amidst the black draperies.

Whilst the bulk of the audience were taking their reluctant way home certain invited guests from their body were beginning to fill up again the great stage which had by now been transposed into a room surrounded by supper-tables. Irving was receiving his friends after what had by then grown to be an established custom of first and last nights. From the buoyancy and joy of the guests it was easy to see how the play had gone. All were rejoicing as if each one had achieved a personal success.

V

In his own rooms that night he met with an accident which prevented his working for ten weeks. And so the run of Richard III. at that time was limited to one triumphant night.

On February 27 it was resumed till the coming of the time, which had long before been fixed, for the production of Madame Sans-Gene.

CHAPTER XIII. IRVING'S METHOD

"Eugene Aram" — Sudden Change— "Richelieu" — Impersonation fixed in Age—" Louis XI."—" Up against it" in Chicago—" The Lyons Mail" — Tom Mead — Stories of his Forgetfulness—" Charles I." — Dion Boucicault on Politics in the Theatre — Irving's " make-up " — Cupid as Mephistopheles

I

THE first time I saw Eugene Aram, June 6, 1879, I was much struck with one fact — amongst many — which afforded a real lesson in the art of acting in all its phases — philosophy, effect, value and method. It is that of the effect, intellectual as well as emotional, of a lightning-like change in the actor's manner. In this play, the Yorkshire schoolmaster, who under the stress of violent emotion wrought by wrong to the woman he loved, has avoided the danger of discovery and has for a long time remained in outward peace in the house of Parson Meadows, the Vicar of Knaresborough. The evil genius of his early day, Richard Houseman, who alone knew of his crime, had succeeded in " tracking " him down; and now, being in desperate straits, tried to blackmail him. Knowing his man, however, he will not meet him. Such a one as Houseman is a veritable " daughter of the horseleech"; the giving is each time a firmer ground for further chantage. Houseman, grown desperate, threatens him that he will expose him to Meadows; and Eugene Aram, who has long loved in secret the Vicar's daughter Ruth, seeing all his cherished hopes of happiness shattered, grows more desperate still. All the murderous potentialities which have already manifested themselves wake to new life in the " climbing " passion of the moment — the hysterica passio of King Lear. As Irving played it the hunted man at bay was transformed from his gentleness to a ravening tiger; he looked the spirit of murder incarnate as he answered threat by threat. Just at that moment the door opened and in walked Ruth Meadows, bright and cheery as a ray of spring sunshine. In a second — less than a second, for the change was like lightning — the sentence begun in one way went on in another without a quaver or pause. The mind and powers of the remorse-haunted man who had for weary years trained himself for just such an emergency worked true. Unfailingly a sudden and marked burst of applause rewarded on each occasion this remarkable artistic tour de force.

II

The play of Richelieu had always a particular interest for those who knew that in it he made his first appearance on the stage in the small part of Gaston, Duke of Orleans.

Regarding this first appearance three names should be borne in memory as those who helped the ambitious young clerk to an opening in the art he had chosen. The names of two of these are already known. One was William Hoskins, who at considerable self-sacrifice had helped to teach him his craft, and who had predicted good things for him. The other was E. D. Davis, an old actor, who was just entering upon the management of the Lyceum Theatre, Sunderland; and who at Mr. Hoskins' request gave him an engagement.

The third friend made his way possible, and gave him opportunity of appearing to advantage in his parts by supplying him with the sinews of war. This friend was none other than his uncle, Thomas Brodribb, the second of the four brothers of whom Irving's father, Samuel, was fourth. He was — perhaps fortunately for his nephew

— a bachelor. He had but small means; but also, happily, small wants. Amongst his assets he had a policy of insurance on which many premiums had been paid; and wishing to do something for his nephew on his starting in a new life, he made over to him this policy so that he might realise on it. This his nephew did to the result of nearly one hundred pounds sterling, all of which was by degrees laid out carefully with most anxious thought on such wardrobe and personal properties as are not usually “ found “ by provincial managements. This kindly and timely assistance enabled the young actor to appear during his first years on the stage in many parts with something of that suitability of presence which his characters demanded. In those early days the wardrobe of country theatres was limited and the actors often chose their dresses in the sequence of importance; so that it was much to a young man to be able to supplement such costume as came to him. Could the generous, kindly-hearted Uncle Thomas have lived to see the grand consequences eventually resulting in part from his thoughtful kindness he might have indeed been proud.

There was this difference in Irving’s Richelieu and the same part as played by any other actor I have seen. In the great scene of the quarrel between Baradas and the Cardinal, when the former wants, for his own purposes, to take, by the King’s authority, Julie from his custody, the latter hurls at him the magnificently effective speech beginning: “ Then wakes the power which in the Age of Iron.”

This by the players of the old school was thundered out with the same vigour with which they fought in their sword combats; and certainly the effect was very telling. It was the act as well as the word of personal mastery.

Irving kept the full effect; but did it in such a way that he superadded to the Cardinal's character the flickering spasmodic power of an infirm old man. He too began in tones of thunder. To his full height he drew the tall form that seemed massive in the sacerdotal robes. He was manifestly inspired and borne up by the divine force of his sacred office. But at the end he collapsed, almost sinking into a swoon. Thus the effect was magnified and the sense of both reality and characterisation enhanced.

With Louis XI., a part which in France is called le grand role, Henry Irving was fairly familiar in his early years on the stage. He had played the part of both Coitier and Tristan, and as one or other of these in most of the scenes he had full experience of the acting value of the title role. It would be very unlike the method of study habitual to him even before he went on the stage if he had not all the time, both at rehearsal and performance, grasped the acting possibilities of both character and situations, and devised new and subtle means for characterisation. When in 1878 he had run the piece for some three months he had learned much, both by practice and from the opinions of his friends. In those days he did not often read criticisms of an ordinary kind. He found that some of them, written by irresponsible writers imperfectly equipped for their task, only disturbed and irritated him. And so he only read such as had filtered through the judgment of his friends; a habit which George Eliot had adopted about the same time.

Though I had not seen his performance that year I could tell, in 1879, from his anxiety about the rehearsal of certain scenes and the care bestowed on the new or altered scenery and appointments, that his new work was to be on a slightly different plane from the old.

After a few performances Louis XI. became a sort of holiday part to him. There is in it but one change of dress: that between the fourth and fifth acts. This change, though exceptionally heavy, is as nothing to the exhaustion consequent on the many changes of costume necessary in most heavy plays. These ordinarily absorb in swift and laborious work the only breathing times between the periods of action. A series of small labours may in the long run amount to more than one large one. The remark of Charles Lamb, who lived in an age when beards were unknown, may be applied:

"A man suffers as much in the aggregate of life in shaving as a woman does in child-birth!"

The limitation of violent effort in this play made him very " easy " in it. In one scene only does such occur; that at the end of the fourth act as originally played. Of late years he played it in four acts altogether, amalgamating the first and second acts with much benefit to the play.

Only once have I seen him put out at anything during the playing of Louis XI. It was in Chicago on the night of Saturday, February 13, 1904. For five weeks following the burning of the Iroquois Theatre in that city no theatre had been allowed to open. The official world, which had itself been gravely in fault in allowing the theatre to be opened before it had been tested, tried to show their integrity by imposing rigid perfection — after the event — on other people. The Illinois Theatre, where we were to play, was the first theatre opened, and naturally we had to stand the brunt of official over-zeal. We had been harassed beyond belief from the moment we entered the theatre. We were served with a notice that we should not be allowed to open until the whole of the scenery, &c., used on the stage had been fireproofed to the satisfaction of the City officials. When we asked what fire- proofing would be considered satisfactory they would not tell us; so the only thing we could do with any reasonable chance of success was to employ the fireproofer whom they recommended. It was an expensive luxury in a small way, for we had to pay some five hundred dollars for what our own men could have done for a tenth of the money. Then they would not allow the gallery to be opened at all, and took out whole sections of seats on the floor and in the balconies. Again, the firemen kept charge of the stage, even during the day when there were in the house but the few workmen employed on the stage. One day our Master Machinist was arranging some small matter at the side of the proscenium when a fireman stepped up to him and said:

"If you touch that I'll jail you!"

On the night of Louis XI. all went well till the end of the bedroom scene between the King and Nemours. Here, when the Duke has escaped, the King calls for aid and his guards rush in with torches and by their master's direction search the room for his enemy. The effectiveness of the scene depends on the light thus introduced, for the scene is a dark one, lit only by the King's chamber-lamp. To Irving's dismay the cue for the lights was not answered. True, the guards came on, but in darkness. The firemen in the wings had seized from the guards the spirit torches — implements carefully made to obviate any possible danger from fire and each carried by one of our own men practised in the handling of them.

After a night or two matters got a little easier. The fire regulations, which directed that the men of that department on the stage should make requisition to the responsible manager who would see them carried out, began to be more decorously observed.

IV

The Lyons Mail is the especial title of Charles Reade's version of Le Courier de Lyons. The play has often been done in its older form, but in the newer only by Charles Kean and Henry Irving. Indeed when Irving took it in hand he got Reade to make some changes, especially in the second act, where Joseph Lesurques has the interview with his father, who believes him guilty, and that he saw him fire the shot by which he himself was wounded.

Irving has often told me that in playing the double part the real difficulty was not to make the two men unlike and guilt look like guilt, but the opposite. He used to adduce instances told him by experienced judges and counsel of where they had been themselves deceived by demeanour. It is indeed difficult for any one to discriminate between the shame, together with the submission to the Divine Law to which he has been bred, of the innocent, and the fear, whose expression is modified by hardihood, of the guilty. In Irving's case the points of difference were not merely overt; there were subtle differences of tone and look and bearing. Loftiness for instance, as against supreme and fearless indifference and brutality.

The Lyons Mail was always one of the most anxious and exhausting of his plays. In the first place he was always on the stage, either in the one character of Lesurques or the other of Dubosc-except at the end of the play where he appeared to be both. All the intervals were taken up with necessary changes of dress. In the next place the time is all-important. In any melodrama accuracy as to time is important to success; but in this one of confused identity it is all-important. There are occasions when the delay of a single second will mar the best studied effect, and when to be a second too soon is to spoil the plot. In certain plays the actors must " overlap " in their speeches; the effect of their work must be to carry the thought of the audience from point to point without wavering. Thus they receive the necessary information without the opportunity of examining it too closely. This is a part of the high art of the stage. There can be illusions by other means than light.

Once there was a peculiar contretemps in the acting. Tom Mead was a fine old actor with a tall thin form and a deep voice that sounded like an organ. His part was that of Jerome Lesurques, the father of the unhappy man whose double was the villain Dubosc. He had played it for many years and very effectively. The end of the first act comes when Dubosc, the robber and murderer, is confronted by Jerome Lesurques. The old man thinks it is his son whom he sees rifling the body of the mail guard. As he speaks the words: “ Good God! my son, my son,” Dubosc fires at him, wounding him on the arm, and escapes as the curtain comes down.

On this particular night — it was one of the last nights in New York, closing the tour of 1893-4 —

Mead forgot his words. Dubosc stood ready with his pistol to fire; but no words came. Now, if the audience do not know that Jerome Lesurques thinks that his son is guilty the heart is taken out of the play, for it is his unconscious evidence that proves his son’s guilt. The words had to be spoken at any cost by some one. Irving waited, but the old man’s memory was gone. So he himself called out in a loud voice: “ I’m not your son! “ and shot him. And, strange to say, none of the audience seemed to notice the omission.

Tom Mead was famous in his later years amongst his comrades for making strange errors, and when he had any new part they always waited to see what new story he would beget. Once on a voyage to America when we were arranging the concert for the Seamen’s Orphans, he said he would do a scene from Macbeth if Mrs.

Pauncefort would do it with him. She, a fine old actress, at once consented and from thence on the members of the company were waiting to see what the slip would be. They were certain there would be one; to them there was no “ might “ or “ if “ in the matter. The scene chosen was that of the murder of Duncan, and all went well till the passage was reached:

“And Pity, like a naked new-born babe Striding the blast, or heaven’s cherubim, horsed Upon the sightless carriers of the air.”

This noble passage he repeated as follows:

“And Pity, like a naked new-born babe Seated on the horse. No! Horsed on the seat!

No! What is the word?”

Once before, during the first run of Macbeth, he played one of the witches; when circling round the cauldron he had to say: “ Cool it with a baboon’s blood.” This he changed to:

“Cool it with a dragoon’s blood! “ As the words are spoken before Macbeth enters, Irving, standing ready in the wings, of course heard the error. Later in the evening he sent for Mead and called his attention to the error, pointing out that as the audience knew so well the words of the swinging lines they might notice an error and that it would be well to read over the part afresh. This he promised to do. Next night he got very anxious as the time drew near. He moved about restlessly behind the scenes saying over and over again to himself, “ dragoon, no baboon — baboon! — dragoon! — dragoon! — baboon! “ — till he got himself hopelessly mixed and his comrades were in ecstasy. When at last he came to say the word he said it wrong; and as he had a voice whose tones he could not modify this is what the audience heard:

“Cool it with dragoon’s blood — No, no, baboon’s. My God! I’ve said it again! baboon's blood."

When we did Iolanthe, a version by W. G. Wills of King Rene's Daughter, Mead took the part of Ebn Jaira an Eastern Wizard. At one part of the piece, where things look very black indeed for the happiness of the blind girl, he has to say: " All shall be well in that immortal land where God hath His dwelling." One night he got shaky in his words and surprised the audience with:

"In that immortal land where God hath His-Ah — um — His — apartments!"

Such mental aberrations used to be fairly common in the old days when new parts had to be learned every night, and when the prompter, in so far as the " book " was concerned, was a hard-worked official and not an anachronism, as now. Macready had an experience of it once when playing Hamlet. The actor who took the part of the Priest in the graveyard scene was inadequately prepared and in the passage:

"for charitable prayers, Shards, flints, and pebbles shall be thrown on her." he said, " shards, flints and beadles." This almost overcame the star, who was heard to murmur to himself before he went on; " Beadles! Beadles " and at the end of the play one behind him heard him say as he walked to his dressing-room: " He said beadles'!"

V

Charles I. is rather too slight and delicate a play for great popularity; and in addition its politics are too aggressive. Whenever I think of it in its political aspect I am always reminded of a pregnant saying of Dion Boucicault — I mean Dion Boucicault the Elder, for the years have run fast — spoken in the beautiful Irish brogue which was partly natural and partly cultivated:

"The rayson why historical plays so seldom succeed is because a normal audience doesn't go into the thayatre with its politics in its breeches pockets!"

This is really a philosophical truth, and the man who had then written or adapted over four hundred plays knew it. A great political situation may like any other great existing force form a milieu for dramatic action; making or increasing difficulties or abrogating or lessening them; or bring ing unexpected danger or aid to the persons of the drama. But where the political situation is supposed to be lasting or eternally analogous it is apt to create in the minds of an audience varying conditions of thought and sympathy. And where these all-powerful forces of an audience are opposed they become mutually destructive, being only united into that one form which makes for the destruction of the play.

One of the most notable things of Irving's Charles I. was his extraordinary reproduction of Van Dyck's pictures. The part in its scenic aspect might have been called Van Dyck in action. Each costume was an exact reproduction from one of the well-known paintings, and the reproduction of Charles's face was a marvel. In this particular case he had a fine model, for Van Dyck painted the King in almost every possible way of dignity. To aid him in his work Edwin Long made for him a tryptich of Van Dyck heads, and this used to rest before him on his dressing-table on those nights when he played Charles.

Irving was a painter of no mean degree with regard to his " make-up " of parts. He spared no pains on the work and on nights when he played parts requiring careful preparations such as Charles I., Shylock, Louis XI., Gregory Brewster (in Waterloo), King Lear, Richelieu and some few others he always came to his dressing-room nearly an hour earlier than at other times. It has often amazed me to see the physiognomy of Shylock gradually emerge from the actor's own generous countenance. Though I have seen it done a hundred times I could never really understand how the lips thickened, with the red of the lower lip curling out and over after the manner of the typical Hebraic countenance; how the bridge of the nose under his painting — for he used no physical building-up — rose into the Jewish aquiline; and, most wonderful of all, how the eyes became veiled and glassy with introspection — eyes which at times could and did flash like lurid fire.

But there is for an outsider no understanding what strange effects stage make-up can produce. When my son, who is Irving's godson, then about seven years old, came to see Faust I brought him round between acts to see Mephistopheles in his dressing-room. The little chap was exceedingly pretty — like a cupid — and a quaint fancy struck the actor. Telling the boy to stand still for a moment he took his dark pencil and with a few rapid touches made him up after the manner of Mephistopheles; the same high-arched eyebrows; the same sneer at the corners of the mouth; the same pointed moustache. I think it was the strangest and prettiest transformation I ever saw. And I think the child thought so too, for he was simply entranced with delight.

Irving loved children and I think he was as enchanted over the incident as was the child himself.

CHAPTER XIV. ART-SENSE

"The Bells" — Worn-out Scenery — An Actor's Judgment of a Part—" Olivia "—" Faust " — A Master Mind and Good Service — A Loyal Stage Manager and Staff — Whistler on Business — Twenty-fifth Anniversary of "The Bells" — A Presentation — A Work of Art" The Bells" a Classic — Visit of Illustrious Frenchmen — Sarcey's Amusement

I

No successful play, perhaps, had ever had so little done for it as The Bells on its production. Colonel Bateman did not believe in it, and it was only the concatenation of circumstances of his own desperate financial condition and Irving's profound belief in the piece that induced him to try it at all. The occasion was in its effect somewhat analogous to Edmund Kean's first appearance at Drury Lane; the actor came to the front and top of his profession per saltum. The production was meagre; of this I can bear a certain witness myself. When Irving took over the management of the Lyceum into his own hands the equipment of The Bells was one of the assets coming to him. When he did play it he used the old dresses, scenery and properties and their use was continued as long as possible. Previous to the American tour of 1883-4, fifty-five performances in all constituted the entire wear and tear.

On our first expedition to America everything was packed in a very cumbrous manner; the amount of timber, nails and screws used was extraordinary. There were hundred-weights of extracted screws on the stage of the Star Theatre of New York whilst the unpacking was in progress. When I came down to the theatre on the first morning after the unloading of the stuff, Arnott, who was in charge of the mechanics of the stage, came to me and said:

"Would you mind coming here a moment, sir, I would like you to see something! “ He brought me to the back of the stage and pointed out a long heap of rubbish some four feet high. It was just such as you would see in the waste-heap of a house-wrecker’s yard.

“What on earth is that? “ I asked.

“That is the sink-and-rise of the vision in The Bells.” In effecting a vision on the stage the old method used to be to draw the back scenes or “ flats “ apart or else to raise the whole scene from above or take it down through a long trap on the stage. The latter was the method adopted by the scene-painter of The Bells.

“Did it meet with an accident? “ I asked.

“No, sir. It simply shook to bits just as you see it. It was packed up secure and screwed tight like the rest!”

I examined it carefully. The whole stuff was simply rotten with age and wear; as thoroughly worn out as the deacon’s wonderful one-horse shay in Oliver Wendell Holmes’ poem. The canvas had been almost held together by the overlay of paint, and as for the wood it was cut and hacked and pieced to death; full of old screw-holes and nail-holes. No part of it had been of new timber or canvas when The Bells was produced eleven years before. With this experience I examined the whole scenery and found that almost every piece of it was in a similar condition. It had been manufactured out of all the odds and ends of old scenery in the theatre.

Under the modern conditions of Metropolitan theatres it is hard to imagine what satisfied up to the “ seventies.” Nowadays the scenery of good theatres is made for travel. The flats are framed in light wood, securely clamped and fortified at the joints and in folding sections like screens, each section being not more than six feet wide so as to be easily handled and placed in baggage-waggons. The scenes are often fixed on huge castors with rubber bosses so as to move easily and silently. But formerly they were made in single panels and of heavy timber and took a lot of strength to move.

II

From the time of my joining him in 1878 till his death Irving played The Bells in all six hundred and twenty-seven times, being one hundred and sixty-eight in London; two hundred and seventy-three in the British provinces, and one hundred and eighty-six in America. During its first run at the Lyceum in 1872-3 it ran one hundred and fifty-one nights, so that in all he played The Bells seven hundred and seventy-eight times besides certain occasions when he gave it in his provincial tours previous to 1878. Altogether he probably played the piece over eight hundred times.

Colonel Bateman originally leased the rights of the play from the author, Leopold Lewis. Finally, at a time of stress — sadly frequent in those days with poor old Lewis — he sold them to Samuel French, from whom Irving finally purchased them. Nothwithstanding this double purchase Irving used, after the death of Lewis, to allow his widow a weekly sum whenever he was playing — playing not merely The Bells but anything else — up to the time of his death.

Mathias was an exceedingly hard and exhausting part on the actor, but as years rolled on it became in ever greater demand.

III

The original choice of the play by Irving is an object-lesson of the special art-sense of an actor regarding his own work. Irving knew that the play would succeed. It was not guessing nor hoping nor any other manifestation of an optimistic nature. Had Bateman, in the business crisis of 1872, not allowed him to put it on, he would infallibly have put it on at some other time.

It would be difficult for an actor to explain in what this art-sense consists or how it brings conviction to those whose gift it is. Certainly any one not an actor could not attempt the task at all. In the course of a quarter of a century of intimate experience of this actor, when he has confided to me the very beginnings of his intentions and let me keep in touch with his mind when such intentions became at first fixed and then clamorous of realisation, I have known him see his way to personal success with regard to several characters. For instance; When in 1885 he had arranged to do Olivia and was making up the cast he put himself down as Dr. Primrose. I had not seen the play in which Ellen Terry had appeared under John Hare's management — with enormous success for a long run — and I had no guiding light, except the text of the play, as to the excellence of the part as an acting one. But neither had Irving seen it. He too had nothing but the text to go by, but he was quite satisfied with what he could do. He knew of course from report that Ellen Terry would be fine. For myself I could not see in the Vicar a great part for so great an actor, and tried my best to dissuade him from acting it. " Get the best man in London, or out of it — at any price," I said; " but don't risk playing a part like that already played exhaustively and played well according to accounts! " Hermann Vezin had played it in the run. Irving answered me with all his considerate sweetness of manner:

"My dear fellow, it is all right! I can see my way to it thoroughly. If I can't play the Vicar to please I shall think I don't know my business as an actor; and that I really think I do!"

This was said not in any way truculently or self-assertively, but with a businesslike quietude which always convinced. When any man was sincere with Irving, he too was always both sincere and sympathetic, even to an opposing view to his own. When one was fearless as well as sincere he gained an added measure of the actor's respect.

Again, when in 1885 Faust was being produced I began to have certain grave doubts as to whether we were justified in the extravagant hopes which we had all formed of its success. The piece as produced was a vast and costly undertaking; and as both the decor and the massing and acting grew, there came that time, perhaps inevitable in all such undertakings of indeterminate bounds, as to whether reality would justify imagination. With me that feeling culminated on the night of a partial rehearsal, when the Brocken scene on which we all relied to a large extent was played, all the supers and ballet and most of the characters being in dress. It was then, as ever afterwards, a wonderful scene of imagination, of grouping, of lighting, of action, and all the rush and whirl and triumphant cataclysm of unfettered demoniacal possession. But it all looked cold and unreal — that is, unreal to what it professed. When the scene was over — it was then in the grey of the morning — I talked with Irving in his dressing-room, where we had a sandwich and something else, before going home. I expressed my feeling that we ought not to build too much on this one play. After all it might not catch on with the public as firmly as we had all along expected — almost taken for granted. Could we not be quietly getting something else ready, so that in case it did not turn out all that which our fancy painted we should be able to retrieve ourselves. Other such arguments ofjudicious theatrical management I used earnestly.

Irving listened, gravely weighing all I said; then he answered me genially:

"That is all true; but in this case I have no doubt. I know the play will do. To-night I think you have not been able to judge accurately. You are forming an opinion largely from the effect of the Brocken. As far as to-night goes you are quite right; but you have not seen my dress. I do not want to wear it till I get all the rest correct. Then you will see. I have studiously kept as yet all the colour to that grey-green. When my dress of flaming scarlet appears amongst it — and remember that the colour will be intensified by that very light — it will bring the whole picture together in a way you cannot dream of. Indeed I can hardly realise it myself yet, though I know it will be right. You shall see too how Ellen Terry's white dress and even that red scar across her throat will stand out in the midst of that turmoil of lightning!"

He had seen in his own inner mind and with his vast effective imagination all these pictures and these happenings from the very first; all that had been already done was but leading up to the culmination.

IV

Let me say here that Irving loved sincerity, and most of all in those around him and who had to aid him in his work — for no man can do all for himself. Alfred Gilbert the sculptor once said to me on seeing from behind the scenes how a great play was pulled through on a first night, when every soul in the place was alive with desire to aid and every nerve was instinct with thought:

"I would give anything that the world holds to be served as Irving is!”

He was quite right. There must be a master mind for great things, and the master of that mind must learn to trust others when the time of action comes. The time for doubting, for experimenting, for teaching and weighing and testing is in the antecedent time of preparation. But when the hour strikes every doubt is a fetter to one’s own work — a barrier between effort and success.

In artistic work this is especially so. The artist temperament is sensitive — almost super-sensitive; and the requirements of its work necessitate that form of quietude which comes from self-oblivion. It is not possible to do any work based on individual qualities when from extrinsic cause some unrequired phase of that individuality looms large in the foreground of thought. Dickens, who was himself a sensitive man and understood both consciously and unconsciously the needs of artistic nature, was only putting the thought into humorous and exaggerated words when he made Mr. Chevy Slyme say that his friend had in his nature “ infernally fine-touched chords.”

This quality is of the essence of every artist, but is emphasised in the actor; for here his individuality is not merely a help to creative power but is a medium by which he expresses himself. Thus it will be found as a working rule of life that the average actor will not, if he can help it, do anything or take any responsibility which will make for the possibility of unpopularity. The reason is not to be found in vanity, or in a merely reckless desire to please; it is that unpopularity is not only harmful to his aim and detrimental to his well-being, but is a disturbing element in his work quit actor. In another place we shall have to consider the matter of “ dual consciousness “ which Irving considered to be of the intellectual mechanism of acting. Here we must take it that if to a double consciousness required for work a third — self-consciousness — is added, they are apt to get mixed; and fine purpose will be thwarted or overborne.

Thus it is that an actor has to keep himself, in certain ways at least, for his work. When in addition he has the cares and worries and responsibilities and labours and distractions of management to encounter daily and hourly, it is vitally necessary that he has trutsworthy and, to him, sufficing assistance. Oliver Wendell Holmes has a shrewd remark in one of his breakfast-table books; that " genius should wed with character." This has perhaps a wider application than the author intended, and the business side of art work is a fair example of its width. It is quite sufficient for one man to originate the scope and ultimate effect of a play; to bring all the workers of different crafts employed in its production; to select the various actors each for special qualities, to rehearse them and the less skilled labourers employed in effect; in fact to bring the whole play into harmonious completeness. All beyond this is added labour, exhausting to the individual and ineffective with regard to the work in hand. When, therefore, an actor-manager has such trusty and efficient assistance as is here suggested many things become possible to him with regard to the finesse of his art, which he dared not otherwise attempt. Somebody must stand the stress of irritating matters; there must be some barrier to the rush of mordant distractions. Irving could do much and would have in the long run done at least the bulk of what he intended; but he never could have done all he did without the assistance of his friend and trusty stage-lieutenant, H. J. Loveday, who through the whole of his management stood beside him in all his creative work and shaped into permanent form his lofty ideas of stage effect. It is not sufficient in a theatre to see a thing properly done and then leave it to take care of itself for the future. Stage perfection needs constant and never-ending vigilance. No matter how perfectly a piece may be played, from the highest to the least important actor, in a certain time things will begin to get “ sloppy “ and fresh rehearsals are required to bring all up again to the standard of excellence fixed. To Loveday and the able staff under him, whose devotion and zeal were above all praise, the continued excellence of the Lyceum plays had to be mainly trusted.

Let it be clearly understood here, however, that I say this not to belittle Irving, but to add to his honour. In addition to other grand qualities he had the greatness to trust where trust was due. With him lay all the great conception and imagination and originality of all his accomplishments. He was quite content that others should have their share of honour.

When one considers the amazing labour and expense concerned in the “ production” of a play, he is better able to estimate the value of devoted and trusted assistance.

V

Even the thousand and one details of the business of a theatre need endless work and care — work which would in the long run shatter entirely the sensitive nervous system of an artist. In fact it may be taken for granted that no artist can properly attend to his own business. As an instance I may point to Whistler, who, long after he had made money and lost it again and had begun to build up his fortune afresh, came to me for some personal advice before going to America to deliver his “ Five o’clock “ discourse. In the course of our conversation he said:

“Bram, I wish I could get some one to take me up and attend to my business for me — I can’t do it myself; and I really think it would be worth a good man’s while — some man like yourself,” he courteously added. “ I would give half of all I earned to such a man, and would be grateful to him also for a life without care!”

I think myself he was quite right. He was before his time — long before it. He did fine work and created a new public taste... and he became bankrupt. His house and all he had were sold; and the whole sum he owed would, I think, have been covered by the proper sale of a few of the pictures which were bought almost en bloc by a picture-dealer who sold them for almost any price offered. He had a mass of them in his gallery several feet thick as they were piled against the wall. One of them he sold to Irving for either X20 or X40, I forget which.

This was the great picture of Irving as King Philip in Tennyson’s drama Queen Mary. It was sold at Christie’s amongst Irving’s other effects after his death and fetched over five thousand pounds sterling.

VI

During the run of Cymbeline a pause of one night was made for a special occasion. November 25, 1896, was the twenty-fifth anniversary of the first performance of The Bells, and on that memorable birth-night the performance was repeated to an immense house enthusiastic to the last degree.

After the curtain had finally fallen the whole of the company and all the employees of the theatre gathered on the stage for a presentation to Irving to commemorate the remarkable occasion. One and all without exception had contributed in proportion to their means. Most of all, Alfred Gilbert, R.A., who had given his splendid genius and much labour as his contribution. Of course on this occasion it was only the model which was formally conveyed. The form of the trophy was a great silver bell standing some two feet high, exquisite in design and with the grace and beauty of the work of a Cellini; a form to be remembered in after centuries. I had the honour of writing the destined legend to be wrought in a single line in raised letters on a band of crinkly gold on the curve of the bell. Gilbert had made a point of my writing it, and be sure I was proud to do so. It ran:

HONOUR TO IRVING. THROUGH THE LOVE OF HIS COMRADES. I RING THROUGH THE AGES.

Gilbert was enthusiastic about it, for he said it fulfilled all the conditions of the legend on a bell. In the first place, according to the ancient idea a bell is a person with a soul and a thought and a voice of its own; it is supposed to speak on its own initiative. In the second place, the particular inscription was short and easily wrought and would just go all round the bell. Moreover from its peculiar form the reading of it could begin anywhere. I felt really proud when he explained all this to me and I realised that I had so well carried out the idea.

VII

It may perhaps be here noted that according to the tradition of the Comedie-Francaise a play becomes a classic work when it has held the boards for a quarter of a century. The director, M. Jules Claretie asked Irving if they might play it in the House of Moliere. Of course he was pleased and sent to Claretie a copy of the prompt-book and drawings of the scenes and appointments.

Jules Claretie was by now an old friend. In 1879, when the Comedie-Francaise came to London and played at the Gaiety Theatre, he came over as one of the men of letters interested in their success. It was not till afterwards that he was selected as Director. I remember well one night when he came to supper with Irving in the Lyceum. This was before the Old Beefsteak Room was reappointed to its old use; and we supped in the room next to his own dressing-room, occasionally used in those days for purposes of hospitality. There came also three other Frenchmen of literary note Jules Clery, Jacques Normand and the great critic Francisque Sarcey. There was a marked scarcity of language between us as none of the Frenchmen spoke in those days a word of English, and neither Irving nor I knew more than a smattering of French. We got on well, however, and managed to exchange ideas in the manner usual to people who want to talk with each other. It was quite late, and we had all begun to forget that we did not know each other's language, when we missed Sarcey. I went out to look for him, fearing lest he might come to grief through some of the steps or awkward places in the almost dark theatre. In those days of gas lighting we always kept alight the " pilot " light in the great chandelier of bronze and glass which hung down into the very centre of the auditorium — just above the sight-line from the gallery. This pilot was a matter of safety, and I rather think that we were compelled to see it attended to, either by the civic authorities or the superior landlord. The gas remaining in the pipes of the theatre was just sufficient to keep it going for four and twenty hours. If it went out there must be a leak somewhere; and that leak had to be discovered and attended to without delay.

I could not find Sarcey on the dim stage or in the front of the house. In a theatre the rule is to take up the curtain when the audience have passed out so that there may be as much time and opportunity as possible for ventilating the house. I began to get a little uneasy about the missing guest; but when I came near the corner of the stage whence the private staircase led to Irving's rooms I heard a queer kind of thumping sound. I followed it out into the passage leading from the private door in Burleigh Street to the Royal box. This was shut off from the theatre by an iron door — not locked, but falling gently into the jambs by its own weight. When I pushed open the door I found Sarcey all by himself, dancing a queer sort of dance something after the manner of the " Gillie Callum." It was positively weird. I never afterwards could think of Sarcey without there rising before me the vision of that lively, silent, thickset, agile figure moving springily in the semi-darkness.

Jules Claretie was many times at the Lyceum after that first visit, and in his regime the Theatre Francais was the home of courtesy to strangers. Once when my wife was in Paris he asked her what play she would like particularly to see; and on her saying that she much wanted to see some time Mounet-Sully in Hamlet he had the piece put up a few nights after and sent her his box.

CHAPTER XV. STAGE EFFECTS

“The Lady of Lyons “ — A Great Stage Army — Supers their work and pay “ The Corsican Brothers” — Some great “ Sets” — A Royal Visitor behind scenes-Seizing an Opportunity — A Triton amongst minnows — Gladstone as an Actor — Beaconsfield and Coryphees — A Double — A cure for haste

I

The Lady of Lyons was produced on April 17, 1879. It kept in the bill for a portion of each week for the remainder of the first and the whole of the second season; in all forty-five times — no inconsiderable run of such an old and hackneyed play.

The production was a very beautiful one. There was a specially attractive feature in it: the French army. At the end of the fourth act Claude, all his hopes shattered and being consumed with remorse, accepts Colonel Damas’ offer to go with him to the war in that fine melodramatic outburst:

“Place me wherever a foe is most dreaded — wherever France most needs a life!”

As Irving stage-managed it the army, already on its way, was tramping along the road outside.

Through window and open door the endless columns were seen, officers and men in due order and the flags in proper place. It seemed as if the line would stretch out till the crack of doom! A very large number of soldiers had been employed as supers and were of course especially suitable for the work. In those days the supers of London theatres were largely supplied from the Brigade of Guards. The men liked it, for it provided easy beer-money, and the officers liked them to have the opportunity as it kept them out of mischief. We had always on our staff as an additional super-master a Sergeant of Guards who used to provide the men and was of course in a position to keep them in order.

The men entered thoroughly into the spirit of the thing, and it was really wonderful how, availing themselves of their professional training, they were able to seemingly multiply their forces. Often have I admired the dexterity, ease and rapidity with which that moving army was kept going with a hundred and fifty men. Four abreast they marched across the stage at the back. The back cloth of the landscape outside the cottage was set far up the stage so that there was but a narrow space left between it and the back wall, scarcely room for one person to pass; and it was interesting to see the perfection of drill which enabled those soldiers to meet the difficulties of keeping up the constant stream of the troops. They would march into the wings with set pace, but the instant they passed out of sight of the audience they would break into a run; in perfect order they would rush in single file round the back of the scene and arrive at the other side just in time to fall into line and step again. And so the endless stream went on. When Claude ran out with Damas the ranks opened and a cheer rose; he fell into line with the rest and on the army marched.

That marching army never stopped. No matter how often the curtain went up on the scene — and sometimes there were seven or eight calls, for the scene was one specially exciting to the more demonstrative parts of the house — it always rose on that martial array, always moving on with the resistless time and energy of an overwhelming force.

It was only fair that Irving should always get good service from supers for they never had such a friend. When their standard pay was sixpence per night he gave a shilling. When that sum became standard he gave one and sixpence. And when that was reached he paid two shillings — an increase of 300 per cent. in his own time.

If the smallness of the pay, even now, should strike any reader, let me remind such that supers are not supposed to live on their pay. There are a few special people who generally dress with them, but such are in reality minor actors and get larger pay. The super proper is engaged during the day — porters, workmen, gasmen, &c., and simply add to their living wage by work at night. At the Lyceum if a man only worked as a super; we took it for granted that he was in reality a loafer, and did not keep him.

The Corsican Brothers is one of the pieces which requires picturesque setting. The story is so weird that it obtains a new credibility from unfamiliar entourage. Corsica has always been accepted as a land of strange happenings and stormy passions. Things are accepted under such circumstances which would ordinarily be passed by as bizarre. The production was certainly a magnificent one. There are two scenes in it which allow of any amount of artistic effort, although their juxtaposition in the sequence of the play makes an enormous difficulty. The first is the scene of the Masked Ball in the Opera House in Paris; the other the Forest of Fontainebleau, where takes place the duel between Fabian and de Chateau-Renaud. Each of these scenes took up the whole stage, right away from the footlights to the back wall; thus the task of changing from one to the other, with only the interval of the supper at Baron de Montgiron's to do it in, was one of extraordinary difficulty. The scene of the Masked Ball represented the interior of the Opera House, the scenic auditorium being furthest from the footlights. In fact it was as though the audience sitting in the Lyceum auditorium saw the scene as though looking in a gigantic mirror placed in the auditorium arch. The scene was in reality a vast one and of great brilliance. The Opera House was draped with crimson silk, the boxes were practi cal and contained a whole audience, all being in perspective. The men and women in the boxes near to the footlights were real; those far back were children dressed like their elders. Promenading and dancing were hundreds of persons in striking costumes. It must be remembered that in those days there were no electric lights, and as there were literally thousands of lights in the scene it was a difficult one to fit. Thousands of feet of gas-piping, the joining hose being flexible, were used and the whole resources of supply were brought into requisition. We had before that brought the use of gas-supply to the greatest perfection attainable. There were two sources of supply, each from a different main, and these were connected with a great " pass " pipe workable with great rapidity, so that if through any external accident one of the mains should be disabled we could turn the supply afforded by the other into all the pipes used throughout the house. This great scene came to an end by lowering the " cut " cloth which formed the background of Montgiron's salon, the door leading into the supper-room being in the centre at back. Whilst the guests were engaged in their more or less rapid banquet, the covered scene was being obliterated and the Forest of Fontaine-bleau was coming down from the rigging-loft, ascending from the cellar and being pushed on right and left from the wings. Montgiron's salon was concealed by the descent of great tableau curtains. These remained down from thirty-five to forty seconds and went up again on a forest as real as anything can be on the stage. Trees stood out separately over a large area so that those entering from side or back could be seen passing behind or amongst them. All over the stage was a deep blanket of snow, white and glistening in the winter sunrise. Snow that lay so thick that when the duellists, stripped and armed, stood face to face, they each secured a firmer foothold by kicking it away. Of many wonderful effects this snow was perhaps the strongest and most impressive of reality. The public could never imagine how it was done. It was salt, common coarse salt which was white in the appointed light and glistened like real snow. There were tons of it. A crowd of men stood ready in the wings with little baggage-trucks such as are now used in the corridors of great hotels; silent with rubber wheels. On them were great wide-mouthed sacks full of salt. When the signal came they rushed in on all sides each to his appointed spot and tumbled out his load, spreading it evenly with great wide-bladed wooden shovels.

III

One night — it was October 18 — the Prince of Wales came behind the scenes as he was interested in the working of the play. It was known he was coming, and though the stage hands had been told that they were not supposed to know that he was present they all had their Sunday clothes on. It was the first time his Royal Highness had been " behind " in Irving's management and he seemed very interested in all he saw. King Edward VII. has and has always had a wonderful memory. He told how Charles Kean had set the scenes, the rights and lefts being different from the present setting; how Kean had rested on a log in a particular place, and so forth. Some of our older stage men who had been at the Princess's in Kean's time bore it out afterwards that he was correct in each detail.

That night the men worked as never before; they were determined to let the Prince see what could, under the stimulating influence of his presence, be done at the Lyceum, of which they were all very proud. That night the tableau curtains remained down only thirty seconds — the record time.

The Corsican Brothers was produced on September 18, 188o, and ran for one hundred and ninety performances in that season, The Cup being played along with it ninety-two times. The special reason for The Corsican Brothers being played during that season was that Ellen Terry had long before promised to go on an Autumn tour in 188o with her husband, Charles Kelly. It was therefore necessary that a piece should be chosen which did not require her services, and there was no part suitable to her in The Corsican Brothers. This was the only time that she had a tour except with Irving until when during his illness in 1899 she went out by herself to play Madame Sans-Ggne and certain other plays. When she returned to the Lyceum at the close of her tour The Cup was added to the bill.

IV

In the course of the run of The Corsican Brothers there were a good many incidents, interesting or amusing. Amongst the latter was one repeated nightly during the run of the piece. In the first scene, which is the house of the Dei Franchi in Corsica, opportunity had been taken of the peculiarity of the old Lyceum stage to make the entrance of Fabian dei Franchi — the one of the twins remaining at home — as effective as possible. The old stage of the Lyceum had a " scene-dock " at the back extending for some thirty feet beyond the squaring of the stage. As this opening was at the centre, the perspective could by its means be enlarged considerably. At the back of the Dei Franchi " interior " ran a vine-trellised way to a wicket gate. As there was no side entrance to the scene-dock it was necessary, in order to reach the back, to go into the cellarage and ascend by a stepladder as generously sloped as the head room would allow. But when the oncomer did make an appearance he was some seventy feet back from the footlights and in the very back centre of the stage, the most effective spot for making entry as it enabled the entire audience to see him a long way off and to emphasise his coming should they so desire. In that scene Irving wore a Corsican dress of light green velvet and was from the moment of his appearance a conspicuous object. When therefore he was seen to ascend the mountain slope and appear at the wicket the audience used to begin to applaud and cheer, so that his entrance was very effective.

But in the arrangement the fact had been lost sight of that another character entered the same way just before the time of his oncoming. This was Alfred Meynard, Louis's friend from Paris, a somewhat insignificant part in the play. Somehow at rehearsal the appearance of the latter did not seem in any way to clash with that of Fabian, and be sure that the astute young actor who played Alfred did not call attention to it by giving himself any undue prominence. The result was that on the first night — and ever afterwards during the run — when Alfred Meynard appeared the audience, who expected Irving, burst into wild applause. The gentleman who played the visitor had not then achieved the distinction which later on became his and so there was no reason, as yet, why he should receive such an ovation. From the great stage talent and finesse which he afterwards displayed I am right sure that he saw at the time what others had missed — the extraordinary opportunity for a satisfactory entrance so dear to the heart of an actor. It was a very legitimate chance in his favour, and nightly he carried his honours well. That first night a play of his own, his second play, was produced as the lever de rideau. The young actor was A. W. Pinero, and the play was Bygones. Pinero's first play, Daisy's Escape, had been played at the Lyceum in 1879.

V

The Masked Ball was a scene which allowed of any amount of fun, and it was so vast that it was an added gain to have as many persons as possible in it. To this end we kept a whole rack in the office during the run full of dominoes, masks and slouched hats, so that any one who had nothing else to do could in an instant make a suitable appear- ance on the scene and not be recognised. As the masculine dress of the time, the forties, was very much the same as now, a simple domino passed muster. I shall never forget my own appearance in the scene a few nights after the opening. We had amongst others engaged a whole group of clowns. There were eight of them, the best in England; the pantomime season being still far off, they could thus employ their enforced leisure — they were of course changed as their services were required elsewhere according to their previously made agreements. These men had a special dance of their own which was always a feature of the scene, and in addition they used to play what pranks they would, rushing about, making fun of others, climbing into boxes and then hauling others in, or dropping them out — such pranks and intrigue funniments as give life to a scene of the kind. When I ventured amongst them they recognised me and made a ring round me, dancing like demons. Then they seized me and spun me round, and literally played ball with me, throwing me from one to the other backwards and forwards. Sometimes they would rush me right down to the footlights and then whirl me back again breathless. But all the time they never let me fall or gave me away. I could not but admire their physical power as well as their agility and dexterity in their own craft.

The second time I went on I rather avoided them and kept up at the back of the stage. But even here I was not safe from another cause of mirth. I was lurking at the back when Irving, his face as set as flint with the passion of the insult and the challenge in the play, came hurriedly up the stage on his way to R.U.E. (right upper entrance). When he saw me the passion and grimness of his face relaxed in an instant and his laughter came explosively, fortunately unnoticed by the audience as his back was towards them. I went after him and asked him what was wrong, for I couldn't myself see anything of a mirthful nature.

"My dear fellow! " he said, " it was you I " Then in answer to my look he explained:

"Don't you remember how we arranged when the scene was being elaborated that in order to increase the effect of size we were to dress the shorter extras and then boys and girls and then little children in similar clothes to the others and to keep in their own section. You were up amongst the small children and with your height " — I am six feet two in my stockings—" with that voluminous domino and that great black feathered hat and in the painted perspective you looked fifty feet high! " And he laughed again uproariously.

VI

The Corsican Brothers was, so far as my knowledge goes, the first play — under Irving's management — which Mr. Gladstone came to see. The occasion was January 3, 188i — the first night when The Cup was played. He sat with his family in the box which we called in the familiar slang of the theatre “ The Governor’s Box “ — the manager of a theatre is always the Governor to his colleagues of all kinds and grades. This box was the stage box on the stall level, next to the proscenium. It was shut off by a special door which opened with the pass key and thus, as it was approachable from the stage through the iron door and from the auditorum by the box door, it was easy of access and quite private. After The Cup Mr. Gladstone wished to come on the stage and tell Irving and Ellen Terry how delighted he was with the performance. Irving fixed as the most convenient time the scene of the masked ball, as during it he had perhaps the only “ wait “ of the evening — a double part does not leave much margin to an actor. Mr. Gladstone was exceedingly interested in everything and went all round the vast scene. Seeing during the progress of the scene that people in costume were going in and out of queer little alcoves at the back of the scene he asked Irving what these were. He explained that they were the private boxes of the imitation theatre; and added that if the Premier would care to sit in one he could see the movement of the scene at close hand, and if he was careful to keep behind the little silk curtain he could not be seen. The statesman took his seat and seemed for a while to enjoy the life and movement going on in front of him. He could hear now and again the applause of the audience, and by peeping out through the chink behind the curtain, see them. At last in the excitement of the scene he forgot his situation and, hearing a more than usually vigorous burst of applause, leaned out to get a better view of the audience. The instant he did so he was recognised — there was no mistaking that eagle face — and then came a quick and sudden roar that seemed to shake the building. We could hear the “ Bravo Gladstone! “ coming through the detonation of hand-claps.

VII

One night, Wednesday, November 17, 188o, the sixty-first performance of the play, Lord Beaconsfield came to a box with some friends. I saw him coming up the stairs to the vestibule of the theatre. This was the only time I ever saw him, except on the floor of the House of Commons. He was then a good deal bent and walked feebly, leaning on the arm of his friend. He stayed to the end of the play and I believe expressed himself very pleased with it. His friend, " Monty " Corry, who was with him, told Irving afterwards that it seemed to revive to him old memories. As an instance, when he was coming away he asked:

"Do you think we could have supper somewhere, and ask some of the coryphees to join us, as we used to do in Paris in the fifties?"

The poor dear man little imagined how such a suggestion would have fluttered the theatrical dovecote. These coryphees, minor parts of course in the play, were supposed to be very " fast " young persons, and the difficulty of getting them properly played seemed for a long time insurmountable. The young ladies to whom the parts were allotted were all charming-looking young ladies of naturally bright appearance and manner. But they would not act as was required of them. One and all they seemed to set their faces against the histrionic levity demanded of them. It almost seemed that they felt that their personal characters were at stake. Did they act with their usual charm and brightness and verve somebody might to their detriment mix up the real and the simulated characters. The result was that never in the history of choregraphic art was there so fine an example of the natural demureness of the corps de ballet. They would have set an example to a confirmation class.

VIII

For the tableau curtains in The Corsican Brothers, Irving had had manufactured perhaps the most magnificent curtains of the kind ever seen. They were of fine crimson velvet and took more than a thousand yards of stuff. The width and height of the Lyceum proscenium were so great that the curtains had to be fastened all over on canvas, fortified with strong webbing where the drag of movement came. Otherwise the velvet would with the vast weight have torn like paper. They were drawn back and up at the same time, so as to leave the full stage visible, whilst picturesquely draping the opening. Material, colour and form of these curtains — which were a full 5o per cent. wider than the opening which they covered — brought both honour and much profit to the manufacturers, who received many orders for repetitions on a smaller scale. When John Hollingshead burlesqued The Corsican Brothers at the Gaiety Theatre this curtain was made a feature. It was represented by an enormous flimsy patchwork quilt which tumbled down all at once in the form of a tight-drawn curtain covering the whole proscenium arch.

In this burlesque too there was a notable incident when J. D. Stoyle — an actor with the power and skill of an acrobat — who personated Irving, walked up a staircase in one step.

IX

Another feature was the “ double.” In a play where one actor plays two parts there is usually at least one time when the two have to be seen together. For this a double has to be provided. In The Corsican Brothers, where one of the two sees the other seeing his brother more than one double is required. At the Lyceum, Irving’s chief double was the late Arthur Matthison, who though a much smaller man than Irving resembled him faintly in his facial aspect. He had a firm belief that he was Irving’s double and that no one could tell them apart. This belief was a source of endless jokes. There was hardly a person in the theatre who did not at one time or another take part in one. It was a never-ending amusement to Irving to watch and even to foment such jokes. Even Irving’s sons, then little children, having been carefully coached, used to go up to him and take his hand and call him “ Papa.” On the Gaiety stage they had about twenty doubles of all sizes and conditions — giants, dwarfs, skinny, fat — of all kinds. At the end of the scene they took a call — all together. It was certainly very funny.

One more funny matter there was in the doing of the play. The supper-party at Baron Montgiron’s house was supposed to be a very “ toney “ affair, the male guests being the creme de la creme of Parisian society, the ladies being of the demi-monde; all of both classes being persons to whom a “ square “ meal was no rarity. As, however, the majority of the guests were “ extras “ or “ supers “ it was hard to curb their zeal in matters of alimentation. When the servants used to throw open the doors of the supper-room and announce “ Monsieur est servi! they would make one wild rush and surround the table like hyenas. For their delectation bread and sponge-cake — media which lend themselves to sculptural efforts — and gdteaux of alluring aspect were provided. The champagne flowed in profusion — indeed in such profusion and of so realistic an appearance that all over the house the opera-glasses used to be levelled and speculations as to the brand and cuvie arose. Indeed a rumour went round the press that the nightly wine bill was of colossal dimensions. In reality the champagne provided was lemonade put up specially in champagne bottles and foiled with exactness. It certainly looked like champagne and foamed out as the corks popped. The orgy grew nightly in violence till at the end of a couple of weeks the noblesse of France manifested a hunger and thirst libellous to the Faubourg St. Germain. Irving pondered over the matter, and one day gave orders that special food should be provided, wrought partly of plaster-o'- Paris and partly of papier-mdche. He told the Property Master to keep the matter secret. There was hardly any need for the admonition. In a theatre a joke is a very sacred thing, and there is no one from highest to lowest that will not go out of his way to further it. That night when the emaciated noblesse of France dashed at their quarry one and all received a sudden check. There were many unintentional ejaculations of surprise and disappointment from the guests, and much suppressed laughter from the stage hands who were by this time all in the secret and watching from the wings.

After that night there was a notable improvement in the table manners of the guests. One and all they took their food leisurely and examined it critically. And so the succulent sponge-cake in due time reappeared; there was no need for a second lesson against greed.

CHAPTER XVI. THE VALUE OF EXPERIMENT

“Robert Macaire “ — A Great Benefit—” Our Genial friend Mr. Edwards—” Faust” — Application of Science — Division of stage labour — The Emperor Fritz — Accidental Effects — A “ top angel” — Educational value of the Stage—” Faust” in America — Irving’s Fiftieth Birthday

I

IN 1883 the Prince of Wales was very much interested in the creation and organisation of the new College of Music, and as funds had to be forthcoming very general efforts were made by the many who loved music and who loved the Prince. On one occasion the Prince hinted to Irving that it would show the interest of another and allied branch of art in the undertaking if the dramatic artists would give a benefit for the new College. He even suggested that Robert Macaire would do excellently for the occasion and could have an “ all-star “ cast. Of course Irving was delighted and got together a committee of actors to arrange the matter. By a process of natural selection Irving and Toole were appointed to Macaire and Jacques Strop. The Prince and Princess of Wales attended at the performance. The house was packed from floor to ceiling, and the result to the College of Music was £1002 8s. 6d. — the entire receipts, Irving himself having paid all the expenses.

An odd mistake was made by Irving later on with regard to this affair. In the first year of its working, when the class for dramatic study was organised, he was asked by the directorate to examine. This he was of course very pleased to do. In due season he made his examination and sent in his report. Then in sequence came a letter of thanks for his services. It was, though quite formal, a most genial and friendly letter, and to the signature was appended “ Chairman.” In acknowledging it to Sir George Grove, the Director of the College, Irving said what a pleasure it had been to him to examine and how pleased he would be at all times to hold his services at the disposal of the College and so forth. He added by way of postscript:

"By the way, who is our genial friend Mr. Edwards? I do not think I have met him!"

He got a horrified letter sent by messenger from Sir George explaining that the signature was that of " Albert Edward " — now His Most Gracious Majesty Edward VII., R. et I. In his modest estimate of his own worth Irving had not even thought that the Prince of Wales would himself write. But the gracious act was like all the kindness and sweet courtesy which both as Prince and King he always extended to his loyal subject the player — Henry Irving.

II

Faust was produced on December 19, 1885. The occasion was graced by the presence of the Prince and Princess of Wales. It ran till the end of that season, the tenth of Irving's management; the whole of the next season, except a few odd nights; again the latter part of the short season of 1888; and for a fourth time in the season of 1894. The production was burned with the other plays in storage in 1898, but the play was reproduced again in 1902.

Altogether it was performed in London five hundred and seventy-seven times; in the provinces one hundred and twenty-eight times; and in America eighty-seven times. In all seven hundred and ninety-two times, to a total amount of receipts of over a quarter of a million pounds sterling.

Irving had a profound belief in Faust as a " drawing " play. He was so sure of it that he would not allow of its being presented until it was in his estimation ready for the public to see. This scrupulosity was a trait in his artistic character, and therefore noticeable in his management. When he was with Miss Herbert at the St. James's Theatre he was cast for the part of Ferment in The School of Reform at short notice; he insisted on delaying the piece for three days as he would not play without proper rehearsal. This he told me himself one night when we were supping together at the theatre, December 7, 1880. As Faust was an exceedingly heavy production there was much opportunity for delay. It had been Irving's intention to produce the play very early in the season which opened on September 5, but as the new play grew into shape he found need for more and more care. Many of the effects were experimental and had to be tested; and all this caused delay. As an instance of how scientific progress can be marked even on the stage, the use of electricity might be given. The fight between Faust and Valentine — with Mephistopheles in his supposed invisible quality interfering — was the first time when electric flashes were used in a play. This effect was arranged by Colonel Gouraud, Edison's partner, who kindly interested himself in the matter. Twenty years ago electric energy, in its playful aspect, was in its infancy; and the way in which the electricity was carried so as to produce the full effects without the possibility of danger to the combatants was then considered very ingenious. Two iron plates were screwed upon the stage at a given distance so that at the time of fighting each of the swordsmen would have his right boot on one of the plates, which represented an end of the interrupted current. A wire was passed up the clothing of each from the shoe to the outside of the indiarubber glove, in the palm of which was a piece of steel. Thus when each held his sword a flash came whenever the swords crossed.

The arrangement of the fire which burst from the table and from the ground at command of Mephistopheles required very careful arrangement so as to ensure accuracy at each repetition and be at the same time free from the possibility of danger. Altogether the effects of light and flame in Faust are of necessity somewhat startling and require the greatest care. The stage and the methods of producing flame of such rapidity of growth and exhaustion as to render it safe to use are well known to property masters. By powdered resin, properly and carefully used, or by lycopodium great effects can be achieved.

There was also another difficulty to be overcome. Steam and mist are elements of the weird and supernatural effects of an eerie play. Steam can be produced in any quantity, given the proper appliances. But these need care and attention, and on a stage, and below and above it, space is so limited that it is necessary to keep the tally of hands as low as possible. In the years that have elapsed, inspecting authorities have become extra careful with regard to such appliances; nowadays they require that even the steam kettle be kept outside the curtilage of the building.

In addition to all these things — perhaps partly on account of them — Mr. Loveday, the stage-manager, became ill and Irving had to superintend much of the doing of things himself in an unwonted way. The piece we were then running, Olivia, however, was comparatively light work for Irving, and as it was doing really fine business the time could partially be spared. I say “ partially “ because prolonged rehearsals mean a fearful addition to expense, and when rehearsals come after another play has been given the expense mounts up in arithmetical progression. For instance, the working day of a stage hand is eight working hours. If he be employed for longer the next four hours is counted as a day, and the next two hours beyond that again as a third day. All this time the real work done by the stage hands is very little. Whilst actors or supers or ballet or chorus, or some or all of them, are being rehearsed the men have to stand idle most of the time. Moreover they are now and again idle inter se. Stage work is divided into departments, and the mechanical things are under several masters, each controlling his own set of men. There is the Master Machinist — commonly called Master Carpenter — the Property Master, the Gas Engineer and the Electric Engineer, the Limelight Master. In certain ways the work of these departments impinge on each other in a way to puzzle an outsider. Thus, when a stage has to be covered it is the work of one set of men or the other, but not of both. Anything in the nature of a painted cloth, such as tessellated flooring, is scenery, and therefore the work of the carpenters; but a carpet is a property " and as such to be laid down by the property staff. A gas light or an electric light is to be arranged by the engineer of that cult, whilst an oil lamp or a candle belongs to properties. The traditional laws which govern these things are deep seated in trade rights and customs and are grave matters to interfere with. In the production of Faust much of the scenery was what is called " built out "; that is, there are many individual pieces — each a completed and separate item, such as a wall, a house, steps, &c. So that in this particular play the property department had a great deal to do with the working of what might be broadly considered scenery.

When Irving was about to do the play he made a trip to Nuremberg to see for himself what would be most picturesque as well as suitable. When he had seen Nuremberg and that wonderful old town near it, Rothenberg, which was even better suited to his purpose, he sent for Hawes Craven. That the latter benefited by his experience was shown in the wonderful scenes which he painted for

Faust. He seemed to give the very essence of the place.

III

When the Emperor Frederick — then Crown Prince of Germany — came to the Lyceum to see Faust, I was much struck by the way he spoke of the great city of the Guttenburgs and Hans Sachs. He had come alone, quite informally, from Windsor, where he was staying with Queen Victoria. As he modestly put it in his own way when speaking to me: " The Queen was gracious enough to let me come! " He was delighted and almost fascinated with the play and its production and acting. I had good opportunity of hearing his views. It was of course my duty to wait upon him, as ceremonial custom demanded, between the acts. In each " wait " he went into the Royal room to smoke his cigarette, and on each occasion was gracious enough to ask me to join him. Several times he spoke of Nuremberg with love and delight, and it seemed as if the faithful and picturesque reproduction of it had warmed his heart. Once he said:

"I love Nuremberg. Indeed I always ask the Emperor to let me have the autumn manceuvres in such a place that I can stay there during part of the time they last!"

IV

As a good instance of how on the stage things may change on trial I think we may take the last scene of Faust —— that where the scene of Margaret's prison fades away — after the exit of Faust in answer to the imperious summons of Mephistopheles: " Hither to me." Then is the vision of Margaret's lying dead at the foot of the Cross with a long line of descending angels. For this tableau a magnificent and elaborate scene had been prepared by William Telbin — a rainbow scene suggestive of Hope and Heavenly beauty. In it had been employed the whole resources of scenic art. Indeed a new idea and mechanism had been used. The edges of the great rainbow which circled the scene were made of a series of stuffs so fine as to be actually almost invisible, beginning with linen, then skrim, and finally ending up with a tissue like gold-beaters' skin; all these substances painted or stained with the colours of the prism in due order. I believe Telbin would have put in the " extra violet ray " if it had been then discovered.

When, however, the scene was set, which was on the night before the presentation of the play, Irving seemed to be dissatisfied with it. Not with its beauty or its mechanism; but somehow it seemed to him to lack simplicity. Still he waited till it was lit in all possible ways before giving it over. The lighting of scenes was always Irving's special province; later on I shall have something to say about it. To do it properly and create the best effect he spared neither time nor pains. Many and many and many a night did we sit for four or five hours, when the play of the night had been put aside and the new scene made ready, experimenting.

On this occasion Irving said suddenly: " Strike the scene altogether, leaving only the wings!"

This was done and the " ladder " of Angels was left stark on the empty stage. For such a vision a capable piece of machinery has to be provided, for it has to bear the full weight of at least a dozen women or girls. The backbone of it is a section of steel rail which is hung from the flies with a steel rope, to this are attached the iron arms made safe and comfortable for the angels to be strapped each in her own “ iron.” The lower end of the ladder rests on the stage and is fastened there securely with stage screws. The angels are all fixed in their places before the scene begins, and when the lights are turned on they seem to float ethereally. This ladder was of course complete with its living burden when the lighting was being essayed, for as it is the centre figures are pure white — the strongest colour known on the stage — it would not be possible to judge of effect without it. Again Irving spoke:

“Now put down a dark blue sky border as a backing; two if necessary to get height enough.” This was done. He went on:

“Put sapphire mediums on the limelights from both sides so as to make the whole back cloth a dark night blue. Now turn all the white limelights on the angels!”

Then we saw the nobly simple effect which the actor had had in his imagination. Never was seen so complete, so subtle, so divine a vision on the stage. It was simply perfect, and all who saw it at once began to applaud impulsively. After a minute Irving, turning to Telbin who stood beside him, said:

“I think, Telbin, if you will put in some stars — proper ones you know — in the back cloth when you have primed it — it had better be of cobalt! “ — a very expensive paint by the way—” it will be all right. They can get a cloth ready for you by morning.”

The device of the “ ladder of angels “ was of course an old one; it was its suitable perfection in this instance that made it remarkable. For this ladder it is advisable to get the prettiest and daintiest young women and children possible, the point of honour being the apex. A year before a box was occupied by a friend of Irving’s who had three lovely children, little girls. The children were §o beautiful that between the acts the people on the stage kept peeping out at them.

Then the Master Carpenter asked Ellen Terry to look out from the prompt entrance. As she did so Mather whispered to her:

"Oh, miss! Wouldn't that middle one make a lovely ' top angel '?"

Even children as well as grown-ups have their vanities. It became a nightly duty of the Wardrobe Mistress to inspect the " ladder " when arranged. She had to make each of the angels in turn show their hands so that they should not wear the little rings to which they were prone.

V

The educational effect of Faust was very great. Every edition of the play in England was soon sold out. Important heavy volumes, such as Anster's, which had grown dusty on the publisher's shelves were cleared off in no time. New editions were published and could hardly be printed quick enough. We knew of more than a hundred thousand copies of Goethe's dramatic poem which were sold in the first season of its run.

One night early in the run of the play there was a mishap which might have been very serious indeed. In the scene where Mephistopheles takes Faust away with him after the latter had signed the contract, the two ascended a rising slope. On this particular occasion the machinery took Irving's clothing and lifted him up a little. He narrowly escaped falling into the cellar through the open trap — a fall of some fifteen feet on to a concrete floor.

VI

When we played Faust in America, it was curious to note the different reception accorded to it undoubtedly arising from traditional belief.

In Boston, where the old puritanical belief of a real devil still holds, we took in one evening four thousand five hundred and eighty-two dollars-$4582 — the largest dramatic house up to then known in America. Strangely the night was that of Irving's fiftieth birthday. For the rest the lowest receipts out of thirteen performances was two thousand and ten dollars. Seven were over three thousand, and three over four thousand.

In Philadelphia, where are the descendants of the pious Quakers who followed Penn into the wilderness, the average receipts were even greater. Indeed at the matinee on Saturday, the crowd was so vast that the doors were carried by storm. All the seats had been sold, but in America it was usual to sell admissions to stand at one dollar each. The crowd of " standees," almost entirely women, began to assemble whilst the treasurer, who in an American theatre sells the tickets, was at his dinner. His assistant, being without definite instructions, went on selling till the whole seven hundred left with him were exhausted. It was vain to try to stem the rush of these enthusiastic ladies. They carried the outer door and the checktaker with it; and broke down by sheer weight of numbers the great inner doors of heavy mahogany and glass standing some eight feet high. It was impossible for the seat-holders to get in till a whole posse of police appeared on the scene and cleared them all out, only re-admitting them when the seats had been filled.

But in Chicago, which as a city neither fears the devil nor troubles its head about him or all his works, the receipts were not much more than half the other places. Not so good as for the other plays of the repertoire presented.

In New York the business with the play was steady and enormous. New York was founded by the Bible-loving righteous-living Dutch.

CHAPTER XVII. THE PULSE OF THE PUBLIC

“Ravenswood” — Delayed Presentation — The Public Pulse—” Nance Oldfield “ — Ellen Terry as a Dramatist

I

IN 1882 Irving purchased from Herman Merivale the entire acting rights in his play Edgar and Lucy, founded on Scott’s novel The Bride of Lammermoor, but it was not till eight years later that he was able to produce it.

This delay is a fair instance of the difficulties and intricacies of theatrical management. So many things have to be considered in the high policy of the undertaking; so many accidental circumstances or continuations of causes necessitate the deviation of intention; so many new matters come over the horizon that from a long way ahead to undertake to produce a play at a given time is almost always attended with great risk.

Ravenswood is a thoroughly sad, indeed lugubrious play, as any play must be which adheres fairly to the lines of Scott’s tragic novel. By the way this novel was written at Rokeby, the home of the Moffitt family, in Yorkshire. The members of that family tell a strange circumstance relating to it. Sir Walter Scott was a close friend of the family and often stayed there; he wrote two of his novels whilst a guest. Whilst at Rokeby on this occasion he was in very bad health; but all the time he worked hard and wrote the novel. When he had finished he was laid up for a while; and when he was well he could not remember any detail at all of his story.

He could hardly believe that he had written it.

For seven years after Irving had possession of Merivale’s play he had thought it over. He had in his own quiet way made up his mind about it, arranging length and way of doing the play and excogitating his own part till he had possession of it in every way. Then one evening — November 25, 1889 — he broached the subject of its definite production. The note which I find in my diary is succinct and explanatory and comprehensive:

“Theatre 7 (P.m.) till 5 (A.M.). H. I. read for Loveday and me Edgar and Lucy, Merivale’s dramatisation to his order of The Bride of Lammermoor. It was delightful. Play very fine. Literature noble. H. I. had cut quite one-half out.”

I can supplement this brief note from memory. Irving read the play with quite extraordinary effect. He had quite an added gift for this sort of work. I heard him read through a good many plays in the course of a quarter of a century of work together and it was always enlightening. He had a way of conveying the cachet of each character by inflection or trick of voice or manner; and his face was always, consciously or unconsciously, expressive. So long before as 1859, when he had read The Lady of Lyons at Crosby Hall, the Daily Telegraph had praised, amongst other matters, his versatility in this respect. I have heard him read in public in a large hall both Hamlet and Macbeth, and his characterisation was so marked that after he had read the entries of the various characters he did not require to refer to them again by name. On this occasion he seemed familiar with every character, and, I doubt not, could have played any of them, so far as his equipment fitted him for the work, within a short time. Naturally the most effective part was that of Edgar of Ravenswood. Not only is it the most prominent part in the cast, but it was that which he was to play himself and to which he had given most special attention. In it he brought out all the note of destiny which rules in both novel and play. Manifestly Edgar is a man foredoomed, but not till the text sounded the note of doom in the weird and deathly utterances of Ailsie Gourlay could one tell that all must end awfully. Throughout, the tragic note was paramount. Well Edgar knew it; the gloom that wrapped him even in the moment of triumphant love was a birth-gift. As Irving read it that night, and as he acted it afterwards, there was throughout an infinite and touching pathos. But not this character alone, but all the rest were given with great and convincing power. The very excellence of the rendering made each to help the other; variety and juxtaposition brought the full effect. The prophecies, because of their multiplication, became of added import on Edgar's gloom, and toned the high spirit of Hayston of Bucklaw. Lucy's sweetness was intensified by the harsh domination of Lady Ashton. The sufferings of the faithful Caleb under the lash of Ailsie's prophecy only increased its force.

We who listened were delighted. For myself I seemed to see the play a great success and one to be accomplished at little cost. We had now, since 1885, produced in succession three great plays, Faust, Macbeth and The Dead Heart, and had in contemplation another, Henry VIII., which would exceed them all in possibilities of expense both of production and of working. These great plays were and always must be hugely expensive. As I was chancellor of the exchequer I was greatly delighted to see a chance of great success combined with a reasonable cost and modest accessories. From the quiet effectiveness of Irving's reading I was satisfied that the play would hold good under the less grand conditions. This opinion I still hold. I must not, however, be taken as finding fault with Irving's view, which was quite otherwise. He looked on the play as one needing all the help it could get; and I am bound to say that his views were justified by success, for the play as he did it was an enormous success. The production account was not large in comparison with that of some other great plays, being a little under five thousand pounds. There were no author's fees, as the play had long ago been bought outright and paid for, so that expense had been incurred and was chargeable against estate whether the play was produced or not. But the running expenses were very heavy, between £18o and 200 a performance. As it was the play was a heavy one for Ellen Terry; we could only play it six times a week. To the management there is always an added advantage in a matinee or any extra performance.

Ravenswood was presented on September 20, 1890, and altogether was given during the season one hundred and two times.

II

During its run we had a strange opportunity of experiencing the extraordinary way in which a play fluctuates with the public pulse. From the first night it was a great success, and the booking became so great that we were obliged to enlarge the time for the advance purchase of seats. Our usual time was four weeks, and as a working rule it was found well to keep to this. Where booking is not under great pressure too long a time means extra particularity in choice of seats, and a de facto curtailment of receipts. For Ravenswood we had to advance, first one week and then a second; so that about the end of the first month we were booking six weeks ahead. I may say that we were booked that long, for as each day's advance sheet was opened it became quickly filled. The agents, too, were hard at work and we were not able to allot to any of them the full number of seats for which they asked. I have a special reason for mentioning this, as will appear. Now at the Lyceum from the time of my taking charge of the business we did not ever " pencil " to agents — that is, we did not let them have seats after the customary fashion " on sale or return." We had, be sure, good reason for this. Whatever seats they had they took at their own risk by week or month, a sort of running agreement terminable at fixed notice. When we arrived at the fiftieth performance the play was going as strong as ever, the receipts being on or about two thousand pounds per week. Within the end of the year, theatre receipts generally began to drop a little; Christmas is coming, and many things occupy family attention. The autumn visit visitors have all departed, and the fogs of November are bad for business. We did not therefore give it a second thought that the door receipts got a little less, for all the bookable seats were already secure. On Thursday, November 20, I had an experience which set me thinking. During that day I had visits from three of the theatre agents having businesses in the West End and the City. They came separately and with an unwonted secrecy. Each wished to see me alone, and being secured from interruption, stated the reason. Each had the same request and spoke in almost identical terms, so that the conversation of one will illustrate all. The first one asked me:

"Will you tell me frankly — if you don't mind are you really doing good business with Ravenswood "Certainly," I answered. " All we can do. Why you know that we can only let you have for six weeks ahead a part of the seats you have asked for." After some odd nervousness he said again:

"I suppose I may take it that that applies to every one you deal with? I know I can trust you, for you always treat me frankly; and this is a matter I am exceedingly anxious about." For answer I rang the bell for the commissionaire in waiting on the office and sent him round to the box office to bring me the booking sheets for six weeks ahead. These I duly placed before the agent — Librarian they called them in those days as they were the survivors of the old lending libraries who used to secure theatre tickets for their customers.

“See for yourself! “ I said; and he turned over the sheets, every seat on which was marked as sold.

“It is very extraordinary! “ he said after a pause. By this time my own curiosity was piqued and I asked him to tell me what it all meant.

“It means this,” he said. “ Things can’t go on at this rate. We have not sold a single ticket this week for any theatre in London!”

I opened a drawer and took out what we called the “ Ushers’ Returns “ for each night that week. We used to have, as means of checking the receipts of the house in addition to the tickets, a set of returns made by the ushers. Each usher had a sectional chart of the seats under his charge and he had to show which was occupied during the evening and which, if any, were unoccupied. I had not gone over these as all the seats having been sold it did not much matter to us whether they were occupied or not. To my surprise I found that on each night, growing as the week went on, were quite a number of seats unoccupied. On reference to the full plan I found that most of these were seats sold to the libraries, but that a good proportion of them had been booked at our own office. Neither of us could account for such a thing in any way. When the next, and then the third agent came there was a strong sense over me that something was happening in the great world. As a rule when there is pressure in a theatre the seats belonging to agents remaining unsold can always be disposed of in the theatre box office.

That night Irving had a little supper-party of intimate friends in the Beefsteak Room; amongst them one man, Major Ricarde-Seaver, well skilled in the world of haute finance. In the course of conversation I asked him:

"What is up? There is something going to happen! What is it? " He asked me why I thought so and I told him.

"That is certainly strange! " was his comment. " Then you don't know?"

"Know what? " I asked. " What is going to happen? " His answer came after a pause.

"You will know soon. Possibly to-morrow; certainly the next day! " The mystery was thickening. Again I asked:

"What is it? " The answer came with a shock:

"Baring's! They've gone under! " Now any one of a speculative tendency in London, or out of it, could have that day made a fortune by selling " bears " — and there is no lack of sportsmen willing to make money on a "sure thing." And yet for three days at least there must have been in business circles some uneasiness of so pronounced a character that it for the time obliterated social life with many people. Had they knowledge where the public pulse lay, and how to time its beats, they might have plucked fortune from disaster.

In the Lyceum we became wide awake to the situation. In a time of panic and disaster there is no need for mimetic tragedy; the real thing crowds it out. The very next day we arranged to change the bill on the earliest day possible. As we were booked for six weeks we arranged to change the tragic Ravenswood for Much Ado About Nothing — the brighest and cheeriest comedy in our repertoire — on Monday, January 3.

This we did with excellent result. From the day of the failure of Baring's the receipts began to dwindle. The nightly return dropped from three hundred pounds odd to two hundred pounds odd, and finally to one hundred pounds odd. With the change to Comedy they jumped up again at once to the tune of an extra hundred pounds a performance.

Except for some performances in the provinces in the autumn that was the last of Ravenswood. There was never a chance for its revival, though from that we might have expected much; it was burned in the fire at our storage in 1898 — of which more anon.

III

Nance Old Held, as Ellen Terry plays it, is the concentration of a five-act comedy into one act and one scene. It is a play that allows an inexhaustible opportunity of the gifts of the great actress. For Ellen Terry's gifts are of so wide a range that the mere variety of them is in itself a gift; and the congruity of them in such a play allows them to help each other and each to shine out all the stronger for the contrast.

Ellen Terry had long had in her mind Reade's play as one to be given in a single act. And now that its opportunity came over the horizon she began to prepare it. This she did herself, I having the honour of assisting her. That preparation was a fine lesson in dramatic construction. Ellen Terry has not only a divine instinct for the truth in stage art, but she is a conscious artist to her finger-tips. No one on the stage in our time — or at any other time — has seen more clearly the direct force of sympathy and understanding between the actor and the audience. At the same time she was not herself an experienced dramatist. She knew in a general way what it was that was wanting and what she aimed at, but she could not always give it words. During rehearsal or during the play she would in a pause of her own stage work come dancing into my office to ask for help. Ellen Terry’s movements, when she was not playing a sad part, always gave one the idea of a graceful dance. Looking back now to twenty-seven years of artistic companionship and eternal community of ideas, I cannot realise that she did not always actually dance. She would point to some mark which she had made in the altered script and say: “ I want two lines there, please! “ “ What kind of lines? What about? “ I would ask. She would laugh as she answered:

“I don’t know. I haven’t the least idea. You must write them! “ When she would dance back again I would read her the lines. She would laugh again and say:

“All wrong, absolutely wrong. They are too serious,” or “ they are too light; I should like something to convey the idea of “ and she would in some subtle way — just as Irving did — convey the sentiment, or purpose, or emotion which she wished conveyed. She would know without my saying it when I had got hold of the idea and would rush off to her work quite satisfied. And so the little play would grow and then be cut again and grow again; till at last it was nearly complete. The last bit of it puzzled us both for a long time. At last she conveyed her idea to me that Alexander must not be left with a serious personal passion for Mrs. Oldfield and that yet she should not sink in his esteem. Finally I wrote a line which had the reward of her approbation. The actress was explaining to Mr. Alworthy how his son did not really love her:

“It was the actress he loved and not the woman!”

In this little play, which is typical of her marvellous range of varied excellences, she runs the whole gamut of human emotion. The part where the great actress, wishing to disenchant her boy lover, exemplifies her art and then turns it into ridicule could not be adequately played by any one not great in both tragedy and comedy. Her rendering here of Juliet’s great speech before taking the potion: “ My dismal scene I needs must act alone,” is given with the full tragic force with which she played the real part — when she swept the whole audience, and yet, without the delay of a second, she says to the emotional poet: “ Now, that’s worth one and ninepence to me! “ It is such moments as these that put an actor into history. Records are not troubled with mere excellence.

Happy, I say, should be the real dramatist who has the co-operation of Ellen Terry in a play she is to appear in — of a part she is to act.

CHAPTER XVIII. TENNYSON AND HIS PLAYS — I

Irving on Tennyson — Frankness — Irving's Knowledge ofCharacter — The "Fighting" Quality — Tennyson on Irving's Hamlet — Tennyson's Alterations of his Work —— As a Dramatist—" First Run" — Experts on Greek Art

I

IRVING had been a friend of Tennyson before I had first met him in 1876. When during the Bateman rule Queen Mary had been produced, he had naturally much to do with the author, and the friendship thus begun lasted during the poet's life. In my own young days Tennyson was a name of something more than reverence. Not only was his work on our tongue-tips, but the extraordinary isolation of his personal life threw a halo of mystery over him. It is a strange thing how few of the people of his own time — and all through his long life of such amazing worth and popularity, had ever seen him. Naturally a man who knew him was envied if only from this source alone. Whenever we met in early days Irving, knowing my love and reverence for the poet, used to talk about him — always with admiration. More than once when speaking of his personality as distinguished from his work he said:

"Tennyson is like a great Newfoundland dog. He is like an incarnate truth. A great creature!"

From some persons comparison with a dog might not have seemed flattery, but to Irving a dog was the embodiment of all the virtues. Often and often he compared the abstract dog to the abstract man, very much to the detriment of the latter. And certainly Tennyson had all that noble simplicity which is hard to find in sophisticated man — that simplicity which lies in the wide field of demarcation between naked brutal truth and an unconsciousness of self. That simplicity it is which puts man on an altitude where lesser as well as greater natures respect him. To him truth was a simple thing; it was to be exact. Irving told me of an incident illustrating this which happened to himself. He had heard a story that not long before Tennyson had been lunching with friends of his in his own neighbourhood not far from Haslemere. His hostess, who was a most gracious and charming woman whom later I had the honour to know, said to him as they went into the dining-room:

"I have made a dish specially for you myself; I hope you will try it and tell me exactly what you think of it."

"Of course I shall," he answered. After lunch she asked him what he thought of it and he answered at once:

"If you really wish to know, I thought it was like an old shoe!"

When they met Irving asked him if the story were true.

"No! " he answered at once, " I didn't say that. I said something; but it wasn't that it was like an old shoe! " " 'What did you say? " " I said it was like an old boot! " With him ethical truth was not enough; exactness was a part of the whole. I had myself an instance of his mental craving for truth on the very last day I saw him.

Irving had a wonderful knowledge of character. I have never in my own experience known him to err in this respect; though many and many a time has he acted as though he trusted when he knew right well that a basis was wanting. This was of the generosity of his nature; but be it never so great, generosity could not obscure his reason. This was shown, even at the time, by the bounds set to his trust; he never trusted beyond recall, or to an amount of serious import. He had, in the course of a lifetime spent in the exercise of his craft, which was to know men from within, given too much thought to it not to be able from internal knowledge to fathom the motives of others. In philosophy analysis precedes synthesis. On one occasion there was a man with whom we had some business dealings and who, to say the least of it, did not impress any of us favourably. Irving was very outspoken about him, so much so that I remonstrated, fearing lest he might let himself in for an action for libel. I also put it that we had not sufficient data before us to justify so harsh a view. Irving listened to me patiently and then said:

"My dear fellow, that man is a crook. I know it. I have studied too many villains not to understand!"

In another matter also Tennyson had the quality of a well-bred dog: he was a fighter. I do not mean that he was quarrelsome or that he ever even fought in any form. I simply mean that he had the quality of fighting — quite a different thing from determination. In a whole group of men of his own time Tennyson would have, to any physiognomist, stood as a fighter. A glance at his mouth would at once enlighten any one who had the " seeing eye." In the group might be placed a good many men, each prominent in his own way, and some of whom might not prima facie be suspected of the quality. In the group, all of whom I have known or met, might be placed Archbishop Temple, John Bright, Gladstone, Sir Richard Burton, Sir Henry Stanley, Lord Beaconsfield, Jules Bastien Le Page, Henry Ward Beecher, Professor Blackie, Walt Whitman, Edmund Yates. I have selected a few from the many, leaving out altogether all classes of warriors in whom the fighting quality might be suspected.

Tennyson had at times that lifting of the upper lip which shows the canine tooth, and which is so marked an indication of militant instinct. Of all the men I have met the one who had this indication most marked was Sir Richard Burton. Tennyson's, though notable, was not nearly so marked.

Amongst other things which Irving told me of Tennyson in those early days was regarding the author's own ideas of casting Queen Mary. He wanted Irving to play Cardinal Pole, a part not in the play at all as acted. One night years afterwards, January 25, 1893, at supper in the Garrick Club with Toole and others, he told us the same thing. I think the circumstance was recalled to him by the necessary excision of another character in Becket.

It was my good fortune to meet Tennyson personally soon after my coming to live in London. On the night of March 20, 1879, he being then in London for a short stay, he came to the Lyceum to see Hamlet. It was the sixty-ninth night of the run. James Knowles was with him and introduced me. After the third act they both came round to Irving's dressing-room. In the course of our conversation when I saw him again at the end of the play he said tome:

"I did not think Irving could have improved his Hamlet of five years ago; but now he has improved it five degrees. And those five degrees have lifted it to Heaven!"

Small wonder that I was proud to hear such an opinion from such a source.

I remember also another thing he said:

"I am seventy, and yet I don't feel old — I wonder how it is! " I quoted as a reason his own lines from the Golden Year:

"Unto him that works, and feels he works, The same grand year is ever at the doors."

He seemed mightily pleased and said:

"Good!"

After this meeting I had a good many opportunities of seeing Tennyson again. Whenever he made a trip for a few days to London it was usually my good fortune to meet him and Lady Tennyson. My wife and I lunched with them; and their sons, Hallam and Lionel, spent Sunday evenings in our house in Cheyne Walk. Meeting with Tennyson and his family has given us many many happy hours in our lives, and I had the pleasure of being the guest of the great poet both at Farringford and Aldworth. I am proud to be able to call the present Lord Tennyson my friend. My wife and I were lunching with the Tennysons during their stay in London when the first copy arrived from Hubert Herkomer — now Von Herkomer — R.A., of his fine portrait etching of the Poet Laureate. It is a fine portrait; but there is a look in the eye which did not altogether please the subj ect.

II

Just before the end of the season 1879-80, Irving completed with Tennyson an agreement to play The Cup. This play, which he had not long before finished, he had offered to Irving. It had not yet been seen by any one, and he was willing that it should not be published till after it had been played. The play required some small alterations for stage purposes — little things cut out here and there, and a few explanatory words inserted at other places. Tennyson assented without demur to any change suggested. As it has been said that Tennyson was absolutely set as to not altering a line for the stage, let me say here, after an experience of his two most successful plays, that any such statement was absurd. Of course he was careful of his rights. Every one ought to be careful in such a matter, and to him there was special need. His manuscript was so valuable that it was never safe; and in other ways he had to be suspicious. Years afterwards he told me that one of his poems had been sold by a critic in America with errors in it which had been corrected.

“I hate the creature! He said lie was owner of the proof!”

Perhaps it was for this reason he was so careful when a play was being printed for stage use. He always wished his own copy returned with the proof.

In his agreements he had a clause that the licensee should not without his consent make any alteration in the play. This was absolutely right and wise; it is the protection of the author. The time for arranging changes is before the agreement; then both parties to the contract know what they are doing. In no case did Tennyson hesitate to give Irving permission to make changes. Like the good workman that he was he was only too anxious to have his work at its best and its highest suitability.

Tennyson had in him all the elements of a great dramatist; but unhappily he had little if any technical knowledge of the stage. Each art and each branch of art has its own technique. Though a play, like any other poem, has its birth, the means of its expression is different. A poem for reading conveys thoughts by words alone. A poem for the stage requires suitable opportunity for action and movement — both of individuals and numbers. Sound and light and scene; music, colour and form; the vibration of passion, the winning sweetness of tremulous desire, and the overwhelming obliteration that follows in the wake of fear have all their purpose and effect on the stage. Inasmuch as on the one hand there is only thought, whilst on the other there is a superadded mechanism, the two fields of poetry may be fairly taken to deal in different media. In his later years when Tennyson began to realise in his own work the power of glamour and stress and difficulty of the stage he was willing to enlist into his service the skill and experience of others. Had he begun practical play-writing younger, or had he had any kind of apprenticeship to or experience of stage use, he would have had no second as a dramatist.

In the draft agreement was an interesting clause which Mr. (afterwards Sir) Arnold White, Tennyson’s solicitor, and I worked out very carefully, having regard to the rights of both parties. This was concerning the definition of the “ first run “ of a play. We were quite at one in intention and only wished to make the purpose textually correct. Finally we made it to read as thus:

... first run of the said play (that is to say) during such time as the said play shall remain in the Bills of the Theatre where it is first produced announcing its continuance either nightly or at fixed periods without a break in such announcements.”

III

Irving was determined to do all in his power to put The Cup worthily on the stage. Accordingly much study and research in the matter began. Galatia has ceased to exist on the map, and the period of the play is semi-mythical. The tragedy stands midway between East and West; when the belief in the old Gods was a vital force. For the work which Tennyson and Irving undertook, learning and experience lent their aid. James Knowles reconstructed a Temple of Artemis on the ground plan of the great Temple of Diana. The late Alexander Murray, then Assistant Keeper — afterwards Keeper — of the Greek section of the British Museum, made researches amongst the older Etruscan designs. Capable artists made drawings from vases, which were reproduced on the great amphorae used in the Temple service. The existing base and drum of a column from Ephesus was remodelled for use, and lent its sculptured beauty to the scene. William Telbin painted some scenes worthy of Turner; and Hawes

Craven and Cuthbert made such an interior scene of the Great Temple as was surely never seen on any stage.

By the way, there was regarding this another experience of super-criticism. In judging the scene, and with considerable admiration The Architect, I think, found fault with the proportions of the columns supporting the Temple roof. They should have been of so many diameters more than were given. The critic quite overlooked the difficulty — in extremes the impossibility — of adhering to fact in fiction. For the mechanism of the stage and for purposes of lighting it is necessary that every stage interior have a roof of some sort. Now in this case there was a dilemma. If the columns were of exact proportion they would have looked skimpy in that vast edifice; and the general architecture would have been blamed instead of the detail.

As it was the stage perspective allowed of the massive columns close to the proscenium appearing to tower aloft in unimaginable strength, and at once conveyed the spirit of the scene. Just as the colossal figure of Artemis far up the stage — an image of fierce majesty wrought in green bronze — was intended to impress all with the relentless power of the Goddess.

But it was to Irving that the scene owed most of its beauty and grandeur. Hitherto, in all pagan ceremonials on the stage — and, indeed, in art generally — priestesses and votaries were clothed in white. But he, not finding that there was any authority for the belief, used colours and embroideries — Indian, Persian, Greek — all that might add conviction and picturesque effect. Something like a hundred beautiful young women were chosen for Vestals; and as the number of persons already employed in The Corsican Brothers was very great, the stage force available for scenic display was immense.

Irving himself devised the processions and the ceremonies; in fact he invented a ritual. One of the strange things about the audience all through the run of the play was the large number of High Church clergy who attended. The effect of the entry into the Temple of the gorgeously armoured Roman officers was peculiarly strong.

IV

It is not given to man, however, to achieve full perfection. When The Cup had been running for a considerable time, Dr. Alexander Murray, whom at first we had in vain tried to persuade, came to see it. We were all anxious to know how the Greek-Eastern effect impressed him, and I made it a point to see him at the end of the play. When I asked him how he liked it he said:

"Oh, I liked it well enough at first; but when the Temple scene came it was different. At the beginning two girls came on bearing a great amphora; but you will hardly believe me when I tell you it had red figures on a black ground, instead of black figures on a red ground. I need not say that after that I could enjoy nothing!"

Both forms of using the colours were practised in the history of Etruscan art, and our people, since the time of the play was somewhat indeterminate, used the older one.

The dress of Ellen Terry as Camma in this scene was a difficult matter. It had for stage purposes to be one which would stand out distinct and apart from the rest. Dress after dress was tried, stuff after stuff was chosen; but all without satisfaction. At length, as the opening night drew near, she began to get seriously anxious. Finally, as a last resource, she asked me to try to find her something. I had been peculiarly lucky in coming across just such stuffs for dresses as she had seemed to want. Now I went off, hot-foot, and was fortunate enough to find, through turning over a whole stock of old material at Liberty's, an Indian tissue of a sort of loosely woven cloth of gold, the wrong side of which produced the exact effect sought for. I may here say that a good many of the special effects on the Lyceum stage were got by using the inside instead of the outside of stuffs.

Amongst them was the basis of Irving's dress as Shylock.

The Cup was produced on the evening of January 3, 1881. It was an immense success, and was played one hundred and twenty-seven times that season. It was burned in the great scenery fire in 1898.

Tennyson came himself to see it for the first time on February 26, 1881.

CHAPTER XIX. TENNYSON AND HIS PLAYS — II

Before “Becket” — Irving’s Preparation of the Play — Re”Robin Hood” — Visit to Tennyson at Aldworth-Tennyson’s Humour — His Onomatoficeia — Sconing-Tennyson’s Belief — He reads his new Poem — Voice and Phonograph — Irving sees his Way to Playing”Becket”

I

IN their conversations after Queen Mary and before The cup Irving and Tennyson had talked of the possibility of putting on the stage some other play of the Laureate’s. After the success of The Cup had been assured Irving was more fixed on the matter; and later on, in 1884, when Becket had been published, he considered it then and thereafter as a possibility. He was anxious to do it if he could see his way to it. Like Tennyson, he had a conviction that there was a play in it; but he could not see its outline. In fact Becket was not written for the stage; and, that being so, it was for stage purposes much in the position of a block of Carrara marble from which the statue has to be patiently hewn. As it was first given to the world it was entirely too long for the stage. For instance, Hamlet is a play so long that it must be cut for acting, but Becket is longer still. For many reasons he was anxious to do another play of Tennyson’s. The first had added much to his reputation, and now the second was a huge success. He loved Tennyson — really loved the man as well as his work — and if for this reason alone exerted all his power to please him. Moreover as a manager he saw the wisdom of such a move. Tennyson’s was a great name and there had been a lot of foolish argument in journals and magazines regarding “ literature “ in plays, and also concerning the national need of encouraging contemporary dramatic literature. Rightly or wrongly the public interest has to be considered, and

Tennyson’s name was one to conjure with. Moreover he had come to depend on the picturesque possibilities of Tennyson’s work. The cup had allowed of a splendid setting, and in Becket its picturesque aspect of the struggle between Court and Church might be very attractive. Beyond this again there were two episodes of the period which so belonged to the history of the nation that every school child had them in memory: the martyrdom of Becket and the romantic story of Fair Rosamund and her secret bower.

Irving took the main idea of the play into his heart and tried to work it out. He kept it by him for more than a year. He took it with him to America in the tour of 1884-5. And in the long hours of loneliness, consequent on such work as his, made it a part of his mental labour. But it was all without avail; he could not see his way to a successful issue. Again he took it in hand when going to America in 1887-8, for the conviction was still with him that the play he wanted was there, if he could only unearth it. Again long months of effort; and again failure. This time he practically gave up hope. He had often tried to get Tennyson to think of other subjects; but without avail. Tennyson would not take any subject in hand unless he felt it and could see his way to it. Now Irving tried to interest him afresh in some of his other themes. He wished him to undertake a play on the subject of Dante. Tennyson considered the matter a while and then made a memorable reply:

“A fine subject! But where is the Dante to write it?”

Again Irving asked him to do Enoch Arden; but he said that having written the poem he would rather not deal with the same subject a second time in a different way.

Then he tried King Arthur; but again Tennyson applied the same reasoning with the same result.

At last he suggested as a subject, Robin Hood. Tennyson did not acquiesce, but he said he would think it over. I remember that Irving, hoping to interest him further in the matter, got all the books treating of the subject; all the romances and plays which he could hear of. He had hopes that the romantic side of the outlaw’s life would touch the poet. In fact Tennyson did write a play, The Foresters, which has been successful in America. I shall have something to say later on about the London production for the purposes of copyright.

II

In the spring of 1890, in response to a kindly invitation, Irving visited Aldworth, the lovely home which Tennyson made for himself under the brow of Blackdown. It was nine years since the two men had had opportunity for a real talk. Sunday, October ig, was fixed for the visit. I was invited to lunch also, and needless to say I looked forward to the visit, for it was to be the first opportunity I should have of seeing Tennyson in his own home.

On the Sunday morning Irving and I made an early start, leaving Victoria Station by the train at 8.45 and arriving at Haslemere a little after half-past ten. Blackdown is just under mountain height — one thousand feet; but it is high enough and steep enough to test the lungs and muscles of man or beast. It was a typically fine day in autumn. The air was dry and cold and bracing, after a slight frost whose traces the bright sun had not yet obliterated. All was bright and clear around us, but the hills in the distance were misty.

Aldworth is a wonderful spot. Tennyson chose it himself with a rare discretion. It is, I suppose, the most naturally isolated place within a hundred miles of London. Doubtless this was an element in his choice, for he is said to have had a sickening of publicity at his other home, “ Farringford,” at Freshwater in the Isle of Wight. The house lies just under the brow of the hill to the east and faces south. This side of the hill is very steep, and now that the trees which he planted have grown tall the house cannot be seen from anywhere above. It is necessary to go miles away to get a glimpse of it from below. When he bought the ground it was all mountain moorland and he had to make his own roads. The house is of stone with fine mullioned windows and the spaces everywhere are gracious. In front, which faces south, is a small lawn bounded by a stone parapet with a quickset hedge below and just showing above the top of the stonework. From here you look over Surrey and Sussex right away to Goodwood and the bare Downs above Brighton. A glorious expanse of country articulated with river and wood and field of seeming toy dimensions. It would, I think, be impossible to find a more ideal place for quiet work. From it the howling, pushing, strenuous world is absolutely shut out, and the mind can work untrammelled, fancy free. To the west lies a beautiful garden fashioned into pleasant nooks and winding alleys, with flower-starred walks, and bowers of roses, and spreading shrubs. Behind it rise some fine forest trees. The garden trends some way down the hillside, opening to seas of bracken and the dim shelter of pine woods. In the fringes these woods in due season are filled with a natural growth of purple foxglove, the finest I have ever seen. Just below where the garden ends is a level nook, a corner between shelving lines of tree-clad hill where a tiny stream flows from a vigorous bubbling well. Just such a nook as Old Crome or Nasmyth would have loved to paint.

Hallam Tennyson met us at the door. When we entered the wide hall, one of the noticeable things was quite a number of the picturesque wide-brimmed felt hats which Tennyson always wore. I could not but notice them, for a certain similarity struck me. In the house of Walt Whitman at Camden, New Jersey, was just such a collection of hats; except that Walt Whitman's hats — he being paralysed and not naturally careful of his appearance at that time of his life were worn out. Walt only got a new hat when the old one was badly worn. But he did not part with the old ones even then.

After a short visit to Lady Tennyson in the drawing-room we were brought upstairs to Tennyson's study, a great room over the drawing-room, with mullioned windows facing south and west. We entered from behind a great eightfold screen some seven or eight feet high. Tennyson was sitting at a table in the western window writing in a book of copy-book size with black cover. His writing was very firm. He had on a black skull-cap. As we entered he held up his hand saying:

"Just one minute if you don't mind. I am almost finished! " When he had done he threw down his pen and rising quickly came towards us with open-handed welcome. In the room were many tall bookcases. The mullioned windows let in a flood of light.

I went with Hallam to his own study, leaving Irving alone with Tennyson. Half an hour later we joined them and we all went out for a walk. The medical nurse who had been attending Tennyson, who had lately had a long illness, came with us. Strangely enough she had been one of my brother George's nurses in the Zulu War, where he had been Stafford House Commissioner. In the garden Tennyson pointed out to us some blue flowering pea which had been reared from seed found in the hand of a mummy. Tennyson stooped a little as he walked — he was then aged, eighty-two — but seemed strong and was very cheerful — sometimes even merry. With us came his great Russian wolf-hound which seemed devoted to him. We walked through the grounds and woods for some three miles altogether, Hallam and Irving walking in front. As I walked with Tennyson we had much conversation, every word of which comes back to me. I was so fond of Tennyson and admired him so much that I could not, I think, forget if I tried anything which he said. Amongst other things he mentioned a little incident at Farringford, when in his own grounds an effusive lady, a stranger, said at rather than to him, of course alluding to the berries of the wild rose, then in profusion:

"What beautiful hips!"

"I'm so glad you admire 'em ma'am! " he had answered, and he laughed heartily at the memory. I mention this as an instance of his love of humour. He had intense enjoyment of it.

He also mentioned an error made by the writer of Tennyson Land of a dog which in Demet Vale saved the child of an old local farmer.

"It's a lie," he said, " I invented it all; though there was such a character when I was a boy. When he was dying he said:

"' Th' A'mighty couldn't be so hard. An' Squire would be so mad an' a'! ' " He said it in broad Lincolnshire dialect such as he used in The Northern Farmer. Tennyson was a natural character-actor; when he read or spoke as such in the first person he conveyed in voice and manner a distinct impression of an individual other than himself.

Then he told me some Irish anecdotes generally bearing on that quality in the Irish nature which renders them unsatisfied. He suggested a parody of a double row of shillelaghs working automatically on each side " and then they would be unsatisfied! " At another time he spoke to me in the same vein.

Then I told him some Irish dialect stories which were new to him and which really seemed to give him pleasure. I told him also some of the extravagant Orange toasts of former days whereat he laughed much. Then turning to me he said: “ When we go in I want to read you something which I have just finished; but you must not say anything about it yet!”

“All right! “ I said, “ of course I shall not. But why, may I ask, do you wish it so?”

“Well, you see,” he said, “ I have to be careful. If it is known that I am writing on a particular subject I get a dozen poems on it the next day. And then when mine comes out they say I plagiarised them!”

In the course of our conversation something cropped up which suggested a line of one of his poems, The Golden Year, and I quoted it. “ Go on! “ said Tennyson, who seemed to like to know that any one quoting him knew more than the bare quotation. I happened to know that poem and went on to the end of the lyrical portion. There I stopped:

“Go on! “ he said again; so I spoke the narrative bit at the end, supposed to be spoken by the writer:

“He spoke; and, high above, I heard them blast The steep slate-quarry, and the great echo flap And buffet round the hills, from bluff to bluff.”

Tennyson listened attentively. When I spoke the last line he shook his head and said: “ No!”

“Surely that is correct? “ I said. “ No! “ There was in this something which I did not understand, for I was certain that I had given the words correctly. So I ventured to say:

“Of course one must not contradict an author about his own work; but I am certain those are the words in my edition of the poem.” He answered quickly: “ Oh, the words are all right — quite correct! “ “ Then what is wrong? “ For answer he said: “ Have you ever been on a Welsh mountain? “ “ Yes! on Snowdon! “ “ Did you hear them blast a slate-quarry? “ Yes. In Wales, and also on Coniston in Cumberland.”

“And did you notice the sound? “ I was altogether at fault and said:

“Won’t you tell me — explain to me. I really want to understand? “ He spoke the last line, and further explanation was unnecessary. The whole gist was in his pronunciation of the word “ bluff “ twice repeated. He spoke the word with a sort of quick propulsive effort as though throwing the word from his mouth.

“I thought any one would understand that! “ he added.

It was the exact muffled sound which the exploding charge makes in the curves of the steep valleys.

This is a good instance of Tennyson’s wonderful power of onomatopceia. To him the sound had a sense of its own. I had another instance of it before the day was over.

That talk was full of very interesting memories. Perhaps it was apropos of the peas grown from the seed in the mummy hand, but Lazarus in his tomb came on the tapis. This stanza of In Memoriam had always been a favourite of mine, and when I said so, he said:

“Repeat it! “ I did so, again feeling as if I were being weighed up. When I had finished “He told it not; or something seal’d The lips of that Evangelist:” he turned to me and said:

“Do you know that when that was published they said I was scoffing. But “ — here both face and voice grew very very grave—” I did not mean to scoff!”

When I told him of my wonder as to how any sane person could have taken such an idea from such a faithful, tender, understanding poem he went on to speak of faith and the need of faith. There was nothing strange or original to rest in my mind. But his finishing sentence I shall never forget. Indeed had I forgotten for the time I should have remembered it from what he said the last interview I had with him just before his death:

"You know I don't believe in an eternal hell, with an All-merciful God. I believe in the All-merciful God! It would be better otherwise that men should believe they are only ephemera!"

When we returned to the house we lunched, Lady Tennyson and Mrs. Hallam Tennyson having joined us. Then we went up again to the study, and Tennyson, taking from the table the book in which he had been writing, read us the last poem, The Churchwarden and the Curate. He read it in the Lincolnshire dialect, which is much simpler when heard than read. The broadness of the vowels and their rustic prolongation rather than drawl adds force and also humour. I shall never forget the intense effect of the last lines of the tenth stanza. The shrewd worldly wisdom — which was plain sincerity of understanding without cynicism:

"But niver not speak plaain out, if tha wants to git forrards a bit,
But creeap along the hedge-bottoms, an' thou'll be a Bishop yit."

Tennyson was a strangely good reader. His voice was powerful and vibrant, and had that quality of individualism which is so convincing. You could not possibly mistake it for the voice of any one else. It was a potent part of the man's identity. In his reading there was a wonderful sense of time. The lines seemed to swing with an elastic step — like a regiment marching.

In a little time after came his hour for midday rest; so we said good-bye and left him. Irving and I went for a smoke to Hallam's study, where he produced his phonograph and adjusted a cylinder containing a reading of his father's. Colonel Gouraud had taken special pains to have for the reception of Tennyson's voice the most perfect appliance possible, and the phonograph was one of peculiar excellence, without any of that tinny sharpness which so often changes the intentioned sound.

The reading was that of Tennyson's own poem, The Charge of the Heavy Brigade. It was strange to hear the mechanical repetition whilst the sound of the real voice, which we had so lately heard, was still ringing in our ears. It was hard to believe that we were not listening to the poet once again. The poem of Scarlett's charge is one of special excellence for both phonographic recital and as an illustration of Tennyson's remarkable sense of time. One seems to hear the rhythmic thunder of the horses' hoofs as they ride to the attack. The ground seems to shake, and the virile voice of the reader conveys in added volume the desperate valour of the charge.

With Hallam we sat awhile and talked. Then we came away and drove to Godalming, there to catch our train for London. The afternoon sun was bright and warm, though the air was bracing; and even as we drove through the beautiful scene Irving's eyes closed and he took his afternoon doze after his usual fashion.

I think this visit fanned afresh Irving's wish to play Becket. I do not know what he and Tennyson spoke of — he never happened to mention it to me; but he began from fthence to speak again of the play at odd times.

III

That season was a busy one, as we had taken off Ravenswood and played repertoire. That autumn there was a provincial tour. The 1891 season saw Henry VIII. run from the beginning of the year. The long run, with only six performances a week, gave some leisure for study; and Irving once more took Becket in hand. I think that again the character he was playing had its influence on him. He was tuned to sacerdotalism; and the robes of a churchman sat easy on him. There was a sufficient difference between Wolsey — the chancellor who happened to be a cleric — and Becket — who was cleric before all things — to obviate the danger of too exact a repetition of character and situation. At all events Irving reasoned it out in his usual quiet way, and did not speak till he was ready. It was during the customary holiday at Holy Week in 1892 that he finally made up his mind. I had been spending the vacation in Cornwall at Boscastle, a lovely spot which I had hit upon by accident. Incidentally I so fell in love with the place and gave such a glowing account of it that Irving; later on, spent two vacations at it. I came up to London on the night of Good Friday in a blinding snowstorm, the ground white from the Cornish sea to London. Irving had evidently been waiting, for as soon as we met in the theatre about noon on Saturday he asked me if I could stop and take supper in the theatre. I said I could, and he made the same request to Loveday. After the play we had supper in the Beefsteak Room; and when we had lit our cigars, he opened a great packet of foolscap and took out Becket as he had arranged it. He had taken two copies' of the book, and when he had marked the cuts in duplicate he had cut out neatly all the deleted scenes and passages. He had used two copies as he had to paste down the leaves on the sheets of foolscap. He had cut the play in this way so that any one reading it would not see as he went along what had been cut out. Thus such a reader would be better able to follow the action as it had been arranged, unprejudiced by obvious alteration, and with a mind single of thought — for it would not be following the deleted matter as well as that remaining. He knew also that it would be more pleasant to Tennyson to read what he had written without seeing a great mass cut out. Becket as written is enormously long; the adapted play is only five-sevenths of the original length. Before he began to read he said:

"I think I have got it at last!"

His reading was of its usual fine and enlightening quality; as he read it the story became a fascination. There was no doubting how the part of Becket appealed to him. He was greatly moved at some of the passages, especially in the last act.

Loveday and I were delighted with the play. And when the reading was finished, we, then and there, agreed that it should be the next play produced after King Lear, which was then in hand, and which had been arranged to come on in the autumn of that year.

We sat that night until four o'clock, talking over the play and the music for it. Irving thought that Charles Villiers Stanford would be the best man to do it. We quite agreed with him. When he saw that we were taken with it, equally as himself, he became more expansive regarding the play. He said it was a true " miracle " play — a holy theme; and that he had felt already in studying it that it made him feel a better man.

Before we parted I had by his wish written to Hallam Tennyson at Freshwater asking him if he could see me on business if I came down to the Isle of Wight. I mentioned also Irving's wish that it might be as soon as possible.

Hallam Tennyson telegraphed up on Monday, after he had received my letter, saying that I would be expected the next day, April 19 — Easter Tuesday, 1892.

In the meantime, I had read both the original play and the acting version, and was fairly familiar with the latter.

CHAPTER XX. TENNYSON AND HIS PLAYS — III

"Becket" for the stage — My visit to Farringford—" In the Roar of the Sea" — Tennyson on "interviewers" — Relic hunters— "God the Virgin" — The hundred best stories — Message to John Fiske — Walter Map — Last Visit to Tennyson — Tennyson on Homer and Shakespeare — His own reminiscences — Good-bye

I

I WENT down by the 10.3o train from Victoria and got to Freshwater about four o'clock. Hallam was attending a meeting of the County Council but came in about five. He and I went carefully over the suggested changes, in whose wisdom he seemed to acquiesce. We arranged provisionally royalties and such matters, as Irving had wished to acquire for a term of years the whole rights of the play for both Britain and America. We were absolutely at one on all points.

At a little before six he took me to see his father, who was lying on a sofa in his study. The study was a fine room with big windows. Tennyson was a little fretful at first, as he was ill with a really bad cold; but he was very interested in my message and cheered up at once. At the beginning I asked if he would allow Irving to alter Becket, so far as cutting it as he thought necessary. He answered at once:

"Irving may do whatever he pleases with it! " " In that case, Lord Tennyson," said I, " Irving will do the play within a year!"

He seemed greatly gratified, and for a long time we sat chatting over the suggested changes, he turning the manuscript over and making a running commentary as he went along. He knew well where the cuts were; he knew every word of the play, and needed no reference to the fuller text.

When he came to the end of the scene in Northampton Castle, I put before him Irving's suggestion that he should, if he thought well of it, introduce a speech — or rather amplify the idea conveyed in the shout of the kneeling crowd: " Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord! " In our discussion of the play on the night of the reading we had all agreed that something was here wanting. Something which would, from a dramatic point of view, strengthen Becket's position. If he could have the heart of the people behind him it would manifestly give him a firmer foothold in his struggle with the King. Naturally there was an opening for an impassioned voicing of the old cry, " Vox popu/i, vox Dei." When I ventured to suggest this he said in a doubting way: " But where am I to get such a speech? " As we sat we were sheltered by the Downs from the sea which thunders night and day under one of the highest cliffs in England. I pointed out towards the Downs and said:

"There it is! In the roar of the sea!" The idea was evidently already in his mind, and when he sent up to Irving a few days later the new material the mighty sound of the surge and the blast were in his words:

"Hubert. The voice of the people blesses thee.

"Becket. And I bless The people, love them, live for them — and yet Not me, not me! they bless the Church in me. The Voice of the people goes against the King, The Voice of the Lord is in the Voice of the People 1 The Voice of the Lord is in the warring floods, And He will lead his people into Peace! The Voice of the Lord will shake the wilderness The barren wilderness of unbelief! The Voice of the Lord will break the cedar-trees-The Kings and Rulers that have dosed their ears Against the Voice — and at their hour of doom The Voice of the Lord will hush the hounds of Hell That ever yelp and snarl at Holy Church In everlasting silence!"

Any one who studies this fine passage in connection with the difference between the play as written and as adapted can see the extraordinary mental subtlety with which the dramatist reconciled two ideas of opposing purpose. In Becket, Tennyson takes as his main purpose — as the dramatic “ tug “ of the play — the opposition of Church and State as spoken of in Henry’s speech:

“Sceptre and crozier dashing, and the mitre Grappling the Crown.”

Becket was, except in the prologue, all churchman when interests clashed. When, however, the dramatist knew that stage exigency required the appearance of opposition between King and people, he did it in such a way, whilst fulfilling all requirements both of the character and the drama, that Becket used the very circumstance to the advantage of his own cause. This is real dramatic instinct, and may be taken as a good illustration of Tennyson’s natural capacity for the drama. It is all the more illustrative in that he was not only creating, but creating within very narrow bounds.

II

When Tennyson had run roughly through the altered play, he seemed much better and brighter. He put the play aside and talked of other things. In the course of conversation he mentioned the subject of anoynmous letters from which he had suffered. He said that one man had been writing such to him for forty-two years. He also spoke of the unscrupulous or careless way in which some writers for the press had treated him. That even Sir Edwin Arnold had written an interview without his knowledge or consent, and that it was full of lies — Tennyson never hesitated to use the word when he felt it —

such as: " ' Here I parted from General Gordon! ' And that I had sent a man on horseback after him.' General Gordon was never in the place! " This subject both in general and special he alluded to at our last meeting; it seemed to have taken a hold on his memory.

He also said:

"Irving paid me a great compliment when he said that I would have made a fine actor!"

That evening the younger members of the family went to a political meeting, at which the local member, Sir Richard Webster, then Attorney-

General, was addressing his constituents, and I went with them.

In the morning, Hallam and I walked in the garden before breakfast. Farringford is an old Feudal farm, and some of the trees are magnificent — ilex, pine, cedar. Primrose and wild parsley everywhere, and underneath a great cedar a wilderness of trailing ivy. The garden gave me the idea that all the wild growth had been protected by a loving hand.

After breakfast Hallam and I walked in the beautiful wood behind the house, where beyond the hedgerows and the little wood rose the great bare rolling Down, at the back of which is a great sheer cliff five hundred feet high. We sat in the summer-house where Tennyson had written nearly all of Enoch Arden. It had been lined with wood, which Alfred Tennyson himself had carved; but now the bare bricks were visible in places. The egregious relic-hunters had whittled away piecemeal the carved wood. They had also smashed the windows, which Tennyson had painted with sea-plants and dragons; and had carried off the pieces When we returned I was brought up to Tennyson's room.

He was not feeling well. He sat in a great chair with the cut play on his knee, one finger between the pages as though to mark a place. He had been studying the alterations; and as he did not look happy, I feared that there might be something not satisfactory with regard to some of the cuts. Presently he said to me suddenly:

"Who is God, the Virgin?"

"Who is what?" I asked, bewildered as to his meaning. I feared I could not have heard aright.

"God, the Virgin! That is what I want to know too. Here it is!"

As he spoke he opened the play where his finger marked it. He handed it to me and there to my astonishment I read:

"I do commend my soul to God, the Virgin." When Irving had been cutting the speech he had omitted to draw his pencil through the last two words. The speech as written ran thus:

"I do commend my soul to God, the Virgin, St. Denis of France, and St. Alphege of England, And all the tutelary saints of Canterbury."

In doing the scissors-work, he had been guided by the pencil-marks, and so had made the error.

The incident amused Tennyson very much, and put him in better spirits. We went downstairs into what in the house is called the " ballroom " — a great sunny room with the wall away from the light covered with a great painting by Lear of a tropical scene intended for Enoch Arden. Here we walked up and down for a long time, the old man leaning. on my arm. He told me that he had often thought of making a collection of the hundred best stories.

"Tell me some of them? " I asked softly. Whereupon he told me quite a number, all excellent. Such as the following:

"A noble at the Court of Louis XIV. was extremely like the King, who, on it being pointed out to him, sent for him and asked him:

“Was your mother ever at Court? Bowing low he replied:

“No, sire I But my father was! ‘“

Again:

“Colonel Jack Towers was a great crony of the Prince Regent. He was with his regiment at Portsmouth on one occasion; and was in Command of the Guard of Honour when the Prince was crossing to the Isle of Wight. The Prince had not thought of his being there, and was surprised when he saw him. After his usual manner he began to banter:

“‘ Why, Jack, they tell me you are the biggest blackguard in Portsmouth! ‘ To which the other replied, bowing low:

I trust that your Royal Highness has not come down here to take away my character! ‘“

Again:

“Silly Billy — the sobriquet of the Duke of Gloucester — said to a friend:

“‘ You are near a fool as you can be! ‘ He too bowed as he answered:

“‘ Far be it from me to contradict your Royal Highness! ‘“

III

That evening at dinner Tennyson was, though far from well in health, exceedingly bright in his talk. To me he seemed to love an argument and supported his side with an intellectual vigour and quickness which were delightful. He was full of insight into Irish character. He asked me if I had read his poem, The Voyage of Maeldune; and when I told him I had not yet read it he described it and repeated verses. How the Irish ship sailed to island after island, finding in turn all they had longed for, from fighting to luscious fruit, but were never satisfied and came back, fewer in numbers, to their own island. In the drawing-room he said to me, as if the idea had struck him, I daresay from something I said:

“Are you Irish? “ When I told him I was he said very sweetly:

“You must forgive me. If I had known that I would not have said anything that seemed to belittle Ireland.”

He went to bed early after his usual custom. That evening in the course of conversation the name of John Fiske the historian, and sometime a professor of Yale University, came up. To my great pleasure, for Fiske had been a close friend of mine for nearly ten years, Tennyson spoke of him in the most enthusiastic way. He asked me if I knew his work. And when I replied that I knew well not only the work but the man, he answered:

“You know him! Then when you next meet him will you tell John Fiske from me that I thank him — thank him most heartily and truly — for all the pleasure and profit his work has been to me! “ “ I shall write to him to-morrow! “ I said. “ I know it will be a delight to him to have such a message from you!”

“No! “ said Tennyson, “ Don’t write! Wait till you see him, and then tell him — direct from me through you, how much I feel indebted to him!”

I did not meet John Fiske till 1895. When the message was delivered it was from the dead.

IV

On the next morning I saw Tennyson again in his bedroom after early breakfast. He looked very unwell, and was in low spirits.

Indeed he seemed too dispirited to light his pipe, which he held ready in his hand. He said that he had not yet got the lines he wanted: “ The Voice of the People is the Voice of God “ — or: “ The Voice of the People is the Voice of England! “ I think that he had been over the altered text again and that some of the cutting had worried him. Before I came away after saying good-bye he said suddenly, as if he had all at once made up his mind to speak:

“I suppose he couldn’t spare me Walter Map?”

Walter Map was a favourite character of his in the original Becket. He it is who represents scholarly humour in the play.

When I told Irving about this he was much touched, and said that he would go over the play again, and would, if he possibly could see his way to it, retain the character. He spent many days over it; but at last came to the conclusion that it would not do.

At this last meeting — at that visit — when I asked Tennyson what composer he would wish to do the music for his play he said:

“Villiers Stanford! “ He and Irving had independently chosen the same man. How this belief was justified is known to all who have heard the fine Becket music.

V

On September 25 the same year, 1892, my wife and I spent the day with Lord and Lady Tennyson at Aldworth. We were to have gone a week earlier, but as Tennyson was not well the visit was postponed. We left Waterloo by the 8.45 train. At the station we were joined by Walter Leaf, the Homer scholar, who had been at Cambridge with Hallam. We had met him at Lionel Tennyson’s years before. The day was dull but the country looked very lovely, still full of green though the leaves were here and there beginning to turn. The Indian vines were scarlet. A carriage was waiting and we drove to Aldworth, meeting Mrs. Tennyson on her way to church. On Blackdown Common the leaves were browner than in the valley, and there was a sense of autumn in the air; but round the house, where it was sheltered, green still reigned alone. Far below us the plain was a sea of green, with dark lines of trees and hedgerows like waves. In the distance the fields were wreathed with a dark film — a sapphire mystery.

We all sat awhile with Lady Tennyson, who was in the drawing-room on a sofa away from the light. She had long been an invalid. She was perhaps the most sweet and saintly woman I ever met, and had a wonderful memory. She had been helper and secretary to her husband in early days, trying to save him all the labour she could; and she told us of the enormous correspondence of even that early time. Presently Hallam took us all up to his father, who was in his study overhead.

The room was well guarded against cold, for we had to pass from the door all along one side of it through a laneway made between the bookcases and the high manifold screen. Tennyson was sitting on a sofa with his back to the big mullioned window which looked out to the south. He had on a black skull-cap, his long thin dark hair falling from under it. He seemed very feeble, a good deal changed in that way during the five months that had elapsed since I had seen him. His fine brown nervous hands lay on his lap. Irving had the finest and most expressive hands I have ever seen; Tennyson's were something like them, only bigger. When he began to talk he brightened up. Amongst other things he spoke of the error in the alteration of Becket, " God the Virgin." We did not stay very long, as manifestly quietude was best for him, and no one else but ourselves was allowed to see him that day. Presently we all went for a walk, Mrs. Allingham, the painter, who was an old and close friend of the Tennysons, joining us. As we went out we had a glimpse from the terrace of Tennyson reading; part of his book and the top of his head were visible. At that time the lawn presented a peculiar appearance. There had come a sort of visitation of slugs, and the grass was all brown in patches where paraffin had been poured on it.

VI

After lunch Hallam brought Walter Leaf and me up to the study again. Tennyson had changed his place and now sat on another sofa placed in the north-west corner of the room. He was much brighter and stronger and full of intellectual fire. He talked of Homer with Walter Leaf, and in a fine deep voice recited, in the Greek, whole passages — of the sea and the dawn rising from it. He spoke of Homeric song as “ the grandest sounds that can be of the human voice.” He spoke very warmly of Leaf’s book, and said he would have been proud to have been quoted in it. He ridiculed the idea of any one holding that there had been no such person as Homer. He thought Ilium was a “ fancy “ town — the invention of Homer’s own imagination. Doubts of Homer brought up doubts as to Shakespeare, and the Bacon and Shakespeare controversy which was then raging. He ridiculed the idea. From the Shakespeare side he was indignant at a doubt. From the Bacon side he was scornful: “ What ridiculous stuff! “ he said. “ Fancy that greatest of all love-poems, Romeo and Juliet, written by a man who wrote: ‘ Great spirits and great business do keep out this weak passion! ‘ “ (From Bacon’s Essay on Love.)

I told him the story which I had heard General Horace Porter — the Ambassador of the United States to France — tell long before. It may be an old story but I venture to tell it again:

“In a hotel out West ‘ a lot of men in the barroom were discussing the Shakespeare and Bacon question. They got greatly excited and presently a lot of them had their guns out. Some one interfered and suggested that the matter should be left to arbitration. The arbitrator selected was an Irishman, who had all the time sat quiet smoking and not saying a word — which circumstance probably suggested his suitability for the office. When he had heard the arguments on both sides formally stated, he gave his decision:

“Well, Gintlemin, me decision is this: Thim plays was not wrote be Shakespeare! But they was wrote be a man iv the saame naame! ‘“

Tennyson seemed delighted with the story.

Then he spoke of Shakespeare, commenting on Henry VIII, which had been running all the year at the Lyceum. He mentioned Wolsey’s speech, speaking the lines:

Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition.”

Then he added in a very pronounced way:

“Shakespeare never wrote that! I know it! I know it! I know it! “ As he spoke he smote hard upon the table beside him.

After a long chat we left Tennyson to have his afternoon nap, and smoked in the summer-house. Then we walked to the south-west edge of Blackdown. The afternoon was very clear and we could see the hills of the Isle of Wight, which Hallam said he had never before seen from there.

After tea Hallam took Leaf and me again to his father. After a while we were joined there by Mrs. Tennyson and my wife. Tennyson was then very feeble, but cheerful. He told us a lot of stories and incidents — his humour and memory were quick in him that evening.

One was of the landlord of a hotel at Stirling. He had, during a trip in Scotland, telegraphed to the hotel to have rooms kept. When he arrived he was delighted with them. They were on the first floor, airy and spacious, and in all ways desirable. He felt pleased at being treated with such consideration. After dinner he was sitting by the open window smoking his pipe when he heard a conversation going on below. One of the speakers was the landlord, the other a stranger. Said the latter:

“I hear you have Tennyson staying with you to-night?”

“Aye! That’s the man’s name. He telegraphed the day for rooms. Do ye ken him?”

“Know him! Why that’s Alfred Tennyson, the poet!”

“The poet! I’m wishin’ I had kent that! “ “ Why? “ asked the stranger. After a pause the answer came:

“He a poet! I’d ha’ seen him dommed before I had gied him ma best rooms!”

As he was reminiscent that night his anecdotes were mostly personal. Another was of a man of the lower class in the Isle of Wight, who spoke of him in early days:

“He, a great man! Why ‘e only keeps one manservant — an’ e’ don’t sleep in th’ ouse!”

Another was of a workman who was heard to say:

“Shakespeare an’ Tennyson! Well, I don’t think nothin’ of neither on ‘em!”

Another was of a Grimsby fishmonger, who said when asked by an acquisitive autograph hunter if he happened to have any letters from Tennyson:

“No! His son writes ‘em. He still keeps on the business; but he ain’t a patch on his faytheR! “ Tennyson was sitting on the sofa as he had been in the morning. For all his brightness and his humour, which seemed to bubble in him, he was very feeble and seemed to be suffering a good deal.

He moaned now and then with pain. Gout was flying through his knees and jaws. He had then on his black skull-cap, but he presently took it off as though it were irksome to him. In front of him was a little table with one wax candle lighted. It was of that pattern which has vertical holes through it to let the overflow of melted wax fall within, not without. When the fire of pleasant memory began to flicker, he grew feeble and low in spirits. He spoke of the coming spring and that he would not live to see it. Somehow he grew lower in spirits as the light died away and the twilight deepened, as if the whole man was tuned to nature’s key. Through the window we could note the changes as evening drew nearer. The rabbits were stealing out on the lawn, and the birds picking up grubs in the grass.

Once again Tennyson seemed troubled about the press, and was bitter against certain newspaper prying. He could not get free from it. It had been found out during his illness that the beggar-man who came daily for the broken meat was getting ten shillings a week from a local reporter to come and tell him the gossip of the kitchen. Turning to me he said:

“Don’t let them know how ill I am, or they’ll have me buried before twenty-four hours! “ Then after a while he added:

“Can’t they all let me alone. What did they want digging up the graves of my father and mother and my grandfather and grandmother. I sometimes wish I had never written a line! " I said:

"Ah, don't say that! Don't think it! You have given delight to too many millions, and your words have done too much good for you to wish to take them back. And the good and the pleasure are to go on for all the future." After a moment's thought he said very softly:

"Well, perhaps you're right! But can't they leave me alone!"

We were all very still and silent for a while. The dying twilight and the moveless flame of the close-set candle showed out his noble face and splendid head in full relief. The mullioned window behind him with the darkening sky and the fading landscape made a fitting background to the dying poet. We said good-bye with full hearts.

Outside, our tears fell. We knew that we should see him no more; we had said good-bye for ever!

CHAPTER XXI. TENNYSON AND HIS PLAYS — IV

“Becket”produced — Death of Tennyson— “Irving will do me justice”— “The Silent Voices” — Production of the Play — Irving reads it at Canterbury Cathedral — And at the King Allred Millenary, Winchester

I

TENNYSON died on Thursday, October 6, eleven days after we had seen him. Two others only saw him after we did — with of course the exception of his own family — Mr. Craik, of Messrs. Macmillan, his publishers, and Dr. Dabbs, of the Isle of Wight, his physician.

Before he died he spoke of May — the spring seemed to be for him a time which the Lords of Life and Death would not allow him to pass. It had too some connection in his mind with his play, The Promise of May. He said to Dr. Dabbs, who wrote to me about it afterwards:

“I suppose I shall never see Becket?”

“I fear not!”

“Ah! “ After a long pause he said again: “ They did not do me justice with The Promise of May — but “ another long pause and then half fiercely:

“I can trust Irving — he will do me justice!”

Tennyson was buried in the Poet’s Corner of Westminster Abbey on October 12. There was a great crowd both in the Abbey and the streets without. All were still, hushed and solemn. The sense of great loss was over all. Very solemn and impressive was the service. There was gloom in the great Cathedral, and the lights were misty. Everywhere the strong odour of many flowers. A body of distinguished men of letters, science and art followed the coffin, coming behind his family. Amongst them Henry Irving, looking as usual, wherever he was, the most distinguished of all. On that sad day, Tennyson's poem, Crossing the Bar, was sung. Then his last poem, The Silent Voices. The exquisite music written for this by Lady Tennyson and arranged by Sir John Frederick Bridge was heard for the first time. The noble words ringing through the great Cathedral seemed like a solemn epitome of the teaching of the poet's life. Six years afterwards I heard Irving speak them in the crowded Senate House at Cambridge with that fervour which seemed a part of his very life. Now, from that Poet's Corner where they both rest I seem to hear the voices of the two great souls in unison, calling to the great Humanity which each in his own way loved and which was so deep in the hearts of both:

"Call me rather, silent voices, Forward to the starry track Glimmering up the heights beyond me On, and always on!"

II

Becket, having been in preparation since the end of September, was ready to take its place after the run of King Lear. The first dress rehearsal was held on the evening of February 3, 1893, beginning at 6.3o and lasting till one o'clock. It was an excellent rehearsal and all went well. The play was produced three nights later, February 6, 1893 — Irving's fifty-fifth birthday. The play was a really enormous success. The public, who had been waiting since early morning at the pit and gallery, could not contain themselves; and even the more staid portions of the house lost their reserve. It was like one huge personal triumph. No one seemed to compare the play or the character to anything seen before. Not even to Henry VIII. and Cardinal Wolsey, which had held the stage for eight months the previous year.

Becket was played one hundred and twelve times that season. The entire scenery was burned in the disastrous fire of 1898. There was a new production in 1904. Altogether Tennyson's play was performed three hundred and eight times, as follows:

London, 147; British Provinces, 92; America, 69.

III

In 1897 Irving gave a remarkable Reading of Becket. This was in the old Chapter House of Canterbury Cathedral, which had been recently restored exactly to its ancient condition. Farrar was then Dean of Canterbury, and as Irving had promised to read Becket for the benefit of the Cathedral Restoration Fund, he and I had three meetings on the subject in the hall of the Athenaeum Club, for which he came specially from Canterbury to London on April 21 and 28 and May 5. At our first meeting the Dean suggested that the Reading should be held in the restored Chapter House, which the Prince of Wales was to open on May 29. Thus Irving's Reading of Becket would be on the first occasion which the restored room should be used. I well remember my host's dismay when he met me at the doorway and apologised that there was not a single room in the club to which a member could ask a stranger; I do not know if that iron-clad rule still exists. A somewhat similar one existed at that time at the United Service Club, on the other side of Waterloo Place. There a member could ask a friend into the hall and there give him a glass of sherry. Such was the only measure of hospitality allowable at the " Senior." That rule has been since abandoned in the " Service " Club; the usual club hospitalities can now be extended to guests.

At these meetings, as I was authorised to speak for Irving on all matters, we arranged the necessary details. The Reading was to be given on Monday, May 31, at two o'clock, the tickets to be a guinea and half a guinea each. As time was then pressing and publicity with regard to the undertaking was necessary we decided at the last meeting that Dean Farrar was to write a letter to the newspapers calling attention to the coming event and its beneficent purpose. I undertook if he would send me the letter to have it facsimiled and sent to four hundred newspapers.

Of course every seat was sold long ahead of the time. A place like Canterbury cannot — and cannot be expected to — furnish such an audience as would be required on such an occasion. Most of them would have to come from London and other cities and towns. When I left the Dean I saw Mr. William Forbes, one of the powers of the London, Chatham and Dover Railway, who kindly undertook to arrange trains to and from Canterbury to suit the convenience of the audience, and especially to look after accommodation for Irving and his friends.

On the day of the Reading we went down by train from Victoria at 10 A.M., Ellen Terry being one of the party. Sir Henry's sons, Henry B. and Laurence, were with him. Another was Sir John Hassard, the Secretary of the Court of Arches, and who then was the right hand of the Archbishop of Canterbury — as he had been to several of his predecessors. At Canterbury, Irving and and I went to see the Chapter House. After a walk through the Cathedral we went to the County Hotel, where Irving rested for a while. A little before two o'clock we went to the Chapter House. At two punctually he stepped on the stage, and was introduced in the usual way by Dean Farrar. There was a fine audience. Every spot where one could stand was occupied. Irving got a great reception.

It was a remarkable occasion, and we could not but feel a certain solemnity from the place as well as from the subject. There were so many historic associations with regard to the great room that we could not dissociate them from the occasion.

Irving read magnificently. To the inspiration of the theme was to him the added force of the place and the occasion. The Reading lasted one hour and thirty-five minutes — a terrible tax on even the greatest strength. During all that time he held his audience spell-bound. At the conclusion he was, naturally, a good deal exhausted; such a tour de force takes all the strength one has.

We all returned to London by the 4.18 o'clock train.

The result of the Reading was an addition to the Restoration Fund of over £250.

IV

On one other historic occasion Henry Irving read Becket. This was at the King Alfred Millenary at Winchester in 1901. In the June of that year he had been selected by the Royal Institution to represent their body; and thinking that he might in addition give some practical aid to the cause, he told the authorities at Winchester that he would on the occasion give a Reading of Becket for the benefit of the Expense Fund. Wednesday, September 18, was fixed for the event. As the Autumn tour had been arranged we would be playing in Leeds; but distance nor magnitude of effort ever came between Irving and his promise. On September 17 he played Charles I. and left for Winchester at the close of the play. At Winchester he was the guest of the then Mayor, Mr. Alfred Bowker. The next day he gave in the Castle Hall, to a great audience, a slightly compressed Reading of

Becket. Winchester was then thronged with strangers from all parts of the world, a large number of whom were accredited representatives of some branch or interest of the Anglo-Saxon race. Poor John Fiske was to have been one of the representatives of America. He was to have spoken, and when I had seen him last he told me that that was to be the crowning effort of his life.

At the close of the Reading Irving received an ovation and was compelled to make a speech. In it he said:

"A thousand years of the" memory of a great King, who loved his country and made her loved and respected and feared, is a mighty heritage for a nation; one of which not England alone but all Christendom may well be proud. The work which King Alfred did he did for England, but the whole world benefited by it. And most of all was there benefit for that race which he adorned. In the thousand years which have elapsed since he was laid to rest in that England in whose making he had such a part, the world has grown wiser and better, and civilisation has ever marched on with mighty strides. But through all extension and all advance the land which King Alfred consolidated and the race which peopled it, have ever been to the front in freedom and enlightenment; and to-day when England and her many children, east and west and north and south, are united by one grand aspiration of human advance, it is well that we should celebrate the memory of him to whom so large a measure of that advance is due."

CHAPTER XXII. “WATERLOO “—” KING ARTHUR “—” DON QUIXOTE”

Acquisition and Production of”Waterloo” — The One Man in America who saw the Play — Played for Indian and Colonial Troops, 1897—” King Arthur” Plays — Burne-Jones and the Armour— “Don Quixote” Plays — A Rhadamanthine Decision

I

ONE day early in March 1892, whilst we were rehearsing Tennyson’s play, The Foresters, Irving came into the office in a hurry. He was a little late. He, Loveday and myself always used the same office as we found it in all ways convenient for our perpetual consultations. As he came hurrying out to the stage, after putting on the brown soft broad-brimmed felt hat for which he usually exchanged his “ topper “ during rehearsals, he stopped beside my table where I was writing, and laying a parcel on it said:

“I wish you would throw an eye over that during rehearsal. It came this morning. You can tell me what you think of it when I come off!”

I took up the packet and unrolled a number of type-written sheets a little longer than foolscap. I read it with profound interest and was touched by its humour and pathos to my very heart’s core. It was very short, and before Irving came in again from the stage I had read it a second time. When he came in he said presently in an unconcerned way:

“By the way, did you read that play?”

“Yes!”

“What do you think of it?”

“I think this,” I said, “ that that play is never going to leave the Lyceum. You must own it — at any price. It is made for you.”

“So I think, too! “ he said heartily. “ You had better write to the author to-day and ask him what cheque we are to send. We had better buy the whole rights."

"Who is the author?"

"Conan Doyle!"

The author answered at once and the cheque was sent in due course. The play was then named A Straggler of '15'. This Irving changed to A Story of Waterloo, when the play was down for production. Later this was simplified to Waterloo.

Irving fell in love with the character, and began to study it right away. The only change in the play he made was to get Sir Arthur — then " Dr." or " Mr." — Conan Doyle to consolidate the matter of the first few pages into a shorter space. The rest of the MS. remained exactly as written.

It was not, however, for nearly two years that he got an opportunity of playing it. It is a difficult matter to find a place for an hour-long play in a working bill. Henry VIII, King Lear, and Becket held the Lyceum stage till the middle of 1893. Then came a tour in America lasting up to end of March 1894. The short London season was taken up with a prearranged reproduction of Faust.

Then followed a provincial tour from September to Christmas. Here was found the opportunity. The Bells is a short play, and for mere length allows of an addition.

In the first week of the tour at the Princes Theatre, Bristol, on September 21, 1894, A Story of Waterloo was given. The matter was one of considerable importance in the dramatic world; not only was Irving to play a new piece, but that piece was Conan Doyle's first attempt at the drama. The chief newspapers of London and some of the greater provincial cities wished to be represented on the occasion; the American press also wished to send its critical contingent.

Accordingly we arranged for a special train to bring the critical force. Hearing that so many of his London journalistic friends were coming an old friend of Irving's then resident in Bristol, Mr. John Saunders, arranged to give a supper in the Liberal Club, to which they were all invited, together with many persons of local importance.

The play met with a success extraordinary even for Irving. The audience followed with rapt attention and manifest emotion, swaying with the varying sentiments of the scene. The brief aid to memory in my diary of that day runs:

"New play enormous success. H. I. fine and great. All laughed and wept. Marvellous study of senility. Eight calls at end."

Unfortunately the author was not present to share the triumph, for it would have been a delightful memory for him. He was on a tour in America; " and thereby hangs a tale."

Amongst the audience who had come specially from London was Mr. H. H. Kohlsaat, owner and editor of the Chicago Times Herald, a close and valued friend of Irving and myself. He was booked to leave for America the next day. When the play was over and the curtain finally down, he hurried away just in time to catch the train for Southampton, whence the American Line boat started in the morning. He got on board all right. The following Saturday he arrived in New York, just in time to catch the " flyer," as they call the fast train to Chicago on the New York Central line. On Sunday night a public dinner was given to Conan Doyle to which of course Kohlsaat had been bidden. He arrived too late for the dining part; but having dressed in the train he came on to the hotel just as dinner was finished and before the speeches began. He took a chair next to Doyle and said to him:

"I am delighted to tell you that your play at Bristol was an enormous success!”

“So I am told,” said Doyle modestly. “ The cables are excellent.”

“They are not half enough! “ answered Kohlsaat, who had been reading in the train the papers for the last week.

“Indeed! I am rejoiced to hear it! “ said Conan Doyle somewhat dubiously. “ May I ask if you have had any special report? “ “ I didn’t need any report, I saw it! “ “ Oh, come! “ said Conan Doyle, who thought that he was in some way chaffing him. “ That is impossible!”

“Not to me! But I am in all human probability the only man on the American continent who was there! “ Then whilst the gratified author listened he gave him a full description of the play and the scene which followed it.

To my own mind Waterloo as an acting play is perfect, and Irving’s playing in it was the high-water mark of histrionic art. Nothing was wanting in the whole gamut of human feeling. It was a cameo, with all the delicacy of touch of a master-hand working in the fine material of the layered shell. It seemed to touch all hearts always. When the dying. veteran sprang from his chair to salute the colonel of his old regiment the whole house simultaneously burst into a wild roar of applause. This was often the effect at subsequent performances both at home and in America.

II

In 1897, when representatives of the Indian and Colonial troops were gathered in London for the “ Diamond “ Jubilee of Queen Victoria, Irving gave a special performance for them. It was a matinee on June 25. The event was a formal one, for it was given by Royal consent, and special arrangements were made by the public officials. Some two thousand troops of all kinds and classes and costumes were massed at Chelsea Barracks. The streets were cleared by the police for their passing as they marched to the Lyceum to the quickstep of the Guards' Fife and Drum Band, the public cheering them all the way. They represented every colour and ethnological variety of the.human race, from coal black through yellow and brown up to the light type of the Anglo-Saxon reared afresh in new realms beyond the seas.

Their drill seemed to be perfect, and we had made complete arrangements for their seats. Section by section they marched into the theatre, all coming by the great entrance, without once stopping or even marking time in the street.

In the boxes and stalls sat the Indian Princes and the Colonial Premiers, and some few of the foreign guests. The house was crammed from wall to wall; from floor to floor; the bill was Waterloo and The Bells. No such audience could have been had for this military piece. It sounded the note of the unity of the Empire which was then in celebration; all were already tuned to it. The scene at the end was indescribable. It was a veritable ecstasy of loyal passion.

As it was impossible to furnish organised refreshment for so many men with the limited accommodation of a theatre, Irving had done the only thing possible to show hospitality to his guests. The caterer who rented the saloons had orders to throw them all open and let the audience have just what they wished at his cost. Not a single one of the strangers took too much. The only exception to the rule of absolute sobriety was the case of two drummer-boys of the band, who, seeing a unique opportunity, " lowered " brandy-and-sodas with such zeal that they were unable to stand. Their comrades, however, were strong and kind; and keeping them close amongst them they proved to the boys that they could walk. None of the public were aware of the youthful indiscretion.

This is quite possible even under more adverse conditions. My maternal grandfather, who was a subaltern in the Peninsular War, said that in his young days — they did go early into the Army a hundred years ago, and ensigns had no horses — he had walked on a forced march all night asleep, pushed along by the hardier veterans.

Waterloo was played by Irving seventy-eight times in London; one hundred and seventy-seven times in the provinces; and eighty-eight times in America. In all three hundred and forty-three times, the last being at Wolverhampton on February 20, 1905.

III

For a long time Irving had in view of production a play on the subject of King Arthur. He broached the subject to Tennyson, but the latter could not see his way to it. He had dealt with the subject in one way and did not wish to try it in another. Then he got W. G. Wills to write a play; this he purchased from him in 1890. As, however, he did not think it would act well, he got Comyns Carr to write another some three years later.

In 1894 the production was taken in hand. Sir Edward Burne-Jones undertook to design scenes and dresses, armour and appointments. His suggestions were new lights on stage possibilities. As he was not learned in stage technique and mechanism there were of course some seemingly insuperable difficulties; but these in the hands of artists skilled in stage work soon disappeared. To my own mind it was the first time that what must in reality be a sort of fairyland was represented as an actuality. Some of the scenes were of transcendent beauty, notably that called “ The Whitethorn Wood.” The scene was all green and white — the side of a hill thick with blossoming thorn through which, down a winding path, came a bevy of maidens in flowing garments of tissue which seemed to sway and undulate with every motion and every breath of air. There was a daintiness and a sense of purity about the whole scene which was very remarkable.

The armour which Burne-J ones designed was most picturesque. I fear it would hardly have done for actual combat as the adornments at shoulder and elbow were such that in the movement of the arms they took strange positions. When some virtuoso skilled in the lore of mail asked the great painter why he fixed on such a class of armour he answered:

“To puzzle the archaeologists!”

For the great Fancy Ball given by the Duchess of Devonshire in Devonshire House, the armour was lent by Irving. It furnished the men of a quadrille and was a very striking episode in a gorgeous scene.

In the preparation of the scenes we had at first some difficulty, for great scene-painters like to make their own designs. But Burne-Jones’ genius together with his great reputation — to both of which all artists bow — accompanied by Irving’s persuasions carried the day. When it was objected that the suggested scenes were impossible to work in accordance with stage limitations, Irving pointed out that there was in itself opportunity for the ability of the scene-painters’ skill and invention. Burne-Jones suggested the effect aimed at; with them rested the carrying it out. And surely neither Hawes Craven nor Joseph Harker could have ever had any emotions except those of pleasure when the round of applause nightly welcomed each scene as the curtain went up.

The cast was a fine one; Irving as King Arthur and Johnston Forbes-Robertson as Sir Lancelot, Ellen Terry as Guinevere, and Genevieve Ward as Morgan Le Fay. Some of the parts were not easy to play. One had a difficulty all its own. In the scene where Elaine is brought in on her bier she had to remain for a considerable time stone-still in full view of the audience. All that season Miss Lena Ashwell, who played the part, never once sneezed or yielded to any other temporary convulsion.

King Arthur was produced on January 12, and ran that season for one hundred and five performances. It was played twelve times in the provinces and seventy-four times in America. In all one hundred and ninety-one performances. It was one of those plays cut short in its prime. The scenery and appointments were burned in the stage fire of 1898.

IV

The subject of Don Quixote for a play was matter that Irving had for a long time held in mind.

In 1888, he had bought from W. G. Wills the entire rights of a play on the subject which he had suggested his writing. He was not, however, satisfied with it. Don Quixote is a great name and a picturesque figure to remember. He is also a great subject for a book, and Cervantes made him the hero and centre of many entertaining and amusing adventures. But he is not in reality a figure for prolonged stage use. He is too much in one note to make effective music. If any one ever succeeds in making a “ full “ play with him as hero the author will have to invent a story for it, or compile one out of the materials which Cervantes has in his immortal work bequeathed to mankind. The dramatic author or adapter can thus maintain the figure in its simplicity, keeping his personality always as a dens ex machina.

When he was satisfied that he could not do Wills' play in its entirety Irving got another enthusiast of the subject, Mr. J. I. C. Clarke of New York, to write a fresh play on the theme. Clarke made an admirable play, of which Irving bought the entire rights in 1894. There were some very fine points in this new play, especially in illustrating the gravity of the Don's high character and his deep understanding of a noble act. But the difficulty of the subject was again apparent; the character was too simple and too fixed for the necessary variety and development of character in a long, grave play. Clarke tried it a second time, but Irving could not even then see his way to it; and so he gave the author back his play to deal with it as he would. He has gone on improving it and doubtless some other player will join him in good fortune in a successful issue to his labours.

Recognising then the limitation of the subject, Irving, being determined to essay the character, made up a one-act play from Cervantes' book, keeping as far as possible to the lines of the first act of Wills' play. There were two scenes; the first showing Don Quixote in his own house with the madness of his chivalric belief upon him. A notable figure he looked as fully armed in rusty armour and with drawn sword in hand he sat reading a great folio of Amadis ofGaule. His own physique — tall and lean, his fine high-bred features heightened by the resources of art to an exaggerated aquiline, all helped to the efficacy of the illusion. In his old armour, his worn leather and threadbare velvet, he was indeed the Knight of La

Mancha.

When in the second scene he rode into the inn yard on his skeleton steed Rosinante the effect was heightened. The scene was beautifully lit. There was a fine, rich, soft light from the moon hung high in the semi-tropic sky. It softened everything to the possibilities of romance. One seemed to forget the unreality in the dim, quaint beauty. The very shadows seemed to be full of possibilities, and to hold a mystery of their own. No one who saw it can ever forget that spare, quaint figure marching up and down, lance on shoulder, watching his armour laid in front of the pump — a solemn, grim travesty of the vigil of a probationary knight.

V

In the preparation of Don Quixote there was an incident which was not without its humorous aspect — though not to some of those who had a part in it. When it was decided that Rosinante was to be a factor in the play, Irving told the Property Master, Arnott, to get a horse as thin and ragged-looking as he could.

“I think I know the very one, sir,” said Arnott. “ It belongs to a baker who comes down Exeter Street every day. I shall look out for him to-morrow and get him to bring the horse for you to see!”

In due course he saw the baker, and arranged that he should on the next day bring the horse. The morrow came; but neither the baker nor the horse. Inquiries having been made, it turned out that on the morning arranged, as the baker was leading the horse down Bow Street to bring it to the Lyceum, an officer of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals saw them, and being dissatisfied with the appearance of the animal, “ ran in “ both man and beast. The sitting magistrate went out to the police yard and made inspection for himself. When he came back to court where the prisoner was waiting in the dock, he said that the case was one of the worst within his experience and gave his decision: He fined the owner of the horse ten pounds; sent the man who had been arrested whilst in charge of it to prison for a week without option of a fine; and ordered the horse to be killed!

CHAPTER XXIII. ART AND HAZARD

“Madame Sans-Gine “ — Size, proportions and juxtaposition — Evolution of” business “—” Peter the Great”—” Robespierre “—” Dante “ — The hazard of management

I

WHEN Irving read the report of the production of Madame Sans-Gene in Paris, he bought the British rights; but it was not till April 1o, 1897, that the new play could be given. This was the Saturday before Holy Week; not in itself a good time, but it would get the play into swing for Easter.

The part of Napoleon in the play is not one that could appeal to any great actor on grounds of dramatic force. Its relative position in the play is not even one that appeals to that measure of self-value which is, to some degree, in all of us. True, it is the part of a great man and such is pleasurable histrionically — if there be an opportunity of excellence. An actor of character finds his own pleasure in the study and representation of strong individuality. Irving had always been interested in Napoleon. As long as I can remember he had always in his room a print and a bust of him — both beautiful. He had many books regarding him, all of which he had studied. He was always delighted to talk of him. I had long taken it for granted that he had an idea of some day playing the character; but I hardly took it seriously. The very light of history which makes the character known to the public also has made known his stature. No two men could be further apart in matter of physique and identity. Napoleon, short and stout, full-faced, aggressive, coarse. Irving, tall, thin, ascetic; with manners of exquisite gentleness; with a face of such high, thoughtful distinction that it stood out in any assemblage of clever men. I have been with Irving in many

Universities — Oxford, Cambridge, Dublin, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester, Harvard, Columbia, Princeton, Chicago. I have stood by him whilst he was the host of Princes, Ambassadors, Statesmen, Soldiers, Scholars. I think I have seen him under most conditions in which man may be compared with men; but I never found his appearance, bearing or manner other than the best. How then reconcile such opposites to such beguilement of his audience that the sense of personal incongruity should not mar the effect at which he aimed. It must be by some strange tour de force that this could be accomplished; and a special effort of the kind, though in its own way a dangerous experiment to a reputation already won, has a charm of its own. Man always wants to climb, even if the only charms of climbing be difficulty and danger. He saw at once that a chance to essay Napoleon was in Madame Sans-Gene. The play. was a comedy and Napoleon's part in it was a comedy position. Matters that work against one in serious drama can be made actually to further one's purpose in comedy.

When he began to think of the part he very often spoke of it with me and took me into his confidence as to his idea of doing it.

"You see," he said to me one time, " perspective is a matter of contrast and juxtaposition. You can enlarge the appearance of anything by placing something smaller beside it, or vice versa. Of course you must choose for the contrasted object something which to common knowledge is of at least or at most a standard size. It would not make a man look big to put him next a doll's house — such you expect to be small and the sense of comparison does not strike one. The comparison must, on the part of the spectator, be unconscious."

Thus it was that in the play Napoleon in his study, when the scene opened and he made his first appearance, sat behind a huge writing-table piled with books; he sat on an exceedingly low chair so that he seemed dwarfed. The room was a vast one with pillars and pilasters which carried the eye upward from the floor. The attendants, the soldiers on guard, the generals and statesmen who surrounded him were all big, fine men. The ladies who played the Princesses, his sisters, were of good stature, and Ellen Terry is a tall woman. He applied here to himself the lesson of juxtapositiOn which in Cymbeline he had used for Ellen Terry's service in the previous year. She, a tall, fine woman, had to represent a timid young girl. Matters had therefore to be so arranged that size should be made a comparative and not an absolute matter. To this end Imogen was surrounded by the tallest and biggest women obtainable. The Queen looked, and Helena was, tall, and such miscellaneous ladies as are possible in a royal entourage even in the semi-mythical days of early England were simply giantesses. Amid her surroundings her timidity seemed natural to one so sweet and tender and almost frail. The towering height and girth of the trees and the architecture and stone-work lent themselves to the illusion. All the men too were tall and of massive build, so that the illusions of size and helplessness were perfect.

Irving was now face to face with the same difficulty, but reversed; there was still the matter of his own proportions. Long before, when we had spoken of the difficulties ahead of him in representing the part, he had said:

"I shall keep the proportions of Napoleon. After all it is only dressing a big doll instead of a little one. They have given me a big doll, whereas Napoleon had a little one. No one need notice the difference, unless the dolls are put together!"

This idea he carried out absolutely. He had made for him " fleshings " of great proportions. When these were on he looked like a Daniel Lambert for the white had no relief in variety; but this was but the doll which he had to dress. When the breeches — which were made to proportion by the best tailor in London — were drawn on, the thighs stood out as in De La Roche's picture. When the green coat was on and buttoned high up, the shoulders, especially at the back, were so wide and tight as to make him look podgy. That dress was certainly supremely artful. It was so arranged that all the lines, either actual or suggested, were horizontal. The sloping of the front of the buttoned coat was from very high on the chest and the slope very generous. The waistcoat was short and the lower line of it wide and broadly marked. The concealment of real height was further effected by the red sash and many orders which were so artfully placed as to lead the eye in the wished-for direction. All that Irving required to satisfy the audience was the coup d' ail; in endeavouring to convince it does not do to start off with antagonism. So long as the first glance did not militate against him, he could depend on himself to realise their preconceived idea — which was of historical truth — by acting.

And when he did act how real it all was. The little short-stepped quick run in which he moved in his restless dominance was no part of general historic record; but it fitted into the whole personality in such a way that, having seen, one cannot dissociate them. The ruthless dominance; the quick blaze of passion which recalled to our memory the whirlwind rush at Lodi; the flamelike sweep over the bridge at Arcola; the conscious acting of a part to gain his end; the typical attack on Nipperg. All these were so vivid that through the mist of their swirling memory loomed the very identity of Napoleon himself.

Strange to ‘say the very excellence of Irving’s acting, as well as his magnitude in public esteem, injured the play qua play. To my mind it threw it in a measure out of perspective. The play is a comedy, and a comedy of a woman at that. Napoleon is in reality but an incidental character. It is true he and his time were chosen, because of his absolutism and his personal character; he is a glorified deus ex machina, whose word is law and is to be accepted as ruling life and death. So far Irving’s reputation and personality helped. He was on the mimic stage what Napoleon was on the real one. Still, after all Madame Sans-Gene is a comedy though the authors were a little clumsy in changing it into melodrama at the end; but when Irving was present comedy, except his comedy, had to cease. Of course in the part of the scene where he and Ellen Terry played together comedy was triumphant; but here the note of comedy was the note of the scene and nothing could be finer than the double play, each artist foiling the other, and all the time developing and explaining their respective characters. But after that Irving, as the part was written, was too big for the play. It was not in any way his fault. No modification of style or repression of action could have obviated the difficulty. It was primarily the fault of the dramatists in keeping the Emperor, who was incidental, on the stage too long.

The same reasoning applied to Cymbeline. Irving was too big for Iachino, and the better he played the worse the harm. Each little touch that helped to build up the individuality of the character helped — he being what he was in public esteem — to expand the sense of deliberate villainy. Iachino’s purpose was not to injure; he only used wrong-doing, however base, as a means to an end: the winning of his wager.

In Ellen Terry’s performance of Madame Sans-Gene came an incident which I have always thought to be typically illustrative of “ unconscious cerebration “ in art — that “ dual consciousness “ which we shall by-and-by consider. The actress had steeped herself in the character; when playing the part she thought as the laundress-duchess thought. She had already played it close on a hundred times. The occasion was the first performance of the piece at Sheffield, where the audiences were enormous and the people hearty. In the scene with the dancing-master, where she is ill at ease and troubled with her unaccustomed train—” tail “ she calls it — it is part of the “ business “ that this keeps falling or slipping from her arm. Once when she put it back its bulk seemed to attract unconsciously her troubled mind. Accordingly she began to wring it as she had been used to do with heavy articles in the days of her wash-tub. There was an instantaneous roar of applause. Half the women of the audience did their own washing and half the men knew the action; all throughout the house, both men and women, recognised the artistic perfection from which she utilised the impulse.

From that evening the action became an established usage.

II

In 1897 Laurence Irving completed his play on Peter the Great and his father purchased it from him. At that time he had in expectation a play by H. D. Traill and Robert Hichens, for which he had contracted on reading the scenario in July of that year. As, however, the latter play was riot ready when arrangements had to be made for opening the London season early in January 1898, young Irving’s play was put into preparation by his father before he went on the provincial tour. Naturally he wished to do all he possibly could for his son’s play, and in the production neither pains nor expense was spared.

On July 24, the night after the closing of the season, he read the play in the Beefsteak Room to Loveday and myself and Johnston Forbes-Robertson, whom he hoped would play the part of Alexis. The reading took three hours and twenty minutes, and was a remarkably fine piece of work. Forbes-Robertson, however, did not see his way to the part, which was ultimately given to Robert Taber, a fine actor, then young and strong, who had just come from America, where he had played leading business.

Great pains were spent in the archaeology of the play, so that when it was produced it was in its way a historical lesson. Irving cut off a whole week of his own work of the tour in order to come up to London to superintend the production personally. Miss Terry and the company played Madame Sans-Gene at Bradford and Wolverhampton — strange to say, the last two towns he played in eight years later.

The production was certainly a very interesting one. The place and time did not allow much opportunity for beauty, but all appeared so real as to enhance the natural power of the play. The part of Peter was a terribly trying one, even to a man of Irving’s “ steel and whipcord “ physique. I fancy it was a lesson to the dramatist — as yet not at his full skill — in saving the actor of his plays. On the seventh night the stage-manager, before the play began, asked for the consideration of the audience for Irving, who was suffering from a partial loss of voice. Laurence Irving was having a brief holiday in Paris, so we telegraphed him to return at once. On Monday night Henry Irving was unable to play and Laurence Irving took his place. It was really a wonderful effort — especially for so young a man — to play such a part on short notice. Fortunately, as author, he knew the words well; and as he had helped his father in the stage management he was familiar with the business. That night after the performance I went to see Irving and had the pleasure of telling him of his son's success.

Unfortunately the tone of the play did not suit the public taste. It was not the fault of the dramatist, but of the originals. History is history and has to be adhered to — in some measure at any rate; and the spectacle of a father hounding his son to death is one to make to shudder those whose instincts and sympathies are normal. The history of the time lent itself to horrors. On the first night in one scene where one of the conspirators who had been tortured — off the stage, but whose screams were heard — was brought in pale and bloody, the effect was too great for some of the audience, who rose quickly and left their seats. On the next night this part of the scene was taken out and other lesser horrors modified. Towards the end of the month it became necessary to prepare for a change of bill. On the last night of the piece the Prince and Princess of Wales were present as they wished to see the play again. The Prince had already seen it twice and had expressed his appreciation of it.

III

Robespierre was produced on April 15, 1899 — the date on which the Lyceum was reopened under the management of the Lyceum Company. Irving's reception after his dangerous illness was exceptionally warm, even for him.

The play had been in hand for some time. In May 1896, whilst in New York, Irving and I went to see Miss Elizabeth Murbury, the agent for America of the French Dramatic Authors' Society. The purpose of the interview was regarding the writing by Sardou of a play on the subject. Irving suggested as a scene that in Robespierre's lodgings. He had read somewhere of Robespierre shaving himself whilst listening to a matter of life and death for many people and all the time turning to spit. This was a grim streak of character which fastened on his imagination. The suggestion was well received by Sardou and the following year Irving entered into a contract whereby he was, after previous acceptance of the scenario, to receive the play before May 1898. On his part he undertook to produce the piece in London before June 1899. In due order the scenario was sent and approved, and the script of the play finally delivered and translated into English by Laurence Irving.

Robespierre was played in London one hundred and five times — of which ninety-three were the first season; in the provinces forty-three times; and in America one hundred and nine times. In all two hundred and fifty-seven times.

Charles Dickens used to say that it was a perpetual wonder to him how small the world was, Here is an instance of how the same may be said to-day:

When we were playing the piece in New England a gentleman wrote to Irving to thank him for preserving in the play the honourable character of his ancestor, Benjamin Vaughan, M.P., one of the dramatis persona who has an interview with Robespierre in the first act!

Robespierre was a terrific play to stage manage. There are in it no less than sixty-nine speaking parts. The rehearsals were endless, for there were required in the play a very large number of supers — more than a hundred. In the scene of the Convention, in which Robespierre is overthrown, much of the effect depends on the rush of the deputies across the floor of the house, and the series of fights for the tribune. It was a stormy scene, and was admirably done. Everywhere the piece was played it went with uncontrollable effect.

Irving's dressing of the part and that personal preparation which is known in the actor's craft as " make-up " afforded in themselves a lesson in stage art. In the first act, where he had to strike the true note of Robespierre's character, everything was done to create the proper effect, Here Robespierre was shown in his true light: A doctrinaire, a self-seeking politician; vain, arrogant, remorseless; something of a poet; a little of an artist; an intriguer without scruple. Irving showed in face and form, in bearing, in speech and even in inflection of the voice the true inwardness of the man. The clear-cut face with prominent chin; the pronounced stillness of bearing except for the restless eyes; the eager suspicion of one who is watched; the gaudy colour of his well-fitting clothes. All these things had their lessons for stranger eyes. He took no chance whatever that the idea of the man's dominant qualities should not be closely and deeply marked in the minds of the audience. But after that — although the man seemed to be the same — he was gradually and perpetually changing. And all the changes were, in addition to the acting and the spoken words, unconsciously conveyed in dress, bearing and facial appearance. When the fatherhood woke in him in Act III., it seemed natural enough, though it would have seemed out of place in the first or second acts. In Act IV., sympathy with the mother was added to intense and over-whelming anxiety for his son — and all seemed still consistent with the original conception of the character as shown. That is, there was no jarring note as things progressed. In fact he was subtly changing in the mind of the audience the original idea of the man's nature. And all the time the face was growing refined and more marked with human kindness, till in the last act he seemed to be a saintly man full of noble and generous feelings; a patriot and martyr. In the last act all the externals were changed: wig, “ make-up of face, clothing from top to toe. The harsh colour of his first-seen coat was softened to an ineffable blue, suggestive at once of distinction, refinement and delicacy. Altogether, though the personality seemed always consistent, it was a figure of harsh and ruthless scheming that walked in at one end of the play, but a noble martyr who was carried out at the other!

IV

Irving had long wished to act the part of Dante if he could get a good play on the subject. To this end he had made several efforts, including that in the direction of Tennyson. In July 1894, when Madame Sans-Gene was being played in London in French — by Rejane — after he had bought the English rights of the play Irving had a conversation regarding a play on the subject of Dante with Emile Moreau, joint author with Victorien Sardou of the French comedy. The issue of the meeting was that Sardou and Moreau were to write a play and submit it to Irving. It was not, however, till some seven years later that the idea began to materialise. There was a good deal of correspondence spread over the time, but after an interview at the end of May 1901 in London with Miss Marbury, who had just returned from paying a prolonged visit to Sardou, the matter rose over the horizon of practicability. It was agreed that Sardou was to submit a scenario before the end of that year. Irving felt justified after the success of Robespierre to venture on another play by the same author. The scenario was sent to him in due course, and he studied it very carefully in such pauses as were in the American tour of that autumn. When we were in Chicago in December he told me that he had practically given up hope of doing Dante as he could not see his way to accepting the scenario. By his wishes I drafted a letter for him to that effect. I considered that the matter had there ended and did not have an opportunity of reading the ‘ scenario which was returned.

Much to my surprise, in the following spring Irving told me that he had decided to do the play and asked me to draw out a contract on the lines of that of Robespierre. I asked him why he had changed his mind and reminded him that from what he had told me of the original scenario, we had agreed that it was not likely to make for success. He did not, however, wish to talk about it then — he could be very secretive when he wished — but said he had sent word to Sardou that he would go on with the idea of the play. I knew it would upset him to argue about anything to which he was pledged; I said no more.

MM. Sardou and Moreau delivered the completed play in August, and forthwith Irving began to use his great imagination on its production, his son Laurence having taken the translation in hand.

The production was on a gigantic scale; the arrangements for it having been made in Paris, but not through me. The labour of preparation and rehearsal was endless, the expense enormous. The curtain went up on the night of production to an incurred expense of nearly thirteen thousand pounds.

On Monday, January 12, 1903, Irving read Dante to the actors and actresses of his company at his office in Bedford Street — the great room occupied for so many years by the Green Room Club. My contemporary note runs:

“Read it wonderfully well. Adumbrated every character!”

To me this was in one way the most interesting of all his readings to the company of a new play. Hitherto I had not read the play or even the scenario, and I am bound to say that as it went on my heart sank. The play was not a good one. It had too many characters and covered too wide a range. Indeed had it not been for Irving's wonderful reading I should not have been able to follow the plot. When I saw the play on the first night acted by a lot of people and lacking the concentration of the whole thing passing through one skilled mind I found a real difficulty of comprehension. Strange to say this very difficulty in one way helped the play with the less cultured part of the audience. As they could not quite understand it all they took it for granted that there was some terribly subtle meaning in everything. Omne ignotum pro magnifico.

The play was produced at Drury Lane Theatre on April 3o, 1903 — the last day, by the way, allowable for production in London by the contract with Sardou and Moreau. On that night it was received with great enthusiasm. There was an immense audience, and managerial hopes ran high. Irving was certainly superb. He did not merely look like Dante — he was Dante; it was like a veritable re-incarnation. Naturally his features had a great resemblance to the great poet. The high-bred " eagle " profile; the ascetic gauntness; the deep earnest resonant voice; the general bearing of lofty gloom of the exile — these things one and all completed a representation which can never be forgotten by any one who saw it.

The play ran during the whole season at Drury Lane, eighty-two performances. On the provincial tour the following autumn it was given twenty-one times in only three towns. Then succeeded the American tour on which it was played thirty-four times. A total of one hundred and thirty-seven performances.

When we opened in New York the civic elections, which that term were conducted with even more than usual vigour, were on. As the receipts were not up to our normal we thought that the political " colieshangie " was the sole cause; we found out the difference when the repertoire bill was put up the third week. The experience was repeated in Philadelphia, Boston, Springfield, Hartford, New Haven, Brooklyn, and Washington. The last performance in America was given at the Federal capital to a great house — the largest the piece was played to in America.

Perforce we had to accept the verdict: the public did not care for the play. Accordingly we stored it in Washington and for the rest of the tour gave the repertoire plays. When the tour was over we paid the expenses of sending the scenery into Canada where we gave it away. This was cheaper than paying the duty into the United States, which we should have had to do had we left it behind us.

Altogether Dante as a venture was a fearful hazard. Before it was done I remonstrated with Irving about the production, he being then not really able to afford such an immense loss as was possible. As Chancellor of the Exchequer to his Absolute Monarchy I had to be content with his reply:

"My dear fellow, a play like this beats Monte Carlo as a hazard. Whatever one may do about losing, you certainly can't win unless you play high!"

CHAPTER XXIV. VANDENHOFF

OLD Vandenhoff played his farewell engagement in Edinburgh, at the Queen's Theatre, in 1858. In the Merchant of Venice, Irving played Bassano to his Shylock; this was on Tuesday, February 16. In Act I., scene 3, where Shylock and Bassano enter, an odd thing occurred. I give it in Irving's words as he told me of it:

"Vandenhoff began: ' Three thousand ' — there was a sort of odd click of something falling and the speech dried up. I looked up at him and saw his mouth moving, but there was no sound. At the moment my eye caught the glitter of something golden on the stage. I stooped to pick it up, and as I did so saw that it was a whole set of false teeth. This I handed to Shylock, keeping my body between him and the audience so that no one might see the transaction. He turned away for an instant, putting both hands up to his face. As he turned back to the audience his words came out quite strong and clearly: ' Three thousand ducats — well! '"

CHAPTER XXV. CHARLES MATHEWS

In Early Days — A Touch of character — Mathews' appreciation — Henry Russell — The Wolf and the Lamb

IRVING had always a deep regard for Charles Mathews. Not only did he look upon him as a consummate dramatic actor — which was always in itself a sure road to his heart, but he had lively recollections of his kindness to him. The first was in his youth on the stage in Edinburgh when he played the boy in one of the plays of his repertoire. Irving had invented for himself a little piece of business; when the lad was placed in the militant position in the play he took out his handkerchief to mop his brow. As he pulled it out there came with it an orange which rolled along the stage and which he hastily followed and recovered. Charles Mathews seemed pleased. His kindly recognition was, however, opposed a little later by another actor who played the same part as Mathews. This gentleman strongly obj ected to what he delicately called the " tomfoolery " which he said interfered with the gravity of his own acting. When Mathews again visited Edinburgh, Irving omitted the incident, fearing it might be out of place. But at the end of the act Mathews sent for him to his dressing-room and in a very kind manner called his attention to a piece of business of which he had made use on the last occasion, and there and then recapitulating the incident asked why he had omitted it. Irving explained that he had been held to task for it by the other actor. To his great delight Mathews spoke quite crossly of the other actor. Said he:

"He had no right to find fault! He must have been an ignorant fellow not to see that it helped his own part. The humour of the situation in the play hangs on the contrast between the boy's bellicose attitude towards the elder man whom he considers his rival, and his own extreme youth-fulness. That very incident is all that is wanted to make the action complete; and since I saw you do it I have asked every other who plays the part to bring it in. I should have asked you, only that I took it of course for granted that you would repeat it. Never let any one shake you out of such an admirable piece of by-play!"

The other occasion was when he had played Doricourt at his first appearance at the St. James's Theatre in 1866. One of the first congratulations he got was from Charles Mathews, who not only sent him by hand a letter in the morning but followed it up with a visit later in the day.

Mrs. Charles Mathews was, till the day of her death, a very dear friend of Irving; and the tradition of affection was kept up till Irving's own death by the son, C. W. Mathews, the eminent barrister.

For my own part I first knew Charles Mathews in 1873, when I had the pleasure of being introduced. From that time on I met him occasionally and was always fascinated with his delightful personality. Years afterwards I was not surprised to hear an instance of its effect from the late Henry Russell, the author of the song " Cheer boys, cheer," and a host of other dramatic and popular songs. It was after supper one night in the Beefsteak Room. Russell told his story thus:

"I was at that time tenant of the Lyceum, and had let it for a short season to Charles Mathews. He did not pay my rent and, as I suppose you know, the freeholder, Arnold, was not one to let me off my rent on that account. The debt ran on till it grew to be quite a big one. I wrote to Mathews, but I never could get any settlement. He was always most suave and cheery; but no cash! At last I made up my mind that I would have that money; and finding that letters were of no avail, I called on him one forenoon. He was having his breakfast and asked me to join him in a cup of chocolate. I said no! that I had come on business — and pretty stern business at that; and that I would not mix it up with pleasure. I had come for cash — cash! cash! He was very pleasant, quite undisturbed by my tirade; so that presently I got a little ashamed of myself and sat down. I stayed with him areliour."

"And did you get yelp-money? " asked Irving quietly. Russell smiled:

"Get my money! I came away leaving him a cheque for three hundred pounds which he had borrowed from me; and I never asked him for rent again! " Then after a pause he added:

"He was certainly a great artist; and a most delightful fellow!"

CHAPTER XXVI. CHARLES DICKENS AND HENRY IRVING

IRVING often spoke with pride of the fact that Charles Dickens had thought well of his acting, when he had seen him play at the St. James's Theatre in 1866 and the Queen's Theatre in 1868. Unhappily the two men never met, for Dickens died in 187o. In later years he had the pleasure of the friendship of several of Dickens' children, and of his sister-in-law, Miss Georgina Hogarth, to whom he was so much attached. Charles Dickens the younger was an intimate friend and was often in the Beefsteak Room and elsewhere when Irving entertained his friends; Kate Dickens, the present Mrs. Perugini, was also a friend. But the youngest son, Henry Fielding Dickens, was the closest friend of all. Both he and his wife and their large family — who were all children, such of them as were then born, when I knew them first — were devoted to Irving. In all the years of his management no suitable gathering at the Lyceum was complete without them. Whenever Irving would leave London for any long spell some of them were sure to be on the platform to see him off; when he returned their welcome was amongst the first to greet him. Indeed he held close in his heart that whole united group, Harry Dickens and his sweet family and the dear old lady whom happily they are still able to cherish and as of old call " Aunty."

Lately I asked Henry Dickens if he remembered the occasion of his father speaking of Irving. The occasion of my asking was a gathering at which he had many social duties to fulfil, so that there was no opportunity of explaining fully. But next day he wrote me the following letter:

“2 Egerton Place, S.W.
“May 29, 1906.

“MY DEAR BRAM

“I do not remember the exact year in which Hunted Down was played at the St. James’s.

“It must have been somewhere about 1866. But I have a vivid recollection of the fact owing to the impression which Irving’s performance made upon my father.

“He was greatly struck by it. It seemed to appeal at once to his artistic and dramatic sense.

“Mark my words: that man will be a great actor.’

“I should not like to pledge myself to the exact words, but that is the substance of what he said after the performance.

“He also saw Irving in The Lancashire Lass, when he had been much impressed by his acting though not to the same extent.

“I do not suppose any man was more competent to give an opinion than my father.

“He was himself, as you know, a great actor. The fever of the footlights was always with him.

“He had a large number of friends in the dramatic profession, amongst them Macready and Pechter, the two greatest actors of his time.

“What a pity he did not live long enough to add Irving’s name to that brilliant list!

“Irving was certainly one of the most striking personalities I ever met, besides being, beyond all question, the most loyal and delightful of friends as I and those who are dear to me have good reason to know.

“We shall always hold his name in loving remembrance.

“Yours very sincerely, “HENRY F. DICKENS.”

CHAPTER XXVII. MR. J. M. LEVY

AMONGST many loving, true friends Irving had none more loving or more helpful than the late J. M. Levy, the owner and editor of the Daily Telegraph. From the first he was a warm and consistent friend, and his great paper, which in the early days of Irving's success was devoting to the drama care and space unwonted in those days, did much — very much — to familiarise the public with his work and to spread his fame. As a personal friend his hospitality was unsurpassed. His house was always open, and nothing pleased him better than when Irving would drop in unasked. Up to the time of Mr. Levy's death there were many delightful evenings spent with him. These were always on Sundays, for during working days we of the theatre had no opportunity for such pleasures. But even after his death the same hospitality was extended by his children. Some are gone, but those who happily remain, Lord Burnham, Miss Matilda Levy, Lady Faudel-Phillips, Lady Campbell Clarke, were friends up to the hour of his death; and with them all his memory is and shall be green. Lord Burnham truly held as a part of his great inheritance this friendship; and he always extended to the actor the helpfulness which had been his father's. In a thousand delicate ways he always tried to show his love and friendship. Whenever, for instance, he had the honour of entertaining at his beautiful place, Hall Barn, Edward VII., either as Prince of Wales or King, he always included Irving in his house-party.

Such a friendship is a powerful help to any artist — and to like and cherish artists is a tradition in that family.

CHAPTER XXVIII. VISITS TO AMERICA

Farewell at the Lyceum — Welcome in New York, 1883 — A Journalistic "scoop" — Farewell

I

IRVING'S first visit to America, in 1883, was a matter of considerable importance, not only to him, but to all of his craft and to all by whom he was held in regard. At that time the body of British people did not know much about America, and perhaps — strange as it may seem — did not care a great deal. Irving had played nearly five years continuously at the Lyceum, and his theatre had grown to be looked upon as an established in stitution. The great clientHe which had gathered round it, now numbering many thousands, looked on the venture with at least as much concern as he did himself. Thus the last night of the season, July 28, 1883, was a remarkable occasion. The house was jammed to suffocation and seemingly not one present but was a friend. When the curtain fell at the end of The Belle's Stratagem, there began a series of calls which seemed as though it would never end. Hand-clapping and stamping of feet seemed lost in the roar, for all over the house the audience were shouting- shouting with that detonating effect which is only to be found from a multitude animated with a common feeling. The sight and sound were moving. Wherever one looked were tears; and not from women or the young alone.

At the last, after a pause a little longer than usual — from which the audience evidently took it that the dramatic moment had arrived came a marvellous silence. The curtain went up, showing on the stage the entire personnel of the company and staff.

Then that audience simply went crazy. All the cheers that had been for the play seemed merely a preparation for those of the parting. The air wherever one looked was a mass of waving hands and handkerchiefs, through which came wave after wave of that wild, heart-stirring detonating sound. All were overcome, before and behind the floats alike. When the curtain fell, it did so on two thousand people swept with emotion.

II

Something of the same kind was enacted across the Atlantic. When on the evening of Monday, October 29, the curtain rose on the first scene of The Bells, there was the hush of expectation, prolonged till the moment when the door of the inn parlour was thrown open and Irving seemed swept in by the rushing snowstorm. The tempest of cheers seemed just as though the prolongation of that last moment in London; and for six or seven minutes — an incredibly long time for such a matter on the stage — the cheering went on.

III

For my own part, I had a curious experience of that reception. Mr. Levy had asked me to send a cable to the Daily Telegraph describing Irving's reception. He knew, and I knew too, that it was a close shave for such a message to reach London in time for press. For in those days printing had not reached the extreme excellence of to-day, and the multiplication of stereos in the present form had not been accomplished. The difference of longitude seemed almost an insuperable difficulty. As I had to wait till Irving had actually appeared, I arranged with the manager of the Direct United States

Cable Company to keep the wire for me. He was himself anxious to make a record, and had all in readiness. I had a man on a fleet horse waiting at the door of the theatre, and when Irving's welcome had begun, I ran out filling up the last words of my cable at the door. The horseman went off at once ventre d terre.

But my cable did not arrive in time. Another did, however, that sent to the Daily News by its correspondent, J. B. Bishop. I could not imagine how it was done, for the account cabled was a true one, manifestly written after the event.

Years afterwards, one night at supper with two men, J. B. Bishop and George Ward, then manager of the newly established Mackey — Bennett cable, it was explained to me. They had come to know that I was cabling and in order not to be outdone Ward had had a wire brought all the way up from the Battery, and actually over the roof of the theatre and in by a side window.

Whilst my man was galloping to Lower Broadway, Bishop was quietly wording the despatch which his friend was telegraphing to his local office as he wrote!

IV

The welcome which Irving received on that night of October 29, 1883, lasted for more than twenty years — until that night of March 25, 1904, when at the Harlem Opera House he said " Goodbye " to his American friends — for ever! Go where he would, from Maine to Louisiana, from the Eastern to the Western Sea, there was always the same story of loving greeting; of appreciative and encouraging understanding; of heartfelt au revoirs, in which gratitude had no little part. As Americans of the United States have no princes of their own, they make princes of whom they love. And after eight long winters spent with Henry Irving amongst them, I can say that no more golden hospitality or affectionate belief, no greater understanding of purpose or enthusiasm regarding personality or work has ever been the lot of any artist — any visitor — in any nation. Irving was only putting into fervent words the feeling of his own true heart, when in his parting he said:

"I go with only one feeling on my lips and one thought in my heart — God bless America!"

CHAPTER XXIX. WILLIAM WINTER

AMONGST the many journalists who were Irving's friends, none was closer than William Winter, the dramatic critic of the New York Tribune, whose work is known all over America. Winter is not only a critic, but a writer of books of especial charm and excellence, and a poet of high order. One of his little poems which he spoke at a dinner of welcome to Irving on his first arrival at New York in 1883 is so delightful that I venture to give it — especially as it had a prophetic instinct as to the love and welcome which for more than twenty years was extended to the actor throughout the whole of the United States. He and Irving had been already friends for some time, and always saw a good deal of each other during Winter's visits to London. The occasion was the dinner given by Colonel E. A. Buck, to attend which many of the friends present came from Cleveland, Buffalo, West Point, Louisville, Chicago — distances varying from fifty to a thousand miles.

HENRY IRVING.

A WORD OF WELCOME.

November 18, 1883.

I

If we could win from Shakespeare's river
The music of its murmuring flow,
With all the wild-bird notes that quiver
Where Avon's scarlet meadows glow,
If we could twine with joy at meeting
Their love who lately grieved to part,
Ah, then, indeed, our word of greeting
Might find an echo in his heart!

II

But though we cannot, in our singing,
That music and that love combine,
At least we'll set our blue-bells ringing,
And he shall hear our whispering pine;
And these shall breathe a welcome royal,
In accents tender, sweet, and kind,
From lips as fond and hearts as loyal
As any that he left behind!

WILLIAM WINTER.

CHAPTER XXX. PERFORMANCE AT WEST POINT

A National consent — Difficulties of travel — An Audience of steel — A startling finale — Capture of West Point by the British

THE United States Military Academy at West Point on the Hudson River had from the time of his first visit to America a great charm for Irving. One of the first private friends he met on arriving at New York was Colonel Peter Michie, Professor of Applied Mathematics at the College. During the war he had been General Grant's chief officer of Engineers. Another friend made at the same time was Colonel Bass, Professor of Mathematics. With these two charming gentlemen we had become close friends. When Irving visited West Point he told Michie that he would like to play to the cadets if it could be arranged. The matter came within hail in 1888, when he repeated the wish to Colonel Michie. The latter, as in duty bound, had the offer conveyed, through the Commandant, to the Secretary for War at Washington. To the intense astonishment of every one the War Secretary not only acquiesced at once but conveyed his appreciation of Irving's offer in most handsome and generous terms. The effect at West Point was startling. The authorities there had taken it for granted that such an exception to the iron rule of discipline which governs the Military and Naval Academies of the United States would not be permitted. The professors had a feeling that the closing his theatre in New York for a night was too great a sacrifice to make. I was made aware of this feeling by an early visit from Colonel Michie on the morning after the sanction of the War Secretary had been given. At half-past seven o'clock he came into my room at the Brunswick Hotel and was almost in a state of consternation as to what he should do. He was vastly relieved when I told him that Irving's offer had, of course, been made in earnest and that nothing would please him so much. And so it was arranged that on the evening of Monday, March 19, Irving and Ellen Terry and the whole of the company should play The Merchant ofVenice in the Grant Hall, the cadets' mess-room.

In the meantime an obstacle arose which covered us all with concern. On the night of Sunday, March II, the eastern seaboard was visited by the worst blizzard on record. Between one and eight in the morning some four feet deep of snow fell, and as the wind was blowing a hundred miles an hour, as recorded by the anemometer, it was piled in places in gigantic drifts. For some days New York and all around it was paralysed. The railways were blocked, the telegraph cut off. Even the cables had suffered. We were getting our news from Philadelphia via London — and even these had to come via Canada. West Point is sixty miles from New York and the two railways — the New York Central on the left hand and the West Shore line on the right — the West Point side — were simply obliterated with snowdrifts. The managers of these two lines and that of the New York, Ontario, and Western line — it having running powers over the West Shore — had most kindly arranged to place a special train at Irving's disposal for the West Point visit. Towards the end of the week the outlook of the journey, which had at first seemed unfavourable, grew a little brighter; it might be possible. Possible it was, for by superhuman exertions the line was cleared in time for our journey of March 19. Our train opened the line.

Of course it was not possible to use scenery in the space available for the performance; so it was arranged that the play should be given as in Shakespeare's time. To this end notices were fastened to the curtains at the proscenium: " Venice: A Public Place "; " Belmont:

Portia’s House “,; “ Shylock’s House by a Bridge,” &c. As it happens, the Venetian dress of the sixteenth century was almost the same as the British; so that the costumes now used in the piece were alike to those worn by the audience as well as on the stage at the Globe Theatre in Shakespeare’s time. Thus the cadets of West Point saw the play almost identically as Shakespeare had himself seen it.

I think that we all in that hall felt proud when we saw over the proscenium of the little stage the flags of Britain and America draped together and united by a branch of palm. It thrilled us to our heart’s core merely to see.

It was a wonderful audience. I suppose there never was another on all fours with it. I forget how many hundreds of cadets there are — I think four or five, and they were all there. As they sat in their benches they looked, at the first glance, like a solid mass of steel. Their uniforms of blue and grey with brass buttons; their bright young faces, clean-shaven; their flashing eyes — all lent force to the idea. As I looked at them I remembered with a thrill an anecdote that John Russell Young had told me after dinner the very night before. He had been with General Grant on his journey round the world and had heard the remark. At Gibraltar Grant had reviewed our troops with Lord Napier. When he saw them sweep by at the double he had turned to the great British General and said: “ Those men have the swing of conquest! “ The attention and understanding of the audience could not be surpassed. Many of these young men had never seen a play; and they were one and all chosen from every State in the Union, each one having been already trained or being on the way to it to command an army in the field. There was not a line of the play, not a point which did not pass for its full value. This alone seemed to inspire the actors, down to the least important. At the end of each act came the ringing cheers which are so inspiring to all.

When the curtain finally fell there was a pause. And then with one impulse every one of those hundreds of young men with a thunderous cheer threw up his cap; for an instant the air was darkened with them. There was a significance in this which the ordinary layman may not understand. By the American Articles of War — which govern the Military Academy — for a cadet to throw up his cap, except at the word of command given by his superior officer, is an act of insubordination punishable with expulsion. These splendid young fellows — every one of whom justified himself later on the deadly heights of Santiago or amid the jungles of the Philippines — had to find some suitable means of expressing their feelings; and they did it in a way that they and their comrades understood. Strange to say, not one of the superior officers happened to notice the fearful breach of discipline. They themselves were too much engaged in something else — possibly throwing up their own caps; for they were all old West Point men.

Right sure I am that no one who had the privilege of being present on that night can ever forget it — men, women, or children; for behind the corps of cadets sat the officers with their wives and families.

When Irving came to make the little speech inevitable on such an occasion he said at the close:

“I cannot restrain a little patriotic pride now, and I will confess it. I believe the joy-bells are ringing in London to-night, because for the first time the British have captured West Point!”

He spoke later of that wonderful audience in terms of enthusiasm, and Ellen Terry was simply in a transport of delight. For my own part, though I have been in the theatre each of the thousand times

Irving and Ellen Terry played The Merchant of Venice, I never knew it to go so well.

Beyond this delightful experience, which must long be a tradition in West Point, the Academy has another source of perpetual memory. In the officers’ mess hangs a picture presented by Henry Irving which they hold beyond price. It is a picture of the great Napoleon done from life by Captain Marryat when he was a midshipman on the British warship Bellerophon which carried the Conquered Conqueror to his prison in St. Helena.

CHAPTER XXXI. AMERICAN REPORTERS

High testimony — Irving' s care in speaking—" Not for publication " — A diatribe — Moribundity

I

I CAN bear the highest testimony to the bona fides of American reporters, though they do not, either individually or collectively, want any commendation from me. I have had, in the twenty years covered by our tours in America, many hundreds of " interviews " with reporters, and I never once found one that " went back " on me. I could always speak quite openly to them individually on a subject which we wished for the present to keep dark, simply telling him or them that the matter was not for present publication. Any one who knows the inner working of a newspaper, and of the keenness which exists in the competition for the acquisition of news, will know how much was implied by the silence — the scorn and contempt that would now and then be hurled at those who " couldn't get a story." I have no doubt that sometimes the engagement on the paper was imperilled, or even cancelled. Of course I always tried to let them get something. It was quite impossible at times that Irving should give interviews. Such take time, and time was not always available in the midst of strenuous work; sickness and weariness are bars to intellectual undertakings; and now and again the high policy of one's business demands silence. In Irving's case his utterances had to be carefully considered. He was one of the very few men who were always reported verbatim. With ordinary individuals there is habitual compression and " editing " which, though it may occasionally suppress some fact or step in an argument, is protective against many errors. It is an old journalistic saying that " Parliamentary reputations are made in the Gallery! " This is almost exact; were it qualified so as to admit of exceptions it would be quite exact. In ordinary speeches, or in any form of ex tempore and unpremeditated utterance, there are evidences of change-ment during the process of thought — uncompleted sentences, confused metaphors, words ill chosen or slightly misapplied. In addition, as in almost every case Irving spoke or was interviewed on professional subjects or matters closely allied to his own work or ideas, there was always a possibility of creating a wrong impression somewhere. Also, he stood so high amongst his own craft that an omission would now and again be treated as an affront. I have known him to receive, after some speech or interview or recorded conversation where he had given a few names of actors as illustrating some part, a dozen letters asking if there was any reason why the writer's name was omitted in that connection. Irving was always most loyal to all those of his own calling and considerate of their needs and wishes. And so in all matters where he was by common consent or by general repute vested with the respon- sibilities of judgment he tried to hold the scales of justice balanced. In order, therefore, to see that his real views were properly set out — and incidentally for self-protection — he always took precautions with regard to speeches and interviews. The former, he always wrote out. On occasions where he had to speak quasi-impromptu — such as on the stage after the performance on first or last nights; any time when mere pleasant commonplaces were insufficient — he learned the speech by heart. When he could have anything before him, such as at dinners, he would have ready his speech carefully corrected, printed in very large type on small pages printed on one side only and not fastened together — so that they could be moved easily and separately. This he would place before him on the table. He would not seem to read it, and of course he would be familiar with the general idea. But he read it all the same; with a glance he would take in a whole sentence of the big type and would use his acting power not only in its delivery but in the disguising of his effort. If there were not time to get the speech printed he would write it out himself in a big hand with thick strokes of a soft pen. With regard to interviews he always required that the proof should be submitted to him and that his changes, either by excisions or additions, should be respected. He would sign the proof if such were thought desirable. I never knew a case where the interviewer or the newspaper did not loyally hold to the undertaking. I am anxious to put this on record; for I have often heard and read diatribes by the inexperienced against not only the system of interviewing but the interviewers. Let me give an instance of the chagrin which must be felt by men, skilled in the work and with responsibilities to their newspapers, who are baffled in their undertakings by reasons which they do not understand or agree with.

In the winter of 1886 I went across to arrange a tour of Faust for the coming year. We especially wished the matter kept dark, for we had alternative plans in view. Therefore I went quietly and without telling any one. When I landed in New York my coming was some way known — I suppose I had been missed at the Lyceum and some one had guessed the purpose of my absence and had cabled, and I was met by a whole cloud of interviewers, nearly all of whom I had known for some years. When we were all together in my hotel I told them frankly that I would talk to them about anything they wished except the purpose of my visit. This being their purpose, they were naturally not satisfied. I saw this and said:

“Now, look here, boys, you know I have always tried to help you in your work in any way I was free to do. I want for a few days to keep my present purpose secret. When what I want to do is through, I shall tell you all about it. It will be only a few days at most. Won’t you trust me about the wisdom of this? All I want is silence for a while; and if you will tell me that you will say nothing till I let you go ahead, I shall tell you everything — right here and now!”

One of them said at once:

“No! Don’t tell us yet. If you are silent the difficulty will be only between you and us. But if you tell us we shall each have to fight his own crowd for not telling them what we know! “ The general silence vouched this as accepted by all. We sat still for perhaps a minute, no one wishing to begin. Before us was the whisky of hospitality. At last one of my guests said:

“By the way, how do you like American as compared with Irish whisky? — of course, not for publication!”

There was a roar of laughter. I felt that my reticence was forgiven, and we had a pleasant chat through a delightful half-hour. Out of that they made a “ story “ of some kind to suit their mission.

II

In a few instances the reporter who writes from his own side without consultation has said funny things. Two cases I remember. The first was when more than twenty years ago we made a night journey from Chicago to Detroit. When we boarded our special train I found one strange young man with a gripsack who said he was coming with us. To this I demurred, telling him that we never took any stranger with us and explaining that, as all our company was divided into little family groups they would not feel so comfortable with a stranger as when, as usual, they were among friends and comrades only. He said he was a reporter, and that he was going to write a story about the incidents of the night. I did not know what kind of incidents he expected! However, I was firm and would not let him come.

When we arrived in Detroit in the morning a messenger came on board with a large letter directed to me. It contained a copy of a local paper in which was marked an article on how the Irving company travelled — a long article of over a column. It described various matters, and even made mention of the appearance en deshabille of some members of the company. At the end was appended a note in small type to say that the paper could not vouch for the accuracy of the report as their representative had not been allowed to travel on the train. I give the whole matter from memory; but the way in which the writer dealt with myself was most amusing. It took up, perhaps, the first quarter of the article. It spoke of " an individual who called himself Bram Stoker." He was thus described:

.. who seems to occupy some anomalous position between secretary and valet. Whose manifest duties are to see that there is mustard in the sandwiches and to take the dogs out for a run; and who unites in his own person every vulgarity of the English-speaking race."

I forgave him on the spot for the whole thing on account of the last sub-sentence.

The second instance was as follows:

When on our Western tour in 1899-1900 we visited Kansas City for three nights, playing in the Opera House afterwards destroyed by fire. At that time limelight for purposes of stage effect had been largely superseded by electric light, which was beginning to be properly harnessed for the purpose. It was much easier to work with and cheaper, as every theatre had its own plant. Irving, however, preferred the limelight or calcium light, which gives softer and more varied effects, and as it was not possible to get the necessary gas-tanks in many places we took with us a whole railway waggon-load of them. These would be brought to the theatre with the other paraphernalia of our work. As we had so much stuff that it was not always possible to find room for it, we had to leave some of the less perishable goods on the sidewalk. This was easy in Kansas City, as the theatre occupied a block and its sidewalks were wide and not much used except on the main street. Accordingly the bulk of our gas-tanks were piled up outside. The scarlet colour of the oxygen tanks evidently arrested the attention of a local reporter and gave him ideas. On the morning after the first performance his paper came out with a sensational article to the effect that at last the treasured secret was out: Henry Irving was in reality a dying man, and was only kept alive by using great quantities of oxygen, of which a waggon-load of tanks had to be carried for the purpose. The reporter went on to explain how, in order to investigate the matter properly, he had managed to get into the theatre as a stage hand and had seen the tanks scattered about the stage.

Further, he went on to tell how difficult it was to get near Irving’s dressing-room as rude servants ordered away any one seen standing close to the door. But he was not to be baffled. He had seen at the end of the act Irving hurry into his room to be reinvigorated. He added, with an inconceivable naivete, that precautions were taken to prevent the escape of the life-giving oxygen — for even Me keyhole was slopped up.

CHAPTER XXXII. TOURS-DE-FORCE

A " Hamlet"Reading — A vast "Bill"

I

PERHAPS the greatest tour-de-force of Irving's life was made on the night of February 23, 1887, when at the Birkbeck Hall he read the play of Hamlet before a large audience for the benefit of the Institute. He had, of course, cut the play, just as he did for acting; indeed his cutting for the reading was a further slight curtailment, as on such an occasion there has to be a limit of time. But the cutting is in itself at once a tribute to his immense knowledge of the play and a lesson to students.

He read the play in two sections, with an interval of perhaps ten minutes between. The sustained effort must have been a frightful strain; for in such an undertaking there is not an instant's pause. Character follows character, each necessitating an instant change of personality; of voice; of method of speech and bearing and action. Irving was a great believer in the value of time in acting. He used to say that on certain occasions the time in which things were taken increased or marred the attention, emotion and eagerness of the audience. A play like Hamlet has as many and as varying times as an opera; thus the first knowledge and intention of the reader must have been complete. Strong as he was, it was a wonder how he got through that evening. When I went round to him at the end of the first part I found him sitting down and almost gasping. He had a wonderful recuperative power, however, and like a good fighter he was up at the call of " time." With unimpaired vitality, strength and passion he went on with his work right to the very end. For my own part I have never had so illuminative an experience of Hamlet. Irving’s own performance of the title role I had of course seen, and with even greater effect than then; for dress and picturesque surroundings, in addition to the significance of movement and action, can intensify speech even when aided by the expression conveyed by face and hands. But the play as a whole came into riper prominence. Imagine the play with every part in it done by a great actor! It was never to be forgotten. The passionate scenes were triumphant. Knowing that he had the whole thing in his own hands and that he had not to trust to others, howsoever good they might be, he could give the reins to passion. The effect was enthralling. We of the audience sat spell-bound, hardly able to breathe.

When he ceased, almost fainting with the prolonged effort and excess of emotion, the pent-up enthusiasm burst forth like a storm.

In his dressing-room he had to sit for a while to recover himself — a rare thing indeed for him in those days. The note in my diary of that night has the following:

“Immense enthusiasm — remarkable — magnificent-every character given in masterly manner — consider it greatest tour-de-force of his life — even he exhausted!”

II

Eight years before, on July 25, 1879, the night of his “ Benefit,” as it was called after the old-time custom, he had given another wonderful example of his power. On that occasion he had taken the great and strenuous act out of each of five plays and finished up with a comedy character. The bill was:

RichardIII.. Act I.
Richelieu Act IV.
Charles I. . Act IV.
Louis XI. . Act III.
Hamlet Act III. (to end of Play Scene).
Raising the Wind.

The strain of such a bill was very great. Not only the playing and the changing to so many complete identities each in moments of wild passion, but even the dressing and preparation for each part. Throughout the whole of that evening there was not a single minute — or a portion of a minute — to spare. Such a strain of mind and body and psychic faculties all at once and so prolonged does not come into the working life of any other art or calling. Small wonder is it if the wear and tear of life to great actors is exceptionally great.

But Irving up to his sixtieth year was compact of steel and whipcord. His energy and nervous power were such as only came from a great brain; and the muscular force of that lean, lithe body must have been extraordinary. The standard of animal mechanics is " foot-pounds " — the force and heart effort necessary to raise a pound weight a foot high.. An actor playing a heavy part judged by this rule does about as much work in an evening as a hod-man carrying bricks up a ladder. For more than forty years this man did such work almost every night of his life; with the added strain and stress of high emotion — no negligible quantity in itself. I know of no other man who could have done such work in such a way and with such astounding passion as Henry Irving on great occasions.

CHAPTER XXXIII. CHRISTMAS

Christmas geese — Punch in the Green Room — A dinner in the Theatre — Gambling without risk — Christmas at Pittsburg

I

ALL through Irving's management of the Lyceum Christmas was, with regard to the working staff and supers, kept in a patriarchal way. Every man and woman had on Christmas Eve or the night before it a basket containing a goose with " trimmings " — sage and onions and apples, and a bottle of gin. The children had each a goose, and a cake instead of the gin. There were some four or five hundred of them, and as they trailed away you could trace them through distant streets by their scent. On most Christmas Eves there was in the Green Room punch and cake for the company. The punchbowl was a vast one, and was refilled as often as required. We would sometimes use a five-gallon keg of old whisky in that bowl, for a liberal supply was always left over for the stage hands.

II

On one Christmas Eve-1882 — Irving had a dinnerparty in the old Beefsteak Room. These were all close friends — Ellen Terry's family and my own and Loveday's, and a few others — twenty in all. We had a real Christmas dinner. Spiced beef, roast beef, turkey, plum pudding et hoc genus omne. All was perfect and after dinner a roulette table was placed before us. Then came the notable surprise.

Before each person was placed a canvas bag containing new silver of different denominations to the value of five pounds. Each and all could play with a good conscience as the hazard was not eating into accumulated fortune!

III

Two years later we were all at Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. Irving arranged an " off " night Christmas and had the whole company, over a hundred persons, to dinner at the Monhongaheela House, where he was staying. We drank all the loyal and usual toasts and finished with a sing-song, wherein various members of the company and the staff exhibited hitherto unknown powers of song and dance. They did amongst them a nigger entertainment which would have passed muster anywhere. There was much punch consumed that night. The whisky for it was brought in great pitchers the size of those used in a wash-basin. I brewed the punch so I know.

CHAPTER XXXIV. IRVING AS A SOCIAL FORCE

THE history of the Lyceum Theatre was for a quarter of a century a part of the social history of London. A mere list of Irving's hospitalities would be instructive. The range of his guests was impossible to any but an artist. As he never forgot or neglected his old friends there were generally at his table some present who represented the commonplace or the unsuccessful as well as the famous or the successful sides of life. The old days and the new came together cheerily under the influence of the host's winning personality, which no amount of success had been able to spoil.

Sometimes the Beefsteak Room, which could only seat at most thirty-six people, was too small; and at such times we migrated to the stage. These occasions were interesting, sometimes even in detail. On the hundredth night of The Merchant of Venice, February 14, 188o, there was a supper for three hundred and fifty guests. On March 25, 1882, ninety-two guests sat down to dinner to celebrate the hundredth night of Romeo and Juliet.

The Prince of Wales dined there in a party of fifty on May 7, 1883. The table was a round one, and in the centre was a glorious mass of yellow flowers with sufficient green leaves to add to its beauty. This bouquet was thirty feet across, and was in the centre only nine inches in height, so that it allowed an uninterrupted view all round the table. I remember the Prince saying that he had never seen a more lovely table. On this as on other occasions there was overhead a great tent-roof covering the entire stage. Through this hung chandeliers. On three sides were great curtains of crimson plush and painted satin ordinarily used for tableaux curtains; and on the proscenium side a forest of high palms and flowers, behind which a fine quartette band played soft music.

One charming night I remember in the Beefsteak Room when the Duke of Teck and Princess Mary and their three sons and Princess May Victoria, whose birthday it was, came to supper. In honour of the occasion the whole decorations of room and table were of pink and white May, with the birthday cake to suit. Before the Princess was an exquisite little set of Shakespeare specially bound in white vellum by Zaehnsdorf, with markers of blush-rose silk.

The ordinary hospitalities of the Beefsteak Room were simply endless. A list of the names of those who have supped with Irving there would alone fill chapters of this book. They were of all kinds and degrees. The whole social scale has been represented from the Prince to the humblest of commoners. Statesmen, travellers, explorers, ambassadors, foreign princes and potentates, poets, novelists, historians — writers of every style, shade and quality. Representatives of all the learned professions; of all the official worlds; of all the great industries. Sportsmen, landlords, agriculturists. Men and women of leisure and fashion. Scientists, thinkers, inventors, philanthropists, divines. Egotists, ranging from harmless esteemers of their own worthiness to the very ranks of Nihilism. Philosophers. Artists of all kinds. In very truth the list was endless and kaleidoscopic.

Irving never knew how many personal friends he had, for all who ever met him claimed acquaintance for ever more — and always to his great delight. Let me give an instance In the late " eighties " when he took a house with an enormous garden in Brook. Green, Hammersmith, he had the house rebuilt and beautifully furnished; but he never lived in it. However, in the summer he thought it would be a good opportunity of giving a garden-party at which he might see all his friends together. He explained to me what he would like to do:

“I want to see all my friends at once; and I wish to have it so arranged that there shall be no one left out. I hope my friends will bring their young people who would like to come. Perhaps you may remember our friends better than I do; would you mind making out a list for me — so that we can send the invitations. Gunter can do the commissariat. Of course I should like to ask a few of our Lyceum audience who come much to the theatre. Some of them I know, but there are others from whom I have received endless courtesies and I want them to see that I look on them as friends.”

I set to work on a list, and two days afterwards in the office he said to me:

“What about that list? We ought to be getting on with the invitations.”

“No use,” I said. “ You can’t give that party — not as you wish it!”

“Why not? “ he asked amazed; he never liked to hear that anything he wished could not be done. I held up the sheets I had been working at.

“Here is the answer,” I said. “ There are too many!”

“Oh, nonsense, my dear fellow. You forget it is a huge garden.” I shook my head.

“The other is huger. I am not half through yet, and they total up already over five thousand!”

And so that party never came off.

He had many many close friends whose names I should like to mention here, but to attempt a full list would not be possible. Such must be incomplete; and those so neglected might be pained. And so I venture to give in this book only the names of those who belong to the structure of the incident which I am recounting.

But Irving's social power was not merely in his hospitality. He was in request for all sorts and kinds of public and semi-public functions — the detailed list of them would be a serious one; of monuments that he has unveiled; of public dinners at which he has taken the chair or spoken; of foundation and memorial stones which he has laid; of flower shows, bazaars, theatres, libraries and public galleries that he has opened.

The public banquets to him have been many. The entertainments in his honour by clubs and other organisations were multitudinous. And wherever he went on any such occasion, whatever space there was — were it even in an open square or street — was crowded to the last point.

This very popularity entailed much work, both in preparation and execution, for he had always to make a speech. With him a speech meant writing it and having it printed so that he could read it — though he never appeared to do so. All this opened many new ways for his successes in his art, and so aided in the growth of its honour. For instance, he was the first actor asked to speak at the annual banquet of the Royal Academy; thus through him a new toast was added to the restricted list of that very conservative body.

The “ First Night “ gatherings on the stage of the Lyceum after the play became almost historic; the list of the guests would form an index to those of note of the time.

There were similar gatherings of a certain national, and even international, importance; such as when the members of the Colonial Conference came en masse; when the Conference of Librarians attended the theatre; when ships of war of foreign nations sent glad contingents to the theatre; when the Guests of the Nation were made welcome.

Some of the latter groups are, I think, worthy to be told of in detail. I venture to give here — only as illustration of the range of his hospitalities at the Lyceum and elsewhere — some names which may be interesting. There are but few to whom they could all be known; but many of them are known either in London or locally. Occasionally, when opportunity permitted and memory served, I jotted down — often on my copy of the menu — the names of some of my fellow guests; and as I usually kept these interesting souvenirs, I am able to give a somewhat suggestive list. It is, of course, only partial — incomplete; by comparison meagre; representative rather than comprehensive. A complete list — were such possible — might be tiresome to the many, even though it should recall to individuals, as this of more than a thousand will, some delightful hours.

H.H. Prince Ibraham Senator Chauncey Depew Principal Story, Glasgow University Mrs. and Misses Story Sir Edward and Lady Russell Mrs. Jack Gardner Miss Genevieve Ward Emma Nevada Coquelin

Admiral Sir Harry Keppel

Mrs. Stirling (Lady Gregory)

Lord Chancellor Walker

Frederick Goodall, R.A.

Mrs. and Miss.Goodall

Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Barrett

Dr. Billings, U.S.A.

Judge and Mrs. McConnell

General Barnes (U.S.A.)

Edwin A. Ward

Dion Boucicault

Mr. and Mrs. E. Cramp

John Farrell

Sir William Robinson

The Ranee, Lady Brooke

Sir Ernest and Miss Cassel

Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Holmes

Sir Wm. Thomson, C.B.

Lady and Miss Thomson

W. T. Emmott

Judge Truax (New York)

Charles Santley

Mr. and Mrs. Margetson

Mr. and Mrs. Edmund Yates

Paderewski Marquis of Worcester Lord Burnham

Mr. and Mrs. Henry F. Dickens The Misses Dickens Miss Georgina Hogarth Gamier

Hon. Sir S. Ponsonby-Fane Alexander Salvini Sir Charles Scotter Richard Harding Davis Sir C. and Lady Kinloch Cooke Hon. Benjamin H. Brewster Mr. and Mrs. C. Bradshaw Albert Bierstadt Stephen Fiske Ernest Moore James Albery Dr. Keeley

Sir F. and Lady Lockwood

Fitzgerald Molloy

Sir Walter Gilbey, Bart.

Thomas Thorne

Sir James D. Linton, P.R.I.

Austin Brereton

Mr. and Mrs. Francis Wilson

Col. Mellor, M.P.

Mrs. and Mrs. Ernest Hawksley

General Sir Owen Lanyon

Charles Dickens (the younger)

James Orrock, R.I.

H. W. Massingham

C. W. Mcllvaine

Montgomery Phister

Patti

Count Albert Mensdorff

J. G. Blaine

Joseph Jefferson

Admiral Lord C. Beresford

Mr., Mrs. and Miss Wirt Dexter

Judge Vanderpoel

Calve

President Daniel Gilman,

Johns Hopkins University Francisque Sarcy Lord Coleridge, L.C.J. Mr. and Mrs. Edward J. Shaw General Osborne (U.S.A.) Louis F. Austin Mr. and Mrs. Richard Mansfield Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Pemberton Haddon Chambers President W. R. Harper,

Chicago University Mrs. Harper

Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer Mempes

Charles A. Dana

Coquelin cadet

Alfred Darbyshire

Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Barrie

C. Hamill

T. H. Bolton, M.P.

W. T. Arnold

Mr. and Mrs. George Henschel Miss Greta Morritt Montagu Williams, Q.C. W. C. Bobbs G. A. Redford Tudge Shea (New York) Tom Taylor

Sir Walter Palmer, Bart.

Lady Palmer

W. Ordway Partridge

Peter A. B. Widener

Marion Crawford

Rt. Hon. and Mrs. H. H.

Asquith Henry Norman, M.P. W. A. Purrington

Rt. Hon. A. J. Balfour Mr. and Mrs. Frank Hill Salvini

Anthony Hope Hawkins

Sir Campbell and Lady Clarke

Mrs. Tyson

The Duke of Fife

Signor Gennadius

Mr. and Mrs. J. Howard, Junr.

Seth Low

Dr. Charcot

Mrs. Gillespie

Dr. and Mrs. Davis

Mr. and Mrs. Bailey Aldrich

Mr. and Mrs. G. J. G. Lewis

John McCollough

Adolphe Brisson -

Guy Boothby

Fraulein Haverland

Sarasate

Mr. and Mrs. Stewart Smith

Sir Morell and Lady Mackenzie

Mr. and Mrs. Wm. Edwards

Charles Major

Leonard Jerome

Dr. Edgar Browne

A. Howard Hinkle

Comte de Franqueville

Sir Harry Poland

Elsie de Wolf

Peixotto

Baillie Cleland

Mr. and Mrs. John B. Jeffery

E. F. S. Pigott

Sir Charles Cameron

Mr. and Mrs. George Grossmith

A. P. Burbank

Sir Charles and Lady Wynd- ham Baillie Sorley Dr. Graydon W. J. Florence Judge Harrison Sir Wemyss Reid Robert Taber

Genl. Rt. Hon. Sir Dighton

Probyn, V.C. H.E. Genl. Horace Porter,

Ambassador U.S. Sir W. H. and Lady Russell Captain Mimra Mr. and Mrs. W. McMichael George Boughton, R.A. Mrs. Boughton

Mr., Mrs. and Miss J. L. Toole

Sarah Bernhardt

Maurice Bernhardt
Israel Zangwill
Mr. and Mrs. Melville Stone
Lord Randolph Churchill
Lady Randolph Churchill
William Warren
Mr. and Mrs. Brydges-Willyams
Senator Clarke
Miss Alice Goetz
Mr. and Mrs Perugini
John Northcott
General Miles (U.S.A.)
Judge Brady (N.Y.)
Mr. and Mrs. F. MacMillan
Judge N. Davis (New York)
John Ayling
H.E. Baghos Pacha Nubar
Mr. and Mrs. Bryan Lathrop
Mrs. W. K. Clifford
Mrs. Glover
James Hearn
Mr. and Mrs. E. T. Cook
Augustus Pitou
A. C. Calmour
James Fernandez
Angus Hamilton
Mrs. Craigie
Mr. and Mrs. Annan Bryce Albert Bruce Joy Jerome K. Jerome Edwin Long, R.A. John Hollingshead Serjeant Ballantine Mr. and Mrs. G. W. Smalley
Duke of Devonshire
Duchess of Devonshire
F. R. Lawrence
Richmond Ritchie
Mrs. Ritchie (Miss Thackeray)
Signor Yturbe

Mr. & Mrs. & Miss Hare
Lord and Lady Pirbright
Sir Henry Lawrence, Bart., and
Lady Lawrence M. L. Mayer
Sir John and Lady Monckton
Sydney Brooks
Mr. and Mrs. Phil May
Joseph Proctor
Mr. and Mrs. J. B. Partridge
Mr. and Mrs. B. Tilghman
Sir James and Lady Dewar
Mr. and Mrs. St. C. McKelway
Ludovic Goetz
Charles Klein
Mr. and Mrs. A. E. T. Watson
Miss Elizabeth Marbury
Wm. Woodall, M.P.
Sir John Tenniel
Genl. Hon. C. and Miss Thesiger
Mr. and Mrs. Beatty-Kingston
Genl. L. Fairchild (U.S.A.)
Seymour Hicks
Randegger
Wm. Heinemann
Mr. and Mrs. H. E. Abbey
C. F. Fearing Tosti
D. F. Lowe, of Heriots Major Lyon
Gilbert Farquhar A. W. Dubourg Hawes Craven Julia Marlow
Mr. and Mrs. George Bancroft
R. Caldecott
Sir Whittaker Ellis
Mr. and Mrs. Ben Webster
Lord Justice FitzGibbon
Mr. and Mrs. Hall Caine
Duchess of St. Albans

Mr. and Mrs. Morton McMichael
H.H. The Raja of Kapurthala
Genl. Francis A.Walker (U.S.A.)
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Labouchere
Marshall Field
Edward Fitzgerald
Charles Cramp
Ludwig Barnay
P. T. Barnum
Sir Squire and Lady Bancroft
George Ade
Coquelin fils
Frank Dicksee, R.A.
Edward Terry
Alfred Gilbert, R.A.
Sir William Van Horne
Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Mackail
Mr., Mrs. and Misses T. Catling
Boito
Howard Carroll Mrs. Ward
Sir Wm. Agnew, Bart.
Conley Grain
Edward Henry Palmer
“Barney “ Barnato
Rt. Hon. George Wyndham
Countess Grosvenor
William Gillette
Dr. and Mrs. David Newman
Mr. and Mrs. E. Routledge
Admiral Gordon
Major W. H. Wiley
F. Anstey Guthrie
Miss Amy Leslie
W. P. Frith, R.A.
Mr. and Mrs. Thaddeus

J. Forbes-Robertson

Gertrude Elliott

Goodenough Taylor

Henry Hackett

James McHenry

E. Freiberger

John McNally

Edwin Booth and Miss Booth Sir James Blyth, Bart. Misses Blyth Earl of Hardwicke Mr., Mrs. and Miss Pullman Justin and Miss McCarthy " Uncle " George Bromley Duchess of Manchester Seymour Lucas, R.A. Mrs. Lucas Paul Mounet-Sully James Whitcomb Riley Mr. and Mrs. E. A. Bendall Mrs. and Miss Cadwallader-

Jones Ilona Eibenschutz Mr. and Mrs. Martin Harvey Judge Adams J. S. Metcalfe Mrs. Allingham Frank Thomson Mary Moore

Sir Gilbert and Lady Parker Edward Dicey John Elderkin Sir Maurice Fitzgerald (The

Knight of Kerry) Dr. Lambdin A. G. R. Heward Henry Harper Sony Joel Louis Becke W. Griscom S. Gatti

C. Hetherington

W. Padgett

Angus Campbell

J. McLure Hamilton

W. Lestocq

Col. Hughes

Senator Jones

Mr. and Mrs. G. B. Burgin

Horace Howard Furniss

Jules Claretie

Mr. and Mrs. C. A. Otis

Dr. Nansen Lord Glenesk

H.E.Charlemagne Tower, U.S.

Ambassador Mrs. Charlemagne Tower Sir George Faudel-Phillips, Bart.

Lady and Misses Faudel-

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Norman Forbes

Sir Henry Thompson

Carl Rosa

Andrew Mudie

Dr. Nedley

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Colvin Ada Rehan

Lord Russell of Killowen,L.C. J. Lady Russell

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Dr. Porteous

Col. Harvey

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W. H. Bartlett

Gerald Lawrence

Fay Davis

Rudolph Lehmann

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CHAPTER XXXV. VISITS OF FOREIGN WARSHIPS

I

WHEN, in May 1894, the United States cruiser Chicago came to London whilst making her cruise of friendly intent, there was of course a warm-hearted greeting. Admiral Erben was the very soul of geniality and Captain Mahan was, through his great work on The Sea Power of England, himself a maker of history. At the banquet given to them in St. James's Hall, Irving, though nominally present, was unable to attend as he had to play at the Lyceum, but he made a point of my going. He felt that all that could possibly be done to cement the good feeling between Great Britain and America was the duty of every Englishman — even the least of them.

At the banquet, on the end of the hall was the legend in gigantic letters:

"BLOOD IS THICKER THAN WATER"

— the phrase that became historic when Admiral Erben was in China. It will be remembered that whilst a flotilla of British boats were attacking a fort on the river and had met a reverse they were aided by the crew of the American ship of war. They were on a mud flat at the mercy of the Chinese, who were wiping them out. But the crew of the neutral vessel — unaided by their officers, who had of course to show an appearance of neutrality in accord with the wisdom of international law — put off their boats and took them off. On protest being made, the answer was given in the above phrase.

Through me Irving conveyed a warm invitation to all the officers to come to the Lyceum to see the play and stop for supper in the Beefsteak Room. They all came except Captain Mahan, who had to be away at an engagement out of London. It was a delightful evening for us all and many a new friendship began.

In addition to the officers, Irving had asked the whole crew of the Chicago to come to the play in such numbers and on such nights as might be possible. They came on three different nights. Each party came round to the office to have a drink — and a very remarkable thing it was considering that, except the petty officers, they were all ordinary seamen, marines and stokers, though they had everything that was drinkable to choose from — for Irving wished them to have full choice of the best — no man would take a second drink! They had evidently made some rule of good manners amongst themselves. A fine and hearty body of men they were — and with good memories one and all. For ten years afterwards — right up to the end of our last tour — there was hardly a week during our American touring that some of that crew did not come to make his greeting.

The return party to the ship came on Sunday, June 3, when we went to lunch on board the Chicago. Irving took with him Toole, Major Ricarde-Seaver and Thomas Nast, the American cartoonist, who had been at the supper at the Lyceum. We went down to Gravesend, where the vessel lay, and were met by the younger officers who brought us on board. There welcome reigned. It shone in the eyes of every man on the ship, from the Admiral down. The men on parade looked as if only the hold of discipline restrained them as Irving passed by with words of kindly greeting. We had a delightful time. One little incident in which I was myself a participant marked a certain difference in the discipline of the navies of Britain and America. At lunch when I refused wine — being gouty — I was asked what I would like. When I said a whisky-and-soda, the officer, in whose charge I was, said with his face fallen:

“I am very sorry old chap, but you can’t have that. Spirits are not allowed to be drunk in our Navy.” Of course I said it did not matter; that I would take a glass of wine. This was poured out for me and stood by me. We were speaking of something else when the officer on the other side of me said suddenly:

“Look here, what’s wrong with you? You are quite pale! Are you not well? “ I certainly felt anything but pale on that burning June day. The heat of the sun on the water seemed to make its way in through the open ports. But when he said I was, I waited developments. The officer, who was regarding me with much concern, turned to the man who was waiting on us and said:

“Tell the Quarter-master to ask the doctor to come here! “ The doctor came. “ I am afraid Bram Stoker is not well,” he said. “ Hadn’t you better look to him! “ The doctor felt my pulse, and with a glance at the as yet untouched wine beside me took out his note-book and wrote a prescription which he handed to the Quartermaster to have sent to the Apothecary.

Presently the dose was brought to me. I don’t of course know what it was, but it tasted exceedingly like whisky-and-soda! In justice to the skill of my physician and the concern of my hosts I may say that I certainly felt better after I had, by degrees, swallowed it.

When late in the afternoon we were returning on shore, the whole crew were on deck. I do not believe there was a man on board who was not there. If the greeting was hearty, the farewell was touching. We had got into the boat and were just clearing the vessel, we waving our hats to those behind, when there burst out a mighty cheer, which seemed to rend the air like thunder. It pealed over the water that still Sabbath afternoon and startled the quiet folk on the frontages at Gravesend. Cheer after cheer came ringing and resonant with a heartiness that made one’s blood leap. For there is no such sound in the world as that full-throated Anglo-Saxon cheer which begins at the heart — that inspiring, resolute, intentional cheer which has through the memory of ten thousand victories and endless moments of stress and daring become the heritage of the race.

Before the Chicago left London, a little deputation came one evening to the Lyceum from the crew. To Irving they presented a fine drawing in water-colour of their ship, together with a silver box with an Address written and illuminated by themselves. It was a hearty document, redolent of the memories of crossing the Line and such quaint conceits as the deep water seaman loves.

I value dearly their gift to myself; a beautiful walking-stick of zebra-wood and silver, of which the inscription runs:

“Presented to Bram Stoker, Esq.

By the crew of U.S. Chicago, 1894.”

II

Three years after the visit of the Chicago-1897- another warship came on a similar friendly mission.

This was the battleship Fuji, of the Japanese Navy. In those days Japan was just beginning to step from her sun-lit shores down into the great world. She had awakened to the need for self-protection and had manifested her fighting power with modern weapons in the capture of Port Arthur. Captain Mimra, who commanded the Fuji, had been appointed Commandant of the fortress-city after the capture.

Irving thought it would be hospitable to ask the visitors to the play. On the night of April 2, Captain Mimra and his officers came. The play then running, Richard III., was one that took up Irving’s time from first to last during the evening so that it was not possible for him to have the privilege of meeting his guests personally. So I had to be deputy host. The party sat in the Royal box and the one next to it, the two boxes having been made into one for the occasion. After the third act of the play we all went into the “ Prince of Wales’s Room “ — the drawing-room attached to the Royal box — and drank a glass of wine together to a toast which was prophetic:

“England and Japan!”

CHAPTER XXXVI. IRVING'S LAST RECEPTION AT THE LYCEUM

The Queens Jubilee, 1887 — The Diamond Jubilee, 1888 — The King's Coronation, 1902

I

AT the time of the Queen's Jubilee in 1887, Irving had something to do in the celebration in a histrionic way. He was able to make welcome at the Lyceum and to entertain individually many of those who came from over seas to do honour to the occasion. The only act of general service which came within his power was to lend the bells which were played in Hyde Park on the occasion of the Children's Jubilee. These were the " hemispherical " bells which had been founded for the production of Faust, and were the largest of the kind that had ever been made. On that day it seemed as though the carillon sounded all over London.

II

Ten years later, when the " Diamond " Jubilee was kept, much more attention was paid to the Colonial and Indian guests than had ever been done before. The Nation had waked to the importance of the "Dependencies," and the representatives of these were treated with all due honour. Irving, thinking like many others that it would be well that private hospitalities given in general form might suppliment the public functions, gave a special matinee performance on June 25 for the troops of all kinds which had been sent to represent the various parts of the Empire. The authorities fell in with the plan so thoroughly that he was encouraged to add to his service of hospitality a reception on the stage after the play on the night of June 28. To this came all the Colonial Premiers, and all those Indian Princes and such persons of local distinction throughout the world as had been named on the official lists, and all the officers taking a part in the proceedings. Besides these were a host of others, amongst whom were a large number of representatives of literature and the various arts.

III

When, in 1902, the time of the Coronation was approaching and matters were being organised for a fitting welcome to the guests of the nation, Irving, remembering the success of his little effort of five years before and the official approval of it, wrote to the Lord Chamberlain to ask if it would be in accordance with the King's wishes that the stage reception should be repeated. His Majesty not only approved of the idea, but commanded that the matter should be taken up by the Indian and the Colonial Offices, so that those high officials in charge of the public arrangements might have the date of the reception placed on the official list of " informal formalities." This meant that a special date was to be made certain for the occasion and that the nation's guests would attend in force. There were so many events of social importance close to the time fixed for the Coronation that there was a certain struggle for dates. Those hosts were supposed to be happy who secured that which they wished. Our date was fixed for the night of Thursday, July 3.

When, on June 26, the ceremony of the Coronation was postponed on account of the dangerous illness of the King, it was made known formally that it was His Majesty's expressed wish that all the functions of hospitality to the guests should go on as arranged. In Irving's case much pains had been taken officially. Sir William Curzon Wyllie, of the Political Department of the India Office, and Sir William Baillie-Hamilton, at the Colonial Office, arranged matters.

When the night of July 3 arrived all possible preparations had been made at the Lyceum. As the function was to take place after the audience had gone there would be little time to spare and we had to provide against accidents and hitches of all kinds.

The play began at eight o'clock and there was an immense audience. At ten minutes to eleven the curtain fell; and then began one of the finest pieces of carefully organised work I have ever seen. Everything had been planned out, every man was in his place, and throughout there was no scrambling or interfering with each other although the haste was positively terrific. All was done in silence, and each gang knew how to wait till their moment for exertion came.

As the audience filed out of the stalls and pit a host of carpenters edged in behind them and began to unscrew the chairs and benches. So fast did they work that as the audience left the proscenium the blocks of seats followed close behind them to the waiting carts. Following the carpenters came an array of sturdy women cleaners, who used broom and duster with an almost frantic energy, moving in a nimbus of dust of their own making. All the windows in the house had been opened the instant the curtain fell, so that the place was being aired whilst the work was going on. Behind the cleaners came a force of upholsterers with great bales of red cloth, which had already been prepared and fitted, so that an incredibly short time saw the floor of the house looking twice its usual size in its splendour of crimson. By this time the curtain had gone up showing the stage clear from front to back and from side to side. A train of carts had been waiting, and as there was a great force of men on the stage the scenes and properties seemed to move of their own accord out of the great doors at the back of the stage. On the walls right and left of the stage and at the back hung great curtains of crimson velvet and painted satin which we used in various plays. The stage was covered with crimson cloth. At each side of the orchestra was lifted in a staircase ready prepared, some six feet wide, carpeted with crimson and with handrails covered with crimson velvet. A rail covered with velvet of the same colour protected unthinking guests from walking into the orchestra. Then came the florists. An endless train of palms and shrubs and flowers in pots seemed to move in and disperse themselves about the theatre. The boxes were filled with them and all along the front of the circles they stood in serried lines till the whole place was in waves of greenery and flowers. The orchestra was filled with palms which rose a foot or two over the place of the footlights. In the meantime the caterer's little army had brought in tables which they placed in the back of the pit, the walls of which had during the time been covered in Turkey red.

All the while another army of electricians had been at work. They had fixed some great chandeliers over the stage and had put up the " set pieces " arranged for the proscenium. These were a vast Union Jack composed of thousands of coloured lights which hung over the dress circle, and an enormous crown placed over the upper circle. I never in my life saw anything so magnificently effective as these lights. They seemed to blaze like titanic jewels, and filled the place with a glory of light.

While all this was going on, we had the whole house searched from roof to cellar by our own servants and a force of detectives sent for the purpose. It did not do to neglect precautions on such an occasion when the spirit of anarchy stalked abroad. When this was done the detectives took their places all round the theatre, and the coming guests had to pass through a line of them. This was necessary to avoid the possibility of expert thieves gaining admission. Some of these guests were known to wear, when in State costume; jewels of great value. In fact one of the Indian Princes who was present that night wore jewels of the value of half a million sterling.

All this preparation had been made within the space of forty minutes. When the guests began to arrive a few minutes before half-past eleven, for which hour they had been bidden, all was in order. Some of them, who had been present at the play and had waited in the vestibule could hardly believe their eyes when they saw the change.

Irving stood in the centre of the stage, for there were three doors of entry, one at the back of the stage, the private door 0.P., and the stage door which was on the prompt side. Only one door, that at the back of the stage, had been arranged, but the guests came so fast — and so many of them were of a class so distinguished as not to be accustomed to wait — that we found it necessary to open the others as well. Servants trained to announce the names of guests had been put on duty, but their task was no easy one, and there were some strange mispronunciations. I give some of the names of the thousand guests, from which the difficulty may be inferred:

His Highness Maharaj Adhiraj Sir Madho Rao Scindia, Maharaja of Gwalior.

His Highness Maharaja Sir Ganga Singh, Maharaja of Bikaner.

His Highness Sir Pertab Singh, Maharaja of Idar.

His Highness Maharaj Adhiraj Sawai Sir Mando Singh, Maharaja of Jeypore.

His Highness the Maharaja of Kohlapur.

Maharaja Kunwar Dolat Singh.

His Highness the Maharaja of Kooch Bahar.

Maharaj Kunwar Prodyot Kumar Tagore.

Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhai.

Raja Sir Savalai Ramaswami Mudaliyar.

Maharaja Sri Rao the Hon. Sir Venkalasvetacha-lapati Ranga Ras Bahadur, Raja of Bobbili.

Meherban Ganpatrao Madhavrao Vinchwikar.

The Hon. Asif Kadr Saiyid Wasif Ali Mirza, of Murshidabad.

The Hon. Nawab Mumtaz-ud-daula Muhamad Faiyaz Ali Khan, of Pahasu Bulandshahr.

Nawab Fateh Ali Khan, Kizilbash.

Gangadhar Madho Chitnavis.

Rai Jagannath Barua Bahadur.

Maung On Gaing.

Lieut.-Colonel Nawab Mahomed Aslam Khan, Khan Bahadur.

The Sultan of Perak.

King Lewanika.

H.R.H. The Crown Prince of Siam.

The Datoh Panglima Kinta.

The Datoh Sedelia Rab.

Sri Baba Khem Singh, Bedi of Kullar.

They were from every part of the world and of every race under the sun. In type and colour they would have illustrated a discourse on ethnology, or craniology. Some were from the centre of wildest Africa, not long come under the dominion of Britain. Of one of them, a king whose blackness of skin was beyond belief, I was told an anecdote. Just after his arrival in London, he had been driving out with the nobleman to whose tutelage he had been trusted. In one of the suburban squares a toxophilite society was meeting. The king stopped the carriage and turning to his companion said:

“Bows and arrows here in the heart of London! And I assure you that for more than a year I have prohibited them in my dominions.”

The Premiers of all the great Colonies were present, and a host of lesser representatives of King Edward’s dominions. Also a vast number of peers and peeresses and other representatives of the nation — statesmen, ecclesiastics, soldiers, authors, artists, men of science and commerce.

The most gorgeous of all the guests were of course the Indian Princes. Each was dressed in the fullest dress of his nationality, state and creed. The amount of jewels they wore, cut and uncut, was perfectly astonishing.

It was very hard to keep Irving in the spot which he had chosen for himself; for as the great crowd streamed in on three sides he kept shifting a little every moment to greet some old friend, and had to be brought back to the point where he could meet all. In such cases he was always amenable to a delightful degree. Seeing the difficulty to himself he asked me to get two or three important friends to stand with him. He named Lord Aberdeen and the late Right Hon. Richard Seddon, the Premier of New Zealand. These came and stood with him, and the nucleus protected him from movement.

Lord Aberdeen was an old friend and had, when he was Governor-General of Canada, shown Irving the most conspicuous courtesy. I remember well the evening when we were leaving Toronto for Montreal after the matinee, February 21, 1894. We had got into the train and the workmen were loading up the scenery and luggage when there was a great clatter of horsemen coming at the gallop and up rode the Governor-General with his escort. His courtesy to the distinguished guest was very pleasing to the warm-hearted Canadians.

"Dick " Seddon Irving had met five years before at the great party which Lord Northcliff — then Mr. Alfred Harmsworth — had given in his new house in Berkeley Square on the night before the Diamond Jubilee — June 21, 1897. When Irving and I arrived we followed immediately after the Colonial Premiers — I think there were eight of them — who had that day received the honour of Privy Councillorship and wore their Court dress. Mr. Seddon asked to be introduced to Irving, and at once took him away to the corner of a room where they could talk freely. I was afterwards told that when he had gone to the Opera in Covent Garden a few days before — where with his family he was given the Royal box — he asked when the opera had gone on for a good while:

"But where is Irving? He is the man I want to see most!"

That Coronation reception was certainly a most magnificent sight. Many who were at both functions said that it was even finer than the reception at the India Office, which was a spectacle to remember. But of course the theatre had an advantage in shape and its rising tiers. When one entered at the back of the stage the coup d' ail was magnificent. The place looked of vast size; the many lights and the red seats of the tiers making for infinite distance as they gleamed through the banks of foliage. The great crown and Union Jack seeming to flame over all; the moving mass of men and women, nearly all the men in gorgeous raiment, in uniform or Court dress, the women all brilliantly dressed and flashing with gems; with here and there many of the Ranees and others of various nationalities in their beautiful robes. Everywhere ribbons and orders, each of which meant some lofty distinction of some kind. Everywhere a sense of the unity and the glory of Empire. Dominating it all, as though it was floating on light and sound and form and colour, the thrilling sense that there, in all its bewildering myriad beauty, was the spirit mastering the heartbeat of that great Empire on which the sun never sets.

That night was the swan-song of the old Lyceum, and was a fitting one; for such a wonderful spectacle none of our generation shall ever see again. As a function it crowned Irving’s reign as Master and Host.

Two weeks later the old Lyceum as a dramatic theatre closed its doors — for ever.

CHAPTER XXXVII. THE VOICE OF ENGLAND

IN August 188o, Irving and I went on a short holiday to the Isle of Wight, where later Loveday joined us. One evening at Shanklin we went out for a stroll after dinner. It was late when we returned; but the night was so lovely that we sat for.a while under a big tree at the entrance to the Chine. It was a dark night and under the tree it was inky black; only the red tips of our cigars were to be seen. Those were early days in the Home Rule movement, and as I was a believer in it Irving was always chaffing me about it. It was not that he had any politics himself — certainly in a party sense; the nearest point to politics lie ever got, so far as I know, was when he accepted his election to the Reform Club. But he loved to “ draw out “ any one about anything, and would at times go quite a long way about to do it. We had been talking Home Rule and he had, of course for his purpose, taken the violently opposite side to me. Presently we heard the slow, regular, heavy tramp of a policeman coming down the road; there is no mistaking the sound to any one who has ever lived in a city. Irving turned to me — I could tell the movement by his cigar — and said with an affected intensity which I had come to identify and understand:

“How calm and silent all this is! Very different, my boy, from the hideous strife of politics. It ought to be a lesson to you! Here in this quiet place, away from the roar of cities and on the very edge of the peaceful sea, there is opportunity for thought! You will not find here men galling their tempers and shortening their lives by bitter thoughts and violent deeds. Believe me, here in rural England is to be found the true inwardness of British opinion!”

I said nothing; I knew the game. Then the heavy, placid step drew closer. Irving went on:

“Here comes the Voice of England. Just listen to it and learn! “ Then in a cheery, friendly voice he said to the invisible policeman:

“Tell me, officer, what is your opinion as to this trouble in Ireland? “ The answer came at once, stern and full of pent-up feeling, and in an accent there was no possibility of mistaking:

“Ah, begob, it’s all the fault iv the dirty Gover’mint! “ His brogue might have been cut with a hatchet. From his later conversation — for of course after that little utterance Irving led him on — one might have thought that the actor was an ardent and remorseless rebel. I came to the conclusion that Home Rule was of little moment to that guardian of the law; he was an out and out Fenian.

For many a day afterwards I managed to bring in the “ Voice of England “ whenever Irving began to chaff about Home Rule.

CHAPTER XXXVIII. RIVAL TOWNS

IN the course of our tour in the Far West of America in 1893-4 we had an experience which Irving now and again told with great enjoyment to his friends. From San Francisco we went to Tacoma and Seattle, two towns on Puget Sound between which is a mighty rivalry. In Seattle we were walking along the main street when we saw a crowd outside the window of a drug store and went over to see the cause. The whole window-space was cleared and covered with sheets of white paper. In the centre, raised on a little platform, was an immense Tropical American horned beetle quite three inches from feelers to tail. Behind it was propped up a huge card on which was printed in ink with a brush in large letters:

“ORDINARY BED-BUG CAPTURED IN TACOMA.”

CHAPTER XXXIX. TWO STORIES

I

NATURALLY the form of humour that appealed most to Irving was that based on human character. This feeling he shared with Tennyson — indeed with all in whom a deep knowledge of the " essential difference " of character is a necessity of their art. Perhaps the two following stories, of which he was exceedingly fond, will illustrate the bent of his mind. The first, having heard from some one else, he told me; the second I told him. I have heard him tell them both several times in his own peculiar way.

II

The first was of an English excursionist who was up near Balmoral in the later days of Queen Victoria. The day being hot, he went into a cottage to get a glass of water. He sat mopping his forehead, whilst the guid-wife was polishing the glass and getting fresh water from the well. He commenced to talk cheerfully:

"So the Queen is a neighbour of yours!"

"Ooh, aye!"

"And she is quite neighbourly, isn't she? And comes to visit you here in your own cottages? " " Ooh, aye! She's weel eneuch! " " And she asks you to tea sometimes at Balmoral?"

"Ooh, aye! She's nae that bad! " The tourist was rather struck with the want of enthusiasm shown and ventured to comment on it inquiringly: " Look here, ma'am; you don't seem very satisfied with Her Majesty I May I ask you why?"

"Weel, I'll tell ye if ye wish. The fac' is we don't leik the gangin's on at the Caastle."

"Oh, indeed, ma'am! How is that? What is it that displeases you?"

"We don't leik the way they keep — or don't keep — the Sawbath. Goin' oot in bo-ats an' rowin' on the Sawbath day! " The tourist tried to appease her and suggested:

"Oh, well! after all ma'am, you know there is a precedent for that. You remember Our Lord, too, went out on the Sabbath She interrupted him:

"Ooh, aye! I ken it weel eneuch. Ye canna' tell me aught aboot Hem that I dinna ken a'ready. An' I can tell ye this: we don't think any moor o' Hem for it either!"

III

The other story was of the funeral in Dublin of a young married woman. The undertaker, after the wont of his craft, was arranging the whole affair according to the completest local rules of mortuary etiquette. He bustled up to the widower saying:

"You, sir, will of course go in the carriage with the mother of the deceased."

"What! Me go in the carriage with me mother-in-law! Not likely!"

"Oh, sir, but I assure you it is necessary. The rule is an inviolable one, established by precedents beyond all cavil! " expostulated the horrified undertaker. But the widower was obdurate. " I won't go. That's flat! " " Oh, but my good sir. Remember the gravity of the occasion — the publicity — the — the — possibility — scandal." His voice faded into a gasp. The widower stuck to his resolution and so the undertaker laid the matter before some of his intimate friends who were waiting instructions. These surrounded the chief mourner and began to remonstrate with him:

“You really must, old chap; it is necessary.” “ I’ll not! Go with me mother-in-law! — Rot!”

“But look here, old chap

“I’ll not I tell ye — I’ll go in any other carriage that ye wish; but not in that.”

“Oh, of course, if ye won’t, ye won’t. But remember it beforehand that afterwards when it’ll be thrown up against ye, that it’ll be construed into an affront on the poor girl that’s gone. Ye loved her Jack, we all know, an’ ye wouldn’t like that I”

This argument prevailed. He signed to the undertaker and began to pull on his black gloves.

As he began to move towards the carriage he turned to his friends and said in a low voice:

“I’m doin’ it because ye say I ought to, and for the poor girl that’s gone. But ye’ll spoil me day!”

CHAPTER XL. SIR RICHARD BURTON

A Face of sted — Some pleasant suppers — Lord Houghton — Searching for Patriarchs — Edmund Henry Palmer — Desert law — The “ Arabian Nights”

I

WHEN in the early morning of August 13, 1878, Irving arrived in Dublin, on his way to Belfast to give a Reading for the Samaritan Hospital, I met him at Westland Row Station. He had arranged to stay for a couple of days with my brother before going north. When the train drew up, hastening to greet him I entered the carriage. There were two other people in the compartment, a lady and gentleman. When we had shaken hands, Irving said to his compagnons de voyage:

“Oh, let me introduce my friend Bram Stoker! “ They both shook hands with me very cordially. I had not come to meet strangers; Irving was my objective. Nevertheless, I could not but be struck by the strangers. The lady was a big, handsome blonde woman, clever-looking and capable. But the man riveted my attention. He was dark, and forceful, and masterful, and ruthless. I have never seen so iron a countenance. I did not have much time to analyse the face; the bustle of arrival prevented that. But an instant was enough to make up my mind about him. We separated in the carriage after cordial wishes that we might meet again. When we were on the platform, I asked Irving: “ Who is that man?”

“Why,” he said, “ I thought I introduced you! “ “ So you did, but you did not mention the names of the others! “ He looked at me for an instant and said inquiringly as though something had struck him:

“Tell me, why do you want to know? “ “ Because,” I answered, “

I never saw any one like him. He is steel He would go through you like a sword!”

“You are right! “ he said. “ But I thought you knew him. That is Burton — Captain Burton who went to Mecca t”

The Burtons were then paying a short visit to Lord Talbot de Malahide. After Irving went back to London, I was very busy and did not ever come across either of them. That autumn I joined Irving and went to live in London.

II

In January of next year, 1879, I met the Bur tons again. They had come to London for a holiday.

The first meeting I had then with Burton was at supper with Irving in the Green Room Club — these were occasional suppers where a sort of smoking-concert followed the removal of the dishes. I sat between Burton and James Knowles, who was also Irving’s guest. It was a great pleasure to me to meet Burton familiarly, for I had been hearing about him and his wonderful exploits as long as I could remember. He talked very freely and very frankly about all sorts of things, but that night there was nothing on the Lapis of an exceptionally interesting nature.

That night, by the way, I heard Irving recite The Captive for the first time. He also did Gemini and Virgo; but that I had heard him do in Trinity College, Dublin.

The Burtons remained in London till the end of February, in which month we met at supper several times. The first supper was at Irving’s rooms in Grafton Street, on the night of Saturday, February 8, the other member of the party being Mr. Aubertin. The subdued light and the quietude gave me a better opportunity of studying Burton’s face; in addition to the fact that this time I sat opposite to him and not beside him. The predominant characteristics were the darkness of the face — the desert burning; the strong mouth and nose, and jaw and forehead — the latter somewhat bold — and the strong, deep, resonant voice. My first impression of the man as of steel was consolidated and enhanced. He told us, amongst other things, of the work he had in hand. Three great books were partially done. The translation of the Arabian Nights, the metrical translation of Camoens, and the Book of the Sword. These were all works of vast magnitude and requiring endless research. But he lived to complete them all.

Our next meeting was just a week later, Saturday, February 15. This time Mr. Aubertin was host and there was a new member of the party, Lord Houghton, whom I then met for the first time. I remember that amongst other good things which we had that night was some exceedingly fine old white port, to which I think we all did justice — in a decorous way. The talk that evening kept on three subjects: fencing, the life of Lord Byron, and Shakespeare. Burton was an expert and an authority on all connected with the sword; Lord Houghton was then the only man living — I think that Trelawny, who had been the only other within years, had just died — who knew Byron in his youth, so that the subject was at once an interesting one. They all knew and had ideas of Shakespeare and there was no lack of variety of opinion. Amongst other things, Burton told us that night of his life on the West Coast of Africa—” the Gold Coast “ — where he was Consul and where he kept himself alive and in good health for a whole year by never going out in the midday sun if he could help it, and by drinking a whole flask of brandy every day! He also spoke of his life in South America and of the endurance based on self-control which it required.

The third supper was one given on February 21, at Bailey's Hotel, South Kensington, by Mr. Mullen the publisher. Arthur Sketchley was this time added to the party. The occasion was to celebrate the birthday of Mrs. Burton's book of travel, A.E.I. (Arabia, Egypt, India), a big book of some five hundred pages. We were each presented with a copy laid before us on the table. I sat between Lord Houghton and Burton. They were old friends — had been since boyhood. Each called the other Richard. Houghton, be it remembered, was Richard Monckton Milnes before he got his peerage in 1863. The conversation was very interesting, especially when Burton was mentioning experiences, or expounding some matters of his knowledge, or giving grounds for some theory which he held. The following fragment of conversation will explain something of his intellectual attitude: Burton had been mentioning some of his explorations amongst old tombs and Houghton asked him if he knew the tomb of Moses. He replied that he did not know it though of course he knew its whereabouts.

"It must be found if sought for within a few years! " he added. " We know that he was buried at Shekem." (I do not vouch for names or details — such do not matter here. I take it that Burton knew his subject and was correct in what he did say.) " The valley is narrow, and only at one side and in one place would a tomb be possible. It wouldn't take long to explore that entire place if one went at it earnestly." Again Houghton asked him:

"Do you know exactly where any of the Patriarchs are buried?"

"Not exactly! But I could come near some of them."

"Do you think you could undertake to find any one of them? "

Burton answered slowly and thoughtfully — to this day I can seem to hear the deep vibration of his voice:

“Well, of course I am not quite certain; and I should not like to promise anything in a matter which is, and must be, purely problematical. But I think — yes! I think I could put my hand on Joseph! “ As he stopped there and did not seem as though he was going to enlarge on the subject, I said quietly as though to myself:

“There’s nothing new or odd in that! “ Burton turned to me quickly:

“Do you know of any one attempting it? Has it been tried before? Do you know the explorer? “ “ Yes! “ I said, feeling that I was in for it, “ but only by name. I cannot claim a personal acquaintance.”

“Who was it? “ — this spoken eagerly. “ Mrs. Potiphar!”

The two cynics laughed heartily. The laughter of each was very characteristic. Lord Houghton’s face broadened as though he had suddenly grown fatter. On the other hand Burton’s face seemed to lengthen when he laughed; the upper lip rising instinctively and showing the right canine tooth. This was always a characteristic of his enjoyment. As he loved fighting, I can fancy that in the midst of such stress it would be even more marked than under more peaceful conditions.

The last time we met Captain Burton during that visit was on the next night, February 22, 1879, at supper with Mrs. Burton’s sister, Mrs. Van Tellen.

He was going back almost immediately to Trieste, of which he held the consulship. In those days this consulship was a pleasant sinecure — an easy berth with a fairly good salary. It was looked on as a resting-place for men of letters. Charles Lever held it before Burton. In the old days of Austrian domination Trieste was an important place and the consulship an important one. But its commercial prosperity began to wane after the cry Italia irredenta had been efficacious. The only thing of importance regarding the office that remained was the salary.

III

Six years elapsed before we met again. This was on June 27, 1885. The Burtons had just come to London and had asked Irving and me to take supper with them at the Cafe Royal after the play, Olivia. That night was something of a disappointment. All of our little partie carree had made up our minds for a long and interesting — and thus an enjoyable — evening.

Chiefest amongst the things which Irving was longing to hear him speak of was that of the death of Edmund Henry Palmer three years before. Palmer had been a friend of Irving's long before, the two men having been made known to each other by Palmer's cousin, Edward Russell, then in Irving's service. When Arabi's revolt broke out in Egypt, Palmer was sent by the British Government on a special service to gather the friendly tribes and persuade them to protect the Canal. This, by extraordinary daring and with heroic devotion, he accomplished; but he was slain treacherously by some marauders. Burton was then sent out to bring back his body and to mete out justice to the murderers — so far as such could be done.

Just before that time Burton had in hand a work from which he expected to win great fortune both for himself and his employer, the Khedive. This was to re-open the old Midian gold mines. He had long before, with endless research, discovered their locality, which had long been lost and forgotten. He had been already organising an expedition, and I had asked him to take with him my younger brother George, who wished for further adventure. He had met my suggestion very favourably, and having examined my brother's record was keen on his joining him. He wanted a doctor for his party; and a doctor who was adventurous and skilled in resource at once appealed to him. Arabi's revolt postponed such an undertaking; in Burton's case the postponement was for ever.

Our new civic brooms had been at work in London and new ordinances had been established. Punctually at midnight we were inexorably turned out. Protests, cajoleries, or bribes were of no avail. Out we had to go! I had a sort of feeling that Burton's annoyance was only restrained from adequate expression by his sense of humour. He certainly could be " adequate " — and in many languages which naturally lend themselves to invective — when he laid himself out for it. The Fates were more propitious a few months later, when Irving had a supper at the Continental Hotel, on July 30 — the last night of the season and Benefit of Ellen Terry. By this time we understood the licensing law and knew what to do. Irving took a bed at the hotel and his guests were allowed to remain; this was the merit of a hotel as distinguished from a restaurant. There was plenty of material for pleasant talk in addition to Captain and Mrs. Burton, for amongst the guests was James McHenry, J. L. Toole, Beatty Kingston (the war correspondent of the Daily Telegraph), Willie Winter, Mr. Marquand of New York, and Richard Mansfield. All was very pleasant, but there was not the charm of personal reminiscence, which could not be in so large a gathering.

IV

The following year, 1886, however, whilst the Burtons were again in London, we had two other delightful meetings. On July 9, 1886, Irving had Sir Richard and Lady Burton — he had been knighted in the meantime — to supper in the Beefsteak Room after the play, Faust. This was another pantie carree; just Sir Richard and Lady Burton, Irving and myself. That night we talked of many things, chiefly of home interest. Burton was looking forward to his retirement and was anxious that there should not be any hitch. He knew well that there were many hands against him and that if opportunity served he would not be spared. There were passages in his life which set many people against him. I remember when a lad hearing of how at a London dinner-party lie told of his journey to Mecca. It was a wonderful feat, for he had to pass as a Muhammedan; the slightest breach of the multitudinous observances of that creed would call attention, and suspicion at such a time and place would be instant death. In a moment of forgetfulness, or rather inattention, he made some small breach of rule.

He saw that a lad had noticed him and was quietly stealing away. He faced the situation at once, and coming after the lad in such a way as not to arouse his suspicion suddenly stuck his knife into his heart. When at the dinner he told this, some got up from the table and left the room. It was never forgotten. I asked him once about the circumstance — not the dinner-party, but the killing. He said it was quite true, and that it had never troubled him from that day to the moment at which he was speaking. Said he:

“The desert has its own laws, and there — supremely of all the East — to kill is a small offence. In any case what could I do? It had to be his life or mine!”

As he spoke the upper lip rose and his canine tooth showed its full length like the gleam of a dagger. Then he went on to say that such explorations as he had undertaken were not to be entered lightly if one had qualms as to taking life. That the explorer in savage places holds, day and night, his life in his hand; and if he is not prepared for every emergency, he should not attempt such adventures.

Though he had no fear in the ordinary sense of the word, he was afraid that if any attack were made on him apropos of this it might militate against his getting the pension for which he was then looking and on which he largely depended. We spoke of the matter quite freely that evening. At that time he was not well off. For years he had lived on his earnings and had not been able to put by much. The Arabian Nights brought out the year before, 1885, produced ten thousand pounds.

There were only a thousand copies issued at a cost of ten guineas each. The entire edition was subscribed, the amounts being paid in full and direct to Coutts and Co., so that there were no fees or discounts. The only charge against the receipts was that of manufacturing the book. This could not have amounted to any considerable sum for the paper was poor, the ink inferior, and the binding cheap. Burton had then in hand another set of five volumes of Persian Tales to be subscribed in the same way. Neither of the sets of books were “ published “ in the literal way. The issue was absolutely a private one. All Burton’s friends, myself included, thought it necessary to subscribe. Irving had two sets. The net profits of these fifteen volumes could hardly have exceeded thirteen thousand pounds.

V

Our next meeting was on September 18, 1886, when we were all Irving's guests at the Continental once again — another partie carree.

On this occasion the conversation was chiefly of plays. Both Sir Richard and Lady Burton impressed on Irving how much might be done with a play taken from some story, or group of stories, in the Arabian Nights. Burton had a most vivid way of putting things — especially of the East. He had both a fine imaginative power and a memory richly stored not only from study but from personal experience. As he talked, fancy seemed to run riot in its alluring power; and the whole world of thought seemed to flame with gorgeous colour. Burton knew the East. Its brilliant dawns and sunsets; its rich tropic vegetation, and its arid fiery deserts; its cool, dark mosques and temples; its crowded bazaars; its narrow streets; its windows guarded for out-looking and from in-looking eyes; the pride and swagger of its passionate men, and the mysteries of its veiled women; its romances; its beauty; its horrors. Irving grew fired as the night wore on, and it became evident that he had it in his mind from that time to produce some such play as the Burtons suggested should occasion serve. It was probably the recollection of that night that brought back to him, so closely as to be an incentive to possibility, his own glimpse of the East as seen in Morocco and the Levant seven years before. When De Bornier published his Mahomet in Paris some few years later he was in the receptive mood to consider it as a production.

I asked Lady Burton to get me a picture of her husband. She said he had a rooted dislike to letting any one have his picture, but said she would ask him. Presently she sent me one, and with it a kindly word: " Dick said he would give it you, because it was you; but that he wouldn't have given it to any one else!"

CHAPTER XLI. SIR HENRY MORTON STANLEY

An interesting dinner— “Doubting Thomases” The lesson of exploration— “Through the Dark Continent” — Dinner — Du Chaitlu — The price of fame

I

ON October 22, 1882, Irving gave a little dinner to H. M. Stanley in the small private dining-room of the Garrick Club. The other guests were George Augustus Sala, Edmund Yates, Col. E. A. Buck of New York, Mr. Bigelow (then British agent of the U.S. Treasury), H. D. Traill, Clement Scott, Joseph Hatton, T. H. S. Escott, Frank C. Burnand, W. A. Burdett-Coutts, J. L. Toole, and myself — fourteen in all.

The time was after Stanley had made his expedition in Africa, which he afterwards chronicled under the name of In Darkest Africa, and had gone out again to explore the region of the Congo for the Brussels African International Association. He had returned for a short visit to Brussels and London. He had been much in Belgium in consultation with the King regarding the foundation of the Congo Free State. Every one present was anxious to hear what he had to say; and Irving, who, when he chose, was most excellent in drawing any one out, took care that he had a good leading. Indeed it was a notable evening, for we sat there after dinner till four o’clock in the morning and for most of the time he held the floor. He was always interesting and at times kept us all enthralled. He had a peculiar manner, though less marked then than it became in later years. He was slow and deliberate of speech; the habit of watchful self-control seemed even then to have eaten into the very marrow of his bones. His dark face, through which the eyes seemed by contrast to shine like jewels, emphasised his slow speech and measured accents. His eyes were very comprehensive, and, in a quiet way, without appearing to rove, took in everything. He seemed to have that faculty of sight which my father had described to me of Robert Houdin, the great conjurer. At a single glance Stanley took in everything, received facts and assimilated them; gauged character in its height, and breadth, and depth, and specific gravity; formed opinion so quickly and so unerringly to the full extent of his capacity that intention based on what he saw seemed not to follow receptivity but to go hand in hand with it. Let me give an instance:

At least two of those present did not seem prepared to accept his statements in simple faith. Of course not a word was said by either to jar the harmony of the occasion or to convey doubt. But doubt at least there was; one felt it without evidence. I knew both men well and felt that it was only the consistent expression of their attitude towards the unknown. Both, so far as I knew — or know now — were strangers to him, though of course their names were familiar. I knew from Irving's glance at me where I sat across the table from him that he understood. Irving and I were so much together that after a few years we could almost read a thought of the other; we could certainly read a glance or an expression. I have sometimes seen the same capacity in a husband and wife who have lived together for long and who are good friends, accustomed to work together and to understand each other. He had a quiet sardonic humour, and this combined with an intuitive faculty of reasoning out data before their issue was declared — together with his glance to my right where the two men sat — seemed to say:

“Look at Yates and Burnand. Stanley will be on to them presently!’

And surely enough he was on to them, and in a remarkable way.

He was describing some meeting with the King of the Belgians regarding the finances of the new State, and how of those present a small section of the financiers were making negative difficulties. The way he spoke was thus:

“Amongst them two ‘ doubting Thomases ‘-as it might be you and you “ — making as he spoke a casual wave of his hand without looking at either, as though choosing at random, but so manifestly meaning it that all the other men laughed in an instantaneous chorus.

Somehow that seemed to clear the air for him; and having established a position which was manifestly accepted by all, he went on to speak more earnestly.

I shall never forget that description which he gave us of the reaching that furthest point on Lake Leopold II. that white men had ever reached. He wrote of it all afterwards in his book on the Congo, though the incident which he then described differed slightly from the account in his book produced three years afterwards. No written words could convey the picturesque convincing force of that quiet utterance, with the searching still eyes to add to its power. How as the little steamer drew in shore the natives had rushed in clustering masses ready to do battle. How one nimble giant had leaped fax out on an isolated rock that just showed its top above the still water, and poised thereon for an instant had hurled a spear with such force and skill that it passed the limit they had fixed as the furthest that a missile could reach them and where they held the boat in safety. How he himself had peremptorily checked in a whisper one beside him who was preparing to shoot, and he himself took a gun and fired high in the air just to show the savages that he too had power and greater power than their own should they choose to use it. How, awed by the sound and by the steamer, the natives made signs of obeisance;;

whereupon he brought the boat close to the rock whence the warrior had launched his spear and laid thereon offerings of beads and coloured stuffs and implements of steel, saying as he prepared to move away:

“We shall come again!”

Then he told of the wonder of the savages; their reverence; their complete submission! How the canoe moved away in that glory of wonder which would in time grow to a legend, and then to a belief that some day white Gods who brought gifts would come to them bringing unknown good.

It was an idyll of peace; a lesson in beneficent pioneering; a page of the great book of England’s wise kindliness in the civilisation of the savage which as yet has been written but in part. We all sat spellbound. There was no “ doubting Thomas “ then. I think, one and all, we held high regard and affection for the man who spoke.

Then encouraged by the reception of his words — and after all it was a noble audience, in kind if not in quantity, for any man to speak to — he went on at Irving’s request to re-tell to us the story of his finding of Livingstone. Here he did not object to any direct questioning, even when one man asked him if the report was exact of his taking off his helmet and bowing when he met the lost explorer with the memorable address:

“Dr. Livingstone, I believe? “ He laughed quietly as he answered affirmatively — a strange thing to see in that dark, still face, where toil and danger and horror had set their seals. But it seemed to light up the man from within and show a new and quite different side to his character.

Somehow there is, I suppose — indeed must be — some subtle emanation from both character and experience. The propulsive power of the individuality takes something from the storage of the mind. Certainly some persons who have been down in deep waters of any kind convey to those who see or hear them something of the dominating note of their experience. Stanley had not only the traveller's look — the explorer's look; he seemed one whose goings had been under shadow.

It may of course have been that the dark face and the still eyes and that irregular white of the hair which speaks of premature stress on vitality conveyed by inference their own lesson; but most assuredly Henry Stanley had a look of the forest gloom as marked as Dante's contemporaries described of him: that of one who had traversed Heaven and Hell.

After a long time we broke up the set formation of the dinner table, and one by one in informal turn we each had a chat with the great explorer. He told us that he wanted some strong, brave, young men to go with him to Africa, and offered to accept any one whom I could recommend.

II

The next year, on September 14, we met again when Irving had a large dinner-party-sixty-four people — at the Continental Hotel. Of course in so large a party there was little opportunity of general conversation. All that any one — except a very favoured few who sat close at hand — could speak or hear was of the commonplace of life — parting and meeting.

I did not meet Stanley again for six years, but Irving met him several times, and at one of their meetings there was a little matter which gave me much pleasure:

When we had gone to America in 1883 I had found myself so absolutely ignorant of everything regarding that great country that I took some pains to post myself up in things exclusively and characteristically American. Our tour of 1883-4 was followed by another in 1884-5, so that in the space of a year which the two visits covered I had fine opportunities of study. In those days Professor James Bryce's book on The American Commonwealth had not been written — published at all events. And there was no standard source from which an absolutely ignorant stranger could draw information. I found some difficulty then in buying a copy of an Act of Congress so that I might study its form; and it was many months before I could get a copy of the Sessional Orders of Congress. However, before we left at the conclusion of our second visit I had accumulated a lot of books — histories, works on the constitution, statistics, census, school books, books of etiquette for a number of years back, Congressional reports on various subjects — in fact all the means of reference and of more elaborate study. When I had studied sufficiently — having all through the tour consulted all sorts of persons — professors, statesmen, bankers, &c. — I wrote a lecture, which I gave at the Birk-beck Institution in 1885 and elsewhere. This I published as a pamphlet in 1886, as A Glimpse of America. Stanley had evidently got hold of it, for one night when we were in Manchester, June 4, 189o, I had supper alone with Irving and he told me that the last time he had met him, Stanley had mentioned my little book on America as admirable. He had said that I had mistaken my vocation — that I should be a literary man! Of course such praise from such a man gave me a great pleasure.

Strangely enough I had a ratification of this a year later. On March 3o, 1891, I met at luncheon, in the house of the Duchess of St.

Albans, Dr. Parke, who had been with Stanley on his journey Through the Dark Continent; I had met him before at Edward Marston's dinner, but we had not had much opportunity of talking together. He told me that it was one of the very few books that Stanley had brought with him in his perilous journey across Africa, and that he had told him that it " had in it more information about America than any other book that had ever been written."

III

The dinner given to Stanley by Edward Marston, the publisher, on the eve of bringing out Stanley's great book, Through the Dark Continent — June 26, 1890 — was a memorable affair. Marston had then published two books of mine, Under the Sunset, and the little book on America, and as " one of his authors " I was a guest at the dinner. Irving was asked, but he could not go as he was then out of town on a short holiday, previous to commencing an engagement of two weeks at the Grand Theatre, Islington, whilst the Lyceum was occupied by Mr. Augustin Daly's company from New York. At the dinner I sat at an inside corner close to Sir Harry (then Mr.) Johnston, the explorer and administrator, and to Paul B. du Chaillu, the African explorer who had discovered gorillas. I had met both these gentlemen before; the first in London several times; the latter in New York, in December 1884, in the house of Mr. and Mrs. Tailer, who that night were entertaining Irving and Ellen Terry. There we had sat together at supper and he had told me much of his African experience and of his adventures with gorillas. I had of course read his books, but it was interesting to hear the stories under the magic of the adventurer's own voice and in his characteristic semi-French intonation. In the course of conversation he had said to me something which I have never forgotten — it spoke volumes:

"When I was young nothing would keep me out of Africa. Now nothing would make me go there! " In reply to the toast of his health, Stanley spoke well and said some very interesting things:

"In my book that is coming out I have said as little as possible about Emin Pasha. He was to me a study of character. I never met the same kind of character." Again:

"I have not gone into details of the forest march and return to the sea. It was too dreary and too horrible. It will require years of time to be able to think of its picturesque side."

At that time Stanley looked dreadfully worn, and much older than when I had seen him last. The six years had more than their tally of wear for him, and had multiplied themselves. He was darker of skin than ever; and this was emphasised by the whitening of his hair. He was then under fifty years of age, but he looked nearer to eighty than fifty. His face had become more set and drawn — had more of that look of slight distortion which comes with suffering and over-long anxiety.

There were times when he looked more like a dead man than a living one. Truly the wilderness had revenged upon him the exposal of its mysteries.

CHAPTER XLII. ARMINIUS VAMBERY

A Defence against torture — How to Travel in Central Asia — An Orator

AMONGST the interesting visitors to the Lyceum and the Beefsteak Room was Arminius Vambery, Professor at the University of Buda-Pesth. On April 3o, 1890, he came to see the play, The Dead Heart, and remained to supper. He was most interesting and Irving was delighted with him. He had been to Central Asia, following after centuries the track of Marco Polo and was full of experiences fascinating to hear. I asked him if when in Thibet he never felt any fear. He answered:

"Fear of death — no; but I am afraid of torture. I protected myself against that, however 1 " " However did you manage that? " " I had always a poison pill fastened here, where the lappet of my coat now is. This I could always reach with my mouth in case my hands were tied. I knew they could not torture me, and then I did not care!"

He is a wonderful linguist, writes twelve languages, speaks freely sixteen, and knows over twenty. He told u.s once that when the Empress Eugenie remarked to him that it was odd that he who was lame should have walked so much, he replied:

"Ah, Madam, in Central Asia we travel not on the feet but on the tongue."

We saw him again two years later, when he was being given a Degree at the Tercentenary of Dublin University. On the day on which the delegates from the various Universities of the world spoke, he shone out as a star. He soared above all the speakers, making one of the finest speeches I have ever heard. Be sure that he spoke loudly against Russian aggression — a subject to which he had largely devoted himself.

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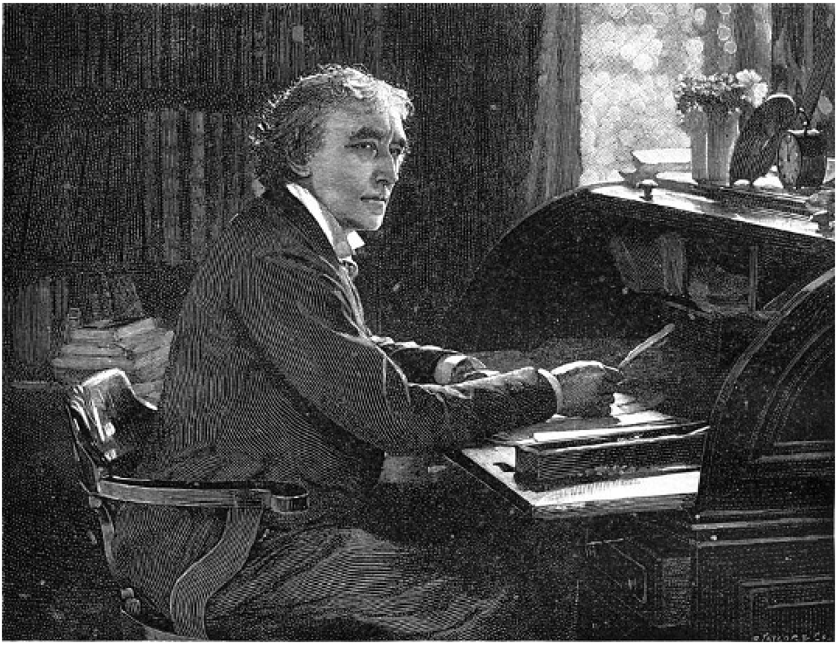

Irving in his study, 1892

CHAPTER XLIII. IRVING'S PHILOSOPHY OF HIS ART

The key-stone — The scientific process — Character — The Play — Stage Perspective — Dual Consciousness — Individuality — The True Realism

I

IRVING and I were alone together one hot afternoon in August 1889, crossing in the steamer from South-sea to the Isle of Wight, and were talking of that phase of Stage Art which deals with the conception and development of character. In the course of our conversation, whilst he was explaining to me the absolute necessity of an actor's understanding the prime qualities of a character in order that he may make it throughout consistent, he said these words:

"If you do not pass a character through your own mind it can never be sincere."

I was much struck with the phrase, coming as it did as the crown of an argument — the explanation of a great artist's method of working out a conceived idea. To me it was the embodiment of an artistic philosophy. Even in the midst of an interesting conversation, during which we touched upon many subjects of inner mental working, the phrase presented itself as one of endless possibilities, and hung as such in my mind. Lest I should forget the exact words I wrote them then and there in my pocket-book, whence I entered them later in my diary.

I think that if I had interrupted the conversation at the above words and asked my friend to expound his philosophy and elaborate it, he would have been for an instant amused, and on the impulse of the moment would have deprecated the use of such an important word. Men untrained to Mental Science and unfamiliar with its terminology are apt to place too much importance on abstract, wide-embracing terms, and to find the natural flow of their true thought interrupted by disconcerting fears. His amusement would have been only momentary, however. I know now, after familiar acquaintance with his intellectual method for over a quarter of a century, that with his mental quickness — which was so marked as now and again to seem like inspiration — he would have grasped the importance of the theme as bearing upon the Art to which he had devoted himself and to his own part in it. And would have tried to explain matters as new and relevant subjects, consequences or causes, presented themselves. But such an exposition would have been — must have been confused and incomplete. The process of a creative argument is a silent and lonely one, requiring investigation and guesses; the following up of clues in the labyrinth of thought till their utility or their falsity has been proved. The most that a striving mind can do at such a time is to keep sight of some main purpose or tendency; some perpetual recognition of its objective. If in addition the thinker has to keep eternally and consciously within his purview a lot of other subjects bearing on his main idea, each with its own attendant distractions and divergencies, his argument would to a listener seem but a jumble of undigested facts, deductions and imaginings. Moreover, it would leave in the mind of the latter a belief that the speaker is without any real conviction at all; a mere groper in the dark. If, on the other hand, the man in thinking out his problem tries to bear in mind his friend’s understanding — with an eye to his ultimate approval and acceptance of his argument and conclusion — he is apt to limit himself to commonplace and accepted truths. In such case his thought is machine-made, and lacks the penetrative force which has its origin in intellectual or psychic fire. A whole history of such thought cannot equal a single glimpse or hint of an earnest mind working truly.

As Irving on that pleasant voyage spoke the words which seemed to explain his whole intellectual method I grasped instinctively the importance of the utterance, though the argument for present reticence did not present itself in its entirety.

To me the words became a text of which the whole of his work seemed the expounding. From him, as an artist, the thought was elementary and basic; explanatory and illuminative.

II

To “pass a character. through your mind “ requires a scientific process of some kind; some process which is natural, and therefore consistent, If we try to analyse the process we shall find that it is in accord with anv other alimentative process. Nature varies in details, but her intents and obj ects are fixed: to fit and sustain each to its appointed task. In the animal or vegetable kingdoms, so in the mind of man. The hemlock and the apple take the juices of the earth through different processes of filtration; the one to noxious ends, the other to beneficence. Hardness and density have their purpose in the mechanism of the vegetable world; the wood rejects what the softer and more open valves or tissues receive. So too in the world of animal life. The wasp and the viper, the cuttlefish and the stinging ray work to different ends from the sheep and the sole, the pheasant and the turtle. But one and all draw alimentative substance from common sources. But he who would understand character must draw varying results from common causes. And the only engine powerful enough in varying purposes for this duty is the human brain. Again, the worker in imagination is the one who most requires different types and varying methods of development. And still again, of all workers in imagination, the actor has most need for understanding; for on him is imposed the task of re-creating to external and material form types of character written in abstractions. It behoves him, then, primarily to understand what exactly it is that he has to materialise. To this end two forms of understanding are necessary: first that which the poet — the creator or maker of the play, sets down for him; second the truth of the given individual to the type or types which he is supposed to represent. This latter implies a large knowledge of types; for how can any man judge of the truth of things when to him both the type and the instance are strange. Thus it happens that an actor should be a judge of character; an understander of those differences which discriminate between classes, and individuals of the class. This is an actor's study at the beginning of his work — when he is preparing to study his Art.

Let me say at the outset of this branch of my subject that I am in it trying to put into words, and the words into some sort of ordered sequence, that knowledge of his craft which in a long course of years Irving conveyed to me. Sometimes the conveyance was made consciously; sometimes unconsciously. By words, by inferences, by acting; by what he added to seemingly completed work, or by what he omitted after fuller thought or experience. One by one, or group by group, these things were interesting, though often of seeming unimportance; but taken altogether they go to make up a philosophy. In trying to formulate this I am not speaking for myself; I am but following so well as I can the manifested wisdom of the master of his craft. Here and there I shall be able to quote Irving's exact words, spoken or written after mature thought and with manifest and deliberate purpose. For the rest, I can only illustrate by his acting, or at worst by the record of the impression conveyed to my own mind.

III

We may I think divide the subject thus:

CHARACTER

- A. ITS ESSENCE
  - *x.—The Dramatist's setting out of it*
  - *y.—.11s truth to accepted type*
  - *z.—The Player's method of studying these two*
- B. RETICENCE
- C. ART AND TRUTH

THE PLAY
STAGE PERSPECTIVE
DUAL CONSCIOUSNESS
INDIVIDUALITY, AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF IT

IV

CHARACTER

A. — ITS ESSENCE

We think in abstractions; but we live in concretions. In real life an individual who is not in any way distinguishable from his fellows is but a poor creature after all and is not held of much account by anybody. That law of nature which makes the leaves of a tree or the units of any genus, any species, any variety all different — which in the animal or the vegetable world alike makes each unit or class distinguishable whilst adhering to the type — is of paramount importance to man. Tennyson has hammered all this out and to a wonderful conclusion in those splendid stanzas of In Memoriam LIV to Lvi beginning “ Oh yet we trust that somehow good “ to “

Behind the veil, behind the veil."

Let it be sufficient for us to know and accept that there can be endless individual idiosyncrasies without violation of type. To understand these is the study of character. The dillerentia of each individual is an endless and absorbing study, not given to all to master. Some at least of this mastery is a necessary part of the equipment of an actor. Now there is a common saying that " the eyebrow is the actor's feature." This is largely true; but there is a double purpose in its truth. In the first place the eyebrow is movable at will; a certain amount of exercise can give mobility and control. It can therefore heighten expression to a very marked degree. But in addition it, when in a marked degree, is the accompaniment of a large frontal sinus — that bony ridge above the eyebrows which in the terminology of physiognomy implies the power to distinguish minute differences, and so is credited with knowledge of " character " — the difference between one and another; divergencies within a common type. With this natural equipment and the study which inevitably follows — for powers are not given to men in vain — the actor can by experience know types, and endless variants and combinations of the same. So can any man who has the quality. But the actor alone has to work out the ideas given to him by this study in recognisable material types and differentiated individual instances of the same type.

X

The dramatist having, whether by instinct or reason, selected his type has in the play to give him situations which can allow opportunity for the expression of his qualities; words in which he can expound the thoughts material to him in the given situations; and such hints as to personal appearance, voice and bearing as can assist the imagination of a reader. All these things must be consistent; there must be nothing which would show to the student falsity to common knowledge. “ Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? “ has a large application in art, and specially in stage art. It is the ignorance or neglect of this eternal law which is to my mind the weakness of some writers. Instance Ibsen who having shown in some character an essential quality through one or two acts makes the after action of the character quite at variance with it. A similar fault weakens certain of the fine work of “ Ian Maclaren “ when he proceeds to explain away in a later story some perfectly consistent and understandable quality of mind or action in one of his powerful and charming character stories. No after-explanation can supersede the conviction of innate character. y Now a dramatist is at perfect liberty to choose any type he likes and to deal with his individual creations just as he chooses. There is no law against it; however ridiculous it may be, it makes no breach of any code in accepted morals. But he should for his own sake be consistent; the character should at least be true to itself. It is by such qualities that posterity as well as the juries of the living judge. The track of literary progress is littered with wreckage from breaches of this truth.

Of this we may be sure: if a character have in itself opposing qualities which cannot be reconciled, then it can never have that unity which makes for strength. Therefore the actor who has to represent the abstract idea as a concrete reality must at the beginning understand the dramatist’s intention. He can by emphasis of one kind or another help to convey the dominant idea. There is an exact instance of this from Irving’s own work; one which at the same time illustrates how an actor, howsoever thoughtful and experienced he may be, can learn: For a good many years he had played Shylock to universal praise; then, all at once, he altered it. Altered it in the manner of utterance of the first words he speaks: “ Three thousand ducats, — well.” He explained it to me when having noticed the change I asked him about it. He said that it was due to the criticism of a blind man — I think it was the Chaplain of the American Senate, Dr. Milburn.

“What did he say? “ I asked. He answered with a thoughtful smile:

“He said: I thought at first that you were too amiable. I seemed to miss the harsh note of the usurer’s voice! ‘ He was quite right! The audience should from the first understand, if one can convey it, the dominant note of a character!”

This was distinctly in accordance with his own theory; and he always remembered gratefully the man who so enlightened him. The incident illustrates one phase of “ passing a character through one’s own mind.” When it has gone through this process it takes a place as an actual thing — a sort of clothing of the player’s own identity with the attributes of another. This new-seeming identity must have at first its own limitations; the clothing does not fit — somewhere too tight, elsewhere too loose. But at last things become easier. The individuality within, being of plastic nature, adapts itself by degrees to its surroundings. And then for purposes of external expression the mastery is complete.

Experience adds much to this power of mastery. When an actor has played many parts he learns to express the dominant ideas of various characters in simple form, so that each, through a sort of artistic metonymy, becomes a type. In fact, as he goes on studying fresh characters he gets a greater easiness of expression; he is not creating every time, but is largely combining things already created. This is true Art. The etymology of the word shows that its purpose is rather to join than to create. Were it not that each mind must create the units which have to be joined, histrionic art would not be primarily a creative art.

In Irving's own words:

"It is often supposed that great actors trust to the inspiration of the moment. Nothing can be more erroneous. There will, of course, be such moments when an actor at a white heat illumines some passages with a flood of imagination (and this mental condition, by the way, is impossible to the student sitting in his arm-chair); but the great actor's surprises are generally well weighed, studied, and balanced.... And it is this accumulation of such effects which enables an actor, after many years, to present many great characters with remarkable completeness."

And again when he insists upon the intention of effect:

"It is necessary that the actor should learn to think before he speaks.... Let him remember, first that every sentence expresses a new thought, and, therefore, frequently demands a change of intonation; secondly, that the thought precedes the word. Of course, there are passages in which thought and language are borne along by the streams of emotion and completely intermingled. But more often it will be found that the most natural, the most seemingly accidental effects are obtained when the working of the mind is seen before the tongue gives it words."

I well remember at one of our meetings in 1876 when after dinner we had some " recitations," according to the custom of that time. Irving was very complimentary to my own work because I anticipated words by expression, particularly by the movement of my eyes. z So far, the study of natural types and the acceptance of the dramatist's ideas. But next the actor has to learn how to show best the development of character. It is not to the purpose of a high-grade play that each character can be at the start as though labelled thus or thus. As the story unfolds itself the new situations bring into view qualities hitherto unknown; there has been heretofore no necessity for knowing them. Here it is that the dramatist must not make contradictions. He may show opposing qualities — such make the struggles of life and passions which it is the duty of the drama to portray; but the opposing forces, though they may clash, must not deny each other's very existence. Honour and baseness do not synchronously coexist; neither do patriotism and treachery; nor truth and falsehood; nor cruelty and compassion. If it be necessary in the struggles of good and bad — any of the common phases of human nature — in the same individual to show that now and again either dominates for a time, the circumstances must be so arranged as to show preponderating cause. If the dramatist acts up to this standard all can go well. But if his work be crude and not in itself illuminative, the actor's work becomes more complex and more difficult. He has in the manifold ways of his own craft to show from the first the possibilities of character which later on will have to be dealt with. He will have to suggest the faintest beginnings of things which later are to be of perhaps paramount importance.

This it is that Irving meant when he said that a character should be " sincere." It must not be self-contradictory. He put this point very definitely:

... the actor must before all things form a definite conception of what he wishes to convey. It is better to be wrong and consistent, than to be right, yet hesitating and uncertain."

And thus it is that the actor’s skill can so largely supplement that of the dramatist. He must add whatever the other has omitted or left undone. He must make straight the path which is in common to himself, the dramatist, and the public. He must prepare by subtle means — not too obtrusive to be distracting to the present purpose, nor too slight to pass altogether unnoticed — the coming of something as yet below the horizon. If this be done with care — and care implies both study and premeditation — the sincerity of the character will from first to last be unimpaired.

B. RETICENCE

On the other side of this phase of the Art of Acting is that fine undefinable quality of all art which is known as “ reticence.” Restraint is almost as rare as passion. The “ reticence “ of the actor is perhaps its most difficult phase. For he has to express that which has in the others to be concealed; and if his expression be too marked, not only does the restraint cease to exist, but a wrong idea — that of concealment — is conveyed.

C. ART AND TRUTH

All these things are parts of an integral whole; they all go to the formulation of an Art. Art is in itself only a part of the mechanism of truth. It is from the inner spirit that the outward seeming must derive. Rules and laws are but aids, restraints, methods of achievement: but it is after all to nature that the artist must look. In the words.of Pope:

“These laws of old discover’d, not deviz’d, Are nature still but nature methodiz’d.”

Irving put the idea thus:

... merely to imitate is not to apply a similar method... the greatest of all the lessons that Art can teach is this: that truth is supreme and eternal. No phase of art can achieve much on a false basis. Sincerity, which is the very touchstone of Art, is instinctively recognised by all."

V

THE PLAY

The play as a whole is a matter of prime consideration for the actor, though it only comes into his province gull actor in a secondary way. In the working of a theatre it is the province of the stage manager to arrange the play as an entity; the actor has to deal with it only with reference to his own scenes. But the actor must understand the whole scheme so as to realise the ultimate purpose; otherwise his limitations may become hindrances to this. Irving who was manager as well as actor, puts the matter plainly from the more comprehensive point of view:

"It is most important that an actor should learn that he is a figure in a picture, and that the least exaggeration destroys the harmony of the composition. All the members of the company should work toward a common end, with the nicest subordination of their individuality to the general purpose."

Here we have again the lesson of restraint — of reticence. There are also various other forms of the same need, to which he has at various times alluded. For instance, speaking of the presentation of a play he said:

"You want, above all things, to have a truthful picture which shall appeal to the eye without distracting the imagination from the purpose of the drama."

In fact Irving took the broadest possible views of the aims and possibilities of his chosen art, and of the duties as well as of the methods of those who follow it. He even put it that the State had its duty with regard to the art of illusion:

“The mere study of the necessities and resources of theatre art — the art of illusion — should give the theatre as an educational medium a place in State economy. Just think for a moment: a comprehensive art effort which consolidates into one entity which has an end and object and purpose of its own, all the elements of which any or all of the arts and industries take cognisance — thought, speech, passion, humour, pathos, emotion, distance, substance, form, size, colour, time, force, light, illusion to each or all of the senses, sound, tone, rhythm, music, motion. Can such a work be undertaken lightly or with inadequate preparation? Why, the mere patience necessary for the production of a play might take a high place in the marvels of human effort.”

VI

STAGE PERSPECTIVE

One of the things on which Irving always insisted was a knowledge and understanding of stage perspective and of its application in the practice not only of the art of the stage in its scenic and illusive aspect but of the art of acting:

“The perspective of the stage is not that of real life, and the result of seeming is achieved by means which, judged by themselves, would seem to be indirect. It is only the raw recruit who tries to hit the bull’s eye by point-blank firing, and who does not allow for elevation and windage.”

In pointing out the necessity of speaking more loudly on the stage than in a room, he puts the same idea in a different and perhaps a broader way:

“This exaggeration applies to everything on the stage. To appear to be natural, you must in reality be much broader than natural. To act on the stage as one really would in a room would be ineffective and colourless.”

He never forgot — and never allowed any one else to forget — that the purpose of stage art is illusion. Its aim is not to present reality but its semblance; not to be, but to seem. He put it thus:

“The function of art is to do and not to create — it is to make to seem, and not to make to be, for to make to be is the Creator’s work.”

He had before said:

“It must never be forgotten that all art has the aim or object of seeming and not of being, and to understate is as bad as to overstate the modesty or the efflorescence of nature.”

Thus we get the higher aim: to seem to be — but always in such wise that nature shall be worthily represented. Nature “At once the end and aim and test of art.”

So Pope. Irving put the value of nature as against mere pretence thus:

“To be natural on the stage is most difficult, and yet a grain of nature is worth a bushel of artifice.... Nature may be overdone by triviality in conditions that demand exaltation.... Like the practised orator, the actor rises and descends with his sentiment, and cannot be always in a fine frenzy.”

How true this is; how consistent with eternal truth! Nature has her moods, why not man; has her means of expressing them, why not man also? Nature has her tones; and with these why may not the heart of man vibrate and express itself?

In this connection and with the same illustration — the orator compared with the actor — Irving put a new phase of the same idea:

“It matters little whether the actor sheds tears or not, so long as he can make his audience shed them; but if tears can be summoned at will and subject to his control it is true art to utilise such a power, and happy is the actor whose sensibility has at once such delicacy and discipline. In this respect the actor is like the orator. Eloquence is all the more moving when it is animated and directed by a fine and subtle sympathy which affects the spectator though it does not master him.”

VII

DUAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The last-mentioned utterance of Irving’s brings us at once to the deepest problem in the Art of Acting: the value and use of sensibility. Throughout his later life, from the time that he first entered the polemics of his art, he held consistently to one theory. To him the main disputants were Diderot and Talma; any other was merely a supporter of the theory of either.

Diderot in his Paradox of Acting held that for good acting there must be no real feeling on the part of the actor:

“Extreme sensibility makes middling actors; middling sensibility makes the ruck of bad actors; in complete absence of sensibility is the possibility of a sublime actor.”

Irving’s comment on this theory is:

“The exaltation of sensibility in Art may be difficult to define, but it is none the less real to all who have felt its power.”

Talma[1] held quite the opposite view to that of Diderot. To him one of the first qualifications of an actor is sensibility, which indeed he considered the very source of imagination. To this quality, he held, there must be added intelligence:

"To form a great actor... the union of sensibility and intelligence is required."

1 When Irving began to consider this branch of the " true inwardness " of his work he was so much struck with the argument of Talma that he had it translated and inserted in The Theatre. This was easy of accomplishment, for with regard to that magazine he had only to ask.

As a matter of fact The Theatre at that time belonged to him. He had long considered it advisable that there should be some organ in which matters deeply concerning the stage could be set forth. He accordingly arranged with the late Mr. F. W. Hawkins, then a sub-editor of the Times, to take the work in hand. Hawkins had already by his work shown his interest in the stage; Irving had a high opinion of his " Life of Edmund Kean " and of his book on the French stage which he had then well in hand. He trusted Hawkins entirely; gave him a free hand, and never interfered with him in any possible way except to suggest some useful article of a neutral kind. He would never even give a hint of his own opinion regarding any one of his own profession, but kept studiously out of the theatrical party-politics of the day. Hawkins had his own views which he was perfectly well able to support; he could take care of himself. Irving was content that the magazine should exist, and footed the bills. Later on when the editorship was vacant Irving made a present of the whole thing to Clement Scott who said that he would like to see what he could do with it.

The Talma articles appeared in The Theatre for the 3oth January and 6th and 13th February 1877. This was before I came to Irving. It was long afterwards when I read them.

In 1883 Walter Herries Pollock, then editor of the Saturday Review, a great friend of Irving, produced an edition of the Paradox ofActing to which Irving wrote a preface. In this he set out his own views in his comments on the work of Diderot.

Irving used his knowledge of the controversy to this effect:

“I do not recommend actors to allow their feelings to carry them away...; but it is necessary to warn you against the theory, expounded with brilliant ingenuity by Diderot, that the actor never feels.... Has not the actor who can... make his feelings a part of his art an advantage over the actor who never feels, but makes his observations solely from the feelings of others? It is necessary to this art that the mind should have, as it were, a double consciousness, in which all the emotions proper to the occasion may have full swing, while the actor is all the time on the alert for every detail of his method.... The actor who combines the electric force of a strong personality with a mastery of the resources of his art, must have a greater power over his audiences than the passionless actor who gives a most artistic simulation of the emotions he never experiences.”

The sentence printed in italics is a really valuable addition to the philosophy of acting. It is Irving’s own and is, as may be seen, a development or corollary of Talma’s conclusion. Talma required as a necessity of good acting both sensibility and intelligence. But Irving claimed that in the practice of the art they must exist and act synchronously. This belief he cherished, and on it he acted with excellent result. I have myself seen a hundred instances of its efficiency in the way of protective self-control; of conscious freedom of effort; of self- reliance; of confidence in giving the reins to passion within the set bounds of art.'

In speaking of other branches of the subject Irving said:

"An actor must either think for himself or imitate some one else."

And again:

"For the purely monkey arts of life there is no future — they stand only in the crude glare of the present, and there is no softness for them, in the twilight of either hope or memory. With the true artist the internal force is the first requisite — the external appearance being merely the medium through which this is made known to others."

I have seen a good many times Irving illustrate and prove the theory of the dual consciousness in and during his own acting: when he has gone on with his work heedless of a fire on the stage and its quelling: when a gas tank underneath the stage exploded and actually dispersed some of the boarding close to him, he all the time proceeding without even a moment's pause or a falter in his voice. One other occasion was typical. During a performance of The Lyons Mail, whilst Dubose surrounded by his gang was breaking open the iron strong-box conveyed in the mail cart the horses standing behind him began to get restive and plunged about wildly, making a situation of considerable danger. The other members of the murderous gang were quickly off the stage, and the dead body of the postilion rolled away to the wings. But Irving never even looked round. He went calmly on with his work of counting the billets-de-banque, whilst he interlarded the words of the play with admonitions to his comrades not to be frightened but to come back and attend to their work of robbing. Not for an instant did he cease to be Dubosc though in addition he became manager of the theatre.

VIII

INDIVIDUALITY, AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF IT

If an actor has to learn of others — often primarily — through his own emotions, it is surely necessary that he learn first to know himself. He need not take himself as a standard of perfection — though poor human nature is apt to lean that way; but he can accept himself as something that he knows. If he cannot get that far he will never know anything. With himself then, and his self-knowledge as a foothold he may begin to understand others.[1] vi;o0t oearnOv: Know thyself! It is, after all, the base of all knowledge — the foothold for all forward thought. Commenting on the speech of Polonius: “ To thine own self be true,” Irving said:

“But how can a man be true to himself if he does not know himself? ‘ Know thyself ‘ was a wisdom of the Ancients. But how can a man know himself if he mistrusts his own identity, and if he puts aside his special gifts in order to render himself an imperfect similitude of some one else?”

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[1] As an instance of the efficacy of the method, let any one try to tell character by handwriting. It is very simple, after all. Let him take the strange writing, and after making himself familiar with it, measure it by himself, asking himself: “ Under stress of what emotion would my own writing most nearly resemble that? “ Let him repeat this with each sign of divergence from his own caligraphy and in a short time he will be astonished with the result. So it is with all studies of character. Without any standard the task is impossible; but weigh each against your own self-knowledge and you at once begin to acquire comparative knowledge of simple qualities capable of being combined endlessly.

Thus we have come back to Irving’s original proposition:

“If you do not pass a character through your own mind it can never be sincere.” The logical wheel has gone its full round and is back at the starting place. Begin with the argument where you will it must come sooner or later to the same end: “ To know others know yourself.” Your own identity is that which you must, for histrionic purposes, clothe with attributes not your own. You must have before your mind some definite image of what you would portray; and your own feeling must be ultimately its quickening force.

So far, the resolution of the poet’s thought into a moving, breathing, visible, tangible character. But that is not the completion of the endeavour. In the philosophy of histrionic art are rarer heights than mere embodiment, mere vitality, mere illusion. The stage is a world of its own, and has its own ambitions, its own duties. Truth either to natural types or to the arbitrary creations of the dramatist is not sufficient. For the altitudes something else is required. Irving set it forth thus:

“Finally in the consideration of the Art of Acting, it must never be forgotten that its ultimate aim is beauty. Truth itself is only an element of beauty, and to merely reproduce things vile and squalid and mean is a debasement of art.”

Here he supports the theory of Taine that art, like nature, has its own selective power; and that in the wisdom of its choosing is its power for good. Does it not march with that sublime apothegm of Burke “ Vice itself lost half its evil by losing all its grossness “?

Finally Irving summed up the whole Philosophy of his Art and of its place amongst the sister Arts in a few sentences:

“In painting and in the drama the methods of the workers are so entirely opposed, and the materials with which they work are so different, that a mutual study of the other work cannot but be of service to each. Your painter works in mouldable materials, inanimate, not sensitive but yielding to the lightest touch. His creation is the embodiment of the phantasm of his imagination, for in art the purpose is to glorify and not merely to reproduce. He uses forms and facts of nature that he may not err against nature's laws. But such natural facts as he assimilates are reproduced in his work, deified by the strength of his own imagination. Actors, on the other hand, have to work with materials which are all natural, and not all plastic, but are all sensitive — with some of the strength and all the weakness of flesh and blood. The actor has first to receive in his own mind the phantasmal image which is conveyed to him by the words of the poet; and this he has to reproduce as he can with the faulty materials which nature has given to him. Thus the painter and the poet begin from different ends of the gamut of natural possibilities — the one starts from nature to reach imagination, the other from imagination to reach at reality. And if the means be not inadequate, and if the effect be sincere, both can reach that veritable ground where reality and imagination join. This is the true realism towards which all should aim — the holy ground whereon is reared the Pantheon of all the Arts."

CHAPTER XLIV. THE RIGHT HON. WILLIAM EWART GLADSTONE

Visits to the Lyceum — Intellectual stimulus and rest — An interesting post-card —— His memory—" Mr. Gladstone's seat " — Speaks of Parnell — Visit to "Becket" — Special knowledge; its application — Lord Randolph Churchill on Gladstone — Mrs. Gladstone

I

FOR fourteen years, from 1881 to 1895, Mr. Gladstone was a visitor at the Lyceum. The first occasion was on the First night of The Cup, January 3, 1881, of which I have already written. He had known Irving before, but this was the first time he had been behind the Lyceum scenes. He was very interested in everything, especially those matters of which up to then he knew little such as the setting of the scenes. His fund of information was prodigious and one could feel that he took a delight in adding to it. He was on that occasion very complimentary about all he saw and very anxious to know of the reality — as distinguished from the seeming — of things such as food and drink used, &c. That night his visit to the stage was only a passing one as he sat through the active part of the play in his own box, except during a part of one scene.

He seemed ever afterwards to take a great interest in Irving and all he did. At the end of June 1882 he invited Irving to one of his delightful " Breakfasts " in Downing Street. On 8th July of the same year he came to the Lyceum and brought Lord Northbrook with him. Whenever he visited the theatre after 1881 he always came and went by the private door in Burleigh Street, and he always managed to visit Irving on the stage or in his dressing-room or both. The public seemed to take a delight in seeing him at the theatre, and he appeared to take a delight in coming. I honestly believe that he found in it, now and again, an intellectual stimulant — either an excitement or a pausing time before some great effort, or a relief of change from fact to fancy after it. For instance: On 8th April 1886, Thursday, he made his great speech in the House of Commons introducing the Home Rule Bill — amid a time of great excitement. Two nights after, Saturday night, he came to the Lyceum — and received an immense ovation. Again, in the time of bitter regret and anxiety when Parnell made the violent attack on him in his Manifesto, November 29, 1890, Saturday, he took his earliest opportunity, Tuesday, 2nd December, of coming to the Lyceum.

This visit was a somewhat special one, for it was the first time that Mr. Gladstone came to sit behind the scenes in the O.P.' proscenium corner which then became known as " Mr. Gladstone's seat." The occasion of it was thus: I had the year previously written an Irish novel, 'The Snake s Pass', 1 Opposite Prompt. which after running as a serial through the London People and several provincial papers had now been published in book form. I had done myself the pleasure of sending an early copy to Mr. Gladstone whose magnificent power and ability and character I had all my life so much admired. Having met and conversed with him several times I felt in a way justified in so doing. He had at once written; I received his letter the same day — that of publication, 18th November 1890. I give his letter, which was in the post-card form then usual to him. I think it is a good example of his method of correspondence, kind and thoughtful and courteous — a model of style. I had as may be gathered written with some diffidence, or delicacy of feeling:

"DEAR MR. BRAM STOKER, — My social memory is indeed a bad one, yet not so bad as to prevent my recollection of our various meetings. I thank you much for your work, and for your sympathy; and I hope to have perused all your pages before we meet again.

When that will be I know not: but I am so fond a lover of The Bride of Lammermoor that I may take the desperate step of asking Mr. Irving whether he will some night, if it is on, let me sit behind the stage pillar — a post which C. Kean once gave me, and which alone would make me sure to hear. — Yours faithfully, W. E. GLADSTONE.

N. 18. 90."

Some days later, after a most cordial invitation from Irving, it was arranged that he should choose exactly what date he wished and that all should be ready for him. There could be no difficulty, as Ravenswood was the only play then in the bill and would hold it alone till the beginning of the new year. When he did come I met him and Mrs. Gladstone at the private door and piloted them across the stage, which was the nearest way to Irving's box. The door to it was beside the corner where Mr. Gladstone would sit.

Possibly it was that as Mr. Gladstone was then full of Irish matters my book, being of Ireland and dealing with Irish ways and specially of a case of oppression by a " gombeen " man under a loan secured on land, interested him for he had evidently read it carefully. As we walked across the stage he spoke to me of it very kindly and very searchingly. Of course I was more than pleased when he said:

"That scene at Mrs. Kelligan's is fine — very fine indeed!"

Now it must be remembered that, in the interval between his getting the book and when we met, had occurred one of the greatest troubles and trials of his whole political life. The hopes which he had built through the slow progress of years for the happy settlement of centuries-old Irish troubles had been suddenly almost shattered by a bolt from the blue, and his great intellect. and enormous powers of work and concentration had been for many days strained to the utmost to keep the road of the future clear from the possibility of permanent destruction following on temporary embarrassment. And yet in the midst of all he found time to read — and remember, even to details and names — the work of an unimportant friend.

When it had been known on the stage that Mr. Gladstone was coming that night to sit behind the scenes the men seemed determined to make it a gala occasion. They had prepared the corner where he was to sit as though it were for Royalty. They had not only swept and dusted but had scrubbed the floor; and they had rigged up a sort of canopy of crimson velvet so that neither dust nor draught should come to the old man. His chair was nicely padded and made comfortable. The stage-men were all, as though by chance, on the stage and all in their Sunday clothes. As the Premier came in all hats went off. I showed Mr. Gladstone his nook and told him, to his immense gratification, how the men had prepared it on their own initiative. We chatted till the time drew near for the curtain to go up. Then I fixed him in his place and showed him how to watch for and avoid the drop scene, the great roller of which would descend guided by the steel cord drawn taut beside him. Lest there should be any danger through his unfamiliarity with the ways of theatres, I signalled the Master Carpenter to come to me and thus cautioned him.

“Would it not be well,” I said, “ if some one stood near here in case of accident?”

“It’s all right, sir, we have provided for that. The two best and steadiest men in the theatre are here ready! “ I looked round and there they were — alert and watchful. And there they remained all night. There was not going to be any chance of mishap to Mr.

Gladstone that night!

I went always to join him between the acts, and Irving when he had opportunity from his dressing — of which there was a good deal in Ravenswood would come to talk with him. We were all, whatever our political opinions indivi- dually, full of the Parnell Manifesto and its many bearings on political life. For myself, though I was a philosophical Home-Ruler, I was much surprised and both angry at and sorry for Parnell's attitude, and I told Mr. Gladstone my opinion. He said with great earnestness and considerable feeling:

"I am very angry, but I assure you I am even more sorry."

I was pleased to think — and need I say proud also — that Mr. Gladstone seemed to like to talk politics with me. In March 1887 when the new Rules of Procedure for the House of Commons were introduced I ventured to write an exhaustive note on one of the suggested new Rules, No. XII., which I sent to him through the kindness of his friend James Knowles. He was good enough to send me a kind message regarding it through his son Mr. W. H. Gladstone. This suggested Rule was shortly dropped altogether, not of course in any way due to my suggestion. I felt, however, gratified that my view was correct. In my University days I had been something of a law maker in a small way, as I had revised and carried out the revision of the laws of order of the College Historical Society, Dublin University — our great debating society founded by Edmund Burke. I had also made the laws for the Actors' Benevolent Fund, for a hospital, and for numerous societies.

On that particular night he was very chatty, and in commenting on the play compared, strangely enough, Caleb Balderstone with Falstaff. He was interested and eager about everything round him and asked innumerable questions. In the course of conversation he said that he had always taken it for granted that the stage word " properties " included costumes.

He was seemingly delighted with that visit, and from that time on whenever he came to the theatre he always occupied the same place, Mrs. Gladstone and whoever might be with him sitting in Irving's box close at hand.

II

The next time he came, which was on 29th January of the next year, 1891, he generously brought Irving a cheque for ten pounds for the Actors' Benevolent Fund. That evening too he was delighted with the play, Much Ado about Nothing, which he had seen before in 1882, in the ordinary way. He applauded loudly, just as he used to do when sitting in the front of the house.

III

He came again in 1892, iith May, when we were playing Henry VIII, and in the course of conversation commented on Froude's estimate of the population of England in the sixteenth century, which according to his ideas had been stated much below the mark. He also spoke of Dante being in Oxford — a subject about which he wrote in the Nineteenth Century in the next month.

Another instance of Mr. Gladstone's visit to the Lyceum: on the evening of 25th February 1893 he came to see Becket. He had introduced his second Home Rule Bill on the thirteenth of the month, and as it was being discussed he was naturally full of it — so were we all. By the way, the Bill was carried in the Commons at the end of August of that year. That night when speaking of his new Bill he said to me:

"I will venture to say that in four or five years those who oppose it will wonder what it was that they opposed!"

He was delighted with Becket, and seemed specially to rejoice in the success of Tennyson's work.

IV

He was as usual much interested in matters of cost. Irving talked with him very freely, and amongst other things mentioned the increasing expenses of working a theatre, especially with regard to the salaries of actors which had, he said, almost been doubled of late years. Gladstone seemed instantly struck with this. When Irving had gone to change his dress, Gladstone said to me suddenly:

"You told me, I think, that you are Chancellor of the Exchequer here."

"Yes! " I said. " As in your own case, Mr. Gladstone, that is one of my functions!"

"Then would you mind answering me a few questions? " On my giving a hearty acquiescence he began to inquire exhaustively with regard to different classes of actors and others, and seemed to be weighing in his mind the relative advances.

In fact his queries covered the whole ground, for now and again he asked as to the quality of materials used. I knew he was omnivorous with regard to finance, but to-night I was something surprised at the magnitude and persistence of his interests. The reason came shortly. Three days after the visit, 28th February, Sir Henry Meysey-Thompson, M.P. for Handsworth, voiced in the

House the wishes then floating of the Bi-Metallists for an International Monetary Conference. Mr. Gladstone replied to him in a great speech, the immediate effect of which was to relegate the matter to the Greek Kalends. In this speech he began with the standard of value, and by figures arrived at gold as the least variable standard. Then he went on to the values and change of various commodities, leading him to what he called “ the greatest commodity of the world — human labour.” This he broadly differentiated into three classes of work which were dependent on ordinary trade laws and conditions, and of a more limited class which seemed to illustrate the natural changes of the laws of value, inasmuch as the earners were not influenced to any degree by the course of events or the cost of materials. This, broadly speaking, was his sequence of ideas. When he had got so far he said:

“Take also the limited class about whom I happened to hear the other day — the theatrical profession. I have it on unquestionable authority that the ordinary payments received by actors and actresses have risen largely.”

With his keen instinct for both finance and argument he had seized at once on Irving’s remark about the increase of salaries, recognising on the instant its suitability as an illustration in the setting forth of his views. And I doubt if he could have found any other class of wage-earning so isolated from commercial changes.

V

Irving told me of an interesting conversation which he had in those days with Lord Randolph Churchill in which the latter mentioned Gladstone in a striking way. Answering a query following on some previous remark, he said:

“The fact is we are all afraid of him! “ “ How is that — and why? “ asked Irving. “ Well, you see, he is a first-class man. And the rest of us are only second-class — at best!”

Mr. Gladstone was a really good playgoer and he seemed to love the theatre. When he came he and Mrs. Gladstone were always in good time. I once asked him, thinking that he might have mistaken the hour, in which case I would have borne it in mind to advise him on another occasion, if he liked to come early, and he said:

“Yes. I have always made it a practice to come early. I like to be in my place, and composed, before they begin to tune the fiddles!”

This is the true spirit in which to enjoy the play. No one who has ever sat in eager expectation can forget the imaginative forcefulness of that acre of green baize which hid all the delightful mysteries of the.stage. It was in itself a sort of introduction to wonderland, making all the seeming that came after as if quickened into reality.

VI

Like her great husband Mrs. Gladstone largely enjoyed the play. She too seemed to wish to be in good time and to be interested in everything. Like him she was incarnate memory and courtesy. I can give a little pleasing instance: Once when stepping from her carriage she dropped her cut glass smelling-bottle. I had met them coming in and saw her loss; so I sent out and got another as like as possible to the fragments that lay on the path. She was greatly pleased at the little attention and did not forget it. Years afterwards, when I went to see her in her box, she held up the scent bottle and said:

“You see I have it still!”

CHAPTER XLV. THE EARL OF BEACONSFIELD

His advice to a Court chaplain — Sir George Elliott and picture-hanging — As a beauty — As a social fencer—" A striking physiognomy"

I

I NEVER saw Benjamin Disraeli (except from the Gallery of the House of Commons) but on the one occasion, when he came to see The Corsican Brothers. Irving, however, met him often and liked to talk about him. He admired, of course, his power and courage and address; but it was, I think, the Actor that was in the man that appealed to him. I think also that Beaconsfield liked him, and gauged his interest and delight in matters of character. Somehow the stories which he told him conveyed this idea.

One was of an ambitious young clergyman, son of an old friend of the statesman, who asked him to use his influence in having him appointed a Chaplain to the Queen. This he had effected in due course. The Premier, to his surprise, some time afterwards received a visit from his protege, who said he had, on the ground of the kindness already extended to him, to ask a further favour. When asked what it was he answered:

"I have through your kindness — for which I am eternally grateful — been notified that I am to preach before Her Majesty on Sunday week. So I have come to ask you if you would very kindly give me some sort of hint in the matter! " The Premier, after a moment's thought, had answered:

"Well, you see, I am not much in the habit of preaching sermons myself so I must leave that altogether to your own discretion. But I can tell you this: If you will preach for fifteen minutes the Queen will listen to you. If you will preach for ten minutes she will listen with interest. But if you will preach for five minutes you will be the most popular chaplain that has ever been at Court."

"And what do you think," he went on, " this egregious young man said:

"But, Mr. Disraeli, how can I do myself justice in five minutes! ' "
Then came the super-cynical remark of the statesman-of-the-world:

"Fancy wanting to do himself justice — and before the Queen!"

II

Sir George Elliott, Bart., M.P., the great coal-owner, was a friend of Irving's and used to come to the Lyceum. One night-4th December Ifigo-at supper in the Beefsteak Room, he told us of a visit he paid to Lord Beaconsfield at Hughenden Manor. Disraeli had taken a fancy to the old gentleman, who was, I believe, a self-made man — all honour to him. He was the only guest on that week-end visit. His host took him over the house and showed him his various treasures. In the course of their going about, Beaconsfield asked him:

"How do you like this room? " It was the dining-room, a large and handsome chamber; in it were two portraits, the Queen and the Countess Beaconsfield — Disraeli had had her title conferred whilst he was still in the Commons. At the time of Sir George's visit he was a widower.

"I thought it odd," said Sir George, " that the Queen's picture should hang on the side wall whilst another was over the chimney-piece, which was the place of honour, and asked Dizzy if they should not be changed. He smiled as he said, after a pause:

""' Well, her Majesty did me the honour of visiting me twice at

Hughenden; but she did not make the suggestion!’

“He said it very sweetly. It was a gentle rebuke. I don’t know how I came to make such a blunder.”

There is another reading of the speech which I think he did not see.

III

Disraeli was always good to his Countess, who loved and admired him devotedly. She must, however, have been at times something of a trial to him, for she was outspoken in a way which must now and again have galled a man with his sense of humour; no man is insensitive to ridicule. One night at supper in the Beefsteak Room, a member of Parliament, who knew most things about his contemporaries, told us of one evening at a big dinner party at which Disraeli and Lady Beaconsfield were present. Some man had been speaking of a new beauty and was expatiating on her charms — the softness of her eyes, her dimples, her pearly teeth, the magnificence of her hair, the whiteness of her skin — here he was interrupted by a remark of Lady Beaconsfield made across the table:

“Ah! you should see my Dizzy in his bath!”

IV

James McHenry told me an anecdote of Disraeli which illustrates his astuteness in getting out of difficulties. The matter happened to a lady of his acquaintance. This lady was very anxious that her husband should get an appointment for which he was a candidate — one of those good things that distinctly goes by favour. One evening, to her great joy, she found that she was to sit at dinner next the Premier. She was a very attractive woman whom most men liked to serve. The opportunity was too good to lose, and as her neighbour “ took “ to her at once she began to have great hopes. Having “ ground-baited “ the locality with personal charm she began to get her hooks and tackle ready. She led the conversation to the subject in her mind, Disraeli talking quite freely. Then despite her efforts the conversation drifted away to something else. She tried again; but when just close to her objective it drifted again. Thus attack and repulse kept on during dinner. Do what she would, she could not get on the subject by gentle means. She felt at last that she was up against a master of that craft. Time ran out, and when came that premonitory hush and glance round the table which shows that the ladies are about to withdraw she grew desperate. Boldly attacking once more the arbiter of her husband’s destiny, she asked him point blank to give the appointment. He looked at her admiringly; and just as the move came he said to her in an impressive whisper: “ Oh, you are a darling!”

V

Irving told me this:

He was giving sittings for his bust to Count Gleichen, who was also doing a bust of Lord Beaconsfield. One day when he came the sculptor, looking at his watch, said:

“I’m afraid our sitting to-day must be a short one — indeed it may be interrupted at any moment. You won’t mind, I hope?”

“Not at all! “ said Irving. “ What is it? “ “ The Premier has sent me word that he must come at an earlier hour than he fixed as he has a Cabinet Meeting.” He had already unswathed the clay so as not to waste in preparation the time of the statesman when he should come. Irving was looking at it when something struck him. Turning to Count Gleichen he said:

"That seems something like myself — you know we actors have to study our own faces a good deal, so that we come to know them."

Just then Disraeli came in. When they had all shaken hands, the sculptor said to the new-corner:

"Mr. Irving says that he sees in your bust a resemblance to himself!"

Disraeli looked at Irving a moment with a pleased expression. Then he walked over to where Irving's bust was still uncovered. He examined it critically for a few moments; and then turning to Count Gleichen said:

"What a striking and distinguished physiognomy!"

CHAPTER XLVI. SIR WILLIAM PEARCE, BART.

A night adventure — The courage of a mother — The story of the " Livadia " — Nihilists after her — Her trial trip — How she saved the Czar's life

I

SIR WILLIAM PEARCE — made a Baronet in 1887 — was a close friend of Irving. He was the head of the great Glasgow shipbuilding firm of John Elder & Co. In fact he was John Elder & Co. for he owned most of the whole great business. He was a " Man of Kent," which is a different thing from being a Kentish man. A Man of Kent is one born in the Isle of Thanet, where the old succession in cases of intestacy differs from the standard British law on the subject. He went to Glasgow as a shipwright and entered the works at Fairfield. He was a man of such commanding force and ability that he climbed up through the whole concern, right up to the top, and in time — and not a long time either for such a purpose — owned the whole thing. To him it is that we owe the great speed of ocean-going ships. For years all the great racers were built at his works on the Clyde. He also built many superb yachts, notably the Lady Tort rida and the Lady Todrida the Second. The first-named was in his own use when we were playing in Glasgow in the early autumn of 1883. That provincial tour was a short one of six weeks previous to our leaving for America on our first Trans-Atlantic tour. We had commenced in Glasgow on 28th August. During the first week Irving, Loveday, and myself, and Ellen Terry, who had her little son with her, and one other young lady, Miss Macready, accepted Mr. Pearce's invitation to go on a week-end yachting tour, to begin after the play on the following Saturday night, 1st September.

II

The Lady Torlrida was berthed in the estuary of the Clyde off Greenock; so a little after eleven o'clock we all set off for Greenock.

It had been a blustering evening in Glasgow; but here in the open it seemed a gale. I think that the hearts of all the landsmen of our party sank when we saw the black water lashed into foam by the fierce wind. Pearce had met us at the station and came with us. Of the yachting party were his son the present Baronet, and a College friend of his, Mr. Bradbury. With the bluff heartiness of a yachtsman Pearce now assured us that everything was smooth and easy. At the stairs we found a trim boat with its oarsmen fending her off as with every rising wave she made violent dashes at the stonework. One of the men stood on the steps holding the painter; he dared not fasten it to the ring. From near the level of the water the estuary looked like a wide sea and the water so cold and dark and boisterous that it seemed like madness going out on such a night in such a boat for pleasure. There were several of us, however, and we were afraid of frightening each other; I do not think that any of us were afraid for ourselves. Ellen Terry whispered to me to take her son, who was only a little chap, next to me, as she knew me and would have confidence in me.

We managed to get into the boat without any of us getting all wet, and pushed off. We drove out into the teeth of the wind the waves seeming much bigger now we were amongst them and out in the open Firth. Not a sign of yacht could be seen. To us strangers the whole thing was an act of faith. Presently Pearce gave an order and we burned a blue light, which was after a while answered from far off — a long, long distance off, we thought, as we looked across the waste of black troubled water looking more deadly than ever in the blue light — though it looked even more deadly when the last of the light fell hissing into the wave. By this time matters were getting really serious. Some one had to keep baling all the time, and on the weather side we had to sit shoulder to shoulder as close as we could so that the waves might break on our backs and not over the gunwale. It was just about as unpleasant an experience as one could have. I drew the lad next to me as close as I could partly to comfort him and more particularly lest he should get frightened and try to leave his place. And yet all the time we were a merry party. Ellen Terry with the strong motherhood in her all awake — a lesson and a hallowed memory — was making cheery remarks and pointing out to her boy the many natural beauties with which we were surrounded: the distant lights, the dim line of light above the shore line, the lurid light of the city of Greenock on the sky. She thought of only one thing, her little boy, and that he might not suffer the pain of fear. The place seemed to become beautiful in the glow of her maternity. He did not say much in answer — not in any enthusiastic way; but he was not much frightened. Cold waves of exceeding violence, driven up your back by a fierce wind which beat the spray into your neck, make hardly a cheerful help to the enjoyment of the aesthetic!

Irving sat stolid and made casual remarks such as he would have made at his own fireside. His quiet calm, I think, allayed nervous tremors in some of the others. I really think he enjoyed the situation — in a way. As for Pearce, who held the tiller himself, he was absolutely boisterous with joviality, though he once whispered in my ear:

“Keep it up! We will be all right; but I don’t want any of them to get frightened. It is pretty serious! “ I think we settled in time into a sort of that calm acceptance of fact which is so real a tribute to

Belief. It certainly startled us a little when we heard a voice hailing us with a speaking trumpet — a voice which seemed close to us. Then a light flashed out and we saw the Lady Tor/rida rising high from the water whereon she floated gracefully, just swaying with wave and wind. She was a big yacht with 600 h.p. engines, after the model of those of the Alaska, one of Pearce’s building, then known as the “ Greyhound of the ocean! “ I think we were all rejoiced; even Pearce, who told me before we went to our cabins in the early morning that all through that miserable voyage in the dark the sense of his responsibility was heavy upon him.

“Just fancy,” he said, “ if anything had happened to Irving or Ellen Terry! And it might have, easily! We had no right to come out in such a small boat on such a night; we were absolutely in danger at times!”

We were not long in getting aboard. The whole yacht seemed by comparison with the darkness we emerged from to be blazing with light and filled with alert, powerful men. We were pulled, jerked, or thrown on board, I hardly knew which; and found ourselves hurried down to our luxurious cabins where everything was ready for our dressing. Our things had fortunately been sent on board during the day; anything coming in the boat would have had a poor chance of arriving dry.

III

In a very short time we were sitting in the saloon, light and warm and doing ample justice to one of the most perfect meals I ever sat down to. It was now after one o’clock and we were all hungry. After supper we sat and talked; and after the ladies had retired we sat on still till the September sun began to look in through the silk curtains that veiled the ports.

Pearce was a man full of interesting memories and experiences, and that night he seemed to lay the treasures of them at the feet of his guests. But of all that he told — we listening eagerly — none was so fascinating as his account of the building and trial trip of the Livadia.

This was the great yacht which the Czar Alexander II. had built from the designs of Admiral Popoff of his own navy. It was of an entirely new pattern of naval construction: a turtle with a house on its back. The work of building had been entrusted to the Fairfield yard with carte blanche in the doing of it. No expense was to be spared in having everything of the best. Under the circumstances it could not he contracted for; the builder was paid by a fixed percentage of the prime cost. The only thing that the builder had to guarantee was the speed. But that was so arranged that beyond a certain point there was to be a rising bonus; the shipbuilder made an extra £20,000 on this alone. Pearce told us that it was the hope of the Czar to be able to evade the Nihilists, who were then very active and had attempted his life several times. The Livadia was really a palace of the sea whereon he could live in comfort and luxury for long periods; and in which by keeping his own counsel he could go about the world without the knowledge of his enemies. It was known that the Nihilists regarded very jealously the building of the ship, and careful watch was kept in the yard. One day when the ship was finished and was partly coaled, there came a wire from the Russian Embassy that it was reported that there were two Nihilists in the shipyard. When the men were coming back from dinner, tally was kept at the gate where the Russian detectives were on watch. I have seen that return from dinner. Through the great gates seven thousand men poured in like a huge living stream. On this occasion the check showed that two men were missing. The Nihilists also had their own Embassy and secret police!

It then became necessary to examine the ship in every part. Those were the days of the Thomassin " infernal machine," which was suspected of having been the means by which many ships had been sent to the bottom. These machines were exploded by clockwork set for a certain time, and were made in such fashion as would not excite suspicion. Some were in the form of irregularly shaped lumps of coal. The first thing to be done was therefore to take out all the coal which had already been put in. When the bunkers were empty and all the searchable portions of the ship had been carefully examined inch by inch, a picked staff of men opened and examined the watertight compartments. This was in itself a job, for there were, so well as I remember, something like a hundred and fifty of them. However, as each was done Pearce himself set his own seal upon it. At last he was able to assure the Grand Duke, who was in command and who had arrived to take the boat in charge, that she was so far safe from attack from concealed explosives. When she was starting the Grand Duke told Pearce that the Czar expected that he would go on the trial trip. In his own words:

"It is not any part of a shipbuilder's business to go on trial trips unless he so wishes. But in this case I could not have thought of refusing. The Czar's relations with me and his kindness to me were such that I could not do anything but what would please him!"

So the Livadia started from the Clyde with sealed orders. Her first call was at Holyhead. There they met with a despatch which ordered an immediate journey to Plymouth. At Plymouth she was again directed with secret orders to go to Brest, whither she set out at once.

At Brest there was an " easy," and certain of the officers and men were allowed shore leave. The rest should have been for several days; but suddenly word was received to leave Brest at once; it was said that some suspected Nihilists were in the way. The men on shore were peremptorily recalled and in haste preparations were made for an immediate start for the south. Pearce's own words explain the situation:

"I went at once to the Grand Duke Nicholas and remonstrated with him. ' I can answer for the workmanship of the Livadia,' I said; ' but the design is not mine, and so far as I know the principle on which she has been constructed has never been tested and there is no possibility of knowing what a ship of the pattern will do in bad weather, and that we have ahead of us. It is dirty now in the Bay and a storm is reported coming up. Does your Highness really think it wise to attempt the Bay of Biscay under the conditions? ' To my astonishment not only the Grand Duke but some of his officers who were present, who had not hitherto shown any disposition to despise danger, spoke loudly in favour of going on at once. Of course I said no more. I had built the ship, and though I was not responsible for her I felt that if necessary I should go down in her. We had a terrible experience in the Bay, but got through safely to Ferrol. There she was laid up in a land-locked bay round the shores of which guards were posted night and day for months. It was necessary that she should lie up somewhere as the dock at Sebastopol — the only dock in the world large enough to hold her — was not ready.

"And whilst she lay there the Czar was assassinated, 13th March 1881."

IV

Then he went on to tell us how once already the Livadia had been the means of saving the Czar's life:

"When she was getting on I had a model of her made — in fact, two; one of them," he said, turning to me, " you saw the other day in my office. These models are troublesome and costly things to make. The one which I intended as a present to the Czar cost five hundred pounds. It was my present to his Majesty on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his succession. It arrived the day before, 17th February-29th February old style. The Czar was delighted with it. That evening there was a banquet in the Winter Palace, where he was then in residence. He had been threatened for some time by means of a black-edged letter finding its way every morning into the Palace, warning him in explicit terms that if his oppression did not cease he would not live past the anniversary of his accession, which would be the following day. When he was leading the way to the dining-hall from the drawing-room he turned to the lady with him — Princess Dolgoruki, his morganatic wife — and said:

"' By the way, I want to show you my new toy! ' The model had been placed in the salon at the head of the grand staircase and they stopped to examine it.

"As they were doing so the staircase down which they would have been otherwise passing was blown up. The Nihilists knowing the exact routine of the Court and the rigid adherence to hours had timed the explosion for the passage of the staircase!"

We spent a delightful Sunday going round Arran. We dined at anchor in Wemyss Bay and slept on board. On the forenoon of Monday we went back to Glasgow.

CHAPTER XLVII. STEPNIAK

A congeries of personalities — The " closed hand " — His appearance—" Free Russia" — The gentle criticism of a Nihilist: — Prince Nicholas Galitzin — The dangers of big game

I

ON the evening of 8th July 1892, after the play, Faust, Irving had some friends to supper in the Beefsteak Room. I think that, all told, it was as odd a congeries of personalities as could well be. Sarah Bernhardt, Darmont, Ellen Terry and her daughter, Toole, Mr. and Mrs. T. B. Aldridge, of Boston, two Miss Casellas — and Stepniak. It was odd that the man was known only by the one name; no one ever used his first name, Sergius. Other men have second names of some sort; but this one, though he signed himself S. Stepniak, I never heard spoken of except by the one word. I sat next to him at supper and we had a great deal of conversation together, chiefly about the state of affairs in Russia generally and the Revolutionary party in especial. Hall Caine had been staying with me for a week, 2oth to 27th June 1892, and he told me all about his coming journey to Russia. He had been studying the matter very carefully and trying to get back to the real cause of the " Exodus." To him it had begun in what was locally known as — the " closed hand." It was, so far as he could gather, on an economic basis. The Russian moujik was illiterate and as a rule a drunkard when he got the chance. In the endless steppes, which are so flat that the roads simply disappear on the horizon line, all the carriage of goods has to be by carts. There are no minor railways. The moujik with his load of corn would take his way to the nearest market centre and there stay in the tavern till he had drunk up all he had received for his crop. The Jew tavern-keeper was also the local usurer, and would make a certain advance on the man’s labour for the coming. year. When that credit had ended, since he never could get even, he would pledge the labour of his children. Thus after a time the children, practically sold to labour, would be taken away to the cities there to be put to work without remuneration. It was practically slavery. Then the Russian Government, recognising the impossibility of dealing with such a state of affairs, undertook to drive out the Jews altogether.

Such was the allegation made by the supporters of the Exodus, and there was at least a certain measure of truth in it. Caine had explained it all to me fully so that when I talked that night with Stepniak I had some foothold of information to rest on whilst I asked for more. He, who had presumably been in the very heart of the Revolutionary party and in all the secrets of Nihilism, told me some of his views and aspirations and those of the party — or rather the parties — of which he was a unit.

II

Stepniak was a very large man — large of that type that the line of the shoulders is high so that the bulk of the body stands out solid. He had a close beard and very thick hair, and strongly-marked features with a suggestion of the Kalmuck type. He was very strong and had a great voice. On 1st May of that year, 1892, I had heard him speak at the great meeting in Hyde Park for the “ Eight-hour “ movement. There were in the Park that day not far from a quarter of a million of people, so that from any of the tribunes — which were carts — no one could be heard that was not strong of voice. The only three men whom I could hear were John Burns, Stepniak, and Frederick Rogers — the latter a working bookbinder and President of the Elizabethan

Society — also one of the very finest speakers — judged by any standard — I have ever heard.

In our conversation at supper that night he told me of the letters which they were receiving from the far-off northern shores of Siberia. It was a most sad and pitiful tale. Men of learning and culture, mostly University professors, men of blameless life and takers of no active part in revolution or conspiracy — simply theorists of freedom, patriots at heart — sent away to the terrible muddy shores of the Arctic sea, ill housed, ill fed, over worked — where life was one long, sordid, degrading struggle for bare life in that inhospitable region. I could not but be interested and moved by his telling. He saw that I was sympathetic, and said he would like to send me something to read on the subject. It came some weeks later, as the following letter will show:

“31 BLANDFORD ROAD, “BEDFORD PARK, W., “August 2, 1892.

“DEAR MR. STOKER,-It is a long time that I wanted to write to you since that delightful party at the Lyceum. But I was so busy, and the parcel I wanted to send to you for one reason or another could never be ready, and so it dragged on. What I send to you is the paper, Free Russia, I am editing. Since you have read all my books and have been so kind and indulgent for them, and so interested in the Russian Cause, I suppose you will be interested in the attempt to give a practical expression to English sympathies. Unfortunately the collection of Free Russia is incomplete (No. r is quite out of print). But what you will have is quite sufficient to give you an idea of the whole.

“May I ask whether you live permanently in London and whether I may hope to see you some day once again? — Yours very truly, S.

STEPNIAK."

III

In February 1893 Stepniak saw Irving and Ellen Terry play in King Lear. The following excerpts are from a letter which he sent to Irving — a long letter of fourteen pages. I was so struck with it when Irving showed it to me that I asked leave to make a copy. Whereupon he gave me the letter.

This was after a habit of his of which I shall speak later. In the letter he said:

"The actor is a joint creator with the author — even with such an author as Shakespeare. He has a right of his own in interpretation, and the only point is how far he made good his claims, and that you have done to a wonderful extent. Yours was not acting: it was life itself, so true, natural and convincing was every word, every shade of expression upon your face or in your voice. The gradual transformation of the man, his humbling himself, the revelation of his better, sympathetic self — it was all a wonder of realism, nature and subtlety. Your acting reminded me of the pictures of the great Flemish master who seems to paint not with a brush but with a needle. Yet this astonishing subtlety was in no way prejudicial to the completeness and the pow.: and masterliness of the great whole.... I cannot forbear from asking you to transmit my compliments and admiration to Miss Ellen Terry — if you think that she may care about such a humble tribute. There is a passage from ' I love your Majesty according to my bonds, not more or less ' and the following monologue, which I am bold enough to say are the weakest in the play: too cold and dry and forward and elaborate for Cordelia. But in her rendering there was nothing of that: it was all simplicity, tenderness, spontaneous emotion. The charm of her personality and character, which she has such a unique gift of infusing into everything, has partially improved the original text. I hope you will not consider my saying so too sacrilegious. There are spots upon the sun. And the scene in the French camp! Her ‘ No cause, no cause! ‘ was quite a stroke of genius. I would not believe before I saw her in that, that words can produce such an emotion.”

And this was the man who stood for wiping tyrants from the face of the earth; who aided in the task, if Underground Russia be even based on truth. This gentle, appreciative, keenly critical, sympathetic man 1

Strange it was that he who must have gone through such appalling dangers as beset hourly the workers in the Nihilist cause and come through them all unscathed was finally killed in the commonplace way of being run over by a train on the underground railway.

IV

It reminds me of another experience with Irving and a surprising denouement. When we were in California in 1893 a gentleman called to see Irving at his hotel. He was a countryman of Stepniak, but of quite the opposite degree — a Prince claiming blood kin with the Czar, Nicholas Galitzin. He supped with Irving and some others, forty-five in all, at the Cafe Riche, 13th September, when he gave Irving a very charming souvenir in the shape of a gold match-box set with gems. Several times after we met at supper and came to be quite friends. Prince Galitzin was a mighty hunter and had slain much big game, including many bears and some grizzlies. He told us many interesting hunting adventures. He had lost one arm. He had not mentioned any adventure bearing on this, and one time Irving asked him if it was by a mischance in a hunting adventure that he had suffered the loss. He said with a laugh:

“No! No! Nothing of the kind. It was a damn stupid fellow who let a Saratoga trunk fall on me over the staircase of a hotel I”

CHAPTER XLVIII. E. ONSLOW FORD, R.A.

Fatherly advice — The design — The meeting — Sittings-living's hands

ONE morning — it was 12th January 188o — I got a note from Irving sent down by cab from his rooms. In it he said:

"There is a certain Mr. Onslow Ford coming to the theatre this morning. Please see him for me and give him some fatherly or brotherly advice."

I left word with the hallkeeper to send for me whenever the gentleman came. I did not know who he was or what he wanted: but I did know what " fatherly or brotherly advice " meant. At that period of his life the demands made on Irving's time were fearful. He used to get shoals of letters every day asking for appointments. Nearly all the writers wanted something — money, advice, free tickets, engagements for self or friend, to sell work of their own or of others, to read plays, to get him to sit for photographs, to ask him for sittings for pictures. There was no end to them; no limit to the range of their wants. Of all the classes three were naturally within the range of his own work: authors of plays, actors wanting engagements, artists of all kinds. Rarely indeed did any one of secured position come in that way; such usually sent letters of introduction. Even then they had in most cases to see me; it was a physical impossibility that Irving could give the time; rehearsals, production, and his work at night and in the day took up the whole possible working hours.

A little after noon I was sent for; the expected stranger had arrived. In those days the stage door in Exeter Street was very small and absolutely inconvenient. There was comfortable room for Sergeant Barry, the hallkeeper, who was a fine, big, bulky man; two in the room crowded it. Barry waited outside and I went in. The stranger was a young man of medium height, thin, dark haired. His hair rose back from his forehead without parting of any kind, in the way which we in those days associated in our minds with French artists. His face was pale, a little sallow, fine in profile and moulding; a nose of distinction with sensitive nostrils. He had a small beard and moustache. His eyes were dark and concentrated — distinctly " seeing " eyes. My heart warmed to him at once. He was young and earnest and fine; I knew at a glance that he was an artist, and with a future. Still I had to be on guard. One of my functions at the theatre, as I had come to know after a year of exceedingly arduous work, was to act as a barrier. I was " the Spirit that denies! " In fact I had to be. No one likes to say " no! " — a very few are constitutionally able to. I had set myself to help Irving in his work and this was one of the best ways I could help him. He recognised gratefully the utility of the service, and as he trusted absolutely in my discretion I gradually fell into the habit of using my own decision in the great majority of cases. " First fire! Then enquire! " was an old saying of an Irish sergeant instructing recruits on sentry duty. He was pretty right!

When Mr. Onslow Ford told me that he wished to make a statuette of Henry Irving as Hamlet I felt that the time for " advice " had come, and began to pave the way for a non possumus strong in intention though gentle in expression. The young sculptor, however, had thought the matter all over for himself. He knew the demands on Irving's time and how vastly difficult it would be to get sittings so many and so long as would be required for the work he had projected. I listened of course and thought better of him and his chance in that he knew his difficulties at the beginning.

Presently he put his hand in his pocket and took out something rolled in paper — a parcel about as big as a pork pie. When he had unrolled it heheld up a rough clay model of a seated figure.

"This," said he, " is something of the idea. I have been several times in the front row of the stalls watching as closely as I could. One cannot well model clay in the stalls of a theatre. But I did this after the first time, and I have had it with me on each other occasion. I compared it on such opportunities as I had — you do keep the Lyceum dark all but the stage; and I think I can see my way. I don't want to waste Irving's time or my own opportunities if I am so fortunate as to get sittings!"

That was the sort of artist that needed none of my " advice " — fatherly, brotherly, or otherwise. My mind was already made up.

"Would you mind waiting here a while? " I asked. In those early days we had only the one office and no waiting room except the stage. He waited gladly, whilst I went back to the Office. Irving had by this time arrived. I told him I had seen Mr. Ford.

"I hope you put it nicely to him that I can't possibly give him sittings," he said.

"That is why I came to see if you had arrived." " How do you mean," he asked again. So I said:

"I think you had better see him, and if you think as I do you will give him sittings!"

"Oh, my dear fellow, I can't. I am really too pressed with work."

"Well, see him any.way! " I said; " I have asked him to wait on purpose." He looked at me keenly for an instant as though I had somehow " gone back " on him. Then he smiled: " All right. I'll see him now! " I brought Onslow Ford. When the two men met, Irving did share my opinion. He did give sittings for a bronze statuette. The result was so fine that he gave quite another series of sittings for him to do the life-size marble statue of “ Irving as Hamlet “ now in the Library of the London Guildhall. It is a magnificent work, and will perhaps best of all his works perpetuate the memory of the great Sculptor who died all too young.

Irving gave many sittings for the statue. With the experience of his first work Onslow Ford could begin with knowledge of the face so necessary in portrait art. I often went with him and it was an intense pleasure to see Onslow Ford’s fine hands at work. They seemed like living things working as though they had their own brains and initiation.

I was even able to be of some little assistance. I knew Irving’s face so well from seeing it so perpetually under almost all possible phases of emotion that I could notice any error of effect if not of measurement. Often either Irving or Onslow Ford would ask me and I would give my opinion. For instance:

“I think the right jowl is not right! “ The sculptor examined it thoughtfully for quite a while. Then he said suddenly:

“Quite right but not in that way. I see what it is! “ and he proceeded to add to the left of the forehead.

After all, effect is comparative; this is one of the great principles of art!

On 31st March last, one of the Academy view days of those not yet Royal Academicians, I went to Onslow Ford’s old studio in Acacia Road, now in possession of his son, Wolfram the painter, to see his portrait of his beautiful young wife, the daughter of George Henschel. Whilst we were talking of old days he unearthed treasures which I did not know existed: casts from life of Henry Irving’s hands.

No other such relics of the actor exist; and these are of supreme interest. Irving had the finest man’s hands I have ever seen. Later on he sent me a cast of one of them in bronze; a rare and beautiful thing which I shall always value. Size, and shape, proportion and articulation were all alike beautiful and distinguished and distinctive. It would be hard to mistake them for those of any other man. With them he could speak. It was not possible to doubt the meaning which he intended to convey. With such models to work on a few lines of pencil or brush made for the actor an enlightening identity of character. The weakness of Charles I., which not all the skill of Vandyck could hide; the vulture grip of Shylock; the fossilised age of Gregory Brewster; the asceticism of Becket.

What, after the face, can compare with the hand for character, or intention, or illustration. It can be an index to the working of the mind.

CHAPTER XLIX. SIR LAURENCE ALMA-TADEMA, R.A.

“Coriolanus “ — Union of the Arts — Archccology — The reevolution of the toga — Twenty-two years’ delay —— Alma-Tadema’s house — A lesson in care— “Cymbeline”

I

IN his speech at the close of the second “ season “ at the Lyceum, 25th July 1879, Irving announced amongst the old plays which he intended to do, Coriolanus. He never announced any play, then or thereafter, without having thought it well over and come to some conclusion as to its practicability. In this instance he had already made up his mind to ask Laurence Alma-Tadema to make designs for the play and to superintend its production. The experience of having a free hand in such matters, now that he was his own master in regard to stage productions, had shown to him the great possibilities of effect to be produced by the great masters of technique. There had in the past been great painters who had worked for the stage. Loutherbourg and Clarkson Stanfield, for instance, had made fame in both ways of picturesque art, the Gallery and the Stage. But the idea was new of getting specialists in various periods to apply their personal skill as well as their archaeological known ledge to stage effect. Indeed up to that time even great painters were not always historically accurate. A survey of the work of most of the painters of the first half of the Victorian epoch will show such glaring instances of anachronism and such manifest breaches of geographical, ethnological, and technological exactness as to illustrate the extraordinary change for the better in the way of accuracy in the work of to-day. The National Gallery and Holland House have instances of errors in costumes incorrect as to alleged nationality and date. Irving wanted things to be correct, well knowing that as every age has its own suitabilities to its own need that which is accurate is most likely to convince. Alma - Tadema had made a speciality of artistic archeology of Ancient Rome. In working from his knowledge he had reformed the whole artistic ideas of the time. He had so studied the life of old Rome that he had for his own purposes reconstructed it. tip to his time, for instance, the toga was in art depicted as a thin linen robe of somewhat scanty proportions. Look at the picture of Kemble as Cato by Lawrence, or indeed of any ancient Roman by any one. Irving had become possessed of the toga of Macready, and anything more absurd one could hardly imagine; it was something like a voluminous night - shirt. Of course the audience also were ignorant of the real thing, and so it did not matter; the great actor's powers were unlessened by the common ignorance. In his studying for his art Alma-Tadema had taken from many statues and fragments the folds as well as the texture of the toga. With infinite patience he had gathered up details of various kinds, till at last, with a mind stored with knowledge, he set to himself the task of reconstruction; to restore the toga so that it would answer all the conditions evidenced in contemporary statuary. And the result? Not a flimsy covering which would have become draggle-tailed in a day or an hour of strenuous work; but a huge garment of heavy cloth which would allow of infinite varieties of wearing, and which would preserve the body from the burning heat of the day and the reacting chills of night. Even for the purposes of pictorial art the revived toga made a new condition of things, in all ways harmonising with the accepted facts. There is in record plenty of marble and stone work of old Rome; of work in bronze and brass and iron and copper; in silver and gold; in jewels and crystals — in fact in all those materials which do not yield to the ravages of time. All this Alma-Tadema had studied till he knew it. He was familiar with the kinds of marble and stone used in Roman architecture, statuary, and domestic service. The kinds of glass and crystal; of armour and arms; of furniture; of lighting; sacerdotal and public and domestic service. He knew how a velarum should be made and of what, and how adorned; how it should be put up and secured. He was learned of boats and chariots; of carts and carriages, and of the trappings of horses. Implements of agriculture and trade and manufacture and for domestic use were familiar to him. He was a master of the many ceremonial undertakings which had such a part in Roman life. In fact, Alma-Tadema's artistic reconstruction was like that of Owen; he reconciled fragments and brought to light proof of the unities and harmonies and suitabilities of ancient life.

II

Irving felt that with such an artist to help- arch2eologist, specialist, and genius in one — he would be able to put before an audience such work as would not only charm them by its beauty and interest them in its novelty, but would convince by its suitability. For there is an enormous aid to conviction in a story when those who follow it accept from the beginning in good faith the things of common knowledge and use which are put before them. I often say myself that the Faith which still exists is to be found more often in a theatre than in a church. When an audience go into a playhouse which is not connected in their minds with the habit of deceit they are unconsciously prepared to accept all things ab initio in the simple and direct manner of childhood. When therefore what they see is vraisemblable — with the manifest appearance of truth to something — all the powers of intellectual examination and working habit come into force in the right direction.

In that summer of 1879 when Irving announced Coriolanus he also announced several other plays.

It was not, of course, his intention to produce these plays all at once but one by one as occasion served. As has been seen, the putting on of The Merchant of Venice and its phenomenal success shelved or postponed most of the plays then announced; but Irving did not lose sight of Coriolanus. One morning in the following winter, whilst Sir Laurence Alma-Tadema, as he has himself told me, was in his studio in his house at North Gate, Regent’s Park, he heard the sound of sleigh bells coming over the bridge. Naturally his thoughts went back to The Bells and Irving, for no one who has seen the play can hear the sound unexpectedly without the thought. He heard the sound stop at his own gate; and whilst wondering what it could mean Irving was announced. He was accompanied by Mr. W. L. Ashmead Bartlett, who afterwards took his present name on his marriage to the Baroness Burdett-Coutts. Irving at once entered upon the subject of his visit; and the great painter was charmed to entertain it. As was usual with him when working on a new play, Irving had a rough scenario in his mind; and he and Alma-Tadema spoke of it then and there. Irving could tell him of the scenes he wanted and give some hints not only as to their practical use but of the ideas which he wished them to convey. When he had gone Alma-Tadema took down his Shakespeare and began his own study of the play. The continuous success of The Merchant of Venice gave him ample time, and his studies and designs were unique and lovely.

III

As we know, the production of Coriolanus did not take place till twenty-two years later; but all through 188o and 1881 Alma-Tadema had the matter in hand. In those years the high policy of his theatre management was a good deal changed. When Irving had experience of Ellen Terry’s remarkable powers and gifts he wisely determined to devote to them, so far as was possible, the remaining years of her youth. She had now been twenty-five years on the stage; and though she began in her very babyhood — at eight years old — the flight of time has to be considered, for the future if not for the past. She was now thirty-three years of age; in the very height of her beauty and charm, and to all seeming still in her girlhood. He therefore arranged Romeo and Juliet as the next Shakespearean production. This was followed in time by Much Ado about Nothing; Twelfth Night, Olivia, Faust —— all plays that showed her in her brightness and pathos; and so Coriolanus was kept postponed. But well into 1881 it was still being worked on, and in those days I had many visits to the studio of Alma-Tadema. The house he then occupied was Townshend House, North Gate, Regent’s Park, which he had so exquisitely fitted up after his previous home had been almost entirely destroyed by the blowing up of a barge carrying explosives on the Regent’s Canal.

I have never forgotten — no one who had seen it could ever forget — that wonderful house; its windows of hammered bronze in Roman design, with panes of onyx and marble cut so thin as to be translucent, almost transparent; its dado rail of the Elgin marbles reproduced in petto in carved ivory; its tesselated floors, its wood carvings, its golden alcoves, its Chinese draperies, its Japanese bronzes. All the exquisite adornment and things of beauty with which a great and successful artist can surround himself in the many years of devotion to his art. It is surely no wonder that Alma-Tadema has prospered. Even with a lesser measure of genius than his, labour and application and such devotion to work could not but achieve success in so marked a degree.

IV

Let me give an instance of his thoroughness in his art work.

Once when in his studio I saw him occupied on a beautiful piece of painting, a shrub with a myriad of branches laden with berries and but few leaves, through which was seen the detail of the architecture of the marble building beyond. The picture was then almost finished. The next time I came I found him still hard at work on the same painting; but it was not nearly so far advanced. Dissatisfied with the total effect, he had painted out the entire background and was engaged on a new and quite different one. The labour involved in this stupendous change almost made me shudder. It needs but a small amount of thought to understand the infinite care and delicacy of touch to complete an elaborate architectural drawing between the gaps of those hundreds of spreading twigs.

V

This devotion to his art is often one of the touchstones of the success of an artist in any medium; the actor, or the singer, or the musician as well as the worker in any of the plastic arts.

I remember Irving telling me of a conversation he had with the late W. H. Vanderbilt when, after lunch in his own house in Fifth Avenue, the great millionaire took him round his beautiful picture gallery. He was pointing out the portrait of himself finished not long before by Meissonier, and gave many details of how the great painter did his work and the extraordinary care which he took. Vanderbilt used to give long sittings, and Meissonier, to aid the tedium of his posing, had mirrors fitted up in such a way that he could see the work being executed. “ Do you know,” the millionaire concluded, “ that sometimes after a long sitting he would take his cloth and wipe out everything he had done in the day’s work. And I calculated roughly that every touch of his brush cost me five dollars!”

VI

When in 1896 Irving produced Cymbeline, Alma-Tadema undertook to design and supervise the picturesque side; or, as it was by his wish announced in the programme: “ kindly acted as adviser in the production of the play.”

He chose a time of England when architecture expressed itself mainly in wood; natural enough when it was a country of forest. It is not a play allowing of much display of fine dresses, and Irving never under any circumstances wished a play to be unsuitably mounted. The opportunities of picturesque effect came, in this instance, in beautiful scenery.

CHAPTER L. SIR EDWARD BURNE-JONES, BART.

"King Arthur " — The Painter's thought — His illustrative stories from child life

I

IT was to Irving an intense pleasure to work with Sir Edward Burne-J ones. The painter seemed to bring to whatever he had in hand a sort of concentration of all his great gifts, and to apply them with unsparing purpose and energy. His energy was of that kind which seems to accomplish without strenuous effort; after all it is the waste of force and not its use which proclaims itself in the doing. This man had such mighty gifts that in his work there was no waste; all the creations of his teeming brain were so fine in themselves that they simply stood ready for artistic use. His imagination working out through perfected art peopled a whole world of its own and filled that world around them with beautiful things. This world had been opened to Irving as to the rest of the world who admired it. But when the player came adventuring into it, the painter displayed to him a vast of hidden treasures. There was simply no end to his imaginative ideas, his artistic efforts, his working into material beauty the thoughts which flitted through his mind. As a colourist he was supreme, and he could use colour as a medium of conveying ideas to the same effect as others used form. His own power of dealing with the beauties of form was supreme.

To work with such an artist was to Irving a real joy. He simply revelled in the task. Every time they met it was to him a fresh stimulation. Burne-J ones, too, seemed to be stimulated; the stage had always been to him a fairyland of its own, but he had not had artistic dealings with it. Now he entered it with full power to let himself run free. The play which he undertook for Irving, King Arthur, was of the period which he had made his own: that mystic time when life had single purposes and the noblest prevailed the most; when beauty was a symbol of inner worth; when love in some dainty as well as holy form showed that even flesh, which was God's handiwork, was not base.

In the working out of the play each day saw some new evidence of the painter's thought; the roughest sketch given as a direction or a light to scene painter or property maker or costumier was in itself a thing of beauty. I veritably believe that Irving was sorry when the production of the play was complete. He so enjoyed the creative process that the completion was a lesser good.

Regarding human nature, which was Irving's own especial study, Burne-J ones had a mind tuned to the same key as his own. To them both the things which were basic and typal were closest. The varieties of mankind were of lesser importance than the species. The individual was the particular method and opportunity of conveyance of an idea; %and, as such, was of original importance. To each of the two great artists such individual grew in his mind, and ever grew; till in the end, on canvas or before the footlights, the being lived.

II

It would be hard to better illustrate the mental attitude of both to man and type and individual than by some of the stories which Burne-Jones loved to tell and Irving to hear. The painter had an endless collection of stories of all sorts; but those relating to children seemed closest to his heart. In our meetings on the stage or at supper in the Beefsteak Room, or on those delightful Sunday afternoons when he allowed a friend to stroll with him round his studio, there was always some little tale breathing the very essence of human nature.

I remember once when he told us an incident in the life of his daughter, who was then a most beautiful girl and is now a most beautiful woman, Mrs. J. W. Mackail. When she was quite a little girl, she came home from school one day and with thoughtful eyes and puckered brows asked her mother:

"Mother, can you tell me why it is that whenever I see a little boy crying in the street I always want to kiss him; and when I see a little girl crying I want to slap her?"

III

Another story was of a little boy, one of a large family. This little chap on one occasion asked to be allowed to go to bed at the children's tea time, a circumstance so unique as to puzzle the domestic authorities. The mother refused, but the child whimpered and persevered — and succeeded. The father was presently in his study at the back of the house looking out on the garden when he saw the child in his little night-shirt come secretly down the steps and steal to a corner of the garden behind some shrubs. He had a garden fork in his hand. After a lapse of some minutes he came out again and stole quietly upstairs. The father's curiosity was aroused, and he too went behind the shrubs to see what had happened. He found some freshly turned earth, and began to investigate. Some few inches down was a closed envelope which the child had buried. On opening it he found a lucifer match and a slip of paper on which was written in pencil in a sprawling hand:

"DEAR DEVIL, — Please take away Aunt Julia."

IV

Another story related to a little baby child, the first in the household. There was a dinner party, and the child, curious as to what was going on, lay awake with torturing thoughts. At last, when a favourable opportunity came through the nurse’s absence, she got quietly from her cot and stole downstairs just as she was. The dining-room door was ajar, and before the agonised nurse could effect a capture she had slipped into the room. There she was, of course, made much of. She was taken in turn on each one’s knees and kissed. Mother frowned, of course, but father gave her a grape and a wee drop of wine and water. Then she was kissed again and taken to the waiting nurse. Safe in the nursery her guardian berated her:

“Oh, Miss Angy, this is very dreadful. Going down to the dining-room! — And in your nighty!- And before strangers! — Before gentlemen! You must never let any gentleman see you in your nighty! — Never Never! Never! Never I That is Wicked! — Awful! “ And so on.

A few nights afterwards the father, when going from his dressing-room for dinner, went into the nursery to say another “ good-night “ to baby. When he went in she was saying her prayers at nurse’s knee, in long night-robe and with folded hands like the picture of the Infant Samuel. Hearing the footstep she turned her head round, and on catching sight of her father jumped up crying: “ Nau’ty — nauity — nau’ty! “ and ran behind a screen. The father looked at the nurse puzzled:

“What is it, nurse?”

“I don’t know, sir! I haven’t the faintest idea! “ she answered, equally puzzled.

“I’ll wait a few minutes and see,” he said, as he sat down. Half a minute later the little tot ran from behind the screen, quite naked, and running over to him threw herself on his knee. She snuggled in close to him with her arms round his neck, and putting her little rosebud of a mouth close to his ear whispered wooingly:

“Pap-pa, me dood girl now!”

CHAPTER LI. EDWIN A. ABBEY, R.A.

"RichardII."—" The Kinsmen" — Artistic collaboration — Medireval life — The character of Richard

I

WHEN Irving was having the enforced rest consequent to the accident to his knee in December 1896, he made up his mind that his next Shakespearean production should be Richard II. For a long time he had had it in view and already formed his opinion as to what the leading features of such a production as was necessary should be. He knew that it could not in any case be made into a strong play, for the indeterminate character of Richard would not allow of such. The strong thing that is in the play is, of course, his suffering; but such when the outcome of one's own nature is not the same as when it is effected by Fate, or external oppression. He knew therefore that the play would want all the help he could give it. Now he set himself to work out the text to acting shape as he considered it would be best. Despite what any one may say to the contrary, and it is only faddists that say it, there is not a play of Shakespeare's which does not need arranging or cutting for the stage. So much can now be expressed by pictorial effect — by costume, by lighting and properties and music — which in Shakespeare's time had to be expressed in words, that compression is at least advisable. Then again, the existence of varied scenery and dresses requires time for changes, which can sometimes be effected only by the transposition of parts of the play. In his spare time, therefore, of 1897 he began the arrangement with a definite idea of production in 1899. When he had the general scheme prepared — for later on there are always changes in readings and minor details — he approached the man who in his mind would be the best to design and advise concerning the artistic side: Edwin A. Abbey, R.A.

II

Irving and Abbey were close friends; and I am proud to say I can say the same of myself and Abbey for the last twenty-five years. Irving had a great admiration for his work, especially with regard to Shakespeare’s plays, many of which he illustrated for Harper’s Magazine. The two men had been often thrown together as members of “ The Kinsmen,” a little dining club of literary and artistic men of British and American nationality. Abbey and George Boughton and John Sargent represented in London the American painters of the group. Naturally in the intimate companionship which such a club affords, men understand more of the wishes and aims and ambitions of their friends. Irving had instinctive belief that the painter who thought out his work so carefully and produced effects at once so picturesque and so illuminative of character would or might care for stage work where everything has to seem real and regarding which there must be an intelligent purpose somewhere. Irving, having already produced Richard III. with the limited resources of the Bateman days, knew the difficulties of the play and the effects which he wished to produce. When afterwards Abbey painted his great picture of the funeral of Henry VI., Irving recognised a master-hand of scenic purpose. Years afterwards when he produced the play he availed himself, to the best of his own ability and the possibilities of the stage, of the painter’s original work. It was not possible to realise on the stage Abbey’s great conception. It is possible to use in the illusion of a picture a perspective forbidden on the stage by limited space and the non-compressible actuality of human bodies.

When he came to think over Richard II., he at once began to rely on Abbey's imagination and genius for the historical aspect of the play. He approached him; and the work was undertaken.

III

Abbey has since told me of the delight he had in co-operating with Irving. Not only was he proud and glad to work with such a man in such a position which he had won for himself, but the actual working together as artists in different media to one common end was pleasure to him. Irving came to him with every detail of the play ready, so that he could get into his mind at one time both the broad dominating ideas and the necessary requirements and limitations of the scenes. The whole play was charted for him at the start. Irving could defend every position he had taken; knew the force and guidance of every passage; and had so studied the period and its history that he could add external illumination to the poet's intention.

In addition, the painter found that his own suggestions were so quickly and so heartily seized that he felt from the first that he himself and his work were from the very start prime factors in the creation of the mise-en-scene. In his own words:

"Irving made me understand him; and he understood me! We seemed to be thoroughly at one in everything. My own idea of the centre point of the play was Richard's poignant feeling at realising that Bolingbroke's power and splendour were taking the place of his own.

"O God! 0 God! that ere this tongue of mine, That laid the sentence of dread banishment On yon proud man, should take it off again With words of sooth! 0, that I were as great As is my grief, or lesser than my name! Or that I could forget what I have been! Or not remember what I must be now! Swell'st thou, proud heart? I'll give thee scope to beat, Since foes have scope to beat both thee and me.'

"This seemed to be exactly Irving's view also — only that he seemed to have thought out every jot and tittle of it right down to the ' nth.' He had been working out in his own mind the realisation of everything whilst my own ideas had been scattered, vague, and nebulous. As we grew to know the play together it all seemed so natural that a lot of my work seemed to do itself. I had only to put down in form and colour such things as were requisite. Of course there had to be much consulting of authorities, much study of a technical kind and many evasive experiments before I reached what I wanted. But after I had talked the play over with Irving I never had to be in doubt."

To my humble mind this setting out of Abbey's experience — which is in his own words as he talked on the subject with me — is about as truthful and exhaustive an illustration of the purpose and process of artistic co-operation as we are ever likely to get.

IV

In his designs Abbey brought home to one the cachet of mediaeval life. What he implied as well as what he showed told at a glance the conditions and restrictions — the dominant forces of that strenuous time: the fierceness and cruelty; the suspicion and distrust; the horrible crampedness of fortress life; the contempt of death which came with the grim uncertainties of daily life. In one of his scenes was pictured by inference the life of the ladies in such a time and place in a way which one could never forget. It was a corner in the interior of a castle, high up and out of reach of arrow or catapult; a quiet nook where the women could go in safety for a breath of fresh air. Only the sky above them was open, for danger would come from any side exposed. The most had been made of the little space available for the cultivation of a few plants. Every little “ coign of vantage “ made by the unequal tiers of the building was seized on for the growth of flowers. The strictness of the little high-walled bower of peace conveyed forcefully what must have been the life of which this was the liberty. It was exceedingly picturesque; a grace to the eye as well as an interest to the mind. There was a charming effect in a great copper vase in a niche of rough stonework, wherein blossomed a handful of marigolds.

V

In this play Irving was very decided as to the “ attack.” He had often talked with me about the proper note to strike at the beginning of the play. To him it was one of what should seem to be stately seriousness. In Richard’s time the “ Justice “ of the King was no light matter; not to take it seriously was to do away with the ultimate power of the Monarch. Richard, as is afterwards shown, meant to use his kingly power unscrupulously. He feared both Bolingbroke and Norfolk, and meant to get rid of them. So meaning, he would of course shroud his unscrupulous intent in the ermine of Justice. A hypocrite who proclaims himself as such at the very start is not so dangerous as he might be, for at once he sounds the note of warning to his victims. This, pace the critics, makes the action of Bolingbroke simple enough. He saw through the weaker Richard’s intent of treachery, and knew that his only chance lay in counter-treachery. A King without scruple was a dangerous opponent in the fourteenth century. It was not until Richard had violated his pledge regarding the succession and right of Lancaster — thus further intending to cripple the banished Duke — that the new Lancaster took arms as his only chance.

In Irving's reading of the character of Richard this intentional hypocrisy did not oppose his florid, almost flamboyant, self-torturing vapourings of his pain and woe. He is a creature of exaggerations of his own greatness, as of his own self-surrender.

As the production of the play progressed Irving began to build greater and greater hopes on it. Already when he was taken ill at Glasgow in 1898 he had expended on the scenery alone — for the time for costumes and properties had not arrived — a sum of over sixteen hundred pounds. It was a bitter grief to him that he had to abandon the idea of playing the part. But he still cherished the hope that his son Harry might yet play it on the lines he had so studiously prepared. To this end he wished to retain the freshness of Abbey's work, and when during his long illness, when another manager, believing that he intended abandoning the production, wished to secure Abbey's co-operation, the painter refused the offer so that Irving might later use the work for his son. Abbey, though no fee or reward for all his labour had yet passed, considered the work done as in some way joint property.- This generous view endeared him more than ever to Irving, who up to the day of his death regarded him as one of the best and kindest and most thoughtful of his friends.

CHAPTER LII. J. BERNARD PARTRIDGE

Lyceum souvenirs — Partridge's method—" Putting in the noses " — The last picture of Irving

FOR a good many years Bernard Partridge was a persona grata at the Lyceum Theatre. He made the drawings of Irving and Ellen Terry for the souvenirs which we issued for the following plays, Macbeth, The Dead Heart, Ravenswood, Henry VIII, King Lear, Becket, and King Arthur. He has a wonderful gift of " remembering with his eyes." This was particularly useful in working any drawing of Henry Irving, whose expression altered so much when anything interested him that he became the despair of most draughtsmen. Partridge used to stand on the stage and watch him; or sit with him in his dressing-room for a chat. He would make certain notes with pen and pencil, and then go home and draw him. In the meantime Hawes Craven, the scene painter, would make sketches in monochrome of the scenes chosen for the souvenir, putting in the figures but leaving the faces vacant. Then would come Bernard Partridge with his own fine brushes and Hawes Craven's palette and put in the likeness of the various actors. These were so admirably done that any one taking up any of the souvenirs can say who were the actors — if, of course, the individuality of the latter be known to him. He used to laugh whenever I spoke of his " putting in the noses." Of course, the single figures were his own work entirely. I think in all the years of Irving's management Bernard Partridge was the only person outside the personnel of the company or staff who was allowed to pass in and out of the stage door just as he wished. He used to be present at rehearsals from which all others were forbidden.

Thus he came to have an exceptional knowledge of Irving's face in pretty well all its moods and phases. For this reason, too, the coloured Frontispiece of this book is of exceptional interest. It was the last work of art done from Irving before his death. Later on, he was, of course, photographed; the last sun picture done of him was of him sitting alongside John Hare, with whom he was staying at his place in Overstrand two months before he died. But Partridge's pastel was the last art study from life. On the evening of 17th July 1905 he was dining with Mr. and Mrs. Partridge in their pretty house in Church Street, Chelsea. Sir Francis and Lady Burnand were there and Anstey Guthrie, and Mr. Plowden, the magistrate. Irving enjoyed the evening much — one can see it by the happy look in his face. Partridge, in the fashion customary to him, made his " eye notes " as Irving sat back in his armchair with the front of his shirt bulging out after the manner usual to such a pose.

Early next morning Partridge did the pastel.

To me it is of priceless worth, not only from its pictorial excellence, but because it is the last artistic record of my dear friend; and because it shows him in one of the happy moods which alas! grew rarer with his failing health. It gives, of course, a true impression of his age — he was then in his sixty-eighth year; but all the beauty and intelligence and sweetness of his face is there.

CHAPTER LIII. ROBERT BROWNING

Browning and Irving on Shakespeare — Edmund Kean's purse — Kean relics — Clint's portrait of Kean

IT was quite a treat to hear Irving and Robert Browning talking. Their conversation, no matter how it began, usually swerved round to Shakespeare; as they were both excellent scholars of the subject the talk was on a high plane. It was not of double-endings or rhyming lines, or of any of the points or objects of that intellectual dissection which forms the work of a certain order of scholars who seem to always want to prove to themselves that Shakespeare was Shakespeare and no one else — and that he was the same man at the end of his life that he had been at the beginning. These two men took large views. Their ideas were of the loftiness and truth of his thought; of the magic music of his verse; of the light which his work threw on human nature. Each could quote passages to support whatever view he was sustaining. And whenever those two men talked, a quiet little group grew round them; all were content to listen when they spoke.

We used to meet Browning at the houses of George Boughton, the Royal Academician, and of Arthur Lewis, the husband of Kate, the elder sister of Ellen Terry. Both lived on Campden Hill, and the houses of both were famous for hospitality amongst a large circle of friends radiating out from the artistic classes.

Robert Browning once made Irving a present which he valued very much. This was the purse, quite void of anything in the shape of money, which was found, after his death, in the pocket of Edmund Kean. It was of knitted green silk with steel rings. Charles Kean gave it to John Foster who gave it to Browning who gave it to Irving. It was sold at Christie’s at the sale of Irving’s curios, with already an illustrious record of possessors.

Irving loved everything which had belonged to Edmund Kean, whom he always held to be the greatest of British actors. He had quite a collection of things which had been his. In addition to this purse he had a malacca cane which had come from Garrick, to Kean; the knife which Kean wore as Shylock; his sword and sandals worn by him as Lucius Brutus; a gold medal presented to him in 1827; his Richard III. sword and boots; the Circassian dagger presented to him by Lord Byron.

He had had also two Kean pictures on which he set great store. One of large size was the scene from A New Way to Pay Old Debts, in which Kean appeared as Sir Giles. The other was the portrait done by George Clint as the study for Kean in the picture. This latter was the only picture for which Edmund Kean ever sat, and Irving valued it accordingly, lie gave the large picture to the Garrick Club; but the portrait he kept for himself. It was sold at the sale of his effects at Christie’s where I had the good fortune to be able to purchase it. To me it is of inestimable value, for of all his possessions Irving valued it most.

CHAPTER LIV. WALT WHITMAN

Irving meets Walt Whitman — My own friendship and correspondence with him — Like Tennyson — Visit to Walt Whitman, 1886 — A gain in 1887 — Walt Whitman's self-judgment — A projected bust — Lincoln's life-work — G. W. Childs — A message from the dead

I

IN the early afternoon of Thursday, loth March 1884, I drove with Irving to the house of Thomas Donaldson, 326 North 4oth Street, Philadelphia. We went by appointment. Thomas Donaldson it was who had, at the dinner given to Irving by the Clover Club on December 6, 1883, presented him with Edwin Forrest's watch.

When we arrived Donaldson met us in the hall. Irving went into the " parlour "; Hatton, who was with us, and I talked for a minute or so with our host. When we went in Irving was looking at a fine picture by Moran of the Great Valley of the Yellowstone which hung over the fireplace. On the opposite side of the room sat an old man of leonine appearance. He was burly, with a large head and high forehead slightly bald. Great shaggy masses of grey-white hair fell over his collar. His moustache was large and thick and fell over his mouth so as to mingle with the top of the mass of the bushy flowing beard. I knew at once who it was, but just as I looked Donaldson, who had hurried on in front, said:

"Mr. Irving, I want you to know Mr. Walt Whitman." His anxiety beforehand and his jubilation in making the introduction satisfied me that the occasion of Irving's coming had been made one for the meeting with the Poet.

When he heard the name Irving strode quickly across the room with outstretched hand. " I am delighted to meet you! " he said, and the two shook hands warmly. When my turn came and Donaldson said “ Bram Stoker,” Walt Whitman leaned forward suddenly, and held out his hand eagerly as he said:

“Bram Stoker — Abraham Stoker is it? “ I acquiesced and we shook hands as old friends — as indeed we were. “ Thereby hangs a tale.”

II

In 1868 when William Michael Rosetti brought out his Selected Poems of Walt Whitman it raised a regular storm in British literary circles. The bitter-minded critics of the time absolutely flew at the Poet and his work as watch-dogs do at a ragged beggar. Unfortunately there were passages in the Leaves of Grass which allowed of attacks, and those who did not or could not understand the broad spirit of the group of poems took samples of detail which were at least deterrent. Doubtless they thought that it was a case for ferocious attack; %as from these excerpts it would seem that the book was as offensive to morals as to taste. They did not scruple to give the ipsissima verba of the most repugnant passages.

In my own University the book was received with homeric laughter, and more than a few of the students sent over to Triibner’s for copies of the complete Leaves of Grass — that being the only place where they could then be had. Needless to say that amongst young men the objectionable passages were searched for and more noxious ones expected. For days we all talked of Walt Whitman and the new poetry with scorn — especially those of us who had not seen the book. One day I met a man in the Quad who had a copy, and I asked him to let me look at it. He acquiesced readily:

“Take the damned thing,” he said; “ I’ve had enough of it!”

I took the book with me into the Park and in the shade of an elm tree began to read it. Very shortly my own opinion began to form; it was diametrically opposed to that which I had been hearing. From that hour I became a lover of Walt Whitman. There were a few of us who, quite independently of each other, took the same view. We had quite a fight over it with our companions who used to assail us with shafts of their humour on all occasions. Somehow, we learned, I think, a good deal in having perpetually to argue without being able to deny — in so far as quotation went at all events — the premisses of our opponents.

However, we were ourselves satisfied, and that was much. Young men are, as a rule, very tenacious of such established ideas as they have — perhaps it is a fortunate thing for them and others; and we did not expect to convince our friends all at once. Fortunately also the feeling of intellectual superiority which comes with the honest acceptance of an idea which others have refused is an anodyne to the pain of ridicule. We Walt-Whitmanites had in the main more satisfaction than our opponents. Edward Dowden was one of the few who in those days took the large and liberal view of the Leaves of Grass, and as he was Professor of English Literature at the University his opinion carried great weight in such a matter. He brought the poems before the more cultured of the students by a paper at the Philosophical Society on May 4, 1871, on “ Walt Whitman and the Poetry of Democracy.” To me was given the honour of opening the debate on the paper.

For seven years the struggle in our own circle went on. Little by little we got recruits amongst the abler young men till at last a little cult was established. But the attack still went on. I well remember a militant evening at the “ Fortnightly Club “ — a club of Dublin men, meeting occasionally for free discussions. Occasionally there were meetings for both sexes. This particular evening — February 14, 1876 — was, perhaps fortunately, not a “ Ladies’ Night.” The paper was on “ Walt Whitman “ and was by a man of some standing socially; a man who had had a fair University record and was then a county gentleman of position in his own county. He was exceedingly able; a good scholar, well versed in both classic and English literature, and a brilliant humorist. His paper at the “ Fortnightly “ was a violent, incisive attack on Walt Whitman; had we not been accustomed to such for years it would have seemed outrageous. I am bound to say it was very clever; by confining himself almost entirely to the group of poems, “ Children of Adam,” he made out, in one way, a strong case. But he went too far. In challenging the existence in the whole collection of poems for mention of one decent woman — which is in itself ridiculous, for Walt Whitman honoured women — he drew an impassioned speech from Edward Dowden, who finished by reading a few verses from the poem “ Faces.” It was the last section of the poem, that which describes a noble figure of an old Quaker mother. It ends:

“The melodious character of the earth, The finish beyond which philosophy cannot go, and does not wish to go, The justified mother of men.”

I followed Dowden in the speaking and we carried the question. I find a note in my diary, which if egotistical has at least that merit of sincerity which is to be found now and again in a man’s diary — when he is young:

“Spoke — I think well.”

III

That night before I went to bed — three o'clock — I wrote a long letter to Walt Whitman. I had written to him before, but never so freely; my letters were only of the usual pattern and did not call for answer. But this letter was one in which I poured out my heart. I had long wished to do so but was, somehow, ashamed or diffident — the qualities are much alike. That night I spoke out; the stress of the evening had given me courage.

Mails were fewer and slower thirty years ago than they are to-day. My letter was written in the early morning of February i5. Walt Whitman wrote in answer on March 6, and I received it exactly two weeks later; so that he must have written very soon after receipt of my letter. Here is his reply:

"431 STEVENS ST. "CAMDEN, N. JERSEY, "COR. WEST. "U.S. AMERICA, "March 6, '76.

"BRAM STOKER, — My dear young man, — Your letters have been most welcome to me — welcome to me as a Person and then as Author — I don't know which most. You did well to write to me so unconventionally, so fresh, so manly, and so affectionately too. I, too, hope (though it is not probable) that we shall one day personally meet each other. Meantime I send you my friendship and thanks.

"Edward Dowden's letter containing among others your subscription for a copy of my new edition has just been recd. I shall send the book very soon by express in a package to his address. I have just written to E. D.

"My physique is entirely shatter'd — doubtless permanently — from paralysis and other ailments. But I am up and dress'd, and get out every day a little, live here quite lonesome, but hearty, and good spirits. — Write to me again. WALT WHITMAN."

The books alluded to, which I received on gth April, are the two volumes of the Centennial Edition of his poems. These were published by subscription as a means through which a party of friends could help him through a bad time.

In 1871 a correspondence had begun between Walt Whitman and Tennyson which lasted for some years. In the first of Tennyson's letters, July 12, 1871, he had said: —

"I trust that if you visit England, you will grant me the pleasure of receiving and entertaining you under my own roof."

This kind invitation took root in Walt Whitman's mind and blossomed into intention. He was arranging to come to England, and Edward Dowden asked him to prolong his stay and come to Ireland also. This was provisionally arranged with him. When he should have paid his visit to Tennyson he was to come on to Dublin, where his visit was to have been shared between Dowden and myself. Dowden was a married man with a house of his own. I was a bachelor, living in the top rooms of a house, which I had furnished myself. We knew that Walt Whitman lived a peculiarly isolated life, and the opportunity which either one or other of us could afford him would fairly suit his taste. He could then repeat his visit to either, and prolong it as he wished. We had also made provisional arrangements for his giving a lecture whilst in Dublin; and as the friends whom we asked were eager to take tickets, he would be assured of a sum of at least a hundred pounds sterling — a large sum to him in those days.

But alas!

"The best laid schemes o' mice an' men Gang aft agley."

At the very beginning of 1873 Walt Whitman was struck down by a stroke of paralysis which left him a wreck for the rest of his days. He could at best move but a very little; the joys of travel and visiting distant friends were not to be for him.

IV

At the meeting in 1884 he and Irving became friends at once. He knew some at least of Walt Whitman's work, for we often spoke of it; I myself gave him a two-volume edition. Walt Whitman was sitting on a sofa and Irving drew up a chair, a large rocker, beside him. They talked together for a good while and seemed to take to each other mightily. Irving doubtless struck by his height, his poetic appearance, his voice, and breadth of manner, said presently:

"You know you are like Tennyson in several ways. You quite remind me of him! " Then knowing that many people like their identity to be unique and not comparable with any one else, however great, he added:

"You don't mind that, do you? " The answer came quickly:

"Mind it! I like it am very proud to be told so! I like to be tickled! " He actually beamed and chuckled with delight at the praise. He always had a lofty idea of Tennyson and respect as well as love for him and his work; and he was hugely pleased at the comparison. He stood up so that Irving might gauge his height comparatively with Tennyson's.

Donaldson in his book on Walt Whitman, published after the Poet's death, wrote of the interview:

"Mr. Whitman was greatly pleased with Mr. Irving, and remarked to me how little of the actor there was in his manner or talk. Frequently, after this, Mr. Whitman expressed to me his admiration for Mr. Irving, now Sir Henry Irving, for his gentle and unaffected manners and his evident intellectual power and heart."

Be it remembered that Walt Whitman was fond of the theatre and went to it a good deal before he was incapacitated by his paralysis; but he did not like the vulgarity of certain actors in their posing off the stage. In his day in parts of the Southern States and even to this day with a certain class of actors in some places — a travelling company on its arrival had a " parade." They all had loud costumes for the purpose, and the whole company, men and women, would strut through the streets. It was most undignified, and naturally offended one who, like the Poet, had the real artistic sensitiveness. When he met the great actor with whose praise the whole country was then ringing and found that he was gentle and restrained and unassuming in manner the whole craft rose in his estimation.

When it came to my own turn to have a chat with Walt Whitman I found him all that I had ever dreamed of, or wished for in him: large-minded, broad-viewed, tolerant to the last degree; incarnate sympathy; understanding with an insight that seemed more than human. Small wonder, I thought, that in that terrible war of '61-5 this man made a place for himself in the world of aid to the suffering which was unique. No wonder that men opened their hearts to him — told him their secrets, their woes and hopes and griefs and loves! A man amongst men! With a herculean physical strength and stamina; with courage and hope and belief that never seemed to tire or stale he moved amongst those legions of the wounded and sick like a very angel of comfort materialised to an understanding man. When it is remembered that in that awful war six millions of men went through the hospitals, when the calls for medical attendance and hospital accommodation could never be adequately answered, no wonder that men were grateful to one who devoted himself to helping not only their bodies but their minds. He lived amongst the suffering, distributing such comforts as were supplied to him by the charitable; writing letters to home for those who were helpless; sympathising, encouraging, spreading hope and comfort in the way only possible to one who walks in the steps of the Master!

To me he was an old friend, and on his part he made me feel that I was one. We spoke of Dublin and those friends there who had manifested themselves to him. He remembered all their names and asked me many questions as to their various personalities. Before we parted he asked me to come to see him at his home in Camden whenever I could manage it. Need I say that I promised.

V

It was not till after two years that I had opportunity to pay my visit to Walt Whitman. The cares and responsibilities of a theatre are always exacting, and the demands on the time of any one concerned in management are so endless that the few hours of leisure necessary for such a visit are rare.

At last came a time when I could see my way. On 23rd October 1886 I left London for New York, arriving on 31st. I had come over to make out a tour for Faust to commence next year. On 2nd November I went to Philadelphia by an early train. There after I had done my work at the theatre I met Donaldson, and as I had time to spare we went over to Camden to pay the visit to which I had looked forward so long.

His house, 328 Mickle Street, was a small ordinary one in a row, built of the usual fine red brick which marks Philadelphia and gives it an appearance so peculiarly Dutch. It was a small house, though large enough for his needs. He sat in the front room in a big rocking chair which Donaldson's children had given him; it had been specially made for him, as he was a man of over six feet high and very thickset. He was dressed all in grey, the trousers cut straight and wide, and the coat loose. All the cloth was a sort of thick smooth frieze. His shirt was of rather coarse cotton, unstarched, with a very wide full collar open low — very low in the neck and fastened with a big white stud. The old lady who cared for him and nursed him had for him a manifest admiration. She evidently liked to add on her own account some little adornment; she had fastened a bit of cheap narrow lace on his wide soft shirt-cuffs and at the neck of his collar. It was clumsily sewn on and was pathetic to see, for it marked a limited but devoted intelligence used for his care. The cuffs of his coat were unusually deep and wide and were stuck here,and there with pins which he used for his work. His hair seemed longer and wilder and shaggier and whiter than when I had seen him two years before. He seemed feebler, and when he rose from his chair or moved about the room did so with difficulty. I could notice his eyes better now. They were not so quick and searching as before; tireder-looking, I thought, with the blue paler and the grey less warm in colour. Altogether the whole man looked more worn out. There was not, however, any symptom of wear or tire in his intellectual or psychic faculties.

He seemed genuinely glad to see ‘me. He was most hearty in his manner and interested about everything. Asked much about London and its people, specially those of the literary world; and spoke of Irving in a way that delighted me. Our conversation presently drifted towards Abraham Lincoln for whom he had an almost idolatrous affection. I confess that in this I shared; and it was another bond of union between us. He said:

“No one will ever know the real Abraham Lincoln or his place in history I”

I had of course read his wonderful description of the assassination by Wilkes Booth given in his Memoranda during the War, published in the volume called Two Rivulets in the Centennial Edition of his works in 1876. This is so startlingly vivid that I thought that the man who had written it could tell me more. So I asked him if he were present at the time. He said:

“No, I was not present at the time of the assassination; but I was close to the theatre and was one of the first in when the news came. Then I afterwards spent the better part of the night interviewing many of those who were present and of the President’s Guard, who, when the terrible word came out that he had been murdered, stormed the house with fixed bayonets. It was a wonder that there was not a holocaust, for it was a wild frenzy of grief and rage. It might have been that the old sagas had been enacted again when amongst the Vikings a Chief went to the Valhalla with a legion of spirits around him!”

The memory of that room will never leave me. The small, close room — it was cold that day and when we came in he had lit his stove, which soon grew almost red-hot; the poor furniture; the dim light of the winter afternoon struggling in through the not over large window shadowed as it was by the bare plane tree on the sidewalk, whose branches creaked in the harsh wind; the floor strewn in places knee-deep with piles of newspapers and books and all the odds and ends of a literary working room. Amongst them were quite a number of old hats — of the soft grey wide-brimmed felt which he always wore.

I was more interested than I can say and was loth to leave. I had to catch the 4.3o train to New York, there to meet General Horace Porter, with whom I was to travel that night to Boston, where he was to lecture at the Tremont Temple on “ General Grant “ to the Loyal Legion. We were to sup with the Loyal Legion afterwards. Donaldson and I had arrived at Mickle Street about three, and at four we left. I think Walt Whitman was really sorry to have us go. Indeed Thomas Donaldson describes the visit. I venture to give it in extenso, even at the cost of seeming vain. But I was and am proud of it — and I humbly think I have good reason to be:

“Mr. Bram Stoker, a man of intelligence and cultivation, having had the advantage of association with the most cultivated in all walks of contemporary English life, was at his best. Mr. Whitman was captivated. Mr. Stoker had previously met Mr. Whitman at my house in Philadelphia in 1884. We remained an hour, and then left in spite of his protest. Many days after this visit he referred to it by saying: And friend Stoker; where is he now? ‘ I replied, ‘ In Chicago.’ [In this, by the way, Donaldson,’ writing ten years after the event, made a slight error. We paid two visits together, 1886 and 1887 — it is to the latter that Chicago referred.] Well, well; what a broth of a boy he is! My gracious, he knows enough for four or five ordinary men; and what tact! Henry Irving knows a good thing when he sees it, eh? Stoker is an adroit lad, and many think that he made Mr. Irving’s path, in a business way, a smooth one over here.’ I replied Indeed! ‘ I should say so,’ was his answer. See that he comes over again to see me before he leaves the country. He’s like a breath of good, healthy, breezy sea air.’”

I can only ask pardon for the quotation. But I think it justifies itself and bears out all that I have already said. It was contemporary and not even in my knowledge till Donaldson sent me his book in

1896.

VI

The opportunity for my next visit to Walt Whitman came in the winter of 1887 when we were playing in Philadelphia. On the 22nd December Donaldson and I again found our way over to Mickle Street. In the meantime I had had much conversation about Walt Whitman with many of his friends. The week after my last interview I had been again in Philadelphia for a day, on the evening of which I had dined with his friend and mine, Talcott Williams of the Press. During the evening we talked much of Walt Whitman, and we agreed that it was a great pity that he did not cut certain lines and passages out of the poems. Talcott Williams said he would do it if permitted, and I said I would speak to Walt Whitman about it whenever we should meet again. The following year, 1887, I breakfasted with Talcott Williams, Igth December, and in much intimate conversation' we spoke of the subject again.

We found Walt Whitman hale and well. His hair was more snowy white than ever and more picturesque. He looked like King Lear in Ford Madox Brown's picture. He seemed very glad to see me and greeted me quite affectionately. He said he was " in good heart," and looked bright though his body had distinctly grown feebler.

I ventured to speak to him what was in my mind as to certain excisions in his work. I said:

"If you will only allow your friends to do this — they will only want to cut about a hundred lines in all — your books will go into every house in America. Is not that worth the sacrifice? " He answered at once, as though his mind had long ago been made up and he did not want any special thinking:

“It would not be any sacrifice. So far as I am concerned they might cut a thousand. It is not that — it is quite another matter: “ — here both face and voice grew rather solemn—” when I wrote as I did I thought I was doing right and right makes for good. I think so still. I think that all that God made is for good — that the work of His hands is clean in all ways if used as He intended If I was wrong I have done harm. And for that I deserve to be punished by being forgotten! It has been and cannot not-be. No, I shall never cut a line so long as I live!”

One had to respect a decision thus made and on such grounds. I said no more.

When we were going he held up his hand saying, “ Wait a minute.” He got up laboriously and hobbled out of the room and to his bedroom overhead. There we heard him moving about and shifting things. It was nearly a quarter of an hour when he came down holding in his hand a thin green-covered volume and a printed picture of himself. He wrote on the picture with his indelible blue pencil. Then he handed to me both book and picture, saying:

“Take these and keep them from me and Goodbye!”

The book was the 1872 edition of the Leaves of Grass—” As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free “ — and contained his autograph in ink. The picture was a photograph by Gutekunst, of Philadelphia. On it he had written:

To Bram Stoker.

Walt Whitman. Dec. 22, ‘87.

That was the last time I ever saw the man who for nearly twenty years I had held in my heart as a dear friend.

VII

When I had come to New York after my visit to Walt Whitman in 1886 I made it my business to see Augustus St. Gaudens, the sculptor, regarding a project which had occurred to me. That was to have him do a bust of Walt Whitman. He jumped at the idea, and said it would be a delight to him — that there ought to be such a record of the great Poet and that he would be proud to do it. I arranged that I should ask if he could have the necessary facilities from Walt Whitman. We thought that I could do it best as I knew him and those of his friends who were closest to him. I made inquiries at once through Donaldson, and when business took me again to Philadelphia, on 8th and gth November, we arranged the matter. Walt Whitman acquiesced and was very pleased at the idea. I wrote the necessary letters and left addresses and so forth with St. Gaudens. He was at that time very busy with his great statue of Abraham Lincoln for Chicago. Incidentally I saw in his studio the life mask and hands of Lincoln made by the sculptor Volk before he went to Washington for his first Presidency. The mould had just been found by the sculptor's son twenty-five years after their making. Twenty men joined to purchase the models and present them to the nation. St. Gaudens made casts in bronze of the face and hands with a set for each of the twenty subscribers with his name in each case cut in the bronze. Henry Irving and I had the honour of being two of the twenty. The bronze mask and hands, together with the original plaster moulds, rest in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington with a bronze plate recording the history and the names of the donors. I felt proud when, some years later, I saw by chance my own name in such a place, in such company, and for such a cause.

Before leaving New York, which I did on November 1886, I saw a good many friends, and arranged with them that we should each pay a certain sum towards a fund which would at least defray out-of-pocket expenses of casting the bronze bust of Walt Whitman when St. Gaudens should have done it.

Unhappily, for want of time — for he was overwhelmed with work — and other causes, St. Gaudens could not get to Philadelphia for a long time. Then Walt Whitman got another stroke of paralysis early in 1888. Before the combination of possibilities came when he could sit to the sculptor and the latter could give the time to the work he died.

Happily he did not in the last years of his life want for anything. He earned enough for his wants, and if anything were lacking for comforts it came. He had good friends. In 1889 Irving sent him a cheque for which he was grateful. But there was one friend as willing as able to help; that was George W. Childs, owner and editor of the Philadelphian Ledger. He was always doing kind and generous things, and used to ask certain of his friends to suggest good cases for help. Once he asked me if there was anything of the kind which I wished him to do. This was in his office on December 14, 1887. Irving and I had been to see him. Irving stayed for only a short while, but I remained as I was going with Mr. Childs to lunch with " Tony " Drexel in the Bank parlour of his great bank in Chestnut Street. When he asked me if I wished him to do anything, I said:

"Yes, Mr. Childs, there is Walt Whitman! A lot of us are anxious about him for he is old and feeble and in bad health. Moreover, though he is not in want, he is poor. His needs are very small, but in his state of health they are likely to be continuous. We are all willing to help, but we are scattered about and may not know. It will be very good of you if you will have an eye on him.” He was sitting down, but he rose up as he said very sweetly:

“Thank you very much, my dear Bram Stoker, for speaking to me about him. But be quite assured and easy in your mind. Walt Whitman will never want. That is already seen to.” It was only after his death and Walt Whitman’s that Donaldson, who looked after the Poet’s affairs for him, knew that the $1200, which had relieved the mortgage on Whitman’s house in Mickle Street, had been secretly paid by Mr. Childs.

Let me lay the memory of this kindness as a flower on the grave of a good man.

VIII

I was not in America between the spring of 1888 and the early fall of 1893 at which time Irving opened the tour in San Francisco. We did not reach Philadelphia till towards the end of January 1894. In the meantime Walt Whitman had died, March 26, 1892. On 4th February I spent the afternoon with Donaldson in his home. Shortly after I came in he went away for a minute and came back with a large envelope which he handed to me:

“That is for you from Walt Whitman. I have been keeping it till I should see you.”

The envelope contained in a rough card folio pasted down on thick paper the original notes from which he delivered his lecture on Abraham Lincoln at the Chestnut Street Opera House on April 15, 1886.

With it was a letter to Donaldson, in which he said:

“Enclosed I send a full report of my Lincoln Lecture for our friend Bram Stoker.”

This was my Message from the Dead.

CHAPTER LV. JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY

Supper on a car — A sensitive mountaineer—" Good-bye, Jim"

IRVING, like all who have ever known him, loved the " Hoosier " poet. We saw a great deal of him when he was in London; and whenever we were in Indianapolis, to meet him was one of the expected pleasures. Riley is one of the most dramatic reciters that live, and when he gives one of his own poems it is an intellectual delight. I remember two specially delightful occasions in which he was a participant. Once in Indianapolis when he came and supped on the car with us whilst we were waiting after the play for the luggage to be loaded. He was in great form, and Irving sat all the time with an expectant smile whilst Riley told us of some of his experiences amongst the hill folk of Indiana where conditions of life are almost primitive. One tale gave Irving intense pleasure — that in which he told of how he had asked a mountaineer who was going down to the nearest town to bring him back some tobacco. This the man had done gladly; but when Riley went to pay him the cost of it he drew his gun on him. When the other asked the cause of offence, which he did not intend or even understand, the mountaineer answered:

"Didn't I do what ye asked me! Then why do you go for to insult me. I ain't a tobacker dealer. I bought it for ye, an' I give it to ye free and glad. I ain't sellin' it!"

The other occasion was a dinner at the Savoy Hotel, July 29, 1891, to which Irving had asked some friends to meet him. " Jamesy " — for so his friends call him — recited several of his poems, most exquisitely. His rendering of the powerful little poem, " Good-bye, Jim," made every one of the other eight men at the table weep.

CHAPTER LVI. ERNEST RENAN

Renan and Haweis — How to converse in a language you don’t know

ON April 3, 188o, when we were playing The Merchant of Venice, Ernest Renan came to the Lyceum; the Rev. H. R. Haweis was with him. At the end of the third act they both came round to Irving’s dressing-room. It was interesting to note the progress through the long Royal passage of that strangely assorted pair. Haweis was diminutive, and had an extraordinary head of black hair. Renan was ponderously fat and bald as a billiard ball. The historian waddled along with an odd rolling gait, whilst the preacher, who was lame, hopped along like a sort of jackdaw. The conversation between Irving and Renan was a strange one to listen to. Neither knew the other’s language; but each kept talking his own with, strange to say, the result that they really understood something of what was said. When I was alone with Irving and remarked on it he said:

“If you don’t know the other person’s language, keep on speaking your own. Do not get hurried or flustered, but keep as natural as you can; your intonation, being natural, will convey something. You have a far better chance of being understood than if you try to talk a language you don’t know!”

CHAPTER LVII. HALL CAINE

A remarkable criticism — Irving and “ The Deemster “- “ Mahomet” — For reasons of State— ‘Weird remembrances—” The Flying Dutchman “—” Home, Sweet Home”—” Glory and John Storm” — Irving and the chimpanzee — A dangerous moment — Unceremonious treatment of a lion — Irving’s last night at the play

I

THE early relations between Irving and Hall Caine are especially interesting, considering the positions which both men afterwards attained. They began in 1874. On the 16th of October in that year Irving wrote to him a very kindly and friendly letter in answer to Hall Caine’s request that he should allow his portrait to be inserted in a monthly magazine which he was projecting.

A fortnight later Hall Caine, as critic of the Liverpool Town Crier, attended the first night of Hamlet at the Lyceum-31st October 1874. His criticism was by many friends thought so excellent that he was asked to reprint it. This was done in the shape of a broad-sheet pamphlet. The critique is throughout keen and appreciative. The last two paragraphs are worthy of preservation:

“To conclude. — Throughout this work (which is not confined to the language of terror and pity, the language of impassioned intellect, but includes also the words of everyday life), every passage has its proper pulse and receives from the actor its characteristic mode of expression. Every speech is good and weighty, correct and dignified, and treated with feeling. The variety, strength and splendour of the whole conception have left impressions which neither time nor circumstance can ever efface. They are happy, indeed, who hear Hamlet first from Mr. Irving. They may see other actors essay the part (a very improbable circumstance whilst Mr. Irving holds his claim to it), but the memory of the noble embodiment of the character will never leave them.

"We will not say that Mr. Irving is the Betterton, Garrick, or Kemble of his age. In consideration of this performance we claim for him a position altogether distinct and unborrowed. Mr. Irving will, we judge, be the leader of a school of actors now eagerly enlisting themselves under his name. The object will be — the triumph of mental over physical histrionic art."

This critical forecast is very remarkable considering the writer's age. At that time he was only in his twenty-second year. He had been writing and lecturing for already some time and making a little place for himself locally as a man of letters.

Two years later they had a meeting by Irving's request. This was during a visit to Liverpool whilst the actor was on tour. There began a close friendship which lasted till Irving's death. Caine seemed to intuitively understand not only Irving's work but his aim and method. Irving felt this and had a high opinion of Caine's powers. I do not know any one whose opinions interested him more. There was to both men a natural expression of intellectual frankness, as if they held the purpose as well as the facts of ideas in common. The two men were very much alike in certain intellectual ways. To both was given an almost abnormal faculty of self-abstraction and of concentrating all their powers on a given subject for any length of time. To both was illimitable patience in the doing of their work. And in yet one other way their powers were similar: a faculty of getting up and ultimately applying to the work in hand an amazing amount of information. When Irving undertook a character he set himself to work to inform himself of the facts appertaining to it; when the time for acting it came, it was found that he knew pretty well all that could be known about it. Hall Caine was also a " glutton

“ in the same way. He absorbed facts and ideas almost by an instinct and assimilated them with natural ease. For instance, when he went to Morocco to get local colour before writing The Scapegoat he so steeped himself in the knowledge of Jewish life and ideas and ritual that those who read his book almost accepted him as an authority on the subject.

II

When Hall Caine published The Deemster in 1887 Irving was one of its most appreciative admirers. We were then on tour in America and he naturally got hold of the book a little later than its great and sudden English success. Still he read it unprejudiced by its success and thought it would make a fine play. When we got back to England early in April 1888, he took his earliest opportunity of approaching the author; but only to find that he had already entered into an arrangement with Wilson Barrett with regard to dramatisation of the novel.

Irving’s view of this was different to that of both Caine and Barrett. To him the dramatic centre and pivotal point of the play that would be most effective was the Bishop. Had the novel been available he would — Caine being willing to dramatise it or to allow it to be dramatised by some one else — have played it on those lines.

I think it was a great pity that this could not be, for Irving and Hall Caine would have made a wonderful team. The latter was compact of imagination and — then undeveloped — dramatic force. With Irving to learn from, in the way of acting needs and development, he would surely have done some dramatic work of wonderful introspection and intensity. — As he will do yet; though his road has been a rough one.

From that time on, Irving had a strong desire that Caine should write some play that he could act. Time after time he suggested subjects; theories that he could deal with; characters good to act. But there seemed to be always some impasse set by Fate. For instance, Irving had had for a long time a desire to act the part of Mahomet, and after the publication in France of the play on the subject by De Bornier it seemed to be feasible. Herein too came the memory of the promptings and urging of Sir Richard Burton of some three years before as to the production of an Eastern play. De Bornier's play he found would not suit his purpose; so he suggested to Hall Caine that he should write one on the subject. Caine jumped at the idea — he too had a desire to deal with an Eastern theme. He thought the matter out, and had before long evolved a scenario. Well do I remember the time he put it before me. At that time he was staying with me, and on the afternoon of Sunday, January 26, 1890, he said he would like to give his idea of the play. He had already had a somewhat trying morning, for he had made an appointment with an interviewer and had had a long meeting with him. Work, however, was — is-always a stimulant to Hall Caine. The use of his brain seems to urge and stimulate it " as if increase of appetite had grown by what it fed on." Now in the dim twilight of the late January afternoon, sitting in front of a good fire of blazing billets of old ship timber, the oak so impregnated with salt and saltpetre that the flames leaped in rainbow colours, he told the story as he saw it. Hall Caine always knows his work so well and has such a fine memory that he never needs to look at a note. That evening he was all on fire. His image rises now before me. He sits on a low chair in front of the fire; his face is pale something waxen-looking in the changing blues of the flame. His red hair, fine and long, and pushed back from his high forehead, is so thin that through it as the flames leap we can see the white line of the head so like to Shakespeare's. He is himself all aflame. His hands have a natural eloquence — something like Irving's; they foretell and emphasise the coming thoughts. His large eyes shine like jewels as the firelight flashes. Only my wife and I are present, sitting like Darby and Joan at either side of the fireplace. As he goes on he gets more and more afire till at the last he is like a living flame. We sit quite still; we fear to interrupt him. The end of his story leaves us fired and exalted too....

He was quite done up; the man exhausts himself in narrative as I have never seen with any one else. Indeed when he had finished a novel he used to seem as exhausted as a woman after childbirth. At such times he would be in a terrible state of nerves — trembling and sleepless. At that very time he had not quite got through the nervous crisis after the completion of The Bondman. At such times everything seemed to worry him; things that he would shortly after laugh at. This is part of the penalty that genius pays to great effort.

III

The next day, January 27, 1890, in the office at the Lyceum, Caine told — not read — to Irving the story of his play on Mahomet. Irving was very pleased with it, and it was of course understood that Caine was to go on and carry out the idea. He set to work on it with his usual fiery energy, and in a few months had evolved a scenario so complete that it was a volume in itself. By this time it was becoming known that Irving had in mind the playing of Mahomet. The very fact of approaching De Bornier regarding his play had somehow leaked out. As often happens in matters theatrical there came a bolt from the blue. None of us had the slightest idea that there could be any objection in a professedly Christian nation to a play on the subject. A letter was received from the Lord Chamberlain’s department, which controls the licences of theatres and plays, asking that such a play should not be undertaken. The reason given was that protest had been made by a large number of our Mahometan fellow-subjects. The Mahometan faith holds it sacrilege to represent in any form the image of the Prophet. The Lord Chamberlain’s department does its spiriting very gently; all that those in contact with it are made aware of is the velvet glove. But the steel hand works all the same — perhaps better than if stark. It is an understood thing that the Lord Chamberlain’s request is a command in matters under his jurisdiction. Britain with her seventy millions of Mahometan subjects does not wish — and cannot afford — to offend their sensibilities for the sake of a stage play. Irving submitted gracefully at once, of course. Caine was more than nice on the matter; he refused to accept fee or reward of any kind for his work. He simply preserved his work by privately printing, three years later, the scenario as a story in dramatic form. He altered it sufficiently to change the personnel of the time and place of Mahomet, laying the story of The Mandi in modern Morocco.

This was not Irving’s first experience of the action on a political basis of the Lord Chamberlain. I shall have something to say of it when treating of Frank Marshall’s play, Robert Emmett.

IV

During the visit to me in Edinburgh in 1891 Irving and Caine saw much of one another. On the 18th we took supper with Dr. Andrew Wilson, an old friend of us all, at the Northern Club. That night both Irving and Caine were in great form and the conversation was decidedly interesting. It began with a sort of discussion about Shakespeare as a dramatist — on the working side; his practical execution of his own imaginative intention. Hall Caine held that Shakespeare would not have put in his plays certain descriptions if he had had modern stage advantages to explain without his telling. Irving said that it would be good for moderns if they would but take Shakespeare's lesson in this matter. Later on the conversation tended towards weird subjects. Caine told of seeing in a mirror a reflection not his own. Irving followed by telling us of his noticing an accidental effect in a mirror, which he afterwards used in the Macbeth ghost: that of holding the head up. The evening was altogether a fascinating one; it was four o'clock when we broke up.

V

On November 19, 1892, Hall Caine supped with Irving in the Beefsteak Room, bringing his young son Ralph with him. The only other guest was Sir (then Mr.) Alexander Mackenzie. It was a delightful evening, a long, pleasant, home-like chat. Irving was very quiet and listened attentively to all Caine said. The latter told us the story of the novel he had just then projected. The scene was to be laid in Cracow to which he was shortly to make his way.

Irving was hugely interested. Any form of oppression was noxious to him; and certainly the Jewish " Exodus " that was just then going on came under that heading. I think that he had in his mind the possibilities of a new and powerful play. As I said he was most anxious to have a play by Hall Caine, and after the abortive attempt at Mahomet, he was more set on it than ever.

He had before this suggested to Caine that he should do a play on the subject of the " Flying Dutchman." The play which he had done in 1878, Vanderdecken, was no good as a play, though he played in it admirably. For my own part I believed in the subject and always wanted him to try it again — the play, of course, being tinkered into something like good shape, or a new play altogether written. The character, as Irving created it, was there fit for any setting; and so long as the play should be fairly sufficient the result ought to be good. Irving had a great opinion of Caine's imagination, and always said that he would write a great work of weirdness some day. He knew already his ability and his fire and his zeal. He believed also in the convincing force of the man.

VI

In 1894 Hall Caine wrote a poem called The Demon Lover, in which he found material for a play. He made a scenario, which he told rather than read to Irving after supper in the Beefsteak Room on St. Valentine's day of the next year, 1895. Irving was much impressed by it but thought that the part would of necessity be too young for him — he was then fifty-six. He asked Caine again to try the " Flying Dutchman."

In the June of next year 1896 we were in Manchester in the course of a tour. Hall Caine came over from the Isle of Man to stay with me, bringing with him the scenario of a play on the " Flying Dutchman " and also the scenario of a new play which he had just completed, Home, Sweet Home. He read, or rather told, me the latter with the

MS. open before him. He never, however, turned the pages! The next forenoon we went by previous arrangement to Irving’s rooms at the Queen’s Hotel. There he read — or told from his script — the scenario of his play on the “ Flying Dutchman.” We discussed it then, and afterwards during a carriage drive, Irving asked Caine if he could not make the character of Vanderdecken more sympathetic and less brutal at the start. Caine having promised to go into this and see what he could do, then told the story of Home, Sweet Home. Irving feared from the description that the play would not do for him. In Act I. the character was too young; in Act II. too rough; and in Act III. too tall. For his objection in the last case he gave a reason, enlightening in the matter of stage craft:

“There is no general sympathy on the stage for tall old men!”

Finally Caine told us the story of his coming novel, which was afterwards called The Christian.

He knew it in his own mind by the tentative title which he used, “ Glory and John Storm.”

In the afternoon we all went to the Bellevue Gardens to see a wonderful chimpanzee, “ Jock,” a powerful animal and more clever even than “ Sally,” who was then the great public pet at the “ Zoo “ in Regent’s Park. Ellen Terry came with us and also Comyns Carr, who had arrived from London. Jock was certainly an abnormal brute. He rode about the grounds on a tricycle of his own! He ate his food from a plate with knife and fork and spoon! He slept in a bed with sheets and blankets! He smoked cigarettes! And he drank wine — when he could get it! His favourite tipple was port wine and lemonade, and he was very conservative in his rights regarding it. Indeed in this case it was very nearly productive of a grim tragedy.

We went into a little room close to the keeper’s house; a sort of general refreshment room with wooden benches round it and a table in the centre. Jock had his cigarette; then his grog was mixed to his great and anxious interest. The keeper handed him the tumbler, which he held tight in both hands whilst he went through some hanky-panky pantomime of thanks — usually, I took it, productive of pennies. Irving said to the keeper:

"Would he give you some of that, now? " The man shook his head as he answered:

"He doesn't like to, but he will if I ask him. I have to be careful though." He asked Jock, who very.unwillingly let him take the tumbler, following it with his hands. The arms stretched out as it went farther from him; but the hands always remained close to the glass. The man just put the edge of the glass to his mouth and then handed it back quickly. The monkey had acted with considerable self-restraint, and looked immensely relieved when he had his drink safe back again. Then Irving said:

"Let me see if he will let me have some! " The keeper spoke to the monkey, keeping his eye fixedly on him. Irving took the glass from his manifestly unwilling hands and raised it to his own lips. Being a better actor than the keeper he did his part more realistically, actually letting the liquid rise over his shut lips.

The instant the monkey saw his beloved liquor touch the mouth he became a savage — a veritable, red-eyed, restrainless demon. With a sudden hideous screech he dashed out his arms, one of them catching Irving by the throat, the other seizing the glass. It made us all gasp and grow pale. The brute was so strong and so savage that it might have torn out his windpipe before a hand could have been raised. Fortunately Irving did instinctively the only thing that could be done; he yelled just as suddenly in the face of the monkey — an appalling yell which seemed to push the brute back. At the same moment he thrust away from him the glass in the animal's other paw. The monkey, loosing its hold on his throat, jumped back across the wide table with incredible quickness without losing its seated attitude, and sat clutching the tumbler close to his breast and showing his teeth whilst he manifested his rage in a hideous trumpeting.

Before that, at our first coming into the room he had nearly frightened the life out of Ellen Terry. She had sat down on the bench along the wall. The monkey looked at her and seemed attracted by her golden hair. He came and sat by her on the bench and, turning over, laid his head in her lap, looking up at her and at the same time putting up his paw as big as a man's hand and as black and shiny as though covered with an undertaker's funeral glove. She looked down, saw his eyes, and with a scream made a jump for the doorway. The monkey laughed. He had a sense of humour — of his own kind, which was not of a high kind.

A little later he regained his good temper and forgave us all. When we went round the gardens he got on his tricycle and came with us. In the monkey house was a great cage as large as an ordinary room, and here were a large number of monkeys of a mixed kind. Our gorilla — for such he really was — started to amuse himself with them. He got a great stick and standing close to the cage hammered furiously at the bars, all the while trumpeting horribly. In the midst of it he would look round at us with a grin, as much as to say:

"See how I am frightening these inferior creatures! " They were in an agony of fear, crouching in the farthest corners of the great cage, moaning and shivering.

VIII

Irving had had an incident with a monkey some years before. On June 16, 1887, we went to Stratford-on-Avon, where he was to open a fountain the next day. We stayed with Mr. C. E. Flower, at Avonbank, his beautiful place on the river. In his conservatory was a somewhat untamed monkey; not a very large one, but with anger enough for a wilderness of monkeys. Frank Marshall, who was of our party, would irritate the monkey when we went to smoke in there after dinner. It got so angry with his puffing his smoke at it that it shook the cage to such an extent that we thought it would topple over. We persuaded Marshall to come away alone, and then Irving, who loved animals, went over to pacify the monkey. The latter, however, did not discriminate between malice and good intent, and when Irving bent down to say soothing things to it a long arm flashed out and catching him by the hair began to drag his head towards the cage, the other paw coming out towards his eyes. It was an anxious moment; but this time, as on the later occasion, a sudden screech of full lung power from the actor frightened the monkey into releasing him.

IX

Irving loved all animals, and did not, I think, realise the difference between pets and /era naturce. I remember once at Baltimore — it was the 1st January1900 — when he and I went to Hagen-bach’s menagerie which was then in winter quarters. The hall was a big one, the shape of one of those great panorama buildings which used to be so popular in America. There were some very fine lions; and to one of them he took a great fancy.

It was a fine African, young and in good condition with magnificent locks and whiskers and eyebrows, and whatsoever beauties on a hairy basis there are to the lion kind. It was sleeping calmly in its cage with its head up against the bars. The keeper recognised Irving and came up to talk and explain things very eagerly. Irving asked him about the lion; if it was good-tempered and so forth. The man said it was a very good-tempered animal, and offered to make him stand up and show himself off. His method of doing so was the most unceremonious thing of the kind I ever saw, it showed absolutely no consideration whatever for the lion's amour-propre or fine feelings. He caught up a broom that leaned against the cage — a birch broom with the business end not of resilient twigs but of thin branches cut off with a sharp knife. It was the sort of scrubbing broom that would take the surface off an ordinary deal flooring. This he seized and drove it with the utmost violence in his power right into the animal's face. I should have thought that no eye could have escaped from such an attack. He repeated the assault as often as there was time before the lion had risen and jumped back.

Irving was very indignant, and spoke out his mind very freely. The keeper answered him very civilly indeed I thought. His manner was genuinely respectful as he said:

"That's all very well, Mr. Irving. But it doesn't work with lions! There's only one thing that such animals respect; and that's force. Why, that treatment that you complain of will save my life some day. It wouldn't be worth a week's purchase without it!"

Irving realised the justice of his words — he was always just; and when we came away the gratuity was perhaps a little higher than usual, to compensate for any injured feelings.

X

“The Flying Dutchman “ play never, I am sorry to say, materialised. The Christian and The Eternal City and The Prodigal Son, together with his plays, kept Hall Caine busy. As for Irving, his work and the two illnesses in 1897 and 1898 allowed no opportunity for new work other than that to which he was committed. The two men were, however, close friends and met on every possible occasion. One of the last plays — if not the very last — that Irving went to see was The Prodigal Son at Drury Lane. He was very pleased with George Alexander, who played the part of Oscar. He said tome, when we met after his seeing it:

“From an actor’s point of view he was all-important. He kept the play together!”

He did not mean that the play was loose-knit or disjointed. It was a purely professional criticism, from the acting side. It is possible in any play for an actor or a group of them to let a play lose interest; others can keep it moving and so sustain the interest of the audience.

CHAPTER LVIII. IRVING AND DRAMATISTS

Difficulty of getting plays — The sources — Actor as collaborator — A startled dramatist — Plays bought but not produced — Pinero

I

ONLY those who are or have been concerned in theatrical management can have the least idea of the difficulty of obtaining plays suitable for acting. There are plenty of plays to be had. When any one goes into management — indeed from the time the fact of his intention is announced — plays begin to rain in on him. All those rejected consistently throughout a generation are tried afresh on the new victim, for the hope of the unacted dramatist never dies. There is just a sufficient percentage of ultimate success in the case of long-neglected plays to obviate despair. Every one who writes a play sends it on and on to manager after manager. When a player makes some abnormal success every aspirant to dramatic fame tries his hand at a play for him. It is all natural enough. The work is congenial, and the rewards — when there are rewards — are occasionally great. There is, I suppose, no form of literary work which seems so easy and is so difficult — which while seeming to only require the common knowledge of life, needs in reality great technical knowledge and skill. From the experience alone which we had in the Lyceum one might well have come to the conclusion that to write a play of some kind is an instinct of human nature. To Irving were sent plays from every phase and condition of life. Not only from writers whose work lay in other lines of effort; historians, lyric poets, divines from the curate to the bishop, but from professional men, merchants, manufacturers, traders, clerks. He has had them sent by domestic servants, and from as far down the social scale as a workhouse boy.

But from all these multitudinous and varied sources we had very few plays indeed which afforded even a hope or promise. Irving was always anxious for good plays, and spared neither trouble nor expense to get them. Every play that was sent was read and very many commissions were given and purchase money or advance fees paid. In such cases subjects were often suggested, scenario being the basis. In addition to the plays, in which he or Ellen Terry took part, which he produced during his own management he purchased or paid fees or options on twenty-seven plays. Not one of these, from one cause or another could he produce. One of these made success with another man. Some never got beyond the scenario stage. In one case, though the whole purchase money was paid in advance, the play was never delivered; it was finished — and then sold under a different title to another manager! One was prohibited — by request — by the Lord Chamberlain's department. Of this play, Robert Emmett, were some interesting memories.

In Ireland or by Irish people it had often been suggested to Irving that he should present Robert Emmett in a play. He bore a striking resemblance to the Irish patriot — a glance at any of the portraits would to any one familiar with Irving's identity be sufficient; and his story was full of tragic romance. From the first Irving was taken with the idea and had the character in his mind for stage use. In the first year of his management he suggested the theme to Frank A. Marshall, the dramatist; who afterwards co-operated with him in the editorship of the " Irving " Shakespeare. He was delighted with the idea, became full of it, and took the work in hand. In the shape of a scenario it was so far advanced that at the end of the second season Irving was able to announce it as one of the forthcoming plays. As we know the extraordinary success of The Merchant ofVenice postponed the work then projected for more than a year. Marshall, therefore, took his work in a more leisurely fashion, and it was not till the autumn of 1881 that the play appeared in something like its intended shape. But by that time Romeo and Juliet was in hand and a full year elapsed before Robert Emmett could be practically considered. But when that time came the Irish question was acute. Fenianism or certain of its sequela became recrudescent. The government of the day considered that.so marked and romantic a character as Robert Emmett, and with such political views portrayed so forcibly and so picturesquely as would be the case with Irving, might have a dangerous effect on a people seething in revolt. Accordingly a " request " came through the Lord Chamberlain's department that Mr. Irving would not proceed with the production which had been announced. Incidentally I may say that nothing was mentioned in the " request " regarding the cost incurred. Irving had already paid to Frank Marshall a sum of L45o.

In the early stages of the building up of the play there was an interesting occurrence which illustrates the influence of the actor on the author, especially when he is a good stage manager. One night Marshall came to supper in the room which antedated the Beefsteak Room for that purpose. The occasion was to discuss the scenario which had by then been enlarged to proportions comprehensive of detail — not merely the situations but the working of them out. Only the three of us were present. We were all familiar with the work so far as it was done; for not only used Marshall to send Irving a copy of each act and scene of the scenario as he did it, but he used very often to run in and see me and consult about it. I would then tell Irving at a convenient opportunity and when next the author came I would go over with him Irving's comments and suggestions. This night we all felt to be a crucial one. The play had gone on well through its earlier parts; indeed it promised to be a very fine play. But at the point it had then reached it halted a little. The scene was in Dublin during a phase or wave of discontent even with the " patriotic " party as accepted in the play. Something was necessary to focus in the minds of certain of the characters the fact and cause of discontent and to emphasise it in a dramatic way. After supper we discussed it for a long time. All at once Irving got hold of an idea. I could see it in his face; and he could see that I saw he had something. He glanced at me in a way which I knew well to be to back him up. He deftly changed the conversation and began to speak of another matter in which Marshall was interested. I knew my cue and joined in, and so we drifted away from the play. Presently Irving asked Marshall to look at a play-bill which he had had framed and hung on the wall. It was one in which Macready was " starred " along with an elephant called " Rajah " — this used in later years to hang in Irving's dressing-room. Marshall stood up to look at it closely. Whilst he was doing so, with his back to us, Irving got half-a-dozen wine glasses by the stems in his right hand and hurled them at the door, making a terrific crash and a litter of falling glass. Frank Marshall, a man of the sunniest nature, was not built spiritually in a heroic mould. He gave a cry and whirled round, his face pale as ashes. He sank groaning into a chair speechless. When I had given him a mouthful of brandy he gasped out:

"What was it? I thought some one had thrown a bomb-shell in through the window!"

"That was exactly what I wanted you to think 1 " said Irving quietly. " That is what those in Curran's house would have felt when they recognised that the fury to which they had been listening and whose cause they could not understand was directed towards them. You are in the rare position now, my dear Marshall, of the dramatist who can write of high emotion from experience. The audience are bound to recognise the sincerity of your work. Just write your scene up to that effect. Let the audience feel even an indication of the surprise and fear that you have just felt yourself, and your play will be a success! " He said this very seriously but with a bland smile and his eyes twinkling, for through all the gravity of the issue in the shape of a good play he enjoyed the humour of the situation. Frank Marshall recovered his nerves and his buoyancy after a while, and when we broke up in the early morning he took his way home eager to get to work afresh and full of ideas.

As Irving was for the time debarred from playing the piece, when completed he let Boucicault have it to see what he could do with it. He did not, I think, improve it. Boucicault played it himself in America, but without much success.

The following list, not by any means complete, will show something of the wide range which Irving covered in his search for suitable plays. I give it because certain writers, who do not know much of the man whom they criticise so flippantly or so superciliously, have been in the habit of saying that Irving did not encourage British dramatists. To those who were on the " inside track " their utterances often meant that he did not accept, pay for, and produce their worthless plays or those of their friends, and he did not talk about his business to chance corners. Moreover, he held that it was not good for any one to produce an inferior play. The greatest of all needs of a theatre manager is a sufficiency of plays, and it is sheer ignorant folly for any one to assert that a manager does not accept good plays out of some crass obstinacy or lack of ability on his own part.

Author W. G. Wills 11

Frank Marshall Richard Voss J. J. C. Clarke 11

Fergus Hume. Penrhyn Stanlaws H. T. Johnson... Egerton Castle and Walter Pollock 0. Booth and J. Dixon J. M. Barrie. F. C. Burnand

11 • •

H. Guy Carleton. Ludwig Fulda Walter Pollock.

Play Rienzi Mephisto King Arthur Don Quixote Robert Emmett Schuldig George Washington Don Quixote The Vestal The End of the Hunting The Jester King Saviolo Jekyll and Hyde (from Stevenson) The Professor's Love Story The Isle of St. Tropez The Count The Balance of Comfort The Bloody Marriage Villon For obvious reasons I do not give what any of these authors received for play or option or advance fees; but the total was over nine thousand pounds.

Regarding one of the plays, Irving's exact reason for not playing it was that he felt it would not suit him — or rather that he would not suit it. He liked the play extremely, and when after studying the scenario very carefully he had to come to the conclusion that it was not in his own special range of work, he obtained permission from the author to submit it to two of his friends in turn, John L. Toole and John Hare. Both these players were delighted with the work, but neither had it in his vogue. Finally another actor saw his way to it, and made with it both a hit and fortune.

The play was Barrie's The Professor's Love Story; the actor who played it E. S. Willard. This is a good instance of delayed fortune. For my own part, knowing the peculiar excellences and strength of the three players who refused it, I cannot but think that they were all right. The play is an excellent one, but wants to be exactly fitted. Irving was naturally too strong for it; Toole was a low comedian, and it is not in the vein of Low Comedy; Hare's incisive finesse would have militated against that unconsciousness of effect which is the " note " of the Professor.

III

In addition to the above plays on which he adventured wholly or in part Irving made efforts regarding plays by other authors, amongst whom were Mrs. Steel, K. and Hesketh Pritchard, Marion Crawford, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Henry Arthur Jones, W. L. Courtney, Miss Mary Wilkins, Robert Barr. These included the possible dramatisation of several novels.

A. W. Pinero was always regarded by Irving as a great intellectual force, and to the last he was in hopes that some day he would have the opportunity of playing in a piece by him. He often expressed his wish to Pinero; and more than once have Pinero and I talked and corresponded on the subject. Pinero, however, would not think of giving Irving a play that would not have suited him. He had for Irving a very profound regard and a deep personal affection. They were always the best of friends and Pinero was loyalty itself. I do not think that any man understood Irving's power and the excellence of his method better than he did. I fear, however, that that very affection and regard stood in the way of a play; Pinero, I think, wanted to surpass himself on Irving's behalf.

CHAPTER LIX. MUSICIANS

Boito — Paderezvski — Henschel — Richter — Liszt — Gounod

I

MUSICIANS always took a deep interest in Irving's work both as actor and manager. They seemed to understand in a peculiarly subtle way the significance of everything he did.

II

BOITO

Boito came to the Lyceum on June 13, 1893, when we were playing Becket. I talked with him in his box and in the little drawing-room of the royal box. He afterwards came round on the stage to see Irving. He was wonderfully impressed with Becket. He said to me that Irving was " the greatest artist he had ever seen." Two nights later, 15th June, he came to supper in the Beefsteak Room. Irving had got some musicians and others to meet him. The following were of the party: A. C. Mackenzie, Villiers Stanford, Damrosch, Jules Claretie, Renaud, Brisson, Le Clerc, Alfred Gilbert, Toole, Hare, Sir Charles Euan Smith, Bancroft, Coquelin, Cadet — an extraordinary group of names in so small a gathering.

III

PADEREWSKI

Paderewski was greatly taken with Irving's playing and with the man himself. He came to supper one night in the Beefsteak Room. Irving met him several times and was an immense admirer of his work. He offered to write for Irving music for some play that he might be doing. I met him a good many times privately, and heard him play in the house of Mrs. Goetz in Hyde Park Terrace in 1891, 1892, and 1895. On one of these occasions he played Bach's Chromatic Fantasia, an Interlude of Mozart, and an Interlude and a waltz by Chopin. It was certainly a delightful occasion.

I remember one very peculiar incident in which Paderewski had a part. Whilst we were playing in New York, Hall Caine, who had been up in Canada trying to arrange the copyright trouble there, came to New York also. One Sunday in November 1895 he and I took a walk in the afternoon. Our destination took us down Fifth Avenue, which in those days was a great Sunday promenade. Hall Caine was soon recognised — he is, as some one said, " very like his portraits "; and as he has an enormous vogue in America certain of the crowd began to follow after him at a little distance. It is of the nature of a crowd to increase, if merely because it is a crowd; and in a short time I saw, when by some chance I looked back, a whole streetful of people close behind us and the crowd momentarily swelling. We increased our pace a little, wishing to get away; but the crowd kept equal pace. Between 42nd and 4oth Street we met another crowd coming up the Avenue following Paderewski who was walking with a friend. We stopped to talk, whereupon both crowds pressed in on us — it was too interesting an opportunity to be missed to see two such men, and each so remarkable in appearance, together.

It was with some difficulty, and by going into a hotel on one side and leaving it by another that we managed to escape.

It is always interesting to the public to see a grouping of popular favourites. In the course of my own experience I have met with many such instances — which is natural enough considering that I lived for more than twenty-five years amongst great artists. One such occasion I remember well: a lovely Sunday afternoon in early June 1887 when Irving had a coaching party to Oatlands Park where we dined with him. The whole road out of London was thronged with people, for the chestnuts were out in Bushey Park. On the box of the coach sat Irving and Toole and General (then Colonel) Cody " Buffalo Bill " who Coriolanus-like had that spring struck London " like a planet." The grouping took the public taste and we swept along always to an accompaniment of admiring wonder, sometimes to an accompaniment of cheers.

GEORG HENSCHEL

Georg Henschel was from the very first a great admirer of Irving away back from 1879, and so he used to come to the Lyceum and sometimes stay to supper in the Beefsteak Room, or in the room we used before it. I shall never forget one night when he sang to us. There were a very few others present, all friends and all lovers of music. Two items linger in my memory unfailingly; one a lullaby of Handel and the other the " Elders' Song " from Handel's Susannah. I had myself first heard him sing at the Handel Festival at the Crystal Palace in 1878, when I was much struck by his magnificent voice and his power of using it. We had all become great friends before he went to Boston where — I think succeeding Gerische — he took over the conductorship of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He had wished to study practically orchestral music. One forenoon — February 28, 1884 — by previous arrangement Irving and I went to the Music Hall to hear his orchestra play Schumann's Manfred. It was quite a private performance given entirely for Irving; the gentlemen of the orchestra, all fine musicians, were delighted to play for him. He was entranced with the music and the rendering of it.

When we were driving back to the Vendome Hotel in Commonwealth Avenue where we were both staying he talked all the time about the possibilities of producing Byron's play. He had had it in his mind for a long time as a work to be undertaken; indeed the ripaition which we had just heard was the outcome of his having mentioned the matter to Henschel on a previous occasion. He was nearer to making up his mind to a definite production that morning than he had ever been or ever was afterwards.

It was agreed between them that later on, if he should undertake to do Julius Casar, for which he had already arranged the book, Henschel was to compose the music for it.

V

HANS RICHTER

Hans Richter was another great admirer of Irving. He too is a great master of his own art, and has the appreciative insight that only comes with greatness. Richter was not only a musician; he had had so much experience of stage production at Bayreuth and elsewhere that if he did not originate he at least understood all about it. I remember one day, 24th October 1900, after lunch with the Miss Gaskells in Manchester, when he talked with me about the new effect for The Flying Dutchman at the Wagner Festival on the following year. This was especially regarding lighting. They had succeeded in so arranging lights that the two ships were to approach each other one in broad sunlight, the other bathed in moonlight.

With Hans Richter I had once the felicity of another such experience in its own way as Irving's comprehensive reading of Hamlet; truly another delightful experience of the survey of a great work at the hands of a master. It was when in the house of my friend E. W. Hennell, Hans Richter amongst a few friends sat down to the piano and gave us a resume of Wagner's Meistersinger, singing snatches of the songs as he went on, and now and again explaining some subtle purpose in the music that he played. It was an hour of breathless delight which no money could purchase. With my wife I attended the Wagner Cycle at Bayreuth that summer and heard the opera in all its magnificent perfection; but I never got so clear an insight to the great composer's purpose as when Richter pictured it for us.

VI

THE ABBE FRANZ LISZT

On i4th April 1886 Abbe Liszt came to the Lyceum to see Faust and to stay to supper in the Beefsteak Room. He was then the guest of Mr. Littleton, staying at his house at Sydenham. At that time musical London made such a rush for the old man that it was absolutely necessary to guard him when he came to the theatre. All the real music lovers of the younger generation wanted to see him, for they had not had opportunity before and were not likely to have it again. He was then seventy-five years of age and had practically given up playing inasmuch as he only played to please himself or his friends. That night he was accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Littleton together with the sons and daughters-in-law of the latter, and by Stavenhagen his pupil, and Madame Muncacksy. As it was necessary to keep away all who might intrude upon him — enthusiasts, interviewers, cranks, autograph-fiends, notoriety seekers who would like to be seen in his box — we arranged a sort of fortress for him.

Next to the royal box on the grand tier O.P. was another box separated only by a partition, part of which could be taken down. This box was on the outside from the Proscenium. ^^e had the door of this box screwed up so that entrance to it could only be had through the royal box. Liszt sat here with some of the others unassailable, as one of the Mr. Littletons kept the key of the other box and none could obtain entrance without permission.

There was an interesting party at supper in the Beefsteak Room, amongst them, in addition to the party at the play, the following: Ellen Terry, Professor Max-Muller, Lord and Lady Wharncliffe, Sir Alexander and Lady Mackenzie, Sir Alfred Cooper, Walter Bach and Miss Bach, Sir Morell Mackenzie, Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Littleton, Mr. and Mrs. Augustus Littleton, Mr. and Mrs. William Beatty Kingston, and the Misses Casella.

Liszt sat on the right hand of Ellen Terry who faced Irving. From where I sat at the end of the table I could not but notice the quite extraordinary resemblance in the profiles of the two men. After supper Irving went round and sat next him and the likeness became a theme of comment from all present. Irving was then forty-eight years of age; but he looked still a young man, with raven black hair and face without a line. His neck was then without a line or mark of age. Liszt, on the other hand, looked older than his age. His stooping shoulders and long white hair made him seem of patriarchal age. Nevertheless the likeness of the two men was remarkable.

Stavenhagen played, but as it was thought by all that Liszt must be too tired after a long day no opening was made for him much as all longed to hear him. The party did not break up till four o’clock in the morning. The note in my diary runs:

“Liszt fine face — leonine — several large pimples — prominent chin of old man — long white hair down on shoulders — all call him ‘ Master ‘ — must have had great strength in youth. Very sweet and simple in manner. H. I. and he very much alike — seemed:old friends as they talked animatedly though knowing but a few words of each other’s language — but using much expression and gesticulation. It was most interesting.”

The next day Irving and my wife and I, together with some others, lunched with the Baroness Burdett-Coutts in Stratton Street to meet Liszt. After lunch there was a considerable gathering of friends asked to meet him. Lady Burdett-Coutts very thoughtfully had the pianos removed from the drawing-rooms, lest their presence might seem as though he were expected to play. After a while he noticed the absence and said to his hostess:

“I see you have no pianos in these rooms! “ She answered frankly that she had had them removed so that he would not be tempted to play unless he wished to do so.

“But I would like some music! “ he said, and then went on:

“I have no doubt but there is a piano in the house, and that it could be brought here easily!”

It was not long before the servants brought into the great drawing-room a grand piano worthy of even his hands. Then Antoinette Sterling sang some ballads in her own delightful way with the contralto whose tones went straight to one’s heart.

“Now I will play! “ said Liszt. And he did!

It was magnificent and never to be forgotten.

VII GOUNOD

Gounod came, as far as I know, but once to the Lyceum. That was during the first week of the season-6th September 1882 — during the continuance of the run of Romeo and Juliet. He came round to

Irving’s dressing-room at the end of the third act and sat all the time of the wait chatting; Gounod was a man who seemed to speak fully-formed thoughts. It was not in any way that there was about his speech any appearance of formality or premeditation. He seemed to speak right out of his heart; but his habit or method was such that his words had a power of exact conveyance of the thoughts. One might have stenographed every sentence he spoke, and when reproduced it would require no alteration. Form and structure and choice of words were all complete.

After chatting a while Irving was loth to let him go. When the call boy announced the beginning of Act IV. — in which act Irving had no part — he asked Gounod to stay on with him. So also at the beginning of Act V., when he had to go on the stage for the Apothecary scene, he asked me to stay with Gounod till he came back — I had been in the dressing-room all the time. Whilst Irving was away Gounod and I chatted; several things he said have always remained with me.

He was saying something about some “ great man “ when he suddenly stopped and, after a slight pause, said:

“But after all there is no really ‘ great ‘ man! There are men through whom great things are spoken!”

I asked him what in his estimation were the best words to which he had composed music. He answered almost at once, without hesitation:

“‘ Oh that we two were maying! ‘ I can never think of those words without emotion! How can one help it? “ He spoke some of the words — the last verse of the poem from The Saint’s Tragedy:

“Oh! that we two lay sleeping In our nest in the churchyard sod, With our limbs at rest on the quiet earth’s breast, And our souls at home with God."

As he spoke, the emotion seemed to master him more and more; at the last line the tears were running down his cheeks. He spoke with an extraordinary concentration and emphasis. It was hard to believe that he was not singing, for the effect of his speaking the words of Charles Kingsley's song was the same. His speech seemed like — was music.

Later on I asked him who in his opinion was the best composer. —" Present company, of course, excepted! " I added, whereat he smiled. After a moment's thought he answered:

"Mendelssohn! Mendelssohn is the best! " Then after another but shorter pause: " But there is only one Mozart!"

CHAPTER LX. LUDWIG BARNAY

Meeting of Irving and Barnay—" Flu§ " — A dinner on the stage — A discussion on subsidy — An honour from Saxe-Meiningen — A Grand-Ducal invasion

I

WHEN in 1881 the Meiningen Company came to London to play in Drury Lane Theatre at least one German player came with them who, though for patriotic reasons he played with the Company, had not belonged to it. This was Ludwig Barnay. The engagement began with Julius Ccesar on 3oth May and at once created considerable interest. I was present at the first performance, and was much struck with the acting of Barnay as Mark Antony. By a happy chance I met him very soon after his arrival and we became friends. He was then able to speak but very little English. Like all Magyars, however, he was a good linguist, and before a fortnight was over he spoke the language so well that only an occasional word or phrase spoken to or by him brought out his ignorance.

At their first meeting Irving and he became friends; they " took " to each other in a really remarkable way. Barnay had come to see the play then running, Hamlet, and between the acts came round to Irving's dressing-room. By this time he spoke English quite well; when he lacked a word he unconsciously showed his scholarship by trying it in the Greek. Irving after a few minutes forgot that he was a foreigner and began to use words in the argot of his own calling. For instance, talking of the difficulty of getting some actors to study their parts properly, he said:

"The worst of it is they won't take the trouble even to learn their words, and when the time comes they begin to fluff." To " fluff " means in the language of the theatre to be uncertain, inexact, imperfect. This was too much for the poor foreigner, who up to then had understood everything perfectly. He raised his hands — palm outwards, the wrists first and then the fingers straightening — as he said in quite a piteous tone: “ Flof! — Fluoof — Fluff! Alas! I know him not! “ Thence on, Irving was very careful not to give trade vernacular without explaining it to him.

Ever after that evening the two men met whenever they could; in London whilst Barnay was there, or in New York or Berlin when they were there together.

II

Barnay often came to supper in the Beefsteak Room. Edwin Booth, John McCullough and Lawrence Barrett, the three leading American tragic actors, also became friends of Barnay, and there were many gatherings of a delightful kind. Chiefest amongst them was a dinner which Irving gave to some of the Meiningen Company on the , stage of the Lyceum on Sunday, 17th July 1881. There was a party of thirty, who sat at a great round table with yellow flowers. Amongst the gathering were Barnay, Cronegk — the stage manager of the Meiningers, Leopold Teller — a fine actor, George Augustus Sala, Alma - Tadema, Burdett - Coutts, Lawrence Barrett, William Terriss, Toole, F. C. Burnand. That the party was at least a pleasant one was shown by the hours it kept. We did not break up till six o’clock A.M.

III

Another delightful gathering about that time — one which became remarkable in its way — was a supper given by Toole at the Adelphi

Hotel on 1st July. Amongst the guests were Irving, Barnay, McCullough, Lawrence Barrett, Wilson Barrett, Leopold Teller. After supper some one — I think it was Irving — said something on the subject of State subsidy for theatres. It was an interesting theme to such a company, and, as the gathering was by its items really international, every one wanted to hear what every one else said. So the conversational torch went round the table — like the sun, or the wine. There were all sorts and varieties of opinion, for each said what was in his heart. When it came to Barnay's turn he electrified us all. He did not say much, but it was all to the point and spoken in a way which left no doubt as to his own sincerity. He finished up:

"Yes, these are all good — to some. The subsidy in France; the system of the Hoff and the Staadt Theatres in Germany; the help and control in Austria which brings the chosen actors into the State service. But " — and here his eyes flashed, his nostrils quivered, and his face was lit with enthusiasm—" Your English freedom is worth them all! " Then, springing to his feet, he raised his glass and cried in a voice that rang like a trumpet: " Freiheit!"

IV

Before the production of Faust in 1885 Irving took a party, including Mr. and Mrs. Comyns Carr and Ellen Terry, to Nurnberg and Rothenburg to study the ground. On the way home they went to Berlin. There Barnay gave two special performances in his own theatre, the Berliner. The bill of the play is in its way historical; the names of the honoured guests were starred. The performances were of Julius Caesar and The Merchant ofVenice.

V

The Grand Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, to whose theatre the Meiningen Company belonged, sent to Irving an Order of his own Court at the same time that he sent one to Augustus Harris, the manager of Drury Lane Theatre, where his Company had played. Later on, however, when he had seen Irving play and had met him, he said that the order sent him was not good enough for so dis- tinguished a man. He accordingly bestowed on him — with the consent and co-operation of the Grand Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh) — the Order of the Komthur Cross of the Second Class of the Ducal Saxon Ernestine House Order — a distinction, I believe, of high local order, carrying with it something in the shape of knighthood. Irving wore the Collar of the Order on the night of 25th May 1897 when the Grand Duke of Saxe-Meiningen came to supper with him in the Beefsteak Room — the only time I think when he wore the insignia of this special honour. Other guests at that supper were Colonel John Hay, the Ambassador of the United States, and his daughter Helen, whose volume of poems made such a success with the literati.

Irving’s first meeting with the Grand Duke was preceded by an odd circumstance. This was on the evening of 28th May 1885.

I was passing across the stage between the acts when I saw a stranger — a tall, distinguished-looking old gentleman. I bowed and told him that no one was allowed on the stage without special permission. He bowed in return, and said:

“I thought that permission would have been accorded to me!”

“The rule,” said I, “ is inviolable. I fear I must ask you to come with me to the auditorium. This will put us right; and then I can take any message you wish to Mr. Irving."

"May I tell you who I am? " he asked.

"I am sorry," I said, " but I fear I cannot ask you till we are outside. You see, I am the person responsible for carrying out the rules of the theatre.

And no matter who it may be I have to do the duty which I have undertaken."

"You are quite right!... I shall come with pleasure! " he said with very grave and sweet politeness. When we had passed through the iron door — which had chanced to be open, and so he had found his way in — I said as nicely as I could, for his fine manner and his diction and his willingness to obey orders, charmed me:

"I trust you will pardon me, sir, in case my request to leave the stage may have seemed too imperative or in any way wanting in courtesy. But duty is duty. Now will you kindly give me your name and I will go at once and ask Mr. Irving's permission to bring you on the stage, and to see him if you will!"

"I thank you, sir! " he said; " I am the Grand Duke of Saxe-Meiningen. I am very pleased with your courtesy and to see that you carry out orders so firmly and so urbanely. You are quite right! It is what I like to see. I wish my people would always do the same!"

CHAPTER LXI. CONSTANT COQUELIN (AIN E)

First meeting of Coquelin and Irving — Coquelin's comments — Irving's reply—" Cyrano"

IRVING and Coquelin first met on the night of April 19, 1888. The occasion was a supper given for the purpose by M. L. Mayer, the impresario of French artists in London, at his house in Berners Street. Previous to this there had been a certain amount of friction between the two men. Coquelin had written an article in Harper's Magazine for May 1887 on " Acting and Actors." In his article he made certain comments on Irving which were — using the word in its etymological meaning — not impertinent, but were most decidedly wanting in delicacy of feeling towards a fellow-artist.

Irving replied to the article in an " Actor's Note " in the Nineteenth Century for June of the same year. His article was rather a caustic one, and in it he did not spare the player turned critic of his fellow-players.

To the " not impertinent " comments on his own method he merely alluded in a phrase of deprecation of such comments being made by one player on another. But of the theory advanced by Coquelin, in which he supported the views of Diderot, he offered a direct negative, commenting himself freely on such old-fashioned heresies.

It is but right to mention that when, some two years later, Coquelin republished his article, with some changes and embellishments, in the Revue Illustree, December 1889, under the title, " L'Art du Comedien," he left out entirely the part relating to Irving.

When the two men met at Mayer's they at once became friends. The very fact of having crossed swords brought to each a measure of respect to the other. “ It is astonishing,” says Colonel Damas in The Lady of Lyons, “ how well I like a man when I have fought with him! “ At first the conversation was distinctly on the militant side, the batteries being masked. The others who were present, including Toole, Coquelin fils, and Sir Squire (then Mr.) Bancroft, had each a word to say at times. Irving, secure in his intellectual position with regard to the theory of acting, was most hearty in his manner and used his rapier with sweet dexterity. Toole, who had his own grievance: that Coquelin, an artist of first-class position, late a Societaire of the Comedie Francaise should accept fee or emolument for private performances, a thing not usual to high-grade players of the British stage — limited himself to asking Coquelin in extremely bad French if it was possible that this was true. At that time Coquelin did not speak much English, though he attained quite a proficiency in it before long.

In a very short time the supper party at Mayer’s subsided into gentle and complete harmony. The actors began to understand each other, and from that moment became friends. Coquelin gave imitations of certain French actors, amongst them Frederic Le Maitre and Mounet-Sully. The performance was a strange comment on his own theory that an actor in portraying a character must in the so doing divest himself of his own identity, and quite justified Irving’s remark in his “ note “:

“Indeed it is strange to find an actor, with an individuality so marked as that of Mr. Coquelin, taking it for granted that his identity can be entirely lost.”

To us whilst his imitations were remarkably clever, there was no possibility of forgetting for an instant that the exponent was M. Coquelin. Why should we? If an actor entirely loses his own identity the larger measure of his possible charm is gone!

I had myself first seen Coquelin in 1876 in Les Fourchambauts. My knowledge of French in those days was of a very inadequate kind — as I regret to say it still is; but I remember the extraordinary perfection of the double entente. His pronunciation of two words nearly alike in sound but quite different in idea, was of exquisite delicacy. For instance, he spoke the phrase sans doute so as to also mean sans dot. Both vowel and consonant sounds were in exact midway between the words and defendably for either meant both. I should think myself that for articulation of his own language Constant Coquelin has no peer.

I find this note in my diary regarding Coquelin on that night of Mayer's supper:

"He is a fine actor; essentially a Comedian!"

In the course of years Irving and Coquelin met often, and the oftener they met the more their friendship ripened. For a good many years Irving took quite an affectionate interest in Coquelin and his affairs; and finally, after the latter had made his enormous success in Paris with Cyrano de Bergerac and was anxious to produce it in London, Irving made arrangements for playing himself for some weeks in the suburbs so that he might give up the Lyceum to his friend.

Cyrano was produced on 4th July 1898 and had a triumphant run.

Irving had purchased the English rights of the play, intending to play Cyrano himself. But on going carefully into it he came to the conclusion that the part was one hardly suitable for him; he sold the rights to Sir Charles Wyndham. It was, I think, after their last meeting that Coquelin sent Irving his picture in character as Cyrano.

There were many gatherings in the Beefsteak Room at which

Coquelin was present. One I remember well as of special interest. Victor Maurel was there also and Campbell Clarke (afterwards Sir Campbell) the Paris correspondent of the Daily Telegraph, F. W. Hawkins, A. P. Burbank, the American actor, Major Ricarde-Seaver, and James Whitcomb Riley. The latter at Irving's request recited a few of his inimitable character sketches. Coquelin and the other actors were loud and eloquent in his praise.

CHAPTER LXII. SARAH BERNHARDT

Irving sees Sarah Bernhardt — First meeting — Supper in Beefsteak Room — Bastien Lepage — Tradition — Painting a serpent — Sarah's appreciation of Irving and Ellen Terry

WHEN Irving and Sarah Bernhardt met there was already that predisposition towards friendship which true artists must feel towards those who work greatly in their own craft. When the Comedie Francaise came to London in 1879 and played at the Gaiety Theatre, Irving went to one of the matinees and was immensely struck by Sarah Bernhardt's genius. He was taken round on the stage and introduced to the various members of the Company; but he did not have in that short season any opportunities of furthering friendships. That was a busy season for every one, both the London players and the foreigners. We were playing repertoire and changing the bill every few nights; the rehearsals were endless. So too with the strangers; they had a great list of plays to get through, and they also were rehearsing all day. When they could the various members of the French Company came to the Lyceum, where they were always made welcome. Indeed, all through his management Irving made it an imperative rule that his fellow-artists should when possible be made welcome at his theatre. Little people as well as great people, all were welcome. In those early days the same rule of hospitality did not hold with the Comedie Francaise; actors had to go in like any one else — on a " specie basis." Even Irving who had thrown his own theatre open to his French fellow-artists had to pay for his own box at the Gaiety. When, however, Jules Claretie became Director of the Theatre Francais he changed all that, absolutely.

The next year, 188o, Sarah Bernhardt was playing for a short time in London — this time her own venture — again at the Gaiety. Irving took a box for her benefit, a matinee on 16th June. Loveday and I went with him. The bill was Jean Marie, the fourth act of La Rome vaincue, and the fifth act of Hernani. Irving was charmed with her playing in Jean Marie, which is a one-act piece with the same note of sentiment in it as that of the song " Auld Robin Gray." He was also struck with her extraordinary tragic force in La Rome vaincue. I had myself seen that play at the Theatre Francais four years before, gth November 1876. When in Paris I had been told that I should not miss seeing a play running at the Francais in which a very young woman named Sarah Bernhardt was with extraordinary power playing a blind woman of eighty. There was such a rush to see the piece that it was being played four times a week — a rare thing at the Francais in those days. Of course I went — I remember I had to buy my way into the parterre and then step by step down to one of the near rows from the individuals who then used to make their living by standing in line so as to get in early and then selling their places to those farther back. I was greatly struck with her acting and also, though in a lesser degree, with that of Mounet-Sully, then young on the stage. He was crude in his artistic method and somewhat rugged, but full of force and power. When I saw Sarah Bernhardt play the act of the play in London I thought that though she had gained in power and finish she had lost something of spontaneity. On that occasion the house was a poor one, but those who were there were delighted — and showed it.

On Saturday night, 3rd July of that year, 188o, Sarah Bernhardt came to supper in the Beefsteak Room. The two other guests were both friends of hers, Bastien Lepage the painter, and Libotton the violoncellist. That was a night of extraordinary interest. Irving and Sarah Bernhardt were both at their best and spoke quite freely on all subjects concerning their art which came on the tapis. Irving was eager to know the opinion of one so familiar with the working of the French stage and yet so daring and original in her own life and artistic method. When they touched on the subject of the value of subsidy she grew excited and spoke of the value of freedom and independence:

“What use,” she said, “ subsidy when a French actress cannot live on the salary, at even the Comedie Francaise!”

On the subject of tradition in art her manner was more pronounced. She railed against tradition on the stage — as distinguished from the guiding memory and record of great effective work. Her face lit up and her eyes blazed; she smote her clenched hand heavily on the table, as, after a fierce diatribe against the cramping tendency of an artificial method relentlessly enforced, she hurled out:

“A bas! la tradition!”

Then the change to her softer moods was remarkable. She was a being of incarnate grace, with a soft undertone of voice as wooing as the cooing of pigeons. As I looked at her — this was my first opportunity of seeing her close at hand — all the wondrous charm which Bastien Lepage had embodied in his picture of her seemed at full tide. This picture of Bastien Lepage, that wherein she is seated holding a distaff, was exhibited in a silver frame at the first exhibition of the Grosvenor Gallery and met with universal admiration. With the original before one and the memory of her wonderful playing ever fresh in one’s mind it was not possible not to be struck with her serpentine grace. I said to Bastien Lepage in such French as I could manage:

“In that great picture you seemed to get the true Sarah. You have painted her as a serpent with all a serpent’s grace! “ He seemed much interested and asked me how I made that out. Again as well as I could I explained that all the lines of the picture were curved — there was not a single straight line in the drawing or shading. He seemed more than pleased and asked me to go on. I said that it had seemed to me that he had painted all the shadows in a scheme of yellow, shading them to represent in a subtle way the scales of the serpent skin.

He suddenly took me by both hands and shook them hard — I thought for a moment that he was going to kiss me. Then he patted me on the shoulder, and suddenly shot out the big wide white cuff then in vogue in Parisian dress, and taking a pencil from his pocket drew the picture in little, showing every line as serpentine, and suggesting the shadows with little curved and shaded lines. Then he shook hands again.

I have regretted ever since that I did not ask him to cut off that cuff and give it to me! It was an artistic treasure!

In some of the discussions on art that evening he too got excited. I remember once the violent way in which he spoke of his own dominant note:

“Je suis un re-a-liste! “ As he spoke his voice rose and quivered with that “ brool “ that marks strong emotion. The short hair of his bullet head actually seemed to bristle like the hair of an excited cat. He rose and brought down his raised clenched fist on the table with a mighty thump. One could realise him at that moment as a possible leader of an emeute. One seemed to see him amid a whirl of drifting powder smoke waving a red flag over the top of a barricade.

Another thing which Bastien Lepage said that night has always remained in my memory. It is so comprehensive that its meaning may be widely applied:

“In an original artist the faults are brothers to the qualities!”

We sat late that night. It was five o’clock when we broke up, and the high sun was streaming into our eyes as we left the building. Many a night after that, Sarah Bernhardt spent pleasant hours at the Lyceum — pleasant to all concerned. She grew to love the acting of Irving and of Ellen Terry, and whenever she had an opportunity she would hurry in by the stage door and take a seat in the wings. Several times when she arrived in London from Paris she would hurry straight from the station to the theatre and see all that was possible of the play. It was a delight and a pride to both Irving and Miss Terry when she came; and whenever she could do so she would stop to supper. The Beefsteak Room was always ready, and a telephone message to Gunter’s would insure the provision of supper. Those nights were delightful. Sometimes some of her comrades would come with her. Marius, Gamier, Darmont or Damala. The last time the latter — to whom she was then married — came he looked like a dead man. I sat next him at supper, and the idea that he was dead was strong on me. I think he had taken some mighty dose of opium, for he moved and spoke like a man in a dream. His eyes, staring out of his white waxen face, seemed hardly the eyes of the living.

One night in 1899, whilst she was playing Hamlet at the Adelphi, she came to supper when there were some characteristic Americans, Mark Twain, Nat Goodwin, T. I. Keenan of Pittsburg, then President of the American Press Union, Colonel Tom Ochiltree — who had a peculiar soubriquet, F. P. Dunne, I. N. Ford of the New York Tribune.

She was always charming and fresh and natural. Every good and fine instinct of her nature seemed to be at the full when she was amongst artistic comrades whom she liked and admired. She inspired every one else and seemed to shed a sort of intellectual sunshine around her.

CHAPTER LXIII. GENEVIEVE WARD

When and how I first saw her — Her romantic marriage — Plays Zillah at Lyceum—" Forget me not" — Plays with Irving: " Becket"; " King Arthur"; " Cymbeline"; " Richard III." — Argument on a " reading" — Eyes that blazed — A lesson from Regnier

I

ON the evening of Thursday, loth November 1873, I strolled into the Theatre Royal, Dublin, to see what was on. I had been then for two years a dramatic critic, and was fairly well used to the routine of things. There was a very poor house indeed; in that huge theatre the few hundreds scattered about were like the plums in a foc'sle duff. I sat down in my usual seat, which the attendants, knowing my choice, always kept for me if possible: the end seat ' O.P. or left-hand side looking towards the stage. The play was Legouve's Adrienne Lecouvreur, a somewhat machine-made play of the old school. The lady who played Adrienne interested me at once; she was like a triton amongst minnows. She was very handsome; of a rich dark beauty, with clear cut classical features, black hair, and great eyes that now and again flashed fire. I sat in growing admiration of her powers. Though there was a trace here and there of something which I thought amateurish she was so masterful, so dominating in other ways that I could not understand it. At the end of the second act I went into the lobby to ask the attendants if they could tell me anything about her as the name on the bill was entirely new to me. None of them, however, could enlighten me on any point except that she had appeared on Monday in Lucrezia Borgia; and the business was very bad.

When the grand scene of the play came — that between the actress and her rival, the Princess de Bouillon — the audience was all afire. Their enthusiasm and the sound of it recalled the description of

Edmund Kean’s appearance at Drury Lane. I went round on the stage and saw John Harris the manager. I asked him who was the woman who was playing and where did she come from.

“She has no right to be playing to an audience like that! “ I said pointing at the curtain which lay between us and the auditorium.

“I quite agree with you! “ he answered. “ She is fine; isn’t she? I saw her play in Manchester and at once offered her the date here which was vacant.” Just then she came upon the stage and he introduced me to her. When the play was over I went home and wrote my criticism, which duly appeared in the Irish Echo next evening.

That engagement of nine days was a series of debuts. In addition to Adrienne Lecouvreur she appeared in Medea, Lucrezia Borgia, The Actress of Padua, the “ sleep-walking “ scene of Macbeth, The Honeymoon. In one and all she showed great power and greater promise. It is a satisfactory memory to me to find after her career has been made and her retirement — all too soon — effected after more than thirty years of stage success when I find this mem. in my diary of 29th November 1873 — the last night of her engagement” (Mem. will be a great actress).”

During the engagement, Monday, 24th November, one night behind the scenes I met a great friend of mine, the American Consul, Wilson King of Pittsburg, who was paying a visit to the actress, whom he had known since childhood, his family and hers having all been old friends. He introduced me to his countrywoman, not formally this time but as a friend. And there and then began a close friendship which has never faltered, which has been one of the delights of my life and which will I trust remain as warm as it is now till the death of either of us shall cut it short.

II

Genevieve Ward both in the choice of her plays and in her manner of playing followed at that time the “ old “ school. I had a good opportunity of judging the excellence of her method, for that very year 1873, after an absence of fifteen years, Madame Ristori had visited Dublin. She was then in her very prime; an actress of amazing power and finish. She had played Medea, Mary Stuart, Queen Elizabeth and Marie Antoinette. Her method was of course the “ Italian “ of which she was the finest living exponent — probably the finest that ever had been. Her speech was a series of cadences; the voice rose and fell in waves — sometimes ripples sometimes billows — but always modified with such exquisite precision as not to attract special attention to the rhythmic quality. Its effect was entirely unconscious. Indeed it was a method which in time could, and did, become of itself mechanical — like breathing — so that it did not in the least degree interfere even with the volcanic expression of passion. The study was of youth and at the beginning of art; but when the method was once formed nature could express herself in it as unfettered as in any other medium. Years afterwards Miss Ward showed me one of Ristori’s prompt books; and I could not but be struck with the accentuation. Indeed the marking above the syllables ran in such unbroken line as to look like musical scoring.

Miss Ward was a friend of the great Italian and had learned most of her art from her. She was a fine linguist, speaking French, Italian, and Spanish as easily as her own tongue. At that time Ristori, who was in private life La Comtessa Campramican del Grillo, lived in her husband’s ancestral home in Rome, and Miss Ward often stayed with her. Miss Ward in her private life was also a Countess, having whilst a very young girl married a Russian, Count de Gerbel of Nicolaeiff. The marriage was a romance as marked as anything that could appear upon the stage. In 1855 at Nice Count de Gerbel had met and fallen in love with her and proposed marriage. She was willing and they were duly married at the Consulate at Nice, the marriage in the Russian church was to follow in Paris. But the Count was not of chivalrous nature. In time his fancy veered round to some other quarter, and he declared that by a trick of Russian law which does not acknowledge the marriage of a Russian until the ceremony in the Russian church has been performed, the marriage which had taken place was not legal. His wife and her father and mother, however, were not those to pass such a despicable act. With her mother she appealed to the Czar, who having heard the story was furiously indignant. Being an autocrat, he took his own course. He summoned his vassal Count de Gerbel to go to Warsaw, where he was to carry out the orders which would be declared to him. There in due time he appeared. The altar was set for marriage and before it stood the injured lady, her father, Colonel Ward, and her mother. Her father was armed, for the occasion was to them one of grim import. De Gerbel yielded to the mandate of his Czar, and the marriage — with all needful safeguards this time — was duly effected. Then the injured Countess bowed to him and moved away with her own kin. At the church door husband and wife parted, never to meet again.

III

In her first youth Miss Ward was a singer and had great success in Grand Opera. But overwork in Cuba strained her voice. It was thought that this might militate against great and final success; so, bowing to the inevitable, she with her usual courage forsook the lyric for the dramatic stage. It was when she had prepared herself for the latter and was ready to make her new venture that I first saw her.

IV

During the holiday season of 1879, whilst Irving was yachting in the Mediterranean, Miss Ward rented the Lyceum for a short season commencing 2nd August. By the contract Irving had agreed to find, in addition to the theatre, the heads of departments, box-office and the usual working staff at an inclusive rent, as he wished to keep all his people together. So I had to remain in London to look after these matters. Miss Ward asked me to be manager for her also; but I said I could not do so as a matter of business as it might be possible that her interests and Irving's might clash; but that I would do all I could.

She opened in a play called Zillah written by her old friend Palgrave Simpson and another. It was put in preparation some time before and was carefully rehearsed. My own work kept me so busy that I did not have any time to see rehearsals till the night before the performance when the dress rehearsal was held. That rehearsal was one which I shall never forget. It was too late to say anything — there was no time then to make any radical change; and so I held my peace.

The play was of the oldest-fashioned and worst type of " Adelphi " drama! It was machine-made and heartless and tiresome to the last degree, and in addition the language was turgid beyond belief. It was an absolute failure, and was taken off after a few nights. Lucrezia Borgia was put up whilst a new play should be got ready. She had not made arrangements for a second new play, so we all undertook to do what we could to find a suitable play, a new one. Miss Ward gave me a great parcel of plays sent to her at various times — some two feet high of them; with a heavy heart I began to wade through them. Some five or six down the line I came on one play which at once arrested my attention. As I shortly afterwards learned it was one which had been hawked about unsuccessfully. So soon as I had read it I sent it up to Miss Ward's home by a messenger, together with a note to the effect that I thought the enclosed, with a little alteration in the first act, would make a great success. Miss Ward's judgment agreed with my own. She knew the author and wrote to him to see her. He came to the Lyceum that night. She had asked me what price she should pay, say for five years with right of renewal. I told her the price then usual for plays, so much per act, and we agreed that she should offer that price for the term of lease, to be duplicated if the option of renewal were acted on. The author came in a hurry, passing through London. Miss Ward was dressing and sent for me and asked me through her door if I could open negotiations for her and she would see the author when she was dressed. I saw him and asked the price he expected. He named that which she had decided upon, so I told him that Miss Ward would take the play; she saw him a few minutes after and the agreement was verbally made.

The play was produced on August 2I — within a fortnight of the time of its discovery. It was an enormous success, and ran the whole time of her tenancy — indeed a week longer than had been decided on as Irving was loth to disturb the successful run.

The play was Forget me not, by Hermann Merivale and F. C. Grove. Miss Ward played it continuously for ten years and made a fortune with it.

V

Miss Genevi6ve Ward played in four of Irving’s great productions, of course always as a special engagement. The first was Becket, in which she “ created “ the part of Queen Eleanor — by old custom, to “ create “ a stage part is to play it first in London; the second was Morgan Le Fay in King Arthur; the third the Queen in Cymbeline; and the fourth Queen Margaret in Richard III. In all these parts she was exceedingly good.

With regard to the last-named play, there was one of the few instances in which Irving was open to correction with regard to emphasis of a word. In Act IV. scene 3, of his acting version — Act IV. scene 4, of the original play — the last two lines of Queen Margaret’s speech to Queen Elizabeth before her exit:

“Bettering thy loss makes the bad-causer worse Revolving this will teach thee how to curse!

When Miss Ward spoke the last line she emphasised the word this —” Revolving this will teach thee how to curse! “ Irving said the emphasised word should be teach—” Revolving this will teach thee how to curse!”

They each stuck to their own opinion; but at the last rehearsal he came to her and said:

“You are quite right, Miss Ward, your reading is correct.” I daresay he had not considered the reading when arranging the play. As a matter of fact in his original arrangement of the play, at his first production of it under Mrs. Bateman in 1877, Queen Margaret was not in the scene at all. In the new version he had restored her to the scene as he wished to “ fatten “ Miss Ward’s part and so add to the strength of the play. Miss Ward was always a particularly strong actress, good at invective, and as the play had no part for Ellen Terry he wished to give it all the other help he could.

VI

Miss Ward has one great stage gift which is not given to many: her eyes can blaze. I can only recall two other actresses who had the same quality in good degree: Mdlle. Schneider who forty years ago played the Grand Duchess of Gerolstein in Offenbach's Opera; and Christine Nilsson. The latter I saw in London in 1867, and from where I sat — high up in the seat just in front of the gallery — I could note the starry splendour of her blue eyes. Ten years later, in Lohengrin at Her Majesty's Opera House, I noticed the same — this time from the stalls. And yet once again when I sat opposite her at supper on the night of her retirement, June 20, 1888. The supper party was a small one, given by Mr. and Mrs.

Brydges-Willyams at 19 Upper Brook Street. Irving was there and Ellen Terry, Lord Burnham and Miss Matilda Levy — brother and sister of our hostess, Count Miranda to whom Nilsson was afterwards married and his daughter, my wife and myself.

Nilsson came in from her triumph at the Albert Hall, blazing with jewels. She wore that night only those that had been given to her by Kings and Queens — and other varieties of monarchs.

CHAPTER LXIV. JOHN LAWRENCE TOOLE

Took and Irving — A life-long friendship — Their jokes — A seeming robbery — An odd Christmas present — Toole and a sentry — A hornpipe in a landau — Moving Canterbury Cathedral — Took and the verger — A joke to the King — Other jokes — His grief at Irving's death — Our last par-ting

THE friendship between Henry Irving and John Lawrence Toole began in Edinburgh just fifty years ago. Toole was the elder and had already won for himself the position of a local semi-star. The chances of distinction come to the " Low " comedian quicker than to the exponent of Tragedy or " High " Comedy, and Toole had commenced his stage experience at almost as early an age as Irving — eighteen. On loth June 1894, during a Benefit at the Lyceum for the Southwark Eye Hospital, at which he did the wonderfully droll character sketch, " Trying a Magistrate," he told me that forty-five years before, Charles Dickens had heard him do the sketch and advised him to go on the stage. Wisely he had taken the advice; from the very start he had an exceptionally prosperous career.

He, the kindliest and most genial soul on earth, became a fast friend with the proud, shy, ambitious young beginner, eight years his junior. From the first he seemed to believe in Irving and predicted for him a great career. To this end he contributed all through his life. When he toured on his own account he took Irving with him, giving him a star place in his bill, and an opportunity of exhibiting his own special tragic power in a recital of The Dream of Eugene Aram. I give as an illustration a bill of such a tour in 1869 which is illustrative of the method of the time.

To the last day of Irving's life the friendship of the two men each for the other never flagged or faltered. Such a thing as jealousy of the other never entered into the heart of either. Toole simply venerated his friend and enjoyed his triumph more than he did his own. He would not hear without protest any one speak of Irving except in a becoming way; and there was nothing which Toole possessed which he would not have shared with Irving. When one entertained, there was always a place for the other; whoever had the good fortune to become a friend of either found his friendship doubled at once. The two men seemed to supplement each other's natures. Each had, in his own way and of its own kind, a great sense of humour. Toole's genial, ebullient, pronounced; Irving's saturnine, keen, and suggestive. Both had — each again in his own way — a very remarkable seriousness. Those who only saw Toole in his inimitable pranks knew little how keenly the man felt emotion; how unwavering he was in his sense of duty; how earnest in his work. With Irving the humour was a fixed quantity, which all through his life kept its relative proportion to his seriousness; but Toole, being a low-comedian, and perhaps because of it, seemed at times vastly different in his hours of work and relaxation. For it is a strange thing that the conditions of emotion are such that what is work in one case is rest in another, and vice versd; the serious man finds ease in relaxation, the humorous man seeks in quietude his rest from the stress of laughter. In their younger days and up to middle life the two men had indulged in harmless pranks. They both loved a joke and would take any pains to compass it. The tricks they played together would fill a volume. Of course from their protean powers of expressing themselves and in merging their identities actors have rare opportunities of consummating jokes. Moreover they are in the habit of working together, and two or -three men who understand each other's methods can go far to sway the unwary how they will.

One of the practical jokes of Toole and Irving is almost classical:

One Sunday when they both happened to be playing at Liverpool at the same time they went to dine at an old inn at Wavertree celebrated for the excellence of its hospitality. They had a good dinner and a good bottle of port and sat late. When most of the guests in the hotel had gone to bed and when the time necessary for their own departure was drawing nigh, they rang and told the waiter to get the bill. When he had gone for it they took all the silver off the table — they had fine old silver in the inn — and placed it in the garden on which the room opened. Then they turned out the gas and got under the table. Hearing no answer to his repeated knocking the waiter opened the door. When he saw the lights out, the window opened, and the guests gone he cried out:

"Done! They have bolted with the silver." Then he ran down the passage crying out: " Thieves, thieves!"

The instant he was gone the two men came from under the table, closed the door, lit the gas, and took in the silver which they replaced on the table. Presently a wild rush of persons came down the passage and burst into the room; the landlord and his family, servants of the house, guests en deshabille — most of them carrying pokers and other impromptu weapons. They found the two gentlemen sitting quietly smoking their cigars. As they stood amazed Irving said in his quiet, well-bred voice:

"Do you always come in like this when gentlemen are having their dinner here?"

Toole would even play pranks on Irving, these generally taking the form of some sort of gift. For instance, he once sent Irving on his birthday what he called in his letter " a miniature which he had picked up! " It came in a furniture van, an enormous portrait of Conway the actor, painted about a hundred years ago; it was so large that it would not fit in any room of the theatre and had to be put in a high passage. Again, when he was in Australia he sent to Irving, timed so that it would arrive at Christmas, a present of two frozen sheep and a live kangaroo. These arrived at Irving's rooms in Grafton Street. He had them housed at the Lyceum for the night, and next day sent the sheep to gladden the hearts — and anatomies — of the Costermongers' Club at Chicksand Street, Mile End, New Town. The kangaroo was sent with a donation to the Zoological Society as a contribution from " J. L. Toole and Henry Irving." A brass plate was fixed over the cage by the Society.

Toole loved to make beautiful presents to Irving. Amongst them was a splendid gilt silver claret jug; several silver cups and bowls; the trophy designed by Flaxman which was presented to Macready in 1818 — a magnificent piece of jeweller's work; a " grangerised " edition of Forster's Life of Charles Dickens — unique in its richness of material and its fine workmanship — which he had bought in Paris for £500.

When Toole and Irving were separated they were in constant communication by letter, telegram or cable. No birthday of the other passed without a visit if near enough, or a letter or telegram if apart, and there was always a basket of flowers each to each. For a dozen years before Irving's death Toole had been in bad health, growing worse and worse as the years went on. He grew very feeble and very, very sad. But without fail Irving used to go to see him whenever he had an opportunity. At his house in Maida Vale, at Margate, or at Brighton, in which latter place he mainly lived for years past, Irving would go to him and spend all the hours he could command. Even though the width of the world separated them, the two men seemed to have, day by day, exact cognisance of the whereabouts and doings of the other, and not a week but the cables were flashing between them.

Poor Toole had one by one lost all his immediate family — son, wife, daughter; and his tie to life was in great part the love to and from his friend. He used to think of him unceasingly. Wherever he was, Toole's wire would come unfailingly making for good luck and remembrance. He would keep the flowers that Irving sent to him till they faded and dropped away; even then the baskets and bare stalks were kept in his room.

No one appreciated more than Toole the finest of Irving's work. For instance, when he saw him play King Lear he was touched to his heart's core, and his artistic admiration was boundless. I supped with him that night after the play, and he said to me:

"King Lear is the finest thing of Irving's life — or of any one else's!"

When Toole was going to Australia there were many farewell gatherings to wish him God-speed. Some of them were great and elaborate affairs, but the last of all was reserved for Irving, when Toole, with some old friends, supped in the Beefsteak Room. When Irving proposed his old friend's health — a rare function indeed in that room — he never spoke more beautifully in his life. His little speech was packed with pathos, and so great was his own emotion that at moments he was obliged to pause to pull himself together.

Toole and I were very close friends ever since I knew him first in the early seventies. I shared with him many delightful hours. And when sorrow came to him I was able to give him sympathy and such comfort as could be from my presence. I was with him at the funeral of his son and then of his wife. When his daughter died in Edinburgh, where he was then playing, I went up to him and stayed with him. We brought her body back to London and I went with him to her grave. With me he was always affectionate, always sympathetic, always merry when there was no cause for gloom, always grave and earnest when such were becoming. I have been with him on endless occasions when his merriment and geniality simply bubbled over. Unless some sorrow sat heavily on him he was always full of merriment which evidenced itself in the quaintest and most unexpected ways.

One evening, for instance, we were walking together along the western end of Pall Mall. When we came near Marlborough House, where on either side of the gateway stood a guardsman on sentry, he winked at me and took from his pocket a letter which he had ready for post. Then when we came up close to the nearest soldier he moved cautiously in a semi-blind manner and peering out tried to put the letter in the breast of the scarlet tunic as though mistaking the soldier for a postal pillar box. The soldier remained upright and stolid, and did not move a muscle. Toole was equally surprised and pleased when from the guardsman's moveless lips came the words:

"It's all right, Mr. Toole! I hope you're well, sir?"

Another time I was staying with him at the Granville at Ramsgate, and on the Sunday afternoon we drove out to Kingsgate. Lionel Brough was another of the party. As we passed a coastguard station we stopped opposite a very handsome, spruce, dandified coastguard. The two men greeted him, but his manner was somewhat haughty.

Whereupon the two actors without leaving their seats proceeded to dance a hornpipe. That is they seemed, from the waist up, to be dancing that lively measure. Their arms and hands took motion as though in a real dance and their bodies swayed with appropriate movement. The little holiday crowd looked on delighted, and even the haughty sailor found it too much. He unbent and, smiling, danced also in very graceful fashion.

Again at another time we found ourselves in Canterbury, where Toole amused himself for a whole afternoon by spreading a report that the Government were going to move the Cathedral from Canterbury to Margate, giving as a reason that the latter place was so much larger. Strange to say that there were some who believed it. Toole worked systematically. He went into barbers' shops — three of them in turn, and in each got shaved. As I wore a beard I had to be content with having my hair cut; it came out pretty short in the end. As he underwent the shaving operation he brought conversation round to the subject of the moving of the Cathedral. Then we went into shops without end where he bought all sorts of things — collars, braces, socks, caps, fruits and spice for making puddings, children's toys, arrowroot, ginger wine, little shawls, sewing cotton, emery paper, hair oil, goloshes, corn plasters — there was no end to the variety of his purchases, each of which was an opening for some fresh variant of the coming change.

At one other visit to Canterbury we came across in the ancient Cathedral an insolent verger. Toole, who was, for all his fun, a man of reverent nature, was as usual with him grave and composed in the church. The verger, taking him for some stranger of the bourgeois class, thought him a fit subject to impress. When Toole spoke of the new Dean who had been lately appointed the man said in a flippant way:

"We don't care much for him. We don't think we'll keep him! " This was enough for Toole. He looked over at me in a way I understood and forthwith began to ask questions:

"Did you, may I ask, sir, preach this morning? " " No. Not this morning. I don’t preach this week.” We knew then that that verger was to be “ had on toast.” Toole went on:

“Do you preach on next Sunday, sir? I should like to hear you.”

“Well, no! I don’t think I’ll preach on Sunday.” “ Will you preach the Sunday after? “ “ Perhaps.”

“May I ask, sir, are you the Dean yourself? “ “ No. I am not the Dean! “ His manner implied that he was something more. “ Are you the Sub-Dean?”

“Not the Sub-Dean.” His answers were getting short.

“Are you what they call a Canon? “ “ No, I should not exactly call myself a Canon.” “ Are you a minor Canon? “ “ No!”

“Are you a precentor? “ “ Not exactly that.” “ Are you in the choir? “ No.”

“May I ask you what you are then, sir? “ — this was said with great deference. The man, cornered at last, thought it best to speak the truth, so he answered:

“I am what they call a ‘ verger! ‘ “ “ Quite so! “ said Toole gravely; “ I thought you were only a servant by the insolent way you spoke of your superiors!”

The remainder of that personal conduction was made in silence.

On one occasion when Toole was taking the waters at Homburg, King Edward VII., then Prince of Wales, was there. He had a breakfast party to which he had asked Toole and also Sir George Lewis and Sir Squire Bancroft. In the course of conversation his Royal Highness asked Bancroft where he was going after Homburg. The answer was that he was going to Maloya in Switzerland. Then turning to Toole he asked him:

“Are you going to Maloya also, Mr. Toole? “ In reply Toole said, as he bowed and pointed to the great solicitor:

“No, sir, Ma-loya (my lawyer) is here! “ I remember one Derby day, 1893, when we were both in the party to which Mr. Knox Darcy extended the hospitality of his own stand next to that of the Jockey Club — a hospitality which I may say was boundless and complete. When I arrived the racing was just beginning, and the course was crowded by the moving mass seeking outlets before the cordon of police with their rope. As I got close to the stand I heard a voice that I knew coming from the wicket-gate, which was surrounded with a seething mass of humanity of all kinds pushing and struggling to get close, “Walk this way, ladies and gentlemen! Walk this way! get tickets here. Only one shilling, including lunch. Walk this way!”

A somewhat similar joke on his part was on board a steamer on Lake Lucerne, when he was there with Irving. He went quietly to one end of the steamer and cried out in a loud voice: “ Cook’s tourists, this way. Sandwich and glass of sherry provided free! “ Then, slipping over to the other end of the boat as the crowd began to rush for the free lunch, he again made proclamation: “ Gaze’s party, this way. Brandy and soda, hard-boiled eggs, and butterscotch provided free! “ Again he disappeared before the crowd could assemble.

A favourite joke of his when playing Paul Pry was to find out what friends of his were in the house and then to have their names put upon the blackboard at the inn with scores against them of gigantic amount. This was a never-stale source of surprise and delight to the children of his friends. He loved all children, and next to his own, the children of his friends. For each of such there was always a box of chocolates. He kept a supply in his dressing-room, and I never knew the child of a friend to go away empty-handed. With such a love in his heart was it strange that in his own bad time, when his sadness was just beginning to take hold on his very heart’s core, he loved to think much of those old friends who had loved his own children who had gone?

Somehow his mirth never lessened his pathos. His acting — his whole life — has been a sort of proof that the two can co-exist. His Caleb Plummer was never a whit less moving because his audience laughed through their tears. It may be his art became typified in his life.

When Irving died I telegraphed the same night to Frank Arlton, Toole's nephew, who during all his long illness had given him the most tender care. I feared that if I did not send such warning some well-intentioned blunderer might give him a terrible shock. Arlton acted most prudently, and broke the sad news himself at a favourable opportunity the next day. When poor Toole heard it his remark was one of infinite pathos:

"Then let me die too!"

Such a wish is in itself an epitaph of lasting honour.

Toole's belief and sympathy and help was of infinite service to the friend whom he loved. It was comfort and confidence and assistance all in one. And it is hardly too much to say that Irving could never have done what he did, and in the way he did it, without the countenance and help of his old friend. Irving always, ever since I knew him, liked to associate Toole with himself in everything, and to me who know all that was between them it is but just — as well as the carrying out of my dear friend's wishes that in this book their names shall be associated as closely as I can achieve by the Dedication. Shortly before his last illness I went down to Brighton to see him and to ask formally his permission to this end. He seemed greatly moved by it. Later on I sent the proof of the page containing it, asking Arlton to show it to him if he thought it advisable. Toole had then partially recovered from the attack and occasionally saw friends and was interested in what went on. Arlton's letter to me described the effect:

"I gave him your message last night, and I fear I did unwisely, as nurse says he has been talking all night about Sir Henry and books."

That visit to Brighton was the last time I saw Toole. He was then very low in health and spirits. He could hardly move or see; his voice was very feeble and one had to speak close and clearly that he might hear well. But his intellect was as clear as ever, and he spoke of many old friends. I spent the day with him; after lunch I walked by his bath chair to the end of the Madeira Walk. There we stayed a while, and when my time for leaving came, I told him — but not before. In his late years Toole could not bear the idea of any one whom he loved leaving him, even for a time. We used therefore to say no word of parting till the moment came. When he held out his poor, thin, trembling hand to me he said with an infinite pathos whose memory moves me still:

"Bram, we have often parted — but this time is the last. I shall never see you again! Won't you let me kiss you, dear!"

Toole died on the night of 30th July of this year and was buried in his family tomb in Kensal Green. Around his grave was a great crowd of loving and sorrowing friends.

CHAPTER LXV. ELLEN TERRY

First meet her — Irving's early playing with her — His criticism — How she knighted an Attorney-General — A generous player — Real flowers — Her art — Discussion on a " gag" — The New School — Last performance with Irving — The cause of separation — Their comradeship — A pet name

I

THE first time I saw Ellen Terry was on the forenoon of Monday, December 23, 1878. The place was the passage-way which led from the stage of the Lyceum to the office, a somewhat dark passage under the staircase leading to the two " star " dressing-rooms up the stage on the O.P. side. But not even the darkness of that December day could shut out the radiant beauty of the woman to whom Irving, who was walking with her, introduced me. Her face was full of colour and animation, either of which would have made her beautiful. In addition was the fine form, the easy rhythmic swing, the large, graceful, goddess-like way in which she moved. I knew of her of course — all the world did then though not so well as afterwards; and she knew of me already, so that we met as friends. I had for some years known Charles Wardell, the actor playing under the name of Charles Kelly, to whom she had not long before been married. Kelly had in his professional visits to Dublin been several times in my lodgings, and as I had reason to believe that he had a high opinion of me I felt from Ellen Terry's gracious and warm manner of recognition that she accepted me as a friend. That belief has been fully justified by a close friendship, unshaken to the extent of a hair's-breadth through all the work and worry — the triumphs and gloom — the sunshine and showers — storm and trial and stress of twenty-seven years of the comradeship of work together.

Irving had engaged her entirely on the strength of the reputation which she had already made in Olivia and the other plays which had gone before it. He had not seen her play since the days of the Queen's Theatre, Long Acre, 1867-8, when they had played together in The Taming of the Shrew, she being the Katherine to his Petruchio. He had not thought very much of her playing in those days. Long after she had made many great successes at the Lyceum, in speaking of the early days he said tome:

"She was always bright and lively, and full of fun. She had a distinct charm; but as an artist was rather on the hoydenish side!"

From the moment, however, that she began to rehearse at the Lyceum his admiration for her became unbounded. Many and many a time have I heard him descant on her power. It was a favourite theme of his. He said that her pathos was " nature helped by genius," and that she had a " gift of pathos." He knew well the value of her playing both to himself and the public, and for the early years of his management plays were put on in which she would have suitable parts. Iolanthe was put on for her, likewise The Cup, The Belle's Stratagem, Romeo and Juliet, Much Ado about Nothing, Twelfth Night and Olivia. Synorix was not a part for the sake of which Irving would have produced The Cup; neither Romeo nor Benedick is a part such as he would have chosen for himself. Neither Malvolio nor Dr. Primrose was seemingly a great rule for a man who had been accustomed for years to " carry the play on his back."

II

I think that Ellen Terry fascinated every one who ever met her men, women and children, it was all the same. I have heard the evidences of this fascination in many ways from all sorts of persons in all sorts of places. One of them in especial lingers in my mind: perhaps this is because I belong to a nationality to whose children “ blarney “ is supposed to be a heritage.

On the afternoon of Sunday, November 25, 1883, we had travelled from New York to Philadelphia, paying our first visit to the Quaker city. Irving and I were staying at the Belle Vue Hotel; there, too, Ellen Terry took up her quarters. I dined with Irving, and we were smoking after dinner when a card and a message came up. The card was that of the Hon. Benjamin H. Brewster, then Attorney-General of the United States. The message was to the effect that he had broken his journey for a few hours on his way to Washington for the purpose of meeting Mr. Irving, and begging that he would waive ceremony and see him. Of course, Irving was very pleased, and the Attorney-General came up. He was a clever-looking, powerfully-built man, but his face was badly scarred. In his boyhood he had, I believe, fallen into the fire. Until one knew him and came under the magic of his voice, and tongue, his appearance was apt to concern one over-much. He was quaint in his dress, wearing frills on shirt-front and cuffs. He was of an Irish family which had sent very prominent men to the Bar; a namesake of his was a leading counsel in my own youth. Irving and I were delighted with him. After an hour or so he asked if it were possible that he might see Miss Terry. Irving thought she would be very pleased. In compliance with the Attorney-General’s request she came down to Irving’s room and was most sweet and gracious to the stranger. After a while she went away; he prepared to go also, for his train was nearly due. When Ellen Terry had left the room he turned to us and said, with all that conviction of truth which makes “ blarney “ so effective:

“What a creature! what a Queen! She smote me with the sword of her beauty, and I arose her Knight!”

III

Ellen Terry had no sooner come into the Lyceum than all in the place were her devoted servants. Irving was only too glad to let her genius and her art have full swing; and it was a pleasure to all to carry out her wishes. As a member of a com- pany she was always simply ideal. She encouraged the young, helped every one, and was not only a “ fair “ but a “ generous “ actor. These terms imply much on the stage, where it is possible, without breaking any rule, to gain all the advantage to the detriment of other players. To Ellen Terry such a thing was impossible; she not only gave to every one acting with her all the opportunities that their parts afforded, but made opportunities for them. For instance, it is always an advantage for an actor to stand in or near the centre of the stage and well down to the footlights. In old days such a place was the right of the most important actor; a right which was always claimed. But Ellen Terry would when occasion served stand up stage or down as might be suitable to the person speaking. And when her own words had been spoken she would devote her whole powers to helping the work of her comrades on the stage. These seemingly little things count for much in the summing up of years, and it is no wonder that Ellen Terry as an artist is, and has always been, loved. From the first, to her as an artist has always been given the supreme respect which she had justly won. No one ever cavilled, no one ever challenged, no one ever found fault. All sought her companionship, her advice, her assistance. She moved through the world of the theatre like embodied sunshine. Her personal triumphs were a source of joy to all; of envy to none.

She seems to have the happy faculty of spinning gaiety out of the very air, and adds always to the sum of human happiness.

Her performance of Ophelia alone would have insured her a record for greatness; Irving never ceased expatiating on it. I well remember one night in 1879 — it was after the third performance of Hamlet — when he took supper with my wife and me. He talked all the time of Ellen Terry's wonderful performance. One thing which he said fixed itself in my mind:

"How Shakespeare must have dreamed when he was able to write a part like Ophelia, knowing that it would have to be played by a boy! Conceive his delight and gratitude if he could but have seen Ellen Terry in it!"

Indeed it was a delight to any one even to see her. No one who had seen it can forget the picture that she made in the Fourth Act when she came in holding a great bunch — an armful — of flowers; lilies and other gracious flowers and all those that are given in the text. For my own part, every Ophelia whom I have seen since then has suffered by the comparison.

Ellen Terry loves flowers, and in her playing likes to have them on the stage with her when suitable. Irving was always most particular with regard to her having exactly what she wanted. The Property Master had strict orders to have the necessary flowers, no matter what the cost. Other players could, and had to, put up with clever imitations; but Ellen Terry always had real flowers. I have known when the rule was carried through under extreme difficulties. This was during the week after the blizzard at New York in March 1888 when such luxuries were at famine price. She had as Margaret her bunch of roses every night. I bought them one day myself for the purpose when the blooms were five dollars each.

V

Ellen Terry’s art is wonderfully true. She has not only the instinct of truth but the ability to reproduce it in the different perspective of the stage. There must always be some grand artistic qualities, quite apart from personal charm, to render any actress worthy of universal recognition. To those who have seen Ellen Terry no explanation is needed. She is artist to her finger tips. The rules which Taine applies to Art in general, and to plastic art in particular, apply in especial degree to an artist of the Stage. That which he calls “ selective “ power, a natural force, is ever a ruling factor in the creation of character.

The finer and more evanescent evidences of individuality must to a large extent be momentary. No true artist ever plays the same part alike on different repetitions. The occasion; the variation of temperament, even of temperature; the emotional characteristic of the audience; the quickening or dulling of the ruling sentiment of the day or hour — each and all of these insensibly, if not consciously, can regulate the pressure in the temperamental barometer. When to the gift of logical power of understanding causes and effects there is added that of instinctively thinking and doing the right thing, then the great artist is re- vealed. It is, perhaps, this instinctive power which is the basis of creative art; the power of the poet as distinguished from that of the workman. Then comes a nicely balanced judgment of the selective faculty. There are always many ways of doing the same thing. One, of course, must be best; though others may come very close to it in merit.

Ellen Terry has the faculty of reaching the best. When one sees any other actress essay a part in which she has won applause, the actuality seems but dull beside the memory. As the object of stage work is “ seeming “ not “ being,” the effort to appear real transcends reality — with the art of stage perspective added.

VI

When Ellen Terry has taken hold of a character it becomes, whilst her thoughts are on it, a part of her own nature. In fact, her own nature “is subdued To what it works in, like the dyer’s hand.

Her intuition, which in a woman is quicker than a man’s reason, not only avoids error from the very inception of her work, but brings her unerringly by the quickest road to the best end. In the studying. of her own parts and the arranging of her own business of them she had always had a free hand with Irving. At the Lyceum she was consulted about everything; and the dispositions of other persons and things were made to fit into her arrangements. I can only recall one instance when her wishes were not exactly carried out. This was at the end of the church scene of Much Ado about Nothing which in the Lyceum version finished the Fourth Act — the scene of the Prison which in Shakespeare ends the act having been transferred to the beginning of the last act. Here Beatrice has pledged Benedick to kill Claudio. Her newly accepted lover finishes the scene: “ Go, comfort your cousin; I must say, she is dead; and so, farewell.” Irving thought that the last words should be a little more operative with regard to the coming portion of the play; and so insisted in putting in the “ gag “ which was often in use:

Beatrice. “ Benedick, kill Claudio!”

Benedick. “ As sure as I’m alive I will!”

Against this Ellen Terry protested, almost to tears. She thought that every word of Shakespeare was sacred; to add to them was wrong. Still Irving was obdurate; and she finally yielded to his wishes.

To my own mind Irving was right. He too held every word of Shakespeare in reverence; but modern conditions, which require the shortening of plays, necessitate now and again the concentration of ideas — the emphasis of purposes. The words of the “ tag “ which he and Ellen Terry spoke, and the extraordinary forceful way they spoke them, heightened the effect. By carrying on the idea of the audience to an immediate and definite purpose they increased the “ tug “ of the play.

It may be interesting to note that this introduction was not, so far as I remember, commented on by any of the critics. It was not printed in the acting version, but the words were spoken — and there was no possibility of their not being heard — on every performance of our run of two hundred nights. Where there are so many Shakespeareans looking keenly for errors of text, it was odd such an addition should have passed without comment!

VII

The sincerity of Ellen Terry’s nature finds expression in her art. In all my long experience of her I never knew her to strike a wrong note. Doubtless she has her faults. She is a woman; and perfection must not be expected even in the finishing work of Creation:

“Auld Nature swears the lovely dears Her noblest work she classes, 0; Her ‘prentice han’ she tried on man, And then she made the lasses, 0

But whatever faults she may have are altogether those of the individual human being, not of the artist. As the latter she had achieved perfection even when I first saw her in 1878.

The mind which balances truly each item, each evidence of character submitted to it by nature, experience or the dramatist, is the true source of art. Without it perfection must be a hazard; when there are many roads to choose from, the traveller may chance to blunder into the right one, but the doing so is the work of luck not art. But when day after day, week after week, year after year one always takes the right road, chance or fortune cannot be regarded as the dominating cause. The sincerity of art has many means of expression; but even of these some are more subtle than others. Such exposition demands mind and the exercise of mind; we may, I think, take it that intention requires intellectual effort both for its conception and execution — the wish and the attempt to turn desire into force. The carrying out of intention requires fresh mental effort. And such must be primarily based on a knowledge of the powers and facts at command. Thus it is that the actor must understand himself; the task is even more difficult when the actor is a woman whose nature, therefore, in its manifestations is continually changing. But this very changeableness has in it the elements of force and charm. Out of the kaleidoscope come glimpses of new things which have only to be recorded and remembered in order to become knowledge. In the variety of emotions is a pauseless attractiveness which does not admit of weariness. Nature was good to Ellen Terry in the equipment for her work. Her personality enriched by the gifts showered upon her is a very treasure-house of art. No other woman of her time has shown such abounding and abiding charm; such matchless mirthfulness; pathos so deep.

VIII

As to the stage characters which she has made her own it would be impossible to say enough. Any one of them is worthy of an exhaustive study. In the early days of her acting, which began when her years were but few, stage art was in a poor way.

The old style of acting, eminently suitable to the age in which it had been evolved, was still in vogue, though the conditions of the great world without were changing. “ The Drama’s laws the Drama’s patrons give “ is a truth told with poetic comprehensiveness; what the public wants the actors must in reason supply. But the age when railways were still new, when telegraphs were hoped for; when such knowledge as that of the influence of worms on the outer layer of the structure of the world was being investigated, and when the existence of bacteria was becoming a conclusion rather than a guess, did not mean to be satisfied with an old-world, unnatural expression of human feeling seemingly based on a belief that passions were single and crude and that they swept aside the manifold complications of life. Ellen Terry belongs to the age of investigation. She is of those who brought in the new school of natural acting. It is true that she had learned and benefited by the teaching and experience of the old school. The lessons which Mrs. Charles Kean had so patiently taught her gave her boldness and breadth, and made for the realisation of poetic atmosphere and that perspective of the stage which is so much stronger than that of real life. But the work which she did in the new school came from herself. Here it was that her manifold gifts and charms found means of expression — of working out her purpose in relation to the characters which she undertook. If I had myself to put into a phrase the contribution to art-progress which Ellen Terry's work has been, I should say that it was the recognition of freedom of effort. She enlarged the bounds of art from those of convention to those of nature; and in doing so gave fuller scope to natural power. Since she set the way many another actress has arrived at the full success possible to the range of her gifts who otherwise would have been early strangled in the meshes of convention. The general effect of this has been to raise the art as well as widening it. The natural style does not allow of falsity or grossness; in the light which is common to all who understand, either by instinct or education, these stand out as faults or excrescences. In this " natural " method also individual force counts for its worth and the characteristic notes of sex are marked. For instance, I have heard — for unfortunately I never saw the piece — that when long ago she played The Wandering Heir her charm of sex was paramount; she played a girl masquerading as a boy so delightfully because she was so complete a woman. In her, womanhood is paramount. She has to the full in her nature whatever quality it is that corresponds to what we call " virility " in a man.

Her influence on her art has been so marked that one can see in the younger generation of women players how in their efforts to understand her methods they have unconsciously held her identity as their objective. In a number of them this appears as a sort of mild imitation. It was the same thing with the school of Irving. Trying to follow in his footsteps they have achieved something of his identity; generally those little personal traits or habits catching to the eye, which some call faults, others idiosyncrasies.

The advantages which both Irving and Ellen Terry gave to dramatic art will be even more marked in the future than it is at the present; though the credit to them of its doing will be less conspicuous than it is now. Already the thoughtful work has been done; the principles have been tested and accepted, and the teaching has reached its synthetic stage.

IX

Naturally the years that went to the doing of this fine art work threw the two players together in a remarkable way, and made for an artistic comradeship which, so far as I know, has had no equal in their own branch of art. It began with Irving's management at the end of 1878 and lasted as a working reality for twenty-four years. At the Prince's Theatre, Bristol, on the last night of the Provincial Tour of 1902, December 13, she played for the last time under his management. Some months later, July 14, 1903, they played again in the same piece The Merchant ofVenice at Drury Lane for the benefit of the Actors' Association. This occasion has become a memorable one; it was the last time when they played together.

Their cause of separation was in no wise any form of disagreement. It was simply effluxion of time. To the last hour of Irving's life the brotherly affection between them remained undimmed. Naturally when these two great players who had worked together in the public •eye for nearly a quarter of a century separated Curiosity began to search for causes, and her handmaid Gossip proclaimed what she alleged to be them. Let me tell the simple truth and so set the matter right:

In the course of their long artistic co-operation Irving had produced twenty-seven plays in which they had acted together. In nineteen of these Ellen Terry had played young parts, which naturally in the course of so many years became unsuitable. Indeed the first person to find fault with them was Ellen Terry herself who, with her keen uncompromising critical faculty always awake to the purposes of her work, realised the wisdom of abandonment long before the public had ever such a thought. There remained, therefore, for their mutual use but eight plays of the repertoire — the finished work of so many years. Of these, two: Macbeth and Henry VIII., had been destroyed by fire, and the expense of reproducing them adequately for only occasional presentation was prohibitive. Two others: Coriolanus and Peter the Great, were not popular. Robespierre had had its day, a long run to the full extent of its excellence. There remained, therefore, but three: Charles I, The Merchant ofVenice and Madame sans Gene. The last of these had not proved a very great success in England; in America it had been done to death. For Charles I., by its very sadness and its dramatic scope, the audience could only be drawn from a limited class. So that there remained for practical purposes of continuous playing only The Merchant ofVenice. There was one other play in which, though her part was a young one, Ellen Terry could always play, Much Ado about Nothing. But then Irving had grown too old for Benedick, and so for his purposes the play was past.

Ellen Terry did not care — and rightly enough — to play only once or twice a week as Portia — or in Nance Oldfield, given with The Bells — whilst there was so much excellent work, in all ways suitable to her personality and her years, to be done. Ordinarily one would not allude to these matters; ladies have by right no date. But when a lady’s Jubilee on the Stage has been a completed fact, to whose paramount success the whole world has rung, there is no need for misleading reticence.

The mere fact of their ceasing to play together did not bring to a close the long artistic comradeship of Henry Irving and Ellen Terry. To the very last the kindly interest in each other’s work and the affection between them never ceased or even slackened. Whatever one did the other followed with eager anxiety. Right up to the hour of his death Irving was interested in all that she did. On that last sad evening, even whilst anxiety for the coming changes in his own work was looming over him, he spoke to me in his dressing-room about her health and her work. He spoke feelingly and sympathetically, and with confidence and affection; just as he had always done during the long period of their working together. He had written to her himself in the same vein. In his letter he had told her what a delight it would be to him to hear her Lecture on “ The Letters in Shakespeare’s Plays.”

X

For my own part I have no words at command adequate to tell the kindly feeling which I have always had for the delightful creature — to express my reverence and regard and love for her enchanting personality. From the very first she took me into the inner heart of her friendship; unconsciously I was given the role of “ big brother.” Nay, she found a name for me which was all her own and which one would think to be the least appropriate to a man of my inches. When I would ask her about some social duty which it was necessary for her to attend to — some important person to receive, some special entertainment to attend — she would make what nurses call a “ wry face “; then she would ask:

“Bram, is this earnest?”

“Yes “ I would reply. “ Honest injun! “ She would smile and pout together as she would reply:

“All right, mama! “ Then I knew that she was going to play that part as nicely as it could be played by any human being. Indeed it was hardly “ playing a part “ for she was genuinely glad to meet cordiality with equal feeling. It was only the beginning and the publicity that she disliked. The picture reproduced will show how affectionately she carried out at times her playful pet name. “ Fussie “ is Irving’s dog; “ Drummie “ is her own.

I should like to write of Ellen Terry a whole volume; but after all, as this book is about Irving, I can only treat of her incidentally, woven though she was into the very texture of his artistic life.

Moreover, she is some day to produce a volume of her own.

It is hard to believe that half a century has elapsed since Ellen Terry went timidly through her first part on the stage. The slim child dragging the odd-looking go-cart, which the early daguerreotype recorded as Mamilius in Charles Kean’s production of A Winter’s Tale, has been so long a force of womanly charm and radiant beauty — an actress of such incomparable excellence that in her art as in our memories she almost stands alone — great amongst the great.

Ellen Terry is a great actress, the greatest of her time; and she will have her niche in history. She is loved by every one who ever knew her. Her presence is a charm, her friendship a delight; her memory will be a national as well as a personal possession.

CHAPTER LXVI. FRESH HONOURS IN DUBLIN

A public reception — Above politics — A lesson in handshaking — A remarkable address — A generous gift

WHEN we visited Dublin in the tour of 1894 there were some memorable experiences. Ever since 1876 my native city had a warm place in Irving's heart. And very justly so, for it had showered upon him love and honour. This time there were two occasions which should not be forgotten.

The first was a public Reception at the Mansion-House given by the then Lord Mayor, Valentine Dillon, a friend of my own boyhood. This took place on Thursday, November 29, and was in truth an affair of national importance. At that time the long-continued feuds between Conservatives and Liberals, Home Rulers and Unionists, Catholics and Protestants, which had marked with extra virulence — for they had been long existent — the past decades, were still operative. Still, improvement was in the air; only opportunity was wanting to give it expression.

The beneficent occasion came in that Reception.

Irving and Ellen Terry were delightfully popular personalities. They had no politics, and what religion either professed was not even considered; their artistic excellence shadowed all else. Lord Mayor Dillon was a man with broad views of life and of the dignity of the position which he held for, I think, the third time. He cast very wide the net of his hospitable intent. He asked every one who was of account in any way; and all came. Some three thousand persons had been bidden and there was a full tally of guests. When once they had actually met in a common cause, one and all seemed to take the opportunity of showing that the hatchet had been buried. Men who had not spoken for years — who had not looked at each other save with the eyes of animosity, seemed glad to mingle on something of the old terms — to renew old friendships and long-severed acquaintanceship.

Irving and Ellen Terry, with some of us lesser lights supporting them, stood on the dais beside the Lord Mayor and the Lady Mayoress; and I can bear witness that not one who passed went without a handshake from both. It was a serious physical effort. To shake hands with some thousands of persons would tax the strongest. Irving went through it with all the direct simplicity of his nature. Ellen Terry, having to supplement nature with art, rested at times her right hand and shook with the left with such cunning dexterity that no one was a whit the wiser. One and all went away from that hospitable and friendly gathering in a happy frame of mind. Dublin was a gainer by that wave of beneficent sympathy.

Two days later, on the last night of the engagement, Saturday, December 1, there was another and even more remarkable function. This was the presentation of a Public Address on the stage after the play. This Address was no ordinary one. It was signed by all the great public officials, both of the city and of the country:

The Lord Mayor, The High Sheriff, The Lord Chancellor, The Commander of the Forces, The Lord Chief Justices, All the Judges, All the City Members of Parliament, The Provost of Dublin University, The President of the College of Surgeons, The President of the College of Physicians, All the Public Officials, And by a host of Leading Citizens.

The Lord-Lieutenant, Lord Crewe, was unable to take a part in it as, being representative of the Queen, he could not engage in such an honour to a private person; but he made a point of remaining in his box so that he might be seen to be present.

When the curtain drew up the great body of the Committee, numbering about sixty, stood behind the Lord Mayor on one side of the stage. On the other Irving, with close behind him Ellen Terry, whom I had the honour of escorting, and all the other members of the Company. The Lord Mayor read the Address, which was conceived in love and honour and born in noble and touching words. In replying for himself and Miss Terry, Irving was much touched, and had to make an effort to speak at all. There was a lofty look in his eyes which spoke for the sincerity of the words which he used in his reply:

“Now when your great University has accepted me to the brotherhood of her sons, and when your city and your nation have taken me to your hearts, I feel that the cup of a player’s honour is full to the brim.”

I have not often seen him moved so much as he was that night. His speech and movement were only controlled by his strong will and the habit of self-repression.

Within and without the theatre was a scene of wild enthusiasm not to be forgotten. I have been witness of many scenes of wild generosity but none to surpass that night.

Irving was always anxious that others should rejoice in some form with his own rejoicing. Before leaving Dublin he placed in the hands of the Lord Mayor a cheque for a hundred guineas for his disposal to the use of the poor.

CHAPTER LXVII. PERFORMANCES AT SANDRINGHAM AND WINDSOR

Sandringham, i889 — First appearance before Me Queen — A quick change — Souvenirs — Windsor, 1893 — A blunder in old days — Royal hospitality — The Queen and Me Press — Sandringham, 1902 — The Kaiser's visit — A record journey — An amateur conductor

I

SANDRINGHAM, 1889

IN April 1889 the Prince of Wales had the honour of entertaining the Queen at Sandringham. He wished that she should see Irving and Ellen Terry, neither of whom she had seen play. Accordingly it was arranged that on April 26 the Lyceum would be closed for the evening and that a performance should be given in Sandringham in a little theatre specially built in the great drawing-room in which were placed the exquisite trophies of arms presented by Indian Rajahs during the Prince's visit. For this theatre Irving had got Walter Hann to paint an act drop; scenery of a suitable size was prepared by Hawes Craven — an exceedingly fine piece of miniature stage work. The Bill fixed was: The Bells, and the Trial Scene from The Merchant ofVenice, the combination of which pieces would, the Prince thought, show both the players at their best.

On the day fixed, April 26, Irving and Miss Terry went down to Sandringham by the regular train between two and three o'clock. The special with the Company left St. Pancras at 3.55, arriving at Wolferton at a quarter to seven, whence they were driven to the house.

The drawing - room looked very beautiful, the white walls showing up the many stands of magnificent weapons and armour; greenery and flowers were everywhere. At one end was the little theatre with a proscenium opening of some twenty feet wide, the arch painted in a pleasant colour between pink and maroon. Mr. Loveday and a staff of men had been down for several days as it was found necessary to have all in order before the Queen's arrival. Sandringham is not a very vast house, and much space was required for the reception of a great Queen who always travelled with a host of servants of all degrees. There was a large gathering in the drawing - room of not only the house guests but local personages; the big music gallery at the back was full of tenants and servants. The Queen had kindly expressed her wish that the audience should do just as they wished as to applauding, and I must say that I have never seen or heard a more enthusiastic audience within the bounds of decorum.

The Queen sat in the centre in front with the Prince of Wales on her right and the Princess on her left, and others of the family beside them. Next came the guests in their degrees. The doorway was crowded with the servants — the Queen's all in black and the Prince's in Royal scarlet liveries.

Her Majesty seemed greatly pleased. It had been arranged that Irving and Ellen Terry were to join the Prince and Princess at supper. The Queen would not wait up, but was to retire at once. However, just as the players were removing their warpaint, Her Majesty sent word by Sir Henry Ponsonby that she would like to speak to Mr. Irving and Miss Terry. Irving was in the act of removing his " make-up " as Shylock, which was a job requiring some little time. He was extraordinarily quick both as to dressing and undressing; but the " priming " of earth on which stage paint is laid, grease, paint, and lampblack and spirit-gum take some little time to remove, even before the stage of soap-and-water is reached. Portia, however, is a part which does not soil, and as to mere dressing, Ellen Terry can simply fly. She knew that Irving would be at least a few minutes, and it is not good form to keep a Queen waiting. Within a minute she was tearing down the passage, with her dresser running close behind her and fastening up the back of her frock as she went. At the doorway she threw over her shoulders the scarf which was a part of her dress and sailed into the room with a grand courtesy. Within a very few minutes Irving in immaculate evening dress followed.

The Queen presented Irving with a souvenir of the occasion in the shape of a pair of sleeve links, with her monogram V. R. in diamonds in red enamel. To Ellen Terry she gave a brooch of pearls and diamonds.

Irving and Ellen Terry supped with the Royal guests. For the rest of the Company supper was prepared in the Conservatory. The heads of de-. partments and workmen were entertained in the Housekeeper's room or the Servants' Hall according to their degrees. Irving had with his usual wish to save trouble arranged for supper for all the party on the train home. But the Prince of Wales would not hear of such a thing. He said that the players were his guests and that they must eat in his house. Some of the Equerries and high officials of the court supped in the Consei vatory with the actors. It had been understood that there was to be no suggestion of payment of even expenses. Irving was only too proud and happy to serve his Queen and future King in all ways of his own art to the best of his power. This arrangement was held to on every occasion on which he had the honour to give a special performance before Royalty.

At half-past two o'clock the whole Company and workmen were driven to Wolf erton station where the special train was waiting. It arrived at St. Pancras at a few minutes past six in the morning.

II

WINDSOR, 1893

The performance at Windsor was in its way quite a remarkable thing. In the earlier years of her reign Queen Victoria was accustomed to have from time to time theatrical performances at Windsor Castle. These were generally held in the Waterloo Chamber, where a moveable stage was erected on each occasion. In old days this stage was so low that once Mr. Henry Howe, who had to come up through a trap according to the action of the piece, had to crawl on his stomach under the stage to get to the appointed place. Howe was nearly eighty years of age when he told me this incident, but the memory was so strong on him that he laughed like a boy. When the Prince Consort died in 1861 all such gaieties were stopped, and for thirty-two years no play was given at Windsor. But when in 1889 the Queen did begin to resume something like the old life at Court her first effort in that direction was to command a performance by those players of the later day whom she had seen at Sandringham, whose merit was widely recognised and who had already won official recognition of another kind — the previous year the University of Dublin had given Irving a degree Honoris Causa. Moreover, the Queen wanted to see Becket, the work of her own Poet Laureate, which had created so much interest and thought.

Sir Henry Ponsonby, the Queen’s Private Secretary, came from Windsor to see Irving at Her Majesty’s wish. Irving was, of course, delighted to hold himself at the Queen’s will. The only stipulation which he made was that he was to be allowed to bear the expenses of all kinds and was not to be offered fee or pay of any kind, even though such was a usual formality. For this he had a special reason; not to set himself up as an individual against the custom of the Court, but to avoid the possibility of such a betise as had in earlier years stopped the Windsor theatrical performances for a time. The way of it was this: At the commencement of the system of having such performances the Queen had left the matter in the hands of Charles Kean, then manager of the Princess's Theatre, and acknowledged head of the theatrical calling. He and his assistants made all the necessary arrangements, taking care that the gift of the Court patronage was, as fairly as was possible, divided amongst actors both in London and throughout the provinces. This worked excellently; and there were few, if any, jealousies. Kean made all the financial arrangements and paid salaries on the scale fixed on his suggestion by the Privy Purse. Matters went along smoothly so long as Kean had control. Later on, however, this was handed over to Mr. Mitchell of Bond Street, the agent who acted for the Queen with regard to her visits to London theatres and other places of amusement. At last came trouble. The scale of salary fixed was, I believe — for I can only speak from hearsay — at the rate of twice the actors' earnings in the previous year. On one occasion an actor of some repute was through some incredible stupidity paid at this rate, strictly applied though the case was exceptional. He had been for years receiving a large salary, but during nearly the whole of the previous year had been ill and of course " out of work." His total earnings therefore when divided by fifty-two amounted to but a meagre weekly wage. At a nightly standard it was ridiculous. Kean would of course, as an actor, have understood this and have carried out the spirit of Her Majesty's wishes. But the man of business went " by the card," and when the comedian received the dole sent to him he was highly indignant, and determined to taste some form of satisfaction, if only of revenge for his injured feelings. Of course the Queen knew nothing of all this, and be sure she was incensed when she heard of it. The actor’s form of revenge was to send the amount of salary paid to him to the police court poor box as a contribution from himself and Queen Victoria.

I may be wrong in details of the story, for it is one of fifty years ago, but in the main it is correct. I had it from Irving and I have often heard it spoken about by old actors of the time. ^^ith such a catastrophe in his memory Irving naturally wished to be careful. He had to consider not only himself but his whole Company, hundreds of persons of all degrees. Some of them might look on the affair as an Eldorado whence should come wealth beyond the dreams of avarice and be “ disgruntled “ at any failure to that end. When he was himself the paymaster and shared as an individual the conditions attaching to his comrades, there could be no complaint. Henry Irving was a most loyal subject; he wished at all times to render love and honour to the Monarch, and as he was in his own way a conspicuous individual it was necessary to be careful lest his good intentions should stray.

Sir Henry Ponsonby quite understood Irving’s feelings and wishes, and acceded to them. Train arrangements were to be at the expense of the Queen, who was particular that this should be the rule with all her guests. Of course Irving acquiesced. When the day March i8, which the Queen wished — had been arranged the matter of accomplishment was left entirely in his hands. Forthwith the work of preparation began.

On the And March I had taken with me to Windsor the heads of our various stage departments and the scene painter; a week later Irving went himself, taking Loveday with him.

New scenery, exactly the same as that in use but on a smaller scale and better suited in its mechanism to the limited space, was painted; and with it a beautiful proscenium for the miniature theatre built up in the Waterloo Chamber. ^^s there would not be room for the usual number of supers or chorus, most of these were taken by the minor members of the Company, and all were carefully rehearsed. As it was, however, the first contingent which went to Windsor on the morning of the day of performance numbered one hundred and seventy-eight persons.

We had a full rehearsal on the day of performance, lasting up to half-past four o'clock.

The day was a lovely one, cold and bright, and except when rehearsing the Lyceum Company found endless pleasure in wandering in the gardens or on the Terrace from which the view was superb; the river winding its quiet way through fields and woods; the whole fair landscape softened in misty distance. The ceaseless cawing of the rooks overhead enhanced the effect. Within doors the players examined the endless art treasures of the Castle.

At nine o'clock the Queen arrived, walking slowly through the long corridor. She sat, of course, in the centre of the dais, with the Empress Frederick of Germany on her right and the Prince of Wales on her left. The room was exquisitely decorated with plants and flowers, and as it was filled with ladies and gentlemen in court dress and uniform, the effect was very fine. The play went well. The Queen had with graceful and kindly forethought given orders that all present might applaud as they would — it not having been etiquette to applaud on such occasions without Royal permission. Another piece of thoughtful kindness of Her Majesty was to have amongst the guests staying for the week-end at Windsor Lord and Lady Tennyson. The adaptation of the play to the lesser space than the

Lyceum was so judiciously done that one did not notice any difference.

At the close of the performance the Queen sent for Irving and Ellen Terry and complimented them on the perfection and beauty of their playing. To Irving she said:

"It is a very noble play! What a pity that old Tennyson did not live to see it. It would have delighted him as it has delighted Us!"

She also received Genevieve Ward and William Terriss.

The Queen always wished that her guests of all degrees should be made welcome, and Sir Henry Ponsonby said that she had arranged that all the Company, players and workmen of all kinds, should dine and take supper in the Castle. The dinner was less formal, but the supper was in its way a function. Four different rooms were arranged for the purpose. In the first were the acting Company and higher officials to the number of about fifty. The gentlemen of the orchestra and the heads of departments in the second and third; the workmen, &c., in the fourth. At the end all drank the Queen's health loyally.

There was an immense amount of public interest in this performance. So high it ran that all the great newspapers asked permission to be represented. This request could not be acceded to as it was a purely private affair; the utmost that could by usage be allowed was that press representatives should during the afternoon be allowed to see the Waterloo Chamber prepared for the performance in the evening.

Late in the afternoon I received a request from a lot of the chief papers that I should myself ask permission to send a short despatch, say some five hundred words, at the close of the performance. I took the message to Sir Henry Ponsonby, who seemed very much struck with it, as though the public importance of the event had suddenly dawned on him. He said:

“I must take this to the Queen at once and learn her wishes respecting it. The matter seems to be of much more importance than I had thought! “ He came back shortly, seemingly very pleased, and said to me, speaking as he approached:

“The Queen says that she is very pleased to give permission. Mr. Bram Stoker may write whatever he pleases about the event. But he must say nothing till after the performance is all over.” Then he added, “ The Queen also told me to explain that she was sending orders to have the telegraph office in the Castle kept open for your convenience till you have quite done with it. I had better explain that the telegraph office here is a private one and that the Queen pays for all telegrams. This she insists on.”

Altogether the performance was a very memorable one. It marked an epoch in the life of the Great Queen — that in which she broke the long gloom of more than thirty years and began the restoration to something like the old happy life of the earlier years of her reign.

III

SANDRINGHAM, 1902

The second visit to Sandringham came thirteen years after the first, being in 1902 after the King’s accession. The occasion was that of the Kaiser’s visit. The King wished to have a surprise for him; and at the time he had his “ Command “ conveyed to Irving his wish was intimated that the matter should be kept absolutely secret till the event came off. This we could see was to be a difficult task; but the promise was given and kept. At the date fixed — November Izi. — we would be playing inBelfast, so that the task to get there and return with the loss of only one night to the audience was really a stupendous one. It would involve special arrangements with at least one shipping company and several railways. This would necessitate the fact of the journey being known to so many people that really secrecy seemed impossible of achievement. However the matter was undertaken and had to be done. Not a soul other than the actively engaged knew of the affair beforehand. Even Ellen Terry was purposely kept in the dark. As the only play to be given by Irving was Waterloo the cast was small, there being only four people in it. These with three others would comprise the party. One man had been sent to London to bring down the scene specially painted for the occasion and to see to arrangements. Mr. Ben Webster, who was to play his original part of Colonel Midwinter, was to come from London, where he was then playing. Let me say here that not the slightest whisper went forth on our side; and we were surprised to see an account of what was to be done, which evidently came from another branch of the entertainment being made ready for the King's Imperial guest.

When we began to consider the practicability of the journey my heart sank. There seemed no way by which the out and return journeys could be done. I was for a time seriously considering the advisability of asking for a torpedo boat to run us over from Belfast to Stranraer, Barrow, Fleetwood, or Liverpool. At last Mr. James Wright, the representative of Mr. Turnbull, Traffic Superintendent of the London and North-Western Railway, and James McDowell, Manager of the Belfast and Liverpool Steamship Company, came up to Glasgow, and after a good deal of consideration arranged a journey which could only have been done by placing the whole resources of shipping and railway companies at our disposal. The

Magic, the fastest boat of the Belfast line, was to be taken off her regular service two days before; loaded up with the best Welsh coal, and held ready at the wharf with full steam up on the evening of the journey. The railroading would be arranged from Euston.

Faust was played in Belfast on the night of November 13. As each one of the little party finished on the stage they got dressed and were driven down to the wharf. The moment the last call was given at the end of the play Irving hurried into his travelling clothes, and he and I and Walter were whirled off to the Magic. The instant we passed on deck the gangway plank was drawn and the ship started off full speed. Such was contrary to law, as ships can only go part speed in the Loch. But no one made objections; we were on the King's service. Mr. McDowell came with us. Supper was ready.

We got to Liverpool at eight in the morning and found alongside the dock the special carriage, one of the Royal saloons used on the London and NorthWestern Railway; got on board, and were whirled off to Crewe, where we caught the fast express to Rugby. There we took on a dining-car and went on to Peterborough. Here our carriage was handed over to the Great Eastern Company, which took us on the fast train to Lynn, and thence on a special to Wolferton.

At the station we found a whole row of reporters. They were not allowed to go to Sandringham. I promised to ask for leave to send them word as soon as the performance should be over. The permission was graciously acceded, and when all was over I sent the line agreed on, " Programme adhered to." It was extended to a column next morning in some of the papers.

The King had sent a brougham for Sir Henry. In it he, Miss Hackney and I were driven at once to Sandringham. The others came on almost immediately by one of the King's motor buses.

Incidentally I may say that there was some concern in the official world and certain private reprimanding because even that brougham was allowed to pass in unchallenged. The police arrangements were — very properly — carried out with the most extraordinary exactitude.

After tea Irving went to lie down for a while in the room provided for him, and let me say that it was no joke providing a room at Sandringham at that time. The Kaiser had with him a vast and important entourage, and all the English guests had to put up with such accommodation as was possible, which of course they were loyally glad to do.

At ten o'clock precisely, Sandringham time — which is half-an-hour ahead of standard time — the Kaiser and the Queen moved into the great drawing-room where the stage was fixed. Then followed the King and family, and guests. There were altogether some three hundred and fifty in the room.

As the movement to the theatre began there was a — to us — amusing episode. After our arrival, when things were being put in order for the performance, it had been discovered that kettle drums were missing. Either they had not been sent at all or they had gone astray. At first we took it for granted that in such a scene of pomp and splendour as was around us drums and drummers would be easy to find. But it was not so. Drums were obtainable but no drummer, and there was not time to get one from the nearest town. Now the military music is necessary for the performance of Waterloo; the quicksteps are not only required for the Prelude but are in the structure of the piece. For the occasion of the Imperial visit, there had been brought from Vienna a celebrated string band, the conductor of high status in his art and all the components of the band fine players. But there was no drummer; and there could be even no proper rehearsal of the incidental music of the play without the drums. We were beginning to despair, when the head constable of the county who was present said that there was one man in the police of the division who was the drummer of the Police Band of the district, and undertook to try and find him. After much telegraphing and telephoning it was found that he was out on his beat about the farthest point-of his district. However, when he was located a trap with a fresh horse was sent for him. He arrived tired and foodless just before the time fixed for beginning. He was a fine performer fortunately, a master of his work, and with the score before him needed no preparation.

When the signal was given of the movement of the Royalties the Conductor took his baton, but when he looked at the score of the Prelude, which is continually changing time with the medley of the various regimental quicksteps, he said:

“I cannot play it.”

“Go on, man! Go on! “ said Belmore, who was acting as stage manager.

“I cannot I “ he answered; “ I cannot! “ and stood unmoving. Things were serious, for already the procession was formed and the Kaiser and the Queen were entering the room. It had been arranged that the Prelude was to play them to their seats. “ Give me the stick! “ said Belmore suddenly, and took the fiddle bow with which he conducted from the unresisting hand of the stranger. Of course all this was behind the scenes and amongst ourselves only. Then he began to conduct. He had never done so, but he had some knowledge of music.

But the gentlemen of the band did not hesitate. They were all fine musicians and well accustomed to playing together. Probably they were not averse from showing that they could play perfectly without a conductor at all! They certainly did seem to play with especial verve. Belmore was a sight to behold. He seemed to know all the tricks of leadership, modifying or increasing tone with one hand whilst he beat time with the other; pausing dramatically with uplifted baton or beating with sudden forcefulness; screwing round with his left hand as though to twist the music into a continued unity. Anyhow it — or something — told. The music went excellently and without a hitch.

Waterloo went splendidly, and we heard afterwards that the Kaiser was delighted with it. It was followed by Dr. Johnson, in which Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Bourchier took the principal parts. Irving was asked to supper with the Royal party; so too were Mr. and Mrs. Bourchier. The rest of us supped in the Conservatory with the Equerries and others.

At one o'clock — half-past one Sandringham time — we drove to Wolferton, where two trains stood ready to start. One, a long one for London — the other a special consisting of engine and brake-van and the two sleeping saloons. The row of reporters were again on the platform and went back on the London train.

Our party got to sleep as soon as we could. At a quarter to seven in the morning we got to the dock at Liverpool and went aboard the Magic which stood ready with steam up. The tide was low, but as there was much fog in the river Mr.

McDowell arranged that the dock-gates should be opened before the usual hour. We actually stirred up the mud with the screw as we passed out into the Mersey. The river was dark with thick fog and we had to find our way, inch by inch, to beyond New Brighton. We were beginning to despair of arriving at Belfast in time when we cleared the belt of fog. We came out seemingly all at once into bright sunshine which lasted all the way home. It was a delightful day and a delightful run. The sun was bright, the air fresh and bracing and the water of sapphire blue so calm that passing to the south'ard of the Isle of Man we ran between the Calf and the Hen and Chickens — the dangerous cluster of rocks lying just outside it.

We ran full tilt up Belfast Lough and arrived at the wharf at five o'clock in good time for a wash and dress for the theatre.

When Irving stepped on the stage that night he got a right hearty cheer.

That journey was in many ways a record.

CHAPTER LXVIII. PRESIDENTS OF THE UNITED STATES

Chester Arthur — Grover Cleveland — A judgment on taste — McKinley — The "War Room " — Reception after a Cabinet Council — McKinley's memory — Theodore Roosevelt — His justice as Police Commissioner — Irving at his New Year Reception

I

HENRY IRVING had the honour of calling four Presidents of the United States by the name of friend.

The first was General Chester A. Arthur, who was in his high office in 1884 when Irving first visited Washington. The President sent to him a most kindly invitation to a Reception through Clayton McMichael, then Marshal of the district of Columbia. This was on the night of Saturday, 8th March. They had already met on Wednesday, 5th. Irving had called at the White House and had the honour of an interview. On the occasion of the Reception he had asked Irving to remain with a very few intimate friends after the rest had gone. They sat till a late — or rather an early hour.

II

Irving's first meeting with Mr. Grover Cleveland was when the latter was President-Elect. The occasion was the matinee for the benefit of the Actors' Fund at the Academy of Music in New York, December 4, 1887. Mr. Cleveland was in a box, and when Irving had with Ellen Terry played the fourth act of The Merchant ofVenice he sent to ask if he would come to see him in his box. The occasion seemed rather peculiar as Irving thus described it to me that evening:

"When I came into the box Mr. Cleveland turned round and, seeing me, stood up and greeted me warmly. As I was thus facing the stage I could hot help noticing that a man dressed exactly as I dressed Shylock, and with a wig and make up counterparts of my own, was playing some droll antics with a pump and milk cans. The PresidentElect saw, I suppose, the surprise on my face, for he turned to the stage for a moment and then, turning back to me again, said in a grave way:

"‘ That doesn't seem very good taste, does it! ‘ Then leaning against the side of the box with his face to me and his back to the stage, he went on speaking about Shylock."

III

Major McKinley was a friend before he was nominated for President. The first meeting was at New York on November 16, 1893. He came to the play with Melville Stone, a great friend of Irving's — who introduced Irving to him. The following week we all met again at supper with John Sergeant Wise. This time Joseph Jefferson was of the party. Afterwards in Cleveland Mark Hanna brought him round to see Irving in his dressing-room. This was after his election. Amongst other things we spoke of the possibility of Mark Hanna coming as United States Ambassador to London. " Ah! if he only would! " said McKinley.

In 1899, during our visit to Washington, Irving and I called at the White House to pay our respects to the President then in his second term of office. The officials of course recognised Sir Henry, and said that they knew the President would wish to see him. A Cabinet meeting was on, but when word was sent the President graciously sent a message asking Irving to wait as the Cabinet was nearly over and he wished to see him. We waited in the " War Room," a small —

by comparison — room off the Council Chamber. Here we were taken charge of by Colonel Montgomery, who explained to us the mechanism by which the President was made aware of and could control all that was then going on in the Philippines where the war was being pursued with grim determination on both sides. All round the room were land maps and sea charts, and on either was marked as news came the position of each body of soldiers or each ship. The room was full of telegraph instruments and telephones some one of which was nearly always at work. Whilst we were waiting a message came that a certain advanced party of United States troops were surrounded and in great danger, and a message was sent by the President to hold their position at any cost, relief was coming. Irving was immensely struck with all this, and said it was the most wonderful piece of organisation he had ever known.

Presently word was brought that the Cabinet Council was over and would we go in. It was a really impressive sight — all the more as there was no pomp or parade of any sort. In the middle of the great room with its row of arched windows stood the President, the baldness of his domed forehead making more apparent than ever his likeness to Napoleon. Grouped round him were the various chiefs of State departments, amongst them John Hay, Secretary of State; Elihu Root, Secretary for War; Charles Emory Smith, Postmaster-General, all of whom were by that time old friends. We had known them intimately since 1883-4. The President was sweetly gracious. We thought that he did not seem well in health; there was a waxen hue in his face which we did not like. The terrible labour of the Presidency — increased in his time by two wars — was undoubtedly telling on his strength. We were with him quite half-an-hour, a long while for such a place and time, and then came away.

That night we supped with the Secretary for War in his house in Rhode Island Avenue; he had a great gathering of officials — nearly all the Cabinet, the Paymaster-General, General Bates and his wife, and Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Nelson Page, friends whom Irving held dear — as I have the pleasure of so doing myself.

Indeed that was a long week in Washington. I do not know that in all my experience of Irving he ever went out so many times in a week. Sunday night, 24th December, reception and supper at the house of Wayne Macveigh, formerly Federal Attorney-General and late United States Ambassador to Italy; Tuesday as I have said; Wednesday to lunch with the British Ambassador, Lord Paunce- fote — Ellen Terry being of the party; Thursday to lunch with the Postmaster-General — here were all the Cabinet except the Attorney-General, who was ill; Friday to lunch with the Secretary of State, and to supper with the Nelson Pages. This last was one of the most delightful parties which Irving — or any one else — ever had the privilege of attending. Four o'clock found us still unbroken.

At that visit to the White House we saw President McKinley for the last time. His assassination was attempted on 6th September 1901; he died on 14th.

On the 18th September Irving gave his Reading of Becket at Winchester for the King Alfred Millenary. He was called on to speak, and after speaking of King Alfred and what he had done for the making of England, he said:

"All that race which looks on King Alfred's memory as a common heritage is in bitter grief for one whom to-morrow a mourning nation is to lay to rest. President McKinley was at once avatar and emblem of noble purpose, high thought and patriotism. He, like his predecessor of a thousand years ago, though he worked" immediately for his own country, worked for all the world; and his memory shall be green for ever in the hearts of a loyal and expansive race — in the hearts of all English-speaking people.”

IV

Irving’s first meeting with Theodore Roosevelt was on 27th November 1895. The occasion was a luncheon party given by Seth Low, ex-Mayor of Brooklyn and then President of Columbia College, where a week before Irving had lectured on “ The Character of Macbeth.” The party numbered sixteen all told and included Charles Dudley Warner, W. D. Howells, Joseph Choate, Professors Morse, Price, and Brander Matthews. At that time Mr. Roosevelt was Commissioner of Police for the City of New York, with absolute power over the whole force. He had been appointed for a term of years irremovably. After the Lexow Commission it was necessary that the force should be re-organised. To do so required brains, energy, integrity, and an iron hand. Irving and I used often to talk of him and the task which he had undertaken, and we were both delighted to meet him. He and Irving had a chat together before lunch and again after it. For myself he was a person of extraordinary interest. Mr. Low, whom I had met a few years before at dinner in the house of the Baroness Burdett-Coutts, introduced me, and before lunch we had a chat. Before he left he came to me and said: “ I am holding a sort of Court of justice the day after to-morrow — a trial of the charges made against policemen during the last fortnight. Would you like to come with me; you seem to be interested in the subject?”

Of course I jumped at the chance; it was exceedingly kind of him to give me such a unique opportunity. I went down at the hour appointed. The place was an immense hall where were gathered all the complainants with their witnesses, and the police with their witnesses. I estimated the number of persons present at not less than a thousand. The place of judgment was a raised table at the end of the room. The Commissioner sat behind it, and I beside him. Everything was done in perfect order. The Commissioner had the list of cases before him, and when one was over a lusty officer with a stentorian voice called out the next. Those interested in each case had been already grouped, so that when the case was announced the whole body thus segregated moved up in front of the table. The method was simple. The case was stated as briefly as possible — the Commissioner saw to that; the witnesses for the prosecution gave their evidence and were now and again asked a question from the Bench. Then the defendant had his say and produced his witnesses, if any; and again came an occasional searching question from the Commissioner, who when he had satisfied himself as to the justice of the case would smite the table with his hand and order on the next case. While the little crowd was changing places he would write a few words on the paper before him — judgment and perhaps sentence in one. The Commissioner was incarnate justice, and his judgments were given with a direct simplicity and brevity which were very remarkable. Each one would take only a few minutes; sometimes as few as two or three, never more than about twelve or fifteen. As there were very many cases brevity was a necessity.

Now and then in a case very difficult of conclusion Mr. Roosevelt, when he had written his decision, would turn to me and say:

“What do you think of that? “ I would answer to the best of my own opinion: “ I think the man’s innocent! “ or “ I think he is guilty! “ Then he would turn up the paper, lying face down, and show me what had been his own decision. As in every such case it was exactly what I had said, I thought — naturally — that he was very just.

I came away from the Court with a very profound belief in Mr. Roosevelt. I wrote afterwards in my diary:

“Must be President some day. A man you can’t cajole, can’t frighten, can’t buy.”

On December 28, 1903, Irving commenced a week’s engagement at Washington. On the morning of Friday, January I, 1904, he received a letter from the President saying that he was that day holding his New Year’s Reception and that he would be very pleased if he would come. Sir Henry would be expected to come by the private entrance with the Ambassadors. It was such a letter as to make its recipient feel proud — so courteous, so full of fine feeling and genuine hospitality — so significant of his liking and respect. The night before we had kept Irving up rather late. After the play and supper some of his comrades stopping in the hotel went up to bid him God-speed — to usher out the Old Year and to usher in the New — to keep the “ First Foot “ in Scotch fashion.

Irving did not rise next morning till a little later than usual and so did not receive the kind letter of the President in time to take full advantage of it. When he was dressed we went off to the White House and went in by the private entrance at the back. The Ambassadorial functions were over, but we were brought up at once and met him just as the section of “ Veterans of the ‘War “ were beginning to pay their respects. He stood a little inside the doorway on the right and shook hands with every one who came — no light task in itself as there were on the queue for the reception a good many thousands of persons, male and female. The long line four deep extended far into the neighbouring streets, winding round the corners like a huge black snake, and disappearing in the distance. The serpentine appearance was increased by the slow movement as the crowd advanced inch by inch.

Beside the President stood Mrs. Roosevelt and beyond him all the ministers of his Cabinet with their wives in line — all the ladies were in full dress. The room was in form of a segment of a circle and the crowd passed between red cords stretched across the base of the arc, the President's party being behind either cord. The President gave Irving a really cordial greeting and held him for a minute or two speaking — a long time with such a crowd waiting. He did not know that I was with Irving, but when he saw me he addressed me by name. He certainly has a royal memory! He asked us to go behind the ropes and join his family and friends. This we did. We remained there a full hour, and Irving was made much of by all.

CHAPTER LXIX. KNIGHTHOOD

Irving's intimations ofthe honour — First State recognition in any country — William I. and Haase — A deluge of congratulations — The Queen's pleasure — A wonderful Address — Former suggestion of knighthood

I

LATE in the afternoon of Friday, May 24, 1895, I got from Irving the following telegram:

"Could you look in at quarter to six. Something important."

When I saw him he showed me two letters which he had received. One was from the Prime Minister, the Earl of Rosebery, telling him that the Queen had conferred on him the honour of knighthood in personal recognition and for his services to art.

The other was from the Prince of Wales congratulating him on the event.

The announcement had given him very much pleasure, and even when I saw him he was much moved. Together we drove to Ellen Terry's home in Longridge Road to tell her the news.

The next day was the Queen's Birthday on which the " Honour List " was promulgated, and when it was known that Irving was so honoured the telegrams, letters and cables began to pour in from all parts of the world. For it was in its way a remarkable event. It was the first time that in any country an actor had been, qua actor, honoured by the State. When Got had been given the Legion of Honour by the French Government it had been specially intimated that it was as a Professor that he was its recipient. In Germany where the theatre is largely a State undertaking, recognition is not given to actors. Irving used to tell a story of Haase, the German actor, who was a great favourite with the Kaiser, William I. During a performance the Kaiser sent for Haase, who put on his dress coat with all the decorations given to him by various States and Bodies. The Emperor noticed them and said:

“Why, Haase, what a lot of orders you have! “ To which the actor ventured to reply:

“Your Majesty, there is only one which could make me happy.”

“And what is that, Haase, what is that? “ “ One given at the hand of your Majesty! “ “ No! no! Haase,” he replied quickly, “ you must not think of that! That can never be! An actor can neither give nor receive a challenge!”

It really seemed as if the whole world rejoiced at the honour to Irving. The letters and telegrams kept coming literally in hundreds during the next two days, and cables constantly arrived from America, Australia, Canada, India, and from nearly all the nations in Europe. They were bewildering. Late in the afternoon of Saturday Irving sat at his desk in the Lyceum before piles of them opened by one of the clerks. Presently he turned to me with his hand to his head and said:

“I really can’t read any more of these at present. I must leave them to you, old chap. They make my head swim.” Of course he did in time read them all; and sent answers too. For three days several men were at work copying out the answers as he sorted them out into heaps, each heap having a similar wording. It was quite impossible to send a distinctly different answer to each — and it was not necessary.

The actual knighting took place at Windsor Castle on July 18. The account of it was told by Arthur Arnold, who was knighted in the same batch, and who came very soon after Irving. He said that the Queen, who usually did not make any remark to the recipient of the honour as she laid the sword on his shoulder, said on this occasion:

“I am very, very pleased.”

II

The corollary of the honour came the next day when on the Lyceum stage a presentation was made to Irving by his fellow-players. This was unique of its kind. It was an Address of Congratulation signed by every actor in the kingdom. The Address was read by Sir (then Mr.) Squire Bancroft. Irving was greatly touched by it; few things were so essentially dear to him as the approval of his fellows. The unanimity was in itself a wonder. The Address was in the shape of a volume and was contained in a beautiful casket of gold and crystal designed by Johnston Forbes-Robertson — a painter as well as a player.

Johnston Forbes-Robertson was a devoted friend of Henry Irving, and at his death he took a prominent part in securing that the dead player should be laid to rest in Westminster Abbey.

III

The idea of knighthood for Irving was not new in that year, 1895. I mention this now because after his death a statement was made that he had by a lecture at the Royal Institution compelled the Government to give him knighthood. The statement was, of course, more than ridiculous. Here is what happened to my own knowledge:

In 1883, before Irving's visit to America, I was consulted, I understood on behalf of a very exalted person, by the late Sir James Mackenzie, as to whether the conferring of knighthood would be pleasing to Mr. Irving. It has never been usual to confer the honour on an unwilling recipient any more than it has been to allow any " forcing " to be effective. I asked for a day to find out. Then I conveyed the result of my veiled inquiry into the matter. At that time Irving thought it was better that an actor, whilst actively pursuing his calling, should not be so singled out from his fellows. On my showing the matter was not proceeded with at that time. From the very beginning of his management of the Lyceum he had been scrupulously particular that all the names given on the cast of the play should be printed in the same type. That rule was never altered even after his knighthood. But as he was no longer " Mr." and would not be called by his title he thenceforth appeared as " Henry Irving." Advertisement was, of course, different as to type, but he did not use the title.

IV

But in the twelve years that had elapsed since 1883 many things had changed. Other Arts had benefited by the large measures of official recognition extended to them, and the very fact of the art of Acting not having any official recognition was being used as an argument that it was not an art at all. Indeed his lecture at the Royal Institution, whilst it was in no way intended to " force " recognition or had no power of so doing, was taken as a manifest proof that the conferring of the honour would be regarded in a favourable light. Thus it was that in 1895 no "judicious " opinion was asked; none was necessary. The Prime Minister was assured that there could not be any contretemps, and even the Prince of Wales felt secure in his most gracious letter of congratulation.

I feel it too bad that one who in his days tried to live up to the ideal of discretion, and has regarded reticence as a duty rather than a motive, should have to speak openly, even after a lapse of years, on so private a matter, and I can only trust that I may be forgiven should any one with the power of forgiveness see the need of it. But such statements as those to which I have alluded are calculated to destroy all the claim of gracious courtesy — of the spontaneous kindness from which high favour springs; and it is, I think, better that I should be deemed to err than that such a misconception should be allowed to pass.

V

The King was always a most gracious and generous friend to Irving. Throughout the whole management of the Lyceum and to the time of Irving's death, King Edward, both as Prince and King, extended to him the largest measure of his approval. He gave him a position by his very courtesy and by the hospitalities which he graciously gave and accepted. When players dined with him the post of honour on his right hand was always given to Irving. He showed his own immediate surroundings in private as well as the world in public that he respected Irving as well as liked and admired him. He showed that he considered the Player in his own way to have brought some measure of honour to the great nation that he rules and whose countless hearts he sways.

He often honoured the player by being his guest in the theatre. At the marriage of the present Prince of Wales he was given a place in St. James's Palace; at the Queen's funeral he was bidden to a seat in St. George's Chapel at Windsor. At the King's coronation he was amongst the guests invited to Westminster Abbey.

And, whether as Prince or King, his Most Gracious Majesty

Edward VII. R. et I. had no more loyal, no more respectful, no more believing, no more loving subject than Henry Irving.

CHAPTER LXX. HENRY IRVING AND UNIVERSITIES

Dublin — Cambridge — Glasgow — Oxford — Manchester-Harvard — Columbia — Chicago — Princeton — Learned Bodies and Institutions

I

DUBLIN

THE first University to recognise Irving's great position was that of Dublin. In 1876 it gave him an informal Address. In 1892 it conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Literature—" Litt.D." As this was the first occasion on which a University degree was given Honoris Causa to an actor, qua actor, it may be allowable to say something of it.

It had for a long time been the intention of the Senate to confer on him a suitable degree. The occasion came in the celebration of the Tercentenary of the University, which was founded by Queen Elizabeth.

In order to be present Irving had to go out of the bill at the Lyceum, where we were then playing Henry VIII. He and I travelled to Dublin by the mail of Tuesday, 5th July. We had heard that the Dublin folk and the Irish generally were very pleased that he was to receive the honour, but the first evidence we saw of it was the attitude of the chief steward on the mail boat. He could not make enough of Irving, and in his excitement confused his honours and invented new ones. He was at a loss what to call him. He tried " Docthor," but it did not seem to satisfy him. Then he tried " Sir Henry " — this was three years before he was knighted; but this also seemed inadequate. Then he tried " Docthor Sir Henry "; this seemed to meet his ideas and to it he stuck.

The function of the conferring of degrees was a most interesting one, the mere pageant of it was fine. There were representatives of nearly all the Universities of the world, each in its proper robes. As Irving passed to his place in the Examination Hall he was loudly cheered. I was, of course, not close to him; I sat with the Senate, of which I am a member. He looked noble and distinguished, and the robes seemed to suit him. His height and bearing and lean figure carried off the peculiarly strong mass of colour. The robes of the Dublin Doctor of Letters are scarlet robes with broad facing of deep blue, and scarlet hood with blue lining. The cap is the usual Academic “ mortarboard “ with long tassel. When Irving was present at the formal opening of the Royal College of Music, where all who were entitled to do so wore Academic dress, his robes stood out in startling prominence.

Of course, each recipient of a degree received an ovation, but there was none so marked as that to Irving. He went up with the President of the Royal Academy, Sir Frederick (afterwards Lord) Leighton and Mr. (now Sir) Lawrence Alma-Tadema, R.A., these three being bracketed in the agenda of the function. When the conferring of degrees was over and the assembly in the Examination Hall poured out into the quadrangle, Irving was seized by a great body of some hundreds of students and carried to the steps of the dining-hall opposite, where he was compelled to make a speech.

At the banquet that night there was something of a faux pas, which was later much commented on. The whole toast list was as follows:

I. The Queen.

II. The Prince of Wales.

III. The Universities.

IV. Trinity College, Dublin.

V. Science, Literature and Art.

The last toast was proposed by the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava, and was responded to for Science by Lord Kelvin; for Literature by the Bishop of Derry; and for Art by Sir Frederick Leighton. The latter was, of course, quite correct, for the President of the Royal Academy is naturally the official mouthpiece for the voice of Art in this country. The mistake was that, in speaking for Art, Sir Frederick limited himself to Painting. He spoke in reality for himself and Alma-Tadema, but ignored completely the sister Art of Acting, the chief exponent of which was a fellow-recipient of the honour which he himself had received that day and who was present as a guest at the banquet. The comments of the press on the omission were marked, and the authorities of the University did not like the mistake. Leighton evidently heard some comment on it, for a few days afterwards he wrote to Irving to explain that he did not think he was intended to reply, except for his own Art.

It was this circumstance that made up Irving's mind to put forward on some suitable occasion the claims of his own Art to a place in the general category. The opportunity came a little more than two years afterwards at the Royal Institution. On that occasion he selected for his subject, " Acting: an Art " — the truth of which he proved logically and conclusively. I mention the circumstance here as his silence has been misconstrued. I have since his death seen it stated that he gave the lecture for the purpose of forcing the Crown to give him a knighthood — a statement silly beyond belief.

II

CAMBRIDGE

The second University to honour the Player was Cambridge. The occasion was this:

He was asked by the Vice-Chancellor, Mr. Hill, to give the " Rede " Lecture for 1898. This request is, from the antiquity and record of the function, in itself an honour.

The Rede Lecture was delivered at noon in the Senate-House of the University on Wednesday, 15th June 1898, for the night of which day he had closed the Lyceum. Irving had chosen as his subject, " The Theatre in its relation to the State." Throughout his life he always selected some subject connected with his work. His art with him was the Alpha and Omega of his endeavour. In this case he showed that, though some might regard the theatre as a mere pleasure-house, it had in truth a much more important use as a place of education.

"I claim for the theatre that it may be, and is, a potent means of teaching great truths and furthering the spread of education of the higher kind — the knowledge of the scope and working of human character."

The lecture was beautifully and earnestly delivered and was received with very great enthusiasm. Very picturesque the lecturer looked in the rostrum in his Dublin robes. These he exchanged later in the day, when he received his Cambridge degree, D.Litt. This dress, all scarlet and red with velvet hat, looked even more picturesque than that of Dublin University.

That was an exhausting day. A journey from St. Pancras at 8.15 A.M. A visit to the Vice-Chancellor at Downing Lodge, Cambridge. The Public Lecture. Luncheon with the Vice-Chancellor in Downing Hall, with speech. The Conferring of Degree. A Garden Party at

King’s College. A Dinner Party in Hall given by the Master and Fellows of Trinity College to the Recipients of degrees. A Reception in the house of the Master of Trinity. And finishing up with a quiet smoke among a few friends at the rooms of Dr. Jackson.

The next morning there was a delightful breakfast in the house of Frederick Myers — Mrs. Myers, formerly Miss Tennant, was an old friend of Irving. Lord Dufferin was the youngest of the party, despite his seventy-two years. I think the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava had the most winning manner of any man I ever met. There was a natural sweetness of the heart and an infinite humour from the head whose combination was simply irresistible. His humour was of enormous and wide-embracing range, and touched with illumination whatever subject he talked of. He and Irving had much to say to each other. The rest who were present wished to hear them both; and so there was silence when either spoke. Irving seemed quite charmed with Lord Dufferin and gave way to him altogether. The picture rises before me of the scene in the study of Frederick Myers after breakfast, well shown by the wide window opening out on the beautiful garden behind the house. Seated on the high fender with padded top, with his back to the fireplace, sat Lord Dufferin, and round him in a close circle — the young girls being the closest and looking with admiring eyes — the whole of the rest of the party. His clear, sweet, exquisitely-modulated voice seemed to suit the sunshine and the universal brightness of the place. Lord Dufferin’s voice seemed to rise and fall, to quicken or come slowly by a sort of selective instinct. It struck me as being naturally one of the most expressive voices I had ever heard.

That night Irving played The Medicine Man at the Lyceum, and I thought I detected here and there a trace of the influence of Lord

Dufferin in the more winning passages of the play.

III

GLASGOW

Irving now held University degrees from Ireland and England. The Scottish degree came in another year. For a long time Professor Herbert Story, D.D., LL.D., the Professor of Ecclesiastical History of the University of Glasgow, had a very high opinion of Henry Irving and of the good work which he had done for education and for humanity. I remember well a talk which Dr. Story had with me in his study after I had lunched with him on 26th June 1896. Incidentally he mentioned that he thought his University should give Irving a degree. Two years after, 22nd October 1898, he told me that it was in contemplation to carry this out in the following year. In that year Professor Story was presented by the Queen to the Principal-ship of the University on the resignation of Dr. Caird from that high position. On the loth July 1899, the honour was actually completed when Irving was invested with his degree of LL.D.

That was, I think, the only honourable occasion of Irving's life since 1878 at which I was not present. But it was quite impossible; I was then in bed with a bad attack of pneumonia. I had been looking forward to the occasion, for Principal Story and his wife and daughters were friends of mine as well as of Irving. It was the only occasion at which in twenty-seven years I was not present when honour was done to him. I read, however, of the heartiness of his reception, both in the Bute Hall, where the degrees were conferred, and by the great mass of the students without. In his speech introducing him Professor Glaister said:-

“Sir Henry Irving’s name stands as a synonym for the best and highest in dramatic art.... He has acquired an unrivalled fame in this country and in America. His fidelity to the best traditions of the stage, and his exclusion from his repertory of all that is vulgar or prurient, have been recognised as influences which elevate and purify dramatic art, and which have made the Theatre a powerful agent in promoting the general taste and culture of the people. His consummate stage management, his constant interest in the cause of charity and in the progress of education, his high character, his writings upon and his supremacy in his own profession have been already acknowledged by many marks of royal, academic, and popular favour.... This University desires that you will confer upon him in this degree its mark of appreciation of his valuable services.”

In his reply, amongst other things Irving said:

“Nearly forty years ago I played in Glasgow. An ambitious lad I was then. Most young players have their heads in the clouds, but upon no cloud did my aspiring eye ever in its finest frenzy perceive the Senate of Glasgow University sitting for the purpose of crowning my career with academic honours. Had such a vision been vouchsafed to me I should have felt that my opportunities of scholarship in early life made a University degree an ironical chimera.... Standing up before you to-day I am most keenly conscious of the honour you have done to the art which has had the faithful service of my life.... To-day’s incidents, so far as they concern myself as a representative of the stage in your midst, are luminous with more liberal ideas; for this reason above all I am grateful to Professor Story for his eloquent acknowledgment that the drama and its interpreters have their share of the humanities which it is the aim of the highest culture to sustain.”

IV OXFORD

On Sunday, 7th March 1886, Irving and I went to Oxford to stay with W. L. Courtney, then a Don of New College. For some years the two men had been close friends and Courtney whenever he was in London, would come to supper in the Beefsteak Room. This Oxford visit was arranged for some time, for Courtney was anxious to have Irvine meet some of the Heads of Colleges. The dinner was naturally a formal one, for in Oxford a very strict order of procedure rules. The Vice-Chancellor of the University — Dr. Jowett, Master of Balliol College — was there; also the Master of University, the President of Magdalen, and the Warden of Merton, the last three with their wives. Professor Max Muller was also a guest, his wife and daughter completed the party of fourteen. Jowett was in great form that evening. He was always a good and original talker, but he seemed on that evening to be on his mettle. During dinner one of the ladies sounded to Irving the praises of the Ober-Ammergau play, its fine effects, its deep moral teaching, and so forth. Irving listened attentively, and presently said quietly:

"It is so good they ought to bring it to the Crystal Palace." The lady was quite shocked, and turning to the Vice-Chancellor said:

"Oh, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, do you hear what Mr. Irving says, ' That the Ober-Ammergau play should be brought to the Crystal Palace! ' " The pause round the table was marked. All wanted eagerly to hear what the Vice-Chancellor, who in those days ruled Oxford, would say to such a startling proposition. His answer startled them afresh when it came:

"Why not!"

The result of the rapprochement which Courtney had so kindly effected was that Irving was asked to give an Address at the

University. He, of course, assented to the honourable request, and the date was fixed for Saturday, 26th June. The subject which he chose for the discourse was, “ English Actors: their Characteristics and their Methods.”

Irving and I with a couple of friends left Paddington on that day at six o’clock. On arriving at Oxford he and I went at once with W. L. Courtney, who had met us at the station, to the New Examination Hall, where the Address was to be given. Irving always liked to see beforehand the place in which he was to act or to speak; a very valuable precaution, for experience enabled him when he knew something of the dimensions and conditions of the place to pitch his voice from the very start in the proper key. From there we drove to Balliol, where we were staying with the Master. At half-past nine o’clock we went to the hall with the Master. In the party were the Earl and Countess of Dalhousie and the Bishop of Ripon and Mrs. Boyd-Carpenter, who with others were guests at his house. The great hall was crowded to suffocation with an immense audience, and the reception was warm in the extreme. Had I not known it before I could have told that the undergraduate lungs were in excellent condition. The discourse was received with rapt attention pointed with applause; and the conclusion was followed by a salvo of cheers. Then came the presentation of an Address, made by the Vice-Chancellor in a delightful, carefully worded speech. Amongst other things Dr. Jowett said:

“I express... our admiration of him for the great services which he has rendered to the world and to society by improving and elevating the stage.... The life of the great actor is not so bright and pleasant as some of us imagine.... He has his times of depression too, and more than ordinary share of the troubles of human life. There is the fierce light of criticism which is always beating upon him; he has to be above his audience, yet he must also feel with them."

Then after explaining the views of Plato on whose work he was so supreme an authority, regarding the rhapsodist, and of Socrates on the same subject, he went on, following up the views of the latter with regard to the good company he kept:

"And so of a great English actor we too might say that he lives in the best society, the society of Shakespeare and Goethe, and is a far better interpreter of them than a thousand commentators, for he thinks and feels with them and studies them not out of a book only; they are his personal friends, and his highest ambition is to render back to the world as a living fire the thoughts which they long ago conceived. For things which we hear with our ears:and see with our eyes make a far deeper impression on us than what we read. And the drama is the only form of literature which is not dead, but alive, and is always being brought to life again and again by the genius of the actor.... The indirect influence of the theatre is very great, and tends to permeate all classes of society, so that the condition of the stage is not a bad index or test of a nation's character. We in England are in part what we have been made by the plays of Shakespeare. Our literature, our manners, our religion, our taste have to a very great extent been affected by them. And those who, regardless of their own pecuniary loss or gain, have brought back Shakespeare to the English stage, who have restored his plays to their original form, who have quickened in the English people the love of his writings and the feelings of his greatness may be truly considered national benefactors."

Surely a noble tribute this from a man of such personal and official distinction to the worth of the drama, the stage, and the great actor to whom his praise was given.

That night we supped with Courtney in the Common Room of New College. Alfred Austin, afterwards the Poet Laureate, was amongst those present. He and Irving had much conversation about a play, Savonarola, which the former had written some time before.

The next day, Commemoration Sunday, we all attended with the Vice-Chancellor at St. Mary’s Church, where the Bishop of Ripon preached a remarkable sermon on the theme of Moses and the Burning Bush, which he applied with extraordinary dexterity to the political position.

The dinner party that night at the Vice-Chancellor’s was a large one, and its arrangement the supreme of topsy-turveydom with regard to precedence. As the chief guest had no official rank in a community where all was governed by hard-and-fast rules of procedure, all law of precedence was foregone. The only bishop of the party was assigned to the woman in the room of no official status. The only royal guest of the party, a grandson of the Queen, was not given a lady at all. And so throughout. Irving sat next to Lady Dalhousie, then in the full tide of her magnificent beauty. I shall never forget the appearance which those two presented. She in a dress of rich silk of the colour then in vogue which was known as sang-de-bœuf; this with splendid old Point de Venise made a fitting shrine for so much loveliness. He so handsome and so dignified looking, with grave, intellectual, refined features and mobile grace of expression. That dinner was in every way delightful; after it we all went over to a concert in the hall. The Vice-Chancellor had originated Sunday night concerts, which were immensely popular.

Breakfast next morning was another pleasant function, at which all the house-party were present. The “ Master,” as Dr. Jowett was called, was in great form. I remember his quoting a remark of Tennyson’s:-

“I would rather get six months than put two S’S together in verse!”

Irving and I, and my wife, who had been staying with the Courtneys for Commemoration, and who had with them attended all the functions of the Vice-Chancellor, went up to town with the Dalhousies. We little thought that we should never see either of them again. About a year afterwards she died of fever, and he who loved her to distraction could not bear his great loss and shot himself.

V

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

In 1894 Manchester had no University exclusively its own. Its College, Owens College, was chartered by the Queen in 188o and it was afterwards grouped with the Colleges of Liverpool and Leeds in the Victoria University. It was not till 1904 that it became a University by itself.

Before the time of visiting Manchester, on his tour of 1894, Irving was asked to give a lecture to the Owens College Literary Society. To this he acceded, and chose as his subject “ The Character of Macbeth.”

His reason for the choice was that he had wished to make, under important conditions, a reply to some of the criticisms with which he had been assailed on his re-production of Shakespeare’s play in 1888, but a suitable opportunity had not up to now appeared. Some of these criticisms had been ridiculous, some puerile, some even infantile. I remember Irving telling me that one ingenuous gentleman had gone so far as to suggest that the Messenger who in Scene 5, Act I. announces to Lady Macbeth the coming of the King, should have a bad cold, his contention having been that Lady Macbeth says in her soliloquy:

“The raven himself is hoarse That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan Under my battlements.”

The delay in his answer to the various feeble or foolish things spoken of his work did not detract from its power. His reasoning on the character from the text and from a study of the authorities which Shakespeare had evidently had before him when he wrote, was absolutely masterly. I venture to say that no student of the play can form any kind of correct estimate of Macbeth’s character without reading it.

The lecture was given on the afternoon of Tuesday, iith December, in the Chemical Theatre, the largest hall then appertaining to the College and holding some eight hundred persons. That the student element manifested itself in no uncertain way is shown by the note in my diary:

“H. I. got enormous reception. Cheers were startling! On leaving, students wanted to take out horses and draw carriage, but wiser counsels prevailed.”

Ellen Terry and Genevieve Ward were both of our little party on the occasion.

VI

HARVARD I

Irving gave addresses at Harvard on two separate occasions.

The first was on 3oth March 1885, on which occasion he took as his subject " The Art of Acting."

We were then playing in New York, but as Irving had promised to come to Boston for the occasion, we left on Sunday afternoon. Several friends came with us, amongst whom were William Winter, of the New York Tribune, and Mr. Dorsheimer, ex-Governor of New York State. The train, on which we had a special carriage, was met at Worcester by a deputation of Harvard students, who travelled back with us to Boston. The address was given on the Monday evening, 3oth, in the Sanders Theatre, a beautifully proportioned hall of octagon shape, which though looking not large yet held on that occasion over two thousand people. The crowd was so great at the doors both inside and outside that when we arrived at half-past seven we could not get in. Finally we had to be taken in through the trap-door to the coal cellar, from which by devious ways we were escorted to the platform. The Address went well. My note says:

"Went well. H. I. looked very distinguished."

That was in reality a mild putting of the fact. Distinguished was hardly an adequate adjective. Even from that sea of fine intellectual heads his noble face shone out like a star.

We were all to sup with the President of the College, Mr. Elliot; but when the time of departure came we could not find Winter. We searched for him high and low, but without avail. As a large party was waiting at the President's house we had to make up our minds to go without him. I had, however, one more last look and found him.. He was in the coal cellar, which was about the only quiet place in the building. He sat on a heap of coal; on the ground beside him was a lighted candle stuck in the neck of a bottle which he had somehow requisitioned. When I came upon him he was writing furiously — if so rude a word may be applied to an art so gentle. He glanced up when I spoke with an appealing look and, with raised hand, said with passionate entreaty:

“Bram, for God’s sake! “ — I understood, and left him, having secured from a local fireman the promise of unfaltering obedience to my instructions to wait and take him to the carriage which we left for him. I also left a telegraph messenger on guard, for I saw that he was writing on telegraph “ flimsy.”

Any one who will take the trouble to look up the file of the New York Tribune of the following day — March 31, 1885 — will read as fine a piece of descriptive criticism as can well be. I hope that such an one when he finishes the article will spare time for a glance, from the eye of imagination, at the silent figure phrasing it in the gloom of the coal cellar.

ii

Irving’s second Address at Harvard was nine years later. On that occasion his subject was: “ The Value of Individuality,” and the Address was given in the afternoon, the place being the same, the Sanders Theatre. There was again a great audience and a repetition of the old enthusiasm.

That night the Tremont Theatre in Boston, where we were playing, saw an occasion unique to the place, though not to the actor. The University had proclaimed a “ Harvard Night,” and the house was packed with College men, from President to jib. At the end of the performance — Nance Old-field and The Bells — the students presented to Irving a gold medal commemorative of the occasion.

I may perhaps, before leaving the subject of Harvard University, mention a somewhat startling circumstance. It had become a custom during our visit to Boston for a lot of Harvard students to act as " supers " in our plays. There seemed to be a brisk demand for opportunities and the local super master grew rich on options. When we played King Arthur in 1895 there were many of these gentlemen who wore armour — the beautiful armour designed by Burne-Jones. The biggest of the men available were chosen for this service, and there were certainly some splendidly stalwart young men amongst them. A few of them got " skylarking " amongst themselves on the stage before the curtain went up. Sky-larking in full armour is a hazardous thing both to oneself and to others, and a blow struck in fun with the unaccustomed weight of plate armour behind it had an unexpected result, for the stricken man was knocked head over heels senseless just as Irving had come on to the stage to see that all was correct for the coming scene—" The Great Hall of Camelot." He reprimanded the super shortly and told him that if he undertook duties he should respect them, and himself, in performing them gravely. Imagine his surprise when in the morning he received a bellicose cartel from the offended young man challenging him to mortal combat. Irving, who took all things as they were meant, understood that the man was a gentleman who considered himself wronged and wrote him a pleasant letter in which he explained the necessity of taking gravely the work which others considered grave. The young man was a gentleman — in my intercourse with them I have always found Americans to be so — and wrote a handsome letter of apology for his misconduct on the stage and explained that he had had no intention of either breaking rules or hurting any one else.

And so on that occasion no blood was shed.

VII

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Owens College, Manchester, blossoming into Manchester University, had a parallel in the growth of Columbia University, New York. In 1895 when, at the request of its President, Seth Low, Irving delivered the address on " Macbeth," which he had delivered in Manchester, it was still merely a College though the matter of its coming development was then at hand. Before our next visit to America in 1899 the whole new University of Columbia had been built and equipped. On 14th November 1899 I was taken all over it by President Low, and was amazed to see what had been done within the four years. The great Library, which the President had himself built and presented, was a magnificent centre for so fine and thoughtfully-conceived a piece of work. Irving's address was given in the Library, the largest hall in the old building, which had been somewhat dismantled for the purpose. It held some fifteen hundred persons. The occasion was Irving's first experience of the New York College cry, which has a startling effect when enunciated in unison by a thousand lusty throats. When he entered the Library with the President, who took in Ellen Terry, the cheering began and soon formulated itself into this special concourse of sounds. At the close of the address, which went extremely well, the enthusiastic cheering was repeated. And again Ellen Terry had her special share of it.

VIII

CHICAGO UNIVERSITY

Irving addressed the University of Chicago twice.

The first was on 17th March 1896, when he repeated his lecture on " Macbeth." The second on April 25, 19oo, when he repeated the lecture which he had given in 1895 at the Royal Institution: " Acting: an Art." Both addresses were given in the Kent Hall which was on each occasion crowded to excess.

The University of Chicago might well be taken as an illustration of the rapid growth possible in America. In the fall of 1893 the ground on which it stands was a section of the World's Fair, what was called " The Midway Pleasaunce." In the spring of 1896, less than two years and a half, the University was built, organised and furnished with students to its full capacity.

IX

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

The last address which Irving gave in America was at Princeton University, where on March 19, 1902, he read a paper on the subject of " Shakespeare and Bacon," an eloquent and logical defence of Shakespeare against his detractors.

X

LEARNED BODIES AND INSTITUTIONS

The following is a list of various addresses given by Irving at Institutions and before learned Bodies other than Universities: —

"The Stage." Perry Bar Institute, near Birmingham, 6th March 1878.

"The Stage as it is." Philosophical Institute, Edinburgh, 8th November 1881.

“Shakespeare and Goethe.” Goethe Society, New York, 15th March 1888. (Given at Madison Square Theatre.)

“Hamlet.” Literary and Scientific Institute, Wolverhampton, 19th February 189o. (This was given at the Agricultural Hall.)

“The Art of Acting.” Philosophical Institute, Edinburgh, 9th November 1891. (This was given in the Music Hall)

“Shakespeare as a Playwright.” Twentieth Century Club, Chicago, 2nd November 1893. (Given in the private theatre in the house of Mr. George Pullman.)

“Municipal Theatres.” Literary Institute, Walsall, 26th September, 1894. (Given in the Grand Theatre.)

“Acting: an Art.” Royal Institution, London, ist February 1895.

“Macbeth.” Contemporary Club, Philadelphia, 17th April 1896 (given at the New Art Gallery). Also at the Catholic Social Union, London, 17th May 1898 (given at the house of Cardinal Vaughan).

“Actors and Acting.” Liberal Club, Buffalo, 4th February 1902.

CHAPTER LXXI. ADVENTURES

Over a mine-bed — Fires: Edinburgh Hotel; Alhambra, London; Star Theatre, New York; Lyceum —— How theatre fires are put out — Union Square Theatre, New York" Fussy" safe — Floods — Bayou Pierre — How to get supper — On the Pan Handle — Train Accidents: Explosions; " Frosted" wheel; A lost driver — Storms at sea — A reason for laughter — Falling scenery — No fear of death — Master of himself

I

OVER A MINE BED

ON gth August 188o Irving and I went for a short holiday together. The heat in London was very great. We began at Southsea, where we stopped at the Pier Hotel; that evening after dinner in the afternoon we got a lug-sail boat and went over to Ryde, returning by moonlight. The next day we walked on the Esplanade. Southsea was very full, and along the sea front a vast crowd of people moved in endless procession. Every one seemed to know my companion, and he became surrounded with a crowd which, though the composing individuals changed, never left him. At last he got tired of shaking hands and answering endless commonplace questions. In a momentary pause he said to me:

"I can't stand any more of this. Let's get a boat and have a sail. We can get quiet that way anyhow!"

We went down on the beach and picked out a likely looking boat that was ready launched. The boatman was very deaf, but as he seemed also dumb we regarded him as a find. He hoisted his sail and we began to steal away from shore. Behind us was a lot of shouting, and many people ran down on the beach gesticulating and calling out. We could not distinguish what they said; but we were both so accustomed to hear people shouting at Irving that we took it that the present was but another instance of clamorous goodwill.

We had got away from shore about half a mile when suddenly there was a terrific sound close to us, and the boat was thrown about just as a rat is shaken by a dog. A column of water rose some thirty yards from us and for quite half a minute the sea round us seemed to boil. The old boatman seemed very much frightened and found his voice to the extent of ejaculations of a prayerful kind, mingled with blasphemy. There seemed some excuse for him, for it was certainly very terrifying. To us, who did not understand, it seemed like an earthquake, or a volcanic eruption of some kind. Irving, however, was quite calm; he did not seem put out at all. The only motion he made was to put on his pince-nez which had been shaken off. I am not as a rule very timorous myself.

.As the sea began to resume its normal calm it presented a strange appearance. All around us were strewn floating fish, mostly belly up, the white catching the eye everywhere. There were scores — hundreds of them, all seemingly dead. We lifted a lot of them into the boat. A few did not move at all, but after a while most of them began to wriggle and flop about. These had only been stunned.

We had after the first surprise taken it for granted that the shock had been from some sub-marine explosion; but we were content to await developments. When the boatman began to get over his agitation he enlightened us:

"'Tis they torpedoes; they've fired 'em by wire from Fort Monckton. 'Tis silly I am not to have thought on 'em an' kept out of the way! " Then he explained that the event of the day was to be an attack on Fort Monckton — the low-lying fort which guards the mouth of the harbour of Portsmouth — by the Glation, then the most up-to-date of our scientifically equipped ships. We appeared to have come right over the mine-bed. The prudent fisherman had by this time put his boat’s head against such wind as there was and began to gather up the unforeseen harvest of the sea. He was intent on this, though his hands shook and he kept looking around him apprehensively. We drifted with the tide. Presently a little distance in front of us another mine went off, and our friend got agitated afresh. He implored us to come away, and began to slack the sheet which he had drawn tight. Irving had lit a cigar and was calmly smoking. He had evidently taken a common-sense view of the situation.

“Why should we come away? We are, I take it, in about as safe a place as can be. The mines here have been fired and we don’t know where the others are. If we go on, no matter in what direction, we shall probably come across another explosion. Let us stay where we are — and enjoy ourselves! “ And stay we did and enjoyed — to a certain extent — the thunder of the cannon which later on, when the attack developed, rolled over the water and was brought to our ears, we being so close to the surface, in a way to make us feel as if each fresh explosion was close at hand.

I think, however, that we both enjoyed the attack more that night when the actual sham battle was fought. In those days search-lights were new and rare. Both the Glatton and Fort Monckton were well equipped with them, and during the attack the whole sea and sky and shore were perpetually swept with the powerful rays. It was in its way a noble fight, and as then most people were ignorant of the practical working of the new scientific appliances of war, it was instructive as well as fascinating. We, who had been out in the middle of it during the day, could perhaps appreciate its possibilities better than ordinary civil folk unused to the forces and horrors of war!

II

FIRES a The first fire of which Irving and I were spectators together was in November 1881. We were playing at Edinburgh and stayed in the old Edinburgh Hotel opposite the Scott Memorial. The house was pulled down long since. The hotel was made up of several houses thrown into one, and was of the ramshackle order. It would have been easily set on fire; and had it got well alight nothing could have saved it.

Loveday and I supped with Irving in his sitting-room on the second storey, and after supper were enjoying our smoke. It was then late for Edinburgh, nearly one o'clock. As we sat we heard a queer kind of roaring and crackling sound in the passage outside.

"That sounds like a fire! " I said, and ran out to see if I could help. In the passage a curious scene presented itself. A sort of housemaid's closet in the back wall was well alight; the flames were roaring. The night porter, when collecting the boots, had seen it and was now trying to put it out. He was in a really dangerous position, and was behaving very bravely. I ran up to my room just overhead and brought down two great jugs of water which were on my wash-hand stand. When I got down a tall man was standing near the closet and talking very angrily to the porter. He was attired in a long white night shirt under which his bare feet and legs displayed themselves. He was not making the least effort to help, but kept on abusing the man who was working. Considering that the chances were that in a few minutes the whole hotel would be on fire, with what awful result none could foresee, it was strange conduct. In the midst of the hurry, for by this time we were all doing what we could, I had to laugh at the absurd situation and his out-of-place blaming:

“This is a pretty nice sort of thing for a gentleman staying in your damned hotel to have to endure! Do you always do this sort of thing, sir? Nice thing indeed! A gentleman to be waked up out of his bed by your infernal stupidity in setting the house on fire. Are we all to be burned in our beds? Nice sort of conduct indeed! Edinburgh should be ashamed of itself! “ Irving and Loveday and I were all hard at work but were doing little good. The porter who knew the place was trying to get at the water tap within. He succeeded at last, and when a jet of water could be used in that narrow space the fire was soon held in check. We stood for a while to admire the angry stranger, still “jawing “ away at the porter, who took not the least notice of him. By this time the other guests were alarmed and came running out of their rooms in various stages of night gear and partial dressing, till the passage was thronged with frightened women and men full of inquiries.

When we went back to the room to finish our smoke we left them all there. The unclad stranger was in the midst, still in a sublime state of indifference to decorum, haranguing — at what or whom he did not seem to know, for the porter had gone. In the room Irving said, as he cut the end of a fresh cigar:

“I wish I had that fellow’s self-conceit — or even a bit of it. With it I could do anything!” b The next fire we were at was on 6th December 1882. We had supped together in the Lyceum after the play and were leaving tolerably early. We were going out by the private door in Burleigh Street, when there came a sudden red glare in front of us a little to the right, or north, just as we were crossing the side-walk to the cab. In those days he always used a four-wheeler; he did not have a brougham till twelve or thirteen years later — and then it was a hired one.

“Hullo! “ said Irving, “ there is a fire! It seems pretty close too. I suppose you’re off! “ It was a standing joke with him against me that whenever there was a fire within range I was off to it hot-foot. I ran back to my office to put on a heavier pair of shoes — attending a fire is wet work and evening shoes are not fit for it. I was just putting them on when a vehicle stopped hurriedly at the door and there was a loud rapping. I ran out — Irving was back.

“Come quick,” he said, “ don’t wait to change. It’s the Alhambra.” We jumped into the cab and the man drove for all he was worth. We got into Leicester Square just as the police were clearing the place and forming a cordon. All the Bow Street men knew us both and they hurried us into a doorway just where the Empire Music Hall is now. From there we had a splendid view, the place all to ourselves.

The fire had made quick headway and as we got to our place the whole theatre seemed alight within, and the flames burst out of the windows. The Fire Brigade got to work quick; but when a building of that size and with so large an interior gets alight there is no checking it. The only thing that can be done with any prospect of success is to try to prevent it spreading. Within a time which seemed incredibly short the roof began to send up sparks and flames, and then all at once it seemed to be lifted and to send up a fiery column of flames and sparks and smoke and burning ashes, which a few seconds later began to fall round us like rain. There was a terrific crash, and more leaping and towering flames. And then the roof fell in.

It was a magnificent, if costly, sight. Fortunately no one was killed or even injured. One of the firemen had his wife and baby at the top of the theatre, I was told; and that it was the delay in saving them that made the warning to the Brigade later than it might have been.

After the fall of the roof, the rest was detail. We waited an hour or so and then came away.

At the next fire we were not together. Irving was on the stage of the Star Theatre, New York, and I happened to be standing at the back of the parquet near the. aisle which in all American theatres runs straight back from the orchestra rail. The occasion was the first night of Irving's playing Hamlet in New York, and the house was crowded to excess in every part. The play went well; incidentally I may say that it was an enormous success. All went well till the " play scene." The light for the mimic stage was supposed to be given from the attendants ranged on each side carrying torches. These torches were of spirit, as such give leaping flames which are picturesque and appear to give good light, though in truth their illuminating quality is small. Early in the scene one of these torches got overheated, and the flaming spirit running over set fire to one of the stage draperies. The super-master, Marion, who was " on " in the scene, at once ran over and tore down the curtain and tramped it out.

Through it all Irving never hesitated or faltered for an instant. He went on with his speech; no one could take it from movement, expression or intonation that there was any cause for concern.

Still a fire in a theatre has very dreadful possibilities; and at the first sign of flame a number of people rose hurriedly in their seats as if preparatory to rushing out. There was all over the house a quick, quiet whisper:

"Sit down! " As if in obedience, the standers sat.

There was but one exception. A lanky, tallow-faced, herring-shouldered, young man, with fear in his white face, dashed up the aisle. It is such persons who cause death in such circumstances. There is a moment when panic can be averted; but once it starts nothing can stop it. The idea of “Sauve qui peut “ comes from the most selfish as well as the most weak of human instincts. I feared that this man might cause a panic, and as he dashed up I stepped out and caught him by the throat and hurled him back on the ground. At such a time one must not think of consequences, except one, which is to prevent a holocaust. The rude, elementary method was effective. No one else stirred. I caught the fallen man and dragged him to his feet.

“Go back to your seat, sir! “ I said sternly. “ It is cowards like you who cause death to helpless women! “ He was so stunned or frightened that he did not make the least remonstrance, but went sheepishly back to his seat.

On the way he had to pass a man who stood a little in front of me — a tall, powerful, black-bearded, masterful-looking man. As the other was passing he put out his hand, and with finger and thumb caught the lappet of the young man’s coat and drew him close. Then he said in a low voice, full of personal indignation as at a wrong to himself:

“Do you know that you rushed past me like a flash of lightning! “ Then he suddenly released him and turned his eyes to the stage. I think it was the most contemptuous expression I ever saw. The rest of those present moved no more. It left me with a very firm impression that no one need fear for the courage and self-restraint of an American audience. d Two years after we had at the Lyceum a somewhat similar experience of a stage fire. This was during Faust. A curtain caught fire, and was promptly put out by the nearest person. Another such fire occurred in 1891 in The Corsican Brothers.

Stage fires generally have very small beginnings, and if they are taken in time are hardly dangerous. At a Theatres Parliamentary Commission the Hon. Sir Spencer Ponsonby-Fane, then and for a great number of years the permanent official in the Lord Chamberlain's department, to whom was entrusted the supervision of London theatres, was asked by a Committee man:

"How are fires in theatres usually put out? " His answer was sufficiently explanatory:

"With the carpenter's cap! " 'When a flame is small it can be smothered in an instant.

It is a reassuring fact that during the last century hardly a life was lost by fire in a London theatre. Indeed there were even very few injuries. I remember one exception which occurred at a panic — arising, as it turned out, without cause — at the Grecian Theatre some twenty years ago. On this occasion the audience did not lose their heads, but they began to move out quickly. There was one old gentleman who would not join in the movement. He said he had always heard that in case of a fire in the theatre the best thing any one of the audience could do was to remain quietly in his seat, and that he did not intend to stir. As it turned out he was the only person injured. He was sitting at the end of a row in the Pit close to the doorway; and as he would not stir, the rest of the audience simply walked over him!

Coolness and theory are most excellent qualities in life. But even they can be exaggerated or out of place! e There was one other fire which had a bearing on Irving's interests though he was not in it or near it. This was the burning of the Union Square Theatre, New York, on the 28th February 1888. This theatre backed on to the side of the Star Theatre where we were playing. The Morton House beside it, at the corner of Broadway and Union Square, caught fire. The theatre was quite burned out. When I saw it, which was quite by chance, it was well alight. I had been paying visits with my wife, and was in orthodox frock coat and silk hat. There was a great crowd held back by the cordon of police. I managed to pass the guard, as I was concerned in the Star Theatre, and inside saw the Fire Chief of that section — the Thirteenth Street. He and I had become great friends in the process of years. The American firemen are born to their work and they are all splendid fellows. If they like you they drop the “ Mr.” at once; and when they call you by your Christian name that is, in their own way, the highest honour they can pay you. I was “ Bram “ to Chief Bresnin and his men. He said to me:

“Would you like to come into the theatre? It may be of use to you some day to know what a theatre is like inside when it is burning! “ I acquiesced eagerly, and we hurried to the stage entrance. A policeman stood there, and when I went to pass in barred the way. The Fire Chief was surprised. “ He is with me! “ he said. The other answered gruffly:

“You can go in, of course; but I won’t let him! It’s murder to let him go in there! “ The chief was speechless with indignation. From his point of view it was a gross affront to question any direction of his. By New York rules the Fire Chief takes absolute command, and the police have to obey his orders. Bresnin threw back the lappel of his uniform coat and showed his badge as Fire Chief.

“Do you see that? “ he asked. The other answered surlily: “I see it!”

“Then if you say one word — even to apologise for your insolence — I shall have you broke! Stand back! Come on, Bram!”

I wanted to go on. But even if I had wished to hang back, I could not do so then. In we went.

The place was a veritable hell. It seemed to be alight in every part; the roaring of the flames was terrific. The streams of water from some twenty fire-engines seemed to be having no effect at all, they did not make even steam, but seemed to simply dry up. The heat was of course very great, but as the draught was coming behind us we did not feel it much. It seemed to be all overhead. I was made aware of it by my silk hat collapsing over my eyes, like a big tam-o'-shanter. The whole place seemed moving and tumbling about; great beams were falling, and brick work rattled down like gigantic hail. We stood on the stage. Here my own special knowledge of the.safest place supplemented the fireman's general experience. It was by no means safe. Within a minute a huge beam, all ablaze, came thundering down not far from us and drove end on right through the stage like a bullet through a sheet of paper. We kept an eye on the door close to us, and when things got perilous we came away.

I went back to the Brunswick Hotel where Irving and I were both staying. I sent for his man, Walter, to tell him if the " Governor " had been alarmed he had better go into his room where he was having his regular afternoon nap and tell him that as yet the Star Theatre was all right, and would probably escape as the ruins of the other theatre were falling and the firemen would be able to deal with them. I had just come from it. He answered me:

"It's all right, sir! The Governor knows about the fire. Some one here went up and woke him and told him that the Star was on fire! So he sent for me."

"What did he say? " I asked. He grinned as he replied:

"He said: Is Fussy safe, Walter? ' So when I told him the dog had been with me all the time, he said All right! ' and went to sleep again!”

III

FLOODS a On Saturday night, 1st February 1896, we played in New Orleans, and as we were to play in Memphis on Monday, arranged that our “ special “ should leave as soon as possible after the play. We had all ready for a quick start, and so far as our part was concerned had loaded up and were ready to start at the time fixed, one o’clock. We did not start, however; something was wrong on the line. It was two o’clock when we heard that we should have to go by a different route, the Valley section, as there had been a “ wash out “ on the course destined for us. In New Orleans the heat had been intense, almost unendurable, and higher up the Mississippi valley there had been terrific rainstorms. It was three o’clock before we started. All went well till the forenoon of next day when we came to a creek called Bayou Pierre. This was a wide valley seemingly miles across — it was really between one and two miles. Here the line was carried on a long tressel bridge. But the flood was out and the whole great valley was a turgid river whose yellow, muddy water rushing past swirled in places like little whirlpools. It had risen some four feet over the top of the bridge, so that no one could say whether the track remained or had been swept away. There was a short and hurried conference between our train master and the local engineer and they determined to “ take the chances.” And so we started.

It was necessary to go very slowly, for in that alluvial soil the running water weakens any support; the motion and vibration of a heavy train might shake down the structure. Moreover, the water level was almost up to the level of the floor of the carriages. Any wave, however little, might drown out the fires. It was a most remarkable journey; the whole broad surface of the stream was starred with wreckage of all sorts; hayricks, logs, fences, trees with parts of the roots sticking up in the air; now and again the roof of a barn or wooden shanty of some kind. Several times the floating masses carried snakes!

Our own little group — Irving, Ellen Terry, Love-day and myself — took the experience calmly. Indeed we enjoyed its novelty. Of course things might have turned out very badly. It was on the cards that any moment we might find that the bridge had been swept away — there could be no possible indication to warn us; or the passage of our long train might cause a collapse. In either case our engine would dive head foremost and the shock of its blowing up would throw the rest of the train into the flooded bayou. Irving sat quietly smoking all the time and looking out of the windows on either side as some interesting matter " swam into his ken.".

In the other cars the same calm did not reign. There were a good many of the company who were quite filled with fear. So fearful were they that, as I was told later, they got reckless and in their panic confessed their sins. I never heard the details of these confessions, and I did not want to. But from the light manner in which they were held by the more sturdy members I take it that either the calendar of their sins was of attenuated or mean proportions; or else that the expression of them was curtailed by a proper sense of prudence or decorum. Anyhow, we never heard of any serious breach or unhappiness resulting from them.

We crossed Bayou Pierre at last in safety, and kept on our way. Ours by the way was the last train that crossed the bayou till the flood was over. We heard next day that one section of the bridge close to the bank had gone down ten minutes after we had crossed. It had been an anxious time for the officials of the line. We could see them from both banks perpetually signalling to our driver, who was signalling in reply. It made the wide waste of water seem wider and more dangerous still. The only really bad result to us was that we arrived in Memphis too late to get anything to eat. In those days the rules governing hours in the SouthWestern Hotels were very fixed, especially on Sundays. Up to nine o'clock you could get what you wanted. But after nine the kitchen was closed and money would not induce them to open it. Irving and Ellen Terry had of course ordered each their own dinner, and these, cold, waited them in their rooms; but the rest of us were hungry and wanted food of some kind. So I tried strategy with the " boy " who attended me, a huge, burly nigger with a good-humoured face and a twelve-inch smile. I said:

"What is your name? " " George, sah! George Washington." " George! " I said, as I handed him half a dollar—" George, you are an uncommonly good-looking fellow!"

"Yah! Yah! Yah! " pealed George's homeric laughter. Then he said:

"What can I do for you, sah! " " George, your cook is a very stout lady, is she not?"

"Yes, sah, almighty stout, wide as a barrel. Yah! Yah! Yah!"

"Exactly, George. Now I want you to go right up to her, put your arms round her — tight, and give her a kiss — a big one!"

"'Fore Gad, sah, if I did, she'd open my head wid de cleaver!"

"Not so, George! Not with a good-looking fellow like you."

"An' what then, sah?"

"Then, George, you tell her that there is a stranger here who is perishing for some food. He is sorry to disturb so pretty a woman, who he is told is the belle of Memphis; but necessitas non habet leges. Explain that to her, won’t you, like a good fellow? Make me out tall and thin and aristocratic-looking, with a white thin face and a hectic spot on each cheek bone, a black, melting and yearning eye, and a large black moustache — don’t forget the moustache. Ask her if she will of her gracious kindness break the iron rule of discipline that governs the house, and send me some food, anything that is least troublesome. A slice of cold meat, some bread and a pitcher of milk, and if she has any cold vegetables of any sort, and the cruet, I can make a salad!”

George laughed wildly and hurried out. I could hear his cachinnation dying away down the long passage. Presently I heard it swelling up again as he drew near. The heavy footfall drew closer, and the door was kicked in after the manner of negro waiters — in hotels there is an iron or brass plate at the base of the dining-room door for the purpose. George Washington bore an enormous tray, resting on an open palm spread back over his shoulder. When he laid it down its weight made the table shake.

On it was food of all sorts enough for a dozen people — beef, ham, tongue, turkey, bread and butter, pies of several kinds, milk, a salad bowl, and a lot of different cold vegetables, and the cruet. Such of my companions who were staying at our hotel came to my room and shared the banquet.

That episode was worth a whole silver dollar to George. It was divided, I presume, with the adipose cook; for there was no external appearance of his head having been “ opened wid de cleaver.” For the remaining days of our stay he followed me when opportunity served like a shadow. A very substantial shadow; quite a Demogorgon of a shadow! b We had had a somewhat similar experience of a flood some years before, though of nothing like so dangerous a nature. This was on 3rd February 1884, on our journey from Cincinnati to Columbus. The thaw had come on suddenly on the southern watershed of the northern hills when the ground through a long rigorous winter was frozen to a depth of several feet. Of course, the water, unable to sink into the ground, ran into the streams, and the Ohio River was flooded. As we left we could see that it was up to the top of the levee. Later on it rose some forty feet higher. It was a record flood. We went by the Pan Handle route of the Pennsylvanian Railway. As we went, whole tracks of country were flooded; in places we ran where the roads were under water, and a mighty splash our engine sent ahead of her. We went very fast, " rushing " all the bridges, especially the small ones of which there were many. In a stopping time I had a chat with the driver — one whom the depot-master of Cincinnati had told me he had put on specially because he was a bold driver who did not mind taking a risk. I asked him why he went so fast over the bridges, as I had heard it was much safer to go slow.

"Not in a flood like this! " he answered. " You see, the water has been out some time and the brick work is all sapped and sodden with wet. Mayhap we may shake a bridge down now and then, but I like them to fall behind me, and not whilst we're crossing. The depot-master told me I was to get you folks in; and, by the Almighty, I mean to do it if I shake down all the bridges in the Pan Handle. Anyhow, this is the last train that will run over the section till the floods are over."

IV

TRAIN ACCIDENTS

At a rough computation the railroad journeys of Irving's tours ran over fifty thousand miles — more than twice round the Equator. The journeys were nearly always taken in special trains running at all sorts of hours, and almost invariably in the bad seasons of the year. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that we had a certain percentage of accidents. That some of these accidents did not entail loss of life is the source of wonder. Several times we have had the train on fire; once so badly that the danger was very great. It was only by the chance of it being discovered just as we were coming into a station that the whole train was not lost. As it was, the Insurance Company had to liquidate damages to our goods to the extent of L5oo.

Three times the bolt head of the engine has been blown out, once entailing a delay of six hours, until not only another engine but another driver who knew the road as well as the engine, could be found.

Once in February 1900 when on our way from Indianapolis to Louisville some accident or explosion took place which seemed to shatter the whole engine into scrap iron. But no one was hurt.

On 17th January 1904 we went from Pittsburg to Buffalo. The cold was intense. There were ten feet of snow lying on the hills, and down the serpentine valley our driving wheel got " frosted " and flew to pieces. Fortunately we were on a stretch of level ground. Down the valley are here and there the remains of train wrecks on the bank of the river. Oui engine was a very powerful one, a great Pennsylvanian fast hauler; the great wheel was so thick that I could not lift a seemingly small fragment of it from the ground.

The very next week, Sunday, 24th January, when going from Albany to Montreal, we met with another accident. I had been most careful about a good engine, and the agent of the New York Central had given us the spare engine used in case of need for the New York and Chicago “ Flyer.” The cold was again intense and the snow thicker than ever. Up high amongst the Andirondack Mountains, where the wind roared over hill and through valley, the snowdrifts piled up in places to great heights. That was an exceptionally severe winter and railroading was hard. We climbed all right to the top of a pass amongst the hills and were going along steadily when there was a sharp explosion. Then in a few seconds the train drew up with a jerk. Our saloon was at the end of the train, so it took me some little time to reach the engine, as I had gone outside instead of passing through the train. The road just there was running on an embankment, and the snow-plough had swept the track, only leaving the snow piled at the sides so that to pass the carriages was difficult leg-deep in the snow. On the sloping embankment the snow lay many feet deep; and as the whole place was intersected with storm rivulets there were great holes like caverns in the snowdrift. The other men had also tumbled out of their carriages in much concern. We came across the train crew working in frantic haste. They told us that both the driver and the fireman were missing, and they feared that they had been blown off into one of the watercourse cavities. In such case either or both might die before we could find them, for these cavities were secret — they were honeycombed out beneath the blanket of snow. Very shortly we found the fireman. He had been on the outside of the engine when the explosion had occurred and was blown into the snowdrift head down. He was nearly choked when he was taken out.

But there was no sign of the driver, and the search went on. Immediately after the accident the brakesman had run back on the track to flag “ Danger “ lest any other train should come down upon us. This is the imperative rule in such cases. When he had done this duty he was to run along the track to the last station we had passed about a mile back, and bring help.

I was back on the line about a quarter of a mile when an engine piled with men came up at a furious pace. As it drew near the men began to call.

“Has he been found? “ I shook my head.

Close to our train they stopped and the men leaping from the engine spread themselves along the slopes of the embankment beginning a systematic search. Presently one of the crew of our train came along leaping through the deep snow calling out that the driver was found and was on the engine. We rushed back and found him there smearing his burns, which were pretty bad, with oil. The explosion had set his clothes on fire, but he had not lost his head. He had waited to turn the steam off, and then had taken a header into the deep snow wherein he had rolled himself till he had put the fire out. When he had managed to crawl out of his burrow the others of the crew, seeing the engine empty, had gone back to make search for him. He, not knowing that he was missed, had climbed quietly back into his cab.

When Irving heard of the man’s gallantry in stopping whilst all on fire to turn off steam before thinking of himself he said it was a thing that should be rewarded in a marked way. He was quite willing to give the reward himself, but he thought that the company would like to, and ought to, join in it. So we got up a subscription which he headed. We handed to the injured men a little purse of sixty-one dollars. They declared that they would like to take their injuries over again any time for half the money or a quarter of the kindness.

The occasions when we were delayed by minor accidents to the train — hot-boxes, breaking steam-pipes, freezing steam brakes, snows-up, washes-out, broken bridges — were never ending. Many of them were not matters for much concern, but they were all causes of delay; and in touring, delay is often disastrous.

STORMS AT SEA a Irving was across the Atlantic eighteen times, of which one, in 1886, was for a summer holiday trip. Of course there were many times when there was bad weather; but on one crossing in 1899 we encountered a terrific storm. The waves were greater by far than any I had ever seen when I crossed in the Germanic in the February of the same year during the week of the worst weather ever recorded. On the occasion we were on the Atlantic transport S.S. Marquette. The weather had been nice for three days from our leaving London. But in the afternoon of the fourth day, 18th October, we ran into the track of a hurricane. As we went on the seas got bigger and bigger till at last they were mountainous. When we were down in the trough the waves seemed to stand up higher than our masts. The wind was blowing furiously something like a hundred miles an hour, but there was no rain. The moon came out early, a splendid bright moon still in its second quarter, so that when night fell the scene was sublimely grand. We forged on as long as we could, but the screw raced so furiously as the waves swept past us that we had perforce to lie by for six hours; it was not safe to go on as we might lose our screw-head. The tossing in that frightful sea was awful. Most of those on board were dreadfully frightened. Irving came out for a while and stood on the bridge holding on like grim death, for the shaking was like an earthquake. He seemed to really enjoy it. He stayed as long as he could and only went in when he began to feel the chill. Ellen Terry came out with me and was so enraptured with the scene that she stayed there for hours. I had to hold her against the rail for at times we rolled so that our feet shot off the deck. I showed her how to look into the wind without feeling it; to hold the eyes just above the bulwark — or the “ dodger “ if you are on the bridge — and a few inches away from it. The wind strikes below you and makes a clear section of a circle right over and round your head, you remaining in the calm. To test the force of the wind I asked her to put out her hand, palm out so as to make a fair resistance; but she could not hold it for an instant. Neither could I; my hand was driven back as though struck with a hammer.

In the companion-way of the Marquette several trunks too large for the adjacent cabin had been placed. They had been carefully lashed to the hand-rail, but in that wild sea they strained at their lashings rising right off the ground the way a chained dog does when he raises himself on his hind legs. One of the trunks, belonging to Irving, a great leather one, full of books and papers, was lashed by its own straps. In the companion-way had gathered nearly all the passengers, huddled together for comfort — especially the women, who were mostly in a panic. In such cases the only real comfort a poor woman can have is to hold on to a man. I happen to be a big one, and therefore of extra desirability in such cases of stress. I was sitting on a trunk on the other side of the companion- way from Irving’s trunk, surrounded by as many of the womenkind as could catch hold of me, when in a roll of extra magnitude the leather straps gave way and the trunk seemed to hurl itself at us. I shoved the women away right and left, but missed the clearing its course myself by the fraction of a second. The corner of it caught me on the calf sideways, fortunately just clearing the bone. Another half-inch and I should certainly have lost my leg. I was lifted into the music saloon which was close at hand and my trouser leg cut open. We had three American footballers on board and these at once began to rub and knead the injured muscle, quite the best thing to do. Then it seemed as if every soul on board, man, woman, and child, had each a separate bottle of embrocation or liniment. These were all produced at once — and used.

Before a minute was over the skin of the wounded spot and for inches around it was completely rubbed off! The pain was excruciating — like an acre of toothache; but I suppose it did me good. In the morning my foot was quite black, but by degrees this passed away. I limped for a week or two and then got all right.

The women had a sore time of it that night. They nearly all refused absolutely to go to their cabins, and, producing rugs and pillows, camped' in the music saloon which was on deck.

One young man, who spent most of his time leaning on the counter of the bar, gained instant notoriety by christening the saloon: " the Geeser's Doss-house!" b On Saturday, 5th October 1901, we left the Thames for New York on the Atlantic transport S.S. Minnehaha. In the river the wind began to blow, and by the time we rounded the South Foreland a whole gale was on. Our boat was a large one, so that we on board did not mind, but it was a bad time for the pilot whom we had to shed at Dover. The row boat to take him off had come out to us in the comparative shelter of the Goodwins and had trailed beside us on the starboard quarter, nearly swamped in the rough sea. When we slowed down off Dover the sea seemed to get worse than ever. To look at it in the darkness of the night, each black slope crested with white as the lighthouse lit up its savage power, one could not believe that a little boat could live in it. It took the men on board all their time to keep her baled. A number of us men had gone down on the after-deck to see the pilot depart. He was a huge man; tall as he was, the breadth of his shoulders seemed prodigious. When he descended the rope-ladder and debarked, which was a deed requiring skill and nerve, he seemed to overweight the little boat, he so towered over the two men in it. When a few strokes took them out of the shelter of our good ship, the boat, as she caught the gale, lurched sideways so much that it looked as though she were heeling over. My own heart was in my mouth. I heard a sudden loud laugh behind me, and turning round, saw one of the passengers, a stranger to me. I cried out with angry indignation:

“What the devil are you laughing at? Is it to see splendid fellows like that in danger of their lives? You ought to be ashamed of yourself. The men could actually hear you! “ For a few seconds he continued laughing wildly; then turning to me said quite heartily:

“Sorry 1 It’s a shame I know; but I could not help laughing! “ Despite myself and my indignation I could not help smiling.

“What at? “ I said again. “ There’s nothing to laugh at there!”

“Well, my dear fellow,” he gasped out, “ I was laughing to think that I’m not a pilot! “ And once again his wild laughter pealed out.

VI

FALLING SCENERY

In the great mass of scenery in a theatre and its many appliances, some of considerable weight, resting overhead there are certain elements of danger to those on the stage. Things have to be shifted so often and so hastily that there is always room for accident, no matter what care may be exercised. For instance, in Abbey’s theatre in New

York — afterwards “ The Knickerbocker “ — on the first night of Irving’s playing Macbeth, one of the limelight men, who was perched on a high platform behind the proscenium and O.P., fell on the stage together with the heavy gas cylinder beside him. The play was then over and Irving was making a speech in front of the curtain. Happily the cylinder did not explode. The man did not seem at the moment to be much injured, but he died on his way to hospital. Had any one been waiting underneath in the wing, as is nearly always the case all through a play, that falling weight must have brought certain death.

I have myself seen Irving lifted from the stage by the Act drop catching his clothing. I have seen him thrown into the “ cut “ in the stage with the possibility of a fall to the mezzanine floor below. On another occasion something went wrong with the bracing up of the framed cloths and the whole scene fell about the stage. This happened between the acts whilst Irving was showing the stage to some American friends, Mr. and Mrs. Francis of Troy, N.Y. Happily no one was hurt. Such accidents, veritable bolts from the blue, are, however, both disconcerting and alarming. During Faust the great platforms which made the sloping stage on which some hundreds of people danced wildly at the Witches’ Sabbath on the Brokken had to be suspended over the acting portion of the stage. The slightest thing going wrong would have meant death to all underneath. In such cases there must always be great apprehension.

VII

I have mentioned all these matters under the heading of “ adventures “ — torpedoes, fires, floods, train accidents, storms at sea, mishaps of the stage — for a special reason. Not once in the twenty-seven years of our working together did I ever see a sign of fear on Henry Irving. Whether danger came in an instant unexpectedly, or slowly to expecting eyes, it never disturbed him. Danger of any kind, so far as I ever had the opportunity of judging, always found him ready.

When he was lying ill at Wolverhampton in the spring of 1905 Ellen Terry ran down from London, where she was then playing, to see him. She had known from me and others how dangerously ill he had been and was concerned as to how fear of death might act on his strength. She had asked him if he had such fear; her description of the occasion as she gave it to me after his death left nothing open to doubt:

“He looked at me steadily for a minute, and then putting his third finger against his thumb — like that — held his hand fixedly for a few seconds. Then with a quick movement he snapped his fingers and let his hand fall. How could I not understand!”

As the great actress spoke, her face through some mysterious power grew like Irving’s. The raised hand, with the fingers interlaced, was rigid till with a sudden movement the fingers snapped, the hand going down as propelled from the wrist. It conveyed in a wonderful way the absence of a sense of fear, even on such a subject as Death. Even at second hand it was not possible not to understand. It said as plainly as if in words: “ Not that! “ There was no room for doubt!

I have often heard him relate an incident from which he said he learned much. It referred to a certain habit of mind: an experience learned and carried so far as to become a part of one’s nature — a veritable second nature. There used to be a Superintendent at Bow Street, who in the early days of the Vaudeville and the Lyceum was a friend of his. Mr. Thompson was a very capable officer who had in his years of experience learned the value of self-control. One evening Irving and David James coming along the Strand saw the Superintendent before them, and determined to try an experiment on him. They crept softly up behind him and clapped sudden and violent hands on his shoulders. He did not turn or draw away suddenly, as an ordinary individual acting instinctively would have done. He stayed very still and turned his head slowly round till he saw who and what it was that disturbed him. As Irving said, he was a master of himself — of his face. No one could have gathered from either expression or action what his emotions were. The lesson which he thus learned he applied twice at least to the practice of his art. Once was negatively — that is, the negative side of the lesson, when in his departure from the Court in The Merchant ofVenice he dropped his shoulder and shrank from the touch of Gratiano; the other was his eternal consciousness of danger and preparation to meet it instinctively in Eugene Aram.

This is indeed part of that “ Dual Consciousness “ to which Irving so often alluded and which had in his estimation so basic a part in the Philosophy of his Art. We shall have to consider it when we reach that portion of the subject of this book: the summing up of the guiding principles of his art.

CHAPTER LXXII. BURNING OF THE LYCEUM STORAGE

Difficulty of storing scenery — New storage — A clever fraud — The fire —— Forty-four plays burned — Checkmate to repertoire

AT ten minutes past five on the morning of Friday, 18th February 1898, I was wakened by a continuous knock at a door somewhere near my house in Chelsea. I soon discovered that it was at my own house. I went downstairs and opened the door, when a muffled up cab-driver gave me a letter. It was from the police station at Bow Street telling me that the Lyceum Storage, Bear Lane, Southwark, was on fire. The four-wheeler was waiting, and I was soon on the way there as fast as the horse could go. It was a dim, dank morning, bitterly cold. I found Bear Lane a chaos. The narrow way was blocked with fire-engines panting and thumping away for dear life. The heat was terrific. There was so much stuff in the storage that nothing could possibly be done till the fire had burnt itself out; all that the firemen could do was to prevent the fire spreading.

These premises deserve some special mention, for they played an important part in many ways, as shall be seen.

One of the really great difficulties in the management of a London theatre is that of storage. A “ going “ theatre has to be always producing new plays and occasionally repeating the old. In fact, to a theatrical manager his productions form the major part of his stock-in-trade. Now, no one outside theatrical management — and very few who are inside — can have any idea of the bulk of a lot of plays. In Irving’s case it was really vast; the bulk was almost as big as the whole Lyceum theatre. To get housing for such is a very serious matter. In the first place, the rental is, on account of the space — no matter where the locality, great. In the second, it does not do to have it too far away from the theatre, for in such case the cartage to and from, together with the workmen's time, makes an enormous item of expense. In the third place, storage for scenery has to be of a kind where it can easily be got at. Scenery is long, unhandy stuff to handle. That of the Lyceum was forty-two feet long when the cloths were rolled up round their battens; the framed cloths were thirty feet high and six feet wide in the folding plaques. In the first ten years of Irving's management we had to keep the scenery stored in all sorts of places and the space available in the theatre was packed solid. We were always on the look out for a really fine storage; and at last we heard of one. This consisted of two great, high railway arches under the Chatham and Dover Railway, then leased to the South-Eastern. It was a part of Southwark where the ground lies low and the railway line very high, so that there was full height for our scenes. In front was a large yard. We took the premises on a good long lease and set to work to make them complete for our work. The backs of the arches were bricked up. Great scaffold poles were firmly fixed for the piling of scenery against them. It is hard to believe what lateral pressure a great pack of scenery can exercise. Before we had occupied this storage a year one of the poles gave way and the scenery sinking against the new wall at the back of the arch carried it entirely away. We had to pay expenses of restoration to the injured neighbour and to compensate him. We had the entire yard in front roofed over, brought in gas, which was carefully protected, and water, and made the storage the best of its kind that was known. The experience of a good many years-went to the making of it.

We had had to put in a clause when making the agreement to take the lease for a reason not devoid of humour to any one not a sufferer by it. When I went to look at the arches I found them full almost to the top with mud — old mud that had been put in wet and had dried in time to something like the consistency of that to be found at Herculaneum. The manager of the estate office of the railway told me the history of it.

Some years before, the arches were placarded as to let, and in due course came an applicant. He said he was satisfied with the rent and took out his lease. The railway people were pleased to get such a big place off their hands and took no more trouble about it till the half-year's rental became due. They applied to the lessee, but could get no reply. So they sent to the premises to make inquiries. There was no one there; and they could not hear any tidings of the lessee. They did find, however, that the arches were filled with mud, and discovered on inquiry that the lessee had taken a contract for the removal of road sweepings. This is a serious item in municipal accounts, for the conveyance of such out of London is costly, whether by road or barge or rail. Into the arches he had for half a year dumped all the stuff; thousands and thousands of loads of it. He had drawn his money as earned from the municipal authorities. Rent day drew near, and as he feared discovery he had bolted, leaving every one, including the contractors for carting, unpaid.

It took the railway company months of continuous work with a large staff of men and carts and horses to remove the accumulation.

As the premises were secure in every way we could devise, we looked upon them as comparatively immune from fire risk. No one lived in them. They were all brick, stone, and slate — as the insurance policies put it. They were completely isolated front and back; at the sides were blocks of solid brickwork like bastions. I had at first, with Irving's consent, insured the contents for aro,000, but only that year when the policies were to be renewed he said it was wasting money as the place was so secure, and would not let me put on more than g000.

In these premises were the scenes for the following plays, forty-four in all, of which in only ten Irving himself did not play. Twenty - two were great productions:

Hamlet. Much Ado about Nothing.
The Merchant of Venice. Twelfth Night.
Othello. Macbeth.
Henry VIII. Louis XI.
King Lear. Charles I.
Cymbeline. The Lyons Mail.
Richard III. The Bells.
The Corsican Brothers. The Iron Chest.
Iolanthe. The Cup.
The Belle's Stratagem. The Amber Heart.
Robert Macaire. Two Roses.
Olivia. Don Quixote.
Faust. Raising the Wind.
Werner. Daisy's Escape.
Bygones. The Dead Heart.
Ravenswood. High Life Below Stairs.
Becket. The Boarding School.
King Arthur. The King and the Miller.
Richelieu. The Captain of the Watch.
The Lady of Lyons. The Balance of Comfort.
Eugene Aram. Book III. Chapter V.
Jingle. Cool as a Cucumber.

For the plays there were over two hundred and sixty scenes, many of them of great elaboration. In fact, each scene, even if only a single cloth at back with wings and borders, took up quite a space. There were in all more than two thousand pieces of scenery, and bulky properties without end. The armour and " hand " properties were stored in the theatre. And the prime cost of the property destroyed was over thirty thousand pounds sterling.

But the cost price was the least part of the loss. Nothing could repay the time and labour and artistic experience spent on them. All the scene painters in England working for a whole year could not have restored the scenery alone.

As to Irving, it was checkmate to the " repertoire " side of his management. Given a theatre equipped with such productions, the plays to which they belong being already studied and rehearsed, it is easy to put on any of them for a few nights. There is only the cost of carting and hanging the scenes and generally getting ready — small matters in the vast enterprise of putting on a big play. They had had their long runs, and though they were good for occasional repetitions, few of them could be relied on for great business over any considerable period. Several of them were held over for a second run, of which good things might have been fairly expected. For instance, Macbeth was good for another season. It was taken off because of the summer vacation when it was still doing enormous business. Ravenswood, too, had only gone a part of its course when the Baring failure, as I have shown, necessitated its temporary withdrawal. Henry VIII. and King Arthur and Becket and Faust were certain draws. When for repertoire purposes in later years several were required, Louis XI, Charles I., The Bells, The Lyons Mail, Olivia, Faust, and Becket were all reproduced at an aggregate cost of over eleven thousand pounds.

The effect of the fire on Irving was not only this great cost, but the deprivation of all that he had built up. Had it not occurred he could have gone on playing his repertoire for many years, and would never have had to produce a new play.

The fire was so fierce that it actually burned the building of the railway arches three bricks deep and calcined the coping stones to powder. The Railway Company, therefore, not only made a rule that in no case was theatrical scenery ever to be stored on their premises, but actually refused to allow us to reinstate or to have use for the term of their lease. They were prepared to fight an action over it, but the scenery having all been burned, we had no more present use for so large a storage, and we compromised the matter.

CHAPTER LXXIII. FINANCE

The protection of reticence — Beginning without capital — An overdraft —— A loan — A legacy — Expenses at commencement of management — Great running expenses — Sale to the Lyceum Company — Irving's position with them

I

So much that is erroneous regarding Irving's financial matters has been said at any time from the beginning of his success on to the day of his death — and after, that I think it well to speak frankly of the matter now. Indeed there is no reason that I know of why it should not be made public. During his lifetime, ever since his business affairs were conducted on a big scale, we observed for purely protective reasons a very strict reticence. It must be remembered that a theatre, and especially a popular one, is a centre of great curiosity. Every one wants to know all about it, and curiosity-mongers if they cannot discover facts invent them. The only possible safeguard that I know of is strict reticence at headquarters, and the formulation of such a system of accounts as makes it impossible for lesser officials to know any more than their own branch of work entails. To this end all our books at the Lyceum were designed and kept. Not one official of the theatre outside myself knew the whole of the incomings and the outgoings. Some knew part of one, some knew part of the other; not even that official who was designated " treasurer " knew anything of the high finance of the undertaking. The box-office keeper made entry of daily receipts and checked over the nightly booking-sheet so as to secure accuracy in his own work; but he had no knowledge whatever of the cash receipts at pit or gallery, where all is ready money. The treasurer made to the bank such lodgments as I gave him; he paid treasury to the actors and staff on each Friday according to the list which I gave him, and on every Tuesday he paid such accounts as were settled in cash and such of my own cheques as I gave to his keeping for the purpose to be paid according to my list. But he did not pay all the salaries — did not know them. Certain of them I myself paid, and these were not of the smaller amounts. He did not pay all the trade accounts; not the larger of them in any case. The weekly accounts of the heads of departments — carpenters, property, wardrobe, gas, electric, supers, chorus, orchestra, &c. — having been thoroughly checked in the office and vouched for by the stage manager, were paid in bulk to the heads of the departments, who distributed the amounts, and returned to me the receipted accounts with vouchers. In fact, the minor books kept by the various departments of both receipts and expenditure had practically only one side. Such officials either received money for handing in to me or paid out money given to them for the purpose. None of them did both. Thus it was that we kept our business to ourselves. Even in such a matter as free admissions none except those in the “ office “ knew of them. They did not go through the box-office at all, but were sent out under my own instruction in each individual case. Even the “ bill orders “ — the equivalent given in kind to those small traders who exhibit in their windows bills of the play of “ double crown “ or “ folio “ size, were not distributed in the usual way through the “ bill inspector,” but sent out in properly directed envelopes by the clerical staff. The account-books of the theatre were kept by myself and rigidly preserved in a great safe of which I alone had the key. The safe stood in the room which Irving and I and Loveday used in common, so that the books were always available for Irving’s purposes when he required them. The accounts were very carefully audited by chartered accountants whose clerks made monthly check of details. Then at the end of each season the audit was completed by the accountants themselves, who made return to Irving direct in sealed envelopes.

Thus I can say that all through Irving's management from the time of my joining him in 1878 till the time of my handing over such matters as were in my care to his executors — by their own desire, after his will had been found, and before his funeral — no one, except Irving himself, myself, and the chartered accountants (who made audit and whose profession is one sworn to individual secrecy) knew Irving's affairs. I am thus particular because the very reticence which we adopted as a policy and pursued as a system was a wise protection, with of course such attendant possibilities as belong to a custom of strict reticence. Not once, in all our long connection of friendship and business, have I given to any one without Irving's special permission a single detail of his business. It was not until 1904, when I was writing an article by request of the Editor of the Manchester Guardian, apropos of his return to Sunderland after an absence of nearly fifty years, that we made known even approximately the vast total of his takings during his management. I quoted figures in that article — which in modern form the paper designated as " an appreciation " — with Irving's consent, and ran up to London from Derby, where we were then playing, to verify them. When we were arranging the matter I reminded him that I had never in all the years given a figure unless he had asked me to. Whereupon he said:

"But you are always free to use what figures and anything else of mine you will. You know, my dear fellow, what confidence I have in your discretion. You are quite free in the matter, now and always I " With this permission I feel at ease in now dealing publicly with matters regarding which I have been silent for so many years. I deal with them now because I regard them as good for Irving — for that memory which he valued more than life.

When Irving took over the Lyceum from Mrs. Bateman he had then accumulated no fortune. He received only a salary up to the time of Colonel Bateman's death. He then had salary — an extraordinarily mild one considering all things — and a prospective share of profits, which under the circumstances did not amount to much. Practically such little as he had in the autumn of 1878 was rather in the nature of a treasury balance than of capital. Of course, in his tour he was earning good money, and this came in a " ready " form; but the expenses which he was incurring in the reorganising and beautifying the Lyceum were vastly in excess of his present earning. When I came to London and took over his financial matters his bankers, the London and County Bank, had already arranged with him a large overdraft, some '12,000, for which he had given bills. This debt and all others incurred in preparation of his long campaign at the Lyceum were duly paid. Throughout his whole managerial life his payment was twenty shillings in the pound, with added interest whenever such was due or possible.

When he was undertaking the provincial tour in the autumn of 1878 — the first under his own management, his friend, Mrs. Hannah Brown, the life-long friend and companion of the Baroness Burdett-Coutts, pressed on him a loan of fifteen hundred pounds. She had wished him to accept a larger sum, but he limited the amount to this. Indeed he took it at all to please her; such a sum went but a small way in the vast enterprise on which he had entered. Unhappily she died before he began to play in his own theatre. The sum which she had lent was repaid to her executor in due season.

When he first knew her, Mrs. Brown was a very old lady. She had been immensely struck with his power, and had recognised before most others the probable destiny that lay before him. When she was almost if not entirely blind he used to often go to see her and the Baroness, in the house in Stratton Street or elsewhere as they resided. Of course, all this I only know from being told it, for Mrs. Brown had died just before I came to live in London. Lady Burdett-Coutts told me of the great affection which Mrs. Brown had for the clever man whose genius she so much admired, and whose friendship was such a delight in her old. age. Not long after Irving's death, when I was dining with her and Mr. Burdett-Coutts, she said:

"I don't think he ever passed the house in her later years without coming in to see her, if only for a moment! " Others, too, of the old friends have spoken to me of Mrs. Brown without stint; and of her Irving often spoke to me himself. She used to go to the Lyceum time after time. During the long run of Hamlet she went some thirty times. For her pleasure the Baroness rented from the management a box at the Lyceum. This was not in itself unique for she had already a box at Drury Lane Theatre and another at Her Majesty's Opera House. I was told that when the old lady was dying — she was then I believe about or over eighty — that she spoke of Irving and his future, mentioning him as: " My poor brave boy! " Irving was then forty, but he was still a " boy " to a woman of her great age.

Mrs. Brown had very considerable means of her own, and a bequest paid by her executor to Irving was five thousand pounds. This was handed to him at the final settlement of her affairs in, strange to say, bank notes. That evening he told me of it when he arrived at the theatre. When he did so I opened the door of the safe thinking that he intended to place it there in safety until the next morning, when it could be lodged in bank. I was mightily surprised when he told me that he had not got it with him. He smiled at me as he said:

“I was afraid to carry it with me. I never in my life had so much money close to me! “ “ What have you done with it? “ I asked. “ I left it in my room at home! “ “ Is it put by safely? “ I asked again. “ Oh yes! “ he added quickly, as though justifying himself. I had an idea that it was not quite safe and went on with my queries:

“Where is it? “ He smiled, I thought superiorly, as he answered: “ In my hat-box!”

“You locked it, I hope? “ Again the smile: “ What would be the use of that? If I had locked away anything it would only have called attention to it. The hat-box is simply lying there as usual with the lid half off. No one would dream of suspecting it — not in a thousand years!”

This illustrates, I think, in a remarkable way the subtlety of his own character, and the method by which he judged others. He had passed the possibilities “ through his mind,” and was so content with his knowledge that he backed it with a fortune. Later on there was a boy who did take things from his rooms. He was, however, found out and the property recovered, all except Edwin Forrest’s watch of which a part had been probably melted down.

That legacy of five thousand pounds was, so far as I know, and had there been other I should certainly have known, the only money which Irving received for which he did not work, through all the long course of his years of much toil. I mention it now specifically because one of the unkindly, presuming that his ignorance of fact was the ignorance of others also, made after the actor’s death a statement that he had been “ subsidised.” It ought not to be necessary to contradict such reckless statements — they ought never to have been made; but having been made it is best to let the exact facts be known. The best of all bucklers, for the living or the dead, is simple, honest truth.

The needs of the theatre were very great; at the beginning almost overwhelming. On my first taking over the responsibility of business affairs I acquired a wide experience of what is known as " pulling the devil by the tail." When Irving took the Lyceum its entire holding capacity was £228. Sometimes under extraordinary pressure, when every inch of standing room was occupied, we got in a little more; but only once in the first two seasons did we cover £250. That was on Irving's " Benefit," as it was then called.

The autumn of 188i was devoted to enlarging and improving the house. At a cost of over 12,000 it was made to hold another £100. Thence on, various improvements and certain dispositions of the seating were effected, which brought up the holding power to a maximum of about £420, though on very special occasions we managed to squeeze in a little more. Some idea may be formed of the vast expense of working such a theatre as the Lyceum, and in the way which Irving worked it, when I say that on that theatre he spent in what we called " Expenses on the House " a sum of 6o,000. During my time the " Production account " amounted to nearly £200,000.

The takings for his own playing between the time of beginning management, 3oth December 1878, and the day of his death, 13th October 1905, amounted to the amazing total of over two million pounds sterling.

Only those who have experience of the working of a great theatre can have any idea of the vast expenditure necessary to hold success. A play may be a success or a failure, and its life must have a natural termination; but a theatre has to go on at almost equal pressure and expense through bad times and good alike. It is necessary for the management to have a large reserve of strength ready to be used if need arises. This implies ceaseless expenditure; a portion of which never can be repaid because the plays which involve it have to be abandoned. It is really too much work for one man to have to think of the policy of the future, and of carrying it into effect, whilst at the same time he has to work as an artist in the running play. No monetary reward would atone for such labour; only ambition can give the spur. Things, therefore, are so constituted in the theatrical world that the ambitious artist must be his own manager. And only those strong enough to be both artist and man of business can win through. The strain of ceaseless debt must always be the portion of any one who endeavours to uphold serious drama in a country where subsidy is not a custom. In the future, the State or the Municipality may find it a duty to support such effort, on the ground of public good. Otherwise the artist must pay with shortened life the price of his high endeavour. Light performances may and generally do succeed, but good plays seriously undertaken must always be at great risk to the venturer. For more than twenty-five years Irving did for England that which in other nations is furthered by the State; and his theatre was known and respected all over the world. This entailed not only hospitality in all forms to foreign artists, but to many, many strangers attracted by the fame of his undertaking, and anxious to meet so famous a man in person. This duty Irving never shirked; he had ever a ready hand for any stranger, and in the long career of his ministration of the duties of hospitality he actually aided, so far as one man could do, the popularity of his own country amongst the nations of the world. Such men are the true Ambassadors of Peace, as well as National benefactors. Reputation for hospitality and charity is a factor in the enlargement of the demands made on these. When duty called Irving was never found wanting, in this or any other form.

But still through all it must be remembered that the more he had to spend the harder he had to work to earn the wherewithal to do it. When I came to him first, six performances each week in heavy plays was deemed sufficient work for the strongest; but as time went on a matinee was added. And for some twenty years seven performances a week was the working rule. In light, amusing, or unemotional plays this is not too much; for when a run is on, the ordinary work of rehearsal is suspended. But for heavy plays it is too much. Still what is one to do who is playing for the big stakes of life. Brain and body, nerve and soul have to be ground up in the effort to hold the place already won. Irving was determined from the very first to strain every nerve for the honour of his art; for the perfecting of stage work; for his own fame. To these ends he gave himself, his work, his fortune. He forewent very many of the ordinary pleasures of life, and laboured unceasingly and without swerving from his undertaken course. He gave freely in its cause all the fortune that came to him as quickly as it accrued. It was only when through shocks of misfortune and the stress of coming age he was unable to put by the large sums necessary for further developments, that he had to forestall the future temporarily. Bankers are of necessity stern folk and unless one can give quid pro quo in some shape they are pretty obdurate as to advances. Therefore it was that now and again, despite the enormous sums that he earned, he had occasionally to get an advance. Fortunately, there were friends who were proud and happy to aid him. Such never lost by their kindness; every advance was punctiliously met, and the attachment between him and such friends grew ever and ripened. It would be invidious to mention who those friends were. Some perhaps would not like their names mentioned, and so " the rest is silence."

There were not many occasions when such measures were necessary. I only mention them now lest any of those friends should deem me wanting, in even such a partial record as this, did I not mention that Henry Irving had constant and loving friends who held any power in their hands at his disposal, and were alike glad and proud to help him in the splendid work which he was doing. Let me, as the only mouthpiece that he now can ever have, since I alone know all those friends, say that to the last hour of his life he was grateful to them for their sympathy, and belief, and timely help; and for all the self-confidence which their trust gave to him.

III

When after his long illness in 1898-1899 the proposition of selling his interest in the Lyceum was made to Irving by the Lyceum Theatre Company — the parent Company — the terms suggested were these:

He was to convey to the Company his lease — of which some eighteen years were still to run, and all his furniture and fittings in the theatre. He was for five years — the duration of the contract — to play an annual engagement of at least a hundred performances at the Lyceum on terms which were mentioned and which were between 10 per cent. and 25 per cent. less than he was in the habit of receiving in any other theatre. He was to hand over to the Company one-fourth of all his profits made by acting elsewhere, he guaranteeing to play on tour at least four months in each year. He was to give the Company free use of such of his scenery and properties as were not in his own use.

He was to pay all the expenses of production of plays in the first year, and in the other years 6o per cent. of the same. For the first season he was to guarantee the Company a minimum of roo for their share of each performance. He was to pay all the stage expenses, and half of the advertisements.

For this the Company were to pay him down 26,500 in cash and £12,500 in fully paid shares in proportion of the two classes, viz., £roo,000 6 per cent. preference shares and £70,000 ordinary shares.

I protested to Irving against the terms. I had already worked out the figures of results, according to such data as were available, of this scheme and also of an alternative one, in case he wished to abandon or alter the one on which we had already decided. The difference was that, according to the alternative scheme, he would at the end of five years, in addition to the total of profits realisable by the Company scheme, be still in possession of his theatre, scenery, and property of all kinds.

That I was correct has been shown by the unhappy result of the Company enterprise. The Company lost almost persistently except in the seasons when Irving played. The one exception was, I believe, when William Gillette played Sherlock Holmes, a piece which Irving recommended the directors to accept. I was present at its first night in New York, and saw at once its London possibilities.

The Company lasted from the beginning of 1899 till the end of the season of 1902. During this period of less than four years the total amount in cash accruing to the Company from Irving’s acting was roughly £29,000.

In estimating this amount I took as the basis of the Company’s expenses the cost of running the theatre in our own time for the number of weeks covering the time of Irving’s seasons with the Company. This allowed as liberal an amount as our own management, which was carried out on a much more generous scale. I excluded only the item of rental, which, as the Company was its own landlord, would be represented by the productiveness of the capital. The above amount would, roughly, have paid during each of the whole four years in which the contract lasted the preference shareholders their whole 6 per cent. and the ordinary shares over II- per cent. in each entire year, leaving seven whole months of each year, exclusive of summer holidays, for earning the 4 per cent. dividend on the £120,000 mortgage debentures, and increasing the dividend on the ordinary shares.

It will from the above figures be seen that the contract which Irving made with the Lyceum Company was not in any way a beneficial one for him, but an excellent one for them.

I am particular about giving these figures in detail, for at some of the meetings of the Company there was the usual angry “ heckling “ of the directorate regarding losses; and there were not lacking those who alleged that Irving was in some way to blame for the result. But I am bound to say that when, at the meeting in 1903, I thought it necessary to put a stop to such misconception and gave the rough figures showing the results of his playing during the time the contract existed, my statement was received even by the disappointed shareholders with loud and continuous cheers — the only cheers which I ever heard at a meeting of the Company. I honestly believe that there was not one person in the room who was not genuinely and heartily glad to be reassured from such an authoritative source as myself as to Irving's position with regard to the Company.

The cancellation of the contract between Irving and the Lyceum Theatre Company was in no way due to any fault or default of his. It became necessary solely because the Company was unable to fulfil its part. The London County Council, in accordance with some new regulations, called on the Company to make certain structural alterations in the theatre. The directors said they could not afford to make them as their funds were exhausted; and so the theatre had to remain closed. At that time Irving had already undertaken vast responsibilities with regard to the play of Dante, for which he had made contracts with painters and costumiers, and had engaged artists. It was vitally necessary that he should have a theatre wherein to play; and so there was no alternative but to annul the contract. Even as it was, he had to take upon his own shoulders the whole of the vast cost of the production upon which he had entered as a joint concern.

In fine, Irving's dealings with the Company may be thus summed up. He received in all for his property, lease, goodwill, fixtures, furniture, the use of his stock of scenery and properties, and a fourth of his profits elsewhere, £39,000 paid as follows: cash, £26,500; shares, £12,500. He repaid by his work £29,000 in cash. The shares he received proved valueless.' He gave, in fact, his property and 2500 for nothing; — and he lost about two years of his working life.

I should like to say, on my own account, and for my own protection, inasmuch as I was Sir Henry Irving's business manager, that from first to last I had absolutely no act or part in the formation of the Lyceum Theatre Company — in its promotion, flotation, or working. Even my knowledge of it was confined to matters touched on in the contract with Irving. From the first I had no information as to its purposes, scope or methods, outside the above. I did not take a single share till it began to look queer with regard to its future; I then bought from a friend five shares for which I paid par value. This I did in order that I might have a right to attend the meetings. Later, in 1903, when shares were selling at all sorts of prices I bought some in the open market. This was simply as a speculation, as I regarded the freehold of the Lyceum as a valuable property which might eventually realise a price which would make my investment at the prevailing figures a good one. These shares I protected on the winding-up and re-construction of the Company with an assessment of 25 per cent. of their face value. But finally, seeing the conditions under which the new Company was 1 The preference shares at the break up sold for, as well as I remember, seven pence for each fully paid share of one pound sterling. He would never sell his shares lest his doing so might injure the property of the Company. They were only parted with at the winding up, when the Receiver sold, on his own authority, all unapplied-for shares. about to work, I sold them in the usual way through my broker.

As a matter of fact I was on the Atlantic or in America at the time the parent company or syndicate — to whom it was that Irving had sold his property — was formed. When I arrived home this association had become merged in the Lyceum Theatre Company which had been floated, and of which the whole capital had been subscribed. Not for nearly a year afterwards did I even see a copy of the prospectus of the Company.

CHAPTER LXXIV. THE TURN OF THE TIDE

High-water mark — A succession of disaster's — Pleurisy and pneumonia—" Like Gregory Brewster " — Future arrangements decided on — Offer from the Lyceum Company — Health failing — True heroism — Work and pressure — His splendid example — The last seven years — Time of Retirement fixed — Singing at Swansea — Farewell at Sunderland — Illness at Wolverhampton — Last performances in London — Last illness — Death — A city in tears — Lying in state — Public Funeral.

I

"THERE is a tide in the affairs of men." For twenty-five years it flowed for Henry Irving without let or lull. From the production of The Bells in November 1871 he became famous; and thence on he bore himself so well that with the exception of the disgruntled few who grudge success to any one, he was accorded by all an unquestioned supremacy in his chosen art. For a full quarter of a century there was nothing but ever-increasing esteem and honour and position; an undeviating prosperity which made all things possible to the ambitious actor. True, the success was accompanied throughout by endless labour and self-sacrifice, and by grinding responsibility. His life was more strenuous than the lives of most successful men. For an actor's work is altogether personal, and when in addition to the practice of his art he undertakes the added stress and risk of management such, too, is altogether personal. But, after all, labour and responsibility are the noblest roads by which a man may travel towards honour. By any other way success is merely the outcome of hazard.

But the tide must turn some time — otherwise the force would be not a tide but a current. The turning came on the night of 19th December 1896 — the night of the production of Richard III. A night of unqualified success — as should be when high-water mark is reached. A night which seemed to crown the personal triumph of the years. After the performance and when the cheering crowd had taken their reluctant way, Irving had a large gathering on the stage. Such had become a custom on first and last nights of the season, and now and again on marked occasions. They were very delightful opportunities for large and comprehensive hospitality, enjoyed, I think, by all. So soon as the curtain fell the scenery would be put rapidly into the “ scene docks “ and the stage left clear. Then the caterers, Gunter’s, who had everything ready, would place long tables round three sides of the stage and prepare a cold “ standing “ supper for all who were expected. During this time Irving would have rapidly changed his costume for evening dress; so that by the time the waiting guests in the auditorium were beginning to file in on the stage through the iron door in the proscenium 0. P., he would meet them coming from his dressing-room. I used to stand at the door myself so as to see that no chance guests whose presence was welcome were denied. For very often there were in the house some whom Irving would like to welcome, and of whose presence we were ignorant to the last. The whole proceeding was an informal one. There were no invitations except such verbal ones as I conveyed myself. On such occasions there would be from three to six hundred guests on the stage, an enormous number of whom were persons whose names were at least widely known; representatives of art and letters, of statesmanship and the various forms of public life; of the great social world, of the professions, of commerce — of the whole great world of personal endeavour.

On this particular occasion there was a large gathering. When the curtain went up on the empty proscenium, the big stage seemed a solid mass of men and women. One could tell Irving's whereabouts by the press of friends thronging round to congratulate him on the renewal of his success in Richard III. of twenty years before.

Little by little as time wore away the crowd thinned. When the last had gone Irving and a very dear friend of his, Professor (afterwards Sir James) Dewar, went for a while to the Garrick Club. After the strain of such a night sleep was shy and the kindest thing that any friend could do was to keep with him and talk over matters old and new, so as to make a break between strain and rest. That night was a strangely exciting one to Irving. On it he had reproduced after a lapse of just twenty years one of the greatest and most surprising successes of his earlier life. For Richard III. when he played it in 1877 was a new thing to all who saw it. Clement Scott, writing of it in the Daily Telegraph, had said:

"The enjoyment derived from the performance was undoubtedly heightened by the pleasurable astonishment with which the playgoer made the unexpected discovery of a new source of dramatic delight. It is not often that a frequenter of theatres can recall in the course of a long experience one particular night when the channels of thought seemed to be flushed by a tide of new sensations."

On the night of its revival all the old triumph came back afresh. No wonder that the player was too high-strung to rest. From the Garrick the two friends walked to Albemarle Street where Dewar had his rooms in the Royal Institution. There they sat and smoked for a while and discussed the philosophy of Acting and the form of education which would be most beneficial for Irving's sons. When Irving rose to go home — he lived literally " round the corner " in 15A Grafton Street, Dewar went with him. Irving insisted on his going in for a few minutes. This he acceded to, anxious that the super-wearied man should not feel lonely at such a time. After a cigar Dewar left. It was then coming daylight, and Irving announced his intention of taking a bath before turning in. Dewar left him tranquil and now ready for his needed rest.

The stairs in the Grafton Street " upper part " were steep and narrow, and Irving in the dim light of morning stealing to the internal staircase slipped a foot on the top stair. Unfortunately on the narrow landing stood an old oak chest. His knee as he slipped struck this, and the blow and the strain of recovery ruptured the ligatures under the knee-cap. When in the morning the surgeon who had been sent for saw him he declared that it would be utterly impossible for him to play for some time. Further advice was even more pessimistic, placing the period at months.

The disaster of that morning was the beginning of many which struck, and struck, and struck again as though to even up his long prosperity to the normal measure allotted to mankind.

It was ten weeks before he was able to play again. Ellen Terry had gone to Homburg — whither she had been recommended — the day after Cymbeline — which had preceded Richard III. — had been taken off. It was the end of January before she could give up her " cure " and return to London. She played Olivia for three weeks with good effect. We had tried Cymbeline for a week after Christmas; but with Irving and Ellen Terry out of the cast the receipts were such that though the salaries rent and such running expenses had to be paid in any case, it was cheaper to close than go on. The entire income did not nearly pay the expenses of keeping the theatre open instead of shut.

That accident of a foot-slip cost Irving two months and a half of illness and an out-of-pocket expense of over six thousand pounds.

This instead of the prosperous winter season which had already seemed assured.

II

A little more than a year afterwards, February 1898, came the burning of the storage, which I have already described, and the effect of which was so permanently disastrous in crippling effort. Eight months after that came the greatest calamity of his life.

The disasters of these three years, 1896-7-8, seemed cumulative and consistent to the “Unhappy master, Whom unmerited disaster Follows fast and follows faster.”

The first struck his activity; the second crippled his resources; the third destroyed his health.

III

To any human being health is a boon. To an actor, qua actor, it is existence. During the provincial tour in the autumn of 1898 all was going well. We had got through the earlier weeks of the tour when we had, through very hot weather, played some of the lesser places and were now in the big cities. Birmingham and Edinburgh had shown fine results of the week’s work in each place, and we were in the midst of the first week in Glasgow — always a stronghold of Irving. On the Thursday night, 13 th October, we were playing Madame Sans Gene to a fine house and all was going splendidly. Just before the curtain went up on the second act, in which Napoleon makes his appearance, Irving sent for me to my office. I came at once to his dressing-room. I found him sitting down dressed for his part.

His face was drawn with pain at each breath. When I came in he said:

“I think there must be something wrong with me. Every breath is like a sword-stab. I don’t think I ought to be suffering like this without seeing some one.” As I saw that he was really ill, I asked if I might go and dismiss the audience. But he would not hear of it. Never in his life have I known him let any pain of his own keep him from his work. He said:

“I shall be able to get through all right; but when I have seen a doctor we may have to make some change for to-morrow.” I hurried off to send for a doctor, and as his call came he went on the stage. The doctor arrived during the last act, but he could not see him till the end of the play. Then the doctor said he feared he was seriously ill, and hurried him off to his hotel — and to bed. A careful examination showed that he had both pneumonia and pleurisy. Two nurses of special excellence were picked out and preparations were made for a lengthy illness.

The bill for next night was The Merchant of Venice and Norman Forbes, almost without preparation, played Shylock. The tour went on by Irving’s wish, for the livelihood of some seventy people depended on it. The ten weeks which it lasted cost him a very considerable sum of money.

The cause of his illness was a chill received the previous Sunday. That day the Company went from Edinburgh to Glasgow, but he remained as he had an engagement to lunch at Dalmeny with Lord Rosebery. In the afternoon he drove back to Edinburgh and took train. At that time, however, the new station of the North British Railway was in process of erection and had reached a stage in which the road from Princes Street down to the level of the line was blocked during reconstruction; so that it was necessary to walk down. There had been a good deal of rain that afternoon and the torn roadway was full of water-pools. In walking through the imperfectly lighted way he got his feet wet and had to sit in this condition in a carriage without a foot-warmer during the hour's journey to Glasgow. He did not feel the ill effects immediately, but the seeds of the disease, or rather the diseases had been laid.

Of course during his illness he had every help and care that could be. But his case was a bad one. For seven weeks he lay ill in Glasgow during which time I almost lived in trains, seeing the work started and finished in each town and in the meantime travelling to Glasgow and to London, where immense and responsible work for the future had to be done. Forbes-Robertson had then the Lyceum for an autumn season, but his tenancy expired at Christmas. So we arranged that the Carl Rosa Opera Company should play for six weeks. Then Martin Harvey would produce a play, The Only Way, a version of Charles Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities, dramatised by Freeman Wills. Our negotiations for letting the theatre were very difficult, for as we did not know when it would be possible for Irving to play, we had in every case to have the option of bringing the temporary tenancy to an end at any time to suit us. This involved that every arrangement made by any one renting the theatre should make similar conditions with his own people. Nevertheless, through all difficulties we arranged for the provisional occupy ing the theatre at a good rental right up to the end of July.

As I used to see Irving every few days I could note his progress — down or up. At first, of course, he got worse and worse; weaker, and suffering more pain. He had never in his life been anything but lean, but now as he lost flesh the outline of his features grew painfully keen. The cheeks and chin and lips, which he had kept clean shaven all his life, came out stubbly with white hair. At that time his hair was iron-grey, but no more. I remember one early morning when I came into the sitting-room and found his faithful valet, Walter, in tears. When I asked him the cause — for I feared it was death — he said through his sobs:

"He is like Gregory Brewster! " — the old soldier in Waterloo. Walter did not come into the room with me; he feared he would break down and so do harm. When I stole into the room Irving had just waked. He was glad to see me, but he looked very old and weak. Poor Walter's description was sadly accurate. Indeed he realised the pathetic picture of the dying Sir John Falstaff given by Mrs. Quickly:

"His nose was as sharp as a pen."

It was not till 7th December that he was well enough to get back to London. On 15th at Manchester, where I then was with the Company, I got a wire from him asking to see me at once on urgent business. I saw him next morning. The business was regarding a speculative offer made to him, against which I strongly advised him. The business did not, however, require much thought; it came to an end before it was well started. That day he left for Bournemouth. He was looking well when he left though still very weak. He felt much even the going down stairs from his second floor in Grafton Street. For the remainder of his life he could never with ease go up stairs.

On Wednesday morning, 21st December, I got a wire asking me to come down to Bournemouth by the 2.15 train. I arrived at five at the Bath Hotel where he was staying. The note in my diary says:

"H. I. looking well. Much stronger, self-possessed and evenly balanced. Arranged to tour at Easter. Lyceum season in September and October. American tour in autumn."

This was just what I had already advised, and in which Loveday had thoroughly acquiesced. We had arranged for a rack-rental of the Lyceum for the season. We should have a tour of three months with small expenses, as we should only take a few plays with light casts and would mainly play in places in which he had never appeared. The satisfactory result was a foregone conclusion.

Then would come a holiday of two months to recuperate and get strong, and then a season of eight weeks in London. This, too, promised more than well. He had already arranged with Sardou and Moreau to produce Robespierre that year (1899); and as he had paid a thousand pounds advance royalties he would have no fees to pay for five or six weeks. He had then also an offer of ten thousand pounds for his lease of the Lyceum to come into operation after October. This offer was still open in case he should wish to avail himself of it. The American tour promised a rich reward.

Irving's judgment was at high tide when with fresh hope and vigour he accepted this policy. I left him the next morning to join the tour at Brighton where it was to finish on Saturday, Christmas Eve. We were both in good spirits, hopeful and happy.

IV

It was an unfortunate thing for his own prosperity that Irving did not adhere to the arrangement then made. I fear that the chagrin which he felt at the check to his plans had too operative a force with him. When the offer made by the parent Lyceum Theatre Company was put before him he jumped at it; and before he had consulted with me about it, or even told me of it, he had actually signed a tentative acceptance. It was now three weeks since he had agreed as to the policy of the immediate future. Loveday and I had been during that time engaged in working out the provincial and American tours, so that it was a surprise when he sent to us both to come down to Bournemouth to see him regarding the new proposal. ^^e went down on the 12th January and stayed a few days. We discussed the matter of the Company's proposition, and I laid before him some memoranda comparing this with the scheme already in hand. The advantage was all to the latter. It was easy to see, however, that Irving's mind was made up. The new scheme was attractive to him in his then condition and circumstances. He had been recently very, very ill and was still physically weak. He had for over two years felt the want of capital or such organised association of interests as makes for helpfulness; and here was something which would share, if it did not lift, the burden. At any rate, whatever may have been the cause or the prevailing argument or interest with him, he had in this matter made up his mind. When a man of his strong nature makes up his mind to a course of action he generally goes on with it despite reasons or arguments. So far as facts and deeds go he is like a horse that has taken the bit between its teeth. He listened, as ever, attentively and courteously and with seeming thoughtfulness, to all I had to say — and then shifted conversation to details, as though the main principle had been already accepted. On the 14th Comyns Carr came down on behalf of the Company as had been agreed before Irving sent for us. Together we all went over the scheme. As Irving had accepted the principle and was determined to go on, we could only discuss details. I tried hard to get a betterment of the sharing terms; but without avail. The only change of importance I could effect was that Irving should be put down for the same salary — almost nominal to an actor of his position — which had always been entered on our books. Even this was to be only the provincial salary, not the American which was three times as much. This concession, however, as to salary was eventually to him an addition of some five thousand pounds. A few lesser matters, such as the Company sharing the cost of storage, were to his betterment.

In the original proposition it had been, I believe, suggested that Irving should be a director of the Company, but when he told me of this I said such a decided “ No “ that he acquiesced. I impressed on him that he must not have his name in any form as a participant in the venture mentioned. He was selling to the Company and sharing his outside profits with them; and that such being the measure of his association, he should not be implicated beyond it.

According to our previous plan of policy I was already in treaty with Charles Frohman regarding the tour in America, to begin in the autumn of that year. There was to be no change in this arrangement, as after the London season with Robespierre was to come this tour. The correspondence with Frohman had now reached a point when it was absolutely necessary that one or other of us should cross the Atlantic. A multitude of details had to be discussed, and as this was our first business transaction with Frohman, all had to be gone over carefully so as to insure a full understanding of our mutual and individual interests and responsibilities. This could not possibly be done by cable, and there was no time for letters; already we were nearly a year later than was usual with such arrangements. As we had to settle things face to face, and as his own affairs would not allow of Frohman’s leaving America at that time, I had to go to New York. I left London on 31st January 1899, and arrived at New York in the Germanic on iith February — after coming through the greatest storm in the North Atlantic ever recorded. I left New York in the Teutonic on 22nd February, and arrived in London on 1st March.

During the time of my absence everything in which Irving was concerned had been completed. The contract between him and the Syndicate Company had been finally settled by the solicitors. The Syndicate Company had sold its rights to the Lyceum Theatre Company, which had been effectively floated and of which the whole capital had been subscribed. There was not anything left to me to do in the matter.

On my return I was surprised to hear that, in addition to the amount of capital originally mentioned in the provisional contract with Irving as that of the final Company to which his agreement was to be transferred on its flotation — namely, 170,,000 in 100,000 6 per cent. preference and 70,000 ordinary shares — there appeared a sum of 120,000 mortgage debentures given to the original freeholders as a part of the purchase money. This made the responsibility of the Company up to 290,000.

Later on I learned that Irving's name had appeared in the prospectus as " Dramatic Adviser," a thing against which I had cautioned him. As a matter of fact he was never called by the directorate of the Company to fulfil the function. Once, he ollered advice as to an engagement — which advice was happily taken to considerable advantage to the Company. But so far as I know he was never asked for his advice, nor were the Company's prospective arrangements ever made known to him in advance of the public intimation. I mention this here as it is, I think, advisable for his sake that it should be known.

With the one exception of Gillette's engagement, he never had knowledge of, or act or part in any of the business of the Lyceum Theatre Company outside those matters dependent on or arising from his own agreement with them.

As to myself: for right or wrong, when once I had communicated to him my views on the advisability of his contracting with the Company at all, I had no part in the matter and no responsibility.

After that illness of 1898 Irving's health was never the same as it had been before it. There was always a certain shortness of breath which, if it did not limit effort, made him careful how he exerted himself. It may have been partly this; it may have been partly the wound to a proud nature which was entailed by the long series of misfortunes with their consequent losses; but there was a certain shrinkage within himself during the last seven years of his life which was only too apparent to the eyes of those who loved him. To the outer world he still bore himself as ever: quiet, self-contained, masterful in his long purpose. Perhaps the little note of defiance which was added was the conscious recognition of the blows of Fate. But outside his own immediate circle this was not to be seen; he was far too good an actor to betray himself. The bitterness was all for himself. He did not vent it on any one; he did not blame any one. He took it as a good fighter takes a hard blow: he fought all the more valiantly. When he was stricken with pleurisy and pneumonia he was in his sixty-first year. He had been working hard for forty-two years; strenuously for twenty-seven of them. Growing age more or less limits the resilient power; labour so exacting and so prolonged increases vastly the wear and tear of life.

So we may, I think, take it that he was actually older than his years. Thus every little ailment told on him with undue force. Things that he used not to mind had now to be carefully considered. He had when working to give up many of his old pleasures so as to save himself for his work. Amongst these pleasures was that of sitting up late. Work had to be considered first, and last, and between; and whatever would take from his strength had to be rigorously put aside. Thus life lost part of its charm for him. He felt it deeply; and, all unknowing, was fostered that bitterness which had struck root already. It is the nature of strong men to fight harder through evil hours, and this was indeed a strong man. He would not give way on any point. Well he knew, with that deep, true instinct of his which is always the superior to mere logical thought, that to give way in anything however small is the beginning of the end:

" — the little rift within the lute That by and by will make the music mute, And ever widening slowly silence all."

His bearing through the last seven years was truly heroic. Now that it may be spoken of and known, I may say that I can recall in my own experience nothing like it. Each day, each hour, had its own tally of difficulty to be overcome — of pain or hardship to be borne — of some form of self-denial to be exercised. For a long time before this he had a complaint which always goes on increasing — a complaint common to actors and to all men and women who have to speak much; the complaint which is called " clergyman's sore throat."

Doctors classify it as Follicular Pharyngitis. It is as well as an irritating and often painful malady, a lowering condition from its constant loss of those secretions which make for perfect health. After his illness this seemed to grow to alarming proportions. Month by month, and year by year the weakening expectoration increased, till for the last three years he used some five hundred pocket-handkerchiefs in each week. Such a detail is a somewhat sickening one even to read — what must it have been to the poor brave soul who through it all had to so bear himself as to conceal it from the world. He who. lived with the fierce light of publicity on him had eternally to play his part day and night, bearing his old brave front so that none might know. Whoso is worthy to wear the crown must have the courage and the patience to endure. I ask no pity for him. He would have scorned even with his dying breath to ask for himself pity from any of the sons of men. But to ask for pity and to deserve it are different things. It is my duty — my privilege now that in the perspective of history, recent though it be, I am writing the true inwardness of his life — to speak the exact truth so that those who loved him, even those who were content to accept him unquestioned, should learn how unfalteringly brave he was. It was not till February 1905 when after a hard night's work he fell fainting in the hall-way of the hotel at Wolverhampton that the true cause of his weakness was diagnosed. Fortunately he fell into the hands of one of the most able doctors in England, Dr. W. A. Lloyd-Davies of that town — a man to whom grateful thanks are due for his loving care of my dear friend.

He it was that discovered that for more than six years — ever since his attack of pleurisy and pneumonia — Irving had been coughing up pus from an unhealed lung. I ask no pardon for giving these medical details. It was prudent to be silent all those years; but the time has gone for such reticence. It is well that the truth should be known.

Many and many a time; day or night; in stillness; in travel; in tropic heat such as now and again is experienced in early summer in America; through raging blizzards; in still cold when the thermometer registered down to figures below zero which would kill us in a breath did we have it in our moist atmosphere; in dust-storms of rapid travel; in the abounding dust of many theatres, the man had to toil unendingly. For others there was rest; for him none. For others there was cessation, or at worst now and again a lull in the storm of responsibility; for him none. Others could find occasional seclusion; for him there was no such thing. His very popularity was an added strain and trial to increasing weakness and ill-health. But in all, and through all, he never faltered or thought of faltering. For the well-meaning friend or stranger there was the same ever-ready hand of friendship, the same old winning smile of welcome. He might have later to pay for the added strain entailed by his very kindness of heart, but he went on his way all the same.

Henry Irving had undertaken to play the game of life; and he played it well. Right up to the very last hour of his life, when he was at work he would not think of himself. He would play as he had ever played: to the best of his power; in the fulness of his intention; with the last ounce of his strength.

If those who make it their business to direct the minds of youth knew what I know about him they would take this man — this great Englishman — as a shining light of endeavour; as a living embodiment of that fine principle, “ Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might.” All his life long Irving worked for others — for his art; never for himself. If rewards came — and they showered upon him — he took them meekly without undue pride, without arrogance; never as other than tributes beyond his worth. He made throughout years a great fortune, but nearly all of it he spent as it came on his art, and in helping his poorer brethren. His own needs were small. He lived in a few rooms, ate sparingly, drank moderately. He had no vices that I know of; he was not extravagant; did not gamble, was not ostentatious even in his charities. There are many widows and orphans who mourn his loss; if only for his comforting sympathy and the helping of his kindly hand. In the sacred niche of many, many hearts there is a blank space which only a memory — no longer an image — fills.

Requiescat in pace!

V

In those last seven years of his life I was not able to see so much of him as I had been in the habit of doing throughout the previous twenty. We had each of us his own work to do, and the only way I could help him was to take on my own shoulders all the work I could. As he did not come to his office in the theatre regularly every day as he was accustomed to do, I used to go to him; to his flat in Stratton Street when in London, to his hotel when we travelled. He did not often have supper in the old way. He still entertained to a reasonable amount, but such entertainments were generally in the shape of dinners on Sunday, the only day possible to him. When the play was over at night he would dress slowly, having a chat as he did so, for he loved to talk over his work past, present and future. When travelling he would often be reluctant to take his way to his lonely home; if indeed a hotel can be called a home. When in London he would linger and linger; the loneliness of his home made it in a degree a prison house. But all that while, night by night and year by year, he would stick to his purpose of saving himself for his work — at any cost to himself in the shape of loss of pleasure, of any form of self-abnegation.

Thus it was that through those last seven years I saw less of his private life than I had hitherto done. My work became to save him all

I could. Of course each day during working months, each night except at holiday times — I would see him for hours; and our relations were always the same. But the opportunities were different. Seldom now were there the old long meetings when occasion was full of chances for self-development, for self-illumination; when idea leads on idea till presently the secret chambers of the soul are made manifest.

Seldom did one gather the half-formed thoughts and purposes which tell so much of the inner working of the mind. It was, of course, in part that hopes and purposes belonged to an earlier age. There is more life and spring in intentions that have illimitable possibilities than in those that are manifestly bounded, if not cramped, by existing and adverse facts. But the effect was the same. The man, wearied by long toil and more or less deprived by age and health of the spurs of ambition, shrank somewhat into himself.

This book is no mere panegyric; it is not intended to be. For my own part, my love and admiration for Irving were such that nothing I could tell to others — nothing that I can recall to myself — could lessen his worth. I only wish that, so far as I can achieve it, others now or hereafter may see him with my eyes. For well I know that if they do, his memory shall not lack. He was a man with all a man’s weaknesses and mutabilities as well as a man’s strong qualities. Had he not had in his own nature all the qualities of natural man how could he have for close on half a century embodied such forces — general and distinctive — in such a long series of histrionic characters whose fidelity to natural type became famous. I have the feeling strong upon me that the more Irving’s inner life is known, the better he must stand in the minds and hearts of all to whom his name, his work, and his fame are of interest.

The year 1899 was so overwhelmingly busy a one for him that he had little time to think. But the next year despite the extraordinary success which attended his work he began to feel the loss of his own personal sway over the destinies of the Lyceum. There was in truth no need for worrying. The work of that year made for the time an extraordinary change in his fortunes. In the short season of fifteen weeks at the Lyceum the gross receipts exceeded twenty-eight thousand pounds. Five weeks tour in the Provinces realised over eleven thousand pounds. And the tour in America of twenty-nine weeks reached the amazing total of over half a million dollars. To be exact $537,154.25. The exchange value in which all our American tour calculations were made, was $4.84 per 1. So that the receipts become in British money, 110,982, 4s. gd. — leaving a net profit of over thirty-two thousand pounds.

But the feeling of disappointment was not to be soothed by material success. Money, except as a means to an end, never appealed to Irving. We knew afterwards that the bitterness that then came upon him, and which lasted in lessening degree for some three years, was due in the main to his surely fading health. To him any form of lingering ill-health was a novelty. All his life up till then he had been amazingly strong. Not till after he was sixty did he know what it was to have toothache in ever so small a degree. I do not think that he ever knew at all what a headache was like. To such a man, and specially to one who has been in the habit of taxing himself to the full of his strength, restriction of effort from any cause brings a sense of inferiority. So far as I can estimate it, for he never hinted at it much less put it in words, Irving’s tinge of bitterness was a sort of protest against Fate, for he never visited it on any of those around him.

Indeed in any other man it would hardly have been noticeable; but Irving's nature was so sweet, and he was so really thoughtful for his fellow-workers of all classes, that anything which clouded it was a concern to all.

As his health grew worse the bitterness began to pass away; and for the last two years of his life his nature, softened however to a new tenderness, went back to its old dignified calm.

VI

In the spring of 1905 came the beginning of the end. He had since his illness gone through the rigours of two American winters without seemingly ill effect. But now he began to lose strength. Still, despite of all he would struggle on, and acted nightly with all his old self-unsparing energy and fire. The audiences saw little difference; he alone it was who suffered. Since the beginning of the new century his great ventures had not been successful. Coriolanus in 1901 and Dante in 1903 were costly and unsuccessful. Both plays were out of joint with the time. The public in London, the Provinces and America would not have them; though the latter play ran well for a few weeks before the public of London made up their minds that it was an inferior play. In both pieces Irving himself made personal success; it was the play in each case that was not popular. This was shown everywhere by the result of the change of bill; whenever any other play was put up the house was crowded. But a great organisation like Irving's requires perpetual sustenance at fairly high pressure.

The five years of the new century saw a gradual oozing away of accumulation. The " production account " alone of that time exceeded twenty-five thousand pounds.

Had he been able to take a prolonged rest, say for a year, he might have completely recovered from the injury to his lung. But it is the penalty of public success that he who has achieved it must keep it. The slightest break is dangerous; to fall back or to lose one's place in the running is to be forgotten. He therefore made up his mind to accept the position of failing health and strength and set a time limit for his further efforts.

VII

The time for his retirement he fixed to be at the conclusion of his having been fifty years on the stage. He made the announcement at a supper given to him by the Manchester Art Club on June 1, 1904. This would give him two years in which to take farewell of the public. The time, though seeming at the first glance to be a generous one, was in reality none too long. There were only about forty working weeks in each year, eighty altogether. Of these the United States and Canada would absorb thirty. The Provinces would require three tours of some twelve weeks each. London would have fourteen or fifteen weeks in two divisions, during which would be given all the available plays in his repertoire.

At the conclusion of the tour we arranged with Mr. Charles Frohman, who secured for us the American dates for which we asked. We had made out the tour ourselves, choosing the best towns and taking them in such sequence that the railway travel should be minimised. All was ready, and on Igth September we began at Cardiff our series of farewell visits. The Welsh people are by nature affectionate and emotional. The last night at Cardiff was a touching farewell. This was repeated at Swansea with a strange addition: when the play was over and the calls finished the audience sat still in their places and seemingly with one impulse began to sing. They are all fine part-singers in those regions, and it was a strange and touching effect when the strains of Newman's beautiful hymn, " Lead kindly light," filled the theatre. Then followed their own national song, " Hen fwlad fen Hadne "—" Land of my fathers."

Irving was much touched. He had come out before the curtain to listen when the singing began; and when after the final cheering of the audience he went back to his dressing-room the tears were still wet on his cheeks.

During that tour at half the places the visit was of farewell. For the tour had been arranged before Irving had made up his mind about retiring and it was the intention that the last tour of all, before the final short season in London, should be amongst the eight provincial cities.

VIII

In one of the towns then visited and where the visit was to be the final one, there was a very remarkable occasion. At Sunderland he had made his first appearance in 1856, and now the city wished to mark the circumstance of his last appearance in a worthy way. A public banquet was organised at which he was presented with an Address on behalf of the authorities and the townspeople. The function took place on the afternoon of Friday, October 28, 1904. The occasion was of special interest to Irving. For weeks beforehand his mind was full of it for it brought back a host of old memories. He talked often with me of those old days, and every little detail seemed to come back vividly in that wonderful memory of his which could always answer to whatever call was made upon it. Amongst the little matters of those days when all things were of transcendent importance was one which had its full complement of chagrin and pain: In the preliminary bill regarding the New Lyceum Theatre, where the names of all the Company were given, his own name was wrongly spelled. It was given as " Mr. Irvine." At that time the name in reality did not matter much. It was not known in any way; it was not even his own by birthright, or as later by the Queen's Patent. But it was the name he hoped and intended to make famous; and the check at the very start seemed a cruel blow. Of course the error was corrected, and on the opening night all was right.

In his early life he was very unfortunate regarding the proper spelling of his name. I find in the bill of his first appearance in Glasgow at the Dunlop Street Theatre his name thus given in the cast of the great spectacular play, given on Easter Monday, April 9, 1869, The Indian Revolt:

"Achmet, a Hindoo attached to the Nana, by Mr.
Irwig (his first appearance)."

I do not think that these two mistakes ever quite left his memory — certainly he was always very particular about his name being put in the bill exactly as he had arranged it.

The Sunderland function went off splendidly. Everything went so well that the whole affair was a delight to him and gave the city of his first appearance a new and sweet claim on his memory.

IX

Another provincial tour was arranged for the spring of 1905. It began at Portsmouth on 23rd January and was to go on to 8th April, when it would conclude at Wigan. But severe and sudden illness checked it in the middle of the fifth week. The passage through the South and West had been very trying, for in addition to seven performances a week and many journeys there were certain public hospitalities to which he had been pledged. At Plymouth, lunch on Wednesday with the Admiral, Sir Edward Seymour; and on Thursday with the Mayor, Mr. Wyncotes, and others in the Plymouth Club. At Exeter, on Wednesday a Public Address and Reception in the Guildhall. Two days later at Bath a ceremony of unveiling a memorial to Quin the actor, followed by a civic lunch with the Mayor, Mr. John, in the Guildhall. On the following Tuesday, 21st February, a Public Address was to be presented in the Town Hall of Wolverhampton under the auspices of the Mayor, Mr. Berrington.

But by this time Irving had become so alarmingly ill that we were very seriously anxious. After the performance of The Lyons Mail at Boscombe on 3rd February he had been very ill and feeble, though he had so played that the audience were not aware of his state of health. The note in my diary for that day is:-

“H. I. fearfully done up, could hardly play. At end in collapse. Could hardly move or breathe.”

His wonderful recuperative power, however, stood to him. Next day he played The Merchant of Venice in the morning and Waterloo and The Bells at night.

The function at Bath was very trying. The weather was bitterly cold, yet he stood bareheaded in the street speaking to a vast crowd. This required a great voice effort. It was a striking sight, for not only was the street packed solid with people, but every window was full and the high roofs were like clusters of bees. Our journey on the following Sunday was from Bath to Wolverhampton. Much snow had fallen and there was intense frost. So difficult was the railroading that our " special " was forty-five minutes late in a scheduled journey of three hours and ten minutes. In that journey Irving got a chill which began to tell at once on his strength. On Monday night he played Waterloo and The Bells. My note is:-

"H. I. very weak, but got through all right."

But that night in going into the hotel he fainted — for the first time in his life! He did not know he had fainted until I told him the next morning. When the doctor saw him in the morning he said that he would not possibly be able to go to the Town Hall in the afternoon and play at night; that he was really fit for neither, but he might get through one of them. Becket was fixed for that night, and it was comparatively light work for him. That night he played all right, but at the end was done up, and short of breath. The next night he played The Merchant ofVenice, and at the end of the play made his speech of farewell to Wolverhampton. But his condition of illness was such that we decided that the tour must be abandoned. Dr. Lloyd-Davies was with him in the theatre all the evening and did him yeoman's service. The next day Dr. Foxwell of Birmingham came over for consultation. After their examination the following bulletin was issued:

"It is imperatively necessary that Sir Henry Irving shall not act for at least two months from this date.

"ARTHUR FOXWELL, M.D.

"W. ALLAN LLOYD-DAVIES, L.R.C.P., F.R.C.S."

On 17th March I visited Irving at Wolverhampton. He was looking infinitely better and we had a drive before luncheon. The two doctors had another consultation and it was decided that Irving must not go to America as arranged for the following autumn. Loveday came down by a later train, and he and Irving and I consulted as to future arrangements. We returned to London next day and a few days later Irving left Wolverhampton for Torquay, where he remained till Igth April.

In the meantime I had seen Charles Frohman and postponed our American tour for a year.

X

A short season of six weeks had been arranged for Drury Lane. This began on 29th April. There were three weeks of Becket and two of The Merchant 01 Venice. In the last week were three nights of Waterloo and Becket and three nights of Louis XI. All went well for the six weeks. The plays chosen were the least onerous in Irving’s repertoire; he was none the worse for the effort.

The last night of the season, June ro, 1499 o5, was one never to be forgotten by any one who was present. It almost seemed as if the public had some precognition that it was the last time they would see Irving play. The house was crowded in every part — an enormous audience, the biggest Irving ever played to in London — and full of wild enthusiasm. An inspiring audience! Irving felt it and played Louis XI. magnificently; he never played better in his life. The moment of his entrance was the signal for a roar of welcome, prolonged to an extraordinary degree. Something of the same kind marked the close of each act. At the end the audience simply went mad. It was a scene to be present at once in a lifetime. The calls were innumerable. Time after time the curtain had to be raised to ever the same wild roar. It was marvellous how the strength of the audience held out so long.

It had been arranged that on that night at the close of the play the presentation of a Loving Cup by the workmen of all the theatres throughout the kingdom should take place on the stage. The representatives of the various theatres assembled in due course, a mass of some hundred of them. As there were to be some speeches, a moment of quiet was necessary; we tried turning down the lights in the theatre, for still the audience kept cheering. It never ceased — that prolonged insistent note of perpetual renewals which once heard has a place in memory. After a while we did a thing I never saw done before: the lights were turned quite out. But still the audience remained cheering through the black darkness of the house.

Irving with his usual discernment and courtesy recognised the right thing to do. He ordered the curtain to go up once more, and stepping in front of the stage said, so soon as the wild roar of renewed strength, stilled on purpose, would allow him:

"Ladies and gentlemen, — We have a little ceremony of our own to take place on the stage to-night. I think, however, it will be the mind of all my friends on the stage that you should join in our little ceremony. So with your permission we will go on with it."

Another short sharp cheer and then sudden stillness.

The presentation was made in due form and then the curtain still remaining up, for there was to be no more formal barrier that night — the audience, cheering all the time, melted away.

It was a worthy finish to a lifetime of loving appreciation of the art-work of a great man.

This was Irving's last regular London performance, and with the exception of his playing Waterloo for the benefit of his old friend, Lionel Brough, at His Majesty's Theatre on 15th June, the last time he ever appeared in London.

XI

The autumn tour of that year, 1905, was fixed for ten weeks and a half, to commence at Sheffield on 2nd October. The tour commenced very well. There were fine houses despite the fact that it was the week of the Musical Festival. On Tuesday, 3rd, the Lord Mayor, Sir Joseph Jonas, gave a great luncheon for him in the Town Hall. Irving was in good form and spoke well. There was nothing noticeable in his playing or regarding his health all that week. On Saturday night there was a big house and much enthusiasm. Irving seemed much touched as he said farewell. From Sheffield we went on to Bradford.

The Monday and Tuesday night at Bradford went all right. Irving did not seem ill or extremely weak. We had by now been accustomed to certain physical feebleness — except when he was on the stage. On Wednesday the Mayor, Mr. Priestley, was giving a big lunch for him in the Town Hall at which he was to be presented with a Public Address. I joined him at his hotel at a little past one o'clock and we went together to the Town Hall. He seemed very feeble that morning, and as we went slowly up the steep steps he paused several times to get his breath. He had become an adept at concealing his physical weakness on such occasions. He would seize on some point of local or passing interest and make inquiries about it, so that by the time the answer came he would have been rested. There was a party of some fifty gentlemen, all friends, all hearty, all delightful. On the presentation of the Address he spoke well, but looked sadly feeble.

That night we played Louis XI. He got through his work all right, but was very exhausted after it. The bill of the next night was the one we dreaded, The Bells. I had been with him at his hotel for an hour in the morning and we had got through our usual work together. He seemed feeble, but made no complaint. There was a great house that night. When Irving arrived he seemed exceedingly feeble though not ill. In his dressing-room I noticed that he did that which I had never known him do before: sit down in a listless way and delay beginning to dress for his part. He seemed tired, tired; tired not for an hour but for a lifetime. He played, however, just as usual. There was no perceptible diminution of his strength — of his fire. But when the play was over he was absolutely exhausted. Whilst he was dressing I went in and sat with him, having previously given instructions to the Master Machinist to send The Bells back to London. When I told Irving what I had done he acquiesced in it and seemed relieved. He had played The Bells against the strong remonstrances of Loveday and myself. Knowing him as I did, I came to the conclusion that his doing so was to prove himself. He had felt weak but would not yield to the suspicion; he wanted to know.

It may be wondered at or even asked why Henry Irving was allowed to play at all, being in his then state of weakness.

In the first place, Irving was his own master, and took his own course entirely. He was of a very masterful nature and took on his own shoulders the full responsibility of his acts. He would listen to the advice of those whom he trusted naturally, or had learned to trust; but he was, within the limits of possibility, the final arbiter of matters concerning himself in which there was any power of choice. The forces of a strong nature have to be accepted en bloc; these very indomitable forces of resolution and persistence — of the disregard of pain or weariness to himself which had given him his great position — ruled him in weakness as in strength. His will was the controlling power of his later as of his earlier days.

Moreover, he could not stop. To do so would have been final extinction. His affairs were such that it was necessary to go on for the sake of himself in such span of life as might be left to him, and for the sake of others. The carrying out of his purpose of going through his farewell tours would mean the realisation of a fortune; without such he would begin the unproductive period of age in poverty. Accustomed as he had been for now many years to carry out his wishes in his own way: to do whatever he had set his heart on and to help his many friends and comrades, to be powerless in such matters would have been to him a never-ending pain of chagrin. All this, of course over and above the ties and duties of his family and his own personal needs. He was a very proud man, and the inevitable blows to his pride would have been to him worse than death — especially when such might be obviated by labour, howsoever arduous or dangerous the same might be. We who knew him well recognised all this. All that we could;”do was to keep our own counsel, and to help him to the best of our respective powers.

XII

The next morning, 13th October, I went to Irving at half-past twelve. Loveday as had been arranged came at one o’clock. We three discussed matters ahead of us fully. We decided on the changes to be made in the bill for the following week when we were to play in Birmingham. Irving seemed quite calm, and, under the circumstances, cheerful. He endorsed the decision of the previous evening as to leaving The Bells out of the repertoire for the remainder of the tour; he seemed pleased at not having to play the piece for the present. We then decided on such other arrangements as were consequently necessary. In the course of our conversation Irving said:

"Of course the American tour is absolutely impossible! It will have to be abandoned! But time enough for that; we can see to it later."

That morning he was undoubtedly feeble. He was so unusually amenable in accepting the changes of his plans that when we were walking back I commented on it to Loveday, saying:

"He acquiesced too easily; I never knew him so meek before. I don't like it!"

When he came down to the theatre that night Irving seemed much better and stronger, and was more cheerful than he had been for some time.

He played well; and though he was somewhat exhausted, was infinitely less so than he had been on the previous evening. There was no speech that night, so that the last words he spoke on the stage were Becket's last words in the play:-

"Into Thy hands, 0 Lord! into Thy hands! " I sat in his room with him while he dressed. He was quite cheerful, and we chatted freely. I thought that he had turned the corner and was already, with that marvellous recuperative power of his, on the way to get strong again. I told him that it was my opinion that now he was rid of the apprehension of having to play The Bells he would be himself soon:

"You have been feeling the taking up of your work again after an absence of it for four months, the longest time of rest in your life. Now you have got into your stride again, and work will be easy!"

He thought for a moment and then said quietly: " I really think that is so! " Then he seemed to get quite cheery.

Percy Burton, who arranged our advance matters, had in answer to my telegram come over from Birmingham, so that he might be fully told of our prospective changes. He was coming home to supper with me before he got the train back to Birmingham. I had asked Irving if he wanted to see him; but he said he did not, as Burton quite knew what to do. Then, always thoughtful of others, he added:

"But if he is going by the one o'clock train you must not wait here. He will want time to take his supper." I stood up to go and he held out his hand to say good-night. Afterwards, the remembrance of that affectionate movement came back to me with gratitude, for it was not usual; when men meet every day and every night, handshaking is not a part of the routine of friendly life. As I went out he said to me:

"Muffle up your throat, old chap. It is bitterly cold to-night and you have a cold. Take care of yourself! Good-night! God bless you!"

Those were the last words that I heard Henry Irving speak!

Burton and I were at supper when a carriage drove rapidly up to the door of my lodging. I suspected that it was something for me and opened the door myself at once. Mr. Sheppard, one of my assistants who always attended to Irving's private matters, stepped in saying quickly:

"I think you had better come down to the Midland Hotel at once. Sir Henry is ill. He fainted in the hall just as he did at Wolverhampton. When the doctor came I rushed off for you! " We all jumped into the carriage and hurried as fast as we could go to the hotel.

In the hall were some twenty men grouped round Irving who lay at full length on the floor. One of the doctors, there were three of them there then, told me quietly that he was dead. He had died just two minutes before. The clock in the hall showed the time then as eight minutes to twelve. So that he died at ten minutes to twelve.

It was almost impossible to believe, as he lay there with his eyes open, that he was really dead.

I knelt down by him and felt his heart to know for myself if it was indeed death. But all was sadly still. His body was quite warm. Walter CoHinson, his faithful valet, was sitting on the floor beside him, crying. He said to me through his sobs:

“He died in my arms!”

His face looked very thin and the features sharp as he lay there with his chest high and his head fallen back; but there was none of the usual ungracefulness of death. The long iron-grey hair had fallen back, showing the great height of his rounded forehead. The bridge of his nose stood out sharp and high. I closed his eyes myself; but as I had had no experience in such a matter I asked one of the doctors, who kindly with deft fingers straightened the eyelids. Then we carried him upstairs to his room and laid him on his bed.

I had to send a host of telegrams at once to inform the various members of his family and the press. The latter had to go with what speed we could, for the hour of his death was such that there was no local information. Loveday arrived at the hotel after we had carried him to his room. He was indeed greatly distressed and in bitter sorrow.

The actual cause of Irving’s death was physical weakness; he lost a breath, and had not strength to recover it.

Sheppard told me that when Irving was leaving the theatre he had said to him that he had better come to the hotel with him, as was sometimes his duty. When he got into the carriage he had sat with his back to the horses; this being his usual custom by which he avoided a draught. He was quite silent during the short journey. When he got out of the carriage he seemed very feeble, and as he passed through the outer hall of the hotel seemed uncertain of step. He stumbled slightly and Sheppard held him up. Then when he got as far as the inner hall he sat down on a bench for an instant.

That instant was the fatal one. In the previous February at Wolverhampton, when he had suffered from a similar attack of weakness, he had fallen down flat. In that attitude Nature asserted herself, and the lungs being in their easiest position allowed him to breathe mechanically. Now the seated attitude did not give the opportunity for automatic effort. The syncope grew worse; he slipped on the ground. But it was then too late. By the time the doctor arrived, after only a few minutes in all, he had passed too far into the World of Shadows to be drawn back by any effort of man or science. The heart beat faintly, and more faintly still. And then came the end.

Before I left the hotel in the grey of the morning I went into the bedroom. It wrung my heart to see my dear old friend lie there so cold and white and still. It was all so desolate and lonely, as so much of his life had been. So lonely that in the midst of my own sorrow I could not but rejoice at one thing: for him there was now Peace and Rest.

I was at the hotel again at 7.3o, and then went to meet his eldest son, H. B. Irving, at the Great Northern Station at 9.35. He had received my telegram in time to start by the newspaper train. His other son, Laurence, with his wife arrived later in the day; my telegram to him had not arrived in time to allow his coming till the morning train. The undertaker had come in the morning at nine, and the embalming was done before Irving’s sons had arrived.

That afternoon all the Company, including the workmen, came to see him. It was a very touching and harrowing time for all, for he was much beloved by every one.

At seven o'clock in the evening the body was laid in the lead coffin. I was present alone with the undertakers and saw the lead coffin sealed. This was then placed in the great oak coffin — which an hour later was taken privately through the yard of the Midland Hotel by a devious way to the Great Northern Station so as to avoid publicity; for the streets were thronged with waiting crowds. At Bradford, Saturday is a half day, and large numbers of people are abroad. The ex-Mayor, Mr. Lupton, who had entertained Irving in the Town Hall at his previous visit, kindly arranged with the Chief Constable that all should be in order in the streets. All day throughout the City the flags had been at half-mast, and there was everywhere a remarkable silence through which came the mournful sound of the minute-bells from seemingly all the churches.

At half-past nine we left the hotel to drive to the railway station The appearance of the streets and the demeanour of the crowd I shall never forget; and I never want to. Everywhere was a sea of faces, all the more marked as all hats were off as we drove slowly along. Street after street of silent humanity; and in all that crowd nothing but grief and respect. One hardly realised its completeness till when, now and then, a sob broke the stillness.

To say that it was moving would convey but a poor idea of that attitude of the crowd; it was poignant — harrowing — overwhelming. In silence the crowd stood back; in silence, without hurry or pushing or stress of any kind, closed around us and followed on. It was the same at the railway station; everywhere the silent crowd, holding back respectfully, uncovered.

For a quarter of a century I had been accustomed when travelling with Irving to see the rushing crowd closing in with cheers and waving of hats and kerchiefs; to watch a moving sea of hands thrust forward for him to shake; to hear the roar of the cheering crowd kept up till the train began to move, and then to hear it dying away from our ears not from cessation but from mere distance. And now this silence! No nobler or more loving tribute than the silence of that mighty crowd could ever be paid to the memory of one who has passed away. Were I a Yorkshireman I should have been proud of Bradford on that day. It moves me strangely to think of it yet.

XIII

The Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey were memorialised by a number of persons of importance to have a Public Funeral with burial in the Abbey. So important were the signatories that no difficulty was experienced. The only condition made was that the body should be cremated, as a rule had been established that henceforth no actual body should be buried in the Abbey. The ground had in the past been so broken that for new graves it would be necessary to go down into the concrete, which might injure the structure. The Abbey authorities were most kind in all ways. Dean Armitage Robinson gave from his sick bed his approval, and Sub-Dean Duckworth and Archdeacon Wilberforce made all arrangements. Indeed the Dean on the day of the funeral got up in order to perform the burial service.

The Baroness and Mr. Burdett-Coutts, knowing that Irving’s flat in 17 Stratton Street was not suited to receive the crowds who would wish to pay their respects, kindly placed at the disposal of his family their spacious house in Piccadilly and Stratton Street. Here on Thursday 19th he lay in state. The great dining-room was made a

Chapelle ardente, and here were placed the many, many flowers that were sent. There was a veritable sea of them — wreaths, crosses, symbolic forms of all kinds. On the coffin over the heart lay the floral cross sent by the Queen. Attached to it was a broad ribbon on which she had written as her tribute to the Dead the last words he had spoken on the stage:

"Into Thy hands, O Lord; into Thy hands."

On a little table in front of the coffin lay the wreath sent by Ellen Terry. Behind, hung high along the end wall of the lofty room, was the Pall—" sent anonymously " as the card on it declared. Surely such a pall was never before seen. It was entirely wrought of leaves of fresh laurel. Thousands upon thousands of them went to its making up. It was so large that at the funeral when fourteen pall-bearers marched with the coffin it covered all the space and hung to the ground, before, behind, and on either side.

Through that room all day long passed a silent and mournful crowd of all classes and degrees; and at any moment of the time a single glance at their faces would have shown what love and sorrow had brought them there.

XIV

I

The Public Funeral took place on Friday, 20th October. It would be impossible in a book of this size to give details of it, even if such belonged to the scope of my work. Suffice it that all the honours which can be paid to the illustrious dead were observed. The King had sent to represent him, according to the custom of such ceremonies, Irving’s old and dear friend, General the Right Hon. Sir Dighton Probyn, V.C. The Queen’s formal representative was Earl Howe; but her personal tribute was the beautiful cross of flowers which lay on the actor’s coffin. The Prince and Princess of Wales were also represented. Others were there also whom men call “ great “ — chiefs of all great endeavours. Ministers and soldiers, ambassadors and judges, peers and great merchants, and many sorrowing exponents of all the Arts. To name them would be impossible; to try to describe the ceremony unavailing. But the place for all this is not here; it belongs now to the history of the Age and Nation.

II

All the previous night the coffin had lain in the little chapel of St. Faith between the South Transept — wherein is the Poets’ Corner where Irving was to be laid, and the Chapter-House — where the mourners were to assemble. The funeral had been arranged for noon, but hours before that time every approach to the Abbey was thronged with silent crowds. There was a hush in the air through which the roar of the traffic in the streets seemed to come modified, as though it had been intercepted by that belt of silence. Slowly, imperceptibly, like shadows in their silence, the crowds gathered; a sombre mass closing as if with a black ring the whole precincts of the Cathedral.

Noon found the interior of the edifice a solid mass of people, save where the passage-way up the Nave and Choir was marked with masses of white flowers. Wreaths and crosses and bunches of flowers must have been sent in hundreds — thousands, for in addition to those within, both sides of the Cloister walks were banked with them.

Who could adequately describe that passing from the Chapter-House whence the funeral procession took its way through the South and West Cloister Walk, down the South Aisle and up the Nave and Choir till the coffin was rested before the Sanctuary; the touching music, in which now and again the sweet childish treble — the purest sound on earth — seemed to rend the mourners' very hearts; the mighty crowd, silent, with bowed heads; everywhere white faces with eyes that wept.

Oh that crowd! Never in the world was greater tribute to any man. The silence! The majestic silence, for it transcended negation and became positive from its dormant force. " Not dead silence, but living silence! " as the dead man's old companion, Sir Edward Russell, said in words that should become immortal. All thoughts of self were forgotten; the lesser feelings of life seemed to have passed away in that glory of triumphant sorrow. Eye and heart and brain and memory went with the Dead as to the solemn music the mournful procession passed along. Surely a lifetime of devotion must have gone to the crowning of those long-drawn seconds. To one moving through that divine alley-way of sympathetic sorrow it seemed as though the serried ranks on either hand, seen in the dimness of that October day, went back and back to the very bounds of the thinking world.

As from the steps of the Sanctuary came the first words of the Service for the Burial of the Dead, a bright gleam of winter sunshine burst through the storied window of the Southern Transept and lit up the laurel pall till it glistened like gold.

And then for a little while few could see anything except dimly through their tears.

When the last words of the Benediction had been spoken over his grave, there came from the Organ-loft the first solemn notes of Handel’s noble Dead March. The great organ had been supplemented by military music, and as the mournful notes of the trumpets rose they seemed to cling to the arches and dim corners of the great Cathedral, tearing open our hearts with endless echoes. And then the solemn booming of the muffled drums seemed to recall us to the life that has to be lived on, howsoever lonely or desolate it may be.

“The song of woe Is after all an earthly song.”

The trumpets summon us, and the drums beat the time of the onward march — quick or slow as Duty calls.

March! March!

THE END

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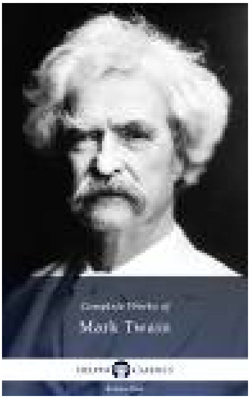

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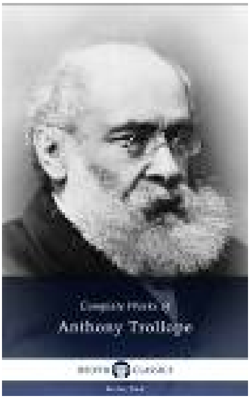

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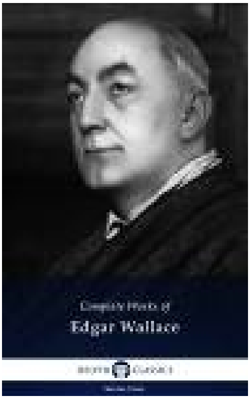

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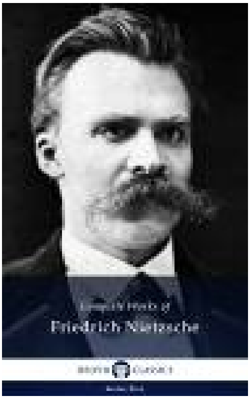

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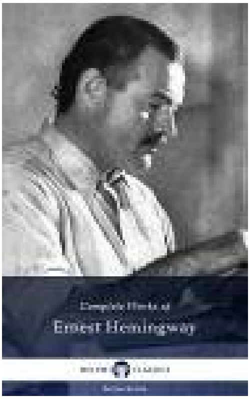

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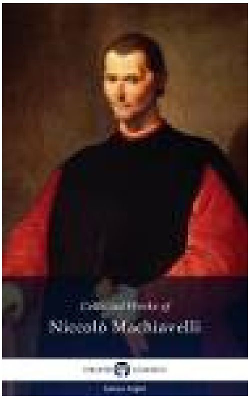

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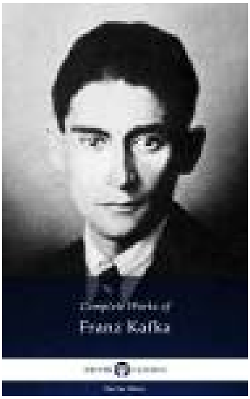

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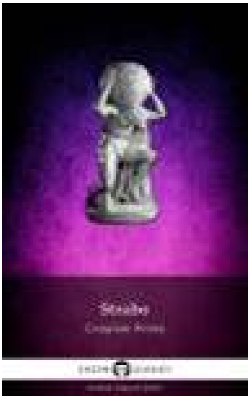

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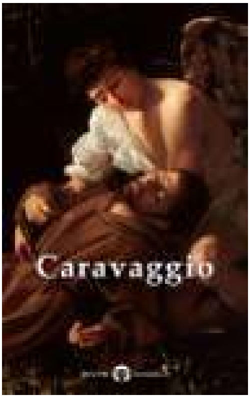

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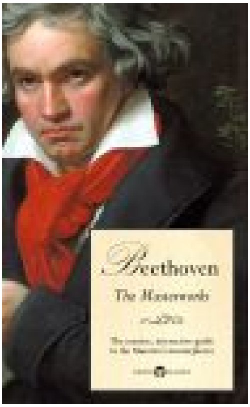

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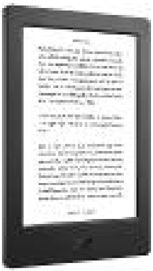

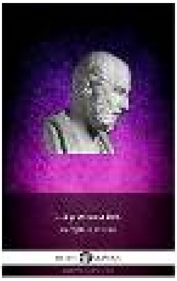

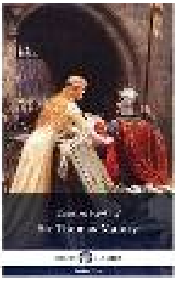

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Gerard Manley Hopkins
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Gertrude Stein
Gilbert and Sullivan
Giotto
Giovanni Bellini
Giovanni Boccaccio
Grant Allen
Gustav Klimt
Gustave Courbet
Gustave Flaubert (English)
Guy Boothby
Guy de Maupassant
H. G. Wells
H. P. Lovecraft
H. Rider Haggard
Hafez
Hall Caine
Hans Christian Andersen
Harriet Beecher Stowe
Heinrich Heine
Henrik Ibsen
Henry David Thoreau
Henry Fielding
Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey
Henry James
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
Henryk Sienkiewicz
Herman Melville
Herodotus
Hesiod

Hieronymus Bosch
Hilaire Belloc
Hippocrates
Homer
Honoré de Balzac (English)
Horace
Horace Walpole
Hugh Walpole
Ian Fleming
Immanuel Kant
Isaac Rosenberg
Isocrates
Ivan Turgenev
Izaak Walton
J. M. Barrie
J. M. Synge
J. M. W. Turner
J. W. von Goethe (English)
Jack London
Jacques-Louis David
James Abbott McNeill Whistler
James Fenimore Cooper
James Joyce
James Russell Lowell
Jane Austen
Jean-Jacques Rousseau
Jerome K. Jerome
Johan Ludvig Runeberg
Johann Sebastian Bach
Johanna Spyri
Johannes Vermeer
John Buchan
John Bunyan
John Clare
John Constable

John Donne
John Dryden
John Galsworthy
John Galt
John Gower
John Keats
John Locke
John Milton
John Muir
John Ruskin
John Webster
John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester
Jonathan Swift
Joseph Addison
Joseph Addison
Joseph Conrad
Joseph Haydn
Josephus
Jules Verne
Julian
Julius Caesar
Juvenal
Kahlil Gibran
Karl Marx
Kate Chopin
Katherine Mansfield
Kenneth Grahame
L. Frank Baum
L. M. Montgomery
Lafcadio Hearn
Laurence Sterne
Leigh Hunt
Leo Tolstoy
Leonardo da Vinci
Lewis Carroll

Livy
Longus
Lord Byron
Lord Dunsany
Louisa May Alcott
Lucan
Lucian
Lucretius
Ludovico Ariosto
Ludwig van Beethoven
Luís de Camões
Lytton Strachey
M. E. Braddon
M. R. James
Marcel Proust (English)
Marcus Aurelius
Margaret Oliphant
Maria Edgeworth
Marie Corelli
Mark Twain
Martial
Mary Shelley
Mary Wollstonecraft
Matthew Arnold
Matthew Prior
Maurice Leblanc
Max Brand
Maxim Gorky
Michael Drayton
Michel de Montaigne
Michelangelo
Miguel de Cervantes
Molière
Nathaniel Hawthorne
Niccolò Machiavelli

Nikolai Gogol
Nikolai Nekrasov
Nonnus
Norse Sagas
O. Henry
Oliver Goldsmith
One Thousand and One Nights
Oscar Wilde
Ouida
Ovid
Paul Cézanne
Paul Gauguin
Paul Klee
Paul Laurence Dunbar
Pausanias
Percy Bysshe Shelley
Peter Paul Rubens
Petrarch
Petronius
Piero della Francesca
Pierre-Auguste Renoir
Pieter Bruegel the Elder
Pindar
Piotr Illitch Tchaïkovsky
Plato
Plautus
Pliny the Elder
Pliny the Younger
Plotinus
Plutarch
Polybius
Procopius
Propertius
Quintus Curtius Rufus
Quintus Smyrnaeus

R. Austin Freeman
R. D. Blackmore
R. M. Ballantyne
R. S. Surtees
Radclyffe Hall
Rafael Sabatini
Ralph Waldo Emerson
Raphael
Rembrandt van Rijn
René Descartes
Richard Brinsley Sheridan
Richard Marsh
Richard Wagner
Robert Browning
Robert Burns
Robert E. Howard
Robert Frost
Robert Louis Stevenson
Robert Southey
Robert W. Chambers
Rudyard Kipling
Rumi
Rupert Brooke
Saki
Sallust
Samuel Butler
Samuel Johnson
Samuel Pepys
Samuel Richardson
Samuel Taylor Coleridge
Sandro Botticelli
Sappho
Sax Rohmer
Seneca the Younger
Septuagint

Sextus Empiricus
Sheridan Le Fanu
Sidonius
Sigmund Freud
Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
Sir Issac Newton
Sir Philip Sidney
Sir Richard Burton
Sir Thomas Malory
Sir Thomas More
Sir Thomas Wyatt
Sir Walter Raleigh
Sir Walter Scott
Sophocles
Stanley J. Weyman
Statius
Stendhal
Stephen Crane
Stephen Leacock
Strabo
Suetonius
T. S. Eliot
Tacitus
Talbot Mundy
Terence
The Brontës
The Brothers Grimm
The Harvard Classics
Theocritus
Theodore Dreiser
Thomas Babington Macaulay
Thomas Carlyle
Thomas Chatterton
Thomas De Quincey
Thomas Gainsborough

Thomas Gray
Thomas Hardy
Thomas Hardy (poetry)
Thomas Hood
Thomas Love Peacock
Thomas Middleton
Thomas Moore
Thomas Paine
Thucydides
Tibullus
Tintoretto
Titian
Tobias Smollett
Torquato Tasso
Varro
Victor Hugo
Vincent van Gogh
Virgil
Virginia Woolf
Voltaire
W. B. Yeats
W. Somerset Maugham
W. W. Jacobs
Walt Whitman
Walter Pater
Walter Savage Landor
Washington Irving
Wassily Kandinsky
Wilfred Owen
Wilkie Collins
William Blake
William Cowper
William Dean Howells
William Harrison Ainsworth
William Hazlitt

William Hope Hodgson
William James
William Makepeace Thackeray
William Morris
William Shakespeare
William Wordsworth
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Xenophon
Zane Grey

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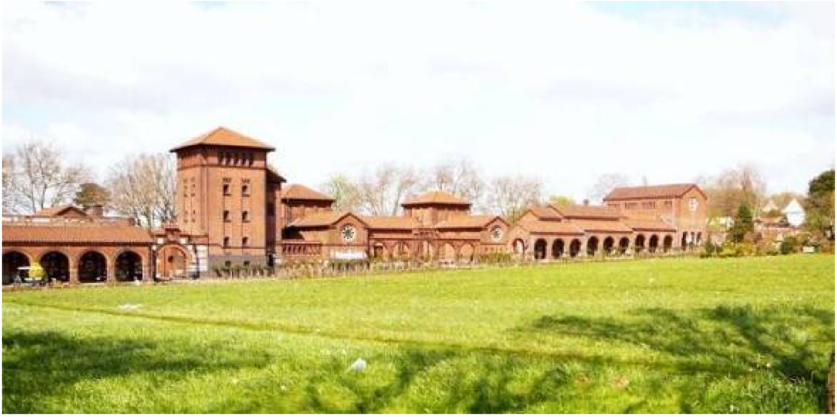
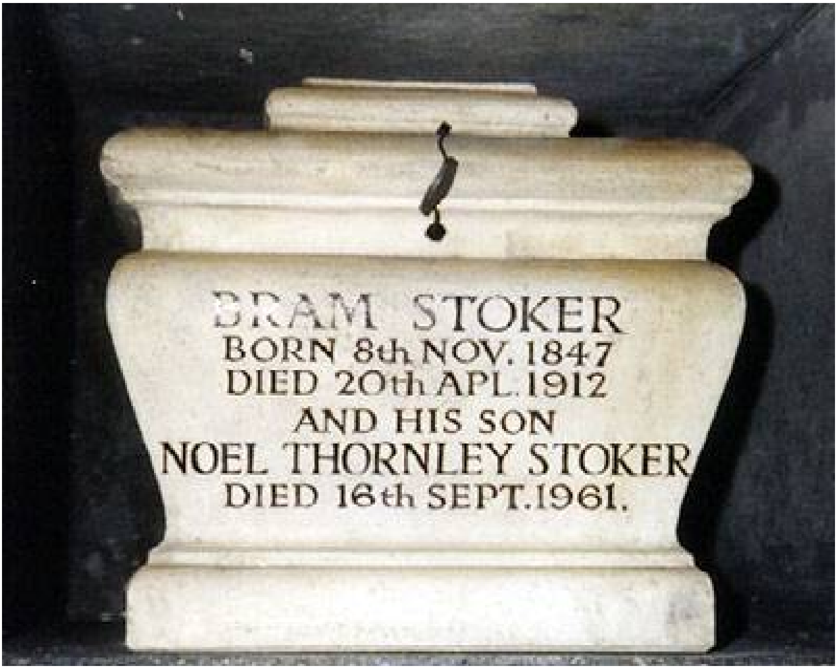


Golders Green Crematorium – Stoker's final resting place



BRAM STOKER
BORN 8th NOV. 1847
DIED 20th APL. 1912
AND HIS SON
NOEL THORNLEY STOKER
DIED 16th SEPT. 1961.

Stoker’s memorial plaque